



# PASSENGER

I'd Like a Ticket to Brizee-Harmon Please

You can get a lot of flight experience piloting short hops in aircraft, somethings making over half a dozen flights a day. It's a pretty straightforward operation, you pick up a finite number of passengers and you let those same passengers off at the destination... unless, of course, you don't.

©2020 David Woodruff – all rights reserved

It was a slow day at LaGuardia Airport, especially at the regional counters. The sky was clear and blue, with only a few puffy clouds in the distance. Perfect flying weather. Still, not a lot of traveling going on. Vince Eddington sat behind the counter staring at a letter from Southwest Airlines. They'd turned down his application again. Not enough hours in the air. Vince couldn't get into the military, so he couldn't get a position through the standard pilot route. But he loved to fly. Piloting these short hops was the only thing left. Central New York Airways was a tiny outfit. You were the pilot, steward, and ticket counter operator all in one. Short hops between LaGuardia, Ithaca, Syracuse, Rochester, and Binghamton. The other pilots called it the Rod Serling route. Ten passengers at the most.

When he was younger, Vince was desperate to become an astronaut. He had all the models; his collection included each one of the Moon landings. But there wasn't a space program anymore. At least not one which required pilots. As he was daydreaming, Andy wiped down the counter again. Vince could smell the ammonia.

"You want to take the ROC route?" Andy asked him.

Always eager to get into the air, Vince jumped at the chance, the destination didn't matter. "Sure, when do we go?"

"Leaves in fifteen minutes, you've got five passengers."

A young woman came up to the ticket counter, she looked like she was lost. "I'd like a ticket to Brizee-Harmon Please."

Vince frowned. "Sorry, we don't go there." The young woman returned a quizzical look. For a moment there was a standoff. The young woman stared at Vince and he simply looked back at her. She seemed completely unwilling to take his no for an answer. Fortunately, Andy stepped in. She took the woman's credit card and then ran it through the machine. She punched up a ticket and handed the credit card and the ticket to the woman under the glass shield of the ticket booth. The woman walked away with a sincere smile on her face.

Narrowing his eyes, Vince gave Andy a harsh look. "You gave that woman a ticket to Rochester."

"I know."

He smirked. "That's not where she wanted to go."

"She comes here every week. She's a regular. Just put her on the plane, take her to ROC, and forget about it. This is a tiny little airline. We need every passenger we can get. We need the money. Now you have six."

"But you perpetrated a fraud," Vince complained.

"She never complains," Andy shot back. "And each week she returns." Her face grew dark. "You want to keep your job? Don't make any waves. Your task is just to sell tickets and fly the plane... nothing else, got me?"

His shoulders drooped. "Whatever you say."

Vince climbed into the cockpit. There was no door. The aircraft was too small. Only a curtain separated the pilot from the passengers. He carried his flight plan with him and a cassette tape. You were supposed to play the cassette tape for the passengers, it was a recording of the safety instructions. Vince looked at the smiling faces of his passengers, all six of them, and then tossed the tape onto the copilot's seat. "You folks know the drill."

In a few moments, they were up in the air. The sky was clear and the breeze gentle. It was an idyllic flight, not a bump, not a jolt. It was a trip to make even the concept of air turbulence no more than an ancient myth. The landing when just as well, if not better. You'd have felt a bigger impact pulling into a parking space at a Seven-Eleven. Vince pulled the plane up to a side area of the tarmac. The plane was too small to rate a jetway, so they had to wait for someone to bring out the stairs. Vince stood and strolled into the passenger compartment. Ah, six happy passengers at their destination. One... two... three... wait a minute. These were all men. Where was the woman who bought the ticket to Brizee-Harmon? He did a quick recount. All he came up with was five. He counted again in a panic. Same answer.

"Excuse me," Vince asked one of the passengers, "wasn't there a woman sitting across from you?"

"Woman," the man sounded confused, "Sorry, I was busy. I didn't notice any woman on board the plane."

Vince could hear the stair wheels on the asphalt outside the plane. His eyes checked the two emergency exits. they were still sealed. He didn't get it. Since the days of the D. B. Cooper hijacking, you couldn't open any door except the emergency exits from the inside of the plane. So, how did she get off? People just don't leave airplanes in the middle of a flight. It's not possible.

There was a hiss of air as the outside crew opened the main door. The passengers rose in unison and headed for the door. The smell of ozone and spilled aviation fuel rushed in to greet them. Vince's eyebrows raised and his forehead wrinkled. "Well, I hope you have a great flight. Please feel free to fly with us at any time. It's been a pleasure serving you." The passengers all exited without saying another word.

Once they were all off, Vince checked everywhere. He even looked under the seats. There was no sign of the missing passenger. Even the seat he'd seen her sitting in wasn't warm. He rushed over the steps and ran into the terminal. He bumped into several of the mechanics as he made his way to the service phone.

"Hey, watch where you are going. There's no call for that."

"Sorry," Vince apologized, "Sorry." He finally reached the phone and dialed the ticket desk at LaGuardia. Andy answered.

"What happened to the woman who wanted the Brizee-Harmon ticket?"

Andy's voiced sounded totally disinterested on the other end of the line. "Why?"

"She's not here, that what."

"She didn't get off?"

“She wasn’t on the plane when I landed.”

There was some static on the line before Andy answered. “Don’t worry about it.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Vince shouted back. “Are you kidding?”

“Look,” Andy’s voice sounded annoyed, “she wasn’t wearing a parachute, so I’m sure she didn’t jump off the plane. She’ll turn up.”

Vince’s face frowned. “But...”

“Don’t give me any buts, you hear me?” Andy’s voice was stern and gruff. “This is a small airline. Don’t make any waves, don’t cause any problems. If no one has lodged any complaints, then keep your mouth shut and do your job... period.” The next thing Vince heard was the sound of a dial tone on the line.



Vince rearranged his schedule to make sure he was back in LaGuardia exactly one week later. It wasn’t long before she arrived. She looked the same. Vince even though she was wearing the same outfit. There was a stillness to her as if she was waiting for something to happen. She approached the ticket counter.

“One ticket to Brizee-Harmon,” Vance suggested as she put her credit card on the counter.

“How did you know?”

“Just a lucky guess.”

He ran the ticket through the machine. Out popped a ticket to Rochester. He handed the woman the ticket and the credit card and she went off to the waiting area.

“We’re going to have to cancel that flight,” Andy explained.

“Why?”

“She’s the only passenger. We need at least three to break even.” Digging into his pockets, Vince produced several greenbacks and handed them to Andy.

“I’ll pay for the rest of the tickets,” Vince explained.

“Suit yourself,” Andy lamented. “I mean she’s cute and all, but she’s also crazy. She keeps buying a ticket to a place that doesn’t exist. I’m sure you can do better. Maybe even right here.”

Vince didn’t even notice Andy. “I have to find out where she is going. I need to know what happened on the last flight.”

Andy shook her head. “You’re wasting your time.”

“We’ll see,” Vince replied casually, “we’ll see.”

Vince climbed into the cockpit. He carefully checked the compartment. She was the only passenger. Vince looked at her face. She gave him a tight and reserved smile. Vince tossed the tape onto the co-pilot’s seat. “You know the drill.” He kept his eye on her until the outer door was closed by the ground

crew. Then he moved the curtain out of the way so it didn't obstruct his view of the passenger area. Sitting down, he adjusted the mirror so he could see behind him. She was sitting there quietly, staring out the window.

He turned around. He didn't even trust her reflection. She was sitting right there, just where the mirror had said she was. Vince took off his cap and looked at her. "We'll be leaving soon." She gave him a partial glance and then held up her hand in acknowledgment. Vince started the flight checklist, every few seconds checking her reflection in the mirror.

It was another fine ride in the air, no bumps or turbulence. The flight was fine over the Catskills, she still sat lonely, staring out the window. "Nice view, Huh?" Vince asked her, but she didn't respond. She was lost in her own thoughts. She seemed a little more relaxed over Binghamton. It was as if some of the stress in her body had melted away. She looked more relaxed. Over Ithaca, she was still in the mirror and Vince noticed she let out a great sigh.

They started their approach over Canandaigua and the far end of the finger lakes. Vince thought I saw a smile creep across her face as they started their descent. He turned away only for a second to confirm the runway assignment at ROC. When Vince looked in the mirror again, she was gone.

Switching the plane to autopilot, Vince went back into the passenger cabin. He searched everywhere for a clue, but there was nothing. The emergency exits were in place, everything seemed normal... except there were no passengers on the plane.

Vince turned back to face the cockpit, only he found it wasn't standing in an aircraft any longer, he was standing on a street. It was a narrow affair, made of cobblestones. There was no traffic, but the street seemed full of people out for a stroll in the fine spring air. *Here's to the losers...* a 1960s song by Frank Sinatra, written by Jack Segal and Robert Wells was playing over some invisible speakers. It was all very pleasant. Off in the distance, he could see a wide-open, green field of grass. Vince couldn't believe what he was seeing. He blinked. Then he shut his eyes and counted to ten. When he opened them, the town was still there.

He cautiously approached one of the pedestrians on the street. "Excuse me, can you tell me what this place is?"

The man raised one eyebrow. "Why, it's Northfield." A sudden look of recognition came over the man's face. "Wait a minute, I recognize you... you're Vince Eddington the astronaut." He seemed excited. The reaction was all out of proportion.

"It's just Vince," he responded, a little taken aback.

A young blond took out a piece of paper and a pen and held it out to him. "Can I have your autograph?" she asked sweetly.

"Sure," Vince replied taking the paper and pen from her. He signed it, but spend most of the time glancing around, trying to get some clue as to what was going on. And to see if he couldn't find out what had become of his passenger. The young lady appeared overjoyed with Vince's signature and ran off around the corner, pen and paper in hand. Vince continued to look for any signs or clues which might give him an inkling what was going on. "Okay," he mumbled to himself, "I'm obviously dreaming. Not a

good thing to be doing while you are piloting an airplane. Okay, I need to wake up now. Jesus, I *have* to wake up, this is going to cost me my license.”

Vince shut his eyes again, forcing them closed tight. When he opened them, he was still on the street, but a man was standing before him in what appeared to be a multi-colored Greek robe. “What is this place?” Vince asked him.

“I believe the gentleman gave you a very succinct answer. This is Northfield.” His voice was calm and metered.

“But it’s more than that isn’t it?” Vince suggested. “This town shouldn’t be here. I shouldn’t be here,” he insisted.

“On the contrary, Mr. Eddington, I think this is just the place for you.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Northfield is a place for dreamers. It’s a place where dreams come true. Didn’t you always wish to be an astronaut?”

Vince’s forehead wrinkled. “How did you know?”

“This is Northfield, Mr. Eddington. It’s a place where everyone’s dreams come true.” The man in the toga sighed. “You see for some people; they never reach their dreams. Life gets in the way. Their dreams are overwhelmed by responsibility. Obligations. So, they come here. Here, in Northfield, you can finally have your dreams.”

“But I wasn’t an astronaut,” Vince protested.

“Over time,” The man explained, “if you remain long enough, you’ll have memories of being an astronaut.”

“But I don’t want to have the memories of something I didn’t do,” Vince insisted, “I want to actually do them. This is just a place where dreams go to die.”

The man gave Vince a disappointed scowl. “It’s the real world which kills dreams, Mr. Eddington, not Northfield. This is where dreamers go so their dreams can live again.”

“Well, I’m not ready to give up on my dreams, thank you,” Vince snapped.

“Even if they seem out of reach?” the man inquired.

“Especially if they seem out of reach.”

The man’s eyes and shoulders drooped, “Then all you have to do is turn back to them. Turn around Mr. Eddington.”

Almost as if compelled to do so Vince turned around. He must have blinked. Vince found himself back on the empty plane. Returning to the cockpit, he landed the plane and taxied it across the tarmac. The ground crew gave him a funny look when they found he was the only one on the plane. But Vince ignored them. He headed straight for the ticket counter.

“Hey Rick,” Vince flagged down one of the other employees. “You ever hear of Northfield?”

“Yeah,” he struggled his shoulders, “It used to be the name of a town on the east side of the river. It was supposed to be some sort of utopia, but it never really got off the ground. I must have folded, what, two hundred years ago I guess.”

“How about Brizee-Harmon?” Vince inquired.

Rick cocked his head. “What you on a history binge or something?”

“Just answer the question.”

“It used to be an airport over on the east side. Never panned out though.”

“Is it still there?”

“No,” Rick snorted, “it disappeared in the 50s. “I think it’s where that development, Lakewood Manors, was built.”

“Thanks,” Vince sighed, “Got another fight for me?”

“My, we are an eager beaver, aren’t we?”

“I need the flight time,” Vince told Rick with an extra spring in his step, “I’m going to get a job with Southwest Airlines...”