

**Layover**  
by Tony Cox

“Professor! Professor Watkins!”

*That's me.* Surprised, I turned toward the voice. A young lady was waving and hurrying toward me. I waited for her. I was at a cab stand in front of the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

“You probably don't remember me, Professor Watkins,” she said, catching her breath, “but I took one of your classes at the University of Oklahoma.”

I looked closely at her and had not even a hint of recognition. I looked at my watch, then at the waiting cab. *I was going to be late.*

Turning back toward her, I asked, “Are you taking a cab?”

“Oh--no. My car is in parking. I live in Seattle now.”

“In that case, how about joining me for dinner? I'd enjoy the company; I'm waiting on a plane to Tulsa. It's a six hour layover, and I have a reservation at Yamashito's Crab House in ten minutes.”

“Yamashito's? Sure!”

She had a small carry-on. I took it and opened the rear door of the cab. The bag and I followed her inside. Settled, the woman smiled at me showing lots of white teeth and dimples. Attractively dressed in a black skirt and jacket, she had long brown hair parted in the middle.

I leaned forward and gave the address to the driver. The quick jerk of acceleration settled me back against the seat. I glanced at her and had absolutely no idea who she was. My classes were small; someone like her should be easy to remember.

“Are you still doing animal virus research?” the unknown woman asked.

“I *still* go after those bad mutant bugs that jump from animals to humans and finally from humans to humans,” I said smiling. “The world doesn't need another Type A Influenza. There are two I'm

watching now, one in birds and another in swine.”

“Where did you go on this trip?”

“To the south China provinces,” I replied. “I go every three months to track the mutations of the avian virus for the CDC.”

She nodded. “I’ve read about the problems those poor farmers are having, the birds make them and their families sick, even to death, and the government destroys their flocks, their livelihood.”

“Yes, it’s sad, but the good news is that no human has passed the bird virus to another human.”

The taxi stopped in front of the restaurant.

“Here we are,” I said. I got out and walked around to open her door. We went inside.

The woman and I ordered the special, which was a crab casserole, and settled on a nice Oregon semi-sweet white.

After the wine was served, she looked at me and laughed. “You still don’t remember who I am, do you?”

I shook my head stubbornly. “Which class did you take?”

“Your seminar on virus transference during animal-human interactions,” she replied.

“Ah yes,” I said. *That was at least three years ago.*

“I was going through a difficult period back then, and what I learned in your class helped me understand some things.”

I remained silent, still trying to place her.

“When I saw you, Professor Watkins, I just had to come over and say hello.” She smiled. “I didn’t expect you to remember me. I wasn’t one of your grad students. I was a biologist specializing in amphibians. I’d already graduated and spent several years in Kenya studying the *hyperolius viridiflavus*.”

“The infamous Common Reed Frog.”

“Yes, that’s the one. In grad school, I’d studied the ability of adult female Reed frogs to switch gender and successfully mate. After graduation, I received a grant to observe gender switching in the wild. At the time, Kenya was a good place to do that.” The woman paused, then continued, “I was successful. I even documented a rare male to female change.”

I nodded. “There’s still quite a lot of speculation about what actually causes the gender change. Some say it’s triggered by a

chemical imbalance brought on by the stress of a decrease in the male-female ratio.”

She frowned. “That’s what some say.”

I raised my hand, palm out. “Wait--I remember a post-doc in one of my classes--he was convinced the mechanism for the sex change was a virus, not just any virus, but one that could mutate toward human transference.”

She was silent while I leaned forward and continued my recall.

“His name was--Frank. Frank Givens.”

The woman absentmindedly tucked an errant lock of hair behind her ear and smiled. “Actually, I go by Frankie now.”