

Grip of Bliss

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-Draft 2-

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY – DAY

A dented, white Lincoln Continental speeds down the highway.

SUPER:

"Somewhere in Southern California..."

Driving the Lincoln, JESSE GECKO (30'S) blonde pushed back hair, black Wayfarer sunglasses, brown cowboy boots, faded blue jeans and a red Hawaiian tee over a dingy-white wife beater.

A static version of "Iko-Iko" is playing on the radio.

Gecko recovers a prescription bottle of WHITE PILLS from his shirt pocket. He opens the lid and pops a pill in his mouth. Taking a beer bottle from between his legs, he washes it down.

With his sunglasses on the rim of his nose, he peers into the rear-view mirror. In the back seat, Gecko's SUITCASE: It's vintage and beat up with stickers. One sticker says, "Tomorrow."

Gecko grins, pushing his sunglasses over his eyes. He turns up the radio, swigs his beer and stomps on the gas pedal.

The Lincoln Continental swerves to the center of the highway, racing under the clear skyline and the blazing sun. Gecko drives past a road sign that says, "Last stop for gas for 100 miles."

EXT. GAS STATION – DAY

A run-down gas station stands in the middle of nowhere. Gecko pulls into the gas station, adjusting the dial on his radio.

DENNY RHODES (RADIO)

How goes it out there, sunny California?
This is Denny Rhodes, on 101.9 The Pulp.
I'm sittin' here with Dr. Alexander Fink,
talking about his new best-selling novel,
"Thought After Death." How are yah, Doctor?

ALEXANDER FINK (RADIO)

Glad to be here, Denny.

Gecko pulls up to the gas pump. He puts the car in park.

DENNY RHODES (RADIO)

We're glad to have yah, Doc. So tell us
about your new book.

ALEXANDER FINK (RADIO)

Well, it's a speculative piece about
brain activity that occurs after we die.

Tossing his beer bottle to the foot of the passenger seat, Gecko regards the driver-side mirror. In the reflection, a black sedan speeds toward the gas station. Gecko leans down alarmed.

GECKO

ssShit!

ALEXANDER FINK (RADIO/CONT'D)

Recent studies have shown that even
after the body is pronounced dead, the
brain can still function. Sometimes for
periods as long as 10 minutes.

DENNY RHODES (RADIO)

10 minutes? That's a freakin' long time!

Gecko studies the mirror as the black sedan zooms past the gas station. He pops up watching the car fade into the distance.

ALEXANDER FINK (RADIO)

Yes it is, Denny. And imagine how long 10
minutes might seem to the subconscious.

DENNY RHODES (RADIO)

And there you have it, folks. "Thought
After Death" by Dr. Alexander Fink. Pick
up a copy for yourself at your local-

SERIES OF SHOTS

1. Gecko turns off the ignition.
2. He pops a White Pill.
3. He recovers a 1911 HANDGUN from the glove box.
4. Slamming the car door, he stuffs the gun in his pants.
5. Climbing in the back seat, he recovers The Suitcase.
6. Gecko approaches the convenience store nonchalantly.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE — DAY

WET CLERK (40'S) an obese slob, sweaty, wearing open coveralls exposing a wet, hairy chest. He lounges back behind the counter, reading a gun magazine. Wet Clerk nods up to DOOR CHIME SOUNDS...

Gecko enters, lowering his sunglasses he approaches the counter.

GECKO
 I'll take 80 on one, friend.
 (Stacks dollars on counter)
 How far to the Mexican border?

WET CLERK
 (Tendering/Regards Gecko's
 Suitcase)
 A ways. Not far now.

GECKO
 (Smirks) Ya'll got a bathroom?

Wet Clerk grabs a bathroom key that's attached to a RUBBER CHICKEN from the wall. He casually tosses the key to Gecko.

WET CLERK
 Sink don't work. But the toilet flushes.

GECKO
 (Strolling toward exit)
 My luck's a' changin' every day.

INT. BATHROOM — DAY

Gecko leans over the urinal, whistling. His hand is squashing the rubber chicken against the grimy bathroom wall.

His melody slows at DOOR SOUNDS and approaching FOOTSTEP SOUNDS. He doesn't turn. Gecko keeps whistling and zips up his pants.

A handgun barrel is pressed against the back of Gecko's head and he stops whistling abruptly. Gecko peeks over his shoulder..

GOLD GOON (40's) with a gold front tooth, brown khakis, black loafers, a loose button-up tee and a tan mesh fedora. He stands grinning behind Gecko, holding a handgun to his head.

STACHE GOON (30'S) Thin mustache, sweaty comb-over, a striped polo and prescription glasses with the tinted lenses turned up. He stands guard at the door with his hand on a gun in his pants.

GOLD GOON
 Hi-Yah, Gecko! Cómo estás?

GECKO
 (Hands up with rubber chicken)
 It's a hot day in hell.

GOLD GOON

Guess that's how it goes... Steal from
Anatolie and hell comes lookin' for yah.
(Starts Frisking Gecko)

GECKO

You came all the way out here to tell me
that?

GOLD GOON

(Uncovers White Pills and 1911)
Hey, nice piece! ...
(Reads label on White Pills)
Ascendapromazine?

GECKO

Yeah... I see things sometimes.

GOLD GOON

Always knew you were a head-case, Gecko.
(Regards Suitcase on the floor)
Hmm. Now I wonder what that could be.

Gold Goon opens the suitcase revealing stacks of \$100 bills.

GECKO

Come on, fellas. Is 30 grand really
worth Anatolie's trouble?

GOLD GOON

(Puts hand over the money)
Oh it aint the money, it's the principle.

Gecko kicks the suitcase shut, smashing it on Gold Goon's
fingers. Gold Goon shouts. Gecko slaps the 1911 out of his hands
with the rubber chicken and the handgun slides across the floor.

Stache Goon draws his pistol, fires and misses as Gecko dives
for the 1911. Sliding across the floor, Gecko grabs the handgun.
He shoots Stache Goon in the head and blood splats on the wall.

Gold Goon lifts his pistol, fires and the bullet hits the stall
near Gecko. Gecko shells rounds into Gold Goon and his body
slacks, opening the suitcase. Gold Goon bleeds over the money.

Scrambling up, Gecko pulls the suitcase from under Gold Goon's
body and forces it shut. Gecko spills bloody money all over the
bathroom as he frantically recovers his White Pills and exits.

EXT. GAS STATION — (CONT'D)

Ramming out of the bathroom, Gecko staggers across the lot with the Suitcase. The black sedan is parked behind Gecko's Lincoln. Wet Clerk storms out of the convenience store holding a shotgun.

WET CLERK

Don't move, yah bastard!

Gecko stops several paces ahead with his back facing Wet Clerk.

WET CLERK

Care to tell me what the hells goin' on?

GECKO

(Looks back to Wet Clerk)

Your bathroom's out of order.

WET CLERK

You son of a bitch!

(Pumps shotgun)

Gecko breaks for the Lincoln. Wet Clerk shells rounds, barely missing. Gecko Slides over the hood of the Lincoln, taking cover behind the car. Wet Clerk fires into the passenger door.

GECKO

Awe, watch the car!

Popping up, leaning on the hood of the Lincoln, Gecko unloads his clip rapidly. Wet Clerk scrambles aside, ducking for cover.

Gecko hurries into the Lincoln, tossing the Suitcase into the passenger seat. He fires up the engine and speeds off. The tender screen on the gas pump says, "Gas remaining: \$ 80.00."

Wet Clerk rambles vexed, chasing into the street. The Lincoln speeds toward the horizon with \$100 bills flying out the window.

SUPER:

"Grip of Bliss"

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY — DAY

Driving at ease, Gecko swigs a beer. He looks at the Suitcase that sits in the passenger seat. Gecko tosses the empty beer bottle over his shoulder and gasses forward.

The Lincoln travels down the center of the highway...

Gecko peers ahead curiously... Sitting on a satchel of coconuts, ANGELICA (20'S) A smokin' Señorita in an embroidered dress. She sits on the side of the road with her thumb to the highway.

Racing past Angelica, Gecko checks the mirror. He winces, seeing that no one's there. Shaking his head, rattled, Gecko cracks a beer. He pops a White Pill and washes it down.

Gecko is fixed on the mirror. He jolts forward to PUT-PUT SOUNDS from the engine. He looks at the gas gauge. It's on empty.

GECKO

No, no, not now, baby!

Gecko pulls off to the side of the road as the Lincoln dies.

Slamming the door, Gecko storms to the front of the car. He pops the hood and a smoke cloud bellows up. Gecko coughs, waving away the smoke. The engine is shot. He peers down the barren highway.

Gecko recovers a map from the glove box. He closes the hood of the car, spreading the map on top. He finds the highway on the map. Dragging his finger across the desert, he stops on Mexico.

Gecko gazes out at the vast desert ahead.

SERIES OF SHOTS

1. Gecko pulls the Suitcase from the passenger seat.
2. Shutting the door, he jams a new clip in the 1911.
3. He leaves the car with his suitcase and a six-pack of beer.
4. Looking back to the Lincoln, he blows her a kiss.
5. Gecko strolls out into the desert under the blazing sun.

EXT. THE DESERT — DAY (BEGIN MONTAGE)

Gecko lugs the Suitcase through the dry brush and the desert flowers. He marches past rows of cacti, beginning to sweat.

The sun shines ominously above the clear blue sky...

Setting down the Suitcase, Gecko stops near some rocks. He's out of breath. Dripping with sweat, he opens a beer and chugs it.

Gecko looks ahead to a cluster of cacti. He winces, baffled... One of the cacti seems to be walking across the horizon.

Dumping a pill into his hand, Gecko pops it into his mouth. He finishes his beer, tossing it aside. He picks up the Suitcase.

Gecko's traveling figure is made a mirage by the heat..

A trail of empty beer bottles are scattered along Gecko's path. The Suitcase hangs loosely in his arm as he carries on.

A RUSTLING SOUND is heard nearby and Gecko turns around sharply.. A cactus shuffles aside, hiding behind another cactus.

Gecko faces forward startled. He dumps two pills into his hand, popping them into his mouth.

Moving along, Gecko is silhouetted by the afternoon sun..

Gecko's cowboy boots stagger forward, kicking up dust. He huffs winded, traveling with a hunching gait.

HISPANIC VOICE (O.S.)
Cómo estás?

Gecko whips toward the voice sluggishly. He peers down an offset row of cacti that mirage into the horizon. All is still.

He dumps three pills into his hand and pops them into his mouth. Gecko chews the pills, twitching, with bloodshot eyes.

Gecko drags the Suitcase along in the dirt. He sways wobbly. His head bobs side to side and his eyes are rolling back.

His vision has become like a mirage..

HISPANIC VOICES (O.S.)
(Whistling/Cheering)
Arriba, Arriba! Epa, Epa!

Dragging the Suitcase toward a cactus, Gecko sits down. Leaning his back on the cactus, Gecko rests the Suitcase under his arm. In a huffing daze, Gecko's head droops. He closes his eyes.

EXT. DESERT — SUNSET (END MONTAGE)

Gecko stirs awake to CRACKLING EMBER SOUNDS. He's slouched against the cactus, hugging the Suitcase. Gecko nods up to..

CACTUS MAN, green skin, thorny limbed, in a poncho and sombrero. He cooks eggs and chili-peppers in a skillet over a campfire.

CACTUS MAN

Hola, amigo.

Wide eyed, Gecko recovers his pills. He dumps the bottle over his hand. Nothing comes out. He peers in the bottle. It's empty.

GECKO

And boom goes the dynamite.
(Tosses the bottle aside)

CACTUS MAN

I think so. You're wanting to cross the border, but the desert is no place for a man. You'd be safer with Anatolie, no?
(Chuckles/Flipping eggs)
Would you like an omelet, Señor Gecko?

GECKO

How come you know so much about me?
... Let me rephrase, how come you're a cactus?

CACTUS MAN

Why does the rooster know to crow at the dawn?

GECKO

(Looks aside)
Dude's got riddles.

CACTUS MAN

(Regards Gecko's suitcase)
It's a long way to Mexico... You'll never make it with all this luggage. You must travel lighter eh?

GECKO

Ha, if wishes were bus tickets, beggars would ride. Anyway, it's not exactly like I'm luggin' around my dirty undies. This Suitcase is opportunity... it's freedom.

CACTUS MAN

It's only luggage, Señor. The more you put into it, the more it will weigh you down... This is freedom.
(Nods up to the sky)
The desert. The campfire. The omelet.

Cactus Man extends the skillet, dumping the omelet into Gecko's hands. Gecko examines the omelet suspiciously.

CACTUS MAN

Don't let your eggs get cold, amigo.

Gecko hesitates. He bites into the omelet.

EXT. OASIS – MORNING

Gecko wakes up in the shade, he's lying on his back. He looks up to palm trees swaying in the breeze. There are CHILDREN PLAYING SOUNDS nearby. He sits up, looking out to a tropical oasis.

He rests before the water, under a drooping palm tree. Beyond the water pool, there's a vast, tropical forest. Gecko notices a water jug at his side. He brings the water jug to his dry lips.

A zooming soccer ball hits Gecko in the face, splashing water everywhere. He shouts in pain, turning sharply to...

THE KIDS, PABLO & LUNA (8-10) two Hispanic children, brother and sister, wearing shorts and tank tops without shoes on. They come rushing toward Gecko playfully.

PABLO

(Smiles) Sorry, Señor!

GECKO

(Taking the soccer ball)

Go play in traffic yah little Chihuahua's.

Gecko lobs the soccer ball high over the children's heads and it bounces out into the distance. The Kids chase after it laughing. Gecko turns up the water jug, drinking from it voraciously.

MARTÍN

You're awake.

MARTÍN (50'S) a heavysset Mexican, epic mustache, wearing a cotton tank top, sandals and a wicker hat. He approaches Gecko pleasantly, carrying a burlap satchel of coconuts.

GECKO

Where am I?

MARTÍN

Paradise, my friend.

Gecko looks out at the water as Angelica emerges slowly onto the shore. She's dripping wet in a bikini. She rings out her hair.

GECKO

(Smitten)

You can say that again...

MARTÍN

(Waving)

Angelica!

Angelica waves at Gecko and Martín. Gecko is fixed on Angelica as she approaches. Martín regards the 1911 that protrudes from Gecko's pants. Martín turns smiling at Angelica as she nears.

ANGELICA

Hello father,

(To Gecko)

So you're finally awake, huh? You must be hungry.

GECKO

(To Angelica's chest)

Coconuts...

ANGELICA

(Laughs a bit)

I'll take that as a yes.

Angelica helps Gecko to his feet. Martín turns out to The Kids.

MARTÍN

Pablo, Luna, Andale!

EXT. CAMPSITE — MORNING

Two SUNDOME TENTS are set up near the water pool, under a canopy of palm trees. The Kids play nearby as Martín, Angelica and Gecko partake in a smorgasbord of coconuts on the grassy shore.

ANGELICA

Maybe I should take you to the Casino, Mr. Gecko. You must be the luckiest man on the planet.

GECKO

(Face in a coconut)

I'm kinda like a rabbit's foot.

MARTÍN

Must be true. If we hadn't found you
when we did, you'd probably be dead.

GECKO

(Slurp) Yeah, proolly.

ANGELICA

What were you doing out in the desert?

GECKO

I was headed for Mexico... I'm on vacation.

ANGELICA

I think maybe you took a wrong turn.
(Angelica and Martín Chuckle)
My father sells coconuts in Tijuana.
We've been coming here for years, this
Oasis has the best coconuts in the world.
Sure, we have to cross the border to get
them... but no one ever comes out here. I
guess you could say we are on vacation too.

GECKO

(Licking fingers) Guess so.

ANGELICA

We can take you to the border if you
like? Mexico is just beyond this forest.

GECKO

(Stops eating)

I had a Suitcase with me...

MARTÍN

Ah, Pablo!

PABLO

(Rushing over/Eager)

Sí Papa?

MARTÍN

Take Señor Gecko to go see his luggage.

(Gecko rolls his eyes)

Proolly just your dirty undies, no?

(Laughing)

As Gecko gets up to follow Pablo, Martín pats his back.

INT. MARTÍN'S TENT — MORNING

Pablo leads Gecko into the tent, pointing to The Suitcase. It rests on the floor, leaning against a stash of burlap coconut sacks. Hunching under the tent, Gecko approaches the Suitcase.

GECKO

Grassy-ass Pepe.

Pablo scampers off. Kneeling down, Gecko checks his shoulder and opens the Suitcase. The bloody money is neatly stacked inside. Gecko grins. He turns sharply to see Martín standing behind him.

MARTÍN

That's no dirty laundry, Señor.

GECKO

... No Martín, it's not.

MARTÍN

(Becoming stern)

I don't care who you are, or what you've done. If you bring any harm to my family, I will strangle you with my bare hands.

GECKO

(Closing the Suitcase)

Fair enough.

EXT. CAMPSITE — MORNING

Gecko and Martín exit the tent. Gecko is carrying his Suitcase. Martín calls out to The Kids.

MARTÍN

(Clapping hands)

Pablo, Luna, Epa, Epa!

Pablo and Luna rush to Martín as he lifts his coconut satchel. Angelica smiles approaching Gecko. She puts on her hiking-pack.

ANGELICA

I hope you saved your strength, Mr. Gecko. The border is a long way still.

GECKO

(Smirking)

Just keep the coconuts coming, darlin'.

EXT. TROPICAL FOREST - DAY (MONTAGE)

The travelers hike down a lush, rocky trail, ascending into a canyon with flowing water. Martín pulls a rickshaw filled with coconut sacks across the stream at the canyon floor.

Walking in the shade of towering palm trees, Angelica looks up at falling dew. Gecko holds his Suitcase over his head.

Moving past the lush vegetation, The Kids are kicking around the soccer ball, heading downstream.

Angelica helps Martín move the rickshaw up the canyon. She nearly slips, spilling a coconut down the slope. Gecko steps up returning the coconut. He smirks helping her push.

EXT. FOOTHILL CLEARING - SUNSET (END MONTAGE)

Reaching the top of the canyon, the travelers look down to a clearing where the sun is setting over the dry valley. On the horizon, the sun silhouettes city formations.

ANGELICA

Look how beautiful... The border is on the horizon. Tomorrow, you will finally be ready to start your vacation.

EXT. CAMPSITE/FOOTHILLS - NIGHT

A campfire has been built near Martín's tent. He sits on a log, singing and playing an acoustic guitar for The Kids.

Nearby, Gecko and Angelica sit on a hill before Angelica's tent. They relax before a second, more intimate, campfire.

ANGELICA

So, Mr. Gecko, what is your real name?

GECKO

... It's Jesse.

ANGELICA

Jesse. I think I prefer this.
(Laughs)

Angelica stares sincerely at Gecko. He slowly leans in and kisses her. She responds and they embrace vigorously. Gecko lays Angelica down before the crackling fire.

INT. ANGELICA'S TENT – MORNING

Gecko tosses awake beside Angelica. He gets up, moving to exit the tent. Gecko looks to Angelica and his Suitcase.

EXT. BOULDER HILL – MORNING

Gecko hikes up a boulder hill, he sits on a stone slab, gazing at Mexico on the horizon. Gecko's eyes shift aside... Cactus Man is sitting on the stone beside him.

GECKO

... Clear sky this morning.

CACTUS MAN

Clear sky at morning, traveler take warning.

GECKO

Again with the riddles.

CACTUS MAN

We all have our roles to play, but yours is the more difficult I think...

GECKO

Can't complain.

CACTUS MAN

Ah, but the journey's not over, Amigo. Or did you really think you could have them both?

(Gecko lowers his eyes)

Now, you must choose.

INT. ANGELICA'S TENT – MORNING

Angelica rouses to RUSTLING SOUNDS, she sits up drowsily.

ANGELICA

Jesse? It's too early for this.

Enter ANATOLIE (40's) Tan, black hair, thin-lined mustache, white laced button-up, white fedora. He ducks in, tipping his hat, smiling courtly, accompanied by GOON 1 and GOON 2.

ANATOLIE

Good morning Señorita.

EXT. DRY VALLEY - MORNING

The Goons throw Angelica to the dusty ground beside Martín and The Kids, pointing sub-machine guns at them. Anatolie sets Gecko's Suitcase on the ground opening it up.

ANATOLIE

(Looking to the money)

Now, where is Jesse Gecko?

Angelica, Martín and The Kids look at Anatolie dreadfully. Goon 1 gazes out past Anatolie.

GOON 1

Boss...

Anatolie turns around, rising... Gecko walks slowly from the palm trees, with his sunglasses on the rim of his nose.

ANATOLIE

(Chuckles)

I didn't think you'd show.

GECKO

How did you find me, Anatolie?

ANATOLIE

Wasn't easy... So what's your move?

GECKO

I came here to kick ass and eat coconuts...
and I'm all outta coconuts.

Gecko draws his 1911 and fires. Goon 1 is shot in the chest. The goon unloads his machine gun into the air as he falls dead.

Anatolie drops to a knee drawing his pistol. Goon 2 steps up, pointing his machine gun. Together they shell rounds wildly.

Gecko shoots, sidestepping. He takes a bullet in the arm and sprints forward. Evading bullet spray he rolls behind a boulder.

Holding his arm, Gecko snarls as bullets shower over the boulder. He leans into the open and returns fire.

The shots hit the dirt near Anatolie and Goon 2 paces forward, firing controlled bursts. Anatolie suddenly grabs the Suitcase. Closing it shut he scampers off, fleeing for the palm trees.

Gecko springs up from behind the boulder, shelling rounds. Goon 2 is jocked full of bullet holes and falls dead onto his back.

Jolting aside, Gecko fires at Anatolie as he vanishes into the wilderness. Staggering up, Gecko barrels after Anatolie, chasing toward the palm trees.

ANGELICA (O.S.)

Jesse!

Gecko stops, turning back... Angelica is standing sincerely. Martín is huddled over the kids on the ground behind her.

ANGELICA

(Apprehensive)

The border is on the horizon.

Gecko breathes heavily. He looks to Martín and The Kids. He looks to Angelica. She's staring solemnly back at him.

He gazes out to the palm trees steadily. Gecko looks over his shoulder to Angelica.

GECKO

(Grim smile)

Ah, it's only luggage.

Dropping the 1911, he stumbles toward Angelica. Gecko extends his arm as blood drips from his fingertips. He takes her hand...

EXT. THE BORDER — DAY

Pablo and Luna are kicking the soccer ball, chasing it forward. Martín is tugging his rickshaw of coconuts, looking to The Kids. Angelica holds Gecko tightly, helping him over the border.

The travelers walk warily toward the white horizon.

EXT. DESERT — DAY

Amongst the rows of offset cacti, amongst the dry brush and desert flowers...

The body of Jesse Gecko rests sitting against a cactus. His skin is aerated and sunken in. His Suitcase has been cast open upon his lap. Bloody \$100 dollar bills carry in the desert breeze.

END