

"ODESSA"

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. PERMIAN BASIN, TEXAS - NIGHT

Pitch black. Desert wind shrieks. It scours the unseen landscape with sand, chokes it in dust.

MAN'S VOICE
(frightened Spanish)
Is it bad? How bad is it?

WOMAN'S VOICE
(seething English)
Quiet, for godssake. Quiet!

Agitated voices swarm close by. A stew of English and Spanish. The wind plays tricks. Can't tell which direction.

A cargo pack rustles. Moonlight cuts the storm and glints over a blade. The quick THWIP of a knife slit through canvas.

The splinter of light reveals shimmering blood. It seeps from a puncture wound. Gunshot.

The loud SNORT of a nervous horse spins the woman in a flash. ESTRELLA (30's), knife trembling in her hand but ready to do damage. Fiercely determined.

ESTRELLA
You shut that beast up or I swear
to Christ I'll cut its throat.

The man, VICTOR (40's), squints against the ripping sand. He's intimidated. Rightly so. She means it.

Tension in the distant VOICES escalates. They're not finding what they're looking for.

Victor steels his eyes on Estrella, sand glued to her face by sweat. He strokes his horse's neck.

VICTOR
Shhh... tranquilo.

Estrella yanks a strip of canvas tight around her leg.

ENGINES sputter up and rev in the darkness. Jeeps. Vehicles on the move. Dim headlights bounce through the sandstorm.

Victor and Estrella stare at each other until they're sure the Jeeps are moving away.

VICTOR

Gasolina.

Estrella nods. She draws a hoodie up over her head and curls up behind a boulder.

ESTRELLA

Well, we ain't here for the margaritas.

The howling sandstorm swallows the moon again. Darkness.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Eerie calm. Heat ripples over a barren wasteland. White hot noon sun.

A road sign reads "U.S. BORDER 7 KM"

Beyond the sign squats an abandoned shack. An armored vehicle roars past without slowing.

INT. ABANDONED SHACK - DAY

Outside a missing back door, Victor's blonde palomino gnaws at the scant vegetation it can find.

Estrella sits on a rusted engine block. Victor helps change her leg bandage.

VICTOR

(in English now)

You don't have to threaten me. I'm in no hurry to meet my maker.

ESTRELLA

I know, Victor. I'm sorry. When I'm scared I get surly.

Victor pulls the new clean bandage tight. She's stoic.

VICTOR

Scared? Scared bootlegger?

ESTRELLA

Make it tighter.

He does. Takes a small pleasure in it. Estrella winces.

VICTOR
Why are you doing this?

Estrella stands. Her face softens.

ESTRELLA
(in Spanish)
Because I love my son.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Estrella sits in the saddle, one leg of her desert fatigues dyed red with blood.

Victor walks, leads the horse by the reins.

Four battered steel gas cans hang like saddle bags. They beat a hollow rhythm. Empty.

EXT. PLATEAU - DAY

Estrella and Victor crouch behind the massive wooden legs of a dormant oil derrick.

Estrella scopes a town below through binoculars--

An oasis. Everything looks normal except for the oil well pumpjacks that hammer away in parking lots and front lawns.

ESTRELLA
Where is it? I don't see anything.

VICTOR
That's why you hired a dowser.

She hands him the binoculars.

ESTRELLA
So when do we go?

Victor stands up.

VICTOR
Ahorita.

Estrella hops to her feet quicker than she should have with her bad leg. She grimaces.

ESTRELLA

Right now?

Victor unhitches his horse from the derrick.

VICTOR

Does it really matter?

Estrella watches him head off toward the back side of the hill. She clutches something in her hand. A fine chain dangles. She kisses her fist.

EXT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Victor pumps a handle at the mouth of a tank hidden behind two dusty hearses.

The pump feeds a hose, the hose feeds a nozzle, the nozzle fills one of the gas cans.

A few dozen yards away, Estrella stands watch. She peers around the corner of the building.

An armored vehicle rolls past. Moving too slow to have a destination.

She pulls back. Places her hand on the hilt of the knife tucked into her belt.

ESTRELLA

(whispering)

Don't stop. Just keep on moving--

VICTOR

Let's go.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Estrella and Victor trek under a blistering sun. Just past the next dune, a fourteen-foot border fence looms.

Victor halts them. He unstraps the gas cans from his horse and they crouch behind a stand of spike-flowered yucca.

Victor reaches into the sand and fishes out a chain. He pulls, throws his weight into it. A camouflaged iron manhole cover slides away to reveal a narrow hole. A tunnel head.

VICTOR

In like a lion, out like a snake.

Estrella's too tired to find much humor in it.

ESTRELLA

This was my first run.

Victor smiles. He knew.

VICTOR

I hope for your son it's the last.

A red mist puffs sharply from his scalp. The faint CLAP of a distant rifle shot follows. Estrella and Victor stare at each other for a few seconds in shock.

Victor crumples to the ground. Blood spits from his head.

Estrella backs away. A second bullet fizzes past her ear. It breaks the trance.

ESTRELLA

Lo siento, Victor.

She dumps two of the four gas cans into the tunnel mouth and goes down after them. Can't carry them all.

INT. TUNNEL - DAY

Almost too dark to see. Estrella's claustrophobic breath rasps out like an emphysema patient.

She crouches through the tunnel dragging the gas cans with her. Her shoulders scrape the earthen walls.

She hears Jeeps. Voices. The tunnel narrows. Her crouch becomes a crawl. Finally reduced to a slither on her back.

Sand needles her face. She pushes with her heels, shoulders constricted between the tunnel walls now.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Stop!

A flashlight beam dances over her face. The back of her head bangs into earth. Her first instinct: Dead End.

ESTRELLA

No... No, Jesus please not like this.

Dogs clangor at the tunnel head. Estrella starts to hyperventilate. She sees a pinhole of daylight above.

She squirms to pull her arms up alongside her. She can barely maneuver in the suffocating space. She screams.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Fire ants swarm in the dust. The edge ring of another manhole cover rises through their colony. It grinds as it slides.

Sand and ants spill through the crescent opening. A hand emerges and grips the edge. A groan below becomes a cry.

Estrella muscles it open enough to wriggle out. She hoists the gas cans from the tunnel and collapses on American soil.

Rifle-wielding BORDER PATROL AGENTS stand on the other side of the fence in front of their star-emblazoned vehicles.

Each agent wears a patch on his uniformed shoulder:

"REPUBLIC OF TEXAS BORDER PROTECTION"

Estrella sits up. The agents shoulder their rifles in defeat.

Victor's palomino whinnies. It gallops gracefully away along the fence and passes a concrete border marker, engraved "United States" on the north side and "Texas" on the south.

Estrella stands, grabs the two gas cans and starts to walk.

EXT. SINGLE STORY HOUSE - DAY

Isolated. Set back off the road. A low-slung rambler with all the middle-class trimmings in a sad state of disrepair.

Estrella struggles up the road with the gas cans, but that fierce determination is back. It's the home stretch.

She steps off the crumbling pavement and slogs across an overgrown, sun-scorched front yard.

ESTRELLA

Sam?

She reaches the driveway and drops the cans beside an eighteen-wheeler with flat, dry-rotted tires. A relic.

A big, multi-bay mechanic's garage sits beyond it.

ESTRELLA

Sam!

SAM (30's), pushes out through the back door with a hunting rifle in his hands. He wears a cast on one.

SAM
Oh, thank God.

They hug briefly and Estrella hurries inside. Sam drops his rifle against the truck and grabs the gas cans.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Dim, shades drawn. Blankets on a bed rise and fall with the weak respiration of a shape beneath.

Estrella enters. She quietly slips to the bedside and sits.

She brushes her sleeping SON's forehead. Just a preschooler.

Carts and stands around the bed support medical machines, drips and monitors. None of them are powered on.

Estrella hangs her fine chain on the bedpost. It's a pendant. Three silver figures hand in hand form a heart.

The muted BURR of a two-stroke gasoline engine breaks the grave silence. A portable generator outside.

The medical equipment flickers to life. Displays light up. Pumps whir. Estrella weeps silently.

Sam kneels down beside her. He unties the bloody bandage from her leg. He knows a gunshot wound when he sees one.

SAM
I'm going next time. That's it.

Sam looks up at her, sees the shell-shocked look.

SAM
He's okay. He did okay and so did you.

ESTRELLA
I only got ten gallons.

Sam sits on the edge of the bed, places his hand on hers. He opens the shades a little to let some light in.

SAM
They'll make more.

The boy's eyelids flutter. They open. Estrella smiles down at him and he smiles back.

BOY

Don't cry, Mommy. I hear the good sound.

ESTRELLA

Yes, baby. I hear it too. It's a beautiful sound. Just beautiful.

FADE OUT.