

# *Patricia*

*A one-act, neo-baroque operetta*

## ***The setting:***

*A short opening scene (in front of the curtain) takes place at baggage claim at the Raleigh-Durham (RDU) airport. Then the curtain rises on the living room of a townhouse in Durham, North Carolina. A couch, side table, chair and stereo cabinet are visible.*

## ***The characters:***

*Patricia* (lyric soprano) is a well-educated single woman around 30 years old. She works as senior technical analyst for a digital imaging firm and has just returned from her first trip to Manhattan where she attended an industry conference and then stayed an extra day to see a Carolina-born ballerina who she has long admired perform with the American Ballet Theater.

*On the flight back, she had a problematic encounter with a seatmate named Hartley* (tenor or baritone), a Manhattan resident about her age and also unmarried. But as she was leaving baggage claim, he called out her name, rushed over, apologized for being somewhat unsocial and gave her his card.

*Beatrice* (mezzo) is a recently divorced black semi-professional singer slightly older than Patricia. She works as a clerical employee at Patricia's firm to make ends meet and that is how the two became friends.

## ***The Story:***

*Patricia is leaving baggage claim at the Raleigh-Durham airport when Hartley suddenly calls out her name, apologizes for being a poor companion on their flight from New York, gives her his card and says he can help her if she ever returns to Manhattan. Bemused, Patricia gives Hartley her card and departs, leaving Hartley to contemplate what he has done and what he thinks about Patricia*

*Beatrice has picked up Patricia at the airport and as the women enter Patricia's townhouse, Beatrice first reminds "Patsy" of an admirer who is pursuing her and then seeks details of her trip.*

*Brushing off the admirer, Patricia recounts her success at a conference, at a bar later that night, and then the thrill of attending a ballet the next day. She also tells her friend about the man on the return flight and getting his card.*

*As the women converse, Beatrice tries to convince Patsy to remain in Carolina where her future seems assured, in contrast to a recent divorce that has left Beatrice depressed about her own future. She yearns for a happy family.*

*Declaring she isn't ready for that, Patricia asks "Bea" to play some ballet music on the stereo as she briefly disappears to put on the fancy dress she bought in Manhattan. When she re-emerges, she dances to the music as Beatrice watches and admires her grace.*

*Beatrice, who has performed in regional Broadway musicals, realizes Patricia has been imitating one. She tells Patricia that she has been singing her "wanting song" and dancing her "dream ballet." She then composes a quick Broadway-style version of her friend's wanting song and sings.*

*Patricia realizes who might help make her dream come true.*

***Curtain***

## Prelude

On the curtain, which is closed, or somewhere in front of the curtain, is a sign that says:

*“Welcome to Raleigh-Durham”*

Patricia emerges from stage right, pulling a roller bag and carrying a brown Bloomingdale’s bag, walking briskly. Her heels click. Just before she is about to exit stage left, Hartley emerges stage right:

**Hartley (dialog):** *“Patricia!”*

She stops and looks back at him, puzzled. He hurries over to her:

**Hartley (dialog):** *“I know you have to go, but I just wanted to tell you I’m sorry I wasn’t the best companion on that flight.”*

Hartley hands Patricia his card.

**Hartley (dialog):** *“I can help you if you’re ever back in New York.”*

Patricia looks at Hartley with skepticism. But she lets go of her suitcase, puts down the Bloomingdale’s bag, opens her purse, fumbles a bit and then pulls out a card of her own. She hands it to Hartley, and puts his in her purse with only a glance.

**Patricia (dialog):** *“Yes, I do have to go.” (Picking up her luggage.) “But thanks for your offer.” Bye, now!”*

She gives him a smile and departs, leaving Hartley alone in front of the curtain. He looks after her, but realizing she is gone, takes a few steps back toward center stage, looking and behaving in an uncertain fashion.

**Hartley (aria):** *There must be a reason  
I called out her name  
Said I was sorry  
Said I was to blame*

*(A)*

*Don’t really know her  
Why did I care*

*What was I thinking  
No thoughts were there*

**(A)**

*(No thoughts were there? No thoughts were there!  
(It wasn't poor thinking  
(No thoughts were there)*

**(B)**

*All my life I've been reasonable  
Carefully thinking things through  
But standing right here I'm starting to fear  
There's a part of me I never knew*

*(All my life I've been thinking things through  
(Where has this got me? I thought I knew  
(I thought I knew ...)*

*(da capo, or repeat the (A) section*

*Hartley starts after Patricia who has vanished off stage, but quickly stops*

**Hartley (rec)** *"She said a friend was picking her up ..."*

*Hartley pauses, seeming uncertain about what to do next. He goes back to stage right, and grabs his bag. He looks first in one direction, then in another.*

**Hartley (rec)** *"Rental cars are ..."*

*Puzzled, probably because he is distracted, Hartley puts his bag down*

**Hartley (aria)**

*She had lovely hands no ring in the view  
Looked great in her suit so tailored dark blue  
But her voice, that Southern inflection  
Different world, my instinct: rejection*

*Rejection  
Different world that Southern inflection*

*Enthralled by her time on the town  
Leaned over my seat to look down*

*My help she sought to enlist  
A hint of her scent but it didn't persist*

*When it didn't persist  
It was something I missed*

*Lovely hands no ring were they bearing  
Crisp white blouse but why was I caring  
She told me her name but soon turned away  
A man on her right had something to say*

*Why was I miffed when she turned his way  
When I was the one who had nothing to say*

*Duke Carolina they're talking the game  
Duke Carolina to me they're the same  
The guy in that cap was a type that she knew  
Kept him amused maybe flirted some too*

*Maybe flirted some too with a guy from her state  
I was standoffish I could be too late*

Hartley's train of thought is interrupted by an announcement asking passengers to report any unaccompanied bags. He looks around and pulls his closer to him.

**Hartley (rec):** *But not long after, she tired of him ...*

**Hartley (aria)**

*Designer glasses while reading a book  
Covered it over when I stole a look  
Lovely hands no ring on that finger  
She wanted to read, I wanted to linger*

*So we talked about this and we talked about that  
Some tips for the beach out of season  
Then back to New York and the ABT  
She stayed over a day for that reason*

*She'd stayed over a day to attend the ballet  
Some dancer she knew and admired  
Drank champagne in a newly bought dress*

*Something floaty she had to confess*

*A mischievous grin helped make that alright  
She had lovely hands no ring was in sight  
Yet I thought with some disdain  
Her interests seemed all too mundane*

*Yes I thought with much disdain  
Her interests were just too mundane*

Hartley picks up his bag and heads off stage left. Just before he leaves, he pauses one last time. He pulls Patricia's card out of his pocket and looks at it.

**Hartley (rec):** *Durham Imaging Analytics  
Research Triangle Park  
Senior Technical Associate ...  
Patricia M. Boone*

Hartley stares at the card and then

**Hartley (aria)**

*I see I misjudged her  
More there I discern  
She likely dissembled  
So smart girls soon learn*

*But on our descent I sensed some fear  
I sensed it was just like mine  
I knew we were then together  
But would it work ... NO NEVER*

Hartley looks around for someplace to dispose of the card, but before doing so, takes another look at it:

(Pause)

**Hartley (rec):** *Perhaps I should give it a try*

Hartley puts the card in his pocket and exits stage left

## The Curtain Rises

Two women, Patricia wheeling a small suitcase while carrying a purse and a Bloomingdale's bag, enter stage left. Patricia is wearing a tailored skirt suit, a white blouse and low heels. Beatrice has on jeans, a colorful top and flats, and is carrying a set of car keys.

**Beatrice: (rec)** ...but he's cute and he's got a good job  
and he's texting you hour by hour

**Patricia: (rec)** Oh Bea pretty please talk of Randal no more  
His texts I ignore, I won't hear it

(Patricia drops her purse on a side table, parks her roller bag and places the Bloomingdale's bag on top of it. She regards her home with distaste.)

**Beatrice: (rec)** Patricia! Be sensible!

**Patricia: (aria)** All my life, I've been sensible  
So responsible, such a bore  
(A) Expectations, not my making  
Could engulf me, evermore

(B) Manhattan, New York, I know it sounds trite,  
I know it sounds foolish to you  
But there I can search for the woman I am  
Shed the woman they made me untrue

(A) All my life, I've been sensible  
So responsible, such a bore  
Expectations, not my making  
Could engulf me ever more  
Expectations I abhor  
Simply living such a chore

**Beatrice: (rec)** They love you here Patsy, think of the firm  
I know you just got a promotion ...

**Patricia: (aria)** I'm good at my work, yes better than most  
But they need me here more than they want me  
Don't show up a man, don't put yourself first  
Hold your tongue, keep your place, just look pretty

*I'm good at my work, far better than most  
But they need me here more than they want me  
Ideas they're not mine, they belong to the boss  
If you speak, you're ignored, just look pretty*

*I'm good at my work, the best they can get  
But a woman in tech is a handmaid  
At first it seemed good, but now it is clear  
Hold your tongue, keep your place, just look pretty*

*Oh Bea, I'm so very unhappy*

*(Beatrice first looks puzzled as Patricia sings. Then she gets it.)*

**Beatrice** *You're good at your work, you're better than them  
You know who I mean, we're talking of men  
Ideas they're not yours, you're a woman you see  
Thanks for your help, but it's all about me*

**Beatrice (dialog):** *speaking of whom ...*

**Beatrice (aria)** *I'm good at my work, I sing better than most  
But they spurn me much more than they take me  
Don't fit the part, 'course it's not cause I'm black  
So I work as a clerk, it's not pretty*

**Beatrice (dialog)** *..But back to you, Patsy. I still don't see it. Just recently, they gave you more money ...*

**Patricia (rec)** *And still call me Honey...*

**Beatrice (rec)** *And a new title, too*

**Patricia (rec)** *.It sounds better, that's true*

**Beatrice (rec)** *And tech is the future, tomorrow's you day*

**Patricia (rec)** *.I wish I could say I like it that way*

**Beatrice (dialog)** *Why not? Think of Steve Jobs. He was so important they made an opera about him. "The Revolution (Beatrice rolls her arms around in circles) of Steve Jobs."*

*Patricia (dialog)* Yes, they made an opera about HIM. Why didn't they make one around HER instead?

*Beatrice (dialog)* About his wife?

*Patricia (dialog)* . No. About Ada Lovelace?

*Beatrice (dialog)* . Who?

*Patricia (dialog)* The first ever computer programmer. A woman.

*(Pause. Patricia looks defiant. Beatrice looks puzzled, then she brightens)*

*Beatrice (dialog)* Was she a mezzo?

*(Patricia looks Beatrice up and down, sizing her up)*

*Patricia (dialog)* Well, if Lin-Manuel Miranda can sing the role of Alexander Hamilton, I see no reason why you can't sing Ada Lovelace.

*Both (duet)*            We're good at our work, we're better than most  
                              We just need some room for our talents ...

*(They stop, not knowing what lines might follow)*

*Beatrice (dialog)* What comes next?

*Patricia (rec)* .. Manhattan!!!

*(The two pause briefly and look at each other)*

*(Patricia, grabbing the roller bag and Bloomingdale's bag, walks briskly off stage right to deposit them in her bedroom.)*

*Patricia: (dialog).* Be right back. Make yourself comfy.

*(Beatrice puts her keys away and moves to the couch. As she does ...)*

*Beatrice: (dialog)* Well, Ok, let's hear about it the conference, a show? Tell me everything.

*(Patricia returns, sits down at the other end of the couch and kicks her heels off. The two women face each other and smile as good friends.)*

**Patricia: (aria)** *At the conference my paper went well  
The room was full, got a slot before lunch  
(A) And Charley was pleased, and better behaved  
Had a different agenda my hunch*

**(B)** *Others asked for my card and invited me out  
To a restaurant far down in Tribeca  
The crowd was so smart, someone else paid the bill  
Let's go on they all said, ... "sure, I will"*

**(A')** *At the conference my paper went fine  
The room was full, there were questions, some praise  
And Charley was pleased, and much better behaved  
His conduct ... should I reappraise?*

*(Beatrice laughs)*

**Beatrice: (spoken)** *He hit on you in D.C. didn't he? And his wife was along then.  
You watch. He'll hit on you again. He even looks at me ...  
sometimes.*

**Patricia: (rec)** *If we want to keep our jobs we must never complain  
Brush it off, just pretend, be a woman*

**Beatrice: (rec)** *That's where Randall comes in  
if only you'd link up with him  
He's a man ... so you know they would listen*

*(Patricia looks exasperated)*

**Patricia: (rec)** *She dumped him, who wants to know why  
Carolina's his world, Duke or die*

*(Beatrice shrugs)*

**Beatrice: (spoken)** *You've got him wrong, but you're not going to listen. So what  
happened next in New York?*

*(Patricia leans toward Beatrice and speaks in a conspiratorial tone of voice.)*

**Patricia: (spoken)** *Well, after dinner, we went to a bar someone knew and I think I got somethin' that will be real useful - to the firm, and to me. I'm not going to tell Charlie first this time and let him get the credit. But I've got to figure out how to use it.*

**Beatrice: (rec)** *Patsy, oh Patsy it's not what I think  
There must have been some quid pro quo*

*(Patricia laughs and waves Beatrice off)*

**Patricia: (aria)** *He was nerdy and drunk, a bit weird  
They never know just what to do  
(A) So I played him along as he sang like a bird  
Then I wrote it all down in the loo*

**(B)** *That took a long time so his ardor was gone  
Steered him into a cab to return  
At the desk said goodnight, meet again? Well we might.  
Who knows when, who knows where. Oh, he'll learn.*

**Patricia and  
Beatrice: (duet)** *He was nerdy and drunk, a bit weird  
They never know just what to do  
(A:) So I/you played him along as he sang like a bird  
Then I/you wrote it all down in the loo*

**Patricia: (rec)** *I'm right proud of myself, I think I did well  
And maybe I've got what we need  
I know what they did to get where they are  
But from me will the firm soon take heed?*

**Beatrice: (rec)** *You could pass it on to Charlie.  
You know very well that you should.  
That promotion you got, your second or third  
Times are changing, your voice will be heard*

**Patricia: (rec)** *But it's not where I want to be  
My parents, my teachers I did what they said  
But the girl I became isn't me*

**Beatrice: (spoken)** *And they told you to stay pretty, too  
Didn't they?  
Carolina pretty*

*(With a wistful nod, Patricia gets up, walks over to the side table, opens her purse and pulls out a card. She hands it to Beatrice who has remained seated.)*

**Beatrice: (rec)** *Hartley Owen .... writer ... nothing much more  
That name, so odd, could even be backwards for sure*

*(Beatrice flips the card over, glances at the blank reverse, and hands it back)*

**Patricia: (rec)** *On the plane we ended up talking a bit  
Well, not really ... how can I put it?  
He seemed condescending, but maybe just shy ...*

**Beatrice: (rec)** *Well, then ... What did he look like?*

**Patricia: (aria)** *He was slim, rather cute in his preppy striped shirt  
And he had on a ruffled blue blazer  
(A) He looked at my hands, liked my voice I could tell  
But pretended to read his newspaper*

**(B)** *Then at baggage claim, he called out my name  
He actually said he was sorry  
He gave me his card, and we left it at that  
Well not quite: I gave him mine too.*

**(A)** *He was slim, rather cute in his preppy striped shirt  
And he had on a ruffled blue blazer  
He looked at my hands, liked my voice I could tell  
But pretended to read his newspaper*

**Beatrice: (spoken)** *He doesn't sound too promising to me.*

**Patricia: (spoken)** *Well ... at least he's no Tom, Dick or Randall!*

*(Beatrice laughs delightedly)*

**Beatrice: (spoken)** *Oh, Patsy. You're the best of friends. But just impossible, too.  
You don't know a soul in New York and this guy, Hartley,  
where has he been and where is he going?*

**Patricia: (spoken)** *He's going to Carolina Beach, out of season. Imagine that! I  
tried to tell him about Wrightsville beach, but ...*

**Beatrice: (rec)** *Hush up, Patsy. You know that's not what I mean ...*

**Patricia: (aria)** *When do I get to go to Africa?  
When in my life, how and when?  
When can I be the person inside  
Why must I stay here and hide?*

*When do I get to go to Africa?  
Experience more than what's here  
When can I change, when can I grow  
My happiness lies there I know*

**Beatrice: (spoken)** *I don't know Patsy and if I did, I'm not sure I'd tell you. You need to find happiness at home. That's where it really lies.*

*(Patricia smiles at her friend, but brushes her off.)*

**Patricia: (rec)** *But more about New York  
I've left the best for last  
You know I stayed an extra day  
But not for a show, the ballet*

*Such unbelievable luck  
It was a sign, I'm sure  
Gillian Murphy, the ABT  
"La Bayadère" at the opera house*

**Beatrice: (rec)** *Patsy you actually went there?  
To Lincoln Center, the Met?  
A singer's goal, I sometimes dream  
But mostly I try to forget*

*Instead I hear children singing ...*

*(Patricia seems not to be listening and continues on.)*

**Patricia: (aria)** *To Bloomingdales I went for a dress  
Discount racks I must confess  
(A) Chiffon and floaty seemed just right  
Quite a bargain and not too tight*

**(B)** *Found some heels at a place nearby  
Little gold purse bought on the street*

*With that I was ready for my night out  
I was ready you know for my treat*

**Patricia and  
Beatrice (duet)**

*To Bloomingdales I/you went for a dress  
Discount racks I/you must confess  
(A) Chiffon and floaty seemed just right  
Quite a bargain and not too tight/I'd look a fright*

*(A little out of breath, they hug each other and laugh)*

**Beatrice: (spoken)** *OK Miss Carolina Princess. Let's see it.*

**Patricia: (spoken)** *I'll do you one better and wear it. Put a CD in the stereo for me to play when I get back. "Sleeping Beauty Highlights."  
Near the top of the stack.*

*(As Patricia exits stage left, Beatrice walks over to the stereo, finds the CD and puts it in the tray. As she returns toward center stage, her mood changes as she compares Patricia's dreams to her own plight.)*

**Beatrice: (aria)** *He told me he loved me  
He was Porgy, I was Bess  
There were soon other women  
My life was a mess*

*How stupid to be trusting  
How stupid to be blind  
Then came the divorce  
Now I'm left behind*

**Patricia (offstage)  
And Beatrice:**

**Patricia: (rec)** *You've still got your singing, you know it's so good*  
**Beatrice: (rec)** *good for nothing*

**Beatrice: (aria)** *Pain transfigured  
My gift I apply  
(A) But a song's not a life  
I simply get by*

*He told me he loved me*

(B) *He was Porgy, I was Bess  
I was blind, I was stupid  
For want of a caress*

(A) *Pain transfigured  
My gift I apply  
But a song's not a life  
I simply get by*

*Beatrice: (spoken) Time is passin', Patsy. I want a family. Kids with a mother -  
and a father. You'd like one, too.*

*Patricia: (offstage)  
(spoken): I do hope you get that, Bea. I really do. But I'm not there.  
I'm not ready for that kind of future*

*(Patricia walks quickly back on stage in her new dress and strappy gold heels,  
medium height and not spiked)*

*Patricia: (sung) I want to be part of THE conversation ...*

*Beatrice: (spoken) What conversation? What in the world are you taking  
about? And that dress: you wore that, out in public, in New  
York City?*

*Patricia: (sung) In New York, things are different  
In New York, things are new  
Got to leave Durham  
Got to get going  
Now you know I want to be there, too*

*In New York, things are different  
In New York, things are new  
The future's emerging  
Not so discouraging  
You know well what I say is true*

*In New York, ideas are heard  
In New York, you have my word  
I could be part of what's emerging  
Change could come from my voice, too*

**Patricia and  
Beatrice (duet)**

*In New York, ideas are heard  
In New York, you/I have my/your word  
I/you could be part of what's emerging  
Change could come from my/your voice, too*

*(Beatrice smiles and shakes her head with admiration as Patricia walks over to the stereo, selects a track and starts the music. Making a ballet-like entrance to center stage, she dances a solo, the two or three skirt layers of her chiffon dress floating around her as the overall lighting dims to a spotlight. She appears to be almost in a trance until finally, stumbling a bit and a little out of breath, she stops in front of Beatrice who is standing bemused, hands on hips. A sheepish grin on her face. The spotlight fades and the lights brighten.)*

**Patricia: (spoken)** *Well, what do you think?*

**Beatrice: (rec)** *So it went alright?  
With you looking like that?  
In a dream of a dress  
All airy and bright?*

**Patricia: (rec)** *To tell the truth I have to say  
I must confess, I got carried away  
Women weren't attired like this  
I stood out for certain, but not amiss*

*(Patricia stops, gets a sly smile on her face and beckons Beatrice to come closer.)*

**Patricia: (spoken)** *You won't believe this, Bea, but at intermission, two men - they were gay, I'm sure - came over and gave me a glass of champagne! "You look too good to be without one," one of them said. I must have blushed a piece!*

**Beatrice: (spoken)** *And then?*

**Patricia: (spoken)** *Oh, we smiled and we chatted about this and that. Nothing special, but I felt I belonged. And afterward, back at the hotel, I just stood in front of the mirror for so long.*

**Beatrice: (rec)** *I think I'm starting to get it  
Just like a Broadway show*

**Patrícia: (rec)**     *How to you mean ...*

**Beatrice: (aria)**     *First you've been singing your wantin' song  
What you need to make your life true  
(A)                    Then you've been dancing your dream ballet  
So pretty, so graceful you flew*

**(B)**                    *Can't have a show without those themes  
Well that's the way it needed to be  
Art and life so intertwined  
You go to the theater to see*

**Beatrice and  
Patrícia (duet)**     *First you've/I've been singing your/my wantin' song  
What you/I need to make your/my life true  
(A)                    Then you've/I've been dancing your/my dream ballet  
So pretty, so graceful you/I flew/flew?*

**Beatrice: (spoken)** *I've been in those shows. Give me a sec. I'll show you what I mean.*

*(Patrícia, slightly puzzled, moves over to the couch and sits down, fanning the skirt of her dress out around her.)*

**Patrícia: (spoken)** *Well?*

*(Beatrice paces around, her lips, arms and hands moving as if she is hearing music in her head. Then she stops takes a deep breath and lets fly in a big, Broadway-show style of voice.)*

**Beatrice: (sung)**     *I wanna be ....  
Part of THE conversation  
Claimin' my share  
Of the next big sensation*

*Not just a girl  
Who's been taught to be pretty  
I wanna change  
Got to get to the city*

*(Beatrice stops suddenly and laughs with embarrassment.)*

**Beatrice: (spoken)** *Won't sell any tickets, but the best I could do on a moment's notice*

*Patricia: (spoken) That was amazing, Bea. Not the words so much, but the melody. Was that from some Broadway show?*

*Beatrice: (spoken) It's just a Broadway voice singing what you might call a stock Broadway tune. A lot of them sound alike. They're easy to imitate, but hard to sing well enough to get booked. It was just something silly really.*

*Patricia: (spoken) Well, Bea, I guess you're going to think this is silly, too.*

*(Patricia walks over to the side table picks up Hartley's card and gazes at it as the lights dim and the spotlight picks her out alone.)*

*Patricia: (sung) Area code 212 ... Harley Owen ... me and you*

*- Curtain -*