

FADE IN:

EXT. THE CANYON - DAY

The morning sun rises over a rugged desert canyon littered with shrubs and cacti. Various SMALL ANIMALS emerge from their burrows and begin another day.

Nature is in blissful harmony until COPPER, a rattlesnake, slithers into view. Brown scales, vivid yellow eyes, and a scar across his angular face. His presence strikes fear into every living thing he passes.

A desert bush starts to rustle. He stops to face it, then raises himself into a striking pose. Stoic and unmoving.

The bush rustles again. Copper's rattle starts BUZZING.

Last warning.

It rustles once more.

Copper lunges into the bush.

SONGBIRDS emerge, scattering for their lives.

The dust settles. Copper re-emerges, dragging out the remains of a TRAIL CAMERA. Big decorative googly eyes stuck on the front of it. On its side, the letters "E.O." are written in permanent marker.

He's seen it before.

POV: TRAIL CAMERA

The dying trail cam captures Copper, finishing it off.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. RATTLESNAKE DEN - CONTINUOUS

A sun-dried LONGHORN SKULL sits atop a rattlesnake burrow with a drape in front of it.

JADE, a serpentine-colored rattlesnake with a white banded pattern running down her back, pushes through the drapes. She stretches and lets out a giant YAWN with unhinged jaws.

She turns to a wilting rose cactus and spruces it the best she can with a disfigured, rattle-less tail.

JADE

Kids! You'd better be ready. I'm leaving without you!

She looks back, definitely intending to wait.

Copper appears over the horizon. Seeing Jade brings a smile to his face.

COPPER

Morning Jade, my lovely rose petal.

A sour look is all she responds with.

COPPER (CONT'D)

Too cheesy?

JADE

I hate when you slink out without telling me.

COPPER

You know it's habit for me.

JADE

And you know I hate it.

COPPER

Do you hate the idea of being safe? I came across another one of those strange boxes. They're definitely something watching us.

JADE

Can we not get into this? All I want is one normal family day. Just us and the kids. Speaking of--
(turns to den)
--last warning!

COPPER

Don't get yourself in a knot. You're too pretty for that.

JADE

I am not.

COPPER

You? Not pretty?

JADE

No, I meant the other--

Copper's tail ropes Jade over to his side.

JADE (CONT'D)
Woah, hey! Stop it!

She tries to wriggle out but can't resist. A smile eventually breaks across her face.

JADE (CONT'D)
That's not fair...

COPPER
You know I don't play fair.

JADE
I know... I like it...

Their necks crane to form a heart shape as their noses meet.

TOPAZ (O.S.)
What are they doing?

Jade and Copper snap back into reality. BROCK, TOPAZ, and FLINT, their young children, peer from the den, watching them wary and wide-eyed.

BROCK (O.S.)
I think they're pretending to be rabbits again.

TOPAZ
Ooh, I hope we get another sister.

Jade and Copper split. Their faces flushed. They can't even keep eye contact.

JADE
Kids! That's enough!

COPPER
L-listen to your mother...

Jade extends her tail into the den and gently scoots them out. She eyes them each from head to tail, rubbing the occasional dirty scale clean.

She looks to Flint, her youngest child and smile. Brock rolls his eyes at their exchange.

JADE
Alright, let's get going. That watering hole ain't gonna wait for itself.

The family slithers across the valley. Flint tries to emulate Copper's stride.

He doesn't notice.

EXT. THE WATERING HOLE - DAY

A large, dry crater with a small, muddy pond at the bottom. Sad-looking, but no one seems to mind. A variety of DESERT ANIMALS share the space together.

A PRAIRIE DOG CHILD, building a dirt castle, stops to watch the rattlesnakes slither by in awe. Others begin to stare at them in disgust.

JADE

I got a sun-bathing spot with my name on it!

COPPER

Are you sure today's a good day to do this? This place is crowded today.

JADE

We have as much right to be here as everyone else.

They look to a JACKRABBIT who pulls his KID to his side.

COPPER

They might not see it that way.

JADE

Well that's there problem. Besides, the weather is a perfect sweltering. You seriously can't beat this.

They find an open area near the water. Jade eyes the soft sand beneath her body and stretches out, rocking herself into a cozy spot.

JADE (CONT'D)

Ohh, yessss...

A family of RAIN FROGS unearth themselves from underground and relocate away from them. Jade notices and shrugs it off.

Flint looks over to group of CHILDREN shooting a tumbleweed ball at a basket. He can't take his eye off them.

BROCK

Forget it, String Bean. Those warm bloods will never play with you.

JADE

Brock!

BROCK

What? It's true.

JADE

Says who?

BROCK

I mean, dad did.

TOPAZ

He said nature intended us to be social outcasts.

Jade turns to Copper with the look.

JADE

Social outcasts? Seriously?

COPPER

You've seen the looks we've been getting since we arrived.

JADE

Let them. We're here to enjoy ourselves. Not worry about our peers. For once, all I want is to give the kids something normal to do.

COPPER

Well, you do that. I'll be keeping watch for *you know who*. It's been a few days, and think she's back on the hunt. Even neutral grounds aren't off limits to her.

BROCK

I want to go with you.

TOPAZ

Me too! Me too!

Jade wants to protest, but with one look at their enthusiasm, she smiles it off.

JADE

In that case, you guys have a great time.

Copper heads for a lone spire overseeing the ravine.

JADE (CONT'D)
And no picking fights with other
parents!

COPPER
No promises.

TOPAZ
Yeah, no promises!

Brock and Topaz follow Copper, asking an endless number of questions about his strength and fierce encounters.

Jade glances at groups of animals. A bit of envy hits her as she watches them share symbiotic exchanges with one another. She shakes it off and turns her attention back to Flint as he continues to watch the other kids.

JADE
Looks like it's just you and me.

Flint responds with a dour sigh.

JADE (CONT'D)
Everything okay?

FLINT
I-it's nothing.

JADE
This nothing sounds like something.

Flint glances away.

Persistent, Jade leans in with a more gentle approach.

JADE (CONT'D)
You can tell me, I'm your mother.

FLINT
Promise you won't tell anyone.

Jade traces an 'X' against her chest with her tail.

JADE
Cross my heart.

A beat passes as Flint takes a deep breath.

FLINT
I'm worried I won't grow a rattle.

JADE

That's it? What makes you say that?
Everyone grows a rattle.

Jade quickly slips her rattle-less tail under her body.

FLINT

Brock said it should have happened
already and that there's something
wrong with me.

JADE

He's only teasing you. You're just
what we call a late shedder.

FLINT

Well I don't like it. They're
always picking on me. It's hard
enough not having any friends my
age to play with.

JADE

A friend is just a stranger you
haven't met yet. Why don't you go
introduce yourself to those kids
over there? I bet they're just as
shy about making friends as you
are.

FLINT

But, dad said they won't give our
kind a chance.

Jade looks up at Copper as he scours the skies from a spire
by himself. It gives her newfound determination.

JADE

Your dad's wrong this time.

FLINT

How do you know?

JADE

They don't say a mother knows best
for nothing. And you owe yourself
the chance to try.

Flint looks at the group of kids, then back to Jade. Her
gentle smile is too persuasive.

FLINT

Well, okay...

JADE
Great! We'll go together.

Flint curls back from her.

FLINT
A-actually, I think I should do
this by myself... Without you.

Jade is taken back, but she maintains a cheery look.

JADE
Oh... right. I get it. Don't want
your mom *cramping* your style. Is
that still a hip thing to say?

FLINT
(cringes)
Mom!

JADE
Right, sorry. Just promise you'll
have a good time!

Jade watches Flint slithers across the valley. She starts to
squirm the further away her gets.

JADE (CONT'D)
(to self)
He's gonna be fine. I'm a good mom.
A great mom even! It's not like I
just sent my youngest child out on
his own, possibly to be publicly
ridiculed and humiliated.

A short beat passes as she tries to hold it in.

JADE (CONT'D)
(to self)
What have I done.

Jade slithers after Flint, keeping low and out of sight.

She inches behind stones, bushes and LARGE SLEEPING ANIMALS.
A sleeping BIGHORN SHEEP turns over. She SPRINGS out of its
way, narrowly avoiding being crushed.

Flint looks behind him. Sees nothing but a cactus patch.

INSIDE CACTUS: Jade is hiding in the heart of the cacti,
knotted up around its branches.

BACK TO SCENE: She slugs her way up and periscopes from the
top, seeing Flint stand before the group of kids.

A SQUIRREL KID takes a shot. The tumbleweed ball bounces off the basket's rim and rolls to Flint. All eyes turn to him.

Flint takes a deep breath, then grabs the ball.

FLINT
Could I play with you guys?

The other kids stare at him, not sure what to say. Flint's nerves begin to match theirs.

FLINT (CONT'D)
Actually, never mind. Here, you can have it back...

Flint offers the acorn back with his tail. It feels like pulling teeth.

The Squirrel kid is pushed towards Flint by his friends. Unsure what to do, he reached out for it.

MOTHER SQUIRREL (O.S.)
Get away from my son, you little monster!

A MOTHER SQUIRREL rushes over, cutting in between the two. She looks like trouble.

FLINT
Sorry! I was just asking if I could play--

The Squirrel shoves Flint back.

MOTHER SQUIRREL
Don't test me boy. I know when a snake is lyin' through those little fangs.

Jade slithers out of hiding, standing before the group.

JADE
Hey, hands off!

The kids shriek and scurry behind the mother squirrel.

MOTHER SQUIRREL
Well... ain't you a *sight* to see.

Flint retreats to Jade's side.

JADE
You must be this mother.

MOTHER SQUIRREL

And you must be trying to pull a fast one! Teaching your boy to hunt on neutral ground. Such a spineless thing to do.

JADE

My son only wanted to play with your child. There must have been some kind of misunderstanding here--

The squirrel's child goes to speak. Mother cuts him off.

MOTHER SQUIRREL

The only misunderstanding here is this little worm not knowing where his place is.

JADE

Please don't talk about my son like that.

MOTHER SQUIRREL

I will speak about your kind however I want!

Copper takes notice of the argument. He has an urge to intervene.

Then, a SHADOW streaks overhead and breaks his concentration. Realizing, he rushes over to the edge of the canyon.

COPPER

(calling to others)

She's here! Aurea is here!

Panic breaks out! Everyone scramble for any cover they can find. Copper gathers Brock and Topaz and hides in a crevice.

Jade and Flint as they slither into a SPACIOUS BUSH. The Mother Squirrel and the others force their way into their hiding spot.

A tense silence now across the area. Animals in hiding tremble as the shadow circles overhead.

JACKRABBIT

Why is she lingering around?

ARMADILLO

She's not gonna leave till she's taken one of us...

The Mother Squirrel, visibly shaken, starts to break. She looks at Flint, shuffles behind him--

--and SHOVES him out of the bush! He tumbles down the rocky cliffside and into the open ravine. Completely exposed!

JADE

FLINT!!!

The shadow makes another pass. It's much larger than before.

Jade shoots out of the bush, slides down the canyon and races into the ravine.

COPPER

Jade, what are you doing?

TOPAZ

Dad, it's Flint! He's down there!

Flint scrambles to find a hiding spot. No place to go. He looks and instinctively starts shaking his rattle-less tail. Hapless, but it is all he knows.

Jade loops Flint with her tail and drags him into a tiny den.

INT. TINY DEN - CONTINUOUS

Jade smothers Flint and squashes herself as far back as possible and watches AUREA, a giant golden eagle with razor-sharp talons, land before her hiding spot. She scans the canyon with an intense face. It seems like an eternity.

Jade's eyes, full of fear, lock onto the eagle, watching her rake a talon against the ground in a rhythmic fashion. She pauses, then repeats the pattern, causing Jade to flinch.

Aurea stops and eyes the den... then THRUSTS her talon into it. It SNAPS inches from Jade's face! She pulls her foot back with nothing and flies away.

EXT. THE WATERING HOLE - CONTINUOUS

Jade trudges out of the den with Flint. Visibly shaken, she hugs Flint tight.

JADE

Are you alright?

FLINT

I don't know...

His response crushes her.

Copper, Brock, and Topaz rush over to them. They look back at the top of the hillside. The others stare down at them.

JADE
(to Mother Squirrel)
Why did you shove my son?

MOTHER SQUIRREL
I only did what we were all
thinking. Better one of you than
one of us.

COPPER
You know what I'm thinking? I'm
thinking about ripping your head
off about now!

Copper lunges at her.

JADE
Copper, STOP!!!

Jade snares Copper with her tail, holding him back. She looks back at the kids who are in shock.

JADE (CONT'D)
Let's... let's just go...

The family makes their leave. Copper gives a venomous glare to the squirrel. Then to Jade.