

Charmaine The Shield

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Fade In.

INT. CHARMAINE AND WILLIAM'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

WILLIAM, Charmaine's husband (late 50's), lies on his back, open-mouth snoring - not the most attractive sight. As he rolls over in bed the motion carries the camera away, out through a doorway and into the hall.

At the end of the hall in a small laundry is Charmaine's generous backside beneath a dowdy house dress. CHARMAINE bends over awkwardly, a mountain of clothes at her feet. Grunting with effort, she struggles to stuff the clothes into an old front-load washing machine.

SUPER ACROSS HER BACKSIDE: CHARMAINE THE SHIELD
CROSS FADE TO: JANUARY, 2003

INT. KITCHEN -- MORNING

Charmaine struggles toward the back door with two large garbage bags, as VERONICA, her fourteen-year-old daughter, enters from the hall. She is bleary-eyed and still in a nightdress.

VERONICA
What's for breakfast, ma?

CHARMAINE
Oh, there's eggs on.

Their accents reveal we are in Ireland. With the bags in her hands Charmaine has trouble opening the back door. Veronica watches, oblivious and impatient.

VERONICA
Not scrambled again, ma? You know I don't like the scrambled.

CHARMAINE
(struggling through the doorway)
Oh, sorry, luv, forgot, but your brothers like scrambled.

VERONICA
Oh, that's right, worry about them loafers, not me.

Charmaine finally makes it out the door.

CHARMAINE (outside)
 Sorry, darlin'.

EXT. CHARMAINE'S HOUSE -- MORNING

While Charmaine stuffs the garbage into an over-full bin, the setting reveals the family home is an unremarkable dwelling in an unremarkable, lower middle-class street.

INT. KITCHEN -- MORNING

As Charmaine enters, two of her sons, TONY (17) and JOSH (21), help themselves to a pot of tea already on the table, where Veronica now sits sulking. Tony is in his pajamas while Josh is in the process of dressing (as a white collar worker) for the day. Charmaine goes straight to the stove to check on the eggs.

William comes to the kitchen doorway, buttoning up his overalls. He looks sternly at his mug in Tony's hand.

WILLIAM
 Here, you, get your own.

TONY
 Why, da?

WILLIAM
 That's mine.

TONY
 Already drunk from it.

WILLIAM
 So now it's a point of honor.

Tony rolls his eyes and is about to fetch another mug when Charmaine places one on the table beside him.

CHARMAINE
 (taking William's mug to rinse it)
 Sorry, luv, forgot to put one out for you.

TRUDY, an attractive sixteen-year-old pushes past her father. Her blouse is undone, showing a black bra. She is doing up the blouse as she proceeds. William notices as she goes past.

WILLIAM

Here, you, don't come out like that.

TRUDY

Like what, da?

WILLIAM

Doin' up your buttons.

TRUDY

You're doin' up yours.

WILLIAM

I don't have titties, do I.

Veronica guffaws.

CHARMAINE

Oh, don't say titties, William.

TRUDY

(indicating her brothers)

They won't look.

WILLIAM

They're men and men look, and besides, it's me I'm protecting.

The children grin as he comes to join them at the table. As he sits like a lord waiting to be served, Charmaine appears by his shoulder to dish up scrambled eggs to his plate. He ignores her in favor of studying Veronica.

WILLIAM

So what's this I hear about you on the doss last week?

Charmaine freezes guiltily, and Veronica glares at her.

VERONICA

You told him?!

CHARMAINE

(working on)

He's your father, dear.

VERONICA

But you...

WILLIAM

Never mind that, I'd've found out.
Ask the boys, I got a sixth sense for
trouble, not that I need it for a
billboard like you. Now I'm telling
you this and this is the last time,
you fool with boys and you'll be
pregnant and thrown out of school and
have a little bastard no one will
ever want...

VERONICA

We weren't foolin' with boys, da!

WILLIAM

Then what was you doin'?

TONY

Foolin' with boys, da, it's her and
that whore, Jody Lonegan...

WILLIAM

(said as routine without looking at Tony)
Shut your cakehole, Tony, (to
Veronica) Now listen, you're my baby,
Veroncia, and touch wood thank you
very much your big sister at least
made it to the work force without
gettin' herself knocked up...

TRUDY

Well I'm not knocked up now!

CHARMAINE

Oh, can't you say 'in the family
way', William.

WILLIAM (to Veronica)

See, now you've upset your mother.
That's your kind of trouble, and
there's trouble enough in the world
without making your kind. Three
minutes of selfish pleasure and
you'll be paying for it the rest of
your life.

JOSH

Is that all you can last, da? Three minutes?

WILLIAM

When I was fifteen and in my village that was considered a Gaelic record.

JOSH

Lifted your game since then, have you?

WILLIAM

For your information y'mother just entered me in the sexual Olympics. Stockholm.

CHARMAINE

Oh, shut up, you, disgusting, talking to the boys like that, and in front of the girls too.

WILLIAM

Times are changing, mother. We all got to change with the times.

He pats her bottom and she slaps his hand. The family is amused as Charmaine continues to serve, shaking her head.

INT. HOUSE FOYER -- DAY

William lurches down a stairwell as with perfect timing Charmaine comes from the kitchen downstairs, carrying various lunch boxes. She meets William at the bottom of the stairs and hands him a lunch box and thermos. He turns and yells upstairs.

WILLIAM

Will you shake a bloody leg, Tony!

CHARMAINE

Don't swear, dear.

Josh flies down the stairs past them and almost hurtles through the front doorway.

CHARMAINE

Here's your packup, Josh!

He doubles back, grabs it, and kisses Charmaine's cheek.

JOSH

Oh, ta, mum. Bye then. Bye, da.

Trudy comes from another room adjoining the foyer.

TRUDY

I won't be home 'til late, alright.

WILLIAM

Oh, late is it? And what're you thinkin' late would be?

TRUDY

Twelve?

WILLIAM

Where?

TRUDY

A girlfriend's.

WILLIAM

Look, you and your sister should know I weren't born yesterday.

TRUDY

I am going round a girlfriend's, da. And we know it were last Friday.

CHARMAINE

Mm, had the cord round his neck n'all, poor thing.

They nod to each other, not smiling.

WILLIAM

What girlfriend where?

TRUDY

(pointing)

Stephanie's. Three blocks down.

WILLIAM

Make it eleven.

TRUDY

Da-a! Ma, say something!

CHARMAINE

Well...

WILLIAM

Just because you got a job doesn't mean you're able to stay out all hours, young lass. Now go on, head off.

Trudy is leaving but Charmaine holds out a lunch bag to her.

TRUDY

Told you, ma, I'm on a diet.

CHARMAINE

But I made it.

TRUDY

(half out the door)

Well it's not my fault you don't listen.

WILLIAM

Hey, cmereawantcha.

He takes the bag from Charmaine and hands it to her.

WILLIAM

Eat it for supper. Now kiss your ma and say ta.

Trudy reluctantly obeys, kissing Charmaine.

TRUDY

Ta. (To William) You're not getting one.

WILLIAM

It's lonely at the top.

Trudy is leaving.

WILLIAM

...And do up your button!

Trudy pokes her tongue.

WILLIAM (confidentially to Charmaine)
Buy her them rubbers like I asked?

Charmaine nods. William does not take his eyes off Charmaine as he immediately bellows.

WILLIAM
Tony!!

Charmaine is startled, William looks up the stairs.

WILLIAM
Get your arse down here now!

CHARMAINE
Oh, don't say arse, William.

WILLIAM
(kissing her cheek)
Well I want that bit on top of his
legs, mother, so what's that bit
then?

CHARMAINE
I'd be more worried why you want that
bit.

Tony, wearing a school uniform, galumphs down the stairs.

WILLIAM
(nodding toward their son)
'Cause it's attached to his willie
and he'll follow that anywhere.

Charmaine grins, slaps William, and hands Tony his lunch.

TONY
(kissing her)
Oh, ta, mum. (confidential) Aim for
the chin next time.

WILLIAM
(going through the door)
What were you doing up there? Taking
a bloody crap?

TONY

(going through the door)

Was tying me tie, da, I can't get me
bloody tie to tie.

They continue out of the house, talking. Charmaine groans at the language. Left with only one lunch box in her hand she turns and encounters Veronica coming along the hall.

VERONICA

(taking the lunch box)

Not talking.

CHARMAINE

But you don't...

VERONICA

You didn't have to tell him, you
promised you wouldn't.

CHARMAINE

But your father writes the notes,
dear.

VERONICA

Oh, that's right, I forgot, you can't
write can you, 'cause he's the head
of the house, isn't he!

CHARMAINE

Well that's not very...

Veronica slams the front door.

CHARMAINE

...nice.

Charmaine sighs, shakes her head and begins to go down the hall toward the kitchen. The front door suddenly opens. Charmaine looks round.

VERONICA

Well, where is it?

CHARMAINE

What?

VERONICA

The note!

CHARMAINE

Oh, sorry...

She crosses to a side table, opens a drawer and takes out a note, which she hands to Veronica.

VERONICA

Well, where'd he say I was?

CHARMAINE

Oh, told him the dentist.

VERONICA

What? Ma, I can't say I was at the dentist all day! Couldn't you come up with something better than that?!

CHARMAINE

Well, I...

Veronica groans melodramatically and trudges away, slamming the door once more.

Charmaine looks down despondently, takes a crumpled handkerchief from her apron pocket and wipes her nose as she continues on to the kitchen.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- DAY

Charmaine stands at an ironing board with a mountain of washing beside her, working methodically to reduce the pile. Ironed shirts, blouses, skirts and trousers on coat-hangers surround her on the door and chairs.

A News segment comes on TV. Charmaine sighs and picks up the remote control, changing the channel. She gets another News segment. She groans, accepting fate.

CHARMAINE

(putting the remote aside)

And they say they don't swap notes.

NEWS: There is a small segment (archival) regarding impending war with Iraq. This is followed by a segment on a

group of Human Shields shown leaving England on two double-decker red buses.

NEWSREADER

And in stark contrast to preparations for war a group of pacifists calling themselves 'the League for Peace' left Dorset today bound for Iraq. The group plans to drive all the way to Iraq where they say they are prepared to act as Human Shields against any allied bombing of Iraqi civilian installations. Nigel Flanders has more.

AMANDA PATTERSON, a stoical, grey-haired woman, is being interviewed while standing before the door to a red double-decker bus. HUMAN SHIELD VOLUNTEERS board the bus behind her.

AMANDA

Our group feels that a message has to be sent to the leaders on both sides that ordinary people do not want war, and in fact are willing to place their lives on the line to avoid war.

Charmaine stops ironing, watching with interest.

NIGEL FLANDERS

But aren't you falling into the trap of playing Saddam's game? I mean, aren't you simply playing into the hands of a ruthless dictator...

AMANDA

We are not concerned with what Saddam Hussein or indeed Tony Blair or even George W. Bush are trying to achieve. We regard them as the problem, not ourselves. We are just ordinary people willing to risk our lives in order to demonstrate to these leaders and to the Iraqi people that we oppose war.

NIGEL FLANDERS

Yes, you say that, but your group really does smack of the lunatic fringe, doesn't it?

AMANDA

We are not intending to protect military targets, but we are prepared to protect civilian targets, and especially children, children who have already been so hardly done by during the sanctions. To me that is far less lunatic-like than someone picking up a gun and going to war for no good reason.

TV cuts back to the studio.

NEWSREADER

Well, better them than me. And Paul, you have some weather for us.

PAUL

Yes, well let's hope it doesn't come to that but I think I'll be staying home and watching it all on TV. Okay, weather today was mainly settled...

As TV continues Charmaine is deep in thought over what she has just seen.

EXT. PRIVATE GARAGE BESIDE CHARMAINE'S HOUSE -- DAY

There is a glimpse of William's car as he exits from their garage. He carries his empty lunch box and thermos and has a newspaper tucked under one arm. He enters the house through the side/back doorway.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Charmaine's backside sways as she has her head inside the oven, scrubbing hard.

William enters, stops, and looks at her backside.

WILLIAM

Now there's a sight for sore eyes.

CHARMAINE (head still in the oven)
Creating or soothing?

He doesn't answer as she exits the stove and looks at him.

WILLIAM

I'm thinking.

Charmaine goes back to scrubbing. He drops the thermos and lunch box on the kitchen table, and slaps her backside with the newspaper as he passes.

WILLIAM

Bring us a cuppa, luv.

CHARMAINE

Break y'leg did you?

WILLIAM (absently)

Oh, no hurry.

He exits to the sitting room. Charmaine sighs and begins to rise to her feet.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- DAY

William reads the newspaper as Charmaine enters, carrying his mug of tea. She notices the headlines referring to the pending war in Iraq. As she places the mug down:

CHARMAINE

Home early.

WILLIAM

(not lowering the paper)
Beauty of being a self-made man.
(flicking pages, irritated) God,
you'd think there was nothing else
happening but this bloody war.

CHARMAINE

(leaving)
Well, the footy's still on the back,
luv.

William snaps the newspaper down suddenly as if he has taken offence. Charmaine freezes. William stares for a long moment.

WILLIAM

Fancy a bit with the kids out, then?

Charmaine is taken a bit aback, but rallies, flattered.

CHARMAINE

Oh...alright, if you got the mood.

William considers.

WILLIAM

Nah.

He goes back to reading.

WILLIAM

Probably get interrupted. Just a thought.

Charmaine rolls her eyes and leaves the room.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

The News is on TV and William and Josh eat their meals and drink beer as Charmaine brings Tony's and Veronica's meals to them. The (archival) News is about the impending war with Iraq. (When Charmaine walks in front of the TV everyone peers round her impatiently.)

WILLIAM

If you ask me they should nuke everything round the lip of the Mediterranean. Bloody wogs.

CHARMAINE

Oh, don't be racist, William.

WILLIAM

Wogs start at Calais, darlin'. I'm being generous.

JOSH (laughing)

Well that's a point, da.

WILLIAM

You name me one country what has been civilized by wogs and I'll show you a bloody mess.

JOSH

Brazil.

WILLIAM

Bloody mess. Go on, give us another.

They laugh.

WILLIAM

All them South American dictators, just like this idjeet. They should just string 'em up by the thumbs.

JOSH

They should have stuck it to him last time, should have finished him off then.

WILLIAM

Oh, bloody yanks, no bottle. Go in there, make out they're big news dishing up a second-rater like him. Yanks are always last ones in, first ones out.

CHARMAINE

(leaving)

Oh, that's silly, William.

WILLIAM

Nothing silly about World Wars one and two!

Charmaine exits.

VERONICA

Wish they'd just get on with it. Why don't they just bomb his palace?

TONY

'Cause they never know which one he's in, you birk.

VERONICA

Don't call me a bloody birk!

WILLIAM

Hey, watch your bloody mouth, there.
Be a lady.

TONY

Birk.

WILLIAM

Shut your cakehole, Tony. (to Veronica)
You see, Darlin', Saddam Hussein has a
whole lot of palaces and he has all
them look-alike fellas, easy to do with
wogs 'cause they look so much alike,
plus he lives underground like the rat
he is. Oh he's a smart bastard, even
for a wog.

VERONICA

Yeah, but I just get so sick of them
talking about it all the while, why
don't they just do something. The
Americans should just go in there and
blow 'em up.

TONY

He just got through telling you the
yanks've got no bottle, Jesus,
Veronica.

Charmaine enters with her meal and hands William the salt.

CHARMAINE

Don't take the Lord's name in vain,
Tony, and look you're spilling gravy on
the pillow.

WILLIAM

(holding out an empty beer bottle)
Crack us some more before you sit down,
luv.

Charmaine puts her meal down and takes William's and Josh's
bottles to the kitchen.

WILLIAM (to Veronica)

No, trick is, luv, you got to go in and beat him fast. See the Frogs and the Krauts are in bed with 'em for the oil, so it just boils down to us and the yanks, and if the yanks can't win in two seconds they get all upset thinking they're having another Vietnam.

VERONICA

What's that?

WILLIAM

What's what?

VERONICA

A Vietnam?

TONY

It's a place, you birk.

VERONICA

Da, will you tell him to stop calling me that, I'm sick of it!

Charmaine enters, handing William and Josh their beers.

CHARMAINE

Stop teasing your sister, Tony. It's the little children I'm worried about, nobody thinks about the little children.

As she sits and puts her plate on her lap, she is unaware the rest of the family is staring at her.

JOSH

What's that, ma?

CHARMAINE

Well, someone was saying today that there's like half a million little children died since they brought in sanctions. It's like no one bothers to think about them little children.

JOSH

Well that's right, ma, that's the point. Saddam's got dozens of chefs, you know, he flies crates of lobsters in from the Bahamas for him and his mates and all the while his own people are starving. That's what he's done with that food for oil stuff.

CHARMAINE

Well I just think something should be done to help them children, that's all.

VERONICA

That's why I think they should just blow him up, stop all them people starving.

CHARMAINE

Oh, that's not very nice, Veronica, can't you think of anything better to do than blow people up? You know soldiers are boys just like your brothers are.

VERONICA

Sounds better all the time.

TONY

But sanctions don't work, ma. So, what would you do?

CHARMAINE

Well I don't know, maybe I'd...

WILLIAM

No, you don't know, mother, so give it a rest, let us watch.

Charmaine accepts the instruction and goes on eating. A second later William is gesticulating angrily at the TV.

WILLIAM

See, that's exactly what they shouldn't do! Give that bastard all this free air time! He's nothing but a modern day pirate, that's all, just a bloody pirate!

Charmaine eats her dinner, suppressing her feelings.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

It is late, and Charmaine dozes in a chair.

Outside a car door closes and the car can be heard driving away. Charmaine wakes as a key turns in the front door. As Trudy enters it brings Charmaine to her feet.

TRUDY

What are you doing, ma?

CHARMAINE

Waiting for you.

TRUDY

(tuts) Well good night then.

Charmaine tries to check her watch but her arm is not long enough for her to focus on it.

CHARMAINE

Here then, wait up, it's one in the morning.

TRUDY

Give it a rest, ma, I'm awful tired. Besides it's two.

She leaves for her room.

CHARMAINE

But you...

But Trudy is gone.

INT. TRUDY AND VERONICA'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Trudy sleeps beneath the covers. Charmaine enters, lifts a blind, pulls down the covers, and gently wakes her.

CHARMAINE

C'mon Trudy, luv, you'll be late for work now.

TRUDY

Oh...Oh, God...Oh, ma, me head feels like it's been split with a tommy hawk.

CHARMAINE

C'mon, you're already late, Trudy.

TRUDY

Oh, couldn't go in like this, ma, oh, oh, I'm so tired.

CHARMAINE

Well you should have thought of that last night. Two in the morning. What a disgrace.

TRUDY

Ma, could you do me a monster?

CHARMAINE

What?

TRUDY

Could you ring up and tell 'em I'm sick? I'll...I'll throw up if I go in like this.

CHARMAINE

Oh...alright, this once, but don't make a habit of it now.

She exits. Trudy grins, and rolls over in bed.

INT. KITCHEN -- MORNING

William, Josh, Tony and Veronica are at the table as Charmaine waits on them.

WILLIAM

Where's our Trudy-girl then?

TONY

Yeah, we're missing her titties.

Charmaine clouts him as she pours tea for him.

CHARMAINE

Oh, she's feeling poorly, poor thing,
I've rung in a sickie for her.

WILLIAM

(reading a newspaper)
She on time last night?

CHARMAINE

No, she were a half-hour late but I
gave her a good roasting for it.

WILLIAM

That's good, mother.

Not taking his eyes from the paper he holds his mug out.
Charmaine fills it.

INT. SUPERMARKET/MALL -- DAY

Charmaine comes from a supermarket. She tows two upright
shopping trolleys (her own property), packed high, and
although it is awkward, makes her way outside.

EXT. MALL -- DAY

Charmaine enters the street, pulling her carts. She becomes
aware of a man yelling abuse further ahead and stops to
stare at him.

ANGRY MAN, late middle-age, abuses ACTIVIST WOMAN, late
30's, as she stands behind a table which bears the placard:
"Human Shields For Peace".

ANGRY MAN

Yus are nothing but a pack of
traitors and idjeets as far as I'm
concerned and you should be arrested,
you should be locked up for what
you're doing here!... Etc.

Charmaine approaches. Behind him the man has an upright
shopping trolley, similar to her own. Activist Woman is
doing her best to placate Angry Man but he has wound himself
up into a fury.

Looking at Angry Man from behind, Charmaine's hand appears,
tapping him on the shoulder. He whirls round.

ANGRY MAN

What?!

CHARMAINE

I think that fella's nicking your trolley.

She indicates. Angry Man looks.

His trolley has been hooked over the tow bar on the back of a car, and the car is pulling out from the curb.

ANGRY MAN

Oh, my God! You! Stop! Thief!

As the car moves down the street, he gives chase.

Activist Woman grins at Charmaine.

ACTIVIST WOMAN

I saw that.

CHARMAINE

Oh. Sorry.

ACTIVIST WOMAN

Oh, no, he had me on the ropes. Was going down for the count.

Activist Woman grins at Charmaine, who grins back at her.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET -- DAY

Charmaine drags the heavy trolleys to the top of a steep hill, but has to stop to catch her breath, suffering.

As she breathes deeply she notices something.

Not far down an adjoining street Veronica, her GIRLFRIEND, and TWO TEENAGE BOYS enter a house. All wear school uniforms.

Charmaine sighs wearily and shakes her head.

INT. CHARMAINE'S HOUSE, SITTING ROOM - DAY

Charmaine falls into a chair, back from the shopping. She looks at the phone on the table beside her, wondering.

EXT. CHARMAINE'S HOUSE, BACK YARD -- DAY

Charmaine takes down the washing, with an enormous amount still on the lines. Veronica appears from the side of the house.

VERONICA

What times tea, ma?

CHARMAINE

Oh hello, darl, home from school then?

VERONICA

No, I'm on the high street bus, ma. Go shopping today?

CHARMAINE

You didn't notice them groceries inside?

VERONICA

D'you get them knickers I asked for, you know them bikini briefs?

CHARMAINE

No.

VERONICA

What? Oh, ma, how could you forget? I asked you for them three friggin' times!

CHARMAINE

Oh, swearing at your mother is it? All because you didn't get some sexy knickers for your boyfriend to stick his hand down.

VERONICA

What? What sort of talk's that?

CHARMAINE

You're the one swearing. Know this, Veronica, I'm not getting your father to write you no more notes. You're on your own now.

VERONICA (a bit unnerved)

Who said I wanted a note?

CHARMAINE

You can wear your sister's old knickers, and ask your father yourself for your notes.

VERONICA

What's brought this on then?

CHARMAINE

I don't like cheeky girls swearing at me, lying to me, and being ungrateful. Now go inside and unpack them groceries.

VERONICA

Will not.

CHARMAINE

Fine.

Charmaine goes on taking the washing down, and Veronica, finding her mother's behavior disturbing, watches her.

VERONICA

What's that about lying?

CHARMAINE

All four of you are up the office tomorrow, and the principal is already talking expulsion.

Veronica looks scared.

VERONICA

Never...Did he say that?

CHARMAINE

You're not having sex are you? You're too young.

VERONICA

No.

CHARMAINE

Mmm, but a few more excursions and you won't even need no knickers. You better tell your da, tonight, he'll hit the roof anyhow, but better first from you than the principal.

VERONICA

You can't tell him for me, can you? You know, do it special.

Charmaine considers.

CHARMAINE

Alright, but on two conditions.

Veronica waits.

CHARMAINE

You stop your waggin' and mind your studies.

VERONICA

I can do them.

CHARMAINE

No, that's one. The other is you go on inside and unpack them groceries.

Veronica grins, comes forward and hugs her. As they part Charmaine spits on her own hand and holds it out. Veronica spits on her own hand then shakes her mother's.

CHARMAINE

Now it's sacred.

They both cross themselves. Veronica nods and grins and goes inside. Charmaine watches her go for a moment and then continues taking the clothes down.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

It is late and William dozes alone in front of the TV, a blanket over him. Charmaine enters, picking up plates and

beer bottles and bits of rubbish. She turns off the TV and goes to William, shaking him gently.

CHARMAINE
Time for bed, da, c'mon.

WILLIAM
Oh, must've dozed off.

CHARMAINE
Well that's never happened before.

WILLIAM
Huh.

Charmaine exits.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALL -- NIGHT

Charmaine comes along the hall when Veronica pokes her head out of her bedroom doorway.

VERONICA
You tell him, ma?

CHARMAINE
Yes, he's very angry and he's going to see the principal tomorrow. Look out.

She indicates William climbing the stairs. Veronica hurriedly shuts her door and Charmaine continues on.

William passes, anything but angry, just a man wanting his bed.

INT. CHARMAINE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Charmaine is awake, thinking, her back to William. He rolls over in his sleep, flinging a great meaty arm across her. Having done it many times, she reaches over to her bedside table, picks up an open safety pin, and pricks his hand with it. It creates only a tiny reaction from William, though enough for him to remove his arm and roll onto his back. He starts snoring loudly. Charmaine, though, is oblivious and thinking hard.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- DAY

Charmaine is ironing again, news of the imminent Iraq war on TV again. Her neighbor, ROSE, enters, hair in rollers, and sits on the lounge.

ROSE

Hey, watchydooin?

CHARMAINE

Rose.

ROSE

What's this shite? Haven't you seen enough of that? Where's "The Eastenders"?

CHARMAINE

Oh, can you wait up, there's a bit coming.

ROSE

Oh, what's that then?

CHARMAINE

It's on them Human Shields people.

ROSE

Oh, them nutters.

CHARMAINE

Now why d'you say that?

ROSE

What, you think they're alright?

CHARMAINE

Don't think they're bad people.

ROSE

What, goin' over there and strapping themselves to an electricity plant and the like, and all to protect that bastard, Sodom.

CHARMAINE

It's Saddam, isn't it?

ROSE

Well he's been giving it to us up the arse long enough.

CHARMAINE (amused)

Oh!

ROSE

According to them buggers we're the ones responsible for all this. It were a Rolls Royce backfiring that started the war with Iran, you know, and chasing our soccer hooligans into Kuwait triggered the invasion.

CHARMAINE

But what's either war really got to do with us?

ROSE

Well if you're going to ask tricky questions, Charmaine...

CHARMAINE

But what if they go in there and don't find no weapons of mass destruction? We'll all look pretty silly then, won't we. Ooh, sorry, 'our mistake'. Don't bother, we'll show ourselves out.

ROSE

'Cause he's got 'em. He's like a dog with a bloody bone, that bugger, never gives up.

CHARMAINE

Mmm, just wonder what blowing up their electricity would really do. I mean, there goes their sewerage, fresh water, all their hospitals, everyone's refrigerator stops. Who'll feed the little children then?

ROSE

You know, Charmaine, you look a bit swarthy to me. Put them black undies on y'head, give us a look.

CHARMAINE

I told you, were them Armada fellas
impregnated me ancestor.

ROSE

Oh, getoutya, you're a halfcaste
Araby immigrant like the rest of us.
Only we did the right thing and
learned the good book.

CHARMAINE

(indicating the TV)

Shut up your face now.

INT. SITTING ROOM/TV REPORT -- DAY

An archival report on Human Shields is intercut with an interview with Amanda Patterson and footage of the Human Shields disembarking from the red buses in Baghdad, being shown to sleeping quarters in a hotel, and being briefed by the Iraqi Friendship, Peace and Solidarity organization.

AMANDA

No, Human Shield volunteers have not been deployed to any military sites. All sites that we have so far chosen are approved by UN staff as being critical to the humanitarian concerns of the Iraqi people, especially the poor and the children. And I would like to remind the powers likely to invade, including Britain, Australia and America that under the Geneva Convention, to which all those countries are signatories, it is a war crime to destroy facilities that provide essential services to the civilian population. We are here to ensure those signatories honor their Geneva Convention agreement.

Charmaine is impressed by what she has just seen, while Rose parodies snoring.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Charmaine is into the pantry and takes down some breakfast cereals from the top shelf, before pulling down an old bread

box behind it. She places the bread box on the kitchen counter and opens it, extracting an old tin container inside. She opens the tin with a spoon handle and takes out a purse, which she opens, extracting a sizeable wad of cash, which she then begins to count.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

Usual dinner setup - The family is assembled, with Trudy, Veronica, Josh, Tony and William eating their dinner in front of the TV. Archival footage of the impending Iraq war is on the News again as Charmaine ferries food to them.

WILLIAM

You know that bastard has a new woman in his bed every night, and then she gets the bullet the next day.

JOSH

What's that mean, da? Gets the bullet. She gets a bullet or she gets the bullet?

WILLIAM

Well, when you think about it, same either way.

JOSH

That's a point!

The men laugh.

JOSH

No need for safe sex then.

The men laugh.

WILLIAM

Wouldn't have to take the pill neither.

The men laugh.

TRUDY

Oh, you're all the same, chauvinist pigs.

CHARMAINE

Oh, don't say, pigs, Trudy.

TONY

Hey, we're not the ones shooting them, you know, case you didn't notice.

VERONICA

No, you're the ones laughing about it.

WILLIAM

And you know what else he does? He has these prisoners in cells under his palaces and gets 'em to taste his supper, and then when they're sure the foods not poisoned they take the prisoner out and shoot him. Only way Saddam knows dinner's up. 'Was that a shot I heard? Oh, good, hoping it's Sheppard's Pie tonight.'

CHARMAINE

Oh, that can't be true.

WILLIAM

Oh, don't be so naïve, mother, course it is. Them Amnesty International people says he's killed thousands. It's only the fact they're wogs I don't get upset.

CHARMAINE

I never seen that.

WILLIAM

I read it in the newspaper. Very 'edifying'. You should try it.

CHARMAINE

Oooh, that's a big word. (muttering)
Bit like supercilious.

WILLIAM

(missing her retort, pointing at the TV)

There, see, that's exactly what I been talking about. These stupid bastards get on TV and say there's alternatives to war but when someone asks 'what alternatives?' all they can answer is more bloody sanctions.

JOSH

They all think they're dealing with a reasonable bloke, da. But he's not a reasonable bloke, he's an unreasonable bloke.

WILLIAM

That, and give them inspectors more time. More bloody time for what? Like looking for a needle in a haystack.

CHARMAINE

Well maybe they will find something if they're given time.

TONY

Oh! Don't be daft, ma.

WILLIAM

Shut your cakehole, Tony. Mother, if I was to tell you I had a bullet and I'm going to hide it anywhere in this house, do you really think you'd find it in a month of Sundays?

CHARMAINE

Well, let's see, a month of Sundays is more than half a year, so...

All heads swing onto William, waiting for his reply.

TONY

And they've got more than one bullet, da.

WILLIAM (weary)

Oh, shut your cakehole, Tony. The fact you're agreeing with your mother's not a good sign.

Human Shields are being talked about on the TV.

TRUDY

Honestly hope they blow the shite out of those people.

CHARMAINE

Oh, now William, you say something.

WILLIAM

That'll be enough language, Trudy girl.

TRUDY

Well is blow the crap out them alright?

William and the others looks at Charmaine, who shrugs, conceding.

CHARMAINE

Well, they say it on "The Simpsons" I suppose, but I was talking about the people.

TONY

Oh, that's good, 'cause there's a lot of things I'd like to say crap about. Especially crap.

He looks, smiling at his father, who gives him a withering stare. Tony develops an itch to his forehead.

VERONICA

I just wish they'd blow them up so we could watch something decent on tele.

CHARMAINE

Oh, now look, all of you, they're people.

TRUDY

What, the Iraqis?

CHARMAINE

No, the chimpanzees in Uganda, what do you think. I think all them Human Shield people are fine people doing what they think is right. What if I was a Human Shield, what would you do? Blow me up as well?

There is a hiatus followed by a roar of laughter from the family.

WILLIAM

With your arse, darlin', you could protect a whole hospital.

Laughter.

JOSH

Yeah, but, ma, they stopped using them blimps back in WW II, didn't they?

Laughter. Charmaine, angry, begins to get up, her meal not finished.

TRUDY

Or the tank driver's'd stop (posh accent) 'Excuse me, madam, you're blocking both lanes and holding up the war.'

Laughter. Charmaine walks past William on her way out, blocking his view of the TV momentarily.

WILLIAM

Oh look out! She's 'shielding' the tele!

Laughter. Charmaine leaves.

WILLIAM

Oh come on, darlin', we were only having some fun, don't be such a bad sport!

He has a swig of his beer.

JOSH

Couldn't bring us back two more then
could you, ma?!

William almost chokes on his beer with laughter.

INT. CHARMAINE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Charmaine, in bed, faces camera, as William gets into bed behind her. After he has settled, he begins to apologize but changes his mind.

WILLIAM

I...oh...night, luv.

He rolls away. After a moment...

CHARMAINE

I'm going to Iraq to become a Human
Shield.

There is a pause, followed by William chuckling.

WILLIAM

'Night.

Charmaine still finds it in her nature to say...

CHARMAINE

'Night.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

William enters, home from work, his newspaper under his arm. He puts his lunchbox and thermos on the table as usual but notices some travel documents left there. He picks them up and makes the discovery they are passport, airline ticket and itinerary. His horror increases as he realizes it is Charmaine's photo in the passport and the ticket is to Iraq.

Charmaine, carrying a massive load of dried washing, enters through the back doorway. She stops when she sees William with the documents in his hands.

CHARMAINE

Early again?

WILLIAM

Is this a joke?

CHARMAINE

No. I told you.

WILLIAM

Where did you get the money to buy a ticket to bloody Iraq?

CHARMAINE

Saved it. You remember you had that drinking problem, and all the children went hungry?

WILLIAM

That were ten year back.

CHARMAINE

Well, since then, I kept an emergency fund like. But the children are almost grown now. Patrick's in London, Josh and Trudy got jobs, only Tony and Veronica to go.

She grins uncomfortably and continues with the basket toward the living room (where she normally irons).

CHARMAINE

And touch wood thank you very much, you stood away from temptation this long.

William, open-mouth, can only watch her go.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Charmaine folds clothes as William enters, carrying her travel documents.

CHARMAINE

Is the garage falling off, luv?
You're always home early these days.

WILLIAM

Have you gone balmy on me?

Charmaine stops, surprised by his intensity.

WILLIAM

You're not goin'...you're...you're
just not goin'.

He leaves the room.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

William is burning the plane ticket as Charmaine enters.

CHARMAINE

What are you doing?

WILLIAM

Teaching you a bloody lesson, stupid
cow.

He drops the burning ticket into the sink, then takes the
passport and rips it into pieces.

CHARMAINE

Quite finished are you?

WILLIAM

I'm not the crazy one, it's you!

CHARMAINE

Me?

WILLIAM

Who's...Have you...Who's going to
look after me and the kids if you go
off and do something as daft as that
and probably get your silly self
killed?

CHARMAINE

Well you're all grown people, aren't
you? Should be able to look after
yourselves now, surely.

WILLIAM

Well, it's more than that you daft
loonie, we all, well we, we, like,
your...

CHARMAINE

Company? Cooking? For a moment I thought you were going to use the only four letter word you've forgotten. Think the last time you said it was...no...that was 1980. God...Now when was that?

WILLIAM

(indicating the burning ticket, etc.)
Oh, you're so smart. Well you can't go and you're not goin' and that's that!

CHARMAINE

Oh...I been forbidden? I can tell 'em I lost my ticket, you know, and that passport was my old one, not that I ever used it. New one's on its way.

She leaves the room. William is in a state of shock.

WILLIAM

You haven't heard the last of this!

MUSIC MONTAGE SEQUENCE:

- 1) In the backyard, Charmaine hangs out the washing while being harassed/berated by Trudy, who waves her arms around excitedly.
- 2) In the laundry room, Charmaine stuffs a huge amount of washing into the washing machine, while Veronica paces in the hall just outside, harassing/berating her.
- 3) In the kitchen Charmaine is seated at the table and slicing up a large pile of vegetables while Josh paces around her harassing/berating her. Charmaine takes a deep sigh of tolerance, her patience wearing thin.
- 4) In the boy's bedroom, Tony is on his hands and knees begging Charmaine as she puts away his socks and underwear.

INT. MAIN BEDROOM -- NIGHT

William is on top of Charmaine, her nightdress up around her neck. He climaxes and she finds the experience equally fulfilling.

As William rolls off her he all but clutches his heart, exhausted with the near death experience. He finally recovers enough to speak.

WILLIAM
Was that good, luv?

CHARMAINE (breathless, loving)
Oh, William, it were wonderful.

WILLIAM
Good.

He pats her.

WILLIAM
So let's hear no more about this Iraqi stuff.

He rolls over to go to sleep.

The joyous expression dries on Charmaine's face as she realizes she has been 'had', literally. She looks at William's back.

William has a look of satisfaction on his face as...

CHARMAINE (OS)
Good, I'd rather not talk about it anymore either.

William's eyes slowly open, and he frowns, wondering what she really meant by that.

EXT. CHARMAINE'S STREET -- DAY

Charmaine tows her two trolleys full of groceries. She frowns as she sees something ahead, and comes to a halt.

William paces about nervously in front of the house.

Charmaine watches curiously.

The mystery is solved as the POSTMAN arrives and hands William the mail.

William sorts through it quickly, shakes his head in disappointment, then puts the mail into his own letterbox. He crosses to his car, gets in and drives away.

Charmaine grins mildly and continues on.

INT. GARAGE WORKSHOP OFFICE -- DAY

WILLIAM

(pacing)

She must've picked up her passport herself. Cunning bastard.

TRUDY (OS)

Da.

William turns, revealing that his four children are gathered in his small and dowdy office.

TRUDY

You think you should be calling ma a bastard?

WILLIAM (thinking about it)

...Maybe not.

He paces a bit and looks at Tony.

WILLIAM

You try that crying bit like I said?

TONY

(nodding)

Cried real tears, da.

JOSH

That's good acting.

TONY

Who was acting?

WILLIAM

Gotta be something we can do, gotta be something, something.

JOSH

Da...let's face it...it's time to bring in the big gun.

William looks at the phone, then gives a nod of instruction toward it. Josh picks up the receiver.

INT/EXT. FRONT DOOR -- NIGHT

The door swings open, revealing PATRICK in a three piece suit.

William embraces him.

WILLIAM

Son!

PATRICK

Da!

WILLIAM

By God, look at you, as fine a man as a man can be.

PATRICK

You're looking well, da, and I've missed you and ma and the kids.

WILLIAM

Come in, come in.

PATRICK

Where is everyone?

WILLIAM

Oh, I gave 'em all money for the flicks.

PATRICK

Crikey, you springing? Must be an emergency.

WILLIAM

It's no joke, she means it.

PATRICK

So what brought it on then?

WILLIAM

Don't know, it's a bolt from the blue. Like them crop circles.

PATRICK

Well don't worry, da, I'll sort her,
only sorry I missed the kids.

WILLIAM

What, you're not staying?

PATRICK

No, told you, we're in the middle of
a big case, I have to be back in
London tonight. Well, where is she
then?

WILLIAM

Jeez...Well, (slapping Patrick on the
shoulder) It's down to you then, son.
In the kitchen. Good luck.

PATRICK

(proceeding down the hall)
Think if I can toss the high court,
da, I can toss the old girl.

Patrick continues on.

WILLIAM (to himself)

(shaking his head)

Into the valley of death...

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Charmaine washes dishes. She hears Patrick's footsteps as he
enters the kitchen.

CHARMAINE

(not turning)

Who was that at the door, luv?

PATRICK (OS)

Oh, some young fella.

Charmaine turns and gasps. Overjoyed, she rushes to him.
They hug and kiss.

CHARMAINE

Oh, this is the most wonderful surprise in the whole world, Patrick! Oh, God, look at you, all done up, like a, like a...

PARTICK

Like a solicitor, mum.

CHARMAINE

You know, I was going to say like a proper businessman but a solicitor is even better, isn't it.

She suddenly sobs.

PARTICK

Ma...What is it, ma? What?

CHARMAINE

Oh, you know, it's just, you're my little baby boy all grow'd up now, and, you're, you're just more than I ever could have wished for. Oh, you're my first born, Patty, and you've turned out just grand, just grand like I always hoped and prayed.

PARTICK

Well, that's in no small part to you and da, ma. All those sacrifices you made. But, you know, I don't understand you two. Why won't you let me do something for you now? You know, pay you back like.

CHARMAINE

Oh, well, it's not that we wouldn't appreciate it, Patrick, and that your asking means you were raised right, just that...it's not the gettin' there that's beautiful, but the gettin' there that is.

PATRICK (chiming in)

...but the gettin' there that is.' Ask the Irish a question and you get an Irish answer.

CHARMAINE

To be sure to be sure. So...They've sent for you then have they?

As his mother moves away, Patrick grins, surprised.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

William sits in his chair, a beer bottle in one hand. He is listening intently, and through the wall the vague sounds of Charmaine and Patrick talking can be heard.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Charmaine sits at the table while Patrick paces before her. Charmaine beams with pride as she watches her son.

PATRICK

You see, it's not just about weapons of mass destruction, ma. Saddam Hussein has been flaunting international law for well over a decade now. He's a known associate of al-Qaida. Now during the war in Afghanistan senior members of al-Qaida were treated for injuries in Iraqi hospitals. Iraq is a closed state. A foreigner doesn't get free medicare without the personal say-so of the dictator...Sadam.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

William is up and pacing. Through the wall the vague sounds of Patrick talking can be heard.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Patrick has his coat off and has loosened his tie.

PATRICK

The only reason the French are against it is because of the oil deals they've signed with Saddam himself. That's the trouble with Europe, always all these conflicting interests. I mean, look at

PATRICK (Cont'd)
 Yugoslavia, I mean, we should be
 ashamed of ourselves. We've got
 genocide going on just like in World
 War II and we do nothing. Why should
 it be up to the Americans to come all
 the way over here and fix the problem
 for us? Are they more decent than us?
 Apparently so.

Charmaine is still beaming with pride.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

William tries to listen at the wall but without much
 success. He takes his beer bottle and places the neck end
 against the wall, the bottom against his ear. This is not
 successful, so he reverses the bottle. He gets beer in his
 ear.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Patrick has now unbuttoned his vest.

PATRICK
 In 1998 the Iraqis expelled the
 Weapons inspectors, compounding the
 fact they were and have been in
 breach of UN rulings and the terms of
 their surrender agreement.

He pauses and looks at his mother. She still grins proudly.

PATRICK
 You getting this, ma?

CHARMAINE
 Oh, yes, dear, it's very interesting.
 I'm sitting here thinking what you
 must be like in front of the
 courtroom, pacing up and down,
 talking like this, shaking your hand.

PATRICK
 Ma, I told you, I don't do that. We
 have barristers for that.

CHARMAINE

Well they should let you get up,
Patty, you're good enough. I think
you're...

PATRICK

I don't want to get up, ma, I'm, I'm,
you know, the solicitor. You see in
business law it's all about the
numbers. But it's getting the
information on the numbers that's the
hard part, and that's my job.

CHARMAINE

Is that how come you know so much
about Mr. Hussein, Patty? Because of
doing all them numbers?

PATRICK

Well, yes. That, and reading "The
Times".

He is perplexed by her.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

William takes another beer from a small polystyrene cooler.
He twists off the top and drinks deeply. He is like an
expectant father in a waiting room.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Patrick sits at the table next to his mother.

PATRICK

Look, ma, I didn't come all the way
back here just to give you a lesson
in politics. The fact is he's just a
bloody ruthless dictator killing
people and he needs to be killed
himself. Same as Milosovich, same as
the Taliban. Don't listen to all that
stuff about precision bombing and the
like, people are going to die, ma,
innocent people who are in the wrong
place at the wrong time.

CHARMAINE

And little babies that never did
nothing to no one.

PATRICK

Yes. And the horrible truth? No one
will give a damn. And if you die with
them, most people back here will say
you were a nutter to go there in the
first place and so serves you right.
All people really want is to see
Saddam gone, ma, and if the Americans
are decent enough to have a go, then
we're with them. Just that when this
happens, the last person on Earth I
want to see in the middle of it is
you. You're the sweetest, most
decent, innocent person I know.

Charmaine takes his hand.

CHARMAINE

Oh, you've always been such a sweet
lad, Patty, you're the best son a
mother could have. But I can't be
that innocent now can I, I mean, I
did have five lovely babies after
all.

She gives him a sly grin. He grins back.

CHARMAINE

Do you not think I can teach you
anything else, Patrick?

PATRICK

What do you mean, ma?

CHARMAINE

Well, about living your life.

Patrick is unsure of what she means.

PATRICK

I don't think so.

CHARMAINE

Well...maybe you're right.

She pats his hand and grins lovingly.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

William looks round, a hopeful expression on his face, as Patrick enters.

WILLIAM

Well?

Patrick is unsure. William stands and hands him a beer.

PATRICK

She's a tough one, da.

WILLIAM

She got that Nuremberg trial video out four times.

PATRICK

Oh, Goering's not a patch on her.

WILLIAM

(toasting)

Here's to swimmin' with bow-legged women.

PATRICK

(toasting)

And may your bride not have a flat arse.

They drink, then shake their heads with misgivings.

INT. SITTING ROOM -- DAY

In the TV screen reflection Charmaine enters the room and approaches. She wears a hat, a long coat, and carries a handbag. She also carries a white envelope.

Charmaine's hand appears and places the envelope against the TV screen, a small piece of sticky tape attaching it to the glass. The envelope has "Everyone" written on it.

In the reflection Charmaine exits the room and the sound of her exiting the front door is heard. As this has been happening...

CHARMAINE (VO)

Dear Family, I know you won't like me for going away like this, but I feel it's something I must do. I don't know why I feel this way, those people in Iraq really have nothing to do with me, but, you see, if I can do something, just one little thing, to stop all the fighting and hatred in the world, then I think at least once in my life I should try, or else, really, what is life about? Is it just about looking out for you and yours? I think it must be a bit more than that.

Car doors close out in the street, and a vehicle is heard driving away.

INT. ROSE'S SITTING ROOM -- DAY

Looking in through Rose's sitting room window, Rose, Charmaine's neighbor, looks out. The reflection of the cab bearing Charmaine away passes in the street outside, and is monitored by Rose's widening eyes.

INT. ROSES'S SITTING ROOM -- DAY

Rose picks up her phone and quickly dials a number.

CHARMAINE (VO)

If anything should happen to me over there, then you really shouldn't be too upset. Because you see...

INT. GARAGE WORKSHOP OFFICE -- DAY

William picks up the phone in his office. He is stunned by the news. He quickly cancels the phone and dials another number.

CHARMAINE (VO)

...I'm really doing what I want to do, and therefore, more than anything else in the world I'm happy to be helping in what I think is a good cause.

EXT. INT CHARMAINE'S CAB -- DAY

Charmaine, in the back seat, looks out on the streets she knows so well, her mood calm, a slight grin on her lips. She looks across to someone sitting in the back seat with her, and the PAN reveals Activist Woman. Activist Woman grins back and Charmaine looks out of the window once more.

CHARMAINE (VO)

And I really don't think I'll die,
but if I do, at least know that I
went thinking I was doing the right
thing, and so I am content. My love
for each and every one of you has no
bounds.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL, DEPARTURE LOUNGE -- DAY

Charmaine sits in the departure lounge near a departure gate. She reads a travel brochure on the pyramids.

PA

British Airways would like to
announce Flight 676 to London, Paris,
Rome and Istanbul is now ready for
departure.

Charmaine begins to get up, but is stopped by:

PA

Calling passengers in rows 23 to 56,
will you please now move to the
boarding gate. All other passengers
please remain seated.

As the announcement is repeated Charmaine checks her boarding pass and sits back down.

EXT. AIRPORT TERMINAL -- DAY

William, Josh, Trudy, Tony and Veronica arrive in William's car and pile out, ready to rush into the terminal. They are pulled up by a SECURITY GUARD.

SECURITY GUARD

Here, mate, you can't leave it there!

WILLIAM

But this is an emergency!

SECURITY GUARD

Move it now or I'll have it towed!

JOSH

Give us the key, da, I'll park it!

William, flustered, burrows into his pockets and hands his son a large bunch of keys.

JOSH

That's your workshop keys, da!

William reaches into all his pockets and comes up with two more sets of keys which he also gives to Josh.

Josh goes to move the car while William, Tony, Trudy and Veronica hurriedly enter the terminal.

INT. DEPARTURE LOUNGE -- DAY

PA

Calling passengers in rows 1 to 22,
will you please move to the boarding
gate. Rows 1 to 22.

Charmaine stands and joins a long queue.

INT. TERMINAL, SECURITY GATE -- DAY

William hurriedly empties his pockets of all change and metal objects, preparatory to stepping through the detector gate. He passes through, as do Trudy and Veronica, but then Tony is called aside and has a handheld detector passed over him. William checks his watch, agitated.

INT. CARPARK -- DAY

Josh drives quickly around the carpark. He swings round a corner and collects a car coming the other way, badly denting the mudguard.

Josh closes his eyes tight and slumps over the wheel.

INT. SECURITY GATE -- DAY

Tony is half undressed and on the other side of the security gate. He passes through and sets off the alarm once more.

WILLIAM

Oh, for God's sake just come naked!

SECURITY GUARD

You better calm down there, sir.

WILLIAM

Tony...Tony!

TONY

I'm sorry, da!

WILLIAM

You go up and look at the departure board, that'll tell you where we are!

Tony nods and William, Trudy and Veronica race up an escalator.

INT. DEPARTURE LOUNGE -- DAY

Charmaine is in the queue, moving forward, not that far from the ticket check.

INT. AIRPORT, DEPARTURE BOARDS -- DAY

William, Trudy and Veronica pull up before a large array of electronic boards. William is bamboozled by it all.

TRUDY

There! Gate 27!

They rush off, out of frame. Presently they rush back through frame, going the other way.

INT. DEPARTURE LOUNGE -- DAY

Charmaine is just about to hand over her boarding pass when she hears thumping and muted shouting from above. She looks round and to her astonishment sees William, Trudy and

Veronica beating on the glass from the observation deck above.

INTERCUT:

INT. OBSERVATION DECK -- DAY

William, Trudy and Veronica are beating on the glass and causing an enormous ruckus.

WILLIAM/TRUDY/VERONINCA
 Charmaine!/Ma!/Mum!
 Up here!/Don't leave!/Don't go!

Charmaine freezes, staring up at them. The FLIGHT ATTENDANT waits for her to hand across her boarding pass.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
 (hand extended for the boarding pass)
 Friends of yours, madam?

CHARMAINE
 (handing her the boarding pass)
 Oh. Family.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
 I'll need your ticket and passport too, please madam.

CHARMAINE
 Oh, sorry.

She burrows into her purse and produces them.

CHARMAINE
 Don't fly very much you see.

As her papers are being checked Charmaine takes another look up at the observation deck, looking for William's eyes.

William sees her and pauses his tirade against the glass. Charmaine grins kindly, calmly. She nods.

The Flight Attendant attracts her attention, handing back her papers. Charmaine grins at her and walks through the boarding gate and onto the gangway.

WILLIAM

I love you.

He is in a state of shock.

INT/EXT. WILLIAM'S CAR -- DAY

With the front mudguard hanging off, and a buckled, wobbling front wheel, William drives grimly home, the rest of his family equally somber.

EXT. BAGHDAD STREET -- DAY

The street is busy, bustling. Charmaine follows ABDUL, a plain clothes officer in the 'Friendship, Peace and Solidarity Organization' - run by the Iraqi government. Behind them a BOY drags a small trolley containing Charmaine's luggage. Charmaine listens hard, trying to understand Abdul, despite his strong accent and the noise of the street.

ABDUL

We have a very nice hotel for you, and you will have the best of service, and you should not have to complain because everything for you is provided, just like as if you were in England. And there is a lady, Mrs. Patterson. Do you know Mrs. Patterson?

CHARMAINE

Oh, Mrs. Patterson? Amanda Patterson?

Abdul nods.

CHARMAINE

Oh, yes! Well, no, I don't know her, I know of her.

ABDUL

She is very bossy lady.

CHARMAINE

Bossy?

ABDUL

Yes, push push push all the time. She is the one who tells you where to go.

CHARMAINE

Oh that's good. I'm looking forward to meeting her.

Abdul rolls his eyes slightly as they enter a hotel.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

Charmaine unpacks her clothes in a twin share room. The evidence of another somewhat bizarre occupant is clear. There is a light knock at her open door. GODFREY, late 60's, a genteel Englishman, appears.

GODFREY

Oh, hello, Godfrey Mendelson.

He offers his hand and Charmaine takes it.

CHARMAINE

Oh, hello, Charmaine O'Connell.

GODFREY

Oh, you must be the Irish lady someone said was coming. I see they put you in here with Silly Sybil. We were wondering who'd get lumbered with her.

CHARMAINE

Oh.

GODFREY

Oh, she's alright, just an old hippie. Nobody's seen her for the last four days, probably got lost somewhere. Bit of a relief really.

CHARMAINE

Oh?

GODFREY

Well come on then, I'll show you round, meet the crew.

CHARMAINE

Oh.

INT. HOTEL PASSAGEWAY -- DAY

Godfrey leads Charmaine down the passageway. The doors to the rooms are all open.

GODFREY

On this floor and the one below we're mostly European. Mainly Brits here, a few Australians, odds and ends downstairs, Germans, French, Italians. The two floors above are mostly Yanks, Canadians and more Australians. We tend to stay pretty much with our own kind, the Yanks like to run their show and we stick to ours, pretty much the natural order of things.

JOCK (30's), a powerfully built and aggressive Scot, is going by, wearing nothing but a towel and carrying a shower pack.

GODFREY

Oh, Jock, this is Charmaine, just in from Ireland.

Jock shakes her hand and Charmaine winces at the strength of his handshake.

JOCK

A fellow Celt! Just what I need to watch my back as I face down the imperialist storm-troopers of the military-industrial complex!

He marches on.

GODFREY

Wish I could say he's joking. Which reminds me, showers are boys that end, girls down there. Makes no sense with plumbing but you know the Arabs and sex. Ah.

Godfrey taps perfunctorily on a door and they enter a room.

GODFREY

Knock knock.

INT. BIG BROTHER ROOM -- DAY

There are four young adults in the room, BRUCE, writing a letter on a table/bench, DENISE, on one of the two beds, asleep, ROGER, meditating and apparently in a trance, and SALLY, listening to a rap CD on headphones. As soon as Godfrey and Charmaine enter the room, Bruce puts down his pen, picks up a small video camera and tapes them.

GODFREY

Hello, just me inducting our latest recruit. This is Bruce, Charmaine, Bruce. Don't mind him filming, he does that to everyone.

BRUCE

G'day, Charmaine, how they hangin'?

CHARMAINE

Oh, Australian is it?

BRUCE

Yep. 'Cept for Sal there, she's a kiwi. Congenital. Don't hold it against her.

Sally waves to Charmaine but does not take off the headphones.

BRUCE

And that's Denise punching out z's and Roger's astral traveling. What are you? Irishman, hey? Drink green beer do you? Hey?! Hey?!

CHARMAINE

Well, yes, been known to.

BRUCE

Yeah, show us an Irishman that doesn't drink and I'll show you a flippin' liar. So you here for the long haul or just having a Captain Cook?

Charmaine is confused.

GODFREY

A look.

CHARMAINE

Oh, no, I'm, I'm here to help in any way I can.

BRUCE

Oh, bewdy, well I'll probably catch up with you at the briefing or breakfast or something.

CHARMAINE

Well, yes, nice to meet you.

BRUCE

Same here. Ta ra.

Charmaine waves to Sally, who waves back, and Charmaine and Godfrey leave the room. Bruce immediately puts his camera down, picks up his pen and goes back to writing.

BRUCE

Bloody PR never stops.

INT. HOTEL HALL -- DAY

They continue along the hall.

GODFREY

I should have warned you, they're the people from "Big Brother".

CHARMAINE

They're with the government?

Godfrey laughs and Charmaine wonders why.

GODFREY

Now, breakfast is between 6 and 7, dinner the same. Miss it and you go hungry. Lunch you're on your own, but there's a little café across the street sells something vaguely resembling sandwiches.

CHARMAINE

And what was that about a briefing?

GODFREY

Well every day after breakfast one of those chaps from FPS, Friendship, Peace and Solidarity, tells us what targets they would like us to guard for them.

CHARMAINE

You mean the man who bought me here, Abdul?

GODFREY

Not his real name. Nothing here is what it seems. You have to constantly remind yourself this is a police state and that people don't always say what they mean and definitely don't mean what they say. Course it's the same with our people, but our dishonesty is far more subtle.

He knocks perfunctorily on a door as he enters.

GODFREY

Knock knock.

Charmaine is mildly perplexed, but follows.

INT. CHARMAINE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Charmaine is in her nightdress and putting on some facial crème before going to sleep. The door to her room is closed. There is a light knock and MARIE, a plump, falsely cheerful American, pokes her head inside.

MARIE

Hi, I'm the hall monitor. Is there a reason your door is closed?

CHARMAINE

I, I was changing. Now I'm going to bed.

MARIE

You're new?

CHARMAINE

Yes.

MARIE

You are?

CHARMAINE

Charmaine.

Marie waits.

O'Connel.

MARIE

(glancing at a clipboard)

Yes, I have you. (reciting) Hi, I'm Marie. Charmaine, we're in a potential war zone here, inside a dictatorial regime. The Iraqis have reason enough to be paranoid about people being spies, you know, secret transmissions, that sort of thing. If they want to they can make you disappear in the middle of the night and we have no way of stopping them. They'd probably torture you to death. So we like to demonstrate up front we have nothing to hide. Okay?

Marie is already gone, leaving the door open behind her as Charmaine replies.

CHARMAINE

Oh...sorry.

INT. CHARMAINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Close on Charmaine lying in bed, in the dark, her eyes closed. She becomes aware of cigarette smoke and that someone is standing over her. She turns and gasps. Silly SYBIL, her otherwise absent roommate, is standing over her, smoking a cigarette.

CHARMAINE (scared)
My door's open, isn't it?

Sybil, a large, late-middle age woman dressed in army fatigues, but with hippie adornments, studies her for a long moment, her face hard. Finally she exhales a stream of smoke over Charmaine.

SYBIL
But is your mind closed?

CHARMAINE
What?

SYBIL
There is like heavy shit going down out there and you are like lying in your warm bed all cosied up with mousse in your hair and Colgate on your breath. Do you have one, tiny, tiny, infinitesimally small inkling of the kind of suffering that is going on out there? Hmmm? Madam Muck.

CHARMAINE
Sorry?

SYBIL
You should be. You should fall down on your knees in a bucket of puke, slit your wrists and crawl through human manure riddled with maggots and giving thanks to Allah, Jehovah, Krishna and maybe even Mother Kali, and let the flies crawl up your nose and out your ears in retribution, in a display of contrition, in some form of ennoblement that separates you from the mindless, indifferent,

SYBIL (Cont'd)
 materialistic detritus that we
 laughingly call the human race.

After letting the point sink in she begins aggressively packing clothes and belongings into a small satchel, but immediately comes back and shoves a threatening finger into Charmaine's face.

SYBIL
 And one more thing. Don't you ever, ever, put your head down on that fluffy Tontine again and fall asleep with that smug, middle-class, decadent contentment that I am ashamed to say so characterizes my fellow citizens, bedfellows of the capitalist pig that suckles yet enslaves all human beings on this planet. And this is the only Earth we have.

She snorts three times like a pig and continues packing.

SYBIL
 Which when you think of it is nothing but an infinitesimally small orb spinning through nothingness in a never-ending dance round a self-destructive colossus yada yada yada. Isn't that ironic. Do you know, if you hold up one grain of sand at arms length the number of galaxies it blocks out, now mind you, mind you, we're talking galaxies here, not solar systems, mind, that's a whole different kettle of fish. What in God's name does that mean? Kettle of fish? And what makes that different? God, you know, the contradictions, the bullshit, the hypocrisy, it's like everywhere and endless.

Having packed some of her gear she leaves the room, only to reappear a second later. She checks the room number on the door through myopic eyes.

SYBIL (to herself)
 Yeah, that's right.

She leaves again.

Charmaine is frozen.

INT. HOTEL CAFETERIA -- DAY

There is a food line-up in a self-serve arrangement. Charmaine arrives in the line and finds herself behind Bruce.

CHARMAINE

Oh, morning, Bruce. Didn't recognize you without your camera.

BRUCE (Irish accent)

Ha, top of the mornin' to you, Paddie.

CHARMAINE (Australian accent)

Oh, g'day, mate.

BRUCE

Ah, not bad, not bad, for a new Australian. Y'sleep alright?

CHARMAINE

Well, not really, missing my family a bit, y'see...and it's a bit strange with the room door open like that.

BRUCE

Why you got your door open?

CHARMAINE

Oh, the um, the hall monitor said I had to.

BRUCE

Oh, we just tell her to get stuffed.

CHARMAINE

Oh?

BRUCE

Yeah, nothing she can do. Our bloody room.

CHARMAINE (concluding)
Is that because you're with big brother?

BRUCE
Nah, just 'cause we tell her to get stuffed. You like "Big Brother"?

CHARMAINE (feeling threatened)
Well...

BRUCE
Nah, me either. But then I got involved and found it real good, plus there's the financial benefits.

CHARMAINE
Good pay?

BRUCE
Oh, ye-e-ah, that's why you turn into a real bastard and backstab everyone.

CHARMAINE
Oh.

BRUCE
But I been talking to this really powerful agent lately. He said becoming a Human Shield was a good strategic move. Clever way to get promotion. Who knows? Might even get a lecture tour out of this. Said he's already talking to a publisher.

CHARMAINE
Well, aren't you afraid? Won't that put you in danger from big brother?

BRUCE
Yeah. But they're killing me off soon anyway, so what've I got to lose?

Bruce has collected his meal and walks away chuckling. Charmaine shudders.

INT. BRIEFING ROOM -- DAY

Abdul, along with two other OFFICERS of the Freedom, Peace and Solidarity Organization, give a briefing to the 50 HUMAN SHIELDS sitting before them. The Presenter, OMAR, is using a large pointer to nominate various targets on a slide-projected image.

OMAR

So if you turn to page three of your sheets...

The Human Shields turn the page of their handout.

OMAR

...Got that? Good. We would also like to suggest this location, 3 B. This is a tin can manufacturing plant and is very vital to ensure our long-term food supplies...

Amanda Patterson, sitting near the front, stands.

AMANDA

Sorry to interrupt.

The three Iraqi Officers roll their eyes and their shoulders slump, knowing what is coming. Charmaine is interested to see Amanda, the woman who inspired her to come to Iraq.

AMANDA

As I pointed out yesterday, and in fact at every other briefing, there is little point in nominating sites if those sites are close to military targets. Now that unmarked square you have neglected to label to the left of location 3 B is in fact, if I'm not mistaken, a barracks, which I believe houses some eight hundred soldiers. While I couldn't agree more that a cannery is important for food supplies, I'm afraid I cannot ask my volunteers to jeopardize their lives by protecting nearby military installations.

OMAR

Yes, but Mrs...

AMANDA

I can only reiterate that we are still very satisfied with the list we presented your administration with three days ago. Namely (reading) The Al Daura Electrical Plant, the Al Daura oil refinery, the Al Daura Water Treatment Plant...

OMAR

But Mrs...

AMANDA

...the 7th April Water Treatment Plant, the Tejio Food Silo...

OMAR

Yes, but we feel...

AMANDA

...the Baghdad South Electrical Plant, and the Al Mamun Telecommunications Facility.

OMAR

Yes, yes, but you see, we don't think you, with the greatest respect, Mrs. Patterson, that you represent everyone's wishes. I...

AMANDA

No, I don't.

OMAR

I...No?

AMANDA

No, course not, how could I? But we did put that list to a vote on more than one occasion and there was almost unanimous agreement on those locations. So as with all democratic decisions, the majority vote is the one that counts.

Omar is inwardly furious, but stumped.

OMAR (trying to be respectful)
 But...you see, Mrs. Patterson, we live here, and we think that it might be better for you to listen to all the sites we suggest, because then you may find there are some sites you have overlooked.

AMANDA
 (sitting down)
 Oh, no problem with that. Please.

OMAR
 Thank you. As I was saying...

AMANDA
 (standing)
 But please do keep in mind that our mandate is to ensure Coalition bombs do not destroy facilities that provide essential services to the civilian population, because under international law that would constitute a war crime. We are not here to protect military targets of any description. On that point we are very firm.

Amanda sits down. Omar is barely in control.

OMAR
 Yes...Thank you, I...

AMANDA
 You're welcome.

Omar can only stare at her.

Charmaine has found Amanda's pluck very inspiring.

EXT. SEWERAGE TREATMENT PLANT -- DAY

Charmaine is with a group of five HUMAN SHIELDS, one of which is HENRY, a comical Welshman. They are touring the sewerage plant. Godfrey is their guide.

GODFREY

It may not seem to you that standing out in the open at a smelly place like this will actually achieve anything, but I can assure you that if the bombs fall and this plant is destroyed, the consequences for the general population will be dire. The first ones to suffer are not the soldiers, but the children playing around the raw sewerage in the streets. As the soldiers get wounded and are treated in the hospitals, all the medicines get quickly consumed, thereby leaving nothing for the infected children. The usual result is that more children die of disease in wars than soldiers are killed. But of course that statistic is almost never reported. Questions?

HENRY

So...what? We just lock off the chain and stand like this with our hand out? Right?

Godfrey moves to a chain secured with a padlock to a railing.

GODFREY

Yes, put the chain over your shoulder like this so it is clearly visible, lock it off like this, and hold your hand out, thus.

HENRY

And you guarantee that will stop an FA18 fighter-bomber?

GODFREY

Never fails.

HENRY

(shrugging)

Where do I sign?

There is general laughter.

GODFREY

Naturally, the pilots are seldom in direct visual contact with their targets and even if they were it would be sheer luck if they spotted you at that speed. So we have this.

He produces an iridium mobile phone.

GODFREY

I'll just put it on speaker for you.

He pushes a fast dial button and the line being connected is clearly heard by all. The phone is quickly answered.

AMERICAN VOICE (phone fx)
Strategic Command.

Godfrey puts the phone to this ear.

GODFREY

Yes, thank you, just testing the line.

He hangs up, and addresses the group.

GODFREY

We have given the Coalition forces the list of sites we intend to safeguard, and we update them when new sites are added. Of course whether or not they choose to ignore us remains in question, but in theory, if you have been asked to shield a site, then there should be no excuse for it to be bombed.

CHARMAINE

Well, um, what if the Iraqi military makes us shield sites we don't want to shield?

GODFREY

Good question, very good question. In that case we won't be phoning it in. So I imagine you should kiss your bottom goodbye.

There is polite but uncomfortable laughter.

INT. CHARMAINE'S BEDROOM -- DAWN

First light comes through the curtains. Charmaine stirs slightly.

SUPER: March 19, 2003, 5:34 AM.

FX: There is a monstrously loud explosion and the entire building shakes.

Charmaine sits up, horrified.

EXT. HOTEL -- DAY

Charmaine exits to the street. There is mayhem, with PEOPLE rushing in many directions and air raid sirens blaring. Foremost is the Big Brother stars, Bruce, Denise, Roger and Sally, stampeding into a taxi. Sally whimpers and is trying to bring a small suitcase with her. Bruce snatches it from her and throws it aside.

BRUCE

Don't worry about your bloody luggage!

They all get in the cab with Bruce shouting to the DRIVER.

BRUCE

Airport! Airport! Um, aeródromo, por favor!

With tires screaming the taxi accelerates into the street.

CHARMAINE

Oh, dear!

INT. BRIEFING ROOM -- DAY

A television screen has a Fox News item describing how the US is invading Northern Iraq. The screen is suddenly turned off.

Amanda Peterson, the person who turned off the TV, addresses the remaining assembled Human Shields (around 30).

AMANDA

One of the joys of being invaded by America is that you get to see it on TV as it is happening to you.

HENRY

Had a friend in blue movies, had the same experience.

The room erupts into laughter. Amanda's face turns hard.

AMANDA

Trust me, you will find this far more obscene than any pornography. Unless you think men, women and children having their limbs blown off is what you accept as entertainment.

Henry is embarrassed and his resentment shows. Amanda refers to a list she holds.

AMANDA

Now I have allocated you all to a station that I would like you to shield. Not everyone will be a shield. We will take turns. Some people will bring food and water, blankets, that sort of thing, and ensure those shielding are well provided for. The schedule for rotation of duties is at the bottom here. I'll place this on the notice board. Please begin your duty immediately. Good luck, and thank you.

INT. CHARMAINE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Charmaine sits at a table, writing. The building shakes occasionally from nearby bombing.

CHARMAINE (VO)

Dear William and children, I'm not sure if the mail works here, but I've decided I should try to write in anycase. As you know, war has broken out here and although the reports on

CHARMAINE (VO) (Cont'd)
 the state television say the
 Coalition forces are being
 defeated, the bombing never stops.

EXT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE, BAGHDAD STREET -- DAY

Charmaine stands, tethered by a chain to the exterior of a telephone exchange. IRAQI CITIZENS come and go to the exchange and look at her in a bemused fashion.

CHARMAINE (VO)
 I spent one week chained to a
 telephone company's front door before
 I was relieved. Tomorrow I begin
 taking food to the other Human
 Shields.

EXT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE -- DAY

Some TEENAGE IRAQI BOYS come past and snatch Charmaine's hat. As she attempts to get it back they tease her by throwing it from one to the other.

CHARMAINE (VO)
 The Iraqi people here have been very
 nice and I think they appreciate what
 we are doing.

An IRAQI WOMAN shouts at the boys, chastising them. She recovers the hat and gives it back to Charmaine.

EXT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE -- DAY

Charmaine has a cup of tea with an elderly Iraqi man, UZMA, who is accompanied by his small GRANDSON (9).

CHARMAINE (VO)
 Lately I have been approached by a
 nice old gentleman whose name is
 Uzma. He comes to see me almost every
 day, but he does not speak English.
 His grandson speaks quite well,
 though, and he has been asking me to
 go and protect his grain silo, which
 I think is a good idea because
 everyone needs bread, but I have
 tried to explain to him there are

CHARMAINE (VO) (Cont'd)
 only so many of us to go around and
 we cannot guard all the sites that
 need guarding. But still, he comes to
 see me often, and brings me some tea.
 It's very nice.

INT. CHARMAINE'S HOUSE, SITTING ROOM -- NIGHT

William, Josh, Tony are watching TV, the room looking very
 messy. William and Josh drink beer.

On the TV there is Stock Footage: The Iraqi Information
 Minister, Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, gives one of his
 ludicrous press conferences where he all but denies the
 Coalition forces are even in the country.

WILLIAM
 Old Baghdad Bob, hey. You know it
 shows to go you, if you say anything
 with a straight enough face there's
 always a percentage of people who'll
 believe you.

TONY
 Why shouldn't we believe him, da?

WILLIAM
 Shut your cakehole, Tony.

JOSH
 He's been taking that performance
 enhancing falafel, hey, da.

WILLIAM
 Yeah... (indicating the TV) him too.

William and Josh laugh at Tony, who is bemused.

JOSH
 Speaking of which I wish they'd hurry
 up with supper. What takes 'em so
 bloody long?

Suddenly there is an almighty ruckus at the other end of the
 house, with Trudy and Veronica arguing.

WILLIAM (weary)
 Oh, not again.

JOSH

You know you wouldn't think making a bloody meal could be so bloody difficult.

They stare in disbelief toward the noise in the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Trudy and Veronica are in a shouting match over how to cook, and who should hang out the washing. The kitchen is an absolute mess, and there is a basket of wet washing sitting on the table, yet to be hung out. William enters from the hall.

WILLIAM (coming over the top)
Hey, hey, hey! Come on now, do we have to have this every night?!

TRUDY

No you don't! You could get off your arse and cook it yourself!

VERONICA

Da, I hung out the washing last night, and you know I did 'cause you saw me!

WILLIAM

Look, is this any way to run things? I mean look at the kitchen, it's filthy.

VERONICA

Well that's only 'cause she's out every night sleazing around like some low-life whore!

TRUDY

Oh, yeah, what about you? Least I never had my father go up the school to drag me out of trouble with boys!

VERONICA

Nice try, but he already knows about that, thanks very much!

WILLIAM

Knows about what?

VERONICA

You know, when you went up to talk to the principal about me... And I've been a good girl ever since.

WILLIAM

I never...

Veronica gasps, and her rage is irrationally directed at Trudy.

VERONICA

You bitch!!

She attacks her. William immediately tries to pull them apart, with limited success. Josh comes into the room, shouting about his dinner not being ready. They all struggle. Tony comes late and tries to pull everyone apart.

Screaming abuse at each other, everyone falls down.

EXT. ELECTRICAL PLANT -- DAY

Charmaine and Henry hand a basket of supplies and a blanket to an ELDERLY MALE HUMAN SHIELD chained to the front gates of the Electrical plant. WORKERS come and go and look at the group curiously. Charmaine and Henry bid the Elderly Human Shield farewell and get into an old car. With Henry driving, the car sets out.

EXT. CAR INT, BAGHDAD INNER CITY STREET -- DAY

Charmaine and Henry drive.

HENRY

You know if you told me six months back I'd be driving through Baghdad in the middle of a war zone, I'd've said you're balmy.

CHARMAINE

What about the part where you offer yourself up for target practice?

They laugh.

HENRY

Oh, I'm fine with that. American precision bombing. State of the art, perfectly safe.

They both laugh.

FX: There is a sudden enormous explosion in the next city block. A huge pall of smoke and flames from the blast shoots across an intersection not far ahead. Henry slams on the brakes.

HENRY (utterly shocked)

Jesus.

For a moment they sit frozen, stunned. Charmaine begins to get out.

HENRY

Hang on, what are you doing?!

CHARMAINE

I'm going to see if I can help!

HENRY

No, get back in the car! Get back in the car, Charmaine!

CHARMAINE

No, come on, we must go help!

HENRY

No! No! No! Get back in the car, now! Please, Charmaine!

CHARMAINE

No, I'm going to help! You go back to the hotel and bring the others!

With that she closes her door and hurries away. Henry shakes his head, scared and a little ashamed. He puts the car in gear and drives away.

EXT. BOMB GROUND ZERO -- DAY

FX: A cruise missile has taken out the better part of a city block. There is utter devastation. WOUNDED lie everywhere,

others walk in a daze. The scene is horrific. Charmaine enters frame, utterly shocked.

CHARMAINE

Oh, oh God.

EXT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

The scene is bedlam, with WOUNDED being brought from all directions into the hospital, and HOSPITAL STAFF trying to deal with the onslaught. Ambulances are arriving one after the other.

Charmaine, in a state of shock, struggles to carry a SMALL GIRL who has a leg blown off.

A WARDSMAN sees her and plucks the child from her arms. As he hurries the child inside, Charmaine slumps, exhausted, and overwhelmed with sympathy for the suffering she sees all around her.

EXT. MARKETPLACE -- DAY

Charmaine wanders in a daze through a marketplace. She nears a CROWD of people who are cheering euphorically.

Perhaps blended with stock footage. SADDAM HUSSEIN, standing on a chair, makes an appearance within the adoring crowd (shortly after the bombing of the restaurant that was supposed to have killed him).

As Saddam steps down, being mobbed, waving and smiling, he suddenly bumps into Charmaine.

In somewhat of a daze, Charmaine looks up at him and recognition dawns. She points a bloodied hand into his face.

CHARMAINE

You're a very evil man and it's
people like you who make this world
such a hard place when it doesn't
have to be!

Saddam looks quickly at an AID.

SADDAM

(Arabic - subtitled)
Get her away from the cameras.

He moves on and the Aid grabs Charmaine, pushing her roughly away.

On the periphery of the Crowd, Charmaine is expelled by the Aid, as Saddam and the Crowd move on.

EXT. STREET NEAR HOTEL -- DAY

Charmaine walks down the street. She looks up and to her surprise sees the rear ends of two red, double-decker buses driving away.

The few remaining Shields are now leaving Iraq.

INT. CHARMAINE'S ROOM -- DAY

In her petticoat, Charmaine washes blood from her arms in a small handbasin. She breaks down weeping, letting all her grief out.

INT. HALL -- NIGHT

The HOTEL MANAGER stands in the hall outside Charmaine's room. He is indignant.

Now dressed but looking exhausted, Charmaine opens the door and cocks her head in query. The Hotel Manager hands her a bill.

HOTEL MANAGER

You pay. You pay this. You pay this now.

Charmaine looks at the bill and the enormous amount of money he is asking for. Slowly, she begins to laugh. She goes on laughing. The Hotel Manager watches, confused and indignant. Charmaine laughs so hard she has to sit on the bed.

INT. HOTEL FOYER -- NIGHT

Charmaine is coming downstairs, carrying her luggage. She is approached by Amanda, carrying a clipboard.

AMANDA (business-like)
 Oh there you are. Look, I was
 wondering if you might take a run out
 to the Al Daura oil refinery
 tomorrow. We have food and water and
 some blankets to go out.

Charmaine looks at her curiously, sympathetically.

CHARMAINE
 Do you not see these bags in my
 hands, luv? It's over. You can go
 home now.

There is brief recognition in her eyes, but Amanda is not
 accepting reality.

AMANDA
 Oh...fine, I'll do it myself.

She hurries on in an officious manner.

INT. PHONE BOOTH, HOTEL FOYER -- NIGHT

Reading from a small piece of paper she holds, Charmaine
 dials a number.

EXT. GRAIN SILO, DESERT -- SUNRISE

As the enormous sun rises behind them, the silhouettes of
 Charmaine, sitting on a donkey, led by Uzma, appears over a
 rise. There is a second donkey led by his Grandson, and
 carrying Charmaine's luggage.

They approach a grain silo in the middle of a flat,
 featureless plain.

EXT. SILO -- DAY

Sitting on a platform adjoining the silo, Charmaine and Uzma
 finish having a cup of tea, and Uzma stands.

UZMA (Arabic)
 Is there anything we can bring you?

GRANDSON
 He asks if we can bring you anything?

CHARMAINE

No, if he just comes with food and water each day, that will be fine.

UZMA (Arabic)

She is as brave as she is lovely.
Please thank her.

GRANDSON

He says you are brave and beautiful
and thank you.

CHARMAINE

(bowing to Uzma)

You are most welcome.

Waving, Uzma and his Grandson depart.

After watching them go, Charmaine crosses to her bags. She pulls out a length of chain. She threads it through an eyelet in the silo wall, and hangs an unlocked padlock from it. She turns and looks out on the desert.

Uzma, his grandson and the donkeys are now quite distant, and their image is being lost in the already shimmering heat of the desert.

Charmaine watches them go.

SONG: In VO Charmaine sings a soft Irish ballad.

INT. CHARMAINE'S & WILLIAM'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Song continues.

Close on a framed picture of Charmaine. William's hand appears and picks up the photo.

He is in his pajamas, and carries the photograph from the dressing table to his bed, where he sits and examines it.

Tears come to William's eyes as he runs his finger across the image of his wife's face.

EXT. SILO -- NIGHT

Song continues.

Charmaine, wrapped in a blanket, shivers in the cold of the night.

EXT. SILO -- DAY

Song continues.

A bird watches Charmaine.

The sun is high in the sky.

Charmaine walks idly across the small platform, and is now seen singing the ballad.

Her song is interrupted as she notices Uzma approaching on a donkey.

They both smile pleasantly and wave.

EXT. SILO -- DAY

Uzma smokes a cigarette while having a cup of tea with Charmaine. He talks quite a lot in Arabic, telling her about the war, and not seeming to mind that Charmaine doesn't understand him.

CHARMAINE

Really, that's terribly interesting
...My goodness me...You don't say.

Uzma offers her a drag of his cigarette.

CHARMAINE

Oh, how kind. No, thank you, I don't
smoke. No, no smoke. Thank you, and I
haven't had my tetanus injection yet.

She grins and nods, and Uzma salutes her with his cup.

EXT. SILO -- DAY

Uzma leaves on his donkey, speaking incessantly.

CHARMAINE

Yes, well thank you for the lovely
food and the tea. Why don't you bring
your grandson out like I keep asking?

Uzma says he does not understand. Charmaine holds her hand out at the Grandson's height.

CHARMAINE
Grandson. Your Grandson. Boy. Bring
boy here so we can talk.

Uzma tells her he understands. Charmaine smiles, far too pleasantly.

CHARMAINE
Yes, that's what you said last time,
and the time before, and the time
before. Write it in your diary, or
better still lend me your penknife
and I'll carve it into your forehead.

UZMA
Shalom.

CHARMAINE
Shalom, Uzma. God's blessings. See
you tomorrow.

Uzma departs. Charmaine takes a big sigh, alone again.

SMASH CUT:

EXT. JET INT COCKPIT -- DAY

In a jet cockpit with the PILOT and flying at great speed
low over the desert.

INTERCUT:

EXT. SILO -- DAY

Charmaine idly weaves a braid out of the chain while humming
to herself.

In the jet the Pilot goes through a heads-up display of
targets, sorting them within the computer.

FX: A computerized image of the silo location appears. The
Pilot punches a red button marked "Target Confirm" and a
series of decreasing circles target the silo and lock on,
displaying 'Locked'.

Charmaine tries to meditate, humming 'Ohhmmm', but having little success.

PILOT (radio fx)
Approaching third target. Range five miles. Visual confirmation thirty seconds.

BASE (radio fx FEMALE VOICE)
Affirmative.

EXT. SILO -- DAY

Charmaine sits against the silo wall, singing softly again. She suddenly sights the jet coming toward her at low altitude, and stops singing. She stands, frowning.

The jet suddenly passes at colossal speed. The noise is deafening.

INTERCUT:

EXT. JET INT. -- DAY

As he banks the jet the Pilot catches a quick glimpse of Charmaine below.

PILOT
Target confirmed. One civilian. I'll buzz it again.

Charmaine watches the jet banking around, fear growing on her face. She suddenly realizes the jet is coming again, and rushes back to her chain.

CHARMAINE (whimpering, scared)
This is it, this is it.

She puts the chain around her and over her shoulder as demonstrated earlier by Godfrey. Hesitating, knowing there is now no going back, she snaps the padlock shut.

The jet comes in, lower.

Charmaine braces herself and holds up her hand, ordering the jet to stop as trained to do.

The jet passes once more, much closer, much lower, much louder.

The jet banks again, going round for another run.

Gasping with emotion, Charmaine watches it.

EXT. JET INT. -- DAY

PILOT (radio fx)
Base, confirm presence or otherwise
of Human Shield activity at target 3.

BASE (radio fx)
Wait one...We have not been so
advised. What is your status?

PILOT
There appears to be Human Shield
activity.

There is a brief pause.

BASE
Target is secondary. Be advised, your
discretion. I repeat, your
discretion.

PILOT
Roger that.

INTERCUT:

EXT. SILO -- DAY

Charmaine sees the jet coming round once more, and steels herself.

As the jet screams in toward her, Charmaine also begins to scream, but her scream is one of defiance.

The jet closes, Charmaine screams, brave, unflinching.

The images and sounds build to a climax.

The pilot suddenly snaps back his trigger cap and banks the jet sharply away.

PILOT (VO)

Target 3 aborted. Refer to ground forces. Moving to fourth target.

BASE (VO)

Affirmative.

EXT. SILO -- DAY

With a groan of relief Charmaine sees the jet moving away. She sinks to floor. As she regains her breath she suddenly realizes the padlock is locked.

CHARMAINE

Oh, whoops a daisy.

EXT. SILO -- DAY

Dehydrated, Charmaine dozes in the hot sun.

She becomes aware of the deep rumble of many engines.

She squints into the distance.

FX: Out of the heat haze an entire ARMY slowly appears - numerous tanks and armored PCs.

Astounded, Charmaine struggles to her feet, watching one tank in particular rumble directly toward her at speed. It pulls up before her some twenty yards distant. With a whirring sound its turret rotates until the barrel is aiming directly at her.

There is a long moment where the tank and Charmaine seem to stare at each other.

TANK COMMANDER PA

Could you step away from the target, please, ma'am.

CHARMAINE

Um...I can't you see, um, the man with the key won't be back until tomorrow! Would you mind coming back then, at all?!

TANK COMMANDER PA

Step aside from the target, please,
ma'am.

CHARMAINE

Can you not hear me in there?! I
can't, y'see! I don't have a key!

She tries to show that she is shackled to the silo.

EXT. SILO -- DAY

The tank is suddenly joined by an armored PC. Its rear door opens and a half-dozen SOLDIERS rapidly emerge. They wear helmets replete with oversized dark glasses, and carry rifles. They quickly form a perimeter, all aiming their weapons at Charmaine. Their commander, a LIEUTENANT, a very big man, steps up onto the platform and crosses to Charmaine. With uniform, helmet and oversized dark glasses, he looks like a large predatory insect.

LIEUTENANT

Do you have any weaponry or range
produce on your person?

CHARMAINE

I'm sorry?

LIEUTENANT

Explain your presence here.

CHARMAINE

Er, I'm a Human Shield, y'see, and,
I'm guarding this grain silo, y'see,
so the people can have bread.

LIEUTENANT

We have not been so advised.

CHARMAINE

Oh...Well, there's been a mistake
then.

LIEUTENANT

Are there hostiles inside or in the
near vicinity?

CHARMAINE

No, just me, and I'm not hostile at all.

The Lieutenant stares at her.

CHARMAINE

At all, at all.

The Lieutenant makes hand signals to his men. They quickly exercise a drill for breaching the door to the silo, tossing grenades inside, taking cover, shouting "Fire in the hole!". There is a loud explosion as the grenades go off. The soldiers, including the Lieutenant, quickly enter the silo.

EXT. SILO -- DAY

After a long moment the Lieutenant exits the silo and crosses to Charmaine. He towers over her, and Charmaine is afraid. However he lifts his glasses, revealing his eyes.

LIEUTENANT

Ma'am...there is no grain in this silo.

CHARMAINE

What?

LIEUTENANT

There is no grain in this silo.

CHARMAINE

But...why would Uzma want me to guard it then?

The Lieutenant stares.

CHARMAINE

He owns it, y'see. He's the one who has the key.

The Lieutenant stares. He signals his men back to the armored PC.

CHARMAINE

But wait! You're not going to leave me all chained up like this?

The Lieutenant crosses to her and aims his sidearm at her chain. He hesitates.

LIEUTENANT

Ma'am, I would like to help you, but given the possibility you may be collaterally injured should I proceed, and given we have numerous free press embedded with us, I would not like to attract the possibility of adverse publicity.

CHARMAINE

Does that mean you're not going to shoot it?

LIEUTENANT

(leaving, holstering his weapon)
Affirmative.

CHARMAINE

Oh! Um, could you be a good boy then and pass me my water bottle over there.

The Lieutenant crosses to her water bottle and hands it to her.

LIEUTENANT

Have a nice day, ma'am.

CHARMAINE

Thank you, and same to you, and all.

The tank and APC leave.

Charmaine purses her lips and shakes her head.

EXT. SILO -- DAY

The next day. Charmaine sits, her expression little altered from the day before.

She watches Uzma and his Grandson approach on donkeys. Uzma waves his familiar greeting and is surprised when Charmaine merely returns a cold stare.

UZMA (Arabic)

Ask her if she knows the Americans
are here.

GRANDSON

He asks, did you know the Americans
are here now?

UZMA (Arabic)

Allah be praised, and we will all
soon be free and you can go home.

GRANDSON

Thank Heavens, and soon we will all
be free and you can go to your home.

Charmaine suddenly holds up her hand, cutting Uzma off as he
begins to say more.

CHARMAINE

Unless you are blind you can see the
silo has been broken into. Ask your
grandfather why he had me watch an
empty silo.

GRANDSON (Arabic)

She wants to know why the silo is
empty.

UZMA (Arabic)

(seeming to see the door for the first time)
This is not good.

GRANDSON

Goodness me.

Uzma wanders closer to the door.

UZMA (Arabic)

Tell her I hope she was not hurt.

GRANDSON

He hopes you were not hurt.

CHARMAINE

Actually I took a large piece of
shrapnel in my leg.

Uzma suddenly turns and looks at her leg. Charmaine sees he understands English. Uzma realizes the jig is up.

GRANDSON (Arabic)

(subtitled)

Lucky she's chained up, grandpa.

UZMA (Arabic) (to his grandson)

(subtitled)

You better skedaddle.

GRANDSON

Okay, grandpa.

As his grandson departs on the donkey, Uzma unchains Charmaine and produces a rolled cigarette. Charmaine plucks it from his lips and makes him light her. They sit down together on the platform.

UZMA

You see, it's all I own in the world.
I have four children, twelve
grandchildren. When this war is over
there will be grain in here again,
and people will want bread.

She hands him the cigarette, and he takes a puff.

CHARMAINE

I have five children, and I would
like to see my grandchildren.

UZMA

Did you save this?

CHARMAINE

Twice.

UZMA

So, I am much in your debt. Please
allow me to drive you to the Turkish
border.

CHARMAINE

Oh, you have a car?

Uzma looks somewhat ashamed. Charmaine takes the cigarette and draws on it.

UZMA

Should you do that without your
tetanus shot?

Charmaine grins at him, forgiving him. Uzma grins. They
laugh.

From a distance, they sit together in peace.

INT. TURKISH AIRPORT -- DAY

Charmaine waits in the busy airport. As she looks around,
however, she sees someone. It is Amanda Patterson, sitting
alone.

Charmaine crosses to her, and as Amanda sees her coming she
is embarrassed.

CHARMAINE

I'm so glad to see you, Amanda. I'm
so glad you're alright.

AMANDA

Yes, well, same to you. Pity it
didn't turn out better. But there you
have it. That's life.

Charmaine appears sympathetic and sits next to her.

CHARMAINE

Please...I want you to know
something. I think you're the
bravest, most unselfish person I have
ever known, and what you did in Iraq
was magnificent.

Amanda is unprepared for the compliment.

AMANDA

I...I...oh.

She puts her hand to her face and begins to cry.

AMANDA

(mopping at her tears with a handkerchief)
Oh, goodness, where did that come
from...I felt I had failed so badly.

Charmaine consoles her.

CHARMAINE

No...no. You're the reason I came to Iraq. You inspired me. I'm the one who failed. But you...you did so much, and you helped so much, it was your strength that we all held onto.

Amanda cries more fully, and they embrace, hugging.

EXT. AIRCRAFT CABIN, IN FLIGHT -- DAY

Charmaine sits alone in a window seat, looking out on a magnificent burst of sunlight on clouds. She shakes her head to herself, ashamed.

CHARMAINE

You're just a silly old woman. A silly, old...

Her eyes fill with tears...

INT. AIRPORT GANGWAY -- DAY

Charmaine, looking depressed, comes along a gangway, pushing her luggage on a small trolley.

As she comes into the public waiting area, however, she is utterly amazed by what she sees.

Her entire street is there, headed by her family, and all bearing signs such as "Our Hero", "Charmaine The Shield", "Welcome Back".

Her family rushes forward and kisses and hugs her with an avalanche of affection.

INTRO: IRISH MUSIC.

INT. SITTING ROOM, CHARMAINE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

A big party. Music continues with the house jam-packed with FAMILY and FRIENDS.

Charmaine and William, along with others, dance and whoop it up.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Charmaine pushes her way through people to the sink, and gets herself a glass of water. She turns round and finds her eldest son, Patrick, right beside her.

PATRICK

Having a good time there, ma?

CHARMAINE

Oh, it's grand, Patrick, grand.

PATRICK

Ma, I want to say something.

He takes her hands.

PATRICK

I want you to know, you've taught me a lot by what you did.

CHARMAINE

How's that, Patrick?

PATRICK

Oh, about standing up for your beliefs, being yourself, not taking crap just 'cause someone's bigger than you.

Charmaine smiles up at him and clasps his face.

CHARMAINE

You've no idea the simple joy I have, being with my family, in a land without tyrants.

PATRICK

(licking his finger and ticking one off in the air)
And another one 'n all.

William appears beside them.

WILLIAM

Here, you, that's my girl, go get your own. Come on, lass, I'm taking you upstairs. Lock up for us will you, Paddie.

William drags her away through the crowd.

PATRICK (laughing)
I don't think this lot's going home,
da!

INT. CHARMAINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Charmaine and William lie together, naked beneath the covers, her head on his shoulder. They are both grinning with contentment. The party continues quietly in the background, Irish music still under.

CHARMAINE
Stupid, isn't it, people going to war
in this day and age. 'Specially when
they could be doing this.

WILLIAM
I got all your letters.

CHARMAINE
Oh, that's good.

WILLIAM
You write lovely letters.

CHARMAINE
Thank you.

WILLIAM
Reminds me of this British soldier
during the Falklands war. Told his
girlfriend he'd write her every day.
And he did. Then one day he gets this
letter from his family. Said not to
write no more. She got married.

Charmaine looks at him for the rest...

WILLIAM
Married the mailman.

CHARMAINE
(laughing, kissing him)
That's why I came back.

WILLIAM

Oh?

CHARMAINE

Stop you coming out.

WILLIAM

I'll show you coming out.

They roll together kissing and laughing.

Will be the best three minutes
of your life!

CHARMAINE

Oh, a new Gaelic record!

They laugh harder. They sober.

WILLIAM

Was it terrible, Charmaine?

CHARMAINE

Well, made me remember a little
story. Don't know if I read it, or if
it were told me. It's about what war
is. See there's this man, and he
takes a sharp stick and pokes out
another man's eye. So that man goes
up to another man, and cuts off his
arm.

William waits.

WILLIAM

That's it?

Charmaine nods.

WILLIAM

Makes no sense.

Charmaine shakes her head. She is quiet for a long moment,
reflective, and hugs his chest.

CHARMAINE

No. No sense at all.

MUSIC UP.
CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER: None of the civilian targets protected by Human Shields during the Iraq war were attacked.

SUPER: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" - Margaret Mead.

ROLL CREDITS.