The Unresponsive Controls

Part 1: The Sudden Turbulence

I am 64 years old. For years, my life was defined by the sky. As a commercial pilot, I was responsible for navigating complex systems through invisible currents. I understood the delicate balance of lift and drag, and I knew that safety depended on the absolute responsiveness of the flight controls. If I pulled back on the yoke, the nose rose. It was a world of cause and effect, governed by physics and meticulous maintenance.

In 2015, my own internal flight deck began to flash warning lights I didn't recognize. It started with a "sensor error"—my left eye began to see double, making the horizon line split in two. Then came the total loss of manual control. I was at a public gathering when my left leg simply refused to deploy. I stood up to walk, and the "gear" was locked. I was grounded, frozen in place, while the crowd moved around me like air over a wing.

I sought out the "ground crew" of medicine. I presented my flight logs—notes on my vision, my stiffness, and the failure of my mobility. But because my external fuselage looked intact, the technicians dismissed the internal glitch. They saw a veteran pilot who was perhaps "fatigued" or "stressed" by the years of flight. They gave me prism lenses and told me to rest, essentially telling me the instrument failure was all in my head.

Part 2: The Critical System Override

The breakthrough didn't come from a standard inspection; it came from a forensic deep-dive into the "fuel" of my system. My neurologist ran a specialized test for GAD 65 antibodies. We weren't looking for a broken part; we were looking for a catastrophic software error. My immune system had initiated a hostile override, attacking the very signals that tell the muscles to "release."

The diagnosis was Stiff Person Syndrome. It is a one-in-a-million malfunction where the body's "autopilot" is stuck in a permanent state of emergency. My left side became a heavy, rigid wing that I could no longer trim. My leg and ribcage were locked in a perpetual "startle," a high-tension state where a sudden noise or a drop in temperature felt like hitting severe turbulence. My body was fighting its own controls.

The specialist's realization was chilling: **"You have been flying with your control cables pulled to the point of snapping. If we hadn't identified this signal override now, the system would have eventually stalled entirely."**

Part 3: Navigating the New Flight Path

The diagnosis didn't clear the weather, but it gave me a new set of instruments. I now manage the "tension" with a rigorous maintenance schedule of biological agents and stabilizers. I have had to accept that I am no longer the pilot of a high-performance jet, but the navigator of a much more fragile craft.

I am sharing this because my time in the cockpit taught me one thing: Never ignore an instrument warning just because the sky looks clear. My history of precision and discipline didn't protect me from a system failure that the "standard" tests couldn't see.

If you are being told your "engine shudder" is just anxiety, or if you feel your controls locking up while the world tells you you're cleared for takeoff, I need you to hear this: Your internal readings are valid.

- **Trust the warning lights:** You are the only one who knows how the controls feel in your hands.
- **Request a second technician:** If the first one says "no fault found," find the specialist who will look at the internal wiring.
- **Never accept "weather" as an excuse for "mechanical failure":** Stress is a condition, but it is not the cause of a seized engine.

I may be grounded from the high altitudes, but I am still the captain of my own journey. I am not a crash site; I am a successful emergency landing in progress.