

No More Squashed Monkey

Maggie's bad mood deepens when she boards the plane and realizes that she has neither an aisle nor window seat, but the one in the middle. In the window seat is an old man with hair growing out of his ears and nose. He seems to have died, resting with his head against the plastic shutter over the window. Perrin has been assigned the aisle seat. Maggie dithers, knowing that the chair will hold her trapped for hours.

She takes her seat, grumpily, and immediately retrieves the in-flight magazine and stares at the pages, willing the time to pass faster. Perrin takes his seat next to her, making musical noises with his mouth and actively watching all the comings and goings on the plane. He swivels around, taking stock of everyone and making throwaway comments to people moving around him with no particular interest in the response he receives. Maggie observes this, sulkily, realizing with disappointment that for the most part, people seem to like the way Perrin behaves.

When the flight gets underway, Perrin retrieves the Moogh mag from his man-bag tucked under the seat in front of him. Maggie watches as he turns to a page with a double spread showing a close-up of the Moogh's face.

"Holy mother of pup!" Perrin exclaims theatrically. "What a fugly mutt! It looks like a squashed monkey!"

Maggie feels a flash of anger, and she audibly sighs in exasperation. She wants to shout, but she remains quiet as she thinks through an important idea. She knows that Perrin will continue to invent grotesque interpretations of the Moogh that will color every word that he writes unless she intervenes. She realizes that she can guide him towards an alternate view of the Moogh. She can shift his opinion before he starts sharing his awful thoughts with the world. To this end, she commits to engaging with Perrin – at least for as long as she can tolerate his annoying idiosyncrasies.

"Some people compare it a newborn," she says, helpfully. "See the little furrows above the nose."

"A newborn what, exactly?"

"A newborn child."

"And where's its wedding tackle?" Perrin asks, looking at a full-frontal photo of the Moogh.

"It's what?"

"It's fricking gonads, man."

"You're grotesque," says Maggie, recoiling.

"I'm grotesque? I mean look at this thing. It looks like a Yeti dipped in fat."

"What!?"

“It looks like a snot gorilla.”

“You’re a freak!” snaps Maggie, furious.

“But I am creative. Huh? You have to admit that, Paprika. And I ask the cutting questions that the public want answered. I’m serious, where’s the willy or the, you know, the front bottom?”

Maggie grits her teeth. Then she gets back to her task of trying to shape Perrin’s perception of the Moogh.

“The trending theory amongst the scientists is that it’s like a bird. Its reproductive system only forms when it is mating season.”

“I wouldn’t mate with it. Would you?” Perrin holds an expression that looks like he was serious in asking that question.

“The Moogh’s not my type,” Maggie says and then feels conflicted for having contributed to his joke.

“And what’s going on in this picture?” Perrin asks. The image shows a tent city and what looks like a hundred hippies dancing around a block of wood.

“That’s a celebration on the day that the Declaration of the Adherents was signed,” says Maggie.

“Well, I should have known that,” says Perrin, sarcastically.

“Something you don’t know?”

“What do I know? I do car crashes and family tragedies. Give me a fire in a primary school I’ll be all over it. I don’t know Moogh shit.”

“The Moogh doesn’t shit,” growls Maggie.

“Duly noted. So what’s happening in this photo?”

“That photograph shows the day that the United Nations awarded the Moogh and the Adherents special status. It effectively told Governments to keep their hands off the Moogh and just let it amble. It was a huge day.”

“Were you there?” Perrin asks.

“That’s me right there.” Maggie points to an indistinguishable patch of color in the middle of the crowd in the picture.

“You really love the squashed monkey, don’t you?” asks Perrin with an honest, open tone.

“Yes,” Maggie says, plainly, like it was the first time she had been able to talk to Perrin without anger in her voice. “It’s the best thing that has ever happened to me.”

Maggie looks at Perrin and sees that he is shaking his head in wonderment, truly surprised by her answer. “Perrin, will you do something for me?”

“What?”

“Will you please not insult the Moogh in my presence? As a matter of

professional and social courtesy.”

Perrin bites his lower lip, nodding his head, quietly. They are interrupted by the air hostess commenting on the photos.

“Oh, that’s the Moogh,” she coos.

“I’m a Moogh reporter,” says Perrin, quickly, putting on a voice. “My assistant Paprika and I are on our way to report on the magnificent beast right now.”

“Well, that’s so cool,” says the air hostess, obviously impressed.

“I’m writing a story about the Moogh’s detachable penis,” Perrin continues.

“Well, you’re the right guy for that job,” the hostess quips. “But I thought that the Moogh was female.”

“Two-five-five, two-zero-two, zero,” says Maggie, cryptically.

“She’s giving me her phone number, now. It’s the effect the Moogh has on women.”

“That’s the color code for Moogh Orange. The color of unspecified gender,” Maggie explains.

Perrin addresses the air hostess, “Well, that’s right. This is advanced Mooghology. You are with the experts now.”

“Wow,” says the hostess to Maggie, obviously impressed. “Can I get you champagne?”

“Oh, thanks. Just a small one.” Maggie blushes.

“I’ll have a scotch on the rocks,” says Perrin.

“Small champagne it is,” the hostess says and then moves away.

Maggie grins and turns her attention back to the in-flight magazine.

“*Touche*,” she thinks. If she can ‘touch’ him, maybe she can win.