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Scene One

Summer 2014. The Helmand Province of Afghanistan. Dusk.

A large tent in Camp Bastion, usually used as an office, that has been temporarily converted into sleeping quarters. The walls are made of thick, khaki canvas with a split at the back creating a doorway into the tent. When the entrance is open, the setting sun casts long, dark shadows across the dusty ground.

A large map dotted with red markers and a notice board have been left up on the side wall. There are three clocks set to different time zones labelled 'Washington', 'London' and 'Hell'. Three bunks have been brought in and a couple of filing cabinets are doubling as tables between the beds. Two desks have been turned into makeshift dressing tables. There is a rail at the back of the tent with a number of empty hangers. Two large flags, one Union Jack and one St George's Cross, are draped from the top of the metal poles that support the structure.

PRIVATE DAVID ROBINS, *twenty four, peers through the doorway. He sees that the tent is empty and enters. He is holding a water bottle canteen with a small bunch of poppies inside. He sets it down on one of the dressing tables.*

He looks over to the entrance before approaching the central of the three beds. He takes a small envelope out of his pocket. He smoothes it out for a moment before hiding it under the pillow.

He hears a sound near the entrance and spins around just as **PRIVATE TREVOR SMITH**, *twenty, enters. He's holding a metal ammo case which he's filled with red tulips and poppies.*

TREVOR Neil shit himself in the cookhouse.

DAVID He didn't.

TREVOR I saw it.

DAVID When?

TREVOR Just now.

DAVID He's still got dysentery then.

TREVOR He dragged himself out of his sick bed. Says no stomach bug is going to stop him from seeing the girls perform. He's sitting there, right, white as a sheet and pouring with sweat. Just about holding it together, managing to nibble on a chunk of bread, when Mark tells us a funny story.

DAVID Which story?

TREVOR The one about how he tried to plumb in that Afghan woman's new washing machine. So Neil's laughing away right, enjoying himself, then suddenly he's not laughing anymore.

DAVID That's how quickly things can change round here.

TREVOR One minute you're fine.

DAVID Completely fine.

TREVOR The next you're literally in the shit.

DAVID What's he gonna do?

TREVOR His C.O. said he can still watch the girls but he's got to stay at the back and promise to sit on a towel. *(Beat)* What you doing in here, 'ey…? Planting surveillance devices?

DAVID *gestures to the flowers.*

Fuck you. I reckoned I was the only one who'd think of that.

DAVID Sorry.

TREVOR *puts his flowers down on the other dressing table.*

TREVOR My bunch is bigger than yours.

DAVID Mine's understated. Yours screams desperation.

TREVOR I am desperate.

DAVID Yeah?

TREVOR I'd post you to the Taliban if it'd mean one of those girls would so much as look at my knob. First class with a bow on the crate and a thank you note for all the good times.

DAVID Cheers mate.

Beat.

Where is Mark anyway?

TREVOR He says he's making himself "presentable".

DAVID Presentable?

TREVOR Yes. Presentable. For the benefit of the band.

DAVID Of all the soldiers Nicholls could have chosen to look after a group of attractive women.

TREVOR Said he drew names out of a helmet.

DAVID Sure he did.

TREVOR *considers this.*

Like choosing a wolf to guard a steak for you.

TREVOR Three juicy, perfectly shaped, delicious steaks. Yeah… Three steaks with lovely round arses and long legs that go all the way up to those lovely round arses.

DAVID I'm not sure you fully understand similes Trevor.

TREVOR We can't all be poets David.

DAVID Don't start in on that again.

TREVOR Okay.

DAVID Don't.

TREVOR Okay.

DAVID Please DON'T.

TREVOR OKAY.

Beat.

You're a poet. And you know it.

DAVID Very clever.

TREVOR You're a poet and now we all know it.

DAVID Yes. You do.

TREVOR *runs over to the most central bed, jumps on it and kneels on the end.*

TREVOR Read me one of your poems David?

DAVID Fuck off.

TREVOR *curls up on the bed like a child.*

TREVOR Settle me down to sleep with one of your little poems Davey.

DAVID *notices as* **TREVOR***'s hand moves close to where he's hidden the envelope.*

DAVID I'm not sure you should be on there.

TREVOR Why?

DAVID What if Nicholls comes in and sees you getting all comfortable on their bed? Making yourself at home. What will he think…?

TREVOR Oh my God. You're right.

DAVID Exactly.

TREVOR Now I can say I've laid in the same bed as one of The Sweethearts.

DAVID *sighs.*

I'm going to email every guy I went to high school with.

DAVID Get up now Trev.

TREVOR *watches* **DAVID**.

TREVOR Why are you being so edgy?

DAVID I'm not.

TREVOR You are. What are you so on edge for Private Robins? *(Beat)* You've not really put cameras in here have you? *(He smiles)* Because if you have mate I'm totally up for/

LANCE CORPORAL MARK SAVY, *twenty seven, bursts into the tent. He has only a tight vest on his top half, his hair is styled with gel and he's wearing a pair of aviator sunglasses.*

He's holding a large crate with an elaborate flower arrangement inside.

MARK Hello Trevor. Hello Sylvia Plath.

DAVID *groans. He turns to see* **MARK***'s outfit.*

DAVID But wait… If you're here, who's playing volleyball with Goose and Iceman?

MARK If you're here, who's composing that sonnet with Shakespeare?

DAVID You do know Shakespeare's dead.

MARK So is Goose. Meg Ryan cried and everything.

TREVOR I cried.

MARK You're not a real man if you don't shed a tear for Goose.

TREVOR *looks over, sees the flowers and sits up.*

TREVOR What the fuck are those?

MARK They are called FLOWERS Trevor.

TREVOR Bloody hell.

MARK Some might call it an arrangement.

TREVOR Is there a florist on the base I wasn't aware of?

MARK Yes, it's just between the bogs and the ammo store.

TREVOR It's a bit of overkill isn't it? Screams desperation.

MARK If something's worth doing, it's worth doing better than your mates.

He places his flowers down on the dressing table, dwarfing the other two bunches.

DAVID Those radiant colours. It makes me think of that beautiful sunrise we saw over the Hindu Kush.

The other two men stare at **DAVID**.

MARK Did you hear that Neil shat himself in the cookhouse?

DAVID I have been updated with the basic facts, yes.

MARK They had to hose down his uniform.

DAVID Poor guy.

MARK I'm officially so funny that I made a man soil himself.

DAVID I think the dysentery played a role too.

TREVOR I dunno. Neil was holding it together until Mark told that bit about flooding the Afghan lady's downstairs.

MARK *adjusts his dog tags.*

DAVID *(to* **MARK***)* So this is what "presentable" looks like then?

MARK You better believe it.

DAVID *(gesturing to his sunglasses)* Can you even see with those on?

MARK Course I can.

MARK *walks into the edge of the dressing table.* **DAVID** *and* **TREVOR** *laugh.*

TREVOR Smooth.

MARK *pushes the sunglasses up on top of his head.*

MARK That's better anyway. Now they can see my handsome face.

TREVOR Damn. It is a great face.

MARK Thank you Trevor. You've got a perfectly adequate face too.

TREVOR Thank you Mark.

MARK Now then. We need to have a plan ready for their arrival.

DAVID A plan?

MARK Gather round my privates.

TREVOR *moves closer.*

So… Who wants which?

DAVID Pardon?

MARK Three Sweethearts. Three of us "protecting" them. That's the kind of maths I like.

DAVID Why did you say "protecting" like that?

MARK Like what?

DAVID *shakes his head.*

TREVOR David's getting edgy again.

MARK Come on. Who wants which girl then?

TREVOR I'm easy. I'm not at all fussy. But I absolutely must have Coco or I'll kill myself.

MARK The lead singer?

TREVOR Yup.

MARK *inhales.*

MARK Do you really think you're lead singer material?

TREVOR My mum says I'm a lovely-looking boy.

MARK And she's right Trev. But next to me…

DAVID Can't we just play it by ear?

Beat.

MARK Play it by ear?

DAVID Yes?

MARK When we're on manoeuvres, do we just "play it by ear"?

DAVID But/

MARK There might be an I.E.D. ahead. The Taliban might be waiting for us. But fret not lads, David suggests we just PLAY IT BY EAR.

DAVID Are you trying to seduce these women or ambush them?

MARK What I'm basically saying is… Shotgun the lead singer.

TREVOR Fuck my life.

MARK *(softly)* I do remember that sunrise over the Hindu Kush. How we'd waited for it.

TREVOR What?

MARK We knew we couldn't make it back in time so we had to camp out. Didn't even bother taking it in turns to be on watch.

DAVID Not one of us could sleep.

MARK Listening out for movement. *(Beat)* Shotgun Helena as well.

TREVOR You can't shotgun two of them.

MARK Just did.

TREVOR That's not fair.

MARK You can have Mari.

TREVOR I don't want Mari.

MARK Yes you fucking do.

TREVOR Alright. I do want Mari. But what about David?

MARK David doesn't stand a chance in hell. Look at him.

TREVOR *stares at* **DAVID**.

Beat.

TREVOR You're right.

DAVID You can't shotgun without line of sight.

TREVOR YES.

MARK Bullshit.

TREVOR He's right. That's completely true.

DAVID The rules are that you can only declare shotgun when you have line of sight of the vehicle. Or in this case pop star.

MARK *shakes his head.*

TREVOR David, you have always been the clever one.

MARK What?

TREVOR I mean…

MARK What did you say?

TREVOR That David is clever.

MARK Is that what you said? Are those the exact words you used?

Beat.

DAVID He didn't mean/

MARK What did he mean David? Clarify it for me. Spell it out for me.

DAVID He just/

MARK Was Private Smith inferring that you were the most clever soldier in this tent?

DAVID Cleverest.

MARK What?

DAVID Cleverest.

MARK Do you concur with his précis Private Robins?

DAVID Not at all.

MARK Not at all?

DAVID I mean, there's a sort of…

MARK Yes. Go on.

DAVID I have a kind of a "book smart".

MARK "Book smart"?

DAVID Yes.

MARK And what type of smart do you feel that I possess?

DAVID Worldly.

TREVOR *(brightly)* Savy by name, savvy by nature.

MARK I'm a lance corporal.

TREVOR I know.

MARK If I say I want the fucking lead singer/

DAVID I don't think you can pull rank with pulling women.

MARK You don't? *(Forcefully)* You don't think so Robins?

Beat.

I asked you a question private.

DAVID Yes, sir.

MARK I think we should have a man guarding the outside of this tent.

Beat.

Do you agree with me Smith?

Beat.

TREVOR *shrugs.*

Why don't you go outside, Robins?

Beat.

I order you to leave this tent.

TREVOR Come on boss.

MARK *points to the doorway.*

DAVID *tries to read* **MARK***'s expression.*

Beat.

DAVID *walks towards the doorway. Just as he's about to leave,* **MARK** *smiles.*

MARK Come back in here.

DAVID *stops.*

I'm only dicking you around mate.

TREVOR *laughs.* **MARK** *puts his arm round* **DAVID***'s shoulder.*

So which one is it you like then David?

DAVID *shrugs.*

It's the lead singer isn't it?

TREVOR Can't he have Mari?

MARK He knows exactly which one he wants. Don't you David?

Beat.

TREVOR Did we have a ruling on the shot-gunning?

Beat.

MARK Charlotte Bronte's right. You do need line of sight to declare shot gun.

DAVID *nods weakly.*

TREVOR Right.

MARK Game on then.

TREVOR Game on.

DAVID *mouths the words "game on".*

MARK The second the lead singer steps through that door I'm shot-gunning the hell out of her.

The entrance to the tent begins to open and the men look up expectantly.

Their faces fall as **CORPORAL RACHEL TAYLOR**, *twenty seven, enters the tent. She's carrying three armoured vests which she throws down on the nearest bunk.*

What, no flowers?

RACHEL You three aren't allowed in their sleeping quarters. That's what Nicholls said.

TREVOR *(mimicking her)* That's what Nicholls said.

DAVID I think he meant once they're actually here.

RACHEL Did all three of you bring them flowers?

They nod.

A few fit girls turn up and you lot lose it. *(Beat)* Hey, did you guys hear that Neil did a massive shi/

DAVID/MARK/TREVOR YES.

RACHEL The new guy, Todd, is having to disinfect the whole area.

DAVID Why did they bring in a crow now anyway?

MARK They needed a general fitter.

TREVOR He took Liam's place, didn't he.

RACHEL *hangs up the three vests on the rail.*

MARK Are those necessary?

RACHEL It's a precaution.

TREVOR You're not going to make the girls wear 'em are you?

RACHEL I'm just putting them here in case of an emergency.

TREVOR Because those vests would cover my favourite parts.

DAVID Parts? Plural?

He indicates breasts on himself.

TREVOR One. Two. Plural.

MARK And do you really have to stand guard over them all night? If Terry get as far as this tent we're fucked anyway.

RACHEL I'm not protecting the girls from the Taliban. I'm protecting them from you.

MARK In that case, you don't stand a chance.

RACHEL I think I'll be safe. Especially considering that you've made the tactical error of wearing sunglasses like an ally and have done… Whatever that is to your hair.

MARK *is wounded, he looks to* **TREVOR**.

TREVOR You look great Mark.

MARK The girls will probably be safer here tonight, protected by us, than they ever are in their own bedrooms.

TREVOR I mean we're in the middle of the fucking desert.

MARK Careful.

TREVOR If a rat five miles away decides to scratch its arse, we'd know about it before the little fella felt an itch.

DAVID Trevor…

TREVOR Plus they wouldn't bloody dare.

RACHEL Don't say it.

TREVOR There's absolutely no way that they'd attack us now.

Everyone gasps.

MARK You've jinxed us.

RACHEL Fucking idiot. You've jinxed us.

TREVOR Sorry.

DAVID He's new here.

MARK Turn and spit.

TREVOR What?

MARK Turn and spit.

RACHEL Turn and spit then touch wood.

TREVOR *turns around.* **MARK** *motions for him to spit, which he does close to* **DAVID***'s shoe.* **DAVID** *grimaces.*

MARK Touch wood.

RACHEL TOUCH WOOD.

TREVOR *grabs his crotch.*

Properly.

TREVOR *looks around for some wood. He can't see any.* **RACHEL** *remembers she has a pencil in her pocket and hands him that.*

RACHEL *watches him stroke her pencil for a few seconds. He goes to hand it back.*

You can keep that.

TREVOR Do you want it David? In case you need to write any more poems?

DAVID It's not funny any more.

MARK Isn't it…?

TREVOR Cos it still feels like it's funny.

RACHEL What's this about poems?

MARK It has come to our attention that David is a budding poet.

TREVOR I found a load of them in his stuff this morning.

RACHEL Why were you looking though his stuff?

TREVOR I needed a cigarette.

DAVID Of course I don't actually smoke.

TREVOR How am I supposed to know that?

DAVID In the weeks you've been here have you ever seen me smoke?

TREVOR *shrugs.*

You're obviously well placed in a surveillance team Trevor.

TREVOR It's because I'm so busy focussing on the enemy that I haven't got time to pay attention to your bloody personal habits.

RACHEL Were they any good then?

TREVOR What?

RACHEL The poems.

MARK Quite accomplished actually.

TREVOR Pile of horse shit.

DAVID All day. They've been on about it all day.

RACHEL Well I think it'd be great if you wrote some poetry about being here. You could be like the Wilfred Owen of Afghanistan.

DAVID Why thank you Rachel.

RACHEL War poets can help to give those fighting a voice back home, can't they?

MARK This is why they shouldn't let women join the army.

TREVOR Exactly.

MARK Far too thoughtful. Like poets. David, does your family know you write poetry?

DAVID Yes.

MARK Even your old man?

Beat.

DAVID Why'd you ask?

RACHEL Come on you three. Clear out now.

MARK Alright.

TREVOR Will do.

MARK No problem.

In unison **MARK** *and* **TREVOR** *walk over and climb onto two of the bunks beside each other. Beat.* **RACHEL** *sighs and sits on one of the dressing tables.*

DAVID *is uncomfortable as he notices that* **MARK** *is close to his hidden envelope.*

DAVID You know… If we go to see Thompson we can make a request.

MARK For the band?

DAVID Yep.

TREVOR I'd like to request they get their tits out.

RACHEL Tits plural?

TREVOR Obviously. Although I'd settle for one if that was a deal breaker.

MARK I'd like to request that they sing anyone else's music except their own.

Everyone murmurs in agreement.

RACHEL They really do make the most terrible shit.

MARK Do you think they know any Sabbath?

DAVID I like one off their first album.

RACHEL Which one was that?

DAVID "Lost Love".

MARK How does that one go?

They all try to remember how it goes and hum the tune. Each of them hums a completely different tune.

DAVID I do think Coco can sing.

MARK She's definitely the talented one.

DAVID She's got a boyfriend though.

MARK Oh yeah, that actor.

TREVOR What's his name…?

MARK He was in *Casualty* I think.

RACHEL And he was a servant in *Downton Abbey* for a bit wasn't he?

DAVID I saw him killed with an axe in *Poirot* once.

RACHEL According to *Heat*…He dumped her.

DAVID What?

RACHEL Apparently he's left her for a children's TV presenter.

DAVID Are you sure?

RACHEL Well if you can't trust a gossip magazine…

MARK Look at his little face lighting up. *(To* **TREVOR***)* We definitely have a third contender in the battle for Coco.

RACHEL If she's recently been dumped she'll be feeling desperate and needy. That's your type isn't it Mark?

MARK Why yes. Yes it is.

TREVOR Excuse me, but can we not talk about break-ups?

RACHEL Why?

TREVOR It's still a very raw subject for me.

RACHEL Is it?

MARK He got an email from you know who yesterday.

RACHEL Leanne?

TREVOR Yes. Leanne.

MARK *(whispered)* She's with somebody new.

RACHEL Oh dear.

DAVID But you ended it with her didn't you?

TREVOR But I didn't think she'd move on so fucking quickly.

RACHEL That sucks Trev.

TREVOR I think a bit of my heart will belong to Leanne forever. Stupid bitch.

MARK Forget about her.

TREVOR That guy was always sniffing round her when we were going out. I never liked him. Leanne always said "Antony's just a friend, he doesn't see me that way". I'm thinking clever boy, you're doing reconnaissance before you move in.

MARK Come on now. Don't get upset.

TREVOR She's probably with him right now… Maybe she's giving him a gentle kiss. Or lying in his arms. Or sucking him off.

DAVID Why would anyone dump Coco?

TREVOR And meanwhile I'm over here and there's nothing I can do about it. At least if I get killed Leanne will feel really guilty. I'll seem far more impressive than Anthony if I'm dead.

MARK *goes over and sits beside* **TREVOR**. *He puts his arm round his shoulders.*

MARK Listen mate, you're too young for the long-distance thing. You broke up with her for a reason. And three more reasons to be single are about to walk into this tent. *(Beat)* Hey Trev?

TREVOR Yeah.

MARK Who cares about Leanne when you're about to be in the presence of three gorgeous pop stars?

TREVOR Not me?

MARK That's it mate.

RACHEL Don't you have a girlfriend Mark?

MARK No.

RACHEL You do. You definitely have a girlfriend.

MARK I am seeing four women at present as part of a casual agreement.

RACHEL Seeing?

TREVOR He means on a laptop screen.

MARK I like to keep a few ticking over for when I'm on leave.

RACHEL Oh right. I get it. You're a disgusting pig.

MARK There's a lot of fun to be had with a webcam and a woman who thinks you're putting your life in danger every day.

RACHEL You ARE putting your life in danger every day.

MARK I know. It's great.

RACHEL Why did you have to turn into such a dickhead?

MARK Don't hate the player.

RACHEL You were so much nicer before Ruth left.

Beat.

MARK Bullshit. I've never been nice.

MARK *turns back to* **TREVOR**.

Are we feeling better now?

TREVOR *(to* **RACHEL***)* Will you get to see the girls changing?

MARK *(he pats* **TREVOR** *on the arm)* Guess so.

TREVOR Could you pay close attention to their bodies and then describe it to us later? In very specific detail?

MARK David could write us a haiku about it.

RACHEL I just don't get it. Why are you losing your minds over three bloody average women who sing dreadful songs?

TREVOR Three goddesses.

RACHEL Ugh.

MARK You can't tell me you're not looking forward to meeting them?

RACHEL I'm not looking forward to meeting them.