



The Devil's Seat

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Detailed Synopsis

After Southland Air Flight 593 made an emergency landing in Chicago nearly two years earlier, for those who survived the impact and fire, their lives were forever changed. Senior flight attendant Maggie Lund walked away from the accident without a scratch. However, she suffers from chronic nightmares and PTSD made more profound by her firm belief that greedy-airline executives, with no regard for human life, purposely “retired” an outdated, fuel-guzzling 737-400 aircraft in what should have been a survivable, wheels-up landing on foam. Instead, Flight 593 ended in disaster with the death of fifty passengers and crew. Frustrated by the fact that no one will believe her story, Maggie eventually has a nervous breakdown while working a trip; she dies that night in her hotel room, a victim of an *alleged* suicide.

First officer Michael Stern was the copilot of Flight 593 when the crew made their fateful, final approach to the airport. After the landing gear wouldn't properly lower, a combination of wind shear and bad luck caused the aircraft to careen off the runway, break apart and then catch fire. With the captain having died in the crash, the investigation was complicated. Authorities relied on witness interviews, flight data and cockpit recordings to piece together what actually went wrong. The NTSB stopped short of calling the crash “pilot-error”, but Michael Stern suffered a painful leg fracture, endured months of physical therapy, and ultimately lost his job at the airline when it was discovered that he had been seen flirting with an attractive-female passenger in an airport lounge just minutes before Flight 593 was scheduled to depart. And although there was no actual proof of his wrongdoing, the implication was that he had a few drinks before the flight, thus impairing his skills as an aviator and his judgement in landing.

Stephanie Stevens, a young, new-age-spiritualist, and sister-in-law of first officer, Michael Stern, is a newer Southland Air employee. Fresh out of flight attendant training or what is affectionately known as “Barbie boot

camp”, Stephanie is eager for work; however, as the airline struggles, she only gets a few trips a month, mainly when other more senior flight attendants need sick leave. Stephanie spends most of her free time helping to provide daycare for her niece, Amanda, as the whole Stevens-Stern family struggles financially. After Flight 593 survivor Maggie Lund has her psychotic episode on a trip, and needs to be replaced, Stephanie dead-heads a flight from her tiny apartment in Los Angeles to join Maggie’s former crew in Phoenix.

When Stephanie’s trip out of Sky Harbor is then grounded for increasingly-common Southland Air mechanical problems, and the crew faces a long delay, she decides to leave the airport and visit a college roommate who lives in the area. The two spend the morning reminiscing and discussing the meaning of life over a few glasses of wine. As the time speeds by, Stephanie realizes she has to get back to the airport and join her crew. She leaves with a heavy heart, realizing that her roommate, who married into wealth, has become imprisoned by the same luxurious circumstances. During her cab ride back to Sky Harbor, Stephanie appreciates how lucky she is in life as an independent, spiritual woman, despite her bills and lack of work. Ironically, at this precise moment Stephanie notices the cab driver speeding up at an intersection to beat the light; “a terrifying eternity seemed to pass until, finally, metal met metal, and then everything faded to blackness when flesh met blunt force . . .”

Jillian Stevens-Stern is a senior flight attendant for Southland Air and is the wife of Flight 593 first officer and survivor, Michael Stern. She met her soon-to-be husband on a trip and after a torrid night together at the crew hotel, Jillian became pregnant; playboy, jet-jock Michael became a father and husband almost overnight. Seven years later, their daughter, Amanda, has been exhibiting incredible artistic talents yet she has difficulty socializing, leading Jillian to believe her daughter maybe a savant, or possibly autistic. Amanda is enrolled in a very expensive private school for exceptional children; it is also an outstanding school that Jillian and Michael can barely afford. Further, Jillian lacks a maternal closeness with Amanda that she blames on her work schedule and so many trips from home. In reality, Jillian secretly harbors a little resentment towards her sister and childcare provider Stephanie, because Amanda seems to be more endeared to her loving, free spirit. When the family discovers Stephanie has been killed in the car accident, Jillian is wrought with sorrow and guilt, while Amanda is simply devastated, nearly to the point of complete denial. Amanda’s emotional struggle becomes more troubling for Jillian and Michael as their daughter firmly believes she is being visited by her beloved aunt.

In the years following the tragedy of Flight 593, Southland Air is attempting to upgrade its aging fleet, but it is slow-going and costly. While the Stevens-Stern family attempts to cope with their loss, while at the same time helping Amanda manage with her delusions, officials at Southland Air are dealing with a disturbing situation as well. Another one of the airline’s older 737-400 jets, registration number N013SL, is wreaking havoc with its pilots, flight attendants and passengers. Somehow, it seems, this aircraft has a mind of its own, and after countless inspections, it is deemed safe and cleared to resume service. To make matters more mysterious, it’s not only the airplane’s unresponsive flight controls, there are also reports of a ghostly stowaway haunting the cabin and then disappearing, leaving only puddles of freezing-cold water on the carpets and seats. Publically, the ghost stories would be a PR nightmare and a Southland employee can be fired for even mentioning the strange occurrences. However, when a veteran Southland captain suffers a fatal-heart attack while trying to save his aircraft from an inexplicable and uncontrollable dive, airline upper management is forced to take action.

As Southland Air employees struggle to keep their airline safe and profitable, Percy Pierpont, the new company CEO has an agenda of his own. After wresting control of the company from its aging founder, Tony Horan, Pierpont’s cost-cutting, bottom-line approach to business helps the end Southland’s economic free-fall; he is rewarded with profit sharing, unrivaled authority and a golden parachute should the airline ever be taken-over by a rival carrier. However, Horan, a flying veteran who started the airline with a single airplane, believes the cost-cutting will lead to more catastrophes like Flight 593. After his ouster, as a majority shareholder Horan wills all of his common stock to everyday employees provided there are no additional accidents before his death. This multi-million dollar gifting is meant to be a safety incentive, to insure public confidence about Southland’s commitment to its passengers. This generous gift ultimately earns him the trust and loyalty of the

people who make the airline work. But there's an important stipulation; if another accident occurs due to poor maintenance or pilot error, prior to Horan's death, the stocks will revert to his estate and be sold off, leaving the airline highly vulnerable to corporate acquisition. And the only Southland individual who would profit from this scenario is CEO mogul, Percy Pierpont.

Notwithstanding the professional challenges for all Southland employees, including Jillian and Michael, if the tragedy of Flight 593 hadn't truly tested their marital relationship, the loss of Stephanie, and the profound effect it had on daughter Amanda, puts the entire family into an emotional tailspin. Seemingly unable to accept her aunt's death, Amanda is convinced that Stephanie is an angel who visits her at home and in school. Further, her classroom artwork depicts witches, demons and plane crashes, greatly frightening her classmates and concerning her teachers. For Michael, already stressed by his inability to find work as a pilot, when Jillian brings their daughter to a child psychologist without his consent, he's had enough and walks out on the family. Feeling disrespected and eager to regain his self-esteem, Michael embarks on soul-searching path that may have deadly consequences for him, his new crewmembers and for passengers who will entrust him with their lives.

Soon, the forces of the moral and malevolent will collide with innocent lives hanging in the balance. Several weeks after Stephanie's death, Jillian used most of her emergency leave time. Before her return to work, Jillian is desperate to find a way to help her daughter heal. Hoping that maybe just a change of circumstances and perspective is the solution, Jillian decides to take Amanda on a trip to Florida for much-needed vacation. After receiving free-employee passes from Southland Air, the week before Thanksgiving, they board a morning flight to Orlando, on the ghostly 737-400 with tail number N013SL. With the identity of the pilots unknown to Jillian and Amanda, once airborne something bizarre occurs on the flight deck that causes great concern for everyone at the mercy of the flight crew. Minutes into the flight, the emergency oxygen masks drop, yet the aircraft is still climbing, leaving in question, who or *what* is flying the plane. Soon, the synergies of man and his machines, reality and dreams, forlorn love and a hunger for revenge, merge at altitude when the living encounters the dead. In order for the passengers and crew to survive, a mother, a husband and a daughter must overcome the wrath of a vengeful spirit, possessed with remorse and vengeance, blinded by rage and oblivion, obsessed with making an ominous truth known, and is occupying *The Devil's Seat*.