

Surprise

Red, though not exactly red, or pink, or maroon, still a warm glow blossoms like early roses. If they provided an odor it would be a fictitious rosy lavender. But they are not for smell or touch. The eyes apprehend them clearly. And this sight provokes other senses into a stream of emotions.

We will return.

Hours before, the brain-thump begins with a stomach drumming like a dirge. Along the vacant lot of a highway, the airport, a luminous many pointed tent beckons, or warns, “Stand clear!” Initial anxiety began with packing too much in too small. Now it intensifies with the regular thud of tires on pavement. Tarmac? Overactive thoughts cased in a weary body wonder, “Where’s my passport?” “Tickets?” Check again, once more.

The cranky worry intensifies when the ease of an e-ticket from a euphemistic kiosk fails to show.

False assurance arrives at the gate, then evaporates: first a frantic search for tickets, the ambiguity, “Will they have enough seats?” A peruse of passengers brings a kind of assurance. Who enjoys flying, this inhuman process of cattle searched and stamped and sent, maybe. A few do, surrounded by friends, or family. They laugh, nibble through pretzels then McChicken then granola bars. All the while they chatter on about stuff, stuff of camping trips, the last trip to Aruba, the not-to-serious worries about connections in Miami. They look and sound happy. No bleary eyes or helpless gut. How joyful to join their happy band.

The rest grouse with internal grumble, it helps.

What the hell is, “Flight attendants prepare for cross-check!” They’ve been checking continuously. The welcome to, “United Airlines Flight 234 with direct service to Atlanta,” by the less than enthusiastic Belinda, Someone might miss the various repetitions, though, while memorizing the fabric pattern of the seat just ahead of one’s nose.

The door seals. They can’t eject us now (horrible word choice). Buckle. The assurance of John Wayne sitting the cockpit’s left seat rasps with confidence: sit back folks; this flight could be done with eyes closed. Please God! Even though we are thirty minutes past departure, he assures—we’ll make it up.

When the tractor meant to push us away from the gate blows a tire, the god of the controls, in a manner of therapeutic calm, reassures that we will touch down at Atlanta nine minutes ahead of schedule, “... the scheduling protocol.

Nearby, a woman grips and counts to one-hundred twice from engine thrust to the hint of aircraft leveling. No sound utters through the slow motion of her lips. Three more launches and touch downs before the destination time, first Atlanta.

Two hours of fidgeting, the first with hope for sleep, then, with hope abandoned, skimming through Sky Store. Head bumping stares out the aquarium oval windows reveal a change from empty skies to cheesecloth illuminated by glaring white wing lights. Mr. J.W. off-handedly orders the attendants to take their seats for the imminent air meeting ground. They never do. We descend. The wing lights dim and glare through the white gauze. Flaps extend downward. Suddenly the engines scream. The decline instantly reverses to incline near the attitude of a NASA rocket. No landing. Silence. Once again knowingly acknowledges what is known, there’s fog in Atlanta, lots of fog. We’ll give it

another go. Yep, those flight traffic controllers have their rules about the space between fog and ground. Will give it another go.

Several minutes pass, abruptly a swan dive through opaque white. Pull up. The voice is unflappable, “Well, folks, Cincinnati is a lovely destination. It’s only 42-minutes away. Our ground folks there will take a look at all the connecting flights and I think they’ll be able to help most of you out. Why, you might get a flight out of there sooner than you think. So, I’m gonna give the gate agent a call and see what he can do for us.” The onboard rumbling intensifies.

Miami, then out over the Caribbean, and gratefully, the asphalt appears and upon it, one of dozens of yellow taxi to negotiate the thunderous cacophony of Barranquilla and two-hours, thereabouts, to Santa Marta. But the season is festival, the cab slows, and two-hours devolves to four. Victor, the driver and articulate instructor in Spanish and speeds to a stop at one of thousands of roadside stands. He totes de-haired coconuts with straws through their opened top. Not bad. The crawl proceeds, but barely. At midnight, the streets are brimming. Bicycle passes us, sometimes people afoot.

At last, number 703, she bids, “Wait, and shut your eyes.” The temptation involves a protest in rank terms. “Now you can come in,” a scratchy voice welcomes.

All is dusk in the room the space that surrounds kitchen, couch and chairs, and a long glass-top table. In one corner, the red glow. Homecoming through the luminance of love from a woman who dressed-up Charlie Brown’s Christmas tree.