

ACT I

SETTING: *A waiting area at Gate 37 in a large airport, somewhere in the Midwest. Stage left, three chairs connected together face downstage. Stage right, Gate 37, complete with podium and microphone. It is late afternoon on Christmas Eve.*

AT RISE *As lights go down, we hear Christmas music that eventually fades into a speaker at the airport, accompanied by the other noises of a busy airport during the holiday season. Black. The music is suddenly interrupted with the following announcement.*

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

Skyways Airlines is paging passenger Carl Zimmerman. Please meet your party at the Concourse A baggage claim. Skyways Airlines is paging passenger Carl Zimmerman. Please meet your party at the Concourse A baggage claim.

(Christmas music begins then fades again as lights comes up on CHERYL DEAN, gate agent, on her cellphone behind the podium at Skyways Airline Gate 37.)

CHERYL

(On phone)

Mike... Mike... Mike! Listen to... One hour. I will be there to pick them up in... No! No!
Mike... Mike... Mike! That was the deal... Dinner with you and what's her name was never an option... Yes, Mike, I know what her name is, I just choose not to... I don't care if she's a good cook! I'm a good cook, too, in case you've forgotten...

(She continues to listen as JOEL HARTMAN enters with a backpack. He's dressed for a midwestern winter, complete with ski cap. He looks around, glances at his ticket to verify his gate then crosses to the podium.)

JOEL

Excuse me...

(CHERYL holds up a finger, the standard signal for "just a minute.")

CHERYL

You've had them all day. That was the deal. Christmas Eve with you and... Yes, I *know* it's still technically Christmas Eve, but the deal was... Mike! The deal was I would pick them up after work... Mike... Mike... Mike! Maybe you should have thought of that before you had an affair with what's her name... Hello...? Mike...? Dammit.

(She looks at JOEL who's been trying not to listen.)

And they call this the most wonderful time of the year.

JOEL

Excuse me?

(CHERYL points to her phone.)

CHERYL

My ex-husband. First Christmas since we got divorced. We have two little boys.

JOEL

(Why is she telling him this?)

Oh...

CHERYL

And you know what really... What makes this so hard is we had these great traditions. *Family* traditions, like decorating the tree, baking cookies, watching Christmas movies, going to church... And we were happy. Joyful. The perfect family. Y'know what I mean?

JOEL

(My family sucks)

Actually...

CHERYL

Then this past March, Mike decided he wanted to make a new "family" with Tiffany from work... Oh God, Oh God...

(She starts to gag.)

JOEL

Are you okay?

CHERYL

(Interrupting)

Her name. It tastes like, like... Death in my mouth...

(JOEL pulls a roll of mints out of his pocket.)

JOEL

Have a mint.

CHERYL

(Taking one)

Thank you. I'm sorry. I don't mean to ruin your Christmas.

JOEL

(I'm Jewish)

Actually...

CHERYL

(Talking over him)

It's just... it's *killing* me, knowing that Mike and what's her name are unwrapping presents and watching *It's A Wonderful Life* with my boys while I'm stuck here at work, y'know?

JOEL

(Just want to know if this is the gate for Albany)

Uh...

CHERYL

(Full steam ahead)

But it's okay. Once I get outta here, I'm gonna pick up the boys. We'll grab some fast food, then head to church. Tomorrow morning we'll open presents then I'll make our traditional Christmas turkey dinner. Does your family eat turkey? Or do you all prefer ham?

JOEL

(I'm Jewish)

Uh... well...

CHERYL

The boys love my turkey. Jake says it's the "bestest" and... oh! Check out the presents I got them...

(She shows him pictures on her phone,)

Jake is crazy about trains, so he's getting an electric train set – isn't that cool? And Ben – Ben is my percussion man, always pounding on the table, on the floor... I got him this drum. I might live to regret that decision, but what the hell – it's Christmas. And I am determined to make it the best one ever for my boys. All I have to do is get this flight to Albany on its way, and I'm home free.

(She realizes he's been waiting to ask her a question.)

CHERYL (cont.)

I'm sorry – did you need something?

JOEL

(As if explaining his existence)

Uh, I was just gonna ask if this was the flight to Albany...

CHERYL

Didn't I just say that?

JOEL

Right. Thanks. Thank you. Sorry...

(He crosses to the waiting area and takes a seat as she picks up the gate mic and speaks into it.)

CHERYL

Attention passengers: Skyways flight 1225 with service to Albany will begin boarding in twenty minutes at Gate 37. Once again, Skyways flight 1225 with service to Albany will begin boarding in twenty minutes at Gate 37. And as always, we thank you for flying Skyways, where "the sky's the limit."

(CHERYL exits. JOEL checks his phone. He's nervous; JOEL is always nervous. After a moment, MARY MARGARET GILMORE enters hurriedly, pulling a rolling bag behind her. She carries a leather handbag over her shoulder, She looks around then turns to JOEL.)

MARY MARGARET

Excuse me – is this the flight for Albany?

JOEL

Yeah.

MARY MARGARET

Have they started boarding yet?

JOEL

Twenty minutes.

MARY MARGARET

Oh good. I was worried. My flight from Milwaukee was delayed and... well, you know how it is. Airports. Christmas. Deck the halls and all that jazz... Plus, this gate is in the boonies.

JOEL

The boonies?

MARY MARGARET

Look around. Gate 37 – the end of the line. Even the moving sidewalk stops at Gate 20... whoa.

(She grabs her stomach and bends over.)

JOEL

Um... are you...?

MARY MARGARET

(Bent over)

I don't know why they call it morning sickness.

(She rights herself)

I feel like puking every hour on the hour.

JOEL

Oh. Wow. You're... you know...

MARY MARGARET

Pregnant? Knocked up? With child? All of the above.

(She sits on the other end of the seats.)

If I was a virgin riding a donkey it couldn't be more perfect.

JOEL

Um...

(Not waiting for a reply – no one waits for JOEL to reply – MARY MARGARET lifts up her legs, studying her ankles.)

MARY MARGARET

If my ankles get much bigger, I'll end up in the elephant house at the zoo.

(She swings her feet around to the seat between them.)

MARY MARGARET (cont.)

Do they look swollen to you?

JOEL

Uh...

MARY MARGARET

Sperm meets egg and boom! Water retention. So, what do you think?

JOEL

Uh...

MARY MARGARET

Brian used to tell me that my ankles were “delicate” and “sexy.”

JOEL

Wow, that’s...

MARY MARGARET

It was part of our foreplay.

JOEL

Oh God.

MARY MARGARET

Brian – if you could only see ‘em now.

(She swings her feet back to the floor.)

JOEL

(Almost against his will)

This Brian, he’s the... the...

MARY MARGARET

Father? Baby-daddy? Ex-boyfriend? All of the above.

JOEL

Oh.

MARY MARGARET

Took off as soon as he saw the plus-sign on the pregnancy test.

JOEL

Wow.

MARY MARGARET

Vamoosed. Vanished. Gone with the wind. Uh-oh!

(She bends over again. More morning sickness.)

JOEL

Should I, uh...? Maybe I should get you a trash can.

(She sits back up.)

MARY MARGARET

Nope. I'm good. Whew! That was a close one. Isn't throwing up the worst?

JOEL

I, uh – I wouldn't know.

MARY MARGARET

What?

JOEL

I've never thrown up in my life.

MARY MARGARET

Never? Not once? Not even as a kid.

JOEL

No.

MARY MARGARET

Weird.

(She suddenly stands up.)

I gotta pee. Save my seat, will ya? And would you mind watching my bag?

JOEL

Uh... I don't think that's a good idea. They tell you not to do that.

MARY MARGARET

Who does?

JOEL

The airport people. You know, the... the... the TSA. They make announcements...

(She stares at him.)

JOEL (cont.)

Y'know, don't accept baggage from strangers?

MARY MARGARET

Emotional or carry-on?

JOEL

Uh...

MARY MARGARET

We're not strangers.

JOEL

I think, technically...

MARY MARGARET

You know I'm pregnant. You know I retain water. You know my ex's name is Brian. My own mother doesn't know this much about me.

JOEL

Yes, but...

MARY MARGARET

I know you've never thrown up. Not once. Not even as a kid.

JOEL

Still...

(MARY MARGARET holds out her hand.)

MARY MARGARET

I'm Mary Margaret Gilmore.

(He stares at it for a moment then takes it.)

JOEL

Joel Hartman.

MARY MARGARET

Nice to meet you, Joel Hartman. Gotta pee.

(She runs off.)

JOEL

But... hey!

TSA ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

Attention please. In the interest of airport security, baggage and personal items should not be left unattended. Any unattended items found will be treated as suspicious...

(JOEL eyes MARY MARGARET's luggage nervously.)

If a stranger asks you to watch their baggage, you should report them immediately. No matter how attractive they are, Joel.

(JOEL looks around – what the hell?!)

Thank you for helping the TSA.

(Airport sounds. JOEL's phone rings. He takes it out of his pocket and answers it.)

JOEL

Hey Mom... No, still here. We're supposed to start boarding in...

(He listens for a long beat.)

Yeah... Yeah... Okay, Mom, okay. So, how's....?

(He listens for a long beat.)

Okay, well, that's promising, right...? No, yeah, I mean, it could be, though... Mom, it could be, c'mon...! Yeah, okay.... Okay.... I'll let you know as soon as we board. Okay, okay...bye... I said I would, Mom, I just said I would...! I'm not... I'm sorry... I didn't mean...

(Long beat. He looks to Heaven for strength.)

Okay, yeah. Okay. Bye.

(He hangs up and puts the phone back in his pocket.)

ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

Skyways Airlines is paging passenger Carl Zimmerman. Please meet your party at the Concourse A baggage claim. Skyways Airlines is paging passenger Carl Zimmerman. Please meet your party at the Concourse A baggage claim.

(ROSIE ARMELLINO enters, lugging an old-fashioned Samsonite overnight bag (sans wheels) in one hand. In the other, she clutches a rosary and a boarding pass.)

ROSIE

(Finishing a prayer)

... pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(She makes the Sign of the Cross and looks around then turns to JOEL.)

Do these airport people hate us, or what?

JOEL

Excuse me?

ROSIE

Look at this place. We're practically in Siberia.

JOEL

Yeah, it's pretty (remote)...

ROSIE

(Interrupting)

This the flight to Albany?

JOEL

Yes, ma'am.

ROSIE

It leaving on time?

JOEL

I think so.

ROSIE

You think so or you know so?

JOEL

Uh... well, she said... the lady at the gate...

(He looks. No one's there.)

She's gone now. She said – about five minutes ago – that we'd be boarding in twenty minutes so we should be...

ROSIE

...boarding in fifteen minutes. Got it.

(To herself)

Mother of God, help me not be too late.

(She looks at JOEL.)

You look like a nice boy. You married?

JOEL

Uh...

ROSIE

You got no ring. So, either you're not married, or you are married and you're cheating on your wife. Which is it?

JOEL

Uhhh... I'm a... I'm not married.

ROSIE

You sure? You seem a little hesitant.

JOEL

No, I'm sure. I'm definitely not married.

ROSIE

Good for you. Take it from me. No one will love you like your mother.

(She sits in the seat next to JOEL, throwing her suitcase in the MARY MARGARET's seat.)

JOEL

(Someone's sitting there)

Uh, actually...

ROSIE

What? You think I'm lying? You think I'm wrong?!

JOEL

(Someone's sitting there)

No, it's just...

ROSIE

Take my Freddie. After all I give him, after all the sacrifice, he turns around and betrays me with another woman.

(She shakes a fist.)

Freddie Armellino, I curse the day you were born!

JOEL

(Someone's sitting there)

Ma'am, I'm sorry your husband cheated on you, but...

ROSIE

Husband? Who said anything about my husband?

JOEL

You said Freddie...

ROSIE

Freddie's not my husband. He's my son. A son who doesn't love his mother!

(SGT. CYNTHIA "SID" ZADNICHEK enters. She is dressed in fatigues and carrying a duffel bag.)

SID

Yo. This the flight to Albany?

JOEL

Yes.

SID

You Joel?

JOEL

(How does she know my name?)

Uh...

SID

Joel Hartman?

JOEL

Yeah.

SID

Your wife's puking in the latrine. She said to tell you she'll be a minute and don't let the plane leave without her.

ROSIE

You said you weren't married.

JOEL

I'm not.

ROSIE

Then why's your wife puking in the toilet?

SID

Because she's knocked up.

ROSIE

What?!

JOEL

She's not my wife! She's practically a stranger!

SID

You impregnated a stranger?

JOEL

No...

ROSIE

And I thought my Freddie was a disgrace. Does your mother know about this?

JOEL

No, I...

ROSIE

You're gonna break her heart.

JOEL

My mother doesn't give a shit about me!

SID

Whoa.

ROSIE

And why should she when you talk like a dock worker.

JOEL

Look lady, that woman in the restroom is not my wife. She is not my girlfriend. I did not get her pregnant. She is a stranger. A complete stranger.

SID

Then how did she know your name?

JOEL

I'm watching her bag for her.

ROSIE

Her bag?

JOEL

(Pointing to it)
Right there.

SID

A stranger asked you to watch her baggage?

JOEL

Yes! I mean, no... I mean...

ROSIE

You ain't supposed to do that.

JOEL

Look, no, listen, wait...

SID

She's right. You always hear that announcement....

TSA ANNOUNCEMENT (V.O.)

If a stranger asks you to watch their baggage, you should immediately report them to airport security.

SID

See?

JOEL

Look, she's not... I'm not... okay, the thing is, she's not a stranger. Not completely.

SID

You just said she was.

JOEL

I know but...

ROSIE

Is she or isn't she?

JOEL

She *is* in the sense that we never met before today...

ROSIE

I'm gonna call security.

(Shouting off)

Security!

JOEL

(Interrupting)

Wait...

SID

(Overlapping)

Aw, c'mon – give her a break. There's nothing worse than puking in a public toilet.

(To JOEL)

Am I right?

JOEL

I wouldn't know.

SID

You've never puked in a public toilet?

JOEL

I've never thrown up at all.

SID

Never? Not once?

JOEL
Not even when I was a kid.

SID
Weird.

ROSIE
What do you know about this girl, huh? This girl who may or may not be a stranger.

JOEL
Her name is Mary Margaret.

ROSIE
Mary Margaret what?

JOEL
Mary Margaret... Mary Margaret... Gilmore. That's it! Mary Margaret Gilmore.

ROSIE
What else you got?

JOEL
She's pregnant.

SID
Duh.

JOEL
She has an ex-boyfriend named...Brian. I think it's Brian.

ROSIE
You think?

JOEL
No, I'm sure – it's Brian. Yes. That's right. Brian is the father. I am not the father.

ROSIE
That remains to be seen.

JOEL
What?!

ROSIE
Anything else?

JOEL

She, uh... she used to have slim ankles. Brian loved her ankles. Called 'em sexy. Delicate. It was part of their foreplay...

SID

(Too much information)

Yo, hey!

JOEL

But now she's retaining water and she thinks they look swollen.

SID

Do they?

JOEL

(Shrugging)

I thought they looked pretty good. Oh! And her mother doesn't know she's pregnant.

SID

Whoa.

ROSIE

A child keeping a secret from its mother. Sounds like my Freddie.

(She shakes her fist at the heavens. SID looks around.)

SID

Look at this place, will ya? It's like they parked us in BFE.

ROSIE

BF what?

JOEL

The boonies.

SID

I bet these are the last three seats in the airport.

(She points to MARY MARGARET's seat.)

Whose bag is this?

ROSIE

Mine.

JOEL

Actually, I'm saving that seat for Mary Margaret.

SID

Mary Margaret's puking in the latrine.

JOEL

Still...

ROSIE

You never said nothing about saving no seat.

JOEL

Yes, I... I mean, I tried to but...

ROSIE

But what?

JOEL

But you wouldn't shut up long enough for me to say it!

ROSIE

Well. Merry Christmas to you, too.

JOEL

I'm a Jew.

ROSIE

What's that got to do with anything?

JOEL

Jews don't celebrate Christmas.

ROSIE

Don't be stupid. Jesus was a Jew, and he celebrates Christmas every year.

(Unbelievable. JOEL has no response.)

I'm going to the ladies.

(She stands up.)

I'll check on your wife while I'm there.

JOEL

She's not my wife.

ROSIE

Sure. Uh-huh.

(She starts to walk off without her luggage.)

SID

Want us to watch your bag?

ROSIE

What? No! Why? So, you can call security on me? Hand it here.

(SID tries to pull the bag off the seat. It weighs a ton. She needs both hands.)

SID

Holy crap, lady – what's in here? Dumbbells?

ROSIE

None ya business.

(She lifts it with one hand and exits with it. JOEL's phone rings. He answers it and walks away to talk. SID takes a seat, but during the following one-sided conversation, can't help but overhear JOEL.)

JOEL

(On phone)

Hey Mom... No, still waiting to board. Has anything...? I told you I'd let you know once we... Mom... Mom... Mom, I... I... I am hurrying! It's just, the flights are crazy with the holidays... Christmas, Mom. This is Christmas Eve and... Yes, I know I'm Jewish, but... Mom... Mom... Yes... Yes... Okay... Tell Dad... Mom, tell Dad... Okay... Okay...

(She's hung up on him. He stares at the phone in his hand.)

Bye.

(He rears back his arm as if to pitch his phone into the abyss of his rage, then thinks better of it and puts it back in his pocket.)

SID

Yo. You okay?

What? JOEL

I kinda overheard... SID

Oh. Sorry. JOEL

Parents can be a pain in the ass sometimes, huh? SID

Yeah, well... JOEL

You shoulda heard my old man when I came out. Ho boy. SID

Came out...? Oh, you mean... You mean you're a... a... JOEL

(SID stands up and extends her hand.)

Sid Zadnichek, Sergeant First Class, 10th Mountain Division, United States Army. SID

(JOEL shakes her hand.)

Nice to meet you. I'm... JOEL

Joel Hartman. Your wife told me, remember? SID

She's not my wife! JOEL

I know. I'm busting your balls. SID

Oh. Right. Ouch. JOEL

(Beat. She stares at him.)