

The Flight Attendant: A Novel

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From the author of *The Guest Room*, a powerful story about the ways an entire life can change in one night: A flight attendant wakes up in the wrong hotel, in the wrong bed, with a dead man - and no idea what happened.

Cassandra Bowden is no stranger to hungover mornings. She's a binge drinker, her job with the airline making it easy to find adventure, and the occasional blackouts seem to be inevitable. She lives with them, and the accompanying self-loathing. When she awakes in a Dubai hotel room, she tries to piece the previous night back together, counting the minutes until she has to catch her crew shuttle to the airport. She quietly slides out of bed, careful not to aggravate her already pounding head, and looks at the man she spent the night with. She sees his dark hair. His utter stillness. And blood, a slick, still wet pool on the crisp white sheets. Afraid to call the police - she's a single woman alone in a hotel room far from home - Cassie begins to lie. She lies as she joins the other flight attendants and pilots in the van. She lies on the way to Paris as she works the first class cabin. She lies to the FBI agents in New York who meet her at the gate. Soon it's too late to come clean-or face the truth about what really happened back in Dubai. Could she have killed him? If not, who did?

Set amid the captivating world of those whose lives unfold at forty thousand feet, *The Flight Attendant* unveils a spellbinding story of memory, of the giddy pleasures of alcohol and the devastating consequences of addiction, and of murder far from home.

CHRIS BOHJALIAN is the author of twenty books, including *The Guest Room*; *Close Your Eyes*; *Hold Hands*; *The Sandcastle Girls*; *Skeletons at the Feast*; *The Double Bind*; and *Midwives* which was a number one New York Times bestseller and a selection of Oprah's Book Club. Chris's work has been translated into more than thirty languages, and three novels have become movies (*Secrets of Eden*, *Midwives*, and *Past the Bleachers*). Chris lives in Vermont and can be found at www.chrisbohjalian.com or on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Litsy, and Goodreads.

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She was aware first of the scent of the hotel shampoo, a Middle Eastern aroma reminiscent of anise, and then-when she opened her eyes-the way the light from the window was different from the light in the rooms in the hotel where the crew usually stayed. The morning sun was oozing through one slender line from the ceiling to the floor where the drapes, plush as they were, didn't quite meet and blanching a strip of carpet. She blinked, not against the light but against the thumping spikes of pain behind her eyes. She needed water, but it would take a tsunami to avert the hangover that awaited. She needed Advil, but she feared the red pills that she popped like M&M's at moments like this were distant. They were in the medicine bag in her own hotel room. In her own hotel.

And this definitely wasn't her hotel. It was his. Had she come back here? Apparently she had. She was sure she had left. She thought she had returned to the airline's considerably more modest accommodations. At least that had been her plan. After all, she had a plane to catch this morning.

Her mind slowly began to tackle the questions she would need to answer when she rolled over, the principal one being the most prosaic: what time was it? It seemed that the clock was on his side of the bed, because it wasn't on hers. On her nightstand was the phone and a china tray with date and sugar cookies and three perfectly cubed Turkish delight candies, each skewered with a toothpick-sized silver spear. Time mattered, because she had to be in the lobby of the correct hotel-her hotel-with the rest of the crew by eleven fifteen, to climb with them all into the shuttle to the airport and then the flight to Paris. Everything else, including how she was going to find the courage inside her to swing her legs over the side of the bed and sit up-a task that, given how she felt, would demand the fearlessness of an Olympic gymnast-was secondary. She breathed in slowly and deeply through her nose, the noise a soft whistle, this time inhaling a smell more pronounced than the anise: sex. Yes, the room was rich with the unmistakable scent of a luxury hotel shampoo, but she could also smell herself and she could smell him, the evidential secretions from the night before. He was still there, an absolutely silent sleeper, and she would see him once she rolled over. Once she sat up.

God, if only she'd brought him back to her room. But at dinner he had slipped her a room key, telling her he would be back by nine and to please be waiting for him there. She had. His room was a suite. It was massive, impeccably decorated and bigger than her apartment in Manhattan. The coffee table in the living room was inlaid with mother-of-pearl, the wood polished to the point that it reflected the light like a full moon. There was a bottle of Scotch in the bar-this was a real bar, not a minibar or campus fridge with a couple cans of Coke Zero on the lone shelf-that might cost more than the monthly maintenance on her apartment back in New York.

She closed her eyes against the shame, the disgust. She tried to remind herself that this was just who she was-how she was-and to ratchet down at least a little bit the self-loathing. Hadn't they had fun last night? Of course they had. At least she presumed they had. When she had first opened her eyes, she had hoped for a moment that she had only been passed-out drunk, but no, it was clear that she had been blackout drunk. Again. The difference was not semantics. She experienced both. Passed-out drunk was more humiliating when it happened: she was the woman with her face half buried in the throw pillows on the couch, oblivious to the party moving on without her. Blackout drunk was more embarrassing the next morning, when she woke up in strange beds with strange men, and not a clue how she'd gotten there. She could recall this hotel room and this man, and that was a good sign, but clearly there were chasm-like gaps in her memory. The last thing she could recall was leaving. In her memory, she was dressed and she was exiting this suite, and he was in one of those marvelous hotel room robes, black and white zebra stripes on the exterior, terrycloth on the inside, and joking about the broken bottle of Stolli they had yet to clean up. He'd mumbled that he would deal with it-the spilled vodka, the dagger-like shards-in the morning.

And yet here she was. Back in his bed.

She sighed slowly, carefully, so as not to exacerbate her looming headache. Finally she lifted her head and felt a wave of nausea as the room spun. Instantly she sank back into the pillow's voluptuous, downy welcome.

On the plane, he had been wearing cologne, something woody she liked and he had told her was Russian. He loved the Russians, he said. Yes, he was an American, a southern boy, he joked, but he was descended from Russians and felt he still had a Russian soul. Pushkin. Eugene Onegin. Something about the gleamings of an empty heart. The Russians poured money into his hedge fund, he beamed—and it was a beam, not a boast, it was so childlike—and the crazy oligarchs were like uncles to him. They were like teddy bears, not Russian bears, in his hands.

She couldn't smell the cologne now, and then she remembered showering with him. It was a large, elegant shower of black-and-white-striped marble, including a marble bench, where he had sat down and pulled her onto his lap as he washed her hair with that anise shampoo.

His name was Alexander Sokolov, and he was probably seven or eight years her junior: early thirties, she guessed. He liked to be called Alex because he said Al sounded too American. In a perfect world, he confessed, he would be called Alexander because that sounded Russian. But when he started work, his bosses had suggested he stick with Alex: it was internationally neutral, which was important given the amount of time he spent overseas. He had grown up in Virginia, though he had no trace of a southern accent at all, and lived now on Manhattan's Upper West Side, running a fund at Unisphere Asset Management. He was a math geek, which he said was the secret to his success and why his fund delivered the sorts of returns that kept everyone on both sides of the Atlantic so happy. It was evident that he enjoyed the work, though he insisted that in reality there were few things duller than managing other people's money, and so mostly he wanted to talk about what she did. Her war stories. He was utterly fascinated.

He had been in 2C on the flight to Dubai and he hadn't slept much on the plane—if at all. He had worked on his laptop, he had watched movies, and he had flirted with her. He had gotten to know her much better than she had gotten to know him. Before landing, they'd agreed they'd each take a catnap and then rendezvous for dinner. They were going to meet in his hotel lobby. They'd both known that dinner would be mere foreplay. She rolled his name over again in her mind one more time before bracing herself to turn over and face the whitecap breakers of pain. To face him. One more time she thought of how much arak she had drunk last night. One hundred and twenty proof. The clear liquid becoming the color of watery milk once they added the ice. And then there was the vodka, the Stolichnaya his friend had brought later that night. She'd drunk arak before; she drank it whenever she flew into Beirut, Istanbul, or Dubai. But had she ever drunk this much? She told herself no, but she was kidding herself. She had. Of course she had. One of these days she was going to get busted by the airline; one of these days she was going to fly

too close to the sun and fail a drug test, and that would be the beginning of the end. It would be the beginning of the end of everything. She would be following the trail her father had hewn, and she knew where that ended.

No, it wasn't her father's trail, precisely, because he was male and she was female. She knew the truth of men and women and booze: it rarely ended well for either gender, but it was the women who wound up raped.

She sighed. It was too bad the airline didn't fly into Riyadh. The hotel minibars in Saudi didn't even have alcohol. She'd have to wear an ankle-length abaya. She wouldn't be out alone, ever, so she wouldn't be out picking up men, ever. Meeting them in their hotel lobbies. Ever.

She thought she might have been fine right now if Alex hadn't taken that call from his friend and had them get dressed. The woman—and Cassie believed that her name was Miranda, but even if this hadn't been one of her blackout benders, her memory this morning was still pretty damn foggy—had phoned just after they'd emerged from the shower, clean and postcoital and still a little drunk, and said she was going to stop by the hotel room for a nightcap. Cassie thought she was somehow involved in the hedge fund, too, and was going to be in the same meetings with Alex tomorrow. She may also have had something to do with Dubai real estate, but Cassie wasn't sure where she had gotten this idea.

When Miranda arrived at the suite, it was clear that she and Alex really had very little history together, and were actually meeting for the first time. And yet they had a past that transcended work: it seemed they had mutual friends and business connections in the construction that was everywhere in this science fiction-like city by the sea. She was his age, with dark almond eyes and deep auburn hair that she had pulled back into an impeccable French twist. She was wearing baggy black slacks and an elegant but modest red and black tunic. And she sure as hell could hold her booze. The three of them had sat in the suite's sumptuous living room for perhaps an hour, maybe a little longer, as they drained the vodka Miranda had brought. It crossed Cassie's mind that this was some sort of planned threesome, and while she wasn't about to initiate it herself, she knew she'd be game if either Alex or Miranda did. Something about the moment—the booze, the banter, the suite—had her aroused once again. Alex and Miranda were in chairs on opposite sides of that exquisite coffee table and she was alone on the couch, and somehow the fact that the three of them were a few feet apart made the moment feel even more heated. But, in the end, this wasn't about a threesome. Miranda left, giving both her and Alex only air kisses beside their cheeks before Alex shut the door behind her. Still, Miranda couldn't even have reached the elevator down some distant corridor before Alex was stripping off her clothes, then his, and they were making love again, this time in the bedroom on that magnificent king with the massive headboard that was shaped like an Arabian arch.

But then she had gotten dressed. She had. She knew she had. She was going to return to the airline's hotel. Hadn't she said good-bye to him at the entrance to his suite? Hadn't she even gotten as far as the elevator, wherever it was, on his floor?

Maybe. Maybe not.

It really didn't matter, because clearly she had come back to his room and climbed back into his bed.

Assuming, of course, that she had even really left. Maybe she was remembering the walk alone from the restaurant to his hotel room after dinner, when Alex had said he had a brief meeting with an investor. He'd told her he wanted her waiting for him naked in his room. She'd obliged.

And now here she was, naked again.

Finally she took a breath, cringing against the spikes behind her eyes, and turned 180 degrees in the bed to face Alex.

And there he was. For a split second, her mind registered only the idea that something was wrong. It may have been the body's utter stillness, but it may also have been the way she could sense the amphibian cold. But then she saw the blood. She saw the great crimson stain on the pillow, and a slick, still wet pool on the crisp white sheets. He was flat on his back. She saw his neck, the yawning red trench from one side of his jaw to the other, and how the blood had geysered onto his chest and up against the bottom of his chin, smothering the black stubble like honey.

Reflexively, despite the pain, she threw off the sheet and leapt from the bed, retreating into those drapes against the window. It was while standing there, her arms wrapped around her chest like a straitjacket, that she noticed there was blood on her, too. It was in her hair and on her shoulder. It was on her hands. (Later, when she was in the elevator, she would surmise that the only reason she hadn't screamed was self-preservation. Given the way her head was pulsating, the sound of her own desperate, panicked shriek might have killed her.)

Had she ever seen so much blood? Not from a human. A deer, maybe, back when she was a kid in Kentucky. But not a person. Never.

On the other side of the body, on the far side of the bed, was the clock. It was digital. It read 9:51. She had not quite ninety minutes to be in the lobby of another hotel and ready to leave for the airport and the flight back to Paris and then, tomorrow, home to JFK.

Her back against the drapes, she slid first into a baseball catcher's pose and then onto the floor. She tried to focus, to make decisions. Her mind only slowed when she spotted the swath of broken glass on the floor, a constellation on the carpet between the foot of the bed and the elegant credenza inside which was the TV. Once upon a time, it had been the bottle of Stoli that Miranda had brought; now it was mostly slivers and triangular fragments that were almost pretty, though the neck was still attached to the shoulder and the shoulder was a jagged edge. And then, when she realized what that might mean, she felt

the nausea rising up inside her. She raced to the bathroom with her hands on her mouth, as if her fingers really had any chance—any chance at all—of damming such a gravity-defying waterfall, and made it the toilet. But just barely.

Other Books

The Red Lotus, NATIONAL BESTSELLER · From the New York Times bestselling author of The Flight Attendant comes a twisting story of love and deceit: an American man vanishes on a rural road in Vietnam, and his girlfriend follows a path that leads her home to the very hospital where they met. Alexis and Austin don't have a typical "meet cute"—their first encounter involves Alexis, an emergency room doctor, suturing a bullet wound in Austin's arm. Six months later, they're on a romantic getaway in Vietnam: a bike tour on which Austin can show Alexis his passion for cycling, and can pay his respects to the place where his father and uncle fought in the war. But then Austin fails to return from a solo ride. Alexis's boyfriend has vanished, the only clue left behind a bright yellow energy gel dropped on the road. As Alexis grapples with this bewildering loss, she starts to uncover a series of strange lies that force her to wonder: Where did Austin go? Why did he really bring her to Vietnam? And how much danger has he left her in? Set amidst the adrenaline-fueled world of the emergency room, The Red Lotus is a global thriller about those who dedicate their lives to saving people—and those who peddle death to the highest bidder. [?](#) [?](#) [?](#) [?](#) [?](#) . Look for Chris Bohjalian's new novel, The Lioness!"