

A Near-Life Experience

by

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FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

KATE, 18, is directed by an ORDERLY through a door off a hospital corridor and into a small office. Kate has red hair held back in a loose braid under a tie-dyed bandanna. She wears jeans and sandals, and multiple hemp bracelets on one wrist. A female POLICE OFFICER sits behind a desk in the small cluttered interview room. Her badge reads "Bozeman Police--State of Montana, Big Sky Country." She looks at a clipboard, at Kate, and back at her clipboard.

OFFICER

You're the wife, correct?

KATE

What's happening with my--what's happening with Jeromy?

OFFICER

I don't know anything about his condition, ma'am. I just need to ask you a few questions. For the report.

She gestures for Kate to take a seat, and she reluctantly does.

KATE

Why is there a report?

OFFICER

Well it's routine, for a gunshot injury. Is this your name and address?

She shows Kate a clipboard; Kate nods.

KATE

Will he be OK?

OFFICER

I really don't know. Were you present when the incident occurred?

KATE

Yes.

OFFICER

Was this at home?

KATE

No.

OFFICER

Because it doesn't look like a hunting accident.

KATE

A what? No...no.

OFFICER

But it was accidental.

Kate stands up quickly, hitting her chair with the back of her knees and knocking it over backwards. The chair hits the floor with a SHARP CRACK, and Kate jumps, startled.

KATE

Yes! Are we done here?

The Officer stands and puts her clipboard down, and Kate flinches, but the Officer only moves around the desk to right the chair again.

OFFICER

I just need to know who fired the gun.

Kate chews her lip nervously, then collapses back into the chair, her face in her hands.

OFFICER

Honey, if he did anything to hurt you--just tell me the truth about it. Help me help you.

KATE

What? No! He would never!

(crying)

Nothing was supposed to happen this way. Not any of it!

OFFICER

Why don't you just tell me everything. From the beginning.

Kate draws a long shuddering sob.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - MORNING

It's any cheap motel room. JANE'S ADDICTION'S "OF COURSE" PLAYS ON A BOOMBOX set on top of the TV. The covers are unmade on a double bed, and an INTERMITTENT BUZZING comes

from the bathroom's open door. The curtains open to a view of the parking lot, where a huge deep red late-70s Cadillac is backed in.

Kate stands before a mirror, running her fingers through her curly shoulder-length hair. She's wearing a too-large, unbuttoned flannel shirt over her underwear. She winces and pulls her hand away: a few strands of hair have snagged on her wedding ring.

KATE

Jer? You seen my brush?

JEROMY (O.C.)

What?

INT. MOTEL BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

JEROMY, 23, stands in front of the bathroom mirror, a towel wrapped around his waist. He's medium height with dark hair and broad shoulders, and tangled dreds on one side of his head; the other side is newly buzz-cut. He holds an electric trimmer.

KATE (O.C.)

Is my other bag still in the car?

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jeromy comes out of the bathroom, skips tracks on the boombox to "BEEN CAUGHT STEALING," then walks up behind Kate, rests his chin on her shoulder and puts one arm around her waist, looking at their reflection.

KATE

Oh my god! I hardly recognize you!
You look so--

JEROMY

What? Normal? Adult? Responsible?

KATE

I was going to say, different.

JEROMY

You love me though.

KATE

Of course.

JEROMY

Remember the vows. For shaggy and

for straight-edge. For stoner and
for--

KATE
I don't remember those.

JEROMY
See? We should've wrote our own.

Kate turns to face him.

KATE
I didn't need the words. Will you
go get my brush, though?

Jeromy grabs car keys and the room key and goes to the
door, still wearing only his towel.

KATE
We're just gonna see your
brother then go, right?

JEROMY
Yeah. Hey.

KATE
What?

JEROMY
I need you for this.

KATE
What? To go see your brother?

JEROMY
No. All of this. This life.

Jeromy kisses her then walks out and crosses in front of
the window, pops the trunk of the Cadillac and begins to
dig through it, holding his towel up with one hand.

Kate watches him, then leans in extremely close to the
mirror, and makes an odd face checking her skin for
blemishes. Then she splays the fingers of her left hand,
posing with her wedding band.

INT. KATE'S CAR - DAY

Kate drives the Cadillac through the back streets of a
small college town. The car sports two bumper stickers: a
weathered one says, JESUS SAVES; a slick, newer sticker
says, I RECYCLE. It's past noon now, on an extremely bright

day near the end of winter. There is still a little snow, but mostly the ground is wet and muddy. Jeromy sits in the passenger seat, the rest of his dreds trimmed off now, and looks out the window: they're in front of Lee's house. Beer cans litter the lawn.

JEROMY

It's just a thing I've got to do.

KATE

I didn't say anything.

JEROMY

I know.

INT. LEE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house is a mess. Pizza boxes, full ashtrays, unopened mail, textbooks, etc. clutter the living room. The furniture is frayed, broken, second- or third-hand. LEE, 26, reclines on the couch in old sweats and a T-shirt. His skin is deathly white and his hair is greasy, his eyes half-open and rolled back.

AN OLD TV PLAYS the sci-fi movie "Forbidden Planet." The astronauts are bracing the hatch closed against something attacking from outside.

Just then there is a LOUD THUMPING AT THE DOOR. Lee does not react or move: a belt is curls around one bicep, and a syringe rests loosely in one hand. THE KNOCK COMES AGAIN; then the knob slowly turns and the door opens. Jeromy steps inside, his large boots and heavy coat giving him a bizarre silhouette.

JEROMY

Hey! Lee? Anybody home?

Jeromy sees the needle and belt, and recognizes the paraphernalia immediately.

JEROMY

What the fuck? I called you! You knew I was coming!

(pause)

Oh, shit.

Jeromy cuffs Lee hard across the face, then presses two fingers to his neck, searching for a pulse.

EXT. LEE'S HOUSE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Kate waits in the car, smoking a cigarette, watching the door of the house, blowing her smoke out the half-open window. The front door opens, and Jeromy stumbles out, pulling Lee behind him, conscious now and shielding his eyes from the brilliant sunlight.

LEE
What the hell!?

Jeromy spins Lee around, shoves him up against a tree and holds him there, staring into his eyes.

JEROMY
Your pupils are fucked.

LEE
What're you gonna do? Kick my ass?

Jeromy relaxes his grip a little. Lee sees two of his neighbors walking down the street: MINA and CARRIE, well-dressed, are stepping carefully around puddles. Lee waves.

LEE
Hey, Mina! Carrie! Check it out!
My brother's gonna kick my ass!

Kate watches from the car, shocked. A long ash falls off the end of her cigarette, unnoticed.

JEROMY
Were you even breathing? You could be dead if I hadn't slapped your ass awake.

LEE
Who asked you to?

Jeromy stares at Lee for a long moment.

JEROMY
Get in the car.

LEE
Why? Where you taking me? The hospital? Rehab?

JEROMY
Vancouver.

LEE
What the fuck's in Vancouver?

JEROMY

Dad is. I can't leave you here.

LEE

Can't kidnap me.

Lee raises his arms, breaks Jeromy's grip on his shirt, then steps back, wiping his muddy hands on his sweats.

JEROMY

I'm trying to do a few things right, OK? I'm your brother, and I'm asking. You can go, or stay. Either way, I'll never bother you again.

INT. LEE'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS - MOMENTS LATER

There is dirty laundry all over the floor. No posters or decorations hang on the walls except for a drooping fake-velvet tapestry with a picture of Elvis in profile. Lee unplugs a bulky old laptop, closes it up, and tucks it under his arm. With his free hand, he riffles through a cluttered desk drawer, and grabs out a handful of floppy disks.

INT. KATE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jeromy's sitting in the passenger seat with the door open.

KATE

For how long?!

JEROMY

Just to Vancouver.

KATE

So--three days? Four? And, you didn't even ask me?

JEROMY

Katie! I'm sorry. There's a thing called a sense of family, all right?

KATE

Oh, what does that mean!?

JEROMY

Just--I have exactly one brother. I haven't talked to our mom in three years. Do you see where I'm

going here, Katie?

Lee stumbles out the front door, still blinking in the bright sun. He doesn't lock up, just saunters toward the Cadillac, carrying a green backpack and his laptop, opens the back door, and slides in.

LEE

Nice ride. Roomy.

Kate smiles grimly and extends her hand to Lee in back.

KATE

I'm Kate. I married your brother.

Lee nods, making himself comfortable.

INT. HIGHWAY DINER - NIGHT

Lee, Kate, and Jeromy sit at a table in a cheezy little diner. The restaurant is right off the highway, and in the window behind them we can see and hear TRAFFIC PASSING. Lee looks even worse, and trembles now and then with chills. Kate chain-smokes thin white cigarettes. A WAITRESS is taking their order. She's large, middle-aged, with a mole between thick black eyebrows.

KATE

Just coffee for me.

JEROMY

What, aren't you hungry? I'm hungry.

(to waitress)

What's your biggest hamburger?

WAITRESS

(deadpan)

The Hoosier Daddy is a full pound of juicy ground chuck, topped with a fried egg, bacon, three kinds of cheese, and rich creamery butter.

KATE

(disgusted, sarcastic)

Ooh, you should get that.

JEROMY

With fries, and a strawberry shake!

WAITRESS

And him?

Lee looks like he's trying not to throw up. He raises one hand, gesturing that he doesn't want anything.

JEROMY

He'll have fries. And water.

The Waitress jots this down and walks away.

SAME SCENE - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Kate watches as Jeromy finishes his burger.

JEROMY

So good.

Lee is looking a little less ill, and is picking at a mound of thick french fries.

LEE

You tell Mom?

Jeromy holds up one finger as he chews and swallows.

JEROMY

I called her. We talked.
(to Kate)
Mom drinks.

LEE

Kate. What'd your parents think then? Just--getting married.

KATE

My parents could be dead, for all I know. Or care.

JEROMY

Hey, c'mon. Your fosters.

KATE

Which set?

JEROMY

Fred, and Mary. Your favorites. You said, you'd call them.

KATE

I will call them.

Jeromy finishes his shake, sucking powerfully at his straw,

and gets up.

JEROMY
Be right back.

Jeromy leaves.

LEE
I get it. You wish I wasn't here.

KATE
Eat your fries.

LEE
One question: whose idea was it?
Getting married?

KATE
We both--

LEE
(points a fry at her)
You know what? Don't answer.

EXT. MUSIC FESTIVAL - DAY

Amplified GRATEFUL DEAD blares from a distance. Jeromy is unshaven, wearing a tie-dye tour shirt, and his hair is long and dredded. He stands behind a row of camping tents, in conversation with EVAN and NOLAN, both early 20s, in crisp haircuts and expensive sunglasses. Their tour shirts are clean and show fold-marks.

EVAN
People said you'd be down.

JEROMY
Pff. "People"? Those people are mistaken.

EVAN
C'mon, man. It's five grand, for a couple days' work. I'll front you for the bus ticket.

JEROMY
Are you serious? No way. Not me.
You want to buy a dime bag or not?

EVAN
I'm good. But think about the other thing.

Evan and Nolan walk away, and stop in front of Kate, who is mid-transaction selling a braided bracelet; she's visibly dazed, high out of her mind, losing track of the bills she's counting out as change.

BINNIE and STAR, a man and woman of over 50 who look comically alike--long stringy hair, thin, dirty face/ chipped teeth--creep around Jeromy. SQUIRREL follows them, an overweight 40s guy looking nervous.

BINNIE

What're you talking to them posers about, man?

JEROMY

Nothing, Binnie. What you need?

SQUIRREL

Rich kids and tourists. That's not our people, man.

STAR

Jeromy's our people. Ain't you?

JEROMY

When you need a hookup.

BINNIE

Aw! And I brought you this.

He holds out a balloon full of nitrous oxide. Jeromy eyes it, then takes the balloon and inhales a lungful.

JEROMY

(croaks, holding breath)
I'm out. Off the tour. Tomorrow.

BINNIE

Heh, who's he sound like, Star?

STAR

You, Binnie. Summer of '73.

STAR

He's never gonna leave us.

JEROMY'S POV: the MUSIC DISTORTS and Binnie, Star, and Squirrel have transformed into JERRY GARCIA, TOM PETTY, and BOB DYLAN, and now stand over him, shaking their heads.

JERRY

Our boy's got to get outta this.

BOB
Or this life'll be the death of
him.

JEROMY
What's happening?

BOB
We're a kind of delegation, son.

JERRY
Tell you the truth about the road
you're on.

TOM
Take a look at yourself, boy.

JERRY
Waiting for every small-time deal
to come through, sooner than later
the arm of the law's gonna come
down on you. Hoo-oo.

BOB
Smelling of booze, someone's vomit
drying...onto your shoes....

JEROMY
Wait, I don't--

BOB
It's a metaphor.

TOM
He means, don't come around here,
no more.

JERRY
You got to change, and now.

BOB
...but the hour is getting late.

TOM
Hit that great wide open. Get
wholesome, settle down. Be a king
of some little town.

Jerry nods at Kate, still flustered in the background. She looks distraught and muddied. Evan and Nolan look over her sad array of bracelets and shake their heads.

JERRY
Find a girl, who'll come along.

Jeromy's hallucination begins to fade again as the nitrous buzz wears off.

TOM

It's no good, he's a rebel
without...how's that go?

JERRY

He's had a long trip already.

TOM

And a strange one.

BOB

Getting stranger.

Jerry, Bob, & Tom turn back into Binnie, Star, and Squirrel, and Jeromy stands, unsteadily.

BINNIE

There's our boy! See he's totally
alive! Jer, baby, you're gonna be
with us forever!

JEROMY

Binnie, did you steal my shit?

BINNIE

Once! You need to let that go.

Jeromy staggers toward Kate, imposing himself awkwardly in front of her.

JEROMY

So, I'm going to ditch all this,
and go have a life, and, you want
to come with?

KATE

Yeah OK. I could.

JEROMY

I mean, I know we hardly know each
other, but--wait, what?

KATE

You mean, like now, right?

Jerry walks past in a crowd of people, gives Jeromy a thumbs up, and disappears again.

JEROMY

(blinking)
You got a car?