

BELL

Ten Minute Short

CHARACTERS

Writer

Passerby

Narrator

BELL

—BELL—

NARRATOR:

At a table outside a café, a WRITER sits scribbling busily for several moments before a PASSERBY stops, pausing to watch their furious writing for a time, finally interrupting.

PASSERBY

Are you a writer?

WRITER

(clearly miles away in thought)

What?

PASSERBY

(confident now)

A writer! You're a writer, aren't you?

WRITER

No, oh, no.

(pause)

I'm a dictator.

PASSERBY

What?

BELL

WRITER

A dictator.

PASSERBY

A dictator.

(pause)

Really?

WRITER

Yes.

PASSERBY

A dictator? As in... dictator?

WRITER

Yes, I have ruled all the major countries at one time or another.

PASSERBY

You're putting me on.

WRITER

No, straight up. Name a country—I've dictated it.

PASSERBY

I've never seen your picture.

BELL

WRITER

Well, no, you wouldn't, would you?

PASSERBY

Wouldn't I?

WRITER

No, no—I run a kind of shadow government.

PASSERBY

Shadow government?

WRITER

Oh yes. Behind the scenes, very hush hush. If you ever see me, you'll know things have gone amiss.

PASSERBY

But I'm seeing you now.

WRITER

Well, that's different.

PASSERBY

Is it?

BELL

WRITER

Oh yes. I'm on holiday.

PASSERBY

Really?

WRITER

Oh, yes. Even dictators need holidays.

PASSERBY

I suppose.

(pause)

So were you working here?

WRITER

Well, I don't think I can say too much about it...

PASSERBY

Or what? You'll have to kill me?

(laughs)

WRITER

(laughs)

No, no—I never kill anyone.

BELL

PASSERBY

That's a relief!

WRITER

Although I have had to hire other people to do it for me. Frequently.

PASSERBY

(nervous laugh)

Have you?

WRITER

Well, in my line of work, sometimes it becomes unavoidable.

PASSERBY

I suppose so. It's in the nature of dictating, I suppose.

WRITER

Well, it is one of the perks.

PASSERBY

Perks!

WRITER

Think of it—you've got someone who really grates on your very last nerve. Day in, day out, everything they do is like stiff little nails on a chalkboard. Everything—

BELL

PASSERBY

I know someone like that, all right.

WRITER

Who doesn't? Well, a word from me and—poof!

PASSERBY

Dead.

WRITER

Well, now, I never said that.

PASSERBY

Some dictator. You don't kill anyone.

WRITER

I can hardly say it now, can I? It's like taking out the rubbish.

PASSERBY

Taking out the—?

WRITER

Do you know what happens to the rubbish after you've taken it out to the curb?

PASSERBY

No, but I think a lot more of it gets recycled these days.

BELL

WRITER

Er, yes. Just so—recycling is good.

PASSERBY

So, you recycle?

WRITER

Well, when one can. The point I was trying to make was that like the rubbish, I ask it to be taken to the curb. What happens next is not my business.

PASSERBY

You don't even have to take it to the curb?

WRITER

No. Thus, it's a perk.

PASSERBY

We're not talking about rubbish bins now, are we?

WRITER

No.

PASSERBY

(pause)

It's not a bad thing being a dictator, I suppose.

BELL

WRITER

Well, there is a lot of responsibility involved though, people's lives in your hand, millions in currency—

PASSERBY

Delicate balance—

WRITER

War and peace—

PASSERBY

Sandwiches—sorry, don't know why I said that.

WRITER

Well, it does cover sandwiches sometimes.

PASSERBY

It always does, eventually.

(pause)

So—you can tell me. Have you been working here?

WRITER

Well, I ought not to say—

BELL

NARRATOR

The writer pauses to look surreptitiously around

WRITER

But you look like a reasonable person.

PASSERBY

Oh, very much so!

NARRATOR:

The WRITER looks around and then beckons to the PASSERBY conspiratorially.

WRITER

Well, I have had to come here in order to give a push. Just a small one, mind you, but sometimes that's how it is.

PASSERBY

(clearly awed)

Oh. I can see that.

WRITER

Things are on the upswing now—it may not look like it entirely, but it will be getting better soon.

NARRATOR: Bells ring, and the WRITER looks up attentively

BELL

WRITER

Good heavens; I'm being called.

PASSERBY

What—just now? That was only the clock tower.

WRITER

(smiles)

You heard the clock tower because you expected to hear the clock tower. If you had been listening closely you might have heard the subtle counterpoint resonances. Easily overlooked unless you're listening closely.

PASSERBY

Ah.

WRITER

Must dash—countries to run, markets to crash. But here—

NARRATOR

The WRITER takes out a card to hand over.

WRITER

In case you ever find yourself in a spot, just hand them this.

PASSERBY

Hand who this?

BELL

WRITER

Whoever it is—it won't matter. They'll know.

PASSERBY

Here—it's blank!

WRITER

It *looks* blank—but trust me. It's not.

PASSERBY

Ah...thanks.

WRITER

There you are. Must run—cheers!

NARRATOR

The WRITER leaves

PASSERBY

Yeah.

NARRATOR

The PASSERBY looks closely at card, then up towards where WRITER has just left.

BELL

PASSERBY

Dictator?

(pause)

Bollocks!

NARRATOR

The PASSERBY throws the card down on the ground and begins to leave. But then they turn around and look back at the card for a moment, deep in thought. Eventually, they run back and pick up the card, look sheepishly around, and surreptitiously slip it into a pocket before walking away.

CURTAIN

BELL