

On the Redeye

by Radical Joan

Narrator: I noticed her the second I got to the gate. She was hard to miss, brighter than everyone around her in a white lace shirt tucked at the waist into a long yellow skirt that swished around her ankles. Behind her, the sunset made the sky look almost pink. Her hair was long enough that the sun caught in it as if it were a spiderweb.

She was taller than the people around her, but it wasn't just that that drew my eye. Standing in line with the business men and their briefcases, the families with children eager to board, the crumpled travelers with shadows under their eyes, she looked like she didn't belong. The sunset gave her outline a sharpness, made her a little difficult to look at directly without squinting. She was a sunspot surrounded by blue-gray carpet and ambient noise.

She examined her fingernails, and I imagined them curled around a vodka cranberry at the end of a dark bar. I wished that we were meeting there. There I would know what to do. The rules of engagement were clear. Here, in the wild, sterile world, all I could do was duck into the nearest airport bookstore for a peanut butter cup and a random paperback. Anything to get me through the redeye.

I wasn't even supposed to be on this flight. I'd just barely missed my connection. Suddenly, the redeye didn't seem quite so bad.

[Flight attendant] We are now boarding flight 269 service to Providence, Rhode Island. Passengers in boarding group A, please have your boarding pass and identification ready.

Narrator: As the line began to move, I saw her look around to gather her carry on bag. That's when she noticed me.

I don't know how, but I knew she knew. And I knew she knew that I knew. And I knew we were safe with each other.

She half smiled and looked me up and down. Clocking me, just as I'd clocked her. I looked away. I ran my fingers through my hair. I needed something to do with my hands.

I wondered what it was she had picked up on- the tattoo spiraling up my left arm or the particular shape of boots or glasses—or just that thing, that way of holding a body invisibly, nonchalant and tucked away and hyper aware all at the same time. Body language half daring a challenge, half hoping to get away with some kind of heist.

I looked at her again, mainly to see if she was still looking at me. She wasn't. She had boarded the plane. That flash of recognition, that moment of intimacy shared between queer strangers, had passed with her. I sighed and gathered up my things.

[Flight attendant]: We are now boarding group B, group B please have your boarding pass and identification ready.

I shouldered my bag and looked down at my boarding pass. 23b. Damn- a middle seat. I wouldn't sleep a wink.

[ding]

[Flight attendant]: "have a nice flight."

[walking noises]

Narrator: I entered the plane and breathed in the familiar smell of clean and stale oxygen. The narrow pathway between seats was still crowded with strangers, hoisting up bags and rearranging themselves in the rows. I spotted her again, a ways back, but she was looking out the window at the darkening runway.

Row 19...

Row 20...

Row 21...

Row- a few seats away, I stopped glancing at the labels on the overhead luggage compartment. I now knew exactly where I would be sitting. I smiled weakly as I slid into the middle seat. Right next to *her*.

I cleared my throat a little, trying not to jostle while I shoved my bag beneath the seat in front of me and dug the seat belt out from right between our set cushions. Why did they always have to be stuck there? Finally, I settled myself in.

I busied myself with the seat back pocket, paying closer attention than I normally would to the safety instructions being demonstrated.

[Flight attendant]: Ladies and gentlemen on behalf of the crew we'd like to welcome you to flight 269 service to Providence. Please take a minute to locate the emergency exit nearest to you. *[ducks under]*

Narrator: Up close I could see the freckles covering her shoulders. They made me think of constellations. As the plane gathered speed *[rushing sound]*, I looked past her out the window. I felt a swooping sensation in my stomach as the plane lifted off the ground. The cars quickly became the size of toys, then ants, then specks, and were finally hidden by clouds and falling darkness.

[Captain]: Good evening, this is your captain speaking. We've reached an altitude of 33,000 feet, so just sit back, relax, and enjoy the rest of the flight.

[Voice 2]: I wouldn't expect you to be reading that

Narrator: I started a bit.

[N]: "Reading what?"

Narrator: She looked down pointedly at the floor between us. In the angle of the planes ascent, the paperback must have slipped out of my bag. I only really noticed now that it's cover featured a muscled and well-oiled man pinning a slight woman against a brick wall. He was kissing her neck.

[N]: Oh god, that's embarrassing. Please don't judge me.

[Voice 2 Laughs]

Narrator: She laughed, and my stomach did a small flip. I blamed it on turbulence.

[V]: I would never judge.

Narrator: She reached into her seat back pocket and pulled out a small paperback. It looked like a pulp novel from the 1950s, the kind with a 75 cent sticker on the cover. A curvy white woman seemed to be slipping a red dress off her shoulders. A shadowy man stood behind her, clutching her waist.

[V]: See? I'm trash too.

[N]: Yeah, at least your trash is vintage though.

[V]: Some things never change.

[N]: True. They still use the same verbs every time- like "ravish." And lips are always, *always*, soft.

[V]: Right? Sometimes, lips are chapped. It's okay, it's perfectly normal.

[N]: It bothers me way more than it should. Ugh, what also gets me is how often there's simultaneous orgasms in these things. I mean, that just doesn't happen that often. Well, to me at least.

[V]: No I agree, it's totally unrealistic. I guess it's supposed to be like straight people become one or whatever. Straights just *love* becoming one.

[N]: Yeah. I don't know, I guess in a couple months I'll see what all the fuss is about.

[M]: What's happening in a couple months?

[N]: I guess I become... straight?

[M]: What, don't tell me they're putting you in conversion therapy or something?

[N]: Dear God no. I'm just getting top surgery. See this scruff? Them's the hormones.

[M]: Oh thank God.

[N]: I didn't mean to scare you. No, I guess I'll just be a guy who's into women or something. Weird.

[M]: Does that mean you... aren't now?

[N]: No, I mean, yes, I totally am. Into women I mean. And a guy. Both.

[M]: *[pause]* Well, that's a relief. I was prepared to be disappointed.

[N]: I'd hate to disappoint.

[M]: Oh, would you?

Narrator: She turned back to the window. Flying this high above whatever light pollution might be coming from below, I could see countless stars. I glanced around the cabin. The woman next to me was asleep, along with most of the rest of the passengers. A few reading lights were on here and there and a flight attendant was walking down the narrow pathway collecting trash.

I felt my pulse quicken. My stomach tightened as my chest fluttered. Suddenly it was much harder to get the words out. As the flight attendant passed, I leaned closer to the window, pretending to examine the stars outside.

[N]: I would.

Narrator: She turned her head so that suddenly our faces were centimeters away from each other. her pupils were dilated, pushing the brown of her eyes almost to the point of invisibility. She seemed to be considering me. I waited.

[M]: Just, you know I'm also-

[N]: yeah. Pronouns?

[M]: she- you?

[N]: he/them, pleasure to meet you.

[M]: A pleasure.

[N]: Do you have a name, she/her?

[M]: I do, but don't you think it's kind of... hot? Not knowing?

[N]: I guess when you put it that way...

[M]: bathroom?

[N]: "Oh please." I reached up to click off the overhead light. "That's such a cliché".

Narrator: She looked around one more time, then uncrossed her legs, deftly rearranging her skirt in the process so it was hitched up under her thigh. Then she leaned forward to reach for the thin blue blanket encased in plastic. I touched her back gently as she did, and she shivered a little. It sent a thrill through my hand. A lump rose in my throat.

[M]: At least something's wrapped up, huh?

Narrator: I laughed lightly as she ripped open the plastic and then draped the blanket over the both of us, the arm rest between us propping it up. I leaned casually back as if finding a more comfortable position to sleep in, draping my arm over the metal wall between us and resting my hand gently in her lap. She was hard. I glanced at her and smiled. She was looking determinedly ahead.

[N]: Just don't make too much noise.

[M]: Is that a challenge?

[N]: maybe.

[M]: okay, well, I guess this is going to give you a huge advantage, but... if you avoid my strapless and just wanted to muff... all I'm saying is it will be a lot harder for me to stay quiet.

Narrator: She cast a glance at me and pulled her hair over her shoulder, showing me more of the broad line between her neck and shoulder. The freckles were scattered over her skin at about the same distance as the stars outside.

[N]: I moved my hand along her thigh, stroking occasionally, watching her throat as she swallowed.

[M]: *[a slight gasp, some rustling, another gasp]*

[N]: better keep it down.

[voice 2]: it's hard to keep it down when your fingers are so-- fuck. Where'd you learn to do that?

[N]: *[laughing a little]* Mira Bellwether.

[M]: can i---

Narrator: her arm crossed over mine under the blanket. It was rare that I had sex without a strap on these days. but we were in a metal box flying through the sky at thirty thousand feet. Anything was possible. I kept massaging my fingers inside her.

[N]: "Let's see which of us whimpers first?"

She smiled and bit her bottom lip as she reached towards me beneath the blanket. Her hand found the top button of my jeans and I felt them open as she burrowed her hand beneath my boxers.

[N]: "Lower"

Narrator: It took her a moment to find my swollen clit-cock. Her hand was wedged unfairly between stiffer layers of fabric. But then she did, and began moving her fingers in rough circles against my cock. I couldn't help it. <Moan sound>

[M]: *[whispers]* You lose.

[N] *[another moan, whisper]* Please.

[M]: I'll have to stop if you're not quiet.

[N]: I can be.

Narrator: I concentrated harder on keeping the sounds suppressed below my ribcage. I concentrated on my breath. Her fingers were playful, even in the little space she had. With every bit of pressure against my cock my stomach swooped and swished. She started moving fast and hard against me. I felt like I was at the top of a roller coaster, waiting for the drop, all flutters and sky high possibility. At one point, she moved lower, but I pulled up her hand with my free arm and a shake of my head. I let my hand continue to rest on her arm.

My other moved gently inside her, feeling her warm and soft beneath my fingers. I kept the pressure gentle, trying to follow every slight move of her hips and the occasional guidance from her.

[N]: more than one finger?

[M]: no that's—that's perfect. Don't stop.

Narrator: I traced my free hand up her shoulders. The orgasm was starting inside me. I had to arch my back to meet the swell of it. I could hear her breathing get more ragged next to me. Then it rushed at me, full force like a speeding jet. I bit down gently on her shoulder to stifle the sound.

[another gasp]

[M]: well, it's been a pleasure getting off with you. Truly. But any more and I'll ruin this blanket, so why don't we hold off?

[N]: *[shaky]* that was--

[M]: better than your novel?

[N]: much better. But maybe just as straight?

[M]: *[laughs]* at least there wasn't a simultaneous orgasm, right?

[N]: true, at least we kept it realistic.

[M]: do you want... more?

[N]: hmm... I left my strap on in my luggage but in an ideal world we could head to the bathroom and you would... suck me off?

[M]: mm ideally I would. On my knees. It'd be so hot, we'd set off the smoke detector.

[N]: I guess we'd throw realism out the window, huh?

[M]: oh of course. Realism be damned.

Narrator: we smiled at each other, a little nervously. It was strange, to feel so close to her, more affirmed than I'd felt with a partner in years, and still feel like I had no idea what to say.

[M]: I think I'm feeling a little, tired, but if you don't mind, I'd kind of like to keep touching you. It's been... lovely.

[N]: I'd like that.

Narrator: She moved the seat rest up and readjusted her skirt, then tangled one of her legs between mine. She rested her head on my shoulder and I leaned into her, feeling molten. Soon, we were both asleep in each other's arms... Minutes later, or so it felt, the plane hit the ground [*rushing sound, followed by flight attendant*]. We were mostly quiet through the disembarking, casting shy glances at each other while everyone gathered their bags. She glanced tellingly around at the people around us, and I smiled and raised my eyebrows. It made me feel giddy to carry this kind of secret.

[deplaning sounds]

Narrator: Outside the causeway, I paused to wait a second, unsure what to say. I had felt her presence behind me, unsettling and comforting at the same time.

[N]: I uh... I gotta go... do you?

Narrator: She looked at the bathroom signs and raised an eyebrow at me, then shrugged with a bit of a scoff. Right.

By the time I re-emerged, she was gone. I wasn't sure if I had expected her to wait for me or not, but I walked to the baggage claim faster than I normally would to try to catch her. Once there, I pretended to peer around the conveyer belt for an early sight of my bag. Really I was looking for her. I started as I felt fingers brush across my back. I knew it was her before I had a chance to turn around. She passed in front of me, then looked over her shoulder with a slight smile.

[V]: Turbulent flight, huh?

Narrator: I swallowed, trying to look suave.

[N]: Oh, I don't know. I thought it went down pretty smooth.

Narrator: I could have sworn she winked at me before she turned away, yellow skirt twirling after her. I watched her as she plucked her bag from the carousel, then cut her way through the crowd, her tall frame visible until she'd reached the sliding glass doors. I tried to memorize the way she walked, each step placed slow and careful. Then the doors were closed, and she was gone. I stood there long enough for my bag to circle the belt twice. I still felt light as air. Even the jostling of the crowd turned me on, remembering the feel of her hands in the sky, no one around knowing that we were fucking...

Finally, I shook myself, grabbed my suitcase, and headed out into the thin morning air.