

I Know What I Did Not Know

Triggered by Eduardo Galeano in Bocas del Tiempo, "La Carta"

by

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DESCRIPTION

A worker asks a playwright to write a love letter for her. In writing the letter, he discovers what he should have been writing all along.

CHARACTERS

- ENRIQUE BUENAVENTURA, playwright
- ELENA
- WAITRESS

MISCELLANEOUS

- An old bar, not too seedy, in Cali, Colombia—not well-lit, but its dimness is somehow artistic in feel. A table and two chairs.
- Guitar in the background throughout

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SOUND: A guitar playing in the background, as if in another room.

ENRIQUE is smoking and drinking rum, a writing pad and pencil next to him, the ashtray and rum bottle not far away, surrounded by crumpled papers. He makes marks on the paper, then scratches them out. He's trying to capture some idea, but it won't be caught.

He crushes out the cigarette, exhales, leans back, stretches (a little groan, maybe), stares at the paper, papers. He drains the glass.

ELENA edges in. She is dressed, oddly enough, in workman's clothes. She clutches a worker's cap or beret in her hands—clearly something that's been worn a lot.

ELENA

Hello.

ENRIQUE

Hello—you're sneaking up on me.

ELENA

The barman said I could find you here.

ENRIQUE

This is my spot, where I retire for inspiration. Though not much today.

ELENA

Maybe you haven't drunk enough yet.

ENRIQUE

Yes—still early in the day. And you are—

ELENA

A mason—bricklayer—

ENRIQUE

I know what a mason is—it's still early in the day—

ELENA

Across the street—I drink here after work. Go on—say it—I can see it in your face.

ENRIQUE

Amazing you can see anything in here—

ELENA

People always have a—

ENRIQUE

I have to say what the others say—a woman working with the bricks—that's rare.

ELENA

May I sit down?

ENRIQUE

You have to sit down because you have to tell me more. Will we need a second glass?

ELENA sits.

ELENA

No—this is my lunchtime.

ENRIQUE

And bricks have to be straight—I understand. But—

ELENA

Bricks keep me out of the kitchen, out of the laundry room, out of the nursery—I thank my father for giving me the skill to escape all that. So I owe the bricks being straight.

ENRIQUE

An interesting father—

ELENA

My father had a heart.

ENRIQUE

Maybe I should use him in my next play.

ELENA points to the pad.

ELENA

Looks like a difficult birth—my father would certainly give it some spike.

ENRIQUE

So what does the woman mason who escapes the domestic life thanks to an intelligent father want with a poor playwright like me?

ELENA takes her time to answer.

ELENA

I saw your play the other night. A la diestra de Dios Padre.

ENRIQUE

Show me what's under your hat. Ah, good—I don't see a brick, didn't get one through my window, so I guess you at least didn't hate it.

ELENA

And I know you drink here—everyone knows you drink here.

ENRIQUE

I depend upon the right hand of the barman, my real Dios Padre.

ELENA

I thought the play was very funny—fun to be in the theatre, to watch everybody. I came away from it better than when I walked in.

ENRIQUE gives ELENA an appreciative look, one a man gives a woman who intrigues him.

ENRIQUE

So the mason loves the arts—working hands and a working head.

ELENA

Don't act so surprised.

ENRIQUE

It's not surprise I'm feeling—the theatre is a democracy, open to all.

ELENA

At least yours is. Like my father.

ENRIQUE pours a bit more rum, sips it. He raises his right hand.

ENRIQUE

You're who we want in our seats—but—there's something else, something else. You didn't come sit at the right hand to give me a review.

ELENA

In your play—

ENRIQUE

In our play, the company's—we all made it together.

ELENA

But the right hand of the father—that one there, holding the chalice—it does make the choices.

ENRIQUE

True.

ELENA

In your play—you know how to talk about—

ELENA hesitates.

ENRIQUE

About what?

ELENA

About how one person can feel about another person and say what they feel—it was true, how you had them say it.

ENRIQUE

Thank you.

ELENA finds it difficult to continue.

ENRIQUE

But there's something else.

ELENA

I don't have any right to ask you this, but I want to ask you to write a letter for me. No, not "want to ask"—I am asking you to write a letter for me.

ENRIQUE

A letter—

ELENA

A love letter, to be specific.

ENRIQUE

For?

ELENA

For—well, for her.

Time slows down. ELENA may be anxious, but ENRIQUE is all smiles, at least on the inside.

ENRIQUE

For her.

ELENA

That's what I said. I can write, you know—I'm not illiterate.

ENRIQUE

Your father wouldn't let you be.

ELENA

So that's not the point.

ENRIQUE

What would you want this letter to say?

ELENA

That's the point—if I knew what the letter would say, I wouldn't come ask you to write it. I can pay you.

ENRIQUE

You've seen our show already—payment enough.

ELENA gestures for the glass. ENRIQUE gives it to her, and she downs the contents.

ELENA

Will you? This is terrible rum.

ENRIQUE

Perhaps that accounts for my lack of inspiration.

ELENA lays out a few bills on the table, gets up to leave.

ELENA

Buy some better rum and write the letter for me.

ENRIQUE

I haven't said I would.

ELENA

Why would you say no?

ENRIQUE

It's not the kind of thing I usually write.

ELENA

When is it ever too late to learn something new?

ENRIQUE

Can you give me some information about her?

ELENA

Use your imagination.

ELENA leaves.

ENRIQUE thinks. He pushes around the paper discards with his pencil, lays his hands on the flattened bills, taps the pencil against the bottle—fidget, fidget, fidget, thinking, thinking, thinking.

He fans out the bills, picks them up, and gestures toward the bar.

ENRIQUE

I would like to request an upgrade.

WAITRESS enters: apron on, cloth over her shoulder, bottle in hand. ENRIQUE hands her the bills. WAITRESS hands him the bottle, turns to go.

ENRIQUE

A question.

WAITRESS

You always have questions.

ENRIQUE

Life is questions.

WAITRESS

Can I keep the change?

ENRIQUE

Keep away.

WAITRESS

Then you can ask.

ENRIQUE

If a woman loves a woman—

WAITRESS

“If”?

ENRIQUE

When?

WAITRESS

Silly man.

ENRIQUE

All right, so when a woman loves a woman—what does one say to the other to say that?

WAITRESS

And why would you think I’d know?

ENRIQUE

It’s just a question, unless, of course, you do know, then it’s a consultation.

WAITRESS

When a man loves a man—what does one say to the other to say that? Eh? Think! You already know! When a person embraces the dog—when the one dying grips the priest’s hand—the morning kiss on the forehead—

WAITRESS raps her knuckles on the top of his head—but gently.

WAITRESS

Just use that, all right? It’s the best part of all your other parts. Enjoy your lunch.

WAITRESS leaves.

ENRIQUE opens the new bottle, pours for himself, lights a cigarette, muses, then clears off the papers on the table, picks up the pencil, and writes, smoking and drinking as he does so.

LIGHT: The light passes from one side of the stage to the other, like the sun in transit. It can be a slow arc.

SOUND: _____ Guitar continues to play in the background.

ENRIQUE reads over what he has written.

ELENA enters.

ENRIQUE

Is it lunchtime already?

ELENA

It comes every day just about this time.

ENRIQUE

And how are your bricks?

ELENA

Getting laid. And yours?

ENRIQUE pours himself a shot.

ENRIQUE

I think—well, you tell me.

ENRIQUE hands her what he has written. ELENA reads. Together, as she reads through the text, they look at each other, nod, perhaps giggle a bit—he gives her an inquisitive “eh?”, she returns with a “hmm”—full non-verbal communication, thoroughly enjoyed. She is touched by what she reads.

ENRIQUE

Well?

ELENA

I didn't know that that was what I wanted to say. But it is what I want to say.

ENRIQUE

It will do?

ELENA

That's up to her. But it does for me.

ENRIQUE

I think it was the new rum.

ELENA

Maybe—and then maybe not.

ENRIQUE stands and faces ELENA. She faces him back.

ELENA

What?

ENRIQUE dips his fingers into the rum and traces them over her lips. Then he kisses her. She kisses him back. That's all they do—kiss. Not embrace, not caress—just kiss. Once.

ENRIQUE

I think it was “maybe not” about the new rum.

ELENA

Pleasure is as pleasure does.

ENRIQUE

I should apologize.

ELENA

But you won't.

ENRIQUE

No.

ELENA

Good. You shouldn't.

ELENA carefully folds the sheet of paper into quarters and slips it into a pocket.

ENRIQUE

Did—does—your father know?

ELENA

My father has always known where my love lies.

ENRIQUE

I agree with you, then—he should make an appearance in whatever plays are coming up. Broad minds are hard to come by these days.

Just before she leaves, ELENA takes the pencil and writes something on the pad of paper. Then she dips her fingers in the rum and flings drops at him as she “blesses” him. ELENA leaves.

ENRIQUE reads what she has written and laughs out loud, really loud, from the belly. He dips his fingers in the rum and makes the sign of the cross.

ENRIQUE

Another use for the right hand of Our Father!

Still laughing, he downs the rest of the glass of rum and begins writing, writing, writing, writing his new plays from the end of the phrasing that ELENA has given him. The guitar plays on and the sun crosses the sky.