

DARK DESERT HIGHWAY

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EXT. NEW MEXICO DESERT -- DAWN

The sun punctures a cloudless sky. Just past dawn but already 100 degrees. In a series of quick cuts, we see...

Abandoned GAS PUMPS stand like rusted monoliths in twisted sage. "REGULAR" and "ETHYL"... dry, dusty reminders of a time when a highway ran through here...

An upside-down CADILLAC lies partially buried... as if the bleak land is slowly interring it's dead...

The hair on a dead FOX'S tail trembles in the hot wind as MAGGOTS attack the roadside carcass.

And...

The CAMERA slowly pushes into a ROTTING BARN. LARGE BLUE TARPAULINS cover SOMETHING at the barn's base. (*We'll find out what later.*) A buzz of FLIES increases as the camera continues it's slow creep in. As the flies crescendo, we...

CUT TO:

EXT. DIFFERENT PART OF THE NEW MEXICO DESERT -- CONTINUOUS

BARE FEET sprint across brambles and sharp stone. A WOMAN (30's) runs like her life depends on it. It does...

Lips chapped and raw. Skin shriveled and baked. Sunken eyes dart across barren terrain. She's terrified.

The woman dives next to a BARREL CACTUS. Frantically searches the ground. Finds... a JAGGED ROCK. Slams it into the cacti. NEEDLES riddle her hands and arms. She hits it again! Again! Finally...

It cracks open! The woman juts her bloody hand inside, scoops out the PULP, and holds it just above her lips. Squeezes. A few precious DROPS of WATER fall into her mouth.

AUDIO FX -- A DISTANT HORN.

The woman looks towards the sound. Listens...

AUDIO FX -- A TRUCK'S DIESEL HORN. CLOSER NOW...

The woman tosses the pulp, pulls herself to her feet and takes off running again. Cactus thorns tear at her bare legs as she stumbles forward.

(CONTINUED)

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WOMAN
 (strained, barely audible)
 Please... Please...

Dust kicks up behind her as the woman runs across the parched earth. Then... she stops. Looks down into a canyon...

WOMAN'S POV

On a two-lane highway at the bottom of the hill, a TRUCK moves towards her.

BACK

A smile forms on her cracked lips.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
 (still barely audible)
 Help please.

The woman picks up a rock and throws it down the steep embankment. The rock stops before it gets to the road...

WOMAN (CONT'D)
 (louder now)
 Help... Please!

As the woman bends to grab another rock, a RED LASER LIGHT snakes across the ground. It slowly moves up the woman's ankle, her calf, her back, and stops at the base of her skull.

She throws another rock.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
 (a full scream)
 HELP!

In a WIDE SHOT... we hear a RIFLE SHOT!

The recoil sounds a split second before the .308 WINCHESTER SHELL bursts through the woman's head, scattering skull, brain, tissue and teeth on the ground below.

The rock rolls down to the road...unseen by the truck driver.

EXT. NEW MEXICO CANYON - MOMENTS LATER

As ANOTHER TRUCK rolls by, the CAMERA drifts up the canyon. Past the BLOOD. Past the SHATTERED TEETH and chunks of flesh the INSECTS have now found.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Past the body as it's dragged across the ground. To... the BOOTS. The largest BOOTS you've ever seen in your life!

CUT TO:

EXT. ARIZONA CUL DE SAC - MORNING

Its one of those housing developments that looks like it sprung directly out of the desert. All the homes exactly the same...until you get close. Then you notice the nice ones have FOR SALE signs. The others are overgrown with rock-shattered windows. The abandoned ones.

Bored MOVERS carry BOXES from a two-story stucco and deposit them into the back of a MOVING VAN. Just in front are the only other vehicles on the street... A DUALY PICK-UP TRUCK towing a "FIFTH WHEELER" CAMPER. The pickup and camper both stick out like a sore thumb...

INT. ARIZONA CUL DE SAC HOUSE, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A PREGNANCY TEST drops into a TRASH CAN. 2 lines. Pregnant.

TINA (25) maneuvers past MOVING BOXES to a mirror behind the door. She tentatively lifts her shirt. No bump. Yet. She sighs. A BEAT passes and... the door flies open. Tina pulls her shirt down. It's her fiance STEVEN (27).

STEVEN

Ready?

TINA

You scared me.

STEVEN

Sorry. Can we go?

TINA

In a sec.

STEVEN

You need anything?

TINA

Yes... Could you tell the movers we changed our mind?

STEVEN

Tina... We've been over this a hundred times.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Texas will be a fresh start. Near family. Give us a chance to get out from under it.

TINA
I know. I know...

The DOORBELL rings.

STEVEN
They're here.

Steven turns and ambles towards the stairs.

TINA
Steven?

STEVEN
Yeah?

TINA
If we're so broke, why are we spending all this money on a rolling goodbye party?

STEVEN
We've been over that too. This is what we wanted.

Steven continues down the steps. Tina closes the door, crosses back to the trash can, and stares down at the pregnancy test. Still two lines. Still pregnant.

TINA
Its not what I wanted.

EXT. ARIZONA CUL DE SAC HOUSE, DRIVEWAY - LATER

Tina stands on the driveway with FOUR OTHERS. All have BACKPACKS or KNAPSACKS at their feet. They are... MICHAEL (25) trust fund slacker-type. ABBY (24), gorgeous, tattooed, impetuous. Michael's girl. JESSICA (24), very pretty but purposely reserved. The newcomer. And ANDREW (25), dressed like a teacher (which he, in fact, is). He's been dating Jessica for just a few months...

Tina shoots an uncomfortable look at Andrew as the moving van pulls away behind her. Andrew will not meet her gaze...

MICHAEL
Where's Steven?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TINA

No clue.

MICHAEL

(bored, antsy)

Let's get this show on the road.

ABBY

(to Jessica)

I'm Abby. You must be Jess.

JESSICA

(uncomfortable)

Jessica... Hi.

ABBY

How long you and the professor been dating?

JESSICA

Just a few months.

ABBY

Pretty girl like you couldn't do better than him?

ANDREW

(to Jessica)

Warned you.

ABBY

And thus...it begins

Abby gives Andrew a playful nudge. Just then...Steven pushes through the front door. He carries a COOLER.

MICHAEL

Finally. Thought this shit was never gonna happen.

Stephen sits the cooler in front of them and lifts the lid.

ABBY

That's what I'm talking about...

Six hands reach inside to grab DRINKS. (Tina grabs a diet soda... Jessica, a water). Steven quiets them with a wave of his hand...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

STEVEN

These last few years haven't been the best for most of us. Maybe we didn't set the world on fire like we thought we would. And maybe we didn't stay as tight after graduation as we promised. Life creeps up. And that sucks. (BEAT) But it doesn't matter. What matters is this and only this. Friendship. Old friends. (to Jessica) New friends. Nobody can take that away. (Raises his beer) To friends.

THE OTHERS

To friends!

They all take a sip. All but Steven. He chugs his beer dry.

TINA

Steven?

STEVEN

One more thing...

Steven throws his bottle through the living room window!

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Fuck you Western Arizona Trust!

TINA

Are you crazy!?

STEVEN

It's the bank's now; who cares?!

A BEAT passes and...a smile comes to Michael's face. He throws his bottle. It shatters on the front door!

MICHAEL

Fuck you, "quit the band and get a real job"!

TINA

Michael!

ABBY

Fuck you 480 credit score!

Abby throws hers. It shatters against a shutter.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

TINA

Stop it!

STEVEN

It feels good Tina, try it.

Tina looks pleadingly to Andrew for a BEAT. Then...

ANDREW

Fuck you student loans!

Andrew's bottle smashes against stucco.

MICHAEL

Yeah well... maybe you should stop getting degrees then, professor.

Jessica turns to Tina. Just two left. Then... Jessica walks slightly forward towards the house.

JESSICA

(quiet, out of earshot)
Screw you... past.

Jessica's water bottle slams against the porch! They all turn to Tina. A BEAT passes and... Tina throws her bottle with everything she has. It shatters a second floor window.

TINA

Fuck you, real world...

As glass rains down we...

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT COMPOUND - DAY

A HIGH POWERED SNIPER'S RIFLE hangs from the back window of a RUSTED, DENTED PICK-UP TRUCK.

A HOSE sprays the truck's bed. Thick, BROWNISH RED WATER mixed with shards of BONE and TEETH pours over the lift gate, across the bumper and down to the thirsty, parched ground.

One enormous boot taps out a beat only HE can hear...

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - LATER

The pick-up and trailer zip past beautiful, majestic MOUNTAINS bathed in orange and purple.

INT. TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Abby snaps a picture of the mountains on her CELL PHONE

ABBY

This is so my new profile picture.

Jessica's curled up on the couch, texting. Andrew pounds the buttons of a PLAYSTATION controller while Michael, BEER in hand, opens a door in the rear of the trailer. The TOY ROOM.

MICHAEL

Whoa. Andrew, check this shit out.

Andrew puts the controller down and crosses to...

INT. TRAILER, "TOY ROOM" - CONTINUOUS

Michael turns on the light. Two new DIRT BIKES and a gleaming ATV stare back at them.

ANDREW

No way.

MICHAEL

Way. I'm thinking maybe we're heading to Las Cruces first to do a little off-roading. Steven and Tina's way of saying thanks for the send-off?

ANDREW

Doesn't sound like Tina.

MICHAEL

OK, Steven's way of saying thanks.

ANDREW

How's he affording this?

As the conversation continues, we hear a SOUND.

AUDIO FX - A MICROPHONE CLICKS ON AND OFF

MICHAEL

You mean with his business crashing? Who knows? Maybe he's going for an eighties-style "BK"; buy all the shit you can and hope the banks don't ask for it back.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Better question...who does a tech start-up in Arizona? I mean, move to the fucking Silicon Valley. Stupid...

(re: the sound)

What is that!?

Michael and Andrew look around. A WALKIE TALKIE sits on a shelf. They shoot each other an "Oh no" look. Michael tentatively picks up the walkie.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(into walkie talkie)

Hello?

STEVEN (ON WALKIE TALKIE)

Cell service is pretty spotty out here. Got the walkies in case you need to reach us. Forgot to mention that mic sticks.

MICHAEL

(embarrassed)

Okay... Got it... Over...

Andrew looks at Michael. Mouths the words "you asshole"...

INT. TRUCK CAB - CONTINUOUS

Steven drops the walkie and goes right back to scanning through his iPod. 5-second-blasts of SPEED METAL rip thru the speakers. Tina's head bounces against the passenger side window as she tries to sleep.

TINA

Can you find a song and stick to it?

STEVEN

I'm looking for something.

TINA

Ways to drive me crazy?

STEVEN

I've told you for years, that's not a drive, it's a short putt.

TINA

(sarcastic)

Yeah... that one never gets old.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TINA (CONT'D)
 (the iPod)
 Any chance I could get a turn?

STEVEN
 What...Coltrane? Miles? Unlikely.

TINA
 Well its a fine mix you're laying
 down, Fatboy Slim...

EXT. ARIZONA HIGHWAY - DUSK

The pick-up and trailer roll past a sign reading "New Mexico - 25 miles" as the sky moves from purple to black...

INT. TRAILER -- LATER

Empty BEER BOTTLES litter the trailer. Andrew's asleep on one couch. On the other, Abby sleeps with her head in Michael's lap as he plays a game on his iPhone. At the back of the trailer, Jessica thumbs through a MAGAZINE.

Feeling eyes on her, Jessica stops turning pages. Looks up. Michael stares, a suggestive smile on his face. A smile that denotes "history". Jessica puts her magazine down, reaches into her bag, pulls out a dog-eared BIBLE and opens it. Michael rolls his eyes as he turns away.

STEVEN (ON WALKIE TALKIE)
 You guys awake?

Andrew wakes. Grabs the WALKIE TALKIE from the counter.

ANDREW
 Yo... what's up?

STEVEN (ON WALKIE TALKIE)
 Getting hungry. Gonna stop.

ANDREW
 Cool.

Michael glances back to Jessica. She won't look up from her bible.

INT. TRUCK CAB -- CONTINUOUS

Tina wakes. Looks blearily around... The truck heads towards a dilapidated ROADHOUSE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TINA
Where are we?

STEVEN
'Bout ten miles inside New Mexico.

TINA
Why are we stopping?

STEVEN
Eating.

TINA
Here?

EXT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE, PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

The trailer lurches to a stop among late-model PICK UP TRUCKS. Most have GUN RACKS along their back windows.

One by one, Michael, Abby, Andrew, and Jessica climb out of the trailer and shake off the stiffness of the road. They stare up at the rotting wood facade and busted neon that barely spells out the name "BIG MICK'S". Just then... a BLACK LINCOLN TOWN CAR peels out of a parking spot, showering them with gravel as it shoots out onto the highway.

STEVEN
(to the town car)
Fuck you asshole!

The town car screeches to a halt. The BLACK REAR WINDOW slowly slides down. In the darkness, SOMEONE watches from the back seat.

TINA
(to Steven)
Way to make friends.

A long, silent BEAT passes. Then, the window slides closed and... the town car slowly moves away, finally disappearing into the murky darkness.

ANDREW
Nice place.

Steven turns to Tina.

STEVEN
Make sure we're locked.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Tina moves to the trailer door and tries the knob. Locked. She joins the others as they walk inside.

INT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The place is dark but packed. A HONKY TONK band plays.

MICHAEL
(yells above the band)
WOW, WHAT A SHIT HOLE!

TWO REDNECKS at the bar turn and glare.

ABBY
Nice, Michael.

MICHAEL
What I say?

After a BEAT, the redneck's eyes fade back into their drinks as a bored WAITRESS approaches.

WAITRESS
How many?

STEVEN
Six.

WAITRESS
This way.

They follow the waitress across a worn DANCE FLOOR to a booth in the corner.

WAITRESS (CONT'D)
Drinks?

STEVEN
Six beers?

JESSICA
Five.

TINA
Four, please.

MICHAEL
And two shots of Jack.

WAITRESS
Yes 'mm

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The waitress turns and...

STEVEN

And can we get some menus?

...is gone before Steven finishes his sentence.

They look around. Eyes continue to bore holes in them. Then... A MAN approaches. BIG MICK McCracken (50).

BIG MICK

Hey all, welcome. I'm Big Mick McCracken, what can I get you?

STEVEN

Menus would be nice.

BIG MICK

No need...(taps his head) got it all right here. Deep fried catfish... best in New Mexico. Steaks bigger than your head. And tamales like mom used to make if mom ran across the border when she was a wee nina. Everything fresh, everything local. What'll it be?

The drinks arrive.

ANDREW

I'll take a steak bigger than my head. Medium.

BIG MICK

Good choice. You missy?

JESSICA

Catfish sounds good.

Michael and Abby pound their shots.

ABBY

Two tamale plates. (re: the shots)
And two more of these.

BIG MICK

Excellent.

Abby pulls Michael out of the booth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ABBY
We're dancing.

MICHAEL
(to Big Mick)
Definitely keep the shots coming.

BIG MICK
(to Steven and Tina)
Last but not least.

STEVEN
Tamales sound good.

TINA
I'll have the steak. Medium well.

Andrew looks down at his beer. A FLY slowly dies in the foam.

ANDREW
Any chance I could...?

Big Mick sees the fly. Scoops up Andrew's glass.

BIG MICK
I am so sorry. Bring you a fresh
one in two scoots.

EXT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE, PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

One-hundred yards from the door, the honky tonk music can still be heard as it pours through the walls and mixes with the desert wind. Then...the rusted, dented pick-up truck we've seen before rolls into frame. The HUGE BOOTS step from it and slowly move towards the trailer...

INT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE, DANCE FLOOR - LATER

Abby and Michael pound more shots and go right back to dancing. Their movements are sexy. Disapproving eyes glare as Michael caresses Abby's ass. She kisses Michael's neck.

Back at the table, Andrew, Steven and Tina are oblivious to Michael and Abby's antics. Jessica, however, is not...

JESSICA'S POV

Michael rubs his hands through Abby's hair as she kisses down his chest. Michael smiles at Jessica. She turns away and sees... SHOTS being tossed back. BEERS being chugged.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MIXED DRINKS being poured. She looks back to the dance floor... Michael signals her with his finger... "come here".

BACK

Jessica pushes out of the booth.

JESSICA
I have to go.

ANDREW
What?

JESSICA
I have to make a call.

ANDREW
You want me to...

JESSICA
NO! I'll be right...

Jessica slams into the Waitress. Her CATFISH PLATTER smashes to the floor!

JESSICA (CONT'D)
(to the waitress)
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry...

Jessica scurries away and EXITS out the DOOR.

INT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE, DANCE FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Abby and Michael continue their amorous movements.

ABBY
I'm hungry.

MICHAEL
Food's here.

ABBY
(suggestive)
Not what I'm hungry for.

Abby flashes a coy smile. Michael scans the bar. Sees a LONG HALLWAY heading back to the RESTROOMS.

MICHAEL
Come on.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Michael takes her hand and leads her away.

EXT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE, PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Jessica nervously rubs a ONE-YEAR "A. A." CHIP.

JESSICA
Lauren, it's Jessica, please pick
up. I need to talk...

Behind her sits the trailer and pick-up.

INT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE, BOOTH -- CONTINUOUS

Six plates of food sit on the table.

ANDREW
Should we wait?

Steven shoots him an "are you kidding me" look and digs in.
Tina cuts her steak and...BLOOD pours from it.

TINA
My God.

STEVEN
What?

TINA
(re: the steak)
Does this look medium well to you?

Steven signals the waitress.

WAITRESS
Yep?

STEVEN
She ordered medium well. This
thing is still mooing.

The waitress grabs the plate, dips her finger in the blood,
and lifts the finger to her mouth. Tastes it. EXITS.

TINA
OK, that officially creeped me out.

ANDREW
Hey, where's Michael and Abby?

INT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE, STORAGE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Abby, now shirtless, slams down on a stack of FLOUR BAGS, Michael right on top of her. She tears open his pants... He yanks her skirt up to her waist. Enters her.

Their love-making is wild and animalistic...they tear and claw as if trying to devour each other. Abby turns her head from side to side, enraptured in passion. Opens her eyes...

ABBY'S POV

A YOUNG BOY (10) stands in the doorway, watching...

BACK

ABBY
Michael...MICHAEL!

MICHAEL
What!?

She motions her head towards the door. Michael turns. The boy stares right thru them with SLOW, BLACK eyes.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Kid... Get out of here.

The boy doesn't move.

INT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE, BOOTH -- CONTINUOUS

Steven digs into his food as Andrew watches Tina take her new steak plate from the waitress. Just then... A RED LASER LIGHT appears on Tina's neck. A beat later... and it's gone.

Andrew turns and stares across room, taking in every dark, unfriendly face. Finally, a SCRAGGLY-HAIRED MAN flashes a jagged, toothless grin. Tina notices.

TINA
Andrew...what is it?

ANDREW
(not sure)
Nothing.

INT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE, STORAGE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The boy still has not moved.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHAEL
KID...GET OUT OF HERE!

A BEAT passes and...an ELDERLY WOMAN (80) appears from the darkness behind the boy, drapes her arms around him, and watches. Other SETS of EYES appear behind her.

ABBY
What the fuck...?

EXT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE, PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

JESSICA
(into phone)
Yeah, I feel better. That's why
you're my sponsor. Thanks Lauren.
Bye.

Jessica ends her call. A BEAT passes and...

AUDIO FX -- A DOOR CREAKS.

Jessica turns. The trailer's door slowly swings open...

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Oh my God.

INT. BIG MICK'S ROADHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Abby and Michael pull on their clothes as they embarrassedly walk down the long hallway filled with other BAR PATRONS.

ABBY
(pissed)
You happy!? Get a good show, you
fucking freaks!?

They turn the corner and make a bee-line to the booth.

STEVEN
What happened?

Before they can answer, Jessica rushes up.

JESSICA
Steven, the trailer's open!

INT. TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

Steven rushes into the trailer, followed by the others.

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CONTINUED:

STEVEN

Fuck!

STEVEN'S POV --

Trashed! Half-eaten food and torn-apart WATER BOTTLES are strewn all over the floor. Cushions are shredded!

BACK

STEVEN (CONT'D)

(to Tina)

Call the cops.

Tina grabs her phone. Presses "911".

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