

FINER LANDSCAPES

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FADE IN:

EXT. FAR WEST TEXAS TOWN - MORNING

Burned-out summer bleakness hangs over the farming industrial landscape. Somewhere in the background oil derricks pound the earth. Sound ricochets across the endless flatness. A straight highway passes alongside the dust and decay.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - CONTINUOUS

Rusty, run-down trailer homes. A corroded landscaping truck sits outside one. On the side of the truck, "FINER LANDSCAPES."

INT. TRAILER HOME - CONTINUOUS

A bachelor's place. Few effects other than a small TV, unmade bed, and empty beer bottles.

LAWRENCE, 50s, grizzled, scarred, and frail, wobbles over to a mini-fridge and pries out the last beer. He pops it open with the edge of the refrigerator. Finishes it in steady gulps.

He looks out a small window with disgust: endless escarpments and dust color. He adds the empty bottle to the floor.

EXT. TRAILER HOME - MORNING

Lawrence, now dressed in coveralls, opens the door to the truck. He brushes some beer cans out of his seat before climbing in.

In the back of the truck, a lawn mower and other yard tools.

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK - MOVING - MORNING

Lawrence drives through the trailer park towards a cluster of mailboxes.

He leans out and opens his mailbox. Withdraws ads which he lets fall to the ground. Among the ads, a RED ENVELOPE.

Lawrence opens the truck door and GRUNTS while hanging on and leaning out to retrieve the envelope.

Inside the envelope, a BIRTHDAY CARD. Lawrence stares at it unbelievably. He puts it down and stares off into space.

He picks it up again. On the card, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DAD. LOVE, JACQUELINE." Inside, a \$20 BILL.

Lawrence places the card on his dash.

INT. GAS STATION - DAY

Lawrence goes to the back of the store and retrieves a twelve-pack of cheapo beer. He walks to the front. The CLERK eyes him.

CLERK

Another day at the office, huh,
Lawrence?

Lawrence remains quiet. The Clerk shakes his head.

CLERK

Let's see some ID.

LAWRENCE

I'm older than you, Gomer.

CLERK

It's the law, Lawrence.

Lawrence drops a piece of plastic on the counter.

CLERK

Well, happy goddamn birthday. I
almost feel like buying you this
twelve-pack. That'll be \$12.95.

Lawrence digs in his pockets but only comes up with coins and a crushed \$1 bill. He pauses.

LAWRENCE

Hold on.

The BELL SOUNDS as Lawrence goes out.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

At his truck Lawrence grabs the Birthday Card from the dash. Opens it to retrieve the cash when--

O.S., FEET CRUNCHING ON GRAVEL. Coming from the interstate.

Approaching from the feeder road--

KATIE

20s, a real head-turner. Cowgirl boots, cut-off shorts, a slim white tank top, and aviators. Not from around there.

Lawrence does a double-take. Katie sees him staring.

Lawrence turns away in embarrassment. Starts back toward the convenience store.

KATIE

Hey!

Lawrence stops.

KATIE

Hi! Sorry, I--

Katie runs to catch up to Lawrence.

KATIE

I'm really sorry to bother you but--

LAWRENCE

You said that. You broke down?

KATIE

Yeah, how'd you know?

LAWRENCE

Cuz nobody in their right mind stops here otherwise.

KATIE

Oh, OK...well, do they sell gas cans inside?

LAWRENCE

Yeah, but he's a real prick. You don't want to deal with him.

KATIE

I'm sorry, you're obviously in a bad mood. I'll leave you alone.

Katie starts toward the convenience store.

LAWRENCE

Everybody's in a bad mood here.

Katie continues walking.

LAWRENCE

Look, now. Hold on. Let me help you.

KATIE

I hope your day gets better.

Katie disappears into the store. The door swings shut.

LAWRENCE

It won't.

EXT. GAS STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Katie bangs out the door empty-handed. Lawrence waits at his truck.

KATIE

You're right. He is a prick.

LAWRENCE

He don't like nobody. Especially young girls from the city.

KATIE

That offer still stand?

LAWRENCE

If you want it to, it does.

KATIE

Well, I guess you don't look too fucked up.

LAWRENCE

There you're wrong. I'm plenty fucked up.

Lawrence with great ceremony opens the door for Katie and helps her in.

KATIE

Why, thank you kindly.
(from inside truck)
Wait. What about the gas?

LAWRENCE

What the hell you think mowers run on?

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK - MOVING - DAY

Heading down a feeder road parallel to the interstate. A gas can slides around the back of the truck along with a lawn mower and other gardening tools.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Katie looks around in wonder at the truck. A big spiderweb of cracks on the front windshield. Beer cans pool around her feet.

A baby shoe hangs from the rearview mirror.

The open windows let hot wind gust through, forcing them to have to shout to be heard.

KATIE

How long you been out here?

LAWRENCE

Oh, since Death entered the world,
I guess.

Katie points at the baby shoe.

KATIE

That yours?

LAWRENCE

Nope. My baby daughter's. I imagine
you look like her.

KATIE

You imagine?

LAWRENCE

Well, she's been gone since she was
16. What brings you out this way?

KATIE

My boyfriend and I are on our way
out West. To do some camping.

LAWRENCE

Your boyfriend? Where's he at?

THROUGH TRUCK WINDSHIELD

A GLINT of METAL comes into view.

KATIE

He's with the car.

LAWRENCE

He made you walk?

A GUST of WIND grabs the birthday card from the dash.

LAWRENCE

Oh goddamn it!

Lawrence grabs for the card desperately but the wind sucks it out the window. Gone for good.

Lawrence grips the steering wheel more tightly.

EXT. SHOULDER OF INTERSTATE - DAY

TREY, 20s, well-groomed, smartly dressed, stands across from Lawrence. Two different worlds.

Trey holds his hand out; Lawrence completely ignores it, in a fog. Finally, Trey drops his hand.

TREY

Well, we really appreciate it. I don't know what I was thinking running out of gas.

LAWRENCE

Pretty stupid all right.

TREY

Um, yeah. Well, we're lucky you were here.

LAWRENCE

Why'd you make her walk anyway? That's a man's job.

TREY

What? Getting gas?

KATIE

Lawrence, it was my decision. Someone needed to stay with the car.

LAWRENCE

It ain't like that. It wasn't even your decision to make. A man goes for the gas. End o' story.

Trey and Katie are silent. Uncomfortable.

LAWRENCE

Well, where is it? Let's get this goddamn shit-show on the road then.

EXT. SHOULDER OF INTERSTATE - DAY

GLUG-GLUG. The gas can tilts up into the air.

Lawrence grimaces while staring down at the gas tank. Stands way too close to the road.

A SEMI BLOWS PAST, rustling Lawrence's shirt. Katie winces. Lawrence barely notices.

Lawrence puts the cap back on carefully. He turns back to them.

LAWRENCE

OK, that's all you're gettin' out of me today.

TREY

Lawrence, hey. I want to thank you. Really. This is huge.

Trey reaches into his wallet. Pulls out some cash.

Lawrence stalks back to his truck, Trey following.

TREY

Here, Lawrence. Let me give you this.

Lawrence spins angrily.

LAWRENCE

You ain't no gentleman, making her go get the gas.

TREY

What?

LAWRENCE

A gentleman doesn't make the woman walk and fetch the gas in the heat of the day. What you did...that was a coward's way. But I guess that's all the big city churns out these days.

Lawrence stands in front of Trey daringly.

TREY

Look, man, I'm a gentleman. I treat her perfectly.

LAWRENCE

I doubt that.

KATIE

Lawrence, maybe you should go. I'm sorry we inconvenienced you but we appreciate what you did.

TREY

Yeah, get back in your car and leave. We really appreciate your help.

Lawrence takes one last look at Katie. And turns on his heel.

TREY

(quietly, to himself)
I'm a gentleman.

KATIE

What?

TREY

Don't open your door. Hold on.

Lawrence starts up his truck.

NEAR CAR

Trey grabs the handle for Katie's door. Majestically, one knee on the ground. He takes Katie by the hand.

Trey locks eyes with Lawrence.

TREY

Now who's the gentleman!

Lawrence guns the truck. A SCREECH of TIRES and Lawrence is gone. Bouncing across the prairie back toward the feeder road.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Lawrence speeds down the feeder road. His eyes reddening. The baby shoe swings like crazy.

Lawrence pulls off suddenly. Gets out.

On his hands and knees Lawrence searches the culverts and grassland desperately.

INT. TREY'S CAR - SAME

Trey sits in the driver's seat checking his appearance. Katie watches him.

KATIE

You could do that more often.

TREY

What's that?

KATIE

Opening doors for me. Flowers on occasion might be nice too.

TREY

I do things for you all the time.

KATIE

I know you think you do.

TREY

We're lucky to have been born in this era. Women are more respected than ever. There's more equality than ever.

KATIE

Oh, just drive. Let's not even try to debate about this. You're not an asshole, I'll give you that at least.

TREY

Not an asshole. Thanks. That fucking creep, though. Why'd he even help us?

KATIE

He wanted to help me. Come on. At this rate we won't get there till dark.

TREY

OK.

Trey sighs and puts the car in gear.

INT. TREY'S CAR - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Katie sees the Red Envelope on the road.

KATIE

Stop!

TREY

What is it?

Katie is already opening her door.

EXT. TREY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Katie picks up the Red Envelope. Miraculously, the Birthday Card and the \$20 bill are still attached.

Katie considers the card. Looks back in the direction that Lawrence was headed.

EXT. FEEDER ROAD - DAY

Lawrence gives up and returns to his truck.

IN SIDE MIRROR

Trey's car approaches.

LAWRENCE

Now what?

Lawrence turns, locking eyes with Trey as the car slows.

Katie gets out holding the Birthday Card. Lawrence's eyes light up.

KATIE

You might've dropped this.

Lawrence quietly takes the Birthday Card from Katie. Shakes his head.

LAWRENCE

That's something else. It sure is.
Thanks.

KATIE

Don't mention it. Well, I better--

Katie turns to head back to Trey's car.

LAWRENCE

Does he treat you good?

KATIE

Huh? What business is it of yours?

LAWRENCE

Does he?

KATIE

We're working on it, I'd say.

LAWRENCE

I never treated mine good. Neither wife. Nor her. Least, the nights I can remember.

KATIE

You should move on, Lawrence. Leave. Start over.

LAWRENCE

Nah. This is where I belong.

KATIE

Well, at least you know someone out there still cares.

Lawrence places a hand on Katie's shoulder.

LAWRENCE

I do.

Katie and Lawrence gaze into each other's eyes.

KATIE

You take care of yourself, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE

I might.

Katie shakes her head and goes to Trey's car.

Lawrence watches her leave.

INT. TRAILER HOME - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

JACQUELINE, 16, with a backpack, goes through a MAN'S WALLET on a dresser. She pulls out the cash. At the last moment she returns one \$20 bill to the wallet. She peers over at the sleeping man on the bed.

LAWRENCE, twenty years younger, turns in his bed. He opens his eyes.

Jacqueline's gone.

O.S., a CAR DOOR SLAM and a TRUCK SQUEALS off. Into the distance.

Lawrence fixes his eyes on the wall.

EXT. FEEDER ROAD - DAY

Katie and Trey drive off into the distance.

Lawrence thumbs the \$20 bill. He climbs in his truck and drives away too.

INT. TREY'S CAR - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Trey drives with a side-glance at Katie. Katie stares out the window.

TREY

You two know each other or something?

The miles pass.

TREY

Is there something you need to tell me, Katie?

Katie flicks on the radio. Leans back.

TREY

Yeah, sleep.

EXT. INTERSTATE - CONTINUOUS

They are all alone on the interstate.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Lawrence's truck's back in the parking lot, near a pay phone.

Lawrence lifts the receiver. Considers whether to dial.

FADE OUT.