

**Back of The Throat**

by  
Yussef El Guindi

Leah Hamos,  
Gersh Agency  
41 Madison Ave, 33rd Floor  
New York, NY 10010  
212.634.8153  
lhamos@gershny.com

Yussef El Guindi,  
325 Summit Avenue, East,  
Apt. 15,  
Seattle, WA 98102  
206-841-0101  
yelg@mindspring.com

## Cast

Khaled

Bartlett

Carl

Asfoor

Shelly

Beth

Jean

(Note: One actor can play the parts of Shelly, Beth and Jean)

Khaled's studio. Futon on floor.  
Assorted objects, furniture. BARTLETT  
stands opposite KHALED. CARL is flipping  
through a book. He will continue to  
methodically inspect other books,  
papers, as well as clothes.

BARTLETT

We appreciate this.

KHALED

Whatever you need, please.

BARTLETT

This is informal, so - .

KHALED

I understand.

BARTLETT

Casual. As casual as a visit like this can be.

KHALED

Either way. Make it formal if you want. I want to help. I've  
been looking for a way to help.

BARTLETT

Thanks.

KHALED

Horrible.

BARTLETT

Yes.

KHALED

Horrible.

BARTLETT

Nice space.

KHALED

Yes. - A little claustrophobic. But it's cheap.

BARTLETT

Live simply they say.

KHALED

I'd live extravagantly if I could afford it.

BARTLETT

What's this say?

(Bartlett picks up a picture frame from a table.)

KHALED

A present from my mother....It says, er, "God".

BARTLETT

"God"?

KHALED

Yes.

BARTLETT

It's pretty.

KHALED

It is....I'm not religious myself.

BARTLETT

I've always been impressed with this...(makes a motion over the writing with his finger.)

KHALED

Calligraphy?

BARTLETT

Very artistic. Why the emphasis on - calligraphy? I see it all the time.

KHALED

Well - frankly - I'm not sure its - . I know in general that, the religion tends to favor abstraction to, er, human representation. The idea being to avoid worship, or, too much distraction with the, um, human form....In truth I don't know a whole lot about it.

BARTLETT

No television?

KHALED

No. Too addictive. It's easier to remove the temptation.

BARTLETT

(picking up a book)

You didn't see the images?

KHALED

Oh yes. God, yes. How could I not. I wish I hadn't.

(The tinkling of a tune is heard. Khaled and Bartlett turn in the direction of Carl, who is standing holding a music box.)

(A beat as they all stand and listen to the tune.)

CARL

"Oklahoma"?

KHALED

I've never been able to identify the tune.

BARTLETT

(referring to the book)

And what's this about?

(Carl closes the music box and places it next to another object he's selected. He resumes his search.)

KHALED

It's the, um - Koran.

BARTLETT

Huh. So this is it.

KHALED

Another present from my mother. Her idea of a subtle hint.

BARTLETT

(flips through book)

You're not religious, you say?

KHALED

No. She is.

BARTLETT

Didn't rub off.

KHALED

Unfortunately not.

BARTLETT

Why "unfortunately"?

KHALED

Well - because I hear it's a comfort.

BARTLETT

And if you had to sum up the message of this book in a couple of lines.

KHALED

Er. The usual. Be good. Or else.

BARTLETT

Sounds like good advice to me. How come you're not religious?

(Khaled looks over at what Carl is rifling through.)

KHALED

I was never comfortable with the "or else" part.

BARTLETT

Nobody likes the punishment part.

KHALED

I'd like to think God isn't as small-minded as we are.

BARTLETT

I guess the point is there are consequences for our actions. Funny, huh. How a book can have such an impact.

KHALED

Yes. I was just reading about Martin Luther and the Reformation and how the whole -

BARTLETT

(interrupting)

Am I pronouncing that correctly? "Kaled"?

KHALED

Close enough. (To Carl) Is there anything in particular you're looking for?

BARTLETT

Don't mind him. He's just going to do his thing.

KHALED

But if there's anything -

BARTLETT

(interrupting)

With your permission, if we still have that.

KHALED

Go ahead, but if there's something -

BARTLETT

(interrupting)

"Kaled"?

KHALED

Er, Khaled.

BARTLETT

"Haled"?

KHALED

More Khaled.

“Kaled”.

BARTLETT

That’s good.

KHALED

But not exactly.

BARTLETT

It doesn’t matter.

KHALED

Khaled.

CARL

That’s it.

KHALED

It’s that back of the throat thing.

BARTLETT

Right.

KHALED

Carl spent some time in the Mid-East.

BARTLETT

Oh yes?

KHALED

So how do you stay informed then? with no tv. Newspapers? the internet?

BARTLETT

Both.

KHALED

And when you want to kick back, you...?

BARTLETT

When I...?

KHALED  
(not getting what he means)

How do you relax?

BARTLETT

Well...

KHALED

How do you spend your free time?

BARTLETT

KHALED  
Really? - That's relevant?  
(Bartlett stares at him)  
Er, sure, okay. I read, mostly.

BARTLETT  
Uh-huh.

KHALED  
That's my big thing, reading.

BARTLETT  
And when you want to amuse yourself, you do what?

KHALED  
(referring to the books)  
Actually I find that stuff amusing.

BARTLETT  
(holding up a periodical)  
This stuff?

KHALED  
Some of it.

BARTLETT  
(reading the cover)  
"Wheat Production and the Politics of Hunger."?

KHALED  
A real page turner.

BARTLETT  
(pointing to the computer)  
Can we look at that, by the way?

KHALED  
It's kind of private.  
(slight beat)  
It's - kind of private.  
(Carl and Bartlett are  
looking at Khaled)  
Will you be taking it away?

BARTLETT  
I doubt we'll need to look at it.

KHALED  
If you want to.

BARTLETT  
I'm actually more curious about how you kick back. What you do  
when you want to relax. Break your routine. Spice things up.

KHALED

Can I ask how that helps you? Knowing how I amuse myself?

BARTLETT

The questions will seem a little intrusive, unfortunately. There's no avoiding that.

KHALED

I understand. I just don't have that exciting a life. Did I mention I'm a citizen, by the way. I can show you my -

(Carl holds up Khaled's passport.)

Right. Just so you know.

(Carl puts it among two or three other items. This pile will gradually grow.)

BARTLETT

Here's the thing. We know you're bending over backwards and I sense we're going to be out of your way shortly.

CARL

Be done in five.

BARTLETT

And we know you didn't have to let us do this.

KHALED

Are you looking for anything in particular? Maybe I can just point you to it.

BARTLETT

He's just going to poke around. It's a random thing.

KHALED

Are you sure? The strange thing is I was going to call you. A friend of mine said he would, which made me think I should too.

BARTLETT

Who?

KHALED

Er - a friend?

BARTLETT

Right; and that friend's name?

KHALED

(hesitates)

Hisham. He wouldn't mind me telling you.

BARTLETT

Hisham what?

KHALED

Darmush. He was thinking of calling you too.

BARTLETT

I look forward to hearing from him.

KHALED

I thought maybe I should just to let you know I'm - here, you know. I am who I am and - just so you're not wondering - in case my name comes across your desk which it obviously has. I wish you'd tell me who gave you my name.

BARTLETT

Also know that anything you say here will be held in strict confidence.

KHALED

(continuing)

Because then maybe I could address the concerns head on; so you don't waste your time. I imagine you're getting a lot of calls. People with scores to settle. Or skittish neighbors. Was it George? He seems a little too curious about where I'm from. He doesn't seem to understand my connections with my country of birth are long gone. Was it - Beth? We had a falling out. It's very strange not being able to address whatever accusations have been made against me. It's like battling ghosts.

BARTLETT

I didn't say anything about accusations.

KHALED

There haven't been?

(Bartlett stares at him;  
slight beat)

Er, amuse myself? Let's see, I go to movies, I read. I like eating out; I sit in cafes. I like to go for long walks. I feel like I'm writing a personals ad. I wish there was more to tell. You'll leave here thinking, gee, what a lame life this guy leads.

BARTLETT

That's the other thing: If you have nothing to worry about than you have nothing to worry about. I know a visit from us can be unsettling. It's an awkward part of this job that when we come around people aren't necessarily happy to see us. We've held meetings to see if we can't fix that, but I guess there's no avoiding the fact that this is what it is. I'm a government official, uninvited, and you've been yanked out of your routine.

KHALED

You're more than welcome, I assure you.

BARTLETT

And we appreciate that.

KHALED

I've wanted to help.

BARTLETT

What I'm saying is we know we've put you on the spot.

KHALED

Well - .

BARTLETT  
(continuing)

It would be natural to be ill at ease, regardless of whether you want us here or not.

KHALED

Sure.

BARTLETT  
(continuing)

Don't waste time *trying* to appear innocent if you are. If you're innocent you're innocent. You don't have to work at it.

CARL  
(turning around, to Khaled)

"Karafa".

KHALED

What?

BARTLETT

So relax.

KHALED

I'm trying.

BARTLETT

We're not here to get you for jay-walking. Don't worry about us finding small stuff. We all have small stuff we'd rather not have people see.

KHALED

Not even that. That's what I'm saying, I'm not even hiding any interesting, non-political stuff.

BARTLETT

Stuff like this.

(From under a pile of magazines, he picks out a porn magazine.)

Don't worry about this stuff.

KHALED

Okay. That.

BARTLETT  
It's not a big deal.

KHALED  
It's - sure.

BARTLETT  
(flipping through magazine)  
Not a huge one anyway.

KHALED  
It's legal.

BARTLETT  
It's porn. Not good. But it's still okay.

KHALED  
They haven't outlawed it yet.

BARTLETT  
No, but that doesn't make it all right.

KHALED  
It's - it's a debate, but sure.

BARTLETT  
A debate?

KHALED  
Er, yeah.

BARTLETT  
A debate how?

KHALED  
About - you know - the place of erotica in society.

BARTLETT  
Uh-huh....You think this is healthy?  
(shows Khaled a picture)  
With cows?

KHALED  
I don't much care for the farm theme, no.

BARTLETT  
You think this should have a place in society?

KHALED  
It already does have a place in society.

BARTLETT  
So does murder. Doesn't make it okay.

KHALED

I'm not sure I'd equate that with murder.

BARTLETT

You go for this stuff? On the kinky side?

KHALED

What's kinky? She's draped over a cow. It's actually meant to be an anti-leather kind of thing. If you read the blurb. A cow wearing a human. A reverse sort of - vegetarian's point of view of sex and fashion. It's a stretch. But someone in that magazine is obviously an animal rights person. Or is pretending to be for the sake of something different.

BARTLETT

The woman doesn't seem to fare too well.

KHALED

No, but - . What does this have to do with anything? It's one magazine?

(Carl holds up four or five more porn magazines.)

Yes. I'm allowed.

BARTLETT

Careful there. You don't want to get caught in little lies over nothing.

KHALED

What lie? I thought you didn't care about the small stuff.

BARTLETT

I don't. It's just a pet issue I have.

CARL

(to Khaled)

"Hany-hany."

KHALED

I'm sorry: am I supposed to understand that?

BARTLETT

You don't speak Arabic?

KHALED

No. That's why I didn't call. I knew you were looking for Arabic speakers.

(Carl holds up two books in Arabic.)

Yes. I keep telling myself I should learn it. Look, I hope you're not going to pick apart every little thing because I'm

(MORE)

KHALED (cont'd)

sure you could come to all sorts of conclusions by what I have. As you would with anyone's home. Come to a bunch of false conclusions by what someone has. Which may mean nothing more than, you know, like a Rorschach test. Without taking anything away from your training; but still: a porn magazine; Arabic books? So what?

BARTLETT

Uh-huh.

KHALED

It's my business. - I don't have to apologize for it. Do I?

BARTLETT

No, you don't. Or any of these titles.

(Carl hands him a few of the books he selected)

"Getting Your Government's Attention Through Unconventional Means", "A Manual for the Oppressed", "Theater of the Oppressed", "Covering Islam", "Militant Islam". (Hold up a little red book:) "Quotations From Chairman Mao Tsetung"?

KHALED

I'd heard so much about it.

BARTLETT

Do you feel that oppressed?

KHALED

I was a lit major; I read everything.

BARTLETT

And so on.

(he throws the rest of the titles on the futon)

It's not what we care about.

KHALED

Good because on the face of it I know -

BARTLETT

(interrupting)

On the other hand a person is reflected by what he owns. It'd be silly to deny that. If you walked into my home, or Carl's, you'd find us. In what we did and didn't have. Just as you are here in all this.

KHALED

But - context is everything. Otherwise, yes, some of this I know looks suspicious. I've played this game myself: walked into my studio and wondered what it might say about me; seeing if something would make me out to be something I'm not.

BARTLETT

You're surrounded by the things that interest you.

KHALED

I have a book on assassins, what does that mean? I bet you've seen it and a red flag's gone up.

BARTLETT

What *does* it mean?

KHALED

Nothing. If I found that book in your home, what would *that* mean?

BARTLETT

It would mean in my line of work it would make sense to study the topic. What does it mean for you?

KHALED

I'm a writer; I read lots of things, for just in case - in case a plot line requires an assassin. I have a book on guns which I'm sure you've selected. (Seeing it) Yes you have. I actually hate guns but finding that you might think gee, okay, here we go.

BARTLETT

Why *do* you have a book on guns?

KHALED

I told you, I'm a *writer*. I need any number of reference books on different subjects. *That's* the context.

BARTLETT

Okay. Now we know. That's why we have to ask. We have no way of knowing unless we ask. Which means throwing our net pretty wide. Please try not to get worked up in the process.

KHALED

I'm not.

BARTLETT

We're not here to unravel your personal life beyond what we need to know.

KHALED

It just feels this isn't as casual as you make it out to be. You're here for something specific, obviously, something brought you to my door. My name came across your desk and I wish you'd tell me why? If you allowed me to clear that up, maybe you could get on with finding the people you really want.

(Bartlett and Carl stare at him)

I mean I appreciate the effort you're making but I just sense something's being left unsaid and I would really like to address

(MORE)

KHALED (cont'd)  
whatever that is. It's like this itch you've brought in that I wish I could just scratch, for all our sakes.

BARTLETT  
Huh. Itch.

CARL  
(removes his jacket)  
Can I use your bathroom?

KHALED  
It's right through there.

CARL  
"Shukran."

(Carl exits.)

BARTLETT  
No, right, it's probably not as casual as I'd like it to be. Though we have begun training sessions on that very subject, strangely, even for old timers like me. "How to put people at ease." I didn't do too bad at it.

KHALED  
No, you're - I am at ease.

BARTLETT  
Thank you. In fact:  
(takes out a form from his pocket)  
If I can have you fill this out at the end of this, I'd appreciate it. It's an evaluation form. And then just mail it in. We're trying to get direct feedback from the public. Especially from our target audience.

KHALED  
I'd be happy to.

BARTLETT  
And if you could use a number 2 pencil.

KHALED  
Sure.

BARTLETT  
So yes, we try, but at the end of the day, there's no getting around the intrusiveness of all this: What am I doing here? A government official, in your home, going through your stuff and asking you questions.

KHALED  
I'd love to know that myself.

BARTLETT

And that's what we'll find out. But in the meantime there's no avoiding the fact that that's who I am. Engaged in trying to find out who *you* are.

KHALED

I wish there was a way of showing you that I'm nobody interesting enough to have you waste your time.

BARTLETT

And you might not be.

KHALED

I'm not; how can I show you that?

BARTLETT

Well that's the thing. How can you show me that?

KHALED

Is there anything in particular you want to know?

BARTLETT

Is there anything you'd like to tell me?

KHALED

If you told me what brought you here -

BARTLETT

(interrupting)

How about the computer? Anything I might want to see?

KHALED

No. Unless you want to look at a bunch of half-finished stories.

BARTLETT

Half-finished?

KHALED

Most of them.

BARTLETT

Why?

KHALED

"Why?"

BARTLETT

Writer's block?

KHALED

Sometimes.

BARTLETT

How come?

KHALED

It's an occupational hazard. It happens.

BARTLETT

Something going on to make you lose focus?

KHALED

Apart from the world going to hell?

BARTLETT

That inspires some people.

KHALED

Not me.

BARTLETT

It inspires *me* to do the best I can.

KHALED

Well, good.

BARTLETT

What inspires you, if I can ask?

KHALED

I never know ahead of time, that's why it's an inspiration.

BARTLETT

We know some of your interests, right, politics, sex.

KHALED

Not even that. But then, doesn't that cover most people's interests?

BARTLETT

I wouldn't say that. No. You wouldn't find these books in my house.

KHALED

Still, they're pretty basic, whether you have a direct interest in them or not.

BARTLETT

They're basic if you consider them important, otherwise they're not.

KHALED

To be an active, informed citizen? And to have a healthy interest in, in - sex; that's not normal?

BARTLETT

No. No, this isn't normal. I have to tell you, Khaled, none of this is normal. Right about now I would place you a few feet outside of that category.

(MORE)

BARTLETT (cont'd)  
(Khaled looks dumbfounded)

To be honest, you are shaping up to be a very unnormal individual. I am frankly amazed at just how abnormal everything is in your apartment. I have actually been growing quite alarmed by what we've been finding. More: I'm getting that uncomfortable feeling that there's more to you than meets the eye and not in a good way. I wouldn't be surprised if we were to turn on that computer and find plans for tunneling under the White House. Or if Carl was to walk out that door having found something very incriminating indeed.

KHALED

You're - joking.

BARTLETT

I try not to joke before drawing a conclusion. It takes away from the gravity of the impression I'm trying to make.

(The toilet flushes.)

Carl. Are you done in there?

CARL

Just washing my hands.

BARTLETT

Can you hurry up, please.

CARL

I'll be right out.

KHALED

What happened to being casual?

BARTLETT

Oh, we're done with that. Could you turn on your computer, please.

KHALED

I - I think I'd like to, er...speak to a lawyer.

BARTLETT

Ah. Uh-huh.

KHALED

I - don't know what's going on anymore.

BARTLETT

I think you do is my hunch.

KHALED

Yuh. Okay. I think I'd like to speak to a lawyer if you don't mind.

BARTLETT

I do mind.

KHALED

I have the right.

BARTLETT

Not necessarily.

KHALED

Yes, I believe do.

BARTLETT

I'd have to disagree.

KHALED

I know my rights.

BARTLETT

What you do have is the right to cooperate with your intelligence and do the right thing and asking for a lawyer is a dumb move because it alerts me to a guilt you may be trying to hide. Which further suggests that I need to switch gears and become more forthright in my questioning; which usually means I become unpleasant. Which *further* irritates me because I'm a sensitive enough guy who doesn't like putting the screws on people and *that* makes me start to build up a resentment towards you for making me behave in ways I don't like....I am perhaps saying more than I should, but you should know where this is heading.

KHALED

(taken aback)

I'd...I'd like you to leave, please.

BARTLETT

I'm sorry you feel that way.

KHALED

I'm sorry too, but I - I think that's advisable. If there's something specific you want me to address, then fine. But. And in that case I would like to have a lawyer present. But I no longer wish to be subjected to this - whatever is going on here, so please. (He gestures towards the door) I'd appreciate it if you - and than if you want me to come in, I'll do so willingly with a lawyer.

BARTLETT

Er, Khaled, you can't have a lawyer.

KHALED

Yes, I can, I know my rights.

BARTLETT

No you don't, you've been misinformed. Could you switch on your computer please?

KHALED

I don't have to do that.

BARTLETT

Yes you do because I'm asking nicely.

KHALED

(moves towards the phone)

I'm - I'm calling a lawyer.

BARTLETT

Is it smut you're trying to hide?

KHALED

No.

BARTLETT

Weird fantasies? Child porn?

KHALED

No!

BARTLETT

Child porn with domestic pets involved?

KHALED

*What?*

BARTLETT

So then it must be something to do with, what? dicey politics? military info.? blueprints? communiques with the wrong people?

KHALED

(overlapping)

No. What are you - ? None of that. No; that's - .

BARTLETT

I mean we've already established you're a left-leaning subversive with Maoist tendencies who has a thing for bestiality and militant Islam. Throw in your research on guns and assassins and I could have you inside a jail cell reading about yourself on the front page of every newspaper before the week is out.

KHALED

Is this - ? What - ? Are you trying to intimidate me?

(Bartlett stares at him)

No. - Look, I - No.

(goes to the phone and starts dialing)

I don't know if this - if you're kidding me or - but. This isn't -

BARTLETT

Khaled.

KHALED

I don't know what's going on anymore. Something isn't...

BARTLETT

Put the phone down.

KHALED

I don't even know now if you're who you say you are. You could be a couple of con-artists who walked off the street for all I know.

BARTLETT

Would you like to call our office instead?

KHALED

I would like you to leave.

BARTLETT

Okay but put the phone down first.

KHALED

I'm going to call my friend who'll know who I should -

BARTLETT

(interrupting)

PUT THE PHONE DOWN!

(Khaled puts the phone down. Slight beat.)

KHALED

(quiet)

I have rights.

(slight beat)

I do have rights. This is still - ....

I don't have to show you anything if I don't want to unless you have a - ....Which doesn't mean I'm trying to hide anything, it just means I care enough about what makes this country - you know - to exercise the right to say no. There is *nothing* on that computer that would interest you, I promise you. And even if there were, I still have the right to -....

(Bartlett continues to stare at him)

They're stories, okay, I told you. Still in progress. I'd rather not have people go poking around something that's still very private. It would be like opening a dark room while the photos are still developing. It would be a horrible violation for me. That may be -

BARTLETT

(interrupting, holds up his finger)

Sorry: Khaled? Hold that thought.

(goes to bathroom door)

(MORE)

BARTLETT (cont'd)

Carl. Could you stop whatever it is you're doing and come out please.

(The door opens and Carl emerges wearing a fatigue jacket and a baseball cap)

Ah. Ah-ha.

CARL

I was searching the pipes.

BARTLETT  
(re: the clothes)

Well. There we go.

CARL  
(re: the clothes)

In the laundry basket, at the bottom.

BARTLETT

Really. Oh, well.

CARL  
(holds up bottom of jacket)

Evidence of nasty right here.

BARTLETT  
(feels bottom of jacket)

Yuck.

CARL

Smell it.

BARTLETT

I'll take your word for it.

CARL

Also: (Takes out a swizzle stick)

BARTLETT

A swizzle stick.

CARL

And: (Take out a small piece of paper)

BARTLETT

A receipt. From. (Reads it)

CARL

Guess where.

BARTLETT

Oh; wow.

Look at the date. CARL

Same date. (Bartlett looks)

Wow. BARTLETT

Proof positive. CARL

Looks like it. BARTLETT

He's our man. CARL

Uh-oh. BARTLETT

What? KHALED

Uh-oh. BARTLETT

Why are you wearing that? KHALED

You were where you shouldn't have been, Khaled; in a place you shouldn't have gone to. Bad news. Very bad news. BARTLETT

What is - ? What does that - (re: the receipt?) I don't even remember what that is? KHALED

(Khaled moves to look at it, but Bartlett gives the receipt to Carl, who pockets it.)

As we shift a little here (he takes off his jacket) I want to assure you of a few things: we will not over step certain lines. We will not violate you or your boundaries in any way. Though we might appear pissed off, you are not to take it personally or feel this is directed at you per se. And though we may resort to slurs and swear words, the aggression is not focused on you so much as it an attempt to create an atmosphere where you might feel more willing to offer up information. BARTLETT

(Over the above speech, Carl has taken a chair and placed it in various spots -

as if to see where they might best place  
Khaled.)

CARL

Here?

BARTLETT

Anywhere. (Back to Khaled)

KHALED

What are you doing?

BARTLETT

One more thing: at no time should you think this is an ethnic thing. Your ethnicity has nothing to do with it other than the fact that your background happens to be the place where most of this crap is coming from. So naturally the focus is going to be on you. It's not profiling, it's deduction. You're a Muslim and an Arab. Those are the bad asses currently making life a living hell and so we'll gravitate towards you and your ilk until other bad asses from other races make a nuisance of themselves. Right? Yesterday the Irish and the Poles, today it's you. Tomorrow it might be the Dutch.

KHALED

Okay. - Okay, look, look: You need to tell me what the hell is going on.

BARTLETT

We'll get to that. We're doing this as efficiently as we can.

KHALED

Because. I think. Actually, you know.

(moves to the door)

You need to leave. I'm sorry, but - er. I don't have to do this. And I, er, yeah. You need to go. (Opens door)

BARTLETT

Khaled.

KHALED

You need to go.

BARTLETT

Don't be a party pooper.

KHALED

I would be happy do this with a lawyer.

BARTLETT

Close the door.

(Carl moves towards Khaled and the door.)

KHALED

You know what? I need to see your badges again because I'm not even sure anymore.

(Carl takes hold of the door and closes it.)

Can I see your badges again please? Because. Whatever this is, this doesn't feel like it's, er, procedure. This is more like, you know, I mean, you're acting like a couple of, er, thugs, frankly. And I realize intimidation is part of the process, but this is - (a nervous laugh perhaps) speaking of boundaries.

BARTLETT

Anything you don't like, you write it down on the evaluation form.

CARL

You gave that to him already? (Searches his pockets for his form)

BARTLETT

I understand your getting nervous. I don't care for this part myself. We're switching from being civil and congenial to being hard-nosed and focused. It will have the effect of taking away from your humanity and it doesn't do much for ours. Plus we're trying new approaches. It's all new territory for us. Which is why we're handing out these forms.

CARL

Here we go.

(hands form to Khaled)

BARTLETT

You don't like something, write it down. Even if we haul you into permanent lock-up, we're still going to pay attention to your feedback. We might get things wrong in the short term, overdo things, with the interrogation, etc., but our image, honestly, how we come across, that can't be our main priority right now.

KHALED

Interrogate me about what?

BARTLETT

Our image can't be more important than questions of safety.

CARL

We don't give a rat's ass.

BARTLETT

We *do* give a rat's ass. But is it more important?

CARL  
(half to himself)  
No, obviously we give a rat's ass.

BARTLETT  
You care about this country? yes? You want it safe?

KHALED  
But I haven't done anything and you're acting like I have, what have I done?

BARTLETT  
What is more important: inconveniencing you with accusations of having broken the law or insuring the safety of everyone.

KHALED  
But how am I a threat to that, I haven't broken the law!

BARTLETT  
I'm speaking about in principle.

KHALED  
Even in principle!

BARTLETT  
I'm trying to be clear about this. I want the process to be transparent.

KHALED  
I'm more confused than ever.

CARL  
(to Khaled)  
You look like you need to sit down. You're beginning to wobble.

KHALED  
What?

BARTLETT  
Would you like a glass of water before we start?

KHALED  
Am I under arrest?  
(neither of them answer)  
Am I under arrest? Because if I'm not and you're not taking me in, than you need to - this is over.

BARTLETT  
Khaled.

KHALED  
You need to go. (Goes to door) I know my rights. This is over.  
(Opens door)

BARTLETT

Khaled.

KHALED

You bet I'll fill in those forms. This is - this is way over the line. Acting like some - cut-out pair of thugs playing tag to try and intimidate me. This is my country too, you know. This is my country! It's my fucking country!

BARTLETT

Khaled, the neighbors.

KHALED

I don't care if they hear it, let them hear it!

CARL

Not if you're guilty.

KHALED

I'm not guilty!

CARL

Then sit down and tell us about it.

KHALED

Tell you what? You haven't told me what I've been accused of!

CARL

Shut the door and we'll tell you.

KHALED

I'm not going to tell you anything until I have a lawyer present! This is still America and I will not be treated this way!

(Bartlett quickly walks over to Khaled, grabs him by the arm and drags him into a corner of the room - away from the door, which Carl shuts. Bartlett pushes Khaled into a corner and stands inches from him. While being dragged to the corner, Khaled says:)

What - ? What are you doing? Let go of me. Let go of me.

BARTLETT

First thing: Shut up.

KHALED

No I -

BARTLETT  
(interrupting)

Second thing, shut up.

KHALED

No, I won't, I -

BARTLETT  
(interrupting)

If I have to tell you what the third thing is, I will shut you up myself.

(Khaled opens his mouth but  
is interrupted)

I will shut you up myself.

CARL  
(walks over to them)

Listen to the man.

BARTLETT  
And if I hear you say "this is still America" one more time I am going to throw up. I will open your mouth and hurl a projectile of my burger down your scrawny traitorous throat. Do you understand me?

KHALED

I'm not a traitor.

BARTLETT

*Do you understand me?*

CARL

Come on, man. Be cooperative.

BARTLETT  
(to Khaled)

If I hear another immigrant spew back to me shit about rights, *I will fucking vomit....*You come here with shit, from shit countries, knowing nothing about anything and you have the nerve to quote the fucking law at me? Come at me with something you know nothing about?

CARL  
(to Bartlett)

Easy, man.

BARTLETT  
It pisses me off!..."It's my country." This is your fucking country. Right here, right now, in this room with us. You left the U.S. when you crossed the line, you piece of shit.

CARL  
(to Bartlett, quiet)

Hey, hey.

BARTLETT  
America is out there and it wants nothing to do with you.

CARL

Hey, Bart.

BARTLETT

*It's galling.* - Sticks in my craw. To hear these people who got here *two hours ago* quote back to me Thomas Jefferson and the founding fathers. They're not his fucking fathers.

CARL

They become his fathers. That's what makes this country special, man.

BARTLETT

I *understand*; but it's like they wave it at you like they're giving you the finger. (sing-song;) "You can't touch me, I have the constitution"

CARL

They do have the constitution.

BARTLETT

I *know* that, Carl. I'm just *saying* it's galling to hear it from people who don't give a shit about it.

KHALED

I do give a shit about it.

BARTLETT

No you don't.

KHALED

I do, very much.

BARTLETT

Don't lie to me.

KHALED

It's why I became a citizen.

BARTLETT

You became a citizen so you could indulge in your perverted little fantasies, you sick little prick. Come here, wrap the flag around you and whack off. (He picks up a porn magazine) Well I don't particularly want your cum over everything I hold dear!

CARL

Hey, Bart. (Takes Bartlett aside)

BARTLETT  
(to Carl)

I don't!

CARL  
I know, it's okay.

BARTLETT  
Jesus. *God damn it.*

CARL  
I know.

BARTLETT  
It's plain to see and we dance around it. We tip-toe and we apologize and we have to kiss their asses.

CARL  
Don't blow it.

BARTLETT  
I'm not; but sometimes it has to be said.

CARL  
Okay, but let's stay on topic.

BARTLETT  
This *is* the topic.

CARL  
The point of the topic.

BARTLETT  
(beat; to Khaled)  
And I have nothing against immigrants. Let me make that clear.

CARL  
(takes porn mag from him)  
Hear hear.

BARTLETT  
The more the merrier. God bless immigrants. My great grandfather was an immigrant.

CARL  
Mine too. Both sides.

(Carl will start leafing through the porn magazine.)

BARTLETT  
This country wouldn't be anything without them. God bless every fucking one of them. My family worked damn hard to make this country the place it is. And if you came here to do the same I will personally roll out the red carpet for you. But if you've come here to piss on us. To take from us. Pick all the good things this country has to offer and give nothing back and then  
(MORE)

BARTLETT (cont'd)

*dump* on us?...then I don't think you're making a contribution, not at all.

KHALED

I am making a contribution.

BARTLETT

You're *unemployed*. You're on *welfare*.

KHALED

I have grants

BARTLETT

That's *taking*.

KHALED

It's a prize.

BARTLETT

For what?

KHALED

For my stories.

BARTLETT

You haven't finished one.

KHALED

For past stories.

BARTLETT

You're blocked, you aren't writing, that means all you're doing is taking from the system.

CARL  
(still leafing through the  
magazine)

Leeching.

KHALED

I *am* writing, I'm just stressed out.

BARTLETT

You're involved in something you shouldn't be, that's why you're blocked. It's hard being creative when all you're thinking about is plotting destruction.

KHALED

I'm not, why are you saying that? *what are you accusing me of?*

CARL

The point is he doesn't have anything against immigrants. Let's be clear about that.

BARTLETT  
(to Khaled)

I'm *dating* an immigrant.

CARL

She gave you her number?

BARTLETT  
(to Khaled)

This is not why I'm pressing down on you. Apart from the reservations I just spoke about, the best thing going for you now is that you *are* fresh off the boat.

CARL  
(re: the girlfriend)

You lucky bastard.

BARTLETT

If it turns out you're not involved in any of this shit, I will personally apologize and invite you out somewhere. In the meantime, why don't you show Khaled why he's neck deep in doo-doo.

CARL

Love to.

KHALED

What?

CARL  
(searches his pockets; to  
Bartlett)

Hey, you know I met Miss September.  
(referring to the porn  
magazine)

BARTLETT

Who?

CARL

When I was helping the guys out on vice. Miss September. Just the nicest person. Devastated the attacks came on her month and ruined what could have been her big breakthrough. Was ready to quit until some guys wrote in saying how her body helped them through their darkest hours.

BARTLETT  
(not amused)

Great.

CARL  
(reaches for his jacket)

Now she only does spreads for special occasions. Usually to do with law enforcement.

BARTLETT

I don't really need to hear this.

CARL

(searches his jacket pocket)

I'm just saying, funny, huh? You never know what gets some people through the night. For some it's like, you know, the Church. For others -

(finds what he's looking for)

it's a place like this.

(he shows Khaled a photo)

Ever been to this strip club?

(Khaled tries to focus on the photo)

Well we know you did because here you are in this photo.

(shows him another photo)

Hidden in this hat and jacket I'm wearing, but: now that I'm wearing it we can pretty much say it's you. You can make out your jaw under the hat, and the earlobe is always a distinguishing feature. It's you, right?

(Khaled looks but doesn't answer)

BARTLETT

Khaled.

CARL

Plus we have your receipt from the club and a bunch of other stuff that places you there.

KHALED

Why are you - ? Why was this - ?

CARL

So it *is* you.

(Khaled hesitates)

I would acknowledge the obvious so you can quickly move ahead and establish your innocence, if that's the case. Which is *not* obvious.

BARTLETT

It's far from obvious.

CARL

I'd use this opportunity to clear up your name, if I was you.

(Khaled is about to speak but is interrupted; sotto voce:)

And look, man, don't be embarrassed about going to these joints. I've frequented these places myself. I'm not as hung up about this as Bart here is.

BARTLETT

I'm not hung up about them.

CARL

What I'm saying is someone in this room understands.

BARTLETT

*I understand.* It was the cow that put me off.

CARL

Personally, you can whack off all you want. You can take your johnson and do what you want with it, as long as it's legal. We're not here to judge you for what you do with your dick. What's that expression in Arabic they use? About a fool and his schlong? Anyway. If you're just embarrassed to admit you go to strip joints, don't be. I love a good lap dance myself. That ass waving in your face. The thighs working up a sweat.

(shows him the photo again)

You, right?

KHALED

Look I...I don't know where you're heading with this. I'm not going to incriminate myself when I don't even know what I'm being accused of. You asked if you had my permission to come in here and everything, well, you don't anymore, I'm sorry.

BARTLETT

We're so past that, my friend. Right now you're standing on our permission not to be disappeared into little atom-sized pieces of nothingness; and then shoved up the crack of the fat ass you'll be sharing a cell with. The best thing you can do for yourself is to identify yourself right now, and I mean right now.

(Carl sticks the photo in front of Khaled's face.)

KHALED

*You can't tell anything. It's too dark. It's a silhouette for chrissakes.*

BARTLETT

Then maybe we shed some light. Would that be helpful?

CARL

Shedding light is always a good idea.

BARTLETT

(to Khaled)

This is going to be like pulling teeth, isn't it. Carl.

CARL

I'm ahead of you.

(Carl goes over to the closet doors as he takes off the baseball hat and jacket.)

BARTLETT

Exhibit number one:

(shows Khaled another photo)

Have you seen this guy?

(Carl slides open one of the doors, revealing ASFOOR: erect, still. Perhaps a spotlight from within the closet is shone on him. Also helpful if a sound effect of some sort accompanies the opening of the door.)

Of course you have, he's been in all the papers. "Terribilis Carnifex", bringer of chaos, exemplar of horror and ghoulish behavior and very committed. And dead of course. Dying at the conclusion of his mad little goal. As a writer do you often wonder what might have been going through his mind at that instant he knew he'd accomplished his goal? Do you? I do. I wonder what he saw - just before he stopped seeing. What he thought, before he accomplished seizing everyone's mind and focusing it on him and his odious little ways. I admire him, you know. If I was an evil little shit, I'd want to be him. That's commitment for you. Dedication.

(to Asfoor)

What *did* you see, by the way?

ASFOOR

Nothing.

BARTLETT

What did you think?

ASFOOR

Nothing.

BARTLETT

Unfortunately, I can't get into his mind. But he did do a lot of typing.

(Asfoor goes over to Khaled's computer. He will start typing.)

Quite the wordsmith. If a little cryptic. We've been able to trace most of his e-mails. Worked out of a library not too far from here. The librarian remembered him. Said he was like a dark cloud that changed the mood the moment he walked in. But said she felt sorry for him nonetheless. Reminded her of Pigpen, she said.

(Carl slides open the other closet panel revealing SHELLY, wearing glasses.)

SHELLY

Like in "Peanuts".

BARTLETT

Ah.

SHELLY  
(enters studio)

You know, the way he always had this cloud of dirt around him.

BARTLETT

I see.

SHELLY  
That way. I thought it might be sadness at first, and felt the urge to say something to him. Cheer him up.

(to Asfoor)

It's a wonderful day. We haven't had this much sun in weeks.

(Asfoor turns to her without saying anything)

Have a nice day.

(to Bartlett)

Didn't say much in return. No, I can't say he did. Barely smiled. His eyes were so...(can't find the words)

BARTLETT

Yes?

SHELLY

Piercingly nondescript. As if I was looking at a description of a pair of eyes, and not the eyes themselves. Of course all these impressions may be hindsight.

BARTLETT

What do you mean?

SHELLY

You know, how new information about a person suddenly makes you see that person in a different light. I'm sure if you'd told me he'd saved the lives of a family from a burning house I'd be remembering him differently. - Though probably not.

BARTLETT

Anything else?

SHELLY

Well...

(hesitates)

He may have misread my attempts to be nice. Because one day he followed me into the room where we archive rare maps. And, well,

(MORE)

SHELLY (cont'd)

made a pass at me. Didn't know he was there until I felt his hands. I screamed, of course. Pushed him away. I even had to use one of the rolled up maps to ward him off. I kept thinking, I hope it doesn't come to anything violent because this is the only existing map of a county in eighteenth century Pennsylvania.

BARTLETT

Why didn't you report the assault?

SHELLY

I don't know why I didn't. - I didn't want to give it - importance. Perhaps if I had you would've caught him and none of this would have happened. I'm sorry. How do you recognize evil?

BARTLETT

We appreciate the information you're giving now.

SHELLY

All I saw was an awful sadness. I had no idea his hurt had no end.

BARTLETT

Thank you, Ms. Shelly. If we have any follow-up questions we'll contact you.

SHELLY

I wish...

(to Asfoor)

I wish you hadn't done that. I wish there had been a way to get to you earlier, before things turned; before your mind went away. Because it has to go away to do that, doesn't it? Become so narrowed that nothing else matters. - I wish I could talk to you. - I would even let you...touch me, again. If it would open you up. If I could talk to you one more time; and find out more about you. Everyday I walk into a building filled with more knowledge than I could ever hope to digest. But none of the books can explain to me why you did what you did or who you are....I wonder if you'd even be able to tell me?

BARTLETT

Thank you, Ms. Shelley. Carl will show you out.

(With one last look at Asfoor, Shelly heads for the front door. Carl opens the door and exits with her.)

BARTLETT

I don't suppose you've ever seen this man up close?

(Bartlett briefly picks up a library book.)

KHALED

Because we used the same *library*?

BARTLETT

Locked eyes across a library table?

KHALED

That's the connection? It's the only library for miles, *everyone uses it.*

BARTLETT

(continuing)

Rubbed shoulders in the book shelves. Shared books? e-mails?

KHALED

(overlapping)

That's what brought you here? You don't think I wouldn't have come forward if I'd seen him, if I'd have had *any* information about him.

BARTLETT

Perhaps you did and didn't know it; look at him again.

(He's shown the photo. At this point, if not before, Asfoor is up on his feet.)

KHALED

I know what he looks like. I would've remembered.

BARTLETT

Look at him again.

ASFOOR

Khaled.

KHALED

You're not going to pin this on me just because I went into the same *building.*

ASFOOR

I'm bleeding into you and there's nothing you can do about it.

BARTLETT

Pin what?

KHALED

Jesus Christ, I've been *wanting to help.*

BARTLETT

(overlapping)

Pin what? You may have seen him, that's all.

KHALED

I *wept for this country.*

ASFOOR

So did I.

BARTLETT

I'm trying to jog your memory, you may have forgotten something, seen him at the computer.

KHALED

I know what you're doing and I'm not going to be screwed by something this flimsy. I will not be dragged in by association of having used the same space!

BARTLETT

Khaled: calm down; you aren't being accused of anything yet.

ASFOOR

We're all in this together.

BARTLETT

Perhaps you have some insight into this e-mail he sent; it's translated:

ASFOOR/BARTLETT

"Nothing the matter today. On Wednesday, I cut myself opening a can of tuna. Don't worry about that. Do you know Luxor? It's worth seeing."

BARTLETT

Or:

ASFOOR

"Tattoos, yes. Do it where the skin folds so you can hide it if you change your mind."

ASFOOR/BARTLETT

"I have a list for you."

BARTLETT

Is "Luxor" part of your e-mail address or how you sign off?

KHALED

No. "Luxor"?

(pointing to the computer)

Check it. This is like twenty degrees of separation. Then everyone in that library is a suspect. I use books, for chrissakes, I'm a writer.

BARTLETT

So you keep telling me.

ASFOOR

You're blocked, I can help.

BARTLETT

Ms. Shelly can't be definite she saw you two together, all the same she did say -

KHALED  
(interrupting)

How would she know who I am?

(Asfoor picks up a book.)

BARTLETT

I showed her your photo.

KHALED

Where'd you get that?

BARTLETT

Your ex-girlfriend.

KHALED  
(digests the information)

How many people have you talked to exactly? What did Beth say?

BARTLETT  
(consulting his notebook)

But Ms. Shelly does think she saw him nearby when you came to ask for a book one time.

ASFOOR  
(reads title of book)

"Caravans of God and Commerce."

BARTLETT

Remembers it because you kicked up a fuss when they didn't have it.

ASFOOR  
(reading from book)

"The road to Mecca was perilous, and not only because of the dangers of the desert."

BARTLETT

Says he stood a few feet away until you had finished and then followed you out.

ASFOOR  
(reading from the book)

"But also because of those who hid in them."

KHALED

*What?*

ASFOOR  
(accent, to Khaled)

Excuse me, sir.

KHALED

No.

BARTLETT  
Said there may have been an exchange between you.

ASFOOR  
(to Khaled)  
I know book you want. I help you find it.

KHALED  
That never happened. You don't think I would have remembered that? I'm a terrible liar. It would be obvious if was lying.

(Asfoor has put down the book; Bartlett picks it up.)

BARTLETT  
I believe you. But you did find the book.

KHALED  
In a book shop, I bought it.

BARTLETT  
He never followed you out? Told you where you could find it?

KHALED  
No.

BARTLETT  
Perhaps the librarian did remember it wrong but if we speculated on this encounter that never took place, what might have happened?

KHALED  
*What kind of sense is that?*

BARTLETT  
He followed you out and:

KHALED  
*What am I supposed to speculate on?*

BARTLETT  
You're the writer, you tell me.

ASFOOR  
Assalam alaykum.

KHALED  
(disoriented)  
I can't remember what never happened.

ASFOOR  
Assalam alaykum.

KHALED  
(awkwardly)  
Alaykum salaam.

ASFOOR  
(in Arabic)  
I know that book you want.

KHALED  
I don't speak Arabic.

ASFOOR  
(in Arabic)  
No?

KHALED  
I'm sorry, I'm in a hurry.

ASFOOR  
Please. A moment. I would like - my name is Gamal. Gamal Asfoor.  
Hello.

KHALED  
Sorry but I have to go.

ASFOOR  
I like to learn English. With you.

KHALED  
I - no, I'm sorry.

ASFOOR  
You teach me. I pay.

KHALED  
I can't. I'm really busy right now.

ASFOOR  
(hands him a piece of paper)  
My number here. I teach you Arabic. You Arab, yes? I watch you.  
I watch you in the library.

KHALED  
No thanks. Thank you, no, goodbye.

ASFOOR  
I know book you want. I get it for you.

KHALED

Really, I can't.

(to Bartlett)

That's ridiculous. There was no encounter. You're making stuff up.

BARTLETT

Well of course I am. You of all people should appreciate the importance of doing that. How that might lead you, stumbling, to a truth or two. Facts aren't the only game in town. Perhaps it never happened, then again, here are the Arabic books. In this story we're making up, maybe he gave them to you.

KHALED

What kind of deductive leap is that? That's worse than guessing.

(Asfoor goes to sit at the computer)

BARTLETT

From his letters we know he shared similar interests with you: writing, poetry, Middle-Eastern stuff, politics, radical books, porn, didn't much like women. Said some nasty things about women in his letters.

ASFOOR

(at the computer)

"Unclean."

BARTLETT

God knows what his childhood must have been like.

ASFOOR

"They corrupt. They diminish you. When I die, do not let them touch me."

KHALED

What on earth does that have to do with me?

BARTLETT

Well, Khaled, not knowing you; not really knowing much about you; just from meeting you and casual observance I would have to say your relation to the opposite sex seems to have a kink or two in it.

(Khaled looks at him  
dumbfounded)

Maybe you two commiserated and found solace in the same twisted images and depictions.

KHALED

I don't know who you're talking about anymore; it's not me.

BARTLETT

I'm just saying.

KHALED  
(overlapping)  
This is beyond making stuff up, this is Alice in Wonderland.

BARTLETT  
Your girlfriend had a lot to say on the matter.

(A knock on the door.)

KHALED  
I knew it. She started this whole ball rolling, didn't she.

BARTLETT  
I didn't say that, but she was helpful.

KHALED  
She's the one who called you.

BARTLETT  
The word "betrayal" came up a lot.

KHALED  
(continuing)  
Something completely personal gets blown up because an ex holds a grudge. Great.

(There's another knock on the door.)

BETH  
(off-stage)  
I'm coming.

(BETH enters from the bathroom in a bathrobe. She is drying her hair with a towel. Overlapping with this:)

KHALED  
You're going to take the word of someone who's *pissed off with me?*

(Beth has opened the door to Carl.)

CARL  
(shows her his badge)  
Goodmorning. Ms. Granger?

KHALED  
(overlapping)  
For something completely unrelated?

CARL  
I wonder if we could talk with you a moment.

BETH

What is this about?

KHALED

Jesus, talk about the personal being political; now she gets to drive home that point and nail me with it.

BARTLETT

(looking at his notebook)

She said some interesting things right off the bat.

BETH

So he was involved after all.

CARL

What makes you say that?

BETH

Was he like one of those cells that get activated?

KHALED

*She said that?*

BARTLETT

Why don't you let me finish first.

BETH

That would make sense. His whole life seemed to be one big lie. I don't think he has an honest bone in his body. What did he do exactly?

CARL

We're just trying to get a better idea of who he is at this point.

BETH

When you find out let me know. Because I sure as hell didn't. You spend two years with someone thinking you have a pretty good idea of who you're shacking up with, then boom, he pulls some shit that makes you wonder who you're sleeping with.

CARL

Like what exactly?

BETH

And I like to think of myself as an intelligent person.

CARL

What in particular made you -

BETH

(interrupting)

Just everything. He never seemed to come clean about anything. Always keeping things close to his chest, like he had another

(MORE)

BETH (cont'd)

life going on. It wouldn't surprise me if he was involved. Though I can't imagine he was high up in whatever structure they have. I could admire him if he was. But he's too weak for that. More like a wannabe. Like someone who would be quite willing to take instructions, if you know what I mean.

CARL

I don't; can you explain that?

BETH

Like he knew his life was for shit and something like this would give it meaning. He had that writerly thing of never feeling solid enough about anything. Of being woozy about most things. Of course when you imagine you're in love with someone, all their faults feel like unique traits that give them character. It's disgusting how love can dumb you down. Anyway, what else do you want to know? So like I said, it would just make sense. He never would tell me what he was working on or what he did when he went out. He just shut me out after a while. Could you turn around, please.

(Beth has finished drying her hair and now selects a dress from the closet. She will proceed to put it on. Carl turns around.)

BETH

And then there was that quarrel we had soon after the attacks.

CARL

What quarrel would that be?

BETH

I almost flipped out because I thought he was actually gloating.

KHALED

That's enough, stop, stop, this is bullshit.

BARTLETT

(consulting notebook)

That's the word she used: "Gloating."

KHALED

I never "*gloated*", that's insane.

BARTLETT

(consulting notebook)

She went on to say that she felt you were almost -

BARTLETT/BETH

Defending them.

BETH

Praising them even.

KHALED

That's a lie.

CARL

Are you sure about that?

BETH

It sure sounded like that to me.

KHALED

She's twisting everything.

BETH

(to Carl)

I don't think that would be an exaggeration.

KHALED

(to Beth)

That's not what I meant.

BETH

(to Khaled)

That's how it sounded.

(If light changes have been accompanying the transitions of time/new characters, a light change would also signal the shift here.)

KHALED

I'm just saying we have to look for the "why"? Why did they do this?

BETH

Because they're evil assholes. Are you justifying this?

KHALED

Why are you so frightened of trying to figure this out?

BETH

Because if you go down that road then you're saying somewhere down the line there's a coherent argument for what they did. A legitimate reason. And there are some things that simply do not deserve the benefit of an explanation and being "enlightened" on an act like this would just be so fucking offensive. I don't want to know why they did this? *I don't care.*

KHALED

Don't you want to make sure it doesn't happen again?

(At some point, Khaled moves to help Beth zip up her dress, but she refuses his help. The exchange continues over this.)

BETH

Next you'll tell me this is all *our* fault.

KHALED

Do you or do you not want to make sure this doesn't happen again?

BETH

And your solution is what, we should flagellate ourselves? It's not enough they fucked us over, now you want us to finish the job by beating ourselves up? Paralyze ourselves by examining our *conscience*?

KHALED

Our *policies*.

BETH

That's your idea of defence?

KHALED

We'll finish the job they started if we don't. You've always been able to see the bigger picture, why can't you see it now?

BETH

(to Carl)

It was more than what he was saying. It was an attitude. The way he looked. And I used to think we shared the same politics.

KHALED

(to Bartlett)

That is a complete - I wasn't justifying anything. I was saying let's get at the root causes so we can stop it once and for all. Where do you get "praising them" from that?

BETH

(to Carl)

There was almost like a gleam in his eye. Like he was saying "it's just what you people deserve."

KHALED

(to Beth)

No.

BETH

(to Khaled)

You all but said it.

KHALED

Why aren't you hearing what I'm saying?

BETH

*It was a rape*, Khaled. It was a rape multiplied by a thousand. You don't go up to the woman who just got raped and say, you know what, I think you probably deserved that because you go  
(MORE)

BETH (cont'd)

around flaunting your ass so what do you expect. And if you want to make sure it doesn't happen again, then maybe you should go around in a fucking burqa.

KHALED

(disbelief, then:)

The United States of America is not a woman who just got raped. The United States of America is the biggest, strongest eight hundred pound gorilla on the block.

(Beth heads for the door)

You can't rape an eight hundred pound gorilla, even if you wanted to. Where are you going?

(she doesn't answer)

Beth.

(She starts to open the door but he shuts it.)

KHALED

Where are you going?

BETH

You have a nerve. Like you tell me.

KHALED

I just want to know.

BETH

Why? Are you afraid I might say something to someone?

KHALED

What are you talking about? - Beth: speak to me, you're freaking me out.

BETH

I followed you, you know.

KHALED

What?

BETH

Those times. When you went out. When you thought I was at work.  
(to Carl)

I should also tell you that I thought he was having an affair. I'm still not sure he wasn't. I think he was doing personals, or a chat room or something. Or that's what I thought. He certainly was at the computer a lot. It must have been something steamy because every time I approached him he would do something to hide the screen.

(Beth approaches Asfoor at the computer. Asfoor blocks the screen by turning around to face her. He smiles.)

Or he would turn it off. I became convinced he'd hooked up with  
(MORE)

BETH (cont'd)

someone. Met someone on line. Our sex life...well never mind that. He denied it of course. We had blow ups about it. So...one day, I followed him. I wanted an answer once and for all. So I followed him. To the park, where he met up with this woman....It was strange. It didn't last long. He talked. She gave him something, then left. When I asked later what he'd done he said he'd been in all day working. The second time I followed him was the day I was to leave on a business trip. Only this time the person he met was a guy.

(Asfoor stands, goes to the closet, grabs a different hat and jacket, puts them on and waits at another point in the room.)

Again, it only lasted minutes. And it kind of weirded me out. Later I thought that was because I was thinking, oh no, Khaled's bi and we've been living a bigger lie than I thought. But it didn't have that vibe. Khaled looked almost - frightened. Once again it was quick. Khaled left first, then the guy.

(Asfoor exits through the front door.)

I left for my trip and told myself I'd deal with it later. Then the attacks happened and none of that mattered for a while. But when I confronted him he freaked out.

KHALED  
(to Beth)

You've been what?

BETH  
(to Khaled)

I called. You were never at home when you said you were supposed to be.

KHALED  
You *followed* me? How dare you?

BETH  
Don't turn this around, I'm fucking supporting you while you're supposed to be writing.

KHALED  
That doesn't mean you *own* me.

BETH  
Who were they, Khaled?

KHALED  
Fuck you, no, it's none of your business.

BETH  
I thought you were having an affair; but now I'm not so sure. Now I'm actually worried. With the things you've said in the  
(MORE)

BETH (cont'd)

past, and now, and these meetings, and your secrecy. Yes, I know you don't like to talk about what you're working on, only you've been working on it for as long as I've known you and you have nothing to show for it. Are you having an affair? Either you're having an affair or you're up to something you shouldn't be. Either one makes you a slimy little shit. So which is it? Tell me or I swear to God I will tell someone what I'm thinking.

KHALED

You can't be serious.

BETH

I am, I'm really wondering.

KHALED

Beth. It's me.

BETH

Great, now tell me who that is.

KHALED

We're all freaked out by what's happened. Don't flip out on me.

BETH

Why couldn't you be up to something. Why not? I'm not sure I even know you.

KHALED

Okay, stop.

BETH

I'm not sure I've ever known you.

KHALED

You're flipping out, stop it.

BETH

No, tell me. You don't talk about your self or what you do. Your past is a fog. Suddenly you have material on subjects I had no idea you're interested in.

KHALED

What are you doing? This is like some 50's B movie, "I married a communist".

BETH

Are you fucking around on me?

KHALED

No!

BETH

Then you must be up to something you shouldn't be and I'm really starting to freak out.

KHALED

(grabbing her)

Would you just shut up. You can't talk like that. Not now. Not even for a joke, people take this shit very seriously.

(Beth just looks at him)

Beth, Jesus Christ, wake up. I'm not a stranger.

BETH

(to Carl, looking at Khaled)

It's funny how people change on you. I mean normally, when you don't think you might be staring at a murderer. How you can be so fascinated and in love with someone and then find all that fall away. And the person stands there naked and butt ugly and you get angry at yourself for ever having wanted this man. I really hope these attacks haven't permanently spoilt my views on love.

KHALED

(to Bartlett)

It was a literary group.

BETH

(to Carl)

Imagine; that's what he said.

KHALED

For writers; to exchange ideas.

BETH

It was like watching a man hide himself in one box after another; like those Russian dolls.

KHALED

(still to Bartlett)

I'm not joking, that's what it was.

BETH

I gave up after that. A few days later I asked him to move out.

CARL

Would you still have a picture of him?

BETH

I don't know; I can check.

CARL

I'd appreciate that.

(She exits. Carl makes notes.)

KHALED

Jesus. No wonder you beat a path to my door. For God's sake. She has an ax to grind. It was a list-serve for writers. We actually discussed plot-lines and books. And yes there was some flirting going on, so what; my moral behavior is not on trial here. And the guy was a jerk because he passed himself off as a woman on line, and - he was just an asshole and I left. That's it. The sum total of my secrets. You could frame anything with enough menace and make it seem more than it is.

(Slight beat)

CARL

Bart.

BARTLETT

Yes, Carl.

CARL

Can I talk to you?

(Bartlett and Carl move off to talk in private. Carl speaks sotto voce throughout this next exchange.)

BARTLETT

What?

CARL

Look: I'm thinking something.

BARTLETT

Go for it.

CARL

I don't think what we're doing now is getting us anywhere.

BARTLETT

Really? I feel like we're making head way.

CARL

Not - no.

BARTLETT

I think we've loosened his bowels and he's going to shit any second.

CARL

No, he's going to hold off because he's fixated on some idea of procedure. He thinks there's some script we're supposed to follow and that will protect him. He'll keep us a few facts shy of the truth and piss us off. The photo *is* too dark. And the clothes are generic. Important, but.

BARTLETT

The receipt is pretty damning.

CARL

We need him to spill his guts.

BARTLETT

What are you suggesting?

CARL

There's an imbalance of authority right now and we need to correct that.

BARTLETT

I tried that already and you pulled me off.

CARL

Yes. But with all due respect, I think I know these people a little better. I've been there. I know how they think. There's some dark shit you have to know how to access.

BARTLETT

Carl - we're not allowed to do that.

CARL

(gets out a small guidebook)

Actually, if we don't hit any vital organs, we can.

BARTLETT

No, I don't think so.

CARL

(reading)

"Section eight, paragraph two. Wilful damage is not permitted but a relaxed, consistent pressure on parts of the body that may be deemed sensitive is allowed. As long as the suspect remains conscious and doesn't scream longer than ten seconds at any one time. Some bruising is allowed."

BARTLETT

(looks at the guidebook)

Huh. I need to re-read this. I completely missed that.

CARL

It has surprisingly useful tips. Especially on how to use simple appliances like microwaves to help you interrogate better.

BARTLETT

You're suggesting what?

CARL

To bring the full weight of our authority to bear on him. With the aim of making him adjust his expectations as to what options are available to him.

(Slight beat)

BARTLETT

Fine....But gently.

CARL

Thanks.

(They turn to look at Khaled.)

KHALED

What?

BARTLETT  
(to Carl)

I'm going to use the john.

CARL

Take your time.

BARTLETT  
(to Khaled)

Can I use your bathroom? - Thanks.

(Bartlett exits into the bathroom. Carl  
stares at Khaled.)

KHALED

What's going on?

CARL

Khaled.

(walks up to him)

There's no easy way to segue into this. So I'm not going to try.

(Carl kicks Khaled in the groin. Khaled  
gasps, grabs his testicles, and  
collapses onto his knees)

First off: that has been coming since we got here, because of repeated references to an innocence that is not yours to claim. If you were innocent, why would I have kicked you? Something you've done has given me good cause to assume the worst. The responsibility for that kick lies with your unwillingness to assume responsibility for the part we know you played. We need to know what that was. It might have been a bit part, but never think that makes you a bit player.

(Khaled doubles over and  
lets out a strangled cry)

Khaled. - Khaled.

(Khaled topples over as he  
lets out a more sustained  
cry)

Don't overdo it. I didn't hit you that hard. - That's not pain you're feeling, it's shock. You're overwhelmed by the *notion* of

(MORE)

CARL (cont'd)  
pain - that more might follow - not what I actually did.  
(Khaled expresses more of  
his pain)  
Enough with the dramatics or I'll give you something to really  
scream about.

(Bartlett opens the bathroom door,  
looking concerned)  
It's nothing. We're good.

BARTLETT  
What happened?

CARL  
He's faking it.

KHALED  
(strangled)  
No.

CARL  
It's shock. I was abrupt.

BARTLETT  
Over ten seconds.

CARL  
But he's conscious and it wasn't a sustained cry.

KHALED  
What are you doing?

BARTLETT  
(worried)  
Carl.

CARL  
It's under control. Go finish what you were doing.

BARTLETT  
Absolutely no bones.

CARL  
One more kick and I'm done.

BARTLETT  
This has to lead to something.

CARL  
The info is in the bag.

KHALED  
(winded; to neighbors)  
Help.

(Bartlett gives Carl a worried look  
before going back into the bathroom.  
Khaled starts crawling towards the door)

Help me.

CARL

If you'd've kept your nose clean, then you wouldn't be here,  
would you, crawling on the ground, trying to get away from the  
next hit that's sure to come if you don't tell us what you and  
Gamal got up to.

KHALED

Please.

CARL

We know you talked with him.

KHALED

No.

CARL

You met up. In the strip joint.

KHALED

I'm not hiding anything. I swear to you.

CARL

We have the receipt. It's as good as a photo.

KHALED

I don't know what you're talking about.

CARL

You really give a bad name to immigrants, you know that. Because  
of you we have to pass tougher laws that stop people who might  
actually be *good for us*.

KHALED

I haven't done anything wrong!

(Carl either kneels on Khaled's chest or  
else grabs him around the neck.)

CARL

God: I know your type, so well. The smiling little Semite who  
gives you one face while trying to stab you with the other.  
You're pathetic, you know that. If you hate us, then just hate  
us. But you don't have the balls to do even that. You bitch and  
you moan and complain how overrun you are by us and all the time  
you can't wait to get here. You'd kill for a visa. That pisses  
me off. That's hypocrisy. Why not just come clean and own up  
that you hate everything this country stands for.

KHALED  
(winded/strangled)

No.

CARL  
No, that's right, because you're too busy *envying us*.

KHALED  
(winded/strangled)

Get off me.

CARL  
I could snap your neck just for that. What's the expression for "fuck-face" in Arabic? "Hitit khara?" "Sharmoot?"

KHALED  
(winded/strangled)

You're crushing me.

CARL  
Just how crushed do you feel, Khaled?  
(slight beat, then:)

Alright, I'm done.

(he lets go and stands up.  
Beat)

Now do you want to tell me what you and Asfoor got up to in the strip club? Were you passing a message on to him? Were you the internet guy? The guy to help him get around? A carrier for something? What? What? Tell me, or I'll -

(Carl pulls his foot back as if to kick him.)

KHALED  
(flinching at threatened kick)

No!

CARL  
(continuing)

I will. I'll exercise my drop kick on your testicle sack and make you sing an Arabic song in a very unnatural key.

KHALED  
I'm going to be sick.

CARL  
You're going to be sick. I'm the one who's throwing up. Only I have the decency to do it quietly, inside, and not make a public spectacle of myself.

(perhaps grabbing Khaled by his lapels)

What did he want from you? What did he want? What fucked-up part did you play in all of this? What happened with you in there?

(MORE)

CARL (cont'd)

What happened when you met up with Asfoor? What did he want?  
 (Khaled opens his mouth as  
 if he's about to vomit.  
 Carl lets go as Khaled dry  
 heaves. Slight beat)

You know what I really resent?...What you force us to become. To protect ourselves. We are a decent bunch and do not want to be dragged down to your level. But no, you just have to drag us down, don't you. You have to gross us out with your level of crap. I personally hate this, you know that. I hate it when I have to beat the shit out of someone because then by an act of willful horror, whose effect on my soul I can only imagine, I have to shut out everything good about me to do my job to defend and protect. Here I am quickly devolving into a set of cliches I can barely stomach and you have the nerve to think you can vomit. No, it is I who am throwing up, sir, and if I see one scrap of food leave your mouth I will shove it back so far down your throat you'll be shitting it before you even know what you've swallowed again.

(Beth enters dressed in a coat now. She carries a photo.)

BETH

I found this.

(Carl steps away from Khaled.)

It's pretty crumpled, but. I threw most of them out.

CARL

Thank you. (He looks at photo) This will help.

BETH

Look - I...I just want to say....I have no idea if he was involved in anything. I know I've said things to suggest he might've been. But I'm just telling you what I thought at the time, when we were all upset. Being a major disappointment and a shit doesn't make you a criminal.

CARL

Understood.

BETH

Okay. - Good. - Just so I don't feel I'm - you know. - This isn't about revenge.

CARL

Believe it or not, safeguarding the innocent is as important apprehending the bad guys.

BETH

Good. Okay. Well....Bye.

Thank you.

CARL

(She exits. As soon as the front door closes, the bathroom door opens and Bartlett enters. He walks over to Khaled, who is still prostrate on the ground.)

Anything?

BARTLETT

He has a better idea of what's at stake.

CARL

Anything solid?

BARTLETT

Authority has been reestablished. That was important.

CARL

Facts?

BARTLETT

On the verge.

CARL

Verge is where I left him.

BARTLETT

Oh I think he's ready to talk. I think he knows we're not looking for sequential sentences that add up to poop; but details that fit in nicely with what we know happened at the club. Where you went to get a hard-on while plotting death and destruction.

CARL

Can we get him off the floor. It looks bad.

BARTLETT

(Bartlett gets the chair as Carl moves to pick him up.)

He's such a drama queen.

CARL

The last piece of the puzzle fits, my friend. You were there. We had surveillance cameras. It wasn't your girlfriend who gave you away. It was your pecker.

BARTLETT

(they sit him down)

You should have followed your religion's advice and avoided all depictions of the human form because that's what did you in.

CARL

Time for exhibit number four, I think.

BARTLETT

If we absolutely must.

CARL

You completely overlook her patriotism, you really do.

BARTLETT

I must have missed it. (To Khaled) We'll tell you what happened and you just stop us if we have it wrong, okay?

(Throughout this next section, Khaled remains dazed, in shock. Carl will slide open both closet doors.)

On a Tuesday night, August 21st, at around 10:05, you went to the "EyeFull Tower Club"; where a Ms. Jean Sommers, aka, Kelly Cupid, "Dancer Extraordinaire and Stripper Artiste", as she calls herself, was performing.

(With the doors opened, a dancing pole is revealed. Light change in the closet to simulate club lighting. Perhaps a disco ball effect and a couple of spot lights. JEAN SOMMERS is already at the pole. She is dressed for the act: elements of a cowboy outfit, including two pistols slung on each hip. She might also be wearing a wig.)

The date on your receipt proves it and so does Ms. Sommers.

JEAN

I do. Anyway I can help, gentlemen.

CARL

Much appreciated.

JEAN

Will you want to see my act now?

BARTLETT

Is it relevant?

CARL

It might be. Clearly they met here for a reason. Your act may have been a signal of sorts. A series of unintended semaphores that spelt out a message to commence something. Why don't we have a look just to cover our bases.

JEAN  
So you do want to see it?

CARL  
You bet.

JEAN  
You got it. Music.

(Appropriate music starts and she performs her act. More burlesque and pole dancing than strip-tease. After it ends, slight beat.)

BARTLETT  
I don't see how they could have passed messages through that.

CARL  
Maybe not, but it doesn't hurt to check.

JEAN  
That was the shortened version.

BARTLETT  
When did you first notice him?

JEAN  
The first time he came or the second?

CARL  
Are we talking dates, or?

JEAN  
(smiling)  
Yeah, dates.

BARTLETT  
The first.

JEAN  
Hardly at all. Except he was nervous and sweaty. Which isn't unusual when I come on. And he had a couple of books. I thought maybe he was a college grad trying to cram for an exam.

BARTLETT  
Hardly a place to study.

JEAN  
You'd be surprised. I see more and more people with lap-tops. We've begun to offer plug outlets in our lap-dance area.

BARTLETT  
Anything else, that first time?

JEAN

Not really. I give full attention to my act. I believe in giving your best regardless of what you're doing.

CARL

It shows.

JEAN

Others leave their body when they do this, I don't. To me my body is a celebration of who I am and I give it to others as a revelation. I try to be your average Joe's desire incarnate. With a little extra thrown in for the more discerning. Nobody leaves my act feeling short-changed.

CARL

Kudos.

JEAN

Thanks.

BARTLETT

Anything else at first glance?

JEAN

No, he was just a set of eyes. It was later. When he asked for a lap-dance that I had more time to observe him.

CARL

(showing her Khaled's photo)

And you're sure it was this guy.

JEAN

Yeah, kinda. It was dark and he was wearing a baseball cap. But I'm pretty sure. And he was wearing this fatigue jacket.

(Bartlett picks up the baseball cap and fatigue jacket to show to Khaled.)

BARTLETT

Any chance you remember the book titles?

JEAN

Yes, as a matter of fact. I'm always curious what other people are reading so I looked. One was on tatoos, and the other had something something in the title - ending with God, which I thought was an odd combo. I plan on going back to college you know.

BARTLETT

So what happened next? When you went one on one?

JEAN

Well...

(moves towards Khaled.)

(MORE)

JEAN (cont'd)  
 Appropriate music for a  
 lap dance fades in quietly  
 in the background)

I began my routine. The usual. I was feeling less than on that day. I had been groped earlier and was not feeling well-disposed to the horny. But I do have a work ethic, like I said, and so I danced. I always give my best.

(she starts to sketch in  
 some of her moves)

Even to people who turn out later to be scum who want to do us harm. Did I tell you my father was a marine?

CARL

No.

JEAN

Highly decorated. My outfit in many ways is a salute to him. That's what he was before he joined up. A cowboy, out west. At night, sometimes, he'd let me wear his medals.

BARTLETT

What can you tell us about Khaled.

JEAN

That's his name, huh?

BARTLETT

Yes.

JEAN  
 (while dancing over a seated  
 Khaled)

If I had him again...I know what I'd do with him. Coming here to do that to us.

BARTLETT

Well, we don't know for sure if he's - .

JEAN  
 (interrupting)

I'd say touch me, Kaled, so the bouncers can come and smash your stupid face in. Coming here to get off on me while all the time wanting to do shit to us. Wrapping your women in black and then sneaking in here and getting your rocks off. I could pluck your eyes out. I could bend your dick round and fuck you up your own ass.

BARTLETT

Your sentiments are understandable. But if you could tell us what happened next.

JEAN

I should have known something was up. I thought he was extra sweaty because he was just too close to something he couldn't

(MORE)

JEAN (cont'd)

have. But it wasn't that. He was always looking around to check for something. It kinda pissed me off he wasn't giving me his full attention. At one time I stuck my boobs in his face and he actually moved his head, like I was blocking his view. I thought, what the hell are you doing here then? I take pride in what I do and expect some respect. Don't act like you're bored. I decided then and there to make him come. But then this guy shows up. Stands a few feet away and stares. Just stares. Like he'd paid for this show as well. "Do you mind?" I say to him.

BARTLETT  
(shows her Asfoor's photo)

This guy?

JEAN

Yeah. It was dark, but yeah. Both of them were Middle-Eastern, that I know. So I tell him to piss off but he just stands there and this Kaled is looking at him. Suddenly his attention is full on him. And he's changed. Like he's frozen or something. And this guy just stares and he's looking at Kaled and me. And I say again, "do you mind?" And he looks at me and his eyes - they're like, I'm-going-to-get-you eyes. Only they're smiling and it's creepy. And then he leaves to the rest-room. And Kaled starts to rise like he wants to follow. Only I push him back down. I'm really pissed off at this point, like I've been insulted. Like my skills have been called into question. So I did something I never usually do. I reached down and squeezed.

(she does so)

Just one time. And that did the trick. I finished him off. So easy....Then he springs out of that chair and into the rest-room.

(the music stops; she moves  
away from Khaled)

And that would have been it; I would have moved on, onto the next customer, but something about them really annoyed me. So I looked for them to come out; to say something, like have some manners the next time, the both of you, and don't come back. But fifteen minutes later, they're still in there. And I say this to Stewart, one of the bouncers and he says let me check, and I say, no, let me do it. If I can embarrass these guys I will, so I go in.

(she opens the bathroom  
door)

And...

(a laugh)

Damn if I don't see both of their legs under one of the stalls. And - they must have heard me, because Kaled comes shooting out and runs, just runs past me. And out saunters Mr. Creepy after him. Calm as can be, like he'd just been holding a meeting in his office. And I'm thinking - no, I actually say to him: "take that shit somewhere else." And he stares at me again, and this time it's scary. Real scary. Like he's telling me he could snuff my life out with his pinkie if he wanted to. So I get out of

(MORE)

JEAN (cont'd)

there and tell Stewart about it, only they're both gone when he goes round to check....And that's my story.

BARTLETT

Did you get a sense of what they might have been doing in the stall?

JEAN

Not a clue. Might have been sucking each other off for all I know. Or shooting up. Who knows. At least one of them's dead. Have you got the other one yet?

CARL

We're working on it.

JEAN

I wouldn't mind getting him in that chair again. Give him a good thwack from me if you find him, care of Kelly Cupid.

CARL

Will do.

JEAN

Anything else I can do for you?

CARL

Not at the moment.

JEAN

Well...I'd better get ready for my act then.

CARL

Maybe we'll come back to check out the longer version.

JEAN

I'd like that. I'd hate to think my routine was being used for a nasty purpose.

(Jean smiles at Carl, then exits. Carl closes the closet doors.)

(Bartlett and Carl turn to Khaled. Bartlett drags a chair and sits opposite Khaled. Carl either sits on the edge of the table, next to Khaled, or stands over him.)

(Khaled looks at them.)

(Beat)

KHALED

She's lying.

BARTLETT

Here's where I have to pry a little more than I like to. Can we - look at your pecker? Please? Very briefly. To clear something up. Cause this thing about tatoos keeps coming up.

(Khaled makes to bolt out of his chair but Carl pins him down, wrapping his arms around his chest, immobilizing his arms. Bartlett puts on a latex glove.)

BARTLETT

I'm sure it's nothing. I bet it's nothing. But it sure does make me wonder.

(Bartlett starts to undo Khaled's trousers. Khaled writhes in his chair in protest. This can be done with most of Khaled's back to the audience. Alternatively, this can take place on the futon, with the agents blocking most of the audience's view of Khaled.)

KHALED

No. - No.

BARTLETT  
(overlapping)

What with that e-mail he sent about tatoos, and the book, and doing it where the skin folds, where you can hide it.

KHALED  
(half in tears)

Stop it. No. - No.

BARTLETT  
(overlapping)

Was there like some secret mark you each showed yourselves? To ascertain something? Membership? Commitment? What were you doing in there for fifteen minutes? Excuse me. This is embarrassing for me too.

(He has yanked Khaled's pants down far enough for him to look.)

What's that? Is that a birthmark? Or?

(Carl also looks.)

What is that?

CARL

Liver-spot?

BARTLETT

(still looking; slight beat)

Yeah....Yeah. It's what it looks like....That couldn't be a tattoo, could it?....I wish we'd bought our camera with us....Next time.

(he continues to peer, then:  
a light slap on the thigh  
to indicate he's finished)

Alright.

(he stands)

Thank you. Apologies for that. Not a part of the job that I like.

(Carl lets go, Khaled covers himself with his hands, and starts to pull up his trousers but Bartlett prevents him from doing so by placing his foot on his trousers.)

But it still leaves us wondering what you did all that time in the bathroom with one of the more hideous individuals we've come across? Now would be the time to fess up to any deviant sexual inclinations. It might get you off.

(Slight beat)

KHALED

(quiet)

I was never there.

BARTLETT

(slight beat)

Alright....We're going to leave you to think about it. Come back later, tomorrow. We'll take a few things with us now.

(he nods to Carl to take the  
lap-top)

Look them over. Assess what we have. What needs filling in. - What might have occurred to you overnight.

(he picks up books from the  
pile)

And then talk some more. You're not taking any long-distance trips, are you?

(looks at Khaled, then moves  
to the door)

Here're your choices, Khaled, that you can think about. Either you're innocent. In which case proving that might be difficult. Or you're guilty, in which case telling us now would score you points because we'll find out soon enough. Or: you're innocent of being guilty. You didn't know what you were getting into. Stumbled into it. Through deception. Other people's. Your own stupidity. And that would be okay too. We can work with that. We can work with you to make that seem plausible.

(at the door now. Carl  
carries the lap-top)

Think about it. And about those evaluation forms: they're no

(MORE)

BARTLETT (cont'd)

joke. It's your chance to respond. That's what this is all about. At the end of the day, we're fighting to safeguard that right. It sounds counter-intuitive. But that's the struggle for freedom for you. It's never as straight-forward as you'd like it to be.

(slight beat)

CARL  
(to Khaled)

"Ma'salamma."

BARTLETT  
(turns to Carl)

What does that mean?

CARL

Peace be with you.

BARTLETT  
(to Khaled)

I can go with that.

Peace be with you.

(They take one last look at Khaled who remains slightly bent over, covering his crotch. They exit and close the door behind them.)

(Beat.)

(Khaled pulls up his trousers. Beat.)

(The closet doors slide open revealing Asfoor. He enters the room.)

ASFOOR

You...you help me, yes? You and me, private class. I have...I have need to - to learn. Quickly. Yes?...When first I come to this country - I not know how to speak. How...even to say anything. How one word best is placed with what word next. Yes? But in my head? It is a river of beautiful speech. Like in Arabic. Arabic is....It is the way into my heart. But everywhere, when I open ears, first thing, everywhere now, is English. You not get away from it. Even back home, before I come, I hear it more and more in people who do not speak it. I say, I must learn language that is everywhere. Language that has fallen on our heads and made us like - like children again. What is this power? What if I know it? I say to them, send me there so I learn this. I want to learn. And in my heart, I say I want to write. I want to write a book. In English. That is goal, yes? And one day, I say...

(while accent is maintained,  
the broken English  
(MORE)

ASFOOR (cont'd)  
gradually starts dropping)

I might even teach it....I will teach language back. I will make them speak their own language differently. I will have them speak words they never spoke before. I will make them like children too, speaking words over and over to make sure they understand it. And soon my language will also fall on their heads. Like theirs falls on ours. Exploding in our brains till we can't even dream in peace.

(slight beat)

And so they sent me....They send me.

(Asfoor draws closer to  
Khaled. Khaled does not  
look at him)

And now...my tongue...it wants to rise. Soar. As it used to. It wants to take off in this new language and conjure up brilliant words. It wants to do things in English that seemed so impossible for so long. I can help you find your voice too....You're stuck. I know you are. You've lost your way. I can feel it. I can help. Most of all...above all else, Khaled...I know how to inspire....I know how to inspire.

(Beat. Blackout.)