



# NOBODY GIRL

by Hana Mason

**THE** only trips Robbie ever seems to do are back and forth from Calgary to Victoria. Puddle-jumps, we call them. Sometimes we do two in one day. On those days, we have to sneak off for a quickie, which is never as satisfying as the *Cosmopolitan* magazines sold in the airport convenience store suggest. After, he buys me coffee, and I straighten my neckerchief. He leaves his tie askew.

When he only flies one way, the whole crew stays overnight. I take a shower and run the water cold, imagine I'm standing under a waterfall. It's pure and sweet and sort of magic, not a dribble from a faucet with poor pressure. I slide on jeans and a t-shirt, but I don't bother with makeup. No

matter how much I fret over my pallid skin and dark under eyes, Robbie never seems to mind. Once the hotel hallways, strange as they are temporary, fall silent, I go up to his suite and spend the whole night, almost like a honeymooner.

One night in the airport lounge after a particularly turbulence-heavy flight, our whole cabin crew was drinking the workday away. I had a gin and tonic because it's the kind of thing Mike would order. He's got these refined tastes. The other girls drank some fruity thing that would have made his lips pull tight. The tonic was bitter and metallic, so I sucked a lime thinking it might help. It didn't.

“If you order gin and Sprite, it looks the same as tonic. Tastes better, too.” It was Robbie from across the bar. He must have seen my grimace. He was drinking a Caesar. He reminded me of people who order tomato juice on flights. I always hated the thick, savoury smell of it going into the little plastic cups, hated the way it stuck around on people's upper lips. His brown hair was fluffy like tufts of shed puppy fur, and he had some acne, but really I couldn't tell the zits from his freckles. His suit was wrinkled, his tie loose. People say they like a man in uniform. Maybe I just like a man half out of one.

After that, we didn't share so much as an introduction. It was like in the movies where it cuts away from the hotel bar right to the hotel room as if nothing needs to happen in-between. I never meant to cheat on Mike. He asked me out at the grocery store, and I thought it might be nice to have someone to come home to. He feels out of my league—responsible, corporate ladder climbing, clean-cut, everything buttoned up and slicked back.

Sometimes I get the feeling if I didn't date Mike I'd disappear entirely. I'd be a nobody girl, just work and sleep and silently wishing for more. With Robbie, it feels like he might die without me, which I know is sort of cruel. When I do come home, Mike buys me dry red wines and ripe cheeses and makes me feel like more than I am. Sometimes more than I can be. But he's handsome, the kind of handsome that gets attention when we're out—a strong jaw and perfectly quaffed hair, a foot taller than me and well-dressed. He always holds me tight like he missed me when I was gone, even if I'm not sure he really did, how he possibly could.



Another flight from Calgary to Victoria. Tired mothers, screaming babies. University kids checking their phones to make sure their rides can still pick them up on the other side two hours late. Becca goes over the speaker with her best stewardess voice and apologizes, again, for the delay. As she turns her back to the crowd, she rolls her eyes.

“Jesus Christ,” she says under her breath, “It’s like these people have never had a fucking flight delayed before.” When I first met Becca, with her rednecky upper-Albertan accent and oilrig mouth, I was surprised she got hired. But then she turned to a customer with a perfect smile and a lilting Pan-Am voice, and I think she could have convinced me of anything.

“You should be an actress,” I told her.

“No, that’s no way to see the world,” she said. I didn’t tell her flying domestically wasn’t one either.

Out over the smoothie kiosk between gates 10 and 11, there are these huge art installations of giant toy planes that spin around and “fly” if you turn a wheel at the base. Some kids have been playing with them for hours now, and I watch the planes go, all in Technicolor, whirring and creaking along, spinning slow, too slow to blur, so slow it’s infuriating.

In the waiting area, people shift and start packing up their books and tablets with something like hope in their eyes, but I know it'll be twenty minutes before anyone leaves those uncomfortable seats.

On the empty plane, it's quiet and scentless, as if there's no air in it at all. We clean the seats and tray tables with alcohol wipes and collect garbage from the floor. Every time I bend down to re-fold the seatbelts my poly-blend pencil skirt rides up in the back and bunches in the front. I look over to Becca as she opens the overhead compartments, her arms in a graceful curve. She's loosened her neckerchief and tied it around her wrist. Exposed, her décolletage is elegant. Without my neckerchief, the yellowing hickeys Robbie gave me last time, despite my protests, would be exposed, and my neck would look bare and pale. I hate having to hide them from Mike—scarves and makeup and sex with the lights off. I readjust it and move on.

Robbie and the co-pilot settle in the cockpit. Robbie's ironed his shirt, which is unusual. So is the fancy knot in his airline tie.

"Ready, stewardesses?" The co-pilot, a short man with greasy hair and jacked-up shoulder muscles laughs and steps out into the cabin. He likes to call us the antiquated name and laugh like it's the funniest thing he's ever heard.

“As we’ll ever be,” Becca re-ties her neckerchief. With one hand she smooths down the top of her blonde hair, perfectly covering the brown roots coming in with her company-mandated chignon. She slides an index finger into her mouth and brings it out with a pop, revealing a ring of oily red lipstick. She bares her teeth at me and I nod, giving her the all clear before she turns away to retrieve the passengers. She doesn’t check mine. I carefully dab around my lips and rub my teeth with my fingertip, adjust a pin digging in to my scalp.

I head to the back and start to set up the refreshment cart. By the time I realize I’ve forgotten my safety demonstration kit and turn to go back, Robbie is right behind me. He catches me between the main cabin and the washroom, and the hallway is so narrow here we’re pressed up close to each other. I think he’s wearing aftershave. I let out a little “oh” in surprise and he laughs.

“I’ll see you later?” he says.

“Sure,” I say, even though he doesn’t have to ask. He looks both ways, sees it’s all clear, and brings my lips up to his with a forefinger under my chin. I want to recoil. He’s never done that before. He slips into the washroom with a conspiratorial glance, and I retreat to the safety of my beverage caddy. I keep thinking about his watery, celery-coloured eyes and

the look in them and how I wish I never saw it at all and why. The safety demonstration recording interrupts my thoughts, and I have to catch up showing the passengers in the back of the plane how to fasten their seat belts and attach emergency oxygen masks.

Becca and I sit across from each other in our little half-seats for taking off. My knees bump up against hers, and I wish they wouldn't. The plane feels heavy around me, like I'm the center axis holding everyone in orbit. My heart beats fast in the groundless nervousness it always does at take-off. A male attendant sits across from us and turns to us when Robbie finishes his cheesy closing line over the speaker.

“Ugh. That joke was old before I ever heard it.”

“He's so weird,” Becca says. She pulls out a nail file and works away at her thumbnail. How she ever managed to get it on the flight, I'll never know. Becca would probably smoke on the plane if she could. Those meticulous nails are yellow with nicotine. She'd make a good stewardess in the proper sense though. Always ready with a smile and a light.

I wonder if either of them has ever interacted with Robbie outside of work, at a holiday party or an airport lounge, or if their impression of him is limited to his pilot speeches. He isn't one of the funny pilots. Sometimes

he practices the jokes in bed after we're done, and I laugh because I'm tired or high. He never smokes, but he lets me and doesn't complain.

"I heard he's sleeping with one of the flight attendants," the guy across the way doesn't bother to whisper. "An affair."

Becca appraises her perfect nails and puts the file away. "Ugh. Why? If I were gonna fuck a pilot, it wouldn't be a puddle jumper. International, get something out of it."

I turn away to the little window in the door of the plane and exit the conversation. I won't be able to lie if they ask me about it; it's always on the tip of my tongue.

"I swear, if I have to serve another hippie student in work boots, I'll do it. I'll fuck a senior pilot straight to Spain." Becca's 'berta twang is on full stage-whispered display.

At night and early in the morning when it's still dark, the city is all lights and blank spaces. It doesn't so much look like ground but clusters of stars in a great blackness. I can't tell above from below. It's like we're swimming through the sky rather than flying. It's midafternoon though, and the blue sky is in stark contrast with the ground. We taxi onto the runway and start off quick, like we're racing against something. We're

moving and moving, and I know Robbie's in control but really it feels like an act of God that we're all going in the same direction at the same time. The ground drops out like it was never even there, and we're flying.

Calgary goes on and on and on in this crazy urban sprawl like it'll never end, even when the city gives way to mountains to Georgia Strait to Desolation Sound back to city again. It's part of what I like about flying domestic, why I'm not fucking a senior pilot straight to Spain: I never want to be far from that view, that feeling of being encompassed in liquid darkness for a moment before the sun starts to paint the clouds and the western sky becomes tangible again. That and I'd probably never get one of the senior pilots. Today we're taking off at two in the afternoon, and all that's below is the patchwork tapestry of greenish-brown wheat fields. Even a slash of canola yellow would be nicer than this.

The refreshment cart takes up the whole aisle and rattles with every move. By now I've got the routine down. Most people order coffee or water, some diet colas or juice. No tomato juice today. Then it's "cookies or pretzels, cookies or pretzels, cookies or pretzels" till everyone's munching away, silent except for the rustle of the pretzel bags. I sneak the nicer people one of each and crush the rude one's snacks in my hand a bit.

Someone in a window seat (16F) gasps and points. Her neighbour joins in the oohing and ahing.

“Look at that lake!” That’s one good thing about flying days. I can catch glimpses of the lakes below. If there’s anywhere I want to go, it’s down there, to those lakeshores. Mike talks about travelling far—Thailand, Italy. Robbie spends weekends beach walking in Victoria. I watch lakes from tiny plane windows.

“Pretty.” 16E rubs his finger on the glass, and Becca scoffs from the other side of the cart. Someone has to clean that window now. I pass down water to the window-seater and catch a glimpse of the lake in question. Beautiful. Better than the stretches of plains and fields and better, even, maybe, than the nighttime rush of darkness. You could swim there for real. The sun reflects off the dark blue so that it looks less like a lake and more like a silk button sewn onto a mountain-grey wool coat. In my mind, I know exactly how it would feel to be there, even though I’ve never been. I’m not worldly. I’ve never even visited my own provincial backyard. How could I ever tell Mike I want to see Banff before I see Bangkok? What would he think of me then?

I think about what it would be like to go there. Maybe with Robbie. We’d play beach volleyball, and he’d lift me up on his weak shoulders and

try to toss me into the water. Or with Mike, if ever I told him the truth. It might be romantic. We could make a day trip of it, watch the sun go down; start small. It seems warm, like a summer day, a whole summer even, captured in a second. My life feels something like those toy planes, spinning slowly, round and round and round. At the lake, it would be still.

The co-pilot comes out of the cockpit and smooths his hand over his hair. He nods to some passengers and tells me, “Robbo wants some tomato juice if you can. I’m headed to the bathroom.” He turns into the stall. Becca pours me a cup.

“Robbie? I’ve got your drink.”

“Ah, thanks,” he says, turning away from the control panel. His skill with the complicated screens and buttons has always impressed me. Autopilot shatters the illusion of genius for a moment, and he is the soft sweet nobody-boy again.

“Is this allowed?”

“Not sure. I couldn’t wait.” Robbie starts to smile and I can still smell his heady aftershave overpowering the tomato juice.

“Wait?”

“To tell you.” He looks so off with his shirt pressed and his fluffy hair slicked down. “I’ve left her. I broke up with her, told her the truth.”

I’m standing so far away from him, still sitting in his chair, but I can tell he wants to kiss me. *Her?* His girlfriend. What’s her name? Did I ever know?

“What?” I should have said ‘why’.

“We can be together.” He does move to kiss me now, stands and grabs me by the waist. He smiles right until his mouth hits mine. I wonder if the co-pilot is coming back, or if Robbie asked him to stay away. I wonder if Becca wonders what’s taking me so long. I spend so much energy wondering, I nearly miss what Robbie says next.

“I’ve left her,” Robbie continues, “and I’m gonna stop doing puddle-jumps. I’ll get us on internationals. We can travel. We can explore far-off cities. Together.”

He looks so happy that I’m overwhelmed. His skin has cleared up, but his freckles make him look younger than he is, and his eyes are watery with joy. I want to mess up his hair, so he’ll at least look normal. How has he so vastly misunderstood me? I should want this. I should want him, someone who so clearly wants me, loves me. Someone I deserve.

“Robbie—“ I start, but he must mistake my panic for joy and kisses me again. He’s sloppy; he’s like a little boy. “What about Mike?”

“Mike?”

“My boyfriend.” Had I never told him?

“You don’t want to leave him?”

“I don’t know.”

“You wouldn’t be having an affair if some part of you didn’t.” Robbie looks less put together now. His hair gel is melting out, his tie ever so slightly loosened, as if my words have dishevelled him. Is that true?

“I don’t know, Robbie,” I say again.

“Really?” His voice breaks a bit like a remnant of teenage hood. He’s so sweet. Sweet like gin and Sprite. How am I hurting the guy I’m cheating with more than the guy I’m cheating on?

I shove the cup of tomato juice I’m still holding into his hands and turn to leave.



It's probably not the lake we saw from the plane, but it doesn't matter. The air is cool but the sun beats down warmly and the water is dark emerald and I'm here. It feels the way I imagined it would.

Once we landed, I got on another trip back to the prairie-side of the puddle then hopped a bus in the general direction of the mountains. I asked the bus driver how I might get to a lake, and he suggested hitching. Instead, I got a map at the station and walked.

My feet ache and my toes feel like they might be bleeding, but when I peel off my sheer pantyhose, they're only pink and swollen with blisters. I get undressed down to my underwear and tie my neckerchief around my head to cover my sweaty hair. The sun warms my shoulders, and I dip my toes in the glacial water. The breeze makes the peach fuzz on my back stand up.

I don't know yet what I'll do about Mike. It's done with Robbie. Just like how it started, we didn't really need words. We made eye contact as we left the plane and with that it was final. Cinematic.

Inch by inch, I make it into the water. It feels permanent and steady. It should feel as temporary and as odd as hotel rooms and plane cabins, but it doesn't. The feeling of existing, suspended in the cold dark water, goes on

forever. Here I am someone. I inhabit my limbs with intention. I am as graceful as Becca. It feels the way I think it should feel with Robbie. Or how I could feel with Mike. I wish a lake could love me back. And I wonder if it does. My breathing is heavy and deep, but there's enough air for me, more than enough. Somehow this feels a little bit like love.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hana Mason is a Victoria-based writer from Calgary. She is the Editor-in-Chief of This Side of West Issue 18 at UVic and a part-time barista. She has work in Riddle Fence, Existere, The Hunger Journal and elsewhere.

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