

THE INSIDE MAN

Matthew Turner

Note: this excerpt = opening 10 minutes

Characters

BORIS: a small middle-aged man, somewhat dishevelled and careworn

CAROL: in her early twenties, she is immaculately made up with matching necklace and earrings; she is wearing a sharp skirt and a blouse with a name-tag

TERRY: mid twenties, large and solid-looking, with dark clothes and big boots

Scene: a store-room, boxes stacked around. Two high-backed chairs in the middle of the stage, back to back. Carol is sitting on the right-hand chair, Boris on the left-hand chair. They cannot see each other, and they are bound to the chairs by thick ropes. Boris is wriggling but he can't get free. Carol is more resigned, even a little bored. There is a large clock on the back wall.

BORIS. It's bad technique.

CAROL. What is?

BORIS. You don't hang around checking under every pile of papers and behind every bookcase. You know what you're looking for, you take it and you're gone.

CAROL. You've robbed many places have you?

Beat.

BORIS. How long do you think they'll keep us here?

CAROL. They? There was only one man, wasn't there?

BORIS. I would have stopped him if I'd known there was only one. And didn't he have a gun?

CAROL. I didn't notice.

BORIS. You can't take a man on if he's got a gun.

Beat. No response.

BORIS. The odds weigh too heavily against you. But I would have done something.

Carol shrugs.

BORIS. I was off guard. You're not expecting... I would have tripped the alarm or something. Did anyone?

CAROL. Not that I know of. Not me.

BORIS. Someone must have pressed the button.

CAROL. What makes you think we've got a button?

Pause. Boris looks around the room agitatedly. Carol stares straight ahead.

BORIS. Try not to worry.

CAROL. I'm not worried.

BORIS. That's the spirit. *[Pause.]* It's Carol, isn't it?

CAROL. How do you know?

BORIS. I saw your name-tag when I was waiting at the counter. Before all the shouting and shoving started. I'm Boris by the way.

CAROL. *[Sarcastic.]* Nice to meet you, Boris.

Pause. Boris nods towards the corner.

BORIS. Do you think we can get a message through to the others?

CAROL. It's OK, Boris. You don't have to *do* anything. We can just sit and wait. It'll be over soon enough.

Pause. Boris begins to speak and then stops himself. He waits and then starts again.

BORIS. So... Carol.

CAROL. Yes Boris.

BORIS. How about you tell me something about yourself.

CAROL. You don't want to know anything about me.

BORIS. Why not? Might pass the time.

Beat. Carol shrugs.

CAROL. What's there to say? I work in a jewellery shop. You already know that. It's a nothing job and there's nothing to it. But without the cash I'll be stuck at my mum's forever.

BORIS. See, that's a start. So where do you want to move? A boyfriend perhaps?

CAROL. Perhaps.

BORIS. Come on, Carol, you don't have to be shy with me.

CAROL. It's not that. It's just... I hardly know you.

BORIS. Yet here we are together, eh Carol? Thrown into each other's orbit by the whim of Fate. Do you believe in Fate?

CAROL. I believe in people.

BORIS. Interesting.

CAROL. People make stuff happen. That's all.

BORIS. Like the people robbing this shop? Eh Carol? Are they steering the wheel of fortune by dumping us in a back room while they make off with diamonds that don't belong to them?

CAROL. Person, Boris. There was only one.

BORIS. Right. Still.

Another pause. Boris is looking around, thinking of something else to say.

BORIS. Your hair.

CAROL. What?

BORIS. The manager. The owners, whoever. Do they make you wear your hair up like that? For a more... professional air.

CAROL. You noticed my hair?

BORIS. I was waiting in line. I notice things.

CAROL. For God's sake, Boris. *[She shakes her head.]* It's so I can show off the merchandise.

BORIS. So the necklace isn't yours?

Carol puts her hand to her neck, as far as she can move it.

CAROL. You think I can afford diamonds, Boris?

BORIS. A perk of the job I guess.

CAROL. You think? Modelling jewellery for rich women to buy. Let me keep them for the weekend and I might agree with you.

That kills the conversation. Boris is frustrated.

BORIS. What's going on? What's taking them so long?

CAROL. I'm sure they know what they're doing.

BORIS. So it's 'they' now. You agree, there was more than one.

CAROL. I didn't say that.

BORIS. You said 'they'. 'They know what they're doing.'

CAROL. I didn't mean... I was only saying... Boris, if we're going to get through this you're going to have to stop doing my head in.

BORIS. I'm sorry, Carol. It's just—

CAROL. Boris, I get it, you need to fill the air to feel a little less useless, and I see I don't have much choice in the matter given our... situation, but please, if you have to talk about something just... *[she shrugs]* tell me about Boris.

Boris perks up.

BORIS. What do you want to know?

CAROL. Nothing really, Boris. *[She shakes her head.]* What do you look like?

BORIS. You didn't see me?

CAROL. I don't remember.

Boris looks over his shoulder then smiles to himself. He can say whatever he likes and she won't know the difference.

BORIS. *[Playful.]* Well what can I say? *[He looks his shabby body up and down.]* Six foot three on a good day... a young 32 and ruggedly handsome... modesty prevails, but you might say I'm coming into my prime.

CAROL. *[Sceptical.]* Is that true, Boris?

BORIS. Would I lie to you?

CAROL. I don't know, Boris. I don't know anything about you. Why were you in the shop? Start with that.

Beat.

BORIS. I can't tell you.

CAROL. Why not?

Beat.

CAROL. I serve plenty of men in the shop, Boris. It's really not that big a deal.

BORIS. But it's a gift. A surprise.

CAROL. Don't worry Boris. Your secret will be safe with me.

BORIS. No I can't.

CAROL. Well I'm not going to beg.

Pause. Boris squirms as he decides whether to tell her or not. Carol isn't bothered.

BORIS. I want to buy a ring.

Beat.

CAROL. Yes.

Beat.

BORIS. It's for my mother.

Carol smiles.

CAROL. Yes.

BORIS. I know. It's strange. I know. But it's just been the two of us since the old man shuffled off. And this would have been their ruby anniversary.

CAROL. I see.

BORIS. Nothing too dear. I only want to thank her for putting me up.

CAROL. You live with your mum?

BORIS. What's wrong with that?

CAROL. Nothing, I'm sure. *[She smiles.]* Something we have in common.

Boris hangs his head. Carol laughs again.

CAROL. Hold on tight and you could pick up your ring for nothing. [*She gestures at the boxes stacked around.*] Pop something nice in your pocket when the cops come to let us out and they'll just tot it up with the rest of the stolen goods.

BORIS. You're not really suggesting...

CAROL. I'm not suggesting anything. I'm just saying, it could be done.

BORIS. Carol, I'm shocked. With what these men have done to us. This indignity. And all because they're too spineless to play by the rules of decent society.

CAROL. OK Boris. Bad idea.

BORIS. And you'd put me in league with these... common criminals. I want nothing to do with men like that.

CAROL. Not 'men' Boris. One man.

BORIS. They caught me by surprise, that's all. It's cowardly really. Let me face them fair and square and they'd never get the better of me.

CAROL. Right Boris.

BORIS. I mean it.

CAROL. I'm sure you do.

BORIS. But what's so special about *this* shop? There are plenty of other jeweller's. It's a large enough building and, yes, it's fairly nondescript from the street. You can pull the job without attracting too much attention. But still, that doesn't mean the haul is worth the risk. So what have they got to hide in here?

CAROL. You're asking me?

BORIS. You'd know, wouldn't you? Any special pieces the owners have got squirrelled away? Uncut stones? Any recent deliveries?

CAROL. Anything like that goes straight into the safe. We signed for some packages yesterday but Mr Thomas said it was none of my business.

BORIS. *[Thinking.]* And where's Mr Thomas now?

CAROL. The guy handcuffed him and took him upstairs when he left us here.

BORIS. Exactly! So that explains the faffing around. They don't just want to raid the cabinets, they want to take whatever beauties are lying in that safe. Maybe that's the prime target after all. And perhaps your Mr Thomas is mounting a defence. The combination isn't as easy to winkle out of him as the rogues had imagined.

CAROL. I hope not. That man looked like he meant business.

BORIS. A coward, Carol. I told you. And a coward crumbles when he's faced down. *[Beat.]* But how did they know about the special delivery? How did they know the safe would be full today of all days?

CAROL. It's not yours to worry about.

BORIS. What do you mean?

CAROL. I mean, perhaps you should focus on the problems you have in front of you. Like getting out of here in one piece.

Boris ponders.

BORIS. You're right of course. But, well, I am inclined to wonder, Carol. I always want to understand.

CAROL. I can see that, Boris.

BORIS. I can't leave a puzzle be.

CAROL. Wait. There's someone on the stairs.

Terry enters. He is wearing a balaclava with large mouth and eye holes, and is holding a large, full sack. He enters from the right and walks past Carol, stepping into Boris's line of sight. As he walks around the stage only one of them can see him properly at any one time.

TERRY. Now listen to me folks. A quick heads-up. I've been having a nice little chat with the manager upstairs...

BORIS. Mr Thomas?

TERRY. If that's his name. And I've... persuaded him to let me have a gander inside that three-inch steel safe he's so proud of. It's funny, you know, you can fit your safe with tungsten bolts and all your anti-explosive devices, but a human being is so much easier to prise open.

Terry laughs. Boris and Carol are both impassive, staring stonily ahead.

TERRY. No?

Terry stares hard at Boris, looking down at him. Boris meets his gaze.

TERRY. You've just got to know which buttons to press. Haven't you?

Pause. Terry stares at Boris and smiles.

BORIS. Shouldn't you be leaving now?

TERRY. Excuse me.

BORIS. If you've cracked the safe what's keeping you? [*Supercilious.*] The police will be here soon.

TERRY. What makes you think that?

BORIS. OK so no one here has rung the alarm, you can be reasonably sure of that, else there'd be flashing lights on the street by now. But sooner or later some passer-by will have noticed the locked door, the deserted shop-front. Someone will have rung the local branch.

Terry shakes his head confidently and smiles again.

TERRY. The police won't be sending a car round. Mr Colbert has taken care of that.

BORIS. Isn't that a little unwise, using names in front of me?

TERRY. That information's worth nothing to you, mate.

BORIS. I'm not your mate.

Terry laughs and takes Boris's chin in his hands. Boris squirms.

TERRY. You think you know better than me how to rob a jewellery shop? So how come you're the one tied to the chair and I'm the one with a sackful of stones?

BORIS. How many shops have you robbed to date?

TERRY. Don't get smart with me, mate. Smart guys make for dead hostages.

Boris snorts contemptuously.

BORIS. Ha! Which gangster flick did you filch that line from?

TERRY. Shut your mouth.

BORIS. I rest my case.