

An Unforgettable Flight

September 2021 – Commission

"Yo! Hey, you! Get me another couple of these red wines, will ya? They're tiny as shit!"

As the loud, wheezing voice of the passenger in 27C sounded once more above the roar of the engines, I sighed in growing irritation. *I love my job, I love my job, I love my job*, I repeated mentally, willing myself through sheer force of repetition somehow to believe it. But as I strode down the narrow aisle and handed this lame excuse of a person his coveted alcohol, forcing a bright and congenial smile onto my lips, I found myself musing that in all my years as airline stewardess, I'd never had to deal with someone quite this obnoxious.

He lolled there in his seat, pig-like eyes staring brazenly up at me with not a hint of remorse or appreciation. He was obese – morbidly so – and though I'd be the last person in the world to body shame anyone, it was clear from the heaps of empty bottles and wrappers we'd already removed for him that in this case, his size was overwhelmingly the result of his own gluttonous appetite.

Far worse was his personality – if you could call it that. I'd very nearly had to force him to buckle his seatbelt (with the help of two extenders, that is), and he'd snarled at me the entire time and called me a bitch. We'd scarcely reached cruising altitude before he'd demanded refreshments, asking the embarrassed female passengers around him why the hell these dumb stewardesses didn't get their shit together before they all starved. And now, with the alcohol beginning to remove what little inhibitions he did have, I realized we were in for one rough ride: a ride that would only end a good twelve hours later in Tokyo.

But then, as if to cement my rapidly growing dislike beyond any doubt, as I turned to answer another passenger request I felt an unwanted hand pawing at my rear.

"Sir! Excuse me sir, but would you kindly keep your hands to yourself?!" But even as I shook myself free and issued my tight-lipped warning, this fellow actually had the gall to wheeze out an insolent chortle. "Wassa matter, bitch? Can't a guy cop a little feel now and then?" To which my only reply was to step briskly away, fuming internally and pondering whether the flight crew would even consider turning this thing around and dumping the guy back at JFK.

Or into the Hudson. Whichever was easier.

"No can do, Millar," the pilot told me sympathetically. "Sorry, but considering how far along we

are, and with how congested things are around JFK, we'd earn ourselves a three-hour delay at least. And not only is that well outside parameters, but I'm guessing then you'd have dozens of irate passengers, not just one." He must have seen the frustration on my face as I turned to close the cockpit door. "Do whatever you need to, Millar. I trust you to figure it out."

Well, that was useless, I grumbled internally, even as I heard the guy's plaintive voice rising once more over the engine's roar. Do what I need to? Hell, if only we could dump the bastard down into cargo, everything would be fixed. Maybe with enough alcohol he'll fall asleep...?

Perhaps it wouldn't have been so bad if the rest of the passengers in this flight weren't so lovely in comparison. I didn't know all the details, of course, but I'd heard and observed plenty during boarding. Most, if not all, of these folks appeared to be in the medical field: RNs, LPNs, and a few doctors, all on their way to Tokyo for some sort of medical conference, judging by the chatter I'd overheard. I'd seen Medecins san frontières bags – EMT badges – names like Peace Corps and WHO and Harvard Medical School. This was a flight chock-full of smart, compassionate folks: folks who were dedicating their lives to help others, and who certainly didn't deserve to put up with this guy's shit for the next twelve hours.

And that's when it came: that first little glimmer of hope.

I'd just repeated to the guy for a third time that we didn't have free martinis when a quiet, feminine voice came from behind me. "Umm, excuse me? Ma'am-" It was the slim brunette seated across the aisle and one row back from him – the perfect place to have witnessed every moment of his intolerably rude behavior. "Ma'am... I'm sorry, but I was wondering if I could speak with you? Privately?"

Well, the seat belt sign was off. And quite apart from my desire to put as much distance as possible between myself and this guy, I was also intrigued by this young woman's mysterious tone. "Sure," I responded in the same discreet, hushed tone. "Right back there by the lavatories..."

Once there and safely out of earshot of the other passengers, she turned to me and shook her head in rueful disbelief. "That guy- God, I can't believe him. And I'm so sorry for what you've been going through... Listen, can't you do anything to deal with him?" I sighed, torn between trying to maintain my professional demeanor with a passenger and venting my frustration to a sympathetic fellow human. "Well, we aren't able to return anymore. To be honest, I think we're just going to have to put up with him as best we can..."

"With sexual harassment? And obscene language? And behavior that's disrupting the entire flight for dozens of other passengers?" Her tone was bitter, but she quickly followed it up with a clarification. "Sorry, I'm not angry at you or the other stewardesses. I'm pissed at him, that's all." And then she drew closer. "Listen. I don't want you to get in trouble. But I'm a nurse, and I know exactly what to give a guy like him to make him shut up. All we need is for you to slip this little sleeping pill," – and here she produced a little blue tablet from her pocket – "into his next drink."

I should be horrified. I shouldn't dream of agreeing, of conspiring to- "I'd even pay you to do it," she offered with a wry smile. "Listen, it's nothing illegal. Believe me – I've heard of flights where asshole passengers have literally been physically restrained and tied to their seats. I think a little snooze for this guy is hardly out of line. Besides-

"I'll do it for free," I interrupted, swallowing my misgivings. "Listen, I don't need money or bribes or anything. Keep that stuff out of it, okay? But you're right that this guy needs something. I don't know if you have any other ideas, but I'm all ears, Miss...?"

"Amy," she responded with a bright smile. "Just call me Nurse Amy."

"Oh, and believe me," she went on conspiratorially. "I can tell you a thing or two about dealing with entitled assholes. See, there was this one guy in our hospital not that long ago..."

Holy shit. I don't quite know where we're going with this whole thing. But right now, I'm simply relieved to know this Amy girl has my back.

It's been a good half-hour since the bastard downed that innocent-looking drink: the one with that little blue pill dissolved into it. His head is lolling back now, those beady little eyes sinking closed at last in slumber. Everyone in a six-seat radius around him is looking simultaneously relieved and disgusted as his mouth sags open and he lets out a first loud snore. But before his long-suffering neighbor can give him a jab to wake him up, I step forward, motioning Amy to stand up beside me in the aisle.

"Umm, hey folks. I just want to sincerely apologize for the disruptions we've been experiencing in this part of the cabin," I begin, with a gesture toward the snoring figure. "I think you all have been witness to the sort of unacceptable behavior your fellow passenger's been displaying." "Whoo, yeah!" "Totally unacceptable." "Yass, girl!" "About time..." A chorus of agreement rose up from the seats

around him, and I flashed a grateful smile.

"Well, enough said! With a bit of professional medical assistance from good Nurse Amy here," – and I gestured graciously beside me – "We've finally managed to send this guy off to dreamland. But even in his sleep our good friend seems to want to disturb us, hmm?" A chorus of snickers rose as they all eyed the loudly snoring guy in distaste. "Shut him up already!" "Is there room in cargo?" "No respect for anyone but himself!" To which I could only agree with a rueful nod.

"Now I want to hear from you all," I continued, hardly even believing the words leaving my own mouth. "Nurse Amy here has kindly volunteered to help teach this fellow a lesson. Nothing harmful, of course – just a few measures to teach him that you can't harass others and expect to get away with it. Are you all okay with this?"

And as the chorus of cheers and laughter and affirmative answers rose above the noise of the engines, I turned to my partner in crime with a smile. "Well, then, Nurse Amy. I'm going to turn this little party over to you."

She may have been slim, and young, and otherwise the least imposing person on the planet. But I swear that the gleam in her eye right then boded nothing good for the snoring asshole in 27C.

(To be continued!)