

My Secret Boyfriends

Their voices are sturdy but not intimidating. Like a kitten that purrs, they sound gentle and happy. And a lot of them have good manners too – they say good morning, good night, thanks for your help, have a good day, sir and see you later.

They are mysterious with their cryptic language, talking in code with numbers and letters. They speak calmly, clearly and quickly, oftentimes only a few words spoken. They are smart and responsible, and graciously help each other with their knowledge and experience:
Medium to fair.

I wouldn't go as far to say I stalk these men (although I confess to following a few in the concourse from time-to-time), however I will admit to eavesdropping on their conversations.

And I, like millions around the world, trust these gentlemen with my life. Literally.

Who are my secret boyfriends? Who do I lust after? – Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers.

I can, some may say pitifully, spend an hour or two listening to verbal interaction between pilots and air traffic controllers. Their dictionary consists of words like wake turbulence, heavy (we'll get to that aviation tidbit momentarily), altimeter, foxtrot, squat code, knots, final, rolling, ILS, and so on.

Visually, I conceive the controllers, high above in their tower, radio plugged-in to the cockpits where my men pilot powerful and gorgeous flying machines. Gliding in as if they are on a magic carpet ride; smooth and flowing, perfectly lined-up, nose slightly raised. Gracefully descending: *Descend seven thousand and maintain speed at one ninety.*

Or, from standstill to full throttle. Mighty and oh-so beautiful, these airplanes whiz down the runway until they are lifted into the air, balletic in their climb - up, up and into the sky.

I multitask; listen to air traffic control live, check FlightAware, cross-reference airport arrivals and departures, Google airline and flight number for originating or planned destination. Back-and-forth.

Wait a second. Did I just hear *heavy*? My ears perk up. Technically, these aircrafts are “capable of takeoff weights of 300,000 pounds or more,” therefore wake-turbulence separation is crucial for aircrafts landing or departing behind them.

These hefty babies, fire-up something inside of me. They jolt my soul and release my inner free spirit. Hearing or seeing a heavy aircraft up-close gives me goose bumps and makes me want to fly.

Heavy aircrafts generally travel great distances, to far-away lands. Breakfast on one continent, dinner on another. Wake up in Asia, go to bed in Europe. Experience a new language and culture, view historic dwellings and nature's masterpieces. Swim in the Indian Ocean one day, the Atlantic Ocean the next.

Airplanes exude fantasy. They take one out of an everyday, sometimes ho-hum existence and create possibilities. Where will I travel? Who will I meet? Will my destiny change course? What will I learn? Will it be tango, samba or southern voodoo? So many possibilities. So very exotic. So wickedly fun.

On one recent dreadful, snowy, rainy, icy winter's evening, my beaus in the tower were busy bees – almost nurturing – as they professionally, efficiently and safely guided pilots from about twelve thousand feet all the way down to touchdown and taxiway exit.

It was, I gather, a snowy and slippery runway. However, the pilots told controllers who in turn told pilots about runway conditions (*medium to fair*) and all safety precautions from years of training were in full use. Each and every pilot, with assistance from a controller, landed his aircraft safely that night.

And because of that, loved ones were brought together for an embracing hug and passenger's faces were lit up with toothy smiles as family, friends and lovers reunited.

The pilots and air traffic controllers created a story that night - a story of love, excitement, togetherness, journeys, moments-in-time and memories. And ultimately, I think that is why I love my boyfriends.

Note: Although there are women (whom I admire and in awe of) in both professions, for storytelling purposes the focus is on male pilots and air traffic controllers.