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The Haunting of Flight 201

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“The dead need no boarding pass.”

THE HAUNTING OF FLIGHT 201

“As a former flight attendant with 15,000 flying hours and 15 years in the skies, I’ve seen, heard, and experienced moments that linger long after landing. From the confined cabin of an aircraft—where the boundary between the ordinary and the unexplainable feels razor-thin—to the vibrant and mysterious layovers around the globe, every journey holds its own story. While this series is a work of fiction, it draws inspiration from the many faces, places, and whispers I’ve encountered throughout my years of flight.”

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THE HAUNTING OF FLIGHT 201

Chapter 1: Pre-Flight Preparations



THE CONSTANT HUM OF Dubai International Airport reverberated through the vast terminal, a blend of voices, announcements, and the steady roll of suitcase wheels. Emily Taylor paused just inside the glass doors, her fingers adjusting the strap of her bag. The early morning sun had barely risen, its warmth still lingering on her skin before the air-conditioned coolness enveloped her.

She scanned the departure hall. Families clustered around luggage carts stacked high with overstuffed suitcases. A business traveler, with a phone pressed to his ear, gestured sharply at a distracted child weaving between his legs. The smell of strong coffee mingled with the faint tang of jet fuel and the distant aroma of cardamom drifting from a nearby café.

Emily exhaled deeply, straightening her posture. Her uniform—a navy blazer and a crisp white blouse—fit her perfectly, her scarf knotted with just enough precision to suggest effortless professionalism. Her blonde hair was pinned back in a bun so tight it seemed to defy gravity.

She glanced at her watch. Early, as always. Yet, an unshakable feeling of anticipation stirred within her. Every flight was a mix of routine and unpredictability—a balance she'd learned to master over her years of service.

Purposefully, she strode toward the crew briefing room, her heels clicking softly against the polished floors. As she turned a corner into the quieter staff wing, the noise of the terminal faded to a murmur. Here, the mood was different—a mix of focus and camaraderie. A flight attendant chatted animatedly with a colleague near the coffee

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machine, while another adjusted her badge in the reflection of a glass panel.

Emily passed a floor-to-ceiling window overlooking the tarmac. The towering aircraft gleamed under the soft glow of floodlights. She paused briefly, her gaze drawn to the massive Airbus A380 that would soon carry her and 500 passengers across the Atlantic.

A chill brushed her arm, unexpected in the climate-controlled terminal. She rubbed the spot absently and shook her head. Just another day, she told herself. Routine. Familiar. Safe.

The glass doors to the crew briefing room slid open with a soft hiss, and Emily stepped inside, her heels clicking against the polished tiles. The space hummed with quiet energy—a blend of anticipation and routine. Ryan Thompson lounged in a swivel chair, one leg propped up on the table, a coffee cup balanced precariously in his hand. He glanced up, dark eyes gleaming with a mix of mischief and ease.

“You’re late,” he announced, his grin widening as he spoke.

Emily didn’t break her stride. “I’m three minutes early, actually.”

“Late, by my standards,” he quipped, straightening in his seat as she slid into the chair beside him.

Before she could respond, the door opened again, and Captain James Lewis strode in. His polished shoes echoed with authority, and the quiet murmur of the room instantly hushed. Behind him trailed Sarah Lee, clutching a clipboard as though it might fly away if she loosened her grip. Her movements were stiff, her shoulders set tight beneath the crisp lines of her uniform.

“Morning, everyone,” Lewis said, his voice a low rumble that carried the weight of decades in the cockpit. “Let’s get started. Dubai to New York. Seven hours, expected turbulence over the Atlantic, but nothing unusual.”

As he outlined the flight plan, his tone stayed steady, even as he detailed emergency protocols and contingency measures. Emily nodded along, her pen gliding across her notebook with practiced ease.

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Across the table, Sarah scribbled furiously, her pen jerking with each word as if every stroke was a battle against her nerves. The sudden clatter of her pen hitting the floor drew a flicker of attention.

Ryan leaned in, his voice just low enough to escape the captain's notice. "She looks like she's prepping for the world's most intense exam."

Emily shot him a sidelong glance but held back a smile. "You got this, Sarah," she whispered. The younger attendant glanced up, her cheeks flushed but grateful, before diving back into her notes.

Sarah Lee clutched the edge of her clipboard like a lifeline as Captain Lewis flipped through his notes. Her gaze darted between the neatly arranged rows of briefing documents and the others seated around the table. Emily glanced at her once, catching the way Sarah's fingers twitched against the pen in her hand. It reminded Emily of her first pre-flight meeting—a nervous knot of anxiety bound up in crisp fabric and protocol.

"Lee," Captain Lewis called, not unkindly. Sarah jolted upright in her chair.

"Yes, Captain?"

"Your section covers turbulence procedures. Anything you'd like to address before we go over the Atlantic expectations?" His eyes, sharp but not unkind, met hers.

Sarah scrambled through her notes, papers fluttering. "I—uh—I've reviewed the protocol. Everything seems... standard. But if the turbulence is worse than predicted, should we consider adjusting service timing?"

Ryan leaned back in his chair, the faintest smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. "Worst case? The coffee spills. Happens every time."

Sarah's wide eyes darted toward Ryan, her breath catching in her throat.

Emily cut in, her voice smooth and firm. "Ryan likes to make jokes. Don't let him get in your head."

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The younger woman exhaled, nodding tightly. “Got it. Thank you.”

Captain Lewis tapped the table lightly, bringing attention back to the agenda. “Good question, Lee. Adjustments are made case-by-case, but I’ll make the call from the cockpit if the turbulence worsens. Just stay steady and keep the passengers calm.”

As the captain moved on to the next point, Emily leaned toward Sarah, her tone low enough for only the two of them to hear. “You’re going to do fine. Focus on your steps, not the outcome.”

Sarah’s lips curled into a small smile, and Emily returned to her notes, satisfied she’d done her part to steady the nerves that had threatened to unravel.

Emily notices a glitch on her airline tablet showing Seat 17C as “Occupied” before switching to “Vacant.”

The business-class cabin was a study in order. Emily walked along the aisle, her tablet tucked under her arm. Leather seats gleamed in the soft ambient lighting, blankets and pillows folded neatly on every one. The hum of the air conditioning was barely audible, a quiet backdrop to her routine checks. She tapped the tablet to open the seat map, its sleek interface showing the layout of the upper deck. Dots flickered on the screen, each representing a seat. Blue for occupied, gray for vacant.

As she scrolled through, a flash of yellow caught her eye. Seat 17C. The status had flipped to “Occupied,” a label it wasn’t supposed to have. Frowning, Emily refreshed the display. The icon blinked a few times before reverting to gray.

She tapped the screen again. Nothing. Just “Vacant,” as it should be. “Ryan,” she called softly, glancing over her shoulder.

He appeared a moment later, his tablet dangling loosely in one hand. “What’s up?”

“Look at this.” She held the screen out to him. “It keeps marking 17C as occupied, but it’s supposed to be empty.”

Ryan squinted at the screen, his lips twitching into a faint smirk. “System glitch. These things are older than the plane itself.”

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Emily refreshed the map once more, the flicker now gone. “Still. It’s strange.”

“You’re thinking too hard,” Ryan teased. “It’s a seat, Emily. It’s not going to bite.”

Her gaze drifted to 17C. It looked no different from any of the others. Gray leather, untouched blanket, everything in place. But the unease persisted, prickling at the edges of her thoughts.

“Just keep an eye on it,” she murmured, more to herself than to Ryan. Her fingers tightened around the tablet as she moved further down the aisle.

Behind her, Ryan shrugged. “Sure. Whatever makes you feel better.” His footsteps faded as he headed toward the galley.

Emily paused for a moment by 17C, her tablet clutched close. The seat stared back at her, empty and silent. And yet, it didn’t feel empty. Not entirely.

Emily stared at the tablet in her hands, scrolling through the digital checklist with mechanical precision. Ryan leaned against the wall near the galley, one leg crossed over the other, his arms folded, exuding his usual relaxed demeanor. Sarah, meanwhile, was busy inspecting the emergency kits under the seats, her fingers trembling slightly as she ticked off each item on her list. The cabin hummed with the low buzz of air conditioning, a backdrop to their focused preparations.

Ryan glanced at Emily, sensing the faint tension in her shoulders. “What’s got you so serious?” He tilted his head toward the tablet. “Another glitch, or are you secretly hacking the system?”

“Nothing dramatic,” Emily replied, though her brow furrowed as she tapped the screen. “It’s this seat map. Seat 17C keeps flickering between ‘Occupied’ and ‘Vacant.’ It’s probably a system error, but...” She trailed off, glancing toward the row in question.

Ryan smirked, walking over to peer at the screen. “These systems are ancient. I wouldn’t trust them to tell me what time it is, let alone who’s sitting where. Don’t lose sleep over it.”

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“It’s not about sleep.” Emily’s tone was firm, but a thread of unease weaved through her words. “It’s just... odd. It’s always 17C.”

Sarah paused her work, glancing up from her checklist. “17C? Isn’t that the seat people say weird things about?” She quickly looked down again, as if afraid to entertain the thought further.

Ryan laughed, the sound light but a little forced. “Sarah, don’t tell me you’re falling for the ghost stories already. It’s your first long-haul flight. Superstition comes free with the uniform.”

Emily’s lips pressed into a thin line. She didn’t reply, but her gaze drifted toward the business-class cabin, where 17C sat as unassuming as ever. Despite Ryan’s reassurances, the glitch on the tablet nagged at her, like an itch she couldn’t quite reach. She checked her watch and turned back to the group.

“Let’s stay on task,” she said, her voice regaining its usual composure. “Ryan, finish inventory in the galley. Sarah, double-check the overhead bins and make sure they’re secure.”

The team dispersed, and Emily stood for a moment in the aisle, her tablet still in hand. The cabin felt unnervingly still, as if holding its breath. Emily forced herself to look away from 17C and returned to her routine, shaking off the unease that clung to her like a shadow.

Emily’s steps were deliberate as she entered the cabin, her polished shoes sinking slightly into the plush carpeting. The Airbus A380’s business-class section was an epitome of quiet luxury. Wide leather seats gleamed under the soft glow of overhead lights, each seat equipped with privacy screens, adjustable controls, and neatly folded blankets.

“Sarah, start with the emergency kits,” Emily instructed, her voice steady as she glanced at the junior flight attendant. Sarah nodded, fumbling slightly with her checklist before crouching down to open the compartments below the seats.

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Ryan appeared from the galley, leaning casually against a seat with his tablet in hand. “I’ll check the coffee machines,” he quipped. “Critical equipment.”

Emily didn’t look up. “Very noble of you.”

The inspection continued in silence, save for the occasional soft clicks of latches and the muffled hum of air conditioning. Emily’s hands moved deftly as she checked overhead bins, ensuring they latched securely. Her focus shifted briefly to Seat 17C, the subject of the earlier glitch. It appeared unremarkable, blending seamlessly with the other rows, yet its emptiness seemed louder somehow.

“Something bothering you?” Ryan’s voice cut through the silence as he approached. He followed her gaze to 17C and raised an eyebrow.

“Just being thorough,” she replied, her tone clipped. She moved on, opening and closing the last few bins with practiced efficiency.

“Thorough is good,” Ryan remarked. “Obsessive, maybe less so.”

Sarah, meanwhile, struggled with the latch on an emergency kit compartment. It snapped open with a metallic clatter, spilling its contents onto the floor. Her face flushed as she dropped to her knees, scrambling to gather the scattered items.

Emily knelt beside her, her voice soft. “It’s fine, Sarah. First flights are always overwhelming.”

Sarah’s lips trembled into a grateful smile. “Thanks. I just don’t want to mess anything up.”

Ryan crouched beside them, holding up a stray oxygen mask. “Don’t worry. I once lost a whole cart of drinks to turbulence. You’re miles ahead.”

Sarah’s laughter was shaky but genuine, breaking the tension. Emily stood, brushing off her uniform, but her eyes flickered once more to 17C. It was just a seat, she reminded herself. Nothing more. Yet as they finished their inspection and the cabin lights dimmed slightly, she couldn’t shake the feeling that something unseen lingered in the quiet air.

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Emily climbed the narrow staircase to the upper deck of the Airbus A380, her heels clicking softly against the aluminum steps. Business class was a world of quiet luxury—plush, wide leather seats in muted tones of gray and navy arranged in pairs, each seat equipped with a privacy divider and touchscreen entertainment system. The ambient lighting glowed a soothing gold, casting soft shadows over the immaculate cabin. This part of the plane always exuded a sense of calm, an unspoken promise of comfort.

She walked methodically through the cabin, her tablet in one hand, her eyes scanning each row. Overhead bins opened and shut with precise clicks as she verified their locks. She checked the seat recline buttons and tray tables, her fingers brushing against the cool leather armrests.

Her steps slowed as she approached Seat 17C. It looked perfectly ordinary. There was no smudge on the polished leather, no scuff marks on the seat's base. A folded navy blanket sat neatly on the cushion, its edges perfectly aligned. Yet something about the seat made Emily linger. She squatted down to peer beneath it, her heart giving an inexplicable flutter. Nothing. Just the smooth metal of the cabin floor.

Ryan's voice interrupted the stillness. "You inspecting seats for treasure now?" He was leaning casually against the divider between cabins, arms crossed.

Emily straightened, masking her unease. "Routine check. We don't all rely on charm to get through inspections."

"Seat 17C, huh?" Ryan's tone turned slightly more serious as he approached. He glanced at the seat, then back at her. "Still thinking about that glitch?"

"Maybe." Emily hesitated, her gaze drifting back to the seat. "Doesn't it feel... off to you?"

"It feels like a seat." Ryan shrugged, though his brow furrowed faintly. "You're overthinking it."

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She exhaled sharply, pushing the thought aside. “Probably.” Forcing her focus back to her task, she moved to the next row, but the weight of Seat 17C stayed with her, settling like a stone in her chest.

The galley was a hive of nervous energy. Sarah crouched awkwardly near the lower cabinet, her lips pressed together in concentration as she fiddled with the latch of a compartment. The tray inside teetered dangerously close to the edge. Emily watched from a few steps away, gauging whether to step in or let Sarah work through her nerves. A sharp clatter broke the relative quiet as the tray spilled, sending cutlery skittering across the polished floor.

“Great,” Sarah muttered under her breath, crouching to scoop up the utensils, her fingers trembling slightly.

Emily approached, crouching beside her. “Leave it for now. We’ll take care of it later,” she said softly. Sarah hesitated, her hands hovering above the fallen knives and forks.

“I—” Sarah looked up, cheeks flushed. “I just don’t want to mess this up.”

“You’re not messing anything up. Trust me,” Emily replied, placing a hand briefly on Sarah’s shoulder. “We’ve all had first flights. Mine was a disaster, and I still lived to tell the tale.”

Ryan appeared behind them, leaning casually against the counter with a carton of juice in hand. “Disaster might be putting it lightly. Emily once sent an entire tray of champagne down the aisle. Gravity did the rest.”

Sarah managed a weak laugh, her tension easing just enough to steady her hands.

Ryan poured himself a glass of juice, holding it up as if in a toast. “Here’s to smooth skies and turbulence-free flights. Anyone?”

Emily narrowed her eyes playfully. “We haven’t even taken off. Don’t tempt fate.”

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“Come on, what’s the worst that could happen? A passenger spills coffee? Someone complains about the salmon?” He grinned, taking a sip.

Sarah straightened, her posture a little more confident now. “Or turbulence.”

Ryan handed her the glass. “Exactly. Let’s focus on locking this galley down before that happens.”

As the three worked together, the earlier tension dissipated. But in the corner of her mind, Emily couldn’t ignore the cold tendrils of unease that had started to creep in since they’d boarded. Seat 17C loomed like an unspoken question she wasn’t ready to answer.

Passengers continued to file in, their voices blending into a cacophony of greetings, complaints, and the occasional burst of laughter. The cabin buzzed with energy, the scent of travel—a mix of leather seats, perfume, and the faint tang of disinfectant—growing stronger with every new arrival. Emily positioned herself near the business-class galley, watching the influx with her usual composed smile.

A man in his mid-forties paused in front of her, glancing at his ticket before scanning the rows of seats. “17C?” he asked, holding up the boarding pass.

Emily’s stomach tightened, but her expression remained serene. “Right this way,” she said, leading him with practiced grace.

As they reached the seat, Emily gestured to the row, noting how ordinary it appeared. “Here you go. Let me know if you need help with your luggage.”

The man nodded but hesitated before sitting. He glanced at the empty seat beside him, his brow furrowing. “Feels colder here,” he muttered, almost to himself.

Emily offered a polite laugh. “Air circulation can be uneven before takeoff. It should even out once we’re in the air.”

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He didn't seem entirely convinced but sank into the seat anyway, adjusting his briefcase under the armrest. Emily's eyes lingered on 17C for a moment before she stepped back, her hand brushing against her tablet. The screen flickered, Seat 17C briefly marked as "Occupied" before switching back to "Vacant."

She pressed her lips together and turned toward the galley, where Ryan leaned casually against the counter, a bottle of water in hand.

"Everything okay?" he asked, tilting his head.

"Just... passengers settling in." Her voice carried an edge she didn't intend, and Ryan caught it.

"Or is it just that seat again?" His smile faltered.

Emily didn't answer immediately. "It's probably nothing."

Ryan's gaze shifted toward the business-class cabin. "If you say so." He straightened, his easygoing demeanor replaced by something sharper. "But let me know if you need backup."

She nodded, her focus already drifting back to the man in 17C. His gaze was fixed on the seat in front of him, his knuckles white against the armrest. For a fleeting moment, Emily thought she saw a shadow move—just a trick of the overhead lighting, she assured herself. Yet, the unease in her chest deepened.

The hum of engines roared to life, a signal that the flight was preparing for departure. Emily took a deep breath, tucking her tablet under her arm, and returned to her station, her smile back in place.

Passengers streamed into the aircraft, their collective voices filling the cabin with a rhythm of clinks, thuds, and murmurs. The steady flow of footsteps alternated between hesitant shuffles and confident strides as individuals sought their assigned seats. Emily stood by the entrance to business class, her polished demeanor unwavering, a warm smile etched onto her face.

"Welcome aboard," she said, directing each passenger with an effortless grace. "Seats are marked clearly. Let us know if you need any assistance."

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A young woman struggled to hoist her oversized carry-on into the overhead bin. Ryan was beside her in an instant, his trademark ease shining through as he slid the bag into place with practiced efficiency. “The bins here are deceptively spacious,” he said with a wink. The woman laughed softly, her tension easing as she moved to her seat.

Further down the aisle, a family of four caused a brief bottleneck, their children bickering over who got the window seat. Emily walked over, kneeling to the children’s level, her voice soft but firm. “Flying is an adventure, and the best view is when you share it. Trust me.” The kids quieted, exchanging skeptical glances before reluctantly settling into their seats.

The commotion began to ebb as the cabin filled. Emily scanned the rows, her gaze pausing on Seat 17C. It sat untouched, its leather surface reflecting the cabin’s ambient light. A sense of unease whispered through her thoughts, but she quickly pushed it aside. Routine, she reminded herself. This was just another flight.

A child near the center of the cabin began to cry, pulling Emily’s attention. The boy clung to his mother’s arm, his face pale and his small frame trembling. “It’s too cold,” he whimpered, pointing directly at 17C. His mother whispered soothing reassurances, but her eyes betrayed her concern.

Emily crouched beside the boy, her voice steady and kind. “Sometimes the air feels colder during boarding, but it’s nothing to worry about. It’ll warm up soon.” Her tone seemed to soothe the mother, but the child’s gaze remained fixed on the seat, his lip trembling.

Ryan sidled up next to Emily as the family settled into their row. “Kids,” he muttered, shaking his head with a wry grin. “They’ve got wild imaginations.”

Emily nodded, but a small knot of unease formed in her chest. The child’s words lingered, quiet and persistent, like a faint echo she couldn’t quite place.

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The cabin buzzed with a symphony of sounds: passengers settling into their seats, the rustle of overhead bins being opened and closed, and the low hum of engines powering up. Emily moved down the aisle with practiced ease, her polite smile unwavering as she guided latecomers to their assigned rows. The repetitive greetings felt like second nature, but a weight lingered in her chest—a remnant of the earlier unease.

“Welcome aboard,” Emily said to a man in a neatly pressed suit, his briefcase balanced precariously in one hand. He nodded curtly, his eyes scanning for his seat. She gestured toward the far aisle, motioning for him to move forward.

Nearby, Ryan was helping an elderly woman hoist her bag into the overhead compartment, his easy charm on full display. “You’re all set now,” he said, stepping aside as she smiled gratefully.

From behind Emily, a child’s shrill voice pierced the hum. “I don’t want to sit here!” The words carried a sharp edge, drawing the attention of several nearby passengers. Emily turned to see a boy clutching his mother’s arm, his small frame trembling.

The mother crouched to the child’s level, her voice soft but firm. “It’s just a seat, sweetheart. There’s nothing wrong.”

“It’s cold,” the boy whispered, his gaze locked on a single spot. Emily followed his line of sight to Seat 17C. Her stomach tightened.

“Everything okay here?” Emily crouched beside them, her voice warm, though a flicker of tension sparked behind her words.

The boy’s mother sighed. “He says the seat feels cold. I think he’s just nervous about flying.”

Emily reached out, brushing her hand across the seat’s surface. It felt no different from any other: smooth, slightly cool leather. “Sometimes the vents blow colder air before we take off,” she explained, her tone soothing. “I promise it’ll warm up soon.”

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The boy's lip quivered, but he allowed his mother to guide him to their assigned row. He kept glancing back at 17C, his tiny shoulders hunched as if bracing for something unseen.

Ryan sidled up to Emily, his expression half-amused, half-curious. "Kids, huh? Always coming up with the wildest things."

Emily forced a smile, but her focus lingered on the boy's retreating form. The unease that had shadowed her since the briefing now coiled tighter, its grip colder than the air-conditioned cabin.

The child's cries echoed louder than any other sound in the cabin, cutting through the boarding chatter. A sharp intake of breath from nearby passengers signaled their discomfort, though most tried to pretend they weren't eavesdropping. Emily approached with a practiced calm, her smile masking the unease clawing at her chest.

The boy clung tightly to his mother, his small fingers gripping her arm like a lifeline. His tear-streaked face twisted in panic as he pointed toward Seat 17C. "It's cold, Mama. I don't want to sit there."

His mother crouched, trying to console him, her voice soft but strained. "Sweetheart, it's just a seat. See? It's empty." She gestured toward the ordinary leather chair, her tone a mix of reassurance and rising frustration.

Emily knelt to meet the boy's gaze. "Hi there. What's your name?"

"Amir," he whispered, his voice trembling.

"Amir, sometimes the air conditioning makes some seats feel cooler before the plane takes off. Once we're flying, it'll feel much better. I promise."

The boy shook his head violently. "No! It's not the air. It's—it's cold like ice. And he's sitting there."

The mother froze. "Amir, what do you mean?" Her eyes darted nervously to Emily.

"There's nobody sitting there," Emily assured, her voice steady despite the chill creeping up her spine.

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Amir buried his face in his mother's chest, refusing to move. His muffled voice carried the weight of conviction. "He's watching me."

Ryan appeared at Emily's side, his presence solid and grounding. He crouched, leaning slightly toward Amir with a friendly grin. "Buddy, I bet it's just your imagination. Planes can feel funny sometimes, especially when you're excited. You like planes, don't you?"

Amir peeked out from his mother's embrace but didn't answer.

Emily stood and addressed the mother with a professional warmth. "Would you prefer to switch seats? I'll see what's available."

The mother hesitated, glancing toward 17C. She shook her head. "It's fine. He'll settle once we're seated."

Ryan raised an eyebrow at Emily as they moved away. "Kids and their wild imaginations. Spooky, though, the way he said it."

Emily didn't respond. Her gaze drifted back to Seat 17C. The seat looked perfectly ordinary under the ambient cabin light, yet it loomed in her mind like a shadow stretching longer than it should.

As she turned her attention back to the passengers, the tablet in her hand buzzed faintly. Emily glanced down. The seat map flickered for a moment, marking Seat 17C as "Occupied" before switching back to "Vacant." A cold shiver ran through her, but she pushed it aside.

"Just a glitch," she murmured, her voice almost convincing.

The cabin settled into a hushed anticipation as the last of the passengers took their seats. Emily stood near the galley, her posture upright but her mind preoccupied. The interaction with the boy lingered like a sour note in her thoughts. Seat 17C had been unremarkable minutes ago, yet now it felt like a beacon of unease, pulling her attention despite her better judgment.

Ryan emerged from the forward galley, tucking his tablet under his arm. "All set in economy. I even helped a guy wrestle his oversized guitar into the bin. You'd think he was boarding a tour bus."

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Emily barely reacted to his attempt at levity. Her gaze flicked to the business-class cabin, scanning the rows. “Did you notice anything odd earlier? That boy—he refused to sit near 17C. He said it was... cold.”

Ryan glanced at the seat in question, then back at her. “Kids say weird things. Remember the one who thought the seatbelt sign meant we were under alien attack?”

She didn’t smile. “It’s not just the kid. The glitch on my tablet, passengers fidgeting... Something feels off.”

Ryan leaned against the counter, arms crossed. “You’re overthinking. Planes have quirks. Besides, if there’s anything supernatural, I’m sure Sarah’s spilling cutlery will scare it off.”

His light-hearted remark earned a small, reluctant smirk, but it did little to quell her unease. Emily turned her attention back to the cabin as Sarah approached, her steps hesitant.

“Everything’s secured, but I, uh...” Sarah faltered, her eyes darting toward Emily. “That seat. 17C. I swear I felt a breeze when I walked past it, and the vents weren’t on.”

Emily’s chest tightened. She opened her mouth to dismiss it, to reassure the younger attendant, but the words wouldn’t come. Instead, she turned to Ryan. He met her gaze, his grin gone now.

“Fine,” he said, pushing off the counter. “Let’s keep an eye on it. But no ghost stories to the passengers, all right?”

As they moved into position for takeoff, Emily couldn’t shake the creeping certainty that something—someone—was watching them. And the faintest chill in the air followed her as she walked back to her station.

The intercom crackled to life, the captain’s voice cutting through the growing hum of anticipation in the cabin. “Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We are cleared for takeoff. Please ensure your seatbelts are securely fastened, tray tables are stowed, and seatbacks are in their upright position. Thank you.”

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Emily glanced down the aisle, her gaze lingering for a fraction of a second on Seat 17C. It was empty, perfectly unremarkable, yet the earlier tension it had stirred hadn't dissipated. The child from earlier sat quietly now, eyes wide and fixed ahead as though bracing himself. His mother gave him a reassuring pat on the hand, but he didn't react.

"Everything ready?" Ryan appeared beside Emily, his expression a mix of professional confidence and casual ease.

"Ready as we'll ever be." She adjusted her scarf, feeling its fabric press against the base of her throat like a tether keeping her grounded.

Sarah appeared at the galley door, a nervous energy still clinging to her. She hesitated before stepping forward. "I checked the emergency kits again. Everything's good."

"Good," Emily replied. "You're doing fine. Just keep it steady."

Sarah nodded, her fingers tightening briefly around the edge of the galley counter before retreating to her assigned jump seat.

As the engines roared to life, a deep vibration rumbled through the cabin floor, echoing in the pit of Emily's stomach. She clasped the small handhold near her seat and steadied herself. The plane began to taxi, its enormous frame rolling forward with measured precision. Passengers settled into their seats, some glancing out the windows, others lost in their own worlds of headphones and pre-flight rituals.

Ryan leaned closer, voice low but audible over the ambient noise. "Smooth ride ahead, huh?"

Emily smirked faintly, not taking her eyes off the aisle. "Let's hope your optimism holds."

The plane gained momentum, the gradual acceleration building until the unmistakable force of lift-off pressed everyone back into their seats. Emily's eyes flicked again toward 17C, her professional demeanor intact but her thoughts circling back to the strange occurrences. For the briefest moment, she thought she felt a chill pass through her, but it was gone as quickly as it had come.

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As the plane ascended into the vast expanse of sky, the bustling world below shrank into a mesh of twinkling lights. Emily exhaled softly, a practiced calm settling over her, even as the unease lingered in the recesses of her mind.

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Chapter 2: Turbulence and the First Incident



THE CABIN WAS ALIVE with the steady hum of engines, the comforting monotony of an aircraft at cruising altitude. Emily Taylor walked the aisle of the business-class cabin, her steps measured and deliberate. She was carrying the calm professionalism she had mastered over years of service. Rows of passengers immersed themselves in the in-flight entertainment or sipped champagne from crystal glasses. Everything seemed routine, yet Emily couldn't shake the unease that had settled since takeoff.

She paused at Seat 17C, her gaze lingering longer than it should. It was empty, as it had been at the start of the flight, but the air around it felt different. Cooler, almost imperceptibly so. She reached for her tablet, confirming once more that the seat was listed as vacant. A flicker on the screen—"Occupied"—before it reverted to "Vacant" again.

"Are you going to keep staring at it, or do something about it?" Ryan's voice was low, laced with humor, as he appeared beside her with a tray of water bottles.

"Nothing to do. It's empty," Emily replied, her voice betraying a hint of tension.

Ryan leaned closer, whispering conspiratorially, "Empty seats don't get that much attention unless you're hiding something."

Emily ignored the comment, stepping away to greet a passenger requesting a blanket. She heard Ryan chuckle faintly behind her, but her thoughts stayed rooted to 17C.

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Minutes later, the captain's voice came over the intercom, steady and controlled. "Ladies and gentlemen, we've been informed of some mild turbulence ahead. Please remain seated with your seatbelts fastened. Cabin crew, secure the cabin."

Emily exchanged a glance with Ryan, whose joking demeanor shifted into something more serious. The practiced professionalism took over as they moved to secure the galley and check on the passengers.

As Emily fastened her belt in her jump seat, she couldn't help but glance at Seat 17C. The seatbelt hung loosely, unbuckled, as if it were waiting for someone who had yet to arrive. The first jolt of turbulence broke her stare, pulling her focus to the present.

Passengers clutched their armrests or reached for their seatbelts. Drinks sloshed in glasses, a few spilling over. Through it all, Emily felt a creeping cold at the edges of her awareness, a sensation she couldn't explain. It wasn't coming from the vents or the aircraft's systems. It felt... deliberate.

The Airbus A380 soared over the Arabian Gulf, the rhythmic hum of its engines lulling most passengers into a sense of complacency. Emily Taylor moved through the business-class cabin with practiced grace, her polished heels clicking softly against the carpet. She balanced a tray of warm towels, handing them out with a courteous smile that had become second nature.

"Thank you," murmured a middle-aged man in a suit, barely glancing up from his tablet.

Emily nodded and moved on, her gaze lingering momentarily on Seat 17C. Vacant, as it should be. Yet it seemed to demand her attention, like a faint whisper at the edge of her consciousness.

Ryan Thompson leaned casually against the galley counter, sipping a cup of coffee. His relaxed posture contrasted sharply with the faint tension in Emily's shoulders.

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"Everything good on your end?" he asked, tilting his head toward the cabin.

"Quiet so far," Emily replied, her voice steady. "But I keep thinking about that seat."

Ryan followed her gaze, his expression unreadable. "You're overthinking it. Planes glitch all the time. Probably nothing."

"Maybe," Emily said, though her tone lacked conviction.

Before she could dwell further, the intercom crackled to life.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We're expecting some mild turbulence ahead as we cross the Gulf. Please remain seated and ensure your seatbelts are fastened."

The passengers stirred, some adjusting their belts while others merely sighed. Emily exchanged a glance with Ryan, both silently bracing for the inevitable flurry of activity.

"Here we go," Ryan muttered, downing the last of his coffee before setting the cup aside.

The first jolt came softly, almost imperceptibly. Then another, stronger. Overhead bins rattled, and a faint murmur of unease rippled through the cabin. Emily steadied herself against a seatback, her instincts kicking in.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she announced with calm authority, "please remain seated with your seatbelts fastened. This is just a routine patch of turbulence."

She moved swiftly, checking that passengers were secure. Yet, as she approached 17C, a chill ran down her spine. The oxygen mask above the seat had deployed, dangling ominously.

Emily froze, her pulse quickening. The seat was unoccupied.

Ryan appeared at her side, his brow furrowed. "That's... odd."

"It shouldn't have deployed," Emily whispered, her voice barely audible over the hum of the engines.

Ryan reached for the mask, hesitating. "You think someone's messing with us?"

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Emily shook her head, unable to answer. The chill around Seat 17C was palpable now, and she felt it settle deep into her bones. Something wasn't right.

The cabin lights flickered, casting fleeting shadows across the faces of passengers clutching their armrests. Emily steadied herself against a seatback as the aircraft jolted violently again, the seatbelt sign glowing ominously overhead. The once-muted hum of the engines was now underscored by groans from the fuselage, an unsettling reminder of the altitude they were fighting to maintain.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please remain seated and fasten your seatbelts," Captain Lewis's voice cut through the intercom, calm but strained. "We're experiencing unexpected turbulence. Cabin crew, secure the cabin immediately."

Emily's professional smile was gone, replaced by tight-lipped determination. She hurried down the aisle, her eyes scanning for unsecured items or passengers who hadn't heeded the captain's warning. Ryan was a few rows ahead, checking seatbelts with an uncharacteristic urgency.

Near 17C, a woman clutched her armrest, her knuckles white. "It's so cold here," she muttered, shivering despite the blanket draped over her lap. Her voice cracked as she added, "It's like... something's breathing down my neck."

Emily forced a reassuring tone into her voice. "It's probably the air circulation, ma'am. Let me adjust it for you." She leaned over to inspect the vent above, but her fingers paused mid-air. The vent wasn't active.

Ryan appeared beside her, his brow furrowed. "What's wrong?"

She tilted her head toward the woman. "She says it's cold, but the vent isn't on."

He glanced at 17C, his face tightening. "Let's keep moving. We'll come back after the turbulence settles."

The plane lurched again, throwing Emily into the armrest of Seat 17C. Her hand instinctively gripped the backrest, and an icy chill

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seeped through the leather. It was colder than any material had a right to be.

The woman next to 17C gasped. “Did you feel that?”

Emily nodded slightly, composing herself before standing. “Let’s get you another blanket,” she said, her voice steady despite the dread clawing at her chest.

Ryan leaned in as she stepped away. “You’re thinking it too, aren’t you?”

Emily didn’t answer. Instead, she tightened her grip on her tablet and walked toward the galley, the sense of foreboding wrapping tighter around her like the cold she couldn’t escape.

The lights dimmed slightly as the captain’s voice came through the intercom, calm but clear. “Ladies and gentlemen, we’re approaching a patch of mild turbulence. Please ensure your seatbelts are fastened and remain seated until further notice.”

Emily glanced at her watch, noting the perfect timing of the announcement. She moved quickly through the business-class cabin, checking that passengers were buckled in. Ryan followed close behind, his movements casual but efficient.

“See? No jinx,” Ryan quipped under his breath, nudging Emily’s arm as he passed. She shot him a quick glare, but her lips twitched in an almost-smile.

Sarah, stationed near the galley, fidgeted with the latch of a service trolley. Her hands trembled slightly as she pushed the cart back into position. Emily caught her eye and offered a reassuring nod. “Just keep everything secured. You’re doing fine.”

The first jolts hit gently, barely noticeable. A murmur rippled through the cabin as passengers exchanged glances. Emily steadied herself against a seatback, her polished demeanor intact. The second jolt, however, was sharper, rattling the overhead bins and making drinks wobble on tray tables.

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Ryan muttered, “That was no mild turbulence.” He moved toward the galley, where a few utensils clattered to the floor.

Emily’s tablet buzzed in her hand. She glanced down to see the digital seat map flickering. Seat 17C flashed “Occupied” again, just as a faint metallic clink drew her attention. She turned toward the row in question. Her breath caught as the oxygen mask above 17C dangled midair, swaying slightly.

“Emily,” Ryan called from the aisle. “What’s going on with that seat?”

Passengers nearby noticed too, whispering in uneasy tones. Emily approached slowly, the chill in the air growing more pronounced with every step. She reached out to steady the mask, her fingers grazing its cool surface. Her stomach twisted as she realized the latch had no reason to release.

“It must’ve been the turbulence,” Ryan said, though his voice lacked conviction. He adjusted his tie and turned to a passenger who was calling for assistance, leaving Emily to stare at the seemingly vacant seat. The air felt heavier here, colder, almost oppressive.

Emily swallowed hard and stepped back, her professionalism masking the unease creeping into her thoughts. There would be no easy explanation for this, and deep down, she knew it.

The cabin lights flickered, briefly casting jagged shadows across the rows of seats. Emily glanced up, her pulse quickening as the lights steadied themselves. She moved toward the source of the disturbance—Seat 17C. Her footsteps felt heavier, as though the weight of the air itself resisted her every step.

Ryan emerged from the galley, a tray balanced on one hand. His casual demeanor faltered as he noticed Emily’s expression. “Another glitch?” He set the tray down on the nearest counter.

“Maybe,” she replied, though her voice lacked conviction. She gestured toward the seat. “It’s just... something feels off.”

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Ryan followed her gaze, his brow furrowing. “Seat 17C. The infamous troublemaker.”

The seatbelt dangled loosely, twisting as if moved by a phantom hand. Emily reached for it, but a sudden chill washed over her, so sharp and biting that she recoiled instinctively.

“Did you feel that?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Ryan stepped closer, the humor drained from his face. “Feel what?”

“Cold. Freezing cold,” Emily said, rubbing her arms as goosebumps rose along her skin. She peered down at the seat. The leather looked untouched, pristine even, but the atmosphere around it seemed different—denser, heavier.

“Planes aren’t haunted, Emily,” Ryan said, though his voice wavered.

“Tell that to 17C,” she shot back, her attempt at levity faltering.

Behind them, a soft murmur arose. A woman in the row behind leaned forward, her face pale. “Excuse me... is the air conditioning broken? It’s so cold here.”

Emily and Ryan exchanged a look. The vents above were firmly closed, and the temperature elsewhere in the cabin felt normal. Emily forced a professional smile, turning to the woman. “I’ll check the system. Thank you for letting us know.”

As the passenger settled back into her seat, Emily leaned toward Ryan. “This isn’t just a glitch.”

Ryan nodded slowly, his confidence cracking. “Let’s just hope it doesn’t get worse.”

Emily glanced at the seat once more, the lingering chill seeping into her thoughts. Something was undeniably wrong, and she wasn’t sure they could ignore it much longer.

The aircraft cabin hummed with the steady drone of engines as Emily moved down the aisle with practiced ease, the drink cart in front of her stocked with neatly arranged glasses and bottles. Ryan was just ahead, making small talk with passengers as he handed out snacks, his

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tone light and casual. Behind them, Sarah fumbled with a tray, trying to keep pace.

The seatbelt sign chimed, followed by the captain's calm announcement. "Ladies and gentlemen, we are anticipating some mild turbulence ahead. Please return to your seats and fasten your seatbelts."

Emily nodded to a passenger as she stowed the cart securely in the galley. "Mild turbulence," she murmured. "That's a relief."

Ryan leaned against the counter. "See? Smooth sailing, just like I said."

The words barely left his lips when the plane gave a sudden lurch. A collective gasp rippled through the cabin. Overhead bins rattled, and a plastic cup toppled off the counter, rolling to Emily's feet.

"Not so smooth now," Emily muttered, bracing herself against the galley counter.

The turbulence hit harder, shaking the aircraft with enough force to make Sarah stumble. "Oxygen masks!" someone shouted. Emily turned her head sharply to see a row of masks dropping in the business-class section—specifically over Seat 17C.

Ryan's brows furrowed as he pointed. "That's odd. That row didn't look affected earlier."

Emily moved swiftly, her hand steadying a concerned passenger. As she approached 17C, her steps faltered. The oxygen mask dangled, swaying slightly as if an invisible force had tugged it free.

"Everything okay?" Ryan called from behind her, his voice tinged with curiosity.

Emily hesitated before responding. "It's...nothing. Probably a glitch in the system."

But as she adjusted the mask and turned to walk away, she felt it—a cold draft, brushing against her arm like an unwelcome whisper.

Emily adjusted her scarf as she walked through the aisle, her tablet gripped tightly in her hand. The cabin, though calm on the surface, hummed with a subtle tension she couldn't shake. She paused near Seat

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17C, her gaze lingering on the leather upholstery. No one was sitting there, yet the air felt charged, colder, almost pressing against her skin.

“Emily?” Ryan’s voice broke her concentration as he approached. “You good?”

“Yeah.” Her reply came a beat too late, her tone unconvinced even to herself. “Just checking the cabin.”

Ryan looked at the seat and then back at her. “It’s empty. Like always.”

Emily turned away, her cheeks warming under his scrutiny. “Passengers are noticing the cold spots,” she said, more to herself than to him. “If they start talking...”

“Let them talk,” Ryan interrupted, his usual nonchalance tinged with a rare edge. “People complain about everything. This isn’t any different.”

But Emily wasn’t so sure. She moved to the galley, where Sarah was refilling the coffee pots. The younger attendant seemed calmer now, her earlier jitters replaced by a quiet focus.

“Everything okay here?” Emily asked, leaning against the counter.

Sarah hesitated. “It’s fine, but... there’s something weird. The water dispenser’s been acting up. It dripped all over the counter earlier, even though it was off.”

Emily’s brows furrowed. “Did you report it?”

“No,” Sarah admitted, her voice small. “I cleaned it up, and it stopped.”

“Next time, log it.” Emily’s voice softened as she added, “Even small things matter.”

Ryan joined them, grabbing a cup of coffee. “Small things? You mean like kids thinking seats are haunted?”

Sarah glanced up, startled. “Haunted?”

“Relax,” Ryan said, laughing. “Just a joke.”

But Emily didn’t laugh. She glanced back toward the aisle, where Seat 17C sat waiting, silent and cold.

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Emily steadied herself as the turbulence subsided, the cabin settling into an uneasy calm. The usual hum of the engines filled the air, but it felt heavier now, as if it carried the tension of hundreds of anxious passengers. She glanced at her tablet. The seat map for 17C remained stable—vacant. But that empty space loomed large in her mind.

“Check the galley,” Emily said quietly to Ryan, not meeting his eyes. “Make sure everything is secure.”

Ryan gave her a curt nod, his easygoing demeanor replaced by a tense seriousness. He disappeared down the aisle, his stride purposeful. Emily turned her focus back to the passengers, her practiced smile returning as she walked through the business-class cabin.

“Are you okay, ma’am?” she asked a middle-aged woman seated two rows behind 17C, who was gripping the armrests tightly.

The woman nodded, her face pale. “I’m fine. Just... that turbulence caught me off guard.”

“It’s normal at this altitude,” Emily assured her, her voice calm and soothing. “But if you need anything, just press the call button.”

As Emily moved down the aisle, she caught Sarah hovering near the galley, her face ashen.

“Sarah,” Emily said softly, “you’re doing fine.”

“I—” Sarah hesitated, her voice barely a whisper. “Something feels wrong.”

“It’s just nerves. Focus on the checklist,” Emily said, giving her a reassuring pat on the arm.

Ryan returned, carrying a bottle of water. “Galley’s clear. Coffee pot didn’t magically tip over again.”

“Good,” Emily said, but her tone lacked conviction. She glanced back toward 17C, her unease now a knot in her stomach.

A child’s laugh rang out, startling her. She turned to see a little girl giggling with her father. It was a moment of normalcy in an otherwise tense cabin, and it gave Emily a brief sense of relief. But as she turned

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back, her eyes caught movement—a flicker in the dim lighting near 17C.

Her pulse quickened. The seatbelt on the empty chair had twisted itself, curling unnaturally as though an invisible hand had gripped it. She blinked, and the seatbelt was back to normal, neatly arranged.

Emily exhaled slowly, her knuckles whitening around the tablet in her hand. The passengers didn't seem to notice, their focus drawn to the in-flight entertainment or idle conversations. But Emily couldn't shake the feeling that something—or someone—was watching.

The cabin was bathed in a dim, eerie light as the turbulence subsided, leaving behind an oppressive silence that seemed unnatural. Emily moved cautiously down the aisle, her gaze fixed ahead, but her peripheral vision was drawn—almost involuntarily—toward Seat 17C. She couldn't shake the feeling that it had become the epicenter of the unease spreading through the flight.

As she approached the seat, a shiver ran up her spine. She instinctively rubbed her arms despite the stable cabin temperature. “Why does it always feel colder here?” she muttered under her breath.

Ryan's voice broke her concentration. “Everything okay?” He was leaning casually against a nearby seat, but the tension in his eyes betrayed his nonchalance.

“Feel this,” Emily said, gesturing to the seat's headrest.

Ryan reached out, his hand hovering just above the leather. His brow furrowed as he pulled it back. “That's... weird. Feels like air conditioning, but there's no vent here.”

Before Emily could respond, a woman seated across the aisle spoke up. “Excuse me, miss. Could you check the air? It's freezing over here.”

Emily turned, offering a reassuring smile. “I'll look into it. Probably just the circulation acting up.”

As she turned back to 17C, her tablet pinged. She glanced down at the display: “17C: System Error.” The words flickered before disappearing entirely.

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“Ryan, did you see—” she started, but the faintest sound interrupted her—a whisper, almost indistinct, like someone exhaling words too softly to be heard. Emily froze, her eyes snapping to the seatbelt, which was now unfastened, though she was certain it had been buckled moments earlier.

“Let’s secure this section,” she said firmly, masking the unease in her voice. Ryan didn’t argue, though his gaze lingered on the seat as they walked away.

Sarah crouched beside an elderly woman clutching the armrests of her business-class seat, her knuckles white against the leather. The woman’s eyes darted around the cabin, wide and glassy, as if she were searching for an escape from the confined space.

“Ma’am, everything is perfectly fine,” Sarah said, her voice a touch too high. She adjusted her tone, softer this time. “It’s just turbulence. It’ll pass soon.”

The woman shook her head, her voice trembling. “I’ve flown for years... but this feels different. The air—it’s... heavy.”

Sarah’s heart raced as she knelt lower, glancing toward Emily at the front of the cabin. She couldn’t afford to let the passengers see her panic. “Take a deep breath,” Sarah said, forcing a reassuring smile. “In through your nose, out through your mouth.”

The woman complied, but her gaze flicked nervously toward Seat 17C. “It’s coming from there,” she whispered.

Sarah followed the woman’s gaze, her stomach tightening. “What do you mean?”

“It’s cold. So cold,” the woman muttered.

Before Sarah could respond, a loud clatter echoed from the galley, causing her to jump. She rose to her feet, excusing herself, and hurried toward the source of the noise. The woman’s words echoed in her mind, intertwining with her own growing unease.

In the galley, a coffee pot lay shattered on the floor, its contents pooling at Sarah’s feet. Ryan was already there, examining the scene

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with a furrowed brow. “This shouldn’t have happened,” he muttered, shaking his head.

Sarah crouched to clean up the mess, her hands trembling. “The woman said it feels... heavy. And cold.”

Ryan looked up sharply. “You felt it too, didn’t you?”

She hesitated, her voice barely audibl. “Maybe.”

The tension between them was palpable, the cabin’s once-warm atmosphere replaced by something unseen but undeniably present.

The sudden lurch of the aircraft sent a ripple of unease through the cabin. In the galley, Sarah tried to maintain composure as she reached for the coffee pot. Her fingers trembled slightly, the earlier turbulence still echoing in her mind. As she poured, the pot slipped from her grip, smashing onto the counter and sending hot liquid splashing across the floor.

“Oh no,” Sarah gasped, jumping back to avoid the scalding spill. She grabbed a towel, her hands fumbling in her haste to clean up.

Emily appeared in the galley doorway, her sharp gaze assessing the chaos. “What happened?”

“The pot—it just slipped,” Sarah stammered, her voice barely above a whisper. She crouched down, blotting at the growing puddle. “I’m so sorry.”

Ryan joined them, his expression a mix of amusement and concern. “That’s one way to get out of serving coffee,” he quipped, grabbing another towel to help.

“Not helpful, Ryan,” Emily said, though her tone was light. She crouched next to Sarah. “It’s fine. We’ve all had our moments.”

“But it just fell,” Sarah insisted, her voice tinged with frustration. “I wasn’t even holding it tightly.”

Ryan arched an eyebrow. “Faulty gravity?”

Emily’s lips pressed into a thin line. She glanced at the counter where the pot had stood. The surface was dry and level—no reason for

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the pot to have toppled on its own. A faint chill swept through the galley, raising the hairs on her arms.

“Let’s just clean this up,” Emily said, her voice firm. “We don’t want anyone slipping.”

As they worked, the faint sound of metal clinking echoed from a closed compartment. Sarah froze, her eyes darting toward the source of the noise. “Did you hear that?”

“It’s probably the turbulence shifting things around,” Ryan said, though his tone lacked conviction.

Emily exchanged a glance with him, her unease mirrored in his eyes. The galley, once a haven of routine, now felt foreign and heavy with an unseen presence.

The turbulence continued to ripple through the cabin, its grip less violent but no less disconcerting. Emily steadied herself by bracing against the edge of a seat as she moved toward the galley. Passengers murmured nervously, some gripping their armrests, while others sat with their eyes squeezed shut. The cabin seemed to exhale collectively, relieved as the plane steadied itself.

Emily adjusted her scarf, the fabric feeling oddly coarse against her skin. She turned toward the aisle, eyes scanning the rows for anything out of place. The passengers near 17C were subdued, but something about that section drew her focus. Her steps slowed as she passed the seat, her hand instinctively grazing the nearby headrests for balance.

A chill swept through her—a sharp, unnatural cold that seemed to coil around her. She stopped mid-step, her breath catching in her throat. The air near Seat 17C felt wrong. It wasn’t the refreshing kind of cool from an overhead vent but something deeper, heavier, as though the very atmosphere recoiled.

Emily glanced down at the seat. The oxygen mask dangled, swaying slightly even though the turbulence had subsided. Her gaze lingered on the twisted seatbelt, the fabric pulling in a direction that made no

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logical sense. The overhead bin above the seat clicked faintly, though no one had touched it.

“Emily,” Ryan’s voice cut through her thoughts as he approached, his hand gripping the back of a nearby seat. “You alright?”

She turned to him, her professional demeanor snapping back into place like a shield. “Fine,” she said, though her voice carried a tremor she couldn’t quite suppress. “I was just checking the cabin.”

Ryan’s eyes narrowed slightly. “17C, huh?” He gestured toward the seat. “It’s giving everyone the creeps. Let’s just keep moving. The less time spent here, the better.”

Emily nodded but didn’t move right away. As Ryan continued toward the galley, she lingered for a second longer, her hand brushing the edge of 17C’s armrest. It was cold. Freezing. She pulled her hand back instinctively and finally turned to follow Ryan.

Her heart pounded as she walked, her thoughts racing. She’d been a flight attendant long enough to know every noise and sensation an aircraft could offer. But this... this was something else entirely.

The child’s sudden wails pierced through the rumble of the turbulence. Passengers nearby shifted uneasily, their chatter dissolving into murmurs as the little boy clung to his mother’s arm. His tear-streaked face turned toward Seat 17C, trembling with fear.

“Shh, it’s okay,” his mother whispered, stroking his hair with trembling fingers. “It’s just the turbulence, sweetheart.”

But the boy shook his head violently. “No! The seat is angry! It’s mad at us!” His cries grew louder, drawing even more attention from the surrounding passengers.

Emily moved quickly, kneeling beside them, her voice calm and steady. “Hey there, little man. What’s wrong?” she asked, her practiced smile in place despite the gnawing unease in her chest.

The boy buried his face in his mother’s jacket, muffling his reply. “It doesn’t want us here. It said we shouldn’t be here.”

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Emily exchanged a glance with Ryan, who was standing a few feet away, his jaw tight. “It’s okay, buddy,” she said softly. “Sometimes, planes make strange noises. But nothing here can hurt you, I promise.”

The boy peeked out, his eyes wide and glassy. “It’s not noises,” he whispered. “It’s him.”

Emily’s stomach dropped, but she forced her expression to remain neutral. “Why don’t we find you a blanket, huh? Maybe that’ll make you feel better.”

The boy nodded hesitantly, and Emily gestured for Ryan to grab a spare blanket from the galley. As she waited, she felt it again—that inexplicable chill radiating from Seat 17C. It seemed to seep into her skin, despite the warm cabin air.

Ryan returned, draping the blanket over the boy’s small shoulders. “Here we go,” he said with a reassuring grin. “That should do the trick.”

The child settled slightly, but his gaze lingered on 17C, his tiny fists clutching the blanket like a lifeline. Emily gave his mother a comforting pat on the arm, though her own discomfort was mounting. She couldn’t shake the feeling that the boy’s fear wasn’t entirely unfounded.

The turbulence eased as suddenly as it had begun, leaving the cabin in a tense silence. Emily stood in the aisle, her hand still gripping a seatback for support. She exhaled slowly, scanning the rows of passengers. Faces ranged from pale and shaken to annoyed, but no one appeared injured. The business-class cabin remained eerily quiet, save for the hum of the engines and the occasional rustle of fabric as passengers settled themselves.

Ryan stepped out from the galley, his tie slightly askew. “Well,” he said, running a hand through his hair, “that was... enthusiastic.” He tried for a grin, but Emily only shook her head.

“Too much for ‘routine turbulence,’” she murmured, her gaze flitting to Seat 17C.

Ryan followed her line of sight, then looked back at her. “You okay?”

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Emily nodded, though her expression remained tense. “Check on Sarah. She’s probably having a meltdown in the galley.”

As Ryan headed toward the back, Emily moved toward the passenger who had earlier complained of a cold draft. “Sir, are you alright?” she asked, her voice steady but kind.

The man nodded, though his arms remained crossed tightly over his chest. “Just... it’s strange. Still feels like there’s a breeze here.”

Emily’s lips pressed into a thin line. “I’ll check the vents,” she said, though she knew the system was functioning properly. As she walked past Seat 17C, she instinctively avoided touching it.

The calm seemed to return to the cabin, but Emily and Ryan both knew it was a fragile peace. The passengers murmured among themselves, a low, uneasy buzz filling the air. At the center of it all, Seat 17C sat vacant, a silent focal point of discomfort that no one dared to address directly.

Ryan approached Emily near the galley. “Passengers are starting to relax, but I’m not,” he said, his tone low enough to avoid eavesdropping.

Emily nodded, her voice equally quiet. “That seat... I can’t explain it, but it feels wrong.”

Sarah appeared, clutching a tray of water bottles and moving with exaggerated care. “No more falling coffee pots, but I swear the galley felt colder a minute ago,” she whispered, glancing nervously toward 17C.

Ryan placed a hand on her shoulder. “Deep breaths, rookie. It’s just a flight.”

Sarah forced a shaky smile. “Yeah. Just a flight.”

In the nearby row, a mother soothed her crying child, her voice soft but strained. Emily caught snippets of their conversation.

“The seat isn’t angry, sweetheart,” the mother cooed. “It’s just the plane moving.”

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Emily turned away, unwilling to meet the mother's eyes. She and Ryan exchanged a look—a shared understanding that whatever had just happened, it wasn't over.

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Chapter 3: Malfunctions and Clues



THE GALLEY WAS EERILY silent, save for the rhythmic hum of the aircraft's engines vibrating faintly through the walls. Emily stood motionless, staring at the overturned coffee pot on the floor. The dark liquid spread across the polished surface like a slow-moving shadow. She felt a prickling at the back of her neck, the same unease that had lingered since they took off.

"Ryan," she called out, her voice steady but low. "Were you in the galley earlier?"

Ryan appeared moments later, his brows furrowed in concern. "Nope, why?"

Emily gestured to the coffee pot on the floor. "This just fell over. It was secure when I checked it before."

Ryan crouched down, inspecting the mess. "Turbulence?" he suggested, though the doubt in his voice mirrored her own thoughts.

"There wasn't any," Emily replied, crossing her arms. "Not even a bump. And look—" She pointed to the nearby compartments. "Everything else stayed in place. It doesn't make sense."

Ryan exhaled sharply, standing and rubbing the back of his neck. "Great. Maybe the coffee pot's haunted too."

Emily shot him a look, her seriousness cutting through his attempt at humor. She bent down, carefully picking up the pot. The metal felt cold against her fingers, colder than it should have been.

"I'll clean this up," Ryan offered, grabbing a towel. "Don't let it spook you."

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"It's not about being spooked," Emily muttered, more to herself than him. "It's about figuring out what's going on."

As she moved to the sink to rinse the pot, she caught her reflection in the galley mirror. Her eyes, usually steady and calm, flickered with unease. Behind her, Ryan glanced toward the empty aisle, his expression thoughtful.

"This flight keeps getting weirder," he said quietly.

Emily didn't respond. She was too focused on the faint chill that seemed to linger in the galley, like the air was holding its breath.

The interphone emitted a faint, persistent crackle, its static unusually sharp against the hum of the engines. Ryan leaned closer, straining to pick out a pattern in the noise. A moment later, there it was again—a whisper, faint and fragmented, yet undeniably human. His brow furrowed as he adjusted the volume, but the whispering didn't grow any clearer.

"What is it?" Emily's voice broke his concentration as she stepped into the galley. She wiped her hands on a small towel, her movements brisk but composed.

Ryan gestured toward the interphone. "Something's off. Listen."

Emily tilted her head, her expression skeptical, but as she leaned in, her demeanor shifted. There was no mistaking the faint words: "He's... still... here." The syllables drifted through the crackling static, chilling in their disjointed cadence.

"That's not normal," Emily said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Ryan keyed the interphone, his tone even but tense. "Cabin to flight deck, are you guys hearing anything unusual? Static or interference?"

The captain's reply came almost immediately. "Negative. Comms are clear on our end. Everything okay back there?"

Ryan hesitated before answering, "Probably just interference. We'll check it out." He placed the receiver back in its cradle but didn't move.

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Emily glanced at him. “Interference doesn’t sound like that,” she said, crossing her arms. Her voice was low but firm.

Ryan shook his head. “No, it doesn’t. But what else could it be?”

They exchanged a look, both uneasy but unwilling to voice the obvious. Emily eventually turned back to her tasks, but the static lingered in Ryan’s ears long after the whispering faded.

“Excuse me, miss?” A sharp voice broke through Emily’s focus as she passed through the business-class cabin. A middle-aged man, sharply dressed in a tailored suit, gestured impatiently at his TV screen. “This thing won’t stop flickering. Can you fix it?”

Emily approached, offering a polite smile. “Let me take a look.”

The screen glitched as she leaned closer, flickering between static and the airline’s entertainment menu. She tapped a few buttons, but the image refused to stabilize. The man huffed, his irritation mounting.

“This is unacceptable. I paid for business class, not a malfunctioning screen.”

“I understand, sir,” Emily replied evenly, though her attention was drawn to the screen. Amid the static, a shadowy image flickered—a shape that didn’t belong to any menu or entertainment option. It was brief, almost too quick to register, but enough to send a shiver down her spine.

“I’ll reset the system,” she said, masking her unease. She fiddled with the controls, and the screen finally stabilized. The man muttered something under his breath, but she barely noticed as she straightened.

“Everything okay?” Ryan’s voice came from behind her, his tone casual but his gaze sharp.

Emily hesitated. “Probably just a glitch. But it looked... strange.”

Ryan glanced at the screen, now displaying a cheerful welcome message. “Strange how?”

“Like someone—or something—was on it,” she murmured, then shook her head. “Forget it. It’s working now.”

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But as they moved on, both of them couldn't shake the feeling that the malfunction had been more than just a coincidence.

Emily moved deliberately through the cabin, her fingers wrapped around the airline-issued tablet. She had done this countless times—log incidents, check manifests, and ensure order. But today, the seemingly mundane task felt heavier, like the weight of 17C was seeping into her thoughts.

The rows were quiet now, passengers lulled by the steady hum of the engines. As she neared the infamous seat, her chest tightened. It was just a seat—leather-bound, immaculately clean, and wholly unremarkable. Yet, the way it sat slightly askew felt almost intentional.

"Here we go," Emily muttered, crouching low to inspect the area.

Her hand brushed against something cold and small wedged under the seat. Pulling it out, she revealed a faded EpiPen. The label was almost illegible, but the batch number, E17-03C, was perfectly clear. She frowned, her thumb brushing over the worn edges.

"Find something interesting?" Ryan's voice broke through her focus as he leaned against a nearby seat.

"Just this," she replied, holding up the pen. "Why is it here? This stuff is supposed to be accounted for after every flight."

Ryan's casual demeanor faltered. He took the EpiPen, turning it over in his hands. "This batch number... it's old. Like, really old. Maybe maintenance missed it?"

Emily's unease deepened. "No. This flight is prepped meticulously. Something's off."

Their conversation was interrupted by a faint cry from a passenger nearby, and Emily stuffed the EpiPen into her pocket. The lingering chill around Seat 17C prickled her skin as they walked away, a silent understanding passing between them.

Back in the galley, Ryan placed the EpiPen on the counter, studying it under the dim overhead light. The grooves in the plastic casing felt

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oddly rough against his fingers, like a relic that didn't belong. He couldn't shake the discomfort coursing through him.

Emily joined him, her tablet tucked under one arm. "You're still staring at it?"

Ryan nodded. "Look at this." He gestured to the faded label, pointing out the date of manufacture. "It expired three years ago. Around the time of that incident—" He stopped himself.

Emily stiffened. "You think it's connected?"

"I don't know. But why else would it be here?" Ryan's tone was lower now, as if the walls had ears. "It's almost like..." He trailed off, shaking his head.

"Like what?" Emily pressed.

He met her gaze. "Like it wanted to be found."

Emily's breath hitched, but she forced a calm response. "Let's not jump to conclusions."

Just as the words left her lips, a faint static crackled through the interphone. Both turned sharply, eyes narrowing at the device as it hissed briefly before falling silent.

Ryan smirked nervously. "Probably another glitch."

But as Emily looked at the EpiPen, unease tightened her chest. The seat, the cold drafts, the flickering screens—it was all starting to connect in ways she wasn't ready to admit.

The hum of the engines filled the cabin, masking the low, scattered whispers among the passengers. Emily moved down the aisle, her steps brisk and deliberate, but she couldn't ignore the rising murmur centered near Seat 17C. She stopped beside an elderly woman wrapped tightly in a cashmere shawl.

"It's freezing over here," the woman muttered, clutching the edges of the shawl closer. Her tone was both irritated and puzzled.

Emily glanced at the overhead air vents. "Let me check that for you, ma'am," she said with a practiced calm, reaching up to adjust the

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settings. She placed her hand near the vent, feeling only a faint stream of air, nowhere near cold enough to explain the discomfort.

Ryan joined her, carrying a tray of water bottles. "What's going on?" he asked quietly, leaning closer.

"She's feeling cold near 17C," Emily replied, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Again?" Ryan raised an eyebrow, his gaze flicking toward the infamous seat. The air seemed still, yet a subtle chill lingered around them, like an open window on a winter's day.

Another passenger, seated across the aisle, spoke up. "I feel it too. Like a draft or something."

Emily forced a smile. "We'll take care of it. It might just be the air circulation acting up."

She exchanged a glance with Ryan, who gave a small, doubtful shrug. "I'll check the temperature controls," he offered before heading toward the galley.

As Emily reassured the passengers, her fingers brushed against the armrest of 17C. She pulled back instinctively; the leather felt unnaturally cold, as though it had been sitting in an icebox. A shiver ran down her spine.

"It's nothing," she told herself under her breath, but the tension in her chest suggested otherwise.

The galley, typically a controlled hub of activity, was unusually chaotic. Sarah stood in front of the oven, waving her hands frantically as smoke billowed from the vents. "It's overheating!" she exclaimed, her voice high-pitched and panicked.

Ryan rushed in, grabbing a towel to fan the smoke away. "Turn it off!" he barked, his calm demeanor cracking under the pressure.

"I already did!" Sarah stammered, her hands hovering uselessly near the control panel. "It just started smoking out of nowhere!"

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Passengers nearby turned their heads, some rising slightly from their seats to get a better view. "Is everything okay?" a man asked, concern etched across his face.

Emily appeared at the galley door, her brows furrowed. "What's happening here?"

"The oven's gone rogue," Ryan muttered, yanking open the door to reveal a tray of scorched meal containers. The acrid smell of burnt plastic filled the air, prompting a chorus of coughs from the cabin.

Emily grabbed a fire extinguisher from the wall, passing it to Ryan, who quickly doused the smoldering tray. The white foam hissed as it coated the interior.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Emily said, stepping into the aisle with a reassuring smile. "We've handled the situation. Please remain seated and enjoy the rest of your flight." Her voice was steady, but her mind raced.

Back in the galley, Ryan leaned against the counter, wiping his brow. "That's not normal," he said, meeting Emily's gaze.

"No," Emily agreed, her voice low. "It's not."

They both looked toward the business-class cabin, where Seat 17C sat in eerie silence, untouched but undeniably at the center of it all.

Sarah crouched beside the galley compartment, her fingers hesitating over the stubborn latch. With a frustrated grunt, she twisted the handle one last time. It gave way suddenly, snapping open and sending her off balance. The movement dislodged a small coffee canister, which toppled, its contents scattering. Instinctively, Sarah reached to catch it but yelped in pain as her fingers grazed the hot metal edge.

"Sarah!" Emily was by her side in an instant. Kneeling, she gently took Sarah's hand, inspecting the faint red mark blooming on her fingertips. "It's a small burn, but we'll need to treat it."

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Ryan appeared in the galley doorway, his expression shifting from teasing to concern in an instant. “What happened?” he asked, crouching to meet Sarah’s teary eyes.

“Stupid latch,” Sarah muttered, cradling her hand. “I was trying to fix it.”

Emily motioned toward the nearby first aid kit. “Ryan, can you grab some burn cream?”

As Ryan moved to comply, Sarah’s gaze darted nervously to the flickering cabin lights just beyond the galley. “Did you see that?” she whispered. Her voice carried an edge of fear. “The lights—they’re...flickering.”

Emily didn’t answer right away. Instead, she focused on applying the cream with steady hands. “It’s just the turbulence,” she said evenly, though her gut told her otherwise.

Emily leaned against the galley counter, her airline tablet in hand. The list of logged incidents scrolled past on the screen: flickering lights, falling objects, malfunctioning equipment. But it was the seat map that caught her attention. Seat 17C, once again, alternated between “Occupied” and “Vacant.”

“What is going on with this thing?” Emily muttered under her breath. She tapped the refresh icon repeatedly, her frustration mounting.

Ryan joined her, leaning over her shoulder. “Still acting up?”

Emily nodded, pointing at the map. “Look at this. It keeps toggling back and forth, but no one is sitting there.”

Ryan frowned, his brow furrowing. “That’s not a software glitch, Emily.”

“Then what is it?” Emily challenged, her voice dropping to a whisper. “Because I’m not imagining this.”

Ryan hesitated, glancing toward the main cabin. “We need to stay calm—for Sarah, for the passengers. But maybe it’s time we report this to the captain.”

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Emily exhaled sharply, her gaze lingering on the glowing “17C Error” text flashing on her screen. “Not yet,” she said quietly. “Let’s gather more evidence first.”

The cabin lights dimmed momentarily, casting an unnatural glow over the aisle. Ryan leaned against the galley counter, his face shadowed yet tense. He glanced at Emily, who was checking her tablet, her brows furrowed as if the flickering screens and strange glitches were translating into the seat map in front of her.

“Emily,” he started, his voice lower than usual, “another passenger just complained about the reading light near 17C. It’s flickering, same as that TV screen earlier.”

Emily looked up, her fingers pausing over the tablet. “Did you check it?”

Ryan shook his head. “I tried. The light stops as soon as I get close. Then starts again when I walk away.”

Her lips pressed into a thin line. She turned toward the rows of seats, her eyes landing once more on Seat 17C. The glow from nearby lights made it stand out unnervingly, a beacon of inexplicable unease.

A passenger caught her attention as she passed, motioning toward the flickering light above. “It’s distracting,” he muttered. “I can’t focus with that thing going on and off.”

Emily offered her best professional smile. “We’ll address it, sir. Thank you for letting us know.” But as she moved closer to 17C, her pulse quickened. The flickering light seemed synchronized with something unseen, as though responding to her approach.

Ryan followed her, his voice just above a whisper. “It’s not just me, right? This is... weird?”

Emily sighed, her grip tightening on her tablet. “Weird doesn’t even begin to describe it. But let’s not scare the passengers. Not yet.”

Ryan nodded, though the unease in his eyes mirrored her own. They exchanged a glance, the silent agreement clear—whatever was happening here, it wasn’t over.

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Emily turned the small, cylindrical EpiPen in her hands. The faded label barely revealed its purpose, but the batch number stood out: E17-03C. Her breath caught. It was the same batch listed in the maintenance log she had skimmed earlier in the flight—a detail she couldn't ignore.

"This shouldn't even be here," Ryan muttered, standing beside her in the narrow aisle near Seat 17C. His tone carried an edge of frustration.

"Exactly," Emily replied, her voice barely above a whisper. She glanced at the seatbelt still twisted awkwardly on 17C, as though someone—or something—had been in a rush to leave.

Passengers murmured behind them, their unease growing as the air around them chilled. Emily felt compelled to act, but her fingers hesitated before tucking the EpiPen into the pocket of her blazer.

"What are you doing with it?" Ryan asked sharply.

"Keeping it safe," she said. "It's significant. I can feel it."

Ryan ran a hand through his hair, his tablet clutched tightly in the other. "It's just a piece of trash that somehow got missed. Don't start seeing connections that aren't there."

Emily gave him a pointed look. "The batch number ties it to Mr. Smith's flight. Coincidence doesn't explain why it's under the seat."

Before Ryan could respond, a passenger approached them. "Excuse me," the man said nervously, gesturing toward the overhead compartment. "Can you help me with my bag? It feels... stuck."

Ryan leaned against the galley counter, his fingers skimming through the flight log on his tablet. The soft glow of the screen flickered erratically, forcing him to tap it repeatedly. His irritation grew as the glitching worsened near Row 17.

"Come on," he muttered, shaking the device slightly. The screen pixelated, and a single message blinked briefly before disappearing: "17C Error."

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Ryan's brow furrowed. He glanced at Seat 17C and then back at the tablet, his grip tightening. "Emily," he called, his voice low but tense.

She turned from the aisle where she was addressing a passenger and moved closer. "What now?"

"This," Ryan said, holding up the tablet. He tapped at the screen, but it remained frozen for a moment before abruptly rebooting. "It was fine earlier. Now it's like the thing is possessed."

Emily peered at the device, then over her shoulder at the infamous seat. "You're sure it's not a system-wide issue?"

Ryan shook his head. "No glitches when I was at the front. This started when I passed 17C."

Emily crossed her arms, glancing at the seatbelt still twisted on 17C. "Maybe it's connected to the EpiPen. That seat's been the center of every weird thing on this flight."

Ryan's laugh was dry, bordering on disbelief. "You think the seat's cursed?"

"I think something's wrong," Emily replied sharply. "We shouldn't dismiss it."

Ryan exhaled, leaning against the counter. "If this gets worse, we're telling the captain. I don't care how crazy it sounds."

Emily nodded, her gaze lingering on the seat. The faint antiseptic smell wafted over again, and her unease deepened.

Emily stepped closer to 17C, her senses sharp. The antiseptic odor hovered faintly in the air—clean but oddly clinical, as if a hospital ward had seeped into the cabin. She wrinkled her nose, glancing around.

A passenger seated nearby leaned forward. "Do you smell that?" he asked, his face pale.

Emily hesitated, but nodded. "It's faint, but yes. Have you noticed it before now?"

He shook his head. "No, it started a few minutes ago. It reminds me of...disinfectant, maybe."

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Another passenger turned toward them, fanning herself with the in-flight menu. "I thought it was just the air system. It's freezing here," she added, rubbing her arms.

Emily offered a calming smile. "I'll look into it. Please let me know if it gets worse."

She stepped back, her hand instinctively brushing the outline of the EpiPen in her pocket. Ryan joined her, his expression skeptical but curious.

"That smell isn't normal," Emily murmured.

"No kidding," Ryan replied. "We're at cruising altitude, and now the cabin smells like a hospital?"

Emily gestured discreetly toward the seat. "Everything circles back to 17C. We need to keep watch."

Ryan's jaw tightened. "If this keeps up, we might not have a choice but to report it."

Emily didn't respond immediately. Her gaze was fixed on the seat, the chill creeping into her bones as if the air itself was alive.

Emily leaned against the galley counter, her tablet in hand. The screen flickered briefly, Seat 17C alternating between "Vacant" and "Occupied" once more. She let out a long, frustrated breath, her fingers gripping the device tighter than necessary. Ryan appeared beside her, his gaze sharp despite the easygoing smirk tugging at his lips.

"This thing's glitching again?" he asked, nodding toward the tablet.

"It's more than a glitch, Ryan," Emily replied, her voice low but firm. "Something's wrong with that seat."

Ryan folded his arms, leaning against the counter. "Alright, spill. What's going through that head of yours?"

Emily hesitated, glancing toward the aisle. Most passengers were either absorbed in their screens or napping, but the air around 17C seemed heavier, colder. She turned back to Ryan, lowering her voice even more. "The oxygen mask, the seatbelt, the cold drafts... and now

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this.” She tapped the tablet, showing him the flickering seat status. “It’s not normal.”

Ryan raised an eyebrow. “You think it’s... what? A haunting?” He chuckled lightly, though the sound didn’t reach his eyes. “Come on, Em. Planes act weird sometimes. It’s probably just a maintenance issue.”

“And the EpiPen?” Emily countered. “How do you explain that? It shouldn’t even be here.”

Ryan’s smirk faded. He glanced over his shoulder toward 17C, his jaw tightening. “Look, I’m not saying it’s nothing. But if we bring this up to the captain, what do we even say? ‘Hey, Jim, there’s a ghost on board?’”

Emily didn’t laugh. “I think we should at least report the technical malfunctions. The smoke in the galley, the interphone crackling, the passenger complaints... It’s adding up.”

Ryan rubbed the back of his neck, his reluctance clear. “Fine. But let’s stick to facts. No theories about ghosts or cursed seats, okay?”

Emily nodded, though her unease didn’t fade. “Agreed. But Ryan... keep an eye on 17C.”

He gave her a faint smile, his usual bravado slipping for just a moment. “Yeah. You too.”

The cabin lights dimmed as the plane settled into the quiet hum of cruising altitude. Most passengers had drifted off, the lull of the engines and soft glow of reading lights creating a fragile calm. But Emily’s focus remained on Seat 17C, her every instinct telling her it was the source of the unease crawling up her spine.

She passed by the seat again, her footsteps deliberately slow. The oxygen mask dangled loosely, swaying ever so slightly despite the still air. She stopped, her gaze narrowing. Reaching out, she adjusted the mask, tucking it back into place. The cold hit her immediately—a sharp, unnatural chill that made her pull back her hand.

“Emily?” Ryan’s voice broke the tension. He stood a few rows behind her, concern etched into his expression.

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"I'm fine," she replied quickly, her voice steady despite the thundering of her heart.

Ryan stepped closer, lowering his voice. "You're not letting this seat get to you, are you? You're starting to look like Sarah back there."

Emily shot him a pointed look. "Someone needs to stay sharp. Whatever's happening here, it's not going away."

Ryan sighed, his shoulders sagging slightly. "Just... don't let it mess with your head, okay? We've still got hours to go."

Emily nodded, but her gaze drifted back to 17C. She couldn't explain the pull it had on her, the way it seemed to demand her attention. Sliding her tablet into her pocket, she resolved to monitor the seat for the rest of the flight. Whatever was happening, she wasn't going to let it escalate further.

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Chapter 4: Passenger Panic



EMILY WAS HALFWAY DOWN the aisle, her practiced smile in place, when she heard a woman urgently call, “Miss! Over here, please!” The voice trembled with something more than annoyance—it was laced with fear. Emily turned sharply, her gaze landing on a mother near Seat 17C. Her young son clung to her arm, his small face pale and tear-streaked.

“Is everything okay?” Emily asked, crouching to meet the boy’s eyes.

The mother leaned closer, her whisper barely audible over the hum of the cabin. “He says... he saw a man sitting there.” She motioned toward 17C.

Emily blinked, her calm demeanor faltering for a fraction of a second. “There’s no one in that seat,” she said gently.

“He said the man looked sad,” the mother pressed, her voice shaking. “And then... he vanished.”

Emily turned to the boy. “Sweetheart, can you tell me what you saw?”

The child pointed a trembling finger at 17C. “He was sitting there. He was looking at me. Then he went away.”

Emily’s stomach tightened. She forced a smile. “Maybe you saw a shadow, or a reflection,” she said softly.

The boy shook his head, his voice barely a whisper. “It was him.”

Emily stood, her professional mask slipping slightly as she exchanged a glance with the mother. The woman’s eyes brimmed with

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uncertainty. “When the turbulence hit earlier,” the mother said, “I felt... something. A chill, like someone walked past me.”

“I’ll take a look,” Emily promised.

She turned to 17C, her steps deliberate. The seat appeared as it always did—unremarkable. But the air around it seemed heavier, colder. Emily swallowed her unease and made a note to keep an eye on the situation.

As Emily moved to check other passengers, a man seated across from 17C raised a hand. “Miss,” he called, his brow furrowed.

Emily approached, her calm expression returning. “How can I help you, sir?”

The man leaned forward, his voice low. “I’ve been hearing whispers. Like static, but... not quite.”

“Whispers?” Emily repeated, her heart skipping a beat.

“Yes. At first, I thought it was the intercom.” He shook his head. “But it’s coming from over there.” He tilted his head toward 17C.

Emily forced a polite smile. “Sometimes the sound system picks up interference,” she said, her voice steady despite the chill creeping up her spine.

The man shrugged, sitting back in his seat. “If you say so.”

Emily stepped away, her mind racing. She stole another glance at 17C, her unease deepening. The whispers, the chill, the boy’s sighting—it was too much to dismiss as coincidence.

She reached for her interphone, her fingers brushing the cold metal. “Ryan, meet me near the galley,” she murmured into the receiver.

Moments later, Ryan arrived, his casual demeanor a stark contrast to Emily’s tension. “What’s up?” he asked, leaning against the counter.

“Passengers are reporting... strange things,” Emily said, keeping her voice low.

“Strange how?” Ryan asked, his brow arching.

Emily hesitated. “A child saw someone in 17C. A man said he heard whispers. And the mother... she felt something.”

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Ryan's smile faded. "It's just turbulence. People get spooked."

"Maybe," Emily replied, though the doubt in her voice was unmistakable.

Ryan sighed. "Let's keep an eye on it. Last thing we need is a full-blown panic."

Emily nodded, but as she glanced toward 17C, the cold, empty seat seemed to stare back at her.

The mother adjusted her scarf with trembling hands as Emily approached, her breath shallow and her cheeks pale. "I... I don't mean to cause trouble, but something's not right," she said, her voice a whisper drowned by the hum of the engines. She glanced at her son, who sat rigid, eyes glued to Seat 17C. "When the turbulence hit, I felt it—a cold draft. It wasn't from the vents; it was... different."

Emily crouched to meet the mother's eyes, her professional smile not reaching her own growing unease. "We'll take a look, ma'am," she assured, stealing a glance at the seat in question. The blanket lay undisturbed, yet the very sight of it felt heavier than before.

The mother shifted uncomfortably. "My son... he keeps saying he saw a man. A sad man sitting there." Her voice cracked, but she steadied herself, clutching her son's hand tightly. "I didn't see anyone, but when he said it, I felt... I don't know how to describe it. Like something passed over me."

Emily nodded, careful to maintain her calm facade. "It's probably nothing, just the turbulence playing tricks on us. But I'll make sure everything's alright."

The child, suddenly emboldened, whispered loud enough for Emily to catch. "He looked at me... and then he was gone."

Emily's skin prickled as she stood, smoothing her uniform. "Let me check the seat again." She glanced over her shoulder, finding Ryan observing the interaction from the galley, his brow furrowed. He gave her a subtle nod, signaling support.

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Returning to 17C, Emily hesitated before reaching out to adjust the seatbelt. It was twisted—again. She swallowed hard, running her fingers along the armrest. It felt unnaturally cold. Reining in her unease, she turned back to the mother with a steady expression. “It’s fine now. Just a glitch. Let’s get you settled.”

The mother nodded but didn’t look convinced, her fingers never leaving her son’s as she settled into her own seat. The boy, however, kept his wide eyes fixed on 17C, as though expecting the sad man to return.

A man in the next row leaned toward Emily as she passed. “Excuse me,” he murmured, lowering his voice. “Do you hear that?”

Emily frowned. “Hear what, sir?”

The man gestured toward his headphones, one side slightly lifted from his ear. “It’s faint, like static... or whispers. I thought it was interference, but...” He trailed off, shaking his head. “It’s probably nothing. Forget I said anything.”

Emily’s stomach tightened. “No, thank you for mentioning it. I’ll ask the captain if there’s any interference with the systems.” She moved on, keeping her steps even, though her mind raced. Static. Whispers. A cold draft. She glanced at 17C one more time, her pulse quickening.

“Passengers are starting to notice,” Ryan murmured as she joined him in the galley. His voice was low, his easygoing demeanor replaced by quiet concern. “This isn’t just turbulence anymore.”

Emily nodded, her fingers brushing the corner of her tablet. “Let’s keep an eye on things. No need to alarm anyone.”

Ryan sighed, leaning closer. “You’re spooked too, aren’t you?”

Emily hesitated, her professionalism warring with honesty. “A little,” she admitted, her gaze drifting back toward Seat 17C. “But we can’t let it show.”

“Agreed,” Ryan said, forcing a smile as he grabbed a tray. “Let’s get back out there before they start a mutiny.”

Emily followed, but the whispers seemed to linger, faint and insistent, at the edge of her hearing.

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Emily crouched beside the anxious mother, who clutched her son tightly. Her face was pale, lips trembling as she spoke. "He keeps saying the man was sad. He...he was sitting there, just staring." Her voice cracked on the last word, her eyes darting to Seat 17C as if expecting the figure to reappear.

Emily placed a hand on the woman's arm, her tone soft yet firm. "It's likely just the turbulence and imagination playing tricks on him. It happens, especially on long flights." She glanced at the boy, who was curled into his mother's side, eyes wide and unblinking. "What's your name, sweetheart?" she asked gently.

"Adam," the boy mumbled without looking up.

"Adam, there's nothing to worry about. Sometimes when we're scared, our minds can make us see things that aren't really there," Emily explained.

Adam's small voice interrupted her, his gaze fixed on the empty seat. "But he was there. He was looking at me."

Emily felt a chill creep up her spine, but her expression remained composed. She rose and straightened her uniform. "Why don't I get you both a blanket? It'll help you stay warm and comfortable."

The mother nodded, her relief palpable though her fingers still gripped her son. As Emily walked toward the galley, she couldn't resist glancing at Seat 17C again. It was empty, of course, yet the air around it felt heavier, colder, as if something unseen lingered.

Behind her, she could hear whispers among the nearby passengers, their murmurs feeding the growing tension in the cabin. Emily forced a professional smile as she retrieved the blanket, ignoring the unease clawing at her chest.

In the galley, Sarah was balancing a tray of drinks, her hands shaking visibly. Ryan stood nearby, his arms crossed as he observed her struggle. "Careful, Sarah. You're holding that like it's a stack of dominoes about to fall," he teased lightly.

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"I'm fine," Sarah snapped, though her voice lacked conviction. She turned toward the aisle, her steps cautious but uneven.

A sudden jolt rocked the plane, sending the tray teetering. Sarah gasped as the drinks tipped, spilling across the lap of a startled passenger.

"Oh no! I'm so sorry!" Sarah blurted, fumbling to grab napkins. The passenger, a middle-aged man in a crisp suit, looked more annoyed than angry, but his sharp glare only deepened Sarah's flustered state.

Ryan stepped in swiftly, handing the man a fresh napkin. "Apologies, sir. Turbulence can be unpredictable. We'll have this cleaned up in no time."

Sarah crouched to mop the floor, her cheeks burning red. "I didn't mean to—"

"It's fine," Ryan said firmly, cutting her off. He bent down beside her and whispered, "Just breathe, Sarah. These things happen."

Sarah nodded, though tears glistened in her eyes. Emily arrived just in time to take over, her calm demeanor diffusing the tension. "Sarah, why don't you take a moment in the galley? Ryan and I can handle this."

As Sarah hurried away, Emily turned to Ryan, lowering her voice. "Passengers are already on edge. We can't afford any more slip-ups."

Ryan glanced toward 17C, where the unease seemed to radiate like a silent alarm. "They're getting spooked. And honestly, so am I," he admitted.

Emily followed his gaze, her resolve hardening. "We'll keep things under control," she said, though the doubt in her tone betrayed her.

Ryan crouched next to the spill, expertly maneuvering the fallen ice cubes and crumpled napkins into his hands. The annoyed passenger scowled, brushing at the damp stain on his trousers. "Unbelievable," the man muttered, his voice sharp enough to cut through the growing tension in the cabin.

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"I sincerely apologize," Ryan said smoothly, his tone calm yet resolute. He offered the man a fresh towel. "We'll take care of this right away. Your comfort is our priority."

The passenger sighed heavily, begrudgingly taking the towel but muttering under his breath about incompetence. Sarah hovered nearby, her face pale with embarrassment, clutching the empty tray like a shield.

"Sarah," Ryan whispered as he straightened, "grab a fresh drink and maybe a snack for him. A little olive branch never hurts."

Sarah nodded quickly and darted toward the galley, still visibly flustered. Ryan leaned closer to Emily, who was securing a passenger's belongings in the overhead bin. "They're getting spooked," he muttered under his breath. "That guy didn't even care about the spill—he's on edge about... something else."

Emily's lips tightened, her eyes flickering toward 17C. "Let's just focus on keeping things calm," she replied quietly. But her tone betrayed her own growing unease.

As Sarah returned, carrying a replacement drink with shaky hands, Ryan intercepted her. "Relax," he said gently. "You're doing fine. Just take it one moment at a time."

Sarah managed a weak smile before delivering the drink. Ryan stood by, his presence a quiet reassurance. Yet, as he glanced toward Seat 17C, his brow furrowed. There was no logical reason, but he couldn't shake the sense that something was deeply, inexplicably wrong.

Emily slipped into the crew rest compartment, craving a moment of stillness. The confined space was dimly lit, a sharp contrast to the bustling cabin outside. She exhaled, leaning against the wall as the low hum of the engines thrummed through her bones.

As she moved to the small storage cubby, her hand brushed against a leather-bound object tucked between two manuals. She pulled it out—a worn logbook, its edges frayed from use. Curious, she opened it, the pages crackling softly under her fingers.

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Her breath hitched as she scanned the handwritten entries. The scrawling script was uneven, as though written in haste. One passage caught her eye, the words seeming to leap off the page: “He never left his seat.”

Emily’s fingers trembled, tracing the faded ink. A chill seeped into her skin, prickling at her spine. The words echoed in her mind, weaving unease into her thoughts.

The faint sound of footsteps startled her, and she quickly closed the logbook, clutching it to her chest as Ryan appeared in the doorway. “What are you doing?” he asked, his voice low.

Emily hesitated, then held up the book. “Found this... It mentions something about a passenger never leaving their seat.”

Ryan’s brow furrowed as he stepped closer. “You think it’s connected to all this?”

“I don’t know,” Emily murmured. But as she looked down at the cryptic message, she couldn’t ignore the gnawing certainty building in her chest. Whatever was happening on Flight 201, this logbook held part of the answer—and it wasn’t going to let them look away.

Emily leaned against the cool metal of the crew rest compartment door, her breaths shallow. She needed a moment away from the escalating tension in the cabin. Closing the door softly, she switched on the dim overhead light. The space was cramped but familiar, with narrow bunks stacked against the wall and small storage compartments lining the corners. It was here she felt a peculiar pull—like an invisible thread tugging her toward the far bunk.

Curious, she crouched and reached beneath the mattress. Her fingers brushed against something smooth and cold. Pulling it out, she revealed an old, leather-bound logbook. The edges of the cover were worn, the leather cracked from years of use. Emily flipped it open, the pages yellowed and faintly stained with what looked like coffee or sweat. The handwriting inside was neat but frantic, with words scratched out and rewritten.

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As she scanned the pages, her pulse quickened. The entries described a flight eerily similar to theirs—mentioning turbulence, passenger panic, and most unsettlingly, Seat 17C. A specific entry caught her attention: “He never left his seat.”

Emily’s breath hitched as she read the line again, her hands trembling. A faint chill crept up her spine, the air in the compartment growing colder. “What the hell is this?” she whispered, her voice barely audible.

She turned the pages carefully, finding fragmented notes: “Oxygen mask deployed without cause,” “passenger claimed to see a figure,” and “temperature dropped near 17C.” The eerie similarities to their current flight made her stomach churn.

The sound of the intercom crackling broke her focus. Shoving the logbook into her pocket, she stood and took a steadying breath. The tension in her chest was heavier now, her unease growing by the second.

Back in the galley, Emily found Ryan adjusting the coffee machine, his face drawn with quiet frustration. “What took you so long?” he asked, glancing over his shoulder.

“Needed a breather,” Emily replied curtly, her hand instinctively touching the logbook hidden in her pocket.

Ryan narrowed his eyes. “Something’s bothering you.”

Emily hesitated, then leaned closer, lowering her voice. “I found this in the crew rest compartment.” She pulled the logbook halfway out, enough for him to see its aged cover. “It mentions Seat 17C.”

Ryan raised an eyebrow, his usual sarcasm giving way to concern. “You’re kidding.”

“I’m not,” she said firmly. “There’s a line in here—‘He never left his seat.’ What does that sound like to you?”

Ryan rubbed the back of his neck, his gaze flickering toward the cabin. “It sounds like we’re in the middle of something we shouldn’t be.”

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Before Emily could respond, a passenger's voice rose above the hum of conversation. "I don't want to sit there anymore!" It came from the business-class cabin, near 17C. Emily and Ryan exchanged a glance, the tension between them thick as smoke.

As they approached the area, a middle-aged man stood near his seat, visibly agitated. "There's something wrong with this row," he said, pointing toward 17C. "It's freezing, and... I don't know, I just feel—off."

Emily put on her professional smile, though her hands clenched behind her back. "Let's see what we can do for you, sir."

Ryan gestured toward an empty seat farther down the aisle. "Why don't you move here? We'll make sure you're comfortable."

The man hesitated but eventually nodded, grabbing his carry-on and moving away. Emily's eyes drifted to 17C. The seatbelt lay twisted, and the air around it felt heavier, colder. She couldn't shake the feeling that someone—or something—was watching.

The commotion in the cabin had begun to settle into a disquieting hum, punctuated by occasional whispers. Emily's composure faltered when a sharply dressed man in business class waved her over with a curt flick of his wrist.

"I need to move," he said, his voice firm but controlled. His polished shoes tapped against the carpet as he gestured toward Seat 17C. "I'm not sitting anywhere near that."

Emily straightened her posture, professional demeanor intact. "Is there an issue, sir? Perhaps I can assist."

The man's jaw tightened. "It's freezing over here. And—" he glanced around, lowering his voice—"there's something... wrong with that seat."

Emily followed his gaze to 17C. The seat looked normal, as always—unremarkable gray leather, a neatly folded blanket, the seatbelt arranged in perfect order. Still, her skin prickled at his words.

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"I'm sure it's just a draft from the vent," she offered. "Let me adjust the airflow."

"It's not a vent," he snapped, shaking his head. "I heard... something. A whisper. It said my name."

Emily froze, masking her reaction with a practiced smile. "I'll see if we can find another seat for you."

Ryan appeared at her side, clipboard in hand. "Everything okay?" he asked, his casual tone undercutting the tension.

Emily tilted her head toward the passenger, who was now pacing impatiently. Ryan gave her a knowing look and leaned in. "Another one spooked, huh?"

"Let's just find him a seat," Emily murmured. But as they guided the man toward an empty spot near the galley, her gaze lingered on 17C, her unease growing by the second.

Emily returned to the business-class cabin, her hands tightening around her tablet. Passengers were restless now, some exchanging uneasy glances, others shifting uncomfortably in their seats. The air felt heavier, thick with an intangible tension.

Ryan leaned against the galley counter, arms crossed. "It's not just the passengers," he said quietly. "Have you noticed the crew? Everyone's on edge."

Emily glanced toward Sarah, who was wiping down a tray table with trembling hands. Her usual nervousness seemed magnified, her shoulders hunched as if bracing against an invisible force.

"Sarah," Emily called softly, stepping closer. The young flight attendant turned, her wide eyes glistening. "Take a breather. You're doing fine."

"I... I think I heard something," Sarah whispered. She glanced over her shoulder toward the galley, her voice trembling. "It sounded like... someone calling my name."

Emily's chest tightened. "The interphone has been glitching," she said quickly, hoping to soothe her. "It's probably just static."

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Ryan snorted. “Static doesn’t call you by name.”

Emily shot him a sharp look but said nothing. Instead, she turned to Sarah, placing a steadying hand on her arm. “Focus on the passengers. Let me know if you need a break.”

Sarah nodded, her lips pressed into a thin line, and turned back to her work. But as Emily walked away, she felt a faint, cold draft brush past her. For a brief moment, she thought she heard it too—her name, whispered so softly it was almost lost in the hum of the engines.

Ryan leaned against the galley counter, watching Emily fidget with her tablet. The faint glow of the screen highlighted her furrowed brow as she scrolled through incident logs, searching for answers. The air in the galley felt colder than usual, even with the coffee machines humming faintly nearby. He took a deep breath and folded his arms.

“Emily,” he began, his voice steady but low, “don’t you think we’re making too much of this? Weird things happen all the time. Planes are like big floating tin cans full of electronics. Glitches, drafts—it’s just part of the job.”

Emily didn’t look up. “A mother felt a chill, her kid saw a man who wasn’t there, and don’t forget the whispers. You think all of that’s normal?”

Ryan sighed. “Coincidence,” he insisted. “Passengers love to exaggerate, especially when there’s turbulence. It’s probably just nerves.”

Emily finally looked at him, her blue eyes filled with doubt. “Do you really believe that? Because I don’t.”

“Belief has nothing to do with it,” Ryan replied, forcing a smile. “Look, if we start acting spooked, it’s game over. Passengers panic. We have to stay professional.”

A sudden jolt from the plane caused the galley lights to flicker briefly. Emily and Ryan both tensed, their eyes meeting in an unspoken acknowledgment of unease.

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“You call that a coincidence too?” Emily asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Ryan hesitated before shrugging. “Coincidence or not, we handle it. That’s what we do.”

Sarah rushed into the galley, her hands shaking as she clutched a tray of empty glasses. Her usually neat pixie-cut hair was slightly mussed, and her eyes darted nervously around the cramped space.

“Sarah, slow down,” Emily said gently, taking the tray from her. “What happened?”

“I heard something,” Sarah blurted, her voice rising. “Back in the aisle near 17C. It sounded like someone whispering my name.”

Ryan raised an eyebrow. “Whispering your name? Are you sure it wasn’t just static or a passenger?”

Sarah shook her head vehemently. “No, it wasn’t static. It was... it felt close, like someone was right behind me.”

Emily placed a reassuring hand on Sarah’s arm. “It’s okay. Deep breaths. We’re all a little on edge, but you’re doing great.”

Sarah’s lower lip quivered as she spoke. “I don’t know, Emily. This flight... it doesn’t feel right. What if—what if something’s really wrong with this plane?”

Ryan stepped forward, his tone firm but kind. “Hey, listen to me. Planes don’t get cursed, okay? They get inspected, repaired, and flown. That’s it. Whatever’s going on, we’ll handle it. Together.”

Sarah nodded hesitantly but didn’t seem convinced. She glanced toward the aisle leading back to the business-class cabin, her expression still filled with apprehension.

“Just stay focused,” Emily added softly. “We’ll get through this.”

As Sarah busied herself with the tray, Emily and Ryan exchanged a look. Neither of them said it, but the same question lingered in both their minds: How much longer could they keep their team—and themselves—calm?

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Emily stood at the threshold of the business-class cabin, the muted hum of the engines a fragile backdrop to the palpable tension. Seat 17C remained an ominous centerpiece, its presence casting an intangible shadow across the aisles. Ryan approached her, his brow furrowed. “Are we really doing this, Em? Digging deeper could just... make things worse.”

Emily didn’t answer immediately. Her gaze lingered on the unoccupied seat as if waiting for it to betray its secrets. “I don’t think we have a choice,” she said finally, her voice low but resolute. “Whatever is happening here—it’s not stopping. Not until we figure it out.”

Ryan sighed, crossing his arms. “And what if the passengers start noticing more? If they panic, it’s on us.”

“They’re already on edge,” Emily replied, gesturing subtly toward the murmuring passengers a few rows back. “But ignoring this... that’s not an option anymore.”

Before Ryan could respond, Sarah appeared, her clipboard clutched tightly to her chest. Her eyes darted nervously between them. “What are we going to tell the captain? He’s not exactly the ‘ghost stories’ type.”

“We’re not telling him yet,” Emily said firmly. “Not until we have something concrete.”

Ryan raised an eyebrow. “And what’s ‘concrete’ in a situation like this?”

Emily exhaled sharply, glancing back toward the galley where her tablet sat. “We start with what we know. The EpiPen, the logbook, the seat anomalies... it’s all connected. We just have to figure out how.”

Sarah shifted uncomfortably. “I don’t like this, Emily. What if it gets worse?”

Emily turned to her, her expression softening. “It might. But running from it won’t help. We owe it to everyone on this flight—to ourselves—to see this through.”

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Ryan's shoulders sagged in reluctant agreement. "Alright. But the minute it feels like we're losing control..."

"We won't," Emily interjected. Her words were steady, even if her own certainty wavered. "We can't."

She straightened her posture, the weight of her decision settling over her like a lead blanket. The uneasy atmosphere pressed closer, but Emily met it head-on, determined to face whatever came next.

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Chapter 5: Uncovering the Past



THE QUIET HUM OF THE cabin was replaced by the rhythmic rustling of pages as Emily flipped through the journal she had discovered. The leather-bound book felt oddly warm in her hands, as if it had absorbed the tension that filled the air. She sat cross-legged in the cramped crew rest compartment, the faint overhead light casting long shadows on the yellowed pages.

Her fingers traced the scrawled handwriting of a flight attendant who had worked the fatal flight three years ago. The words were hurried, almost frantic in places, smudged with what looked like water stains—or tears.

“Turbulence was worse than reported. Passengers panicked. Medical emergency in 17C. Administered EpiPen... It didn’t work. I...”

Emily’s heart clenched as she read the rest: “He couldn’t breathe. We tried CPR. The turbulence made it impossible. He... he died in my arms.”

A cold draft swept through the compartment, sending shivers down her spine. She froze, her eyes darting to the narrow doorway, but no one was there.

She turned the page. The handwriting was shakier now. “The airline said we couldn’t tell anyone. Covered it up. Seat 17C—something—it’s wrong. Can’t explain. Cold, eerie. It doesn’t feel empty.”

The door creaked open, and Ryan’s head appeared. “Emily? What are you doing in here?”

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Emily quickly closed the journal, holding it close to her chest. "Just... reading," she said, her voice steadier than she felt.

Ryan's eyes narrowed. "Reading what?"

She hesitated before handing him the journal. His face darkened as he skimmed the entries, his jaw tightening with every line. "This is about that guy... the one who died?"

Emily nodded. "Mr. Smith."

Ryan shook his head, handing the journal back. "We need to figure this out, Em. This isn't just turbulence anymore."

Emily stared at the journal, the weight of the haunting words pressing down on her like the turbulence that had claimed Mr. Smith's life.

Ryan stood in the galley, leaning casually against the counter as he scrolled through his tablet, checking passenger requests and confirming meal distributions. The hum of the engines provided a steady background noise, but something felt off. A faint shiver ran down his spine, prompting him to adjust his collar. He glanced at the vents above, only to confirm they were turned off.

"Is it just me, or is it freezing in here?" Ryan muttered to himself. He moved to the coffee machine, where steam still rose from a fresh brew, yet the air around him seemed unnaturally cold. His fingers brushed against the countertop, finding it icy to the touch. Ryan frowned, his usual calm demeanor replaced by unease.

"Emily," he called out, his voice steady but laced with curiosity.

Emily entered moments later, a clipboard tucked under her arm. "What's up?"

"Feel this," Ryan said, gesturing to the counter. Emily placed her palm on the surface and immediately pulled back, her eyes narrowing.

"That's... odd," she said, moving toward the nearest air vent to check for any airflow. "The vents are off. It shouldn't be this cold."

"Exactly," Ryan said. He tapped on his tablet, pulling up environmental controls. "Everything looks normal here."

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Emily crossed her arms, her gaze drifting to the interphone near the door. “It could be nothing,” she said, her tone suggesting she didn’t quite believe her own words. “But maybe we should log it, just in case.”

Ryan nodded, but as Emily turned to leave, a soft, almost imperceptible whisper crackled through the interphone. Both of them froze.

“Did you hear that?” Ryan asked, his voice low.

Emily nodded, stepping closer to the device. “It sounded like... whispering.”

Ryan grabbed the handset, pressing it to his ear, but the line was silent. He shook his head. “Nothing now.”

Emily exchanged a look with him, her unease evident. “Let’s keep this between us for now. No need to alarm anyone.”

Ryan hesitated before nodding. “Agreed. But let’s stay alert.”

The cold draft lingered as they walked away, the galley now feeling less like a workspace and more like the epicenter of something they didn’t yet understand.

The murmured conversations of passengers quieted slightly as Dr. Rukmini Patel rose from her seat in the economy cabin and made her way toward the galley. Her calm, composed demeanor stood out amidst the restless energy in the cabin. She had overheard bits of the crew’s hushed conversation earlier and felt compelled to intervene.

“Excuse me,” she said softly, catching Emily’s attention near the beverage cart. “I couldn’t help but notice some... unusual activity on this flight.”

Emily blinked, momentarily startled, before recognizing the speaker. “Dr. Patel, right? You’re the professor of folklore.”

“Indeed,” Dr. Patel said, her lips curving into a polite smile. “I specialize in aviation-related hauntings.”

Ryan, standing nearby, exchanged a skeptical glance with Emily. “Aviation hauntings? That’s a niche field,” he said, unable to mask the incredulity in his tone.

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Dr. Patel's expression didn't falter. "It's more common than you think. Planes, like ships, carry histories. Emotional energy lingers in confined spaces, especially where tragedies occur."

Emily's throat tightened at the word "tragedies." She glanced toward Seat 17C, then back at Dr. Patel. "You think what's happening is... paranormal?"

Dr. Patel adjusted her glasses. "I think it's worth considering. Have there been cold drafts? Unexplainable sounds? Malfunctioning equipment?"

Ryan's silence was answer enough.

Dr. Patel tilted her head slightly, her tone softening. "Acknowledgment is often the key. Spirits tied to unresolved events need to be recognized. Ignoring them only amplifies their presence."

Emily folded her arms, her professional facade slipping slightly. "We're dealing with scared passengers and a plane at cruising altitude. Acknowledgment isn't exactly on the menu."

"I understand your position," Dr. Patel said. "But if the disturbances escalate, you may not have a choice."

Ryan leaned closer, his voice quieter. "And if we ignore it?"

Dr. Patel's gaze shifted to 17C. "You might invite more than whispers and drafts."

Her words lingered as Emily and Ryan exchanged uneasy glances, both feeling the weight of the conversation pressing down on them like the cold air in the galley.

Dr. Rukmini Patel adjusted her wire-rimmed glasses as she leaned closer to Emily and Ryan in the cramped galley. The distant murmur of passengers filled the silence between them, a stark contrast to the tension lingering in the air. Ryan crossed his arms, his brow furrowed.

"I couldn't help but overhear," Dr. Patel began, her voice calm but deliberate. "You mentioned unexplained events centered around a specific seat?" Her gaze flickered toward Emily, who nodded cautiously.

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“Seat 17C,” Emily replied. “Passengers have complained about chills, and... there’s more. It’s not just mechanical glitches.”

Dr. Patel leaned back, considering. “It’s not uncommon for flights to be associated with lingering spirits, especially when deaths occur onboard. Aviation folklore is full of such stories. Did you know that unresolved deaths often manifest in the most mundane ways? A flickering light. A cold draft.”

Ryan frowned. “You’re saying this is... supernatural?” His tone carried a mix of disbelief and curiosity.

“Unresolved deaths leave imprints,” Dr. Patel continued. “Spirits linger when they feel neglected, forgotten. Recognition—acknowledgment, even—can sometimes quell the disturbances.”

Emily glanced at Ryan, her unease mirrored in his expression. “And what happens if they don’t get... acknowledgment?” she asked.

Dr. Patel’s gaze hardened slightly. “They escalate. It’s like a storm building pressure. The more they’re ignored, the more disruptive they become.”

The galley fell silent for a moment, save for the faint hum of the plane. Ryan cleared his throat. “Well, that’s comforting.”

Dr. Patel offered a faint smile. “I didn’t say it to comfort you, Mr. Thompson. I said it to prepare you.”

Emily tightened her grip on the tablet as the weight of Dr. Patel’s words settled over her. She hesitated, then leaned forward slightly, her voice low. “Dr. Patel, if this really is... something lingering, why now? Why not sooner?”

Dr. Patel adjusted her glasses again, her thoughtful expression unshaken. “Lingering spirits are tied to triggers. Something aboard this flight—an object, turbulence, even a memory—may have reignited the presence.”

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Ryan exhaled sharply, running a hand through his hair. “You’re telling us we’ve got a ghost onboard. Great. Should we start handing out sage sticks?”

Emily shot him a look but turned back to Dr. Patel. “You said acknowledgment can help. What does that look like?”

“Recognition of their pain,” Dr. Patel said softly. “Their story. Their presence. Spirits, if you believe in them, don’t want chaos—they want peace. Ignoring them only denies them closure.”

Emily’s mind darted to the journal, the EpiPen, the glitches on her tablet. A fragmented puzzle started to form, and her stomach churned at the implications. “If we don’t... acknowledge this presence,” she said carefully, “what happens?”

Dr. Patel’s expression turned grave. “You’re confined to 30,000 feet, with no escape. Ignoring it would be... unwise.”

Ryan let out a low whistle. “Guess we’re in for a ride.”

Emily stood abruptly, the tension in her chest like a coiled spring. “We’ll figure it out,” she said, more to herself than anyone else. “We have to.”

Dr. Patel placed a gentle hand on Emily’s arm. “You’re not alone in this. Sometimes, understanding is the first step.”

Ryan’s voice was low as he leaned against the galley counter, the faint hum of the airplane’s engines filling the silence between them. Emily had just finished recounting the unnerving details from the journal she’d found. His brow furrowed as he glanced down at the cold drink in his hands, condensation pooling in a ring on the counter.

“You remember the turbulence three years ago?” he asked, his tone weighed down by something deeper. “The one that made all the headlines for a week?”

Emily nodded slowly, sensing where this was going. “The passenger who... didn’t make it?”

“Yeah,” Ryan said, meeting her gaze. “He was in Seat 17C. Mr. Smith.”

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Emily felt a chill crawl up her spine. “That was this flight?”

Ryan nodded, his jaw tightening. “They said it was a medical mistake during turbulence. An allergic reaction. But I heard rumors that the turbulence was so bad, they couldn’t get the EpiPen to work right. The guy died before they could stabilize him.”

Emily crossed her arms, glancing toward the business-class cabin. “And the airline just buried it?”

“Of course they did,” Ryan replied, his voice tinged with bitterness. “They didn’t want the bad press. But I always wondered... if it was really just turbulence, or something more.”

Her eyes lingered on 17C, the unoccupied seat now cloaked in a new, unsettling light. The hum of the engines seemed louder, more oppressive, as if the plane itself were holding its breath.

Ryan broke the silence. “Maybe he’s still here, Emily. Maybe he’s trying to tell us something.”

She didn’t answer. Words felt inadequate against the weight of what they were uncovering.

Emily sat in the crew rest compartment, the expired EpiPen resting in her hands like a relic of a long-buried truth. The batch number stared back at her: E17-03C. Her breath hitched as she flipped through the pages of the journal again, her fingers trembling. There it was—a log entry from the flight three years ago, the handwriting frantic and scrawled.

“Administered EpiPen. Turbulence prevented proper dosage. Passenger unresponsive.”

Ryan ducked into the compartment, his presence grounding her in the oppressive quiet. “You found something?”

Emily looked up, holding the EpiPen like it might shatter. “This... it’s the same batch. It was used during Mr. Smith’s reaction.”

Ryan’s expression darkened, his shoulders stiffening. “That shouldn’t even be here. Medical supplies are supposed to be replaced after every flight.”

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“Unless someone didn’t replace it,” Emily said softly, her voice tinged with anger. “Or... unless it’s not supposed to leave.”

They both stared at the small device, its presence suddenly monumental. Emily felt the weight of an invisible force pressing against her chest, heavy and suffocating.

Ryan crouched beside her, his voice a quiet whisper. “You think this is why he’s still here?”

Emily didn’t answer immediately. Her eyes darted to the journal, the words on the page flickering in the dim light. “If it is... then we need to figure out what he wants before things get worse.”

Ryan’s hand rested on her shoulder. “Then we start here. With the truth.”

The once-muted hum of the business-class cabin grew restless as Emily walked down the aisle. A man in his late forties wearing a tailored navy blazer pressed his fingers against his temples. Nearby, a young woman winced, her face pale as she leaned her head against the window.

“Excuse me, miss,” the man called out, his voice strained. “Is it just me, or is it unusually cold in here?”

Emily stopped by his seat, her practiced smile faltering ever so slightly. “I’ll check the temperature controls,” she offered. “But could I get you anything in the meantime? Water, perhaps?”

He shook his head, his brow furrowed. “It’s not just the cold. I’ve got this splitting headache. Feels like... pressure, but not from the altitude.”

Emily’s gaze shifted to the woman in the window seat, who now rubbed her temples in small, desperate circles. Behind them, another passenger whispered to his seatmate, gesturing vaguely toward 17C.

Ryan appeared at the other end of the aisle, a reassuring presence in the midst of growing tension. “What’s going on?” he asked under his breath as he approached Emily.

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She stepped closer, her voice low. “Headaches. Several passengers near 17C. They’re saying it’s too cold, too uncomfortable.”

Ryan frowned, glancing toward the seemingly unremarkable seat. “I checked the vents earlier—nothing unusual. Maybe it’s... the air pressure?”

Emily gave a tight nod but said nothing. Instead, she walked back toward the galley, her mind racing. She adjusted the thermostat controls, noting that the cabin’s temperature was normal. And yet, the complaints persisted.

Her tablet buzzed in her hand, an alert blinking across the screen. 17C—Environmental Anomaly Detected. Emily’s chest tightened as she refreshed the page, but the message vanished. She exhaled sharply, her fingers gripping the edge of the counter.

“Emily,” Ryan’s voice called out softly. “It’s not just the passengers. I felt it too. There’s something... off about that seat.”

Her eyes met his, unspoken dread filling the silence between them. They couldn’t explain it—not yet. But they both knew the business-class cabin wasn’t as serene as it should have been.

The glow of the tablet screen illuminated Emily’s face as she stood in the crew rest compartment, her fingers navigating through pages of the airline’s digital manifest. The search for answers had led her here, away from the watchful eyes of the passengers and crew.

“Anything?” Ryan asked from the doorway, his voice low to avoid startling her.

Emily glanced over her shoulder, shaking her head. “Nothing. No record of Mr. Smith or any passenger death on Flight 201 three years ago. It’s like it never happened.”

Ryan stepped closer, leaning against the narrow wall. “That doesn’t make sense. The journal—Marla’s entries—they mentioned him.”

“Exactly,” Emily said, her voice edged with frustration. “But there’s no documentation. No medical report, no incident log. It’s like the airline scrubbed everything.”

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Ryan's brow furrowed as he crossed his arms. "A cover-up?"

"Maybe," Emily whispered, scrolling through another set of records. Her gaze froze on a maintenance report buried deep in the system. The words jumped out at her: Unexplained issues near Seat 17C—cabin temperature fluctuations reported.

She turned the tablet toward Ryan. "See? They knew something was wrong, but they kept it quiet."

Ryan exhaled slowly, the weight of realization settling over him. "So what now? If this goes deeper than we thought..."

Emily straightened, her determination hardening. "We keep digging. If the airline won't acknowledge the truth, then we have to." Her fingers hovered over the screen, then tapped on a final log entry: Flight 201, anomaly unresolved.

Ryan nodded, his voice steady but grim. "Then we're on our own."

The galley hummed with its usual symphony: the whirl of the coffee machine, the faint clang of utensils being sorted, and the muffled laughter of passengers. But to Sarah, the soundscape felt oppressive, as though it pressed on her ears. She leaned against the counter, her breath shallow and quick. The faint whispers she'd heard moments earlier still lingered in her mind, like a phantom melody just out of reach.

"Sarah?" Emily's voice cut through the fog of Sarah's thoughts. Her tone was gentle but firm, carrying that same calm authority Sarah admired so much. "Are you alright?"

Sarah shook her head, barely meeting Emily's gaze. "I—I heard something," she stammered, gripping the edge of the counter. "It was... it sounded like someone calling my name."

Emily frowned, stepping closer. "What did it say?"

"Just my name. Over and over," Sarah whispered, her eyes darting to the interphone on the wall. "But there's no one here."

Emily glanced at the interphone, its light eerily still. She reached out, placing a hand on Sarah's shoulder. "Sometimes the mind plays

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tricks, especially when you're stressed," she said, her voice steady. "Take a deep breath."

Before Sarah could respond, the sound returned—a faint, rhythmic whisper, so quiet it was almost drowned out by the galley's hum. Emily froze, her fingers tightening slightly on Sarah's shoulder. The whisper was unmistakable this time. It wasn't static or machinery. It was deliberate.

"It's coming from there," Sarah said, pointing a trembling finger at the interphone. Emily hesitated for a moment before reaching for it, her hand steady despite the growing tension in the air. She pressed the button.

"Hello?" Her voice was calm but carried an edge of steel.

Static crackled faintly on the other end, followed by a low hum. Then, a single word: "Cold."

Emily's breath caught, and Sarah let out a small gasp. Emily released the button, setting the interphone back on its hook. She turned to Sarah, her expression hardening.

"Stay here. I'll check on the passengers."

Sarah nodded, her face pale. As Emily left, the galley seemed to grow colder, the whispers fading into an unsettling silence.

Ryan was stationed near the business-class cabin, his tablet in hand as he reviewed the digital logs. He had taken on the task to distract himself from the strange events of the past hour, but even the familiar routine of checking maintenance records failed to ground him. The air felt heavier here, especially near Seat 17C.

As he scrolled through the logs, an entry caught his attention: "Environmental anomaly detected near 17C—investigation inconclusive." The log was dated three years ago, on the same flight number. Ryan's heart began to race as he clicked on the file, opening a detailed report.

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The description was brief but chilling: “Unexplained drafts and temperature fluctuations reported by multiple passengers. Cabin systems show no faults. Resolved post-flight.”

Ryan frowned, his thumb hovering over the screen. The report didn’t explain anything, and yet it spoke volumes. He scrolled further, finding a second note buried in the maintenance archives: “Crew reported discomfort and unease in the area during turbulence. Suggested seat replacement pending approval.”

“Ryan?” Emily’s voice broke his concentration. He looked up to find her standing nearby, her face pale but determined.

“I found something,” he said, holding out the tablet. “It’s a report from three years ago. They knew there were issues with this seat.”

Emily took the tablet, her brow furrowing as she read the entries. “They didn’t do anything about it,” she murmured, a note of anger creeping into her tone.

“Not surprising,” Ryan replied, his voice low. “Airlines don’t like to admit when something’s wrong. It costs too much.”

Emily handed the tablet back to him, her expression grim. “We need to figure out how this connects to Mr. Smith.”

Ryan nodded, glancing back at Seat 17C. It sat there, silent and unassuming, but the air around it felt wrong—too cold, too still. As the whispers from the galley drifted faintly into the cabin, Ryan tightened his grip on the tablet. Whatever was happening here, it wasn’t over.

The lights in the cabin dimmed ever so slightly, a precursor to another bout of turbulence. Emily gripped the edge of the galley counter, her tablet trembling slightly in her hands. Outside, the faint hum of the engines continued unabated, but within the plane, the air seemed to crackle with tension.

“I swear, this turbulence feels... different,” Sarah murmured, clutching the edge of a service cart. Her voice was barely above a whisper, but in the silence, it was like a shout.

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Emily glanced at her, her expression calm but strained. “Focus, Sarah. Secure the galley before anything else falls.”

Ryan appeared behind them, his brow furrowed. “Captain says we’re clear of storms, but the air pressure around us is fluctuating.” He placed a reassuring hand on Sarah’s shoulder. “It’s just air currents. Nothing to panic over.”

Emily didn’t respond immediately. Her eyes drifted toward Seat 17C. The overhead bins rattled slightly, and a faint sound—like a muffled sigh—seemed to emanate from nowhere.

“I’m starting to think this isn’t just air currents,” Emily finally said, her voice low.

Ryan leaned in closer, his tone half-joking but edged with unease. “You think our friend in 17C is playing games again?”

Sarah froze, her eyes darting between them. “Please don’t say that,” she whispered. “I’ve heard... things. Whispers.”

Emily shook her head, forcing a calm tone. “We don’t have time for speculation. Passengers are getting restless. Let’s keep them calm.”

Another jolt of turbulence sent Sarah stumbling, and Emily caught her just in time. The faint, cold draft that followed wasn’t lost on any of them.

Ryan sighed, his usual humor absent. “If this isn’t just turbulence, we need to figure out what’s causing it before the whole cabin goes into a panic.”

Emily nodded, her gaze returning to Seat 17C. “We’ll figure it out. But first, let’s survive the next hour.”

Emily barely had time to steady herself before the turbulence intensified. The plane lurched, and the lights flickered, bathing the cabin in intermittent shadows. A woman screamed in the distance, her voice cutting through the murmurs of unease spreading among the passengers.

“Everyone, stay seated and keep your seatbelts fastened,” Emily called out, her voice steady despite the chaos.

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Ryan, crouched in the aisle near the galley, gritted his teeth as the service cart rolled toward him. He caught it just in time and locked it into place. “This is getting ridiculous,” he muttered under his breath.

The interphone crackled to life, static filling the cabin. A faint whisper threaded through the noise: “He never left...”

Emily’s blood ran cold. She grabbed the receiver, her hands trembling slightly. “Hello? Captain Lewis?”

Only static answered her.

Ryan approached, his expression grim. “That wasn’t the captain, was it?”

Emily shook her head. “No. But whatever this is, it’s not stopping.”

A child nearby began to cry, his voice high-pitched and panicked. “He’s here! The sad man is here!”

Passengers turned to look, their faces pale and drawn. The whispers in the interphone grew louder, overlapping voices that seemed to come from nowhere and everywhere at once.

Emily knelt by the child, her voice soothing. “It’s okay. You’re safe. I promise.” But as she spoke, the air around her grew colder, and the hairs on her arms stood on end.

Ryan placed a hand on her shoulder. “Emily, we need to do something. Now.”

She nodded, her mind racing. “If this is about 17C, we need to figure out what it—what he—wants. Before we lose control of this flight entirely.”

The turbulence stopped as suddenly as it began, leaving an eerie stillness in its wake. Emily and Ryan exchanged a look. The haunting wasn’t over—it was only just beginning.

Ryan’s fingers hovered over the airline’s digital records, the glow of his tablet illuminating his face in the dim cabin. His brows knitted in concentration as he sifted through maintenance logs, passenger manifests, and medical records. He glanced up as Emily approached, her footsteps silent against the carpet.

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“Any luck?” she asked softly, leaning over his shoulder.

Ryan tapped the screen twice, pulling up a scanned image of an old medical log. “Here’s something,” he said, scrolling until a single line of text stood out. His voice dropped, heavy with significance. “EpiPen malfunction reported—Seat 17C.”

Emily froze. “What’s the date?”

Ryan’s jaw tightened as he read aloud, “Three years ago. The same flight, same turbulence. Mr. Smith’s flight.”

The hum of the engines filled the silence between them. Emily reached out and took the tablet, her eyes scanning the log entry. “It failed,” she murmured. “They tried to use it, and it failed.”

“They covered it up,” Ryan said, his tone hardening. “Just like everything else.”

Emily’s grip on the tablet tightened. “This isn’t just negligence, Ryan. It’s deliberate. They let it happen and hoped it would disappear.”

Ryan exhaled sharply, running a hand through his hair. “If that’s true, then this haunting isn’t just about anger. It’s about guilt—ours, the airline’s, everyone’s.”

Emily nodded, her voice steadier than she felt. “We need to make this right.”

Ryan’s gaze met hers, the flicker of resolve behind his tired eyes. “How?”

“I don’t know yet,” Emily admitted. “But we have to start by acknowledging what happened.”

The faint echo of a whisper drifted through the galley, sending a chill through both of them. They exchanged a glance, the unspoken weight of their responsibility hanging in the air.

Emily sat in the jump seat near 17C, the expired EpiPen cradled in her hands. The turbulence had subsided for now, leaving the cabin bathed in an uneasy quiet. She could feel Ryan watching her from across the aisle, his posture tense, his eyes shadowed with exhaustion.

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“This isn’t just about us, Ryan,” she said quietly, not looking up. “It’s about everyone who ignored what happened. Everyone who chose silence.”

Ryan leaned against the bulkhead, his arms crossed. “We didn’t know. Not until now.”

Emily’s lips pressed into a thin line. “Does that excuse it?”

He didn’t answer immediately. Instead, his gaze shifted to Seat 17C, where the faint imprint of the disturbance seemed to linger. “No,” he admitted finally. “But what can we do? It’s not like we can undo what happened.”

“We can acknowledge it,” Emily said, standing and placing the EpiPen on the tray table of 17C. Her hands trembled as she stepped back. “We can stop pretending this seat is empty. Stop pretending he didn’t exist.”

Ryan watched her, his jaw tightening. “And if it doesn’t work?”

Emily met his eyes, her resolve firm despite the fear knotting in her stomach. “Then at least we’ll know we tried.”

The seatbelt of 17C clicked suddenly, fastening itself. Emily and Ryan both flinched, their breaths catching in their throats. The air grew colder, a faint whisper swirling around them. Emily’s voice was barely audible as she whispered, “I’m sorry. For everything.”

For a moment, nothing happened. Then, the cabin lights flickered, and the oppressive chill began to lift. Ryan exhaled, the tension in his shoulders easing slightly. “Maybe it’s a start,” he said.

Emily nodded, her eyes lingering on the seat. “Maybe.”

Chapter 6: The Final Turbulence



THE CABIN TREMBLED violently, jolting passengers forward in their seats as the plane entered a sudden pocket of severe turbulence. Overhead lights flickered, casting brief shadows over panicked faces. Gasps and screams erupted as the aircraft shook with a force that felt anything but routine. Emily gripped the armrest of a nearby seat to steady herself, her pulse pounding in her ears.

“Everyone, please remain seated and fasten your seatbelts!” Her voice was steady, but the undercurrent of urgency was unmistakable.

A mother seated near the infamous 17C clutched her child tightly, her eyes darting nervously toward the shaking ceiling panels. “Make it stop!” she cried, her voice rising above the commotion.

Ryan stumbled from the galley, his hands braced against the walls for support. “It’s worse than the captain predicted,” he muttered, sliding into the seat beside Emily. “This is no ordinary turbulence.”

Emily shot him a sharp look, her professionalism battling her own growing dread. “Focus on the passengers. We can’t let them see us panic.”

A deafening bang echoed through the cabin as one of the overhead bins burst open, spilling luggage into the aisle. A heavy suitcase struck the mother near 17C, eliciting a sharp scream of pain. Blood trickled from a gash on her forehead as she slumped forward.

“Medic kit!” Emily barked, springing into action despite the plane’s shuddering protests. Ryan was already moving, grabbing the first aid kit from under a seat. The child wailed as Emily pressed gauze to the woman’s head, murmuring reassurances she barely believed herself.

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As the plane dipped violently again, Emily's eyes flicked toward 17C. Its tray table was ajar, vibrating in sync with the chaos around it. Yet there was something deliberate in the movement, a defiance that sent chills down her spine.

"Emily, what are you staring at?" Ryan asked, his voice strained as he tried to stabilize himself against the cabin wall.

"Nothing," she lied, tearing her gaze away. "Just keep them calm."

The turbulence showed no sign of relenting, the plane rattling like it might split apart. Emily met Ryan's eyes and saw her own fear reflected there. Whatever was happening wasn't natural—and it wasn't over.

The plane jolted violently as another wave of turbulence rolled through. Emily's hands shot out instinctively, gripping the back of a nearby seat. Gasps and screams erupted from passengers, their voices rising in panic. The overhead bins above Row 17 snapped open, spilling their contents into the aisle. A suitcase tumbled down, hitting the floor with a dull thud before ricocheting into the mother seated near 17C.

The mother cried out, clutching her arm where the suitcase struck. Blood trickled from a gash on her temple, startling the passengers nearby. Emily dashed forward, dodging stray bags and loose items scattered across the aisle.

"Ma'am, are you okay?" Emily knelt beside the mother, her voice steady despite her pounding heart.

"I—I'm bleeding," the woman stammered, her eyes darting toward her young son, who clung to her arm with wide, tear-filled eyes.

Emily turned to Sarah, who hovered nearby, frozen in place. "Sarah! Get the first-aid kit, now!"

Sarah nodded, fumbling her way toward the galley as Emily pressed a clean napkin from her pocket against the woman's wound. "You'll be okay," Emily reassured her, glancing quickly at the bins still swaying ominously above.

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Ryan appeared, his face etched with concern. "I've got this aisle. You focus on her," he said, crouching to gather the luggage strewn across the floor.

"Thanks," Emily murmured, her focus returning to the mother. "Keep pressure on this until Sarah comes back, okay?"

The mother nodded weakly, her son burying his face in her shoulder. Emily offered him a small, reassuring smile, though the chill settling over her told her something was deeply wrong.

Just as Sarah returned with the kit, a series of sharp hisses filled the cabin. One by one, oxygen masks dropped from the ceiling. Passengers screamed, clutching at the dangling masks as confusion rippled through the rows. Emily froze for a moment, her mind racing. The turbulence wasn't severe enough to trigger them.

"Everyone, remain calm!" she called out, rising to her feet. Her voice carried over the cacophony, but her words barely penetrated the panic spreading through the cabin.

Ryan stood by the galley, his brows furrowed as he examined the masks. "What the hell is going on? This shouldn't be happening."

Emily didn't answer, her attention fixed on the mother and child in Row 17. The boy tugged at his mask, crying out, "He's here! The sad man is here!" His small hands clawed at the straps as though trying to fend something off.

"Emily!" Ryan's voice snapped her back to the present. "The lights are flickering."

Sure enough, the cabin lights dimmed, plunging the plane into a disorienting half-darkness. Emily's heart pounded as she moved toward the child, kneeling beside him.

"It's okay," she whispered, placing a firm hand on his shoulder. "You're safe."

The boy shook his head, tears streaming down his face. "He's watching us!" he cried, pointing toward Seat 17C. Emily followed his

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gaze, her stomach tightening as the seat appeared to glint eerily in the dim light, its tray table rattling faintly.

“Emily,” Ryan’s voice was tense, low. “This isn’t turbulence. This is something else.”

She nodded, her jaw tightening as she rose to her feet. “We need to keep them calm,” she said, her voice firm. “Whatever this is, we’ll figure it out.”

The cabin trembled under the faint, rhythmic shudder of turbulence, but it wasn’t enough to explain what came next. Emily steadied herself against the armrest of an empty seat, her eyes darting across the dimly lit cabin. The gentle hum of the engines faltered for a split second, and then the lights flickered—once, twice—before plunging the plane into semi-darkness.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please remain calm,” she announced, her voice firm but betraying the knot of dread tightening in her chest. Her polished demeanor was slipping, but she couldn’t afford panic—not now. The scattered light from passengers’ phones illuminated the shadows around them, casting faint, ghostly patterns on the cabin walls.

“Emily, the lights—” Ryan’s voice broke through the tense silence as he emerged from the galley, his face pale, the ever-present smirk nowhere to be found. He moved swiftly to her side, his clipboard forgotten.

“I know,” Emily whispered sharply, gripping the interphone. “Cabin crew, check passenger safety and secure all carts,” she instructed, her voice echoing through the system. But as she replaced the handset, a strange sound crackled through the speakers—static, faint but insistent. For a brief, harrowing moment, she thought she heard a voice—whispered, disjointed, and chilling.

“Did you hear that?” Sarah appeared from behind the curtain, clutching a flashlight that trembled in her hands. “I swear I—”

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“It’s just the comms glitching,” Ryan cut in, his tone dismissive but his expression tight. “Focus on the passengers.”

Emily nodded, but her hands shook as she took a step toward the aisles. Around her, passengers whispered nervously, their faces illuminated by the glow of their screens. A baby cried somewhere in the rear, and a child clutched their mother’s arm, wide-eyed and trembling.

“Emily,” Ryan whispered, his voice low, “this isn’t just turbulence anymore.”

Near the front of the cabin, Seat 17C remained untouched, its tray table still folded neatly into place. Emily’s attention lingered there as she made her way down the aisle, her heart pounding against her ribs. She barely registered Ryan trailing behind her.

Suddenly, the tray table shot open with a violent clatter, snapping shut just as quickly. Gasps erupted from passengers nearby as Emily froze in her tracks. “What the—” Ryan started, but Emily raised a hand to silence him.

“Stay calm,” she said, louder than intended, addressing the passengers. “It’s just—” The words caught in her throat. How could she explain what she didn’t understand?

The tray table slammed again, this time repeatedly, as though some unseen force was trying to break it free. Emily approached cautiously, her breath shallow, the air around her impossibly cold. “Ryan,” she murmured without looking back, “get the captain on the interphone. Now.”

Passengers huddled in their seats, murmuring prayers, while others craned their necks to watch. A woman near the front clutched her armrest, whispering to the man beside her, “It’s that seat—it’s cursed.”

Emily reached out a tentative hand, her fingers brushing the edge of the tray table. The moment she touched it, the slamming stopped. Silence descended over the cabin, thick and oppressive. She felt Ryan’s hand on her shoulder and turned to find him staring past her, his face drained of color.

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“Emily,” he said, his voice barely audible, “look.”

She turned slowly, following his gaze toward the reflection in the window beside 17C. For a fleeting second, a shadowy figure sat there, its head bowed, its outline faint but unmistakable. And then it was gone.

The interphone panel in the galley emitted a sharp crackle that startled Ryan mid-sentence. He was briefing Sarah on securing the galley equipment when the sound interrupted, loud enough to draw Emily’s attention from the aisle.

“What was that?” Sarah asked, her voice trembling.

Ryan frowned, stepping toward the panel. “Probably just interference,” he muttered, though his hand hesitated before picking up the receiver. As he pressed it to his ear, the static deepened, a low, grating hum that made his brow furrow.

Emily approached, her expression cautious. “Ryan? What’s going on?”

He held up a hand, signaling for silence. Then, faintly, beneath the static, came a voice. Male. Distant. It sounded fragmented, as though it were being dragged through the noise: “... never... left... this... seat.”

Ryan dropped the receiver as if burned, his face pale. “Did you hear that?”

Emily took the receiver, her grip steady though her pulse raced. She pressed it to her ear. “This is Emily, senior attendant. Is someone there?” Her tone was professional, but her voice wavered just enough for Ryan to notice.

The static hissed in reply, the eerie voice rising just enough to form the same phrase again: “He never left this seat.”

Emily’s hand trembled as she set the receiver down, her face a mask of disbelief. “It’s impossible. That can’t—”

“Is it the cockpit?” Sarah’s voice cut in, small and afraid. She edged closer to the galley, her wide eyes darting between Emily and Ryan.

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“No.” Emily’s voice hardened, though not with certainty but resolve. “The captain would never communicate like that. It’s... it’s just a technical fault.”

“Technical fault?” Ryan snapped, his usual calm shattered. “Emily, you heard it too. That wasn’t static. That was—”

“Enough,” Emily interrupted sharply. She glanced at Sarah, whose hands gripped the edge of the counter as if bracing herself against the storm. Emily softened her tone. “We need to stay composed. The passengers can’t see us like this.”

Ryan exhaled, shaking his head as if trying to dismiss the growing dread. “If this is some joke, it’s not funny,” he muttered, but his voice lacked conviction.

Emily turned toward the cabin. “Check the systems again. Focus on safety. I’ll handle the rest.”

Sarah opened her mouth to speak, but Emily’s firm gaze silenced her. The younger attendant nodded, retreating toward her station. Ryan lingered, his jaw tight. “This isn’t over,” he said quietly, his words following Emily as she stepped into the aisle, her professional mask firmly back in place.

Behind her, the interphone crackled faintly, but neither Ryan nor Sarah dared to touch it again.

The aroma of brewing coffee usually brought comfort to the crew, but this time, it was accompanied by a sharp, acrid scent. Ryan was the first to notice, his nose wrinkling as he glanced at the coffee machine.

“Something’s burning,” he said, moving closer to the galley counter. Emily, who was checking supplies a few steps away, turned immediately, her eyes narrowing as she caught the faint tendrils of smoke curling from the machine.

“Kill the power,” she ordered, already moving toward the aisle to assess the passengers. Her calm mask was firmly in place, but Ryan could see the tension in her stride.

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He reached for the machine's switch, but before he could flip it, a loud pop echoed through the galley. Sparks erupted from the base, and a small flame leapt to life, licking hungrily at the edge of the counter.

"Fire!" Ryan barked, his voice cutting through the cabin noise. Passengers turned their heads, their expressions ranging from alarmed to terrified.

Sarah froze, her hands clutching a water bottle as if it were a lifeline. "What do we—"

"Fire extinguisher, now!" Ryan snapped, his hand already reaching for the compartment beneath the counter. Sarah scrambled, yanking the extinguisher free and thrusting it into his waiting hands.

The flame grew rapidly, smoke curling upward and filling the narrow galley. Ryan pulled the pin, aimed, and squeezed, releasing a jet of white foam that hissed as it met the fire. The flame sputtered, fighting against the extinguisher's spray, but Ryan held steady, his grip unyielding.

"Ryan?" Emily's voice carried over the chaos, calm yet urgent. She was shielding a cluster of passengers from the smoke, her eyes darting toward the galley.

"I've got it!" he called back, his voice rough from the acrid air. The flame finally died, leaving behind a charred, smoldering mess.

Ryan coughed, waving away the lingering smoke. He turned to Sarah, who was still clutching the extinguisher as if her life depended on it. "Are you okay?"

She nodded, her face pale. "What... what caused it?"

Ryan glanced at the coffee machine. Its surface was blackened, the plastic warped from the heat. "I don't know," he admitted, his voice low. "But it shouldn't have overheated like that."

Emily joined them, her expression unreadable. She surveyed the damage, then met Ryan's gaze. "Get it secured. We'll deal with the questions later."

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Ryan nodded, but as he worked, his mind raced. This wasn't just an electrical failure—it felt intentional. Deliberate. And the uneasy feeling that had been building all flight long refused to leave him.

In the cabin, passengers murmured nervously, their eyes darting toward the galley. Emily offered reassuring words, but even she couldn't deny the weight of the tension pressing down on them all.

The cabin seemed to sway like a ship in a storm as Emily gripped the back of a seat for balance. The turbulence rattled her nerves, but it was the passengers' panicked cries that pierced her composure. Moving toward the injured mother near 17C, she felt the air grow heavier, as if weighted by something unseen. The woman clutched her head, blood trickling from a gash where the overhead bin's contents had struck her.

"I need a medic!" Emily shouted to Ryan, who was already gathering supplies from the galley. She knelt beside the mother, her fingers trembling as she inspected the wound. "Ma'am, stay still. Help is on the way."

The mother's eyes fluttered open, dazed but focused enough to whisper, "He was here. I saw him."

Emily's throat tightened. "Saw who?"

"The man... by the seat. He just stared. Then—then he was gone."

Before Emily could respond, a cold gust brushed her neck, carrying a faint, chilling whisper. "Emily." The sound was barely audible but unmistakable. She froze, the name sending a shock of icy fear through her veins.

"Emily, are you okay?" Ryan's voice brought her back. He handed her a first-aid kit, his own expression tense as he crouched beside her.

She didn't answer, her ears straining for the voice again. Instead, the sound of static crackling through the intercom filled the cabin, masking any lingering whispers. Shaking herself, she focused on cleaning the wound, her professionalism battling the terror gnawing at her composure.

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Ryan placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "You heard it, didn't you?"

Emily hesitated, her lips pressed into a thin line. "Not now, Ryan. We need to focus."

But even as she said it, the voice echoed in her mind, a haunting reminder of the unseen force gripping the flight.

Sarah stood frozen in the galley, her wide eyes reflecting the chaos unfolding in the cabin. Her hands trembled, clutching a half-filled tray she'd been carrying moments before the turbulence intensified. The rattling sound of unsecured equipment behind her did nothing to break her trance-like state.

"Sarah!" Emily's voice snapped through the cacophony, sharp with urgency as she approached the galley.

Sarah's lips moved, but no sound escaped. Her eyes darted past Emily, focusing on something in the corner. Emily followed her gaze but found only shadows dancing against the wall, cast by the flickering lights.

"Sarah, look at me!" Emily gripped her shoulders, shaking her gently but firmly. "We need to get these passengers through this safely. I can't do it alone."

Finally, Sarah blinked, her breathing ragged. "I-I saw him," she whispered. "By the galley door. He was just standing there."

Emily kept her voice calm but insistent. "It's not real, Sarah. It's just the stress, the turbulence. Focus on what you can control."

Sarah nodded shakily, her grip tightening on the tray before she set it down on the counter. Her legs felt weak, but she forced herself to move, following Emily out of the galley.

"Just help me check on the passengers," Emily said, her tone softer now. "One step at a time."

As they reentered the cabin, Sarah clung to Emily's steadiness, but the shadows near the galley seemed to linger in the corner of her vision, a silent threat she couldn't quite ignore.

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Emily's fingers trembled as she retrieved the expired EpiPen from her pocket. The chaos around her—the cries of passengers, the hiss of oxygen masks, and the ceaseless shuddering of the plane—faded into a dull hum. Her gaze locked on Seat 17C, its tray table eerily still now, as though waiting.

Ryan's voice cut through the noise, sharp and worried. "Emily! What are you doing?" He was bracing himself against the aisle, his face pale but focused.

She didn't answer, instead stepping closer to the cursed seat. Each step felt heavier, as if unseen hands were pulling her back. Around her, passengers huddled in fear, whispering prayers or shouting for explanations. The injured mother near 17C clutched her son, her face a pale mask of terror.

"Emily!" Ryan called again, louder this time. He made a move toward her, but a sudden jolt of turbulence forced him to grab a nearby armrest for balance.

Emily knelt before the seat, her breath shallow. The EpiPen felt colder than it should in her hand, as if infused with the anger of its long-dead owner. Slowly, deliberately, she placed it on the tray table.

"Take it," she whispered, her voice barely audible above the din. "Please... just take it."

The moment the EpiPen touched the table, the seatbelt on 17C unlatched itself with a sharp click, then re-buckled. Gasps erupted from the passengers who could see it. A man in 17A crossed himself, muttering, "God save us."

Ryan reached her side, pulling her to her feet. "Emily, are you insane?" he hissed, though his voice wavered with something close to fear.

"I had to," she replied, her voice steady despite the tears brimming in her eyes. "He wanted acknowledgment."

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The plane groaned under the strain of the turbulence, and Emily felt the vibrations travel up her spine as she clung to Ryan's arm. Then, from behind them, a child's piercing scream cut through the cabin.

"The sad man!" the boy near 17C cried, pointing with trembling hands. "He's here! He's walking!" His mother tried to shush him, but her own wide eyes betrayed her terror.

Emily and Ryan turned, but they saw nothing—just the dimly lit cabin filled with frightened faces and trembling bodies. Yet the air around 17C felt different, heavier. A chill wrapped around Emily like an icy hand, making her shiver despite the sweat on her brow.

"Everyone, stay calm!" she called out, her voice ringing with authority. She squeezed Ryan's arm. "We need to keep them together."

Before Ryan could respond, a low whisper filled the air, coming from nowhere and everywhere at once. "He never left..." The interphone near the galley crackled to life, repeating the phrase with a chilling clarity. "He never left this seat."

Passengers screamed, some clutching at their oxygen masks as if to block out the sound. Others simply froze, their eyes darting toward Seat 17C as if expecting to see something rise from its leather surface.

Emily took a deep breath and stepped closer to the seat once again. Her hands trembled, but she refused to back away. "Mr. Smith," she whispered, her voice cracking. "We hear you. I hear you. Please... tell us what you want."

The air seemed to grow still for a moment, the turbulence momentarily easing. Then, with a soft but deliberate motion, the EpiPen rolled off the tray table and landed at Emily's feet. The seatbelt unbuckled itself once more, then went slack, as though the seat had finally exhaled.

Ryan bent to pick up the EpiPen, his face ashen. "What does it mean?" he asked, his voice barely audible.

Emily stared at the seat, her mind racing. "It means... we're not done yet."

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The child's scream tore through the air like a lightning bolt, freezing Emily in her tracks. She turned to see a young boy in the aisle, pointing toward the business-class cabin. His face was pale, tears streaming down his cheeks as he clung to his mother's hand.

"He's here!" the boy wailed. "The sad man! He's walking through the plane!"

Passengers craned their necks, their eyes wide and darting around, but there was nothing to see. "There's no one there, sweetheart," the boy's mother said, trying to soothe him, but her voice trembled. "You're just scared because of the turbulence."

Emily knelt down to the boy's level. "What does he look like?" she asked gently, though her heart raced.

The boy sniffled, his voice shaking. "He's tall... and sad. He's looking for something. He keeps staring at Seat 17C."

Emily's stomach dropped. She glanced toward 17C, now empty but somehow oppressive. Her throat felt dry, but she managed a reassuring smile. "You're very brave," she told the boy. "Stay with your mom. Everything will be okay."

As the boy was ushered back to his seat, murmurs rippled through the cabin. "What's going on?" one woman demanded, clutching the armrests of her chair. "Is this part of the turbulence?"

Emily rose, forcing authority into her voice. "Please stay seated and keep your seatbelts fastened. Everything is under control."

But the whispers began again—soft, almost melodic. Passengers turned their heads, straining to hear, but Emily knew they wouldn't find the source. It wasn't coming from the speakers. It was coming from nowhere, and everywhere.

The plane jolted violently, throwing Emily against the aisle seat. She grabbed the headrest for support as passengers screamed, clutching at their seatbelts. Overhead bins rattled, threatening to spill their contents again.

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“This is the captain speaking,” came the voice over the intercom, strained but steady. “We’re declaring an emergency. Flight attendants, secure the cabin and prepare for a possible descent.”

Ryan appeared from the galley, his face pale but determined. “We need to check the aisles before the turbulence gets worse,” he said, already moving toward the economy cabin.

Emily nodded, her legs unsteady as she braced herself against the aisle. A quick glance at 17C sent a chill down her spine—the seatbelt had unbuckled itself. The tray table was down again, as if inviting her closer.

She swallowed hard, forcing her attention back to the passengers. One woman in business class clutched her chest, her breathing shallow. Another man was gripping his armrest so tightly his knuckles were white.

Ryan’s voice came through the crackling interphone. “Emily, we’ve got passengers freaking out in the back. I’m going to need backup soon.”

“I’ll be right there,” she replied, but her feet wouldn’t move. The seat seemed to call to her, its silent presence demanding acknowledgment. Finally, she whispered under her breath, “Not yet.”

As the plane lurched again, Emily tightened her grip and moved forward, determined to hold everything together—just as the cabin lights flickered ominously, plunging them into darkness once more.

The cabin trembled as if the air itself was caught in turmoil, but Emily’s voice remained steady. She knelt beside Seat 17C, her trembling hands resting on the armrest. Her breath came in shallow, hurried gasps, but her mind was clear, honed by a singular purpose.

“Mr. Smith,” she began, her voice low but audible enough to cut through the panicked murmurs around her. “I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry.”

Ryan, holding onto the edge of the galley for balance, turned his head sharply. “Emily, what are you—”

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“Let me do this,” she said firmly, her eyes not leaving the vacant seat. She inhaled deeply, her voice softening. “I didn’t know you, but I understand now. You were forgotten, treated like you didn’t matter. That was wrong. You deserved better.”

Passengers seated nearby stilled, their whispers fading into silence as if the cabin itself were holding its breath. Even Ryan’s protests fell away. Emily’s hands reached into her pocket, pulling out the expired EpiPen. Her fingers shook as she placed it delicately on the tray table of 17C, now eerily still.

“This was yours,” she continued, her voice breaking slightly. “I hope this brings you peace. And... I hope you forgive us.”

For a long moment, nothing happened. The cabin remained suspended in an uneasy quiet, the flickering lights casting shadows that seemed to dance along the walls. Then, the seatbelt on 17C unfastened with a soft, almost reverent click before re-buckling itself as if acknowledging her gesture.

Ryan took a hesitant step forward. “Emily... did you see that?”

Emily only nodded, tears glistening in her eyes. “He heard me.”

Beat 14: The Apology

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Emily only nodded, tears glistening in her eyes. "He heard me."

The plane jolted one last time, a sharp drop that sent gasps rippling through the cabin. Then, just as suddenly, the turbulence ceased. The cabin stilled, leaving only the steady hum of the engines and the faint creak of the aircraft settling back into equilibrium.

Passengers looked around in stunned silence, their expressions a mix of disbelief and relief. One child sobbed into their mother's arms, while another whispered, "It's over, isn't it?"

Emily slowly rose to her feet, her knees weak, her breath shaky. She glanced toward the galley where Ryan stood frozen, his knuckles white against the counter. Their eyes met, and he gave her a small, incredulous nod.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain," came a crackling voice over the intercom. "We seem to have cleared the turbulence. Please remain seated as we assess the situation. Thank you."

The captain's announcement was met with scattered applause, though it quickly tapered off into uneasy murmurs. Emily turned back to Seat 17C, expecting some sign of acknowledgment, but it was just a seat again—unremarkable, unassuming.

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“I think it’s done,” she whispered.

Ryan stepped closer, his voice low and cautious. “You really think that worked?”

Emily didn’t answer. She didn’t have to. The weight that had pressed on the cabin all flight long was gone, replaced by an eerie, heavy stillness. As she turned to reassure the passengers, a faint whisper brushed her ear—soft, fleeting, almost imperceptible.

“Thank you.”

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THE HUM OF THE ENGINES, usually a source of steady comfort, now felt oppressive as Captain James Lewis's voice broke through the intercom. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Due to unforeseen system malfunctions and multiple injuries onboard, we will be making an emergency landing at Munich International Airport. Please remain seated with your seatbelts fastened."

Emily Taylor's stomach dropped—not from the plane's descent but from the weight of the announcement. She exchanged a look with Ryan Thompson, who was already moving toward the aisle.

"Let's secure the cabin," Ryan said, his voice calm but tight.

Emily nodded, stepping into action. "Sarah, take the rear. Make sure everyone's seated and their belts are secure," she instructed.

Sarah Lee stood frozen near the galley, her hands clutching the edge of the counter. "I—I'm not sure I can—"

"Sarah," Emily said firmly, meeting her eyes. "You've got this. Focus on one row at a time."

A nod, shaky but resolute, was Sarah's response before she hurried toward the back.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Emily began as she walked briskly down the aisle, her voice clear but measured, "please ensure your seatbelts are fastened and all belongings are stowed. This is a precautionary measure for your safety."

Passengers murmured, their faces pale and drawn. A young boy clung to his mother's arm, wide-eyed and trembling. "Are we gonna crash?" he whispered, his voice barely audible over the rising tension.

Chapter 7: Emergency Landing



EMILY CROUCHED BESIDE him, her expression gentle. “No, sweetheart. We’re landing early to make sure everyone stays safe. Just hold your mom’s hand, okay?”

The boy nodded, gripping his mother’s hand tighter as Emily stood and continued down the aisle. She felt the cabin lurch slightly, a reminder that they were descending faster than usual.

At the galley, Ryan caught her arm. “Turbulence is kicking up again. If we don’t calm them soon, panic’s gonna spread.”

Emily took a deep breath, her gaze darting to the business-class cabin, where Seat 17C sat eerily vacant. For a moment, she thought she saw the seatbelt buckle snap open, but when she blinked, it was fastened again. Shaking off the thought, she turned back to Ryan. “Let’s keep them focused on what they can control. We’ve got this.”

He nodded, and they split up to finish securing the cabin. As Emily reached the cockpit door, she felt a chill creep up her spine. Somewhere, faintly, the intercom crackled.

The cabin lights flickered weakly as the plane descended into a dense layer of clouds. The sound of rushing air outside filled the space with an unsettling hum, broken only by the occasional sob or whispered prayer. Emily walked down the aisle, her steps measured despite the tremors that rippled through the aircraft.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please remain seated and ensure your seatbelts are securely fastened,” came the captain’s steady voice over the intercom. “We’ll be landing at Munich International shortly. Emergency services are standing by.”

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Passengers clutched their armrests and each other. A mother murmured soothing words to her crying child, her voice trembling despite the calm she tried to project. A businessman two rows back twisted his tie nervously, his gaze darting toward the ominous seat 17C, though no one dared to say a word about it.

Emily stopped beside an elderly woman gripping a rosary so tightly her knuckles had turned white. “Ma’am, would you like me to adjust your seatbelt for you?” she asked gently.

The woman shook her head. “No, dear, I’m fine. Just pray we make it down safely.”

“I will,” Emily said softly, offering a brief, reassuring smile before continuing. The unease in the air was palpable, heavier even than the turbulence that had thrown the plane into chaos just minutes before.

As she approached the galley, she caught Ryan’s eye. “How’s it looking back there?”

“Scared but stable,” he said, his voice low. “No one’s mentioned anything... out of the ordinary. Not yet.”

Emily nodded, though the unspoken understanding between them lingered. Everyone could feel it—the tension coiling tighter with each passing second.

“Let’s keep it that way,” she said, steeling herself as the plane jolted once more, prompting another wave of gasps from the passengers.

Miss! Miss, what’s happening?” A man in an aisle seat reached for Emily’s arm as the plane shuddered again, the seatbelt sign above blinking insistently.

“It’s just some turbulence,” Emily said with practiced calm, her hand resting lightly on his shoulder. “We’re preparing to land, and the crew is making sure everything is secure. You’re safe.”

The man nodded, though his fingers still clutched the armrest as if it might break loose at any moment. Emily moved on, scanning the cabin for loose items or any signs of panic. Her heart raced, but her training kept her movements smooth and her expression neutral.

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Ryan was crouched near a woman with a toddler, securing their bags under the seat. “Ma’am, I’ll need you to hold your child securely during the landing,” he instructed, his voice firm but kind.

The woman nodded quickly, adjusting her grip on the squirming child. “Will it be rough?” she asked, her eyes wide with fear.

“Not if we all stay calm,” Ryan replied. He glanced up at Emily as she approached. “Everyone’s buckled in?”

“Just about,” she said, her eyes briefly flicking toward 17C. It sat empty, but the chill that seemed to radiate from it was almost tangible. She pushed the thought away and turned back to Ryan. “Double-check the overhead bins?”

“On it.” Ryan straightened and began his sweep, ensuring the compartments were latched securely.

Emily returned to the front of the cabin, her hand brushing against the intercom. Her gaze drifted toward the passengers, their faces pale and drawn. “Ladies and gentlemen,” she said, her voice clear and steady, “we’ll be landing shortly. Please keep your seatbelts fastened and remain seated until the crew instructs otherwise.”

A murmur of acknowledgment rippled through the cabin. Emily leaned back, letting the intercom click off. For now, all they could do was hold steady—and hope.

Sarah stood in the galley, trembling fingers fumbling with a tray of glasses. The sound of clinking glass was steady, but her movements were erratic, betraying her unease. She muttered under her breath, trying to calm herself as the cabin shook slightly from a pocket of lingering turbulence.

Emily appeared at the entrance, her calm presence cutting through the tension. “Sarah, everything okay?”

“Yes, I just—” Sarah’s words broke as the tray tipped, sending glasses tumbling onto the counter. She let out a sharp gasp, her hands flying to catch a few before they shattered. A single glass hit the floor, spinning before coming to a stop intact.

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“Hey, deep breath,” Emily said, stepping closer. Her voice was low, soothing. “It’s okay. It happens.”

“I’m sorry,” Sarah whispered, cheeks flushed. “I just... I can’t stop thinking about all this. The turbulence, the passengers, the whispers...” She trailed off, her voice faltering.

Emily crouched, picking up the stray glass. “Listen to me. This job isn’t easy, and first flights are always the hardest. But you’re here, handling it, even when it’s scary. That’s what matters.”

Sarah hesitated, her lip trembling. “Do you really think I can do this?”

Emily smiled softly, placing the glass back on the counter. “I know you can. You just need to trust yourself a little more.”

From the galley doorway, Ryan leaned against the frame, his easy grin cutting the tension. “If it makes you feel better, I dropped an entire cart of meals on my first flight. Almost started a food fight.”

Sarah let out a reluctant laugh, the corners of her lips curving upward. “Really?”

“Swear on it,” Ryan said, hand over his heart. “You’re doing better than I ever did.”

Sarah straightened, exhaling deeply. “Thanks. I’ll be okay.”

“You’ve got this,” Emily said, patting her shoulder before turning back to the cabin. Sarah watched her go, her confidence flickering but alive.

The plane jolted as it touched down, the screech of tires on tarmac filling the cabin. The emergency lights cast an eerie glow, highlighting the pale, shocked faces of passengers clutching their seatbelts. Through the windows, the flash of ambulance lights reflected off the darkened glass.

“Crew, prepare doors for emergency disembarkation,” the captain’s voice commanded over the intercom, steady despite the chaos.

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Emily moved through the aisle, her steps quick but deliberate. She nodded to passengers as she passed. "Stay seated. Help is on the way. You're safe now."

At the galley, Sarah stood frozen, her eyes wide as the emergency crews approached the plane. Her knuckles gripped the counter so tightly they turned white. Emily placed a firm hand on her shoulder. "Sarah, we need to assist the passengers. Can you do this?"

Sarah swallowed hard, nodding. "Yes. I'll try."

"That's all I ask," Emily said gently, stepping back to let Sarah take her place by the door. As the hatch opened, the sharp scent of jet fuel mingled with the cold night air. Paramedics rushed in, their voices sharp with urgency.

Ryan helped guide a stretcher toward the mother seated near 17C. Blood trickled from a cut on her forehead, and her whispered words carried a haunting chill: "He was so cold... so cold."

Emily caught the look in Ryan's eyes as he overheard. He quickly masked his discomfort, focusing instead on assisting another passenger. Around them, the chaos of the emergency landing unfolded, but for a moment, both Emily and Ryan were drawn back to 17C.

Sarah stepped forward to assist, her hands shaking but her movements purposeful. Emily met her gaze and nodded, silently conveying her pride. The young attendant stood taller, her fear still present but no longer paralyzing.

As the last of the injured were carried off, Emily glanced at the seat once more. The pristine leather seemed untouched by the chaos, yet it radiated a quiet unease that made her skin crawl.

The mother near Seat 17C clutched her son's hand tightly, her pale face streaked with exhaustion and worry. Her whispered words, barely audible amidst the controlled chaos, sent a ripple of unease through Emily as she moved swiftly down the aisle. "He's still here... watching."

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Emily crouched beside the mother, her gaze scanning the boy's face, which was pinched with fear. "Ma'am, we're almost there," she said gently. "Stay seated. The paramedics will meet us as soon as we land."

The woman nodded, but her grip on her son did not loosen. "He was here," she whispered, eyes darting toward 17C. "Cold as death."

"Mom, he's looking at us again!" the boy whimpered, burying his face into her shoulder.

Emily glanced toward the infamous seat, now bathed in the dim overhead lights, as ordinary and untouched as ever. Her stomach tightened, but she forced a calm smile. "You're safe," she said firmly, addressing both mother and child. "I promise."

The plane jolted as the landing gear lowered. Emily steadied herself against the armrest and turned to Ryan, who had just emerged from the galley. "We need to make sure they're stabilized before touchdown," she said.

Ryan nodded and knelt beside the family. "Let's get him buckled properly," he said, his tone even and comforting. "Think you can help me, champ?"

The boy shook his head furiously, but Ryan's easy demeanor seemed to settle him enough to let go of his mother. As Ryan secured his seatbelt, the mother leaned closer to Emily.

"Do you believe in... ghosts?" she asked, her voice trembling.

Emily hesitated, then met the woman's eyes. "I believe you," she said softly, her own voice barely above a whisper.

She straightened as the plane dipped lower, her fingers brushing against the back of 17C. It felt colder than it should. A shiver ran through her, but she quickly stepped away. The intercom crackled with the captain's calm announcement: "Prepare for landing."

Ryan caught her eye as they returned to their jump seats, his expression unreadable. But Emily knew what he was thinking: Whatever haunted this flight wasn't finished with them yet.

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Dr. Patel stood at the edge of the chaos, her sharp eyes fixed on Seat 17C. Amid the rushing paramedics and distraught passengers, her presence was an odd anchor of calm. The seat remained pristine—its leather unblemished, its blanket undisturbed, and its tray table perfectly stowed. This ordinary appearance felt deliberate, as though the haunting force took care to preserve its sanctuary amidst the disarray.

She adjusted her wire-rimmed glasses, her breath fogging them momentarily in the cold draft she couldn't logically explain. "Interesting," she murmured to herself.

Ryan, passing by with a clipboard in hand, caught her standing still and approached. "Dr. Patel, you okay? This is... a lot."

Her lips twitched in what might have been a smile. "It's not the injuries that fascinate me, Mr. Thompson. It's the seat. Do you see it?"

He glanced over at 17C and frowned. "See what? It's just a seat."

"That's precisely it," she said, stepping closer. "No stains, no debris, no sign of anything that's happened in the last few hours. Yet everyone avoids it." She pointed discreetly to a few passengers who veered around the area despite the crowded cabin.

Ryan rubbed the back of his neck. "Yeah, well, people pick up on weird vibes, I guess."

"This isn't about vibes," Dr. Patel replied, her tone sharper. "That seat is untouched by everything else. It's as though the spirit is guarding it, preserving it as a symbol."

Ryan sighed and shook his head. "Look, I appreciate the insight, but we have injured passengers to handle. I don't have time for—"

A sudden creak interrupted him. Both turned to see the seatbelt on 17C shift slightly, the metallic buckle twisting just enough to draw their eyes.

Ryan swallowed hard, his fingers tightening around the clipboard. "Okay... I'll admit, that's creepy."

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Dr. Patel nodded. “The spirit is trying to communicate. Seat 17C is more than just a symbol—it’s the heart of this tragedy.”

Ryan hesitated, then looked at her. “If you’re right, how do we even deal with this?”

Dr. Patel’s gaze remained fixed on the seat, her voice soft but firm. “By acknowledging it. Spirits linger because we refuse to see them.”

Ryan said nothing, the weight of her words sinking in as another passenger flinched, avoiding the untouched seat like it carried a curse.

Emily entered the business-class cabin, her steps faltering as her gaze landed on Seat 17C. The passengers around it sat stiffly, whispering amongst themselves, casting uneasy glances toward the infamous seat. But Emily’s attention was on the tray table. Resting on it, as if deliberately placed, was the EpiPen. Its faded yellow label gleamed under the cabin’s flickering light, and Emily felt the air grow heavier around her.

“Ryan,” she called softly, beckoning him over.

He approached, his face tightening when he saw the object. “Didn’t you put that in the medical kit?”

“I did,” Emily replied, her voice barely above a whisper. “But now it’s back. It wasn’t here before.”

Ryan frowned, glancing around at the passengers, some of whom were now openly staring. He leaned in closer. “We need to move it. They’re already on edge.”

“Wait,” Emily said, reaching for the EpiPen with trembling hands. The air near Seat 17C felt colder, her fingers brushing against the icy surface of the tray table. A faint chill ran up her spine as she lifted the device. The batch number was unmistakable: E17-03C. She swallowed hard.

“Do you feel that?” she asked.

Ryan shook his head, but his unease was palpable. “What am I supposed to feel?”

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“Cold,” Emily murmured. “And... something else. Like it’s watching us.”

Ryan straightened, his voice sharpening. “Emily, don’t start with this. It’s just a glitch, a misplaced item. That’s it.”

Emily’s lips tightened, but she didn’t argue. She slipped the EpiPen into her pocket, unable to ignore the growing knot in her chest. The haunting wasn’t over—it felt stronger, more deliberate. Seat 17C seemed to hum with an energy she couldn’t explain.

Ryan stood by the galley, speaking in hushed tones with a member of the emergency team. The responders were trying to catalog the malfunctions, their questions blending with the static of their radios. Ryan rubbed his temple as they pressed him for specifics.

“The coffee machine overheated,” he explained. “There were... unexplained temperature changes in the cabin. But no, I didn’t see any direct cause.”

The responder scribbled notes, but her skeptical expression wasn’t lost on him. “Anything else?”

Ryan hesitated, glancing toward Seat 17C. “Some of the equipment near that seat malfunctioned,” he said finally. “We logged it as ‘unexplained cabin issues.’ You’ll find it in the report.”

The responder paused, her pen hovering over the clipboard. “And the passengers? Did anyone report unusual activity?”

Ryan nodded reluctantly. “There were complaints—cold drafts, whispers. But nothing concrete.”

“Whispers?” the responder echoed, raising an eyebrow.

Ryan felt his frustration rise. “Look, I’m telling you what we experienced. If you want more, check the cabin environment report.”

The responder jotted down his words but didn’t press further. Ryan turned away, his jaw tight. He’d deliberately omitted the haunting’s most unsettling details—no one would believe it, and the airline would do everything in its power to bury the truth.

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Emily appeared beside him, her face pale. “They’re taking her away,” she said, nodding toward the stretcher carrying the injured mother. Her voice trembled. “She kept muttering about... a cold man.”

Ryan exhaled sharply. “We’ll keep it together, Emily. Just focus on getting through this. One step at a time.”

But Emily’s eyes lingered on Seat 17C, and for a brief moment, Ryan thought he saw her shiver.

The evacuation process began with a wave of subdued chatter rippling through the cabin. Passengers, shaken but eager to step onto solid ground, hesitated as they filed toward the exit. Emily stood near the galley, her voice steady and reassuring as she guided the flow. “Please take your time. Watch your step as you exit,” she said, offering small nods to passengers who avoided eye contact.

Ryan stationed himself near the business-class section, his frame blocking the view of Seat 17C. Despite his calm demeanor, his body was taut with unspoken tension. A middle-aged man shuffled past, pausing briefly to glance at the seat. “That one,” he muttered under his breath, barely loud enough for Ryan to hear. Ryan’s jaw tightened. “Keep moving, sir,” he replied, forcing a neutral tone.

A woman holding a small child lingered near the aisle, the boy clutching her neck as he whispered something inaudible. Emily approached, her professional smile softening as she crouched to meet the child’s gaze. “You’re safe now,” she said gently. The boy’s eyes darted to Seat 17C, his grip tightening. “The cold man is still there,” he murmured. His mother hurriedly hushed him, apologizing to Emily before they moved on.

Nearby, Dr. Patel leaned casually against the bulkhead, her gaze fixed on Seat 17C. Unlike the others, she didn’t avert her eyes. The seat seemed untouched by the chaos—a pristine, almost defiant anomaly amidst the aftermath. “It’s curious,” she remarked quietly as Emily approached her. “What is?” Emily asked, though she already knew the answer.

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“That seat,” Dr. Patel said, her voice measured. “Not a single scratch, scuff, or sign of distress. Almost like it wasn’t part of the flight at all.” Emily shivered, glancing at the seat as if it might shift under her scrutiny. “We’ve been through enough for one day,” she replied, trying to sound dismissive. But even as she walked away, the thought lingered: Why did it look untouched?

Passengers continued to disembark, giving 17C a wide berth. Ryan caught Emily’s eye, his expression unreadable. “Do you think it’s over?” he asked, his voice low enough that only she could hear. Emily hesitated, then shook her head slightly. “I don’t know,” she admitted. But even as she spoke, she felt the weight of Seat 17C pressing on her, its silence louder than any scream.

Emily stood near the emergency exit, watching as the last few passengers disembarked. Her shoulders slumped slightly, the tension of the flight finally catching up to her. Ryan approached, a clipboard in hand, his face shadowed with exhaustion.

“We made it,” he said, his voice low but steady.

Emily nodded, her gaze distant. “Barely.”

Ryan leaned against the doorframe, the weight of his own thoughts evident. “Do you think he’s... at peace now?”

Emily didn’t answer immediately. She crossed her arms, her eyes drifting toward Seat 17C. It was empty now, the once-ominous presence seemingly gone, but it felt like a hollow victory. “I don’t know,” she admitted. “I hope so. We did what we could.”

Ryan exhaled sharply, rubbing the back of his neck. “It’s hard not to feel like we failed somehow.”

“You didn’t fail, Ryan.” Emily turned to face him, her tone firm. “None of us did. This wasn’t something we could have trained for.”

A faint smile flickered across his lips, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “Still, it doesn’t feel like enough.”

Their conversation was interrupted by Sarah, who approached hesitantly, her movements tentative as though unsure she was welcome

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in this moment. "Sorry to interrupt," she said softly. "The captain wants to debrief us before we leave."

Emily nodded, straightening her posture. "We'll be there in a minute."

Sarah hesitated, her expression conflicted. "I just... I wanted to say thank you. Both of you. I don't think I could've made it through without you."

Ryan gave her a small, tired smile. "You did great, Sarah. You should be proud of yourself."

Emily rested a hand on Sarah's shoulder, offering a reassuring squeeze. "You proved you belong here. Don't forget that."

As Sarah walked away, Emily and Ryan exchanged a look, the weight of the night still heavy but made lighter by the shared acknowledgment of their efforts.

After the debriefing, Sarah lingered in the aisle, nervously picking at the hem of her sleeve. Emily approached her, sensing the younger attendant had more to say.

"You did well today," Emily began, her voice calm and reassuring.

Sarah looked up, her eyes bright with unshed tears. "I was so scared. I thought... I thought I'd mess it all up."

Emily smiled gently. "Fear doesn't mean failure, Sarah. It means you care. And caring is what makes you good at this job."

Sarah wiped at her eyes, her cheeks flushing with a mix of embarrassment and relief. "Thank you, Emily. For everything. I know I have a lot to learn, but... I'm not going to give up."

"That's all anyone can ask," Emily replied, her smile widening. "You'll be fine. Just remember, no one does this job alone."

Sarah nodded, her posture a little straighter. "I'll be better next time. I promise."

As Sarah turned to leave, Ryan stepped beside Emily, his hands shoved into his pockets. "She's got guts. I'll give her that."

"She's got more than that," Emily replied. "She's got potential."

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Ryan glanced at her, his expression softening. “You’re a good leader, you know. She looks up to you.”

Emily shrugged, but the compliment warmed her. “I just do what I can.”

As they walked toward the exit together, the weight of the flight still lingered, but so did a quiet sense of resolve. Whatever came next, they would face it together.

Captain Lewis leaned back in his chair in the emergency debrief room, his eyes scanning the airline’s incident report on the tablet. His jaw tightened as he reached the section labeled “Summary for Public Disclosure.” The language was sterile, clinical—designed to downplay the chaos that had erupted mid-flight. Injuries were framed as “minor complications,” and the eerie disturbances were entirely omitted.

“Standard procedure,” he muttered, shaking his head.

Emily stood at the doorway, arms crossed. “Standard procedure? They’re scrubbing the truth,” she said, her voice low but firm.

“Emily,” Lewis began, choosing his words carefully, “this isn’t our call. The higher-ups decide what goes out. They want to avoid panic.”

“Panic?” Emily’s eyes narrowed. “Passengers were bleeding, Captain. A mother was muttering about a ‘cold man.’ And Seat 17C—”

“Enough,” he interrupted, his tone a mix of authority and weariness. “I know what we saw. But the airline’s priority is the brand, not ghost stories.”

Emily took a step closer, her voice dropping. “This isn’t just a ghost story. It’s negligence, buried for three years. You can’t erase that with corporate jargon.”

Lewis sighed, rubbing his temples. “You’ve done good today, Emily. Let’s leave it at that. Go get some rest.”

She stared at him for a moment before turning to leave. “Rest,” she murmured under her breath. “Sure. Maybe the ghosts will let me sleep.”

The door clicked shut behind her, leaving Lewis alone in the stark, fluorescent-lit room. He glanced back at the tablet, its screen flickering

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briefly before stabilizing. His reflection stared back, shadowed by unease.

Emily paused at the base of the boarding stairs, the cold night air biting through her uniform. Passengers shuffled toward the terminal under the floodlights, murmuring in subdued tones. She should have followed them, but something rooted her in place.

Her gaze drifted upward, toward the dark silhouette of the aircraft. Lights from the terminal glinted off its windows, but her focus was drawn to one: the small, square pane of Seat 17C.

A strange weight settled in her chest, pulling her forward. Against her better judgment, she climbed the stairs once more. The cabin was deserted, eerily quiet save for the faint hum of the idle systems.

She hesitated at the business-class divider, her hand resting on the smooth leather of the nearest seat. Ahead, 17C sat undisturbed, its tray table neatly stowed, its seatbelt perfectly aligned. Emily's breath caught in her throat.

"Why you?" she whispered, her voice barely audible.

The air around her grew colder, a soft draft brushing against her face. She took a tentative step closer, her hand reaching for the seat. Just as her fingers grazed the headrest, a faint voice seemed to murmur in the stillness.

"Thank you."

Emily froze, her heart pounding. The whisper was gone as quickly as it came, leaving only the heavy silence of the empty cabin. She pulled back sharply, her mind racing.

Turning on her heel, she hurried down the aisle, unwilling to look back. But as she stepped off the plane, she couldn't shake the feeling that the story of Seat 17C was far from over.

The Airbus A380 sat on the tarmac, a looming shadow under the glare of Munich's floodlights. The rush of emergency crews had subsided, leaving an eerie quiet around the massive aircraft. Emily lingered near the terminal's glass wall, her gaze fixed on the jet. The

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cold December air seeped through the thin panes, chilling her skin but doing little to temper the storm in her mind.

Behind her, the crew filed out one by one, exchanging subdued farewells. Ryan placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder before heading for the exit. "You coming?" he asked softly.

"In a minute," Emily replied, her voice distant.

Ryan hesitated, studying her face. "Don't let it get to you, Em. Whatever it was... it's over."

She nodded, though her eyes betrayed her doubt. As his footsteps faded, Emily found herself moving toward the boarding stairs once more, drawn by an invisible pull she couldn't resist.

The cabin lights were dimmed, casting long shadows across the rows of seats. The air inside was still, but heavy, as though the plane itself held its breath. Emily's heels echoed faintly as she walked, the sound swallowed by the oppressive silence.

Seat 17C was exactly as she'd left it—untouched, pristine, yet charged with a presence she could feel in her very bones. She reached out, her fingers hovering over the headrest.

A soft whisper brushed against her ear, so faint she almost dismissed it as her imagination. "Thank you."

Her breath caught, and she turned sharply, scanning the empty cabin. Nothing. Just rows of silent seats staring back at her.

The chill in the air lifted slightly, as if the plane had exhaled. Emily stepped back, her heart pounding, and made her way toward the exit. She paused at the door and glanced over her shoulder one last time.

The cabin remained still, the faintest sense of peace lingering in its shadows. Whatever unrest had gripped 17C seemed to have loosened its hold, for now.

As Emily descended the stairs, the wind picked up, carrying with it a strange sense of finality. She didn't look back again.

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Chapter 8: The Final Message



The automatic doors of Munich International Airport hissed open, releasing a blast of frigid December air. Emily stepped out first, her breath visible in the icy night as she adjusted her scarf against the cold. Ryan followed, his steps slower than usual, the usual lightness in his gait replaced by an unfamiliar weight. Sarah trailed behind them, clutching her clipboard as if it might anchor her in the aftermath of everything they had endured.

The trio exchanged a glance but said nothing, the silence heavy with unspoken thoughts. The faint sounds of bustling activity within the terminal—the occasional announcement, the hum of cleaning crews—seemed oddly distant, muted against the stark reality of the night.

“Well,” Ryan finally broke the silence, his voice dry but lacking its usual humor. “That was... eventful.”

Emily exhaled a shaky breath, her hands tightening briefly around the strap of her carry-on bag. “Eventful,” she echoed, her voice quieter.

Sarah stopped next to them, her face pale but her eyes determined. “I still can’t believe we made it out... all of us,” she murmured, her voice trembling.

Emily glanced at her, offering a faint, reassuring smile. “We did what we could, Sarah. And we got through it.”

Sarah nodded but didn’t respond, her gaze drifting back toward the brightly lit terminal behind them. She hesitated, then whispered, almost to herself, “Do you think it’s over?”

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Ryan shook his head and shrugged, looking skyward for a moment before speaking. "I don't know, but I do know one thing." He paused, then smirked faintly. "I'm never sitting in Seat 17C again."

Emily couldn't suppress a small laugh, though it carried no real joy. "That makes two of us," she replied.

The three of them lingered for a moment longer, the night air nipping at their skin. Finally, Emily took a step forward, her head held high despite the exhaustion weighing her down. "Let's get to the hotel," she said, her tone firm but kind.

As they moved toward the waiting shuttle, the wind picked up, whispering through the empty streets. Emily resisted the urge to glance over her shoulder, a chill running through her that had nothing to do with the weather.

Dr. Patel stood near the terminal's wide glass windows, her slim figure silhouetted against the tarmac. Her leather-bound notebook rested under her arm, a silent testament to the chaos she had just witnessed. Emily, Ryan, and Sarah approached her, their steps heavy with exhaustion.

"Dr. Patel," Emily began, her voice hoarse but steady, "thank you for staying calm through all of it. We couldn't have handled it without your support."

The doctor turned, her expression a mixture of warmth and caution. "You all did well," she replied. "But I fear this is far from over."

Ryan frowned, crossing his arms. "What do you mean? The flight's done. Whatever... that was, it's behind us now."

Dr. Patel shook her head slowly. "Spirits tied to such events don't vanish just because the immediate crisis is resolved. Unresolved pain, guilt—it lingers, often far longer than you'd expect."

Emily's stomach twisted. "You think it could happen again?"

"I think," Dr. Patel said carefully, "that until the truth of what happened on Flight 201 is fully confronted, there will always be echoes. Signs."

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Sarah hugged her clipboard tighter, her voice barely a whisper. "Signs like... what?"

The doctor's gaze shifted past them, toward the plane now sitting silent on the tarmac. "You'll know them when you see them."

For a moment, none of them spoke, the weight of Dr. Patel's words hanging in the cold air. Finally, Emily extended her hand. "Thank you, Doctor. For everything."

Dr. Patel clasped her hand firmly. "Stay vigilant. And remember, acknowledgment is sometimes the only way to quiet the past."

The three flight attendants watched as Dr. Patel walked toward the exit, her figure blending into the sea of passengers.

The clamor of voices hit them as they turned the corner into the terminal. Reporters with microphones and cameras surged toward the passengers, their questions a chaotic wave of noise. "What caused the emergency landing?" "Was anyone hurt?" "Is it true there were technical failures?"

Emily instinctively stepped in front of Sarah, shielding the younger attendant from the chaos. Ryan, ever the pragmatist, raised his hands in a futile attempt to keep the reporters at bay.

"Excuse us, no comment," he said firmly, but his voice was lost in the din.

A reporter thrust a microphone toward Emily, her expression sharp and probing. "Miss, can you confirm reports of unusual events during the flight? Were there—" she hesitated, her voice dropping slightly—"supernatural occurrences?"

Emily's heart skipped a beat, but her face betrayed nothing. "The emergency landing was due to technical issues and turbulence," she said evenly. "Our crew's focus was on ensuring passenger safety."

"But witnesses said—"

"That's all I can say," Emily interrupted, her tone polite but final. She pushed forward, leading Ryan and Sarah toward the terminal's quieter corridors.

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Behind them, passengers milled about, some speaking to the press while others hurried away. A mother clutching her child muttered something about “the cold man,” but the reporters seemed not to notice.

Ryan leaned in as they moved further from the fray. “That could’ve been worse.”

Emily didn’t respond, her mind replaying the question about the supernatural. The word “supernatural” felt like an open wound, raw and exposed.

Sarah finally broke the silence. “Do you think they’ll write about... you know?”

Emily glanced over her shoulder, her eyes narrowing as she watched the reporters fade into the distance. “Not if we don’t give them a story.”

Emily stepped into the crowded terminal, keeping her expression neutral as reporters closed in around her. Microphones and cameras pressed forward, their operators shouting questions over the din of the airport.

“Miss Taylor! Is it true the flight had to make an emergency landing due to a supernatural event?”

“Can you confirm rumors of injuries caused by unexplained turbulence?”

Emily raised her hand calmly, signaling for silence. “Our priority was ensuring the safety of our passengers and crew. Any further details will come from the airline’s official statement.”

A reporter pushed through, her voice sharp and probing. “But what about Seat 17C? Passengers mentioned strange occurrences. What can you tell us?”

Emily froze for a fraction of a second, her gaze flickering toward the reporter before settling into a practiced calm. “I’m not sure what you’re referring to. The focus was on addressing technical issues and turbulence.”

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Ryan appeared at her side, his towering presence adding a layer of support. “Emily, let’s move,” he said quietly, nodding toward the exit.

The reporters surged forward again, but Emily slipped through with Ryan and Sarah close behind. Her heart pounded, each question echoing in her mind. As they moved into a quieter corridor, she muttered under her breath, “17C stays out of this.”

Ryan glanced at her, his expression unreadable. “You think they’ll let it go?”

“They have to,” Emily replied, her tone firm. “No one needs to know what really happened.”

Ryan leaned against a pillar in the terminal, pulling out his airline-issued tablet to check post-landing updates. He scrolled through maintenance logs and crew notifications, his brows furrowing as a new message popped up.

“Seat 17C - Status: Available for Flight 202,” the alert read.

His grip on the tablet tightened. “No way,” he muttered, shaking his head as if to clear the words from his mind.

“What is it?” Sarah asked, noticing his expression.

Ryan hesitated, then turned the screen toward her. “They’ve already marked 17C as available for the next flight.”

Sarah’s face paled. “That can’t be right. Shouldn’t it be flagged after... after everything?”

Emily joined them, her sharp eyes scanning the screen. “It’s protocol to mark seats for review after an incident. This shouldn’t be happening.”

Ryan sighed, swiping at the screen to log a report. “Looks like the system disagrees. Or maybe someone higher up doesn’t want to raise questions.”

Emily’s jaw tightened. “Either way, it’s not our problem anymore. Let’s just get through tonight.”

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The group passed through the terminal, exhaustion evident in their steps. Sarah slowed as they approached a large departure monitor, her brow furrowing.

"Hey, do you see that?" she asked, pointing.

The screen flickered, its usual list of flights and gates dissolving into static. Emily and Ryan stopped beside her, watching as the distortion spread across the screen. For a brief moment, garbled text appeared: "F-ght 201 w-s j-st the beg-ning."

Emily's breath caught. "Is that...?"

Ryan stepped closer, his fingers hovering near the screen as if touching it might confirm its reality. "Probably just a malfunction. These things glitch all the time."

But Sarah shook her head. "That's not normal." Her voice wavered. "Do you think it's—"

"Don't," Emily interrupted, her voice firm but low. "We've been through enough. Let's not give this more power than it deserves."

The screen flickered again, then returned to its usual display. Emily turned abruptly, her posture stiff. "Let's go," she said, her tone leaving no room for argument.

Ryan hesitated but followed, though his gaze lingered on the monitor for a moment longer.

Emily glanced over her shoulder, still unsettled by the monitor's static. She turned her gaze upward, and her breath hitched. Across the flickering screen, bold, uneven letters scrawled themselves into place:

"FLIGHT 201 WAS JUST THE BEGINNING."

Her heart thudded in her chest as the words pulsed faintly before the screen went dark. For a moment, Emily couldn't move, her feet rooted to the glossy tile floor of the terminal.

"Emily?" Ryan's voice was steady but carried an edge of concern.

She raised a trembling hand, pointing toward the now-blank monitor. "Did you see that?"

Ryan followed her gaze but frowned. "See what?"

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“The message,” Emily whispered, her voice barely audible. “It said—” She stopped herself, shaking her head.

Ryan stepped closer, his brow furrowed. “Emily, it’s probably just a glitch. These systems mess up all the time.”

Emily’s hands clenched into fists. She wanted to believe him, but the image was burned into her memory. “It didn’t feel like a glitch,” she said, her tone more forceful.

Ryan exhaled and put a hand on her shoulder. “You’re overtired. Let’s get to the hotel and figure this out later.”

But as they walked away, Emily couldn’t shake the feeling that the words weren’t meant as a warning—they were a promise.

Ryan kept his steps measured, his grip on his tablet tightening as Emily’s unease lingered beside him. “Look,” he started, glancing sideways at her. “We’ve had a rough day. Every screen and system around here probably needs an upgrade.”

“Ryan,” Emily interrupted, her voice sharp. “You saw what happened on the plane. This isn’t just old tech failing.”

He sighed, running a hand through his hair. “So what do you think it is? Ghosts hijacking an airport monitor?”

Emily stopped walking, forcing him to face her. “You tell me. Seat 17C, the turbulence, the mother muttering about a ‘cold man’—how do you explain any of that?”

Ryan held her gaze for a long moment, then looked away. “I don’t know. But I do know we’re safe now. Let’s focus on that.”

Emily wanted to argue, to press him further, but the exhaustion weighing her down was too much. She nodded curtly and fell into step beside him.

As they passed the bustling crowd near baggage claim, a tug on Emily’s sleeve stopped her in her tracks. She looked down to find a young boy from the flight, his wide eyes locked on hers.

“You made him happy,” the boy said simply, his voice clear and matter-of-fact.

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Emily crouched to his level, her heart pounding. “Who, sweetheart?”

“The man in the seat,” he replied, pointing back toward the window overlooking the tarmac.

The boy’s mother hurried over, pulling him gently by the hand. “I’m so sorry,” she said, smiling nervously. “He’s been talking about that seat since we got off the plane. Must have been all the excitement.”

Emily forced a smile and nodded. “It’s okay.”

But as the boy was led away, she couldn’t ignore the chill creeping down her spine. His words lingered in her mind, a quiet echo of everything she wished she could forget.

The terminal was quieter now, the initial chaos of disembarking passengers dissipating. Sarah caught up with Emily near a row of empty chairs, her expression hesitant. “Can I ask you something?”

Emily glanced at her, still distracted by the events of the evening. “Sure. What’s on your mind?”

Sarah hesitated, fiddling with the edge of her clipboard. “Do you think it’s really over? The haunting, I mean.”

Emily sighed, her shoulders dropping as if the weight of the question pressed down on her. She looked out the large glass windows at the dark silhouette of Flight 201 on the tarmac. Its empty cabin stared back, silent and foreboding.

“I don’t know,” Emily admitted, her voice low. “I want to believe we did enough. That acknowledging Mr. Smith—what happened to him—brought him some peace.”

Sarah bit her lip, her wide eyes searching Emily’s face. “But what if it didn’t? What if... he’s still there?”

Emily turned to her, her expression softening. “Then we’ll deal with it, Sarah. Just like we did tonight.” She placed a reassuring hand on Sarah’s shoulder. “You did great out there, by the way. Don’t let fear take that away from you.”

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Sarah nodded slowly, her lips curling into a small, grateful smile. “Thanks, Emily.”

The two women stood in companionable silence for a moment before Emily’s gaze drifted back to the plane. The sense of unease still lingered, a shadow that refused to lift.

As Emily and Sarah started walking toward the terminal exit, a faint breeze swept through the corridor. It was colder than it should have been, given the controlled environment of the airport. Emily stopped mid-step, her eyes darting around.

“Did you feel that?” she asked, her voice hushed.

Sarah paused, hugging her arms against her body. “Yeah. It’s freezing all of a sudden.”

Emily turned her head slowly, her eyes narrowing as she scanned the terminal. The wind wasn’t natural—there were no open doors nearby, no vents powerful enough to create that kind of chill.

She glanced over her shoulder, back toward the gate they had left behind. For a fleeting moment, she thought she saw a faint outline, a shadow that flickered at the edge of her vision. When she blinked, it was gone.

“Emily?” Sarah’s voice pulled her back.

Emily shook her head and forced a small smile. “Probably just the air conditioning.”

Sarah didn’t look convinced, but she nodded and followed Emily toward the exit. Still, the cold lingered, wrapping around them like an unwelcome guest.

The hotel room was quiet, its modern decor offering little comfort. Emily lay on the bed, staring at the ceiling as the events of the day replayed in her mind. The chill from the terminal seemed to have followed her, settling in the corners of the room.

She turned onto her side, pulling the blanket tighter around her. Her phone buzzed on the nightstand, a message from Ryan lighting up the screen: “Try to sleep. We made it through.”

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Emily typed back a quick response: “You too.” But as she set the phone down, she knew sleep wouldn’t come easily.

Her thoughts drifted to Seat 17C, the chilling whisper of “Thank you” still fresh in her memory. Was it gratitude? Or something else entirely?

A faint creak sounded from the hallway, and Emily’s pulse quickened. She sat up, listening intently, but the sound didn’t repeat. With a deep breath, she lay back down, forcing her eyes shut.

Still, the uneasy feeling lingered, and when sleep finally claimed her, her dreams were filled with cold drafts and flickering shadows.

Ryan jolted upright, his breath ragged and chest heaving. His eyes darted around the dim hotel room, searching for the familiar comforts of reality. The faint glow of his phone on the nightstand provided the only light.

He reached for it instinctively, his hand trembling slightly. The flight updates app opened without a second thought, the screen illuminating his tense expression. Seat 17C blinked on the screen, still marked as “Available.”

“Damn it,” he muttered under his breath, rubbing a hand over his face.

The dream had been vivid, too vivid. He’d been on the plane again, walking through the eerily silent cabin. Seat 17C was empty, but it wasn’t. The seatbelt had been buckled, the tray table lowered, and the air around it felt colder than ice. He remembered a voice—soft, almost pleading—calling his name.

“Ryan...”

He shook his head, dismissing the echo in his mind. “It’s just a dream,” he whispered to himself.

But the weight in his chest didn’t lift. As he set the phone back down, his eyes lingered on the dark corners of the room, half expecting a shadow to move. The unease stayed with him as he lay back down,

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staring at the ceiling until exhaustion eventually pulled him back into an uneasy sleep.

In her own room, Sarah sat cross-legged on the bed, the flight manifest and her personal notes spread out before her. A small lamp cast a soft glow over the papers, highlighting her neat but hurried handwriting.

She traced her finger over the timeline of events she'd jotted down, her brow furrowed in concentration. "Cold air near 17C," she murmured. "Unexplained malfunctions. The child said he saw a man."

Her pen hovered above the page, hesitant. "What does it all mean?" she whispered to herself.

She leaned back, closing her eyes for a moment. The fear that had paralyzed her during the flight felt distant now, replaced by a quiet determination. This was her first brush with the supernatural—or whatever it was—and she refused to let it define her career.

Sarah opened her eyes and added one final note at the bottom of the page: "Focus on staying calm. The passengers need that."

She stared at the words for a long time before setting the pen down. "I'll be better next time," she said aloud, her voice steady.

The tarmac at Munich International Airport lay shrouded in the stillness of the early hours. Floodlights illuminated the massive Airbus A380, now empty and lifeless. Its once-bustling cabin held only silence, the faint hum of its idle systems barely audible.

From the terminal windows, Emily stood watching the aircraft, her reflection blending with the shadowed outline of the plane. Her arms were crossed, her expression unreadable.

The faint glow of the cabin lights dimmed gradually, leaving the plane in near-total darkness. But as Emily turned to leave, something caught her eye—a faint, pulsing light emanating from the heart of the aircraft.

Seat 17C glowed softly, its illumination unnatural and cold. It flickered for a moment, as if to say goodbye, before fading completely.

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Emily's breath hitched, and she felt a chill run down her spine. Without a word, she walked away, her footsteps echoing faintly in the empty terminal.

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THE END

