

(Name of Project)

by  
(Name of First Writer)

(Based on, If Any)

Revisions by  
(Names of Subsequent Writers,  
in Order of Work Performed)

Current Revisions by  
(Current Writer, date)

Name (of company, if applicable)  
Address  
Phone Number

FADE IN:

**INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT**

A sleazy, fleabag motel, with lots of vacancies. A hot and muggy night. The sound of the CRICKETS and CICADAS form a nighttime symphony.

NORM, 40s, sports coat slung over his arm, makes his way towards a town car. He pat dries his sweaty face with a handkerchief. Fights clouds of mosquitoes...

Norm gets in, turns the ignition key, the car starts up. A long beat. He turns on the headlights...

BOOM! The car EXPLODES. He howls and flails as tongues of FLAME overtake the screen, the shape of bodies, sultry music...

**EXT. SKYLINE - NIGHT**

A cityscape lays before us, sweltering in the midst of what looks like a brutal summer night. Seen, barely, through thick clouds of black smoke and flames, which undulates languidly across the burning sky.

The entire city seems to be on fire...

**EXT. WALTER'S APARTMENT - BALCONY - NIGHT**

The curtains are open. A door leading to the rickety fire escape is open. In the distance, we see the billowy smoke that's grown substantially.

A large fan CREAKS, looks old, as it woefully strains to circulate sweltering air. It's hot in here, we can sense the heat as we pan across a dump, walls show cracks, the unmade bed, dubious stains on the carpet.

WALTER, 30s, gets off the bed, sweating copiously, covers the bases with boxers, He's tall, dark and ugly, But a good ugly, The kind of ugly that gets laid more than many of the good looking brands.

We see RACHELINA, pushing 40, *on the bed looking both needy and hapily spent. And it's hard not to imagine she was once a real looker, but tragedy and too much drink have dulled her features...*

He grabs a generic can of beer, moves to the fire escape, gazes at the flames.

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Rachelina grabs him from behind, conducts her own kinky frisk, caressing his cock. He winces. She slurs her words a little maybe drunk.

WALTER

I'm sorry. It's not gonna happen.

RACHELINA

What's wrong, Walter? Did the heat melt your popsicle?

WALTER

Swear to God - feels like it's gonna fall off. What's gotten into you?

RACHELINA

It's too damn hot, everything has started looking good...even you.

She holds out scissored fingers. Walter passes her the cigarette. She takes a drag.

RACHELINA

It's the Big Sleazy motel.

WALTER

Fond memories I take it.

RACHELINA

Yea, when I was in my lustful twenties. Back then, when I was up for some hot, sleazy motel sex...I'd meet up during lunchtime or what have you's with some guy, or girl I'd had my eye on. I'd flirt and smoke and get sloshed. Take the afternoon off. We'd end up there.

(half-smirking)

One of your clients probably torched it. Probably that Zachetti guy.

He laughs in spite of himself.

WALTER

You got him all wrong. He's not an arsonist, just careless with matches.

Rachelina retrieves her clothes, throws on a cheap blouse and pencil skirt...

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CONTINUED: (2)

WALTER

It's not like her husband was in  
the trunk.

She glances over-- and sees Walter on the bed, blowing  
rings at the sagging ceiling.

RACHELINA

Oh please, she offered to pass two  
of her students with failing  
grades to set fire to her Mustang.

WALTER

It was a ford. I worked out a  
sweet deal with the DA.

RACHELINA

Uh-huh. They're not the one who  
has to shell out thousands of  
dollars.

WALTER

Aw, c'mon. Hasn't anybody tried  
to chisel on an insurance claim,  
at least once? Cut me some slack.

Rachelina shakes her head: Jesus. Finally:

RACHELINA

No! If I cut you anymore, you'll  
probably hang yourself.

**INT. '72 MUSTANG - DAY**

Rachelina drives through a small coastal town, oozing big  
Southern Charm. And for the record, it's hot. The heat is  
a character: it lives in your clothes, in your hair, you  
can feel your dreams evaporate as you sleep.

**EXT. STRIP MALL - DAY**

Rachelina pulls up to a small cinder-block building in a  
once bustling strip mall, many of the storefronts boarded  
up -- pre-date 1980s. A sign out front is missing a few  
of its letters; WAVERLY INSURANCE.

**INT. WAVERLY INSURANCE - DAY**

Inside it's burning hot. An AIRCONDITIONER REPAIR MAN  
stands on a ladder, messing with some wires. A couple of  
cubicles.

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A middle-aged RECEPTIONIST, PEG, a very efficient-looking woman sits behind the desk.

**INT. RACHELINA'S OFFICE - DAY**

A clingy small office, reflecting Rachelina's non-brilliance in the matter of financial success. A fan is on full blast -it's blade tapping against metal with each rotation; tack, tack, tack.

She fumbles with a stick of nicotine gum. Walter enters, still in a walking boot. Offers a cigarette. A little 'fuck you' behind her eyes.

He rolls his fedora onto his head, cuts the brim. Stares at certificates and plaques on the wall.

WALTER

Top saleswoman four years in a row.

RACHELINA

Um... yea. I can sell a dead man life insurance.

WALTER

Lunch?

RACHELINA

You buying?

WALTER

On my meager salary, you kidding?

RACHELINA

Well, if you get yourself a better class of clients, you can get out from under that shithole.

**INT. BIG MAMA'S CAFE - DAY**

A greasy spoon that hasn't changed much since the eighties, customers fan themselves with menus, as streamer covered fans and air conditioners spread the sweaty, reeking air to all four corners.

At a window table, Walter and Rachelina have lunch. Across from the cafe, a crummy neighborhood.

WALTER

She wasn't too happy when I broke the news to her.

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CONTINUED:

RACHELINA

Four years is a bargain. When was the last time you had an honest client?

WALTER

...you?

She shakes her head in disbelief, tosses a napkin at him.

SALLY, 40s, a waitress, attractive but worn, bop from table to table, refills Rachelina's glass with ice tea.

WALTER

Holy Cow! You forget to pay the electric bill, Sally.

SALLY

AC isn't keeping up with this dang heat, they tryin' to fix it now -- hopefully soon, or we'll be frying the catfish on the sidewalk.

Rachelina and Walter nearly choke on their food. Walter goes to light a cigarette.

WALTER

Whatever you two have going on, why don't I delicately extract myself and order us some dagwoods.

SALLY

You want me to break your other leg?

RACHELINA

Are you ok? You've been acting really strange lately.

SALLY

Yes, it's 124 degrees and I'm kinda pissed off about it.

INT. CAFE - DAY

TEDDY, a conservative black police detective in his mid-forties joins them. Tough, smart, by the book - a firm believer in God, country and the police force.

TEDDY

Walter, what the heck happened?

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CONTINUED:

WALTER

A slipped on a banana peel.

TEDDY

(chuckles)

If it's not one thing, it's another with you.

Sally sets a glass of ice cold water in front of Teddy.

SALLY

Hey Teddy. You eating or drinking?

TEDDY

Sally, I'll take a coke and a piece of that apple pie.

SALLY

I'd also recommend the prime rib special.

WALTER

Prime Rib?

SALLY

Off the truck last night.

TEDDY

OK, Sally, I'll go with the special.

Teddy fumbles to open his note-pad...

TEDDY

It's hot enough. Why people want to start fires is beyond me. Brisbane. I take it he's one of yours?

The silence between them seems to answer the question.

TEDDY

All you insurance boys and girls would like to prove fraud by arson, wouldn't you?

(probing...)

Probably a mechanic?

RACHELINA

Seriously? Using gasoline. Leaving the can. No, it's a pyro. They're idiots.

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RACHELINA

Proving arson isn't difficult. There are definite telltale signs. For instance, accelerants normally leave trails of char that are noticeably heavier than the burn around them. They show up like black lines everywhere the accelerant was spread. There's only one accelerant I know of that doesn't do this. And it's not gasoline -- it doesn't all burn. The gasoline vapor burns, and the liquid residue is pretty easy for investigators to spot.

(off his look)

Also, arson fires tend to have points of origins that simply don't make sense like closets, or in Brisbane's case a corner, areas with no heat sources or electrical infrastructure.

Teddy rolls with it.

RACHELINA

I knew five minutes after I walked in there -- no valuables. You don't remove anything from the house. Family heirlooms, photographs, valuables, and other keepsakes beforehand, etc. It all has to burn.

Sally sets down his piping hot apple pie and coke. Teddy smiles in appreciation, then digs in.

TEDDY

Y'know. Never thought I'd say this, but you'd make a good detective. You think he did it himself?

RACHELINA

Uh-huh. Make him sweat it out.

INT. RACHELINA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A post-sex Sally stands before the mirror pinning her hair up. Her cute little waitress dress is unzipped. Reflected behind Sally, we can see Rachelina lying naked on the bed, lost in thought.

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CONTINUED:

SALLY

John was telling me, God, it's so hot... he couldn't remember how many people he treated for heat related injuries. Say's he's never seen it this bad. Don't know why I bothered to shower.

Sally grabs her heels, purse, picks up a book: "*THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE*," by James Cain.

SALLY

I'm borrowing this.

Then the POWER goes out. Another blackout.

Rachelina has just emerged from the shower: her hair is wet; she wears a black full slip, lace at hem and bust, She is moving to the armoire, grabs a pack of cigarette's, lights up.

MAN

There was two sticks of dynamite in the trunk behind the seat where he was sitting. They were hooked to the tail light.

MAN

What saved him was probably the head rest in the back which stopped a piece of metal that would have gone in his head.. Also the car had a sunroof, which allowed the blast to escape...

INT. RACHELINA'S HOME - NIGHT

A two-story home is now old and worn, the paint gone. A dilapidated swing-set on the porch. Rachelina's Mustang is parked out front...

INT. RACHELINA'S HOME - NIGHT

It's the end of a scorching workday. Rachelina, hot, barefoot and languid, pads through a modest, cheaply furnished and cluttered, but homey.

She opens the fridge, grabs a can of generic beer. Cracks it open and takes a tentative sip. Yuck.

INT. RACHELINA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's sweltering hot. The covers bunched at the foot of the bed. Rachelina's slip is damp with sweat and clings uncomfortable to her body. She tosses and turns on top of the bed.

The air conditioning unit is obviously blowing hot air. She gets up, turns it off, slides open a patio door.

INT. ROADHOUSE BAR - NIGHT

A dark, seedy dive bar. There aren't many customers. It's hot and there's not much air. They are miserable. Looking like extras on the voyage of the damned.

Rachelina's dressed younger. An eternal teen-ager. Denim cut-offs, tank, wedge heels. She downs a bourbon and holds up the glass.

RACHELINA

I'm dry over her.

The barmaid, ALLISON -- a late thirties woman who doesn't look a day over fifty, brings the bottle. Her gaze settles on --

*In a dark corner booth, a flawless Hitchcock blonde, in a subtly sex yet elegant white sun dress barely covering her sexy tan legs. A diamond tennis anklet, sweat rolls languorously down her taut skin.*

This is MARNIE DIETRICHSON, She's stunning. Probably 40s, could be a bit younger, and not particularly interested in making friends.

Marnie grabs her clutch, heads out. Her body, moving fluidly under that dress. MEN gawk and stare.

As she passes by, shoots Rachelina a look with just enough flirt in it.

EXT. SMALL TOWN - NIGHT

We're in a bustling town square, with a bandstand. Live music and a Confederate statue. Large CROWDS OF PEOPLE congregating: seated in folding chairs. Booths, food and drink, etc...

We drift away from all this and LINGER FOREBODINGLY on Rachelina disappearing into the CROWD.

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CONTINUED:

*Marnie saunters along the pier. A stone's throw from the fishing docks.*

EXT. PIER - NIGHT

*Away from the crowd, it's more quite, peaceful.*

*Rachelina races to catch up, runs well in her heels.*

RACHELINA

*Hey, wait up.*

*Marnie spins. They stare, both feeling the heat and it's not the weather. But Marla plays it cool.*

RACHELINA

*I'm Rachelina. My friends call me Rachel. And you're...?*

MARLA

*Mrs. Marnie Dietrichson.*

RACHELINA

*Come back to Hot Tamales with me.*

MARLA

*It's too hot. Not to mention the smell of tequila, sweat, and sex.*

RACHELINA

*What's wrong with that?*

MARLA

*Everything. If you're a woman like me.*

RACHELINA

*And what type of woman would...*

*Marla lights up, her colossal WEDDING RING sparkles. Rachelina knows she should walk away, but she doesn't.*

*Marla gazes out over the harbor, hoping a breeze will cool the sweat staining her face.*

*Marla seems unfazed by Rachelina's voyeuristic interest in her, but Marla is surely not unaware of it...*

MARLA

*You still here?*

RACHELINA

*I'm not as smart as I look.*

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CONTINUED:

MARLA

That feels good. Call me fractious, but this summer can't end soon enough.

RACHELINA

I know. It's been so hot. Triple-digits everywhere. That's not good for a lot of things. Crops, for one thing. Libidos, another.

MARLA

A cold shower would help you with that.

RACHELINA

Nobody likes a cold shower.

MARLA

You have the morals and attitude of a man. I like that.

RACHELINA

You mind if we walk while we talk.

MARLA

Talk about anything? Whatever you want. Anything but the heat.

RACHELINA

So, you happily married?

MARLA

Are you really interested? It sounds like you're collecting data for a census. And you?

RACHELINA

No I got out of that business a long time ago... cooking and cleaning...

MARLA

And what is your business?

RACHELINA

Insurance.

Marla leans back into the rails. Takes both hands, gathers her hair up off her nape.

Rachelina's eye's feasting on her again.

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CONTINUED: (2)

MARLA

Hard work your job, must be use to getting doors shut in your face.

RACHELINA

And sometime they open and you meet interesting characters.

MARLA

Am I interesting?

Marla attempts to break the spell she's cast on Rachelina as she resumes her stroll, Rachelina lags behind.

MARLA

I went there for the cheap drinks.

RACHELINA

You don't look cheap.

MARLA

How do I look?

RACHELINA

Not from around here. You look too well-tendered. I'm thinking Pine Haven.

MARLA

Why do you go there?

RACHELINA

Pick up lonely, bored, or horny wives.

MARLA

Do I look horny?

RACHELINA

No, but you look lonely.

MARLA

Actually my car was overheating. I thought I'd let it cool down.

Usually I just hang out at a nice little bar, actually the only one in Pine Haven.

RACHELINA

Your fan belt is probably broken. I could look under the hood for you.

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CONTINUED: (3)

MARLA

You a mechanic? I need a mechanic.

Something passing between them that's charged and poignant.

**EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

Marla follows closely behind Rachelina, who lifts the hood, a cloud of steam pours from under the hood.

MARLA

Would that make it boil?

RACHELINA

Yup, especially if you've been driving pretty fast.

(tinkers under the hood)

Your radiator's just boiling hot. It's this hot spell, That's what's causing the overheating. I'll toss in some antifreeze.

She grabs anti-freeze from her trunk. Without thinking, goes to unscrew the radiator cap, burning her hand.

MARLA

Careful, it's hot.

Marla pulls out a scarf from her clutch, hands it to her. Rachelina pours anti-freeze into the radiator.

MARNIE

It's leaking too.

RACHELINA

Lady, you think you got troubles. I was looking over the charred remains of a car the other day -- the guy tried to torch it with his wife inside. Yeah - he doused the inside with lighter fluid then tossed in a match, Luckily for her he forgot the windows.

MARLA

The windows?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RACHELINA

Yeah, If the windows aren't open or smashed, the fire burns itself out. All fires need fuel, heat and oxygen, in vehicle fires.

MARLA

Perhaps I know what you mean.

Marla gets in and starts it up. Rachelina shuts the hood, moves to the driver's side, checks the instrument panel.

Marnie follows her gaze. She's low on fuel, too

MARNIE

I'm glad you noticed the gas...  
I'd hate to get stuck in this heat.

MARNIE

I should get going. Thank you.

MARNIE

No. He keeps a tight leash on me.  
Usually, I skinny-dip by the pool.

RACHELINA

And where would that be?

MARNIE

You're not too smart. Are you?

Rachelina hands her a BUSINESS CARD.

RACHELINA

Nothing wrong with us hanging out.

MARNIE

Sure, if that's all we want to do.

Marla squeals out of the lot leaving Rachelina hooked.

INT. RACHELINA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A post-sex Sally stands before the mirror pinning her hair up. Her cute little waitress dress is unzipped. Reflected behind Sally, we can see Rachelina lying naked on the bed, lost in thought.

SALLY

My hubby was telling me, God, it's so hot...

(MORE)

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CONTINUED:

SALLY (CONT'D)

he couldn't remember how many people he treated for heat related injuries. Say's he's never seen it this bad. Don't know why I bothered to shower.

Sally grabs her heels, purse, picks up a book: "THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE," by James Cain.

SALLY

I'm borrowing this.

Then the POWER goes out. Another blackout.

INT. '79 CAMERO - NIGHT

A cozy sound of rain on the roof. The view through the windshield distorted by thick FOG and rain rivulets. She switches on the wipers -- just a single stroke back and forth -- clearing the view for a moment.

Rachelina trails Marla's car, keeping a safe distance. She slows as Marla pulls off to the shoulder of the road.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Rachelina approaches the Mercedes, Marla lets down her window.

MARLA

Well, to tell you the truth. I don't think I should be here at all. Driving up here gave me time to remember I'm married.

RACHELINA

I won't tell if you don't.

MARLA

I'm afraid I wasn't inebriated as I thought I was. I'm afraid I...I used you to get even with my husband. Don't be angry.

RACHELINA

I won't if you promise not to feel bad.

Suddenly, impulsively she kisses Rachelina, a consolation prize. Drives off...



**EXT. PLANTATION ESTATE - DAY**

A Spanish revival style home, very old Hollywood, palm tress. A huge two-story window fronts a lake, and below, a deck and exterior staircase. The grounds are surrounded by dense woods. They climb out.

ANGELA

It's been in his family for generations. We had slaves. Still do.

**INT. PLANTATION HOME - DAY**

It's beautiful. Angela gives Jack a tour. A staggering mix of 18th century furniture and modern pieces, old and worn, still impressive.

ANGELA

Even though we are a fine old family, settled here and all that, even though there's been a Rodance living in this great big house. Even though you can't keep it warm when it's cold out. Cool when it's hot out, or dry when rain is coming in through the cracks. Fuck the niceties, Angela gets right in Jack's face.