

An RAF VC10 banks and turns on its final approach into Aden. The newly married HONOR Martin thrilled by what she sees out the window - sun, desert, mountains, sea, beach, port. The no smoking light comes on. Her husband JOE doesn't extinguish his cigarette - he'll do it in his own time.

HONOR

I could learn to smoke if you like?

He doesn't say anything.

HONOR (CONT'D)

You could teach me..

JOE

You're perfect as you are, Mrs Martin.

She remembers something - and takes a pair of white gloves out of her hand bag and puts them on.

HONOR

For the sun - mother says.

She sits up straighter for landing. A tilt of the wing - the sea out of the window.

HONOR (CONT'D)

Will there be sharks?

JOE

Yes. (A beat) And jellyfish.. And dangerous men.

She looks at him to check he's joking. He's not. He's deadpan serious. But then after a few moments there's a trace of a smile on his face and she sees that he's teasing her.. (He is and he isn't - there will be all three: sharks, jellyfish and dangerous men). He stubs out his cigarette and takes her hand.

HONOR

I'm so excited I feel I could land

He fastens his seat-belt and looks straight ahead, his thoughts on the challenges in front of him and the secret he's leaving behind as the flaps on the wings lift and the jet engines put in some more effort.

2

EXT. RAF BASE. KHORMAKSAR. DAY.

2

HONOR and JOE standing in front of a large Nissan hut which passes for the terminal. Busy. The VC10 is the weekly flight from RAF Brize Norton. The heat is profound, the sun amazing. The transport for CAPTAIN JOE MARTIN and his new wife HONOR hasn't arrived. A BOAC billboard (blue lettering on a plain white background) is behind them. It looks as though they've just stepped out of it. They're a handsome pair. Both are wearing the clothes they put on twenty three hours ago in a damp dawn in deepest Hampshire. The Jackie Kennedy suit Honor is wearing (far too much wool for Aden) gives her a whiff of glamour to go with her own and her husband's good looks. White gloves. JOE puts two small suitcases down, an unwanted admission (three weeks into marriage he really wants his wife to be impressed all of the time) that the Royal Military Police are not here to sweep them from jet plane to married quarters and their new life policing the British Empire in

This is what she does, she plays around on the edge of remarks like this. She hasn't turned. She starts digging out grapefruit segments with the knife. He goes. She opens a gin bottle and pours a big slop on her half grapefruit.

5

EXT. RMP BASE. DAY.

5

An egg is split onto the bonnet of a Military Police Land Rover. Two big white letters emblazoned on the bonnet: MP.

His sleeves are rolled up high. He stands and - taking his time and taking care - unrolls his sleeves down to the elbow. MARKHAM watches. TILBROOK watches MARKHAM watch him. TILBROOK and the two MEN leave. MARKHAM alone with his conscience. White Christmas ends and then starts again. MARKHAM goes after Tilbrook.

8 EXT. GUARD ROOM. DAY. 8

MARKHAM comes out. TILBROOK and the two MEN in a civilian saloon car with a DRIVER, engine started, ready to go. MARKHAM goes over to the jeep. He wants to say something but before he can:

*
*

TILBROOK
Not a mark on him.

The men look on at the jeep driving away and their commanding officer watching it go. ED looks into the cell through a slit window. His POV of an Arab PRISONER in stress position, fingertips against the wall, up on tiptoes, knees bent a little. He's hooded and he's hot. ED looks over at the men.

*

9 INT. GUARD ROOM. DAY. 9

Close up on PRISONER in intense discomfort in intense heat with Bing crooning and the white noise from the generator messing with his head. ED comes in quiet as a desert rat. The PRISONER knows someone else has come into the room and it's a worry. Up very close with his breathing inside the hood.

10 EXT. RAF BASE. DAY. 10

HONOR and JOE waiting in the heat. Fewer people around now. Plastic Christmas trees (freight from the plane) being loaded onto the back of an open truck. JOE shifts his weight.

The last delivery from the plane of baggage. The remaining SERVICEMEN collect their luggage. JOE turns and catches the eye of the FIRST ARAB MAN. SECOND ARAB MAN (baggage handler) says something to FIRST ARAB MAN which sounds like impatience. FIRST ARAB MAN gets into baggage truck and parks it up by the side of the terminal. The Christmas tree truck goes. JOE conscious that they're the last to be picked up. Even the Christmas trees have gone. He smiles some manufactured reassurance at his new wife and she smiles back. The FIRST ARAB MAN by the side of the terminal looking at HONOR. He's jumpy. He wants to do something - unclear what - and he doesn't want anyone to see it. Are Joe and Honor in danger?

JOE
It might be cooler inside,
darling...

She shakes her head - she's happier out here.

HONOR

I love it when you call me darling.
I don't think I'll ever get used to
it.

JOE

This isn't Aldershot, is it?

HONOR

I can't tell you how happy that
makes me.

SECOND ARAB MAN walks around the baggage truck to the driver side door. He opens the door and leans in. He takes something (we don't see what) from the glove compartment and conceals it within his clothing. FIRST ARAB MAN looks at what SECOND ARAB MAN is doing then looks back at the English couple. This could be it - his moment. He really wants to find the courage to do something. SECOND ARAB MAN, coming back round the truck, calls out an instruction and the moment passes.

11 INT. GUARD ROOM. DAY. 11

PRISONER trying to control rising panic brought on by Ed's silent presence. His breathing inside the hood. Sweat patches under his arms. ED moves in much closer to him. He looks back at the door. Nobody there.

12 EXT. BASE. DAY. 12

A fly buzzing. The stillness of the men intensifies. This is it. Nobody moves. Dual focus on the fly and on the four cards. Finally, the fly lands on the Queen of Hearts. Big reaction. The game is over. Nick has won. Back slapping all round. BAXTER oversees the handing over of winnings to NICK.

13 INT. GUARD ROOM. DAY. 13

ED stops the tape playing and then turns the generator off. PRISONER made super anxious by not knowing what ED is doing and by the silence. ED approaches the PRISONER. ED puts his hands on his shoulders - what's he doing? The PRISONER stops breathing. ED presses down on his shoulders with both hands so the prisoner is not on tiptoes anymore. Profound physical relief mixed with real fear. Slowly, slowly the PRISONER dares to straighten up his knees. MARKHAM in the doorway (unseen by ED). ED removes the hood.

MARKHAM

What are you doing?

ED

Using my imagination.

BAXTER

How would I do that, sir? A pet fly that understands English?

NICK picks up the Queen of Hearts and examines it. Nothing.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

An officer needs three things - judgement, authority. . and luck. You've got all three, sir.

NICK smiles and goes. BAXTER turns back to the men.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

I farted on her.

STONEHAM

What?

BAXTER

He always puts his money on the Queen of Hearts. I farted on her before the game; the fly was always going to choose her.

Laughter. ED peels away. BAXTER goes after him. *

BAXTER (CONT'D)

Can I ask where you're going, sir?

ED stops and looks at him without answering.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

Off base?

ED

Doing my job.

BAXTER

It's basic military police practice that we know where you are, sir.

ED goes, ignoring Baxter. STONEHAM takes a big bite of his fried egg sandwich and egg yoke spills onto his trousers. He tries to wipe it and the egg smears and spreads.

ORCHOVER

Let it dry then it flakes off.

STONEHAM grateful. NICK collects two fried egg sandwiches from the Land Rover and joins BAXTER. He gives him his fried egg sandwich.

BAXTER

We'll miss you, sir.

They watch ED walk away.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

Lieutenant Lai thwai te i s. . what's
the word?

NICK

Are you about to criticize an
officer in the presence and hearing
of another officer, Baxter?

BAXTER

The British army is the best in the
world because you trust the man
standing next to you.

15 EXT. MARRIED QUARTERS. BASE. DAY.

15

ALISON, sleeveless white dress, brown arms, pegging a white
bra to the makeshift washing line outside her door, next to a
row of grey socks. She goes inside.

15A EXT. MARRIED QUARTERS. DAY.

15A

NICK walking towards married quarters. NICK sees the bra - a
sign intended for him: husband not at home. NICK hasn't seen
MARKHAM approaching and he's almost caught with the wrong
kind of smile on his face.

MARKHAM

ED (in Arab clothes) sits with his INFORMANT. Dockers and other port workers all Arab. The INFORMANT is smoking.

INFORMANT

Egyptian ship under a Moroccan flag. The biggest shipment of arms into Aden yet.

ED

When?

INFORMANT

Unloaded last night. Land mines left the docks at dawn. Small arms and grenades are leaving as we speak.

INFORMANT

What did you say when we first met?(Arabic) Al-hoorob tuksab bil kadeeah, mush bil banadi k.
[Wars are won by deception not guns.]

*
*
*
*

ED

Wars are won by deception not guns.

INFORMANT smiles.

ED (CONT'D)

(Arabic) Lai sh mubtasi m?
[Why are you smiling?]

INFORMANT

They're British weapons left behind after Suez.

ED

We're supplying the weapons and the targets. The British Empire is eating itself and we're not even making money out of it.

INFORMANT

One thing in the shipment that isn't British. A Blindi cide Bazouka. Belgian.

ED

(Impressed) They're serious.

INFORMANT

So you'll turn a blind eye?

ED deciding. A big decision..

ED

I'd want something in exchange. Your NLF man - can you give me a name?

INFORMANT

Better than that..

He shows ED a photograph of:

INFORMANT (CONT'D)

Kadir Hakim. What's the expression you have? Putting on a show. He wants to put on a show to announce himself.

ED

What kind of a show?

INFORMANT

He sees you as a symbol of the occupation. Those are his words.

ED

Who? Who does he mean?

INFORMANT

Maybe it's the red caps you wear.

It sinks in. The RMP are a specific target.

ED

(In Arabic) Shookran.
[Thank you.]

The deal done, business over..

INFORMANT

How is your wife?

ED swerves the subject.

ED

She's fine. Your English is getting better.

INFORMANT

Thank you.

ED

I don't like it. You might say something in your sleep.

INFORMANT

Give me your hands.

ED holds his hands out. A beat.

INFORMANT (CONT'D)

You're making a mistake.

INFORMANT refolds the bottom of the sleeves of ED's garb so that the folds are tucked inwards rather than out.

INFORMANT (CONT'D)

This way the sand doesn't get into the fold. Every Arab man knows this.

A beat. ED back to Kadir Hakim's show..

ED

Kadir Hakim's show..

INFORMANT

Soon. The man you have as your prisoner..

ED lets the silence lengthen.

INFORMANT (CONT'D)
He knows. You don't have long..

18A EXT. ROAD. TURN OFF TO VILLAGE. DAY. 18A

A local truck drives along the main road. It slows and takes the turn off to a nearby village.

19 EXT. BASE. DAY. 19

ARMSTRONG studying an Arab phrase book and dictionary. He's placed himself in the hope and expectation of: YUSRA, a young Adeni woman walking past heading for the married quarters and the Markham house where she works as "the help". ARMSTRONG spots her. ARMSTRONG trying and failing to find the courage to go after YUSRA and talk to her. She looks at him and smiles and this gives him the courage to approach her.

ARMSTRONG
(In Arabic) Ahlan, kafi haalak,
anna kuai ce, issmi al-areef
Armstrong. Tony.
*[Hello. How are you? I am fine. My
name is Corporal Armstrong. Tony.]*

YUSRA amused by this then touched and serious.

YUSRA
Tony. Yusra.

ARMSTRONG
Yusra.

YUSRA smiles and goes. ARMSTRONG hopelessly in love and trying hard to hide it.

Bing Crosby faintly audible in the background. ARMSTRONG rejoins the men who are in a tight group apart from DIMARCO who is doing shuttle runs out in the heat of the day. ORCHOVER and STONEHAM watch DIMARCO.

ORCHOVER
He wanted to be in the Paras.

STONEHAM
Why isn't he?

ORCHOVER
After the first four days of
selection he was top of everything.
Fittest, sharpest, best shot..

STONEHAM
What happened?

*

ORCHOVER

He couldn't jump.

STONEHAM

He couldn't jump out the plane?

ORCHOVER

He couldn't jump off the wooden box in the gym. Frightened of heights.

BAXTER joins them. BAXTER has something to show them. He's opening his pack and getting out a small drum.

BAXTER

I don't know what the locals call it.

ARMSTRONG

Mirwas, sir. Tight skin, small, hairy.

STONEHAM

Why would Captain Page want a drum?

ARMSTRONG

To remind him of your lovely bollocks, Stoneham.

DIMARCO joins them. BAXTER hands it to DIMARCO to look at.

BAXTER

He'll get a regimental plaque for the wall - they all get that; the good ones get a heavy piss up in the Sergeants Mess and the very best? The one's you'd die for? They get something that means something. It doesn't matter what it is - it's the fact of giving it.

ORCHOVER

Best officer I've served under in twenty years.

STONEHAM nods solemnly. He worships Orchover and takes what he says very seriously.

BAXTER

Year and a half and we're all still standing.

DIMARCO riffs on the drum with his fingers - punctuation to close and underline what Baxter has been saying.

DIMARCO

The new man. What do you know about
him, Sarge?

*

BAXTER

I know his driver's late.

The terminal behind JOE and HONOR deserted now. SECOND ARAB MAN positions himself at the front of the baggage truck so that he's out of view. He takes the secreted object out from inside his clothing. A grenade. It's a grenade. He looks at it, gathering himself for what he's about to do.

HONOR takes Joe's arm which means he's under the umbrella. He allows this, even though it's not quite right (what if the driver appears and she's touching him?)

HONOR

Tell me something I don't know
about my new husband.

JOE laughs but he's uneasy about this.

JOE

Like what?

HONOR

Anything.

JOE

I'm just as you see me.

Oh no he isn't. It's clear in the abruptness of what he's just said. He kisses her to smooth over the bump.

HONOR

What if they've forgotten us?

JOE

(Almost angry) They'll be here.

HONOR

What if night comes and it's just
you and me and the desert and the
stars?

SECOND ARAB MAN taking several deep breaths. Behind JOE and HONOR FIRST ARAB MAN approaching - JOE feels him coming. He doesn't turn round. HONOR, taking her cue from him, doesn't look round either. Her arm in his. FIRST ARAB MAN is sweating and nervous. He's trying to tell them something. It's important. He keeps checking over his shoulder. HONOR and JOE have no idea what he's saying - it could be anything.

FIRST ARAB MAN

(Arabic) Intabeh, arguuk intabeh.
[Be careful. Please be careful.]

HONOR

What's he saying?

FIRST ARAB MAN repeating with urgency, voice lowered, not wanting to be overheard. HONOR repeats the last Arabic sentence. SECOND ARAB MAN coming, his hands held together in front of him holding the (hidden) grenade.

He hears HONOR speak the Arabic sentence and that FIRST ARAB MAN is right next to him.

SECOND ARAB MAN

(Arabic) Taharaku, taharaku, ab i do anhom.

[Move. Move! Get away from them.]

FIRST ARAB MAN refuses to budge. Sweating and super nervous now. His presence next to Joe and Honor is what's keeping them alive - stopping the grenade being thrown. JOE and HONOR have no idea what's going on. SECOND ARAB MAN joins his

NICK

A good officer knows everything his men are doing.

She opens the freezer compartment.

ALISON

Why didn't Ed get it? The promotion?

NICK

Don't know.

There are no ice cubes in the freezer.

ALISON

Nothing to do with me?

NICK

No.

ALISON

So you do know.

She picks up a sharp knife.

NICK

Your husband is a good officer.

ALISON

So it must be me.

She hacks at the ice stuck to the top and sides of the freezer section with the knife. A chunk of ice breaks off. It's too big to fit in her glass..

ALISON (CONT'D)

What am I going to do without you?

NICK

I think you should put some effort into being Mrs Lai thwai te.

She stops.

NICK (CONT'D)

And maybe a bit less of that..

He looks at her drink.

ALISON

Don't do that. Not now - so late in the bloody day.

She tries to jam the ice in, the glass cracks, her thumb is cut. Blood.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Can we? One more time? Please.

She puts a record on. Ketty Lester Love Letters. She leans in very close to him as they dance. Her hand and her cheek on his chest next to his heart.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Promise me you'll be safe.

NICK
I can't do that.

ALISON
Promise me anyway.

NICK
I promise.

23 EXT. VILLAGE. DAY. 23

The local truck arriving. VILLAGERS being ushered into their dwellings by INSURGENTS. INSURGENTS unloading a crate.

24 EXT. VILLAGE. DAY. 24

INSURGENTS open the crate. A whole range of weapons including the Belgian Blindi cide bazouka.

25 EXT. ROAD. DAY. 25

ARMSTRONG driving. He looks at his watch. He's really late. Foot down. Bumpy road. Foot down despite the bumps.

26 EXT. VILLAGE. DAY. 26

INSURGENTS unpacking weapons. INSURGENT sentries with rifles outside. The two ARAB MEN from the RAF base approaching on bicycles. A group of INSURGENTS go towards them. The men stop. The INSURGENTS speak with the SECOND ARAB MAN, who says something and points at the FIRST ARAB MAN. The INSURGENTS shove the FIRST MAN to the ground and make sure he stays there. It doesn't look good for him. A shout. A man approaches. This is KADIR HAKIM. He has natural authority. The INSURGENTS back away from the FIRST ARAB MAN who looks up at KADIR HAKIM. KADIR HAKIM stands and looks at the FIRST ARAB MAN with what looks like infinite regret. He puts his hand on FIRST ARAB MAN'S shoulder, a gesture of reassurance or even kindness. Then he takes a pistol from under his clothing and, without fuss or hesitation, shoots him in the head.

34 EXT. MARRIED QUARTERS. DAY. 34

MARY Markham (on her way in) heavily pregnant and carrying a plastic Christmas tree, passes NICK (on his way out) at the entrance. GEORGE MARKHAM, age 6, insisting on dragging a second tree in all by himself. MARY looks at NICK.

NICK

I was just taking a last look at
the desert - from the roof.

She nods. MARY knows he's lying. He nods. He goes. She watches him go.

35 EXT. LAITHWAITE FLAT. DAY. 35

ALISON, towel wrapped around her, opens the door to MARY.

ALISON

My fourth shower of the day.
Sometimes I think it's all I do.
Sweat and wash.

MARY clocks the gin bottle. Not all...

MARY

Perspire and ablute.

ALISON

Mmmm?

MARY

The men do the sweating and the
washing.

ALISON stares at the Christmas tree. A woman on the edge.

ALISON

What would any of us do without
you?

MARY

Are you all right, Alison?

ALISON

The walls used to sweat. Do you
remember? In Hong Kong. We'd sit
and watch the water running down
the walls.

So no then, she's not all right.

MARY

We all think he should have got it.

ALISON

Hmm?

MARY

Ed - promotion.

Alison laughs. That's not it. She thinks that's it..

MARY (CONT'D)

So it'll be hard for him with the new man. He'll need your support.

ALISON nods (all right let her think that's the thing that's breaking her heart in two) and then smiles and then nods again. MARY holding the Christmas tree.

MARY (CONT'D)

This is for you and Ed.

MARY knows. She knows everything.

36

INT. MARKHAM'S OFFICE. BASE. DAY.

36

ED in with MARKHAM. MARKHAM moves the photograph of Kadir Hakim around on his desk.

MARKHAM

What did your man say?

ED

He's the charismatic leader they've all been waiting for. And to announce himself to the world it's us Redcaps he's after.

ED picks up the picture of Kadir.

*

MARKHAM

That's every day in Aden, Ed. What would you have me do? Send the whole unit out on night patrol and not give Captain Page a send off because your source has a feeling in his waters?

ED

Give me permission to interview the prisoner. My source says..

MARKHAM

My orders are to leave him to stew. Talking to these people without softening them up doesn't work.

ED

How would we know that? Has it ever been tried?

MARKHAM looks at him.

ED (CONT' D)
You're obeying orders.

GEORGE
Mrs Laitwaite. What's the
difference?

MARY
Hmm?

GEORGE
Between fairies and angels.

MARY
Angels are men.

GEORGE
No, they're not.

MARY
Ask daddy.

Daddy! MARKHAM at the door.

GEORGE
You do it, daddy. Mummy can't
reach.

Daddy - the returning hero - will do it. Mummy can't reach.
Mummy is good at hiding the small part of her that resents
this. MARKHAM is distracted - not ready for this home stuff.

MARKHAM
You do it.

GEORGE
I can't.

MARKHAM
Yes, you can.

GEORGE
(Close to tears - not being able to
do what his father says he can do
is too tough) I can't.

GEORGE does as he's told. MARKHAM calls Mary out on why she's being/looking concerned for him.

MARKHAM (CONT'D)
What is it?

MARY
Nothing.

MARKHAM
Not nothing, Mary. Tell me.

MARY
The number he wants on the back of his football shirt for Christmas..

MARKHAM
I don't understand.

MARY
Have you tried sewing a number eight?

MARKHAM
Is that it? Is that all?

She nods because she's a good wife and she's married to a man with a stressful job who needs all her support and this deeply domestic problem has eased the strain.

MARY
And you?

MARKHAM
I'm fine.

39 EXT. RAF BASE. DAY.

39

ARMSTRONG jumps out of the Land Rover, marches round in front of JOE and HONOR and salutes, stamping his foot.

ARMSTRONG
Corporal Armstrong. Sir.

HONOR smiling a bit - knowing she shouldn't, but unable to stop herself - at her husband being saluted.

JOE
You're late, Armstrong.

ARMSTRONG
Sir yes sir sorry sir.

HONOR
Hello, Armstrong.

She takes off her sunglasses. A bit of a move this - suddenly her eyes and then a smile too. A dazzle. She knows how to do this stuff. Not good for Joe - she's undermining him in his first contact with one of the men.

JOE
Why?

ARMSTRONG
Sir?

JOE
Why are you late?

ARMSTRONG
The war doesn't stop, sir, at anyone's convenience, sir.

JOE
Are you being facetious?

ARMSTRONG
I don't know sir.

JOE
It's a yes or no answer, Corporal.

ARMSTRONG
It is if you know what facetious means, sir.

HONOR bites her lip so as not to laugh. ARMSTRONG sees it. Pretends not to. He puts the cases into the Land Rover.

JOE
Don't do that, darling.

HONOR
What?

JOE
He needs to know that lateness won't be tolerated by me.

HONOR
What did I do?

JOE
You took your sunglasses off.

Here comes ARMSTRONG. HONOR puts her sunglasses back on.

GEORGE comes in and looks on at his father transforming himself from day time glamorous to evening glamorous. He eyes up his red cap. MARY comes in and smiles. GEORGE goes.

MARKHAM

What would you like for Christmas?

MARY

I'd give anything for a wet week-end in Haslemere.

Downstairs Alison is playing Love Letters again.

MARKHAM

That song again. You'd think she'd get tired of it.

MARY comes and rests her head against his shoulder. They shadow shuffle a few half dance steps inside a square foot of floor - memory, their history, like the echo of a dance they had a hundred years ago.

MARY

MARY (CONT'D)

fan speed high until he goes to bed then turn it down to the second slowest speed; bed time is straight after Uncle Bill on BFBS. Two puffs on his asthma inhaler. Don't forget to tell Corporal Stoneham all of this... It's important. And Green Teddy needs his pyjamas on for bed.

They smile at this and her list. The warmth between them enables MARKHAM finally to tell her a little of what he's feeling - deep ambivalence about obeying orders and whether there's a difference between rules and morality.

MARKHAM

Ed Laitwaite took the hood off a prisoner today.

She wants to say the right thing but she won't risk it until she knows what he thinks..

MARKHAM (CONT'D)

I had to put it back on.

41 INT. MARKHAM FLAT. HALL. DAY.

41

MARY kisses GEORGE (playing with his motors) good-night. Green Teddy in his lap.

MARY

Good night, lovely boy. Good night Green Teddy.

GEORGE

You smell nice, Mummy.

She smiles and goes. Softness and loveliness.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Fucking nice.

Back to his motors.

42 INT. MARKHAM FLAT. DAY.

42

MARKHAM and STONEHAM (just arrived) by the door.

MARKHAM

Two targets for tonight, Corporal.

STONEHAM

Sir.

MARKHAM

Number one - a haircut. Short and sensible.

(MORE)

Number two - a new favourite
footballer. It has to be a winger
so there's a number eleven or a
number seven on his back.
Achieve these and I'll get you
mentioned in dispatches. Good lad.

MARKHAM goes. STONEHAM takes a deep breath and turns to the
tasks ahead.

He stands and heads out, stopping before leaving.

(MORE)

ED (CONT'D)
If something happens. . . Your
conscience, sir. . .

MARKHAM Looking long and hard at the hood. A beat. Slowly,
the PRISONER turns his head to look at Markham. MARKHAM
hasn't moved. Will he replace the hood?

*
*
*

44 EXT/INT. SERGEANTS MESS. DAY. 44

Crates of beer being delivered for the Nick Page farewell. ED
smoking and pacing.

ORCHOVER
On duty tonight, sir?

ED smiles enigmatically.

45 EXT. ROAD. SEA. DAY. 45

HONOR wearing a head-scarf - a bit of Audrey Hepburn in with
the Jackie K - holding it on as they drive.

HONOR
She sells sea shells on the sea
shore. The sea shells that she
sells are sea shells she's sure.
Joe. . . ?

JOE shakes his head. He doesn't want to play.

HONOR (CONT'D)
We were playing it on the plane.

Honor's not getting this right, how to be with other ranks.

HONOR (CONT'D)
You couldn't get it, could you,
darling? Not at all. Not even
slowly. . .

JOE doesn't like this.

HONOR (CONT'D)
(Arabic) Intabeh.
[Be careful.]

ARMSTRONG looks at her in the mirror, struck.

ARMSTRONG
You speak Arabic?

HONOR
No. The man at the airport kept
telling us the same thing. (Arabic)
Intabeh, arguuk intabeh.
(English) Such a beautiful language.

ARMSTRONG glances at her in the mirror.

HONOR 4r. . 7hNT' D)

ALISON
Brigadier Christmas.

ED sees the sprig of heather on the side. She sees that he's seen this.

ALISON (CONT'D)
Captain Page came to say goodbye.
Which says a lot about him, don't
you think?

MARY

He brought me a sprig of heather.
Such a charmer. Did he come and see
you too?

ALISON smiles and nods and looks at the heather.

MARY (CONT'D)

And there was me thinking I was the
special one.

49 INT. SERGEANTS MESS. DAY.

49

BAXTER finishes a beer. ED walks in.

ED

(To Baxter) I don't want you
drinking tonight.

BAXTER

Too late.

ED hasn't seen MARKHAM.

*

MARKHAM

The whole unit is on the base; the
base is secure..

ED thinking, not really listening.

ED

Yes, sir.

MARKHAM

The best officers know when to
switch off, Ed.

ED

Yes, sir.

Damn. He shouldn't have said that.. An implied suggestion
that Ed is not the best.. ED goes.

50 INT. LANDING OUTSIDE LAITHWAITE FLAT. DAY.

50

ALISON slips out. She's had a lot to drink.

51 INT. NICK'S (MARTIN) FLAT. DAY.

51

ALISON lets herself in.

- 52 INT. NICK'S (MARTIN) FLAT. BEDROOM. DAY. 52
- ALISON gets into Nick's bed. As close as she can get to the loved one. She can hear singing from the Sergeant's mess - For He's a Jolly Good Fellow. She puts her face into the pillow, smelling him on it.
- 53 EXT. BASE / ENTRANCE CHECKPOINT. DAY. 53 *
- The Land Rover driving into the base. The excitement of arrival. HONOR sitting up very straight.
- HONOR
Say it for me, Armstrong.
- ARMSTRONG
Ma'm.
- HONOR
The Arabic. Say "Welcome to Aden" again.
- ARMSTRONG
(Arabic) Intabeh.
[Be careful.]
- 54 OMITTED 54
- 55 INT. GUARD ROOM. DAY. 55
- ED comes in. The PRISONER is not wearing the hood. *
- ED
So..
- The PRISONER looking at Ed's watch. ED sees this and tries to read what it might mean. The PRISONER seems jumpy.
- 56 INT/EXT. DWELLING/VILLAGE. DAY. 56
- INSURGENTS and KADIR HAKIM (all armed) leaving on a mission.
- 57 INT. JOE AND HONOR'S MARRIED QUARTERS. DAY. 57
- JOE shown in by ARMSTRONG who stands there awkwardly, waiting to be dismissed. JOE remembers about dismissing him.
- JOE
Thank you, Corporal.
- HONOR waits. She folds her arms. She's waiting for something. JOE grasps what it is. He picks her up and carries her across the threshold. He puts her down.

GEORGE
He's got long hair.

STONEHAM
Yes. . . .

One step forward two steps back.

GEORGE
What number is he?

STONEHAM
Seven. Sometimes eleven.

Stoneham under pressure. He needs this haircut to happen.

STONEHAM (CONT'D)
Have you ever been up on the roof
at night?

GEORGE
No.

STONEHAM
What do you think you might see?

George connects the roof with:

GEORGE
The stars!

Bingo. Exactly what Stoneham has been seeking to elicit.

STONEHAM
How about I cut your hair while you
look at the stars?

The haircut is on. They'll do it on the roof.

62 EXT. SCRUB JUST OUTSIDE THE PERIMETER. DUSK. 62

KADIR HAKIM moving to a more advanced position closer to the base. He finds the perfect cover he knows is there and settles himself. Laying low as dusk starts to fall. Other INSURGENTS make their moves to more forward positions.

63 EXT. GUARD ROOM/SCRUB JUST OUTSIDE THE PERIMETER. DUSK. 63

ED outside smoking intensely. KADIR HAKIM takes a look through his rifle sight. The shot could be on. He settles himself. ED stubs out his cigarette and goes back inside.

64 INT. GUARD ROOM. NIGHT. 64

ED takes his watch off and places it on the table. PRISONER making a big effort not to look at it. Then he just has to glance at it. ED's thought. Might it be that this man doesn't want to be here because he knows the base is going to be attacked? ED stands up quickly and ushers the PRISONER by the arm outside.

65 INT/EXT. MARKHAM FLAT. ROOF. NIGHT. 65

GEORGE and STONEHAM about to go out onto the flat roof.

STONEHAM

Promise me you won't tell your Dad.

GEORGE smiles, from somewhere beneath a huge, red cap. Out they go - the roof, the night sky, the stars. There's a chest high wall around the roof.

66 EXT. BASE. NIGHT. 66

JOE heading for the mess. A big moment ahead. KADIR HAKIM'S POV through his rifle sight. JOE's route takes him behind a building and out of the shot.

67 EXT. BASE. NIGHT. 67

PRISONER'S high anxiety as ED takes him round the back of the guardroom. He REALLY wants to get back inside. ED looks out at the desert. Sounds of raucousness from the mess. ED worried and alone.

ED

What's happening?

He's super intense and focused here. Both men are breathing fast.

ED (CONT'D)

What's happening?

MARKHAM on his way to the mess, sees this.

MARKHAM

What are you doing? Lieutenant
Lai thwai te. . WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU
DOING? Why is he out here?

PRISONER has wet himself.

MARKHAM (CONT'D)

Return this prisoner now to the
guardroom.

(MORE)

Then get yourself to the Sergeant's
Mess and start behaving like a

MARKHAM is going to bugger the party right up.

MARKHAM (CONT'D)

At twenty two hundred hours I'm retiring to my married quarters - from where I have to report I will be unable to see or hear anything.

Smiles all round.

MARKHAM (CONT'D)

Captain Page. .

NICK

Sir?

MARKHAM

I'm giving you the choice. Late night cribbage and cocoa with me or an evening not playing cribbage and not drinking cocoa. .

Laughter. . Then an effortless change of gear into what is his heartfelt farewell to Nick.

MARKHAM (CONT'D)

. . in the company of the men with whom you have shared sixteen months of danger, fear, sweat, bad jokes, mutual respect, collective courage and an experience neither you nor they will ever forget.

Everyone moved. NICK really is loved. JOE looks on. ED looks on at JOE looking on.

72

INT. LAITHWAITE FLAT. NIGHT.

72

All the WIVES together. HONOR brought in by ALISON. All the WOMEN turn to look at her. She straightens her skirt. Self conscious Jackie K.

HONOR

Wool in Aden. . .

MARY looks at her.

MARY

Your MFO boxes haven't arrived. .

HONOR smiles.

MARY (CONT'D)

None of my dresses fit. You can have them all while I'm so enormous.

HONOR looks at the profoundly 1950's maternity dress MARY is wearing. ALISON catches her eye; their amusement is shared. They're going to be friends these two.

73 INT/EXT. SERGEANTS MESS. NIGHT. 73

NICK is presented with the drum. He feigns surprise.

74 EXT. SCRUB JUST OUTSIDE THE PERIMETER. NIGHT. 74

KADIR HAKIM looking at the base. Two INSURGENTS bring up the bazouka. They start positioning it for a shot at the mess.

75 INT/EXT. SERGEANTS MESS. BASE - CONTINUOUS 75

A cheer. NICK stands on a chair. He's holding the drum under one arm and a plaque in the other hand. JOE listening and looking round at the rapt men in the room.

NICK

I can't begin to put into words what it has meant to me to serve with all of you. So I won't. Except to say that I have been guided in everything I've done by what some army officers call respect for their men, others call comradeship but which I have no hesitation in describing as love.

That's a big word and this is 1965 but it's the only word that will do and the men listening to Nick know it and how moved they are is reflected in the steadiness of the silence.

76 EXT. ROOF. NIGHT. 76

STONEHAM cutting GEORGE's hair.

STONEHAM

Done.

Haircut done. GEORGE doesn't like it. He puts the red cap on. STONEHAM reaches for the stars as a distraction technique:

STONEHAM (CONT'D)

Even the nearest star is billions of miles away but it feels like you can reach up and touch it..

Big mistake.

GEORGE

Up on the wall and I could touch it.

77 INT/EXT. SERGEANTS MESS. BASE. NIGHT. 77

ED by the door. JOE tries to make friends.

JOE
Lai thwai te? Captain Martin.

ED
Call me Ed. Captain.

JOE
Not a drinking man?

ED
Not tonight.

MARKHAM looks at his watch. 2200. Time to go. He slips out.

78 EXT. ROOF. NIGHT. 78

GEORGE trying to jump up onto the wall. He can't do it.

GEORGE
Lift me up like Daddy does.

79 EXT. SCRUB JUST OUTSIDE THE PERIMETER - CONTINUOUS 79

The drum beating. Faster and faster. The bazooka is ready. The INSURGENTS look to KADIR HAKIM for the nod to fire. KADIR HAKIM looks up at the roof as a red cap appears. Slowly, he pulls his rifle round. He wants this shot. He gestures for the two INSURGENTS with the bazooka to wait. This is the one. This is his red cap.

80 INT/EXT. SERGEANTS MESS. NIGHT. 80

ORCHOVER and NICK on a table each in a kind of Cossack dance off. Drum banging, boots on the ground stamping out the rhythm, tables slapped. Faster, faster, faster.

81 EXT. SERGEANTS MESS. NIGHT. 81

MARKHAM comes out, checks his watch and smiles.

82 EXT. SCRUB JUST OUTSIDE THE PERIMETER - CONTINUOUS 82

KADIR HAKIM looks through the rifle sight. We see GEORGE's head (red cap on) in the cross-hairs. The noise from the mess. KADIR HAKIM holds his concentration. Settled for the shot.

STONEHAM

Don't tell your Dad we borrowed it.

88 INT. BEDROOM. MARKHAM FLAT. NIGHT. 88

STONEHAM puts his own red cap on the peg in the wardrobe where Markham's belongs.

89 INT. BATHROOM. LAITHWAITE FLAT. NIGHT. 89

ALISON staring at the mirror. MARY comes in.

MARY

The door was open.

ALISON

I'm pregnant. It's not Ed's.

MARY

Alison..

ALISON

I'm going to tell him.

MARY

Such close relationships we make in Army life. And they matter so much, don't they? At the time. But we pack up and we move on. And we forget. Because we have to.

ALISON turns and looks at MARY.

MARY (CONT'D)

In the morning he'll be gone. And your baby belongs to Ed.

89A EXT. MARRIED QUARTERS. NIGHT. 89A

Fireworks over the married quarters.

89B EXT. BASE. MORNING. DAY TWO. 89B

Sunrise over the base.

90 INT. BARRACKS. BASE. MORNING. 90

Dormitory. Spartan. ARMSTRONG in his bunk practising an Arabic phrase. Repeated. The call to prayer outside. Repeated.

YUSRA walking to work. ARMSTRONG loitering with intent. He falls in with YUSRA as she walks.

ARMSTRONG

(Arabic) Lamma ashooofak afrah.
[Seeing you makes me happy.]

He gives her an envelope (it contains a love letter). She

The British Embassy is redeveloped.
The possible sites are put off, we leave.
Once the roads and the schools and
workily enough to make us. And
what we've given to parts of the
None of us should apologise for
MARKHAM (CONT. D)

talked to him.
at him. MARKHAM knows ED is a blowout and he has a dog at
They walk past the union rack on the sidewalk. ED won't look

out of sight after all.
MARKHAM

ED and MARKHAM walk and talk.

INT. BASE. MORNING.

... and then carries on shaving.

I would've told you.
HOOPER (CONT. D)

JOE stops shaving for a moment.

secrets.
When I asked you if you had any
HOOPER

a thrilling, romantic brilliant edge.
somebody personal and knowing that she's allowed in on it is
everyday, so normal) is exciting to her and seeing him do
newness of their relationship is such that him shaving (so
HOOPER in the door to the bathroom watching JOE shave. The

INT. MARTIN EGAT. MORNING.

sounds like you had a good time.
MARKHAM

MARKHAM fumbles his son's hair.

I got shot in the head.
GEORGE

Yes?
MARKHAM

Da-da-da.
GEORGE

Yes?
MARKHAM

ED

What's the longest conversation you've had with anyone in Aden who was born here? Have you had the courtesy or the curiosity or the imagination to ask anyone if they agree with you?

This is borderline insubordination. MARKHAM hesitates.

ED (CONT'D)

(Quietly, sorry) They hate you and everything you stand for.

MARKHAM

"You"? It's "us", Ed. We wear the same uniform.

Here comes NICK. He spent the night in the mess and it shows.

MARKHAM (CONT'D)

We all trust each other because we live by the same rules.

*

95

INT. MARTIN FLAT. MORNING

95

JOE looks at HONOR in her woolen suit.

JOE

You should wear what Mrs Markham has lent you.

HONOR

Darling, they're..

JOE

She'll be offended if you don't. And you're beautiful whatever you wear.

HONOR

Alison said she'd help me out with..

She waves her arm at the empty flat.

HONOR (CONT'D)

.. everything.

JOE

Lieutenant Laitwaite is.. a Lieutenant. Below me in rank.

HONOR

So..

JOE
What if I have to order him to do
something he doesn't want to do? It
won't help either of us if my wife
and his wife are friends.

She's hurt by his sharpness. She smiles bravely.

HONOR
Where will you be today?

JOE
Out on patrol.

HONOR
I won't make you lunch, then?

JOE kisses her on the cheek on his way out. HONOR looks around her. She digs around in her suitcase and pulls out a pair of marigold rubber gloves. JOE hasn't gone. He stands at the door and looks at her, arguing with himself as to whether he's done the right thing marrying this woman.

96 INT. MARTIN FLAT. MORNING. 96

HONOR in rubber gloves cleaning in her Jackie K suit. The music from the Laithwaite flat. That song again. She listens. She takes the gloves off.

97 EXT. BASE. MORNING. 97

JOE, a private moment - getting himself together before meeting the men - outside the briefing tent. He hasn't seen ORCHOVER approaching.

ORCHOVER
The one you need to win over is

A beat. NICK slightly wrong-footed.

JOE (CONT'D)
(Sotto) Has Lai thwai te got hi s wi fe
under control?

BAXTER joins them.

BAXTER
(To NICK) It's time, sir.

98 INT. LAI THWAITE FLAT. MORNING.

98

ALISON standing in the middle of the room, very still, doing nothing, living the departure of Nick as she knows it will be happening. She's not looking out of the window. A knock at the door. She goes quickly to the door. She's hoping for a last farewell. It's HONOR.

99 EXT. BASE. MORNING.

99

NICK being driven off the base sitting on the bonnet of Land Rover and banging on his drum as the men cheer and wave him out. STONEHAM on the verge of tears. ORCHOVER comes and stands beside him. ED isn't there.

INT. LAI THWAITE FLAT. MORNING.

ARMSTRONG

Scotch.

NICK affects his innocence.

NICK

Blimey.

ARMSTRONG stops. They're a few yards from the turn off down through the village. ARMSTRONG's shorts are wet with whisky.

NICK (CONT'D)

Stick them on the bonnet. They'll be dry in two minutes.

ARMSTRONG gets out of the LANDROVER, looks about him - nobody around - and takes his gun belt off and then his shorts off. He lays his shorts flat on the bonnet, then steps away from the Land Rover to look at the landscape.

ARMSTRONG

It is beautiful, sir. This place.

He turns back just as NICK slides across into the driver seat and roars off down the road towards the village leaving ARMSTRONG alone and shortless. His POV of a waving and laughing NICK in the Land Rover. NICK stops. ARMSTRONG walks towards him. When he gets within a few yards, NICK accelerates away, hooting with laughter.

103A EXT. VILLAGE. DAY. CONTINUOUS.

103A

As NICK drives into the village ARMSTRONG sees a flash of metal in the sunlight and in that moment the fear that was in his gut earlier, the half felt sense of danger is fully felt and he tries to call out but his shout is too late and strangled for NICK to hear.

ARMSTRONG

COME BACK, SIR.

Two beats. ARMSTRONG's POV of the LAND ROVER on the far side of the village. Bang. An explosion. ARMSTRONG grabs his pistol from the gun belt on the ground (a panicked fiddle this) and starts running towards the explosion.

104 EXT. BASE. MORNING.

104

ED alone by the perimeter fence - looking out, listening intently. Is that gunfire? Was that an explosion?

105 EXT. VILLAGE. MORNING.

105

ARMSTRONG sprinting into the village with his pistol drawn. He comes round a corner and stops.

INSURGENTS firing (pointlessly, gleefully) into the blown up Land Rover wreckage. ARMSTRONG's been seen. He turns and runs for his life.

106 OMITTED 106

107 EXT. OUTSIDE VILLAGE. MORNING. 107

ARMSTRONG dives behind a rock. He peeks out. INSURGENTS coming his way. ARMSTRONG runs. An INSURGENT moves twenty yards to the side, changing his line/angle of sight. ARMSTRONG running. INSURGENT shouts. ARMSTRONG hears it. Flat out. He comes to an incredibly steep slope of scree - almost sheer. He looks back. The INSURGENTS coming. He has no choice. Like a fell runner down the steepest fell he goes for it down the slope. Half running, half bouncing. INSURGENTS running towards the top of the slope. ARMSTRONG almost at the bottom, loses control of his descent and he's falling fast the last fifty yards. He hits the bottom. His ankle very badly injured. He crawls fast along the narrow valley at the bottom and behind a rock. INSURGENTS arrive at the top. Their POV. Nothing. ARMSTRONG in serious pain. Breathing very fast and trying not to shout out with the agony he's in. He gets control of his breathing.

108 EXT. DESERT. DAY. 108

ARMSTRONG crawling. He's close to exhaustion. The heat. He looks back at his ankle. It's hugely swollen and the pain is profound. He puts his face in the dirt. Is he giving up? He lifts his face and there a hundred yards ahead up the valley side is what looks like a small shelter in the rock. He forces himself to get going again.

109 EXT. SHELTER. DESERT. DAY. 109

ARMSTRONG dragging himself up to the shelter. He crawls inside. He pulls himself round onto his back and props his back against the wall so that he's facing the door. He looks down at his pistol held in his lap. He passes out. A chopper passes over head.

110 EXT. BASE. DAY. 110

JOE waiting to address the men. MARKHAM looks over as BAXTER approaches JOE and says something quietly to him. More information on what has happened as it comes in. The look on Joe's face.

JOE half way through addressing his new men in what has become the hardest speech he will ever have to make.

JOE

RAF recon are saying it's a single Land Rover. It's burnt out. It's our job to find the people who did this. These are the moments our training is designed to deal with.

The camera goes round the faces. STONEHAM struggling. ORCHOVER seeing this.

STONEHAM

Sir? Is it them?

JOE

Captain Page and Corporal Armstrong should have been at the airfield two hours ago.

JOE

The men are all finding this hard.
It's pretty vital that we officers
keep our emotions under control.

ED stares at JOE. Where to begin. . DIMARCO picks up half of
Nick's drum and stares at it, uncomprehendingly and then

STONEHAM

He's not dead.

ED

They've taken him..?

ORCHOVER increasingly nervous.

JOE

Radio back to base. I want a search party out now.

ORCHOVER

Sir, I think we should move out. We're sitting ducks..

JOE

We're not finished here.

117 EXT. VILLAGE. DAY.

117

The corpse wrapped in a ground sheet being loaded onto a Land Rover. ORCHOVER looking about him, nervous. JOE watching, overseeing the removal of Page's body. The lifting of the body into the Land Rover.

JOE

Steady.

Done. They're ready to go. JOE takes his time. He gets into the lead Land Rover. A pause. He straightens his headgear. Finally, he nods for the cortege to move off.

JOE (CONT'D)

Slower.

Really? Bloody hell. STONEHAM slows down.

JOE (CONT'D)

Slower.

STONEHAM slows to a crawl.

JOE (CONT'D)

We take our dead with us and we do it with dignity. I want them all to know what the British Army is made of.

The convoy crawls out of the village at 4 mph. Not one of the soldiers looking anywhere other than straight ahead. The sound of a Singer sewing machine.

118

INT. MARKHAM FLAT. DAY.

118

MARY sewing a number seven on the back of a Manchester United

121 INT. LAITHWAITE FLAT. DAY. 121

Ketty Lester. ED comes in. ALISON sitting very still. VERY still. ED goes over to her. His hand comes up a quarter of the way towards her shoulder. A tiny but discernible flinch. He withdraws his hand. He stands beside his wife with both hands down by his sides.

122 INT. MARKHAM FLAT. DAY. 122

MARKHAM trying to write a letter of condolence to Nick's family. That song again.

MARKHAM

Can you get her to stop playing that bloody song. Sorry. Sorry. I can't write this..

MARY

Where do they live?

MARKHAM

Sancreed. The toe end of Cornwall.

MARY

We've been there. The sheep in the churchyard. Do you remember?

MARKHAM

He was their only son. It will kill them, Mary. Help me.

MARY feels a twinge. She ignores it. Her husband needs her.

MARY

Dear Mister and Mrs Page..

The pain from what might be the beginning of a small contraction. She controls her breathing, comes through the pain, and resumes her duties:

MARY (CONT'D)

It is with great sadness that I write to you..

123 INT. MARTIN FLAT. DAY. 123

JOE comes in. HONOR has made a huge effort to look fragrant and lovely for her husband's return. She stands. This couldn't be more inappropriate. He doesn't register her fragrant loveliness.

JOE

I'm afraid the honeymoon is over.

He looks at her. His wife, for better and for worse. A long beat. He barely knows her..

JOE (CONT'D)

We barely know each other.

ALISON's pain - a stifled, strangled howl. She manages to keep it silent. Then MARY bends over - the pain of a full blown contraction kicking in - and manages to keep almost silent a long, low moan. The men all turn and look at the three women. HONOR looks about her for her husband.

126 EXT. BASE / ENTRANCE CHECKPOINT. DAY. 126

JOE looks at the Union Jack being lowered to half mast.

127 EXT. BASE / ENTRANCE CHECKPOINT. DAY. 127

JOE approaching the perimeter just along from the main gate. He looks out at the desert and contemplates the scale of the task ahead. Is that a figure? Out there in the shimmering heat is that a person walking? Is Joe seeing things? The figure gets closer. The Lawrence of Arabia shot. As he comes into view Joe can see that the figure is limping and that he's using a stick and then, finally, that the figure coming towards him is Corporal Armstrong.

JOE
(To himself) Armstrong...
(Shouted) Armstrong.

ARMSTRONG approaches and stands (after a fashion, given his physical condition) to attention.

JOE (CONT'D)
You're late.

ARMSTRONG
Sir yes sir.

JOE
Very late.

ARMSTRONG
Yes sir.

JOE
Welcome home.

ARMSTRONG fighting back tears of relief. He salutes to stop himself from crying. JOE returns the salute.