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THE LONG DAY'S DYING

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PRODUCTION NOTES

The play is set during the War on Terror sometime between 2006 and 2008. This was period when the US was beginning to place more pressure on the Australian government to involve its special forces units in riskier operations inside Afghanistan.

All the dialogue, the banter, insults and the to and fro between these three SOLDIERS should be seen as attempts as much at staying alive and keeping their minds occupied in the face of the danger that they are in. The tensions rise to the surface in the face of this interlude from the normal protocols which usually demand absolute silence on the battlefield. Their exposure and containment within the four walls of this village house has offered a respite of sorts.

One actor should be playing all the TALIBAN FIGHTERS, including the dead body in the beginning of the play.

David Blackman

CHARACTERS

Ash, mid thirties

Blackmore, late twenties

Swallow, mid twenties

Taliban Fighter, 30-45 years old

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

IED	Improvised Explosive Device
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
EXFIL POINT	Exfiltration or extraction location
RECCE	Reconnaissance
INTEL	Valuable information
OP	Observation post

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

ACT ONE

LIGHTS on CORPORAL ASH sitting in his underwear. His body chiselled and scarred from years of combat. SOUND of hard rock music blaring in the background (CREED'S "Weathered" is recommended). A bottle of whiskey and a shot glass sits on a table next to him. He is clearly drunk.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

How are the headaches going?

ASH

Fine.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

Flashbacks?

ASH

Hardly any.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

What about the grog?

ASH (CONT'D)

(Shaking his head)

Sworn off it...

The images on the screen take on an even more ferocious intensity.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

Afghanistan...East Timor before that...two tours of Iraq in the last twelve months...

ASH

Great place to visit...

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

And three charges of assault in the last five years...one of them against US personnel in Afghanistan...

ASH

Iraq.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

Right. Not including the most recent incident-

ASH

That was dropped.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

On the condition you attend these sessions.

ASH has lost his humour. He is stonily silent.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Nothing to add?

ASH thinks about this for a second.

ASH

It was a one off. Won't happen again.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

Married...two children. Still together?

ASH

Last time I checked.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

Have you ever thought of a change?

ASH

Change to what?

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

I see you left for a year to work as a body guard in the Arab Emirates. A lot safer I would imagine.

ASH

Advisor. I was a military advisor.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

Why did you return?

ASH

At this level Doc, there is nothing else.

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

Yes...but given all that's happened, the fact you've managed to survive for this long...why would you want to go back to a war zone?

ASH seriously ponders this for a moment.

ASH

I like the skill. I have the skill...

PSYCHIATRIST'S VOICE

The skill?

ASH

It's all that matters in the end.

SOUND of a bugle playing The Last Post. It is a mournful tune that should pervade the theatre. Through the screen two figures emerge, SERGEANT TOM BLACKMORE and TROOPER RAY SWALLOW. They are fitted out for combat including weapons. They hand ASH his equipment which he adeptly puts on then his rifle which he expertly checks.

BLACKMORE

C'mon then.

Nothing is said as if they are on auto pilot. Once complete they separate to different parts of the stage as if walking through an alien landscape. Taps ends. SOUND of an explosion. A body bursts through the screen and lies prostrate on the floor. LIGHTS. Four bodies slowly appear on stage. None are moving. Who is dead and who is alive is not quite apparent. One by one, SERGEANT BLACKMORE, CORPORAL ASH and TROOPER SWALLOW, lift their heads to see if the others are alive. LIGHTS. They are in a room of a village somewhere in Afghanistan. Without speaking they crawl to a defensive position. One of them rushes quickly up the stairs and after a few seconds comes quickly back down and goes into a crouch position. Their faces are covered with scarves commonly worn by locals in Afghanistan. The first to remove it is BLACKMORE.

The three of them remain in a firing position with guns covering different arcs of the stage.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Ash...

Silence.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Ash...

ASH

Yeah...

BLACKMORE

You alright?

ASH

I'm fine.

BLACKMORE

Ray...

SWALLOW

Right Tom. I'm good.

BLACKMORE

Where are the others?

ASH

You're not serious?

BLACKMORE

Well...how many did you see?

ASH

No idea.

SWALLOW

You shot one of them..!

ASH

So...my mind was preoccupied at the time.

SWALLOW

I saw a few at the windows...

BLACKMORE

A few what..?

SWALLOW

Ragheads...insurgents...fucking Taliban motherfuckers Jesus! The enemy ...

ASH

(Irony)

Calm down Ray. Just because we were ambushed and nearly wiped out...there's no need to be alarmed.

BLACKMORE

(Anxious)

At this stage...

ASH

Yes..?

BLACKMORE

No one in the village can be considered friendly...

ASH

(Sarcastically)

Are you just thinking out loud or was that an order?

Pause.

SWALLOW

Order a fucking air strike.

BLACKMORE and ASH look at him like he has lost his mind.

SWALLOW (CONT'D)

Course we get out of here first...

ASH

How far do you think we're gonna get before we're spotted..?

BLACKMORE

Spotted by whom? We don't even know what the fuck's out there.

SWALLOW

Well then order one on a Yank position! They told us this place was Taliban fuckin free.

BLACKMORE

We're not going out there and we're not orderin' any airstrike.

SWALLOW

So...what? We sit here and wait for them to come and get us?!

ASH

Scared Ray?

BLACKMORE

Shut it.

ASH

Yes Sergeant.

BLACKMORE gives ASH a dirty look.

ASH (CONT'D)

Well you are the sergeant. Make a decision.

BLACKMORE

I have. For the time being...we stay. They know we're here let them make the first move.

SWALLOW

What if the first move is to overrun us and stick our heads on Al fuckin Jazeera..?

ASH

Fame at last.

BLACKMORE

If it gets that close we'll order air support...

ASH

The Yanks will send a drone at 36,000 feet...renowned for its accuracy.

SWALLOW

That's cuttin it a bit close isn't?

ASH

What Tom hasn't got the heart to tell you is that if it looks like we don't have a hope in hell, he'll make sure we're all buried together in the rubble...

SWALLOW

(Plaintive)

I don't want to be buried with these bastards...

ASH

If they kill you...won't make any fucking difference...

BLACKMORE

Alright...Swallow, check your equipment.

SWALLOW doesn't move.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

You're the signaller Ray.

SWALLOW goes over to his backpack. He opens it up and pulls out the radio. He checks a few switches.

SWALLOW

It's dead.

BLACKMORE

Then change the battery ...

SWALLOW

I don't have another battery.

BLACKMORE

What are you talking about? You didn't come with one fucking battery!

SWALLOW

It's out there. Randall's got it.

ASH

Randall's dead.

BLACKMORE

Shit.

SWALLOW

He had extra space...I mean it was a last minute thing. He offered...

ASH

Randall's got a lot of extra space now...especially round his middle...

SWALLOW

He was standing right next to the IED Tom. His pack would be fucked and everything in it.

BLACKMORE

You don't know that...why in hell did the Boss make you a siggie..?

SWALLOW

He said it was temporary ...till we got a replacement.

ASH

One that knows what he's doing...

Pause.

SWALLOW

I'm not fucking going out there...it's totally exposed...

ASH

(Dryly)

That would be suicide I have to admit.

Pause.

ASH (CONT'D)

Fuck it.

ASH peeps his head above the 'window sill.'

BLACKMORE

Stay the fuck down...

ASH drops his head down.

SWALLOW

What did you see..?

BLACKMORE

(To ASH)

You didn't see a thing did ya..?

SWALLOW

Well?

ASH

Nothing. Except of course...three of our mates all blown to shit in the courtyard.

SWALLOW

What happened?

ASH

The car...it must have been an IED.

SWALLOW

Jesus...is anything moving?

ASH

Yeah...I think I saw Youngie's dick walking in the opposite direction...what the fuck do you think I saw?!

BLACKMORE

Well is there..?

ASH

(Sombre)

No. They're all very still.

Pause.

BLACKMORE

It's not like it doesn't affect us too.

ASH

How so?

BLACKMORE

They...they were men under my command...

ASH

You were one of two sergeants on this patrol and the other one is lying in about three pieces out there and each one would be more in command than you could ever be...Sergeant.

SWALLOW

Jesus fuckin Christ will you just shut it..?

BLACKMORE

(To ASH)

That's right...your mates weren't they?

SWALLOW

Tom...

SOUND of a groan coming from the DEAD TALIBAN FIGHTER. They all get a fright.

SWALLOW (CONT'D)

What the fuck..?

BLACKMORE

He's still alive...

ASH

Bullshit...he's passing some kind of gas...

SWALLOW

The farting dead person...that would be a first.

BLACKMORE

He's not farting...! Ash, finish him off.

ASH

Why me?

BLACKMORE

He's your kill...your responsibility.

SWALLOW

He'll die anyhow. What difference does it make?

BLACKMORE

(To ASH)

Finish him off.

ASH goes over to him. He checks the body. He looks for obvious signs of trauma, finds nothing.

Check his face.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

ASH looks at BLACKMORE for a second.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

He picked up the grenade before it went off.

ASH does so. He quickly turns his face away.

ASH

Good call.

A groan comes from the body.

ASH (CONT'D)

He's still alive.

BLACKMORE
(Sarcastically)

What do you think we should do. Call a medic..?

Another groan.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

He's cactus.

ASH

I don't want to be sitting here listening to his final moments.

SWALLOW

Bit squeemish all of a sudden..?

BLACKMORE

Finish him off then.

ASH takes one of the styrettes of morphine around his neck and is about to jab it into the dying TALIBAN FIGHTER.

SWALLOW

You've got to be joking..What if you need'em heh?

ASH

I won't be needing any of these.

BLACKMORE grabs ASH'S hand.

BLACKMORE

What if we do?

Pause.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Put it away.

ASH reluctantly does so.

SWALLOW

Put a round in his head.

ASH

Don't want to let everyone know exactly where we are.

BLACKMORE

Suffocate him then...Jesus you've lost the plot.

ASH

I don't want to suffocate him alright. Fuck...

SWALLOW

If you wanna stick a needle in'im use this...

SWALLOW throws a long pin towards ASH who picks it up.

ASH

A cooking skewer.

BLACKMORE and ASH stare at SWALLOW in disbelief.

SWALLOW

I saw it in a movie...these paras are behind enemy lines and they kill this German...well he's still alive after a grenade got him...like this one, so one of the paras sticks one of these into him. No sound. Right under here.

SWALLOW presses his fingers underneath his sternum.
Pause.

SWALLOW (CONT'D)
He kept it down the side of his boot. In his gaiter.

ASH
Gaiters?

SWALLOW
Those things they wrapped around their-

ASH
I know what a fucking gaiter is.

SWALLOW
Works also if you stick it in the femoral artery just below the groin.

ASH looks at SWALLOW.

ASH
You're a wealth of information Ray.

SWALLOW
Either way will finish him off.

ASH doesn't move.

SWALLOW (CONT'D)
Fuck you then I'll do it.

SWALLOW is about to take the skewer off ASH. ASH pulls it away then sticks the pin into the TALIBAN FIGHTER underneath the sternum.

ASH
Like this Ray?

BLACKMORE
(Mock chef's voice)
And then you baste for another twenty minutes...

All movement ceases. ASH pulls the pin out, wipes it on the side of his leg, then gives offers it back to SWALLOW.

SWALLOW

You can keep it. Got another one.

ASH thinks about it for a second, wipes it on his own combat fatigues then slips it into his combat boot. BLACKMORE takes a look around their temporary refuge.

BLACKMORE

So much for restricted rules of engagement...

SWALLOW

Kidding? This is more like it. Feels like a real war for a change.

ASH

What now?

BLACKMORE

Drag him into the next room before he starts to pong.

ASH starts to drag the body offstage. He begins to struggle.

ASH

Ray...grab his legs.

SWALLOW looks to BLACKMORE.

BLACKMORE

Go on give him a fucking hand.

SWALLOW gets up grabs the dead TALIBAN FIGHTER'S legs. They drag him into the next room and quickly re-enter.

SWALLOW

Well we could do a lot worse than this...real flooring...concrete walls, a regular palace this. Remember Baghdad? That place we bivouacked...

ASH

That was a real palace Ray.

SWALLOW

Too fuckin right. Hussein's son wasn't it? Gunday or something.

ASH

Uday...

SWALLOW

Yeah Uday...what a perverted cunt he was...all those porno paintings on the wall.

ASH

And you takin a shit in the corner of his bedroom.

Pause.

SWALLOW

I had to fuckin go didn't I..?

ASH

(Sly curiosity)

Did you wank off as well?

No answer.

ASH (CONT'D)

You did didn't ya?

SWALLOW

Yeah...all over your face...

BLACKMORE

Good for the skin...

ASH

More toilets than a dunny factory and there's you like some derro in the bush...

SWALLOW

I didn't fucking know. Jesus the whole city was on the blink... We've just come in from God knows where after watching those Republican Guard pricks for three fuckin days and you're on about some friggin' toilet..!

ASH

Just don't shit where I sleep again Ray. There's a bucket in the next room.

SWALLOW

With the dead fella. I've got to stare at some dead bastard while stranglin a darkie..?

BLACKMORE

I'm sure he won't mind.

SWALLOW

Bucket in the other room. Primitive bastards...

ASH

It's not all about the plumbing Ray.

SWALLOW

What is it about then huh? About how they respect and treat each other? These mongrels'll kill ya for wakin' up on the wrong side of the fuckin bed! They're medieval...

ASH

Their country...

SWALLOW

Then why are we here..?

BLACKMORE

Where?

SWALLOW

Affuckinghanistan!

Pause. The three of them look at each other.

BLACKMORE

We're makin war on terror...now shut up and get some mines out there...

SWALLOW

Mines? I thought we were gettin' out of this mess..?

ASH

Not according to the senior officer.

BLACKMORE

(Weary)

Don't push it...

ASH

Touchy bastard...

BLACKMORE

Fuck off Ash. You've got the claymores last time I checked. Give one to Ray and put it out there...

SWALLOW

It's still light outside...

BLACKMORE

Not for much longer. Anyhow we're not going anywhere tonight. Position them-

ASH

I know where to position claymores Tom. Bein' doin' this just a little longer than you.

BLACKMORE

Fine then. Get to it.

LIGHTS. SWALLOW and ASH stand facing the audience. Each hold a clay more in their hands. As they speak, they begin to position the mines and lay out the detonating wires.

SWALLOW

I can't remember how many times we've done this. Setting up a perimeter...laying down claymores. These are my favourites. Very reliable and make a real impact on the enemy. They're full of ball bearings see...thousands of 'em with an explosive charge in the back. Turns anything caught in its radius into swiss cheese...make that mince meat. Seen many a soldier, commandos all, puke at the sight of what these things can do. Eyeball here, jawbone there...testicles landing on someone's gear. Not pretty but why of course should it be? Let it all be disgusting I say. I've seen nothing here I fucking like. Walk into a village and you can hear the people before you see them...creaking from all the plastic and metal holding them together. Men without arms, boys without legs. When they sit down its like a rusty old shit heap hitting a stop sign. Women with no faces thanks to those fucking berkhas. Not the countryside. Like a moonlanding on some patrols. Staring into a freezing fucking night with the wind howling through your down jacket like it was made of tissue paper. Bloody cruel it is.

ASH

Some things never change. SAS were using these in Vietnam. Those were the glory days. Through all the fighting and the dangers, the unit lost two men. One cos' he fell off the helicopter taking him back to base. The other shot by his own me coming back into the patrol perimeter from the wrong entrance. Nobody could catch us out in the jungle. The VC called us the "jungle ghosts". Put a bounty on our heads of \$65,000.

(MORE)

ASH (CONT'D)

That story more than others led me to join up. An ambush patrol would sit for days waiting for the target to come down the trail, with a few of these claymores set up at strategic points. Once the target was in range...well, there really wasn't much left. No need to check on the handiwork. Then we just disappeared into the jungle, no one the wiser. But eventually the VC did get wise and would find the claymores before they were activated. Then they'd turn to them to face their enemy. Never happened to us of course. Mainly American patrols. But we took notice. Made sure the claymores were never out of sight of the man with the control switch. Problem here of course...we're not the ones doing most of the ambushing..

SWALLOW

It reminded me of a butcher's shop at times. My uncle was a butcher. Used to help him out on Saturday mornings, watching all this meat carved up. That's one childhood memory that's served me well. When things are lookin' a little too grotty in the carnage department, I just imagine its another Saturday morning.

ASH

I was seventeen when I joined. Dad refused to sign the papers. We were in a mess hall in Williamstown. I'm looking like a drowned rat after completing the swimming test off the local pier. Dad just shook his head. The principal's son joining the commandos. Told him I'd run away if he didn't sign. Never see me again. He knew that I meant it. Mum would have never forgiven him.

LIGHTS. ASH, SWALLOW and BLACKMORE are in the room.

BLACKMORE

Well..?

ASH

Textbook stuff Sergeant. Just the right angle and distance apart.

BLACKMORE

What about camouflage?

SWALLOW

No one's gonna see'em. Draped a dirty old scarf over it. Blends in beautifully.

BLACKMORE

Alright then. Ray, you take upstairs.

SWALLOW

Why not him?

BLACKMORE

You've got better eyesight than he does...

SWALLOW

Bullshit. Ash can see a pair of tits at 100 meters as fast as any man...

ASH

Faster.

BLACKMORE

Just go.

SWALLOW

What the fuck am I going to do up there?

BLACKMORE

Keep an eye out. What do you think you're gonna do..?

ASH

Imagine you're a sniper Ray. Hunting the enemy.

SWALLOW

Half the friggin wall is missing.

BLACKMORE

Then keep fucking still.

SWALLOW

One well placed RPG and whoever's up there is cactus!

ASH

What do you expect in a real war?

BLACKMORE

Look...all you've got to do is make sure no one tries to get the jump on us.

ASH

See but don't be seen.

SWALLOW

(Turning on ASH with venom)

Mate, I could give a heavy footed cunt like yourself a lesson in concealment any fuckin day.

BLACKMORE

Then get up there and fucking prove it...Jesus.

SWALLOW gives ASH a withering look. He reluctantly grabs his rifle and heads up the stairs. ASH and BLACKMORE are alone.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

You shouldn't be so hard on him you know...

ASH

Why not? He's a prick.

BLACKMORE

So are you.

ASH

True. But he's also a cowboy...ready to shoot anything that moves.

BLACKMORE

Where the fuck do you think we are? Swallow has my permission to shoot anything that breathes.

ASH

As long as its not us.

BLACKMORE

Exactly.

ASH grabs his weapon and pulls out his cleaning kit.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

This is your second tour. You of all people should know what to expect.

ASH

It was your boy up there who fucked everything up on the last one.

BLACKMORE

That was Iraq.

ASH

And this is Afghanistan.

BLACKMORE

Big fucking difference.

ASH

These Talibs aren't the same. Yanks reckon they're startin to copy their tactics.

BLACKMORE

Shows how stupid they are...

ASH

Tried to outflank'em...

BLACKMORE

...while using suppressive fire. God it's common sense. Even these bastards would have to figure it out eventually. Surprised it took'em this long.

ASH

We're not supposed to be their teachers.

BLACKMORE

We're not gettin close enough to teach'em anything.

ASH

Till now.

BLACKMORE

(Pointedly)

Same war different day.

ASH

And Ray's still the same bastard last time I checked.

BLACKMORE

You don't like him because he's a bit thick.

ASH

So are you and look how famously we get along.

BLACKMORE

(Frustrated)

Swallow was covering our backs. We were under threat. Remember?

ASH

He acted against orders...or so you say.

BLACKMORE

Hold on...I never gave Swallow the order to shoot. That was the Boss's decision.

ASH

He was reckless then and the rest of us had to pick up all the fucking pieces...

BLACKMORE

By "us" you mean you...

ASH

(Defensively)

We all had to wear the blame for that one...

BLACKMORE

(Almost laughing)

Mate he wasn't the only one who made mistakes...

Pause. ASH is staring hard at BLACKMORE.

ASH

Wouldn't care to elaborate?

BLACKMORE thinks very hard for a second as ASH bores holes through him.

BLACKMORE

(smirking)

No loss in the end. One less haven for terrorists. That's all.

ASH

We hit the wrong village courtesy of our American allies who then kindly cover their arses and ours by destroying any trace of said village's fucking existence...and that's all you've got to say? One less haven for terrorists?

BLACKMORE

We tried to give the villagers money didn't we? They refused.

ASH

The mission went pear shaped before it even started...

BLACKMORE

Bullshit...

ASH

Our target wasn't even fucking there!

BLACKMORE shakes his head.

ASH (CONT'D)

What?

BLACKMORE

How did you ever get into this unit Ash..?

ASH

By being better than the likes of you.

BLACKMORE

Keep telling yourself that...

ASH

Let me see then. What else? Three years of Commando training...that's where, I admit, I had trouble adjusting to the number of wannabe SAS heroes and non coms...people like yourself... who all said I'd never last...

BLACKMORE

Some of us took bets...

ASH

(Through gritted teeth)

I passed the preliminary tests for selection and barely raised a sweat...unnatural one instructor said. No sergeant I said, just no booze for three months unlike the other dickheads. Not mentioning any names.

BLACKMORE gives ASH the finger.

ASH (CONT'D)

Only one on the cadre course still standing at the finish line...bastards all around me crawling on their bellies to make it. Some did some didn't.

BLACKMORE

Real fuckin hero...

ASH

You, rumour has it, were hospitalised on your first attempt ...

Pause. BLACKMORE looks away uncomfortably.

ASH (CONT'D)

Silence is truth huh?

BLACKMORE

My feet...I'd been in Thailand at a kick boxing school... didn't wear shoes for about a year.

ASH

That was smart wasn't it...

BLACKMORE

I wanted to continue. My feet got infected...skin was too soft.

ASH

They figured the rest of you wasn't?

BLACKMORE

Another guy almost died on our course...

ASH

Someone almost dies on every course. Instructors aren't happy otherwise.

BLACKMORE

And look at you now...busted three times...

ASH

Twice.

BLACKMORE

Twice my arse...it should have been a third time if the Boss didn't get involved...

ASH lights up a cigarette. He covers the end with his hand.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Course...a bit of salad on your chest will get you that kind of intervention won't it..?

ASH

You should try it some time. Just have to make sure you're still alive to collect it.

BLACKMORE

A Star of Gallantry for going berserk and killing every thing in sight...

ASH

It's not in the handbook but it does work...

BLACKMORE

Fact is...no matter what they've pinned on your chest mate, you're not a natural fit for this unit.

ASH

And a petrified little non com like you is..?

BLACKMORE

(With conviction)

You don't have a feeling for tradition...

ASH

The regiment's 40 years old. Christ...the Brits disbanded the Black Watch after 400 years...so much for fucking tradition...

BLACKMORE

They're part of a super regiment now...they get to keep that thing in their caps...a tassle...

ASH

It's a hackle. A red hackle.

BLACKMORE

Right...fuck, a hackle, whatever...anyway they can keep it.

ASH

Woopy fuckin doo. It's all political bullshit. Nothing's sacred...not even us.

BLACKMORE

The pollies would never do that. They love us. Christ, every time they visit like they're ready to serve us hand and foot.

ASH

Yeah for about fifteen minutes. Then they go home and fuck up our pay slips.

BLACKMORE

That's not the fucking point.

ASH chuckles.

ASH

You know Tom...scratch through that armour and all the filth you've accumulated over the years...all that's left is a fucking boy scout...eager to please and just wanting a pat on the head. Probably bend over and spread'em if the scout master asked nicely.

BLACKMORE strides over to ASH, his weapon pointing at him.

ASH (CONT'D)

Now look whose lost his fucking marbles.

BLACKMORE

You call me that again and I'll blow a big fucking hole through that black heart of yours...

ASH takes his cigarette out of his mouth.

ASH

You haven't got the balls mate...

BLACKMORE

Tell me...what was the reason again your wife pissed off on you with the kids...you woke up one morning and what...tried to bash her head in with a sidelamp-

ASH flicks the cigarette at BLACKMORE'S face. He prepares to get up.

BLACKMORE lunges at ASH. They roll clumsily on the ground. This quickly turns into vicious close quarter combat as their training kicks in and they are try to gain the advantage and kill their opponent. LIGHTS. The door upstairs slowly opens. The TALIBAN FIGHTER slowly walks down the stairs, his AK47 rifle pointing down towards ASH and BLACKMORE. Both ASH and BLACKMORE suddenly notice the presence in the room. The TALIBAN FIGHTER points his weapon at them. They freeze. The TALIBAN FIGHTER steps into the middle of the room. He says nothing, just staring at them, his weapon pointed menacingly in their direction. ASH and BLACKMORE eye off their own weapons.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

What have you got on you...

ASH

A knife in the side of my boot...you..?

BLACKMORE

Razor blade in my collar...

ASH

You plan on giving him a close shave...

BLACKMORE

Why doesn't the bastard do something..

ASH

He's probably deciding whether he has to kill us or not...

BLACKMORE

I'm gonna go for it...

ASH

Go for what..?

BLACKMORE

My weapon...

ASH

Don't be stupid...look at his hands, steady as a rock.

BLACKMORE

It's now or never...what do you think..?

ASH

I think...why are you telling him everything...

BLACKMORE

He can't understand us...take a look at him, he's pure native.

BLACKMORE makes a move towards his weapon.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

(in a British accent with only a faint East Asian influence)

Do not move or I will shoot. Did you understand that?

ASH

(Ironic)

Yeah. A real ignorant bastard...

The TALIBAN FIGHTER goes behind BLACKMORE and sticks the AK47 to his head. With his feet, he kicks away BLACKMORE'S weapon away, then kicks him in the back of the knee. BLACKMORE goes down to his knees in obvious pain. ASH doesn't move.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Now bend forward like you are praying...in a mosque.

BLACKMORE complies. The TALIBAN FIGHTER feels the collar of BLACKMORE.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

You can keep you razor.

BLACKMORE is in the praying position. The TALIBAN FIGHTER then goes behind ASH and gives him a good kick in the back of the knee. ASH goes down. The TALIBAN FIGHTER pushes the muzzle of his rifle against ASH'S upper back. He leans forward into the praying position also. The TALIBAN FIGHTER takes out the knife from the side of ASH'S boot and tosses it across the room.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

Good.

The TALIBAN FIGHTER steps back satisfied.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

Is there anyone else...

BLACKMORE

You must be loving this you bastard. On our knees like some Islamic...

ASH

Be quiet Tom.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

You are surrounded. There is no hope of escape.

No answer. LIGHTS. SWALLOW appears at the top of the stairs. SWALLOW takes a step down the stairs. SWALLOW slowly takes his throwing knife out of his boot and aims.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

Hands together like you are in a church...

ASH

Mosque...church...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

If you deviate from this position...I will kill you both.

ASH

Deviate...

SWALLOW prepares to throw the knife. The TALIBAN FIGHTER quickly turns around and prepares to fire. His gun jams. SWALLOW throws. LIGHTS. The knife lands into the side of the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S neck. He lets out a cry of surprise more than pain. He drops his weapon and falls to his knees. With lightning speed ASH and BLACKMORE grab the TALIBAN FIGHTER and lower him to the ground. The AK 47 is kicked away from the FIGHTER. SWALLOW rushes down the stairs and deftly pulls out his knife. This time he lets out a cry of pain. ASH has grabbed a compression bandage from his webbing and pressed it onto the wound. BLACKMORE finds an old rag on the ground and hands it to ASH.

BLACKMORE

Here...use this.

ASH takes it and wraps it around the FIGHTER'S neck securing the bandage.

The TALIBAN FIGHTER is rolled onto his back. He stares at his captors with the look of a wild animal that knows he has become prey to an even bigger animal. ASH then goes through the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S pockets. He pulls out a small booklet. During the following dialogue, ASH continues to look through the booklet.

ASH

What the fuck is this..?

SWALLOW

I was aiming for the throat...off by a few inches.

ASH

What if you missed Ray..?

BLACKMORE

He didn't.

ASH

If he aimed for the bloody throat he sure as hell did...

SWALLOW

I got him didn't I?

ASH

His whole chest a target and you decide to play the odds...

SWALLOW

Get fucked. Next time I'll use your bloody head as a target.

BLACKMORE

Why didn't you just shoot the bastard?

SWALLOW

Where's the skill in that?

ASH turns to the TALIBAN FIGHTER. He holds up the notebook.

ASH

What's this then...

BLACKMORE

What have you got there..?

ASH

Some fucking manifesto of sorts.

SWALLOW

What?

BLACKMORE grabs it off ASH.

BLACKMORE

A guidebook to jihad I'll bet.

He scans through the pages.

SWALLOW

What's it say?

BLACKMORE

How the fuck would I know? It's in...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Urdu. It is written in Urdu.

BLACKMORE

Ash you did one of those courses see what this says...

ASH goes over to BLACKMORE and SWALLOW who are momentarily distracted by the contents of the booklet. The TALIBAN FIGHTER watches this exchange as he tries to crawl back and grab his weapon which is only inches away from his grasp. BLACKMORE steps on his wrist. Another cry of pain.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

So...what does it say?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

It is a handbook...a code of conduct...

SWALLOW

You've got to be joking...terrorists have a code of fucking conduct?

BLACKMORE

(To ASH)

You believe him?

ASH

Well it's not a prayer book...

BLACKMORE

How do you know?

ASH

I've seen one before.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

It is a guidebook...to ensure civilian casualties are kept to a minimum.

ASH shoves the book aggressively in the face of the
TALIBAN FIGHTER and points to a section.

ASH

What does this say? Heh?

The TALIBAN FIGHTER focuses on the words.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

"...the utmost effort should be made to avoid civilian casualties..."

BLACKMORE

Go on...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

"...and suicide attacks should only be used on important targets..."

ASH

Are we an important target?

The TALIBAN FIGHTER is frozen. His eyes shift
between all three of them who have gone silent.

SWALLOW

Maybe we should do him now..?

ASH

Not even ask his name?

BLACKMORE

Don't want to know his name...

Pause.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

(to SWALLOW)

So how the fuck did he get past you?

SWALLOW

What are you sayin'? I dropped the cunt didn't I..?

BLACKMORE

That's right. But he was bloody well up there with you.

SWALLOW

(To BLACKMORE)

Ungrateful bastard...

ASH

What happened Ray...he just walk right past you?

BLACKMORE

You ya Taliban prick...how did you get past him?

ASH

(to TALIBAN FIGHTER)

More to the point why didn't you kill him first?

SWALLOW

That just wouldn't happen...

BLACKMORE steps on the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S
wrist once more.

BLACKMORE

I asked you a question!

BLACKMORE presses even harder.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

He made no sound...if he had...

ASH

The ghost walks again...unheard by enemy or friend...

SWALLOW

Shut up Ash.

BLACKMORE

What is it Ray? How the fuck did you let this guy get the drop on us?

SWALLOW

I was takin a crap alright! Or about to when this prick appears out of nowhere. I swear to God I didn't see or hear a bloody thing...just felt his body movin' past...

BLACKMORE

And you forgot your weapon...skill my arse.

SWALLOW

(to BLACKMORE)

I swear to God Tom...he must have been hiding up there already .

BLACKMORE

Well why didn't you stop him heh? How did you know he wasn't going to shoot the both of us?

ASH

He didn't know.

SWALLOW

By the time I had my pants up he was down the stairs.

ASH

Ray didn't forget his weapon...he couldn't find it...

Pause.

SWALLOW

It was dark...

BLACKMORE

Unbelievable.

BLACKMORE viciously grabs SWALLOW by the collar.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

I could have your fucking hide over this!

SWALLOW

Jesus Christ Tom I didn't fucking see him!

BLACKMORE

Don't Tom me you useless prick...

SWALLOW

I'm a soldier not a fucking bat! You can hardly see a bloody thing up there! He didn't see me either...

BLACKMORE

You're the professional. These guys aren't in the same league.

SWALLOW

(Desperate)

Maybe he's not like the others...

BLACKMORE

(fuming)

That's it. When this mess is sorted you're out on your ear. Find another team to get killed. If they'll fuckin have ya.

SWALLOW is visibly shocked by this. He doesn't know what to say.

ASH

Don't worry Ray, I'll still play with you.

SWALLOW

(forlorn)

Get fucked...I didn't bloody see him...

Pause.

ASH

Who was it that checked upstairs in the first place..?

BLACKMORE

(Defensive)

What?

Who went upstairs?

ASH

No one speaks.

Someone did. It wasn't me.

ASH (CONT'D)

As if they all had the idea at the same time, the three SOLDIERS look at the TALIBAN FIGHTER.

It wasn't Ray either...

ASH (CONT'D)

It was...him...

TALIBAN FIGHTER
(Indicating BLACKMORE)

He is pointing to BLACKMORE. BLACKMORE looks at the TALIBAN FIGHTER like he could cut his throat.

SWALLOW pushes BLACKMORE away.

SWALLOW

No one would have gotten past me if I knew they were up there...

BLACKMORE
(to the TALIBAN FIGHTER)

Where were you hiding?

Silence.

Where were you hiding?

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Behind the wardrobe...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

BLACKMORE

The one against the wall.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

The one leaning against wall. When I heard you underneath I knew you would check upstairs...so I hid behind it.

ASH
You hid behind it..?

SWALLOW
Jesus...

BLACKMORE
I looked inside the wardrobe...

TALIBAN FIGHTER
I know.

ASH
(Feigned indignation)
We could have died cos of your slackness.

SWALLOW
(Vindicated)
Not to worry Sergeant. All turned good in the end. Now let's shoot the prick.

SOUND of explosions in the distance. These start getting louder and louder. All listen with apprehension and fear.

SWALLOW (CONT'D)
Air strike...

SOUND of explosions almost upon them. They all hit the deck. Nobody moves.

Pause.

SWALLOW (CONT'D)
Why is this bastard still alive...

BLACKMORE
We're going to question him aren't we...

ASH
What do you think he's gonna tell us?

SWALLOW
We should do him now before any of his mates arrive...

BLACKMORE

No. We question him first. He's got to know something.

SWALLOW

He's just a fuckin foot soldier...bloody hell look at him..!

ASH

Can't go on that...even their leaders look like shit. Can't tell the fuckin difference...

BLACKMORE

This guys gotta have intelligence we could use...

ASH

Use for what? Our only job should be to get the fuck out of here don't ya think?! Half the bloody team was kebabed by these bastards. I say we deal with him and get the hell out.

SWALLOW

Fuck it Tom. Let me do him now. He's not gonna tell us anything. They never fucking do.

BLACKMORE

How do you know? Heh? How many times we had one of them to interrogate?

ASH

Look how many times the Yanks have tried. Got'em nowhere.

BLACKMORE

Maybe they weren't applying the right methods.

SWALLOW

Jesus Christ last time we applied the right methods even the Yanks were claiming overkill...

ASH

(To SWALLOW)

Went at it with real gusto if I recall...

BLACKMORE

(To SWALLOW)

You should have given that one a bit more time instead of rushing it. He would have talked.

SWALLOW

Bullshit. Why don't we handcuff him naked with his underwear over his face...humiliate the fucker...look at the smug bastard, not like he doesn't deserve it.

BLACKMORE

Do an Abu Ghraib..?

ASH

His mates come barging in here and we've got Shiekh Hilali sucking on his undies...what do you think they're gonna do? Make our death a quick and painless one..?

SWALLOW

Then put him in a stress position...

ASH

We're in a fucking stress position. Anyway...this is their territory. I wouldn't be getting too keen on the idea of breaking the bastard first...

SWALLOW

(Mock sympathy)

All gettin a bit too much for you in your old age huh..?

ASH

You're such a fucking idiot at times. We don't hold all the cards. And nothing we've been through in training comes close to the real thing.

BLACKMORE

(With mock solemnity)

The Grand Inquisitor has spoken.

ASH

Don't call me that...

SWALLOW

Grand wanker more like it...

BLACKMORE

(Ignoring ASH)

Ash knows the limits of human endurance don't ya mate..?

ASH

You do your own dirty work.

BLACKMORE

It's part of the job...one that you used to be very good at.

ASH

(Dryly)

I still am but maybe it's time for the next generation to step up...

SWALLOW

(in sheer frustration)

So who the fuck is gonna start!?

BLACKMORE takes off his webbing and grabs a rope in preparation of torturing their prisoner. The TALIBAN PRISONER recoils with fear.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I came here to surrender...

ASH, BLACKMORE and SWALLOW look at him in stunned silence. They were not prepared for this. No one says anything.

ASH

What's that accent?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I am originally from Brixton.

ASH, BLACKMORE and SWALLOW still remain silent.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

And I came to you to surrender.

BLACKMORE

All the way from Brixton.

SWALLOW

More reason to end it here. Bastard used to be one of us...

ASH

One of us..? What the fuck are you talking about?

SWALLOW

Culturally...you know.

ASH

No.

SWALLOW

Fuck...he was brought up like us. Pommie background...that sort of thing.

BLACKMORE

Shut it Ray.

ASH

Do you even know where Brixton is Ray?

SWALLOW

Course I fuckin' do. (To the TALIBAN FIGHTER). It's a Pommy town with a lot of Paki bastards in it.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Yes...

SWALLOW

See!

ASH

His accent's too educated for Brixton.

BLACKMORE

(To ASH)

What are you a fucking linguist?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I studied in London.

ASH

Where...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

LSE.

ASH

You're kidding...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

No.

SWALLOW

What the fuck is that?

ASH

The London School of Economics.

BLACKMORE

Bullshit.

SWALLOW

What the fuck is it?

ASH

A very famous university.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

It is true.

BLACKMORE

Oh look...Ash is getting a hard on...somebody in the room might be smarter than him..

ASH ignores this.

SWALLOW

He's gotta to be lyin...

BLACKMORE gives the TALIBAN FIGHTER a kick.
He recoils.

BLACKMORE

Well?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Your presence in Afghanistan has radicalised many.

SWALLOW

Nobody loves us anymore...

BLACKMORE

What happened? Didn't get the right job? Your sister fucking a decent white man for a change..?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I don't have a sister.

BLACKMORE gives him another vicious kick.

SWALLOW

We're here to save you people understand?

ASH

He's not from Afghanistan...Jesus.

SWALLOW

Awrr they're all the fuckin same! One big bloody Holy Land.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

(To SWALLOW)

You were not a very good student...were you?

Pause. No one moves.

SWALLOW

I'm going to smash your head in!

SWALLOW rushes towards the TALIBAN FIGHTER, picks him up off the floor and throws him against the wall. He collapses onto the ground and SWALLOW prepares to put the boot in. The TALIBAN FIGHTER blocks SWALLOW'S leg with one foot and kicks SWALLOW in the ankle with the other. SWALLOW goes down. ASH instinctively punches the TALIBAN FIGHTER in the face, picks him off the floor and throws him across the room. SWALLOW has gotten up and jumps onto the TALIBAN FIGHTER and starts strangling him.

BLACKMORE

Very pretty.

ASH

Tom...

BLACKMORE watches. ASH realises he is going to say nothing to SWALLOW. ASH pulls SWALLOW off and throws him across the floor. He then pulls the TALIBAN FIGHTER up with one arm and deftly grabs a chair with the other, placing the seat behind him and forcing the TALIBAN FIGHTER onto it.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I take that as a yes...

ASH lets out a laugh.

SWALLOW

What's so funny heh?

ASH

You're supposedly a trained killer Ray...in one of the few units in the world that can call itself elite...and you're still touchy about your education. Like it really fucking matters!

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I did not mean to be insulting.

ASH

Shut up.

SWALLOW

I know what you meant you curry munching cocksucker!

ASH

Didn't drop your "g" on that one mate...

SWALLOW

Heh?

ASH

Look where we are Ray. No person with a real education would end up here.

SWALLOW

What about the Boss?

ASH

Military education doesn't count.

SWALLOW

Why not?

ASH

He's out there in about ten pieces.

Pause.

SWALLOW

Fair enough.

BLACKMORE

Ash, gag him.

ASH takes out a bandana and ties it tightly around the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S mouth.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Ray...back upstairs... and this time no surprises.

SWALLOW thinks of saying something but changes his mind. He goes back up the stairs. BLACKMORE motions ASH away from the TALIBAN FIGHTER.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Do you think he is alone?

ASH

You know the answer to that.

BLACKMORE

How many?

ASH

If there was more than what we are they would have busted into here by now.

BLACKMORE

Then why the IED?

ASH

They killed half the team didn't they? Maybe they thought they could have wiped us all out with the explosion.

BLACKMORE thinks about this for a second.

BLACKMORE

I want you to question him.

ASH

Why not let Ray do it..?

BLACKMORE

He'll kill him before we get anything.

ASH

You think?

BLACKMORE

Don't get smart with me Ash. If you already know the fucking answer keep your mouth shut.

ASH

What if he doesn't talk.

BLACKMORE

Tell him we're going to leave him alone with Swallow.

ASH

I'll do it if that's what has to be done. No holding back.

BLACKMORE

Yes. But Swallow will have his heart in it. It's the little things that count.

LIGHTS. ASH goes over to the TALIBAN FIGHTER who sits subdued. He undoes the bandana around his mouth.

ASH

Here's the deal mate. We've lost three of our men to an IED. Maybe one that you or your dead mate over there put together. Then all of a sudden you show up alone. We can't help but think there's others.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

You saw no one else.

ASH

The place seemed deserted.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

That's what happens to villages that have been bombed...people tend to leave, or die.

ASH

That wasn't us. We were told to investigate...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Yes..?

ASH

The mission was supposed to be low risk.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

This province is a Taliban stronghold...or haven't your intelligence people told you that yet?

ASH

One...two more? If you are really deserting then this could be a sign of faith.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Why not five or six?

ASH

We both know it's not that many.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Why not?

ASH

Because you would have shown your hand already. Instead you tiptoed into here like you were hiding from us.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Unless I came to give myself up.

ASH

You really don't expect us to believe that shit do you?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Why not? Even extremists have their limits.

ASH

Look...this isn't personal for me. I don't give a rat's arse about religion or politics. I'm a soldier. You give us the right information I'll see you make it out of here alive. The other way...let the brains trust up there look after ya. Understand?

The TALIBAN FIGHTER stares at ASH. He says nothing.

ASH (CONT'D)

Two then? Two more?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

If you checked my equipment you would find-

ASH

The banana clip on your AK was your last. We're not amateurs mate.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

More reason to believe my intentions were to surrender.

ASH

Two. It's two.

LIGHTS. SWALLOW comes rushing down the stairs.

SWALLOW

We've got company...

BLACKMORE who has been cleaning his rifle against the wall, springs into life.

BLACKMORE

How many?

SWALLOW

Just the one...

BLACKMORE

Can you take a shot at him...

ASH

If he misses we give away our position and then who knows what they got planned...

SWALLOW

Well you've been questioning the bastard...you should have his life story by now...

ASH

There's your boy out there and one more.

BLACKMORE

Have you got his position?

SWALLOW comes down to the ground floor and kneels facing outwards towards the audience.

SWALLOW

You can see him from here. He's not bad actually. Uses his elbows and knees on the crawl as well as anyone I've seen...

ASH

Let me have a look.

ASH gets on his knees and stares out the "window" towards the audience. LIGHTS.

ASH (CONT'D)

He thinks he can't be seen. He knows we're in here but hasn't chosen a path where he's out of view. His arse is sticking up too high. Gawd...might as well paint a neon sign on it...

BLACKMORE

Where's he heading...

ASH

For the claymores...and he's got an RPG on his back.

SWALLOW

We're fucked.

BLACKMORE

Ash...go out there and take care of him.

ASH

What?

BLACKMORE

You heard me. Get out there. Go on. You know where he is. He hasn't seen you. Yet. Element of surprise.

SWALLOW

Why don't we just take Mustafa here and use him as a human shield...get close enough to blast the shit out of his mate.

ASH

I'll go...Ray, why don't you go back up there and cover my backside.

SWALLOW

Take the night vision goggles and you might be able to see his...

BLACKMORE

No. There's only one. If we lose you Ash...you get the picture.

ASH

Sure.

SWALLOW

It's almost dark outside...

BLACKMORE

No matter. Your eyes will adjust. Just focus on a spot that appears totally black and keep looking at it. You'll be fine.

ASH

(Sarcastically)

Thank you Doctor. I feel all better now.

ASH looks at BLACKMORE. He realises there is no point in arguing. LIGHTS. The stage is in darkness. He can barely be seen.

ASH (CONT'D)

Blackmore's right of course. In pitch black...your eyes change, like an animal hunting in the night. The pupil of your iris opens wider and this lets more light in the back of your eye.

LIGHTS. The basic line of ASH'S body can be seen.

ASH (CONT'D)

The most important thing is to move slowly.

ASH starts to move.

LIGHTS. The stage is in darkness. ASH is outside.

ASH (CONT'D)

I've never actually killed someone...not like this. Blown people up, shot them from a distance or in a blur of excitement, ambushed them on numerous occasions...but this is the first time up close. I know a man in the regiment whose killed several...mostly with his bare hands or blade. Came home one night from the pub and beat up his pregnant girlfriend. Boots'n all. Almost took a knife to her before the police arrived. Not a good look. Now's he in a psych ward...

LIGHTS on the SECOND TALIBAN FIGHTER.

He is on his belly, with his head slightly raised. He faces away from ASH.

ASH (CONT'D)

There are various methods to finding your prey when he is trying to remain unseen. One is the arc method. You take an object and treat it as the centre of a square. Then you examine the whole square, up, down and of course, across. Then move to the next square.

Pause.

ASH (CONT'D)

I prefer the arc method. First thing, you fix a series of pictures in your mind as you sweep your eyes across. Then sweep again from the starting point. Your mind will tell you if anything has changed. If the picture from your first traverse is different...a little voice will speak.

Pause.

ASH (CONT'D)

There he is...he hasn't seen me. Thinks he's the only one out here.

The SECOND TALIBAN FIGHTER slowly comes up to a kneeling position.

ASH (CONT'D)

You've done it now. I have you. You are mine. Can't see me but you might as well be in a spotlight as far as I'm concerned. Question is...do I kill you now or do I wait...

The SECOND TALIBAN FIGHTER is now standing. He looks to the left and right.

ASH (CONT'D)

Yes, see who might be around. Look very carefully. He's seen nothing. I might as well be...invisible. Course this was the last thing he was expecting. Someone coming into the cold where all the danger is. But this is what they train us for...

The SECOND TALIBAN FIGHTER takes a step forward in the opposite direction from ASH.

ASH (CONT'D)

This is almost too easy.

The SECOND TALIBAN FIGHTER bobs down. Then quickly stands up again. ASH mimics this move.

ASH (CONT'D)

This is too easy...shall we dance. All he has to do is turn around once and he might have a...no, he'll be dead before then. Can't get too close.

The SECOND TALIBAN FIGHTER suddenly turns around. ASH lifts his weapons and shoots a three second burst. The TALIBAN FIGHTER falls down on his back.

ASH (CONT'D)

A three second burst...they'll know it's me. I always give a three second burst.

ASH walks over to the body and stands over it. He becomes agitated and starts to breath heavily.

ASH (CONT'D)

He's gone. One round through his windpipe. He'll drown in his own blood. That's cruel that is. He's starting to scream in agony. Bubbles are coming out of his throat. He's suffering...that's not my intention. It's about the skill...I want the skill...I have...the skill.

ASH fires another three second burst into the body. It ceases moving. ASH looks at the body for a second then walks away. He starts shaking.

ASH (CONT'D)

Oh no...you weak bastard...alright then...go on. Let it all out. Let it spew forth...

ASH goes on his knees, turns his back on the audience and throws up. He wipes the spew off his chest. He stands up. Breathes deeply.

ASH (CONT'D)

And I've pissed myself. All my orifices opened at once but at least I could control one of them. Barely. They'll be able to smell me...the stink of piss and spew mixed with sweat. Delightful.

LIGHTS. ASH is in a corner. He is undressing and wiping himself down with a wet cloth. He takes a pair of underwear from his pack and changes. He is watched by BLACKMORE and SWALLOW.

The TALIBAN FIGHTER is sitting on a chair, bound and gagged.

SWALLOW

So Ash...tell me something...did you piss yourself from all the excitement or were you just shit scared?

ASH tries to ignore him.

BLACKMORE

Shut up Ray. You've given off a few smells in your time mate.

SWALLOW

Maybe when I first started by Ashie here is a pro... should be able to control his bodily functions...shouldn't ya?

ASH is about to say something.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Can I have some water.

No one moves. The three of them barely glance at him.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

It has been-

BLACKMORE

We know how long it's been...

ASH

Let him have some water.

SWALLOW

Killing made you soft mate? He won't be thirsty if we cut his throat.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Just a mouthful...

SWALLOW

How about I give you a mouthful of my spit..?

SWALLOW is standing over the TALIBAN FIGHTER.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Why are you not professional like the others?

SWALLOW whacks him hard across the face. The TALIBAN FIGHTER is stunned.

BLACKMORE

Swallow...give him some water.

SWALLOW doesn't move.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Now.

SWALLOW grabs his water bottle, opens it, hangs it over the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S head and allows tiny drops to pour onto his forehead. The TALIBAN FIGHTER resists, then after a few drops, relents and opens his mouth. The drops continue.

SWALLOW

Must learn to conserve mate...this is a dry country you know...

BLACKMORE laughs. ASH takes his water bottle and pours water into the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S mouth. He gulps hungrily. SWALLOW walks away.

SWALLOW (CONT'D)

So what are we gonna do? Can't stay here indefinitely.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

That is more like it Private.

BLACKMORE

Shut up. It's your fate we're discussing.

SWALLOW

Kill him.

ASH

We'll have to kill him...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I have told you my goal was only to surrender...

SWALLOW laughs derisively.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

Why would I have waited upstairs...I could have ambushed you any time...thrown a grenade while you were preparing your defence. I chose not to.

SWALLOW

How many SAS personnel have your mob ever caught heh?

The TALIBAN FIGHTER says nothing.

SWALLOW (CONT'D)

That's right. We would have been the first...put us on one of those videos of yours blindfolded...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

My group are warriors...not a production company.

SWALLOW pulls out his sidearm and presses it to the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S head.

ASH

Can't stay here. Can't leave him alive. Anyhow Swallow's turn.

BLACKMORE

We wait till we get support.

ASH

How? Our communications are down.

BLACKMORE

Once we don't appear at the exfil point they'll send out a recce.

ASH

That's hours away. What if his mates decide to come in force..?

BLACKMORE

That's not going to happen.

ASH

So we just fucking sit here like a bunch of dildos waiting to be right royally fucked like those outside..?!

TALIBAN FIGHTER

The longer you stay here the more chance you will all die.

SWALLOW

What do you fucking know? Huh?

ASH

Then we should just kill you and get out of here.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

You are in a Taliban stronghold.

BLACKMORE

Bullshit.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Why? Because it says so on your map...or an American intelligence officer said this is so?

BLACKMORE

This area was cleared weeks ago.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Then why haven't you left already?

BLACKMORE has no answer.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

My cavalry will arrive before yours. They are probably out there now...so I suggest you take advantage of my information and leave...

BLACKMORE

And you want to come with us?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

That is right.

BLACKMORE

Had enough of this war huh?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

That is one way of putting it.

BLACKMORE

Do you know another...

ASH

They say we're losing this war...why not wait it out.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

By the time you lose it there may not be a country left.

BLACKMORE

(Shaking his head)

Don't buy it.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I do not want to remain in this country. I have information...names of important people...leaders, their plans, locations...explosive dumps...valuable information that would make you all the more useful to your unit...to the Americans.

BLACKMORE

Stuff the Americans...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

You fight for them...you must care what they think...

Silence. All three are listening intently.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

Information that will save the lives of your comrades...

SWALLOW

What about our three fucking comrades outside huh? Why didn't you save them if you're such a conscientious bastard all of a sudden...

BLACKMORE

You ambushed our unit.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

The car bomb was not meant to be detonated.

Pause.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

At least not here.

SWALLOW

Rubbish...why are we listening to his bullshit!?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

It is true. The car was meant to be driven to another location, destined for an American base...but your unit appeared...

BLACKMORE

So you just couldn't miss the opportunity could ya?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

You outnumbered us..we knew we could not win in a firefight...we were only four. So we used what was at our disposal.

BLACKMORE

So we intruded on your plans.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Exactly.

BLACKMORE

Swallow...throat.

SWALLOW goes behind the TALIBAN FIGHTER and pulls the bandage around his throat. BLACKMORE nods. SWALLOW releases the pressure. The TALIBAN FIGHTER gasps for breath.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Never forget. We're in charge of whether you live or die. Not your fucking mates out there. They arrive first, I'll crack your head open like a watermelon.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

If you kill me there is no chance you will live...

ASH

If we're caught.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

We do not leave now the time for escape will soon be past.

SWALLOW

How do we know you're not some little cocksucker in their organisation who wipes all their arses heh? Whenever they take a crap you're there with the left or right hand to give it a good scrape...I mean look at him...there's nothin' to say he's anyone important...that he's not worth blowing away right this fucking second!

Pause. It is a moment of truth. No one moves. The TALIBAN FIGHTER'S eyes move back and forth from each of his three potential executioners.

ASH

Why don't we take him with us..?

Silence.

ASH (CONT'D)

Get him back to base. Have some real intel for a change.

BLACKMORE

We can do that now...

ASH

There isn't enough time. We've got to get out of here...

SWALLOW

What...you spooked by his little bullshit story?

ASH

I think he's telling the truth. His mates are gonna get her first.

BLACKMORE

He's bluffing.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Then I am bluffing. You have nothing to worry about.

ASH

Tom...you've got to make a decision. Either we bunker down and wait or we take our chances and get the fuck out of here.

BLACKMORE

I'm well aware of the options.

ASH

Stop being so bloody scared of making a mistake...

BLACKMORE

I'm not.

Someone make a decision...
SWALLOW

Christ...
ASH

ASH picks up some straw off the floor.

We draw straws.
ASH (CONT'D)

What?
SWALLOW

Draw fucking straws..?
BLACKMORE

Oh fuck you've got to be kidding...
SWALLOW

What are you playin at Ash? Heh? This ain't no fuckin game...
BLACKMORE

I'm not kidding.
ASH

Pause.

Why not...
SWALLOW

You're agreein' to this shit? I'm in charge...
BLACKMORE

You're both sergeants Tom...
SWALLOW

No he's not! He's a fucking corporal...
BLACKMORE

Yeah but he was once a sergeant before gettin himself busted.
SWALLOW

ASH
(To SWALLOW)

You got my resume wrapped around that little snake of yours...I'm impressed...

SWALLOW
(Sanguinely)

I believe in fairness to all. Always have. Let him have his straws...

ASH
Most number of short straws we go. Long straws we stay.

BLACKMORE
Go ahead.

They are all standing. Each takes a straw. ASH pulls out his beret from his pack. He places it behind his back and places his straw in it. He then passes it to SWALLOW behind his back who does the same before passing it to BLACKMORE behind his back. It comes back to ASH who puts the beret on the kitchen table and takes each straw out very carefully. There are two broken straws.

ASH
Looks like we're going.

BLACKMORE
Let me see.

ASH
There you go...two short one long. Nothing much to it.

SWALLOW
We go then.

BLACKMORE
There's one more thing. Him...

SWALLOW
I thought it was already decided.

ASH
You bastard...want to kill him no matter what...

He's mine Ash.

SWALLOW

SWALLOW pulls out his knife.

ASH

We draw straws on him too.

Pause.

BLACKMORE

You've got to be fucking joking. He's our prisoner...what we do with him is our business.

ASH

Even if it means killing him...

BLACKMORE

Of course! We've got that right...

ASH ignores him and picks up three more straws. He grabs his beret off the table.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

If this has become a democracy, I would like to vote for my own life.

SWALLOW

Jesus Christ now I've heard everything...

BLACKMORE and SWALLOW look suspiciously at the TALIBAN FIGHTER.

ASH

Why not?

BLACKMORE

Untie him.

ASH unties the TALIBAN FIGHTER. He is given a straw. The four of them are gathered in a circle.

SWALLOW

How fuckin' cosy is this...

The cap is once again passed around. The TALIBAN FIGHTER whose back is to the audience can be seen pulling two of the straws out of the cap and breaking them. ASH notices this from and gives the TALIBAN FIGHTER a glance. He says nothing. After SWALLOW and BLACKMORE are finished, ASH takes all the straws and lays them on the table.

ASH

Three broken straws says he comes with us.

SWALLOW

Let me see...

SWALLOW rushes over to the table. He and BLACKMORE stare at each suspiciously for a second.

BLACKMORE

Tie him up again Ray.

SWALLOW

Right.

BLACKMORE

Then interrogate him in the next room.

ASH turns on BLACKMORE but says nothing. The TALIBAN FIGHTER looks around stunned. SWALLOW roughly ties his hands behind his back using plastic cuffs. The TALIBAN FIGHTER tries to knee SWALLOW to the ground. SWALLOW sidesteps him and gives him a backward leg sweep to the ground. The TALIBAN FIGHTER falls hard.

SWALLOW

Not nice.

SWALLOW picks him up, seats him, ties his hands behind his back, lifts him from his arms to a standing position. The TALIBAN FIGHTER groans with pain. SWALLOW drags him to the next room. ASH and BLACKMORE are alone.

ASH

If he roughs him up too much there's no point bringing him back with us....

BLACKMORE has lit a cigarette. He looks at ASH and blows smoke.

BLACKMORE

Really. What a shame...

ASH

We voted.

BLACKMORE

Voted?! WE DREW FUCKING STRAWS.

SOUNDS of screams.

ASH

I bet he's enjoying himself.

BLACKMORE

Well at least somebody's havin a good time. Don't ya think?

ASH

Stop it.

BLACKMORE

He knows something that he's not telling us. I can feel it.

ASH

Just like you felt that ambush back in Tikrit...

BLACKMORE

I didn't give the orders...

ASH

Nah you just follow'em like a bloody robot. Look...we have to take him back. He's no fucking freedom fighter. The guy wants out...he'll talk.

BLACKMORE

My oath he will...

SOUND of more muffled screams.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Whatever he knows...or is not telling us...I want it out of him now.

SOUND of more muffled screams.

ASH

He's going to kill him.

BLACKMORE

Not if he talks.

ASH

And once he does we shoot him anyway...

BLACKMORE

Take him back and what happens Ash? This guy so fuckin dopey he has no idea what the Yanks will do to him? He could provide a grid reference for Bin Laden's shithouse and they'd still make him suffer for his troubles. The guys fucked either way you look at it...

SOUND of the beating getting louder. The muffled screams more pitiful. ASH suddenly goes into the other room.

SWALLOW

(offstage)

What the hell?!

ASH drags the TALIBAN FIGHTER out and throws him back into his chair. SWALLOW, recovering from his shock, rushes out holding his commando knife. He squares off with ASH who does the same.

SWALLOW (CONT'D)

You're dead Ash...

ASH

C'mon then...

SWALLOW lunges for ASH who quickly realises SWALLOW means business. ASH quickly grabs his own knife from his webbing. SWALLOW makes some quick cutting and thrusting moves towards ASH who steps back. ASH stumbles and is on the floor. SWALLOW goes in for the kill.

ASH is defenceless.

BLACKMORE comes behind SWALLOW and pulls him away from his hair like some annoying child. SWALLOW resists forcing BLACKMORE to exert more pressure. He brings his other arm around SWALLOW'S throat and squeezes. SWALLOW'S knees buckle. BLACKMORE lowers him to the ground.

SWALLOW

Alright...al...alright...

BLACKMORE lets go of SWALLOW who crawls upstage coughing. He turns around and leans against the wall, chest heaving. ASH has not moved.

BLACKMORE

Fine fuckin sight...

LIGHTS. It is darkness outside. The room is illuminated by moonlight. All are isolated in their own part of the room. BLACKMORE is dozing. SWALLOW is upstairs. ASH goes up to the TALIBAN FIGHTER who is once again tied up to the chair. ASH checks his wound.

ASH

Need some morphine for that?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

You have run out. And the others are not likely to offer theirs.

ASH smiles, realising the TALIBAN FIGHTER has heard everything since they found themselves in their current surroundings.

ASH

So you got elephant ears to go with those brass balls of yours huh?

ASH pulls up a seat next to the TALIBAN FIGHTER. He pulls out a cigarette and lights one. He offers the packet with a cigarette extending out of it to him. The TALIBAN FIGHTER shakes his head. ASH takes a deep drag of his cigarette.

What's the real story?

ASH (CONT'D)

I have told you.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

No lies.

ASH

None.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Right.

ASH

Pause.

ASH (CONT'D)

How does someone like you ends up here...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Why do you care? I am your prisoner. You can do with me what you like.

ASH

A future economist becomes terrorist. You wouldn't read about it.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Then maybe you don't read enough. In our world intelligence is no barrier to faith. Our fighters are motivated by beliefs.

ASH

Except for you of course.

ASH considers the TALIBAN FIGHTER for a moment.

ASH (CONT'D)

Still a proud bastard aren't ya? Haven't let go of the West...what it gave you.

ASH takes a drag of his cigarette.

ASH (CONT'D)

Know what that makes you?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I have no doubt you will tell me.

ASH

An ungrateful bastard as well.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I earned my place in that university. No favours.

ASH

No family to lean on huh..?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

They could not afford my education.

Pause.

ASH

So what happened? Get thrown out...couldn't hack it?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Study was never a problem for me. Even with two jobs.

ASH

Fucking hated school. Couldn't wait to get out.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

You sound more intelligent than the others. Your family are educated?

ASH

Very.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

(Thinly veiled sarcasm)

And you Corporal...what made you choose this profession?

ASH

(As if talking to himself)

This profession...is like a club. A pretty exclusive one at that. Once you're in...no one can take that away from you. And we're the best at what we do. I have to admit I wasn't really doing that great on the outside...drifting from jobs...tried for Officers' School after a stint in Commandos but couldn't get in..."intelligent enough but not possessing certain necessary qualities..." Even these bastards don't know about that.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

(Dryly)

Your secret is safe.

ASH

Yeah...Blackmore's got a point. I'm not their ideal recruit...questioning everything...but I've seen guys who I know couldn't make it on civvie street and after a few years with us, walk out like they're seven feet tall.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

If they are still walking.

ASH stares hard at the TALIBAN FIGHTER for a second. He grabs the parachute insignia on the side of his combat fatigues.

ASH

People see the uniform and what it must have taken to earn it.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Here in Afghanistan you are as insignificant as anyone else. That piece of cloth will make no difference.

Pause. ASH is taken aback by the retort from the TALIBAN FIGHTER. His hand instinctively reaches for his sidearm. He places his hand on it. The TALIBAN FIGHTER notices this but says nothing.

ASH

So...what did happen with you?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Why is it important?

ASH

Cos...if somebody like you wants to kill us...somebody with options, the rest of your mob must really want their pound of flesh...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

You are a soldier. It should make no difference how badly the enemy wants to kill you...

ASH

It matters.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

You should talk to your allies then. All those drones and air strikes against suspected enemy strongholds. Does wonders for recruiting.

(MORE)

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

By your own country's estimates...for every insurgent eliminated this way, thirty, maybe forty civilians are killed. Blown to bits in their own homes.

ASH

Like this one...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

This was a peaceful village before it was destroyed in one such attack. Most of the population left fearing more attacks.

ASH

These things happen in wartime.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

A soldier can afford to say such a thing.

ASH

We don't have any say how this war should be fought. I'm just busy trying to stay alive.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

What about your friends..?

ASH

This is our second tour of this shit heap...before that Iraq. We've had friends blown up in our faces...literally. Sympathy dries up pretty quick in those conditions.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Even for each other..?

ASH

(Ruminating)

Sometimes...even for each other.

Pause.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I had a friend at university...this was after the July bombings in London. He had attended a few meetings of radical groups...went to the mosque...but had never contemplated violent action.

ASH

Of course not.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

The British security services saw it differently of course. His movements were monitored. Then one day they came to...his...our flat...SAS, MI5, doesn't really matter. They kicked the door in and said he resisted...

ASH

Where were you at the time?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Class. Where else? An enthusiastic Englishman clubbed my friend across the face with his rifle. They took him to hospital and chained him to his bed. A week later he was released...permanently blinded in his right eye.

ASH

Let me guess, wrong flat?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

No not at all. A diligent neighbour had tipped off security forces. But they found nothing.

ASH

So what happened?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

At first he could barely leave the flat, he would panic if he heard a knock on the door. One time he wet himself...he was... no longer a man who could face the world.

ASH

He should have gone to the press...perfect fodder for those bastards.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

There were already other unintended victims of your war on terror. My friend's grievance was...how you say, small change.

ASH

And because of that you came here? Bit...excessive don't you think?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

He dropped out of school...came to visit his family in Pakistan. His parents were all for the West crushing the Taliban but when they saw what they had done to their son...nothing was said. I followed him here, watched him retreat into history...as if he wanted to forget he had ever heard the English language.

ASH

So what did he find?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Everything Corporal...everything. His faith in one life was shattered and in another...completely reborn. As if it was the most natural thing to do. Eventually he went to a training camp and became a martyr.

ASH

A suicide bomber...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

It's all a matter of perspective.

ASH

Cowards mostly ...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

He found his courage...knowing he was willing to give his life.

ASH

And you followed him into the camp...ready to fight.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Yes.

ASH

Only now you want to surrender. It doesn't add up.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I am not surrendering my faith...

ASH

Only your willingness to die for it...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

This country has become overrun with mercenaries like yourself. Twice my men have been ambushed by special forces...the last was by a detachment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade...it was a pretty fair match until the Apache helicopter arrived. It might as well have been a spaceship. I watched it leisurely stalk one of our men running for cover where there was none. He burst open in a hail of gunfire that lasted only a few seconds. I could see just how frightened he was the moment before he disintegrated. The soldiers cheered...it was a cathartic moment.

ASH

We get back...you end up in a interrogation cell at Bagram. You tell the truth right away they'll still torture you for making it all too easy. Where's the fun in that? Anyhow, if you're so keen to get out, why don't you just walk back to Pakistan?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Because the chances of doing that undetected are slimmer than escaping here alive with you...a lone Taliban fighter will receive no assistance from village elders while being hunted by his own.

ASH

Your mates not so understanding..?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Let's just say with your CIA I am not bothered by the idea of some preliminary torture...as long as I know I have genuine information that will eventually stop it...

ASH

Christ...you've just redefined the meaning of optimism you know that?

SOUND of explosions. ASH and BLACKMORE hit the deck. SWALLOW comes down the stairs. Dust falls from the ceiling.

BLACKMORE

(To SWALLOW)

Well?

SWALLOW

Couldn't see a fucking thing.

BLACKMORE

(To the TALIBAN FIGHTER)

One of your mates?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

He is the last.

BLACKMORE

You sure now.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

There were four of us...

SWALLOW

And then there were none...

SWALLOW aims his gun at the TALIBAN FIGHTER.

BLACKMORE

So how many RPG'S has he got?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Enough to destroy your position. You will need to kill him first before he gets any closer.

SWALLOW aims his rifle at the TALIBAN FIGHTER.

ASH

Probably aiming for you Ray when you were spotted upstairs...

SWALLOW

I wasn't spotted.

BLACKMORE

There's no one up there now Ray. You must have been spotted.

SWALLOW

That bastard fires another round and I'll cut this one's fuckin' head off and nail it to the door. His mate can shoot at that.

BLACKMORE

Swallow...you go find him...

SWALLOW

Are you out of your fucking mind? I'd be a sitting duck! He knows where we are and we ain't got a fucking clue where he is!

ASH

Shouldn't take long to figure that out...

SWALLOW

Then why don't you go?

ASH

Fine.

BLACKMORE

No. He's already done his duty. Your turn.

SWALLOW

Why don't we just get the fuck out of here? Now!

BLACKMORE

We go out there and there's a chance all of us get it.

SWALLOW

Fuck it. Alright. Give me the goggles.

BLACKMORE says nothing.

SWALLOW (CONT'D)

I want them. I am not going out there blind.

BLACKMORE

No. You've got the moonlight. Use it to your advantage.

SWALLOW

Fuck you Tom...I don't give a rat's arse if you need them for later. There probably isn't going to be a fucking later so give me the goggles!

BLACKMORE

Just get out there Ray...finish the bastard off alright.

SWALLOW doesn't move.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

WHAT DO I HAVE TO FUCKING DO?!

ASH

Let him have them Tom.

BLACKMORE

Shut up.

ASH

I mean it. Let him have them. He'll be back.

SWALLOW

Glad you're so fucking confident.

ASH

Don't be scared Ray. Just remember, you're a trained killer.

SWALLOW puts on the night vision goggles. The stage is bathed in a translucent green. LIGHTS. SWALLOW is outside stalking his prey. LIGHTS on ASH. As he speaks, SWALLOW'S movements mimic ASH'S description.

ASH (CONT'D)

An SAS soldier is trained to move as quietly as a...ghost. Step by step. Noiseless. Not a sound or a breath can be heard. Or so the manual states. We spend months...years perfecting the technique...toe down first, pressing gently on terra firma, listening for any sound that might result from the pressure, looking for a patch of earth free of debris of any kind, natural or human, before allowing the front of the foot to make contact and then the heel would follow. Every step calculated and measured. Listening, always listening. I've seen brave, tough soldiers lose their nerves under the pressure in a combat zone...forgetting all their training, their hearts racing when they realise their next step could be their last, like when we find ourselves in a minefield. Very disconcerting for some. Ray has to feel each step in the dark. He moves his feet a little to the left and then the right before placing it down, constantly maintaining balance. Ready to shoot, kill an enemy that may have seen you first. All you can hear is your heartbeat, so loud you're convinced the whole world is listening through a stethoscope. Ray hadn't forgotten his training. Despite the nerves, the obvious danger, the fact he shouldn't have been out there...he moved...like a professional.

Pause.

ASH (CONT'D)

He was edging closer to where he would be able to see the most likely hiding spot and at the same time, expose his position. He crept stealthily towards his target. From a secure vantage point that was not totally visible to any likely hiding spot, Ray scanned the houses across the relatively tiny square of the village. He used the box method. This went on for minutes. Back and forth over the same imaginary box grids, looking for any change to what you looked at only seconds before. Nothing. Slight movements in Ray's body told me he was restless. Should he get closer? A few more steps. Don't do it Ray. Wait. No matter how quiet you are, they will sense your presence, as long as they don't know exactly where it is.

SWALLOW'S facing the audience on one knee, his head moving across from one side to the other in a methodical pattern. Suddenly he stops. He raises his weapon to a firing position.

ASH (CONT'D)

First a hand, no...just a few fingers touching the edge of a window on the upper floor. Ray waited. He was in a zone. His instincts for hunting now completely taken over. The five knuckles emerge then slowly a head rises above the window sill. Ray waits for enough to emerge. Ray watches...just another inch or two, nothing more and this person will die instantly in a barren village on the edge of nowhere, his head virtually obliterated by the round. He waited for the RPG to appear realising his nemesis might have seen him also but Ray would fire first. There it is. The body raised obscenely high as he prepares to take aim. This is too easy. Ray is about to squeeze the trigger. Suddenly the target fires first...

Ray is bathed in LIGHT.

ASH (CONT'D)

A torch is shone onto Ray's face and he is momentarily blinded. From there it was all over. The man with the torch was a spotter. The RPG that hit Ray came at ground level from another terrorist. He didn't have a chance really.

LIGHTS on a TALIBAN FIGHTER with RPG on his shoulder ready to fire. SWALLOW notices hit too late. He turns his head just before it is fired. SOUND of RPG being fired followed by a loud explosion. SWALLOW disappears from the stage.

LIGHTS on ASH and BLACKMORE. They look at each other. The TALIBAN FIGHTER is tied up to the chair his mouth gagged.

ASH (CONT'D)

Take a look.

BLACKMORE

What with? It's pitch black out there. Anyhow...he's dead.

ASH

You don't know.

BLACKMORE

For Christ's sake Ash don't be a dickhead. Course he's fuckin' dead.

ASH

You sent him out there.

BLACKMORE

What was I supposed to do? Wait till his mates blow us all to Kingdom Come?!

ASH

I don't know...

BLACKMORE

How did he let himself get killed?!

ASH

Luck never hurts. His obviously run out.

BLACKMORE

That's bullshit. All he had to do was wait. Patience. Let the bastard reveal himself.

ASH

Well he revealed himself all over Swallow...

BLACKMORE

We had to take the initiative...not wait around like sitting ducks...

Pause.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Ungag him.

ASH

What?

BLACKMORE

He know's something.

ASH hesitates.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Go on.

ASH ungags him.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

How many are out there.

ASH

He told me already. The one out there is the last...

BLACKMORE

What about the reinforcements he's been talking about...

ASH

If they'd arrived we'd be dead already.

BLACKMORE

Jeez you're a dopey cunt sometimes. Did you ever think he was lying to you?

ASH

He said nothing. I just knew...

BLACKMORE

You're kidding...what did he actually tell you?

ASH

I read his eyes alright! They didn't shift.

BLACKMORE

(Incredulous)

What are you...the Taliban fucking Whisperer?! He's a renegade bastard whose bitten the hand that feeds more than once.

He turns to the TALIBAN FIGHTER.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

How many are out there?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

He has read my eyes.

BLACKMORE grabs the TALIBAN FIGHTER viciously by his collar with both hands.

ASH

He asked you a fucking question. How many are there...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Two. There are two of them.

Pause.

BLACKMORE

Lying prick...

ASH

(Furious)

Why didn't you tell us the truth...I thought you were surrendering...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

There is no guarantee you will let me live no matter what I tell you.

BLACKMORE

Swallow is dead because of you. He didn't have a fucking chance did he? He's looking for one of you cunts and there are two of 'em out there...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

We are all taking our chances...

BLACKMORE

(To ASH)

So much for your extra sensory powers...

ASH

Alright there's two out there. What do we do now?

BLACKMORE

I'm the brains trust all of a sudden.

ASH

Stop looking for my fucking approval. You got the extra stripe. You figure it out.

BLACKMORE

Now that Swallow's dead there's no power struggle is there?

ASH

Make a decision.

BLACKMORE

Alright. We're gettin out of here.

ASH

What about him...

BLACKMORE

I'll take care of it.

BLACKMORE pulls out his sidearm and prepares to shoot the TALIBAN FIGHTER.

ASH

We agreed to bring him along.

BLACKMORE

With Swallow around it might have been possible. Makes no difference now.

ASH looks at the TALIBAN FIGHTER who is panicked.

ASH

We can still take him with us...

BLACKMORE

Give me a fucking break! We have no idea what's out there. No time to think about what he could or could not tell us.

ASH

No.

BLACKMORE

No..?

ASH

You're not going to kill him.

BLACKMORE

Alright then you do it.

Pause.

ASH

I can't...

BLACKMORE

You're not serious.

ASH

I'm not executing a prisoner. The Yanks want to kill him I couldn't give a rats. Whatever game he's been playing if he has something to offer that might make a difference then...

BLACKMORE

Don't get all moral on me Ash...

ASH

I'm not.

BLACKMORE

You've done it before and then some...

ASH

That was an accident...

BLACKMORE

Accident? You blew open the head of what was either a 12 year old kid or a very fast midget in broad fucking daylight...

ASH

We were on a mission for Christ's sake..!

BLACKMORE

Ash you're a trigger happy cunt and every asshole that's served with you knows it so stop this fucking act!

ASH

It's not an act.

BLACKMORE

Mate...whatever...the kid's dead, you're alive and Shylock here needs to collect his seventy fucking virgins!

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Shylock was Jewish.

BLACKMORE

(Venomously turning on the TALIBAN
FIGHTER)

BIG FUCKING DIFFERENCE!

ASH

We could have killed him anytime since we got here in which case we should have done it at the very beginning!

BLACKMORE

What difference does it make?!

ASH

He could be telling the truth...

BLACKMORE

Bullshit! He's already lied to us once!

TALIBAN FIGHTER

If you stay here you will not survive...

BLACKMORE

There you go! The six o'clock news!

ASH approaches the TALIBAN FIGHTER.

ASH

We can't leave you here understand...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I am ready to die.

BLACKMORE

SEE! We even have his blessing.

ASH presses his pistol to the side of the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S head.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

About time. Get it over and done with.

ASH

Count of three...unless you say stop.

The TALIBAN FIGHTER looks at ASH alarmed. He didn't anticipate this.

ASH (CONT'D)

One...

ASH cocks his weapon.

ASH (CONT'D)

Two...

ASH presses it against his temple.

BLACKMORE

More effective at the back of the neck mate...

ASH turns viciously to BLACKMORE.

ASH

Three...

BLACKMORE

FIRE!

Pause.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Stop...stop...

ASH brings his weapon down.

ASH

He's no martyr.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I can get you out of the village...without them knowing.

BLACKMORE

Yeah I'll bet you're a regular Ali Baba. And there's forty fucking thieves just waiting for us outside.

ASH

It's worth a chance.

BLACKMORE

It's worth nothing. Just like his fucking life. I'm goin...you want to die protecting this turd, go right ahead.

ASH is caught in a quandary.

ASH

We should wait it out...

BLACKMORE

I thought so initially but not now. Kill him and let's be done with it.

ASH

Look...we're at least two hours overdue back at base camp. They've got to know we're in some kind of trouble.

BLACKMORE

Our exfil RV is six hours and 20 clicks from here. No emergency call has gone out. Anyhow this was supposed to be a routine patrol...set up an OP, we sit we watch we leave. Show the Yanks we're prepared to pull a little extra weight.

ASH grabs his weapon and checks the magazine.

ASH

They want to attack in force, let' em.

BLACKMORE

Ash this isn't fucking Zulu! The natives have rockets and they bloody well know how to use them!

ASH says nothing. BLACKMORE cocks his weapon and aims it at the TALIBAN FIGHTER. ASH raises his own weapon to BLACKMORE'S stomach. The standoff doesn't last too long.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

Alright. It's over for you Ash either way. Disobeying a direct order, endangering the lives-

ASH

Oh fuck off will ya. If you make it...send me a postcard...

BLACKMORE

(Desperate)

C'mon Ash we can do this...just like the old days...if you like I'll put the gun in his hands then shoot him. But we got to get out of here.

ASH turn away. BLACKMORE realises it is pointless. He puts on his webbing, stashes extra ammunition on his body, checks his grenades. He grabs one of his grenades and hands it to ASH.

BLACKMORE (CONT'D)

If he starts to annoy you...feed him this.

ASH grabs it. He throws it back to BLACKMORE.

ASH

You'll probably need it more than I will.

BLACKMORE

(Slighted)

Suit yourself.

BLACKMORE places the grenade back on his webbing and moves towards the “main” entrance to their hideout. (This would be towards the front of the stage).

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I wouldn't go that way.

BLACKMORE tries to ignore this comment but stops anyway.

BLACKMORE

Any fucking suggestions?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Now I am useful?

ASH

(To the TALIBAN FIGHTER)

Give him an answer.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

The roof. You can access it from upstairs. It should allow you to escape as long as they are not waiting for you and...you are not spotted. It is a calculated risk.

BLACKMORE

How do I know it's not a trap?

ASH

(Exasperated)

Fuck...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Unlike yourselves...I did not come through the front door.

BLACKMORE rushes up the stairs and exits. ASH says nothing, as it dawns on him the predicament he is in.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

What if your help doesn't arrive?

ASH

Then I'm a bloody dickhead aren't I?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

What will you do?

ASH

Blackmore's probably right. Your mob will get to us first. And I'm not surrendering.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

(Soberly)

No...you will not.

Pause.

TALIBAN FIGHTER (CONT'D)

It is no matter. We have more chance or survival remaining here than trying to escape.

ASH

What are you talking about?

Pause.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

There will be no major attack.

ASH doesn't move but his whole body is filled with tension.

ASH

What?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Those two fighters still out there...they are hunting me.

ASH

Hunting you..?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Yes.

ASH

So you'd already deserted...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

I made an untidy exit from our last firefight after we were ambushed by an American airborne unit...

ASH

When did this happen..?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Two days ago.

ASH

Why did you come here?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Since the villagers left we have used it to hide supplies, weapons caches and so on.

ASH

Those two out there have access to these supplies...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

No. They are...hidden.

ASH pauses to digest all this information.

ASH

What about the car bomb?

The TALIBAN FIGHTER says nothing.

ASH (CONT'D)

You rigged it...

Pause.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

It was not meant for your men. Those out there would have used it to capture me...their deaths would have given me more time to escape.

ASH

So...you're an expert in explosives.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Reluctantly.

ASH

Did you get a degree in that?

No answer.

ASH (CONT'D)

Don't be modest. You're obviously not some run of the mill terrorist.

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Fortunes of war...your men were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

ASH

Like you now?

The TALIBAN FIGHTER does not answer.

ASH (CONT'D)

What else have you rigged for your little mates outside..?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

This village has been mined since the Russian invasion. There was no need for us to add anything...only to know where not to step.

ASH

So what happens now...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

You and I...we are still alive. All you need to do is untie me. I will show you where the weapons are located...RPG'S, heavy machine guns.

ASH

Where?

Pause.

ASH (CONT'D)

Well?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Upstairs. Underneath the floor. A hidden compartment...

ASH looks upstairs.

ASH

So that's where you were...wardrobe my arse...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

With these weapons...you will have no problem disposing of the others.

ASH

You could have told us this before...shown us these weapons...

Pause.

ASH (CONT'D)

You played all of us didn't you...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Your friends wanted to kill me...you on the other hand...

ASH

So you really are trying to surrender...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Of course.

ASH gets on one knee beside the TALIBAN FIGHTER. He pulls out the skewer from the side of his boot and grabs the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S head by the hair and pulls it back. He holds the skewer inches from his face.

ASH

No more lies...

Silence.

ASH (CONT'D)

Well?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

None.

ASH

Are you sure?

Silence. ASH waves the skewer back and forth between the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S eyes.

ASH (CONT'D)

Which one of these shall I poke out first? The real eye or the fake one?

Pause.

ASH (CONT'D)

Silence is truth heh? The Western fucking infidel takes your eye out but you still don't have the stomach for jihad? Or maybe it never happened and you just had a little accident with one of your homemade fucking bombs...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

It...happened...

ASH

Go on. Admit it, you're a pathetic little bastard.

The TALIBAN FIGHTER is shaking his head vigorously in desperation.

ASH (CONT'D)

Maybe I'll take out the good one and leave you here for your friends?

TALIBAN FIGHTER

N...NO!

ASH

Keep your fucking head still..!

ASH prepares to do it. What becomes very clear here is that ASH has done this sort of thing before and is not bluffing. He pushes the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S head further back, the skewer almost scraping the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S eyelid. The TALIBAN FIGHTER no longer resists. He starts crying and shuts both eyes as he awaits his fate. ASH halts. In frustration he stabs the skewer into the TALIBAN FIGHTER'S leg. He screams in agony but tries to control himself. ASH places his hand on the top of the pin. He considers whether to push it in deeper.

ASH (CONT'D)

I push this in just another inch...

TALIBAN FIGHTER

Please...no...

The TALIBAN FIGHTER looks at ASH imploringly, fully understanding what he might or is capable of doing. ASH realises he has broken him. He pulls the pin out and throws it across the floor. ASH then goes behind the TALIBAN FIGHTER and undoes his bindings.

ASH

Should have stayed at university...you don't belong here.

The TALIBAN FIGHTER struggles to stand up, his leg hobbled by the pain. He turns away from ASH, unable to look at him. ASH grabs his rifle.

ASH (CONT'D)

Show me this hiding spot.

The TALIBAN FIGHTER hesitates.

ASH (CONT'D)

Go on.

The TALIBAN FIGHTER walks to the entrance of the stairway. When he is out of view ASH takes his weapon and follows. He stops at the entrance aims his rifle up the stairs and fires. SOUND of a body falling. ASH checks his clip, replaces it then goes back to the table. Footsteps are heard upstairs. The door upstairs is thrown open. ASH quickly trains his rifle on the door. A hand appears momentarily through the door upstairs and lobs a grenade into the room, landing at ASH'S feet. He quickly looks down. BLACKOUT.

The Last Post is heard once more.

The End