



PRECIOUS METTLE

By

AN ARM & A LEG

BLACK SCREEN:

An EXPLOSION, followed by high pitch ringing.

Muffled yells and scuffles in the background.

The ringing slowly subsides, and the muffled voices get clearer.

MALE VOICE #1

Johnny...Johnny! Are you okay?

MALE VOICE #2

Is he bleeding anywhere?

MALE VOICE #1

I don't think so. Holy shit,
Boulder. He looks okay!

MALE VOICE #2

Dude. Come on, man, wake up.

FADE IN:

A pinpoint of light begins to enlarge and overtake the black screen. The white light turns to sky blue. This is-

JOHNNY'S POV:

Blurred images of two concerned soldiers with visored helmets come into focus. They lean in from both his right and left. They wear flak vests over their desert camo fatigues.

The soldier on the left has BETTY BAIT scrawled on the front of his helmet. The soldier on the right has BOUNDER on his helmet.

BETTY

Ah-ha, there's my man!

Boulder extends his middle finger in field of view.

BOUNDER

Johnny, how many fingers am I
holding up?

Johnny slaps the hand aside and begins to sit up.

JOHNNY (OS)

Fuck you. Gimme a hand.

EXT. BAGRAM AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN - SUNSET

The three minesweepers are in a high-desert setting surrounded by a snow topped mountain range. The military base is on the distant horizon.

SUPER: BAGRAM AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN 2007

Betty and Bounder stand and extend a helping hand to get Johnny on his feet.

BETTY

Dude, we thought you bought it,
for sure.

Johnny is helmetless. He hits the side of his head with the heel of his hand, opens and closes his mouth in a forced yawn.

JOHNNY

Mah-mah-mwah!

BOUNDER

Yeah, man. The way you flew back
like that? Sorry, man, but it was
comical.

Johnny brushes the dirt and dust from his fatigues.

JOHNNY

Happy to be your comic relief,
douchebag.

Johnny holds one nostril closed and blows a streamer of bloody snot on the ground.

JOHNNY

What the hell was that?

BOUNDER

I.E.D.

BETTY

Probably a 105mm setup with nylon fishing line your unit didn't detect.

BOUNDER

It must have been you that stepped on it. Betty and I don't have a scratch on us.

JOHNNY

I don't know how you got off without getting all fucked up. You were, like, right next to me.

BETTY

I know, right? Look at us!

Betty and Bounder have arms around each other and take a sarcastic bow.

Johnny laughs and looks around.

JOHNNY

Hey, ah, either of you seen-

BETTY

Your sweeper? Don't bother looking.

BOUNDER

Yeah, you don't need it no more. Besides, we don't have a bucket for all the pieces.

JOHNNY

What about my lid?

BETTY

Nah, forget about it. You don't need your helmet either.

BOUNDER

Let's beat feet.

Betty and Bounder heft their PSS-14 mine detectors over their shoulders and start to walk towards the setting sun.

They pause, look at each other, and decide to leave their detectors too.

Betty turns to Johnny.

BETTY

Come on, Johnny. We're done here.

BOUNDER

Yeah, don't be a hero. It's not worth it.

Johnny looks around for a moment. He arches his back to stretch and shivers. He tries to shake-off the aftershock.

He begins to follow his mates when he hears a faraway and distorted voice call out-

VOICE (VO)

Johnny...

Johnny stops and looks about. Not seeing anyone, he continues-

VOICE (VO)

Johnny!

Johnny jumps and turns around. He shouts to his mates.

JOHNNY

Did you call me?

They don't turn around. Betty just raises a hand high and waves for him to follow.

His mates have tossed their helmets aside and remove their flak vests as they walk.

VOICE (VO)

Stay with us, Johnny.

Johnny is totally creeped out and whirls around again.

JOHNNY

What the fuck, man?!

VOICE (VO)

Come on, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Fuh-hu-huck this.

Johnny turns and runs after his mates.

Betty and Bounder have walked quite a distance and are silhouetted by the setting sun.

JOHNNY

Guys...wait up!

Johnny holds a hand up and squints at the setting sun.

Betty and Bounder are imperceptible against the bright light.

Johnny runs as fast as he can to catch up.

VOICE (VO)

Oh, no, you don't!

The sun is almost below the horizon and his mates are nowhere to be seen.

Johnny stops mid-stride, as if frozen.

JOHNNY

What the fu-?

He begins to skid backwards. He drops to his hands and knees and begins to claw at the ground.

JOHNNY

No, no, no! I don't want to-

It's no use. Johnny continues the slide backwards. It's an irresistible force.

VOICE (VO)

Got him!

The sun sets below the horizon.

Cut to black:

From silence comes a sudden crescendo of muffled shouts and a steady 'Wop-Wop-Wop' of an approaching helicopter.

FADE IN:

EXT. BAGRAM AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN - DAY

A Blackhawk medivac helicopter touches down and kicks up a whirlwind of dust.

A MEDIC is already on the ground and actively tends to Johnny. He's lost one leg and an arm.

To Johnny's right and left lie Betty and Bounder. Both have missing limbs and coverings over their heads. They're both dead.

The Medic pats Johnny's cheek.

MEDIC

Johnny? Johnny? You with me?

Johnny stirs and his eyes flutter. He looks at the Medic with his remaining, blood-filled, angry eye.

Blood flows from his mouth when tries to talk.

MEDIC

Don't try to talk. I got ya, Bud.
You'll get a medal for this, you
know. You'll go home a hero.

FADE OUT

THE END