

"Gunderson Road"

By

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For Kimmi

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FADE IN:

EXT. MOHAVE DESERT - PRESENT DAY

Crane shot looking straight down a lonely desert highway. The landscape is barren, with nothing but brown desert scrub on either side. The air is perfectly clear; the sky is perfectly blue, and the empty highway goes off into visual infinity. There are no signs of human life apart from the highway itself and the telephone poles that run alongside it on the left. The air is nearly silent except for the faint breath of a breeze.

From a height of about 30 feet, the camera drifts down and slightly to the left until a weather-beaten street sign comes into view from the bottom of the frame. The sign is only a foot or two from the camera, so it almost fills the frame. It says...

"GUNDERSON ROAD"

After a beat, we hear the flutter of wings, and two bird feet land on the top of the sign. We don't see the whole bird, only his feet and legs.

CUT TO:

EXTREME CLOSE-UP OF VULTURE

We see only the head of this scavenging bird, a turkey vulture. He is not as colorful as an eagle or a hawk; he is more like the working man of the desert. He has only one thing to say...

VULTURE

Caww!

The VULTURE turns his head to survey his surroundings. He is looking for something.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V., LOOKING EAST DOWN THE HIGHWAY

This is the same scene we just saw, looking straight down the lonely desert highway. Nothing there.

CUT BACK TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

He turns his head to look in the opposite direction.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V., LOOKING WEST DOWN THE HIGHWAY

It's the same thing: an empty highway going off to infinity.

CUT BACK TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

He turns his head again.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V., LOOKING NORTH

In this direction, there is a telephone pole with the horizontal wires it is holding. Beyond the wires is a faint dirt road heading off toward distant hills. This road obviously isn't used very much.

CUT BACK TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

He turns his head again.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V., LOOKING SOUTH

This scene is a bit more interesting. It is the beginning of a maintained dirt road that is obviously well-used. This is the Gunderson Road that the sign refers to. Like others, this one goes off into infinity. Near the start of the road is a cattle guard with a barbed wire fence on either side.

At the junction of dirt road and the paved highway, around the vicinity of the street sign, is a large clearing in the scrub, as though many vehicles have pulled over here. At the edge of the clearing, in the middle distance, a beaten-up pickup truck is parked. There could be someone in the cab of the truck, but it isn't clear.

CUT BACK TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

The VULTURE cranes his neck, trying to figure out if someone is in the truck.

Then he continues his scan of the horizon, until he suddenly focuses on something. He has found what he is looking for! He sees...

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V., LOOKING TOWARD THE CENTER OF THE INTERSECTION.

Roadkill! There's a red blob of flesh in the middle of the highway.

CUT TO:

C.U. OF DEAD ANIMAL IN HIGHWAY

It's a bloody mess, apparently a rabbit that has been run over several times. All we see is fur and guts. We can hear and faintly see flies buzzing around the carcass.

CUT TO:

FULL SHOT OF VULTURE SITTING ON THE SIGN

This is our first view of the whole bird, perched above the words "GUNDERSON ROAD." He spreads his wings and flies up off the sign.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT OF DEAD ANIMAL

The VULTURE lands about two feet from the carcass, approaches cautiously, then starts nibbling at the edges. Then he becomes more enthusiastic and takes bigger bites from the middle of the blob.

In the distance we hear the faint sound of an engine.

CUT TO:

TELEPHOTO SHOT, EAST DOWN THE HIGHWAY

A vehicle comes into view in the far distance. It resolves itself into a motorcycle, coming this way fast.

CUT TO:

C.U. OF VULTURE PECKING AT THE CARCASS

The VULTURE seems oblivious to the sound.

CUT BACK TO:

TELEPHOTO SHOT, EAST DOWN THE HIGHWAY

The motorcycle has advanced considerably. At this point, we begin to worry that the VULTURE might become roadkill himself.

CUT BACK TO:

C.U. OF VULTURE PECKING AT THE CARCASS

As the sound of the motorcycle gets louder, the VULTURE finally looks up. After a moment of consideration, however, he resumes pecking at the carcass.

CUT BACK TO:

TELEPHOTO SHOT, EAST DOWN THE HIGHWAY

The motorcycle has gotten big, fast and loud! It is being ridden by a mean-looking BIKER wearing a black leather jacket and a Nazi-like helmet. It is clear that the VULTURE is in grave danger.

CUT BACK TO:

C.U. OF VULTURE PECKING AT THE CARCASS

The VULTURE looks up again, as the sound of the motorcycle becomes overpowering. He finally makes the smart choice, spreads his wings and flies up off the road.

CUT TO:

LONG SHOT OF GUNDERSON ROAD SIGN

We see the whole sign now - not just the top of it but all the way down to its base - as well as the surrounding terrain and the pickup truck in the background.

The VULTURE lands on the top of the sign and folds his wings.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - EAST DOWN THE HIGHWAY

Surprisingly, the motorcycle doesn't race past at high speed; instead, it slows down and turns off the highway to the right, toward the clearing.

CUT TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

The VULTURE cocks his head, as if to say, "What's this?"

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - SOUTH TOWARD GUNDERSON ROAD

The motorcycle pulls into the same clearing where the battered pickup truck is parked, but keeps its distance from the truck. The motorcycle is a lot closer to us than the pickup truck. The BIKER stops the bike, turns off the engine, puts down the kickstand and dismounts. Then he takes off his helmet. He is a big, beefy, heavily tattooed Hell's Angels type, the sort of dude you wouldn't want to cross in a bar.

CUT TO:

FULL SHOT OF VULTURE ON SIGN

The VULTURE is looking nervous now, because the BIKER is too close for comfort. He shifts back and forth on his feet then starts to spread his wings, ready to take off if he needs to.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - TOWARD CLEARING

The BIKER now starts walking toward the camera - and the VULTURE.

CUT TO:

FULL SHOT OF VULTURE ON SIGN

Totally spooked, the VULTURE flies up off the sign.

CUT TO:

WIDE SHOT, NORTH TOWARD TELEPHONE POLE

The VULTURE lands on the top of the telephone pole on the opposite side of the highway. He is safe now.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - TOWARD GUNDERSON ROAD

The BIKER continues walking toward the street sign. He looks up at it and walks around it, as though it was a significant landmark.

Slowly, meaningfully, the BIKER reaches out and touches the sign pole.

CUT TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

The VULTURE cocks his head quizzically.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - LOOKING TOWARD TRUCK

We are now looking only at the pickup truck, which is parked sideways toward us. It turns out there was someone in the cab all along, and now he is active. The VENDER opens the driver's side door and gets out. We don't get a good look at him because he is so far away, but he appears to be a grizzled rancher or cow poke dressed in worn denim. He is apparently someone who has spent all his life in the desert.

The VENDOR goes to the back of the pickup and rummages around for something. He pulls out a cylinder of some kind, about 3 feet long and 6 inches in diameter. We aren't sure what it is. The VENDOR goes to the front of the truck, holds the cylinder vertically and attaches it to the truck. Then he unrolls the cylinder, and we can now see what it is: a huge advertizing banner. The VENDER unrolls the banner along the whole length of the truck and attaches the other end to the tailgate. The truck has essentially become a billboard now. The lettering on the sign is so big that even from our distance we can easily read it...

"VIEWING GLASSES \$20"

In smaller print below that, it says...

"NO REFUNDS"

CUT TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

The VULTURE looks confused. Obviously, he can't read, so he can't make sense of the sign.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - WIDE SHOT OF CLEARING

We now see the pickup truck, the motorcycle and the Gunderson Road sign all in the same frame. The BIKER is walking toward the pickup truck. Although he is far away from us, the desert is quiet enough that we can overhear him talking to the VENDER...

BIKER

Is this where you get the viewing
glasses?

VENDER

[Unintelligible]

BIKER

How much are they?

VENDER

[Unintelligible]

BIKER

You wouldn't have any discount on
that?

VENDER

[Unintelligible]

BIKER

It just seems a lot to pay.

There is a pregnant pause while the BIKER shifts around, trying to decide whether to make the purchase. In the end, he pulls out his wallet, hands some money to the vender and receives something in return. He then starts walking back toward the Gunderson Road sign.

CUT TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

The VULTURE turns his head and glances longingly at...

CUT TO:

C.U. OF ANIMAL CARCASS

Roadkill. Warm, luscious roadkill. The flies are buzzing more feverishly now as the pavement heats up.

CUT BACK TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

As much as a bird can show it, the VULTURE is frustrated. The flies are getting the dinner he deserves.

In the background is the sound of more vehicles on the highway.

CUT BACK TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - WIDE SHOT OF CLEARING

The pickup truck and the motorcycle are now joined by another vehicle, pulling off the highway into the clearing. It is a minivan, emitting all the random sounds of a squabbling family on vacation.

CHILD #1

It's my turn!

CHILD #2

It isn't five minutes yet.

CHILD #1

Mom! It's supposed to be my turn!

MOTHER

Kimberley, did you put on your sunscreen?

The FATHER gets out of the driver's side of the minivan and starts walking toward the VENDER.

Just then, another vehicle arrives. This is a sports car convertible with the top down and a stylish looking couple inside.

Then yet another car arrives: a rusty Nissan containing what looks like two college students.

The clearing is suddenly a very busy place.

CUT TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

The VULTURE again glances longingly at...

CUT TO:

C.U. OF ANIMAL CARCASS

Roadkill. Healthy, nutritious roadkill. The meal is looking a little less enticing now, but it's probably still edible.

CUT BACK TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - WIDE SHOT OF CLEARING

Everyone is out of their vehicles now, milling about in the clearing. There are about fifteen people altogether, clustered generally around the Gunderson Road sign.

MOTHER

It's almost time. Do you have your glasses?

CHILD #1

[Unintelligible, but obviously whining.]

MOTHER

No, those are Joseph's glasses. You have to use your own.

Come on, or you'll miss it.

Everyone starts moving toward the street sign now. (Only the VENDER isn't among them.) As they do so, the chaotic activity of the group becomes a bit more coordinated. Each person pulls out an identical pair of dark sunglasses and puts them on. The group draws together in a compact ball around the sign, as though posing for a picture.

With their dark glasses on, every member of the group now looks directly up at the camera.

MOTHER

Shhhhh!

The babble dies down to silence. Even the children are quiet now and are intensely focused in the direction of the camera. Although we can't see their eyes, it appears that everyone is looking directly at the VULTURE.

CUT TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

The VULTURE looks nervous and confused. Why are they looking at him?

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - FULL SHOT OF GROUP

Everyone in the group is silent and almost totally still. They seem engrossed in the moment. This lasts for about five seconds.

Then one person starts moving, then another and another. Slowly, the babble starts again.

SOMEONE IN CROWD

Wow, did you see that?

SOMEONE #2

I saw something, but it wasn't what I thought it would be.

SOMEONE #3

It was pretty much as I expected, but they say some times are better than others.

CHILD #1
(whining)

I didn't see it. My glasses don't
work.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - FULL SHOT OF PICKUP TRUCK

The VENDER is rolling up his sign and packing up his
wares.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - FULL SHOT OF GROUP

Everyone is dispersing now. People are getting back
into their cars and leaving.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - LOOKING EAST DOWN THE HIGHWAY

About half the vehicles are getting on the highway and
are heading east into the distance.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - LOOKING WEST DOWN THE HIGHWAY

The remaining vehicles are heading west.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - WIDE SHOT OF EMPTY CLEARING AND
PICKUP TRUCK

The scene now is exactly as it was when we first saw
it. The pickup truck is parked just as it was before.
There is silence for a second, then we hear the engine
of the truck trying to start. It's obviously an old
engine, and for a few seconds it just cranks wearily
without turning over. Then the engine guns to life,
sputters, then comes to life again. From the sound
alone, we know the truck has seen better days.

The truck is put into gear and starts moving. It heads
toward the cattle guard at the entrance to the road,

but then it dies once more. The ignition starts cranking again.

CUT TO:

FULL SHOT OF VULTURE ON TELEPHONE POLE

The VULTURE spreads his wings and takes off.

CUT TO:

FULL SHOT OF GUNDERSON ROAD SIGN

The VULTURE lands on the top of the Gunderson Road sign, closer to the roadkill. We can't see the pickup truck now, but we can hear it cranking.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - WIDE SHOT OF PICKUP TRUCK

The engine finally guns to life again, and the truck starts to cross the cattle guard.

CUT TO:

C.U. OF VULTURE

He's looking at...

CUT TO:

C.U. OF ANIMAL CARCASS

Roadkill. It looks dried and tired now - but still passable nutrition if one is very hungry.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - WIDE SHOT OF PICKUP TRUCK

Before the truck has completely crossed the cattle guard, it stops, but not because of an engine problem, since the engine is still running. Apparently the VENDER forgot something. He gets out of the cab, and goes to the back of the truck where he rummages around.

CUT TO:

C.U. OF VULTURE

As much as a bird can show it, he's feeling tired, frustrated and exasperated.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - WIDE SHOT OF PICKUP TRUCK

The VENDER pulls a shovel and a five-gallon plastic bucket out of the back of the truck. Then he starts walking with them toward the center of the intersection - toward the roadkill. The camera pans toward the highway, as the VENDER shovels up the roadkill, dumps it into the bucket, then takes the shovel and bucket back to the truck.

CUT TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

The VULTURE looks stunned.

CUT TO:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - WIDE SHOT OF PICKUP TRUCK

The VENDER gets back in the truck and drives away into the distance, trailing dust.

CUT TO:

EXTREME C.U. OF VULTURE

The VULTURE looks frantic. His head darts back and forth as he looks around in all directions.

RAPID SEQUENTIAL CUTS:

VULTURE'S P.O.V. - LOOKING EAST DOWN THE HIGHWAY

Empty.

- THEN NORTH TO THE HILLS

Empty.

- THEN WEST DOWN THE HIGHWAY

Empty.

- THEN SOUTH DOWN GUNDERSON ROAD

This last shot is held for a few beats while the pickup truck vanishes in a distant cloud of dust.

CUT TO:

FULL SHOT OF VULTURE ON TOP OF SIGN

After a moment of reflection, the VULTURE has only one thing to say about this turn of events...

VULTURE

Caww!

He spreads his wings and flies up out of the frame, leaving only the sign.

"GUNDERSON ROAD"

CUT TO BLACK

THE END