flying over Africa

The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exubéry
Out of Africa, Karen Blixen

you cannot repeat
your first flight
to see the world
from a great height
changes you
in ways further flights
might reinforce
but never replace

a pilot friend told me
of the multiple sunrises
viewed from the cockpit
when flying long haul

reminding me
of the little prince
on his tiny planet
shifting his chair
to watch the sunset
again and again

flights often mark
crossroads in our lives
physical journeys
prompting mental shifts
changing our view
of the world

born of missionary parents
my teacher at sixty
took a trip to China
denied access
to the place
he'd called home
he saw the village
only from the air
in a small plane
not large enough
to contain his grief

flying over Kenya's plains
in my sixtieth year
I think of the gift
Denys gave Karen
a view of the home
she worked so hard
to build then save
her yearning to stay
boundless as the land
she loved

I came because
she came before me
a pioneer in her time
lighting the way
for all women
seeking a bigger life

with every flight
comes a departure
and arrival
each place I go
I'm greeted with
a warm flannel
and a cool drink
a welcome kindness
to cleanse and refresh
the traveller in us all

no matter how big
the world may seem
small gestures and
individual stories
connect us
we are not
as different
as we think

like the wildlife
we come to see
our need for food
shelter and protection
is what binds us
as one

like the little prince
we can shift position
and see the world
with fresh eyes
to pay attention
to what's before us
is the greatest gift
we give ourselves

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