

Sixfold, May 2023

No Bomb on Board

1.

As it turned out, there was no bomb on board

Pacific-bound passengers sleep right through it
not knowing that we've turned around.
Night vibrates on in a velvet-dark shroud.
I hurry to the cockpit for updates
review my life
raft assignment my life
jacket instructions
forgetting my life
that may not be
which door do I open
for launch hoping
not to mess up
all still alive
thinking fast
from blink
to blink
will this one
be the last
will all
become
nothing

Through the darkness, sudden blaze of runway lights!
We'll keep on flying toward death but not tonight.
I grab the mic and half sigh, half cry
"Ladies and gentlemen, fasten your seat belts
for landing in LA," then gasp it out
again in three more languages.

Passengers wake up still unaware of the bomb
or why they're back to where they got on
after so many hours in the air--unaware
of life rafts or life vests or life we all
could have lost, not to mention the blinks.
In dismay they grumble that they're here,
which wasn't at all their plan for this day.

2.

A Pair of Shoes

Gardenia-scented breezes breathed me past
tiptoeing waves that rumbled satin black
Tahitian sand. There was a single shoe,
a few steps later, reading glasses, bent
and lightless. Inbound I'd served the skipper's
coffee one and one, had cooked Tom's steak not
rare but medium. On that very beach
I'd slapped away Tom's wandering hands and said
a terse goodbye.

His crew headed for Samoa, where
Flight 806 went down with passengers
and crew. Tom's landing, the black box said,
the Tom I'd told to go to hell the night before.
Miles and years away, I walk my dog today
and see beside the road a single shoe--

3.

Fight or Flight Night

--*It's your lucky night*--he said and I knew
then he was no knight in shining armor,
as they say. Things went downhill from there
He detailed each carrier landing,
each different lay on each layover. Thus
the night had not gone well. We finished
dinner, strolled too long on the moon-starved beach.
--*Too early to call it a night*--he shoved

past me through my front door demanding
that I offer him-- what else? a night cap.
Also a goodnight kiss. You can guess
the rest. We wrestled. He twisted my arm
and I snatched my keys from the nightstand--small
defense. Threats and bruises. He seemed to doze
so I grabbed the phone. He cursed and called me
a tease. Accusations, more threats, wrestling.

When the night was finally over, relief
that whoever he was would never
come back. Wherever he is after
so many years, he probably doesn't
remember that night
or me--

4.

Flight 815

Hurling west toward Pacific morning
imprisoned in a metal tube. Sleeping
passengers. Overheads packed, and packed
underneath. Crew sleeping shifts in aisle seats.
Air of stale food, toilets and failing
deodorant. Dim light endless night
Why on earth had she bid this flight?

Destination far as the sextant's star.
Tiare flowered hais and seashell leis
flying fish and joyous swish of dolphins
nearing shore thatched huts' glass floor
for prying eyes to see sea creatures' lives
slack strings strum, steel drums thrum hips gyrate,
grass skirts vibrate: tamouré!

dim light endless night why this flight

Hurling west over Pacific black velvet--
longing for shore. At the jump seat in back she
touches the door, whose red arrow beckons
with a sign: to OPEN.

5.

Jettison unneeded words

*I write a line
about orange. Pretty soon it is a
whole page of words.*

--Frank Ohara

The earth, our big blue marble, is “as blue as an orange,” says Eluard. Orange, the new black, is as orange as a black box filled with words of flyers fallen silent. Reentry capsule is jettisoned to splash down offshore. No reentry without hand stamp, says the sign at the sock hop door. Without a word, he takes my hand. A man of few words. Strong silent type. Say it with flowers, not words. Actions speak louder. “Leave some white space talking through” says Mrs. Thornton in watercolor class. White space talks like white noise. Then Mama said *Don't talk with your mouth full*. Now I say *Don't talk with your mouth too full of words*. Enough is enough, by definition. Why do they call it a black box if it's orange?