

(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**

The desert heat waves ripple against a blinding blue sky. A drone shot reveals the vast, beautiful, hostile expanse of the canyon.

Amidst the dust, two horses cut through the heat ripple. Leading the way --

MARGOT, 30s, a cross between Grace Kelly's untouchable elegance and Kim Novak's haunting mystery. Even in the desert heat, she doesn't sweat.

Clad in a tailored, spotless cream riding outfit, she is a pristine mirage in a wasteland.

Trailing her is her husband, ARTHUR VANCE, 50. Powerful, wealthy, and sweating through his designer linen.

He spurs his horse forward, trying to close the gap.

Without looking back, Margot subtly accelerates. A flawless, silent rejection.

He spurs harder. She matches his speed instantly. It's a high-stakes drag race masked as a casual afternoon ride.

Margot pulls her horse to a sudden stop at the canyon's edge. Dust swirls around them, but settles instantly on him. Not a grain touches her.

Victor pulls up beside her, chest heaving, hands tight on the reins.

Margot turns her head. Her expression is perfectly composed, beautiful, and utterly unreadable.

She adjusts her riding glove, smoothing the leather.

MARGOT

You're flushed, darling. The desert doesn't agree with you.

VICTOR

(defensive, wiping his brow)

I'm fine. Just catching my breath.

Margot offers him a tight, beautiful smile. It doesn't reach her eyes.

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MARGOT

Of course. Let me know when you're ready to lead.

(beat)

If you can.

She snaps her reins. Her horse lunges forward, kicking up a blinding cloud of dust right into Victor's face.

Victor coughs, shielding his eyes, left behind once again.

Before Victor can spur his horse to follow, the rhythmic thud of a third horse approaches from behind.

Slicing through the dust cloud comes GWEN STERLING, 40.

Gwen is sharp, dark, and grounded. A striking brunette clad in a cleavage-baring tank and Cargo shorts.

She looks like she actually belongs in the desert.

Gwen pulls her stallion to a stop directly between Arthur and Margot. She looks at Victor, but her posture opens completely toward Margot.

GWEN

You two always leave a mess in your wake.

Victor adjusts his posture, pulling his shoulders back, eager to reassert his dominance in front of his counsel.

VICTOR

Gwen. Didn't think you'd catch up.

GWEN

I always catch up, Victor. Especially when there's an asset to protect.

Gwen glances over at Margot. Margot shifts her weight, her horse taking a half-step closer to Gwen's.

It is incredibly subtle—a synchronized movement that Victor misses entirely because he's too busy wiping the sweat from his neck.

MARGOT

Gwen reads the terrain better than you do, darling. She knows exactly when to strike.

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ARTHUR

(scoffing)

She knows the law, Margot. That's what I pay her for.

Gwen offers Victor a sharp, professional smile that feels entirely hollow.

GWEN

Exactly, Arthur. I'm just making sure everything is executed... flawlessly.

Gwen and Margot lock eyes for a fraction of a second. No words. No nods. Just a cold, terrifying mutual understanding.

Arthur spurs his horse forward, finally taking the lead, completely unaware that

Arthur leads the way, sweating through his expensive linen. Trailing him Margot and Gwen.

ARTHUR

(calling back)

I'm telling you, another two miles and the valley opens up. The resort is going to look spectacular from the ridge.

MARGOT

(smiling)

If you say so, darling. But if my makeup melts off completely, you owe me that Cartier bracelet.

ARTHUR

Deal. Gwen, did the developers finalize the zoning for the northern parcel?

GWEN

All signed and filed this morning, Arthur. The land is entirely yours. No one else even knows it exists.

Arthur chuckles, deeply satisfied.

He guides his horse to a halt at a massive rocky overlook. The drop into the canyon below is steep, jagged, and terrifying—a forty-foot sheer decline.

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ARTHUR

Look at this. Beautiful.

Arthur smoothly dismounts, holding the reins.

He steps closer to the cliff's edge, soaking in the view, his back entirely turned to the women.

MARGOT

It really is breathtaking.

Margot looks back at Gwen. The playful, doting "trophy wife" mask completely vanishes. Her eyes turn dead, cold, and calculated.

Gwen nods once. No words.

Gwen reaches into her riding jacket and pulls out a compact, heavy metal AIR-HORN.

Before Arthur can even turn around—

Gwen slams the button.

A DEAFENING, PIERCING BLAST echoes off the canyon walls.

Arthur's horse instantly PANICS. It rears wildly, its massive hooves striking out in terror. One hoof slams directly into Arthur's chest.

ARTHUR

Hey! Whoa—!

Arthur loses his footing on the loose shale. He tumbles backward over the lip of the canyon.

He crashes violently down the steep, rocky ravine. His body smashes against boulders before slamming into the dry creek bed forty feet below.

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

**EXT. CANYON FLOOR - CONTINUOUS**

Arthur lies in the dirt, gasping for air. His designer clothes are torn and bloodied.

He tries to move, but shrieks in pure agony. His right trouser leg is ripped open—the jagged white edge of his tibia has pierced the skin. A horrific compound fracture.

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He clutches his leg, sweating profusely, staring up at the sky.

**EXT. CANYON OVERLOOK - CONTINUOUS**

Up on the ridge, Margot and Gwen calmly dismount.

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

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

Gwen walks over to Arthur's panicked buckskin horse, calming it expertly.

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

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

Gwen returns to the cliff's edge.

GWEN

(dead calm)

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

Margot nods, taking one last look down at Arthur. She drops her lit cigarette over the edge. It drifts down toward him.

MARGOT

Goodbye, Arthur. Enjoy the view.

They turn their horses around and gallop away, leaving Arthur's fading screams to be swallowed by the desert wind.

**EXT. HIGHWAY 15 - DAY**

Arthur's massive, luxury pickup truck hauls an expensive three-horse trailer down the empty desert highway.

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

Blinding, oppressive white light. The temperature gauge on the dashboard reads 121 degrees.

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Arthur's black luxury pickup truck sits idling on the asphalt shoulder, its V8 engine purring under the strain of the maxed-out air conditioning.

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

**INT. PICKUP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS**

Inside, the cabin is an icebox. The vents blast a freezing arctic gale.

Margot sits in the passenger seat, staring out the window at the baking, wavy horizon.

In the driver's seat, Gwen calmly sips an iced espresso from a thermal cup. She checks her luxury watch.

MARGOT  
(a low, distant  
voice)  
Do you think it's over yet?

GWEN  
At one-twenty? The human body  
drops unconscious within ninety  
minutes. It's been three hours,  
Margot.

MARGOT  
So he's... gone.

GWEN  
Physically? Yes. The heat doesn't  
leave loose ends.

Gwen shifts the truck into drive, looking out at the dead craters with supreme confidence.

GWEN (CONT'D)  
We drop down to that hourly-rate  
motel by the crossroads. We wait  
out the sun. By tomorrow morning,  
we're back in the city, and you  
are a very wealthy widow.

Margot twists her gold bracelet, looking out at the dead earth as the truck pulls back onto Highway 190, accelerating away.

***MOMENTS LATER...***

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Gwen drives, one hand calmly on the wheel.

Margot flips down the vanity mirror. Her makeup is pristine.

She pulls a wet wipe from her bag and deliberately smears her mascara, mimicking heavy tear stains.

MARGOT

What time do we say it happened?

GWEN

One o'clock. We spent two hours searching for him ourselves before we panicked and drove to get signal. It makes the delay look natural.

MARGOT

And the location?

GWEN

Black Canyon Road. It's sixty miles west of where he actually is. Rough terrain. It'll take the county search and rescue at least two days just to clear that grid.

Margot nods, taking a deep, shaky breath, physically getting into character.

MARGOT

How do I look?

Gwen glances over at her, her eyes narrowing into cold slits of lethal ambition.

GWEN

Like a woman whose five-million-dollar world is crashing down. Take a breath. Let's go.

The luxury truck tears down the shimmering asphalt line, heading straight toward the Sheriff's station.

**EXT. SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY**

The truck and trailer pull into the dusty parking lot of a remote sheriff's substation.

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

A buzzing desk fan sweeps back and forth, rustling open files. The station is quiet until the heavy glass doors swing open.

Gwen storms inside, radiating high-priced fury. Behind her, Margot stumbles, dabbing her dry eyes with a tissue, playing the fragile, hysterical wife.

Gwen marches straight to the front counter, slamming her designer handbag down.

GWEN

I need to speak to the Sheriff.  
Immediately.

SHERIFF MILLER (50s), a weathered desert veteran, steps out from his back office, adjusting his gun belt.

SHERIFF MILLER

I'm Miller. Can I help you ladies?

GWEN

We called your dispatch an hour ago from the resort. My client's husband, Arthur Vance, is missing in Black Canyon. His horse returned to the trail alone.

Miller's folksy demeanor vanishes.

He spreads a large topographical map across the front counter.

SHERIFF MILLER

An hour ago? Your phone report said the horse threw him at one o'clock this afternoon.

GWEN

Yes. We spent over two hours riding the ridge trying to track him ourselves, but the wind covered his tracks. Every second we waste, he gets closer to heat stroke.

Miller taps the map, looking grimly at the blinding sun glaring through the front window.

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SHERIFF MILLER

If he's on foot out by the North Ridge without water, he's in serious trouble.

Miller snatches his radio mic.

SHERIFF MILLER

Dispatch, this is Miller. We got a Code Red missing person. Get the chopper prepped for a sweep of Black Canyon, Sector Four.

In the background, Margot covers her face with her tissue. Behind the cotton, her lips curl into a sharp, victorious smile.

DISPATCH (V.O.)

(through static)

Copy that, Sheriff. But you might want to check the tower telemetry first.

Miller frowns, turning toward the plate-glass window. Outside, the horizon shimmers under an oppressive, white-hot haze.

SHERIFF MILLER

Dispatch, what's the outside air temp reading at the Black Canyon sensor right now?

DISPATCH (V.O.)

One-hundred-and-twenty-three degrees, Sheriff. And it's still climbing.

Miller lets out a low, frustrated breath. He drops the radio mic onto the desk.

He looks at Gwen, then at the seemingly distraught Margot.

SHERIFF MILLER

I'm sorry, ladies. We can't get the bird up.

MARGOT

(screaming, on cue)

What?! What do you mean? My husband is dying out there!

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SHERIFF MILLER

When the air gets this hot, it turns thin as paper, Mrs. Vance. The rotors can't catch enough lift to fly safely, and the engines will seize. Protocols dictate the choppers are strictly grounded until it drops below one-twenty.

GWEN

And when will that be?

SHERIFF MILLER

Not until the sun drops past the mountains. Around eight tonight.

Stepping into his space, sharp -

GWEN

So you're doing nothing? You have dozens of deputies and vehicles sitting right outside! Why aren't your men on the ground?

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

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

Gwen stands by the window, peering through a crack in the dusty plastic blinds. Sweat glints on her collarbone.

She holds a cheap plastic cup of melting ice, pressing it against the side of her neck.

From the adjacent bathroom, the LOUD, HISSING SOUND of a shower echoes against the thin walls.

Calling out, frustrated -

GWEN

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.

The bathroom door clicks open. Steam billows out into the bedroom.

Margot steps out, wrapping a thin, scratchy motel towel around her body. Her skin is flushed pink from the water, but she looks completely unbothered by the squalor.

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MARGOT

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

GWEN

We shouldn't have stayed this close to the station. Every time a truck drives past, I think it's Miller's deputies.

Margot walks over to the dresser, picking up a bottle of expensive lotion. She calmly applies it to her shoulders.

MARGOT

Relax, Gwen. The Sheriff thinks we're grieving widows-in-waiting at the luxury resort down the highway. No one is looking for two wealthy women in a fifteen-dollar-a-night roach motel. It's the perfect blind spot.

GWEN

It's not a blind spot if Arthur manages to—

MARGOT

(Interrupting, sharp)  
Arthur is forty feet down a ravine with a compound fracture in one-hundred-and-twenty-degree heat. He doesn't have water. He doesn't have a phone. By tomorrow morning, the sun will finish what we started.

Gwen stares at the melting ice in her cup. Her lawyer's brain is still calculating risks.

GWEN

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

Margot steps closer to Gwen, her eyes narrowing.

The playful attitude vanishes, replaced by a cold, threatening intensity.

MARGOT

He is a pampered billionaire who screams if his steak isn't medium-rare.

(MORE)

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MARGOT (CONT'D)

He's going to bake out there,  
Gwen. And when he dies, that trust  
reverts to me. Which means you get  
your two-million-dollar legal fee.

Margot taps the front of Gwen's wet cup with her  
manicured nail.

MARGOT

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

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

The sun is a burning orange ball sinking behind the  
mountains. The heat is still oppressive, radiating off  
the concrete.

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

Margot lies on a plastic chaise lounge in a sexy white  
designer bikini, dark sunglasses. She is coated in  
tanning oil, completely serene.

Next to her, Gwen sits under a faded umbrella. She wears  
a chic linen cover-up.

A high-end laptop rests on her knees, the screen  
reflecting columns of financial data.

Margot takes a slow sip of an iced coffee.

MARGOT

Any word from our friend the  
Sheriff?

GWEN

Nothing. The temperature just  
dropped to one-eighteen. They  
won't be moving the trucks out  
until dusk. They're still setting  
up a base camp sixty miles away.

MARGOT

Perfect. How is his money looking?

Gwen taps a few keys on her laptop.

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GWEN

I just accessed his secondary treasury account using his security token. I've scheduled three wire transfers to our shell company in the Caymans. The moment the death certificate is signed, the trust releases the remaining five million directly to you.

MARGOT

To \*us\*, darling.

Margot sits up, sliding her sunglasses down her nose. She looks at Gwen with a sharp, transactional smile.

MARGOT

I couldn't do this without my favorite legal counsel.

GWEN

Let's make sure we get there first. I just sent the resignation email from his private account to his corporate board.

MARGOT

What did you make him say?

GWEN

That the pressure got to him. That he's wandering the desert to find himself and doesn't want to be followed. If they find his body out there next week, the police will read that email and rule it a suicide.

Suddenly, a LOUD PHONE RINGTONE shatters the quiet.

Both women freeze. Their relaxed postures instantly vanish.

Gwen looks down at the second phone on the table—Arthur's personal phone, glowing with an incoming call from "SHERIFF MILLER."

Gwen slides the phone over to Margot.

GWEN

Put the tears on, Margot. You're a wreck. Answer it.

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CONTINUED: (2)

Margot takes a sharp, jagged breath, deliberately hyperventilating to force tears into her eyes.

Her voice instantly transforms into a trembling sob as she hits answer.

MARGOT

(Into phone, crying)

Hello? Sheriff? Please tell me you found him...

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

The desert is bathed in an eerie, silver moonlight.

The oppressive heat is gone, replaced by a biting, cold wind that howls through the rock formations.

Arthur lies face down in the dirt. He is shivering violently.

His eyes snap open. He gasps, coughing up a mixture of blood and dry sand.

He tries to sit up, but the moment he shifts his weight, a white-hot spike of agony shoots through his body.

ARTHUR

(a strangled shriek)

Ahhh! God...

He looks down at his right leg. In the moonlight, it is bent at a sickening, unnatural angle.

The bone hasn't broken the skin, but the swelling is massive, stretching his expensive safari trousers to the bursting point.

He frantically reaches for his belt. His leather canteen pouch is torn open. Empty. His phone pocket is unbuttoned. Cleaned out.

He slaps his wrist. His luxury smart watch is gone.

He is completely erased.

Arthur sinks his forehead into the freezing sand, weeping from the sheer, hopeless isolation.

ARTHUR

(whispering)

Help... Somebody...

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The wind is his only reply.

He closes his eyes, ready to let the cold take him. To sleep.

*FLASHBACK AUDIO: An OLD MAN'S voice echoes in Arthur's mind.*

ARTHUR'S FATHER (V.O.)

*You don't walk away from a  
commitment, Arthur. If she leaves  
you, she gets nothing. If you  
die... everything we built belongs  
to her. Don't let her take it.*

Arthur's eyes fly open in the dark.

The despair in his face transforms into an ugly, burning rage. If he dies out here, Margot and Gwen win.

ARTHUR

(Through gritted  
teeth)

No. No...

He forces himself up onto his elbows. He looks up at the ridge, forty feet above him. It looks like a mountain.

He looks around the canyon floor. He spots a thick, gnarled piece of dead Joshua tree wood resting near a boulder.

Arthur begins to drag himself forward.

He crawls, using his fingernails to dig into the dirt, dragging his useless, broken leg behind him.

He shrieks in pain with every inch, but he doesn't stop. Revenge is his water now.

He reaches the dead branch. He grips his torn leather belt, bites down on it hard, and prepares to pull his fractured leg straight to bind it.

**EXT. CANYON FLOOR - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT**

Arthur sits propped against a boulder.

He loops his sturdy leather riding belt around his right ankle. He wraps the other end around a thick, anchored desert shrub.

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Arthur positions the gnarled piece of Joshua tree wood next to his swollen, deformed shin.

He has strips of his torn safari shirt ready.

Arthur takes a second, smaller leather strap and bites down on it so hard his gums bleed.

He grips his own knee with both hands. He closes his eyes.

Arthur violently shoves his body backward, using the anchored belt to pull his own ankle forward. Traction.

A muffled, agonizing ROAR escapes his covered mouth.

Underneath the skin, the bone SHIFTS with a dull, wet crunch.

Arthur's eyes roll back. He nearly blackouts, but the sheer spite keeps him conscious.

Panting, tears streaming through the dirt on his face, he frantically wraps the cloth strips around the wooden branch and his leg, binding them tight.

The leg is straight now. Crude. Painful. But stable.

**EXT. CANYON FLOOR - DAWN**

The sky bleeds a pale, cold purple. The morning air is crisp, but the horizon promises another day of executioner heat.

Arthur drags his splinted leg, using a smaller branch as a crutch. He is shivering, his stomach growling audibly. Shock is consuming his remaining calories.

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

Then, he spots it.

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

Arthur collapses next to the cactus, his mouth watering. He reaches out to grab a fruit.

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

He groans in frustration.

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Arthur grabs a flat, sharp stone. He begins furiously scraping the skin of the purple fruit, grinding the needles off against the rock.

He doesn't have time to be perfect.

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

Arthur shoves the pulp into his mouth.

He chews frantically, swallowing the sweet, sticky juice.

Needles prick the inside of his lips, but he doesn't care.

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

Arthur looks up at the canyon wall. The sun is just starting to peak over the top, hitting his face with a sudden, warning heat.

He has food. He has a splint. Now, he needs shade before he bakes.

**EXT. CANYON FLOOR - DAY**

The sun hits the canyon like a physical blow. The pale morning light burns away, replaced by a blinding, white glare.

The sand is already hot enough to radiate heat through Arthur's boots.

ARTHUR hobbles along the base of the towering canyon wall. He uses the gnarled branch as a crude crutch, his breath coming in ragged, wet gasps. Sweat pours into his eyes, blinding him.

He looks back. His tracks are a jagged, chaotic line of dragged dirt.

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

Arthur trips on a loose stone. He crashes hard onto his side. He screams, clutching his splinted leg as waves of white-hot agony ripple through him.

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He lies there, panting, the sun baking his dark hair. If he doesn't get up, he will cook right here on the rocks.

Whispering, delirious...

ARTHUR

Get up... Get up...

Through the shimmering heat waves, he 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.

Arthur forces himself onto his hands and knees.

He drops the crutch. It's too slow. He begins to crawl, dragging his bound leg like a dead weight.

**EXT. ROCK CAVE - CONTINUOUS**

Arthur reaches the mouth of the fissure. He shoves his upper body inside the dark opening.

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

Arthur lets out a sob of relief, dragging his legs completely into the darkness.

He collapses onto the cool dirt floor.

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

Arthur freezes, his heart hammering against his ribs.

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

It is defending its shade.

Arthur holds his breath, paralyzed.

He is too weak to run. He looks at the blazing, lethal sun outside the cave, then looks at the deadly predator inside.

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Slowly, deliberately, Arthur slides his hand down to his belt. He grips a sharp, heavy stone he used to smash the cactus fruit.

A low, lethal whisper -

ARTHUR

My spot.

With a burst of survival adrenaline, Arthur slams the stone down just as the snake strikes.

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

The morning sun pierces through the cracks in the cheap plastic blinds, cutting bright lines through the dusty air.

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

On the cramped double bed, MARGOT and GWEN lie entangled in the messy sheets, sharing a quiet cigarette.

Margot smiles, tracing a finger down Gwen's collarbone.

MARGOT

We should check out before noon.  
Get a room at the resort. I can't  
take another hour in this dump.

GWEN

Let me call Miller first. If the  
choppers went up at dawn, they've  
already cleared Black Canyon.

SUDDENLY-- three LOUD, HEAVY KNOCKS BAM against the door.

SHERIFF MILLER (O.S.)

(muffled, booming)

Mrs. Vance? It's Sheriff Miller.

Both women freeze. Their eyes widen in terror.

Margot extinguishes her cigarette.

GWEN

(a frantic, silent  
whisper)

Oh my god.

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SHERIFF MILLER (O.S.)

Mrs. Vance? I saw your truck out  
front. You in there?

Gwen leaps out of bed, grabbing her clothes from the floor. Arthur's phone sits on the nightstand, glowing with a notification.

Gwen snatches it and shoves it under a pillow.

GWEN

(whispering)

Dash to the bathroom! Turn on the  
shower! Cry! Go!

Margot scrambles out of bed, bolts into the adjacent bathroom, and cranks the shower knob.

The loud, hissing ROAR OF RUNNING WATER fills the room.

Margot dashes back out, diving under the sheets and pulling them up to her chin. She furiously rubs her eyes with her knuckles to make them bloodshot and watery.

Gwen frantically pulls her sundress over her head. She kicks her thong under the bed, grabs her laptop, and slides into a plastic chair by the desk, pretending to review legal documents.

She takes a deep, stabilizing breath. Calling out, perfectly calm...

GWEN

Just a moment, Sheriff!

Gwen glances at Margot. Margot nods, her face already twisted into a mask of desperate, trembling grief.

Gwen walks to the door, clicks the deadbolt open, and swings it wide.

Miller stands on the concrete walkway, his Stetson in hand, sweating through his tan uniform. Behind him, the desert sky is a blinding blue.

GWEN

Sheriff. Good morning. We were  
just about to call your office for  
an update. Come in.

Miller steps into the cramped, humid room. He looks around, his eyes lingering for a fraction of a second on the messy bed where Margot is weeping quietly over the sound of the running shower.

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CONTINUED: (2)

SHERIFF MILLER

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

Gwen doesn't blink, stepping directly into his line of sight.

GWEN

Margot couldn't handle the crowds at the resort, Sheriff. Everyone was staring. She needed privacy. Have your teams found anything?

Miller sighs, running a hand over his weathered face. He pulls a folded-up topographic map from his pocket.

SHERIFF MILLER

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

Margot lets out a sharp, theatrical sob from the bed, competing with the white noise of the shower.

MARGOT

Oh god... nothing?

SHERIFF MILLER

But... we did find something else. About twenty minutes ago. One of my ground units found Arthur's horse.

Gwen and Margot both hold their breath.

SHERIFF MILLER

It wasn't anywhere near Black Canyon. It was thirty miles east, near the old dry creek beds by the granite cliffs. And the saddlebags were still attached.

Gwen doesn't flinch. She takes a slow step toward Miller, her posture shifting from cooperative to combative. A cold, condescending smile touches her lips.

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GWEN

A horse wandered thirty miles east, Sheriff? And that surprises you?

SHERIFF MILLER

Well, yes, counselor. In this heat, a riderless animal usually heads down-canyon toward the-

GWEN

Toward the nearest water source. Exactly. Basic equine survival instinct.

Gwen taps a finger on the map in Miller's hand, pointing decisively away from the granite cliffs.

GWEN

Arthur was thrown on the northern ridge of Black Canyon. The horse panics, catches a scent of moisture from the east, and gallops off. A panicked animal can easily cover thirty miles in an afternoon. Are you suggesting a horse's flight path dictates where a human with a broken leg is crawling?

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

SHERIFF MILLER

No, ma'am. I'm just saying it's a physical clue. Protocol dictates we shift a ground team over to-

GWEN

Protocol? Or laziness? If you pull your teams off the northern ridge now, you are abandoning Arthur where he actually fell. You are wasting precious daylight because your men found an easier grid to search.

From the bed, Margot lets out a trembling gasp, perfectly on cue over the sound of the running shower.

MARGOT

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Gwen folds her arms, looking down her nose at the lawman. She is in absolute control, enjoying her intellectual dominance.

GWEN

My client's husband is a  
billionaire, Sheriff. If your  
'protocol' causes his 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 he is.

Sheriff Miller stares at Gwen for a long, heavy beat. The easygoing demeanor completely fades from his eyes. He measures her—absorbing the threat, the arrogance, and the sheer intensity of her pushback.

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

SHERIFF MILLER

(low, measured)

I see your point, counselor. You  
certainly know your way around a  
legal brief. And horse psychology,  
apparently.

GWEN

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

SHERIFF MILLER

Right. Well... I'll tell the boys  
to double down on Black Canyon.  
We'll leave the horse where it is  
for now.

Miller places his Stetson back on his head, adjusting the brim. He steps toward the door, then pauses, looking back at the two women.

SHERIFF MILLER

Just one thing bothers me, though.

Gwen's jaw tightens slightly. Her face is a mask of stone.

GWEN

And what's that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

SHERIFF MILLER

The reins on that horse. They weren't dragging. They were looped neat and tidy over the saddle horn. Like someone tied 'em up before the beast took off.

A suffocating silence fills the room.

SHERIFF MILLER

But like you said... animals do strange things in the heat. Ladies.

Miller turns and walks out. The door clicks shut behind him...

NT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - CONTINUOUS

The door latch clicks shut.

For three agonizing seconds, the room is dead silent.

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

Margot throws the scratchy sheets off her body. She bolts out of bed, her face pale, the fake tears instantly vanishing. She grabs Gwen by the arms.

MARGOT

The reins, Gwen! The reins were tied over the horn! You told me you took care of the horse!

GWEN

I did take care of it. I tied them so the beast wouldn't trip and break its neck before it got away from the canyon.

MARGOT

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

Gwen twists out of Margot's grip. She walks over to the table and picks up her iced espresso, looking at Margot with absolute, chilling condescension. She lets out a short, arrogant laugh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GWEN

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

MARGOT

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

GWEN

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. Sixty miles away from your husband.

Gwen walks over to her laptop, tapping the spacebar to wake the screen. The financial spreadsheets glow against her face.

GWEN

By the time they realize Black Canyon is a dead end, it will be tomorrow morning. By then, Arthur will be a biological statistic. The reins won't matter. The only thing that will matter is your signature on the probate filing.

Margot looks at her, trying to absorb her cold confidence. The panic in her chest slows, but it doesn't disappear.

MARGOT

What if Miller checks the security cameras at the resort? He knows we checked out.

GWEN

Let him check. We told the desk we were driving to Vegas, then we slipped back here on the back roads. I avoided every toll booth. There is no paper trail. No cameras at this dump.

Gwen steps in close, grabbing Margot's chin, forcing her to look into her dead, ambitious eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWEN

We have won, Margot. Stop acting like a criminal and start acting like a millionaire.

Gwen lets go of her chin and turns back to her laptop. Margot stands alone by the bed, looking toward the window as the sound of Miller's truck completely fades into the desert heat.

INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY

The cheap desk fan WHIRS, lazily slicing through the hot, sticky air. On the dresser, ice inside a plastic bucket has completely melted into lukewarm water.

MARGOT sits on the edge of the unmade bed, her hands trembling around a glass of water.

GWEN stands by the cracked mirror, wiping sweat from her neck with a damp towel.

MARGOT

(voice shaking)

The sound... it keeps echoing in my ears. That blast. What if someone heard it? A hiker, a park ranger a mile away?

Gwen stops wiping her neck. She turns, looking at Margot with the patronizing patience of a professor addressing a slow student.

GWEN

An air horn, Margot? Who is going to report a two-second noise in a million acres of desert? A bird? Even if they did, what does it prove?

MARGOT

It proves it wasn't an accident!

GWEN

(stepping closer,  
clinical)

Legally? It proves absolutely nothing. If I shot Arthur with a rifle, the coroner finds a hollow-point slug against his ribs. That's ballistics. A forensic signature.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She steps into the center of the room, her voice dropping to a cool, analytical rhythm.

GWEN

If I pushed him with my bare hands, there's a chance my DNA is under his fingernails. Touch-forensics.

Gwen picks up the compact, heavy-metal marine canister from her briefcase, tossing it lightly in her hand. It catches the dull motel light.

GWEN

But sound? Sound leaves no physical trace. It doesn't have a fingerprint. It doesn't drop DNA.

MARGOT

But the horse—

GWEN

The horse did the work for us. Arthur's autopsy will show blunt-force trauma to the chest from a horseshoe, a fractured tibia from a forty-foot tumble, and a cause of death listed as hyperthermia.

She sets the canister down on the nightstand with a sharp, deliberate THUD.

GWEN

The air horn didn't break his leg, Margot. Gravity did. The air horn didn't kill him. The sun did.

Gwen leans down, pinning Margot with her unblinking eyes.

GWEN

In a court of law, intentions don't mean a damn thing without physical evidence. I didn't just plan a murder. I drafted a flawless legal defense.

Margot stares at the metal canister on the nightstand. She swallows hard, nodding slowly as the cold brilliance of the plan sinks in.

MARGOT

(a quiet whisper)  
Flawless.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWEN

Exactly. So stop shaking. The law  
is a weapon, darling. You just  
have to know how to aim it.

Gwen walks into the bathroom, closing the door behind  
her.

Margot sits alone on the bed, staring at the metal  
canister. The fan continues its lazy, relentless whirl.

EXT. ROCK CAVE - CONTINUOUS - DAY

The jagged, heavy stone slams down into the dirt with a  
wet, heavy THUD.

The dry, frantic rattling suddenly stops.

ARTHUR lies gasping on the cave floor, his chest heaving.  
His knuckles are scraped and bleeding.

In front of him, the MOJAVE GREEN RATTLESNAKE is severed  
completely in two. The triangular head lies a foot away,  
its jaws still reflexively snapping open and shut in the  
dark dirt.

Arthur stares at the twitching head, his heart hammering.  
He remembers a survival documentary he watched on his  
luxury yacht years ago.

\*Dead snakes can still bite.\*

Using the tip of his crude wooden crutch, Arthur  
carefully drags the snapping head toward the mouth of the  
cave.

He digs a quick, shallow hole in the loose sand with his  
boot heel, shoves the head inside, and buries it  
completely, stomping the earth flat.

He 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.

His stomach roars with a savage, empty ache. Shock and  
the sheer physical exertion of setting his leg have  
drained his glucose levels.

Arthur kneels in the dirt. He uses the sharp edge of his  
broken stone to slit the tough, scaled skin down the  
center of the belly. H

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

He hesitates for a fraction of a second—the civilized corporate mogul recoiling at the horror of what he's about to do.

Then, he remembers Margot's face. He remembers Gwen's cold smile.

Arthur rips a chunk of the raw, stringy meat away from the spine with his bare teeth.

He chews aggressively, his jaw clenched, swallowing the tough, metallic-tasting meat. It is pure protein. Raw fuel.

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

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

Arthur wipes the snake blood from his mouth with the back of his hand. The panic is gone from his eyes. His pupils are sharp, dark, and focused.

He looks down at his crudely splinted leg. The pain is a constant, throbbing roar, but the raw meat is hitting his system, stopping his shivering.

He has shelter. He has food. He has twelve hours until the sun goes down and the desert cools enough for him to move.

Arthur leans his head back against the cold granite wall of the cave, watching the canyon entrance like a predator waiting for nightfall.

ARTHUR  
(A dark, gravelly  
whisper)  
Keep searching the north ridge,  
ladies.

He closes his eyes, drifting into a deep, tactical sleep.

EXT. GRANITE CLIFFS - CANYON - DUSK

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUDDENLY—a distant, rhythmic THUD-THUD-THUD shatters the silence.

The sound rapidly builds into an earsplitting roar.

A San Bernardino County 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 and tumbleweeds.

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

INT. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

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

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

In the observer seat, SHERIFF MILLER stares out the window, holding a pair of heavy military binoculars. His eyes scan the shining white circle of light on the canyon floor below.

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?

SHERIFF MILLER

(Over intercom,  
staring through  
binoculars)

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.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF MILLER (CONT'D)

And I bet Vance did the same  
thing. Sweep the base of that  
ridge.

EXT. ROCK CAVE - CONTINUOUS

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

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

ARTHUR snaps awake. He looks out the cave entrance.

Through the dust storm, the Sheriff's helicopter hovers just fifty yards away.

Arthur frantically grabs his crude wooden crutch, dragging his splinted leg toward the cave mouth.

ARTHUR

(screaming over the  
roar)

Here! Down here!

He reaches the edge of the light. He raises his arm to wave—

He freezes. The beam sweeps inches from his hand.

ARTHUR

(to himself,  
panicking)

Wait. Wait, wait, wait.

He stares at the chopper. His eyes go wide. Realization hits like a physical blow.

ARTHUR

Hospital. They call the next of  
kin. They call Gwen.

He aggressively slaps his own forehead, forcing his brain to rack through the trap.

ARTHUR

The laptop. The emails she sent.  
"Psychotic break." "Heat stroke."

The searchlight begins to pivot back toward the cave mouth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARTHUR

She locks you away. She takes the  
five million. You walk out of here  
straight into a cage.

The white light hits the very edge of the cave opening.

ARTHUR

(whispering, lethal)  
Unless you stay dead.

Arthur kills his voice and yanks his arm back into the shadows.

He drops to his stomach, pressing his body flat against the dirt, burying his face.

The blinding beam sweeps directly across the empty cave mouth. One second. Two seconds. Three seconds.

It moves on. The roar begins to fade.

Arthur lies in the pitch black, breathing hard, but smiling.

EXT. GRANITE CLIFFS - CANYON - CONTINUOUS

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. Fuel  
warning is chiming. We have to  
head back to base.

SHERIFF MILLER (V.O.)

(over radio,  
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 - CONTINUOUS

Arthur crawls back to the edge of the cave mouth.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He is completely alone.

The frantic energy leaves his body, replaced by a cold, eerie calm. He looks down at his dirt-caked hands, then out at the black expanse.

A sharp, icy wind whistles through the canyon. He shivers.

Arthur tightens his grip on his crude wooden crutch and pulls himself upright. The prey is gone.

He looks out into the dark.

                                ARTHUR  
                                (a dark, quiet  
                                whisper)  
                                Time to hunt.

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

INT. ROCK CAVE - DAY

The dust from Arthur's battle with the rattlesnake slowly settles in the cool, dim air of the fissure.

Arthur sits propped against the granite wall. His face is streaked with dried sweat and snake blood. His breath is shallow.

He stares deep into the dark recess of the cave, where the morning sun cannot reach.

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

Nature doesn't make straight lines.

Arthur shifts his weight, dragging his tightly bound splinted leg over the gravel. He digs his fingers into the loose rock pile.

He pulls.

With a METALLIC SCRAPE, a three-foot-long, solid iron MINING SPIKE slides out of the shale. It is heavily rusted, pitted with age—left behind by a prospector a century ago.

It is incredibly heavy. Cold. Unbreakable.

Arthur grips the iron rod. A dark, grim smile cuts through his blistered lips.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He slams the tip of the spike into the dirt. It holds his full weight effortlessly. No more worrying about a wooden branch snapping under him in the dark.

He 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.

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

He slides the stone bowl directly underneath the quartz vein.

DRIP.

A drop of cool mountain water hits the stone.

Arthur leans his head back against the cave wall, clutching his new iron cane. The heat roars outside, but inside, the desert just gave him a weapon and a lifeline.

One drop at a time.

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - CANYON TRAIL - NIGHT

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

ARTHUR hobbles along a narrow ridge line, using his gnarled Joshua-tree branch as a crutch. His movement is a painful hitch-and-drag.

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

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

Arthur shakes his head violently.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARTHUR  
(a dry, rattling  
whisper)  
Focus... find the road...

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

Arthur snaps his head around.

Ten yards ahead on the trail stands MARGOT, perfectly still in the moonlight. She wears a pristine white designer bikini, holding a glass of iced champagne.

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

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

Arthur takes a desperate, swinging step toward her—but Margot vanishes into a swirl of blowing sand. Empty space.

A sharp, metallic CLICK echoes from above.

Arthur spins, loses his balance, and falls hard onto his good knee.

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

GWEN  
(clinical, without  
looking up)  
The human body is seventy percent  
water.

Legally speaking, you're already a corpse.

Sign the probate papers.

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

Arthur lunges forward, swinging the heavy iron mining spike like a bat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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. Gwen disappears.

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

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

He rolls onto his back, looking up at the swirling sky.

BOOMING FLASHBACK AUDIO echoes from the canyon walls:

ARTHUR'S FATHER (V.O.)

Get up, Arthur! A Vance doesn't die in the dirt while a lawyer and a thief spend his legacy! STAND UP!

The words hit Arthur like pure adrenaline.

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

Arthur bites his bleeding lip until the pain anchors his mind. He tastes copper.

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

The unbreakable iron supports his splinted leg perfectly.

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

He grips the rusted iron rod until his knuckles turn white.

ARTHUR

(through gritted teeth)

I'm coming home, Margot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

He takes a heavy, agonizing step forward, planting the iron spike with a rhythmic, determined thud, refusing to look at the shadows again.

Arthur lunges, swinging his wooden crutch like a bat. The wood SMASHES against the hard granite.

The mirage shatters. Gwen disappears.

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

He rolls onto his back, looking up at the swirling sky.

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Arthur bites his bleeding lip until the pain anchors his mind. He tastes copper.

He rolls over, grabs his crutch, and forces his body back onto his feet.

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

He grips the wooden branch until his knuckles turn white.

ARTHUR

(through gritted teeth)

I'm coming home, Margot.

He takes a heavy, agonizing step forward, locking his gaze on the distant red light, refusing to look at the shadows again.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

The room is dim and quiet compared to the blinding glare outside. A buzzing desk fan sweeps back and forth, rustling the edges of open case files.

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

A quiet tap on the doorframe.

DEPUTY STEVENS (30s) 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.

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 toward the granite cliffs.

DEPUTY STEVENS

Maybe Mr. Vance tied them before he fell?

SHERIFF MILLER

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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. Gwen. She's too loud. Threatening me with a lawsuit within ten minutes of walking into my station. People only wave legal briefs when they're trying to keep you from looking at the facts.

DEPUTY STEVENS

You think they're hiding something?

SHERIFF MILLER

They checked out of the resort at nine-thirty yesterday morning, but told us the accident happened at one. Where were they for those three and a half hours? Why pack your bags before your husband gets lost?

DEPUTY STEVENS

(realizing)

They were setting a timeline.

SHERIFF MILLER

(grim nod)

They were giving themselves a head start. Wanted us looking sixty miles away at Black Canyon 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 rude lawyer? The DA will laugh us out of the county. Right now, it's just a gut feeling. I need something concrete.

DEPUTY STEVENS

Where are you going?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SHERIFF MILLER

Front desk clerk at the resort says the wife didn't head back to the city. Spotted their truck parked over at that hourly-rate dump down the highway. The Desert Sunset.

Miller checks the cylinder on his revolver, CLICKS it shut, and slides it into his holster.

SHERIFF MILLER

The lawyer drove back to town this morning. The little trophy wife is all by herself in Room 14. Think I'll drop by, say hello, and see how she 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. DESERT SUN MOTEL - DAY

The midday sun beats down like a hammer. The stagnant pool water reflects a blinding white glare.

MARGOT lies on a plastic chaise lounge in her stark white bikini, large black sunglasses hiding her eyes. She looks relaxed, but her fingers nervously twist a gold bracelet around her wrist.

A shadow blocks the sun.

Margot slides her sunglasses down.

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

MARGOT

(startled, sitting  
up)

Sheriff! God, you scared me. I...  
I didn't hear your truck.

SHERIFF MILLER

Sorry about that, Mrs. Vance. Mind  
if I sit?

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARGOT

Have your teams found Arthur?

SHERIFF MILLER

No, ma'am. Not yet. We've been combing the north ridge of Black Canyon just like your lawyer insisted. Nasty terrain up there.

Miller looks at the stagnant pool.

SHERIFF MILLER

Where is Ms. Gwen today, anyway?

MARGOT

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. Margot pulls a towel over her bare legs.

MARGOT

I couldn't stay inside that room, Sheriff. The walls are closing in. I'm out of my mind with worry.

SHERIFF MILLER

I imagine you are. Which is why I wanted to clarify a couple of things from your statement yesterday. Just little details tangled up in my head.

MARGOT

(a tight, fake smile)  
Of course. Anything to help.

SHERIFF MILLER

You told me that when Arthur's horse bolted, you and Ms. Gwen spent two hours searching Black Canyon before driving down for cell service. That right?

MARGOT

Yes. Exactly. It was a nightmare.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SHERIFF MILLER

Right. Well, my deputy checked the traffic camera down at the crossroads crossroads. The only road out of Black Canyon. It shows your truck and trailer passing by at eleven-thirty in the morning.

Chloe's heart drops. Her breath hitches.

SHERIFF MILLER

But your lawyer told me the accident happened at one o'clock. And that you searched for two hours *\*after\** that.

MARGOT

(stammering, eyes darting)

I... I must have gotten the time wrong. I was in a panic. Time blends together when your husband is dying.

SHERIFF MILLER

Sure does. Trauma does funny things to a clock.

Miller leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees. His eyes lock onto hers like a hawk. The friendly demeanor vanishes.

SHERIFF MILLER

But there's one more thing, Mrs. Vance. I checked the digital log on the luxury resort's electronic gate. You and Ms. Gwen keycards logged your checkout at nine-thirty yesterday morning. *\*Before\** you ever drove out to the desert.

Margot opens her mouth, but no sound comes out.

Without Gwen's sharp legal shield, she is drowning. She grips the edges of her plastic lounge chair until her knuckles turn white.

SHERIFF MILLER

Looks to me like you ladies packed your bags and ended your vacation before your husband ever fell off that horse.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SHERIFF MILLER (CONT'D)

(beat)

Why would you do that, Margot?

Margot's grieving-wife mask cracks completely. A bead of sweat rolls down her neck. She is trapped.

EXT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - MINUTES LATER - DAY

The door to Room 14 SLAMS shut.

INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - CONTINUOUS

MARGOT bolts inside, her breath coming in ragged, terrified wheezes.

She rips the pillow off the bed, snatches Arthur's stolen phone, and hits speed dial. She paces, biting her fingernails to the quick.

MARGOT

(frantic whisper)

Pick up, pick up, please...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. GWEN'S LUXURY CAR - CONTINUOUS

GWEN drives down a smooth, shimmering highway. The city skyline rises in the distance. The cabin is air-conditioned and pristine.

She answers via her sleek wireless earpiece.

GWEN

Margot? I told you not to call this-

MARGOT

(hysterical)

He knows, Gwen! The Sheriff knows!  
He was just here at the pool!

Veronica's eyes narrow in the rearview mirror. Her knuckles tighten on the leather steering wheel. Her voice remains dead calm.

GWEN

Breathe. What does he think he knows?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARGOT

The cameras! He checked the timestamp at the crossroads gas station! He knows the truck left at eleven-thirty, not two! He knows we checked out of the resort \*before\* we went into the desert!

Gwen pulls the luxury car hard onto the shoulder. Gravel SPRAYS. She slams it into park.

GWEN

Did you say anything?

MARGOT

I stammered like an idiot! I said it was the trauma, but he didn't buy it! He asked why we packed our bags before Arthur ever fell!

GWEN

(through gritted teeth)

And what did you say to that? Tell me exactly what you said.

MARGOT

Nothing! I started crying and ran! Gwen, we're ruined. If they find Arthur alive, or if they see his leg was broken deliberately-

GWEN

Shut up! Arthur is dead, Margot. At one-twenty degrees, he's already gone. The Sheriff has timeline discrepancies. That is it. No body, no crime.

MARGOT

I can't go to prison! If Miller comes back with a warrant, I'm telling him it was your idea. You drafted the paperwork. You bought the air-horn!

The line goes dead silent.

Inside the car, Gwen's face hardens into pure, murderous ice. The trophy wife is a loose thread.

GWEN

(a low, lethal whisper)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWEN (CONT'D)

If you turn on me, you get zero dollars, a twenty-year sentence, and I will personally destroy you on the stand.

(beat)

You are the grieving widow. Lock the door. Do not answer it. I am turning the car around right now.

MARGOT

(sobbing)

Hurry... please hurry.

Margot hangs up, throwing the phone onto the bed.

She collapses against the motel door, sliding down to the carpet, burying her face in her knees.

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - GRANITE CLIFFS - LATE AFTERNOON

The sky is a toxic mix of bruised orange and dusty yellow. Heat waves ripple off the black canyon rock like grease on a skillet.

The heavy, metallic THWACK-THWACK-THWACK of a luxury Eurocopter EC130 shatters the canyon quiet, skimming fifty feet above the floor.

INT. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

GWEN sits in the front co-pilot seat in expensive aviation headphones, high-end stabilizing binoculars glued to her eyes.

In the back, MARGOT clutches the armrests, sweating through a black silk blouse.

The PRIVATE PILOT (40s) fights heavy thermal crosswinds.

PRIVATE PILOT

(over intercom)

Ma'am, ground temp is pushing one-sixteen. The air is too thin. We hit a sudden down-draft in this canyon, we're going down hard.

GWEN

(over intercom,  
commanding)

You get ten thousand dollars for an hour, Captain. Stay in the canyon

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GWEN (CONT'D)  
 until I tell you to turn around.  
 Hover over the dry creek bed  
 ahead.

Gwen locks her binoculars onto the base of the steep ravine—the exact spot where they forced Arthur's horse to rear.

Through the lenses, she spots the deep crater in the dirt forty feet down.

GWEN (CONT'D)  
 (over intercom)  
 There. That's the drop.

Margot leans forward, her breath fogging the plexiglass window.

MARGOT  
 (over intercom)  
 Do you see him? Is he face down?

Gwen pans the binoculars across the empty dirt. She frowns. No corpse.

GWEN  
 He's not there.

MARGOT  
 What? Animals must have—

GWEN  
 Look closer.

Through the optics, Gwen zooms in on the clay.

A trail of blood-stained, deep gouges tracks away from the impact site. Handprints. Fingernail scrapes.

Next to them, a deep, continuous groove where a heavy, splinted leg was brutally dragged.

GWEN (CONT'D)  
 He crawled. He set his own leg and  
 he crawled away.

MARGOT  
 (hysterical)  
 Oh my god. He's alive. He's going  
 to kill us.

GWEN  
 Shut up, Margot! He's on foot,  
 without water, in a heatwave.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWEN (CONT'D)

He didn't make it half a mile.  
(to Pilot)  
Track that trail!

The pilot tilts the joystick. The luxury chopper drifts sideways, its violent rotor wash kicking up a massive cloud of blinding white dust along the canyon floor.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

ARTHUR stands leaning heavily against the gnarled trunk of a desert Joshua tree.

His shirt is gone. His chest is a violent, blistering raw red. His lips are split and bleeding.

He looks less like a billionaire and more like a feral, dangerous animal.

The mechanical roar of the helicopter hits him. He doesn't flinch. He slowly looks up.

Through the swirling dust storm and blinding sun glare, his bloodshot eyes lock onto the sleek black Eurocopter hovering right above him.

He can see the silhouettes behind the glass.

Arthur doesn't wave. He doesn't cower.

Slowly, deliberately, Arthur raises his hand. He wipes a streak of dark snake blood across his chin, looking directly into the cockpit.

He forms his hand into a tight fist, then extends a single, rigid finger straight up at them.

A gesture of absolute, burning, unbroken defiance.

INT. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS

Through the optics, Gwen stares right into Arthur's savage, bloodshot eyes. She gasps, flinching back from the plexiglass.

For the first time, the cold, calculating lawyer looks terrified.

GWEN

He's alive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARGOT

(screaming)

Land the chopper! We have to  
finish it! Land it!

PRIVATE PILOT (MENDOZA)

(over intercom,  
frantic)

I can't land! The rotor wash is

kicking up too much sand—zero visibility!

Engine temp is red-lining! We're losing

lift! I'm pulling us out!

Mendoza yanks the collective. The engines SHRIEK as the  
helicopter pitches backward, climbing fast out of the  
canyon.

Through the windows, Margot and Gwen watch Arthur's lone  
silhouette shrink into the vast desert. He isn't running.  
He is just watching them fly away. Waiting.

Mendoza fights the controls, yelling over the deafening  
engine roar. He reaches for the radio button.

MENDOZA

(over intercom,  
frantic)

Desert Air Traffic Control, this  
is November-four-two-niner-Sierra.  
We have a visual on a severely  
injured individual at the base of  
the cliffs—

Gwen's hand shoots across the cockpit. She slams her palm  
flat against the radio console, cutting him off mid-  
sentence.

MENDOZA

(screaming over the  
engine)

What the hell are you doing?! That  
man is dying down there! I have a  
federal obligation to report—

GWEN

(ice-cold, inches  
from his face)

You don't report a damn thing,  
Mendoza. Look at me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MENDOZA

He's your client's husband! We  
have to call this in!

Gwen looks him dead in the eye. Her voice cuts through  
the headset like a razor blade.

GWEN

There is fifty thousand dollars  
cash in my briefcase. You drop us  
at the private airfield, delete  
the flight log from your GPS, and  
take a two-week vacation.

(beat)

If you radio this in, my firm will  
tie you to the corporate fraud  
case we're settling next week.  
You'll slide into a cell right  
next to us.

Mendoza freezes. His hand hovers over the control panel.  
The weight of her words hits him.

He looks at the empty desert, then back into Gwen's dead  
eyes. He knows she can do exactly what she promised.

In the back, Margot hyperventilates, clutching her face.

Mendoza swallows hard. Slowly, deliberately, he takes his  
finger off the radio button. He grips the joystick with  
both hands, steering the aircraft toward the western  
horizon.

MENDOZA

(over intercom, voice  
tight)

Hold on. We're heading back to the  
airfield.

Gwen slowly pulls her hand back from the console. She  
adjusts her designer sunglasses, completely composed.

GWEN

Good choice, Captain.

Behind her, Margot collapses into her leather seat, her  
chest heaving as the helicopter flies away, leaving  
Arthur behind.

EXT. PRIVATE AIRFIELD - HANGAR - DUSK

The black Eurocopter touches down on the asphalt with a heavy bounce. The rotor blades spin down, throwing off waves of residual heat.

Before the blades stop, the cabin door slides open. MARGOT and GWEN scramble out onto the tarmac, driven by pure panic.

Gwen sprints to Arthur's luxury pickup truck parked inside the shaded hangar. She pops the tailgate, grabs a heavy leather duffel bag, and flings it onto the asphalt.

MENDOZA steps out of the chopper, watching them with tense, wary eyes.

GWEN  
(screaming over the  
engine whine)  
Fifty thousand. It's all there,  
Mendoza. Wipe the flight logs and  
get out of the state.

Mendoza snatches the duffel bag. He doesn't say a word. He turns and bolts toward his personal vehicle.

Margot grips Gwen's arm, her voice cracking.

MARGOT  
Where are we going?! We need to  
pack! We need to get to Vegas and  
catch a flight-

GWEN  
(slapping Margot's  
hand away)  
If we run, we look guilty. If  
Arthur reaches a phone, an APB  
goes out before we hit the state  
line. We have to stop him before  
he gets out of that canyon grid.

MARGOT  
How?! He's a monster out there!  
You saw his eyes!

GWEN  
He's a man with a shattered shin  
and no water. Spite only carries a  
body so far. Look at the horizon.

Gwen points past the shimmering asphalt toward the deep purple desert expanse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Miles away, on the crest of a dark ridge, a lone red light BLINKS rhythmically against the darkening sky. A radio tower.

GWEN

That's the only landmark for twenty miles. It sits right off the Highway 15 access road. That's where he's crawling. We take the back highway, we intercept him in forty minutes.

MARGOT

And when we find him? What do we do?

Gwen climbs into the driver's seat of Arthur's massive pickup truck, gripping the leather steering wheel. She stares through the windshield into the oncoming night.

GWEN

It's dark. It's an unlit dirt road. A delirious, dehydrated man stumbles into the path of a three-ton vehicle.

(beat)

A tragic hit-and-run, Margot. The police will spend weeks looking for a ghost driver.

Margot stands on the tarmac. The sheer horror of the plan washes over her—but the thought of a prison cell hardens her face.

She climbs into the passenger seat, slamming the door.

GWEN

Put your seatbelt on.

Gwen slams her foot onto the gas. The massive engine ROARS.

The truck peels out of the hangar, tires SCREECHING against the asphalt as it tears down the empty desert road.

EXT. HIGHWAY 15 - NIGHT

A lone San Bernardino Sheriff's cruiser TEARS down the empty asphalt, its roof-rack lights throwing a violent pulse of red and blue against the passing Joshua trees.

INT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

The speedometer needle shivers past NINETY-FIVE.

SHERIFF MILLER grips the wheel with both hands, his face set in stone. The dispatch radio CRACKLES on the dashboard.

DEPUTY STEVENS (V.O.)

(over radio, static)

Sheriff, we just pinged the GPS on Arthur Vance's luxury pickup truck. It bypassed the city limits. It's heading south on the old unlit access road near the Ridge-line Radio Tower.

Miller snatches the mic, speaking over the engine whine.

SHERIFF MILLER

Copy that, Stevens. Advise ground units to divert from Black Canyon. They're not hunting a missing person anymore.

(beat)

They're intercepting a homicide.

Miller hits the siren. A piercing wail shatters the desert night as the cruiser flies over a blind crest, chasing the distant, blinking red light of the radio tower

EXT. DESERT PERIMETER - ACCESS ROAD - MIDNIGHT

The blinking red light of the RADIO TOWER looms massive overhead, casting an ominous, strobing crimson glow across the flat dirt.

A chain-link perimeter fence separates the open desert from the unlit, gravel access road.

A heavy, agonizing RUSTLE echoes from the brush.

ARTHUR stumbles out from the shadow of a massive yucca plant. He is a horrific sight. His bare chest is a map of blisters and blood. His hands are raw, wrapped in strips of his torn trousers.

He leans heavily on the solid iron MINING SPIKE. His crudely splinted leg drags heavily through the dirt, leaving a long, jagged scar in the earth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He reaches the chain-link fence. He collapses against it, his forehead resting on the cold steel.

His throat is so dry it sounds like sandpaper.

ARTHUR  
(a cracked, silent  
whisper)  
Made it...

Just fifty yards across the gravel road is a small metal equipment shed with an external, yellow security telephone glowing under a single bulb. Civilization.

Arthur hooks the iron spike into the links of the fence, preparing to haul his broken body over the top.

SUDDENLY—a pair of blinding HIGH-BEAM HEADLIGHTS cuts through the darkness from a mile down the straight access road.

The heavy, unmistakable roar of a V8 engine echoes through the canyon.

Arthur freezes, squinting into the glare. He recognizes the silhouette. It's his own massive luxury pickup truck.

The truck flies down the gravel road at seventy miles an hour, kicking up a massive wall of white dust. It doesn't slow down. It isn't searching.

It aims directly for the perimeter fence where Arthur hangs.

Through the windshield glare, he catches a fleeting glimpse of two silhouettes: Gwen gripping the wheel with lethal intent, and Margot clutching the dash.

They are using the truck as a three-ton battering ram.

Arthur's eyes go wide. Exhaustion evaporates, replaced by a massive surge of survival adrenaline.

He can't climb in time. He can't run. He has less than three seconds.

With a feral roar, Arthur yanks his iron spike free, throws his body backward, and flings himself into a deep, shadow-drenched wash behind a cluster of jagged, immovable boulders.

The truck slams into the chain-link fence at full speed—

EXT. DESERT PERIMETER - ACCESS ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The massive black pickup truck SMASHES through the chain-link fence. Metal tears and posts snap with a deafening SCREECH.

The truck grinds to a halt, its front bumper buried in the wrecked steel mesh. Steam hisses from the crumpled hood.

One headlight is shattered. The other projects a single, crooked beam of white light into the swirling dust.

The driver and passenger doors fly open.

GWEN and MARGOT step out onto the gravel. Gwen grips a heavy tire iron from the cabin. Her hair is wild, her breathing frantic. Margot follows, shaking violently.

They step into the beam of the single headlight, staring at the twisted steel.

MARGOT

(crying, coughing in  
the dust)

Did you hit him? Is he under the  
bumper?

Gwen approaches the front of the truck, shielding her eyes from the glare. She peers beneath the chassis.

Nothing but mangled wire and torn desert brush.

GWEN

No. There's no body.

MARGOT

But he was right here! I saw him!

GWEN

The fence is torn, but there's no  
blood. He dropped into the wash  
before impact. He's down there in  
the dark.

Gwen points the tire iron toward the pitch-black rocky ditch just ten feet away. A cluster of massive, ancient boulders sits completely unlit in the shadows.

GWEN

Arthur! I know you can hear me!  
Your leg is broken. You can't run.  
If you crawl out now, we can talk

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GWEN (CONT'D)  
about a settlement! Five million  
dollars! We can split it!

The only response is the rhythmic, mechanical CLICK-CLICK-CLICK of the truck's cooling engine. The wind whistles through the torn wire.

MARGOT  
(terrified, pulling  
Gwen's shirt)  
Gwen, let's get in the truck and  
drive. Please. Let the desert have  
him.

GWEN  
(slapping her hand  
away)  
If we leave him, he crawls to that  
phone  
booth across the road. Look at the  
truck,  
Margot—the radiator is pierced. We  
aren't driving anywhere. It's him  
or us. Right now.

Gwen steps over the wrecked wire, descending into the dark wash.

Margot hesitates, then scrambles down after her, terrified of being left alone in the light.

EXT. THE JAGGED BOULDERS - CONTINUOUS

Total darkness. The crooked headlight from the road only illuminates the tops of the rocks, leaving the wash floor in ink-black shadow.

Gwen and Margot move single file between two towering boulders. Gwen keeps the tire iron raised.

MARGOT  
(frantic whisper)  
I can't see anything... it's too  
dark.

GWEN  
Keep your back to the rock. He can  
barely stand.

A heavy scrape echoes from behind a boulder to their left.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gwen spins, swinging the tire iron wildly. It smashes against the stone, throwing off a brilliant shower of sparks.

GWEN

Show yourself!

Behind Margot, a figure rises like a ghost.

ARTHUR. He is completely silent. He isn't standing—he is wedged against a narrow rock fissure, using the tight stone walls to anchor his broken body.

Before Margot can turn, Arthur's cloth-wrapped hand shoots out of the dark. He grips her collar and yanks her backward into the crevice.

MARGOT

(a choked, muffled  
scream)

Vero—!

Arthur slams his palm over her mouth, pinning her against the cold granite.

He holds the sharp, jagged stone from the cave inches from her throat. He doesn't strike. Instead, he leans in, whispering a low, terrifying rattle directly into her ear.

ARTHUR

Heard the news, Margot? Your father's trust has a loophole. If one of us is murdered... the survivor gets every single penny.

Margot's eyes go wide with paralyzing terror.

ARTHUR

But murder costs a life. Unless... it looks like you two turned on each other out here in the heat. Paranoid. Greedy.

Gwen hears the scuffle and spins, pointing her weapon into the narrow gap.

GWEN

Margot?! Where are you?

Arthur shoves Margot forward, launching her directly into Gwen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The two women collide violently, tumbling to the gravel floor of the wash. Gwen drops the tire iron. It CLATTERS against the stones.

Gwen scrambles on her hands and knees, frantically feeling the dirt for the metal rod.

A heavy boot slams down directly onto her hand, pinning her fingers against the sharp gravel. A bone-cracking crunch.

GWEN  
(a sharp shriek of  
agony)  
Ahhh! My hand!

Gwen looks up through the darkness.

Arthur stands over her, balancing on his solid iron mining spike. He looks down with absolute, chilling detachment.

GWEN  
(panting, backing  
away)  
Arthur... wait. I'm just the  
lawyer. I was doing a job. She  
paid me. Margot wanted you dead!  
She hated you!

From the dirt, Margot looks up, her face streaked with tears and dust as she hears her lover instantly betray her.

Arthur looks from Gwen to Margot. He doesn't raise a weapon to strike them. He just lets out a cold, hollow chuckle that echoes off the canyon walls.

ARTHUR  
I know exactly who you both are.

Arthur raises his heavy, solid iron mining spike—and slams it down with massive force.

He doesn't hit Gwen. He drives the sharp iron tip straight through the exposed radiator, battery, and wiring harness of the wrecked truck, shattering the single remaining headlight.

Instantly, the entire canyon plunges into absolute, pitch-black silence and darkness.

EXT. DESERT PERIMETER - ACCESS ROAD - MINUTES LATER

The desert wind howls under a sea of indifferent stars.

A rhythmic, heavy hitch-and-drag sound emerges from the dark wash.

Arthur crawls up onto the gravel road, using his raw hands to drag his splinted leg. He is bleeding, exhausted, and broken—but his eyes are clear.

He drags his body across the empty road toward the small metal equipment shed.

He reaches the yellow security telephone. Gripping the steel frame, he pulls himself up and lifts the heavy plastic receiver to his ear.

Behind him, deep in the absolute blackness of the jagged boulders, the faint, panicked, hysterical screams of Margot and Gwen echo into the empty desert night.

They are trapped in the dark with no vehicle, no water, and nowhere left to run.

Arthur presses the operator button.

ARTHUR  
 (into phone, a calm,  
 chilling voice)  
 Connect me to Sheriff Miller. Tell  
 him Arthur Vance is coming home.

FADE OUT.

INT. SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

GWEN leans over the front counter, her manicured fingers pressing hard into a topographical map. Her eyes are hot with frustration, staring directly at Sheriff Miller.

Behind her, MARGOT sits on a wooden bench, dabbing dry eyes with a crumpled tissue, playing the fragile wife.

GWEN  
 (sharp, demanding)  
 Let me get this straight, Sheriff.  
 The helicopters are grounded  
 because the air is thin. Fine. But  
 you have dozens of deputies and  
 tracking dogs outside. Why aren't  
 your men on the ground looking for  
 my client's husband?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF MILLER

Because it's one-hundred-and-twenty-three degrees out there, counselor. At that temperature, the desert isn't just hot. It's a biological kill zone.

GWEN

He is a human being stranded in a ravine! Every minute you waste is a minute he gets closer to death! Your trained professionals can't handle a walk in the sun?

Sheriff Miller slams his heavy hand down onto the counter. His folksy patience evaporates.

He steps into Gwen's space, radiating the authority of a man who knows exactly how brutal his jurisdiction is.

SHERIFF MILLER

A walk in the sun? You think this is a park, lady? In this heat, a deputy carrying tactical gear burns through two liters of water every forty-five minutes. Within an hour, your core hits one-hundred-and-five. Your kidneys shut down. Your brain swells, and you start hallucinating.

GWEN

They have vehicles. They have trucks—

SHERIFF MILLER

Trucks blow tires on the boiling gravel. Radiators explode in thirty minutes. If I send a team into Black Canyon on foot right now, I'm not running a search party. I'm signing six death warrants.

Miller leans closer, his voice dropping to a gravelly threat.

SHERIFF MILLER

By three o'clock, my office will be deploying a second team just to carry the corpses of my own men out of the dirt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Gwen glares at him, unmoved by the human cost. Her mind only calculates how this delay guarantees Arthur's demise.

GWEN

So you're doing nothing.

SHERIFF MILLER

I am following San Bernardino County safety protocols. We have teams loading water tanks and staging horses at the perimeter. The second the sun drops behind the western ridge and the temp slips under one-fifteen, we move. Until then... your husband is on his own.

Margot lets out a loud, shuddering sob from the bench, burying her face in her hands.

Under the counter, out of Miller's sight, Gwen's fist relaxes. A cold wave of relief washes over her. The law is literally working in her favor.

GWEN

(a tight, icy  
whisper)

I hope your protocols can survive the deposition, Sheriff. Come on, Margot. We're leaving.

Gwen grabs her designer handbag and turns on her heel. Margot follows, stumbling slightly, still clutching her tissue.

Miller watches them go, his eyes narrowing as the heavy station doors swing shut.

-----When Sheriff Miller's headlights and strobe lights hit the phone booth, they illuminate Arthur, who is covered in blood and sweat and holding a large iron mining spike,. Miller stops his cruiser on the gravel road and, seeing Arthur, realizes who he is,. Arthur drops the phone receiver, which then swings on its cord,. He looks at Miller and says, "I told you, Sheriff. I'm home," before stepping forward,.This final, dramatic visual highlights how Arthur has transformed into an unstoppable, powerful figure, despite his physical condition,.In this final, high-stakes scene, a weary yet triumphant Arthur confronts Sheriff Miller at the desert's edge, signaling the end of his ordeal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

He emerges from the darkness, gripping a mining spike as a scepter, and confirms he is finally home.

TITLE: Control the Board

GENRE: Survival Thriller / Psychological Suspense

COMP-TITLES: A Perfect Murder meets 127 Hours

THE HOOK:

Billionaire Arthur Vance has everything—wealth, power, and a stunning young wife, Margot. But during a private horse trek to scout a remote desert luxury resort site, his life is shattered. Coerced by her ice-cold corporate attorney, Gwen, Margot uses an air-horn to spook Arthur's horse, sending him plunging forty feet down a jagged ravine. Gwen methodically stages the scene as a tragic accident, loops the horse's reins, and establishes a false timeline with the local police. They leave him to bake in 123-degree heat, confident the desert will leave no witnesses.

THE TURNING POINT:

Arthur wakes up at the bottom of the canyon with a brutal compound fracture. Just as a rescue helicopter hovers nearby, Arthur calculates the trap waiting for him back in civilization: if he is rescued conventionally, Gwen will use fabricated emails to claim he had a heat-induced psychotic break, locking him in a psych ward to bleed his estate dry. To fight back, Arthur chooses to "stay dead." He pulls himself into the shadows, letting the rescue team pass him by

THE ESCALATION:

Armed only with an ancient iron mining spike he unearths in a cave and a drop-by-drop water vein, Arthur begins a grueling, primitive trek toward a distant radio tower. Meanwhile, the local lawman, Sheriff Miller, notices a tiny flaw in the staged crime scene: the horse's reins were tied too perfectly for a panicked animal. Miller traps Margot in a web of lies at her motel pool. Panicked, Margot alerts Gwen. Realizing their window is closing, the two women hire a private helicopter, spot Arthur's drag-marks, and launch an emergency hunt to finish him off themselves.

THE CLIMAX:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

At midnight, Arthur reaches the radio tower access road just as Gwen and Margot arrive in his three-ton luxury pickup truck, accelerating to seventy miles an hour to run him down. Arthur dives into a rocky wash as the truck smashes the perimeter fence, destroying its own radiator and headlights. Plunged into the pitch-black canyon floor, the hunter becomes the prey. Arthur uses psychological warfare in the dark, whispering the legal loopholes of their trust fund into Margot's ear until the two terrified women violently turn on each other. Arthur uses his iron spike to shatter the truck's battery, leaving them stranded without water in the blackness. He crawls to the emergency phone, dials the Sheriff, and declares he is finally coming home.

Principal Character Breakdowns(Producers look closely at characters to see if they can attract bankable, A-list acting talent.)

ARTHUR VANCE (50s): The ultimate apex predator of the boardroom forced to become an apex predator of the dirt. He starts the film soft, shielded by wealth, but his journey strips away his corporate suit to reveal a feral, terrifyingly resilient survivor driven by pure, unadulterated hatred.

GWEN (40s): The true mastermind. Sharp, clinical, and aggressively brilliant. She doesn't panic when things go wrong; she simply recalculates the legal and physical math. Her weapon isn't a gun—it's a tire iron, a briefcase full of hush money, and absolute, sociopathic authority.

MARGOT (20s): The weak link in the chain. She plays the doting, fragile trophy wife flawlessly, but the mask hides a desperate greed. She lacks Gwen's psychopathic stomach for violence, making her a ticking emotional time bomb that Arthur easily detonates in the dark.

SHERIFF MILLER (50s): A weathered, small-town lawman who respects the desert's lethal rules. He isn't a flashy detective, but his folksy patience hides a razor-sharp eye for physical anomalies (like a neatly tied horse rein). He represents the slow, inevitable march of justice closing in on the villains.

*EXT. DESERT - DAY*

*A VAST EXPANSE of rocky, unforgiving terrain. Could be the Serengeti, or the surface of Mars out here. The sun's barely up and it's already 100 degrees. Hard to imagine a more inhospitable, barren landscape.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

*Welcome to the Sonoran Desert.*

*In the short distance, THREE ON HORSEBACK, stripped down to essentials in the infernal heat, ride at a leisurely pace...*

EXT. CLIFF'S EDGE -- LATE AFTERNOON

...a cliff's edge.

EDMUND ROSENBLUM, 40s, cold, authoritative - dismounts, daps his face with a handkerchief

He looks down the drop-off staggering.

His wife, MARNIE, not yet 40, rides up, floppy hat. She's an icy blonde, similar to a Hitchcockian character"ample cleavage showing.

She's got a conflicted look similar to Jim's. It becomes pretty clear pretty quick that these two are having problems in their marriage.

JIM

All set?

WOMAN

Yup.

WOMAN

(annoyed)

Look, can we just -- get on the road? The sooner we get there the better. Right?

*RAQUEL, 30s, hot and sultry looks, rides up, a button down short-sleeve blouse. Her chest heaves, sweat running down between her breasts, but she's too intelligent and determined-looking to be just sexual eye candy.*

Chaz steals a glance at her ample cleavage. As she buttons her short-sleeve silk blouse, a bit uncomfortable..

He sips from a canteen, stares down at the diorama of desert below, stretching to the horizon in all visible directions.

Marnie finishes tying her boot and smiles at what she sees.

Raquel gently nudge Edmund towards the edge of the cliff... Back at the edge, Edmund smiles for the picture.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAQUEL

Now just two steps back, there's plenty of room... two steps.

MARNIE

Edmund, don't get too close to the edge.

Edmund does. One then two. A smile, takes it all in.

Raquel's snaps a photo of him with a cellphone.

EDMUND

Relax, you can't get rid of me that easily.

Marnie glances around for miles in any direction, and not one sign of civilization. Not a building, not a road, not so much as a hint at which way to go.

Raquel turns, hands the phone to Marnie. They exchange a look.

Raquel steps towards Edmund, smiles, then pushes him off, then back up away.. her and Marnie trade look...

They hear his voice and looks back,

But Edmund is still hanging there. The slope and gravity are not making it easy for him to pull himself back up.

EDMUND

Pull me bakc up.

RAQUEL

Can't.

EDMUND

What?

MARNIE

You heard her.

Marnie stands concerned. Raquel eyes dart back between Edmund and Marnie then runs over. Edmund starts to lose his grip, slides back towards the edge--

Then without warning, raquel uses both feet and pushes Edmund over the cliff. He slides on his belly as his arm reaches back, pleading for Raquel...

Edmund shouts profanities, hitting the rock then rolling to the edge. He SCREAMS as his body falls a hundred feet or so. A sickening CRUNCH.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAN

Grab her! Grab her!

But it's too late. He's gone.

WOMAN

You let him go.

WOMAN

No, she panicked... she started backing up. I couldn't hold her...

WOMAN

I didn't killer.

Lee steps toward Barbara, trying to calm her down but she moves away from him.

Lee snaps a piece of brush and sweeps the ground of tracks, but something catches his attention and he bends down. It's the matching earring to the one Barbara was wearing. With no time to celebrate his good luck he quickly sweeps again but doesn't realize as he leaves that he has also turned up a black piece of the camera housing that blends with the dirt.

who personified the cool, patrician blonde type that Hitchcock preferred strikingly cool patrician looks,

EXT.

EDMUND ROSENBLUM EXLEY - early 40s, cold, obviously brilliant, authoritative - daps his face with a handkerchief as

*who try their best to help their friend with the broken rib over jagged sandstone cliffs.*

CLAIRE MOREAU, 40s, a strawberry blonde, more attractive than she presents herself; put together quickly in terms of hair, make-up, blouse and pencil skirt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

*MARLA LOPEZ-SORIANO, 50s, a sexy-ass Latina, impeccably attired, who bares no resemblance to JLO whatsoever-- ok, her ass... But too intelligent and determined-looking to be just eye candy.*

*CLAIRE, Mexican-American who's well preserved and still surprisingly hot in her mid-50s, who bares no resemblance to Salma Hayek whatsoever-- ok, her full-figure...*

CLAIRE, 30s, an incredible beauty, with an impressive intellect to match her looks...

BESS CAMEROTA, 40s, Latina, curvaceous, who combines a businesslike demeanor, tailored feminine skirt and a subtle sexiness. She's a little weather beaten, probably someone's mom, still cocksure beautiful

BETH LASSETER-- a young 40, a smokey-eyed brunette whose figure still inspires all the boys' fantasies. She's a little weather beaten, definitely someone's mom, still a hot MILF

GINA LOLLOBRIGIDA...A Sultry beauty and impressive hourglass figure, White silk shortsleeve blouse (with covered buttons), orange belt, cream heather wool skirt, striped handbag, kitten heels, diamond pendant necklace, gold bangle bracelets, and gold hoop earrings

*MONTAGE: as they march north over the course of multiplied days, we watch their condition deteriorate. They start soaked in sweat and end up shirtless, lips blistered, pants torn from walking through scrub brush. They are hot, tired and don't have the energy to talk. During that time, they discard their backpacks and TWO EMPTY WATER JUGS, left with only one half full jug between them. They will have to ration what's left. The journey has sapped their strength and spirits as much as their water.*

SID HUDGENS - late 40s, an avatar of pure sleaze stands near Jack's car as Jack comes out of the mansion.

COYOTE SCRIPT FOR REFERENCE

SKINNY DIP SCRIPT TOO

DERELICT SCRIPT look at.

In actual aviation, most emergency medical and rescue helicopters cannot safely fly when temperatures exceed 120°F (49°C).

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Because hot air expands and becomes thin (low density), the rotor blades lose lift and engines can't generate enough power to carry the aircraft. By trapping him during a record-breaking desert heatwave, the women have essentially guaranteed a bureaucratic and physical delay. Here is how you can naturally layer this twist into the sheriff's station scene right after they give their fake story.

The Compounding Delay: Not only are the police looking in the wrong quadrant (60 miles away), but they are legally banned from even launching a fast aerial search for the next 12 to 15 hours. The Psychological Blow to Arthur: Later in the script, you can show Arthur on the canyon floor hearing the absolute silence of the sky. He expects to hear sirens or choppers, but there is nothing. The heat that is killing him is the exact reason no one is flying to save him. The Clock is Set: This gives the audience a very clear ticking clock. Arthur has exactly until tomorrow morning to survive on foot before a helicopter even begins looking—in the wrong place. If you are tracking the sequence of events chronologically, what do you want to happen next? Do we transition to Arthur waking up alone as the evening temperature finally begins to drop? Do the two women go back to Arthur's hotel/mansion to start destroying his things or changing his passwords? Do you want to introduce a local deputy or tracker who thinks the horse's behavior or the timing of the accident doesn't make sense?

BLACK SCREEN.

The rhythmic, structural CREAK of leather.

The rhythmic, muted THUD of heavy hooves on packed clay.

The rhythmic, wet GASPING of an animal working hard in the heat.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

The riders look like they stepped out of a luxury travel magazine.

LEADING THE PACK:

ARTHUR VANCE (50s). Ruggedly handsome, wearing tailored, slate-gray technical desert gear and a custom Stetson. He sits high in the saddle, radiating the absolute, effortless dominance of a man who buys and sells companies before breakfast.

BEHIND HIM:

MARGOT VANCE (20s). His trophy wife. She wears oversized, polarized designer sunglasses that reflect the harsh desert landscape. She is stunning, her blonde hair pulled back neatly, a diamond horse-bit bracelet glittering on her wrist. She laughs, a sound too light for this heavy terrain.

BRINGING UP THE  
REAR:

GWEN VANCE (40s). Sharp, athletic, wearing crisp, dark riding leathers. Her eyes are not on the view; they are fixed forward, tracking the narrow movement of Arthur's horse.

She looks completely unbothered by the 100-degree heat. Immovable.

Arthur guides his 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.

ARTHUR

(Calling back, deeply  
satisfied)

Look at that grid, Gwen. Another  
two miles

and the valley opens up entirely. The private resort is going to look spectacular from this ridge.

MARGOT

(Smiling, playful)

If you say so, darling. But if my  
makeup melts off

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

completely out here, you owe me that Cartier bracelet we saw in Beverly Hills.

ARTHUR

(Chuckling)

Consider it bought. Gwen, did the county developers finalize the zoning for this northern parcel?

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

Arthur nods, deeply pleased with himself.

He dismounts, holding the leather reins loosely. He steps a few inches closer to the crumbling lip of the canyon, turning his back completely to the two women to soak in his empire.

MARGOT

It really is breathtaking.

Margot looks back at Gwen.

The playful, dotting "trophy wife" expression completely vanishes from Margot's face. Her eyes turn dead, cold, and transactional.

Gwen nods once. No words.

Gwen reaches calmly into her tailored riding jacket and pulls out a compact, heavy metal canister—a high-powered air-horn.

She raises it. aims it directly at the ear of Arthur's horse. And slams the button.

A DEAFENING, PIERCING BLAST echoes through the canyon walls.

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

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

ARTHUR

Hey! Whoa—!

Arthur loses his footing on the loose, shifting gravel. He tumbles backward over the lip of the canyon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

He crashes violently down the steep, rocky ravine, his 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

Arthur lies in the dirt, gasping for air. His designer clothes are torn and bloodied. He tries to move, but shrieks in agony—

his right leg is visibly fractured, bent at a sickening angle.

INT. HELICOPTER - CONTINUOUS - DAY

The Eurocopter tilts violently as it climbs out of the canyon, the engines roaring against the turbulent desert heat.

The PRIVATE PILOT, CAPTAIN MENDOZA (40s), weathered, with a faded military tattoo on his forearm, frantically adjusts his headset. He reaches for the radio dial.

MENDOZA

(Over intercom,  
panicked)

Desert Air Traffic Control, this is November-four-two- niner-Sierra. We have a visual on a severely injured individual at the base of the granite cliffs—

Gwen's hand shoots across the cockpit. She slams her palm flat against the radio console, cutting Mendoza off mid-sentence.

MENDOZA

(Screaming over the  
engine)

What the hell are you doing?! That man is dying down there! I have a federal obligation to report—

GWEN

(Ice-cold, inches  
from his face)

You don't report a damn thing, Mendoza. Look at me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MENDOZA

He's your client's husband! We have to land!

GWEN

If you land this bird, or if you transmit one more syllable over that radio, you spend the next twenty years of your life in a federal penitentiary.

MENDOZA

Are you insane? I didn't do anything!

GWEN

You flew a private, unlogged charter into a closed search-and-rescue zone. And let's not forget about the offshore accounts my firm set up for your charter company last winter to hide your charter tax evasion. If I go down, Mendoza, your family asset seizure happens before our first bail hearing.

Mendoza freezes, his hand hovering over the controls. The color completely drains from his face. He looks out the window, then back at Gwen's dead, unblinking eyes.

From the backseat, Margot is hyperventilating, clutching her hair.

MARGOT

(Hysterical)

Gwen, he's going to tell the police!

GWEN

He's not telling anyone. (To Mendoza) There is an unmarked duffel bag in the trunk of my car at the hangar. Fifty thousand dollars, cash. It's yours.

Mendoza swallows hard. His eyes dart to the radio dashboard. Fifty thousand dollars is more than he makes in a year of luxury charters.

GWEN

You fly us back to the private strip.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWEN (CONT'D)

You wipe the GPS flight log from the helicopter's internal cache. Then you take your wife and you go spend a very nice, very quiet month in Cabo. Do we have an understanding, Captain?

The cockpit falls completely silent, save for the thrumming of the rotors. Mendoza stares at the instrument panel, his conscience wrestling with his greed and fear.

Slowly, Mendoza removes his hand from the radio dial. He pulls the joystick back, banking the helicopter sharply to the west, away from the canyon.

MENDOZA

(Over intercom, voice tight)

Heading back to the airfield. Hold on.

In the passenger seat, Gwen relaxes into her leather cushion. She adjusts her designer sunglasses, completely unfazed.

GWEN

Good boy.

Behind her, Margot stares out the side window as the desert terrain

flies past. She is trembling, realizing that they have just crossed

the line from a crime of opportunity to a full-scale criminal conspiracy.

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MAN

I looked up the coules' will and there's five million tied up in thr estate held in trust. His father didn't believe in divorce so if he or his wife every hiy he reno trail the entire estate goes to charity. If one of them die or is murdered the entire estate reverts back to the other, but murder usually cost the life of the killer but if he could be made to commit suicide...i

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The Character Dynamics  
 The Protagonist (Rose): Younger, sharp, but feels suffocated. She didn't just marry her older husband for money—she married him for security or status, but now feels like a caged bird in his wealthy, controlled world.  
 The Husband (George): Older, perhaps a powerful tech executive or real estate mogul. He isn't physically abusive, but he is intensely surveillance-obsessed. He tracks her phone, controls the finances, and uses emotional manipulation to keep her close, driving her into a corner.  
 The Lover (Elena): Free-spirited, dangerous, and alluring. She works locally in Niagara—perhaps as a helicopter tour pilot or a high-end bartender at the casino. She represents the thrilling, unstable freedom Rose craves.  
 Act I: The Beautiful Cage  
 The Setup: George and Rose arrive at a luxury, high-rise boutique hotel overlooking Niagara Falls for a "reconnection" weekend. Rose feels trapped by George's constant, subtle monitoring (e.g., checking her smartwatch data, managing her schedule).  
 The Spark: While George is stuck in a virtual business meeting, Rose escapes to a local upscale lounge. She meets Elena. The attraction is instant, electric, and physical.  
 The Secret: We quickly reveal this isn't their first meeting; they have been having a secret affair. In a secluded spot near the roaring rapids, Elena plants the seed: George will never let Rose go, and his wealth could be theirs if he were simply... gone.  
 Act II: Surveillance and Suspense  
 The Plan: Elena and Rose plot a "tragic accident." Because George loves hiking the dangerous, mist-slicked trails of the Niagara Gorge, Elena will corner him on a secluded path near the whirlpool rapids and push him. Rose will provide a perfect digital alibi by staying in the hotel room, streaming a movie under George's logged-in profile.  
 The Twist: The night of the murder arrives. Rose waits in the room, paralyzed with anxiety. Elena tracks George down into the dark, foggy gorge. But George, suspicious of Rose's sudden compliance, has been tracking Elena's phone too. A brutal struggle happens in the dark, next to the roaring water.  
 The Turn: Elena fails. George overpowers and kills her, throwing her body into the river. He takes Elena's phone and texts Rose from it: "It's done. Meet me at the old power station."  
 Act III: The Hunted Femme Fatale  
 The Realization: Rose arrives at the abandoned, crumbling power station on the edge of the river, expecting to throw herself into Elena's arms. Instead, she finds George standing there, holding Elena's waterlogged phone.  
 The Chase: The tech-driven, controlled husband transforms into a cold, vengeful hunter. He cuts off Rose's access to her car and phone. A terrifying cat-and-mouse chase ensues through the industrial ruins and the mist-covered boardwalks.  
 The Climax: Trapped on a slick, narrow viewing platform directly over the thundering falls, Rose tries to use her wits to manipulate George one last time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

But George is too far gone. In a desperate, physical struggle, the wet railing gives way. Rose manages to break free, but George loses his footing, plunging into the abyss—leaving Rose alive, but completely shattered and forever changed by the river

To make the secondary couple work in a modern thriller, they need to contrast Rose and George perfectly. They shouldn't just be random bystanders; they should be the "normal" mirror that highlights how toxic Rose's life is. **The Vibe:** Liam and Margot are young, genuinely in love, and a bit tech-savvy. They are vacationing on a budget, staying in a basic room on a lower floor. They represent the simple, happy life Rose traded away for wealth and security. **The Inciting Incident for Them:** They cross paths with Rose and George early on (maybe a clumsy interaction in the hotel elevator or a shared tour). **Because Margot is an aspiring travel vlogger or photographer,** she is constantly filming her trip on her phone or a small camera. **The Noir Complication:** Margot accidentally captures something in the background of her footage—a secret glance between Rose and Elena, or George secretly tracking Rose's location. This accidentally puts Liam and Margot directly in George's crosshairs later in the script. **How to Introduce Liam and Chloe** Right after we see the tension in Rose and George's suite, we can cut to the hotel lobby or elevator to introduce our second couple. **The Contrast Scene:** Rose and George stand in the elevator. George is silently scrolling through a tablet, adjusting the security settings of their home, while Rose stands stiffly beside him like a mannequin. **The Interruption:** The elevator stops. Liam and Margot burst in, laughing, soaked in mist from a boat tour, dripping water onto the pristine marble floor. Margot is holding up a camera, trying to dry the lens. **The Connection:** Margot accidentally bumps into Rose. Rose smiles—a genuine, fleeting flash of human warmth. George immediately steps between them, icy and protective, ushering Rose out. Margot looks down at her camera screen, realizing she caught the intense, trapped look in Rose's eyes on video.

EXT. NIAGARA - DAY

A blinding, sweeping aerial shot.

A drone flies directly through a massive wall of white, crashing mist. The roar of the water is deafening—a deep, metallic bass that rattles the chest.

Below, millions of gallons of churning, turquoise water plunge over the edge of the Horseshoe Falls.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

It is magnificent, terrifying, and completely indifferent to human life.

Superimposed on the screen: NIAGARA.

The drone pans up, tracking past the edge of the roaring abyss, moving toward the skyline. It glides past the massive neon casinos and locks onto a sleek, ultra-luxury glass skyscraper: THE MAJESTIC HOTEL.

The camera pushes directly through the floor-to-ceiling glass window of a penthouse suite, plunging us into a stark, suffocating silence.

INT. THE MAJESTIC HOTEL - PENTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The roar of the falls instantly drops to a low, distant hum.

ROSE (26) lies perfectly still on a massive king-sized bed. She wears nothing but a silk sheet and a stark, blood-red shade of lipstick. Her eyes are wide open, staring blankly at the ceiling.

On the nightstand, a smartphone buzzes. It glows with a notification from a security app: GEORGE'S PHONE CONNECTED TO BEDROOM BLUETOOTH.

Rose doesn't move. She instantly closes her eyes and fakes a deep, peaceful sleep as the bathroom door clicks open.

Inferno 123 works so brilliantly as a title because it is a hidden cinematic Easter egg that acts as a double meaning: The Exact Run Time: The original 1953 film has an exact running time of 1 hour and 23 minutes (83 minutes). The Lethal Temperature: In your modern screenplay, 123°F is the exact record-breaking desert temperature that triggers the aviation safety protocols, legally grounding Sheriff Miller's rescue helicopters and leaving Arthur entirely on his own

### **INFERNO 123**

**Format:** Feature Film (90-95 Pages)

**Genre:** Neo-Noir / Survival Thriller

**Logline:** When a ruthless tech mogul is left to die in a 123-degree Mojave Desert ravine by his trophy wife and her female lover—his trusted attorney—he must weaponize his raw survival instincts to crawl out of the grave and orchestrate a flawless psychological trap.

**The Hook (Why Now?)**

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Inferno 123 is a high-concept, modern reimagining of the 1953 Technicolor classic Inferno.

In the original film, a desert stranding was an automatic death sentence. Today, technology has solved isolation—which means the villains have to actively weaponize technology against their victim. By setting the thriller during a record-breaking heatwave where expanding, thin air legally grounds all emergency aircraft, the script establishes a terrifyingly realistic "kill zone" where money and power are useless against the raw elements of nature.

### **The Core Conflict**

**The Legal Trap:** A unique \$5 million trust clause dictates that if the billionaire or his wife divorce, the entire estate reverts to charity. But if one dies or is murdered, the survivor inherits everything.

**The Conspiracy:** The husband's trusted lawyer uses her intimate knowledge of his assets and schedule to engineer the perfect crime. By using a marine air-horn to startle his horse, they leave zero forensic evidence, making a brutal attempted murder look like a tragic riding accident.

**The Hubris of Elitism:** The lawyer believes her top-tier legal mind makes her vastly superior to a small-town desert Sheriff, leading to a high-stakes psychological game of cat-and-mouse while they wait for the sun to finish the job.

### **The Character Transformation**

The heart of the movie is Arthur's brutal physical and mental evolution. He begins Page 1 as a pampered, arrogant billionaire who relies on wealth to solve his problems. Stranded at the bottom of a ravine with a compound leg fracture, he is forced to shed his civilization. He sets his own leg, scavenges for survival assets, battles native predators, and shifts his motivation from basic panic to cold, calculated vengeance. He realizes that staying alive is the ultimate act of revenge.

### **The Cinematic Climax**

The thriller culminates in a breathless, midnight intersection at the desert's edge. Armed with a heavy-duty pickup truck, the women try to run Arthur down on an unlit road to finish the job under the guise of a hit-and-run.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Instead, Arthur uses his newly forged survival instincts and a century-old iron mining spike to disable their vehicle, plunge the canyon into total darkness, and leave them trapped in the very wasteland they tried to bury him in—all while he calmly dials the Sheriff from a roadside telephone.

**Target Audience & Tone**

**Tone:** Gritty, atmospheric, and highly suspenseful. A mix of the brutal, isolated survival stakes of 127 Hours and the sleek, icy criminality of Gone Girl.

**Comps:** Revenge (2017), The Edge (1997), and classic neo-noirs like Blood Simple

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INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - MINUTES LATER

SHERIFF MILLER (50s), a weathered desert veteran, spreads a large topographical map across the front counter.

Margot is weeping softly in a chair. Gwen stands over the map, pointing a manicured finger at a mountain ridge.

GWEN

We trailered the horses in right here, Sheriff. Arthur wanted to see the old mining trails. He got angry because the reception went dead, yelled at Margot, and galloped off toward the north ridge.

SHERIFF MILLER

And the horse came back alone?

GWEN

About an hour later. Sweating and terrified. We tried to follow the tracks, but the wind is kicking up the sand. We couldn't find him.

Sheriff Miller taps the map, looking grimly at the blazing sun outside the window.

SHERIFF MILLER

If he's on foot out by Black Canyon without water, he's only got about twenty-four hours before heat stroke sets in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Into the radio -

SHERIFF MILLER

Dispatch, this is Miller. We got a Code Red missing person. Get the chopper prepped for a sweep of Black Canyon Sector Four.

In the background, Margot covers her face with a tissue.

Behind the tissue, her lips curl into a sharp, victorious smile.

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Miller stares at the map, then turns toward the large plate-glass window.

Outside, the desert horizon shimmers under a blinding, oppressive haze.

He turns back to the radio, his hand hovering over the mic.

SHERIFF MILLER

Dispatch, scratch that air support request. What's the outside air temperature reading at the Black Canyon sensor right now?

DISPATCH (V.O.)

(Through static)

One hundred and twenty-three degrees, Sheriff. And it's still climbing.

Miller lets out a low, frustrated breath and drops the radio mic onto the desk.

He looks at Gwen and a seemingly distraught Margot.

SHERIFF MILLER

I'm sorry, ladies. We can't get the chopper up.

MARGOT

What? What do you mean? My husband is out there!

SHERIFF MILLER

When the air gets this hot, it turns thin as paper.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF MILLER (CONT'D)

The rotors can't catch enough lift to fly safely, and the engines will seize up in minutes. Search and Rescue protocols dictate the birds are strictly grounded until it drops below one-twenty.

GWEN

And when will that be, Sheriff?

SHERIFF MILLER

Out here? Not until the sun drops past the mountains. Around eight tonight. By the time we load up a ground team and ride out to Black Canyon on foot in this heat, we'll be chasing shadows in the dark.

Margot buries her face into a tissue, sobbing loudly.

Underneath the desk, out of the Sheriff's line of sight, Gwen's hand gently squeezes Margot's knee. A silent victory.

SHERIFF MILLER

We'll map out the grids now. First thing at first light, when the air cools down, we fly.

ARTHUR

(calling back)

I'm telling you, another two miles and the valley opens up. The resort is going to look spectacular from the ridge.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Walter enters this small lot. Apparently deserted at this hour. Walter is almost to his beat-up Porsche. When --

MARNIE, 30s, in a simple yet elegant summer dress that clings to her insane sweaty body, seems to appear from nowhere. Stumbling drunkenly. Walter is surprised as -- she trips. Literally falling into his arms.

WALTER

Whoa!

She looks up into Walter's eyes. Walter smiles his smarmiest smile at this hot MILF. She's stunning, despite her hair, face a little unkept.

**INT. CHEAP MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT**

The room is dark. FIREFLIES flutter just outside the window -- the only source of light.

The overhead ceiling fan doing little to combat the heat.

Gwen lies naked on the bed, the sheets largely discarded. She smokes. Her sweat differs from the run-of-the-mill sweating, it's the sheer volume.

Margot comes out of the bathroom, naked, dripping wet.

At a painstakingly, aching pace, Marnie slithers up her body, in a lewd, sexual way, kissing her breasts, abs...

Folds her arms over Gwen's torso, rests her chin in her hands.

For the record, The heat is a character: it lives in your clothes, in your hair, face, you can feel your dreams evaporate as you sleep.

In bed, Gwen and Margot lie naked all over each other. Their sweat differs from the run-of-the-mill sweating, it's the sheer volume.

On the bed that resembles last nights debauchery, they're lying naked all over each other, listening to the shuffling wind chimes.

In bed, Gwen and Margot lie naked all over each other. Their sweat differs from the run-of-the-mill sweating, it's the sheer volume.

**EXT. SEEDY BAR - NIGHT**

*The apocalyptic smog from the raging wildfires undulates languidly throughout most of the city...*

**EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - DAY**

A blinding, merciless sun beats down on the cracked earth. Three elite, well-groomed horses trek single file along a narrow ridge.

Leading the pack is ARTHUR (50s), ruggedly handsome, wearing expensive designer safari gear. He radiates the effortless confidence of a man who owns everything he looks at.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Behind him is MARGOT (30s, his stunning trophy wife. She wears oversized sunglasses, laughing at something Arthur just said.

Bringing up the rear is GWEN (40s), sharp, athletic, in a tank and cargo shorts. She looks perfectly composed despite the 100-degree heat.

ARTHUR

(calling back)

I'm telling you, another two miles and the valley opens up. The resort is going to look spectacular from the ridge.

MARGOT

(smiling)

If you say so, darling. But if my makeup melts off completely, you owe me that Cartier bracelet.

ARTHUR

Deal. Gwen, did the developers finalize the zoning for the northern parcel?

GWEN

All signed and filed this morning, Arthur. The land is entirely yours. No one else even knows it exists.

Arthur chuckles, deeply satisfied. He guides his horse to a halt at a massive rocky overlook.

The drop into the canyon below is steep, jagged, and terrifying—a forty-foot sheer decline.

ARTHUR

Look at this. Beautiful.

Arthur smoothly dismounts, holding the reins.

He steps closer to the cliff's edge, soaking in the view, his back entirely turned to the women.

MARGOT

It really is breathtaking.

Margot looks back at Gwen. The playful, doting "trophy wife" mask completely vanishes. Her eyes turn dead, cold, and calculated.

Gwen nods once. No words.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Gwen reaches into her riding jacket and pulls out a compact, heavy metal air-horn.

Before Arthur can even turn around, Gwen slams the button.

A DEAFENING, PIERCING BLAST echoes off the canyon walls.

Arthur's horse instantly PANICS. It rears wildly, its massive hooves striking out in terror. One hoof slams directly into Arthur's chest.

ARTHUR

Hey! Whoa—!

Arthur loses his footing on the loose shale. He tumbles backward over the lip of the canyon.

He crashes violently down the steep, rocky ravine, his body smashing against boulders before slamming into the dry creek bed forty feet below.

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

**EXT. CANYON FLOOR - CONTINUOUS**

Arthur lies in the dirt, gasping for air. His designer clothes are torn and bloodied.

He tries to move, but shrieks in pure agony. His right trouser leg is ripped open—the jagged white edge of his tibia has pierced the skin.

A horrific compound fracture.

He clutches his leg, sweating profusely, staring up at the sky.

**EXT. CANYON OVERLOOK - CONTINUOUS**

Up on the ridge, Margot and Gwen calmly dismount.

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

Margot slowly reaches into her pocket, pulls out a chic pack of cigarettes, and lights one.

She takes a slow drag, watching her husband bleed in the dirt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gwen walks over to Arthur's panicked buckskin horse, calming it expertly.

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

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

Gwen returns to the cliff's edge.

GWEN

(dead calm)

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

Margot nods, taking one last look down at Arthur. She drops her lit cigarette over the edge. It drifts down toward him.

MARGOT

Goodbye, Arthur. Enjoy the view.

They turn their horses around and gallop away, leaving Arthur's fading screams to be swallowed by the desert wind.

wind.

Use code with caution.