

SCRIPT TITLE

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EXT. NEIGHBOURHOOD PARK-DAY

Two young parents watch as their boy runs around a park. The boy is playing with their dog. The parents are drinking coffee on a bench talking when there is shouting. They see the boy has fallen and is having a seizure. SLOW MOTION.

The parents run to him and kneel beside him as the dog lays by his side.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM-NIGHT

A man (PETER, WHITE, EARLY 30'S) wakes in a startled gasp. Sits up quickly in bed, drenched in sweat. A woman (SARAH, WHITE, ALSO EARLY 30'S) beside him is startled awake.

SARAH

What is it? Are you ok?

Peter struggles to gain his bearings.

PETER

Yeah- yeah. I'm ok. Just a bad dream.

Sarah rolls back over and settles back in.

SARAH

Again?

Peter gets up and changes his shirt to the light of the bathroom.

PETER

Yeah... again.

Closing the bathroom door he exits and walks down the hall. He pushes open a door quietly revealing a toddler resting comfortably in his bed. He watches him sleep for a moment and continues on to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN- NIGHT

Peter opens the fridge and grabs a bottle of water and guzzles it. He leaves the fridge open he stands at the sink gazing out. His eyes catch what looks like a human shadow in the yard. His eyes strain to see it.

SARAH
(suddenly from behind) What are you
looking at?

Peter jumps, slamming his knee against the cabinets below the
sink.

PETER
Shit!

Trying to be quiet.

PETER (CONT'D)
(whisper) You scared the hell out
of me!

Sarah closes the fridge door and turns on a light.

SARAH
What were you doing?

PETER
I thought I saw something in the
yard. Just my mind playing tricks
on me.

SARAH
Let's get back to bed. You've got a
long day.

PETER
Yeah... I don't think I'll be going
back to sleep. May as well get an
early start. I'm meeting Tobey for
coffee after work.

SARAH
Ok- well I'm going back to bed. Say
hi for me. Tell him Maggie left her
playpen here.

PETER
OK.

She walks off. Peter takes another look outside then shuts
the fridge door.

EXT. NEW YORK TIMES BUILDING- MORNING

Peter exits a cab and adjusts his sport jacket and satchel
over his shoulder. He looks around cautiously, gives a quick
glance up at the building and quickly enters.

INT. NYT CORNER OFFICE- MORNING

Peter works from behind a desk strewn with papers, maps and books. There is a light rap at the door and a MAN (JAMES, MID-50's, WHITE, STRESSED) peaks his head in.

JAMES
Knock knock?

Peter is jumpy.

PETER
Oh, James. Yeah come on in.

James enters and sits like he's been in the office a million times before. He doesn't speak for a few beats till Peter finally looks up at him.

PETER (CONT'D)
Um... what's up?

JAMES
What are you working on right now?

Peter stops what he's doing like he's inconvenienced.

PETER
Well I've been following the developments in Italy with...

JAMES
Never mind. Sorry, that was rhetorical. I meant STOP what you are doing. It's going on the back burner.

PETER
Oh-ok. What's going on?

JAMES
What does the name SHAMIN KAHIN mean to you?

Peter's interest is peaked. He leans back.

PETER
A ghost tale... mythical mystic. He keeps turning up from time to time- different places around the Middle East. Why?

JAMES

Our contact over there has reached out to us. He wants to meet with you.

BEAT

PETER

Your contact wants to meet with me?

JAMES

No- SHAMIN KAHIN wants to meet with you. Immediately.

James can't contain his enthusiasm. He's bubbling in his seat. Peter is not.

PETER

Really? How does he even...

JAMES

Why don't you seem as excited as I am- or as you SHOULD be?

Peter is trying to process this.

PETER

Well, for one- how do you even know this is the real Shamin Kahin? Even if he does exist, how does your contact know this is him? Have you verified...

JAMES

Nabiun is utterly trustworthy and I trust him implicitly. I have spoken to him directly and I told him that you would be on the first flight out... TODAY.

Peter instantly clenches up.

PETER

Today? James I can't just up and..

James' demeanour changes.

JAMES

(interrupting)Peter... Peter.

James stands and approaches the window looking out over the city.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Respectfully? We've known each other for a long time now right?

PETER
Yes.

JAMES
As your friend I have to ask- what's happened to you?

James picks up a plaque off a shelf.

JAMES (CONT'D)
It's like you haven't been yourself for a couple of years now. Where is the guy that won this Pulitzer? Where is the guy that ran head first naked into the fray? It seems like- again, respectfully- like having a kid has made you lose your nerve.

Peter is off-put by his words.

PETER
(defeatedly) You're right... I would say that the man that won that is NOT the same person.

JAMES
Yeah... I'd say that's accurate.

PETER
James, I simply can't leave in the middle of the holidays. Sarah and Dylan...

JAMES
Peter-(BEAT) I'm not blaming you. I LOVE Sarah and Dylan. I'm just saying that I am not the only one that's noticed. We go back a long time but MY bosses feel that they are paying you to be the person that won that Pulitzer. We all have orders.

James stiffens his back and his tone changes.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You leave tonight. You will meet your guide at the airport in Baghdad.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

We will not miss out on this opportunity. You will meet this Shamin Kahin, should he exist, and conduct the interview and report back to us. If you feel that you are unable to do this... inform us within the hour and we will need you to clear out your office.

Peter sits behind the desk taking it all in.

PETER

So that's how it is.

James walks to the door.

JAMES

There's how things are... and how they should be. I'm sorry it's come to this.

James exits and closes the door behind him. Peter sits, staring at the Pulitzer plaque, sighs.

PETER

Shit.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK CITY STARBUCKS- MORNING

Peter and TOBEY (WHITE MALE, EARLY 30'S) sit at some bar chairs by the window overlooking the street.

TOBEY

And so they didn't even give you a choice?

PETER

No. I mean- I guess I can't say I blame them.

TOBEY

Which part?

PETER

He was right. I'm not the same person I was when I won that award.

TOBEY

Thank God.

PETER

Thanks.

TOBEY

Well it was what- 5 years ago? I would hope that you've grown since then. Matured... evolved.

PETER

Yeah, I guess.

Peter seems distant. He scans the people walking by the window on the street.

PETER (CONT'D)

Sarah says that I seem like I've changed too... since we had Dylan.

TOBEY

Do you think that's true?

PETER

I feel-I dunno. It's like I'm scared all the time. I worry about Dylan... getting sick, getting hurt. I mean we try to do our best but sometimes, you know? Sometimes there's nothing you can do, and that makes me anxious.

TOBEY

Out of control?

PETER

Exactly. And so the days of me taking off half way around the world chasing stories-that part I can control.

TOBEY

So, what are you going to do?

Peter is conflicted.

PETER

I'm going to go- only because I can't be unemployed. But when I get back I am going to start looking for other work.

TOBEY

Well, good for you then.

PETER

Really? You think that's the right thing to do?

Tobey laughs.

TOBEY

Man, I don't know. Do what is right for you and your family. But I will say this; don't let fear dictate your life. Fear is a great motivator- but it is a jealous lover. Once you let it in it will influence you to make terrible decisions.

PETER

Noted.

Tobey gets up and gathers his things to leave.

TOBEY

And here's a news flash... None of us are in control of anything anyway.

They embrace and Tobey leaves. Peter has pulled out his phone and makes a call.

PETER

Hey James. Yeah... I'm in.

INT. NEW YORK AIRPORT- NIGHT

LaGuardia Airport. It's BUSY. Peter and Sarah are saying goodbyes at the gate. Dylan is restless by her legs.

SARAH

You've got everything?

PETER

Yeah I think so... all I needed was some clothes. I guess they're taking care of everything else.

Peter is visibly uncomfortable in the airport. Too many people. Sarah notices.

SARAH

Hey- look at me.

Peter reluctantly looks at her.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 We're going to be fine. You'll be
 back Christmas eve right?

Peter relaxes a bit.

PETER
 Yeah I think so...

SARAH
 Cuz I was thinking... maybe we could
 go to Christmas Eve service at St.
 Michaels?

Peter tenses up again.

PETER
 Sarah...

SARAH
 I know, I know- but I think if you
 just give it a chance. Dylan's made
 a bunch of friends.

PETER
 I- I'm not saying I'll go. If you
 want to go that's great. But I'm
 not making any promises.

Sarah looks disappointed but keeps a stoic demeanour.

SARAH
 No it's fine. We can see when you
 get back.

PETER
 Ok. Sorry.

He grabs his bag and hugs Dylan.

PETER (CONT'D)
 Ok bud... I'll see you in a few days.

SARAH
 Peter...

He looks at her as she puts her hands up cupping his face.

SARAH (CONT'D)
 (Slow and deliberate) Enjoy
 yourself. If this is your last one...
 make it your best one. And when you
 get back, we can look for what you
 want to do next... TOGETHER.

Her words sooth his soul. He smiles contently.

PETER
I love you.

SARAH
Love you more.

Sarah picks up Dylan and they wave as Peter walks through to security.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL- NIGHT

Sarah and Dylan are at a large window watching as Peter's plane takes off and disappears into the dark. They linger for a moment and then turn and leave.

FADE OUT.

INT. BAGHDAD AIRPORT- EVENING

Another busy airport. Much different than LaGuardia. Peter walks out of the terminal and we see a MIDDLE EASTERN MAN (YURSHAD, LATE 40'S, RUGGED LOOKING) holding a small hand-written sign saying "Petr". Peter notices him and walks to him.

PETER
I'm Peter... I think you're supposed to be my guide?

The man is very friendly and cordial, kind-looking. He speaks with a very thick Middle Eastern accent.

YURSHAD
Yes! Peter Goodman? Peter! So good to meet you!

Peter is a little taken back by his friendliness.

PETER
I think that Nabiun set it up for you to take me...

Yurshad quickly cuts him off, looking around.

YURSHAD
Yes! Yes-it is all taken care of. Let me take you out of this busy place. Too many people around, no?

Peter lets out a small chuckle.

PETER

Yeah, I was thinking the same thing.

YURSHAD

You have your bag?

PETER

Yes. Just a few things I was told.

YURSHAD

Yes! Yes, no need to carry many things.

PETER

So-when do we go to meet Shamin Ka...

Yurshad cuts him off again and starts leading him outside

YURSHAD

Tomorrow, tomorrow. Let's get you settled in to the hotel. You must be tired from your travels.

Yurshad leads him out of the airport hurriedly.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY BAR- NIGHT

The lobby is almost empty. Yurshad sits at the bar alone as Peter enters the lobby and sees him.

YURSHAD

Peter! Come join me!

Peter smiles and makes his way over. He is comfortable with him, like they've known each other a long time. Peter sits beside him.

YURSHAD (CONT'D)

Eamil albari... (*bartender*)

Yurshad motions for him to pour another drink like his. Peter examines the milky white drink.

PETER

What is this?

YURSHAD

This is lions milk.

Peter gives him a side glance and then to the bartender. They both chuckle at Peter's expression.

YURSHAD (CONT'D)
This is Arak... made from anise. Very popular drink here.

Peter takes a timid sip, cringing at its potency.

YURSHAD (CONT'D)
Good, no?

Yurshad takes a big gulp emptying his glass.

YURSHAD (CONT'D)
You have settled in to your room?

PETER
Umm... sure. Yeah I suppose.

YURSHAD
That does not fill me with assurance.

PETER
No, it's fine... I just have a hard time relaxing when travelling.

YURSHAD
Have you not seen the film *Die Hard*?

Peter looks confused at this reference.

PETER
I... yes, I have seen it.

YURSHAD
You must remove your socks and shoes and make fists with your toes on the carpet.

The bartender pours Yurshad another glass and he drinks.

YURSHAD (CONT'D)
Very effective.

Peter laughs a little, beginning to relax.

PETER
Ok... I will do that.

There is a slight awkward silence.

PETER (CONT'D)

So- how did you come to be involved
with Shamin Kahin?

Yurshad stops drinking as the bartender looks at him and then
walks away.

YURSHAD

Forgive me, we shall not talk of
those things here. There will be
plenty of time tomorrow.

PETER

Ok, I didn't mean to- I just have
been wondering what I have to do
with any of this. Why have me fly
all the way out here when there are
any number of journalists in the
area. (BEAT) So, he IS real?

YURSHAD

As real as you or I. I understand
your- lack of comprehension. There
are many things Shamin does that
lack understanding. Time, my
friend. Time is the friend and
enemy of us all. Tell me of your
family. You are married?

PETER

Me? Yes..., I'm married. Sarah.

Peter pulls out a photo and shows him.

YURSHAD

Sarah- a *joy* and *delight*, it means
in Arabic. You have a son as well I
see.

PETER

Yes, Dylan. He's just a few years
old.

YURSHAD

A beautiful wife, a son- you are a
most blessed man.

Peter puts the picture away looking like he's never thought
of being BLESSED.

PETER

Yes... it seems that I am.

YURSHAD

You are unsure of this?

PETER

I guess I never thought of it that way.

YURSHAD

What do THEY think of you coming halfway to the other side of the earth?

Peter smiles.

PETER

She thinks it's a great opportunity and that I should enjoy it.

YURSHAD

Yet, you don't seem to think so?

Peter contemplates what to say as he takes another sip.

PETER

I... I am unsure of my place right now... in this world now that I am a father. I am wondering if I still have the same- fire.

Yurshad turns to face him and leans on the bar.

YURSHAD

Ahh... I see.

PETER

You do?

YURSHAD

Forgive me- it is only an observation.

PETER

No, go ahead.

YURSHAD

You have had some success at your profession?

PETER

Yes. But it has been some time...

YURSHAD

And you now have a child.

PETER

Yes.

YURSHAD

Then the answer seems clear.

PETER

I wish it were so clear to me.

YURSHAD

We all examine the world through our own lens. It would seem to me that the lens with which you are experiencing the world has changed. You are no longer a journalist who sees the world through the lens of a journalist. You are now a journalist who sees the world through the lens of a father. Everything must change, for you are now seeing things differently.

PETER

I just don't know that I can do both.

YURSHAD

Perhaps you shouldn't.

Peter looks self-reflective at his words. Yurshad notices.

YURSHAD (CONT'D)

But this is not a thing to fear. We are not always the same person. Each new stage of life requires us to change our perspectives on the world- and how the world will affect us.

PETER

You're right.

Yurshad lets out a hearty laugh.

YURSHAD

Of course I'm right. You are on the right path. But, do not fear. Fear will only cloud your judgement-make you weak.

PETER

You're the second person in the last 24 hours to tell me that.

YURSHAD

I suppose that is telling, in
itself.

Yurshad takes the bottle the bartender left and fills both
their glasses.

YURSHAD

To answer your question- I do not
know why Shamin has sent for you
specifically. I do not question
that. I do know that you are on a
path, and that your path and
Shamin's must cross tomorrow. For
what reason? That is for you alone
to find out.

He holds his glass up and he and Peter clink glasses.

YURSHAD

Tomorrow.

PETER

Tomorrow.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL RIVER BOAT-DAY

A small boat traversing a meandering river. The current is
quick as the craft skillfully handles the water. Peter sits
near the front of the boat. Yurshad walks to the front of the
boat.

TITLE CARD-

EUPHRATES RIVER. MODERN DAY IRAQ.

Yurshad approaches Peter.

YURSHAD

You would be wise to keep your face
covering on. At least when we
disembark.

Peter adjusts his scarf around his neck.

YURSHAD (CONT'D)

Not now... but when we disembark. We
don't get many Americans here.

PETER

Oh, ok thank you. How long?

YURSHAD

We are here. Once we leave the water, probably- a few hours into the forest.

PETER

We are here?

Yurshad stands at the edge of the boat looking towards the tree line.

YURSHAD

We are. (BEAT) Welcome to Janaat Eadn- the garden of Eden.

EXT. SMALL RIVER PORT- DAY

There are a few boats docking and unloading crates as the boat pulls up. As Peter disembarks he pulls the scarf across his face. People stare but mind their business.

YURSHAD

You may leave your things here. The way is not easy, and you will not require them.

Peter looks unsure, unsettled but keeps moving. He throws a small backpack over his shoulder and follows Yurshad.

EXT. THICK TRAIL PATH- DAY

The two make their way down an ever-thickening path through the trees.

PETER

So...

YURSHAD

You have questions.

PETER

Yes.

YURSHAD

I would assume so. The one who called you here was specific. I am not to tell you anything until we arrive. He will speak to you then.

PETER

Why all the secrecy? If he sent for me then he knows that it's not the first time I've been in dangerous lands.

YURSHAD

If your goal is for something to remain secret then you must use secrecy. Only those that Shamin Kahin asks for know of this place and what it is.

Yurshad is leading Peter into the trees. A barely recognizable path winds out before them. The trees and bush are closing in as they walk.

PETER

But you know it. Why does he trust you not to tell others?

Yurshad smiles like he is amused by the thought.

YURSHAD

Because you don't disobey Shamin Kahin.

PETER

The garden of Eden? That's a little hard to accept.

YURSHAD

Some things remain true whether you may accept them or not. This is ancient soil. You don't think the Americans were invading Iraq for oil do you?

PETER

Shaman kahin? Is that his real name?

YURSHAD

Shamin kahin is what he is. Shaman I think is what you might use to describe him.

Peter is struggling to keep up with Yurshad. It is hot.

PETER
So, if the goal is to remain
secret, then why invite a
journalist?

Yurshad is quiet. He continues on without speaking.

Peter stops as if he's felt something change. He looks around as he gets light headed and nauseous. He falls to his knees.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY
DREAM SEQUENCE

The same boy at the park(5) is playing with his dog and a receptionist while the mother and father speak to a doctor sitting behind a desk. We can tell he is giving them bad news. The parents break down.

The boy is unaware in the waiting room. He continues playing with the dog.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIL PATH- DAY

Peter comes out of it and shakes his head. CONFUSED he carries on.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE FOREST- DAY

The two men come into a clearing in the forest. There is a small hut looking structure. Smoke trickles from a vent in the roof.

As Yurshad walks into the clearing Peter stops. He shudders from a drastic change in temperature... and feeling of dread. He breathes out and his breath can be seen in the air.

YURSHAD
We are here. You must come this
way.

Peter is increasingly uneasy and leery of the situation. The two men push the cloth door open and enter the hut.

INT. SMALL RURAL HUT- DAY

Peter enters behind Yurshad. By the fire a figure sits. Motionless, clad in a hooded cloak.

YURSHAD
Greetings, Shamin Kahin. We have arrived.

SHAMIN
Yes. It appears you have.

His voice is strange and not quite human. Yurshad sits by the fire and stokes it. There is an unusual chill. Peter shudders as he enters.

SHAMIN (CONT'D)
My apologies. I tried to keep it warm for you.

YURSHAD
Think nothing of it.

He gets the fire going and notices Peter standing in the doorway not coming in.

YURSHAD (CONT'D)
You may come in, Peter. This is why you are here.

Peter cautiously comes in and makes his way to a seat at the fire. He is visibly cold now. The figure finally moves and retrieves a tobacco pipe of sorts and hands it to Yurshad.

YURSHAD (CONT'D)
Oooo... there it is.

He takes the pipe and lights it, inhaling deeply and out again. He hands it to Peter who takes it hesitantly. He takes a breath of it. As he exhales he feels all the cold and tension leave him.

PETER
What is this?

SHAMIN
Something to help relax. It is from the garden.

Shamin still sits in darkness.

PETER
You know me, but forgive me... who are you?