

Dare to Au Pair

What if you've
been chasing the
wrong dream
all along?

A NOVEL

MAIA CORRELL

Dare
to
Au Pair

Dare to Au Pair



MAIA CORRELL



CamCat
Books

CamCat Publishing, LLC
Fort Collins, Colorado 80524
camcatpublishing.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

© 2024 by Maia Correll

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, address CamCat Publishing, LLC, 1281 East Magnolia Street, #D1032, Fort Collins, CO 80524.

Paperback ISBN 9780744310320
Large-Print Paperback ISBN 9780744310351
eBook ISBN 9780744310344
Audiobook ISBN 9780744310375

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available upon request

Book and cover design by Maryann Appel
Interior artwork by CSA-Archive, Deepika Praveen, VoinSveta

5 3 1 2 4

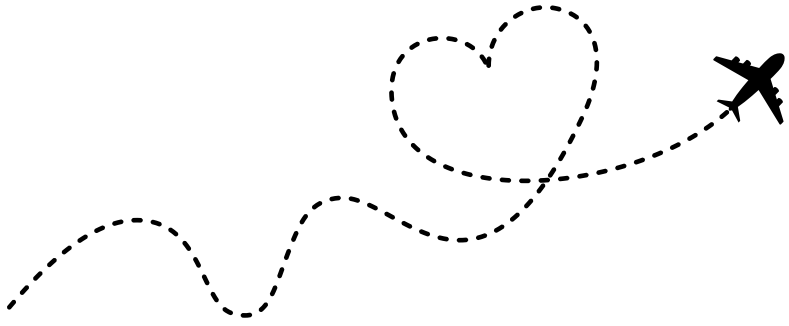
To Jill.

My best friend and soul sister.

*May our adventures continue to bring us joy, laughter, and
divinely-timed lifelong lessons.*







CHAPTER ONE

Well, this is craptastic.
Yes. *Craptastic*.

How else do I describe chucking all my post-graduation eggs into a Dublin law firm's marketing coordinator position? And spoiler alert, only to *not* get the job I'm way over-qualified for but desperately need to give my resume a distinguished glow-up to launch my career into corporate America's high-flier travel industry.

What a world we live in. Where fully-packed resumes, sporting flying colors in academic achievement and esteemed summer internships still don't carry enough *va va voom*. And rosy as my references may be, the cutthroat reality is that foreign work experience is a necessity to even get me to Continental Air's doormat—better known as the company I've been LinkedIn-stalking since I was twelve.

I should've taken that Santander job when I studied a semester in Sevilla. In my defense, Spanish Culture 301 feat. Food and Film was a bit more enticing than donning the ever-alluring and wrinkle-prone bank teller button-up in the Iberian Peninsula. At the time, I'd figured I'd be a shoo-in for the next opportunity that came around—wrong. I guess being 20 percent Irish doesn't mean much these days. How could my people do this to me!

Still, if I'd chosen the latter option in Spain, I probably would've avoided this floundering situation: splayed out on my childhood bed, analyzing my overconfidence when it comes to job applications, while my bichpoo, Zelda, casts me a sleepy-eyed glance to signal it's dinnertime. I stare up at the glow-in-the-dark stars covering the ceiling, and it temporarily distracts from the hauntingly dichotomous belongings collecting along the room's perimeter. Like the plastic bins that've gobbled my college dorm's contents. One Direction cardboard cutouts from my middle school heydays. Frayed stuffed animals that I refuse to part ways with no matter how hard Mom tries to pry them from my hands.

And as much as I'd like to indulge in yet another evening of scouring the online job boards, blasting a '90s rom-com or Planet Earth documentary in the background to keep me sane, I've got to make myself presentable for this—sigh—date. Yes, *the* Kat McLauren is going on a date. It's been twenty-two years, so better late than never, right?

I'd be lying if I said it wasn't on my mind all week. Like my brain had been marinating in a deliciously potent cocktail dishing up buzzing delight and cloying dread. Love that for me.

So, even though my back wants to glue itself to my third-grade butterfly sheets for eternity, come hell or New England beach traffic, I'm not gonna show up a sniveling mess. Besides, the ride there and back will give me ample time to course-correct this barely budding career of mine. That's the secret to ten-year plans: failure is *not* an option, especially for this summa cum laude destined for a corner office with a view of the country's most prestigious airline.



SHOWING UP TWENTY minutes early for this devilishly normalized form of mate selection comes with its perks. Relaxing into a weather-worn bench on the lawn beside the town's yacht club, I drink in the sight.

The shipyard is peaceful tonight. Melting into an electric orange horizon, the sun casts its last rays across a sailboat-studded cove. Twilight's cool air blows off the Atlantic as the water's gentle rippling hints of winds ensue beyond the herd of boats bobbing around Hyannis Port.

For a moment, my focus cascades into the evening's serenity, capturing the scene in my memory—only mildly cursing for leaving my Canon at home.

Families, lovers, and friends stretch out on wooden decks, admiring the coral sky from their boats. How easy it must be for them to sink into their private bliss. I wish I could join them in their calm, diving in and rinsing off the worries of the world. Except my incessant foot tapping would have another thing to say about it.

Seriously, Kat.

I watch my foot bounce up and down, taking notice of my unpainted toes. Shit. Of all the footwear at my disposal, I had picked sandals. The one option that highlights my gloriously dull, unadorned toenails. Hopefully he doesn't think unpainted toes are uncouth, gross, or lame.

He, being Conor, whose profile I stumbled across last week on the dating app I swore I'd never use. But after many lonely nights I don't care to count, my friend Tiff not-so-subtly snatched my phone and downloaded it, insisting that it was my turn to finally "get some."

His profile isn't bad. I mean, he's objectively attractive, yes. Dusty blond hair. Probably hits the gym six days a week after a morning protein shake and might even sprinkle a few CrossFit sessions in there too. Definitely a lifeguard.

And our obligatory prescreening text chat isn't too mind-numbing. If discussing the newest fad to practice yoga while goats climb on our backs doesn't scream sexy, I don't know what does.

Really though, how else am I supposed to break the awkward tension when messaging a stranger who could turn out to be obsessive,

psychopathic, or worse . . . nice. It would be great if I had prior romantic experience to pull from. But I don't. While everyone else my age was out having their sexual awakenings, I was burying myself in school and barely surmountable course loads. On the one hand, I've kept my clean-as-a-whistle academic record on its pedestal for all to see—Continental Air most especially. On the other, the art of the French kiss is vitally missing from my life's report card.

I figured once I hit the first tailgate at UConn, shotgunned a Miller Lite, and wowed all the boys with some forced extroverted charm, it'd be smooth sailing from there. Yet, as much as I idolized the idea of *lady in the streets, but a freak in the sheets*, I found myself watching from the sidelines too often to count. My roommates would make out with strangers at a New Haven nightclub or go skinny dipping without a second thought.

And there I was, propped up in bed preferring to watch *Little Women* or *Sleepless in Seattle* for the thirtieth time. In my defense, my choice was a tad more appealing than slugging vodka shots until 3 a.m. just for a guy drenched in cologne and back sweat to stick his slobbery tongue down my throat. And thus began the self-fulfilling prophecy for a dating dry spell.

Back to Conor. I wish I didn't have to use a blurry picture of a guy from his first frat party to gauge my attraction toward him. Why can't we have it like our parents did? Walk into a bar one night and find your mystery person hunched over a pool table. Better yet, what about the Jane Austen era? Walk downstairs and you oh-so-casually have company over to call on you. It's always some bogus connection like a friend of a friend of a cousin's old governess. Then, suddenly, the surrounding world collapses as your eyes meet theirs. From that moment on, whenever your paths cross, there's a fire lit beneath you, a shortness in your breath—and no, it's not the corset.

Wouldn't that be nice. Sometimes I think Jane should be shelved in fantasy. There's nothing general about that fiction.

Don't get me wrong, my life goal isn't marriage and triplets by twenty-three. But when you've still never even had a first kiss, you can only wonder if you'll be a bachelorette for life. Seriously, why is it that I can deliver the keynote at my graduation ceremony without a whisper of nerves, but the second I have to interact with the opposite sex, I'm a fumbling mess who doesn't know left from right? It's like all my intelligence, wit, and charm—if I have any—gets vacuumed from my body.

I flick up my phone.

7:37.

He was supposed to be here seven minutes ago. By now, the sun has almost fully sunk into the horizon, and the briny breeze reeking of low tide wanders to places where my chiffon dress isn't thick enough to block out the chilling air. Late May in Massachusetts really only brings warmth between the hours of ten and two.

I shift on the bench, nearly splintering the back of my bare thigh. Finally, my phone dings. I whip it up, my disappointment fleeing as quickly as I read his text.

Hey. So sorry to do this, but do you think we can reschedule? I popped a tire this afternoon.

Thank the heavens. After the superficial niceties of making sure he was okay, I let the whole date slide right off my back. The way I see it, I showed up, I did my part. I'm hoping his version of "rescheduling" is the same as mine, i.e., say it to be polite but no hard feelings if we both just let it fizzle out.

My stomach howls, and now that I have my night back, I know exactly how I want to spend it: plowing through enchiladas from the best Mexican restaurant in the Northeast while watching copious amounts of *Gilmore Girls* on my laptop.

I bolt to my car after picking up my order and sputtering out a few shaky sentences in Spanish to the hostess. Sure, I may have gotten a biliterate stamp on my high school diploma and minored in the

language in college, but every time I have to use it, my brain likes to pretend it's washed all the built-up knowledge down the drain.

As if on cue, Tiff calls on my drive home.

"Yes?" I say to the dashboard speaker.

"How did it go?"

I give her the details, scant as they are.

"Kat, I'm so sorry."

"It's fine, really. I've got better plans." The warm tortilla chips taunt me in the passenger seat. "Wait, that came out wrong. I'm sure he's nice and all—"

"Why do you keep avoiding going out with someone?" Tiff blurts out.

Easy for her to say when she's had guys fawning over her since the seventh grade when she invested in a push-up bra.

"I'm not avoiding it, I just have—"

"Other things to focus on?"

"Well, yeah." I'm getting defensive now. She knows how important Continental Air is to me. I've been wanting to apply to their Young Soarers program since I first found out about it. It's only been within my top three talking points for the last decade.

"I just want you to be happy," she says.

"I don't need a guy to be happy. I need the fruits of my frickin' labor to start showing up."

Tiff's silence catches me off guard. I look at the dashboard illuminating my face. It's the only light gracing my body, save for the stop lights and neon street signs shining through the windshield. Kind of weird to think that once the big lightbulb in the sky shuts off for the day, we're humbled to our small but mighty presence. We're left with ourselves and what we've created, good and bad.

Damn, I'm on a roll tonight.

But that's the problem I keep running into: I've got the one-liners—loglines in the making—but nothing to tie them together. No

story. And I don't have the time to try and figure it out, at least not right now. If I wanted to be a filmmaker, I wouldn't have majored in Marketing, right? At the time, it seemed like the most creative of the "regular" degree paths. But, nonetheless, I'll get to the entertainment industry eventually. Once I've got my platform, fulfilled my tenure in corporate America, and figured out what the heck I'd make in the first place.

It's not for lack of trying. May I present the dozens of filmmaking competitions I've entered from second to seventh grade. Pardon my French, but screw the Massachusetts Junior Creatives board who said my work lacked "vigor, originality, and vulnerability." We try not to think about that. Besides, I'm sure the *eventual* patrons of "An Ode to the Lobsterwoman" would have thought differently.

It's the worst itch I've ever faced; a yearning to play in a different world but no clear entryway. I'm just a business school misfit with a pesky spark.

Nonetheless, I still have space for content brainstorming sessions on my calendar to keep my creative juices refreshed. I've had to move it around a few times, but it's there. I'll get to it.

But mark my words, Kat Nieve McLauren *will* be a filmmaker. She'll direct. She'll produce. She'll write. She'll run the gamut regardless of the genre she settles on. There's no pigeonholing this phoenix even if she doesn't know the route to her dreams . . . yet.

There's a clatter coming through the speaker. "Tiff, you there?"

"Mm-hmm. Sorry, we're cleaning up from dinner. Our au pair came today. She's from France." Tiff, being the oldest of five brothers and sisters, used to be the go-to babysitter when we were in high school and her two lawyer parents were tied up in court. When she and I went to UConn, her mom learned of an au pair program that hires anyone eighteen to twenty-eight from around the world and sticks them with a family to handle their kids.

"France," I say, sighing. "Sounds nice."

“How’s your practice Young Soarers application coming by the way?”

“Fine.” Of course I don’t really believe that, but like hell I’m gonna let Tiff know. We may be best friends but I don’t want her to hear me squirm. It’s bad enough she gets to live with her boyfriend in New York while they work at their cushy accounting firm. I don’t need to openly admit that I’m freaking out over previous years’ essay prompts that I’m only using as prep for when the real application drops this summer.

Let me explain.

The Young Soarers program has to be the most coveted, the most prestigious, the most determinant of future success that the travel industry has ever seen. Reinforcing its hard-to-reach reputation, Continental Air only opens the hallowed admissions gates to new applicants every six years. And it just so happens that this year—my graduation year—intersects with the next induction window.

To be a Young Soarer is to be among a revered class of finance whizzes, top-tier marketers, and eloquent public relations professionals. I’ve had my sights set on it since I was still losing baby teeth and making excel sheets outlining the most illustrious companies and their top-earning positions.

Now, as a fresh college graduate with a business degree hot off the overpriced textbooks, I *will* be among the fifteen Young Soarers selected, continuing en route to fulfill my vision board’s timeline. First: Complete the Young Soarers three-year rotational program with stints in Accounting, Marketing and PR, and Pricing. Second: Schmooze through the corporate matrix with my plan to serve a lengthy term as the airline’s International Content Editor—a.k.a. travel blogger, but with dental. I have to. It’s only meant to be, given that I’ve been manifesting it for over a decade. Ever since I watched my first episode of *Globetrotter* and started making Pinterest boards chock-full of sculpted architectural masterpieces and turquoise waters. If I can’t be a

full-time movie maker just yet, then I'll gladly settle for a country-hopping journalist in the meantime. Ideally, if I could somehow pair my future filmmaking career with world travel, *that* would be the dream. But the dream has to wait. There's no telling how many books on the law of attraction I've impulse bought after listening to the respective authors speak on podcasts. Okay, fine. Seven.

I don't take such an intensive plan lightly. Oh no. I'm putting in the hours. I *have* put in the hours. All those countless weekends when I had opted to plow through essays and miscellaneous assignments so I'd have ample time to review them before their deadlines, consequently forgoing spontaneous beach days and ski trips. All to ensure high marks, while filling my "free time" with campus club meetings. After all, a Young Soarer is "a leader who keeps their visions in sight, navigating their way through storms and maneuvering with gravitas."

Check, check, and check.

Unfortunately, however, I'm missing one vital check: sufficient work experience abroad. And no, my semester in Sevilla doesn't count. Studying in a foreign country for six months is apparently *too* mainstream these days.

Muddled conversation and clanging silverware pounds through the speaker. I almost forgot Tiff and I were on the phone.

"Hey, do you want me to send the au pair website your way?" she asks.

"Why?" I grip the steering wheel tightly, my knuckles getting whiter.

"You need the experience, right?" Her voice teeters on a matter-of-fact and polite suggestion seesaw.

My jaw clenches as the law firm's rejection swarms my frontal lobe.

"I don't know if that qualifies," I grumble.

"It should. You know my brothers. What our au pair will be putting up with can probably guarantee her a seat in the CIA."

Stomping on the car break, my torso lunges into my seatbelt. Narrowly avoiding a deer darting across the road and into my headlight, the brown lunch bag holding my precious tortillas goes flying toward the glove compartment before spilling out on the sand-caked floor mat.

Lovely.

And by the time I pull into the driveway, my spicy rice bowl is getting lukewarm enough where it'll need the microwave to zap it back to life; the perfect segue to cut this conversation loose before I have to endure any more embarrassing pity.



I DON'T KNOW what made me do it.

Okay, false.

Pinot noir. That's the culprit.

Seriously, the one night I let myself go wild. What can I say? One and a half glasses later, and I'm a different woman.

I had just finished my spicy chicken, extra guac burrito bowl when the notification popped up on my phone. Tiff sent a picture of her family and the au pair from their earlier dinner. Next to pasta-sauce-smearred plates, their wine glasses hold only a few drops. It'd probably been one of those long dinners, where they've lost track of time and eaten so much but still have room to shovel in a few spoonfuls of Häagen-Dazs.

Must be nice. I take a long sip from my own glass.

"Don't waste me!" the red wine screams. I reason it'll start tasting funky tomorrow. Plus, I'm not *too* tipsy . . . yet.

As if my fingers have a mind and motive of their own, they tap away at my laptop's keyboard. I've interrupted my reality dating show and intermittent Instagram scrolls for this very important career-hinging research. It leaves me staring at the words "au pair jobs" sitting in the search bar. Hey, I *have to* indulge myself. If I can finagle an

international job overnight, then only three months stand between me and submitting my perfectly pristine Young Soarers application. And when I'm *obviously* inducted—seriously, how many candidates have dedicated two thirds of their lives to whetting their marketable skills and curating an immaculate academic record?—it'll at long last be the satiating culmination to a nearly fifteen-year-long effort. An odyssey more like.

I tighten the grip on my phone, scanning Tiff's photo. Then I scour the search results on my laptop and am drawn to the first company that pops up. *Dare to Au Pair*. The name taunts me a little. I click on the website link, and gigs posted from the Pacific Islands to India confetti the screen. My eyes examine the postings as my hand attempts to pour the last few drops from the bottle. The wine has obviously impaired my dexterity, my hand magnetically repelling itself from the glass as I struggle to get the cherry red liquid into the cup. A few droplets splash on the Continental Air brochures strewn along the counter, right across CEO Howard Gupta's face, staining his plump cheeks. His quote bubble snags my attention.

"We treasure your trip, big or small. Whether you're flying from Chicago to Sydney or London to Florence."

Mmm, Florence. Italy. Pasta. I could roll with that. But after thirty minutes of trying to find any open au pair positions around Florence, I was realizing I was a little late to the game. Italy must be a hot commodity for au pair hopefuls. I bet it's a bunch of eighteen-year-olds who want to take a gap year, fly to Europe, fall in love, and eat the best food of their lives.

And maybe they will, good for them. But I'm not into wishful thinking. It's never resulted in anything I can rely on.

Combing through the last remaining European positions, I stumble on one that was only posted fourteen hours prior. The site doesn't give much detail on the family for privacy reasons. The only information I can see is three kids, ages eight to eleven. Èze, France.

A quick Google Maps search tells me it's on the French Riviera near Cannes and Nice.

So maybe it's not Italy. But it's on the Mediterranean. And I do love a good baguette. Besides, when I studied abroad in Spain, I hardly touched France, except for one hurried weekend trip to Paris. Maybe Èze would be a good fit. Plus, the man ringing me out at a souvenir shop back in Charles de Gaulle airport had even told me I looked French. I still don't know what he meant by that. Maybe it's my brunette hair or the way I purse my lips when perusing a store. Could be my freckled skin or curvy hips or the fact that I can just barely skate by on basic French thanks to some affinity for language learning.

Thank goodness Mom's at choir rehearsal, unable to hear me drunkenly converse with myself as I rationalize this application and browse plane tickets. Normally, I'd sleuth through "pros and cons" and "liked, didn't like" videos on YouTube to help make my decisions. But tonight, the pinot dictates. And I don't care if it is the wine talking; my gut is telling me this'll be good. How can it not be? Dips in the glittering Mediterranean Sea, fresh-baked croissants, and I just have to watch some kids a few days a week. I mean, I've babysat before, in much less glamorous settings. And this *does* sound more attractive than the internship I didn't even get: filing paperwork and arranging a tax attorney's schedule in Dublin. I'll probably have spare afternoons to get some writing in—screenplay treatments, documentary outlines, the like. Maybe I'll embellish my creative portfolio, snapping some pictures and establishing video shots. A deep breath fills my lungs and swiftly escapes me as my email dings.

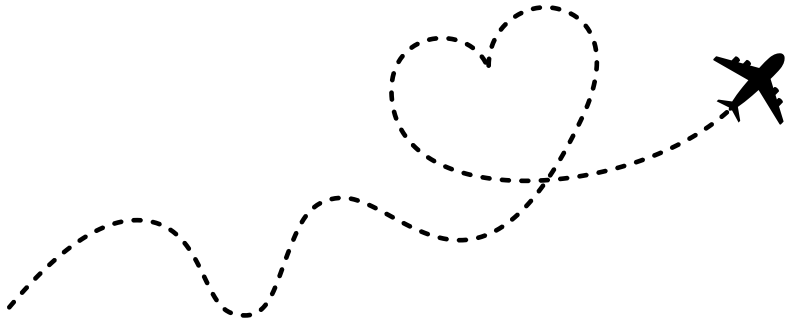
It's from the Welcome Team at Dare to Au Pair.

That was fast.

The subject line reads, "Félicitations et Bienvenue!"

I didn't think this far ahead.

Holy craptastic crapperoni.



CHAPTER TWO

Truly, I wasn't expecting unicorns to start line dancing across the floor while the New England Patriots sprayed champagne on me. But I thought I would feel something a bit more special than the heartburn swirling in my chest. Those fleeting seconds of relief after reading the congratulatory email came and went, leaving me right where I started—lying on my living room couch, no one around to divulge the news to.

Is this how all my classmates felt? The ones that got their jobs pre-graduation? What did they do after the momentary little joy ride from uploading their “thrilled to announce . . .” posts on LinkedIn?

Something about “So grateful to have graduated from one of the top business schools in the country, and now I’m gonna be a European nanny, but don’t worry because it’s just a dues-paying means to an end” just doesn’t sit right.

I’d rather keep my feed blank and save it for something worthwhile.

Mom took the news as best as she could. I wasn’t fortunate enough to escape her blank stare that had drawn out for what felt like eternity. She followed up with her slew of questions that I couldn’t answer because the au pair coordinators didn’t tell me jack.

“Is it safe? How do you know? Are they paying you? What about food? What will Continental think?”

That last one irked me most of all. Why would *they* care? It’s not like this type of work is beneath them. Besides, why can’t I make a decision for myself without feeling like I need the world’s thumbs up?

Anyway, it’ll be the breath of fresh air I need from living at home. Don’t get me wrong, Mom is a wonderful human. She makes the best pot roast and gladly joins me for ocean swims, even when the water temperature dips below sixty degrees. Aside from that, we’re two very different people. Exhibit A: She dutifully attends weekly vestry meetings, and I go to church on my yoga mat surrounded by quartz crystals. Do I need an Exhibit B?

We respect our differences, but the air is getting stale. And working abroad as a last-ditch effort to bolster my Young Soarers application sounds a bit more enticing than sitting around the house waiting for her to tell me for the nineteenth time this eon to clean out my closet. All while I go on another string of failed dates. No thanks.

The morning after I applied to my summer soiree, a hefty hangover loomed in my forehead—what I get for going with the nine dollar, bottom-shelf bottle of red. I tried for about two hours to undo my application, but in my drunken state, it looks like I had signed the binding e-contract after the coordinator sent me my acceptance email. And I wasn’t really looking to drop \$500 on the withdrawal fee.

It all happened so fast. I didn’t even have time to regret it, because my flight to France would take off thirty-six hours after my acceptance email came through, and I had to pack three months’ worth of clothes into one suitcase.

When I told Tiff the news, she cackled until my silence clued her in that I wasn’t joking, and yes, I was *actually* doing it. We promised to FaceTime, but we’re reluctant to admit that it’s just a nicety meant to make ourselves feel better. These days, text is our norm, even when we live four miles away from each other. This time, I think we both know

what'll end up happening. She'll be free when I'm busy and vice versa. The five hour time difference is just an added hindrance.

Our friendship clinging to childhood memories, it's like my best friend is slipping through my fingers. Like our chapter together is closing for now. Then who will I have? My social life has shriveled up like a raisin in the sun. Once the corporate era starts, Tiff will be living it up in New York with her boyfriend, Trey, and I'll probably coop up in some dingy Boston apartment alone. All our other college friends have moved out of state to bigger and better things, or so they say. But at least I'll be in my dream job with Continental Air once this joke of a summer is through. I hope.



THE PLANE RIDE, rather vainly I thought, would be productive.

"I'll have so much time to brainstorm," I said to myself. Maybe I'd finally finish my documentary outline on Icelandic orca pods or the memoir from study abroad that's nagging for my attention.

Sometimes I appease the Capricorn in me with the productive butterflies that come from thinking about the work, as if the act of planning it is equally as exciting as doing it. But the leather-bound journal and my favorite ballpoint pen sit in my backpack underneath the seat in front of me. And I don't bother moving an inch to retrieve them.

Instead, a twisting knot swells in my stomach. It's an all-too-familiar feeling. I felt this same out-of-body confusion watching my classmates walk across the graduation stage. Each of them wearing ear-to-ear smiles and the same not-so-flattering cap and gown. The promise of new adventures brimming in their eyes. A gilded vision of the future. An illusion. Seriously, did they really shake President Cawley's hand thinking, "Goodbye shotgunning beers outside the football stadium. Hello cube farm at insurance firm. This is where the real fun

begins.” Who am I to assume? Maybe they’re stoked, and I’m glad for them. But I can’t be the only one who didn’t want anything to do with that. Or they just have immaculate poker faces.

Still, it doesn’t change where I’m at now. It’s not like I can redo college. I don’t know which direction I’d choose if I even had the chance. Filmmaker of sorts, yes. But when a career lives on a project-to-project basis with no guarantee of stability, income, or health insurance, it’s hard to even think about taking the leap. Or, at least, that’s what my divorced mother has drilled into me.

Plus, it’s hard to admit to friends, family, and even strangers my dream to be a full-time creative if I’m not already a world-renowned Octavia Butler or Steven Spielberg. Like until you’ve won an Oscar or have taken home a National Book Award, don’t even bother classifying yourself a creator of any caliber. It’s a baseless and wildly false extrapolation, I know. But tell that to my clenching throat whenever someone asks about my real career aspirations.

My education is invaluable, I know it. Outside the major, it got me to think critically, to ask questions and learn from unique angles. I just wonder if my diploma read something different, what path it might have opened up for me.

But I can’t daydream any more could-have, should-have, or would-have scenarios. Because if my plan of becoming a Young Soarer inductee comes to fruition, I’ll be well on my way to living out the timeline on my vision board’s collage of magazine clippings.

Kat McLauren, travel writer extraordinaire with the nest egg to dive into the world of entertainment. A clear vision at my ship’s helm . . . hopefully. Sure, there may be some residual impatience for not throwing the ten-year plan aside and taking life by the horns now. But I’m not willing to chance sitting in a two-hundred-square-foot apartment eating Cup Noodles for the ninth night in a row, wondering why I threw my common sense down the drain. Fact is, the uncertainty of it all would chew me up and never spit me out.

On top of all of this swirling in a constant loop around my head, I can't possibly write even half a sentence on this circus of a flight. Across the aisle are two women who apparently hadn't read the unofficial rules to pipe down after dinner was served on the red eye.

Nope, they go right on with their conversation, so by the time we've reached the middle of the Atlantic, everyone onboard, including the pilot, can tell how upset woman #1 is with her daughter becoming a yoga instructor in Bali and how woman #2 can't fathom where the younger generation's work ethic has gone.

It completely interrupts my perusal of the sparse documents the Dare to Au Pair company had sent about the kids I've been assigned. An eleven-year-old girl and two eight-year-olds, a boy and a girl. No names listed. All that's provided is an image of a rustic cottage, an address, a list of French emergency services numbers, and a brochure highlighting must-see attractions in the French Riviera.

The plane gabbers continue on with their gossip, so I cue the noise-canceling headphones.

Ah, that's better. The first dollop of quiet on this trip settles in, bringing with it a tingling in my stomach. I don't have enough evidence or Wi-Fi signal to consult Google for which of my chakras is getting all fired up. Then I begin to feel something else. Down my back this time. Not tingly. Wet. Cold and wet.

What the—

I leap forward as the chill sends shivers up and down my spine. Turning around, I meet the menace. It's a three year old who spilled his juice bottle. I smile at him and then his father who desperately apologizes in French. I open my mouth but realize I have no clue how to say this in his language. So I go with what I know that's closest.

"It's okay. Está bien." My aggressive head nods communicate more than my words.

He's cute. The kid, I mean. Well, the dad's not too bad looking himself. Forget age. He looks like he could be in a Giorgio Armani

commercial. But as much as I can hope for a drop of vain attention, I'm delusional if I think he'd ever flirt with me. Without makeup, I can pass as a high school sophomore.

I wave to the little boy. At first he playfully grins, biting one of his fingers and giggling intermittently. But that ends without warning. Not two seconds later, his juice bottle goes flying and smacks me right in the forehead. His laughter explodes as the orange juice drips down my jawline. Other passengers offer napkins and empathetic glances that make me want to hurl.

Instead, I scurry to the bathroom at the rear of the plane and comply with the faucet's weak water pressure. The hairs framing my face are still sticky as I coat them with a damp paper towel. The coolness gives me pause, and I stare at myself in the reflection.

What am I doing?

I've exceedingly succeeded in having the most dreadful start-of-a-journey flight. Maybe this'll be the only bad juju for the trip. There's a hiccup in every travel story, right? I've just gotten it out of the way early on. I'm fine with that. So long as it's not foreshadowing my life for the next three months. I thought babysitting would be easy.

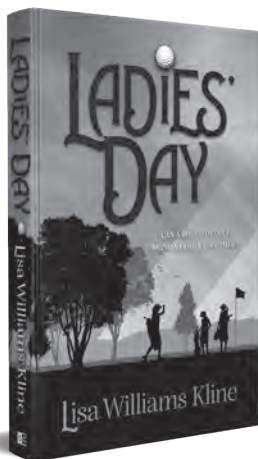
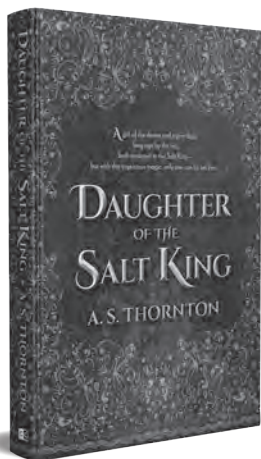
After I return to my seat and give the father and his kid a polite *it's-not-okay-but-I'll-pretend-like-it-is* nod, I grip the plastic armrests for the next three hours as my worries torment my brain.

What if I just quit while I'm ahead?

No, I can't do that. My hopefully-soon-to-be Continental Air co-workers will think I have the work ethic of a fruit fly. But maybe I can find an excuse that would let me go home. Something socially acceptable that wouldn't stab my integrity or conscience. In the meantime, I just hope I can wrangle these kids better than I can the toddler kicking my seat.



MORE WHIMSICAL ROMANCE READS FROM CAMCAT BOOKS



Available now, wherever books are sold.





CamCat Books

VISIT US ONLINE FOR MORE BOOKS TO LIVE IN:
CAMCATBOOKS.COM



SIGN UP FOR CAMCAT'S FICTION NEWSLETTER FOR
COVER REVEALS, EBOOK DEALS, AND MORE EXCLUSIVE CONTENT.



CamCatBooks



@CamCatBooks



@CamCat_Books



@CamCatBooks

*Café au lait, career epiphanies,
— and love triangles.
Just a typical day at your summer job.*

When recent business school grad and meticulous ten-year planner, Kat McLauren, takes an unplanned au pair position in the French Riviera to schmooze a future employer, she haphazardly upholds her reputation while rejuvenating a local tourism magazine, grappling with three unruly kids, and avoiding a romance with the host family's eldest son. But if a summer full of well-aged wine, sizzling flirtation, and a bit of betrayal can promise one thing, it's that sometimes the best things in life are the ones we don't plan for.



**CamCat
Books**

Cover Design: Maryann Appel

Cover Artwork: Leontura, Proslgn, Virtusis

Fiction / Romance

USD\$16.99 CAD\$21.99 GBPE£13.99

ISBN 978-0-7443-1032-0

90000



9 780744 310320

BE THE FIRST TO HEAR about new CamCat titles, author events, and exclusive content! Sign up at camcatbooks.com for the CamCat Publishing newsletter.