

"Cracker Jack"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FIELD -- NIGHT

JACK, an older, pock-marked man with graying hair, finishes piling dirt into what was presumably a large hole in the ground. When he is finished, he walks back to his car and throws the SHOVEL in the open trunk. He grabs a WOODEN CROSS and a hammer. He slams the cross into the ground where the filled hole is and walks back to the car. He pushes back a LARGE EMPTY BAG into the depths of the trunk and slams it shut.

He walks toward the driver's door of his old pick-up and sees A CHURCH in the distance. The lights are on inside and people are standing and singing in the aisles.

He gets in his car and drives toward the church, extremely slowly.

When the car has arrived at the church, Jack gets out and walks in.

INT. CHURCH -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack walks casually in through the front door. He watches PASTOR MEEKS deliver his sermon. The preacher-man is about 40 and looks pretty good for a man of his age. He delivers his speech fluidly and with cause.

Jack just watches as if checking out some kind of sideshow act.

MEEKS

Now I know our little town doesn't mean much to the world. But whether or not those liberal-minded folks up in the north of this great land want to believe it or not, we have a war on our hands.

People in the church seem to be listening attentively. Jack smirks. Meeks has noticed the man by now.

MEEKS (CONT'D)

And we're gonna' bring it to 'em whether they like it or not. Through faith, ladies and gentlemen.

EXT. CHURCH -- MOMENTS LATER

The crowd is filing out of the church. Meeks says good-night to them as they leave.

A balloon of a man, ANDREW JOHN, stops at the threshold and notes, in a jolly manner, to Meeks:

ANDREW JOHN

One fine sermon, preacher. We'll
give 'em hell.

A woman's cry in the distance:

WOMAN

Andrew John! Where are you? I can't
open the car!

Andrew John shakes his head and smiles. Meeks shakes the
mans hand as he walks off.

ANDREW JOHN

Damn, man. I'll tell ya we'll give
'em hell.

Once everyone has left, Jack, with a piece of grass in his
mouth, emerges from the corner of the church. Meeks notices
him. Meeks stirs and looks nervous, as if waiting for some
kind of grave news.

MEEKS

Well? C'mon.

JACK

(casually)
All set.

MEEKS

You're kidding. Already? Where?

Jack points his finger out toward the field.

MEEKS (CONT'D)

Out there?

JACK

Made him a cross and everything.
Did your boys have to be so violent
with the man? Shit.

Meeks looks startled.

MEEKS

Shit. Not like he was a Christian.
This whole situation seems cock-eyed.

JACK

Man needs a proper burial.

Meeks shakes his head and starts walking back into the church.

MEEKS

Alright. Take the damn cross off of
it. Call me if anything comes up.

JACK

Its too far out there for anyone to--

The door of the church slams shut.

EXT. MOTEL -- LATER

Jack's pickup pulls up to THE PLAINS MOTEL. This is his place. Its pretty well-kept but dated. The L in "Motel" is flickering from entropy.

Jack gets out of his truck and walks inside.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack grabs A FLASK. He shifts some papers around on his desk and finds A KEY. He leaves.

INT. MOTEL HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

He walks down a hallway, looking for room 24. Finally, he arrives and pulls out a key, opening the door.

INT. ROOM 24 -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack opens the door, turns on the light, and looks around for a moment.

He walks up to a small desk and sits down. There is A NOTEBOOK sitting there. Jack opens it and looks inside.

There is some writing in a foreign language but there is also some english writing. He sees "Jack Parley," his name, written with a question mark after it and a corresponding photograph. He also sees some other photos of people he recognizes from town with their corresponding names next to them.

INSERT:

C.U. on Meeks, giving his sermon, earlier.

MEEKS

We might not notice it happen. But
it will be right under our nose.
They will move in covertly and
integrate easily. Into towns just
like our own.

BACK TO SCENE:

Jack keeps flipping through the notebook, trying to decipher what this person was up to.

MEEKS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We need to stay alert.

(MORE)

MEEKS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They want to be part of this great enterprise we call America and will sooner snatch it from our grip than try and learn our language... or live peacefully among us.

Jack looks over at a FRAMED PICTURE sitting on the desk which he had not noticed earlier. It is a picture of a beautiful, exotic-looking woman.

He sighs and takes up a SMALL BAG he had brought into the room with him. He puts the picture in there and all the papers on the desk and the notebook and a TAPE RECORDER which was also lying there.

As he is walking out, he hears a knock on the door. He freezes. Another knock. Then a key goes into the door and the door opens. A woman in a maid's uniform enters. The woman is EVA, and she is not extremely pretty but has a certain charm about her which Jack has come to like. She is about 30.

JACK

Jesus!

EVA

Oh. Sorry boss. Whatcha' doin' here?

Jack looks down at his bag covertly and grips it tight.

JACK

The guy just up and left I guess. I saw him peeling out of here this morning in his car. Got suspicious and decided to check the room.

Eva looks down at the floor sheepishly, somehow knowing that he is hiding something from her.

EVA

K.

Jack looks around one last time.

JACK

So you can clean it.

EVA

Alright, boss.

She shifts a bit. There is an awkward moment of silence.

EVA (CONT'D)

Is everything alright, boss?

Jack looks at himself in the mirror. He approaches it and looks at himself in the mirror up close.

JACK
Its alright. Guess I haven't gotten too much sleep.

He looks back at her, smiling faintly. He holds up the flask.

JACK (CONT'D)
Got a little time?

Eva smiles.

MOMENTS LATER...

They are both sitting on the edge of the bed, watching the television. The news is on, but the volume is not up high.

We can see some diplomat or something meeting with a foreign diplomat.

Jack nurses his flask.

JACK (CONT'D)
How old are you eva?

EVA
Thirty, boss.

JACK
Call me Jack, please.

She smiles.

EVA
Thirty, Jack.

A moment of silence.

JACK
Got any kids?

EVA
Nope.

JACK
Got me a boy. He's off in college.

EVA
I heard. The preacher was talking about it last sunday. One of the first from High Plains to go, right?

JACK
Sure enough.
(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

I told him from an early age: "You can't just accept being doomed to work in the factory like the rest of these guys. Most of his friends from school are their. And their kids will be there. And their kids' kids'.

EVA

Sure. But its not too bad.

Jack offers Eva the flask.

EVA (CONT'D)

No thanks. I am one of the first women in my family to work, much less outside the factory.

JACK

Well, I'm glad to have offered you this job.

EVA

Me too.

Eva gets up and looks around the room.

EVA (CONT'D)

So wasn't the guy who was here a foreigner or something.

JACK

Yes. Don't know where from, though.

EVA

I think he was an Arab.

JACK

Me too.

EVA

I heard my brother Lewis and his friends talking about how some Arab guy was snoopin' 'round town like he was plannin' something.

JACK

That was the rumor.

EVA

I don't think he was that suspicious. Probably just passing through. People here get too isolated. Scared and stuff.

She looks at herself in the mirror. She looks back at Jack.

EVA (CONT'D)

I wanna' get out of here some day.
Maybe *I* will be that foreigner in a
foreign land one day, just passing
through on a whim.

JACK

Know what you mean. When my wife
died, I swore I would get out. But
its hard. Got this old dump to run.

EVA

Mmhmm.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE -- MORNING

Jack is about to fall asleep in the chair in his office. A
hand touches the service bell. Jack comes to attention and
notices A BEARDED MAN standing at the front window. He gets
up and approaches him.

JACK

How was your stay?

BEARDED MAN

Fine.

JACK

Where next?

BEARDED MAN

Final destination is Alaska.

JACK

Alaska? Damn. Long ride.

BEARDED MAN

Yep.

JACK

Here's your receipt.

BEARDED MAN

Have a good one.

EXT. MOTEL -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack walks outside after the bearded man. Its cold and he
isn't wearing much.

The bearded man gets in his 24-wheeler and drives off. The
motel is right next to the interstate. All kinds of trucks
and cars are buzzing by. Jack lights a cigarette. A car
pulls into the parking lot and THE WOMAN FROM THE PICTURE
gets out.

She walks up to Jack, who is kind of shocked to see her. She is just as beautiful as the picture made Jack believe. She hardly has an accent. She speaks low, and precisely.

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

A Syrian man. He said he was staying here. Is he still here?

Jack is on guard now.

JACK

He checked out yesterday.

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

He hasn't called me. I am worried.

JACK

He your kin?

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

He is my brother.

JACK

What was he doing *here*? Just passing through like everyone else?

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

No.

JACK

Gotta' tell you, people found his presence mighty strange.

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

Why.

JACK

Don't get too many people stayin' for very long. Just passin' through mostly. This town was born from the highway and moves along with it.

She nods and crosses her arms, clenching from the cold.

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

Is there a restaurant here?

JACK

Yes. Waffle house down the street.

She takes a piece of paper out of her purse and writes something down.

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

Here is my number. Call me if you hear anything, please.

Jack smiles.

JACK

Sure will.

He looks down and frowns, staring at the paper as she walks off.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack dials a number on the phone and waits.

JACK

Its me... Yes I know... Listen, his sister came by looking for him...
 Yes... I knew this was a bad idea...
 He was illegal? I guess she wont be calling the authorities, then...
 Yeah, she just left... K... Well, I just don't know. My work is done.
 I did you a favor 'cause you did my boy that favor... Well, I am through with this. I plan on getting out of this town soon anyway... I'll call you if I find anything out... Alright bye.

He hangs up the phone and looks down at his desk. There is a picture of him and a woman smiling.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE -- LATER

Jack is drawing quite a good SKETCH OF EVA on a piece of paper and drinking heavily from a BOTTLE OF JACK. Something outside catches his attention. It is the man's sister again. She approaches Eva, who is wheeling the cleaning cart beside the edge of the building. She starts talking with her about something. Eva answers. Some more words are exchanged.

The woman walks into the office. Jack comes to some kind of attention, wiping his face.

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

I would like a room.

JACK

You're staying?

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

Yes. He is still in this town.

Jack betrays himself a little, perhaps because he is drunk. She catches the look of surprise on his face and cocks her head.

JACK

Okay.

He scrambles around for a key.

JACK (CONT'D)
How long will you be staying?

WOMAN FROM PICTURE
As long as I need to.

He hands her a key.

JACK
Twenty four just opened up.

EXT. MOTEL -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack walks up to Eva, who is fetching things from a cleaning closet.

JACK
What did that woman ask you?

EVA
If I had seen her brother. Jeez.
You stink, Jack.

JACK
What did you tell her?

EVA
I said that he was here and just
left. Guess what? I found out why
he was here.

JACK
Oh?

EVA
He was looking for a relative!
(chuckling)
Can you believe that? He has a long-
lost cousin or something here! In
our little town! Can you imagine?

She scratches her head and looks into the distance, in misguided wonderment.

JACK
Jesus.

She comes to.

EVA
What's wrong, Jack?

JACK
Nothing. Listen, will you keep an
eye on the office for me?

Jack walks off and gets in his car.

EXT. CHURCH -- LATER

The pick-up pulls up to the church. Jack gets out and enters.

INT. CHURCH -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack walks through the church, past the aisles and past the altar into some back area.

INT. MEEKS' OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Meeks is talking on the phone. A knock on the door.

MEEKS

Come in!

(on the phone)

Listen, Jack just walked in, can I call you back?

Jack closes the door behind him.

There is a PORTLY YOUNG CRACKER sitting in front of Meeks' desk also. He notices Jack.

PORTLY MAN

Jack.

JACK

Felix.

Felix sips from a coffee cup as Jack sits down in front of Meeks.

JACK (CONT'D)

Listen, we have a problem.

MEEKS

What? The woman?

JACK

Well, I found out what that fella' was doing here.

FELIX

Whatever he was doing, he wasn't meant to be doin' it here.

Jack looks at Felix spitefully.

JACK

I'm always cleaning up your mess, Felix. Dammit, you killed someone. He was just here looking for a relative!

Meeks looks confused.

MEEKS

A what? Here?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BAR -- EVENING

There are men playing pool and there is country music playing. The foreign man walks in. The local men notice him and watch him cautiously as he sits at the bar and orders a drink. He has a pretty heavy accent.

FOREIGNER

May I have a scotch please.

The bartender doesn't respond and goes about making the drink.

The foreigner walks over to the jukebox and puts in a quarter.

Jack is sitting in a corner watching the man curiously. There is some rattle from the jukebox. Pink Floyd starts playing on the speakers.

The foreigner walks back to the bar and fetches his drink. He then walks over to Jack casually. Jack notices the man is dressed nicely and is quite handsome. He is perhaps 35 or 40.

FOREIGNER (CONT'D)

(to Jack)

Nice music.

JACK

I beg your pardon?

FOREIGNER

That music. You know?

JACK

I don't believe I have ever heard it.

We hear, "I see you on the dark side of the moon" blaring.

The foreigner smiles at Jack and closes his eyes, listening to the song.

JACK (CONT'D)

Is there--

Felix, who is obviously quite drunk, touches the man on the shoulder. His eyes open and he turns around.

FELIX
 Hey bud. Next time, don't play faggot
 music.

FOREIGNER
 Faggot?

FELIX
 You kiddin'?

FOREIGNER
 Excuse me. I don't believe I know
 you. Your name please?

FELIX
 Why does my name matter? Listen,
 you got a lot of nerve.

FOREIGNER
 Nerve?

Felix laughs and turns around, looking at Meeks and some fat
 man standing near the pool table. They also smile.

FELIX
 Man can't even speak the language.

FOREIGNER
 You are rude.

JACK
 C'mon Felix.

FELIX
 What? Is it too much to ask a man
 to know my language if he is going
 to come in *my* bar and drink and play
 his damn foreign music?

The foreigner looks down.

FOREIGNER
 I understand quite well.

FELIX
 I don't think so.

Jack motions to the man.

JACK
 Maybe it would be best if you left.
 He is really drunk. We don't want
 trouble.

The foreigner looks at Jack regretfully. He stares at him
 for a while, with pained eyes. Then he turns around and
 socks Felix in the mouth.

Felix falls down. Meeks and the fat man come to attention. The fat man pull out a knife and approaches the foreigner.

We hear on the speakers:

"And if the cloud bursts, thunder in your ear you shout and no one seems to hear and if the band you're in starts playing different tunes I'll see you on the dark side of the moon."

The foreigner puts his hands up. Jack stands up and watches the man, who is now facing the other men. The foreigner starts to walk out.

FOREIGNER

I will leave now.

MEEKS

Damn right, boy.

Felix glares at him.

The foreigner leaves. Jack looks at Felix. Then at Meeks.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BAR -- MOMENTS LATER

The foreigner walks off into the field back toward the motel.

Then we see the front door of the bar. Felix and the fat man walk out wearing grave faces.

Cars rush by on the highway.

BACK TO SCENE:

Jack stares at Meeks behind the desk. Felix sighs.

FELIX

He had what was comin' to him.

Jack looks over at Felix with hateful eyes.

Meeks just sits there.

JACK

I'll see you guys in hell.

Jack storm out.

EXT. MOTEL -- LATER

Jack walks into his office. Eva is there, sleeping in the chair. Jack gets a blanket and covers her.

INT. MOTEL -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack knocks on number 24. The woman from the picture opens the door.

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

Yes?

Jack just stares at her. He tries to say something. He is about to.

JACK

I ain't got no one.

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

What?

JACK

All my kin is expired.

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

I see.

JACK

So... I just wanted to say that I would have liked to have... known him.

The woman looks confused.

JACK (CONT'D)

I used to paint. Gave that up. I drew you.

Jack hands her the notebook which belonged to her brother. He also gives her the picture of her.

She looks up at him worriedly.

JACK (CONT'D)

It wasn't me. But I failed him. Anyway, I'll tell you where he is.

He walks off.

She looks at the picture of her and then the drawing which Jack made, which looks almost exactly like the photograph.

She opens the notebook. She sees Jack's name with a question mark next to it.

EXT. MOTEL -- MOMENTS LATER

It has started to pour rain. It is that cold rain. Jack runs into the office.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Eva has woken up.

EVA

Jack.

JACK

I gettin' out. It's time.

EVA

For what?

JACK

You wanna' come with me?

Eva just stares at Jack worriedly.

JACK (CONT'D)

Goodbye, Eva.

We see:

EXT. HIGHWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Jack climbs over the fence and up the hill toward the highway. He trips. He keeps on crawling and climbing. Cars rush by. It is pouring cold rain. Jack coughs and grunts. He approaches the highway on his hands and knees. He makes a thumb with his hand.

EXT. FIELD -- LATER

The woman from the picture, holding an umbrella, is standing in front of the cross in the ground. She starts digging up the ground.

A pick-up approaches.

Meeks and Felix get out and approach her casually. She eyes them suspiciously as they approach.

MEEKS

(to Felix)

Looks like our guest is finally getting back to the highway.

FELIX

'Bout time, preacher.

MEEKS

I am glad. He didn't exactly fit in here. In fact, he doesn't really fit in anywhere in this country.

FELIX

Got that right.

The woman continues to dig. She is filthy by now.

MEEKS

I sure hope no one finds out about his little visit here. Because it seems to me people could get caught up in something they don't want.

FELIX

Sure hope that doesn't happen.

She turns to them both and stares at them with piercing eyes. We can hear the din of the cars passing over the highway in the distance.

She continues to stare at them. They can't decipher what her eyes are saying.

They become unnerved as time passes by.

Meeks pulls the cross out of the ground and throws it in the back of the truck.

They drive off as the woman continues to dig.

EXT. HIGHWAY -- LATER

Jack is standing, looking up into the dark, rainy sky. He still has his thumb out, hailing uncaring cars.

Eventually a car stops. Jack gets in.

INT. CAR -- MOMENTS LATER

He is surprised to see the woman from the picture. She smiles.

WOMAN FROM PICTURE

Where you want go?

JACK

Anywhere. Don't matter.

She motions to the back seat. Jack turns around and sees the dead man's MANGLED, DIRTY BODY. Jack looks at him almost lovingly. Jack puts his hand on the man's dirt-incrusted hands. The car keeps moving away from the town, down the never-ending highway flooded with cars.

FADE OUT: