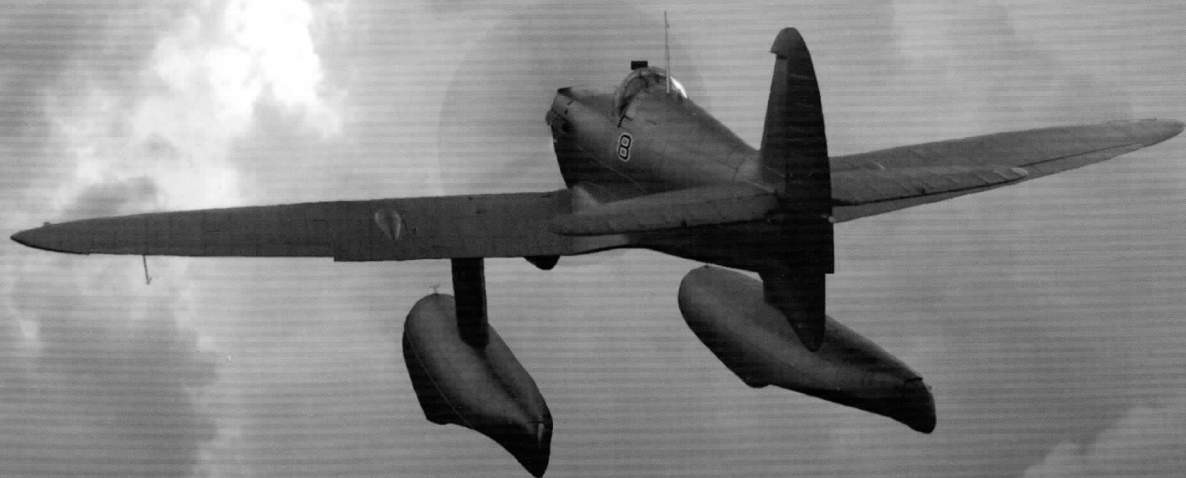


# THE RACE

## TALES IN FLIGHT



Patrick Ryoichi Nagatani



RADKA ZELENKOVA

BURGUNDY 7

My grandfather was a hero and my father was a traitor. I have spent my whole life trying to figure out which of these I am.

The same type of plane I fly now from Tokyo to San Francisco, my grandfather flew for the Czech Air Force in World War II. He fought the Germans in the Battle of France and was shot down over the mouth of the Somme River at the English Channel. I imagine his charred body fused to the metal of the cockpit where I sit, left hand on the control column, and right hand on the throttle. His plane was gray camo, mine, *Burgundy 7*.

I don't believe in spirits and all that shit, but if we do share our blood somehow, Dédé is getting the chance to fly a Spitfire again.

A commercial jet would do this trip in one eleven-hour stretch, but the Spitfire's tiny fuel tank makes this race a puddle-jump across the Pacific via three refueling stops. I am two hours into the first stage of The Race. The way the blue and white swirls around me, I have moments when I cannot feel if I'm gaining or losing altitude or holding still.

You might wonder what I am drinking. But the answer is nothing, of course.

I can see my face reflected in the windscreen, and what I see is a middle-aged dyke with a grown-out buzz cut whose father died not six months ago and whose wife is sleeping with another woman. My life is completely falling apart, save this span of nineteen or so hours in the air, a welcome suspension that is not without its own continuous adrenaline rush.

When I signed up for this Race, my father was ill but alive. I had not yet decided if I would hop an airliner to Chicago to end our long silence. But she who hesitates is lost, and that is no longer an option. So I am dedicating this flight to my grandfather and, reluctantly, to my father.

I wonder if the fact that Lucie is leaving me proves there is some kind of order in the universe. I, who have broken relationships and hearts, am now experiencing the same from the other side.

I did have a broken heart when I was very young, but I broke it myself.