

Bigger Fish to Fly

PILOT (voice), flying the plane
MICHELLE, an anxious flier
STANLEY, a flight attendant
PASSENGER (non-speaking)

SCENE 1 - ARM DOORS, CROSS CHECK

A passenger plane wrapping up its final boarding. A row of seats lines most of the stage on one side. Toward the back of the plane is a sliding door leading to a tiny room, and towards the front end is that nasty little first-class curtain and the cabin intercom. The PILOT is never seen, only heard via intercom from the cockpit.

PILOT (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. On behalf of the entire crew, I'd like to welcome you aboard flight 1971 with nonstop service to New York City. We'll be up and on our way real soon here. In the meantime, please make sure your seatbelts are fastened as our lovely cabin crew come around for a final cabin check.

Lights up on the cramped airplane lavatory. MICHELLE sits on top of the toilet seat, clutching a small blue cooler to her chest. She is breathing heavily.

MICHELLE

It's fine. We'll be fine! We can do this. Right, girl?

As she self-soothes, MICHELLE reaches into her cooler and gently pulls out a clear plastic bag filled with water and a live fish.

MICHELLE

Yes, I know, you're right.

A PASSENGER approaches from the aisle and jiggles the bathroom door. MICHELLE startles.

MICHELLE

Just a minute!

MICHELLE puts her fish back in the cooler and rushes to collect herself. The PASSENGER doesn't let up. They keep trying the door.

MICHELLE

Someone's in here!

The PASSENGER wiggles the door with more force.

MICHELLE
OCCUPIED!!

The PASSENGER keeps going ham on the door. MICHELLE slams it open.

MICHELLE
All yours.

MICHELLE returns to her seat and sets the cooler in the seat next to her.

STANLEY, a flight attendant, approaches. He is uniformed with the airline's signature turquoise tie and vest. He spots MICHELLE's cooler.

STANLEY
Excuse me ma'am. I'm sorry, but all carry-on items must be stowed under the seat in front of you.

MICHELLE
Oh no, no, she's not a carry-on. She's with me.

STANLEY
...She?

MICHELLE uncovers the cooler. STANLEY peers at the fish.

STANLEY
She.

MICHELLE
I bought her ticket.

STANLEY
I gotta say, this is a first for me.

MICHELLE
She's allowed. According to the Transportation Security Administration website, live fish are allowed in water and clear plastic containers after officer inspection.

STANLEY
Well. As long as her seatbelt is fastened...

*MICHELLE secures the metal buckle into the latch around the cooler.
STANLEY laughs.*

MICHELLE
Do things go wrong on this plane often?

STANLEY
I can assure you passenger safety is our number one priority.

MICHELLE
Yes but how *actively* will you need to keep us safe? Are you really prepared for an actually really real emergency? Do you know how to fly a plane?

STANLEY
(amused:)
My job doesn't require me to fly the plane.

MICHELLE
But you're the flight attendant! You attend to the flight! What if the pilot is incapacitated? The plane's got to stay in flight. Who steps up if not the captain's crew??

MICHELLE is breathing heavily again. STANLEY notices.

STANLEY
First-time flier?

MICHELLE nods.

STANLEY
That's all right. If it helps you feel any better, you can review the safety card in that seat back pocket there. We'll be taking off soon but in the meantime, if you or Goldie need anything, you just call me over with this button here.

*STANLEY presses the flight attendant call button above her seat. It lights up. He presses it again and it turns off.
He smiles customer servively.*

MICHELLE
...
Goldie?

STANLEY
Because he's a goldfish.

He means MICHELLE's fish.

MICHELLE
She's an orange basslet.

STANLEY
Right, sorry, she.

MICHELLE
You can tell she's a girl because of her color.
Only the females are orange. The male basslets are mostly purple.

STANLEY
I see.
Well, if you need anything at all from here to New York, give me a ring.

STANLEY exits, continuing the cabin check.

PILOT
Cabin crew, arm doors, cross check.

The big emergency doors slam shut, two over the wings and two in the front. Once the crew has armed the doors:

PILOT
Flight attendants, please prepare for gate departure.

The engine rumbles as the plane begins to taxi. MICHELLE breathes deeply.

STANLEY picks up the intercom.

STANLEY
Ladies and gentlemen, if we could please have your undivided attention for just a moment, we'll be demonstrating the safety features on this aircraft...

MICHELLE picks up the safety card from the seatback pocket and inspects it.

MICHELLE
This is... there's a lot here. This is a lot of stuff, right? And this can all happen? On this plane?

MICHELLE places a hand on her cooler. Beat.

MICHELLE

I know, I know. I just want to make sure.

STANLEY

—in the unlikely event of an emergency water landing, a life vest is located under your seat—

MICHELLE

Water landing?

MICHELLE presses the call button.

STANLEY continues the safety demonstration.

STANLEY

At this time, please make sure all portable electronic devices are set to airplane mode. Handheld devices may be—

MICHELLE presses the button with increasing urgency.

STANLEY

—kept on your person, but larger devices such as laptops and tablets must be stowed for take-off. Once again, we remind you that this is a-
(off intercom)

For crying out loud.

STANLEY passes off the intercom to another flight attendant and approaches MICHELLE.

STANLEY

Yes?

MICHELLE

How unlikely is unlikely?

STANLEY

I'm sorry?

MICHELLE

You said in the unlikely event of a water landing.
How unlikely?

STANLEY

Well, we'll be flying over the continental United States.

MICHELLE
That's not what I asked.

STANLEY
...
Extremely unlikely, ma'am.

MICHELLE
But how much is *extremely*?

STANLEY
Ma'am-

MICHELLE
I just want to be prepared for any scenario, that's all!

STANLEY
Ma'am-

MICHELLE
I mean you wouldn't include it in the safety demonstration if it weren't useful! Right?

STANLEY
Ma'am-

MICHELLE
And if it's useful, that means we might be landing in water, and if we're landing in water I want to be prepared, that's all! That's all!!

STANLEY
Ma'am.

STANLEY puts a hand on MICHELLE's shoulder. She settles down, but her breathing is a little out of control.

STANLEY
What's your name?

MICHELLE
Michelle.

STANLEY
Michelle. I'm Stanley.
I see you're a little nervous about being in the air for the first time.

MICHELLE

I just want to be prepared. For her.

MICHELLE puts a hand on the cooler.

STANLEY

I promise you that both your safeties and comforts are my sole mission from here to NYC.

MICHELLE seems happy with that.

MICHELLE

Thank you.

She looks at her safety card, then back at STANLEY. She points something out on the card to him.

MICHELLE

Actually. Could I get one of these?

SCENE 2 - TO INFLATE

*The same flight. 36,000 feet of altitude later.
MICHELLE sits clad in an inflated bright orange life vest.*

STANLEY approaches with a beverage cart.

STANLEY
Anything to drink for you? Tea? Water?

MICHELLE
No, no water, thank you.

STANLEY
Would you like lunch today? We've got beef and tuna.

MICHELLE
Tuna??

STANLEY
Right away.

MICHELLE
No!! No tuna, thank you.

STANLEY
We also have salmon.

MICHELLE
No fish, please. Thank you.
Do you have anything meatless?

STANLEY
Of course. I can get you a garden salad.

MICHELLE
From whose garden?

STANLEY
I'm sorry?

MICHELLE
Whose garden is the salad from?

Beat.

STANLEY
Amelia Earhart's.

*A moment.
Then, MICHELLE laughs.*

MICHELLE
Oh! Amelia Earhart. Like the pilot! That's funny!!

STANLEY smiles and hands MICHELLE a plastic salad container from the cart. This is the first time he's seeing her actually at ease.

STANLEY
Plenty more where that came from.
Do you know the difference between a piano, fish, and glue?

MICHELLE
There are so many differences.

STANLEY
Sure, but see, you can tuna piano, but you can't tuna fish!

Beat.

MICHELLE
Tuna piano?

STANLEY
Tune-a piano. Like a piano that's out of tune.

A moment. It clicks. MICHELLE laughs.

MICHELLE
Ohhhh!! I get it! Tuna piano! That's funny!! That's funny.

...
What's the glue about?

STANLEY
I knew you'd get stuck on that.

STANLEY winks and moves along with the cart.

MICHELLE is alone again. She's confused. Then it clicks.

MICHELLE
Stuck! Ha!

She breathes in—out.

MICHELLE
(to the cooler:)
We're almost there, girl.

She opens her salad container.

MICHELLE
Are you hungry?

Beat.

MICHELLE
Yeah, tell me about it. At least I get *something*.

*The plane jostles. In the turbulence, MICHELLE's salad scatters all over.
She sighs.*

SCENE 3 - DESCENT

*The plane is preparing for landing. STANLEY is at the intercom.
MICHELLE at her seat.*

STANLEY

Ladies and gentlemen, we will be making our descent into New York City momentarily. In the meantime, please make sure your seat backs and tray tables are back in their upright position.

MICHELLE is looking out the window when STANLEY approaches for the final check.

MICHELLE

Did you know fish like to be pet?

It's funny. Humans didn't evolve to sustain themselves underwater, and here are these creatures that did, that live there—and they *love* human touch, even when it's so rare they will ever get it.

It's like. We're not really meant to be together, exactly, but we *are*, and they love it. We love it.

She loves me, I can tell. And I love her. She listens to me when I'm sad, and she'll never tell me in a way that matters, but I know she likes it when I clean her tank, and when I feed her, and when I put the purple stones at the bottom of her pebbles.

Pause.

Thank you, Stanley.

SCENE 4 - EPILOGUE

Later. The sea. Concert piano plays.

MICHELLE's fish swims.

End of play.