THE LAST THING THEY DO

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FADE IN:

FORLORN CHILDREN SING

EXT. VALLEY IN PANJSHIR – DAY (LONG AGO)

An ageless stone building waits by a bone dry gravel road that wends deep into an ancient mountain landscape.

FARZANEH (VO)
It seemed a school had stood there always: in the valley by the road where Alexander’s armies once marched.

On the wind: SOUND OF A LONG-DEAD ARMY

INT. SCHOOL

POV LOOKING OUT: the black doorway frames swirling dust, a jagged escarpment and serrated peaks beyond.

FARZANEH (VO)
Rome’s legions, the chariots of Persia, Mongol horsemen, the silken soldiers of the Raj: all had passed by its door…

A NEW SOUND DRONES: a Russian Mi-24 helicopter rises above the escarpment and looms like Death.

FARZANEH (VO)
And all found reason to destroy it.

It unleashes a pair of S-8 missiles right into the doorway.

BLINDING LIGHT

When it fades, weathered stones lay strewn.

FARZANEH (VO)
Yet always the stones would remain: awaiting resurrection by the foolish and the brave.

DISTANT MUSIC BUILDS

The source, a US Army Humvee, runs roughshod over the stones.

INT. HUMVEE TROOP CARRIER - DAY

MUSIC CONTINUES: Alice Cooper’s SCHOOL’S OUT -- in Farsi. It blares inside the clattering armored vehicle as words type out on a dust-caked Toughbook.

ON SCREEN

In a remote village of the rugged Panjshir

Dirty fingers speed along the keys.

SHONDA (O.C.)
(to herself)
“Today is a joyous --” damn this road.

The screen jumps with every rock and pothole.

ON SCREEN

Because a new school opens its door

A bone-breaking jolt blurs the words.

THREE FEMALE WARFIGHTERS bounce and pitch like ragdolls in the back of the rattling Humvee. They shout to be heard.

SHONDA
Jesus Lord Almighty --

BUMPKIN
Don’t blame Him. He ain’t driving.

DOC
Sherman was right. War is hell -- on the coccyx.

BUMPKIN
No way. The kid from Charlie Brown said that?

The writer is USCG Seaman SHONDA BRYCE: 26, black, striking, hard. Beside her: USAF SPEC LYDIA “DOC” HERNANDEZ: 36, dark, slight, edgy. Behind her: USMC PVT LAUREN “BUMPKIN” SHULZ: 19, blond, plump, wide-eyed. All wear full camo combat gear appropriate to their branch of the service.

Bumpkin’s helmet and the tiny blue flower pinned to it bobble as she reads over Shonda’s shoulder.

BUMPKIN
Look at you go, girl! “The new school, the Mulberry Girls Academy, was built with donations collected by American third graders.” Aw that’s cute as kittens.

SHONDA
CNN, here I come.

BUMPKIN
(reads over her shoulder)
“And this new school has the d… d…”

DOC
“Distinction.”

BUMPKIN
I knew that -– “distinction of being the last to open before US forces complete their phased withdrawal from Afghanistan.” Yay! We gonna be in history --

RED (O.C.)
Don’t count on it, Bumpkin.

FRONT SEATS

82nd AB MSG MARGARET “RED” AMES, 22: redheaded, hotheaded, a soldier’s soldier. Sweat glistens on her forearm tattoo (“No Fear”) as she works to keep the Humvee on the rocky road.

RED
When guys promise to pull out, they don’t always. Ain’t that right, Captain?

She smiles at US ARMY ENG CAPT HARRIET “HARRY” BEECHER, 29, who looks out her window with the soldier’s 1000 yard stare.

RED
Captain Beecher --?

CAPT BEECHER
Almost there, Red?

RED
Yes, ma’am.
(flicks off the music)
OK, people: Listen up!

Beecher looks back and locks eyes with each one in turn.

CAPT BEECHER
I know we haven’t worked together before so I’ll keep it simple: The Major wants pictures of happy school girls and I want to be back on the road no later than 1400 to make the base by nightfall. We get there, get the shots and get out -- copy?

RED
Hooah!

Beecher turns away. The others trade looks.

DOC
But Captain, what about the women?

CAPT BEECHER
What about them?

BUMPKIN
We’re gonna chat and such, right?

CAPT BEECHER
No.

DOC
But we’re a Female Engagement Team. We’ve got to engage them --

SHONDA
Otherwise I got to do a rewrite…

Red looks at Beecher. She just stares out the window.

RED
You heard the Captain’s orders: No Hearts and Minds -- just in and out! Strictly PR BS, so if it smiles, shoot it, newbies –- and not with your M-4s.

Red smiles at Beecher but her CO is a million miles away.

EXT. HUMVEE TROOP CARRIER

The Humvee raises a choking cloud as it rattles by a boulder as big as a house.

EXT. KALDAR VALLEY

FROM A MOUNTAIN TOP: the Humvee crawls like a bug deep into the rugged vale.

INT. HUMVEE TROOP CARRIER

Beecher and Red see it at the same time.

RED
What the…?

CAPT BEECHER
Stop.

Red slams on the breaks, bodies pitch forward.

BUMPKIN
Thank the Lord! I got to pee me something fierce –-

Bumpkin gets up while the others stare out the windshield.

DOC
That it?

SHONDA
Better not be.

BUMPKIN
Be what?

RED
GPS don’t lie.

BUMPKIN
Wait you mean -- that’s the Mulberry Girls Academy?

POV THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD: fifty meters away, by the gravel road -- an ageless, roofless stone building.

BUMPKIN
Where are the happy school girls, the villagers --?

SHONDA
The damned roof?

DOC
So much for CNN --

RED
Shut it.
(to Beecher)
Captain?

BEECHER
Ma Deuce.

RED
Yes, ma’am.

Red climbs up into the MG mount as Beecher pulls out binoculars and studies the building.

LATER

Wind gusts. Stone dust swirls. The Humvee hunkers in the barren terrain. The building waits.

INT. HUMVEE TROOP CARRIER

A wrapper crinkles as Shonda eats a Cliff bar. Doc picks at her cuticles. Bumpkin bites her lip and fidgets.

BUMPKIN
Sure looks empty, huh?

SHONDA
Hm-hmm.

DOC
I read there hasn’t been an insurgent episode in this valley since ’05.

Red peeks back down into the vehicle.

RED
What now, Captain?

CAPT BEECHER
(lowers her binoculars)
Going in.

RED
Yes, ma’am!

Red goes for her carbine.

CAPT BEECHER
No, Red -- I want you on the .50 cal.

RED
You can’t send one of the cherries.

CAPT BEECHER
I agree.

Beecher grabs her carbine.

RED
You’re going solo? Captain --

She opens her door and gets out.

RED
It ain’t worth it for a pile of rocks. I say we turn around and --

CAPT BEECHER
Tell the Major what exactly?

Beecher slams the door.

RED
(to herself)
What the frig?

The others stare at her.

RED
Well what are you turds looking at?
Dismount!

EXT. HUMVEE TROOP CARRIER

Beecher cocks her weapon as she walks from the Humvee.

ROOF OF THE HUMVEE

Red mans the .50 cal up in the gun turret.

RED
Move it, go, GO!

DOOR OF THE HUMVEE

The newbies pile out in their 80 odd pounds of battle-rattle like Keystone Kops.

ROOF OF THE HUMVEE

Red shakes her head and cocks the .50 cal.

SEEN DOWN THE .50 CAL

Beecher crosses the wide open expanse. The stone building looms over her head.

SEEN FROM ABOVE

The newbies deploy around the vehicle aiming their M-4s.

NORTH OF THE HUMVEE

Shonda sneaks a peek at Beecher.

SHONDA
Out in the open like that? Hm-hmm --

RED (O.C.)
Eyes on the flank, puddle rat!

ROOF, HUMVEE

Red sweats as she aims down the barrel.

RED
(to herself)
C'mon, Harry… you're in no man's land…

POV .50 CAL GUNSITE: Beecher passes the midway point -- shadow in the building --

RED
MOVEMENT!

Beecher freezes –- then runs straight for the nearest cover: the building.

RED
(to herself)
What -– shit -- get down!

Red aims -- no shot -- Beecher's in the way.

REAR OF THE HUMVEE

Bumpkin aims, scared, bladder pressing.

BUMPKIN
Y'all? What's going on up there?

OUTSIDE THE BUILDING

Beecher slams flat against the building, sweaty, winded, gives the OK sign. She calls out in Persian. No reply.

ROOF OF THE HUMVEE

Red takes careful aim.

RED
(to herself)
OK *haji,* come to Red…

POV .50 CAL GUNSITE: Movement inside the doorway.

RED
(to herself)
Gotcha…

But before she can fire, Beecher charges in. TWO SHOTS.

REAR OF THE HUMVEE

Bumpkin mumbles a prayer.

NORTH SIDE, HUMVEE

Shonda squeezes her M-4 hard.

SOUTH SIDE, HUMVEE

Doc’s carbine trembles.

ROOF OF THE HUMVEE

Red searches desperately for a target --

DOWN THE .50 CAL

Aim at the doorway -- window -– doorway -- a figure appears: Beecher. She gives the All Clear.

ROOF OF THE HUMVEE

Red lets out a huge sigh then for the others’ benefit:

RED
Booyah! Captain Beecher bags another.

INT. SCHOOL

A goat lies dead in a spreading pool of blood, two bullet holes in its head.

Beecher stares. The sun beats down on the “classroom”. Weeds grow through the floor boards. Something moves behind the weather-beaten teacher’s desk: a baby goat. She walks through her mother’s brains and gore and bleats. Beecher rushes to the back door and throws up.

EXT. CREST OF THE HILLSIDE

Wind whips a lone, shrouded figure watching from above.

NEAR THE SCHOOL

Red strides across the barren terrain. Shonda, Doc and Bumpkin follow -- wary, weapons ready.

SHONDA
Just saying it seemed a little crazy --

RED
That’s because you ain’t Harry Beecher.

DOC
I agree with Shonda. Of course I’m only a Spec III with a BS in psychology so --
(stops in her tracks)
You don’t mean she’s *the* Beecher?

RED
Don’t go making a big deal out of it.

SHONDA
Out of what?

BUMPKIN
(fidgets as she walks)
Harriet Beecher? Shut the barn door! I did a report on her in sixth grade and *was* her on Halloween and now she’s my CO!

RED
What’s your problem, Jackness?

BUMPKIN
My bladder, Sarge: it’s like a IED and there ain’t no bushes --

RED
Jesus. Lend bashful your FUD.

Reluctantly, Doc hands Bumpkin a Female Urinary Device.

DOC
Rinse it when you’re done.

Bumpkin stops and stares at the funnel-shaped thing.

RIGHT OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

Shonda, Doc and Red talk quietly.

DOC
Don’t you remember? Early in the war,
the one who saved the whole platoon?
Got the medal -- from the president?

SHONDA
She’s the one? Medal of Honor, right?

RED
No. That one they don’t give to us.
(spits)
Even though she is the best damn
soldier I ever –-

Beecher walks out.

CAPT BEECHER
Red, get me Wilkins.

RED
Yes, ma’am.
(turns, bellows)
Bumpkin!

OVER BY THE HUMVEE

Bumpkin uses the FUD to urinate on the Hummer tire.

BUMPKIN
Look at me: peeing like a man. Wee!

LATER

DOWN THE ROAD (200 METERS NW OF THE SCHOOL)

A steel gray river winds through the deep gorge. Red stands on the escarpment above and chucks a stone.

NEAR THE CLIFFS (100 METERS SE OF THE SCHOOL)

Doc and Shonda scout the perimeter at the foot of the russet sandstone cliffs. The midday heat blazes.

EXT. HUMVEE

Bumpkin stands by as Beecher speaks into the radio.

CAPT BEECHER
Alpha One, this is Bravo Five. Be advised: No one's at the school. It appears to be abandoned, over.

INT. BAGRAM AFB, MAJOR WILKINS'S OFFICE

MAJ WILKINS, 40s, works at his cluttered desk. The boxes behind indicate he's already packing. He turns to his laptop, pulls up a file, talks at his speakerphone.

MAJ WILKINS
Bravo Five, my intel states an American charity is working on that building: group called Dream Catchers, over.

CAPT BEECHER (V.O.)
Alpha One, nobody's here. It's a soup sandwich, sir, and it's getting late so --

MAJ WILKINS
Five, what do the villagers say, over.

CAPT BEECHER (V.O.)
We haven't seen any, over.

MAJ WILKINS
Well Five, I suggest you do. Perhaps they could shed some light?

EXT. HUMVEE

Beecher stares at the school.

CAPT BEECHER
Major, it doesn’t have a roof.

MAJ WILKINS (V.O.)
Well, Captain, since you happen to work for the Army Corps of Engineers you’d be ideal for the job.

CAPT BEECHER
Job? Sir, our mission was to take pictures of a school not build one --!

MAJ WILKINS (V.O.)
Take it easy, Harry, I’m not ordering you to build anything.

INT. MAJOR WILKINS’S OFFICE

Wilkins sits back.

MAJ WILKINS
Look, you asked to come off the line -- so I put you as far from the action as I could. Now you got, what, a week left till you go home --?

EXT. HUMVEE

Beecher stares at the horizon.

CAPT BEECHER
Six days --

MAJ WILKINS (V.O.)
Well can you think of a better way to spend a couple of those days than finishing up a nice school for some poor kids out there in Shangri La?

INT. MAJOR WILKINS'S OFFICE

Wilkins sits back.

MAJ WILKINS
But you know you have my utmost, Harry: so my orders are -– you choose. And whatever you do is fine by me –- long as you're back in plenty of time for your big flight home. Alpha One: out.

EXT. HUMVEE

Beecher hands Bumpkin the handset.

CAPT BEECHER
What's your name again?

BUMPKIN
Schulz, ma'am, Lauren Schulz, but everybody just calls me Bumpkin --

CAPT BEECHER
(stares off at the school)
Any children?

BUMPKIN
No, ma'am, I'm only 19. 'Course so is my cousin and she's got three. But I do love babies, and puppies --

CAPT BEECHER
Get the sergeant.

BUMPKIN
Yes, ma'am!

Bumpkin runs like a bunny. Beecher checks her watch.

EDGE OF THE ESCARPMENT

Red IMs on a smartphone. Her eyes well up.

BUMPKIN (O.C.)
Sergeant Ames!

Bumpkin huffs and puffs across the rocky field.

BUMPKIN
Come quick, the Captain wants us --

Red jumps up, arms raised.

RED
STOP!

Bumpkin skids to a halt on the dusty gravel. Red comes storming around the red painted stones.

RED
You see those stones, fobbit?

BUMPKIN
Yes, ma'am --

RED
Good, so you ain't blind -- just dumb.
And what's on said stones?

BUMPKIN
Red paint --

RED
(in Bumpkin's face)
And what's that signify, Marine?

BUMPKIN
Minefield?

RED
Uh-huh.
(indicates the stones)
"Red you're dead." Got it? Now if I ever catch your ass anywheres near…
(sees beyond Bumpkin)
Damn.

EXT. HILLSIDE, NEAR THE SCHOOL

The sun beats down on Doc and Shonda at the rock strewn base of the crenellated mount.

SHONDA
Because my second cousin’s second wife knows Ted Turner’s former make-up girl’s assistant, that’s how.
(spits dust off her lip)
Lord, the delta was never like this. Got any water left?

Doc reluctantly hands over her canteen.

DOC
But didn’t he sell CNN and would they even hire a woman without any…

Shonda pulls off her helmet. Her head is shaved.

DOC
Experience?

She pours water on her steamy bare head.

SHONDA
Don’t worry, I got it all covered…

She plops her helmet back on, looks over at Beecher.

SHONDA
What do you make of her, Doc? Beecher, I mean: seem a little PTSD to you?

She returns the canteen.

DOC
You’ve been in country, what, 8 weeks? Imagine what 8 years could do to you.

Doc goes to drink: not a drop. She notices a pebble roll past her boot and looks up the hill.

SHONDA (CONT)
Anyway, all I need’s a war story on my reel then when I quit this man’s army --

POV FROM THE HILLSIDE: crouching back behind a rock.

SHONDA (CONT)
I’ll just stroll on into CNN and --

YELLING! Chaos, blinding sun, a silhouetted soldier aims a weapon. Shonda and Doc train their M-4s up the hill. It's Red. She yanks a trembling TAJIK BOY, 12, down the crag.

CAPT BEECHER (O.C.)
Weapons down!

Beecher marches up.

RED
Caught the little *haji* spying, Captain. He's clean.

CAPT BEECHER
Hernandez? You speak Persian, right?

DOC
A smidge --

CAPT BEECHER
Ask him what he was doing up there.

Doc asks. The boy giggles.

CAPT BEECHER
What's so funny?

HAJI
Sounded like she said: What was I pooping up there?

Red looks under the boy's hat.

RED
What's your name, *haji*?

HAJI
Haji.

CAPT BEECHER
Where you live, son?

HAJI
The village around the bend.

CAPT BEECHER
What were you doing?

HAJI
Looking for Boosah.

CAPT BEECHER
Who’s Boosah?

HAJI
My goat.

CAPT BEECHER
(beat)
What do you know about the school, the people building it?

HAJI
They leave two or seven days ago because of trouble.

CAPT BEECHER
What kind of trouble?

BUMPKIN
Captain?

Bumpkin points up the valley. A dust plume rises. Beecher pulls out her binoculars.

BINOCULAR POV: racking into focus –- a roughshod overloaded truck kicks up a storm of dust.

INT. ZIL-157 TRUCK

The Soviet-era cargo hauler rattles like rocks in a barrel. A sock monkey dangles from the rearview mirror. A grimy hand uses a dirty *pakol* to wipe the windshield. Up ahead: the stone building, a Humvee. No sign of people.

EXT. SCHOOL

The truck downshifts hard and stops so fast its covered load nearly topples off. The driver door opens and a big man labors to get down. KAKAY, 50s: dark, bearded, wears Pashtun dress and a 1980s Russian tank commander’s cap with one earflap. He eyes the abandoned Humvee. He curses, cocks his antique rifle and limps toward the building --

CAPT BEECHER (O.C.)
Drop your weapon -- now!

Beecher aims from the school window. Behind rocks, newbies chime in.

DOC, SHONDA, BUMPKIN
Hands up! Get down!
Come here! Don’t move!

Confused, the big man gets down, gets up, rifle down, hands up. Finally he goes prone. The newbies charge in.

ROOF OF THE HUMVEE

Red orders from the .50 cal.

RED
Stay back --!

WINDOW OF THE SCHOOL

Beecher shifts aim.

CAPT BEECHER
Tango in the truck!

ROOF OF THE HUMVEE

Red swings her MG.

NEAR THE TRUCK

The newbies sprawl.

OUTSIDE THE TRUCK

The passenger door opens. A BEARDED MAN, hands above his turban, steps out and falls flat on his face. The adrenaline-filled newbies rush up. They whoop and high five like they scored a touchdown.

BUMPKIN
Hey, Captain, got ‘em good, huh?

Beecher marches up and grabs the teen with amazing power.

CAPT BEECHER
What if it had been a trap –- a bomb?
(to the others)
You want to be the last ones here to get butchered?
(to Bumpkin)
Well do you --?

RED (O.C.)
Captain? Let me handle these FNGs.

Beecher’s white hot stare bores into Bumpkin’s doe eyes. She releases her grip and walks away.

SHONDRA
(aside to Doc)
What do you think now --?

RED
Shut your dumpster! Know why you fobbits got picked for this mission? Because you’re what’s left: the bottom of the barrel. The women with field experience and a lick of sense are already home. So listen good: the next moron who so much as bats an eye without orders is gonna get my boot right where it tickles --

KAKAY
Excuse me --?

RED
I said SHUT UP!

Red kicks him hard.

RED
You two: guard them.
(to Bumpkin)
And you –- pull yourself together and check the back –- carefully!

Bumpkin hurries off, wiping tear streaks from her dirty face. Red draws her M9, glances over at Beecher, and cocks it hard.

TRUCK CAB

Red climbs up and checks the cab.

BACK OF THE TRUCK

Bumpkin pulls up the cargo bay tarp --

SPIT FLIES –- BARED TEETH

TRUCK CAB

Red hears her SCREAM.

BACK OF THE TRUCK

Red comes running, aiming. She finds Bumpkin petting a big, young, slobbering Tajik shepherd dog.

BUMPKIN
Think I scared him.
(nose to nose with the dog)
Didn’t I, boy? Huh? Didn’t I --

RED
Next time, shoot it -- or I shoot you.

Red holsters and marches off. Bumpkin gets a big wet lick.

FRONT OF THE TRUCK

Beecher walks up to the prone prisoners, nods. Red gives the big man a hard nudge with her boot. Kakay turns over, dark clothes and beard powdered light gray with stone dust.

CAPT BEECHER
Speak English?

KAKAY
Yes, sir, very much.

CAPT BEECHER
How about your comrade?

Red kicks him, he rolls over. This is TREBOR, 21. The dog comes running and licks his face. He giggles. His Tajik clothes seem off, and his beard -- and he’s Caucasian.

RED
Who the hell…?

HAJI (O.C.)
Trebor!

Haji runs up and yanks off Trebor’s fake beard.

TREBOR
Thanks for the shave, bro.

CAPT BEECHER
Get them up.

They pull the men to their feet. Trebor struggles to pull on his crazy skateboarder’s knit hat.

CAPT BEECHER
Who are you and what are you doing here?

TREBOR
I don’t know: What are you and who are you doing here?

RED
Are you high?

TREBOR
Why yes, Miss Action Figure: long rides go better with hashish.

CAPT BEECHER
What’s in the truck?

KAKAY
The rest of the Mulberry Girls Academy, sir: school books, desks, chairs –-

TREBOR
Winding silver pencil sharpener --

CAPT BEECHER
You’re with the American charity?

TREBOR
Dude: I *am* the American charity.

Trebor opens his robes to reveal a Dream Catchers t-shirt.

TREBOR
Dream Catchers is me -- and Kakay.
(high fives Kakay)
He’s COO and Director of Transportation and I’m pretty much everything else.

RED
What a joke.

TREBOR
Maybe, GI Jane -- but not my mission.

RED
What do you know about missions?

TREBOR
I know guns won’t win this war. You can’t beat terror with more terror. You get that, obviously -- which is why you’re bailing. The real enemy here is ignorance so there’s only one way to win.
(regards the building)
Build schools that will change the world: one little girl at a –- hey!
(spins around)
Where’s my roof?

HAJI
The Mullah took it.

TREBOR
Huh?

HAJI
To give Kahil.

TREBOR
Aw man!

Trebor yanks off his hat and staggers away, muttering curses. Haji and the dog trail after.

SHONDA
Read about him for my story. Father’s some billionaire investment banker.

RED
Spoiled brat; serves him right.
(to Kakay)
Tell me, Jawa: What's it like working with a rich tree hugger?

KAKAY
I fought against the Soviets alongside Americans. Many promised to return to help, but none ever did. Then Allah sent Trebor: a brave and generous soul -- except perhaps when he smokes. But mark me: that boy is a good man. Now you tell me something: your husbands, do they know you are here?

Red bristles.

CAPT BEECHER
Round them up, Red.

RED
(beat)
You are one lucky Sasquatch.
(turns away)
All right, people! Oscar-Mike, let's go! And lose that dirty mutt!

CREST OF THE HILLSIDE

The shrouded figure watches Bumpkin shoo the shepherd dog.

NEAR THE HUMVEE

She catches up with Shonda and Doc.

SHONDA
Knew this story was too good to be true.

BUMPKIN
I think he's cute --

DOC
Shh. Listen.

DISTANT SINGING: The musical trill of children.

BUMPKIN
Sounds like angels.

Rounding the bend are two dozen TAJIK GIRLS in colorful garb. They range from teens to toddlers and sing an OLD ENGLISH CHURCH HYMN.

GIRLS CHOIR
“And did the countenance divine
shine forth upon our clouded hills?”…

VILLAGERS follow. The men look at the Americans and whisper while the women scurry for the truck, uncover its cargo and praise Allah.

DOC
Captain Beecher, since we’re going to be engaging the villagers after all, protocol dictates we should switch to our *hijabs* --

RED
Frig that. We’re American warfighters, not chattel --

DOC
It’s a sign of respect --

RED
The hell it is --

DOC
Captain?

Beecher stares as Trebor and Haji enter the school.

RED
See: Told you.
(aside to no one)
Harry Beecher in a dirty head rag: that’ll be the --

A CRY

Trebor storms out of the school.

TREBOR
Hey! You!

Haji appears in the doorway: tears in his eyes, the dead goat in his arms.

BUMPKIN
Aw I had a pet goat once.

SHONDA
Is that what she “bagged”?
(looks at Doc)

TREBOR (O.C.)
Why you running away? Huh?

Trebor and the dog head straight for Beecher.

TREBOR
There’s still stuff you can kill right here! I mean it’s so much more efficient, right: to just shoot --

Red blocks him with her M-4 across his chest. Bumpkin restrains the dog.

TREBOR
God you people make me so mad! Know what I’d like to do? Huh --?

Red shoves him back onto his butt.

TREBOR
Become a Swiss citizen! Hey…
(realizes)
You pushed me --

DOC
Captain?

Beecher turns. Kakay approaches with the MULLAH: 60s, bearded, time-worn. He leads the men of the village.

KAKAY
The Mullah, he wishes to address loss of the goat.

The Mullah speaks. Kakay translates.

KAKAY
Again you Americans come to our valley… And again you destroy… There must be a reckoning.

Beecher nods and walks away.

TREBOR
In other words: “You kill it, you buy it” --

RED
She knows, idiot.
(aside about his beanie)
So stupid in that hat.

TREBOR
Look who’s talking?

Beecher walks over to Haji and kneels before him.

CAPT BEECHER
(in Dari Persian)
I am sorry.

She bows her head. Haji sniffles and nods back.

RED
How much?

Kakay asks. The Mullah responds.

KAKAY
Because you shoot it inside school, you must pay more.

RED
Here we go…

KAKAY
They want six dollars.

Several of the elders hold up six fingers. Beecher takes out a couple bills, presents them to the boy, bows her head and walks away.

NEAR THE HUMVEE

Trebor lies in the dust with his dog. Beecher walks past.

TREBOR
Must be nice: to buy a clear conscience.

Red passes by.

RED
You ought to know, Bono. Good luck with your “dream”.

Red cackles as she struts away.

TREBOR
It’s not my dream, Jane. It’s theirs.

Beecher listens as she walks.

TREBOR (O.C.)
And they’ve been waiting a hell of a long time -- for something we take for granted. It’s a piddling dream –- pathetic even -- but that doesn’t mean they don’t deserve to have it come true.

Beecher stops as she climbs in the Humvee and looks back. The eyes of every girl, every woman, are on her. Then she notices the Mullah and the elders. They are laughing.

CAPT BEECHER
What are they laughing at?

KAKAY
Trebor.

CAPT BEECHER
Why?

KAKAY
Because he is a man yet he cares about the dreams of girls.

A gust whips their clothes and swirls the dust around them. The eyes of every girl are downcast.

CAPT BEECHER
What time is it, Red?

RED
(checks her watch)
1420, ma'am: but we can still make base by dark, no sweat…

Beecher sets her jaw.

RED
You know my driving: balls to the walls…

Red notices Beecher reach into her jacket.

RED
Seriously, Captain -- it's not too late.

CAPT BEECHER
Hope you're right.

BEECHER TAKES OFF HER HELMET

AND TIES ON THE LOWLY *HIJAB*

CAPT BEECHER
Six days, ladies. Clock's ticking.

She walks away. Red realizes the others are staring at her.

RED
Well? What the hell you waiting for?

Doc, Bumpkin, Shonda all take off their helmets and tie on headscarves. Red throws down her helmet and whips out a camo headscarf to cover her blaze of auburn hair.

NEAR THE TRUCK

LALA, 12, dirty, pretty, inquisitive eyes. She watches Beecher approach and runs away, past Trebor, Kakay and the dog, sitting in the shade of the truck.

KAKAY
Uh-oh: the spooky one.

Beecher walks up. Kakay rises. Trebor does not.

TREBOR
Thought you had some leaving to do?

CAPT BEECHER
Thought you had some helping to do?

GIRLS LAUGH IN THE BACKGROUND. Beecher offers her hand. Trebor appraises it. He jumps up, pulls off his hat, and shakes her hand with vigor.

TREBOR
The girls will be stoked.

KAKAY
But not so much the Mullah.

The Mullah and the smoking men look on with suspicion.

EXT. SCHOOL – LATE AFTERNOON

A conga line of female villagers and materiel stretches from the truck to the school. Bumpkin carries a globe and flags like a majorette. Shonda carts a desk and grumbles.

INT. SCHOOL

Doc organizes supplies in a rustic hutch. Overhead, Red nails down the tarp from the truck as a makeshift roof. She looks down as Trebor confers with her CO.

TREBOR
Thought I'd get a bunch of, what do you call it -- with the ripples --?

CAPT BEECHER
Corrugated metal?

TREBOR
Scads of it at the old Russian depot.

RED
And that's your plan for the roof? First good blizzard and that scrap'll fly off or cave in --

BUMPKIN (O.C)
Excuse me?

Outside, Bumpkin and villagers carry rolls of chain link.

BUMPKIN
Where you want your fence put?

TREBOR
Round back, thanks.

CAPT BEECHER
Chain link: What’s that for?

TREBOR
Can’t play baseball without a backstop.

RED
(aside to no one)
Must’ve been some hash.

CAPT BEECHER
How many schools have you built?

TREBOR
Including this one -- one.

CAPT BEECHER
And how long you been at it?

TREBOR
Four months --

CAPT BEECHER
I mean construction work.

TREBOR
Four months… so I’m all ears.

They both look up at the open sky.

CAPT BEECHER
For starters, you need lumber: heavy duty, top grade -- to build trusses that can take the weight of heavy snow.

Beecher pulls out a pad and pencil and begins sketching.

CAPT BEECHER
Then you've got to factor in the stressors… the wind… calculate the load bearing capacity…

The Army engineer gets lost in her calculations and Trebor slips away. Red looks down and shakes her head.

EXT. SCHOOL – EARLY EVENING

Slanting light paints the iron ore mountains blood red. Gray smoke trails from the cigarettes of watchful village men. Girls run and shriek with laughter playing blind man's bluff with Trebor. Beecher stands outside the school, still sketching.

In the long shadow of the Humvee, Bumpkin sits on the gravel and eats an MRE. Doc reorganizes her packs. Shonda works her Blackberry.

SHONDA
Look at these nails. I'm supposed to be reporting, not constructing. Add to that the irony of being a million miles from home, a thousand degrees in the shade, and I'm shopping for space heaters.

DOC
Better not let Ames catch you.

SHONDA
Not my fault I got a family. One's got a toothache, another's failing algebra --

DOC
Maybe she's right: better not to know.

BUMPKIN
I love knowing: like what Mama's cooking for supper and her knowing about my supper like this yummy pork rib.
(offers to Doc)
Sure you don't want none?

DOC
I told you it's not kosher.

SHONDA
Thought your name’s Hernandez?

DOC
I married a gentile. Who are you: My mother --?

BUMPKIN
(holds up her meal)
Hey Mr. Kakay! Want some pork?

Kakay stares at Bumpkin like she has two heads.

SHONDA
Jesus, girl! He’s a Muslim!

BUMPKIN
Us Christians get it all?
(discovers in the MRE)
Hey look -- jelly beans!

SHONDA
What do you make of her latest move?

They watch Beecher write calculations in her tablet.

DOC
Beecher -- building the school? Could be a task taken on as penitence -- you know, for atonement? Out of guilt, remorse --

BUMPKIN
Or maybe she’s just being nice?

Lala walks up to Beecher and offers a leg of meat. Beecher accepts and the shy girl hurries off.

SHONDA
All I know is: there’s something going on inside that woman.

DOC
Or there will be -- eating that.

BUMPKIN
Now that would be an irony: if that was the little old goat she shot?

Beecher takes a bite. They burst out laughing -- till someone taps Shonda on the shoulder: Red.

RED
Would've seen me coming: if you didn't have your nose in that damn thing.

Red snatches away the phone and removes the battery.

RED
You cherries want to know a secret? When I first got here, I was nearly as dumb as you dumbasses.

Red looks at Doc and Bumpkin. They take out their phones and hand them over. Red removes the batteries.

RED
And my first CO was Captain Beecher: she took the time to turn a snot-nosed nothing into something. And if it weren't for her, me -- and a whole lot of other good soldiers –- would be dead.

Red tosses back their useless phones.

SHONDA
What about the way she's been acting?

RED
What about you, Coastie: A weekend warrior who has the balls to sneak in here at the last minute to do a story so she can get her pretty face on TV?

DOC
You have to admit Beecher's showing signs --

RED
Of what: Miss BS for bullshit? We all know the brass wants a nice going-away story to make the pull-out easier to swallow. Captain steps up and gets it done. That's just the way she is --

BUMPKIN
(pops a jelly bean)
Or was: I mean you ain’t served with her in, what, 2 years? Maybe --

Red gets in Bumpkin’s sweet face.

RED
Maybe you need to shut up and color before I shake the stupid out of you.

Red marches off toward the school.

SHONDA
Then there’s the Sergeant who’s got a thing for her Captain.

DOC
“The greatest pain is to love, but love in vain.”

INT. SCHOOL

Another on a long list of names gets crossed out. Red walks in. Beecher flips to her roof sketches.

RED
HQ says IED stalkers will be here next week to sweep the minefields.

CAPT BEECHER
Good. Don’t need them near the school.

RED
Of course the villagers are used to them; probably been here since the Soviets.

CAPT BEECHER
(shows her sketches)
What do you think: Tri-bearing trusses or a slant roof config?

RED
You’re the engineer, but I can’t see how it’ll make a difference either way –- once the Taliban come back.

Beecher just keeps sketching.

RED
Seriously, Captain, why are we even doing this: we'll be gone soon?

CAPT BEECHER
But we're here now, Red.

RED
Working on a Charlie Foxtrot --

CAPT BEECHER
You have something better to do?

RED
I just thought –- I mean it doesn't…

CAPT BEECHER
Spit it out, Sergeant --

RED
It's you, Captain, OK: First the goat, now this. I just don't understand…

Beat. Beecher resumes sketching.

CAPT BEECHER
People change.

RED
Not you.

CAPT BEECHER
Look, all I want is to get home -- all of us -- in one piece. And if staying here in this quiet backwater will help us do that then why not?

RED
But I, people look up to you --

CAPT BEECHER
(turns on Red)
Get it through your thick skull, Sergeant: I'm no hero.

Their eyes flash.

RED
Heard. Understood. Acknowledged.

Before Beecher can speak Red snaps a salute and walks out.

THE CALL TO PRAYER RESOUNDS

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - LATE EVENING

Headlights flare on. The Humvee drives away from the school silhouetted by dusk.

THE PRAYER CALL CONTINUES

EXT. ROAD TO THE VILLAGE

The armored vehicle lurches around a bend, toward an ancient hamlet: lamp-lit windows in a cluster of rustic structures dwarfed by gray jags turned to gore by the dying sun.

THE PRAYER CALL CONTINUES

EXT. VILLAGE

The Humvee approaches the largest of the village's modest buildings. Its beams fall upon the Mullah and a dozen men. The vehicle stops.

THE PRAYER CALL CLIMAXES

Beecher, Trebor and Kakay dismount and approach the Mullah. She greets him correctly.

BEECHER
Allah-u-Akbar --

The Mullah raises his hand to cut her off. He speaks harsh words that Kakay translates.

KAKAY
He says he knows why men come here… but asks himself… why would they send women?

BEECHER
Tell him we’re here to help.

Kakay does. The Mullah laughs.

KAKAY
That is what the men always say… before they destroy… yet after 30 years of war my people are desperate to still believe… But I do not… I know who and what you are… and soon, so shall they.

INT. MANGER

A match strikes and lights a lamp, illuminating stone walls and dirt floors, worn prayer rugs and embroidered pillows. A dung-fed fire burns in the middle of the room.

INT. BAHARAH’S MANGER - NIGHT

The warfighters stand tired and dirty, gear bags slung, in the converted animal pen.

BUMPKIN
Smells kind of goatish.

BAHARAH, a middle-aged woman by the door, speaks to Trebor and Kakay. He translates.

KAKAY
She and her daughter hope the accommodations are acceptable -- given the circumstances…

CAPT BEECHER
(in Dari Persian)
A thousands thanks.

DORRI, 19, Baharah’s daughter, smiles back. She carries a food platter with tea and wrapped naan. Even in her blousy clothes, it is obvious she is pregnant. Baharah speaks directly to Beecher now.

KAKAY
And Baharah says she is thankful also… to have such brave women… willing to help our women… show the Mullah our girls are worthy too. We must convince him… we do not want our girls to learn to be Americans… we just want them to learn.

The Muslim women smile and leave.

KAKAY
Imagine the will to risk so much.

BUMPKIN
Pretty gutsy lady.

TREBOR
Considering she’s the Mullah’s wife.

SHONDA
Probably can’t read, write, never been 5 miles from home --

DOC
Positively medieval.

TREBOR
But at least *she* knows what she’s fighting for.

Trebor and Kakay leave. The women drop their packs. Bumpkin unties her bun and her dirty blond hair falls. Red chucks her pack.

RED
Awesome: now we’re smack in the middle of a domestic *jihad*.

SHONDA
Beats sleeping in that smelly Hummer.

DOC
Yes but it was our smell…

Doc wrinkles her nose, Shonda, Bumpkin dig into the food.

BUMPKIN
Wait till I tell Mama about this supper. Captain, Sarge, ain’t you eating?

Beecher shakes her head as she stands watch at the window. Doc compulsively picks up crumbs from Shonda and Bumpkin.

DOC
You know this rug is worth a fortune back home, right?

BUMPKIN
This raggedy thing?

Bumpkin looks anew at the black and red rug.

SHONDA
Tell me that is too.

Shonda nods at a rug on the wall.

DOC
Baluchi war rug: it’s a museum piece.

It has a crude design: Afghanistan overlaid with tanks and machineguns, shooting soldiers and fleeing civilians.

SHONDA
Is that supposed to be our soldiers -- terrorizing those people?

RED
Just their way of saying thanks, USA.

BUMPKIN
I like rugs with puppies on them.

SHONDA
What I don’t get is why the Mullah would agree to us staying here?

DOC
A good Muslim has to accept guests -–

RED
Even unclean infidel ones.

Red slings her sleeping bag.

RED
I'll do my rack ops by the vehicle.

DOC
Shouldn't worry too much, Sergeant: these people turned on the insurgents years ago --

RED
Yeah well "people change". Except the ones who'd like to cut our throats.

Red shoulders her weapon and brushes past Beecher.

EXT. HUMVEE – 3AM

Red leans against the vehicle in the moonlight: IMs on her BlackBerry, reads, slams her fist on the armored hull.

INT. MANGER

Lamplight fades, Bumpkin snores, Shonda rolls over, Doc grinds her teeth, and Beecher stares at the tiny flame.

THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE

EXT. PROVINCIAL AFGHAN ROAD – DAY – 2003, FLASHBACK

A Humvee explodes into a surreal gusher of dirt and metal. Another is hit by an SPG and erupts in lurid flames. US soldiers run pell-mell through the impressionistic nightmare. Bullets whiz by some and through others.

COMMAND HUMVEE

SGT LANSKY cranes to assess the situation.

SGT LANSKY
…tangos in front, along the wall, and in those buildings… need to get somebody on that flank -– Captain? What are your orders, sir?

CAPT DANE hunkers down.

CAPT DANE
I need Beecher! Where the hell is she?

Through the dreamlike hell of battle comes young LT Beecher. She carries a Walkie, jumps over soldiers in the dirt, past others taking bullets. Blood and gore spray the rocks and dust. In the midst of the carnage, she meets up with another female soldier: LT KATE ADAMS.

LT BEECHER
Kate.

LT KATE ADAMS
Hey Harry -– good thing we aren’t allowed in combat!

LT BEECHER
Yay, Congress. Where’s Dane?

LT KATE ADAMS
Follow me.

They run together through the surreal killing field, fast then slow, Kate deftly leading the way past every obstacle until she is blown into a thousand surreal bits.

END FLASHBACK

INT. OUTHOUSE

Harsh slats of light reveal Beecher. She spits into a rancid, fly-infested hole. She looks like hell.

A ROOSTER CROWS

The door of the lean-to swings open and Beecher walks out, startled to find The SHROUDED FIGURE (from the ridge).

CAPT BEECHER
Allah-u-Akbar --

SHROUDED FIGURE
Your Persian is appalling. Now listen.

The Shrouded Figure is a woman, educated, English accent.

SHROUDED FIGURE
What you seek to build, he will only destroy. He’s no choice.

CAPT BEECHER
The Mullah --

SHROUDED FIGURE
No, Kahil. Do keep up. It must be razed when he returns otherwise all will be punished when they return.

CAPT BEECHER
The Taliban --

SHROUDED FIGURE
No, the Grenadier Guards. Now leave this wretched valley while you still can.

The door opens. Beecher turns. Bumpkin walks out.

BUMPKIN
Who you talking to, Captain?

Beecher looks back. The Shrouded Figure has disappeared.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAWN

The sun peeks down the yawning valley, burnishes the tops of squat buildings and the .50 cal. Red does her pushups.

EXT. OUTHOUSE

Village men peak over the wall as Shonda and Doc, huddled against the cold, stumble in pants and t-shirts. Beecher appears at the gate in full battle gear.

CAPT BEECHER
Stupid O’clock, ladies! Time to go shopping!

Beecher looks at the men, unlatches her holster, they duck.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Warfighters mount the Humvee. Trebor signals and Kakay shifts into drive. The little convoy pulls out and the shepherd dog chases after. Girls cheer as the convoy drives straight into the newborn sun.

The village disappears in the dust. The vehicles rumble on the rutted road, mountains just visible in the dawn haze. They pass a gap-toothed shepherd and his scrawny flock. Bumpkin baas like a sheep. Beecher smiles but Red just stares straight ahead gripping the steering wheel hard.

They cross a crude bridge over silvered water. Kakay struggles and curses the old gears. In fits and starts, the truck leads the way up the steep mountain road. Higher and higher, the vehicles climb the perilous mountain. They stream past a bullet-pocked sign.

BAZARACK 181KM

They ride through a vast rumpled expanse of gray and green under a painful blue sky: past burned out villages and blackened tank hulks, bleached bones and forgotten cemeteries. A crumbling medieval way station stands like a ghost town. A domed arch rises over desolation.

The ancient landscape gives way to a NATO vehicle, an auto, increasing buildings, power lines; modern trash. Ahead a gleaming white *madrassa* appears in the heat haze.

INT. HUMVEE – NOON

The warfighters crane to see the brand new *madrassa* school calling a long line of boys to learning.

RED
First period: Death to America. Thank you, Uncle Saudi.

SHONDA
Boys always get the best.

BUMPKIN
Don’t seem fair.

DOC
It never does.

INT. BAZARACK – LATE MORNING

The little convoy arrives in town center amid a honking, spewing, churning mass of vehicles of every description. A rusty Citroen idles by dirty teenage donkey handlers in scruffy turbans. Sheep duck under a ‘50s British lorry loaded with pipes and scraps and artificial limbs, followed by a legless boy on a wheeled 55 gallon drum lid.

An old crone dumps her night soil out a second floor window and watches the Soviet truck roll by. Smoking men with white beards stained yellow by nicotine observe the truck grind to a halt next to a cart full of stinking goat hides.

INT. HUMVEE

Red stops the vehicle. Beecher locks eyes with her squad.

CAPT BEECHER
Remember: Stick together. Don’t talk to anybody and don’t listen to anybody. We get the lumber and get out, copy? And if anybody gets handy, you know what to do.

BUMPKIN
Nothing.

RED
Because gals kicking *haji* ass would be “culturally offensive”.

DOC
That’s right. Studies have shown –-

Beecher gets out and so do the others.

DOC
You try and educate people.

EXT. HUMVEE

Beecher calls over to Trebor and Kakay by the truck.

CAPT BEECHER
Where is the lumberyard?

Trebor and Kakay both shrug. Beecher notices a local.

CAPT BEECHER
Doc, ask that man.

She does. He laughs.

CAPT BEECHER
What did he say?

DOC
“How much did your husband pay for you?”

BUMPKIN
Maybe he can show us?

Bumpkin points at a donkey and cart loaded with lumber.

CAPT BEECHER
Worth a try.

Beecher heads for the donkey cart.

RED
(aside to no one)
It’s official: we’re following an ass.
(to Shonda, Bumpkin)
You two, stay with the Hummer.

Shonda and Bumpkin watch the others disappear into the chaos of the market. Then they hear it.

SQUEAKY WHEELS

The legless boy rolls up, turns on pleading eyes. Bumpkin goes for her pocket and gives him coins. Then a Hershey bar. Then she tousles his ink black hair. Lice jump out.

SHONDA
You really are a Bumpkin.

SERIES OF SHOTS: The 3 warfighters and the 2 men work their way through the hectic bazaar past henna bearded hawkers and beggars, cheap clothes and sugar-candy, drugs and spices, DVDs and ragged hides. Doc nearly jumps out of her skin when a vendor offers her dead snake meat.

Red looks into the slat of a window and sees a pair of young green eyes, like hers, looking back above a veil. Finally, Beecher finds the entrance and leads them into a dusty, busy lumberyard.

INT. LUMBERYARD OFFICE

A fat man in a turban, ABDULLO, sucks on a water pipe behind a lacquered desk sweating in a freshly laundered robe. He sports old sunglasses with the worn Foster Grant sticker still on the lens. He speaks.

Across from him, the warfighters sit cross-legged on a dusty rug spread on a hard-packed floor. Trebor sits in front. Kakay translates.

KAKAY
He says what you request is hard to come by and therefore expensive.

CAPT BEECHER
(discreetly to Trebor)
Tell him we know the drill -- just name a price.

TREBOR
(to Kakay)
Tell him that I am saying what she just said to me.

Kakay does. The fat man speaks and pours tea.

KAKAY
He says all in good time. First we must drink.

RED
Again? That makes 6 cups.

DOC
(raises her hand)
Where’s your restroom?

EXT. BAZAAR

In a rush, Doc winds her way through a maze of makeshift stalls and down a narrow passage. A MAN emerges from the far end. Doc stops. She turns. Another MAN appears at the other end of the narrow passage. She begins to sweat.

Both men begin to walk toward her. One speaks. The other laughs. They close in. She mumbles to herself, trying to find the right words in Persian, but they will not come.

DOC
No… God… please…

The first man nears, reaches out an ambiguous hand. Doc sticks her shaking M9 in his face.

DOC
Get on the ground! Now!

He backs away –- hands up. She spins around, the pistol shaking violently now. Something has snapped in her.

DOC
You too! Get down! DO IT!

Both men get on their knees. She grabs one by the head and yanks him down. She aims at the other and he goes flat. She kneels on the spine of the first and talks in his ear.

DOC
How do you like it? Huh?

She puts her weapon to the back of the quaking man’s head.

DOC
Because I must say it’s a whole different experience on this side --

RED (O.C.)
Hernandez!

Red stands at the end of the passage.

RED
I told you to wait for me.

She approaches slowly, warily. Doc is on a hair trigger.

RED
You know the two-gal rule. I mean you, of all people, understand we got to "go" by the book, right? Doc…

The M9 shakes in Doc's hand. The man sobs.

RED
Give me your weapon… Airman?

Doc de-cocks her M-9 and hands it over to Red.

RED
Now tell them it was all a drill…

Doc does.

RED
And they passed with flying colors.

Doc does. Red quickly leads her out of the dark passage.

INT. LUMBERYARD OFFICE

Abdullo writes on a slip of paper and slides it across his desk. Trebor picks it up. Shonda peaks over his shoulder.

SHONDA
I could get it online for half that --

CAPT BEECHER
We've got 5 days left. Tell him it's a deal.

Kakay speaks. The fat man claps and shakes Trebor's hand.

TREBOR
The thing is I'm like a little short.

CAPT BEECHER
How short?

TREBOR
Pretty much all of it.

CAPT BEECHER
I don’t understand… I mean I thought your father…

Trebor stares then stalks out. She looks to Kakay.

KAKAY
It is not what you think. Most of the money for the girls school, yes, it was from his rich father -– to pay for Trebor’s college.

CAPT BEECHER
But he used the tuition money to come here instead.

KAKAY
Yes and now he is disowned.

Beecher pulls out a packet of Army-issue cash and counts. Abdullo takes it with much bowing. Red and Doc enter.

CAPT BEECHER
Problems?

RED
Nah: couple *hajis* got frisky is all.

CAPT BEECHER
Then what?

RED
Nothing: per your orders.

Beecher’s eyes lock on. Doc looks away. Not Red.

CAPT BEECHER
Get the truck loaded.

RED
You’re the Captain.

Red gives a half-assed salute and walks away from Beecher.

EXT. STREET, BY THE HUMVEE

CLOSE ON A SCREEN

VIDEO: the legless boy does a trick off a ramp.

Wide-eyed, the boy watches himself do this on Shonda's camera. She and Bumpkin cheer and tousle his lousy hair. A group of men approaches, led by the two who encountered Doc: shouts, fists wave, insults in Dari.

SHONDA
Who peed in their *qabali*?

ANGRY MAN ONE
Why you still here, huh?

ANGRY MAN TWO
You should go! You are dirty!
Corrupt! You have no God!

BUMPKIN
I do too have God --

A vegetable hits the Humvee. The two level their carbines.

ANGRY MAN TWO
How you like threats, huh? How you like fear?

ANGRY MAN ONE
You stay to die: Or maybe fuck?

A rock just misses Shonda. She takes aim.

TRUCK HORN

The Soviet truck roars up in front of them. An Army smoke grenade explodes. Red jumps down and WHISTLES. Shonda and Bumpkin follow her to the Humvee. The men surge forward.

ON THE TRUCK

Beecher stands up behind the truck cab, carbine on her hip. The men yell and shake their fists at her defiant figure as it disappears in the smoke.

ON THE STREET

The truck and Humvee race away. The angry men scramble and hurl stones at the dust cloud.

ON THE HUMVEE ROOF

Carts and vehicles pull aside as the convoy courses past. Red mans the .50 cal and stares down every man they pass.

BACK OF THE TRUCK

Beecher crouches and covers her face.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - NIGHT

In the middle of nowhere, the vehicles sit by a spark of firelight beneath a razor thin crescent moon.

EXT. DESERT ROAD, BESIDE VEHICLES

Trebor and Kakay sleep, their snores condense on cold air. The rest lie by the fire. They speak quietly as they drift off; sort of a warfighters sleepover.

BUMPKIN
Shonda?

SHONDA
“Bitch”.

BUMPKIN
Doc?

DOC
I don’t accept degrading male labels --

SHONDA
Yeah, yeah: bitch, slut, dyke or --?

DOC
“Married”: OK, divorced, but still.

SHONDA
Bumpkin?

BUMPKIN
“Slut”.

SHONDA
Miss 700 Club? Come on --

BUMPKIN
One time we got hit bad by an IED and I had to do the body clean up and so that night I was crying and this lance corporal, he started talking Bible to me and one thing led to another. Next day he told the whole unit. Now I don’t even believe he was a committed virgin.

SHONDA
Guys are lucky: they only have to fight one war.

DOC
(picks at herself)
Studies show we’re more likely to get raped here than shot: by our own men? And when you report them, they just break you down from officer to Spec III… because “you were asking for it.” That’s what studies show.

RED
Now you know why the correct answer is “Dyke”. Then the rest is all *mox nix* -- unless the boys persist. Then you just introduce them to your girlfriend: Miss Kay Bar.

She pulls out her glinting Ka-Bar knife.

RED
She’s one gal who’ll never let you down.

Red glances up at the Humvee.

INT. HUMVEE

In the front seat, Beecher sleeps fitfully.

EXT. PROVINCIAL AFGHAN ROAD – DAY – 2003, FLASHBACK

Tracers create an abstract weave through which LT Beecher runs. The slow-motion nightmare becomes hyper real as she slides in behind the Humvee with map case and Walkie.

LT BEECHER
Got the Major, sir!

Dane grabs the Walkie and yells into it.

CAPT DANE
It’s a Goddamn ambush! They got our ass in a sling --!

Beecher takes in the carnage around her. The remaining Humvees circle, stop, soldiers deploy, return fire, help the wounded, become the wounded. Beecher closes her eyes.

In her mind, she sees an aerial view of the battle: the string of Humvees nearly encircled by a Kasbah’s old stone walls, manned by 4 dozen well-armed Al Qaeda fighters. MOVE IN on their line, to a wooden wagon that fills a gap in the wall, then ZIP to a spot 100 meters beyond.

EXPLOSION

SERGEANT LANSKY
Sir, what are your orders --?

The maelstrom roars. Dane screams into the Walkie.

CAPT DANE
I need air support now --!

SERGEANT LANSKY
There’s no time --

Dane grabs Beecher.

CAPT DANE
Give me the coordinates --

A CORPORAL screams out.

CORPORAL
They’re killing us --!

His shoulder explodes like a dandelion in a gust.

CAPT DANE
Read the Goddamn coordinates --!

A PFC points up the road.

PFC
Hajis Oscar-Mike!

Al Qaeda fighters sprint across the road. Two are riddled, but the rest reach the wrecked Humvee.

SERGEANT LANSKY
They flank us, sir, we’re dead -–

Dane fixates on Beecher and the map.

CAPT DANE
What are you waiting for, Beecher?

She stares at Dane as the white sun flares behind him.

CAPT DANE
BEECHER!

END FLASHBACK

SERIES OF SHOTS: Beecher stares through the mud-splattered windshield. The truck and the Humvee crawl up the steep winding road that leads back to the mountains. They careen down the straightaway to the high river valley.

The vehicles return through dusty, empty streets, and pass the shrouded figure, whipping her garment. Trebor looks in the rearview. Girls emerge from the orange dust cloud chasing the convoy, laughing, joyous. Beecher smiles.

EXT. SCHOOL – NOON

The dour Mullah and the elders watch and stroke their nicotine-stained beards. FOLLOW a piece of lumber: handed down from the truck and delivered to saw horses by Trebor and Kakay. Bumpkin flexes a saw as Haji measures.

BUMPKIN
Like your hat, Trebor.

TREBOR
Thank you.

BUMPKIN
Mind if I ask you a personal question?

TREBOR
Shoot -– not really though!

BUMPKIN
(teen girl laugh)
Where’d you get that name from?

TREBOR
My parents named me Robert. But I wanted to turn my life around so…

She ponders the meaning.

HAJI
Robert, Trebor? He reverse it --

BUMPKIN
I knew that. You must be a Christian?

TREBOR
I am whatever you wish -– long as you smile that pretty smile…

He makes like he’s praying and walks away.

BUMPKIN
Mr. Kakay, have you heard the good news about Jesus?

Haji almost loses his tape measure.

KAKAY
Yes. I love him. He is a great prophet among many.

BUMPKIN
Which kind of Muslim are you again?

KAKAY
Shia -- though most Afghans are *Sunni*.

BUMPKIN
There a difference?

Haji gapes as Bumpkin saws.

KAKAY
Well, let’s see: you are Catholic?

BUMPKIN
No! Evangelical Baptist.

KAKAY
And is there a difference?

Bumpkin ponders this as she saws off the piece. She picks it up and a VILLAGE MAN is right there. He smiles so she smiles. He speaks.

BUMPKIN
What’s he saying?

KAKAY
Nothing worthy of your ears --

He reaches out, touches her chest. She hesitates. BANG Red slams a sawhorse with her hammer and scares off the Village Man. She snatches the board from Bumpkin.

RED
Less talk, more work –- so we can get the hell out of here.

Red stalks off.

CLOSE ON THE ROOF SKETCH

A pencil shades in the parts of the roof already completed. Beecher flips her tablet closed and walks over to Doc, who compulsively sorts nails.

CAPT BEECHER
Doc, how’s it coming?

DOC
Almost there: Impressive -– how you've marshaled these villagers.

CAPT BEECHER
It won't be enough.

Girls help. Women do their part. But the men just watch.

CAPT BEECHER
Only 4 days left, we'll need the men to finish in time.

DOC
They won't lift a finger: not without the Mullah's blessing.

The Mullah berates his wife and pregnant daughter over their role in the work. Trebor steps in to mediate.

DOC
She's the only reason he's let us get this far: that and the fact that he'll have a nice new goat pen the minute we leave.

The Mullah glares at Beecher. She turns away, catches Lala watching her. The girl starts to run.

CAPT BEECHER
Wait –- please…

Lala hesitates, but will not look up.

CAPT BEECHER
(in Persian;
English subtitles)
Why do you run?

LALA
(in Persian;
English subtitles)
Because you are smart and clean and I…

Ashamed, the dirty girl runs off.

SERIES OF SHOTS: the work progresses. Roof beams rise against an azure sky, lumber is cut and hammered. The roof sketch is 30% shaded in by sunset.

The workers trudge toward the fading village. Bumpkin leads a donkey pulling a cart carrying twin girls. Shonda has a toddler on her shoulders. Doc, wiped out, rides in a wheelbarrow pushed by Haji. Red drives the Humvee. Beecher follows. She stares into space.

EXPLOSIONS

CAPT DANE
BEECHER!

EXT. PROVINCIAL AFGHAN ROAD – DAY – 2003, FLASHBACK

LT Beecher sets her jaw and runs like hell, runs away. She makes her way back through the nightmare of tracers, bodies and shrapnel. Bullets riddle her pack, knock off her helmet but still she runs –-

EXPLOSION

A kaleidoscope of flame and dirt and Beecher goes down. She feels her abdomen: blood. She struggles on, reaches the last Humvee. Its aft is on fire. She climbs in.

DANE’S POSITION

SGT Lansky watches.

SGT LANSKY
God, she’s cracked.

IN THE HUMVEE

LT Beecher jams it into gear, and takes off.

ALONG THE WALL

Enemy fighters pour fire into the burning armored vehicle. One aims an RPG and launches it.

IN THE HUMVEE

She sees it, veers just in time -- the rocket streams wide.

NEAR THE WALL

The vehicle trails black smoke as it rattles toward the wall.

DANE’S POSITION

SGT Lansky stares while Dane hunkers down.

SGT LANSKY
She’ll never make it.

CAPT DANE
Good.

IN THE HUMVEE

Bullets lash the windshield but LT Beecher doesn’t waver.

BUMPKIN (V.O.)
Captain Beecher!

END FLASHBACK

INT. BAHARAH’S HOUSE – LATE NIGHT

Beecher’s eyes spring open: Bumpkin speaks frantically.

BUMPKIN
Ma’am, quick: It’s her daughter!

INT. MAIN BEDROOM, BAHARAH’S HOUSE

The women push past villagers to enter the lamp-lit room. Beecher sees the Mullah. The old man pleads with Allah. An OLD WOMAN holds a bundled bloodied blanket. She pulls back the corner: it’s a beautiful, healthy baby. Then she looks to a forlorn corner where Baharah tends her daughter.

DOC
She said everything was as it should be, but then…

Dorri lies moaning on stained cushions, gray, sweaty, semi-conscious. A wet sheet covers her legs. Much blood has spilled on the cold tile. Beecher stares transfixed.

BUMPKIN
Captain --?

CAPT BEECHER
Get Red.

Bumpkin takes off.

CAPT BEECHER
What do we do, Doc?

DOC
I’m not that kind of doctor.

SHONDA (O.C.)
Damn.

Shonda scans the floor.

SHONDA
I don’t see it --

CAPT BEECHER
What?

SHONDA
The placenta.

The Mullah confronts Beecher, shouting, wet eyes wide, beseeching with clenched fists. He grabs her and breaks down and village men have to pull him from the room.

DOC
He said something about saving his daughter…

CAPT BEECHER
I got the gist.

DOC
You realize what’ll happen if you try and she dies --

Dorri cries out and Baharah weeps as she tends her.

CAPT BEECHER
Calm them and keep me posted.

Doc nods and goes to Baharah. Red and Bumpkin rush in.

RED
What now: They want a new mosque --?

CAPT BEECHER
It’s the Mullah’s daughter: she hasn’t delivered the afterbirth and unless she does, she’s going to die.

RED
Way above my pay grade.
(pulls out her iPhone)
Maybe we could --?

Shonda snatches the phone and works it like lightning.

BUMPKIN
How come you get to have a phone?

RED
Because I’m the sergeant, moron --

DOC
She’s looking really pale here!

CAPT BEECHER
Bryce --

SHONDA
We’re in business.

BUMPKIN
What do we do?

Shonda shows the iPhone. They all flinch.

CAPT BEECHER
OK, smallest hands?

Everybody puts their hands together like on the playground.

CAPT BEECHER
You win, Schulz.

BUMPKIN
Me? No --

DOC
This girl’s dying!

CAPT BEECHER
Sing, Doc.

DOC
What?

CAPT BEECHER
Anything.

Doc begins a quiet song in Hebrew. Beecher looks deep into Bumpkin’s eyes.

CAPT BEECHER
You can do this.

Beat. Bumpkin nods. She approaches Dorri but the girl refuses her touch. Baharah looks at Beecher, speaks to her daughter. She relents.

CAPT BEECHER
Bryce.

Shonda reads from the smartphone.

SHONDA
“A hand is inserted through the vagina into the uterine cavity.”

BUMPKIN
O Lord…

Bumpkin reaches in. Dorri cries out. Baharah quiets her.

BUMPKIN
Please guide me…

SHONDA
You there yet?

BUMPKIN
I think so.

SHONDA
“Feel around for the placenta.”

BUMPKIN
It ain’t a sock drawer -- wait. I… I think I got it.

SHONDA
“Now detach it from the uterine wall”.

BUMPKIN
How?

SHONDA
“Gently.”

BUMPKIN
Oh sweet Jesus…

Slowly she pulls out a bloody mass. She plops it on the floor and Shonda slaps her on the back. Baharah cries for joy in Doc’s arms. Beecher pats Bumpkin on the shoulder.

CAPT BEECHER
Sierra Hotel, Private.

BUMPKIN
Thank you, ma’am -- I mean hooah!

Bumpkin beams and leaves Beecher with Red.

RED
Mind if I go back to real Army work?

Shonda aims Red’s iPhone.

SHONDA
Everybody, smile --

Red snatches back her phone on the way out.

EXT. SCHOOL – MORNING

The sun glints above harsh peaks. Clouds churn. Beecher and the others slog up the dusty, chilly backlit road.

SHONDA
All I’m saying is: I don’t see how we’re going to finish in 3 days --

BUMPKIN
What the…?

DOC
I don’t understand…

The school is a beehive of activity. The women and the girls go about their usual chores, but hard at work carrying, stacking and sawing are the men of the village. The officious Mullah walks up followed by Kakay and Trebor. He speaks, Kakay translates.

KAKAY
The Mullah says when he lost his sons in the wars he became a bitter man of lost faith… but today he gives genuine thanks to Allah.

Baharah walks up holding the newborn babe and hands her to the Mullah and the proud grandfather speaks, eyes welling.

KAKAY
Because He sent someone here…

Kakay chokes up. Trebor finishes for him.

TREBOR
To help save his beloved daughter.

The Mullah puts his hands together in solemn thanks and bows his head to Beecher.

EXT. SCHOOL – AFTERNOON

The Village Man, the one who touched Bumpkin, hammers on the roof alongside Red.

CLOSE ON THE ROOF SKETCH

A pencil shades the completed roof beams: 50% done.

COMMOTION IN THE BACKGROUND

Beecher looks around.

IN THE DISTANCE

Through heat waves, a convoy approaches. Boys run alongside the dust-choked road.

NEAR THE SCHOOL

Half a dozen US Army vehicles pull up in front.

LEAD HUMVEE

A Marine steps out of the lead vehicle. USMC CAPT ZEKE NEWMAN, 30, lean, chiseled, intent to the brink of brash till a little girl salutes him. He salutes back then breaks into a brilliant smile.

AT THE SCHOOL

Red hammers atop the roof beams. CAPT Newman approaches.

CAPT NEWMAN
Soldier –- where’s your CO?

Red sizes him up.

RED
Around.

CAPT NEWMAN
I see. Maybe she’s got your helmet?

He walks on. Red blushes and hammers extra hard.

ARMY HUMVEE TRUCK

It’s loaded with troops: young Afghans, 2nd Kandak, and a squad of Marines including BROWERTON, MUNEZ, and BUCK. Shonda passes by with lumber on her shoulder.

BROWERTON
What you building me, babe?

SHONDA
A dog house. Where you headed?

BROWERTON
Up the valley: gonna turn over an OP to the Afghans.

MUNEZ
Show them the finer points of running a mountaintop Observation Post --

BUCK
Like where to drop a load without getting your ass shot off.

BROWERTON
That and a wake up and we head home.

BUCK
Hey -- Bumpkin? Is that you?

Bumpkin stops as she walks past with the twins.

BUMPKIN
Yeah, hi, do I know you?

BUCK
No, but I know you. Hell, everybody knows you, BAM --

MUNEZ
From the Internet.

BROWERTON
C’mon, man…

BUMPKIN
I don’t understand…

Munez holds up his iPhone.

MUNEZ
You know: the pictures of you with that corporal -- posted online?

BROWERTON
At ease that shit…

She looks in utter disbelief, eyes welling.

MUNEZ
Why, man? She's famous. Got like a million hits --

SHONDA
Bumpkin --

Bumpkin hurries the twin girls away.

SHONDA
Bastards!

BUCK
Hey maybe when we come back, you can give us all a slice of Bumpkin pie?

He laughs till he sees Doc, staring.

BUCK
What are you looking at, granny?

MUNEZ
Maybe she wants to give us some too?

BUCK
That there is way past the Sell By:
But I could use a clearing barrel --

Doc goes for her pistol but Shonda grabs her and pulls her away. The two Marines jeer and laugh.

ON THE ROOF

Red seethes.

RED
Damn jarheads. Where the hell is…?

She looks around, sees Beecher: over by the cliff, talking to that Marine Captain.

RED
What the frig?

He takes her by the arm and points a finger at her. Red slams the claw end of the hammer deep and jumps down.

BEHIND THE SCHOOL

Beecher approaches, wiping her eyes as the wind kicks up. Red stands waiting.

RED
What’s wrong with you?

CAPT BEECHER
Nothing --

RED
(blocks her way)
He’s a Gyrene, for God’s sake: you let him push you around -- like a damn girl –- in front of a truckload of men?

CAPT BEECHER
It’s none of your business --

RED
The hell it ain’t? They’d like nothing better than to have you turn out to be weak, a fraud –-

CAPT BEECHER
I don’t care what they think.

RED
We’ve gone through hell to get this far, done everything we’ve been asked to and then some to prove we’re as good as they are -- and now you don’t care?

Marines on the truck whistle and egg her on.

RED
Shit. All right, Harry, chew me out, kick my ass. Come on --

Red shoves her.

CAPT BEECHER
I can’t, Red --

RED
Show them!

Red swings hard. Beecher blocks it.

CAPT BEECHER
I’m pregnant.

Red shoots a look at Newman watching from the lead Humvee.

RED
And he did it.

CAPT BEECHER
Yes.

Newman gives the signal.

CAPT BEECHER
He’s my husband.

He climbs in and the convoy gets underway. As the convoy disappears in a ginger cloud, Red looks at Beecher and gets the biggest, broadest smile. And they laugh.

EXT. COURTYARD, BAHARAH’S HOUSE - EVENING

Dirty, sweaty, the women, Trebor and Kakay trudge in.

TREBOR
Dude, it teaches all kinds of valuable life lessons. Baseball is like…

SHONDA
What the…?

Center of the courtyard, surrounded by lamps and candles: a large rock basin filled with steamy water.

BUMPKIN
It’s a miracle.

Baharah waits in the doorway. She speaks to Beecher.

KAKAY
She says this is a gift for the mother-to-be and her ladies-in-waiting -- and nobody else.

Stern Baharah leads Trebor and Kakay away.

TREBOR
‘Night, ladies! See, man, we’re striking out, like baseball…

Baharah shoos away curious men lurking in the street as Bumpkin latches the heavy door to the courtyard.

BUMPKIN
Well, you ladies-in-waiting -- I ain’t!

She starts unbuttoning. Beecher walks away.

SHONDA
Where you going, Captain?

CAPT BEECHER
Check on the Hummer --

DOC
But this is all for you --

RED
I got it, Captain. You enjoy your Girls’ Night.

BUMPKIN
What about you, Sarge?

RED
I don’t need a bath half as bad as you turds. Besides, Army Regs state that a tub full of naked babes on Night Ops requires an expert gunner on the .50 cal.
(loudly)
And I’ll vaporize anybody who tries to peek over that wall!

She pulls a flask from a leg pocket.

RED
And here: Something “culturally inappropriate” I’ve been saving for a special occasion.

She tosses it to Doc and heads out.

CAPT BEECHER
Thank you, Sergeant.

Red waves over her shoulder as she exits.

LATER

Bumpkin plops naked in the hot water.

BUMPKIN
Last one in is a rotten egg!

Shonda takes a big swig, passes the flask and slips off the last of her GI underwear. Beecher scans the crest of the surrounding wall.

SHONDA
Shove over, tub hog.

Shonda climbs in and Doc follows in t-shirt and shorts.

BUMPKIN
No clothes!

DOC
Then no touching --

SHONDA
Just get your skinny butt in here.

Doc quickly yanks off her clothes and climbs in.

BUMPKIN
Come on, Captain. Red’s got our backs.

Beecher quickly undresses. Her body is scarred. All is quiet as she climbs in, just the sound of soft, warm water. The women lay back side by side and close their eyes, a heavenly commune, carbines and pistols within easy reach.

LATER

Another lamp flame winks out as they pass the flask. Bumpkin, Shonda and Doc are pretty well buzzed. Beecher still keeps an eye on the wall.

DOC
And I have two wonderful children: Sarah Maria, 9, and Ira Luis, 12. He’s fat.

BUMPKIN
Aw.

DOC
I think it’s to annoy the hell out of me.
(teary)
Because: I’m not there for him.

SHONDA
You’re doing something important: all of you are.

BUMPKIN
You too: Getting on TV…

SHONDA
It’s the money: I got my mom to care for; my Aunt on disability, her daughter who’s still in school and has a baby, and my boy, Calvin. He’s 12 -- and a little angry his own chunky self.

DOC
(jokes)
What were you -- 14 when you had him?

SHONDA
(icily)
As a matter of fact…

DOC
(beat)
Mazel Tov!

Doc swigs, passes to Beecher. Bumpkin snatches it.

BUMPKIN
Harry can’t drink –- can I call you “Harry”?

CAPT BEECHER
We’re naked in a tub, Lauren, be odd if you didn’t.

BUMPKIN
OK -- Harry -- when’s our baby due?

CAPT BEECHER
First day of spring.

BUMPKIN
Aw.

SHONDA
You just found out?

CAPT BEECHER
The day we left.

SHONDA
Morning sickness?

CAPT BEECHER
Yes.

DOC
Hormones?

CAPT BEECHER
Oh yes.

BUMPKIN
Pick names yet? I like Harry for a boy. And Harry for a girl!

They laugh. Beecher checks her watch, climbs out. The others follow, dry and dress.

DOC
Of course you can’t be pregnant in country: it’s against regulations --

SHONDA
Not to mention dangerous.

CAPT BEECHER
That’s what my husband said: but I’m here now, it’s relatively safe, and I’ll be headed home soon as the school’s done. Of course if I ever dreamed I could get pregnant, I never… I mean they said it was impossible.

She covers the scars on her abdomen.

BUMPKIN
Just as I suspected, Harry…

Bumpkin smiles, the cross on her chain glistens.

BUMPKIN
It’s a miracle.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL

Red stands guard, smiling.

EXT. SCHOOL – NOON

The last of the roofing goes up and Red nails it in place. She gives thumbs up. Beecher shades in the roof: 98%.

BUMPKIN (O.S.)
Ma’am!

Bumpkin stands by the Humvee holding the radio handset.

INT. BAGRAM AFB, MAJOR WILKINS’S OFFICE

MAJ Wilkins paces as he packs trophies and plaques and yells at his speakerphone.

MAJ WILKINS
Bravo Five, mind telling me where the hell you are, over.

EXT. HUMVEE

Beecher admires the bustling school.

CAPT BEECHER
Right where you suggested Alpha One: at the school --

MAJ WILKINS (V.O.)
For a couple days -- not 5 --

CAPT BEECHER
Can’t build a good roof in 2 days, sir –-

MAJ WILKINS (V.O.)
Good enough for pictures!

INT. MAJOR WILKINS’S OFFICE

Wilkins packs and paces.

MAJ WILKINS
In case you’ve forgotten, Captain, you’re going home tomorrow so I want you back here -- today.

CAPT BEECHER (V.O.)
Yes, sir -- except we’re almost done and tomorrow will be a public relations coup. Pictures, video, the whole 9 –-

MAJ WILKINS
I got a much bigger news story, Harry –- you. There’s brass, suits, bigwigs, the networks all here to see off one of the war’s biggest heroes –- and I do not intend to disappoint them.

EXT. HUMVEE

Beecher grits her teeth.

CAPT BEECHER
Sir, I need to be here for this.

MAJ WILKINS (V.O.)
Why?

CAPT BEECHER
I just do.

MAJ WILKINS (V.O.)
Captain, you will return to base…
(beat)
Tomorrow: 1700 hours and not a second --

CAPT BEECHER
Thank you, Major.

She hands over the radio and Bumpkin beams.

LATER

Splotched and beaming, Lala paints a sign:

MULBERRY GIR

Villagers go about cleaning and prepping the classroom. Doc helps girls wash the blackboard. Bumpkin decorates. Shonda fixes the teacher’s old chair. She sees Trebor. He sneaks off with Lala. Shonda follows.

BACK OF THE SCHOOL

Shonda peaks around the corner: Trebor pulls out -- a book. Thrilled, Lala takes it.

CORNER OF THE SCHOOL

The girl comes running and bumps straight into Shonda.

LALA
(in Persian;
English subtitles)
I never have a book of my own. It is beautiful!

She hugs it close as more girls rush past.

BACK OF THE SCHOOL

Trebor hands out the books. Beecher walks up.

TREBOR
Who needs hash when you can have those smiles? Tell me -- at this precise moment –- how do you feel?

CAPT BEECHER
Like… I’ve done some good -- that might actually last.

TREBOR
I know, right? WOOHOO! And think: for the price of one cruise missile, we could build a hundred schools like this -- if the damn Army could just…
(beat)
Sorry. I was wrong -- about you.

He offers his hand this time.

CAPT BEECHER
Guess you never really know a person -- till you build a slant roof config together.

She shakes his hand.

CAPT BEECHER
So who’s the lucky teacher?

Trebor’s hand goes slack. He looks over at the old woman who helped with the birth. Slumped in a chair, sound asleep, as girls run around screaming.

CAPT BEECHER
Dude.

LATER

Beecher and Trebor march by the front of the school.

CAPT BEECHER
Doc: on me!

Bumpkin and Shonda braid village girls’ hair.

CAPT BEECHER
Bumpkin, Bryce: happy pictures -– now!
Sergeant Ames --

Red looks down from the roof.

CAPT BEECHER
Roof’s up? Afternoon off: That’s an order!

Red gives a grudging salute.

EXT. HERMIT’S HILL – MID-AFTERNOON

Trebor leads Beecher and Doc up a steep forbidding path.

TREBOR
Her name’s Farzaneh. The way the villagers tell it, she grew up here, learned to read and write from British soldiers, and somehow wound up at Oxford.

The trail gives way to a barren plateau. At the center sits a stone hut. Smoke curls from a crude chimney.

TREBOR
She had it made in London but came back.

CAPT BEECHER
Why?

TREBOR
To start a girls’ school.

DOC
Sounds perfect!

TREBOR
Yeah, except for one thing --

CLICK -- a shotgun cocks. On a boulder behind them: the Shrouded Figure -- armed with a sawed-off double-barrel.

TREBOR
Yo, Farzaneh.

A WHISTLE BLOWS

INT. FARZANEH'S HUT – LATE AFTERNOON

CLOSE on a whistling Chinese tea pot. A hand burned long ago pours steaming water into earthenware cups. FARZANEH, 49, tall, thin, veiled, moves her shotgun off a hide-covered rock and sits to serve "high tea". Doc takes a brown wafer shaped biscuit.

DOC
Everything looks delicious --

She takes a bite and nearly loses a tooth.

DOC
Given your background, I'm surprised you wear the veil and *burqa*.

FARZANEH
They suit me. Rather like you and obsequiousness

Doc nearly drops her biscuit.

FARZANEH
And you, Captain, are quite stubborn.

CAPT BEECHER
You know why we're here?

FARZANEH
Of course --

CAPT BEECHER
And?

FARZANEH
Never.

TREBOR
These girls need a teacher --

FARZANEH
What they need is to face the truth. This is Panjshir, the Valley of Lions: where every mote of dust is a girl's dream trampled by marauding men --

CAPT BEECHER
They’ve heard that their whole lives. But you were a girl here once. You know the importance of hope. That’s why you came back --

FARZANEH
I came back because I was a fool.

She pushes up her sleeves in succession. Both arms were badly burned once.

FARZANEH
The Russians taught me that -- then the Taliban.

CAPT BEECHER
You want to hurt the people who hurt you? Then help these girls.

FARZANEH
Look at me. What can I teach them: except that in a blink of God’s uncaring eye, their deepest wishes, their precious hope, will burn -- along with your absurd school.

EXT. HUT

Beecher, Doc and Trebor retreat across the rocky terrain.

CAPT BEECHER
What’s your assessment now, Doc?

DOC
Complete bitch.

INT. HUT

Farzaneh watches through the chinks in her rock wall.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET, NEAR BAHARAH’S COURTYARD

CLOSE ON A CAMERA VIEWFINDER

FAST MONTAGE: amusing and touching stills of villagers young and old with Shonda and Bumpkin.

BUMPKIN (O.S.)
Aw wait till the Sarge sees --

SHONDA (O.S.)
Look at this one!

Bumpkin and Shonda compare shots as they walk.

BUMPKIN
Cute!

SHONDA
You got an eye, girlfriend.

BUMPKIN
No way.

SHONDA
Yeah and when I meet Ted Turner, I’m going to tell him.

BUMPKIN
Thanks!

They reach the heavy courtyard door. It’s locked.

SHONDA
Hm. Boost me.

Bumpkin does. Shonda looks over the wall.

SHONDA
Oh my God --

BUMPKIN
What?

SHONDA
It’s Red. Push me up!

Bumpkin does.

EXT. COURTYARD, BAHARAH’S HOUSE

Shonda opens the heavy door. Bumpkin walks into the secluded courtyard and stops dead.

BUMPKIN
It can’t be.

Red lies prone on her back, naked -– except for a bright string bikini, eye cups and ear buds.

BUMPKIN
She’s a girl!

SHONDA
No…

As Red sleeps, Shonda picks up her bridal magazine.

SHONDA
She’s a girly girl!

BUMPKIN
This isn’t happening…

Shonda reads messages on Red’s phone.

SHONDA
And get this: she’s involved with somebody -- named Bill!

BUMPKIN
A boy?
(covers her mouth)
No way!

SHONDA
And they’re engaged!

BUMPKIN
You mean --?

SHONDA
(whispers)
She’s not gay!

BUMPKIN
I could shoot the phony!

They raise their cameras and start shooting.

CAMERA VIDEO

Red lifts an eye cup.

RED
You turds!

SERIES OF SHOTS: Bumpkin and Shonda run down the street laughing. Barefoot and covered by a blanket, Red yelps and hops in hot pursuit. Women stare out windows. Boys laugh. Village men at prayer bow toward Mecca. Bumpkin and Shonda run past. The men rise and bow again. Red runs past.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET

Kakay and Trebor watch from the shade with the shepherd dog.

TREBOR
Dude, see? Action figure!

EXT. VILLAGE CENTER

Bumpkin and Shonda round a corner, Red right behind -– they screech on the brakes. Beecher stands, arms crossed.

BUMPKIN
Oh hey, Harry –-

CAPT BEECHER
AttenSHUN!

They snap to. Red barely holds on to her blanket.

CAPT BEECHER
Coast Guardsman, your insignia -- dull.

SHONDA
Yes, Captain!

CAPT BEECHER
Dust on your boots, Marine.

BUMPKIN
Yes, ma'am!

On to Red: an ear buds dangles. MUSIC LEAKS

CAPT BEECHER
Is that Bieber I hear, Master Sergeant?

RED
No, ma'am. ABBA…

Beecher wipes a white splotch from Red's nose.

CAPT BEECHER
Fifteen?

RED
Thirty, Captain –- "tan don't burn", just like you taught me.

CAPT BEECHER
Look at your sergeant! This is how you win hearts and minds, people: this is shock and awe. Dismissed!

VILLAGE STREET

Beecher rounds a corner, laughing to herself –- BAM -- a man drops an old trunk from a cart. Beecher goes flat against a mud wall, suddenly sweating, breathing hard.

SURREAL EXPLOSIONS churn the earth. Villagers and buildings explode into abstract colors and shapes.

MOVE IN on Beecher's face --

EXT. PROVINCIAL AFGHAN ROAD – DAY – 2003, FLASHBACK

IN THE HUMVEE

LT Beecher drives.

THE ROAD

The burning Humvee careens at the stone wall. Enemy fighters pour lead into the vehicle but on it comes.

IN THE HUMVEE

BULLETS SLAM into the windshield. LT Beecher never blinks. The wall is 50 meters off, 35, 20, 10 –-

She slams the vehicle hard right. It balances on its left wheels for an instant -- then barrels alongside the wall.

DANE’S POSITION

SGT Lansky and CAPT Dane can watch.

LANSKY
What the hell’s she doing?

IN THE HUMVEE

LT Beecher cranes to see then slams down the gas.

ALONG THE WALL

The burning vehicle accelerates. The flames grow. Beecher somehow holds her on course and SMASHES through the wooden wagon –- the one filling the gap in the stone wall.

DANE’S POSITION

Dane and Lansky watch.

CAPT DANE
Turning tail, that’s what.

BEYOND THE WALL

The burning Humvee speeds toward safety.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BAHARAH’S OUTHOUSE – MORNING

Beecher lifts her head up from the rancid hole and stares.

EXT. NEAR THE SCHOOL

Shonda does her eyes, her lips glisten. Village women watch in wonder and mimic her making up. She unhooks her pack and pulls out a long luscious wig.

THROUGH THE CAMERA VIEWFINDER

The school stands framed against the mountains. Shonda steps into the shot -- a glitzy TV news diva in camo.

SHONDA
(news voice)
In a remote village of the rugged Panjshir, today is a joyous –-

A RAM BLEATS

INT. SCHOOL – MORNING

The ram is held by the scruff, its head gently pointed toward Mecca. The Mullah prays then cuts the animal’s throat. Villagers cheer. Red offers Beecher $6.

EXT. SCHOOL

A new sign unveiled:

MULBERRY GIRLS ACADEMY

CHEERS! Celebration! Boys run wild with homemade streamers. Doc blows up condoms and hands them out as balloons. Bumpkin and Trebor bob up and down hard as they ride little donkeys. They race for the finish and the children cheer. Shonda films villagers as they barbecue the ram. Kakay steps in front of the camera, arm around Trebor, tears in his eyes.

KAKAY
Our Muslim children will know the light of education –- and their elders the meaning of hope –- because of this young Christian man, and his angels!

Baharah steps up with a rug and unrolls it. It's her *Baluchi* war rug -- only now it features 5 American warfighters added: icons of our women side-by-side with village girls. Baharah hugs Beecher. Then the Mullah does too.

Doc points at her watch. Beecher waves goodbye and turns. There stands Trebor with a bat. Red stands beside him. She tosses Harry a baseball.

BEHIND THE SCHOOL

The village baseball game: grownups in flowing clothes play the infield, Red pitches. Beecher offers Lala the bat.

LALA
(in Persian;
English subtitles)
I am still dirty.
(looks up, takes the bat)
But at least now I am a student.

Lala swings and hits: robed fielders fumble and the crowd cheers her round the bases. She crosses the plate and the Mullah declares her safe! The crowd goes wild and hoists her up on their shoulders. They march her around to the front of the school where the celebration abruptly ends.

KAHIL has arrived.

Flanked by a half dozen heavily armed fighters, the warlord sits astride an Arabian charger. Tall, lean, 50, in an outfit of silks and cross belts and rakish headgear, his fierce blue eyes rimmed in black *surma* pigment, Kahil is a Tajik emulating Peter O'Toole's Lawrence of Arabia. It's charming, menacing, mesmerizing.

The Mullah steps forward, right hand on his chest.

THE MULLAH
Allah-u-Akbar! Salaam aleikum --

The warlord waves him off and the Mullah bows his head.

KAHIL
It's a fine roof: far better than the first. It shall make a good bridge.

He signals. His fighters move forward. Beecher steps up.

CAPT BEECHER
That roof is ours: bought and paid for by the United States Army.

KAHIL
It’s in my valley.

CAPT BEECHER
I have the receipt.

KAHIL
I can just take it.

CAPT BEECHER
You could try.

KAHIL
We have a name here for people who act as you do:
(leans forward in his saddle)
“Men”.

Kahil laughs. Thus the fighters and the villagers laugh.

CAPT BEECHER
Still, no Taliban touches this school.

Kahil’s face turns fierce.

KAHIL
Look at me, *kafir*: do you see a barbarian? Do you hear foolishness from my lips? Do you think I am just anybody? Habib!

HABIB
He is Kahil, protector of this valley, river to his people -- and bane of the Taliban!

The fighters and the villagers CHEER.

CAPT BEECHER
You tell him I am Harriet Beecher, Captain, 36th Engineer Brigade --

KAHIL
I know who you are. You are the enemy.

RED (O.C.)
If you say so…

On the roof of the school Red aims her M-4 at Kahil. Seemingly out of nowhere, another hundred fighters encircle the school and the villagers. Kahil laughs.

KAHIL
I carry 23 great wounds, all got in battle. Seventy-five men have I killed with my own hands –- do you think I fear a woman?

FARZANEH (O.S.)
You should…

A veiled woman walks boldly through the fighters: Farzaneh.

FARZANEH
Since I know you nick all your best lines from LAWRENCE OF ARABIA.

KAHIL
You took me to see the bloody movie.

ON THE ROOF

Red cranes to see. A fighter puts a knife to her neck, another snatches away her carbine.

IN FRONT OF THE SCHOOL

Farzaneh walks up to Kahil.

FARZANEH
Still a warlord?

KAHIL
Still a maiden?

FARZANEH
No. A teacher and this is my school, where girls will learn about the world.
(looks at Beecher)
And they will teach me about hope.

KAHIL
I had heard American women had come to poison Muslim children with their teachings --

FARZANEH
Nonsense, these people are here to help our people, our daughters --

KAHIL
The Koran forbids it, I should forbid it.

FARZANEH
The Koran forbids no such thing and you know it, Kahil.

KAHIL
(laughs)
It still stands, Farzaneh: my proposal.

FARZANEH
Much has changed in 25 years.

KAHIL
Yet you've never married. Why?

She lowers her veil and reveals the burns on her face.

KAHIL
I see: you still love me.

FARZANEH
And you still love beauty.

KAHIL
Yes. But alas it fades: even my own. But a mind such as yours, that is eternally tempting.

His gaze shifts from Farzaneh to the anxious school girls.

KAHIL
Habib! What is the going tax rate for a new school?

HABIB
Three chickens and a goat, my Lord.

KAHIL
So it shall be.
(to Farzaneh)
Teach them to be like you. Then when I return you can teach me a few things?
(to Beecher)
By that time, enemy, you will be gone.

Kahil snaps his reins, gallops through the crowd. His fighters melt into the landscape. The Mullah thanks Allah.

SHONDA
Captain!

A dust plume rises in the distance.

NEAR THE SCHOOL

Boys stand and stare alongside the dust-choked road. Three US Army vehicles approach the school –- the shot-up remains of the convoy seen earlier: Two race on through raising a dun colored cloud while the third pulls to a sliding stop.

ARMY HUMVEE TRUCK

It's loaded with wounded troops: bloodied young men from the 2nd Kandak along with Browerton, a blood-soaked rag around his head, Munez blackened by smoke, and Buck, the cleanest of the lot. Beecher and Red run up.

BUCK
We need gas. Now --!

CAPT BEECHER
What happened?

BROWERTON
They hit us first light --

CAPT BEECHER
Who?

BROWERTON
Taliban, Al Qaeda: had to be five, six hundred of them.

BUMPKIN
Sweet Jesus.

RED
Haji's coming out of the woodwork for one last hurrah.

CAPT BEECHER
Where's Zeke -– Captain Newman?

BROWERTON
They hit the OP hard. Fierce bastards: We held them off for more than an hour. Then the Captain, he and the others, they covered our retreat.

RED
You left him there?

BUCK
He ordered the wounded out.

RED
Funny -- you don't look hit?

CAPT BEECHER
We've got to raise Bagram --

MUNEZ
Forget it. We lost communication with HQ last night -- nothing since.

SHONDA
Maybe a lucky rocket took out their Comm tower --

DOC
Or maybe they already wiped out the base, killed them all --

BUCK
And they could get here any minute so give us some Goddamn gas!

TREBOR
Got a can in the truck they can have. I'm not going anywhere.

He leaves. Beecher walks away, and studies the school and the valley. Shonda, Red, Doc and Bumpkin follow closely.

SHONDA
What do you say, Captain?

DOC
We should leave now, right?

BUMPKIN
What about them?

Villagers scurry about with anxious children.

BUMPKIN
American soldiers just helped them build a school -- for girls.

SHONDA
Al Qaeda won’t like that one bit --

DOC
Then the villagers can leave, too --

SHONDA
And go where?

BUMPKIN
What about the old, the sick -–

SHONDA
The Mullah’s daughter can’t be moved --

DOC
You want to die? Or be captured -– by them? You know what they do to prisoners, to Jews? God knows what they do to women?

Beecher just stares at the school and sets her jaw.

RED
Captain, you know me. I ain’t afraid of a fight. But outnumbered a hundred to one?

CAPT BEECHER
That’s why you should go.

RED
Harry -–

CAPT BEECHER
I can’t leave, Red. He’s still up there.

RED
What about your baby?

CAPT BEECHER
What about theirs?

Beecher looks out over the villagers.

CAPT BEECHER
These people are in danger because of a decision I made.

BUMPKIN
What can you do?

CAPT BEECHER
I don’t know.

SHE PULLS OFF HER DIRTY *HIJAB*…

AND SHE PUTS ON HER HELMET.

CAPT BEECHER
But I’m going to find out.

Beecher walks away, toward the school.

SHONDA
I was right: she is crazy.

Doc breaks for the truck. Shonda and Bumpkin look at one another and follow. Finally even Red turns away.

ARMY HUMVEE TRUCK

Trebor fuels the truck from an old jerry can. Doc walks past and climbs on the crowded vehicle and squeezes in between a pair of Afghan soldiers and stares at the floor.

Bumpkin climbs on and grabs the M-16 in Buck’s hands.

BUCK
Hey --

BUMPKIN
What? You ain’t using it.

Bumpkin yanks it away from him.

SHONDA
Ammo too, boys: grenades, claymores, any TA-50 you got, hand it over.

The tired men toss clips, packs and grenades overboard. Bumpkin’s arms brim with weapons. She kneels before Doc and touches her knee with her fingers. Doc can’t look up. Bumpkin leans in close, whispers, and jumps down. Shonda calls up to Browerton.

SHONDA
Hey dog: Do me a favor?

She pulls something from her jacket and tosses it up.

SHONDA
Give that to Ted Turner.

He examines it. It’s a miniDV videotape.

BROWERTON
Hey, what unit he in?

But she’s gone.

NEAR THE SCHOOL

Laden with weapons and ordinance, Shonda and Bumpkin pass by Red, who waits with arms crossed.

BUMPKIN
Thought she’d change her mind.

RED
Just as well. Get them out of here!

Trebor finishes fueling and bangs the side of the vehicle. The engine roars and the truck speeds away.

ON THE TRUCK

Doc looks up: at the bloodied faces, the ghastly wounds, at Buck crying.

NEAR THE SCHOOL

Red, Shonda and Bumpkin walk up with the weapons cache. Kakay points, the women turn: Doc comes limping up the road. Shonda and Bumpkin drop their loads and rush to her. Red watches the three with their arms around one another, like school girls, then looks for Beecher. She stands in the road, staring up the forbidding valley.

EXPLOSIONS

EXT. PROVINCIAL AFGHAN ROAD – DAY – 2003, FLASHBACK

SERIES OF SHOTS: LT Beecher drives the Humvee like mad. The flaming vehicle races away from the ambush toward safety. CLOSE on her face. The Army engineer sees in her mind’s eye FROM HIGH ABOVE the Humvee approaching an X.

LT BEECHER
This is it.

She slams on the brakes. The Humvee grinds to a halt. Enemy fighters watch as Beecher seems to rise out of the flames. She takes hold of the red-hot .50 cal, cocks it, and lets loose.

She methodically hammers the back of the stone wall and every enemy fighter trapped against it. A tear streaks her face but she is relentless. And one by one to the very last, they fall.

The firing ceases. Dane, Lansky, all the American soldiers see what she has done. And they cheer. Until her burning Humvee explodes, a hellish fireball.

But Beecher’s already far from the inferno, pistol drawn: ready for come what may.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. NEAR THE SCHOOL

SERIES OF SHOTS: The baseball backstop comes down. Beecher supervises chain link and rocks carted in by long lines of villagers and hoisted up to Red waiting on the school's roof.

A DIAGRAM in Beecher's tablet shows the chain link and rocks situated on the roof.

Kakay oversees villagers building walls that run from the front and backdoors of the school. Men set up cans and drums of gasoline. Girls paint the white-flashed rocks blood red. Shonda sets out a claymore mine.

Haji leads a line of boys carting ammo and materiel from the Humvee toward the school. Doc parses out ammo and weapons from her highly organized mini-arsenal of mines, grenades, M-4s, M-16s, and an M203 grenade launcher.

A dozen villagers, men and women, learn to shoot M-16s. Bumpkin instructs Trebor. She has to reach around him to demonstrate. He smiles and winks at Haji.

EXT. NEAR THE SCHOOL

Bumpkin takes a water break. That's when she sees him.

BUMPKIN
Oh my God!

THE MINEFIELD

Bumpkin comes running to the edge of the red painted rocks.

BUMPKIN
Little one…

Beyond a TODDLER pursues one of the condom balloons.

BUMPKIN
Sit down, honey, like this. And I'll go find your mommy, OK? No, NO!

The Toddler walks toward her.

ON THE SCHOOL

Red fastens two sections of chain link and looks up to see Bumpkin run into the minefield.

RED
Jesus!

MINEFIELD

The Toddler waits. Bumpkin makes her way gingerly.

BUMPKIN
That’s a good boy, yeah, good boy!

IN THE SHADE OF THE SCHOOL

The Tajik shepherd dog pricks up his ears.

MINEFIELD

Bumpkin reaches out, fingers stretching, she’s got him. She hugs the Toddler close and squeezes her eyes shut.

DOG BARK

Bumpkin opens her eyes -- turns. The playful shepherd dog runs straight for them.

NEAR THE MINEFIELD

Red sees the dog scamper toward the minefield.

RED
God, he’ll kill them both.

She goes for her pistol -– but she’s not wearing it.

MINEFIELD

The dog runs up to Bumpkin and the Toddler and the frisky pup jumps and gambols and --

BAM the dog lands dead. Bumpkin holds the Toddler close with one hand, her M-9 in the other. Her lip trembles -- but she does not cry. Her eyes are different somehow.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Shonda reels rope back to the school. Doc hands out the last weapon. Kakay hoists the capstone of a small rock hut. Trebor hands Red a last piece of chain link. She and the Village Man (who touched Bumpkin) hammer together, silhouetted against a rising crescent moon. In the headlights of the Humvee: Beecher pages through her sketches and checks off each defensive work.

EXT. NEAR THE SCHOOL – 3 AM

Down the road and up the craggy hill, men stand guard: a picket of orange dots and gray smoke in the moonlight.

INT. SCHOOL

The class, decorated for the first day of school, is full: Shonda, Bumpkin and Doc; Trebor, Kakay and Farzaneh; the Mullah and his wife and a dozen village men and women sit in the candlelight.

CAPT BEECHER (O.C.)
Remember: To win, we don’t have to beat the enemy. We just have to hold them off till help arrives.

Beecher refers to a careful diagram of the school and its defensive works drawn on the blackboard.

CAPT BEECHER
And the key is the school.

FOCUS on the minefields and the positions behind.

CAPT BEECHER
It’s defended by minefields on either side of the road; stone walls in back connect it to a pair of strong points: the Love Shack, equipped with the M-240 --

SHONDA
Roger that.

CAPT BEECHER
And the Pie Hole complete with a 40 mike-mike --

BUMPKIN
My new BFF.

FOCUS on the ridge to the left of the minefields.

CAPT BEECHER
Our left is anchored on Dead Man’s ridge -- each pass here is mined with a claymore.

RED
They try to sneak up -- boom.

Kakay holds an Army flare gun.

CAPT BEECHER
Here Kakay’s men fight a holding action -– if flanked, they shoot the flare.

KAKAY
It will be the last thing I do.

FOCUS on the cliffs and river right of the minefields.

CAPT BEECHER
Our right ends at Roadrunner gorge. Long way down to flank us but if they try, the Mullah’s fighters will be waiting.

The Mullah strokes his beard with an antique knife. His wife clutches his arm tightly. Beecher draws a small Hummer far behind the school.

CAPT BEECHER
This is the “fire brigade”. If there’s a breakthrough anywhere --

DOC
I drive the Humvee up --

RED
And I use the MG to hose them down.

FOCUS on the thin line at the edge of the village.

CAPT BEECHER
And if somehow they get by all that --

TREBOR
My team defends the goal line.

CAPT BEECHER
But first they have to get past the school.

FOCUS on cut-away views of the walls and modified roof.

CAPT BEECHER
With walls two feet thick and a roof reinforced with stone and chain link, it'll stand up to RPGs, mortar fire --

RED
It better -– since you're funneling their attack right at it.

CAPT BEECHER
That's the idea. We want them to break their assault on this little rock. And they will. These men will hit this place with everything they've got -- because it stands for everything they hate.
(chalk down)
Questions?

TREBOR
How many forts have you built?

CAPT BEECHER
Including this one –- one. OK? You know what to do.

They disperse. The Mullah and his wife bow to Beecher as they leave. Bumpkin, Shonda and Doc meet in the middle of the class. Red walks up.

RED
Remember: Keep it short and upbeat.

She hands over their phone batteries.

BUMPKIN
Did that work –- with Bill?

RED
Like a charm. It’s sweet, the way they worry about us.

She smiles and walks away. Farzaneh rips cloth into bandages. Villagers open viewing slats in the narrowed-windows. Beecher stands at the teacher’s desk and studies a map of Panjshir. Red rejoins her. They speak softly.

RED
I raised my buddy in Central Command: they still don’t know what’s going on but it appears *haji* bloodied our nose at Bagram then high-tailed it to the valley.

CAPT BEECHER
Where they lost valuable time taking the Observation Post –-

RED
Or bypassing it --

CAPT BEECHER
And now they’re behind schedule and desperate to get past the village, disperse down these mountain passes and slip over the border.

RED
Except we’re blocking the exit --

CAPT BEECHER
Making them easy prey for eagle flights and fast movers --

RED
That’s just it: CentCom also said there are other attacks, bigger. The cavalry may not be coming any time soon, Harry. And we can’t hold out forever. But there is another option:
(whispers)
Let them pass.

FARZANEH (O.C.)
No.

They look over at Farzaneh. She rolls bandages and shrugs.

FARZANEH
I'm a teacher. I hear everything. Al Qaeda, Taliban: You don't know them like I do. This school –- what you have accomplished together –- they would sooner die than let it go unpunished. In God's name, they must murder us all.

CAPT BEECHER
Even the girls?

FARZANEH
Especially the girls.

She carries off a stack of bandages, Red helps. Beecher rolls the map. Beneath is the *Baluchi* rug featuring the 5 women warfighters. She touches the woven figures. She looks around. Villagers pray, Trebor and Kakay check ammo.

TREBOR
It's just I put you through so much -- and now this?

KAKAY
I have no regrets but one: that Allah never gave me a son -- like you.

The men hug. Beecher turns to her women on their cells.

DOC
No, everything's fine. A mother can't tell her son she loves him…?

SHONDA
Al Qaeda is doing no such thing, Mama, you can't believe those TV reporters…

BUMPKIN
Promise, I'll bring you the recipe when I come home. Huh? They got naan at Piggly Wiggly? No way!

Beecher smiles, pulls out her own cell.

CLOSE ON HER PHONE

Indicates many failed calls to Zeke. Her thumb hovers over the Call button.

EXPLOSION

RED
Mortars!

More rumbling impacts, dust falls from the ceiling.

A ROLLING BARRAGE

Everyone crouches lower as it comes closer and closer.

IMPACT

A 60mm shell hits the roof –- stone dust streams down but it holds. Red gives Beecher thumbs up.

THE BARRAGE RECEDES

SHONDA
It’s headed for the village.

METALLIC EXPLOSION

RED
Shit -- the Hummer.

Red goes for the heavy door.

CAPT BEECHER
Red --!

RED
We need Ma Deuce!

Red runs out into the night.

ANOTHER ROLLING BARRAGE BEGINS

Shonda has the door.

SHONDA
Captain?

CAPT BEECHER
Shut it!

They close the heavy door as shells hit the minefield, around the school, beyond the school, toward the village. They open the door: the burning Humvee lights the night. SILHOUETTES approach. Trebor enters with Red: chest burned, hands black, but she has the .50 cal.

RED
Got burned, Harry, sorry.

CAPT BEECHER
Don’t let it happen again.

Farzaneh throws the *Baluchi* war rug near the wall and Beecher helps Red sit on it. Bumpkin mans a window slot.

BUMPKIN
Look –- fireflies!

KALASHNIKOVS STUTTER

The “fireflies” become tracer bullets filling the night. Beecher flips down her night vision goggles.

POV NIGHT VISION GOGGLES: a green wall of heavily armed fighters comes right at them.

CAPT BEECHER
Here they come.
(flips up her goggles)
Let’s stop them.

Shonda, Bumpkin and Trebor run for the door.

CAPT BEECHER
Doc –-

DOC
Already on it.

The skinny woman hoists the heavy machine gun to a window.

ALONG THE SOUTH WALL

Bullets ping and chip the stones as Shonda runs crouched.

ALONG THE NORTH WALL

Bumpkin runs. She’s hit in the head. The bullet takes off her helmet but she gets back up and runs.

ON THE WAY TO THE VILLAGE

Tracers zing past Trebor until he hears MACHINE GUN FIRE.

IN THE SCHOOL

Doc blazes away with the .50 cal.

IN FRONT OF THE SCHOOL

Gas-soaked ropes catch fire. Gasoline ignites in the fire pots illuminating lurid figures rushing toward the school.

IN THE PIE HOLE

Bumpkin lets loose with the Mark-19 grenade launcher.

IN THE LOVE SHACK

Shonda fires a stream from her 7.62 MG.

IN FRONT OF THE SCHOOL

The dashed lines of red tracers sweep and converge, grenades explode, mines erupt, and the first wave of attackers is gone.

IN THE SCHOOL

CAPT BEECHER
Reload!

FARZANEH
That was just a quiz.

Doc looks sick to her stomach.

RED (O.C.)
Hey, Doc.

Red sits in the corner, hands bandaged, shivering, smiling.

RED
“They asked for it.”

Doc sits up, snaps the bolt back, ready for action.

IN THE PIE HOLE

Bumpkin reloads, blood dripping down her cheek.

IN THE LOVE SHACK

Shonda smoothes the bullet belt running into her weapon.

ABOVE THE BATTLEGROUND

The sun rises behind the little school.

IN THE SCHOOL

Beecher looks through her binoculars.

POV THROUGH THE BINOCULARS: sunlight descends across the field revealing bodies. Suddenly BULLETS fill the air.

A shot smashes Beecher’s lens, she’s hit. Bullets riddle the blackboard. Villagers fall, others fire back. Doc replies with the .50 cal as bullets tear her jacket. Farzaneh tends Beecher. She’s dazed, her face bloody from the shattered lens, but that’s all.

EXPLOSIONS

ON THE RIDGE

Claymores explode as the second attack wave moves up the hill against sporadic gunfire.

IN THE LOVE SHACK

Shonda turns her M-240 on the ridge and pins them down.

ON THE PRECIPICE

Enemy fighters wind their way down the escarpment toward the river below.

IN THE PIE HOLE

Bumpkin is on to them. She fires a grenade up and over and misses. But the second shot -- dead on target. She whoops!

IN THE LOVE SHACK

Shonda keeps a heavy fire on the ridge till her MG runs out of ammo. She flips open the next box. It’s full of artillery shells. She curses then pulls out her smartphone.

IN THE PIE HOLE

Bumpkin gets the text -- and lays a grenade right into the hillside, blasting the enemy. She laughs till --

EXPLOSIONS

FRONT OF THE SCHOOL

RPGs hit the school dead on. No effect. More fighters take aim and fire. The missiles stream leaving twisted trails of exhaust and explode into the ancient stones.

INSIDE THE SCHOOL

Defenders litter the floor. Farzaneh tends wounded. Doc tries to take out the RPGs. Beecher looks up. With each impact dust pours from the ceiling onto Doc. She spits.

DOC
Damn it -– they pop up too quick!

RED
Whack a mole, Doc.

Doc changes strategy. She anticipates, sends a stream of bullets, and clips an enemy fighter as he pops up. She looks at Red and laughs as another fighter looses an RPG which explodes on the chain link outside the window. Doc flies across the room. The .50 cal smashed.

IN THE FRONT OF THE SCHOOL

The enemy creeps up into position for an all-out charge.

IN THE PIE HOLE

Bumpkin sees and splits her attention between the ridge and this new threat.

ON THE RIDGE

Heavy firing builds, sounds of hand-to-hand fighting, a murderous barrage of mortar shells rains down on the hill.

SILENCE

The emergency flare shoots up overhead.

IN THE LOVE SHACK

Shonda sees.

SHONDA
Poor Kakay…

She takes off running along the wall. Bullets ping here and there then heavy fire rains down.

OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

She makes the back door, bangs on it, waits an eternity as bullets gouge, zip by, finally it opens and she ducks in.

INSIDE THE SCHOOL

She stops cold: The classroom is shattered, wounded and dead amidst papers and books. Doc sits dazed next to Red who shivers uncontrollably.

RED
The ridge?

Shonda nods. Red slips deeper into shock. Shonda snaps up a carbine and hurries to Beecher watching from the window.

CAPT BEECHER
Some plan, huh?

SHONDA
Planning’s what you do to keep busy before all hell breaks loose.

DOC
Coast Guard teach you that?

SHONDA
No: Being a mom.

WAR CRY SOUNDS

They look out.

IN FRONT OF THE SCHOOL

A broad picket line of fighters streams across the field.

INSIDE THE SCHOOL

FARZANEH
Here comes the real test.

Beecher opens up with an M-16, Shonda her carbine. A third rifle joins in: Farzaneh. They cut down the fighters in the road. Others enter the minefields and explode -- but some get through. One makes the far side of the wall and crawls toward the school while the rest are shot down.

SHONDA
Not so many tangos now.

CAPT BEECHER
Not so many mines either -–

The back door kicks open.

RED
Harry!

Beecher spins and laces the Al Qaeda fighter with bullets. But something lands in the middle of the class: A grenade.

Before Beecher can react, Shonda has it, sprints to the door -- flings it outside --

IT EXPLODES

Shonda’s hit, Beecher catches her as she collapses. Farzaneh helps Beecher and Doc sit her down next to Red. Parts of Shonda’s face are raw meat. Her eye is swollen. A sliver of jawbone glistens. Her lower lip dangles.

DOC
How do you feel?

SHONDA
Just had my wip wipped off, Doc, how you fink I feel?
(anxious, to Red)
How do I wook?

RED
Like a damn hero.

DOC
Where’s Bumpkin?

IN THE PIE HOLE

Bumpkin feels for more grenades. One left. Enemy fighters approach through cleared lanes in the minefield. One nears her trench and Bumpkin pops up and fires point blank in his chest. Blood sprays everywhere. She draws her pistol, kills the next one, pins the others down -- changes clips.

Fighters dodge and scamper. Bumpkin shoots down another tango, another but one comes on. Her weapon jams. She tries to clear it. He leaps in the hole. She fixes it, aims -- he knocks it away and draws his curved blade.

Bumpkin, on all fours, tries to crawl away, loses her helmet. He grabs her blond hair pulls her head up and raises the blade and his grinning face explodes.

Doc shoots him down like a dog. Bullets fly, she’s hit in the leg, her arm, shattered -- Bumpkin pulls her into the trench. More fighters rise up and charge across the field. But they’re cut down by explosions: grenades.

BEHIND THE PIE HOLE

Fifty meters back, behind cover: Trebor lobs in more grenades with an M-16 203 -- loving every second of it.

IN THE PIE HOLE

Bumpkin sees her chance. She grabs Doc.

NEAR THE SCHOOL

Bumpkin drags Doc behind the stone wall toward the school as a wide line of enemies charge. They get closer and closer but a steady stream of Trebor’s grenades cuts them down one by one till only a single fighter remains.

He jumps over the wall and straight into Bumpkin’s Ka-Bar. He drops his AK-47 and moans and she looks so sorry. Then he grabs her by the throat and she knees him in the groin. He goes for his knife and she twists hers hard and shoves him down dead.

BEHIND THE PIE HOLE

Trebor pushes back his knit hat and smiles.

TREBOR
Dude --

A bullet cuts him down.

POV SNIPER RIFLE: Trebor lies dead.

ON THE RIDGE

A sniper looks for a new target.

POV SNIPER RIFLE: his crosshair finds Bumpkin.

The sniper starts to squeeze the trigger. His fingers convulse. His fawn collar goes dark with blood.

INSIDE THE SCHOOL

Bumpkin helps set Doc down next to Red and Shonda. Farzaneh gets to work. Beecher notices Bumpkin’s head.

CAPT BEECHER
You OK?

BUMPKIN
Sure. Why?

A fist-sized piece of scalp is missing from her head.

CAPT BEECHER
Come here.

Beecher leads Bumpkin to the window. The room is littered with the dead and the dying. Farzaneh applies a tourniquet to Doc’s shredded arm, Shonda helps Red. Beecher tends to Bumpkin, one eye on her scalp, the other out the window.

IN A SWALE FAR IN FRONT OF THE SCHOOL

Fighters jostle for position, reload their AK-47s and RPGs and assemble a new weapon: stinger missiles.

INSIDE THE SCHOOL

Beecher sees what’s coming.

CAPT BEECHER
So… what are you going to do –- when you get home?

BUMPKIN
Think I’m gonna buy my mama a new used pick-up with one of Doc’s rugs. How about you, Doc?

DOC
Take a bath -- with my children this time. I liked that. Shonda?

SHONDA
Enter a beauty contest. What do you fink? Going to get this wip sewn back on and get back to it. How about you, Sarge?

Red stares straight ahead.

SHONDA
Sarge --!

RED
Pick out a wedding dress, with lace.
(smiles, looks up)
‘Bout you, Harry?

Beecher watches as the gun barrels of countless fighters bob above the swale.

CAPT BEECHER
Plant a garden with Zeke, with sweet flowers right outside my baby’s window.

BUMPKIN
(tears well)
What was the point, Captain, of all of it? Why are we here? Why did we even try? Nothing lasts --

FARZANEH (O.C.)
That is not true.

Farzaneh takes off her veil and uses it to tie a gauze pad over Shonda’s eye.

FARZANEH
Long ago, someone tried. For the first time, someone cared more about a child than themselves, more about the future than the present. They discovered hope. And in all the time since, mountains and deserts have come and gone, but hope… that has lasted, that they cannot destroy -–

EXPLOSIONS

The full fury of enemy mortars and RPGs hits the school. Rockets trail from the ridge and the valley, mortars drop in deadly waves, pummeling the schoolhouse mercilessly.

DEAFENING EXPLOSIONS

Rock the building and all inside until dust and smoke and ash consume it. The firing ceases. The wind kicks up. The smoke clears. The school still stands. But the roof is ablaze. The enemy fighters scream their war cry and launch themselves across the valley floor.

Amidst the acrid smoke and debris, Beecher pulls herself up to the window, draws her M-9 and awaits the inevitable.

But the charging mass stops as one -- as an Apache roars right over the school. Its chain guns ablaze, the attack helicopter strafes a row right through the mass of enemy fighters. Bumpkin, Farzaneh, Shonda cheer!

The Apache banks for another run and is blasted right out of the sky by a stinger missile. Its flailing hulk tumbles down, down into the gorge. And the enemy surges forward once more. The defenders fire their last rounds but it’s hopeless.

FROM ABOVE

The enemy swarms around both sides of the school. Half press on toward the village, the rest close in on the school.

IN THE SCHOOL

Beecher draws her last clip. Red cries out.

RED
Harry? Harry!

Beecher goes to her. In shock, Red reaches out her bandaged hands, like a child.

RED
Please -- don’t let them take me.

Beecher hugs her close. The door explodes. Debris fills the room. Still clutching Red, Beecher aims at the smoking doorway. Silhouetted Al Qaeda fighters rush for the opening -– too many of them.

Beecher lowers the pistol -– to her sergeant’s head.

But the fighters are cut down.

OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

Fighters are slaughtered left and right by heavy fire from the ridge.

OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE

The charging fighters headed for the village don’t find women and children defending the barricades –- but two hundred heavily armed men. And they are cut to pieces.

OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

Fighters flee for their lives back down the valley, every step under fire from the ridge. But another fighter, an Al Qaeda leader, fiercer than the rest, takes cover by the smoking school.

INSIDE THE SCHOOL

Bumpkin watches from the window.

BUMPKIN
I don’t know why they’re running. But I know it’s a miracle!

Beecher drops her M-9, closes her eyes and cradles Red. Shonda and Bumpkin reach out and cry together. Doc buries her face in Farzaneh’s robes. Beecher opens her eyes.

The brutal Al Qaeda leader stands in the hazy doorway.

Beecher still holds Red, she looks at her pistol, so does he. He grins –- a flash –-

Bullets rake the wall by her face.

The Al Qaeda leader’s turbaned head falls, then his body.

Out of the smoke and haze steps a tall figure with a great curved sword: Kahil.

The warlord crosses the shattered classroom to Beecher. He raises his bloody *pulwar* and sheathes it. Farzaneh stands -– and throws herself into his waiting arms. He holds her close as he looks down on Beecher with his cool blue eyes.

KAHIL
Seems I misjudged you, enemy… of my enemy.

OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

A flight of MI-35 attack helicopters roars right over the school. Amidst blue signal smoke, Beecher watches them fly

up the valley, MGs blazing. She pulls out her phone. She calls. The valley lights up with missiles unleashed by the MI-35s. What remains of the enemy force must be destroyed by this hellish onslaught. Beecher puts away her phone and turns away. Then she realizes it’s chiming.

CLOSE ON THE PHONE SCREEN

A long list of texts, all from Zeke, ending with:

ON MY WAY

She pulls out her binoculars, looks up the valley.

POV BINOCULARS: far off, in the growing heat waves a battered Humvee heads her way.

LATER

Beecher embraces her husband, with all the strength in her soul. Tears flow freely down his face. Hers is bliss.

They walk hand-in-hand in the swirling dust. But they must separate. They kiss as only two lovers on the brink of existence can.

Zeke runs to his men in a waiting Black Hawk. Harry runs to hers on the MEDEVAC helicopter.

FORLORN CHILDREN SING

Prop wash churns the ancient powder.

POV: FROM INSIDE THE SCHOOL

The charred doorway frames the MEDEVAC as it lifts off.

OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

Haji runs up and waves goodbye. Lala and Farzaneh, the Mullah and his wife, all of the villagers watch as the wind whips their clothes. Some already carry saws and hammers.

INSIDE THE MEDEVAC HELICOPTER

Beecher looks back at her squad. Shonda checks her face in a pocket mirror and tosses it out the door. Doc laughs, a

full, easy, relaxed laugh. Bumpkin rests her hand on a body bag on top of which rests Trebor’s knit beanie. And Red, she sits transfixed on some distant place –- till she scrunches up her face to make Harry laugh. And she does.

Her face breaks into a beaming smile in the splendid sunlight. And she touches her abdomen. Then her smile fades as she looks back down:

At the wreckage and the bodies and the blasted stones scattered around the ruins of the ageless building by the bone dry road in the ancient mountain landscape.

FADE OUT.