

INFERNO 123

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 - 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.

Behind him is MARGOT (30s), an icy, elegant Hitchcock blonde. She wears oversized designer sunglasses, laughing at something Arthur just said.

Bringing up the rear is GWEN (40s), a striking brunette—sharp, athletic, wearing a tank top and cargo shorts.

She looks like she actually belongs in the desert.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

Margot immediately follows suit, stepping out of her stirrups. She leaves her horse's reins loose and wanders right toward the crumbling edge of the cliff.

ARTHUR

Margot, careful. Watch your footing there.

MARGOT

(looking down,
breathless)

It's incredible, Arthur. Come look. You can see the whole valley.

Arthur smiles, walking over to join her. He steps right to the lip of the forty-foot drop.

Margot turns her head to look back at Gwen. The playful, doting "trophy wife" mask vanishes. Her eyes turn dead, cold, and calculated.

Gwen nods once. No words. Gwen steps up behind Margot's horse, ready to catch it.

Suddenly, Margot lets out a sharp, theatrical GASP.

Her designer boot deliberately kicks a flurry of loose shale over the edge. She sways wildly, her arms flailing as if losing her balance over the abyss.

MARGOT

Arthur! Help me!

Instinct takes over. Arthur lunges forward, throwing his full weight toward her to catch her waist and pull her back to safety.

The moment his hands grip her, Margot's body goes rigid. She doesn't fall backward.

Instead, she firmly plants her back foot, grabs Arthur by the lapels of his safari jacket, and uses his own rushing forward momentum against him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

With a smooth, practiced, ice-cold twist, she sidesteps and hurls him directly past her—right into the open air.

Arthur's eyes widen in a millisecond of absolute comprehension.

He falls.

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.

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 calmly adjusts her oversized sunglasses. There is no breathlessness. No panic.

She stands side-by-side with Gwen at the edge, looking down at him.

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 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 still-burning 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 luxury pickup truck hauls an expensive three-
horse trailer down the empty desert highway.

EXT. ZABRISKIE POINT OVERLOOK - DEATH VALLEY - DAY

The temperature gauge on the dashboard reads 121 degrees.

Arthur's 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. ARTHUR'S PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

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

Do you think it's over yet?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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. The day after tomorrow, 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...

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.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWEN (CONT'D)

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

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

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

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A RATTLESNAKE as thick as your arm. On the prowl, fixed slit eyes. It's CROSSING the road when--

We HEAR O.S. the familiar ENGINE NOISE of truck.

INT. ARTHUR'S PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

Gwen spots the snake in the road ahead. Her expression lights as she SPEEDS UP.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY - DAY

The truck SQUASHES the snake dead center, flattening it.

EXT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - DAY

A rickety Bates Motel clone squatting close enough to the highway so we can see the sputtering neon sign: DESERT SUNSET MOTEL.

The lot is half-full with road-punished travel vehicles - dusty autos with luggage carriers and out-of-state plates.

INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Marnie looks elegant, French twist hairdo, white-hot summer dress, puts in diamond earrings, *It is sexy, but it isn't overtly obvious.*

Gwen breezes out the bathroom, very nicely put together in a sexy blouse and form-fitted pencil skirt, fumbles on Manolo pumps.

MARGOT

My hands are still burning where I gripped his lapels. I can still feel the fabric tearing. He looked at me with so much devotion, Gwen. Right up until the edge. It was ghastly.

Margot sits on the edge of the dingy bed, slides into beige stilettos.

Gwen turns, looking at Margot with the patronizing patience of a professor addressing a slow student.

GWEN

Devotion doesn't leave a forensic signature, Margot. The police weren't on that ridge. The only thing the physical evidence will show is that your husband died trying to be a gentleman.

MARGOT

But I led him there. I orchestrated the fall. If a detective looks closely enough at the shale, at the footprints—

GWEN

They will see that you panicked because you lost your footing. Arthur, being the doting, protective savior he always prided himself on being, lunged forward to catch his beautiful wife.

Gwen goes to Margot with a chilling, clinical calm.

GWEN

In his rush to save you, his own momentum carried him over. You didn't push him, darling. His own chivalry did.

MARGOT

And my skin cells on his jacket?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWEN

You are his wife. You've shared a bed for ten years. If your DNA wasn't all over his clothes, a detective would actually find it suspicious.

Gwen grabs her briefcase, shifts through legal documents.

GWEN

An autopsy will show a fractured tibia from a forty-foot tumble, internal bleeding, and a final cause of death listed as hyperthermia.

MARGOT

(a quiet, chilling realization)

He really is going to cook out there, isn't he?

GWEN

We are the grieving survivors. We tried to find a way down the canyon, but the terrain was too treacherous. We rode for help, but the desert is vast and we got turned around. By the time Search and Rescue finds him... the sun will have cleaned up the mess.

Margot meets her gaze. The terror in her eyes slowly hardens into an elegant, ice-cold composure. She takes a slow sip of her water.

GWEN

I didn't just plan a murder, Margot. I weaponized his own instincts against him. In a court of law, intentions don't mean a damn thing without physical proof. And right now, the only witness to your 'crime' is forty feet down a dry creek bed, entirely helpless.

Margot. Her breathing has leveled out. She swallows hard, nodding slowly as the terrifying brilliance of the plan sinks in.

MARGOT

(a quiet, elegant whisper)

Flawless.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GWEN

Exactly. So stop shaking. The law is a weapon. You just have to know how to aim it. C'mon.

Gwen takes Margot's hand, Margot throws on her designer sunglasses.

The fan continues its lazy, relentless whir.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

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.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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!

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

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

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.

This bemuses Gwen. She pretends to ponder it.

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?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

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's 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.

Gwen glares at him, unmoved. 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

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.

A tight, icy whisper -

GWEN

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.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - DAY

A few hours after sunset. The DEAFENING ROAR of the helicopter blades echoes down the narrow canyon walls.

Dust and dead brush whip into a frenzy as the search chopper passes directly overhead. From that altitude, the deep shadow of the ravine obscures everything.

The helicopter keeps moving, its sound slowly fading away. They missed him.

Down in the dirt, Arthur opens his eyes.

He is shivering despite the heat, his face caked in dried blood and sweat. He watches the chopper disappear over the ridge line.

He is completely on his own.

He looks down at his leg. The horrific compound fracture barely seen in the dusk.

Arthur lets out a ragged, guttural wheeze. It sounds like a laugh, but dissolves into a cough that brings up blood.

He looks up toward the distant ridge where his wife pushed him. His eyes glaze over with a terrifying, primal rage.

Using his elbows, Arthur digs his fingers into the brutal, rocky dirt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He drags his broken body forward. One inch. Then another.

ARTHUR
(under his breath)
I'm not dying out here...

The words are barely out of his mouth before he
COLLAPSES.

INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY

The wall unit continues its dying, desperate whir.

On the dresser, a plastic ice bucket has completely
melted into a pool of warm water.

Gwen stands by the window, stripped to her lacy bra and
skirt. Sweat glints heavily on her collarbone as she
peers through the dusty curtains.

She presses a glass of melting ice hard against the side
of her neck.

The LOUD, HISSING SOUND of the bathroom shower echoes
through the thin walls. Steam billows out into the
bedroom, making the air thick and unbreathable.

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 shower cuts off.

Margot exits the bathroom. Her skin is flushed from the
heat, wrapping a thin, scratchy towel around her elegant
frame.

Despite the squalor, she carries herself like she is at a
five-star resort.

MARGOT
The water wasn't even cold. The
cold tap comes out boiling. Sixty
dollars a night to stay in this
dump. How does one even ask for a
refund?

Margot sits on the edge of the unmade bed. She calmly
lights a cigarette, taking a slow, measured drag.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARGOT

I say we head back to the estate.
We can wait for the search parties
in a room with central air.

GWEN

No. The optics would be
disastrous. A grieving wife
doesn't check into a luxury spa
while her husband is missing. A
few more days in this furnace
won't kill us.

Gwen watches Margot.

Despite the oppressive heat, Margot begins methodically
moisturizing her legs. Her beauty is striking, almost
sociopathic in its calmness.

MARGOT

You're still sweating, Gwen. Your
lawyer's brain is overthinking.

GWEN

I've seen men survive worse out of
pure spite, Margot. The human body
can do terrifying things when it's
cornered.

(beat)

What if he crawls out? What if a
hiker finds him?

MARGOT

Finds him? Arthur is forty feet
down a jagged ravine with a
compound fracture in one-hundred-
and-twenty-degree heat. He doesn't
have water. He doesn't have a
phone.

Margot stops rubbing her leg, looking up at Gwen with a
cruel, beautiful smile.

MARGOT

And remember—we didn't push him.
You said so yourself. He lunged
forward to save his clumsy,
fragile wife. His own chivalry
carried him over the edge.

GWEN

Intentions don't mean a damn thing
without physical proof.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWEN (CONT'D)

The law is on our side. But physics still worries me.

MARGOT

Then let physics do the work. He is a pampered billionaire who throws a tantrum if his steak isn't medium-rare. He's going to bake out there, Gwen. Like a roast in an oven.

Margot stands up, letting the towel slip slightly, completely unbothered by the stifling room.

MARGOT

And when the sun finishes him, his father's trust reverts entirely to me. Which means you get your five-million-dollar legal fee.

A heavy, breathless silence fills the room. The air conditioner groans, struggling against the desert outside.

MARGOT

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

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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...

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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 - 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.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

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.

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.

INT. DESERT SUNSET MOTEL - ROOM 14 - DAY

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gwen and Margot lie in bed, the sheets, hot, sticky with sweat barely covers their nude bodies.

Her hands explore down below the sheet, gently caressing. For Margot, her touch is an aphrodisiac. As Gwen touches Margot:

MARGOT

I can't take another hour in this dump.

GWEN

I should call Miller. 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.

SHERIFF MILLER (O.S.)

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

Gwen leaps out of bed, naked, throws on her silk shirt and pencil skirt.

GWEN

(whispering)

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

Margot bolts into the bathroom, and cranks the shower knob. The loud, hissing ROAR OF RUNNING WATER fills the room.

Arthur's phone on the nightstand, glowing with a notification. Gwen shoves it under a pillow.

The hot water in the shower stall is already blasting, making steam.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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

GWEN

Just a moment, Sheriff!

Gwen fumbles on her sexy Manolo Blahnik slingbacks as she messes up the other bed.

Gwen glances at Margot behind the misty shower glass.

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.

His eyes lingering for a fraction of a second on Gwen's unbutton shirt, her chest heaves, sweat running down between her breasts.

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.

He comes in, looks around, seeing, wine glasses, the messy bed resembles last nights debauchery, the possible lesbian involvement.

A wet Margot comes out of the bathroom, wrapping herself in a towel. A beat of silence. Oops.

MARGOT

Sheriff. Sorry, didn't know you were here.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GWEN

Yea, that. We wanted to be closer.
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, 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.

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—

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

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.

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...

Gwen, 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.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

GWEN (CONT'D)

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.

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?

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

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 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.

The fear on her face morphs into anger and frustration as
she confronts Gwen.

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 lets out a short, arrogant laugh.

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 is growing more desperate by the second.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

Gwen walks over to her laptop, tapping the spacebar to wake the screen.

GWEN

The entire search is staying exactly where I pointed them. Sixty miles away from your husband.

Beat. The financial spreadsheets glow against her face.

GWEN

By the time they realize Black Canyon is a dead end, it will be too late. By then, Arthur will be a biological statistic.

Gwen thinks... then:

GWEN

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. Her panic subsides, 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 pressing her forehead against Margot's. A desperate attempt to ground them both.

GWEN

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

A heavy BEAT. Margot stares into Gwen's eyes, terrified of the woman she loves.

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.

Arthur hobbles along the base of the 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.

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 - DAY

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

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.

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 RATTLESNAKE is severed 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.

INT. YACHT CABIN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

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

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR (V.O.)

*...even hours after death, a
snake's reflex can still deliver a
lethal bite.*

RESUME SCENE

Arthur blinks. Sweat stings his eyes.

The snake's jaws suddenly snap open.

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 him.

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.

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

Arthur 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--

QUICK FLASH: *On the CLIFF, Arthur staring up and them. Gwen's cold smile. His wife 's lit cigarette falling towards him.*

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He chews, 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.

A dark, gravelly whisper -

ARTHUR

Keep searching the north ridge,
ladies.

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

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.

Her laptop rests on her knees, the screen reflecting columns of financial data.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

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.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GWEN (CONT'D)

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.

*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. GRANITE CLIFFS - CANYON - DAY

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

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

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

The sound rapidly builds into an earsplitting roar.

A 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 - NIGHT

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, 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?

Still staring through binoculars -

SHERIFF MILLER

(Over intercom)

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

EXT. ROCK CAVE - NIGHT

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

ARTHUR
(screams)
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
(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.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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

EXT. GRANITE CLIFFS - CANYON - NIGHT

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

PILOT STEVENS (V.O.)

(over radio)

Nothing but rocks and rattlesnakes, Sheriff. Fuel warning is chiming. We have to head back to base.

SHERIFF MILLER (V.O.)

(frustrated)

Copy that. Turn us around.

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

EXT. ROCK CAVE - NIGHT

Arthur crawls back to the edge of the cave mouth.

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

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. A quiet whisper -

ARTHUR

Time to hunt.

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

INT. ROCK CAVE - NIGHT

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.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.