

Encounter

She has the seat next to mine on the Chicago flight.
There is, perhaps, a god of minor miracles
who arranges these things.
(Does she realize how pleasant it is for an older man
when young women dress like that?)

I help her hoist her bag
into the overhead bin.
"Thank you," she tells me with a smile,
and seems to mean them both.
(Does she realize how hard it is on an older man
when young women dress like that?)

She takes out a magazine which makes me realize
we are both headed for the same conference.
Should I introduce myself?
We talk a bit, small.
She is from Brazil,
understands the limitations of the Lula government.
And so intelligence, I discover,
is part of her beauty.

I ask her name again.
She will have to tell me a third time
before the sieve between my ears
holds it in place.
"Don't worry about that," she suggests.
And I add kindness to the list of things
I can measure about her.

After a time I take out my new hand-held computer
with its roll up keyboard
to work on a poem.
She has never seen a roll-up keyboard before
and is fascinated,
asks "What kind of poetry do you write?"
I give her my two chapbooks,
go on composing, holding my breath
for a kindly response.
She reads one page, turns to the next—
a good sign I tell myself.

"I like this one," she exclaims,
pointing to the verse about horse shit
and Central Park South.

"I know that corner."

Later she promises to read them all,
and send me her thoughts via email.

I will never make love to this woman, desirable—
not beyond the reach of my dreams,
since dreams have a distant reach, but
beyond any reasonable hope.
Still, she allowed me to stroke
her mind with my poems
while she returned that caress
with her attention, a kindly word,
and a promise for the future as she read.

And so I leave the plane with an afterglow
not so different from the one I used to know,
as it hovered over a lover's bed.

Steve Bloom
June 2003