DESERT GIFTS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. CASINO - LOBBY - DAY

Tourists scurry in all directions, their voices drowned out by SLOT MACHINE JINGLES.

KYLE (40's), professional, rushes through the revolving glass door with roller luggage in tow.

Fresh and eager, Kyle works his way through the crowd until a CHILD (10) running to catch up with his MOTHER (30's) trips over Kyle's luggage. Kyle glares at the child's mother.

KYLE
I thought I was in Vegas. Not Disney World.

MOTHER
What's your problem? He's just a kid.

Kyle dismisses her, grabs his bag, and continues on.

INT. CASINO - FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Kyle beelines to one specific slot machine and inserts his player's card. He pulls five $100 bills from his pocket, slides them into the machine, and starts playing.

First spin...nothing. Second spin...nothing.

A cocktail waitress approaches with a smile and a large glass of whiskey. Her name tag reads CHERYL.

CHERYL
Kyle!

She places the drink near him.

CHERYL (CONT'D)
J.D. rocks. I saw you come in.

Kyle stands and hugs her.

KYLE
Hey, Cheryl. It's nice to see you.

CHERYL
How was your flight?

KYLE
Good. Slept most of the way. How are you doing? How's that baby niece of yours?

CHERYL
Great. I'll show you some pictures later. I'm slammed right now.

Kyle tips Cheryl with a $20 bill before she leaves. He sits back down to his slot machine.

First spin...nothing. Second spin...nothing. And so it continues.

Without batting an eye, Kyle drops another $500 into the slot machine and continues losing.

INT. CASINO - FLOOR - LATER

Kyle sits at a video poker machine, his luggage still in tow. He feeds the machine $100 bills as he continues to lose.

Cheryl brings him another drink. Without conversation, Kyle tips her a $5 bill.

INT. CASINO - FLOOR - LATER

Kyle, still with his luggage, approaches a roulette table. A placard on the table reads MINIMUM BET $100. The dealer's name tag reads WILLIAM.

WILLIAM
Kyle! How the hell are ya, man?

KYLE
Good, Billy. How are you doing?

WILLIAM
Ah, you know. Still workin' here, right? You just get in?

KYLE
Yeah. Haven't even checked in yet.

Kyle drops a stack of twenty $100 bills on the table.

KYLE (CONT'D)
Quarters. Inside.

William counts Kyle's cash and slides 4 stacks of 20 chips to Kyle. Kyle immediately drops chips on numbers as if by muscle memory. He then puts a stack of chips on 17.

William spins the wheel, then the ball. The ball bounces around and settles.

WILLIAM
(announcing to table)
Twelve red.

William clears all the chips from the table.

KYLE
God, I can't buy a winner tonight.

INT. CASINO - HIGH-ROLLER CHECK-IN - NIGHT

Kyle staggers in drunk. The receptionist behind the desk wears a name tag that says TRICIA. She immediately smiles.

TRICIA
Hi, Kyle. Good evening. How was your flight in?

KYLE
(grumpy)
Fine. Can I get my key card?

She has him sign a form, then hands him a small folder with his room key cards. Kyle stares at the room number, confused.

TRICIA
Is there a problem?

KYLE
There's no seventeen in the room number.

Tricia checks the computer.

TRICIA
Oh, right. You checked in late, so we couldn't hold your room. I'm sorry. But it is an upgraded suite.

INT. CASINO - HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Kyle enters with his luggage and unpacks his bags. He opens a closet door to access the in-room safe. As he pulls the safe door open to place his wallet inside, he stops.

KYLE'S POV

Several large stacks of cash sit in the back of the safe.

BACK TO SCENE

In disbelief, Kyle pulls out a stack and fans through new, crisp $100 bills. He pulls out another stack and does the same.

Holding the stack of cash, he sits on the sofa and stares at the room phone next to him. He picks up the receiver to make a call --

But he stops, looks at the cash, and hangs up. He heads back to the safe, pulls out another stack, and leaves his room with the money.

INT. CASINO - FLOOR - LATER

Kyle sits at a slot machine, holding a drink in one hand, pressing slot machine buttons with the other. He leaves the slot machine empty handed and heads back to --

INT. CASINO - HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Kyle stares at the remaining stacks of cash in his safe. He pauses for a moment but then takes a couple more stacks.

INT. CASINO - FLOOR - LATER

Kyle sits at a blackjack table. Hand after hand, the BLACKJACK DEALER sweeps his chips. Kyle once more heads to --

INT. CASINO - HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Without hesitation, Kyle grabs the remaining stacks of cash from the safe.

INT. CASINO - FLOOR - LATER

Back at his slot machine, Kyle loses spin after spin.

INT. CASINO - HOTEL SUITE - MORNING

Kyle enters drunk and disheveled. He checks his safe once more, hoping to find something, then shakes his head in disbelief.

KYLE
Oh well. Free money, right?

He sits on the sofa, pulls out his cell phone and makes a call. On the call he sounds perfectly sober and alert.

KYLE (CONT'D)
Hi, honey. How's everything at home?
(listens)
The girls okay?
(listens)
Yeah, the conference is great. But the speaker sessions yesterday were really boring.
(listens; chuckles)
Right...no, even worse than last month's.
(listens)
I'm just having a coffee right now with Greg, about to head into a workshop.

A KNOCK on the door.

KYLE (CONT'D)
Hey, honey? I need to go. They're heading into the workshop now.
(listens)
Love you too.

A KNOCK on the door again, this time with a WOMAN'S voice.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Housekeeping!

Kyle walks to the door and looks through the peephole.

KYLE'S POV - THROUGH PEEPHOLE

A female HOUSEKEEPER (30s), dressed in hotel housekeeping clothes, stands next to a trolley.

BACK TO SCENE

Kyle opens the door. The housekeeper pauses for a moment confused, as if expecting someone else. She looks again at the room number on the door.

KYLE
I don't need much. Maybe just some fresh towels.

The housekeeper grabs a stack of towels from the trolley and enters. Kyle goes about his business, turning on the TV and his laptop.

The housekeeper makes her way to the bathroom and changes out the towels. On her way back, she looks to see where Kyle is. He's still distracted.

She intently looks into the open safe and starts digging through it. When she looks back, Kyle is staring at her.

KYLE (CONT'D)
What the hell are you doing?

They stare at each other.

KYLE (CONT'D)
What's your name? I'm calling down to the desk.

HOUSEKEEPER
Where is it?

Kyle finally realizes this isn't right. He runs for the door, but the housekeeper is quickly on him and drops him to the floor.

Kyle tries to fight her, but she's tough and wrestles him into submission. She picks him up from the floor and pushes him onto the sofa.

HOUSEKEEPER (CONT'D)
So, where is it?

KYLE
Where's what?

She grabs his hand, twists it, and nearly breaks his finger.

HOUSEKEEPER
Don't fuck with me!

KYLE
Okay! I...oh shit, I --

HOUSEKEEPER
You spent it? Are you fuckin' kiddin' me?

KYLE
It was just there. In my safe.

The housekeeper sits on an ottoman in front of Kyle. She becomes strangely calm for the situation. She LAUGHS.

HOUSEKEEPER
You've got balls...I'll give you that. I mean, how do you even spend a hundred grand in one night?
(beat; laughing again)
And not even your own money. You just took a wad of cash you knew wasn't yours and blew it all.
(beat; angry)
Dude, what the fuck is wrong with you that you'd do that?

Kyle sits nervously with no answer.

HOUSEKEEPER (CONT'D)
Ya know what? It's okay. It'll all be fine. You'll just get it back to me.
(beat)
Today.

KYLE
How am I supposed to --

HOUSEKEEPER
Shut the fuck up! That money you stole?

KYLE
I didn't steal it. I --

HOUSEKEEPER
You don't wanna know the people it belongs to. It'll take them but a minute to find your house...your family.

KYLE
Please. Leave my family out of it. This is <u>my</u> problem, not theirs.

The housekeeper pauses at this statement with a curious look.

HOUSEKEEPER
Don’t bother calling the police or anything stupid like that. You watch TV. You know how shit like that ends up. Listen to me.
(slow and deliberate)
Twelve hours. Pay me then. Or deal with my people later.

She smiles and gives him a pat on the shoulder.

After she leaves, Kyle collects himself and thinks through his options.

He pulls out his phone and taps 9-1-1 but stops and rethinks it. He clears the screen and opens his banking app. The app shows a bank account with a $35,000 balance.

MONTAGE - KYLE CONTINUES THE WORST LOSING STREAK EVER

-- Kyle sits at a blackjack table. The blackjack dealer sweeps the last of his chips.

-- Kyle continues losing at a video poker machine. He pounds the machine and walks away.

-- Kyle continues losing at a slot machine.

-- Kyle shakes his head in disbelief at a craps table.

INT. CASINO - FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Kyle approaches a roulette table. He empties his pockets and drops fifty $100 bills on the table for the ROULETTE DEALER.

KYLE
Quarters. Inside.

The roulette dealer slides 10 stacks of 20 chips to Kyle. Kyle takes a stack and places them on different numbers. Then he takes another stack and places it on 17.

The roulette dealer spins the ball. The ball bounces around and settles on 5 -- right next to 17.

ROULETTE DEALER
(announcing to table)
Five red.

Kyle shakes his head in disbelief. He repeats his play but with twice as many chips, placing the largest stack on 17. The ball bounces around the wheel again until --

ROULETTE DEALER (CONT'D)
(announcing to table)
Five red. Repeat.

KYLE
You’re fucking kidding me!

Kyle tries again, now with all of his remaining chips. He slides a large stack on 17.

As the roulette dealer spins, Kyle moves the entire stack of chips from 17 to 5. He watches the wheel.

The ball bounces around, slowing as it approaches 5. It bounces in and out of 5, then into 17.

Kyle slams the table with his fists.

KYLE (CONT'D)
You fucking whore!

INT. CASINO - CASHIER’S CAGE - LATER

A somber Kyle stands by a CASHIER, who works on a computer.

CASHIER
I can approve ten thousand in credit. That’s about it.

Kyle nods.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
(typing on computer)
Okay. Sign the marker at the table.

INT. CASINO - FLOOR - ROULETTE TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Kyle is at the roulette table again with a few stacks of chips in front of him. He looks resigned to losing as he places most of his chips on 17. The ball comes to rest.

ROULETTE DEALER
(announcing to table)
Fifteen black.

Tears now in his eyes, Kyle repeats the bet on 17 with the rest of his chips.

ROULETTE DEALER (CONT'D)
(announcing to table)
Thirty red.

Kyle empties his pockets and exchanges a couple $10 and $20 bills for chips. He wipes tears from his eyes and slides all the chips on 17.

The roulette dealer tosses the ball. Kyle watches.

The ball bounces around the spinning wheel, slowing as it approaches 17. Finally, it lands in 17.

ROULETTE DEALER (CONT'D)
(announcing to table)
Seventeen black.

The roulette dealer slides a stack of chips to Kyle, who places them all on top of the original stack on 17.

The roulette dealer spins the ball and --

ROULETTE DEALER (CONT'D)
(announcing to table)
Seventeen black. Repeat.

Kyle pumps his fist. He looks around the casino and stops when he sees the housekeeper, now in street clothes, watching him play. She jerks her head to gesture “upstairs.”

Kyle holds his chips for a moment. Then he places them all on 17. It’s a colossal stack of chips.

The PIT BOSS walks over to watch. The roulette dealer spins the wheel, then the ball.

Kyle quickly removes his bet from 17 and puts half on 5 and half on 32.

The ball bounces around the spinning wheel, slowing as it approaches 5. It bounces into 5, then into 17 -- one more funny hop, and the ball settles into 32.

INT. CASINO - HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Kyle counts large stacks of $100 bills in front of the housekeeper. As he nears the last of them --

KYLE
Ninety-nine eight. Ninety-nine nine. One hundred.

One additional $100 bill remains in Kyle’s hand. The housekeeper notices, smiles, and winks at him.

HOUSEKEEPER
A little bonus I guess for cleaning my funny money.

The housekeeper packs the cash into a small backpack and heads to the door. She stops and looks back at Kyle.

HOUSEKEEPER (CONT'D)
And by the way, your problem is their problem.

She leaves. Kyle sits on the sofa and collects his thoughts. He pulls out his phone and nervously makes a call.

KYLE
Hi, honey. It's me.
(listens)
I'm good. How are the girls?

Kyle cries in relief.

KYLE (CONT'D)
I miss them too. Tell them I'm on my way home. I'm coming home early.
(listens)
No, I'm okay. We'll talk when I get home. I just need...
(beat)
I have a problem I need help with. I'll explain everything to you later.

INT. CASINO HOTEL - LOBBY - LATER

A weary Kyle walks with his luggage in tow. To his left is a row of shops, one with a sign "DESERT GIFTS." To his right are slot machines on the casino floor.

Kyle stops, pulls out the $100 bill, and stares at it. Then he stares out at the casino floor.

INT. CASINO HOTEL - LOBBY - LATER

Kyle exits the gift shop with a shopping bag full of gifts.

FADE OUT.