



I Fly Delta by Nick Holle

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Excuse me. That's my seat. Sorry, lady. Okay. Excuse me. Thank you, ma'am.

It's funny. Last time I flew Delta, saw a stew haul off and cold cock a passenger. I kid you not. Guy was giving her a hard time about this and that. He pinches her rear end. Next thing you know she snaps her fingers with her right hand, diverting attention, then follows through with her left hand—BAM!—right in the kisser. Poked a hole in his cheek with her diamond, started spewing blood all over the nice little old lady beside him.

How do you do, ma'am? Name's Bert. Used to be a sales rep for a little company called Proctor & Gamble.

So the stew gets a standing ovation, and while the guy's clutching his face on the ground, a couple of the passengers get up and give him a few swift kicks to the torso. Not out of control, just to give him the message not to pull that crap again, as if the hole in the cheek hadn't. Guy in G6 is a Chippendale. He happily gives the angry stew a back rub, and the rest of her crew tries to settle the melee. They give everybody a free drink to take the edge off. I went with a Long Island Iced Tea.

Well, reluctantly, you know, they gotta patch up the guy's cheek, or the next thing you know there'll be a coupla pints of blood on the floor, they'll be reading the guy his last rites. So the hole is gonna need stitches. They need a doctor to do it. Liability reasons, Delta being a major airline and all.

So the stews are going seat to seat looking for a doctor. Some guy in first class hears about what happened, brings the blood-drenched nice little old lady that was sitting next to that creep with the hole in the cheek up to have his seat, gives her two grand to get herself a new outfit when we land. And this guy, who tells us he made a half billion selling travel-sized hatchets online, comes back to coach, says drinks are on him. Second standing ovation of the flight.

So the search for the doctor ends when this lady informs one of the stews that the man sitting next to her is a doctor, or at least he did two and a half years of med school then got bored, went to study philosophy at The Sorbonne. The doc's seat is empty. She says she thinks he went to the bathroom, probably number two, been gone for a half-hour.

They give the doc ten more minutes. He's still inside. They knock. Nothing. They bring back the Chippendale. He busts down the door. What do ya know? The doc's sprawled out on the toilet, all junked up on medicinal heroin.

So with the OD and the hole in the cheek, the captain is thinking we need to make an unscheduled stop in Houston. This does not make the marketing fellas in 17D through F too happy. They got a one p.m. Eastern Daylight make-or-break-the-company meeting in downtown Atlanta. So these guys, who've already knocked back four rounds courtesy the travel hatchet guy from first class, try and make their way up to the cockpit to start some shit with the captain.

The stews are trying to stop them, but they're just nice gals, no match for drunken buffoons. Then they actually run over the six-year-old who just got done touring the cockpit, don't even help the kid back up. Well, this ticks off the Chippendale, who was one heckuva nice guy by the way and who, interestingly enough, was no longer a Chippendale because the travel hatchet guy saw him kick that door down and hired him on as a bodyguard.

So the former Chippendale yells, "Halt!" Runs up, stops them before they get to the cockpit. He tells them the captain is responsible for the lives of the passengers, needs to think about them first and foremost. If this means landing the plane so the needy can get medical attention, then that's what it means. Then the marketing fellas tell him that they're responsible for their wives and seven collective children, and they need to think about them first and foremost. If this means threatening the captain to keep the plane in the air, then that's what it means. The former Chippendale says hijacking's a federal offense. The three marketing fellas say they don't give a hoot.

So these guys are gonna brawl. All the passengers are on the edges of their seats, first-class edges being more comfortable, and for all the captain knows, everything is A-okay, except for, you know, the hole in the cheek and the OD. So right at the moment when all heck is gonna break loose, up pops the half-billionaire travel hatchet guy to save the day again. Says if the marketing fellas can't make it to the meeting and the company goes belly up, he'll buy the company.

Well, everybody gasps, on the verge of another standing O., but the marketing fellas shake their heads. They say no way. Said there's no guarantee they'll keep their jobs, keep food on the table, through a merger or buy-out. This stumps everybody, even Mr. I-Can-Buy-My-Way-Outta-Trouble-Any-Time-I-Want travel hatchet guy.

So with all hope lost, one of the marketing fellas turns around kicks down the cockpit door. The navigator screams, "What in the blue kittens is going on here?" The captain takes his hand off the wheel, turns around, and the plane dips a couple hundred feet. Co-captain says, "Jesus, watch the air."

Anyway, so the three marketing fellas and the former Chippendale all start talking at once. It takes a good five minutes to get the whole story out to the captain. And we're all back here thinking we overshot Houston which would've been fine, seeing as we weren't supposed to stop there anyway, though not an ideal situation for the creep with the hole in the cheek and the OD'd pseudo-doctor.

So the captain is listening to this whole thing, knowing how irrational the marketing fellas were, but being a real sarcastic son of a gun at the same time. He says sure we'll just leave those two guys back there to die and get you fellas to your business meeting. And the marketing fellas are pretty ticked. They're college-educated. They know when they're being patronized.

While this whole time, the travel hatchet guy is trying get a word in edgewise. He was wanting to lay another offer on the table. You see, he saw the marketing fella kick down the cockpit door, and he's thinking if they lose their company, he might as well hire them on as bodyguards too. You never can have too many bodyguards, kicking down doors, I guess the only qualification you need to be one. Travel hatchet guy says if the other two can kick down doors, he'll hire all three, match their current salaries.

The marketing fellas say, "Why not?" So the travel-hatchet guy, the marketing fellas, the former Chippendale, and three of the stews all go back to the bathrooms. One of the marketing fellas fires a right kick at the other bathroom door, comes down no problemo. So it's time for the third one to kick down a door, but there's no doors left. The two of them are already down—the one the marketing fella just did in and the one the former Chippendale got looking for the doctor. Only two bathrooms in coach on a 737.

So there's not much time before we do or don't land in Houston, and the travel hatchet guy is ready to forget the test and hire them all anyway. But the third marketing fella, who, mind you, is pretty drunk at this point, says, "I'll just kick down this one." One of the stews cries out no. Too late. Guy kicks down the emergency exit.

So all of the sudden, we're losing some serious cabin pressure, everybody grabs a hold of something sturdy, except for the hole-in-the-cheek-guy and the OD'd half-doctor/half-philosopher who get sucked right out of the plane, no real loss there, probably woulda died anyway.

Now there's a lot of screaming and hollering and holding on to our dear lives. And then for God knows why, the nice little old lady with the blood-drenched clothes wanders back into coach to see what happened. She loses her footing, gets sucked out the exit, though she catches herself on the edge of the door with her fingertips.

The situation is total mayhem, everyone's frantic. Then the nice little old lady loses her grip on one hand, that close to flying with the birds. She starts dictating her last will and testament to the

passengers in the nearby seats who, not to take anything away from the nice little old lady, were probably thinking about themselves at that point.

So right about the moment the nice little old lady was hanging on by her last finger and all hope was lost, up steps of the epitome of bravery, the former Chippendale himself, and he snatches her wrist, yanks her inside the plane. I guarantee on the gonads of God if we all hadn't been hanging on for our dear lives, we would've given him our third standing ovation of the morning right there.

Now with everyone pretty safe, as far as the open emergency exit goes, our lives were then in the hands of the smart-ass captain, who at this point thinks it's a good idea to crank some Lynyrd Skynyrd over the PA system. I look up to see one of the stews trying to instruct us once again on the various crash positions, but over the screaming, the plane engines, the wind, the Hail Marys, and "Free Bird" I can't hear a single word she's saying.

So it's pretty rough up there, we're sure death is waiting for us behind the next cloud. The plane is shaking like it's having a grand mal seizure, and we're practically on a nose dive towards Earth. I just closed my eyes. It's all I could do. I just closed them and thought of green grass and blue skies and all the other beautiful things of this world. Women. I just tucked all those things into the old memory box and was going to take them with me into the tunnel of light. Funny thing, knowing when you're gonna die.

Well, then the smart ass pilot straightened the plane out, spotted a field to land in. Funny thing is, he flies into a flock of seagulls—not the band, but the birds. Actually they were Canadian geese, down south for the winter, though now they were smacking into the plane, splattering the windows with blood. They're coming through the open emergency exit, shitting themselves with fear, which then meant shitting on us.

All this and the pilot still lands the plane in an open quarry, happened so quick barely felt a thing. All these sighs of relief, and we get up, picking geese guts off our faces. We're jumping out the open emergency exit into the big rubber raft thingy. We're all walking around dazed and confused, and next thing I know there's a bunch of suits hauling us into vans.

We drive five minutes to this abandon hanger. We get out, and they shuffle us in. All of us, the travel hatchet guy, the three marketing fellas, the former Chippendale, the smart-ass pilot, his crew, all the stews, the nice little old lady with the blood-drenched clothes, the six-year-old that got knocked down by the marketing fellas, me, and the rest of the passengers. And we can't figure it out, thinking this is probably standard procedure for a near-fatal plane crash. Near-fatal for us, fatal for the hole-in-the-cheek creep and the OD'd Nietzsche.

Finally all these suits gather up front. The leader steps forward, says he's a bigwig for Delta. He says he assumes, like him, we'd just assume this whole thing never happened. Well, this stirs up the crowd pretty easily. One of the marketing fellas yells, "No way, man. I'm gonna sue your ass!" The other passengers rally around the guy, start chanting, "Sue! Sue! Sue! Sue!"

But the Delta bigwig holds up his hands, tries to calm us down. Says he'll take care of it. Says if we promise not talk to lawyers, the press, anybody about this, he'll give us each three million dollars, untaxed, no questions asked. Travel hatchet guy goes, "What about the IRS? They're always on my butt." The Delta bigwig says no problem. They just gotta pay them off too. "It's surefire," he says. "We do it all the time."

Well, that got us. They started writing checks right there. It was seventy-nine people winning the lottery all at once, except for the travel hatchet guy, three mil being small change to him. He signs his check over to the Little League that the kid who got floored by the marketing fellas coming out of the cockpit plays in.

Everyone gets done signing, and we all give the Delta bigwig a standing ovation. He blushes, says if it were up to him, he'd rather we crashed, saved all this money. That gets a big laugh, and then we made arrangements to get on another plane to Atlanta.

Now I can judge by the look on your face, you wanna know what happened next. What'd I do with the money? Well, I got to Atlanta, forgot why I was going there, turned around went to Vegas. Dumb. Dropped two million two in fourteen days on the craps tables. Finally, I just cut my losses, bought some plane tickets started flying around, no place in particular. No airline in particular for that matter, but the major ones. I figure if I just keep on flying, something like that Delta flight is bound to happen sooner or later. Seems like if I can fly around the country, make three mil every time something like that happens, I could get by with a pretty honest living. And I'll be damn sure to steer clear of Vegas from there on out, that I can tell ya. Yes, ma'am.

What, you don't believe me? It's true as The Bible itself.

A window seat? Over there? You could have mine if you want.

Ah, you're right. That one looks more comfortable anyway. Well, nice to meet'cha, ma'am. Cross your fingers for a near-disaster. Wink wink. I'd wink myself, can't, on account of this weird thing happened back in college. See, I was trying to get change for a twenty from a traffic cop and—oh yeah, another time maybe. Take care of yourself.