

BLISS TWIST

Written by

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EXT. SECLUDED ROAD, SANTA BARBARA - LATE AFTERNOON

A well-preserved pickup comes driving along an exclusive back road, radio blaring Tex-Mex rap music. A magnetic sign on the pickup says "*Homes & Guitars - made to order*".

The lone driver, JOE RAMIREZ (early 30's, third-generation Santa Barbara latino, free-lance artisan) is enjoying life, singing along with the upbeat song.

EXT. COUNTRY ESTATE GATE - CONTINUOUS

Joe pulls up outside a 20-acre country ESTATE fronted by a serious metal gate and high-security wall. Noticing a security video camera, Joe makes a face playfully, then pushes the gate buzzer.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
(from speaker)
Please identify yourself.

JOE
Carpenter, here to fix some window.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
Drive in and stop by the first house.

JOE
(not seriously)
Yes Ma'am.

The gate opens, Joe drives his pickup through.

EXT. LONG DRIVEWAY TO BUILDINGS - CONTINUOUS

Joe drives along a winding driveway through a private oak forest until he comes to a small caretaker's house.

A young woman, THAKA KUNG (around 25, from Myanmar, athletic and naturally beautiful) comes walking toward him. He stops his pickup, eyes her appreciatively. She halts and they stare at each other a moment, lost in each other's gaze.

JOE
Uhm ...

THAKA
(foreign accent)
Yes, well - the broken window. Martin phoned for you.

JOE
I don't think I've met you before,
what's your name?

THAKA
(hiding emotions)
This does not matter.

JOE
Maybe to me it does.

THAKA
(dismissive)
Drive around the main house to where
you see a barn and a new building.

JOE
Hey, I'm the carpenter who built that
building last year. Joe, Joe Ramirez.
And you?

THAKA
This is not a social visit - you are
to do your work and leave the
premises promptly.

JOE
(still friendly)
Pues - any chance of setting up a
social visit, maybe go down to the
beach, watch the sunset - you surf?

THAKA
(standing firm)
Go do your work.

Joe holds her gaze honestly a moment.

JOE
I don't know why, but you just
totally knock me off my feet.

THAKA
(feisty)
Perhaps I will do just that if you do
not perform your duty promptly.

JOE
(not giving up)
So where's your accent from?

THAKA
Go!

Joe laughs softly in a friendly way into her defensive scowl, then he shrugs and drives on up toward the main house.

INT. LAB OFFICE IN BACK BUILDING - DAY

A man in his late-30's, MARTIN HARPE (a thin brilliant work-consumed bioengineer) is busy at his computer.

He glances out through a large window frame - the glass has been mostly broken out, with shards still lying here and there on the floor. He sees -

EXT. PRIVATE ZOO - ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

Across from the lab, beside the barn, is a 2-acre high-fenced private PETTING ZOO, with all sorts of ANIMALS living peacefully together - including predators alongside their usual prey.

In among the animals is a psychiatrist, GUDRUN HARPE (early 30's, the nervous, fast-moving wife of Martin).

Gudrun is enjoyably feeding and petting the various animals. There are usually-dangerous ones alongside usually-timid ones, all of whom seem placid, entirely without fear or aggression.

EXT. BARN AND LAB BUILDING - PARKING SPACE

Joe drives slowly up in his pickup, parks, gets out. Noticing the unusually large petting zoo, he walks in its direction.

As Joe stands looking at the placid animals, Gudrun looks up and sees him - they stare at each other.

JOE

What's with all those animals, hey?
Are they on tranquilizers or
something?

GUDRUN

Oh, well - yes, sort of.

JOE

That legal?

Gudrun walks over to the wire fence to talk with the carpenter.

GUDRUN

We're fully licensed. So was traffic especially congested, coming out here today?

JOE

(frowning)

Don't get me started on that. This is my home town and it's been overrun by the invading masses with their new money - they just come in and bully their way into the best places - we mourn the long lost spirit of the harbor. Lastima mucho.

GUDRUN

Oh. Well said. Good. And of course if you do the eco logic - and I suspect from your expression you're someone who has - when you do the math and look for the root cause, and identify the best cure for overpopulation and rampant inequality and all the rest - what do you come up with? What really must change deep down if we humans aren't going to be remembered as the rapers and pillagers of the earth?

JOE

(appreciative)

Now listen to you - and yeah, it's obvious. We're all of us packing this universal sex drive, this raw mating instinct, this biological wanna-fuck hunger that just keeps them babies coming. But you know, I'm not at all ready to give up my sex drive, so I'm at a loss - what to do? So por que no, I come out here and I help you fix something. La vida. Life goes on.

Joe stops talking, cocks his head and just stares at Gudrun a moment.

JOE (cont'd)

(uncertain)

Hey, don't I maybe know you from around somewhere?

Gudrun stares back at him a moment.

GUDRUN

Uhm - well - wait ...

JOE
 It's how you talk, how you're just
 prettily standing there, and the
 slightly curious tone of your voice,
 your, well, your everything - pues, I
 might even know your name - Gudrun?

GUDRUN
 (realizing)
 Oh my God - Joe!

Martin walks outside his office, comes up beside Joe.

MARTIN
 (gruff to Joe)
 You the carpenter I called for?

JOE
 At your service.

GUDRUN
 (to Martin)
 Martin, this is an old friend of
 mine. I can't believe it - Joe!

Joe points to the broken window.

JOE
 That the urgent problem?

MARTIN
 Bonus if you can fix it right away.

JOE
 Pues - bit of plastic tonight, new
 glass tomorrow. But how the hell did
 that thing explode out like that?
 Somebody throw a brick?

Martin looks guiltily at Gudrun - Joe watches them, then
 turns his head and sees -

Thaka, standing off in the distance under a tree, staring
 intently right at him.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON, WHITE HOUSE - DAY

As the sun sets, from above we observe the snarl of human
 activity in downtown Washington DC. And - there's the White
 House, squatting just beyond the non-stop buzz of traffic.

INT. WHITE HOUSE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

OLIVER GETTY (in his 50's, trim, with a flustered, sleepless look) walks fast along a corridor trailing an AIDE.

OLIVER
I'm here with that Jackson update,
he's expecting me.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The PRESIDENT (60's, very smart, just slightly overwhelmed) is talking with several people. Oliver enters the room. The President sees the obvious stress on Oliver's face, and with a finger motion sends everyone in the room out.

PRESIDENT
Ollie, you're not looking good.

OLIVER
Yeah. Preliminary report just came in. I'll have more in an hour - but there have been at least 700 people hospitalized with an unclassified virus in five cities - Zurich, Cairo, Karachi, New Delhi and Perth. It's one hell of a gnarly flu.

PRESIDENT
(focused elsewhere)
So what - give them flu shots.

OLIVER
(forceful)
Listen to me. First-phase is nausea, fever, mental confusion, swelling of genitals, total loss of motivation, inability to concentrate -

PRESIDENT
Sounds like half my staff.

OLIVER
Can I talk freely?

PRESIDENT
Hold on.

The President goes over to his desk, flips a switch, nods for Oliver to go on.

OLIVER

Okay then - just possibly this rogue virus might be related to that damn SILENS situation you inherited before I came on board - you remember, that super-classified bio-defense project you ordered shut down.

PRESIDENT

(remembering)

Uhm - but that research, it was specifically intended to develop antibodies for computer-projected variants, not -

OLIVER

(interrupting)

Whatever - my team's initial computer matchings show possible similar DNA fingerprints. Hopefully no one outside my team, without our files, can detect this. Of course we blasted all those HARPE files but it's so damn similar and listen - there's a high possibility of long-term neurological damage to the amygdala, the sex drive and so forth. We just don't know yet, it's all comp spec.

PRESIDENT

Yeah but - shit.

OLIVER

That's why I'm here an hour early and out of breath. Something smells foul here, beyond the pandemic stats. We must locate the creator immediately.

PRESIDENT

You're sure we're dealing with something from a lab, not a Labrador?

OLIVER (cont'd)

That's the good news because, if we can quickly identify the source, an antidote will be a hell of a lot faster to come up with.

PRESIDENT

And the bad news?

OLIVER

Whoever's spreading this - what's their motive, what's coming at us?

The President exhales loudly - eyes Oliver.

PRESIDENT

So do you see a terrorist move in all this?

Oliver shakes his head negative.

OLIVER

No. The target locations involved, they're basically random - this is almost certainly a nonaligned airborne contagion, possibly some ignorant infected tourist. It's not yet been detected anywhere in the States.

PRESIDENT

(shaken)

So okay then, what's your plan, Ollie - you've always been the guy with the plan.

OLIVER

There's only a few scientists who could finesse this. Find the guy who made it and we've found the guy who can clean it up. I've got my short list.

The President looks at his watch, frowns, leads Oliver to the door.

PRESIDENT

I have a dozen hot spots - crazier and crazier - pissing on local fires while the world flames. What's the solution, Ollie - you find me that and you're golden. So yeah, move fast on this, keep a total gag - just you, your team and me. If this virus is on the loose because of our own research, we're in for serious trouble.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HARPE PHARMACEUTICAL HEADQUARTERS - NY - NIGHT

In early evening we see a large office complex with plenty of security.

INT. EXECUTIVE OFFICE SUITE - CONTINUOUS

ANGELA FORENZE (late 30's, hot-shot bio-engineer and CEO of HARPE Pharmaceutical Labs) is working alone at her computer. She's sharp-looking, tough and dedicated.

Her phone rings, she answers.

ANGELA
Angela here.

INT. MARTIN'S LAB OFFICE - SANTA BARBARA

Martin, nervous and hungry-looking as always, is pacing in front of a bank of computer screens. We vaguely see the large broken window behind him, and Joe busy at work.

CROSSCUT -

MARTIN
Don't hang up. It's me.

Angela is stunned.

ANGELA
My God. Martin. I thought you were long gone from the earth - two years! I can hardly breathe.

MARTIN
Please. I know it's been strange. It's been hard but it's been good. I'm back and I'm balanced. We need to talk, Angela - so I'm pushing through and phoning.

ANGELA
(angry now)
Marty. You really have some nerve.

MARTIN
I know. I left you and HARPE hanging. It was pure love, Angela. You gotta understand. And I was going stark crazy working for my brother - it was just too much, not my thing. Then Gudrun, she woke me up. We were in a perfect flow, over to Myanmar - I found something that's luckily still with me, if only barely -

He runs out of words and she also just sits silently.

MARTIN (cont'd)
Then, well, bad things happened.
Crazy ass-holes with machine guns.
But even that is past - and it woke
us up to what we feel called to do.
And now we've mostly done it.

ANGELA
Oh? And do I dare ask what that is?

MARTIN
I'll tell you in person - we'll need
your help for the final phase, you
and HARPE, and with or without my
brother.

ANGELA
Martin - I'm not hardly processing
what you're saying. You sound so -
changed. And damn you, I have my side
too. We've needed you here almost
desperately for two long years. This
company is failing because you left -
we ran on your brain and your brain
suddenly disengaged entirely from our
team.

MARTIN
Yeah. I was a complete shit.

ANGELA
But okay, I've also let go. I've had
to - Russell has been fucking weird
lately. So tell me, what's up?

MARTIN
Please, you must just trust me if you
can. I'm feeling entirely solid on
this - it's our common root passion,
you, me, Gudrun, Russell - and we're
just now ready to act. Russell has
been funding us since we returned.
Totally classified of course but now
I need to bring you in.

ANGELA
So - are you in town? We should meet,
perhaps right now.

MARTIN
I'm out west, at my grandfather's old
place. I'm flying to New York in two,
three days, four at most. Please,
don't tell Russell I called.

(MORE)

MARTIN (cont'd)
This must remain between you and me
until details get lined up.

Angela still looks stunned.

ANGELA
Martin, Martin. The same Jack of
Hearts. You and your hot charge.
You're an entirely unique creature,
you know that - giant brain and
testicles to match. I admit, it feels
so very good to reconnect with you.

MARTIN
Yeah. Been a crazy flow and this now
is the fulfillment, for us all. But
do keep Russ entirely out of our loop
for now, can you promise me?

Angela sighs, shakes her head, gives in - and her slightly-
southern accent comes to the fore.

ANGELA
I'm a fool. I weaken. You always do
this to me you know. I thought we
were partners - then you were gone.
Sounds like some dumb country-western
song, don't it? But your voice - it
wakes up something. So alright. I
need you too. Come and talk to me.

MARTIN
You know I love you in my own
particular way. Do stay mum.

END CROSSCUT -

The line goes dead - Angela hangs up - stares at the phone.

She's jolted by a sound, turns and looks through the open
door of her office.

A man, RUSSELL HARPE (early 40's, owner of the company,
athletic and dominant) passes by Angela's door. He sees
Angela - enters her office suite.

RUSSELL
You're working late.

ANGELA
(totally jolted)
Russell! I thought you were still
down in Rio. So how did the funders
treat you?

Russell is now standing looking out her picture window at an overly-crowded street below.

RUSSELL

(bothered)

Look at all that - people people everywhere! You should see Rio, it needs an extermination crew. Same everywhere - too many people, and everyone at each other's throats.

ANGELA

Yes, Russell - that's your pet peeve but there's nothing to change it except for a meteor hitting us.

Russell walks over to her desk.

RUSSELL

I know. But something's got to give. So plug me in, how's our financials holding up?

ANGELA

Well dammit, we're right on the edge. Sometimes I think you're running this company into the ground on purpose. Ever since Martin left, you've been -

RUSSELL

(interrupting)

Angela, I function on many levels, not all of them visible. You have your job to do while I'm working on something beyond you. Have faith. And right now I'm in and out, I need to be in Los Angeles tomorrow morning.

ANGELA

And you're still flying the plane yourself? I strongly dislike you taking that unnecessary risk.

MARTIN

Don't deny me - I like the rush.

ANGELA

So tell me - did you get a signature on your mystery deal? I so hate it when you leave me in the dark, you've depleted our capital like crazy and given me zero indication of where that money has gone.