

# TAKE FLIGHT

A short story

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"I need to shave my legs before we go," said Missy, as she buckled her short denim skirt.

"It's always something. Either you have to shave your legs or paint your toenails. I just don't understand why you're never ready when it's time to go." Rocky rolled his eyes as he stomped around the bedroom.

"I hate the nubs, and you like my soft smooth legs and you know it. And I've already painted my toenails, thank you very much."

"It's a stock car race for god's sake, not a cocktail party. Now come on." He turned and walked away.

Missy mumbled under her breath, "I wish it *was* a cocktail party." She slammed the bathroom door as Rocky stomped down the hall. He walked to the kitchen and grabbed a beer, then got busy in the garage under the hood of his old '55 Chevy while she sat on the side of the bathtub shaving her legs.

Slipping on her glittery-heeled sandals, she looked at her reflection in the mirror. Even with pretty blonde hair draped over her shoulders, she didn't feel comfortable with her appearance, nevertheless had become accustomed to it. She never felt pretty enough for Rocky, or anyone else for that matter. Reaching for the clutch purse that matched the floral pattern on her summery blouse, she headed to the kitchen to try to smooth things over with Rocky again. There she heard the clanging of tools in the garage, and of course she knew this is where he went when he was annoyed with her.

Attempting to make a sexy entrance when she walked down the garage steps from the kitchen door, she could see his backside as he worked under the hood. She snuck up behind him, grabbed his butt and gave it a squeeze. It startled him so much that he quickly stood up, bumped his head on the raised hood, and let out a yell. "SHIT! What the hell?!"

Rocky turned around and saw Missy standing in her short skirt and heels trying to look sexy, and then she gasped, "My god, Rocky! I was only playing around! I'm so sorry!" He grabbed a greasy rag off his workbench to catch the blood running down his face from the cut in his forehead; she turned and ran back up the steps into the kitchen, and frantically searched the pantry for a plastic bag to make an ice pack. Rocky followed her into the kitchen, but this time, grease had gotten into the wound so he leaned over the sink to wash it with soap and water. Missy held paper towels on the cut to stop the bleeding, and then he held the ice pack on it. "We'll, I guess this means we can't go to the race tonight, doesn't it?" she asked, pouting.

He looked down at her sparkly sandals and skimpy outfit. "Missy, you don't want to go to the race. Your shoes give it away. Stay home and I'll go alone. Just find me a damn band aid."

"I do too want to go, especially if you insist on going with that huge gash on your head. I'm so sorry honey. I was just playing with you." Missy felt like she had to stick with him no matter what, keeping him attracted to her with her young alluring body. She was insecure without him and was afraid if he left without her, he would find another woman, leaving her with no one or nowhere to turn.

"It's not a huge gash. Good god, this is nothing. Hell, I've sewn up worse cuts than this with fishing line on the riverbank. Are you finally ready? I'm missing the race."

Missy put the bandage on Rocky's forehead, grabbed her petite purse, and hurried after him. He slammed the hood on his cherryed out Chevy while she carefully sat down in the passenger seat. Her tight skirt rode up her thighs so high that he could see the crotch of her panties. She picked up her legs, trying her best to keep her knees together. However, it was difficult because of how high the car was off the ground compared to her 5'3" frame. As she swiveled around to face forward, he slammed the door, shaking his head. She saw his reaction to her short skirt as she looked away.

They pulled into to the dusty parking lot. "Honey, can't you park closer this time?"

"Why?" Rocky asked with his usual detached tone.

"In case it rains. I hate walking through the mud."

"You should've thought of that before you put on those silly sandals. We have to park where those boys tell us. This is how it's done at the tracks, and you knew that before you came." He kept silent and followed the directions of the parking attendants.

Missy turned her head away and stared out the window as they drove through the dirt field, wishing she were somewhere else. She thought about her high school days ... no cute clothes, no cell phone, no friends, and no car. Which ones married their sweethearts? Did any of them go to college? Were they traveling the country or world? She thought how traveling could be an escape.

Growing up, both parents were heavy drinkers. Vodka tonic was Mother's drink every afternoon, and Dad drank a case of beer every other day. The family fell apart after her mother gained a few pounds and grew that spare tire that so many middle-aged women get. Her Dad belittled and berated her on her appearance, although he had a huge beer gut himself. Through constant verbal abuse, he convinced her mother that she couldn't survive on her own because she was too ignorant and stupid to support herself. Then he quit coming home at night, and Missy heard rumors around town that he was seeing a young blonde.

Missy was fourteen when her dad divorced her mom, and remarried only a month after the divorce was final. She was introduced to a 23 year old stepmother, whom she thought had as much sense as the little shaggy dog the new bride kept on her lap most of the time. She rarely saw her dad after he left

them, although he picked her up for a weekend every now and then in the beginning. The weekends became further apart until she only saw him on her birthday once a year, and maybe at Christmas.

After high school and with no direction, any hope for college was dashed when her parents told her to get out and find a job like they did when they were her age. She had been waiting tables after school since she was old enough to work, and was still waiting tables in a local café. Her mother had moved them from apartment to apartment until, finally, she couldn't make the rent a few months in a row and they ended up homeless. They found themselves sleeping in the car on many nights, taking spit baths in the truck stop or rest area before school. She desperately tried to look and act like a normal teenager before her thoughtless mother would drop her off at school in the morning. Men would take them in for a few weeks at a time if Mom would "put out", then they'd end up in a drunken fight. Missy then knew that her next night would be spent in the car parked at a truck stop, while mom slept in a smelly truck cab with the driver to help pay for the next bottle of vodka, gas and few meals. It was a depressing and dismal existence for a girl trying to find direction in her life. Acting normal became a challenge, but she learned how to *act normal*, no less.

Her grades were high enough to go to college, but without support, she never found the way. Waiting tables was not the future that she dreamed of. She was tired of bouncing from truck stop to truck stop, or couch to couch, doing homework on a picnic table at the rest stop, or in the back seat, depending on her mom's degrading behavior, but she felt she had few choices to get away on her own. The only other option was living with her father, whose wife she considered a sleazy bimbo and treated her like dirt. The advice her mother offered was that as long as she kept her figure and looked pretty, she'd always have a bed, a roof over her head, and food in her stomach. She convinced her that college would be a waste of time and money, money they didn't have, and that all she needed was a man to take care of her. High school graduation was a high point for her, but neither parent showed up. Her faith in her future and self confidence was shaken. She felt she had nowhere to turn to get away from the circle of life she was trapped in.

One lonely night in a local bar, Missy found that meal ticket she'd been waiting for. Rocky offered her a ride home, along with his bed, and she took him up on it. Two days after she met him, he began buying her sexy clothes, jewelry, and all the things she had never had before. She believed she had met the man she needed and that she'd struck gold. For 2 years, she stuck it out with him, but never felt complete or happy. Her life became a daily show of acting; trying to appear normal, just as she had done early in life with her parents.

As Rocky drove through the dirt field by the racetrack, Missy stared out of the window towards the loud cars going round and round. She kept thinking about her life with Rocky. He gave her money for clothes, make-up, anything she wanted ... except a diamond engagement ring. She thought to herself, "Will he ever propose? I need that commitment. I wonder if he'll just leave me when I turn middle age, like Dad did Mom. What should I do?" She was deep in thought as he pulled the Chevy between two pickup trucks. Rocky was 40 years old, exactly double her age, and had an eighteen year old daughter who resented her. Missy understood her feelings all too well.

Parking the old Chevy, Rocky turned and said, "You ready to walk in those stupid heels? Why the hell didn't you wear some decent shoes for walking through a dirt field?"

"These are pretty and I thought you'd like them. I always wanted a pair and finally got them so I'm going to wear them." She grabbed her small clutch purse. "Like I said at home Rocky, I like to look pretty for you." He shook his head as he mumbled under his breath.

He got out of his prized classic car, lit a cigarette, and took a long drag off his smoke as he gazed towards the track. As she struggled to open the heavy door, he looked back at her and said, "Look at you. Ain't too smart, are ya'? *Now hurry up.* We're late because you had to shave your *damn legs*. Hey, hold my keys for me. They bother me in my pocket." He tossed his oversized keychain towards her as she was sliding out of the car. Missy slid down out of the seat of the car to the dirt ground, leaned over and picked his keys up trying to shake the dirt off them before putting them in her purse. His words burned a hole through her heart. All she knew was that she had to stay young and pretty to keep a roof over her head and food in her stomach. She didn't want to end up losing this man. She was in constant fear of losing her pretty young face or gaining a little weight. She needed him and the security of a home so she put up with the emotional abuse. She struggled to keep up with him as they walked towards the dirt track. The sound was deafening as the cars rounded the track. She hated the dusty air and the red clay, but she didn't know what other options she had.

An hour or so after the race started, Rocky and his buddies were on their third or fourth beer. "We're going to get another beer; be right back." Rocky and his drinking buddy both stood up and staggered as they headed towards the concession stand. Not only were they drinking beer, but they were also passing a whiskey flask around. Missy knew she would have to wrestle the keys out of his hands later to keep him from driving home. After the last race, he nearly killed them on the way home, and she was not going to allow it to happen again. It would be a challenge to *keep* the keys from him, but she had them for now. That big Chevy was bigger and bulkier than any car she'd ever driven, but she wasn't going to let him kill her or anyone else on the way home tonight.

For several minutes, she stared toward the cars going round and round, but she didn't see them. Deep in thought, she saw herself in the backseat as a child with drunken parents arguing in the front. The thought of living with a condescending drunk for the rest of her life had her in a trance. The deafening sounds of the engines and a beer spilled on her feet brought her back to the present. She looked around the stands and watched as drunks shouted obscenities and spit constantly. She felt disgusted with her surroundings. She was the only female with a skirt on, the only one not smoking, the only one with a full set of teeth, and apparently, the only sober person in the stands. Reality began setting in as she realized these two years she had been with Rocky had been miserable. Constantly trying to impress him with her looks and his sexual needs was her lot in life right now. She considered her future with him. She watched the racecars going in circles, always in the same direction. They were going nowhere, over and over. Suddenly she realized they were a reflection of her life.

Before she knew it, she had stood up and was headed towards the car, alone, knowing she had the keys...the keys to her future. This was her chance to break free. Painful words began running through

her mind as she walked. Every time she told Rocky she wanted to go to college, he told her she wasn't smart enough and he wasn't going to waste his money. He always said, "Just stay pretty and you won't have to worry about a thing. You'll always have your "sugar daddy" to take care of you. Where do you think you'd go anyway? Back out on the street where I found you?"

As she walked towards the parking lot with his keys in her hand, she began to realize a few things. He managed to extinguish any ambition she was trying to muster, just like her parents always did. Everywhere she looked, she saw defeat before she even started. She knew her father was nowhere to be found by this time; busy with his young wife. She had nobody to turn to but herself. It was now or never. She looked up to the stars and whispered, "God, I'm going to need you tonight."

Missy thought about the money she had been secretly tucking away in an old purse hidden deep in her dresser. She quietly mumbled to herself, as she struggled through the dirt. "I bet there's almost a thousand dollars. I'm getting the hell out of here. I'm not going to be a truck stop whore like my mother, and I'm not going to be a doormat or sex slave for men to wipe their filthy feet on. I'm not anybody's fool any more. No more. It stops here. I'm breaking this circle right here and now!"

As she hurried towards the car, Jesse popped into her mind, her favorite cousin. He had joined the Coast Guard right out of high school with intent to fund his college, but soon discovered a life of travel and awesome adventures. Missy began thinking about his adventures he'd talked about with flying in the Coast Guard doing Search and Rescue. She went on thinking about how he had saved lives, served the country, and how much respect she felt towards him because of his service. Self respect and dignity was something she had never experienced, but she knew she still had a chance. The GI Bill for college crossed her mind as she thought about starting online classes like Jesse did. He had earned his college degree while in the Coast Guard, and at the young age of thirty, he was planning his second career. As she unlocked the car door, she spoke out loud, "*I need to call Jesse!*"

She climbed into the driver's seat and turned the key, quickly glancing back towards the track to clear her getaway. Nobody was in sight. She strained to see over the wheel. "Dang, this steering wheel seems awful big, but I know I can handle this thing," she remarked, as she struggled with the oversize wheel. As she pulled the stick on the column down into drive, the engine began to growl. Carefully avoiding as many potholes as possible, she found the highway and took off, getting up to 55 miles per hour down the long straight road towards the house. To her surprise, she enjoyed driving that big old car, even without power steering. As heavy and cumbersome as the steering wheel and car felt, she found that she could turn it any way she wanted when she put her strength into it.

She parked the Chevy in the garage while making a mental list of what she needed to do to get away quickly. As soon as she walked inside, she grabbed her cell phone and called Jesse, stationed in Hawaii. To her surprise, he promptly answered, and was surprised and happy to hear from his younger cousin. After several minutes of her giving a brief explanation, they settled on a plan.

Jesse said, "It'll take a long time to get all the way out here from Alabama. The recruiter is a friend of mine so we'll set up a meeting. She won't lead you astray, and I bet we can get you into aviation too. There are so many opportunities for you in the Coast Guard, and you'll love it. Michelle, you can go to

college and plan for the rest of your life. You're making the right move. You've *got* to get yourself off that endless merry-go-round. You know I was in a similar situation with my parents, but we have to depend on ourselves if we want things to change. You come on out, little cousin. Call me from the airport when you've confirmed your flight plans."

Excitement and fear overcame her. "Jesse, that sounds awesome, but I've never flown in my life."

"You'll be fine," he said. "Just calm down and take it one step at a time. Go to the airport and they'll help you. Call me from there."

"Okay. I'm nervous but I *know I can do this*. God will give me the courage. I'll call you from the airport. I'm ready for take off!"

Eagerly she changed into jeans, a decent blouse, some comfortable walking shoes, gathered clothes, and counted her money. "Great, over a thousand dollars, enough to buy a plane ticket to Hawaii." She knew she didn't have much time before Rocky would show up with one of his drunken buddies. She talked to herself in a low voice, as she quickly separated her clothes into two piles. "No sleazy clothes, and *no more Missy. Never again*. I'm done with satisfying everyone else. *My name is Michelle Turner.*" Turning her head towards the kitchen, she spoke out loud, "I'm Michelle again!"

After hastily stuffing her nicer clothes, shoes, and personal items in the faded suitcase she had used for the last ten years, she walked into the kitchen and grabbed a piece of notebook paper off the desk and began writing. 'Rocky, I'm sorry I took your car without asking, but you were too drunk to drive. I'm breaking out of this circle I'm in. Thanks for taking me in for the last couple of years and maybe one day, we can be friends. However for now, I have to find my own way. Please don't try finding me. I'm going far away to make something of myself. Take care of yourself and that awesome Chevy. It's a nice ride. Love, Michelle.'

Walking out of the front door she called a taxi on her cell phone and told him to pick her up in front of the closest grocery store. With a shoulder bag, her rolling suitcase, and with a brisk pace, she walked the mile to the store without looking back. The taxi arrived several minutes after she sat down on the bench in front of the store. Watching down the road in anticipation, she saw it coming. "Finally. Thank God."

The taxi pulled up and she got in the back seat, took a deep breath, and told the driver, "To the airport, please." Then she closed her eyes, exhaled and felt her shoulders relax.

"Yes'm. Where you heading, if you don't mind me asking?"

She firmly responded, "I'm heading to the top!"

"I like that! Sounds like the place to be!" he replied with a chuckle.

Michelle stared at the runway lights in the distance. Butterflies filled her stomach. "I've never flown before. This ought to be interesting," she remarked to the driver, as they pulled up to the departure gates.

"Everybody has to start somewhere. The clerks will help you." He pointed to the gate attendant. "You tell them what your destination is, and they'll get you there ... as long as you got the do-re-me."

Michelle handed him a ten for her ride as he wished her luck. "I may need it, thank you," as he handed her the suitcase. She turned and headed towards the ticket counter, pulling everything she now owned in one suitcase and a shoulder bag. "I'd like a one way ticket to Honolulu please." The woman at the ticket counter handed her the boarding pass after Michelle paid mostly in twenty dollar bills.

Michelle turned and headed towards security, trying to appear like an experienced traveler. She watched the actions of others and quickly soaked in the routines of flying, then blended into the crowd of travelers as she found her gate. With wonder and excitement, she watched a huge airplane pull up to her gate and begin the process to prepare for her flight. Her future was unfolding before her eyes. No more circles, just a straight shot across the country to her destination. A grin of excitement was etched across her face as she imagined what her future would be. After a few moments, an attractive woman neatly dressed in a military uniform sat down across from her. Michelle assumed she was in the Coast Guard, and began imagining herself in that uniform ... independent, successful, commanding respect because of her appearance alone, making a difference in so many important ways. As she looked back at the big jet on the tarmac, pride, fear, and a dozen other emotions swelled in her heart. A tear rolled down her cheek.

Boarding began and Michelle handed the ticket clerk her boarding pass. The clerk said, "I see your destination is Hawaii. Enjoy your vacation and have a good flight!" She scanned the pass and handed it back to Michelle.

The thought of going on a vacation was the last thing on her mind, but the thought put a *genuine* smile on her face. No more acting. "I will. Thank you." Michelle began her long walk down the jet way and never looked back except to say goodbye during take off as she watched out of the window until the runway lights were out of sight. As darkness emerged under the plane, she looked up at the stars, closed her eyes, and thanked God for her courage.