

INSIDE MY HEAD

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Note: this excerpt = opening 8 minutes

Characters

PATIENT: male, mid thirties, heavy set

THERAPIST: female, late twenties, in a sharp suit

Lights up.

A man is pointing a gun at a woman. The man is standing with his legs apart, both hands clutching the gun. His eyes and the gun are trained upon the woman, who is sitting down.

The woman looks calmly up at the man, as though he is not the only object of interest in the room. The man is motionless in his dominant pose.

The woman turns to the desk behind her and picks up a large, expensively bound notebook. She opens the notebook, finds a page and begins to write, glancing occasionally back up at the man, who is now disconcerted at the lack of attention he is getting.

The woman stands up and slowly walks away from the chair, observing the man like a specimen. At first he keeps the gun trained on the empty chair, nonplussed, then moves it to follow the woman as she moves in a slow arc behind him.

She stands holding the notebook at arm's length in front of her, writing. He stands pointing the gun at her. He gestures aggressively with the gun towards the chair, once, twice, but she doesn't respond to his will.

She talks without looking up from the notebook.

THERAPIST. Don't you think it's a little obvious?

PATIENT. Obvious?

THERAPIST. The authoritarian posturing. The phallic compensation.

She looks up from the notebook. The man looks at his gun as if it has wilted, then thrusts it back out at her.

PATIENT. Don't twist this. You don't know what you're talking about.

THERAPIST. Clearly.

PATIENT. You've never met anyone like me before.

THERAPIST. Again, agreed.

PATIENT. I'm not your random crack-up. I'm not here with a messy fucking divorce or an addiction to painkillers or 'cause life's 'all just got on top of me' [*he mimics a whiny self-pity*]. This isn't an act. [*He points the gun upwards in front of his face.*] This is me. This is where I live.

THERAPIST. Interesting. Explain.

PATIENT. You don't need me to. It's all there in your notes. I'm not your average law-abiding citizen.

THERAPIST. And you're comfortable with the badge of sociopath?

PATIENT. If that's what you want to call it.

THERAPIST. But you *know* that's what we call it. Don't you? You're not unintelligent or incurious. You've read the odd Sunday newspaper. You've heard about this particular psychological profile, the man who rejects the rules, rejects social conditioning in all its forms, and you've thought, yes, sociopath, I'll have some of that. It sets you apart from the common man.

As the man responds the woman returns to writing in her notebook.

PATIENT. What can I say? I come from a place where the rules don't apply. We don't talk everything out like— Fuck, what are you writing down?

THERAPIST. Do you want me to stop writing?

PATIENT. Don't lay your judgement on me. Don't think you can shrink me down into one of your little boxes.

THERAPIST. Well do you *want* to be a sociopath or not?

PATIENT. Is that where it comes from? Shrink?

THERAPIST. The derivation, I believe, is from 'headshrinker'. You've heard of headshrinking, haven't you? That custom of certain Amazonian tribespeople to create trophies of the defeated dead. But your metaphor is apposite.

PATIENT. [*Contemptuous.*] Sarky bitch. You get off on that? You think you can control everything you don't understand by giving it a name. Reducing people to Latin labels. You studied for, what, seven years just so you could feel superior to people like me. Am I right? All the sad cases through your turnstyle, a never-ending power trip. And you fell for it, the way it made you feel. You started to believe it was actually true, not just something you and your professional chums had invented as a wall around yourselves.

Pause.

PATIENT. Until today.

The woman lowers her notebook.

PATIENT. Your pen versus my gun.

THERAPIST. Except that my pen is loaded.

PATIENT. Don't make me prove to you that this gun is real.

The woman sits casually on the edge of the desk and puts the notebook to one side.

THERAPIST. But... I'm puzzled now. What did you come here for if I'm not allowed to make notes?

PATIENT. I came here to talk.

THERAPIST. And instead you put on this show of strength. This front. What are you trying to tell me? The gestures are all very well but, really, words are much quicker.

Pause.

PATIENT. You want me to say it? Is that part of the cure?

THERAPIST. Tell me.

Pause.

PATIENT. I want you to help me.

Pause.

PATIENT. I want answers.

THERAPIST. Fine. So we begin.

She gets up and walks around the room. The man, exasperated, follows her with the gun.

THERAPIST. You ask for answers but the answers are inside yourself. We need you to open up, to shed the defences you've taken a lifetime to acquire. We need to get you to—

The man interrupts, waving the gun at her.

PATIENT. Aren't you worried this might go off?

THERAPIST. Go off?

PATIENT. By accident.

She gives him a curious look.

THERAPIST. You've told me you're some sort of gangster. That's what you'd have me believe – you're a man inured to patterns of violent behaviour. And if that's true, if you really *are* such a picaresque character, then I'd trust you to know how to handle the gun. The alternative assumption is that you're *not* that type of person – hence this role is one you adopt to counteract an inherent perceived weakness – hence you're privately petrified of guns and the one you hold now is fake.

Pause.

THERAPIST. Either option satisfies my instinct for self-preservation.

Pause.

THERAPIST. Do you think a man is defined by what he does for a living?

PATIENT. Another little box.

THERAPIST. No. I'm only curious. For a man, I wonder, does it make a difference, how he feels about the job he does?

PATIENT. I had a job once. A job I loved.

THERAPIST. Describe it to me.

PATIENT. I don't want to. I don't want to remember.

THERAPIST. Let me put it another way. Would you rather have a job that you hate, one that marks a renewed grief every weekday morning but which pays well enough for you to afford the luxuries in keeping with your sense of self-image, or would you rather awake with pure joy each day to a job that barely covers the rent on your studio flat and the overdue electric bill?

PATIENT. They paid me nothing on the docks but I never lost the taste for work. *[Beat.]* Eight years since that came to an end.

Pause. The woman waits for the man to speak.

PATIENT. It was outdoors, you see?

THERAPIST. You liked that?

PATIENT. Working in the open air, it feels like proper work, like proper living. And the salt in the air, it's like it's more than your normal air, this is the sea and the land and the cranes and the air and you feel what you've earned in your muscles at the end of the day. That soft ache in your bones that tells you you've done a fine day's work and no one can say otherwise.

THERAPIST. What were your duties?

PATIENT. Whatever I was told. I wasn't after getting the foreman's job or anything like that. Just tell me what needs shifting, what needs lashing down. Show me a chit and have me strike the containers off.

THERAPIST. It was honest work?

The man eyes the woman suspiciously.

PATIENT. I don't know what you're getting at but yes it was. *[Beat.]* It wasn't making someone want something they don't really want. It wasn't sitting at a desk inventing diseases that only you can cure. It was getting stuff from one place to the other. The goods are here, they need to be there, you get them there and you've done something, you've done your job.

THERAPIST. Even if the goods themselves are spurious?

PATIENT. What?

THERAPIST. Your cargo. Did you ever think about what was inside the containers?

PATIENT. It was someone else's job to put stuff in the boxes. Not mine.

THERAPIST. You never questioned whether the stuff from here really needed to go over there? Whether you were really shifting Korean gadgets and Chinese plastic toys that nobody really needed, football shirts stitched in sweatshops for which the demand was entirely fabricated by sneaky marketing ploys?

PATIENT. My job was to move the goods and I moved the goods.

THERAPIST. And what happened?

PATIENT. What do you mean?

THERAPIST. You said it came to an end. Eight years ago.

The man becomes more reflective, talking almost to himself.

PATIENT. I didn't want to join the union. My mates had all joined, they tried to make me. But for me I was fine just doing the job. It was fine for me just the fact that they wanted me to do the job, that they called me back each week to do the next.

THERAPIST. Until the week they didn't call you back?

The woman reaches for her notebook again.

PATIENT. That's what I don't understand. You stay loyal to someone and that's a good thing, right? That's a virtue. I never questioned them, I never rocked the boat, and I was the first they let go.