

PAPERS, PLEASE

Written by

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INT. IMMIGRATION CHECKPOINT, ARSTOTZKA BORDER - MORNING

THE INSPECTOR, late 40s with a sullen, wrinkled, bearded face, tosses down a NEWSPAPER on top of a wooden DESK, the headline "DISGRACED TRACK STAR VINCE LESTRADE WANTED FOR MURDER" plastered on the front.

Pulling out a small INSPECTOR HANDBOOK, a pen, a folded piece of PAPER, and a PHOTO of his family, he arranges the objects across the top of his desk with precise placement.

As he sits down in a creaky, metallic chair, he dusts off his uniform before leaning into a rusted microphone.

THE INSPECTOR
(into microphone)
The checkpoint is now open. Next.

Looking out from behind a three inch thick plexiglass window, he waits for the first person of the day to arrive at the booth.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
Papers, please.

A PASSPORT and CITIZENSHIP CARD slides toward him as he scans the details of each.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
Ronald Babich. Thirty five years old.
Purpose of visit: returning home
after tour of duty.

He stamps the passport with a green APPROVED stamp and hands both back to an ARSTOTZKA CITIZEN.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
Glory to Arstotzka. Cause no trouble.

ARSTOTZKA CITIZEN (O.S.)
Glory to Arstotzka.

The citizen grabs his documents quickly and rushes to the exit.

The Inspector marks off a tally on a piece of paper, checks the clock, and leans back into the microphone.

THE INSPECTOR
Next.

A disheveled IMMIGRANT woman walks up to the booth and hands over her documents as he looks them over.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
 Laura Traster. Twenty seven years
 old. Purpose of visit: to care for
 ill family members.

The Inspector notices a symbol on the woman's passport
 denoting her from the neighboring country of Kolechia.

He glances at his open handbook, the words "DENY ALL
 KOLECHIAN ENTRANTS AT THIS TIME" in bold lettering.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
 Your current documentation does not
 permit entry.

A bright red DENIED is stamped down on the visa page.

KOLECHIAN IMMIGRANT (O.S.)
 But Inspector—

The Inspector pushes the passport back through the opening
 of the window.

KOLECHIAN IMMIGRANT (O.S.) (cont'd)
 I can explain.

The Inspector shoots a stern look at the unsatisfied migrant
 as if to say "Really? You're gonna argue with me?"

KOLECHIAN IMMIGRANT (O.S.) (cont'd)
 You won't even ask me any questions?

THE INSPECTOR
 Move along.

KOLECHIAN IMMIGRANT (O.S.)
 Inspector, my mother and father are—

People in line start to complain.

PERSON IN LINE (O.S.)
 Come on!

OTHER LINE MEMBER (O.S.)
 What's taking so long?

THE INSPECTOR
 Please, madam. Just come back when
 your papers are in order.

KOLECHIAN IMMIGRANT (O.S.)
 Goddamn it, this is unfair!

THE INSPECTOR

Please move-

The woman rears back and spits towards The Inspector's face.

KOLECHIAN IMMIGRANT (O.S.)

Fascist!

A hearty amount of fluid makes it past the small holes in the protective glass.

The Inspector wipes some from his beard and notices some more on the photo of his family.

A finger on his left hand goes to press a red button beneath his desk as he gently wipes off the fluid.

He hesitates before pulling his finger away as he watches the angry woman leave.

THE INSPECTOR

(into microphone)

Next.

The Inspector stares at his picture, trying to collect himself when a guard, OLGA, early 30s with wavy, blonde hair, taps on the glass and passes a handkerchief to him.

OLGA

Here.

THE INSPECTOR

Thank you.

She lingers near the window for a moment, her nearby superior, LUDMILA, early 40s with long, dark hair, eyeing her.

LUDMILA (O.S.)

Lieutenant?

OLGA

Coming.

The Inspector catches Olga's hypnotic gaze as she departs back to her post, the woman trying to hide her eyes behind loose strands of her bob cut.

The hearty voice of an approaching person brings him back into focus.

JORJI (O.S.)
 Good to see you again, Inspector! It
 is me, Jorji! Hope you are all right
 after all that commotion.

JORJI, early 60s with a scruffy salt and pepper beard and
 tattered red clothes, hands The Inspector his papers.

THE INSPECTOR
 Hello Jorji.

The Inspector puts away his spit covered cloth as he skims
 through the paperwork before stamping the passport green.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
 Cause no trouble. Glory to Arstotzka.

JORJI (O.S.)
 Oh, thank you Inspector! Thank you! I
 will not forget this!

The man beams happily to himself as he walks into Arstotzka,
 The Inspector a bit unnerved by his euphoric demeanor.

THE INSPECTOR
 (into microphone)
 Next!

INT. IMMIGRATION CHECKPOINT, ARSTOTZKA BORDER - AFTERNOON

The Inspector chews on a plain ham and mayo sandwich.

He checks the time every now and then while he keeps track
 of a running tally of how many people he's let in and how
 many credits he's earned.

Glancing at the newspaper on his desk, he sees the front
 page headline once more, the smiling image of an early 30s
 man, VINCE LESTRADE, looking back at him.

His piercing blue eyes hold his attention before he looks
 back at the photo of his family, a younger Inspector
 wrapping his arm around a younger Vince.

A loud chime echoes throughout the checkpoint as The
 Inspector tosses his sandwich in the trash and leans into
 his microphone.

THE INSPECTOR
 (into microphone)
 The checkpoint is now open. Next!

INT. IMMIGRATION CHECKPOINT, ARSTOTZKA BORDER - LATER

A green APPROVED stamp comes down on a visa with a loud thump.

THE INSPECTOR
Cause no trouble. Glory to Arstotzka.

THANKFUL IMMIGRANT
Thank you so much.

THE INSPECTOR
(into microphone)
Next!

The Inspector doesn't bother watching him go as he looks back up at the clock, a few minutes left in his shift.

He begins to tally up his day's final earnings.

A pair of hands slide a passport and a citizenship card towards him.

The Inspector pulls away from his tallying to study them without looking up.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
(mostly to himself)
Travis Eustace, 35 years old. Purpose
of trip...

He cracks up.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
Visiting The National Park?

Raising his gaze to examine the fool who thinks he can trick him with such an obvious lie, The Inspector can't help but smirk.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
Is that correct?

The smiling face of a bearded, grizzled, still recognizable VINCE LESTRADE meets The Inspector's bemused gaze.

VINCE LESTRADE
That's right, Inspector.

The Inspector's smirk vanishes.

VINCE LESTRADE (cont'd)
Missed out going before the war.
Figured I'd make up for lost time
now.

Both men recognize each other. They're at a stand still,
trying to evaluate their next steps.

VINCE LESTRADE (cont'd)
Is there a problem?

THE INSPECTOR
The National Park was destroyed
during the war. Your documents are
wrong, sir.

VINCE LESTRADE
Oh, well, this is embarrassing. I'm
actually going to The National Park
Center. I just have really bad
handwriting though. You have to
squint a bit sometimes to make out
what I wrote.

THE INSPECTOR
I can read what you wrote just fine.

VINCE LESTRADE
Well, mind taking one more look at
least? I mean, I deserve that much.
Don't I, Victor?

THE INSPECTOR
Excuse me?

VINCE LESTRADE
I knew you worked at this checkpoint
so I thought why not come back and
see my hardworking cousin on the way
into the country?

Vince nervously smiles as The Inspector slides Vince's
paperwork back to him. Vince reaches out and grabs The
Inspector's hand before he has a chance to let go.

THE INSPECTOR
Vince...

Vince tightens his grip.

VINCE LESTRADE
How's your son?

The Inspector looks hard at Vince.

THE INSPECTOR
I'm sorry. About every-

CLICK.

The barrel of a pistol peeks out from beneath Vince's jacket pointed square at The Inspector's face.

VINCE LESTRADE
Just stamp it green, Victor.

THE INSPECTOR
Vince. Put that down.

Vince's teeth dig into his lower lip, his breathing becoming more labored.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
You're throwing your life away-

VINCE LESTRADE
(whispering)
Stop. You don't get to say that
anymore.

Vince inches closer to The Inspector as his left hand instinctively reaches down beneath the counter.

VINCE LESTRADE (cont'd)
Stamp it. Now.

The Inspector stares straight at Vince, his finger itching to press up on the button below him.

An immense calm overtakes The Inspector as he closes his eyes before reopening them.

THE INSPECTOR
Just do it.

Vince curls his finger around the trigger as tight as he can.

He can't do it.

Backing away, he slowly puts down his pistol on the counter, his hands following.

The Inspector pushes the button. The dull metallic grate comes down between him and Vince.

Ludmila come running in, Olga close behind.

The taller, sullen looking woman rams the butt end of her rifle into Vince's stomach and then his mouth as he falls to his knees.

Blood spills from his mouth as Olga begins to restrain him.

LUDMILA

Olga, take care of this.

Olga nods as Ludmila addresses The Inspector.

The grate comes up as he sees the displeased woman glaring back at him.

THE INSPECTOR

Yes, Lieutenant?

LUDMILA

What the hell happened here, Inspector? Why didn't you call us sooner?

THE INSPECTOR

I apologize, Lieutenant. I-

LUDMILA

Your job isn't to negotiate with murderers, Inspector.

THE INSPECTOR

The gun wasn't loaded, Lieutenant. This man wasn't a threat.

LUDMILA

Olga, the weapon.

Olga hands over Vince's pistol as Ludmila opens the chamber with care.

She chuckles.

LUDMILA (cont'd)

Today's your lucky day, Inspector.

Thrusting it towards The Inspector's face, he sees the back of each bullet glistening.

She empties the rounds into her palm before pocketing the gun.

LUDMILA (cont'd)

I suggest you don't push your luck further. Now carry on.

The Inspector leans into his microphone, not taking his eyes off Ludmila as she stares him down.

Ludmila nods before motioning to Olga.

The younger guard beckons the prisoner towards her superior before Ludmila shoves Vince off.

Olga gives The Inspector an apologetic look as she walks back to her post.

The Inspector tries to maintain his cool as he stares at Vince's blood splattered on the ground.

THE INSPECTOR
(into microphone)
Next!

INT. IMMIGRATION CHECKPOINT, ARSTOTZKA BORDER - NIGHT

With quick precision, The Inspector gathers his personal belongings and exits the booth.

As he locks the door, his photo slips out of a hole in his pocket, landing on the ground.

THE INSPECTOR
Damn it.

Turning around to grab it, a BOOT steps into frame.

OLGA
I got it.

THE INSPECTOR
(hurriedly)
There's really no need.

Before he can stop her, Olga picks it up, handing it to him with a warm smile.

THE INSPECTOR (cont'd)
Thank you.

He snatches back the picture, stuffing it in one of his hole-less pockets.

OLGA
A family photo ought to be framed,
don't you think?

The Inspector ignores her as he walks towards the bus stop, a crowd of people gathering in wait.

OLGA (cont'd)
Did you know Vince Lestrade?

He freezes.

OLGA (cont'd)
Is that why it took so long for you
to call us?

The Inspector purses his lips before he whips around,
walking back over to the attentive woman.

THE INSPECTOR
Olga, I'm just trying to get by like
everyone else. Why are you so
interested in me?

Olga smiles as she takes the man's right hand in her left,
the Inspector staring down at her grip.

OLGA
Because every day I watch you, I
know, deep down, you're more than a
good Inspector. You're a good person,
Victor. And this country needs good
people now more than ever.

Olga pulls away from him, breaking from his gaze as she
walks past.

OLGA (cont'd)
Welcome to the cause.

As the bus pulls up, Olga disappears into the crowd. The
Inspector, eyebrows raised and eyes squinted, feels
something shift in his hand.

A firm piece of paper with the word "EZIC" underneath a
square, shining sun rests in his right palm.

His eyes go wide as he stuffs it in his pocket, turning back
to try to find Olga in the crowd just as the bus pulls away.

The stunned man watches as she departs, waving to him from
inside the crowded vehicle.

He takes a moment to recompose himself, keeping his hands
tucked inside his pockets.

One grips the photo, the other Olga's "gift" as he joins the
remaining throng of people waiting, slipping back into a sea
of anonymous faces.

THE END.