Back of The Throat

by

Yussef El Guindi
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”.

“God”?

BARTLETT
Yes.

KHALED
It’s pretty.

BARTLETT
It is....I’m not religious myself.

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

Calligraphy?

KHALED
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

(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.

"Haled"?

BARTLETT

KHALED
More Khaled.
"Kaled".

That’s good.

But not exactly.

It doesn’t matter.

Khaled.

That’s it.

It’s that back of the throat thing.

Right.

Carl spent some time in the Mid-East.

Oh yes?

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

Both.

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

When I...?

How do you relax?

Well...

How do you spend your free time?
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.

Who?

BARTLETT

KHALED
Er - a friend?

BARTLETT
Right; and that friend’s name?

KHALED
(hesitates)
Hisham. He wouldn’t mind me telling you.

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.
It’s not a big deal.

It’s - sure.

Not a huge one anyway.

It’s legal.

It’s porn. Not good. But it’s still okay.

They haven’t outlawed it yet.

No, but that doesn’t make it all right.

It’s - it’s a debate, but sure.

A debate?

Er, yeah.

A debate how?

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

Uh-huh....You think this is healthy?

With cows?

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

You think this should have a place in society?

It already does have a place in society.

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
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)


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.
You’re surrounded by the things that interest you.

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

What does it mean?

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

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

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.

Why do you have a book on guns?

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

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.

I’m not.

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

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.

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.
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.

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

And you might not be.

I’m not; how can I show you that?

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

Is there anything in particular you want to know?

Is there anything you’d like to tell me?

If you told me what brought you here –

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

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

Half-finished?

Most of them.

Why?

“Why?”

Writer’s block?

Sometimes.

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)
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.
I have the right.

Not necessarily.

Yes, I believe do.

I’d have to disagree.

I know my rights.

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.

(taken aback)

I’d...I’d like you to leave, please.

I’m sorry you feel that way.

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.

Er, Khaled, you can’t have a lawyer.

Yes, I can, I know my rights.

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?

No.

BARTLETT
Weird fantasies? Child porn?

No!

KHALED
Child porn with domestic pets involved?

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?

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
(interminating)

PUT THE PHONE DOWN!

(Khaled puts the phone down. Slight beat.)

KHALED
(qiet)
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)
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.

Really. Oh, well.

BARTLETT
(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)

A swizzle stick.

BARTLETT
CARL
And: (Take out a small piece of paper)

A receipt. From. (Reads it)

Guess where.

BARTLETT
Oh; wow.
Look at the date. (Bartlett looks)

Same date.

Wow.

Proof positive.

Looks like it.

He’s our man.

Uh-oh.

What?

Uh-oh.

Why are you wearing that?

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

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

(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 overstep 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.

(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
ting. 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.

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
doors.)
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

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.

First thing: Shut up.

BARTLETT

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!
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)
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.

I have grants

KHALED
That’s taking.

BARTLETT
It’s a prize.

KHALED
For what?

BARTLETT
For my stories.

KHALED
You haven’t finished one.

BARTLETT
For past stories.

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.
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.
Like in “Peanuts”.

Ah.

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

I see.

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

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

Have a nice day.

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

Yes?

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.

What do you mean?

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.

Anything else?

Well...

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)
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.

Look at him again.

BARTLETT

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.

Pin what?

BARTLETT

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”?

BARTLETT
(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.
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

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)

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
sh*t 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)*
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.)

Where are you going?

KHALED

BETH
You have a nerve. Like you tell me.

I just want to know.

KHALED

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 online. 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)
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 online, 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.
The receipt is pretty damning.

We need him to spill his guts.

What are you suggesting?

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

I tried that already and you pulled me off.

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.

Carl – we’re not allowed to do that.

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

No, I don’t think so.

“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.”

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

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

You’re suggesting what?

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.

Take your time.

CARL

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)
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)
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.

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

Thank you.

(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?

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

Anything solid?

Authority has been reestablished. That was important.

Facts?

On the verge.

Verge is where I left him.

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.

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

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

He’s such a drama queen.

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.

(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
Yeah, dates.

(smiling)

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?

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?

What is that?

(Carl also looks.)

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)
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.

I can go with that.

BARTLETT
(to Khaled)

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.)