

Like My Father Flies
by Bill Glose

I.

My childhood homes stood next to runways
on Air Force bases overseas. Dad would sometimes
wear his flight suit to the dinner table,
kit bag packed, ready by the door. We'd push corn
around our plates, glance at the wall-mounted speaker,
waiting for it to squawk the alert, yank him from our meal.
When he disappeared into night's maw, we'd peck
at what remained, wonder *Was just another drill?*

In Vietnam, my father dropped bombs, dodged missiles
the size of telephone poles. His stories
remain locked behind mute lips, one of many lessons
he taught by example. Fathers don't brag—
they play catch with sons, take fishing trips,
define the world through actions, not words.

II.

His plane, an F-4 Phantom, wore camouflage
on its body, shark's mouth on its nose. After school,
I'd wear his boots and gloves, the g-suit
with compression leggings, reverently touch
plaques in the hallway displaying unit patches
and bullets that were bigger than my hand.

I rode bikes with sons of pilots. At runway's end
we'd park by chain-link fences while Phantoms
roared overhead, ripping the blue like lightning.
From the concrete curves of bomb shelters, we jumped
into piles of leaves, shouted *Geronimo*, pretending to fly.

III.

I have my mother's eyes, she with vision too poor
to drive at night. Pilots don't wear glasses.
I became, instead, a paratrooper, jumped
from cargo planes that rumbled like buses
through gray skies. Floating beneath a silk canopy
was closest I could come to being him.

When my unit was sent to the Middle East,
I was eager to march on ground trod by father's shoes.
After I was gone, Mom said it was only the second time
she'd seen my father cry.

IV.

Now, every business flight I take is with forehead
pressed to Plexiglas, sun reflecting off silver rivers
stitched into a patchwork green. Beside me,
wings slice wisps of white cotton. If I slit
my eyes, the world beyond the thatch of my lashes
is nothing but a blur.

And I am flying.
I am flying.
I am flying.