

Hard Power

a play by

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(c) 2023

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

FREDERICK BAXTER, male, 30-35, African American - Vice President, Global Markets, at a boutique NYC investment bank, Harvard Law School graduate.

KOUAME/BARTENDER/AIDE/FELIX/JIMMY/HARRIS, male, no specified age, African and American - This actor plays several different characters throughout the play ranging in age and background.

HANS ZIEGLER, male, 60-70, White South African - An experienced salesman who knows how to get deals done with the various governments in West Africa.

JU CHANG, female, 30-35, Chinese national - Harvard Law School educated, leading a team of negotiators for the PRC on their Belt and Road initiative in Africa.

IGOR KOZLOV, male, 40-50, Russian national - Working for the Russian government to complete trade deals in Western Africa.

MINISTER MIRIAM MAMADOU/DORIS/GATE ANNOUNCEMENT, female, 50-60, African - Minister of Mines, Petroleum Resources and Energy, Republic of Côte D'Ivoire, an experienced civil servant.

SETTING

The play takes place in present-day Abidjan, Republic of Côte D'Ivoire. The play moves quickly from location to location and should be staged in such a way that the motion of the play feels continuous to the audience. Locations can be indicated by key set pieces (e.g. a desk, a row of chairs, a pair of elevator doors) which move fluidly on and off stage instead of detailed sets.

LANGUAGES

Occasionally, the characters speak in languages other than English. In some cases, the translation of that language will appear directly afterward in block parentheses []. It is NOT intended for that translation to be used in the production to inform the audience (e.g. as a caption or supertitle). This translation is only provided to assist actors and readers who don't speak those languages.

**PASSENGER ARRIVAL, FÉLIX HOUPHOUËT BOIGNY INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT, ABIDJAN, REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE.**

BAXTER enters pulling a carry-on suitcase with a matching briefcase perched on top. He is talking on a cell phone.

The SOUND OF JETS taxiing and taking off.

BAXTER

I know. I know! What? I didn't have
a choice, Lizzie. Lizzie? Lizzie, I
can't hear you. No, I can't. I'm
not pretending- Listen!

He holds up the phone to the sky as a jet roars overhead.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

OK? Listen- I know. I know! Can-
Can- Lizzie? Lizzie. Can we talk
about this later? I can't say no to
Jimmy. I think you know why. Listen-
I'll call you- I'll call you- Yes I
will. Yes. When I get to the- Yes!
Hotel. Yes! Lizzie. Lizzie? Hello?

KOUAME ENTERS running, grabs BAXTER's suitcase and starts running back the way he came.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

HEY!

KOUAME

Double parked! Double parked!
Hello!

BAXTER

Give me that!

KOUAME

(Pulling on the suitcase)
Hello! Quickly please! Double
parked!

ZIEGLER ENTERS

ZIEGLER

Mr. Baxter?

BAXTER

My name is Baxter. Are you Zeigler?

ZIEGLER

Forgive him, we're double parked
and that's not a good situation
here.

(shaking BAXTER's hand)

Hans Zeigler. People just call me
Zeigler. Just let him take the
bags.

BAXTER lets go of the suitcase but hangs onto his briefcase.
KOUAME runs off with the suitcase.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

That's Kouame, he's my driver when
I'm in town. A little jumpy but
that is an asset when driving in
Abidjan. Quick reflexes, eh? Did
you have a good flight?

BAXTER

No.

ZIEGLER

(Looking around
nervously)

Of course. The car is over here. So
Jimmy is sick?

BAXTER

Cancer.

ZIEGLER

Is it bad?

BAXTER

Stage 4 lymphoma.

ZIEGLER

Not good. He just found out?

BAXTER

Tuesday.

ZIEGLER

You Americans, you're always the
last to know everything. In you
get.

ZIEGLER and BAXTER climb into the back seat of KOUAME's very
small car.

KOUAME

Quickly please. Hello! Hello!

BAXTER
You don't have to worry.

ZIEGLER
Do I look worried?

BAXTER
I am up to speed.

ZIEGLER
Of course. And what does that mean?
Up to speed?

KOUAME hits the gas and they take a twisting and turning ride.

BAXTER
I don't understand.

ZIEGLER
You say you are up to speed. You
work on Jimmy's Global South team?

BAXTER
I work on Europe and Central Asia
for him.

ZIEGLER
I see. Hang on.

They take a very sharp corner.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)
Good one, Kouame!

KOUAME
Thank you Mr. Z!

ZIEGLER
He wants to drive Formula One.

KOUAME
Mercedes! Number four four!

ZIEGLER
Louis Hamilton! How then are you up
to speed?

BAXTER
I've read the files-

ZIEGLER

On the plane? Dear god. Have you done one of these before? In Africa?

BAXTER

Not in Africa but in several-

ZIEGLER

You do them on your own or with a team?

BAXTER

We always work in teams.

ZIEGLER

Always?

BAXTER

Yes.

ZIEGLER

So where are they? Your team? In your suitcase? Oh! It's the roundabout!

They hang on as they do a tight 360-degree turn.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

Very smooth!

KOUAME

Thank you sir!

BAXTER

Mr. Ziegler-

ZIEGLER

Just Ziegler is fine.

BAXTER

I was sent here-

ZIEGLER

Because Jimmy is sick.

BAXTER

-because I can do what needs to be done. Obviously, it was a last-minute change, but I am here to close this deal. So it's you and me until we can get a team on the ground here.

ZIEGLER

They are sending a team?

BAXTER

They are pulling one together. It's complicated because Jimmy can't... just can't.

ZIEGLER

How many other black men do they have at that bank?

BAXTER

What?

ZIEGLER

I'm sorry, I hate having to pretend. It's Jimmy, you and...?

BAXTER

A lot of black people. We are an international investment bank, so we're a fairly diverse group of people.

ZIEGLER

I am not trying to offend.

BAXTER

You're pretty good at it.

ZIEGLER

I am being too direct. Apologies. It's just this: I would love to do all the things, OK? Show you the country, make the introductions, give you all the background, the context, the whole big story, but we just don't have time. And we certainly don't have time to do it twice. There are four other teams who have been here for a week already. They are experienced and-

BAXTER

I am here to close this. To get this done.

ZIEGLER

They have their shit together. Is your shit together Mr. Baxter?

BAXTER

Always.

ZIEGLER
You've never been to Africa?

BAXTER
Don't worry about me. I'm better
than I look.

ZIEGLER
That's what Jimmy told me.

BAXTER
What else did he tell you?

KOUAME
Here!

KOUAME slams on the brakes then jumps out of the car and goes
to get the suitcase. BAXTER and ZIEGLER squeeze out of the
backseat.

BAXTER
I can take that.

ZIEGLER
Let him take it in.

BAXTER takes his suitcase from KOUAME.

BAXTER
I can carry it. Thank you.

KOUAME looks at ZIEGLER who shrugs.

ZIEGLER
(Handing cash to KOUAME)
Tomorrow morning, OK? 8 o'clock?

KOUAME
Yes, Mr. Z.

KOUAME jumps back in the car and takes off. ZIEGLER digs
around in his coat and produces a small envelope with the
hotel logo on it.

ZIEGLER
I've already checked you in-

BAXTER and ZIEGLER ENTER the HOTEL LOBBY.

BAXTER
Look, Mr. Ziegler-

ZIEGLER
Just Ziegler.

BAXTER

You have the domain expertise here. Jimmy made that clear. I need your help. I need to understand the local context. I am just here to execute what we need to execute. To keep everything moving until the team arrives.

ZIEGLER

When is that?

BAXTER's cellphone starts ringing.

BAXTER

Soon. You and I need to do a status review- go over our plan so that we are on the same page. Not right now though.

BAXTER sends the caller to voicemail.

ZIEGLER

Got it. Here you go.

(ZIEGLER hands him the envelope.)

What do you need?

BAXTER

I need to go get about an hour of sleep, and then can we meet down here? Does that work for you?

ZIEGLER

Yes. Let me just give you a bit of "local context," eh? Three of the four project bidders are staying at this hotel. Us, the Russians and the Chinese.

BAXTER

Where's the fourth?

ZIEGLER

India? They can't afford this place. The point is, when you are here, keep your ears open and mouth shut, eh?

BAXTER

Got it. See you in an hour?

ZIEGLER

I'll be in the bar.

ZIEGLER EXITS.

2

HOTEL LOBBY, ELEVATOR DOORS. (CONTINUOUS)

BAXTER stands in front of the ELEVATOR DOORS.

The ELEVATOR DOORS open and JU is inside, looking down at her phone as she steps off the elevator. She almost walks right into BAXTER.

JU

Oh! Sorry.

BAXTER

(also looking at his phone).

It's OK.

JU

Bax?

BAXTER looks up, then holds the doors open.

JU (CONT'D)

Ju. - Ju Yang.

BAXTER

Oh my God- Sorry- I-

JU's phone goes off - it's a tune like a video game. BAXTER steps into the elevator.

JU

Are you- Sorry.

(answering).

Wéi, nín hǎo. Shì de. Shì de. Bù bù
bù. Wǒ liǎng fēnzhōng hòu dào
[Hello? Yes. Yes. No no no. I will
be there in 2 minutes].

(hanging up)

Sorry. I have to go- Are you here
for a few days?

BAXTER

Til Thursday.

JU

We'll have a drink then. Leave me a
note at the desk. Room 723.

BAXTER

(Looking at his room key)

OK. I'm 744.

JU
It's so funny to see you.

BAXTER
Small world.

JU
Too small, I think. OK? OK.

JU turns and quickly EXITS. The elevator doors close.

3

HOTEL LOBBY, BAR

ZIEGLER sits in a booth at the bar with two drinks on the table. He drinks one of them. BAXTER ENTERS, he has changed into slightly more casual attire, but BAXTER is always business casual. BAXTER is holding a thick folder.

ZIEGLER

Ah!

(gesturing at the second
glass)

I took the liberty- You look like a
scotch man to me.

BAXTER

Actually, I don't drink.

ZIEGLER

(dumping the contents of
one glass into the other)

More for me.

(waving over the
bartender)

Can I get you something?

BAXTER

Club soda with lime?

ZIEGLER

(to BARTENDER)

*Eau gazeuse au citron vert. Merci,
Edouard.*

BARTENDER goes back to the bar and gets the drink. BAXTER sits across from ZIEGLER.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

No, no. Sit here. I like to see the
door.

BAXTER moves to the chair next to ZIEGLER.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

Thank you. I want to say first, I
am sure you are a very good at what
you do. Jimmy wouldn't send you if
you couldn't do the job. I just
want you to know that I know that.

BAXTER

Thank you.

ZIEGLER

I should have started by saying that. Things change very quickly, all over Africa. I have been working here since the 1970s. Did you know that?

BAXTER

I did.

ZIEGLER

You do your homework. That's why he sends you.

BAXTER

You have a reputation.

BARTENDER brings BAXTER's drink, ZIEGLER dismisses him and he EXITS.

ZIEGLER

If I don't by now I'm doing something wrong, eh? So, what do you need from me? Smart Harvard man like you? I do my homework too.

BAXTER

(tapping the folder)

Jimmy gave me his notes and the draft proposal. It's a little vague on parts of financing. Is that still under negotiation?

ZIEGLER

As all things are.

BAXTER

I read the bid documents so I understand the process, how the bidding rounds work. That means I know what everyone else knows- what they want everyone to know anyway. So you tell me: what don't I know?

ZIEGLER

To the point, I like that. Yes. The final proposals, eh? They will not be that different. There are not too many ways to get ore out of the ground.

BAXTER

So this is all numbers?

ZIEGLER

Numbers are always important, but no. It is the intangibles. Here it is always the intangibles.

BAXTER

OK. This week is final round of bidding. What are the intangibles?

ZIEGLER

If I may, let me give you an example. Let's say you want to buy a car.

BAXTER

Is there a short version of this?

ZIEGLER

Humor an old man. You need a car. And there are three men with cars. And the cars, they are all exactly the same. And the price? The price is a little more from him, a little less from him. But they are the same car, so you can get the price you want from any of these men. How do you decide which car to buy?

BAXTER

The men.

ZIEGLER

Yes! Which man do you want to be in business with? Who understands you? Who can sell you other things you need? Who will come to your house and help you build a garage for your car? Or make a nice paved road for your car? Who will put up streetlights, and provide power so that you can drive your car at night?

BAXTER

I get it.

ZIEGLER

And. Very important- when you get in trouble in your car, who will come to help you? These are the things you are selling.

BAXTER

I don't sell, I negotiate.

ZIEGLER

Negotiation is what happens after they choose you. Up to then, it's all selling.

BAXTER

I've been up for thirty-six hours. Why don't you just tell me what they want?

ZIEGLER

What do we all want? Freedom, security, prosperity.

BAXTER

Anything more specific?

ZIEGLER

Tomorrow morning, we will meet the minister and she will tell us. Do you have plans for dinner?

BAXTER

Is it dinner time? I need to get myself on local time.

ZIEGLER

I have a friend attached to the embassy, we're meeting at eight if you'd like to join us. Since we're talking about Boundiali we may need some help from the State Department along the way.

BAXTER

Because of the borders?

ZIEGLER

Yes, it has two borders: Mali and Burkina Faso. So we may need State to help us liaise with... other departments.

BAXTER

I'd like to join you but I think I'd fall asleep in my salad course.

ZIEGLER

Not a problem. I will set things in motion.

BAXTER

(standing)

I'll just order in.

ZIEGLER

Try the soupoukandia- a hearty seafood stew. The chef is Senegalese. Goes to the docks every morning. Excellent. You will sleep like a baby.

BAXTER

Thanks.

ZIEGLER

Tomorrow morning we will begin the selling! I'll meet you in the lobby. Half past seven?

BAXTER

OK. Good night.

ZIEGLER

Good night. Oh- and Baxter? Stay away from the Chinese-

BAXTER

-and the Russians. I'll make sure they aren't in my room.

ZIEGLER

Very good.

BAXTER takes his folder and EXITS. ZIEGLER signals the BARTENDER for another round.

4

BAXTER'S HOTEL ROOM

BAXTER sits in his HOTEL ROOM. He is talking into his cell phone.

BAXTER

Lizzie? Hey, I don't know what time it is there. I guess it's pretty early? Or late? Anyway, I wanted to... to... I mean I couldn't really hear you at the airport, but... I'm really tired. I got your voicemail and... I mean, I guess you're really unhappy? And I don't want you to... You know, I don't want to leave this in a voicemail. OK? Just call me. Whenever. When you want to talk. I think I'm like four or five hours ahead of you, so... OK. Bye.

BAXTER hangs up the phone. He lies down on the bed and stares up at the ceiling.

There is a KNOCK at his door.

BAXTER looks through the peephole and then opens the door. It's JU.

JU

Hey! Hello!

BAXTER

Hi.

JU

Sorry, is this a good time?

BAXTER

Uh, sure, yeah. Come in.

JU ENTERS and BAXTER closes the door.

JU

We just got back from dinner. Some contemporary French place.

BAXTER

Was it good?

JU

(taking off her shoes)
Yes, but not a good choice for the team. My colleagues are not very adventurous. We can't do asian food every night. And even when we do, they complain about how bad everything is. Not great travelers, these guys. I don't have to ask why you are here, I guess.

BAXTER

Same here.

JU

Everyone wants the same thing. It's a small world. Do you have anything to drink?

BAXTER

I don't know.

JU opens the minibar and finds several nip bottles of alcohol.

JU

May I?

BAXTER

Sure.

JU

They also don't drink when they travel. At home they are- I'm sorry do you want one?

BAXTER shakes his head no.

JU (CONT'D)

Some things don't change. Do you work for State?

BAXTER

We do projects with them. You?

JU downs a bottle.

JU

Daddy.

BAXTER

Still a party official?

JU

Once and always. But I get to travel so, it has perks.

BAXTER

You could have stayed in the US. A lot of people do.

JU

What would I do in the US?

BAXTER

I don't know. You could be... a cultural attaché?

JU

Attaché?

BAXTER

Yes.

JU

Do I look like an attaché?

BAXTER

You look very cultured.

JU

You look exactly the same. Exactly. I think you even have the same tie.

BAXTER

I like blue ties.

JU

You still with what's-her-name? Libby? Liddy?

BAXTER

Lizzie. Yes. It's complicated.

JU

Is it?

BAXTER

At the moment. Just, not... not for long I think.

JU

That's too bad. Is that too bad?

BAXTER

It's not great.

JU
I never liked her. Did I ever tell
you that?

BAXTER
Many times.

JU
You don't need someone like her.

BAXTER
What do I need?

JU
Someone... someone more cultured.

BAXTER
You went back to Daddy.

JU
True. Only child. A country of only
children. Can you even imagine?

JU downs another bottle.

BAXTER
I'm an only child.

JU
You have a brother.

BAXTER
No, I don't.

JU
Are you sure? I think I met him.

BAXTER
Pretty sure you didn't.

JU
Huh. So you're here to claim the
mining rights for Uncle Sam?

BAXTER
And you're here to, what? Is this
the belt or the road?

JU
Technically, road. Road is about
things that travel by sea,
naturally.

BAXTER
Naturally.

JU
Some things don't translate well.

BAXTER
Whatever gets the job done.

JU
You know that we have a huge head
start here.

BAXTER
This isn't a discussion we should
have.

JU
You're going to have to get used to
losing sometime.

BAXTER
Stop trying to push my buttons.

JU
Is that what I'm doing?

BAXTER
Clearly.

JU
Is it working?

BAXTER
No.

JU
You know I'm right.

BAXTER
I know you think you are, yes.

JU
I do. Yes.

JU's phone beeps. She pulls it out and looks at it.

JU (CONT'D)
Shit. You know, they think I'm like
a butler or something. I mean,
don't they know-

BAXTER
You're a Harvard fucking attorney
after all!

JU
Fuck yeah! I gotta go.
(JU puts a few bottles in
her pockets.)
For later. I'm sure we'll see each
other- somewhere.

BAXTER
I'm sure.

JU
OK. Oh!

JU turns and gives him a long kiss. Then grabs her shoes and
heads for the door.

JU (CONT'D)
And watch out for the Russians.

BAXTER
OK. What?

JU
Podlyye russkiye. Oh, Baxter. Bye.

JU EXITS and BAXTER closes the door behind her.

5

**LOBBY OF THE MINISTRY OF MINES, PETROLEUM RESOURCES AND
ENERGY, ABIDJAN, REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE.**

A spartan space with connected plastic chairs along one wall that would look at home in an elementary school classroom.

IGOR sits in a plastic chair with a briefcase on his lap.

BAXTER and ZIEGLER ENTER. BAXTER is carrying a briefcase. ZIEGLER carries a leather portfolio and a paper shopping bag.

BAXTER
(patting his briefcase)
I made three printed copies of the
proposal.

ZIEGLER
Good because I didn't.

BAXTER
Glad we cleared that up.

ZIEGLER
(Looks at his watch)
We have some time. Are you OK?

BAXTER
I'm fine.

ZIEGLER
I have an old friend just down the
hall. I am going to pay my
respects. You can come?

BAXTER
I'm fine here.

ZIEGLER
Here is good.

ZIEGLER looks at IGOR, then looks back at BAXTER and subtly
shakes his head "no."

BAXTER
I'm fine. Thanks.

ZIEGLER
Just a minute or two.

ZIEGLER EXITS.

BAXTER sits in a chair a few seats away from IGOR. BAXTER pulls a copy of the Wall Street Journal from his briefcase and starts looking through it. After a bit...

IGOR

You are the American? It's OK. I know you are. Kozlov, Igor.

IGOR holds out his hand and there is an awkward moment as BAXTER decides if he should take it.

IGOR (CONT'D)

I don't bite.

BAXTER shakes his hand.

BAXTER

Baxter.

IGOR

Very good. Very good. It is because you come with the big jew that I know. Only the Americans would be with that guy. He is not a nice man, you know. Of course you know. I talk too much. I apologize. Is it always so hot in Africa? I find this place being so uncomfortable. Where are your people?

BAXTER

My people?

IGOR

Not him. Your people. Americans always come in groups. Little sweaty groups in suits.

BAXTER

Where are your people?

IGOR

My people trust me to do the start things. They stay in their rooms and drink the bad vodka - did you try the vodka? Terrible. Terrible! Ack!

(He spits)

But it is in the room so they drink it. And I come and do the "Hello" and the "Happy to see you." Because I am a very nice, charming person, no?

BAXTER
It's a good plan.

IGOR
Yes. So your people, they trust you too? But not too much because they send the big jew with you.

BAXTER
We're a team.

IGOR
Really? OK. I mean, OK, if that's your team. I would be more picky, but OK. Anyway, I am wondering. I need to ask you. A favor perhaps? No, no, no. Not like that. You see too many American movies. Your paper - if I may ask - would you share with me?

BAXTER
My paper?

IGOR
Yes. I like the funny pages. American newspapers all have the good funny pages. The Dagwood. The... the... Wizard from the Id.

BAXTER
This paper doesn't have comics.

IGOR
No funny pages?

BAXTER
No. Just news.

IGOR
What kind of paper is that?

BAXTER
It's the Wall Street Journal.

IGOR
Are you on the Wall Street? Buy! Sell! Do you trade on the big capitalist markets?

BAXTER
No.

IGOR

Then why do you read such a paper?
New York Post. THAT is a paper. Big
headlines. Good funny pages. What
real Americans like to read, yes?

BAXTER

I read this.

IGOR

Huh. You read the wrong paper. You
know what happens if you read the
wrong paper, Mr. Baxter? You get
the wrong story.

ZIEGLER ENTERS.

BAXTER

Back already?

ZIEGLER

Wasn't there.

An AIDE ENTERS

AIDE

Mr. Baxter, Mr. Ziegler? The
minister will see you now.

ZIEGLER

Just in time.

IGOR

Udachi, Mr. Baxter.

IGOR gives BAXTER a little wave and smiles at ZIEGLER.

BAXTER, ZIEGLER and the AIDE EXIT.

6

**A CONFERENCE ROOM IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES, PETROLEUM
RESOURCES AND ENERGY, ABIDJAN, REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

The room is decorated in a mid-century style but feels sparse and municipal. MINISTER MIRIAM MAMADOU stands near a long conference table.

The AIDE, BAXTER, and ZIEGLER ENTER. The AIDE then EXITS, closing the door behind him.

ZIEGLER
Madam Minister.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Mr. Ziegler.

ZIEGLER and MINISTER MAMADOU embrace and kiss on each cheek.

ZIEGLER
You look incredible.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Hans, you old liar.

ZIEGLER
Allow me to introduce Mr. Baxter
representing the United States of
America.

BAXTER
Madam minister.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Where's Jimmy?

BAXTER
I am afraid he was unable to make
the trip.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Why?

ZIEGLER mouths the word "cancer."

MINISTER MAMADOU (CONT'D)
Oh, that is too bad. Please send
him my regards.

BAXTER
Absolutely.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Where is the rest of your team?

BAXTER
We are the team for today.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Just you two? Well then, shall we?

They all sit down at the table.

ZIEGLER
Before we start...

ZIEGLER reaches into his shopping bag and pulls out a small box tied in a ribbon.

MINISTER MAMADOU
What is this?

ZIEGLER
I was in Paris last week.

MINISTER MAMADOU
(looking at the ribbon)
Pierre Herme?

ZIEGLER
Of course.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Hans, you know I can not accept this.

ZIEGLER
Of course.
(he undoes the ribbon and opens the box.)
Maybe we can share them?
(pushing the open box to BAXTER)
Mr. Baxter?

BAXTER looks concerned, but ZIEGLER calmly insists, so he takes a piece of chocolate and puts it on the table next to him.

ZIEGLER takes a piece of chocolate for himself.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)
(offering the box to MINISTER MAMADOU)
Madame Minister?

MINISTER MAMADOU
(taking a piece.)
I don't want to be rude.

MINISTER MAMADOU puts the chocolate in her mouth.

BAXTER
Thank you so much for-

ZIEGLER holds up a finger to pause BAXTER. A look of bliss passes over MINISTER MAMADOU's face.

ZIEGLER
You recognize it?

MINISTER MAMADOU
Should I? Wait. Is this the Belize?

ZIEGLER
I can't fool you.

MINISTER MAMADOU
I really shouldn't like it so much,
but-

ZIEGLER
I agree, it's very good. Mr Baxter?

BAXTER, trying to be a good sport, eats his piece of chocolate.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)
It's good?

BAXTER
Mmmm. Very. Madame Minister, thank
you for meeting with us and
including the United States in this
final round of bidding. I have
copies of our revised proposal.
Two, as requested.

BAXTER removes two thick documents from his briefcase and places them on the table.

MINISTER MAMADOU
(picking out another
piece of chocolate)
Yes. Thank you.

There is a pause where BAXTER obviously expects MINISTER MAMADOU to pick up the proposals. But she doesn't.

BAXTER
(opening his copy)
If we turn to page 7...?

MINISTER MAMADOU
Did Jimmy make the changes we
discussed?

ZIEGLER
Of course, yes.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Then I am sure the proposal is as
expected. Mr. Baxter, let me ask
you: Why this sudden interest in my
country?

BAXTER
The US has always supported our
friends and partners in Africa.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Have you?

BAXTER
We closed almost six billion
dollars in two-way trade with
Africa last year.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Yes, well, Africa isn't a country.
It's a continent. This is Côte
D'Ivoire.

BAXTER
Of course.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Why are you suddenly so interested
in Côte D'Ivoire.

BAXTER
We're adjusting our priorities.

MINISTER MAMADOU
And why is that, do you suppose?

ZIEGLER
The current administration is very
focused on renewable energy.
(pointing into the
chocolates)
Try that one.

MINISTER MAMADOU
(eating another piece of
chocolate)
What is it?

ZIEGLER
It has pieces of macaron shell in
it.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Clever. Mmmmm.

BAXTER
Madame Minister, we are prepared to
make a significant investment and
more to expand our relationship in
the mining sector of the Cote
D'Ivoire.

MINISTER MAMADOU
More?

BAXTER
Ongoing investment to further our
mutual interests.

ZIEGLER
A long term partnership to create
prosperity and security.

MINISTER MAMADOU
We will see. Frankly, I am
skeptical Mr. Baxter. Working with
the US has always been complicated.
The World Bank-

BAXTER
The World Bank stands behind this
proposal.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Yes. Well. The World Bank has an
agenda. Other bidders financing
doesn't come with as many
restrictions.

ZIEGLER
That won't be an issue.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Won't it?

ZIEGLER
They are motivated.

MINISTER MAMADOU
And then there are your politics?
That kind of instability is
concerning.

BAXTER
Our instability?

MINISTER MAMADOU
Yes. We have some experience here
working with unstable government
regimes. We know one when we see
one.

BAXTER
The United States stands by it's
commitments.

ZIEGLER
But we understand your concerns.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Financing verifications are due
this week. You are aware?

ZIEGLER
Of course.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Good. I will review the proposal as
it stands, but I encourage you to
make liberal use of the financial
supplements to outline your
investment expansion strategy.

BAXTER
Supplements?

ZIEGLER
(putting the lid on the
box of chocolates)
Yes, the supplements to financial
documentation. We will do that.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Wonderful. Well, thank you coming
today.

BAXTER
Thank you for the opportunity-

They stand.

ZIEGLER

Madam Minister, did I see new buildings going up by the airport?

MINISTER MAMADOU

You know who is building that.

ZIEGLER

Does that mean he knows something?

MINISTER MAMADOU

If he does, he's keeping it to himself.

ZIEGLER

What is he building out there?

MINISTER MAMADOU

Factories. Assembly mostly. Value add, Hans.

ZIEGLER

It's a shame the port is in such a state. A good container port, though. That would be value add.

MINISTER MAMADOU

We have a lot of people, Mr. Baxter. Good people. Smart, skilled people. Young people who need work. Parts come in and assembled things could go out through the port. Those are good jobs.

BAXTER

There are lots of jobs in mining.

MINISTER MAMADOU

But they are dirty jobs. And far from home and families. In parts of our country where security is more difficult. Is that the kind of job you would want? Mining is a necessity, but processing, refining - those are good jobs. Those are value add jobs that build an economy. A middle class. A future.

ZIEGLER

We'll keep that in mind.

MINISTER MAMADOU picks up the proposals and puts the box of chocolates on top.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Thank you for coming in.

The AIDE ENTERS and holds the door open.

ZIEGLER
We look forward to seeing you again
in the coming days as you gather
all the information you need to
make your decision.

MINISTER MAMADOU
Thank you.

BAXTER
M'am.

BAXTER EXITS

ZIEGLER
Don't count me out yet.

MINISTER MAMADOU
I never do, Hans.

ZIEGLER and MINISTER MAMADOU share kisses on each cheek.

MINISTER MAMADOU (CONT'D)
My best to Jimmy and Doris.

ZIEGLER
Of course.

ZIEGLER EXITS and the AIDE closes the door as he EXITS.

7

**LOBBY AND HALLWAY OF THE MINISTRY OF MINES, PETROLEUM
RESOURCES AND ENERGY, ABIDJAN, REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE.**

ZIEGLER and BAXTER walk past IGOR and down a seemingly
endless hallway.

ZIEGLER

I think that went pretty well.

BAXTER

She didn't even open the proposal.

ZIEGLER

The proposals are all the same. You
should have told me you've never
done this before. I could have
helped you.

BAXTER

I have done this before.

ZIEGLER

Really? You've represented the
United States of America in
international trade negotiations?

BAXTER

Yes.

ZIEGLER

By yourself?

BAXTER

Yes. Mostly, yes.

ZIEGLER

In Africa?

BAXTER

What was that? With the chocolate?

ZIEGLER

It's chocolate.

BAXTER

Do you know how the Foreign Corrupt
Practices Act works?

ZIEGLER

Oh please. It was fucking
chocolate.

BAXTER

We have to follow all the laws and regulations that apply-

ZIEGLER

OK, OK. Put your integrity back in your pants, man. No one pulls the F.C.P.A. on a box of chocolate.

BAXTER

Just so you know: I don't like it. It doesn't reflect well.

ZIEGLER

On you?

BAXTER

On the United States of America.

ZIEGLER

Ha! Oh, you're serious? OK. Listen, did you know that before she ran this ministry she ran the Ministry of Agriculture? For a decade? The woman knows more about chocolate than anyone else in this hemisphere. That's why the chocolate. Anyway, at least now we know what they want.

BAXTER

We do?

ZIEGLER

Oh, shem, Baxter. What does she want?

BAXTER

Well, that's not part of this.

ZIEGLER

You want the ore, she wants the value-add.

BAXTER

This is a mining bid.

ZIEGLER

Did you think this was only about mining?

BAXTER

This is a mining bid.

ZIEGLER

Baxter, stop being so narrow, eh?
Everything is on the table here.
Because for them, everything is at
stake. If you have one resource
that every rich country in the
world wants don't you leverage that
resource to get anything and
everything you need?

They walk.

BAXTER

I can see maybe the roads, the
infrastructure.

ZIEGLER

She wants jobs. Processing plants.
Refineries.

BAXTER

Those are supposed to be American
jobs.

ZIEGLER

Well, there are no jobs at all
without the ore.

BAXTER

Do you know how much that will
cost?

ZIEGLER

I can't believe you don't
understand-

BAXTER

No, no, no. It's a question. How
much will all this cost? How much
money do we need?

ZIEGLER

What does it matter? A factory
here, a refinery there. A container
port-

BAXTER

And the port? Seriously?

ZIEGLER

You're right, the port is a wish
list item. Just take your proposal
and add a zero or two to the end.

BAXTER

Which is it, a zero? Or two?

ZIEGLER

Do you want to be the man who gets a steady supply of cobalt and graphite and nickel for your extremely wealthy country's electric future or not? The Chinese have the Congo locked up. The Russians have mercenaries in Mali, the Central African Republic, and Mozambique. Tell me, have you looked at the survey reports for West Africa? I have. Jimmy has. This is it. This is it. Anyway, it's time to get our ducks in a row, eh? You have things to do.

BAXTER

(Looking at his watch)

Right, we have a meeting with the World Bank External Affairs Officer at two.

ZIEGLER

I am confident you can handle the bankers on your own.

BAXTER

You're not coming?

ZIEGLER

I have other ducks to line up.

BAXTER

What other ducks?

ZIEGLER

The ducks Jimmy pays me to deliver.

BAXTER

Cut it out, OK? Just tell me what fucking ducks.

ZIEGLER stops walking.

ZIEGLER

The CIA Station Chief for Western Africa. Do you know who that is?

BAXTER

No.

ZIEGLER

Well, that's the duck I'm going to go get.

BAXTER

Wait- Why do we need the CIA?

ZIEGLER

You worry too much, Baxter. You need to get moving if you want to make your two o'clock. Traffic, you know. Good luck.

ZIEGLER EXITS.

BAXTER

(shouting after him)

Why do we need the CIA?!

8

SECOND FLOOR, THE WORLD BANK, BANQUE MONDIAL, ABIDJAN.

THE SOUND OF A VERY BUSY OFFICE - PHONES RINGING, PEOPLE TALKING.

ELEVATOR DOORS OPEN and BAXTER ENTERS. He heads to his right and finds IGOR sitting on a line of chairs in a waiting area. There is a cubicle wall with a nameplate that says "Felix Yao."

BAXTER pokes his head around the cubicle wall.

BAXTER

Excuse me-

FELIX (O.S.)

Please! Have a seat! Please!

BAXTER

But I-

FELIX (O.S.)

Please! Give me a minute. Have a seat.

BAXTER takes a seat near IGOR who is reading a magazine.

IGOR

Mister Wall Street Journal.

BAXTER

Mr. Kozlov.

IGOR

(showing him the cover)

They have this very funny magazine, have you read?

BAXTER

(reading the cover)

The Harvard Business Review? I am familiar.

IGOR

It has the cartoons! Always very funny how Americans think they know how everything works. You need the papers too?

BAXTER

Yes.

IGOR
You go meet them upstairs first?

BAXTER
I have been to three floors
already.

IGOR
It is always this way. Here, in
Russia, everywhere. Always the
papers. You have this one, they
want that one.

BAXTER
It seems like that sometimes.

IGOR
I lived in your United States, did
you know? I did. 5 years. Russian
Embassy in DC. I spent many days at
your 'DMV' to get the license for
the driving? I fail test three
times. The parallel parking? Ugh!

BAXTER
That can be tricky.

IGOR
I see your man is not with you? He
doesn't get his hands dirty with
the money. Can I ask-

BAXTER
Mr. Koslov, I don't mean to be rude
but-

IGOR
No, no. I talk a lot. Always I am
talking to someone. Even if no one
is there, I talk out loud. It is my
way.

BAXTER
Thank you.

They sit in silence for a few seconds.

IGOR
I just- apologies.

They sit for a few more seconds.

IGOR (CONT'D)
Only, can I ask-

BAXTER

What?

IGOR

I am an excellent judge of people. To me, you are a very good, honest person. So I ask because, to me, you should not be with that man.

BAXTER

I don't think we should-

IGOR

How well do you know him? You look him up?

BAXTER

I'm sorry, this isn't an appropriate conversation.

IGOR

Appropriate? Is just advice.

BAXTER

Thank you, but I'm fine.

IGOR

OK. I just- OK. So sensitive. I just say this. I say this and no more OK? Then we talk about the weather.

BAXTER

Mr. Kozlov...

IGOR

Igor. Just so you should know. OK? He has been in business a long time, yes, but longer than you think. He changes the name. It is Ziegler now, but you look back, find Van Zietel. Why the name changes? To wash it clean.

BAXTER

Clean of what?

IGOR

Rhodesia. 1970s. Nasty business. You seem like a smart man. Someone who wants to know who they are in the business with. That is all. OK?

BAXTER
What happened in Rhodesia?

IGOR
Some weather we are having, eh Mr.
Baxter?

BAXTER
Yes.

IGOR
Always hot here. Relentless.

FELIX ENTERS from behind the cubicle wall.

FELIX
Mr. Baxter?

BAXTER stands.

FELIX (CONT'D)
(to IGOR)
Mr. Kozlov, I'm still waiting on
the documents from your embassy. It
shouldn't be long.

IGOR
Of course. They know I have nothing
but time.

FELIX EXITS.

9

RUE WASHINGTON, ABIDJAN.

THE SOUND OF STREET NOISE.

BAXTER is walking on a busy street, not quite sure of where he's going.

BAXTER'S CELL PHONE RINGS and he answers it.

BAXTER
Hello? What?

JIMMY is in his bed talking softly into a cell phone.

JIMMY
(in a hoarse whisper)
Baxter?

BAXTER
Who is this?

JIMMY
Baxter? Baxter!

BAXTER
Jimmy?

JIMMY
(whispering)
Yes, it's me.

BAXTER
I'm sorry - I'm on the street. Hang on. How are you feeling?

JIMMY
Shut up. Doris doesn't want me working. Susan got me a phone from the office. Why are you bringing up the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act?

BAXTER
What? Oh, Jimmy, I had a good reason-

JIMMY
Shut up. It wasn't a question. Don't do it. I mean, yeah yeah yeah. You get your honesty merit badge. But cut it out.
(MORE)

JIMMY (CONT'D)

You're making Ziegler nervous. Just let him do what he needs to do.

BAXTER

I thought he might be taking advantage of your not being here-

JIMMY

He's not like that. Actually, he is exactly like that, but not in this case.

BAXTER

OK. My name will be on this deal, so-

JIMMY

There's another, more important name on this deal.

BAXTER

I know, I knows, the United States of-

JIMMY

No, mine! My name! Listen, he's fine.

BAXTER

He's talking about the CIA?

JIMMY

He's doing everything we need him to do. What he's good at. Just let him do it. Oh, about the team-

BAXTER

I could really use the help.

JIMMY

You're on your own. I had people lined up but half of them got sick and the other half got poached for some equity thing in DC this week. So, it's just you and Hans.

BAXTER

There's no team?

JIMMY

You're the team. Send Susan stuff if you need any research or paperwork done.

BAXTER
Isn't she doing your stuff?

JIMMY
I'll tell her to do you first this week. I'm sure you can handle it. Your at first and goal. Just get it over the line. Oh and- Look, Bax. I'm sorry but... Libby called the office.

BAXTER
Libby? You mean Lizzy? My wife-

JIMMY
Right, yes. She had... papers for you and wanted to know where to send them. I had Susan accept them so you wouldn't have to worry about it.

BAXTER
She "accepted" them?

JIMMY
Process server. Sorry, kid. Susan overnighted them to your hotel. I told her to put in the list of divorce attorneys we have on retainer.

BAXTER
OK.

JIMMY
Sorry, but it happens. Don't let it distract you. Got it? You're very close now. This is very important.

BAXTER
Yeah, but I have no support team, and-

JIMMY
Don't worry. I'm going to get you where you need to go. You need to deliver this for me, OK? I have your back, Bax. It will be worth it.

DORIS (O.S.)
Jim? Are you OK?

JIMMY
Oh shit. Gotta go!

JIMMY closes the phone and shoves it under the sheets.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
I'm fine, Doris.

BAXTER stares at his phone and looks at the chaos around him.
He looks at his watch. He EXITS, trying to find a taxi.

10

HOTEL LOBBY, BAR

ZIEGLER is sitting at a table with a drink. BAXTER ENTERS holding his briefcase and an overnight mail envelope, unopened.

ZIEGLER
How are the money men?

BAXTER
(sitting at the table)
They need more paperwork.

ZIEGLER
Men with money always want more
paper. I'll never understand it.

BAXTER
(pulling some papers from
his briefcase)
Do you know how to get in touch
with our surveyor?

ZIEGLER
Assi? He's in Cairo.

BAXTER
We need him to sign these. Today.

ZIEGLER looks at the forms, pulls out a pen, signs each one,
and pushes them back to BAXTER.

ZIEGLER
It's a worthless piece of paper
that goes into a file with hundreds
of other worthless pieces of paper,
never to be looked at again.

BAXTER gives ZIEGLER a long, hard stare.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)
Or did you want to try to find him
in Cairo?

BAXTER puts the form back in his briefcase.

BAXTER
I'm getting a migraine. Did you
find what you were looking for?

ZIEGLER

CIA people can be difficult to find.

BAXTER

They have that reputation.

ZIEGLER

Ha! Yes, just that. Well, luckily they're not all that good at hiding from me.

(finishes his drink)

I'm having dinner with an old friend who will get us what we need.

BAXTER

I thought your friend in the embassy-

ZIEGLER

Well, State are apparently not interested. He referred me to the a contact in the Defense Department, who referred me to... Anyway, I always get to the right people eventually.

(noticing the overnight envelope in BAXTER's hand)

Ah, Jimmy told me. Bad luck, that. A bit of advice from an old man: when you get news like that, three things: Don't call her, don't email, text or put anything in writing, and whatever you do, stay away from sex for a while, eh? You are entering a season of bad decisions. Trust me, I've been married four times.

BAXTER

That's not the ringing endorsement you think it is.

ZIEGLER

Always go with experience. Maybe this is a good time to start drinking?

BAXTER

Good night, Ziegler.

ZIEGLER
I will see you for breakfast.

BAXTER
OK.

ZIEGLER EXITS.

BAXTER tears open the envelope and pulls out the papers inside. He reads them, page by page. He lays them on the table and looks down at them.

When he looks up, JU is standing by the bar. She turns and smiles at him.

BLACKOUT

11

DARKNESS (CONTINUOUS)

DANCE MUSIC plays and a projection of the night sky appears.

The stars wheel and turn, showing the European constellations, the Chinese constellations, and finally the features of African starlore.

The three different styles of figures dance and spin in the sky.

LIGHTS COME UP ON:

12

BAXTER'S HOTEL ROOM (CONTINUOUS)

BAXTER and JU are standing near the bed which is unmade and the sheets and coverlet are pulled back. BAXTER is pulling on his pants. JU is sitting on the bed in her top and underwear. The overnight envelope is on the bed and JU is reading through the papers.

JU

She's got everything covered. Very comprehensive.

BAXTER

She's a good attorney.

JU

Not asking for anything that's not hers, even split, that's very fair.

BAXTER

I know.

JU

No children? That makes it easy.

BAXTER

Easy peasy.

JU

Who says that?

BAXTER

I thought there would be more time. Along the way.

JU

Magical thinking. Always your downfall. She's done waiting.

BAXTER

Obviously.

JU

She wasn't a good match for you anyway. You knew that all along didn't you?

BAXTER

Noted.

JU

Freddy, what are you doing? You're not a banker.

BAXTER

I am, in fact, a banker.

JU

You wanted to be in the action. Legislation. Interpretation. The House, the Senate, the Supreme Court. You applied to clerk, didn't you?

BAXTER

I didn't get that.

JU

So what?

BAXTER

So you do what you can. You do the next thing. And the next. And... Things don't always work out the way you plan them. You improvise.

JU

You think I don't know that?

BAXTER

No, I don't think you know that. You always have a plan. Aren't you doing exactly what you planned to do?

JU

Did they refill your minibar?

BAXTER

I have no idea.

JU gets off the bed throwing BAXTER his t-shirt.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

Thanks.

JU opens the minibar and grabs a few nip bottles.

JU

Are you on a per diem?

BAXTER

We don't work like that.

JU collects the entire contents of the minibar and the basket of snacks into her sheet and dumps them out on the bed.

JU
Aren't you thirsty?

BAXTER
I am.

BAXTER grabs one of the small bottles of sparkling water, opens it and drinks.

JU
This wasn't my plan.

BAXTER
Wasn't it?

JU
This is *the* plan. There's a difference.

BAXTER
OK. How's *the* plan going?

JU
(downs one of the nip bottles)
The plan is.. Honestly, I've fallen behind on *the* plan. I'm supposed to be married and pregnant. Don't worry. This isn't- This isn't that.

BAXTER
OK.

JU pulls on her skirt and is looking for her shoes.

JU
I'm just not wild about *this* part of *the* plan.

BAXTER
I'm not wild about banking.

JU
See?

BAXTER
The money is good. It's better than good.

JU

That's very American. To be miserable for money.

BAXTER

Am I miserable? You're miserable.

JU

I am miserable for family. Isn't family better than money?

BAXTER

Lizzie doesn't believe in misery. She says it's a mindset that you can change. You just have to try harder.

JU

What is wrong with her? Is she from Connecticut?

BAXTER

Vermont.

JU

Such a white girl. She is. Does she have an Instagram account?

BAXTER

It's optimism, isn't it? I mean I thought it was. Until it wasn't.

JU

(typing on her phone)

It's denial. I'll never understand what you see in her.

BAXTER

She's just like the rest of us.

JU

Freddy, she was never like any of us. You always wanted her to be- Is it this one? This one right?

(showing him the list on the phone)

Wow. OK. Wow. Houseplants. Girlfriends. Wine. Does she do that macrame herself?

BAXTER

She buys it on Etsy.

JU

Wow. Books. Wine. Art. Wine. A lot of wine.

BAXTER

There's some wine involved.

JU keeps scrolling, scrolling.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

There's something missing, right? Someone?

JU

(Putting her phone down)
Freddy. She's got a whole other thing going on. It was never going to work. You see that, right?

BAXTER

I wanted it to.

JU

You know what you need? You need a hobby. Like drinking. You should take up drinking.

BAXTER

That's a disease, not a hobby.

JU

(opening another nip bottle and downing it)
That is very narrow minded.

BAXTER

Ziegler thinks the same thing.

JU rolls her eyes.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

What?

JU

Where's my other shoe? He's got a reputation.

BAXTER

Yes, and it's accurate.

JU grabs a bag of potato chips and tries to open them.

JU

Is it?

BAXTER

So far. But he has that thing. I don't have that thing he has.

JU

What thing?

BAXTER

That thing where people are completely at ease with you. Where everyone is an old friend. Where you talk about your lives, your family, your children. Who talks about that stuff? At work?

JU

People who have lives, families, children?

BAXTER

It's like people just open up to him. They've had dinner, they go on trips. They tell him things. Like, Oh, I'd like this, I'd like that. We need jobs. We need a factory, a refinery, a container port. People don't talk to me.

JU

You probably don't talk to them.

BAXTER

Why would I?

JU

You're not missing anything. I mean, it's always the same thing. Give me, give me, give me.

BAXTER

Can you blame them, really?

JU

No, not really.

(handing the bag to

BAXTER)

Can you open these?

BAXTER

(opening the bag)

Are we snacking now?

JU
(Munching on chips)
Yes.

BAXTER picks up a chocolate bar and opens it.

BAXTER
(eating)
What do you know about Rhodesia?

JU
What's to know? It's Zimbabwe when
Zimbabwe was run by the British and
then a violent, brutal White
Nationalist government.

BAXTER
The good old days of colonialism.

JU
What is with you?

BAXTER
I'm just- I'm not very happy at the
moment.

JU
At this moment?

BAXTER
You ever feel like you're standing
on a ladder, balanced on a chair,
balanced on a desk, balanced on
beach ball? And at any moment...

JU
Every single day. Everyone does.

BAXTER
I don't know. So what do we do?
After we snack?

JU
I don't know. Whatever we want to
do next.

BAXTER
Anything?

JU
Behave.

BAXTER
(eating more chocolate)
This is a terrible idea.

JU
No, don't do that. Don't. We're
just doing whatever. No judgement,
OK? It's fine. Freddy. It doesn't
have to be anything at all. Really.

BAXTER
I meant the chocolate.

JU
Oh. OK.

BAXTER
OK.

BAXTERS CELL PHONE RINGS.

BAXTER picks it up and looks at it.

BAXTER (CONT'D)
Shit, I have to take this.

JU
I should go anyway. Do you see my-
BAXTER holds out her shoe.

BAXTER
(into the phone)
Baxter. OK. OK, hang on.
(to JU)
We should-

JU
I'm sure we will. But not tonight.
She gives him a quick kiss.

JU (CONT'D)
Be careful what rocks you turn
over, huh?

JU EXITS.

BAXTER
(into the phone)

Hello? OK, tell me what you've got. OK. OK. Then start at the
beginning.

13

HOTEL LOBBY, BAR

It is morning.

ZIEGLER sits at a table with a glass of orange juice, and a coffee service. He is preparing his cup of coffee when BAXTER ENTERS carrying his briefcase.

ZIEGLER

Mr. Baxter, good morning! Have you eaten? Sit down, sit down.

BAXTER sits. BARTENDER brings ZIEGLER a bowl of porridge with fruit.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

Thank you - What can he get you?

BAXTER

Coffee.

ZIEGLER

They make a wonderful hot porridge with, what is this? Mango? Pineapple?

BAXTER

Just the coffee.

BARTENDER EXITS.

ZIEGLER

I had a productive meeting with our Agency friend. I think we can get the Section Chief to our meeting this afternoon. What? You have an issue with this?

BAXTER

Walk me through your logic.

ZIEGLER

We have a lot stacked up against us. The World Bank.

BAXTER

We need the money.

ZIEGLER

Yes, but others have sovereign funds. Paying out of pocket.

(MORE)

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

Cash on the barrelhead as we used to say. The World Bank has lots of strings, conditions.

BAXTER

Basic conditions, human rights.

ZIEGLER

To you, yes. But to our hosts- No one wants to be told what to do, or what they must believe. Do you? And then there's the question of the value add.

BARTENDER ENTERS, places a cup and saucer on the table and pours coffee from a carafe.

BAXTER

(Opening his briefcase
and pulling out a file)
I've been working on that - the financial supplements?

ZIEGLER

I hope so.

BARTENDER

Cream? Sugar?

BAXTER

No, Thank you.

BARTENDER EXITS.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

Usually we have a section on restricted capital expenditures. What we can put to capex versus opex? This proposal doesn't have one. I think Jimmy left it out on purpose. There are four tranches to the investment structure-

ZIEGLER

That sounds like it might be a good thing.

BAXTER

Do you read these proposals?

ZIEGLER

The commissions section.

BAXTER

Right. OK. There are basically four buckets of money, so if we restructure the funding a little, we can use one of those buckets for non-mining activities. Which we usually couldn't, but in this case-

ZIEGLER

We can. You are very good with numbers and details.

BAXTER

I've added money to the proposal and put it into the fourth traunch. We use that to build processing and refining facilities. Small facilities, they handle maybe ten percent of the ore, but it will do what she wants. Jobs, income, value-add.

ZIEGLER

You're skimming off some of the jobs, but not all of the jobs. Very clever.

BAXTER

And it puts them in business with the United States of America, with all the benefits that entails.

ZIEGLER

A nice, neat package.

BAXTER

I did something similar in a petroleum bid in Albania a few years ago. On that deal we beat out the Russians, the Chinese, the Turks, and the Swedes.

ZIEGLER

Very good. This plus my Station Chief and I think we have checkmate.

BAXTER

I don't want the CIA. It's too aggressive.

ZIEGLER

You are good with the numbers and details, I am good at this.

(MORE)

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

Think of it as an expansion of the "all the benefits" you proposal entails. They represent your country and some of the power that you can project into their region.

BAXTER

Jimmy and I think it's threatening.

ZIEGLER

I see.

BAXTER

We have enough here to close the deal.

ZIEGLER

Because it worked with oil? In Albania? Albania is in NATO. And they are auditioning to be in the EU. And oil, forgive me, is every-fucking-where. Jimmy is overestimating the strength of your hand.

BAXTER

So you want to what? Show her how we can flex our muscles if she doesn't cooperate? Waterboard the deal out of her?

ZIEGLER

You sound like an idiot.

BAXTER

Do I, Mr. Van Zietel?

ZIEGLER

Is that what this is about? You want to dig up our skeletons?

BAXTER

It didn't exactly take the CIA to dig it up.

ZIEGLER

It was a long time ago. You haven't done anything that you ended up regretting?

BAXTER

Have I gotten myself on the wrong side of history? No.

ZIEGLER

History? Ha. History never has one side. I was young. I had limited experience in the arms trade. Am I proud of what I did? Of course not. Of course not. Do I look back and think I would make different decisions? It was business. You know what I learned from Rhodesia?

BAXTER

I hope it has something to do with not selling chemical weapons to White Nationalists in Africa.

ZIEGLER

I learned not to take a side. Countries take sides, governments, people take sides. Weapons, guns, missiles, explosives - if you are selling them, it is easy to believe you have to take a side. But it's actually safer, and more profitable, if you don't. The weapons, they really only have one purpose. And a gun is only loyal to the person holding it.

BAXTER

That's fucking bleak.

BARTENDER ENTERS with a pot of coffee.

ZIEGLER

It's practical. Unlike your tryst with your Harvard classmate. Don't. Just don't. Everyone in this hotel works for me.

BAXTER looks up at the BARTENDER who smiles at him.

BARTENDER

More coffee?

BAXTER

No.

ZIEGLER waves him off. BARTENDER EXITS.

ZIEGLER

Not a brilliant move on your part, but I can certainly understand, given your circumstances.

(MORE)

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

Think of it as a reminder that we are not who we are in our worst moments, eh? I was just hoping you'd get something useful out of it. Was it useful?

BAXTER

In it's own way.

ZIEGLER

Well, I think we've covered just about everything. I'll bring my Station Chief, you'll bring the supplementals? Do you need a ride? Kuoame can pick you up.

BAXTER

I'll meet you there.

ZIEGLER

Excellent. Good talk.

ZIEGLER EXITS

15

**A CONFERENCE ROOM IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES, PETROLEUM
RESOURCES AND ENERGY, ABIDJAN, REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

BAXTER, ZIEGLER, and HARRIS are seated at one end of the table and MINISTER MIRIAM MAMADOU is seated at the other.

MINISTER MAMADOU is flipping through pages in a report in front of her.

HARRIS keeps checking his watch. ZEIGLER gives him a nudge.

MINISTER MAMADOU puts the report down and looks at them.

BAXTER

Do our supplements meet your expectations, Madame Minister?

MINISTER MAMADOU

You've done very well.

BAXTER

Thank you, Minister. We want to be partners in developing the processing and refining of your resources.

ZIEGLER

And create a strong business relationship with the United States, with all that entails.

MINISTER MAMADOU

Is that where your friend comes in?

ZIEGLER

Yes. Mr. Harris is here to highlight some of the many benefits of a partnership with the U.S.. Harris?

HARRIS

Right, I will make this brief.

MINISTER MAMADOU

What part of the government do you represent, Mr. Harris? The State Department?

HARRIS

We are State adjacent, m'am.

MINISTER MAMADOU

I see. Proceed.

HARRIS

I have just four things to show you.

HARRIS pulls out a MICRO-PROJECTOR and points it so it projects out over the audience. He controls it with his phone.

HARRIS (CONT'D)

There we go.

MINISTER MAMADOU

(Looking at the first image)

These are pictures?

HARRIS

Yes. This first one is a map of region.

(He pulls out a LASER POINTER and uses it to identify what he's talking about)

The countries in red are the ones that have had military coups in the last four years: Gabon, Niger, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Guinea, Chad, Mali. Seven coups, four years. Three of these share a border with you.

(NEXT SLIDE)

This one is a map of your borders. The red X's are the current locations of militia camps in neighboring countries. ISIS, AQAP, the usual suspects. These are the places your insurgent groups in the North are receiving training and support. A lot of X's.

(NEXT SLIDE)

This one is an arial photo of Carrier Strike Group Twelve, U.S. sixth fleet. The big ship in the middle is the U.S.S. Gerald R. Ford. This is our newest nuclear aircraft carrier, the largest one in the world and the largest warship ever constructed. It has over 75 aircraft on board, and about forty-five hundred sailors and airmen.

(MORE)

HARRIS (CONT'D)

Her fighter jets can engage targets anywhere within a 500 mile radius.

(Pointing at the image)

C.S.G. Twelve also has one Ticonderoga-class guided missile destroyer, the U.S.S. Normandy, and four Arliegh-Burke Class guided missile destroyers, the Rampage, Carney, Roosevelt, and the Thomas Hudner. Their missiles can hit targets with millimeter precision up to fifteen-hundred miles away. C.S.G. Twelve patrols the Mediterranean and the Western coast of Africa. From their home port in Greece they can be here in Abidjan in five days, eleven hours. Fun fact: The United States has eleven active aircraft carriers. China has two. Russia has one.

HARRIS TURNS OFF THE MICRO-PROJECTOR and puts it and the laser pointer back in his bag. He pulls a business card out of his bag and pushes it across the table to MINISTER MAMADOU.

HARRIS (CONT'D)

And finally... This... is my phone number. If anything threatens your country- your neighbors, the red X's, insurgents, anybody- this is the first number to call to receive the assistance of the United States of America. Any questions? OK.

(MINISTER MAMADOU pushes them back to him)

Thank you. Unfortunately I have another meeting, but I appreciate your making time for me. Minister, gentleman.

HARRIS takes his papers and EXITS.

MINISTER MAMADOU

Anything else?

BAXTER

We appreciate the opportunity to-

MINISTER MAMADOU

Yes, of course. Thank you for your work on the supplementals.

(MORE)

MINISTER MAMADOU (CONT'D)

I appreciate that you responded to our concerns. We will be making a decision very soon.

ZIEGLER

We'll look forward to hearing from you.

They all stand.

BAXTER

(shaking her hand)

Thank you Madame Minister.

MINISTER MAMADOU

A pleasure, Mr. Baxter.

BAXTER EXITS. ZIEGLER closes the door behind him.

MINISTER MAMADOU (CONT'D)

(disappointed)

State adjacent?

ZIEGLER

You know why I asked him to come. It's a dangerous world.

MINISTER MAMADOU

Hans... When you're a hammer everything looks like a nail.

ZIEGLER

What are they offering, the Chinese?

MINISTER MAMADOU

There are more countries than China-

ZIEGLER

Please. Russia has no money and no one takes India seriously. It's China and it's us.

MINISTER MAMADOU

Their proposal is considerably more generous on infrastructure and facilities.

ZIEGLER

How much more could they be putting on the table?

MINISTER MAMADOU
(Reaching into her bag)
I couldn't possibly tell you.

MINISTER MAMADOU hands him a document.

ZIEGLER reads the document. He is surprised by what he learns.

ZIEGLER
That is... a lot. Considerably more.

MINISTER MAMADOU
If I knew what you were talking about, I'd probably agree with you.

ZIEGLER
OK. Yes, it's... nice

MINISTER MAMADOU
Nice?

ZIEGLER
You're missing the point.

MINISTER MAMADOU
What is the point?

ZIEGLER
All that new infrastructure, all those new facilities, how do you protect that investment? How do you secure that investment? Sure, they can help you build things-

MINISTER MAMADOU
A lot of things.

ZIEGLER
Yes, that. But if you are threatened, if you are under attack, what can they do? Beat your enemies over the head with their checkbook? What can they do? I'll tell you what they can't do. They can't park a squadron of F-35 stealth fighters in Abidjan harbor and put laser-guided cruise missiles right up the ass of your enemy. With millimeter fucking precision? And. Miriam, that is the fucking point.

(MORE)

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

We aren't talking about rubber or cocoa, this is something they need. You have something they need. Use it to buy a friend. A big, well-armed friend. Because without security, how can there be prosperity?

MINISTER MAMADOU

Without prosperity, what is there to secure? Hans, you have always been persuasive. That is your super-power. But there is a flaw in your argument.

ZIEGLER

And what is that?

MINISTER MAMADOU

We are in Africa. We are Africans. They are Americans. And the U.S., they don't care about us. They are not coming to our rescue. Ever.

ZIEGLER

Say you're right. They don't care about you. Americans never will. But. But if anyone- ANYONE- lays one finger on the cobalt they need-

MINISTER MAMADOU

I think we both know that's a stretch.

ZIEGLER

Is it?

MINISTER MAMADOU

It's a promise made by a man who was never really here, isn't it? You are a smart man. I know you mean well. It's always good to see you, Hans.

They kiss on both cheeks.

MINISTER MAMADOU (CONT'D)

Maybe next time.

MINISTER MAMADOU EXITS.

ZIEGLER folds up the paper and puts it in his jacket pocket.

HOTEL LOBBY, BAR

BAXTER and ZIEGLER sit at a table. ZIEGLER is finishing a drink.

BAXTER
And that's it?

ZIEGLER
It won't be official for a few days
but... That's it.

BAXTER
Jimmy's going to be pissed.

ZIEGLER
Jimmy has bigger problems. And
being on the brink of death tends
to make people more forgiving, in
my experience. He went into
hospice. No one tells you anything.

BAXTER
Do you have any good news?

ZIEGLER
You can go home tomorrow.

BAXTER
Home. Great.

ZIEGLER
If it makes you feel any better,
your girlfriend had to give up a
lot to get the win.

BAXTER
She's not- How much is a lot?

ZIEGLER pulls the folded piece of paper from his pocket and
hands it to BAXTER.

ZIEGLER
Everything we had plus this.

BAXTER
Is this...

ZIEGLER
A improvements to Abidjan harbor
and a fully automated-

BAXTER
A container port?

ZIEGLER
Yes.

BAXTER
What does that cost?

ZIEGLER
(pointing)
It's the nine-digit number over
here. Actually, it's close to being
a ten-digit number.

BAXTER
Just for the port?

ZIEGLER
That's how badly she didn't
want you to have it. So at least it
cost her a lot.

BAXTER
It cost her nothing. It cost the
PRC a lot.

ZIEGLER
Actually, in the end, it will cost
the Ivorians a lot. The PRC will
get it all back with interest. Or
seize the asset later. Or
renegotiate the whole thing.
Anyway, they don't lose money. But
that's a billion dollars less she
has to put against you next time.

BAXTER
Will there be a next time?

ZIEGLER
If I have learned one thing in
life, it's that there is always a
next time.

BAXTER
We were never going to get this.

ZIEGLER
Hard to say.

BAXTER
I thought we had a chance.

ZIEGLER

I did too. I must go. I have a flight this evening. My friend, I have enjoyed our work together. Here.

ZIEGLER pulls a thick document out of his bag and hands it to BAXTER.

ZIEGLER (CONT'D)

From our State adjacent friend. It's a satellite survey of South America. Mineral deposits. I think you will find it interesting.

BAXTER

OK. Thanks.

ZIEGLER

I am sure we will see each other again. Soon. Maybe learn some Spanish?

ZIEGLER EXITS.

16

**GATE 8, FÉLIX HOUPHOUËT BOIGNY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT,
ABIDJAN, REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE.**

A set of connected plastic chairs. IGOR sits in one, his carry-on bag beside him. He is reading a copy of the *Fraterite Matin* newspaper.

GATE ANNOUNCEMENT

*Passagers du vol Royal Air Maroc
934 à destination d'Accra,
l'embarquement débutera dans 10
minutes à la porte 3. [Passengers
for Royal Air Maroc Flight 934 to
Accra, boarding will begin in 10
minutes.]*

BAXTER ENTERS pulling his carry-on suitcase and carrying his briefcase.

IGOR

Mr Wall Street Jou-

BAXTER stops and considers leaving, but then continues.

IGOR (CONT'D)

Ohhh. That is not nice.

BAXTER sits a few seats down from IGOR.

BAXTER

I'm not in the mood, IGOT

IGOR

I know. Bad news for me, bad news for you. What do they say in America? The money talks, the bullshit walks. Where is your friend, the old jew? Or does he just drop you off? Do you fly back home to the Big Apples?

BAXTER

Not home, not quite yet.

IGOR

It is funny. I have been the travelling man for so long, I don't think I know where the home is.

BAXTER

Isn't Russia your home?

IGOR
Russia? No! Why you would think that?

BAXTER
I assumed-

IGOR
Ah, well! There you go! You know what they say? When you assume- What is it? When you assume you have a big ass. Or you see my ass. Or something. I was born in Cuba. Don't I look Cuban?

BAXTER
Of course. My mistake.

IGOR
My parents are Russian. We go back to Russia when I had seven years old. My parents always are the diplomats. We live all over the world. Cairo, Beijing, Sydney, all over the world. So I am a diplomat too.

BAXTER
Like a family business.

IGOR
Have you lived all over the world?

BAXTER
I spent a few years in Switzerland.

IGOR
Switzerland doesn't count. I like telling people I am Cuban. It's funny, no?

BAXTER
It's something.

IGOR
You are looking for her? Your Chinese friend? She was here before, but they go in the good lounge. V.I.P. Not out here with the losers.

BAXTER
I see.

IGOR

You know, you and I we should be working more together. I mean, it make sense. Look at all the players, we have the most in common.

BAXTER

What is it you think we have in common?

IGOR

Our countries, I mean.

BAXTER

What do our countries have in common?

IGOR

We are the Superpowers, yes? We have the nuclear missile. We have the militaries. The big economies. And, not like them, we are both democracies.

BAXTER

You think Russia is a democracy?

IGOR

You think the U.S. is a democracy?

BAXTER

We're kind of famous for that, actually.

IGOR

This is your problem. You think like an American. That American way of doing is the only way. You think everybody everywhere wants to be an American. You know what? No one wants to be an American. And you know what? No one has to be an American to have freedom, democracy.

BAXTER

You're an expert on democracy?

IGOR

There are all kinds of democracy. Your kind, my kind. Lots of them. I mean, look at this place. Look at these countries.

(MORE)

IGOR (CONT'D)

They are all, mostly, like democracy. And you say, oh, but they are young democracies. They are corrupt democracies. I say no. I say they are fighting for it. They are dying for it. They are risking everything for it. American democracy? It's like your fast food. You are fat. You are lazy. You eat the crap, and who cares? You don't even deserve the democracy you have. That is why you are losing it. That is why it is all slipping away. You can feel it slipping away, right? Because you don't deserve it. You know I am right. Nothing personal.

BAXTER

Of course.

IGOR

So we should be working together more. Or the communists will get everything.

BAXTER

Good talk, Igor.

JU ENTERS pulling her carry-on bag behind her. JU and BAXTER see each other, and JU stops walking.

BAXTER'S CELL PHONE RINGS. He looks at the phone.

BAXTER and JU look at one another. BAXTER'S CELL PHONE CONTINUES TO RING. BAXTER must choose between answering the phone and talking to JU.

BAXTER holds up the phone. JU smiles, nods, shrugs, and keeps walking.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

(Answering the phone)

Hello? Hi. Yes. Yes, I am at the airport now. No, I'm going to DC. Yeah, I thought- I thought so. Yes.

JU EXITS.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

No, this is good time. I'm waiting for the flight.

IGOR goes back to reading his newspaper.

BAXTER (CONT'D)

Yeah. I know. Yes. Yes. I know. I
know. You didn't have a choice.
Yeah. You know... listen. I'm
sorry. Really. I'm sorry.

END OF PLAY