

IN FLIGHT

a comedy in verse

by Jenny Lyn Bader

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Characters

Vera Martinelli (“Marty”) – late 30’s. Editor of the in-flight airline magazine Omega Traveler.

Melanie Hall –50’s. The CEO of Omega International.

Andrew Stern – 40’s. A novelist and dreamer.

Ted Hall – 25. Melanie’s son. Schooled at all the right schools.

Art Blum – The managing editor. Older than Marty.

Page Robin – 20’s – A bright, eccentric young woman.

Setting:

The editor-in-chief's office at the in-flight magazine Omega Traveler, with high-tech paraphernalia, doors to spare, abundant light. Airplanes can sometimes be seen taking off through a picture window.

Time:

Late winter.

The play takes place over several weeks, mid-February to mid-March:

Act I.

- Scene 1. Morning.
- Scene 2. The next day.
- Scene 3. Two weeks later.
- Scene 4. Two weeks after that. Dusk.
- Scene 5. Two days later.
- Scene 6. The next morning.

Act II.

- Scene 1. Three days later. Afternoon.
- Scene 2. The next day.
- Scene 3. The day after that.
- Scene 4. The following day.

I realized that my dreams of travel and of love were only moments...

-Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past

The mind is its own place, and it itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

-John Milton, Paradise Lost

ACT I

Scene 1. The sleek offices of The Omega Corporation. MARTY, a woman in her late 30's, sits at her desk, multitasking. ART runs in, out of breath.

MARTY
What's wrong?

ART
She's so unhappy that she threw
it clear across the room!

MARTY
The new issue?

ART
She didn't even want it on her shelf.
And now she's on her way down here.

MARTY
Herself?
You're kidding.

ART
Oh I really wish I were!
She's in a mood, so please be nice to her.
Her aim was not too good, that — teapot broke.

MARTY
The antique?

ART
Yeah, I think it was baroque.

(The phone rings. MARTY answers:)

MARTY
Yes? Thanks for calling back. One second please.
(to ART:)
It's Punja Jones from Literarities.

ART
Literarities? Hasn't that been banned?
(shrugs)
Who cares, I love to read what I don't understand.
Tell him I said that! I mean it.

MARTY

(to Art:)

Sssh!

(to phone:)

Hi.

Long time no talk! I'm looking for a guy —
who wrote for us.

(ART exits.)

The poet with the hair?

No, not that one. The one with less despair...
and with the 50-volume epic work.

Right, right, he also was a coat check clerk!

His phone was disconnected? I'm sorry
to hear it. Yeah, a typical story.

And that was more or less how long ago?

If you run into him, do let him know

I have a job for him, with real money.

What? You hadn't heard? I thought ...that's funny.

...No, not a "poetry journal" in that... sense.

(embarrassed:)

An... in-flight magazine. But it's... intense.

Hans Farber writes for us.

(There is a knock at the door)

—Each issue, why?

It isn't what you think... Oh, alright, bye.

(MARTY calls to the door)

Yes?

(ANDREW, 40ish, enters, bewildered by the office. Deep-voiced
and bedraggled, he could charm the leaves off a tree.)

ANDREW

Am I in... Is this the right office — ?

MARTY

For the interview?

(They look at each other a moment. Then they are interrupted as
MELANIE bursts in from the door leading to the executive offices.
She shows a magazine to MARTY.)

MELANIE

What the hell is this?

MARTY

Would you excuse me a moment?

ANDREW

Of course.

(ANDREW exits.)

What is your problem? MARTY

Oh, the problem's yours!
(hands MARTY the magazine:)
Let's see if you can guess. MELANIE

A magazine? MARTY

Specifically. MELANIE

Let's see. The sea looks green.
The font is Baskerville. Point size is ten. MARTY

I shouldn't have to ask you this again.
What is this piece? MELANIE

A travel essay. MARTY

On? MELANIE

The Cayman Islands. MARTY

Very good! MELANIE

What's wrong? MARTY

Who wrote this article? MELANIE

Hans Farber. Why? MARTY

And how'd he get there? MELANIE

Uh... didn't he... fly? MARTY

MELANIE

That would have been a boon for his career,
as after all, we have an airline here,
and this, our in-flight airline magazine,
promotes the airline! You see what I mean.
So then: why would you send a man to visit
a place we don't fly? That's not helpful, is it?

MARTY

We don't?

MELANIE

Right about now? You should look
nervous.

MARTY

I —

MELANIE

It's a destination we don't service!
I guess that isn't something that you knew?

MARTY

Calm down, I'll check his invoices.
(types and checks her computer screen)
He flew-
a plane. Of ours. To Jamaica, then took —
a boat to the Caymans. A day trip!
(Pointing at the computer screen:) Look...

MELANIE

A boat? A day trip? —This is an outrage.

MARTY

Hans Farber is an artist on the page,
the finest writer on our staff, and so...

MELANIE

Not anymore, because I let him go.

MARTY

Do you have any sense who Farber is?
In the genre, he's so respected! His...

MELANIE

It's not a "genre." it's an industry.

MARTY

You promised me complete autonomy.
You said I would get creative control...

MELANIE

Until you got yourself into a hole.
This isn't "creative": no, it is a fact.
It's not mysterious why Hans was sacked.
It isn't very hard to figure out...
We go places! –And it's them you write about!

MARTY

We fly Montego Bay. It's right nearby.

MELANIE

To the Caymans... Our competitors fly...

MARTY

Caribbean boats are thought romantic—

MELANIE

I don't care — Caribbean, Atlantic
Mediterranean, Caspian, Red —
in the airline business, boats are thought dead.

MARTY

I do think that you're... overreacting.

MELANIE

Just try to be a bit more exacting.
You need a modicum of self-control.
See, no one wants to fly now, not a soul,
not with strip searches at the airport gates,
shoe-bombs exploding, interminable waits...
The prices, with the rising cost of fuel
The lack of airplane food that isn't gruel
the fact that they all hate us overseas,
the fears of catching some strange bird disease.
But you... You change their minds! That is your gift!
Already, we've seen circulation lift.
Oh yes, I know you've turned the place around.
You've won those magazine awards, you've found
subscribers! —For an in-flight publication!
That's why this error causes consternation.
You should know better, so I am afraid
that this is just a nasty joke you've played.

A joke? On you? MARTY

No, on the company. MELANIE

I don't play jokes, that really isn't "me."
(drily) MARTY
I have no sense of humor.

What you lack
is common sense. You've lost it. Get it back.
(MELANIE exits.) MELANIE

(to the door:) MARTY
Goodbye, yes thanks. It's nice to see you too.
Always a pleasure, great working with you!
(yells:)
Come in!
(ANDREW enters again.)
I hope you're not in a hurry.
Sorry about-

Oh, it's fine — don't worry. ANDREW

I'm Marty. MARTY

Andrew Stern. ANDREW

Ah! You're the one - MARTY (pleased)
who sent the excerpt! Now, what was that from?

That was a chapter from my newest book.
A... novel. (intensely:) It's called - Sandstone. ANDREW

Alright, look- MARTY
Of course we'd love to have you working here,
but this, hm, novel – wouldn't interfere?

ANDREW

Oh no it wouldn't.... It is so – exciting.
So many novelists do travel writing!
Like Mary Shelley, as I'm sure you know,
Virginia Woolf, George Orwell. And Defoe -

MARTY

You understand this is an in-flight mag?

ANDREW

Yes, but I've read it. It's not just some rag!
You have an editor who's new – her name
is Vera something? Now, it's not the same.
It reads like water rushing, like a breeze,
uncovering the world with expertise.
The passengers all steal it without fail!
One issue, on the Appalachian trail,
it made me want to walk, and I'm no hiker,
and go to see my sister. I don't like her-
But now? I visit her religiously
just so that I can fly down to DC
and read the next installment.

(MARTY looks skeptical)

This is true!

I've seen how business travelers love it too,
and immigrants with shopping bags and loads,
scribbling down the phone numbers and roads...
It satisfies a very urgent need:
I swear to you, it makes the public read.
The masses can be reached in print. It's proved.
I see it. And I find that I am — moved.
I want to write for them, for the whole mob.
That is the reason that I want this job.

MARTY

Wow. Seriously? That it?

ANDREW

Oh there's more!
I love your title. Such a metaphor!

MARTY

Omega Traveler?

ANDREW

Omega meaning "last":
Last of a series. Of a world that's past.

MARTY

Omega's just the airline — It's not meant...

ANDREW

I know it isn't there in your intent.
But it evokes finality, the fears
of our time. We've exhausted our frontiers.
The "Omega Traveler." —Who is he?
He is a man before modernity,
who takes us traveling — an ancient art —
and through the written word, he plays his part.

ANDREW (continued)

Before the airplane, that was all we knew:
descriptions, evocations that felt true...
when writing was the only way to know
a place that you could never really go.
Mere prose was like a multi-engine jet!
But in the world today, we all forget.

MARTY

(flip)

I know I do.

ANDREW

I feel nostalgia-

MARTY

Right.

ANDREW

—for a time when it was urgent, just to write.
For the age of the steamship, the oil lamp...

MARTY

Nah, you wouldn't have liked it. It was damp.

ANDREW

It was a special time to be alive.

MARTY

So if you worked here, then you would revive
the lost arts of writing and of traveling?

ANDREW

They're not lost, *per se*, just – unraveling,
and stripped of meaning in the public sphere.
I first explored the (thick French accent:) *genre* late last year
in London where I lived between a priory
and a flea market. I began a diary...

MARTY

Huh, what was that like?

ANDREW

“London is not agreeable, or cheerful, or easy, or exempt from reproach. It is only magnificent. You may call it vulgar at heart and tiresome in form... But for one who takes it as I take it, London is on the whole the most possible form of life.”

MARTY

That’s lovely. That was from your diary?

ANDREW

(embarrassed)

—No!

Oh no, it’s Henry James. He gets it though!
He struggles with the same issues I do:
How can you get the feeling to come through?
What to say about a place that captures
its essence: the moment that enraptures?
His problems were the same as mine.

MARTY

I’m sure
they were. Problems like those tend to endure.
So, do you have any questions for me?

ANDREW

What does Marty stand for?

MARTY

Martinelli.
Vera Martinelli.

ANDREW

You are! My word.
Ah, now I feel stupid and absurd.
To not know you are... shows I have no class.

MARTY

Hey, if you didn’t know, you weren’t kissing ass!

ANDREW

Precisely, Marty, that is just my fear.
You caught me being utterly sincere.

(MELANIE bursts in)

MELANIE
Hello again! I need to talk to you.

ANDREW
Should I go?

MELANIE
Mm hm!

MARTY
Yes, I think we're through.
I've got your c.v., thank you very much.
It's lovely meeting you, we'll be in touch.

ANDREW
Oh no - Thank you, the pleasure was all mine.

(ANDREW exits.)

MARTY
Hi Melanie. What did I do this time?

MELANIE
I should move you up to business affairs.
You're so much brighter than the guys upstairs
and might like number-crunching — it's the best.

MARTY
You don't sound too good, Mel. You sound...
depressed.

MELANIE
There is a person I want you to hire.

MARTY
So that's why you found someone here to fire!

MELANIE
Oh please. You had an opening before.

MARTY
But now I would have two, and two is more.
Finding one good applicant's hard enough
Two applicants of quality? That's rough.
You put me in a tough situation —
so you can come offer me salvation.

A mere coincidence.

MELANIE

I doubt that one.
Who is it? Friend of yours?

MARTY

No. It's my son.

MELANIE