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IN A NEWARK MINUTE

By David Lohrey

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MS HERRERA: A well-preserved middle-aged AIRLINE employee.

ALICE: An attractive secretary on her break. Dressed for work.

MR. CONKLIN: Thirties-something middle management type on a business trip.

HOLA: A young, hip, altogether striking woman, who reveals much while hiding much.

MR. BERNIE STAMPINO: A thug in street clothes. Looks awkward and uncomfortable.

MRS. LYLA STAMPINO: Over-dressed, with too much make up. Just this side of a hooker.

SCENE: The ticketing line of the Newark International Airport, mid-afternoon.

TIME: The present.

SCENE 1

(Airport muzak plays in the background)

MS HERRERA

I'd be more than happy to check. I have the schedules...
(Looking into computer screen)

PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM ANNOUNCEMENT

"Ground Transportation to La Guardia and Kennedy Airports is available on the lower level adjacent to Baggage Claim at Terminals A, B, and C."

MS HERRERA

It takes a minute to get into the system. I'm sorry for the delay.
(Continues clicking and looking)

It is a little slow today. If you'll just bear with me...
 (Click, click, click...)
 Here we are. It shouldn't take more than a minute now...

ALICE

Oh, that's all right.

PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM ANNOUNCEMENT
 United Flight 84 to Washington-Dulles is now boarding at Gate 12B." Due to heightened security measures, all unattended baggage will be confiscated by airport personnel.

MS HERRERA

If you'll give me just a minute...

ALICE

I'm not in a hurry. I work right across the street and I thought I'd just drop by.

MS HERRERA

You at the Ramada?

ALICE

The where? Oh, no. I'm with Alcoa Salvage, just off Airport Boulevard.

MS HERRERA

(Still searching)
 Here we go.

ALICE

I was at the dentist this morning.

MS HERRERA

Oh, my. Not my friend.

ALICE

Tell me about it. But today I was in and out in less than an hour.

MS HERRERA

Good for you. Nice out?

ALICE

Beautiful. It could be spring!

(MR. CONKLIN sets down his luggage, and rushes to the counter. Ignoring ALICE, he addresses MS HERRERA)

MR. CONKLIN

Flight 84! Gate! What Gate? Do I get my ticket here?

MS HERRERA

(Gesturing to ALICE)

I'm sorry, sir. You'll have to wait your turn.

MR. CONKLIN

It takes off in ten minutes. Is it too late?

MS HERRERA

Thank you.

(MR. CONKLIN steps back and takes position)

ALICE

(To MS HERRERA)

Thank goodness those rains didn't make it this far north.

MS HERRERA

I know. Did you see those pictures on the news? All those animals drowned and left to rot on the ground.

ALICE

The Carolinas were devastated. It's a miracle we were spared.

MS HERRERA

The storm: where'd it go? It just blew away.

ALICE

Out into the Atlantic.

(MR. CONKLIN begins to fidget. Begins rocking impatiently, looks at his watch, clears throat, etc.)

MS HERRERA

And they predicted New Jersey'd be completely flooded.

ALICE

Well, here we are.

(MR. CONKLIN seeks MS HERRERA'S attention)

MR. CONKLIN

Uh, Miss, excuse me, please, but...

MS HERRERA

(To ALICE:)

I'm sorry.

(Now to MR. CONKLIN:)

Sir, I can only help one customer at a time.

MR. CONKLIN

I have to know: is Flight 84 still available?

MS HERRERA

I'll be with you as soon as I can. Thank you.

ALICE

I better...

MS HERRERA

Don't be silly. I forgot what you wanted me to check.

ALICE

That's all right. When I came in, I asked you first, I wanted to find out about flights to the Bay Area.

MS HERRERA

The Bay Area?

ALICE

In California.

MS HERRERA

What airport would you be traveling to? Would that be San Francisco?

ALICE

My sister lives in Sunnyvale, so San Francisco's closest. I take BART down when she's working. Why don't you try San Jose, too. It's less crowded. Only you can't get sourdough bread at the gift shops. Although they do carry Ghiradelli chocolate.

MS HERRERA

That would be Newark International to San Jose?

ALICE

I thought you were going to try San Francisco first.

MR. CONKLIN

Miss, I've got to make the next flight to Washington-Dulles.

MS HERRERA

(To MR. CONKLIN:)

I'm working as fast as I can.

(To ALICE:)

Where were we?

(HOLA gets in line behind MR. CONKLIN. Her walkman is so loud, everybody can hear it. She's in high pumps and wears shades. She's totally into herself and her music. MR. CONKLIN shows irritation, but HOLA is oblivious)

PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM ANNOUNCEMENT

"Please maintain close visual contact with your personal possessions. All carry-on articles are subject to physical search prior to boarding. This will be final call for United Flight 84, now boarding at Gate 12B."

HOLA

(Removing her headset, she addresses MR. CONKLIN)

Excuse me, was that something about Dallas? Did they say something about Continental Flight 91? That's my flight.

MR. CONKLIN

No.

HOLA

What did they say? Did you hear the announcement?

MR. CONKLIN

They announced my flight to Washington.

HOLA

Oh? I couldn't hear a thing. What flight number?

MR. CONKLIN

Flight 84, United Airlines.

HOLA

Oh, that's an unlucky number. Flight 84, 1984. Eight and four are a bad combination.

MR. CONKLIN

What are you, a numerologist?

HOLA

Yes, I am.

MR. CONKLIN

And 84 is, uh... Why is that? It's, you said, unlucky, or something?

HOLA

Well, yeah. 84, 86, 54: those numbers represent disharmony and dislocation. They are unnatural numbers. That's why George Orwell used 1984 to capture modern soullessness. He was a numerologist.

MR. CONKLIN

Really? George Orwell. I never associate him with, uh, well, I guess you'd call it superstition.

HOLA

I wouldn't. Superstition is a dismissive term. It's condescending, suggesting ignorance on the part of its user.

MR. CONKLIN

I don't think of myself as ignorant.

HOLA

But you must be, if you can't embrace life's mysteries.

MR. CONKLIN

Yeah, well what happened to good ol' reason? Can you tell me that?

HOLA

I have to go to the ladies'. Would you mind watching my bags?

MR. CONKLIN

Uh, sure, but hurry back. My flight is leaving soon.

(HOLA scurries off)

ALICE

You were checking...

MS HERRERA

The Bay Area! Look, I almost had Bermuda on the screen. These computers have a life of their own.

ALICE

They sound sort of alike: Bermuda. Bay Area. Bay Area. Bermuda.

MS HERRERA

But the tickets aren't the same.

ALICE

Oh?

MS HERRERA

You'd be surprised. It's much more to fly to the Caribbean than it is to the West Coast.

ALICE

I've never been down there.

MS HERRERA

Lovely. It rains every day, but it is enchanting. The people are so friendly.

(MR. and MRS. STAMPINO get in line behind MR. CONKLIN.
They never stop touching each other as they talk.)

BERNIE STAMPINO

Great, it's a short line.

LYLA STAMPINO

Yeah, whaddaya know about that.

BERNIE STAMPINO

So, baby, if everything goes right, in less than six hours we'll be laying in the hot sun.

LYLA STAMPINO

I can't wait. We'll just melt away into a puddle of sunscreen.

BERNIE STAMPINO

I'm gonna make love to you so many times, your body'll need treatment for skin abrasions.

(MR. CONKLIN overhears this but pretends not to listen; they
make no effort to control their voices)

LYLA STAMPINO

(Perhaps she's licking his ear)

That's the kind of friction I like.

BERNIE STAMPINO

I'm gonna fuck your brains out.

(Now offended, MR. CONKLIN takes care not to look around)

LYLA STAMPINO

I can't wait to wrap my legs around your sweaty body. I just hope you don't wimp out.

BERNIE STAMPINO

What are you talking about?

LYLA STAMPINO

You know perfectly well what I'm talking about. That time your dick turned all blue and you sat whimpering on the bed, crying, "It's broken. Oh, my God, I think you broke it."

BERNIE STAMPINO

What'd you expect? You're too rough.

LYLA STAMPINO

Yeah, well, I'm just warning you. Don't wimp out.

(As they talk, they pick up the bags HOLA left on the floor behind MR. CONKLIN. Ever so quietly, they pretend her stuff is theirs)

BERNIE STAMPINO

Don't worry about it. I'll have you squealing like a stuck pig, begging for more.

LYLA STAMPINO

You better. Only I wanna know why I always gotta beg.

BERNIE STAMPINO

Don't worry about it.

LYLA STAMPINO

I don't wanna have to beg for my dildo like the time your little friend pooped out.

BERNIE STAMPINO

Shut up, will ya?

LYLA STAMPINO

You shut up, noodle dick.

(They now have all the luggage)

BERNIE STAMPINO

Shit, baby, this line is taking too long. We better try to make it to the gate. Let's run.

LYLA STAMPINO

Oh, honey, I'm too tired to run. Can't we get a cart?

(They take off, walking quickly away)

MS. HERRERA

Newark to San Jose round trip is \$386.

ALICE

And to San Francisco, you said it's \$325?

(HOLA comes rushing back from the restroom)

HOLA

My bags! Mister, where'd my bags go?

MR. CONKLIN

(Turning around, realizing for the first time)

Oh, my God!

HOLA

Where'd they go? You promised to watch them.

MR. CONKLIN

I did! I was! They were right where you left them.

HOLA

Weren't you watching them? What the fuck were you doing?

MR. CONKLIN

Yes, of course I was. I don't know.

HOLA

Oh, shit.

MR. CONKLIN

Don't panic.

HOLA

My suitcases are gone. They're gone, you idiot. I can't believe it. And it's your fault. You promised to watch them.

MR. CONKLIN

I'm so sorry.

HOLA

Sorry? You're sorry? Is this some kind of joke? What the fuck do you expect me to do? I can't wear sorry. I won't have anything to wear.

MR. CONKLIN

Well, Miss, I don't know what happened.

HOLA

Didn't you see anybody? You must have seen somebody.

MR. CONKLIN

There was somebody, but...

HOLA

What'd they look like?

MR. CONKLIN

I didn't see them.

HOLA

You didn't what? What? Are you blind?

MR. CONKLIN

I didn't look at them.

HOLA

Where were they? How could you not see them? I left my bags right here!

MR. CONKLIN

Well, they were...

HOLA

What? They were what?

MR. CONKLIN

They were fighting.

HOLA

So? And?

MR. CONKLIN

And I was too embarrassed to look.

HOLA

Too what?

MR. CONKLIN

They were talking about sex. It was a married couple, I think, and they were having a thing about sex. I couldn't look.

HOLA

You idiot!

MR. CONKLIN

Now, listen! They were talking filth.

HOLA

You fell for it. I didn't think you were that stupid. Don't you know that's the oldest trick in the book? I mean, where are you from?

MR. CONKLIN

I'm from California.

HOLA

Of course. And you're telling me, you never heard of that before?

MR. CONKLIN

No, honest.

HOLA

Well, I'm sorry, Mister, but now what am I going to do? My flight's leaving pretty soon. Listen, you better go and get the police.

MR. CONKLIN

Me? Why me?

HOLA

I didn't see anything.

MR. CONKLIN

Neither did I.

HOLA

But you can tell the police what they said. You can describe their voices. You said they were married. You can explain what happened. I wasn't even here.

MR. CONKLIN

All right.

(He starts to load up his heavy luggage)

HOLA

Don't be silly. I'll watch those. And hurry. Maybe those people are still in the airport.

MR. CONKLIN

Where should I go?

HOLA

See if you can find someone at the security gate. There are tons of cops back there.

MR. CONKLIN

Good idea.

(CONKLIN runs off)

HOLA

Hurry back.

(She starts to tear/peel off the ID tags from CONKLIN's bags. Then she looks at her watch. Suddenly, MR. and MRS. STAMPINO show up.)

HOLA

There you are. It's about time.

(Each of them grabs one of CONKLIN's bags.)

BERNIE STAMPINO

Here some name tags.

HOLA

Is Joey out front?

BERNIE STAMPINO

Right.

HOLA

Then we meet at the usual spot. Good luck.

(They move quickly, heading in different directions)

ALICE

(To MS. HERRERA)

OK, if you can't get me into San Francisco, what about Oakland?

MR. CONKLIN

(He returns out of breath, alone. He notices his missing luggage)

Hey!

(Now more desperately to MS. HERRERA at the counter)

Lady, lady! Did you see who took my luggage?

MS. HERRERA

Please be patient, sir. I'll be with you in a minute.

END OF PLAY

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