



**CAT OUT  
OF THE BAG**



— BY THE TAIL - BOOK I —

**TATIANA  
CALDWELL**

## CAT OUT OF THE BAG (By the Tail, Book 1)

### *Excerpt*

Sofia Saldana expelled a long, deep breath and rubbed her hands down her face as she tried to relax in her seat. She'd almost missed this flight. Stupid job had even had her come in at five that morning to address an issue before she left for her trip. Damn, she hated her boss, that team, that company. It was going to be so good to escape all of that for a full week.

The plane was deceptively calm and quiet as it moved along the runway. Any minute now they'd be picking up speed and the craft would be vibrating with the violent roar of the engines preparing for takeoff. She hated that she was stuck at a window seat. Right at the wing, on top of that. But she'd booked the flight to San Francisco during a last-minute decision to leave New York City for a much-needed seven-day getaway to try to save her sanity, and this was the only seat left. She'd just have to either close her eyes or keep her focus solely on the hardcover novel gripped in her trembling hands.

Small price to pay to not have to worry about the pressures of work for a bit. She just had to make it through these few hours of anxiety.

"Don't like flying?"

The gruff, masculine voice startled her. She'd barely paid attention to anything at all on the aircraft since boarding it, not even the casually dressed, attractive man she was seated right next to who was now speaking to her. He was in his early-to-mid-thirties, about her age.

"Am I that obvious?"

"Yes. You are that obvious," he said. The expression on his face was a mixture of concern and amusement.

She gave him a laughing snort and a slight shake of her head. "It's funny, because it's not the idea of being high up that frightens me. I'm fine, so long as I don't look down."

"Hmm," he nodded at her. "It's the same way for me. Which is why I specifically chose something other than the window seat."

Sofia sat upright and took a quick but full survey of the plane, including the large man at the end of their row, then sighed and leaned back in the stiff airplane seat. "I would have too, if there'd been one available." She frowned at the window. "If they would let us close the shades during takeoff, it wouldn't be so bad."

"I know what you mean. I can't stand the airlines that enforce that," he said. There was a brief pause before he spoke again. "But we can switch seats if it would make you feel better."

(Excerpt)

"I thought you said you don't like the window seat either?"

"I don't. But I can't relax knowing a lady is sitting next to me shaking in fear because I wasn't gentleman enough to come to her rescue."

*Her rescue?* Sofia winced inwardly as her "potential chauvinistic asshole" alarms went off. She looked up at him again, real good this time, and her defenses relaxed a bit. The smile he was giving her seemed warm, genuine and trustworthy, even. But he had intense eyes—piercing green like malachite—under lush, dark eyebrows. Sinfully thick lips under a straight, well-defined nose and surrounded by a goatee groomed to perfection. This man was so gorgeous, chances were high he could deceive her into believing the sky was burgundy if he said so with *those* lips.

"That's kind of you, but I'll be fine," she said politely but with finality in her voice. "I'm not that big of a scaredy-cat. I don't need rescuing." She tried to look away from him, but his mouth seemed to twitch and his eyes damn near sparkled with amusement at her words.

He flashed bright-white teeth at her. "Okay then. Well, just let me know if you change your mind."

*Muy guapo*, she thought. No way was he available. He wore no rings or any jewelry at all, but a man *that* fine had to have a secret wife, a girlfriend, a boyfriend, *someone* pining for his safe return.

Sofia couldn't put her finger on it, but there was something fiercely enticing about this man—even beyond his good looks. The thought crossed her mind that they might have met somewhere before, because the draw to him was so strong. Startling, almost. But as she studied him, there was no visual recognition. From time to time he glanced at her inquisitively, and every time their eyes met, the spark of attraction made her stomach flutter.

She had the most unusual urge to press her lips against his, stroke the black, close-cropped curls on his head, even though she didn't know a lick about him. She couldn't even quite guess his ethnicity. His complexion and features were definitely multiracial. African-American, most likely, and something else. White maybe, or perhaps he was even Latino. It didn't really matter though—he was one hundred percent fine as hell. Plus he radiated "good fuck", and it'd been oh so long since she'd had one of those.

Scolding herself, she turned her head away from him and the tension between them, only to find herself staring out the window as the plane accelerated. A short, low whimper reverberated in her throat as she anticipated the impending liftoff.

This flight was going to be six-and-a-half hours of pure agony for more reasons than one.