

MARGJE WOODROW

FAKE TRIP



THRILLER

A SCHOOL
TRIP TO
BARCELONA
GONE
WRONG...

Margje Woodrow

Fake trip



Ready for the fake trip? 🐾 😊

I don't know.



Don't you want this? 🐾

Yes.



See you soon.

Begijnstraat?



👍 Bring rope with you.

???why????



I already have the rest: 🙄 🙄
🧴 💊



Need it too.





As soon as I delete the chat, a gnawing feeling spreads through my stomach. What am I doing? Do I really want this? Suppose it goes wrong? I check the time. Another hour. So, hurry up. I unzip my suitcase and grab summer clothes from my wardrobe. I put toiletries in a plastic bag. A power bank, my charger, the mask and my ID card. Check. Shall I download something from Netflix for on the plane? The flight takes about two hours, but my head will probably be spinning so much that I won't be able to watch a series anyway. Still, I click on a few episodes of the second season of *You*. Everyone is talking about it. Of course, I am behind again. While the downloading starts, I walk to the garage. There, I scour the stacked transparent boxes. Where is the rope? A long electrical cord catches my eye. Would that be good too? Or a blue washing line? When I imagine what we are planning to do with it, I shudder. Above me, the fluorescent light falters. As if a ghost is warning me: *Don't do it! You can still go back! Don't do it!*

I switch off the light and I walk back upstairs with the clothes line. I check again that everything really is in my suitcase. Exactly as instructed by school, I write my address details on the label. Because I don't want to stand out. Lately,

things have been going wrong. Very badly even. But we are going to solve that now.

I swap my blue jeans for a black pair. Downstairs, I set up my suitcase in the corridor. I grab a black hoodie from the coat hook and put it on. When I pull the cords, the hood covers almost my whole face. Maybe that stinking mask isn't even necessary. Or is that taking too big a risk?

Demi

The stabbing pain in my shoulder is unbearable. It extends to my neck. With every little movement I cramp up. Sweat stings my armpits. Stupid turtleneck. How am I going to cope in boiling hot Barcelona? For four days? I should have called in sick. The programme is full of things I can't take part in. I've run out of excuses. I fell down the stairs. Crashed into a fence on my bike. Got a ball in my face. I make up all sorts of things and pretend to be the biggest klutz on earth. Still, Brands, my mentor, is looking at me increasingly strangely. Fortunately, he doesn't keep asking. Not yet. What's keeping him, anyway? We will board the plane in about 20 minutes. We have already been through the security check and are hanging out in the waiting area by the gate. The flight attendants are at the counter ready to let us board.

Maud sits in a corner staring ahead. Is she still feeling awful? She had been drinking a lot, too.

Cheyenne is sitting next to me. Just like the others, she is busy on her phone.

'Do you know why Brands is not here yet?' I ask.

Interrupted, she looks up. 'What?'

‘Brands,’ I say. ‘Where is he? I only see babyface.’ I nod in the direction of Jensen, who is also accompanying us to Barcelona. He is standing with Joudia. Something is going on, because she is nodding angrily at Alec and Stefan. Have they made another stupid remark? Or gave her a lame tag on Instagram?

I laugh to myself. Joudia and the other girls shouldn’t always immediately bite like that. I haven’t done that for a while and it saves a lot of frustration.

‘Oh, him!’ Cheyenne’s eyes gleam. ‘Is he coming too? Nice.’ She leans towards me. ‘Now choose. Fuck, marry or kill.’

‘Kill,’ I reply immediately.

‘Really? I would do him.’

‘Gross. He’s almost thirty or something.’

She shrugs. ‘Doesn’t matter to me.’

‘What about Stefan?’

‘I’m so done with it. With his bullshit.’

Surprised, I look at her. Just two days ago, at the party, I got a whole sex report with way too many details.

Cheyenne has no filter. Whatever she believes, feels or thinks, she just blurts it out. On Instagram and WhatsApp, too.

‘So it’s over between you?’

‘Yes, but he doesn’t know that yet. Wait...’ She taps her phone furiously. A I hear a swoosh sound. ‘Done,’ she says. ‘Bye, bye, Stefan.’

‘No,’ I say. ‘You can’t do it like that, can you? You were together for quite a long time.’

‘Ah, only four months. And it wasn’t exactly great with him, was it?’

I sigh. Couldn’t she have just waited until after Barcelona? Stefan will certainly be pissed off. And she’s already arguing with Katja, too. It’s going to be a lot of fun over there. *Not!* I don’t understand anyway why Katja chose Barcelona. Surely she wanted to go to Berlin with Joudia? Why did they switch, anyway? School must have told them to.

Cheyenne knocks into me. Just in the wrong place. I squeeze my eyes shut briefly and quash the pain.

‘What?’

‘Nothing,’ I reply quickly. ‘You gave me a static shock.’

‘Oh, sorry. It’s because of that synthetic jumper of yours. It must be from Primark? Let’s see.’

Before I know it, she pulls down my turtleneck. Her breath slides down my neck. ‘Well, well! De-mi!’ she shouts loudly.

Everyone at the gate looks up.

‘How did you get such a mega-red mark on your neck?’

I push her hand away. ‘It’s nothing.’

She looks at me wide-eyed. ‘Are you sure?’

I turn my head to the side so she doesn’t see my rising tears. Even Cheyenne doesn’t know what’s going on. Sometimes I want to scream it out loud. Especially when it has just happened. But I never do. Never.

I frantically reset myself; something I have become very good at. ‘Okay,’ I whisper. ‘But you mustn’t tell anyone. It’s a hickey.’

‘From who?’ She shouts loudly, again.

‘Shh!’

‘Okay, okay.’ She rolls her eyes. ‘Tell me.’

‘Um... From...’ Fleeting, I look around. ‘From er... Billy.’

Excited, she claps her hands. I can see in her eyes that she believes me. ‘Billy,’ she repeats. ‘Not bad. Have you done anything else? Also er...’ She forms a circle with her thumb and forefinger. Then she pushes her other index finger through it. ‘...this stuff?’

‘Yes,’ I lie.

‘And I’m only hearing that now? You’re a dark horse. On the plane, you’re going to tell me all about it. Gosh, your first time... It’s super special, isn’t it?’

I nod, but hate that I now have to make up a whole story again.

Billy sits a little way away. He should know what I am going to say about him. Just now, at security, he very sweetly put my case in the grey bin on the belt. Because he saw I was in pain. I answered ‘yes’ when he asked if I had been exercising too hard.

Really, I am just lying about everything. Worse still, I can’t stop it for now.

Billy

‘A teacher who doesn’t show up... You don’t believe that, do you?’ Stefan stretches. ‘Pretty relaxed for us, though. We can do whatever we want, right? Brands and his rules are impossible. Weirdo.’

I nod, although I am sorry Brands is not going along. He is certainly not a weirdo to me. Because thanks to him, I am now on the plane on my way to Barcelona. Last week that was out of the question. But Brands promised to sort something out for me.

I click the seat belt and look around me. Passengers shuffle sideways down the aisle like crabs, looking for a place for their suitcase or bag above the seats. Sweat, kerosine, Stefan’s deodorant; I smell everything. It’s my first time in a plane. I don’t find it scary, but still my hands are clammy. And I worry about my mother. She is afraid someone will ring the doorbell again, wanting something from her.

‘Just don’t open the door,’ I told her yesterday. ‘Crawl behind the sofa or wait in the bedroom until he’s gone.’

Mostly, I deal with new creditors. I politely accept letters, get rid of them pretty quickly with some small talk or send them on to our trustee. ‘Just join the back of the

queue. There are about a dozen waiting in front of you.' I can talk like the best of them at such moments. But just then, at the security check, I asked Demi if she had been exercising too hard. She couldn't lift her suitcase. While I know very well that she hasn't been able to exercise for weeks because of an injury.

'Do you want some?' Stefan pulls open a bag of cheese and onion crisps and crams a handful into his mouth.

'No, man. I still need to have breakfast.'

He chews loudly and with his mouth open.

I am not the only one who finds it gross. In the seat across the aisle, Joudia looks at him angrily. 'Can you eat normally, please?'

'Why don't you book a single ticket to Morocco?' Stefan barks back. 'And can you never come back, too?' Alec laughs, which encourages Stefan to keep going. 'Or jump out of the plane in a sec. Preferably without a parachute.' Bits of wet crisps fly around. 'I'd be happy to push you.'

Joudia squeezes her eyes together and turns her nose up. One moment more and she will attack him. It's happened before, in the classroom. Govers from Dutch was fetching coffee. Most of the class thought it was funny. Especially when Stefan pulled off her headscarf.

Stefan is the best when it comes to offending people. He especially picks on Joudia. Okay, she is bossy. Still, I feel sorry for her. Always going on about her origins. Stefan sometimes also makes jungle noises when Mavis leaves the classroom. Even though last school year, they

were still hanging out together. ‘Don’t be so racist, man,’ I tell him. He just doesn’t care. ‘She can’t hear, right?’ is his usual response.

‘I’ll have some crisps,’ I say to distract Stefan.

He holds out the bag to me, but keeps his gaze on Joudia.

‘Just leave her alone,’ I say.

‘What the hell? She annoys me, doesn’t she?’ He snaps his fingers. ‘Hey, Joudia. Hey!’

When Joudia looks up, he says, ‘Question, does the crew know there is a bomb under that headscarf?’ He looks at her with a challenging expression.

She does not respond.

Stefan stands up. ‘Ma’am?’ He waves exaggeratedly at one of the stewardesses. ‘Hello, yes, here. There’s a little problem.’

Goddammit, he’s starting again. I grab his arm. ‘Shame on you, man.’

He jerks away.

A flight attendant with a blonde ponytail, a MILF according to Stefan, comes our way.

‘Don’t!’ I say. ‘You’re not going to start talking about bombs on a plane.’

He pretends not to hear me. I bend down and look past him at Joudia. She’s staring downwards. Her hands are shaking.

This is going wrong, I think, and I click the seat belt open. Just as I stand up, Stefan asks the flight attendant, ‘When will you come over with your trolley? I’m thirsty.’

As cheeky as he sounds, I'm just glad he's not saying anything about bombs.

Smiling, the woman replies, 'You can order something in half an hour. Would you like to sit down now?' she nods at me. 'You too, please. We are about to take off.'

'Something is about to take off in my trousers, too,' Stefan says loudly on purpose, even before she has turned around.

'Excuse me?' She is not smiling anymore. 'Did you say something?'

'N-not really.' It's the first time I've heard Stefan stutter.

We've been on the way for an hour. Take-off was actually nothing special. I was briefly pressed into my seat, my ears popped and, before I knew it, the plane was flying above the clouds.

Thankfully, Stefan is leaving Joudia alone. It's often how it goes with him. As soon as he's no longer getting a laugh out of it himself, he switches to something else.

A few rows away, Demi and Cheyenne are standing in the aisle. They have to move aside when two flight attendants want to pass them with their trolleys. It's the fourth time they've looked at me giggling. Or are they looking at Stefan? Because Cheyenne dumped him just before departure. Nice and brutal, via WhatsApp. Which, by the way, had little effect on him. 'Do you see me crying? I already have a new project,' he said. 'Her over there.' He pointed at Isabel, who was waiting a bit further away at the gate. 'She's too hot, right?'

I had to admit, Isabel really is one of those girls who makes your head turn. Indonesian. Long, brown hair, tinted skin and dark eyes. But Demi does more for me. Much more even. Only she hasn't realised it yet. I am surprised, by the way, that Stefan is looking at Isabel. He doesn't like people of colour, does he?

'Right?' he insisted.

'She is certainly nice.'

He whacked my shoulder. 'Are you dead?! Or are you gay?'

My smile was forced. When I was new to this school a few months ago, it was easy to join Stefan's gang. I quickly realised that he thinks he is a big deal. But that didn't irritate me so much then. Lately it does.

Suddenly, I look up. Stefan is grabbing something from the drawer of the trolley next to him in the aisle. The flight attendants don't notice anything. It's so fast, I can't see what he's putting under his jumper. But I do hear clinking.

He orders two cans of apple juice, pays and flips open the table. At least six mini bottles of vodka emerge from under his jumper. 'So,' he says with satisfaction. 'Look what I've sorted for us.'

He takes a few sips from both cans and then empties the bottles into them. Then he opens Netflix on his phone, grabs his AirPods and pulls the hood of his hoodie over his head.

I don't have any videos on my mobile. It's an old model, but I'm okay with that. Out of boredom, I sip the vodka

and apple juice, but the stuff is so strong that I start to cough.

Yesterday, our group chat was full of it: Stefan and Alec want three things in Barcelona: to chill, to cause trouble, and to get wasted.

They have long since forgotten what happened two days ago.

I haven't.



I look at the screen without taking anything in. My head is spinning. Exactly as I predicted, but ten times worse.

What have I done?

What have we done?

I can hardly believe it.

Shivering, I crawl deeper into my coat. Why did I get on that rotten plane? Walking around with a poker face for four days is not something I can keep up.

Of course you can. You haven't been doing anything else for so long.

The little voice in my head is irritating, but right: I can do this! If I can just do what I always do, above all not be myself. I have to stay in my role. Like I have always done.

Funny how there was such a lukewarm response to Brands' absence.

Only Jensen seemed to panic just before we got on the plane. He kept trying to get Brands on the phone. Which of course didn't work.

For a moment, I was afraid of the mobile phone in my jacket pocket. Had I turned it off? Imagine if someone recognised the ringtone. Maybe I should have thrown the thing

in a bin at Schiphol Airport. But it seemed better to dump it
somewhere in Barcelona. Just like the laptop.

Demi

Cheyenne totally fell for it on the flight. ‘I’m not normally jealous of you,’ she said, after I described what the so-called sex with Billy was like. She also asked a lot of questions. ‘Is Billy pretty muscular? Does he kiss okay? And... Um... Is he pretty big? Did he use a condom? Did he put it on himself or you? Was he careful?’

And I just made up answers, while keeping a sharp eye on Billy. I felt terrible.

‘My first time with Alec was a drama,’ she said so loudly that he had to have heard it. So that he immediately looked in our direction. As did Billy.

‘No sweet caressing or anything,’ she continued. ‘No, right away, hup, in. So stupid. Really, Billy sounds too good to be true.’

I nodded, but was so embarrassed. I asked her at least ten times if she would speak quieter. I just hope now that Cheyenne doesn’t say anything to him. I can so see her putting an arm around him and complimenting him. Or staring at his crotch in exaggerated admiration. My stomach turns at the very idea.

As soon as I descend the plane stairs, the heat hits my face. It is only early morning and already over 30 degrees in Barcelona. I flap the bottom of my jumper. Nothing helps. If only I could walk around in a T-shirt or top like everyone else. Without bruises and red welts on my skin. Without pain. I shake my head. As I walk towards the airport entrance, I give myself a stern talking to. *Come on, Demi. Self-pity won't do you any good. Go and enjoy four days without any threat. Relax.* I breathe in deeply and exhale quickly a few times. That – along with paracetamol – is my best reset trick.

It is very busy at Barcelona Airport. People swarm like ants. As if half the world is visiting this city. Fortunately, it's a bit cooler in here.

I join the trail of eighteen students heading for the exit. Three taxi drivers hold up a sign with the name of our school. They look sullen, as if they have absolutely no desire to take us to the hostel.

The heat overwhelms me. My jumper sticks to my back.

While the drivers load our bags, I keep an eye on which taxi van Katja gets into. So far, I haven't spoken to her. She is arguing with Cheyenne yet again. I don't want to know why. Those two are so weird: super close one minute, hating each other the next. I often find myself torn between them. Although I do think Katja feels aggrieved very quickly. Especially since we are in the fourth year.

'Everything okay between us?' I ask as soon as I sit next to her.

She nods coolly.

‘Are you sure?’ I wipe the drops of sweat from my nose.

‘What should be wrong?’ She pulls an indignant face.

‘That’s exactly what I’m asking you. You’re not mad at me, are you?’

‘No,’ she sighs. ‘Just super tired.’

‘Oh, okay.’ I decide to change the subject. ‘Funny that Mr Brands isn’t here, don’t you think? Or will he come later? On another flight or something?’ I ask questions on purpose, so she has to respond.

‘I don’t know,’ she snarls. ‘What does it matter?’

‘Well, really. I’m just trying to have a nice chat with you.’

‘Sorry. I barely slept last night because I was terrified of the plane ride. And this shit with Cheyenne is also bothering me.’

‘I get it,’ I say. ‘But was it okay on the plane? Where were you sitting actually?’

‘Two rows behind you and Cheyenne.’

‘Seriously?’ I feel the blood rise to my cheeks. Oh, no. Please don’t let her have heard us talking. Because Katja is madly in love with Billy. She confided this to me last Saturday night, after a few shots.

I was totally bummed when she said that. After all, Billy is the first boy I really feel something for. But I didn’t dare say that to her. Especially not when she asked me, ‘How do I handle it with him? Tips, please... Because you always manage everything. You get what you want, right? And you’re pretty daring. What you did with that

pillow... My god, I saw it... You've got some guts.'

I knew immediately what she meant. I also knew that Cheyenne had not kept our agreement.

To all the young people who gave me input for *Fake Trip* during my school visits: Thank you!

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