



# take flight

A SHORT

ALEXANDRA WARREN

# Amelia

It never failed.

Anytime I was flying into my hometown - *no matter the connection city* - it never failed that I would know someone on the flight. And today, it just so happened to be my high school ex-boyfriend Jeremy.

Jeremy and I had been the perfect pair. Him as the starting linebacker on the football team, and me as... I was just a regular student. But I didn't get in anyone's way, I always stayed out of trouble, and I was always, always there to cheer Jeremy on as he worked his hardest to give the opposing team as many concussions as possible.

He was the guy in all of my school dance pictures. The guy who let me wear his letterman jacket more often than he did. And the guy who cheated on me with my best friend the summer before I was set to follow him off to the college he had gotten a football scholarship to attend.

I still hated him for it.

But for whatever reason, he assumed I was past it all by now which led to him buying me a drink as we waited for our boarding call that truly couldn't come soon enough.

"So Lia, I know you ain't fucked around and got married on me, have you?" he asked as if I somehow owed it to him to stay single for all of this time; as if he hadn't been the one to ruin us in the first place.

I could only roll my eyes as I told him, "It's been ten years, Jeremy. I could've been married a few times over by now."

"Well I don't see a ring. You must be on that new shit. Don't need a ring to prove your commitment," he challenged, already seeming convinced of his little theory as I took in everything that had changed about him.

The facial hair that had grown in quite nicely against his hickory brown skin, the grown man weight he had put on since being the lanky football player with just enough strength for his position, the smell of his cologne that gave off vibes way sexier than the Axe Body Spray he used to wear. It almost wasn't fair that he could glow up so well and still seem so... *immature*.

"I don't have a ring because I'm not married, Jeremy," I told him sternly as I took a sip of the drink I wish he hadn't bought. The only reason I felt a little inclined to stay.

Though I was just about ready to stand up and leave once I heard him reply, "So you must've been waiting for me to get my shit together then. Is that why you're coming back? To find me?"

I couldn't help but laugh, taking another sip of the drink before I answered, "Get over yourself. It's the holidays. I'm coming to visit my parents and get back out of here just as fast as I left the first time."

While it hadn't always been in the plans to move to the East Coast after graduation from the local college I ended up at, it felt more than right once I got there. I loved my work, I loved my humble abode, and I loved the snowy winters that had initially been unfamiliar to me since being raised in Arizona.

Still, my internal happiness must not have been as easy to detect as I thought considering the way Jeremy's face scrunched when he asked, "Why'd you move anyway? You could've opened your little non-profit in the city. The kids around there need you just as much as the ones you're helping out in Philly."

I cringed at his use of the word "little" as if he knew anything about what I was doing, the kids I were serving, the money I had worked tirelessly to raise to keep my mission of fighting childhood obesity alive. But since our airline was set to announce it was time for boarding any minute now, I straightened up in my seat as I told him, "I moved because I wanted to. It doesn't require an explanation."

"You're right. I guess I just... wished you would've stayed. Wished we could've had this little run in earlier. Maybe we wouldn't both still be single."

"I'm pretty sure we would," I muttered to myself over the rim of my glass, taking a sip as I peeked over to our boarding area that was slowly becoming more crowded. In fact, I couldn't help but notice the enormous amount of baby strollers which meant it was already guaranteed to be the flight home from hell.

*"As long as I'm not sitting by Jeremy,"* I thought to myself as I listened to him go on and on about his college football days, making claims that he would've been in the league if he hadn't suffered a hip injury. But I knew the truth. I had followed his career. And I knew there was no such hip injury which meant he still couldn't face the fact that he just wasn't good enough.

*Immature.*

I peeked past him towards the boarding area once more and noticed people were already beginning to line up which was my cue to get out while I had the opportunity. And I had no problem interrupting to tell him, "Uh... looks like our plane is about ready to board."

"Yeah? Maybe we can sit together. You know Southwest has open seating. What boarding group are you in?"

I took a quick look at my boarding pass, secretly hoping our letters didn't match when I told him, "I'm in Group A."

"Damn. I'm in Group C. You'll have to save me a seat," he suggested as if that was even an option; as if this had been some joyous, highly-anticipated reunion worth continuing.

But no matter how tempted I was to tell him off, turn him down in some embarrassing fashion the way he had done to me so long ago, I could only stammer, "I... uh... we'll see." as I

climbed off the bar stool, grabbing my carry-on suitcase by the handle and dragging it away from the bar with Jeremy right on my heels.

“Maybe I can swing by your crib for Christmas. Say what’s up to the fam. I saw your dad at the grocery store a few weeks back and he was happy as hell to see me. I’m sure it wouldn’t be a problem.”

It was unfortunate how much I knew Jeremy’s words to be true. My parents - *particularly, my father* - absolutely adored him to the point where I could never even tell them why we had broken up in the first place. They were devastated enough to find out we weren’t together anymore. I could only imagine the hurt they would’ve faced if they knew their golden boy wasn’t so shiny after all.

Still, I found myself trying to let him down easy when I told him, “Um... I’m sure we’ll all be pretty busy. And you should be too. Celebrating with your own family.”

He quickly brushed me off, tossing his duffle bag over his shoulder as he replied, “I see them all the time. They’ll be fine without me for a few hours.”

*A few hours?*

*Oh, hell no.*

“Jeremy, look. I...”

Before I could finish my sentence, I was interrupted by the intercom announcing, “Now boarding A1-A30.”

“*Shit*. That’s me. I’ll um... see you on the plane,” I told him as I scurried away, hoping it would be for good.

Though I didn’t get too far when he called after me, “Save me a seat!” just as I was handing my boarding pass to the attendant.

“Enjoy your flight,” she offered with a smile as she scanned the paper before sending me down the jetbridge. And I was grateful for the moment of peace to pull myself together as I tried to come up with a plan to avoid being stuck with Jeremy for a few hours.

Maybe I could just... put my bag in the seat next to me to make it seem like someone had already taken the spot. Or maybe I could just go straight to the back of plane, hoping he’d give up looking for me and take a spot closer towards the front. Or maybe I’d just have to put my headphones on and pretend to already be asleep by the time he boarded.

I released a heavy sigh as I made an attempt to put my carry-on in the overhead bin. But I quickly stumbled back on my heels once I realized I hadn’t lifted it high enough to clear the edge.

“I got you, ma,” I heard from behind me just as the suitcase was taken from my hands and stored in the bin with ease.

I turned to tell the mystery man thank you. But once my eyes locked with his, I was completely lost for words.

He was handsome. *No...* not just handsome. He was gorgeous. *Beautiful*. Perfectly smooth dark chocolate skin, freshly groomed facial hair as if he had hit the barbershop on his way to the airport, casual travel wear that was fitted just enough to show off his athletic build.

I honestly felt hypnotized until he asked, "Is the seat by you taken?"

I shook my head as I stepped into the row, plopping down in the window seat as I told him, "Uh... no. No it's not."

"I appreciate that," he replied as he slid in next to me, pulling the backpack from his shoulders and sliding it under the seat in front of him just as I worked to put on my seatbelt. But it seemed as if my hands wouldn't stop shaking long enough for me to secure it, the nerves of being seated next to someone even finer than Jeremy without the dreadful history taking over.

Though he seemed completely unfazed as he took care of his own seatbelt while casually asking, "Headed home for the holiday?"

I was sure to avoid his eyes, staying focused on my seatbelt as I told him, "Something like that. What about you?"

While I wasn't usually one to engage in airplane small talk for a couple of reasons, mainly because people had a hard time knowing when it was appropriate to stop talking, I definitely wasn't dreading it as much as I looked at the mystery man's beautiful smile just as my seatbelt clicked when he answered, "Just going to visit some family."

"Well I'm sure they'll be happy to see you," I told him confidently, knowing *my* eyes were certainly being blessed by his presence.

And his crooked grin became even fuller when he replied, "Yeah, I'm hoping so," before turning in his seat to add, "I'm Devin by the way."

I accepted his extended hand, finding it just as warm and comforting as his existence as I piped out, "Amelia. But you can call me Lia. Everyone else does."

The smile that had initially struck me as playful and flirty turned into more of a seductive smirk, his voice seeming to drop an octave when he insisted, "I like Amelia. If you don't mind, of course."

And while it felt like I was suddenly under a spell, hypnotized the same way he had unknowingly done when I first laid eyes on him, I still managed to find just enough strength to reply, "No. *Not*... Not at all."

The playful smile returned, though I couldn't help but notice the fact that he was still holding onto my hand, giving it the slightest rub with his thumb until I heard Jeremy call from above us, "Yo, Lia. I thought you were going to save me a seat."

I yanked my hand away, feeling caught red-handed for no good reason as I stammered, "I... I mean..."

"I can find another seat if..." Devin started, even going as far as undoing his seatbelt.

But I caught him by the forearm just as I shouted, "No! *I mean*... you were here first. *Stay*. Jeremy can sit somewhere else."

It seemed like all eyes were on us now that I had caused a scene, though I wasn't sure if it was out of spite for Jeremy or out of thirst for Devin. Either way I was grateful when the flight attendant stepped in to say, "Sir, we need to continue boarding if we expect to get to your destination on time. Please find a seat."

And since Jeremy didn't have much of a choice without completely embarrassing himself, he offered, "I guess I'll just see you when we land then."

"Yeah, sure. Whatever," I told him with a dismissive wave, taking the opportunity to rub it in *just* a little bit by serving him the coldest of shoulders.

But I didn't feel as good about it once Devin chimed in to say, "My mans seemed a little hurt, Amelia. You sure you don't want me to switch seats?"

I nodded, digging in my purse for the book I planned to read on the flight as I told him, "I'm positive. He *uh*... we already chatted plenty."

"Ahh so you're trying to give him a hint, huh? Letting him know you aren't interested?" he asked innocently in an attempt to put the pieces together.

And while that might not have been the full story, I had no problem firing back, "Is it that obvious?"

Devin shrugged, securing his seatbelt as he replied, "Maybe not to him, but definitely to me."

"Well apparently your observation skills are a little more fine-tuned than his," I insisted as I stood up a little in my seat to peek down the aisle towards the front of the plane to see how many people were still waiting to find a seat. Then I turned towards the back to find Jeremy a few rows behind us, stuck in the middle seat between two women who seemed equally ecstatic to have him in their row.

I'm sure he was just as thrilled.

"You think so, huh?" Devin asked just as I settled back into my seat.

And while I adjusted to get comfortable, I answered, "I know it."

"In that case, I also couldn't help but use my fine-tuned observation skills to notice how beautiful you are. I mean, I totally understand why ol' boy was sweating you so hard."

I tried my best not to blush from his compliment, though it was hardly any use considering the way my cheeks instantly flooded with heat. But instead of acknowledging that part of his statement, I focused on the latter when I explained, "He was just... trying to make up for lost time. Time that was lost for good reason."

"His loss, indeed," Devin replied with another one of his little smirks, forcing me to turn away from him towards the window so I wouldn't get caught blushing again.

In fact, I stayed that way through the announcements of the safety checks being completed along with the message from the Captain about our expected arrival time and the weather conditions.

While I usually didn't feel inclined to watch the demonstration of safety measures given by the flight attendants considering how many times I had seen it before, I couldn't help myself in using it as an excuse to at least check Devin out through my peripheral. Though I certainly wasn't expecting to find him sweating and panting, squeezing the life out of his armrest as the plane headed towards the runway for departure.

"Are you okay?" I asked, halfway concerned and halfway tickled that this grown ass man was freaking out about a little flight.

His breathing was measured as he replied, "Yeah, *I'm*... I'm straight. I just... I hate this part. Once we're in the air, cruising on top of the clouds, I'm good. But taking off and landing? They can save that shit."

"It's really not that bad, Devin," I told him with a giggle, putting a gentle hand to his forearm in an effort to ease some of the tension while also trying to distract him from the fact that the plane was getting ready to take off whether he liked it or not.

But it was clear my words alone weren't enough to convince him when he replied, "Come on now, Amelia. There's this giant metal object shooting hundreds of people in the air and I'm not supposed to feel some type of way about it?"

"Well when you put it like that..." I trailed, realizing I had never thought of airplanes as literally as he had. In fact, now that I *was* thinking of them the same way he did, it did all seem a little strange.

Still, our conversation seemed to be helping a little bit as he released a heavy sigh before asking, "I probably sound like a punk, huh?"

I shook my head no, peeking out of the window for confirmation before turning back to him to say, "We all have our phobias. Yours just happens to be what you just did without even realizing it."

I watched as his shoulders sank a little deeper when he peeked past me out of the window and realized I was actually telling the truth. "*Damn*. I didn't even notice we had taken off. Can you fly with me every time?"

I couldn't help but laugh when I asked, "You must not fly very often?"

And it was clear his cool demeanor was back as he licked his lips before digging in his backpack while he replied, "I prefer to drive. Prefer to be in... *control*."

The undertone of sensuality in his words sent chills straight down my spine as I stammered, "Oh... Uh... *Right*. I... see your point." Before I practically stuffed my face between the pages of my book; anything to avoid making a fool out of myself, though that seemed to already be the case as I felt Devin's heavy gaze settle in on me once he sat back upright.

I fully expected him to tease me about the fact that I couldn't seem to keep it together around him. But instead, he asked a simple, "What you reading, ma?"

I used my finger as a bookmark, turning the cover his way when I answered, "Some silly book about some silly ass girl trying to avoid falling in love with this lounge owner. You?"

"The Alchemist," he answered confidently, eliciting a laugh from me that forced him to ask, "What's so funny?"

"Nothing. It's just... why do all of ya'll swear by that book?" I asked, thinking about the many dates I had gone on and gotten that particular book as an answer whenever I asked about a favorite.

And just like all of the others, Devin answered, "Because its good. Changed my life," before continuing on to say, "This is like my third time reading it and I always find something new to connect with."

"I suppose I can appreciate that," I told him as I turned my attention back to my own book.

Though Devin didn't let me stay that way for long as he added, "Besides, it can't possibly be any less enlightening than that silly romance novel you're reading."

I shrugged, smirking as I explained, "I read for pleasure. For an escape from the real world."

"Well I read for knowledge and inspiration. So I can face my real world problems head on," he fired back in what seemed like an attempt to one-up me until he flashed me another one of his crooked grins.

In fact, his little grin was what allowed me to insist, "Your prerogative, Devin."

"Yours too, Amelia," he replied with a wink before turning back to his book just as I turned back to mine.

And this time, I only got through a few pages before Devin suggested, "Must be quite a scene that's got you over there squirming like that."

My cheeks went rosey at the accuracy, knowing the hero was finally putting it down on the heroine for the first time in his office at the lounge. Though I tried to play it off when I replied, "*Huh?* Oh... no. I'm just uh... a little cold. That's all."

"You want my hoodie?" he asked, already busy pulling his arms out of the sleeves as I tried to stop him since I wasn't actually cold.

In fact, I was hot all over as I played the details of the scene in my head while telling Devin, "You really don't have to do that. I'll be fine."

"I insist," he said as he pulled it over his head and handed it to me. And since it would've been a little rude for me not to accept it, I tried my best not to ruin my hair when I handed him my book to hold so that I could pull it over my head, immediately being engulfed by the scent of his cologne.

"*Damn, he smells good,*" I thought to myself, taking a deep inhale before I told him, "Thank you. I appreciate it."

"Looks like Nori appreciates Maxwell's stroke game too," he teased as he skimmed the pages of my book, embarrassing me to the point of needing to snatch it back.

"Give me that," I said just as I got a good grip on the spine, pulling it from his hand and stuffing it on the far side of my seat.

Though that wasn't exactly enough to stop Devin from continuing to tease me when he said, "No wonder ya'll women like those books so much."

"Don't you have Sandiego to be worried about? I asked in an attempt to take the spotlight off of me and put it on him.

But my efforts were a complete fail when Devin corrected, "His name is Santiago. And I told you I already read that a few times before. I'm trying to see what's going on with your little freak nasties over there."

I laughed louder than necessary, though I couldn't exactly help it. And when I did calm down, it was only to ask, "So now you want to escape the real world like me?"



Devin shrugged, the seductive smirk back as he took a moment to check me out before answering, “Actually, my real world isn’t so bad at the moment.”

The blushing was back as I looked down at my hands resting in my lap, mainly to avoid his eyes. And even though my eyes weren’t on him, he still caught my attention when he reached over the armrest to grab my hand, giving it the slightest graze with his fingertips as he started, “Feel free to let me know if I’m overstepping, but... do you have a man, Amelia?”

I shook my head, peeking back up to answer, “Can’t say that I do.”

“Ol’ boy isn’t going to come flying over the seat on me for asking, is he?”

I chuckled as I shook my head again, this time peeking back over the seats to find Jeremy fast asleep on the shoulder of one of his new lady friends before I answered, “Nah, he’s already found new company.”

“How long are you going to be in town?” he asked, his voice sultry as he continued to tease my skin with the pad of his thumb, moving from the back of my hand up to my wrist.

And while the simple motion was enough to soothe me - *along with a few other things* - I still managed to find the strength to answer, “Just a couple of days. Why?”

He pulled his hand away and my body instantly missed his touch as I listened to him reply, “I was thinking we could... *I don’t know*. Link up or something. Maybe grab some coffee? I’m only going to be there for a couple of days myself, but I’d hate to be stuck wondering more about you later, Amelia.”

While I was completely flattered by his invitation, I also couldn’t help myself in firing back, “We still have at least an hour left on this flight. That’s plenty of time to get your questions answered.”

“But I’d hate to interrupt your escape,” he offered, taking a short nod at the book that was still hidden in between my body and the seat. And I had no problem putting it away for good once I remembered the purpose of this little visit.

In fact, I could only release a heavy sigh before I told him, “I’m sure I’ll need it even more after spending time with my family.”

“Not too excited about your visit, huh?”

I gnawed at my lip, trying to formulate an explanation appropriate enough for a stranger, though Devin didn’t exactly feel like a stranger. Everything about him felt familiar, felt serene, felt... *comfortable*.

So instead of editing my feelings, I decided to give him the full truth. “I am. It just... becomes a lot. *Real fast*. So many questions I don’t have the answers too. So many nosey aunties asking about my love life, trying to hook me up with locals as if I ever plan on moving back. My parents pressuring me about my career choice, passively insisting that I get a more profitable job. Run-ins with people from my past that I’ve intentionally avoided like Jeremy back there. The days quickly start to blur together.”

He immediately nodded to agree. “Yeah, I can imagine that. But you gotta enjoy it regardless, right? I mean, I’m sure they only do it because they care about you.”

“Hey, whose side are you on?” I asked teasingly, poking him in the arm that I quickly realized was even more ripped than it looked and covered in some sort of branding beneath the sleeve of his t-shirt.

And his bicep seemed to grow even larger when he flexed as he shrugged to reply, “Neither. I’m completely neutral.”

“Well it sure doesn’t sound like it,” I muttered, turning back straight in my seat in a mini-pout.

But it didn’t last long as Devin grabbed my hand the same way he had done before, giving those soothingly sexy strokes as he explained, “I guess I just prefer to see the bright side of things. Is it annoying as hell to have people all in your business? *Absolutely*. But at the end of the day, those aren’t just any people. They’re your family, ma. And family is everything.”

“I can’t argue with that,” I replied, though I really meant I couldn’t argue with *him* considering how sedated I felt thanks to his touch.

It was almost as if I was suddenly under a light anesthetic and he was the doctor, talking me silly until I fell asleep. I only vaguely heard him say, “But since you gave me permission to be all in your business, tell me more about yourself. I know you weren’t coming from Denver cause I’ve never seen you around town before.”

I shrugged, my eyes fluttering closed as I explained, “It was just a layover. I actually live out in Philly.”

His exaggerated voice was enough to knock me out of my trance when he repeated, “*Philly*. That’s a lot different than Phoenix. And it’s kind of backwards. Don’t most people move away from the cold weather instead of to it?”

Again, I shrugged. “Winter isn’t really that bad once you have the right gear to handle it. And when you can rely on public transportation to get around instead of slipping and sliding on the streets by yourself, it certainly makes things a lot easier to manage.”

Devin seemed amused by my words, smirking as he replied, “I actually enjoy slipping and sliding on the streets. Cheap thrill.”

“Yeah, cheap until your ass is laid up in someone’s hospital. And besides, what’s the point of being out in the cold for a cheap thrill when you could be inside getting plenty of... *nevermind*,” I told him, making myself blush as I thought about how far I was about to go with this complete stranger no matter how non-stranger he felt.

Though it was obvious I was a little too late as Devin’s amusement grew when he said, “*Wow*. See, that book of yours got your mind all in the gutter. Need to be reading some inspirational shit like me. And listening to gospel music.”

I rolled my eyes, taking a good look at him before I said, “You hardly strike me as the type of guy who listens to gospel music.”

“Girl, me and Kirk Franklin go way back. Donnie McClurkin too. *Yolanda Adams*...,” he trailed, making me laugh as I realized how limited his knowledge was.

In fact, I couldn’t help myself in teasing, “So basically you watched the gospel segment of the BET awards?”

We laughed together as he replied, "Aight, you got me. But that still doesn't mean you don't need it after reading all of that filth."

"Who said it was the book that had my mind in the gutter?" I asked so flirtatiously that I hardly recognized myself.

It wasn't like me to come onto a guy, and definitely not this strong no matter how much it was clear Devin appreciated it as he licked his lips in preparation for a reply that got cut short by the flight attendant asking, "Would you like something to drink?"

"Uh... water. *Please*," I answered shortly as I watched her scribble my request on her pad before turning to Devin.

"I'll have the same," he added, sending her to the next row and leaving me to figure out my next move; figure out if there was such thing as a next move.

And before I could answer my own questions, Devin posed a new one when he asked, "Now what was that you were saying about your mind being in the gutter for other reasons?"

"I did say that, didn't I?" I asked sarcastically, trying to play it cool since I truly had no idea what I was doing.

But it seemed to be working as Devin's smile grew, showing off dimples - *shit, dimples* - when he said, "Nah, nah. Don't play funny with me now, ma. I wanna know what that's all about."

"*Me too*," was what I really should've responded. But instead, I decided to share another truth. "You're cute, Devin. Real cute."

This time, it was him rolling his eyes when he replied, "Amelia, I'm a grown ass man. Cute isn't exactly a compliment."

"How about handsome?" I suggested, though it truly didn't feel sufficient.

And he only shrugged as he answered, "Not the best, but better."

"How about... I'd pick you up in a bar?"

His eyebrow piqued with interest when he said, "And do what with me?"

But before I could come up with a response, the plane jolted just as an announcement came over the loudspeaker.

*"Ladies and gentlemen, the Captain has turned on the fasten seat belt sign. We are now crossing a zone of turbulence. Please return your seats and keep your seat belts fastened. Thank you."*

I looked down to my thigh that was suddenly locked in a grip by Devin who was already panting and sweating the same way he had done about take-off. And while I didn't exactly mind having his hands on me, had already been thinking about his hands on me as it pertained to the answer to his question, I knew it wasn't exactly appropriate to enjoy his pain no matter how much pleasure it was providing me with.

So instead, I locked my hand over his as I told him, "It'll be fine, Devin. Just relax. It'll pass."

The plane took another jolt, more violent than the last, making me just as nervous as Devin clearly felt considering the way his grip tightened, leaving the realm of sexy and moving to the sector of desperation as he pleaded, "I can't go out like this."

"*Shit, me neither,*" I thought to myself as I peeked past him towards the row in front of us to find people who looked just as panicky as we did. Then I peeked back a few rows and found Jeremy still fast asleep.

"*What a bastard,*" I muttered as the plane weaved against a steady current of turbulence; enough for me to feel comfortable enough to at least take a breath.

But as I looked over to Devin who was clearly still holding his, I considered my options for ways to distract him the same way I had done before. The air was too tense for a simple conversation to do the trick. And considering his hand was still latched onto my thigh, a simple touch clearly wasn't enough either.

So instead, I took it to the next level, his grip loosening just slightly as I slowly glided his hand up my thigh over my skirt towards my waist, slipping it under his hoody that I was still wearing and giving him full permission to explore.

When he whispered, "*Amelia...*" it was a good sign because it meant he was at least breathing again. And when his breathing appeared to become even more calculated as I let his hand travel from my waist, up my stomach, stopping at my full breasts for a squeeze and tease, I realized I had done my job well enough to gloat, "See. I told you it would pass."

"And now I have other problems," he replied with a nod towards his lap, my eyes going wide the second I realized what he meant.

"My God! *I mean...* yeah, yeah you do," I told him, trying not to sound too alarmed by his massive erection.

Though once again, it was clear I had outed myself as he tweaked my cloth-covered nipple in between his fingers and whispered, "Does this have something to do with those other reasons you were talking about earlier? Something to do with what would happen when you'd pick me up in a bar?"

"*Maybe...*" I answered with a smirk, gnawing at my lip as I applauded myself in my head for successful execution while also releasing a groan of satisfaction.

And Devin matched my smirk when he insisted, "You playin' real funny, ma. You know that, right?"

"Whatever that means..." I trailed, feeling giddy as he continued teasing my breasts the same way he had done to my hands, to my wrists, and now my whole front half.

And my body grew hotter as he leaned in even further, his face hovered in front of mine when he replied, "I'm not gonna let you keep playing for long."

"Well how are you going to stop me?"

Before he could answer, he yanked his hand out from under the hoody just as the flight attendant returned with our glasses of water, though now I wished I would've ordered something a lot stronger. And it was clear Devin needed a drink just as badly as I did the way he gulped

down his cup in two quick sips, handing it back to the flight attendant who had only made it to the row behind us.

For a second, she looked surprised until she glanced over towards me, my face surely flushed red as I tried to regain my composure. And while I fully expected her to throw a little shade my way, she only gave me an expression of, "You go girl" before turning back around to pass out the rest of the drinks on her tray.

Once again, I was faced with the aftermath of my actions that felt great in the moment while also feeling so unlike me now that it had passed. But there was no turning back, especially considering the way Devin was eying me now that we were back in safe flying grounds and his thirst was quenched. The only thing saving me was the water in my hand, though I almost choked on my sip once I felt Devin's hand back on my thigh, this time a lot closer to the inner part than the outer as he ran his fingertips along my skin until he reached the hem of my skirt.

But his hand went stiff once we heard another announcement from the captain. "*Ladies and gentlemen, as we start our descent, please make sure your seat backs and tray tables are in their full upright position. Make sure your seat belt is securely fastened and all carry-on luggage is stowed underneath the seat in front of you or in the overhead bins. Thank you.*"

"Fuck. Not again," Devin muttered, his chest already visibly heaving up and down as he prepared for another bout with one of his most hated things.

And for whatever reason, it was his fear that made me feel empowered enough to ask, "Why'd you stop?"

"Huh?" was all he replied, still wrapped up in his mental frenzy over the plane preparing to land.

And his eyebrow piqued as he watched me pull his hoody back over my head, draping it over my lap - *and his hand* - as I repeated, "Why'd you stop? You said you were done letting me play, right?"

The seductive smirk I had already become infatuated with grew on his face as he reminded me that his hand was still in the same place. And since I knew the only way we'd survive this thing was if I kept him occupied - *or maybe I was just coming up with an excuse to let this go beyond the point of logical* - I moved the armrest upright before leaning in to wrap my arms around his bicep, resting my head on his shoulder to make us look a little less obvious as his hand traveled higher and higher up my thigh.

"What's your last name?" he asked as his fingertips continued to rove my skin.

"Hubert. Why?"

"The least I could do is know your full name before I do this..."

In the blink of an eye, Devin turned his head, putting his hand against my cheek and his lips against mine as he kissed me like his life depended on it. Hell, maybe it did considering the altitude of our plane was shrinking by the second which meant we were just about ready to land.

But if landing meant our kiss being done, I wasn't interested. I wanted this to go on for as long as possible, wanted to feel his tongue swirling with mine, wanted to feel the tug of my

bottom lip between his teeth before he came back in for me, wanted to feel his other hand continue its pursuit of wherever it planned to land.

At this point, I didn't even care if it went all the way.

Devin was kissing me with an urgency, with a passion as if we had been waiting to do this for years and not minutes - 108 minutes to be exact. And he didn't let up until we heard the flight attendant announce, *"On behalf of Southwest Airlines and the entire crew, I'd like to thank you for joining us on this trip and we are looking forward to seeing you on board again in the near future. Happy Holiday!"*

My lips felt swollen as I put a hand to them to check, too embarrassed to look Devin in the eyes now that the cabin lights had been turned back on, unveiling the fact that he had kissed me stupid.

Though it was clear that was the least of his concern as he whispered, *"Shit. I can't get off of the plane like this."*

I peeked over to his incredibly impressive problem before I suggested, "Just put your hoody in front of you until it goes down. And walk behind me."

"But I still have to get your bag down from the overhead bin," he reminded me, the whole reason behind him sitting next to me in the first place.

"I'll get my bag. You focus on... handling all of that," I told him, staring a little too hard and feeling a little too curious about what it looked like bare.

My nerve endings were on high alert, even the slightest brush of his fingertips on my skin sure to set me off. But I had to keep it together, had to pretend to be composed as I collected my belongings before getting off of the plane with Devin right on my heels.

The flight attendant was all smiles as she gave pleasant parting words to all of the passengers who passed her. But when she got to me, she said, "Mmhmmm... I see you, girl," turning my cheeks bloodshot red as I bypassed the pilot who offered a knowing smile as well.

I honestly couldn't walk fast enough, though it wasn't that I wanted to get away from him. In fact, I wanted to savor the moment, savor being around Devin, even if I didn't really know what to say. But he brought something different out of me. Something foreign, something unfamiliar, something I really didn't know how to handle now that it seemed to all be coming to an end.

And as we strided side by side towards the baggage claim area, the only thing I came up with was, "So..."

"So," he repeated, his smirk wide enough for me to see out of my peripheral.

"That was... *interesting*."

"Interesting indeed," he replied shortly with a little nod, not making things any easier for me.

"I don't... usually do that... with a stranger. Who I just met. On a plane," I admitted, for whatever reason feeling the need to explain my behavior and finding it even more bewildering now that I had said it out loud.

But again, Devin seemed completely unfazed as he insisted, “First time for everything, right?”

“I... *yeah*. I guess so.”

With a gentle handle to my wrist, Devin stopped my trek, pulling me to the side so that I was right in front of him when he said, “Don’t go getting all shy on me, Amelia. I know the real you now. Though I really should be thanking you. You made my flight a breeze.”

*A breeze.*

That was exactly what I needed to calm myself down. Exactly what I needed to make some sense of this. The only thing that would provide any sort of relief, even if the Phoenix air was only remotely cool.

I released a sigh, taking another look at Devin and trying not to get lost in everything I found attractive about him - the lips I now knew could give a damn good kiss, the facial hair I knew would feel great grazing against my inner thigh the same way his fingers did, and those damn dimples... *ugh*. “Well it was... nice to meet you? That doesn’t seem sufficient. Thanks for... *all of that*? I’m sorry. This is awkward. I’m being... *mmm...*”

I couldn’t say anymore. In fact, words didn’t even seem relevant now that Devin’s lips were plastered against mine, reminding me of everything that had happened on the plane and then some. It didn’t matter that we were in the middle of an airport looking straight out of a rom-com movie, or that parents passing by were probably covering their children’s eyes as Devin palmed my ass. All that mattered was the way I felt - *the way he made me feel* - in this moment. Though the second he pulled away, I was embarrassed beyond belief.

“*You did it again, girl*,” I halfway scolded, halfway applauded myself in my head as Devin wiped his lips with a smirk before digging in his wallet and pulling out a card.

He slipped it into my hand as he said, “Give me a call when you have some down time. Maybe we can pick up where we left off.”

“Coffee, right?” I reminded him with a wink.

A wink.

*Now I’m a winker?*

Devin’s smile was a mix of the seductive and playful two he had been giving me since I met him when he nodded to reply, “Yeah. Coffee.”

He lifted my hand to his mouth for a kiss that made me blush before he turned to walk away. And I stood in that same spot, watching his every step until a pair of kids stole my attention as they whipped around the corner screaming, “Daddy!”

“Munchkins!” Devin shouted back, squatting down to catch them both in his arms. And for a second, I was... *shook*. Completely shook. Stunned until I thought back to our conversations on the plane.

*Just going to visit some family. Family is everything.*

The man who had just touched and kissed me with the familiarity of a lifelong lover was now using those same hands, those same lips, to hug and kiss his children. I wasn’t even sure where the kids had come from, who the mother was, hell, if the mother was next up for a hug and

kiss session. But here I was, gawking at Devin from across the airport as he had an adorable reuniting with the kids I didn't even know existed just in time for the holidays.

So many questions came to mind, but I couldn't stop watching, couldn't stop swooning, couldn't stop... appreciating the moment we had shared even if it was just a moment.

But I knew it was just a moment as I released another heavy sigh before I finally began to move my feet, stopping by the trash can to regretfully toss his card in it then continuing my walk towards the baggage carousel to snag my second suitcase.

After that, I headed outside to find my parents waiting for me next to the minivan that was on its last. While the sight usually would've slightly annoyed me, knowing what conversation was sure to come soon after my arrival, the smile on my face still lingered as I thought about the high note my trip had started off on.

Maybe being home for the holiday wouldn't be so bad after all.

At least, that's what I thought until I heard my dad say, "Hey Lia. Is that Jeremy I see over there? Go on and ask him if he needs a ride home."

# The End