

Gate A-4 by Naomi Shihab Nye

Instructions: The stanzas of the poem “Gate A-4” by Naomi Shihab Nye have been broken into six parts below. Read each of the parts out loud with your partner, then fill in the table based on the information presented in the poem. Some of what was said/narrated/thought has been expressed explicitly in the poem. Other parts can be imagined based on what the speaker does tell us. Some of the sections have already been filled in (in italics) or sometimes questions are posed in order to help organize the material. Complete each part before continuing with the next one.

Fill in all empty squares, based either on what you think was said or thought.

Part 1

Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after learning my flight had been delayed four hours, I heard an announcement:
 "If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately."

Well—one pauses these days. Gate A-4 was my own gate. I went there.

	What was said/narrated	What was thought
Speaker	<i>Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after learning my flight had been delayed four hours, I heard an announcement.</i>	<i>Fill in here what the speaker might have thought:</i>
Airport announcer	<i>"If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately."</i>	
Speaker		

Part 2

An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing. "Help," said the flight agent. "Talk to her. What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this."

What was said/narrated		What was thought
Older woman	<i>Wailing.</i>	
Speaker		
Flight agent		

Part 3

I stooped to put my arm around the woman and spoke haltingly. "Shu-dow-a, Shu-bid-uck Habibti? Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-bit-se-wee?" The minute she heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying. She thought the flight had been cancelled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment the next day. I said, "No, we're fine, you'll get there, just later, who is picking you up? Let's call him."

	What was said/narrated	What was thought
Speaker	<i>Shu-dow-a, Shu-bid-uck Habibti? Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-bit-se-wee?</i>	
Older woman		<i>She thought the flight had been cancelled entirely.</i>
Speaker	<i>No, we're fine, you'll get there, just later, who is picking you up? Let's call him.</i>	

Part 4

We called her son, I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and ride next to her. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends. Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her? This all took up two hours.

What was said/narrated		What was thought
Speaker	<i>What might she have said to the son?</i>	
Older woman	<i>What might she have said to her sons?</i>	
Older woman	<i>What might she have said to the speaker’s dad?</i>	
Older woman	<i>What might she have said to the Palestinian poets?</i>	

Part 5

She was laughing a lot by then. Telling of her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade *mamool* cookies—little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts—from her bag—and was offering them to all the women at the gate. To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the mom from California, the lovely woman from Laredo—we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling. There is no better cookie.

What was said/narrated		What was thought
Speaker	<i>She was laughing a lot by then. Telling of her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade mamool cookies—little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts—from her bag—and was offering them to all the women at the gate.</i>	
Older woman	Fill in here what she might have said to the women at the gate:	
A woman at the gate	Fill in here what she might have said to the older woman who offered her a cookie:	

Part 6

And then the airline broke out free apple juice from huge coolers and two little girls from our flight ran around serving it and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my new best friend—by now we were holding hands—had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and I thought, This is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person in that gate—once the crying of confusion stopped—seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too.

This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.

	What was said/narrated	What was thought
Speaker	<i>And then the airline broke out free apple juice from huge coolers and two little girls from our flight ran around serving it and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my new best friend—by now we were holding hands—had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.</i>	
Speaker	Fill in here what she might have said to the older woman:	<i>This is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person in that gate—once the crying of confusion stopped—seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too.</i>