

The Plane

Between the enormous wings the body of the plane stretches its one hundred and twenty seats or so in threes on either side towards the distant brain way up, behind the dark blue curtain and again beyond no doubt a little door. In some countries the women would segregate still to the left of the aisle, the men less numerous to the right. But all in all and civilisation considered the chromosomes sit quietly mixed among the hundred and twenty seats or so that stretch like ribs as if inside a giant centipede. Or else inside the whale, who knows, three hours, three days of maybe hell. Between doing and not doing the body floats.

To the right of the fuselage the enormous wing spreads back quite motionless on the deep blue of the high sky, the sunlight quiet on the dull-shining metal, the jet-exhausts invisible in their power save for a tremor against the blue or the propellers invisible in their speed save for a hinted halo, no cloud and from this seat no reef of nature no man-made object passing to show that the plane flies immobile at eight hundred and thirty kilometres an hour height twelve thousand metres on a sheet of paper handed over the back of the armchair in front by a black hand above Bordeaux with outside temperature minus forty-two degrees.

Inside they have pressurised the comfort. The people sit hidden in their high armchairs but for a few head-tops bald fluffy blond curly back between the port and starboard engines, looked after cradled in their needs, eat drink smoke talk doze dream and didn't catch what you said.

– That curtain up there between us and the first class. It reminds me of a tabernacle.

– Oh. Yes.

– Or a Greek Orthodox church. Have you ever –

– Oh yes and travel-talk ensues half drowned in air-conditioning and other circumstantial emptiness with the eyes gazing at the blue temperature of minus forty-two degrees.

Christine BROOKE-ROSE, *Between* (1968) ■■