

ORESTE CALLEJA

Excuse me,



...are those
your eyes?

WRITTEN FOR RADIO

EXCUSE ME, ARE THOSE YOUR EYES?

Written for radio by

ORESTE CALLEJA

CAST

JOHN:

WOMAN:

GIRLFRIEND:

Also:

BUS DRIVER - MAN ON BUS - TOURIST - STEFAN

FADE UP BUSY STREET TRAFFIC

INSIDE A BUS ON THE MOVE

JOHN: *(coughing badly - wheezing)* Excuse me, do you mind?

MAN ON BUS: What?

JOHN: I said... *(coughs)* I said, do you mind. Could you put that out?

MAN: *X'hiex? Is-sigarett?!*

JOHN: -Please. I suffer from asthma. And it's suffocating in this bus.

MAN: *(swearing)* *X'il-qabec!* Ok! OK! There! Ok, now?! Happy?

JOHN: Thank you!

BELL RINGS FOR BUS TO STOP.

JOSTLING SOUNDS AS PASSENGERS TRY TO GET ON AND OFF.

WOMAN: Hey, watch it!

MAN: *U ar'hemm!*

DRIVER: *(off mike)* *Lura hi!* Let them get off! Move back! All back!

BUS ON THE MOVE AGAIN

WOMAN: I'm sorry. He was very rude, wasn't he?

SHUFFLING OF NEWSPAPER

JOHN: Pardon?

WOMAN: That man:. He was very rude. I'm sorry.

JOHN: Oh. Well, that's O. K.

WOMAN: No, it really is not. The trouble is nobody bothers to tell anybody like him anything.

JOHN: Well, it can be embarrassing...

WOMAN: No - afraid perhaps. People are, you know, of the likes of him.

JOHN: Yes, well, you know; prudence!...

WOMAN: Ah, ah... *(slight pause)* No, Millicent - Therese, actually.

JOHN: Pardon?

WOMAN: (*quite proper - half giggling*) My name is Millicent Therese. Not Prudence.

JOHN: Oh...? OH! No, I meant; prudence being the better part valour! (*laughs good naturedly*).

WOMAN: Oh! (*not understanding - giggles anyway*) Oh, yes! Valor!

PAUSE.

WOMAN: Really. Some people just don't care. As long as it doesn't bother them.

JOHN: (*shuffling newspaper*) Yes, quite.

WOMAN: I really must apologize.

PAUSE - NO ANSWER.

SHUFFLING OF NEWSPAPER.

WOMAN: (*undaunted*) I mean, from you it's okay. They can take it.

JOHN: Take what?

WOMAN: Being told off. Like you did.

JOHN: Well, I didn't really tell him off. Just asked him to put it out. I really do suffer...

WOMAN: (*over his words*) Yes, but for you it's all very well. . .

JOHN: ...suffer from asthma, I mean. - All very well?

WOMAN: To tell him off. Like you did. Customer is always right after all, isn't he?

JOHN: Am I a.... customer?

WOMAN: Well, you know, a tourist!

JOHN: Oh, I see! (*slight pause*) Well, actually, I'm not really.

WOMAN: Not what?

JOHN: A tourist. I live here.

WOMAN: In Malta?

JOHN: Yes.

WOMAN: Yes.

WOMAN: (*complacently*) But you're a tourist.

JOHN: No. I live her. Have done for thirty-five years.

WOMAN: But... you are English.

JOHN: No. American, actually.

WOMAN: Oh. (*Pause. Then - a question?*) But - you are not Maltese.

JOHN: Well, no. Not exactly.

WOMAN: Not exactly what? What do you mean?

JOHN: I was born in Pennsylvania.

BELL RINGS FOR A BUS STOP

JOSTLING OF PASSENGERS

DRIVER: (*shouting above the noise*) *Ersqu lura! Lura hi! Iva, Ersqu lura ha mmorru! Back! Everybody back!*

BUS EVENTUALLY ON THE MOVE AGAIN

WOMAN: Is that the "Times"?

JOHN: What - the paper?... Yes. Yes it is.

WOMAN: (*conspiratorial*) You don't have to hide it from me, you know.

JOHN: Hide the paper? Why should I hide it?

WOMAN: You know. (*whisper*) Politics! People don't like to show their true colours. You understand!

JOHN: Ah, yes, I think I do. Here, you can have it.

SHUFFLING OF PAPER

WOMAN: Oh no, just wanted to see the headlines... Oh! (*sharper*) Oh! Is that your name!?

JOHN: (*alarmed*) Where?

WOMAN: There! Upper right hand corner! In pencil! That's where the shopkeeper writes your name when he reserves the paper for you, isn't it? (*An accusation?*) That is your name, isn't it?

JOHN: (*well, so?...*) Yes, it is.

WOMAN: Borg! Your name is Borg!

JOHN: Well, yes ...

WOMAN: It is Borg! (*accusing*) You are Maltese!

JOHN: Well...

WOMAN: Borg is Maltese! The most common Maltese name in the whole island!

JOHN: Well, not quite...

WOMAN: It is! I tell you, it is!

JOHN: Well, not exactly !...

WOMAN: You know it is! Don't you tell me not exactly! I know! I am Maltese too, you know, even if I speak English very good!

PAUSE

JOHN:: *(quite heavy)* Actually, it is Borg.

WOMAN: What?

JOHN: Borg. With a guttural "g" at the end. Not Borg - Borg. *(Repeats the "g")* G, g.

WOMAN: Borg?

JOHN: It's Swedish.

WOMAN: Swedish?

JOHN: Yes, it's a Swedish name really. Like Bjorn Borg, the tennis-player?

WOMAN: Oh... OH!

PAUSE.

WOMAN: *(as if to herself)* I thought you said you were English. *(corrects herself quickly)* Canadian!

JOHN: American actually.

WOMAN: American, Canadian! Same thing, no!

JOHN: No, not really...

WOMAN: But you said you're American, yes?

JOHN: Yes.

WOMAN: *(point made)* Yes! *(slight pause, challenging:)* Well?

JOHN: Yes?

WOMAN: You said you were American, yes?

JOHN: Yes.

WOMAN: Right. Not Swedish!

JOHN: Oh, no, not Swedish!

WOMAN: Well. But your surname is not Borg.

JOHN: No. Borg. It's a Swedish name. *(revenge)* Most common name in Sweden they tell me.

WOMAN: But you're American!

JOHN: I was born there. My father was Swedish.

WOMAN: *(completely deflated)* Oh... OOH! *(slight pause)* Do you play tennis too?

NO ANSWER

NEWSPAPER SHUFFLED NOICELY & HARD.

WOMAN: Table-tennis?

NEWSPAPER AGAIN.

WOMAN: *(not about to give up)* Of course, looking at you, I can see now. That snow-white hair, fair complexion, blue eyes. Oh, yes! I once dated a Swedish boy. From Norway.

JOHN: Well - actually, that was shell-shock. And the contact lenses, of course.

WOMAN: What?

JOHN: My white hair. Shell-shock.

WOMAN: What?...

JOHN: ...A bomb went off just outside our front floor... you know, the Blitz! The Jerries completely leveled our street that day. Turned my hair absolutely white. I was barely ten then! And there I was, lily white! Used to dye my hair with shoe polish, I remember, for the rest of the war.

WOMAN: No!

JOHN: *(laughs heartily)* Yes! Oh, yes!

PAUSE

NEWSPAPER

WOMAN: And what about the lenses?

JOHN: Beg your pardon?

WOMAN: You said "...and the contact lenses"!

JOHN: I did not . . .

WOMAN: You did!

JOHN: Never said a word!...

WOMAN: Not now - before! Just now! You said "It was shell shock and the contact lenses!" " You know what I mean - about your eyes.

JOHN: I don't... OH! The contact lenses!

WOMAN: Yes - the contact lenses! Your blue eyes.

JOHN: Oh, right! (*laughs*) That is the contact lenses.

WOMAN: (*since no further explanation is forthcoming:*) What is? I don't understand.

JOHN: Well, you see, they are actually brown - a dirty, mousey kind of brown... My eyes! That's why I wear contact lenses. Perfect eyesight otherwise. Twenty-twenty!

WOMAN: Twenty?... The lenses?

JOHN: Twenty-twenty! Perfect! But these lens are special, see? Blue! They can give your eyes any kind of tint they want to, really! Amazing what they can do nowadays!

WOMAN: You mean - those aren't your eyes?...

JOHN: Oh, no! Not really! Are those yours?

WOMAN: What?

JOHN: Your eyes? Are those your eyes?

WOMAN: What?... Why, certainly they are my eyes!

JOHN: Oh yes, well... Yes. At first I thought... (*Stops himself*).

WOMAN: Thought what?

JOHN: Oh, nothing. I beg your pardon. Yes, yes... I see, they are yours alright. Well, it's these lens, you know. I do need a check-up, like my girlfriend always says. That I must admit.

PAUSE

WOMAN: (*no more fooling*) What's wrong with my eyes?

JOHN: Your eyes - wrong? Why nothing! Really! You see, it's the ontact lenses; they tend to dry up and you get to see a halo around the edge of everything when they do that.

WOMAN: Oh. (*still suspicious*) And you see a halo round my eyes.

JOHN: Well, yes. Red really.

WOMAN: A red halo.

JOHN: Actually, around everything. Even your hair. It has a really unsightly reddish halo. Most awful pink all around really. You wouldn't believe it!

PAUSE

WOMAN: My hair is red.

SLIGHT PAUSE.

JOHN: I beg your pardon?

WOMAN: I said, my hair is red!

PAUSE

JOHN: Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't realise...

WOMAN: And it's not shoe-polish!

JOHN: No. No, I'm sure. I'm terribly sorry.

WOMAN: You are not American really, are you?

JOHN: What?

WOMAN: I said, you're really not American, are you?

JOHN: I assure you...

WOMAN: Or Canadian - or English!

JOHN: I've a Swedish surname...

WOMAN: Swedish! Pahh! Swedish your grandmother! *Nanntek* Swedish! If I had the time to waste I would tell you what I think... Oh my God, time! Where are we!?... My stop! Oh my God, I have to get off here! Excuse me. - *Skuzi ftit iva!* ... I have to get off here! Excuse me!... *Skuzi ftit, iva!* I must get off!

JOHN: (*grunting as she pushes past him*) Right, yes! There!... Ooch! Watch it!

WOMAN: Pull the bell!

JOHN: Bell?... Ooch! Where?

WOMAN: There! Under your nose! Pull it, hurry!

JOHN: Where!... I can't... Ooch!

WOMAN: There! Quick! (*yells frantically*) Stop! *Ghidlu jwaqqaf 'il dak!* Stop!

CHAOS IN THE BUS.

LAUGHTER PERHAPS.

BELL RUNG INSISTENTLY SEVERAL TIMES.

DRIVER: (*shouting above the din*) Stop ringing that bell! Who's ringing that damn bell! Stop! Damn you!

NOICE, BELL, etc.

DRIVER: (*that's it!*) DAMN!

BUS COMES TO A SCREECHING STOP.

DRIVER: (*approaching*) Okay! Okay! Who's ringing the damn bell? Who!?

PANDEMONIUM IN THE STREET TOO NOW.

TRAFFIC JAMMED. HORNS.

WOMAN: He did! This one here! He did!

JOHN: She wanted to get off!

DRIVER: Listen, woman, dammit! you better stop it, you hear? No ringing! No bell, no more! Damn tourists!

WOMAN: I'm not a tourist! I tell you he did it!

DRIVER: Damn Maltese, then! Damn tourists, damn Maltese, damn bell, damn bus!

WOMAN: Yes, damn bus, all right! We're suffocating in here. Why don't you turn on the air-condition!

CHEERS FROM THE CROWD, BUT ALSO ANGRY SHOUTS, JEERS & WHISTLES.

DRIVER: Damn air conditioner! You think I don't feel fucking heat! Damn tourists, damn Maltese!...

ANGRY SHOUTS

DRIVER: ...If you don't like it get off! Get off my damn bus, now, you hear! Get off!

WOMAN: That's all I wanted to do in the first place!

DRIVER: Get off my damn bus then! And you too!

JOHN: Well, actually...

DRIVER: Yes, you tourist! You too, English!

WOMAN: English, pahh! He's not a real tourist, you know!

DRIVER: What?

WOMAN: And his hair is not white, either!

DRIVER: What!?

JOHN: (*Amicably*) It's shoe-polish, you see.

DRIVER: What...

WOMAN: And his eyes, they're not his...!

JOHN: No, quite! But neither is her hair.

WOMAN: My hair is mine!

JOHN: It is not!

WOMAN: It is!

JOHN: 'Tis not!

WOMAN: 'Tis!

JOHN: 'Tis not!

WOMAN: You - you're a fake!

JOHN: And you're a clone!

WOMAN: You're the clown! You with your fake white hair and fake blue eyes! You fake you!

JOHN: ...A clone! A hybrid! A no-language, no identity, bastardized nonentity in the middle of nowhere!

CHAOS - A LYNCH MOB, TRAFFIC, UP THEN FADE.

THE ELECTRONIC BEEPS OF A TELEPHONE DIAL.

DRIVER: Hey, George, listen!... George? Can you hear me? Yes. Yes! It's this damn mobajl! - Okay, now? - Listen, the damn bus broke down... - Yes, again! Why? How do I know! Why, I'm a mechanic?! - What? - What noise? - Oh, that! Just a couple of damn foreigners... - No, listen! Listen! I'm going down to the pool - Yeah, the White Rocks. I'll wait there at the bar. Send someone, will you. - Well, whenever you can! Damn I hate this sun! - I said, Damn I hate this fucking sun! I hate people! I hate the heat! Damn I hate them all! Damn I hate them!

SPLASH OF A BODY DIVING INTO POOL.

ON THE TERRACE IN A RESTAURANT.

SOUND OF CROWD, DRINKS, MUSIC IN BACKGROUND.

JOHN: *(snapping fingers - away - off mike)* Waiter! Waiter!

WOMAN: *(very close)* Excuse me, are those your eyes?

TOURIST: *(perhaps a German: or Nordic accent)* Pardon?

WOMAN: I said, excuse me, are those your eyes?

TOURIST: Aach - my eyes?...

WOMAN: Behind the spectacles.

TOURIST: Behind spectacles... Ah, ya, I should think so!

WOMAN: Not contact lenses, then?

TOURIST: Behind spectacles? No, No! Why should I wear lenses behind spectacles?

WOMAN: Well, they could be plain sunglasses.

TOURIST: Ach, well, they are!

WOMAN: I mean some people wear contact lenses behind sunglasses. I mean, glasses with tinted lenses which are sight-glasses just the same, you understand?

TOURIST: I think I do...

WOMAN: (*eager to explain*) Well, see, I met this man:, this Maltese. . . You don't mind if I sit down?...

SOUND OF CHAIR BEING PULLED UP BRISKLY

WOMAN: ...Well! This Maltese, he said he was English, (*Fade*) but I knew, I knew right away!...

CROSS FADE

JOHN: (*fading up*) ...I knew, of course, I was never going to be rid of her. So I said I was Swedish!

GIRLFRIEND: Swedish! (*laughs*) You!

JOHN: Practically told her I was Bjorn Borg!

GIRLFRIEND: Who?

JOHN: (*still chuckling, but subsiding fast*) Never mind!

GIRLFRIEND: Really, John! (*laughs on*) I never! Still, really, I know what you mean. It really can be quite a handicap sometimes, I imagine.

JOHN: What can?

GIRLFRIEND: A name, of course! And yours really... John Borg is just too common for words! But Borg - and Bjorn Borg, at that, well!...

JOHN: Right. (*dead sober*) Right.

GIRLFRIEND: Not that there is anything wrong with it, of course...

JOHN: Right.

GIRLFRIEND: But still; sometimes I wish one had a choice in choosing one's last name - as well as a first name!

JOHN: Well, to a certain degree women do.

GIRLFRIEND: Do? Do what?

JOHN: Have a choice. I mean, when they get married they can take a husband's name, no?

WOMAN: Yes! There's always that, of course.

JOHN: Of course. So all you have to do is choose someone called Campbell, perhaps, or Johnson...

GIRLFRIEND: Or Carter!

JOHN: Not Carter, please! Gorby's out, too.

WOMAN: I don't like Bush.

JOHN: Perhaps. But it beats Borg. Anything but Borg!

GIRLFRIEND: Exactly!

PAUSE

JOHN: Is that why you never would date me?

GIRLFRIEND: What? Why certainly not! What's in a name, after all!...

JOHN: Why wouldn't you, then?

GIRLFRIEND: Date you.?...Oh come on, really, John!...

JOHN: JOHN:. That's it, isn't it - John. Too common for words.

GIRLFRIEND: Really!

JOHN: A dime a dozen.

GIRLFRIEND: Really!

JOHN: That's why you married Stephen ...

GIRLFRIEND: (*correcting*) Stefan.

JOHN: (*already correcting it himself*) Stefan! Right! See!...

GIRLFRIEND: That's ridiculous. I did not date you because... Must we go through this again!?

JOHN: Yes. Well?

GIRLFRIEND: I did not date you because... I did not love you. There, if you must know!...

JOHN: Bullshit! And you loved Stefan?

GIRLFRIEND: Well...

JOHN: So why do you see me now, then?

GIRLFRIEND: Well - I used to. Love Stefan.

JOHN: And now?

GIRLFRIEND: Now I love you.

JOHN: Right. In spite of my name.

GIRLFRIEND: In spite of your name. - No! You said it!...

JOHN: (Was waiting for this - pounces) ...Ha! You said it! ‘

GIRLFRIEND: You put words in mouth!

TOURIST: Excuse me... Excuse me, is that chair taken?

JOHN:/GIRLFRIEND: (together) YES!

TOURIST: Oh, I beg your pardon!...

JOHN: Sorry! Waiting for someone actually!

TOURIST: Well, excuse me!

GIRLFRIEND: Can't he see my handbag on it! Of course it's taken!

JOHN: Keep it low. He only asked. After all, he's not really coming, is he?

GIRLFRIEND: He said he would. Soon as he finishes jogging.

JOHN: Working up a sweat - for you. Not that he doesn't need it - all that flab!...

GIRLFRIEND: (pleased) Really, I do believe you're jealous of Stefan.. After all these years!

JOHN: Perhaps. It all seems so pointless, anyway, doesn't it?

GIRLFRIEND: What? Me?...

JOHN: You. Me and you. You and Stefan.

GIRLFRIEND: Well, at least he still does things for me.

JOHN: I used to, too, remember? And see where it's got me. A pizza for two every other Tuesday.

GIRLFRIEND: And afterwards - don't forget the afterwards. (*with meaning*) There's always desert, afterwards!

JOHN: (*none too enthusiastic*) Right.

GIRLFRIEND: What's that supposed to mean?

JOHN: Sometimes even desert doesn't quite do it for me.

GIRLFRIEND: Oh!

JOHN: Without a three-course meal to lead the way.

CHAIR PUSHED BACK ANGRILY.

GIRLFRIEND: Well, if that's how you feel!...

JOHN: Oh, sit down.

GIRLFRIEND: Think of Stefan - he hasn't even touched desert in months!

JOHN: Sit down. Please? Where's that damned waiter!

GIRLFRIEND: Why should I? It isn't as if I can do anything about it. There's hardly enough time for a pizza anymore - let alone a three-course meal!

JOHN: I know. Nobody can do anything about anything. Ever. What's done is done.

GIRLFRIEND: (*calmer*) What's wrong with... desert, anyway?

JOHN: Nothing, I guess.

GIRLFRIEND: No! Oh, no! You can't just say "Nothing, I guess" - Tell me what's wrong. Is it my fault? Is it?

JOHN: I don't know.

GIRLFRIEND: You know you don't even kiss me anymore.

JOHN: I do! (*aside*) Here we go again!...

GIRLFRIEND: Hardly ever!

JOHN: But I do.

GIRLFRIEND: And not the same way.

JOHN: Why; you still remember the old way?

GIRLFRIEND: Yes! I most certainly do. But you don't.

JOHN: Perhaps you're right... Waiter! There he goes!

GIRLFRIEND: Show me. Now!

JOHN: ...Waiter! Damn!

GIRLFRIEND: I said show me. Now. Kiss me.

JOHN: Kiss you!

GIRLFRIEND: Yes, now!

JOHN: In front of everybody?

GIRLFRIEND: They're just a bunch of tourists. Nobody knows us.

JOHN: They could be Swedish. They'd know me!...

GIRLFRIEND: Not funny. Kiss me, I said.

JOHN: What would that prove?

GIRLFRIEND: I don't know.

JOHN: Then why should I?

GIRLFRIEND: I don't know! Maybe to prove you're not a total fake, JOHN:Borg; with your glib remarks, your funny one-liners - your sweet nothings... To prove you're not just a one-line has-been.

JOHN: That... might be hard.

GIRLFRIEND: I very much doubt it. (*mumbles*) Never is...

SLIGHT PAUSE.

JOHN: (*sharply*) Oh, good. Very good, indeed.

GIRLFRIEND: Kiss me anyway.

JOHN: It won't prove anything...

GIRLFREIND See those two, kissing in the corner - grabbing at each other? That used to be us.

JOHN: Well, I told you - they're Swedish!

CHAIR PUSHED BACK ANGRILY.

JOHN: (*quickly*) No, I'm sorry!...

GIRLFRIEND: It just isn't funny anymore, JOHN:.

JOHN: Wait, I'm sorry! Can't help it... . But would you have liked it better if I said, "They're Swedish - and they're young?"

GIRLFRIEND: (*desperately*) You're as young as you feel!

JOHN: (*cynical*) Right!

GIRLFRIEND: Kiss me. Now.

JOHN: The waiter could come ...

GIRLFRIEND: Now, JOHN:- or you'll never see me again.

JOHN: (*slight hesitation*) Very well, then...

THEY KISS.

PAUSE.

NOTHING, SAVE SOUNDS OF THE RESTAURANT AS BEFORE.

STEFAN: (*out of breath - he's been jogging. Off*) Excuse me... (*closer - a discreet cough. Then, very distinct, and very close:*) Excuse me, is that my wife you're kissing?

DEAD SILENCE

HOLD THEN

FINGERS SNAPPED SHARPLY TO ATTRACT ATTENTION.

JOHN: Waiter!

FINGERS AGAIN SNAPPED TWICE IN QUICK SUCCESSION, PERHAPS USING THE BEGINNING OF THE SIGNATURE TUNE OF "THE ADAMS FAMILY", THEN ON WITH THE MUSIC...

THE END

June 1992. St. Julians, Malta

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