

CROSSING

A short film

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EXT. JACUMBA DESERT - NIGHT

Somewhere deep on the California side of the Jacumba Desert. It's lifeless - nothing but harsh desert mountains and low-lying brush.

We hear light footsteps, hushed whispers in Spanish. It's dark, but we can make out the source: a group of immigrants, about a dozen or so, all of Hispanic decent.

We can see their faces in the moonlight - faces of exhaustion, desperation. Their clothes are torn. They have very few belongings. Cloth is wrapped around their shoes.

We focus on a woman in her late 20s. Her features are sharp but delicate; her hair raven black. Beads of sweat cover her forehead, chest, and collarbones. Her frame is slender, but there's a steeliness in her expression. This is LOUISA.

Louisa holds the hand of a 4-year-old boy, her son. The boy is having difficulty breathing. They walk slower and slower, falling behind the group.

The boy collapses, wheezing. Louisa immediately drops her belongings. She grabs her boy, sits him upright in her lap, pulls him close against her. She takes deep breaths with her boy, trying to slow his breathing. She fans him with her hand, kisses his hair.

She begins to pray silently as the boy's wheezing grows in intensity. She looks up - the group is falling out of sight. Louisa calls out in a whisper.

LOUISA

Diego!

DIEGO - Louisa's brother, a wire-thin Hispanic man in his 20s - stops. He looks back. He calls ahead to a Hispanic man in his 40s - one who seems to be the group's leader.

Diego and the man exchange whispers in Spanish.

Louisa is still trying to slow her boy's breathing. She starts to sing softly to him. She's on the verge of crying.

The man starts walking back to Louisa. His face is hardened, on the verge of crazed.

The exchange between Louisa and the man is all in Spanish. We don't use subtitles - we don't need them.

The man shouts in a whisper at Louisa. She shakes her head no, fighting off tears.

The man slaps the boy's face. Louisa turns away to shield her son from the man.

The man tries to force Louisa's arms apart. She clutches her boy, shakes her head no, lets out a primal scream.

The man pulls out a gun, sticks it to Louisa's head. Louisa is crying. The man is shouting at her - no longer in a whisper.

The rest of the group has gathered around now. They watch as the man cocks the gun. Louisa's eyes are closed now. She cries silently, holds her son close. Her son's breathing has grown even worse.

Just when it seems the man might shoot, the group is lit up by search lights.

BORDER OFFICER'S VOICE
Border patrol! Don't move!

The man turns, fires in the direction of the blinding flashlight. He's immediately torn apart by bullets. He falls to the ground, dead, his blood falling on Louisa and her boy.

The group of immigrants are screaming.

We see the border agents for the first time. There are two: CARL MORRISON, white, 40s; BOBBY RAMIREZ, Hispanic, 40s.

They slowly approach the immigrants, their guns drawn, shouting in Spanish for them to hold still. The immigrants are screaming. It's loud, confusing, chaotic.

The officers get closer, trying to shout above the screams.

One of the immigrants takes off running into the mountains. Ramirez takes off after him, Morrison tracks the man with a light.

MORRISON
Don't fire! Bobby! Don't fi-

Ramirez lets out four shots. All hit the man in the back. He falls to the ground.

Ramirez comes back, his gun still drawn. Morrison keeps his gun drawn as they approach the group together.

Ramirez shouts in Spanish for the immigrants to put their hands on their heads and get on the ground.

Louisa still holds her son. Her son's breath is even more labored. He's crying, gasping for air, starting to panic.

The immigrants are still screaming, pleading. Ramirez shouts again.

Morrison moves to Louisa, kneels down next to her. She recoils from him. Morrison looks at the boy, speaks into his radio.

MORRISON

Gonna need an ambulance.

Ramirez is still shouting, trying to contain the group.

The group is frantic. They scream, plead. They won't hold still. Ramirez fires a shot into the sky, takes his gun and butts the nose of the immigrant in front of him. The sound is awful. The strike breaks the man's nose, it spouts blood, he falls to the ground.

Morrison looks over.

MORRISON

Bobby!

Louisa looks to Morrison, turning her son away, filled with fear. Morrison looks her deep in the eye.

MORRISON

It's okay. We'll get him help.

Morrison and Louisa share a brief moment.

Morrison quickly gets up, joins Ramirez in frisking and handcuffing the immigrants. Morrison and Ramirez exchange a look.

FADE TO BLACK

Over black, we hear the beginning of Morrison's testimony.

MORRISON (V.O.)

...it was loud after that.
Confusing.

FADE IN

INT. BORDER STATION, CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The next day. Morrison sits at the head of a table, surrounded by a committee of high-ranking border officials. He speaks into a recording device, his tone dry and sober.

MORRISON

The second suspect started to flee. I tracked him with a light. Officer Ramirez—he pursued.

BEGIN FLASHBACK: EXT. JACUMBA DESERT - NIGHT

Morrison's testimony continues as we cut back to the night before.

Morrison and Ramirez handcuff the immigrants. The group detained, Ramirez walks uphill toward the man he shot.

MORRISON (V.O.)

The suspect turned and pointed his weapon at Ramirez...

Ramirez comes to the dead man. He looks down at him. He hesitates a moment, then uses his foot to flip the man on his back. Morrison watches from a distance.

MORRISON (V.O.) CONT'D

It left Ramirez no choice. He fired his weapon, hitting the man in the shoulder...

Ramirez points his gun at the dead man, fires a bullet into the man's shoulder. Morrison starts to approach Ramirez.

MORRISON (V.O.)

...spinning the suspect around. Officer Ramirez fired four more shots into the man's back, killing him.

Ramirez puts his gun back in his holster, walks back downhill. Morrison confronts Ramirez - without saying a word. Ramirez walks past him back to the immigrants.

END FLASHBACK

Back in real-time, Morrison continues his testimony.

MORRISON

The rest we detained for
processing.

The group sits in silence for a moment. The COMMITTEE HEAD speaks.

COMMITTEE HEAD

Officer Morrison, on behalf of
the State of California and the
United States of America, we
thank you and Officer Ramirez
for your courage and continued
service-

EXT. BORDER STATION, HOLDING CELL - DAY

Louisa holds her son, surrounded by the same group as the night before. They look exhausted, defeated. Her son breathes normally now, but he looks very ill. She fans him with her hand as he sleeps.

In front of the holding cell, Ramirez does paperwork at a desk. He's surrounded by a few other border agents.

The door opens, Morrison walks in, goes to his desk. Ramirez eyes Morrison; Morrison eyes Ramirez. No words are exchanged.

Morrison gathers things from his desk, looks to the holding cell. He catches eyes with Louisa. Louisa looks away; Morrison keeps his eyes on her. She looks back at Morrison. They meet eyes for a moment. She looks away again.

Morrison approaches the holding cell. Louisa stares at the ground. Ramirez watches.

Morrison comes to the bars. He stands there a moment. Louisa looks up at him. Morrison gestures to Louisa's son.

MORRISON

How is he?

Louisa doesn't respond. She continues fanning her son. She stares Morrison hard in the eye, her expression cold.

Morrison takes in her stare. He stands still, never looking away.

MORRISON CONT'D

...anything I can do?

Louisa still doesn't respond. She keeps eye contact, her stare even harder and colder.

Morrison stands a moment longer, then turns away. He starts to walk back to his desk.

Louisa calls after him.

LOUISA

Water.

Morrison turns. Louisa looks to her son, then back at Morrison.

LOUISA CONT'D

Some water. Fever.

Morrison and Louisa hold eyes a moment. Morrison nods.

Ramirez and the other border agents watch as Morrison walks to a kitchen area. He pulls a cold water bottle from the refrigerator, grabs medicine from a cabinet.

Morrison walks back to the cell. Louisa stands to meet him. Morrison passes the water and medicine through the cell bars. Louisa and Morrison lock eyes. They share a moment. Louisa softens slightly.

LOUISA

Thank you.

Morrison nods, walks away. He goes to his desk, packs up his things.

Morrison heads for the door. Ramirez calls after him.

RAMIREZ

Breach of protocol.

Morrison ignores him, keeps going to the door. Ramirez's tone is restrained but firm.

RAMIREZ CONT'D

Said that's a breach of protocol.

Morrison keeps walking without acknowledging Ramirez. He goes to the door, leaves.

Ramirez is fuming, but does his best to swallow it. He gets up, goes out to the hallway. Morrison is nearing the end of the hall.

RAMIREZ

Morrison!

Morrison slows as Ramirez comes up behind him. Ramirez grabs Morrison's arm, forces him around.

RAMIREZ CONT'D

'The hell you think this is--

MORRISON

Higher law than protocol, Bobby.

RAMIREZ

Higher—you want to tell my father about higher law? Sixteen years he wait, like he was—

MORRISON

Like he was supposed to. I know. I'm glad he waited. And I'm glad you're here. But I wouldn't've faulted...hell, guess it doesn't matter what I'd have done.

Morrison turns to leave.

RAMIREZ

You better decide why you're here.

This hits Morrison. He turns, looks at Ramirez.

RAMIREZ CONT'D

If it's cause she's gone—if it's cause she's passed and you don't know what to do in civilian life, you'd better keep looking.

Morrison hesitates, gathers his thoughts like he might say much more, but then:

MORRISON

See you Monday.

Morrison leaves. Ramirez watches Morrison go.

Ramirez walks back to the holding cell. He looks to the cell. We follow his gaze, focusing on Diego - Louisa's brother.

We show Ramirez. There's nothing dramatic in his behavior, but we sense the beginning of a plan.

INT. TRAILER - NIGHT

A trailer home. We see Morrison in his evening routine.

He eats a frozen dinner, pours himself tequila. He sits on his couch, eating in the glow of a television screen. He's wrestling with something.

He puts his food down, grabs his drink. He stares off, lost in his thoughts. We spend a moment with him - long enough to sense his loneliness, and long enough to sense the weight of whatever he's grappling with.

EXT. TIJUANA - DAY

The next day, late afternoon. Morrison drives his hard-top truck through Tijuana - the non-touristy part.

Locals look at Morrison. Morrison returns their stares.

He pulls up to a hole-in-the-wall bar. He parks his truck. He sits with his thoughts a moment, then gets out. He eyes the locals watching him.

He walks to the bar, opens the door.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

We follow Morrison into the bar. It's old, weathered - the walls cracked, the paint peeling.

RODRIGO - a balding, chubby Mexican in his 40s - tends bar. He greets Morrison.

RODRIGO
Officer Gringo!

Morrison takes a seat at the bar.

MORRISON
Rodrigo.

Rodrigo pours tequila without having to ask Morrison's order.

Morrison looks around the bar. In the corner, at a table, is part of the same group of immigrants from the day before, including Louisa, Diego, and Louisa's son.

Diego looks up from the table, spots Morrison. He taps Louisa. Louisa looks to Morrison.

Morrison and Louisa lock eyes a moment. Morrison gives a slight nod. Louisa looks away.

Morrison pulls money from his wallet.

MORRISON

Do me a favor, Rodrigo. That group in the corner. Get them another around of whatever they're drinking.

Morrison puts his money on the bar.

RODRIGO

A round for sending them back?

Morrison nods.

RODRIGO CONT'D

Yes, señor.

Rodrigo pours their drinks, eyes Morrison. Morrison is lost in his thoughts.

RODRIGO CONT'D

It's for the best, my friend. America...today?

Rodrigo finishes pouring the drinks.

RODRIGO CONT'D

No, señor. No.

Rodrigo takes the drinks to the group. As he serves, the group looks over. We focus on Louisa. She eyes Morrison.

Morrison lifts his glass, gives a slight, apologetic smile.

Louisa studies him a moment, holding her drink. She hesitates. Then she relaxes into a hint of a smile, takes a sip.

INT. BAR - LATER

Time has passed. Night has fallen. A band is playing in the bar now.

Morrison still sits at the bar, buzzed. The group of immigrants still sit at the same table.

Louisa gets up, approaches Morrison. She takes the seat next to his.

They sit in silence a moment. Louisa is the first to break it. Her English is heavily accented, but intelligible.

LOUISA

Hello.

Morrison looks at her. A moment passes.

MORRISON

Hello.

Another moment passes. Morrison searches for something to say.

MORRISON CONT'D

How's your boy--

LOUISA

What are you?

MORRISON

...we're border patrol-

LOUISA

No. What are you. You seem like a kind man. But you force us back to such hell-

MORRISON

I just do my job.

LOUISA

What is your job? To break families? To treat us like animals-

MORRISON

It's not up to me. All that...

Morrison gestures to Louisa's group in the corner.

MORRISON CONT'D

I mean, all this. Out there.

He gestures out the bar to nothing in particular.

MORRISON CONT'D

If it was up to me...

Morrison stops himself, drinks.

LOUISA
 ...If it was up to you, what?

Morrison looks her deep in the eyes. He speaks simply.

MORRISON
 I'd know your name.

Louisa studies Morrison. She stares off for a bit. Then, without looking at Morrison:

LOUISA
 Louisa.

Morrison looks at her. He waits until he has her eyes.

MORRISON
 Carl.

They both drink.

MORRISON CONT'D
 What're you trying to get to?
 What's up there?

LOUISA
 Family. In Madera County.

MORRISON
 What kind of work?

LOUISA
 Orchards.

Morrison shakes his head.

LOUISA CONT'D
 What?

MORRISON
 That's ten, eleven hours a day.
 Hundred-degree fields. Work
 comes and goes. They treat you
 like shit. You're better off
 going back wherever you came.

LOUISA
 No. You don't know. Sonora...you
 don't know.

MORRISON

Y'all think there's some
promised land up there. Work
waiting. Stick your hand out
anywhere and grab an orange--

Louisa looks to her son.

LOUISA

He never met his father. Killed.
Drugs. Where we live...where we
live, there's no schools. No
medicine. The water doesn't run.
No, you...you don't know.

Louisa's fighting back emotion. Morrison watches her.

MORRISON

I'm sorry...

Morrison considers saying more. Now he's fighting back
emotion.

MORRISON CONT'D

...I'm sorry.

LOUISA

For what? You just do your job.

This stings Morrison. He stares straight ahead, contrite.
He drinks.

Louisa watches him. She sees a part of him she hasn't seen
before. She softens slightly.

The music changes. The band plays a slower song. Louisa
looks out to the dance floor.

Morrison still stares straight ahead, still drinks. Louisa
watches him again.

LOUISA CONT'D

Dance with me.

Morrison looks to her.

LOUISA CONT'D

Please. I want to dance with
you.

Morrison hesitates, then sets down his drink. Louisa takes
his hand.

Louisa leads Morrison to the dance floor.

Morrison takes Louisa in his arms. They're both reluctant at first.

They sway with the music slightly, but are mostly still. They slowly grow closer.

Louisa hesitates, then allows her head to rest on Morrison's shoulder.

Morrison pulls her close. His eyes are closed. Louisa's eyes are open.

LOUISA

You seem like a good man.

Morrison pulls her even closer. Louisa closes her eyes. They dance.

EXT. CREEK BED - NIGHT

Later that night. A remote spot near a dried-up creek bed. Morrison sits alone in his truck, the engine off, lost in thought.

Three figures approach through the darkness. Morrison watches.

They get closer. Finally, we can make them out: Louisa, Louisa's son, and Louisa's brother Diego.

Morrison gets out. The group stands in silence, looking at each other.

MORRISON

Y'all ready?

They nod.

MORRISON CONT'D

Gonna keep you back here 'til we cross. Stay as still as you can at the border.

Morrison opens his truck bed. Louisa's son and Diego crawl in the truck. Louisa is the last to get in. She lingers for a moment before she does, looking at Morrison.

LOUISA

Thank you.

Morrison nods, almost avoiding eye contact. Louisa gets in.

Morrison arranges bags and blankets to best hide them. He closes the truck bed. He moves around the sides of the truck, peering into the hard-top cover to check his work.

Satisfied, Morrison gets in his truck. He starts the engine and drives into the night.

EXT. SAN YSIDRO PORT OF ENTRY - NIGHT

Morrison's truck pulls up to the San Ysidro-Tijuana border crossing. He moves through a line of cars.

He gets to the crossing station, doing his best to hide his nerves.

A U.S. Customs agent approaches Morrison's window. Morrison pulls out his ID, hands it over. The Customs Agent holds his flashlight on it.

CUSTOMS AGENT

How you doin', officer?

MORRISON

Not bad.

The Customs Agent moves to the front of the truck, holds his light on the license plate. He marks something on his clipboard.

He moves to the back of the truck. We cut to the point-of-view from inside the truck bed. We see a flashlight go around the truck. It's tense.

We cut back to Morrison. He watches the Customs Agent in his rearview mirror. The Customs Agent checks the back license plate, marks his clipboard again.

The Customs Agent comes up to the window.

CUSTOMS AGENT

Bringing anything across tonight?

MORRISON

Nothing except three wetbacks.

The Customs Agent looks at Morrison, his expression sober. Morrison returns his stare. Finally, the Customs Agent relaxes into a smile and gives a small laugh. He gives Morrison his ID.

CUSTOMS AGENT
Have a good one.

Morrison takes his ID and drives on.

EXT. FIRE ROAD - NIGHT

Morrison drives on a dirt fire road. He's still alone in his truck. It's dark and discreet.

Morrison slows and comes to a stop along the side of the road, kills his engine. He gets out, looks around. There's nothing but darkness.

He goes to the back of the truck, opens the truck bed.

MORRISON
Alright.

Louisa, Diego, and Louisa's son crawl out. Morrison closes the truck bed.

MORRISON CONT'D
C'mon. We'll get you further north.

Diego and Louisa's son get in the back cab of the truck. Morrison starts walking to the driver's door.

LOUISA
Hey...

Morrison turns. Louisa approaches him. She leans into him. They kiss for the first time. It's long and slow.

Louisa pulls back, looking into Morrison's eyes, filled with a tender passion. Morrison looks at her, speaks with a smile.

MORRISON
Let's go.

Morrison gets in, starts the truck. Something in Louisa's expression changes slightly as she walks to the passenger door.

INT. BORDER STATION - NIGHT

Ramirez sits alone at his desk. He wears headphones, listens to a radio.

We sense he's heard something significant. He slowly takes off his headphones, stares at the radio.

We hold on him a moment.

EXT. FIRE ROAD - NIGHT

Morrison and the group drive, still on fire roads. It's mostly silent inside the truck.

Morrison looks around at the darkness, breaks the silence, speaking in a low, breathy voice to himself as much as to anyone else.

MORRISON

If these hills could talk...

Louisa looks out the window, her head turned away from Morrison. In the back, Diego seems tense.

Something catches Morrison eyes in the rearview mirror. He sees headlights off in the distance.

Morrison keeps driving. Louisa almost has her full body turned toward the window.

The headlights are getting closer, moving very quickly.

Morrison still keeps driving, watching his mirror. The car flashes blue and red siren lights.

Morrison turns around to look.

As the lights get closer, we see the driver is Officer Ramirez.

Diego looks back also, leaning forward and exposing his chest. As he does, Morrison sees tape across Diego's chest - a wire.

Diego turns back around, catches eyes with Morrison. Morrison and Diego exchange something unspoken. Morrison realizes what has happened. Diego looks away.

Morrison looks to Louisa. She's crying, looking out the window.

Morrison slows down his truck, comes to a stop, keeps the engine running and his foot on the brake.

He holds his eyes on Louisa.

Louisa can feel his stare. She fights it, but eventually gives in. Louisa looks at Morrison, her face covered in tears. Morrison takes in her look.

Morrison looks straight ahead. He puts the truck in park, the engine still running.

Morrison looks in his mirror back at Ramirez. Ramirez gets out of his jeep, his gun drawn.

Morrison gets out, steps into the jeep's headlights. He keeps one hand up in the air, the other hand on a gun in his holster.

Ramirez and Morrison stare at each other, Ramirez pointing his gun at Morrison.

Tense moments go by. Ramirez and Morrison still stare at each other, neither one of them moving.

Louisa, Diego, and Louisa's son get out of Morrison's truck. Louisa is holding her son's hand. They start to walk toward Officer Ramirez.

Ramirez calls to them, still keeping his gun on Morrison.

RAMIREZ

Go.

The group stops. They look to Ramirez, unsure what to do.

DIEGO

You said you'd--

RAMIREZ CONT'D

Go. Get out of here.

Louisa lets go of her son's hand. She goes to Morrison. She looks him deep in the eyes.

LOUISA

You're a good man.

Morrison looks at her, not saying anything. Louisa starts to cry. She gives Morrison a long, deep kiss.

She goes back to her son, grabs his hand. Ramirez still has his gun on Morrison - both are completely still.

Louisa looks back once more at Morrison. They hold eyes for a moment. Then Louisa, her son, and Diego disappear into the surrounding canyons.

Morrison looks back at Ramirez. They stare at each other a moment longer.

Ramirez makes a silent choice. Eyeing Morrison, he puts his gun down, gets back in his jeep, drives away.

Morrison watches Ramirez go. He looks up at the night sky.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN

EXT. ORCHARD - DAY

An orchard somewhere in California's Central Valley.

We see a group harvesting almonds. Most are Hispanic. We see a white man from the back.

The man turns. We see his face. It's Morrison.

We watch him for a moment as he goes about his work.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Morrison walks into a bar filled with migrant workers. He goes to the bar, orders a beer. He looks out at the group, his eyes searching.

He stops. Something catches his eye. We see what he sees:

A slender Hispanic woman with raven black hair has her back toward Morrison. She talks and laughs with a group.

Morrison watches, transfixed, almost in disbelief.

The woman turns, revealing her face.

It's not Louisa.

Morrison comes out his trance. He sips his beer, stares off.

FADE OUT.