

A JEWEL IN THE DESERT

Written by

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EXT. SONORAN DESERT - CARUS'S SHACK - DAY

Up close, a mighty saguaro Cactus...stands proud amongst the arid landscape.

Barren, rocky, harsh.

Everything shimmers under the relentless sun.

A dirt track dissects the dry scrubland and runs up to a corrugated metal SHACK - abandoned trucks rust alongside.

The kind of place that makes you think, why is it there?

A faint desert WIND whistles...until...

FOOTSTEPS

...Crunch into the burnt soil.

CARUS (50s), soiled clothes, fading beauty, stumbles forward with blood soaked shorts and t-shirt. One arm hangs limp to her side, gun in hand.

CARUS

Elliot, Elliot! It's worked, it's worked. I can...feel it, within me.

She drops to her knees, and reaches out as though she can touch the air.

CARUS

It's all here. I can sense it.

With a face full of joy she soaks it in, until...

...Carus's face softens, her grin slides away and a quizzical frown appears. Her eyes widen in horror.

She thrusts her hands out in front of her, as though she is protecting herself from an unseen force.

CARUS

Too much. Stop. I can't, I can't...

Her body vibrates like she's being electrocuted and she--

SCREAMS - deep, guttural.

The hand holding the gun begins to rise.

EXT. SONORAN DESERT - DIRT TRACK - NIGHT**TITLE: LAST NIGHT**

A battered SEDAN moves slowly, lights dimmed. It tracks a barbed wire fence and stops at a gap.

INT. CARUS'S CAR - NIGHT

Carus checks a map as ELLIOT (20s), tanned and youthfully fit, cautiously drives. He would be a cocky guy if he wasn't in the middle of the desert late at night.

CARUS

That's it.

ELLIOT

Yeah, cool. You sure there's a house out there, with jewels? I mean it doesn't--

CARUS

Jewel. Just one. And soon we'll have it.

Elliot gazes outside at the moonlit desert, frowns.

ELLIOT

For reals?

Carus puts a finger on his lips, smiles.

CARUS

Yeah, for reals. Look, I heard it from a native Seri gardener who works there. He saw it, and then mouthed off about it in a bar. Everyone ignored him, but me.

ELLIOT

What! He's seen it?

CARUS

Yup, for the last time.

Elliot throws Carus a quizzical look.

EXT. SONORAN DESERT - DIRT TRACK - LATER

A bright MOON shines amongst a star filled sky - it lights up the rocky terrain.

Carus and Elliot quietly head down a ravine. Elliot carry's a canvas bag with a small SPADE sticking out the top.

ELLIOT
So, why the spade?

Carus stops, points to the horizon - ahead a RANCH style property rests in the distance. Nothing grand.

CARUS
You'll see. Won't be long.

Elliot frowns at the Ranch.

ELLIOT
Is that it? I mean, why here?

CARUS
Because they have the worlds best cactus collection. Let's go.

Carus heads off as a confused Elliot follows.

THE RANCH - MINUTES LATER

All quiet, no lights.

Using the moonlight, Carus takes them around the side, up to the gate. After a pause they move through to a large garden with rows and rows of cacti.

Carus turns to Elliot - time to make a point.

CARUS
(hushed)
Now listen. You'll get all that I promised, and more. Just do as I say, no questions. Right?

Somewhat confused, he nods.

CARUS
Ok, it's time you knew. What we're after is a cactus, not a gem. That's why the spade.

Elliot goes to protest but Carus stops him.

CARUS
Once we have the plant I will explain and we'll be rich.

Elliot balls a fist - not happy.

CARUS

Trust me. Now come on.

Carus counts the rows, and heads down one. After a while she crouches down, gets out her phone.

With her phone torch she discreetly lights up the plant - punches the air in delight.

CARUS

That's it. Let's dig.

EXT. SONORAN DESERT - CARUS'S SHACK - DAY

All's quiet...until the battered Sedan pulls up.

INT. CARUS'S SHACK - DAY

The lock turns and the door opens, letting in the desert sunshine like it's the doorway to a blast furnace.

Inside is a simple lock up with various work benches. Across one bench is an array of laboratory vessels, burners, tubes.

Carus gingerly enters, the canvas bag in hand.

Behind her stumbles Elliot.

ELLIOT

Carus, what the fuck is going on?
And what is this place? You haven't
said a word.

CARUS

This...is where the magic happens.

ELLIOT

Stop it! Carus, you promised cash.
Remember in that bar, when you hit
me up? "It's a quick job Elliot. We
take the gems, and run."
(off Carus ignoring him)
Hey! You need to start talking.

Carus carries on, retrieves the cactus. She gently places it down on a bench, like it's a precious urn.

Growing out of the top of the cactus is a flower. Carus carefully strokes it, then beckons Elliot over.

CARUS

This cactus is virtually extinct.
And it only flowers once every
hundred years. This is history.

ELLIOT

Tell me you have a special buyer.

CARUS

(carries on)

Plants out here can live thousands
of years. But not a cactus. But,
when they combine, like this one,
they become special. Very special.

ELLIOT

You've lost it. I knew fucking a
dried up bitch like you was stupid.

Carus head perks up. She slips a hand into a pocket.

CARUS

Not stupid.

She turns round, gun in hand.

CARUS

But terminal.

BANG

Carus shoots. Elliot is thrown back and blood splatters
everywhere. He gasps for air, holds his stomach.

Carus moves above him, gun aimed.

CARUS

You have a chance to survive, if
you obey. If not, there's a dirt
grave waiting.

ELLIOT

Arggh...What? Why?

Elliot winces with pain, his blood seeping across the floor.

CARUS

Why? I need your blood. That's why
I chose you, in that bar. Fit guy,
after a cheap fuck. Sound right?

She quickly drops down and ties his hands to some metal
hooks, then back up to the equipment. Returns with a syringe.

Elliott tries to kick Carus. She kneels on his leg and holds up the syringe in victory.

ELLIOT
(weakly)
Stupid bitch.

CARUS
Do you know about the Seri people,
their myths? I do. And as I read
them alone, ignored, getting old, I
read one about a plant. Part
cactus, part scrub, with a flower
that defies time. Got me thinking.

Elliott spits blood in her face.

Carus takes a deep breath to calm and inserts the syringe.

CARUS
I need your blood for my recipe.
And like any recipe, it needs the
best ingredients. That's you. Fit,
young, and now, I hope, full of
hormones fighting to live. Alive.

Elliott's head rolls to one side, weak - dying.

ELLIOT
You're gonna...rot in hell.

Carus keeps her focus on extracting his blood, lifts up the full vial. Content, she leans up close to Elliott's ear.

CARUS
I gonna live for five hundred
years. Plenty time to repent.

She pecks him on the cheek.

CARUS
That's for the blood, oh and the
sex. That was cool too. Just think
of who I can do next. Exciting!

Energized, she jumps up and heads to the equipment.

She opens a note book, and reads the instructions. She pushes through various clear liquids into a container, then adds various powders and plant extracts.

Once everything is mixed, she pours on the blood and stirs.

Behind, Elliott twitches, his body losing strength.

CARUS
 (to Elliot)
 Now it's the tricky bit.

Carus moves over to the cactus, and with a very fine needle, finds the throat, just below the head of the flower.

She inserts the needle and extracts a yellow liquid. Once out she stares at the extraction like it's the 'holy grail'.

She spins toward Elliot, shows him the yellow fluid.

CARUS
 This is probably the most important
 liquid on the planet. The rest...
 (points to the vessels)
 Will turbo charge it. If only the
 stupid Seri knew how.

She takes the flower extraction over and gently mixes it.

Once it's all together, she distributes it between several small bottles and quickly places all but one in a cool box.

CARUS
 I'll freeze those later, they can
 be my top up's. Who knows what goes
 down in a hundred years.

Carus laughs, then lifts up the remaining bottle - almost overcome in the moment. She knocks back the fluid then sits down on the floor next to Elliot, the gun alongside.

Elliot coughs one last time and goes limp. Carus reflects.

CARUS
 In death, new life.

She closes her eyes and meditates.

CARUS (V.O)
 (screaming)
 Noooo...

EXT. SONORAN DESERT - CARUS'S SHACK - DAY

We're back where we began, out in the desert.

Carus kneels down, her body violently shaking. She stares down at her shaking hand which rises up with the gun.

CARUS
 I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

The gun presses into her forehead, her fingers tighten.

CARUS
I can't, I can't.

She pours every ounce of her focus on the trigger. But nothing happens until--

She gasps...as the skin on her legs begins to mutate.

The texture hardens, crusts over, and turns pale like it's a wild scrub, growing in the desert.

CARUS
(to the gun)
Fire, damn it. Fire! ARRRGHH....

Both legs snap, and distort turning into gnarly branches. Her torso crusts over, and she collapses down on to her side.

Her mouth gapes in horror just it hardens into a fixed shape - a small hole resting within a timber log.

And last, her head morphs into a twisted, wooden knot - except two human eyes remain. They watch, they look. Trapped.

The desert wind blows sand onto the scrub - harsh and gritty.

The eyes blink and a tear rolls down the stump that she is.

CARUS (V.O.)
I gonna live for five hundred years. Plenty time to repent.

EXT. SONORAN DESERT - CARUS'S SHACK - DAY

A Seri GIRL (18) exits the shack, looks around. She tries to work out what's going on, where everyone is? All is quiet.

She carries the cool-box and looks inside. Finds a bottle of the magical concoction. The sun beats down.

She goes to drink it until the faint desert wind carries...

...the sound of a WOMAN sobbing.

CARUS (V.O.)
If only the stupid Seri knew how.

The girl pauses, listens, then pours it away.

She heads off into the desert, covering her eyes as she goes.