

# Somewhere Over The Pacific

By F/O Kathy Bustle (United)

A wall of words washes over me. I am slumped over with my head in my hands. Can he not read my body language? It's saying, "I hate you!" But nothing gets through to HIM. Nooooo—he just KEEPS ON TALKING.

Why, why, why, why, why, why? Why me? Why won't he stop talking? Will he ever stop talking? Will this flight ever end? And I traded IN to this trip—what was I thinking?!

I'm sleepy, so, so sleepy. Can barely keep my eyes open. Single augment; middle-of-the-night body time; all-nighter home. Must stay awake. Talking would help, it really would. The two of us could have a stimulating discussion about the war or domestic spying or the current administration or even the management stock allocation. But that's just wishful thinking, because on this trip there will be no discussing. There will be only him talking, just his lips continually flapping, and I know he'll never stop. He'll never stop because he is completely oblivious. He does not know I stopped listening three days ago in Flight Ops.

He must really think this is how a conversation is supposed to go—"I'll talk for hours and you just sit there and 'listen.'" Maybe everyone "listens" to him, slumped over, head in hands, never saying a word. They never say a word, because one word is all it takes to start him up again. You know...they start to slow down a little, out of ideas, I guess, and then you blow it and say, "Uh-huh," or "Oh, really," with a little too much enthusiasm, and they're OFF again for another half hour. That's a mistake you don't make twice. You learn. Oh, yes, you learn.

The only solution, I conclude, is to hold completely still—not make any movements at all. The old "playing possum" strategy. He'll think I'm sleeping, or dead. No one talks to a sleeping person or a dead person. He

will wind down like an antique clock. But it could take a while. I must be strong.

Slowly, carefully (must not let him see me move), I spread my fingers just wide enough to see the airplane clock: 1045Z. Three hours until my break. I'll never make it without killing him.

write-ups are slipped under the cockpit door—I am thrilled to take care of them. And, look, there's the re-dispatch message coming over the printer. Joy! I pull up weather, I check the fuel required, and using calligraphy worthy of a Mandarin scribe, I methodically transfer the re-dispatch



I start to fantasize about this. How would I do it? I could make it look like an accident (I don't know how he got tangled up in his shoulder harness like that or why I didn't notice it soon enough to save him). Or do I just brazenly DO it and claim temporary insanity? I could call in witnesses. He must have tortured others. No jury would convict me! I mean, I might get a call from Professional Standards or something, but I can live with that.

Once more through my fingers, I look hopefully at the airplane clock. Only eight minutes have passed. I'll never make it. I'm not a religious person, but I start to pray.

And help arrives. Maintenance

info onto the flight plan. Voila! Then, feeling positively giddy, I create an ACARS reply to Dispatch that is truly a work of art. &&%%\*\*R—D—A\*\*&&%%!!!

Talk away over there, I don't mind anymore, for I am very busy with my many duties. An hour has painlessly gone by, I've got a crew meal on the way, and my break is coming up. "Uh-huh," I say perkily. "Oh, really," I add with gusto. I can do this. I've got a new attitude, and after today, I'll never see this guy again. As Martha would say, that's a good thing. ☺

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