Men I Love: Not Air Florida, not then
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The Best Of The Best: This is the sweetest time.

The forecasters are staying up all night, the highway crews are out and moving, my little city is ready and waiting, and I am tucked away up here in my in-town aerie, warm and snug and delighted.

As February ends, we are going to have the biggest snowstorm in two years. This is typical of this area. I remember once watching snow land on the cherry blossoms. That's a sight that remains, once you've seen it.

I had no need to get the ingredients for what I call The Snow White Casserole: toilet paper, milk, and bread. All those white things, grabbed by mad shoppers, who happen mostly to be white, too.

Out at the farm, the driveway will be plowed by one of our neighbors, who loves doing stuff like that, and he'll call to let me know when it's safe for me to return, if I feel like it.

The airports are on high alert with de-icing equipment.....

I remember the Air Florida flight that hit the 14th Street Bridge more than twenty years ago. Someone I loved was scheduled to be on that flight, and I sat in my office, thunderstruck at the idea of his death. There was no way to comprehend that he was gone, and, even though I was an airline attorney, no one could get through to the airline. In those days before personal computers, pulling up the manifest was reserved only for the airline, and Air Florida was holding that very tightly to its corporate vest.

No one could have survived, everyone said the same thing, milling together in the office where he would not return. I went and made sure the door to his office was closed. I didn't dare go inside, but I didn't want anyone else going in there, either.

We had a joke. He flew to Florida every week in the winter – his wife was there for the season, so he spent four days at the office and three days with her. Since we both hated Richard Nixon, a tradition had been born: I had found a startlingly bad watercolor portrait of The Big Dick at a street vendor's stall one day, framed and cheap. Of course I bought it, and hung it in his office.

He carefully hung it in my office when I was away.

I took it out of the frame and taped it inside his raincoat.

He covered my desk with it, meticulously fashioned with double-sided tape.

On this trip, it was folded and hidden inside his briefcase, the one he would have carried onboard with him so he could work on the flight.

There were things I could not think of.

The people who were milling and growing steadily hysterical moved away from me, as if I were too dangerous for them to approach. I wanted nothing to do with them, and they knew it. Grief and shock are private, dangerous things, subjective and unpredictable, always unknowable.

I got a call from Jim, who was living in Saratoga Springs then. He had been to visit so many times, and he had always flown into and out of National Airport, so he knew what and where it had happened. He called to make sure I was safe, hadn't been flying anywhere.

It was hard to tell him I was safe, because I didn't feel very safe right then. I couldn't tell him that someone else I loved was gone. He was just relieved that I was all right. His love never stopped standing close to me, embracing me at the times I most needed his touch.

There was no point in trying to get home that night, with all the snow and all the traffic, so I made a reservation at a hotel and then I sat behind my desk, while people left for home, saying tentative goodnights as they departed, and I knew I couldn't leave because he might return, and I didn't want him to walk into an empty office.

I thought that I should take his nameplate off his door, but I didn't do it.

Tomorrow, I thought, I'll do that tomorrow. His papers have to be assembled, I knew, for shipment to the Presidential Library on whose board he sat. The pictures on his office walls, they'd have to come down, too.

Well, he said, standing in my office doorway, it's a real mess out there. He had snow in the brim of his hat, on his shoulders, and his face was red and shiny. He was smiling at me.

All I did was burst into tears.

I missed my flight, he said, and the phones in the airport had long lines, so I thought I'd just come back here.

I sat there, crying.

He took off his hat and coat and gloves, put down his briefcase, and I stood up and hugged him. I cried and cried and couldn't talk, and he just held me and said things that I no longer remember. Then we walked the almost-impassable two blocks to the hotel where I'd also managed to reserve a room for him, and we had dinner in the dining room, and everything was fine. The crashed plane not far from us might well have been on the other side of the world. I drank too much and cried some more, and told him how the idea of his death frightened me so much.

Eight months later, he was gone.

We had had our proper goodbyes, although I didn't know they were goodbyes at the time, over a lunch to which he had invited me at the International Club, which isn't there anymore, either, and when we parted, me to go back to my different office in a different place, and him to his old office where they later found my birthday card to him on top of his desk, I turned to look at him one more time as we walked away from each other that summer day in downtown Washington.

He had turned around, too, to look at me. I guess we both knew.

After his funeral, I took the nameplate from his door. I keep it with me, no matter where I am.

We're going to have a great big snowstorm tomorrow. It fits nicely with this great big life I stumbled into, and the great big people I've been lucky enough to love and the great big stories they gave me.