

The Crying Signpost

# Part 1

## An Introduction to Ghosts

### Chapter 1

I had to get down that slope in a hurry, a slope so steep and rocky, so wet and slippery a centipede would have had trouble keeping its footing. The lives of two people were at stake and it was up to me to get to the bottom in time to save them. I suppose that was the stickiest moment in Tim's "Case of the Crying Signpost". That or the night when one of the lives at stake was mine, the night Tim had to fly in a plane without wings.

I'm getting ahead of myself, a thing not easy to do when the story isn't even begun. I should start by introducing myself. My name is Gwendolyn Morgana Melcham. For some reason, I've always

## The Crying Signpost

been called Nelly, which is OK with me considering I never much liked the names, Gwendolyn and Gwen.

My chief companion in life—and the person who has gotten me into the most trouble—is the remarkable, the incredible Tim Morcombe. Now, I'm guessing most of you know little or nothing about Scotland Yard or about its most famous cases, so you'll be wondering who this Tim Morcombe is. Well, I could fill a large book with the answer to that question but, as the saying goes, a person is as a person does and because this story of mine is going to tell you a lot about what Tim does, I'll let you decide for yourselves what kind of person he is.

I'll tell you one thing Tim is not. He is not ordinary. I even met him under the most extraordinary circumstances. The year was 1936 and the world felt much larger back then. Of course, I don't mean it was physically any larger but there were no trans-oceanic TV broadcasts, no internet, no smart phones, no jet planes and no space satellites. Distant places were harder to reach and information traveled more slowly. I think you get what I'm saying.

Part of my problem was I felt all alone in that great, unfamiliar world of 1936. I was twelve. My mother, Davey Morgan, was a world-famous aviator. In those days, a woman aviator was called an aviatrix, as if there were any difference between a male pilot and a woman who did the same thing.

My father, George Melcham, was a ship's captain for an ocean shipping company operating out of New York City. With my father constantly away from home on distant seas and my mother always

## The Crying Signpost

flying, I was mostly left alone in Chicago with my sweet but doddering great aunt, Cecilia Morgan. Two or three times a year, I'd get a visit from one or the other of my parents. I seldom saw them together.

At the end of 1936, I was in seventh grade. School had gotten off to a rocky start, mostly thanks to my teacher, Miss Bayard, who had decided I was lazy. The truth be told, I wasn't lazy and I didn't need disciplining but my teacher didn't see things that way. To her way of thinking, the only cure for my laziness was constant disciplining.

Things had gotten so bad I was seriously considering leaving school after the Christmas break. Then, out of the blue, my Dad wrote inviting me to join him for a month-long vacation in Puerto Rico. He wanted me to take a train to Miami, Florida and catch a boat to the island. He had written to my principal and, somehow, he had gotten her to let me out of school for four weeks.

Believe it or not, this news didn't exactly thrill me. Although I liked seeing my Dad, it was nearing the middle of the school year and the idea of falling behind in my classes and missing all kinds of school activities felt scary and unpleasant. On top of this, I had never traveled by myself and San Juan, Puerto Rico, seemed a long way to go. As I say, the world felt much larger back then.

In the end, I decided I couldn't let my Dad down. So, early one morning in the first days of January, 1937, just before sunrise on a gloomy, cold day, my Aunt Cecilia loaded me into a taxi that rumbled to our front door, brown smoke belching from its tailpipe. In less than an hour, I was on a big,

## The Crying Signpost

black train pulling out of a Chicago railroad station to start its long journey to Miami.

I'll skip the details of this trip. Being shy around strangers, I kept mostly to myself, speaking only to order meals, sleeping most of the time and willfully ignoring the monumental scenery unfolding outside my train window. When I arrived in Miami, I was supposed to go to the Port of Miami to catch a boat to San Juan but the minute I hopped off the train, a red-faced porter came up and asked if I was Nelly Melcham.

I said, "Yes, sir."

Nodding, he handed me a note. It was from my mother. In her scrawled handwriting, Davey told me to skip the boat and go to the airport instead. Dad had wired her about my vacation. To save me some time, she had arranged for a friend to fly me to Puerto Rico.

That's right, fly. It doesn't seem to be much of a big deal today but, in 1937, flying over the ocean was a very big deal, especially for a girl afraid of heights. Don't laugh. Even though my mother was a world-famous aviator, this twelve-year-old girl preferred her feet solidly on the ground, not in some flimsy crate bouncing on high winds. For one bleak moment, I was ready to turn right around and head back to Chicago but it was too late for that. I was already a million miles from home.

The red-faced porter helped me find a taxi to the All-American Airport, which was somewhere on the outer edges of Miami. On the way, I kept telling myself surely Davey would only entrust her daughter to the safest, most reliable pilot she knew.

## The Crying Signpost

Unfortunately, the thought didn't make me feel any better.

The airport turned out to be a roughshod place with rusted, metal buildings and sod-grass runways. Not the kind of place to inspire confidence. I can still remember walking into the pilot's lounge, identified by a small sign over the door of a squat hut, my one suitcase in hand, looking for a man named Charlie Hall. Well, I had an easy time finding Charlie, who was drinking his early-morning coffee with a few fellows around a table in the back of the building.

As it turned out, that was the only thing easy about my trip. The only thing to go as planned. Little did I know, I would never make it to Puerto Rico.

## The Crying Signpost

## Chapter 2

When I entered the pilot's lounge, no one noticed me, so I raised my voice and announced I was looking for Charlie Hall. The guys around the table were talking loudly, laughing and joking, and no one heard me. Taking a step closer, I tried using a louder voice, which got their attention.

"I'm looking for Charlie Hall," I called.

There was immediate silence. A guy with his back to me stood and slowly turned to face me. He was a big, friendly-looking fellow with a smudge of grease on his forehead and soiled, worn patches on the knees of his green overalls. His thin hair was sandy blond and seemed to have a will of its own, falling to the left every time he pushed it to the right,

## The Crying Signpost

which was often. He gave me a broad smile and, right away, I liked him.

“So, you’re Davey’s kid,” he said.

Walking over to me, he took my hand in his firm grip, wrapping a big, hard palm around my fingers and crunching them until they hurt.

“Yes, sir,” I answered, doing my best not to wince, “pleased to meet you.”

He gave a friendly stare. “Are you ready to get going?”

“Yes sir,” I said. “When are we leaving?”

“Right now. The plane is all set. I was just waiting for you.”

“Well, I’m ready.”

Charlie looked me up and down, eyeing my stylish but lightweight, red jacket. Then he walked over to a wall and grabbed a jacket off a hook. He tossed it to me.

“Here, you’d better wear this. Belonged to my partner. He doesn’t need it anymore.”

Wordlessly, I pulled the heavy jacket over mine. It was a flyer’s jacket, somewhat similar to the one Charlie was now donning, made of thick leather with a collar of white sheepskin. The jacket proved way too big for me, hanging practically to my knees. Still, I was dressed for flying. Pulling up the long sleeves so I could use my hands, I grinned at Charlie. Immediately, the sleeves fell back down.

“That’s much better,” said Charlie, grinning back at me. “All you need is a helmet and you can do the flying. Now, come on.”

With me following, he started out of the lounge. Before we’d gone three steps together, he



## The Crying Signpost

slowed. Reminding me of a cop directing traffic, he held up one of his big hands for me to stop. Then, he dipped his other hand into a deep pocket of his overalls.

“I almost forgot,” he said, handing me a folded piece of paper. “This came for you.”

This new message was from my Dad. A telegram. On his way to San Juan from Marseilles, his ship had been damaged in a storm and needed to return for repairs. He expected to be nearly a week late getting to Puerto Rico. Until then, I was to stay with two friends of his who lived on the island, Carlos and Mae Perez. There was a telephone number for them. I was to call when I arrived in San Juan. They would meet me at the airport.

Now, I was really upset. This was typical of Dad. He was the world’s greatest man—smart, kind and competent; but when he made plans to see me, the plans always got messed up. I mean, always.

Once again, I thought about heading back to Chicago but it wasn’t a serious thought. To be honest, despite all my fears, I was more excited than I wanted to admit about flying with Charlie. Part of it was a daughter’s wish to please her mother. In my heart, I knew this plane trip would end forever Davey’s never-spoken but obvious disappointment to have a daughter afraid of flying. There was something else working in me, too—an honest excitement to be doing something new and different. So, with my one suitcase in hand, I stepped outside and joined Charlie who had left the lounge and was waiting for me on the edge of the runway.

“What’s up?” he asked.

## The Crying Signpost

“Here,” I said, handing him the telegram. “Read for yourself.”

Charlie gave the telegram a quick look-over. “What do you want to do?” he asked.

“Go to San Juan,” I said.

“Right,” he agreed, pointing across the runway to a dirt field on the other side. “Mine is the one on the right. You wait there while I fetch maps and food.”

Charlie’s plane looked to be an old Ryan M-2 Bluebird, a remarkably sturdy plane of the times used mainly for mail runs and carrying small cargos. His plane had the same look and feel as a Ryan my Mom once owned, with its yellow paint job and extra tanks fitted below the wings for long-range flying. In fact, Charlie’s Ryan looked so similar to Davey’s old plane, I started to wonder about it.

Well, I’d hardly taken five steps toward it, when I heard the oddest sound, low and melodic, coming from somewhere nearby. I slowed and listened. The sound was faint but distinctive. Jazz.

A long, plaintive jazz riff was sounding somewhere nearby. There could be no doubt about it. From where? Don’t forget, this was way back in the Thirties, when radios were big and clunky and you needed to plug them into an electrical outlet. Battery-powered radios didn’t exist and there were no such things as portable CD players and iPods.

I looked around. About twenty feet away, there was a pile of wooden crates, likely cargo waiting to be loaded on a plane for somewhere. Among the nondescript crates was one, odd piece, somewhat similar in looks to a normal suitcase. The

## The Crying Signpost

sound seemed to be coming from this peculiar suitcase and so I walked over, listening all the while. After a few steps, there was no question about it. The music was coming from the suitcase.

It was a strange piece of luggage, smooth-surfaced and rounded at the corners. Every side was covered by a gray, rubbery material with small holes piercing the rubber in a few places on two of the sides. Putting my own suitcase on the ground, I stooped and was thinking about peering into one of the holes, when I got the surprise of my life.

There was light coming out of the hole.

I glanced around to make sure no one was looking. The temptation to open the suitcase tugged at me but the thing didn't belong to me and I had been raised to respect other people's property. Still, it felt OK to peek into one of the holes—just a little peek.

I couldn't believe what I saw when I crouched and gazed through a hole. There was a man inside the suitcase. No bigger than my hand, he was sitting on top of a small pile of cotton balls held together by a mesh net and he was playing the smallest saxophone you ever could have imagined. I rubbed my eye and looked again, hoping to see something normal. You know, folded shirts and pants, socks and shoes—but he was still there. Only now, he wasn't playing his saxophone. Instead, he was talking to me. At least, his lips were moving though I couldn't hear his words. So, I turned my head and put my ear to the hole and that's when I heard my first words ever from Tim Morcombe.

## The Crying Signpost

“Do you see a Bellanca Pacemaker anywhere around?” was what he asked me.

I turned my head to stare at him through the hole. His question was not quite as strange as his appearance but it was still rather peculiar. Back in 1937, few people flew and hardly anybody knew anything about planes. Being the daughter of a world-famous flyer, I happened to be one of the few people who could tell a Ryan M-2 Bluebird from a Bellanca Pacemaker but this little man certainly couldn't have known this about me. When he spoke again, I had to put my ear to the hole to hear him.

“Well, do you see the Bellanca?” he asked, a little impatience in his voice.

Moving my mouth to the hole, I answered, “Nope, just a Ryan Bluebird that Charlie owns and an old Curtiss down the field.” Then I put my ear back to the hole to hear what he would say next.

“Will you open this suitcase?” he said, sounding even more impatient.

I nodded. “Just a second.”

The suitcase had two thick straps running around its middle. I found where the straps were closed by heavy brass buckles and, with some difficulty, I managed to unclasp the buckles and pry the suitcase open.

“That's better,” said the little man, hopping off his pile of cotton balls. “Now, who's Charlie?”

“My mother's friend. He's going to fly me to Puerto Rico.”

“What time is it?”

“Time? I don't know. Around six in the morning, maybe.”

## The Crying Signpost

“Puerto Rico, you say?” He seemed to think for a moment. “No, that won’t do. Still, you’re flying, you say?” He thought for a bit more. “What’s your name?” he finally asked.

“Nelly Melcham,” I answered.

“Listen Nelly,” he said, “my name is Tim Morcombe. I’ve been hired by the governor of Louisiana. At his request, I’m on my way on urgent business. Most urgent, in fact.”

I’m not normally rude but I couldn’t help pointing and saying, “In that?”

The man was not offended. He took a moment to glance around the odd, rubbery suitcase in which he was standing and then he laughed. From the way he threw back his head, I supposed he laughed loudly but you had to be his size to appreciate it.

When he finished laughing, he answered by saying, “Mostly, the Pacemaker was supposed to do the transporting but I prefer to move from place to place in this suitcase, which hides me from people who might have trouble accepting my size.”

People who might have trouble accepting his size? *That would be pretty much everybody in the world*, I thought, without saying it. Instead, I got right to the question on my mind.

“So what happened to the Pacemaker?”

“I would very much like to know the answer to that question,” he replied, his eyes narrowing.

Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted Charlie heading toward us. Somehow, I knew Tim would not want to be seen and so I quickly picked up his suitcase, being careful not to jostle him, and hurried out of view behind some crates.

## The Crying Signpost

“So, you’re headed for Louisiana?” I asked, speaking quickly.

“I was. To New Orleans, to be exact. Alas, no Pacemaker.”

“What would you say if I could get you there?”

“It would be a great service but how on earth could you do that?”

“You let me take care of that,” I answered.

Tim gave me a puzzled look but I didn’t have time to explain. Closing the suitcase on him and hastily refastening the straps, I stood and started to move away from the crates, when I immediately ran into Charlie. Surprised, I bounced off his chest, tottering and dropping Tim’s suitcase.

“What the heck,” exclaimed a startled Charlie.

“Sorry,” I said, my face turning red. Flustered, I reached down and picked up

Tim’s suitcase, then found my own. All the while, I was wondering how the little man had fared with all the banging and dropping. One of the smaller crates must have been part of Charlie’s cargo because he hoisted it on his shoulder, balancing it with his left hand. Then he stretched his other hand toward me.

“Here,” he said, “let me help you.” When he saw I now had two suitcases, he gave me a curious look. “I thought you only had one.”

“No, two,” I replied, blushing.

“Well, are you ready to go?” he asked.

With as much confidence as I could muster, I plunged into my planned speech. “Charlie,” I said, “I need to ask about your plane.”

## The Crying Signpost

As it turned out, my hunch about his old Ryan Bluebird was correct. The plane had once belonged to my Mom. A gift from a friend to a friend, that's how Charlie described it. Davey was that way, generous with her friends, especially when one needed her help.

Charlie was forever grateful to Davey. I had to do a lot of fast talking, with some girlish batting of my eyelids, I suppose. In the end, Charlie caved and agreed to give me what I wanted.

"You sure you know these people in Louisiana?" he asked, for a third time.

"Oh, yes."

"And they won't mind you dropping in, all unexpected."

"They're old friends. They'll be pleased."

"Then I suppose it's all right; anything for Davey's kid," he muttered, somewhat grudgingly. "I'll go change my flight plans and we can head right out. What do you want to do about those folks in San Juan, the Diegos?"

I had completely forgotten about them but I worked up a quick answer. "When I get to New Orleans, I'll send them a telegram explaining I'm stopping on the way. I'll ask them to send a telegram to my Dad," I added. "He'll understand. In fact, he'll be pleased. He's always encouraging me to be more adventurous."

This last statement was certainly true. My Dad and Davey seemed exceedingly disappointed to have a daughter more interested in reading about the world than living in it. Whenever they were home, they tried hard to get their little bookworm out of her

## The Crying Signpost

books and into a more active life. On the other hand, a sudden, unexplained detour to Louisiana was probably not what my parents had in mind when urging me to take some chances, risk some adventures.

In the end, Charlie didn't seem entirely sure he was doing Davey a favor. Grumbling a little under his breath, he grabbed both suitcases in one huge hand and lugged them to the plane, stowing them inside. Then, while he went back to the control tower to change his flight plans, I sat on the grass near the edge of the runway, enjoying the warm, semi-tropical sun of Miami, which felt good after the cold temperatures of Chicago.

When Charlie finally rejoined me, I climbed aboard his plane. Buckling myself into the sole passenger seat behind the cockpit, I was acutely aware of the one suitcase lying in the back of the plane with its strange contents.

Anyway, that's how I met Tim Morcombe, in a meeting out of nowhere in a small airport just outside Miami. That was the extraordinary beginning of our first big adventure together.



## Chapter 3

For all my excitement about flying, I ended up paying little attention while Charlie readied his Ryan M-2 Bluebird for takeoff. Suddenly, I had more important things on my mind. All I could think about was this strange little man, this Tim Morcombe. No, that's not exactly right. Having never before seen such a tiny person, I wasn't exactly thinking about him. Rather, I was wondering *what* to think about him. I mean, a six-inch man? Creatures of that sort only existed in books, not in real life. What a mix of emotions I was feeling—curiosity, excitement and confusion.

There was also fear. Yes, I was still thoroughly afraid of flying. When Charlie finished

## The Crying Signpost

getting things ready and we finally taxied to the end of the runway for our takeoff, I was too afraid even to look out the plane's window and I did my best not to think about all the trees and buildings that would soon be turning into little dots, as the plane climbed into the sky.

To this day, I vividly remember that first, sharp jolt when the old Ryan lurched off the ground at the end of its bumpy run down the long, narrow runway. I remember, just as well, the bouncy climb through a stiff headwind, with the plane's body angling steeply as Charlie gunned the throttle to push the old craft into the sky.

After what seemed an eternity, the plane reached the right cruising altitude and Charlie leveled off. I tried to think of something to say but a glance forward made me change my mind. Charlie was not paying any attention whatsoever to me. Instead, he was busily checking instruments, calculating times on a piece of paper fastened to a clipboard and pausing now and then to stare through the cockpit's windshield at the wondrous panorama of puff-ball clouds dotting a vividly blue sky.

Well, I thought, *it's time to look to my own business*. Hoisting myself off my seat, I went back among the wooden boxes piled in the belly of the plane. I decided I should get as far from Charlie's curious eyes as possible, so I grabbed Tim's suitcase off the pile and settled, as best I could, on some oily blankets in the far back of the plane, close to the tail.

The area had a nauseating smell of aviation fuel, which I did my best to ignore. Opening Tim's suitcase, I peered in. The little man had tucked

## The Crying Signpost

himself comfortably atop his pile of cotton balls and was napping peacefully. I couldn't believe he was asleep. With all the noise beating from the plane's powerful engine and the loud whirring of propellers, you could barely think, much less sleep.

Now that his suitcase was open, I waited to see if the noise would wake him. When he didn't stir, I did my second rude thing of the day, poking the little man with the tip of my index finger. Immediately, his eyes popped open and he yawned and smiled at me.

"Hello," he shouted, his small voice barely loud enough to be heard above the engine's roar.

"Hello," I called back. "Can you tell me what's going on?"

He shook his head and held up a hand. While I waited, he pulled something out of his ears, first from one, then the other. It was cotton, no doubt shredded from one of his little cotton balls. No wonder he could sleep.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?" he asked, shouting as best he could.

I tried again. "Why are you going to Louisiana?"

"I told you, to do some work at the request of the governor."

Tim struggled out of his pile of cotton balls and clambered onto the edge of the suitcase. Reaching into the pocket of his jacket, a tweedy brown coat, he pulled out a handful of papers. Ruffling through the bunch, he handed me a piece of paper about half the size of a postage stamp. Actually, it turned out to be a larger piece of paper,

## The Crying Signpost

folded several times. When unfolded, it was nearly the size of a normal business card, with neat, fancy print on its face. This is what I remember it saying:

Timothy P. Morcombe, Professional  
DISCREET EAVESDROPPER,  
INDETECTABLE SLEUTH  
*One of a kind in the Detection Profession*  
DAILY RATES ONLY  
INQUIRE LONDON TELEPH. 2331

What it all meant wasn't exactly clear to me. I got the impression Tim was some kind of private detective, a Sherlock Holmes in miniature. I was impressed he was all the way from London but it made me wonder what the heck he was doing in an out-of-the-way, Miami airport and why he was all alone.

"You're a detective?" I asked.

This drew an impatient look. "Of course," he said. "You just read my card."

"What does a discreet eavesdropper do?"

"He listens to hear what others prefer to keep secret. My size gives me a great advantage. From years of practice, I can disappear almost anywhere."

He said this last thing with a certain amount of pride. "You mean you sneak around listening to people?" I asked.

I didn't like the sound of that. Remember, the year was 1937. The kinds of stuff used nowadays as a normal part of investigations—electronic scanners, telephone wiretaps, telephoto cameras, super-computers collecting data—none of these things

## The Crying Signpost

existed back then. Eavesdropping sounded to be a fancy word for snooping.

Tim smiled and shook his head. “It’s not as bad as it sounds. I don’t listen in on ordinary people, only people with something bad to hide. My special size and unique talents make me invaluable to police. Even national governments will use me. In most of my investigations, I’m catching thieves and finding the property they stole. That’s my specialty.”

“Is that why you’re going to New Orleans? To catch some thieves?”

“No. The Louisiana case is outside my normal work. If I don’t get there quickly, something terrible will happen.”

I shook my head and told Tim I didn’t understand. Sighing, he gestured with his hand for me to come closer. I leaned down, drawing my face close to his.

“May I sit on your shoulder?” he asked. “It’ll bring me much nearer your ear. This shouting is wearing on my voice.”

His voice did indeed sound hoarse. “All right,” I said

“Then bend down, please.”

Nodding, I carefully bent to his level. Suddenly, with a quick, agile movement, he hopped off the suitcase and onto my shoulder. He was so light, I could hardly feel his weight but then I felt him take hold of my hair and pull a hunk away from my ear. When he started talking again, I made a surprising discovery. Heard up close, without the shouting raising the pitch, Tim’s voice was quite deep.

## The Crying Signpost

“If I don’t get there soon, a woman’s life could be lost,” was what he told me.

I was so startled, I actually forgot where he was perched and started to turn my head. The movement could have had nasty results.

“Hold still,” he shouted, stopping me in the nick of time. “Let’s not knock me off. Now listen, Nelly, while I tell you a very strange tale.”

It was, indeed, a strange tale he told, stranger than any told to me by my parents, who had gone just about everywhere and seen just about everything. When Tim finished, I could only shake my head in disbelief, though gently this time, being careful not to knock him off my shoulder.

“Your story is unbelievable,” I said.

“Of course it is.”

“I mean, there’s no such thing as ghosts.”

“Of course not,” he agreed.

“And people don’t become invisible and cry out on stormy nights.”

“Of course they don’t,” he agreed again, with maddening calm.

“Then I don’t understand why you’re traveling all the way to New Orleans,” I said. “I mean, if none of this is true.”

“Because,” he answered, “the woman really is missing and several reliable types have reported hearing strange sounds in the middle of a storm, sounds much akin to crying. The governor and the military folks don’t believe in ghosts, either, but they’re at their wits’ end. I’m not so quick to judge what I haven’t seen nor heard. There is a great

## The Crying Signpost

mystery in the city of New Orleans and I've been summoned to solve it. That's what I'm going to do."

I gave him a doubtful look. "It sounds all made up to me. You sure this isn't someone's joke?"

"It's not made up. There's every reason to believe the woman's disappearance is real and she is in great danger."

Tim sounded so serious, I believed him. With a gentle grip, I wrapped my fingers around him and took him off my shoulder to look him in the eye.

"I want to help."

"I was hoping you'd say that," he answered, smiling. "This case may require more than my normal eavesdropping talents. In fact, I quite believe I will have need of a long-legged assistant and you certainly look old enough to help."

I nodded vigorously. "I am."

"But you're going to Puerto Rico, right? That's a problem, isn't it?"

"Actually, my Dad has gotten delayed. I have time."

"How much time?"

"At least a week. I really want to help."

Tim gave me an appreciative smile. "I welcome your company. Now, let's get some rest. We'll soon be most busy."

That's what we did, with me unsuccessfully trying to sleep while Tim snoozed away the hours. Partway through the flight, I fetched the sandwiches Charlie had packed. Waking Tim, we shared them. Of course, a man as small as Tim ate very little and so there was plenty for me. Eventually, I returned to my seat and dozed behind Charlie.

## The Crying Signpost

As the hours passed, time slowed to a crawl. The plane was noisy and, even though this was supposed to be a great adventure, the flight grew monotonous. At long last, my eyelids grew heavy and I fell asleep.

I slept soundly until the plane banked sharply and began going down. My first reaction was a stab of fear. In the next instant, I realized the plane was descending for its landing.

Charlie shouted at me, "Louisiana, Nelly. Wake up. Here's Louisiana."