**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 (circa 1979) 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.S.)

 (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

“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.S.)

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. OK, people: Listen up!

Red flicks off the music. Beecher’s gaze remains outside.

 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 stares into the distance. The others trade looks.

 DOC

But Captain, what about the women?

 BUMPKIN

We’re gonna chat and such, right?

 DOC

I mean 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

The 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?

 CAPT BEECHER

Man the Ma Deuce.

 RED

Yes, ma’am!

Red climbs up into the MG mount. Beecher pulls out binoculars. She studies the unfinished building amidst the roiling dust. Sweat beads on her upper lip

THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE BUILD

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.

Stoic SGT LANSKY (30s) 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?

CAPT DANE hunkers down behind the Command Humvee.

 CAPT DANE

I need Beecher! Where the hell is she?

Through the dreamlike battle comes young LT Beecher. She carries a Walkie, jumps over prone soldiers, past others taking bullets. Blood and gore spray the rocks and dust. In the carnage, she meets up with LT KATE ADAMS (20s).

 LT BEECHER

Kate.

 LT KATE ADAMS

Hi, 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 motion, Kate deftly leading the way past every obstacle. She makes it to cover and smiles until she is blown into a thousand surreal bits of dust.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HUMVEE TROOP CARRIER

Beecher’s hands shake, holding the binoculars.

EXT. KALDAR VALLEY

Wind gusts. 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?

 DOC

Intel says it’s safe in this valley. Last incident here was back in ’03.

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 climbs out.

 RED

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

 CAPT BEECHER

And tell the Major what exactly?

Beecher slams the door behind her.

 RED

What the…

Red realizes the others are staring 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 shouts from 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 MG.

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.S.)

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 –- sweat beading on her lip.

 CAPT DANE (VO)

Beecher? BEECHER!

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?

Dane SCREAMS as the white sun flares behind him.

 CAPT DANE

BEECHER!

END FLASHBACK

EXT. NEAR SCHOOL

Beecher takes off 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, fidgety, bladder pressing.

 BUMPKIN

Y’all? What’s going on up there?

OUTSIDE THE BUILDING

Beecher slams flat against the building, sweaty, winded. 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 gore and bleats. Beecher goes to the back door and throws up.

EXT. CREST OF THE HILLSIDE

Wind whips a lone SHROUDED FIGURE watching from the ridge.

EXT. 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)

Wait, 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 washer for Halloween in sixth grade and now she’s my CO!

 RED

What is your problem, Jackness?

 BUMPKIN

My bladder, Sarge: it feels like a IED and there ain’t no bushes ‘round --

 RED

Jesus. Lend bashful your FUD.

Doc hands Bumpkin a Female Urinary Device.

 DOC

Wash 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. They don’t give that one to us.

 (spits)

Even though that woman 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.