

"Deja Voodoo"

Original Screenplay

By

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

Blurred faces in emergency room scrubs. MUFFLED VOICES as they leave and a privacy curtain is pulled shut.

The PUPIL in a blue iris contracts and expands, trying to focus. POLICE OFFICER standing nearby.

The curtain is pulled open and a female doctor approaches. She nods at the policeman.

DOCTOR JESSICA MOORE (late 30'S - early 40's) checks the drip in a Foley bag. Her tanned skin, freckles and sun-bleached hair tells us she's an outdoor person.

She notices the patient's eyes are open.

JESSICA

Well hello there, Mr.Johanson.

GUNNAR JOHANSON (60++) continues to try to bring her face into focus. As soon as he does, his eyes flicker like he is seeing an apparition. His entire body responds.

He's an over 6 feet tall, an old-school biker with a long grey/white beard, a severely busted lip, swollen eye and scuffed cheek bone. His voice has a baritone resonance.

GUNNAR

Where'd you come from?

JESSICA

I'm Dr. Moore. Mr. Johanson, can you tell me what happened to you?

GUNNAR

I remember you...

JESSICA

No, afraid not.

(beat)

Do you remember hitting your head?

GUNNAR

I didn't hit my head. Them pigs did.

Indicates the cop standing nearby.

JESSICA

Really now?

GUNNAR

Yes, ma'am.

JESSICA

May I ask what in the world prompted you to start a fight at a *policemen's awards ceremony*?

He keeps a penetrating eye on her.

GUNNAR

They were giving a post-humorous award to my wife.

She's checking his face wounds.

JESSICA

You mean posthumous. I can't exactly picture you being married to a cop. Did she die in the line of duty?

GUNNAR

Hell no, she was a dispatcher. I'd of left her long time ago if she ever became a beat cop. Bad enough as it was.

Dr. Moore indicates for Gunnar to role on his side.

JESSICA

I need to check your back and kidneys again. Scans don't show anything ruptured, so you're lucky there.

Gunnar groans as he rolls on his side.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Mind telling me how she died?

GUNNAR

Cancer - and that fuck-head was definitely trying to be humorous. Kept referring to her as "their Bonnie Buns"...

JESSICA

That doesn't sound...

GUNNAR

(interrupts)
She had a really big ass and tits.

There's several large blue-black bruises on his lower back.

JESSICA

What'd they hit you with?

She indicates for him to roll back over.

GUNNAR

Fuckers boot-stomped me!

JESSICA

Well we need to see if you can pee -
in order assure us that you can.

GUNNAR

A beer sure would help.

JESSICA

Well, can't help you there.

GUNNAR

Can I go get one then?

JESSICA

Nope. You need to stay right here
for the rest of the night.. I think
that IV will do the trick.

Flirtacious rogue smile on his part.

GUNNAR

Darlin', you have any idea how long
its been since I heard a lady say
that? "I need you to stay right
here for the rest of the night".
And *men* don't pee, they piss. Come
on, let me go.

JESSICA

Nope. You won't be smiling if a
clot forms in your urinary track
and you can't *piss*.

She writes in the chart, turns to leave.

GUNNAR

Hey, doc?

JESSICA

Yes?

GUNNAR

I *do* know you.

JESSICA
No you don't.

GUNNAR
Still painting?

That stops her.

JESSICA
What?

GUNNAR
You were really, really good.

JESSICA
I'll be back to check on you in a couple hours.

GUNNAR
Yes, ma'am.

When she's a yard away:

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
Still got a bunch of critters following you around?

That stops her again. A deep frown creases her forehead.

Gunnar continues to stare at her as she leaves.

INT. SEMI-PRIVATE HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Gunnar is in his biker vest and jeans, sitting on the bed pulling on boots.

Jessica enters with a bunch of papers and hands him some.

JESSICA
You need to check in with your doctor if you run a fever or your lower back starts hurting or you can't - "piss".

GUNNAR
Hmph. My back's always hurt'n and I ain't got no doc. So maybe you ought to give me some pain pills... Just incase.

JESSICA
No can do.

GUNNAR

(smiling)

Well, that kinda pisses me off.
Might stop pissing just for the
hell of it - so I can come back
here and *piss* you off somemore.

JESSICA

Mr. Johanson...

GUNNAR

You painted magnificent
landscapes. Shamed those other
frilly-frocks.

Staring at him, something in her mind clicks, but she leaves before admitting it.

INT. CALTRANS TRUCK TRAVELING - CA MOUNTAINS - DAY

A heavy duty CALTRANS truck with a front blade travels up a mountain road. Gunnar's wearing a reflective work vest. On the seat beside him is a cooler and between his legs is an open can of beer. As he rounds a bend he glances down into a steep canyon where a creek runs along the bottom.

There's a female body lying in the middle of the creek, face up.

He slams on the brakes, jumps out and limp-jogs back down the road until he can relocate the body in his binoculars.

INSERT

Binocular view

It's Jessica - wearing hiking shorts and a sports bra with a cap and sunglasses on. Her head is resting on a rock as if it were a pillow while her butt and legs are in the gurgling water.

EXT. CANYON - DAY

He makes his way down to her.

GUNNAR

Hey! Hey! Doc! You okay?

SAMMY, her dog, BARKS from across the creek then splashes over to Jessica's side, GROWLS, poised to attack if Gunnar should come any closer.

She can't hear him due to the rushing water, but she hears her dog and jumps to her feet.

Gunnar stops on his side of the creek.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
You okay, Doc?

JESSICA
Uh - yes. Sush, shush Sammy.

She takes hold of the dog's collar. The dog stops barking but watches Gunnar's every move.

GUNNAR
Saw you from up on the road.

Indicates the truck above them.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
You do this often?

JESSICA
Pretty much. On my days off.

She shades her eyes.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
You wouldn't happen to have a cold beer, would you?

GUNNAR
That's a dumb question. I ought to make you climb up and get it since you wouldn't give me one, but hell, I'm a gentleman.

LATER

Canyon breezes, dancing shadows under cottonwoods, gurgling water.

Gunnar sits on his side of the creek with his work boots off and his feet in the water. The cooler of beer is beside him. She's sitting on a rock in the middle of the stream in the sun, sipping a beer with Sammy nearby. The dog's eyes never leave Gunnar.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
I'd of never figured a doctor lady layin' out in a creek. Or drinkin' beer.

JESSICA
Most-times I prefer nature to people. You always drink on the job?

GUNNAR

Most-times. Once I'm past the twenty-mile marker. After that my cell phone don't work no-more and the radio dispatch has a mind of its own.

(winks)

Kind of like you, I guess. Prefer to get away a bit.

(beat)

How come you sit out in the water? Ain't it cold?

JESSICA

Running water keeps the gnats away - plus I love the sound. De-stresses me. You get used to the cold after a while.

Gunnar looks across the stream at her minimalist campsite. He notices a Land Rover parked under mesquite trees.

GUNNAR

You're running with the wrong tribe.

JESSICA

Excuse me?

GUNNAR

There's a reason birds of a feather flock together.

She frowns. Shrugs.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

You ain't paying heed to your real callin', darlin'.

JESSICA

What?

Gunnar gives her a penetrating stare. Then studies the surrounding mountain ridges before glancing at her out the corner of his eye.

GUNNAR

I reckon its just deja voodoo.

JESSICA

What?

GUNNAR

Deja voodoo. Like in deja vu, only since you're a seductive sorceress, its voodoo. How many animals you got following you around now-a-days?

JESSICA

Look sir, you're a rather hard character to forget, so I can definitely say I have never met you.

GUNNAR

Gunnar. Name's Gunnar. And yes, yes you have. Look Doc, after seeing you I sort of freaked out. And it ain't much better right now.

JESSICA

Really, how's that?

GUNNAR

I dunno.

He starts pulling on his socks and boots, stands.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Only explanation I can think of is Deja Voodoo.

He hefts the cooler up onto his shoulder.

JESSICA

Hey. Why didn't you come back for a post-op check like you were supposed to?

Gunnar shrugs.

GUNNAR

What for? So you could tell me the same damn thing as all them other docs. That I need to get operated on.

JESSICA

Maybe.

GUNNAR

Well I'm tired of listening to your song and dance routine tryin' to get me to say yes to cuttin' on my bones while I'm thinkin' you all is over-rated. Look, I got to be goin'. Want one more?

JESSICA

No. I'm good. Thanks.

Gunnar hefts the cooler on his shoulder and starts up the slope. She calls after him.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Hey Gunnar. Nice seeing you again. Glad you're okay although you do need to make an appointment.

He stops.

GUNNAR

Meanin'?

JESSICA

Your X-Rays were something else.

GUNNAR

No, I mean the part about it being nice to see me again.

Gunnar wedges the cooler between a rock and the slope and slides back down to the creek. Sammy growls.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Damn it all to hell, woman.

JESSICA

What?

GUNNAR

God probably thinks this is real damn funny.

JESSICA

What?

He points a finger at her.

GUNNAR

When the sum-bitch finally brings you back... I'm too old to do a goddamn thing 'bout it.

She observes the confused giant from her rock, then wades over to him, taking off her sunglasses. Sammy stays right by her leg. She stops, nose-to-chest and looks up at him.

JESSICA

So just what is it about me that makes you think you know me, knew me, whatever Mr. Rip Van Winkle?

GUNNAR

Your eyes mostly. I'd know 'em anywhere. And your smile - that little corner curl thing you do and the way you walk around so self-assured and not intimidated. I usually scare the shit outta people, specially rich white women and you don't seem to mind me at t'all.

His eyes hold hers. Its like she's trying, but nothing is happening - connecting.

JESSICA

So why is it you remember me but I don't remember you?

GUNNAR

Probably 'cause I'm always half-fucked up - and that kinda opens up the mind... Probably too many pills an' weed. I apologize ma'am.

Turns to leave, then stops.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

You ain't dead, are you?

JESSICA

What?

GUNNAR

I see dead people sometimes.

JESSICA

Ah, no. I'm not dead. Are you schizophrenic? I mean that literally, not sarcastically.

GUNNAR

Nope. Although sometimes I do wonder.

He turns and hefts the cooler back on his shoulder and waves goodbye, not looking back.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Take care of yourself gal and start painting again, alright? Only damn thing that ever made you happy, 'cept maybe all them critters of yours.

She remains frozen watching him make his way back up the steep hillside.

EXT. JESSICA'S BACKYARD PATIO - DAY

She's in a lounge chair by a pool reading through piles of paperwork. She stops to take a sip of wine. Her gaze travels around her walled-in back yard.

An ocelot rolls on its back, soaking up the sun. Sammy and another dog sleep in the shade. A three legged collared coyote hops over to a water bowl. A tabby cat rubs against her chair.

Her eyes stop on french doors of what appears to be an empty pool cabana.

Her CELL PHONE RINGS. She doesn't recognize the number.

JESSICA

Yes?

She sets her glass down.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

How'd you get my number?

(beat)

Really? And they fell for that?

(smiles - beat)

Actually I have been thinking about you.

Sammy picks up on the uncertainty in her voice and is now beside her. She pets him.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

No, I'm not saying I believe you, its just I've witnessed and heard some really strange things work'n in the ER. There's definitely a lot we don't know.

She looks over at the coyote.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
 Yes, I've been to Death Valley.
 Yeah, I know that place... Because
 I sometimes paint and photograph
 out there.

Closes her eyes, shakes her head.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
 Okay, okay, I admit it, I do paint.
 On occasion. Or at least try to...
 So why do you want to meet way out
 there?
 (smiles)
 So it'll be just us and the
 universe? Really now? And how do I
 know you'll behave?.... Let me
 think on it a bit. Yes, you're
 number is now in my phone. Good-
 bye, Mr. Johanson.

Sets the phone down, sips her wine, starts thinking, then BUZZ, BUZZ. She picks up the phone, recognizes the number which irritates her.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
 That's not exactly "a bit". I need
 to think on it some more. I'll call
 you back. .. Yeah, I promise.

She hangs up. Closes her eyes and lifts her chin to feel a soft breeze blowing.

INSERT DRONE VIEW

Of her, far below, in her backyard. We pull back even further until we are high above Santa Barbara and zooming inland over the coastal mountains, over the Bakersfield area, and up the Interstate 395 and across the barren Owens Valley, over a desert mountain range, across Death Valley and then we hover and slowly come back down to earth over a concrete building that is missing a roof and has busted walls and empty windows.

BACK TO

Jessica's eyes flicker open. She glances around as if reassuring herself where she is.

A beat, then she picks up the cell phone and hits a button.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Okay, I'll meet you out there.
Only, Gunnar, you've got to promise
me not to misbehave. I mean it.

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF SO. CALIFORNIA DESERT - DAY

Jessica's Land Rover races up from the bottom of the screen, while an old-school Harley Davidson is coming in from the left.

On the Harley, Gunnar wears wrap-around sunglasses with a bandana tied around his head. His helmet is strapped over his right knee and the wind parts his beard.

It appears they will reach the junction of their roads at the same time.

The Rover speeds up in order to turn right just in front of the bike.

INT. LAND ROVER TRAVELING - DAY

Jessica's in faded and definitely used outdoor clothing, her blonde ponytail pulled through the back of a khaki cap. On the front seat beside her is an expensive camera with a telephoto lens. On the passenger floorboard is a cooler. The back of the Rover is crammed with camping gear.

Gunnar pulls up beside her, totally relaxed, speeding along in the oncoming empty traffic lane. Gives her a two-finger salute. She smiles, picks up her camera with her right hand and snaps a shot of him while driving.

They speed ahead, nose-to-nose over an undulating two lane road.

An oncoming TRUCK materializes. Jessica lets-off the gas, and tilts her head for him to move over, but Gunnar remains in 'his' lane.

CLOSE ON TRUCK

The TRUCK DRIVER BLASTS his horn at the oncoming motorcycle.

Gunnar just keeps cruising towards disaster.

Jessica screams at him.

Just as it appears a head-on collision is imminent, Gunnar leans left onto a washboard road that intersects the highway at an angle. The truck flashes by.

INSERT

The TRUCK DRIVER, sure he was going to bulldoze over the biker, can't figure out where the idiot disappeared to.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

Jessica lets out a gasp, pulls over and watches Gunnar's dust trail head off into the foothills.

EXT. RHYOLITE RUINS, NEVADA - TWILIGHT

Silhouette of a gutted and crumbling roofless concrete building. (Like their lives?) The ruin sits on a talus slope overlooking a barren desert floor.

Two headlights come up a narrow asphalt road. It's the Land Rover, which pulls alongside one of the busted walls.

A road weary Jessica gets out and stretches, takes off her sun glasses and pulls two cold beers from the cooler. She steps through a hole in the wall into the middle of the roofless building. Evening winds lift strands of her hair. She looks around.

JESSICA

Marco.

A deep male baritone voice responds.

GUNNAR

Polo.

Gunnar steps into view. His sunglasses are tucked in his T-shirt so now we see the twinkle of a trickster in his pale blue eyes in the last light of the day.

Jessica hands him a cold beer. They both drink thirstily before he holds out his arms for a hug. She ignores him.

JESSICA

Did you know that road was there?

GUNNAR

God works in mysterious ways,
darlin'.

JESSICA

You got a death wish or something?

GUNNAR

Not any more.

She stares at him like he's an idiot.

He steps forward again to hug her. She steps back. He's a good foot or more taller than her. She indicates the helmet strapped over his knee.

JESSICA
Your bad knee, I presume.

GUNNAR
Yep.

LATER - NIGHT

They sit with their backs against an outside wall of the ruins studying the valley below which is now bathed in bright moonlight. Night winds ruffle them. The moon is full. It's QUIET, peaceful. Bottle of tequila and an empty Colonel Sanders bucket are nearby. They're sipping from tin cups.

Gunnar sucks on a joint. Every time he offers a hit to Jessica, she declines.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
Never figured on a doctor lady
liking tequila. Although I ain't
complaining.

JESSICA
(quietly)
Can't judge a book by its cover. I
brought wood. Want a fire?

GUNNAR
Nah. A fire would ruin this. Just
look at those stars.

JESSICA
They're moving fast, aren't they?
Look where Venus is now.

She points.

Gunnar smiles as he shakes his head.

Jessica gives him a quizzical look. He indicates the heavens.

GUNNAR
They aren't movin', darlin'. We
are.

JESSICA
Right you are, wizard.

GUNNAR

Exactly why I don't trust you doctors. I don't think any of you're as smart as you pretend.

Jessica chuckles as she pulls a blanket around her shoulders. Gunnar helps her then settles back taking another drag of marijuana.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Damn, I didn't think anybody but me and my bros knew about this place.

JESSICA

I've been here six-seven times.

GUNNAR

Really?

JESSICA

I've always liked photographing around here. What about you? How did you find this place?

GUNNAR

I found it on a run to Vegas. Me and my buddies, we decided to take a detour so we could do some mescaline.

JESSICA

You still do that?

GUNNAR

What, mescaline?

She nods. He shakes his head.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Nope. High ain't worth all the puking.

JESSICA

What exactly are you taking? Doing? Now?

He looks at her for a beat.

GUNNAR

Nothing as heavy as I used to, that's for sure. Hard enough walking as it is.

JESSICA

I'm serious. As your doctor being
out here in the middle of nowhere,
I need to know.

Gunnar goes to his bike, fishes around in a saddle bag and
pulls out some pill bottles. He starts rattling them like
maracas while doing a shuffle back towards her.

A yard away he starts tossing her the pill bottles, one at a
time. She manages to catch everyone of them, although he
tries to throw a few out of her immediate reach.

Looking through them;

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Percocet. Vidicon.

Holds one up. Sarcastically.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Ibuprofen. My God! What a score.

Gunnar sits down next to her.

GUNNAR

I depend on that one for hang-
overs.

JESSICA

Oxycodone-acetaminophen oral.
Tramadol. Jesus, how'd you pull off
getting this many opioid
prescriptions?

GUNNAR

(big smile)

That's what crossing state lines
will do for you.

He indicates the pill bottles.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

My favorites are the ones that say
"don't take with alcohol 'cause it
will enhance the affect". What the
hell? Don't they know fools like me
see that and say, "hell, yeah!".

JESSICA

How do you even function?

GUNNAR

It's the only way I do function.

JESSICA

Then you should dedicate your body to science. Seriously, Gunnar, you shouldn't be taking any of this stuff while drinking like you do. And smoking pot. You could die.

GUNNAR

Its the other way around. I'd die if I didn't take them.

JESSICA

How about cutting back while you're out here with me? That's the last thing I need, for you to die of an overdose on my watch.

GUNNAR

Then you keep 'em, doc, and I'll come to you when I need to. Don't want you worried about me.

She studies him for a beat.

JESSICA

Really?

GUNNAR

Yeah, really.

She fills various pockets in her cargo pants with the pill bottles.

He starts playing his harmonica.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

I seriously doubted you'd show.

JESSICA

(shrugs)

Well, there were some serious doubts. But I wanted to discuss this - this supposition of yours a bit more.

GUNNAR

What?

JESSICA

The act of supposing or assuming something is true, a suggested possibility.

GUNNAR

I know what the word means. I just
wanna hear your version.

JESSICA

I'm still thinking on it.

Long beat as he looks around, turning melancholy.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

What?

GUNNAR

Ah, its just being here reminds me
of how many of my bros ain't around
no more. Cain't figure out why I'm
the last Mohican. But looky what,
here I got a new friend, you. Only
I reckon you're a bit whimpy when
it comes to partin'.

He pours another tin cup of tequila.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

'sides my back and knee, I got a
bunch of busted bones that act up
time-to-time. Even my hands're
gettin' arthritic. Gets old, being
old. And to tell the truth, the
pain - it just keeps on gettin'
worse and worse instead of better,
even with a dump truck load of
drugs.

Jessica studies him for a beat.

JESSICA

I know. I saw your x-rays.

He shrugs, takes a drag of weed.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Why do you hate doctors so much?
Why won't you let us help you?

GUNNAR

First off, every buddy of mine that
got operated on didn't care for the
results. And they couldn't figure
out why the hell they still had to
pay a mountain of money for
something that didn't work out
right.

(MORE)

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Second of all, after seeing what all you did to my wife, the only way I'm ever gonna enter a hospital is D-O-A.

He softly blows a TUNE.

JESSICA

You weren't DOA when I saw you.

GUNNAR

But I was knocked out. Close enough.

JESSICA

Would you let *me* help you?

GUNNAR

Nope. Fixing you is more important.

JESSICA

There's nothing wrong with me.

GUNNAR

Hell yeah, there is. You're gonna end up just as miserable as before. And I can't let that happen again.

His eyes hold hers. She whispers.

JESSICA

What are you talking about?

GUNNAR

I'm here ta'tell you - your heading down the same damn wrong path, darlin'. Wake up. Smell the roses. Figure out what makes you *happy*, not what you feel obligated to do.

He starts playing the harmonica, leaving her in befuddled confusion.

JESSICA

I am happy.

GUNNAR

Don't look like it to me.

She leans her head back feeling the soft night breezes and closes her eyes. After a beat *she glances at him as if a thought just entered her mind.*

LATER

Jessica, wearing a heavy jacket, rolls out sleeping bags on either side of a fire. Gunnar lays down on one; watches her finish making camp while blowing TUNES.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

You must have sashes of badges.

JESSICA

I never was in the Girl Scouts.

GUNNAR

If I weren't so damn tired, I'd raise hell with the front desk about the sleeping arrangements.

Jessica sits on her bag while pulling off well-worn hiking boots, then scoots down inside her mummy bag. She blows up a small camp pillow and lays her head on it, then crosses her hands on her chest. She looks like an Egyptian mummy in her mummy bag.

JESSICA

Well the booking agent said two singles. Sorry.

GUNNAR

Hey, mummy?

I am not your mommy.

GUNNAR

I said mummy - you look like a mummy.

Jessica doesn't open her eyes.

JESSICA

Jesus.

GUNNAR

I'm glad you came.

INT. LAND ROVER - TRAVELING - APPROACHING STORM - DAY

They are following an endless road along the base of mountains. Ahead, a towering dark curtain of rain is closing in on them. Gunnar indicates the top of a rise.

GUNNAR

Pull off over there. Don't want to be in the flats when that hits.

Jessica pulls over on top of a bare hill and turns off the engine.

They watch the sky grow darker and darker. A CLASSICAL OVERTURE plays on the radio. Winds shake and shove the car. Lightening and THUNDER explode around them. A drenching downpour pummels the roof.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Better than any damn drive-in movie.

He reaches over and holds her hand. She doesn't seem to mind.

JESSICA

I was at a drive-in in Nebraska once when a tornado came through.

GUNNAR

That don't surprise me none. If I remember right, you and wild weather go hand in hand.

She frowns. He lets go of her hand, arches his hurting back.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

I got a personal question.

JESSICA

I hate those.

GUNNAR

You had much tenderness since you divorced? Maybe even beforehand?

JESSICA

None of your damn business.

GUNNAR

Just wondered.

JESSICA

That was a weird thing to ask.

GUNNAR

Nah, it ain't.

JESSICA

So why'd you ask it?

GUNNAR

I just want to hold you in my arms once in a while, like old times.

(MORE)

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Cain't do much more than that
anyway.

He moves a strand of hair out of her face. She's frowning,
looking at him.

RAIN STOPS, SUN COMES OUT.

Gunnar turns his head to look out the front windshield. His
face shows amazement.

Jessica squints, trying to focus on the bright reflection of
what now fills the valley in front of them. She puts on her
sunglasses.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Look at that! A frickin' lake in
Death Valley! How in the hell did
you do that?

He looks at her out of the corner of his eye, eyebrows
raised.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Come on, my little sorceress, lets
go down and make sure its not a
mirage.

EXT. "BAD WATER" AREA OF DEATH VALLEY - DAY

They are sitting on a blanket in the sun alongside the Rover
which is parked near the edge of the newly formed lake.
Gunnar has his back against a tire and Jessica sits between
his legs, reclining back on his chest. Both are wearing
sunglasses. Her camera is in her hand.

JESSICA

It's absolutely miraculous.
Absolutely beautiful.

Bands of sunlight float over miles and miles of brightly
blooming yellow flowers.

GUNNAR

You used to rush off and break out
your box of paints when you saw
such a site. Guess we need to go
buy some.

She looks down. Barely audible.

JESSICA

No, I brought some.

GUNNAR

Great! Wanna go get 'em?

Shakes her head no as she raises her camera and starts clicking off frames.

INT. DEATH VALLEY TOURIST CENTER - RESTAURANT - NIGHT

In b.g. tourist buses are parked under light poles outside the plate glass windows of the restaurant that Gunnar and Jessica enter.

The place is filled with EUROPEAN AND ASIAN TOURISTS. The majority of the patrons' heads turn to look at the odd couple waiting for a table.

Jessica whispers up to Gunnar.

JESSICA

There's not one American in here.

GUNNAR

That's cause they're all home watching TV.

A WAITRESS shows them to a table next to a GERMAN FAMILY wearing European styled clothing. (shorts too short, patterns don't match) Every member of the family can't help but stare at grizzly Gunnar.

JESSICA

(whispers)

They probably think you're a gold miner, a prospector.

GUNNAR

I am a prospector, a prospector for "luv."

He leans over the table and with a crooked smile starts patting out a rhythm on the table top, then sings **Neil Young's "Heart of Gold"**.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

I'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR A HEART OF
GOLD,
AND I'M GETTIN' OLD.
YOU KEEP ME SEARCHING FOR A HEART
OF GOLD,
AND I'M GETTIN' OLD.
I'M A MINER FOR A HEART OF GOLD.

A WAITRESS approaches, smiling at his antics.

WAITRESS

What can I get you two?

Gunnar holds up his menu and points to a selection speaking in overly loud pig-Latin.

GUNNAR

Iway ouldway ikelay away
amburgerhay andway iesfray andway
otway Udbay Ightslay.

Everybody within hearing range is staring at him with quizzical frowns, including Jessica.

He gives the foreigners in the room an arrogant look, then smiles up at the waitress; He replies loud enough so all can hear.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

That's *my* language, honey.

WAITRESS

(smiling)

Really? Pig Latin?

GUNNAR

(winks at waitress)

Yeah and in English that was a
hamburger and fries plus two Buds-
make-me-wiser.

The waitress looks at Jessica.

JESSICA

I'll have the chicken salad and an
ice tea. Thanks.

LATER

The waitress brings their food. They eat in silence as people continue to stare at them. When they are done, Gunnar leans back and pulls out a thick wad of bills. He lays four twenty-dollar bills on the table.

As they are exiting, the waitress rushes up and touches his arm, trying to hand back three twenties.

WAITRESS

Ah, sir, you left this.

GUNNAR

Nah, that's for you, darlin'. Us
blue collars, we gotta stick
together. Dam stiff white shirts
(MORE)

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

(eyes Jessica)
 sure as hell don't give a crap, now
 do they?

WAITRESS

But you gave me an extra seventy-
 two dollars!

Gunnar looks at her like its no big deal.

GUNNAR

Yep, I reckon I did just that.

EXT. DEATH VALLEY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

As they exit the restaurant they hear music playing down the porch. Gunnar cocks his head, indicating he'd like to go listen. She nods in agreement. They walk along the wood porch to the entrance of a cocktail lounge. Gunnar holds open the door for her.

INT. DEATH VALLEY COCKTAIL LOUNGE - NIGHT

There are only THREE PATRONS at the bar. PATRON #1 looks to be a maintenance man, PATRON #2 looks like a husband taking a break from his wife, and PATRON #3 is a loner on the road. The BARTENDER is a college kid.

They all stare at Gunnar. Gunnar nods as he helps Jessica onto a bar stool, then goes to the Juke Box, where he strokes his long beard while deciding on selections, then punches in his choices. When he returns he smiles at the bartender.

GUNNAR

A JD on the rocks.

The bar-keep nods and starts pouring Jack Daniels while looking at Jessica.

JESSICA

A margarita, please.

A ZZ TOP SONG starts playing on the Juke Box.

The three bar patrons, including the bartender, now believe their assumption that Gunnar could be Billy Gibbons of ZZ TOP. They stare at Gunnar as he moves his head to the music while staring straight ahead. Jessica has a "what are you up to" look.

Patron #1 walks over to Gunnar with his napkin and a pen.

BAR PATRON #1

Ah, excuse me. You don't happen to be Mr. Billy Gibbeons, by chance?

Gunnar gives the man a big grin and nods, yes-indeedy. He takes the man's pen and scrawls something across the napkin. #1 Bar Patron can't believe his luck. He quickly folds the napkin and puts it in his breast pocket.

BAR PATRON #1 (CONT'D)

I love your damn music. And I mean it, by-God.

GUNNAR

Well thank you, man. Appreciate the compliment.

The bartender waits until the other two patrons have gotten their autographs, then he spins out extra credit card machine tape and rips off a piece and slides it in front of Gunnar, along with a pen.

Gunnar picks up the pen.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

This for anybody special?

BAR TENDER

Yeah. My mom. My dad started calling her "Hot Legs" after your song.

GUNNAR

Okay, then.
(reads aloud while he writes)
Dear Hot Legs, here's hoping you the best. Keep on dancin' darlin', Mr. Billy Gibbeons.

He pushes the autograph back to the bartender who places it under the cash drawer.

BAR TENDER

Want another one? It's on the house.

GUNNAR

Another JD would be fine, son. But I'll pay. Don't want you comin' up short.

The bartender shows surprise and appreciation.

When the next song comes on, it's **TOM WAITS "Hold On"**. Gunnar stands and takes Jessica's hand and leads her out onto the dance floor. Slow dancing, he sings in her ear with same deep gravely voice as Waits.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
 SHE LEFT ME SON...
 JUST LIKE A BULLET LEAVES A GUN.
 YOU GOTTA HOLD ON...
 HOLD ON...

JESSICA
 Who is that? Sounds like you.

Gunnar winks down at her, then pulls her close and turns.

GUNNAR
 He's an old buddy of mine. Tom
 Waits. Took him sixty-seven years
 to get into that juke box. Cryin'
 shame.

Dances with her held close for the rest of the song. When it's over, he indicates the door.

The bartender holds up money, reminding him he has change coming. Gunnar just waves for him to keep it. They exit.

EXT. TOURIST CENTER - NIGHT

There is a night wind blowing as they stand on the porch.

JESSICA
 Can't you get in trouble, forging
 Mr. Billy's signature?

GUNNAR
 I'm sure Billy don't mind. I only
 do it 'cause it makes people's day.
 Gives 'em something to talk about.

Gunnar takes Jessica's hand and leads her across the parking lot into a thick stand of date palms.

EXT. DATE PALM GROVE - NIGHT

The palms are planted in straight lines, rows and rows of them. It's like they are walking among the pillars of a desert temple in the moonlight.

Jessica stops and looks up at Gunnar's moonlit face.

JESSICA
 Gunnar?

GUNNAR
What, darlin'?

JESSICA
I can't go there.

GUNNAR
Go where?

JESSICA
I'm a doctor, for christsake. I
can't be part of your - your crazy
lifestyle. It's too unethical.
Especially the drugs.
(beat)
I'm sorry.

GUNNAR
Nothing to be sorry for.

He starts singing **Jackson Brown's song, "Free Fallin'"**

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
OH, SHE'S A GOOD GIRL,
LOVES HER MOMMA . .

She elbows him.

JESSICA
Stop it.

GUNNAR
Let's dance again.

He holds out his arms and they start waltzing under the palms
and full moon as his deep voice softly sings **Neil Young's**
"Harvest Moon" in her ear.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
COME A LITTLE BIT CLOSER
HEAR WHAT I HAVE TO SAY
JUST LIKE CHILDREN SLEEPIN'
WE COULD DREAM THIS NIGHT AWAY.

BUT THERE'S A FULL MOON RISIN',
LET'S GO DANCIN' IN THE NIGHT
WE KNOW WHERE THE MUSIC IS PLAYIN'
LET'S GO AN FEEL THE NIGHT.

BECAUSE I'M STILL IN LOVE WITH YOU
I WANT TO SEE YOU DANCE AGAIN,
BECAUSE I'M STILL IN LOVE WITH YOU
ON THIS HARVEST MOON.

INT. LAND ROVER - TRAVELING - NIGHT

Jessica is driving. Gunnar is blowing happy tunes.

JESSICA

Why do you carry around such a big
wad of cash? Aren't you afraid
someone will rob you.

Gunnar stops playing and looks at her with an incredulous
smile.

GUNNAR

Do I look like somebody someone's
gonna rob?

JESSICA

Oo-kay... But why not keep it in a
bank and use a debit card?

GUNNAR

Because I don't want some asshole I
don't know knowing where or on what
I spend my money or how much I got.
It's none of their goddamn
business.

JESSICA

Which really means you don't want
the Feds knowing you're earning
something a little extra, a little
illegal perhaps?

GUNNAR

Wait 'til you retire and find out
your social security check don't
last but a week.

(smiles)

I'm just preserving the lifestyle I
was accustomed to is all.

(blows a riff)

So when are you going to start the
lifestyle you should be accustomed
to?

Jessica raises her eyebrows. Gunnar pantomimes painting.

Gunnar resumes playing his harmonica. Jessica shakes her
head.

EXT. RHYOLITE RUINS CAMP SITE - NIGHT

Jessica and Gunnar are lying in sleeping bags, still on opposite sides of the fire, surrounded by the fractured concrete walls.

JESSICA

What a day.

GUNNAR

Yep, it was.

He looks over at her with a twinkle in his eye.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Can I have one more oxycodone?

JESSICA

Nope. You've had your quota.

GUNNAR

But I'm in pain. Cocaine then? To wrap 'round my brain?

JESSICA

Nope.

GUNNAR

But I'm hurtin'. Real bad.

Jessica pushes up on an elbow.

JESSICA

Really?

With a twinkle in his eye, he raises the top of his bag and looks down at his crotch.

GUNNAR

I got blue balls, Doc. Some really, really big ba-lue...

JESSICA

Liar. With all the drugs in you, its an impossibility.

She returns to lying on her back and closes her eyes.

GUNNAR

I ain't as de-erected as you think. And I've been known to do the impossible.

JESSICA
Go to sleep, Gunnar.

LATER - EARLY MORNING

In b.g. there's a makeshift camp kitchen under an overhead shade tarp tied to a pieces of wall beside two blank window openings.

Jessica is nudging Gunnar, who is snoring.

JESSICA
Come on. Get up. You can go back to sleep in the car. I want to paint the dunes this morning.

GUNNAR
Now you wanna paint?? Now??

JESSICA
Yes, I do. Now arise, Sir Knight or I shall leave you here to roast.

Gunnar half asleep, crawls out of his sleeping bag and crookedly limp-walks over to the Rover, climbs in the backseat and falls back asleep. Jessica shakes her head.

EXT. SAND DUNES - DEATH VALLEY - EARLY MORNING

Jessica, wearing her cap and sunglasses and a long sleeved shirt, is painting away at an easel.

In b.g. Gunnar approaches from the distantly parked Rover. He is faltering and staggering like a silent film actor lost in the desert. He drops to his knees beside her and reaches out.

GUNNAR
(desperately)
Beer dear.

JESSICA
Sorry. It's back in the car. All I brought is water.

Gunnar feigns unconsciousness and falls flat on his face in the sand. Jessica glances down at him.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Gunnar, there's a scorpion coming your way at three-o'clock.

With his eyes still closed;

GUNNAR

I fear him not, for we are
brothers.

He raises the sleeve of his shirt, showing a tattoo of a
Zodiac scorpion.

JESSICA

Ah. Gunnar.

Gunnar opens his eyes and just inches away, level with his
face, is a large scorpion clicking its pinchers.

Gunnar jumps up, arms flaying like he has no ailments at all.
Jessica laughs as she continues to paint. Suddenly he lifts
her in his arms and starts back for the car.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

GUNNAR

I am rescuing my damsel from the
Dunes of Death.

JESSICA

Put me down. I'm not finished.

Gunnar sets her down and bows at the waist.

GUNNAR

Your wish is my command.

He back-steps to study her painting.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

That's good dear, very, very good.
Damn good.

JESSICA

Thank you.

GUNNAR

Why'd you quit?

JESSICA

I dunno. My ex-husband said I
sucked.

GUNNAR

And you believed him? Like I keep
sayin', you docs ain't as smart as
you pretend to be.

She shrugs. He eyeballs the Rover so far away.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

(whines)

Why couldn't they let you park closer? Dam Sierra Club bible-thumpers.

(beat)

After this, we go for a bike ride.

Jessica perks up.

JESSICA

Can I sit in front?

GUNNAR

Yes, indeedy.

He strolls back to the car, singing and snapping his fingers.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Zipidy do dah, zipidy day,
My-oh-my, what a wonderful day.

EXT. OPEN DESERT ROAD - DAY

Jessica sits in front of Gunnar who has his left arm wrapped around her waist, while his right hand covers her hand on the throttle. She's wearing the helmet.

She points in a direction.

EXT. RHYOLITE DESERT INSTALLATION ART - NEVEDA - DAY

They pull off the blacktop and follow a dirt road to a place where random pieces of huge surreal outdoor art stand in the middle of no-where.

GHOST RIDER

They roll to a stop beside a ghostly figure made from plaster-cast sheets holding a sun-flashing relic bicycle. Gunnar salutes the shroud as he gets off his low slung chrome Harley, that also flashes sunlight, and holds the bike as Jessica swings her leg over and dismounts.

GIANT SOFA

Once the kick-stand is down, he leans on her shoulder and limps along as she leads him to a giant mosaic concrete sofa. Once seated on the oversized sofa, Jessica produces a couple beers from her backpack. She pops the beers. They drink in silence looking at the strange surrounding yard art from behind sunglasses.

Gunnar bends around her and reaches into the backpack for the bottle of tequila, then with a crooked walk, limps his way over to a shrouded plaster-cast rendition of the disciples and Christ at the Last Supper.

THE LAST SUPPER

Its an eyrie art piece with the sun behind it glowing through the rigid white sheets. Gunnar takes a seat in the shade of Christ.

Jessica stretches out lengthwise on the sofa with her backpack as a pillow, allowing her dear friend some private time.

When he finally looks beseechingly over at her, she joins him. She sits beside him and puts a hand on his thigh.

JESSICA

(gently)

You okay?

Head down, he nods.

GUNNAR

I was the cancer that killed my
Bonnie. I was really hard on her.

Jessica looks out across the desert, pats his thigh.

Gunnar's eyes fill with tears. He tries to smile, but can't.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

I loved my Bonnie... even though
she had a way of pissing me off.
Her death sure weren't pretty.

He scans the desert horizon.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

I'll never let you white coats hook
me up to lines and hoses while I
turn into a skull and bones. No
fuckin' way.

(wipes an eye)

I wanted to kidnap her, take her up
to Padre Blanca, lay her out on
that big rock and let her spirit go
- go flyin' off with the wind.

(looks at Jessica)

But there was no way my kids would
let me do that, 'cause she - and
them - they all hated my guts.

(sucks in a deep breath)

(MORE)

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

If she just hadn't takin' that fuckin' job we could've gotten along better.

JESSICA

You blame her job?

Gunnar makes half-circles in the sand with his boot.

GUNNAR

Never could figure it out. Used to think she had the hots for one of them cops, but the kids told me afterwards she just wanted more money for the family.

JESSICA

Well?

GUNNAR

I thought you're supposed to be on my side?

JESSICA

I am.

She loops an arm through his.

GUNNAR

Probably why she was always so pissed off. I never went for pay-grades.

Gunnar moves more sand around with his boot-toe.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

I just couldn't see myself sitting behind a desk or driving 'round trying to bust boys like me for doing shit they shouldn't be doin'.

(weak smile)

I like my life to just roll on by, and not make more or less of it. Just enjoy as is.

JESSICA

What did you enjoy most?

GUNNAR

Driving up through the mountains early in the morning - up through the canyons.

Gunnar looks across the expanse of the desert with a picture in his mind.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Smelling hot coffee and sage -
watching the sun on the morning
mist.

He smiles as he looks out the corner of his eye at her.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

That's why, when I saw you in the
creek, I knew we were kindred
spirits. And I knew, I mean I
really knew, that you used to be
mine.

JESSICA

(changing the subject)

You surprised me, being so polite.
Which is why I decided it'd be okay
to come out here with you.

GUNNAR

I'm not always an asshole.

His look tells us he really cares for this lady. Then that twinkle in his eye.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

So what about you, Miss Tree
Hugger? You said you were married
to a big-wig developer. Sure you
two weren't exactly Ozzie and
Harriet. Especially if he didn't
like you painting.

JESSICA

He wasn't one when I married him. A
developer, that is. But once he
started making big money, I just
couldn't breathe under his command
anymore. Or stand him bulldozing
land to build his houses on. And
the thing he hated most about me
was how my painting tended to
replace cooking dinner and keeping
house. Led to some pretty heated
arguments. One good thing came of
it though.

GUNNAR

What's that?

JESSICA

I learned to appreciate tequila.

GUNNAR

Yep. That was a purdy good thing.

JESSICA

Beware, Sir Knight, what you wish for. I seriously doubt you really want a proctor in your life, which is what I'd be.

GUNNAR

That some kinda butt doctor?

JESSICA

No. It's a person with a book of rules. Gunnar, your crazy expectations of "us" , it just won't work out. You know that, don't you?

He grunts. That's not what he wants to hear. He's having a hard time. Fidgets, seems embarrassed. Breathes deep. His blue eyes ask for approval, for confirmation that what he feels is mutual.

Jessica is moved, but not sure how to respond, her practical mind unable to deal with the awkward situation and not wanting to hurt his feelings.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Stop. You've got to realize I am a doctor and under my roof I wouldn't tolerate your total disregard for rules, the law especially, and your over zealous use of drugs - and I'm sure you wouldn't tolerate my 24/7 work ethic or...

He raises both palms.

GUNNAR

Okay. Stop. Stop the proctering. I get it.

She leans over and gives him a playful peck on the cheek.

JESSICA

Here. Take my camera. And when I yell, come, okay?

She starts walking away towards a twenty-foot high concrete cinder-block statue of a woman on her knees (Lego-style).

VENUS OF THE DESERT

The legs, arms and face are painted pink concrete blocks. The hair on the head is painted yellow and there is protruding pubic block also painted yellow. As Jessica nears the statue she starts taking off her clothes. When she's naked except for her hiking boots, she kneels beside the statue, mirroring it's pose and yells out.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Marco!

Gunnar achingly steps out from under Jesus's shadow. He looks around.

GUNNAR

Polo.

JESSICA

Marco.

Gunnar turns in the direction of her voice and sees the cinder block women and her at the base. He laughs and shakes his head.

Approaching.

GUNNAR

So you are a natural blonde, you teasing winch.

Jessica laughs as she pulls on her undies and shorts.

While she hops around trying to get her booted feet back into her shorts he grabs her bra and dangles it.

JESSICA

Satisfied now? You've seen me naked so no more fantasizing?

She heads towards him bare-breasted, shirt in hand. Gunnar continues to move backwards, holding the bra higher than he expects she can reach.

When she jumps up to grab it, he pulls her against him and holds her tight.

She just rest against his chest, quietly. He kisses the top of her head then releases her. She smiles up lovingly as she pulls on her sports bra.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Feel better now? No more fantasizing what I look like?

GUNNAR
A bit. Thank you.

As they turn to walk back to the bike, he glances down at her.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
You got a nice figure.

JESSICA
Flattery will get you nowhere, Sir Knight.

He smiles, giving her a quick hug, then looks up into the sky and gives heaven the finger.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Let's go back for the Rover. I want to find the Armagosa before it gets dark.

GUNNAR
The Arma what?

JESSICA
Armagosa Opera House, a place near Death Valley Junction.

GUNNAR
Never heard of it.

JESSICA
Its where a ballet dancer from New York bought a motel and built a theater in it. They say she painted an audience on the walls so she could perform every Friday night, rather or not anyone showed up. Her name was Marta Beckett.

GUNNAR
Now that's a bonafide artist! She don't give a crap what others think. She just does what she has to, even if people think she's crazy.

She rolls her eyes because he is preaching at her again.

INT. LAND ROVER - TRAVELING - DAY

Jessica is driving down out of desert mountains. Gunnar is playing his harmonica.

She looks out the window down into a deep ravine as they come around a sharp curve, then looks over at Gunnar with a warning eye.

JESSICA

I never told you I witnessed you doing something really bad after I treated you in the emergency room.

GUNNAR

Uh, oh. How bad?

She smiles secretively, raising her eyebrows, asking him to guess. There are too many choices, so he just shrugs.

JESSICA

I was coming back from Fresno over the mountains. It had been snowing. There'd been a car wreck up near Rose Valley and the cops were there.

A smile starts spreading on Gunnar's face as his eyes dart around like a school boy who has been caught.

JESSICA(CONT'D)

Seems there was this police car parked along the edge, where a car had previously gone over the side. . . There was no officer inside, mind you.

JESSICA(CONT'D)

Then this CALTRANS truck in front of me just sorta edged forward until its snowplow blade caught the bumper of that police car... and then - what do you know? No more police car.

Pantomimes falling over a cliff ledge with her hand.

GUNNAR

What makes you think that was me?

She pantomimes his long beard.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Well you saw what those assholes did to me.

JESSICA

Ah, testosterone revenge. The life blood of the emergency room.

GUNNAR

Hey - they're lucky that's all I did.

JESSICA

(teasing)

I wonder if you'd never gone to that award dinner and gotten ass-whipped, if we would have ever met.

GUNNAR

I was far from being ass-whipped, little lady! It was twenty-on-one, for Chrissake! And 'sides, like I said - we already met. An' this time 'round you're stuck with me til I die - maybe even a bit afterwards since I been cheated out of a dozen years or more.

EXT. ARMAGOSA MOTEL - DEATH VALLEY JUNCTION - DAY

There's a stormy low ceiling of clouds with sudden gusts of wind stirring up dust devils and trash around an abandoned 1940's L-shaped cinder block motel with blistered paint. Several windows have broken glass with curtains blowing eerily threw them.

INT. LAND ROVER - OUTSIDE ARMAGOSA MOTEL - DAY

Jessica and Gunnar are staring at the spooky building from within the car.

JESSICA

Come on. Let's go explore.

GUNNAR

Nope.

JESSICA

I can't believe you. We drove all the way out here to see this place and you won't even get out of the car? What, you of all people, is a scaredy pants?

GUNNAR

Yep.

JESSICA

Gunnar, it's a friggn' empty motel.

GUNNAR

Yep. And there's a crazy lady ghost in there.

JESSICA

How do you know?

GUNNAR

I just know.

JESSICA

Then lets go meet her.

Jessica gets out of the car and walks towards the main entrance.

She stops, turns and waves for him to follow her. Gunnar shakes his head no. He's not stepping a foot outside the car.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Gunnar. Get out of the car. I want you to see Marta's murals and the theater.

Gunnar shakes his head 'no' behind the windshield. He is not budging.

Jessica laughs at him as she steps under the motel porch and turns the handle of the front door. It's unlocked. She checks her camera settings, then enters.

INT. ARMAGOSA MOTEL - DAY

She cautiously enters. The lobby has faded murals of tropical trees and birds and a very long hallway with shabby red carpet on her right. The wind makes an **EERIE WHISTLING SOUND** coming down the hallway. The hairs on JESSICA's arm stand up. She rubs them down before snapping a couple frames.

The front door slams shut. She jumps, reopens it, and waves for Gunnar to join her before closing it.

Gunnar remains in the car.

Jessica walks down the extraordinarily long and narrow hallway. Closed and open doors line the sides. The room numbers have come loose and hang sideways or are missing. A few open doors let in just enough light to see in the hallway.

She sticks her head in one room. The interior is predominantly 1940's with faded patterns on the bedspread and curtains. She notices the tile shower near the hallway door has thick rust marks dripping from the hot and cold handles.

They look like rivulets of dried blood pooled on the bottom of the shower. Jessica's eyes get a little big as she backs out and moves a little faster down the hallway.

She rounds a 90-degree turn to face another hallway with doors.

JESSICA

Damn.

It's darker down this hallway. Near the far end of the hallway is a double door leading into the theater. She opens the doors and peers in. She tries some light switches, but they don't work, so she opens the outside door facing the courtyard to let in light.

Armagosa THEATER

It's surreal inside the theater with ghoulish laughing faces painted on the walls facing the stage. There are rows of empty red velvet chairs covered in dust and a red velvet curtains hang on either side of the stage.

Jessica climbs up on the stage and looks out at the fake audience staring back at her. The hair on her arms rises as she snaps a shot of the painted faces.

GUNNAR (O.S.)

(voice booming)

Get off the stage!! Goddamit, NOW!

Gunnar's silhouette fills the outside door frame.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Jess, get the fuck over here!

The urgency in his voice makes her scramble off the stage.

When she reaches him, he grabs her arm, pulls her out into sunlight and pushes her in the passenger seat, slams the door, then hurriedly slides in behind the steering wheel.

A peacock on the roof SCREECHES, alarming both Gunnar and Jessica.

INT. ROVER - OUTSIDE ARMAGOSA MOTEL - DAY

Gunnar hits the door-lock button and fish-tails in a cloud of dust back onto the open highway. A savage wind rocks their car and the sky is dark. Wind and rain envelope them.

INT. ROVER - TRAVELING - DAY

Neither says a word until they can no longer see the motel in their rearview mirrors. The rain lightens.

JESSICA
What was all that about?

GUNNAR
You didn't see her?

JESSICA
Who?

GUNNAR
The old ballerina lady.

JESSICA
Come on Gunnar...

Gunnar looks hard at her.

GUNNAR
You didn't see her?

JESSICA
No, I didn't see her.

She waits to see if he might start laughing.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Where was she?

GUNNAR
She was over on the left coming right at you.

JESSICA
Are you pulling my leg?

GUNNAR
Hell, no. She was wearing this long fluffy pink skirt and toe shoes and her face was real white and she had on red lipstick and black around her eyes. And she was real *pissed off* at you.

Jessica notices his hands are shaking and the carotid artery on the side of his neck is pulsing.

JESSICA
You really did see her. Marta Beckett?

GUNNAR

Hell yeah! I told you I see dead people.

A beat of silence.

JESSICA

Damn. Really? Do you see any thing else... abnormal?

GUNNAR

Sometimes these little glows - like giant fireflies, but their ain't no fireflies in California.

JESSICA

Orbs maybe. My guess is that they were - orbs.

GUNNAR

What the hell is an orb? 'Cause I swear they're my old bros circling me, buggin' me to hurry up and come join 'em. That lady was jealous of you and mad at you. She was going to hurt you.

(looks at her)

Next time listen to me, okay?

She stares at him.

JESSICA

Why was she mad at me?

GUNNAR

'Cause you got a gift you ain't using.

Gunnar stares at the road ahead.

Jessica looks out across the desert speeding by. She looks back at him, deep in thought.

She pops open a beer and hands it to Gunnar, then opens one for herself. She rolls down her window, closes her eyes and lets the wind blow on her face. After a beat:

JESSICA

Do you know what an Indigo Child is?

GUNNAR

Nope.

JESSICA

It means a kid - a person - who can see or has contact with other realms - posses extra senses ordinary people don't have.

GUNNAR

You think I'm an In-di-go?

JESSICA

Yep.

GUNNAR

What about you?

JESSICA

I'm an Indigo too. I don't see ghost though. I experience astral projection.

GUNNAR

What the hell is that?

JESSICA

Its when the mind travels outside the body - and flies around. Looks down on people and places.

Jessica opens a bag of chips, takes a few and offers Gunnar some.

GUNNAR

You shittin' me?

JESSICA

Nope.

She eats a few chips.

GUNNAR

Is it like being a drone? That astro-thing?

JESSICA

As-tral. Yeah. Pretty much. But people can't see me. Its also called OBE or Out of Body Experience.

(beat)

Gunnar, I think we did know each other before.

Gunnar slams on the brakes. The car skids to a stop in the middle of the highway.

GUNNAR
What did you just say?

JESSICA
I did know you - knew you - but not exactly "this" you.

She indicates his body.

GUNNAR
When did you change your mind?

JESSICA
I started having strange dreams after treating you in the ER.

GUNNAR
Strange as in bad?

JESSICA
No. Strange as in all of a sudden you were visiting me every night.

She smiles.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Only the guy in my dreams, he...

GUNNAR
He what?

Teasing smile.

JESSICA
Well, he - he was younger than you. We had fun together. A lot like you and I do now.

GUNNAR
Fuck his being younger! Look, its still me, darlin', I promise. Otherwise I wouldn't have recognized you.

She teasingly frowns.

JESSICA
So what happened? Why are you so old?

GUNNAR
'Cause like I said, God likes fucking with me or maybe he can't get his timing straight.

JESSICA

Or maybe, just maybe, you have bad karma.

GUNNAR

What's that really mean anyway?
Karma.

JESSICA

Karma is the sum of a person's niceness or meanness during their life on earth.

GUNNAR

Humph.

JESSICA

And if you've been nice, respectful and loving you come back to a much better life. From what I've seen, you are improving. Like how you treated that waitress and barkeep, so keep it up and maybe next time we'll sync up.

She smiles. He doesn't think this is very funny.

EXT. RHYOLITE CAMP SITE - NIGHT

Ambience of great expanse - limitlessness in the heavens above.

Jessica is lying on her back looking up at the Milky Way. It is so clear it appears closer than usual.

A low fire is burning.

Gunnar steps through a hole in the wall, zipping up his pants. She speaks while looking at the heavens.

He sits down next to her.

M.O.S. FLASHBACK: EXT. SMALL WAGON TRAIN TRAVELING - DAY
(1860'S)

Gunnar, with a shorter blonde beard, rides ahead of the wagons, playing a harmonica. Jessica rides a horse wearing pants and wide brimmed hat. There's a wooden paint box (has paint smears on it) hanging from her saddle horn. On the buckboard of a wagon beside her is her HUSBAND, a sour looking guy on the whimpy side. The glances between them are hostile on his part, indifferent on hers.

JESSICA (V.O.)

You didn't like my husband. Called him a liar and a thief. In front of others. Only he couldn't do anything about it because you were the trail boss.

GUNNAR (V.O.)

Oh, he was a liar, alright. And a thief. And the last straw was when I caught him trying to burn one of your paintings. Afterwards, in private, I bull-whipped him for it.

M.O.S. FLASHBACK: EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

Husband yelling at Jessica while pulling a painted canvas out of her hands and throwing it in a campfire. He looks up and sees Gunnar watching him. Husband walks off into darkness as Jessica tries to save the painting. Gunnar steps back into the darkness.

LATER - MORNING

Jessica is dressing her husband's whip wounds.

JESSICA (V.O.)

(laughing)

He said he was attacked by a bear.

GUNNAR (V.O.)

I never could figure out why you married the guy. Even if he did promise to take you West. I always thought you could've done it on your own selling your pictures.

M.O.S. FLASHBACK: EXT. INSIDE AN ARMY FORT - DAY

With gracious relief, Jessica accepts a gold coin from a man dressed in a suit and bowler hat who puts a painting in the back of his mercantile wagon, tips his hat and heads out through the fort's gates.

JESSICA (V.O.)

Weren't that many buyers for a lady back then. You wanted to marry me, didn't you? After my husband was killed?

M.O.S. FLASHBACK: EXT. MOUNTAIN RIVER SHORELINE - DAY

Frightened travelers are hiding behind rocks along a river with arrows hitting near-by trees.

HUSBAND makes a run for a rifle laying next to a dead pioneer and is hit by several arrows.

Gunnar scrambles up a steep shoreline until he has a decent angle to shoot the Indians.

GUNNAR (V.O.)

Only time I was glad to see an arrow in a man. Yeah, I wanted to marry you. Still do. But you were like a rogue mustang always fighting the bit. You wanted no part of being owned by any man - married or not. On those points you haven't changed much... At least you were always glad to see me - until you linked up with that doctor fellow.

M.O.S. FLASHBACK: EXT. MOUNTAIN OVERLOOK - DAY

Jessica is standing on a ledge painting a panoramic view. Upon seeing Gunnar approaching, she stops and runs to him, jumps in his arms and kisses him. Passion exudes from both of them.

JESSICA (V.O.)

You kept telling me you were going to buy a me a gallery in San Francisco.

GUNNAR (V.O.)

I was. Only you... you...

Long beat of silence.

JESSICA (V.O.)

I remember a lot of sick people, crying babies.

M.O.S. FLASHBACK: EXT. WESTERN ARMY FORT - DAY

Ill people in beds and out on porches vomit in buckets or on the dirt, others twist with gut pain. They are being attended by an older ARMY DOCTOR with Jessica at his side.

LATER

CLOSE on Jessica and Gunnar having an argument which leaves him defeated and upset.

GUNNAR (V.O.)

Yeah, and you wanted to save them all.

(MORE)

GUNNAR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

You kept following around that damn Army doctor, doing whatever he told you to do. You gave up everything to help him. Even me. You never touched a brush or a canvas again. I kept trying to stop you and get you back on the trail before you died either of typhoid or exhaustion. But you wouldn't listen. Then you caught it, darlin'... you caught it and I couldn't... I couldn't save you.

M.O.S. FLASHBACK: EXT. GRAVEYARD OUTSIDE ARMY FORT - DAY

Gunnar, hat in hand, wet-eyed, stares at her grave marker. On his saddle in b.g., hangs her paint box.

PULL BACK to see there hundreds of fresh graves.

BACK TO:

EXT. RHYOLITE CAMP SITE - NIGHT

Gunnar stretches out, laying next to her, rolls her on top of his chest, holds her in his arms, kisses the top of her head while she rests her head on his chest.

He tightens his hold around her.

Jessica clings to him, tears in her eyes. Finally she rolls off his chest and sits up.

JESSICA

This is crazy.

He reaches for her hand and kisses it. They smile at each other, quietly acknowledging this strange new awareness.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

It's too friggin' crazy.

He pushes back a strand of hair around her face.

GUNNAR

Never been another like you, Jess.
Not in a hundred years.

Kisses her hand again.

LATER - MORNING

They are drinking coffee by the fire, their breaths cloudy in the cold early morning air.

JESSICA
Maybe it's quantum entanglement.

GUNNAR
I got no idea what the hell that is... Could also be what that Hawkins fellow says.

JESSICA
Gunnar. You actually know who Steven Hawkins is?

GUNNAR
I gotta a TV. What a mix-up there. The brain of a genius in a skull that can't talk. Anyway, he says when we see a star its actually thousands of years old, but to us it exists now. So at the instant we see it, its a mix of both the past and present at the same time.

Jessica thinks for a beat.

JESSICA
Gunnar, that was really profound.

Gunnar shrugs and grins.

GUNNAR
So why can't I race my bike on this "Race Track" you're taking me to?

JESSICA
Because its not really a race track - its an ancient lake bed and protected by you-know-who.

GUNNAR
Jesus H. Christ. A man can't do shit anymore. Glad I played when I did. Well, come on. I gotta see these big ol' rocks that can rock'n'roll all by themselves.

JESSICA
They don't rock or roll. They glide. They slide.

GUNNAR
Even better.

EXT. DEATH VALLEY 'RACE TRACK' - DAY

A HUGE BOULDER sits all alone on a dry and cracked lake bed with a long skid mark behind it with no evidence of any means of assistance in moving it forward.

Jessica and Gunnar stand on a rise looking at it.

JESSICA

You ever feel you're being pushed by something you can't see? Like you've got your heels dug in, but still - you keep gettin' pushed?

GUNNAR

Nope.

Jessica glances at him.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

I'm more the pusher, than the pushee.

JESSICA

You're lucky then.

Gunnar chuckles.

GUNNAR

Oh, I think you're a pusher too. You just took the wrong fork in the road is all - so everything feels wrong. Let me remind you again darlin', when you last gave up painting for doctorin', it didn't turn out so well.

EXT. METEORITE CRATER - DEATH VALLEY - SUNSET

The Rover is parked on the rim of a meteorite crater. Jessica and Gunnar sit with their feet dangling over the tailgate looking down into the crater, chewing on jerky and sipping both beer and tequila.

Jessica's pretty near drunk. She indicates the crater.

JESSICA

Ya know, that's about as big as the hole in me.

GUNNAR

Pretty big for such a little gal.

He's watching her out of the corner of his eye.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

I thought you were Miss Poster Gal
for independent, financially
successful women.

JESSICA

I am! But that don't mean I ain't
got a big hole too.

GUNNAR

Hmph. I'm gonna let that one
pass... So what's in this big hole
of yours?

JESSICA

Wonder if there's pieces of
meteorite down there?

She jumps off the tailgate, grabs the near empty bottle of
tequila and slides, half running, before falling back on her
butt and sliding the rest of the way down into the bottom of
the crater. Once she hits the bottom, she stands and proudly
holds the bottle up, not having spilt a drop.

Gunnar salutes her.

She slowly turns around then looks up and speaks loudly like
an oracle in a coliseum.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

How doth one fall into such an
abyss as this?

She waits for an answer. A CROW CRAWLS.

She rotates a bit, as if speaking to another section of her
amphitheater.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Hark, to all ye cursed with
creative minds.

(beat)

Beware the shackles of union and
marital shrines, for there you'll
find no bliss, only chains that
bind and that horrible hiss,
"No more, no more. Don't do that
anymore" - which pushes you out the
fucking door.

She turns a bit, addressing another section of the talus
slopes.

She drunkenly whispers.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
And when its really, really late...
you begin to doubt your fate.

With anger.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
And all you want to do is yell,
Go to hell! Can't you at least
leave me alone 'til dawn? Until my
ideas have spawned?

She turns to yet another section of the crater.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Whoa again... triple whoa, to all
you out there with a creative mind.
Beware the day-job that will suck
you blind, suck your life away.
Because one day... you'll look
around...
(pantomimes)
And YOU, you are nowhere to be
found. YOU have vaporized.
Disappeared. Poof - into the
universe with no sound.

She does another quarter turn.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Leave your house filthy,
Your sheets unchanged
Work 'til you're totally drained
'Cause that's when...

She holds up an invisible something.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
You created this!
You painted this.
You wonderful, wonderful bitch!

Beat of silence, then she lifts her chin and hollers.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
So how do you get out of this hole,
this abyss? You hold on to yonder
knight...

She indicates Gunnar up on the rim with the tequila bottle.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
And thus you become you, in his
light.

She bows.

Gunnar whistles and claps. Then he cups his hands and yells down.

GUNNAR

My dear, it is time for thee to
climb back up to me.

JESSICA

Why?

He indicates THREE COYOTES staring at her from the rim. One is sitting, the other two standing.

Jessica howls at them and waves like they are her fans.

GUNNAR

Dear damsel, I fear yonder fuckers
are thinking you'll make a fine
supper.

She gazes about, drunkenly puzzled on how she is going to climb out. The sides are steep with very loose soil. Sliding down was one thing, but making her way back up the sandy slops is another.

One of the coyotes YELPS, then, from further out in the desert, another, then another.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Got a gun in the car?

JESSICA

Gunnar, this is California, not
Texas! And don't you dare hurt
them.

GUNNAR

Rope then?

JESSICA

In the back, in the spare tire
storage thingy. What, you're gonna
lasso 'em?

Gunnar dumps everything out of the back, lifts the floor storage lid and pulls out a roll of yellow nylon rope. He ties one end around the back bumper, then ties knots several feet apart down the length of the rope. He throws the rope to her over the edge. But it reaches only $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down.

GUNNAR

No, I'm gonna lasso you.
Climb on up until you can reach it,
then tie it around your waist.

Dropping the empty bottle, Jessica drunkenly climbs on all fours up the loose sand until she reaches the rope. She ties the end of the rope around her waist while still on her knees, and tries to start climbing but her feet keep slipping out.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Ok. Stop. Just lay on your back and hold on to the rope. I'm gonna pull you up.

Gunnar slowly drives the car forward, dragging her up on her back.

At an estimated distance, he puts the car in park and comes back for her. Looking over the edge;

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Almost, darlin. Just a couple more feet. Turn around and grab my hand.

He pulls her up and over the ledge. She lays exhausted on her back, smiling up at him.

JESSICA

Thank you, Sir Knight.

Gunnar unties her and starts looping the rope over his elbow and through his hand;

GUNNAR

Those coyotes got me thinking.
Wadda ya say we go out for a fancy steak dinner?

JESSICA

Hell yeah!

She rolls over onto her knees and slowly manages to stand up, but before she can take a step, she pukes. Gunnar kicks sand over the mess and helps her into the car.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

I'm gonna have a really bad hangover unless I get some food in my gut.

She pulls off her puke stained T-shirt and pulls on a low cut tank top. Gunnar smiles.

INT. DEATH VALLEY INN - RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The couple enters the four star restaurant. They look filthy, sun burnt and penniless.

The MAITRE D' eyes them with disdain.

GUNNAR

Two for dinner.

(whispers to her loud
enough so the guy hears)

Guess he don't know who I am.

The maitre d' glances at Jessica. She mouths the words, like she's helping him out. "ZZ Top. You know, the band?"

MAITRE DE

Oh, well, we do have a dress code.

Gunnar spreads his beard and opens the leather vest revealing a T-shirt with a tux silk-screen print. He grins. Then pulls out his wad of bills and peels off some bills and hands it to the guy.

MAITRE DE (CONT'D)

Follow me.

He leads them out to the balcony dining area - far from other patrons but from which there is an incredible view of the desert. Tiny white lights and SOFT JAZZ MUSIC accent the scene.

JESSICA

(to the maitre d')

Sorry, too hungry to change into
pearls and heels.

The maitre de just nods as he seats them.

MAITRE D'

Your waiter will be right with you.

He leaves.

GUNNAR

Asshole.

A very effeminate male waiter with his nose up in the air approaches. Gunnar raises his eyebrows. Jessica's look reprimands him.

SNOOTY WAITER

Good evening. What may I start you
off with?

The lilt in his voice irritates Gunnar even more.

GUNNAR

First thing is stop the act. You're more a sissy than any damn woman I ever knew. Second thing, don't be touching my food. Don't wanta be catching that HIV shit.

JESSICA

Gunnar!

(to the waiter)

I'm sorry. Please excuse him. Too much sun. I'd like a glass of water and a sweet tea.

GUNNAR

JD on the rocks.

The waiter doesn't seem to know what that is.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Jesus.

JESSICA

Jack Daniels.

The waiter leaves.

GUNNAR

That's what I fear most. You gettin' HIV or that Eboli shit. Hospitals ain't exactly healthy places to spending all your time at.

JESSICA

Stop it.

LATER

They have finished eating and are looking down a level below at a glowing swimming pool surrounded by spot-lit palm trees. Gentle night winds lift strands of Jessica's hair and Gunnar's beard.

JESSICA

I feel a whole lot better now.
Thank you.

The waiter approaches and stands behind Jessica's shoulder.

SNOOTY WAITER

May I take your plates?

GUNNAR
 (snaps)
 HEY! Dude!!

Both the waiter and Jessica jump.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
 Don't you be lookin' down the
 lady's front.

SNOOTY WAITER
 Ah, sir. I wasn't...

JESSICA
 (reprimanding)
 Gunnar.
 (to waiter)
 Yes, thank you. We're finished.

The waiter picks up Jessica's plate and silverware, then cautiously reaches for Gunnar's. Gunnar leans back out of the way, all the while keeping an intimidating eye on the young man.

The waiter, holding both plates, takes a step backwards.

SNOOTY WAITER
 Do either of you care for some
 dessert?

GUNNAR
 I'll have a Glenfiddich, eight-
 years or more - straight up.

The waiter eyes Jessica for approval since this is an expensive alcohol. She doesn't respond.

JESSICA
 I'll have a coffee, thank you.

The waiter hurriedly leaves, shaking his head. Gunnar's body language says he might go after the guy.

Jessica reaches over, pats his arm.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
 Karma dear, remember your karma.
 Don't want to come back *fifty years*
 older than me next time. How about
 we continue our conversation? I
 believe we were getting started on
 religion.

Gunnar remains irritated.

GUNNAR

I don't give a shit about religion.

JESSICA

Quit being so irritable. Well I love the subject. I took two semesters of comparative religion, one class by Joseph Campbell.

Thoughtfully looks out across the night desert.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Lets start with the Christians. Now they believe in a quick zip line up to the pearly gates or down into the fiery pit of hell. And which direction you go mainly depends on if you accept Jesus as the Son of God, which means you believe he is half-man, half-God, an android of two realms.

GUNNAR

Like Hercules?

JESSICA

Exactly. And then there is that all-important *order* of when you decided Jesus was the son of God and not just a prophet like Mohammed. For example, maybe you did good deeds and helped people all your life, but didn't get around to stopping and really deciding on the God-Son-Holy Ghost issue - so guess what, you *don't* get to ride the elevator up.

The waiter arrives with their drinks. He avoids eye contact with Gunnar as he sets the drinks down.

SNOOTY WAITER

Is there anything else I can get you?

GUNNAR

A good cigar.

The waiter blinks, very uncomfortable. He lets out a breath.

SNOOTY WAITER

I am afraid, sir, smoking is not permitted on the premises.

Jessica kicks Gunnar under the table to stop him from doing what his eyes say he is about to do.

The waiter flees back inside the main restaurant.

Jessica cocks her head and eyes Gunnar like a teacher keeping a student on track.

JESSICA

Which brings us to the Muslims. Now they believe Mohammed was a man, not a deity like Jesus, but a prophet which is a regular man that God speaks through. And when they die, their souls float up to a place with rivers of milk and honey - instead of pearly gates and streets of gold. That's where the twelve celestial virgins watch over them while they sleep until Judgment Day. And then, sometime in time, Allah, who is also God, decides he is ready to judge everybody - which includes the living and the sleeping dead all at the same time.

GUNNAR

What's the point of sleeping when you're dead?

(beat)

Look, if I can't get a cigar, then I'm gonna smoke a joint.

JESSICA

No, you're not. He just said no smoking.

GUNNAR

Dam, you really are a proctor. So, okay. What about the Jews then? What happens to them? I gotta couple Jew friends from Poland.

JESSICA

They don't believe in hell, only a glorious afterlife.

GUNNAR

That's cause hell for them has always been right here.

JESSICA

And they believe Jesus existed,
only he was a man, like Mohammed,
not a deity. Although,
interestingly, they too believe
they'll have to wait around for the
messiah - God - Allah to show up
and proclaim its Judgment Day.

GUNNAR

What's with all the judgment crap?
(beat)
I'm sure God, Jesus, Allah - all of
those dudes wouldn't want us
judging them.
(leans forward, pointing a
finger)
'cause a lot of us would surely
find them guys guilty in the first
degree of deserting their post and
not taking care of critical
matters.

JESSICA

Knowing you will be judged is what
keeps the righteous righteous,
Gunnar. It's what keeps people in
line. That's why hell was invented.
To keep people in line.

GUNNAR

Well, I'm here to tell yah, it
don't work on the evil doers 'cause
they don't give a rat's ass about
being judged.

JESSICA

Obviously. Now the Buddhist believe
that after you die, you'll be sent
back into the Ferris-wheel of life
based on how close you came to
giving up your earthly desires. In
other words, the less you demanded
from life, the higher up the order
you go. The closer to enlightenment
you get.

GUNNAR

I saw a TV program on this one. The
orange sheet guys...

JESSICA

(interrupts)
Monks.

GUNNAR

Yeah, the orange monkey men said you could reach enlightenment by "letting go of ego." Don't that mean you quit going around thinking you're hot shit?

JESSICA

Exactly. You stop thinking all your needs come first.

GUNNAR

Well I sure as hell don't think I'm hot shit anymore. And I sure as hell don't have any worldly possessions anymore and I think your shit comes before mine. So don't I qualify?

JESSICA

Nope. You still have earthly desires - like say drugs, booze, your motorcycle.

She smiles. He shakes his head.

GUNNAR

Well, I'll be given 'em up - when I die. So what happens if I reach enlightenment?

JESSICA

Then your soul is liberated - which means all your elements come apart and you dissolve into nothingness.

GUNNAR

What-the-hell? You're saying if I give up drinking and drugs and my motorcycle, I'll "dissolve into nothingness"? What-the-hell kinda incentive is that?

JESSICA

A Buddhist one.

Jessica sips her coffee while looking up at the stars then smiles at her friend.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Now the Tibetan monks believe your conscious mind stays alive for four and a half days after you die.

GUNNAR

How in the hell do they know that?

JESSICA

I have no idea. They just figured it takes that long for the soul to realize it no longer has a suitable place to reside.

GUNNAR

Then what?

JESSICA

Then your karma - which, remember, is the negative or positive energy you've accumulated in life - is assessed. So if you did *more bad* than good, you gotta go back to earth and keep doing it over and over again until you finally learn your lesson.

GUNNAR

Fuck that.

JESSICA

Still, at least you get another chance to be - to do - better.

(beat)

Which, to me, seems better than what Christianity, Judaism and the Moslems have to offer. According to all three of them, once you get the thumbs down, you're S-O-L.

Gunnar is deep in thought.

GUNNAR

What about coming back as a cow?

JESSICA

That's more the Hindu version. They believe the *form* you come back in is related to how you treated others. So say, if you physically mistreated others, you might come back as a stray dog or an alley cat that gets kicked around.

They both laugh. In b.g. the waiter frowns at their behavior.

In a more contemplative voice:

GUNNAR

Ask me, it all seems like a Vegas buffet created by some dudes on acid.

Jessica shrugs.

JESSICA

Humph. It is kind of like a buffet. People do choose a religion according to their taste.

Gunnar stands.

GUNNAR

You excuse me? I gotta go take a piss. If twinkle-toes comes back, don't let him look down at your boobs again, okay?

INT. DEATH VALLEY INN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Gunnar comes out of the men's room and looks around. He heads for the waiter who is talking to the maitre d' at the concierge desk.

Both men grow nervous as Gunnar approaches.

SNOOTY WAITER

Get ready to call 911.

The maitre d' pulls out his cell phone and holds it in his palm.

MAITRE D'

May we help you, sir?

GUNNAR

The check?

Gunnar puts out his hand.

The waiter looks through his book and rips out a check which he hands Gunnar.

MAITRE D'

We take everything except American Express and checks.

GUNNAR

What about American eagles?

MAITRE D'

Excuse me?

Gunnar pulls out his thick wad of bills and peels off two one-hundred dollar bills, which he hands the maitre d'.

MAITRE D' (CONT'D)
I'll be right back with your
change, sir.

Not wanting to be left alone with Gunnar, the waiter sees to a nearby table.

Gunnar continues to intimidatingly watch the waiter, which makes the poor guy spill the water he is pouring.

The maitre d' returns and hands Gunnar his change in crispy bills. Gunnar indicates the waiter.

GUNNAR
Sir, you need to teach that boy
some manners. Ain't polite to be
checking out a lady's cleavage.

As Gunnar heads out to the balcony to get Jessica, he salutes Snooty Waiter with the crispy bills.

EXT. BALCONY DINING AREA - NIGHT

GUNNAR
Shall we, madame?

He pulls back her chair.

JESSICA
Why thank you, sir. You already
paid?

GUNNAR
Of course.

As they leave, arm and arm, the waiter is seen arguing with the maitre d' while pointing at them.

JESSICA
You didn't leave him a tip, did
you?

GUNNAR
Hell, no.

JESSICA
Karma, Sir Knight, karma.

Gunnar stops.

GUNNAR

Shit.

He pulls out a ten and goes back and gives it to the guy.

INT. LAND ROVER - TRAVELING - NIGHT

The windows are down. Gunnar's beard is blowing wildly and so is Jessica's hair.

Blinding lights come over a rise, then flash by. They are back in darkness.

GUNNAR

What about that "bright light at the end of the tunnel" so many folks seen?

JESSICA

Well, some neurologist believe it's nothing more than the brain short-circuiting just as the fuse blows.

She looks over at Gunnar. He shrugs.

GUNNAR

Can I ass-terd-ly eject out before that happens?

JESSICA

I don't know. You can't make it happen. It just sorta happens on its own.

GUNNAR

I know how that feels. I can't make a ghost appear either. Kinda frustrating' ain't it? No way to prove your Indigo shit.

JESSICA

Yep.

EXT. RHYOLITE CAMP SITE - NIGHT

They are sitting beside a fire, sharing a blanket for warmth. Jessica is drawing a design in the sand with a stick.

JESSICA

You know, aside from religion, there's some interesting scientific theories about life after death.

GUNNAR

Like what?

JESSICA

Well, we now know a "thought" is a form of energy because we can watch parts of the brain light up when a person is using that part of the brain. And if, as Einstein so eloquently put it, energy can neither be created nor destroyed, it only changes form, then our thoughts, are, and always will be.

Jessica pokes her stick in the fire, holding it there until the end glows bright. She draws in the air with the glowing ember, like a sparkler.

GUNNAR

Will be what?

JESSICA

You - as defined by your thoughts. Maybe like invisible cell phone waves, we're all zipping around after we leave our bodies and when alive we happen to be in the right spot at the right time, and our brain is tuned to the right frequency, we absorb somebody else's energy, and voila, we can play a concerto at age two. That's sort of the Carl Jung theory anyway.

Jessica pulls two beers from the nearby cooler, then snuggles back under the blanket. She pops open the beers, hands Gunnar one, sips the other.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

That's why the universe is full of universal knowledge. And I think when we pray, our subconscious taps into that.

GUNNAR

So what's a ghost? Scientifically that is.

JESSICA

Visible energy would be my guess.

GUNNAR

And orbs?

JESSICA

Same thing, maybe a bit more concentrated. You know very few people can see them with the naked eye, so you're lucky there. Most are seen on baby monitors or caught on film.

GUNNAR

Baby monitors?!

She nods.

JESSICA

Some folks think they're angels, others think they're old souls watching over newly developing ones.

GUNNAR

But nobody thinks they're partyin' dead bros missing a partner?

JESSICA

(laughs)
Not that I've heard.

Gunnar stares hard at her.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

What?

GUNNAR

I ain't leavin' till I know you got turned back around.

JESSICA

Well then, since I don't want you to die, I'm going to stay a doctor and fix your sorry ass instead.

GUNNAR

Hell you are.

He looks hard at her. It's a stand off.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

I swear I get more piss-T-D'd over the damn ghosts than I did over Vietnam.

JESSICA

You mean P-T-S-D.

GUNNAR

Whatever.

He digs in his pocket for his harmonica.

JESSICA

You're good. Why didn't you ever go for it? Join a band? Start a band?

GUNNAR

I did join a band. A couple in fact. But like you were hollerin' down in the crater, nothin' pissed Bonnie off more than me playin' music all night long.

Gunnar starts playing away.

LATER

They are still in separate sleeping bags, but now on the same side of the fire, lying close, spoon fashion. Gunnar is touching her hair.

GUNNAR

Want me to wash your hair? Give you a backrub?

JESSICA

What brought that on?

GUNNAR

I just figured I better work on my karma. Don't wanta end up an old alley cat.

Jessica turns and kisses his cheek.

JESSICA

You won't. You're too sweet under that hard-core front.

She rolls back over.

GUNNAR

You really know how to hurt a man, don't you?

INT. LAND ROVER - TRAVELING - DAY

Gunnar is driving.

Jessica's sitting with her camera poised and ready with the lens resting in an open window as they cruise across the desert.

They pass an abandoned 40's roadside diner.

JESSICA
Stop. Stop! Go back.

Gunnar makes a squealing, dust raising U-turn and crosses back over the oncoming lane to pull up beside a dilapidated building. Jessica looks at Gunnar.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
See anything?

Gunnar looks around.

GUNNAR
Not yet.

They get out and walk around the place, peering in the windows. Gunnar finds the back kitchen door unlocked.

INT. ABANDONED DINER - DAY

They go in and look around. The place was once a Mom and Pop roadside tavern with a tiny kitchen, a long bar, tables and chairs, a small parquet dance floor with a plywood stage in a corner.

She's noticing the two inches of dirt and sand covering everything.

JESSICA
What about now? See any?

GUNNAR
Nope.

They sit on dust covered chrome and red Naugahyde stools at a shellacked pine bar sipping beers from their cooler while highway traffic zips by outside filthy front windows. Gunnar points at the dust covered mirror behind the bar.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
Hey look... my bros.

On the mirror are passing flashes of light - but they're reflections off passing cars.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
Damn! This is it. *This place is it!*

Makes a sweeping motion with his arm.

JESSICA

Is what?

GUNNAR

Heaven. No damn clock on the wall.
No phone for the old lady to hassle
me.

Gunnar picks up a stack of old plastic ashtrays.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

I can smoke all the cigarettes I
want and I'm sure there'll be
plenty of marry-me-you-wanna and
coke hidden in the bathroom. And
look over there...

(indicates the stage)

a stage where I can sing and play
any damn thing I want to when I
want and for as long as I want to.

JESSICA

You left out the twelve virgins.

GUNNAR

Nope, no virgins allowed in my
heaven. Only gals with experience.

Gunnar enjoys his vision as his smile grows. He offers her
his joint, she shakes her head no.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

You know you're missing out on one
of life's greatest little
pleasures.

JESSICA

I'm going to go get my paints.

GUNNAR

Hot damn. That's my gal. Hell if
this ain't heaven.

LATER

Jessica's working at an easel painting Gunnar.

WE SEE the late afternoon sun rays spotlighting the chrome
and red Naugahide stools and Gunnar sitting in a chair with
his feet propped up on a table enjoying his joint in mellow
silence with an open cooler next to him.

There's several empty bottles on his table. He's in his own world, although he glances over at her occasionally.

GUNNAR

You're looking more and more how I
remember you.

She smiles at him. The room dims as the sun starts setting outside.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

Almost done?

JESSICA

Yes, actually I am. I just got to
clean up.

She feels his eyes on her. Their minds speak to one another. The room fades into twilight darkness as she wipes brushes and stows paint tubes.

Gunnar slowly gets up and goes over to the stage. He holds his arms out like Jesus on the cross and starts singing, slow and easy in his deep baritone voice **LEONARD COHEN'S SONG "I AM YOUR MAN."** (It's a song full of masculine anguish over having to beg for love.)

Passing car lights strobe over him.

GUNNAR

IF YOU WANT A LOVER,
I'LL DO ANYTHING YOU ASK ME TO.
IF YOU WANT ANOTHER KINDA LOVE
I'LL WEAR ANY MASK FOR YOU.
IF YOU WANT A PARTNER
TAKE MY HAND, OR IF YOU WANT
TO STRIKE ME DOWN IN ANGER,
HERE I STAND,
I - AM - YOUR MAN.

Jessica closes up her easel, takes a beer and sits in a chair watching him. The performance - the words - affect her. Gunnar's voice grows with intensity.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)

IF YOU WANT A BOXER,
I WILL STEP INTO THE RING FOR YOU.
IF YOU WANT A DOCTOR,
I'LL EXAMINE EVERY INCH OF YOU
IF YOU WANT A DRIVER
OR IF YOU WANT TO TAKE ME FOR A
RIDE
YOU KNOW YOU CAN.
I - AM - YOUR MAN.

Gunnar stares at her, his soul reaching out. There is a beat of wretched silence. He continues.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
 THE MOONS TOO BRIGHT
 THE CHAINS TOO TIGHT,
 THIS BEAST WON'T SLEEP AT NIGHT
 I'VE BEEN RUNNING THROUGH ALL THE
 PROMISES
 I MADE AND COULD NOT KEEP
 BUT A MAN NEVER GOT A WOMAN BACK
 BY BEGGING ON HIS KNEES.

With torment, he wails.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
 BUT I'LL CRAWL TO YOU BABY
 AND I'D FALL AT YOUR FEET
 AND I'D HOWL AT YOUR BEAUTY
 LIKE A DOG IN HEAT,
 AND I'D CLAW AT YOUR HEART
 AND I'D TEAR AT YOUR SHEET
 AND I'D SAY PLE-EASE-EEE!!
 I - AM - YOUR MAN.

Jessica's eyes are teary as she walks over and gives Gunnar a loving hug and kiss.

Gunnar holds her tight. He kisses the top of her head.

JESSICA
 Who wrote that?

GUNNAR
 I did.

JESSICA
 You did not.

GUNNAR
 It was Leonard Cohen, my buddy.

JESSICA
 (smiling)
 Another buddy?

GUNNAR
 Yep. We go way back. He's an old
 beatnik like me. Come on, let's get
 out of here before the rats and
 bats come out.

EXT. RHYOLITE RUINS CAMP SITE - MORNING

Gunnar sticks his head out of the sleeping bag and blinks in the sunlight. He peeks down inside his bag.

GUNNAR
(singing)
HERE COMES THE SUN, LITTLE DARLIN'
HERE COMES THE SUN . . .

Jessica's head emerges as he unzips the side of the bag. She touches his beard.

Their breaths are smoky in the cold morning air.

She twirls some strands, then pinches a spot down near the bottom.

JESSICA
What was happening around this time
in your life?

GUNNAR
I was buying my first scooter and
headin' for Californy.

JESSICA
What about here?

She touches his beard several inches higher.

GUNNAR
Ah, we'll skip that part.

JESSICA
Here?

GUNNAR
Marriage and a baby carriage.

JESSICA
Here?

GUNNAR
Ah, more baby carriages.

JESSICA
And here?

She's almost to his lower lip.

GUNNAR
I found you again.

Her finger touches his lower lip. They look deep into each others eyes. She gives him a light kiss before freeing herself from the sleeping bag. She's still got on khaki hiking shorts and a tank top.

He follows suit. He's wearing worn-out boxers and tugs on the Levis folded beside him in the sand.

Jessica sits on her sleeping bag, starts putting on socks and hiking boots.

JESSICA

You know I gotta pack. I go back to work tomorrow.

GUNNAR

No you don't.

JESSICA

Yes, I do.

She fires up the camp stove and puts coffee on, then starts packing.

Gunnar walks away and stands on a busted slab of concrete. He starts stomping a boot, getting a tempo going before blowing and sucking hard on his harmonica. He belts out the **Beatles'** "Oh! Darling."

GUNNAR

OH DARLING! PLEASE BELIEVE ME,
(harmonica)

BELIEVE ME WHEN I TELL YOU
I'LL NEVER DO YOU NO HARM

(harmonica)

OH, DARLING!

IF YOU LEAVE ME,
I'LL NEVER MAKE IT ALONE,
BELIEVE ME WHEN I BEG YOU,
DON'T EVER LEAVE ME ALONE.

(harmonica)

JESSICA

Oh, stop it! I'm not leaving you.

He stops singing.

GUNNAR

Then what the hell you call it?

JESSICA

Going back to work.

GUNNAR

Well, I call it leaving me. Leaving me out here in the desert on my lonesome.

JESSICA

Gunnar, come on down and help me pack this stuff up.

Jessica waits a bit to see if he will.

He shakes his head. Nope.

He is not coming off the slab of concrete. Instead he starts singing **Tom Petty's last refrains of "Stay"**.

GUNNAR

OH WON'T YOU STAY-A-AY,
JUST A LITTLE BIT LONGER?
YOUR MOTHER WON'T MIND.
Your hospital WON'T MIND,
I WON'T MIND. . .
JUST STAY A LITTLE BIT LONG-N-GER.

Jessica shakes her head in frustration and starts shoving stuff in canvas bags and into the back of the car. When all that's left is a folding table with the camp stove and coffee on it, she stands facing him, hands on hips.

JESSICA

You want coffee or not?

He keeps playing his harmonica.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Fine then.

She pours coffee into a travel thermos and dumps the rest. Folds up the camp stove and shoves it into a box, collapses the table and carries everything in two trips to the Rover. She shoves it all in and slams the door shut.

She faces him again.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Good-bye kiss?

He keeps on playing.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Okay then, bye. Love you.

Once in the car, she blows him a kiss. Driving off, she waves out the window.

INT. HOSPITAL ER WAITING ROOM - DAY

A tired and overworked Jessica comes out of swinging ER doors. She's carrying a pile of charts.

Gunnar materializes beside her.

JESSICA

Where'd you come from?

He gives her a little shoulder hug and kiss on top the head.

GUNNAR

Been waiting on you to get off.
You've got a fucked schedule by the
way. So how's life back in the
trenches?

JESSICA

Grueling.

GUNNAR

So quit. Come drinking with me.

JESSICA

Gunnar, I might drink a bit too
much when I'm on vacation, but not
around here. I can't. I don't.

GUNNAR

Dinner then?

She was going to say no, but seeing his face, changes her mind.

JESSICA

Okay. Where do I meet you?

GUNNAR

The Broadway Diner?

JESSICA

Okay. I get off at eight tonight.

GUNNAR

Eight it is.

INT. BROADWAY DINER - NIGHT

Jessica enters wearing scrubs and white coat.

She's led to a table where Gunnar sits with a young lady who has purple hair and multiple body piercings.

As Jessica approaches, Gunnar stands, indicates the young lady.

GUNNAR

Jess, this is one of my daughters,
Jude.

Jessica puts out her hand and shakes the young woman's heavily ringed and tattooed hand.

JESSICA

Jude. Hi, I'm Jessica Moore.

Gunnar pulls out a chair for Jessica, which shocks his daughter. As Jessica sits;

JUDE

Dad says you two met a long time ago. Cain't figure that out though. I mean my mom and him met in high school and got married when she was what, Dad? Seventeen?

GUNNAR

Well, honey, like I told you, its kinda complicated.

JESSICA

I met your father approximately two months ago. In the ER. He had a concussion.

JUDE

Well that makes a hell've lot more sense. So you're what, a nurse?

JESSICA

No, a doctor.

JUDE

A doctor? Jesus, Dad, way to score.

JESSICA

(to Gunnar)

What exactly is the purpose of this?

Gunnar rubs his face. He's all twisted up.

GUNNAR

I dunno. Hell. Just thought you ought to meet some of my family.

JESSICA

Gunnar.

JUDE

Jesus Christ, Dad, you must've really cracked your head. Lady like her sure as hell ain't gonna be interested in a guy like you. She's a *doctor*, for christsake!

Jessica stands, shaking her head.

JESSICA

Gunnar, I'm sorry, but this was not a good idea.

Jude's laughing. Gunnar is getting mad, real mad.

Jessica leaves.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Jessica is sitting at a conference table with six other doctors.

At the head of the table is DR. MARCOS, her no-nonsense female boss. DR. JONES, somewhat paunchy, DR. RICHARDSON, a black doctor and DR. SUMBIA, who is Indian and wears a head scarf.

DR. MARCOS

... so those are the new policies. They take affect the first of next month.

DR. JONES

(angry)

It should be mandatory for the entire board of directors to spend 24 hours in the ER before they're allowed to make changes like that!

DR. SUMBIA

We spend much too much time on the computer as is. And it makes me nervous that so much information is being kept in this "cloud". What protection does this cloud have anyway? What happens if it's satellite should get wiped out? Besides, we are paid to attend patients, not fill out more forms and work more hours.

CELL PHONE in Jessica's lab coat BUZZES LOUDLY. She reaches in and quickly turns down the sound. Repeat BUZZING. Quiet, then buzzing. Quiet, then buzzing.

JESSICA

Excuse me.

FOLLOW INTO HALL

She answers her phone.

JESSICA

Hello, this is Doctor Moore...
Gunnar?... What am I doing? I'm in
the middle of a conference meeting,
that's what I'm doing. You know
better than to call me when I'm
working.

(frowns)

Are you drunk? You sound drunk.

(getting pissed)

Look, I really can't talk right
now. I'll call you when I get out.
Sober up, okay?

She hangs up.

FOLLOW back into conference room.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

It was a patient. Now what were you
saying?

She retakes her seat.

INT. JESSICA'S LAND ROVER - TRAVELING - DAY

She's driving home from work in scrubs. Her attention is drawn to the beauty of the golden light of a setting sun on the mountains behind Santa Barbara. She pulls over and quietly absorbs the colors, the patterns. The artist in her is awakening.

EXT. JESSICA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

She's working on her laptop on a kitchen island. A TV in her line of vision starts a program on an artist, shows samples of the artist's work. She becomes spell bound. Leaves her laptop and moves to watch the program.

INT. POOL CABANA

She's standing inside the empty space looking around.

INT. HOSPITAL HALL - DAY

Jessica, in a lab coat with a stethoscope around her neck, is walking with a pile of charts in her arm. She stops to answer the buzzing cell-phone in her lab coat. She recognizes the caller's number. Doesn't answer. BUZZ-BUZZ-BUZZ. She irritatedly answers.

JESSICA

What?...

(surprise on her face)

Jude? No, I haven't seen him. Why?

She stops walking.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

What makes you think he's missing?... That was what, they day before yesterday?

Jessica dumps the charts on a counter to better concentrate on the call.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

(very worried)

He left his wallet and cell phone on the table?

(beat)

Jude, go look in the bathroom. See if he took his meds with him.

Especially the pain pills.

(rubs her forehead pacing)

What? They're still there?! - Shit.

SHIT!! Do you have any idea where he might be? Okay, calm down. Calm down. Look, go ahead and call the cops.

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF CALIFORNIA DESERT - DAY

The Land Rover is flying down the undulating road heading towards Death Valley. It's passing cars and tourist buses like they are standing still.

EXT. RHYOLITE RUINS - DAY

The Rover slides to a stop by the Rhyolite ruins. Jessica jumps out and looks around, then jumps back in the car.

EXT. DESERT FIELD OF INSTALLATION ART - DAY

The Rover careens around the field of art pieces, then speeds away.

She stops on a rise and stands with her arms over the top of the door as she pans the desert floor with binoculars.

INT. DEATH VALLEY TOURIST CENTER RESTAURANT - SUNSET

She rushes into the tourist restaurant and looks around, buys a couple candy bars and a bottle of water and exits as fast as she came in. She sticks her head in the bar. Nope. She drives through the date palm orchard. Nope.

INT. ABANDONDED DINER - NIGHT

She's sitting at the bar, head down on top her arms, tears trailing through dirt on her exhausted face. (We can make out her face due to the flashlight lying nearby.) Her eyes follow the passing car lights on the filthy mirror behind the bar. Forlornly she gets up and heads back outside.

EXT. ABANDONDED DINER - NIGHT

Just as she reaches for the door handle, she slumps to her knees. She starts crying hard, hard enough to cause her to fall on her side, and curl up like an embryo.

Car lights zoom over her. After awhile she rolls flat on her back, cried out, and stares up at the stars. A night wind fluffs her hair and raises a small dust devil near her. Her eyes stare up, as if she is in a trance. A large bug crawls over her face but she doesn't react. Her mind is elsewhere, traveling.

She blinks, sits up and jumps in the Rover.

EXT. DESERT - DAWN

She's LEAVING Death Valley as the sun starts rising over the distant horizon. She slows down and starts looking off to her right. There it is, the washboard road Gunnar vectored off on when he avoided the head-on collision with the truck.

She turns and drives down the bumpy road looking across the entire expanse of desert for a sign of him.

In the far distance the GLINT of early morning SUNLIGHT ON METAL catches her eye. She slams on the brakes and grabs binoculars off the passenger seat. Standing on the hood, she looks through the binoculars at the reflected light.

She drives off-road, running over sage brush, bouncing over gullies, leaving a dirt rooster tail.

She stops at the edge of a deep ravine. She rushes over to the mangled mass of Gunnar's motorcycle.

The back wheel's chrome bumper is just high enough above the edge to catch the rising sun's light.

She yells out for him.

JESSICA
Gunnar?! Gunnar! MARCO!

Silence. She shivers and rubs her arms in the early morning cool air.

She notices blood in the sand near the bike. She hastily slides down into the ravine and follows the trail. The trail leads to an overhanging mesquite tree.

We see the silhouette of Gunnar sitting against the mesquite tree.

Jessica scrambles up to him. She stands in front of him, studying him for a beat, then kicks the bottom of his boot. She is angry, crazily so.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
You son-of-a-bitch! What in the hell were you thinking?! Get the-fuck up!

She kicks his boot again. Points back at his bike.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Did you see what you did to your bike? She's never going to forgive you. You idiot! You fucking, God damn, idiot!!

She kicks the bottom of his boot again. Kicks sand at him.

Tears stream from her eyes. She screams with pure agony, then crumples down beside him. She pulls his shoulder and head into her lap and tenderly strokes his head while shooing flies away. He is dead. The harmonica falls out of his hand.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
(weeping)
Oh, God Gunnar. Damn you.

She rocks his dead body.

LATER - NIGHT

The stars are out in full force. She's got him lying on his back facing the heavens. She's lying near him. She's got his harmonic in her hand over her heart.

MUSIC: LEONARD COHEN: "BIRD ON A WIRE." (V.O.)

LIKE A BIRD ON THE WIRE,
 LIKE A DRUNK IN A MIDNIGHT CHOIR,
 HE TRIED, HE TRIED IN HIS OWN WAY
 TO BE FREE.

The wispy vapor of his soul lingers above her then darts off.

JESSICA

Bye, babe.

She gives a little farewell wave then looks over at the body.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Sorry, but I gotta call your
 favorite people now cause you stink
 to high heaven.

She gets up and presses numbers on her cell phone, moonlight reflecting in her tears.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

This is Dr. Moore. Jessica Moore.
 I've found the man who's been
 missing from Santa Barbara...
 Gunnar Johanson. Ah, about a mile
 in off a dirt road that veers off
 the main road to Death Valley. I
 dunno, maybe eighteen or twenty
 miles from where you turn off 395.
 Its the highway to Death Valley
 below Owen's Lake. It's just a
 dirt road. No, there is no sign.
 No, no... He's dead. Motorcycle
 accident. How do I know? Because
 I'm a doctor.

(beat)

I ah, I... because I've been
 looking all over for him out here.
 Because I know he liked to get away
 out here.

(beat)

Oh, yeah, that's a good idea. Hold
 on.

MapQuest comes up on her phone pinpointing where she is.

EXT. SANTA BARBARA STREET - DAY

Jessica turns down a twisting canyon lane lined by eucalyptus trees. She is exhausted and very blue. Suddenly something darts in front of her car and she slams on the brakes, swerves, but hits it. She jumps out.

Lying beside the front tire is a GREY and WHITE CAT. Depression and shock cause her to burst into tears as she kneels beside the cat and picks up the limp body.

JESSICA

Don't die, please don't die! I'm sorry. I'm taking you to the hospital, okay. Just hang in there. Don't die, okay? Don't die. Don't die.

She wraps the cat in a sweater on the passenger seat and turns around.

INT. VETERINARY OFFICE -DAY

The scrawny cat is lying on a metal table. Jessica has a comforting hand on its side. A VETERINARIAN is looking at an X-Ray of a broken back leg and hip.

VETERINARIAN

Sure you want me to operate?

JESSICA

(tearfully despondent)
Yes. Yes, I do.

VETERINARIAN

Why? He's an old stray.

JESSICA

I've just seen enough death lately. I really didn't mean to hit him. I love animals. Really, I do.

INT. POOL CABANA - DAY

It has been transformed into an Art Studio. On an easel is a large canvas.

Jessica's paintbrush moves across the canvas in sure strokes.

The grey cat is in a towel-lined box, his back and hip shaved with a long line of stitches showing.

INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jessica is lying in bed staring out an open window at a full moon. Night winds stir strands of her hair. Bathed in the moonlight, we see grief still consumes her.

The grey cat MEOWS from the box now by her bed. She tenderly lifts it onto the bed where it curls up beside her. She absently pets it. LOUD PURRING. She finally closes her eyes.

INT. POOL CABANA - DAY

We see the painting she's working on - its a desert panorama on a huge 5 x 8 foot canvas. CLASSICAL music is playing.

The grey cat is lying on top of her work station, watching her. His fur has started to grow back over the stitches.

Dr. Marcos and Dr. Jones press her doorbell on a monitor in the studio. Sammy starts barking. The lame coyote perks up.

JESSICA

Dammit.

INT. JESSICA'S HOUSE - DAY

Jessica opens the front door. The doctors stare at her with very concerned looks.

DR. MARCOS

Jess, how are you doing?

Jessica wipes the paint off her hands on a paint-covered apron.

JESSICA

Fine. Come on in.

The two enter, looking around for clues as to if she is really okay or not. Jessica leads them to the kitchen.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Want something to drink?

DR. MARCOS

Sure. Got any coffee?

The kitchen is a wreck. There are dirty dishes in the sink and plates with half-eaten meals sitting around and a few empty wine bottles.

DR. MARCOS (CONT'D)

(concerned)

Are you taking your anti-depressants?

JESSICA

Yes. If you don't believe me, you can check the bottle.

She indicates the pill bottle, which is being twirled around on the counter by the cat. Dr. Marcos picks up the pill bottle and sees it is almost empty.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Look. The reason for the mess is
I've been really busy painting.
Come on. Come see what I'm working
on.

She leads the way with her menagerie following. Entering a
hall, the grey cat hisses and swipes at Sammy. The dog jumps
back and keeps his distance.

INT. POOL CABANA - DAY

Her co-workers are truly impressed.

DR. MARCOS

You painted that?

JESSICA

I did.

DR. JONES

I never knew you went to art
school. My God, when did you have
time with med school?

JESSICA

I never went to art school.

DR. MARCOS

You're kidding me?

DR. JONES

Damn. You're good.

JESSICA

Thank you.

Jessica resumes painting.

DR. MARCOS

(hesitantly)

Ah, Jessica, when do you think
you'll be coming back? You've been
gone a month now. We can't keep
holding...

Jessica turns and looks at her boss.

JESSICA

Dr. Marcos, I won't be coming back.

DR. MARCOS

What? Why not?

JESSICA
Because I've decided to quit.

Dr. Jones notices the painting of Gunnar.

DR. JONES
You can't do that!

DR. MARCOS
Jessica, what are you saying?

JESSICA
I can do that. I am quitting.

DR. MARCOS
You can't just quit. We need you.

JESSICA
Sorry, but I don't want to be a doctor anymore.

DR. JONES
No way! Nah, you can't do that. You can't just up and quit!

DR. MARCOS
What'll you do? Live on?

JESSICA
I have stock and a decent savings account. Plus I'm going to sell this house and everything in it. Then move to the desert.

DR. MARCOS
Look, Jessica don't do anything so drastic until after you've been on the antidepressants for a while longer.

Jessica faces her ex-colleagues.

JESSICA
Dr. Marcos, it has nothing to do with being depressed. Just the opposite in fact.

She smiles while wiping clean a brush.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

I hated being on call 24/7 and constantly busting my ass to fill out paperwork for price gouging insurance companies and a money-hungry corporate board. Sorry, Dr. Marcos, but I'm done with that.

(beat)

Besides, I'm tired of being around sick, hurt and dying people that I know won't ever be able to afford their bills. The whole system is sick.

DR. JONES

(interrupts - indicates
the painting of Gunnar)

Is that the guy? That friend of yours who died?

Jessica nods admiringly, while the others are shocked by the image of an old weathered, bearded biker.

JESSICA

Yes.

DR. MARCOS

He looks like an old biker.

JESSICA

He was.

DR. MARCOS

(disgusted)

Jesus, Jessica. What were you thinking?

DR. MARCOS (CONT'D)

My God, this is insane. Did he get you take psychedelics or something while you were out there? He must have or...

JESSICA

No, he did not. Now if you two will please excuse me, I'd like to get back to work.

She turns up the CLASSICAL MUSIC.

Dr. Marcos is about to keep arguing, but stops.

She signals Dr. Jones to leave with her.

LATER - NIGHT

Two floor floodlights illuminate the large painting. IT'S DONE.

Jessica proudly appraises it while popping open a bottle of Champagne. She toasts the painting of Gunnar on the wall, the finished work and the watching cat before walking outside into the night.

FOLLOW OUT TO BACKYARD PATIO - NIGHT

CLASSICAL MUSIC: ie. Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata as the moon's light is reflected in the dark pool.

All the animals follow her out of the cabana. Sammy keeps his distance from the grey cat. Each animal finds a spot to lay around the padded lounge chair she reclines on. Except for the grey cat. He jumps up and stretches out on her stomach, his head resting on her breast.

She pets him while sipping champagne and looking up at the moon. HEAVY PURRING.

When she stops petting to pour more champagne, the cat reaches up with a paw and touches her face, as if asking for her to look at him.

Jessica slowly sets her glass down. With a bit of awe, she lifts the cat nose-to-nose and looks into it's eyes.

JESSICA

(laughing softly)

You old shit-bird. I sort of thought it might be you.

She laughs as she hugs him.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

So the Hindu's won, heh? Could'a been worse, you lucky old cuss.

She runs her hand down his back and leg.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Still think us sawbones are a waste of time?

She holds the cat in front of her face again, nose-to-nose, trying to telepathically receive an answer.

The cat just tilts its head, purring.

She stands and starts waltzing around the yard, holding the cat against her, her moon-shadow floating over flower pots, patio tiles and her other pets.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

God, Gunnar, I'm so glad you came
back to me. I'm so glad.

We hear **Neil Young's "Harvest Moon"** being sung in Gunnar's deep, soothing baritone voice.

GUNNAR (V.O.)

NOW ITS GETTING LATE,
AND THE MOON IS CLIMBING HIGH
I WANT TO CELEBRATE
SEE IT SHININ' IN YOUR EYE,

BECAUSE I'M STILL IN LOVE WITH YOU
I WANT TO SEE YOU DANCE AGAIN.
BECAUSE I'M STILL IN LOVE WITH YOU
ON THIS HARVEST MOON.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END