

Passport

by Gustavo Ott
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*This is your passport I hold in my hand:
a hemisphere, half red ink, half blue—
as yet untorched by terror, but polluted/
perhaps by the gaze of the future. For
example [...] your eyes translated into these
flashing sad idioms. Take this blank page [...]
the last boring national/ tattoos.[...]
Stars shatter on
The epaulets of all the uniforms, the hats/
and coats of countries that no longer exist.
I wear your insignia, therefore I wear death's
insignia. Which means that nothing can hurt me./
And with these wings and flames, I pledge
Allegiance to nothing: I can go anywhere.
Carol Muske-Dukes*

Cast of Characters:

EUGENE-male or female
OFFICER
SOLDIER

The action takes place in a train station, in some forgotten country.

“PASSPORT” premiered at the Cuarta Pared Theater in Madrid, Spain in October 1991, directed by Javier Yagüe. In 2003 it was produced by Teatro San Martín de Caracas for the Ateneo de Caracas, directed by Luis Domingo González with the following cast:

MARIA BRITO as Eugenia
DAVID VILLEGAS as Officer
ALFONSO REY as Soldier

1

Train station.

On one side, the Soldier is asleep in a chair that barely holds him up.

On the other, Eugene is asleep in his train seat, a half-open map in his lap. Eugene wakes and the map falls to the floor. A hurrying passenger bumps into him.

We hear the other passengers talking in different languages. Eugene notices a sign in an unknown language that apparently tells the name of the station.

Eugene picks up his suitcase and walks tentatively around the station, listening to the voices reverberating over the loudspeakers, again in an indecipherable language.

Eugene looks for someone to talk to, but no one stops. He sits down on his suitcase. He looks at his watch and can't believe the time.

Then the Soldier wakes up like this is his daily routine and begins to shout.

Soldier: Everybody out! Closing time. Everybody out!

Eugene sees him and hurries over hopefully.

Eugene: Excuse me, sir, could you, sir, excuse me, I, I...

Soldier: Clear the station, we're closing. Come back Monday!

Eugene: Sir, I have a problem. That is I think I do. I took the wrong...

Soldier: Clear the station. Everybody out! We open again on Monday!

Eugene: I don't understand what you're saying, sir, but...

Soldier: Out! Everybody out!

The soldier pays no attention to Eugene, until he turns and looks at him with scorn.

Eugene: Sir, I was going to ask something.

Soldier: So. What do you want?

Eugene: I don't understand your language...

Soldier: Huh? What did you say?

Eugene: What are you saying?

Soldier: What the fuck do you want?

Eugene: Do you know um... Where am I? What country is this?

Soldier: I don't understand you. Get an interpreter.

The soldier starts to leave but Eugene stops him. The soldier is annoyed.

Eugene: I don't understand. What language do you speak? I don't understand anything, sir...

Soldier: Passport.

Eugene: Excuse me?

Soldier: Passport!

Eugene: Ohh! Passport. I have it here. Of course, passport.

Eugene hands him his passport. The soldier looks through it minutely. He compares the photo to Eugene's face. He checks the stamps.

Soldier: That's strange! It might work.

The Soldier leaves with the passport. Before going he makes an unintelligible sign to Eugene.

Eugene: Wait here, right?

2

Eugene waits a long time. The minutes feel like hours. He slowly wears down until he slumps onto his suitcase again. There is total silence, broken by the entrance of the Officer who gestures for him to leave.

Officer: Everybody out, leave the platform, you can't stay here.

Eugene approaches him uncertainly.

Eugene: Sir. *(Beat)* Could you tell me... What city is this?

Officer: Clear the platform. Closing time. No more trains till tomorrow.

Eugene: What did he say? Spain? Tobago?

Officer: You have to leave.

Eugene: I don't understand.

Officer: Leave, good-bye. Time to go.

Eugene: What did you say? Go! Go! For God's sake, where?

Officer: *(In defective Spanish)* You speak Spanish?

Eugene: Español-Spanish... no, I don't understand Spanish, a little, un poco.

Officer: Passport!

Eugene: I just gave it to the other soldier.

Officer: Passport!

Eugene: I told you...

Officer: Don't play games with me.

Eugene: I gave my passport to the other soldier...he left and he hasn't...

Officer: Hmmmmm...no passport. Where are you from?

Eugene: We're never going to understand each other. I wonder what time it is. *(Looks at his watch)* It can't be. *(To the officer)* Do you have the time? *(Showing him his watch)* THE-TIME.

Officer: A bribe?

Eugene: Did you say five? What did he say?

Officer: He's got no passport. He speaks some gobbledygook and he wants to bribe me.

Eugene: It's not five. Did you say five thirty? *(Looking at his watch)* This piece of shit stopped.

Officer: Do you have any other identification?

Eugene: *(Pointing to the watch)* It doesn't work.

Officer: I hate to say this, but you've got a serious problem.

Eugene: What a ridiculous situation. Christ!

Officer: Your doc-u-ments.

Eugene: I don't understand you, I speak English. I don't understand. I speak En-GLISH!

Officer: *(Trying to imitate)* Spi.

Eugene: Spe.

Officer: Spi.

Eugene: E-e-e. Speak.

Officer: Spi- Spy? You confess, spy?

Eugene: I speak English!

Officer: *(Takes out handcuffs and puts them on Eugene. Eugene screams, but we don't hear him)* You're a damn...

3

Music.

The Officer takes Eugene to his desk and shoves him into a chair. Beside him, his suitcase. The Soldier appears behind Eugene, who at first doesn't see him.

Officer: ...Spy!

Soldier: He confessed?

Officer: And he's got no passport.

Eugene: I don't understand you. I don't understand anything at all. What are you saying?

Officer: Passport!

Eugene looks to the heavens with a desperate gesture.

Officer: Where did you come from? The North, the South?

Soldier: There's something strange about you.

Officer: You must be from the South.

Soldier: Open a file on him and we'll throw him in the hole.

Officer: I'm going to explain the situation to you. You know what you've done is illegal?

Eugene: Pardon? (*Desperately*) I don't understand. I don't understand anything.

Soldier: He says he doesn't understand.

Officer: You speak his language?

Soldier: Some

Officer: How come you speak so many languages?

Soldier: I watch a lot of TV.

Officer: Tell him he has to sign this paper.

Soldier: *(to Eugene, who can't see him yet)* Sign the paper, you worm.

Eugene: I don't understand what you're saying.

Soldier: *(To Officer)* He says he understands perfectly.

Officer: Excellent... *(Writing)* "...I understand that I am in a terrible illegal situation and I voluntarily renounce all my inalienable rights..."

Soldier: Yes, that's it

Eugene: *(Trying to see the Soldier)* Yes?

Soldier: You just say yes, that's all.

Eugene: Yes?

Officer: Because if you've entered the country without a passport, there are severe penalties.

Eugene: I don't understand.

Soldier: He says he's aware of that.

Officer: Good. So: did you come alone or with others?

Eugene: I don't understand...

Officer: *(To Eugene)* Did you come from the South?

Eugene: I don't understand.

Officer: What did he say?

Soldier: He comes from the South, from a city up in the mountains, with a seaport. He has a wife, a lover and a son he hasn't seen for a long time, but that doesn't bother him as much as knowing that he doesn't care.

Eugene: Sir, could you please... could you please explain what is going

on?

Officer: Passport!

Eugene: But I just told you I gave it to a... *(Finally seeing the Soldier)*
To him! I gave my passport to him!

Soldier: He says he's got no passport and he doesn't care because he
thinks you're an asshole and that I'm very intelligent, but
handsome.

Officer: He said that?

Soldier: Actually he used the word gorgeous, more than handsome.

Eugene: I guess you told him you have my passport.

Officer: What was he doing when you found him?

Soldier: Looking all around and I think he was trying to plant plastic
explosives in baby strollers. Isn't that right?

Eugene: Yes, that's it... *(To the Officer)* You see. All cleared up. The
Soldier here has my passport and he already looked it over.
Right?

Officer: What he said. Is it true?

Eugene: Yes, he has it.

Officer: For the last time: Passport!

Eugene: Jesus, I gave my passport to...

Officer: Passport!

Eugene: Fuck this!

Officer: Passport!

Eugene: Assholes!

Officer: This suspect is suspicious. Maybe he does understand us and
he's just playing dumb.

Soldier: Or he's calling us names. Insulting us...

Officer: But you understand what he says.

Soldier: When he talks fast I don't understand much.

Eugene: I want to talk with the consulate.

Officer: Passport!

Eugene: I already told you I gave it to him...

*(Eugene tries to touch the Soldier.
The Soldier hits him with the rifle butt. Eugene blacks out.
The Soldier and Officer look at each other conspiratorially)*

Officer: Let him sleep a while. Go check his luggage.

*(The Soldier goes through the suitcase. He takes everything out,
piece by piece)*

Officer: Check it carefully. We don't want a replay of my brother and the bomb.

Soldier: That's all foreigners know how to do... plant bombs.

Officer: A bomb killed my brother.

Soldier: Oh. Yeah? In an attack?

Officer: No, it went off when he was playing with it.

Soldier: He was playing with a bomb?

Officer: He wasn't too bright.

Soldier: I guess not. Runs in the family, huh?

Officer: Don't get smart with me or I'll put you back on toilet duty.

Soldier: Sorry sir. It won't happen again.

Officer: No one in your family's died?

Soldier: What do you mean?

Officer: With the bombs and all that crap...

Soldier: My dad.

Officer: Ah...

Guard: A foreigner. She was crossing the border with her hand luggage. She dropped it. My father tried to be polite and booommm!

(Eugene comes to, but remains on the floor)

Eugene: What happened? Why'd you hit me?

Soldier: He's awake.

Officer: We better frisk him. He could be armed.

Eugene: Why'd you hit me? What did I do?

Soldier: I hit you hard so you could take a little nap.

Officer: *(To Eugene)* The captain warned me there are lots of terrorists... You need to understand, we've had many attacks.

Eugene: I guess that's an apology.

Officer: Why only yesterday a commercial flight...

Eugene: Thank you...thank you, we're all nervous, I understand.

Officer: *(Helps Eugene to his feet)* You've come to a country that has many enemies.

Eugene: It's okay. The pain's going away.

Officer: *(Taking Eugene by the arm)* And that's why I need to know where your passport is.

Eugene: Yes?

Soldier: Look, let's get this over with fast. We need to know who you are, where you're from and what you're planning...

Eugene: I think they understand me now.

Officer: It would be better if you didn't speak while I'm...

Eugene: Fine. It's all forgotten. Could you tell me how I can get to...?

Officer: Passport!

Eugene: They'll never understand me!

Soldier: *(Checking the suitcase)* There's some books here.

Officer: Books? In what language?

Soldier: I don't know. Greek, Chinese, Peruvian.

Officer: Greek Peruvian? Are you Greek Peruvian?

Eugene: Look, I don't know what you're saying. I was on the train and I must've missed a transfer. I've got a ticket to... my ticket!

(Eugene starts to rifle through his jacket pockets, but his movements seem very dangerous. The Soldier, terrified, points his gun at him and shouts. The Officer also pulls out his revolver and aims it at Eugene)

Both: What is this?! What are you doing? Show your hands. Show your hands or we'll shoot, you filthy pig. On the ground, now, get down, show your hands. Show your hands!!!

The Soldier grabs Eugene while the Officer keeps his gun on him. They shove him to the wall. They frisk him again.

Soldier: *(Checking his pockets)* I think I found his wallet.

Officer: Check it carefully...

Soldier: Hey, look!

Officer: What's that?

Soldier: Money. Foreign currency.

Officer: *(Hits Eugene)* Did you declare this money at the border?

Eugene: That's mine.

Soldier: Here's more money. And cigarettes.

Officer: *(Hits Eugene)* Cigarettes? Drugs?

Eugene: You're breaking my bones!

Officer: So attempting to smuggle in contraband.

Eugene: Now what?

Officer: Foreign currency, huh? You know this money's illegal in this country?

Soldier: No passport and trying to destroy our economy and our children with foreign currency and drugs.

Eugene: What did I say? What did I do?

Officer: What are you? A smuggler from the South?

Eugene: Let me explain.

Officer: We know what to do with people like you, you terrorist, you fucking smuggler.

Eugene: Somebody help me!

(The last blow knocks Eugene to his knees. They turn him over. Tense music)

Officer: You have something to declare?

Eugene: I don't understand you!

Officer: Where's your passport?

Eugene: What?

Officer: Passport!

(They blindfold him)

Eugene: What's going on? I didn't do anything!

Soldier: Don't say anything that can be used against you.

Officer: Don't waste your time, he doesn't understand a word.

Eugene: I didn't do anything. Don't you understand? I want to talk to... I

want to talk to someone who understands me.

Officer: Shut him up and turn off the lights.

Soldiers: *(Preparing his hands)* Yes, sir.

(The Officer exits. The Soldier and Eugene are left alone. The Soldier cracks his knuckles. Music)

4

Eugene, blindfolded. The Soldier is asleep beside him, snoring. Behind them, the Officer eats soup, slurping noisily.

- Eugene: I've never had any problems with the police or the military. I've never broken any laws. Actually, I've never even been inside a jail. I've never even seen one in my whole life.
Can you take this blindfold off?
I swear I won't see anything.
Nothing like this ever happened to me before.
I thought things like this didn't really happen.
Maybe to other people. But not me. I suppose my government has already requested my release. They're probably talking about me on the news. There was a time when I thought I should have terrible things happen to me so I could have experiences and grow. To have incredible things happen to me while I was still young. Fantastic stories to tell. But nothing ever happened to me. I guess this whole situation will be one of my experiences.
What I don't know is what it's good for.
I guess it must mean something.
What do you think it means, huh?
Huh?
What do you think it all means?
- Officer: I don't understand what you're saying. You could be insulting me in that weird language and here I am, thinking you're saying your prayers. Shut up!
- Eugene: So you're thinking what I'm thinking. That this whole experience will turn out fine. And I'll get a lot out of it... I'm glad...
I'm glad you think so.
- Officer: Maybe you're speaking in code. Communicating with your accomplices. Via... via antenna... or some way we don't know. Through the air. That's it. You're communicating through the air...

(The Soldier wakes up)

Soldier: What happened?

Officer: You were snoring.

Soldier: I don't snore. I was dreaming, dreaming I was someone else.
(To Eugene) Do you dream you're someone else?

Eugene: *(To the Soldier)* I think I know you. Yes...yes...yes...

Soldier: *(Imitating him)* Yes...yes...yes...

Eugene: Your voice sounds familiar. Even if I can't see you, I can feel you. Your voice. Your voice sounds like that soldier I saw a few days ago at the train station. The one who took my passport.

Soldier: Passport?

Eugene: Exactly. Could you take this blindfold off...?

Soldier: *(Making fun of him)* Yes...yes...yes...

Eugene: Yes? Yes?

Soldier: Yes...yes...yes... *(laughs)* You're a fraud. Your passport isn't worth the paper it's printed on.

Eugene: What's that?

Soldier: Yes...yes...yes...

Eugene: I remember the face of the man who took my passport. Because when I first saw him, he reminded me of someone. Someone I saw... on TV back home. It was a report on how young people were training to defend our country against some enemy. In a little room, maybe like this one. They were packed in, must have been at least eighty of them... No clothes. No room. Fighting for breath. And you were asking them: Do you want to defend your country? Do you want to die for your country? And they said yes. They'd give everything for their country. You talk like that soldier. But I guess soldiers sound the same everywhere.

(The Soldier takes the blindfold from Eugene's eyes)

Eugene: Thank you! Finally! You!!

(The soldier uses the cloth to gag Eugene, who can no longer speak)

Soldier: Let's hear how you say your prayers now.

The Soldier takes a picture of himself with his prisoner, as though he were a trophy. Then he takes him to a chair at center stage.

5

The Officer goes over to Eugene, gets him out of the chair and removes the handcuffs. Eugene tries to remove his gag, but the Officer warns him not to. He takes Eugene to a shower.

Officer: We're waiting for a call from headquarters to see what we're going to do with you. But these things take time. While they look for the Commander, he looks over your documents, the reports, the files. The commander will call when your country contacts him or you are deported or charged and sentenced under our laws. In the meantime, you can get cleaned up. Understand?

Eugene nods, automatically.

“Luna Llena” by Simón Díaz plays, duet version with Ilán Chester. They remove Eugene's clothes, but not his gag. He stands in underwear or naked and they throw water on him. Eugene screams. Then they dunk his head in a bucket of water.

What looks like a hair washing at the moment reminds us of torture. They dunk his head up to three times in a bucket of water.

After a pause, the Officer puts a belt around Eugene's neck, pushes him down on four legs, like a dog and the Soldier takes his picture while the Officer gives a “thumbs up.” It's the kind of picture a tourist would take. Then, they put a pointed black hood on his head.

They attach cables to him that aren't connected to anything, but which he thinks are. They stand him up on a chair, make him open his arms wide. The Soldier and Officer scare him, pretending they will electrocute him.

They laugh. Eugene catches on and sits down in the chair, humiliated.

The Officer takes off the hood. Eugene brings to mind Munch's The Scream.

The Officer hands him a towel. Eugene dries off. Shivers with cold.

The two look at each other.

Suddenly, very nicely, the Officer takes the gag from his mouth.

Officer: (Politely) I hope they haven't hurt you.

6

Then the Soldier enters. He carries a tray with a glass and a jar of water. The Officer sits down in a chair and orders the Soldier to give Eugene water. Eugene takes it.

Eugene: I don't understand you, you see?

Officer: I know we don't speak the same language, but...

Eugene: I don't understand you, sir, not a word...

Officer: But we understand each other... don't we?
Would you like a little of this precious liquid?

Eugene: *(To please him)* Thank you...

Officer: Yes?

Eugene: Yes...

(The Officer orders the Soldier to serve him water. Eugene drinks)

Eugene: Thank you...thank you... I knew there must have been some misunderstanding...

Officer: Are you still thirsty?

Eugene: What?

Officer: Thirsty?

Eugene: I-do-not-speak-your-lan-guage.

Officer: You know. Drink... to drink.

(Makes drinking motion)

Eugene: Oh! To drink... Yes, yes... yes...

Officer: More water, quickly...!

(The Soldier serves Eugene more water. Eugene drinks it, but leaves a little. The Soldier spills it out)

Officer: Now. It so happens I'm a government worker at this train station. I live in this very town. I'm from here, but you see I'm a man of the world, a humanist.

Eugene: Thank you very much. That's very kind of you...

Officer: Even though I don't speak your language, I know exactly what you're going through.

Eugene: I guess you spoke with the consulate by now...

Officer: *(Makes drinking motion)* Do you want more water?

Eugene: No, thank you.

Officer: Fine. Give him more water.

(The Soldier gives him more water. Eugene accepts it with a sigh)

Officer: You have a nice face. You don't look like a terrorist or a smuggler. Do you want more water? *(Makes drinking motion)*

Eugene: No, thank you.

Officer: Fine. Give him more water.

(The Soldier gives him water. Eugene drinks it with difficulty)

Officer: You have a nice face...

Eugene: *(Standing)* Did you say we're leaving now?

Officer: No, you're no criminal...

Eugene: *(Sitting back down)* We're staying

Officer: But you must cooperate... Do you want more water? *(Makes drinking motion)*

Eugene: No, thank you, really. Not anymore. It’s enough. I don’t want any. No.

Officer: Fine. Give him more water.

(The Soldier gives him water. Eugene drinks it but spills most down his front)

Officer: We live far off from in the distance. Foreigners almost never come here. People from our own country don’t even come here. People from neighboring regions don’t come here, so you have to understand, a person like you, who... Do you want more water? *(Makes drinking motion)*

Eugene: No, please! I’m begging you! Please! No more!

Officer: Fine. Give him more water.

(The Soldier gives him water. Eugene feels like he is going to explode)

Officer: Because we have plenty of water here, you know? There are lots of rivers and open sewers.

Eugene: I wish I could understand you!

Officer: Now!

(At the Officer’s order, the Soldier takes an old microphone from the tray and shoves it in Eugene’s face)

Soldier: Repeat that.

Eugene: What?

Officer: Repeat what you said

Eugene: What?

Officer: “Ungerstanyu”

Eugene: Understand you

Soldier: “Untersandoo”

Eugene: Understand you!

Officer: I certainly hope you haven't said anything that could be used against you.

Eugene: They probably want to figure out what language I speak. Get a translator...

Officer: Okay, that's the way, my friend. Now repeat after me: "I gould unersand hoo."

Eugene: Understand you...

Soldier: Understand you...

Eugene: Understand you...

(All laugh)

Officer: Excellent.

Eugene: You liked that. Understand you, understand you. *(Laughs)*
You're starting to understand me a little...

Officer: Excellent, now say this word with me: *(After a pause)* Pass...

Eugene: Pass.

Officer: Port... Passport.

Eugene: Oh my God!

Officer and Soldier: Passport!

Eugene: You haven't understood a word I've said.

Officer: Say Passport!

Eugene: What kind of hell is this!?!
(The Officer loses his temper grabs Eugene violently)

Officer: You have to have some kind of identification! Everyone does!
No one is special here!

Officer and Soldier: Passport! Passport. Passport!

Eugene: Good Lord, what is this place!?

Music. "El loco Juan Carabina" by Simón Díaz. Officer and Soldier drag Eugene to one side of the stage.

7

Eugene dresses.

The stage changes colors, as though time were passing outside a window.

We hear people in the distance.

Eugene gets up, goes to the window.

He looks out.

He sees the Soldier, at the mirror, fixing himself up the best he can. He puts on cologne and doesn't like the smell.

To the other side, the Officer, dressed as an ice cream vendor, pushes his cart slowly.

Lights up on a park.

The Soldier heads that way, with a newspaper and a flower, and waits...

Voices, especially of children.

The Soldier tries to swat a fly and looks at Eugene.

Eugene waves to him, but the Soldier ignores him.

The Ice Cream Man/Officer takes out an ice cream and eats it staring at the ground.

The Soldier loses his patience. He crumples up the paper and steps on the flower.

Then he regrets it, picks up the flower, now in bad shape, and puts it in his pocket.

The Ice Cream Man/Officer pushes his cart as though moving into a strong wind.

The Soldier returns to the mirror, musses his hair furiously.

The Ice Cream Man/Officer walks ahead of his cart now as though he were fleeing from it, but the cart follows him, like a monster.

8

The Soldier goes over to Eugene.

- Soldier: Hey, foreigner. What are the women like in your country?
- Eugene: What's that?
- Soldier: I said what are the women like in your country?
- Eugene: Oh! Why did I come here?
- Soldier: Right, the women. So? Are they...um...wild or submissive?
- Eugene: I guess I made a mistake.
- Soldier: I like them submissive.
- Eugene: I was looking for a long-distance train, but I fell asleep and they switched tracks. No one woke me up. No one said anything.
- Soldier: You're lucky. Not here. Here they're butch. Strong. With mustaches. Not like the women you see on TV.
- Eugene: Exactly. Days went by and I got used to traveling. The mountains, the bridges. The foreign countries. Everything I'd never seen before.
- Soldier: They make them exercise and they get these disgusting muscles. I like my women soft and delicate.
- Eugene: You say you like bridges too?
- Soldier: I love them.
- Eugene: Me too.
- Soldier: In your country are the women loving or do they ask for money?
- Eugene: That's it, just like you say. Days and bridges went by. I lost my

maps. My bearings. The world's a big place. And everywhere there are stations, people saying good-bye. Train tracks, roads, switchmen, bells...

Soldier: ... Yeah, I know what you mean, even if I don't understand a word you're saying. We all feel the same way about women. Whether it's in Chinese or Croatian. I've been divorced three times. And all three times I hated them more than I ever loved them. You married? A widower? I'd love to be a widower.

Eugene: All right. I'll explain the best I can.
I traveled for too many reasons. Maybe it was travel instead of picking up a gun.
Because... because I believed in all those mistaken theories about time and distance...
Because of a broken dream.
Because I believed in heroic deeds. Because I was brave, and stupid, and foolish.
Because I was in love with life, even though I was dead.
Because I wanted to praise a world that can't even stand itself.
Because the streets smelled of the scent of couples who swore eternal love and could never stay together.
Because in my country nothing grew anymore, not even weeds.
Because there they stole the roots, the trees, the winds. Because there were schools for the blind and deaf to educate specialists, counselors, and artists. Because... because (*Laughs*) I think I left my country because there were so many gray vases.
Maybe I took that train to go through the insanity of this very moment!
(*Furious, loud*) I took it because I felt like it and I didn't know what I was doing!
I took it because right now I'm sweating right down to my balls!

Soldier: Don't get so worked up. She's not worth it. Even if she is that amazing woman who makes you feel all that. She's not worth it. Think about yourself. No one else matters. Okay? Okay.

Eugene: Okay?

Soldier: Okay!

Eugene: Understand you...

Soldier: Understand you...

(*They both laugh. The Officer takes off the ice cream vendor's*

uniform)

Soldier: *(Laughs)* You see? Now we're understanding each other.

Eugene: I don't know how, but you understood everything.

(The Officer approaches them with a plate and some bread)

Officer: Telling secrets?

Soldier: He's as broken as everyone else

Officer: What, did you think people were better in other places?

Soldier: It makes me feel better to know they're just as fucked up.

Officer: Me too. *(Shows Eugene the food)* You hungry?

Eugene: *(Pleased)* It's about time, I was hungry.

Officer: What? You're not hungry?

Eugene: I'm dying for something to eat.

Officer: Not hungry, ah? Don't you trust the food?

Soldier: Don't worry. We're not going to poison you. If we wanted to kill you, you'd be swimming underground by now.

(The Officer breaks the bread in two and gives the smaller half to the Soldier)

Officer: You'll get hungry soon enough. Then you'll have to talk to ask for food.

(The two men eat)

Soldier: Leave him alone. So maybe he plants bombs, but he's not a bad guy.

(Eugene reaches out to ask for a bit of bread from the Soldier. The Soldier is moved and goes to him. He gives the crumbs to Eugene, who accepts them happily. He eats the crumbs like a happy mouse. Music)

9

Eugene lies down and sleeps. The Officer fills out forms while the Soldier, sitting in his chair, tries to whistle. He can't. He hums a ballad until he realizes that he doesn't know it very well. He starts over again and makes another mistake.

Officer: You're losing your ear.

(Now the Officer hums the whole stanza)

Officer: That's how it goes.

(The Soldier tries again, but once again goes out of tune. The Officer laughs)

Soldier: I'd like to know where the tracks end.

Officer: The tracks never end. They come to one station, like this one, and then keep going to another and then another.

Soldier: You've traveled. You've seen the world.

Officer: It's hard to remember it.

Soldier: If I traveled, I'd never forget my way.

Officer: If you traveled, you'd forget even your own self. Why don't you tell me the story about your father and the bomb again?

Soldier: It was at the border and she was a foreigner. A beautiful blonde dressed in blue, who spoke like an angel...

(The Officer and Soldier's voices fade. Little by little we stop hearing the Soldier's voice, although he still gestures as though speaking animatedly. Eugene stands and stares at the Soldier telling his story, but neither the Officer nor the Soldier realize that Eugene is awake)

Eugene: ...I think that blow must have affected my hearing... I can't hear anything. I've gone deaf. Or everyone got quiet so I wouldn't hear them. Or they're pretending they're talking to trick me.

(A distant beating is heard)

But I hear something.

I hear...

What is that? It's... it's... it's...

A heart. It's my heart. I've never heard it beat so hard. It's loud.

Like it's trying to tell me something.

(The beating grows still louder)

It's close, like a lament. It's making me nervous. I hear you already, that's enough, that's enough, enough!

(The beating stops. The sound of flowing water)

Now what? Water. Currents moving inside of me. I think it's...

It's my blood, I can hear it moving in my veins. I can hear it like a raging river.

(Strange noises)

And now? The sound of my thoughts. As they forge a path. As they rise up. As they try to be me.

I can hear the sound of my organs.

The beat of my eyelashes across my eyes,
the scrape of my lips parting.

The roar of my saliva as it falls through my insides and breaks against my stomach.

The howl of the wind entering and leaving my lungs.

I can hear everything going on inside my body and nothing else.

I think I've gone stone deaf.

(At the end of Eugene's words we once again hear the Soldier whistling a ballad)

Soldier: Tomorrow I'm leaving for the South.

Officer: The South? What for?

Soldier: They have things there.

Officer: The only thing in the South is people.

Soldier: I don't care, I'm leaving for the South.

Officer: They have worse passports there. And dangerous crimes.

Soldier: In the South they've got information. You know what's going on. Here, for all we know we could be... we could be defending a border that doesn't even exist anymore and we'd find out when

it was already too late. Or maybe they changed the laws and we don't know about it. Maybe they don't need soldiers anymore and everyone's sitting at home watching TV. Everyone but me. Maybe there's a new boss and we're still taking orders from the old ones.

Maybe there are guys like him, who speak other languages and read strange books, and know what they're talking about.

Officer: You think this guy knows what he's talking about?

Soldier: Absolutely.

Officer: How do you know?

Soldier: Because he looks sure of himself. He looks you in the eye. He's a man of conviction.

Officer: I've seen bomb-makers that had that same look like wedding cake dolls.

(Their voices fade away again, although they continue their animated conversation. We only hear Eugene, who watches them)

Eugene: There's like a murmuring. Something far off. I wonder what they're saying? Gov...government stuff, I'm sure. National concerns. *(He listens)*
I bet they're talking about me. And my stupid mistake. They look like good people. Honest. Intelligent. Too bad they can't understand me! I bet we'd be good friends.
Even if they are so close and I can't hear them and they can't hear me either.

(Sea sounds. Eugene, surprised)

But I...

I hear.

I hear waves, like a sea inside me.

I hear the sea, like it's lapping at me, covering my body.

And I can hear what's on the other side of this wall.

I hear a soldier's girlfriend who comes and doesn't find what she was promised.

I hear an ice cream vendor who's eaten nothing but his own merchandise for weeks.

I hear a boy in a park, who they make cry so they can take his picture.

I hear a train pulling in and now it's gone, long gone.

I hear different voices, in other languages and mine.
I can hear the noise of five foreign cities.
I hear the whistle of traffic cops in Hong Kong. A plane
touching down in Frankfurt, even the sobs of a forgotten bride
in Vancouver.

(Eugene, deaf, impassioned)

I hear music and footsteps.
A party thousands of miles away. The tinkling of laughter and
raised glasses. Best wishes in five languages I don't speak, but
can understand.
I hear the scratch of a blind man trying to read Braille.
I hear bad news in Morse code.
I can hear long-distance declarations of love and two strangers
meeting in a train station like a picture postcard.
I hear the applause of an appreciative audience in some
unknown theater of the world. I hear the scraping of the clouds
across the moon and New Year's fireworks.

(Suddenly, Eugene is nervous)

I hear a gunshot. Someone falling. Someone running away. A
door slamming and a radio sputtering out tomorrow's news like
it was already five days old.
I hear a crowd moving toward the same place and I can hear that
they don't know why.

I can hear so far away, but them, they're right next to me, and I
can hardly hear them... Could it be that I'm not here? Or that
I'm dying? Or am I already dead?

10

Suddenly, the Soldier and Officer are pressing in on Eugene.

Officer: What is he saying?

Soldier: I think he's praying.

Officer: That was scary.

Soldier: Like he was possessed

Officer: You think it's the devil?

Soldier: Or a fever?

Officer: Or he's crazy?

Soldier: Or he was singing

(To Eugene) Were you singing? What was all that you were saying?

Officer: Who were you insulting? What bad words were you using?

Soldier: Talk, prisoner. Talk...

Eugene: *(Terrified)* Yes... yes... yes...

Officer: What is all this "yes... yes... yes."

Soldier: He repeats constantly.

Officer: What do you think it means?

Soldier: It's like some kind of greeting. Like "hello."

Officer: Or maybe it's an affirmation. Maybe "yes" means "yes."

Soldier: I don't think so, "yes" doesn't sound anything like "yes."

Officer: But maybe in another language, "yes" it does.

Soldier: "Yes?"

Officer: "Yes."

Soldier: They're not the same. Watch. *(To Eugene)* Look, foreigner, you want a bullet between the eyes?

Eugene: Yes... yes... yes... *(They laugh)*

Soldier and Officer: Yes... yes... yes... *(They laugh)*

Soldier: You want me to cut off your toes and serve them to you for lunch?

Eugene: Yes... yes... yes...

Soldier and Officer: Yes... yes... yes... *(They laugh)*

Soldier: Now say: "I am a beast of burden."

(The Soldier gestures for Eugene to repeat what he has just said)

Soldier: Now say: "I am a beast of burden."

Eugene: I am a beast of burden.

Soldier and Officer: Yes... yes... yes... *(They laugh)*

Officer: My turn. Let me. *(To Eugene)* Say: "I am an animal. I am a filthy animal."

Eugene: *(Accusingly)* Filthy animal.

Officer: What?

Eugene: Filthy animal.

Soldier: I think he called you...

Officer: I'm a filthy animal?

Eugene: Yes... yes... yes...

Officer: Son of a bitch! After all I’ve done for you, this is how you repay me. I’ll kill you.

Soldier: Relax, boss. He can’t understand you. He doesn’t know what he’s saying.

Officer: He called me a “filthy animal.”

Soldier: He was repeating, like a parrot. Like a little wild animal. Right?

Officer: Sometimes I think he’s just playing dumb

Soldier: He doesn't understand us. For example, watch this. *(To Eugene)*
Are you afraid?

(Silence)

Soldier: Are you afraid?

Eugene: Yes.

Soldier: Do you like being afraid?

Eugene: Afraid.

Soldier: Do you like it?

(Eugene gestures that he doesn't understand)

Soldier: See? He doesn't understand a thing.

(The Soldier goes back to whistling his ballad, a bit more in key now. He goes back to his chair)

Man: Why don't you tell me that story again, about your father and the bomb?

Soldier: It was at the border and she was a brunette in a red suit...

(The telephone rings. This is the most surprising sound in the world to the Soldier and Officer. They are startled, then turn to look at each other in terror)

Soldier: I thought it was disconnected.

Officer: It's never rung before

Soldier: Well, you'd better answer it, sir

Officer: You do it

Soldier: No, I can't

Officer: Are you afraid?

Soldier: You're the commanding officer at this post. It's your duty

Officer: But you could pretend to be my secretary or something like that

Soldier: I'm a soldier, not a secretary

Officer: Go on. You answer. I can put you on toilet duty again.

Soldier: Well, since you asked so nicely.

(The Soldier answers the telephone. Looks serious)

Soldier: Hello? Yes, sir... Yes sir! ... Yes sir? ... “Yes sir” ... Yes sir...
Yes sir ... Of course sir... Right away, sir.
One moment. *(To the Officer)* It's for you.

Officer: Who is it?

Soldier: A superior.

Officer: *(Terrified, answers)* Yes sir... yes, it's me... Yes...
The prisoner arrived five days ago... Yes... yes... He's eaten
well and he's been chattering away... He's had one bath, but he
doesn't smell bad. We've had one bath too and the Soldier you
can already tell... Yes... Yes...
(Suddenly he frowns and looks at Eugene. Eugene is frightened)
Are you sure?
Orders? Did we look in his wallet?
*(The Soldier picks up Eugene and takes his wallet. He hands it
to the Officer, who looks through it as he talks)*
We already did that and of course... of course... yes... yes...
(Pulls a piece of paper from Eugene's wallet)
Here it is. Yes sir, just like you said. Excellent idea. At your
service. Don't worry. But, before we hang up, clarify one thing
for me, so we can proceed.
Yes, tell me:

What's the weather like there?
What do the women wear?
How much does a beer cost?
What's the President's name?
(Waits for answers)
Hello? Hello? Hello?
(Hangs up. Eugene looks at him, hopefully)

Eugene: Is everything all right? Is it all worked out? You realized the mistake now?

(Theme music. The Soldier and the Officer look at each other and go over to Eugene. They take him by the arms and move him to center stage, very violently)

Eugene: But...but...but...For God's sake, don't make a mistake. I hope not. Don't do anything to me...

Soldier: You'd better be quiet...

Eugene: Wait...wait...

Officer: Move!

Eugene: What did he say? What's going on?

Officer: We've found something important. We received information from the capital. They gave us information and we corroborated it with your ID.

(The Officer hands the Soldier a piece of paper)

Soldier: What's this supposed to be?

Officer: It was in his wallet. It's falling apart.

Soldier: Yes, but what is it?

Officer: An ID.

Soldier: Do you understand what it says?

Officer: Perfectly.

Soldier: But... what language is it in?

Officer: Ours.

Soldier: Ours?

Officer: *(Reads)* "Driver's License. Eugene Gant, Address, city, etc. etc.
Date: July 19th. It's got his picture. Like a snap shot.

Soldier: *(To Eugene)* Is this yours?

(Eugene looks at it. He hardly recognizes it)

Officer: Is this you?

(Eugene stares at it)

Soldier: It's you!!!

(Eugene trembles)

Officer: Why are you pretending you don't understand us? Why are you pretending you speak some other language? You're from here. This is your country. You speak our language. We know exactly who you are.

They called from the capital with your information. You work in the Ministry of Agriculture. You receive applications. You stamp them. You process them. You file them. Why are have you been pretending to be someone else?

(They hand the ID to Eugene, who looks at it happily. He begins straightening himself up)

Soldier: What are you hiding? Why are you pretending to be a foreigner? Don't you love your country? Don't you remember it at all?

Officer: After all this country's done for you! *(Enraged)* Do you recognize this paper? Doesn't all this look familiar?

Eugene: Yes... it's.

It's me. I was twenty and I thought I'd never die. The whole world was a cake and I was the birthday boy. It's my driver's license. And that's my name. My name is Eugene. Eugene Gant... and... Oh my God! I'm in my own country. This is where I'm from!

But everything's changed so much!

Officer: What is he saying?

Soldier: He's very sick. He's traveled across 12 continents and in all of them the soldiers were happy, except here. He doesn't like it here. He wants to go to the South.

Officer: Fine. The best thing to do is get rid of him.

(The two men begin to dress Eugene as in Scene One and return his suitcase to him)

Eugene: I'm back and I don't recognize a thing. They all talk so different, so strange, so foreign.

Officer: Get him out of here.

(The Officer begins to exit, but first he pulls the telephone from the wall and takes it with him)

Officer: *(Almost crying)* I'm sick of the capital!

(The Officer exits)

Soldier: *(To Eugene)* All right, off you go.

Eugene: To where?

Soldier: To where the tracks end.

Eugene: But I live in this country, on the way to somewhere, very close to someplace.

Soldier: You'll go on stumbling around the world.

Eugene: We're talking now, we understand each other

Soldier: Yes, now we understand you. *(Returns Eugene's passport)* But we don't care.

(The Soldier takes hold of Eugene to throw him out)

Eugene: Thank you.

Soldier: Good-bye.

Throws Eugene out. Sound of trains, cars, planes, a whirlwind. Eugene meets the noise head on. We hear the same music that

*opened the play: “Paso Molino” with Malena Muyala.
The Soldier goes to his chair. He hums the tune and falls asleep.
Eugene picks up the map, straightens, shakes his head. We hear
the other passengers and people talking in different languages.
Eugene notices a sign in an unknown language that, apparently,
shows the station name.*

*Eugene picks up his suitcase and walks tentatively around the
station, listening to the voices reverberating over the
loudspeakers, again in an indecipherable language.*

*Eugene looks for someone to talk to, but no one stops. He sits
down on his suitcase. He looks at his watch and can't believe
the time.*

No one is nearby, only voices.

*Then the Soldier wakes up like this is his daily routine and
begins to shout. It's the same scene that began the play, only
this time, the dialogue is covered by the music, at top volume,
and we see the scene in shadows.*

Soldier: Everybody out! Closing time. Everybody out!

Eugene sees him and hurries over hopefully.

Eugene: Excuse me, sir, could you, sir, excuse me, I, I...

Soldier: Clear the station, we're closing. Come back Monday!

Eugene: I don't understand what you're saying, sir, but...

Soldier: Out! Everybody out!

Eugene: I don't understand your language...

Soldier: Huh? What did you say?

Eugene: What are you saying?

Soldier: What the fuck do you want?

Eugene: Do you know um... Where am I? What country is this?

Soldier: I don't understand you. Passport!

Eugene: Ohh! Passport. I've got it here. Of course, passport. I must have it here somewhere.

*Eugene takes out his passport and hands it to the Soldier.
Black.*

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