

deadline

By

soo hugh

based on several true stories

MANAGEMENT:
Energy Entertainment
310-274-3440

OVER BLACK:

MUSIC: A lone woman's voice sings Handel's *Cara Sposa* from the opera *Rinaldo*. A mournful, heart-broken aria...

... The story of a brave Crusader who sets off to fight the Muslim infidels but falls under the spell of a beautiful enchantress. His call to duty and thirst for blood prove too strong for love. And he abandons her.

... The song builds to a fevered passion and continues over:

EXT. DESERT COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Scorched, blackened fields imprisoned by gray mountains. An oppressively bright day.

A light wind shifts. The only sign of disturbance in what feels like a world turned to stone and silence. And then...

The crackle of BARE FEET against loose rocks. Bandaged. Bleeding.

KATE LICHT, 25, covered in a black dupatta, or long shawl. Kate looks straight at the sun and does not to blink.

A GLOVED HAND pushes her forward. Roughly.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Kate, hair matted against her face with sweat, sucks in the dry air for relief. Feels the energy drain from her body, and falls...

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Could be a second later. Or ten minutes. Time no longer matters.

Kate pushes her face deeper into the black dirt.

A SHADOW falls over her. She feels the presence, and shivers. But she does not look up. Won't let herself face who's there.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Kate, now kneeling. Her face bears the mark of the earth.

TWO AFGHANI INSURGENTS, faces obscured by thick turbans and beards, hold AK-47 knockoffs at their sides. These guns make their mark one out of every two shots. On a good day.

Kate comes face to face with THE LEADER. A lean, beardless Afghani man in his thirties. Wears clean trousers and shirt. A man who looks like he belongs in a classroom, a hospital, an office. Anywhere but here.

An Insurgent raises his gun and points it at Kate.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Kate. The dupatta now covers her face completely. She has become a shadow.

MUSIC abruptly ends...

Allowing us to hear Kate SCREAMING. The type of scream we hope never to hear in our lifetime. A scream to stop a beating heart.

SLOW DISSOLVE:

EXT. DESERT LANDSCAPE - DAY

Vast plain of ragged desert plants and jagged hills. Looks similar to where we've been before. But...

A MANGY BROWN DOG.

Struggles in the heat. Limps on to a single-lane interstate road and plops down. Pathetic.

TITLE: "Southern California"

A.C (O.S.)
I'm tired, man.

INT. DINER, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA - DAY

Bright, harsh day bleeds through diner windows, offering the forgettable locale a spiritual aura.

JEFFREY HIGHSMITH, forties, a face made interesting, even handsome, by deep lines and searing eyes that notice everything but give nothing. He wears a button-up shirt with a nice sheen. Expensive. Even in the middle of nowhere he presents well.

Jeffrey faces PRIVATE FIRST CLASS A.C BORDEN, twenty-one, crew cut, baby face. A.C nervously drums a lit cigarette against the rim of a full ashtray.

JEFFREY

You're the one who said you wanted to wash your hands clean.

A.C

It's the right thing, ain't it?

Jeffrey almost sneers at him.

JEFFREY

When the story comes out, your military buddies are going to know it's you who fingered them. And it's going to be the worst day of your life. You're thinking about what that means. Don't. Because you have no idea.

A.C

You think I don't know that?

JEFFREY

You don't. You'll get a dishonorable discharge from the army, go back to your home town where even your mother won't be able to look you in the eye. Words like traitor, un-American, coward will be part of your everyday vocabulary. Start getting used to them.

A.C slams his fist on the table. His coffee spills.

A.C

I just want people to know. What really happened there.

JEFFREY

Are you sure you know what happened?

A.C

(quiet desperation
simmers)

You have to write it. It's the only thing left I have to count on.

JEFFREY

I can write it.

(beat)

But it's just words. Words of a high school drop out with the reading skills of a fourteen year old claiming one of the most venerable institutions in this country is abusing terrorists suspects. The operative word is not abuse. It's terrorist.

A.C blows on his coffee, thinking. He looks so young. So pathetic. Jeffrey almost gives him a break.

JEFFREY

(standing)

Let me know how the hero thing turns out.

A.C

(quiet)

I have photos.

A wet flicker in his eyes that he tries to swallow back. *Be a man.*

A.C has trouble lighting another cigarette. His hands shaking. Jeffrey takes the lighter and lights the cigarette.

JEFFREY

Where are they?

A.C digs into his pocket and pulls out a cell phone. Pushes * it to Jeffrey...

YUSIF AGHA. Bloody. Beaten. Dead with no tongue.

Jeffrey looks at A.C. Cigarette dangling helplessly from his fingers. Staring out the window...

The Mangy Brown Dog lying in the middle of the road. He is done.

INT. JEFFREY'S CAR, DESERT ROAD - LATER

Jeffrey, eyes masked with sunglasses, revs down the road at 80 miles per hour. The only change in scenery is the power lines zigzagging against blue skies.

JEFFREY

(into cellphone)

Get me a non-stop to D.C.

And then get me the last flight
back tonight... See you in the
morning.

A.C's cell phone sits on the passenger seat.

The heat outside makes the near horizon ripple like a dream.

Loud DRILLING...

INT. KATE'S BEDROOM, KABUL - DAY

... Wakes up Kate. A sweet, plain face that looks years younger than her real age. The girl one always liked in the moment but forgets when she's out of sight.

Kate sits up in her bed. Pushed against the only window in the small room cluttered with unpacked boxes.

She stretches her hands outside in the scorching air, hungrily swallows this strange new world with her eyes...

Morning rush down a newly constructed street crowded with cars, bicycles, foot traffic and carts dragged by donkeys. A vibrant, moving world of people in western and traditional clothing.

A new modern apartment building going up a few blocks away, the source of the drilling sound, stands next to decrepit buildings. A city that's held on through clenched teeth.

A STREET VENDOR looks up and spots her. Kate ducks back into her room.

INT. BAR, WASHINGTON, DC - NIGHT

Upscale, oak-paneled bar. An unimaginative after-work choice. Jeffrey sits at the bar. He's hardly touched his drink.

MICK (O.S.)
You trying to get my wife to leave
me?

Jeffrey turns and sees MICK TAYLOR, the guy who's on the inside but tries not to show it. Everything about him is big. Everything about him screams Texas.

MICK
I haven't been home for dinner in a
month now.

Mick motions to the bartender and points to Jeffrey's drink.

MICK

Good thing you don't have kids.
You'd have one guilty conscience.

JEFFREY

I have enough ex-wives for that.
(to the point)
I need corroboration.

The drink arrives.

JEFFREY

This is the last one-

MICK

For a news man, you're a shitty
liar.

JEFFREY

I trust you. If you say it, then I
know it's a go.

Mick laughs. It's more like a bellow.

JEFFREY

I have someone from the inside.

MICK

You using his name?

JEFFREY

And his pictures.

MICK

There are all sorts of pictures-

JEFFREY

I just need someone from State to
confirm that this was more than
just a couple of bad seeds.

MICK

D.O.D know what you have?

JEFFREY

I sent them my notes. Haven't heard
back.

MICK

Means they're not too interested.
Doesn't that tell you something?

JEFFREY
Well they should be.

MICK
(shrugs)
Or maybe they know Americans don't
really want to know what their
military is doing. So a few brown-
skinned boys get roughed up? The
unfortunate cost of what it takes
to keep the country safe.

JEFFREY
I'm going to make them care.

Mick bellows again.

MICK
I wish you believed that, Jeffrey.
You're a smart guy. Hell smarter
than I am. But when it comes to
seeing everything at once? Shit.
You don't even know how big the
canvas is.

JEFFREY
Mick-

MICK
I never understood why people like
to meet in dark places. Here, all
of Washington sees me having drinks
with you. They know what you do.
They know what I do. But since
we're out in public, we can't
possibly be talking dirty. The key
is to clean up the dirt as nice as
you can.

Mick lifts his drink, clangs Jeffrey's glass and winks.

MICK
I'm here to have a drink with my
friend. One drink. Then I'm going
to go home, have dinner with my
family, and screw my wife. Gotta
live the American dream.

JEFFREY
Three deaths.

Mick drinks.

JEFFREY
The commanding officer got
promoted.

Mick drinks.

JEFFREY
Secretary of Defense?

Mick drinks.

JEFFREY
Vice-President? President?

Mick does not drink.

MICK
(serious)
Don't write that story. The Times
tried six months ago but scrapped
it when they realized they couldn't
pull it off.

JEFFREY
I can.

MICK
Don't.

Mick swallows the rest of his drink and stands up.

MICK
Well, Jeffrey. Good luck to you.
And I really do mean it this time
when I say I hope I never see you
again.

Mick pats Jeffrey on the back and walks away. Stops at a
table and greets some DOUR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. His laughter
travels through the bar.

But Jeffrey's not looking. Because he's enjoying his drink.
Smiling.

JULIE (O.S.)
(accented English)
... bullshit appeasement to
American imperialism...

INT. WORLDCARE CONFERENCE ROOM, KABUL - DAY

The conference room is too small to seat the THIRTY STAFF MEMBERS -- a Benetton ad of different races. Kate stands in the back with a few others. Taking copious notes.

JULIE MERTAIN, twenties, a striking French girl with sunken cheeks that will look bad in thirty years but looks so damned sexy now.

JULIE
Guns have no place in the clinics.

TOM GURNEY, forties, stands at the front of the room. He's trying to stay calm but it's hard in the heat.

TOM
(stammering)
I understand some of you feel a great deal of conviction on this, but-

EMILY DOYLE, British, slightly overweight, rolls her eyes.

EMILY
We've been over it at every fucking meeting for the past three months! They're not leaving. Live with it!

JULIE
Emily, I so wish you would go home and live out your miserable Bridget Jones existence-

TOM
(warning)
Julie.

JULIE
(passionate)
Tom, I know you agree with me, but you've turned into a bureaucrat.

JOANNA, a fresh-faced American, raises her hands.

JOANNA
I'm glad they're here. It makes me feel safer. And they got rid of the Taliban.

JULIE
I trust the Taliban more than George Bush.

This gets a reaction from the room. Angry whisperings, though clearly some people agree with her.

TOM
(trying to regain control)
We are here as aid workers. We're
not political. WorldCare is showing
the people of Afghanistan that
compassion will prevail over bombs.

Kate's eyes shine watching Tom. This is why she came to Kabul.

TOM
And girls. Head scarves are now
mandatory for all WorldCare female
employees.

Julie's cheeks flush. But she doesn't argue back. Kate
watches her, fascinated.

HONK...

INT. CORPORATE TOWN CAR, NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Morning rush hour traffic.

Jeffrey, settled in the back seat against plush leather
seats. Lost in the morning paper. Completely out of sync with
the daily grind.

The TOWN CAR weaves into an illegal spot in front of an
apartment building.

Jeffrey opens the door.

JEFFREY
Kevin!

KEVIN JORGEN, a few economic check boxes down from Jeffrey,
climbs into the car. Jeffrey nods to his DRIVER and the car
breezes back into traffic.

KEVIN
God, this is a good way to start
the day.

JEFFREY
One of the first things I made the
lawyers write in the contract.

Kevin laughs with a slight edge. Looks at Jeffrey. His good suit. Nice briefcase. Then he decides to shake the feeling off.

KEVIN
Hear you're working on the detainee story.

JEFFREY
So were you. What happened?

KEVIN
Couldn't get anyone to speak on the record. Just enough careful insinuations and double speak to make you think you're going crazy.

JEFFREY
But you have enough people talking off the record-

KEVIN
Wish The Times could see it that way.

JEFFREY
Kevin, you missed out. This is big.

KEVIN
(edge coming back into his voice)
Really.

INT. TOM'S WORLD CARE OFFICE - LATER

The big man's office. Tiny. Could even be mistaken for a closet.

Kate sits in front of Tom at his desk. He sets a piece of paper in front of her.

TOM
By signing this contract, you are committing yourself to two years. Here. In Kabul.

Kate nods.

TOM
Kate. Let me be frank.

Kate, holding the pen in her hand, looks up.

TOM

You have no business being here.
Coming to a place like this with
only one year of field work is
grossly negligent. I made this very
clear to London. But. You seem to
be the exception.

KATE

(her very first words)
I want to be here.

TOM

Right. And you have some very good
friends.

Kate picks up the papers and signs.

MITCHELL (O.S.)

This looks like a cover to me.

INT. MITCHELL'S OFFICE, NEW YORK - NIGHT

The corner office with glass panes looking out into an open work room where MAGAZINE STAFF bustle. The office is a cool oasis of power and influence. Large glossy posters of THE WORLD covers proudly line the walls. This is big, corporate news magazine culture.

MITCHELL WALKER, sixties, holds up a blown up photo of Yusif Agha with no tongue. DEPUTY EDITOR ED LEVIN, aside, reads a proof of the story.

Jeffrey waits calmly. A man who enjoys moments like this.

MITCHELL

You get a confirmation from your
source in the state department?

JEFFREY

Confirmed.

ED LEVIN

Off the record?

Jeffrey throws him a dismissive glance.

JEFFREY

(at Mitchell)

You had no problem using him on the
bribery story.

Mitchell spreads the photos around his desk.

MITCHELL
How much do I owe you?

JEFFREY
Three hundred.

MITCHELL
Jesus.

Mitchell takes out his wallet and counts out some bills.

MITCHELL
You would think I would have
learned my lesson by now. How'd you
know he had something?

JEFFREY
I could say something that
demonstrates my keen insight into
the human psyche but I'd rather not
gloat.

Mitchell laughs loudly. He looks at Jeffrey with something
like a father's admiration.

ED LEVIN
We can't run this part about the
President.

JEFFREY
You're not touching it.

ED LEVIN
We can't go off the record on
something like that. We need paper
trail.

JEFFREY
Presidents don't leave paper
trails.

MITCHELL
You run this by your source?

Jeffrey tosses his head. It's almost a nod.

JEFFREY
You're looking at my third
Pulitzer.

ED LEVIN
We need it on the record.

Mitchell weighs his options. Takes a good look at Jeffrey. Who stares back. His confidence is hard to argue with.

MITCHELL

Ed. Get this to legal. If we can't get sued, run it.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY NEWSTAND - DAY

A NEWSSTAND OWNER shelves the latest issue of THE WORLD.

Yusif Agha's dead face looks out at the passing CROWDS. The bold, yellow title reads TONGUE TIED: DETAINEE MURDERS REVEALED. Date of the magazine reads April 22, 2004.

CHRIS KLEIN (O.S.)

The photos are so haunting...

INT. NEWS STUDIO, WASHINGTON, D.C - DAY

ON AIR red signal.

CHRIS KLEIN, the host presides over a round table. The comforting mug of coffee sits in front of his notes. Also at the table: SENATOR ARMAND COTTER, "ah shucks" accent soothes the voice of ambition, and Jeffrey sit under glaring studio lights.

Off stage, MATT BYLER, thirties, watches intently.

CHRIS KLEIN

Could you describe some of the thoughts that went through your head when you first saw them?

JEFFREY

(somber)

Well Chris, I'm a journalist and words are my trade, but I must admit words failed me at that moment.

THE HOST

And your source, Private Borden. He was carrying all these photos on his cell phone?

JEFFREY

Yeah, you can say he had some heavy pockets.

(beat)

I'd like to say a few words about A.C.

INT. A.C BORDEN'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

Small trailer park living room littered with dirty laundry, pizza boxes, beer cans.

A.C, slumped on the sofa, drinking a beer. He looks terrible, his eyes glazed over from the joint he holds in his hand.

He watches a television playing the broadcast from Jeffrey's studio interview.

JEFFREY

(on TV)

We got to be quite close throughout the investigation, and something I tried to emphasize in my piece is that the orders for systematic abuse came from high up and went down the food chain. The dirty work fell on those who had the no recourse to speak out. Those who were with the prisoners in the detainee camps. But A.C felt compelled to speak out. It was not easy for him.

A.C's face registers no emotions.

INT. CONTROL ROOM - LATER

Matt Byler - the network wonder kid. He brought the news division to number one and kept it there.

Jeffrey leans against the control window looking out at the studio floor.

MATT

Itching for a move?

JEFFREY

Depends on how far the move is.

MATT

You can stay in New York-

JEFFREY

I'm not talking about that kind of move.

MATT

You're a legend among the news and
beltway crowd but how about
grabbing some of that primetime
spotlight?

JEFFREY

I don't do entertainment.

MATT

I know. Hard hitting journalism.
Your way.

JEFFREY

There's no public for that.

MATT

There is. Something's in the air. I
don't know how long it's going to
hold, but we need to get on it now.
For the first time since Watergate,
news is back.

JEFFREY

(excited)

I have a contract-

MATT

I'll buy it out.

INT. MITCHELL'S OFFICE, NEW YORK - DAY

Mitchell eats a sandwich at his desk. All the major dailies
spread out in front of him. This is relaxation.

His phone BEEPS.

MITCHELL

(into speakerphone)

Yeah?

ASSISTANT (O.S.)

I have Ken Myers from the Times on
the phone.

Mitchell puts down his sandwich.

MITCHELL

Put him through

The phone beeps again.

MITCHELL
(into speakerphone)
Ken.

KEN (O.S.)
Mitchell, how's everything?

MITCHELL
Good. The usual. You guys there?

KEN (O.S.)
Good. The usual.
(beat)

I want to give you a heads up on a story we're running for tomorrow's paper by Kevin Jorgen. It's about Jeffrey's piece. I just emailed you the article.

MITCHELL
Did you just ruin my day, Ken?

KEN (O.S.)
Call me when you've read it.

INT. TOM'S WORLD CARE OFFICE - DAY

Julie, short-sleeved and khaki pants, storms in and drops a heavy key set on Tom's desk. On top of a file left open. Kate's photo sticks out.

Julie looks back to make sure no one's watching. Picks up the file and scans the pages quickly.

INT. MITCHELL'S OFFICE, NEW YORK - DAY

Ed Levin and PHIL HOPPER, the head of legal, face Jeffrey who sits on a sofa. Mitchell stands with his back to them, looking out the window. A man who can't face his surrogate son's disgrace.

JEFFREY
I don't understand how this is happening-

ED LEVIN
It's happening because you pushed too hard. You didn't follow the process. You lied.

JEFFREY
I did what most journalists have to do to get the story-

ED LEVIN
No, you made the story-

PHIL HOPPER
Excuse me. I'm sorry if I don't feel like sitting here while the two of you debate the ethics of your trade. We have a serious problem. As we speak, Private First Class Borden is testifying to a closed door hearing. Apparently he's changed his story. Yusif Agha's death was not murder.

JEFFREY
(exploding)
Did you see those pictures? How can anyone refute that?

PHIL HOPPER
You have a bigger problem tomorrow. Several people from state are being called in. They're trying to narrow in on your source. Is there anything I should know?

EXT. JUSTICE DEPT. STEPS - DAY

CROWD OF REPORTERS chase down A.C, in military uniform, and his LEGAL TEAM as they descend the wide stone steps.

A.C, hunched over, fixes his gaze on the ground. His lawyers lead him through the crowd.

TV cameras push into his face.

REPORTER 1
A.C. Are you now claiming that Yusif Agha attacked the other guards-

REPORTER 2
-and then tried to escape?

REPORTER 3
Are you considering legal actions against Mr. Highsmith?

A.C descends the last step and sees a sedan waiting for him.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - SAME

A.C slides to the window. Trying to get as much space between him and what he just did.

He leans his head against tinted windows. He does not see the Washington Monument. Jutting tall into the grey clouded sky. And the American flag waving violently against heavy gusts.

INT. STATE DEPT. LOBBY - DAY

Jeffrey storms up to the front desk. The ATTENDANT, a serious-faced woman, looks up.

ATTENDANT

Please sign in. Who are you here to see?

JEFFREY

Mick Taylor. Undersecretary for International Affairs.

ATTENDANT

One moment.

The attendant speaks quietly into her headset. At one point, she looks up at Jeffrey. Nods and whispers back into the phone.

ATTENDANT

Mr. Highsmith. Mr. Taylor is not in at the moment. But his assistant can help you.

She motions to a phone on a table nearby. Jeffrey walks over to the phone. It rings.

JEFFREY

Hello?

ASSISTANT (O.S.)

The secretary is on a call right now-

JEFFREY

Tell him this is important.

ASSISTANT

And then he's walking across the street for his next appointment-

JEFFREY

I don't think you're listening to
me-

ASSISTANT

In fifteen minutes he walks to his
next appointment.

JEFFREY

(getting it)

Thank you.

EXT. STATE DEPARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

Jeffrey, sitting on a bench, watches TOURISTS stroll the
pretty tree-lined street.

Mick walks out, flanked by TWO SUITED MEN. Mick looks around
casually. Spots Jeffrey. Pats one of the Men on the back, and
says his good-byes. Without ever breaking his Texas smile.

Mick joins Jeffrey on the bench. The smile is no longer on
his face.

MICK

You must have lost your head.
Coming here, calling me from the
front desk-

JEFFREY

I couldn't get you on the phone.
Are you testifying?

MICK

You shouldn't be here.

JEFFREY

Don't screw me over.

MICK

No, your source screwed you over.
I've just been asked to dig it in a
little deeper.

JEFFREY

I need you to back me up on this-

Mick laughs. Then gets serious very quick.

MICK

I warned you. But I should have
known you wouldn't listen.

Mick gives a hand wave to someone he sees across the street.
Easy smile returning.

JEFFREY
I wrote the truth.

MICK
You know better than to say
something like that to me.
(change in tone)
Funny word. Legacy. Makes you think
about the order you leave things.
Bet you're thinking a lot about
that right now. Well, I've been
thinking too. I thought I'd made my
climb, reached the final peg on the
totem pole. I've tried to be
satisfied with the view I got. But
wouldn't it be nice to take a
breath of cleaner air?

INT. CLINIC, KABUL - EARLY EVENING

White, antiseptic clinic. Looks like any clinic in America.
Which is why it stands out in Kabul.

Armed INTERNATIONAL SECURITY FORCE GUARDS keep a watchful eye
on the room. Stone faced, disciples of order.

Kate, coat and bag in hand, about to call it a day. Looks up
at an old TV monitor attached to the wall. Tuned to CNN.
Volume off, titles on.

ON TV: Photo of Jeffrey next to an image of the magazine
cover. Captions read: "JOURNALIST IN HOT SEAT."

CUT TO: Jeffrey, in sunglasses and suit, rushing past
reporters and into THE WORLD building.

JULIE (O.S.)
Walking home?

Kate looks up and sees Julie waiting for her.

EXT. RIVER STREET, KABUL - LATER

Julie and Kate wander slowly down a crowded street alongside
the river. VENDORS hawk their brightly colored goods. A Blue
Mosque hovers in the near distance.

An AMBITIOUS TEENAGER hawks copies of pirated Jean-Claude Van
Damme DVDs. Eye the foreign girls. Especially Julie.

KATE

(trying to laugh it off)

Everyone expects me to pack up and go home. I don't understand what it is about me that inspires so little confidence.

JULIE

You can't worry about people like Tom. You're here for the right reasons. I can see it.

KATE

Really?

Julie smiles. And it makes you fall in love with her.

KATE

Are you here for the right reasons?

JULIE

I hope so.

(beat)

Will you do me a favor, Kate?

KATE

(flattered)

Anything.

JULIE

Will you cut my hair tonight?

KATE

Me? I can't cut hair-

JULIE

Please.

INT. JEFFREY'S OFFICE, NEW YORK - NIGHT

Dark office lit by ambient skyline and spill-over from center work space.

Jeffrey, in his chair, stares out at frenzied REPORTERS. Coming to terms with the fact that he may no longer be a part of them. And the thought of it makes him...

Pick up the phone and dial a number.

A.C (O.S.)

You got me. Leave a message and I might call you back.

BEEP.

Jeffrey slams the phone down, the vein in his neck pulsing.

EXT. KATE'S GUEST HOUSE ENTRANCE/STREET, KABUL - NIGHT

Julie and Kate exit the gate, laughing. Julie, hair shorn short, looks even more stunning without the disguise of hair. She links her arm with Kate's.

TWO PRIVATE SECURITY GUARDS on duty at the gate. Eyeing Julie. Kate notices.

KATE

I'm hungry.

JULIE

What about that place.

Julie points to a small restaurant down the street. A counter really with some tables and mats on the floor. A group of BEARDED MEN, eating their meals, lost in conversation.

KATE

We can't go there. Let's go to one of the places on Chicken street.

JULIE

I can eat pizza and Chinese food anywhere in the world. This place looks perfect.

Julie lets go of Kate's arm and walks toward the restaurant.

KATE

We're not accompanied by men-

JULIE

Kate. What are they going to do to us?

Julie takes a seat at the counter. The bearded men look up and take her in -- her short hair, her figure seen through the short-sleeved blouse. That sense of self-assurance only some people can pull off convincingly.

Kate stands in the street. Unsure. Julie smiles back at her and sticks out her tongue.

INT. CLINIC HALLWAY, KABUL - DAY

Kate, holding a corded phone in hand, leans against the wall.

KATE
(into phone)
Mom?

Crackled, static-heavy connection.

JO (O.S.)
What's all that sound? Is that
gunfire?

KATE
No, the connection's really bad -

Another conversation crosses in - a man and woman speaking in Arabic, hushed tones. Feels like you're listening in on a secret. And you don't want to stop.

JO (O.S.)
Kate? Are you still there?

KATE
I think our lines are getting
crossed-

Kate stretches the tangled phone cord. The static evens out. The second conversation silenced.

KATE
They had to re-lay the telephone
wires in the neighborhood so it's
been a little patchy.

JO
Jesus. Is this the return to the
natives thing you were looking for?

KATE
Mom.

JO
After all, you wouldn't want to be -
what was that word you used?
Conventional?

KATE
(helpless)
I don't want to fight, mom.

JO
Those stupid stories your father
told you-

KATE

Don't.

JO

It's driving me crazy. The thought
of you over there-

Kate lets the phone cord tangle again. Static intrudes. The voices come back.

JO (O.S.)

Kate?

Kate hangs up the phone.

INT. CLINIC OFFICE - SAME

Julie talking with Tom, going over some papers.

Kate rushes out of the hallway, past Julie and Tom. She doesn't see them.

Julie turns to Tom, but he just shrugs.

EXT. STREET, KABUL - LATER

Kate walks aimlessly down a wide boulevard. Past a brand new "mall" selling mostly knock-off designer wares.

A PERFUME girl smiles as Kate passes. Spritzes perfume on her.

Kate crosses the street. Looks up and sees...

THE INTERNATIONAL MAYTON HOTEL. A large, modern building with imposing surrounding gates.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Kate opens her hotel room and walks in. Stands in front of the massive king sized bed with thick red covers against pristine white walls.

She goes to the air conditioner against the window and shuts it off. It's now quiet. Expensively quiet.

Kate looks down at a large swimming pool, half-full with foreign DIGNITARIES swimming laps and WEALTHY VISITORS in chic one piece bathing suits. Tall trees crowd out the view of the rest of the city.

Kate pulls the curtains closed. The room goes dark.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A loud BOOM rocks the room.

Kate wakes up, on top of the covers. She still wears her shoes. It takes her a moment to realize where she is.

Sirens WAIL...

EXT. CLINIC STREET, KABUL - NIGHT

DEMONSTRATING RIOTERS fill the street, chanting angrily. They carry signs ("They killed one of us," "Death to America") with Yusif Agha's face - the picture used on the cover of THE WORLD.

Kate rushes down the sidewalk, through CROWDS cheering in support of the demonstrators.

Military vehicles and International Security Guards try to move the building crowd back. But they're not moving.

Kate sees Tom and Julie outside the clinic gates.

JULIE

Where have you been?

KATE

I didn't feel well. What's happening?

JULIE

There's been suicide attacks all over the city. A car ran into a military truck on the next block.

Julie points to the smoke and fire spewing close by. Blackening the sky.

CROWD

(in Dari)

This is just the beginning. We will take our vengeance.

The demonstrators face the International Guards, hurling rocks. The guards raise riot-gear shields. The stuff cable news television eats up and replays every thirty minutes.

TOM

Casualties will be coming in.

INT. CLINIC, KABUL - LATER

Chaos. The clinic is overcapacity. Wounded bystanders on tables, on the floor.

Kate and Tom stand over a PREGNANT WOMAN. Her skirt covered in blood. Their work space is tight. Working elbow to elbow with another casualty just a few feet over.

TOM
Patocin.

Overhead fluorescent lights FLICKER.

TOM
The power's going down.

The power cranks down. Sputters. Then goes dark. Patients CRY out. What more can go wrong for them?

TOM
The generator should be kicking in.

The pregnant woman bangs her head against the table.

TOM
Damnit! Where are the lights?

Generator engines CHUG. Half the lights come back on. Casting an eerie glow.

PREGNANT WOMAN
(seeing Tom with needle)
No! No!

The pregnant woman grabs Kate's arm, screaming in pain. She kicks at Tom. Kate, instead of pulling free, freezes. Takes in the chaos. And can't move.

Julie rushes in, grabs the pregnant woman's chest and holds her down. The pregnant woman lets go of Kate's hand.

Kate snaps back to the moment. She moves to the other side, trying to hold the woman's hand.

TOM
Get out, Kate. There's not enough room.

Kate looks up at Tom. But he's not thinking of her anymore.

Kate releases the woman's hand. She steps aside.

EXT. STREETS, KABUL - NIGHT

Hushed, somber streets. Heavy winds blow the hot night air. A gray city. As if drained of all its color.

Kate turns down a narrow street that gives her a clear view of the Blue Mosque. The blue more vibrant against the drabness of the night.

She notices a house behind the mosque. Barely standing. Next to the house is a tree, leaning sharply at an angle, as if growing against the sun.

Kate stares longingly at that tree. At that moment it looks the way she feels -- off kilter.

Suddenly, the sky opens and rain pours down.

Kate runs, hurrying under awnings. She turns a corner...

A shadowed figure jumps out at her.

Kate SCREAMS.

A HOMELESS BEGGAR. Missing a leg and an eye. One of hundreds of war vets haunting the city. Taking shelter underneath a closed store doorway.

He pushes Kate out.

INT. JEFFREY'S OFFICE, NEW YORK - DAY

Jeffrey sits at his desk, staring out at the city's skyline. It's drizzling.

A KNOCK on the door. Mitchell.

MITCHELL

You look like shit.

JEFFREY

Thanks.

Mitchell takes a seat across the room. By the door. Jeffrey perceives this. And he braces himself.

MITCHELL

Jeffrey, there's no question that you're a brilliant journalist-

JEFFREY

Spare me the elocutions.

MITCHELL

The White House is asking for a formal retraction. There's been riots all over the Muslim world.

JEFFREY

Don't do it.

MITCHELL

I shouldn't have run the article.

JEFFREY

We don't have the luxury of should haves and should nots in our line of work.

MITCHELL

We let the easy slaps on the back sway our sense of reason. You're too good of a reporter to have let this happen.

Jeffrey hangs his head. He can't believe this is happening.

JEFFREY

When you were trying to get me to join the magazine, you told me a story. Do you remember?

MITCHELL

Jeffrey-

JEFFREY

You were starting out as a junior editor at the Washington Post. And these two reporters say they have a hunch about a burglary. And you didn't like it.

Mitchell nods.

JEFFREY

You said you never wanted to doubt your reporters' instinct ever again. Well, what the hell are you doing now?

MITCHELL

I'm trying to save the magazine.

Mitchell gets on his feet.

MITCHELL

And Jeffrey, don't bullshit me. You didn't sign till I made you the highest paid print journalist in the country. I'm not going to feel too bad for you. I hear you've been talking to the networks.

EXT. MARKET, KABUL - LATE AFTERNOON

Busy outdoor market. Narrow walkways lined with stands selling fruits, nuts, textiles. SHOPPERS packed tight.

Julie, at one of the stands, looks through a pile of apples. She's still not wearing a head scarf.

Behind her, Kate. In conservative western clothes and a short head scarf. She's sweating. Her skin pale. Something's wrong.

FEMALE SHOPPERS eye her suspiciously. Nearby, a group of CHILDREN point at her. One of the boys runs up to Kate, touches her skirt, and runs back. But Kate's having trouble focusing.

Kate turns back to Julie.

But she's gone.

Kate looks around, trying to focus. But the world starts spinning...

Kate falls against a vendor stand. Falls forward...

Someone grabs her from behind.

JULIE

Kate?

INT. TAXI, KABUL - LATER

Kate takes a long drink from her bottled water. Color slowly returning back to her cheeks.

The TAXI DRIVER glances at them through his rearview mirror, worried Kate's going to be sick in his car. He doesn't see a TEENAGER on a scooter pull tight in front.

The Taxi skids...

A beat up BLACK NISSAN cuts in. The Taxi Driver waves his hand angrily out the window. The black Nissan STOPS. The taxi brakes.

Four MEN pile out of the black Nissan. Hooded.

The driver REVERSES...

SCREECH. Another BEAT UP CAR locks them in from behind.

DRIVER
(accented heavily)
Down!

KATE
What's happening-

MEN WITH BLACK HOODS jump out of both cars. Storm towards the taxi with their guns raised.

The bustling CROWD outside scramble... Disappear.

GUNFIRE. Glass pours all over Kate and Julie. Julie grabs Kate's hand.

More GUNSHOTS. So close by it's deafening. The taxi driver slumps forward, draining blood so quick that red's all you think you can see.

Kate screams.

A door opens.

They pull Julie out. Kate holds on to her hand. But her door opens...

EXT. MARKET STREET - SAME

Kate lands on the ground. Dragged...

She looks at the sun -- buildings blur into sky into ground -- time comes undone.

INT. BEAT UP NISSAN - SAME

One of the kidnappers shoves Kate inside the car. Drapes a loose black hood on her head.

DARKNESS.

EXT. UPPER EAST SIDE APARTMENT, NYC - NIGHT

Jeffrey watches his DRIVER place boxes on the curb.

DRIVER
It was a pleasure, Mr. Highsmith.

The driver offers his hand. Jeffrey looks at it, unmoved.

JEFFREYY

How long have you been with me?

DRIVER

Four years.

JEFFREY

And in those four years did I ever ask how your day was? What you did on the weekends? What you hope to accomplish with your life?

DRIVER

I-I don't think so.

JEFFREY

I didn't. So was it really a pleasure driving me around? No. It was your job.

The driver backs off, unsure whether to tell Jeffrey off or just walk away.

The driver gets back in the car. Speeds off.

A.C (O.S.)

That's a hell of a way to say good-bye.

A.C steps out from the shadows. It's been a rough couple of days on him and it shows.

JEFFREY

What are you doing here?

A.C

I don't know.

INT. JEFFREY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Soft beige room with expensive, subtle furniture gives the room a hotel feel. Cold comfort.

Jeffrey pours A.C a drink. He doesn't pour one for himself.

A.C

I don't know how you people live in the city. Seems like it would be kinda hard to get your thoughts strung together.

JEFFREY

I don't have any trouble stringing
my thoughts together.

A.C

No, I suppose you don't.

A.C tries to smile. But starts to cry instead.

JEFFREY

I don't want to see you cry.

A.C

(trying to pull himself
together)

You warned me, man.

JEFFREY

You said you wanted to be a hero.
Remember?

A.C starts pacing. He can't calm down.

A.C

Hey man, I need a smoke.

JEFFREY

Open the window.

A.C opens the window. The cold air seems to calm him down.

A.C

I saw you on TV. On that news show.
At the time did you mean what you
said about me?

JEFFREY

No.

A.C

I can't sleep.

JEFFREY

I really hope you didn't come here
from some redemption-

A.C

I can't get him to go away. He
won't stop screaming. I just want
him to shut up!

JEFFREY
(slowly)
I thought you said you weren't in
the room?

A.C
(to himself)
I thought if I talked the screaming
would stop.

Jeffrey stands. He's careful but trying to inch closer to
A.C.

JEFFREY
Were you in the room?

A.C doesn't hear him. He's somewhere else. In his thoughts.
In a cell back in Guantanamo.

JEFFREY
(soothing)
What were you supposed to do? Tell
the United States military to go
fuck itself? You're just a kid.

A.C looks at Jeffrey, remembering he's in the room too.

JEFFREY
And that's how they got you to say
I made you lie. Because you didn't
just come in when it was all over.
You could have stopped them.

Then it hits Jeffrey.

JEFFREY
You were part of it.

A.C
(standing)
Don't come closer!

JEFFREY
(seeing the story come
back to life)
Tell me what happened. A.C, you can
still be that hero.

A.C
It's too late!

JEFFREY
No, it isn't.

A.C
Who's going to believe me?

JEFFREY
(pushing)
I will. But you have to tell me
what really happened. Tell me what
you did to him?

A.C
You want to know what happened?!?

JEFFREY
Yes!

A.C
You want to know what I did?!?

JEFFREY
Yes!

A.C
I beat him with a cattle prod. I
cracked his knees. His ribs. He
couldn't stand anymore. I did that
to him!

A.C flops back down on the window sill, sobbing. Just a kid
that grew up too fast.

A.C
At the end he would just mumble to
himself. About his family. His
country. He said he wanted to see
his village once more. Godah. Like
a prayer, he would say Godah.
Godah.

A.C looks at Jeffrey. Desperate.

A.C
Do you think the screaming ever
goes away?

JEFFREY
(brutal)
I don't think so.

And in that brief moment clarity hits A.C.'s eyes. And A.C.,
the boy lost, looks like he's found himself. He stands
slowly...

And hurls himself out of the window. Off the fire escape.

CRASH... CAR ALARM BLASTING.

Jeffrey runs to the window. A.C.'s bleeding body on top of a car. Blood and glass everywhere.

Jeffrey throws up on the fire escape.

EXT. LICHT HOME - FAIRFIELD, CT. - SAME

Tree-lined street dotted with large, stately homes with wide green lawns and trimmed hedges. This is not new money but money that's been around and rolled in for generations.

SWARM OF JOURNALISTS crowd outside closed gates of a white Colonial.

A LUXURY SEDAN divides swarm. Drives through open gates to the front of the house.

JO LICHT, an attractive woman in her forties with tasteful highlights and a well-structured face, steps out of the car. Makes a convincing job of acting as if the crowd is not there. In front of her house. Making her prime-time news.

Reporters SCREAM questions through the gates.

REPORTER 1
- any word from the kidnappers?

REPORTER 2
When was the last time you spoke to
your daughter-

SUSAN IVERS. Jo's sister, with the same patrician nose and disciplined four miles a day figure, waits with the door open.

Jo runs to the door. Slams the door shut.

INT. JO'S BATHROOM - LATER

Dark slate bathroom straight out of a design magazine. Soft light dapples in through tree branches. That's been carefully planned.

Jo sits on her toilet, shaking. She unwraps a pack of cigarettes and pulls one out. The sizzle of a match making contact. A lone stream of smoke.

Jo coughs slightly. It's been a while since she's had her last smoke.

FEMALE ANCHOR (O.S.)
... abducted yesterday just outside
a busy market in the center of the
city...

INT. JEFFREY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dark. With the exception of a plasma screen TV permanently set to CNN. Sound low. TV lights flicker shadows across the walls.

Jeffrey faces the ceiling. He's still in his day clothes. This is not routine for him. But then again, nothing's been routine for the last few days.

Jeffrey raises one arm, slowly. Then he lets the arm fall. THUD. On his chest. He raises the other arm. Lets it fall. He repeats, slowly. THUD, THUD.

FEMALE ANCHOR (O.S.)
Katherine Licht, age 21, and Julie
Mertain, age 33...

Jeffrey is not paying attention -- misses the photograph of Kate at her high school graduation.

FEMALE ANCHOR
Ms. Licht is the daughter of the late Robert Licht, former US Ambassador to the United Nations and a Middle East expert. Authorities have not commented on whether this was a factor in her kidnapping.

On TV: The marketplace. INTERNATIONAL SECURITY GUARDS presence more visible...

FEMALE ANCHOR
Katherine Licht's family were notified late last night...

Phone RINGS.

On TV: Jo's black sedan entering the gates. Jo running into the house. The news camera zooms in on her face. And freezes.

RING.

JEFFREY
(on answering machine)
Please leave a message.

BEEP.

JO
Jeffrey, it's Jo. I need your help.

INT. ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Door flings open into a dark room.

Two MASKED MEN dump a body on the floor and rush out. Door slams shut.

The body coughs...

Kate, still hooded.

She sits up and pulls the hood off. Orients herself to the room, sees a tiny sliver of light...

A small window, boarded with thick wood.

Exhausted. Frightened. Cold. Kate curls up against the wall -- touches her face to make sure she's really there. And realizes her nose is bleeding.

INT. STATE DEPT. PRESS ROOM, WASHINGTON D.C - DAY

Jo, fitted black suit, stands at the podium. The State department seal hangs on blue drapes. Next to the American flag.

At her side --

DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE JANET PIERSON, fifties, with that glimmer in her eyes that reads as cold ambition but in men read as charisma.

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER, sixties, distinguished, fills his uniform with the right blend of ruggedness and duty.

SENATOR MIKE BISHOP, once a presidential hopeful now trying to stay in the spotlight as long as possible.

Jo faces REPORTERS in assigned seats. A packed house.

JO
(eloquent)
Kate is a very sweet, gentle girl.
Kate joined WorldCare one year ago
and was so moved by her experience
that she asked to move to
Afghanistan. She wanted to help
those most in need.

Kate is generous to a fault,
smarter than she lets on, and so
much more gracious than she
sometimes should be.

Jo takes a drink of water.

JO

Her captors have not identified
themselves but they reassure us
that Kate is in good health. At
this point, they have not listed
any demands. I would like to thank
the State department and the White
House for their support. We are all
praying for Kate's safe return.

INT. STATE DEPT. HALLWAY - LATER

Jo, Senator Bishop, and Major General Thatcher walk briskly
through a hallway away from the press room.

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER

Aircraft jets are surveying the
hills around Kabul with heat-
sensory detection systems. But it's
a lot of territory to cover. It's
going to take time.

JO

I can log online and look at
satellite photos of my own
backyard. I hope you're not trying
to tell me that the internet may
have better technology to find my
daughter than the United States
military?

SENATOR BISHOP

I don't mean to sound glib but
we're not talking Fairfield,
Connecticut-

Jo stops abruptly and turns to Senator Bishop.

JO

Let's get this straight, Mike. I
hope you will excuse me if I skip
the formalities but it seems we're
beyond that now. I hope you don't
take me for a cookie-baking, Range
Rover driving, upper class suburban
housewife.

I met my husband at Harvard where I beat his 3.6 GPA with a 3.9. I've seen my husband deal with people like you. And when I mean people like you, I mean people who will do and say just about anything to make sure they use this tragedy as a re-election point. I'm going to be god-damned sure that my daughter comes home in spite of the stupid mistakes you and people like you are sure to make.

And without skipping a beat, Jo walks off. Her heels digging into the carpet.

Senator Bishop looks to Major General Thatcher. Who returns the favor by walking away. Bishop checks a glance at the STAFFERS. Trying to look busy but it's clear from the way they avoid his eyes that they heard everything. May even agree with what she says. Even if she is a bitch.

EXT. RIDING TRAILS, FAIRFIELD, CT. - DAY

Jeffrey sits on a bench surrounded by thick trees. Well groomed horse trails run along fenced edges. Private.

CLICK CLACK of horse hooves. Jo emerges from a turn on horseback and rides up to the bench.

Jeffrey stands.

JO
Hello Jeffrey.

JEFFREY
(voice tight)
Jo.

Jo dismounts in a smooth elegant move. She doesn't sit. Instead, holds the rein and smooths down her horse.

JEFFREY
Strange place to meet.

JO
I don't want to be seen talking to you.
(beat)
I hear you've gotten into some trouble.

Jeffrey almost laughs. She makes it sound so slight. Then realizes it is for her.

JEFFREY
I'm sorry about Kate.

JO
I don't need your condolences yet.

JEFFREY
Then tell me what I'm doing here.

JO
I need a free agent.

JEFFREY
I'm a journalist, Jo.

JO
Not anymore. Unless you want to go
take a shot at Topeka, Kansas. I
hear they have a nice paper.

Jeffrey doesn't appreciate her sense of humor. He sets a hard
stare on her. And she doesn't flinch.

JO
It's your lack of situation that
makes you useful to me. I need
someone who can access sketchy
parties.

JEFFREY
Sketchy parties?

JO
People the government try to find
but just can't seem to. You're good
at finding those people.

JEFFREY
Does the State department know
you're talking to me?

JO
No.

JEFFREY
I suggest you let them handle the
situation.

JO
Is that what you would do if she
was your daughter?

Jeffrey's silence answers her question.

JO

Go to Kabul under the pretenses of investigating the kidnapping as a story. Find the people who have Kate and work out a release plan. The US government does not condone payment to kidnappers but I do.

JEFFREY

This may be a serious crime.

JO

I can't take my chances and trust them to do what's best for Kate. I've made some enemies.

JEFFREY

What makes you think the kidnappers will negotiate with me?

JO

Everyone negotiates. They just don't admit it. You know that better than anyone.

JEFFREY

(ignoring that last shot)
Listen, I want to help you but I just can't do this now-

JO

I can make your problems go away.

JEFFREY

How?

JO

You need to pull a rabbit out of a hat. I have the means to make something appear out of thin air.

JEFFREY

Magic?

JO

Magic. Documents confirming the chain of command.

(beat)

From inside the White House.

Jeffrey looks at her.

JO
I also made some good friends when
Robert was alive.

INT. JEFFREY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jeffrey, phone in hand, avoids looking out the window.

MATT
(on telephone)
Sorry about keeping you on hold.

JEFFREY
No worries. So Matt, I've been
thinking about the offer and I'd
love to consider it further.

MATT
You can't be serious?

JEFFREY
I'm very serious.

MATT
Jeffrey, you're being investigated
by the Justice department.

JEFFREY
They're dropping the charges. The
magazine's doing a formal
retraction.

MATT
Listen, I can't possibly sell you
to the networks right now.

JEFFREY
You are the network.

MATT
Let's talk in a year and see where
we are. Good luck.

The phone clicks dead.

ROARING GUST of a plane's engines...

INT/EXT. MERCEDES TAXI, KABUL - DAY

...Flying over dust blown streets of Kabul. Afghanistan.

Jeffrey in the backseat of a 1970s diesel Mercedes taxi,
engines PURRING.

Outside, construction cranes fill the skyline. The car passes a newly built house -- gated Spanish villa with creeping vines of bougainvillea.

Just a few feet away, an off-street plunges into a massive crater. A missile's bulls-eye turned swimming pool for LOCAL KIDS.

INT. INTERNATIONAL MAYTON HOTEL LOBBY, KABUL - DAY

Elegant, European-style lobby. Plush carpeting, ornate wall moldings, heavy curtains shield the room in a luxurious haze. Outside: third world country. Inside: Venice.

The reception MANAGER hands Jeffrey his room key card.

MANAGER
(British accent)
We hope you have a good stay with
us, Mr. Highsmith.

JEFFREY
Thank you.

MANAGER
Your press credentials?

JEFFREY
That will be faxed to you.

MANAGER
Would you like us to forward it on
to the consulate?

JEFFREY
Yes, thank you.

Jeffrey turns and sees A WOMAN lingering by the entrance, watching him.

He walks towards her. Studies her all-American, sun-kissed blond hair under a head scarf. The opposite of glamour, but still alluring.

JEFFREY
I wasn't sure you'd come.

SUSIE HOPKINS. And as he comes closer, she stiffens. Her armor in place.

SUSIE
I was in the neighborhood.

She points to seats. Jeffrey follows her, takes her in --

SUSIE

I'm with the UN offices for project services. We keep an eye on aid spending.

JEFFREY

Some would call it running away.

They lock stares. Years pass between them. Susie finally smiles.

SUSIE

Hello Jeffrey.

JEFFREY

Susie.

SUSIE

You're covering the kidnappings?
Not your usual beat, Jeffrey.
You're not a field reporter.

JEFFREY

(trying to charm)

I'm always looking to broaden my horizons.

Susie's trying to figure out his angle.

SUSIE

Kidnappings are becoming daily news. I don't see where the story is in that.

JEFFREY

It's a story when one of the girls is linked to a powerful political dynasty. You know anything?

SUSIE

Consensus says it's Taliban trying to rally back to relevance.

JEFFREY

But you're not convinced.

Susie takes a quick look around.

SUSIE

It doesn't fit their profile. They target locals.

Sell-outs to foreign influence.
These two girls don't make sense.

(beat)

There are whispers about an off-shoot group who thinks the Taliban went too soft. Odds don't look good for the girls if it's them.

JEFFREY

What do you know about the girls?

SUSIE

On paper, they were aid workers. But the NGOs aren't very popular now. And like you said, there's extenuating details. Why these two girls? Why now?

JEFFREY

So you don't think it's a wrong place, wrong time?

SUSIE

This whole country is wrong place, wrong time.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET, KABUL - LATER

Traffic barely moves down a busy street. Jeffrey and Susie in the back seat of a cab. The air conditioning blows loudly but does little to bat away the heat.

LOCAL CHILDREN approach, knocking on the window. Susie waves the cab over.

The cab stops. Jeffrey and Susie get out, flanked by children grabbing at their clothes. Jeffrey reaches in his pocket.

SUSIE

If you give them money, we'll have a hundred more chasing us through the day. This isn't Washington.

Jeffrey takes his hands out of his pockets. Empty. And we realize that Jeffrey's not in his element. He's used to the hushed corridors of corporate hallways, Congress chambers. Not used to getting his nice shirt wet with sweat.

Susie yells something to the kids in Dari, leading Jeffrey away.

SUSIE

Here.

Jeffrey looks around. The corner looks familiar. He's seen it before...

And now this common street looks different -- more threatening...

MEN huddled in cafes, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes... eyeing them.

Susie points out a sharp skid on a wall. One of the vehicles slammed into the wall, hard.

SUSIE
Military officials questioned some
witnesses but there wasn't much to
go on-

A small stone pelts Jeffrey in the neck. He turns and sees a nine year old STREET KID laughing at him.

JEFFREY
The kids love me here.

Another pelt.

Susie yells something at the kid. His youthful swagger clipped by hearing a blond woman speak his language. He yells something back to her.

SUSIE
He says he saw the whole thing.

Susie beckons the kid over. The kid shakes his head no.

SUSIE
He wants money.

Jeffrey pulls out some coins. The kid approaches easily and takes the money.

Susie talks with the kid. Who's enjoying the moment.

SUSIE
(translating)
There were two cars. Four guys in
one, three in the other. Only half
of them had guns. Someone called
the driver a traitor and shot him
in the head.

JEFFREY
Where was the kid standing?

The kid points up. Jeffrey and Susie follow his finger - the apartment building right above the street.

Susie takes out a small camera from her pocket and steps closer to the kid. He mugs for the camera, giving a thumbs up sign. The kid says something to her, and she laughs.

JEFFREY
What'd he say?

SUSIE
Says he wants to move to America
and be a basketball player. Says
Allah would be pleased.

The kid tells her something else. Susie's face changes.

JEFFREY
What?

SUSIE
He says we should find the
videotape.

EXT. STORE, KABUL - LATER

Jeffrey watches Susie speak with the STORE OWNER. Who doesn't like talking to a woman. He responds to Jeffrey.

SUSIE
(translating)
He thinks the camera was new. The
man using it didn't seem too
familiar with how to use it.

Jeffrey takes out a piece of paper and jots down a note.
Hands it to the Store Owner.

JEFFREY
If he sees that man again. Tell him
to call me. There's a reward.

Susie translates.

Jeffrey positions himself in the place of the camera man.
Looks across the street. It's a good line of vision.

INT. KATE'S GUESTHOUSE DOOR, KABUL - NIGHT

WARNING and DO NOT DISTURB tape over the door. Jeffrey cuts through it.

A CREAK. They turn and see the door across the hall slightly ajar. Dark eyes watching them. Susie takes a step to the door, but it shuts closed.

JEFFREY
(not too concerned)
We'll say we found it open.

Jeffrey pushes his weight on the door. But the door's too thick.

Susie holds up a nail file.

JEFFREY
So you do miss it.

SUSIE
What?

JEFFREY
Being a reporter.

INT. KATE'S ROOM, KABUL - LATER

Closet. Nothing remarkable about the clothes. Nothing that says much about the person wearing them.

Jeffrey turns away. Glances at -

Susie. On the made bed, flipping through Kate's books. Covered with post-it notes: "Repeat back what they say;" "Do not confuse we and them;" "Smile. They are a friendly people." Susie smiles.

Jeffrey moves to Kate's desk. He picks up a framed photo of Kate, Jo and ROBERT LICHT. Kate leans closer to her father.

Jeffrey takes the photo out of the frame...

Slides the photo in his jacket.

INT. ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - NIGHT

Kate. Opens her eyes, realizes she's on a mattress.

Someone's moving in the next room.

INT. COMMON ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - SAME

An OLD WOMAN sings to herself in a scratchy, half-there voice.

The room is both kitchen and living room. Perhaps once a happy home to a family, but now it's pretty bare with just a table and a few tattered chairs.

Kate opens her door and walks into the room. The Old Woman does not look up.

KATE
(in Dari)
Hello?

Still no reaction from the Old Woman. It's clear from the way she moves and sees that the Old Woman is not blind.

And then Kate sees it. The front door. Half open.

EXT. COUNTRY VILLAGE - SAME

Kate pushes the door open wide. Turns back to the Old Woman. Who still does not respond. *Can she just walk out?*

But. A GUARD, stationed at the door, pushes her back in the house. He shouts something at the Old Woman. Who dismisses him with a tired wave. The Guard slams the door in Kate's face.

HOTEL MANAGER (O.S.)
Mr. Highsmith?

INT. HOTEL LOBBY, KABUL

The Hotel Manager rushes towards Jeffrey.

HOTEL MANAGER
My apologies for disturbing you but we have not received your press credentials. We need to have our guests purpose of visit accounted for.

JEFFREY
I'm sorry. I'll get someone from the magazine on that right away.

Jeffrey rushes past him. To Susie waiting by the entrance.

JEFFREY
How about a tour of the countryside?

INT. ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - DAY

A knock at the door. Kate looks up.

The Leader. HAMID HADID.

HAMID
(faint British accent)
Hello Kate. My name is Hamid. Would
you like to stretch your legs?

INT/EXT. CAR - DAY

A battered SUV bumps along a dirt off-road, up a steep hillside. Kabul, spread out in the background.

Ahead, mountains that run forever.

Susie and Jeffrey in the backseat.

Their DRIVER, a wide man with a heavy beard, smokes out the window and steers with one arm. His face partially obscured by a hat.

EXT. VILLAGE, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - LATER

Kate shields her eyes, adjusting to the overwhelming sunlight. Hamid leads her through the village. Now just a handful of adobe walled huts, rotting slowly back to dust.

An old, limping BLACK DOG follows him loyally. The dog sniffs at Kate's feet.

HAMID
I understand the circumstances are
not as you wish. But for the time
being, we can play the role of a
host and a guest.

Hamid doesn't acknowledge Kate's incredulous stare.

A weary VILLAGE MAN passes, carrying a large stack of chopped wood on his back. He could be fifty or a hundred years old.

Hamid nods his head in a respectful greeting. The Man does not look at Kate.

KATE
They don't see me?

HAMID
They don't want to see you.

KATE
Is it that easy?

HAMID

This village once had four hundred people. But then the Soviets invaded, and it began a slow death. There's only a handful of people left. And they're tired of seeing everything.

Hamid walks her to the edge of a field. Scorched. We've been here before.

HAMID

My father sold off all his livestock to pay for my passage out of the country. He had eight children and he could only afford to get a few of us out.

(beat, looking out at the fields)

He did not want us to die fighting an enemy we would never see again. When I came back, my father was dead. This is how I found my village. You've already met my mother.

Kate squints her eyes to see him against the sun.

HAMID

I know all about you, Katherine Licht. Your upper class upbringing, private schools, good American university. And now you know what you need to know about me.

Hamid bends down and pats the dog.

KATE

(quiet)

Where is Julie?

HAMID

Your mother has been on television.

(beat)

Would you like to send her a message?

INT/EXT. ROADBLOCK, KABUL - LATER

The car slows down in front of a security checkpoint. THREE AFGHANI SOLDIERS come to attention.

SUSIE

You sure you know what you're
doing?

Jeffrey, calm, pulls an envelope out of his pocket.

JEFFREY

Yes.

The first soldier approaches the car. The driver rolls down his window. They speak in low voices.

The soldier looks back at Susie and Jeffrey. Jeffrey avoids eye contact.

The soldier motions to the back of the car. The other two soldiers take a look. The first soldier stays in place, doesn't take his eyes off Susie. He leans in and whispers something to the Driver, grinning.

CLACK! The back door closes.

Jeffrey leans forward and hands the Driver the envelope. Who hands it to the Soldier. The soldier opens the envelope, counts the money. He takes his time. Relishing the control he has.

Finally, the soldier nods.

The gates lift up.

EXT. DIRT ROAD, AFGHANISTAN - LATER

The SUV passes a truck on the narrow road, revealing...

Lush, colorful poppy fields. Heroin. Beautiful.

EXT. ROCKY HILLS, AFGHANISTAN - LATER

The SUV stops. The Driver turns around. Half his face is covered with tiny scars. A tortured face.

DRIVER

(heavy accent)

I stop here.

JEFFREY

(to Susie)

We walk the rest of the way.

SUSIE

Walk? Where?

DRIVER
They will find you.

SUSIE
Who?

DRIVER
Half a mile. Not much.

SUSIE
Jeffrey. Please tell me what's
going on.

JEFFREY
I'm meeting a contact. He's not a
visible person. Understand?

SUSIE
(indicating the driver)
How can we be sure he'll be here
when we get back?

JEFFREY
We don't. If you don't feel
comfortable, you can stay in the-

SUSIE
(trying to control
herself)
I'm not staying here by myself.
Jeffrey, the risks you take...

Her lips tremble.

JEFFREY
I promise everything will be okay.

Susie looks at him. He's a rock.

The driver pulls out a gun and offers it to Jeffrey. Jeffrey
considers it, but shakes his head no. He gets out of the car.

Susie looks at the driver. At the mountains around them. She
takes the gun.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN - LATER

Jeffrey and Susie trekking over a low hill. They sense they
are being watched...

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN - LATER

... A fork in the path. Barely noticeable. They can no longer see their car.

SUSIE
What next?

JEFFREY
Someone will-

BANG! A gunshot misses them by a few feet. Susie screams. Jeffrey grabs her and falls to the ground. He scans the landscape.

AN INSURGENT FIGHTER, turbaned and holding a machine gun older than his age, jumps out from behind the rocks and waves them forward.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN - LATER

The brightness from outside shields the cave's entrance in pitch darkness. The Fighter frisks Jeffrey and then Susie. He finds the gun in Susie's jacket and takes it. Jeffrey almost smiles.

JEFFREY
You took the gun?

SUSIE
I was supposed to just trust you?

The fighter pushes them inside.

INT. CAVE - COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN

Jeffrey and Susie's eyes adjust to the darkness, discover AZIZ RUHEL, late twenties, sitting on the ground. Thick beard, intense fair eyes, and a week's grime on his clothes and skin.

AZIZ
Please sit.

Jeffrey and Susie sit across from him, keeping one eye on The Fighter crouched at the cave's entrance, gun aimed at them.

Another YOUNG FIGHTER stands a few feet behind Aziz. Dark eyes that have forgotten life's little pleasures.

JEFFREY
You must be an important man now.

Aziz's stone cold face cracks a smile. Jeffrey laughs with him. Susie looks between the two men -- *what the hell is going on?*

Aziz offers his hand. Jeffrey shakes it warmly.

AZIZ
Professor.

JEFFREY
(to Susie)
I taught a course at Yale. Aziz
should have been my best student.
But he didn't like deadlines.

SUSIE
You went to Yale?

AZIZ
They like diversity at your
American schools.

SUSIE
How did you end up back here?

Aziz looks at Jeffrey.

AZIZ
Let's just say I saw opportunities,
my friend.

JEFFREY
You said you wanted to help build a
democracy in this country. Not join
the Taliban.

Susie looks at Aziz. Uncomfortable.

AZIZ
The leadership is changing and we
want to legitimize our power. We've
learned from our mistakes.

JEFFREY
Are you behind the kidnappings?

AZIZ
When the Americans came and chased
us out, the group fractured. Most
of the groups have now come back
together to build a stronger,
smarter Taliban.

(off Susie's look)
You don't like the sound of that?

Susie doesn't respond. Aziz continues to smile.

AZIZ
A few splinter groups chose not to come back. One of them calls themselves the Order of the Faith. They raised a little money from Pakistan. Al-Qaeda. And their money drew better leaders. I believe they are your kidnappers.

JEFFREY
Do you think they will kill the girls?

AZIZ
I can't speak for them, my friend. But I can tell you the Taliban do not target aid workers. They are here to help, and we respect that.

SUSIE
(boldly)
But what about reports that the Taliban is responsible for the latest political assassinations?

Aziz laughs, waving her off.

AZIZ
(too dismissive)
Look at these boys. Do they look like political assassins to you? They just want to feel like they have some control of their lives. We give them that.

SUSIE
I see why you're the propaganda official.

Aziz loses his smile. But he's not angry, just thinking.

AZIZ
You call it propaganda when you don't agree with the message. Who's really the one with the agenda? Ask them yourself. I don't speak for them.

SUSIE

You want me to ask them if they're
cold-blooded killers?

AZIZ

I have nothing to hide.

Susie turns to Jeffrey. Realizes there's something she's not getting. But stands and walks to the Insurgents.

Jeffrey moves to the cave's mouth. Aziz follows him.

JEFFREY

(low voice)

I need to get in touch with the
people who have the girls.

AZIZ

I'm curious what capacity you are
looking for that information?

JEFFREY

I'm doing some private consulting
work.

AZIZ

I bet you are, my friend. By the
way, I read the article. I'm sorry
it's proven to be your Achilles
Heel.

Jeffrey blinks. He doesn't want to talk about that.

JEFFREY

I can pay for that information. In
exchange for reliable information,
you and your organization... or
just you, if you like, will get a
one-time fee of one million
dollars.

AZIZ

I like Americans. So willing to
make friends with everyone.
I will get back to you.

(beat)

We shouldn't keep your beautiful
friend waiting.

Aziz waves over at Susie. Who's been watching them.

JEFFREY
I remember your weakness for
blonds.

Aziz laughs.

INT. SUV, COUNTRYSIDE - EARLY EVENING

The day starts to fall and the sky opens in a violent shade of orange.

The car treks back. Jeffrey stares out the window. A weariness haunts his face. Susie, asleep, on Jeffrey's shoulder.

Out the window, he sees an Old Woman carrying a heavy basket on her back.

The car passes.

... Hamid's mother. And she walks toward a desolate, hopeless village.

INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT, KABUL - NIGHT

New restaurant on touristy Chicken Street. Red and white checkered tablecloths and tea candles dot small tables. Clientele of WEALTHY AFGHANI PATRONS and FOREIGN JOURNALISTS enjoy passable Italian pasta.

Susie looks over the short menu.

INT. BATHROOM CORRIDOR, RESTAURANT - SAME

Jeffrey, holding his cell phone with one hand and a public phone in the other. Sees Susie in the dining room talking with a WAITER. She points to him. He waves.

JO
Hello?

JEFFREY
It's Jeffrey.

JO
You're not supposed to contact me-

JEFFREY
I need a press credential.

JO
I don't care what you need. Don't call me here.

She hangs up.

INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT, KABUL - NIGHT

Jeffrey picks up his menu.

JEFFREY
What looks good?

He feels Susie's questioning eyes on him.

SUSIE
What was so important you couldn't
wait to get back to the hotel?

JEFFREY
I was hoping to catch someone at
the magazine. I need a press
credential.

(Smoothly)
Do you think you can get me a
temporary one till they get their
act together?

SUSIE
How am I supposed to do that?

JEFFREY
UN people always know the right
people.

LAUGHTER from a group of ARAB MEN in robes and SUITED
AMERICANS at a table nearby. The old boys network with a few
new faces.

SUSIE
Strange how people traveling on
business take liberties they would
never take at home. They buy the
most expensive bottle of wine,
charge it to their Islamic
countries and say it was for their
business partners. You can't
control the infidels but you can
still make money with them.

JEFFREY
(gently)
Susie, you've been here too long.

SUSIE
(bitter smile)
Maybe.

JEFFREY

You didn't have to leave the magazine.

SUSIE

You were right. I wasn't willing to do whatever it takes.

(beat)

I would have only been staying for you. And you made it clear that was not in my best interest.

RUMBLING TIRES... A procession of MILITARY TRUCKS. ARMED AMERICAN SOLDIERS stand over handcuffed AFGHANI MEN.

JEFFREY

Where are they going?

SUSIE

They're being taken to the military base in Bagram for questioning. Most of them will be released.

JEFFREY

And the others?

SUSIE

They'll be flown to the detainee camps.

A SOLDIER jokes with his BUDDY, barely twenty. The soldier flicks a cigarette butt off the truck. He reminds us of A.C.

INT. HOMELAND SECURITY INFORMATION SERVICES, D.C - DAY

Windowless room filled with rows of blinking computers. AGENTS wearing headsets, looking for the needle in the haystack.

AGENT LAWLER pulls up a flagged conversation on her computer.

JEFFREY (O.S.)

You need to get someone to issue me a-

JO (O.S.)

I don't care what you need. Don't call me here.

Agent Lawler picks up the phone.

KATE (O.S.)

You have four days.

INT. KATE'S ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Kate, wearing a long head scarf which partially covers her eyes, looks directly into the camera.

KATE
(reading)
... to release two hundred and six
prisoners awaiting transportation
to the detainee prison camps. We
will not consider any other
options.

Kate glances up. Someone just behind the camera is speaking to her.

KATE
I do not know where I am. And I
have been warned that any actions
taken to discover my whereabouts
will lead to...
(voice breaking)
... to serious repercussions.

INT. STATE DEPT. ROOM - NIGHT

ON TV MONITOR: satellite feed of Kate. She looks frightened. Vulnerable.

Jo watches the footage, her face difficult to read. Behind her, Janet Pierson and Major General Thatcher.

KATE
(on monitor)
Mom, I'm okay. Please don't be
scared.

The video feed ends. STATIC.

Jo clenches her jaw.

JO
Are we even considering the release
of those prisoners?

JANET PIERSON
That is not an option.

JO
What's next then?

Janet moves to the table. Major General Thatcher stays still.

JANET PIERSON

In most of these cases with foreign kidnappings, the abductees are released. Especially if they're women.

JO

So we should wait on precedence?

JANET PIERSON

Of course not. I'm just saying that the odds look hopeful.

JO

Hopeful. I hate that word. It means you have nothing better to say.

(beat)

I'm going to Kabul.

JANET PIERSON

What do you think you can do that we can't?

Jo stands, ignoring the question.

JANET PIERSON

Why don't you tell us about Jeffrey Highsmith.

JO

Did you really think I was going to just stand by and wait for you guys to fuck up?

JANET PIERSON

No. I was warned about you. But tell me how turning to an ex-boyfriend helps you? Doesn't seem your style.

JO

Don't underestimate me.

JANET PIERSON

I don't. We should start working together.

EXT. HOTEL, KABUL - DAY

Jeffrey walks out the hotel entrance. A HOTEL ATTENDANT directs him to a waiting taxi.

DRIVER (O.S.)
Mr. Highsmith.

Also waiting, the driver with the scars.

DRIVER
I'm to take you to your
appointment.

Jeffrey motions for the waiting taxi to go. He walks over to the driver.

JEFFREY
I didn't know I had an appointment.

Without answering, the driver jumps into his car. Starts the engine. Jeffrey considers his options. Then gets in. The car drives out the hotel gates...

Passing a bullet-proof US consulate sedan -- Jo in the backseat with Thatcher.

EXT. POOR NEIGHBORHOOD, KABUL - DAY

The car drives quickly through side streets.

JEFFREY
Can we slow down?

DRIVER
We're late.

The car BRAKES to a sudden stop. On reflex, Jeffrey tenses.

But it's only a LINE OF BICYCLES crossing the street. Jeffrey notices the Driver checking him out in the rearview mirror.

The driver honks his horn. Has little effect on the cyclists. They pass, and the car continues. Gaining speed.

JEFFREY
(gripping door handle)
I asked you do slow down.

The car speeds up.

JEFFREY
Do you understand-

DRIVER
Someone is following us.

Jeffrey looks out the back window. A beat up car follows. The windows tinted too dark to get a good view.

The driver turns the wheel sharply, squeezing into a tight alleyway.

SCREECH. The beat up car does a quick reverse and follows.

Jeffrey's car leads the chase -- through winding streets -- that get narrower -- less graveled.

The other car stays on course...

Follows up a steep driveway...

The other car gains some distance. But the Driver spins his wheel and does a sharp 180-turn -- in the middle of a crowded plaza. People get out of their way.

The other car follows...

Into shanty towns. Apartments and tents packed tightly together. Some with no roofs.

The Driver makes a last minute U-turn that moves the car back down the hill.

The beat up car attempts to do the same move.

HONK! An open truck swerves -- about to hit Jeffrey's car -- but his Driver maneuvers out of the way.

The open truck blocks the other car in.

Jeffrey leans back. His heart still racing. He looks over at the driver and sees that he's twitching with relief too. That feeling when adrenaline's still pumping but your heart's telling your body to calm the hell down.

Jeffrey's car makes a few more turns -- drives deeper into a shanty neighborhood -- pulls into an abandoned lot. Next to a barely standing building.

The driver gets out of his car -- opens Jeffrey's door.

DRIVER
We're late.

INT. BROTHEL - DAY

Christmas lights pulse to the trance-dance music. A room the size of a small bar with curtained side rooms. Filled with cigarette smoke.

CHINESE PROSTITUTES. Young girls in bras and underwear, stand at attention as the door opens.

Jeffrey walks in. And it's clear this is not what he expected. The prostitutes grab at him, putting forward their best faces. Their best body parts.

The Driver pulls the girls off Jeffrey and leads him towards the back.

A DOOR.

INT. BROTHEL BACK ROOM - DAY

Jeffrey follows the Driver into a long, narrow room.

WORKERS lean over a low table. Carefully unpacking plastic bags. They ignore the visitors.

Jeffrey covers his nose. Something's killing the air.

AZIZ (O.S.)
Professor!

Aziz stands in the back, in his turban and long robes. His two Guards not too far away.

The Driver keeps watch at the door. Jeffrey walks over to Aziz.

Workers open plastic containers. Careful. DRIED POPPY BUDS. Nimble hands use a blade to cut into the buds.

AZIZ
One millimeter. Or nature is not very forgiving. If the blades cut too deep, the liquid will spill out too quickly. But if you cut too little, then the substance will harden in the pod.

Jeffrey, nose still covered, watches experienced hands scrape out a semi-liquid ooze.

AZIZ
Your government burned one thousand acres of my fields last month.

The men gather the liquid into vials.

AZIZ
I know where the American girl is being held.

JEFFREY
You work fast.

AZIZ
Money is a better incentive than
grades. Instead of paying the
kidnappers you will pay me. This is
a better arrangement.

JEFFREY
Better arrangement for who?

AZIZ
Did you know that kidnapping is a
\$500 million dollar global
business?

JEFFREY
You said you weren't behind this.

AZIZ
No. But it doesn't mean I can't
profit from it. I make up for lost
profits and your government kills
those who have her and rid the
Taliban of our pest problem. You
leave with a clear conscious.

JEFFREY
We have very different definitions
of a clear conscious.

AZIZ
That's what my brothers said to me.
But I'm not so sure about that, my
friend.

The Old Woman sleeps sitting in a chair, mouth open. She snores with every other breath.

Kate watches her. Willing her to wake up.

Lights FLASH through the room. Sounds of TIRES crack the dirt roads, stop.

Kate walks over to the window. A GUARD, even younger than the last one, stands watch outside Kate's house.

A truck idles twenty feet away. Hamid leans against the passenger window. Talking quickly. He's upset. THREE SHADOWED FIGURES sit in the car.

Hamid steps away, trying to calm down. He looks up and catches Kate's eye. She steps out of his line of sight.

Hamid helps a WOMEN IN BURKHA get out and walks her into another home.

Kate turns back to the Old Woman...

Eyes open wide. Focused on Kate. The Old Woman stands. Whispering quickly, full of anger. She walks up to Kate. Pushes her against the door...

EXT. VILLAGE HOUSE - SAME

The guard stands alert and raises his gun. Kate backs away from him, out of the house. He yells something at her. But his voice betrays that he's probably just as scared as she is.

Kate points to the old woman. Still muttering.

The rebel guard splits his attention, and gives Kate the break to run off.

He SCREAMS after her. Shoots into the air...

EXT. VILLAGE, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - SAME

Kate running fast...

Past houses. Past dry canals that once irrigated the fields. Past the generator that's long stopped working.

EXT. FIELDS, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - SAME

... Into the fields. Kate's feet scrape against the rocky dirt.

She turns back. Sees the village get further away. And no one coming after her.

Kate looks ahead of her. Towering mountainsides. Impenetrable.

There's no need for anyone to hurry. There is nowhere to go.

She drops to the ground. Panic and fear make way to fury. She pounds the ground with all the strength she has.

KATE
(screams, helpless)
Please, someone help me!

Exhaustion overcomes her... She lies down on the cold earth.
Closes her eyes.

Now FOOTSTEPS running towards her. Getting closer...

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM, KABUL - NIGHT

Steam travels across the bathroom.

Jeffrey leans against the tiled wall as water pours on him.

INT. JEFFREY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

RINGING PHONE.

Jeffrey, wrapped in a towel, opens the bathroom door. A trail of steam pillows out. He runs to the phone.

JEFFREY

Hello?

TELEPHONE MAN (O.S.)

(rough English)

I told to call. You looking.

JEFFREY

Who is this?

TELEPHONE MAN

You want videotape?

JEFFREY

Yes. Do you have it?

TELEPHONE MAN

My friend. But he not speak
English. I call.

JEFFREY

I need that tape.

TELEPHONE MAN

We can meet.

INT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE, KABUL - NIGHT

A taxi pulls up in front of a deserted warehouse.

Jeffrey steps out. Followed by Susie. As he pays the driver, she looks around. At the poorly lit, desolate street. Lined with tented sheets and cardboard boxes. Kabul's skid row.

SUSIE
Maybe we should wait till morning.

JEFFREY
I don't want him changing his mind.

Jeffrey grabs her hand and leads her through the entrance.

INT. WAREHOUSE FLOOR, KABUL - NIGHT

Half-renovated office building. Looks like whoever wanted to fix it up changed his mind. And left quickly.

JEFFREY
Hello?

His voice echoes.

SUSIE
I don't like this.

Footsteps CLACK above them.

INT. STAIRWAY, KABUL - NIGHT

Jeffrey and Susie wait at the bottom of the stairs. Susie looks like she's going to pass out. Jeffrey looks a shade better.

TELEPHONE MAN (O.S.)
No move.

Jeffrey and Susie look up and see stairs zigzagging up dark floors.

A MAN'S FACE pops over several flights above them.

Susie flinches on instinct.

The telephone man. Somewhere in his fifties. It's difficult to see his eyes in the darkness.

TELEPHONE MAN
We talk here.

JEFFREY
Is your friend here?

The Telephone Man turns and speaks to someone next to him. A FIFTEEN YEAR OLD BOY looks down at them.

TELEPHONE MAN
This is my son.

The son whispers to his father. The telephone man nods reassuringly.

TELEPHONE MAN
We don't want police. My son did
not buy camera. He stole.

The son doesn't look too chastened. He seems to be having fun.

TELEPHONE MAN
Don't want trouble.

JEFFREY
We don't work with the police. We
won't tell them anything about
this.

TELEPHONE MAN
We feel bad about girl. Don't like
kidnapping.

JEFFREY
The videotape may help us.

TELEPHONE MAN
You bring money?

JEFFREY
Yes.

Jeffrey shows him an envelope. Flicks his fingers over the bills.

TELEPHONE MAN
Okay. Give money to woman. I send
son. They meet in middle.

JEFFREY
No. I want to come.

TELEPHONE MAN
Must be woman.

SUSIE
(not sure)
I can do it.

JEFFREY
I shouldn't have brought you here-

SUSIE
I can do it.

JEFFREY
(up at the man)
Show me the tape first.

The son hands something to his father. The man shows them the tape.

SUSIE
It can help us.

Susie takes the envelope out of Jeffrey's hands and starts walking. Before Jeffrey has a chance to say anything. Footsteps descend from above.

Jeffrey tries to keep Susie in view, but once she's reached the landing above, he loses sight of her.

JEFFREY
Susie, walk along the side. I can't see you.

Susie comes into view. She peers down at him.

He sees her walk up another flight of stairs. Then disappears out of view.

JEFFREY
Susie!

A beat. Jeffrey decides whether to run up.

She comes back into view, leans over, and shows him the videotape.

JEFFREY
Come on down.

Her footsteps run down the stairs. Quickly. Susie falls into Jeffrey's arms.

INT. JEFFREY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Jeffrey opens his hotel room. An HOTEL ATTENDANT wheels in an old VCR.

ATTENDANT
This is the only one we were able to find, Sir.

JEFFREY
That's fine.

The attendant looks over at Susie, sitting on the bed with her shoes off. Smiles knowingly at Jeffrey.

JEFFREY
(handing him tip)
Thank you.

The attendant leaves, taking a last look at Susie.

Jeffrey connects the VCR to the TV in his room. He gets a signal. And pops in the tape.

Jeffrey takes a seat next to Susie. His shoulders squared next hers. She throws him a quick look. But he's handling the remote.

Jeffrey pushes play.

SHAKY VIDEO FOOTAGE. Through the eyes of someone just learning how to use the camera -- random zoom ins and outs -- frantic movements.

SCREECH...

A smooth patter of GUNSHOTS.

The camera jerks around. Boy holding camera drops to the floor. He remembers his camera, focuses his lens across the street...

A black Nissan cross parked in front of the taxi -- taxi tries to reverse -- another dark car blocks the other side. Crowds run to safety.

Masked men rush out of both cars -- shoot out the windows -- at the driver.

Kate -- crouching in her seat -- holding on to Julie. Her eyes wide with fear. The door opens...

Kate and Julie herded into different cars. Tires burn. The cars hurry out.

And the tape goes BLACK.

SUSIE
You think you get used to seeing-
(off Jeffrey's look)
What's wrong?

Jeffrey, steel focus in his eyes, rewinds the tape...

EXT. KABUL STREET - DAY

Heavy clouds move quickly, strangely over the street.

Kate stands alone. Looks around, but no one is there. The ground starts shaking... Something is coming.

VOICE CHANTING. Getting louder. More desperate. Closer.

And then she sees them...

A LARGE WAVE OF WOMEN -- covered in matching blue burkas -- flood the streets. They move like a wave across the ocean's sand -- hands raised to the heavens -- beseeching their God for relief.

They push past Kate. They don't see her.

But someone stops. Turns slowly, and stares right at her...

Julie. Wearing a burka. But we see that she is smiling.

INT. BEDROOM, COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN

TITLE: "3 DAYS LEFT"

Kate tries to wake up. She's feverish, pale.

She passes out again.

JO (O.S.)
Can we trust him?

EXT. HOTEL SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Jo, wearing a pantsuit too hot for the weather and sunglasses that hide her eyes, smokes a cigarette. Jeffrey sits on a lounge chair across from her.

JEFFREY
I've known him for ten years. He's
a good business man.

JO
So I wire him the money. Then?

JEFFREY
He hands over the coordinates.

JO
Then?

JEFFREY

You use your influence to get a
special forces team to do a
recapture mission.

JO

That's not going to be that easy to
negotiate.

JEFFREY

Everyone negotiates. They just
don't know it.

JO

(smiling tightly)

They're going to want to know how I
got that information.

JEFFREY

It's not illegal to buy
information.

JO

And if the kidnappers find out?

Jeffrey does not answer.

Jo fixes her eyes on the perfect blue reflection in the pool,
weighing her options.

JEFFREY

They are not going to release those
prisoners.

JO

You know better than to talk to me
like an idiot.

Jo stubs out her cigarette.

JO

Go ahead and make the deal.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY, KABUL - SAME

Susie walks up to the reception desk.

SUSIE

Excuse me. Could you call Mr.
Highsmith's room. Tell him Susie's
down in the lobby?

CONCIERGE

Yes, ma'am.

The concierge picks up the phone.

Susie turns and looks out a large window that faces the backside pool area.

She sees Jeffrey and Jo, seated on lounge chairs, speaking intimately, seriously. It's clear they've met before. Jeffrey leans in and lights another cigarette for Jo.

CONCIERGE

I'm sorry. There's no answer.

SUSIE

(can't take her eyes off
them)

I have his press credentials.

EXT. TRAVEL AGENCY, KABUL - DAY

Jeffrey stops in front of a storefront. KABUL ONE TRAVEL. He looks down at the note in his hand. Scribbled: "Mr. Highsmith, your ticket is waiting for you at Kabul One Travel."

Jeffrey walks in.

SOMEONE is watching him from across the street.

INT. TRAVEL AGENCY, KABUL - DAY

Tiny space covered with glossy travel posters. A pretty AFGHANI TRAVEL AGENT, reading a magazine, looks up. She seems surprised to see someone come in.

Underneath her short head scarf, she wears glossy lipstick and mascara. She chews bubble gum.

JEFFREY

(speaking slowly)

Excuse me. I'm here to pick up my
ticket to Istanbul. I understand
there is a ticket waiting for me?

The girl smiles flirtatiously at him.

TRAVEL AGENT

(poor English)

Yes? Ticket. Name?

JEFFREY
Sherlock Holmes.

The girl's eyes widen.

TRAVEL AGENT
Sherlock Holmes.

She disappears behind dark curtains. Jeffrey looks outside. It's a busy shopping district and SHOPPERS and PEDESTRIANS stroll along.

The girl comes back with a ticket book in her hand.

TRAVEL AGENT
This.

JEFFREY
Thank you.

Jeffrey puts the ticket away safely underneath his jacket.

EXT. TRAVEL AGENCY, KABUL - SAME

Back on the street, Jeffrey looks in both directions before choosing to turn left.

A pair of eyes hold on him. And starts to follow.

Jeffrey stops in front of a bookstore. He looks like he's looking at the books on display. But he's actually looking at the reflection in the glass. A WOMAN IN BURKHA stands a few feet behind him. Looking at him. He can't see her face.

Jeffrey turns and enters the crowds.

Whoever's watching him tries to keep up. But he's walking too fast. His head bobs in and out of the sea of heads.

Then he disappears...

JEFFREY (O.S.)
Why are you following me?

Jeffrey stands behind a WOMAN IN BURKA. He grabs her hand, and pulls aside the slit covering her eyes. It's only a teenaged girl. Light skinned. She looks at him, frightened. Holds up a piece of paper.

Jeffrey takes the paper. It's his note. "Kabul One Travel."

Several people in the crowd watch them. Suspicious. Wondering what this foreigner is doing to a woman.

Jeffrey backs away.

JEFFREY
I'm sorry.

The girl runs away.

From the middle of the crowd, Susie watches Jeffrey try to collect himself.

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER (O.S.)
We both know I don't need to be here.

INT. AFGHANISTAN DEFENSE MINISTRY OFFICE - DAY

Jo and Major General Thatcher face Defense Minister ABU MASSAD. A military man who only learned to wear a suit two years ago. Because he chose the right side.

ABU MASSAD
Thank you for the consideration.

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER
I don't like the options but it's the only one we have right now.

Massad nods, acknowledging Thatcher's honesty. Two military guys who understand one another.

ABU MASSAD
It should be a joint effort. Your American troops and the newly trained Afghani military.

Jo's lips tighten. She doesn't like the sound of that. Thatcher throws Jo a look. *Let me handle this.*

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER
Because of the sensitivity of our intelligence, we are not comfortable working with outside forces. We're talking about a limited special ops team.

ABU MASSAD
Our men have proven capable in previous operations.

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER
We want to minimize attention to this.

(beat)
It's not on the books.

ABU MASSAD
I see. So you're here asking me to
sign off on a mission that does not
exist?

Thatcher nods.

ABU MASSAD
The US military has a policy of not
getting involved in civilian
kidnapping. Why now?

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER
There are special circumstances.

ABU MASSAD
So am I to understand that this
girl is special?

JO
The deadline is a little less than
72 hours away. We don't have much
time.

ABU MASSAD
(to the General)
The rich really are different,
aren't they?

JO
(she's had it)
If you don't give us permission to
go in and save my daughter, and she
dies, I will spend the rest of my
life talking about how the
Afghanistan government,
specifically you, Mr. Abu Massad,
are responsible for the murder of
my daughter. Then I will pay
someone to kill you. You will be
looking over your shoulders for the
rest of your life. Because you
won't know when it will happen.

Massad leans back in his tall leather chair and fixes a tight
stare on Jo. Major General Thatcher shifts uncomfortably.

But Jo remains cool.

Massad breaks into a half-smile.

ABU MASSAD

Whoever says that women lack the thirst for blood has severely underestimated your sex, Ms. Licht.

JO

I hope so.

ABU MASSAD

Fine. But I would like something in return. Jeffrey Highsmith.

(off Jo's surprised look)

We've been tailing Mr. Highsmith since his arrival. We've even protected him. If people find out that he authored the story on the detainee deaths, he will be a target. He may never make it out of this country alive.

JO

What do you want with him? He's just a reporter.

Abu narrows his eyes. He doesn't like being played for a fool.

ABU MASSAD

We know that Mr. Highsmith is working with Aziz Ruhel. Mr. Ruhel is a high level Taliban propaganda official. We want him.

JO

(beat)

Fine. I will make sure Mr. Highsmith is available to you for questioning.

Jo stands.

ABU MASSAD

And the French girl? Does she have a price?

INT. TOM'S WORLD CARE OFFICE - DAY

Tom moves a box off a chair. Jeffrey squeezes in.

Things are coming to an end here. STAFF hurry to pack the last of their things.

Tom has lost his stiff upper lip. He's just trying to keep things together.

JEFFREY
Not losing any time getting out of
here, are you?

This was not the thing to say to Tom. But Jeffrey knew that.

TOM
You have ten minutes.

JEFFREY
Why the French girl?

TOM
Excuse me?

JEFFREY
Kidnapping Kate by herself would
have sufficient. She's the more
valuable hostage-

TOM
You think you can value one life
over-

JEFFREY
Let's do a reality check. Kate
makes this a big story. Not Julie.
So why would the kidnappers take a
chance in going for two girls at
once? It's messy.

TOM
Julie was a very outspoken girl.
She attracted a lot of attention.

JEFFREY
She was attractive.

Tom tries to control his anger.

JEFFREY
Which is a dangerous thing for a
woman to do in Kabul.

TOM
I tried warning her-

JEFFREY
(pushing buttons)
Were you in love with her?

TOM
(furious)
Where the hell do you get off-

JEFFREY
You take one girl who does her best
to make sure no one noticed her.
And put that together with someone
who made sure everyone noticed.
Something sound strange to you
about that?

TOM
Maybe Julie was the target and Kate
the mistake.

JEFFREY
I dont think so. It's like they're
tying to make everyone forget about
Julie...

TOM
(off Jeffrey's look)
What?

Jeffrey rushes out of the office.

TOM
What the hell is going on?

INT. JEFFREY HOTEL BEDROOM, KABUL - NIGHT

Jeffrey presses play on the videotape. Susie watches,
standing.

ON TV: Slow motion. Footage zoomed in, difficult to see...

Kate dragged out of the car -- pushed into the front car.
Another kidnapper grabs Julie. But lets her walk. Julie gets
in the car -- looks over at Kate. Worried.

Kate is now being hooded. But Julie is not.

SUSIE
Julie. She wasn't kidnapped.

INT. BEDROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - NIGHT

Kate opens her eyes. Her feet are now bandaged.

JULIE (O.S.)
Hello Kate.

Julie leans over Kate. Head covered in a long scarf. She looks softer. More feminine.

KATE
Julie.

Kate throws her arms around her. Julie rocks her gently. Kate notices the headscarf. She pulls away.

KATE
You're with them.

JULIE
Kate, I can explain-

Kate slaps her. Hard.

JULIE
We just want to send a message.

KATE
Then send me home now.

JULIE
Not yet.

KATE
You chose me.

JULIE
Yes. I saw your file on Tom's desk.
Saw your family connections. It was
like a sign.

KATE
You hate that scarf.

JULIE
No. I needed to make sure I got
noticed. Look like a target.

KATE
Why are you doing this?

JULIE
The world has a funny way of
listening when they see the face of
a sweet white girl. I didn't make
the world the way it is.

KATE
Yes you do.

Julie stands.

JULIE
You should rest.

KATE
You could have staged your own
kidnapping.

JULIE
There's a file on me. It would have
looked too suspicious.

INT. JEFFREY'S HOTEL ROOM - SAME

Jeffrey combs through piles of papers gathered on his bed. He hands a piece of paper to Susie.

JEFFREY
This is some of the intel on Julie Mertain. Files that go back years. Radical revolutionary activities in Paris. Here.

Susie looks over the papers. Sees the classified stamps on the documents.

SUSIE
How did you get these files?

JEFFREY
A friend owed me a favor.

SUSIE
A friend?

Susie goes to the bed. Picks up another stack of paper. More classified CIA documents.

SUSIE
Just faxed you classified
intelligence documents?

Susie throws the papers on the bed. She's had it.

SUSIE
I know you're not with *The World* anymore. They fired you.

JEFFREY
They didn't fire me.

SUSIE

Why are you here Jeffrey? How do you know Jo Licht? I saw the two of you.

JEFFREY

Kate's her daughter-

SUSIE

How do you know her?

JEFFREY

She's someone I knew a long time ago.

Susie moves towards the door. Jeffrey charges after her.

JEFFREY

It's not like that-

SUSIE

Please, tell me something -- anything -- I can believe.

JEFFREY

I watched Kate grow up. At least the first few years of her life-

Susie opens the door...

Jo. She looks between Jeffrey and Susie. Senses the tense moment. Susie -- face to face with the woman she can't help but consider a rival. And she hates herself for that.

JO

I didn't mean to interrupt.

Jo turns to leave. But sees Kate's face on the TV -- paused.

INT. ARMY COMMAND CENTER, KABUL - DAY

TITLE: "TWO DAYS LEFT"

Jeffrey and Jo look up at electronic maps displayed across several large screens. One screen zooms in on an area about fifty miles outside of Kabul.

First Lieutenant MARK KENTRIDGE walks up. Salutes. Thatcher waves him down.

KENTRIDGE

The team is in prep. They should be ready to deploy in thirty minutes, Sir.

EXT. MOUNTAINS, AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Two CHOPPERS fly in rotation over mountains. Across a still blue sky.

CHOPPER SOLDIER (O.S.)
Coordinate set. Estimated time of arrival 0900.

INT. ARMY COMMAND CENTER, KABUL - DAY

Major General Thatcher point out two moving dots on a map to Jeffrey and Susie.

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER
Two choppers are in air scouting the location before the ground troops move in. They have instructions to hang outside of a ten mile radius so as to avoid detection.

Lieutenant Kentridge, standing a few feet behind, wearing a headpiece, speaks softly into his mic. Thatcher looks up at him.

KENTRIDGE
Grounds troops on the move, Sir.

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER
The deal is that both of you wait in the temporary command center with me. You're not going anywhere near that village until it's cleared. Understand?

Kentridge looks up. Surprised. This is not protocol. The general sees his reaction.

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER
Yes. I'm going too.

EXT. MILITARY BASE JUST OUTSIDE KABUL - DAY

About THIRTY SPECIAL FORCES SOLDIERS from the 1st battalion run in line towards CONVOY VEHICLES.

In the near distance, two more CHOPPERS take off. Blowing heavy gusts.

The vehicles drive out in formation.

INT/EXT. ARMORED MILITARY TRUCK - DAY

Jo and Jeffrey strapped inside the truck.

The General sits in the row ahead. A large GPS screen with blinking lights play on a monitor at the drivers side.

The truck drives behind the moving Convoy vehicles ahead.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARMORED MILITARY TRUCK - DAY

The trucks veer off-road. Kicking dust into the air.

CUT TO:

INT. ARMORED MILITARY TRUCK - DAY

Busy activity as the General and First Lieutenant get live updates from Chopper troops. Everyone seems to be talking at once. Everyone except Jo and Jeffrey.

On the road, Jeffrey sees a FIVE YEAR OLD GIRL and her EIGHT YEAR OLD SISTER sitting by the road, selling sodas underneath the desert sun. Jeffrey looks around. There's no one or nothing for miles.

Jo breathes deep.

JO

(not looking at Jeffrey)

Do you remember Robert telling us
about being in Afghanistan when he
was a boy?

Jeffrey tries to nod.

JO

Kate loved hearing those stories.
She would have him tell the same
stories over and over.

(beat)

We had a difficult relationship.

Jo finally turns to Jeffrey.

JO

And she came here to get away from
me.

INT. COMMON ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Kate sits at the table, eyes empty. She's starting to
disappear. Lose hope.

Julie watches her. Concerned.

INT/EXT. ARMORED MILITARY TRUCK - DAY

The truck bounces roughly along rocky roads. A village comes
into view.

The truck swerves sharply and comes to a halt. About a mile
outside the village.

Some SOLDIERS have already set up an outdoor command center.

A MEDIC truck pulls up behind them. It's pretty impressive
with how they made a patch of desert become something.

INT. COMMON ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Sounds of a car approaching. Fast.

JULIE

Don't move.

Julie goes to the window. From underneath her robes, she
pulls out a handgun.

EXT. VILLAGE, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Convoy trucks fan the village. Special Ops. Soldiers (S.O.S)
pile out. Coordinate into smaller teams of three. Divide the
houses.

One team breaks down a door and move in.

Choppers circle above...

INT. VILLAGE HOUSE, AFGHANISTAN - DAY

An S.O.S keeps watch at the door while the other two comb
through the two room house. It's deserted.

S.O.S 1

(into headset)

Secure.

INT/EXT. ARMORED MILITARY TRUCK - DAY

Jeffrey and Jo wait inside their truck. Watching the commotion outside.

Jo opens the door.

An S.O.S blocks her way from getting outside.

S.O.S 2
(to General)
Sir.

JO
I can't sit in this car.

General nods.

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER
(to S.O.S 2)
Watch her.

INT. ANOTHER VILLAGE HOUSE, AFGHANISTAN - DAY

A team breaks down another house door. Quietly move into the house with guns raised.

Sounds of someone SHUFFLING in the second room.

An S.O.S inches forward, cautious. Alert. Motions to his two other teammates. They flank behind him. He knocks down the door.

A large table flies at him.

He shoots...

EXT. ARMORED MILITARY TRUCK, AFGHANISTAN - DAY

SHATTERING GUN FIRE.

Everyone looks up. Jo darts toward the village. S.O.S 2 chases after. And tackles her down to the ground. Jeffrey reaches them and helps Jo up. She's shaking.

INT. ANOTHER HOUSE, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - DAY

More S.O.S pile into the small village house. Look into the second room and see A VILLAGE MAN and his WIFE dead. Riddled with gunshots.

INT. COMMON ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN

Julie's face breaks out into a big smile. She puts her gun back underneath her robe and runs out the door.

Out the window, Kate sees Julie embrace Hamid. He looks at her tenderly. They unload Hamid's truck of food and water.

Julie looks up and sees Kate watching her. Julie almost looks embarrassed. But happy.

EXT. COUNTRY VILLAGE, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - DAY

S.O.S soldiers finish the search of the last house. About TWENTY VILLAGERS, rounded up and gathered in the center square, hold on to one another. Frightened.

The Armored Military truck drives in. The First Lieutenant approaches and opens the door for the General.

Some S.O.S drag the dead couple out of the house. The herded Villagers' cry louder.

FIRST LIEUTENANT
(to General)
She's not here.

General looks at the dead bodies.

MAJOR GENERAL THATCHER
Shit.

Inside the car, Jo looks at the dead bodies.

EXT. FIELDS, COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Hamid walks quickly through the scorched fields. Holding a gun. Julie and Kate try to keep up, Julie pulling Kate by the hand. The rebel guard and the old black dog follow.

JULIE
Where are we going?

Hamid doesn't answer.

JULIE
Hamid?

Hamid looks back. Not at Julie, but the village. He stops, satisfied.

HAMID
This is good.

Julie and Kate reach Hamid. The rebel guard lingers behind.

JULIE
For what?

Hamid looks at Kate.

HAMID
This was once our family's
vineyards. It is no longer well
known, but Afghanistan was one of
the leading wine-makers of the
area.

Hamid has a strange look on his face. As if seeing something
that is no longer there. A memory that comes alive, even if
it's only for a fleeting moment.

HAMID
My brothers and I used to help my
father with the harvest. We hated
it. Our fingers would be sore. But
my father. He loved these fields.

Julie steps forward and puts a hand on Hamid's shoulder. He
brushes her hand off. Julie cringes.

HAMID
The Soviets came and took control
of the vineyards. When they left,
the Taliban came. And burned them
all down. And like a curse, these
fields remain black.

Hamid has a hard look on his face. He turns to Kate.

HAMID
I saw your house on the television.
Such a big house. For so few
people.

Hamid offers her the gun.

HAMID
Here.

Kate looks at the gun. Isn't sure what he wants.

HAMID
Take it.

Kate shakes her head.

HAMID

Take it!

Kate takes the gun. Her hands shaking. She's never held a gun before.

HAMID

It's heavier than you thought.

Kate nods.

HAMID

(pointing to the dog)

Shoot him.

JULIE

Hamid!

HAMID

Kate, shoot the dog.

KATE

(frightened)

Why?

HAMID

You think it's easy to shoot
someone? Even a dog? You think that
the gun makes the man a murderer?

Hamid steps closer to Kate. She steps back, but finds the rebel guard suddenly behind her.

HAMID

You think what we do is easy?

JULIE

(worried)

Please, Hamid. Stop.

HAMID

Shoot!

He takes another step closer. He's now directly beside her.

HAMID

(loudly, into Kate's ears)

Shoot!

Kate looks at Julie. Who shakes her head. She doesn't know what to do.

HAMID

Don't look at her. She can't help
you. I said shoot!

Kate raises the gun. She doesn't know what to do.

KATE

I don't know-

HAMID

Shoot!

Kate shoots. BANG! The power of the release throws her back, and she drops the gun. She missed hitting the dog. Who cowers, whimpers.

Kate, crying, turns to Julie. Who looks at Hamid with fear. No longer knowing who this man is.

Hamid picks the gun up.

HAMID

(gently)

Thank you.

Hamid bends over and pets the dog affectionately. The dog follows him back to the village.

INT. JO'S HOTEL BEDROOM, KABUL - NIGHT

Jo curled up on her hotel bed. She watches the digital clock.

INT. SUSIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jeffrey knocks on the door. His clothes covered from the day's dirt.

Susie opens the door. She is surprised to see him. And not that sure she wants to see him.

INT. BEDROOM, COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN - NIGHT

Kate sits by the door. Her ears pressed to the door. Voices from the next room.

Julie and Hamid arguing.

JULIE (O.S.)

That's not what we planned-

Hamid WHISPERS something back to her.

JULIE (O.S.)
You're not a murderer.

HAMID
Maybe it's time I became one. Two
innocent people. Dead. For that
girl in there? I'm not the one who
weighed her life against theirs.

JULIE
(heart breaking)
I believe in you.

HAMID
I never asked you to do that.

Kate pulls away from the door.

INT. SUSIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Susie hands Jeffrey a drink. He takes a gulp and gags.

JEFFREY
What is that?

SUSIE
Local whiskey.

Jeffrey shudders, but finishes it in one swallow. Susie hands him the bottle.

JEFFREY
I'm leaving in the morning.

SUSIE
What about Kate?

JEFFREY
(a little too steady)
She's going to die.

SUSIE
Don't say that.

JEFFREY
Susie-

SUSIE
Call Aziz. See what went wrong.
Maybe he can get you another
location-

JEFFREY

The kidnappers know that we had information. They're going to go completely off grid. Do you understand?

SUSIE

They can't disappear-

JEFFREY

These people can!

SUSIE

I want to stop being angry at you. I want to stop caring about you.

JEFFREY

Susie-

SUSIE

Please let me finish. You have to look back sometimes. You have to see how one point in your life connects to another point.

(frustrated)

I don't know what I'm saying.

JEFFREY

Yes, you do.

SUSIE

I understand she's going to die. But I'm asking you to see this through. That girl deserves more than your words.

INT. COMMON ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - SAME

Hamid at the table with a basket of apples and a bowl of sliced apples. The black dog, his loyal friend, sleeps on the floor.

Kate walks out of her room. Julie is not there.

KATE

Where is she?

HAMID

We sent her back to her hiding place.

Hamid holds a paring knife. He peels an entire apple in one elegant spiral.

HAMID

Your mother is a determined woman.

Hamid pulls out a newspaper. On the front page, a large photo of Jo. Screaming at Jeffrey.

Kate tries to control herself.

HAMID

Do you see yourself in your mother?
Or are you more like your father?

KATE

I'm not sure. I don't think I'm
like either of them.

HAMID

Were you close with your father?

Kate nods.

HAMID

It hurts. Knowing that the only
thing left of him is you.

Kate doesn't respond.

HAMID

I am baking an apple pie. You like
apple pie?

(beat)

I had an apple pie for the first
time in London. I wish I could find
a word that could describe that
moment. It was like nothing I have
tasted before.

Kate watches him peel another apple, mesmerized.

HAMID

My first pie came out a disaster. I
didn't trust the sweetness of the
apple and used too much sugar. And
so I learned.

He gives Kate another slice.

HAMID

For my second pie I did not use
enough butter for the crust so it
fell apart. And so I learned. My
third pie was perfect.

KATE
Are you going to kill me?

Hamid stops peeling but does not look at Kate. He looks like he's about to say something, but changes his mind. He continues peeling.

HAMID
Have you ever made an apple pie?

Kate shakes her head limply.

HAMID
Really? Never?

KATE
No. We just buy our pies.

HAMID
You want to know why you're here?
Why I am doing this?
(beat)
I would like every family to be
able to pay thanks to Allah without
a gun in their hand. I would like
to pay tribute to my brother's
life. He was a brave man. And he
was murdered by your soldiers in
the detainee camp.

(beat)
And I would like for the daughter I
hope to have to have a chance to be
like you.

Hamid offers Kate a slice of an apple.

FIRE ALARM SIRENS...

INT/EXT. HOTEL STREET - DAY

... WAIL.

TITLE: ONE DAY LEFT

CROWDS charging in one direction across a wide street.
INTERNATIONAL GUARDS and AFGHANI POLICE try to maintain
order. People abandon their cars on the road and move on
foot. They are afraid of something.

Jeffrey, carrying his suitcase, sees the crowds. On instinct,
he drops the suitcase. Runs toward the center.

SUSIE (O.S.)
Jeffrey!

Susie motions from across the street.

Jeffrey maneuvers through the crowds. Finally reaches her.

JEFFREY SUSIE
What's happening? You stayed.

For a moment, they forget what's around them...

But the sirens BLARE forces them back to reality.

SUSIE
An unmarked car drove up to the
plaza and dropped a package. Bomb
squad just arrived.

JEFFREY
Is there no way to get access?

SUSIE
I have a plan.

INT. APARTMENT DOORWAY - LATER

Jeffrey reaches the last step of the landing.

Susie at an apartment doorway, whispering to a YOUNG MOTHER who holds a wailing BABY. THREE OTHER CHILDREN stand at her side, watching Susie with awe.

The mother looks at Jeffrey, shakes her head. Susie pulls out money. It's more money than the mother sees in a year. The mother agrees, reluctant.

She opens the door.

INT. YOUNG MOTHER'S APARTMENT - SAME

Susie and Jeffrey walk into the one room apartment. A makeshift kitchen to one side, one large bed, and a line of laundry cuts through the middle of the room.

The mother tries to calm the baby.

Susie goes to the open window.

SUSIE
I hope you're not afraid of
heights.

She climbs onto the edge of the window. Jeffrey holds on to her hips as she finds a grip. Susie uses the top ledge as support and pulls herself up. Her feet disappear.

SUSIE (O.S.)
I have a view.

Jeffrey looks down. Five floors down. Just enough to make a fall look messy.

SUSIE (O.S.)
If you get on the ledge, I can reach your hands.

Jeffrey steps out.

EXT. WINDOW LEDGE - SAME

Jeffrey, hands gripping the window sides, wills himself not to look down.

Susie's face peers out from the top, her hand extended.

EXT. ROOF - SAME

Susie finishes pulling Jeffrey up to the roof. Jeffrey stands and looks out at rows and rows of rooftops.

Susie looks through binoculars. She can see into the plaza square, about two hundred feet away. In the plaza, military trucks and INTERNATIONAL FORCE SOLDIERS in battalion-gear crowd the center.

Susie hands the binoculars to Jeffrey.

SUSIE
I can't look.

Jeffrey raises the binocular. Soldiers stand over something. Jeffrey zooms in. Someone moves out of the way...

A large rolled-up rug. A soldier bends down, begins to unroll the rug. Careful.

Jeffrey zooms in. Because the zoom is so close, it's difficult to keep the object centered. Another Soldier walks into frame, blocking Jeffrey's view.

SUSIE
What's happening?

JEFFREY
I don't know.

Jeffrey zooms out.

The soldiers stand and call out to someone. A group huddles, discusses something.

Jeffrey's hands shake slightly. He has to steady himself to keep the image centered.

Something's happening. A commotion. Soldiers start fanning out, motioning for the trucks to come over.

Jeffrey zooms in...

A HAND. Covered in dried blood. A truck moves in, obstructing his view completely.

INT. JO'S HOTEL ROOM, KABUL - EVENING

Jo looks down...

At photos. But we can't tell who it is.

JO (O.S.)
Jeffrey. Can you come to my room. I need to talk to you.

INT. HOTEL ELEVATOR, KABUL - EVENING

Jeffrey in the elevator. He looks tired.

The elevator stops on floor three. Two men enter - AN AFGHANI MAN IN SUIT and a COLONEL.

Jeffrey nods a greeting.

The men push a button for floor six. A button for floor seven is already lit - Jo's floor. The elevator passes floor four...

Then five...

Floor six...

The doors open.

COLONEL
Mr. Highsmith. You will follow us.

INT. FLOOR SIX HOTEL ROOM - LATER DAY

Jeffrey sits across from Abu Massad. The Colonel and the Man in the Suit stand a few feet away.

ABU MASSAD

Your information was not correct.
Any guess as to what happened?

JEFFREY

My source was wrong.

ABU MASSAD

You mean Aziz Ruhel.

Jeffrey doesn't answer.

ABU MASSAD

You choose to protect him?

JEFFREY

I don't know what you're talking
about.

ABU MASSAD

Even after he betrayed you.
(off Jeffrey's reaction)
Ah. You don't like thinking that.
Not your star pupil. You've had
quite a few betrayals lately. Maybe
you should question your instincts.

Abu motions to the Colonel. The Colonel picks up a file off the desk and takes out three photographs. Lays them on the table -- Aziz, Hamid, Yusif.

ABU MASSAD

Do you recognize these men?

Jeffrey looks at Yusif's picture -- smiling for the camera. He's almost unrecognizable from the photos that covered the magazine.

JEFFREY

Two of them.

ABU MASSAD

Yes. You know Aziz. Yusif Agha.
And this is Hamid Hadid.

(beat)

The brothers.

Jeffrey pales.

ABU MASSAD

Ah, you didn't know? People change
their names. Believe they're going
to become a new person.

But they can't really escape who
they really are.

JEFFREY
I thought I knew him.

ABU MASSAD
Because he aired his dirty secrets
to you? Told you he was Taliban and
a drug trafficker? He is. But then
he saw his brother's face on the
cover of your magazine. And plotted
revenge. Or maybe he just wanted
the money. Who can tell with these
animals.

JEFFREY
(sickened)
He knew I would bite.

ABU MASSAD
It pays to know the weakness of
others.

JEFFREY
A.C said Yusif talked about his
family.
(remembering)
And his village. Godah.

Abu Massad looks over at his men.

ABU MASSAD
Godah.

INT. BROTHEL - NIGHT

Jeffrey stands in the dark room. Afghani SECURITY MEN carry
flashlights.

The room is now empty with the exception of empty beer
bottles on the floor. A heavy haze of smoke cloud the air.
They left recently.

Jeffrey walks to the back room. The Colonel watches him.

INT. BROTHEL BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Also empty. But the table is still there. And if you look
closely, you see dried resin from the buds. The wasted drips
that did not make it into the vials.

INT. BEDROOM, COUNTRYSIDE, AFGHANISTAN - MORNING

Kate sleeping.

The door opens loudly. Kate jumps up. Her reaction quick. She's learned to sleep with one eye open. Always alert.

Aziz looks at her with very little emotion.

AZIZ

Get up.

In the doorway, the Old Woman watches her. Frightened. Hamid comes up behind her and gently pulls her away.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. DESERT COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

TITLE: "No days left"

The scorched fields.

A light wind shifts. The cackle of BARE FEET against loose rocks. Bandaged. Bleeding.

Kate focuses her eyes toward the sun and does not blink.

A Gloved Hand pushes her forward. Roughly. Kate walks forward, but feels the energy drain from her body, and falls...

A Shadow falls over her. But Kate does not look up. Wills herself not to look at that face.

Aziz leans over her, pulls her up roughly.

AZIZ

Kneel.

Kate kneels. Aziz takes out a video camera from underneath his long shirt. Turns it on and aims it at Kate. The two guards don matching hoods, and stand behind Kate.

Kate looks past them. At Hamid. Who stands off to side. He can't look at her.

Aziz pulls the dupatta down over her face. Kate starts screaming.

The hooded rebel guards raise their guns and point it at her.

Aziz presses record.

AZIZ
(in Pashtun)
Ready.

REBEL GUARD 1
(standing behind Kate, in
Pashtun)

The deadline has passed and we have seen no action. You do not take our warnings seriously. You take us for fools. But do not make that mistake. We are very serious in our threats.

The rebel guard continues speaking, but this is not subtitled. His voice breaks into a loud, angry prayer.

Kate shivers. The wait is agony.

Then the guard stops speaking. And there's a long pause...

Hamid steps forward.

HAMID
That's enough.

He steps to Kate, and lifts her dupatta. She looks at him, confused.

Aziz, joking with his rebel guards, walk back towards the village.

NEWS ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
The footage came through the wires
early this evening.

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Empty restaurant, closed for the night. The CLEANING CREW try their best to ignore...

Jo. A plate of food hours cold in front of her. Her real companions are a bottle of wine and an ashtray.

A portable television plays American news.

ON TV: Kate kneeling. Imprisoned by mountains. Flanked by the two Guards with guns pointed. It's the image that will sell magazines and newspapers.

NEWS ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
This comes on the heel of the
murder of Frenchwoman Julie
Mertain.

Jo looks out the window out at a garden oasis. So green it
hurts your eyes.

NEWS ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
The kidnappers have extended the
deadline for 24 hours. They promise
that this is the last extension.

Jo lights another cigarette.

JEFFREY (O.S.)
Can I join you?

Jeffrey pulls a seat at the table. They sit in silence for a
moment. Smoke from Jo's cigarette floating. Dissipating in
the space between them.

JO
Could you please turn that off?

Jeffrey pushes the off button on the TV. Jo pushes her dinner
plate away.

JO
Any news on Godah?

JEFFREY
No. Either A.C Lied or he heard
wrong. But there is no Godah.

JO
Where does that leave us?

JEFFREY
It leaves us nowhere, Jo.

JO
So I'm waiting for my daughter to
come home in a body bag?

There is nothing for Jeffrey to say.

JO
(softening)
Robert wanted more children. But I
wanted to go back to work. Have my
own career.

And then he got a job in Berlin,
and it was too good of an
opportunity to turn down. Funny how
they're always too good to turn
down.

JEFFREY
He appreciated it, Jo.

JO
Yes, I know. But Kate... she never
felt like I wanted her.
(voice cracking)
But that's not true. I was just so
mad at myself. Angry at what I had
let myself become. Feeling like
time was always against me.

Jo's eyes fill with tears. Jo presses her eyes closed. And
lets the tears roll down.

Jeffrey waits. Lets her have this moment. She needs it.

The moment passes, and Jo opens her eyes.

JO
Thank you.

JEFFREY
For what?

JO
For not comforting me.

Jeffrey looks like he's about to cry. So he looks away.

JO
You and I sitting here... After all
these years. These past few days,
I've wondered how my life would
have turned out if I stayed with
you just as much as I've thought
about my daughter. Doesn't that
sound awful?

Jeffrey shakes his head sympathetically.

JO
Who was the woman in your room?

JEFFREY
Someone I used to care for. Perhaps
still do.

JO
You two look good together.

Jeffrey almost smiles. He's thought the same thing.

JO
You would have liked her.

JEFFREY
I know.

INT. BEDROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Kate looks up and sees Hamid at the door. She turns back and stares out the window.

Hamid enters the room, carrying a glass of water. He sits down next to her, sets down the water on the floor. He looks out the barred window. It looks out at a mud wall.

HAMID
I apologize that the view is
lacking.

KATE
No, it isn't.
(beat)
I see my mother's roses. And the
swing set my dad built for me.
Every year she talks about taking
it down. But she doesn't.

HAMID
I wish I could see that place.

Kate doesn't answer him.

HAMID
(soft)
Julie is dead. My brother thought
she had become a liability.

Kate sucks in her breath. She didn't expect it to hurt so much. Even though she knew.

KATE
No matter how softly you speak. Or
how clean your shirt. It doesn't
hide what you are. I know you
killed Julie. You may not have
pulled the trigger. But you killed
her. Because she loved you.

HAMID
(voice breaks)
Yes.

KATE
You're a coward.

Kate's stare bears into him. With such strong hatred.
Contempt.

Hamid realizes this girl has changed very much in his presence. From that uncertain, meek girl to this.

HAMID
Perhaps. But if I gave you the choice. You or her. What would you choose?

Kate does not answer. The answer is obvious.

HAMID
I hope in the next life, we meet again. So we can start over.

KATE
I hope in the next life I make you suffer.

Hamid accepts this. He puts the glass on the floor. Takes out a vial from his pocket. Kate watches him.

Hamid opens the vial and mixes the solution in with the water. Hamid picks up the glass, and offers it to Kate.

HAMID
Well. To the next life.

Kate takes the glass.

HAMID
It is better this way.

INT. JEFFREY HOTEL BATHROOM, KABUL - DAY

Jeffrey lays awake, holding a sleeping Susie. They both have their clothes on. He watches her chest cave in and out with small breaths. He watches her goodness.

The phone rings. Jeffrey, without letting go of Susie, picks it up.

JEFFREY
Hello?

AZIZ (O.S.)
Hello my friend.

JEFFREY
Aziz.

There is a long silence on both sides.

AZIZ (O.S.)
(finally)
I have a question that I would very much like an answer to, professor. Three boys. They start in this world from the same place. But time takes its course. One kills for politics. Another for money. And the third for vengeance. Tell me, professor, would you say we were more similar or different?

JEFFREY
Murderers are murderers.

AZIZ (O.S.)
Yes. And thus death is death.
(beat)
I fear this is the last time we will ever speak.

JEFFREY
Aziz...

AZIZ
I played a cruel trick on you. That car chase. Just wanted to scare you.

JEFFREY
It worked.

AZIZ (O.S.)
In college I read Shakespeare for the first time. And it was very difficult for me to understand. I did not like the coincidences. But now... Now I understand. You are in my country. And we are talking on the phone. But where is our modern Shakespeare who can put poetry to the chaos of our times? I had hoped you could be that person, Professor.

JEFFREY
(it's hard for him to
speak)
I'm sorry I disappointed you.

AZIZ (O.S.)
Not at all, my friend. In my
culture, we say goodbye with *salaam*
aleikum, mandana bashi. Peace be
with you.

JEFFREY
Salaam aleikum, mandana bashi.

CLICK. The phone goes dead.

Susie opens her eyes. Smiles at Jeffrey.

SUSIE
Who was that?

A LOUD KNOCK at the door.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY, KABUL - DAY

Jeffrey and Susie charge across the deserted lobby.

EXT. HOTEL, KABUL - DAY

SOLDIERS and MILITARY VEHICLES crowd the hotel driveway.

Jo and Thatcher are listening to a SOLDIER explain something.
They look over at...

A WHITE VAN. Parked across the hotel. Windows blacked out.
More soldiers keep people away at a twenty feet radius.

Jeffrey walks Susie over to Jo. Jo looks up, and tries to
smile. But her face is cracked in sorrow.

THATCHER
Are you sure you don't want to wait
inside?

Jo shakes her head.

The BOMB SQUAD. Fan around the van.

The crowds watch with tense faces. They just went through
this with a rolled up rug. How much more can they take?

A detonation EXPERT waves a detector around the van. It's
difficult to see through the crowds.

But it looks like he's pointing at something in the back of the van. A line of soldiers flank his side, weapons raised.

The detonation Expert feels for the door. It's unlocked. He turns it slowly.

EXPERT
We have a body!

Jo moves forward, but she's stopped by Thatcher.

The Expert disappears into the van... He's in there for awhile.

Jeffrey puts his arms around Jo. She's shaking.

JEFFREY
Jo. Go inside-

Jo looks up at him. Her face just begging for more time.

Soldiers scurry around the van. The crowd cranes their neck to see.

The Expert crawls out. Carrying a body. A limp body.

Jo gasps. And starts sobbing uncontrollably. She pounds Jeffrey's chest. Wanting to make someone hurt as much as she does.

The Expert charges through the crowds.

Jo pulls away and goes to him. To her daughter. The expert pauses briefly at Jo. Shows her Kate.

EXPERT
She's alive.

Jo almost stops breathing. And runs into the hotel with the expert.

Susie wipes the tears in her eyes. Jeffrey takes her in his arms.

He looks up and see Abu Massad walking towards them.

ABU MASSAD
So there's a happy ending.

Jeffrey nods.

ABU MASSAD
We found Godah. It was renamed by the Soviets.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE: GODAH - DAY

Afghan SOLDIERS search the village where Kate was once held.

The soldiers herd the remaining residents outside. They don't put up any fight.

The Colonel gets out of his truck. Followed by Jeffrey.

INT. COMMON ROOM, COUNTRYSIDE AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Jeffrey enters the common room. On the table: a freshly baked apple pie. One piece missing.

The Colonel charges out of the bedroom, shaking his head. It was optimistic to think they would still be here.

Door KNOCK...

INT. JO'S HOTEL BEDROOM, KABUL - DAY

Jo opens the door. Jeffrey and Susie walk in. Kate, sitting on the bed, still a little pale but smiling.

JO
Kate, this is Jeffrey and Susie.

Kate stands, and offers her hand. Susie shakes it, tears in her eyes.

Jeffrey looks at Kate for a long moment. He really is at a loss for words. She's standing in front of him. A face he's only seen on television screens and in pictures. Now in the flesh. She looks beautiful

KATE
My mother's told me everything you have done for me. Both of you.
Thank you.

Susie takes something out of her pocket. A post-it note. She hands it to Kate. Kate smiles with recognition.

KATE
It feels like a millions years have passed since I wrote this.

JO
(to Jeffrey)
It looks like time is on our side again.

Kate looks at her mom and nods.

KATE

I almost forgot. I was asked to give you something.

Kate goes over to a desk and picks up a piece of paper. She hands it to Jeffrey.

It's a photograph. Taken a long time ago. Faded. Of Aziz, Hamid and Yusif. Standing in their father's vineyard. Hands stained. Smiling.

Sound of CHOPPERS flying overhead...

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A truck flies across a barely there road. Buried in a cloud of dust.

INT. SUV - DAY

Aziz sits in the passenger side. Next to his two insurgent rebels.

He hears a DRONING sound from above. Sticks his head out and sees...

CHOPPERS circling above. Aziz orders the driver to stop.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Aziz and the insurgents get out, guns strapped to their side. They spread out into the vast countryside.

The choppers let out a RING OF SHOTS. One of the insurgents is taken down quickly.

Aziz takes cover against a rock.

Three more choppers circle above.

In the haze of the horizon, a Convoy of military trucks approach.

Aziz knows he's cornered. He whispers a prayer, bends down and touches his nose to the ground. Then he sits up and opens his eyes. He looks around him. At the mountain. The landscape. He is home.

Aziz grabs his gun...

Charges out into the open space, shooting at the choppers above.

Bullets rain down on him. But he keeps shooting.

INT. HIDEAWAY - DAY

Another village house. Somewhere else.

Hamid sits by himself at a table facing a television. And a piece of apple pie.

ON TV: Footage of Kate being rushed inside the hotel. Jo at her side, holding Kate's hand.

NEWS ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
And this just in. Aziz Ruhel,
former Taliban propaganda official,
implicated in the kidnapping of
Katherine Licht, was killed in a
shoot out with Afghan and joint
coalition troops.

Hamid drops his head. A SOB from behind...

The Old Woman, watching her son die on TV.

EXT. HOTEL ENTRANCE - DAY

A TAXI DRIVER loads Jeffrey's bag in the trunk.

Jeffrey stands facing Susie.

JEFFREY
You sure you don't you want to come
back?

SUSIE
It's tempting. But... You were
wrong. I don't miss being a
reporter.

JEFFREY
I don't think I do either.

SUSIE
Why do I find that hard to believe?

JEFFREY
Who knows? I might like teaching
better. Might do some good this
time around.

SUSIE
I know you will.

Jeffrey leans in, and kisses her.

EXT. STREETS, KABUL

Jeffrey looks at the passing city from his moving taxi...

MUSIC: the Aria. Plays over MONTAGE:

INT. GUESTHOUSE BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

A long lock of hair falls to the ground. The lovely, ringing sound of clippers. Snip. Snip...

A soft pile of hair gathers.

And laughter. Two girls.

KATE (O.S.)
It's so short!

Kabul's call to prayer...

INT. BLUE MOSQUE - DAY

Crowded with male AFGHANI worshippers. Offering their prayers to Allah...

JEFFREY (O.S.)
Why do you think he really let you go?

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

A MOTHER leans down with her FOUR CHILDREN. Head touching the floors. Offering their prayers...

KATE (O.S.)
As I was falling asleep, he told me
he had hoped vengeance would taste
sweet.

INT. BACK ROOM, STORE FRONT - DAY

A weathered CLERK kneels. Offering his prayer...

KATE (O.S.)
But he found it tasted too bitter.
And he didn't want that taste in
his mouth for the rest of his life.

INT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

KIDS of all ages chasing around a soccer ball. On a dirt field looking out at war torn buildings. Playing like all kids play.

KATE (O.S.)
He wouldn't be able to enjoy his
apple pies.

FADE OUT...