

Intelligence

by Kevin Martens Wong

A grassy knoll, somehow superlatively untouched, adjacent to a large but mostly empty road; we could be in Lim Chu Kang, or Dempsey, or even some part of Pulau Blakang Mati, though it's probably best to call it Sentosa. No one is here, except for the curious and the lost; on-stage now is someone who falls into at least one of those two groups, ULISSES. He appears as stereotypically Kenneth Jerome Rozarian as they come, and is sit-squatting under a tree listening to the music, waiting for some event or other as they come.

And here comes someone else now. Let's call them THE PERSON LIKE ANY OTHER, or THEPLANO, since that's who they secretly desperately want us to believe they are, of ambiguous gender, race and stature. Though THEPLANO almost sounds Kristang too, actually (is that part of it? We're not sure either).

THEPLANO: (to ULISSES) Excuse me.

ULISSES: (without looking up) Excused.

THEPLANO: (taken aback) What?

ULISSES: (leaping gaily to his feet) Nah lah, joking lah. Sorry I was Zooming my girlfriend, uh, uncle ... auntie ... (a pause) ... whatever you are.

THEPLANO: The person like any other.

ULISSES: I'm sorry?

THEPLANO: The person like any other.

ULISSES: You mean, a person like any other, right?

THEPLANO: (smiles sweetly) That's what I said.

ULISSES: I'm quite sure you said *the* person like any other.

THEPLANO: Would you excuse me?

ULISSES: From?

THEPLANO: Listening to your music.

ULISSES: You weren't listening to my music.

THEPLANO: Yes. You were listening to my music.

ULISSES: You are Benjamin Kheng, Narelle Kheng, Jonathan Chua and Sandra Riley Tang?

THEPLANO: You listen to the Sam Willows?

ULISSES: (*affronted*) Why can't I listen to the Sam Willows?

THEPLANO: You can listen to whatever music you like.

ULISSES: Yes. (*A pause.*) Ben. (*Another pause.*) Narelle? Jonathan. (*Another pause.*) Sandra?

THEPLANO: I am a person like any of them.

ULISSES: That's really good to hear. What can I do for you, Benarelathandra?

THEPLANO: Are you here for the tour?

ULISSES: The Keramat Kristang one...are you...the tour guide?

THEPLANO: Yes. I'm really pleased to meet you.

ULISSES: Ah, that's nice. Look, I'm not sure if my friend is coming –

THEPLANO: A friend from your community?

A pause.

ULISSES: Aren't you from the community?

THEPLANO: Like any other.

ULISSES: I'm...not convinced I know what that means.

THEPLANO: You know. You. The Others.

ULISSES: What's your surname?

THEPLANO: (*a bit too quickly*) I have no surname. It's...it's too long. Too difficult to say.

ULISSES: (*more kindly, now worried he is being disrespectful*) Is it a patronymic?

THEPLANO: It's...what is that?

ULISSES: What is what?

THEPLANO: A patio mimic.

ULISSES: No, no, I'm quite sure that's you.

THEPLANO: I get offended when people ask about my surname.

ULISSES: How do you deal with ICA, then?

THEPLANO's *demeanour changes, abruptly.*

ULISSES: Yo, what the fuck? Are you okay...dude? ... man. I'm not sure.

THEPLANO: A person like any other.

ULISSES: THE. You definitely said the person like any other.

THEPLANO: It's insulting when you correct me.

ULISSES: Man, I'm fucking sure of it.

THEPLANO: Are you a student?

ULISSES: What?

THEPLANO: (*smiling sweetly*) Are you a student?

ULISSES: I have a beard, my lady...dude. Ladydude. *The* ladydude.

THEPLANO: PhD students from reputable institutions can still have beards. And tattoos.

ULISSES: So now you suddenly know how life works?

THEPLANO: As much as you do.

ULISSES: Then by all that is holy why in the blue blazes would you think I'm a student?

You meant PhD student? Or like. School student. Like I'm five, or something, *mae deus*. Because your *tone* –

THEPLANO: Oh, you know. Sometimes when you're out with your students on an excursion, the teacher looks like a student. It's very easy to get mistaken. You know what I mean?

ULISSES: *(smiling sweetly)* No, I don't.

THEPLANO: Don't worry, I'm not offended.

ULISSES: I'd be very offended if you were offended, trust me, dude/lady.

THEPLANO: Does your community take offence at a lot of things?

ULISSES *backs away from* THEPLANO *slowly*.

ULISSES: Woah. Wait.

THEPLANO: We are one and the same.

ULISSES: Are you like, ISD or something?

THEPLANO: *(without skipping a beat)* Why would I be?

ULISSES: Shit. Hold on, okay? *(pulls out his phone and begins to text)*

THEPLANO *moves right in front of* ULISSES, *and he curses*.

ULISSES: For fucking bloody pig swine's sake!

THEPLANO: Why would you think I'm ISD?

ULISSES: *(finishing his text message)* Look, I... *(keeps his phone)* I don't okay! I'm sorry. You're right. It's really rude to call somebody ISD. You're like, the tour guide. Right. With no surname.

THEPLANO: I do have a surname.

ULISSES: Well, what is it?

THEPLANO: What's yours?

ULISSES: Albuquerque.

THEPLANO: Mine's Albuquerque.

ULISSES: Oh, really.

THEPLANO: It's like Zuzarte and Zuzartee. With a second e.

A pause.

ULISSES: I thought you said you weren't from the community.

THEPLANO: I never said that. I said I'm an Albuquerque.

ULISSES: There is no such surname.

THEPLANO: I'm Newrasian.

ULISSES: We don't call them that, and there's nothing wrong with being a New Eurasian.

THEPLANO: I never said that there was.

The person that ULISSES was texting finally arrives.

ULISSES: Oh my fucking god, Mars, teng *bong*. Took you long enough.

MARS: Sorry. My grandmother wanted to go through the Elton John records again.

ULISSES: Again?

MARS: I am getting good at sitting at a table and crying quietly.

ULISSES: Good to know motherfucker.

THEPLANO: My name is Ælton.

ULISSES: Like, Elton John?

THEPLANO: No. With the Irish orthographic symbol.

MARS: Like the letter *ash*? I'm not sure that that's Irish, my...uh...hey, did you get this person's pronouns?

ULISSES: Patio and mimic.

MARS: Is this like, the ISD person?

ULISSES: No, this is Ælton Albuquerque.

THEPLANO: And what if I am ISD?

A pause.

MARS: Well, I'm terrified.

ULISSES: Me too, I guess.

They both look at THEPLANO, who regards them expectantly.

MARS: Yeah.

ULISSES: Fucking terrified man.

ULISSES sits back down under the tree and begins to listen to his music again, and MARS

begins to do something with his phone.

THEPLANO: *(a little frantically)* Well...I'm not ISD. What if I'm not.

MARS: *(without looking up)* Well...good.

THEPLANO: You're not worried I'm ISD?

MARS: You're one of us, right? *(gently nudges ULISSES with his foot)* What did you say patio mimic's surname was?

ULISSES: Albuquerque.

MARS: Albuquerqueer?

THEPLANO: No, you're pronouncing it wrong. It's like D'Silva and De –

MARS: C'mere, Uli.

ULISSES: What, right now?

MARS: The red planet waits for no man.

ULISSES: *(standing up)* What does that even mean?

MARS: It means I'm not waiting.

They kiss passionately. THEPLANO yelps.

THEPLANO: What the fuck was – I mean –

ULISSES: Hey Mars.

MARS: Sup.

ULISSES: I'm a student.

MARS: Oh?

ULISSES: Yeah.

MARS: What are you studying?

ULISSES: Your bicep.

MARS: Oh.

ULISSES: You didn't ask which one, you bloody swine.

MARS: Oh. Which one?

ULISSES: I'm not sure.

MARS: Do you need more time to be sure?

ULISSES: *(reaching out for Mars's left bicep)* I think I need –

THEPLANO: ENOUGH.

MARS and ULISSES freeze.

MARS: Wassup, Ælton?

THEPLANO: You're not gay.

ULISSES: What makes you think that?

THEPLANO: You said you were Zooming your girlfriend.

MARS: What?

THEPLANO: *(eagerly)* He said he was Zooming his girlfriend.

MARS: You were what, Uli?

ULISSES: I was Zooming my girlfriend, shithead.

MARS: You are a little shithead.

ULISSES: I know.

They kiss again. THEPLANO screams.

ULISSES: Well excuse you.

THEPLANO: YOU SAID YOU WERE ZOOMING YOUR GIRLFRIEND!

ULISSES: I was.

THEPLANO: (*looking very severely at MARS*) You...you're not...

MARS: I'm offended.

THEPLANO: But...

ULISSES: I have a girlfriend, yes.

THEPLANO: Then...then what is he? She? They?

ULISSES: Dudelady.

MARS: Well, I'm technically your thirteenth cousin nine times removed...

THEPLANO: Oh god, what the fucking fuck...

ULISSES: No, we don't do that.

THEPLANO: Then...what...

ULISSES: We just kiss.

MARS: We're just two guys that kiss, dude.

ULISSES: Dudelady.

MARS: Dudelady, sorry.

ULISSES: Mars, you really should know better.

MARS: I know. Sorry. For Ælton I'm going to have to be a ... cisgender transsexual?

ULISSES: You can be whatever you want to me, baby.

MARS: I'll be a thirteenth cousin nine times removed.

ULISSES: I consent.

They kiss passionately. THEPLANO retches.

MARS: Weren't you supposed to run some tour or something, dude?

ULISSES: You know, like we signed up for?

THEPLANO: (*laughing almost hysterically to themselves*) There is...there is no... (*catches themselves, jerks back into motion*). No one else is coming? How strange.

ULISSES: I'm coming soon.

THEPLANO: Oh for fuck's sake, shut up.

ULISSES: Can I get your number?

MARS: It's for his girlfriend.

ULISSES: And you.

MARS *kisses* ULISSES *on the cheek*.

THEPLANO: You know what. This is it. I quit. I never wanted this.

ULISSES: But don't you want me?

THEPLANO: Fuck off.

THEPLANO *walks off the stage*.

ULISSES: So, what do you think?

MARS: Dude, what if you were wrong?

ULISSES: Am I ever?

MARS: You said kissing would be fun.

ULISSES: ...again, am I ever?

Enter a third Kristang.

HENRIETTA: Is this the tour? Hi.

ULISSES: Hi! Teng bong.

MARS: Oh shit! She can see us.

ULISSES: Oh fuck.

HENRIETTA: What?

ULISSES: Oop. Sorry.

MARS: Shit. Dude!

ULISSES: Look, being undead is hard okay.

HENRIETTA: You're...you're...

MARS: Not as undead as that dude we just saved you from.

ULISSES: She doesn't need to know.

HENRIETTA: I'm sorry, who am I talking to?

ULISSES: Someone has to watch over yall sorry sights.

MARS: Good fellas.

ULISSES: Rambunctious rascals.

MARS: Big aimless fights.

HENRIETTA: I'm confused.

MARS: We're what you came here for.

HENRIETTA: ...the Kristang keramat?

ULISSES: I like to think of myself as the *lucky letori*.

MARS: The Temple (*flexes his biceps*) of Time.

HENRIETTA: ...what do your biceps have to do with Time?

MARS: They took a lot of it. To make.

ULISSES: You're not helping.

MARS: And she's not scared.

HENRIETTA: Of two undead Eurasian men trying to show me how smart they are?

ULISSES and MARS look back at where THEPLANO exited, then back at HENRIETTA.

ULISSES: Oh, this generation really hasn't seen anything yet.

MARS: Kiss again?

ULISSES: That's really the wrong way to start.

THE END