

The Man From The Airplane

A Dramatic Monologue by Evelyn Hooven (October 2015)

An impersonal airport hotel on the outskirts of a major city in the Caribbean. It is after a severe storm that has deranged all plane schedules. . . and after a marital argument and rift. A man is speaking to his wife, whose listening we must imagine. It is late at night. The line-lengths should suggest the rhythm of his thinking.

All right, I'll try.

No censorship, no holds barred.

Just so you understand—my own way, own time. . . .

A man's alone in his office, early evening.

Follow me, come with me on this.

This man thinks his firm,

and with it his hold on the world,

is failing.

Try to imagine

the special loneliness of a man

accustomed to the ministrations

of women—

receptionists, assistants,

sundry auxiliaries.

Of course I'm that man.

Yet, even after fifteen years,

it stays hard to admit.

Before things looked up,

turned out, long before. . . .

My company's failing.

Will I have to disband—

just to stop payment into

the time-is-money

and space-a-fortune world?

Just to clear out?

Taking stock. Trying to assume

an appraiser's eye: typewriters,

La-Z-y Boy, waiting room tables,

soft- and hardware, couches,

switchboard, fixtures and coolants—

ho-hum and damn.

Inventory of the not used up,

the used only slightly,
but all that counts
is that it's not brand new.

How much should I ask?

What settle for?

What give or barter away?

Am I obsolete?

Do I have worth?

What can't I part with?

I need to leave.

In the pleasant bar,
where the sandwich kitchen stays open,
in the music bar,
a brand new waitress asks,
"What will you have?"
"You on toast," I want to answer,
but am forced to wonder:
Will she smile?
Will she fling my triple decker,
my whisky neat

onto sawdust, and shout,

“Predator, abuser, pig!”?

So I give my order strictly and wince. . . .

birthright privilege altered,

outright taken away

and nothing in return.

You heard me.

Being chief spectator to your freedom

is not a fair return.

I’m no saint.

Most men aren’t.

Do I want an affair?

A skier, cool-cheeked and firm?

Too tiring.

Or a Ballerina?

Too costly.

I’m in no mood

to chase some mini in the failing office.

Not worth the lies and—

the guilt.

I can't believe I'm telling this to *you*.

But. . . you're exactly the one

I need to tell it to.

Office some days later. Packing.

Consider, a voice says,

consider the faces of those who return at dusk—

how beautiful they are.

Leonardo startles,

via college art history,

and across five hundred years.

I look down from my high window.

What is it I'm fighting for?

Against?

A desire to die with a sense

of the bigness of life

as the last instant?

Are these tears mine?

A pile of magazines my secretary forgot to sort:

cooking and sex, sex and money,

health and getaways, scams, money, and. . . .

Do I want an affair with a temporary girl,
thin, inconsequential?

Does she exist?

Suddenly on the thirty-second floor,
after hours of dismantling,
it seems that
nothing's been my own.

I know that's not sharing, caring,
but it comes to me that way.

None of my own changes, surprises.

Safety first

and now not even that.

Lucky, in this town,

just to stay alive,

keep a few others alive.

The wolf's at the door.

I know this isn't mature;

I couldn't foresee miscarriage,

stillbirth, near-suicide.

But I feel inconsolably abandoned:

nobody loves me best.

Yet. . . then. . .

Back then—

Fifteen years is too far.

Try eleven.

Remember the firm's early-on affiliates,

in Portugal and Spain?

Here's a journey with too many hours between planes. . . .

Taxi to the oldest quarter in Lisbon.

Steep hill, little doorways,

sardines.

The sun's in flames.

I get lost.

Can't miss my only-connection-for-the-day plane.

Can't find my way and no stopover on economy.

Humiliation of the limited ticket laden with provisoes—

doesn't let you for a minute forget

the little you've managed to buy,

all you have to do without.

Where's the airport,

I'm lost, I must. . . .

An old woman looks at my clothes, portfolio,

grasps my plight's essentials,

stands at the corner in dark espadrilles,

with a basket of customary,

it seems immemorial provisions—

a basket on her head—

yes, as in the song.

She waits, steadfast soldier;

two young women come out of doorways,

unbidden sentinels, loyal.

Finally a taxi.

The old woman gestures towards me,

speaks slowly.

The driver repeats,

in halting English.

This man, isn't it true,

is from the airplane,

and must be returned.

And it was true.

In that ancient quarter of Lisbon,

she calls me The Man—

sole and unmistakable—

from the Airplane.

The Man from the Airplane.

The Man. . . .

I forget my usual litany:

boarding card, receipt compartment,

hotel destination,

international dialing code,

frequent flier verification,

voucher, currency-equivalent, gate.

Probably because I'm traveling alone

and not too disheveled

on the overbooked flight,

I'm shifted to luxury class.

But I feel—

unique, distinctive.

My luck will turn.

Life will change.

The glass of champagne stays replenished.

Everything's diced or smoked or mousse

or just plucked from a tree.

Coverlets seem to be silk,

though a jet sophisticate assures me it's an imposter,

this holofill, this polyester.

Says he's used to embossed eiderdown.

He's boastful, talky,

but then it seemed like charm.

After the earphones and useless information—

this is your captain again,

this your steward—

the lovely rave and drone—

altitude, longitude,

I look,

as if for the first time,

at the clouds.

A woman saying her rosary interposes,

Lisboa, Lisboa.

A young man in a prayer shawl sings softly to himself.

The clouds are textured and formal.

So these are the sands of time.

Is there a music of the spheres?

No longer in pieces,

no debarking,

embarking,

descending,

but wholly airborne,

I fall asleep.

No flight since

has been like that.

I want it back.

I need it now.

Evelyn Hooven graduated from Mount Holyoke College and received her M.A. from Yale University, where she also studied at The Yale School of Drama. A member of the Dramatists' Guild, she has had presentations of her verse dramas at several theatrical venues, including *The Maxwell Anderson Playwrights Series* in Greenwich, CT (after a state-wide competition) and *The Poet's Theatre* in Cambridge, MA (result of a national competition). Her poems and translations from the French have appeared in *ART TIMES*, *Chelsea*, *The Literary Review*, *THE SHOp: A Magazine of Poetry* (in Ireland), *The Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Vallum* (in Montreal), and other journals, and her literary criticism in Oxford University's *Essays in Criticism*.

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