

On A Trans-Atlantic Flight

by Jennifer L. Lopez

I used to think I could see God in the clouds. Not in an indefinite expanse of clear blue, calm and crisp and quiet, desperate in its infinity, but somewhere up there, among the water vapor masses between us and eternal sky. Not in gray and grumpy nimbostratus, nor fine feathered cirrus, but in a fair weather cumulus blanket and the sun beams like knitting needles that pierced it, the ends of which, I was sure, illuminated some somber earthly occasion - corporeal cessation. But certainly God was in the clouds, sending forth that sun vector to call an angel home.

Necks craned and twisted, bodies pressed forward against restraints just for a glimpse out of the small windows of a 757. My first flight. Even as we lifted from the ground, the Earth tried to pull me back, urging me not to endeavor to things for which my body was not made. Or perhaps the weight on my chest was God, knowing the human race was too curious for its own good, placing a firm hand of protection, holding us close, leashing our titanium bird lest we flew too close to the sun.

My head swam, unsettled by artificial air pressure, though it may have been the sight of the clouds that did it. Nerves and terror and elation and uncertainty coagulated in my stomach. Expecting a breeze, a mist, a warm breath on my cheek, I considered holding my breath, eyes squeezed shut, as white opacity filled the tiny bubble windows. Curiosity, though it may or may not have killed a cat, overtook my timidity, prying open my expectant eyes just as the clouds broke.

Did you know the sky goes on forever anyway, that you could follow it and it would never lead you anywhere, not to peace, nor to happiness, nor to god, and did you know that the sun knits blankets of cumulus clouds to shield my fragile and naïve heart from such

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despair? I used to think I could see god in the clouds. But there, above it all, atop a secular cumulus quilt, I saw that my geometry was all wrong: the gilded shafts I had been certain were line segments, with an Alpha and Omega — originating from the hand of a benevolent god and ending far below, soul escalators bringing the dead into eternal bliss - were instead rays, of all things, capped at one end by the stinging sun, extending onward forever.

On a trans-Atlantic flight, I searched urgently for validation, winged hope. I found only science and weather, impressive but not divine, water vapor polluted by a need to push our limits, to stretch, to disintegrate our mortal restrictions. Puffs of little substance whose mass is no match for the hard nose of human determination, pierced by a persistent sun whose light will outlast even the clouds as it is reflected back, changed by the tangible clutter of temporal curiosity, fractured, bounced, splintered, and so on, et cetera, ad infinitum.

I may never fly again.

