

EXT. DESERT VALLEY - DAWN

A noose hangs from a dilapidated tree in the southwestern American desert. The tree stands at the bottom of a dusty bowl filled with red and orange hues. Behind it, in the distance, a low mountain range boxes the valley in.

A young man's head is THRUST into the noose. This is ARTURO (20s). He's dressed like a traditional Mexican cowboy, a vaquero, wearing a dust-crusteD plaid work shirt, jeans, and boots. He growls and struggles against the hand gripping the back of his head.

The hand belongs to MIGUEL (40s). He also wears worn workman's attire and has on a battered cowboy hat and a red bandana. He pulls the noose tight against Arturo's neck and steps back.

MIGUEL
Any last words?

Arturo looks at him imploringly.

ARTURO
You're liars!

Miguel closes his eyes and turns away.

Arturo is standing on a small stump, his hands tied behind his back. Nearby, a pair of horses meander, their leads hitched to the tree.

HECTOR (late 20s) stands in front of Arturo, holding a gun on him. Dressed like the other two, he is chubby and bubbling with anticipation. He tips back his slightly too-small cowboy hat as he grins at Arturo.

HECTOR
If you ain't a rustler, what you
doing at the end of that rope?

Arturo grits his teeth and turns his attention back to Miguel, who is securing the end of the noose to the tree.

ARTURO
Miguel, why are you doing this?

Miguel looks back, his face tired.

MIGUEL
Just be quiet, 'Turo.

Arturo's defiance begins to crumble.

ARTURO

Please. Yulena and Rico don't have anyone else.

Miguel goes back to checking the rope. Hector shoves his leering grin back in Arturo's face.

HECTOR

Don't worry. She won't have trouble finding another Papi.

Before Arturo can respond, Hector punches him in the stomach, knocking the wind out of him. Arturo struggles to stay balanced on the stump. Hector starts to laugh.

MIGUEL

Hector. Just do it.

Hector pouts, his lip stuck out. He holsters his gun and takes a step back.

ARTURO

No, ple--!

Hector viciously kicks the stump out from under him. Arturo falls, and stops suddenly with a grisly CRAACK. He dangles, swinging slightly in the breeze. His face is still.

MIGUEL

Cut him down.

HECTOR

Cut him down yourself. I ain't--

MIGUEL

Shut up. Someone's coming.

Miguel nods towards the horizon. Hector sneers, but follows his gaze.

A rider is approaching in the distance.

As the rider nears, it becomes clear that it's a woman. MALVINA (early 40s) is dressed in a duster and cowboy hat the color of the desert. Her long hair is pulled back, and she's wearing a SHERIFF'S BADGE just above her heart.

Hector scoffs.

HECTOR

It's just a woman.

MIGUEL
She's wearing a badge. And a pistol.

HECTOR
There ain't no such thing as a lady
sheriff.

Malvina reaches them and comes to a stop. She glances at Arturo's hanging corpse, then back to the men.

MALVINA
Which one of you's the sheriff?

HECTOR
Ain't no sheriffs out here, Lady.

MALVINA
Just justice, apparently.

HECTOR
This ain't none of your concern.

He rests a hand on the gun on his hip. Malvina lowers her hand to the pistol on her own hip. Miguel steps in front of Hector.

MIGUEL
Ma'am, please. He was a horse thief.
What's done is done.

MALVINA
That ain't always the case.

Miguel's face wrinkles in confusion. CLICK. Hector points his cocked revolver at Mal.

HECTOR
It's time for you to move along,
puta.

MALVINA
You're right about that.

BAM!

Hector drops. Malvina's gun is out of its holster like it was never there. One of the horses breaks free from the tree and takes off into the desert. Miguel runs in the other direction. BAM! He drops in the desert, not far away.

Malvina dismounts and looks up at Arturo's body. Her horse nickers. Malvina scoffs.

MALVINA (cont'd)
 Stop your worrying, Irene. I learned
 from the last one.
 (beat)
 And we ain't got time to look for
 another one.

EXT. DESERT VALLEY - DAY

Arturo lays on the ground. The noose is gone but the
 bruising on his neck is dark and prominent. Malvina kneels
 next to him, holding a recently severed ear. Gently, she
 opens Arturo's mouth and puts the ear inside.

MALVINA
 Yurgosef, argoth windox naaneese.

She watches. For a moment, nothing happens. Then slowly, his
 mouth begins to chew. Satisfied, she stands and dusts
 herself off.

ARTURO (O.S.)
 WAAAAH!

Arturo sits up suddenly, his hands going to his throat.
 Finding no noose, he drops them slowly, and looks around.
 His eyes fall on Malvina. He stares at her.

MALVINA
 I'm Malvina. You can call me Mal. You
 got a name?

Arturo continues to stare. Malvina glances at Irene.

MALVINA (cont'd)
 Well, this might've been an exercise
 in futility.
 (to Arturo)
 Fella. Habla ingles?

He nods slowly.

ARTURO
 What happened? I thought...

MALVINA
 Couple 'a assholes over there killed
 you? They did. Don't worry, I
 returned the favor.

Arturo follows her gaze to Hector and Miguel's corpses.
 Hector is missing an ear. He looks back at Mal.

ARTURO
I don't understand.

MALVINA
You were dead. Now, thanks to me and a little magic, you ain't. And that's cause I need your help.

ARTURO
Dead?

He scoffs, then smiles.

ARTURO (cont'd)
You're not God, lady. And magic ain't real. Thank you for cutting me down, but I can't help you. I've got to get back.

He gets to his feet.

MALVINA
Where you headed in such a hurry?

ARTURO
Back to the ranch where I work. I've got to tell Señor Ruggeroli what happened, he'll--

MALVINA
Be glad to hear that he's down two men and his horse thief ain't dead?

He glares at her.

ARTURO
I've worked for him for three years. He knows I wouldn't steal from him.

MALVINA
Sounds like someone did. Which means he's gotta do something about it. You ever hear of setting an example?

ARTURO
He wouldn't do that.

He starts for the horse still hitched to the tree.

MALVINA
Why're you in such a hurry to undo the miraculous resurrection I just performed?

He whirls on her.

ARTURO

I didn't die! I passed out, all
right?! I was just so scared. I...
I...

She smiles coldly.

MALVINA

Put your hand on the back of your
neck.

He stares at her.

MALVINA (cont'd)

Humor me.

He puts a hand to the back of his neck, wincing a little as
he touches the bruised and scraped skin.

MALVINA (cont'd)

Turn your head.

He complies, then stops, his eyes widening.

MALVINA (cont'd)

You feel them neck bones moving? They
ain't supposed to do that. 'Less you
been killed.

ARTURO

(sotto)

No. It's not...you can't...

Mal pulls a bejeweled DAGGER from her belt, and offers it to
him.

MALVINA

Someone that's recently departed can
feel the connection that objects have
to the people they're important to.
If they hold that object, it'll draw
them to the owner.

Cautiously, Arturo takes the dagger. He stares at it for a
moment, then looks at her with the glimmer of a smile.

ARTURO

I can't feel anything.

He tries to hand it back, but Mal doesn't take it.

MALVINA

The draw ain't something big.
You ever been fishing?

ARTURO

I grew up near a lake.

MALVINA

You know that tug when you got
something nosing around the bait on
the end of your line? If you was just
dead, it'll feel something like that.

With a shrug, he closes his eyes, the dagger clenched in his hand. Suddenly his eyes pop open.

ARTURO

I feel it!

Arturo whirls in a circle, then points across the desert towards a low mountain range in the distance.

ARTURO (cont'd)

It's pulling that way.

He looks at her, a grin on his face. Slowly, the grin fades. He looks at the dagger then at Mal.

ARTURO (cont'd)

Magic. It's real.

His hands go to the abrasions still prominent on his neck. Gingerly, he runs his fingers over the damage. His eyes start to well up. Suddenly, he springs forward and wraps Mal in a bearhug.

ARTURO (cont'd)

You brought me back! My God! Thank
you!

Mal pats his shoulder.

MALVINA

How about you show your gratitude by
helping me? I need to find the man
that dagger belonged to. I lost his
trail, and you're my best chance of
catching up to him.

He steps back.

ARTURO

I can't. I have a family. Near the town where I grew up, there's a war. My son and girlfriend are in danger. I'm going to Mexico to get them out, I just need to save enough money to get there. I appreciate what you've done for me, but I've got to help them first.

Mal reaches for one of her saddlebags, and throws it open. It's nearly overflowing with silver nuggets. Arturo can't help but goggle at the silver.

MALVINA

You help me find this man and kill him, I'll send you back to your family with enough silver you won't ever have to work again.

Arturo has to tear his eyes from the saddlebag.

ARTURO

All right.

Malvina hops on Irene.

MALVINA

Then mount up. He's already got a two day head start on us.

He hurries to scramble on the horse as she starts in the direction of the mountain range.

EXT. DESERT CAMP - DUSK

VIRGINIA (12), dressed in a plain frontier dress, sits on a rock and watches ERASMUS (40s), dressed in all black, crouched in front of a pile of dead brush murmuring indistinctly. Both are disheveled and travel worn.

Behind Virginia, the sun is sinking behind the top of a familiar low mountain range.

As Erasmus murmurs, a small stream of smoke rises from under the brush. Erasmus' murmurs pick up speed, and his hands begin forming strange gestures in time with the murmurs. The smoke slowly thins out, then disappears. Erasmus rises abruptly and kicks at the brush pile.

ERASMUS

Bastard!