

When Time Flies

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CHAPTER ONE

The private jet engines hummed beneath me, low and unyielding, like a memory I couldn't shake.

Cabinets, fixtures, and countertops—every surface shone like it had something to prove. They had to. In this world, perfection was everything.

My eyes flicked to the cockpit, to the neat row of water bottles perched in their cupholders. All so pristine. All so orderly.

I tugged at my sleeve, hoping the storm inside me remained hidden.

If I had a mental weather app, it would say “100 percent chance of drama.”

I glanced toward the captain. He sipped his black coffee as if nothing in the world could touch him. The co-pilot texted on his phone. Both of them, calm as rocks.

Me?

I needed calm wherever I could get it.

The biggest perk of the Gulfstream 650? It had a cabin door that separated me from the pax, or passengers, and their drama.

Ding! A text on my phone chimed. My screen shared it was 0900.

We're ready for breakfast. Thanks Indy.

I tapped the “thumbs-up” symbol.

As a corporate flight attendant, I had worked with these pilots many times before, so I knew their breakfast preferences. I opened the tiniest oven in the world and shoved in a tray of bacon. Later, I would prepare the eggs to serve everything hot.

I was flying one pax, Mr. Jacobs, who had preoccupied himself with coffee, the *Financial Times*, and a nap. That was why I liked flying businessmen: we didn't talk except for a “good morning” or “what would you like for lunch?”

With time to burn, I conducted the usual self-critical evaluation of my life and my attempts to fix it.

The old rage from my liver rose, and my intestines churned like an electric whisk on the lowest speed. I was a cliché of

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both Chinese medicine and Ayurveda. The fact that my shame, anger, and fear culminated into Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) really made me textbook. As the spiritual experts would say: *You keep holding onto old crap.*

I'd tried everything to let go of the past. I talked about my feelings to numerous therapists—some good, some not. I even attempted the “woo-woo” including:

Inner child work.

A soul retrieval from a Native American shaman
(Apparently my soul couldn't be retrieved).

Good ole fashioned journaling.

Cry therapy.

Ayahuasca in the Amazon jungle (The result? Shitting and vomiting at the same time).

Exploring my “shadow side.”

Breath work while a didgeridoo played in the background
(One word: painful).

Shrooms.

Trauma workshops.

Belief coding.

Vision boarding (I was desperate).

Transcendental Meditation.

Ketamine.

Visits to psychics, mediums, astrologers, and tarot readers, who all agreed...

I was pretty fucked.

Then I returned to the Western approach and did a one-week stint each with Lexapro and Zoloft, which only gave me migraines. I freakin' loved the *I-can't-even-get-anxious-if-I-wanted-to* feeling of Xanax...but alas, it wasn't enough.

Nothing worked.

I let out a sigh from my belly, as a multitude of yoga teachers had taught me. As I expelled the air, I felt strange...odd...not dizzy, not nauseous, but weird. I checked the monitor that displayed the airshow. Time To Destination, or TTD, was three hours to go until we landed in Teterboro, New Jersey.

The words and numbers on the monitor blurred into an astigmatism.

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I rounded the corner into the crew rest and then plopped onto the club seat. Exhaustion crawled through my veins like slow lightning. My vision pulsed. The feeling was jetlag times infinity. I tried to stay centered and think through what was happening. I had been flying—almost nonstop—to save money to buy a house. Crossing all those time zones and the constant fatigue combined with the IBD did not make for a healthy lifestyle.

I'd let myself get *that* run down. Damn.

My body felt weightless. It was like the moment before a fall, that breathless pause—only it never ended. A newfound hum in my ears grew until it swallowed my every thought. My eyes darted over my lap to the khaki fabric wall and finally to the window. The sky brightened to an angelic white, nearly blinding me. I wasn't dizzy. I had the urge to stare straight ahead, yet I could not focus.

Am I vaporizing?

I stretched out my fingers. They were disappearing! I felt so airy, as if I could levitate off the seat. I grasped the armrests until...

I couldn't grasp them anymore.

The outline of my body began to blur. I lost the solidity of flesh. Tiny sparks of light flickered along my arms, breaking apart into floating specks, like dust in the sun. These particles—that were once me—scattered outward. Where I had sat, I was now only a swirl of luminous dust, leaving me somewhere between confused and terrified.

The world spun ahead of me, leaving no room for panic, no room to understand. In an instant, purple lightning hummed and sounded like the constant static of a bug zapper. The spinning intensified, yet I wasn't queasy.

What the fuck is going on?

I realized I was spinning through blackness, as if I was on an otherworldly plane. Then the particles of my body snapped back together and returned it to its human shape. I kept rotating and twirling until, out of nowhere, I smelled old wood and cleaning solution. And then...

There I was, sitting on a chair in a—was it a *courtroom*?

My mouth was so dry it felt like sand had settled on my tongue. A dull ache pulsed behind my temples, the kind that

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usually came from waking too early and too thirsty. My eyes darted across the courtroom, desperate to anchor on something steady, but every face seemed sharpened against me, a blur of judgment I couldn't decipher. My chest tightened, heavy as stone, and though I begged my body to move, shift, or raise even a finger, nothing obeyed. It was as if my body had betrayed me; every molecule refused to budge. Before I could get one thought together, I heard:

"Indy, doodoo, what's wrong?"

Mom.

Where am I?

I did the only thing I could think of in an emergency: the Ujjayi breath. Inhale up the throat and exhale down the throat, making a Darth Vader sound.

It wasn't working—my body wouldn't listen, my mind wouldn't quiet. The storm surged inside me.

"Indy! What are you doing? Brian, what is she doing? What's that noise she's making?"

I turned to see my father, and then—wait a minute...whoa. Mom, Dad, my lawyer, the prosecutor, and *the judge*? The old building was the courthouse in Brookline, Massachusetts, the uber wealthy part of Boston where I had attended private school.

My eyes widened like I just spotted free Wi-Fi on a transatlantic flight.

My parents appeared younger. I looked down at my outfit to discover I was wearing a skirt suit, and the only time I had worn a skirt suit was on the day of my plea bargain.

I investigated my surroundings until I stopped at a massive window with a mirrored surface on the opposite wall. It had the perfect amount of glare to catch my reflection. I recognized the Indy Kash from thirteen years ago with hair down to my bra strap and leftover baby fat rounding out my face.

I found myself trapped again in one of the darkest corners of my life, dragged to a place I had sworn never to revisit. That single moment had shattered everything—my trust in myself, my family's faith in me, and whatever fragile hope I had left for a future. Seventeen years old, branded guilty for a crime I did not commit, I felt the sentence jabbing into my bones like daggers. I wanted to scream, shout, holler...yet any feral sound

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was locked behind my ribs. And then, just as I braced to turn away from it all, I caught her—a young woman beside me. Her coal eyes pierced mine. White paint streaked her face.

Then, she vanished.

I was left staring at the ghost of myself in the reflection until Mom whispered from behind me, “Doodoo. Focus.”

My mother with her West Indian tough love. It never ceased.

The judge said, “Miss Kash, are you all right? Do you need to be excused? The bailiff can take you to the restroom.”

I shook my head, too stunned to do anything else.

“We will proceed then. Miss Kash, I understand this a lot for you to take in, but this is *very* serious.” He turned his attention to the prosecutor and my defense attorney. “You have entered a plea bargain which I have accepted. Miss Kash is a first-time offender, and her character references, schoolwork, and activities are outstanding. Up until this point, she has shown good judgment, which makes her actions so surprising.”

Was this really happening?

The judge continued, “Let the court recognize the submission of affidavits from the following: Trevor Stone, Brooks—”

I remembered this part clearly. The people who fucked me over. I was too numb to scream or cry or do anything.

“As the plea bargain states: India Jean Kash, you plead guilty to the crime of arson. Because there was only property damage, I am ordering: a twenty-five hundred dollar fine; three hundred hours of community service; and ten sessions with a court-approved therapist. I am also ordering probation, which will be lifted upon completion of paying the fine, the community service, and therapy requirements—all of which the defendant must complete by the time she turns eighteen—or within the next seven months. Usually with property damage, I would order restitution to be paid, but insurance is covering the damage. Several parents at Brookline Prep submitted a letter ensuring that they will pay for any damage that insurance does not cover. Miss Kash, if you do not complete the outlined requirements by your eighteenth birthday, the plea bargain is off the table. Do you understand?”

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My mind flashed to the meme that went viral. “Pyro Girl” was me with horns and red eyes on a loop of setting fire to a building and two words that repeated over and over: *Pyro Girl!* “Burning Down the House” by Talking Heads played in the background. It resounded in my thoughts and nightmares. I could never escape the humiliation of “Pyro Girl” or the internet harassment that came with it. My mind then flashed to rejection letters from colleges that destroyed any chance of having an amazing career in STEM. After Brookline Prep expelled me, I returned to my old high school, where kids would ask me to set their ex’s phone or locker on fire.

A tear trickled down my cheek, then another and another until I was bawling.

“India Jean, get yourself together right now!” Mom whisper-yelled from behind me.

I ignored her and spoke up. “Your Honor, I’m innocent! I was set up! I know exactly who did it—”

“Enough,” the judge said as he raised his hand. “Counselor, I suggest you get your client under control. She is about to blow one of the best plea bargains I’ve ever agreed to.”

My lawyer leaned over and whispered, “India, shut up!”

I didn’t know what to do. Here I was again, about to accept a punishment I did not deserve. A punishment that ruined my entire life. But what was I supposed to do? This *was* the best deal, and the seventeen-year-old me had to stand by, again, and accept it while my parents, my lawyer, and everyone else believed that I was guilty.

The tears would not stop flowing. “I’m sorry, Your Honor. That will not happen again. I understand the terms of the plea bargain.”

As if I was outside of my body, I heard myself plead guilty, the judge bang his gavel, and my lawyer and parents begin to talk. My intestines churned, and this time, the whisk was on its highest speed.

I grabbed my stomach and ran past my lawyer, pushed through the swinging door then the main door, and burst into the hallway. I sprinted as I desperately searched for a toilet. Then, I felt myself vaporizing again.

The angelic light beamed, the purple lightning hummed in my third eye, and I disappeared into the blackness. I twirled

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and floated, morphed into particles and back into my physical form, and landed right where I had started in the crew rest club seat.

The oven dinged.

What the—?!

I was gripping the armrests so hard that my forearm muscles bulged. My breathing quickened, but my stomach seemed fine. I touched it. No churning. I inhaled and exhaled deeply to slow my breath and released my grip on the armrests. The engines of the private jet droned as usual. I checked the monitor in front of me: two hours and fifty-seven minutes to destination. Several minutes had passed. I peeked my head out of the crew rest, and yes, those were the same pilots. Wait, did the oven ding?!

Shit!

All I wanted was to sink into myself, to unravel thought by thought until I could make sense of what had just detonated my world. My heart ached for the release of falling apart, for the luxury of losing my mind, even if only for a moment. But the air was too thick with urgency, and the weight of responsibility loomed. The job came first, whether I was ready or not.

I jumped out of the seat and scurried into the galley to smell overcooked bacon. If it did burn, the smell would engulf the entire plane, and the pilots and pax would be furious. If there was an actual fire, well, it would be Pyro Girl 2.0.

I threw on fluffy mitts, opened the oven, and pulled out the tray of sizzling bacon. It could pass as extra crispy. I didn't realize how long I'd been mulling over my life in the crew rest and then the—the *whatever-that-was* happened, but that only lasted a few minutes in present time—

STOP!

Indy, focus.

I shook my head and put on my game face. I cracked eggs, microwaved them in a glass cup, and scrambled them with a fork. For each pilot, I arranged eggs, bacon, and a cup of fresh berries on a separate plate. On trays, I dropped off the food in the cockpit.

On my walk back to the galley, I heard a ding. The service bell.

Mr. Jacobs needed a refill on coffee.

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I carried the pot with trembling hands. For him, it was a quiet comfort in a cup. For me, it was a suffocating reminder that I could barely breathe.

#

The rest of the flight was unusually busy with Mr. Jacobs obsessing over the “floofing,” or little tumbleweed balls sloughing off the insanely expensive carpet. I had to call Lily, the lead flight attendant who got me this job, to discuss the matter with her. Between calls to Lily, the head of maintenance, and involving the pilots, we sorted the matter. Mr. Jacobs was still annoyed but at least pacified enough to accept that the carpet company would rectify the situation this week.

The other kicker was Mr. Jacobs requested a late breakfast, which he had *never* done before since he was an intermittent faster. With only forty minutes left in the flight, I rushed to cook him a culinary feast using a microwave the size of a hotel safe and the equivalent of an Easy-Bake oven. By the time he had finished eating, I had to clean up the aircraft and prep for landing. This meant stowing away loose items and walking into the cockpit to give the pilots a thumbs-up that the cabin, pax, and me were ready for landing.

I was about to head back to the crew rest, when a thought occurred: that was where I had, well, “gone into my past.” So maybe that wasn’t the best choice of seats right now. Instead, I pulled out the jump seat, which resembled an awkward dentist chair, and sat behind the pilots.

My phone chimed with a text. It was from Ron, the owner of the management company.

“We’re having computer issues. Can you screenshot the catering invoice and send it to me? The caterer cc’d you on the email. Thanks.”

I gave the text a thumbs-up, searched my email and found the invoice, and screenshotted it. I opened the Photos App. But instead of the invoice popping up, I saw...

His face.

CHAPTER TWO

Impossible.

I blinked and looked again.

Jayden Mokashu.

How was *he* in my photos?!

The hair on my arms raised. My heart thumped like a rabbit with ADD, and the churning in my stomach that I knew all too well had returned. We would be landing soon, so I couldn't unstrap myself and dash to the lav. *Indy, it's okay. Relax*, I thought.

What did that annoying shaman tell me? The lady with the poofy blue hair... Oh yeah, the one from Trauma Workshop #3. Imagine myself as Dorothy as Toto pulls back the curtain to discover the Wizard, who is a small man manipulating a machine, and I'm Dorothy who has gone on the hero's journey and found courage, and that the Wizard represents the ulcerative colitis and—

What the fuck am I talking about?!

I returned to the reality in front of me and began the deep breathing techniques that I always fell back on. Hand over belly, inhale, exhale. At least all those restorative yoga classes were good for something. I glanced at the pilots. Thankfully, they didn't notice me freaking out behind them.

Once I was able to compose myself, I examined every detail of the picture: Jayden's coiffed dreadlocks tinted with honey blond that extended four inches from his scalp. The smooth black skin and twinkling eyes. A smile like Dwayne Johnson, confident and flashy. The merlot-colored suit only he could wear, with a midnight tie and crisp white shirt.

His face radiated goodness.

That was a lie.

But that wasn't the point. How did a person who hadn't been in my life for *thirteen years* suddenly appear in my photos?

Jayden was a narcissist of the highest degree, and he chose his victims carefully. At that time in my life, I was a fawn to his wolf...and like a wolf, he was agile, the leader of his clan, and trustworthy to his sycophants. But at first, he appeared compassionate.