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Lucy in the Sky

Paige Toon

Prologue

London to Singapore

Friday: Depart London Heathrow at 2115

Saturday: Arrive Singapore at 1750

Duration: 12 hrs 45 minutes

'Ladies and gentlemen, would you please fasten your seat belts, stow away your tray tables and put your seats in the upright position. All electronic equipment must be turned off during take-off and landing, and mobile phones must be switched off until you're safely inside the terminal at Singapore International Airport, as this can interfere with the aircraft navigation systems...'

Oh, bugger it, I think I've left my phone on. Bollocks! It's in the overhead locker. I weigh up my options: ask the fat bloke next to me to move or cause a possible plane crash? Fat bloke? Plane crash? Better not risk it.

'Excuse me, please.'

He looks confused.

'I've left my phone on.'

Grunting unhappily, he nudges at his skinny wife to move. Then, huffing and puffing, he hauls himself from his seat. Now all he has to do is edge sideways and we'll be home and free. Argh, this is taking forever! Wonder if he'd be quicker in an emergency? I'm starting to regret my decision to have a window seat.

Path cleared at last, I quickly locate my phone in my bag and see that a text message has come in. My finger hovers over the off button, but that tiny blinking envelope is far too inviting. Nope, I can't resist. Aah, it's from James.

Hi lucy! Just shagged james in ur bed. Thought u should know. 4 times this month.
Nice sheets! xxx

It doesn't compute. I don't understand. It's from James. What does he mean, just shagged James...Oh, no. My stomach feels like it's plummeted 10,000 feet but the plane hasn't even taken off yet.

An air hostess hovers in the aisle. 'Miss, would you take your seat, please? The aircraft is about to depart.'

I can't. My feet are frozen to the spot. I look at her in alarm, my grip tight on the phone.

'You need to turn that off.' Her tone is steely as she nods towards the phone's glowing screen.

'Please. I just have to make -- '

She shakes her head, slowly, adamantly, and Fatso heaves a heavy sigh. I feel the weight of dozens of pairs of eyes staring at me as I stagger, stunned, into my seat. The whole row quakes and judders as my hefty neighbour manoeuvres himself back in beside me.

'Miss. Your phone.'

I glance up at the unsmiling air hostess, then back down to my mobile. The message screams out at me.

Hi lucy! Just shagged james in ur bed.

But I have no choice. With her beady eyes watching me like a hawk, my finger slowly presses down on the little red button. There's no nuclear explosion. No one dies. The light on the phone merely dims and my heart sinks.

James has cheated on me.

And the slag had the gall to text me from his mobile phone.

The plane is taxiing to the runway. Outside the window it's a cold and windy English winter night. I'm on my way to Australia for the wedding of my two best friends, Molly and Sam. And some summer sunshine...

But right now I don't know how I'll ever be warm again. I feel like someone has ripped out my intestines and replaced them with shards of ice.

My gorgeous sandy-haired boyfriend has been having sex with another girl.

The image of him in bed with someone else slams into my mind. Someone else running her fingers through his hair. Someone else gazing into his blue, blue eyes. Someone else writhing up against him, their bodies bathed in sweat...

I think I'm going to throw up. I rummage around the seat pocket in front of me and manage to find a sick bag. But the feeling passes and I force myself to take a couple of deep breaths. Oh, God, this is a thirteen-hour flight! I don't know how I'm going to cope.

The plane lurches forward and forces me backwards into my seat as it zooms off down the runway. Suddenly we're in the air, and we're climbing, climbing, climbing, and leaving the lights of London far behind us. Then abruptly there's cloud and it all goes dark outside.

My mind whirrs into action. Who is she? Have they been seeing each other long? How many times have they slept together? Is she better in bed than me? Is she slimmer? Taller? Sexier? Does he love her? Oh, God. Oh, God. How could he do this to me?

Nausea rockets back through me and this time I really do throw up.

'Urgh.' Fatso flinches in disgust, while his anorexic wife peeps at me nervously from behind his great hulk of a frame.

Ding. 'Ladies and gentlemen, the captain has switched off the fasten seat belt sign and you are now free to move around the cabin...'

'Excuse me.'

It's uncanny how much quicker my neighbour moves when the stench of vomit is filling the air. Sick bag in one hand, phone in the other, I edge out and begin to walk uphill to the toilet as the aircraft continues to climb. As soon as I'm inside, I lock the door and empty the revolting contents of the bag down the pan, before rinsing my mouth out with water. The diamond earrings that James bought me for my twenty-fifth birthday last October glint back at me in the mirror.

'Hey, baby...Lucy, wake up...'

'Urgh.'

'Happy birthday.' James smiles, kissing my forehead. I wrestle myself awake and look at him, deep blue eyes peering eagerly into mine.

'I'm so tired. What time is it?'

'Six thirty.'

'James, six thirty? I don't have to get up for another hour!' I moan.

'I know, but I have to go into work early. I wanted to give you this.'

He places a silver gift box on my stomach, on top of the downy duvet. Looking at his expectant face, it's impossible not to forgive him for the early morning wake-up call. I sit up in bed and smile at him.

'I hope you like them.'

Them? I lift off the lid to find a black velvet box. Nestling inside is a pair of diamond solitaire earrings.

Now I'm awake.

'James, these are beautiful! They must've cost a fortune!'

He flashes me a mischievous grin and takes the box, carefully taking the earrings out.

'Will you put them on? I want to see what they look like.' He hands them to me, one by one, while I fasten them to my earlobes. Then he leans back and nods his approval.

'Stunning. They suit you.'

I climb out of bed excitedly and go to the wardrobe mirror, while James flicks the bedroom halogens on. The earrings immediately sparkle, white diamonds perfectly set off against my dark hair. They're heavy, but I love them so much I don't think I'll ever take them off.

'Thank you.' I turn back to him, tears welling up in my eyes. He holds his hand out to me and I crawl back under the covers and into his warm arms.

'Do you really have to go into work early?' I ask, as he starts to kiss my neck.

'Nah. Well, not this early.'

'You little sod...'

He grins and undresses me until the only thing I'm left wearing are the diamonds on my ears...

I switch my phone back on, needing to read that message again, whatever the consequences. I look at the time it came in: 9 p.m. I tried to call him on my way to the departure gate at Heathrow. He didn't answer. Now I know why. I crouch over the pan and throw up again.

Fatso is sitting in the aisle seat when I get back, and grumbles about me being up and down all night.

I ignore him, while his wife smiles at me apologetically. 'Are you all right, love?' she asks, as soon as I'm seated. The small act of kindness breaks me. I answer 'No' in a small voice, and the floodgates open.

It's the worst flight of my life. I can't eat, I can't sleep, I can't concentrate on any of the films. I take a sleeping pill and as I curl my legs up underneath the window, and in between terrible dreams and recurring pins and needles, I manage to doze off. Every time I wake up, stark reality hits me and I check the time on the digital flight chart to see how much longer I have to wait before we arrive in Singapore and I can call him.

Ten hours and fifty-one minutes...

Seven hours and thirteen minutes...

Four hours and twenty minutes...

It's agony. What if he doesn't answer? No, I can't think about that right now.

James and I met at a party in London three years ago, introduced by a friend of a friend. He was already working as a corporate lawyer, while I was barely out of university. I didn't even fancy him at first. Fairly tall at six foot, well built with shortish, sandy blond hair, he was still wearing his dark grey work suit with a white shirt unbuttoned at the top. He'd taken his tie off so he didn't look too City Boy. But his cheeky smile reeled me in. That and his blue, blue eyes.

On our first date he took me to the Oxo Tower, where we drank champagne looking down over the city of London and the boats on the Thames. We made love four days later in a flat that he shared in Clapham with a South African bloke named Alyn. Two months after that, I moved in and Alyn moved out. Some people thought we'd moved too quickly. I couldn't move quickly enough.

James paid the lion's share of the rent while I pulled warm pints in a pub most evenings and did work experience at Mandy Nim PR, a public relations firm which promotes everything from vodka to lipgloss. After eleven weeks - one week short of the time I'd given myself to find a 'proper job' - I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time and landed a junior position there. Now I work as a senior PR and my friends tell me I've got the best job: taking home all the freebies I could ever dream of.

Thinking about it now, even in those early days James would often arrive home later than I did after my shifts down the pub. Were all those late nights at the office really necessary? Surely he wasn't cheating on me back then...

No. No. It's not possible. I just don't get it. He would never cheat! Would he?

Oh, Christ, I don't understand. Maybe there's been some mistake with that text. Maybe his friends sent it! That could be it. Maybe he was down the pub and they grabbed his phone when he went to the Gents. That's possible, isn't it?

But in my heart of hearts I know that's simply not true.

Fatso is guffawing at some joke on the TV screen. His wife whimpers in her sleep. I wonder if she's getting a better night's kip sitting upright in a chair than she would at home in bed where the gravity of his body weight must pull her in. She looks fairly peaceful.

I stretch my legs out under the seat in front of me and flex my feet. I'd like to go for a walk up and down the aisle but I can't be bothered going through the rigmarole of getting out past Fatso again.

Oh, bugger him! I ease myself up and over his sleeping wife. 'Don't get up!' I whisper loudly as he looks at me in surprise. I tread carefully, toes nudging aside his flabby flesh spilling over onto the armrests. Finally I'm free.

I pace the aisles for a couple of minutes before starting to feel self-conscious. Eventually I go and lock myself in one of the toilets. I look tired, drawn. My eyes are red and puffy.

Oh, James...I love you. I don't want to lose you. This flight is taking forever. I've never gone so long without being able to use my phone. I sit down on the toilet seat and start to weep with frustration.

What am I going to do? The thought of moving all my stuff out of our flat...

Our lovely, lovely flat. We bought it last summer. It's in Marylebone, just off the High Street. It's only a small one-bedroom, but I adore it.

For a short, sharp moment, anger surges through me. No. He should move. Bastard! If he's been shagging around...

But my rage soon dissolves back into despair. Where would I go? Would he move in with her? I couldn't even afford the mortgage on my own. If I moved out, would she move in? What would I do with all my stuff? How would we divide our CDs? DVDs? Who would get the sofa? The TV? The bed? Oh no, the bed. Please don't let me think about it.

There was a night back in January, when I woke up at two o'clock in the morning to see James at the foot of the bed taking off his suit trousers, seemingly trying not to fall over. He'd told me he was working late, but the stench of cigarette smoke and alcohol filled the air. I pretended to be asleep because I didn't want to talk to him when he was drunk. The next morning he denied he had a hangover, even though his face was practically grey. He insisted he'd had only two drinks after getting his work done. I don't know why he lied. It was obvious that he went out and got hammered. But sometimes it simply isn't worth arguing with him.

Just the other evening I was searching through the kitchen cupboards for my box of chocolate cherry liqueurs. I knew James hadn't eaten them because he doesn't like them, but I asked if he knew where they were, anyway.

'No,' he'd replied.

'I can't find them anywhere.'

'Oh, shit, that's right, I gave them away.'

'You what? Who to? There were hardly any left!'

'A tramp.'

'A tramp?' I asked in disbelief.

'Yeah.'

'Oh, please.' I shook my head.

'It's true! He was rummaging around the black bin bags on the pavement downstairs and making a right mess. I ran back up and grabbed the first thing I could find to get him to bugger off.'

'James, cut it out. Where have you put them? Stop winding me up.'

'Lucy, I'm not joking. Why would I lie?'

'I don't bloody know. Anyway why would you give liqueurs to a tramp? He might've already had a drinking problem and there's you encouraging it.'

'Yeah, it probably wasn't very smart, was it?' he relented. 'But I wasn't really thinking.'

What a load of bullshit. There is no way he gave away my chocolate cherries to a tramp. I bet the bitch he's been shagging scoffed them.

I get back to my seat feeling nauseous, and the smell of the greasy breakfasts on the trolley coming through the cabin doesn't help. I won't be eating anything. I don't think I'll ever be able to eat chocolate cherry liqueurs again, either.

Which is just brilliant.

Who the hell is this slag? Someone he works with? A memory suddenly comes back to me of James's office Christmas party a couple of months ago. He left me chatting to one of the firm's secretaries as he went to get us something to drink. Ten minutes later he still hadn't returned so I set off to find him. He was standing by the bar talking, a little too intimately, I thought at the time, to a tall, slim brunette. Their body language was close, and I remember feeling a white stab of jealousy. But when

he glanced up and saw me he didn't look guilty. 'Lucy, there you are! I was just talking to, er, Zoe here.'

Later, when I asked him about her, he told me he was embarrassed because he almost hadn't remembered her name. She was new, he said, and didn't have many friends. He thought she seemed nice, but she wasn't his type. I asked, of course. I always ask.

I feel a shift in the atmosphere and look at the digital flight chart: only twenty-five minutes to go. A wave of nerves soars through me, followed by a quick throb of nausea. Seconds later the captain makes the announcement about landing. I fasten my seat belt, stow away my tray table and put my seat in the upright position. As other passengers switch off their electronic equipment, I clutch my mobile phone tightly -- Singapore International Airport terminal is only minutes away...

Singapore

Singapore International Airport

Stopover time: 2 hrs 10 minutes

My phone is in my hand as I walk through the gate towards the airport terminal. I can see that it's busy up ahead so I do a U-turn and push back through the throng towards the emptying gate. Then I'm dialling his number and it's ringing, ringing, ringing...

Voicemail.

I don't believe this! I've waited thirteen bloody hours to make this call. It's just after ten in the morning in England -- where the hell is he? I'm not sure I want to know. I press cancel and try again, but then the sickness in the pit of my stomach engulfs me and I slump down into a seat and bury my head in my hands.

'I wish I could come with you. I'm going to miss you so much,' he murmurs into my hair as he holds me tight.

'I wish you could come too.'

'No Aussie blokes are allowed within a foot of my beautiful girlfriend. I'm issuing them all with a restraining order!'

'As if, you nutter.'

'I love you, Lucy. Call me as soon as you get there. And call me tonight before you board the plane.'

'I will do. I love you too.'

He kisses me tenderly, then opens the door before pausing and looking down at my suitcase.

'Baby, how are you going to manage that? Are you sure you'll be all right?' he asks anxiously.

I tell him that I'd planned to go to work as usual in Soho, then come back here later this afternoon to collect my suitcase and catch a cab to Paddington. I'm taking the Express to the airport.

'I've got a better idea,' he says, coming back inside and closing the door. 'Why don't you catch a cab to work and take your suitcase with you, then taxi it to Paddington later? That way I can carry it down the stairs for you now.'

'Oh, James, it's too expensive. Honestly, I'll be fine.'

'No, it's not. I'll pay, don't worry about that. Come on, are you ready?'

I waver, as he looks at me with concern. I haven't tidied up the flat after my panic packing but I don't suppose that matters.

'Well...OK.' I smile at him gratefully. 'Thank you.'

His face lights up as he takes my suitcase and leads me down the stairs.

I press redial.

'Hello?'

'James!'

'Lucy! Hey, where are you?' he asks me warmly.

'Where were you? I've been trying to call!'

'I was in the shower.' He sounds confused at the angst in my voice.

'With her?'

'Sorry?'

Suddenly rage swells up inside me.

'Were you in the shower with the BITCH you were SCREWING last night who had the NERVE to text me from YOUR MOBILE PHONE?'

Silence.

'JAMES?'

'Lucy, what are you talking about?'

'You know what I'm talking about.'

'Lucy. I categorically do not know what you're talking about.'

'The girl, James, the girl you shagged last night. She texted me from YOUR MOBILE PHONE!' But my rage is losing momentum.

Now he's exasperated. 'Lucy, what the -- I can assure you, I did NOT shag anyone last night. I had a couple of Friday-night drinks with the boys from work and then I went home to bed.'

'But -- '

'ALONE.'

'So who sent -- '

'I still don't know what you're going on about! What text?'

'I got it at nine o'clock, before take-off. It said, "Hi Lucy! Just shagged James in your bed. Thought you should know...Four times this month -- "'

'Those fuckers!' James angrily interrupts.

'What?'

'It must've been the lads, trying to wind you up. They'll have nabbed my phone when I went to the bar.'

Tears spike my eyes and I take a few deep breaths as I realise he could be telling the truth.

'Lucy?' he asks gently. 'Are you all right?'

'No! I'm not! I threw up on the plane!'

'Oh, God. Lucy, I'm so sorry.'

'It's OK,' I sniff. 'It's not your fault.'

After a moment he speaks softly. 'Baby, you should have known. I would never cheat on you. I missed you so much when I came home last night and you weren't there. I can't believe you think I'd do that. It makes me pretty sad, actually.'

'James, I'm sorry. I didn't understand. I didn't know what was going on!'

'Hey, it's OK. It's OK. I love you.'

There are people heading down towards the gate next to me now so I dry my eyes and speak quietly into the receiver. 'I love you too. I'm sorry for doubting you. I was just really confused.'

'Don't worry. If one of your friends did that to me, I'd hit the bloody roof! But look, Lucy, promise me you won't let this spoil your holiday. You're going to have such an incredible time.'

When we finally hang up, the relief is so overpowering I actually laugh out loud. A few passengers queuing by the gate turn to stare. I realise I must look a right state, so I head off in search of the nearest ladies' loos.

It's a hot and humid Saturday evening in Singapore and when I packed my hand luggage, I had the intention of making the most of every warm minute. In the cramped toilet cubicle, I change out of my jeans into an emerald-green summer dress and swap my trainers for cork-soled, black strappy wedges. Back out in front of the mirror I tie my just-below-shoulder-length chestnut curls into a high ponytail and splash my face with cold water. I'm not wearing any make-up, but I do apply some moisturiser and cherry-flavoured lip balm.

Feeling much more normal, I set off looking for Singapore Airport's outdoor swimming pool. One of my work colleagues, Gemma, told me about it. I don't want to swim, but there's an outdoor bar area and I sure as hell need a drink. I've got an hour and a half to kill before the flight to Sydney.

The humidity hits me the second I walk through the electric doors at the end of Terminal One. I decide on a bar-side seat and order myself a cocktail, trying to ignore the terrible Singaporean pop music blasting out of the stereo. Excitement suddenly surges through me. I'm going back to Australia!

The last time I saw Molly and Sam we were all sixteen and still at high school. I can hardly believe that was nine years ago. Molly and Sam were on-again-off-again back then -- something which caused me a lot of heartbreak. I had the most overwhelming unrequited crush on Sam, and every time he got together with Molly or cooled it down, my heart would sink or soar accordingly.

I'm so relieved neither of them ever found out how I felt. But life goes on, and now I can honestly say I'm thrilled that my two friends are tying the knot.

At least I think I am, although that could all change when I see Sam again. I sincerely hope not. What is it with first loves that you supposedly never get over?

As soon as Molly called me with the news of their engagement, I knew I'd have to go back. I left Australia when my English mum married for the second time. It seemed a bit silly, her walking out on my drunkard dad in Ireland and taking me to Australia when I was four years old, only to meet an Englishman and move back to England again twelve years later. I cried and cried at the time. It felt like leaving was the most

soul-destroying thing in the world. But it's amazing how you adapt. I love England now. I love the city where I live and work and I love going home to mum and Terry's house in Somerset. I also love having two brothers -- well, two stepbrothers -- Tom, who is twenty-one, and Nick, who is eighteen. It was lonely growing up with just Mum and me.

There are kids with armbands splashing in the pool. A young couple appear at the top of the stairs. They're both wearing jeans and carrying backpacks and they almost immediately wipe their brows. I'm glad I packed my dress.

I think I'll have another cocktail. 'Excuse me. Could you tell me what this is again?'

'Singapore Sling, madam.'

That figures. 'Another one, please.' The bartender nods and gets to work. What's in them, I wonder, grabbing a menu from further down the bar. Grenadine, gin, sweet and sour mix and cherry brandy...Mmm.

This Singaporean pop music is actually quite catchy. James would laugh if he could see me now, drinking cocktails and tapping my feet.

Maybe he did hide my chocolate cherry liqueurs as a joke. I still don't accept his story that he gave them to a tramp.

OK, here's the thing about my boyfriend. He is prone to the occasional crazy white lie. But I genuinely believe he doesn't mean any harm. For example, at the party on the night we met, he told me his mum was once offered £10,000 to sell her chocolate cake recipe to the boss at Mr Kipling. He no doubt assumed I'd forget, but a few months later I went for afternoon tea at his parents' house and his mum, a tiny little sparrow of a thing, happened to be serving chocolate cake.

'Is this the infamous recipe?' I asked her knowingly, and she replied, 'Oh, no, dear, this is from M&S. I burn everything I bake!'

When I questioned James about it later, he cracked up and asked me where on earth I'd got that idea. I told him and he denied it, laughingly insisting I must've dreamt it. I don't know, maybe I did.

There have been other lies, which I know I didn't dream -- some of them quite inventive. Like the one about his grandpa snogging Marilyn Monroe when she sang for the troops in Korea. I found out from James's dad later that the old guy didn't even fight in the Korean War, and anyway Marilyn had just married Joe DiMaggio at the time. I Googled it and everything.

But his mum selling her chocolate cake recipe to Mr Kipling...That's my personal favourite. Little ratbag. Sometimes I think James could be an actor. But no, he's far too good as a lawyer.

And he really is. He was promoted six months ago and got a massive pay rise. That's how he could afford to buy me those earrings for my birthday. Knowing James, though, even without the promotion he would have saved up for six months to get them for me. He spoils me rotten. I get flowers at least once -- sometimes twice -- a month and he's always taking me out to dinner and buying me presents. My friends think I'm ludicrously lucky.

There's a high-pitched buzzing and I can hear a plane taxiing by. It's noisy, as if we're going through a car wash. I watch as a balding forty-something man makes his way down the steps into the swimming pool, his pot-bellied stomach shuddering with every step. Three young guys are sitting at a table on the other side of the bar, drinking beers. One of them looks over at me and then turns back to his mates and says something. All three turn around and grin.

I feel so much happier now. Damn it, I'm going to have another one.

'Singapore Sling?'

'Yes, please.'

I'm feeling a little tipsy. I know you shouldn't really drink on your own but, bugger it, I'm on holiday. And I've been through a lot in the last, how long has it been? Fifteen hours or so? I wonder if I'll laugh about this in years to come. It's starting to seem pretty funny now -- but I imagine the three Singapore Slings help.

The thought of poor James going home to an empty flat, sleeping in an empty bed and missing me...Aah. I wish he could've come to Australia as well. If he hadn't received that promotion he would have asked for the time off, but at the time I was booking my flights, he felt it was too soon. I really wish Molly and Sam could meet him.

There's a couple in the spa and they're kissing. The balding forty-something is doing breaststroke and he keeps copping an eyeful every time he swims past. You don't very often see guys do breaststroke, do you? I kind of wish I had my swimming costume with me now, but then I wouldn't be here, swinging my wedge-clad feet on this lovely high bar stool.

'Would you like another, madam?'

Is he flirting with me? That was definitely a twinkly grin. Can you have twinkly grins or is it just twinkly eyes and cheesy grins? I mean cheeky grins. God, I'm pissed.

This is definitely, definitely my last one. Whoa! Almost slipped off my stool. What time is my flight again? There's a TV screen with the flight times behind the bar and I struggle to make out the numbers. No, I'm not looking at you, pal. Where's my flight? Sydney, Sydney, Sydney -- ah, there it is. Last Call.

Shit, does that say Last Call?

Bollocks! I slide, almost fall, from the stool and, practically tripping over my wedge sandals, make for the exit. Then I realise I haven't paid. I rush back, see the relief on Twinkly Grin's face after he must've figured I was doing a runner, throw down my credit card, will him to get a wriggle on and then turn and run. Where the hell is Gate C22?

Singapore to Sydney

Saturday: Depart Singapore at 2000 Sunday: Arrive Sydney at 0650 Duration: 7 hr 50 minutes

Oh dear, those air hostesses do not look happy. They've called for Lucy McCarthy twice over the tannoy in the last ten minutes as I've zigzagged my way here. I try to apologise for being late but 'sorry' comes out like 'shorry' and it doesn't help that I'm unable to walk down the plank in a straight line.

Did I just say plank? I meant aisle, of course.

The other passengers are looking at me. Yes, yes, I've had a couple of drinks, but what am I, a total freak? Ah, here's my seat. Window again, fab. Yep, you'll have to move. And I'm not so drunk that I can't see you raising your eyebrows at each other, either. Bet you thought you had a nice empty seat next to you -- too bad! I think I'll take my carry-on bag with me to my seat this time.

I plonk myself down and try to locate the seat belt from under my bum. Blanket...No. Pillow...No. Where is the bloomin' thing? Ah, seat belt. I tug, tug, tug at it. Why won't it budge? Oh, OK, that seat belt belongs to the man next to me. Sorry, mate. Ah, here's mine. Click. I do feel woozy.

'Ladies and gentlemen, would you please fasten your seat belts, stow away your tray tables and put your seats in the upright position...'

Yeah, yeah, heard it all before. Blahdeblahdeblah.

'...mobile phones must be switched off until you're safely inside Sydney International Airport...'

Yep, I know that bit too. Been there, done that. Oops, I haven't switched it off yet actually.

Can't...quite...reach...bag...

Seatbelt...too...tight...

I eventually unclick myself and grab my bag, finding my phone. No messages, thank goodness. I switch it off and chuck it back into my bag. Then I buckle myself up again and breathe a nice big Singapore Sling sigh of relief.

My tanned legs are peeking out from underneath my sundress and I admire them happily. I do like this fake tan -- it's a nice, natural-looking one. But it is such a pain in the arse having to use old sheets on the first night that you apply it. And then you have to wash them and put your good ones back on again...So it's two loads of laundry in two days. Well, I had to leave James to deal with the washing this time as he hurried me out of the flat.

Nice sheets!

The memory barely registers before my stomach freefalls and I ask myself: how the hell did James's blokey friends know about my shitty fake tan sheets?

Oh, no...They didn't know. Because they didn't send that text.

I hurriedly unbuckle my seat belt and reach for my bag, giving the seat back and the person in front of me a big, solid head-butt. I fumble around for my phone and switch it on.

Hi lucy! Just shagged james in ur bed. Thought u should know. 4 times this month. Nice sheets! xxx

'Miss -- you need to turn that off.'

What, do they have eyes in the back of their bloody heads?

'I can't! I have to make a phone call!'

'Miss, the other passengers on this flight have already been held up enough, don't you think?' She looks at me meaningfully. 'So you'd better turn that off, right now.'

'Is there a problem?' Another bitchy air hostess arrives to join the party.

'No, Franny, we're alright here. This young lady was just about to turn off her phone.'

With a deep fury bubbling away in my very core, I comply. Power trip over, they smugly sashay off down the aisle. I'm tempted to hurl my phone at the back of Franny's frickin' head.

That lying, cheating son of a bitch. I'm going to kill him.

The plane takes off and I'm so full of rage that I barely notice. The forty-something man and his wife/girlfriend/mistress (most likely) next to me shift uncomfortably in

their seats. And while I'd like to think I have a certain amount of self-control, at the moment I'm not entirely sure I do. It's just as well I've been given a window seat -- I'd probably be rampaging down the aisle, screaming like a banshee, if I could get out. I can't handle another eight hours of this.

The sun is setting as we start our journey through another night. It calms my mood somewhat and it occurs to me that I haven't actually eaten anything since leaving London yesterday evening. Four cocktails on an empty stomach -- oh, dear. I suddenly have an urgent need to go to the toilet. The people next to me are only too eager to oblige, standing up and eyeing me warily as I squeeze past them.

The nasty fluorescent light in the bathroom flickers on. I clock my diamond earrings in my reflection and seriously consider tearing them from my ears and flushing them down the toilet. Ha! Knowing how the bastard lied through his teeth to me, they're probably not even real. Lucy in the sky with cubic fucking zirconia. That'd be about right.

The air hostesses have started to serve drinks at the top of the aisle. I figure they can back up into Business Class and let me take my seat so I walk up towards them. The older one, Franny, nods at the younger one, who swivels round and spots me before turning back to Franny with an almost imperceptible shake of her immaculately groomed head. Then the bitches make me wait back by the toilets while they carry on serving the entire cabin with their frosty, false little smiles until finally they reach me and I'm able to pass. I am livid, but I won't let them see they've got to me. I get back to my seat and realise I haven't even been given a drink.

Franny and her evil counterpart are serving food now. The chicken stir-fry is slimy and unappetising, but I'm famished so I eat it all. Even the fake-cream sponge goes down nicely. The alcohol is starting to wear off and I find I'm exhausted, although I'm still so mad at James I can barely breathe.

So he lied about cheating. I can't believe I actually apologised for suspecting him! How dare he? The image of him in bed with another girl comes to me once more, but I channel my anger back fast and strong. I can't deal with those sick nerves again -- anger is much easier to handle.

I need to go to the loo again. The air hostesses have already cleared our dinner trays, but they're still working on the seats behind us. The curtain that divides Economy and Business Class is tied back and the Business Class toilets are tantalisingly close. What the hell, I think, and walk up the aisle.

It's much nicer in here. They've even got hand cream and flowers.

There's a knock at the door. What now? I wee as quickly as I can while the knocking increases in urgency and volume, and then unlock the door. Surprise, surprise, it's Franny's frosty friend. She must have seen me come in here. I haven't even had time to use the hand cream yet -- damn.

'Miss, these are Business Class toilets -- the Economy Class toilets are at the other end,' she tells me condescendingly.

I motion to the passengers in Business Class and say, 'I don't think anyone here really mi -- Wait. Are those telephones?'

An Asian businessman has a phone to his ear and this phone is attached by a cord to the back of the seat in front of him.

'That's certainly what they look like, don't they?'

I look at her desperately. 'I need to make a phone call.'

'I'm afraid you can't. They're for Business Class passengers only.'

'No, you don't understand. I have to make an urgent call.'

'I'm sorry, but there is nothing I can do. You need to take your seat now.'

I should've known better than to piss off an air hostess.

She determinedly guides me back to my seat as I look over my shoulder in desperation at the phones. I don't care that there's only a few hours left of this flight. I want to call the son of a bitch and scream at him NOW. I will use that phone.

An hour later, when all the other passengers are either sleeping or watching the in-flight entertainment, I hoist myself up in my seat and climb over my dozing neighbours, carefully treading on their armrests so as not to wake them. I lift back the curtain dividing us and Business Class and step through. The Asian businessman is sleeping, so I creep over to him. Carefully taking the phone from its mount, I scrutinise it. No! It looks like it needs a credit card.

'Miss! What are you doing?'

The businessman jolts wide awake at the sound of the air hostess's shrill voice and stares at me, startled. He shouts something I can't understand and, before I know it, the phone has been wrestled out of my grip by Franny and I'm being frogmarched up towards the front of the plane.

In the kitchenette area she turns to me and says with icy-cold hardness: 'You'd better listen to me long and hard. First, you rocked up late and drunk. You were lucky that we didn't refuse you passage on this aircraft -- '

'I wasn't that drunk,' I interrupt.

'Enough! This is the one and only time I am going to tell you. If you don't go back to your seat and calmly stay there for the duration of this flight, you will be banned from ever flying with this airline again. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?'

A red flush has crept across my face and I nod my assent. Mortified, I make my way back to my seat. Again I climb up and over the sleeping passengers, all the time watched closely by Franny. When she's satisfied that I've been put firmly and literally back in my place, she turns and leaves, shaking her head in disgust.

After a few minutes of sitting there with my face burning, I decide I'd better watch a film or something -- anything to try to take my mind off my situation. I won't be moving again.

An hour later, when they're bringing the breakfast trolley through, I barely look up, and when we finally land I can't meet their eyes as I walk out through the door. They don't say anything which may cause a scene in front of the other passengers, but I know they're delighted to see the back of me. I just hope they're not on my return flight. But right now, of course, there are other concerns on my mind.