



Flight
SQA016

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CHAPTER 1

If First Officer Tom Kent piloted a Boeing 747 with the same laidback attitude he drove his red Chevrolet Camaro he'd have been fired from Crown Airlines immediately.

He weaved in and out of traffic with one hand lightly resting on the wheel while the other busily gesticulated to his tense passenger. "But, Em, you're used to those itty bitty planes, this," he said and smiled, "this beautiful piece of engineering is a Boeing 747-400, four Rolls Royce engines, the best in the business!"

Emily White stared straight ahead out of the windscreen, her gaze fixed on the blurred line of cars they were overtaking. If she was going to die she wanted to know which make and model took her from this world.

"And what are the odds that we'd occasionally fly the same schedule?" Tom asked as he happily smacked his hand down on the wheel. "It works out perfectly, I can drive you to and from work on those days. I have to admit this journey was starting to get a bit boring but now I have someone to talk to."

He turned to Emily and offered a big, friendly smile which she quickly returned so he could refocus his attention back to driving like a bat out of hell. He slammed his foot on the brake then weaved around another car that had joined the freeway.

"You okay?" Tom asked with a frown. "You've not said a word since we left home?"

“Yeah,” Emily quickly answered. “Yeah, sorry Tom, I’m just a bit out of it. Nervous, I guess.”

“You’ll be great.” Tom enthused. “You completed all your training, you’re good to go.”

Emily laughed at his childish enthusiasm for everything. “It’s my first time serving first-class passengers, real ones! Not just people from the training course putting on a posh accent.”

“You’ll be fine,” Tom said. “How bad can it be?”

“Three weeks of intensive training before you’re even allowed on a real flight says they think it can be pretty bad,” Emily said with a chuckle. “This is nothing like I’m used to. In my old job you didn’t have different classes, you just sat them down, checked their seat belts, did the safety demo, and tried to sell them as much over-priced merchandise and gifts as possible before we landed. This is proper service, they pay a lot for these seats and they expect the earth.”

“And you’ll be great,” Tom reached into the centre console and picked out a sweet from an open bag and threw it into his mouth. “You’ve had the training, you passed the course. And think of the money.” He rubbed his thumb and finger together.

“That’s the only reason I’m doing this.” Emily sighed. “The schedule stinks and I’ll hardly see Henry but the money makes it worthwhile.”

Tom nodded half-heartedly. “I still think that two transatlantics a week are going to be too much for you, Em. You’ll burn out,” he said seriously.

Emily shrugged. “It’s the only way I get to spend time with Henry. What’s the point in having time off if I’m in the wrong country? And the more I work, the quicker I can pay you and Lucy back.”

“You don’t need to pay us anything. We love having you and Henry stay with us.” Tom’s reply was genuine.

Emily smiled and reached over to gently squeeze his shoulder. “You’re both so kind but you know me, I have to pay my own way. I’ve gotta pay you guys rent, not to mention pay Lucy for all her baby-sitting services. Especially now! She’s going to see Henry more than I am. He’s only five, he’s going to think she’s his mother.”

They both shared a laugh and Emily stole a sweet before returning her hands to her lap and nervously rubbed them together.

“Lucy loves Henry, she loves watching him while you’re away. You don’t owe us anything, you focus on paying off your debts first.”

“Okay, I’m getting depressed,” Emily told him with a sigh. “Tell me more about this fancy plane of yours. Any advice?”

“Well, we seat three hundred and sixty-seven passengers in total,” Tom began as if reading from a well-rehearsed presentation. “Two hundred and seventy-one in standard, seventy-two in premium and twenty-four in first-class. There are ten cabin crew on board and your senior cabin crew manager is Iris Winter, have you heard of her?”

“Nope.” Emily shook her head.

“She’s a bitch,” Tom said simply. “Don’t mess with her, do what she tells you and you’ll be fine. If you don’t agree with something, ignore it, it’s not worth it. I’ve heard stories of her busting first-class cabin crew back down to economy for talking back to her and that would be a hell of a pay cut for you.”

“What?” Emily cried. “Surely she can’t do that?”

“Her husband is head of cabin operations in New York, she does what she likes and he lets her.” Tom shook his head.

“Needless to say, she rules with an iron fist because she can. So keep out of her way.”

“Gotcha.” Emily nodded.

“First-class has four cabin crew. Two attend to the upper deck first-class area while the other two look after first-class at the front of the plane, the nose,” Tom explained. “If you can get the nose, do. There are fourteen seats on the upper deck but only ten in the nose. It’s quieter and more of the frequent flyers take the nose because it’s nearer the door for disembarking.”

Emily nodded. “Okay, try to get the nose, got it.”

Tom looked at his watch. “Wheels up at seven this evening, so we’ve got three hours until then. You’ll have an hour in the debriefing room and then an hour on board until passengers start to arrive.”

“When do we land at Heathrow again?” Emily asked.

“Seven-thirty in the morning. This will be a busy flight because it’s Sunday evening. Another who does a week’s work in London wants to get there for early Monday morning so this is the flight.”

“One hell of a commute.” She laughed.

“Not if you’re in first-class.”

Emily groaned. “True. Oh, I hope they all just want to go to sleep.”

“They will,” Tom said. “They lose a few hours going to London. We take off at seven in the evening and land at seven in the morning but it’s only a seven hour flight, so between take-off, and landing they only have five hours to sleep, max.”

They arrived at JFK airport and Tom pulled into the Crown Airlines parking lot and his assigned space. Emily fussed with her deep-purple skirt to ensure it was as pristine as when she removed it from the dry-cleaning bag that morning.

“You look great,” Tom reassured.

“Great isn’t good enough,” Emily told him. “I need to look impeccable all the time.”

She smoothed her white shirt down and got a compact mirror out of her bag to examine her hair and makeup.

“It’s okay for you guys,” Emily continued as she fussed with a few strands of long, blonde hair that had fallen out of the intricate up-do she had chosen that morning. “White shirt, tie, black suit. Done.”

“Don’t forget the hat.” He placed his First Officer’s cap on his head and slung his uniform jacket over his shoulder.

Emily opened her carry-on luggage and removed her matching purple jacket. She replaced her flat shoes with the impressive high-heels she was supposed to wear when not serving. She fiddled with the high collar of her jacket and then picked up her name badge from her bag, affixed it to her lapel, and looked at Tom for approval.

He smiled at her and nodded. “Perfect, you look one hundred percent Crown first-class.”

“Good.” Emily zipped her bag up. “Let’s hope I still look like this after a nine-hour nightshift.”

Tom lifted out her carry-on luggage and gestured towards the Crown Airlines staff entrance. They walked across the car park and into the building.

CHAPTER 2

Emily walked confidently along the carpeted corridor dragging her wheeled, work-issued luggage behind her. She looked out for the cabin crew debriefing room for Flight SQA016 to London Heathrow. Animated chatter drifted from a nearby meeting room. Emily poked her head around the door and asked, “Flight sixteen to Heathrow?”

“Yes, and you must be Emily White?” a friendly Australian girl replied.

“That’s me.” Emily held out her hand.

“Jessica, Jessica Martin,” she shook Emily’s hand. “I work first-class so hopefully we’ll be paired up. I used to work with Michael, who you replaced.”

“What happened to Michael?” Emily asked.

“Promotion, he got a cushy desk job over in Training,” Jessica sighed. “What we all want when we’re sick of waking up and not knowing what day it is or what country we’re in.”

“Well, that should be a little easier for me now.” Emily smiled as Jessica led her to a small table with assorted refreshments. “It’ll either be London or New York. If I’m in a hotel, then it’s London.”

Jessica laughed. “After a nine hour shift you’ll still get confused, trust me. Have you done transatlantic before?”

“No,” Emily admitted quietly. “Never even been out of this country. With my last job, I was on short-haul all over the

place, really fast paced. Will be nice to not have to deal with turnarounds.”

Jessica filled up a small coffee cup and nodded. “Yep, when we’re done with that plane, we’re outta there. No going straight back for us.”

“So are you on the upper deck?” Emily asked casually as she took the cup Jessica offered her.

“No, I’m in the nose, fewer passengers.” Jessica winked. “I just hope Iris keeps it like that.”

“The cabin manager?”

“Yup, she’s a bitch,” Jessica said softly.

“Yeah, I’d heard.”

The chattering in the room suddenly stopped and the staff fell silent as a well-groomed, short woman with light brown hair entered the room and looked around at the group.

“Good afternoon, crew,” she said as she parked up her luggage. “Two hours until take-off so let’s get this debriefing underway.”

Emily was quickly introduced to the team by Iris who gave her the quickest of polite smiles. A wave of relief washed over Emily when it was announced that she would be paired up with Jessica and they would be taking responsibility for the forward first-class compartment, the coveted nose.

The briefing lasted exactly forty-five minutes. Emily wasn’t at all surprised that the agenda was adhered to with military precision.

After the meeting, the cabin crew scrambled to get their bags and to get to the gate to begin boarding preparations but Emily found her exit from the room cut off by Iris.

“Miss White, I’m glad to have you with us,” Iris said in a frosty tone.

“Thank you, Mrs Winter.” Emily said, keeping her professional face firmly in place. “I’m eager to get started and be an asset to the team.”

That seemed to please Iris and she gave a stiff smile. “Good. Welcome to the team. Stick close to Miss Martin, she knows first-class very well and will be able to show you all the intricacies of working onboard a real flight. Things that they probably don’t teach you in training.”

“Absolutely.” Emily nodded, deciding that the less she said, the better.

Iris stepped to one side and Emily quickly exited the meeting room. She was relieved to see Jessica waiting for her down the corridor, for although she had worked in JFK before, she had never even set foot in the long-haul sections of the airport, so was unsure where to go.

“Hey, thanks for waiting.”

“Been sufficiently welcomed to the team?” Jessica asked with a knowing grin.

“Yeah,” Emily said. “I feel all warm and cosy now.”

Jessica laughed. “If you’re lucky that will be the last time you talk to her one-on-one, aside from when you call her onboard to say we’re ready for take-off or landing.”

“Fingers crossed.” Emily smiled as they walked through a set of security doors.



A few passengers had gathered at the boarding gate and looked up with interest as the glamorous cabin crew glided past.

Emily glanced out of the windows along the airbridge and admired the sheer size of the 747. She stepped onto the aircraft

where some of her colleagues turned right to head towards the economy section while she followed Jessica to the left, up towards the front end. They passed through the premium section before dropping their bags off in the first-class crew galley.

“Have you seen the new first-class cabins?” Jessica asked, removing her dress jacket and hanging it neatly in the galley closet. “They have only been in service a couple of months.”

“No, the training course had the old stock,” Emily replied as she hung her jacket next to Jessica’s.

“Ta da!” Jessica threw back the curtain that separated first-class from the galley.

Emily stepped through and looked around with an impressed nod. She walked further into the cabin. There were ten luxurious seats, five on either side of the aircraft, narrowing towards the front but still enough to give each passenger privacy. There was a faint glow of purple in the dimmed ceiling lights. Even in the low light Emily could see that everything about the cabin was magnificent and she understood why people would choose to fly in such luxurious surroundings.

Jessica explained the layout. “So the seat rows are six through ten. On the left we have seat A and on the right we have seat K, that’s just so we’re compliant with the seating in economy.”

Emily nodded and looked up at the row numbers to familiarise herself with them.

Jessica approached seat 8A and began a quick demonstration. “As you can see, the chairs all have a separate, high-backed, curved wall behind them which gives the passenger behind more privacy, and there is a large storage bin below the window. All seats fully convert into flat beds.” She sat down and pointed at the screen embedded in the shiny wall in front of her. “They also

have a private touch-screen television, which is dead simple to use and the ground crew check it as part of their maintenance routine so we don't need to worry." To the right of the screen sat a permanently fixed stool with a half-height back on it. "These are for people travelling together who want to work during the flight or dine together." Jessica pressed a button on the wall next to the television and a panel popped out. She lifted out a table and folded it out to full size. "These new tables can accommodate two full dinner services."

She folded the table away and stood up. She indicated a panel of buttons to the side of the seat and identical buttons at eye level on the curved wall. "You can use either of these panels to make the bed," she explained, pushing a button that caused the base of the chair to slide forward while the back reclined automatically. "When the chair is a bed the stool becomes the end of the bed."

Emily nodded as she took it all in. "And we make the beds for all the passengers, right? We don't want them to do it themselves even if they want to."

"Right, health and safety," Jessica agreed. "Most will say they want to go to bed and will go to use one of the three washrooms over by the galley. When they go, you need to lower the chairs, get the padded bed sheets, the pillow, and the quilt from the galley and make the bed up. We stagger the meals slightly to make sure that everyone doesn't want to get ready for bed at the same time. As with all service, we move from the back to the front of the cabin."

"Okay," Emily pointed to a device embedded in the armrest. "Is that the inflight phone?"

Jessica looked to the inner armrest. "Yep, well, it's everything. It's a phone for voice and text services. You can also watch TV,

play games, or use it to call other passengers if you know their seat number.”

Emily blew out a breath. “Wow, do they use all that?”

“Nah.” Jessica laughed as the chair stopped moving once in its fully reclined position. “It’s just a gadget to sell seats.”

Emily looked at the control panel. “This makes it go back into a seat, right?”

“Yep. In the morning we slowly turn up the cabin lighting and they wake up and go to the washrooms. Once someone leaves, you strip the bed and press that button so when they get back it will be a chair again. It’s much easier than making the bed.”

Emily pressed the button and watched as the chair started to move again. “Cool,” she said, “Seems easy enough.”

Jessica smiled and started to walk towards the galley and Emily followed her. “So,” she said, “this is a scheduled weekend flight which means we have a few regulars on this trip. Some of our passengers live in New York and work in London so they have a weekly commute. These frequent flyers are the most important to us, they pay around twelve thousand dollars a flight, twice a week for most of the year. That’s more than a million dollars a year each and if they’re not one hundred percent satisfied then they won’t hesitate to complain and then the airline is in trouble. Simple as.”

“Well, that’s done nothing to help my nerves.” Emily giggled nervously.

Jessica removed a cabin trolley from the galley and guided it into the cabin. “There’s nothing to worry about, you’ve done the training and you’ll have me by your side. We’re going to smash this.” Jessica smiled and Emily felt immediately better to have an ally.

Jessica set up the first seat. “So, bottle of water, overnight bag with all they’ll need, pillow, and a selection of today’s newspapers.”

“Got it.” Emily nodded and started to repeat the process on the next seat.

“The frequent flyers we have with us today are 9K, Liam Jones,” Jessica said as she angled her head towards the seat and grimaced. “He’s nice enough, he’s in the music business and as long as you keep the alcohol flowing he is fine, bit of a proper, though.”

“Nice.” Emily grimaced.

“Yeah, but in 9A we have Doctor Charles Harvey and he is lovely,” Jessica smiled as she set up the seat. “He’s a surgeon and travels back and forth to a training college in London. Let me tell you, if the whole plane was filled with Charles Harveys everything would be great.”

“Cool.” Emily smiled. “It will be nice to see a friendly face.”

“He doesn’t fly every week but he’ll be with us today,” Jessica said. “Lastly, we have 10A, Olivia Lewis. I don’t know exactly what she does, she’s a business woman of some sort. Doesn’t talk much, commutes regularly. She has this seat because it’s nearest to the exit door. Every Sunday she’s on flight sixteen to London and then returns on Friday’s flight nineteen. Same thing every week.”

“Oh, that’s my return, I’ll see her twice a week.” Emily looked around the cabin to make sure that all the seats had been set up correctly.

Jessica frowned. “You’re in London for a week before your turnaround?”

“No.” Emily gave a soft laugh. “I have kind of a gruelling schedule, I’m over to London today and then after the required

twenty-four hours break I'm back to New York on the Tuesday morning flight."

"Whoa." Jessica blinked. "And then back out and back home again within a week?"

"Yeah," Emily admitted. "The Tuesday morning London flight gets me into New York for early Tuesday afternoon which means I can spend Tuesday evening and all of Wednesday with my five-year-old kid, Henry. Then I'm back to London on the Wednesday night, arriving Thursday morning and then back to New York on flight nineteen on Friday."

Jessica nodded in understanding. "And then you get Friday afternoon, all day Saturday and Sunday morning with Henry. You're not kidding about that being a gruelling schedule."

Emily pushed the trolley back to the galley. "Yeah, I know, I need the money to clear some debts I have. I figure I can do this for six months and then I'll have some breathing space. I've worked it out and it's just within company policy."

"What about childcare?" Jessica asked before blushing. "I'm sorry, that's none of my business, you've only just met me and here I am asking personal stuff."

"No, it's fine." Emily smiled. "My best friend, Lucy, runs a childcare service from home and she takes Henry. We live with her and her husband, Tom, at the moment so I'm really lucky there."

"Tom and Lucy? You mean First Officer Kent and his wife?"

Emily blushed. "Yeah, that's the one. They're both good friends."

"They're lovely people," Jessica said. "But keep that a secret, you don't want Iris finding out or she might say something."

"Yeah, I figured she wouldn't like cabin crew fraternising with the cockpit." Emily winked and Jessica laughed.

She helped Emily to secure the trolley and started to show her the rest of the galley. “And just remember, if the passengers are using the toilets on either side of the galley and they are queuing in the corridor then they can probably overhear what we are saying.”

“Gotcha. Be professional at all times.”

“Exactly. Now, they’ll be boarding soon and they start with first-class so we better get some champagne flutes set up.”

CHAPTER 3

Iris Winter had just completed an unscheduled inspection of the first-class compartment and, aside from needlessly moving a few items a few centimetres, declared it suitable. Jessica assured Emily that suitable was the best they were going to do and told her to get ready to greet the passengers who would be boarding within the next five minutes.

In the small washroom beside the galley, Emily checked her hair and makeup meticulously, knowing that even a hair out of place or a stray smudge of mascara could make a difference. When she was satisfied, she removed her dress jacket from the hook and put it on, ensuring the white collar of her blouse and the collar of her purple jacket balanced as per regulations.

With a deep breath she pulled on a pair of white gloves and went to wait in the cabin while Jessica stood in the corridor to greet the passengers, by name if she knew them.

Before long Emily heard Jessica greet Doctor Harvey and welcome him on board, she told him that Emily would assist him with his carry-on luggage and Emily waited for him to appear. She couldn't help but smile, he was dressed in khaki trousers, a woollen shirt and tie with a tweed jacket. His messy red hair spoke of a man who didn't fuss about his appearance.

"Hello Emily," he said warmly as he held out his hand to her. "Charles Harvey."

Emily shook his hand, surprised but delighted that her first ever first-class passenger was so friendly. “Doctor Harvey, it’s a pleasure to meet you,” Emily said.

“Oh, please, call me Charles,” he said as he handed her his overcoat.

Emily gave a gentle laugh. “I think my boss would prefer it if I call you Doctor Harvey.”

He nodded in reluctant agreement. “Very well, shall I put my bag in the closet?”

“Oh, no.” Emily smiled. “I can do that.”

“It is rather heavy.” He apologised.

“Not a problem,” Emily said politely and took the bag. “Can I get you a drink? Champagne?”

“Oh, just orange juice for me,” he said and took his seat.

Emily placed his coat and bag in the closet before serving him a pre-poured glass of orange juice. The next two passengers to enter the cabin were a married couple on holiday. They were seated up front in 6A and 7A. Emily checked their boarding passes to ascertain their names without the need to ask.

“Here you are, Mr and Mrs Archer, can I get you both some champagne?”

They seemed bewildered by the whole experience and Emily got the impression that she wouldn’t be the only person enjoying their first trip in first-class that evening. They eagerly accepted the champagne and asked Emily to explain the various buttons on their seats.

While Emily showed the Archers how everything worked, Jessica greeted three incredibly tall and thin women who just had to be fashion models going by their dress and poise. They were shown to seats 6K, 7K, and 8K and all given champagne.

Next a dark-haired, unshaven, leather-clad man approached the cabin. He was talking animatedly on his phone and looked Emily up and down lewdly as he waved his boarding pass in her face.

“Mister Jones.” Emily knew who he was before she’d even read the pass and followed him into the cabin.

“Champagne, please, love.” He checked out the models and fell into his seat with his leg hooked over the arm.

“I’ll get that for him,” Jessica offered. “Can you seat the next passengers?”

Emily greeted the next two passengers. She glanced around the cabin. Only one seat was still empty, 10A, but no sooner had she noticed than another passenger arrived. This had to be Olivia Lewis.

She was a little under average height but made up for the fact with expensive high-heeled shoes. Her slightly olive skin tone and beautiful dark hair made it difficult for Emily to place her ethnicity, but she considered Miss Lewis easily more attractive than the models seated a few rows in front of her. She wore a navy business skirt suit, and quickly took her seat after handing her overcoat and one of her small luggage bags to Jessica who had arrived to greet her.

Jessica looked at Emily in a silent indication to join her in the galley and both of them exited the cabin. While she hung up Miss Lewis’ overcoat Jessica explained, “Miss Lewis won’t want a drink, she prefers to stick to water. She’s happy with the bottled water provided, but she’ll need a glass. And you need to get her a fresh bottle if she finishes the first one, and obviously take the empty away with you.”

“Okay.” Emily pulled out a tray and got a glass tumbler out and held it up to the light to check it was spotlessly clean.

“For service tonight I want you to take row A and I’ll take K. If you need anything I’ll be right next to you,” Jessica said with a smile as she picked up a couple of glasses of champagne and took them into the cabin. Emily followed and walked over to 10A.

“Good evening, Miss Lewis, here is a glass for your water.”

Miss Lewis had settled into her seat and was reading one of the provided newspapers. A pair of black-rimmed spectacles perched on the end of her nose. She looked up at the interruption.

“Thank you” she looked at Emily’s name badge which read ‘Miss E White’. “Miss White.”

“Emily.” Emily supplied her first name with a polite smile as Olivia placed her glass on the drinks table built into the armrest.

It quickly became clear that Olivia wasn’t about to say anything else, so Emily went to check that Doctor Harvey and the rest of her allocated passengers were comfortable and had everything they needed.

When she was happy that her five wealthy passengers were satisfied she walked back to the galley and removed her white gloves and swapped her high-heels for her flat shoes for service. She quickly entered the washroom and checked to see if she was still looking up to first-class standards before returning to the galley.

“It’s all going well so far.” Jessica kicked off her own heels and put on her flat shoes before removing her jacket.

“Yeah,” Emily agreed. “But we’ve not even taken off yet.”

The internal crew telephone bleeped once and lit up, Jessica answered the call and Emily assumed it was Iris asking for an update. Jessica reported that her section had boarded and were seated and a few seconds later she hung up the phone.

“Okay, first and premium are all in. So it’s just economy now, but they are usually pretty quick so we need to do another sweep of the cabin, check everyone is okay and then the safety video will be played.”

Emily returned to the front of the cabin and attended to Mr and Mrs Archer and politely conversed with them about their trip to London, which turned out to be a wedding anniversary trip. After a brief conversation with the Archers, she approached Doctor Harvey.

“Can I get you anything, Doctor Harvey?”

“No thank you,” he replied. “Is this your first flight with us?”

“Yes,” Emily admitted. “I transferred to Crown three weeks ago.”

“I’m sure you’ll enjoy it,” he told her enthusiastically. “I’ve been flying with Crown for fifteen years and I’ve always had the very best time.”

“We aim to please,” Emily smiled at him as she moved onto her final passenger. “Can I get you anything, Miss Lewis?”

Olivia looked up from her newspaper and regarded Emily for a moment before shaking her head. “No, thank you, Miss White.”

Emily smiled politely and returned to the galley.

“Everything okay?” Jessica was putting things away in preparation for take-off.

“Yep, they’re all fine.”

“Great. Once economy is seated we prepare the cabin for take-off while the safety vid is on, then we tell Iris we’re good to go and take our seats.” Jessica picked up a stack of menu cards and flicked through them while Emily checked that the correct trolleys had been delivered by the ground services team

and signed for them. She then checked and signed the passenger manifest.

“I’ll go take this to Iris.”

Emily walked through the premium cabin towards the main galley where Iris was located. “All trolleys have been checked and our passenger manifest is correct,” she said. Iris checked every item meticulously before finally signing and handing the paperwork back.

Tom Kent’s voice came over the intercom system introducing himself and welcoming everyone on board and Emily smothered a smile at his professional tone.

“Everyone’s seated and Captain Locke said we are clear for push-back,” Sean, the steward working in economy appeared and told Iris.

“Roll the safety video,” Iris told him. Emily quickly excused herself and made her way back to her own cabin as all the televisions in the premium cabin sprang to life with the safety video.

She entered the first-class cabin and checked seatbelts were fastened and the aisles were clear. She could hear Jessica having a discussion with Mister Jones to encourage him to end his phone call.

Once she was satisfied the cabin was secure, Emily took her seat by the emergency exit which was located between the last seat in row A and the first-class washrooms where three folding jump seats were available for crew members. A few moments later Jessica took the seat next to her. She picked up the telephone embedded in the wall next to her and pressed the button to indicate that their cabin was secure and that they were both seated and ready. Emily looked out of the porthole window and watched as the airport slowly rolled past them.

As a scheduled flight leaving on time, Flight SQA016 had priority access to the runway, and before long the four giant engines were sending the aircraft up into the air. Ten minutes into the ascent, a single light indicated to the cabin crew when they could leave their seats and begin their duties. Emily and Jessica quickly entered the galley and began opening trolleys for the dinner service.

“Okay,” Jessica said as she turned the ovens on. “We work from back to front. First we hand out menus, there are two choices of starters and three choices of mains. Take Miss Lewis’ order straight away, she likes to be served quickly so she can get to sleep, everyone else you can give a few more minutes. Take their full order including wine or any other drinks and then we’ll get everything cooking, again we’ll work back to front.”

A few minutes later, the sound of the seatbelt warning light being turned off was accompanied by the sound of approximately one hundred and fifty seatbelts being simultaneously removed. Moments later, Iris Winter’s voice filled the cabin as she welcomed everyone on board and reminded them, pointlessly, that although the seatbelt sign had been switched off it was recommended to keep the belt securely fastened when not moving around the cabin.

Jessica and Emily entered the cabin and began handing out menus.

“Can I take your order now, Miss Lewis? Or would you like a few more minutes?” Emily asked politely.

“Salad starter, I’ll have the chicken for main, no dessert, please,” Olivia said as she handed the menu back.

“Any wine with your meal?”

“No.” Olivia shook her head. “I’ll have some more water though, still water.”

“I’ll get on that immediately.” Emily pushed the button to release the table and unfolded it before heading into the galley where she gathered the cutlery, tablecloth, and condiments, and put a chicken meal in the oven to heat through.

Jessica appeared and said to Emily, “Don’t bend over when you serve near Jones, he’s wasted already and he’ll probably try to grab you.”

“Ugh, thanks for the warning.”

In the cabin, she approached Miss Lewis’ table and prepared it to the exacting standards she had practiced over and over during training. Miss Lewis ignored her, content to flip through the in-flight magazine silently.

Emily returned to the galley and picked up another bottle of water and a clean glass. “Miss Lewis doesn’t talk much, does she?”

Jessica shook her head. “Nope, at first I used to think she was a bit of a snob but now I think she’s just quiet.”

Emily placed a salad, bottle of water, and glass on a tray and exited the galley to serve the starter. “Here you are, Miss Lewis.”

Olivia wordlessly unwrapped her metal cutlery from her thick linen napkin while Emily stepped forward to speak with Doctor Harvey.

“Can I take your order, Doctor Harvey?”

“One of everything,” Doctor Harvey laughed in a way that indicated that wasn’t the first time he had told the joke.

Emily quickly took all of the orders up the row and on her return cleared away Olivia’s starter dish and cutlery. In the galley, she removed the main course for Olivia from the oven and turned to Jessica. “So, she’ll want this now?”

“Yes.” Jessica nodded. “She doesn’t want a break between courses.”

Emily quickly plated the meal and went back into the cabin and placed the dish on Olivia's table and put some fresh cutlery beside it. "Can I get you anything else, Miss Lewis?"

Olivia looked happy at the speed of delivery and shook her head. "No, that's wonderful, thank you, Miss White."

Emily quickly poured wine for her row and began serving the starters when she noticed that Olivia had finished her main meal.

"All finished?" she asked and, at Olivia's nod, removed the plate. "Would you like me to clear everything away?"

"Yes, I'm going to prepare for bed," Olivia said as she picked her wash bag from out of the storage bin by the window.

"I'll have your bed ready for when you get back," Emily said with a smile. She cleared all of the items from the table and folded the it back into the wall and clicked it into place.

In the galley, Emily quickly deposited the dishes and used linens into the appropriate trolley, opened a storage locker, and removed a stack of bedding. The sound of the washroom door closing indicated that Olivia had left her seat and Emily rushed into action to close the window blind and make the bed.

When she had finished, she stepped back to review her work. Jessica passed by and nodded. "Looking good, Em."

Emily continued serving the remaining meals. At one point she looked up to see Olivia exiting the washroom. She wore pyjamas and the airline-provided slippers, her face was scrubbed clean of makeup and she got into bed. She switched off the dim nightlight and then donned a face mask and earplugs.

Back in the galley Emily said, "So, Miss Lewis takes her sleep seriously eh?"

Jessica laughed. "Yep, and nothing wakes her. I don't know how long she's done this journey, but she's just out like a light so don't worry about tiptoeing past her."

Over the next hour, Emily and Jessica finished the dinner service and slowly set up all of the beds, except for Liam Jones's because he had passed out in his seat. Both women had tried to wake him but he was out for the count which Jessica said wasn't unusual. They placed a blanket over him and left him alone. Once everyone was tucked up in bed, Jessica turned the cabin lights to the dimmest setting and drew the curtains as she entered the galley.

"So, what do you think?" Jessica asked Emily with a smile.

"Yeah," Emily nodded. "Hard work!"

"Yep, but as long as you have a good partner then it's all fine. You did really well tonight, you should be proud."

"I don't know about that," Emily said shyly. "It was okay, I need to speed up a bit."

"That comes with time," Jessica said. "Now, let's get the galley cleared and then we can prep for breakfast which we'll serve in..." she looked at her watch, "three hours."

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BY A.E. RADLEY

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