

# Despair

FADE IN:

EXT. THE CITY - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT. Los Angeles. But it could be any city.

We're watching JACKSON, an elegant man in his mid-30s. He's making his way through the pedestrian traffic of Melrose Avenue or Santa Monica. He's preoccupied, not paying much attention to his surroundings.

CUT TO another man, same age, same social class, coming from the other direction, on the other side of the street. His name is BILL.

Bill looks across the street and starts in surprise. He has just seen and recognized his old friend Jackson. He starts waving wildly, trying to attract Jackson's attention.

BILL

Hey! Hey, Jackson! Hey!

But Jackson is too lost in his own thoughts to notice Bill.

Bill runs across the street, avoiding traffic as best he can—it's not an intersection and it's a busy street.

Then he runs after Jackson.

BILL

Jackson! Damn it! Jackson!

At last, Jackson hears someone calling him and turns. His face expresses a pleasant surprise as he recognizes his old buddy.

JACKSON

Bill?

They shake hands. Bill is a bit out of breath.

BILL

It's great to see you.

JACKSON

Yeah. How long's it been? A year? I thought you were working for that Swiss company in Geneva.

BILL

Nah, that didn't pan out. I've been back for eight months now. Working for Chalmers, downtown. Damn, I'm glad I ran into you. I've just had some amazing news and I was bursting to tell someone, then, bam, you suddenly show up. Must be fate.

Jackson points at a bar or a sidewalk cafe.

JACKSON

D'you have time for a drink? Then you can tell me all about it.

BILL

Great idea. I hope you don't think I'm nuts...

INT. CAFE - DAY

Jackson and Bill are sitting at a table, with half-empty glasses. Jackson is listening to Bill's story.

BILL

So this guy turns out to be an attorney from Auckland, you know, in New Zealand? He tells me that I have this uncle, some guy on Mom's side that I've never met or even heard of before in my life.

He was some kind of prospector and found a uranium mine in Papua New Guinea or some place like that. But the local cannibals or headhunters got to him before he could hitch back to town... Well, what it boils down to is that I've inherited his claim, and apparently it's worth millions, millions you hear me!

JACKSON

(impressed)

Congratulations! What are you going to do with all that money?

BILL

I don't know yet, but hold on, I haven't told you the really weird part yet. You remember how in college I used to go and see that psychic...

JACKSON

Yeah... Madame Zora, or was it Nora? Don't tell me you still believe in that crap?

BILL

Listen, I don't make fun of your beliefs. You're still voting Republican, aren't you? You know how many people go to psychics in this country? 35%! That's a lot of people.

JACKSON

Yeah, but it's all so fake...

BILL

Some of them may be fakes, but there's a lot of quacks in the medical profession, and that doesn't make medicine fake. Anyway, I've been seeing this psychic woman, Laura Nelli... She's a psychomancer. All the stars go to her. I heard she picks all of Jack Nicholson's roles... She's amazing... You can ask anyone... Anyway, she's predicted everything that happened to me, just the way I told you. The uncle. The mine. Everything. What do you say to that, eh, Mister Skeptic?

JACKSON

Um. I don't know.

(a pause)

It could be a coincidence, I guess. You know, like fortune cookies, "you're going to come into money," just kind of generic stuff that could happen to anyone.

BILL

No, it wasn't like that at all. She spelled it all out, with the details and everything. You had to be there... You should go see her. She's amazing. Here's her card...

CLOSE-UP on the card, which is tastefully designed, and simply reads "Laura Nelli-Psychomancer" with an address and a phone number on it.

Jackson doesn't look convinced, in fact he seems to find the whole idea distasteful. He pockets the card distractedly.

JACKSON

You know I've never believed this crap...

BILL

You should keep an open mind. Listen to this: she told me I'm going to meet a gorgeous blonde, marry her and have three kids—two boys and a girl. I'm going to be very, very happy for a long time and live to the ripe old age of ninety-seven, with a bunch of loving grandchildren and great-grandchildren around me. Isn't that great?

JACKSON

Only if you swallow what she told you. I don't believe in fate. As far as I'm concerned, there's just as big a chance that you'll be run over by a bus in the next half-hour.

Bill is clearly annoyed; he starts to get angry and agitated.

BILL

Now I remember how much you used to piss me off in college! You've always been a closed-minded bastard. You've never believed in anything.

JACKSON

That's not true. I..

But Bill gets up and angrily throws a few dollars on the table.

BILL

I can't believe I thought you'd be happy for me! I've already given notice to Chalmers. I'm leaving tomorrow for Tahiti. That's where I'm going to meet my future wife and mother of my kids.

Bill leaves the cafe. Jackson follows him.

JACKSON

C'mon, Bill! I didn't mean to...

#### EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

They're outside. An angry Bill steps onto the street, preparing to cross it again. Jackson is just stepping out of the cafe.

Bill is so angry, he isn't paying attention. Suddenly, a BUS seems to come out of nowhere and SLAMS into him.

His body is thrown into the air, then crashes down onto the tarmac, several feet away.

The usual pandemonium follows: traffic stops, pedestrians gawk at the motionless, bloody body lying in the street, a POLICEMAN arrives to chase away the curious, etc.

Jackson just stands there, in a daze, looking at the body. It is quite obvious that Bill is dead. Stone cold dead.

We HEAR the SIREN of an approaching ambulance. Two ORDERLIES put Bill's body on a stretcher, cover his face and wheel him into the back.

Jackson watches the whole scene as if in an emotional paralysis. The sounds of traffic are muffled in a surreal silence.

He slowly puts his hand into his pocket, then frowns. He pulls out the card of the psychic that Bill just gave him.

Jackson's face changes as his emotions finally kick into gear. He's furious now, his jaws clench; he's just reached a decision.

CLOSE-UP on the card: "LAURA NELLI-PSYCHOMANCER", with her address.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. LAURA NELLI'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

A brass plaque that reads: "LAURA NELLI-PSYCHOMANCER".

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal Jackson standing on the sidewalk, checking that he's found the right address.

INT. LAURA NELLI'S HOME - DAY

An elegant interior. A MAID has just let Jackson in.

MAID

Do you have an appointment?

JACKSON

No, but I have to see Ms. Nelli as soon as possible. It's urgent.

MAID

I'll tell her. If you'd care to wait...

The Maid leaves. Jackson sits down in a comfortable chair. He picks up a magazine, tries to read it but finds that he can't concentrate, so he puts it down and starts fidgeting.

Another door opens and LAURA NELLI walks in. She's tall, distinguished, classy-looking. A high society lady. She's got dark hair and a slightly oriental or Gypsy look about her.

Jackson gets up. Laura says nothing. She just looks at him, not smiling, but not looking hostile either. Just indifferent, waiting. This deflates some of Jackson's pent-up anger.

JACKSON

I had to talk to you because... I felt that... I...

He pauses as if he's trying to marshall his thoughts. His anger begins to rebuild.

JACKSON

OK... I'm here because... A good friend of mine... A client of yours... Bill Jones... You told him he was going to become very rich, marry a beautiful girl and live a long life... Damn! People like you are such frauds! You prey on people's fears and hopes and I just wanted to come here in person and tell you how...

Laura puts up her hand to stop Jackson.

LAURA

He was run over by a bus, wasn't he?

Jackson is stunned. Flabbergasted. Speechless. Almost.

JACKSON

Yes, but how?... How do you know? It just happened... I just came from there... You couldn't have...

LAURA

I saw it in his future when he came to consult me.

JACKSON

You saw it in his...

Jackson goes from bewildered to indignant in the blink of an eye.

JACKSON

Then why didn't you tell him that? Why did you tell him that he was going to live to ninety-seven?

LAURA

Because he was about to die. Nothing I could say or do could have changed that. I wanted his last moments on Earth to be as happy as possible.

(a pause)

Wouldn't you do the same for a patient dying of cancer?

Jackson has nothing to say to that. She's right. He acts almost as if he is in a trance.

LAURA

Since you came all this way to see me, would you like me to read your future?