

The Baggage Handler

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THE BAGGAGE HANDLER

Cast:

Fred: Harried, overburdened.

Muriel: Light, breezy.

Baggage Handler: A soft-spoken man.

At Rise: A bell rings, then the lights come up. A baggage handler stands by a counter. An unlit panel at stage rear suggests a pile of luggage that goes to infinity.

FRED (O.S.)
Help me with this.

MURIEL (O.S.)
It's your baggage.

FRED (O.S.)
But it'll be OUR baggage when we're together again.

MURIEL (O.S.)
If you'd done the work I did in our last life together, you wouldn't have so much baggage.

FRED (O.S.)
What work?

They arrive on stage. Muriel carries a belly pack. Fred carries a duffel bag, two suitcases, a backpack, and a belly pack.

MURIEL
Putting up with you. It was a full time job.

FRED
For a part time brain.

AIRPORT VOICE
Due to astral rebirth flight security precautions, do not accept karmic packages from strangers. For your karmic safety, all baggage must be checked before boarding.

Fred and Muriel approach the baggage check-in area.

BAGGAGE HANDLER
Put every bag on the table, please.

FRED
Was that the bell for our departure?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

No, someone returned for some lost baggage.

FRED

Will you at least help me with this?

MURIEL

Sure.

She takes Fred's smallest pack and puts it on the table. When Fred lifts his baggage to the counter, a rusty carburetor, pair of ratty tennis shoes, some worn out leather moccasins fall out.

MURIEL

Yep, you're the man in this lifetime.

to Baggage Handler

He brings the same junk into every life we share.

FRED

These are antiques.

MURIEL

Your feelings are antiques. You might consider learning a few more grunts to communicate what you feel in our next life together.

FRED

I have feelings. They just aren't the ones you want me to have.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

All your baggage, please.

The Baggage Handler nods at Muriel's small pack.

MURIEL

I can't just carry it onto my flight?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

No, ma'am. It has to be checked in and stowed.

MURIEL

to Baggage Handler

I think it's good that you're conscientious.

to Fred

For one lifetime could we just focus on feelings?

FRED

I have the feeling I'm going to hear
about my feelings in this life.

The Baggage handler looks into Muriel's small bag.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Oh, my god.

He snaps it close.

MURIEL

What?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Nothing.

MURIEL

to Baggage Handler

It's bad; I know it.

FRED

I'll look.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

I'm sorry, sir, you aren't allowed
to see what's in her baggage.

FRED

But I'm going to find out soon enough,
so what's the harm?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Sometimes people don't want to go
back when they know what's in their
baggage.

MURIEL

I'm going to die young, aren't I?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

I can't say.

MURIEL

to Fred, pointing at his baggage

Look at all that. That's why I don't have any. You're going
to kill me again, I know it.

FRED

That was lifetimes ago, and it was
an accident.

MURIEL

A spear through the heart. Some accident.

FRED

I didn't ask you to step in front of that badger.

MURIEL

Who kills a badger with a spear?

FRED

Who nagged me all day about being hungry?

MURIEL

How many lifetimes will it take for you to accept responsibility for what kind of man you are?

Muriel runs off stage.

FRED

It was an accident.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

I'm sure it was.

FRED

You probably see a lot this, people who fuss about their baggage.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

I do.

FRED

Does baggage really get lost?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Yes, sir.

FRED

You mean my things might be lost?

Fred pulls his bag of artifacts close.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Not by accident. When people are tired of their baggage, they find ways to leave it behind.

FRED

And you have to stop them? Why not get another job?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

I'm here to atone for a mistake.

FRED

Send some M-16s to the crusades?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

No, I...

Muriel reappears on stage.

MURIEL

How did I get back...

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Your flight will be leaving soon.
You must check your baggage before
you board.

MURIEL

But it's not fair now that I know
I'm going to be killed.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

You don't know that for certain.

MURIEL

You're the one who convinced me
something awful is in my bag. Do
you enjoy frightening people? Is
that why you took this job?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

No.

Fred goes to Muriel.

FRED

Step over here with me.

Muriel follows Fred several feet away. The Baggage Handler continues to go through Fred's baggage, looking at the odd things Fred is taking into his new life, a broken arrow, an old stone ax with a broken handle, a carburetor.

FRED

You don't have to take it with you.

MURIEL

What are you talking about?

FRED

Leave it behind. I'll distract him.
Get that small black bag with spark
plugs out my backpack and ditch your
bag.

MURIEL

The bag isn't the problem, you are.

FRED

Fine, but we have to make a decision before he's through checking us in.

MURIEL

Not if I went back with someone else.

FRED

Who?

MURIEL

The King.

FRED

That was an Elvis impersonator. They should outlaw karaoke bars in Heaven.

MURIEL

If they had a decent karaoke bar in Hell, this place would be a ghost town.

FRED

You're good, Muriel.

MURIEL

Why can't we just distract him long enough for me to look inside the bag?

FRED

Will you still go with me if you know I'll do something bad?

MURIEL

No, I won't. I'm tired of this, Fred. Let me go.

FRED

Where?

MURIEL

Anywhere. Anyone.

FRED

You can't.

MURIEL

Why not?

Fred steps away from Muriel. Muriel follows.

MURIEL

Why not?

FRED

You're my best shot.

MURIEL

Your best shot? Are you going to shoot me?

FRED

When I'm with you, I feel more alive.

MURIEL

I'm sure you do. Only I feel more dead.

FRED

No, I mean you're infuriating, dogmatic, inflexible, and stubborn.

MURIEL

Add learning how to do sweet talk to your lessons in this next life.

FRED

But after every lifetime we're shared, I felt I accomplished something.

MURIEL

And I'm supposed to go back with you because of that?

FRED

Why have you come back with me?

MURIEL

You're opinioned, stubborn, and a blank wall in terms of feelings, but...

FRED

But...

MURIEL

I don't know why.

FRED

So we still have something to work out?

MURIEL

One of us does.

FRED

That's the spirit. Let's go take care of business.

Muriel shrugs. They approach the Baggage Handler.

FRED

Tell me again, how'd you end up with
this job?

Fred stands so the Baggage Handler must turn his back to
Muriel, who edges around to Fred's backpack.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

I found a way to have someone else
take my baggage into their life.

FRED

What happened?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

She always felt burdened, issues she
could never resolve or understand.

FRED

I didn't realize it could be so
complicated.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

People grow weary of their baggage,
but they always come back for it.

Muriel takes a small black bag from Fred's backpack.

FRED

Is finding the lost baggage difficult?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

No. What's difficult is listening to
the stories people tell about what
it's like trying to live without
something so important to them.

FRED

If so many people do it, why are you
the only one being punished?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

She killed herself.

FRED

Who?

BAGGAGE HANDLER

The girl I tricked into taking my
baggage.

Muriel listens.

FRED

Is she okay now?

BAGGAGE HANDLER
No. She's still healing.

FRED
Have you seen her?

BAGGAGE HANDLER
I see her every time I close my eyes.

Muriel steps forward.

MURIEL
How long will you be here?

BAGGAGE HANDLER
Until I'm done helping all the people
I taught to pass their baggage onto
others.

A light shines on a panel at the rear of the stage. Muriel,
Fred and the Baggage Handler look at the mountain of luggage.
Muriel picks up her bag and steps forward.

MURIEL
I'm ready to check in my bag now.

BAGGAGE HANDLER
The right choice, Ma'am.

MURIEL
You knew?

BAGGAGE HANDLER
Yes.

MURIEL
Why didn't you stop me?

BAGGAGE HANDLER
It was your choice, and your
consequences.

FRED
It was my idea. If anyone is going
to be punished, it should be me.

MURIEL
Fred, that's not necessary. I
understand now why I'm with you.

FRED
Why?

MURIEL
You are my baggage.

FRED

I'm sorry.

Muriel sighs. The Baggage Handler takes her bag.

MURIEL

Thank you.

BAGGAGE HANDLER

Experience the journey.

MURIEL

to Fred

I'm ready now.

FRED

We're ready now.

MURIEL

to Fred

I'm afraid.

FRED

I know.

Fred takes her hand and kisses it.

FRED

We'll be afraid together.