

# Nearly Nine

Amongst the infinity of numbers that are nearly nine, there is ample enough space for a great many terrible and tragic occurrences. Nearly nine minutes, by definition, is an eternity. For instance, it took nearly nine minutes for Aiden Potter to remember the word 'gorgeous.' Whitney Heap just stared as Aiden, fidgeting with a tennis ball, struggled to remember the word. "Are you some kind of retard?" she asked, before slinking away in her cotton that illustrated the perfect outline of her body.

It also took nearly nine minutes for Sasha Oliver's cheeks to return to their natural color. Her father gnawed the gristle on his steak. "I just think no one wants a female doctor," he admitted. "You'd make a better nurse." Sasha admitted failure by turning back to her own plate, a dismal wilted forest of greens.

Paul Schaffer's friends took nearly nine minutes to ruin a bunker at Amdahl Country Club while his back was turned. Coach screamed spittle onto his face, but Paul was more afraid of being outcast. Years later, this cowardice would again arrest him as the dull thuds of a neighbor beating his girlfriend echoed throughout the building. After nearly nine minutes, Paul put on headphones.

At age seven, it took Justine Carson nearly nine minutes to put her cat to rest. The ailing Himalayan left several long, ruby red streaks down Justine's arms as it struggled for animal rights. At twenty-seven, nearly nine minutes ago, Justine, dressed neatly in her uniform, completed her duty to Alaska Airways.

It took nearly nine seconds for Justine to empty most of two handguns into the crowd of passengers. "Repent and live!" she called out over the chaos. Then she turned to baptize the tail section. Paul ached to act, to push aside his cowardice for heroism. He moved quickly down the aisle and dove to tackle Justine. She turned and responded. Paul crumpled to the floor.

Sasha immediately rushed to his side. She struggled to pull him out of the aisle. Justine stood over them, her gaze hard and distant. A rush of footsteps came from the tail section as Aiden blindsided Justine with his laptop. With a spray of blood, Justine went limp. Aiden patted her down, looking for more surprises. He opened her coat.

"Bomb!" Aiden shouted, and the crowd stirred. Paul screamed as Sasha dug the bullet out with her hands. Aiden thought for a moment, then grabbed some people to help him carry Justine to an exit row. "Hold tight!" yelled Aiden, and he pulled open the emergency door. Wind roared into the cabin. People sobbed and

questioned and clung to those nearest. With an awkward heave, he pushed Justine out the door. Aiden held tight to the door frame as the body tumbled out. Justine was nearly beyond the plane when Aiden caught a bright flash of orange.

It took nine years to find the wreckage.