

NIGHT FLIGHT, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

*For my father*

Iced glass on the terminal's windows shimmered in the distance as we landed in fog and sleet for a short layover in Reykjavik.

While the Loftlieder 4-prop refueled for its flight on to Luxembourg, we spilled out into the waiting area of the tiny airport, wind reshuffling snow on the tarmac; half asleep, surrounded by other blurry-eyed passengers and American military stationed there for months on end.

Inside, a loudspeaker blared departures in languages we didn't know, as my father took me to the men's room.

A curious boy of seven, I took my time, gazing absent-mindedly around the vacant stalls and urinals, the steam radiators hissing, till a group of enlisted men stumbled in, drunk and loud, shouting more obscenities than I'd ever heard.

Scared and shocked, I stood frozen in front of the urinal, my business done, till my father's iron hand clasped me securely on the shoulder and led me, quickly, out into the dimly-lit corridor, his face stern and gripped with what seemed to be anger.

For a second I thought he was mad at me for taking so long. No words were said, but years later I realized the truth: How the pure indignation of his love sought to spare me.

We boarded and took off through mist,  
my mother and brother beside us  
huddled beneath blankets,  
the cabin pressure easing as we leveled off.  
Later, I awoke to the muffled drone of  
the plane's engines, my family dozing,  
the tiny aisle cold, vacant and dark,  
except for a few overhead lights the  
size of distant stars.

Through the small wind-swept window,  
I could see gray cloud cover, barely visible,  
below, and felt a kind of warmth all over  
a long way down.