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Black Box

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BLACK BOX

I want to fly in the black box; sometimes I want to live in the black box. The ones they keep on airplanes, the ones that are always found, always safe. Last week a small plane went down south of town. There was footage of wreckage, and the ages of the dead. It always looks like the same small plane, the crumpled toy in a forest. There is steam from the downed plane, or is it mist. Mist in the same anonymous landscape, pines or elms or ash, with the carnage long gone. Then they talk about the black box and uncertain circumstances. Nothing was reported. Communication stopped. A missing blip on a computer screen means people are dead on the ground. Sometimes the plane, if small, private, will not show up where it was supposed to land. Two days later, a woman will miss a business class, a man will miss a reunion. And almost immediately talk turns to the black box, that inviolable space with the last words, words streaming in as the plane was screaming down. And I think: if only they had been in the black box they would be safe now, they would have been saved. And I think: let the words lie crumpled on the ground, let the words be the ones who can't get out. And let them lead the saved out of the box, freed into life by the giant key kept only by agents from the agency. The lid is open, and there they are: aged forty-two, and twenty-seven, and nine, from Dayton, from Poughkeepsie, from Encino, smiling and shaking their heads that we could invent such a miraculous box. And how nice that the boxes have become so available, too, so affordable: for the car, the boat, the home. The black box can always be found, and we are always in it, and always safe, and we come out explaining; we know why things happened, we know we'll fly again.