

ZOO

Pilot
By

Appelbaum, Nemeč, Pinkner, Rosenberg

10-22-14

TEASER

THWAK--! A golf ball soars through the air. And we HEAR:
"Dammit."

The errant shot hooks off into the high grass surrounding the fairway... It is sunny. And 70. Every day. So we must only be in one place:

EXT. GRIFFITH PARK GOLF COURSE - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Two thirtysomething golfers, RUDY and BLAINE - aiming to get in nine holes before they have to be at the office - walk the green. Rudy was the one behind the shank...

BLAINE

Take a mulligan, my man. You are already so deep in the bucket it won't matter a bit...

But Rudy eyes THE THICKET beyond the 5th hole... Where his ball vanished...

RUDY

My pride. My pride is the difference. And the fact it was your story that threw me...

BLAINE

What about my story?

RUDY

She *really* said she wants an open relationship?

Rudy steps into the thicket... Disappearing from view...

BLAINE

Yeah... She did...

From the thicket:

RUDY (O.S.)

As in: you can sleep with *whoever* you want to and she won't get mad?

And now we go to the OTHER SIDE of the thicket. Beneath a wild stand of CALIFORNIA OAK TREES. Their massive branches, gnarled and contorted, create a vast canopy that blocks the sun, and plunges this area into an eerie gloom...

BLAINE (O.S.)

Yep.

As Rudy searches for his ball, striking at the foliage with his club, he calls back:

RUDY

I mean, that's kind of awesome, no?

And now we'll cut back and forth between the men, on either side of the thicket --

BLAINE

Uh. Sure. Until you factor in the secondary component --

RUDY

Which is?

When something DROPS onto Rudy's shoulder, startling him. Bouncing off, he sees it is only a reddish-brown ACORN.

Rudy looks up... To where a SQUIRREL races along one tubular branch, disturbing the acorns in its wake...

BLAINE

So can she...

RUDY

So can she what?

BLAINE

Sleep with anyone she wants to. And I can't get mad...

RUDY

Really?

BLAINE

Really.

Rudy considers this a beat... Then:

RUDY

Can I have her cell phone number?

He grins. But then several more ACORNS fall from above. As in *dozens*...

Rudy frowns. And looks up into the trees... and the color leaches from his face, in fear and confusion. Because he sees, perched in the low branches --

A LION - 400-pounds of coiled muscle and rippling haunches. A male, its tail swishing methodically, as its amber eyes stare down at Rudy...

RUDY (CONT'D)
What the fu--

BLAINE (O.S.)
You find it...?

The lion glances up, to another tree. Rudy follows its gaze to see --

ANOTHER LION. This one a female.

BLAINE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You find it, bro--?

And the female SPRINGS from the tree. *Straight onto Rudy. STRAIGHT INTO CAMERA. His stunned CRY is cut off mid-gasp as our TITLE CARD fills the screen:*

"ZOO"

And then, after a moment, we PUSH THROUGH the letters to:

EXT. THE OKAVANGO DELTA - BOTSWANA - AFRICA - DAY

One of those sweeping, moving, dynamic AERIAL SHOTS that are careful to take in the herds of galloping gazelles; the vast grassland plains; the splendid riverine forests, etc.

As we move, we HEAR THE STENTORIAN VOICE OF A MAN, mid-60s:

PROFESSOR NATHAN OZ (O.S.)
Extinction events. Major biotic
crises. Wiping out all life on
earth. Devastating. Catastrophic...

At last coming to a WATCHTOWER, overlooking a collection of TENTED ROOMS surrounding a MAIN LODGE. This is --

EXT. KITUKO SAFARI CAMP - DAY

As we MOVE toward one TENTED HUT, in particular...

PROFESSOR NATHAN OZ (O.S.)
... But not necessarily *sudden*. Not
necessarily... *without warning*.

INT. TENTED HUT - DAY

CLOSE ON: A COMPUTER MONITOR. Upon which, NATHAN OZ, eminent zoologist and lecturer stands in his home office. In a well-worn sweater. Uncombed white hair. If you're kind of fond of Henry Fonda, than you'd dig Professor Oz.

Nathan SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO CAMERA, in what is obviously a *self-taped recording* (he occasionally wanders out of frame). Stacks of books and papers abound, half-completed charts and diagrams...

PROF. NATHAN OZ (ON MONITOR)

The five accepted Mass Extinction Events... each of them presaged by an ecological disturbance. Volcanic. Glacial. Oceanic overturn. Asteroid impact. Gamma ray burst.

Nathan Oz swirls a tumbler of scotch in one hand as he paces, trying to keep up with his own rapid-fire thoughts:

PROF. NATHAN OZ (ON MONITOR) (CONT'D)

Consider: what if prior to any of these events, there was an... anticipatory cognizance?

WIDEN: a young African boy, DANIEL, 14, is watching the TV, drinking in Professor Oz's words...

PROF. NATHAN OZ (ON MONITOR) (CONT'D)

What if between the Cretaceous and Tertiary periods - 66 million years ago - when that asteroid was about to slam into earth...

As we MOVE PAST HIM, to take in the messy hut: the papers strewn among empty bottles of rum, African textiles, and hand-made wooden furniture...

PROF. NATHAN OZ (ON MONITOR) (CONT'D)

... What if the dinosaurs sensed the global wildfires that were about to be unleashed? A shared preconscious instinct. The primal desire for life to survive.

A MAN enters the hut. A 240-pound Bantu giant named ABRAHAM KENYATTA, mid-20s. When he sees Daniel, Abraham scowls...

ABRAHAM

What are you doing? Did he say you could look at that?

DANIEL

No. But he is in another *changaa* coma.

ABRAHAM

That is private property. You are now a trespasser as well as being a lazy *wadudu*. Go get the truck ready!

DANIEL

It's almost over--

ABRAHAM

Daniel--

DANIEL

Shh. This is the good part...

Daniel ignores his older brother, continues to watch as ON THE MONITOR: Professor Oz seems to be rattled at this notion:

PROF. NATHAN OZ (ON MONITOR)

... The evidence is there, though we may be too ignorant - or better yet too *unwilling* - to recognize it...

Abraham shakes his head, disapproving. But his attention shifts. To the *other side of the hut*:

To the MAN there. Passed-out on an indoor hammock.

This is JACKSON OZ, mid-30s. And our hero. Although that would come as quite a surprise to him, given his emotional weariness; the sweet surrender of a life untold.

Oh, and the cataclysmic HANGOVER he is presently in the throes of...

Abraham shakes his head but his attention shifts to Oz, legs akimbo, on his hammock.

ABRAHAM

Rise and shine, *rafiki*. We have twenty impatient Swedes waiting for us to show them the rhinos!

Oz opens his eyes. Big mistake. His head is pounding.

OZ

Twenty impatient Swedes who can drink *changaa* all night long. Go away.

Abraham smiles as he goes to a sideboard and begins preparing some kind of concoction from the small collection of jars and bottles. Each jar-rattle like a hollow-point to Oz's skull.

OZ (CONT'D)

You're not going away, are you?

Oz clocks the computer screen... where Nathan Oz continues, his rheumy eyes leaden with dread...

PROFESSOR NATHAN OZ (ON MONITOR)

... We can even ignore the defiant pupil. Denial is understandable, *human* -- when things scare us, we're inclined to turn and look away.

Daniel clicks the mouse... Nathan Oz is caught in FREEZE-FRAME on the monitor. Daniel turns to Oz, who finally rolls out of the hammock.

DANIEL

What does your father mean, Jackson?
I'm confused.

OZ

'Course you are. It's gibberish--

DANIEL

What does he mean: "the defiant pupil"?

OZ

He was a professor. He had a student who wouldn't listen --

ABRAHAM

-- "Defiant", like you, baby brother. Now go see to the trucks. And then put the radio parts on the plane. We'll bring them out to Simon tomorrow...

Daniel leaves the hut... Oz turns to Abraham..

OZ

Radio parts?

ABRAHAM

The radio at Simon's camp is on the blink. I thought we'd fly out there, help them fix it...

Oz nods. Another look back to his father's image on the computer screen. It clearly has an effect on him - his mood suddenly clouding - which Abraham clocks...

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about Daniel.

As Abraham hands Oz a small jar filled with a dark liquid...

OZ

It's okay. What's this?

ABRAHAM

A potion. To remedy the punishments of drinking with the Swedes. Don't be such a coward, *rafiki*. It's just nutmeg. Lemon. Grapeseed oil. Herbs.

Oz knocks it back. Then GAGS.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Oh. And two heaping tablespoons of baboon dung.

Abraham grins. OFF OF Oz, tears in his eyes, CUT TO:

EXT. FLATBED TOUR TRUCK - MOVING - DAY

Abraham drives a ferocious eight-wheel, open-air ALL-TERRAIN SAFARI TRUCK, with a large group of SWEDISH TOURISTS tucked into the bench seats. The jungle "road" is merely a flattened dirt pack hacked into a dense acacia forest.

Oz is at the front of the vehicle, speaking over a MICROPHONE through the truck's DOZEN SPEAKERS (softly, so as not to disturb the wildlife). He wears a wide-brimmed slouch hat with chinstraps. And it looks like Abraham's hangover cure hasn't worked a lick.

And the truck's terrible shock absorbers - juddering over the knobbed jungle topography - doesn't help matters...

OZ (AMPLIFIED)

The thing to remember about the black rhino - which is why they are tricky to find - is that they live in transitional habitats. Between open grassland and high forest...

Abraham pulls the truck to a stop in a scrubby wash... He takes out a pair of BINOCULARS and scans the bush...

With the engine shut off, the SOUNDS OF THE JUNGLE are almost suffocating. A CACOPHONY OF BIRDSONG, MONKEY HOWL, AND INSECT SYMPHONY. The Swedes look enthralled...

OZ (AMPLIFIED) (CONT'D)

Another little known fact? The famous "horn" of the rhino is not, actually, a horn. But rather, it is a mass of compacted hairs...

Abraham has spotted something. He hands the binoculars to Oz. Who peers through them...

BINOCS P.O.V.: A splendid BLACK RHINO grazes in a clearing at the edge of the treeline...

OZ (CONT'D)

Well, well, well. You folks are in for a treat...

But then Abraham directs the binoculars across a wide SODA LAKE, on the other side of which, in a natural blind --

A HUNTER aims his rifle. Sighting on the regal beast...

OZ lowers his binocs. And looks at Abraham, who seems to know exactly what is percolating in Oz's dome. CUT TO:

POV: THROUGH THE HUNTER'S TELESCOPIC SITE: The Rhino. Bisected by the cross-hairs. Dead to rights. *Trigger-finger twitches.* Kill-shot approaches...

When, suddenly, the SAVAGE OPENING RIFFS of AC/DC's "*SHOOT TO THRILL*" CRAAANK! Scaring the shit out of the rhino who THUNDERS OFF AND AWAY, vanishing into the hedgerow...

EXT. SODA LAKE - DAY

The hunter lowers his rifle. This is PHILIP WEBER, 34. His daddy made lots of money from the money that *his* daddy made. An asshole's asshole. And he doesn't care who knows it.

Weber glares in anger at the approaching flatbed full of tourists. The Swedes are actually *dancing* to the song...

The music is shut off. Oz climbs off of the truck. Meeting a furious Philip Weber in the middle. Weber is flanked by THREE OTHER MEN - his FRIEND (American) and their GUIDES.

PHILIP WEBER

What the hell'd you do that for?

OZ

We are opposed to animal murder in this zip code...

PHILIP WEBER

I have a valid license to hunt that rhino...

OZ

Just because it's legal doesn't make it right...

PHILIP WEBER

Are you kidding me -- ?

OZ

Besides. That rhino? He's my friend. His name is Victor. He hosts a Sunday brunch by the *Masai Mara*. And his chocolate-chip pancakes are *out of this world*...

Oz grins... Weber is livid... He shoves Oz roughly back...

PHILIP WEBER

I paid 200 grand for that license!

OZ

And *I* paid nine dollars for this hat. I think we *both* got ripped off...

But Weber's friend and the two guides surround Oz, ready to give him a good, old-fashioned beat-down:

ABRAHAM (O.S.)

We have a problem here -- ?

All eyes turn. To Abraham. Who somehow looks even more enormous by the water's edge, his gentle eyes belying a capacity for menace... Weber's Guide recognizes Abraham...

GUIDE

No. No problem, *rafiki*.

PHILIP WEBER

What do you mean, "no problem"?

The Guide attempts to implore Weber with his eyes.

GUIDE

Trust me, Mr. Weber. There is no problem...

Weber glares at Oz, as he and Abraham make their way back to the truck... And one of the Swedes turns back up the AC/DC as Oz flashes the peace sign, and we CUT TO:

INT. NEWSROOM - LOS ANGELES TIMES - DAY

The old-school newspaper room polyphony of clattering typewriters and teletypes has been replaced by the soulless susurrations of mouse-clicks and downloads...

CLOSE ON: herky-jerky VIDEO FOOTAGE. Filmed with a SECURITY CAMERA. Of the TWO LIONS escaping their cage.

There is a BODY just out of frame. Splayed on the ground. Its zookeeper's whites spattered crimson.

This footage TRANSITIONS to footage taken with an iPhone: of the TWO LIONS FLEEING THE ZOO, SCATTERING TERRIFIED PATRONS. PASSING RIGHT BY A YOUNG CHILD - A BOY OF 8, SEPARATED FROM HIS PARENTS - a balloon, tethered to his wrist, floating above him, the boy too stunned to even scream, as we --

WIDEN: to meet JAMIE PAULSON, 24. A little pouty, a little punky, she is a cub reporter, on the Metro desk. And she is currently piecing together a story, 21st Century-style:

Using various forms of social media (YouTube videos, Twitter feeds, etc.) Jaime is developing a time-line of the lion rampage --

More footage: *grainy, pixilated SECURITY CAMERA images from the golf course. As Blaine, from our opening, is frozen at the sight of a LION emerging from the thicket. Its blunt muzzle soaked red with Rudy's blood... As Blaine RUNS --*

We move CLOSER TO JAMIE'S FACE. As, despite the horrific images, her eyes dance with the *thrill* of an emergent story. Because there is nothing quite like it in the world to make Jamie Paulson's pulse quicken...

Jamie dials a number on her landline and continues to watch the images... Which now include dozens of EMERGENCY SERVICE VEHICLES; POLICE, FIRE, ANIMAL CONTROL...

JAMIE (INTO PHONE)

Yes, this is Jamie Paulson, with "THE TIMES"-- yes, again. Does Fremer want to say anything? About *what*? The lions killed their keeper, fled the zoo, and ran onto the Griffith Park Golf Course, where they attacked and killed two golfers, before being destroyed by Animal Control. How about *about that...*? Yes, you said that already-- look, tell him if he wants to get ahead of the story before the press conference, I'm your girl. I can have it up on our site before--

But her confident flow is interrupted by --

VOICE (O.S.)

PAULSON -- !

She looks up... To see ETHAN CROSS, the Associate Editor, standing by her cubicle.

Ethan is early 30s and prematurely balding, but he is still very handsome in that Ed-Harris- kind-of-bald-handsome...

ETHAN

She wants to see you...

JAMIE

I got a thing going on --

ETHAN

Yeah, she doesn't care about your thing. *Now.*

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - L.A. TIMES - DAY

Jamie is before the City Desk Editor - BRENDA SALINGER - late 40s, imperious-yet-kind. Usually kind. Not *presently* kind.

Ethan Cross hovers nearby.

BRENDA SALINGER

First, let me direct your attention to today's editorial page. *This* paper's editorial page...

She opens the paper...

BRENDA SALINGER (CONT'D)

Which lends official support - and I stress the word *official* - to the most recent round of Federal and state budget cuts...

Jamie's eyes tick to Cross. Whose expression seems to say "*don't look at me!*" As Brenda's fingers whirr over her desktop computer.

BRENDA SALINGER (CONT'D)

And now may I direct your attention... To... *This*...

Brenda's enormous computer screen is suddenly filled with a BLOG SITE rife with liquid *Riot Grrrl* graphics accompanied by crunchy Trent Reznor-esque industrial guitar licks...

BRENDA SALINGER (CONT'D)

It's a blog. It's called "*SOMEWHAT DAMAGED*". And it's written by a person who calls herself "*The Girl With The Bowie Tattoo*".

Ethan looks at her... Did Jamie just gulp?

BRENDA SALINGER (CONT'D)
 Your typical noisy, nosy firebrand
 crap. Raging against the machine.
 Regaling against injustice and
 malfeasance at the bureaucratic,
 corporate and governmental level...

Jamie nods. Attempting her best "Mickey The Dunce".

JAMIE

Okay --

BRENDA SALINGER

Today's post is called: "*THE HAND
 THAT FEEDS YOU HASN'T WASHED AFTER
 USING THE REST ROOM*". And, aside
 from being guilty of an incredibly
 clunky headline, it goes on to say:
 (reads)

*"This city has become more and more
 dangerous due to systemic under-
 funding, spearheaded by Lawrence
 Fremer, the Severus Snape of the
 Parks Services. Sequestration is a
 dish best served rare. Bloody rare.
 Case in point: the Parks Services
 budget was slashed to ribbons and, as
 a consequence, two lions in the zoo
 took the whole 'Born Free' thing to a
 whole other level... "*

Ethan shakes his head... Brenda fixes her icy gaze at Jamie.

BRENDA SALINGER (CONT'D)

It then goes on - in 3,000 words - to
 vehemently argue *against* the budget
 cuts we have *officially* endorsed...

A beat as Brenda and Ethan wait for a response... Then:

JAMIE

Okay. And what does this have to do
 with me?

ETHAN

Oh, come on! Don't take us for
 fools, Jamie--

JAMIE

What--?

BRENDA SALINGER

I've been editing your copy for two
 years now, Jamie.

(MORE)

BRENDA SALINGER (CONT'D)
 Your default reference for an evil
 bureaucrat is to compare him or her
 to that particular Hogwarts
 professor...

JAMIE
 And based on that flimsy pretext you
 think I'm the one who writes this
 blog?

Brenda Salinger just glares at her.

BRENDA SALINGER
 Are you *really* going to jettison what
 little dignity our working
 relationship has left by forcing me
 to ask you to strip down to your
 underthings so we can see whether or
 not there is a David Bowie tattoo
 somewhere on your body?

Jamie looks at her. At Cross. PRELAP: the sound of a low
 ROAR and CUT TO:

THE PROPELLER OF ABRAHAM'S BIPLANE. As the engine idles...

EXT. KITUKO SAFARI CAMP - BOTSWANA - AFRICA - DAY

It's a two-seater fixed wing. Abraham is in the cockpit. Oz
 behind him. Daniel runs out to them, handing them a HARD
 CASE, which contains the new parts for the radio...

DANIEL
 Be careful -- !

ABRAHAM
 Me or him?

DANIEL
 Both. But *especially* him...

Daniel grins. As Abraham hits the stick and they begin to
 taxi down the dirt runway...

EXT. ABRAHAM'S PLANE - IN-FLIGHT - DAY

It is breathtaking from up here. Africa's natural beauty can
 almost make one forget of its incipient dangers.

ABRAHAM
 He looks up to you. More than me.
 And I am his brother!

OZ

I don't think so --

ABRAHAM

He wishes to be a scientist. Like the great Jackson Oz!

OZ

Failed scientist, you mean. The criminally *underachieving* Jackson Oz!

ABRAHAM

Have it your way. Me, I am a man of pleasure. I like "when". *When* is my next meal? *When* is my next drink? *When* is my next woman? Daniel, he prefers "why". *Why* is the sky blue? *Why* does the plane fly. *Why* does the lion roar?

OZ

I prefer "how". *How* will I ever get you to stop talking -- ?

Abraham laughs...

OZ (CONT'D)

Besides. It's not *me* Daniel aspires to be. It's my father. Now *that* should concern you! He shouldn't be watching those tapes. They're filled with wild theories and speculation. Extinction events, dinosaurs, a defiant pupil -- my father's student's all *worshipped* him -- all those tapes really document is a brilliant man coming unhinged. To be honest, I only watched a few of them. It's too painful... And it's not like they're gonna give me any answers.

Oz looks out across the expanse... A HERD OF ZEBRA make marathon strides across the rolling grassland below...

OZ (CONT'D)

The most disturbing thing about those videos? We were working side by side at Harvard the entire time he was making them. He had just been short-listed for a Nobel. He was beside himself. Ecstatic. Gratified. Or so I thought... At night? Alone? He was *that* man. That scared, raving doom prophet...

He lets it linger...

ABRAHAM

As you have said: "All men are unknowable. But with animals you know where you stand." My friend, Jackson Oz, the philosopher of the Okavanga Delta.

OZ

Animals are predictable. They want food. Shelter. They don't want a bigger T.V.. Or a corner office. They don't have insecurities. They don't have ego. They don't have ambition...

ABRAHAM

They don't kill themselves.

Oz looks at him for a beat... Then:

OZ

No. They don't do that, either.

Abraham lets that linger, then he pushes the stick, the wing tips dramatically, and we see, in the distance, ANOTHER SAFARI CAMP.

This one is larger than theirs. More upscale. Double the tented huts and with a larger lodge. And a dirt runway. Where Abraham can put down his bird.

EXT. MSISIMKO SAFARI CAMP - DAY

The plane comes to a stop. Oz and Abraham climb out. Abraham is instantly concerned...

ABRAHAM

Where are The *Kuwakaribisha* Girls?
With their welcomes and their hot
towels and their cold lemonade?

OZ

Maybe they're just over you and your
excessive flirting...

Oz tries a smile. But Abraham is deeply troubled. Because the place looks abandoned.

EXT. MSISIMKO SAFARI CAMP - DAY

As they enter the camp proper. It is quiet as a crypt. A quick survey of the tents; the lodge; the latrines... Nothing. No one. Oz tries to explain it away:

OZ

Well, the safari vehicles are missing...

Indeed, the car barn is empty. But for a single LAND ROVER.

ABRAHAM

Yes, but where is the cook staff? Housekeeping? They never leave.

OZ

What about bandits?

ABRAHAM

There have been no reports of bandit activity in this area in years...

When Oz notices the GAS COOKING STOVE. Still on. As he walks over to it, Abraham heads into the MAIN LODGE. Oz looks into the POT over the cooking stove's flame. It is caked with burnt rice, black as cinder.

Oz again glances around the camp. There's no sign of disruption; of mayhem. When Abraham shouts from the lodge:

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Come here --

INT. MAIN LODGE - MSISIMKO SAFARI CAMP - DAY

Abraham leads Oz over to the base-camp HF RADIO. Which is squawking agreeably...

OZ

I thought it wasn't working?

ABRAHAM

I did, also. Based solely on Simon telling me they were having issues with it. So when I couldn't raise him these last few days. I assumed it had finally given up the ghost.

But that is not the case. Which only makes things more worrisome...

OZ

We should take the plane. Go look
for them...

ABRAHAM

The jungle is too dense to see
anything from above. We'll have to
drive...

Oz attempts to comfort his friend...

OZ

I'm sure there is a simple
explanation, Abe --

ABRAHAM

Perhaps. But how do you explain
this?

He leads Oz into THE KITCHEN... More stoves are on... More
food is out, in preparation, fly-buzzed, though it is...

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

The food is here. The pots are here.
The pans are here...

He gestures to a large BUTCHER BLOCK KNIFE HOLDER.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

But the knives are gone.

He looks at Oz. With portent. And, despite the heat of a
kitchen in Africa, a shiver runs down Jackson Oz's spine.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE**EXT. MSISIMKO SAFARI CAMP - DAY**

To resume. Oz loads supplies into a Land Rover. When he sees Abraham, at the camp's perimeter, studying something on the ground. Oz walks over...

OZ
What is it?

ABRAHAM
Dung. Lion dung. And there are tracks...

Oz looks down at it. Nods.

OZ
The tracks of a single lion.

Abraham nods...

OZ (CONT'D)
But a single lion coming into camp wouldn't scare everyone off. Certainly not with your brother presiding over things here...

Abraham agrees...

ABRAHAM
No... But what *did*?

INT. JAMIE PAULSON'S APARTMENT - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Which is kind of a shithole apartment behind the "*Rock And Roll Ralphs*" on Sunset, just west of La Brea. It's a sloppy sprangle of magazines and newspapers; old computer parts and printed-out pages; overdue library books and dirty dishes.

The television is on to some vacuous LOCAL NEWS STATION spending 20 minutes on weather that never changes...

We MOVE INTO THE BATHROOM. As Jamie steps from the shower. The attempt to wash off the day's indignities having failed.

As she towels off, she catches her reflection in the bathroom mirror. And we catch a glimpse of the *David Bowie-circa-"ALADDIN SANE"*-tattoo on her right shoulder-blade.

When her DOORBELL rings.

BACK IN THE LIVING ROOM. Jamie, now in a robe, opens the door. To Ethan, her Associate Editor. Jamie looks like she may slug him.

JAMIE

Really, dude? "*Don't take us for fools, Jamie*"?

ETHAN

What was I supposed to say?

JAMIE

Oh, I don't know: maybe a *single comment* in my defense?

ETHAN

In your "*defense*"? I've been telling you for a year that this blog was idiotic! That eventually you'd get caught...

Jamie just looks at him... Disdain and disappointment wrestling for dominion over her expression...

JAMIE

You could have said *something* in support of me, no?

ETHAN

No. I couldn't. Because we both agreed it is in neither of our best interests to have our... *Situation*... Known...

JAMIE

What *situation* is that, Ethan? If you are referring to the *situation* in which you are having sex with a junior reporter under your purview, then I can assure you that *situation* has been twice-nullified. Because I am *no longer* under your purview. And you are *no longer* going to have sex with me.

Jamie goes into the tiny kitchen and begins rinsing out the dishes in the cluttered sink...

ETHAN

Be accountable, Jamie. Stop chasing after the unicorn that killed Kennedy...

JAMIE

What the hell does that mean?

ETHAN

You *invent* things. That aren't there. Such is your desire for some vast conspiracy. That you impose it on *nothing*.

JAMIE

"*The unicorns that killed Kennedy*"? How long you been saving that one up, Ethan -- ?

ETHAN

If you and four other people are looking at a house on fire, the four other people see a house on fire. You see an attempt by the Right-Wing Extreme to send a message via smoke-signals to plotters hoping to undermine our democracy...

JAMIE

Do not do that, Ethan. Do not demean my work. I was right about the Baby Janet story. That abuse would have continued if I didn't follow the thinnest of leads. And the Mission Viejo sweatshop--

ETHAN

-- I didn't mean to suggest you weren't a good journalist, Jamie.

But Jamie is no longer paying attention. She is looking at the television. The local news still playing on it.

Because there is A MAN being interviewed. This is LAWRENCE FREMER, 43. Holding a press conference. Beneath Fremer's name is his title: "*LAWRENCE FREMER, COMMISSION PRESIDENT. THE LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND PARKS*".

LAWRENCE FREMER (ON TV)

We are still in the midst of an active investigation into exactly what caused this morning's tragic events...

JAMIE

Oh, we all know *exactly what*, assface. You cut corners and people died...

And with that, Jamie heads into her bedroom to get dressed.

ETHAN

Jamie--

JAMIE

See yourself out, Ethan. I've got unicorns to chase...

EXT. LAND ROVER - MOVING - JUNGLE SWITCHBACK - AFRICA - DAY

Abraham drives the Land Rover they took from the Msisimko camp down this dirt road. With a velocity that shows no respect for the ruts and potholes that pock the path...

When Oz notices something.

OZ

Stop the truck.

ABRAHAM

What -- ?

OZ

Now.

And Abraham does. Bringing the Land Rover to a stop. Oz reaches over to the ignition. Turns the key. Kills the engine...

OZ (CONT'D)

Listen --

Abraham does. It's quiet. Dead quiet.

ABRAHAM

I don't hear anything...

OZ

Exactly. Where are the birds? Where are the monkeys? The insects, even? Have you ever heard it this quiet out here?

ABRAHAM

Sometimes. Before a storm.

OZ

There's not a cloud in the sky, Abraham...

They sit there a beat. Oz trying to shake off the troubled feeling rising in his gut.

ABRAHAM

What are you thinking?

OZ

I don't know yet...

Finally, Abraham shakes his head. Starts the Land Rover up again. And on they go.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - BRENTWOOD - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Jamie's crappy Honda Civic lurches and farts to a stop outside this beautiful home on a Brentwood street lined with beautiful homes. And lots of parked cars.

She gets out, passing A TELEPHONE POLE PLASTERED WITH "MISSING" SIGNS. Dozens and dozens of them.

All asking for help in locating a vanished family cat. But not *the same cat*. No, rather, many *different* cats.

Jamie pays this little mind as she goes to the front door. She sees a SIGN taped to it. "AROUND BACK FOR THE Q".

EXT. BACKYARD - BRENTWOOD HOME - DAY

It's a big backyard crowded with 60 or so PEOPLE for a Labor Day Weekend barbecue. The smell of grilling burgers and dogs freights the ear. Tables and music and kegs...

And Lawrence FREMER - wearing a Hunter S. Thompson "BUY ME BRUNCH" apron - mans the grill. We remember Lawrence from the news report Jamie was watching in her apartment. He's the head man at Rec And Parks. As he tongs a link of bratwursts, he brags to a FRIEND:

LAWRENCE FREMER

I par-boil them first. In a soak of beer and onion. For two whole days, then, and this is the key, I--

When Fremer looks across the yard. His face falls. As he sees Jamie Paulson coming toward him...

LAWRENCE FREMER (CONT'D)

Be right back, Bill. Keep an eye on the burgers--

Fremer moves toward Jamie... It is obvious these two have crossed swords before...

LAWRENCE FREMER (CONT'D)

What the hell are you doing here? At my house?

JAMIE

I came to ask you a few questions. The last thing I expected was to find you having a party a couple days after three people died on your watch...

LAWRENCE FREMER

It's Labor Day Weekend. This was set long before that. And what happened at the zoo had *nothing* to do with what you think it did...

JAMIE

No? Then would you care to comment on information we have that relates to the zoo's feeding schedule being adjusted due to budgetary restrictions? And the feedings themselves being greatly reduced for the same reason?

He looks at her...

LAWRENCE FREMER

"Information" culled from where, Jamie? Our previous vendors? Our previous *disgruntled* vendors?

JAMIE

Care to comment?

LAWRENCE FREMER

You've been waging a war on me and my department for two years now, Jamie. Ever stop to consider why? A childhood trauma perhaps? Mom and Dad leave you in the monkey house when you were a little girl?

She doesn't take the bait. Rather:

JAMIE

About the feedings, sir...

He shakes his head... Considers... Then:

LAWRENCE FREMER

The feedings have been changed because we are going to a more environmentally-safe food source. That is all. The zoo is fully staffed with the best people in the business. Always has been.

He looks at her...

LAWRENCE FREMER (CONT'D)
This wasn't about the zoo. This was
about the lions.

JAMIE
The lions? What about them?

But Fremer's attention is drawn ACROSS THE YARD... To where
his daughter, 8-years-old, is CRYING TO HER MOTHER. Fremer
looks back at Jamie...

LAWRENCE FREMER
The issue *isn't* with the zoo. An
autopsy is being completed now that
will confirm it.

Fremer's daughter continues to wail. Several other guests
crouch down to comfort her. Fremer gestures to his daughter:

LAWRENCE FREMER (CONT'D)
Maybe *that's* a story you should be
following with your dogged
journalistic paranoia --

JAMIE
What story?

LAWRENCE FREMER
Someone has been abducting the cats
in this neighborhood. *Dozens* have
gone missing over the last few weeks.
And, just last night, they took my
daughter's cat, Cupcake. So if you
don't mind--

JAMIE
-- Who would steal cats?

LAWRENCE FREMER
No idea. But if you find him, let me
know. Because I want to smash his
face in.

Jamie and Fremer watch as Fremer's daughter sobs in her
mother's arms. Fremer turns to Jamie:

LAWRENCE FREMER (CONT'D)
Now get the hell off my property.

EXT. SAVANNAH - AFRICA - DAY

As the Land Rover rumbles out from the dense jungle umbrage to the open expanses of the savannah, A *CHATTERING FLOCK OF STORKS BURST FROM A TREETOP*. And we HEAR:

OZ (O.S.)
Remember when you told me about that clan? The Abagura?

INT. LAND ROVER - MOVING - DAY

Oz looks over to Abraham...

ABRAHAM
The Abagura. Yes. What of them?

OZ
You said that when they raid a village, they all go in single file. So as to only leave one set of footprints; so that no one would ever know how many of them had been present at the attack...

Abraham recognizes the "wheels spinning" look in his friend's eyes.

ABRAHAM
Yes. So?

OZ
What if it wasn't only one lion in your brother's camp that scared everybody off? But many? In single file?

Abraham looks at him...

ABRAHAM
Sure. And then they all played musical chairs --

OZ
(smiles)
Okay. It's ridiculous. I know--

Oz is suddenly thrown forward as Abraham *stomps the brakes*...

OZ (CONT'D)
What the--

But Oz stops himself as he sees, amidst the tall ELEPHANT GRASS:

A COVERED SAFARI BUS leaning obscenely on two sets of wheels against a crop of sausage trees... It has clearly SPUN OFF THE ROAD. Surrounding it, the tall grass is eerily still.

There are no signs of people.

The CLACKER of a round chambering in a Remington pulls Oz's attention back to Abraham. Abraham loads the two rifles and hands one to Oz...

ABRAHAM

Stay close to the truck...

EXT. OKAVANGO DELTA - DAY

Oz follows Abe out of the Land Rover.

ABRAHAM

... And keep me covered.

OZ

You know I'm not the greatest shot.

But Abraham is already pushing his way through the tall, coarse grass, heading for the bus, weapon shouldered, as Oz's eyes nervously search the savannah for any signs of movement as Abraham continues forward...

But only the soft, hot breeze is stirring. And the CARRION EATERS circling above, making it all the more portentous --

Oz raises the Remington and presses an eye to the sight, ZOOMING FOCUS onto Abraham, who is half a dozen steps away from the canted entrance of the bus...

Abraham, ever-cautious, calls out in Swahili:

ABRAHAM

Hujambo-- Mtu yeyote huko--?

From inside the bus there is the unmistakable sound of a MAN MOANING WEAKLY. Abraham recognizes it as --

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Brother-- !

And Abraham races inside the bus. Oz tries to follow Abraham's silhouette, but he can't see anything... He moves his scope to the rear of the bus... When suddenly --

A NOISE on Oz's flank--! He turns -- past the 3 meter high grass he sees a FLASH OF MOVEMENT IN THE JUNGLE -- his back tensing in fear as --

A TERRIFIED WOMAN CHARGES OUT FROM THE TREE LINE, JABBERING AT OZ IN FRENCH --

TERRIFIED WOMAN
*AIDEZ-MOI-- S'IL VOUS PLAÎT-- LES
 LIONS-- LES LIONS-- !!*

She gets right into his face... Chattering on... Grabbing at him... Eyes flashing panic, fear, doom --

Her name is CHLOE TOUSIGNANT. She is early 30s and beautiful despite her ravaged appearance:

CHLOE
AIDEZ-MO!

OZ
 I can't understand you-- Are you hurt?

She tries English, thickly accented:

CHLOE
Please! We must leave! Immediately!

OZ
 Calm down. What happened to you?

CHLOE
 Please!

OZ
 (calls out)
 ABRAHAM! ABRAHAM!

But Oz cuts his words short, eyes going wide, when he sees, near the bus:

THE TALL GRASS SWAYS AND A MASSIVE MALE LION APPEARS FROM WITHIN THE THICKET.

Thick mane, long and dark -- its muscled body undulating with lethal grace. It is both beautiful and terrifying --

Oz is frozen. Chloe whimpers. As if the demons that haunt her nightmares have returned, as the lion moves through the tall grass toward the entrance of the bus...

OZ (CONT'D)
 (softly)
 No--

The lion's ears prick up as it turns. Looks at Oz and Chloe for a beat. As if taking them in. As if weighing its options... And then, it *slinks into the bus*.

OZ (CONT'D)

No... God... No...

(shouts)

ABRAHAM--!

But the words are no sooner out of Oz's mouth when *THREE QUICK GUNSHOTS, MIXED WITH THE LION'S ROAR RING OUT FROM INSIDE THE BUS* --

The bus begins to SHAKE... Instinctively, Oz starts for it, but Chloe frantically pulls him back towards the Land Rover --

CHLOE

No--! We have to go! Now--!

-- It is too late for him--

OZ

-- My friend is in there--

-- No--

But as Oz tries to pull away from her he sees: the bus stops shaking. A frozen moment as Oz watches, breathless, praying to see Abraham emerge from the bus. But, instead --

IT'S THE LARGE MALE LION THAT SLINKS OUT. *It's maw sloppy with blood spatter*. It STARES, once again, at Oz and Chloe with an implacable amber-eyed gaze --

OZ (CONT'D)

... No --

And then a soft scream emerges from Chloe. OZ turns to see --

A DOZEN MORE LIONS LIFTING THEMSELVES FROM THE TALL GRASS.

As scared as he is, Oz notices that EACH TAWNY HEAD HAS A GOLDEN MANE. *Males*. Oz looks bewildered. We are not sure why. Nor do we have the time to ruminate over it because --

THE BLOOD-SPATTERED LION ROARS AND TUMBLES INTO A CHARGE, DISAPPEARING BENEATH THE TOP OF THE GRASS --

The other lions fall in behind him. All of them unseen now, as the tall grass sways and ripples out in every direction. As if the beasts are moving with what seems to be a coordinated synchronicity, fanning out as --

OZ AND CHLOE RUN. Racing full tilt for the Land Rover --

Oz glances back, sees the ripples of tall grass approaching as the lions close the gap, trying to sight up the rifle at full sprint...

BANG! He squeezes off a wild shot into the coarse grass -- Oz tries to chamber another round - but fumbles the Remington which **FALLS FROM HIS GRASP** - disappearing into the grass, Oz leaves it, barely breaking stride, as we **CUT TO:--**

Chloe still running, up ahead -- **CRYING** as she runs through the **THICK, COARSE GRASS** and **WIPES OUT** -- coming down **HARD** -- unable to see anything but grass, when suddenly OZ is there to help her up --

OZ (CONT'D)

C'MON!

Oz pulls her to her feet -- they scramble the last few yards to the Land Rover, as --

The blood-spattered lion bursts from the grass. **LUNGING** into the air... **STRETCHING** himself out --

AND WITH ONLY A MOMENT LEFT BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH - OZ RIPS OPEN THE DOOR TO THE LAND ROVER AND TRIES TO SCRAMBLE IN - AS THE POUNCING LION SMASHES INTO THE DOOR LIKE A MIDDLE LINEBACKER DOING A 4.2 40 --

Oz is heaved back into the door post with such violence that stars dance in his eyes and his knees go soft, but -- from inside the Land Rover, **CHLOE** (*who has entered from the passenger side*) **GRABS AT OZ** --

She pulls him into the truck before he spills to the ground!

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Oz yanks the door shut just as the remainder of the lions arrive on the scene -- **CAMERA WHIPS** around the Land Rover as the grass sways from the unseen lions powerful frames...

As Oz fires up the engine and peels off and away... Leaving the lions in the Land Rover's wake...

And as Chloe hugs herself tight, trying to stave off her body's dreadful shaking, Oz checks the **REAR VIEW MIRROR:**

But what he sees is somehow *even more terrifying* --

Because the blood-spattered lion is not pursuing the vehicle. Rather, it takes a seat in the middle of the rutted, dirt road. Placidly watching the Land Rover bounce away... as he is joined by the rest of his pride.

Who also simply sit and watch after the vanishing vehicle...

Oz trembles at the sight of this...

Because it's as if these beasts now possess a quality far more dangerous than their ferocity, savagery, strength...

The quality of patience.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

CLOSE ON A BLACK BEAR, as it "ROOOOARS"... We WIDEN OUT TO:

EXT. L.A. ZOO - BEAR ENCLOSURE - DAY

MITCH LARKIN (30s, hyper-intelligent, with a moppish awkwardness), emerges from the enclosure, hands dirty. He carries VIALS of a brownish substance...

Jaime stands at the edge of the enclosure, calling out:

JAMIE

Mitchell Larkin?

MITCH LARKIN

Yes. Although it's "Mitch". Which isn't much better than "Mitchell". But it's all I had to work with...

JAMIE

Jamie Paulson. "*L.A. Times*".

Jaime offers her hand, but:

MITCH LARKIN

I'm not gonna shake your hand...

He holds up the vials...

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

Samples. Put it this way: *the woods* are not the only place a bear, uh, *relieves himself*... Never mind. How can I help you?

He smiles sheepishly, more than a bit taken with her looks.

JAMIE

You're the animal coroner, right? You ran the autopsy on the two lions who escaped--?

MITCH LARKIN

Ethologist.

JAMIE

I'm sorry--?

MITCH LARKIN

Ethologist. Not coroner. I study the behavior of animals in natural conditions.

JAMIE
 (re: the Zoo)
 And *unnatural* conditions...

MITCH LARKIN
 Yeah. Those, too. But if the story
 you're after is that the lions were
 mistreated, I'm afraid I'm only going
 to disappoint you...

JAMIE
 But they were agitated enough to kill
 the zookeeper and two others?

MITCH LARKIN
 Yes. I have a theory about that.
 And it, too, will most likely
 disappoint you.

JAMIE
 Try me.

EXT. RIVERINE FOREST - AFRICA - DAY

Oz drives the Land Rover down this narrow slash of jungle
 road. Chloe is finally starting to calm down. A tad.

OZ
 Are you okay--?

CHLOE
 No, I have never been less okay.

OZ
 Here, this will help --

And he takes a FLASK from his pocket... Hands it to her...

OZ (CONT'D)
 Kentucky bourbon.

She unscrews the cap. Takes a sip. Then another. Oz allows
 the bourbon to work its magic... Then:

OZ (CONT'D)
 My name's Jackson.

CHLOE
 Chloe.

OZ
 Can you tell me what happened, Chloe?

She considers... Looks at her cuts and bruises... Plays with the cap of the flask... Then, finally:

CHLOE

We were out looking for the animals. There were perhaps twenty of us. A very sweet group of Japanese tourists. A Russian couple. A... teen tour. Eight wonderful children...

(tears in her eyes)

When the Guide...

OZ

Simon -- ?

CHLOE

Yes. When he called out "*Simba!*" And we saw them. Two beautiful lions. Lolling in the sun. Everyone took photographs. But then... something fell down on us. From a tree. It was... another lion... And then another after that. And then a third... The ones in the sun never even moved.

She shakes her head with the memory...

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Simon tried to fire at them with his gun. But the lions got to him first, I think. I cannot be sure. I just ran. There was one Japanese man running with me. But a lion caught him. I didn't look back. But I could hear it. There were so many screams. It all happened so fast...

Oz looks at her, riven by her story, as she takes another sip, a longer one this time... Then:

CHLOE (CONT'D)

I can only tell you that I ran into the jungle. I knew I was going to die. And that it was going to be the worst death one could imagine.

She looks at him, her haunted eyes meet his:

CHLOE (CONT'D)

How does that even happen? At what point do you die? How does one get eaten to death?

Oz stares at her, realizing that she's waiting for an answer.

OZ
... I don't know.

She nods. Then, of the bourbon:

CHLOE
They do good work in Kentucky.

And as she takes another sip...

INT. MEDICAL TREATMENT ROOM - ZOO - DAY

A fully-tricked out ANIMAL TREATMENT ROOM. Which is almost like a surgical theater. Only everything supersized. Larkin leads Jamie to a massive EXAM TABLE.

MITCH LARKIN
Meet Adam and Eve...

Mitchell pulls back the sheet on the exam table, revealing: THE AUTOPSIED BODIES of the two LIONS. Jamie grimaces.

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)
They're siblings. Captured in the Serengeti at eight months old. They were living in that enclosure for the past fourteen years... Without incident. Here...

Mitch offers her a BUSINESS CARD.

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)
Mitchell Larkin, Associate Professor, UCSD. If you're going to quote me, go with "Mitchell", it'll make my mother happy. She still wishes I hadn't given up my cello lessons. Don't ask.

JAMIE
But funding was recently pulled. I know the cutbacks affected the Landscaping Department and Janitorial Services. Rumor has it the men's rooms are now, sadly, devoid of urinal cakes. But isn't it possible that the well-being of the animals was also affected --

MITCH LARKIN
Anything is always *possible*. But not based on what I see here.

Mitch pulls a FILE, and hands it to Jamie. As she reads...

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

Their body fat content was normal.
No signs of bruising or lacerations.
They were healthy, well-fed, well-
adjusted creatures.

He moves to a PAN beside the table. On which there are --

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

Brains were each 250 grams, which is
the high end of normal, but that's
still, you know, normal. If you
don't want to take my word for it, I
can show you...

Mitch indicates the lions --

JAMIE

No, that's okay. I'd rather not see
any half-chewed body parts.

MITCH LARKIN

Oh, there were no body parts. The
lions didn't feed.

JAMIE

Is that... Typical?

MITCH LARKIN

Depends on your definition of
typical. Typically, when a lion
kills, the male eats first. He fills
up til he's satisfied, and the female
eats the remains. But then, people
aren't their typical food source.

Jamie considers that.

JAMIE

You said you had a theory?

Larkin nods, gestures to the lions on the slab --

MITCH LARKIN

You don't wanna see this anymore, do
you -- ?

JAMIE

No...

Larkin covers the lions back up with the sheet.

MITCH LARKIN

A professor of mine at Harvard... My mentor really... He would say that they did it to ensure their own survival...

JAMIE

Their own survival? That zookeeper and those golfers in no way threatened those lions...

MITCH LARKIN

His theory, not mine. Among the many things he said, my professor would say that we all -- *humans* -- are the greatest threat to the continued existence of life on this planet. And that one day all the "*lesser creatures*" would figure that out.

JAMIE

... Come on --

MITCH LARKIN

I didn't say it was a *sane* theory. Though they all laughed at Newton when he proposed his notion of gravity.

Mitch deposits the brains into plastic specimen bags, which he seals inside travel containers as:

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

Anyway, it sort of loses its bubbles when you consider the eleven...

JAMIE

The eleven what?

MITCH LARKIN

The eleven times zoo lions have killed humans with no apparent mistreatment or provocation...

JAMIE

... ever?

MITCH LARKIN

Three hundred and fifty zoos in the United States. Which collectively attract 175 million visitors a year. The first one opened in 1874.

(MORE)

MITCH LARKIN (CONT'D)

And, in all that time, there are only eleven documented cases of unprovoked lions killing humans... And approximately six hundred and twelve people that choked to death on hot dogs bought at the zoo...

(he looks at her, grins)

If the lions are waging a turf war, the hot dogs are doing a better job.

EXT. ZOO - DAY

Mitch walks Jamie through the grounds...

JAMIE

So, what now?

MITCH LARKIN

Now? Now I head back to San Diego. I teach at eight a.m., can't miss the first day of school.

JAMIE

But don't you want to know why this happened? So it doesn't happen again?

MITCH LARKIN

I'm confused. Is this still about budget cuts? Because, like I said, there's nothing to that.

JAMIE

I dunno. Maybe I'm looking for the unicorn that killed Kennedy...

MITCH LARKIN

Should I understand that? Is that, like, a saying?

JAMIE

No...

MITCH LARKIN

I'm sorry I couldn't give you what you wanted. But sometimes a mystery remains a mystery.

Jamie nods... Resigned...

JAMIE

Right. Like missing cats in Brentwood...

MITCH LARKIN

Is that another saying?

JAMIE

No. Apparently there's a rash of missing cats in Brentwood.

MITCH LARKIN

Are you sure they've gone missing? Maybe they just couldn't get into a good private school.

Jamie smiles. Awkward as he is, he's kinda charming. She hands him a business card...

JAMIE

My cell number is on there. If you think of anything...

I/E. RIVERINE FOREST / LAND ROVER - MOVING - DAY

Red-orange tones shaft through the leafy greens of the forest's canopy, suggesting the approach of dusk... They drive in silence for a beat... Then:

OZ

I never asked: did you have... A friend or loved one with you? Did you lose someone?

CHLOE

No. But this *is* my honeymoon...

OZ

Was your husband... ?

CHLOE

My husband is back in Paris. Although he never became my husband. Five weeks before we were to be married I learned of his love for a travel agent with an office on Rue De Rivoli...

OZ

I'm sorry. That must have been a shock...

CHLOE

It was. I did not know there was still such a thing as travel agents.

He looks at her... She smiles slightly. Her sense of humor returning, albeit slowly. But he appreciates it.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

The wedding was cancelled. But the safari honeymoon was planned. I decided to come on my own... I needed to be as far away from Rue De Rivoli as can be...

Oz nods. Drives on for a beat... Then:

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Our guide, Simon, was your friend?

OZ

Yes. And his brother is... *Was...* My best friend...

CHLOE

The man who went into the bus?

As the sorrow of his own loss asserts itself, Oz nods.

OZ

The man who went into the bus.

Before Chloe can respond, Oz stops the Land Rover. Because the road before them ends abruptly at a GORGE'S LIP.

CHLOE

Why are we stopping--?

OZ

This is as close as we can get by Jeep. There's an Emergency Shelter two miles from here. With a radio we can use to call for help...

Chloe looks at him, fearing the answer as she asks:

CHLOE

You're not suggesting -- ?

OZ

Yeah. We walk.

OFF CHLOE. Her panic returning...

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE**EXT. RIVERINE FOREST - DUSK**

As the sun begins the final leg of its day's work, the Land Rover remains where last we saw it: perched near the upper edge of a rocky gorge...

OZ (O.S.)

If we move at a healthy clip...

INT. LAND ROVER - DUSK

Oz watches the sky as he continues to try and convince Chloe of the merits of leaving the Land Rover behind:

OZ

... we can make the Emergency Shelter before dark...

But Chloe ain't hearing it. Her fingers remaining tightly wound around Oz's flask.

CHLOE

I am *not* getting out.

OZ

We've got to get to that radio and call in what's happened out here.

CHLOE

Yes. *Understood.* With no argument. So you go without me.

Oz takes a breath, steeling his own nerves and by extension steeling Chloe's. He leans in...

OZ

Chloe... I can't think of anything I want to do less than climb out of this car--

CHLOE

So do not. Free will is what separates us from the animals. Free will and this truck...

Oz can't help but smile at her resolute stubbornness. Then:

OZ

I know two things about lions: they recently fed. So they won't be doing any long trekking in search of dinner. And all this...

He gestures to the forest surrounding them...

OZ (CONT'D)

... is uncomfortable for lions. Their paws. They prefer wide-open terrain. They don't come out this way. We'll be fine...

Chloe turns to him. His words sinking in. But then:

CHLOE

You are lying to me. I see the look in your eyes...

OZ

Okay. Something is clearly not right here. Back at the vehicles, there were almost a dozen male lions. They never travel like that. A typical pride consists mainly of females, their offspring, and one or two males.

He looks at her...

OZ (CONT'D)

I don't know what's going on. But I *do know* that we don't want to be here when night falls...

He tries to appeal to her with his eyes... She looks at him for a beat... Then:

CHLOE

When they attacked us? As they were tearing those poor people apart? I could swear those lions were smiling.

OZ

Smiling?

Chloe takes another pull of whiskey from the flask, then hands it back to him as:

CHLOE

Yes. Like they were... *Having fun.*

And she opens the door, and gets out of the Land Rover. Leaving Oz to consider those final words, as we CUT TO:

INT. VILLAGE IDIOT - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

A mid-sized restaurant/watering hall. Ethan, Jamie's former paramour, enters the bar.

He does a quick scan and sees Jamie. Sitting at a table in a corner, nursing a glass of wine and feeling sorry for herself.

Ethan sidles up next to her. Jamie looks at him, her expression neutral.

ETHAN

Drowning your sorrows?

JAMIE

I've been trying to. But they just keep coming up for air...

(she shrugs)

What do you want?

ETHAN

I spoke to Brenda. She's willing to reinstate you. Conditionally.

JAMIE

I have to shut down my site.

ETHAN

Which is no great tragedy. Your blog gets 24,000 unique eyeballs. The paper has 4.2 million readers.

JAMIE

I *like* my unique eyeballs...

He studies her for a beat... Then:

ETHAN

Why don't we take a little vacation? We'll go up to Ojai for the weekend and...

JAMIE

I don't need a vacation. I need a reset. I mean, when did I become so pigheaded?

ETHAN

Let me put on my "*HURT LOCKER*" suit before answering that one...

She looks at him... Softening a bit to him... as her PHONE vibrates on the bar. With a TEXT.

She checks it: "*IT'S MITCH LARKIN. CAN YOU TALK?*" Jamie ignores it, but Ethan has read it over her shoulder...

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Who's Mitch Larkin?

JAMIE
Just a guy...

ETHAN
I hope he's not part of your
"reset"...

Nothing from Jamie. So:

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Ojai? What do you say?

JAMIE
I say I just lost my job. And I'm
not really sure that this thing we've
been doing for over a year now even
has a name. But I can't say I feel
good about it...

Jamie gets ANOTHER TEXT. From Mitch: "*I FOUND THE CATS*".

Now, Jamie is *intrigued*, but she doesn't want to it to show.

ETHAN
Look, this is a chance for a do-over.
On both fronts. You come back to the
paper. And we take our thing to the
next level. Because I don't want to
lose you in either...

He looks at her... Open-faced, vulnerable...

ETHAN (CONT'D)
What do you say-?

She considers... Then smiles:

JAMIE
I say, I'd like another Malbec. If
you're buying...

ETHAN
Done.

And he goes to the bar. A spring to his step. But Jamie's
text goes off yet again. She looks at it: "*You really need
to see this.*"

A look to Ethan. A look back to the text. And we CUT TO:

EXT. GORGE - AFRICA - DUSK

As the sun dips dangerously close to the horizon-line, Oz and Chloe edge their way along THE GORGE'S UPPER LIP when they break out into an OPEN MEADOW - a couple hundred feet wide. It's shaped like a half moon with the straight side dropping perilously to the gorge's bottom...

Chloe stops a moment, taking in the breathtaking view. Then Oz points towards the other side...

OZ

There's a stepped slope over there,
that'll take us down to the water.
(off the fear in her eyes)
Staying on the move is safest.

As they start walking along the gorge's lip, Chloe continue to look around the landscape searching for trouble...

CHLOE

You bushwhackers just live for the excitement of this all, yes?

OZ

I'd be inclined to agree with you if I considered myself a bushwhacker. But you don't deal with a lot of wildlife growing up in Boston. At least not the kind you find out here...

CHLOE

Boston? This is a long way from there. Why Africa?

The directness of the question gives Oz pause. He looks to Chloe, the distraction of conversation seems to be relaxing her a bit. Him too, if he's being honest. So...

OZ

I suppose because it's a long way from there.

Chloe meets his eyes. Sees the hint of pain there.

CHLOE

I see.

OZ

Sometimes life throws a bag of hammers at you. I took a regular pelting for a while, figured it wa--

But Oz's breath catches in his throat as he sees...

A LARGE MALE LION EMERGES FROM THE TREE LINE, BLOCKING THEIR PATH. Oz and Chloe freeze in their tracks--

As ANOTHER LARGE MALE LION emerges from behind the first. Taking a position to block their retreat.

And now SIX OR SEVEN MORE MALE LIONS REVEAL THEMSELVES FROM BEHIND THE FIRST, DASHING ANY REMOTE THOUGHT OF ESCAPE...

Oz is stunned. Because they were, in fact, walking in a single file. But then:

CHLOE

Please, God, no --

Oz and Chloe instinctively back up to *THE EDGE OF THE MEADOW, A TINY DIRT OVER-HANG*. Chloe takes a peek at *THE STEEP DROP*. To a raging river, boiling with current...

A choked sob escapes Chloe's lips. The fear of what is to come too overwhelming to stifle... As Oz shifts himself between Chloe and the Lions:

OZ

I'm sorry. I-- I'm sorry...

Trapped on the dirt over-hang, Oz and Chloe can only watch as... THE BLOOD-SPATTERED LION emerges from the trees -- its tail swishing as it makes a slow approach...

Chloe, squeezes her eyes shut. Her body trembling as she whispers Psalm 23:4:

CHLOE

*Oui, si je marche dans la vallée de
l'ombre de la mort, je ne crains
aucun mal...*

The blood-spattered lion, its shaggy mane rippling in the breeze, continues its approach as the others hang back. Like a gang of hoodlums giving their boss first dibs on the kill.

Oz inches farther back - adding more weight to the already stressed over-hang...

The blood-spattered lion steps up to Oz, bringing them literally nose-to-nose -- the Lion's carnivorous breath hot on Oz's face. But what Oz more keenly notices are --

THE LION'S EYES: because while the right eye appears normal, the LEFT EYE is freakishly odd.

The PUPIL is incredibly DILATED. Like a felt-tip pen left too long on a piece of paper. So the entire left eye is subsumed by its pupil...

And we see Oz react as something occurs to him. *Something deeply meaningful, though we don't yet understand it.*

OZ
(stunned, to himself)
The defiant pupil --

But before we can quite understand the realization he has come to, the blood-spattered lion opens its jaw and lets loose a FEROCIOUS ROAR!

Terrified, Chloe JERKS BACKWARDS - losing her footing - and as she starts to slip off the over-hang, she GRABS at Oz to keep from going over the edge, yanking him closer to her --

And out of the reach of the blood-spattered lion, whose jaws gnash at the place where Oz's head was only a second ago --

But this causes them to both stumble back... And soon they are TUMBLING DOWN the sloped embankment.

And the lion also loses its footing... *And goes toppling after them!*

Slipping and sliding down the few hundred feet on the soft dirt and mud.

It's a wide and harrowing ride as they careen down towards the turbulent river below. And it's made *all the more* harrowing by the four hundred pound lion plummeting down the embankment after them...

Oz and Chloe narrowly evade a pair of razor clawed swipes the lion makes for them... But then suddenly the sloped embankment beneath them is no more. They have gone over a ledge. And they are --

FREE FALLING! Oz, Chloe and the lion experience a PROLONGED MOMENT OF WEIGHTLESSNESS. ALL SOUND MOMENTARILY LEACHES OUT. It's a moment captured in time. Like a breath being held --

And then the SOUND RETURNS as they SPLASH INTO --

EXT. RIVER - DUSK

They all disappear under the surface of the water. A forever beat -- then Chloe is up first... then Oz... gasping for air as *the current HAULS THEM DOWNSTREAM, through violent chutes, steep drops and deep holes --*

Struggling to keep their heads above water, Oz and Chloe frantically search the rapids for signs of the lion...

OZ

Do you... See him -- ?

But Chloe can't answer. As she's taken a lung full of water.

Oz reaches out. Trying to get close enough to grab her. But the river is a crazed chauffeur. Fighting against it.

Oz gets a hand on her. But in that same moment, the blood-spattered lion suddenly RISES UP FROM BENEATH THE CURRENT --

The creature LUNGES for Chloe -- but Oz YANKS her clear of the lion's downward trajectory -- just as they SLAM INTO A ROCK OUTCROPPING.

Oz is dazed, but also slowed enough for his fingers to find purchase before he can be dragged further down river. And while Oz grips the rock tight with one hand and Chloe with the other--

THE LION IS SWEEPED BACK UNDER THE WATER AND DOWN A CHUTE.

Oz hauls Chloe to the safety of the rock. Soaked, breathless, relieved. Almost unable to comprehend that they survived. And Chloe continues to cling to him, like he was the last train out of Hell.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**EXT. BRENTWOOD - NIGHT**

Jamie pulls her car to the curb on this dark, quiet, tree-lined street. Larkin is there waiting for her in front of a LARGE BRICK BUILDING. As she joins him:

JAMIE

I thought you said you were heading
back to San Diego...

Unlike his earlier enthusiasm, Larkin looks somewhat drawn. Like he's reeling a little.

MITCH LARKIN

I was. But then I got to thinking
about what you said. *Dozens* of
missing cats. It seemed so... Odd.

(beat)

Domestic cats will wander but they
always return to their food source,
which suggested maybe there was a
predator...

JAMIE

Okay...

MITCH LARKIN

I figured I'd drive around this
neighborhood a bit. See if I saw
anything...

Jamie smiles a bit at the absurdity of this...

JAMIE

You went on a cat stakeout?

MITCH LARKIN

Something like that...

(shrugs)

Sounds foolish, I know... Then one
ran across the road. A Siamese.
Which means someone's pet. So I
followed it.

JAMIE

You followed a cat--?

MITCH LARKIN

Yes. Which isn't easy...

JAMIE

Okay, you're kind of freaking me out
right now...

MITCH LARKIN

You're not the only one...

Which is not at all comforting to her. After a beat:

JAMIE

So what happened? To the cat? Where
is it?

Rather than answer her, Larkin snaps on a FLASHLIGHT.

MITCH LARKIN

You should see for yourself.

He turns and starts down a WOODED PATH beside the building.
As Jamie follows, we CUT TO:

EXT. EMERGENCY SHELTER - AFRICAN DELTA - NIGHT

Oz and Chloe reach the small, wood framed EMERGENCY SHELTER.
Oz dials the combination lock as:

OZ

"The Defiant Pupil."

CHLOE

What is that?

OZ

Up until today, I thought it was a
student...

The lock undone, he opens the door.

INT. EMERGENCY SHELTER - AFRICA - NIGHT

Oz and Chloe enter. Oz flips on the lights to reveal the
bare necessities for survival...

Shelves of first aid supplies. A potbellied stove in the
middle of the room. A bathroom and small bedroom off to the
back. The air is stale; no one's been here in a while. Oz
moves to a HIGH-FREQUENCY RADIO. As he powers it up:

OZ

My father was a scientist. He had
all sorts of theories about animal
behavior. Some of it real out-there
stuff, but plausible.

(MORE)

OZ (CONT'D)

For instance, he wondered why animals continued to live in fear of their predators, when in theory they have the ability to coordinate and kill whatever species is a threat...

He futzes with the radio... Trying to raise a signal...

OZ (CONT'D)

But in the end, his theories never quite added up. Which nearly drove him crazy...

(correcting himself)

Not "nearly". Actually drove him crazy...

Chloe is sorting through cans of beans. Tuna. Etc.

CHLOE

What does this have to do with a pupil?

OZ

Well, that's just it. Sometimes when he was rambling he'd talk about a defiant pupil. That the defiant pupil was his "aha" moment.

Beat as Oz is still trying to process this...

OZ (CONT'D)

And now I think... What he was talking about... Is the mydriasis I saw in that lion's left eye. Right before we fell...

CHLOE

What does this mean? "Mydriasis"?

OZ

The pupil was enlarged. *Blown*. I'm not sure due to what. But I think it explains why those lions attacked us. And why they've defied every known aspect of typical behavior...

(beat)

And I think... maybe my father wasn't entirely crazy.

(then)

He made a bunch of tapes. His manifesto of sorts. I have them back at my camp.

As Chloe considers this, with a squawk, the RADIO HUMMMS TO LIFE, emitting static. Oz depresses the microphone --

OZ (CONT'D)
Botswana center, this is Jackson Oz.
I'm in Emergency Shelter 25...

EXT. BRENTWOOD - BEHIND THE BRICK BUILDING - NIGHT

The back of the two-story brick building is surrounded by GRAND OLD TREES.

JAMIE (O.S.)
So, not that this isn't how I love to
spend my Sunday nights...

The FLASHLIGHT BEAM sweeps across frame as Larkin appears through the trees, followed by Jamie...

JAMIE (CONT'D)
But just exactly where are we going?

Larkin stops beneath the trees closest to the building:

LARKIN
We're here.

Jamie looks around. No cats. Looks back at Larkin.

JAMIE
Okay...

With that, Larkin angles his flashlight up into the branches of the trees. And there, on the lower branches... Several CATS cling. Five or six.

JAMIE (CONT'D)
Nice. You found a few of them!

But Larkin moves his flashlight funnel into higher branches. Where there even more cats. Perhaps twenty. Or thirty.

And, to Jamie's horror, Larkin sweeps the beam across the other trees... To reveal: In every tree. On every branch.
A HUNDRED FUCKING CATS.

A few bare their fangs and HISS as light sweeps across them. They are close to feral. And seem to be laying in wait...

Jamie is speechless. Stunned. Finally she looks down and meets Larkin's eyes, clearly chilled himself...

JAMIE (CONT'D)
What... Is this place?

LARKIN
Sunshine Elementary.

Jamie looks at him, horrified...

LARKIN (CONT'D)
And tomorrow's the first day of
school.

As the "what the fuck is going on here?!" implications of
that wash across Jamie's face --

JAMIE
Maybe we should call your
professor...

LARKIN
We can't. He's dead. Committed
suicide five years ago...

As Jamie and Larkin continue to stare at the hissing,
screeching, slinking felines, their diamond-eyes glowing --

LARKIN (CONT'D)
Although he does have a son.

INT. EMERGENCY SHELTER - AFRICA - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: *the son*. Oz has fixed them mugs of instant coffee
as across the room Chloe comes out of the bathroom.

OZ
I made coffee. I hope you like it
black and bitter, because that's all
we--

He turns and his words catch in his throat. She has washed
her face. Put her hair up. Her clothes still filthy and
torn but she looks much better. Check that: she looks
beautiful.

If Oz is obviously taken aback at the transformation, he is
saved from embarrassment by the SOUND OF JEEPS approaching...

CHLOE
That was fast. They said it would
take them an hour.

EXT. EMERGENCY SHELTER - NIGHT

Jackson emerges, followed by Chloe. AS TWO POLICE JEEPS
appear over a hill, their headlights cutting the darkness.

Oz and Chloe shield their eyes as the jeeps skid to a stop, kicking up dust which swirls in the blinding lights. Half a dozen backlit SILHOUETTES emerge from the vehicles.

KENYAN POLICEMAN

Jackson Oz?

OZ

Yes...

And now the figures have come forward far enough to see that they're in UNIFORM, *guns on their hips*.

KENYAN POLICEMAN

You are under arrest.

OZ

For what?!?

And now, emerging though the lights and swirling dirt... *Is Phillip Weber*. The rich kid, would-be big game hunter. A pleased grin on his face. And as Oz realizes...

OZ (CONT'D)

You've got to be kidding me...

Chloe looks on, confused as THE OFFICERS SLAP HAND CUFFS ON OZ and usher him toward a Jeep.

OZ (CONT'D)

Look, this is a joke, I don't have time for this-- I have to get back to my camp. There's something happening here and we need some answers--

Jackson is tucked inside the jeep. The door shut. And as the jeeps drive off, we PULL HIGH AND WIDE, as we HEAR:

PROFESSOR NATHAN OZ (V.O.)

Our ability to think. To interpret. To imagine. In the end, that's what distinguishes humans from other animals.

INT. JACKSON OZ'S TENTED HUT - KITUKO SAFARI CAMP - NIGHT

Dark. The room is lit by a flickering image we cannot see.

PROF. NATHAN OZ (O.S.)

Abstract thought. Poetry. Analogy. The contemplation beyond what we can touch. See. Taste.

FIND Daniel Kenyatta sitting in a chair, once again watching a computer monitor, images reflecting on his face...

PROF. NATHAN OZ (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 But what's the measure of our
 cognitive advantage over other
 species?

ON THE COMPUTER: Nathan Oz stands in his study addressing the camera. Ice cubes clink in his glass as he ponders.

PROF. NATHAN OZ (ON MONITOR) (CONT'D)
 Where has the sum total of our human
 intelligence gotten us? The Mona
 Lisa. The Eiffel Tower. Quantum
 mechanics, yes.

A phone RINGS.

PROF. NATHAN OZ (ON MONITOR) (CONT'D)
 But also The Holocaust. Carbon
 emissions. Terrorism. The decay of
 our world is rampant. Savage.
 Wasting.

The image FREEZES as the phone RINGS AGAIN. Daniel turns from the computer screen, and answers the SAT PHONE.

DANIEL
 Hello?

JAMIE (ON THE PHONE)
 Hi, my name is Jamie Paulson. I'm
 looking for Dr. Jackson Oz.

DANIEL
 Sorry. Jackson's not here. Maybe
 you try back in an hour or two.

INT. JAMIE'S CAR - DRIVING - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Jamie on her cell, covering her disappointment:

JAMIE
 Yes, okay. I will. Thank you.

INT. JACKSON OZ'S TENTED HUT - KITUKO SAFARI CAMP - NIGHT

Daniel hangs up the phone and turns back to the VIDEO FILE open on the computer. He presses PLAY:

PROF. NATHAN OZ (ON MONITOR)
 But consider the birds, the bees, the
 bears, the barracuda...

And we're slowly PUSHING IN ON NATHAN OZ, as:

PROF. NATHAN OZ (CONT'D)
As the world sails toward the tip of
the iceberg, what survival strategy
will *they* employ?

That hangs there a moment. Then Nathan Oz looks down and
ponders the amber liquid in his glass.

PROF. NATHAN OZ (CONT'D)
Will they spend their last days below
decks, doing an Irish jig? Or man
lifeboats and die on the stormy
seas...?

Nathan looks back up. And we are CLOSE on his haunted eyes,
his tone dark, troubled:

PROF. NATHAN OZ (CONT'D)
Or perhaps take matters in their own
hands...

EXT. SKY - SPAIN - DAY

At 20,000 feet. WE PUSH THROUGH CLOUDS. To reveal the lush,
verdant fields of Northern Spain.

PROF. NATHAN OZ (V.O.)
... and toss overboard the captain of
the ship?

As if to punctuate that last ominous remark, A PLANE roars
past camera, streaking through the sky.

INT. IBERIA FLIGHT 47 - DAY

PUSH DOWN THE AISLE, toward the rear of the jet. A FLIGHT
ATTENDANT passes out drinks. As she passes we FIND a 43 YEAR-
OLD MAN in a suit and glasses. He turns the page of his
paperback novel, as --

Suddenly: light TURBULENCE. Just a little. No big deal.
DING. "*FASTEN SEATBELTS*" LIGHTS UP. The man becomes visibly
tense, does his best not to let it show --

FLIGHT ATTENDANT'S VOICE
(Spanish, not subtitled)
*Ladies and gentleman, the pilot has
turned on the fasten seatbelts sign.
Please return to your seats with your
seatbelts fastened...*

Another JOLT. The man nervously clutches his armrest.

WOMAN

No se preocupe, es normal.

The MAN turns to the 82 year-old WOMAN next to him.

MAN

Excuse me?

WOMAN

(Spanish accent)

Is normal. The turbulence.

MAN

I know, thanks.

WOMAN

I get nervous too. Then my husband reminds me that planes *want* to be in the air.

MAN

Well, he sounds like a smart man.

WOMAN

Smart. Yes. But a pain in my ass.

The man smiles, slides open his window shade, just as -- **WHAM!** SOMETHING SMALL AND BLACK STRIKES THE WINDOW! THE MAN GASPS. FOR HE IS STARING AT A CREATURE PLASTERED TO THE WINDOW. *A FUCKING BAT--! 20,000 FEET UP!*

For an instant, the man looks into the bat's EYES. And sees it has an ENLARGED, ink-blot PUPIL in its left eye. The same one the blood-spattered Lion possessed.

The man tries to recover his breath as the bat slips off the window, revealing, in the distance -- *A SWIRLING DARK CLOUD --*

The man's eyes narrow in confusion as he realizes -- *IT'S A MASSIVE SWARM OF BATS! Headed straight for the plane!*

The Man stabs at the call-button. As **WHAMMM--!** The plane is enveloped by the cloud of bats. Their teeming mass blocking the light from the windows as the plane convulses violently, *PASSENGERS SCREAM, and WE SMASH TO BLACK!*

END OF PILOT