

ROOM FOR DOUBT

Written by

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NB: AT NO POINT IN THE FILM DO ANY CHARACTERS COME CLOSER THAN TWO METERS TO EACH OTHER.

FADE IN:

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

The room is several meters across, dimly lit and dingy. Two chairs are up against one of the bare brick walls. There is an open large steel door in the right hand wall, and barred windows high up another.

PETER Greville (about 20) enters the room and practically marches to its far side with his hands on the back of his head. He wears casual but rugged clothes and carries a large backpack. He has an intelligent, but rather unfriendly, air.

Peter is followed at a distance by CROWTHER (40s) who is pointing a gun at him. He is dressed all in black in a manner that makes him appear authoritative. He looks emotionally detached from the situation, but his face is not brutal.

CROWTHER

And stop.

Peter comes to a standstill inches from the right hand wall.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

Now, turn around.

Peter obeys. Crowther, with his eyes and gun still on Peter, shuts the door behind him.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

All right.

Crowther indicates that Peter may lower his hands, which he does.

PETER

Do you have to keep that thing pointed at me?

CROWTHER

(cold yet sincere)
As if our lives depended on it.

PETER

You can't do this. You have no right.

CROWTHER

I can and I must.

PETER
Do you know what year it is?

CROWTHER
(sarcastically)
I am quite aware of the date.

PETER
Yeah, well it's 2030 and you can't
treat me like this.

CROWTHER
(ignoring the point)
Your name?

Peter remains silent. Undeterred Crowther pulls a (in fact, Peter's) cell phone from his own pocket.

PETER
Hey, give that back.

CROWTHER
Am I right in thinking it is Peter
Greville?

Peter hesitates and then nods.

PETER
Can I please have my phone?

Crowther starts looking at various screens on it.

CROWTHER
A student in political science at
the university here.

PETER
(defiant)
And a very good one.

CROWTHER
How good?

PETER
Well, let's see. I was awarded the
highest scholarship to go on the
course to start with. I came top in
my first and second years, and look
set to do the same in the third.

CROWTHER
Impressive.

PETER
I want to speak to my lawyer.

CROWTHER
(slightly mocking)
You have a lawyer?

PETER
I have my rights.

CROWTHER
Which I will do my best to respect.

PETER
I'll believe that when I see it. I mean what the hell is this about?

CROWTHER
I appreciate not everything will make sense.

PETER
(shouting)
I haven't a clue about ANYTHING. One minute I'm down by the harbor, minding my own business, the next you've sprung out of nowhere, shouted "don't move" and pointed a gun in my face.

CROWTHER
That's just it. I don't think you were "minding your own business".

PETER
What's that supposed to mean?

CROWTHER
That you're not quite as innocent as you look.

PETER
Oh, I am SO innocent, I don't even know what I'm supposed to be guilty of.

CROWTHER
(sighing)
Why can't you just tell me what you were up to?

PETER
(desperate)
Because there's nothing to tell.

CROWTHER
That backpack. Take it off.

Peter hesitates before removing it from his back and holding it.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)
Now, empty it.

PETER
It's private property.

Crowther slightly raises his hand that points the gun.

CROWTHER
(calm but firm)
Please do as I say.

Peter reluctantly unzips the main pocket on the backpack.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)
Side pockets.

Peter unzips the side pockets. He then holds the entire opened backpack upside down but nothing falls out.

PETER
Satisfied?

Feeling bolder, Peter takes a step forward.

CROWTHER
(monumental tone)
Don't move an inch.

PETER
But ...

Crowther continues waving his gun at Peter.

CROWTHER
Just get back against the wall.

Peter obeys.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)
And stay there.

PETER
For how long?

CROWTHER
As long as it takes.

PETER
I want to make a phone call.

CROWTHER
I really wouldn't worry about such niceties.

PETER
Everybody is entitled to one.

CROWTHER

Well, if you're going to be like that, you already made it.

PETER

What??

CROWTHER

I first encountered you at ten to one in the morning.

PETER

And?

CROWTHER

You made a phone call at five to.

PETER

(distressed)

How can you say that?

CROWTHER

I could easily get it verified that a call was made on your cell phone at that time.

PETER

Because you made it.

Crowther shrugs.

PETER (CONT'D)

You force me to throw my phone to the ground. Then as I continue to walk with your gun at my back, you make a call.

(beat)

And who the hell were you calling anyway?

CROWTHER

(coolly)

You didn't hear?

PETER

(sarcastically)

Oddly enough the act of you whispering kind of prevented it.

(beat)

And then you march me in your, oh so, friendly fashion for I don't know how many kilometers.

CROWTHER

Two actually.

PETER
 So where are we?
 (beat)
 And who the hell are you?

After a silence of several seconds, Crowther's own cell phone RINGS and he answers it.

CROWTHER
 Harris? OK, you're outside.
 (beat)
 And they're with you? Good.

Crowther unlocks and opens the door with a key he has. HARRIS (about 30), dressed in a smart suit and with a friendlier air than Crowther, enters.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)
 (to Harris)
 OK, I'm going to have a word with them. You keep an eye on him.
 (to Peter)
 And you stay exactly where you are.

Crowther leaves the room, shutting the door behind him. Harris gives Peter a faint and awkward smile.

PETER
 Do you have a gun too?

Harris takes a gun from inside his jacket and gives an apologetic look that says "afraid so".

PETER (CONT'D)
 And if I walked towards you would you use it?

HARRIS
 (slowly; diplomatically)
 I would advise you against taking the action where you might find out.

PETER
 So are YOU going to tell me why I've been arrested?

Harris hesitates.

PETER (CONT'D)
 I guess you're too scared as well.

Peter nods towards the door to suggest Crowther is also intimidating Harris.

HARRIS
 It's more that you haven't been.

PETER
So he has no right to do any of
this?

HARRIS
I wouldn't say that.

PETER
Who is he?

HARRIS
His name is Crowther. Beyond that
there's not much I can tell you.

PETER
I take it he's not a policeman.

Harris shakes his head.

PETER (CONT'D)
A soldier?

Harris gives an equivocal expression that neither confirms
nor denies Peter's assertion.

PETER (CONT'D)
(tentatively)
So he does have certain powers?

HARRIS
Undoubtedly.

PETER
Has he remained within them?

HARRIS
He's a good man.

PETER
A good man wouldn't behave like
this.

HARRIS
Why, what's he done to you?

PETER
Oh, only pointed a gun at me for no
reason and marched me here.

HARRIS
Did he beat you? Hurt you? Touch
you even?

PETER
No.

HARRIS

Then you have no reason to believe
he isn't.

PETER

Even if he is, does that excuse him
doing things he shouldn't?

Harris suddenly looks quizzical.

PETER (CONT'D)

Well, does it?

HARRIS

That's just it, I don't know.

PETER

YOU don't know??

HARRIS

Look, I believe in Crowther. I'd
trust him with my life.

PETER

And the "but"?

HARRIS

I also believe in the law.

PETER

I'm glad to hear it.

HARRIS

And whether he is within its
confines depends very much on why
you're here.

PETER

You don't know that either??

HARRIS

All I know is half an hour ago I
received a call from Crowther
asking me to come straight here.

PETER

And you didn't ask why?

(beat)

So this phone call. Was it at about
five to one?

HARRIS

(thinking)

Definitely past the hour.

PETER

(to himself)

So who was his first call to?

HARRIS

Well, I guess I ought to introduce myself. My name is John Harris, basically just a policeman.

PETER

Just a policeman?

HARRIS

Sorry?

PETER

Well, I find it hard to believe Crowther would be mixing with "such lowly figures".

HARRIS

Our paths have crossed on a few ... shall we say, inter-disciplinary cases over the years.

PETER

So when he rang you tonight was he following official procedure or just calling a pal for a favor?

HARRIS

I trust him enough to respond when he asks.

PETER

Then why are you telling me all this?

HARRIS

I still believe in fair play.

PETER

Or maybe you're trying to throw me off the scent. Maybe you know a lot more than you're letting on.

HARRIS

I can assure you that is not the case.

PETER

Would you tell me if it was?

(beat)

OK, you said whether Crowther is acting lawfully would depend on what I'm supposed to have done.

Harris nods.

PETER (CONT'D)

So what have I done?

Harris shrugs.

PETER (CONT'D)

Can you give an example of a crime that might fall one side of the line, and one that would land the other?

Harris remains silent. Peter takes a deep BREATH.

PETER (CONT'D)

Well, tell me this. Is there any misdemeanor someone might have committed where on the face of it Crowther was overstepping the mark, but where you would still choose to support him?

A pensive expression suddenly comes across Harris's face. There is a KNOCK on the door.

CROWTHER (O.S.)

OK, I'm coming in.

The door opens. Crowther enters and points his gun at Peter.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

(to Harris)

Given you any trouble?

HARRIS

None at all.

CROWTHER

OK, Peter, there's someone here to see you. Mr Harris and I shall let you speak in private, but we will just be outside.

Crowther glances at Harris to say "be alert" and Harris raises his gun in response.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

I therefore urge you not to try to get past as we leave or re-enter. Any hint of an attempt, and we will have no choice.

Crowther waves his gun.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

So, whatever happens, please stay on that side of the room. Do you understand?

Peter nods.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

Now, the conversation you have will not be recorded and this room is not bugged.

PETER

Oh, sure.

CROWTHER

You'll just have to take my word for that.

PETER

I don't.

CROWTHER

(ignoring this comment)

I have, however, asked this person to tell me what you say. There is no compulsion for them to do so, and no undue pressure will be applied. I am merely counting on them appreciating the seriousness of the situation, and choosing to cooperate.

PETER

What if I specifically instruct them not to repeat what I divulge?

Crowther does not respond.

PETER (CONT'D)

OK, so my safest course is to say nothing.

CROWTHER

I simply hope you will tell them the truth, and that they will tell me.

PETER

The truth about what?

CROWTHER

What really happened tonight.

Crowther opens the door, and he and Harris exit the room all the while pointing their guns at Peter.

A second later JESS (about 20, attractive) stands in the doorway. Her clothes look functional and she wears a long coat, as if what she is wearing has been thrown on at short notice.

Peter sees her and his eyes pop out of his head.

PETER

Jess.

The door closes behind her.

PETER (CONT'D)

You don't know how good it is to see you.

Peter takes a step forward but stops when he sees Jess take a corresponding one back. Peter moves back to the wall where he was, but throws his arms out, inviting Jess to come over to him.

PETER (CONT'D)

Well, come on, give me a hug.

JESS

I don't think so.

PETER

Why not?

JESS

Edward told me to keep my distance.

PETER

Edward? You mean Crowther??

JESS

He said that was his surname.

PETER

But I'm your boyfriend. What exactly am I going to do?

JESS

I don't know, but he said it in a way that made me listen.

PETER

You mean he threatened you?

JESS

No.

PETER

Then what did he do?

JESS

Why does everything with you have to be about strength and threats? Can't you just recognize sincerity when you see it?

PETER

Oh, please.

JESS

Sometimes when someone speaks, you can just tell it's in your interests to do as they say.

PETER

Yeah, but not mine.

JESS

You've got him all wrong. He was very courteous.

PETER

Oh, wonderful. He scares me to death, holds me here, but none of that matters just as long as he's polite to my darling Jess.

JESS

Why do think he's this big ogre?

PETER

(sarcastically; staring around the room)
Oh, I've really no idea.

JESS

Well, if he was why would he call me here?

PETER

So it WAS you he rang.

JESS

He found the most frequently used number on your phone, gave me a call, asked who I was ...

PETER

And you just told him?

JESS

(ignoring the question)
... and asked me to come to this building he described as soon as possible.

PETER

(jumping on what she has just said)
So you know what this place is.

JESS

He just told me how to get to it.

PETER

What does it look like?

JESS
You did come here too.

PETER
Yeah, facing straight ahead with a
gun at my back.

JESS
Well, it's a big brick building.
There's corridors, a few rooms that
I guess are like this, others
without heavy doors. Has a derelict
feel, and seems very remote.

PETER
So if I shouted do you think
someone would hear?

JESS
I doubt it.

PETER
How did you get here?

JESS
Taxi.

PETER
Is it waiting?

JESS
At those prices?

PETER
Anyone else here?

JESS
As far as I know, just Edward and
John.

PETER
First name terms with them all.
What a good strategy Crowther for
getting her to do exactly as you
say.

JESS
So you'd rather I hadn't come?

PETER
Of course not, but you seem very
trusting of him.

JESS
Some people just give you that
confidence.

PETER

Don't you see he's trying to drive
a wedge between us?

JESS

Why would he want to do that?

PETER

I don't know, but it sure is
working. You haven't exactly
offered any sweet words of comfort
since you got here.

JESS

I'm just wondering what the hell
you've done.

PETER

Nothing.

JESS

Really??

(beat)

Look, I realize misunderstandings
may have arisen, but I don't think
you could have ended up here
without having done something.

PETER

He really has got to you, hasn't
he?

Jess SIGHS.

PETER (CONT'D)

Do you have your cell phone?

JESS

Edward took it.

PETER

Well, when you get it back, will
you ring ... I don't know, someone,
to tell them I'm here.

JESS

(non-committal)

Perhaps.

PETER

(taken aback)

Just what did he say to you out
there?

JESS

He asked if I knew anything about
what you were doing tonight.

PETER
Which you didn't.

JESS
Then he said he would leave us alone, but that he hoped I would report back to him what you ...

PETER
Yeah, I know that bit. So do you really believe this place isn't bugged?

JESS
I'm inclined to.

PETER
I know it doesn't look like it would be, but Crowther's approach doesn't make sense. If he promised we were speaking in confidence, but then recorded me, then he might get somewhere. But by telling us he's going to ask you, I just know to say nothing.

JESS
It's the latest interrogation methods. We've been studying them in psychology.

PETER
So this IS an interrogation.

JESS
All interrogate means is to question systematically.

PETER
So what started as a simple conversation is already a systematic questioning.

JESS
(sighing)
The point is torture never got to the truth, because people just lied to make it stop.

(beat)
The latest philosophy is if you are entirely honest with people, they might feel inspired to be honest back.

PETER

Still sounds manipulative. Crowther gets you to repeat what I said rather than speak with me directly, so that I'm lulled into divulging more than I should.

JESS

It still leaves me with the option of what to volunteer.

PETER

Yeah, until he literally beats it out of you.

JESS

He promised me there would be no pressure.

PETER

And you believe him?

JESS

I think I do.

PETER

Well, now we know Crowther's game we can play it to our advantage. We make up exactly what we want him to think, and you tell him that.

JESS

No.

PETER

Why not?

JESS

His appeal to honesty. It's kind of compelling.

PETER

You've fallen for his trap.

JESS

It just shows his approach works.

PETER

Well, it strikes me he's relying on our honesty while being totally dishonest himself.

JESS

That's where we'll have to agree to differ.

PETER

Agree to differ?? You seem to be placing this sadistic maniac above your own boyfriend.

(beat)

OK, if I were to tell you about tonight, and if I were to specify certain things I did not want you to repeat, would you promise not to do so?

JESS

So there is something to tell.

Peter nods reluctantly.

JESS (CONT'D)

Which means, whatever else is said, you're not entirely innocent.

(beat)

Even though you were swearing blind to Edward you hadn't a clue why he had taken you. Who's the dishonest one now?

PETER

Well, do you promise?

JESS

All right.

PETER

OK, everything I say after this I do not want you to repeat.

JESS

(sighing)

I agreed to specific things, not the whole story.

PETER

Then I'm saying nothing.

JESS

And what good will that do you?

PETER

A hell of a lot more than saying something.

JESS

Really? Because if they want information they're not going to release you 'til they get it.

PETER

Perhaps, but I can't take the risk.

JESS

All right. I promise I won't tell Edward anything that could land you in trouble AND serve no purpose other than landing you in trouble.

PETER

What kind of a promise is that?

JESS

The kind that means I want you to tell ME what you were up to.

(beat)

Look, if it was just some petty, stupid thing you did that, though technically a crime, is of no consequence to anyone, then I'll keep quiet.

PETER

Thank you.

JESS

But I don't think it was.

PETER

What's that supposed to mean?

JESS

I'm not sure. Maybe you did something really bad, or maybe you did something very small, only it's had unforeseen consequences.

Peter inexplicably starts LAUGHING.

JESS (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

PETER

I guess Crowther thought you were going to be the charming girlfriend who would just sweet talk everything out of me.

JESS

Well, it's hard to be that when you've been such an idiot of late. And I need to know why.

PETER

Look, I can truthfully say I've done nothing really bad.

JESS

Good.

PETER

And what I did wouldn't have had any unforeseen consequences.

JESS

How would you know if they're unforeseen?

PETER

(ignoring the question)

So, based on your promise that you won't tell Crowther anything that would serve no purpose other than landing me in trouble, you won't be saying a word.

JESS

Provided what you've done has had no repercussions.

PETER

It can't have done.

JESS

Then come on, tell me.

Peter looks resolved to open up to Jess, but only momentarily.

PETER

When you were on the other side of that door, could you hear what we were saying?

JESS

Of course not. Now, please.

Peter draws a deep BREATH and begins to talk in a quiet voice.

PETER

All right. You know that naval ship in the harbor right now?

JESS

I heard you mention it.

PETER

Well, a few of us thought it would be an opportune moment to protest against government spending on the navy.

JESS

(unimpressed; sarcastic)

Oh yes, the most pressing problem facing our country today.

PETER

Every dollar that goes into it is a dollar taken away from health, education, welfare ...

JESS

There's bigger scandals in the world than that.

PETER

Well, the opportunity was there so we decided to take it.

JESS

"We"?

PETER

(hesitantly)
Me, Ben and Tony.

JESS

Those idiots??

PETER

They're my friends.

JESS

I knew you'd been hanging around them too much.

(beat)

So come on, what did you do?

PETER

Hung a banner from the side of the ship.

JESS

What??

PETER

Saying "While we sail, all else will fail".

JESS

That's a pathetic slogan. How big was this thing?

PETER

A third of the length of the ship.

JESS

And that's what you were doing tonight?

Peter nods.

JESS (CONT'D)

Alone?

PETER

Yes.

JESS

So those two really landed you in it.

PETER

It was a team effort.

JESS

How?

PETER

Ben had the idea, Tony made the banner.

JESS

And you took all the risk. You were lucky you weren't actually caught on the ship.

PETER

I was never going to be.

Jess glances around at the room in which he has ended up now.

JESS

Oh, really?

PETER

Getting nabbed after I'd got clear was just unfortunate. Couldn't have been anticipated.

Jess SIGHS.

JESS

So how did you get away with it that long? Aren't there cameras all over these things?

PETER

Not at the moment. They've all been taken out for a refit.

JESS

But anywhere on a ship there's bound to be someone.

PETER

We'd worked it all out. In the afternoon they were most off-guard, and there was one mooring chain I could climb and get aboard that was out of the line of vision of any lookout.

JESS

Until one of them moves two meters to the side.

PETER

OK, there was some risk, but what do you ever gain without it?

JESS

Less than what you lose when it goes wrong.

PETER

Anyway, I sneaked into this tiny room -- some kind of equipment store -- and stayed there for the next nine hours.

JESS

(exasperated)

Anyone could have found you there.

PETER

We'd observed it from afar, and people only went in it on certain days.

(Peter wonders whether to say the next part)

Although ...

JESS

What?

PETER

Well, just before I came out again, a sailor entered. He didn't see me -- I was hidden among all this stuff -- but he literally brushed against me.

JESS

And you say there was no chance of you getting caught.

PETER

Then at half past midnight I sneaked onto the deck, quickly found a toilet and then hung the banner over the side, again working out the lookouts' blind spots. Then I climbed down the chain to come ashore ...

JESS

(sarcastically)

... and quietly walked away.

PETER

And that's the thing. I was far enough away from the ship that I really thought it was mission accomplished. Then suddenly out of nowhere comes Crowther.

JESS

Far enough away that it wouldn't be obvious it was you who'd hung the banner?

PETER

I think so.

JESS

Yet Edward knew?

PETER

Someone must have seen me leave the ship and called him.

JESS

But if you were a distance away how would he know he had the right person?

PETER

Because there was no one else around.

JESS

No one?

PETER

What do you expect after midnight?

JESS

There are people down there at all hours: the homeless, students, insomniacs.

PETER

Well, the only people I saw in the whole time Crowther marched me here were two figures he shouted to to move aside.

JESS

You think the area had been cleared especially?

PETER

What do you mean?

JESS

That they were onto you, and got everyone out the way.

PETER

But, if so, I'd have been on the ship when they started the operation, so why didn't they catch me there?

(thinking)

Still, the way they responded to Crowther, those figures could have been guards on the edge of a restricted area.

JESS

Well, all I can say is you total idiot.

PETER

For exercising my right to peaceful protest?

JESS

In such a way that will land you in trouble for nothing.

PETER

How can you say that?

JESS

Oh, come on, someone would have spotted and removed that banner within half an hour. So it'll never have any impact, but you'll pay dearly.

PETER

There's no laws against freedom of speech.

JESS

Yeah, only trespassing. You climbed aboard a naval ship, you revealed its weaknesses, you don't think they'll throw the book at you?

Peter stares at the floor.

JESS (CONT'D)

I just don't get you, Peter. You stand head and shoulders above your peers. You could go to the top as a political analyst, a government advisor. Why throw it all away?

PETER

You're being a bit melodramatic.

JESS

Really? You have a criminal record there's certain jobs you'll never get.

PETER

Yeah, well maybe I was just tired.

JESS

Of what??

PETER

Always being the analyst who slaves for years over things that get ignored. Why couldn't I be the activist for a change, see some action, have some fun?

JESS

I think you've kind of answered that question.

Jess indicates the room.

PETER

Well, Ben and Tony said ...

JESS

Exactly, THEY said it. They've sucked you into THEIR world and landed YOU in it.

PETER

Well, maybe I wanted to be sucked in. Maybe it wasn't them duping me, but me searching for something.

JESS

Part of life is knowing what you're good at and sticking to it. You're just not cut out for all of this.

PETER

Well, I might get away with it yet. There's really nothing that points to me.

JESS

Is that so?

Jess points to Peter's backpack on the floor.

PETER

It's empty. Proves nothing.

(beat)

In fact, the only thing that could give me away is you. And you said you'd keep quiet.

JESS

I said ...

PETER

That you'd do so if what I'd done had no wider consequences.

JESS

But it could. If they think it wasn't you they might keep searching and arrest someone innocent.

PETER

Who? No one else was around.

JESS

I will try to say nothing that incriminates you, but I am not sending them down false roads.

PETER

So you'll say nothing at all?

JESS

I'll do what I can.

PETER

Don't mention Ben and Tony.

JESS

Come on, they deserve to take some of the heat.

PETER

Yeah, but they could confirm the plan. They could also make out I was the prime mover.

JESS

All right, I'll do my best.

PETER

Who knows, play our cards right, in a few hours we could both be snuggled up together back home.

JESS

I don't know.

PETER

You think it's impossible?

JESS

I mean I don't think I know you any more. I'm certainly not sure if I feel the same way.

PETER

(stunned: distraught)
Because of what happened on one evening?

JESS

(shaking her head)
You were never the most appealing guy. Most of my friends asked why on earth I was going out with you.

PETER

Gee, thanks.

JESS

But I knew. Sure you could be sullen, petulant, insular one minute, confrontational the next, but I saw beyond that. I saw an exceptionally intelligent kid who worked hard, and would go on to do great things. I saw someone who, for all their faults, had good intentions and was constantly striving to fulfill them.

PETER

But if I was too sullen or insular, you should be happy I'm embracing new things.

JESS

No, because you've put all of your worst traits into them. A guy who's difficult when he's working at his desk, I can handle. A guy who unleashes his petulance on stuff like this ...

Jess shakes her head.

PETER

Look, when you get out of here, will you call someone?

JESS

I've already said, I'll have to see.

PETER

I still don't get why.

JESS

Edward wants to keep everything quiet, and if I think he's got good reasons for that ...

PETER

Well, it might help if he gave you those reasons.

JESS

I guess I could call your parents.

PETER

No thanks.

JESS

Why not?

PETER

You know we're not that close. They'd only go off on one about how stupid I've been.

JESS

Wouldn't they want to know?

PETER

They're on the other side of the country, so you'd be worrying them for nothing. They couldn't get here, and they'd be the worst people to try to liaise with any authorities.

JESS

Well, if that's what you want.

PETER

OK, if you've heard nothing from me in twenty-four hours call them, but let's hope this is resolved before then.

JESS

Long before.

Jess KNOCKS hard on the door.

JESS (CONT'D)

(shouting)

OK, we're done.

The door opens, and Harris enters.

HARRIS

Everything go OK?

Neither Peter nor Jess responds.

HARRIS (CONT'D)

(to Jess)

Mr Crowther is waiting to receive you.

JESS

Thank you. Goodbye Peter.

Jess smiles faintly at Peter, who tries to smile back. Jess leaves the room. Harris stands in front of the still open door. He holds his gun but does not point it at Peter.

PETER

(sarcastically)

You might want to shut that.

HARRIS

(kindly)

I think we'll be OK.

PETER

You've changed your tune.

HARRIS

Just thought you could do with a little air.

PETER

No, I can see it in your eyes. Something's changed.

Harris BREATHES OUT.

HARRIS

It's just that ... I really don't know if Crowther has the right to hold you here.

PETER

Still?

HARRIS

He's talked around enough subjects, but not really about any of them.

PETER

Why would he keep you in the dark?

HARRIS

Because this whole thing may be above my rank?

PETER

If everything's done under the cloak of darkness, does rank come into it?

HARRIS

In any case, it's put me in a quandary.

PETER

Why?

HARRIS

On the one hand, you haven't been charged with anything, so technically we can't hold you.

PETER

So what would you do if I just walked?

HARRIS

There's nothing I could.

PETER

And Crowther?

HARRIS

At the moment nothing either. He's down the other end of the corridor talking to your girlfriend.

PETER

In that case ...

Peter starts to step forward.

HARRIS

Wait a second.

Peter finds himself obeying the instruction and stopping.

HARRIS (CONT'D)

Like I said, I couldn't stop you but I would hope that you choose to stay.

PETER

Because of what Crowther would do to you?

HARRIS

(shaking his head)
He'd huff and he'd puff for sure, but he'd know I'd done nothing wrong.

PETER

So why do you want me to stay?

HARRIS

It's just a feeling.

PETER

Well, forgive me if I'm not going to risk my future on your feelings.

HARRIS

There's only one reason Crowther would hold his cards so close to his chest.

PETER

Which is?

HARRIS

That this is big.

PETER

All the more incentive for me to walk.

HARRIS

Much bigger than you.

PETER

Meaning?

HARRIS

That whatever you've done may be small, but the repercussions could be anything but.

PETER

Why is everyone obsessed with unforeseen consequences?

(beat)

Look, I would be incapable of doing anything that could cause such damage. I'm an intelligent guy.

HARRIS

Anyone can do the most innocent thing, only for it to unexpectedly spiral out of control. It doesn't even mean it was their fault.

PETER

In which case, I could be in the clear?

HARRIS

Let's suppose you were appearing in court. If you'd done nothing, you'd go free. If you'd committed a major crime, you'd serve a long sentence. But what if you'd done something small, only the consequences happened to be huge?

PETER

I'd pay for the specific act I'd committed but no more.

HARRIS

In legal terms, yes. But what if the circumstances meant that you had to be, er, punished further?

PETER

You're planning to throw me under a bus?

Harris grimaces, suggesting that the answer could be "yes".

PETER (CONT'D)

In that case, I'm definitely getting out while I have the chance.

HARRIS

But what if it was necessary for all concerned -- you included -- for you to be thrown?

PETER

(confused)
Can you give a hypothetical example?

HARRIS

No, because I can't think of one. Which is why I'm so keen to find out what's happened in reality.

PETER

And so keen for me to stay?

HARRIS

(nodding)
If there are major problems you may hold the key to minimizing them.

PETER

(thoughtfully)
So this isn't just about me?

HARRIS

Precisely.

PETER

How wide are we talking?

HARRIS

Would it affect your decision if you knew?

PETER

Possibly.

HARRIS

Well, stick around and find out.

Peter SIGHS.

HARRIS (CONT'D)

But I've said all there is to say.
I can't hold you here any longer
against your will. The choice is
yours.

Harris steps aside from the door, leaving Peter's path to it clear. Peter stares at the door. He looks at Harris's face whose expression is extremely passive. He moves to take one step forward, then stops.

PETER

All right, you win.

HARRIS

You mean you'll stay?

PETER

Looks like it.

HARRIS

Excellent.

(beat)

Now, Crowther will be back soon,
and be careful. He can make you say
things you don't intend.

PETER

I thought you wanted the truth to
come out.

HARRIS

I do, but you've been good enough
to stay. So it's only fair I advise
you to let it come out on your
terms rather than his.

PETER

(sarcastically)

And here I was thinking we were all
in this together, in pursuit of one
noble goal.

(beat)

All the same, thanks.

HARRIS

You're welcome.

Crowther suddenly appears at the door, and enters.

CROWTHER

(sternly)

OK, Harris, I'll take it from here.

HARRIS

Thank you, Sir.

Harris leaves the room, and Crowther shuts the door behind him. Crowther takes one of the chairs and half throws it towards Peter, though not in a threatening manner. He then takes the other, puts it near the door and sits on it. His tone is just slightly softer than before.

CROWTHER

So you decided to stay.

PETER

Sorry??

CROWTHER

Well, Harris gave you the choice.

PETER

You put him up to it?

CROWTHER

No, but I know what he's like. A stickler for the rules.

PETER

Good job someone is.

CROWTHER

Just for the record, I would have seen if you'd left.

Crowther holds his gun aloft.

PETER

Did Harris know that?

CROWTHER

No, he thought I was at the other end of the corridor.

PETER

So this was some kind of test?

CROWTHER

If you like, though one pursued through necessity. You see, I did need to be absent to interview your girlfriend.

PETER

Where is she?

CROWTHER

I sent her home.

PETER

(not knowing if he should
ask what she said)

And?

CROWTHER

She's absolutely fine. I'm taking it on trust she'll tell no one about this, but she seemed to accept the importance.

PETER

So if I had tried to walk I'd have been back in a second?

CROWTHER

And life would have got a lot more difficult.

(beat)

But you didn't. You, thinking you had the opportunity to leave, chose not to. That counts for something.

Crowther points at the chair by Peter and, with a gesture, invites him to sit. Peter lifts the chair upright and does so.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

Now, I cannot stress how important it is I get to the bottom of this. So I am happy to have received at least some indication of your intention to cooperate.

PETER

(defiant)

Yeah, well don't get too excited.

CROWTHER

I'm serious, I need your help. You see, your girlfriend didn't reveal a lot.

PETER

(perking up)

Oh.

CROWTHER

She simply said "I do not imagine our conversation revealed anything that would contradict what you already believe to be the case".

PETER

(to himself)

Good old Jess. I should never have doubted you.

CROWTHER

The trouble is I don't know what she thinks I believe.

(beat)

(MORE)

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

Which is why I've got to get it from you.

PETER

Well, you still haven't convinced me I'll benefit from saying anything at all, but I'll give you one thing. You weren't lying when you said this place wasn't bugged.

CROWTHER

Did you really think it was?

PETER

Jess said you believed an appeal to honesty was the best way to get what you wanted.

CROWTHER

A way. Not the best.

PETER

What do you mean?

CROWTHER

That this place isn't set up for eavesdropping.

(beat)

Well, look at it, it's just a dingy room in a dingy building that's hardly been used in years. Even the front door's missing its lock.

PETER

So why take me here?

CROWTHER

It was just the nearest vaguely fit-for-purpose place I could grab at short notice.

PETER

You mean it's not an official establishment?

CROWTHER

It's one we use if we have to.

PETER

Sounds like even the place you're holding me in isn't legal.

CROWTHER

Well, count your blessings. It draws no attention and that could help you as much as me.

PETER

How?

CROWTHER

(ignoring the question)
Your girlfriend did say one other thing.

PETER

What?

CROWTHER

She pleaded with me to go easy on you. She said whatever you'd done, it was a moment a madness, it wasn't the real you. She asked what the harm would be in letting you off.

PETER

A very good question.

CROWTHER

Well, I can't decide on anything until I know what you did.

PETER

You mean you really are in the dark?

CROWTHER

Maybe. Or maybe I just want to hear it from you.

PETER

And Jess really said nothing else?

CROWTHER

Not a word.

PETER

(formal tone)
In that case, after the most careful consideration, I have concluded that my interests are best served by doing the same.

CROWTHER

(sighing)
I thought we were making progress.

PETER

I just don't get you. It doesn't seem like you play by the book, so why aren't you coming over here and attempting to beat it out of me?

CROWTHER
 (philosophically)
 Because it would do no good, and
 potentially much harm.

PETER
 In what way?

CROWTHER
 I like to look at the big picture,
 so it's not enough for me to know
 what you did. I need to know why
 you did it, I need to know who you
 are.

(beat)
 So tell me what did you want from
 life?

PETER
 What kind of a question is that?

CROWTHER
 One I want you to answer.

Peter leans back in his chair, but then composes himself once more. The following lines are delivered with a sense of improvisation as Peter has never been asked this precise question before. It is also clear, however, that the ideas contained within them are ones he has pondered many times.

[NB: The following monologue has been included in order to vary the pace, but it should be shorter than three pages. Much of the below speech should therefore be cut, but it is produced in its entirety here to retain maximum flexibility when deciding what to retain and lose].

PETER
 I guess it's easier to start with
 what I didn't want. I didn't want
 wealth. Money just wasn't the be
 all and end all for me. And I
 didn't want fame.

(beat)
 Or did I? Because I wanted to be
 known for something. Yeah, that
 always weighed pretty heavily on my
 mind. Being known.

(beat)
 Others might call it a search for
 fame, but that word just demeaned
 the quest. To me, it was a search
 for identity, just to be known for
 having done something
 extraordinary; to walk into a room
 and for everyone instinctively to
 know that this was the guy who had
 ... well, whatever.

(beat)
 (MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

If I were an artist I wouldn't need to be Leonardo da Vinci, the creator of the most famous painting in the world. But it would matter that I could put onto canvas something that no other person was capable of putting; so that people could just look and say "that's Peter Greville's brush stroke. Only he could have painted that". Then it didn't need to be the best painting ever. If no one else could create it, it automatically became perfect in its own right. I had no need to conquer the world. If it was recognized as being unique to me, I might achieve just one thing: a single painting, a sole novel, one simple but defining act.

(beat)

Well, that was the theory at least, because when I look at my own life, whatever I did achieve, it just wasn't enough. When I was seventeen I applied for this politics scholarship at the university here. Only one was awarded, so if I got it I would stand out from the crowd, be known everywhere I went as THE politics scholar. There were hundreds of applicants, and I remember thinking as I went through the endless rounds of forms, exams and interviews, that if I just got this, I'd be on a high for the rest of my life.

(beat)

And then I did. And I was happy, don't get me wrong. I spent days pinching myself to remind me that I had actually done it. But if even then I had to tell myself to enjoy the moment, how far was I from feeling permanently on cloud nine?

(beat)

I know it sounds ungrateful, because people were pleased for me, but whatever interest they showed, I wanted more. When I received the news I threw a party, but for a night that was supposed to be my night it felt like an anticlimax.

(laboring the point)

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

I just couldn't get over the fact that even on that night, for ninety per cent of the time ninety per cent of the guests were talking to other people about totally different things. I'd just assumed an achievement like that would automatically make me the life and soul of the party, always having the witty turn of phrase, always being a delight to talk to. If I couldn't get everyone's undivided attention on that night of all nights, it said little for me standing in the limelight for evermore.

(beat)

Then when I went to university, I soon discovered that not everyone had even heard of my scholarship. And if it was ever mentioned, it never sustained interest for more than two minutes. That fell pretty short of the lifetime I'd imagined, and I soon learned that in terms of conversation there wasn't much mileage in the honor.

(beat)

Of course, that was three years ago and one can change a lot in that time, but I'm not sure my desires have ever really altered. Indeed, the fact that this scholarship didn't suddenly see my life slot into place only led me to set higher goals that would. I'm set to come top of the year by a long way, but already my tutors are telling me that's just the stepping stone to a PhD. Does that mean another three years of hard slog before I gain fulfillment? But what if the title of doctor still doesn't make people take notice? What if my first publication doesn't? What if nothing ever does?

(beat)

You might say all this proves is I always like to be on the move, to set myself a challenge, but it doesn't feel that way. I'm not a naturally hard worker, and to do what I've done has required real effort. It was always the thought of the result, and the attention it would garner, that drove me on, not the enjoyment of the doing.

(beat)

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

OK, so I'm not exactly a shirker, but if there had been a short cut to gaining an identity I'd have gladly taken it. I guess that's why I liked the idea of doing one outstanding thing.

(beat)

You probably think that, after describing my life like this, I realize my dreams will never be fulfilled, but no. I still believe if I could just get the right achievement under my belt then I'd be happy; that my life would consist of never-ending days of pleasure, always in interesting situations with interesting people. I'd be known, I'd be loved and I would enjoy myself.

(beat)

I still maintain that I didn't seek wealth, because I never strove to make money. I just took it for granted that once I'd made it I would automatically have the means to do whatever I wanted.

(on a different tack)

And I still don't feel I sought fame for one reason. I always felt that my achievement had to be worthwhile. Though going on a reality TV show might make me a household name, I never considered it. Conversely, writing a book that showed everyone some better way to live had major appeal, but still I wanted to enjoy the spoils of having written it. Even if it didn't quite transform our planet, I was determined that whatever I achieved should at least be at no one else's expense. I just had this idea that my advancement, though serving me well, would also be the world's.

(almost summarizing it to himself)

So it seems I wanted a lot from life. I wanted to be known for something; something that was unique to me, something that was worthwhile, and yet something that didn't require too much effort.

(almost apologetic)

I guess that's not the answer you were expecting.

CROWTHER

(quietly)

I wasn't expecting anything. I just wanted to hear what you had to say.

PETER

(rather bemused)

Well, I'm glad you seem happy with my proclamation.

Peter suddenly seems to snap out of the almost trance-like state he has by now entered through "telling his story".

PETER (CONT'D)

Why what DID I want from life? I'm twenty for heaven's sake. I'm not past it just yet.

Crowther leans back in his chair.

CROWTHER

(philosophically)

OK, you say you want to do something worthwhile that makes you stand out from the crowd. Is that true?

PETER

Why would I lie?

CROWTHER

I just have this feeling you may think that, but deep down you wish to remain in obscurity.

PETER

Based on ... ?

CROWTHER

Well, if you did what I think you did tonight, you couldn't even tell anyone it was you.

Crowther stares at Peter who in turn tries to give little away.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

So either you don't seek recognition after all, or you didn't think this escapade through.

PETER

(deliberately vague in tone)

You can do something with no intention of putting your name to it, but kind of knowing your hand will be recognized.

CROWTHER

By whom?

PETER

Those whose opinions you value.

CROWTHER

But that's different from saying you want the world to know you.

PETER

Is that a problem?

CROWTHER

For me, rather the opposite, but I need to be sure it is that and not just poor thinking.

PETER

Do I strike you as a poor thinker?

CROWTHER

It's just that the potential act in question doesn't seem like it could ever shake the world in the way you'd like.

PETER

"Potential act in question?" What the hell does that mean?

CROWTHER

Look, I'm not saying you ever thought what you did tonight would be the thing that gave you lifelong fulfillment. But I still can't help feeling it reveals your wider desires.

PETER

You've lost me now.

CROWTHER

Well, to me, what you'd gain from the act is not widespread adulation, but a warm feeling inside. The knowledge yourself that you'd done something good. So I just wonder if that's all you need.

Peter shakes his head firmly.

PETER

And I should know.

CROWTHER

Sometimes we know ourselves the least.

PETER

OK, your version would make me sound a far more magnanimous person. Now, someone might lie -- even to themselves -- to look less selfish, but not more. So if I'm sticking to my account, it's probably because it's true.

Crowther rises and walks around the back of his chair.

CROWTHER

Do you know the trolley problem?

PETER

Oh, please.

CROWTHER

So that's a "yes"?

PETER

Only about fifty different versions.

CROWTHER

Well, let's keep this one simple. A trolley is hurtling down a track and is about to kill five people. It is in your power to flick a switch that would put it onto another track where it would only kill one. Do you?

PETER

(firmly)

Yes.

CROWTHER

OK, there's one person on a bed and you have the opportunity to take organs from their body and put them into five dying people, thus saving five lives for the price of one. There are no complications, you just have to flick a switch. Do you?

PETER

(as firmly as before)

No.

CROWTHER

You seem very sure.

PETER

I know all these scenarios. In the first you're minimizing the effects of an accident that will happen whatever you do. In the second, you're actively taking one person's life in order to save others.

CROWTHER

Thank you.

PETER

How is this helping you? I've only given you the answers everyone does.

CROWTHER

What if in the second scenario you could save ten thousand people with one life?

PETER

Never going to happen. No one has that many organs.

CROWTHER

Sure, but in principle would you actively take one life if you could save that many?

PETER

(more considered)
I think I would.

CROWTHER

But how is that structurally different from the other scenario? In both you're saving more lives than you take.

PETER

It's just the sheer number involved.

CROWTHER

So would a thousand people be persuasive enough? What about ten?
(beat)
Or fifty?

PETER

(getting rattled)
I could only decide if a real situation was in front of me.

CROWTHER

Now, what if the first decision with the organs was left to the person who would die if they flicked the switch?

PETER

If they choose to sacrifice themselves, fine. But they shouldn't feel pressured to save the five lives, or guilty if they decide not to.

CROWTHER

But would they be under a greater obligation if they could save ten thousand?

PETER

I think so.

CROWTHER

If you were present, would you be telling them they had to make the sacrifice?

PETER

Strongly persuading them.

CROWTHER

How strongly?

PETER

Very.

CROWTHER

And what if the person giving their life was you?

PETER

(thoughtful)

To save the lives of five people? I'd want to know how long each was likely to live after their transplant, what their quality of life would be ...

CROWTHER

So that's not a definite "no".

(beat)

And if it was ten thousand?

PETER

Then I'd have no choice.

CROWTHER

You really mean that?

Peter hesitates for several seconds.

PETER
(quietly)
No, I don't think I do.

CROWTHER
(genuinely taken aback)
You didn't rule it out with five people, you said ten thousand was an overwhelming number and that you'd try to persuade anyone else.

PETER
Well, maybe I am just irrational -- or selfish.

CROWTHER
Maybe.

PETER
It's just that if I die that's it, that's the end.

CROWTHER
Which is better than it being the end for ten thousand.

PETER
But they're not me. If I'm gone, for all intents and purposes it's the end of the world.

CROWTHER
Now, that is self-centered.

PETER
But if I'm not here to witness it, then this world kind of doesn't exist.

CROWTHER
You're not religious then?

PETER
I don't know, but I don't think this is a matter of being religious or not.

CROWTHER
Well, it's hard to escape the conclusion you think you're above other people, and that the rules don't apply to you.

PETER
But what are the rules here?
(beat)
(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

Anyway, at least you'll believe me now that I want to enjoy the spoils of having done something extraordinary.

CROWTHER

What if you died saving the ten thousand, but everyone knew about it: hailed you a hero, wrote songs, erected statues?

Peter shakes his head as if the idea doesn't appeal. His subsequent response, however, feels quite considered.

PETER

I just can't picture doing something that wouldn't enable me to bask in the glory. I'm a writer, an analyst, I'll never pursue anything so dangerous that I might end up dead.

CROWTHER

All these are just hypothetical questions to gauge how you might react in real life.

PETER

Exactly. None of us know how we would. Personally, I take comfort in the fact it's unlikely I'll ever be faced with such a terrible dilemma.

CROWTHER

But if you think it so improbable things will ever get that bad for you, why pin all your hopes on the equally unlikely chance they'll work out perfectly?

Peter remains silent and bows his head. Crowther starts pacing up and down his side of the room.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

Well, I've tried to elicit all I can.

PETER

(sarcastically)
And you're still none the wiser?

CROWTHER

(shaking his head)
I'm not totally in the dark. But I still have to gamble on who you really are.

PETER

What's that supposed to mean?

CROWTHER

It means I'm not going to get any further with this type of questioning.

PETER

So no more games?

CROWTHER

Pure straight talking.

Crowther stares Peter in the face.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

The thing is I do know what you were doing tonight.

Peter sits upright.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

And I wouldn't say I was angry. It's hardly a major crime; in fact, I have a certain sympathy for it.

PETER

Really?

CROWTHER

That fishing boat down in the harbor. Owned by the nasty, exploitative Strillhirst Group.

PETER

Is someone in a position of authority supposed to say that?

Crowther shrugs as if to say "who cares?".

CROWTHER

They've been fishing with unethical practices for years: pay their workers peanuts, conditions on board stink.

(beat)

So I know the tradition, it was around when I was your age.

PETER

I haven't a clue what you're talking about.

CROWTHER

No need to act all innocent. As a way of protesting, people would sneak aboard, steal some fish and give them to those in need. It made no difference in practice, but the THOUGHT of digging into their profits while helping the less fortunate had a certain appeal.

A small smile comes across Peter's face, but he tries to hide it.

PETER

And you want me to admit to doing that tonight?

CROWTHER

(nodding)

Your backpack's empty so I have no definitive proof.

PETER

Well, there were fish in there, but I discarded them when I saw you approaching.

CROWTHER

I thought I took you by surprise.

PETER

I spied you in the distance. I didn't know you were coming for me, but still I panicked.

CROWTHER

How far would this have been from where I caught you?

PETER

Fifty meters, a hundred?

CROWTHER

So if I went back to that spot, within a hundred meter radius I'd find them?

PETER

(shrugging)

It wouldn't be easy. They were in a plastic bag to stop my backpack smelling, and I threw it quite a way.

CROWTHER

In which direction?

PETER
 (shrugging)
 No idea. For all I know, it could
 have landed in the water.

CROWTHER
 I need to get the whole area
 checked out.

PETER
 Why?

CROWTHER
 (not answering)
 I've got to make some calls, but
 I'll just be outside.

Pointing his gun at Peter, Crowther opens the door with his
 key, exits and shuts it behind him. Peter rises from his
 chair, picks up his empty backpack and stares at it.

PETER
 (to himself)
 Why didn't I say I was heading
 towards the boat? They could never
 get me on something I hadn't done
 yet.
 (beat)
 Still, a minor offense that he's
 sympathetic towards.

Peter smiles but then stares around the room and his face
 drops once more.

PETER (CONT'D)
 So why all this then?

The door opens again and Crowther appears pointing his gun at
 Peter. He shuts the door behind him.

CROWTHER
 I've got someone to check out the
 area.

PETER
 I'm sure they won't find it.

CROWTHER
 I really hope they do.

PETER
 It's that important?

CROWTHER
 Deadly so.

PETER
 Why?

CROWTHER

All right.

Crowther sits and gestures for Peter to do the same.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

You remember a decade ago COVID-19 swept the planet?

PETER

Yeah, I was ten.

CROWTHER

And you know how contagious it was?

Peter nods.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

Well, there's something new out there. It looks like another coronavirus, only this time far more deadly and transmissible.

PETER

What??

CROWTHER

And it's on that fishing boat.

PETER

(suddenly relaxed)

Oh, the fishing boat? And you think that I could have ...

Crowther is confused at Peter's apparent brightness.

CROWTHER

You don't sound that worried.

PETER

Probably because I'm not.

CROWTHER

That might change after what I have to say.

Peter sees Crowther's face.

PETER

OK, carry on.

CROWTHER

By early yesterday morning five on board were seriously ill. The company wanted to hush it up, but someone managed to alert the authorities.

(beat)

(MORE)

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

By the time the boat arrived in port that evening one was dead. We got scientists, protected up to the hilt, on board, ran whatever tests we could. It was all done in a hurry, but the conclusions seem clear enough.

PETER

Which are?

CROWTHER

The coronavirus is on the fish, and has been caught by the fishermen.

PETER

So they're all going to die?

CROWTHER

Well, we can't let anyone off the boat.

PETER

That's brutal.

CROWTHER

What else can we do? It seems the death rate for people who get it is twenty per cent.

PETER

That's infinitely higher than COVID-19.

CROWTHER

And on average every individual who gets it will give it to another fifty. So even if the original person doesn't die, plenty of others will.

PETER

How could they know all this so quickly?

CROWTHER

They've been studying these viruses intensively for ten years now. They know what to look for.

PETER

Well, from what you've described, it doesn't sound much like a coronavirus at all.

CROWTHER

It's evolved and that's what makes it so deadly.

(MORE)

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

It's as equally likely to spread via surfaces and creatures as the air.

PETER

But you've touched my cell phone.

CROWTHER

I sprayed it first.

PETER

So that's why you told me to throw it to the ground.

CROWTHER

Yes, but I'm still surprised I found you where I did. As soon as we knew, we cleared the area.

PETER

As you led me here, you shouted to two people. Were they guards on the edge of the zone?

CROWTHER

(nodding)

I don't know how you got past any of them to enter it.

PETER

Well, that's because, as it turns out, I wasn't on the fishing boat.

CROWTHER

(not believing him)

You said you were.

PETER

Only because I thought that was more innocuous than what I was actually doing.

CROWTHER

Oh, really?

PETER

(taking a step forward)

It's true.

CROWTHER

(severely)

Get back.

Peter sees Crowther's gun pointing at him once more.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

You pretty much admitted you'd never sacrifice yourself for anything. Now, you're proving it.

PETER

All I'm proving is we rarely face the dilemmas you described.

CROWTHER

So what were you doing in the area?

PETER

That ship in the harbor.

CROWTHER

I know the one. We've been in touch with the Captain, he's keeping everyone on board.

PETER

I was hanging a banner on that, protesting against naval spending.

CROWTHER

(sarcastic; unbelieving)
Yes, the most pressing issue facing the country today.

PETER

I sneaked aboard in the afternoon and hid for hours. I didn't see any guards because nothing had been sealed off yet.

CROWTHER

How convenient.

PETER

Well, you won't find any bag of fish in the harbor.

CROWTHER

You said yourself it could have landed in the water.

PETER

But the ship can prove I was there.

CROWTHER

How? Its cameras are out.

PETER

I know, but it can verify the banner.

CROWTHER

What did it say?

PETER

"While we sail, all else will fail".

CROWTHER

That's pathetic.

PETER

(annoyed that Crowther's reaction is exactly the same as Jess's was)

Oh, what??

CROWTHER

(pointedly)

Sounds like the kind of thing you've just made up.

PETER

Well, get it checked out.

CROWTHER

And when they don't find it I fully expect you to say it must have blown away.

PETER

No, I fastened it very securely.

CROWTHER

All right.

Pointing his gun at Peter, Crowther opens the door with his key.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

(shouting)

Harris.

Crowther comes back a few steps into the room. Harris enters.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

Mind this one for a few minutes, will you?

HARRIS

Sure.

CROWTHER

And don't ask him anything.

HARRIS

Nothing at all?

CROWTHER

Make all the small talk you like, but don't press him on anything.

HARRIS

OK.

CROWTHER

(to Peter)

And don't divulge anything we've discussed. There are some things he's better off not knowing.

Crowther leaves the room shutting the door behind him.

HARRIS

(faintly)

So, how's it going?

PETER

(unconvincing)

All right.

Harris sees the equivocal expression on Peter's face.

HARRIS

Are you OK?

PETER

I don't know. On the one hand, I should be out of here very soon.

HARRIS

Oh, really?

PETER

But given what I've just heard, my release is the least of anyone's troubles.

(beat)

Sorry, I shouldn't be burdening you with any of this.

HARRIS

Don't worry about it.

PETER

You still don't seem to know very much.

HARRIS

And it sounds like Crowther wants it to stay that way.

PETER

(genuine)

I don't blame him. I think he's looking out for you.

HARRIS

You've warmed to him?

PETER

He believes in what he's doing.

HARRIS

Absolutely.

PETER

Look, I just want to say you were kind to me from the start. Thank you.

HARRIS

That's all right.

PETER

No, it's really appreciated.

Peter takes a step forward and stretches his arm out wanting to shake Harris's hand.

HARRIS

Could you stay back, please?

PETER

(nearly laughing)

No, it's OK. I know why Crowther wanted me to keep my distance, and, well, the reason doesn't apply anymore.

HARRIS

He gave me orders to ensure you stay over there, and until he rescinds them ...

PETER

This coming from the man who was going to let me walk?

(beat)

But out of respect for you ...

Peter moves back against the wall.

PETER (CONT'D)

(cheerily; miming a handshake)

It'll only delay things by a few minutes.

The door opens and Crowther steps into the room, with a grave expression on his face.

CROWTHER

(to Harris)

Could you please leave us?

HARRIS

Yeah, sure.

CROWTHER

Now.

Harris disappears out of the door, shutting it behind him. Crowther points his gun at Peter.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

Give me one reason why I shouldn't shoot you right now?

PETER

Sorry??

CROWTHER

It's one thing to tell me nothing when you hadn't a clue what this was about. But now you know you pose a threat, and you just don't care.

PETER

I don't get it.

CROWTHER

I've called the ship. There's no sign of a banner.

PETER

That can't be.

CROWTHER

After all I've done for you.

PETER

Yeah, well, what exactly have you done for me?

CROWTHER

I was one of several people charged with patrolling the sealed off area tonight, under strict instructions to shoot anyone I saw. If any of the others had got to you first, you'd be dead by now.

PETER

What??

CROWTHER

They said anyone in the vicinity had the potential to kill so many, we just couldn't take the risk.

PETER

That's inhuman.

CROWTHER

Which is why I didn't. I deemed that, since the evidence suggested keeping a two meter distance was safe, I could get you here and work out if you'd been anywhere near the boat.

PETER

You were breaking the rules for me?

CROWTHER

And now I wonder why.

PETER

Who exactly are you?

CROWTHER

Part of an elite military unit. We're called in when speed and stealth are required.

PETER

And you would have had the right to kill me?

CROWTHER

In the situation we're handed, we do whatever's necessary.

PETER

Completely lawfully?

CROWTHER

The powers that be give us certain permissions, and turn plenty of blind eyes.

PETER

So you should have shot me?

CROWTHER

(nodding)

Everything I've done tonight has been an attempt to ensure I don't have to.

PETER

Wow.

CROWTHER

My first hope was I wouldn't have to by ascertaining you were nowhere near the coronavirus.

PETER

But I wasn't ...

CROWTHER

And my second was that if you were,
I wouldn't have to shoot you
because you'd decide to do the
honorable thing yourself.

Peter stands stunned silent.

PETER

So you really don't believe I
wasn't on that fishing boat?

CROWTHER

No. And given all your lies, I
don't know if you'll choose to do
the right thing.

PETER

Who else knows we're here?

CROWTHER

Just Harris, your girlfriend, the
ship's Captain and my Chief
Commander.

PETER

And how much does this Chief
Commander know?

CROWTHER

Well, I only told him about you
once I got you here.

PETER

Was he angry?

CROWTHER

More exasperated. I've a bit of a
reputation for being the soft one
in the unit.

(beat)

That's why I couldn't tell him
sooner. He'd have just said
"shoot".

PETER

Woah!

CROWTHER

He's got to look at everything. He
can't let being nice to one person
disrupt a whole operation.

PETER

"Being nice"?? This is my life.

CROWTHER

And he'd say you can't protect one life if it threatens countless others. I can't blame him. It's his job.

PETER

But is it, or is it just how he is?

CROWTHER

He couldn't do his job if he weren't that level-headed. Most people would think him ruthless, but if he said I had to die for the greater good I'd accept the need.

PETER

So why did you defy him for me?

CROWTHER

I just thought if I could get you here first, I could buy us some time.

PETER

And?

CROWTHER

In the end, it's made no difference.

PETER

It's made the world of difference, because really I wasn't there.

Crowther sees something genuine in Peter's eyes.

CROWTHER

How can I believe you? There's no banner, no one took it down, and you're not going to tell me it blew away.

PETER

Perhaps someone removed it and the Captain doesn't know.

CROWTHER

You find something like that on a naval ship, you report it.

PETER

But until you've asked every single sailor, you don't know that.

CROWTHER

I've told the Captain to contact me if anything else comes to light.

PETER

Will he be questioning everyone?
Making a mass announcement at
least?

CROWTHER

I think you're clutching at straws.

PETER

What's the alternative for me?

Crowther looks incredibly awkward.

PETER (CONT'D)

Well, if I've nothing to lose.

Peter takes a determined step forward.

BANG. Crowther has fired his gun and a bullet has hit the wall to one side of Peter.

CROWTHER

One more step and I won't be
missing.

A shocked Peter moves back against the wall. Crowther becomes calmer, sits down and invites Peter to do the same.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about all this, but maybe
now you can understand. Stealing
fish is a minor crime ...

PETER

I didn't ...

Crowther hushes Peter with a hand gesture.

CROWTHER

... but, in this instance, it's had
the most major repercussions. It's
hardly your fault, but there's no
way I can let you go.

PETER

Well, what's your evidence for all
of this? You can't just expect me
to take your word for it.

Crowther digs into his pocket and produces a small tablet. He crouches and gently throws it across the floor. It lands by Peter's chair.

CROWTHER

This is all our analysis on this
coronavirus.

Peter bends down, picks up the tablet and looks at it.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)
It's live data.

PETER
(reading)
Yeah, it says three fourteen. God,
is that really the time?

Peter gazes intently at the tablet and then starts pressing the screen as if moving to others.

CROWTHER
Do you want me to talk you through
it?

PETER
No, I'm OK.

CROWTHER
It's quite complicated stuff.

PETER
I'm pretty hot on data analysis.

CROWTHER
So you see what it's saying?

PETER
(reluctantly)
Yes.
(beat)
And it looks too detailed to be a
hoax.

CROWTHER
Why would we make something like
this up?

PETER
You might want to make it look
worse than it is to convince me.

CROWTHER
This is coming straight from the
scientists. Do you really think I'd
have the skills to manipulate it?

Peter shakes his head. In terms of the science, he accepts what he is being told. He momentarily reaches his hand out to offer the tablet back to Crowther before realizing that would be a bad idea and putting it in one of his pockets.

PETER
So what's your plan for me?

Crowther gives an anguished expression.

PETER (CONT'D)
The time scale for doing it?

Crowther remains silent.

PETER (CONT'D)
Is there any urgency to act? Can't you just leave me here?

CROWTHER
As far as we can tell with this new coronavirus, once you've got it, you're potentially contagious forever.

PETER
Then couldn't you quarantine me? Even imprison me if it helps.

CROWTHER
What kind of life would that be?

PETER
Better than the alternative.

CROWTHER
So every day someone brings you your food, someone else comes for another reason, and it only takes one occasion on one day for you to come closer than two meters and ...

PETER
Well, can't you keep me here long enough for them to question everyone on board?

CROWTHER
(sighing)
There's no point, I know you're lying.

PETER
Well, if you think that, how come you're ... showing me any sympathy at all?

CROWTHER
Because you're frightened. And, for what it's worth, I don't blame you.

Peter begins to CRY.

PETER
You talk like it's all over for me, but even if I had been on that fishing boat why kill me?
(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

Would I really have been the only person who had had contact with those on board?

CROWTHER

Quite possibly "yes".

PETER

And you really think that virus originated on those particular fish on that specific boat? You don't think maybe it got onto them from elsewhere?

CROWTHER

That may be, but it's not the point. Every person who has it will infect fifty others, and each of those will give it to another fifty. So two rounds and that's two thousand five hundred people. Multiply that by fifty and you're already over a hundred thousand.

PETER

(sarcastically)

And by ten rounds you'll have infected more people than there are in the entire world.

CROWTHER

I know all that, but the most conservative estimate suggests if you walk free today ten thousand will die.

PETER

I couldn't be held responsible for ten thousand deaths.

CROWTHER

It's not a matter of who's to blame. It's just a simple fact that that many will die who would otherwise live.

Peter puts his head in his hands.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

So you do accept where I'm coming from?

PETER

Yes, but it doesn't apply because I wasn't there.

CROWTHER

I have to act assuming you were.

PETER
 (jumping on this)
 So you do have some doubt?

Crowther looks pensive.

CROWTHER
 I can't base my plans on you not
 being there when there's no
 evidence to support the claim.

PETER
 But there's also no evidence to
 suggest I was.

CROWTHER
 Maybe not, but the risks all tilt
 one way.

Suddenly there is a KNOCK on the door. Crowther rises from
 his chair.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)
 What is it Harris?

RIGGS-OWEN (O.S)
 Chief Commander Riggs-Owen. Can you
 open up? I'm fully protected.

Crowther jumps out of his skin on hearing who it is, and
 opens the door with his key. RIGGS-OWEN, in a protective suit
 that covers his entire body with a transparent visor so his
 face is visible, enters the room.

CROWTHER
 (saluting)
 Sir.

RIGGS-OWEN
 Never mind all that.
 (to Peter; quite kindly)
 So you're the one who's been
 causing all the trouble?

Peter instinctively stands when he is spoken to.

CROWTHER
 Actually Sir, he's been no trouble
 at all.

RIGGS-OWEN
 I'm sure.
 (cold, but not
 unsympathetic)
 That's why we like you to shoot
 them on sight. Because once you
 look into their eyes, it's
 impossible.

CROWTHER

Sir, this is a rather unexpected visit.

RIGGS-OWEN

The rest of the operation seems under control, so I thought I'd come here and give you the news.

CROWTHER

News?

RIGGS-OWEN

Well, it looks like this one was telling the truth.

Peter BREATHES OUT with relief.

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

I've just heard from the ship's Captain. After you called him, he got everybody up, explained the situation, and a crew member came forward.

PETER

You see.

RIGGS-OWEN

Just after midnight, he went into this equipment store to return a rope. He took a walk around the deck for twenty minutes, and then saw the banner. He decided to take it down and draw no attention.

CROWTHER

But it would be his duty to report it.

RIGGS-OWEN

Apparently, this sailor's a bit of a maverick. He saw it as a student prank, thought the perpetrator could end up in more trouble than the crime merited, so chose to hide it.

CROWTHER

But he's produced it now?

RIGGS-OWEN

Oh, yes.

PETER

Thank goodness for that.

RIGGS-OWEN

So that's the first news.

CROWTHER

And the rest?

RIGGS-OWEN

When this sailor came forward, he also admitted to something else. The rope he was returning to the store, he'd just used to sneak aboard the infamous fishing boat. Apparently, it's a tradition to steal fish as a way of protesting against the company's ethics.

CROWTHER

I know it, but he was under instruction to stay on board.

RIGGS-OWEN

(shaking his head)

He was already off the ship, hiding out somewhere, when the order came through. So now everyone on board either has, or could have, this coronavirus.

PETER

Every single one?

RIGGS-OWEN

When they're all crammed on the same vessel, we work to that assumption.

CROWTHER

(to Peter)

But you kept your distance from everyone the whole time you were there. So maybe ...

PETER

(melancholic)

No, I didn't. That sailor who went into the store. That's where I was hiding, he brushed against me.

CROWTHER

Maybe we could verify if more than one went in there this evening.

PETER

(shaking his head)

The times work out. It was him.

RIGGS-OWEN

In that case, you both realize what needs to be done. I'll leave you to sort out the details.

(to Peter)

I don't know you, but I don't think you'll let me down.

(to Crowther)

And I'm certain you won't.

CROWTHER

(saluting once more)

No, Sir.

Riggs-Owen turns to leave, but then turns back again.

RIGGS-OWEN

Oh, one other thing Crowther. There's no evidence to suggest this virus can be caught if you're not closer than two meters to someone, but we have to err on the side of caution. The protocols just formulated mean that by having been in the same room as this chap without protection, you need to be treated the same way.

CROWTHER

(with no emotion)

Yes, Sir.

RIGGS-OWEN

Sorry about that. You know it's for the greater good.

Crowther remains silent.

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

Has anyone else been in this room? I've seen someone in the building -- he seemed surprised to see me all dressed up -- but ...

CROWTHER

(slow but firm)

No. No one else has been in here.

Peter looks at Crowther, but says nothing.

RIGGS-OWEN

Well, all the best with it.

Riggs-Owen exits the room, closing the door behind him. Crowther stands stunned silent. There is a quiet dignity in his face, but he also looks as if he is struggling to hold it together.

PETER
Are you OK?

CROWTHER
(faintly)
Yeah.

PETER
I am so sorry.

CROWTHER
There was no way you could have anticipated this.

PETER
But if you'd just shot me, you wouldn't be here now.

CROWTHER
I knew when I didn't I was gambling, and when you gamble you sometimes lose your own stake.

PETER
And there I was thinking it was all about me.

CROWTHER
It's not about either of us. It's about the people on the boats who've already got it. It's about those who don't have it, who we can save ...

PETER
Please don't just shoot me.

CROWTHER
You can't leave.

PETER
I know, but please don't end it like that.

CROWTHER
You really want to prolong this?

PETER
My worst nightmare is suddenly to cease to exist. I know what needs to be done, I just need to do it my way.

CROWTHER
All right.

PETER

If only I can get my head around it, see it make sense to me.

CROWTHER

I understand.

PETER

So how much does it fulfill what I wanted? I wanted to do something worthwhile.

CROWTHER

What could be more worthwhile than saving ten thousand lives?

PETER

But am I saving them or just ensuring they don't die?

CROWTHER

What's the difference?

PETER

If there are ten thousand people in a building and I stop a plane going into it, I've saved those lives. But the people I'm saving aren't identifiable, they're hypothetical.

CROWTHER

If they live rather than die they're no less real.

PETER

I guess.

(beat)

I wanted my achievement to be unique to me.

Peter shakes his head.

CROWTHER

But it is. All the people on those boats are bound by various laws of the sea. They have to stay.

PETER

And you?

CROWTHER

I'm bound by my Chief Commander's orders. You're the only one doing this out of choice.

PETER

It doesn't feel like I have much of a choice.

CROWTHER

Well ...

PETER

Does this mean you can't actually make me?

CROWTHER

Let's just say I'm counting on you making yourself.

Peter looks thoughtful and then moves on.

PETER

And I didn't want to slave for years to do that extraordinary thing.

CROWTHER

Box ticked.

PETER

Though suddenly I'd give anything to have the option of working hard for the next fifty.

(beat)

And I wanted to enjoy the spoils of what I'd done.

Peter gazes downwards, knowing this goal will certainly not be achieved.

CROWTHER

I can ensure your memory is honored.

PETER

How?

Crowther digs into a pocket and produces a paper.

CROWTHER

I've written a statement, which I can leave behind.

PETER

But won't the authorities want to hush all this up?

CROWTHER

If it spreads anyway, they might not be able to.

PETER

So I may get to become famous after I die if the thing that none of us wants to happen happens.

CROWTHER

I'll leave the message, and whether anyone acts on it is as out of our hands as whether this virus ultimately spreads.

PETER

I wouldn't bother.

CROWTHER

The more I hear you talk, the more I'm convinced you don't crave the limelight at all.

PETER

I'm still self-centered. Here you are, doing all you can to comfort me, while going through exactly the same yourself.

CROWTHER

That doesn't matter.

PETER

(philosophically)

Now, on my own I might have been responsible for ten thousand deaths. But if we'd walked out of here together would we have infected twice that number, or caused five thousand each?

CROWTHER

Who knows?

PETER

And if this whole thing is bigger than us, why did you save Harris?

CROWTHER

Because there really is no evidence you can catch it from more than two meters away. He'd be dying for nothing.

PETER

Which means you are too?

CROWTHER

That's just how it is. You should always expect more from yourself than from anyone else.

Peter nods thoughtfully, knowing that Crowther's words also apply to him.

PETER

All the same, you could argue with Harris that, though the risk is minuscule, the number of lives threatened means it's not one you can take.

CROWTHER

Then where do you stop? If Harris needs to die, does that mean your girlfriend has to?

PETER

Oh God, Jess, of course.

(beat)

Maybe there is one thing you could do for me?

CROWTHER

What?

PETER

If I write a letter to Jess will you ensure she gets it?

CROWTHER

You'll have to make sure you don't say anything to suggest she was here.

PETER

So that's a "yes"?

Crowther nods.

PETER (CONT'D)

It hadn't been going well between us. But if I could just apologize for doing some stupid things, and tell her how much I love her ...

CROWTHER

I'm sure she'll find it a comfort to know the sacrifice you made.

PETER

I thought I wanted the world to love me. Now, I realize just one is enough.

CROWTHER

What about your family?

PETER

I'm not that close to my parents, but ... I'll write something for them in this letter.

CROWTHER

Now the main thing is to get Harris out of here.

PETER

Of course, but without him, how do we get anything to Jess?

Crowther holds up the note he has already written.

CROWTHER

This explains everything -- without saying anything we shouldn't. Do you want to add a few words?

Crowther throws the note and a pen to Peter.

PETER

Do we still need to keep our distance?

CROWTHER

Force of habit.

Peter picks them up and starts writing frantically, resting on his chair. Crowther takes his cell phone and makes a call.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

Harris? OK. In two minutes I want you to come to this room, but do not enter. Outside will be a letter. Before you even pick it up spray it with disinfectant ... What? No, it doesn't matter if it gets soggy. Then leave straight away. Is that clear?

(beat)

I want you to get that letter to Peter's girlfriend. Her number will be on it.

Crowther looks at Peter who immediately scribbles the number on the note.

CROWTHER (CONT'D)

Do not ever mention tonight to anyone who doesn't ask. If someone in authority does, you can say you were here, but you never entered this room, OK? And tell the girl the same. Neither of you ever set foot in here.

(beat)

I'm sorry, no time for questions, goodbye.

Crowther ends the call. He sees the note that Peter has now left on his chair and takes it.

Crowther opens the door with his key, which he leaves in the lock. He exits the room momentarily and returns without the note, shutting the door behind him.

PETER

So what can I do for you?

CROWTHER

Sorry?

PETER

You've spent all this time thinking about me. It's your turn now

CROWTHER

Well, I don't have any family, there's not many people to miss me.

PETER

Work colleagues?

CROWTHER

Harris perhaps, but this is a pretty strange job. Most regular soldiers saw me as shady, those who worked in the unit labelled me soft.

PETER

There's no shame in showing compassion.

CROWTHER

But there's been so few opportunities to get close to anyone.

(beat)

And as my Chief Commander has made clear, duty is the only thing that matters.

PETER

Well, if you ask me he's a bastard. He didn't even equip you with protective gear tonight.

CROWTHER

Which would hardly be conducive to speed and stealth.

(beat)

No, I don't blame him for anything. It's how we have to operate.

PETER

How can you be so stoical?

CROWTHER

In my job it's part of the training. I'm impressed with how you've come to terms with this.

PETER

I guess I'm not such a selfish so-and-so, after all.

CROWTHER

(thoughtfully)

You know, deep down I never thought you were.

PETER

Some people are great at hiding the evil in them. Have I actually been masking the good?

CROWTHER

I expect those who knew you well saw it.

PETER

(gently)

Yeah, all three of them.

(smiling)

Well, I think we could do with a little self care.

CROWTHER

What do you suggest?

PETER

Why don't we go on board one of the boats to live out our days? With permission from your Commander, and an escort so we put no one at risk.

CROWTHER

It's a thought.

PETER

They must have provisions, and, if they've any sense, they'll just eat, drink and be merry.

CROWTHER

And we could tell them about your sacrifice ...

PETER

... OUR sacrifice ...

CROWTHER

... and maybe be hailed as heroes.

PETER

Nice idea.

CROWTHER

Yeah.

Both smile, but then a reality check hits them.

PETER

Ain't going to happen, is it?

CROWTHER

(shaking his head)

Riggs-Owen would never agree, risks too much attention ...

PETER

Well, in that case, just do it.

CROWTHER

Sorry??

PETER

Shoot me now.

CROWTHER

I thought that was your worst nightmare.

PETER

I've got where I need to be, I know why I'm doing this, so there's no point prolonging the inevitable.

CROWTHER

I can't do it.

PETER

You're a soldier and you've never killed?

CROWTHER

Not someone I've got to know.

PETER

You really should have done it at the start.

CROWTHER

I've done everything humanly possible to avoid this, yet still it comes ...

PETER

No, you're not killing me, I'm killing myself. I'm just asking you to pull the trigger since I imagine you're a better shot.

Crowther looks more distressed than ever.

PETER (CONT'D)
Please, just do it.

CROWTHER
All right.

Peter and Crowther stand upright, and Crowther points his gun at the side of Peter's head.

They both stand for several seconds in this position, though it seems like an eternity. Then suddenly Peter says ...

PETER
No, stop.

CROWTHER
What??

PETER
Don't do it, not like this.

CROWTHER
I thought you'd ...

PETER
So did I. But now I really stare death in the face, I don't feel fulfilled, I just feel empty.

CROWTHER
What more can I do?

PETER
I don't know.

CROWTHER
This isn't easy on me either.

PETER
I'm not TRYING to make it harder.

CROWTHER
I'm sorry, I'm just going to have to do it.

PETER
Please don't.

CROWTHER
Can't you see we're tearing ourselves to shreds? I can't let it carry on, I've got to end it now.

PETER
No, I beg you.

Crowther points his gun at the side of Peter's head. For all his protests, Peter finds himself glued to the spot, though his face becomes more and more fearful.

Once more, they stand for several seconds in this position. Then Crowther turns the gun to point it at his own head and FIRES. He falls dead to the ground.

Peter hears the shot and is startled to discover he is still there. He turns and sees Crowther's dead body lying on the floor. Peter stands stunned silent, not knowing what to do. Suddenly he hears frantic BANGING on the door.

JESS (O.S.)

Peter, Peter, what have they done to you?

PETER

Jess??

JESS (O.S.)

Peter, Peter?

PETER

Can you hear me?

Peter walks over to the door and opens it a tiny amount with the key Crowther left in the lock.

PETER (CONT'D)

Jess, listen to me, you have got to stay away.

JESS (O.S.)

I thought you were dead.

PETER

No, I'm not ... dead.

JESS (O.S.)

But the gunshot. Where's Edward?

PETER

Look, this is complicated, but you have to get away from here. Harris will call and explain everything.

(beat)

No, please, just ...

Jess pushes the door wide open and enters the room. She sees Crowther's dead body.

JESS

My God, what have you done?

PETER

I can explain, but you've got to keep back.

JESS
(screaming)
How could you do it? He was a good man.

PETER
I know, but ...

JESS
You monster, you, you ...

Peter suddenly grabs Crowther's gun from the floor and points it at Jess.

PETER
Stand back. Don't come a step closer.

JESS
(hysterical)
What the hell has got into you?

PETER
Why are you even here?

JESS
(blurting out the words)
I decided to walk home to clear my head. Then I suddenly thought I can't leave you like this, so I came back. But John was nowhere, then I heard a gunshot ...

Tears stream down Jess's cheeks.

PETER
Listen, there's a deadly virus. He and I have got it, and if you come any closer so will you.

JESS
(sobbing)
So you mean you've got to ...

Peter nods.

JESS (CONT'D)
I won't let you, I won't let you.

PETER
It has to be done.

JESS
Why? What evidence do you have for this?

PETER

Enough, and with the thousands I could infect, I just can't take the risk.

JESS

There must be ways to isolate you.

PETER

I've been through all this, and all I can ask is you understand my sacrifice and get out of here.

JESS

But I can't.

PETER

(distressed)

You can't understand why I do this?

JESS

No, I can't leave you.

PETER

You have to.

JESS

Well, who do I tell? What do I do?

PETER

Harris has a letter that explains everything. Give my parents a sanitized version, but above all say as little as you can.

JESS

Why?

PETER

So they don't come after you.

JESS

But if I'm a risk to people too ...

PETER

You're not, and make sure it stays that day.

JESS

But maybe I want to die with you ...

PETER

Never make decisions when emotions are running high.

JESS
But it's how I really feel about
you.

PETER
(happy; philosophical)
Then that's all I need to know.

JESS
How could I go on?

Peter points at Crowther's body.

PETER
He died unnecessarily tonight.
Don't let it be the start of a
trend.

Jess nods.

PETER (CONT'D)
I do know I'm the one who's got it
easy. I've heard the only thing I
realize matters to me, and that's
enough.
(beat)
Now go.

JESS
Can't I just stay for a bit?

PETER
(gently)
Not for the world.

Jess, shaking with tears, reaches her arms out as if for a
hug, though she knows she will not be receiving one.

JESS
I love you.

PETER
I love you too.

JESS
Goodbye Peter.

PETER
Goodbye.

Jess turns and leaves, leaving the door open behind her.

Peter puts his head in one hand. After this, he stands in the
center of the room, gazing upwards in a state of transcendent
ecstasy and then downwards in distress at Crowther's dead
body.

Peter takes a deep BREATH, puts Crowther's gun to the side of his head and is about to pull the trigger when ...

JESS (O.S.)

Aaaahhh!!

A startled Peter takes the gun down. He hears FOOTSTEPS quickly coming towards the room. He then looks to see Jess enter and behind her a tall figure, all in black, who seems familiar.

PETER

Riggs-Owen??

RIGGS-OWEN

(calm, with a tinge of irritation)

Well, this is a turn-up.

PETER

What's going on?

RIGGS-OWEN

(taking a step forward)

OK, let me ...

PETER

(shouting)

Keep your distance.

Peter now sees that Riggs-Owen has been pointing a gun at Jess's back.

RIGGS-OWEN

(sighing)

Yeah, all right. Get back against the wall.

(to Jess)

And maybe you should leave us. Go to the end of the corridor. I've got guards on the front door so don't try to escape.

JESS

I'm not leaving him again.

RIGGS-OWEN

I'm not going to hurt him, I just want a few words in private.

PETER

Jess, it's OK.

JESS

(tearful)

Is it?

PETER

If he wanted to see me dead, why
did he interrupt me killing myself?

Peter stares at Riggs-Owen whose expression gives nothing away. Riggs-Owen does, however, step away from the door to leave the exit free for Jess. She hesitates and then departs.

By now Peter is back against the wall and Riggs-Owen is pointing his gun at him.

PETER (CONT'D)

So what's the score? You were quite adamant we had to die.

RIGGS-OWEN

(ignoring the question)
Could you please put that gun down?

Peter hesitates.

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

By the time you ever raised it, I'd have fired mine. So it will do you no good, while discarding it will make this conversation just a little more relaxed.

Peter bends down and puts his gun on the floor.

PETER

If you really want me to relax
you'll reciprocate.

Riggs-Owen considers this for a second. He does not follow suit but lowers his gun a little.

RIGGS-OWEN

The thing is we have new
information.

PETER

What information?

RIGGS-OWEN

This coronavirus isn't anywhere
near as deadly as we thought.

PETER

(shocked; pointing at
Crowther)
You mean he died for nothing?

RIGGS-OWEN

His requirement was based on the
information we had at the time.

PETER

"His requirement"? This is a life we're talking about.

RIGGS-OWEN

These days, whenever a new virus turns up, they analyze it quick and they get results quick. Usually, they're pretty accurate from the start but on this occasion ...

PETER

When did you learn all this?

RIGGS-OWEN

A few minutes ago.

PETER

So if you'd got here just a bit quicker he might still be alive.

RIGGS-OWEN

That's the way it goes.

PETER

You don't seem very cut up about this.

RIGGS-OWEN

In this job you learn not to care too deeply.

PETER

Maybe it was a lesson he never got.

There is an uncomfortable silence in the room.

RIGGS-OWEN

The latest analysis suggests this virus carries the same mortality rate as COVID-19. Now, that wasn't harmless, and there's still analysis to be done, but the measures we take don't need to be quite as extreme.

PETER

Crowther showed me his proof. Where's yours?

Riggs-Owen takes a small tablet from his pocket, crouches and throws it towards Peter who picks it up and looks at it.

RIGGS-OWEN

It's all here, and continuously updated.

PETER
Yeah, I see how it differs from
Crowther's.

Peter looks intensely at the tablet.

PETER (CONT'D)
So what about all the people on the
boats?

RIGGS-OWEN
They'll need to stay on them for
now, but casualties should be low.

PETER
Even with one already dead?

RIGGS-OWEN
He had underlying health issues.

Peter continues to gaze at the tablet.

PETER
It says three fifty-six here.

RIGGS-OWEN
That's the time.

PETER
The tablet Crowther showed me said
three fourteen.

RIGGS-OWEN
And?

PETER
It wasn't forty minutes ago I was
looking at it.

RIGGS-OWEN
Must have been.

PETER
No, no it wasn't.

RIGGS-OWEN
In unfamiliar situations you can
lose track of time.

Peter takes Crowther's tablet from his pocket and looks at
it.

PETER
And it still says three fourteen.

Riggs-Owen stands stone silent.

PETER (CONT'D)
 You froze the information you
 transmitted to him.

RIGGS-OWEN
 Why would I do that?

PETER
 When you came here before you knew
 the risk was lower.

RIGGS-OWEN
 Well, if I did, why didn't I tell
 you?

PETER
 Because you wanted him dead.

RIGGS-OWEN
 What? One of my elite unit?

PETER
 One of your elite unit who was seen
 as a soft touch?

Riggs-Owen looks rattled. Peter's words have touched a raw
 nerve.

RIGGS-OWEN
 (slowly; deliberately)
 I do not remember anyone in the
 unit ever describing him as that.

PETER
 Maybe you just have a selective
 memory.

Riggs-Owen stands stone silent.

PETER (CONT'D)
 Come on, what is this all about?

RIGGS-OWEN
 All right, I'll tell you. You see
 I've got to deal with you somehow.
 If I kill you, it hardly matters
 ...

Riggs-Owen raises his gun again. Peter shudders.

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)
 (lowering his gun again)
 But, in truth, that's not possible.
 So if I am to let you live, you're
 going to have to know the whole
 story.
 (beat)
 (MORE)

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

Crowther wasn't lying on anything he told you.

PETER

So this place is bugged.

RIGGS-OWEN

No, just his cell phone.

PETER

So you've heard everything I've said tonight?

RIGGS-OWEN

Everything you've said in here when he was with you.

(beat)

And until three quarters of an hour ago what Crowther told you was true as far as we all knew.

PETER

And then came the news that this coronavirus wasn't so deadly?

Riggs-Owen nods.

PETER (CONT'D)

So why not tell Crowther?

RIGGS-OWEN

Because he'd already proved himself a liability. Based on what we knew, he should have shot you on sight.

PETER

And that's a reason to kill him?

RIGGS-OWEN

If one coronavirus like this has come up, so will another. It could be two weeks, it could be a year, but next time it could be that deadly.

PETER

I still don't get it.

RIGGS-OWEN

Well, if he blundered again, who knows what the consequences might be?

PETER

He would have learned his lesson.

RIGGS-OWEN
 (shaking his head)
 This wasn't the first time he'd got
 into a scrape of his own making.

PETER
 Couldn't you have just -- I don't
 know -- discharged him?

RIGGS-OWEN
 And risk him letting something slip
 as he tries to adjust to civilian
 life?

PETER
 But if he did, who'd be listening?

RIGGS-OWEN
 This unit operates under the radar.
 The top people in government know
 about it, and that's it.

PETER
 And?

RIGGS-OWEN
 Well, if people were aware of half
 our actions, they'd demand we stop.
 From the outside they sound brutal,
 but we know they work so, if we
 can't act as we do, lives are lost.

PETER
 So when you said before I had to
 die, I was just collateral damage?

RIGGS-OWEN
 (nodding)
 Two people thinking they have a
 deadly virus and deciding to kill
 themselves invites no questions.
 One living to tell any kind of tale
 does.
 (beat)
 I've got the recording from
 Crowther's cell phone to prove what
 you were thinking when you did it.

PETER
 And you just wipe the bit when you
 turned up before.

RIGGS-OWEN
 (shaking his head)
 Better to doctor it to make my
 arrival seem earlier. And as for
 now, I came running back to stop
 you as soon as I heard the news.
 (MORE)

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

(beat)

At least that was the theory.

PETER

Meaning?

RIGGS-OWEN

I heard one gunshot, but no second.
And then I heard a girl's voice.

Riggs-Owen nods towards the door to imply Jess.

PETER

And that wasn't part of the plan?

RIGGS-OWEN

(nodding)

If it had just been you, I could
have shot you myself, but with a
third person ...

PETER

You do anything to Jess, and I'll
...

Riggs-Owen raises a hand to calm Peter down.

RIGGS-OWEN

I take no delight in any of this.
As far as I'm concerned, Crowther's
and your deaths were for the
greater good.

PETER

How can you possibly say that?

RIGGS-OWEN

Another blunder by Crowther could
cost thousands of lives.

(beat)

And any less convincing a story
than two people committing suicide
might expose our whole outfit.

Peter looks unimpressed.

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

We have to be far-sighted.

PETER

But things could pan out in so many
ways there's no straight line
between him dying and others
living.

RIGGS-OWEN

Come on, he even chose to kill
himself rather than you.

(MORE)

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

Now, if that doesn't make him a liability ...

Peter starts to LAUGH.

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

PETER

You suggested to Crowther he had to die as you left, like it was a mere afterthought. I thought it was strange, but you were minimizing the time he had to think.

RIGGS-OWEN

(with a shrug)

And?

PETER

You also threw me off the scent by saying I was telling the truth about being on the naval ship. But you knew that would be enough to require me to die. I just made the deception easier by volunteering I'd been close to a sailor.

RIGGS-OWEN

If Crowther had followed orders he'd have shot you on sight, and that is the truth.

(beat)

So if I then decide you need to die, you're no worse off.

PETER

You're unbelievable.

RIGGS-OWEN

But your demise was to make the story more plausible, which means I can't shoot you now because there's someone else who knows about it.

(beat)

And I can't shoot them because you can't make the same excuse for three deaths as you can two.

PETER

And that's your only reason?

RIGGS-OWEN

With every further death there's another family to ask questions and I can't risk that.

(beat)

(MORE)

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

So, I've got to work out a way that none of this gets out. Now, Jess knows about the virus so I can explain how Crowther misunderstood it. With your co-operation.

PETER

Which you don't have.

RIGGS-OWEN

Really? You see, you weren't too thrilled at the prospect of death even when it served a purpose.

PETER

(sarcastically)

So that's your starting point for stopping me blabbing?

RIGGS-OWEN

That and the fact I could send you down for trespassing on a naval ship.

PETER

So it's all stick and no carrot.

RIGGS-OWEN

Not necessarily. I still need you invested in the deal, so I'll sort you with a job in government.

PETER

(half skeptical; half interested)

Just like that?

RIGGS-OWEN

I don't think you appreciate how high up I am.

(beat)

With your abilities it won't look so strange. We start you after university, and with me watching over you you'll be at the top in no time.

Peter looks partially convinced.

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

Come on, it's everything you ever wanted. You'll rise high without having to slave for years. So high that the work you do will have an impact, and you'll be recognized for it. Because, believe me, working in the top echelons of government does have its rewards.

PETER
 (sarcastically)
 I can do anything provided my
 master approves.

RIGGS-OWEN
 I'm a busy man so I'll leave you
 alone. Provided you don't venture
 onto any more ships, or utter a
 word about tonight.

PETER
 Then I'm not free at all. So maybe
 I will just say damn it, and expose
 what you did.

RIGGS-OWEN
 Just be aware that the minute I
 suspect the risk of me having to
 explain your death is LOWER than
 the risk of you talking ...

Riggs-Owen pointedly waves his gun at Peter.

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)
 And that goes for all time.

PETER
 (slow; horrified)
 And that goes for killing Jess if
 you had to?

RIGGS-OWEN
 (deliberately not
 answering)
 Come on, the end of the story or
 the best deal of your life?

PETER
 I always said I didn't want my
 success to be at anyone else's
 expense.

Peter stares at Crowther's body.

PETER (CONT'D)
 And if he'd shot me on sight, it
 would be me dead not him.

RIGGS-OWEN
 Well done. In one evening you've
 gone from corpse to getting
 everything you ever wanted.

PETER
 Except in that time I saw what was
 really important.

RIGGS-OWEN

So now you really have got it all.
Life, career AND your relationship
stronger than ever.

PETER

(resigned)

Which is why I've got to agree. For
Jess's sake.

RIGGS-OWEN

(pointedly)

If that's the reason you think
you're doing it, fine.

This comment having touched a raw nerve, Peter stares
bitterly at Riggs-Owen whose gun by now is more down by his
side. Quick as a flash, Peter bends down, picks up Crowther's
gun and points it at Riggs-Owen.

PETER

Don't move a muscle.

RIGGS-OWEN

(calmly)

All right, have your moment.

PETER

It's a moment that might be your
last.

RIGGS-OWEN

Shoot me, and any new threat is
dealt with less well.

PETER

After the way you treated him, why
should I trust anything you say?

RIGGS-OWEN

Because it's true. But from your
point of view, kill me and you're
either dead or behind bars.

PETER

Why? I shot you because I thought
you had the virus. I'd been led to
believe it was deadly, and you
won't be there with your recording
to prove otherwise.

RIGGS-OWEN

It still wouldn't sound plausible.

PETER

Why not? There's someone out there
with enough information to make it
so.

RIGGS-OWEN

(sighing)

I know about Harris. I know he was in here, I know he had a letter and I know when he left.

PETER

So?

RIGGS-OWEN

I sent two of my unit to intercept him.

Peter looks frightened.

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

(pointing to Crowther)

Don't worry, thanks to this one he doesn't know too much, so it shouldn't be long before he's free. We'll need to ascertain that he never read that letter, but one thing's certain. No one else will ever see it.

PETER

But there are still enough people who know about this coronavirus.

RIGGS-OWEN

Yes, all in the know so all happy to throw the book at you.

PETER

Looks like you've got everything sewn up.

RIGGS-OWEN

(staring at Peter)

Almost everything.

(beat)

Come on, there's nothing else you can do that won't see you dead or as good as.

Peter stands silent for several seconds, then nods.

PETER

(melancholic)

All right.

RIGGS-OWEN

Good. So I'll call Jess back, and you can live happily ever after.

PETER

(reflective)

Somehow I very much doubt that.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

(beat)

Please don't tell her how I sold out.

RIGGS-OWEN

Why would I? It would hardly aid keeping it all hush.

PETER

Everything I ever wanted, only I'll be living under one person's thumb and at another's expense.

Riggs-Owen steps out of the room.

RIGGS-OWEN (O.S.)

(calling)

Jess.

Riggs-Owen steps back into the room. There is silence for a few seconds, during which Peter's face grows increasingly anxious, but finally FOOTSTEPS are heard. Eventually Jess enters the room.

JESS

Peter, Peter.

RIGGS-OWEN

He's fine, but don't go hugging him.

Jess almost collapses with relief.

JESS

Oh, Peter, never leave me again.

Peter smiles. Jess looks at Crowther's body.

JESS (CONT'D)

So did he have to die?

RIGGS-OWEN

I'll explain everything, but until I do say nothing to anyone.

Jess looks unsure about this.

PETER

He's right. This is so top secret, any word you utter could cost lives.

Jess nods her agreement. Riggs-Owen smiles at Peter's 'compliance'.

RIGGS-OWEN

Now, we'll need you to quarantine so keep your distance as we walk, but the main thing is to get you out of here.

(beat)

Well come on, you've got to be pleased about that?

PETER

I'll say.

JESS

(pointing at Crowther's body)

What about Edward?

RIGGS-OWEN

He'll be taken care of.

JESS

Treated with respect?

RIGGS-OWEN

The utmost.

JESS

Will he have a hero's funeral? Will we be able to go?

Riggs-Owen hesitates, but Peter jumps in.

PETER

He wouldn't want one. We discussed everything like that, and he was bent on minimal fuss.

JESS

Well, if that's what he wanted.

RIGGS-OWEN

(nodding)

He always said the same to me.

(beat)

Now, are you two ready?

Peter and Jess nod.

RIGGS-OWEN (CONT'D)

OK, let's go.

Riggs-Owen exits the room. Jess smiles at Peter mixing sorrow at Crowther's death with utter joy at Peter being alive and hers. She then leaves. Peter gazes at Crowther's body, his face displaying a mixture of shame and callousness. He finally exits as well.

Once all three are gone, the door swings shut and a key TURNING in the lock is heard. The room is quiet, with Crowther's motionless body only emphasizing just how still everything feels.

FADE OUT.

THE END