

International Airport

David Olguín

Oh, how difficult it is to know the heart of Man!

Friar Antonio de Guevara

Cast of Characters

JUAN

the Tourist, a young man of 17.

JONATHAN

the Traveler, a man of 65 with a foreign accent.

He is robust, powerful in spite of his age; his hands look like claws.

They are dressed somewhat alike;
the old man's clothes are perhaps a little the worse for wear.

Place

The waiting room of an international airport. White light.
The place breathes loneliness. It is a cold Hell.

Time

???

The waiting room is empty except for the Tourist and the Traveler, who is reading a newspaper in Arabic. We do not see his face until he puts the paper on his lap and cleans his glasses. The Tourist seems impatient. The Traveler continues reading as the Tourist gets up and walks back and forth listening to the echo of his footsteps on the marble floor. The Traveler stops reading and concentrates on watching the young man.

TRAVELER: What use is an untouched heart?

TOURIST: *(Distracted)* Sorry?

TRAVELER: I asked you what use a heart is if it hasn't suffered?

TOURIST: No...I don't understand.

TRAVELER: Forget it.

TOURIST: What?

TRAVELER: Forget it. *(Pause.)* My name's Jonathan.

(The Tourist barely nods. Pause.)

TRAVELER: What time do you have?

TOURIST: *(Looking at his watch)* It stopped. It says 12, but it must be...two-fifteen.

TRAVELER: Are you always so positive? If your watch says 12, how do you know it's two-fifteen? What makes you so sure?

TOURIST: There's nobody here. My flight is scheduled for four-thirty in the morning and nobody seems to be around. You get to the waiting

- room an hour before take-off and it's been a while, but not that long, since they announced that 502...
(The Traveler smiles disparagingly.)
 What are you grinning at?
- TRAVELER: You didn't take into consideration the time you were asleep...
- TOURIST: I was asleep?
- TRAVELER: ...and you woke up and went back to sleep.
- TOURIST: *(Alarmed)* Did they call for British flight 502?
- TRAVELER: Of course not.
- TOURIST: Hey, are you sure?
- TRAVELER: *Bien sûr que non.*
- TOURIST: Really?
- TRAVELER *(Looking at his watch)*: It's exactly two. Your flight leaves at four. *Il est deux heures en point.*
- (Pause)*
- TOURIST : *(Puzzled)* You have a watch.
- TRAVELER: I do. I always wear a watch. Time is important to me.
- TOURIST: Since you asked me the time...
- TRAVELER: Is it a sin to ask the time? Time is important to me, but its internal workings, its implacable exactitude. Precision, detail... I always pay attention to details. That's my living, boy...watching, observing, analyzing... I don't just study a person's external movements, but their internal ones. They're what interest me the most.
 The essence.
- TOURIST: *(Puzzled)* What is it you do?
- TRAVELER: Me? What difference does it make? Forget it. I just wanted to check the exact time. I've been waiting so long that I'd better know if time is following its course.
- TOURIST: I don't understand what you mean.
- (The Traveler shrugs.)*
- TOURIST: *(Uncomfortable)* And where are you going?
- TRAVELER: I don't know.
- TOURIST: You don't know where you're going?
- TRAVELER: No. I don't know. I never have. I don't care. Do you know?
- TOURIST: To London.
- TRAVELER: London! Portobello Market, Bloomsbury, the National Gallery, the theaters, Soho, warehouses—both sordid and elegant—peep shows. A great place.
- TOURIST: Have you been there?
- TRAVELER: Often. I congratulate you. It's a good choice for a trip. But why London?
- TOURIST: Well, the truth is...
- TRAVELER: What?
- TOURIST: ...it could have been New York, Buenos Aires, Beijing, Cairo. It was all the same to me.
- TRAVELER: Why is that?
- TOURIST: I don't know.
- TRAVELER: Is it always the same to you? Is everything in your life the same to you?
- TOURIST: I don't know. I just wanted to get away.
- TRAVELER: Well...
- TOURIST: That's it... to get away...
- TRAVELER: ...to forget myself, to be someone else in another place, with other people. *(Pause.)* I know the feeling.
- TOURIST: Yeah?
- TRAVELER: Run away, split. And you'll do anything to put a distance between you and your home, your mother, your father, your city and everything around you. If you could, you'd destroy the universe to just get it to present itself in a different guise. And since that's impossible, all the fury turns in on you. You feel like you want to disappear.

(*Silence. Pause.*) Is this the first time you take a trip?

TOURIST: Yes.

TRAVELER: You must be really excited.

TOURIST: More like relief.

TRAVELER: Exactly. That's what you feel. There's nothing new under the sun. I love traveling, looking at people, watching them in the most varied landscapes. I've been everywhere. To the heart of Africa. Rivers, mountains, cities. I've gotten lost in the bowels of the earth, in labyrinths. I've seen so much.

TOURIST: And what city did you like the best?

TRAVELER: You want me to be honest?

TOURIST: Yes. I mean, you're experienced.

TRAVELER: One day, one painful day, I understood that the landscape changed, but something stayed the same: the interior landscape, my own little homeland of the soul. That's been the same since the first time I ever sat in a waiting room. When I understood that, or rather —because it wasn't a matter of understanding— when I felt it, it was as though I had been chained to a chair where the exterior is different. It moves, but you wait, you wait forever, in the same waiting room, in the same chair. Time, when you think about it, is an illusion. Sometimes I feel like I've been chained to this spot for centuries. Like I had been looking at you forever. You understand? (*The young man looks bewildered.*) *Compris? Capisco? Begreifen? ¿Entiendes?*

TOURIST: I think so.

TRAVELER: Well I don't think you do. I don't think you have the faintest idea what I'm talking about. And that's not fair, you know? Staying clean...

Unawareness? Shit. Purity gets in the way. *¿Mi segui?*

TOURIST: I don't understand.

TRAVELER: You see?

(*Pause.*)

TOURIST: (*Uncomfortable*) And now you're going to London? On the 502?

(*The Traveler looks at him, laughs and then falls silent.*)

TOURIST: (*Timid*) Excuse me...

TRAVELER: Look at me. Do you really see me?

TOURIST: Yes.

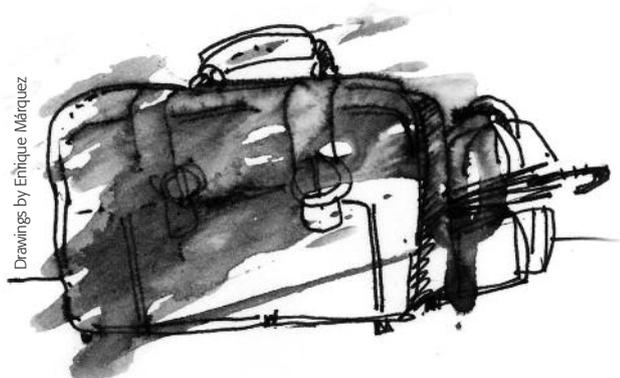
TRAVELER: Look at me closely, face to face, first at my eyes and then look at the details of my body. It all talks. If I were you I wouldn't be here. *Tu comprends?* My skin is thick. Look. It's wrinkled. Like an elephant. But I warn you, I don't have its natural goodness.

TOURIST: What do you mean?

TRAVELER: The elephant. The natural goodness of an elephant.

TOURIST: What about it?

(*The Traveler raises his shoulders. The Tourist discovers that his hands are shaking involuntarily. He controls them. There is fear in his silence, so much so that he prefers to talk.*)



Drawings by Enrique Márquez

bello. Miranda, Miranda. And she, douce, Miranda was with another client, an Arab or a black, a Hindu, a Pakistani, somebody else that was doing her with all his might and she was singing, singing the same thing she always sang, the same thing you'd heard so many times. "I've got you under my skin mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm... I've got you..." Miranda Parker.

TOURIST: You're totally out of your mind.
(The Tourist gets out of his seat, picks up his suitcase and starts to walk away. The Traveler, humming the Cole Porter song, goes after him calmly, takes him by the collar and throws him onto the other seat.)

TRAVELER: What use is an untouched heart?

TOURIST: Hey, what the hell is going on?

TRAVELER: Answer me.

TOURIST: Let me go. Let go. Help! Police!

TRAVELER: I am the police, sweetheart.

TOURIST: Help! Help!

TRAVELER: *(Shaking the Tourist)* And I'm also the Pope and an organ grinder's monkey and a flower and the black-eyed serpent stalking you. And I've been a cock-sucking transvestite stealing watches from frustrated cretins. And a beast and a lamb. I'm the sore, the hand and the knife. The cause, the dark motive, the dirty bottom at the bottom of the bottom of your eyes. And I'm also the cold look that lights the dead sun on fire in your pure little head. *Capisci?* Words corrupt. I have the hooves of a goat, black hair on my hands and tatoos all over my body. Do you understand who I am? Where I'm at? Where I come from and where I'm going, sweetheart? That's it.

Quiet. Be very quiet. I could destroy you. Tear you to bits. Now that I look into your eyes I think that I've always been filled with a terrible feeling of failure. Only one thing has changed: I'm someone else; I came close to God. But if you want to know Him, you have to repent and it all begins and ends in a name: Miranda Parker. Remember? Do you remember her?

TOURIST: No.
(The Traveler gives him a sharp slap. The young man weeps.)

TRAVELER: And now?

TOURIST: No, no. I don't know who you're talking about.

TRAVELER: *(After punching the Tourist in the stomach)* Really? Eyes black like coal. Portobello, Notting Hill Gate, London, England. I'm a cop, but I also consider myself your friend. *(He kicks the Tourist.)* Remember now? Confess!

TOURIST: Yes.

TRAVELER: Now, tell me, Juan, how many times did you shoot her before you cut her throat?

