

John Coleman Bennett

## **Skywriting for the Rest of Us**

Ten minutes before guests arrive.  
Lasagna in the oven.  
In the fridge the salad sits  
with a thin sheet of plastic wrap  
keeping it fresh: a cuisine curtain  
waiting to reveal the meal.

I'm such a private man, my little routines  
teasing like appetizers for the big dinner.  
God, how you've endured my inadequacies,  
my quirks. You'll find me a project or two,  
tell me to hit the road one more time  
so I can arrive late and make our guests  
believe I've been industrious, clutch.  
Today it's a pair of tongs so we might  
seem civilized to the friends we want  
most to appear civilized, and I'm off  
for the grocery knowing such excuses  
are growing scant. Soon we'll have everything  
we want in our home, and then  
I'll have no reason to leave like this.  
Nothing to contribute.

A short walk in the turn of March  
when spring seems like a season  
Earth's been considering, but needs convincing.  
On to Main Street. The shy, greening  
trees disappear and the big, cerulean sky  
parachutes in sight. Not a cloud.  
No fog. Not even a flock  
to obscure this view. Then, the putter  
of a little Cessna climbing up, circling around  
as if confirming the mechanics  
before it begins the big message:

*Marry Me...Jenny?*

So much of what I say has come out wrong  
that I, too, know embarrassment as a smoke

trail always at my back. I can see the pensive,  
prospective groom standing there now, wishing he could  
revise, rearrange, edit. Maybe had he taken  
a moment more before he tendered the pilot's cash,  
then carelessly wrote the message on a Post-it  
and rushed it over, he might not cringe  
as he is now, seeing an ellipsis settle-in  
for every uncertainty he's owned.

Why hadn't he gone with convention on this one,  
tying the directive down with a comma and ending speculation?

*A simple Jenny, will you marry me?*

Some of us suspect he's spread his net wide,  
varying the message in different states  
across shared sky—*Marry me...Kate?*

*Marry me...Beth? Marry me...Mary?*—

quite sure only one, if any, will agree,  
and knowing if the smoke runs low  
before the vocative lunge on any run,  
at least the offer stands.

Others remember exhaust sputters  
leaving dots where love belongs.

The rest of us know he's doing the best he can  
with language, jet engines, and this new feeling  
he just couldn't help but billboard to the world  
by putting clouds in an otherwise cloudless sky.

But the sun sinks, the chill stiffens, and the tongs—

Yes! the tongs—I buy and head back.

I feel responsible for what's happened.

If I were a pilot, I'd put off the party  
and head to the airport. If I owned a single-  
engine I'd fire it up and head for the sky  
without hesitation. I'd write the simple response  
we've all been waiting for: *Yes!*

I'd land safely on the tarmac, taxiing in  
as if I've done something good for us all:  
everyone's mind back at ease, our parade back  
to its route. Not to let the letters fade,  
streak away, as they do now, before the answer  
becomes widely commercialized:

We were promised so much.