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On Standby

The stranded understand each other,
shocked we can't fly with the angels.
We haven't learned how to behave just yet.
We binge on cocktails, bar chips and salsa.
We don't behave like angels when we hear—
flight cancelled—we crowd the pearly gate.
Rated and ranked, we wait in a state of purgatory.

Though I'm no assassin, I kill time
when I read Edgar Allen Poe from the grave.
If you say I'm not serious enough flipping pages
while those with rented wings come and go,
can I recommend an economics textbook
about gumdrops or widgets waiting to be shipped,
the marginal cost per unit? We're a problem,
you and I, to the gate agent. His suit crisp
with pleats, he keeps the wait list secure.

Odds are poor to fly soon. Odds are better
to *stand by your man*, the singing
of a woman next to me suggests, plugged
into earbuds. She's singing in a bluegrass tone
of voice that makes me think of Kentucky—

where I've just passed through—where
there's childhood, too, green hills and blue lawns,
where children play at airplanes. Like we
used to do, swinging our arms in arcs
and crashing so gently to the ground, fallen,
from grace, falling onto the lawn where we made
summer's grass-and-earth-stained angels.

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