

WHITE CITY

Pilot

Written For

AMC

By

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TEASER

EXT. KABUL STREET - DAWN

Metal gates, sand bags, modest concrete compounds. Dust. Empty, save two plastic-chaired police. They are deep in music videos on their respective flip phones.

INT. JON'S BEDROOM - DAY

JON LISTON, tired but handsome American, 30s, naked except a first baseman's mitt, lies on the floor of a room cluttered with books. He is tossing a baseball, catching it, and glancing at his own phone. The phone alarm finally buzzes. He takes a deep breath and gets up.

A beat. He stares at his phone. Unlocks it. Selects 'photos.' Jon stares. We don't see what he sees.

EXT. KABUL STREET - DAY

Jon barely slows at a bakery where a kid, obviously a friend, tosses him a piece of warm bread. Blue burqa-clad ladies float around him. One waves. Jon smiles big, waves back.

INT. TAXI CAB ON THE MOVE - DAY

Jon finishes his bread, watching waking Butcher Street. Scrawny Pashtuns squat, urinating against fruit stalls. Children unload bloody goat carcasses from a pickup. The taxi driver slams on brakes, losing a game of chicken to a wrinkled farmer pulling a vegetable wagon.

EXT. TAHIR'S APARTMENT BLOCK - DAY

Jon exits cab to some Soviet-era brutalism and a donkey cart.

INT. TAHIR'S APARTMENT BLOCK STAIRWELL - DAY

Jon walks up the clean-ish stairs.

INT. TAHIR'S APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

Jon knocks. A boy, WALID, 8, answers, barring the way. Walid's father TAHIR HABIBI, 40s, Pashtun, enters the hall. The two share a solemn look - business to attend to.

INT. TAHIR'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Chinese furniture. Pictures of relatives on the walls. Walid, his younger brothers, and sister, QUADRIA, 13, all in school uniforms, crammed on to a vinyl love seat. Tahir sits in the easy chair. All look at the bedroom door, waiting for something. Tahir's wife, MEHRNOOSH, 40s, Pashtun, den mother, arms crossed, watches Tahir from the hallway, concerned.

Jon emerges in Pashtun regalia: turban, shalwar kameez, vest.

TAHIR

You look ridiculous.

The kids laugh. Walid hands Jon prayer beads to complete the look. Mehrnoosh shakes her head, cracking a smile.

JON

They're your clothes.

Jon grabs cricket bat, pretends to hit laughing kids.

MEHRNOOSH

Kids, school. Jon, sit. Have tea.

INT. TAHIR'S HALLWAY - MORNING

As Jon and Tahir leave, Mehrnoosh hugs Tahir, tight, tears. She is frightened for him.

INT. KABUL AIRPORT - DAY

Noisy, graceful mayhem. Chickens. Airborne poverty. A troop of Chinese hookers, confused. Jon takes a bottle of wine from his backpack just before the metal detector, sets it beside, passes through, picks it up, carries on. The guards are too busy going through the hookers' stuff to notice. Tahir rolls his eyes at Jon. Above them, a sign: "Kandahar Gate."

A BEAT OF PLANE ENGINES.

EXT. DIRT ROAD OUTSIDE OF KANDAHAR - DAY

Silence as a Toyota Corolla bisects a flowering poppy field, lush and red and white. Then, Jon's voice, stone confident.

JON (O.S.)

See, that's the thing about love.
First you just want what you want.
It's half lust. That's some beauty
and virtue, moths to flame shit.

(MORE)

JON (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Then, you get a little older, you think, I want to make it good for you, the woman you love, whoever. So the trick is, subsume yourself in the other.

INT. COROLLA - SAME MOMENT

A delicately illiterate white beard, OSMAN, 60s, drives. Tahir is shotgun. Jon in the back. It is a rough ride.

JON

But the real trick is, look out for yourself at the same time. You have to be generous enough to let the other take care of you.

TAHIR

My wife wanted sex last night. She was so wet. It was disgusting.

JON

Tahir, that's a good thing. That means she's into it.

TAHIR

I do not think this is a road.

Note: Dialogue is in PASHTO, subtitled, where italicized.

JON

Is this a road?

TAHIR

Osman?

OSMAN

It is a shortcut.

TAHIR

You've taken this way before?

OSMAN

Yes. Safer.

They are in a dangerous place. He is visibly nervous. Jon reveals no fear. Tahir is somewhere in the middle - alert.

JON

Anyway. Point is, negotiating is like love. The details - monogamy, polygamy, don't matter -

TAHIR

I have only one wife, as you know.

JON

(nodding at Osman)

How many do you think our colleague here has?

TAHIR

Probably not as many as the men we are about to meet.

JON

And that's how we come at them. A simple negotiating strategy.

TAHIR

Which is?

JON

They're married, we're married. We all have families. Essential sameness.

TAHIR

Not much of a strategy. And you left your wife.

JON

Technically I'm still married.

TAHIR

Just hope they have a little grey in their beards. The old ones, maybe can reason. The young ones will kill us. Don't try to get into the heads of these people, Jon. They are from the stone age.

JON

Nice to be out of Kabul though.

Tahir shrugs, but is clearly pleased to be on adventure.

EXT. DIRT TRACK - DAY

The Corolla lurches out of a poppy field onto a better road and takes a left. A few farm boys stare.

TAHIR

I am concerned that shortcut may have drawn attention to us.

OSMAN
Everywhere here is bad.

JON
Osman, we're fine.
 (then, English)
 Tahir, tell him.

Osman looks at Tahir. Tahir nods. Osman not really reassured.

TAHIR
 I hope you are better at
 negotiating peace with Taliban than
 you were with your wife.

JON
 Well, how do you do it?

TAHIR
 Do what?

JON
 Make peace.

TAHIR
 Me? Impossible.

JON
 I mean with your wife.

TAHIR
 I never go to war.

They come around a bend. Osman groans, low and sad and frightened, and leans back from the wheel. And we see --

EXT. DIRT TRACK - INTER-CUT

A 'checkpoint' - a stone in the road, protected by a handful of young men. They are in ANP uniforms and Muj couture - shalwars, Air Jordans, shades - and carry AKs.

TAHIR
 Shit.

Osman stops the car some 20 feet from the stone, praying under his breath. Time slows. Tahir watches the road blockers. Jon watches Tahir to see what depth of shit they are in. The road blockers chat among themselves, guns drawn.

JON
 Are they village police? Taliban?

TAHIR

No difference down here.

Osman's praying gets louder. He grabs prayer beads.

JON

(sotto, to Tahir, about Osman)
Don't let him make problems.

TAHIR

(eyes fixed on road blockers)
You are the problem. Stay quiet.

Jon shrinks in the back seat. A gunman approaches, stroking his black beard. He inspects through the windows. First Osman - who checks out. Then Tahir - also checks out. Everyone's frozen, waiting.

The gunman looks at Jon. Then leans in for a better look. Doesn't check out. The gunman raises his rifle.

Off Jon and Tahir, afraid that they will die.

SMASH CUT TO:

Lower Dens' "I get nervous" plays over long cuts: A Burqa in a dry cleaning bag; the white moustache of a British Colonial Officer; Afghanistan's Wikipedia page; the face of the Buddha; a pomegranate; the American Flag behind buzzing Blackhawks; a Narco Villa; a cable marked "TOP SECRET"; sandbags next to a swimming pool; A Kuchi nomad in a Marlboro jacket, with a goat; final image of KABUL FROM ABOVE: an isolated mountain redoubt, unchanging.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. CG HEADQUARTERS, BRUSSELS - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Bustling plaza. A large bronze globe and sign: "The Crisis Group - Preventing and Resolving Deadly Conflict Worldwide."

INT. CG HEADQUARTERS CONFERENCE ROOM

Grand views. Jon stares out the window. CG Vice President COLIN FLANNAGAN, Irish, 50s, sits at his desk. The conversation is tense but cordial, respectful.

COLIN

Take a look at my desk. Do you see those reports? Darfur, Timor, Fallujah. You know what you don't see? Afghanistan.

JON

You know, you could have chewed me out on the phone. You didn't have to fly me to Brussels.

COLIN

When you go off line, it's because something is up.

A beat. Jon finally turns from the window.

COLIN (CONT'D)

If there's a problem, I need to know about it.

JON

Not a problem. Good news. I've been putting out feelers to the Taliban. They responded. They're willing to meet with me in Kandahar.

A beat. Colin gives it careful consideration. But --

COLIN

That's why there's no report.

(beat)

Jon, we're a think tank. We're not freelance diplomats.

JON

It's an opportunity to really understand this war.

COLIN

And they're going to guarantee your safe return?

JON

Mujahid may be on every UN black list, but he's an honest terrorist.

COLIN

You know how many security incidents we've had since I became VP of ops?

JON

Respectfully: it'll be more dangerous in the end not to try.

COLIN

Zero.

A beat.

COLIN (CONT'D)

Look, I get it. I do. I was there for Good Friday. I know what you're chasing. But our mandate is to understand conflicts, report on them --

JON

-- And advocate for a peaceful resolution. That's what I'm doing.

Colin stares at Jon -- it's part boss, part friend.

COLIN

Get back to Afghanistan. Write your report.

JON

But don't meet.

COLIN

Don't meet.

Off Jon.

EXT. CG HEADQUARTERS, BRUSSELS - DAY

Jon exits. He pauses, as if not knowing how to vent his anger. People stream past.

On Jon, pissed, we begin to HEAR --

OVERLAPPED: A MULLAH'S SERMON BLASTING THROUGH A SPEAKER as --

INT. HELOISE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jon kneels beside the bed, going down on HELOISE FLAUBERT, French reporter, late 20s. The room is spare. Carpets *bokhari* (wood burning stove), desk. A laptop glows between a pile of papers and empty wine bottle.

The SERMON plays through the window. Jon stops, listens, then continues. But finally --

JON

There was no air strike in Herat.

Heloise looks at him like: really?

JON (CONT'D)

Do you know what that mullah said?

HELOISE

I actually wasn't listening.

JON

There are plenty of bad things we've actually done. Why does he have to make up a new air strike?

HELOISE

You're really asking me this? Now?

JON

Why can't they just tell the truth?

HELOISE

An anti-American sermon. Shocking. How long have you been here?

He stands up and falls into the bed next to her.

HELOISE (CONT'D)

I am not satisfied, American.

A beat.

JON

Ehsan Mujahid reached out. He offered me a meeting. In Kandahar.

HELOISE

The Taliban spokesman offered you a meeting. With who?

JON

Top Taliban leadership. As close to Mullah Omar as you get, he says.

HELOISE

About what?

JON

Nobody knows. That's the point.

HELOISE

But with you? You're a think tank analyst who writes reports that no one reads.

JON

The Taliban appear to.

HELOISE

Mon dieu, Jon, you are, you are -

Jon makes to roll her over.

JON

I am? I am?

HELOISE

You want more than is yours.
You are like...Napoleon.

Jon glances down at his junk.

JON

I don't think that's fair.

HELOISE

And why should they talk with you?

JON

Because Tahir and I know more about them than anybody. And we don't fly drones. And we actually want to know where they're coming from.

Heloise shrugs. Maybe he has a point, but still.

HELOISE

They come from a cave in the 13th century. There. I just saved you a trip to Kandahar.

JON

You're as bad as my boss.

She absorbs this. Jon's phone buzzes. Heloise reaches for it.

HELOISE

You have ten new text messages...
'EMERGENCY.' 'UTMOST IMPORTANCE.'
'CRITICAL WE MEET.'

JON

George.

HELOISE

You better go.

She puts a leg over him. They resume fooling around.

EXT. KABUL GOLF COURSE - DAY

A rusting tank looms over the patchy fairway; a nomad grazes sheep by a sandtrap. GEORGE BOWILBY, 30s, European Union Political Officer, tweed-clad Etonian of ambiguous ethnicity, lines up a putt. Jon approaches.

JON

So what's the big emergency?

GEORGE

Where have you been? Pakistan has put up a blockade.

JON

And?

GEORGE

Thousands of supply trucks stuck on the Pak side for weeks.

JON

So?

George sinks the putt.

GEORGE

Much needed emergency goods on those trucks. I'm a diplomat, Jon, a humanitarian, I need aid. And these...

Jon frowns. George rummages in his golf bag.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

...these may be the last beers we get until the Khyber Pass reopens.

He hands one over as they walk to the next hole.

JON

Who knows, drying out might not be bad for a couple weeks.

George doesn't even dignify that suggestion with a response.

GEORGE

Lizzie Ghaffari.

JON

Excuse me.

GEORGE

Lizzie Ghaffari. She's a new political officer at your beknighted embassy.

JON

I heard there was a new girl. Iranian, right?

GEORGE

Yes, and extremely...impressive. Now, if, as planned, we rendezvous at L'atmo at the end of the week, and L'atmo is dry, then where am I?

JON

Want to hear my news?

GEORGE

Not really.

Jon shanks his drive.

JON

I've been invited to meet top Taliban leaders in Kandahar.

GEORGE

Nonsense. You've been trying to get a meeting with the Talibs forever.

JON

And I think Tahir actually did it.

GEORGE

Jon. Let me ask you. Aside from not wanting you dead. Why peace?

JON

What?

GEORGE

What has it ever gotten us? Really?

JON

Alright George.

GEORGE

Well, if it amuses you, by all means. Play through.

Jon just gives him a look, places his ball on the tee.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

But the blockade will dry up this town in a matter of days. So for god sakes, priorities.

Jon considers. A beat. As he hits his drive --

INT. TAHIR'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

No school today, the kids lounge. Jon hands Walid a box. His brothers crowd. His sister Qadria watches TV and feigns disinterest. Walid rips paper off, revealing Jenga.

JON

Happy birthday.

(off Walid's look)

You try to balance all the pieces.

Walid understands and starts setting up. Jon helps. Mehrnoosh enters, takes the empty cup of tea beside Jon. Shouts --

MEHRNOOSH

Tahir. Go so you can come back in time for the mosque.

Tahir enters, hair slick, dressed up in gold shalwar.

MEHRNOOSH (CONT'D)

Why does this man take so long in the shower for you?

Jon shrugs. She exits.

JON

Did you call Babak?

TAHIR

Yes. He won't return my calls.

The Jenga tower tumbles. Jon and Walid rebuild.

JON

Why?

TAHIR

Maybe because we called him a drug kingpin in our report last year.

JON

Everyone calls him a drug kingpin. He is a drug kingpin.

TAHIR

Then maybe because we are not important.

JON

We're important if we are talking with the Taliban in his backyard. Let's go. Dadfar will help us.

Walid hugs Jon, surprising everyone, before they exit.

EXT. SERENA HOTEL - DAY

Elaborate security procedures as Jon and Tahir enter.

JON

I don't know why you get so nervous about seeing Dadfar.

TAHIR

I am not nervous.

JON

He's a friend of mine.

TAHIR

He was a leader of the Northern Alliance. The right hand of Masood.

JON

And we get to have lunch with him.

TAHIR

It is different for you.

JON

Well you didn't have to dress up.

INT. SERENA HOTEL RESTAURANT - DAY

Friday lunch at the Serena, the place to see and be seen. DR. MOHAMMAD DADFAR, 60s, Member of Parliament, Armani suit, graceful behind spectacles, chubby. The contrast between this rich foreign place and Tahir's apartment is radical.

DADFAR

Why would the Taliban agree to meet with you now?

Jon looks to Tahir, who is clearly uncomfortable. Quietly --

TAHIR

Zia passed the message. The Kandahar Shura agree it is time to begin talking.

Dadfar sips coffee and regards Tahir with more interest.

DADFAR

Why with you?

JON

Because I have been trying to speak with them for years. No one else has tried. Not the UN, no embassy. Maybe we're the only option.

DADFAR

We know what they want.

JON

'Ousting the foreign infidels?' It's for public consumption! They have to compromise eventually.

DADFAR

Whom does Zia really speak for? Do you know for certain?

JON

So, better I ignore the offer?

DADFAR

Not necessarily.

JON

Exactly. This could be the first peace overture of the war.

(a beat)

Please. We need your help this. You're a leading Parliamentarian.

They all chuckle. This is true but irrelevant.

JON (CONT'D)

We're going to fly to Kandahar and drive down toward Spin Boldak.

DADFAR

And you need a guarantee of protection from Babak in his territory.

Exactly. A beat.

JON

He won't meet with us. I was hoping you might -

DADFAR

No. Mullah Babak and I are not...on the right terms, now.

Jon is deflated. Tahir looks, perhaps, relieved.

DADFAR (CONT'D)

But I know someone he might listen to. In Pul-e-Charki.

TAHIR

He is in prison?

DADFAR

NDS caught him with two kilos of heroin at the airport last month.

JON

Perfect.

Tahir looks at Jon like, what the fuck? Angle on --

TOMMY PIERSON, 30s, NY Times Reporter, notices Jon's meeting as nearly every expat present checks his phone. Tommy joins CLAIRE SUMMERS, US press attaché, a young 30, at a corner table. She's a Southern belle with a wine stain on her cheek.

CLAIRE

(handing him her phone)
Ugh. Can you believe this?

TOMMY

(reading)
'Three suspected VBIEDS. Black Corollas. Stay in position.'
(handing phone back)
Well, it's supposed to be a war.

CLAIRE
I'll be under lockdown for days.

TOMMY
Serving your country with pride.
But, seriously, speaking of work,
when do I meet the new Ambassador?

CLAIRE
I haven't even met the man yet,
Tommy. I don't know how he's going
to want to deal with y'all.

TOMMY
Did you just call the *New York
Times* y'all?

CLAIRE
I'm talking about all y'all.

Jon approaches. Tahir hovers behind. Jon sits.

JON
So George told me there's a new
girl at the embassy.

CLAIRE
Lovely to see you too, Jonny.

TOMMY
Hey you want to get out of here?
George is at L'atmo. Says the booze
situation is dire.

CLAIRE
I want to come.

JON
So come.

CLAIRE
(holding up her phone)
These damn VBIEDs. I already pissed
off the new RSO once. I can't sneak
out again.

JON
Tahir, you want to come?

TAHIR
I'm going to Friday prayers.

He walks off. The boys look at Claire like: so, you coming?

CLAIRE
Of course I'm coming.

EXT. L'ATMO - DAY

Heloise walks over open sewers toward a metal gate. A black Corolla rolls up, drawing her attention - a VBIED? She watches then steps around sandbags into...

INT. L'ATMO GUARD HUT - CONTINUOUS

A radio plays Farsi-pop next to a steel door. A young GUARD in a ragged leather jacket stops Heloise.

GUARD
No gun?

HELOISE
No gun.

GUARD
No knife?

HELOISE
No knife.

GUARD
No grenade?

HELOISE
No grenade.

GUARD
(to door)
I love you!

A slit in the steel door opens, and another guard peers out.

HELOISE
(re: "I love you")
That's a terrible password.

INT. L'ATMO COMPOUND - MOMENTS LATER

We follow Heloise through Kabul's "Rick's Bar" to find George, nursing a beer, forlorn.

GEORGE
My darling.

HELOISE
 Bonjour, George. Ca va?

GEORGE
 Look at the carnage.
 (points at empty bottles)

One of the bow-tied Afghan waiters smiles.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 What are you grinning at, Moustafa?

She takes George by the arm through the garden. Anita Ward's "Ring My Bell" plays. Expats unwind, spring break style.

EXT. L'ATMO POOL - AFTERNOON

Tommy lounges, Claire reads *US*, Jon dangles feet in water.

TOMMY
 So they said no? Can't blame'em.

JON
 Yes I can.

TOMMY
 When they're tired of fighting with each other, they'll reach out to each other. These things have a pace. Up the chain, down the chain. Everyone has to piss on a new plan.

George and Heloise arrive. The gang is now all here.

GEORGE
 Are you talking about our boy's plan to meet his Taliban penpals?

CLAIRE
 Ohmigod I heard. Has anyone okayed this? You'll get in such hot water.

JON
 They'll give me a stern talking to.

Heloise takes off her jeans and lies in a sun chair. Jon watches her.

GEORGE
 Our own Don Quixote, south to Kandahar. Hiyaa, rocinantes!

HELOISE
Stop it. You just encourage him.

JON
You would give an arm to interview
these Talibs.

Which was said too sharply. The others stare at Jon.

JON (CONT'D)
I'm just saying: how do you think
this war ends?

CLAIRE
You get blown up by a VBIED?

GEORGE
God forbid this all ended. What the
hell would I do?

HELOISE
You'd be fine.
(indicating Tommy and Jon)
These two would be screwed.

TOMMY
Baby, it's Friday. Take it easy.

Tommy playfully pulls Heloise close and kisses her. Triangle revealed. Jon is poker-faced. Heloise steps to the pool.

HELOISE
(to Jon)
Good luck ending the war.

Jon and Tommy both watch Heloise dive into the pool.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. PUL-I-CHARKI PRISON - DAY

Gnarly concrete, razor-wired, blast walls. A galaxy from L'atmo but only a thirty minute drive. Tahir waits. A cab pulls up. Jon exits, in shades. They regard the prison.

JON

What would you do, if you were locked up?

TAHIR

I would pray.

JON

There's no such thing as God.

TAHIR

You are an infidel.

JON

There's still no God.

TAHIR

You are a hung over infidel.

INT. PUL-I-CHARKI PRISON, CELL BLOCK - DAY

Renovated by the Americans but still over-crowded. A guard leads Jon and Tahir down a cell block of caged inmates.

JON

You know they say there's a grave outside this place with two thousand bodies in it.

TAHIR

I told you that.

JON

No you didn't.

TAHIR

I've got to get my kids out of this country.

JON

You always say that.

TAHIR

No. Look at this place.

JON
Your kids aren't in prison.

TAHIR
We will begin looking at the
websites for the boarding schools
with her next week, yeah?

JON
Yeah. If you really want.

TAHIR
I want.

JON
You know it is just possible that
what we're doing here could do some
good. I like living here.
(beat)
Think we can smoke in here?

The guard turns around with a zippo, surprising them, and
lights the cigarette. Then they go through a door.

INT. PUL-I-CHARKI PRISON, GROUP CELL - DAY

A gymnasium-sized room with hundreds of inmates. HABIB
MUHIBULLAH, 50s, toothless, very thin, twitchy, watches his
own TV, in his own corner, clearly has connections.

GUARD
Here.

Habib regards his visitors in silence. All dialogue in DARI.

JON
Salaam alaikum

Habib won't look at Jon, only speaks to Tahir.

HABIB
*He wants to meet with Taliban
Kandahar Leaders?*

JON
They invited us.

TAHIR
How did you know that?

HABIB

*You like working with these
Americans? You know they take
pictures of your wives?*

JON

*We've heard you can introduce us to
Mullah Babak.*

HABIB

*Why does he want to meet with the
Kandahar Taliban?*

TAHIR

Just to hear them out.

HABIB

*He is from the American government?
He doesn't dress like them.*

TAHIR

*He works for a neutral
organization. A think tank. He
provides advice.*

HABIB

*He's a spy.
(to Jon)
Would you be interested in
reverting to Islam?*

JON

*I'm a man of the book. I'd also be
interested if you could introduce
me to Mullah Babak.*

Habib twitches a bit, fumbles with TV remote.

HABIB

*Ha. He works for 'neutral
organization.'*

JON

Just a quick intro. Please.

HABIB

*(to Tahir)
Pictures of your daughters, dog-
washer.*

Tahir abruptly stands. Says, in English --

TAHIR

This man will not help us.

Tahir walks away, surprising Jon who is forced to follow. As Habib yells after them, to Jon --

HABIB

He doesn't like it when you put the cameras on his women.

EXT. PUL-I-CHARKI PRISON - DAY

Tahir hurries toward the car. Jon follows.

TAHIR

That man is sick in the head.

JON

He might still have introduced us.

TAHIR

Opium addict, should be killed.

JON

Jesus Tahir. He's our only way in.

TAHIR

And you. Man of the book.

JON

When did you become so pious?

TAHIR

I'm not. Some things just aren't worth faking.

Jon is stung by his partner calling him out. He stops.

JON

You think this isn't worth it?

On Jon, really asking. Tahir could derail Jon here, but instead, after a beat, he rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

TAHIR

Man of the book.

JON

Practically Moses.

He smiles. They continue walking to the car.

INT. JON LISTON'S HOUSE - DAY

Tahir, Jon stare at an eccentrically detailed WALL OF AFGHAN POLITICS: maps, headshots, etc - and pass a bag of chips.

TAHIR

So how important are the entrance exams for Qadria?

JON

Depends. The really fancy schools care more about extra-curriculars.

TAHIR

She's good at tests.

JON

Being an Afghan girl is as good as anything. It's a feel-good story.

Enter George.

GEORGE

Have you seen these absurdities in the Urdu Express? Some deputy interior minister in Islamabad is jabbering like a monkey about how he'll blockade the Khyber until the drones have stopped flying.

JON

Tahir won't go to Kandahar without Mullah Babak's say so, either.

George considers. Then approaches wall.

GEORGE

Tahir, really. You don't think it's a good plan?

He begins diagramming emphatically on the map as ---

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Befriending this heroin dealer, in this Kabul prison, so this narco-overlord will give you passage through these opium fields, so that you might have a bit of a nosh and a chat with Mullah Omar's inner circle out here, in Talibanistan?

TAHIR

Might be worth it.

JON
 Thank you, Tahir.
 (to George)
 And when did you start reading
 Pakistani newspapers?

GEORGE
 Since it became relevant to the
 future of high culture in this
 country.

JON
 Not sure gin and tonics are 'high
 culture.'

GEORGE
 Are you going to help me or not?

JON
 I'm working, George.

GEORGE
 Fine, dwell on Kandahar. But when
 the gin dries up, you'll be kicking
 yourself. Or maybe you just don't
 have the contacts to help anymore.

George exits. Jon watches then stares at the map. On Jon, as
 if re-tracing the absurdity George just pointed out. A beat.

JON
 I need to make a field trip.

EXT. RED CROSS HANGAR AT KABUL AIRPORT - DAY

Jon walks past a twin prop to a door marked RED CROSS.

INT. RED CROSS FLIGHT OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Sparse office. A goat faced South African bro-dude, GUMBO,
 30s, feet up on the desk, picks his teeth and squints at Jon.

JON
 And the Red Cross is the only one
 that has that mobility now. See?

Gumbo grumbles, admires dislodged food on his pick.

GUMBO

Seems to me like it's a lot of hassle, and I could lose my license, and I'm only another hundred hours from clocking what I need and getting out of this shithole to fly commercial.

JON

True. But it's a critical mission. I need you. And it's easy for you.

More thoughtful grumbling, a shrug.

JON (CONT'D)

We make it easy on both sides... And I'll owe you one.

GUMBO

Owe me one.

Beat. Silence. Toothpick down.

GUMBO (CONT'D)

You think like I didn't know you come in here for a favor?

JON

Look, no offense...See you at the Duck and Cover.

Jon bows his head, admitting defeat, and turns to leave.

GUMBO

Ahh, get in Liston. I'll do it.

JON

Alright. Thank you. I'll text you -

GUMBO

Helpful, yeah? Good for you?

Jon sees something coming, nods.

GUMBO (CONT'D)

Yes sir, good for you. Good for refugees, good for the government. And yet, no one ever asks: what would be good for Gumbo?

On Jon, waiting.

GUMBO (CONT'D)

Well?

JON

What would be good for Gumbo?

GUMBO

You know that blondie at the
Embassy, with the spot on her face?

EXT. US EMBASSY COMPOUND - DAY

Claire hurries along with LIZZIE GHAFFARI, 28, half Iranian, Prada suit, minimal, expensive jewelry - the new deputy political counselor. Around them we see bunkers, college quad-esque apartment blocks. A Cal banner flutters from a window.

CLAIRE

Darlin, I am so sorry. Nasty cats
in your hooch.

LIZZIE

God, doesn't seem that important
next to these VBIED alerts.

CLAIRE

Pishh. Don't worry about carbombs,
nothing you can do. But your hooch.
That's your sanctuary.

They reach a COFFEE STAND operated by two Afghans, Slogan:
"Honor First, Coffee Second."

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Do you have anything that matches
that bracelet?.

LIZZIE

It's actually unique - my
grandmother gave it to me.

CLAIRE

It's gorgeous.
(to coffee guy)
Haneef, I'll take a double-skinny
soy latte please.
(then, to Lizzie)
You know, you're famous here.

LIZZIE

What?
(to Haneef the coffee guy)
Small black, please.

CLAIRE

At the pool yesterday, everyone was asking about 'the new girl.' I'm tellin ya. News travels. Come to the French Bar, you'll see.

LIZZIE

But we're on lockdown, no?

CLAIRE

Only if you want to be.

Lizzie looks uncomfortable. A handsome MARINE steps into line. Claire cocks an eyebrow.

LIZZIE

Listen, thanks so much for showing me around, but I should probably get up to speed on cable traffic before Ambassador Wilcox arrives.

CLAIRE

Lizzie, trust me. Before you jump into writing cables, it helps to get to know the people you work with -

(to Marine, off name tag)

Right, Sergeant Cooper?

Claire gives the sergeant a smile, he returns it. Claire notes to her satisfaction that this slightly unnerves Lizzie.

EXT. TAHIR'S APARTMENT BLOCK STAIRWELL - DAY

Tahir descends the stairs quickly, only to find Jon, waiting, smoking. Tahir can sense something is up.

JON

We should just go.

TAHIR

Just go?

JON

To Babak's. Let's just drive to his villa and say we want to see him.

TAHIR

He's never agreed to meeting.

JON

But he should. Don't you think?

TAHIR
It is bad to be rude.

JON
Rude? What's he going to do? So he
turns us away. We'll leave.

On Tahir, skeptical.

EXT. BABAK'S NARCOVILLA - DAY

Jon admires the architecture. Ionic columns, tinted windows,
electric-green eagle sculptures. Tahir paces. Guards emerge.

TAHIR
This is wrong.

Jon proceeds to buffalo the guards with his confidence.

JON
Jon Liston and Tahir Habibi of The
Crisis Group, for Mullah Babak.

GUARD #2
Wait.

Guard #1 leaves.

TAHIR
This was a very bad idea.

Jon, Tahir wait under Guard #2's evil eye. Guard #1 returns.

GUARD #1
Okay come.

Jon looks at Tahir: see?

INT. BABAK'S NARCOVILLA LIVING ROOM - DAY

On the marble floor, black turbaned Babak ASSOCIATES stare at
Jon and Tahir who translates MULLAH ABDULLAH BABAK, 50s,
permanent squint, long white beard. During the conversation,
associates' heads swing back and forth, as at a tennis match.

BABAK/TAHIR
Mullah Babak says, we are welcome.

JON
And please extend our thanks.

BABAK/TAHIR

And, now that we have eaten, and are comfortable, Babak says he is pleased you came, but he wants to know why you called him a drug trafficker in a report when, in fact, he is not a drug trafficker?

Italicized dialogue in DARI.

BABAK ASSOCIATE

These men insulted you.

This associate is a mean fucker with crumbs in his beard.

JON

Actually, Interpol suggested you were a drug trafficker. Not me.

BABAK/TAHIR

Interpol is lying. There are too many lies. Everywhere.

JON

I agree. That's why I'm here.

A beat while everyone waits to find out why he's there.

JON (CONT'D)

Mullah Babak, we are invited to meet Taliban commanders in Spin Boldak. But the road is dangerous.

BABAK/TAHIR

Who exactly will you see?

JON

Eshan Mujahid's people.

BABAK/TAHIR

They kill our children. They are Godless.

JON

God or no, without negotiation they will continue to kill our children.

Beat while Babak thinks. Tahir eyebrows Jon: our children?

JON (CONT'D)

If we listen to them, we can unravel their lies. But we need passage through your territory.

BABAK ASSOCIATE

*Sahib, these men come unannounced
to your home after insulting you in
a report and ask for your help?*

This is a threat. Associates scowl.

TAHIR

(whispering)
We should leave. Now.

Tahir stands up. Jon stays seated. Speaks in Dari --

JON

*Mullah Babak, I also understand
there are some untruths with the
D.E.A. Some misunderstandings.*

TAHIR

Jon, let's go.

BABAK

*Many misunderstandings with D.E.A.
(to Tahir)
You, keep translating.*

JON

The D.E.A. is easily confused.

Tahir sits, looks at Jon like: what the fuck are you doing?

JON (CONT'D)

Maybe I can help clear up their
misunderstandings.

BABAK/TAHIR

A small plane has been spraying
poison on my aubergine fields.

JON

Just the kind of misunderstanding I
could help you avoid.

BABAK/TAHIR

How?

JON

I know people in the US Embassy.

A hard look at Tahir: come on man, sell it.

TAHIR

He knows people. This is true.

JON

All of it is true. But can you really guarantee our safety between Kandahar and Spin Boldak?

A beat. It hangs until --

BABAK/TAHIR

It can be done.

The associate shoots Babak a look. Babak shuts him down.

BABAK/TAHIR (CONT'D)

He says he will give us a letter. But he can't guarantee safety off the main road. And you must promise to make your call.

Jon exits, Tahir trailing. As Tahir passes the associate raises a hand to get their attention and mumbles in Dari. The Afghans all laugh. And we catch up to --

EXT. BABAK'S NARCO VILLA - MOMENTS LATER

Jon and Tahir, walking away.

TAHIR

Since when do you know people in the D.E.A.?

JON

I said I know people in the Embassy.

TAHIR

Who? He'll expect you to deliver.

JON

Everything I said was the truth.

Tahir stops, pissed. Jon pauses.

JON (CONT'D)

What did he say back there?

TAHIR

He asks does The Crisis Group pay ransom?

Off Jon.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. US EMBASSY CHECKPOINT - NEXT MORNING

Jon in the foreigners' line. Soldiers check pistols into lockers, x-ray bags. A separate much longer line for Afghans.

EXT. EMBASSY COMPOUND - MORNING

Claire and Lizzie bump into Jon.

CLAIRE

Look at this. Jonny Liston in a blazer.

JON

And good morning to you, too.

LIZZIE

Lizzie Ghaffari, with political.

They shake. Eye contact. Fall into step together -

CLAIRE

The blazer is perfect for a favor I wanted to ask you... I gave your info to this Al Jazeera reporter, in just for a couple days, they needed an expert, could you...?

JON

You know I hate doing that.

CLAIRE

Please? I told him you would.

JON

Sorry, Claire. Too busy today.

LIZZIE

You don't like giving interviews?

CLAIRE

Oh he likes it fine.

JON

(to Lizzie)

So you're the new deputy political counselor. Our incoming Ambassador brought you along?

LIZZIE

No. Start of my tour just matched
Wilcox's appointment.

(switching to Dari)

*Your name was tossed around at FSI
as someone useful to know out here.*

JON

*Your Dari's good, you learn in
school?*

CLAIRE

(re: them speaking Dari)

Lizzie, I had no idea. Jon, you
know I hate when you do that -

LIZZIE

*No, I'm half-Iranian. And it is
unbelievable that people can work
here without speaking the language.*

CLAIRE

What was that? "Iranian"? I got
that much -

LIZZIE

*Because this is the most important
post in the world, and our press
spokeswoman can't understand a word
I'm saying.*

CLAIRE

Come on, Lizzie, I hate this -

LIZZIE

Sorry. I just had so many questions
for Jon.

A beat while Claire studies them both.

CLAIRE

Here's a good question for Jon.
What are you doing here?

They arrive at the Ambassador's residence.

JON

Seeing your boss.

And then he's inside. Off Lizzie and Claire, surprised.

INT. JON'S HOUSE - LATE MORNING

George, who also lives here, wakes up in suit pants and silk pajama top. Hung-over but stoic, he pours the last drops of whiskey into his coffee. He watches TV. Feels better with his first smoke until the announcer switches from cricket to --

BBC ANNOUNCER

...and from Pakistan, where the blockade of NATO container trucks enters Day 4 with no foreseeable resolution...

George casually throws an ashtray at the television. Then he TAKES PISTOL IN ANKLE HOLSTER from a drawer, straps it on, remembers to grab wallet and keys, exits.

INT. L'ATMO GARDEN - DAY

George, his mood unimproved, reads the newspaper at a table. Heloise and Tommy sit opposite.

TOMMY

Dude, you know, it's not very cool to invite us to brunch and then just read the paper the whole time.

GEORGE

(from behind the paper)
Brunch is for contemplation.

The waiter arrives with plates of eggs. He drops one and the clatter makes George wince.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

And my friends behind the bar told me no one was here last night, because there was no -

A tremendous EXPLOSION two blocks away drowns him out.

HELOISE

That sounds like it was just around the corner.

Smoke is visible beyond L'atmo's high walls. Tommy is already on the phone. Heloise and Tommy are getting up to leave.

GEORGE

Hang on a minute, where are you all running off to? To cover that?

HELOISE

Merde. Yes. I'll probably have to file today.

George rubs his temples.

GEORGE

You would think they'd have the decency not to explode these VBIEDS or whatever it was while I'm trying to have a meal. No manners at all.

TOMMY

I'll be sure to tell the survivors that the Deputy European Union Representative was interrupted while trying to brunch.

Heloise and Tommy are off. A beat, George alone.

GEORGE

'To brunch.' What an atrocious verb.

INT. US EMBASSY AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE - DAY

Mahogany desk, striped sofa, armchairs. Standing at a bookshelf is outgoing AMBASSADOR GERSHORN, 60s, small, sharp-featured, pro bureaucrat, glasses. A cardboard box sits on the desk containing his effects. Jon is sitting in a chair.

GERSHORN

No.

JON

Just like that? No?

GERSHORN

I'm leaving my post in two days.

JON

Exactly. You have nothing to lose.

GERSHORN

I'm not going to tie the incoming ambassador to some speculative talks.

JON

It's not tying him and they're not speculative. They've agreed to meet.

GERSHORN

I thought you prided yourself on not being government.

JON

Well, someone should at least hear what they have to say, don't you think?

GERSHORN

And in the proper time through the proper channels they will.

JON

How many years will that take?

A beat. Gershorn stares. To be clear --

GERSHORN

You do not speak for anyone in the United States Government and you are not passing messages. If you want to do this, it's at your own risk. And the last thing this Embassy needs is a kidnapped American in Spin Boldak.

JON

My HQ in Brussels gives me top kidnap and ransom insurance.

GERSHORN

There's a fine line between talking to the Taliban and aiding and abetting terrorists.

JON

That's absurd.

But the threat has landed. Jon stares.

GERSHORN

If you'll excuse me, I have another meeting.

Jon stands. Starts to leave, then --

JON

You have kids, right? What do you tell them you actually do?

Gershorn goes about his business. Jon exits, pissed. Gershorn picks up phone.

GERSHORN

We may have a problem in Kandahar.

INT. US EMBASSY COMPOUND - DAY

Jon watches the political section playing volleyball. Quietly seething. He sees Lizzie across the way. Approaches.

JON

Where are you from?

LIZZIE

Born in Tehran, grew up near Palo Alto. Dad's a techie. You?

JON

Where'd you go to school?

Suddenly the tone feels off.

LIZZIE

Cal undergrad. Stanford for my master's -

JON

Right.

LIZZIE

Sorry?

JON

Why were you doing that, before, with Claire?

LIZZIE

What's with the interrogation?

JON

She was showing you around. You didn't seem particularly grateful.

LIZZIE

Come on, it was a joke. She couldn't understand anything anyway, right?

JON

Lizzie. When you show off with the language you inherited, like you inherited those Peacock Throne diamonds -

(points)

(MORE)

JON (CONT'D)
 - maternal side, I'd guess - you might get into whatever graduate seminar you applied for. But no one who knows anything real will listen to you, except to figure out how they can screw you, in whatever way they find most interesting at the time. Nice bracelet.

She's stunned. He walks off, taking out his phone --

JON (CONT'D)
 Hey, Claire. Yeah, you know what, I actually can do that Al Jazeera interview.

INT. AL JAZEERA HOUSE - DAY

An expat garden. Jon opposite AL JAZERA CORRESPONDENT, 50s, a Dan Rather-type recently poached from one of the networks.

AL JAZEERA
 Jon Liston, senior analyst with The Crisis Group, thanks for joining us... This most recent attack comes at a politically sensitive time, as the Afghans plan for elections later this year. Does it raise questions about the coalition's strategy?

Beat. On Jon, nasty glint in his eye, considering.

JON
 Questions?

EXT. SHAR-E-NAW STREET FOUR - INTER-CUT

George has gotten himself up from lunch and gone to see the explosion's aftermath. It is chaos and carnage.

JON (O.S.)
 Do you mean questions like...

As George steps gently around the wreckage:

JON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 ...are western governments funding the very insurgents they are fighting through a corrupt web of subcontractors?

(MORE)

JON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Is American foreign policy
implemented by timid bureaucrats
more concerned with collecting
danger pay than trying to
understand other cultures?

AL JAZEERA

Well -

George watches Afghan cops digging through rubble.

JON (O.S.)
Or maybe you mean questions like
why our top diplomats cede
responsibility for Afghanistan to a
military command that believes the
only good Taliban is a dead one?
Are those the kind of questions you
mean?

Heloise, Tommy and a handful of other journos wander about
the bomb scene, snapping pictures of the dead.

Back on Jon for the kicker:

JON (CONT'D)
Or would you prefer some answers?

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. HELOISE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jon knocks on her gate. She opens.

HELOISE
Nice interview.

JON
Claire introduced me to the guy.
She can't say I went looking to
nail them. Can I come in?

HELOISE
You should call first.

She keeps the gate half-closed. It's not a good time. A beat.

JON
Well, it was urgent. I need someone
to deliver this to George.

He holds up an envelope.

HELOISE
Your housemate.

JON
Could you make sure he gets it?

She takes a badge out of the envelope.

HELOISE
What does George need with a
visitor pass to the ICRC airport
office? And you couldn't just leave
it at your house for him?
(then, realizing)
You're actually going down to Spin
Boldak aren't you.

JON
We're leaving in the morning.

HELOISE
Your embassy is onboard?

JON
We don't need them.

Heloise can't even answer.

JON (CONT'D)
I wanted to see you before I left.

Jon leans in to kiss her. She bats him away. A beat.

HELOISE
You're here because you're scared.

JON
I'm not -

HELOISE
Scared, and you want me to tell you
it will all be fine. Like you're
some kind of bullshit hero off to
the war. Like everything you do is
worth it.

TOMMY (O.S)
Heloise?

HELOISE
(yells)
Be right there.

A beat.

JON
I'm not scared.

Heloise cocks her head, like, oh yeah?

JON (CONT'D)
It's just work, and I just want to
get it right. It's not about "worth
it." I don't have anything to
prove. Right?
(a beat. Then, off her look:)
Anyway the appointment is set. I
have to go now.

Heloise has much love for Jon, but this is bullshit.

HELOISE
It's better to be a coward than a
liar, Jon.

She turns and leaves. He stares after, as if he might never
see her again, and then stays a beat beyond the clang of the
closing gate, gathering his courage.

INT. JON LISTON'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jon, naked, tosses the ball in the air. The phone alarm rings. He turns it off. A beat and --

He stares at his phone. Unlocks it. Selects 'photos.' Jon stares. This time, we SEE --

A photo. Jon and his 8-year-old SON.

A beat, as if Jon is considering making a phone call. Finally, he sets the phone aside and we see --

EXT. SPIN BOLDAK - DAY

Jon and Tahir's Corolla pushing through the poppy field.

EXT. RED CROSS HANGAR AT KABUL AIRPORT - DAY

George looks at the picture of Jon on the Red Cross visitors' badge he is holding. Shows it to the guards.

EXT. SPIN BOLDAK - DAY

The corolla lurches out of the poppies, turns down the track.

EXT. RED CROSS HANGAR AT KABUL AIRPORT - DAY

George looks at the note that came with his badge. PALATE 3-3-43. He walks, curiously, along the tarmac to hangar 3.

EXT. SPIN BOLDAK ROAD - DAY

Black bearded guys at the checkpoint walk up to Osman's car.

INT. RED CROSS HANGAR AT KABUL AIRPORT - DAY

George sees palates covered in tarps marked with the Red Cross Logo. He searches, peeking: guaze; rice; generators. Boring, boring, boring. Finally, Palate 3-3-43. George yanks the tarp off: cases and cases of EL ULTIMO TEQUILA.

Off George's face. Victory.

INT. COROLLA ON SPIN BOLDAK ROAD - DAY

We pick up the end of the teaser. The gunman stares at Jon, yells to his fellows, levels the rifle. Osman prays harder.

JON
(sotto, to Tahir, about Osman)
Don't let him make problems.

TAHIR
(eyes fixed on road blockers)
You are the problem. Stay quiet.

JON
(Pashto)
Show them the letter.

Tahir snatches the letter from him.

TAHIR
(whispering)
Shut up. Your Pashto isn't good enough.

The insurgents arrive. Two of them - LUDIN, fatigues, 20, and AMANULLAH, patoo (cloak), 23 - compete for dominance.

This scene is in PASHTO. It does not play fast.

LUDIN
Get out of the car!

EXT. SPIN BOLDAK ROAD - CONTINUOUS

They all exit the car, hands up.

AMANULLAH
(to Ludin)
I will tell them what to do.

Ludin shoots Amanullah an evil look before turning to Tahir.

LUDIN
Who are you?

Osman is nervous. Tahir is confident with the letter.

TAHIR
*Tahir Habibi, close friend of
Mullah Babak.*

AMANULLAH

*No one can travel on this road
without permission.*

He draws the patoo around him, strangely effeminate.

TAHIR

We have a letter -

LUDIN

*I don't want your letter.
(points to Osman)
Who are you?*

OSMAN

I'm Osman.

LUDIN

*(points to Jon)
And you?*

TAHIR

*He is my cousin, from Helmand. He
is not right in the head and can
not speak.*

(then)

*Brothers, this is serious, we are
guests of Mullah Babak. If you
bother us, it is an insult to him.*

Tahir hands the letter. Ludin shakes his head, ashamed of his illiteracy, now angrier. Amanullah confidently takes the letter. Studies it, upside down. The other insurgents watch.

AMANULLAH

*It is as they say. Babak writes
that we must let them pass.*

(beat)

*And the commander of the road must
take a toll. The letter says this.*

He dead eyes Tahir.

TAHIR

*Yes, this is exactly what it says,
the commander must take the toll.*

On Ludin viewing this exchange with frustrated skepticism.

EXT. SPIN BOLDAK ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Ludin pushes the stone back. Amanullah counts his new cash.

INT. COROLLA ON SPIN BOLDAK ROAD - SHORT TIME LATER

Tahir, Jon, Osman all have cigarettes.

EXT. DIRT DRIVEWAY OUTSIDE TALIBAN GUESTHOUSE - DAY

Osman pulls up to a brick compound surrounded by poplar trees. Dozens of Taliban militants observe their arrival.

INT. TALIBAN GUESTHOUSE - DAY

Windowless room. Osman and Tahir sit on torshaks, Jon paces.

JON

What's taking so long?

We stay on him, pacing. The others seem to be marking time by his footsteps. It's excruciating.

JON (CONT'D)

We have to get back to Kandahar by sunset.

And then the door bursts open. Two TALIB GUNMEN enter, bind and blindfold our guys. Osman cries out.

As they are led out of the room.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. BACK OF HILUX PICKUP - DAY

Bumpy ride. Jon, Tahir and Osman crouch between six heavily armed TALIB MILITIAMEN.

JON

If they were gonna kill us, they
would have just done it there.

(beat)

Right?

Tahir sighs. Hilux pulls sharply off road onto steep rocky descent, is waved through another checkpoint by MORE GUNMEN. At bottom of trail, driver slams brakes.

Dialogue in PASHTO where italicized.

TALIB GUNMAN

Out!

They stumble, still blindfolded, out of the pickup.

INT. HALLWAY OF KANDAHAR SHURA HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Guards remove blindfolds and untie their hands. They walk through door to:

INT. KANDAHAR SHURA MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Velvet carpets and torshaks cover the floors of a dark, dank windowless room. 10 white bearded KANDAHAR SHURA MEMBERS sit in a semicircle at the far end of the room. Two teenage boy-servants in satin pajamas and mascara serve tea. Guards sporting bandoliers and AKs stand in all corners. Jon and Tahir sit in center of room. Osman in back with guards. One-legged SHURA LEADER prays, all raise palms toward ceiling. Whole scene plays in PASHTO.

SHURA LEADER

*In the name of Allah, the Gracious,
the Merciful. All service is for
Allah and all acts of worship and
good deeds are for Him. Peace and
the mercy and blessings be upon us
and all of Allah's righteous
slaves.*

(MORE)

SHURA LEADER (CONT'D)

*O Praise Allah, the infidel
occupiers of our holy Emirate and
their vulgar puppets denigrate your
holy tenets, and we heed that you,
Almighty Allah, say that their
multitude shall be routed and they
shall turn their backs. Great
Allah, we surrender!*

ALL SHURA MEMBERS, OSMAN, AND TAHIR

*God is the Greatest! God is the
greatest!*

All wipe their faces with their hands. Long silence.

SHURA LEADER

*We have seen your reports... Just
because you speak some Pashto and
spend time with dog washers, you
think you understand our country?*

JON

I'm trying.

SHURA LEADER

*You can fool your stooge countrymen
but you are as blind as the rest.
(beat)
You have tried so long to meet us.
But you don't know us at all.*

JON

*I know you speak for Taliban
leaders in Pakistan.*

SHURA LEADER

And you, who do you speak for?

JON

*Myself. But I talk with my fellow
"stooges," and they listen to me.*

On SHURA LEADER, considering this.

SHURA LEADER

And now you will listen to us.

On Jon. This is victory.

INT. OSMAN'S COROLLA - SUNSET

Osman, Tahir and Jon driving back to Kandahar. Jon pulls the
bottle of wine from under driver's seat, opens it.

JON
Not bubbly, but it'll do.

He takes a swig, passes to Tahir, who declines.

TAHIR
You should have offered some to those asshole Mullahs. Your next negotiating strategy.

Osman grabs the bottle and takes a long chug. The mood is somewhere between celebratory and relieved.

JON
Next time.

TAHIR
Next time?

Jon looks at his phone. Three missed calls from George.

JON
Wonder how George is getting on?

TAHIR
Next time?

EXT. SPIN BOLDAK ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Corolla driving north to safety.

INT. L'ATMO GARDEN - SUNSET

The gang is all there. George, in full celebratory mode, walks in, grinning.

GEORGE
Just chatted with Liston. All off-the-record of course. But a success, I'd say.

TOMMY
Success? For him maybe.

GEORGE
Now now, Tommy. No need for jealousy. I'm sure he'll give you an interview. He says they gave him the names of people they want out of Gitmo and others they want removed from the 1267 black list.

HELOISE

But he's ok? He's coming back?

Claire walks over, Lizzie Ghaffari in tow. Gumbo following.

GEORGE

My dear, not only is he coming back, he's now living proof that the Talibs are ready to negotiate. Puts the burden of action on the Americans, really. Powerful stuff.
(to Tommy)
If anyone reads the report.

CLAIRE

Lizzie, this is Kabul's cutest couple, Tommy Pierson and Heloise Flaubert. Oh, and George.

Gumbo, clearly dogging Claire, interjects.

GUMBO

I'll get us drinks, beautiful.

Claire tries to calm herself. George lights up at Lizzie.

GEORGE

I don't believe I've had the pleasure. George Hewlitt-Bowilby, Deputy Special Representative of the European Union to Afghanistan. May I buy you a drink?

LIZZIE

I'd love a drink. And who was that you said, discussing a ceasefire?

Success. George signals for a drink.

GEORGE

My housemate, Jon Liston. Extraordinary guy, actually.

LIZZIE

Huh. I actually just met him. Maybe he's extraordinary. Or maybe...

George frowns. Lizzie has the gangs' attention.

EXT. SPIN BOLDAK ROAD - INTER-CUT

Our corolla slows, approaching the stone-in-road checkpoint.

LIZZIE (O.S.)
...he's just another white guy.

This time the checkpoint is manned by Ludin, without Amanullah. On Jon, thinking everything is fine. Tahir gets out to talk.

LIZZIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You know? A me-versus-the-world-charmer, dashing enough but probably sexual vanilla, and essentially, a war tourist, with no idea what Afghans actually think. People like that do a lot of good, sometimes, though.

Ludin shoots Tahir in the head.

We see what that actually looks like.

In the following seconds Jon is paralyzed. Osman puts pedal to metal as Ludin turns to them.

LIZZIE (CONT'D)
At least, they get the money flowing. So maybe he is extraordinary. Hard to know.

Jon and Osman peel away.

On Jon, face pressed to glass, looking out the back window.

SMASH TO BLACK

LIZZIE (O.S.) (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Anyway. Thanks for the drink.

END OF SHOW