

A SUBJECT OF INTEREST

written by
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Inspired by true events.

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"The past is never dead. It's not even past."

William Faulkner

NOTE ON LANGUAGE: in scenes where two or more Brazilian characters speak to each other, their dialogue will be in Portuguese with English subtitles, but will be presented in this script entirely in English.

EXT. - SPEEDBOAT\GUANABARA BAY - DAY

It's early morning, and a midsize speedboat cuts through Guanabara Bay, the large body of water that envelops Rio de Janeiro. The city lights fade in the distance.

A big, corpulent man stands on the deck of the boat. He is JOHN MORETTI, a US Agent in his late forties, a striking face framed by a mane of luscious blond hair.

His translucent blue eyes are fixed ahead, at an islet near the coast.

The place looks barren and empty - except for a large concrete building jutting from the rocks. Beside it, a modest sign reads: ILHA DAS FLORES\NAVY INTELLIGENCE CENTER.

John takes in each word carefully, his attention slowly turning to the mysterious construction.

It seems uninhabited... at first. Soon, he spots movement through small grated windows.

The boat slows down as it nears the flimsy dock. A couple of guards approach John. *Time to go.*

He nods. But he doesn't move. Not yet.

His eyes remain on the island ahead. On the concrete compound. On the movement he detects through the tiny windows.

EXT- MINISTRY OF WAR\ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

In downtown Rio de Janeiro, RODRIGO FERREIRA stands hesitantly in the middle of a wide square, facing the majestic Brazilian Ministry of War building.

Rodrigo is young, not even twenty and looks it. Handsome face and trim body. Not necessarily small, but he doesn't seem to take up space... he shrinks under the gaze.

Hundreds of people cross the small plaza towards the neighboring Central Tran Station - most stare head, or at their feet as they navigate the horde.

But Rodrigo looks up, apprehensive eyes scanning the enormous building.

INT. - MINISTRY OF WAR\ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Rodrigo steps inside, battered briefcase in hand, and walks to a small reception desk.

The RECEPTIONIST, a young woman about his age, is absorbed in a book and doesn't notice him.

He waits, standing awkwardly in front of her.

She's reading Jean-Paul Sartre's "Critique of Dialectical Reason". He summons the courage.

RODRIGO

Hi.

It comes out in a whisper, quickly vanishing into the dungeon-like room. His throat tightens. She's pretty... her brow furrowed deeply as she reads, golden eyes glistening behind round glasses.

He's about to try again when a mail man appears, slapping a hand on the desk and grinning at the receptionist.

MAIL MAN

Every week, a different book!

It's a booming voice. The receptionist looks up with a half-smile. They've done this little game before.

RECEPTIONIST

What can I do? Too many books, too little time.

He laughs and hands her a stack of envelopes and folders.

MAIL MAN

Too little time... now *that* I get!

RECEPTIONIST

See, peas in a pod...

He lets out a short laugh before heading off. Rodrigo seizes the moment and gives the receptionist a tentative wave.

RODRIGO

Hey, hi.

She looks up, genuinely surprised to find him there, then smiles.

RECEPTIONIST

You can just walk in. No need to check-in.

RODRIGO

Oh... no... Hum, that's not... This is my first day. Working here.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh, of course.

She drops her book and leans towards him.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Sorry. I shouldn't read at work, really. Promise you won't tell?

She winks at him and laughs, and it's like Rodrigo unlearns how to speak.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

So, where are you going?

RODRIGO

Hum... I... I don't... I was told to meet a John Moretti. He's with U.S. AID, I think...

Her smiles falters immediately, the warmth suddenly gone. She looks down, a bit flustered, and picks up a large directory, placing it over her book. Rodrigo notices this. But... *why?*

RECEPTIONIST

Hum, yes... Mr. Moretti. That's the fourth floor.

She scans the directory for a bit, her eyes avoiding Rodrigo's.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Office 453. Just... you know, take the elevator, fourth floor, then take a right.

She doesn't look at him. Doesn't smile. Barely moves. Rodrigo stares at her. *What's going on?*

RODRIGO

Oh, OK. (*a beat*) Thank you.

He waits, but there's no response. He walks to the turnstiles leading into the inner elevator lobby.

RECEPTIONIST

Actually...

He halts and turns around eagerly.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
Sorry, hum... there's something
here for Mr. Moretti. Could you?

RODRIGO
Yeah, yes... of course.

Still avoiding his gaze, the receptionist slips into a side room and returns with a large black box. It's heavy, and she struggles to set it down on the counter.

Rodrigo stares at it. It looks like a... he doesn't even know what. A *fax machine*? A *large recorder*?

RODRIGO (CONT'D)
Oh... sure, OK.

He grabs it with some effort, balancing it precariously as he passes through the turnstiles. He glances back.

RODRIGO (CONT'D)
Oh, and... thanks!

She finally looks at him, her eyes narrowed. A hint of a polite, practiced smile.

RECEPTIONIST
You're welcome.

INT. - JOHN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

We're in John's dark, sparse office, shreds of light cutting through robust wooden windows, the shutters closed tight.

Noise from the bustling street outside filters in fitfully, and a fan, hanging precariously from the plaster ceiling, stirs dust into the stifling air. A bulky typewriter rests on a small desk by the wall.

John sifts through a pile of documents spread across a large metal table... handwritten notes, scribbles, typed letters, military records, tables, charts.

We make out some of the words: "interrogation intelligence", "subject resistance", "debility and deprivation", "pain and fear".

One of the charts links different weight ranges to voltage indicators: 150-160 pounds - 10 milliamps; 170-180 pounds - 12 milliamps; 190-200 pounds - 14 milliamps.

John's eyes dart through the words and numbers as he smokes, the gray haze curling up to the ceiling. He looks at the door, waiting. Then... a knock.

Before John can even move, Rodrigo bursts in, awkwardly juggling his briefcase and the large metal box.

RODRIGO

Sorry, sorry.

He stands in the doorway, staring at John.

The American doesn't say anything. He simply stares back, sharp eyes studying Rodrigo from head to toe. Linger.

RODRIGO (CONT'D)

I'm not sure... hum... is this...

Rodrigo steps back to check the room number, but stumbles and almost drops the box.

JOHN

Rodrigo?

RODRIGO

Sorry?

John walks over, grabs the metal box and places it on a nearby table.

JOHN

You're my new interpreter? Rodrigo Ferreira?

RODRIGO

Oh, yeah. Yes. And... you're John?

JOHN

Mr. Moretti. Yes.

RODRIGO

Oh, sorry, yes. Mr. Moretti.

Rodrigo stands clumsily at the door.

JOHN

Come in already!

Rodrigo closes the door and steps forward, reluctantly.

John examines the black box. It's large, about 8X8, and black except for two metal terminals on top and a silver sign on its side bearing the US AID insignia: a handshake and the words "United States Agency for International Development".

RODRIGO
What is it?

JOHN
It's a car battery.

RODRIGO
Oh... OK.

Rodrigo wants to ask more... but doesn't. John points to the small desk with the typewriter.

JOHN
This is you.

Rodrigo walks over and places his briefcase on the desk.

JOHN (CONT'D)
So, since you're late, I'll cut to the chase, alright?

RODRIGO
Sorry. I couldn't find the --

JOHN
(*ignoring him*)
My job is to train the police.

Rodrigo nods, and yet... *train the police?*

JOHN (CONT'D)
And your job is to come with me and translate. Interpret my lectures. We'll be on the road a lot. You good with that?

RODRIGO
Yes. They warned me about it.

JOHN
They *warned* you?

RODRIGO
Well... not... you know, they just said I'd have to miss classes sometimes.

JOHN
Oh yeah! I try to do one or two a week, you know. Rio, Minas, and São Paulo. That's my jurisdiction. But I can't visit every police station or military office in this goddamned country. I try, but...
(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

heck, I'm just one man. That's why we're putting together a manual of sorts.

John points to the stack of documents on the large table, then to a pile of blank pages next to the typewriter.

JOHN (CONT'D)

So I thought we could start with that. This is how it works: I dictate in English, and you translate and type. Translate and type. Both at the same time. So you have to be quick, OK? Muita rápido!

Rodrigo sits down and immediately checks to see if the ink ribbon is placed correctly.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The last kid couldn't handle it. It's fast work and you need to keep up.

Rodrigo aligns a sheet of paper against the platen, rolling the knob to feed it into place. John is impressed.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And don't worry about content. Just translate and type, translate and type. Got it?

RODRIGO

Got it.

JOHN

OK, then. Maybe we should just... give it a try? See how you do?

(Rodrigo nods)

Wonderful. And if you have any questions, just... pergunta a mim, alright?

(Rodrigo nods again)

Where was I...? Here! "On the issue of soundproofing". OK, good. Ready?

Rodrigo faces the blank sheet of paper, fingers hovering over the keys. He nods one more time.

JOHN (CONT'D)

On the issue of soundproofing. Period. Continue.

Rodrigo types remarkably quick. John is *really* impressed.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Protocol for soundproofing a secure space to facilitate the controlled execution of advanced interrogation techniques.

Rodrigo hesitates. *Controlled execution? Advanced interrogation techniques?*

JOHN (CONT'D)

Are we good?

The young man nods. Eyes on the paper. But... *are we good?*

He takes a breath and starts typing, hammering away at the keys. John stands next to him, carefully observing his every move, his eyes tracing every line of the young man's face.

INT. - BUS\DOWNTOWN RIO - NIGHT

Rodrigo stands in the corner of a crowded bus making its way down Avenida Rio Branco, his head resting against the window.

The bus crawls through heavy traffic... a sea of cars jammed into the narrow, two-lane street.

Through the smudged glass, Rodrigo finally sees the cause of the slowdown: a police blitz up ahead; military jeeps blocking the way, officers lining the street, shining flashlights into cars, barking orders at drivers.

As the bus inches forward, Rodrigo watches a group of young people being ordered out of their car, flashlights in their terrified faces.

An officer pushes a young woman against the wall and begins to search her. Another young man is shoved aside and questioned. An officer barks orders at the driver, who fumbles through an old wallet, looking for his license.

There seems to be some misunderstanding, and the officer grabs the wallet from the driver's hands, who moves forward, trying to explain something.

That's when another officer steps in and punches him hard in the stomach, knocking him to the ground.

The young woman screams and lunges forward, but is yanked back by the officer who is searching her.

The other young man backs away immediately and, with terrified eyes, simply watches the scene unfold.