Several years ago, as I was looking over my travel itinerary for a business trip from San Francisco to New Orleans, I noticed that would have some time at the airport in Dallas before catching my connecting flight. So I called my friend Luke who lives in Dallas, and said, "Luke, I've got an hour-and-a-half layover at the airport. If you'll come out and meet my plane, I'll treat you to dinner." Luke enthusiastically agreed.

When the pilot announced that our flight would be delayed on the ground an extra few minutes in San Francisco because of air traffic control I paid no attention, but as those few minutes dragged on. I became more agitated and upset. Every minute that passed was one minute less that I would be able to spend with my friend. The plane arrived in Dallas an hour late. That left me only half an hour to visit with Luke and I still needed time to catch my connecting flight. At this point, I knew that our having dinner together was totally out of the question.

When I stepped off the plane, Luke was there, waiting for me.

"Hey, Luke," I said apologetically, "Thanks for coming out to meet me. I hope you didn't have to wait here too long."

"Oh, no problem," he replied easily. "I called ahead and found out your plane was going to be late."

"Oh, good," I replied. "Look, I'm really sorry about dinner, but I'll owe you one next time. Come on, we'll find out what gate my next plane is leaving from. We can head over there together and talk a bit."

I started walking but Luke didn't budge.

"I am very interested in having dinner with you," he said to me.

I looked back at him incredulously. "What are you talking about?"I laughed. "The only way you're going to have dinner with me tonight is if you buy a plane ticket to New Orleans!"

"We're having dinner," replied Luke with determination."Believe me, I have this whole thing scoped out. Just follow me."

He picked up one of my bags and carried it out through the security check. I followed him closely, silently protesting and growing more anxious with every passing moment. He started running, down into the parking garage,and I ran along behind him. thinking to myself, "There is no way we are going to get into his car, drive to a restaurant, have dinner, and still get back in time for me to make my plane! "

The two of us hustled down a short flight of stairs in the parking garage and walked rapidly along several rows of cars until we came to the place where Luke's car was parked.

I immediately noticed that in the parking space next to his car, he had set up a folding table. Luke pulled out his car keys and opened the trunk of his car. He reached in and pulled out a checkered picnic tablecloth, which he spread with a grand flourish over the table. Then he grabbed two folding chairs and set them up next to the table, then a bottle of champagne and a large container of horsd'oeuvres(开胃菜). He set a candle in the center of the table and lit it.

There we were, sitting across the table from each other in the middle of a parking lot toasting each other with champagne and grinning from ear to ear. Drivers in search of a parking place were annoyed at us for taking up the space, but once they took a closer look, many of them broke into astonished smiles.

With seven and one-half minutes to go, we put everything back in the trunk and ran for my plane. We readily got through the security check and arrived back at Gate23 with five minutes to spare. What Luke and I had not remembered, however, was that my next flight was leaving from Gate 31, which was in the other terminal!There was no way I was going to get from Terminal 2 to Terminal 3 in time to make my plane. I was starting to get hysterical. But Luke was ready for anything-- he flagged down an airport employee who was driving an electric cart, and we jumped on the back.

"Our plane is leaving from Gate 31 in three minutes!" Luke implored(恳求).

The driver was up to the challenge. He drove the cart like a Grand Prix racer(方程式赛车), dodging and weaving around the pedestrians. We loudly applauded his every move. We were laughing. We were screaming. We were cheering him on.

We arrived at the gate with only seconds to spare. The flight attendant scolded me, in mock anger. "Where have you been? You think we can wait all day for you? Get on this plane right now!" She grabbed my ticket rushed me on board and slammed the door behind me. I collapsed into my seat, relieved and energized by the whole bizarre experience.

Throughout the entire flight images of my dinner with Luke popped into my head. But then I realized the whole thing had happened so quickly that I hadn't really had a chance to thank him properly.

So as soon as the plane landed I called him at home and said,"Luke, that was such a wonderful thing you did for me. I really want to thank you."

"You don't have to thank me," Luke replied evenly."Somebody already beat you to it."

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"When I got back to my car," he explained, "there was a flower on the windshield, with a little note that said: Anybody who would do something like that for another person must be a beautiful human being."