Love in the Air

B Alan Bourgeois · Opening excerpt · 1 of 2

On the afternoon of December 31, the sky over Los Angeles looked deceptively polite—high, pale blue, the kind of weather that made you believe your plans had moral authority.

Ford Caldwell moved through LAX with the unhurried precision of a man who had spent four decades walking into courtrooms. He wasn’t slow; he was deliberate. At seventy-nine, his posture still carried the memory of argument: shoulders back, chin level, eyes taking in exits, clocks, gate numbers. His carry-on was a soft leather bag with a zipper that never snagged, because Ford didn’t tolerate snagging.

He had spent Christmas with his daughter and grandkids—noise, laughter, too much pie, and the strange ache that came after good family time, when affection left behind a bruise. He kissed his daughter’s cheek at the curb that morning and promised he’d text when he landed back in Florida.

Back in Merrily Beach, the Gulf would be warm enough for a sunrise walk. He had a routine there: weights three mornings a week, a brisk beach run the others, and a protein shake he pretended was enjoyable. He liked being fit. Not because he was afraid of age—he simply didn’t see any reason to surrender early.

Reading sample — continued

At the gate, he checked the board.

DELAYED.

A ripple of groans moved through the waiting passengers like a wave through tall grass. Ford didn’t groan. He opened his phone instead and saw a Happy New Year text from Alan, his friend in Austin, timed to arrive as if Alan could bless an entire calendar year into behaving.

Alan: Happy New Year, my friend. May 2026 be kind to you. Proud of you. Ford: Same to you, Alan. I’m headed home. If the airlines behave.

He smiled, slipped the phone into his jacket, and watched the gate agent’s face tighten as she spoke into the microphone again.

“Ladies and gentlemen, due to an extreme storm system in the central region, air traffic routes are being reworked. We appreciate your patience.”

Ford had argued against weather once, metaphorically, in a courtroom—human nature, systemic failures, predictable consequences. Weather didn’t care about rhetoric.

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In Fort Lauderdale, Jed Mercer was doing a gentle stretch beside a charging station, the way some people might pray.