

The Science of Torture

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ACT I

SCENE 1

Lights up on a dilapidated office. Worn-out desks and cabinets huddled against mold-streaked walls.

A large, protocolar metal table centerstage. A few outdated chairs scattered around.

A ceiling fan hanging precariously, stirring dust into the stifling air.

The distant noise of a bustling street filtering through a pair of large wooden windows, their shutters closed tight... allowing no daylight in.

A bulky typewriter rests on a small table near the edge of the stage.

Then...

...lights up on American. Big. Corpulent. A striking face framed by a mane of luscious blond hair and blue eyes you can spot from a mile away.

He sits in one of the better-looking chairs and smokes slowly, tapping his right foot rhythmically.

Brazilian walks in abruptly, flustered, juggling a large briefcase and a huge black metal box.

He's not necessarily a small man, but he doesn't seem to take up space - he shrinks under the gaze. Easy to miss were it not for his high-pitched, energetic cadency.

BRAZILIAN

Sorry, sorry, sorry.

American stops tapping his foot. He lets out a puff of smoke.

Brazilian drops the heavy metal box onto a side table by the door and sets the briefcase down on the large metal table centerstage.

BRAZILIAN

(catching his breath)

Traffic. Always horrible the traffic here in Rio, hein?

AMERICAN

Well... what isn't horrible here, huh? *(he laughs)* But I live three blocks away, so... I've been spared that, at least.

BRAZILIAN

Yes, yeah... well, it can be horrible, you know, sometimes. *(points at the black metal box)* I also had to carry that up five flight of stairs, you know...

American goes over to the black box and examines it.

BRAZILIAN

What is it, anyway?

AMERICAN

It's a battery.

BRAZILIAN

A battery? That big?

AMERICAN

It's a car battery.

BRAZILIAN

Oh... OK.

Brazilian seems to realize something, and his eyes drift away from the battery.

He doesn't look at it again.

American picks it up and places it on a table near the wall.

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".

AMERICAN

Thanks for carrying it up.

BRAZILIAN

You're welcome.

AMERICAN

Even if it did make you late.

BRAZILIAN

Sorry, sorry.

AMERICAN

Or was it the traffic?

Brazilian doesn't know how to answer. American laughs, but Brazilian doesn't understand at what.

AMERICAN

You are supposed to be the teacher here, aren't you?!

BRAZILIAN

I'm not sure what we're doing here is really me teaching.

AMERICAN

Eu estou aprendendo o português, não estou?

BRAZILIAN

Muito bem!

As American speaks, Brazilian starts to go through the papers in his briefcase, removing them haphazardly and organizing them into three piles on the main metal table.

AMERICAN

See... you *are* teaching me. Thus, you're a teacher. And in the US, things are done a bit differently, all right? The teacher isn't late. Not ever. The students... maybe, sometimes. But never the teacher. And traffic isn't an excuse, you know. Traffic is traffic. You know about it, you plan ahead.

BRAZILIAN

Yes, I know. I know. I'm sorry. Desculpa!

AMERICAN

No, it's... Não é uma problema.

BRAZILIAN

Um problema. Não é *um* problema.

AMERICAN

Oh. OK. *Um* problema.

BRAZILIAN

Good.

AMERICAN

Um problema... *um* problema? This whole gender thing, it's the same in Italian, I don't... it's just... Rules I get. If a noun ends with an O, it's masculine. If it ends with an A, it's feminine. But *o* problema? It doesn't make any sense. All these Latin languages, they just... I like languages that make sense, you know?

Brazilian stops going through the papers and turns to American.

BRAZILIAN

Like English?

AMERICAN

Of course.

A beat. Brazilian looks at American.

BRAZILIAN

So... if I say to you... I don't know... "cite", what do I mean?

AMERICAN

Site?

BRAZILIAN

Yes. Cite.

AMERICAN

You mean a place, right? A historical site? Christ the Redeemer, for instance.

BRAZILIAN

No, I don't mean site. I mean cite.

AMERICAN

(pointing to his eyes)

Sight?

BRAZILIAN

Wrong again. Last chance.

AMERICAN

Oh, come'on. Site? Sight? Just... Just... use it in a sentence.

BRAZILIAN

Sorry. This isn't a spelling bee. No "use it in a sentence". Just... cite. What is it?

AMERICAN

I've told you.

BRAZILIAN

No. You guessed "sight" *(points to eyes)*. You guessed "site" *(points to floor and room)*. But not cite *(points to mouth)*. You know... to quote something. A poem. Part of a speech. To cite.

AMERICAN

Oh... OK. I get it. I get it... like you can... I don't know... like you you can stare at a stair!

BRAZILIAN

Or see the sea.

American laughs and Brazilian quickly return his attention to the papers he's organizing.

BRAZILIAN

All languages are the same. English. Portuguese. They're all a bit... *nonsensical?*

American nods, confirming the use of the word.

BRAZILIAN

That's all languages are, really. A bunch of rules waiting to be broken. In the end all that matter is that we understand each other. Translation is the same, you know. At first it can be... paralyzing, trying to figure in your head exactly what one thing in English is in Portuguese. Until you realize that no... that's not the point, you know? You don't translate in your head. You can't do it. It's not a... a... exchange of words only. It's about the meaning. Words are just letters. But the meaning makes them something. So translating is about making sure people understand the meaning of what is being said in one language by saying it in another. Not worry about words.

American nods briefly. He walks towards the large table, surveying the organized documents.

AMERICAN

Let's get to it, then.

BRAZILIAN

Oh yes, sorry, sorry.

Brazilian grabs his briefcase, now empty, and puts it on top of one of the desks in the corner.

AMERICAN

You say sorry a lot.

BRAZILIAN

Me?

AMERICAN

No. All of you. Brazilians. Always "sorry, sorry, sorry".

BRAZILIAN

Don't people say sorry in Indiana?

AMERICAN

Only when there's something to be sorry about.

BRAZILIAN

Well... sorry for saying sorry all the time, then.

American laughs as Brazilian walks towards the typewriter, but, sensing a stiffness in his colleague, moves over and places a hand on each of his shoulders.

AMERICAN

Hey, I'm just teasing you, you know that, right?

Brazilian smiles briefly and turns to the typewriter.

AMERICAN

Nothing wrong with saying sorry. Heck, I say it at least a dozen times a day. *(Beat)* Been married for twenty years, and the trick? Saying sorry. Even if you have no idea what you're apologizing for. Just do it, you know. Sorry. The key to a happy marriage.

American's grip on Brazilian's shoulders tightens.

AMERICAN

Remember that! You'll thank me when you're married.

BRAZILIAN

If I get married...

American finally lets go of Brazilian's shoulders and steps back.

AMERICAN

Don't you have a girl?

BRAZILIAN

No, I don't.

AMERICAN

And why the heck not!?

Brazilian arranges himself in the chair and places a blank piece of paper behind the typewriter's cylinder, adjusting the ink ribbon.

AMERICAN

It's none of my business, I know. It's just... a man ought to be married. Have children. A home to go back to. It's important when you do the type of work we do.

BRAZILIAN

The type of work *you* do.

AMERICAN

Sorry?

BRAZILIAN

"Sorry"?

AMERICAN

(laughing defensively)

That's... different. That was an interjection, not an apology.

BRAZILIAN

Well, I'm sill counting it.

AMERICAN

Fine. Count it. Don't count it. But you said it yourself, my friend. Translating is not just replacing words, huh? *(beat)* You're in this as much as I am.

Brazilian clears his throat and sits upright, hands resting over the keys.

BRAZILIAN

(pointing at the large metal table)

Let's just get back to work now.

A small tension.

American is clearly not used to being ordered by Brazilian.

AMERICAN

Yes, sir!

BRAZILIAN

When you're ready.

AMERICAN

As you wish!

American takes a seat next to Brazilian and goes through a few of his notes.

AMERICAN

OK, where were we?

BRAZILIAN

Location. "On the issue of location" is the last thing I have here.

AMERICAN

OK. Good.

American clears his throat and begins dictating as Brazilian types quickly, keeping pace.

AMERICAN

On the issue of location. Good. OK. Period. Continue. The essential steps required to prepare a safe house for operations, specifically focusing on ensuring it is fully secure and soundproofed for use in interrogation activates. Period. Next paragraph. Hum... First and foremost, identify a location that meets structural requirements. Period.

Of paramount importance, colon, a basement that can be converted into a soundproof space. Semicolon. Garage with internal door is preferred, providing discreet entry and exit points. Semicolon. A distance of at least 800 feet from neighboring homes, comma, vital for maintaining privacy and reducing risk of detection.

BRAZILIAN

Reducing risk of...?

AMERICAN

Risk of detection.

BRAZILIAN

All right then... go on.

AMERICAN

Hum... yes, well... next paragraph. OK. Once location is secured, the next step involves a thorough inspection. Period. Agent must personally inspect every aspect of property, such as electrical installations, plumbing, structural soundness to ensure everything is up to standards. Next paragraph. Then comes the most critical aspect of the operation. Colon. Soundproofing. Period.

American takes a beat to observe if Brazilian is catching up, before continuing to read.

A blackout.

SCENE 2

Lights up as American stands far upstage, hands in pocket, looking through the shutters of the closed wooden window.

Downstage, Brazilian sits at the typewriter and works, typing slowly as he checks for words and notes in documents around him.

American then notices something outside. He moves closer to the window, his face pressed against it.

He whistles. A cat-call, really.

Brazilian notices it but doesn't turn around.

AMERICAN

I'll be... This is unbelievable!

He turns to Brazilian, a huge smile on his face.

AMERICAN

You've got to see this!

Brazilian keeps busy and still doesn't turn around.

AMERICAN

I'm telling you. You've got to...

American turns back to the window, his face pressed against the wood.

AMERICAN

I'll be darned! It's just...

He cat-calls again.

BRAZILIAN

We've got, what... (*rummages through the documents*) twenty more pages to go and finish today.

AMERICAN

Oh, come on! We've been doing this for what... four hours non-stop? We need a break.

American takes quick steps towards Brazilian and places both hands on his shoulders, pressing them slightly.

AMERICAN

You need this. Trust me. (*beat*) If there's a man who needs to see this, it's you.

Reluctancy, Brazilian gets up and is guided by American all the way to the window upstage.

He presses his head against the shutters.

BRAZILIAN

What am I supposed to look here?

AMERICAN

Across the street, the building. Third floor. Through the... the... the fanlight.