

The Princess of Kandahar

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"They made me invisible, shrouded
and non-being. A shadow, no
existence, made me silent and
unseeing. Denied of freedom,
confined to my cage.
Tell me how to handle my anger and
my rage?"

-- Zieba Shorish-Shamley

DARKNESS

A tangle of voices mixed with bursts of gun shots.

FADE IN

A murky haze -- Lines of brown and blue moving constantly.

A sea of people. Turbanned men and young boys in brown and
gray coats. Women in blue burkas -- beneath a patch of blue
sky fringed with pink.

SUPER: AFGHANISTAN - 1995

Arriving at a SOCCER FIELD, their destination. They form a
half circle as they throw their arms up in the air.

A woman, completely covered in burka is pushed toward the
middle of the field by a turbanned, bearded man, clutching an
AK47.

The shouting grows louder as the woman is forced down to her
knees by the man, who then looks back at the crowd and raises
his weapon up in the air, and the crowd goes wild.

He then points the gun at the woman's head...and pulls the
trigger.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DAY - PRESENT TIME

A lone palm tree rises up into a blue afternoon sky. Behind
it, the sparkling blue of the Pacific Ocean and the city of
Los Angeles.

EXT. VENICE BEACH BOARDWALK - DAY

Two girls in bikinis rollerblade into view.

This is the VENICE BEACH BOARDWALK with its long palm trees and endless golden sun. A young, hip crowd of surfers and musicians, mixed with an endless stream of newly tanned tourists in cheap sunshades and flashing cameras.

The two girls come to a stop at a park bench directly facing the beach sand. One of them wipes the sweat off her forehead.

SAMIRA, an attractive twenty-two year old, olive skin and long dark hair. She takes off her sunshades to reveal a pair of bright deep blue eyes.

Her less attractive, but still cute friend, KATE, is of the same age but with very white skin, chopped hair and tiny nose ring.

Kate looks at her arm with surprise.

KATE

Dude, I told you we should go to the tanning salon, look at me, I'm whiter than a snow flake!

Samira proudly regards her own tanned skin, then shakes her head.

SAMIRA

Kate, you're a white girl, sweetheart. White girls don't tan, they burn.

KATE

That's so cliché!

SAMIRA

It's a fact!

KATE

I don't...

She stops. Something got her attention.

Into frame, enters a large tanned body-builder with oily, shiny skin. He walks into a crowded OUTDOOR GYM and quickly gets busy lifting weights.

Kate is eating him away with her eyes. Samira notices and gives her a "control yourself" nudge.

KATE

It's that same guy.

Samira looks at him, then carelessly looks away.

SAMIRA
I don't get it. What do you see in
this guy? Bet you he's all muscles
but no brain. Forget about him...
I'm sure you can do better.

Kate glances at her with a somewhat furious eye.

KATE
You said the same about Mike, the
teacher... Oh, and Jim!

SAMIRA
Who's Jim?

KATE
The surfer.

SAMIRA
(rolling her eyes)
Him! He was a loser to begin with!

KATE
(irritated)
Yeah, but you say the same thing
about every guy I like!

SAMIRA
Because you always pick the wrong
guy... That's not my problem!

Kate grins and rolls her eyes.

SAMIRA
Seriously, Kate. You have a thing
for weirdos. I don't get it.

KATE
A thing??

SAMIRA
Oh, forget it!
(getting up)
Come on lets get out of here, I'm
starving.

Samira starts to walk away. Kate shakes her head.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON

A late model BMW speeds down this scenic, two-lane highway.

INT. THE BMW

Samira is driving. Kate lights a cigarette and hands it to Samira, then lights one for herself. Both girls are now in jeans and T-shirts.

KATE

Does your mom know you smoke?

SAMIRA

No. She'd kill me. You know how controlling she is.

KATE

She's not that bad... At least she gives you money and shit to spend.

SAMIRA

My mom gives me money?! Are you kidding? If not for my dad I'd starve to death... He saw me smoking by the way.

KATE

Noway! What did he say??

SAMIRA

(laughs)

Nothing. He just looked surprised. I told him I'm under alot of stress because I can't find a job.

KATE

And he bought it?

SAMIRA

Hell yeah! My daddy's cool!

KATE

Dude, you're so lucky!

SAMIRA

I know I am!

She rolls down the window and flicks the cigarette out, then repeatedly honks at an old woman crossing the road.

SAMIRA

Hey, what time is Amy's party?

KATE

Around eight. Why?

SAMIRA
I'm going with you.

Kate glances at her. Her face betraying some concern.

KATE
Are you sure? I thought you guys
had an argument the other day.

SAMIRA
(smiles)
Yeah. When she said I was trying to
steal hey boyfriend. What an idiot.

KATE
Well? Maybe then it's not a good
idea to go to her house, Samira.
Seriously.

SAMIRA
Are you kidding? She should be
HONORED to have me there!

Kate regards her for a moment, then takes a deep breath.

INT. TONY'S CAFE - AFTERNOON

Crowded outdoor cafe. Samira checks and bites her nails, Kate
dips celery in a sauce then bites on it.

KATE
... And then what happened?

Samira looks up from her nail.

SAMIRA
Oh, then he walks over and says...
" excuse me, I just wanted to tell
you, you have the most beautiful
eyes "...
(she laughs hard)
I said yeah... I know that.

KATE
... And?

SAMIRA
That was it. I just kept walking.
The guy was ugly! You know what I
mean... UGLY!

KATE

Dude!

A cute waitress brings their food. Samira's plate has toasted bread and salad. Kate gets a burger with fries.

WAITRESS

Here you go ladies. A tuna sandwich
on whole wheat and Tony's burger.
Enjoy.

She then leaves.

KATE

... So, I was saying, even if the
guy isn't a Mel Gibson, I still
give him some kind of a chance...

Samira takes a bite from her sandwich.

SAMIRA

(chewing, laughing)
Some kind of a chance?? No wonder
you always end up with losers
and...

She stops chewing and puts down the sandwich, then flips the
piece of toast upside down.

KATE

What?

SAMIRA

(fuming)
Wait!

She finds the waitress at the next table.

SAMIRA

EXCUSE ME!!

The waitress motions for her to "wait"

SAMIRA

NO! GET OVER HERE NOW!

The waitress grins as she excuses herself and walks over to
Samira.

WAITRESS

Is there a problem?

Samira shoots her with a glare as she flashes that same piece of toast.

SAMIRA
Yes there IS a damn problem! What
is this?

WAITRESS
(grinning)
Mayonnaise?

SAMIRA
That's right! See? You're not that
DUMB after all!

KATE
(embarrassed)
Samira stop!

WAITRESS
Ma'am, There's no need for this
kind of language, please.

SAMIRA
(loud)
If you don't like to be called DUMB
then be careful when you take an
order. I told you I don't want Mayo
on my sandwich, didn't I?

WAITRESS
(nearly in tears)
I don't remember.

SAMIRA
Well I did!!

A man in suit shows up at the table.

MAN
I'm the manager. Is there a
problem?

SAMIRA
(getting up)
Yes there is! Everytime I come here
you guys screw up my order! And I'm
sick and tired of it!

MANAGER
I'm very sorry to hear that, ma'am.
I'll make sure...

SAMIRA
(interrupting)
Forget it. Lets go Kate!

She quickly walks out.

EXT. MELROSE AVENUE - LATER

Expensive shops and restaurants line up both sides of this trendy and "cool" street in Los Angeles.

Two Girls in designer jeans walk past Samira and Kate. Samira stares at them then rolls her eyes. Kate is quiet.

SAMIRA
What?

Kate stares at her for a long moment.

KATE
Why are you like this?

SAMIRA
Like what?

KATE
You know what I'm talking about,
Samira. And I don't mean what you
just did in the restaurant. It's
alot of other stuff...

SAMIRA
What stuff? So now its my fault
they slapped my bread with a ton of
mayonnaise??

KATE
I told you I'm not just talking
about today. It's EVERYDAY! And
we've had this same exact
conversation a hundred times
before... But you keep doing it
over and over again!

Samira thinks for a moment, then paints a big fake smile over her lips.

SAMIRA
Kate, you're my best friend, my
only friend actually, and you know
I have a bad temper but...

KATE

(interrupting)

But you always say that! You always talk about your temper and you say you're working on it, dude! But it's getting worse and worse everyday! I've known you since high school and you had a bad temper then, and its even worse now. Samira, you really need to lighten up a little, this world does NOT revolve around you... People are NOT out to get you, so stop being so defensive all the time.

SAMIRA

I, think people are out to get me??

KATE

You know what I mean! It's like you have a personal vendetta against half the people in LA!

SAMIRA

Well then, if you really think I'm THAT weird and crazy, why do you hang out with me then?

Kate rolls her eyes and smiles.

KATE

I don't think you're THAT weird and crazy, dude. I don't know. Let's just forget it!

SAMIRA

GOOD IDEA! Now, lets go get ready for that party of yours and kick some ass!

EXT. A HOUSE IN THE HOLLYWOOD HILLS - NIGHT

The view of downtown Los Angeles from this enormous, ornate house is extraordinary.

An outdoor cocktail party in progress. Samira and Kate stand in a corner drinking beer. Samira wears a tight black dress. Kate is in jeans and simple shirt.

SAMIRA

(a little buzzed)

They all look stupid.

KATE
Let's just have a good time.

Samira takes a long sip of beer.

SAMIRA
You call this a party?

KATE
Samira. Please...

SAMIRA
Whatever! They all looks so stupid.

KATE
You already said that.

SAMIRA
I did?

KATE
Here comes Amy.

Five girls in their twenties walk over to them. Kate now looks tense.

Amy, a cute blond in short black dress. She smiles as she gives Kate a short hug.

KATE
Hey, Amy. Nice party.

Amy smiles, then regards Samira up and down, and her fake smile quickly fades.

AMY
(still looking at Samira)
I thought you're coming alone,
Kate.

Kate looks uncomfortable. Samira stares at Amy.

KATE
I thought you said bring anyone...

SAMIRA
What! What's your problem!

AMY
(shrugs)
Nothing. I just don't remember
inviting you... That's all.

SAMIRA
(sarcastic)
Really! So I'm not welcome here...
Wow! You really broke my heart!

She slaps her beer bottle onto Amy's hand and turns to leave.

SAMIRA
Bunch of idiots! Lets go Kate!

Kate looks very uncomfortable now. But she doesn't move.

AMY
Kate's not going with you, you know
why? Because she thinks of you like
we all do... A STUCK UP BITCH!

Samira tries very hard to keep her calm.

SAMIRA
Yeah, whatever! KATE LETS GO!

KATE
... I'm staying.

Samira looks at her for a long moment, taking it in.

SAMIRA
You are??

KATE
Samira, I'm sorry. I can't do this
anymore... I need friends... Real
friends.

Samira looks shocked as she stares at Kate. She then slowly
turns and starts to walk out.

EXT. AMY'S HOUSE

Samira looks for her car and finds it, then manages another
look over her shoulder back at the house before she gets in.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

SARA, a beautiful woman in her late forties, quietly pushes
open the door and walks in. She makes her way to a window,
then pulls the curtains open.

The sunlight motivates an unconscious groan from A FIGURE
still shrouded by covers.

Sara pulls back the covers and peers down at her daughter's face, Samira, who whimpers as she rolls onto her belly.

SARA
(heavy English accent)
Are you planning to get up this
morning or what?

Samira looks horrible. Her eyes are very red. Traces of last night's make-up still visible all over her cheeks. Sara notices.

SARA
What is wrong? You were crying?

Samira quickly wipes her face and turns to the other side.

SAMIRA
No.

Sara rolls her eyes. She is moving constantly, collecting pieces of clothing into a small laundry basket.

SARA
Look at you! Look how much mess you
make. You need two servants in this
house just to clean after you.

Samira slaps her forehead and pulls a pillow over her head.

SARA
How you do when you marry, ha? Your
husband clean for you?

SAMIRA
Mom! Please it's too early in the
morning for this!

SARA
Early?? It's eight... In the
morning!! When I was your age I
wake at FIVE! In the morning!

Samira is ad lipping her mom silently.

SARA
... I milk the goat and bake the
bread...

SAMIRA
And wash the dishes...

MAN (O.S.)
And water the plants and plow the
field...

KARIM is Samira's father, a kind looking man in his mid fifties. Olive skin and wavy dark hair. He's in an expensive suit and tie.

He walks through the bedroom door and encircles him arms around Sara's waist.

KARIM
So what did I miss?

His English is nearly perfect.

SAMIRA
Milking the goat!

KARIM
No, we already said that one.

SARA
See? Karim, all you do is spoil
this girl! Look at her, look at her
room.

He notices Samira's red eyes.

KARIM
What happened to your eyes?

SAMIRA
Nothing! Why do you guys keep
asking me that?

INT. SAMIRA'S HOUSE - MORNING

A bronze staircase leads down to an elegant living room with large plasma TV, next to a marble fireplace with framed family pictures on the mantel.

Samira lazily walks down the stairway and gets an evil stare from her mother as she joins her at the breakfast table. Karim is on the phone.

KARIM
I can't do it this week, Ali. Noway
brother... I have a couple of big
loans I need to close... I know,
but I'm sorry...

SAMIRA
Who's dad talking to?

SARA
Ali. The Iranian guy who wants to
buy the piece of land we have in
Kandahar.

KARIM
No Ali, it's impossible...

SAMIRA
We have a land in Kandahar?

SARA
Since when you care what we have or
do not have? You are too busy with
your stupid shopping!

KARIM
No I'm not playing games! I gave
you my word, didn't I?... OK
Then!... OK, I'll get back to you
in a couple of days... God bless
you too.

Karim hangs up and joins them at the table.

SARA
So?

KARIM
He thinks I'm playing games to
raise the price.

SARA
Why?

KARIM
He wants to close the deal next
week and I keep telling him I can't
do it. He doesn't believe me.

SAMIRA
Can some please tell me what's
going on?

Karim takes a long sip of coffee.

KARIM
OK, I bought a piece of property in
Kandahar few years ago, a vacant
land.

KARIM(cont'd)

I knew the prices would go up soon after the invasion, and they did. And now this old friend of mine, Ali, wants to buy it to build a hotel, and he wants to start construction immediately, but the problem is I can't go now. I'm too busy with work.

SAMIRA

(to Sara)

Isn't Kandahar your hometown or something?

Karim nods. Sara ignores the question.

SARA

So what is going to happen now?

KARIM

I don't know... He has to wait.

SAMIRA

I'll go.

They both stare at her.

KARIM

Go, where?

SAMIRA

I'll go to Afghanistan, or whatever... And I'll close the deal for you.

SARA

(completely ignoring Samira)

So, Karim, I think you should take time off and go before he change his mind.

KARIM

(shakes his head)

Impossible.

SAMIRA

Mom! Dad! I said I can go.

Sara suddenly bursts out on her.

SARA

What you mean you want to go to Afghanistan!

SARA(cont'd)

You have any idea what you are talking about? Is everything to you a game??

SAMIRA

No it's not a game! Why do you always treat me like I'm just a little girl? Why can't you for once in your life have some faith in me, mom?

SARA

Because you are irresponsible, that is why! Everything you do is irresponsible!

Samira looks at Sara in disbelief.

KARIM

Samira, listen to me. We don't treat you like a little girl, honey. But this is something that I need to take care of personally. That's all... End of story.

SAMIRA

But dad, you're busy and I'm not... I really want to help you.

SARA

You even know what Afghanistan is? You think you find Starbucks wait for you there? No. You never even bothered to learn the language, how you expect to go there and talk to the people?

SAMIRA

How many times I asked yo to teach me? But you always say you're busy.

SARA

I never said I was busy! You are always busy with your friends and your stupid parties. So do not blame me!

SAMIRA

Dad, please let me go. I just want to do something different. I really want to.

KARIM
Is that why you were crying last
night?

Samira gives up.

SAMIRA
... Just forget it!

She gets up and runs upstairs. Sara keeps looking at her,
then shakes her head.

SARA
She is out of control, Karim. It is
all your fault. You spoil her too
much.

KARIM
Something is up with her.

SARA
What you mean?

Karim is lost in a deep thought.

SARA
Karim?

KARIM
You know, if we wait, there's a big
chance we will lose the deal. Ali
is desperate to buy, and if I don't
do something, chances are he'll buy
another land from someone else.

SARA
But you can't go.

He keeps looking at her.

SARA
No! I will never send my daughter
to that place!

KARIM
Maybe we should. Sara. It's time
for her... She needs to know, she
needs to see.

She is constantly shaking her head.

SARA

She does not need to see anything.
She is very young for this.

He looks at her for a long moment.

KARIM

We were young, too.

SARA

But we were different. We are born
there. She grow up in Beverly
Hills.

KARIM

And that's exactly why I think she
should go.

She still doesn't look convinced.

KARIM

Few years ago I would never think
of such a thing, but now things are
different and the Taliban are
gone... Ali tells me the situation
is alot better than before, and
lets not forget they have five star
hotels there with personal drivers.

SARA

NO! Ali can wait, or he can send
you the paper with FedEx and you
sign.

KARIM

We asked about that. Ali went to
the city clerk office but they told
him the owner has to be there to
sign in person.

She shakes her head.

KARIM

Sara, she is not a little kid so
lets not treat her like one... let
her go, let her be responsible for
something. I don't want my daughter
to grow up thinking the whole world
is Beverly Hills... Let her go, I
have a feeling she needs to get
away from here.

Sara ponders this one for a long moment.

INT. SAMIRA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Samira is stretched on her bed reading a magazine. Karim and Sara walk in. Her eyes quickly dart between the two of them.

KARIM
Find your passport.

INT. SAMIRA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Samira sits on a large sofa in the living room, formally dressed, staring at a large suitcase. Karim sits next to her and holds her hand. Sara is standing few feet away, a concerned looks in her eyes.

Karim produces an ENVELOPE, which he presses into his daughter's hand.

KARIM
Here's everything you'll need.

Samira nods.

KARIM
So, lets go over everything one more time.

SAMIRA
Dad, we've been going over it for a whole week.

KARIM
I'm waiting.

SAMIRA
Fine!
(very quickly, in one breath)
I get to the airport I take a taxi to the Continental Hotel Ali will met me in few days we go to the city clerk Office we sign the papers he gives me check for two hundred thousand dollars I take it and come back... OK?

He looks at her with an apprehensive smile, then nods.

A long moment passes. Samira then pats her thighs and gets up. Sara hands her a piece of paper,

SARA

Samira, listen carefully. Like I told you, last time I speak with my sister Nazia was more than five years ago, after that we lose her. I wrote her husband name here for you, mister Abduljabbar Wazir, ask for his name at city clerk. Do not go anywhere alone, you understand??

Samira nods reassuringly as Sara pulls her into an embrace.

SAMIRA

Mom, I'm going to be just fine... really.

Sara looks at her for a long moment, she then hands her a neatly folded piece of cloth.

SARA

You will need this.

SAMIRA

What is it?

SARA

Scarf.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. KANDAHAR - AFGHANISTAN - DAY

A devastated landscape. Flooded roads, half-destroyed huts, broken trees... A dog picks its way through the mud.

A vast stretch of mountains. Unbroken, mysterious -- it stretches away, meeting and blending with the sky.

And in the far distance, a 747 dots the skyline. Gliding closer and closer until it disappears behind the mountains.

EXT. KANDAHAR - CITY STREETS - DAY

Big FOUR AXLE TRUCKS and small BUSES outfitted with colorful displays.

Packed family cars and slow agricultural traffic -- all share the same standard road -- just one lane each way and no separation.

A small TOYOTA VAN honks repeatedly to a turbanned man pulling the leash of a stubborn donkey, while talking on a CELLPHONE. The man finally clears the road and the white van continues on it's way through this pot-hole filled road.

INT. THE VAN

Samira, the only passenger, is in the back seat looking out at the street with absolute shock. The driver, a man in his early thirties, looks at her through the rear view mirror.

DRIVER
(heavy English accent)
You are Pashtu?

SAMIRA
What?

DRIVER
Where you come from?

SAMIRA
Oh, I'm an American, from America.

He stares at her for a moment before he nods.

She looks at a group of Afghani men at a rundown outdoor cafe -- smoking water pipes... She then sees a group of women walking by, completely covered with Burkas.

(Note to reader: Burka is a dress that covers the entire body and hides the face behind a net such that you cannot see the eyes)

From out of nowhere, a WHITE PICK-UP truck PULLS CLOSE to the van, matching it's speed. It's occupants are two Afghani men. The driver of the truck nudges his friend and they both give Samira a strange look.

The van driver notices and slows down.

DRIVER
You have cover?

SAMIRA
What do you mean?

DRIVER
Cover for head.

SAMIRA

Yes. I have a scarf but it's in my suitcase. Why?

The driver looks very worried. He keeps an eye on the pick-up truck.

Then, the truck driver motions for him to pull over. The van driver hesitates a bit, then pulls to the side and comes to a full stop.

DRIVER

Big trouble.

SAMIRA

Why did we stop?

The men from the truck, both dressed in traditional Afghani clothes (turbans and long coats), slowly get out, look around suspiciously then start walking to the van. One of them reaches with his hand under his coat and gets ready to pull something out.

SAMIRA

Who are they? The police?

At that same moment, a US military HUMVEE with a mounted .50 Caliber gun pulls out of the traffic line and approaches the van. The two men immediately walk back to their vehicle while eyeing Samira... And in seconds they are gone.

The van driver quickly starts the engine and gets ready to take off. The Humvee pulls to the side of the van.

Samira can see two young MARINES in the Humvee looking at her with curious eyes. They smile and wave to her and she waves right back, then the van speeds away.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

Dear Kate... I know you'll be shocked when you see this letter, because I'm sending it to you from Afghanistan... Surprised aren't you?? Well, don't be... My dad begged to come here to close one of his real estate deals, and I thought why not, I can use a little vacation...

The van comes to a full stop at a long circular driveway, in front of a five-story building. A sign at the front reads... "THE CONTINENTAL HOTEL"

SAMIRA (V.O.)
... By the way, I was hoping you'd
call me after what happened at
Amy's party. But you didn't and
it's OK, I forgive you...

INT. HOTEL LOBBY

A young Afghan boy in a blue uniform and hat, drags a suitcase across the lobby floor toward an elevator, followed closely by Samira.

About fifty people sit smoking and chatting animatedly. Beer cans litter the tables, along with leftover pistachio shells. Most of the patrons are men in UNITED NATIONS uniforms.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Simply furnished with a single bed, a chair and small table.

Samira looks up from the paper and stretches her back, then pulls the chair closer and continues to write.

SAMIRA (V.O.)
... A funny thought crossed my mind
on the way from the airport to the
hotel; who was that fashion
designer who came up with these
horrible outfits for these people?
What's with the burkas?? Why do
women have to wear these terrible
looking blankets over their bodies?
And what's with the funny hats and
the turbans? Why can't they just
wear jeans and skirts? If they let
me take over this country for one
week! One week only, I'll turn this
place upside down, I'll call it
Melrose-stan instead of
Afghanistan!

INT. SAMIRA'S HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Samira is deep asleep. She moves. She just heard something... She quickly rises and looks around. Nothing. In the distance, the gentle sound of a folk song.

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Samira stands facing a small bathroom mirror, applying lipstick. She then reaches inside her purse and takes out the scarf, and stares at it for a long moment.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MORNING

A turbanned Afghan man walks through the front door of the hotel, followed closely by two women in burkas... They walk past a table with two US MARINES, they nod to the man deeply, respectfully, and he does the same.

These two Marines are the same guys who were in the Humvee and waved to Samira earlier. Both are in their mid twenties.

One of them is ANTHONY, tall, olive skin and square-shouldered. The other is SEAN, a blustery, mad scientist-type with an open farm-boy face and glasses.

Both have their helmets and M16 rifles resting on an empty chair.

SEAN

Hey how come he gets two women and
I get you!

Anthony shoots him with a boyish grin.

ANTHONY

Why? What's wrong with me?

SEAN

Just about everything!

Samira comes out of the elevator and walks past them. She is wearing a black scarf.

SEAN

Isn't that the girl?

ANTHONY

What girl?

SEAN

The girl from the van!
(to Samira)
Excuse me!

She stops and looks at them. They both get up. Sean walks to her, Anthony lags few feet behind.

SEAN
Hi.

SAMIRA
Hello.

SEAN
Are you... from around here?

SAMIRA
(smiling)
I'm a US citizen.

SEAN
I knew it! I even told this guy...
(looks for Anthony)
... I told him when we saw you
yesterday...

She waits for him to finish, but he gives her a silly smile instead.

She looks over his shoulder at Anthony, who gives her a polite nod.

SAMIRA
So you guys hang out here all the
time?

SEAN
You mean here in the hotel? No
ma'am... I wish!

He takes a step closer and points with his thumb backwards.

SEAN
We're with them...

Samira looks inside and spots TWO OLDER MEN in US military uniforms at a corner table, chatting over coffee and breakfast. Obviously a couple of high ranking officers.

SAMIRA
Oh, I see...

SEAN
Glad you do, ma'am.

SAMIRA
Well, the driver is waiting for me
outside. Nice to meet you.

SEAN

Nice to meet you too. I'm Sean by the way, and that shy Marine behind me is Anthony.

SAMIRA

I'm Samira... See you guys.

She turns and walks to the front door.

SEAN

Gorgeous, isn't she!

ANTHONY

Sure is!

EXT. THE CONTINENTAL HOTEL

That same driver with the same van is parked at the end of the circular driveway.

Samira walks over to the van, and looks surprised to see him.

DRIVER

Hello.

SAMIRA

It's you again... Are you the only driver in town or what?

He smiles.

DRIVER

No. I work for hotel. You ask for personal driver, true?

SAMIRA

True. What's your name by the way?

DRIVER

I am Hameed.

SAMIRA

My name is Samira.

His eyes instinctively shift to the scarf.

SAMIRA

What? No good?

HAMEED

You need cover everything. People
here no like woman with no cover.

She rolls her eyes as she gets into the van.

SAMIRA

Well too bad! That's the only cover
I have and they should be happy I'm
even wearing it!

INT. THE VAN - LATER

SAMIRA'S POV

A rugged landscape, remote and steep, with lines of stone
walls and thousands of sheep.

A tall MINARET dots the gray skyline. It's perched on a
distant hill, isolated and austere.

HAMEED

We stop here so I can pray, yes?

SAMIRA

Is this a Mosque?

HAMEED

Yes. The Mosque of Mullah Yaqub...
He make it.

Hameed parks the van, and they both get out and walk up a
white pavement interspersed by the black outlay of a narrow
alley, which leads up to the Mosque entrance.

Local men quietly walk up the same path. Occasional,
respectful nods are exchanged as they walk through the main
entrance.

HAMEED

You are Muslim, yes?

She nods.

HAMEED

(pointing)

OK. I go inside here and you go to
other side for woman.

Hameed walks in. Samira stands there for a moment, not sure
what to do.

She then walks along the side of the building toward the other entrance... Few women, either in burkas or black veils are making their way in. Samira follows them.

INT. THE MOSQUE - WOMEN SECTION

Rays of light fall diagonally through high openings, projecting geometric patterns on the tiled floor.

About twenty women stand in rows, leading them is an older woman, her head covered in a white cloth. She bends as she murmurs verses from the Quran, then kneels to the ground and the women follow in sync.

Samira looks a bit overwhelmed. She takes a step backwards then turns and leaves quickly.

EXT. A ROAD IN KANDAHAR - LATER

An endless sea of sheep and goats in constant motion, beneath a purple sky fringed with pink.

The van appears and makes a sharp turn, then continues down an incline.

INT. THE VAN

Hameed looks at Samira through the rear view mirror. Her head is relaxed on the head rest as she stares out.

HAMEED

Why you no speak?

SAMIRA

(sighing)

I don't know what to say.

HAMEED

This is your first time in Afghanistan?

SAMIRA

Yes. And the last time!

HAMEED

Your family Afghani?

SAMIRA

Yes, but both of my parents moved to America along time ago... And never looked back.

HAMEED

What a shame... Good Afghanis always go away and bad one stay... What they work in America?

SAMIRA

My dad has a mortgage company. My mom was a teacher, she's retired now.

HAMEED

She is teacher but she never teach you Afghani language?

SAMIRA

You know what's so funny, they always spoke English around me. I never understood why.

HAMEED

You have family here?

SAMIRA

As a matter of fact I do... And I was going to ask you, how would someone go about finding people around here? City Clerk?

HAMEED

It is very very hard. All Afghanis are refugees.

The van slows down then comes to a full stop as a ten-year-old boy and a strongly built man in his mid thirties, cross the road, both riding a mule...

... The man with the weather-beaten face and dark eyes looks at Samira and Hameed, then gives them a gracious "thank you" nod.

And just when the van is getting ready to move, Samira suddenly lets out a HORRIBLE SCREAM when something slammed hard against her window, scaring her to death.

A woman in burka is nearly stuck to the window. So close, Samira can see her eyes blinking under the net.

They stare at each other. Samira's eyes are wide open, she almost stopped breathing. Then, a turbanned man comes running toward them from a tiny mud and brick home across the narrow, dusty road, holding a large wooden stick.

He murmurs something then raises the wooden stick high up in the air and STRIKES the woman across the back. Samira screams loud, the woman doesn't move. Another strike... And another.

SAMIRA

HAMEED!

Hameed is watching the scene with wide open eyes as the man begins to drag the woman away from the van. She suddenly reaches and removes the burka cover, revealing a pair of defiant, large brown eyes, staring calmly at Samira...she then blinks.

INT. THE VAN - MOMENTS LATER

The van is speeding away as Samira turns and looks at the woman being dragged inside that same mud and brick house. She is shaking hard. Hameed looks at her through the mirror.

HAMEED

Everybody take drugs... Everybody is crazy.

Samira tries to say something, but the words won't come out.

INT. SAMIRA'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Samira is on the phone.

SAMIRA

(loud)

... Yes, dad. Yes, Ali called and asked me if I need anything... Yes... Two or three days max, that's what he said... OK!... yes I'm fine... OK!

She hangs up the phone, then lies down on bed as she takes a deep breath.

INT. THE VAN - MORNING

It's a gloomy morning. Dark clouds lay low over the horizon as the van speeds past low clay and brick buildings along the dusty road.

HAMEED

You sleep good last night?

SAMIRA

No. I don't know what's wrong with me... I think I really miss home.

HAMEED

When you go?

SAMIRA

Few days, I hope.

He keeps looking at her through the mirror.

HAMEED

You think we are bad people, no?

She thinks about this one for a long moment.

SAMIRA

There's no honor in hitting a woman, not here, not anywhere.

HAMEED

I never hit my woman.

She looks away, then shakes her head.

SAMIRA

You can say whatever you want, but why should I believe you? You just sat there and watched that woman getting beat up and didn't do shit!

He suddenly pulls to the side and stops the van.

HAMEED

What you want me to do, ha? Get out and beat him? I told you that man is crazy. All is crazy. They take drugs all day and all night, If I get out he shoot me!

SAMIRA

(loud)

What do you mean he'll shoot you! Where the hell is your police! Where is the god damn government?? How do you people live like this??

HAMEED

Police? Government? This is joke?
The government let people take
drugs so they do not think about
life or about job or money. The
government give us drugs instead of
food because it is cheaper here in
Afghanistan.

She keeps looking at him with wide open eyes.

HAMEED

I am sorry. It is very hard to
control myself when I talk about my
country. I do not mean to be like
this. I am very sorry.

INT. THE VAN - LATER

Hameed unfolds a piece of paper and looks at it.

HAMEED

I think we are close. I hope I find
it.

SAMIRA

My dad said it's a green building.

Hameed looks through the rear view mirror.

HAMEED

Oh no, we have to stop.

A US army Humvee is behind them, and the driver is motioning
for him to pull over. Hameed pulls to the side and stops.

Two Marines clutching M16 rifles slowly get out and walk to
the van. One of them is Anthony and the other is a young
black Sergeant.

The Sergeant carefully walks along side the van as he looks
inside, and gives Samira a nod.

SERGEANT

Paper please, sir.

HAMEED

Sure.

Hammed takes out a card and hands it to the Sergeant, while
Anthony stays next to Samira's side. She rolls down her
window.

ANTHONY

Hello again.

SAMIRA

Oh hi, are you following me or what?

ANTHONY

Oh no, Ma'am, this is just a routine stop.

SAMIRA

I'm just kidding. So where's your partner?

ANTHONY

He's around. I'm riding with Sergeant Jeremy this morning.

JEREMY

I see you met the whole gang.

SAMIRA

Just about.

JEREMY

May I ask what are you guys doing around here?

SAMIRA

Oh, we're just trying to find an address... Kind of a long story.

ANTHONY

Samira, you should be very careful around here, especially this neighborhood. It's not safe at all.

SAMIRA

Thanks for the advice. I just wanted to go check out this building my dad owns, we'll be on our way back in no time.

JEREMY

A bunch of warlords control this particular area, that's why we advice everyone who's not local to stay away from it... Just be careful.

SAMIRA

Warlords?

JEREMY
(smiling)
Bad guys.

Jeremy hands Hameed back his card, nods again to Samira and starts back to the Humvee.

ANTHONY
Good to see you again.

SAMIRA
You too, Anthony.

INT. THE VAN - LATER

The van is speeding down a dirt road.

SAMIRA
So, do you know any warlords?

HAMEED
No. No war for me. I hate war. But
I hear Mullah Yaqub is big warlord.
Very strong man. Everybody afraid
of him, even US army.

A dozen or more children in dirty clothing pause to watch as the van lumbers down a dirt incline from the road, then stops at the edge of vacant, rugged land -- except from a two-story green structure.

Samira and Hameed get out and stare at the building.

Broken doors and windows -- Piece of rotten wood scatter all around.

SAMIRA
Are you sure this is it?

HAMEED
I am sure. This is only building in
area.

They walk around the building to the entrance, and walk in.

INT. THE GREEN BUILDING

Bare thread walls. Bullet holes fill the ceiling and walls. Concrete floors littered with logs of rotten wood and broken tiles.

And in one corner, a dozen or so women sitting on the floor, covered in burkas. Their heads pointed at the entrance -- at Samira and Hameed.

In front of the women, stands an man in his mid thirties, bearded and has sharp piercing eyes. He is calm and absorbed, dressed in long pants and a jacket which is too large for him and torn so that he seems almost clownish.

Next to the man is a CHALKBOARD filled with words in a foreign language.

The man murmurs something to Hameed.

HAMEED
(to Samira)
He ask who we are.

SAMIRA
(to the man)
Hello.

MAN
(heavy English accent)
Who are you? What you want?

SAMIRA
I'm... Sorry to disturb you.

Samira looks at Hameed, not sure what to say. Hameed exchanges few words with the man in Pashtu.

HAMEED
He is teacher.

SAMIRA
Teacher? You mean this is a school?

MAN
Yes. School for women.

SAMIRA
I... I had no idea. I thought this place was vacant.

MAN
Who are you?

SAMIRA
My dad... My father owns this building.

MAN
Ali your father?

SAMIRA
No. Ali wants to buy this building
and the land from my father.

The man bursts out in a sudden rage.

MAN
Just leave us alone! We are poor
people! We have nothing! Go away!
GO!

Samira is shocked. She takes a step backwards then quickly
turns and walks out. Hameed stays inside.

EXT. THE BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Hameed walks out and finds Samira leaning against a wall,
nearly in tears.

SAMIRA
Lets go. Please.

The man rushes out of the building, but slows down when he
sees Samira.

SAMIRA
I have nothing to do with this.

He tries hard to calm himself.

MAN
Everybody they come here and they
want us to leave this building. Ali
come here and make problem for us.
He say he take the building down
and make new building. He say if we
don't leave he call police. And
Mullah Yaqub come with his men and
make more problem, and Taliban
shoot on the wall and make us
afraid.

He takes a deep breath as if collecting his thoughts and
searching his brain for English words.

MAN
These women very poor. I come here
from Iran to teach for them.

MAN(cont'd)

I come teach anything, make them feel normal and give hope for them... Last year, many woman kill themself with fire, you know fire? They put on head and burn. When I read this I decide I come here and help... But now they want to destroy the building and make new hotel. Who need new hotel?

Samira is listening intensely as the man throws his arms up in the air, then turns to walk back in.

SAMIRA

Sir.

He looks at her.

MAN

My name is Hussein.

SAMIRA

Mister Hussein. I'm so sorry. I wish there was anything I can do, but like I said I have nothing to do with this whole thing.

Hussein shakes his head and walks back inside the building. Samira and Hameed walk towards the van.

GIRL (O.S.)

(heavy English accent)

What is your name?

Samira stops and looks at this tiny shape standing by the door.

SAMIRA

My name is Samira, and you?

GIRL

My name is Shahnaz. You know what Shahnaz mean in Pashtu?

Samira takes a step closer to her.

SAMIRA

No I don't. Why don't you tell me?

SHAHNAZ

Shahnaz mean little princess. I am the princess of Kandahar.

SAMIRA

You are?

Shahnaz takes Samira's hand and gently pulls her to the side of the building, away from Hameed. There, she slowly removes the burka's cover from the head down, and looks at Samira.

Shahnaz's pretty face frames unusually bright deep blue eyes and long, even though somewhat dull, dark hair.

Shahnaz paints a pretty and sunny smile over her lips as she points her finger at Samira's eyes and face, then at her own.

The two girls are a MIRROR IMAGE of each other. Samira is in complete shock.

SAMIRA

Shahnaz, tell me something, what's your father's name?

SHAHNAZ

Why? He make trouble again?

SAMIRA

No. Just tell me his name, please.

SHAHNAZ

His name is Abduljabbar Wazir.

Samira quickly backs away. She looks around, not sure what to do. She looks at Shahnaz again, then at the building.

SAMIRA

We have to go.

She walks to the van.

SHAHNAZ

I hope I see you again.

Samira stops and take a very deep breath, she then turns.

SAMIRA

Listen, I don't know how to do this, but I'm only going to be here for a very short while, then I'll be gone...forever. You understand?

Shahnaz nods.

SAMIRA

Good! Now, goodbye!

SHAHNAZ
You are very beautiful girl.

SAMIRA
Thank you, I know I am. So,
goodbye, forever.

Samira walks back to the van. Shahnaz waves goodbye.

INT. THE VAN - LATER

Driving through the streets of Kandahar. Samira is lost in a deep thought.

SAMIRA (V.O.)
Kate, you are not going to believe
this, but I ran into this pretty
little girl today who calls herself
the princess of Kandahar, and this
girl turned out to be my cousin...
Can you believe this?? I didn't
even KNOW I had a cousin...

INT. SAMIRA'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Samira sits at the table and continues to write.

SAMIRA (V.O.)
... I felt so weird and just turned
and walked away. I know what you're
saying to yourself now, "crazy and
weird"... But I didn't know what
else to do! Seriously. She's in a
burka and she just looked, I don't
know, strange, I guess.

EXT. THE GREEN BUILDING - MORNING

Women in burkas are filing in. Samira stands next to the front door, and recognizes that same tiny shape.

SAMIRA
... Shahnaz

SHAHNAZ
You come back!

SAMIRA
(sighing)
Yeah, I'm back... There's something
I want to tell you.

EXT. A STREET IN KANDAHAR - LATE AFTERNOON

The van pulls to the side of the road, then comes to a full stop. Samira and Shahnaz get out. Shahnaz clutching tightly to Samira's hand. Hameed lights a cigarette and waits behind.

About a mile away, another vehicle comes to a stop. It's that same white pick-up truck that followed Samira earlier from the airport.

The two girls approach a very poor home with adobe walls supporting wooden rafters. One of many on a stretch of this long muddy road. Most of the houses are surrounded by high mud walls protecting an interior courtyard and the home.

SAMIRA (V.O.)
... She started crying when I told
her we are cousins... She then told
me my aunt Nazia died two years ago
after she suffered a simple
infection, but due to lack of
medical facilities, the infection
became a lung disease that killed
her. So her husband married again
because he couldn't take care of
his only daughter Shahnaz...

A GROUP OF MEN are squatting in a half-circle, the usual pattern for conversation, but they are silent now as their eyes fix on the approaching Samira.

SAMIRA (V.O.)
... He married a widow with few
young children of her own.

The front door SQUEAKS as Shahnaz pushes it open and both girls walk in.

INT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dimly lit, primitive room with no windows and no chairs. An older, scarfed woman is on her knees feeding broken sticks into the belly of a primitive wood stove, and the fire inside glows brighter. On the flat top of the stove is a pot of stew.

Four ragged, barefooted children sit around the stove in a half-circle, their hungry eyes on the pot of stew.

Shahnaz says something in Pashtu and everyone, and everything seems to freeze in time... All eyes on Samira.

SAMIRA

... Hello.

They keep staring at her.

SHAHNAZ

They do not speak English.

SAMIRA

Yeah. I noticed.

Shahnaz and the woman exchange few words, then the woman quickly wipes her hands with her dirty black dress and approaches Samira, warmly inviting her in.

SHAHNAZ

Her name is Jameela.

At that moment, another door squeaks open, and an older man walks in. His presence causes a stir as the children move aside to make room for him on the dirty old rug.

SHAHNAZ

(whispering)

This is my father.

ABDULJABBAR is in his late sixties. Turbanned. He leans on what looks like a Sheppard's stick as he stares at Samira for a long moment. Shahnaz says something to him in a low, almost trembling tone. He nods, then turns and leaves.

SHAHNAZ

Come with me I show you something.

She takes Samira's hand and the two girls walk through a doorway into a backyard filled with junk and old tires, then walk through long dry bushes to the back of the house, there, Shahnaz quickly climbs up an old wooden ladder to the roof.

Samira hesitates.

SHAHNAZ

Come Samira.

SAMIRA

I can't. I'm afraid of heights.

SHAHNAZ

Do not be afraid. I hold your hand.
Come, please.

Samira climbs the twenty or so steps and makes it with a final pull from Shahnaz.

EXT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - LATE EVENING

Hameed looks impatient. He checks his watch and looks at the front door of the house. He then lights a cigarette and walks to the van. At that moment, the white pick-up suddenly appears and comes to a stop in front of him.

Hameed watches in horror as the driver gets out, clutching an AK47 rifle pointed at him. The other man watches the road.

EXT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - ROOFTOP - SAME TIME

It's dark. The milky way appears, almost tactile, as if someone had mixed particles of light with blue-black paint and brushed it against the sky.

Samira and Shahnaz are sitting side by side. Soft wind plays with Shahnaz's hair as she stares at the sky.

SAMIRA

So this is your secret spot?

SHAHNAZ

Yes. I always come here to look at the stars.

Samira looks up.

SAMIRA

They're so beautiful.

SHAHNAZ

I have name for everyone. Even one for you.

SAMIRA

For me?? Did you know me from before?

SHAHNAZ

Yes. Mamma told me you are born in our old house, then you go far away when you are very young... You know my Mamma pick your name?

SAMIRA
She did? I didn't know that.

SHAHNAZ
She always say to me you have
beautiful cousin far away.

SAMIRA
I wish I met her.

SHAHNAZ
We always come here me and her and
look at the stars.

She wipes a tear.

SHAHNAZ
She wish for me to have good life
because her life was very hard.

SAMIRA
You will, sweetheart. I know you
will.

Suddenly, A BURST OF GUN SHOTS. Shahnaz instinctively shields
Samira with her arms.

SAMIRA
Oh my god what was that!!

SHAHNAZ
They are shooting again.

The girls run to the edge of the roof. The moonlight
illuminates the truck, it's tires squeaking as it speeds
away.

Samira lets out a loud scream when she spots a body lying
next to the van.

EXT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Samira and Shahnaz run out of the house towards Hameed.
Jameela, Abduljabbar and the children stand by the door. Few
men had gathered.

Samira leans over Hameed and frantically starts to shake him.
He suddenly opens his eyes and looks at her.

HAMEED
I dead now?

Samira quickly scans his body for any bullet holes. Nothing, except from the mud on his pants and shirt.

SAMIRA

No. I don't think so!

He takes a deep breath as he relaxes his head back on the muddy ground.

HAMEED

Thank god. I promise I will fast seven extra days in Ramadan!

SAMIRA

What happened? Who was shooting at you?

HAMEED

Taliban... Taliban man ask about you. I tell him I know nothing. He is very mad and he shoot the gun, but not at me. He shoot the sky.

The word Taliban sends a very cold chill down Samira's spine. She looks absolutely horrified as Shahnaz takes her hand and squeeze it tight.

Few men finally step forward and help Hameed to his feet.

INT. SAMIRA'S HOTEL ROOM - DAWN

Samira put her pen down and looks up at the window. Shafts of light illuminate motes of dust as the sun breaks through.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

... The Taliban. Even I, the ignorant spoiled girl from Beverly Hills, know what this word means, especially to women. All women. I asked Hameed about them, he said they never left after the invasion. And they will never leave... He told me I better leave Afghanistan immediately...

She gets up and walks to the window.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

... I told him there's nothing on Earth that I want more than to leave this creepy ugly place...

SAMIRA(cont'd)

But I just want to finish this damn sale first, then I'll be out of here in no time and I will never look back.

INT. THE VAN - MORNING

Samira looks at Hameed as he drives.

SAMIRA

I didn't think you'd show up this morning.

He looks at her through the rear view mirror and paints a faint smile over his lips.

HAMEED

Why, you think I'm woman?

She smiles and shakes her head.

HAMEED

Look. I do not do this for you. I have two small children and woman in my house. How I bring food to them? We have war here in Afghanistan always. All my life I see war and people die. But we cannot stop our life, and if I die because I drive for you, it is OK. But I do not die at home hungry.

SAMIRA

Hameed, I'm sorry about what I said to you earlier, I really think you are a brave man.

The van is starting down that same incline that leads to the green building.

SAMIRA

By the way, Ali is coming tomorrow to finish the deal, he called me this morning.

Hameed looks at her through the mirror for a long moment, as if studying her.

HAMEED

Is good deal for your father, no?
Too much money.

SAMIRA

Yeah. I guess so... I don't know.

HAMEED

So you go to America soon?

She nods.

INT. GREEN BUILDING / SCHOOL - LATER

Class in progress. Samira shows up at the front door and Shahnaz immediately waves to her. Hussein grins.

HUSSEIN

So, you come back.

SAMIRA

May I sit in?

HUSSEIN

I give class in Pashtu, you know
Pashtu language?

SAMIRA

No.

He rolls his eyes.

Samira walks to the corner toward the women who share an old dirty rug, and instead of making room for her, they all look away. Shahnaz skids a little and Samira sits next to her.

HUSSEIN

I hear your friend Ali come
tomorrow.

SAMIRA

He's NOT my friend... How did you
know he's coming?

HUSSEIN

He send message for me. He say he
want the building empty when he
come.

SAMIRA

So what are you going to do?

HUSSEIN

We have no place for school. Maybe
we go study under tree and your
father go buy new car.

He gave her a kind of a sub-human look when he said these words. And Samira felt it.

One of the women murmurs something from under the veil, others pick up the chatter and suddenly they all get up.

SAMIRA
What happened?

SHAHNAZ
It is OK, Samira. Do not worry.

HUSSEIN
They want you to leave.

Samira takes a deep breath as she slowly gets up and walks out of the room.

EXT. THE GREEN BUILDING

Shahnaz and Samira walk out of the building and stroll down a narrow dirt road. Hameed appears in the distance, leaning against the van, smoking a cigarette.

SAMIRA
Why do they have to be so stupid? I
didn't do anything. This whole
thing is not my fault!

Shahnaz is calm and silent. She pulls back the cover of her burka as she takes a deep breath.

SAMIRA
Say something.

SHAHNAZ
Something.

Samira smiles and looks at her. Shahnaz hangs her head down.

SAMIRA
Shahnaz, what's on your mind?
Please talk to me... You don't
think I'm bad, do you?

Shahnaz shakes her head.

SAMIRA
Well?

SHAHNAZ

We are very afraid to lose the school because it is very important to us.

Samira closes her eyes for a moment and takes a very deep breath.

SHAHNAZ

You know who make this building a school? American woman. Sister Kathrine.

SAMIRA

An American woman??

SHAHNAZ

(nodding)

Sister Kathrine come here three years back to teach Afghan woman to speak English. She find this building no one live in it and she make it school. I come to her everyday.

SAMIRA

Is that how you learned English so well?

SHAHNAZ

Yes. Sister Kathrine teach me everything. She was so beautiful lady. But after sometime Taliban man came and ask for her to leave Afghanistan, because she is Christian woman, not Muslim.

Samira is listening intensely.

SAMIRA

And then what happened?

SHAHNAZ

She say no. She told them she stay and teach poor woman. So one time they come and they shoot her.

SAMIRA

What?? They shot her??

SHAHNAZ

Yes. They shoot her and they shoot the school from inside and they destroy the chairs and the tables and computer and everything. After that they leave.

SAMIRA

Oh my god! So the Taliban shot her because she's Christian??

SHAHNAZ

They say that but we do not believe them. Taliban want woman be always weak and no learn anything. No read no write no work no anything.

Samira pauses for a long moment.

SAMIRA

No wonder Hussein and the women hate me. To them I'm just like the Taliban...

Shahnaz slowly nods.

SHAHNAZ

I go back to school now. You stay with me please?

SAMIRA

Oh no. No way, I'm not going back in there. But I have a better idea, why don't you skip school so we can hang out. Take me and show me around?

Shahnaz thinks about it for a second then nods.

SHAHNAZ

Good idea. I take you to bazaar.

EXT. BAZAAR - AFTERNOON

A ramshackle bazaar, which stretches on both sides of a pot-hole filled road for few hundred yards, leading to the entrance of a Mosque.

Tiny shops crammed with electronic goods, military gear and Western foodstuffs, some of the electronic goods clearly used and perhaps discarded.

Samira and Shahnaz get out of the van and walk towards the shops. Hameed stays behind and lights his usual cigarette.

SAMIRA
So this is the Bazaar!

SHAHNAZ
Yes. You find everything here.

Shahnaz quickly pulls down the cover of her burka. Samira's black scarf is mostly loose and barely covers her hair.

The girls mingle with the largely male crowd. Samira is amused.

SAMIRA
I've never seen a place like this
in my life... I love it!

SHAHNAZ
We do not come here much. It is
very expensive.

A woman in burka passes by them. She drags a small boy behind her, trying to catch up to a man few feet in front.

SAMIRA
By the way, how come women here
always walk behind the men?

SHAHNAZ
Because in Afghanistan we have many
land mine!

Shahnaz says this and laughs to herself from under the cover. Samira gets the joke a moment later and starts to laugh.

SAMIRA
Shahnaz you're such a funny girl.
That's why I'm going to buy you
lunch my dear.

They pass by an outdoor cafe with men smoking from a water pipe. Two United Nation soldiers also mix with the crowd...

Two men from the cafe whisper something to each other as they look at Samira.

The girls arrive at an Antique and Clothing store. Something catches Samira's eyes and she stops.

INT. ANTIQUE STORE

Samira picks up a red scarf embroidered with thin gold lines, then walks to the counter.

The shopkeeper is a bearded man in his thirties.

SAMIRA

How much?

He regards her with a professional eye and determines she is a tourist.

SHOPKEEPER

(heavy accent)

... Ten dollars.

Samira reaches inside her pocket. Shahnaz places her hand on Samira's arm, stopping her from taking the money out, she then murmurs something to the shopkeeper. He shakes his head.

SAMIRA

What did you tell him?

SHAHNAZ

I tell him from here to here... For lower the price.

SAMIRA

From here to here??

SHAHNAZ

(to shopkeeper)

One dollar!

He stares at her.

SHOPKEEPER

I say ten. Is very good scarf. No cheap.

SHAHNAZ

Forget it Samira, lets go.

They turn to leave.

SHOPKEEPER

(grinning at Shahnaz)

OK! Wait!

EXT. BAZAAR - LATER

The girls walk out of the shop. Shahnaz has the scarf.

SHAHNAZ

(excited)

Thank you very much Samira. This is first gift in my life.

SAMIRA

Are you serious?? No one ever gave you a gift, not even in Christmas??

SHAHNAZ

We do not have Christmas.

SAMIRA

Oh, that's right!

Samira looks at her with a somewhat sad eye. She then manages a smile.

SAMIRA

By the way, you got some real talent! I never bargained in my life.

SHAHNAZ

We never pay normal price. My Mom told me always bargain.

SAMIRA

I wish I had you with me the other day in Melrose.

SHAHNAZ

What is Melrose?

SAMIRA

(laughs)

It's the American version of Bazaar.

The two men from the cafe show up behind the girls... Also in sight is A US officer, around forty-five. He passes by them and gives them a smile and a nod. He wears a bulletproof vest and a pistol at his side. A couple of burly Special Forces soldiers guard his back and move away youths who kept swarming around him.

SAMIRA

Everywhere I go I see soldiers.

SHAHNAZ

I like soldiers. They are good.
They shoot Taliban.

SAMIRA

Oh please don't mention this name.
I'm still freaking out after last
night.

SHAHNAZ

Do not worry Samira, I protect you.

Samira looks at Shahnaz, then wraps her arm around her.

SHAHNAZ

What about after you sell our
school to Ali, you go home, no?

Samira closes her eyes for a moment and shakes her head.

SHAHNAZ

What?

SAMIRA

(sighing)

Nothing... It's just that...the way
you said it. Made me feel like...
Like bad. God I hate this!

SHAHNAZ

Me too. I hate it too much because
school make me smart girl. Make me
feel life is good. Now, life not
good.

Samira is about to say something but at that same moment one
of the men from the cafe RUSHES her and PUSHES her hard,
sending her FLYING to the ground, screaming.

Shahnaz screams something in Pashtu while trying to push the
man away. But his partner wraps his arms around her, holding
her in place while his friend continues the assault on
Samira, kicking her hard.

A crowd of men and young Boys quickly gather, including a
couple of familiar faces, the TWO TALIBAN MEN from the pick-
up truck.

One of the on-lookers says something, then runs to Samira,
only to be bunched hard by the attacker who also screams at
him in Pashtu.

Samira is bleeding from her mouth. She is still lying on the ground, a dazed look in her eyes and is about to lose consciousness. Shahnaz screams again and tries to loosen the man's grip on her.

The attacker suddenly PULLS A LARGE KNIFE as he shoots Samira with a deadly glare. He lifts his arm up and is about to strike.

Suddenly, BULLETS BURST from an automatic rifle. It's the US officer and his guards -- M16 rifles ready in their hands.

The attacker stares at the officer, as if challenging him.

OFFICER

What the hell is going on here?

(looks around)

Anyone speaks English?

Shahnaz tries to say something but the man quickly covers her mouth.

Hameed casually arrives at the scene which by now includes over a hundred people with very curious eyes. He is trying to make his way inside the circle, obviously unaware that Samira is under attack.

A local man in his late twenties approaches the officer.

LOCAL MAN

(heavy accent)

I speak.

OFFICER

What's going on here? Is that his wife or something?

LOCAL MAN

No. No his wife.

The officer takes a step closer but the attacker shoots another stare at him while gripping harder on the knife.

The officer takes a deep breath as he looks at the man, then at the crowd as if studying the situation.

OFFICER

What did she do to him?

LOCAL MAN

She walk in bazaar with no cover.

She no good woman.

OFFICER
So what's he gonna do? Kill her?

The attacker murmurs something.

LOCAL MAN
He say for you to leave. We take
care of her.

OFFICER
I asked you a question, answer it!
Is he going to kill her!

The local man and the attacker exchange a quick look.

LOCAL MAN
No.

The officer hesitates for a moment then takes a step
backwards as he stares at the attacker, then looks at the
motionless Samira... Then slowly turns.

SAMIRA
(faint)
US... Citizen... Help....

On pure instinct, the officer turns back and pulls his
pistol, then points it at the attacker. His guards
immediately stand ready in firing positions with their rifles
pointed at the same target.

OFFICER
BACK OFF! BACK OFF YOU SON OF A
BITCH!!

One of the Taliban men makes a move toward the officer but
one of the guards quickly gives him a "don't even think about
it look". The man stops.

The attacker squeezes his teeth, darts his eyes between the
officer and Samira... Then slowly backs away.

INT. ARMY HOSPITAL - EVENING

Samira is lying on a hospital bed. Bandages cover parts of
her face and arms. She slowly opens her eyes. Shahnaz is
sitting next to her, holding her hand. Her eyes are red from
crying.

An Army Nurse just finished examining Samira. The officer,
his guards, Anthony, Sean, Jeremy, Hameed and few other
Marines are also in the room.

NURSE
(to officer)
She'll be fine in a couple of days,
sir. She's just pretty banged up.

The officer nods to the nurse as she leaves the room. He walks closer to Samira and holds her hand.

OFFICER
Hi there.

SAMIRA
Hi.

OFFICER
I'm colonel Martin Greene,
commander of the US Marine base
here in Kandahar. Glad you're OK!

SAMIRA
Thank you for saving my life. I
heard you talking to that guy but I
couldn't speak. My whole body was
numb.

COLONEL MARTIN
You're lucky we were there...

He pulls out a tiny USB driver from his pocket and shows it to her.

COLONEL MARTIN
... If not for these little damn
things, you wouldn't be alive!

SAMIRA
What is it?

COLONEL MARTIN
It's a USB driver. Local Afghans
who work here in the base snatches
them off the computers and sell
them in the bazaar, and we go out
and buy them back. Usually we have
people do that for us, but today I
wanted to do it myself.

SAMIRA
Thank god.

SEAN
I say we go down there and kick
some serious Taliban ass!

Martin gives him the "look".

SEAN

Sorry sir. I'm just pissed off! We all are!

COLONEL MARTIN

No one's going anywhere! These people have their own traditions and we have to respect that. Bet you if this girl was blond with blue eyes no one would even come close to her. They thought she was one of them. That's all.

Sean lowers his eyes as he nods in respect. Martin gets up.

COLONEL MARTIN

Anyhow. Let her rest.

SAMIRA

I'm fine. I like to go back to my hotel, please.

Martin looks at her for a moment then nods.

COLONEL MARTIN

You should be careful out there, young lady, you hear?

She nods. Martin heads for the door as the Marines clear his path. He stops and looks at Hameed.

COLONEL MARTIN

Are you the driver?

HAMEED

Yes... Yes sir.

COLONEL MARTIN

Make sure you take her back to the hotel.

(to Jeremy)

Go with them, sergeant.

JEREMY

YES SIR!

Martin is saluted on his way out, followed by everyone else, except Anthony. He walks closer and sits next to Samira, then holds her hand.

ANTHONY

Are you OK?

She nods and paints a faint smile over her lips.

SAMIRA

Anthony, I need a big favor from you, is there a computer around here? I need to send an urgent e-mail to my dad.

ANTHONY

Sure... Just give me few minutes.

He leaves the room. Samira takes Shahnaz in her arms and slowly runs her fingers through her hair.

INT. SAMIRA'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Samira is back to her table and the letter.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

... When I first came here I wanted to turn this place into a Melrosestan, I thought it would be nice if everyone was hip and cool. But now I know this will never happen, not in my wildest dreams...and I can't do anything about it. But I know there is onething I can do for sure, Kate, even if it will start a war.

INT. THE VAN - MORNING

A RAIN STORM pelts the windows.

Samira is lost in a deep thought as the van makes it's way through the muddy streets of Kandahar.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

Dad, please listen to me...

KARIM (V.O.)

No! I said no!

Karim's voice on the other end sounds very far and muffled.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

Dad, you're not listening to me, please... I have to do this.

Sara's voice is heard on the other end asking Karim to "give her the phone"

SARA (V.O.)
(loud and angry)
Samira listen to me. Come back here immediately. Do not be so foolish!
You hear me?

SAMIRA (V.O.)
(crying)
I can't do that.

SARA (V.O.)
What?? Why are you so stupid girl!
Why??

SAMIRA (V.O.)
Don't call me stupid! I'm not the one who left and ran away to America!

Sudden silence on the other end. Nothing but a distant static.

A LIGHTNING FLASH lights up the sky. Samira is startled as she looks around. Hameed is looking at her through the mirror.

SAMIRA
What's wrong, Hameed?

He takes a deep breath.

HAMEED
I am very sorry. I feel very shame from myself.

SAMIRA
Why?

HAMEED
Because I did not help you yesterday. I swear to you I do not see nothing, too many people there.

SAMIRA
Oh, please don't even think about it. I'm sure you would've helped me if you knew.

HAMEED

I am also very shame from my countryman... Afghan people are not like that, believe me. We have honor. We do not kill our woman in the street like sheep. I do not know these people, I do not know where they come from... Remember I tell you? Good Afghanis go, bad one stay.

Samira slowly nods.

INT. THE GREEN BUILDING - DAY

A HEATED ARGUMENT in progress between Hussein and another man. And this Man is Ali. In his mid fifties, short, bald and wears a very cheap dark suit.

Both men are speaking in Pashtu. Ali is pointing his finger at Hussein. Hussein is extremely angry, his body is shaking as he motions "No" to Ali. One of the women says something, and Ali screams at her, then goes back to screaming at Hussein.

SAMIRA (O.S.)

You are wasting your time, we're not selling.

Silence. A pin drop can be heard.

Ali slowly turns and finds Samira, standing at the door. Hameed is behind her.

Shahnaz lifts up her burka cover and her dropped jaw and wide open eyes are revealed. A woman nudges her and she quickly lowers it again.

ALI

(heavy English accent)

What you said?

SAMIRA

I said we've changed our minds, Mister Ali, and we are not selling you this land. So please leave!

ALI

What?? What is this bullshit!! I talk to you father two days ago why he did not say nothing to me!!

SAMIRA
Because he didn't know. I just told
him last night!

He looks at her with his narrow, suspicious eyes.

ALI
Someone pay you more... How much
more? Tell me.

SAMIRA
I told you, this place is not for
sale anymore. Not for you, not for
anyone... That's all.

ALI
This is your last word?

She nods with confidence and determination as she lifts up
her chin and stares at him.

Ali is about to say something nasty to her. But changes his
mind as he takes a deep breath, then heads for the door.

ALI
No problem. I talk to you father
and we will see.

SAMIRA
We shall see!

He leaves.

Samira blows a ton of air and drops her head down.

SAMIRA
(to herself)
I can't believe I just did this.

The women suddenly burst in loud cheers. Shahnaz throws her
arms in the air as she runs to Samira and Hugs her. Hameed is
slowly nodding and has a deep smile over his lips.

Hussein is speechless as he stares at Samira in disbelief.
She walks to him.

SAMIRA
Mister Hussein, can I sit in your
class now?

He slowly nods. This time the women make room for her on the
rug. One of them even pats her gently on the back. Samira
turns to her and smiles.

HUSSEIN
Why you did that?

SAMIRA
Because we have too many shiny cars
on our driveway. We don't need a
new one.

He forces a smile.

HUSSEIN
What happened to your face?

SAMIRA
Oh, it's nothing. Just another day
in Paradise...

He keeps looking at her.

The enormity of the new situation arrives to her with a thud
as she takes a deep breath and her lips begin to tremble.

SAMIRA
They attacked me and beat me
yesterday...

Tears now...

SAMIRA
... I felt small and humiliated. I
was so scared...

Hussein kneels next to her... The women move closer and one
holds her hand.

SAMIRA
... I'm not supposed to be here.
I'm the last person on Earth to be
a hero, because I'm not, and I'm
not sister Kathrine either. She had
something to offer you, but I
don't... I'm NOT a good person and
I want to go home and forget about
you all... So bad... ...I want to
feel safe and warm and never think
about this place. But I can't, and
I don't know why.

Hussein puts his hand on her shoulder.

HUSSEIN

Welcome to Afghanistan my dear. I say same thing to myself every morning, why I'm here? No one give me money or food, nothing. But I stay because I want to make something good for these women...

He takes a deep breath.

HUSSEIN

... My wife was from here, from Kandahar. Oneday I take her to hospital because she is very sick, but Taliban do not let doctor see her... And after few hours she die. So this is my revenge from them. That is why I am here.

Samira looks at him for a long moment.

SAMIRA

I'm sorry to hear that... But why? Why wouldn't they let the doctor see her?

WOMAN

(slight British accent)
Because under the criminal Taliban, male doctors were not allowed to see female patients, and female doctors are not allowed to go to work... And if they do...

The speaker is one of the students. She slowly lifts up her sleeve and reveals her AMPUTATED HAND.

WOMAN

... That's what happens to them.

Samira's eyes are wide open as she stares at the amputated hand.

Another woman puts a hand on Samira as she joins the slowly forming circle.

WOMAN # 2

(very slight accent)
We are not heroes either, many of these women want to die, but they cannot even afford to buy poison...or Kerosene.

The woman produces a piece of paper and hands it to Samira. It's a black and white picture of a young, alluring "Eva Gardner".

SAMIRA

This is the actress...what's her name?

WOMAN # 2

Eva Gardner.

SAMIRA

Yes!

WOMAN # 2

This was my nickname when I studied acting at the university of California... The woman in this picture is me... Fatima Abdulla.

Samira is in a complete shock.

FATIMA

(sighing)

It was my childhood dream to be an actress, so after the Russians left in 1989, my uncle, who lives in California brought me there and sent me to school... It was the best three years of my life, and when I finished I got an offer from a film producer to act in a Hollywood movie. I turned it down because I wanted to come back here, to my country to teach acting. Everybody there thought I was crazy, but I told them my country needs me alot more than Hollywood...

Samira is listening intently.

FATIMA

... So I came back and started my own small theater company... Everything was great until the Taliban came in 1994 and life was never the same after that.

SAMIRA

They closed the theater?

FATIMA

They came in oneday during a show
and said that I broke the law
because I was showing my face to
men... And...

Samira keeps looking at her.

SAMIRA

And what?

Fatima slowly reaches and starts removing her burka over. She does it in a slow, animated motion, starting from the right side of her face, revealing beautiful olive skin and a large brown eye... And when she removes the cover completely, Samira gasps in horror.

The left side of Fatima's face is completely MUTILATED.

FATIMA

... They poured ACID on my face and
burned the theater.

She pulls the cover back onto her face.

FATIMA

I'm sorry. I did not mean to scare
you.

Samira is out of words as she keeps staring at her.

FATIMA

We thought things will be better
when the Americans came, were we
wrong. Because after more than
twenty years of treating women like
sub humans, like animals, it's very
hard to change the mentality of the
people...

Fatima sighs as she looks around.

FATIMA

... I think about killing myself
everyday to end this miserable
life... ...But I do not do it
because God gave us life and only
God can take it away, no one else
has the right to...

Samira's chin begins to tremble as she chocks out a sob.

FATIMA

So that is why we come here. Not to learn how to read and write, but to feel alive.

EXT. THE GREEN BUILDING - LATER

Samira and Shahnaz walk hand in hand down the same narrow dirt road behind the building.

SHAHNAZ

Thank you. You are the best sister in the world.

Samira paints a faint smile over her lips.

SAMIRA

Just don't call me hero, please.

SHAHNAZ

But you are.

SAMIRA

I'm not. I'm far from it... You know, back home my friends call me a stuck up bit...

She stops.

SHAHNAZ

Stuck up bit?

SAMIRA

Yeah...bit. Bad. They call me bad person.

SHAHNAZ

Why??

SAMIRA

Because I am.

Shahnaz looks at her.

SHAHNAZ

But you are MY hero.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

... I lied to you, Kate. My father never begged me to come here, I was the one who begged.

SAMIRA(cont'd)

I did it because I hated you all
and wanted to get away from you...
But I just realized something, it
was ME who I hated, not you. It's
those demons inside of me that
turned me into this ugly person
that no one liked. It was my
jealousy and the desire to want
what everyone else had...

She reaches for Shahnaz's hand and squeeze it tight as she
turns and looks at the building.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

... But now I finally have
something of my own, and I'm not
letting go.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

A young waiter brings two cups of coffee to Anthony and
Samira. Anthony is in Jeans and T-shirt.

ANTHONY

... You really want my opinion?

She nods.

ANTHONY

I think you're the craziest...and
bravest girl I've ever known.

She smiles.

SAMIRA

You wouldn't say that about me if
you met me a couple of weeks ago.

ANTHONY

Why not?

SAMIRA

Well, lets see... My mother would
tell you this;

(she mocks her mother's
accent)

My daughter is very spoiled girl
she sleep all the time and go
shopping everyday!!

He smiles.

ANTHONY
(sighing)
You know, I really miss home.

SAMIRA
(sarcastic)
Why? This place is not exciting
enough for you?

ANTHONY
Believe it or not this used to be a
beautiful, peaceful country at one
time... And the Russians came, then
the Taliban, and things were never
the same after that.

She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath.

SAMIRA
Enough with Afghanistan. So, tell
me, where do you live back home?

ANTHONY
San Diego.

SAMIRA
No way! We're neighbors... I'm in
LA!

ANTHONY
Oh, the city of angels... No wonder
you...

He stops.

SAMIRA
What? No wonder what??

He smiles.

ANTHONY
Nothing.

SAMIRA
No, say it. I act like a typical LA
girl don't I? Say it!

ANTHONY
Well, I meant you sure don't look
like a typical Afghani girl... Your
hands are too clean.

She rolls her eyes and smiles. He keeps looking at her.

ANTHONY

So, what happens to you, what's next?

She blows a troublesome piece of hair out of her face.

SAMIRA

I know things will go downhill from here on. My parents already decided not to stop sending me money, thinking this would force me to go back.

ANTHONY

I think you should go back, Samira... It's not safe at all for you here... You know the Taliban have you on their radar by now, right?

SAMIRA

The Taliban have every woman on their radar, not only me... So I'm not going anywhere, not until I make sure this Ali guy will not come back and harass Hussein and the women.

ANTHONY

How can you say that? How can you be so irresponsible with your own life??

SAMIRA

It's funny that you say that, it seems I get called irresponsible no matter what I do. But I like it this time, I'm actually proud of it.

ANTHONY

I don't understand.

SAMIRA

Anthony, I am twenty-two years old and I have yet to do anything meaningful in my life, for myself or the others. And you know what's so sad about it? Is that I never saw it... Not until I came here and realized how insignificant my whole life has been.

SAMIRA(cont'd)

How secure and how protected... But
these women out here are all
alone... All alone!

She takes a deep breath and thinks for a moment.

SAMIRA

I don't even know what it means to
make a difference in someone's
life, and this is my only chance.
My only chance to find out.

He looks at her then slowly nods.

EXT. KANDAHAR STREETS - DAY

The rain had finally stopped. Young boys are herding
Camels... Trucks and buses fill the muddy roads.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

Kate, you still haven't wrote back
to me, not a single letter. I think
you're still mad but it's OK, I
understand, But I will not stop
writing...

A young girl in dirty clothes and curly unwashed hair, runs
across the street and sits next to an old woman. Insects
crawl over her face but she makes no effort to swat them
away.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

... My money will run out soon and
I would have to leave the hotel,
and I have no idea where to go, or
how to survive.

INT. THE GREEN BUILDING - LATE EVENING

The van comes to a full stop. Hameed and Samira get out and
walk towards the building.

A rhythmic Tambourine sound is heard.

Soft winds blows a crimson curtain gently, revealing the
erotic motion of a woman's hips in perfect sync to the beats.

HAMEED

What is happen in this place??

SAMIRA
I have no idea. Shahnaz told me to
come back in the evening.

Hameed looks very surprised and takes a step closer to the
window with the curtain.

SAMIRA
(smiling)
I wouldn't do that if I were you,
Hameed. You know how these Afghan
women are, they'll tear you up to
pieces, baby.

He immediately stops.

HAMEED
True... OK I come for you later...
In two hours?

SAMIRA
Sounds good.

INT. THE GREEN BUILDING

Afghani-style party in progress. Candles are lit everywhere.
Women without burkas sit in a half circle, taking turns
dancing. Samira and Shahnaz in the middle, having a blast,
laughing and clapping all the time.

Shahnaz is in a cute white dress, richly embellished with
fine hand embroidery, worked in cross-stitch.

Samira is pulled up to dance, Shahnaz gets up with her. They
put their hands together and move their hips. Shahnaz is
actually good at this, Samira claps for her.

SHAHNAZ
(excited)
Samira this is party for you!

SAMIRA
For me?? Why?

SHAHNAZ
Because you save school!

A woman in black veil shows up at the door. She then
completely removes the black cloth, revealing glittering
black eyes, shiny black hair and tight red dress. She joins
the rest of the women.

SAMIRA
Why the curtains?

SHAHNAZ
If Taliban see party they come and
shoot everybody.

SAMIRA
I bet you they do that because
they're jealous! No one wants to
party with them! I know I don't!

SHAHNAZ
Me too!

Shahnaz looks at her and they both crack up laughing.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GREEN BUILDING - LATER

... And the party continues. Fatima grabs Samira's hand and with a plastic cone clipped at the tip, she quickly sets to work... The HENNA oozing from the tip meandered across Samira's wrist, leaving coil-like designs on the way. It tickles. Samira chuckles.

A petal or two here, a few dots there, and Samira now has an oriental bracelet etched on her wrist and ankle.

SAMIRA
Oh my god! This is so cute!

EXT. THE GREEN BUILDING - MORNING

Samira -- her sleeves rolled up, hair in a pony-tale -- walks out the front door holding a large bucket of which she empties on the side, on top of a large pile of TRASH.

And as she walks back in, Shahnaz shows up with a similar bucket, followed by another woman, then Fatima and then Hussein...

Two Humvees pull up at the front. Anthony, Sean and Jeremy get out and pick up few folded chairs and tables from the trunks and bring them to the side of the building.

SAMIRA
What are you guys doing?

JEREMY

A gift from Colonel Martin, ma'am.

SAMIRA

No way! Are you serious??

Anthony walks to her.

ANTHONY

And this is a gift from me.

He hands her a MARS chocolate bar.

SAMIRA

CHOCOLATE!!!

In a second she peels it and takes a big bite. Shahnaz comes running.

SEAN

Hey, he stole that from me!

SHAHNAZ

Me too, me too!

Anthony hands another one to Shahnaz... And in seconds all three Marines are SWARMED by women in burkas looking for chocolate.

INT. THE GREEN BUILDING - LATER

The room looks surprisingly bigger and brighter as pieces of rotten wood and broken tiles have been replaced with tables and chairs, all arranged neatly facing the chalkboard.

Hussein wipes the sweat off his forehead and proudly announces;

HUSSEIN

Now I call this school!

A woman ululates from under her burka while the rest clap their hands as they slowly file into class.

INT. SAMIRA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CALIFORNIA

Karim is stretched on a large sofa watching TV. Sara nervously paces the room, then stops and looks at him.

SARA

How you do that, Karim. How??

KARIM

Do what?

SARA

Do what? Do what? You ask me?? Do this! Relax, and you do not care about your daughter! You do not worry!

He closes his eyes for a second as if collecting his thoughts...then looks at her.

KARIM

So, what do you want me to do now, Sara? Fly to Afghanistan, beat up my daughter then put her a plane and bring her back? Just because of a lousy piece of land?

SARA

Lousy land? When we live there we had nothing and...

KARIM

But now we do! More than we ever dreamed of!

He pulls a piece of paper out of his pocket, unfolds it as he stares at Sara, then starts to read;

KARIM

(reading)

" Dear dad, I know you will hate me forever after reading this e-mail, but it's OK, I'm sure oneday you'll understand. I decided not to sell the land to Ali, and I will tell him that tomorrow when I meet him. Forgive me for doing this, dad, please... You were always very kind and understanding with me even when I acted like an idiot...

He looks up at her from the letter. She rolls her eyes.

KARIM

(reading)

...This building is being used by few poor women as school, including my cousin Shahnaz and I will not take that away from them...

KARIM(cont'd)

My God, dad, you should see
Shahnaz, she could be my twin, she
is the sweetest and most adorable
girl in the world..."

He stops again.

KARIM

Should I continue?

She looks at him for a long moment, then shakes her head.

KARIM

Screw Ali and screw all the money
in the world. I'm proud of my
daughter, and you should be proud
of her, too.

Sara takes a deep breath as she sits on the sofa.

SARA

She say Shahnaz is beautiful?

He nods.

KARIM

Sara, remember this, the decision
to stop sending her money was
yours, not mine. So you will have
to bare all the consequences, not
me. Think about it.

SARA

You think I hate my daughter? You
think I do harm to her??

KARIM

You ARE harming her now! I agreed
with you because I thought she'll
be back the next day when she runs
of money... We were both wrong!

SARA

(getting emotional)

I never harm Samira! I am just
afraid for her and I want her to
come back! That is all.

KARIM

Well she's not! Not yet... I'm
going to the Western Union office
first thing in the morning.

She quickly nods.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MORNING

Samira steps out of the elevator, dragging her suitcase behind.

EXT. THE CONTINENTAL HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Hameed is loading the suitcase in the back of the van.

HAMEED

Why they do it?

SAMIRA

They want me to go back home. I guess they are very angry with me for not selling the land.

HAMEED

That is no good news. I am so sorry.

SAMIRA

It's OK. I'll be fine. I'm leaving in two days anyway, no need for me to stay here any longer.

He slams the back door shut and walks to the driver side. Samira gets into the back seat, and the van slowly makes it's way out of the busy hotel driveway, onto the street.

HAMEED

So where you sleep now?

SAMIRA

(sighing)

I'm not sure. I really haven't thought about that yet.

HAMEED

If you want, you stay with my family. I go sleep in friend house.

She forces a smile.

SAMIRA

Thank you so much, Hameed. You have been so kind with me, I will really miss you.

HAMEED

You are good person. You do very good and you help my people. I do everything to help you.

SAMIRA

Thank you, really. I think I might stay with Shahnaz... It's only a couple of days, I'll be fine.

HAMEED

OK, in two days I go to your relative house and I take you to airport.

Hameed is about to make a turn to go down that same incline which leads to the school.

SAMIRA

Oh, that would be so great, Hameed.
I...

She stops talking the second Hameed makes that turn. Her eyes shift and focus on something.

SAMIRA

What is that?

Few blocks away, a thick line of black smoke is billowing from a building.

HAMEED

I do not know. This is very strange.

Samira looks very worried, her eyes narrowing as she tries to pinpoint the source of the smoke.

She then lets out a LOUD SCREAM.

SAMIRA

OH MY GOD IT'S THE SCHOOL!!

THE GREEN BUILDING IS ON FIRE.

US Marines in Humvees, and local Afghan Police have cordoned off the area around the building as a large crowd of local Men and Boys stood and watched.

An APACHE helicopter hovers near by.

The van stops and Samira bolts out and runs to the building.

She quickly makes her way through the crowd, only to be stopped by a Marine, who assumes she doesn't speak English and motions for her to " stay back "

SAMIRA
(frantic)
Let me through! My cousin is in
there let me through!

She tires to push the young Marine but he holds his ground.

MARINE
I'm sorry, ma'am. You can't get in
there. Please stay back.

ANTHONY (O.S.)
It's OK, Tom, let her through.

She sees Anthony coming from behind and runs to him. He has a bandage wrapped around his arm.

SAMIRA
ANTHONY WHAT HAPPENED??

ANTHONY
The Taliban! We've been fighting
them all morning.

SAMIRA
What happened to the school? Where
is Shahnaz??

ANTHONY
They burned it.

Samira looks at him for a second then bursts toward the building. He runs after her.

ANTHONY
Samira STOP goddamn it! Don't go
there!

Flaming logs of wood and tile strewn where the building once stood.

Samira then notices something about twenty yards away in the field behind the building. The LIFELESS BODY OF HUSSEIN dangling from a thick tree branch.

She lets out a loud, horrible scream as Anthony quickly comes from behind and covers her eyes then turns her.

ANTHONY

Don't look!

She is shaking hard, trying to say something but the words won't come out.

She looks to the side and gasps in horror as two men in some kind of MEDICAL UNIFORM pick up white sheets from the back of a truck, then place each one over the bodies of the DEAD WOMEN, including Fatima.

The two men then walk to the other side and start taking down the body of Hussein.

SAMIRA

SHAHNAZ!!

Her chin begins to tremble. She looks at Anthony, her eyes begging silently.

ANTHONY

Shahnaz is not one of them. I looked.

Sean and Jeremy come from behind. Both look very exhausted. Sean walks closer then holds her tight.

SEAN

I'm sorry, Samira.

A burst of GUN FIRE is heard in the distance... Then another one.

JEREMY

The fuckers won't die!

He gives Samira a sympathetic look then walks away.

SEAN

They ambushed us early, at first light, about a mile from here... They kept coming at us... And when it was all over we came and found this.

SAMIRA

Why?? Why did they do this? Why??

The two medical workers carry off the body of Hussein into the back of the truck.

SAMIRA
He didn't do anything. He was only
trying to help.

Samira takes a deep breath as she looks at what remained of the building, only part of the front wall is barely standing. She then looks at the empty field beyond... And spots something in the thick bushes. A SHAPE.

She suddenly burst running towards the shape.

ANTHONY
Samira!!

Samira slows down only feet away from what she can see now as a tiny body in burka... Shahnaz slowly raises her head and looks at her.

EXT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Soft wind blows as Shahnaz leans her head on Samira's shoulder and clutches her arm.

SAMIRA
(soft)
Sweetie, please say something. You
haven't talk all day.

Shahnaz slowly shakes her head as she squeezes harder on Samira's hand.

SAMIRA
Hey didn't you say you have a star
named after me?

Shahnaz nods.

SAMIRA
Which one is it. I like to see it.
(pointing)
Is it that one?

Shahnaz slowly raises her eyes, then shakes her head.

SAMIRA
That one?

Shahnaz points at a bright, twinkling dot.

SHAHNAZ
That.

Samira gasps as she stares at the star.

SAMIRA
It's so pretty...

Shahnaz takes a deep breath.

SHAHNAZ
I want to go there.

SAMIRA
Where?

Shahnaz points at the stars as she wipes a tear.

SHAHNAZ
I don't want to be here any more. I
want to be with my Mamma and my
friends. They all go there today.

Samira squeezes her hand.

SAMIRA
Shahnaz, don't say that. Please...

SHAHNAZ
We hear shooting... Alot of
shooting everywhere... All the
woman was afraid and they cry...
Mister Hussein say do not be afraid
they do not come to us... But they
come. When I see them I go out from
small window and they do not see
me. And I hear them scream and I
hear them shoot. Everybody
screaming... The man and The
woman...

She closes her eyes.

SHAHNAZ
... And after the shooting stop I
see them take Mister Hussein
outside to the tree... He say to
them you are criminal and you do
not know God... And they...

She suddenly burst crying... Samira holds her tighter.

SHAHNAZ
I want to go to happy place,
Samira... I am very sad, very
sad... Please let me go.

SAMIRA
I will never let you go.

INT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Shahnaz and Samira sit side by side on an old rug in that same dimly lit room... Both lost in a deep thought. Jameela looks at Samira and gives her a faint smile.

Jameela is next to the old wood stove, dishing stew from a large pot into tin plates. The children's eyes follow the spoon, and then the first plate, to Samira... She takes it and nods " thank you " to Jameela as she stares at the yellow stew.

SAMIRA (V.O.)
Dear Kate... I have no way of mailing these letters anymore, but I decided to keep writing, because I need to... Few days have passed now after what happened at the school... I had my friend Anthony call the airlines from the base and cancel my flight. I couldn't go anywhere. I'm very worried about Shahnaz. She barely speaks to me or anyone.

Samira is raising the first spoonful to her mouth when she notices the children, apparently for the first time. She is chewing slowly, her eyes on the children, their eyes on her.

SAMIRA (V.O.)
Everything that's been happening to me lately in a first... But this is a new first... I am completely out of money. I never even knew people can actually be out of money, and now I am, and I can't even buy my own food... First thing I will do when I go back home is to kiss the hands of that waitress from the restaurant on Melrose, and tell her how sorry and how stupid I was, remember her, Kate? She should see me now. I haven't even showered for days because of a simple reason... There IS no shower in this house, or any other house for that matter...

She looks at Shahnaz, then offers her some stew. Shahnaz shakes her head.

SAMIRA (V.O.)
... There is only a tiny room with
no lock, lit with a candle...

INT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Samira has a medium size pot of steaming water in her hand. Shahnaz carries a small candle and is leading the way through the courtyard. She then pushes a door wide open and both girls walk in.

The candle light illuminates... Nothing. Nothing but a tiny stool and an old sponge.

SAMIRA
That's the...the shower?

Shahnaz paints a very faint smile and nods. Samira turns and runs out.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Samira and Shahnaz are walking hand in hand down a muddy road.

SAMIRA
Where are we going?

Shahnaz looks at her and smiles.

SHAHNAZ
To bring food.

SAMIRA
From where??

SHAHNAZ
You will see.

SAMIRA
I want a tuna sandwich!

SHAHNAZ
What is that?

SAMIRA
The best food!... With lots of
mayonnaise!!

Perched on a distant hill is a small white building. A small group of men, women and children rush past them.

SAMIRA

What's going on here? Where are they going?

SHAHNAZ

To bring food also.

The small group of people suddenly and out of nowhere turns into a large mob. A sea of people. A tangle of voices, gestures, faces, veiled women, eyes.

Shahnaz looks at Samira, urging her to hurry. Samira is clueless.

They finally arrive to their destination and enter the courtyard of the building.

SHAHNAZ

(loud)

I go this way you go that way.

She then suddenly lets go of Samira's hand and disappears in the crowd.

About thirty yards away is the building's entrance. In front of it is a small podium and a large metal crate. Suddenly the front door opens and a man steps out to the podium.

He is tall, slender, dressed in long pants and a jacket. Another man walks out the door but stays behind. MULLAH YAQUB is in his late fifties. Bearded and square-shouldered. He has a long wooden stick and watches silently as people fight to get a closer spot to the crate.

The slender man removes the large cover of the crate, reaches inside and pulls a small plastic bag of RAW MEAT... And tosses it to the closest hand within his reach.

One man jumps over the podium and runs to the crate. Mullah Yaqub suddenly grabs the man from his shirt, and with surprising strength pushes him aside then strikes him hard with the stick. The man screams as he falls back into the hands of the crowd.

THE CROWD SUDDENLY GO WILD trying to close the short distance to the MAN and the MEAT, even if that involves stepping on others.

Samira screams loud as she is swarmed from all sides by bodies in constant motion.

SAMIRA
SHAHNAZ! HELP ME!!

Samira's hand is SUDDENLY PULLED. On pure instinct, she closes her eyes and starts fighting and kicking the man pulling her... And when she opens her eyes, she is only inches away from the slender man who just reached and handed her a bag of meat.

She looks around and sees a man in his mid thirties, walking away with two bags of his own. He turns and looks at her, then gives her a smile and a nod as he disappears in the crowd.

SAMIRA (V.O.)
I never knew who this stranger was.
He didn't wait for me to say thank
you... He just smiled and walked
away after he made sure we will
have food on our table tonight.

EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON

They each have two bags of meat. Both look exhausted. Samira is limping in one shoe.

SAMIRA
What... Was... That!!

SHAHNAZ
(smiling)
That... Was... Food!!!

SAMIRA
I don't get it. Who was that man?
Who were these people??

SHAHNAZ
You see old man? That is Mullah
Yaqub... He do this for Zakaa, one
time every month, he give food for
poor people.

SAMIRA
You mean it's a religious thing?

SHAHNAZ
Yes. In Islam everyone give food
for poor people.

SAMIRA
And that's us!

SHAHNAZ
(smiling, nodding)
Yes. We are now poor sisters.

SAMIRA
Well, at least I got you to smile,
finally. But please DO NOT make me
do this again... EVER!

INT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Shahnaz bushes the door open and they both walk in.

A group of ten bearded, turbanned men are gathered in one room. These are the town elders, the most respected.

Silence. Except from an old electrical fan humming in one corner.

Abduljabbar sits on a low couch smoking a cigarette. Opposite of him is Mohammad Wali, around fifty-five, grey beard and small narrow eyes.

Shahnaz and Samira walk into a different room and join Jameela and the children. Jameela looks happy when Shahnaz hands her the bags of meat. She then murmurs something, and Shahnaz physically recoils.

SAMIRA
What is it? Who are these men?

Shahnaz turns and looks at Samira, completely stone faced.

SAMIRA
What?

SHAHNAZ
My father... Marry me to that man!

Samira looks at her for a long moment, taking it in.

SAMIRA
... What man?

Shahnaz walks to the door and points a trembling finger at Mohammad Wali. Samira grins.

SHAHNAZ
My father owe money for this man
and he can not give him money. So
he give him me.

Shahnaz has a somewhat sad look in her eyes, but she hides it with a smile.

SHAHNAZ

This is normal in Afghanistan.

Samira is out of words and out of breath. She studies her surprisingly strong cousin. Shahnaz looks at her.

SAMIRA

You can't marry this man! He's old enough to be your father! Don't even think about it.

Shahnaz smiles, a bright sunny smile. There is a strange calm in her demeanor... She holds Samira's hand and slowly nods.

SHAHNAZ

Do not worry, Samira. Everything will be good.

She then wraps her arms around Samira and walks away.

INT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dark and quiet. Samira is deep asleep. The moon light cast tiny silver beams on her face through an open window. She stirs... She slowly opens her eyes, they flutter softly... She turns from her side and looks... The spot next to her on the rug is empty.

Samira quickly rises. She sniffs. A strange smell is in the air. She jumps to her feet and runs out of the room -- through the courtyard and into the kitchen -- the source of the odor.

There, A HORRIBLE SCENE;

Shahnaz is standing in the middle of the kitchen. She is wearing that RED SCARF Samira had given her earlier along with that cute white dress.

In one hand she has the burka, neatly folded under her arm and with that same hand she is clutching a CAN OF KEROSENE, and in the other hand, a LIT CANDLE.

Their eyes meet. Shahnaz blinks as she drops the can of kerosene to the floor, and with a slow, animated motion she brings the candle to the burka.

THE BURKA SUDDENLY GLOWS AS IT CATCHES FIRE.

Samira is in absolute shock as the fire catches the sleeve of the white dress and quickly inches closer to the rest of Shahnaz's body.

Samira lets out a HORRIBLE SCREAM and bolts toward Shahnaz, who stood there calmly.

THE COURTYARD

Abduljabbar and Jameela run across the courtyard into the kitchen and are both shocked with what they see;

Shahnaz is lying on the kitchen floor motionless, smoke billowing from her body. Thick blood stains cover her arms and face.

Samira sits next to her. Her face covered with blood and tears. Jameela screams and kneels next to the girls. Abduljabbar stands there with a dazed look in his eyes.

EXT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

First light. The morning mist lay low over the city of Kandahar. It's quiet.

The front door is suddenly pushed wide open and Samira bolts out. She carries the, still unconscious, Shahnaz in her arms as she stumbles onto the street.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

I had no idea if Shahnaz was dead
or alive... All I wanted is to get
her to a hospital...

Samira is running frantically down the long muddy road. Bare foot and breathless.

SAMIRA (V.O.)

... She burned herself with the
burka... Her cage became her
passport to the " happy place ". A
place where she can finally be free
from this hell they call
Afghanistan... I guess it was her
own poetic justice.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. A ROAD IN KANDARAH - EARLY MORNING

Foggy. Cold. A soft wind blows some dry leaves along the ground.

Quiet. The only sounds are the soft calls of some DISTANT BIRDS.

Samira appears. Bloodied and covered with mud, still holding Shahnaz in her arms as she runs aimlessly. She stumbles and falls hard, dropping the lifeless body of Shahnaz.

SAMIRA
HELP ME!! HELP ME PLEASE!

She drags herself to Shahnaz and struggles to lift her with her bloody arms.

Then, and out of nowhere, a small truck slows down. A woman and a small girl in the back, both in burkas, knock hard on the back window and the truck comes to a full stop.

A male passenger quickly gets out and takes Shahnaz from Samira, and with the help of the woman they place her gently on the bed of the truck.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

DARKNESS

A tangle of voices. Muffled. Anonymous.

Darkness slowly fades into shades of grey and white.

Flutter.

A face. Distant, yet very close...

SAMIRA'S POV - THE FACE sharpens into focus hovering above her...SHAHNAZ.

SHAHNAZ
Samira.

INT. ARMY HOSPITAL

Shahnaz leans over. Her head and arms heavily bandaged but she manages a faint smile as she runs her fingers through Samira's hair.

Samira's arms are also heavily bandaged and her face is pale.

SAMIRA
(faint)
You're alive!

INT. THE MARINE'S BASE - DINING HALL

Sean picks up a large plate of eggs and vegetables from the long breakfast line, then walks across a dining hall crowded with Marines, to a large table, and sits next to Anthony and Jeremy. Across from them is Samira and Shahnaz, and in the middle is Colonel Martin.

SEAN
Breakfast is served!

Shahnaz and Samira look better now that most of the bandages are gone, except from few on Shahnaz's arm. Her hair has been almost completely cut, giving her the look of a small boy.

Empty food plates and coffee cups fill the table. Colonel Martin lights & smokes a clay pipe, seems lost in a deep thought... He then looks at Shahnaz.

COLONEL MARTIN
How you feeling now, young lady?

Her face turns red as she slowly nods "OK" then lowers her eyes.

COLONEL MARTIN
You're very lucky to be alive. I hope you realize that.

She nods again.

JEREMY
I was talking to a local doctor the other day. He said there were about ninety-three cases last year of suicide by fire, and fifty-four so far this year. More than seventy percent of these women die...

JEREMY(cont'd)

I guess the Taliban did a good number on these poor people.

COLONEL MARTIN

It's not only the Taliban, and it's not religion, either... It's old traditions. It's the culture of Man.

Anthony is looking at Samira. A concerned and somewhat sad look in his eyes. She sighs and nods to him.

SEAN

But how do you change that? I mean, there must be a way to show them what's right and what's not.

COLONEL MARTIN

You can't. Period. They've done it for thousands and thousands of years. Not me, not you or the whole US army can do anything about it.

ANTHONY

I know what they need... Education.

SEAN

I don't know about that. You mean a doctor won't commit a crime? They do... Ever watch Dateline?

A young Marine walks over to Colonel Martin and whispers something in his ear. He gets up quickly and follows the Marine out of the dinning hall.

SEAN

What happened?

Anthony shrugs as he walks to the other side and sits next to Samira, and holds her hand.

ANTHONY

Are you guys OK?

SAMIRA

We're fine. Thanks to you. All of you.

SHAHNAZ

How long we are here?

ANTHONY

About three weeks.

SAMIRA

Oh my god, has it been that long??

ANTHONY

Yeah. You were both completely out the first week.

SAMIRA

Anthony, I have got to call my parents. I bet you they're going crazy by now.

ANTHONY

Sure. You can use the...

He stops as he spots Colonel Martin and few Marines walking quickly through the dinning hall doorway, and heading for the table. Colonel Martin looks unusually concerned.

He looks at Shahnaz.

COLONEL MARTIN

Your father is outside.

Shahnaz physically recoils and quickly clutches Samira's arm.

SAMIRA

What does he want?

COLONEL MARTIN

His daughter.

Samira quickly gets up and runs to the window of the dinning hall. Shahnaz hesitates for a moment then follows her, along with Sean and Anthony.

The window is in the second floor and over looks a large fenced compound, filled with soldiers and all types of military equipment.

Few armed Marines stand ready at the front gate, facing them is a mob of twenty men, including Abduljabbar and Mohammad Wali.

Samira turns and finds Shahnaz cowering in fear. Her face streaked with tears.

SAMIRA

Colonel. Please, we can't give her back to them. They'll force her to marry that old man. Please!

ANTHONY

Sir. Not only that, but her father has the right to kill her because she disobeyed him... And that's what he'll most likely do, just to save his honor.

COLONEL MARTIN

I'm sorry. We can't afford to turn the locals on us. It's been tough as it is... Samira can stay because she's a US citizen... But not the little girl... I'm very sorry.

SAMIRA

How can you say that?? Don't you have kids of your own? Would you let them die?? Have a heart!!

COLONEL MARTIN

(firm)

Samira, I'm very sorry. But this is a domestic matter and I can't have the US army get involved in it. There isn't much I can do... The girl has to go.

Anthony, Sean and Jeremy quickly glance at each other. Anthony squeezes his teeth.

INT. ARMY HOSPITAL

Shahnaz and Samira stand by their hospital beds, stuffing few shirts into a small plastic bag.

SHAHNAZ

Samira. Is OK I go alone.

Samira brings her closer and holds her tight.

SAMIRA

You're not going anywhere without me... Sisters forever, remember?

SHAHNAZ

I'm sorry I make problem for everyone. I wish that night you let me...

SAMIRA

Don't even finish!

An army nurse hands them a couple of white scarfs.

NURSE

One of the local women here in the base said you might need those.

SAMIRA

Thank you.

ANTHONY

Samira...

SAMIRA

I'm going with her, Anthony.

He looks at her for a long moment.

ANTHONY

I know...

INT. MARINE'S BASE - COURTYARD - DAY

Armed Marines stand ready as Colonel Martin walk out the door and into the courtyard, flanked by Shahnaz and Samira. Anthony, Jeremy and Sean are few steps behind, all three are armed to the teeth.

Colonel Martin reaches and holds Shahnaz's hand, and squeezes it tight. He looks at her. She blinks.

They arrive at the gate. Mohammad Wali has a thin smile over his lips. He proudly gives the crowd behind him a victory glance. Abduljabbar stares at his daughter, then lowers his eyes.

COLONEL MARTIN

(to Shahnaz)

Point your father.

She does.

COLONEL MARTIN

And the man next to him is...

She nods.

The man who assaulted Samira in the bazaar and the two Taliban men are also in the crowd.

A Marine slides the iron gate open. Colonel Martin and the girls are now face to face with Muhammad Wali. He quickly reaches for Shahnaz and tries to pull her. She screams.

Colonel Martin hesitates for a moment, then suddenly pulls out his gun, and points it to Wali's head as he shields Shahnaz behind him.

Everyone is shocked, including the Marines. A local interpreter rushes to the scene from inside the base.

COLONEL MARTIN
(to interpreter)
Tell him this... You harm this
girl, you die. Tell him!

The interpreter hesitates for a moment then murmurs something to Wali. Wali looks at the colonel up and down, then murmurs something.

INTERPRETER
(accent)
Sir. He said this girl is his wife
and he do what he want with her.

Martin shoots a stare at Wali. Abduljabbar reaches and takes his daughter's hand, then slowly pulls her out.

At that moment, the man from the bazaar also grabs Samira's hand and pulls her. She screams and slaps him. He's about to strike her but is quickly STRUCK with the handle of a gun... He falls unconscious.

Anthony grips the pistol and pulls Samira back.

The crowd stirs and the scene is quickly turning to chaos.

Wali snatches Shahnaz from Abduljabbar, but Samira bolts forward and tries to pull her away.

JEREMY
GET THE COLONEL INSIDE!!

Colonel Martin is quickly pulled inside and shielded by the Marines.

One of the two Taliban men pulls an AK47 rifle from under his jacket and takes aim at Martin, only to be shot dead by Sean.

The mob is now completely out of control.

Wali pulls hard on Shahnaz's hand, Samira has the other one... Wali is winning, Shahnaz is screaming hysterically... Then, a HAND comes out of nowhere and strikes Wali hard, sending him flying to the ground. It's ABDULJABBAR...who then pushes Shahnaz toward Samira, away from himself.

GUNS ARE DRAWN. SHOTS ARE FIRED.

Marines everywhere. One is trying to close the gate.

COLONEL MARTIN
Everybody inside!! Get the girls.
Quick!

Shahnaz and Samira are shielded then pulled inside by Jeremy and Anthony, behind them is Sean, firing his M16 rifle in the air.

Finally, the gate is closed.

INT. THE CONTINENTAL HOTEL - DAY

Karim and Ali stand at the front desk, talking to a young man behind the counter.

KARIM
... And when was that?

FRONT DESK MAN
(checks his log)
Almost two weeks ago.

Karim nods then walks across the hallway with Ali to a table in the dinning hall and join Sara.

SARA
What they said??

Karim shakes his head.

ALI
Karim, I am so sorry.

KARIM
Sorry? I told you to watch out for her, Ali. I told you treat her like your own child!

ALI
She did not give me chance. I tried to be nice but she say something bad and I get mad and leave... And when I come back I see the building burn.

Karim rubs his chin as he takes a deep breath.

KARIM

It was my fault. I'm the only one
to blame.

Sara's chin begins to tremble as she holds Karim's hand.

SARA

What happened to my daughter? Where
we can find her??

Ali spots a familiar face. Hameed.

ALI

I know this man. I see him with
your daughter in the building.

They all look at Hameed.

INT. THE MARINE'S BASE - BACK SIDE - EARLY EVENING

That same Army Nurse opens up a side door in the main
building, carefully looks around, then nods "OK"... Shahnaz
and Samira appear and quickly run toward the back gate.

Two young Marines at the gate pushes the door open and the
girls run out.

The nurse turns and walks back. Colonel Martin is standing
there.

NURSE

I hope they'll be OK, sir.

COLONEL MARTIN

I hope so too.

INT. THE MARINE'S BASE DINNING HALL - EVENING

Anthony unfolds a piece of paper and reads from it to Sean
and Jeremy.

ANTHONY

"It's better for everyone if we
left the base, otherwise these
people will come back and cause
alot of trouble for all of you.
Thank you for all your help... I'll
try to stay in touch... Samira."

He puts the paper down and shakes his head.

SEAN
Where the hell did they go?

ANTHONY
I have no idea.

JEREMY
These two are crazy... But pretty
damn gutsy!

INT. THE SCHOOL - LATE EVENING

Samira and Shahnaz walk towards the remains of the building.
Shahnaz freezes.

SHAHNAZ
I am afraid of this place.

SAMIRA
I know, but it's the only place I
could think of... I'm sorry.

They walk behind what's left of the building, which is half
of the front wall, and sit in the corner.

Shahnaz buries her head in Samira's chest. Samira holds her
and slowly runs her fingers through her hair, or what's left
of it.

SAMIRA
I miss your hair.

SHAHNAZ
Me too.

Samira takes a deep breath.

SAMIRA
I'm still mad at you though... Very
mad.

SHAHNAZ
I am sorry... I was very sad.

SAMIRA
You should've talked to me. Tell me
how you feel, that's what sisters
are for.

SHAHNAZ
I am very tired of this life...
Mamma leave me...

SHAHNAZ(cont'd)

You leave me very soon and go back to America... And my friends from school die... And I stay alone and I marry that man. That is why I choose heaven.

SAMIRA

But you're too young to die. You still have a long happy life ahead of you. Please, don't ever think of doing that again, you hear?

SHAHNAZ

(crying)

We have no happy life here. God forget us long time ago... You know what I do when I go to heaven? I tell God please remember us, because we love you too much, but you don't love us.

INT. THE VAN - MORNING

Hameed is driving, next to him is Ali, Karim and Sara sit in the back.

The van is making that same turn and coming down that same incline which leads to the school.

KARIM

(shaking his head)

What did they do to this country!!

Hameed looks at him through the rear view mirror and murmurs something in Pashtu. Karim nods.

KARIM

You're right, absolutely. The good ones leave and the bad ones stay... I agree.

Hameed slows down as they pass by the school.

SARA

Look what happened here! They are criminals!

ALI

They shot the teacher and the women. Your daughter is lucky she was not here.

SARA
I can not believe all this happen
and she stay here!

Hameed stares at her for a second through the mirror. He then says something in Pashtu to Karim.

KARIM
We go to see Abduljabbar first.

Hameed nods and continues driving away from the building.

INT. THE BUILDING - SAME TIME

Samira's head pops from behind the broken wall and quickly scans the area... And grins when she sees the van speeding away.

She turns and looks at Shahnaz who is still rubbing her eyes.

SAMIRA
I think I just saw...

SHAHNAZ
Who?

SAMIRA
I think it was Hameed's van, I'm not sure.

SHAHNAZ
We have food?

Samira reaches into the plastic bag and takes out a couple of MARS chocolate bars, and hands one to Shahnaz.

SAMIRA
This is it. No more food after this.

Shahnaz looks at her as she peels the bar and takes a bite.

SHAHNAZ
I'm sorry I make so many trouble for you.

SAMIRA
Shahnaz, you need to stop saying that and think of how we can get food.

SHAHNAZ

I know how... But you do not like.

SAMIRA

How??

SHAHNAZ

From same place like we do before.
They have food today.

Samira rubs her forehead, just like her father does.

SAMIRA

As awful as it is, we have no
choice. But it's raw meat, how are
we going to cook it?

SHAHNAZ

I cook do not worry. I make small
fire.

Samira smiles at her.

SHAHNAZ

What?

SAMIRA

What would I do without you... You
are my "happy place".

Shahnaz blinks.

EXT. SHAHNAZ'S HOUSE - LATER

Hameed stops the van on the side of the road and points to
the house, then notices a truck parked across the street.
Hameed grins. It's Wali and few of his men.

KARIM

What is it, Hameed? Who are these
men?

HAMEED

Bad people. That man his name is
Muhammad Wali, he sell meat and he
sell people.

SARA

People?

HAMEED

Yes. He is work with Taliban.

ALI
Why they look at us?

HAMEED
I do not know.

Karim and Sara get out and walk to the front door, Karim knocks. Wali is watching, he is on full alert.

Hameed and Ali watch from inside the van as Abduljabbar opens the door, and seems very surprised to see Karim and Sara. Jameela appears behind him.

Abduljabbar appears to be inviting them in, Karim nods while politely tabbing his hearts, then walks in with Sara.

EXT. THE WHITE BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Samira and Shahnaz arrive at the courtyard of that same building. Both masking their faces with the scarves.

SAMIRA
(muffled)
Make sure we don't lose each other.

SHAHNAZ
What?

Samira lowers the mask.

SAMIRA
I said make sure we don't lose each other.

She then puts it back on.

SHAHNAZ
OK!

An even bigger crowd had gathered today. The girls try to get closer to the crate... and just like clock work, the slender man walks out followed by Mullah Yaqub, and the frenzy begins.

INT. THE VAN - LATE AFTERNOON

Hameed skillfully navigates around a pot-hole and makes a turn into a long muddy road.

Ali turns and looks at Sara, her face streaked with tears. Karim holds her hand.

ALI

... But you know your sister died from before, no?

SARA

(nodding)

Long time ago, one cousin of Karim came from Kabul and told us he hear my sister die, but he was not sure. After that Samira called me and told me... I was ready for it...

She dabs her tears with a Kleenex.

SARA

... But I did not know she die like that, so poor, so sad... I wish she came with us to America, I wish we helped them.

KARIM

You know we tried, alot. But she refused to leave, and after the invasion they just vanished. I was actually very surprised Samira found them.

ALI

They tell you about Samira?

KARIM

Yeah. It's a long story, but she's in the Marines base with her cousin.

EXT. THE BUILDING'S COURTYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

The girls look exhausted as they walk away from the building. Shahnaz has two bags of meat. Samira walks next to her, empty handed.

SAMIRA

I can't believe this, I'm such an idiot!

SHAHNAZ

(smiling)

I am too small that is why I go close to meat man.

SAMIRA

Yeah, thank god! This meat should last us few days... By the way do you know any short cuts? I don't think it's a good idea to walk like this in the open.

SHAHNAZ

Yes I do...

Samira suddenly freezes. Shahnaz looks at her.

SAMIRA

(whispering)

Don't move!

SHAHNAZ

(whispering)

Why?

Samira bends down and picks up something, then takes a second to look back... And spots TWO MEN walking slowly behind them.

Samira holds Shahnaz's hand and continues to walk. She looks very nervous.

SAMIRA

Those trees, over there...

She is pointing with her eyes at a field with large trees to the left side of the road. Shahnaz nods.

SAMIRA

We need to go there as fast as we can... At the count of 3... 1... 2...

Shahnaz looks confused but goes along with the plan.

SAMIRA

... 3! RUN!!

They bolt in the direction of the trees. The two men are caught by surprise for few seconds but quickly give chase.

The girls climb a small hillside, then run through a foliage and into the field.

SAMIRA

SHAHNAZ HURRY!!

Samira runs past a large tree and makes a sharp turn to the left then climbs down a cliff.

Thick brown trees furnish the field, their shadows crisscross, illuminating the brown sandstone with long gray lines.

Samira is breathless. She slows down, then stops. She just realized she is running alone. Shahnaz is nowhere in sight.

LEAVES CRACK.

Samira is on full alert, she drops to her knees and lowers her head.

One the men suddenly appears, walking above the cliff she just came from. She lowers her head even further, then the second man comes to view. Samira gasps in horror... This man has Shahnaz with him.

SAMIRA
SHAHNAZ!!

The two men stop and look at her.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

A door is pushed wide open and the girls are thrown inside. Both blindfolded. The door is then closed and locked.

Silence. Except from an air conditioner humming in the wall.

The girls quickly remove the blindfolds, and Shahnaz runs into Samira's arms.

SHAHNAZ
(breathless, crying)
Sorry Samira I can not run fast.
They catch me easy.

Samira holds her tight while checking the room.

SAMIRA
It's OK, sweetheart...

Marble floors. Textured walls. Colorful ceramic vases lines up the built-in shelves on all the walls.

The girls sit on a large mahogany bed, topped with silk turquoise sheets and round pillows.

Samira looks surprised.

SHAHNAZ
Why they bring us here??

SAMIRA

I don't know. Are we still in
Kandahar?? Maybe we were kidnapped
by the king!

SHAHNAZ

I'm scared.

SAMIRA

Me too honey... Me too.

A door slams somewhere. The sound of footsteps... Getting
closer... The girls listen carefully to a subdued
conversation outside.

Shahnaz looks horrified as she moves closer to Samira while
keeping an eyes on the door.

The door suddenly opens, and Mohammad Wali walks in with
three men. Shahnaz gasps in horror.

A fourth man is ushered into the room.

THE CLERIC, forty, a serene man whose beard and glasses make
him appear older than his age... He carries a copy of the
Quran in his right hand.

Wali paints a thin smile over his lips as he looks at
Shahnaz... He eyes then shift to Samira.

MOHAMMAD WALI

(gloating, with heavy
accent)

No American army here ha?

He bursts out in a evil laugh.

SAMIRA

What do you want from us! LEAVE US
ALONE!

MOHAMMAD WALI

I want my wife!!

SAMIRA

(loud)

Go marry someone your own age, you
creep!!

He takes a step forward and suddenly SLAPS her hard across
the face, sending her FLYING to the ground, blood SPATTERING
from her mouth.

BUT SHE IS STILL DEFIANT.

SAMIRA
And you call yourself a MAN!! YOU
GODDAMN BASTARD!!

The clerk shakes as he takes a step backwards. Wali advances again at Samira. Shahnaz screams and tries to push him away, but he shoves her to the side like a feather, then raises his hand and is about to strike Samira...

MAN (O.S.)
WALI!!

Wali stops... It's MULLAH YAQUB, standing at the door, shooting him with a deadly glare, behind him is the twosome who kidnapped the girls.

Wali retreats.

Mullah Yaqub then says something to him in Pashtu, something apparently harsh because Wali reacts defensively as he responds to the Mullah and points his finger at Samira.

The mullah then says something else and motions for Wali and his men to step out. Wali hesitates for a moment as he takes a deep breath, then walks out of the room with his men.

Shahnaz runs to Samira.

SHAHNAZ
Samira!!

SAMIRA
(keeping an eye on the
Mullah)
I'm OK!

Mullah Yaqub closes the door, then sits on a large chair across from the girls.

He reaches inside his pocket and takes out a small silver container and opens it to reveal fresh, neatly packed tobacco on one side, and tobacco paper in the other.

He raises his eye brow and looks at Samira.

MULLAH YAQUB
What is your name...

He speaks very good English, almost no accent.

SAMIRA

Samira.

He slowly nods, then takes a paper and lays in it a line of tobacco, then licks one side and rolls it gently.

He lights it and takes a long drag, releases the smoke as he closes his eyes for a second, then looks at Samira.

MULLAH YAQUB

My name is mullah Yaqub.

SAMIRA

I know who you are. I saw you at the building this morning... Please help us, this man, Wali, had us kidnapped and brought us here to his house. Please help us.

MULLAH YAQUB

This is MY house...

Samira looks very surprised.

SAMIRA

I don't understand. Why did you do this? What do you want from us?

MULLAH YAQUB

(very calm)

Mohammad Wali paid me to bring his WIFE to him... That's why.

SAMIRA

Shahnaz is NOT his wife, he's old enough to be her father! This is NOT fair!

He takes another long drag...

MULLAH YAQUB

And who are you to come here, to our country and tell us what's fair and what's NOT!

SAMIRA

This is my country, too. I am Afghani!

He murmurs few words to her in Pashtu. Samira quickly looks at Shahnaz.

SHAHNAZ

(whispering)

He said you are not Afghani, you are American.

SAMIRA

OK fine, I'm an American, but I will still tell you this is NOT fair. In America people go to prison for that.

MULLAH YAQUB

(shakes his head)

America America... You think America is fair? There is NOTHING fair about America!

SAMIRA

At least we don't burn schools and kill innocent people just because they want education to better their lives, at least we don't force young girls to marry old men, old enough to be their grandfathers... At least we have JUSTICE in America, but here, you took it away from your own people, you, the Taliban, you stole their innocence in the name of religion!

He keeps staring at her calmly until she finishes...

MULLAH YAQUB

So you have justice in America...

SAMIRA

Yes we do!

He nods repeatedly.

MULLAH YAQUB

You think I'm Taliban?

She doesn't answer. She just looks at him.

MULLAH YAQUB

Do you?

SAMIRA

Yes I do.

MULLAH YAQUB

Well I am not! I am Afghani and they are NOT... And I did not burn the school and I did not kill the women and the teacher, the Taliban did... They did it and did alot of horrible things in my country, but I'm sure you know that because you seem to watch alot of news... On Television, like all you Americans do. But do you know who brought the Taliban here? Do you know who gave them money and weapons?

She hesitates for a moment then shakes her head.

MULLAH YAQUB

I will tell you. It's the Americans...

SAMIRA

I don't believe you! My country would never do such a thing!

MULLAH YAQUB

I know you don't believe me! Because you have been brainwashed and you will believe whatever they tell you on CNN, They tell you what YOU want to hear and believe, but the truth is, America is no different than Afghanistan, you just kill people NICELY, in a civilized manner with a smart cruise missile from the air... So, young lady, don't come to me, to my country and tell me what is fair and what is not... Please do not insult me.

She takes a deep breath, then slowly nods.

MULLAH YAQUB

Now, you were told to leave. Why didn't you?

SAMIRA

I wanted to. So many times, but I couldn't.

SAMIRA(cont'd)

I wanted to help Mister Hussein and the women at the school, after that, my cousin Shahnaz tried to burn herself so she wouldn't have to marry that creep. And I couldn't leave her alone.

She picks up Shahnaz's arm and rolls up her sleeve, then flashes it.

SAMIRA

Look at the scars she has. She poured Kerosene on herself... Kerosene!

MULLAH YAQUB

Her father agreed to the marriage!

SAMIRA

See? That's what I'm talking about! You treat women as if they were sheep! This girl is only fourteen! She just wants to go to school! She just wants a normal life! She is a poor little girl and she's not asking for money, all she wants is to live a normal life. Is this too much to ask for in this country?

He keeps staring at her.

SAMIRA

Mullah Yaqub. I beg you to listen to me, sir. If that man marries Shahnaz I assure you she will kill herself. So right now this girl's life is in your hands, because you brought us here, to your house... Please. Please think of her as your own daughter.

MULLAH YAQUB

My daughter married when she was thirteen.

Samira is shocked...

SAMIRA

... Is she happy? Do you talk to her? Do you ask her if she is happy?

Mullah Yaqub rolls his eyes then gets up and leaves the room. Shahnaz squeezes hard on samira's hand.

SHAHNAZ

Samira I am very scared. Mullah
Yaqub will give me to Wali.

SAMIRA

Over my dead body!

Minutes later the door opens again and Mullah Yaqub walks in
with Mohammad Wali. Shahnaz screams in horror.

MULLAH YAQUB

Get up. Both of you.

SAMIRA

NO! You will have to kill us
first!!

Yaqub walks to Shahnaz and reaches with his hand to her.
Samira suddenly slaps his hand hard as she shields Shahnaz
behind her.

SAMIRA

I SAID YOU HAVE TO KILL US FIRST!

MULLAH YAQUB

Real Afghanis don't kill innocent
people... Get up and go, you two
are free. I paid all her father's
debts, the marriage agreement is
over.

Samira stares at him for a long moment, taking it in.
Mohammad Wali turns and leaves the room.

EXT. THE MARINE'S BASE - AFTERNOON

A LAND CRUISER and a pick-up truck pull near the front gate,
next to Hameed's van. Colonel Martin is talking to Karim and
Sara, next to them is Anthony, Jeremy and Sean. All eyes on
the Cruiser now.

Samira opens the back door and runs to her parents.

SARA

OH MY GOD! SAMIRA!

Samira throws herself into her mother's arms, and in seconds
a circle tightens around them.

Samira looks for Shahnaz and finds her, few feet away... Sara
looks at her.

SARA
Shahnaz?

SAMIRA
Yes, mom. This is Shahnaz.

Sara is in tears.

SARA
She looks like her mom.

Mullah Yaqub steps out of the Land Cruiser. Colonel Martin gives him a warm hand shake.

COLONEL MARTIN
Mullah Yaqub, it's always good to see you, sir.

MULLAH YAQUB
You too, Colonel. Always a pleasure.

COLONEL MARTIN
I owe you one, personally.

The mullah smiles and nods as he turns to go back to the car. Samira runs to him.

SAMIRA
Mullah Yaqub.

He looks at her.

SAMIRA
Why... Why did you do this?

He takes a deep breath and turns to walk away. Stops and turns again.

MULLAH YAQUB
My daughter. She killed herself after two weeks... With Kerosene.

Samira slowly nods.

MULLAH YAQUB
You go back home now?

She nods.

MULLAH YAQUB
Will you miss Kandahar?

SAMIRA
I don't want to.

He nods, then walks to the car. She looks at him for a long moment, then waves goodbye.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

SUPER: FOUR YEARS LATER

EXT. LOS ANGELES - EARLY MORNING - MONTAGE

The morning mist lay low as the city of Los Angeles wakes. Rustic metal gates roll open.

A dark, tanned hand lifts a plump red apple, brings it to an anonymous nose then places into a box with other apples.

MOVING THROUGH... Slowly winding over city streets... Downtown scrappers dot the skyline.... Outdoor cafes serving breakfast.

And finally arriving to Samira's house in Beverly Hills.

INT. SAMIRA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Samira is in the kitchen making breakfast. She is a bit thinner now and has highlights in her hair. She pours coffee into four cups, then places each cup next to a plate of pancakes on the breakfast table.

SAMIRA
(looking upstairs)
Breakfast is ready everyone! Come
on the panckes are getting cold!

Karim comes down the stairs, still fixing his tie.

KARIM
I have no idea why you have to
announce breakfast like that every
morning.

Sara walks out of the bedroom, rubbing her eyes.

SAMIRA
(louder)
I said EVERYONE!

Another bedroom door opens and SHAHNAZ walks out, then runs downstairs in a hurry.

She is now an eighteen year-old beauty, taller, fuller and prettier than ever. She wears a long-sleeve shirt, long skirt and white scarf.

SHAHNAZ
(in perfect English)
What time do they open??

SARA
Why? What?

SAMIRA
The frame store. She wants to go
buy a frame for her degree.

SARA
But I thought we are going
shopping?!

SHAHNAZ
We are?

SARA
(rolling her eyes)
That's what you said last night.

Karim checks his watch, takes a long sip of coffee then gets up.

KARIM
I'm late. I'm out of here!

SARA
OK honey, see you later.

He leaves.

SARA
So you two are going out and
leaving me alone as usual!

Shahnaz hugs her and kisses her.

SHAHNAZ
Mom, I promise we'll be back by
noon...
(winks at Samira)
Right?

Samira winks and nods. Sara rolls her eyes.

SARA
Fine! I will not take you with me
tomorrow to San Diego!

EXT. MELROSE AVENUE - DAY

Samira and Shahnaz appear walking hand in hand. They are passing store windows... Each display is more beautiful and expensive than the one before.

Samira puts her hand on a leather belt displayed at the front of a store, then looks inside.

SAMIRA
(loud)
Five bucks for this belt, take it
or leave it.

GIRL (O.S.)
Noway! I'll take ten!

SAMIRA
Forget it!

She turns to walk. Shahnaz is cracking up.

GIRL (O.S.)
WAIT!

INT. TONY'S CAFE - PATIO - LATER

Kate is sipping on wine.

Samira and Shahnaz walk in. Hugs and kisses as they sit.

KATE
You guys are late, as usual.

SHAHNAZ
(smiling)
I'll take all the blame this time.

That same waitress brings more wine to the table, and orange juice for Shahnaz.

WAITRESS
(to Samira)
What happened to you last night?
Everyone was asking about you.

SAMIRA

I know, Suzie, I'm sorry I got so busy.

KATE

What are you guys talking about?

SAMIRA

I'm taking a screenwriting class with Susie. Remember those letters that you gave me? The ones I sent you from Afghanistan?

KATE

You still have those?

SAMIRA

Yes, of course. Suzie saw them the other day and thought we should write a screenplay based on them. Shahnaz is going to help us.

KATE

Hey I like this, sounds like a good idea. What are you going to call it?

Samira looks at Shahnaz and holds her hand.

SAMIRA

The princess of Kandahar.

Kate brings her glass up for a toast.

KATE

To the princess... And to old friends!

"Cheers" all around.

INT. SAMIRA'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - NIGHT

Shahnaz looks up and points.

SHAHNAZ

... Right there. That's your star.

Samira looks at her and smiles.

SAMIRA

Who would have thought.

SHAHNAZ

Thought what?

SAMIRA

That you will end up living with me here in America, and will graduate from high school with honor, and will grow to become the most beautiful girl... I can't believe I almost lost you there.

SHAHNAZ

I know. I don't know if I ever thanked you for saving my life. So thank you.

SAMIRA

You saved mine right back.

SHAHNAZ

I did?

SAMIRA

Yes, in so many ways.

Shahnaz smile at her, then looks up again.

SAMIRA

By the way, I have something to show you.

Samira reaches for a piece of cloth on the table, unfolds it and displays it. It's a BURKA.

SHAHNAZ

Oh my god!

She takes it from Samira.

SAMIRA

It's my mom's. She kept it all these years.

Shahnaz stares at it.

SHAHNAZ

I wish they make the holes a bit bigger, makes it easier to breath.

Samira rolls her eyes.

SHAHNAZ

You know, if I could punish the Taliban for what they did to us, I'd make them wear a burka, just for oneday, so they would know how it feels to live all your life under a shadow.

SAMIRA

I agree. But those days are gone now, and you should start thinking about college.

Shahnaz looks at her for a long moment.

SHAHNAZ

Samira, I'm going back.

SAMIRA

What? Where??

SHAHNAZ

To Kandahar...

SAMIRA

Shahnaz, don't be crazy! There's nothing for you there!

SHAHNAZ

Yes there is. Alot! I want to go back and build the school and start all over. I owe it to mister Hussein... To sister Kathrine and to the women who died there.

Samira is nearly in tears.

SAMIRA

Please don't do this, Shahnaz, please. They will kill you. You can't fight these people.

SHAHNAZ

I can't fight them alone, I know that. But if I, and everyone else think this way, how are we going to build our country? We can't let the good people leave and the bad ones stay... Someone has to start something and hopefully others will finish the job...

SHAHNAZ(cont'd)

Sister kathrine, mister Hussein,
the women and you started it, and
now it's my turn to finish it.

Samira looks at her for a very long moment, then brings her
closer and takes her in her arms.

THE END