

About the Cabin

By Hank Willenbrink

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Setting:

A Delta flight to Tulsa

Time:

Now

Characters:

Jimmy, M, 30s

Margaret, F, 30s

AT RISE: A Tulsa-bound Delta flight out of Detroit. Margaret, an off-duty flight attendant (though still in her navy sweatervest) sits looking out the window with a library copy of a bestseller. Jimmy enters down the aisle with a backpack advertising a microbrewery and a ball cap over what used to be long hair wearing a t-shirt for an obscure Belgian town. He has noticeable tattoos. Margaret recognizes him immediately.

JIMMY
Hey.

MARGARET
Hi.

JIMMY
I told this Indian that I had two weeks to live and that I had to sit next to you.

MARGARET
An Indian?

JIMMY
He had this seat number.

MARGARET
An Indian, impressive.

JIMMY
Well, flight's to Oklahoma, so... real deal braided pigtails down to his ass. Is that what you call 'em? Pigtails?

MARGARET
Doesn't feel right.

An announcement over the loudspeaker. As with every announcement, Jimmy and Margaret stop their conversation. In these moments we seem to have a glimpse of something they're not showing: an old love affair which might take off again. Announcement: Ladies and Gentlemen: the Captain has turned on the fasten seat belt sign. Please store your carry-on luggage under the seat in front of you or in an overhead bin. All seat backs and tray tables should be at their full upright and locked position.

JIMMY
How're you doing?

MARGARET
Well. How about you?

JIMMY
...
Tulsa, huh? Is Tulsa home?

MARGARET
No. Salt Lake.

JIMMY
Nice. Very nice out there. How long have you?

MARGARET
Six years.

JIMMY
Wow. Beautiful place.

MARGARET
Yes. Yes it is. And you?

JIMMY
Work.

MARGARET
Nice. And how long are you staying.

JIMMY
24 hours.

MARGARET
You're still in Boston? Providence?

JIMMY
Nashville.

MARGARET
Right. And what are we doing out there?

JIMMY
We are working, / obviously, and we are...

MARGARET

And what have we been up to?

JIMMY

Let's see. We have been a teacher.

MARGARET

And what are we now?

JIMMY

Now we are drumming.

MARGARET

Right, Nashville, the whole thing.

Announcement: Ladies and Gentlemen: the Captain has turned off the fasten seat belt sign, which means you are now free to move around the cabin.

JIMMY

Yes the whole music, thing, yes. What about you?

MARGARET

I was with Southwest...

JIMMY

Right.

MARGARET

But I took some time off, because I thought I might want to do what I studied in school. Kinesiology. You know, sports science.

JIMMY

Cool.

MARGARET

Yeah, well, I didn't like it. You know, I enjoy not working more than actually working. In medical school, they put us in front of these cadavers to cut up and I was like get me out of here. I dropped out and got the job with American.

JIMMY

But, you went back. That's cool.

MARGARET

It wasn't my dream. My dream was to be working for a professional men's soccer team. Just me and 20 to 30 guys. I was a little boy crazy.

JIMMY
Just a little?

MARGARET
Who are you drumming for?

JIMMY
Guess.

MARGARET
You know I'm no good at this.

JIMMY whistles a bar of a popular tune by a 70s or 80s band that's still doing reunion tours.

Really.
Huh. I like them. I like that one song they have...

JIMMY
Yeah. Everyone likes that song.

MARGARET
So are you in the band?

JIMMY
No. They just needed some extra rhythm parts. Everyone cans everything now.

MARGARET
It's a good song. How's the little one?

JIMMY
Eight. She's eight.

MARGARET
Aw. What is that? Third grade?

JIMMY
Yes, third grade. I was playing with Sheryl Crow on her last tour.

MARGARET
I like her. What's she like? Is she nice?

JIMMY
Yeah, she's nice.

MARGARET

That's good. She looks nice. Maybe it's the whole Lance Armstrong thing. You know that someone could take someone with testicular cancer and really love them. Even if it didn't work out, it still says something about your character. It's good to find out that people you think are nice actually are nice in real life. I find that people, in general, are nicer on airplanes.

Announcement: In a few moments, we will begin our beverage service including hot and cold drinks and Coke products including Coke, Diet Coke, Sprite, Fresca, Ginger Ale, and juices. You may purchase a cocktail from us if you like. Beer is \$6. Cocktails and wine are \$7.

JIMMY

I've found the opposite to be true.

MARGARET

You're sitting in a different place and we're all pretty much equals up here. I mean, there's first class, but that's different. They're kind because they haven't lost circulation to their legs. But the rest of us, it's really egalitarian. Probably the only time that we're all facing the same direction going basically the same way.

JIMMY

It's like elementary school. With the lines. You know, how you get in line. Which is the most orderly way to go. Probably the thing that we remember most. It's like written into your brain. Get in line, single file, one after another. And if you think about this too it's like how can you tell people who aren't normal? They don't stay in the lines.

MARGARET

Do you know what I'm saying?

JIMMY

Yeah. Do you?

MARGARET

Totally.

JIMMY

I should tell you something, though. That Indian? He flipped me off.

MARGARET

No. Why?

JIMMY

I think he found you cute. They don't get squaws like you down on the reservation. Yes, I know, it's bad, I know.

MARGARET
Anyone ever told you that you're a jerk?

JIMMY
Nope.

MARGARET
Why's that?

JIMMY
Because I'm not.

A moment of closeness. Maybe she touches his hand.

MARGARET
You have drummer's hands. Lots of rings, long tapered fingers, like a kid.

JIMMY
Kids can wear rings.

MARGARET
Not boys.

JIMMY
No, not boys.

Moment's over. Announcement: Ladies and Gentlemen: the Captain has turned on the fasten seat belt sign. Please return to your seats with your seat belts fastened.

MARGARET
Sheryl Crow was on a flight I worked a couple weeks ago.

JIMMY
How'd you find her?

MARAGET
She was a total bitch.

JIMMY
Yes, yes she is.

MARGARET
So, earlier?

JIMMY

Totally lied. But here's the more important question, what does that do to your theory of airplanes.

MARGARET

Exceptions.

JIMMY

Goes to show you never can tell.

MARGARET

We should do this again.

JIMMY

We should.

MARGARET

That's the problem, huh?

JIMMY

It proves the rule.

MARGARET

Which one is that?

JIMMY

Margaret...

MARGARET

What?

JIMMY leans toward her. He places his face in her ear. He just sits there for a moment. Announcement: As we start our descent, please make sure your seat backs and tray tables are in their full upright and locked position, your seat belt is securely fastened and return all carry-on luggage to underneath the seat in front of you or in the overhead bins. MARGARET breaks away. She looks out the window. JIMMY watches her. A long moment. Announcement: Welcome to Tulsa. Tulsa is in the Central time zone. Local time is 3:47pm. JIMMY stands and shoulders his pack.

MARGARET

Hey. Good to see you, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Yeah, you too.

END OF PLAY