

A Poster of Poses

Next day, Maggie rings the office and learns that her flight departs that afternoon and that she is to meet Perrin at the airport. She spends the morning listless in her hotel room, depressed. She calls Novell, hoping to revisit the conversation about sacrificing Perrin with a glass knife, but the phone rings out.

Finally, she drags her suitcase out of the hotel lobby and towards a waiting taxi. She is hoping that the cab driver will help her lift the suitcase into the boot without asking. However, as soon as he approaches, the driver asks, "Can I help you with your bag?" and that ruins it completely. Maggie waves him away and loads the suitcase in the boot on her own.

At the airport, she finds Perrin in the departure lounge news agency, standing in front of the Moogh section. He is making annoying trombone noises with his mouth as he quickly flips through one of the Moogh magazines.

"Which one do you recommend?" he asks, when he glances around and sees her standing there, looking at him mistrustfully.

"They are all trite, populist shit," says Maggie, matter-of-factly.

"So which is the best?"

"You'd like them all equally," she says.

"I'll take the one with the glossiest cover, then."

Maggie watches as Perrin transacts for the magazine. He shoves the Moogh mag into his man bag, slung over his shoulder.

"Come on, we have to go," says Maggie, morosely.

"Which gate is it?" Perrin asks.

"You don't even know which gate it is?"

"I know it's one of the gates, that's a start."

"It's Gate 43." She moves away and Perrin trots along beside her.

"So," he says, "I need a crash course in Moogh, so I am an expert by the time we touch down."

"Well, that's not going to happen."

"What, you're not going to brief me?"

"I'll brief you, but I have been around the Moogh for years, and I consider myself a novice."

"Maybe you're not that bright," says Perrin, dismissively.

"I beg your pardon?" Maggie stops dead and stares at him, astounded. She shakes her head, disbelieving and continues on her way, upping her pace, hoping to leave Perrin behind. But the Ambulance Chaser walks as fast as

he talks.

“I wouldn’t be doing that if I were you,” says Perrin, chuckling. “Begging me, that is.”

“There’s no technical manual for the Moogh,” Maggie continues with a grumpy tone. “It is a phenomenon, never seen before, that calls into question every *a priori* assumption about what is true and honest and--”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Perrin interrupts, waving his hand in the air.

“Don’t you shush me!” Maggie protests, angrily.

“You’re missing the point somewhat, Paprika,” says Perrin, “I’m not here to write about the Moogh.”

“What? Paprika? What are you even talking about?”

Perrin starts sniggering uncontrollably. He puts his hand to his mouth to arrest his laughter. “It’s okay. It’s okay,” he says, trying to change the topic.

“There is absolutely nothing okay about any of this.” Maggie shakes her head and starts mumbling to herself out of sheer frustration.

“Hey, Paprika!” Perrin calls out from behind her. She turns to see that he has stopped in his tracks and is pointing to a large wall poster.

“I mean like, shot the duck?” he says, with a questioning look.

Gate 43 is the route that many thousands of people take to get from the City to the Moogh Zone. Decorations in this section of the airport include a variety of Moogh paraphernalia. One piece is a poster that shows simple line diagrams of the Moogh holding different poses. In one, it is looking upwards with its left hand pointing skyward. In another, it is leaning forward, like it was investigating something on the ground. There are nine poses in all and the diagrams look like a Tai Chi instruction manual.

“What has it been smoking, forever?” as Perrin, studying the images.

“They are Moogh Poses,” says Maggie, flatly.

“And what does that even mean?”

“When the Moogh is not ambling, it is still. And when it is still, it holds its body in one of nine different positions, Moogh Poses.”

“And what’s all this going on,” Perrin waves his finger to indicate the illustration showing a flock of birds and bees and other insects flying around the Moogh and flowers around its feet.

“We call that the Entourage,” Maggie tells him, patiently. “Where-ever the Moogh goes, it is accompanied by many different types of birds and insects, including lots of big fat honey bees. The bees feed on the Daisies that grow in the Moogh’s footprints.”

“This is like Alice and Wonderland shit,” mutters Perrin, taking it all in.

“That is the first thing that you have said that I agree with,” Maggie says.

She glances towards Gate 43 and for the first time in days, she gets a sense that she is escaping the City for the Moogh Zone. She looks back at Perrin and the crushing reality swoops back in. She's not going to the Moogh Zone alone. A thought crosses her mind. Maybe there is some way she can lose Perrin on the way. Now there's something worth contemplating.

Perrin glances her way, and she makes an innocent smile. They look at each other for a long beat. It seems for a moment that something new and exciting might flower from that first foray into agreeing with each other. The moment passes without anything grown.

Perrin breaks the brief silence by saying, "I wouldn't get used to it."

Maggie makes a snorting noise, "I will never get used to anything you do." She turns and continues towards the departure gate.