

Cabin Pressure

Jane Harcourt talked with a practiced and confident air into the onboard mike - hiding, as best she could, the boredom from her voice.

“Thank you for your attention during the safety demonstration Ladies and Gentlemen.

Please take a few moments to read the safety leaflet in the pocket in front of you to familiarise yourselves with the key safety features of this aircraft. After take off we will be serving you an evening meal with drinks”

Senior stewardess Jane returned the mike to the holder and sighed as Captain Michael Jones came over the tannoy with his usual smug patronising drivel about the flight time and promising a smooth flight in his experienced hands. ‘Which I’d rather he kept to himself’ thought Jane.

Nevertheless she was hoping for a relaxing and peaceful shift as the Dreamliner lifted smoothly off Heathrow runway 2 at 8.40pm for the 14 hour flight to Singapore.

With a bit of luck she thought, the soon to be distributed meal and substantial quantities of alcohol would have most of the passengers dozing off.

Her cabin crew knew to be generous with the booze before a night flight and were also hoping for a trouble free time.

Jane supervised the First and Premium cabin service of boeuf en croute and bottles of Chateau Neuf du Pape.

Meanwhile further back behind the curtains food wrapped in cellophane on plastic trays were being spun out like a Las Vegas croupier dealing cards for a game of vingt et un. Janice grinned, only to be thrown sideways as the plane gave a sudden jolt.

Ignoring the screams and yelping she once again lifted the microphone.

“Ladies and Gentlemen” she announced confidently “ the captain has informed me that we are experiencing a short burst of turbulence – please return to your seats and fasten your seat belts – the toilets will be out of commission for just a few minutes”

She smiled reassuringly and went back through the galley, entering the 6 digit pass code and entered the cockpit.

The first thing that greeted her was the sight of Michael ‘handy’ Jones slumped over the controls

Next to him was Andrew, the co-pilot looking ashen faced. To Jane he also looked about 15 and was surprised he was able to ride a moped, much less fly a plane with nearly 400 passengers on board.

She quickly checked the pilots pulse and determined that he hadn’t yet joined the choir invisible, despite being at an altitude that was quite close to them.

She looked at Andrew and simply told him to get a grip and “do your bloody job”

Back in the cabin and once again mike in hand and crossing her fingers she addressed the passengers

“Ladies and Gentlemen, we have a minor medical situation and the captain has asked me to enquire if we have a doctor on this flight”

She waited patiently as predictably there was no cry of “I’m a doctor”

“No problem” she continued “perhaps a nurse?”

Still nothing

“Maybe a first aider – or someone with some medical background?”

Silence

For obvious reasons she was hesitant to ask if anyone had been a cub or brownie and earned a badge that qualified them to tie a bandage or open a tin of plasters without slicing through a major artery.

Instead she smiled as confidently as she could whilst saying

“Not a problem, our crew are trained in these matters, please continue to enjoy your after dinner drinks and enjoy a film from our extensive onboard library”

The plane seemed steady enough for the moment in the hands of Master Acne up front.

Returning to the galley she opened the flight cabinet and removed the passenger manifest

As she scrolled down she found just a few names down a Mr Tarquin St John Courtly currently seated in seat 7a in first class.

Of more interest than his ridiculously stupid name was the title – Neuro Surgeon – most passengers don't list their occupations but apparently this bloke obviously thought it was important that he should boast about his job.

Much to Jane's relief.

Discarding the manifest she passed down the cabin and knelt by 7a, where Tarquin was sipping a large scotch and scrolling through the film menu.

She tapped him on the shoulder and he reluctantly removed the headphones and put down his drink.

"Yes?" he demanded brusquely.

"You're a doctor sir?"

"No" was the surprising response

Jane was taken aback

"I'm MISTER St John Courtley – I'm a consultant – somewhat higher than a doctor"

"Follow me!" demanded Jane removing his drink and forcibly holding his arm.

Huffily sighing Mr Posh followed through the galley and into the cockpit.

She shoved him in saying "Sort it" and closed the door.

Some minutes later he emerged and pompously told her the pilot was now conscious and he didn't appreciate being dragged to deal with a relatively minor emergency.

"Don't disturb me again" he instructed her.

She pulled the curtain closed and facing him and to his complete astonishment she grabbed him firmly in the last place he would ever wish to be handled so aggressively.

Her grip, honed by years of holding a racquet whilst winning several tennis tournaments almost lifted him off his feet whilst at the same time making his eyes stream profusely.

His face turned puce and he grasped for breath.

"Anytime, anyone, anywhere asks if there is a doctor available you'll know just what to say won't you?" she paused "MISTER consultant"

He nodded vigorously as almost impossibly her grip tightened even more

"Tell me" she demanded

He stuttered and panted answering in a shaky voice

"The answer is...ye...sss"

"Good boy" she said as she loosened her grip "Now return to your seat and I'll have someone bring you a brandy"

With a satisfying smile she watched him limp back down the aisle – tonight she would write her flight report and head it 'Doctors Orders'