A FLY ON THE WALL
WITH THE MONA LISA

By Eliana Pipes

SETTING:
The Louvre museum, at the Mona Lisa exhibit.

CHARACTERS:

THE FLY:
Very insect-like and also very cute! Big red eyes, hairy bug arms and legs, big heart.

HYPER TOURIST
Full of adrenaline, holding several travel guides with highlighter marks and post-it-notes

SLEEPY TOURIST
Couldn’t sleep on the plane, very tired, their feet hurt a lot, not a big “museum person”

ART CRITIC
A snooty patootie, an arts student, secretly worries they’ll never make anything good

ART LOVER
Very well-attuned to Fancypants’ attitude, art makes them feel a sense of wonderment

PARENT:
Loves the museum, loves the Mona Lisa, wants to instill a love of art in their child.

CHILD:
Naturally curious, but a little bored by the museum, playing with a toy.

NOTE:
All of the Patrons can be played by the same two actors, or multiple actors, or even voiced by the same actor playing The Fly. The sound effects can also be assigned to a person or stage directions reader, make mouth-trumpet noises! Do whatever you want, have fun!
SCENE ONE.

A pristine white gallery space. It feels elite and still, the kind of place where you instinctively lower your voice.

Then, suddenly the silence is broken by –

A chorus of TRUMPETS that play a glorious fanfare, the kind that announces kings and queens. As they play, the portrait of the Mona Lisa is lowered down from the sky in a bulletproof glass frame.

The Mona Lisa lands, center stage, with great pomp.

The, after a moment, A VOICE echoes out. *(Is it the Mona Lisa speaking?)*

VOICE
Hello!
Thank you so much for being here!
And welcome to my home, in Paris, France at the great Louvre Museum!

The trumpets play another fanfare at the mention of the museum’s name.

VOICE
It’s quite a destination, and I’m so flattered that you made the long trip just to see little old me!
(realizing)
Oh wait! *Can* you see me?
You can’t, can you?
Hold on a second, I’ll come closer!

The trumpets start to play the entrance fanfare again.

Then – THE FLY enters, and suddenly the Trumpet Fanfare goes out-of-tune as if the musicians are in shock, and then it cuts out altogether.

The FLY is a *sight*. They have big wings, big red eyes, and hairy insect arms and legs. They’re always smiling.

The FLY is the VOICE.

FLY
There we go, that’s better!
So, like I was saying – I wanted to show you what it’s like to spend a day in my six shoes! I’m very proud to be a positive representation for my species, and I hope to inspire other flies everywhere to dream big!

I’ve come so far, you know – as a fly. We get dealt a tough set of cards, always on the move, people trying to swat at you. I was born in a garbage can you know, on an old banana peel.

It was a humble upbringing, but I’ve come so far! Now, I live in this beautiful museum! I eat the fancy pastries that people buy at the café and throw away! I have air conditioning!

And people come from all over the world just to admire my beauty!

Oh, look look – here they come now –

The FLY positions themselves in front of the Mona Lisa and strikes an artistic pose.

HYPER TOURIST and SLEEPY TOURIST enter, both wearing fanny packs and sneakers with good arch support.

When HYPER TOURIST sees the Mona Lisa, they stop in their tracks, struck by the beauty.

The Fly speaks to the audience in asides.

HYPER TOURIST
  (gasps)

FLY
  (to the audience)
Everyone does that.

HYPER TOURIST
Oh my god, it’s beautiful. I can’t believe the majesty of it, WOW you know I mean wow.

FLY
I’m blushing!

SLEEPY TOURIST
Yeah, it’s a nice painting.

HYPER TOURIST
I’m speechless, I literally can’t speak –

SLEEPY TOURIST
You’re speaking right now –
HYPER TOURIST
Yeah but only to say that I’m SPEECHLESS –

FLY
I have that effect on people all the time.

The Sleepy Tourist checks the time, and tugs on the Hyper Tourists’ sleeve.

SLEEPY TOURIST
Okay speechless, I’m sweaty. Can we go back to the hotel please? I had too much bread and butter at that restaurant and now I need a nap.

HYPER TOURIST
Oh come on, we’re already here – just quit whining and enjoy the art!

SLEEPY TOURIST
(whining)
I’m not whining! –

HYPER TOURIST
Yes you are! –

SLEEPY TOURIST
I don’t care about art! –

HYPER TOURIST
Yes you do! –

SLEEPY TOURIST
My feet hurt! –

HYPER TOURIST
OH COME ON!

The Hyper Tourist goes to the Sleepy Tourist and turns their body to face the painting. The Fly adjusts to take an even more radiant pose.

HYPER TOURIST
This is a once in a lifetime moment! You are face-to-face with art and history! Just, give it a chance! Take a look at it! Take a good long look!

Beat.
The Sleepy Tourist does take a good long look. They smile.

SLEEPY TOURIST
(in appreciation)
Hm. You’re right, it is kind of beautiful isn’t it?

Hyper Tourist smiles too. They walk off together, and the Fly takes center stage again.

FLY
See? Oh, it feels good to make someone’s day!
Whenever someone comes to see me they always leave happier than they came in.
Ope, on to my next appearance!

The Fly poses again.

The Art Critic comes in, wearing a turtleneck and holding a notebook. The Art Lover enters a step behind them, and takes out their smartphone to get a picture of the painting.

ART CRITIC
What are you doing?

ART LOVER
I’m taking a picture!

ART CRITIC
Why?

ART LOVER
It’s the Mona Lisa!

ART CRITIC
Yeah, exactly, it’s the Mona Lisa – you already know what it looks like. I’ll get you a print from the gift shop if you want, you can take home a much better version than your blurry smartphone camera.

ART LOVER
Yeah, but I’m in the room with it. That’s special.

FLY
In the room with me!

ART CRITIC
It’s not so special.
The Fly is bothered by this.

FLY
Pardon me?

ART LOVER
You don’t think it’s special?

ART CRITIC
No, it’s contrived!

FLY
(huffs, offended)

ART CRITIC
There were much more masterful painters from the period, Da Vinci is just famous because of that stupid book – and the Mona Lisa only came to fame because someone tried to steal it. It was a press scandal, it has nothing to do with the quality of the –

ART LOVER
So you don’t like it?

ART CRITIC
It’s not a matter of liking it or not, it’s a matter of being informed.

ART LOVER
Well I like it.
Press scandal or not – I like it. I think it’s beautiful.
It makes me – feel something. And that’s plenty for me.

ART CRITIC
. . . Fine.

The Art Lover takes another photo, then exits.

The Art Critic lingers behind a moment while the Art Lover leaves, then discreetly snaps a picture of the painting with their phone.

The Fly takes center again.

FLY
Well, ignore that. Honestly, ignore that whole thing. I mean, how rude honestly, how incredibly rude some people can be – I’ll never understand.
But you know what, maybe this is a valuable lesson!

Some people just don’t want to see what’s special about you. They never will, no matter how hard you try, and it’s not worth it to chase those people’s approval! Whether you’re a fly, or a person, or even a famous painting they just . . . never will.

(confessing)

I know that people come to see the painting, not to see me. I know.
You don’t make it from a banana peel to an art museum without a little smarts.

And I could choose any painting in the building to land on, but I chose this one because . . .
Because people love it. And it’s nice, sometimes, to feel special.
To feel seen.

And I do have a lot in common with the painting –
See, look at my exoskeleton!

The Fly turns to show off their exoskeleton.

FLY
Those dark tones, the greens and blues, just like the painting!
Oh, and look at my eyes! I have compound eyes, with 4,000 lenses! I can look in 4,000 directions at once, which means I can follow you anywhere you are in the room! Just like the painting, see!

The Fly rotates their big compound eyes to demonstrate.

FLY
I could be a work of art too – I think!
I really have come so far.

PARENT and CHILD enter, holding hands.

The Fly goes in front of the painting again and strikes a pose, but it's not quite the same. The Fly is sad.

The Parent heads in first, speaking in peppy tones and trying to muster enthusiasm. The Child follows, seeming distracted.

PARENT
Now come on honey, pay attention! Museums have a lot to teach us, you know!

CHILD
How do they teach you?
PARENT
It just . . . happens. Just, find something you like and go look at it.
Oh — like this one! The Mona Lisa, honey, this painting is famous!

CHILD
What happened to her eyebrows?

PARENT
I don’t know! But there is something special about this one, it’s an optical illusion.
Wherever you go in the room, it looks like she’s staring straight at you.
Wanna test it?

CHILD
Okay!

PARENT
On the count of three! One, two, THREE –

On “three” both the Parent and Child RUN to different spots in the room. The Fly follows them with their compound eyes, unenthusiastically.

PARENT
Is she looking at you?

CHILD
I think so!

PARENT
Let’s try again! One, two, THREE –

They run again, but the Child stops short.

PARENT
Do you see it?

The Child moves closer to the painting. The Fly is sulking and barely notices. Then, the child lights up with excitement.

CHILD
Is that a bug?

FLY
(gasps)
The Fly turns to The Child.

PARENT
I don’t think so.

CHILD
It is! It’s a bug, I see it! Look!

FLY
   (hopeful)
You see me?

The Parent comes to take a closer look.

PARENT
I don’t know how a bug could even get in here.

CHILD
But it did! See – the wings, and the eyes!

PARENT
Huh. You’re right.
I think it is a fly. Good eye, honey.

The Child smiles, still transfixed on The Fly.

PARENT
So, do you like the painting?

CHILD
I like the fly.

The sound of Trumpets in Fanfare.

The Fly basks in the celebration, knowing it’s finally meant for them. The Fly smiles back at the child.

Blackout.

End of Play