

El Migra

(Excerpt from within the first act of the screenplay)

EXT. DESERT - WATCH TOWER - DAY

30' tall metal TOWERS topped with banks of LIGHTS stretch across the wasteland like robot sentinels.

ANNIE approaches, seeing nothing until, hidden behind a huge concrete footing --

The RED JEEP.

She circles, trying the doors -- locked. Running her finger through the thick dust. She looks into the desert.

ANNIE

Will...?

It's futile -- there's no life for miles. But she can't stop herself.

ANNIE (cont'd) (CONT'D)

...WILL!

INT. CAMRY - DESERT - DAY

From inside the Camry we watch ANNIE walk out past the TOWER: the mercury in the thermometer dangling from the rearview rises to 120 degrees.

EXT. DESERT BEYOND TOWERS - SAME TIME

ANNIE'S quickly flushed in jeans and blouse, her white sneakers instantly caked in desert dust. She stops, trying to knock them clean - that's not going to work.

But most of all, there's a disquiet to this dead place -- a *presence...*

She turns, as if hearing a sound, expecting a lizard to scurry by. But there's nothing...nothing she can see...

And she realizes --

It's the heat that seems alive, not the barren wasteland.

It surrounds her, invisibly...everywhere and nowhere. She can feel it but not touch it.

Spooked, she wants to leave. She turns to head back

when --

-- A HAT

Hidden by a bush, just like Will had in the photo.

She holds it to her nose and sniffs -- a flood of emotions cross her face. He was here. She puts it on.

Eyes fixed to the ground now, she continues up an incline.

There's his CANTEEN. She picks it up when --

Whoosh!

A FLOCK OF BIRDS shoots up from beyond the ridge, flying away with a warning CRY.

ANNIE watches, nervous. Still, committed she heads to the crest.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOP OF THE RISE - CONTINUOUS

Just more endless wasteland. Then by some rocks she

sees --

A CAMERA

She struggles through sandy soil to retrieve it. Grabbing it dislodges the rocks and from behind them leaps --

A GILA MONSTER!

She startles as the creature BOLTS past her. It zigzags several yards before --

-- *It VANISHES.*

ANNIE'S eyes widen.

Did she really see that? She looks closer...

And now sees the rippling CURTAIN OF HEAT LINES.

Moving from side to side, it glimmers reflective, every-thing around it whitening out...

ANNIE inches closer to the wavering surface. Up close she hears that *HUM* buzzing...

ANNIE

It's just a mirage...just
light rays...

She picks up a small rock, hesitates -- then tosses it into
the apparition --

-- it vanishes too.

ANNIE (cont'd)

...bending when they hit
hotter air...it's not real..

Afraid, yet compelled, she reaches her hand toward
it...

...Closer to the undulating surface, to the shimmer...

ANNIE (cont'd)

...it's not real.

Her trembling fingertips graze the surface, DISAPPEARING into
the LIQUID LIGHT --

-- Disappearing further, until suddenly --

ANNIE'S face fills with revulsion. She yanks out her hand and
--

It DRIPS WITH BLOOD.

And, she quickly realizes, not hers.

Red blood with bits of lizard guts coats her fingers. She
looks at it with horror.

EXT. SELLS - INDIAN RESERVATION - DAY

The town is bigger than Ajo, but very dilapidated and poor.
The people are all TOHONO INDIANS.

Agitated, ANNIE'S oblivious to the stares as she pulls up and
gets out of her car.

INT. FIX-IT SHOP - DAY

An array of electronics, from old computers to toasters,
awaiting repair.

ANNIE enters but finds it empty. A VOICE calls from the back.

VOICE (O.S.)
Yeah? What's up?

ANNIE
I need help downloading
off a memory card.

JOSEPH (O.S.)
Well -- look who it is.

JOSEPH, the dirtbiker, comes out holding a DVD player.

ANNIE
"Mr. Fix-It"?

JOSEPH
Oh I wear lotsa hats -- or
head-dresses, I guess. Science
teacher, Tribal Council --
(mimes "parentheses")
"Alternate". Mr. Fix-It.
(takes camera from her,
examining it)
What'd ya do to your camera?

ANNIE
You tell me.

INT. FIX-IT SHOP - BACK ROOM - MINUTES LATER

JOSEPH opens up the camera and hooks it up to his computer.
PICTURES start to appear on the screen...

Against a squat rocky RIDGE:

Footprints in the dirt, an empty TOOTHPASTE TUBE under a
cactus, a discarded PLASTIC JUG...

ANNIE
Have you ever seen something
disappear out there? I mean
just -- vanish.

JOSEPH
Sure.

ANNIE
Sure?

JOSEPH

Well, not really disappear
but appear to. It's a vanishing
line, when you move --

ANNIE cuts him off, too scared to dance around it.

ANNIE

I mean really disappear.
I mean -- *jesus*, I'm not
even sure what the fuck
I mean.

She looks at her hand as if she still seeing the lizard's
blood.

And he looks at her appraising, deciding if she can handle
the truth. His manner changes. His voice is low and soft...

JOSEPH

The ancestors of my people
were called the *Hohokam*. One
day they vanished. Just -- gone.
It's said they left this world
for a higher realm. I grew up
with legends...stories...of places
in the desert, hidden in the
hottest high noon heat, where
that land and ours sometimes
overlap. Where a Sentry made
of the Sun itself stands guard.

(beat)

And if you stray across its
border, that's when things...
disappear.

(beat)

They called it *El Migra*, but
not the kind that rides around
in SUVs.

ANNIE

Do you believe that?

JOSEPH

Kept us breeds from playing
too far from home, that's
for damn sure.

ANNIE

That's not what I asked.

He looks at her. But before he can answer the next pictures
come up on screen --

The stack of CLOTHES atop the WHITE BOULDERS. And then: the naked IMMIGRANT laying half dead by the scrub.

ANNIE (cont'd) (CONT'D)

Oh god...

The image of his WIFE appears: barely alive but drinking from Will's water bottle.

More pictures beside a gnarled, dead mesquite, each gets successively brighter.

JOSEPH

What was he doing out there?

ANNIE

Playing "idealist." Since the role of family "cynic" was already cast.

JOSEPH

Squaw speak with forked tongue.
Dipped in bullshit.

ANNIE

Last year he started working with this group, 'Rights Watch.' You know how many illegals cross the border and never make it to the other side?

(beat)

This is Will: trying to save the world, one immigrant at a time.

...But as the next shots come up:

The COUPLE DEAD, their fallen bodies are burned and charred. A flurry of overexposed images taken on auto...

JOSEPH

Not this time.

Then the last photo:

OFF ANGLE, from the ground, as the camera fell.

We can just make out WILL -- flashed by a FIERY GLOW coming from something out of view.

And he looks terrified...

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Behind the motel, ANNIE stares out into the desert. Even the darkness seems to pulse with heat...

She takes out her cell and dials.

ANNIE
Pop?...It's me.

Hearing his voice, ANNIE'S face floods with emotion she struggles to control.

ANNIE (cont'd)
No, no news yet. But he was here, for sure. You were right.
(beat)
No, no, everyone's being really helpful. The Border Patrol, everyone.
(stronger)
I'm going to find him, Pop, I promise. Don't worry.
(beat)
Alright, I'll call you when I have news. Remember to keep your phone on. And charge it, okay? You always forget. Yes, you do. Okay...I love you too.

As she closes her phone, the fear and tears welled inside spill out with a deep and lonely SOB...

In the distance, a HELICOPTER SPOTLIGHT cuts through the dark as it hunts for illegals in the desert...

INT. CAMRY - BACK ROAD - DAY

ANNIE'S heading out, driving toward the highway when she notices a SQUAT RIDGE ahead.

She sifts through Will's PHOTOS: the RIDGE MATCHES.

EXT. DESERT - ALTAR OF SACRIFICE - DAY

ANNIE parks and gets out. A circle of dead cactus form a wind screen around --

A ROCK ALTAR

As she approaches, she hears *buzzing*: FLIES swarming. Closer and she sees:

Dead animals lay on the altar -- some still-decaying, others bleached bone against the blood-stained stone.

A couple small skulls look almost human...

Strewn through are written notes and photos of people, curled and faded. Religious icons -- rosaries and prayer candles. An amalgam of Pagan and Christian.

The blood. The flies. The fading faces. ANNIE shivers in the heat.

EXT. DESERT - BEYOND ALTAR

ANNIE heads up an incline to the ridge... Where the ground flattens out --

The WHITE BOULDERS

and gnarled, dead MESQUITE.

Will was here. Then she hears --

THE HUM...

That electric buzz. It's in the air...and makes the hair on her arm stand up in fright.

She turns, trying to pinpoint the source...

EXT. DESERT - ROCKY RISE - DAY

Nervous, ANNIE climbs up the rise...the *HUM* louder, filling her ears...

She forces herself on, slowly, with trepidation, to the top where her eyes widen in surprise.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHACK - MOMENTS LATER

A ramshackle 10' by 10' SHED; this 'HUMMING' is just the generator beside it.

INT. SHACK - DAY

ANNIE steps inside. It's dark and empty except for a few bags in a corner. She stumbles over something in the dirt floor.

A metal RING set in a WOODEN TRAPDOOR.

Curious, she turns to the bags. She reaches inside and pulls out --

A shrinkwrapped BRICK of COCAINE.

She's reaching for the trapdoor when --

CLICK-CLACK

The pump of a SHOTGUN!

It's FRANK, the jarhead Border Patrol agent, his double barrels trained on her from the doorway.

FRANK

Thought you were lookin'
for a lost friend.

ANNIE

I am.

FRANK

Hands up and turn 'round
slow.

EXT. DESERT - SHACK - DAY

FRANK follows her outside; ANNIE tries to swallow her fear.

ANNIE

I just found this place,
okay?

FRANK

You and your pal weren't
running a little smuggling
op?

(beat)

We don't much appreciate
pochos pissin' in our back-
yard.

ANNIE

I'm no smuggler.

FRANK looks at her, then grins in his good-old-boy way.

FRANK
Didn't really think ya
were, Senorita. Too
pretty...

He lowers the gun, to her relief.

FRANK (cont'd)
What're the odds though, huh?
Of ya just stumbling across
this place? One little shack
in the whole goddamn desert.

ANNIE
Pretty big, I guess. But you
did too...

Then it hits her --

ANNIE (cont'd)
Or not.

FRANK'S smile freezes.

And --

ANNIE bolts. TIGHT ON HER terrified face when --

A BLAST

of sound and light explodes around her.

WHITE OUT:

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - RESERVATION - EVENING

ANNIE lays on a patio chaise, cold compress on her head.

The house behind is small but modern. JOSEPH approaches
carrying a jug of wine.

Her eyes flutter open...

ANNIE
What...happened?...

JOSEPH

Ya got a good knot on your
head, probably took a fall.
Found you by the highway.
(pours a glass)
Cactus Jack. It'll help.

She sits up a bit and sips -- it's strong. But good.

JOSEPH (cont'd)

You're lucky I did. What're
you doing on the Reservation?

She shakes her head, unsure.

ANNIE

My head hurts.

JOSEPH

Oh, yeah.

He hands her two aspirin from the tray; she swallows them
with the wine then reclines to rest her head.

JOSEPH (cont'd)

Better?

She nods, looking out at the desert: the late afternoon sun
casts purple shadows over the wasteland.

After a moment:

ANNIE

This is the first place the
desert feels...tranquil.

He looks at her with respect for her intuition.

JOSEPH

Before my grandpa broke
ground, he made sacrifices
to appease *El Migra*...

But ANNIE isn't listening, her face fills with returning
memory.

ANNIE

I was looking for Will.
(beat)
And Frank - I thought he
shot me.

JOSEPH looks stunned.

JOSEPH

Frank?

ANNIE

I found a shack, and drugs.

JOSEPH

On the Reservation?

ANNIE

I don't know. But Frank was there.

JOSEPH

Whoa.

(beat)

I'd love to nail that fucker.

ANNIE

I'm going to the FBI.

JOSEPH shakes his head, refilling her glass.

JOSEPH

Annie, people around here don't like outsiders meddling.

ANNIE

Will's still missing. What do you want me to do?

JOSEPH

Let me take care of it. I want you to turn around and leave and let me clean up this mess.

(beat)

Tell me that's what you're gonna do.

She's looking glazed-eyed, her speech slurring.

ANNIE

Honestly, I could give-a fuck about what goes on in this shit-hole. But I'm not leaving without my brother...

She gestures, wine sloshing out of her glass as she does.

ANNIE (cont'd)

We don't see eye to eye on most... Shit, we basically stopped talking years ago. But he's family.

He watches her drink. And chooses his words carefully.

JOSEPH

Yeah. I know all about family. I'm trying to help mine too. From this shitty life we've been left with. In the middle of nowhere with no way to earn a living unless we whore ourselves to the fucking casinos. Well, fuck that. I found another way.

(beat)

But the thing about helping someone? Sometimes it means you gotta fuck someone else.

The GLASS falls from her hand and shatters on the ground...

ANNIE

...what's...wrong...

JOSEPH

I wish you would've let it go.

ANNIE struggles to get to her feet; whatever drug he gave her's taken effect.

JOSEPH just watches, letting her stumble backwards.

Behind her, the PATIO DOOR slides open.

As she turns to make a run for it, she walks straight into --

FRANK

Stepping through the open door.

He grabs her as she tries to get past. Amused by her feeble struggling, he grips her in a bear hug -- she passes out.

He lets her unconscious body fall to the ground. Then looks at JOSEPH.

FRANK
Your call, Chief.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

Extreme CLOSE-UP of ANNIE'S CLOSED EYES.

As they flutter OPEN, pull back to reveal --

EXT. DESERT - EARLY MORNING

SHE IS LYING amidst ROCKS AND CACTUS.

As realization dawns, ANNIE struggles to get up, dis-oriented from the effects of the drug.

She stands, totally alone and without water, sunglasses, sunscreen or food in the middle of nowhere.

And looks down to see:

They've taken her shoes, leaving her BAREFOOT.

She looks out, turning 360 degrees: desolate, barren but even more --

Otherworldly.

Like she's been transported to another realm. The light seems WHITER here...there's the sound of a distant wind...though no movement, no breeze.

And just below it, the faintest of HUMS...prickling with the heat...

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - MORNING

Stripping off her blouse and tank top, ANNIE rips the undershirt in two. She wraps and ties it around her feet, putting her blouse back on.

She checks her pockets:

Car keys, tissue and half-empty Icy Mints. She tries to swallow her panic.

CUT TO:

WALKING MONTAGE

Her FEET sink into the sandy soil making it slow going...
The blazing SUN takes its toll... Stumbling, her HAND
grabs a stunted tree for support --
-- right beside a SCORPION, tail up to strike.

EXT. DESERT - LATER

ANNIE staggers into view. The cloth coverings already torn from walking on the rocky, hot sand -- her feet scorched and cut.

From her POV, everything's is whitening out... Then, ahead, she sees --

A SHAPE by some scrub. A human shape sitting against a bush. But closer and:

It's a DEAD IMMIGRANT

His body seared, he lays sprawled against the bush, face contorted in agony --

-- his chest split open, as if exploded from within.

THIS IS NO NATURAL DEATH. Beside him is a small puddle of what looks like ice.

Even though she knows it can't really be frozen water, ANNIE licks her lips. She reaches down to touch it --

It's MELTED PLASTIC.

ANNIE backs away from the eerie scene --

And trips --

-- Over the legs of ANOTHER DEAD ILLEGAL lying beyond the first.

She falls, landing right beside his grimaced face. His chest too is split open and from inside --

A COATI pops out.
The rodent crawls from inside the corpse's chest.

ANNIE gags, throwing up liquid she can't afford to lose.

But as she drags herself away she notices --
-- their SHOES.

The black boots on one corpse, on the other filthy canvas sneakers.

MATCH CUT TO:

THE CANVAS SNEAKERS ON ANNIE'S FEET.

Too big but better than nothing. Hours later and she's stumbling ON and ON, near collapse.

Ahead, vision blurring, she sees a FIGURE. But this one's moving. Alive...

ANNIE
Who's there?

It's --

WILL?

He stands ARMS WAVING OVERHEAD TO SIGNAL HER. He seems to appear and disappear in the rippling light...

She looks around. No weird heat waves or curtain of light, just Will.

She's got to get to him. A few more steps. But then she falters and --

Collapses.

In a heap, laying in the dust. She looks up to see --

-- It is WILL!

He seems okay, if filthy and heat-stroked. Wearing his hiking clothes - long pants, boots, hat.

She reaches out to him.

ANNIE (cont'd)
Why'd you have to come
here? Look what's happened...

He manages a smile.

WILL
It was worth it. I found
her.

ANNIE
Will...

WILL
Mama was trying to come back
to us. I knew it.

ANNIE
That was fifteen years ago.

WILL
You shouldn't have given
up on her...

As she realizes -- hat? He's wearing the hat.

She touches the HAT still on her own head...

WILL (cont'd)
...*Tambien eres mexicana,*
Annie, whether you like
it or not.

He wavers in the rippling LIGHT; she rushes forward frantic --

ANNIE
WILL!

But he's disappeared. Gone.

Then --

VOICE
Aqui.

She turns to see a FIGURE but it vanishes as quickly... like a ghost in fog.

ANNIE
Will?...

VOICE
Eres mexicana?

The FIGURE reappears, now to her left -- but as she turns that way --

IT *disappears* again.

ANNIE
Come back...

She stops, sure she's hallucinating, but still:

VOICE
Me oyes?

The disembodied voice calls, closer:

VOICE (cont'd)
Aqui!

She steps toward the appearing FIGURE --

ANNIE
Will...

But from the haze emerges --

-- a hardened Hispanic face.

CHIDO, early 20's, hair combed straight back, sweat-stained pocket-T and fierce expression.

ANNIE recoils in fright.

EXT. DESERT - TREE

Under a canopied tree, ANNIE is surrounded by SEVEN MEXICAN MALES. Most around her age, filthy with desert dust, cold eyes staring down.

Hoping they're a mirage -- cause she's scared shitless -- she puts her hand out as if to pass through CHIDO --

But he grabs her wrist, his rough touch jarringly real.

VIEJO, the one old man (50's) with long white hair, leans his creased face in for a better look.

NOTE: ALL DIALOGUE FROM THE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS IS IN SPANISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES, UNLESS NOTED.

VIEJO

Where the fuck'd she come from?

A young PUNK, 12 (going on 30), wearing pants chopped off below his knees and a Mexican mullet eyes her up and down.

Even in this heat his hungry eyes give her a chill.

PUNK

Maybe from Sonoyta like us.

(to ANNIE)

You Mexican?! Salvadoran?!

ANNIE doesn't answer. Doesn't move...

PUNK (cont'd) (CONT'D)

(to VIEJO)

She deaf?

VIEJO

Maybe dying.

FEO (20's), Viejo's son, nods. His face is sunken, pock-marked. He asthmatically wheezes.

FEO

If she dies...Cesar...should get her hat.

But CHIDO looks past the dust caking Annie's face, taking in her appearance with disdain.

CHIDO

She's not dying, she doesn't understand. She's Anglo.
Pinche gringa!

ANNIE

No one -- none of you speak --
Hablo English?

No one answers. She is all alone. Fourteen cold eyes stare at her.

And then:

BLUE (O.S.)
Habla, not blo. Christ.

Everyone turns. And now she sees, standing apart from the group is BLUE:

20's, blonde, rugged and boyish, he wears a cowboy hat tilted to shield his eyes: the American hero.

BLUE (cont'd) (CONT'D)
 Here. Take slow sips.

He brings a water bottle to her lips. She drinks, saved.

ANNIE
 I...I was looking for my
 brother, I got lost...but I
 thought he was there --

BLUE
 Lost? Yeah, forty miles from
 the nearest town. American
 town that is. You are American?

ANNIE
 Want the Red Sox starting
 line-up?

She watches the Mexicans hang on BLUE'S every move. He's clearly their guide. Their Coyote.

ANNIE (cont'd)
 You're taking them across?

BLUE
 (nods at nearby MOUNTAINS)
 Border Patrol's checkin'
 the pass so we're cutting
 high, taking the scenic
 route.

He reaches out to help her up. Unsteady, she leans on his strong arms...

BLUE (cont'd)
 You okay? Cause we're movin'
 out. You can join the flock
 but you better stay close.

...The IMMIGRANTS watch, not happy with this.

BLUE (cont'd) (CONT'D)
I can't watch your back
if I can't see it.

She manages a grateful smile, hand still on his arm.

ANNIE
Thank you.

He turns back to the GROUP - IN SPANISH.

BLUE
Let's get goin', chickens!

The PUNK echoes the American.

PUNK
Come on chickens! Move
your asses!

BLUE strides off, leading his flock to the Promised Land.
ANNIE keeps close.