

Short Story
1850 words

SAYING IT

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Outside, gnats welcomed him. Trexler, the compound honcho, bid him a cheery good morning. Bugs and the Brit's chirpy inflection could be annoying before Everette had his coffee.

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"That's more than enough. I'm only going to Burning Bush 1. But make sure you don't tell Ginny."

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"Well, I guess I do need to be able to get it down if you were to get sick or something," she had said.

He teased her. "Honey, it's always gonna come down. You just wanna

interfere a little with how and where."

A month later his wife had her pilot's certificate and instrument rating-- which was typical of anything Ginny set out to do. She did everything so well it was easy to just expect it as par and forget the praise. Ev winced. He'd forgotten to say so many things. Lately he was getting worse. Maybe you just don't know how, he almost muttered aloud. Hate stumbling around with words. Clumsy-- inadequate-- ambiguous-- words probably cause more misunderstanding in the world than fences.

John Everette flooded the cockpit with fresh air as he ate his breakfast of durian fruit and looked down at the riverine wilds where it grew. He wondered again how anything so vile-smelling could taste so good. From 6,000 feet, the mangrove canopy shimmered with condensation and refracted light. The Malay Peninsula's granite spine humped in an early morning stretch. He could have made better time in the new Piper, but this was mostly a private errand and he wouldn't use an institute plane for that.

The motor's burly bass induced a silent colloquy complete with behind-the-eyes video. Was it last Wednesday? Thursday? You couldn't tell one day, one season, from another here. All of 'em equalizing 12 hours of dark and light. And when you're in the eternity business, what's the difference?

Whatever day it was, Ginny was wearing that dumb gray dress and if you hadn't known her long before that dual edition of jungle genes bringing up the rear ever said "Daddy," and the sun weren't prying in her sorrel hair, and you hadn't spotted the casuarina colors in her

eyes, you might not've turned around so fast. That's when it hit you. She needs a vacation. Eleven months she's done most of the cooking at Home Plate. What is she now, 41, 42? Time, New England winter, the tropics, even a brief surplus of money never changed her. Put her in a sarong kabaya, take the pins out of her hair the way you did the other night, and 20 years vanish. How do you tell such a woman how you feel? Don't just wing it, say it. All of it. Tell her she means more to you than ever.

The undulating verdure below grew denser as Everette's shadow skimmed inland. "Telephone pole arcade," pilots call it. More than one has gone down without reaching the bottom-- disappearing through the greenery, impaling on unseen trunks. In '92 a party of Sakai reported finding an old wipeout when they climbed into the trees after wild honey. The plane, lost 8 years earlier, was invisible to ground as well as air searchers.

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You never should've left here, you know. But there was a hole in the dedication. Being poor was no surprise. Missionaries get used to that. But there was an unexpected lack. It was bad enough to discover

it, hell not to be able to identify it. You faked it a while. A poor solution to anything.

And Ginny knew. She also knew you had to resolve it yourself. Once, she asked if the home branch of the institute would suit you better than the jungle aviation arm. You laughed. "Can you see me hunkered in a cubicle with a quill and scroll? I don't have linguistic gifts, just wings." For awhile it did make you wonder if constant, plodding exposure to translating the Word in different dialects would answer your own gnawing questions. It didn't come about as some big epiphany. One of Trexler's letters-- good ole Trex wrote you the whole time you were back in New England forgetting about him-- told about the discovery of the wreckage in the trees. The pilot wasn't one you ever knew but his bones wore a stainless steel cross inscribed with: "Send me." That same year a magazine published a poll that claimed 92% of Americans believe in God. But a whopping lot of them apparently drop it right there. For most, "Send me" has a whole different meaning. And your big-mouthed, wing-folded alter ego informed you if you weren't gonna do anything about what you said you believe, you were just another so-what stat. When you announced you wanted to return to the bush, all Ginny did was smile and ask when.

Everette lined up the Stinson with a small trough in the green. The thick vegetation on either side of the rift had to be chopped back weekly to keep it from repossessing the landing strip.

As he got out of the plane he saw the village artist walking toward him with two rolls of his work under his arm.

"Welcome, Mr. Everette," said the native. "We are hoping you had a

fine flight."

"Yes, thanks, Gelami. I brought a few books for the library. The medicine stocks should arrive next week." He clasped the burnt leather hand and indicated the cloth. "Let's have a look."

Gelami held out the bolts. Everette unrolled each one. Berry reds, indigo and pepper greens defined leaf patterns like those growing around the mission perimeter. It was genuine batik, not the common sarong or printed kain chocking the village shops and market stalls. Hair-fine tracery of dyes bled through wax gave a muted mossiness to the designs on the fine fabric. Everette stroked the soft weave. "I'll buy 'em both."

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"You really think so?"

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Airborne again, he wished he had the native flair for romantic expression. He could hear Ginny saying, "Ev, they're gorgeous, but you shouldn't have splurged so."

He ran his hand through his thick brown hair. Yeah well, better start practicing what you're gonna say, he told himself sternly. Something more than just that 20 years of putting up with a knothead deserves a special gift. One that tells her she's still beautiful, still what makes you break out the parang to hack and hike 9 miles to Home Plate when nothing can fly and the road is gumbo. Something more than just "Happy anniversary, darling." Why are words so damn

difficult? Maybe it is a cultural thing. Why can't you come right out with it? Just say: "I love you more than anything on earth." Just say: "I'm sending the twins to camp at Ipoh for two weeks and I've rented us a cottage with a private beach at Penang. We'll skinny dip, make love on moonlit sand, and you'll dine on satay and pineapples and wear these sarongs with green orchids in your hair. Forget the cost. It's something I want for you, so let me hear no protests because that, my dear, is the missionary's position." He laughed out loud.

The weather worsened abruptly. Not unusual this time of year when the northeast monsoon was shifting. He climbed above a bulbous bag of rain sagging blackly between him and First Base. His radio blasted static to his questions.

The ceiling thickened. He couldn't get above it. He found a corridor of bright calm that lasted several minutes. Then his mezzanine of light dimmed. He headed for a hole in the mist that closed before he reached it. The plane shuddered as lightning bounced around his wing tips. The engine had an alien burr in the changed density. He could smell ozone seeping in the window chink. Now and then the draft soaked his arm.

Everette wiped his forehead on his sleeve as the buffeting got rough and thunder got louder. Easy, John-boy, you've bulled through many a storm. Plenty of fuel. Relax.

The dark deepened. Above and below were meaningless. His instincts began to argue with the attitude indicator. He wanted to pull the nose up sharply. It was all he could do to believe the instrument. Through the prop he saw lightning arc across his path like a warning bow shot.

For an instant the nacelle glowed eerily.

What if you buy the farm? Widow your wife on a trip you didn't have to make? Leave your boys when they need you most? Nothing urgent, just personal interests. Just a few yards of cloth!

No, that's a sorry view. It was for a gift of love and that was not, that would never be an unworthy thing. He looked up. Not exactly a valley, Lord, but I see some bad shadows and I could sure use some of that goodness and mercy following my tail. Please help m-- Everette felt his skeleton plunge violently in its sack. The batik bolts levitated beside him. He got the nose down and recovered from a near stall. The altimeter indicated he'd dropped over a 100 feet.

As the shock passed, he was amazed that his life had indeed reeled by like a fast rewind while retaining total clarity. Out loud he blurted, "It's true!" But more astonishing than the cliche was the fact that it was his life with Ginny only. Scenes, conversations, intimacies as real as the present. Separate from the man at the controls, he savored each part of it, especially things he had forgotten. He felt no vertigo, no nausea, but it took great effort to integrate all his faculties again.

He nailed his concentration on the artificial horizon, struggling with his impulse to doubt it. You're the real instrument, Lord, the only true horizon. I know you're with me--your rod and staff-- You-- and she-- I know you better because of her--

The radio clapped a bolt of static in his ears then smoothed to a low rasp that turned to a human voice: "First Base to oh-niner-zulu. The deck is clear to 270 feet. You'll be able to see the tree tops. We

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GLIMMER TRAIN
THE SOCIAL
CHECK HOW RECENT

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He nailed his concentration on the artificial horizon, struggling
with his impulse to doubt it. You're the real instrument, Lord, the
only true horizon. I know you're with me--your rod and staff-- You--
and she-- I know you better because of her--

The radio clapped a bolt of static in his ears then smoothed to a
low rasp that turned to a human voice: "First Base to oh-niner-zulu.

The deck is clear to 250 feet. You'll be able to see the tree tops. We can hear your engine. Come on down, Ev, you're close to home."

John Everette smiled. Yes, he thought. Yes. Either way. But thank you, Lord. This homeside can still use me. And I have so many things to say to my wife...

Glenn Holloway
913 E. Bailey Rd.
Naperville, Illinois 60565

SAYING IT

Glenn Holloway

Day broke louder than usual at First Base. One of the resident peafowl had staked out John Everette's roof, now it squawked at rivals and rummaged for insects in the thatch. Everette yawned and sat up on his cot watching the ceiling rock as he reached for his jeans. Ginny was already up and gone to the kitchen hut.

Outside, Trexler, the mechanic bid him a cheery good morning. The Brit's chirping inflection could be annoying as a gnat before Everette had coffee. "Your plane's ready, Ev. Weather patches are moving in from the coast but it looks like you've got two, maybe three hours," Trexler said.

"I'm only going to Burning Bush 1. But don't tell Ginny."

Everette stared fondly at the old gull-wing Stinson he had rebuilt himself. He never saw it without thinking how Ginny handed him tools, brought him lunch, helped him paint it. She even checked out in it-- because he wanted her to, not because she had any real love of flying.

"Well, I guess I do need to be able to get it down if you were to get sick or something," she had said.

He laughed. "Honey, it's gonna come down. You just wanna interfere a little with how and where."

Less than a month later his wife had her license and instrument rating-- which was typical of anything Ginny set out to do. She did everything so well, it was easy to just expect it as par and forget the praise. Ev knew he'd forgotten to say a lot of things lately.

From 6,000 feet, the mangrove canopy was shiny with condensation and refracted light. The peninsula's granite spine humped in an early morning stretch. He could have made better time in the new Piper but this was mostly a private errand and he wouldn't use an institute plane for that. This bird was his in ways no other could ever be, even if someday he owned one of the twin-engine dream jobs a friend was designing.

The motor's burly bass induced a silent colloquy complete with behind-the-eyes video. Was it last Wednesday? Thursday? You couldn't tell one day, one season, from another here. All of 'em equalizing 12 hours of dark and light. And when your business was eternity it didn't much matter.

Whatever day it was, Ginny was wearing that dumb black dress and the kids were trailing behind her and if you hadn't known her long ago in Singapore, and if the sun

SAYING IT

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hadn't known her long ago in Singapore, and if the sun weren't prying around in her sorrel hair and you didn't spot the casuarina colors in her eyes, you might not turn around so fast. That's when you knew she needed a vacation. Eleven months she'd done most of the cooking at Home Plate. What was she now, 41, 42? The tropics, New England winter, even a surplus of money for awhile hadn't changed her much. Put her in a sarong kabaya, take the pins out of her hair the way you did the other night, and 20 years vanished. How do you tell such a woman how you feel? Why can't you just say you love her more than ever-- starting way before that dual edition of jungle genes bringing up the rear ever said "Daddy?"

The undulating green below grew denser as Everette's winged shadow moved inland. "Telephone pole forest," pilots called it. More than one had gone down without ever reaching the bottom--disappearing through skyside verdure, impaling on unseen trunks just below. In 1991 a party of Sakai reported finding an old wipeout when they climbed into the trees searching for honey. The plane, lost 8 years earlier, was invisible to ground as well as air searchers.

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Everette sighed. You wouldn't be back here if not for that pilot. Your door opened, too. It had to be planed off, hinges oiled, and then shoved. But it did open-- whining and complaining like the old ornate gate on Grandpa Stellar's high Back Bay porch.

You never really left here, you know. But there was a hole in the dedication. Being poor was no surprise.

Missionaries get used to that. But there was an unexpected lack. Bad enough to discover it, hell not to be able to identify it. You faked it awhile. Like pulling your shirt tail out to cover a suspected split in the seat of your pants.

But Ginny knew. She also knew it wasn't anything she could solve for you. Once, she asked if the stateside, scholarly branch of the institute would suit you better than the jungle aviation arm. You laughed. "Can you see me hunkered in a monastic cubicle with a quill and candle? I don't have linguistic gifts, just wings. Maybe a few people-skills." For awhile it did make you wonder if constant, plodding exposure to the Word in different dialects would answer your own gnatting questions.

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Everette lined up the Stinson with a small trough in the green. The thick vegetation on either side of the rift was already making incursions into the hand-cut landing strip.

He saw the old weaver walking toward the plane before he got out. There were two bright rolls under his arm.

"Welcome, Mr. Everette," said the native. "We are hoping you had a fine flight."

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Gelami held out the bolts. Everette unrolled each one. Berry reds, indigo and pepper greens sparingly accented with brown repeated the leaf patterns vining wild around the mission perimeter. It was genuine batik, not the common sarong or printed kain chocking the shops and market stalls. Hair-fine tracery of pigment bled through wax gave a muted mossiness to the designs on the hand-woven fabric. Everette stroked its softness. "I'll buy 'em both."

Airborne again, he could hear Ginny saying, "Ev, they're gorgeous! But you shouldn't have splurged so."

He chewed his lip. Yeah well, you could start practicing what you're gonna say to her. Something more than just that 20 years of putting up with a knothead deserves a special gift. One that tells her better than words that she's still beautiful, still what makes you hike 9 miles to Home Plate when nothing can fly and the road is gumbo. Something more than just "Happy anniversary, darling." Why are words so difficult? Why not come right out with it? Just say: "I love you more than anything on earth." Just tell her: "I'm sending the twins to camp at Ipoh for a week and I've rented a private cottage on the beach at Penang. We'll skinny dip in the ocean, make love on moonlit sand and you'll dine on satay and pineapples and wear these sarongs with green orchids in your hair. You may as well accept it without

protest, because that, my dear, is the missionary's position." He laughed out loud.

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The ceiling thickened rapidly. He couldn't get above it. He found a corridor of calm that lasted several minutes. Then his mezzanine of light dimmed. He headed for a bright hole in the mist that closed before he reached it. The plane shuddered as lightning bounced around near his wing tips. The engine had an alien burr in the changed density. He could smell ozone seeping in the window chink. Now and then the draft was dripping wet on his arm.

Everette wiped his forehead on his sleeve as the buffeting got rough. Easy, John-boy, you've bulled through many a storm. Plenty of fuel. Relax.

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What if you buy the farm? Widow your wife on a trip you didn't have to make? Leave your boys when they need you most? Nothing urgent or even worth-while beyond personal interests. Just a few yards of cloth!

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weren't prying around in her sorrel hair and you didn't spot the casuarina colors in her eyes, you might not turn around so fast. That's when you knew she needed a vacation. Eleven months she'd done most of the cooking at Home Plate. What was she now, 41, 42? Time, the tropics, New England winter, even a surplus of money for awhile hadn't changed her much. Put her in a sarong kabaya, take the pins out of her hair the way you did the other night, and 20 years vanished. How do you tell such a woman how you feel? Why can't you just say she means more to you than ever-- starting way before that dual edition of jungle-born genes bringing up the rear ever said "Daddy?"

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Everette lined up the Stinson with a small trough in the green. The thick vegetation on either side of the rift was already making incursions into the hand-cut landing strip.

He saw the old weaver walking toward the plane before he got out. There were two bright rolls under his arm.

"Welcome, Mr. Everette," said the native. "We are hoping you had a fine flight."

"Great, Gelami. Thank you. The new hymn books and medicine stocks are in the back." He clasped the burnt leather hand then indicated the beautiful cloth. "May I see?"

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sarong or printed kain chocking the shops and market stalls. Hair-fine tracery of pigment bled through wax gave a muted mossiness to the designs on the hand-woven fabric. Everette stroked its softness. "I'll buy 'em both."

Airborne again, he could hear Ginny saying, "Ev, they're gorgeous! But you shouldn't have splurged so."

He chewed his lip. Yeah well, you could start practicing what you're gonna say to her. Something more than just that 20 years of putting up with a knothead deserves a special gift. One that tells her better than words that she's still beautiful, still what makes you hike 9 miles to Home Plate when nothing can fly and the road is gumbo. Something more than just "Happy anniversary, darling." Why are words so difficult? Why not come right out with it? Just say: "I love you more than anything on earth." Just tell her: "I'm sending the twins to camp at Ipoh for a week and I've rented a private cottage on the beach at Penang. We'll skinny dip in the ocean, make love on moonlit sand and you'll dine on satay and pineapples and wear these sarongs with green orchids in your hair. You may as well accept it without protest, because that, my dear, is the missionary's position." He laughed out loud.

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The ceiling thickened rapidly. He couldn't get above it. He found a corridor of calm that lasted several minutes. Then his mezzanine of light dimmed. He headed for a bright hole in the mist that closed before he reached it. The plane shuddered as lightning bounced around near his wing tips. The engine had an alien burr in the changed density. He could smell ozone seeping in the window chink. Now and then the draft was dripping wet on his arm.

Everette wiped his forehead on his sleeve as the buffeting got rough. Easy, John-boy, you've bulled through many a storm. Plenty of fuel. Relax.

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No, that's a sorry view. It was for a gift of love and that was not, that would never be an unworthy thing. He

looked up. Not exactly a valley, Lord, but I see some bad shadows and I could sure use some of that goodness and mercy following my tail. Please help m-- Everette felt his skeleton plunge violently in its container. The batik bolts levitated beside him. He got the nose down and recovered from a near stall. He nailed his concentration on the artificial horizon, struggling with his impulse to doubt it. The altimeter indicated he'd dropped over a 100 feet.

You're the real instrument, Lord, the only true horizon. I know you're with me--your rod and staff-- You-- and her-- I know you better because of her--

The radio clapped a bolt of static in his ears then smoothed to a low rasp that turned to a human voice: "First Base to oh-niner-zulu. The deck is clear to 250 feet. We can hear your engine. Come on down, Ev, you're close to home."

John Everette smiled. Yes, he thought. Yes. Either way. But this homeside can still use me, Lord. And I know some things I have to tell my wife. Thank you for letting me stay around awhile longer.

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Read
Naperville, IL 60565

SAYING IT

Glenna Holloway

Day broke louder than usual at First Base. One of the resident peafowl had staked out John Everette's roof, now it squawked at rivals while rummaging for insects in the thatch. Everette yawned and sat up on his cot watching the ceiling shake as he reached for his jeans. Ginny was already up and gone to the kitchen hut. Connecticut was a world away.

Outside, gnats welcomed him. Trexler, the compound honcho, bid him a cheery good morning. Bugs and the Brit's chirpy inflection could be annoying before Everette had coffee.

"Your plane's ready, Ev," said Trexler, who was also the mechanic. "Monsoon weather patches are moving in from the coast but it looks like you've got two, maybe three hours."

"That's more than enough. I'm only going to Burning Bush 1. But don't tell Ginny."

Everette stared fondly at the old gull-wing Stinson he had rebuilt himself. He never saw it without thinking how Ginny handed him tools, brought him lunch, helped him paint it. She even checked out in it-- because he wanted her to, not because she had any real love of flying.

"Well, I guess I do need to be able to get it down if you

were to get sick or something," she had said.

He teased her. "Honey, it'll always come down. You just wanna interfere a little with how and where."

A month later his wife had her license and instrument rating-- which was typical of anything Ginny set out to do. She did everything so well it was easy to just expect it as par and forget the praise. Ev winced. He'd forgotten to say a lot of things. Lately he was getting worse. Maybe you just don't know how, he almost muttered aloud. Hate stumbling around with words. Clumsy-- inadequate-- ambiguous-- words probably cause more misunderstanding in the world than fences.

John Everette flooded the cockpit with fresh air as he munched his breakfast of durian fruit and looked down at the riverine wilds where it grew. He wondered again how anything so vile-smelling could taste so good. From 6,000 feet, the mangrove canopy shimmered with condensation and refracted light. The Malay Peninsula's granite spine humped in an early morning stretch. He could have made better time in the new Piper but this was mostly a private errand and he wouldn't use an institute plane for that.

The motor's burly bass induced a silent colloquy complete with behind-the-eyes video. Was it last Wednesday? Thursday? You couldn't tell one day, one season, from another here. All of 'em equalizing 12 hours of dark and light. And when you're in the eternity business, it doesn't much matter.

Whatever day it was, Ginny was wearing that dumb gray dress and if you hadn't known her long before that dual edition of jungle genes bringing up the rear ever said "Daddy," and the sun weren't prying in her sorrel hair, and you hadn't spotted the casuarina colors in her eyes, you might not've turned around so fast. That's when it hit you that she needs a vacation. Eleven months she's done most of the cooking at Home Plate. What is she now, 41, 42? Time, New England winter, the tropics, even a surplus of money for awhile never changed her. Put her in a sarong kabaya, take the pins out of her hair the way you did the other night, and 20 years vanish. How do you tell such a woman how you feel? Don't just wing it, say it. All of it. Tell her she means more to you than ever.

The undulating green below grew denser as Everette's shadow skimmed inland. "Telephone pole arcade," pilots call it. More than one has gone down without reaching the bottom--disappearing through skyside verdure, impaling on unseen trunks. In 1992 a party of Sakai reported finding an old wipeout when they climbed into the trees after wild honey. The plane, lost 8 years earlier, was invisible to ground as well as air searchers.

The incident opened the door for contact with the tribe. They had rejected the mission team in the past. Now, the New Testament had been translated into the Sakai language, reading courses begun and Burning Bush 5 firmly established, deepest

outpost in the Malay interior.

Everette sighed. You wouldn't be back here if not for that crash, that pilot. Your door opened, too. It had to be planed off, hinges oiled, and then shoved. But it did open-- squeaking and protesting like the old ornate iron gate on Grandpa Stellar's river view porch.

You never really left here, you know. But there was a hole in the dedication. Being poor was no surprise. Missionaries get used to that. But there was an unexpected lack. It was bad enough to discover it, hell not to be able to identify it. You faked it awhile. Like pulling your shirt tail out to cover a suspected split in the seat of your pants.

But Ginny knew. She also knew you had to resolve it yourself. Once, she asked if the stateside branch of the institute would suit you better than the jungle aviation arm. You laughed. "Can you see me hunkered in a monastic cubicle with a quill and candle? I don't have linguistic gifts, just wings." For awhile it did make you wonder if constant, plodding exposure to translating the Word in different dialects would answer your own gnawing questions.

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same year a national magazine published a poll that claimed 92% of Americans believed in God. But a whopping lot of them apparently dropped it right there. For most, "Send me" had a whole different meaning. And your big-mouthing, wing-folded alter ego informed you if you weren't gonna do anything about the things you said you believed, you were just another so-what stat. When you announced you wanted to return, all Ginny did was smile and ask when.

Everette lined up the Stinson with a small trough in the green. The thick vegetation on either side of the rift was already making incursions into the hand-cut landing strip.

He saw the old artist walking toward the plane before he got out. He had two rolls of his work under his arm.

"Welcome, Mr. Everette," said the native. "We are hoping you had a fine flight."

"Great, Gelami. Thank you. The new hymn books and medicine stocks are in the back." He clasped the burnt leather hand and indicated the cloth. "May I see?"

Gelami held out the bolts. Everette unrolled each one. Berry reds, indigo and pepper greens repeated the leaf patterns like the ones growing around the mission perimeter. It was genuine batik, not the common sarong or printed kain chocking the shops and market stalls. Hair-fine tracery of dyes bled through wax gave a muted mossiness to the designs on the fine fabric. Everette stroked the soft weave. "I'll buy 'em both."

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Gelami exposed a crescent of white teeth. "She will wear them like a queen. She will know they are a gift of love."

"You think so?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Everette. These colors will tell her. Your voice will whisper in these leaves."

Airborne again, he wished he had the native flair for romantic expression. He could hear Ginny saying, "Ev, they're gorgeous! But you shouldn't have splurged so."

He ran his hand through his thick black hair. Yeah well, better start practicing what you're gonna say, he told himself sternly. Something more than just that 20 years of putting up with a knothead deserves a special gift. One that tells her she's still beautiful, still what makes you break out the parang to hack 'n' hike 6 miles to Home Plate when nothing can fly and the road is gumbo. Something more than just "Happy anniversary, darling." Why are words so damn difficult? Maybe it is a cultural thing. Why can't you come right out with it? Just say: "I love you more than anything on earth." Just say: "I'm sending the twins to camp at Ipoh for a week and I've rented a private cottage on the beach at Penang. We'll skinny dip, make love on moonlit sand, and you'll dine on satay and pineapples and wear these sarongs with green orchids in your hair. You may as well accept it without protest, because that, my dear, is the missionary's position." He laughed out loud.

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The ceiling thickened. He couldn't get above it. He found a corridor of calm that lasted several minutes. Then his mezzanine of light dimmed. He headed for a bright hole in the mist that closed before he reached it. The plane shuddered as lightning bounced near his wing tips. The engine had an alien burr in the changed density. He could smell ozone seeping in the window chink. Now and then the draft soaked his arm.

Everette wiped his forehead on his sleeve as the buffeting got rough and thunder got louder. Easy, John-boy, you've bulled through many a storm. Plenty of fuel. Relax.

The dark deepened. Above and below were meaningless. His instincts began to argue with the attitude indicator. He wanted to pull the nose up sharply. It was all he could do to believe the instrument. Through the prop he saw lightning arc across his path like a warning bow shot. For an instant the nacelle glowed eerily.

What if you buy the farm? Widow your wife on a trip you didn't have to make? Leave your boys when they need you most? Nothing urgent or even worthwhile beyond personal interests. Just a few yards of cloth!

No, that's a sorry view. It was for a gift of love and that was not, that would never be an unworthy thing. He looked up.

Not exactly a valley, Lord, but I see some bad shadows and I could sure use some of that goodness and mercy following my tail. Please help m-- Everette felt his skeleton plunge violently in its sack. The batik bolts levitated beside him. He got the nose down and recovered from a near stall. He nailed his concentration on the artificial horizon, struggling with his impulse to doubt it. The altimeter indicated he'd dropped over a 100 feet.

You're the real instrument, Lord, the only true horizon. I know you're with me--your rod and staff-- You-- and she-- I know you better because of her--

The radio clapped a bolt of static in his ears then smoothed to a low rasp that turned to a human voice: "First Base to oh-niner-zulu. The deck is clear to 300 feet. You'll be able to see the tree tops. We can hear your engine. Come on down, Ev, you're close to home."

John Everette smiled. Yes, he thought. Yes. Either way. But thank you, Lord. This homeside can still use me. And I have so many things to say to my wife...

8

Holloway

SAYING IT

Day broke louder than usual at First Base. One of the resident peafowl had staked out John Everette's roof, now it squawked at rivals while rummaging for insects in the thatch. Everette yawned, sat up on his cot watching the ceiling shake as he reached for his jeans. Ginny was already at the kitchen hut. Today was C Day. The big Change. He, John J. Everette, was going to change if it killed him.

Outside, gnats welcomed him. Trexler, the compound honcho, bid him a cheery good morning. Bugs and the Brit's chirpy inflection could be annoying before Everette had coffee.

"Your plane's ready, Ev," said Trexler, who was also the top mechanic. "Monsoon weather patches are moving in from the coast but it looks like you've got two, maybe three hours."

"That's more than enough. I'm only going to Burning Bush 1. But make sure you don't tell Ginny."

Everette stared fondly at the old gull-wing Stinson he had rebuilt himself. He never saw it without thinking how Ginny handed him tools, brought him lunch, helped him paint

SAYING IT

This story includes some excellent description--e.g. the mangrove field, but the parts don't all hang together. I have a hard time picking up a continuous train of thought in this story. It seems disunified, unfocused. Some passages get caught up in their sentence structure and cloud meaning. The second sentence is a run on--not a good start.