

# JUST BEFORE DAWN

**by John Selby & B Budd Smith**

What would happen if a medical doctor in Ojai loves his daughter, who's dying of cancer, so intensely that he slips into an altered state and heals her - and then can't stop himself from healing others too.

This groundbreaking Ojai tale blasts the film medium into raw mystic realms where science and spirit become entangled in a deep family drama that rushes toward a jolting but ultimately uplifting climax.

Enjoy the ride.

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FADE IN:

EXT. SECLUDED OJAI MEADOW - DAY

The whole Ojai valley can be seen down to the west. It's a perfect springtime morning.

There's a cozy but expensive Spanish-style home nestled in the East End of the valley in the Topa Topa foothills. The house sits on acreage, with a pool, barn, corral and several horses - plus a landscaped meadow.

In the meadow two large side-by-side archery targets stand side by side in front of a low wall of straw bales. Suddenly male voices speak up -

KENNY (V.O.)  
So - to the heart.

ARTHUR (V.O.)  
Oh, who knows ...

A middle-aged but still young-looking man, Dr. KENNY BANKS (handsome, healthy, with strong eyes and vulnerable smile) stands next to his psychiatrist friend ARTHUR BIGGS (36, rotund, balding, brilliant).

They're alone together in the open meadow - archery bows taut, arrows aimed toward the two targets. There's a moment of extreme tension as the two men hold breaths, then begin exhaling in unison -

They release their arrows at the exact same moment. With violent impact, the arrows converge and sink deep - into the same bulls-eye target.

Intermixed with this classic archery image, we see an extremely brief shot of an arrow plunging deep into a man's chest - then we're back to the benign twin-arrow image.

Stunned, Kenny and Arthur look at each other intently.

ARTHUR  
Jeez, you went for mine ...

KENNY  
But - I didn't -

Arthur shakes his head, confused - then looks at his watch.

ARTHUR  
Damn, late - catch ya for lunch?

EXT. CHICKEN COOP BESIDE BARN - DAY

An old hound-dog, KIERDO, stands outside the chicken coop - he barks playfully at the hens inside their secure nests.

We HEAR Arthur's car driving off.

As Kierdo turns away in frustration, he comes face to face with a wild COYOTE - eyes bright, maybe wanting to play.

Kierdo whines nervously at the coyote, barks a half-friendly challenge.

KENNY (V.O.)  
Kierdo, Kierdo!

The coyote turns and trots off into the oak trees. Kierdo watches him disappear, then bolts for the main house - running with difficulty caused by hip dysplasia.

EXT. PATH TO HOUSE [CONTINUOUS]

Kierdo runs up a wide dirt path under live oaks and sycamores, past a large well-tended vegetable garden -

Our camera POV pulls back a bit - and we realize we're watching this through twin orbs of high-power binoculars.

EXT. HOUSE GARDENS [CONTINUOUS]

Kenny is standing quietly in casual slacks and a sports shirt, looking down over the misty Ojai valley. We watch him through binoculars as Kierdo comes running up to him.

Kenny gives the aging dog a big loving bear-hug - but notices the pain Kierdo feels from his hip disease.

KENNY  
(compassionately)  
Kierdo, that hip looks hopeless  
without a miracle of some sort.

We HEAR the sound of a woman and a man talking in hushed, serious, foreign-accented voices:

WOMAN (V.O.)  
So - that is him?

MAN (V.O.)  
All seven dimensions congruent.

Another woman's voice (anxious, American - that of the doctor's wife Jenna) grabs Kenny's attention.

JENNA (V.O.)  
Kenny, did you see anything - is it  
still out there?

As Kenny turns and looks, we shift from dual-binocular screen to NORMAL SCREEN.

EXT. LARGE BACK PORCH [CONTINUOUS]

JENNA BANKS (40's, small solid body, pressurized emotions) is standing in her bathrobe on an nicely-overgrown porch.

KENNY (V.O.)  
(supportive)  
Nothing out here but old Kierdo. Must  
have been another of those vivid  
dreams of yours.

Jenna doesn't respond - she just stands there, not quite focusing on him, her eyes looking here and there nervously.

KENNY  
(concerned)  
Hey, you okay?

JENNA  
Of course I'm okay. I'm only bothered  
by that coyote.

KENNY  
If you see it again phone me, I'll be  
at the office till noon, then out  
visiting Uncle Jack - see how that  
foot's doing.

Jenna nods vaguely, goes inside the house.

Kenny hesitates, expression uncertain - then turns and walks over toward a well-preserved '56 convertible Chevy parked next to a black new BMW and an old Ford pickup.

INT. BANKS HOME [CONTINUOUS]

Jenna enters an expansive but cozy living room. Glancing out the window, she HEARS Kenny driving away.

She finds her cell phone on the coffee table and phones.

JENNA  
(breathless)  
Reverend Bairhardt - it's me ... yes,  
I realize, but please, I don't know  
... what is - I need to see you.

INT. KENNY'S CHEVY - DAY

The convertible top moves back and away, revealing brilliant blue sky and white clouds.

EXT. CREEK ROAD [CONTINUOUS]

Kenny roars down his long private driveway. As he comes to the county road his expression becomes more peaceful, he's enjoying the fresh springtime air.

He heads downhill alongside a shady fast-running stream, and turns on some music - an old '60s tune, maybe *'What A Day For A Daydream'*. His expression becomes blissful and he whistles along with the music.

As Kenny passes out of sight - a CAR comes along behind him, being discrete but following him.

EXT. COUNTY ROAD INTO OJAI [CONTINUOUS]

Kenny drives along orange and lemon groves - it's near Easter, everything's in bloom. He waves to a local farmer.

EXT. OJAI MAIN STREET [CONTINUOUS]

Kenny comes to Ojai's old-fashioned Spanish Arcade. Several LOCAL PEOPLE shout friendly greetings to him - everybody seems to know and like him.

He passes the Ojai Presbyterian Church and looks up at the stained-glass crucifixion scene - we see the sudden repeat flash of an arrow piercing the chest of a man -

Kenny hangs a left, drives on into the *Banks Medical Building* that's comfortably half-hidden by overgrown trees.

INT. DOCTOR'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

Several PATIENTS are talking, reading, gazing out at gardens and a fishpond. The office stereo is playing '60s music.

Receptionist BETTY HASSEL (late-60's, friendly but in charge) sits at her post talking to a tall striking dark-haired woman (MADRINA - 30's, vague accent, mysterious).

Kenny comes in whistling a smooth lick with the lead guitar on the waiting-room stereo - pauses to greet a couple of the patients, joking amiably.

He turns - and finds himself face to face with the young dark-haired woman. Dressed stylishly but with no make-up, Madrina has unaffected natural grace and beauty.

Kenny becomes bashful in her presence, his breathing freezes. The woman extends her hand formally. She's not smiling - her eyes take in the doctor quizzically. Then she speaks with a resonant, slightly-foreign accent.

MADRINA

(surprised)

So - you are Doctor Banks?

KENNY

That's right.

MADRINA

(slightly anxious)

My name is Madrina. Please forgive me, I am somehow surprised to find you so, well - so different. I must speak with you please - in private.

KENNY

Have you done the preliminaries?

MADRINA

Yes, of course.

Kenny regains his composure, smiles.

KENNY

So, Madrina. I'm sure everything's going to be just fine.

She inhales sharply, her eyes brightening as a sensual smile spreads across her lips.

MADRINA

(almost whispering)

Thank you - thank you.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BACK EAST, PRINCETON CAMPUS - DAY

A wet March snow is falling as SHANNON BANKS (daughter of Kenny and Jenna, 20, with startlingly brilliant eyes, naturally-deep expression but somewhat emaciated body) emerges from the castled depths of Princeton University.

She walks with determination through the snow.

EXT. PRINCETON, NASSAU STREET [CONTINUOUS]

Crossing Nassau Street into town, Shannon falters, her strength nearly gone but her expression positive.

A friend comes walking by, looks concerned.

FRIEND

Hey Shanny, how you feeling today?

SHANNON

(feigning health)

Fine thanks.

EXT. PRINCETON SIDE STREET [CONTINUOUS]

Walking along the mostly-deserted snowy street, Shannon comes face to face with a very old, mysterious-looking MAN who's standing quietly alert - as if waiting for her.

Shannon reacts, somewhat frightened by the man's presence. She almost speaks - then walks past the old man.

The old man's ancient face shows his inner excitement. He follows Shannon through the snow. She glances back nervously, sees him following - hurries her pace.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. KENNY'S PRIVATE OFFICE - DAY

Kenny is staring vaguely out a picture window at beautiful gardens. His body convulses slightly - he raises his hands to his chest.

A light rap of knuckles on his door makes him jerk. In walks Betty, bringing the ceremonial cup of morning coffee.

She puts Madrina's folder down on the desk, and speaks with a fairly strong, judgmental Scottish accent.

BETTY

She says she has no insurance, is paying in cash. Some street address in Italy - vague complaint of recurrent abdominal pain. My guess is she's Egyptian. The last name, Magdalen - or is it the Israelites who end their names that way? Oh - before I forget - Roger Maddox is back in hospital. Probably won't make it out this time. He'll be the very last of your father's old buddies.

Kenny frowns.

KENNY

What - you think Dad could have helped him?

BETTY

(cautious)

There never was any way of knowing, beforehand. Besides, old age gets us all, regardless.

She takes a couple steps toward the door, then turns.

BETTY (cont'd)

(still bothered)

That lady - spooky eyes. And the way she took your hand and held it for so long. Have you two, well, met before?

KENNY

What? No.

BETTY

Kenny, what is it, are you alright?

KENNY

(trying to joke)

Of course I'm alright - I'm the doctor, remember?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LARGE MEETING ROOM, PRINCETON - DAY

At a simple non-esoteric gathering, 20 wide-awake folk have their attention focused on a middle-aged long-haired leader named RALPH BERRINGER. A seemingly-atonal Peruvian flute is playing softly, sounding spooky to unaccustomed ears.



RALPH

Let me perhaps put this another way.  
Each and every one of us here  
represents eternity's crazy  
impassioned love affair with  
chronological time. Spirit did  
somehow individually embody its  
quantum presence quite miraculously  
within three-dimensional human form.

Shannon comes in, quietly unnoticed, sits down in the back. Her face shows she's in pain - but also able to tune in to what's happening in the room as the teacher continues spontaneously talking.

RALPH (cont'd)

The basic eternal truth for me that's  
present right now is this - we'll  
never comprehend the deeper mysteries  
of human incarnation until we realize  
right in the center of all our seven  
chakras that Mother God and Father  
God - they are profoundly organically  
in love! And which is the neutron and  
which the proton? And from whence  
cometh the attractive force that  
holds them close together, but also  
holds them forever apart?

Ralph now notices Shannon. His expression shifts, he gives her a slight nod of concerned recognition, smiles softly to her - then goes on talking to the group.

RALPH (cont'd)

The dynamic energy of human sexuality  
and celestially playful creation that  
motivates our entire being from first  
to last breath - this charge is  
nothing less than the primal raw  
expression of Holy Spirit by whatever  
name, manifesting right here right  
now. (beat) So let's look inward -  
focus on the energy, the quantum  
power of love, the eternal spiral. Do  
you feel it coursing through you with  
every breath that you welcome in and  
every breath that flows like the tide  
out ... and all those black holes and  
white holes holding such perfect  
motionless silence in between ...  
breathe on!

He falls silent and looks around the room, then holds Shannon's steady gaze, smiles to her warmly.

RALPH (cont'd)  
Shannon - we're pleased you could  
come today.

Just then the old man (LAZANTHO) enters, nods to Ralph.

Ralph's reaction to the old man is shock, then confusion -  
then an excited delighted nervousness.

LAZANTHO  
(calmly to Ralph)  
Don't let me disturb your flow.

RALPH  
(voice low, tremulous)  
Welcome, Lazantho! (beat - then to  
the group) My friends, most of the  
deep understandings I am bringing  
through anew to you have come to me  
through this man who is suddenly,  
after so many years, here in our  
presence again.

Shannon glances at the old man as Ralph continues talking.

RALPH (V.O.)  
Enough words - let's close our eyes,  
focus on the breath, the heartbeat.  
Let's set aside all traditional forms  
of understanding and just relax right  
here, right now, into the infinite  
atmospheric ocean of spiritual  
presence, gracefully indwelling ...

All eyes are now closed - except for Lazantho's, which are  
fixed again upon Shannon. She opens her eyes and sees the  
old man looking right at her.

He rises, nods for Shannon to follow - leads her outside.

EXT. PRINCETON STREET [CONTINUOUS]

Uncertain but not timid, Shannon walks alongside the old man  
silently through the snow. There's no one else in sight.

He pauses, eyes Shannon again - then smiles strangely,  
seeming to recognize her. He's spooky but not menacing.

LAZANTHO  
So - you are Shannon.

SHANNON  
My friends call me Shanny.

LAZANTHO

This moment, the snow lightly falling, fluttering to the ground, to rise again, no doubt. Who said that? But what is this - you appear ill.

SHANNON

(matter-of-fact)

Stomach cancer. Ralph's helped me - but he doesn't work miracles, not in my case at least.

LAZANTHO

(beat) You must tell me - do you see yourself dying?

SHANNON

(becoming emotional)

I keep expecting to get better, deep inside I feel ... but still, in my body I keep getting worse.

LAZANTHO

Your yourself being ill - so strange. This means you should - ah. I know someone you can go to who can help you - if this is truly what you want.

Shannon doesn't answer - she begins trembling. Lazantho takes out a pad and pen, writes something - hands her the note. She reads what he wrote - then looks up, surprised.

SHANNON

But this street address - are you playing with me? It's in Ojai - that's my home town.

LAZANTHO

Yes - and I shall perhaps join you later. Meanwhile, praises that you have been found - and my blessings, such that they are, upon you. Go now.

SHANNON

How strange. Deja vu. Is this really happening or are you just another of my weird dreams?

LAZANTHO

I now give you the energy to go catch a plane very soon - promise me.

Lazantho turns and walks away. Shannon stares after him, then looks down at the piece of paper -

INT. HALLWAY OF KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Kenny emerges from his office - sees his nurse RUTH with the tall mystery woman, Madrina, standing on the scales.

KENNY  
(formally)  
When you're ready.

He walks past them into one of the patient rooms.

INT. PATIENT ROOM [CONTINUOUS]

Closing the door behind him, Kenny exhales loudly. The room has impressionist watercolor scenes of Ojai on the walls.

The door opens - Ruth walks in, hands Kenny a clipboard with the woman's vital statistics.

RUTH  
Everything normal - that we can see.

Ruth exits and Madrina comes walking into the privacy of the examination room. She closes the door behind her. They stand staring fixedly at each other.

MADRINA  
I am sorry if I disturb you.

KENNY  
Disturb me - of course not, why should you disturb me? Have a seat - I understand you have stomach pain.

Madrina settles into a comfortable chair.

MADRINA  
Yes, I have had pains on and off, right here.

She places a hand lightly over her left abdomen.

MADRINA (cont'd)  
I am hoping perhaps, that you can help me to heal.

KENNY  
I'll do my best.

MADRINA  
(suddenly intimate)  
I must say to you, what a great relief it is to finally find you.

KENNY

I've been right here, fifteen years  
and counting.

MADRINA

(confused)

No, I mean - oh, this is so  
difficult. Perhaps I should  
not have come at all.

KENNY

If you have pain, it's important to  
have it checked out.

MADRINA

Yes, well ...

KENNY

So when did you first feel the pain?

MADRINA

Months ago I noticed something inside  
me - it has not become better. I need  
the right person, someone like you,  
to touch me - to heal me.

KENNY

(defensively)

Hold on now - doctors aren't healers.  
We're here to do what we can, but  
it's of course your own body that  
does the healing.

She stares at him blankly, as if what he's said doesn't  
quite make sense to her. He turns away a moment, clears his  
throat - then faces her again.

KENNY (cont'd)

Tell me, where are you from, I mean  
originally?

MADRINA

Oh, my father, he was a mix of  
American Indian and Irish. My mother  
was Hawaiian and Chinese.

KENNY

Ah. Quite the genes. So then, about  
your pain.

MADRINA

Yes - perhaps you can feel me, tell  
me what it is.