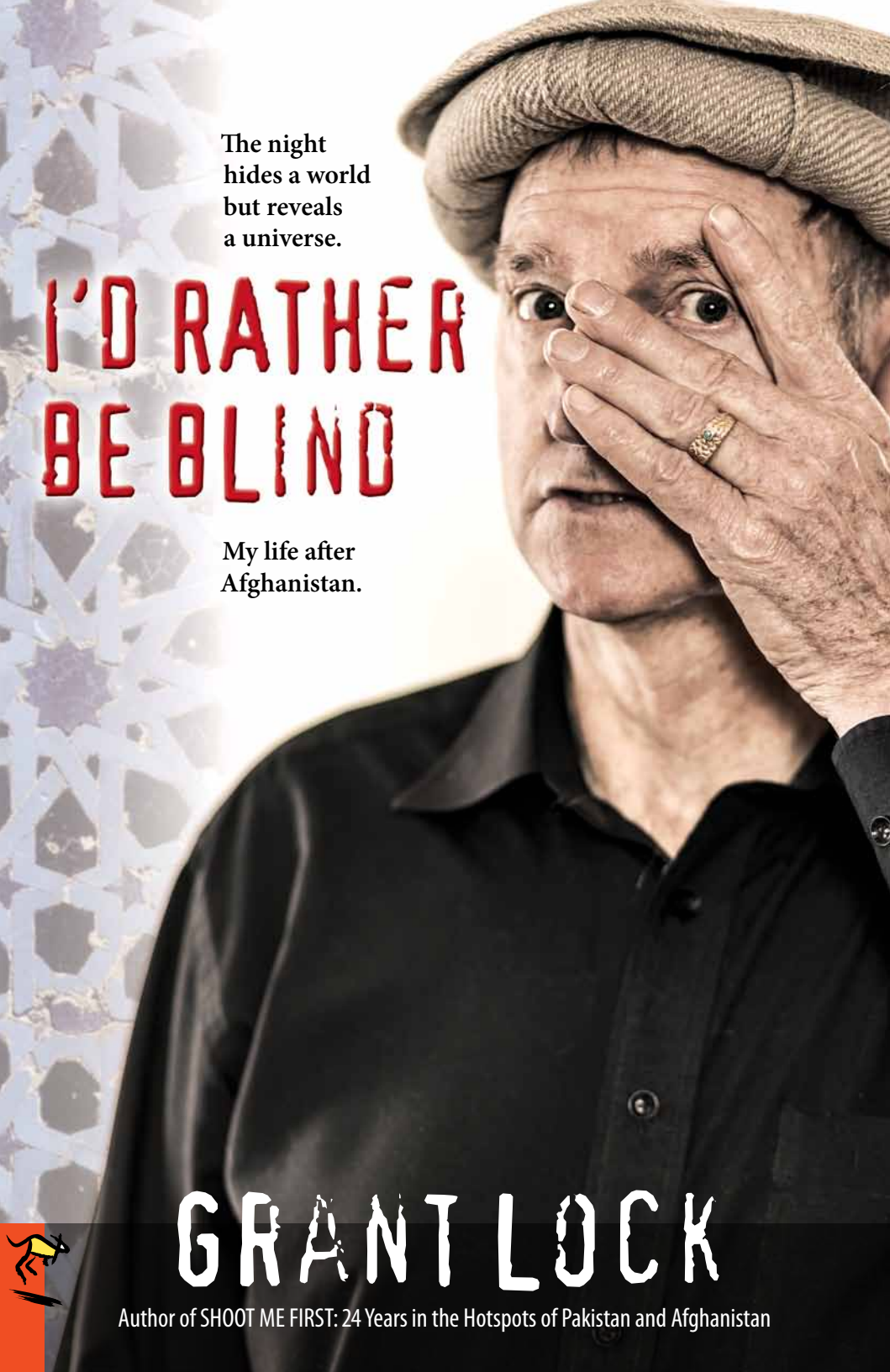

The night hides a world but reveals a universe.
I'D RATHER BE BLIND
My life after Afghanistan.
GRANT LOCK
Author of SHOOT ME FIRST: 24 Years in the Hotspots of Pakistan and Afghanistan

# I'D RATHER BE BLIND

The night
hides a world
but reveals
a universe.

# I'D RATHER BE BLIND

My life after
Afghanistan.

Grant Lock


Melbourne

First published in 2016
Copyright © Grant Lock 2016
The moral right of the author has been asserted.
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from the publisher.

grantlock@shootmefirst.com

Broad Continent Publishing
PO Box 198, Forest Hill Victoria 3131, Australia
management@broadcontinent.com.au
www.broadcontinent.com.au

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry
Creator: Lock, Grant.
Title: I'd rather be blind : the night hides a world but reveals a universe : my life after Afghanistan /Grant Lock.
ISBN: 9780980526448 (paperback)
Subjects: Lock, Grant.
Lock, Grant—Family.
Community development personnel—Australia—Biography.
People with visual disabilities—Australia—Biography.
Post-traumatic stress disorder.
Cultural awareness.
Pakistan—Social life and customs.
Afghanistan—Social life and customs.
Dewey Number: 361.7092

Cover photograph by Sam Roberts
sam@samrobertsphotography.com.au
www.samrobertsphotography.com.au
Telephone +61 415 179 717

Photos on pages 30 and 116 by Heather Bellamy. Photo on page 168 by Angela Seewald. All other photos Grant and Janna Lock collection.

Edited by Owen Salter
Designed by Michael Collie
Set in 11 point Minion
Printed and bound in Australia by Openbook Howden Design & Print.

Thank you Janna Maxine.
Your love makes possible
the impossible.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The night hides a world,
but reveals a universe.
PERSIAN PROVERB

To my companions on my journey into night, thank you for your support and encouragement.

Janna, my amazing fellow-traveller, thank you for your love, friendship and advice. Thank you for all you have given to the concerns, passions and story we share.

Michael Collie, thanks for being my publisher. We have developed a special working relationship. Your energy, vision, professionalism and creative skills have again brought it all together. And thank you Elspeth for being there.

For you blokes at the Blokes' Breakfast: you read, listen and continually encourage me. Len Woodley, for your mentoring, and Bill Hague for your early editing.

Owen Salter, thanks for your masterful final editing.

Thank you, Sam Roberts. Your front cover photography is admired by many.

Thank you, Dosty (Friendly), for your furry, late-night lap-company—even though you make it harder to use the keyboard. You have truly lived up to your name.

For security reasons some names have been changed.

Finally, whether you are sighted, vision impaired, or totally blind, here is good advice:

Go as far as you can see.
When you get there
you'll see further.
PERSIAN PROVERB

# CONTENTS


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Blasphemers will die | 13 |
| 2 | The salesman | 15 |
| 3 | In love with the garbage man | 19 |
| 4 | Macular wall | 23 |
| 5 | Widow of the curly comeback | 27 |
| 6 | The fur piano | 31 |
| 7 | Frishta goes shopping | 35 |
| 8 | Hanging out | 39 |
| 9 | The gun | 41 |
| 10 | The road not travelled | 45 |
| 11 | Some of your children will die | 49 |
| 12 | Survival at Sandspit | 51 |
| 13 | Who? | 57 |
| 14 | The Lamborghini and the big stick | 61 |
| 15 | Road therapy | 65 |
| 16 | Holding on | 67 |
| 17 | Lost | 71 |
| 18 | Flowers and phones | 75 |
| 19 | The plainclothes policeman of Kabul | 79 |
| 20 | Mobile Mo | 83 |
| 21 | The commander and the flood | 85 |
| 22 | Liars, twisters and fools | 89 |
| 23 | Young Lawrence of Arabia | 91 |
| 24 | Double dilemma | 95 |

25 Out of your brain 97
26 The package 103
27 The man 107
28 The delivery 111
29 The Basant trap 113
30 Sadiq Sahib 117
31 Cat and mouse 121
32 Silent night 125
33 Will the real Islam please stand up? 129
34 The club 133
35 The last straw 137
36 And one thing more 141
37 Land-locked Afghanistan 147
38 Stop picking on us! 149
39 Melons 153
40 The fifth face 159
41 Never say never 161
42 That woman 165
43 Miscalculation 1 169
44 The pervert 171
45 Miscalculation 2 175
46 Fumes 179
47 Welcomely obscene 181
48 Flashman 183
49 The rifle 187
50 And the winner is … 193
51 The touch 197
52 The squatters 199
53 When the planets align 203

54 Healing 207
55 The last Wali, the Mad Mullah and Malala 215
56 Julietta 223
57 Tsunami 227
58 The left side 229
59 Finding the mastermind 231
60 Two dollars' worth 237
61 The crab girl 241
62 Hubble images 245
63 The muddy morgue 249
64 Faces of death 251
65 Keemia 255
66 The Afghan wedding and the drummer from hell 257
67 The cigarette 261
68 Grounded 265
69 Flotsam 267

A wise enemy
is better than
a foolish friend.

AFGHAN PROVERB

ONE

# BLASPHEMERS WILL DIE

ADELAIDE, JULY 2014

I lie here like a broken brick. My phone slips from my fingers.

It was two hours after midnight when Maria rang.

"Dad, I know it's late, but I just saw it on the BBC News website. Two foreign aid workers gunned down in Afghanistan."

My deep-sleep speech is slurry but my brain is clear. "Who, Maria? Who?"

"Two females. No names yet."

"Did they say where?"

"It was in Herat. Didn't you have a project out there?"

"Yes. Our primary mental health care program." My throat tightens. "Run by women. Amazing women."

There is a pause. "Sorry, Dad. I'll ring if I find out more."

The phone clicks. I slump back onto my pillow. A voice in my head is insistent. *It is them. It is them.*

Like the shutters that roll down in Kabul's bazaars at closing time, a wave of weakness sweeps down my body. My breathing is short and shallow. Somehow, I know the voice is right.

I see their faces. I recall their love for serving the people. Now their bodies lie in some Afghan morgue, or more likely the back room of a grotty hospital. Muslims bury their dead on the same day so there is no need for refrigeration. But these two bullet-ridden bodies need to get back to Finland. That's their home, the land of the reindeer and countless lakes.

It's not fair! It's not right!

*

It was just another shopping trip. Old taxi. Afghan bazaar. But during Ramzan, the month of the fast, it's different. The mornings are busy and

the afternoons are quiet. The best way to make it through to sundown is to have a long sleep after the lunch you don't have.

Doesn't Allah give a special blessing, and forgive manifold sins, if nothing passes your lips during daylight hours? And isn't there a great blessing for the brave jihadi warriors who eliminate unbelieving *kafirs,* those who call Allah "Father"? That is *shirk*—blasphemy. And how much greater the blessing if the deed is done during the holy month!

Two men have spotted the car. It's the taxi the foreign women usually use. This is going to be easy. The heavenly virgins will not be greeting these brave Taliban fighters today; because they will not meet a martyr's death. Only the *blasphemers* will die. It will be like shooting fish in a barrel—a rusty yellow barrel with wheels and grimy windows. The well-covered fish are in the back seat.

Amidst the weaving traffic of Herat's Shar-e Naw, a motorbike with a pillion passenger draws alongside the taxi. That's not unusual. Some bikes carry a whole family, so what is another motorbike with a couple of men? The bike holds its position then moves closer. The pillion rider raises an automatic weapon.

Glass shatters. Metal perforates. Souls leave bodies.

TWO

# THE SALESMAN

ADELAIDE, 2015

I've always been wary of a balding man with a moustache.

"This will take you places you never thought you could go." He strokes the tips of his moustache. He's sized me up and knows why I'm here. His retail radar has detected that I'm close to making a decision.

Everyone knows we have seasons in our lives. Seasons of change and seasons of self-examination. When I was a young bloke, nothing could stop me. I'd take on anything. And I didn't care what people thought. But these days I'm more sensitive.

"Seems to be losing his confidence."

"Can't make quick decisions any more."

"Not moving like he used to."

Then one night I am lying there, and my wife sighs and says, "Don't worry, dear, I guess it doesn't matter if you can't do what you used to do."

It all hurts.

But this morning, I finally got things into perspective. I looked in the mirror. I didn't see the guy I used to see. I have to be realistic: my self-confidence has slipped and I need a bit of help. Not from those mollifying counsellors with all their jargon and endless appointments. No, I need something tangible, something that puts real power into my hands.

That's when I made my decision. And that's why I'm here in this city showroom.

Don't get me wrong. It's not entirely an age thing. I figure the Grim Reaper is still well down the track for me. But sometimes you just have to do what you have to do.

"Any colour other than white?" I ask.

"Not in this model, sir. But you can have coloured trim"—he strokes the cuff of my pale blue shirt—"to match your favourite outfit. The choice is yours. Bronze, aqua, silver. Whatever. Anything goes these

days!" He smiles. "Just last week a woman from Burnside took one of these. She is so pleased. A big step, but it's changed her life. People notice her. Her self-esteem has risen enormously."

This guy sure knows how to press the buttons. But he's right. People do need to pay me a bit more attention. I'll no longer be just another sheep in the crowd.

"It's the latest model, sir, and just right for you." Adam doesn't seem the right name for a bald guy with a small moustache, but no matter. Normal is over for me, and he knows it. "Step over here and I'll show you how it folds down." He starts the demonstration and adds quietly, "You get maximum attention when it's down."

I smile. I'm impressed. I can already see the heads turning when I arrive at the Morialta Gorge car park, or turn up at the gym.

Adam turns to me. "Why don't you take it out for a test run?"

He doesn't need to offer a second time. I can't wait to get out onto the street. Now I'll get the respect and attention I deserve. After all, not many people own one of these. Not even my identical twin brother, although I know he's thinking seriously about it. And I wonder what my mother would think if she could see me now. Would she be proud or disappointed?

Adam knows what I want to hear. "People will stop and look at you when you go by," he chuckles. "It's pure power, sir."

I don't need convincing. But I want to be sure of the options. "Are there any other models?"

"Of course," he says and waves his hand around the show room. "It's your choice. You don't have to take the latest release."

But I'm hooked. I feel its profile. Nice! Secretly, I can't wait to leave the showroom to try out my new people impresser.

"Just here," Adam says. I sign and head for the door. I can feel the eyes of the young receptionist following me. "All the best, sir," she says in a sweet voice.

"Thank you." I pause and give her half a nod and a satisfied smile. As I turn to leave, I collide with a large woman entering with a guide dog. "Watch it!" I blurt out. I repent immediately. "I beg your pardon, ma'am. I'm very sorry." She doesn't reply but forges ahead, resolutely gripping the frame on her black Labrador.

Clearly it wasn't her fault. She's probably totally blind. I'm really glad I don't need a guide dog—not yet, anyway. I still have a bit of peripheral vision left, and this new white cane will make all the difference.

✱

The salesman was right. I am noticed now. When I cross the road nobody assumes I'm on drugs. They see the cane and slow down. They even stop for me. That's power, real power. Now, wherever I go, my white cane goes with me. It has become my good friend. But I'd readily trade it for the driver's licence I so reluctantly surrendered when I returned from Afghanistan.

May Kabul be without gold,
but never without snow.

AFGHAN PROVERB

THREE

# IN LOVE WITH THE GARBAGE MAN

ADELAIDE, 2015

She must have better hearing than I do. On Monday mornings, long before I pick up the roar of the council truck, I feel Janna stirring beside me. As the "stop–start" of the big diesel approaches, she is sitting up and peering through our bedroom window.

Once she even ran out in her skimpy summer nightie and gave him a little box, gift-wrapped and tied with red ribbon. Christmas was the excuse. My vision is going, but through the window I saw enough. I groaned, pulled the blanket up around my head and hoped the neighbours were still counting sheep.

It's not that she is stuck on one particular guy. It seems she has a thing for all council drivers. Parcel delivery drivers don't move her. The cheerful postie is ignored. The young muscle man who delivers building supplies over the road doesn't even score a glance. But when Monday morning comes around, guess who is all bright-eyed, waiting for her hero to appear?

Unlike my wife, this average mortal is a slow starter on Monday mornings. After a full weekend, I covet all the sleep I can get. At my desk, time snails down to slow motion. The voice of my ZoomText screen-reader drones faintly. It's only multiple shots of dark chocolate mocha that enable me to reach the moving mirage of my lunch break.

The mechanical arm thrusts the bins up and down.

Thump, pause, thump.

Roars forward.

Thump, pause, thump.

Roars forward.

As the noise grows louder, I hear her enchanted sigh. "I love that man."

I had always thought that phrase was reserved for me. We sleep between the same sheets, but right now, I know where her thoughts are.

*

She's back in Kabul, Afghanistan, holding the corner of her long *chaddar* shawl to her nose as she hurries past the accumulating, buzzing mound at the end of our street. The locals empty everything onto it.

The first to check it out are the kids. Bottles, tins and paper all help put a piece of flat bread on the family table. And if there is a portion of unconsumed bread or discarded rice in the trash, well, that's a bonus. Then come the stray dogs. Even the fat-tailed sheep have a nibble as their bearded shepherds lead them out to rocky pastures. But the permanent custodians, along with their grave-filling diseases, are the flies. No wonder Afghanistan has one of the world's highest child mortality rates.

With a bit of luck, and some persuasive currency from the neighbours, a municipal truck will pull up once every seven or eight weeks. There's a flurry of shovels and we start all over again. In only a fortnight vehicles and pedestrians will have to veer to avoid the creeping mass.

It didn't help to learn that Kabul was labelled the capital city with the highest level of atmospheric faecal material. Not surprising when so much is mixed up, stirred up and shovelled out onto those dusty roads. It was good to know that our organisation was changing that. We trained the locals to build effective toilets. Similar, but superior, to the long drop we had on the farm when I was a kid.

But the Afghan winters change everything. The old white-beards have a proverb: *"Kabul bey zar barsh, bey barf ney*—May Kabul be without gold, but never without snow." Without snow crops will wither in the fields and wells in the city will dry up. Janna and I loved the snow. Its forgiving, pristine blanket covered the sanitary iniquities of a battered and bruised population. It was a welcome change from the blistering heat we endured for twenty years on the plains of Pakistan.

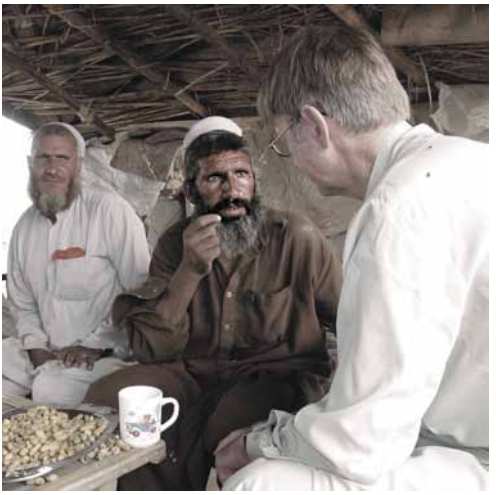
*

That's why, for my wife, Mondays are special. And that's why the sweet roar of that diesel truck pumps a surge of gratitude through her veins. And it's why she loves every driver the local council sends our way.

"It's not *just* the drivers," I remonstrate with her. "There are lots of other people taking care of the business. In the offices, the landfill sites, the recycling stations … lots of people. It's not *just* the drivers."

She doesn't even hear me. She's sitting up in bed, peering out the window.

"I love that man."



The first day you meet you are friends.
The next day you meet you are brothers.
AFGHAN PROVERB

TWENTY-SIX

# THE PACKAGE

ISLAMABAD, 2000

"You are a good man, Ali. A man I can trust."

The pilot fingers the braid of the officer's cap resting on his knees. *"Jhi Janaab.* Thank you, Sir."

"That's why I promoted you last year; chose you above the others."

Ali has heard about the suave, suited man sitting behind that desk. You can always tell a Pakistani man's position by the size of his desk, and this one is huge.

Sadiq Sahib slides open the top drawer. "You are a man who respects your superiors, Ali, and always obeys orders."

Ali knows that he is not being buttered up for nothing. This is Pakistan, and there is always a time to pay back a favour: a better examination result, a blind eye at the customs counter, a promotion.

His boss reaches into the drawer and places a large packet on the desktop.

It's a plain parcel, wrapped in green plastic with a lot of tape. It looks ordinary enough, but they both know what is in it. They both know that, if a pilot carries it to Europe, it will elude the sniffer dogs and customs officials.

"Your next flight to Frankfurt is Wednesday morning."

The pilot nods.

"I'd like you to deliver this little package to our German office."

Ali feels the beads of perspiration gathering on his forehead. He's worked hard for his position. Thousands of hours flying all over the globe, including to Maria's Italy. It will all be over if he says no.

It's not the first time his boss has detected reluctance in a new pilot, but they all come round in the end.

The package goes back into the drawer.

"Think it over. Let me know on Monday."

The pilot rises, salutes the Savile Row suit and moves to the door.

"And Ali, I haven't seen you at the mosque lately. Is everything OK?" Sadiq Sahib doesn't wait for an answer. "I'll see you next Monday, and *choop karo*—say nothing."

*

Maria was beautiful, and she knew it. Ali couldn't take his eyes off her. It was mutual. It is hard to imagine a more handsome specimen than a well-educated, self-assured Pakistani pilot, with his immaculately trimmed moustache and perfectly pressed uniform.

It didn't really matter that he was a Muslim and she was a Catholic. "Sure," he told her one Sunday when she was showing him the fountains of Rome, "I go to the mosque for Eid ul-Fitre and Eid ul-Azre. But that's all."

"Same as me," she said. "Christmas and Easter keeps the family happy."

Italians are family-minded people, as are Pakistanis. So it should have all worked out. But different cultural backgrounds can put enormous pressure on a couple, even when they are deeply in love.

Maria expected a place of their own. Ali assumed she would be happy moving in with the extended family in Lahore. That's what all Pakistani brides do. But Maria pined for her own place—she didn't care how small.

She resented, too, being relegated to virtual servant status. Ali's mother could be charming, with gold dripping from her ears and wrists, insisting that guests try another *jelaabee* or another serve of lamb *qorma.* But it was Maria who had to clean up afterwards. Her three sisters-in-law were well up the pecking order. Hadn't they all produced sons? And they all spoke both Urdu and English. Maria could only communicate in English. No one here spoke Italian, and she struggled with the rudiments of hard-sounding Urdu, the everyday language of the community.

Maria felt trapped. Where was the freedom she had enjoyed as a woman in Europe? It wasn't that she hated the *chaddar.* It was the legalism. "Don't forget to cover your head when you are out, Maria," her female in-laws regularly reminded her. "You are bringing shame on our family and on your husband."

She found it best to say nothing, but inside, Maria burned.

*Shame! Shame! That's all you think about! Mamma mia! Don't you know I was a free woman in Italy? I was in charge of a department in the travel agency. I went* where *I liked,* when *I liked! And I wore* what *I liked.*

When little Ishaaq came along, they all said, *"Moobarak ho!* Congratulations! A son. You have brought great honour to Ali." But Ali was away days and weeks at a time.

Whenever she could, Maria took refuge in the bedroom that had been allotted to her and Ali. But never for long. There would be three sharp taps on the door.

Tap, tap, tap! "Time for you to clean the rice, Maria!"

Tap, tap, tap! "Bring in the washing, Maria!"

Tap, tap, tap! "We're going to the women's bazaar to buy gifts for our guests. Be sure to prepare the chicken for the *biryani,* Maria!"

Ali tried to console her. He was more moderate than the rest of the family. He had travelled widely and understood where Maria was coming from. He too felt trapped. He was glad when his flights kept him away on Fridays. Then he didn't have to front up at the mosque to preserve the family's honour. After all, his father was an influential businessman, a "somebody". Not to join him at the mosque just wasn't to be considered.

Ali could see what was happening, but what could he do? He was bound to his family, his clan and this culture of shame and honour. Instead of just going through the motions at the mosque, he started looking for answers; he started praying. And locked in her room, weeping, Maria also started pleading with her namesake.

But neither the prayers in the room nor the prayers in the mosque produced anything. No meaning. No response. Nothing.

"There is no God," Ali pronounced. "We are both praying, and there is no answer. No answer from Allah and no answer from Mary and Jesus."

They sat in silence. Then Maria whispered, "If you are out there, God—if you exist—please help us. Please show yourself."

And Ali said, "Ameen."

Little Sabina's arrival was hardly noticed. After all, she wasn't a boy. But Ali loved her big brown eyes. They sparkled like her mother's used to.

*

Ali can hear the train in the distance. It has all been too much. Things are not working out. *Better to end it all. Maria and the kids will go back to Italy. She will be happy back there.*

He lays his body on the track and grips the far side rail. He's chosen this place well. With the curve of the line and the summer darkness, the driver will not see him until it's too late.

He hears the rumbling clatter through the metal of the rails: *Better this way. Better this way. Better this way.*

A hand touches his shoulder. "*Bhai Jhi*—Dear brother." The voice is firm and strong. "What are you doing?"

Ali doesn't move.

"*Aa-o. Chai meraysaat pio*—Come, drink tea with me. Come, Ali, come!"

But Ali is consumed by the call of the rails.

*Better this way. BETTER THIS WAY. BETTER THIS WAY.*

SIXTY

# TWO DOLLARS' WORTH

KABUL, 2005

Tears come to the Afghan woman's eyes. "I am pregnant."

Janna is excited. *"Tarbreek! Tarbreek!* Congratulations, Marzia!" She hugs her visitor.

But the pregnant woman's body is stiff. Unresponsive.

"Janna Jaan, dear Janna, I must have fifty Afghanis."

Janna knows that her Marzia is not the asking type. Fifty Afghanis is less than $2. "What is it for, Marzia? A check-up?"

The younger woman struggles to look her proxy mother in the eye. She touches her body as though it carries a disease and whispers, "I have to get rid of it."

*

Janna first met Marzia soon after we moved across town to the suburb of Aloudin, close to our Kabul headquarters. She was the first person to receive my wife into the neighbourhood.

"Grant! I had a lovely welcome today."

"From whom?" I ask as I adjust our fickle diesel heater.

"She must be one of the poorest women around. But she was lovely. And she only had rubber flip-flops on her feet."

"That's not good with all the snow," I reply. "Time to eat?"

We move to the table for our evening meal. This is a good part of the day, when we share our daily ups and downs. Janna talks about her team member pastoral care and widows' work, and I talk about the development projects I am involved in.

"I met her when I was taking the shortcut to the office," Janna says. "The park looks like fairy-land, with the pine trees all covered with snow."

"Looks good now," I mumble, "but in the summer it's a dust-bowl, and it'll be a mud-bath when the snow melts."

Janna ignores me and proceeds to serve the spinach and potato curry. "She had two ragamuffin kids with her, and she was taking them to the *Parwishghar,* the orphanage. You know, the large compound at the end of our block."

I nod. "Yeah, the one with the big flat roof where the security soldiers post a lookout and a sniper whenever some dignitary is on the way to Parliament House."

Janna passes a bowl to me. She pauses. "Grant, I was horrified that she had to give up her little children. You know how I love kids."

"Is she a widow?"

"No, she's not. She has an old grey-beard as a husband. Apparently, the kids only go for the day."

"So orphanages here take kids who aren't orphans? That's interesting."

"Marzia told me that because they are so poor, she can take her little boy and girl in the morning and collect them in the afternoon. They get a free meal and some teaching."

I reach for another piece of warm naan bread, fresh from the tandoor shop at the end of the street. "That's good. What do they learn?"

Janna rolls her eyes. "Marzia says they learn to sweep, clean and wash things. There are hundreds of kids there—not surprising after nearly thirty years of war."

I tear off a piece of the flat bread and shape it into a small edible scoop, Afghan-style. "Sounds like they only get that meal if they work for it. But that's better than starving, despite what the West might say about child labour."

"Oh," Janna says, "they're not her only kids. She has six altogether. And she's not going to have any more. *'Bayshuck!'* she said. 'Definitely not!' "

But Marzia is not the first to make that statement and then feel the nausea of morning sickness.

✱

There is desperation in Marzia's eyes as she repeats her words in a whisper. "Janna Jaan, I *have* to get rid of it."

"But Marzia!"

The Afghan woman raises her hand and pours out the logic of her poverty. "We are very poor, Janna Jaan. My husband can't get work. My oldest son finds a little but not enough. There are already eight of us. How can we feed another mouth?" She tightens her fists. "I *have* to do it! Again!"

"What do you mean, Marzia? *What* do you have to do again?"

Then it all comes out.

Marzia has already been to a doctor. He gave her medicine guaranteed to remove the baby. But the guarantee failed. She had to buy more medicine. She scrounged and lied to her white-bearded husband to put enough money together.

"The second time, I was so sick I thought I would die. But it's still there! Now I have no more money, Janna Jaan. But I *have* to get rid of it!"

Janna knows how much Afghans love their children. Knows how hard it has been for her visitor to take this course. "But, Marzia, you have tried twice now. Perhaps … perhaps this is a special baby."

"Please, Janna Jaan, help me. It is for the best."

Janna is struggling. She reads the pain and resolve in the young woman's gaze. *What can I do? I've never been asked to finance an abortion before. This is one roleplay we didn't rehearse during our cross-cultural training back in civilised Melbourne.*

"I'll tell you what I will do," she hears herself saying. "I will give you the money, Marzia, and I will pray with you." She takes her visitor's work-worn hands into her own. "But remember, Marzia Jaan, this could be a special baby."

After her visitor leaves, Janna can't stop mulling.

*It's a crazy world. Back in Australia, a country struggling to grow its population, the unborn are conveniently disposed of. And, if a couple want to adopt a child, it's as difficult as forcing a camel through the eye of the proverbial needle. In all Australia, there are only a few hundred adoptions a year and the number is falling, while the wait time for adopting overseas children is five years and rising.*

*I love to see all the children here in Afghanistan, but oversized families are a huge challenge. What can be done to encourage family planning? Husbands, religious leaders and cultural expectations are all against it. Add ignorance, illiteracy, poverty, war and high child mortality and it's*

*all uphill. Still, the old Afghan proverb says, "There is a path to the top of even the highest mountain." The government does have some family planning clinics, and other organisations also help. And our big team contributes with female clinics, community development and capacity building across the country. But climbing that mountain is tough going. There are too many heavy rocks in the backpack.*

A month later, Marzia returns. Her skinny frame and baggy clothing give no clue to the success or failure of the two dollars' worth of Afghanis.

"Come in, Marzia, come in," Janna says.

The young woman slips her shoes off outside the door and Janna leads her to the *toshak* cushions in our living room. "I've just made tea."

She brings another cup and settles beside her guest. "Tell me how it went, Marzia. Are you OK?" She reaches for the teapot. "Did the medicine fail again, for the third time?"

"No, it didn't."

Janna pauses.

"I didn't take it."

"You didn't take it?"

"You were right, Janna Jaan." Marzia lays a hand on her abdomen and gives a slight smile.

Janna leans forward. "Marzia, tell me. What happened?"

"The doctor took my pulse, and then he said it was too late. He gave the money back and said exactly what you said: 'This must be a special baby.' " She reaches into the folds of her clothing. "Here is the money, Janna Jaan."

Janna puts down the teapot. *There is something about this ragged young woman. How many others would bring the money back to me? They would just say they paid for the medicine and it didn't work. Or just not show up again.*

She hugs her friend. "You must keep it, Marzia, for the sake of your baby. Your special baby!"

There is a doorway that
connects two hearts.

AFGHAN PROVERB

Crisp, beautiful and revealing. Valuable for anyone trying to build an appreciation of Islamic societies. And that should be all of us.

**John Anderson**

Former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia

Lock's adventures are probed for meaning so that the reader may have a deeper comprehension of a region frequently in our headlines but seldom in our understanding.

**Lynn Arnold**

Former Premier of South Australia

The raw reality of daily life for ordinary people, up close and personal. Lock gives the most pressing global issues of our time a human face.

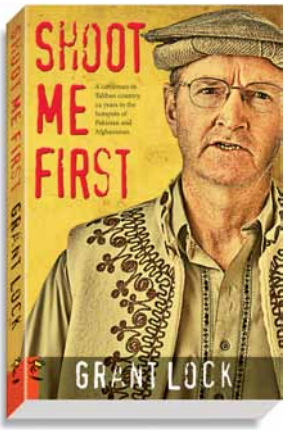
**Mark Durie**

Author of *The Third Choice*

Your book brought back so many memories. I couldn't help but cry.

**Habiba**

Afghan refugee




**Shoot Me First**

**Paperback. Audiobook. eBook**

**Grant Lock directed Afghanistan's largest eye care program.** **Until he himself became blind. He returns home to a society with its own blind spots: myopic attitudes to Islam, mental health and what makes us human. After battling corruption, injustice and disadvantage in the deserts, mountains and cities of Pakistan and Afghanistan, Lock confronts challenges—both intimate and global—with courage and compassion.**

**Riveting. To his experience in some of the world's most troubled places, Lock brings a bushman's wit and wisdom. Lock writes about Islam with authority and insight.**

**John Anderson AO**

FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA

**Grant Lock is master of the ripping yarn. This smorgasbord of human experience spans centuries and continents and embraces themes common to us all: hostility and hospitality, disaster and hope, the mundane and the marvelous.**

**Dr Bernie Power**

AUTHOR OF *UNDERSTANDING JESUS AND MUHAMMAD*

**Inspirational. I could sit in a pub all day listening to Grant Lock.**

**Haydn Raford**

FREELANCE WRITER

**I thank God for you every day.**

**Farida**

AFGHAN WIDOW

**Grant Lock** dug wells, built schools and helped restore the eyesight of thousands of Afghans. Grant is married to Janna, the woman the widows of Kabul call Frishta (Angel). Development work in Pakistan and Afghanistan followed their notable success as cattle breeders in South Australia.

broad continent

**Biography**
**Pakistan Afghanistan**

ISBN 978-0-9805264-4-8

9 780980 526448

www.broadcontinent.com.au