

F~~r~~light

By Michael Cornetto

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FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

In the living room of a typical small New York apartment, ERICA YOUNG(28), a thin bookish woman, sits on the two-seater couch, a phone to her ear.

Her clenched face expresses pain, as if she has just been punched in the stomach. She is near tears.

ERICA

But, but I'll never be able to book -- Another writer? Don't do that! I'll be there -- Thank you, Mr. Selzman, thank you. You won't regret your decision. -- Yes sir, see you tomorrow morning sir.

She trembles as she hangs up the phone, then she cries.

EXT. CAFE

Several umbrella tables surrounded by white plastic chairs adorn the sidewalk in front of a small cafe.

At one of the tables sits RUBY (28) a buxom, fashion-conscious woman who wears large two-tone sunglasses.

Across from Ruby sits Erica. Her hand shakes as lifts her round glasses and dabs at her eye with a crumpled tissue.

Both have a coffee on the table in front of them.

ERICA

I, I can't do it. I'm such a coward.

RUBY

Honey, just tell this Selzman guy you're gonna take the train, and that's that. So, you're there in three days. What's he gonna do?

ERICA

He'll hire another writer. He already has one lined up, like he figures I won't show up.

Ruby glances away. Her lips tighten into a flat red line.

ERICA

(fresh tears)

Ruby, I really need this job.

Ruby reaches across the table and pats the top of Erica's shaking hand.

RUBY
I know, I know honey. Lemme
think here for a minute.

Ruby stares up at the sky. Erica dabs at her tears.

RUBY
You're just gonna have to
confront your fear. You're gonna
take that flight.

ERICA
WHAT?!

RUBY
Relax! You're gonna sleep right
through it.

Erica cocks her head. Ruby sifts through her purse.

RUBY
I have them somewhere -- Ah!

With a sneaky smile, Ruby shows Erica a little brown
prescription vial. She removes the child-proof lid.

RUBY
Put out your hand.

Erica tentatively obeys. Ruby, looks both ways, before she
taps four red capsules into Erica's trembling palm.

RUBY
Take a couple of these before the
flight. Honey, believe me,
they'll knock you out. Before you
know it you'll be in sunny LA.

Erica watches as she closes her quivering hand around the
red capsules.

RUBY
And if that's not enough...

Erica glances up at Ruby, alarmed. Ruby pulls a thick
manuscript from her purse and offers it to Erica.

RUBY
I'll give you a copy of my new
script to read on the way.
That'll put anyone to sleep.

They both laugh. Erica takes the manuscript.

INT. JFK AIRPORT - NIGHT

Erica sits in the departure lounge, alert, nervous. A small
clear plastic cup, half full of a colourless iced-drink
garnished with a lime, vibrates in her hand.

LOUDSPEAKER
Flight 21 is now open for general
boarding.

She starts, spilling some of the drink on her clothing. She glances down at the wet stains, frowning.

The passengers around her stand and head toward the gate.

She pats her jacket pocket then reaches into it. She pulls out some wadded tissues and four red capsules.

She examines the contents of her unsteady hand, thoughtful. Then she pops two of the capsules into her mouth. She washes them down with the remainder of her drink.

She dabs the wadded up tissues against the wet stains on her clothes.

LOUDSPEAKER
Flight 21 is now open for general
boarding.

She takes a deep breath and then stands on wobbly legs.

AT THE DEPARTURE GATE

A STEWARD and a STEWARDESS guard either side of the gate. Erica freezes. She stares wide-eyed at the stewardess.

STEWARDESS
Ticket please.

Erica doesn't move. The passengers behind her begin to grumble. The stewardess places her hand on the side of Erica's arm.

STEWARDESS
Miss, are you alright?

Erica snaps out of it, self-conscious, tremulous.

ERICA
Sorry. Sorry.

She hands the stewardess her ticket and nervously steps through the gate. The stewardess watches her with concern.

INT. PLANE

Erica sits straight up in her aisle seat. Her white knuckles grip her armrests. Her eyes are tightly closed.

Passengers mill about the plane, finding their seats, stowing their bags. One, standing next to Erica, has trouble stowing his bag in the overhead compartment. He bangs his body against Erica's seat, jolting it.

Erica's eyes snap open. She looks around, frantically.

ERICA
What's that?!

The passengers nearest her stare at her oddly. Embarrassed and shaking, she slides into her seat and bows her head. She closes her eyes, trying to hide.

INT. PLANE - LATER

Ding! Ding! Erica's eyes open.

The stewardess rushes down the aisle. Erica's attention follows her as she passes.

A loud hum as the engines rev. Erica sits up, wide eyed. She tightens her grip on her armrests.

The plane lunges forward. Erica's head darts nervously back and forth, looking for the cause.

A rumble as the flaps drop. Erica squirms in her seat. She pulls at her seat belt trying to loosen its strangling grip.

Then heaviness as the plane lifts off. Erica groans as she tightly shuts her eyes.

BEGIN ERICA'S DREAM

Her arms outstretched, Erica flies through the air.

Clear blue sky above her, she nervously watches the gentle green countryside pass by below.

She braves a glance upward but the movement causes her body to twist 360 degrees. Surprise, then shock, then enjoyment as she rights herself.

She zooms off, further up into the air, chasing a puffy white cloud.

ERICA
Whee!

The cloud grows dark as it fills the sky. A howling wind whips up, it ruffles Erica's clothes and stings her face. Her eyes narrow in self-defense. Her outstretched body vibrates in the turbulence.

A brilliant white flash of lightning causes her eyes to shut in reflex. Her limbs flail about trying to perch on air. Then she falls down an endless, empty abyss.

END DREAM

INT. PLANE - NIGHT

Erica squawks as she wakes. Groggy, she looks about. The nearby passengers seem worried, self-absorbed.

The plane shudders. Erica is vigilant.

ERICA

Oh, my god!

The plane drops through several hundred feet of air. Anything not stowed or seat-belted rises, weightless, from its resting place. One of the passengers is pasted against the cabin roof.

Erica panics.

ERICA

OH MY GOD! WE'RE GOING TO CRASH!

Then back to a full gee as the plane settles at it's new altitude.

The airborne passenger and any other unnaturally flying objects return quickly and nosily to the floor. A couple of overhead compartments snap open, adding their contents to the mess.

Erica quakes as her head flits about surveying the scene. The nearby passengers are in no better state than she is. They cry. They moan. They pray. Erica hyperventilates.

She tears at her jacket pocket and reaches inside pulling out the last two red capsules. She examines them as they jump around her trembling hand.

INT. PLANE - LATER

The Steward stands at the door of the plane, smiling, as the passengers deplane.

STEWARD

Thank you for flying with us. --
Enjoy your stay in LA -- Thank
you for flying with us...

The Stewardess enters, she looks worried. She grabs the Steward and pulls him away from the last of the exiting passengers. She whispers.

STEWARDESS

Call an ambulance. 25B. I can't
wake her.

The Steward glances down the aisle. Erica's limp arm hangs over the armrest of her seat.

INT. JFK AIRPORT - DAY

Ruby sits in a departure lounge, thoughtful.

Her cell phone rings, interrupting her private reverie. She puts the phone to her ear.

RUBY

Oh! Morning Selzie. So nice to hear from you. -- She didn't show? -- Awww. That's too bad, but I did warn you she could be a bit flaky. -- Of course I'll do it. Would I ever let you down? -- No problem, no problem at all. I'm on the next plane out of here...

Ruby smiles slyly.

FADE OUT.