

Kabul Goes Pop: Music Television Afghanistan

This plot summary is for anyone who might benefit from knowing what happens in the show before coming. It contains spoilers and strong language.

Plot Summary

The show begins with Samia and Farook in Pop Heaven, a fantasy broadcast version of the music TV show they present. They decide to tell the story of their rise to fame.

Farook recounts his audition in 2004 for Tolo TV's music show VOX in Kabul, Afghanistan. He flashbacks to his first broadcast of the show while Samia excitedly observes, and they do the dance routine to Britney Spears' *Baby One More Time*. Samia plays a caller, Nazia, who adores Farook. Farook plays *Shape of my Heart* by the Backstreet Boys.

Samia interrupts him and flashbacks to how she became the co-host of VOX. She worked as a receptionist at Tolo TV when a creepy male colleague approached her and offered her a job. Present-day Samia and Farook discuss their first impressions of each other. They flashback to when Asif, the producer of the show, met with them and introduced Samia as a co-host.

They have their first live broadcast where Farook is impressed by Samia's rebellious song choice, *Kiss Kiss* by Tarkan. They reflect on their relationship with music. Then, they have their 2nd broadcast. Off-air, they reflect on Asif's reaction - it's clear that he's not happy about their subversive behaviour. They then flashback to a conversation where they shared music and formed a friendship.

Together they reflect on their friendship during the show years. They flashback to Asif worrying about "push back" from society. Following this, the pair flashback to their 3rd live show where they played the "fart game." Asif watches them and they are forced to an ad-break so he can warn them about taking things too far.

Samia and Farook return from their ad-break and continue the show. They play *My Heart Will Go On* by Celine Dion and discuss Afghanistan's obsession with *Titanic*. They go off-air and reflect on how their lives have changed because of the show's success: "we're not just famous, we're superstars".

In their 4th live show, Samia reveals her hair live on TV. They flashback to Samia realising this was an unprecedented act for an Afghan woman on TV. Farook reflects that he "shouldn't have let it slide" and they flashback to a conversation with Asif, where he reprimands Samia. Samia and Farook narrate the implications of their ongoing rebellious behaviour and flashback to a TOLO TV annual party, where guests are drinking alcohol and the executives congratulate the presenters.

On their 5th live show Samia is in Kabul Zoo and asks Farook to stand in for Maqbool the Monkey. Then they remember a summer where they drove around in Farook's new car (named Jamie Lynn Spears) and were abused by "two bearded men" who call Samia a "slag."

Samia and Farook have their 6th live show and do a Q&A. Farook breaks this broadcast and asks Samia when she got her first threatening text. They reveal that Farook's car was stolen and burned, then return to their broadcast and play *Hero* by Enrique Iglesias. They discuss the song and reveal that they have been instructed by Asif to play fewer songs by women.

They remember when they were ordered to stay inside the studio for their safety when Samia's younger brother is caught in a Taliban suicide bombing. Present-day Farook reflects on Samia being "the braver one", and he remembers noticing Asif calling Samia into his office after the show received a threatening package. Samia is certain that the station executives are going to fire her.

They have their 7th show and dance to *Macarena* by Los Del Rio. Farook regrets his actions and present day Samia reassures him. Farook narrates the public response to their dancing, including the Chief Justice Fazl Hadi Shinwari's warning and Tolo TV's public statement disaffiliating with the show.

Farook does their 8th live show, but Samia is not there and he doesn't know where she is. He repeatedly calls her on voicemail then plays *Muqabla Muqabla*. The song reminds him of being caught in a landmine explosion when he was 9 years old.

On their 9th live show, Farook sends Samia a message through the show for her to get better soon. Samia has been missing for 6 days, and he has received a voicemail of a woman screaming. A Taliban member, Mahmood, calls into the show, and implies that Samia is a "whore" and that they killed her. *Buttons* by the Pussycat Dolls plays.

Off air, Farook blames Asif. He explains to the audience that Samia was found dead near her home and was raped and shot in the head. Present-day Samia tells her version of what happened. She imagines alternative endings the story could have had if she not been killed.

The show is cancelled, and Farook goes into hiding in the studio. He plays *Baby One More Time* and sobs.

The play ends in Denmark, where Farook has sought asylum. He has been at a party, where someone played *Baby One More Time* and everything that happened came flooding back to him. Samia returns onstage and asks him how he is. Farook tells Samia that she was his best friend, and Samia tells him that he was hers too. She sings the chorus of *Baby One More Time* and Farook leaves.