

DELAYED

by
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From an Idea by Rick St. Peter

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CHARACTERS:

JOHN – 40, a tough-looking cabbie and union organizer. A veteran cabbie, he has finally pushed to the limit. He has been traveling the country organizing cabbies to strike/unionize, but is on his way back home and his original union, which he fears is splintering.

WILLIE – ∞, a calm man, controlled, kind - a stark contrast to Lefty's anxious nature. He is well-dressed giving the image of a business man, but we never really learn his business.

MORT – 30, a dark, mysterious man awaiting a flight to Blaine, MO. He is connected with theatre... or is he?

VOICE - Airport announcements.

SETTING:

An airport waiting area.

/ = A point of overlap by the following line

≠ = Pause in overlapping line until previous line's next '/' or its end

LIGHTS UP on a lone man, JOHN, dressed in a cheap suit, no tie, as he sits anxiously awaiting his flight. He tries to read his newspaper, but is unable.

VOICE (OFF STAGE)

(Barely understandable.)

Attention passengers of Flight 35 to New York: Due to inclement weather this flight has been delayed indefinitely. / We apologize for the inconvenience and will continue monitoring the situation in anticipation for a break in the fog.

JOHN

Shit! Now whado i do? ≠ I'm sure you will.

He returns to his newspaper, with little success. WILLIE, well-dressed with a bowtie, perfectly shined shoes, enters. He sits in the seat next to JOHN who shoots him an "are you kidding me" look. WILLIE moves one seat over.

They sit in silence. JOHN tries to concentrate on his paper. WILLIE pulls out an aged, leather-bound notebook and fountain pen and begins to write. After a moment.

WILLIE

(Leaning over, showing his book.)

What do you think of that?

JOHN

(Slowburn.)

Look, buddy, I'm really not in the mood.

WILLIE

You can't just...

JOHN

No! I can't.

JOHN goes back to his paper. WILLIE stares at him.

WILLIE

You okay? You appear a bit...

JOHN

Tense? *(beat)* I'm fine. I just...

WILLIE
 (pause)
 Yes?

JOHN
 Nuthin'.

WILLIE
 (pause)
 Maybe I can help?

JOHN
 I don't think so.

WILLIE
 You never...

JOHN
 I know, pal! I know! You can't help me, alright?!

WILLIE
 But...

JOHN
 Je-sus! You do not get the message, do ya?! Look, I'm stuck here in East Tree Stump, fuckin' Kansas and I need to be in New York before ten! Can you make that happen? HUH? CAN YOU?!

Silence. Their eyes are locked. WILLIE reaches for his shoulders.

WILLIE
 Maybe you just need a little relaxation help.

JOHN
 (*Shooting up out of his chair.*)
 Whoawhoawhoa... WHOA! What the fuck?!

WILLIE
 I apologize. I didn't mean to startle you.

JOHN
 Startle me? Look, pal, I ain't that kinda... / Don't get me wrong, ain't nuthin' wrong with ya if ya are, but...

WILLIE

Excuse me? ≠ Oh! My!

(Chuckling to himself.)

I was just trying to help you relax.

JOHN

I bet.

WILLIE

You have entirely the wrong idea. I was just going to rub the tension out of your shoulders.

JOHN

Yeah, well, I don't like being touched.

JOHN sits back down, tentatively. They sit in silence for a moment returning to their respective activities. Finally...

WILLIE

So what do you do?

JOHN

(Annoyed.)

God!

WILLIE

We have been thrust together, for the time being, at least. We may as well make the best of it.

JOHN

(pause)

Fine.

WILLIE

What do you do? For a profession?

JOHN

Cabbie.

WILLIE

Oh? Interesting work?

JOHN

I wouldn't call it so innerestin'. Some-a da people, maybe. But, da work? ... eh. Whada ya do all day, but drive around an' pick up people who live a better life than you do.

WILLIE

Your life is substandard, then?

JOHN

Sub... Yeah, well, it ain't great.

WILLIE

You have opportunities to get away from it. To travel and see new places.

JOHN

Kansas?! Who da hell would visit Kansas on purpose? I mean, without a fam'ly reason?

WILLIE

Well, I did.

JOHN

Still. *(beat)* Okay, then, work. You here for work?

WILLIE

No.

JOHN

Oh.

WILLIE

You are, though? Or did you have a family business to which you attended?

JOHN

No. No fam'ly. I was here for work.

WILLIE

(A bit confused.)

I thought cab drivers only work in the city where they live.

JOHN

Yeah. I ain't here to drive a cab, see, I'm here to get the local cabbies unionized. I been doin' it for a couple-a months now and I need to get back to New York to...

WILLIE

Yes?

JOHN

Ah, never mind, ain't important to someone like you.

WILLIE

How do you know?

JOHN

'Cause, well, look atcha there with your perfect suit and spit-shine shoes. You ain't got no worries. I mean, you prolly work in some high-rise office, don't even need no cabbie. Got yer own driver and that.

WILLIE

Not really. Why do you think I don't care about your plight?

JOHN

Don't nobody care about the cabbie's plight.

WILLIE

You do.

JOHN

Yeah, 'cause I'm a cabbie.

WILLIE

That doesn't matter. I know plenty of people who just meander through life without a care toward another person.

JOHN

Yeah, I seen 'em.

WILLIE

Then you know whereof I speak.

JOHN

Sure. It's like when I get stiffed on a fare and da bum just walks away. Not even a look over da shoulder.

WILLIE

Yes. But, far worse, the person sitting at the next desk, with the same job and showing no concern whatsoever for the plight of their deskmate. That is one thing that I cannot abide, especially when it is so obvious that whatever affects their neighbor affects them, as well.

JOHN

I getcha!

WILLIE

Yes?

JOHN

Yeah! Like, we got dis one guy name-a Clayton who has been fighting this at every turn. We would-a been voted and set if he would-a just kep his damn mouth shut. Every time he talks it's another nail in da coffin of da little guy, y'know?

WILLIE
I do.

JOHN
It sickens me right in da gut.

WILLIE
It does not make me very happy, either, to see what man does to his fellow man.

JOHN
Yeah. It stinks. *(beat)* So, whada you do, then?

WILLIE
Well, you might say that I am a... motivator, of sorts.

JOHN
(Suspiciously.)
Yeah? What is dat, exactly?

WILLIE
I... test people to see if they are worthy of what I have to offer them.

JOHN
An' what's dat?

WILLIE
(pause)
A long life of happiness.

JOHN
Ah... Yeah... An' how, exactly, can you promise dat?

WILLIE
I can't, necessarily, promise it, but I can make it more of a possibility.

JOHN
Hmm... How, exactly, do you test 'em?

WILLIE
I have associates...

JOHN
Associates?

WILLIE
Yes, associates. They go out in the world and test prospects.

JOHN

Where do you get your... "associates" from?

WILLIE

Some are people who have worked their way up through the organization. Actually, one of them is my son, Jessie... we call him Lucky... something happened to him a long time ago...

(Noticing John's lack of interest.)

... But, that's of no concern here. You see, he goes out with his partner, Luciano Pozzo, to seek out those who are willing, who really want to make a difference in the world.

JOHN

K... but, how do dey do dat?

WILLIE

They have several ways, but the most effective seems to be making Jessie a subservient figure to see how the applicants will react to his situation. If they help him regardless of what he does to them, they pass the first test. That kind of thing. If they do not offer help unconditionally, then we know that they are not right for what we are doing.

JOHN

What's the second test?

WILLIE

I'm afraid I cannot divulge that information. It's confidential.

JOHN

Well, dat's quite the weeding out job you do, dere.

Unseen by them another passenger, MORT, a well-dressed man with an overcoat draped over his arm, obscuring his hand, enters the area.

WILLIE

We have a very high retention rate. Very low turnover. I believe the numbers speak for themselves. It really is a job you have to want to do, though, or you just won't be any good at it.

JOHN

Same wit da cabbie trade. You really gotta wanna do it or you just wanna blow yer brains out, y'know?

WILLIE

I don't doubt that a bit.

SOUND: A tone signifying an announcement.

They freeze, listen intently.

VOICE (OFF STAGE)

(Barely audible.)

Attention all passengers, the National Weather Service has informed us that visibility has been reduced to zero. We apologize for the delay.

JOHN

(Confused, but assuming it is something bad.)

Goddammit!

WILLIE

My my.

They notice the new inhabitant.

JOHN

Oh! Hey, dere. / Didn't see you standin' dere.

MORT

Good evening.

WILLIE

A fellow castaway!

(Motioning to a chair.)

Please.

MORT

(Sitting.)

Thank you.

WILLIE

My name is William. William Godot. You can call me Willie, if you like. And this is... Oh, my, I never did get your name.

JOHN

's alright. We got off ta kind-a rocky start.

(Reaching to shake Mort's hand.)

John Costello. My friends call me Lefty.

MORT

Mort Guffman.

JOHN
Mort.

WILLIE
Mort. Very nice to meet you, sir.

JOHN
Likewise, I'm sure.

MORT
Thank you. And to you, sir.

WILLIE
Unfortunate, this delay.

MORT
Yes.

WILLIE
You are flying to New York, as well?

MORT
No. I just came from there. Barely were able to land.

WILLIE
You are on the ground and safe now.

MORT
Somewhat. Yes.

JOHN
Somewhat on da ground? or Somewhat safe?
(He starts laughing coarsely.)

MORT
I'm not sure. It just seemed like the thing to say.

JOHN
(Laughing harder... then confused.)
O... kaaaay...

A moment of uncomfortable silence passes between them.

WILLIE
So, Mort, what do you do?

MORT
I'm in theatre.

WILLIE
(Delighted.)
Really? How fascinating.

MORT
It can be.

JOHN
I tell ya, I work da the-ater district many-a weekend and a lot o' dose mooks I wouldn't give da time o' day to. Y'know?

MORT
Oh?

JOHN
Yeah! Dey's all head down, expensive clothes, fi' dolla fare and no fuckin' tip! Like I ain't nuthin'. Ain't nobody. Y'know?

MORT
Some of them can certainly be a tad hubristic...

JOHN
Hu-what? I ain't never heard dat word.

MORT
Uh... Yes... a bit arrogant.

JOHN
Oh. Yeah! Ya got dat right, mister.

WILLIE
Nonetheless. In what arm of the theatre arts do you ply your trade?

MORT
I work for a producer.

WILLIE
And he sent you here?

MORT
Always looking for the next big thing.

WILLIE
Ah, yes. And is it in Kansas?

MORT

I don't know. I am actually headed to an even smaller place than this, if you can believe it.

WILLIE

Oh?

MORT

A little town called... wait, let me look.

(He pulls out his ticket.)

Blaine. Yes, that's it. Blaine, Missouri.

WILLIE

I have never heard of that. Is it near anything I might know.

MORT

I don't think so. My understanding is that it is only near itself. *(beat)* Whatever that means.

WILLIE

Ah.

MORT

(Taking some papers out of his pocket.)

Wait until you see this. Look at this. It's called Red, White, and Blaine! The exclamation mark is theirs. Honestly! There is such a thing as taking mother, home and country too far, don't you think?

WILLIE

Well...

JOHN

Yeah, dere is! 'specially when it comes at the expense of the workin' man!

MORT

What?

WILLIE

I think you may be reading too much into this.

MORT

I might have mis-spoken. What I meant was, that there is really no place for some half-baked home movie on the Great White Way.

JOHN

Oh, I get it. Dere ain't no place for the workin' man on Broadway. Ain't dat always da way!

MORT

Now, wait a minute. What I mean is...

JOHN

I know whacha mean! Believe me, I know whacha mean!

WILLIE

John... Lefty... I think you may be letting it get to you little more than you should.

JOHN

Doncha hear 'im, Willie? He wants to make sure his precious "Great White Way" ain't dragged down da cellar by da likes-a me. We ain't good enough to have stories about. Ain't dat whacher sayin'?

MORT

Not exactly. What I mean is that this looks to be a very amateurish production. We have always had a great many productions glorifying the common man...

JOHN

"Common man?" Common?!

MORT

There is just no winning with you, is there?

JOHN

Not if ya gonna shit all over what's mine!

MORT

Don't take this personally, but I'm going to find another place to wait.

SOUND: A tone signifying an announcement.

All freeze, listen intently.

VOICE (OFF STAGE)

(Ear piercing.)

Attention passengers. Would passenger William Goodrich Godot please see the attendant at Gate 53. William Goodrich Godot, please see the attendant at Gate 53.

WILLIE

Ah. That's me. If I do not pass this way again, very nice to have met you both. Mort, good luck and safe travels. Lefty, keep looking out for the other guy.

WILLIE exits, MORT watches him go.

JOHN

(Gathering his things, his back to MORT.)

Well, I guess I'm gonna go, too. Find somethin' ta eat.

MORT pulls the coat from his arm to reveal a pistol.

MORT

Fatt says, "Hi."

JOHN

(Turning to face him.)

What?

BLACKOUT.

SOUND: Gunshot.