

(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:

**EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - CANYON TRAIL - DAY**

A wide, sweeping aerial shot reveals an ocean of hostile, sun-baked earth. Towering walls of ancient red granite rise like jagged teeth against a sky so blue it looks artificial.

The heat waves ripple off the ground, warping the horizon.

Moving single file along a razor-thin mountain ridge are three magnificent, dark-coated Andalusian horses.

The riders. Leading is--

GEORGINA STERLING (50). Striking, elegant, in incredible shape. She wears a tailored, cream-colored linen riding shirt and immaculate tan breeches.

Designer sunglasses reflect the harsh landscape. A diamond horse-bit bracelet glitters on her wrist.

She laughs, a sound too light for this heavy terrain.

Trailing behind her is---

JERRY STERLING (40s), a handsome son-of-a-bitch with graying temples. He's sweating through designer safari gear-- a tan utility shirt with epaulets, and shading his eyes under a custom, dust-free Stetson.

Bringing up the rear --

SIENNA SMITH (40). Fiercely intelligent and stunning, wearing a form-fitting, dark slate equestrian top unzipped to flash cleavage.

She looks unbothered by the heat. Immovable.

Her eyes are not on the view; they are fixed forward, tracking the narrow movement of Georgina's horse.

Georgina guides her horse to a halt at a massive rocky overlook. Below them, a sheer forty-foot drop descends into a dry, jagged boulder wash.

A physical graveyard of stone.

GEORGINA  
(calling back,  
satisfied)  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GEORGINA (CONT'D)

Look at that grid, Jerry. Another two miles and the valley opens up entirely. The private resort is going to look spectacular from this ridge.

JERRY

(smiling, playful)  
If you say so, darling.

GEORGINA

(chuckling)  
Consider it bought. Sienna, did the county developers finalize the zoning for this northern parcel?

SIENNA

All signed, sealed, and filed this morning, Georgina. The land is legally yours. No one else even knows this trail exists.

Georgina nods, pleased with herself.

She dismounts, her polished mahogany riding boots crunching on the gravel.

Holding the reins, she steps a few inches closer to the crumbling lip of the canyon, turning her back to them to soak in the scene.

GEORGINA

It really is breathtaking.

Sienna looks back at Jerry. A beat. There's electricity between the two.

Sienna's eyes turn dead, cold, and transactional.

Jerry nods once. No words. He reaches calmly into his saddlebag and pulls out a compact, heavy metal canister—a high-powered air-horn.

Jerry aims it at the ear of Georgina's horse. And slams the button.

A DEAFENING, PIERCING BLAST echoes through the canyon walls.

Georgina's horse instantly PANICS. It rears up wildly on its hind legs, its front hooves striking out in pure terror.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

One heavy iron shoe slams directly into Georgina's shoulder.

GEORGINA

Hey! Whoa—!

Georgina loses her footing on the shifting gravel. She tumbles backward over the lip of the canyon.

Georgina crashes down the steep, rocky ravine, her body smashing against jagged boulders before slamming into a dry creek bed forty feet below.

Silence returns to the desert, save for the panting horses.

**EXT. CANYON FLOOR - CONTINUOUS**

Georgina lies in the dirt, gasping for air. Her pristine cream shirt is torn, shredded, and staining fast with blood.

She tries to move, but shrieks in agony. Her right trouser leg is ripped open, the jagged white edge of her tibia has pierced the skin.

A horrific compound fracture against the white fabric.

She clutches her leg, sweating, staring up at the sky.

**EXT. CANYON OVERLOOK - DAY**

Up on the ridge, Jerry and Sienna calmly dismount.

They stand side-by-side at the edge, looking down at her. There is no panic. No screaming for help.

Sienna pulls out a pack of cigarettes, and lights one. She takes a slow drag, watching her friend bleed in the dirt.

Jerry walks over to Georgina's panicked horse, calming it expertly.

Slowly, methodically, Jerry takes the dangling leather straps and loops the reins over the saddle horn—tying them into a neat, secure bowtie.

He pats the horse's flank, letting it wander off down the trail.

Jerry returns to the cliff's edge.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JERRY

(dead calm)

We need to ride back before the  
wind covers our tracks.

Sienna nods, taking one last look down at Georgina. She drops her lit cigarette over the edge.

SIENNA

Goodbye, Georgina. Enjoy the view.

They swing back into their saddles, turn their horses around, and gallop away, leaving Georgina's fading screams to be swallowed by the desert.

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - CANYON TRAIL - MOMENTS LATER

Jerry and Sienna gallop at a furious pace away from the ridge. The sound of Georgina's distant screams fades into the rushing wind.

Jerry pulls his horse to a sudden halt near a deep, plunging rock fissure. Sienna pulls up beside him, her horse chest-heaving.

Without a word, Jerry reaches into his saddlebag and pulls out the metal air-horn canister. He takes his utility shirt sleeve and wipes down the metal surface, clearing his prints.

He hurls the canister deep into the black fissure. It vanishes with a distant, metallic CLANG.

Jerry looks at Sienna. The cold transaction is over; now the performance begins.

Jerry dismounts. He steps over to a sharp, jagged wall of granite. He raises his hands and violently drags his palms and knuckles across the rough stone.

Skin tears. Blood wells up across his knuckles. He winces, but keeps going, tearing the sleeve of his designer safari shirt. He grabs a handful of red desert dust and smears it across his face and clothes.

Sienna watches, completely unbothered, adjusting her hair to look disheveled and panicked.

JERRY

(breathing heavily)

She stepped too close. The horse spooked. I tried to climb down to get her. I couldn't reach.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SIENNA

(nods, practicing her  
tone)

The trail gave way. There was no  
cell service. We had to ride all  
the way back to the trailer.

Jerry swings back into his saddle. His bloody hands grip  
the leather reins.

JERRY

Let's go find the sheriff.

They spur their horses into a hard gallop, heading toward  
the valley floor.

EXT. DESERT STAGING AREA - LATER

A massive, heavy-duty dually pickup truck sits parked in  
the shimmering heat, hooked to a sleek, luxury aluminum  
four-horse trailer.

Jerry and Sienna ride into the clearing. They quickly,  
efficiently unsaddle their two horses and lead them up  
the ramp into the trailer. The heavy metal doors slam  
shut and latch.

Jerry jumps into the driver's seat. Sienna slides into  
the passenger side.

Jerry turns the key. The massive diesel engine roars to  
life. He punches the accelerator, throwing the truck into  
gear. The tires spit gravel and cloud the desert air with  
dust as the truck and trailer barrel down the empty dirt  
road toward the distant highway.

EXT. SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

A low-slung, sun-bleached concrete building sits baking  
under the brutal Mojave sun. A lone American flag hangs  
limp on a metal pole. Two dusty patrol SUVs are parked  
out front.

The heavy diesel rumble of Jerry's dually truck cuts  
through the quiet desert air. The truck and horse trailer  
screech to a violent, erratic halt across three parking  
spaces. Dust billows around the vehicle.

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

A sleepy, air-conditioned silence fills the room. Behind a bulletproof glass window, DEPUTY Miller (50s) slowly flips through a clipboard.

BANG! The heavy front door flies open, slamming against the wall.

Jerry bursts in, stumbling, hyperventilating. His designer safari shirt is torn, his hands are masked in dried blood and red dust. He looks wild-eyed, completely unhinged by panic.

Sienna rushes in right behind him, her hair a tangled mess, weeping hysterically into her hands.

JERRY  
 (screaming, crashing  
 against the desk)  
 Help! Oh god, please, we need an  
 ambulance! We need a helicopter!

Deputy Miller drops his pen, instantly on his feet, reaching for his radio.

DEPUTY MILLER  
 Sir, calm down. What happened?

JERRY  
 My wife—Georgina—she fell! Up on  
 Cougar Ridge trail! Sixty, maybe  
 seventy feet down into the canyon!

Sienna collapses onto a plastic waiting room chair, rocking back and forth, putting on a masterclass of traumatic shock.

SIENNA  
 (sobbing)  
 The rock just—it just crumbled  
 under the horse! There was so much  
 blood...

DEPUTY MILLER  
 (into radio)  
 Dispatch, this is Unit 4, I need a  
 high-angle Search and Rescue team  
 routed to Cougar Ridge  
 immediately. Possible air-vac  
 required.

Miller turns back to Jerry, pulling out a notepad, his eyes scanning Jerry's bloody, torn hands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEPUTY MILLER

Son, how long ago did she fall?

JERRY

(voice cracking,  
sweating)

I don't know—two hours? Maybe three? There's no cell reception up there! We rode the horses as fast as they could run back to the staging area. I tried to scale down the cliff face to reach her, I swear to god I tried—

Jerry holds up his shredded, bloody palms as proof. Miller nods, entirely buying the performance.

DEPUTY MILLER

You did the right thing coming straight here. If she fell that far, you couldn't have moved her anyway.

SIENNA

(looking up, eyes  
red)

Is she going to be okay? Please tell me she's going to be okay...

DEPUTY MILLER

The desert heat is our biggest enemy right now, ma'am. But our birds are fast. (to Jerry) I need you to show my supervisor exactly where on the topo map she went over.

Jerry nods frantically, wiping sweat from his forehead, hiding the cold, victorious smirk threatening to break across his face.

JERRY

Anything. Just save my wife.

SIENNA

Is the helicopter going now? Please tell me they're going now!

SHERIFF MILLER

Bird's spinning up out of Barstow, ma'am. But it's a thirty-minute flight time, and the sun's dropping.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Miller turns back to Jerry, looking him up and down. His eyes linger on Jerry's pristine, expensive boots and the clean, un-scuffed leather gloves sticking out of his pocket.

SHERIFF MILLER

You said you tried to climb down  
after her?

Jerry doesn't flinch. He holds Miller's gaze, offering a gutted, broken nod.

JERRY

I tried. I couldn't get a  
foothold. I had to make the call  
to leave her to get help. God, I  
should have tried harder.

Jerry covers his face, faking a choke-up. Miller pats his shoulder—a heavy, sympathetic thud.

Miller stands over the topographical map, his hand still on his radio. A static burst cuts through the speaker.

DISPATCH (V.O.) crackles in, loud and metallic.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

(over radio)

Unit 4, cancel the bird out of  
Barstow. Air Rescue 5 is grounded.

Miller frowns, leaning closer to his shoulder mic.

SHERIFF MILLER

(into radio)

Dispatch, did you copy my last? We  
have a traumatic compound fracture  
on a cliff-face. Ground transit to  
the Cougar ridge is going to take  
over three hours.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

Copy that, Miller, but the digital  
gauge at the Baker station just  
registered degrees. Air density is  
too low. Command says nothing is  
spinning up until the mercury  
drops below 120. Air support is a  
no-go.

Jerry turns his head slightly, hiding his eyes from the deputy. Under his breath, he lets out a slow, controlled exhale.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

It worked.

Sienna lets out a sharp, theatrical wail, burying her face into Jerry's damp safari shirt.

SIENNA

(screaming)

No! No, you can't just leave her out there! She's bleeding to death!

Miller looks gutted. He kills the radio transmission and addresses the panicked couple.

SHERIFF MILLER

Ma'am, I am truly sorry. When it gets this hot, the rotors can't catch the air. The helicopter literally cannot fly. We have to dispatch the regional ground SAR team from Barstow.

JERRY

(voice cracking,  
acting)

How long? How long for a truck to get up that mining road?

SHERIFF MILLER

With the heat, the engines will be redlining. Best case scenario? Four, maybe five hours before we even reach the trailhead. And then we search on foot.

Jerry covers his mouth, feigning a breakdown, but behind his hands, his eyes are sharp, calculating. He steps up to the topographical map on Miller's desk.

Jerry raises a trembling, bloody finger. He bypasses Cougar Ridge entirely. Instead, he presses his finger onto a remote, jagged canyon twenty miles to the west.

JERRY

It was here. Black Rock Canyon.  
Just past the old sulfur mine.

Sheriff Miller frowns, leaning over the map to look closer at the coordinates.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

SHERIFF MILLER

Black Rock? Son, that's twenty miles further out than the Cougar Ridge trail. There's nothing out there but deep shale washes.

SIENNA

(wiping a theatrical  
tear)

That's where we were, Sheriff. Georgina wanted to see the old mine ruins.

SHERIFF MILLER

(into radio)

Dispatch, update coordinates for ground SAR. Target area is Black Rock Canyon, near the sulfur ruins. Advise teams that transit time just doubled. It's going to be six to seven hours minimum before boots are on the ground.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

(over radio)

Copy that, Unit 4. Updating SAR dispatch.

Jerry turns his head slightly toward the window, letting out a slow, controlled exhale.

Sienna catches his eye for a split second. A cold, silent look of victory passes between them.

JERRY

(choking back fake  
tears)

Please, Sheriff... just find her.

**EXT. ZABRISKIE POINT OVERLOOK - DEATH VALLEY - DAY**

The alien, deeply wrinkled yellow badlands of Death Valley stretch out for miles, looking like a landscape from another planet.

A luxury black, pristine pick-up hauls an expensive three-horse trailer as it blasts down the highway.

**EXT. CANYON FLOOR - MOJAVE DESERT - DAY**

Georgina's face is caked in dried blood and alkaline dust. Her eyes snap open.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The sun has shifted, beating down directly into the narrow trench of the dry creek bed.

The heat is a physical weight, pressing the air right out of her lungs.

She tries to sit up. A blinding, white-hot bolt of agony shouts through her central nervous system.

GEORGINA

(a choked, dry  
rattle)

Ah... God... Jerry...?

She looks down. Her right leg is a nightmare. The white splinter of her tibia glints under the brutal desert sun, surrounded by a pool of purple, sticky blood that has already begun to attract black desert flies.

Her shirt is shredded, exposing her bruised shoulder where the horse shoe struck her.

She reaches for her waist. Her pockets are empty. No phone. She looks around. Nothing but jagged red granite walls.

Georgina realizes the truth. The silence of the canyon settles over her like a shroud. They aren't coming back.

High above, THREE VULTURES cut wide, lazy circles into the cloudless sky.

GEORGINA (V.O.)

(weak, raspy)

*The vultures are already  
circling... Sorry to disappoint,  
boys. I ain't dead yet.*

Georgina digs her fingernails into the dirt and drags her body forward, one grueling inch at a time, toward the pathetic sliver of shade beneath a boulder.

**EXT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - DAY**

Just off a rural roadway, a barely-occupied MOTEL. A relic from yesteryear. A sputtering neon sign: DESERT SUNSET MOTEL.

A couple of road-punished travel vehicles - dusty autos with luggage carriers and out-of-state plates.

**EXT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY**

Sienna in a sexy summer dress that clings uncomfortably to her body in the heat, leans against her late-model Corvette, its top down.

Beat. Jerry pulls alongside in his truck. He climbs out, they unload suitcases.

SIENNA

This heat... God, I love it.

JERRY

You love 123 degrees?

SIENNA

I love the physics of it. A top-tier corporate attorney like me, and I had absolutely no idea that helicopters lose lift when the air gets too thin. What did the Sheriff call it?

JERRY

Density altitude. The rotors can't catch the air. It's like trying to swim in water that's boiling away.

SIENNA

Density altitude. It sounds so clinical. So natural. It completely grounds the fleet until dusk.

JERRY

It buys us a ten-hour head start. Minimum.

SIENNA

By the time the temperature drops enough for those blades to spin, your wife won't be looking for water anymore. She'll be past the point of sweating.

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY**

The wall-unit air conditioner RATTLES and groans violently, blowing weak, lukewarm air into the cramped room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hair wet, fresh face -- Sienna, wrapped in a towel, stands by the window, peering through the curtains. Sweat glints on her collarbone.

She holds a glass of melting ice, pressing it against the side of her neck.

The LOUD, HISSING SOUND of a shower echoes against the thin walls. Steam billows out into the bedroom.

Calling out, frustrated -

SIENNA

It's like an oven in here. The weather channel says the asphalt outside is hitting one-forty. Even the local power grid is failing.

Jerry exits, wet, a towel around his waist, but he looks unbothered by the squalor.

JERRY

The water wasn't even cold. The cold tap comes out boiling.

He lights a cigarette, then -

JERRY

Sixty-dollars a night to stay in this dump. How do you get a refund?

(beat)

I say we head back to the resort. Wait it out there.

SIENNA

No. The optics would look bad. A few more days wont kill us.

JERRY

A few more days? Georgina is forty feet down a ravine with a compound fracture in one-hundred-and-twenty-degree heat. She doesn't have water. She doesn't have a phone. By tomorrow morning, the sun will finish what we started.

Sienna paces. A crack in her resolve.

A pause - Jerry throws her arms around Sienna. Sienna doesn't push him away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SIENNA

The human body can do strange things when it's cornered, Jerry. I've seen men survive worse for spite.

JERRY

She is a pampered billionaire who screams if her steak isn't medium-rare. She's going to bake out there, Sienna. And when she dies, that trust reverts to me. Which means you get your five-million-dollar legal fee.

He kisses Sienna. They stand there a moment, Sienna frozen in place. Finally Jerry steps away.

JERRY

So stop pacing. Stop sweating. Just pray the weather stays exactly this hot.

Sienna grabs Jerry. And just like that, they're making out and she's already got a hand inside his boxers.

**EXT. CANYON FLOOR - MOJAVE DESERT - LATE AFTERNOON**

The sun has sunk low enough to turn the canyon walls into deep, bloody crimson shadows.

Georgina lies beneath the thin, pathetic shadow of a granite boulder. Her breathing is shallow, a rhythmic, dry clicking in her throat.

She stares down at her right leg.

The white spear of her tibia bone stands out in sickening, sharp relief against her blood-soaked cream riding trousers.

Flies buzz in a dark cloud over the sticky pool forming around her calf.

GEORGINA

(guttural whisper, to herself)

Fix it... you have to fix it...

She reaches down, her fingers trembling. Her diamond horse-bit bracelet, scuffed and caked in dirt, clinks against her wrist.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

She looks at her right leg. The bone is under the skin, but the calf is swollen to twice its size, purple and hot to the touch.

She cannot crawl out of this forty-foot grave. She has to stand.

Georgina scans the graveyard of stone. Shadows stretch like black fingers across the canyon floor.

Ten feet away, sticking out from a pile of dried flood debris, is a thick, sun-bleached branch of a dead ironwood tree.

It is sturdy, jagged, and forks perfectly at the top into a rough 'Y' shape.

GEORGINA

(voice a raspy, dry rasp)

Come on... come on...

She drags her dead-weight lower body across the sharp gravel. Every inch sends a sickening tremor up her spine.

She reaches the ironwood branch. She wraps her fingers around the rough, splintered bark and hauls it closer.

She positions the 'Y' crook of the branch right under her left armpit. It fits, but the jagged wood bites brutally into her flesh.

To cushion it, she unclasps her diamond horse-bit bracelet around the wood, using the platinum links to bind a remaining scrap of her torn linen sleeve over the splinters.

A makeshift crutch. Luxury turned into survival utility.

GEORGINA

(breath wheezing)

Up. Get up.

Using the granite boulder behind her for leverage, she pushes down on the ironwood branch with her left arm and drives her healthy left leg into the dirt.

Her body elevates. Her shattered right foot dangles an inch off the ground, trembling.

For a second, she hovers, perfectly balanced on one leg and a dead tree branch. The wind howls through the canyon, threatening to topple her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She leans her weight forward onto the crutch. The wood groans, but holds.

Georgina takes her first, agonizing step forward into the dark, swinging her broken body toward the steep ravine path. She isn't waiting to die.

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY**

Jerry and Sienna tangled in the sheets post sex. Sienna holds up her hands, turning them this way and that.

Sienna snuggles into Jerry's chest. Gets serious for a moment.

**EXT. RAVINE PATH - CANYON WALL - NIGHT**

The sunset casts a stark, skeletal light over the sheer, forty-foot incline. It's a vertical wall of loose shale, crumbling red granite, and prickling catclaw brier.

Georgina stands at the base, looking up. The crutch is wedged tight under her arm, the diamond bracelet glinting.

She plants the base of the crutch into a narrow ledge. Pushes.

GEORGINA (V.O.)  
 (calm, measured, a  
 boardroom tone)  
 In any hostile acquisition, your  
 greatest asset isn't your capital.  
 It's your predictability.

Georgina drives her good left boot into the gravel, hoisting her weight up a measly six inches.

The shale slides out from under her. She barely catches herself, her fingers clawing into the raw dirt.

GEORGINA (V.O.)  
 You find out exactly what your  
 opponent expects you to do... and  
 you do the absolute opposite.

She jams the crutch upward, wedging it into the root system of a stubborn desert shrub. She pulls her body up again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The jagged catclaw thorns slash across her exposed arms and neck. Blood beads on her skin, black in the moonlight.

She doesn't even blink. The pain in her leg has entirely numbed her to everything else.

GEORGINA (V.O.)

Jerry thinks I'm a creature of comfort. He thinks because I buy five-thousand-dollar saddles and sleep in five-star resorts, that I am soft. He thinks the desert will do his dirty work for him.

She takes another agonizing step. The ironwood branch groans under the pressure.

A sharp rock cuts right through her left riding boot, but she keeps moving.

She is ten feet up now. Thirty more to go.

GEORGINA (V.O.)

He forgot who built the company. He forgot who negotiated the northern parcels. He forgot that before I had the money... I had the teeth.

Georgina stops, gasping for air, her forehead pressed against the cold granite wall.

She looks up at the rim of the canyon, her eyes blazing with a terrifying, cold-blooded clarity.

GEORGINA (V.O.)

They aren't looking for me out here, Jerry. Which means when I come back... you won't see me coming at all.

With a final, guttural heave, she jams the crutch upward and rips herself further up the mountain.

**EXT. RAVINE PATH - CANYON WALL - DAY (CONTINUOUS)**

Georgina hangs suspended on the cliff face, fifteen feet up.

A slab of red granite breaks off under her makeshift crutch. She drops two feet, her good boot skittering wildly over the loose shale.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She doesn't panic. Her heart rate doesn't even spike.

Instead, she scans the rock face in the moonlight. Her panic vanishes, replaced by a cold, mechanical focus.

She wets her index finger with spit, holding it up to the night air.

Georgina feels the wind drift, calculating the thermal updraft against the rock face.

She locks her left elbow, wedging the crutch into a horizontal fissure.

She shifts her center of gravity low, hugging the cold stone—executing a textbook three-points-of-contact climbing stance.

She looks up at the next ledge, mapping out her route with the unblinking precision of a military surveyor.

This isn't a rich woman panicking in the dirt. This is a trained specialist returning to her element.

She doesn't pull with her arms; she uses her core, sliding her hip laterally onto a solid limestone shelf.

She jams the crutch up to the next tier, climbing out of her own grave with chilling, methodical efficiency.

Twenty feet to the rim.

She drags herself over the final crest, collapsing onto the flat desert plateau. Her breathing is ragged, but her eyes are dead and hyper-focused.

**EXT. DESERT PLATEAU - DAY**

*The transition is brutal. The 123-degree kiln has vanished, replaced by a piercing, sub-50-degree desert chill.*

*Her body shakes. Hypothermia is setting in.*

*She rolls onto her back, shielding her eyes from the blinding sun. She survived the fall. She survived the climb.*

*She blinks away sweat. Something glitters in the dirt three feet away. A sleek, titanium smartphone. Resting perfectly on a flat stone.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Georgina freezes. Her breath catches. It's her phone. Placed neatly. Deliberately. Left behind like a mock tombstone.

She drags her body forward, ignoring the pain, and snatches the phone. Georgina presses the power button.

The screen lights up. Reflecting the dirt and dried blood on her face. NO SERVICE.

A cynical, breathless laugh escapes her lips.

They knew there was no signal. That's why they left it.

Suddenly-- DING. The phone catches a single, fleeting bar of roaming cellular signal from a distant tower.

A lone notification drops down from the top of the screen.

It's an automated Apple Home alert from her luxury estate. FRONT DOOR UNLOCKED BY USER: JERRY STERLING.

Georgina stares at the screen. Her eyes narrow. The agonizing pain in her face vanishes, replaced by a cold, terrifying clarity.

They aren't looking for her. They are already at her house.

Georgina grips her smartphone. The screen mocks her: NO SERVICE. She doesn't panic. Her engineer's brain takes over, calculating.

She pulls a sharp, jagged flake of obsidian rock from the dirt. Using the stone like a wedge, she forces it into the seam of the phone's sleek casing.

With a brutal twist, she pries the chassis open. Snap. The waterproof seals tear. The backplate pops loose.

She exposes the dense, custom circuitry inside.

With precise, blood-stained fingers, she unclips the phone's internal GPS chip and antenna array.

Even without a cellular network to make a call, she knows the hardware's autonomous receiver is still actively pinging overhead military satellites.

She pulls a high-efficiency solar-charging phone sleeve from her pocket.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She splices the exposed wiring into the power source, forcing the phone into a hardwired beacon loop.

She opens her proprietary, offline mapping app.

The screen flickers. A raw, unrendered topographic grid appears. A tiny, pulsing BLUE DOT blinks in the dead center of the empty desert grid.

It works. She has an active, offline satellite tracking coordinate.

Georgina looks down at her shattered leg, then at the blue dot on the screen.

She flips the compass calibration. A thin vector line cuts across the digital map, pointing precisely Northeast.

Toward a hidden, underground water pipeline five miles away.

She presses the phone back together, wraps it securely in a torn strip of her shirt, and ties it to her wrist.

She looks out at the horizon. She has a map. She has a target.

The blue dot on the topographic map pulses on the screen. It tracks her perfectly.

Georgina stares at it. A cold, sudden realization washes over her face.

If she can see herself, so can they.

Jerry has her master passwords. He's sitting in their house right now. All he has to do is open the tracking app on his own device, and he'll see her crawling toward the highway.

He'll come back to finish her off.

Her finger hovers over the screen. If she turns it off, she loses the digital map. She loses her lifeline.

She will be blind in a desert that wants to kill her. She doesn't hesitate.

She holds down the power button. SLIDE TO POWER OFF.

She swipes her bloody thumb across the glass. The screen goes pitch black. The phone dies.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Her reflection stares back at her from the dark glass-haggard, bleeding, but fiercely alive.

She wraps the phone in a scrap of clothing and slides it deep into her pocket.

Georgina looks up at the sun, using it to judge her heading. Northeast. Toward the highway.

She pulls the crutch from under her arm and crawls forward on her elbows. Her eyes hunt the barren earth.

She finds a low, skeletal thicket of dead creosote bush and dry sage. Perfect tinder.

Georgina rips the brittle, dry twigs from the roots, stacking them methodically into a small, tight teepee shape on the dirt.

She creates a fire break by clearing a flat circle in the dust around the wood.

Georgina reaches down and unzips the hidden, high-end utility pocket on the thigh of her expensive riding trousers.

She pulls out her only remaining tool: a heavy, brushed-platinum Cartier cigarette lighter. A gift from Jerry.

She flicks the wheel. A clean, wind-resistant blue flame flares to life, casting a warm glow over her caked-on blood and dirt.

**EXT. DESERT PLATEAU - NIGHT**

Georgina doesn't light the wood yet.

She looks up at the western horizon. Twenty miles away, the faint, pulsing blue and red lights of the Sheriff's rescue trucks are visibly crawling along the wrong mountain range.

GEORGINA (V.O.)

(quiet, analytical)

If I build a signal fire, they'll see it. The ground team will redirect. The radio traffic will trigger. And Jerry will know the desert failed him.

She looks down at the tinder stacked in the dirt. She flicks the lighter off, plunging her face back into shadow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GEORGINA (V.O.)

He'll have time to clear the bank accounts. He'll have time to run.

Using the sharp, broken end of her ironwood branch, she digs into the hard desert crust, excavating a tight, ten-inch hole in the dirt.

Beside it, she digs a second, angled tunnel connecting to the bottom for airflow.

GEORGINA (V.O.)

Never give your target a warning shot. You hide the smoke. You hide the fire. You wait until you're close enough to cut the throat.

She transfers the twigs into the hidden pit.

GEORGINA (V.O.)

A Dakota fire hole. No light signature. No visible smoke. Just pure, underground heat.

Flick. The Cartier flame meets the dry creosote. The wood catches.

The fire burns entirely underground. It vents its heat upward through the main hole without throwing a single spark or visible glow across the flat desert territory.

Georgina hovers her trembling, dirt-caked hands directly over the warm, invisible thermal vent. The heat floods her chest.

She stares into the darkness, completely hidden from the world, waiting out the freezing night.

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 13 - NIGHT**

TREVOR (20s), the smarmy motel clerk, lets himself in, turns on the light.

O.S. RHYTHMIC THUMPING AND GROANING.

A couple is having noisy SEX next door.

MAN (O.S.)

You like that?

WOMAN (O.S.)

Mmm... I do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN (O.S.)

Fuckin' pound that shit.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Fuck my tight little pussy.

Trevor rolls his eyes... vaguely amused, until it gets boring.

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY**

The crack of dawn.

Jerry sleeps, a freshly-fucked Sienna curled up next to him. She's awake. A beat, then she eases away from him. Touches his face lovingly.

**EXT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - POOLSIDE - DAY**

An old, cracked turquoise swimming pool sits in the center of this gritty roadside motel.

The desert sun is already a white-hot hammer. The heatwave has turned the air into a shimmering haze.

Sienna pulls herself out of the pool. Dripping wet in a string bikini. More naked than not. She grabs a towel and dries off.

Trevor lounges against a rusty patio umbrella.

TREVOR

Triple digits before seven A.M.  
Heat like this makes people  
restless. Makes 'em do crazy  
things.

SIENNA

(cold, dry)  
The accommodations are fine,  
Trevor. Thank you.

TREVOR

There's nicer places than this.  
Closer to the city.

SIENNA

This is convenient. And temporary.

She picks up her iced tea. The ice is already completely melted. Trevor watches her sip it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TREVOR

Ice melts fast out here. Almost as fast as a trail goes cold.

Sienna freezes. She slowly lowers the glass.

SIENNA

Excuse me?

TREVOR

You're Sienna Sterling. The lawyer. Must be a nightmare for the husband.

SIENNA

I don't discuss my clients.

TREVOR

Oh, I'm sure. Especially when the client's wife vanishes into thin air. A woman like Mrs. Carson doesn't just get lost, does she?

Sienna steps into sexy heels. Trevor steps closer, his eyes raping her.

TREVOR

Thin walls in Room 14. This place? You'd be surprised at the things you hear through the drywall. 'Come on, baby.' 'Mmm, I like that.' Sounds like a real grief-stricken environment in there.

Sienna's face goes stone cold. She doesn't flinch.

SIENNA

A cold shower might help you with that overactive imagination, Trevor.

TREVOR

I spend a lot of time out in those canyons. My trailer's out past the North Ridge. Great A/C. King-sized bed. If you ever get lonely.

SIENNA

I'm not that desperate.

TREVOR

You like 'em older, huh? Richer?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Sienna takes a step past him. Trevor plants a hand on the patio table, blocking her path.

TREVOR

There's old mining caves out in those hills. Cool, dry. Good place to hide a body. Or seek shelter. If she's alive, that's where she'll be. So you tell Mr. Carson don't go worrying his little head none.

SIENNA

(hard, dangerous)

He is worried. And I'd step back if I were you.

SIENNA

As much as I've enjoyed the chat, Trevor...

Trevor smiles. Sienna walks away, her heels clicking sharply on the scorching concrete.

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY**

Sienna slips inside, locking the deadbolt behind her.

Jerry grabs his suitcase and hurls it onto the unmade bed. He begins tearing clothes off hangers, jamming them inside in a frenzy.

JERRY

No. No way. We are leaving. Right now.

SIENNA

Jerry, stop. Put the clothes back.

JERRY

Did you not hear yourself? The kid knows, Sienna! He knows we're screwing around while my wife is rotting out in the dirt. If he tells that Sheriff-

SIENNA

He hasn't told Miller. If he wanted to talk to the cops, he would have done it already. He wants money.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JERRY

Then we give him the money! Or we get in the car and we drive back to the city where we can think straight. This heat is killing me. I can't breathe in this room.

Jerry zips the suitcase. He reaches for his truck keys on the dresser.

Sienna steps into his path. She doesn't move. Her calm is terrifying.

SIENNA

You leave now, and you look guilty. Miller is waiting for you to run. He's probably watching the parking lot right now.

JERRY

I don't care! I'll tell him I couldn't handle the grief. I'll tell him the stress was making me sick.

SIENNA

And what happens when they check your phone records? What happens if Miller interviews Trevor and the kid tells him he heard us celebrating her disappearance through the wall?

Jerry stares at her, his hand frozen over the keys.

SIENNA

You aren't a grieving husband if you flee the county, Jerry. You're a fugitive.

JERRY

(voice cracking)

We left her out there, Sienna. We watched her fall and we just... walked away.

SIENNA

No. \*She\* got lost. \*You\* panicked. That's our story. That's the only story that keeps us out of a cage. Now drop the suitcase.

Jerry's shoulders sag. The fight drains out of him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He slumps onto the bed, burying his face in his hands.

Sienna watches him for a beat. She crosses to the dresser, picks up his keys.

**EXT. CANYON FLOOR - DAWN**

The morning air is crisp, but the horizon promises another day of executioner heat.

Georgina drags her leg, using a smaller branch as a crutch. She is shivering, her stomach GROWLS.

She scans the barren ground. Nothing but rock and sand.

Then, she spots it.

A cluster of PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS growing against the canyon wall. Hanging from the green pads are plump, purple-red cactus fruits.

Georgina collapses next to the cactus, her mouth watering. She reaches out to grab a fruit.

She pulls her hand back—his fingers are instantly pierced by dozens of microscopic, hair-like needles.

She groans in frustration.

Georgina grabs a flat, sharp stone. She scraps the skin of the purple fruit, grinding the needles off against the rock.

Georgina smashes the fruit open with the stone. The interior is a vibrant, bleeding crimson, packed with seeds and wet pulp.

Georgina shoves the pulp into her mouth.

She chews frantically, swallowing the sweet, sticky juice. Needles prick the inside of her lips, but she doesn't care.

*GEORGINA (V.O.)*

*God, it's sweet. Spite tastes  
good, but staying alive tastes  
better.*

She wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, leaving a smear of red juice and blood that looks like war paint.

Georgina looks up at the canyon wall.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The sun is just starting to peak over the top, hitting her face with a sudden, warning heat.

She has food. She has a splint. Now, she needs shade before she bakes.

**EXT. CANYON FLOOR - DAY**

The pale morning light burns away, replaced by a blinding, white glare.

Georgina looks back. Her tracks are a jagged, chaotic line of dragged dirt.

Georgina looks up. The shadows at the base of the cliff are shrinking by the minute. Soon, there will be nowhere to hide.

Georgina trips on a loose stone. She crashes hard onto her side. She screams, clutching her leg.

She lies there, panting. If she doesn't get up, she will cook right here on the rocks.

Whispering, delirious...

GEORGINA

Get up... Get up...

Through the shimmering heat waves, she looks thirty yards ahead.

At the base of the granite cliff face, a dark, jagged fissure splits the rock—a narrow, shallow cave recess.

It looks completely black inside. Cold.

Georgina forces herself onto her hands and knees.

She drops the crutch. It's too slow. She crawls, dragging her bound leg like a dead weight.

**EXT. CANYON - DAY**

Georgina trudges through the heat. The flimsy stick from before is gone, replaced by a GNARLED MESQUITE BRANCH—a crude, makeshift crutch wedged tightly under his armpit.

Georgina fights her way up a steep, gravelly incline.

She hoists herself forward. The crutch slips on the loose shale.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She wobbles, jolting pure agony up her spine.

She stops. Pants like a dying dog. Her tongue is too swollen for her mouth.

VVRRRRRRR...

Georgina freezes. She tilts her head, straining to hear over the pounding of her own heart.

An engine idling. The low, deep rumble of a customized V8. His truck.

Adrenaline obliterates the pain.

Georgina drives the crutch into the gravel, throwing her body weight upward.

She scrambles, half-limping, half-lunging up the final steep incline, desperately balancing against the rock face.

Georgina reaches the crest, chest heaving.

GEORGINA  
(a dry, silent croak)  
Jer... ry...

She looks down into the wash below.

Nothing. Just a vast, shimmering ocean of empty sand.

The rumble grows louder. Deafening. It echoes off the canyon walls.

Georgina frantically spins around on her good leg, the crutch grinding into the dirt.

She looks up at the sky, then toward a nearby ravine.

Ten feet away sits a dead, skeletal shrub. Hanging from its branches are thousands of DESERT CICADAS.

Their bodies vibrate in unison, creating a shrill, mechanical hum that perfectly mimics a distant, idling engine.

The sound isn't a rescue. It's nature laughing at her.

The realization hits Georgina, hard. The adrenaline fades, leaving only the crushing weight of her exhaustion.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She loses her balance. The crutch slips, and Georgina crashes hard into the dirt, her leg twisting beneath her.

She screams, but only a raspy hiss escapes her throat.

A tear wells in her eye, but the desert heat evaporates it before it can track down his cheek.

Propped up on one elbow, she stares at the vibrating insects. Her despair hardens into rage.

Georgina swipes her crutch through the air, smashing the gnarled branch down into the dead shrub.

The cicadas scatter in a frantic explosion of wings, leaving her in absolute, terrifying silence.

Georgina lies in the dust, staring at the endless blue sky.

She drags herself back up, using the crutch.

Georgina takes one agonizing step forward. Away from the mirage. Deep into the rocks.

**INT. SHERIFF SUBSTATION - BREAK ROOM - DAY**

Jerry and Sienna wait. Sienna sits at the laminate table, a half-empty paper cup of stale coffee between her hands.

Miller steps inside. He looks haggard. His uniform shirt is stained with sweat and white desert dust; his eyes are shot with red veins.

JERRY

Miller. Tell me you found her.  
Tell me the ground team reached  
the ridge.

Miller removes his Stetson, placing it heavily on the table.

SHERIFF MILLER

Mr. Carson... my boys spent the  
entire night combing the Black  
Hills. They cleared the western  
ridge, the boulder wash, and the  
lower basin.

SIENNA

And?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF MILLER

Nothing. No sign of the horse, no sign of your wife. The wind picked up around midnight, wiped out any ground tracks. With the heat index yesterday, and the plunge in temperature last night...

Miller trails off. He doesn't want to say the words.

Jerry covers his face with his hands, letting out a ragged, muffled sob.

Beneath his palms, his lips curve into a tight, victorious grin.

JERRY

She's still out there. She's alone. You have to keep looking!

SHERIFF MILLER

We aren't stopping, sir. The temperature is dropping back down to 118 today, which means the air density is clear. Dispatch just authorized the Barstow helicopter. Air Rescue 5 is spinning up right now.

Sienna's eyes freeze. The fake tears in her eyes dry up instantly.

SIENNA

The helicopter?

SHERIFF MILLER

Yes, ma'am. They're going to run a grid search over the entire Black Hills quadrant from above. If she's moving, or if her horse is tied up somewhere, the thermal imaging will pick her up within the hour.

Jerry lowers his hands. His face is pale—this time, the panic isn't acting.

Jerry looks at Sienna. A silent, terrifying realization passes between them in a fraction of a second.

JERRY

Thank god. Can we... can we go out to the trailhead?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JERRY (CONT'D)

We can't just sit in this room  
anymore. We're losing our minds.

SHERIFF MILLER

Alright. Follow my cruiser out.  
But you stay by the trucks. Let  
the air team do the tracking.

Miller turns and exits, buzzing himself back through the  
secure comms door.

The instant the door clicks shut, Jerry turns on Sienna,  
his voice a harsh, frantic whisper.

**EXT. ROCK CAVE - DAY**

Georgina reaches the mouth of the fissure. She shoves her  
upper body inside the dark opening.

**INT. ROCK CAVE - DAY**

Instantly, the temperature drops. The air is cool,  
smelling of ancient dust and dry earth. It feels like  
heaven.

She lets out a sob of relief, collapses onto the floor.

Suddenly-- a sharp, dry, buzzing rattle echoes from the  
back of the cave.

Georgina freezes.

In the dim light, three feet away from her face, a coiled  
MOJAVE GREEN RATTLESNAKE raises its triangular head. Its  
tongue darts out, tasting his sweat.

It is defending its shade.

Georgina holds her breath, paralyzed.

She looks at the blazing, lethal sun outside the cave,  
then looks at the deadly predator inside.

Slowly, deliberately, Georgina slides her hand down to  
her belt. She grips a sharp, heavy stone she used to  
smash the cactus fruit.

A low, lethal whisper -

GEORGINA

My spot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

With a burst of survival adrenaline, Georgina slams the stone down just as the snake strikes with a wet, heavy THUD.

The dry, frantic rattling suddenly stops.

Georgina lies gasping. Her knuckles are scraped and bleeding.

The snake is severed in two. It's head lies a foot away, its jaws reflexively snapping open and shut in the dark dirt.

Georgina stares, her heart pounding.

**INT. YACHT CABIN - DAY (FLASHBACK)**

*High-end luxury. Air conditioning hums. On a flat-screen TV, a host holds up a dead viper.*

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR (V.O.)  
*...even hours after death, a  
snake's reflex can still deliver a  
lethal bite.*

**RESUME SCENE**

Georgina blinks. Sweat stings her eyes.

The snake's jaws suddenly snap open.

Using the tip of her crutch, Georgina drags the snapping head toward the mouth of the cave.

She digs a quick, shallow hole in the sand with her boot heel, shoves the head inside, and buries it, stomping the earth flat.

She returns to the back of the cave, looking down at the remaining three feet of thick, muscular snake body.

It is still writhing with post-mortem nerve spasms.

Her stomach growls. Shock and the sheer physical exertion of setting her leg have drained Georgina.

Georgina uses the sharp edge of the stone to slit the tough, scaled skin down the center of the belly.

She peels the skin back like a sleeve, exposing the pale, tight ribbon of white meat underneath.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Georgina hesitates for a fraction of a second - the civilized corporate mogul recoiling at the horror of what she's about to do.

Then, remembers--

QUICK FLASH: *On the CLIFF, Georgina staring up and them. Jerry's cold smile. That lit cigarette falling towards her.*

Georgina rips a chunk of the raw, stringy meat away from the spine with her teeth.

She chews, swallowing the tough, metallic-tasting meat. It is pure protein. Raw fuel.

As she eats, she looks out through the narrow mouth of the cave.

Outside, the canyon is blinding, shimmering under a brutal, midday sun. The air looks thick with white heat.

Georgina wipes the snake blood from her mouth.

The panic is gone from her eyes. Her pupils are sharp, dark, and focused.

Georgina leans back against the cold granite wall, watching the entrance like a predator waiting for prey.

She closes her eyes, drifting into a deep, tactical sleep.

**EXT. BLACK HILLS TRAILHEAD - DAY**

A dust storm of blue and red light illuminates the desert scrub.

Two Sheriff's cruisers and a Search and Rescue transport truck sit idling at the mouth of the wrong canyon.

Jerry's truck is parked right behind them. Jerry and Sienna stand near the hood, water bottles, sunglasses shielding their eyes.

Miller walks briskly back from the tracking line, a radio crackling to life on his shoulder. His face is hard.

Jerry steps forward, putting on his frantic-husband face.

JERRY

Miller! Did the air team spot her?  
What's the word?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF MILLER

The air team didn't find your wife, Mr. Carson. But a local rancher over in the Canyon Trail system just called in.

Sienna's breath hitches.

SHERIFF MILLER

He found her dark Andalusian gelding. It was grazing near an old water wash.

Jerry forces a massive, gasping sigh of relief. He covers his mouth, playing the part.

JERRY

Oh, thank God. Thank God. Where is it? Is she near the horse?

SHERIFF MILLER

It wasn't anywhere near the Black Hills. It was twenty miles east, near the old dry creek beds by the granite cliffs.

The fake relief instantly drains from Jerry's face. His jaw slackens. Next to him, Sienna goes entirely rigid.

SIENNA

(stuttering,  
recovering fast)

That... that's impossible. The horse must have wandered. It must have run all night through the canyons—

SHERIFF MILLER

Ma'am, it is 123 degrees out here today. A horse galloping full tilt for twenty miles through red granite boulders in this heat would have cooked its own lungs. It wouldn't be grazing. It would be dead.

Sienna doesn't flinch. She shifts into lethal defense attorney mode. A cold, condescending smile touches her lips.

SIENNA

It didn't gallop, Sheriff. It had a full day and a night.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SIENNA (CONT'D)

It probably stood under a mesquite tree during yesterday's peak heat, then spent eight hours of cool night air walking the flats. Basic equine survival instinct—it was searching for a water wash. While your men were searching this ridge all night, the animal was moving east.

Miller blinks, caught off guard by her aggressive, clinical tone. He looks from Sienna to the map.

SHERIFF MILLER

A loose horse avoids rugged terrain in the dark, counselor. It's a physical clue. Protocol dictates we shift a ground team over to the granite cliffs—

SIENNA

Protocol? Or laziness? If you pull your teams off the northern ridge now based on where a stray animal drifted overnight, you are abandoning Georgina where she actually fell yesterday. You are wasting a second day of daylight.

JERRY

Oh god, Sheriff, please don't stop looking where he fell... she's out of water...

Sienna, looking down her nose at Miller. She is in absolute control, enjoying her intellectual dominance.

SIENNA

My client's wife is a billionaire, Sheriff. If your 'protocol' causes her death because you followed a stray animal, the civil lawsuit will bankrupt this county.

(beat)

Keep your men on the northern ridge. That is where she is.

Miller stares at Sienna for a long, heavy beat.

The easygoing demeanor fades. He measures her - absorbing the threat, the arrogance, and the sheer intensity of her pushback.

He nods, slipping the map back into his uniform pocket.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SHERIFF MILLER

(low, measured)

Twenty-four hours. Hiding in the shade, walking at night. You certainly have it all figured out, counselor.

SIENNA

I'm paid to look at facts, Sheriff. Not shadows.

SHERIFF MILLER

Right. Well... I'll tell the boys to double down on Black Hills.

Beat.

SHERIFF MILLER

Oh, just one more thing. That rancher who caught the animal? He said the split-leather reins weren't dragging. They weren't snagged on the brush. They were looped neat and tidy over the saddle horn. Like someone tied 'em up so the beast wouldn't trip while it walked.

Jerry's stomach bottoms out. His mind races back to the cliffside.

Beat.

SHERIFF MILLER

In all my years tracking in this basin... I've never seen a panicked horse manage to tie its own reins into a neat little Western bow after throwing its rider.

Sienna's plastic smile freezes. Miller gives her a tiny, terrifying nod.

SHERIFF MILLER

So whoever sent that horse walking twenty miles east... they did it yesterday morning, right after she fell. Before the reins could get caught. Which means whoever tied that knot... knew exactly what they were doing. Have a good afternoon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Miller walks away toward the command truck. Jerry looks at Sienna, his face pale with pure terror.

JERRY

(whispering)

Sienna... he knows. He knows the horse didn't run away wild.

**INT. JERRY'S TRUCK - DAY**

Jerry drives - his composure cracks a little as he gazes into Sienna's eyes.

JERRY

The reins, Sienna. You didn't see his face when he said it. I did. Why the hell did you let me tie them?

SIENNA

You told me you were making sure the beast didn't trip and break its neck on the trail! You're the horseman, Jerry, not me.

JERRY

But he noticed! Miller noticed! He knows a panicked horse doesn't tie its own reins!

SIENNA

Miller doesn't know a damn thing. He's a small-town cop with a badge and a pension to protect. He noted a detail. That's what they do to feel useful.

JERRY

He looked right at us. He knew we were lying.

SIENNA

He knew he was being threatened with a lawsuit by a senior partner from a top-tier firm. Did you see his face? He folded. The entire search is staying exactly where I pointed them. Twenty miles away from your wife.

Jerry shakes his head, sweating through his collar. Beat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SIENNA

By the time they realize Black Hills is a dead end and shift teams east, it will be too late. The heat index is hitting 124 today. Georgina has already been out there for over twenty-four hours without water. By tonight, she'll be a biological statistic.

A tense beat.

SIENNA

A coroner in this heat isn't going to pull forensic evidence off a piece of split-leather. The reins won't matter. The only thing that will matter is your signature on the probate filing.

His panic subsides, but it doesn't disappear.

JERRY

What if Miller checks the gate cameras at the ranch? Or the highway towers?

SIENNA

Let him. We didn't take the highway yesterday morning, remember? We took the unmapped construction fire-roads through the valley. Why do you think I had you avoid every toll booth and intersection? There is no digital footprint. No cameras out in this wasteland.

Sienna leans closer, her fingers digging hard into Jerry's knee, forcing him to look at her. Her eyes are fierce, dangerous.

SIENNA

Look at me. We are in this together. No turning back.

**EXT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - POOL - DAY**

Jerry lies on a chaise lounge, sunglasses.

Next to her, Sienna, wearing a sexy bikini and sarong, sits under a faded umbrella. She's on her laptop, typing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Between them on the table: a heavy, leather-bound folder embossed with \*THE CARSON FAMILY TRUST\*.

Jerry takes a slow sip of iced tea.

JERRY

A bullet would have been simpler.

SIENNA

A bullet leaves a lead signature, Jerry. And twenty million dollars goes to a dog shelter.

JERRY

I'm just saying. The heat is making me antsy.

SIENNA

Georgina was a city mogul who thought she could conquer the Mojave without a map.

A moment between them, finding common ground.

SIENNA

The desert is doing the work for us. No lawyers, no forensics, no Reno trail. Just tragic, wealthy stupidity.

Sienna's phone DINGS. It's an incoming e-mail.

SIENNA

The board is already asking questions about his sudden absence. We need to be careful, Jerry. A woman like Georgina doesn't just vanish without a paper trail.

JERRY

Let them ask.

Beat. Sienna tapping the keys of her laptop.

SIENNA

I'm logged into her secure corporate cloud server right here. I've already begun seeding the narrative through his synchronized desktop apps. A few vague messages to her inner circle about "needing space" and "clearing her head."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JERRY

And the location data? If the police look at his digital footprint?

SIENNA

I routed the connection through a spoofed VPN network. As far as his board is concerned, she sent those messages from a roadside diner on the edge of the county line. When the heat finally does its job, the coroner will look at his empty canteen, look at the digital trail, and call it a tragic, foolish accident.

Sienna raises her glass in a silent toast.

SIENNA

And you walk away a very wealthy, grieving widower.

JERRY

I couldn't do this without you.

**EXT. CANYON - GRANITE CLIFFS - DAY**

The brutal midday glare has faded into a deep, bruised purple and orange twilight.

The canyon shadows stretch out like long, black fingers across the desert floor.

Suddenly-- a distant, rhythmic THUD-THUD-THUD shatters the silence.

The sound rapidly builds into an earsplitting roar.

A Sheriff's BELL 429 HELICOPTER cuts over the lip of the canyon. Its twin engines scream as it hovers low, kicking up a massive, blinding storm of dust.

A high-powered, high-intensity NIGHTSUN SEARCHLIGHT ignites from the belly, casting a brilliant, blinding white beam of light across the rugged terrain.

**INT. HELICOPTER - NIGHT**

The cockpit is washed in the green glow of instrument panels.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEPUTY PILOT STEVENS (30s) grips the flight controls, fights the turbulent desert wind currents bouncing off the canyon walls.

In the observer seat, Miller stares out the window, holding a pair of binoculars.

His eyes scan the circle of light on the canyon floor.

PILOT STEVENS

(Over intercom)

Sheriff, we're burning fuel fast. Air temp just hit one-nineteen, which is right on our safety margin. The lawyer said he went missing sixty miles west at Black Canyon. Why are we sweeping the granite cliffs?

Still staring through binoculars -

SHERIFF MILLER

(over intercom )

Because that lawyer is too smart for her own good, Stevens. She was working too hard to keep me away from this grid. Look down there. That's where we found the horse. An animal doesn't run thirty miles through a heatwave across open desert. It walked down into these shadows to survive.

Beat. He lowers the binoculars.

SHERIFF MILLER

And I bet Mr. Carson did the same. Sweep the base of that ridge.

**INT. ROCK CAVE - NIGHT**

Inside the narrow fissure, the darkness is shattered by a strobing, blinding white searchlight passing outside.

The roar of helicopter blades is deafening, vibrating the ancient rock walls. Loose dust rains down.

Georgina snaps awake. She looks out the cave entrance.

Through the whipping dust storm, the rescue chopper hovers fifty yards away, its massive searchlight cutting through the night.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

*The blinding beam sweeps inches from her fingertips, then abruptly pivots away, illuminating a distant canyon wall.*

*Georgina's face drops. She stops screaming. The crushing reality settles in.*

*We no longer hear her spoken voice. Only the DEAFENING, rhythmic thrum of the blades, and the raw, desperate echo of his thoughts:*

GEORGINA (V.O.)

*They can't see you. The dust...  
the shadows are too deep.*

*She lunges forward, trying to push her body further out onto the ledge, but her leg gives out.*

*She collapses onto her stomach, burying her face in the dirt as loose gravel spills over the edge.*

*Georgina pushes herself, staring helplessly into the sky.*

GEORGINA (V.O.)

*Shine it back. Just one more pass.  
Look at the cave.*

*The chopper begins to tilt, nose dipping as it prepares to sweep a different sector.*

*The light leaves the ridge entirely, plunging the cave mouth back into total darkness.*

GEORGINA (V.O.)

*(cold, hollow)  
They're leaving.*

*The deafening roar begins to fade, pulling away into the vast night sky.*

*Georgina lies flat in the pitch black, her fingers clawing into the sand. The desperation slowly burns away, leaving nothing but fury.*

**EXT. CANYON - NIGHT**

*The helicopter tilts its nose forward, its searchlight tracking away down the dry creek bed.*

PILOT STEVENS (V.O.)

*(over radio)  
Nothing but rocks and  
rattlesnakes, Sheriff.  
(MORE)*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PILOT STEVENS (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Fuel warning is chiming. We have  
 to head back to base.

SHERIFF MILLER (V.O.)  
 (frustrated)  
 Copy that. Turn us around.

The chopper roars away over the mountain ridge, its  
 thumping blades fading back into the vast desert silence.

**EXT. ROCK CAVE - NIGHT**

Georgina crawls back to the edge of the cave mouth.

Georgina watches the blinking tail lights of the  
 helicopter disappear over the jagged horizon.

Georgina looks down at her dirt-caked hands, then out at  
 the black expanse. A sharp, icy wind whistles through the  
 canyon.

Georgina tightens her grip on her crutch and pulls  
 herself upright. The prey is gone.

She looks out into the dark. A quiet whisper -

GEORGINA  
 Time to hunt.

She steps out of the cave shadow and into the moonlight.

**INT. ROCK CAVE - NIGHT**

Georgina collapses inside the cave mouth, escaping the  
 freezing wind. She lays her crutch aside.

Her face is streaked with dried sweat and snake blood.  
 Her breath is shallow.

Georgina stares deep into the dark recess of the cave,  
 where the moon cannot reach.

Something catches her eye: a straight, unnaturally  
 geometric shape sticking out from a pile of loose shale.

Nature doesn't make straight lines.

Georgina shifts, dragging herself over the gravel. She  
 digs her fingers into the loose rock pile. She pulls.

Georgina digs it out: a heavy, rusted, eight-inch IRON  
 MINING SPIKE. Left behind by prospectors decades ago.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She runs her thumb along the jagged, lethal tip. A weapon.

A dark, grim smile cuts through her blistered lips.

She slams the tip of the spike into the dirt. It holds her full weight effortlessly.

She looks up at the low ceiling above the shale pile.

A pale white vein of QUARTZ cuts through the dark granite. Along the edge of the quartz, the rock is slick. Dark.

A single, pristine drop of moisture forms on the stone. It hangs for a beat—then falls, disappearing into the dry sand. Water.

Georgina uses the sharp, rusted tip of the spike to hollow out a small, bowl-shaped crater in a flat piece of shale.

She slides the stone bowl underneath the quartz vein.

DRIP. A drop of cool mountain water hits the stone.

*GEORGINA (V.O.)*

*They say spite doesn't find water  
in the dark... They don't know me.*

But the desert cold is setting in fast.

Georgina is shivering.

She rips a loose strand of fabric from her filthy leg splint and shreds a handful of dry desert grass into a nest, placing it right beneath the exposed quartz vein.

Georgina raises the iron mining spike. She strikes the heavy iron edge against the glassy quartz ridge.

SPARKS fly into the dark.

Georgina strikes again. And again. Harder. Showering the dry grass with brilliant orange sparks until a tiny wisp of smoke curls upward from the nest.

She leans down, inches from the stone bowl, and blows a soft, steady stream of air into the tinder.

FLAME erupts, casting dancing shadows on the cave walls.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Georgina collapses back against the rock, cradling her new iron weapon, watching her fire grow as the water drips.

**INT. ROCK CAVE - DAY**

Blinding desert sunlight cuts through the mouth of the fissure. The fire from last night is nothing but cold, white ash.

Georgina tucks the spike firmly into the bindings of her leg splint. Concealed. Ready.

She's unrecognizable. Her skin is blistered charcoal-red; her lips are split open and crusted with black blood.

She reaches down to the shale bowl. It is full to the brim with clear, cold water.

She doesn't hesitate - lifts the stone and drinks greedily, letting the water spill down her cracked lips and blood-streaked chin.

She sets the empty stone down.

Georgina grabs her GNARLED MESQUITE BRANCH crutch, digs it into the gravel, and hauls herself up.

**EXT. ROCK CAVE - DAY**

Georgina steps and stumbles out into the roaring heat. She shields her eyes from the glare.

The vast, empty desert stretches out for miles before him. The wind is dead. The silence is absolute.

She checks the positioning of the sun, orienting herself.

She thrusts the heavy crutch forward into the sand and begins her agonizing walk back toward the civilized world.

One brutal step at a time.

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

A buzzing desk fan sweeps back and forth, rustling the edges of open case files.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Miller sits behind his worn oak desk, his Stetson resting on a cabinet. He stares intently at three large Polaroid photos of Georgina's abandoned horse.

A quiet tap on the doorframe. Stevens steps into the office, holding a clipboard.

DEPUTY STEVENS

Sheriff? Ground teams just finished their second sweep of the North Ridge. Still empty. No signs of the victim, no water bottle, nothing. Expand the grid?

Miller doesn't answer right away. He picks up a photo, bringing it close to his eyes.

SHERIFF MILLER

Stevens... you ever known a horse to tie its own reins over the saddle horn after throwing its rider?

DEPUTY STEVENS

No, sir. Usually they trail 'em. If a beast panics, it runs until the reins catch a branch and snap.

SHERIFF MILLER

Exactly. But look at this shot from the recovery site. Those leather straps were looped neat as a bowtie. Someone tied that animal up before it wandered off.

DEPUTY STEVENS

Maybe Mrs. Carson tied them before she fell?

SHERIFF MILLER

With a compound fracture? You drop forty feet down a ravine, your leg bone is pushing through your denim—you don't climb back up to tidy your horse's tack, Stevens.

Miller tosses the photo back onto the desk. He rubs his eyes, leaning back in his creaking chair.

SHERIFF MILLER

And then there's that lawyer woman. Jerry's little shadow. She's too loud.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SHERIFF MILLER (CONT'D)

Threatening me with a lawsuit  
within ten minutes of walking into  
my station.

DEPUTY STEVENS

Well, high-priced city attorneys  
usually like to flex.

SHERIFF MILLER

People only wave legal briefs when  
they're trying to keep you from  
looking at the facts. She wasn't  
acting like his counsel. She was  
acting like his co-conspirator.

DEPUTY STEVENS

(Realizing)

They were setting a timeline.

SHERIFF MILLER

(Grim nod)

They wanted us looking miles away  
in the hills so nobody would check  
the cliffs until the sun finished  
the job.

Miller stands, grabbing his gun belt from the chair and  
buckling it around his waist. He snatches his Stetson.

DEPUTY STEVENS

Want me to call the DA? Get a  
warrant for their phones?

SHERIFF MILLER

On what grounds? A tidy saddle and  
a hyperactive lawyer? The DA will  
laugh us out of the county. Right  
now, it's just a gut feeling. I  
need something concrete.

Miller picks up a thick, weathered manila folder from the  
corner of his desk.

SHERIFF MILLER

I did some deep digging on the  
missing wife. Found out Jerry  
didn't really know the woman he  
married.

DEPUTY STEVENS

Where are you going?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SHERIFF MILLER

The lawyer drove back to the city this morning to file some paperwork. The husband is sitting at the motel all by himself.

Miller places the folder under his arm and adjusts his hat.

SHERIFF MILLER

Think I'll drop by, say hello, and see how he handles a couple of unscripted questions without her shield.

Miller walks out. The screen door SLAMS behind him, leaving the fan buzzing in the quiet room.

**EXT. THE DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - DAY**

The midday sun beats down like a hammer.

The stagnant pool water reflects a blinding white glare.

Jerry sits by the pool. A shadow blocks the sun.

Jerry slides his sunglasses down.

Miller stands over her in full uniform, sweating. His Stetson casts a dark shadow across her face.

JERRY

(startled)

Sheriff! God, you scared me. I...

SHERIFF MILLER

Sorry about that, Mr. Carson. Mind if I sit?

Without waiting, Miller pulls up a plastic chair. It creaks under his weight. He adjusts his heavy gun belt.

JERRY

Have your teams found Georgina?

SHERIFF MILLER

No, not yet. We moved our search twenty miles east. If she fell where Miss Sterling and you claim, then she walked out. Nasty terrain up there.

Miller looks at the stagnant pool.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF MILLER

Where is Ms. Sterling today,  
anyway?

JERRY

She had to drive back to the city.  
Firm business. She'll be back  
tonight.

SHERIFF MILLER

Ah. Left you all by yourself. Must  
be tough. Sitting out here.  
Just... waiting.

He emphasizes the word waiting. It hangs heavy in the  
heat. Jerry doesn't flinch.

JERRY

I prefer the heat to that air-  
conditioned tomb of a room,  
Sheriff. Out here, everything is  
completely transparent.

SHERIFF MILLER

I imagine you are. Which is why I  
need you to come down to the  
station.

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

Fluorescent lights hum. A desk fan cuts the dry air.

Miller taps a cheap pen against a closed manila folder.

Across the desk sits erry. Crisp linen shirt, tailored  
jeans. A sweat stain is blooming under his collar.

He checks his watch for the third time.

JERRY

Look, I've answered all of this.  
We had a rough patch. Every  
marriage does. But I don't see  
what our personal life has to do  
with her getting lost out there.

MILLER

Just standard procedure, Mr.  
Sterling. When a woman vanishes  
into a hundred and twenty degrees  
of nothing, we look at the people  
closest to her first. You three  
went into the canyon together.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MILLER (CONT'D)

Only you and Miss Sterling came back.

JERRY

(Defensive)

I told you. We panicked. Lost our bearings.

MILLER

Right. The panic. It's just... most folks who get turned around in the Mojave show up within forty-eight hours. Usually by way of a vulture circle or a drone flyover. But your wife? No body. No tracks. Almost like she didn't want to be found. By us, anyway.

JERRY

She's gone, Sheriff. It's been three days. Nobody survives out there without water.

The sudden silence is heavy.

MILLER

Normally, I'd agree with you. But then I started looking into her background. Out of curiosity --did you know she was a survivalist?

JERRY

(Blinks, a beat too late)

A what? No. She liked camping. Glamping, mostly. Don't try to make this sound like she planned some vanishing act to punish me.

MILLER

Oh, it wasn't a hobby. Before she met you, she spent three weeks tracking poachers through the Yukon with nothing but a hunting knife and a flint strike. Two years ago, she pulled a dislocated shoulder out of its socket, reset it herself against a boulder, and hiked twelve miles back to civilization.

Miller leans forward. His eyes lock onto Jerry's, unblinking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MILLER

That desert out there? To you or me, it's a furnace. To her? It's a hardware store.

Jerry shifts.

MILLER

If I were you, Mr. Carson, I'd start praying my deputies find her before she finds her way back to your house.

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY**

Blinds are drawn tight, cutting the desert sun into harsh stripes across the room.

Jerry paces, sweating through his shirt. He holds his phone to his ear with a trembling hand. It rings. Once. Twice.

SIENNA (V.O.)

(Through phone)

Jerry? I just got to the office—

JERRY

He knows, Sienna. He fucking knows.

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

Sienna, sharp, wearing a tailored blazer, freezes with her hand on a sleek leather briefcase. Her high-rise city office is the polar opposite of the desert motel.

SIENNA

(Calm, controlled)

Stop. Take a breath. Who knows what?

JERRY (V.O.)

Miller! The Sheriff. He was just here. He sat right across from me tapping this goddamn folder and looking at me like he already had the cuffs out.

SIENNA

Jerry, calm down. It's an open missing persons case.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SIENNA (CONT'D)

He is supposed to interview you.  
What did he say?

**INT. MOTEL ROOM / INT. SIENNA'S OFFICE - INTERCUT**

JERRY

He asked about the timeline again.  
He said people only hire lawyers  
when they're trying to hide the  
facts. He called you my 'shadow.'  
Sienna, he's looking at the horse.  
He knows the reins were tied up.

Sienna closes her office door with a soft, deliberate  
click. Her composure cracks just a fraction.

SIENNA

The reins? Georgina was thrown.  
You said the horse bolted.

JERRY

It did! But I—I must have secured  
the tack before I let it wander  
off. I don't remember, I was  
panicked! Miller said a woman with  
a broken leg doesn't tidy her  
horse.

SIENNA

Okay. Listen to me. A tied rein is  
circumstantial. It proves nothing.  
Did you admit to anything?

JERRY

No! But then he dropped the bomb.  
He asked me if I knew she was a  
survivalist.

Sienna frowns, pacing behind her glass desk.

SIENNA

A survivalist? Georgina? She  
writes cookbooks, Jerry.

JERRY

No, before me. Yukon tracking.  
Poachers. Resetting her own  
dislocated shoulder against a rock  
and walking twelve miles out.  
Miller said the desert isn't a  
furnace to her. He said it's a  
hardware store.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jerry drops to the edge of the unmade bed, burying his face in his hand. He's hyperventilating.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Sienna... what if she didn't die out there? What if she's tracking us right now?

SIENNA

(Sharp, commanding)

Jerry! Pull yourself together. She's been out there three days with no water and a broken leg. She is dead. Miller is playing mind games because he doesn't have a body and he doesn't have a warrant. He's trying to make you break.

JERRY

It's working.

SIENNA

Lock the door. Don't answer it for anyone but me. I'm canceling my afternoon meetings and driving back down there. Do you hear me? Do not talk to him again.

Sienna hangs up. She stares at her phone, her calm facade completely vanishing. Her hands are shaking.

**EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - CANYON TRAIL - DAY**

The desert is a jagged wasteland of silver moonlight and ink-black shadows. The wind howls a cold, whistling scream.

Georgina hobbles along a narrow ridge line. Her movement is a painful hitch-and-drag.

Her eyes are sunken. Her lips are cracked and peeling.

She stops, gasping. The landscape WARPS. Stars stretch into burning trails of white light. The silver rocks appear to breathe.

Georgina shakes her head violently.

GEORGINA

Focus... find the road...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The whistling wind shifts. It morphs into a MAN'S LAUGHTER. Playful. Taunting.

Georgina snaps her head around. Ten yards ahead on the trail stands--

Jerry, perfectly still in the moonlight, holding a glass of iced champagne.

JERRY

(smiling, echoing)  
You don't belong out here,  
darling. Why don't you just lie  
down?

GEORGINA

(gasping)  
You... you're back at the motel.

Georgina takes a desperate, swinging step toward him - but he vanishes into a swirl of blowing sand. Empty space.

A sharp, metallic CLICK echoes from above.

Georgina spins, loses her balance, and falls hard.

Sitting atop a massive boulder is Sienna in her sharp corporate suit. She taps away on a glowing laptop, its blue light casting a ghoulisg glow on her face.

SIENNA

(clinical, without  
looking up)  
The human body is seventy percent  
water. Legally speaking, you're  
already a corpse. Sign the probate  
papers.

GEORGINA

(furious roar)  
Shut up! Get out of my head!

Georgina swings the spike like a bat. The solid iron SLAMS into the granite boulder.

A bright shower of ORANGE SPARKS explodes in the darkness. The metallic CLANG echoes like a gunshot through the canyon.

The mirage shatters. Sienna disappears.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The violent vibrations from the iron impact rattle up Georgina's arms. The agonizing shockwave forces her down onto her good knee.

She collapses face-first into the freezing sand, shivering, disoriented. The desert is a house of mirrors.

She rolls onto her back, looking up at the swirling sky.

BOOMING FLASHBACK AUDIO echoes from the canyon walls:

GEORGINA'S FATHER (V.O.)

Get up, Georgina! A Carson doesn't die in the dirt while a lawyer and a thief spend her legacy! STAND UP!

The words hit Georgina like pure adrenaline.

She blinks. The warping stars slow down. The breathing rocks solidify. The delirium recedes, crushed by sheer hatred.

Georgina bites her bleeding lip until the pain anchors her mind. He tastes copper.

She rolls over, plants the tip of the iron spike deep into the sand, and leverages her weight to force her body back onto her feet.

The unbreakable iron supports her splinted leg perfectly.

Her eyes lock onto a distant, blinking red light on the southern horizon -- a radio tower. Civilization.

She grips the rusted iron rod until her knuckles turn white. Through gritted teeth...

GEORGINA

I'm coming home, Jerry.

She keeps going, refusing to look at the shadows again.

**EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAY**

A sleek, corvette sedan streaks down a ribbon of asphalt that cuts through the shimmering heat of the Mojave.

**INT. SIENNA'S CORVETTE - DAY**

Sienna grips the steering wheel. Her knuckles are white. The speedometer needle pushes past 85.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Thee bleak, violent landscape rushing past her windows.

On the passenger seat, her briefcase sits next to an open, half-empty pack of cigarettes.

She glances at the rearview mirror. Sweating. She adjusts the AC vents, blasting cold air directly onto her face.

SIENNA

(To herself, a  
mantra)

Three days. Nobody survives three  
days.

She reaches down and taps the dashboard screen. She hits speed dial.

The phone RINGS. Goes straight to voicemail.

JERRY (V.O.)

(Through speakers)

Hey, it's Jerry. Leave a message.

SIENNA

Jerry, it's me. I'm crossing the  
county line now. Turn off your  
phone. Don't look out the window.  
Just wait for me.

She cuts the call.

She watches the jagged, red-rock cliffs rising in the distance. The very cliffs where they left Georgina. They look closer now. Looming.

Sienna reaches for a cigarette. Her hand shakes so violently she drops the lighter into the center console.

SIENNA

Damn it.

She digs for it, eyes leaving the road for a split second—

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY**

Sienna is trying to fuck Jerry, but Jerry is tense. He struggles to relax as he closes his eyes and thrusts upward, but finally --

JERRY

Sienna...I'm sorry...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Pissed, Sienna rolls off him, lights a cigarette.

Jerry gets up, covers the basics with boxers.

She is propped up against the headboard, the sheet pulled over her breasts, one knee provocatively bent, showing lots of leg.

Across the room, a TV plays on mute. The chyron reads:  
\*MOGUL MISSING IN NEVADA DESERT.\*

Jerry reaches for the remote on the nightstand. He clicks the volume up.

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)

...now entering its fourth day.  
Search and rescue teams face  
grueling triple-digit temperatures  
as they expand the grid around  
Bryce Canyon.

The screen cuts to B-ROLL FOOTAGE: Volunteers on horseback and K-9 units combing through the blinding, jagged white canyon rocks.

It looks like the surface of Mars.

NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)

Authorities state that without  
water, survival odds drop  
drastically after seventy-two  
hours. Georgina Carson's family  
remains hopeful, offering a fifty-  
thousand-dollar reward for any  
information-

Jerry hits the mute button. She eye-fucks him, a slow, dark smile spreading across her lips.

JERRY

Fifty thousand. Her family is  
getting desperate.

SIENNA

Let them spend it. When they find  
her she'll be dead. Right where we  
left her. The coroner will say it  
was an accidental fall and  
exposure.

JERRY

Miller thinks she's alive.

Sienna rolls her eyes... stubs out her cigarette. Enough.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SIENNA

Georgina is dead, Jerry. Dead.  
Gone. And soon buried.

**EXT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - DUSK**

The desert sky is bruised purple and deep orange.

Trevor, wearing a grease-stained tank top and a baseball cap backward, stands next to a rugged, mud-caked 4x4 ATV.

Sienna approaches; holds her phone screen right in front of his face, showing a banking app transfer screen.

TREVOR

Ten grand? Man, I don't know, lady. The Sheriff said nobody goes out past the North Ridge. It's a crime scene or something.

SIENNA

It's a search and rescue, Trevor. The volunteers missed a spot. My firm rewards initiative. Ten thousand dollars. Right now. Just drive me up to the granite ledge and back.

Trevor stares at the screen. He hands her a spare helmet.

TREVOR

Hop on. Hold tight. It gets bumpy.

**EXT. GRANITE CLIFFS - NIGHT**

The ATV engine ROARS, then cuts out. The headlights throw long, eerie beams across a jagged ravine.

Sienna hops off before it even fully stops.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Hey, slow down! You break an ankle out here and I'm the one carrying you.

Sienna ignores him, aims her tactical flashlight.

She beams it down into the dark ravine—the exact place she and Jerry watched Georgina tumble.

The light washes over empty sand and rock.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SIENNA

No. No, no, no...

She slides down the embankment, reckless, dirt coating her clothes. Trevor follows, confused but curious.

TREVOR

Whoa, lady, chill. If your friend fell down here three days ago, she ain't gonna be--

Sienna drops to her knees, shines the flashlight beam.

The sand is disturbed. There is a clear imprint of a body. But the body is gone.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Holy crap. Look at that.

Sienna looks where Trevor is pointing.

A trail of dark, dried crust coating a jagged boulder. Blood. Lots of it.

But leading away from the bloodstain are footprints. One deep, heavy footprint, followed by a dragged line in the dirt.

Heading straight up the opposite side of the canyon walls. Heading back toward town.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Man, whoever that is, they're a beast. A forty-foot drop, losing that much red juice, and they just... walked it off? That's like some Rambo stuff right there.

Sienna's breath hitches. Her vision blurs. She looks at the drag marks. They are fresh. The wind hasn't filled them with sand yet.

SIENNA

(whispering, panic)

She's alive.

TREVOR

Well yeah, obviously. That's good news, right? We should radio the Sheriff. He's got the night scopes--

Sienna spins on him, eyes wide, manic, terrifying him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SIENNA

No! No cops. We go back. Right now.

TREVOR

(backing up a step)  
Whoa, alright, lady. Chill. I'm just saying, if she's wandering around bleeding to death, she needs a doctor, not--

SIENNA

Take me back to the motel, Trevor!  
Take the money and shut up!

She scrambles back up the rocks toward the ATV, her fingernails tearing on the shale.

**EXT. GRANITE CLIFFS - NIGHT**

Trevor backs away from the bloodstain, his boots sliding on the loose gravel. He holds his hands up, trying to placate her.

TREVOR

Okay. Fine. No cops. It's your ten grand, lady. Let's just get on the rig and head back--

Sienna doesn't answer. Her panic has crossed a threshold, morphing into a cold, lethal survival instinct.

She looks past Trevor. On the ground near the bloodstain sits a heavy, jagged piece of granite shale. Sharp as a hatchet.

TREVOR

Hey. You listening to me?

SIENNA

( eerily calm)  
I'm listening, Trevor. You're right. We should radio the Sheriff.

Trevor exhales, a wave of relief washing over him.

TREVOR

Man, thank God. For a second there, you were seriously creeping me out--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sienna drops her flashlight, its beam pointing straight up, illuminating the underside of Trevor's jaw.

In the same fluid motion, she lunges forward, scooping the granite stone from the dirt.

Before Trevor can react, she drives the sharp edge of the rock hard into the side of his neck.

Trevor chokes out a wet, garbled gasp.

He stumbles backward, clutching his throat. Blood wells between his fingers, black in the erratic light.

He stares at her, eyes wide with betrayal and absolute shock. He tries to speak, but only a wet rattle escapes.

Sienna doesn't hesitate. She steps inside his guard and strikes him again - a brutal, heavy blow to the temple.

Trevor drops. He hits the canyon floor, sliding into the very bloodstain Georgina left behind.

He twitches once, then goes completely still.

Sienna stands over him, panting. Her clothes is splattered with dark crimson. She drops the rock.

She doesn't look at his face. She reaches down, rips the ATV keys from his belt loop, and grabs her flashlight.

**EXT. LEDGE - CONTINUOUS**

Sienna scrambles up the embankment, throwing herself over the ridge.

She straddles the idling 4x4 ATV. She slams the key into the ignition, twists it, and kicks the machine into gear.

She pins the throttle. The rear tires spray dirt and rock as the ATV roars to life, tearing away, and racing back out into the empty, black desert.

**EXT. DESERT ARROYO - NIGHT**

The desert has frozen over again. Moonlight washes the cracked earth in a ghostly silver.

A small, controlled fire CRACKLES inside the shelter of a deep, sandy arroyo.

Georgina sits hunched beside the flames.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The heat from earlier has left her face peeling, raw, and caked in alkaline dust. She looks older. Harder.

The gnarled mesquite crutch rests on the sand beside her.

Georgina stares into the embers, chewing slowly on a charred, stripped piece of cactus pad she managed to harvest.

Suddenly, a twig SNAPS in the darkness above the arroyo banks.

Georgina freezes. The chewing stops.

Without moving her head, her hand slides down slowly, her fingers wrapping around the cold, rusted grip of the concealed mining spike.

She waits. Listening into the dark.

Georgina holds her breath, her fingers white-knuckled around the iron spike hidden in her splint.

Low, gravelly GROWLING echoes from the lip of the wash.

Two yellow, bioluminescent eyes lock onto Georgina from the darkness.

A starving COYOTE. Its ribs press against its mangy fur. It's not scavenging, it's desperate.

The coyote lunges down the sandy bank, jaws snapping.

Georgina tries to scramble back, but her splinted leg catches on the sand.

She falls on her back as ninety pounds of muscle and teeth crash onto her chest.

Snarling jaws snap inches from her throat. Georgina jams her left forearm against the beast's throat, holding its snapping teeth back by sheer force.

With her right, Georgina rips the spike from her splint bindings.

She drives the iron upward into the animal's ribs. Once. Twice. The coyote yelps, its grip loosening.

Georgina rolls over, pinning the animal beneath her, and drives the spike down into its chest with her full body weight.

The animal thrashes - then goes completely still.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Georgina lies on top of the carcass, gasping for air, her chest heaving - face is splattered with fresh blood.

She looks down at the spike in her hand, slick and dripping.

**EXT. DESERT ROADWAY - NIGHT**

A quarter-mile from the motel, Sienna steers the ATV off the road and drives it deep into a cluster of thick mesquite bushes.

She kills the engine. The headlights die, plunging the desert into pitch blackness.

She scrambles off the machine, stumbling through the brush toward the distant, neon glow of the motel sign.

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - NIGHT**

The harsh, yellow bathroom light flickers.

Sienna stands over the sink, stripped to sexy underwear. She washes off the blood. The water in the basin runs a sickening, pale pink.

She dumps bloody clothes into a trash bag, knotting it.

A sudden, frantic KNOCKING on the bathroom door makes her jump.

JERRY (O.S.)  
(muffled, panicked)  
Sienna? Is that you in there? I  
heard a vehicle. I thought --  
Jesus, Sienna, open the door!

Sienna closes her eyes, forces a mask of cold composure over her face, and opens the door. She wears a towel.

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM - 14 - NIGHT**

Sienna comes out, trash bag in hand. Jerry stands there.

JERRY  
Where the hell have you been? Your  
phone was off. I've been losing my  
mind. And what is that? What's in  
the bag?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sienna tosses the bag into the closet. She turns to face him, her voice dead, flat, and chillingly quiet.

SIENNA

Sit down, Jerry.

JERRY

No! Tell me what's going on. Why do you look like that? Did you see Miller?

SIENNA

I went back there.

Jerry freezes. The air leaves his lungs.

JERRY

You went out there? Alone?

SIENNA

Because you were unraveling, and I needed to know the truth. I paid the desk clerk to take me up on his ATV.

JERRY

(blinking)

The kid? Trevor? Where is he?

SIENNA

He's dead, Jerry. I killed him.

Jerry stares at her in absolute, horrified disbelief.

JERRY

You... you what?

SIENNA

He knew too much. He saw what was at the bottom of that ravine.

JERRY

Oh my God... Oh my God, Sienna, you're insane. We're ruined. It's over.

SIENNA

Look at me! Trevor is a missing person in a desert full of missing people. Nobody cares about him. He is not our problem.

Jerry shakes his head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JERRY

Then what is? What could possibly be worse than you murdering a kid?!

Sienna stares out the window blinds, looking out into the vast, dark desert.

SIENNA

The bottom of the ridge was empty, Jerry.

JERRY

What do you mean she's not there?

SIENNA

Jerry. I hiked down to the exact spot. Just a pool of dried blood on the gravel. No body.

Jerry stared at her, his chest heaving. The reality hits him like a freight train.

JERRY

Oh god. Georgina is alive. She crawled out.

SIENNA

With a compound fracture in this heat? She didn't run a marathon, Jerry. She's probably a hundred yards away, passed out under a rock. The heat or the blood loss might have already caught up to her.

JERRY

Might have?

SIENNA

We have to be absolutely sure. If she's still breathing when Miller's trackers find her, we are both spending the rest of our lives in a maximum-security cell.

JERRY

Go back? The Sheriff is already suspicious about the damn reins! If Miller catches us anywhere near that eastern canyon-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SIENNA

If he catches us, we tell him we were frantically searching on our own! We have to find her before they do, Jerry. And if she's still breathing... we finish it.

A terrified whisper...

JERRY

And what if we don't find her, Sienna? What if she finds us?

**INT. PEGGY SUE'S 50'S DINER - DAY**

A jukebox blares upbeat 1950s rock-and-roll.

Families laugh over milkshakes in bright cherry-red vinyl booths. The atmosphere is loud, kitschy, and bursting with Americana nostalgia.

Jerry and Sienna sit in a corner booth beneath a framed picture of Marilyn Monroe. A plate of half-eaten greasy diner food sits between them.

Jerry handles his fork with a shaking hand, completely detached from the cheerful energy around them.

Jerry looks out the diner window.

Past the neon "Open" sign, the vast, shimmering expanse of the Mojave desert stretches out toward the horizon like a furnace.

A massive, faded green fiberglass Brontosaurus from the diner's roadside park looms in the foreground, baking in the 124-degree heat.

The surreal, bright landscape feels like a trap closing in on them.

Sienna leans across the Formica table.

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY**

*The wall-unit air conditioner is silent, having died during the night. The room is already sticky.*

*Sienna and Jerry are spooned up together, sound asleep. Just then... A loud pounding on the door.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF MILLER (O.S.)

(muffled, booming)

Mr. Carson? It's Sheriff Miller.

Sienna and Jerry exchange concerned looks.

SHERIFF MILLER (O.S.)

Mr. Carson? I saw your truck out front. You in there?

SIENNA

Just a moment, Sheriff!

Jerry rolls out of bed, finds his boxers and throws it on.

Sienna throws on her silky nightgown, and messes up the other bed. She smokes a cigarette.

Jerry clicks the deadbolt open, and swings it wide.

Miller stands there, his Stetson in hand, sweating through his uniform.

JERRY

Sheriff. Good morning. We were just about to call. Come in.

SHERIFF MILLER

Morning. Sorry to drop in on you unannounced. The front desk clerk over at the resort said you checked out yesterday afternoon and moved here.

He looks around, seeing wine glasses. His eyes lingering for a fraction of a second on Sienna. Sweat running down between her succulent breasts.

SHERIFF MILLER

Counselor.

JERRY

Have your teams found anything?

Miller sighs, running a hand over his weathered face.

He pulls a folded-up topographic map from his pocket.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SHERIFF MILLER

We got the birds up at five AM. Cleared the entire northern ridge of Black Canyon where you said she went. Nothing. Not a footprint, not a clothing scrap.

Jerry lets out a sharp, theatrical sob.

JERRY

Oh god... nothing?

Miller turns and walks out. The door latch clicks shut.

For three agonizing seconds, the room is dead silent.

The only sound is the rumble of Miller's truck engine cranking to life in the gravel lot outside.

Right next to the motel. A throwback from the seventies. Not many customers, a few truckers,

At a window table, Sienna sits across from Jerry in a booth. She works on her laptop...

The first pale orange rays of the Mojave sunrise cut through the dust-caked window blinds.

JERRY

Where the hell were you?

SIENNA

Went for a swim.

JERRY

Then why are your hands shaking?

SIENNA

The clerk. Trevor. He knows.

JERRY

Knows what? What did he say?

SIENNA

He heard us. Through the walls. He practically spelled out the affair to my face. He's dropping hints about the canyons, the mining caves.

JERRY

Oh, Jesus. If he talks to the Sheriff-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SIENNA

He won't. Not yet. He's a parasite  
throwing a line into the dark to  
see if he can catch a shark.  
He's fishing for a payout, Jerry.  
We ignore him for now.

Sienna touches Jerry's face and then kisses him.

SIENNA (CONT'D)

But if he fishes too hard... we'll  
just have to make sure he cuts his  
own line.

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - DAY

A brutal, blinding sun beats down on a vast expanse of jagged rock and canyon walls. Heat waves ripple off the parched earth.

GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) lies in the narrow shade of a boulder. Her tailored hiking clothes are torn, soaked in sweat. Her left leg is crudely splinted with two thick tree branches and tied with strips of her own torn flannel shirt.

Beside her sits an EMPTY CANTEEN and a SINGLE BOX OF MATCHES.

Gerry opens her cracked, sunburnt lips. She winces, shifting her weight. A sharp gasp of agony escapes her as her leg jolts.

She looks up toward the rim of the canyon.

GERRY

(hoarse whisper)  
Donald...? Larry...?

Nothing but the whistling wind answers her.

Gerry drags herself forward on her elbows, pulling her dead weight across the sharp gravel. She reaches the canteen. Picks it up. Shakes it.

Nothing. Not a drop.

She doesn't cry. Instead, her jaw tightens. A cold, fierce anger washes over her face. She hurls the canteen against the rock face. It clatters loudly against the stone.

She slumps back, staring at the sky. Realization sets in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They aren't coming back.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAY

A pristine, cherry-red 1953 CADILLAC CONVERTIBLE tears down the asphalt, kicking up a massive plume of dust against the barren desert backdrop. The top is down.

INT. CADILLAC CONVERTIBLE - CONTINUOUS

DONALD CARSON (40s), ruggedly handsome and wearing sharp aviator sunglasses, grips the steering wheel. He checks the rearview mirror. The canyon retreats into the distance.

Beside him sits LAURA SMITH (30s). She is stunning, wearing a silk headscarf that flutters in the wind. She was Gerry's maid of honor, her absolute closest confidante. She stares straight ahead, her face a mask of cold calculation.

Donald takes one hand off the wheel and lights a cigarette.

DONALD

She can't walk a mile on that leg,  
Laura. In this heat, it'll take  
three days. Max.

Laura doesn't look at him. She opens her purse, pulls out a compact mirror, and checks her lipstick. Her hand shakes slightly, but her voice is steady.

LAURA

And the search party?

DONALD

They'll look where I told them we  
got separated. Twenty miles north  
of here. By the time they check  
this canyon, the vultures will  
have done the cleanup.

Laura snaps the compact shut. The sharp click echoes over the roar of the engine. She looks back over her shoulder at the shimmering horizon.

LAURA

We shouldn't have left her the  
matches.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DONALD  
(dry, humorless  
chuckle)  
What's she going to do? Set the  
sand on fire? Relax. Gerry Carson  
is officially a ghost.

Donald steps on the gas. The Cadillac accelerates, disappearing down the shimmering, endless highway.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - NIGHT

The desert has transformed. The brutal heat is gone, replaced by a freezing, pitch-black wind that howls through the rocks.

GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) shivers violently under the moonlight. Her teeth chatter. Hypothermia is setting in.

She crawls on her stomach, dragging her splinted leg behind her. She gathers dead, brittle sagebrush and twigs into a small pile against a rock wall.

Her hands shake so hard she can barely grip the SINGLE BOX OF MATCHES.

She pulls out a match. Strikes it against the box.

STRIKE. Just a spark, then darkness.

GERRY  
(through chattering  
teeth)  
Come on... come on...

She strikes a second match. It flares to life, casting a warm orange glow on her dirty, sweat-streaked face.

She cradles the flame with her hand, leaning over the sagebrush. The wind HOWLS. A sudden gust blows the match out.

Darkness again. Gerry lets out a frustrated, ragged sob. She looks inside the box.

THREE MATCHES LEFT.

She pauses. Forces herself to take a deep, shaky breath. She looks down at her torn flannel shirt. She rips off a loose, dry strip of the cotton fabric.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She wraps the fabric tightly around a thick twig, creating a makeshift tinder bundle.

She takes the third match. Strikes it. It ignites.

This time, she shields it with her entire body, placing the flame directly against the ripped fabric. The cotton catches. A small, steady fire begins to burn.

Gerry carefully feeds more twigs into the flame. The fire grows, casting long shadows against the canyon walls.

She leans back against the rock, holding her trembling hands over the heat. The fire reflects in her eyes. The fear is gone. It is replaced by a cold, burning resolve.

GERRY

(whispering to the  
wind)

Three days, Donald. I'll see you  
in three days.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A slow-turning ceiling fan pushes the hot desert air around a cramped room. On the wall hangs a dusty map of San Bernardino County.

DONALD CARSON (40s) sits in a wooden chair, his head buried in his hands. His shoulders heave in a convincing display of silent sobbing.

LAURA SMITH (30s) stands beside him, her arm wrapped tightly around his shoulders. She holds a damp handkerchief to her eyes, her mascara lightly smudged. She looks devastated.

SHERIFF MILLER (50s), a weathered lawman with a thick mustache, paces behind his desk. He places a heavy hand on Donald's shoulder.

SHERIFF MILLER

I'm sorry, Mr. Carson. We've got  
two search parties out on horses  
right now. But that canyon country  
north of the ridge is a maze.

DONALD

(muffled, cracking  
voice)

It's my fault, Sheriff.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DONALD (CONT'D)

I shouldn't have let her wander  
off to find that trail. I should  
have gone with her.

LAURA

(sniffles, chiming  
in)

Don't do this to yourself, Donald.  
Gerry wanted to see the ridge. You  
know how stubborn she could be.

Laura looks up at the Sheriff, her eyes wide and  
pleading.

LAURA

Sheriff, she's my best friend. If  
anything happens to her... I don't  
know how we'll live with  
ourselves.

Donald reaches up, gripping Laura's hand tightly in  
"shared grief."

SHERIFF MILLER

We're doing everything we can,  
Miss Smith. But realistically...  
it's been twenty-four hours. In  
this heat, without water...

The Sheriff sighs, shaking his head. He doesn't finish  
the sentence.

DONALD

Please, Sheriff. Just keep  
looking.

SHERIFF MILLER

We will, son. Why don't you two  
get some rest at the motel across  
the street? I'll call the second  
we find anything.

Donald nods weakly. He stands up, leaning heavily on  
Laura as if he can barely walk from sorrow.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Donald and Laura step out onto the wooden porch. The  
bright desert sun hits them.

They walk down the steps and cross the dusty street,  
moving out of view of the Sheriff's window.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The moment they step into the shadow of a brick building, Donald's posture completely changes. He straightens his back, lets go of Laura, and pulls his aviator sunglasses out of his pocket.

Laura dabs her eyes one last time, completely calm. Her tears are gone.

DONALD  
(normal tone, cold)  
You were good in there.

LAURA  
The maid of honor always knows how  
to cry on cue.

Donald smiles, lighting a cigarette. They keep walking toward the motel, completely unbothered.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - DAY

The morning sun rises like a furnace, instantly burning away the night's freeze. The small campfire is nothing but gray ash.

GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) wakes with a start. Her skin is sunburned, blistered, and caked in dry mud. Her lips are cracked and bleeding.

She tries to move, but her left leg screams with white-hot agony. The splinted branches have shifted.

Gerry looks around the barren canyon floor. Hunger and thirst are clawing at her, but right now, she needs mobility.

Her eyes lock onto a thick, dead YUCCA STALK wedged between two rocks. It's roughly four feet long, heavy, and has a natural fork at the top.

She begins to crawl toward it, dragging her useless leg. Every inch is a battle against the sharp gravel.

She reaches the stalk. Grabs it. Tugs.

It's stuck tight.

Gerry grips it with both hands, plants her good right foot against the boulder, and pulls with everything she has left.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GERRY  
(groaning through  
gritted teeth)  
Get... out...

With a sharp CRACK, the stalk breaks free. Gerry tumbles backward into the dirt, panting, clutching her prize.

She takes her torn flannel shirt, rips another long strip from the hem, and uses it to bind the branches tighter around her broken leg, securing the makeshift splint.

Slowly, agonizingly, she pushes herself up using the rock wall for balance. She wedges the forked end of the yucca stalk under her left armpit.

She tests her weight on it. The wood groans. She gasps from the pain in her hip, but she stays upright.

She takes one hobbling step forward. Then another.

She looks up at the towering canyon walls blocking her path to the highway. It looks impossible.

Gerry glares at the horizon, her grip tightening on the crude crutch until her knuckles turn white.

GERRY  
(voice like  
sandpaper)  
I'm coming for you, Laura.

She takes another heavy, limping step forward, heading deep into the maze of the canyon.

EXT. ARID CANYON SLOPE - AFTERNOON

The sun burns at its peak.

GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) drags herself forward, leaning heavily on the crude forked yucca crutch. Each step is an exercise in pure agony. Her skin is raw, peeling, and ghostly pale from dehydration.

She stops, leaning against a sun-baked boulder, panting. Her eyes scour the barren terrain.

Through the heat waves, she spots a large, bulbous BARREL CACTUS wedged between a cluster of jagged rocks.

Gerry's dry tongue darts out to lick her cracked lips.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Using the crutch, she hooves closer to the cactus. She drops to her knees beside the plant, losing the crutch in the dirt.

She pulls out her pocket knife—a small, silver tool. She hacks at the top of the cactus. The thick, needle-covered skin resists.

GERRY

(weakly, grunting)

Come on...

She drives the knife down with both hands, slicing off a thick top chunk. White, pulpy flesh is exposed inside.

Gerry doesn't hesitate. She reaches inside with her bare, bloodied fingers, scooping out a handful of the wet, fibrous pulp. She crushes it over her open mouth.

A few milky, bitter drops of moisture trickle onto her tongue. She swallows desperately.

She scoops another handful, squeezing with everything she has left, frantically licking the moisture off her dirty palms.

She slumps back against the rocks, exhaling a ragged, raspy breath. A grim, ironical smile breaks through her cracked lips.

GERRY

(croaking, mimicking  
Donald's upper-class  
tone)

This stuff's a great discovery...  
Just sit here and work on it all  
day... and you get just enough  
juice to sit here and work on it  
all day.

She looks down at her hands. The bitter taste is awful, but the moisture clears her mind. The desperate panic in her eyes solidifies back into calculated focus.

She grabs her yucca crutch and prepares to keep moving.

EXT. CANYON FORK - LATE AFTERNOON

GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) limps heavily around a bend in the canyon walls. The desert floor opens up into a wider wash.

Suddenly, she stops. Her eyes widen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In the dirt ahead are the unmistakable tread marks of a heavy vehicle.

Gerry drops to one knee, letting her yucca crutch clatter to the ground. She runs her hand over the deep, wide tire tracks. A cherry-red 1953 Cadillac.

She crawls forward, following the tracks a few feet until they terminate near a flat rock face.

On the ground lies a discarded, empty pack of Chesterfields—Donald's brand. Next to it, a silk scarf, torn and trampled into the dirt.

Gerry picks up the scarf. It belongs to Laura.

She holds the scarf, her mind racing. She looks up at the canyon walls, mapping the geography in her head.

GERRY

(whispering,  
horrified)

This is the North Wash... We never  
went south.

The pieces fall into place. She looks back down at the tire tracks. They didn't get lost. Donald and Laura drove her straight into this dead-end canyon intentionally. They knew exactly where they were leaving her.

And if they left her here, it means they told the Sheriff they were twenty miles away in the opposite direction. No search party is ever going to walk through this canyon.

Gerry clutches Laura's dirty silk scarf in her fist until her knuckles turn white.

The fear drains completely from her face. Her breathing slows. Her eyes go dead, cold, and lethal.

GERRY

You thought I'd just lie down and  
rot.

She forces herself back up onto her good foot, shoving the yucca crutch back under her armpit. She ties Laura's torn scarf tightly around her wrist like a trophy.

GERRY

I'm not dying in this ditch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She turns away from the tracks, heading with absolute purpose toward the steep, rocky incline of the canyon wall. She is no longer trying to be found. She is climbing out.

**INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - DAY**

Donald, only wearing boxers, tosses ice cubes into timblers, fixes themselves drinks...

A freshly-fucked Laura is propped up against the headboard, the sheet pulled over her breasts, one knee provocatively bent, showing lots of leg.

She smokes, giggles...

Donald, smoldering with carnal desire, His arms are strong. His stomach taut

He hands her a drink, his eyes linger on the sweat rolling languarousls down her leg,

Laura plays demure, showing some leg, more leg, protesting....

**EXT. SOUTH RIDGE - DAY**

The blinding desert sun beats down on a rugged mountain pass twenty miles away from where Gerry is actually trapped.

A dozen MEN ON HORSEBACK—local volunteers, cowboys, and deputies wearing dust-stained Stetson hats—move in a slow, sweeping line across the rocky terrain.

SHERIFF MILLER (50s) rides at the front of the pack. He holds a pair of heavy binoculars to his eyes, scanning the empty canyon walls.

DEPUTY HARRIS (20s) gallops up beside him, wiping sweat from his forehead with a dirty bandana.

DEPUTY HARRIS

Sheriff! The tracking dogs lost  
the scent by the old creek bed.  
They're just circling in the heat.  
It's too hot for 'em.

SHERIFF MILLER

(lowering the  
binoculars, sighing)  
Keep the men moving, Harris.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF MILLER (CONT'D)

Carson said she went over this ridge to find the main trail. If she's out here without water, she won't last another twelve hours.

DEPUTY HARRIS

Sheriff... with all due respect, we've been combing these south hills for two days. What if Carson got the location wrong? What if they got separated further north?

SHERIFF MILLER

The husband was in shock, Harris, but he was clear about the landmark. If we pull the men off this ridge to check the North Wash, we lose a whole day of riding. If she's here, that day is the difference between finding a missing person or a corpse.

The Sheriff clicks his tongue and spurs his horse forward.

SHERIFF MILLER

Keep sweeping the ridge. We don't stop until sundown.

The line of horses moves slowly over the hill, moving further and further away from Gerry's actual location.

INT. EL MOROCCO LOUNGE - NIGHT

A smoke-filled, upscale cocktail lounge. A jazz quartet plays softly in the corner. Wealthy patrons laugh over martini glasses.

DONALD CARSON (40s) and LAURA SMITH (30s) sit in a secluded leather booth. Donald wears a sharp tuxedo; Laura wears a stunning black sequined evening gown and Gerry's diamond cocktail ring.

The waiter sets down a silver bucket containing a sweating bottle of vintage champagne and two crystal flutes. He bows and exits.

Donald wraps his hand around the bottle and pours. He is relaxed, smiling, completely devoid of the "grief" he showed the Sheriff.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DONALD

To the San Bernardino Search and Rescue team. May they continue their tireless, completely useless work in the southern hills.

Laura laughs, a rich, melodic sound. She raises her glass.

LAURA

To forty-eight hours of pure incompetence. Cheers, darling.

They clink their glasses together. The crystal rings out over the jazz music. They both drink deeply.

LAURA

(setting her glass down)

Donald, what about the lawyers? How long until the estate settles?

DONALD

Three months for the temporary administration. Once the courts declare her legally dead, the insurance and the mining company shares automatically transfer to me. To \*us\*.

Laura smiles, admiring the diamond ring on her finger. She tilts her hand, watching it catch the candlelight.

LAURA

Poor Gerry. She always did have exquisite taste in jewelry. It would be such a shame to let it sit in a vault.

DONALD

It looks better on you anyway.

Donald reaches across the table, covering her hand with his. Laura looks up, her eyes bright with victory.

LAURA

Do you think she's still... you know?

Donald takes a slow sip of his champagne. His face hardens into an icy, unfeeling mask.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DONALD

It's been two days without water  
in a hundred and five degrees.  
Trust me, Laura. Right now, Gerry  
is just a memory.

He smiles again, raising his glass for another toast.

DONALD

To our future.

Laura clinks her glass against his. They drink,  
completely unaware that out in the dark, the woman they  
left for dead is clawing her way up a cliff face.

INT. EL MOROCCO LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

The jazz quartet continues to play, but the warm,  
celebratory mood at DONALD CARSON (40s) and LAURA SMITH's  
(30s) booth instantly evaporates.

Standing over their table is CHALMERS (50s). He wears a  
rumpled, sweat-stained trench coat despite the desert  
heat, a trilby hat tipped back on his head, and carries a  
thick leather folder. He possesses the sharp, unblinking  
eyes of a hawk.

DONALD

(switching to a  
polite, guarded  
tone)

Can I help you, pal? We're in the  
middle of a private conversation.

CHALMERS

Apologies for the intrusion, Mr.  
Carson. Miss Smith.

Chalmers doesn't wait to be invited. He slides into the  
booth right next to Laura, crowding her. He drops the  
heavy leather folder onto the table, right next to the  
champagne bucket.

CHALMERS

My name is Chalmers. I'm with  
Pacific Mutual Indemnity.

Laura stiffens. Her hand drops to her lap, instinctively  
trying to hide Gerry's massive diamond ring under the  
table.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

(faking a fragile  
voice)

If this is about Gerry's life insurance, this is incredibly insensitive. The search parties are still out there. We are devastated.

CHALMERS

(unfazed, lighting a  
cheap cigar)

Oh, I know all about the search parties, Miss Smith. Terrific boys. But my company doesn't deal in devastation. We deal in a five hundred thousand dollar policy signed by Mrs. Carson just three weeks ago.

Donald catches the eye of a waiter, signaling for help, but Chalmers keeps talking, opening his folder.

CHALMERS

See, five hundred grand is a lot of money to pay out on a missing persons report. My bosses get a little squeamish about paying for ghosts. So, they sent me down from Los Angeles to double-check the math.

DONALD

(eyes narrowing,  
dangerous)

Are you accusing us of something, Chalmers? The Sheriff knows exactly what happened. It was a tragic accident.

CHALMERS

(smiles, blowing  
smoke)

Accidents are my favorite thing to look at, Mr. Carson. Especially accidents where the grieving husband is spotted drinking vintage champagne with the missing wife's best friend forty-eight hours after she vanishes.

Donald opens his mouth to blow up, but Chalmers leans forward, his smile vanishing. His voice drops to a lethal whisper.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHALMERS

I walked that ridge this afternoon. I found your Cadillac's tracks. Funny thing is, the Sheriff thinks you got separated twenty miles south. But those deep tread marks? They head straight for the North Wash. Dead end canyon. Brutal terrain.

Laura suffocates a gasp. Donald's face turns pale beneath his tan, his fingers gripping his champagne flute so hard the glass groans.

CHALMERS

(snapping the folder shut)

Don't pack your bags just yet, folks. I'll be staying at the motel across from the station. See you tomorrow.

Chalmers tips his hat, slides out of the booth, and vanishes into the smoky shadows of the lounge.

Donald and Laura sit in horrified, dead silence. The celebratory champagne suddenly tastes like ash.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CANYON CLIFF FACE - NIGHT

A sheer wall of jagged volcanic rock towers into the moonlight. The wind HOWLS, whipping dust across the stone.

GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) hangs twenty feet above the canyon floor. Her bare fingers claw into a narrow rock crevice. Her muscles scream, trembling from exhaustion.

Her yucca crutch is gone—useless for a vertical climb. Instead, she has tied her broken left leg tightly to her good right leg using Laura's silk scarf, creating a rigid, awkward trunk.

She pulls herself up an inch. Her right boot finds a tiny ledge. She shoves her weight upward.

A sharp chunk of rock BREAKS FREE under her fingers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gerry SLIPS. She drops three feet, catching herself violently on a lower ledge. Her broken leg slams against the cliff face.

GERRY  
(screams into the  
wind)  
Ahhhhh!

She hangs there by her fingertips, gasping for air, tears of pure agony cutting tracks through the dust on her face. Below her, the dark canyon floor waits like a graveyard.

She closes her eyes. The pain threatens to black her out.

Then, she looks at her wrist. Laura's silk scarf is stained with her own blood.

In the moonlight, Donald and Laura's faces flash in her mind—laughing, drinking champagne, wearing her rings.

Gerry's teeth bare in a snarl. The pain transforms into blinding rage.

GERRY  
(through grit teeth)  
Not here. I am not dying here.

She reaches up with her right hand. Digs her bloody fingernails back into the jagged stone. She finds a new hold.

She hauls her dead weight upward. One agonizing inch at a time.

Her hand reaches the lip of the canyon rim. She hooks her fingers over the flat ground. Then her other hand.

With a final, guttural groan, Gerry drags her torso over the edge and collapses face-first onto the flat, open desert plateau.

She lies there, panting, bleeding, staring at the open sky.

Ahead of her, miles in the distance, the faint, shimmering headlights of cars blink on the desert highway.

She made it out.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Donald throws the door open, slams it shut, and locks it. He rips off his tuxedo bowtie and hurls it across the room. He is breathing hard, pacing like a caged animal.

Laura stands by the window, her hands shaking as she lights a cigarette.

LAURA

He knows, Donald. He went to the North Wash. He saw the tracks. If he goes to the Sheriff-

DONALD

He isn't going to the Sheriff. Not yet.

LAURA

How can you be so sure?!

DONALD

(turning on her,  
snapping)

Because he's an insurance investigator, Laura! If he goes to the cops, the company loses their leverage. He's looking for a payout, or he's looking for absolute proof to deny the claim. He doesn't have enough to lock us up yet.

Laura paces, taking a frantic drag of her cigarette.

LAURA

We shouldn't have gone to El Morocco. We shouldn't have worn the ring. I told you it was too soon!

DONALD

Shut up! Just shut up and let me think!

Donald stops pacing. He looks out the window, staring into the dark desert night. His eyes cold, calculating.

DONALD

The search parties are calling it off tomorrow. If Chalmers wants proof, he's going to have to go out into that canyon himself to look for a body.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

(horrified)

You want to let him find her?

DONALD

No. We're going to find her first. We leave at dawn. We drive back to the North Wash, we find whatever is left of Gerry, and we bury her where Chalmers will never look.

Laura stares at him, the realization of what they are about to do sinking in.

LAURA

And if Chalmers follows us?

Donald turns back to her. He reaches into his jacket pocket and pulls out a sleek, silver snub-nosed revolver. He places it gently on the dresser.

DONALD

Then the desert takes two casualties.

EXT. ROCK CREVICE - NIGHT

The desert wind HOWLS. The temperature has plummeted. GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) is wedged tightly inside a narrow, horizontal fissure between two massive boulders.

She shivers violently, her knees pulled to her chest. Her teeth chatter.

Suddenly, a sound cuts through the whistling wind.

A dry, rapid, maraca-like hiss.

\*CH-CH-CH-CH-CH-CH-CH.\*

Gerry freezes. Her eyes snap open, widening in the moonlight.

Just three feet away, sitting on a flat stone inside the very same crevice, is a heavy, diamond-patterned RATTLESNAKE. It is coiled, its tail blurred in motion, its triangular head raised and locked onto her body heat.

Gerry suffocates a gasp. She doesn't dare breathe.

The snake senses her movement. Its fork tongue darts out, tasting the cold air. It pulls its head back, preparing to strike.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

If it bites her now, she will die in this crevice.

Gerry can't move her legs—the broken fibula binds her to the stone. She can only move her hands.

Slowly, millimeter by millimeter, her fingers slide down to her pocket. She feels the sharp, wooden edge of her SINGLE BOX OF MATCHES.

She slides the box out. Her hands are shaking from the freezing cold.

\*CH-CH-CH-CH-CH-CH-CH-CH.\* The rattle grows louder, more aggressive. The snake shifts its weight forward.

Gerry pulls out a single match. She positions it against the striking strip.

She has one shot. Snakes are terrified of sudden fire, but if she misses the strike, the noise will trigger the bite.

Gerry bares her teeth. She strikes the match fiercely.

\*WHOOSH.\*

A sudden, blinding burst of chemical phosphorus flares to life, illuminating the dark cave in bright orange.

Gerry thrusts the burning match directly forward, holding the flame inches from the snake's face.

The rattlesnake recoils instantly from the heat and glare. It strikes blindly at the air, missing her arm by an inch, its fangs catching nothing but smoke.

Gerry doesn't flinch. She grabs her heavy, wooden yucca crutch lying beside her and slams the base of it down onto the stone right in front of the snake's coil, creating a barrier.

GERRY

(a low, feral growl)

Move.

Terrified by the flame and the heavy thud of the wood, the rattlesnake unravels itself and slithers backward, disappearing out the back exit of the rock crevice into the dark desert night.

The match burns down, stinging Gerry's fingers. She blows it out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Darkness returns. Gerry slumps against the stone wall, her heart hammering against her ribs. She looks down at the matchbox.

TWO MATCHES LEFT.

A ragged, trembling breath escapes her lips. She wraps her arms around herself, her face hardening. The desert tried to kill her again, and again, she won.

INT. HOTEL POOL - DAY

A sparkling turquoise oasis of luxury nestled against the harsh desert mountains.

LAURA SMITH (30s) relaxes on a striped canvas lounge chair, wearing a chic white swimsuit and massive dark sunglasses. She holds a frosted glass of iced tea, looking every bit the high-society traveler.

Suddenly, a shadow falls over her, blocking the warm sun.

Laura tilts her sunglasses down. Standing at the foot of her chair is CHALMERS (50s). His rumpled trench coat is unbuttoned, his hat tipped back, and he is casually eating a handful of peanuts from a paper bag.

LAURA

(sighs, annoyed)

Don't you ever change your clothes, Mr. Chalmers? Or do insurance companies pay you by the wrinkle?

CHALMERS

(smiles, chewing)

They pay me by the truth, Miss Smith. And right now, the fabric of your story is looking a little frayed. Mind if I sit?

Without waiting for an answer, Chalmers drops his heavy frame into the lounge chair next to her. He sets his folder on his lap.

LAURA

Donald is out talking to the search captain. If you want to harass someone, go find him. I am trying to cope with the loss of my best friend.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHALMERS

Oh, I'm sure it's brutal. The grief must be exhausting. That's probably why you're wearing her diamond cocktail ring today.

Laura flinches. Her hand instinctively clenches around her glass, turning her knuckles white. She shifts her fingers to hide the diamond, but it's too late.

LAURA

(icily)

Gerry lent this to me before we left Los Angeles. She wanted me to wear it for our anniversary dinner next week.

CHALMERS

Lent you a twenty-thousand-dollar heirloom right before she wandered off into a death trap canyon? Generous woman.

Chalmers leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees, his smile vanishing. His sharp eyes lock onto hers from behind his tobacco smoke.

CHALMERS

Let's talk about that canyon, Laura. You told the Sheriff you stayed in the Cadillac while Donald went looking for Gerry on the south ridge.

LAURA

That's right. For three hours.

CHALMERS

Funny thing about the desert dust, Miss Smith. It leaves footprints. I went out to the North Wash this morning. I found Donald's boots. And right next to them, I found a pair of high-heeled Italian leather loafers. Size six, I'd guess. Expensive.

Laura's breath hitches. She sets her iced tea down on the glass table, her hand shaking so badly the ice rattles loudly against the crystal.

LAURA

Lots of people hike out there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHALMERS

In silk scarves and Italian loafers? Come on, Laura. You're a smart girl. Donald is a cornered rat. When the Sheriff checks those tire tracks against his Cadillac, Donald is going to dump all the blame on you to save his own skin.

LAURA

(standing up,  
trembling with rage)  
Donald loves me! He would never-

Laura freezes, realizing what she just blurted out.

Chalmers slowly stands up, a cold, victorious smirk spreading across his face. He dusts peanut shells off his trousers.

CHALMERS

"Donald loves me." Past tense or present tense, Miss Smith? Because forty-eight hours ago, you were just the grieving maid of honor.

Laura stares at him, her face completely pale, trapped by her own words.

CHALMERS

Enjoy the pool, Laura. The weather is beautiful today. But I wouldn't go near the deep end if I were you.

Chalmers turns and walks away toward the hotel lobby, leaving Laura standing frozen by the sparkling water, suffocating in her own panic.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

The lobby is quiet, cooled by a massive whirring floor fan. DONALD CARSON (40s) strides through the glass doors, carrying a rolled-up topographical map. He looks confident, dusted with a light layer of trail grime.

LAURA SMITH (30s) jumps up from a leather armchair near the entrance. She looks like a frayed wire—her hair is slightly disheveled, and she is clutching her purse like a shield.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DONALD

(keeping his voice  
low, smiling)

The search captain said they're  
scaling down the perimeter by  
sunset. By tomorrow morning, the  
books are closed on Gerry Carson.

Laura doesn't smile. She grabs Donald by the forearm, her  
fingernails burying deep into his skin, pulling him into  
the shadow of a decorative pillar.

LAURA

(whispering  
frantically)

Donald, we have to leave. Right  
now. Drop the map, get the car  
keys, we're leaving tonight.

DONALD

(frowning, shaking  
her off)

What are you talking about? If we  
run now, it looks like a  
confession. We stay, we play the  
grieving pair for one more day,  
and we walk away clean.

LAURA

Chalmers knows! He went to the  
North Wash!

Donald freezes. The smug smile completely vanishes from  
his face.

DONALD

What?

LAURA

He was at the pool. He sat right  
next to me, Donald. He found your  
boot prints. And he found my  
footprints. He knows I wasn't  
waiting in the Cadillac. He knows  
we both walked her down into that  
dead end.

DONALD

(teeth gritted, eyes  
darting around the  
lobby)

Did he go to the Sheriff?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LAURA

(tears welling up)

Not yet. He's playing with us. He said you're going to pin it all on me to save yourself. Donald, he knows about us. I... I slipped up. I told him you loved me.

Donald's face turns an ugly, venomous shade of purple. He grabs Laura by both shoulders, pinning her back against the pillar, his voice dropping to a lethal hiss.

DONALD

You stupid bitch. You handed him the motive on a silver platter.

LAURA

(gasping, terrified  
by his grip)

Donald, you're hurting me! What do we do?

Donald lets go of her, shoving her back slightly. He rubs his jaw, his brain frantically calculating.

DONALD

He's an insurance investigator. He wants a payout to stay quiet, or he's looking for the body to deny the claim. If he goes back out there with the Sheriff, we're done.

LAURA

So we run?

DONALD

No. We do what we should have done in the first place. We drive back out to the North Wash right now. We find whatever is left of Gerry, and we bury her deep enough that nobody ever finds a bone.

Laura stares at him, her body trembling as she realizes there is no turning back.

DONALD

Go upstairs and pack the bags. I'm getting the car.

EXT. WHITE ALKALI FLAT - MIDDAY

The landscape is a blinding, bleached-white salt flat. The sun is a white-hot iron disc directly overhead, baking the earth at 110 degrees.

GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) stumbles blindly across the shimmering salt. Her wooden yucca crutch sinks inches into the crust with every step.

She is no longer looking forward. Her head hangs low, her eyes bloodshot, unfocused, staring at her dragging boots.

Suddenly, the dry wind stops howling. The desert goes unnaturally quiet.

DONALD (V.O.)

(smooth, echoing)

You look terrible, Gerry.

Gerry stops. She blinks, wiping sweat and crusty salt from her eyes.

Just ten yards ahead, standing casually on the baking salt flat, is DONALD CARSON. He looks immaculate. His tuxedo is crisp, unwrinkled. He holds a crystal glass filled with ice and clear, condensation-beaded water.

Donald smiles, tilting the glass. The ice CLINKS musically against the crystal.

DONALD

You always were too stubborn for your own good. Why don't you just lie down? It's so much cooler in the shade of the rocks.

Gerry's dry tongue darts over her bleeding lips. Her brain screams for the water.

GERRY

(a raspy, agonizing  
whisper)

Donald...?

She takes a frantic, limping step toward him.

Beside Donald, the shimmering heat waves ripple, and LAURA SMITH materializes. She wears her beautiful black silk evening gown. She laughs—a rich, echoing sound that vibrates in Gerry's ears.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAURA

Look at her, Donald. She thinks she's going to make it back to town. She thinks you still love her.

DONALD

(laughing smoothly)

She's a ghost, Laura. She just doesn't know it yet.

Gerry lets out a raw, desperate cry. She lunges forward, reaching out her blistering, bloody hand to grab the crystal glass of water.

GERRY

Give it to me!

She trips over her bound leg and plunges face-first into the burning white salt.

The impact jolts her back to reality.

Gerry opens her eyes, gasping, her mouth filled with bitter, burning salt crust. She looks up.

The salt flat is empty. There is no tuxedo, no silk gown, and no crystal glass. Just the endless, shimmering horizon of heat waves bouncing off the white desert.

The ice clinking she heard? It was just the dry, brittle yucca stalks scraping against the side of her wooden crutch in the wind.

Gerry lies in the dirt, a ragged, broken sob tearing from her throat. She squeezes her eyes shut against the blinding glare.

GERRY

(choking on the salt)

He's not here... they're not here...

She digs her fingers into the burning salt crust, forcing her upper body up. She grabs her crutch, her knuckles bleeding. She drags herself back onto her good foot, her eyes blazing with a renewed, venomous clarity.

GERRY

But I am.

She takes another heavy, punishing step forward into the white expanse.

EXT. CANYON BED - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun dips lower, casting long, skeletal shadows across the rocky wash.

GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) drags her useless leg, leaning heavily on the splintered yucca crutch. Her breath comes in shallow, rattling gasps.

Up ahead, half-buried by a landslide of red rock, sits an OLD MINING SHACK. Its corrugated tin roof is rusted through, and the wooden boards are bleached gray by decades of desert sun.

A ghost town relic from the 1890s gold rush.

Gerry's eyes track to a rotting wooden post out front. Tied to it is a rusted iron lever leading into the ground. A hand-pump water well.

Gerry lets out a dry, desperate sound and accelerates her hobbling pace. She reaches the well, dropping her crutch, and collapses against the iron pump.

She grabs the handle. It's freezing cold and stiff. She shoves her weight down on it.

\*SCREECH.\*

The dry iron groans. No water.

Gerry pumps it again, violently, using her entire body weight.

\*SCREECH. CLUNK.\*

Nothing but a hiss of dry air from the depths of the earth. The well is bone dry.

Gerry drops her forehead against the blistering metal handle, a single, silent tear cutting through the dust on her cheek.

She turns, dragging herself through the ruined doorway of the shack to escape the wind.

INT. MINING SHACK - CONTINUOUS

The air inside is thick with dust and the smell of old pine. Sunlight streaks through the holes in the roof like golden bars.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gerry slumps against a stack of rotting timber. She looks around the abandoned room.

In the corner sits a rusted iron stove. On top of it is an old, dented KEROSENE LANTERN and a half-empty, corked glass bottle labeled: \*LINIMENT - 1912.\*

Gerry crawls over to the stove. She pulls the cork out of the bottle and sniffs it. Pure alcohol and turpentine.

Her eyes drop to the lantern. She shakes it. A heavy sloshing sound echoes inside. It still holds vintage kerosene.

Gerry looks down at her swollen, blackened left ankle. The splint is loose again.

She pulls out her matchbox.

ONE MATCH LEFT.

Gerry sets her jaw. She pours the high-proof liniment alcohol directly over her open blisters and cuts. She screams into her sleeve, her body shaking from the blinding chemical burn, but the wound is now sterilized.

She tears another strip from her shirt, soaks it in the kerosene from the lantern, and wraps it tightly around the thickest wooden board she can find in the shack.

She takes her final match. Strikes it.

The flame catches the kerosene, exploding into a bright, roaring torch.

Gerry holds the torch high, illuminating the dark corners of the shack. She looks at her reflection in a shattered piece of glass on the floor. Her face is raw, but her eyes are lethal.

GERRY

(whispering)

I have fire now, Donald.

She rests her back against the wall, holding the torch close to keep warm as the freezing desert night settles over the shack.

## EXT. MOJAVE DESERT PLATEAU - NIGHT

The black sky is heavy with stars. GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) limps out from the shadow of the canyon wash, stepping onto the flat, endless desert plateau.

She holds the sputtering kerosene torch high in her left hand. The orange flame dances against the freezing wind, casting long, monstrous shadows across the sand.

Her right hand grips the yucca crutch. Her medical splint is caked in red dust and dry kerosene.

Every movement is mechanical now. She has gone past exhaustion into a state of pure, adrenaline-fueled delirium. Her eyes are wide, fixed on a single line of distant, blinking lights on the horizon.

The highway.

She hobbles forward. A jagged rock catches the base of her crutch.

Gerry trips, tumbling violently into the gravel. The kerosene torch flies from her hand, hitting the sand and sputtering out.

Darkness devours the plateau.

Gerry lies face-first in the dirt, gasping for air. Her body is completely spent. She can't feel her legs anymore. The freezing desert cold is sinking into her bones.

GERRY

(a shattered whisper)

No... get up... get up...

She looks at her bare wrist. Even in the dark, she can see the stain of Laura's silk scarf.

She closes her eyes. In the blackness of her mind, she hears the clinking of ice glasses and Laura's melodic laugh from the pool: "She thinks she's going to make it back to town. She thinks you still love her."\*

Gerry's eyes snap open. The despair evaporates.

She digs her bloody fingernails into the dirt. Shoving her body upward, she drags her dead weight back onto her right knee. She grabs the yucca crutch, forcing herself upright by sheer force of absolute malice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She leaves the dead torch in the sand. She doesn't need the fire anymore. Her rage is bright enough to guide her.

She takes a punishing step forward. Then another.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - PRE-DAWN (FROM EARLIER)

The sky is a deep, bruised purple. The air is deathly cold.

Gerry lies in the gravel at the very edge of the asphalt. She is a ghost of her former self...

Her face is black with soot, dirt, and dried blood. She can barely keep her eyes open.

Her broken left leg is completely numb, still tightly bound to her right leg with Laura's blood-stained silk scarf.

In the distance, a pair of headlights cuts through the darkness. It's the massive, rusted flatbed delivery truck.

Gerry rolls her body onto the asphalt, throwing herself directly into the lane of the oncoming vehicle...

Gerry forces her upper body up, using her elbows.

GERRY

(voice a shattered  
whisper)

Help... please...

She tries to raise her arm, but it drops heavily back into the dirt. She doesn't have the strength to stand.

The headlights loom closer. It's a massive, rusted flatbed delivery truck.

Gerry uses the last ounce of her adrenaline. She rolls her entire body onto the asphalt, throwing herself directly into the lane of the oncoming vehicle.

The truck's brakes SCREECH, echoing loudly across the empty desert. The headlights illuminate Gerry, casting her long, desperate shadow behind her.

The truck grinds to a halt just ten feet away from her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The driver's side door flies open. A burly, middle-aged TRUCK DRIVER (50s) jumps out, carrying a heavy flashlight. He runs toward her, his boots slapping against the asphalt.

TRUCK DRIVER

My God! Lady! Are you alright?!

He shines the flashlight on her. He gasps, seeing her blistered face, her torn clothes, and the crudely bound, broken leg. He drops to his knees beside her.

TRUCK DRIVER

What happened to you? Did you have a wreck?

Gerry grips the driver's sleeve with a terrifying, iron strength. Her bloody fingernails dig into his flannel shirt. Her eyes are wide, burning with a frantic, unhinged intensity.

GERRY

(croaking, desperate)  
Don't... don't call the police.

TRUCK DRIVER

Lady, you're bleeding to death out here. You need a hospital. I've got to call the Sheriff.

Gerry pulls him closer, her voice cracking but sharp as glass.

GERRY

No Sheriff. Take me to town. Put me in the back of your truck. If anyone asks... you never saw me.

The driver stares at her, terrified but deeply moved by the sheer desperation and power in her grip. He nods slowly.

TRUCK DRIVER

Okay. Okay, lady. Just let go. I'll get you into the cab.

He lifts her up. Gerry lets out a muffled gasp of agony as her leg shifts, but she forces herself to stay conscious. As he carries her toward the truck, she looks back at the dark desert horizon.

The sun is just beginning to peek over the mountains. Dawn has arrived.

EXT. NORTH WASH - DAY

The early morning sun cuts long, harsh shadows across the canyon floor.

The cherry-red 1953 CADILLAC CONVERTIBLE bumps violently over the rocks, grinding to a halt right next to the deep tire tracks from their previous trip.

DONALD CARSON (40s) steps out of the car. He is dressed in rugged khakis, his aviator sunglasses on. He unholsters the silver snub-nosed revolver from his belt, checks the cylinder, and shoves it into his front pocket.

LAURA SMITH (30s) steps out of the passenger side. She wears practical boots now, but her face is pale, twisted with anxiety. She grips the door to steady herself.

LAURA  
(whispering)  
Where do we start?

DONALD  
Where we left her. Under the boulder wall.

Donald marches forward with purpose. Laura hesitates, then hurries to keep up with his pace.

They hike into the narrow canyon inlet, kicking up dust. Donald stops at the massive boulder where they originally marooned Gerry.

The spot is completely empty.

Beside the rock lies the EMPTY CANTEEN, smashed against the stone.

Donald drops to one knee. He touches the cold gray ashes of Gerry's campfire. He looks up at the surrounding canyon walls, his brow furrowed in disbelief.

DONALD  
She built a fire.

LAURA  
(panicking, looking around)  
A fire? With what? Donald, where is she?! You said she couldn't walk a mile!

DONALD  
She couldn't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Donald stands up, his eyes scanning the dirt. He spots the drag marks in the gravel. He follows them a few yards until he finds the hacked, broken stump of the YUCCA PLANT. Nearby lie the chopped-off needles of the barrel cactus.

DONALD

She made a crutch. And she harvested water from the cactus.

Laura suffocates a scream, grabbing Donald's arm, her fingernails digging into his sleeve.

LAURA

She's alive! Donald, she's alive out here somewhere! If Chalmers finds her before we do—

DONALD

Shut up! Look at the tracks!

Donald points to the base of the sheer volcanic cliff face. In the dirt are the deep scuff marks of Gerry's boots and the blood-stained fibers left behind from where she dragged her bound leg up the rock.

Donald looks straight up the towering, impossible vertical wall. His jaw drops.

LAURA

(terrified)

She didn't... she couldn't have climbed that. Not on a broken leg. It's impossible.

Donald reaches down and picks up a small piece of fabric caught on a sharp stone at the base of the cliff.

It is a shred of Gerry's torn flannel shirt.

Donald stares up at the canyon rim, the realization hitting him like a physical blow. The absolute arrogance drains from his face, replaced by a cold, primal fear.

DONALD

She climbed it. She's out.

INT. DOCTOR'S HOUSE (BACK PORCH) - DAY

A quiet, modest ranch house on the outskirts of town.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The back door flies open. DR. REID (60s), a tired-looking small-town physician in a rumpled undershirt, steps out onto the porch.

The TRUCK DRIVER (50s) stands there, sweating, holding the door open. Behind him, leaning heavily against the wooden porch railing, is GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s).

DR. REID

(shocked)

Gerry?! My God, Donald said you were lost in the south ridge! The whole town is looking for-

GERRY

(voice like gravel)

Shut up, Arthur. And get your bag.

Gerry stumbles forward into the kitchen. Dr. Reid rushes to catch her under the arm, helping her onto a wooden chair.

INT. DR. REID'S CLINIC ROOM - LATER

The room smells of rubbing alcohol and iodine.

Gerry sits on the examination table. She has washed the dirt from her face, but her skin is raw, peeling, and fiercely red from the sunburn.

Dr. Reid carefully cuts away the blood-stained remains of Laura's silk scarf. He inspects her swollen, heavily bruised left leg. He gently presses near her ankle.

Gerry's jaw tightens. She gasps, gripping the edges of the table until her knuckles turn white, but she refuses to cry out.

DR. REID

It's a clean fracture of the fibula, Gerry. You're lucky. If it had splintered, you'd have lost the leg out there. But how the hell did you climb out of a canyon like this?

GERRY

Anger is a very good splint, Arthur.

Dr. Reid shakes his head, setting down a bottle of antiseptic. He reaches for the wall-mounted telephone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. REID

I'm calling Sheriff Miller. Donald and Laura are over at the motel, they're losing their minds with grief—

Gerry's hand shoots out, slamming the telephone hook down, cutting the line. She stares at the doctor with dead, unblinking eyes.

GERRY

You don't call anyone.

DR. REID

Gerry, this is a police matter. If they left you out there—

GERRY

If you call the Sheriff, Donald's expensive lawyers will have him out on bail before sunset. They'll claim it was a panic reaction. They'll say they got confused.

Gerry leans forward, her voice dropping to a sharp, icy whisper.

GERRY

They wanted me dead, Arthur. They stole my life, they stole my rings, and they toasted to my ghost. The law can't give me what I want.

Dr. Reid looks at her bleeding hands, her blistered face, and the terrifying resolve in her eyes. He slowly lets go of the telephone receiver.

DR. REID

What do you want, Gerry?

Gerry looks out the frosted window toward the center of town.

GERRY

I want them to see a ghost. Set the leg, Arthur. Tight. I have a dinner date.

INT. CADILLAC CONVERTIBLE - DAY

The cherry-red Cadillac flies down the desert highway, its engine roaring at maximum capacity. The speedometer needle bounces violently against the 80 MPH mark.

LARRY SMITH (30s) grips the steering wheel so tight his knuckles are ghostly white. He keeps glancing frantically at the rearview mirror, checking the empty road behind them.

Beside him, GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (30s) is practically hyperventilating. She has pulled her knees up to her chest, her expensive silk dress ruined, stained with desert dust.

GERDINE

If she's on the highway... if someone picked her up... Donald, she's going straight to the police. They're going to be waiting for us at the hotel!

DONALD

(staring straight ahead, teeth gritted)

She isn't going to the police.

GERALDINE

How can you possibly know that?! She knows we left her to die!

DONALD

Because Gerry doesn't think like that. If she wanted the law, she would have waited for a search party. She climbed a cliff face on a broken leg, Gerry. She did that out of spite. She's coming for us. Directly.

Geraldine looks down at her bare wrist, then at her fingers. She shivers despite the blistering midday heat.

GERALDINE

The ring. She's going to want her ring back.

Donald reaches into his jacket pocket and pulls out the silver snub-nosed revolver. He places it flat on the dashboard between them. The metal glints aggressively in the desert sun.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DONALD

Let her come. She's one woman with a smashed leg and no weapon. We get back to the hotel, we pack the bags, we take the cash out of the safe, and we get across the state line before anyone realizes she's alive.

GERALDINE

And Chalmers? The insurance man?

DONALD

If Chalmers gets in our way, he goes in the trunk.

Donald slams his foot down harder on the accelerator. The Cadillac fishtails slightly as it tears around a sharp bend in the highway, racing toward the shimmering outline of the town on the horizon.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

The door flies open. DONALD CARSON (40s) bursts into the room, his silver revolver drawn and raised. His chest heaves. His eyes dart frantically around the elegant, sunlit suite.

LAURA SMITH (30s) ducks in behind him, slamming the door shut and locking it with a trembling hand.

The room is deathly quiet. The silk curtains flutter gently in the breeze of an open window.

DONALD

(whispering, tense)

Check the bathroom. Go.

Laura hesitates, then creeps toward the bathroom door. She pushes it open, peeking inside. She turns back, exhaling a shaky breath.

LAURA

Empty. She's... she's not here.

Donald lowers the gun, a wave of intense relief washing over his tense shoulders. He wipes a bead of sweat from his forehead.

DONALD

Good. Grab the suitcases. I'll open the wall safe. We have twenty minutes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Donald marches over to a landscape painting on the far wall. He swings it open, revealing the dial of a small combination safe.

Laura spins around to grab the leather luggage from the closet. Suddenly, she stops dead in her tracks. Her eyes widen in pure, unadulterated horror.

LAURA  
(a strangled gasp)  
Donald...

DONALD  
(impatient, dialing)  
Not now, Laura. Pack the clothes.

LAURA  
Donald! Look at the bed!

Donald snaps his head around, annoyed. His jaw instantly drops.

Laid out perfectly in the center of the crisp, white bedsheets is a single object.

It is Laura's silk headscarf—the one Gerry used after the accident. It is no longer clean. It is tattered, caked in dust, and frayed from the elements.

Tied directly to the center of the weathered scarf is Gerry's massive diamond cocktail ring.

The diamond catches the afternoon sun, flashing brilliantly against the worn fabric.

Donald slowly steps away from the safe, his gun hand trembling as he approaches the bed.

LAURA  
(hysterical, backing  
away toward the  
door)  
She's been here. Donald, she's in  
the building! She knows we're  
here!

DONALD  
(staring at the ring,  
his voice cracking)  
She didn't take the money... She  
just left the ring.

Suddenly, the phone on the nightstand rings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The loud, shrill sound cuts through the dead silence of the room. Both Donald and Laura leap backward, staring at the plastic receiver as it rings a second time.

NT. HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

The telephone RINGS a third time, deafening in the small room.

Donald stares at the plastic receiver. He swallows hard, his throat dry. He glances at Laura, who is clutching her head, silently weeping from panic.

Donald steps forward. He sets his silver revolver down on the nightstand next to the phone. He lifts the receiver to his ear.

DONALD

(voice tight,  
controlled)

Hello?

A long beat of dead air. Only the low hiss of static on the line.

Then, a voice cuts through—dry, raspy, and completely devoid of emotion. It's GERRY.

GERRY (O.S.)

(through the phone)

Do you like the arrangement on the bed, Donald? I thought the scarf tied it together nicely.

Donald's hand tightens on the receiver until his knuckles go white. He looks around the room frantically, staring at the open window, wondering if she is watching from a building across the street.

DONALD

Gerry... listen to me. It was a mistake. We got turned around in the south hills, the heat—

GERRY (O.S.)

(cutting him off)

Don't waste your breath on a corpse, Donald. You said it yourself. Gerry Carson is officially a ghost.

DONALD

Where are you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GERRY (O.S.)

Look out the window. Down at the Cadillac.

Donald drops the phone, leaving it dangling by its cord, bouncing against the nightstand. He dashes to the window, throwing the sheer curtains aside.

EXT. HOTEL COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Two stories below, parked in the gravel lot, sits the cherry-red Cadillac.

Standing beside the driver's side door is GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s). She leans heavily on a polished wooden cane, her left leg encased in a tight, clean white medical cast. She wears a clean linen suit, but her face is still raw and blistered from the desert sun.

She holds a silver Zippo lighter in her right hand.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Donald watches from the window, his breath fogging the glass.

LAURA

(rushing over,  
looking out)

What is she doing?! Donald, what is she doing to the car?!

EXT. HOTEL COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Gerry looks straight up at the second-story window. She doesn't smile. She flickers the Zippo. A bright orange flame flares to life.

She drops the lighter into the open top of the convertible.

The interior of the Cadillac—which Donald had meticulously packed with a gallon jug of extra gasoline for their escape—instantly IGNITES.

A massive, roaring fireball bursts from the car, shattering the windows of the first-floor rooms. Thickening black smoke billows into the sky.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - CONTINUOUS

The shockwave rattles the hotel room windows. Laura screams, covering her ears, dropping to her knees.

Donald stares down at the burning car—their money, their suitcases, and their only escape route going up in a massive plume of black ash.

He spins around, filled with a blind, murderous rage. He reaches for the nightstand to grab his silver revolver.

The nightstand is empty. The gun is gone.

Donald freezes. He looks toward the open hotel door.

Standing in the doorway is CHALMERS (50s), the insurance investigator. He is casually tossing Donald's silver snub-nosed revolver up and down in his hand. He smiles, a cheap cigar clamped between his teeth.

CHALMERS

Looking for this, Mr. Carson? I took the liberty of using the manager's key.

Behind Chalmers, the heavy, rhythmical \*THUMP-CLICK\* of a wooden cane echoes down the hallway carpet.

Chalmers steps aside, tipping his hat.

Gerry steps into the room, leaning on her cane. She looks at her husband, then down at Laura on the floor. She reaches out her bare hand toward the bed, picking up her diamond ring, and slides it back onto her finger.

GERRY

The Sheriff is downstairs, Donald. It turns out Chalmers here is a very thorough man. He brought a recording device to the lounge last night.

Donald backs up against the window, trapped, looking from the burning car below to his wife standing in front of him.

DONALD

(weakly)  
Gerry... please...

GERRY

Take them away, Chalmers. The desert is finished with them.

EXT. ROCKY RAVINE - AFTERNOON

A narrow, suffocating stone pass. GERALDINE "GERRY" CARSON (40s) rests her back against the scorching rock face. Her skin is cracked, her shirt soaked through with yellow desert dust.

Her stomach lets out a low, painful GROWL.

She looks down at her hands. They are trembling from a lack of protein. Hunger is starting to make her vision blur.

Suddenly, a tiny rustle of gravel echoes from a nearby ledge.

Gerry freezes. Her eyes scan the jagged stone.

Perched on a flat rock five feet away is a fat, grey DESERT CHUCKWALLA LIZARD. It basks in the sun, its throat puffing up and down, completely unaware of her presence.

Gerry's survival instinct takes over. The upper-class woman who used to dine at high-end steakhouses vanishes.

Slowly, carefully, she slides her hand down the shaft of her wooden yucca crutch. She can't lunge with her broken leg—she only has one shot, and it has to be from a distance.

She raises the crutch like a spear, balancing the heavy, forked end in her palm. Her breathing slows. Her eyes narrow, locking onto the target.

The lizard shifts its head, sensing danger.

Gerry strikes.

She drives the blunt base of the yucca stalk down with a violent, desperate burst of strength.

\*THUD.\*

The wood slams against the stone, kicking up dust. The chuckwalla thrashes beneath the heavy branch, its tail whipping.

Gerry drops to her knees, ignoring the sharp spike of pain in her broken ankle. She uses her bare hands to pin the creature against the rock, quickly snapping its neck with a cold, mechanical twist of her fingers.

She sits back in the dirt, clutching the dead lizard. She is breathing hard, panting like a wild animal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She pulls out her small silver pocket knife. Her hands don't shake anymore.

With practiced, ruthless efficiency, she slices the lizard open, skins it, and cuts the pale meat into thin, flat strips.

She lays the raw strips out carefully across the surface of a flat, black volcanic boulder. The stone is baking in the 110-degree heat, sizzling slightly as the meat touches the surface.

Gerry watches the meat dry and cure under the brutal desert sun, turning into rough, dark jerky.

She picks up a cured piece. Puts it in her mouth. She chews slowly, forcing the tough, gamey protein down her dry throat. Strength floods back into her system. Her eyes clear.

She packs the remaining strips into her pocket, grabs her crutch, and pulls herself back up.

FADE OUT.

*The fire Gerry set to the Cadillac spreads to the curtains, trapping Donald and Laura inside a burning suite, forcing a desperate, smoky physical confrontation where Gerry has to use her wooden crutch as a weapon. In this high-stakes climax, Gerry confronts a desperate Donald in their burning hotel suite, culminating in a brutal fight where she ultimately traps him in the inferno. After overpowering him with a heavy ash tray, she saves her former rival, Laura, from the collapsing room. Finally, as they escape with the help of a detective, Gerry leaves Donald to be consumed by the fire, ensuring a fiery retribution for his betrayal. The script excerpt features an intense showdown where Gerry, despite her injuries, proves to be the superior combatant against a cornered Donald, ultimately leaving him to perish in the flames while saving her rival, Laura.*

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - COUGAR RIDGE - DAY

She rolls onto her back, shielding her eyes from the blinding sun. She survived the fall. She survived the climb.

She blinks away sweat. Something glitters in the dirt three feet away. A sleek, titanium smartphone. Resting perfectly on a flat stone.

Elena freezes. Her breath catches. It's her phone. Placed neatly. Deliberately. Left behind like a mock tombstone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She drags her body forward, ignoring the agonizing spike of pain in her leg, and snatches the phone. She presses the power button. The screen lights up. Reflecting the dirt and dried blood on her face. NO SERVICE.

A cynical, breathless laugh escapes her lips. They knew there was no signal. That's why they left it.

Suddenly—DING. The phone catches a single, fleeting bar of roaming cellular signal from a distant tower.

A lone notification drops down from the top of the screen.

It's an automated Apple Home alert from her luxury estate. FRONT DOOR UNLOCKED BY USER: JULIAN VANCE.

Elena stares at the screen. Her eyes narrow. The agonizing pain in her face completely vanishes, replaced by a cold, terrifying clarity.

They aren't looking for her. They are already at her house.

Elena grips the titanium smartphone. The screen mocks her: NO SERVICE.

She doesn't panic. Her engineer's brain takes over, calculating.

She pulls a sharp, jagged flake of obsidian rock from the dirt.

Using the stone like a wedge, she forces it into the seam of the phone's sleek casing. With a brutal twist, she pries the chassis open. Snap. The waterproof seals tear. The backplate pops loose.

She exposes the dense, custom circuitry inside. With precise, blood-stained fingers, she unclips the phone's internal GPS chip and antenna array.

Even without a cellular network to make a call, she knows the hardware's autonomous receiver is still actively pinging overhead military satellites.

She pulls a backup external battery bank or a high-efficiency solar-charging phone sleeve from her pocket.

She splices the exposed wiring directly into the power source, forcing the phone into a hardwired beacon loop. She opens her proprietary, offline mapping app.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The screen flickers. A raw, unrendered topographic grid appears. A tiny, pulsing BLUE DOT blinks in the dead center of the empty desert grid.

It works. She has an active, offline satellite tracking coordinate. Elena looks down at her shattered leg, then at the blue dot on the screen. She flips the compass calibration. A thin vector line cuts across the digital map, pointing precisely Northeast.

Toward a hidden, underground water pipeline five miles away. She presses the phone back together, wraps it securely in a torn strip of her shirt, and ties it to her wrist.

She looks out at the horizon. She has a map. She has a target.

The blue dot on the topographic map pulses on the screen. It tracks her perfectly. Elena stares at it. A cold, sudden realization washes over her face.

If she can see herself, so can they. Julian has her master passwords. He's sitting in their house right now. All he has to do is open the tracking app on his own device, and he'll see her crawling toward the highway.

He'll come back to finish her off.

Her finger hovers over the screen. If she turns it off, she loses the digital map. She loses her lifeline. She will be completely blind in a desert that wants to kill her. She doesn't hesitate. She holds down the power button. SLIDE TO POWER OFF.

She swipes her bloody thumb across the glass. The screen goes pitch black. The phone dies. Her reflection stares back at her from the dark glass—haggard, bleeding, but fiercely alive.

She wraps the dead phone in a scrap of clothing and slides it deep into her pocket.

Elena looks up at the blinding sun, using it to judge her heading. Northeast. Toward the highway.

She drops to her hands and knees and begins her crawl.

The "Satellite SOS" TwistThe Twist: While Sienna is putting on her theatrical wail, Sheriff Miller's radio chirps again. Dispatch overrides the channel: "Unit 4, scratch that location update. Emergency satellite beacon just pinged an active SOS loop from Cougar Ridge.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Registered to a tech hardware profile: Georgina Sterling."The Impact: Jerry and Sienna freeze. They realize Georgina didn't die in the fall, she's awake, and her high-tech gear bypasses the lack of cell service. They have to fake relief for the Sheriff while internally panicking that she is transmitting data.

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - COUGAR RIDGE - DAY (TWO DAYS LATER)

Baking, shimmering 123-degree heat waves ripple off the jagged granite. The air looks like liquid glass.

At the top of the cliff face, GEORGINA (50) sits huddled under the meager shadow of a boulder.

She is unrecognizable. Her elegant cream riding shirt is shredded and stiff with dried blood. Her face is blistered by the sun, her lips cracked and bleeding.

Her right leg is tightly bound in a fierce, rigid splint made of jagged Joshua tree branches and heavy leather horse tack.

She is exhausted, but her eyes are blazing with a cold, terrifying focus.

She holds her opened, high-tech smartphone. The backplate has been pried off, exposing the copper circuitry.

With precise, steady fingers, Georgina takes a loose wire she stripped from the hardware antenna and splices it directly into the exposed battery bank.

The custom circuitry sparks once.

The dark glass screen flickers to life. A raw topographic grid loads.

**\*\*NO SERVICE.\*\***

Georgina doesn't flinch. She taps a line of custom code into a deep system terminal, forcing the internal military-grade GPS antenna into a hardwired beacon loop.

A neon-green node flashes on the screen.

A digital timer begins to count up: **\*\*00:01... 00:02...\*\***

Georgina looks out across the vast expanse of the Mojave toward the west—the direction where she knows her husband sent the police.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

Jerry wraps an arm around her shoulder, squeezing tightly—a hidden gesture of absolute, victorious relief.

Suddenly—\*CHIRP.\*

Miller's shoulder radio cuts through her weeping, loud and metallic. Dispatch completely overrides the standard channel.

DISPATCH (V.O.)  
 (over radio)  
 Unit 4, break-break. All units  
 stand down on the Black Rock  
 Canyon search grid.

Miller frowns, instantly grabbing his mic.

SHERIFF MILLER  
 (into radio)  
 Dispatch, copy, we were just  
 prepping the incident report here.

DISPATCH (V.O.)  
 Scratch that report, Miller. An  
 emergency military-grade satellite  
 beacon just bypassed our regional  
 towers. We have an active SOS loop  
 pinging coordinates twenty miles  
 east.

Jerry freezes. His arm slips off Sienna's shoulder.

SHERIFF MILLER  
 Twenty miles east? Where?

DISPATCH (V.O.)  
 Cougar Ridge. Hardware profile  
 just registered the device to a  
 commercial tech patent. It belongs  
 to a Georgina Sterling. The beacon  
 is moving, Miller.

She's alive.

The room goes dead silent.

Sienna's theatrical wail catches in her throat. Her eyes go wide, locking onto Jerry in pure, unadulterated terror.

Jerry stares blankly at the topographical map on the wall. The color drains entirely from his face. The cold, calculated crime has just backfired.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Sheriff Miller doesn't notice their panic. He slams his fist onto the table, injected with a sudden surge of adrenaline.

SHERIFF MILLER

Son of a bitch, she's a fighter.  
(into radio) Dispatch, reroute all  
units to Cougar Ridge! Get the  
medical truck rolling!

Miller snatches his Stetson off the table and looks at Jerry and Sienna, completely misinterpreting their shock.

SHERIFF MILLER

You hear that? Your wife is alive.  
Let's go get her.

Miller barrels out of the room.

Jerry and Sienna remain seated. Stiff. Terrified. The realization sinks in: Georgina is out there in the desert, she knows exactly what they did, and she is coming back.

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - BRIEFING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The heavy door slams shut behind Sheriff Miller. His hurried footsteps fade down the hallway.

The moment he is gone, Jerry and Sienna break.

Sienna lunges across the table, her face twisted in pure, unadulterated panic. She grabs Jerry by his torn collar.

SIENNA

(hissing, terrified)  
How is she alive, Jerry?! You said  
the fall broke her leg! You said  
the heat would kill her in twelve  
hours!

JERRY

(sweating, hands  
trembling)  
I saw the bone pierce her skin,  
Sienna! She shouldn't be  
breathing, let alone hotwiring  
military satellites!

Jerry frantically pulls out his own custom titanium smartphone. His thumbs fly across the glass, opening a proprietary encrypted corporate tracking app.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The screen flashes: \*\*CONNECTING TO  
GEORGINA\_SECURE\_NODE...\*\*

A digital map of the Mojave pops up. A bright, neon-green tracking node blinks precisely at the summit of Cougar Ridge.

JERRY

There. She's at the ridge. She must have climbed out of the wash.

SIENNA

(eyes wide)

The police are heading right for her. When they find her, we are dead.

Suddenly, the neon-green node on Jerry's screen flares bright red.

A single line of text scrolls across his screen, overriding his tracking app:

> \*ACCESS TERMINATED BY ADMINISTRATOR. GOODBYE, JERRY.\*

The red node vanishes. The screen drops into pitch-black void.

Jerry taps the screen violently. Nothing.

JERRY

No, no, no... she cut the link.

SIENNA

What do you mean she cut it? Where is she?!

JERRY

(the horror sinking  
in)

She turned it off. She didn't trigger an accident beacon for help. She triggered a manual ping. She wanted us to know she's alive.

Sienna sinks back into her chair, the realization hitting her like a physical blow.

SIENNA

She's not waiting for the sheriff.

JERRY

No. She's coming for us.

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - COUGAR RIDGE - CONTINUOUS (TWO DAYS LATER)

Baking, shimmering heat waves ripple off the granite rock.

At the very top of the cliff face, Georgina stands.

Her pristine riding clothes are unrecognizable—tattered, shredded, and stained with dried blood. Her right leg is tightly bound in a fierce, rigid splint made of jagged Joshua tree branches and heavy leather horse tack.

She holds her opened, modified smartphone. The exposed copper wiring she spliced into the battery bank sizzles softly.

Georgina watches the tiny digital timer on the screen hit exactly \*\*02:00 MINUTES\*\*.

Enough time for the signal to register. Enough time to make them sweat.

With a cold, ruthless smile, Georgina rips the copper wire out of the battery casing. The screen goes completely dead.

She wraps the blacked-out phone in a cloth, slides it into her pocket, and turns her back to the canyon.

She looks toward the distant, shimmering black ribbon of the highway miles away. She leans heavily on an improvised wooden crutch, digs her good foot into the dirt, and begins her grueling, relentless march toward civilization.

FADE OUT.

Use code with caution.

Use code with caution.