

## NO PLANE NO GAIN

Bert, 24, a squeamish flight attendant on his first day on the job

Nancy, 43, a newly-appointed head flight attendant in fear of losing her job

James, 50, a grumpy heart surgeon who sees his business trip as an exciting opportunity to get away from his family

*The curtain rises and the inside of an airplane is revealed. There is a row of blue, cushioned seats and JAMES sits in the middle with headphones on. He is barely visible; the back of his chair is to the audience. BERT and NANCY are seen up stage right, conversing inaudibly. There is a barely noticeable white noise of the engine humming filling the whole plane. It is 7:35 PM and the plane is about to take off from Albuquerque on it's way to Vancouver.*

NANCY

You said you were ready, Bert. You look a little sick.

BERT

Yeah! Yeah... I'm fine.

NANCY

*(NANCY looks coldly and menacingly at BERT.)* Don't mess up.

BERT

N--no, I'm sure I'll be fine. I'm ready for this.

NANCY

Oh, good. You have a lot to live up to, you know. Your father was one of the greatest flight attendants American Airlines has ever seen. Same with your mother, aunt, grandfather, and his father too.

BERT

Oh, gosh, I hope I can make them all proud.

NANCY

You better. *(NANCY chuckles.)* Ok, get ready. The plane is taking off.

BERT

*(He grabs the seat in front of him)* Well, the thing is, ma'am, I may or may not have a deathly fear of planes. *(The plane swoops upwards and BERT puts his hand to his mouth and buckles over.)*

NANCY

What? Really?! Why are you even here, Bert?

BERT

*(Bert reaches for a barf bag.)* I told you! I have to make my family proud! They were all great flight attendants and they expect me to be great too! And I will be! This is nothing! *(BERT forces a chuckle.)* I'm not even scared. *(BERT barfs into his barf bag)*

NANCY

*(NANCY sighs.)* You better be, because there's no turning back now, Bert. We're already high in the air.

BERT

Really? Already? Let me see. *(BERT goes to look out of the small window.)*

NANCY

*(NANCY pulls BERT away from the window and closes the blinds.)* Maybe looking out the window isn't the best idea for you right now. Why don't you clean yourself up and go up and ask if anybody wants some dinner. You wouldn't believe the stuff people will eat after they've waited in a boarding line for an hour and a half. Did you know our "lasagna" is 3% rubber? I heard a rumor that we use an ingredient that they use to make those mouse pads for your computer. You know, to keep the lasagna fresh. I bet they can't even tell. Or maybe they can, but they just eat it anyway. I mean, what else are they gonna eat? See, that's the beauty of airplane food. It's disgusting, but they have to eat it. *(While NANCY has been talking, BERT has gone to the mirror, wiped his face of vomit, straightened his hat, and stumbled out into the seating area of the plane.)* Oh. He's gone. Good luck, Bert. *(NANCY takes out a tupperware container and begins to eat the airplane lasagna.)*

BERT

Thanks! *(BERT walks up and leans on JAMES's seat, acting friendly.)* Hi, customer! What takes you to this wonderful flight?

JAMES

Traveling for a surgery. I'm a heart surgeon. God, I don't know why on earth some people prefer to have surgeries in their own homes. In their own homes!

BERT

*(BERT is enthusiastic.)* That sounds very interesting! Would you like something to drink?

JAMES

Um, could I just have a ginger ale, please?

BERT

Of course, sir! One ginger ale coming right up! I will be right back.

JAMES

Thank you.

BERT

*(As BERT turns to walk away, the plane begins to shake slightly and BERT tightly grabs the top of JAMES's seat for balance.)* Gah! Did you feel that?

JAMES

It's just turbulence. Haven't you ever been on a plane before?

BERT

Y--yes... of course. I am a flight attendant, after all. It's just... I... um... I DON'T WANT THIS PLANE TO CRASH! (*BERT begins to bend over and breathe deeply.*)

JAMES

Oh -- oh my god! Are you okay, sir?

BERT

Yes, yes, I'm fine. I just get a little airsick sometimes. Nothing for you to worry about. (*The plane shakes again.*) GAH! OH, GOD, DON'T LET THIS PLANE CRASH! THIS CAN'T BE HOW I DIE!

JAMES

Come on, get up, man.

BERT

I'll be up in just a second, sir! (*BERT slowly sits down on the floor of the plane, breathing heavily and frantically, reaching for a barf bag and grabbing several. He opens one and begins to breathe heavily into it.*)

JAMES

Are you serious? (*JAMES gets up from his seat and shouts down the aisle.*) Can we get some help up here?

NANCY

(*NANCY fast walks up the aisle to where BERT is now laying on the floor, face down.*) Oh, god, really, Bert? Get up! (*She hoists BERT up from off the ground and holds him under her arm as he continues to breathe heavily. The two begin to slowly walk to the back of the plane.*)

BERT

(*BERT turns around to JAMES*) My name is Bert, by the way! Just holler if you need anything else. Oh, and I'll get that ginger ale right away, sir! (*BERT throws up in a bag as he reaches the back of the plane with NANCY.*)

NANCY

What was that, Bert? You just embarrassed both of us! In front of a customer!

BERT

Gosh, sorry, Nancy. I don't know what came over me. You'll have to excuse me. This is my first plane ride. I heard about turbulence, but I guess I didn't realize it would be that bad.

NANCY

Well, get used to it, Bert! This is your job now! This is what you're meant to do, and it has been since you were born to two flight attendant parents! So you better learn how to do your job properly! I'm warning you, Bert.

BERT

I'll get better! I promise. And I'll start by getting that man his ginger ale! (*BERT stumbles to a cabinet in the back of the plane and retrieves a plastic cup and a gallon bottle of ginger ale.*) I'll be right back, Nancy! (*He stumbles out into the area where JAMES is seated.*)

NANCY

Bert, wait! You're going to embarrass me even more! Ugh... how did you even get this job? (*She fast walks up to BERT just as he approaches .*)

BERT

(*Before NANCY can do anything, BERT greets JAMES.*) I've got that ginger ale you wanted, sir! (*He unfolds JAMES' tray table and places the plastic cup on it, beginning to pour ginger ale into it from the big bottle.*)

JAMES

(*JAMES removes his headphones and turns to BERT, surprised.*) Um... thanks, I guess. Just don't have another breakdown, okay, man? You're stressing me out.

BERT

Oh, no, I assure you, I'm fine! Better than ever! In fact, there's nothing I love more than being on planes! And, trust me, I've been on MANY. I just... why, I just don't know what in the world came over me earlier.

NANCY

(*NANCY forces a smile.*) He's sorry.

BERT

Yes. Very sorry. Is there anything I can do to make it up to you? To show you how committed I am to my job? (*BERT winks at NANCY after he says this.*)

NANCY

(*NANCY rolls her eyes at BERT, then turning to JAMES.*) How about one free ticket... to anywhere of your choosing!

JAMES

Well, that does sound nice... (*JAMES looks at BERT sympathetically.*) But it's quite all right. I accept your apology. Say, Bert -- is that what you said your name was?

BERT

That's right! Bertram Preston, that's me!

JAMES

Well, Bert, my favorite thing about being on airplanes is just looking out my window. You would not believe how calming it is. Just watching the clouds roll by beneath you... all by yourself way up, higher than anyone else can see. Whenever I get stressed or upset about work, I just close my eyes and imagine myself flying high in a graceful airplane, high above my troubles.

BERT

Well, that sounds like fun, sir? Mind if I take a peek?

JAMES

Sure! (*JAMES reaches to pull away the curtain on his window.*) I think you'll really enjoy this.

NANCY

(*NANCY puts her hand out, keeping JAMES from removing the blinds.*) Wait! Bert, maybe this isn't the best thing for you in your... current state.

BERT

Oh, Nancy, I appreciate your concern, but I think I'll be quite fine.

JAMES

Ah, he's all right. It's just a window. What harm could it do?

NANCY

But-- (*Before NANCY can stop him, JAMES pulls away the curtain, revealing the ground far below. BERT's eyes open wide and he starts swaying slowly back and forth, but he cannot force any words out of his mouth.*)

JAMES

See? Not that bad, huh?

BERT

Wow... we're really high, huh? That's... um... that's-- (*BERT puts his hand to his mouth and gags silently. His other hand, still holding the uncapped soda bottle which hovers over JAMES' lap, begins to shake uncontrollably. Suddenly, his whole body starts shaking wildly as his eyes stare fixated out the window.*)

NANCY

(*NANCY puts her hands on BERT's torso, attempting to pull him away from JAMES.*) Bert! What are you doing? Stop that! Just look away from the window!

JAMES

Hey, Bert, you okay, man? You're kinda scaring me a little bit...

NANCY

Come on, Bert! Stop shaking like that! Get away from James before you spill that soda on him!

JAMES

This suit is very expensive!

PILOT, OVER PA

Attention, passengers... (*BERT's head jerks up to face the speaker from which the pilot's voice is coming from.*) We are about to enter a violent storm cloud, so I ask that you please fasten your seatbelts and remain calm. Thank you. (*BERT's eyes slowly close, his face shaking in terror, as he faints on top of JAMES, the ginger ale spilling on both of them.*)

NANCY

Ah!

JAMES

Ugh! Oh god, Bert. (*BERT cannot hear him, being still passed out. JAMES turns to face NANCY.*) Get him off me, for pete's sake!

NANCY

(*She stutters, flabbergasted as she tries to pull BERT away.*) O--of course, sir. I'm truly sorry for my colleague's actions. This... this is inexcusable. (*NANCY leans down to speak directly to BERT while still attempting to pull him off of JAMES.*) Did you hear that, Bert? Inexcusable! (*NANCY gets up close to BERT's face.*) INEXCUSABLE! (*NANCY sighs.*) Wait... are you there Bert? Can you hear me?

JAMES

Jesus, lady, can't you see that he's out cold?

NANCY

Oh, god... this isn't good. This most definitely is not good.

JAMES

(*Thunder cracks, signifying the plane's entrance into the storm. JAMES jumps when he hears this, as does NANCY.*) Thunder. Well, that's just great. (*He sighs.*) Just... great. Now, would you mind getting this sad excuse for a steward off of me before this plane gets struck by lightning and we crash?

NANCY

(*NANCY mumbles as quietly as she can while still being polite.*) Y--yes, of course. (*With excruciating force, NANCY delivers one last tug on BERT's limp body, successfully getting him off of JAMES and onto the floor of the plane.*) Ugh... there we go. (*Thunder cracks again. NANCY looks to JAMES, her face sincerely and deeply sorry.*) Gosh, is there anything I can do? And, trust me, I mean anything. (*NANCY leans into his face, tears starting to well up.*) Anything. I... I just want to fix this mess.

JAMES

(*JAMES yells forcefully at NANCY.*) Well, you could start by getting me something to clean this up with! (*NANCY nods in understanding as a sole tear makes its way down her face, a display of her sheer embarrassment.*)

NANCY

Of... of course, sir. (*NANCY must shield her face from JAMES as tears start rolling down her face. Ashamed, she pulls BERT down the aisle and into the back of the plane. She props him up against the back wall in a sitting position. She leans against the wall beside him, hands to her face, clearly sobbing uncontrollably. She slouches down against the wall so that she is sitting on the floor of the plane beside the unconscious BERT. After a few beats of crying, NANCY seems to collect herself, wiping the tears from her eyes. She remembers JAMES' request and quickly stands up, brushes off her legs, and grabs a wad of napkins from the drawer. Before she goes out to give them to JAMES, she looks in the mirror on the wall, wiping her face one last time and taking a deep breath. She turns away from the mirror, ready to face JAMES, when BERT suddenly wakes up with a jolt.*)

BERT

(*BERT's eyes snap open and he shakes his face to wake himself up.*) Gah!

NANCY

(*NANCY jumps and turns around quickly to face BERT, clearly extremely agitated.*) Bert!

BERT

How did I get here? Wait... Nancy... was I just unconscious?

NANCY

Ugh! Yes, Bert, you were.

BERT

What? Really? For how long? Oh, gosh, I hope I didn't cause any problems.

NANCY

Yeah, well, you did. You spilled that entire bottle of ginger ale on that man!

BERT

(*BERT gasps.*) Oh... that's not good.

NANCY

(*Extremely annoyed at BERT's passivity, NANCY yells at him.*) No, Bert, it's not! Now we -- you -- have to go explain to him what on earth happened! And how do you even explain that? A flight attendant who can't get on a plane without passing out? What do you think people are going to think of that? I'm the one who hired you, Bert, so I'm the one who's going to get fired! And so will you!

BERT

(*BERT now realizes what he has done, shame washing over him.*) Nancy, I --

NANCY

Why did you even become a flight attendant? You're terrible! You are nothing like your parents! No, that's an understatement. Your parents were the greatest thing to ever happen to

American Airlines. They were the ones who turned me into who I am today. And you? You'll never come close to anything that they achieved.

BERT

*(As NANCY has been yelling, BERT's face has gotten red and he's grown angry.)* Don't you think I know that? Can you even imagine how hard it was to come into this job this morning knowing I would fail? *(BERT stands up to face NANCY.)* I don't want to be here! I hate planes! I hate helping people! But what do you think would have happened if I didn't take this job? I would probably get disowned!

NANCY

*(Now sympathetic, NANCY is no longer yelling.)* You--you mean your family is the only reason you took this job?

BERT

Family is the only reason any of the Prestons are flight attendants! The only difference is that they just lucked out and ended up being really good at it. I guess I missed out on that gene.

NANCY

So if you were born to a different family, you wouldn't be here?

BERT

Oh, god, no. Why would anyone willingly lock themselves on this airborne tin can? Airplanes are just tragedies waiting to happen! Why are any of these passengers on this flight? Vancouver isn't even that far from Albuquerque. Why aren't they taking a train? Why aren't they driving? I wish I was driving. But I'm stuck here. Trapped in this tin can. UGH! You know, I'll still be trapped after this. Even when we land. I can't escape this life. I'll have to get back on another plane, and another, and another. Hopefully, I'll get over how terrifying this is somewhere down the line. I'll probably need a lot more help from you to get there.

NANCY

I won't. I won't help you.

BERT

What? Why not? You don't want me to succeed?

NANCY

Yes, Bert, of course I want you to succeed. I owe it to you. I mean, your parents are the only people I can thank for my success. But, Bert, you can't succeed in this job. I don't care if you become the best flight attendant ever. I don't care if you get to be better than your parents. If you're not happy while you're doing this, I can't possibly imagine a situation where you're successful for yourself. You shouldn't care about being successful for your parents if you'll be broken on the inside.

BERT

What are you saying?

NANCY

Bert, look at me. (*NANCY grabs BERT's face, forcing him to look her in the eyes.*) Your happiness always comes first. It has to. And... you just can't be happy here, Bert! Face it, you're only here to appease your family. And you know what that's worth? Nothing!

BERT

I KNOW! I know, Nancy. It's driving me insane! But I can't leave! What will my parents think?

NANCY

Ugh, come on, Bert. Screw your parents! Who says you have to do everything they tell you? You're an adult! You are your own person! Bert, I want you to listen to me now: your parents do not own you.

BERT

*(BERT looks down at his feet, his head hung as a symbol of his surrender as he realizes the truth in NANCY's words. He sighs and looks at NANCY with eyes that show reluctance to admit that she is right, while simultaneously thanking her.)* You're right. You... you're right! *(BERT lets out a chuckle.)* You know, I don't think I've ever agreed with them on anything. I mean, ever. No wonder I hate being here. Why should they be able to shoehorn me into doing this job? It just... makes me so angry! I feel like I've been manipulated and morphed into someone I'm not. *(BERT grunts in frustration.)* I'm done here. As soon as this plane lands, I'm leaving. For good! Anywhere is better than here. There can't possibly be something that I'm worse at than being a flight attendant. But all I know is that I'm DONE with planes! I'm done with this job! I'm done with my parents! And for the first time, I'm free! I'm-- *(There is a sudden jolt and the emergency lights go on as the plane jerks upwards suddenly, knocking BERT and NANCY to the floor. In front of them, JAMES falls out of his seat. But, just as suddenly as it started, the chaos stops, and the lights go back to normal.)*

CO-PILOT, OVER PA

*(Before anyone can say anything, the PA dings, and the CO-PILOT's voice is heard, shaken and worried.)* Bertram and Nancy, please report to the cockpit immediately. I also ask that passengers please keep their seatbelts fastened and their tray tables in the upright posi-- Oh my god! He's bleeding! Oh-- *(A loud THUNK is heard over the PA and the transmission ends.)*

BERT

*(BERT and NANCY rise from the floor, and BERT brushes the dust off of his shoulders. Grumpily, he turns to NANCY.)* I guess we better check that out!

NANCY

Whatever it was...

*(BERT and NANCY make their way to the cockpit, passing JAMES, still shaken on the floor.)*

JAMES

Hey! Guys! What was that?

BERT

You said you're a doctor?

JAMES

*(JAMES nods.)* Mhm. Heart surgeon.

NANCY

Come with us. This might be ugly.

JAMES

Wh-what do you mean? *(JAMES scrambles to get off the floor and gets up, walking behind NANCY, curious and worrisome. NANCY ignores him, clearly even more worried than he is. When the three arrive at the cockpit, they are horrified. Both PILOT and CO-PILOT lay, unconscious, faces down against the control panel.)*

BERT

Gah! Oh my god, Nancy, what happened? *(Shaking with terror, BERT gets down to sit in the PILOT's seat, slapping the unconscious man's face in an attempt to wake him up.)*

NANCY

God, I don't know. I mean, look out the window! You can't see anything through that storm. How nervous must they have been? *(NANCY bends down to look at the controls more closely.)* Oh, thank god they at least left the autopilot on. I think we'll be safe until either one of them wakes up.

JAMES

*(JAMES has two fingers on the CO-PILOT's neck, feeling for a pulse, then moving to do the same for the PILOT.)* Neither of them are dead. *(JAMES squints and scrutinizes the PILOT's face, his fingers still on his neck.)* Boy, this guy's heart is racing! Must have been pretty scared about crashing this plane. Hell, I would be too if I was at the head of a 747 heading into a giant storm cloud. *(JAMES shudders.)* I'll try to wake them up.

BERT

*(Anguished, BERT leans back in the pilot's seat and covers his hands with his eyes.)* This is the last thing I need today. *(There is silence in the cabin for a beat, but then a tremendous BOOM is heard from outside the plane and a blinding white light comes through the windshield. The plane jolts upwards and back down again. The lights flicker violently, and NANCY, BERT, and JAMES are screaming uncontrollably. BERT clutches the seat beneath him for dear life, NANCY with her hands on the wall and JAMES hugging the CO-PILOT's limp body. The BOOM ends and the white light disappears to reveal the return to the everlasting storm clouds ahead. The plane begins to spiral downwards and the flickering of lights intensifies.)* WAS THAT LIGHTNING?

NANCY

YES, BERT. IT WAS LIGHTNING! NOW DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS PLANE, OR GET OUT OF YOUR SEAT! (*NANCY lunges towards the pilot seat, reaching to pull BERT out of it so that she can man the controls. But, before she can do anything, BERT grabs the yoke<sup>1</sup> without thinking and leans backward, pulling the yoke with him. As the plane rights itself, NANCY is sent flying onto her back. BERT then leans forward, sending the plane downwards, intentionally this time. BERT's eyes are squinted, his whole body tense, and NANCY struggles to get back up. After a few beats, the plane emerges beneath the storm cloud and a clear sky is revealed. BERT leans backwards one more time, and sets the plane on a course parallel to the ground beneath him. The plane is silent, unmoving. JAMES' eyes are closed tight, lying on the floor and still gripping the CO-PILOT. BERT's shoulders drop as he relaxes his body, hands still on the yoke. NANCY jumps up and pushes a button on the control panel.*)

ROBOTIC VOICE OVER PA

Autopilot engaged.

*(BERT lets go of the yoke and his hands fall to his sides.)*

NANCY

*(NANCY turns to BERT.)* Bert! What was that?!

BERT

*(BERT stammers.)* I--I don't know, Nancy! I just grabbed this joystick and leaned backwards! *(BERT lets out a chuckle.)* I didn't think it would save us!

JAMES

*(JAMES quickly opens his eyes and darts his head back and forth and jumps up to look out the window. Upon realizing his safety, he lets out a sigh of relief. His eyes are on the ground, shaking his head in disbelief.)* Nice work, kid.

BERT

*(BERT turns to whisper to NANCY.)* Which one is the intercom button?

*(NANCY pushes a button on the control panel and nods to BERT. She is beaming.)*

BERT

*(BERT clears his throat, ready to speak to his passengers.)* Folks, this is your captain, Bertram Preston, speaking. I would ask that everyone remain calm and that they keep their seatbelts on and their tray tables in the upright position. And, please, enjoy the remainder of our flight.

CURTAIN

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<sup>1</sup> A yoke is a steering wheel for a plane.