

# KEVIN PRUFER

## AUTO WRECK

Far from your damage, snow is falling.

It covers up the taxis and the buses. It covers the terminals and  
the airplanes on the runways and those parked at the gates.

The old woman is saying that she has to catch her flight. She's  
sorry she doesn't have identification, it's at home on the table  
where she left it, she's sorry, please let me through.

And the young man shakes his head sadly and tries to explain again—

And the woman drops her plastic bag at the young man's feet. Her son  
is waiting for her in Cleveland, she says, he is very sick. He's in the  
hospital and what can she do? Look at me, I'm an old woman, do I  
look like a terrorist?

And the young man says his supervisor is on his way, that he'll sort it out—

But her plane is leaving, she says, and then she is crying because now  
her plane has probably left and there she is stuck in the airport with  
a storm coming on and her son in a bad way and they'll probably  
cancel all the late flights now.

And the people behind her shift back and forth in line. He feels their  
angry eyes on him.

Is there maybe someone I can call? the young man says. I can call  
someone for you. But the woman has turned around, has walked away.

At his feet is her plastic bag.

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One, two, three, I said, and down we went  
so the snow whipped our faces raw  
and when we hit the ramp, the inner-tube bounced us clear into the air.  
For a moment we suspended there, your warm breath  
on my cheek and both of us hollow-boned as birds.

Oh my brother, wake up.  
Don't you know a thousand satellites circle the earth like gnats?  
I could find our old house on this screen. I could find this hospital 's  
window.  
I'm sorry about the snow. When they push the needle in, it buries you.

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And the plastic bag sat on a shelf in the lost luggage room  
and all night long it became thick and heavy  
so the plastic stretched over what grew inside it.

So late at night, the airport was mostly empty  
and in the bag his heart was slowly beating.

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What will I do? she asks the ticket agent as the fabulous de-icers cover  
the wings with mist.  
What will I do? as the plane rumbles through the snow, as it rides the  
long, low runway far from her, as it lifts gently into the air.  
What will I do? as the hundred faces press against the windows and  
the plane tips dangerously, then rights itself again, rising through  
the blizzard in his skull,  
up and up through the windlash and white.  
My son is in the hospital, she says, watching all this through the window.

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And some summers, we lay on the balcony and played cards with girls from the neighborhood.

For days, we did nothing but play cards and when it grew too hot, we quarreled.

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Do not die, I was saying from the back of the line, while the old woman argued with the guard, while she dropped her bag at his feet and shouted and shook her head.

And the pained young man asked her to move aside while he radioed for help.

And we were all impatient, the line stopped dead and the snow coming down,

so when the old woman stormed off, I was relieved. The man next to me sighed, said she wasn't no terrorist, they should just let her through,

and, the line moving again, I agreed.

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The truth is, my brother, you are asleep in your bed and in your head it is snowing

and I have already told you about sledding and I have asked you about the satellites and those long summers when we played on the balcony with the girls whose names I can't remember.

And the truth is, I am looking out the hospital window into the street,  
this laptop balanced on my knees.

And the truth is, I never heard a word that old woman said, though  
she looked half-crazy and, still, I think they should have let her  
through.

I flew all night to get here, making up the story about that old woman  
and still you can't hear me, though the doctor says it's ok to talk, how  
can it hurt?

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I can find our old house on the laptop's screen, and I can zoom in on it.  
There's the balcony, seen from above, light-speckled  
and strange. I do not know who lives there now.  
Do you?

There are maybe two boys  
and above their heads satellites circle the earth  
taking pictures which they send on down to us.

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And the next morning, the heart stopped beating.

And when the young man slipped into the lost-luggage room, he made  
sure no one saw him.

And when he opened the bag, he found not my brother's heart, he  
found not my brother's body, he found not a pile of snow, ash—

(and up we flew on the inner tube and suspended there for the longest  
time)

he found a child's blanket, yellow and blue, and on it a name was  
stitched. It was soft and, in places, tattered,

something a mother long ago might have made to cover her first child  
at night.