

Knifepoint
By Jeff James

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Characters:

John, 30s

Karen, 30s

Kidnapper

We are in a room empty of any distinguishing characteristics other than a film of filth that seems to permeate the air. On one wall, very high up, is a very small, very grimy window covered with bars; the window is so dirty that it is hard to tell what sort of light may or may not be coming through it. There is one very formidable door to the room - with bars in its window - currently closed. There is no other way out. Two rickety-looking wooden chairs sit dead center, backs to each other but separated by a few feet. Far downstage is a metal lock-box, easily seen by the audience but not in the immediate sightline of the characters. Most of the illumination in the room comes from a bare light-bulb hanging from the ceiling.

After a moment the lock on the door jiggles and it swings open. The KIDNAPPER, who is wearing all black, including a black neutral mask, leads in KAREN, who is blindfolded and bound by the hands. She does not struggle. He makes her sit down in one chair and he quickly ties her to it. He then leaves through the door and leads in JOHN, also blindfolded and bound and not struggling. He ties

JOHN to the other chair, shuts the door and audibly locks it.

A moment of stunned silence, perhaps as though they are testing to see if the kidnapper is still in the room, and then they both begin struggling with their bonds. John's ropes seem to be tied tighter, and as he becomes more frustrated he starts grunting and swearing. He appears to think he is alone in the room.

JOHN

(Loudly.)

FUCK!

With this, Karen pulls off her ropes and blindfold and stands up. She stares as John frantically pulls at his ropes. After a moment, the fact that she is free and John is not sinks in and she starts to case the room. She looks in every corner and tries to reach the window, but without success. Then she sees the lock-box. She creeps towards it as though afraid it might jump at her, and then jumps a foot when John swears again very loudly.

JOHN

FUCKING HELL!

John stops struggling with his ropes for a second and pants with the effort. Karen creeps around him as quietly as possible and then goes to the

door. She checks for cracks and openings while John goes back to twisting around his ropes. Karen jiggles the door very quietly, and then in a sudden burst of frustration shakes it very loudly. John freezes, and so does Karen when she realizes what she has done.

JOHN

Who's there?

Pause.

JOHN

Hello?

Long pause. Karen walks softly to the other side of the room. She stares at John the whole time, and seems to be considering something.

JOHN

Is... is somebody th...

KAREN

(Cuts him off.)

Tell me why you're here.

JOHN

I... I don't under...

KAREN

(Cuts him off again.)

What's there not to understand? *(Pause.)* Why are you here?

Long pause.

KAREN

Answer me.

JOHN

I... I...

KAREN

What?

JOHN

I don't know.

KAREN

What don't you know?

JOHN

...Why I'm here.

Pause.

KAREN

You're lying.

JOHN

No, no I'm not, I...

Karen grabs his hair and pulls. He yelps and stops mid-sentence.

KAREN

Don't lie to me.

JOHN

Oh God! Oh Fuck oh fuck oh...

KAREN

Shut up. *(Pause.)* What's your name?

Pause.

KAREN

(More insistently.)

Your name!

JOHN

John! *(Pause.)* John Ferguson. *(Pause.)* What... what do you want?

KAREN

(Pulls his hair in warning.)

No questions.

JOHN

I... I don't have any money. *(Pause.)* I mean... my family doesn't... have any money. So I don't know why..

KAREN

Think about it. *(Pause.)* You must know why. *(Pause.)* If you think about it you'll know why you're here.

Pause.

JOHN

Is someone angry with me? (*Pause.*) Have I done... have I done something wrong? I can't... I can't imagine...

Pause.

KAREN

You don't know?

JOHN

I just said...

KAREN

You don't fucking know?

JOHN

Look, just tell me what... what it is I've done. Just tell me, alright?

Long pause.

KAREN

FUCK! (*Pause.*) Listen, tell me... tell me how it happened.

JOHN

What? I mean, I don't... I'm sorry I don't... (*Pause.*) I don't understand what's going on here.

KAREN

When you were kidnapped. How did it happen?

JOHN

Don't you know?

KAREN

(Pulls his hair.)

Fucking tell me!

JOHN

Christ, alright! *(Pause.)* I was walking to my car, and... there were a bunch of men, all in black. Wearing... masks or something.

KAREN

How many?

JOHN

I don't know. I didn't count. Maybe three or four. *(Pause.)* Look, what is all this? Why are you doing this to me?

KAREN

I said no questions!

JOHN

Look... I've been locked in that room for God knows how long dealing with this shit, and I'm sick and fucking tired of it, okay? If you're gonna kill me then fucking kill me. If not, tell me what you want!

Long pause.

KAREN

Give me a reason I should trust you.

JOHN

What do you mean, trust you?

KAREN

Why should I?

JOHN

You shouldn't. I mean... I don't know why you would need to trust me.

KAREN

I can untie you... if I decide to.

Long pause.

JOHN

What's going on here? (*Pause.*) Who are you?

KAREN

I said that I could untie you. But I need a reason.

Pause.

JOHN

I don't know what to say to that. (*Pause.*) Stop being so fucking cryptic and untie me.

Pause.

KAREN

Where were you before here?

JOHN

A room.

KAREN

No shit. What kind of room?

JOHN

There wasn't much to look at.

KAREN

Doors? Windows?

JOHN

One door and one tiny little window.

KAREN

Anything else?

No response.

KAREN

I said, anything else?

JOHN

No. Nothing. Will you untie me now?

Karen reaches over and pulls off John's blindfold. He blinks furiously for a second and then strains his neck to look at Karen.

KAREN

Did it look like this?

JOHN

Yes. *(Pause.)* I don't know. It could be the same. *(Pause.)*
Who are you?

KAREN

We're in the same situation.

JOHN

(Indicates his bonds.)

No, we're not.

Pause.

KAREN

Alright.

JOHN

What?

KAREN

I'll untie you.

JOHN

I thought you needed a reason.

KAREN

I have one. *(Pause.)* I can't think of anything else to do.

John sits still while Karen loosens the ropes. When he is finally free he rubs his wrists for a second while staring at Karen. Very suddenly, he leaps up and grabs her, slaps her, and pushes her to the ground.

JOHN

You fucking bitch. Why wouldn't you untie me?

John walks around the room and checks every part for a way out. After fiddling with the doorknob for a few seconds he turns and sees the lock box.

JOHN

(Pointing.)

What's that?

KAREN

I don't know. *(Pause.)* You would have done the same thing.

JOHN

No, I wouldn't. What makes you think I would?

KAREN

I didn't know who you were.

JOHN

I don't know who the hell you are and I would have untied you. It's the only decent thing to do. *(He grabs her.)*
Maybe I should tie you up again, see how you like that.

KAREN

(Trying to twist away.)

NO! *(Pause.)* I'm sorry, alright! I had to be safe.

JOHN

Safe, huh? How safe do you feel now? *(Squeezing her arms.)*
Huh, you bitch? *(Pulls her hair.)* How does that feel?

Suddenly John drops her and goes over to the lock box, which he picks up and begins examining from all angles. He tries to pry it open without success.

KAREN

Be careful with that.

JOHN

Why do you care what I do?

KAREN

You don't know what might be in it.

JOHN

No. I don't.

He shakes the box up next to his ear and listens to it rattle. After a second, he throws it on the

ground very suddenly. It makes a loud sound but nothing else happens.

KAREN

JESUS! Why the hell did you do that?!

JOHN

It could have opened. *(Pause.)* Shit.

Long pause.

JOHN

Tell me your name. *(Pause.)* I told you mine. Tell me yours.

KAREN

Karen.

JOHN

Just Karen?

KAREN

Wilson. Karen Wilson.

JOHN

Well, Karen, I still don't understand why you didn't untie me, but...

KAREN

(Overlapping.)

I said I was sorry, alright!

JOHN

(Overlapping.)

...But I'm going to ignore that for right now, okay? Okay, Karen? *(She does not respond.)* Alright, then. *(Pause.)* So, what have we got here?

He gets up and walks around the room, indicating as he talks.

JOHN

One door. Locked. One window, very high up. Covered in bars. Four walls and no way out. Two chairs, one light-bulb on a string, you, me, and one very locked little box with oh-wouldn't-you-like-to-know rattling around inside. *(Pause.)* Nothing to do, and... plenty of time to wait.

Pause.

JOHN

So, why don't you tell me why you're here?

KAREN

I was kidnapped. *(Pause, she sighs.)* The same as you.

JOHN

The same as me, huh. How did it happen, then?

KAREN

Men in black... wearing masks. I don't really remember. It happened so fast.

JOHN

You don't remember, huh? (*Pause.*) Obviously not. You would have untied me if you remembered.

KAREN

Look... after everything they... (*Pause.*) I'm sorry.

JOHN

Do you think you're the only one they fucked with? Do you?

KAREN

I still think you would have done the same thing.

JOHN

You don't know me.

Pause.

KAREN

How're... how're we gonna get out of here?

JOHN

I don't know. Why don't you tell me?

Long pause, then John gets up and walks over the door and starts pounding on it and yelling.

JOHN

YOU FUCKING ASSHOLES! FUCK YOU! LET ME OUT OF HERE!

Pause.

KAREN

Did that help?

JOHN

Shut up.

Long pause.

KAREN

What now?

JOHN

I don't want to talk to you.

Pause.

KAREN

What else are we going to do?

JOHN

Sit here quietly.

Pause.

KAREN

What does that achieve? I mean... we were put here in this room together.

JOHN

So?

KAREN

So... I don't know... the least we could do is compare stories.

Pause.

JOHN

Why should I trust you?

KAREN

Because... I'm the only other person here.

JOHN

That wasn't enough for you!

KAREN

I'm sorry. I freaked out. I made a mistake. (*Pause.*) But now you're untied... and we're stuck here together.

Long pause.

JOHN

Alright. What do you want to do?

KAREN

Ask me a question.

JOHN

What?

KAREN

Anything. What do you want to know?

(End of Excerpt)