

# Big Black Car

by Clint Hutzulak

*“...I may wake up and find myself once more confined to prison.... And even if this should not happen, merely to dream it is enough. For this I have come to know, that all human happiness finally ceases, like a dream.”*

– Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681)

**King**  
**Guard**  
**Female Prisoner**  
**Time**

Props: small radio, laptop, bowl of foamy water, paper or plastic crown, sketch pad or artist palette.

A small chamber in a castle. A desk or table with three chairs. Bowl is on table.

It could be present-day in an imaginary Eastern European country. There is intentional incongruity between the King with his Old World crown, and modern appliances, such as a portable radio, a telephone or laptop on the table.

The acting should be artificial and stilted, with awkward pauses or gaps, as if each of the actors is thinking of something more pressing. Often, they don't address each other as much as they seem to be thinking aloud.

*Guard*                    *Strikes Prisoner across side of head.*

Now. I want you to look at this photograph again and tell me who you see.

*Prisoner*                I've already told you. I see no one.

*King*                    *King, standing downstage, perhaps looking out a window looking out over a garden, begins to laugh, his shoulders beneath a heavy coat shaking up and down as he laughs. His back is to the table. He holds an artist's palette or a sketch pad. It appears he has been sketching or painting some scene out beyond the audience. He is a rather smug, contented king.*

*Guard looks at King for a moment, then glares at Prisoner, who also has turned to look at King.*

Look at them in the garden. I've never seen anything quite like it.

*Guard*                    Do you know where you are? *(moves bowl closer to Prisoner)*

*Prisoner*                *Spits into the aluminum bowl, the red foamy saliva tilting with a mucus glimmer as the bowl is moved on the table before her.*

Guard Do you know where you are?

Prisoner Yes.

Guard Where are you?

Prisoner (*smiling*) I am here with you.

Guard Where are we together?

Prisoner It's a lovely room. The air is heavy with the scent of flowers. Somewhere behind me there are flowers in a vase.

Guard Where is this room?

Prisoner Here.

Guard Do you know where you are?

Prisoner No.

Guard Do you know where I am?

Prisoner You are in the little black radio.

  

King I'm very interested in something more... you know (*snaps fingers*). Je ne sais quois. To the heart of the matter, please, post-haste. Let's find out what she knows. What has survived our best efforts to crush her and her kind?

  

Prisoner Love.

Guard No, I want you to imagine a thing not abstract. Something you can hold.

Prisoner The sea.

Guard No. You cannot hold the sea.

Prisoner I can hold the sea. When I was a child I swallowed the sea.

Guard Now what do you swallow?

Prisoner You.

Guard You cannot swallow me.

Prisoner I can hold you.

Guard Yes. You can hold me. Now imagine something else. Something you can hold.

Prisoner Why must it be something I can hold? It's more interesting to imagine something I cannot hold. There is almost nothing I cannot hold.

Guard So imagine something you can hold, and then you will be free to imagine whatever else you want.

Prisoner I could hold a door.

Guard Not a door. Something else.

Prisoner My breath.

Guard No.

Prisoner I have found a finger in my pocket. I can hold this finger and think about the rest of the hand, about what it is doing without this finger. *(keeps hand in pocket of jacket throughout speech, but appears to be looking at table as she concentrates on feeling the disembodied finger)*

Guard Alright. The finger. Describe it.

Prisoner There is no blood on the end where it has been cut from the hand. In fact, it doesn't appear to have been cut from a hand at all. Where I expect a cut, the skin is smooth and unblemished. It is a complete finger. The nail is nicely shaped, and stronger than my own nail. There are two white marks in the nail, where a violent blow perhaps wounded the nail some time ago. It is a man's finger. Definitely a man's finger. There is some hair above the second joint. The skin is soft and yellow, though thicker and redder at the joints where the finger bends. The finger bends easily in one direction, inward, like a living finger. When I turn the finger over, the whorls of the fingertip remind me of the elevation lines of mountains drawn on a map I once saw. The tip of the finger is shaped like a teardrop, narrowing to a soft downward hanging cone of sensitive flesh, the whorls finer and closer together as they near the tip of the finger. Past the first inward bend of joint, the lines in the flesh run parallel to the length of the finger, while on the rest of the finger, the lines run crosswise.

Guard How did you come to have this finger in your pocket?

Prisoner I was riding the bus. A woman pressed a small packet wrapped in paper and string into my hand as she brushed past me. When I got off the bus I stopped by the library and opened the packet. The finger was inside, muffled in tissue.

Guard The woman. What did she look like? Would you recognize her if you saw her again?

Prisoner Yes. She wore a black leather jacket tied at the hips with a man's belt.

Guard If I were to show you a photograph of the woman, would you be able to identify her as the one who gave you the packet containing the finger?

Prisoner No. I have a problem matching people up to their photographs.

Guard            Your husband has forgotten you. If I were to show him a photograph of you, he would no longer be able to identify you.

Prisoner        Have I changed a lot since I've been here?

Guard            Yes. None of your friends would recognize you now.

Prisoner        Good.

Guard            Why are you glad?

Prisoner        I could as easily be saddened by change. But I'm not. I am happy that everything changes and comes to an end. This won't go on forever. One day you'll be unable to keep me here in this room. No matter how you try I will not sit up or answer your questions.

Guard            That day is a long way off.

King            (*turns from window*) O, we are far from done. There is so much more.... (*waves sketch pad airily*). How old is she? Ask her age. I'm dying to know.

Guard            How old are you now?

Prisoner        I am thirty years old.

Guard            She says she is thirty. Our records confirm this.

*Time*            *Knocks loudly offstage.*

King            Someone is at the door.

Prisoner        Now I am forty.

Guard            Now she is forty. Now she is forty years of age.

King            Enter, Time.

*Time*            *Enters, bows to Prisoner, Guard, and King.*

Prisoner        Now I am fifty.

Time            Do not make happiness the keystone of your life.

King            Let me change my coat. I must get outside. I haven't been out for ages.

Guard Don't leave me here.

*King Places crown on Prisoner's head. So long, see you tomorrow. Exits*

Prisoner I am sixty.

Time *(to Guard)* As are you. *(sits at table between Guard and Prisoner)*

King *(offstage)* My kingdom for a horse!

Prisoner *Examines crown, replaces it tentatively on own head.*

Guard And I?

Prisoner Tiny flames of blue fire are eating my sight.

Guard You're almost blind. Let me help you with your coat.

Prisoner Yes, thank you. *(Guard helps Prisoner to her feet)*

*All this is now mine. (waves hand in sweeping gesture) No longer do I have time to waste with this foolish questioning. I must out, and survey all that is my domain.*

King *(Re-enters)* I am too ill to leave. Show clemency.

Prisoner I will take a bus from here to my home, and there I shall see my dear husband and my children, waiting for me as I left them some time ago. I just went to buy a bottle of milk. It was to take only five minutes. How clearly I remember!

Time Thirty years have passed since you set out on your errand. Your husband is long buried, your children older now than you when you left them. Not one will recognize you. Your house has disappeared beneath a new street, named after the tyrant who tortured and maimed you. You have been forgotten completely.

Guard Show clemency.

Time Youth, love, happiness, what mean they now? All has been taken from you except a thin horse called sorrow.

Prisoner I'll rent a car and go there now, where my husband lays. Come with me. It will be a short trip.

Guard Hooray, a lovely drive in a car.

King I will chauffeur the car.

*King exits with Guard and Prisoner in tow.*

Time *(Alone at table, looking at audience.)* I am the car.