

I'LL SEAT

by

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8/31/2013

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Characters

MARTIN, male, 50s-60s.

JOANIE, female, 30s-40s.

KENNY, male, a teenager.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT, male, 20s-30s.

HATFIELD, male, 40s-60s.

DETECTIVE HUGHES, female, 30s.

ARTIE, male, 40s-50s.

Time

Present.

Setting

Economy cabin of a jet airliner, with a row of three seats.

I'LL SEAT

Lights up on the economy cabin of a commercial jet with a row of three seats visible. MARTIN sits in the middle seat, his laptop open in front of him. KENNY is scrunched up, covered with a blanket while clutching a pillow against the window to MARTIN's left. JOANIE pages through the in-flight magazine to his right. All entrances and exits occur down the aisle to and from the unseen back of the plane.

MARTIN

(After a thoughtful pause.)

That dress...

JOANIE

(A bored sigh.)

Which dress?

MARTIN

The lavender one.

JOANIE

I hate that dress. I told you that when you gave it to me.

MARTIN

It was perfect, though, for the party at Colin's, the night of the murder.

JOANIE

Fuck Colin.

MARTIN

And you did, remember? On the coffee table in his office.

JOANIE

Well, fuck Colin figuratively then. Besides, it wasn't a coffee table; it was a credenza.

MARTIN

You know...you're right: It was a credenza. Mahogany. Anyway, the lavender dress--

JOANIE

Jesus, Martin, will you quit with the lavender dress? I threw it out a long time ago, OK?

MARTIN

But did you throw it down the trash chute of Colin's SoHo apartment, or did you toss it in the dumpster behind the Canary Club?

JOANIE

Fuck, Martin, how should I know? You going to keep this up, I'm going to walk.

JOANIE unbuckles and exits. MARTIN types for a bit, then stops, reflecting. He looks over at KENNY. Pokes him--no response. Shakes him--KENNY moans and burrows into his blanket. MARTIN shakes him again...

KENNY

Fuck! Leave me alone!

KENNY digs deeper into his sleep. MARTIN sighs. After a moment he flags down the FLIGHT ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT

Yes, may I help you?

MARTIN

Can I get a gin and tonic?

ATTENDANT

Certainly, sir. We serve Absolut.

MARTIN

A double, please.

ATTENDANT

Would you like a lemon slice or lime?

MARTIN

Lime, of course.

ATTENDANT

It's just--well, I had a boyfriend once who took lemon. Probably because he had lemon trees on his estate on Martinique, one of the Windward Islands that's an overseas department of France. You remind me of him.

ATTENDANT leaves, smiling.

MARTIN

Interesting.

MARTIN types. HATFIELD approaches, wearing suspenders over shirtsleeves, baggy trousers, and a fedora. He takes the open seat next to MARTIN.

HATFIELD

Martin, did you bring up that thing with Colin to Joanie?

MARTIN

Might've mentioned it.

HATFIELD

Well, she's all upset now, and it's your fault.

MARTIN

I just had a few questions.

HATFIELD

You and your few questions. She's breaking my balls about it.

MARTIN

Sorry, Hatfield, but you know how it is.

HATFIELD

Yeah, and sometimes you got to let it ride. You're going to get more information obliquely than head on.

MARTIN types.

MARTIN

I'll remember that.

ATTENDANT returns with MARTIN's drink.

ATTENDENT

Here you are, sir. One gin and tonic...

(Brightly.)

Absolut-ly!

HATFIELD

That looks good. Can I get one of those?

ATTENDENT

Right away. Lemon or lime?

HATFIELD

Lime. Who drinks it with lemon?

MARTIN

His boyfriend. Lives on Martinique.

ATTENDENT

Not any more. He...

(Getting weepy.)

He was washed out to sea in the great hurricane of twenty-ten.

HATFIELD

Gaston or Tomas?

ATTENDENT

Hurricane Colin.

Ah-hah.
MARTIN

ATTENDANT leaves, sniffing.

HATFIELD
You know, technically, Colin was only a tropical storm.

MARTIN
(Typing.)
How many meteorologists do I know? I think we can get away with hurricane.

HATFIELD
That's how it starts.

MARTIN
(Preoccupied with his laptop.)
How what starts?

HATFIELD
The slippery slope. First it's tropical storms into hurricanes, then suddenly tomatoes are vegetables.

MARTIN
They aren't?

HATFIELD
Come on, they're fruits, you know that.

MARTIN
How many fruits do I know? I think we can get away with vegetables.

HATFIELD
Fuck you, Martin.

MARTIN
Obliquely or head on?

HATFIELD snorts his appreciation of MARTIN's witticism. ATTENDANT returns, gives HATFIELD his drink, then leaves without a word, still sniffing. HATFIELD watches him go. Then...

HATFIELD
I should get back to Joanie. You got her so wound up, she's dripping sarcasm all over the upholstery.

MARTIN
You're just sniffing after that flight attendant.

HATFIELD
That too. So what?

MARTIN
So I noticed, is all.

HATFIELD
Yeah, well, keep it to yourself if you can.

*HATFIELD heads back with his drink.
MARTIN thinks and types. DETECTIVE
HUGHES arrives and leans over the open
seat. She's dressed like Hatfield but
with a heavy overcoat.*

HUGHES
(*Deadly serious.*)
I want a word with you, Martin.

MARTIN
Not in the mood, Detective.

HUGHES
You got no choice in the matter.

MARTIN
Not now, I said.

HUGHES
You can't keep putting me off.

MARTIN
Really. You seem to forget who's running this show.

HUGHES
And you seem to be unaware of your limitations.

MARTIN
What limitations?

*HUGHES reaches over, takes MARTIN's
drink, smells it, puts it back.*

MARTIN (CONT'D)
You're talking through your hat.

HUGHES
An expression that puts you squarely in the wrong century.

MARTIN
I'll fix it later. For now, take a hike. Beat it. Am-scray.

HUGHES
I'll be back. And you will talk to me. You'll be in the mood.

MARTIN makes a "yak-yak-yak" motion with one hand as he returns to his keyboard. HUGHES leaves. Then ARTIE drops into the open seat. He's wearing a loud, cheap suit with stains under the arms and mustard on his tie.

ARTIE

(Whispering urgently.)

Martin! I can't take it no more.

MARTIN

What, Artie?

ARTIE

(Assumes a conversational tone.)

The pressure. First, the feds. Then the mob and my ex--and then my other ex. Now I gotta remember my new name is "Artie," too?

MARTIN

It isn't Artie Two--it's just Artie.

ARTIE

You know what I meant. You're just toying with me. That's all I am to you, a pawn in the game of life.

MARTIN

It had to be done, Artie. You needed a new identity.

ARTIE

But I liked the name Leslie. It was my dad's name, and his mother's name before that.

MARTIN

Nobody takes a Leslie seriously anymore. Not since *Forbidden Planet*. And that was 60 years ago.

ARTIE

You're a heartless bastard, Martin. Or should I say "Marty."

MARTIN

I don't think that's going to happen.

ARTIE

And what makes you think I'm gonna cooperate?

MARTIN

The union. They make all the rules. Including the ones about monikers and nomenclature.

ARTIE

I could take it on the lam. Disappear into any one of a hundred burgs. You'd never find me.

MARTIN

Oh, I'll always know where you are. And I could make your disappearance very unpleasant...Artie.

ARTIE backs off, twitching, sweating.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

You got the second set of books ready?

ARTIE

Yeah.

MARTIN

And the key to the code book listing all the individuals who found cash in their pockets that wasn't their own?

ARTIE

It's safe.

MARTIN

In a safe?

ARTIE

(Tapping his temple.)

Up here.

MARTIN

You think that's going to protect you?

ARTIE

Only thing I got. My ticket to a long retirement.

MARTIN

We'll see. What about Colin?

ARTIE

The mobster or the tropical storm?

MARTIN

I'm calling it a hurricane.

ARTIE

Oh, you got such a disrespect for names.

MARTIN

Deal with it. I was asking about our friend who owns the Canary Club.

ARTIE

Don't worry. His fingerprints all over this mess.

MARTIN

Keep up the good work, Artie. When this is over, you might find yourself with a nice gig--and a bungalow in Florida.

ARTIE

Just as long as we agree on the definition of "gig" and "bungalow."

MARTIN

What--you don't trust me?

ARTIE

(Snorts derisively.)

This from a guy thinks there's a difference between "uninterested" and "disinterested."

MARTIN

I don't expect you to understand, Artie. It's not in your nature. Now get out of here.

ARTIE leaves. JOANIE arrives, wearing a lavender dress.

JOANIE

There. Satisfied?

MARTIN

Much better. In fact, very nice.

JOANIE sits.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Color goes well with your eyes.

JOANIE

What do you know about my eyes. Yours always stuck on that computer screen.

MARTIN

Joanie, you know I love you, don't you?

(Beat, no answer.)

Do you love me?

JOANIE

Got no choice in the matter.

MARTIN

You know, you're the second person's told me that today.

JOANIE

Who else?

MARTIN

Doesn't matter. The important thing is that you know that you do have a choice. Every day you make choices. You choose to get on this plane. You choose to sit next to me. You even choose to wear the lavender dress.

JOANIE

(Unconvinced.)

Doesn't feel like a choice.

MARTIN

But it is. Don't you see? I might try to manipulate you, but if it's not in your character, not who you really are, then I can't force it. It won't work and that's all there is to it.

JOANIE

What about Colin? You killed him.

MARTIN

Colin had it coming. You don't betray *omerta* and get away with it. That's a given, beyond anyone's control.

JOANIE

I don't trust you.

MARTIN

You don't have to. Just go with the flow.

JOANIE sets her jaw and MARTIN leans over to kiss it. KENNY awakens.

KENNY

Shit. What's she doing here?

MARTIN

Settle down, Kenny.

KENNY

No, you told me you weren't seeing her any more. You said you were going to dump her.

JOANIE

Dump you, asshole!

MARTIN

Don't take it personally, Kenny. There's no need to feel threatened. You two live in separate worlds.

KENNY

Then what am I doing here?

MARTIN

A momentary distraction.

JOANIE

Oh, and I suppose that's all I am to you, too?

KENNY

There you go again, bitch! It's always about you! All I ask for is a little of his time and you always interfere.

JOANIE

Maybe if you weren't such a stereotypical misunderstood juvenile delinquent--

KENNY

Don't you dare call me that. I'm dyslexic, all right? And my alcoholic father abused me when I was six, after my mother left him for a vampire.

JOANIE

Poor Kenny. You having a tough time coming of age?

HUGHES returns, having traded her overcoat and trousers for a fantasy policeman's outfit featuring a tiny miniskirt, bosom-revealing blouse, fishnet stockings, and standard-issue handgun in a sexy body-hugging holster.

HUGHES

You in the mood now, Martin?

JOANIE

Who's this?

HUGHES

Your nemesis, honey. His salvation.

JOANIE

You want my heel in your eye? Keep it up...

A bell. All look up to listen...

ATTENDANT (O.S.)

The Captain has turned on the seatbelt sign, Martin. He's expecting some turbulence...

MARTIN

(Gleefully buckling up.)

Bring it on!

HATFIELD, ARTIE, and ATTENDANT join JOANIE, HUGHES, and KENNY in haranguing MARTIN, who's happily trying to transcribe it all verbatim. As the ad-libbed overlapping voices reach a peak...fade to black.

THE END