International Airport

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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. IONATHAN

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

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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?	Traveler:	What time do you have?
Tourist:	(Distracted) Sorry?	Tourist:	(Looking at his watch) It stopped. It
Traveler:	I asked you what use a heart is if it		says 12, but it must betwo-fifteen.
	hasn't suffered?	Traveler:	Are you always so positive? If your
Tourist:	NoI don't understand.		watch says 12, how do you know
Traveler:	Forget it.		it's two-fifteen? What makes you
Tourist:	What?		so sure?
Traveler:	Forget it. (Pause.) My name's	Tourist:	There's nobody here. My flight is
	Jonathan.		scheduled for four-thirty in the
			morning and nobody seems to be
	(The Tourist barely nods. Pause.)		around. You get to the waiting

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

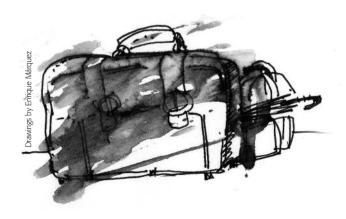
TOURIST: What do you mean?

TRAVELER: The elephant. The natural good-

ness 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.)



TOURIST: Why are you telling me all this Tourist: Yes? about the elephant? Well, I mean. TRAVELER: (Sings and hums) "I've got you It's weird, don't you think? under my skin. Mmmmmmmm-TRAVELER: You don't see me. What filth! You mmmmmmm mmmmmmmdon't have eyes. Look at me. Don't mmmmm." Remember? you see? I only have their power. TOURIST: What? It's a professional hazard. Big ears TRAVELER: You don't even remember the to listen to everything with, a long song? trunk to perceive intentions at a Tourist: (Puzzled) No. distance, lead feet that sink into TRAVELER: "...for the sake of having you near/ the ground, experience, power ... in spite of the warning voice that Thick, hairy skin, sweetheart. As comes in the night/ and repeats though inside an elephant lived... and repeats in my ear/ Don't you know little fool/ you never can what do I know? Forget it. win./ Use your mentality/ Wake (Pause. The Tourist notices that up to reality..." Sound familiar? there is no one else in the waiting TOURIST: You're really weird. room or near them. The Traveler TRAVELER: I am weird. "I've got you under my skin..." Miranda Parker. Now do scrutinizes him, making him uncomfortable.) you understand me? TOURIST: I don't know what you're talking about. TOURIST: (Getting up, ready to move away) Excuse me... TRAVELER: Extraordinarily white skin and the TRAVELER: (Stopping him) Say, Juan, can you most beautiful face on earth in the tell me ...? midst of straight, extraordinarily TOURIST: (Turning around) How did you black hair. Miranda Parker. know? TOURIST: I don't know any Miranda Parker. TRAVELER: What? TRAVELER: You went to that sweet prostitute TOURIST: How did you know? every chance you got. Why did TRAVELER: How did I know what? you do that? TOURIST: What the devil are you talking Tourist: My name. TRAVELER: Oh. You told me. about? TRAVELER: About her. The little bitch sang TOURIST: No. I don't remember telling you my name. "I've Got You Under My Skin" Traveler: No? Well, gee...Are you sure? while you did her as though it Tourist: Of course. were the last thing you'd ever do. TRAVELER: People do a lot of things and then TOURIST: You've got me confused with don't remember doing them, but somebody else. I don't... they did. TRAVELER: That day, the day that changed TOURIST: I'm going to the bathroom. your life, you got there drunk. You TRAVELER: Better stay here, sweetheart. Public remember? bathrooms are full of germs, filth, TOURIST: Hey, listen, please... bad smells, and sometimes people TRAVELER: Lots of coke, right? A bad high, by lurking... the monster of sorrow, with noth-TOURIST: (Ready to go) Excuse me. ing in your pockets and you needing Traveler: Juan... her. You went to her lair in PortoTOURIST: 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-eved 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?



TOURIST: I didn't do anything.

TRAVELER: It was a brutal murder that went

unpunished. You were lucky: you got away with it. But that's why

I'm here.

TOURIST: I swear, I've never been to London.

TRAVELER: It was so long ago. Your memory is

failing you. That's why I came to find you. Memory, conscience, time...the illusion that is time. But I am an elephant with a perfect memory; I warned you, darling.

TOURIST: Let me go, please.

TRAVELER: Where?

TOURIST: I won't say anything. I just want to

leave.

TRAVELER: There's nowhere to go here,

sweetheart. One waiting room gives onto another and another. And in all of them there's just you and me. Wherever you go, I'll find you. I'm here and everywhere. You have me at the bottom of you and I'll be there murmuring words and more words in your inner ear.

TOURIST: You're crazy. You miserable, sick

old man!

TRAVELER: Maybe. Time brings illness. You'll see that too. You carry yourself everywhere. The landscape is different, the feeling, the same.

(Suddenly, over the airport loudspeaker comes an announcement.)

VOICE OFF: British Airways announces its flight 502 bound for London. Passengers, please go to Gate 5.

TRAVELER: (Laughs) Gate 5. This is Gate 27. You're in the wrong room, sweetheart. This is 27. (Looks at his watch.) Go on, run. Il est quatre heures et demi. I thought it was two, but I must have seen wrong. Gate 5. I'll be waiting at Gate 5. You'll see me in the corners of every waiting room you cross. I'm here, there, inside you, everywhere. I'm God, you little asshole. Go on, get out.

(The Tourist looks at him, picks up his suitcase distrustfully and walks decisively toward the corridor.)

TRAVELER: Remember: Gate 5. London, Notting Hill Gate tube station, Portobello Road number 7. Miranda Parker is waiting too!

(The Tourist has gone. The Traveler opens his Arabic newspaper and sings softly to himself.)

(The house goes dark.)

