

EXT. DESERT (SAND DUNES) - DAY

CAPTAIN GABBY DAVIS stands alone on desert sand. The wind blows around her. Her skin is jet against bleached rocks and sky. She holds an M-16, braced in the crook of her arm. She is surrounded by a half-hearted wall of sand bags.

Several feet away is another structure of sandbags. In it, SERGEANT MATTHEW MCCLAIN, 21, sans helmet, buzz cut exposed, dozes away.

Between them, across the dusty groove called the road, stretch two saw-horses painted with red and white stripes.

Gabby watches a cloud of smoke billowing along in the distance.

It appears to her as a dreadful sand beast barreling down the road, eyes dark and evil, mouth snarling like a bear, forked tongue licking the dry ground. Fire and smoke form its fearsome dust-plume tail.

Rightfully uncertain of her eyes, Gabby watches this beast approach along the pale scar of road with growing terror. It gets closer, larger, more menacing. She glances nervously at McClain, still asleep.

The "beast" stops a few feet away. It is an old black Camry with a man inside. He rolls down his window.

DRIVER
(in broken, heavily
accented English)
Hello, captain!

Gabby stows her weapon and steps towards the car.

The driver, MOSEN, a greasy 30-something guy with a snaggle-toothed smile, pulls something from the car's glove compartment.

GABBY
Hey Mosen. How's your wife?

Mosen tosses a small sack to Gabby. She snatches it out of the air and reaches inside, takes out a dried fig, tosses it in her mouth.

MOSEN
She is...

He makes a rounding motion over his belly.

GABBY
Congratulations.

From her own belt, she produces a crumpled carton of cigarettes. Mosen waves them off, but she tosses them to him anyway.

GABBY
Get some cash for them...sounds
like you'll need it.

He smiles. Gabby pulls aside one of the saw-horses to let him pass.

He waves and drives off, kicking up more dust.

EXT. DESERT - DUSK

Gabby shields her eyes and squints at the horizon watching another watery image hurtles towards her.

The figure gets closer, its outline filling in with colors: white, blue, olive green. It barrels directly towards her without slowing. Gabby grips her M-16.

In an instant, the blurred image resolves itself into a sweaty young woman wearing a white tank top and fatigues. Medical Specialist SHEILA MORALES slams into Gabby full force. They both fall over.

Gabby lands hard on her ass, bracing her M-16 to keep it from hitting the ground.

GABBY
Watch it!

Sheila rolls over, covered in yellow dust, laughing. The tan on her shoulders has crimsoned under the sun and sweat-matted bangs stick to her forehead.

SHEILA
(laughing)
What? You've got your safety on.

Gabby sits up out of the sand and irritably locks the safety on her gun.

SHEILA
Shit...! Who'd you think I was?

GABBY
I knew it was you.

Gabby gets back up to her feet.

SHEILA
Rough day?

GABBY
Busy.

SHEILA
A customer? Everything okay?

GABBY
I knew him. That fig guy.

SHEILA
Did you have to shoot him?

Gabby gives her a look.

Sheila stands, shedding a waterfall of sand. Gabby looks down into Sheila's blue eyes and reddened cheeks. Her skin glows, illuminated from the ricocheting light like a flash bulb.

SHEILA
I'm just kidding, Captain...

Sheila reaches out and eases the gun-strap from Gabby's shoulder, pries her fingers gently away from the barrel. Gabby lets her take the gun. Sheila jabs the butt end hard into the sand and smiles up into Gabby's silk-brown eyes.

INT. TENT - DAY

Showered, wearing a fresh white T-shirt and her dog tags, Sheila sits at a table inside a drab army tent. She picks at a plate of food, sucking fruit juice off of her fingers, tearing apart a piece of bread.

She is surrounded by a group of young male G.I.s, McClain and others, running their hands over their buzz cuts, joking roughly with each the way boys do.

For a moment...

Instead of the white T-shirts and desert camouflage, all the GIs are in trucker hats, leather jackets, filthy ripped jeans and work boots. Sheila is up on the table in a sexy red dress twirling a feather boa, stepping among the plastic dinner trays in stilettos.

STRIPPER MUSIC plays inexplicably and colored dots of light float around inside the tent from an unseen disco ball.

Gabby appears in the white triangle of light at the tent flaps. As she enters she glances up at Sheila on the table. They share a look, two tiny smiles...

The spell is broken...

Everyone is suddenly back in the tent as before. The GIs are GIs. Sheila is seated at the table, wearing her fatigues, still picking at her food.

Gabby takes off her gear, stowing it with practiced efficiency. When everything is carefully checked, locked and piled, she sits down.

The soldier next to her, MUNCIE, a sweet-faced 19 year old farm-boy, slides a plate of food over to her.

MUNCIE

Here.

GABBY

Thanks.

Gabby eats hungrily. Sheila looks over at her and smiles. McClain grunts.

GABBY

(around a mouthful of
food)

Shut the fuck up, McClain.

The table laughs.

MCCLAIN

I didn't say anything, Cap!

GABBY

You forget that I can hear right
inside that hick brain of yours.

Laughter erupts from the table. McClain looks about to say something.

GABBY (CONT'D)

I heard that.

More laughter.

MCCLAIN

Whatever.

GABBY

And speaking of. If I ever catch you without your flak jacket and helmet again, it's night watch for a month. We all have to wear this shit, you know.

MCCLAIN

Yeah, I know. Protection against the terrorists hiding in the sand dunes. Or maybe the shower? Or right here among us...Muncie, is that you...?

SGT. CARRILLO, 19, a short stocky kid with a clean-shaven skull, leans forward, interrupting.

SGT. CARRILLO

Hey, did you guys hear what happened yesterday? Over in A Company, back at base?

ANOTHER GI

Yeah, I heard about it. It was their tactics guy. What's his name? Laredo?

SGT. CARRILLO

Yeah.

The men around the table concentrate on their dinner plates, used to hearing stories their young minds shouldn't yet have to bear.

MCCLAIN

(impatiently)

So what happened to him?

SGT. CARRILLO

He killed a kid.

MUNCIE

A kid?

SGT. CARRILLO

Yeah, like a little 9-year-old kid.

MCCLAIN

In cold blood?

SGT. CARRILLO

Yeah. Thing is. The fuckin' kid had an AK.

MUNCIE

Poor Laredo.

GABBY

What? He's still alive isn't he?

Gabby concentrates on her meal. The men look at her.

GABBY (CONT'D)

We're in a fucking war. What do we think is happening out there?

SHEILA

Jesus, Gabby...

GABBY

They do what they have to do. And so do we. Not because we like it. That's what war is.

SHEILA

Speak for yourself.

MCCLAIN

I'm pretty sure I could do it.
 (caresses his biceps under
 the sleeves of his T-
 shirt)
 I'll fuckin' shoot anything when I
 get going!

Someone throws something at him. Sheila laughs. It is a free and lofty sound amidst the coarse bass rumbles.

MCCLAIN

No, I'm serious. I just close my eyes and squeeze the trigger! These crazy towel-heads...their fucking mules have AK's for christsake! What are we supposed to do?
 (beat for scattered laughter)
 Or...you know? They'll just strap some C4 on the fucking mule and chase it down the road!

The men open their mouths and howl, even kind-faced Muncie laughs, way down in his belly. The two women do not. Gabby's hand flies out still attached to a fork and slaps McClain's shoulder.

MCCLAIN

Ow! Shit, boss. I was joking.

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