

*I put a spell on you*

Script for a sound piece to be heard on headphones

I was traveling back from Montreal to Amsterdam and I had a layover in London for a few hours and the flight ended up getting delayed because of fog in Amsterdam. There were no flights going in or out and Heathrow London is kind of a really bad place to have a layover because they have this waiting lounge where you have to wait for you gate to open in order for you to wait for your plane to board. And if there's a delay and you're really tired, which I was you can't really sleep because then maybe you're going to miss the announcement that your plane is boarding and you're going to miss your flight.

So I was trying to keep myself awake, and it was really frustrating, and anyway, we finally get the call that we're able to go to the gate, and they let us on the plane, it's already two hours late, we get on the plane and the pilot announces that we're going to be sitting there on the runway for a while because we're still waiting for the fog to clear, and so, you can almost hear this sigh of frustration, with all the passengers (he laughs) because we've all been waiting for so long and now we weren't actually taking off, we were just sitting there waiting again. On the other hand I was quite happy just to be in my seat, because I was so annoyed, with having to wait so long, and now at least I could sleep if I needed to.

And it wasn't a full flight it was actually kind of a small plane, British Midlands small plane, three seats on either side of a single aisle, and only half of the plane was full, there was an empty seat between me and my neighbor. And so I was sitting in the window seat, he was sitting in the aisle, and we started this conversation, mostly just talking about having to wait for so long to get on this plane and I could hear that he had an American accent and so I asked him where he was from, and he said well I'm from L.A. but I haven't been home in months and so he said well what are you doing here in London? I said well I'm coming from Montreal...um...I had an exhibition there; I'm an artist.

I usually have a problem telling people that I'm an artist, because, especially Americans, it's just a little be off the register, they'll ask "Art? That's a profession?" or they'll say, "But what do you do for a living, you know, I mean...How do you make money?" nevertheless I decided that I would tell him that I was an artist, I had had my opening the night before in Montreal at Optica Center for Contemporary Art. And so I decided to tell him a little bit about my exhibition, so I told him about the exhibition and about my video narrative that was in the show called "My baby just cares for me" and I told him it was a piece about, an American architect who comes into the Brussels North Station and he's traveling back from Paris to Amsterdam, and something happens to him while he's there and he can't quite figure out what it meant, or even what had happened. You know he's watching a couple in a physical struggle and he can't quite figure out if the woman is in danger or if the couple is faking it, so I told him...I told him the whole story and how eventually the architect tells security and has to run out to catch his bus, completely missing the conclusion of what happened.

So he says, "That reminds me of something that happened to me...when I was living in L.A. I came out of a shopping mall one time, and there was this couple that was in a fight, and there's a man choking a woman, and um (long pause).

You know this guy telling me this story is quite large, he looks like he could have been an ex-rugby player or something, and he's really quite muscular, looks athletic, you know I remember seeing him in the waiting lounge and I was wondering what he did for a living, because on one hand he has this sort of athletic appearance, but then he also looks quite sophisticated, like he has a dark blue suit on, he was reading this book really intensely, he had his bi-focal glasses on, you know he was around I don't know, he must have been around 45 or something like that, but he looked like he was quite a serious guy, so I thought maybe he was a professor or writer or something.

Anyway, so he tells me, that he comes out of this mall and the man is choking this woman and he comes right up to the man and throws him off the lady and says, you know, "What the hell are you doing?" and then two seconds later, the woman comes up from behind him and hits him over the head with a steel bar and completely knocks him unconscious, and so he wakes up and all of his stuff is gone, this couple had completely scammed him and had stolen all of his stuff. And so I was like, "Oh my god that's terrible!" and he said, "Yeah, you never know who you're dealing with so, the character in your story, you know, he did the right thing, you never know!"

So I said "That's pretty intense." And so I was getting into this conversation, even though I was really tired, I decided to ask him what he did for a living. And so he said "Well, I'm an evangelist." And I was like, "Oh no! (he laughs) as soon as the word left his mouth, I was sorry for having asked him what he did for a living. But on the other hand, he had been a good listener, he had, you know listened to my story and given me an interesting story in return. So, I decided that I would listen to what he had to say.

But I said "Look, you know, I'm interested in what you do for a living, as far as like, what you do with your organization or whatever it is, but I don't want you to try to convert me on the plane, okay, whatever you do, leave your spiel for someone else. And so he said, "That's fair enough." You know.

So he starts telling about this organization called Victory Outreach or, or Reaching for Victory, or something like this and tells me that he likes to work with kids, mostly teenagers who are drug addicts or those at risk for getting into violence and gangs and this kind of thing. And he says that he travels a lot. He's been traveling, you know, across America, into Europe, he did a couple lectures in London and now he's on his way to Amsterdam to do something. And I was like "Wow, this guy is traveling a lot to do this evangelism thing," I said "It's pretty unusual, so why are you traveling so much, you know, it seems like a lot of evangelists just stay in their own community?" and I said, "How did you get into this?"

He seemed a bit uncomfortable, when I asked him this,

And he said, "Well, you know, I think I understand where these kids are coming from, because I used to be a...um...criminal."

And I was just like, "What do you mean you used to be a criminal?"

And he said "I was in...in uh...I was in prison for 17 years in L.A. including 4 on "death row."

I said "Death Row!? Wha...what did you do?"

And he said, "Well I used to be a hit-man for the Mexican Mafia in L.A."

And at this point I was just like "Oh my god!" I couldn't believe it...I mean...I was just speechless, and so he continued and told me how he was supposed to kill this man in prison for the mafia and went into graphic detail about how was going to do it, he would wrap a hand-made knife into his towel and bring it into the shower and stab this guy when his back was turned. But the man he was supposed to kill ended up being the one who converted him to Christianity and so he said that he was quite high on heroin at the time, but somehow, his mind cleared at the moment he was supposed to kill this guy in the shower. I couldn't get that image out of my head of him murdering this guy in the shower.

I've never felt what vertigo actually feels like but I think I was experiencing vertigo at that moment. It felt like the floor was dropping out under me, and I felt trapped between him and the window, and I was thinking, "the guy sitting next to me is a killer!" you know, "or he had...he had been one once." And my mind was racing, I couldn't keep track of all the images that were going through my head and so he keeps going on and on, telling about how he thinks that our professions are similar somehow, that because, my work deals with storytelling, that we're trying to do similar things in some way, that somehow we're both interested in human interaction and the choices that people make and that our stories are actually ways of communicating with people. And at this point I'm only hearing half of what's coming out of his mouth, my imagination is racing. And so he gets up to go to the lavatory, and I immediately put my headphones on, and I'm listening to one of my favorite songs, "I put a spell on you" sung by van Morrison and I take my camera and I start taking photographs out the window, I have a habit of doing this, I take photographs out the window, and like to reconstruct the landscape when I get my snapshots back. And so I'm trying to distract myself from this sense of falling or vertigo or whatever it was exactly and I'm taking these photographs and so in twenty minutes it's announced that we're going to be landing. And so we land and I just can't wait to get off this plane. I mean first of all I'm super tired and second of all I just feel like a rat in a cage and uh this man next to me he pulls out a book from his briefcase, which was in the overhead bin, and writes something into it and hands it to me and I open the book and he had written "To Marcelino, God Bless, signed Art Blajos" and it's his biography, and its called Blood In, Blood out, and there's a little subtext that says "To join the Mafia you kill. To leave the Mafia you die."