

*Lonesome Valley*  
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by Tim J. Lord

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(A sparsely decorated room.

(A bed with a man asleep in it, sprawled, taking up the whole thing.

(A window, sunrise light just starting to creep through it

(A woman sitting near it, wrapped in a sheet or clothes too big for her, smoking, watching the sun rise.

(The man stirs, realizes he's alone. That makes him edgy, he flips over to get a better view of the room, finds her still staring out the window.)

JAMES  
Up early.

ANNA  
Sun's coming up.

JAMES  
Like I said, early.

ANNA  
No time of day like it.

JAMES  
I wouldn't know.

ANNA  
I am not surprised.

JAMES  
Cold. Come back to bed.

ANNA  
You're a little kid.

JAMES (kidlike)  
I am not!

ANNA  
Har-har.

(JAMES throws a pillow at ANNA.

She deflects it easily.)

JAMES  
You're seriously up, aren't you?

ANNA  
(nods)

JAMES  
Toss me a cig then.

ANNA  
You can go back to sleep.

JAMES  
You're up, I'm up. Can't sleep with awake people around me.

(ANNA tosses him a pack of cigarettes, then  
a lighter. He lights up.)

ANNA  
Reminds me of home. This view.

JAMES  
Did you move to Nevada while I was away?

ANNA  
I mean where I grew up.

JAMES  
Buttfuck, California, or someplace, right?

ANNA  
No—

JAMES  
Most folks think California is all glamour and palm trees. Don't know about the  
incorporated strip malls and shithole desert towns—

ANNA  
Independence is not a shithole.

JAMES  
Independence? Missouri?

ANNA  
No, California.  
Small town. Eastern Sierra. The Owens Valley.

JAMES  
Near China Lake.

ANNA  
Yes.

JAMES  
Never been over there. Can you imagine?

ANNA  
You Central Valley types fear the desert.

JAMES  
It's true. You grow up on a farm, the descendant of dustbowl Okies, and desert...that's what hell looks like.

ANNA  
It's a crazy valley, very narrow. On the west side, there's the Sierra Nevada, shooting 10,000 feet into the air. And the east side is no slouch either—the White Mountains, climbing some 7,000 feet skyward. But north-south it runs forever.

JAMES  
I like the coast.

ANNA  
Navy boy.

JAMES  
San Diego was way more my style, rather than desert or farm, thank you very much.  
And this place...  
What time do we get going?

(From outside, the sound of muezzin  
beginning the dawn prayers.)

ANNA  
We have time.

(silence)

JAMES  
What've you been up to?

ANNA  
If you don't remember last night it's not my fault you drank too much whiskey.

JAMES (smiling)  
Thank you for smuggling that in.

ANNA  
I didn't bring it for you.

JAMES  
Unlucky you then.

ANNA  
You can make it up to me if you brought some good coffee.

JAMES  
Don't think so

ANNA  
Bullshit.

JAMES  
...If you can boil some water we can have good coffee.

ANNA  
Deal.

(ANNA gets up, starts to dress.)

ANNA  
You hear about these clowns in Congress back Stateside?

JAMES  
Insanity. Morons.

ANNA  
They have no idea.

JAMES  
Trying to kill us I swear. I've been imagining the money *actually* running out. And you know it would happen in the middle of some shitstorm. You're expecting a pick-up and instead it's ISI inviting you to be their longterm guest.

ANNA  
I don't want to believe they would ever let it get that far.

JAMES  
But you do believe it.

ANNA  
I do. We are international laughing stocks.

JAMES  
We should let someone turn us.

ANNA  
If they've got good weather and easily managed security concerns, I would.

JAMES  
Portugal?

ANNA  
I love Portugal.  
(silence)  
You don't think... I mean, in the absence... with so little leadership...  
You don't think Simpson would use it as an excuse—

JAMES  
No.

ANNA  
I've really started to wonder, he talks about it so much.

JAMES  
There has never been a coup attempt in the U.S.—

ANNA  
Simpson would consider that challenge a reason to try.

JAMES  
...What a dick.

ANNA  
...What a dick.

(silence)

(ANNA grabs up a couple bottles of water,  
opens them and starts filling a coffeemaker.)

JAMES  
...Speaking of coups—

ANNA  
I don't want to talk about it.

JAMES  
It wasn't your fault.

ANNA  
I let it happen.

JAMES  
You couldn't've stopped it.

ANNA  
Worse. I started it.

JAMES  
You didn't—

ANNA  
He was my guy. I singled him out, converted him. Groomed him—

JAMES  
He was a psychopath. No one picked it up.

ANNA  
I was there with him. I should have.

JAMES  
Anna—

ANNA  
No, James. Drop it.

(She stares him down. He relents.  
ANNA exits into the bathroom.)

JAMES  
Why does "Owens Valley" sound familiar?

ANNA (off)  
The California Water Wars.

JAMES  
Mulholland's Los Angeles water project...

(She comes back in the room, kicks him out  
of bed.

(JAMES starts getting dressed as she  
straightens the sheets.)

ANNA  
Yeah, LA gets most of its water from Owens Valley.

JAMES  
Right. Mulholland shucked and jived and fooled the locals into giving up their water rights.

ANNA  
Killed farming in the valley. Got violent even.

JAMES  
Hm.

ANNA  
Not violent enough.

JAMES  
What're you suggesting?

ANNA  
Owens Valley lost. They should have fought harder.

JAMES  
Too bad they didn't have you there to insight their riot.

(ANNA stops what she's doing.)

ANNA  
Don't make me regret letting this...thing between us start up again.

JAMES  
I'm sorry.

ANNA  
Where's the coffee?

(He reaches into a backpack, grabs out a Ziploc bag, and tosses it to her.)

(She measures it out into the coffeemaker, gets it brewing.)

(Meanwhile, he sets his bag on the bed, roots for the shirt he wants. In the process he pulls out a gun and drops it on the bed. It is a very casual act.)

ANNA  
I, uh... I heard you had some trouble.

JAMES  
Nothing too out of the ordinary.

ANNA  
You had hitmen tailing you.

JAMES

My team and I, we were tailing them.

ANNA

You must have nine lives.

JAMES

Just one. But I have an unpierceable armor that keeps me safe from all foes.

ANNA

Not the first time someone's tried. Almost think you like getting made.

JAMES

It happens. You deal with it.

ANNA

Does it make you wonder though, about...

JAMES

...Yes.

But I'm still here.

ANNA

Me too. I was surprised, actually, that they let me...

JAMES

That bad...

ANNA

Three thousand six hundred fifty-two. That they reported.

JAMES

(nods)

ANNA

And still I land on my feet.

JAMES

I made a call. I wanted you on this. I need you on this, your mind, your talents.

ANNA

This op is really gonna blow hard, huh, if you're complimenting me.

JAMES

I could shift you. Put you on a team.

ANNA

No. I have to do this on my own.  
Me vs. the bad guys...

JAMES

What is it?

ANNA

Some days... Hard knowing who the bad guys are

JAMES

There are bad guys and good guys, but mostly there's people like us, hovering in the middle, doing what we have to, what we're ordered to—

ANNA

But a nuke, in that psychopath's—

JAMES

That was my call. I put that into play.

ANNA

...I know.

JAMES

Don't put that on you.

ANNA

We keep fucking everything up. So many beautiful places... innocent people...

(silence)

JAMES

History is a mother fucker. We look at the past and it's easy to see when and where we went wrong. But right now, us... you and me in this moment... No idea how it's going to turn out. That's why we do the leg work, try to get it right. Maybe we do, maybe we don't, but we try just the same.

ANNA

There was a moment we could've got it right, but our pride wouldn't let the war die. We just keep digging the hole deeper. How do we get out of it?

JAMES

...Are you quitting on me?

ANNA

No.

JAMES

This operation has been my every breath for two years.

ANNA

Okay. I'm good. Sorry.

JAMES

No. I'm taking you off it. I'm sorry, Anna...

(He reaches for a cell phone. But ANNA transforms into someone sure of purpose.

(She moves in behind JAMES. One swift move and she pulls the sheet up over his head and takes him down to the bed—she has him in a solid sleeper hold. He struggles but she's gotten the drop on him. They wrestle a bit, but she never lets go. Eventually the struggling lessens... then stops... but she keeps holding on.

(And then it's over.

(She lets go of him and collects herself. Coolly, she crosses to the window and grabs a bag that is already packed. She goes through his things, takes his wallet, his phone, and his gun, adds those to her bag.

(She lights another cigarette and looks back out the window.)

ANNA

That's one...

(ANNA exits.  
Lights out.)

End of play.