

Flight Zero One

by

Tony Breeze

FLIGHT ZERO ONE

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FLIGHT ZERO ONE

CHARACTERS

Judy Robinson	Female pilot with small Canadian airline, a rough & ready survivor
Bill & Mary McMurdo	Sickly old man (NS) & his wife who've been through thick & thin together
Tasmin Archer & Joe	Heavily pregnant young woman & her partner, tomorrow's young hopefuls
Mrs Hooper & Abigail	Mother & precocious daughter on their way to a TV audition
Walter J.Cronkheim III	Grumpy businessman on his way to his next buck
Vanessa James	Fading actress on her way to a facelift
Officer Sharpe	A Canadian policeman (may be plain-clothes) on his way to court with the Red Indian
Officer Mulligan	Female police officer also acting as escort.
Sammy Two-Rivers	Red Indian prisoner on his way to court, slow, charismatic, a man of few words

NB: With grateful thanks to Arnold R. Shulman, of Sedona, Arizona, USA.

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(Introductory music Sinatra's "Come Fly With Me" - music down – sound of wind howling. We see the dark and dusty interior of a Canadian fur trapper's cabin in winter.

Voices off "Over there, there's a cabin, etc.

 (We hear someone trying to open the old door but it won't budge)

Judy (Off) The door's jammed.

Joe Here, let me try

 (The rickety door is eventually forced open and a group of people come in with a flashlight. They are not dressed for the snow but have airline blankets round them to keep them warm)

W.J.Cronkheim (Carrying holdall) Jesus H. Christ ! Don't ever do that to me again

Judy (Shining flashlight around) What's wrong? I got you down didn't I?

W.J.Cronkheim You got us down - you certainly did that.

Vanessa I've never been so frightened in all my life.

Mrs Hooper Everybody told me I shouldn't fly at New Year.

Mary McMurdo (Supporting her elderly husband) Come in, love, you'll be all right now

Mrs Hooper I want you to know that I'll be making a formal complaint to the airline about this

Abigail (To her mum) Don't fuss me -

Mrs Hooper She nearly got us killed

Joe (Bringing in heavily pregnant wife) If you must know, she actually saved your lives - if she hadn't found that clearing when she did, we'd have been spread over three states

Judy Thank you. You think that I did it on purpose? That I arranged for the engines to develop problems?

Mrs Hooper I've never prayed so much in my whole life - they were right about it being unlucky to fly at this time of year.

Judy It was nothing to do with the time of year, it was probably dirt in the fuel line.

Vanessa Whatever. We're here now, safe and well, which is more than I thought we'd be ten minutes ago

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(Two police officers bring in a prisoner in handcuffs who looks as if he's from Indian stock)

Sharpe Come on in, son, make yourself at home

(Everyone stops and looks as the Indian slowly walks across the room)

Mulligan Just sit yourself down over there.

Joe (To his pregnant wife) Are you all right love?

Tasmin I think so.

Joe Come and sit down (he takes her to a chair)

Vanessa "It ain't much but its home" ... what is this place?

Sharpe It's what the fur trappers used to use in the old days

Vanessa (Running her finger along dust) You'd think they'd at least clean the place up before they left, it's filthy

W. J. Cronkheim Maam, the temperature outside is minus thirty, we've just escaped death by inches and between you and me I don't give a shit about the dust

Mrs Hooper Hey! Just watch your language.

Vanessa There's a stove and some lamps!

Joe All we got to do is find a way of lighting them. Anybody got a light?

(They all look at each other and shake their heads)

W.J.Cronkheim Wouldn't you just know it - not only do I crash-land in the middle of nowhere but I'm stuck in a freezing cabin with a bunch of schmucks who don't have a match between them

Joe Come on, somebody must have a light - my wife's pregnant

W.J.Cronkheim You don't say? And here was I thinking it was the warm bread she'd been eating

Joe (To Judy) You must have something to make a fire

Judy We've got plenty of kerosene in the plane, you almost had all the fire you wanted back there.

Joe You officer, do you have a light?

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Sharpe I'm afraid I don't smoke

Joe (To Mulligan) What about you?

Mulligan (Shaking head) Sorry

Joe What about him?

Sharpe He's not allowed

Joe Somebody must have one

W.J.Cronkheim The trick is to conserve energy, I've seen it in the movies. All we've got to do is snuggle down together till daylight and in the morning we can get out of here

Vanessa If you think I'm snuggling down with you, you've got another thing coming

Sharpe (To Indian who is moving towards stove) Where d'you think you're going?

Mulligan (Hand on her gun) What are you doing?

(The Indian doesn't speak but, still handcuffed, gathers some rubbish from the floor, puts it in the stove and when he moves away we see it bursting into flames. The others cheer & keep the fire going by putting bits on)

Vanessa We got a fire!

W.J.Cronkheim That's great, son. How did you do that? Old Indian secret?

(The Indian doesn't speak but nods, holds up a cigarette lighter which he flicks into life and smiles)

Sharpe You shouldn't have that – give it here. (He takes it off him and gives it to the young Joe who begins to light the oil lamps.

(To Mulligan) I thought you said you'd searched him?

Mulligan I did.

W.J.Cronkheim What's he in for?

Sharpe Arson.

W.J.Cronkheim Great ... he doesn't say a lot does he?

(The Indian gives him a disdainful look)

Vanessa So what's the plan Miss Erhart?

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(She exits with difficulty through the rickety door)

Pregnant Wife Are you letting her go out on her own?

W.J.Cronkheim I sure am

Tasmin But there might be grizzly bears out there

W.J.Cronkheim Precisely

Tasmin (To Joe) You go, love

Joe What about you?

Tasmin I'll be OK

Joe If you're sure

(He follows her out, also struggling with the door)

Mulligan (Following them) I'll give them a hand

Vanessa (To Cronkheim) Have you no shame?

W.J.Cronkheim You got it (meaning 'dead right')

Sharpe I'd have gone but there's no way I can leave this guy on his own

Vanessa (Looking scathingly at Cronkheim) So much for gallant Canadian gentlemen

W.J.Cronkheim Maam, I ain't Canadian and I sure as hell ain't no gentleman

Vanessa This is the last time I fly this airline

W.J.Cronkheim It was nearly the last time you flew any airline - if she hadn't spotted that clearing we'd've been singing with the heavenly choir

Tasmin Should we send somebody out to get help?

W.J.Cronkheim By my estimation the nearest help is Fort Vermilion, about a hundred miles that away (Points with thumb) You gonna start walking? Don't forget it's New Year's Eve - would you be out in the back of beyond at this time of year if you didn't have to be?

(They shake their heads)

The whole damn world is either gathered round their TV sets or partying the night away

Mrs Hooper Some New Year we're gonna have.

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W.J.Cronkheim God, it feels even colder in here than it is outside

 (Pause while they all take in their plight)

Vanessa So why don't we have our own here?

Mrs Hooper Our own what?

Vanessa Party - to warm us up, boost our morale

W.J.Cronkheim Am I hearing you right? You almost met your maker out there and now you want to party?

Vanessa Why not?

W.J.Cronkheim Who're you going to invite? The abominable snowman?

Vanessa (Indicating others) We got all the guests we need right here

 (Judy, Joe & Mulligan struggle back in with kindling)

Judy What for?

Vanessa I think what we need is a party

Judy Yeah?

Vanessa Yeah - right here and now - there ain't no reason to be miserable, just 'cos we've had a little setback - this is New Years Eve

W.J.Cronkheim 'Setback' she calls it. We belly-flop in the middle of nowhere and she calls it a "setback" - is she real?

Vanessa Where's your spirit?

W.J.Cronkheim I got all the spirit I need right here in this bag (Producing a bottle of whiskey from his bag) Never travel anywhere without it

Vanessa I wasn't exactly thinking of that sort but it'll do for starters.

W.J.Cronkheim What d'you mean?

Judy There's some mugs over there (she goes for them)

W.J.Cronkheim Who said I was sharing it?

Vanessa Sure you'll share it - you wouldn't be that mean

W. J. Cronkheim Wouldn't I?

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Judy I'm afraid they're a bit dusty

Vanessa (To Cronkheim) Come on

W.J.Cronkheim Aw!

(He reluctantly hands it over for the common good and she begins to pour)

Abigail (Prissily) What am I going to drink?

Mrs Hooper Do you want mommy to get you some snow to melt?

Abigail Yuk! No thanks

Joe I've got something she can have (produces a carton of juice from his bag)

W.J.Cronkheim Didn't you send out a mayday or whatever it is you're supposed to do?

Judy There wasn't time

Abigail We could light a signal fire outside

Mrs Hooper It would take too long dear - we'll be OK in here

Judy Come and get it

(They go for the mugs of whiskey)

Tasmin (To Joe) Not for me, you go ahead

Mulligan This ain't so bad - we got a stove, we got some lamps and we got this

Vanessa Yeah, but where are we gonna sleep?

W.J.Cronkheim (Sitting on the spare bed) I bags this bed

Vanessa If you had anything about you, you'd give it up for somebody more deserving

W.J.Cronkheim There ain't anybody more deserving than me

Sharpe (Approaching him and towering over him) I really think you ought to consider the young lady, sir

(Cronkheim sees that he means what he says and backs down)

W.J.Cronkheim (Moving) Of course - I wasn't serious

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(We end up with the old man on one side of the stage and pregnant young woman in a bed on the other)

Vanessa I know what this party's lacking - we don't know anything about the other guests - so how's about we all introduce ourselves?

(Murmur from the others)

I'll start the ball rolling since it was my idea - I guess you all know me?

(They all shake their heads murmuring "No," etc)

But you must do - don't you watch TV?

Abigail You've been on TV?

Vanessa I want you to look very carefully

(She gives a side view)

How about this side?

Abigail Sorry

Mrs Hooper (Hesitantly) You do seem a little familiar

Vanessa There you go

Mrs Hooper You weren't on that quiz show where they - ?

Vanessa No! I wasn't on any quiz show

Mary McMurdo (Matter-of-factly) You're the woman with the dog

Mrs Hooper The what?

Mary McMurdo In the commercial, the woman that's waiting at the bus stop when she gets peed on by the dog

Vanessa Well actually -

Mrs Hooper Yes I know the one - you're her?

Vanessa I wouldn't call it the pinnacle of my career - but yes, that was me

Abigail Yeah, that's a great one

Vanessa (To herself) Thirty years in the business and I'm remembered for being peed on by a dog!

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Mrs Hooper It's a good commercial - I watch that one - some of the others I don't bother with but that one I do

Vanessa I'm greatly honoured

Abigail What was the dog called?

Vanessa. (Tetchily) I don't remember what the damned dog was called!

Mrs Hooper Have you done anything else?

Vanessa Of course ... nothing much recently ... but I'm waiting on one or two things

Mrs Hooper Do you hear that? She's a real actress (to Vanessa) My daughter wants to go into show business - we're actually on the way to an audition for the Hughie Mortimer Show right now

Vanessa (Again disdainfully) Really?

Mrs Hooper Show them, Abigail

Vanessa No, really

 (But Abigail needs no further encouragement - she takes up a pose and begins singing the Lion's song from the Wizard of Oz 'If I only had a heart' [or some other audition piece]. All the others wince visibly and Abigail doesn't know when to stop. When she does there is muted applause)

Judy (Interrupting at appropriate moment and sounding unconvincing) That's great

Mrs Hooper She hasn't finished yet

W.J.Cronkheim (Loud stage whisper) If I only had a gun!

Mrs Hooper (Casting a nasty look at Cronkheim) (To others) Well what d'you think?

Mulligan (Sounding unconvincing) She's very good

Abigail Should I do some more?

Vanessa (Quickly) No dear, that's great, we just want to hear from some of the others

 (She indicates Judy)

Judy Well you all know me, I'm the one that got you into this mess - Judy's the name - spent most of my life spraying crops and dousing forest fires till I got this job - that's about all there is for me

Sharpe We don't blame you, maam

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W. J. Cronkheim I do. If the plane had been properly serviced none of this would have happened

Vanessa So what's your claim to fame?

W.J.Cronkheim I don't have one - Walter J Cronkheim the third at your service - I'm what you might call 'an entrepreneur'

Abigail What's that mom?

Mrs Hooper Somebody who makes money out of other people's misfortunes

W.J.Cronkheim Don't pay your mom no heed, I just buy and sell things

Abigail What do you buy?

W.J.Cronkheim I buy what one person doesn't want and sell it to somebody who does

Abigail Why doesn't the second one just miss you out and buy it themselves from the first one?

W. J. Cronkheim Because he sometimes doesn't know he needs it till I convince him that he does – it's called the power of persuasion

Vanessa It's called capitalism

(Abigail looks confusedly at her mom who fobs her off with a wave of the hand)

Abigail What if the second one doesn't want what the first one's got?

W.J.Cronkheim Then we have to resort to something to make him think he needs it – good old advertising

Judy (To young couple) What about you two?

Joe We were hoping to get to Edmonton - my wife has to see a specialist there - (nodding towards her swollen abdomen) We lost our first kiddy (thinking what he's said he tries to backtrack) but I'm sure we'll be OK this time

Vanessa Sure you will... (Turning to prisoner and Sharpe) Say, is this guy dangerous?

Sharpe I don't reckon so, Maam

Mulligan He aint given us any trouble so far.

Mrs Hooper Shouldn't you go and sit in the plane with him

Judy I don't think there's any need for that, it's freezing out there - if the man says he's not dangerous, we'll take his word for it

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Mrs Hooper I shan't sleep

W.J.Cronkheim You'll sleep all right

Mrs Hooper What about my daughter?

W.J.Cronkheim He'll be quite safe from her

Mrs Hooper Charming!

Judy He doesn't mean it

W. J. Cronkheim Don't I?

Mulligan (To the old lady) Are you O.K.?

Mary McMurdo I don't know. We were hoping to get to Calgary to see our kids but it doesn't look like we'll make it now.

Mulligan You'll make it, but not tonight.

Judy (To others) O.K. So now we all know each other a little better how's about we find out what provisions we've got between us.

Mrs Hooper Provisions?

Judy Yeah, food

Mrs Hooper We don't have any food

Abigail I wish we did.

Judy Somebody must have something

Mary McMurdo (Going to her bag) I have an apple pie that I was taking for the family. I don't mind if you folks want to share it between you.

Judy (Taking it from her) That's very kind of you ... anybody else?

Joe Archer We got a little chocolate you can have

Judy O.K., let's have it for the communal store

Vanessa I got some boiled sweets

Judy Pass 'em over.

Officer Sharpe We've got a couple of sandwiches left I think – (checks his bag) Yeah, there you go.

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Judy (To Cronkheim) What about you?

W.J.Cronkheim What about me.

Judy You got any kind of eatables?

W.J.Cronkheim I might have

Vanessa What does that mean?

W.J.Cronkheim It means "What I got is none of your business"

Judy Mister, we got ourselves into a predicament here and the only way we're going to get out if safe and sound is to share out fairly all we got.

W.J.Cronkheim Why should I have to suffer just because you lot didn't have the foresight to think ahead.

Joe You got some stuff in that bag?

W.J.Cronkheim (Putting his arm round it) What's it to you?

Mulligan I think you should hand it over, friend

W.J.Cronkheim (Guarding his bag) Why should I? Why should I have to do without?

Joe You wouldn't be so mean

W.J.Cronkheim You just watch me

(At this point the Indian gets up and walks slowly over to Cronkheim who is clutching his beloved bag. The Indian takes hold of the bag and roughly drags it from his grasp then takes it to the centre and tips out his goodies and belongings into the middle, throwing down the bag and giving Cronkheim one of his looks)

W.J.Cronkheim Hey ! That's theft. That's my property. You've no right.

Judy We got every right. (She begins to share it out with the others) Here you are – Eat it slow - I don't know when we'll be eating again.

All (As she goes round them) Thanks, etc

Vanessa This guy reckons we're a hundred miles from civilisation. Is he right?

Judy I'm afraid so

Mrs Hooper So how long do you reckon we'll have to stay here?

Judy I don't rightly know