Once upon a time recently in...a land nearby

Purple Engine

R. Ryan Brandys

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by R. Ryan Brandys

My tray table is out of its upright and locked position.
My elbows bump the unforgiving armrest as we begin our moonlit descent into Las Vegas.
They've dimmed the cabin light. Told us to Stow All Portable Electronic Devices...
In the air, I must exist differently, because today I am a proud sardine.

Out my window I see the city lights as a sea of golden breadcrumbs.
Our grid of humanity stretches endlessly in the dark,
And our lights form dotted lines so precise and perpendicular,
The pattern of mankind makes the constellation of the big dipper look untidy.

Out my window the purple engine roars. The turbine spins, an oiled rotor
Still as strong on its billionth revolution as the day the airline mechanic
Welded the fan blades and drilled a hole to mark the center of gravity.

Smooth steel and giant rivets scoop the air.
And I imagine, in this fog and rain, the rivets could shear off,
This wing could split and run this meat-packed missile through the ground.
But risk is the price I pay for serenity.

Purple engine, I could kiss you.
You are a well-oiled machine doing your thankless duty.
As my life hangs in the balance.

See those lighted columns on the horizon?
Those skyscraper hotels owned by dot-com three-comma capitalists?
Well they're the ones who taught me to measure my self-worth in gigahertz.
And they've got to be right because their buildings represent
The ultimate culmination of human cooperation: Casino Hotels, 50 stories high.
Masterpieces of architecture, built just like the pyramids:
By the obligatory cooperation and compensation of selfish strangers.
And for a price mankind can cater to your every need: a tiny slice of utopia if you can afford it.
It wasn't man that built this city. It was money.

What will I say to the airline mechanic when they cut his pay in half?
And even with his hard-earned wages he can barely feed his family?
Well, he won't know what it's like to be a proud sardine. Do I tell him:

*Up here you look smaller than a breadcrumb.*

*Your town is a pathetic fungus on the crust of the earth,*
*Growing only to be exploited. That's why your children won't eat tonight.*

But the flight attendant will begin the snack service.
She distributes peanut packages that no one eats.

*And thanks again for drilling that hole so precisely. We all appreciate it.*

Oh, Purple Engine, you are pure in heart, but a slave to sinful creatures.