

ONE THOUSAND KILOMETRES IS A LONG TIME TO BE AWAY

BY CONNIE BOLAND

I am heart hammering, thighs trembling, fingers shaking, excited.

Wiggling in my seat like a teenager on the last day of school before summer break. Like a five-year-old who can see the chocolate cake but must eat her carrots first. A potty-training toddler who has to go...right now.

"Will this plane never land!" I am 100 percent restless anticipation.

My seatmate shifts toward the aisle. I glance at her sideways, trying unsuccessfully to wipe the grin from my flushed face. My hairless armpits are damp. There's a band of sweat under my red lace bra. The matching thong is moist. Pants are snug around my groin. A romance novel pulsates on my lap.

"How long have you been away?" My seatmate hands over a plastic glass of water expertly poured by our flight attendant.

"Can I get you ladies anything else?"

Condensation cools my hot fingers. Water droplets tickle my palm. Liquid does not satisfy my thirst. "How long to Deer Lake?"

My seatmate has a deep, throaty laugh.

"About 20 minutes." The flight attendant bends over to release the brakes on her cart. "We'll be there before you know it." She pushes on down the aisle.

"Ten weeks," I tell my seatmate. "How did you know?"

She nods toward the couple to our left. Heads together, cuddled under a blanket, legs askew. Giggling. "You sound like them."

I lean forward. "Young love," I say, settling back against warm leather. "How sweet are they?"

Seventy days of Facetime chats is a long time to be away from your partner. Nights are cold in Northern Labrador. In our mid-50s, we are too awkward for phone sex.

"What did you miss the most," my seatmate asks.

I don't talk about pelvic floor exercises. I imagined sitting on a marble. Squeezing gently, holding the muscles tight. Releasing the marble.

Instead, I say: "I missed..."

"I missed things I didn't know he did until he wasn't there to do them."

I tell her about my favourite Mom mug, coffee, and full fat cream laid out on the kitchen counter while I sleep. Twenty-dollar bills tucked into my wallet. A full gas tank in the morning. Snow brushed from my windshield. "I missed the things that make me feel loved."

The flight attendant is back. "We're getting ready to land," she says. "You're almost home." A single tear tastes like salt.

It's a short stroll across the tarmac. He's slouched against a wall in the arrivals lounge. Sky blue eyes twinkle over an ebony mask. The skin under his eyeglasses crinkle with the power of his smile. He tugs at my zipper. Pulls me into the sweet spot under his chin. He smells like shampoo, seared prime rib, and moose stew. He smells like home. We stand breast to chest, until the baggage alert forces us apart.

"I'll get your bags," he whispers. "Stay here. Don't move. I just want to be able to see you."