

15th St. Jerome Translation Contest

— 2020 EDITION —

English
Student honourable mention



Katharine Ruff

I knocked back eighteen Valiums before my flight (but everything's under control)

Next week, I'm flying to France. Nine hours in the air, the best part of which will be spent puttering over the ocean. This does not bother me at all. Not in the slightest. Actually, the secret is to just never think about it. I know people who, weeks before take-off, start imagining all sorts of horrifying scenarios in which the plane somehow develops a fault and crashes. Not an affliction I have to deal with, thank God.

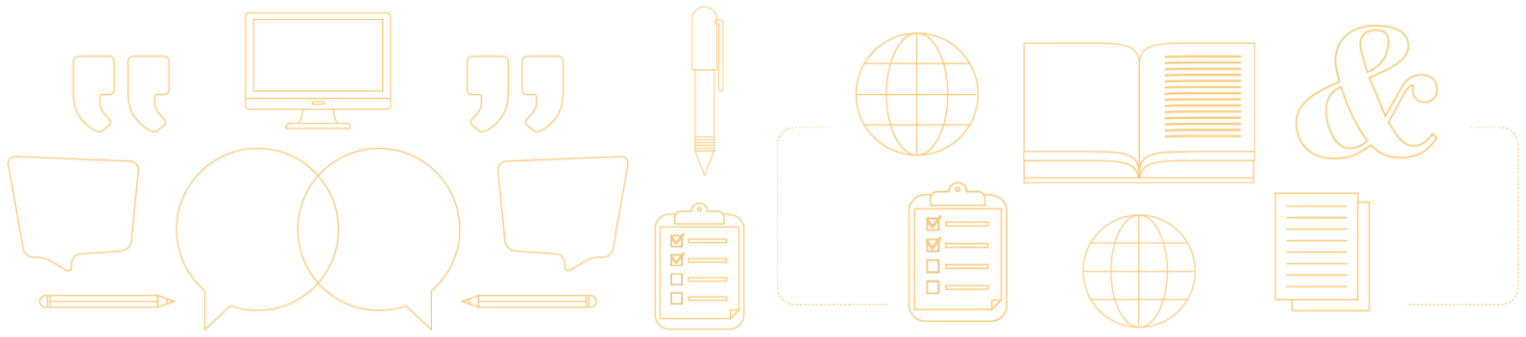
All in all, I'm as calm as a turkey before Christmas.

I *definitely* can't wait to find myself 12,000 feet above solid ground. Laid-back as ever, as chilled out as a pothead, thoughts miles away. Gazing with rapture at the endless deep blue sky and, of course, the magnificence of our planet that I glimpse through the plate-sized window from my lofty seat: the abundant wonders, enchanting lakes, forever snow-dusted mountain peaks, vast prairies, and the ocean that is soon to swallow up the carcass of the plane.

What bliss, dear reader; what absolute bliss!

It's as if I were born to fly. As soon as I take my seat in the cabin, I come alive. I want to envelop the passenger next to me in a bear hug. I'm like a child in a toy shop; everything is captivating. The passengers packed like sardines, the soft comfort of my seat, the wide eyes of the newborn who – what luck! – is sitting with his brother just one row in front, the brochures whose pages I feverishly turn to learn what my upcoming meal will consist of (a heap of frozen pasta with bits of unfortunate-looking salmon plucked from the septic tanks of the Indian Ocean). The carefully-worded speech of the flight attendant, whose exaggerated, precise gestures show us how to exit the plane when it bursts into flames mere seconds before smashing onto the tarmac of the runway. The legends of air travel that never get old.

Soon I'll be up, up and away, which means the tricky choice of the first film, and then the high-definition opening scenes punctuated with two bouts of turbulence and three interruptions by the air hostess. The gloopy texture of my tomato juice, served without celery but with an abundance of ice cubes. The feeble thrumming of the engines, whose hiccupping pitch leads me to knock back another Valium, the eighteenth of the day. The pilot's jovial announcement in English that, due to a problem with the ventilation system, we are all going to die horrendously painful deaths. The cheerful glance at my fellow passengers when, without warning, the plane playfully swerves off course for a couple of brief seconds before straightening up again. Or not.



[...]

Blackness gathers outside and all is calm on board; sleep calls, eyelids grow heavy, the body contorts and manages to find the ideal position. Torso twisted, legs crooked, head jammed against the arm rest, feet tucked in with hands, shoulders wedged into the back rest [...]. The discomfort quickly fades when, between two poor excuses for dreams, comes the vivid image of the precise moment when the plane, having lost both engines, begins its slow descent towards the blue waters of the Atlantic. The immense marine cemetery will soon be all over the six o'clock news, accompanied by the solemn voice of the newsreader announcing the heavy death toll of a terrible air catastrophe. Two hundred and three souls, including fifteen children, twelve cabin crew, and – in an immeasurable loss for French culture – a Jew on the run whose last column in *Slate* spoke of his particular fondness for transatlantic flights.

Maybe I'll just cancel?!!!