

2 The following text is an extract from a letter to the boss of an airline company. In it, the writer complains about his experience as a customer on a recent flight. The writer has included five photographs in his letter to Mr Richard Branson, which are not included here.

(a) Comment on the ways in which the writer uses language and style to voice his concerns. [15]

(b) On a return flight the writer has further problems, not relating to food, this time. He writes again to Mr Branson.

Write a section of the letter (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the material of the original extract. [10]

Dear Richard,

REF: Mumbai to Heathrow 7th December

I love your brand, I really do – which is why I continue to use it despite a series of unfortunate incidents over the last few years. This latest incident takes the biscuit.

Ironically, by the end of the flight I would have gladly paid over a thousand rupees for a single biscuit following the culinary journey of hell I was subjected to at the hands of your airline. 5

Look at this Richard. Just look at it: [see photograph 1].

I imagine the same questions are racing through your brilliant mind as were racing through mine on that fateful day. What is this? Why have I been given it? What have I done to deserve this? And, which one is the starter, which one is the dessert? 10

You don't get to a position like yours, Richard, with anything less than a generous sprinkling of observational power so I KNOW you will have spotted the tomato next to the two yellow shafts of sponge on the left. Yes, it's next to the sponge shaft without the green paste. That's got to be the clue hasn't it. No sane person would serve a dessert with a tomato would they? 15

I know it looks like a baaji¹ but it's in custard, Richard, custard. It must be the pudding. Well, you'll be fascinated to hear that it wasn't custard. It was a sour gel with a clear oil on top. Its only redeeming feature was that it managed to be so alien to my palate that it took away the taste of the curry emanating from our miscellaneous central cuboid of beige matter. Perhaps the meal on the left might be the dessert after all. 20

Anyway, this is all irrelevant at the moment. I was raised strictly, but neatly, by my parents and if they knew I had started dessert before the main course, a sponge shaft would be the least of my worries. So let's peel back the tin-foil on the main dish and see what's on offer. 25

I'll try and explain how this felt. Imagine being a twelve year old boy, Richard. Now imagine it's Christmas morning and you're sat there with your final present to open. It's a big one, and you know what it is. It's that stereo you picked out of the catalogue and wrote to Santa about.

Only you open the present and it's not in there. It's like it is your hamster, Richard. It's like it is your hamster in the box and it's not breathing. That's how I felt when I peeled back the foil and saw this: [see photograph 2]. 30

Now I know what you're thinking. You're thinking it's more of that baaji custard. I admit I thought the same too, but no. It's mustard, Richard. MUSTARD. More mustard than any man could consume in a month. 35

I needed a sugar hit. Luckily there was a small cookie provided. It had caught my eye earlier due to its baffling presentation: [see photograph 3].

It appears to be in an evidence bag from the scene of a crime. A CRIME AGAINST COOKING. Either that or some sort of back-street underground cookie, purchased off a gun-toting maniac. You certainly wouldn't want to be caught carrying one of these through customs. 40

I was exhausted. All I wanted to do was relax, but obviously I had to sit with that mess in front of me for half an hour. Once cleared, I decided to relax with a bit of your world-famous onboard entertainment. I switched it on: [see photograph 4].

Is that Ray Liotta²? A question I found myself asking over and over again throughout the gruelling half-hour I attempted to watch the film like this. After that I switched off. I'd had enough. I was the hungriest I'd been in my adult life and I had a splitting headache from squinting at a crackling screen. 45

My only option was to simply stare at the seat in front and wait for either food, or sleep. Neither came for an incredibly long time. But when it did it surpassed my wildest expectations: [see photograph 5]. 50

Yes! It's another crime-scene cookie. Only this time you dunk it in the white stuff. Richard, what is that white stuff? It looked like it was going to be yoghurt. It finally dawned on me what it was after staring at it. It was a mixture between the baaji custard and the mustard sauce. 55

So that was that, Richard. I didn't eat a thing. My only question is: how can you live like this? I can't imagine what dinner round your house is like. It must be like something out of a nature documentary.

As I said at the start I love your airline, I really do. It's just a shame such a simple thing could bring it crashing to its knees and begging for sustenance. 60

Yours sincerely,
Tarun Achari

¹baaji: an Indian vegetable dish
²Ray Liotta: a Hollywood film star