

DEAD RUN
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FADE IN:

EXT. A WESTERN CITY - DAY

CREDITS OPEN ON a sprawl, a stink, a vast urban sink. High rises and fast food joints, sweaty clerks, outcall girls, cool and smooth executives, and lots and lots of wannabes in cars, in trucks, in busses. PLAYING OVER is Kate Miner's "No More Bridges To Burn."

THE BORDERING MOUNTAINS

might be called the Almost Range. Almost clear peaks touch the almost blue sky. The city's homes claw inexorably up the slopes, and fumes seep into the canyons.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAINS

the greater metropolitan area lies behind us now, not so great anymore compared to

EXT. THE GREAT AMERICAN DESERT - DAY (CREDITS CONTINUE)

Two-lane blacktop looks like it curves gently into nowhere, but aluminum cans from somewhere are tangled in the creosote bushes at the side of the road. A car spurts past, whipping up gum wrappers and Styrofoam. The car is tight, suicidal, something on the order of a Mercedes M3.

INTERCUT - INT. CAR, TRAVELING

The WOMAN behind the wheel wears white canvas shoes, leggings stretched over supple loins, and a sports bra with a \$500 cashmere sweater thrown over. She obviously works out in the gym. She works just as hard in a business to pay for it all. She's working now on racing away from everything, from her past and people who used to matter and thoughts that no longer make sense. END THE SONG with the woman's incessant changing of the RADIO so that surreal snatches blare.

CALLER 1

We started out the last century
with the hero of San Juan Hill, and
we ended up with Bill.

TALK HOST

Don't give me that right wing
conspiracy garbage. Teddy
Roosevelt had his affairs too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RAPPER

"I'm-all thinkin' you'd better be a
ho, when you come a-shakin' your
back door.
Don't you get it, girl?
Just milk my lizard dry
Don't ask for love, It only make
you cry."

WESTERN SINGER

"You gave up on me like I gave a
damn."

PSYCHIC

Lost?

CALLER 2

Yes.

PSYCHIC

A lost love?

CALLER 2

Yes! How did you know?

PSYCHIC

My spirit guide of course. Did you
meet this person in high school?

A HANDWRITTEN NOTE

lies crumpled on the floorboards of the passenger's side. The
driver's shoulder bag rests on the bucket seat. OUR ANGLE
MOVES UP to the gas gauge: it indicates the woman is running
on empty. So it's Salanpas, Pearl Jam and the 3 o'clock
news.

EXT. CAR

It screeches into the curve.

INTERCUT INT. CAR WITH EXT. BRIDGE (CREDITS CONTINUE)

The woman nearly loses control. She wants to lose control.
But she swerves back onto the straight. Frustrated that she's
still alive, she applies more gas.

A bridge over a washout looms ahead. She aims for the
concrete casement. This time she'll do it. She'll really do
it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The engine sputters, coughs dead. The car glides to a stop at the side of the road, right near the bridge. The woman pounds the radio on and off.

WOMAN

Shut up, shut up, shut up!

DISSOLVE TO:

THE SUN

casting long silent shadows across the land. END CREDITS.

EXT. ROAD

The car sits; the woman too. The mirage beyond the bridge pulls it together then tears it apart—a battered pickup. As the pickup approaches, it takes solid form. It crosses the bridge and passes.

INT. CAR - INTECUT WOMAN & REARVIEW MIRROR

The pickup slows and pulls onto the shoulder. It begins to back up. Looks like a MALE is driving. The woman becomes fearful. Male. White male. White male scum.

EXT. ROAD

He's as thin as a stray cat, sullen too. Undoubtedly a rapist.

INT. CAR

She rolls up the windows, locks the doors. She may want to die but not his way, not with bits and piece of her body strewn all over the desert for the coyotes to find. His knuckles tap the glass.

DESERT RAT

Ma'am.

He leans down, liquid eyes searching her face.

DESERT RAT (CONT'D)

You OK?

She turns on the ignition, gets only the grating whir and clank of the starter.

DESERT RAT (CONT'D)

Out of gas?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She nods quickly, too quickly, but he saunters slowly back to his pickup.

VARIOUS ANGLES - INT. CAR & EXT. ROAD

She watches him take a gallon can from the back of his truck. He returns and pauses at the window to order loudly:

DESERT RAT
Open up your tank.

She activates the lever, still nervous.

He walks to the rear of her car, muttering like a Good Samaritan who has never been understood.

DESERT RAT (CONT'D)
Ain't gonna hurt you.

She didn't hear, but seeing what he's up to, she opens the window about an eighth of the way to call out.

WOMAN
Thank you.

He empties the can without comment and comes back to the window. She fights the urge to close it tight.

DESERT RAT
Where you headed?

WOMAN
I don't know. I mean... I'm just taking a drive.

He nods skeptically. She reaches for her purse and opens it.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
How much do I owe you?

DESERT RAT
Nothin'.

WOMAN
No please.

DESERT RAT
(indicating the can)
This ain't gonna take you far.
There's crossroads up ahead.
Dryer's Corner. 'Bout five miles.
Fillin' station there.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DESERT RAT (CONT'D)

You might be able to make it before
it closes otherwise you gonna have
to wait till morning. Not much
business to stay open for at night.

She produces a five dollar bill and thrusts it through the
open window.

WOMAN

This should cover it.

DESERT RAT

Said no thanks.

Irritated, he walks away.

CUT TO:

ESTABLISHING SHOT OF MOUNTAINS

Real mountains. The kind that ate the Donner Party.

INT. WOMAN'S CAR, TRAVELING - INTERCUT HER POV - EXT.
CROSSROADS SERVICE STATION - END OF DAY

The station lies at the base of the second range of
mountains, a spec of civilization against a vast natural
backdrop, like a tiny melanoma on Miss Nude America's thigh.

EXT. STATION

A rental car sticker is on the bumper of a new sedan. The
sedan is parked on the office side of the station's two-pump
island. Neither pump takes an ATM card. The woman pulls up
on the road side of the island. The woman opens her window,
cranes her head out.

WOMAN

Hello?

But no one comes out of the cramped office. So the woman gets
out of her car.

But there's not a soul in the garage, just an early model
compact.

With impatience better suited for traffic jams and call
waiting, she moves around the back of the station.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Anyone here?

EXT. DELAPIDATED HOUSE

Nothing to be seen but a light on in the kitchen. She mounts the porch. Boards creak.

She's going to knock on the door, but a cat brushes against her calf, giving her a start. She pets it, a forlorn thing that wants more, but she straightens to peek through the window.

WOMAN'S POV - INT. KITCHEN

A family lies on the floor, bellies first, Mom, Dad, Brother and Sis. Mom's Asiatic face, big as a pumpkin, is bruised and swollen. Brother's pants and underwear have been twisted down to his ankles. The one eye that can be seen is wide and unmoving.

INTERCUT WOMAN

as she hears a muffled voice inside.

MAN (OS)

You'd think they'd at least have a
beer in the fridge.

The woman bolts off the porch. The cat lets out a SCREECH.

EXT. STATION

She sprints to her car, HEARING the OS door bang open behind her. As she rounds the corner, she glances back, doesn't see anyone.

She reaches her car, is yanking the door open when a MAN appears. He wears Doc Martins and a military fatigue jacket with the name tag removed. Could be surplus, could be his.

SOLDIER BOY

Hey!

The sight of him makes her blood run cold. A SECOND MAN pulls up behind the first. He's got a pony tail, must be a Yankees fan because of the cap he wears. Then comes a THIRD MAN, the one she heard speak. He's chubby, winded, and clutching a slice of baloney squashed between a slice of Weber's White Bread.

SOLDIER BOY (CONT'D)

Who are you?

YANKEE

When'd you get here?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VOICE

Shut up.

Her head jerks to the FOURTH MAN-thick-chested with piercing eyes-who has come around the other side of the building. He wears pointy handmade Italian shoes, designer jeans, a Sundance windbreaker and an ordinary T-shirt just like the locals.

BOSS MAN

What do you want, lady?

Full survival mode. She sounds calm. Calm sounds inane. But inane is alive.

WOMAN

Gas of course. I was looking for an attendant.

She drops on the driver's seat and is pulling her legs in as Soldier Boy advances quickly.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Fill it with premium please.

Soldier Boy stops, confusion in his eyes. He looks toward Boss Man while Porky snickers.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

You do work here, don't you?

SOLDIER BOY

We're closed.

WOMAN

I'm sorry to have bothered you then. I'll just...

She closes the door. Can she start up and get away in time?

BOSS MAN

Hold it.

(approaching the car)

Where are you headed?

WOMAN

A cousin's.

BOSS MAN

You have a cousin around here?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAN

I...I think I took the wrong
turnoff.

BOSS MAN

You've never been to this gas
station before, then?

WOMAN

I just pulled up. Lone Oak.
That's the road I was looking for.

BOSS MAN

That's twenty miles back.

WOMAN

Oh my gosh. I'm running on empty.

Boss Man studies the woman for a moment then nods to Soldier
Boy.

BOSS MAN

Fill it.

Boss Man steps back as Soldier Boy moves to service the
woman's car. Porky throws a chewy grin at Yankee.

PORKY

Bitch wants gas.

BOSS MAN'S EYES

ask the silent question, "Does she know?"

THE WOMAN'S EYES

ask, "Can they hear me screaming inside?"

MEANWHILE

Yankee washes her windows, and Porky enters into the game as
eagerly as a puppy.

PORKY

Check your oil?

WOMAN

It's fine, thanks.

PORKY

I know how to do it.

He starts to reach through the window.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

No!

PORKY

I'm just going to release the hood.

His hand moves slowly, his arm touching her thigh.

WOMAN

It's fine, I said.

PORKY

Won't take but a minute.

WOMAN

I just had it checked.

PORKY

You got goose pimples.

She hits the door lock, brings the window up.

Porky nearly rips her bra off, trying to pull his body inside.

Window wipers slash, blinkers wink as she frantically tries to get free and get the car started. Shouts from Soldier Boy and Yankee who were doing such a good, full service job.

She twists the ignition. Tires squeal. Gasoline sprays from the nozzle ripping from the tank.

BOSS MAN

Stop her! Stop her!

The woman peels away from the station while Yankee jumps into the sedan.

Porky's feet churn on the gravel.

She jabs the window down, jerks the wheel.

The car fishtails onto the road, throwing Porky to the ground.

Soldier Boy and Boss Man run to the road as the sedan roars in pursuit.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)

She knows. She knows goddamnit.

Soldier Boy is helping Porky up, but Boss Man shoves Soldier Boy toward the direction of the compact in the garage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)
Get the gooks' car!

EXT. ROAD INTO FOOTHILLS - INTERCUT INTS. OF CAR & SEDAN

The narrowing road undulates over moguls, pitching the racing cars like a yawing ships at sea. The woman's car outclasses the rented sedan, and the woman is a good driver. But Yankee is better.

First the woman sees the horizon; then she doesn't. No one is behind her.

Then she is rammed.

She jerks the wheel and swerves from side to side. This time she does not want to loose control. But this time it isn't up to her.

The scream of wind, the roar of engines. Yankee comes up on the woman's side.

Terror in her eyes. Concentration in his.

The screech and bump of a sideswipe.

He tries again. First Yankee sees only the road; then as his sedan noses into a rise, he spots her car ahead.

They crest the hill nearly side by side. They crest it at the same time as twenty tons of Peterbilt steel and the raw material for Scott Paper. A logging truck. It obliterates the sedan.

She catches the smash-and-crash in her rearview mirror. She fights socialization: you're supposed to stop when you see an accident. She fights the urge to vomit too: all that's back there is death or killing.

Her car roars on, the hazard lights blink-blinking into the night.

DISSOLVE TO:

DAWN

painting soft monochromes into the intermountain plain. The light gives shadows to rock formations, canyons and hills, and highlights a dirt road that threads toward riparian foothills. The road snakes upward to wooded slopes.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE

The road has become a rutted track. The woman's car lists with a broken rear axle.

The woman studies the plain below. There's a moment when she thinks she's safe. Then she sees dust.

It's moving. Moving fast. Moving toward the hills.

She can't make out a vehicle and has no rational way of know who might be inside. But she knows.

INT. WOMAN'S CAR

She opens the door, leans over the front seat and grabs a liter bottle from the jumper area.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD

The bottle has a couple of inches of water at the bottom. She thrusts it into her bag, turns and walks up the road.

She quickens her pace. Starts to run. Faster and faster. She looks back.

Nothing but her car.

It disappears as she turns into a steeper gradient.

EXT. SWITCHBACK

She runs flat out, her breathing crazy with fear. She slows to a trot, forcing herself to think. She drops into a walk, starts to observe her surroundings.

Shale on one side of the road goes nearly straight up; there's some buckbrush and a couple of sugar pine that might catch the death drop on the other side. She edges near the berm to reconnoiter.

About a hundred yards below, her car blocks the road. No dust on the flats. But that's when she hears it. An OS ENGINE. She fights the urge to run again. She drops to a crouch in the shadow of madrone.

EXT. ROAD FARTHER BELOW - DAY

Tires spew dirt.

THE WOMAN

listens to the OS CAR straining closer and closer.

THE COMPACT

slogs up the track.

THE WOMAN

wants it to be help, wills it to be help, prays for it.

INT. COMPACT

Soldier Boy drives, Boss Man beside him, Porky squeezed in back. None of them likes the shaking and rattling.

SOLDIER BOY

Cheap shit car. If this is what
you get for co-operating, who needs
it?

PORKY

(snickering at the memory)
They sure got it.
(returning to the present)
Sure could do with cup of coffee.

BOSS MAN

Did you see a Dairy Queen, asshole?
When'd you see a Dairy Queen? Huh?

PORKY

Just said I wanted coffee.

BACK TO THE WOMAN

willing herself to wait.

INTERCUT HER POV

as the compact pulls into view and stops behind her car,
which is blocking the road. She does not recognize the
compact from the service station.

INT. COMPACT

The killers watch and wait.

EXT. ROAD

Then they get out.

EXT. SWITCHBACK

The woman gasps, draws back from the edge.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She keeps close to the embankment and heads quickly up the road. When she's sure she won't be heard, she breaks into a run.

FEATURE THE KILLERS

Boss Man opens the hood of the woman's car and touches the back of his hand to the engine block.

BOSS MAN

Cold.

INTERCUT INT. OF CAR

Soldier Boy finds the crumpled note on the floorboards. He reads it, mumbling the words.

SOLDIER BOY

"My darling, I didn't want you to find out the way you did. I was hoping I could reach some kind of res...res-o-lution first. You can't imagine how torn I am. I do love you. You must understand that. And I never thought I could love two women at the same time. But I do. Not because I chose to but because-" Yada, yada, yada.
(throwing the note away)
Just another nagging wife.

BOSS MAN

See if she had a map.

Soldier Boys scoops out the owner's manual, breath mints, comb, tissues, and other clutter from the glove compartment. He keeps a folded map and the car's registration. He hands the former to Boss Man. Boss Man sees that it's a map of the twelve western states.

PORKY

What's it say?

BOSS MAN

"You are fucking here."

He shoves the map at Porky, who turns it around and upside down with a furrowed brow.

Boss Man glances at his watch and tells Soldier Boy:

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)

Could have an hour on us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SOLDIER BOY
 Could be watching us right now.

Boss Man looks up the steep rocky slope.

BOSS MAN
 Doubt it.
 (nodding up the road)
 She went that way if she went
 anywhere.

SOLDIER BOY
 (reading the registration)
 Car belongs to Women's Work
 Productions. What's that?

PORKY
 Who cares?

SOLDIER BOY
 Be nice to have a name for her.

PORKY
 I call her bitch. Fucking bitch.

EXT. BEYOND SWITCHBACK

The woman has broken into a steady lope, grueling, but not
 crazed. The road has narrowed and turned into a small
 twisting valley.

BACK TO THE KILLERS

BOSS MAN
 (to Soldier Boy)
 You were with the Marines, right?

Soldier Boy shrugs modestly.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)
 So what do you know about tracking?

SOLDIER BOY
 Just Boy Scout shit, isn't it?

BOSS MAN
 You go ahead of us. Move fast.
 We'll be right behind.

SOLDIER BOY
 Hey, wait a second. I only had
 four months before those fuckin'
 jar heads framed me with-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOSS MAN
C'm'on, c'm'on. The faster we
waste her, the faster we get home.

Soldier Boy starts reluctantly up the road.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)
Run! You always brag about how
buff you are. Get the lead out.

Soldier Boy breaks into a trot.

Boss Man turns to see Porky urinating through the driver's
window of the woman's car.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)
What the hell are you doing?

PORKY PIG
This is for what that bitch did to
Paulie.

Boss Man starts up the road. Porky zips up and follows.

EXT. ROAD'S END

The woman presses through foliage that marks the road's
becoming a trail. A weathered sign full of bullet holes
reads, "Help Prevent Forest Fires."

EXT. SWITCHBACK

Soldier Boy rounds the turn, stops to catch his breath.

CUT TO:

EXT. WILDERNESS - DAY

The woman's shoes pound the rough ground. The trail is a
sometimes path marked by downtrodden grass and erosion of the
thin topsoil. Sweating profusely, she jogs slowly, steadily.

SOLDIER BOY

moves in a grudging shamble of a trot, huffing and puffing as
if he's sprinting. The contours of the land determine his
course. Like the woman, he takes the least tortuous way.

CUT TO:

TWO HOURS LATER

Boss Man and Porky flail through brush. It slaps their faces, pricks their clothes, pisses them off.

ANGLE UP TO THE SUN

streaming through the branches and

COME DOWN ON THE WOMAN A COUPLE OF MILES AHEAD

She stops to catch her wind. Every muscle aches. Her face is beet red. Her tongue feels like a tennis ball. She drains the water in the bottle, puts the bottle back in her shoulder bag, doesn't notice the cap falling to the ground. HOLD ON THE CAP and

MATCH CUT TO:

SCUFFED ITALIAN SHOES

plodding past, oblivious. ANGLE UP to Porky following Boss Man. Porky is ready to faint.

ANOTHER ANGLE

as Boss Man rubs the stinging sweat from his eyes. His complaint raises to a shout.

BOSS MAN

Where is he? Where is he? WHERE
IS HE?!

PORKY

I thought we was lookin' for the
bitch.

BOSS MAN

He's looking for the bitch. We're
looking for him. It's the same
goddamn thing!

CUT TO:

CLEAR COOL WATER

rolling over rocks.

WIDER - EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

On the bank of the stream a buck hangs from a tree. A Fish & Game tag is wired to one of its six points.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Although the deer has been skinned out, a ragged wound can be seen where it took a gut shot. Nearby a paunchy HUNTER who looks like he stepped out of Land's End catalogue pushes a desultory fork around a plate heaped with hot food. A tethered burro grazes in the background.

A GUIDE squats at a fire, dishing up a plate for himself. He wears a flannel shirt and comfortably worn khakis, a Buck knife sheathed in his belt. A stoic veneer of cordiality covers a volcano of instinct and conviction.

HUNTER

I was sure I had him right between the eyes.

GUIDE

Close enough.

HUNTER

I kind of wanted to get him myself.

GUIDE

It's your tag on that rack. You got him.

HUNTER

You know what I mean.

GUIDE

You hired me to help. That's all I did.

The hunter picks up a bottle of good whisky, takes a swig.

HUNTER

Sure ran a long ways. Thought I'd have a heart attack helping you carrying him back. Not that I did much carrying, either.

He offers the bottle to the guide, who shakes his head.

HUNTER (CONT'D)

Well, there's always next year. Maybe I'll go for the whole show then. Horses, wrangler. Not getting any younger, y'know.

GUIDE

You could afford to chopper in if you wanted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HUNTER

Ninety minutes from downtown.
Wouldn't seem quite real.

GUIDE

And what we're doing, this is real,
is it?

The woman staggers into the camp. The men jump up as she
babbles wildly.

WOMAN

Help me. They're after me.

GUIDE

Who?

WOMAN

They're dead. They killed them.

GUIDE

(clutching her)
Who's dead? Who killed them?

WOMAN

All four of them. Kids too.

GUIDE

Get her some water.
(helping her)
Sit here. You'll be OK. Are you
with anybody?

WOMAN

One of them, he hit a truck.

The hunter brings a canteen. The guide unscrews the cap. The
woman grabs the canteen to drink greedily, but the guide
holds on.

GUIDE

Easy, easy.

HUNTER

Are you with other backpackers?
Did you fall off the trail or
something? What happened?

She gives him a startled look.

WOMAN

You have to believe me. They're
killers. Really.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HUNTER

You're not on any medication, are you?

WOMAN

(to the guide)

My God, look at me. I'm not making this up.

GUIDE

You need something to eat. Then you'll feel better.

He starts to move away, but she grabs him.

WOMAN

Do you have a cell phone?

HUNTER

Him? Are you kidding?

WOMAN

What about you?

HUNTER

Not out here. Too much like home.

WOMAN

I-I think I left mine at home. Or work. Or...

(eyes watering)

I stopped at this service station. There was this family. Murdered. And as I ran away from their house, four men. One of them was in this car that chased after me. But he hit a truck. And I kept going until my car-- But there was another car. I heard it where the road ends. It's the other three. They could be anywhere.

The guide glances at the hunter, who shrugs.

GUIDE

We'll get you down the mountain to a hospital. You'll be fine.

A pistol shot rings out. A .45 caliber bullet takes away the hunter's jaw.

INTERCUT SOLDIER BOY

crashing through the undergrowth.

The guide suddenly becomes a believer.

The burro panics but can't break away because of its tether.

More shots. The guide yanks the woman to her feet, pushes her.

GUIDE

Run! Run!

She dashes to the creek, trips, but scrambles across.

The guide charges for his tent. Two bullets geyser the ground in front of him.

Soldier Boy now blocks his way.

The guide drops and rolls in the opposite direction, scrambles for the water.

Soldier Boy slams another seven-shot magazine into his Colt semi-automatic. He runs after the guide, firing wildly.

The guide splashes into the water as the burro takes a bullet.

The guide catches up with the women. They flee with Soldier Boy emptying his second clip.

As the burro squeals in agony, Soldier Boy drops into the water, burying his face in the cooling liquid and sucking in great gasping draughts.

FEATURE THE WOMAN & THE GUIDE

He plows ahead. She stumbles after. When she nearly trips, he puts an arm around her waist to help her.

GUIDE

You can make it.

But she's winded and limping.

WOMAN

Where? Where we going?

GUIDE

As far away as we can get.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She stumbles on until he stops to make a decision. The trail, such as it, rounds a hip of land then opens into a rocky area. The hip is an alluvial pan that descends from flatter ground, more densely treed.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

We'll go that way.

He starts up.

WOMAN

Need to rest.

She bends over. Before she knows what hit her, he slings her over his shoulder and bulls upward. He takes one lurching step after another. Agonizing.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Put me down. I can do it.

GUIDE

Shut up.

He stumbles into the treeline, falling forward. She rolls away, and he crawls to look down the hip.

No one.

He rolls in her direction. She looks hurt, ready to cry.

WOMAN

I just needed to catch my breath.

GUIDE

Know how you feel.

He closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. HUNTERS' CAMP - DAY

Boss Man and Porky drag themselves in. Soldier Boy, a muddy wet mess, is gulping down the hunter's plate of food.

SOLDIER BOY

Took you long enough.

While Porky scrambles to drink from the stream, Boss Man nudges the dead hunter with his shoe.

BOSS MAN

Where is she?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SOLDIER BOY

There were two men here. She got away with one of 'em. But they won't get far. She looked like puke.

Boss Man walks over to inspect the fallen, still whimpering burro.

SOLDIER BOY (CONT'D)

We got their food and water. And there's two rifles with scopes in the tent over there.

Boss Man produces a .9mm Baretta.

The gunshot quiets the burro and jerks the Porky out of the water.

BOSS MAN

(to Soldier Boy)

Asshole.

Boss Man picks up the canteen. He is taking a drink when he sees Porky on the guide's plate of food like a dog on a gut wagon.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)

I'm surrounded by a bouquet of assholes.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DESERT - DAY

Sand and rock, Russian thistle, a single wide trailer up on blocks. The Desert Rat's pickup is parked next to it.

INT. TRAILER

A cute but sweaty WIFE tries to push Gerbers into the mouth of a fussing kid who wants to smear it all over his face.

TV NEWS ANCHOR (OS)

...bodies found early this morning at the service station at Dryer's Corner.

WIFE

Get us the dish rag, hon.

DESERT RAT

Shh. Tryin' to listen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He adjusts the rabbit ears of their television.

BURN IN SCREEN for an ON SITE REPORTER AT THE SERVICE STATION.

REPORTER

Like many Americans trying to get away from it all, the Chou family moved to this remote crossroads at the edge of the national forest three years ago from...neighbors say they were somewhat vague on the point..."someplace back east." But unlike most of us, their quest for the quiet life was also driven by a pressing need for anonymity. Sheriff George Taylor Morris has confirmed with the Federal Marshall's office that Mr. Chou was really Tommy Sung, a key informant in an investigation into alleged laundering of illegal campaign contributions from foreign countries. Although the Witness Protection Program tragically failed Sung and his family, justice has been served after a fashion when the assassin meet with violent death shortly after the murders. A logging truck smashed into the killer's rental car, killing him instantly. The Sheriff is waiting to interview the driver of the truck who is in a coma at county hospital. According to a hospital spokesperson, the driver is expected recover. In the meantime Sheriff Morris had this to say to reporters:

A VIDEO TRAIN PICKS UP THE SHERIFF

standing before a bank of microphones outside a hospital. Behind him is DEPUTY 1, a handsome and dedicated officer with an IQ in the low nineties.

SHERIFF

We got an ID from the dead man's wallet. It was an alias of course, but the FBI tells me it's the alias of a known contract killer.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

We've got some cross checking to do, but basically I'd say this case is as good as solved.

THE SCREEN GOES BLACK

from the Mrs. turning off the set.

DESERT RAT

Hey!

WIFE

How come I'm supposed to do everything while you just sit around watchin' soaps?

DESERT RAT

That was the news. I was listen' to the news.

WIFE

Well, I asked you to help with Dudley.

DESERT RAT

This is important.

He turns the set back on for a short blast from a COMMERCIAL JINGLE. He turns it off.

WIFE

What's important about dead people?

DESERT RAT

That fillin' station they was talkin' about. I sent a girl there yesterday.

WIFE

So?

DESERT RAT

I don't know. I got this feelin'.

She turns back to the baby but has a second thought.

WIFE

What girl?

DESERT

Never saw her before.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WIFE

Till you bought her a drink in the
Gold Strike.

DESERT RAT

No.

WIFE

"Got this feeling'." That's why
there's nothin' left in the bank,
ain't it?

DESERT RAT

Nooo.

CUT TO:

EXT. WILDERNESS - DAY

One hand on the guide's shoulder, the woman hobbles
alongside. They keep to the high ground to which they
climbed earlier.

WOMAN

I'm sorry I got you into this.

GUIDE

Could you have prevented it?

WOMAN

What?

GUIDE

Did you tell that guy to chase you?

WOMAN

No.

GUIDE

Then no need to sorry.

WOMAN

I don't understand.

GUIDE

If you didn't cause all this, then
what are you apologizing for?

WOMAN

I'm sorry about your friend then.

GUIDE

He didn't feel anything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

What?

GUIDE

Are you the kind of woman who says "what?" because you can't hear? Or because just don't want to listen?

WOMAN

My God, he's dead.

GUIDE

We all die sooner or later.

WOMAN

That's all you can say?

GUIDE

I haven't had time to think about it. Rest here. Let's look at that foot.

CROSS CUT WITH:

EXT. HUNTERS' CAMP

Soldier Boy unsheathes a .306 Mauser action rifle from a leather scabbard.

BOSS MAN (OS)

Here.

Crouching in the entrance of the tent, Boss Man tosses a box of shells.

BACK TO THE GUIDE & THE WOMAN

She winces as the he pulls off her shoe.

WOMAN

Who was he?

GUIDE

Hunter.

WOMAN

That tells me a whole lot. He had a name didn't he?

GUIDE

Mr. Giles Webb.

EXT. HUNTERS' CAMP

Porky stuffs canned food into a pack saddle.

PORKY
Dibs on the second sleeping bag.

SOLDIER BOY
Up yours.

PORKY
(to Boss Man)
Hey, he's got a rifle. I should
have a sleeping bag.

BACK TO GUIDE & WOMAN

He peels away the sock.

WOMAN
He was your friend, wasn't he?

GUIDE
I'm an outfitter. He hired me.

WOMAN
The great white hunter.

It's a blister, huge.

GUIDE
No, he was terrible.

WOMAN
That's not what I mean.

GUIDE
What do you mean?

WOMAN
Well, he didn't hire you because
you're civil, that's for sure.

GUIDE
You want me to be civil? I can be
civil. It's just today for some odd
reason I didn't get around to
reading Miss Manners.

WOMAN
I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUIDE

I thought we just established it's not your fault.

He unsheathes his knife.

WOMAN

What are you going to do with that?

GUIDE

You can't go on lame like this.

For instant she wonders if he's going to cut off her foot, but he plucks a broadleaf from a hardwood like a sycamore then moves to an evergreen.

He rams his blade into the trunk and digs out sap which he smears on the leaf.

WOMAN

What are you doing?

GUIDE

Making a skin barrier to prevent infection.

He looks around, sees a clump of tar weed.

He pulls some of the buds that are coated in black resin and adds them to the sap on the leaf.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Aloe would help but we don't have any.

She rummages through her bag.

WOMAN

I have some lip balm. That would work.

He comes back to her and takes the tube. He squeezes some of the contents onto the leaf. Then he strikes a match to heat the knife blade.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Is this going to hurt?

In answer he presses the hot blade into the mixture on the leaf. A whisp of vile smoke rises.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Silly question.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He takes her foot and butters the blister. It bursts and burns. She wants to cry out, but bites her lip.

GUIDE

Good girl.

WOMAN

Don't call me girl, goddamnit.

He lights another match to reheat the blade. She squeezes her eyes closed as he quickly repeats the process.

GUIDE

There.

WOMAN

It hurts worse.

GUIDE

And it will keep on hurting. But at least you'll be able to walk on it.

He picks up her sock and starts to put it on, but she yanks it away from him to do it herself. He picks up her shoulder bag and searches through it.

WOMAN

What are you doing?

He pockets her lip balm and carries the bag closer to the drop off.

Dumbfounded, she watches him swing her bag over his head and let it fly.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Hey! That had my wallet in it.

GUIDE

Which is why they'll be convinced you really dropped it down there.

EXT. HUNTERS' CAMP

The dead hunter is missing his boots. Boss Man, having discarded his shoes, laces up the second boot and stands to test the feel.

BACK TO WOMAN & GUIDE

heading out. She limps gingerly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUIDE

The trick is not to favor it.

WOMAN

Some trick.

GUIDE

You favor it, you'll just get
another blister someplace else.

She steadies her gate, her face a mask of pain.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Try thinking about something else.

WOMAN

Like what?

GUIDE

God's creation in all its glory.

WOMAN

You have got to be kidding.

EXT. HUNTERS' CAMP

Boss Man leads the way across the creek. He carries a rifle. Soldier boy follows with the second rifle slung over one shoulder and a rucksack over the other. Porky struggles with trying to make one of the burro's pack bags sit more easily across his shoulders.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

The woman's bag and its contents are strewn on the ground. Boss Man comes up to it; Soldier Boy starts to pick up.

BOSS MAN

Leave it.

The two head on, but Porky sees the wallet and relieves it off cash and credit cards.

EXT. RIDGLELINE - DAY

Surrounded by majestic mountains, the guide and the woman trek across an arid spine of land.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

Is there water around here? I
don't see any water around here.
Why aren't we following the creek?

GUIDE

That's probably what they're doing.

WOMAN

Probably. Probably. You probably
have a plan.

He doesn't answer but notes that she's on the verge of
delirium.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Well.

GUIDE

Well what?

WOMAN

The plan. Where are we going?
What's your plan?

He stops and stoops forward.

GUIDE

Get on my back.

WOMAN

What?

GUIDE

Get on my back!

She complies. CAMERA HOLDS STATIONARY as he piggy-backs her
forward to what looks to be the edge of the world.

WOMAN

Mr. Giles Webb. Was he married?
Did he have children?

GUIDE

Divorced. Grown daughter. Grandkid
on the way.

WOMAN

Shit, I'm thirsty.

CUT TO:

THE CROSS HAIRS OF A RIFLE SCOPE

scanning the terrain. The OS stream burbles as refreshing counterpoint to Porky's talking with a mouth full of food.

PORKY (OS)

You shouldn't drink so much. In the movies when they're in the desert John Wayne tells 'em to conserve their water.

EXT. CLEARING

Boss Man lowers his rifle. Porky gnaws on a chub of salami, talking with his mouth full to Soldier Boy, who gulps from the canteen.

PORKY

Conservation, that's the law of the land.

SOLDIER BOY

(lowering the canteen)

Don't you ever compare yourself to John Wayne again.

BOSS MAN

Better fill that. I have a feeling they've cut across to higher ground.

SOLDIER BOY

Bad enough following this river.

BOSS MAN

Go on.

Soldier Boy turns to climb down to the stream bed.

PORKY

What do you mean a feeling?

BOSS MAN

Guys who camp, they know how water twists and turns down a mountain. He's trying to get above us, letting us take the sucker's way down here.

SOLDIER

But what about her wallet back there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOSS MAN

You step on grass, you flatten it.

He squats and cocks his head to look ahead at a low angle.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)

Except for us, I haven't seen a sign of that for the past half hour. He thinks he can outrun us.

PORKY

Outrun us where?

BOSS MAN

How am I supposed to know? On the other side of these mountains are more mountains. And on the other side of them there's even more.

PORKY

Jeez, you sound half Indian. How do you know all that?

BOSS MAN

I went to high school. They had a class there called geography. Remember it?

Porky shakes his, No.

EXT. STREAM BED

The bank is steep. Soldier Boy is careful with his footing until his face kisses a large silky web. He screams and crashes through ferns.

INTERCUT BOSS MAN WITH PORKY

BOSS MAN

You all right?

SOLDIER BOY

Spider. Goddamn spider.

PORKY

Most of them aren't poisonous. I saw that on television. You're bigger than they are.

BOSS MAN

Y'know, there's no way we can go home unless we get them first.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)

But you keep your mouth moving, and
one of us just might kill you in
the meantime.

CUT TO:

EXT. GLACIATED VALLEY - DAY

A pile a metamorphic boulders stands out among the sage, dry
rye grass, and scraggly trees. The guide, still carrying the
woman, plods for the rocks.

Her lips are cracked; her eyes, half closed; and he looks as
bad as she did four hours ago.

EXT. FORMATION

He sets her down, jarring her to full consciousness. He
turns away to rummage under a fallen and rotting tree. She
blinks up at the blazing white hole that the sun makes in the
sky. She crawls around the boulders to find shade.

He scoops a handful of glistening white grubs.

She can't believe her eyes. A small pool of water. Still,
silent, inviting.

He scrapes the wriggling fat mass into his mouth, eats.

She drinks greedily.

He scoops another handful and goes to find her.

He sees her drinking, hesitates. Suddenly he jerks her back.

GUIDE

Don't!

WOMAN

Wha-?

GUIDE

Throw up!

WOMAN

Are you crazy?

He jabs a finger down her throat. She gags then bites. He
yells and jerks his finger free.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

What's all over your hand?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUIDE

Grubs.

She projectile vomits into his chin and chest. Bending over, she dry heaves.

He drags a hand over his face and drops to his knees to examine the water. She looks at him through bleary eyes.

WOMAN

I'm with a crazy man.

GUIDE

No larvae, no insects, no water plants.

(turning to her)

An arsenic spring. It could have killed you.

She sits on the ground, eyes overflowing with tears.

WOMAN

I can't do this any more. I can't.

GUIDE

They're not going to win this way. You're not going to give up.

WOMAN

Don't tell me what I'm going to do.

He pulls her to her feet.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I need to rest.

He pushes her to the fallen tree, lets her go.

Numbly, she watches him push the log over. She shakes her head adamantly when she sees the grubs.

He selects a huge one and gulps it down.

Her lips are a tight line, and she is still shaking her head as he brings select morsel to her.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I've fasted before. I can go for a week without eating.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GUIDE

There's liquid in them. You're dehydrated now. You'll die without water.

Her eyes plead with him, but his are full of menace.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

I'm going to sit on you and shove this down your throat unless you eat it.

She takes it angrily.

WOMAN

How do you do it? How do you get your stupid body to do any of this?

GUIDE

It's here to serve me, not the other way around.

She pops the grub in her mouth. She takes one chew and is about to gag it up when he clamps a hand over her mouth.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Eat!

Right now she's more afraid of him than anything in the world. She forces the grub down. After a moment her eyes soften.

He lets go. He nods to the log.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

More.

She sniffs and hesitantly takes another grub. She eats it, crying like a small girl forced to eat Brussels sprouts.

WOMAN

At least you didn't tell me it tastes like chicken.

GUIDE

More.

He crouches and begins eating more himself. Soon she is next to him, taking them in rapidly.

CUT TO:

A RIVLET OF ROCKS

streaming down a gully. The source is the killers climbing upward.

REVERSE ANGLE

They hate it. But what they hate more is what puts them here.

CUT TO:

GUIDE & WOMAN

She's walking now, hand on his shoulder to steady herself.

WOMAN

The plan. I'd kind of like to know the plan.

GUIDE

Homesteader. More of a hermit. Runs a few head of cattle on the other side of Sawtooth Ridge.

WOMAN

I didn't know we still had homesteaders.

GUIDE

The tree huggers haven't been able to run everybody out. Not yet.

They keep walking for several moments.

WOMAN

He doesn't like environmentalists. Figures. He gets paid to shoot Bambi.

GUIDE

I'm trying to save your life, and you're going on about my politics. Is that what you really want to do?

She stops.

WOMAN

If that's how you feel, why are you helping me?

GUIDE

This isn't about feelings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

So go off and just leave me.

GUIDE

That's how they do it in your world, isn't it?

WOMAN

What do you mean "my world?"

GUIDE

Down there. Power lunches, power bullshit. Weekend backpackers who get a wild hair about logging or hunting or raising cattle. Outlaw everything. What you can say, whether you can smoke. Then they let the people who have to work to make a living just rot. Just rot while they enjoy their vacation home with no leaf blowers. Then they toast each other with Chardonnay and talk about how compassionate they are!

WOMAN

You are crazy, you know that? You know how crazy that sounds?

He sighs tiredly.

GUIDE

Yeah.

He starts walking again. She plods after him.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CANYON - SUNSET

GUIDE

We better hole up here. Temperature is going to be dropping pretty fast.

With a heavy sigh, the woman props herself against the rock face. Too exhausted to hurt or fear, she takes in their surroundings.

WOMAN

Mother Nature, she is glorious, isn't she? But cruel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUIDE

Not cruel. Not a she.

WOMAN

Who ever heard of Father Nature?

GUIDE

Neither. It doesn't make assumptions like we do. It just is.

WOMAN

Whatever.

CUT TO:

BRILLIANT STARS

overlook

EXT. OUTCROP - NIGHT

The woman and the guide have found hard sanctuary. They sit side by side, the woman hunched over her knees, shivering.

WOMAN

Can't we light a fire?

He nods for her to look out.

INTERCUT THEIR POV - EXT. ACROSS THE CANYON

A flicker of firelight.

WOMAN

God, I thought we had left them to hell and gone.

GUIDE

A mile and a half in this country amounts to the same thing.

WOMAN

So why can't we light a fire?

GUIDE

And let them know where we are?

WOMAN

Can't we block the entrance? A small fire? They won't see a small fire. Please?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He gets up.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTCROP

He has piled brush and branches across the front and now pulls a final branch up.

INT. SHELTER

Using his knife, the woman scrapes dry shavings into a pile. He backs inside, position the last branch.

WOMAN

More?

GUIDE

Can't chance it.

He strikes a match. Cupping the flame, he ignites the shavings. He feeds the small fire more wood. She fans smoke away from her face.

WOMAN

Didn't think of this.

GUIDE

You'll get used to it.

She coughs.

CROSS CUT WITH:

EXT. KILLERS' CAMP

Big fire. Porky is downwind of it, alternating between stirring a heating can of beans and slapping mosquitoes. Soldier Boy sits in the haze on the other side. Boss Man is propped uncomfortably against a tree trunk. He's wrapped around his rifle, a sleeping back twisted over his shoulders and head as he wills himself to suffer in silence.

SOLDIER BOY

Smoke keeps the bugs away.

PORKY

Who's gonna watch the food?

SOLDIER BOY

Why does it have to be watched?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Porky picks up the can to take it away from the flame. He squeals, nearly drops the can, sets it down gingerly.

SOLDIER BOY (CONT'D)
Metal conducts heat.

PORKY
Who asked you?

Porky gets the bottle of whiskey. As he's knocking back a gulp, there's an eerie shrieking kind of COUGH.

Boss Man flies out of his cocoon, eyes saucered with terror.

BOSS MAN
What's that?

EXT. ROCKY SHELTER

Another OS GROWL.

GUIDE
Mountain lion.

Shivering, the woman rubs her legs.

WOMAN
I know, I know. More afraid of us
than we are of it.

GUIDE
Not all the time.

WOMAN
This fire isn't doing any good.
I'm freezing, I'm starved. Oh
Jeez, I just want to go to sleep.

He tentatively puts an arm around her. She huddles closer from a mutual need to survive. And to fight loneliness.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
You were right.

GUIDE
About what?

WOMAN
I didn't know Mr. Giles Webb to
give a damn about him. But he
deserved to live. Same with that
family. They were people.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUIDE

He was a nice guy. I liked him.

WOMAN

That's a switch from what you said earlier.

GUIDE

Earlier I was running for my life.

WOMAN

Yeah. Like with that family. When I saw them, that changed everything. I want to live so bad- Were you scared today? You didn't act scared.

GUIDE

I'm trying not to think about it.

WOMAN

My talking about it bothers you then?

GUIDE

Go ahead if it helps.

WOMAN

My name's Janey. Janey McKenzie. Do you go to movies?

GUIDE

Nope.

WOMAN

Well, it won't be any good to name my projects then, will it?

GUIDE

I don't care if you name 'em.

WOMAN

Bet you don't watch television, either.

GUIDE

Sometimes there's no choice.

WOMAN

Gddamnit, what's your fucking name?

GUIDE

I don't like it when women swear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAN

What do you want us to do then?
Flutter our eyelashes and flirt?
Faint at the sight of blood? I
don't feel a thing for you. Not a
thing.

GUIDE

Good. Then maybe we can get some
sleep.

They lean into each other. She wraps an arm around him.

WOMAN

Who was she?

GUIDE

Who?

WOMAN

The politically correct person who
drank Chardonnay and let you rot.

GUIDE

Wife.

WOMAN

What happened? She got the
vacation home and you got the leaf
blower?

He chuckles tiredly.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Really. What happened?

GUIDE

I was doing a stint in the Forest
Service. She was in law school on a
summer internship. She didn't hunt,
but she loved to fish, she said.
But she was one of those catch-and-
release types. Why would you fish
if you're not going to eat the
thing? I mean, what's the point?

WOMAN

She didn't like the taste?

GUIDE

Then why play at it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WOMAN

You split up because of fishing?

GUIDE

It was just a sign that it could never work.

He shifts his weight, yawns.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

So what's your story?

WOMAN

Finish yours fist.

GUIDE

All I ever wanted to do was camp. Hunt, fish, lead some white water excursions. Had to take jobs as a tree-topper, though. She got a job with the EPA. I became an embarrassment to her. Her friends thought I was some kind of gun nut survivalist.

WOMAN

I wonder why.

GUIDE

Try to talk to them, they just call you names. But I wanted children. That was the real threat. Like I said, handwriting was on the wall when we first went fishing.

They let the silence settle for a moment; then she speaks.

WOMAN

A couple of friends and I from college, we wanted to change the world. So we started this business. Worked hard at it. Were getting there. Two of us got married. The third, she said didn't need a man. Not the way we did, she said. Not that I was dependent on my husband, but... Well, when I found out he was sleeping with Tish, I suddenly became this completely dependent bimbo. All emotions, no brains, no accomplishments, just go on Rosie O'Donnel, bare all and beg the two-timing bastard to come back.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Well, I couldn't do that, so I ended up just driving. I wanted to die. My whole life, you see, had been this lie. Career and marriage, wink at adultery, change the world. Then I was the one who was betrayed, and that was all that mattered. I wanted to die.

GUIDE

(closing his eyes)
Betrayal does that.

WOMAN

I sure want to live now.

She yawns, snuggles closer to get more comfortable.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

You didn't tell me your name.

He's not going to, either. He's asleep.

CUT TO:

DAWN

breaking over the high country. A bird chirps.

EXT. KILLERS' CAMP

A millipede crawls over Boss Man's limp hand. OS Porky SNORES peacefully. CAMERA FINDS Porky then PULLS FOCUS to a squirrel eating the remains of dinner about five feet from Soldier Boy's slack, drooling mouth.

CUT TO:

A BLADE OF GRASS

dripping dew. The woman's tongue delicately licks it.

EXT. MEADOW - EARLY LIGHT

She and the guide move on their hands and knees, lapping up globules of water as if each were priceless gold.

LAP DISSOLVE:

LATER

He stands near a clump of brush, then reaches down to help her to her feet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

Thanks. Not exactly a bloody Mary
and eggs Benedict, but I guess it
will have to-

The grass RUSTLES OS. The woman looks down with a start as
something wriggles into the brush.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

What was that?

GUIDE

Lizard, maybe a snake.

She clasps his arm with fright.

WOMAN

Snake.

GUIDE

Could have been a rodent.

She starts to let go.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Sounded more like a snake.

She steps so that he's between her and the brush.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Most species aren't poisonous, and
those that are usually want to be
left alone.

WOMAN

I don't know how you live with all
these things around.

GUIDE

Animals?

WOMAN

Things. Creepy-crawlies. Animals
you can take for a walk. You can
ride them in the park. Worst case,
you ask for medium and it comes
rare; but you can always send it
back to the chef.

He smiles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Bet you're a big fan of The
Crocodile Hunter.

The smile turns skeptical as she tries out a mock Australian
accent:

WOMAN (CONT'D)

What a beauty! Fangs that could
rip your arm off if you get too
close. But she's just protecting
her young, and we won't bother her
much with this camera that we're
shoving up her backside, which just
happens to have enough poison to-
Isn't she a beauty?

He's frowning.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

You're not a fan?

GUIDE

I'm not crazy about the way he
thinks.

WOMAN

He thinks?

GUIDE

He thinks like a pantheist.

WOMAN

I never heard him mention religion.

GUIDE

He says we're all the same.
Elephants, fleas, you and me, we're
all the same.

WOMAN

Well, we all belong to the Animal
Kingdom. We share common ancestry.

GUIDE

We share some biological functions.
Microscopically, an elephant is
pretty much like a flea, but no
monkey is my uncle.

WOMAN

Oh. You're one of those.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GUIDE

What's that mean?

WOMAN

You don't believe in evolution.

GUIDE

I believe in facts.

WOMAN

Evolution is an undisputed fact.

GUIDE

Ever hear of the trilobites?

WOMAN

Some kind of cave people?

GUIDE

How 'bout this? "Gird up your loins like a man, and I will question you. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand. Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place? Have you entered the storehouses of the snow? Can you lose the cords of Orion? Do you hunt the prey for the lioness? Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high?"

WOMAN

Job?

GUIDE

Pretty good. You know your bible.

Embarrassed, she waves off the thought.

WOMAN

No, no, not me. Had to look it up for a documentary. So you're one of those right wing fundamentalists.

GUIDE

Yeah, me and Mother Theresa and C.S. Lewis.

He starts to walk away, and she hurries to catch up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

WOMAN

I'm sorry. You don't like labels. None of us do. It's a just a helpful shorthand. So you're a Babtist or a Catholic or a...?

GUIDE

Christian stoic.

WOMAN

That's a church?

GUIDE

Just a shorthand.

WOMAN

I think I know who the Stoics were.

GUIDE

Then you probably know that Christianity was caught between the ancient Jews and Greeks. Experiential people versus people who had to turn everything into abstraction. Walking with Christ is about relationship, but we still all try to explain it, so that requires philosophy. Now the early church-

WOMAN

You know, I don't think it's a good idea to argue about religion.

GUIDE

Is that what I was doing?

WOMAN

Oh, I've had people waylay me in the street, shove a comic book at me and tell me I'm going to hell.

GUIDE

And?

WOMAN

We should talk about something that we both know something about.

GUIDE

Like?

CUT TO:

EXT. SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

A 4X4 mobile unit comes to a stop. TWO DEPUTIES get out and start for the entrance of the low-slung brick building. Deputy 1 stops, looking to the side.

EXT. PARKING LOT

The Desert Rat's pickup is parked by itself, facing the building.

INT. PICKUP CAB

Desert Rat pulls at his lower lip, watching the entrance, trying to make up his mind. He's surprised by the first officer coming up to him.

DEPUTY 1
What brings you here sober and orderly?

DESERT RAT
Nothin'.

DEPUTY 1
Nothing?

DESERT RAT
I'm waitin'.

DEPUTY 1
Waiting for who?

DESERT RAT
Nobody. I... I'm just waitin' and thinkin'.

The dep steps back.

DEPUTY 1
OK, step out.

DESERT RAT
What?

DEPUTY 1
You heard. Out.

EXT. PARKING LOT

The second deputy sighs as the Desert Rat gets out. The first dep puts a hand on Desert Rat's shoulder to turn him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEPUTY 1
Assume the position.

DESERT RAT
Wha'd I do?

DEPUTY 1
Do it!

Desert Rat spread-eagles himself against the fender. While the first dep pats him down, the second comes up.

DEPUTY 2
Les giving you trouble?

DEPUTY 1
Never know when some squirrely
SOB's going to be waiting out here
with a deer rifle and a sniper
scope.

The first dep peels away to yank down the back of the cab seat. While Desert Rat remains rooted, the dep checks the greasy clutter of jumper cables, oil can and empty beer bottles.

DEPUTY 1 (CONT'D)
Just waiting to get on the six
o'clock news.

DEPUTY 2
Find anything?

The officer comes back to thrust a finger in Desert Rat's face.

DEPUTY 1
I'm watching you.

He storms to the station.

DEPUTY 2
You can go, Les.

The Desert Rat skulks into his truck.

DEPUTY 2 (CONT'D)
Shouldn't come around unless you
got legitimate business. Makes
people jumpy.

CUT TO:

EXT. GUIDE'S & WOMAN'S SHELTER - DAY

The brush has been cleared away. Just a rocky outcrop. The killers trudge past.

CUT TO:

LONG SHOT - EXT. TIMBERLINE - DAY

The man and woman move slowly but steadily, she talking all the while, he concentrating on the ground. He kicks a rock over, picks up another.

WOMAN (VO)

You have to understand that I'm clueless at this point. So I go, "Tish, I just got back from Paris, please, why don't you go this time and straighten things out?" I'm not thinking that Lance might be stressed out and ready go ga-ga at the first friendly face. And Tish is my best friend, remember.

CUT TO:

EXT. FILLING STATION - DAY

There's an all-American van out front, the occupants lined up for a family snapshot against the now famous backdrop. Desert Rat's pickup slowly passes.

CUT TO:

EXT. WILDERNESS - DAY

The guide and woman continuing walking.

WOMAN

They have this running buffet, see? French crews don't take lunch breaks. They just snack and suck down wine the whole day through. So between getting tipsy and my husband being stressed out, there's my good friend Tish being really friendly. Well, I look back and figure that's when it all started.

LONG SHOT

WOMAN (VO)

So I play idiot for six months,
maybe a whole year. But Erica,
she's my best-best friend, and
she's no idiot.

CLOSER

as they come up on a ravine.

WOMAN

She had to know something was going
on, don't you think?

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

He circles a large rock at the mouth of the boulder strewn
gully. He peers at a fissure.

WOMAN

I'm boring you, aren't I?

GUIDE

No, no. It's good that you're
talking; keeps your mind off your
troubles.

WOMAN

That's all I've been talking about
while you've had your head down all
morning. Reminds me of Lance with
his face buried in the trades. What
are you looking for?

GUIDE

Fossil.

She suddenly worries whether he's rational and casts an
uneasy look in the direction from which they came.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

(nodding upward)

Think you can make it?

WOMAN

Isn't it possible that they're not
following us any more? Why
couldn't they be over there? Or
there? A hundred miles from here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUIDE

Animals don't like to work if they don't have to. That's why the Indians followed game trails, and the mountain men followed the Indians. The settlers with their wagons, they couldn't go straight up and down. They took the trails that had already been blazed, the easiest ones through the lowest passes. Not a lot of those. That's why there aren't roads every which way today. It's the mountains themselves that are telling us where to go. If those killers can listen to their feet, the mountains are telling them where to go too.

She blows the hair out of her eyes.

WOMAN

I think they're telling us all to go to hell.

He starts up.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOGOL ROAD - DAY

Broken plastic, powdered safety glass, and the white ashes of flares mark where the Yankee got squashed like a cockroach. Desert Rat's pickup comes up, stops for a moment.

INT. CAB

He pulls his lip again then looks toward:

THE MOUNTAIN

CUT TO:

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

Like Sisyphus, the guide crabs his way upward. The woman struggles to keep up. He gives her a hand, pulls her.

LATER

just before they reach the top, he sees something—a flatish, palm sized, sharp-edged rock. He picks it up for a cursory look, but his eyes suddenly beam like searchlights.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUIDE

Eureka.

He scrambles over the top, forgetting the woman. She crawls to

LEVEL GROUND

and sprawls out like wilted lettuce. He thrusts the fossil under her nose, a creature shaped like a cross between a horseshoe crab and a giant sow bug, frozen in a matrix a crystalline shale.

GUIDE

This is a trilobite. Troglodytes, that what you were thinking of.

Exhaustion wars with the growing awareness that he's lost his marbles.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Isn't she a beauty? Look. Tail, thorax, head, eyes. Probably fed by straining mud. Do you know how old this?

WOMAN

(sitting up)

No.

GUIDE

600 million years. This is the first evidence of animal life. Before that, just some carbon laminae in Precambrian rocks, probably the remains of blue-green algae and other microscopic plants. Plants! Then this. Look how complex it is. There is no prior form that it could have evolved from. Then 370 million years ago, boom!

She gives a start and scrambles to her feet.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

12,000 species of insects appear in the fossil record out nowhere! Nowhere.

(tapping the rock)

Darwin wrote about trilobites.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Tenth Chapter, Origin Of The Species. He said their existence could not be explained by evolution. But then he goes on with about future scientists finding the missing links. That was 150 years ago. But they haven't because there aren't any. Not for trilobites, not for spiders, not for you and me.

Warily, she watches him calm down to examine the fossil with awe.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

"His wonders to behold."

WOMAN

May I please see that?

GUIDE

Really a remarkable specimen.
Museum quality.

He hands it over. She looks at it for a moment. Before she throws it as far as she can. Then she shouts at his stunned look.

WOMAN

Don't come near me! I did not climb all this way to listen to another lecture from a religious kook!

She wheels, wincing, and begins to hobble off.

GUIDE

(watching her for a moment)

Wrong way.

She turns and just looks at him.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Janey, I didn't mean to spout off. I'm just trying to keep my mind off the same things you are.

Her angry looks becomes rueful.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

That homesteader's not far now. We're going to make it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAN

Damn straight we're going to make it.

She limps back, and he moves in to take her arm to help her along.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

The woman's car hasn't moved. Desert Rat unlimbers from the interior with its registration.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN MEADOW - DAY

PAN DOWN from a azure sky larded with fluffy clouds to a small alpine lake. It glimmers like a jewel set among cathedrals of rock. A rude cabin, blackened by fire, fronts the lake. This year's grass pushes through cracked earth, but most of the trees and brush aren't going to recover from the fire that ravished them. The woman and the guide MOVE INTO FRAME.

REVERSE ANGLE

as they approach the cabin.

GUIDE

I haven't been here for three years. There must have been a wildfire.

WOMAN

No shit, Sherlock.

EXT. CABIN

GUIDE

Sorry.

WOMAN

Why's that? You weren't playing with goddamn matches, were you?

He pushes the partially open door.

INT. CABIN

They stand at the threshold, looking in. A couple of rafters have fallen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The chimney of a pot bellied stove has collapsed. Shelves pegged to the wall are akimbo, and jars and utensils have spilled to the plank floor.

GUIDE

I wish you wouldn't swear.

WOMAN

Oh, he wishes Janey wouldn't swear. Hey, Tarzan, fuck you. And fuck the horse you rode in on.

GUIDE

Getting angry doesn't help.

WOMAN

Getting angry is totally fucking appropriate. You have just led us on a goddamn wild goose chase.

EXT. CABIN

He turns on her.

GUIDE

Wait a second, lady. We're not here because of me.

WOMAN

Well, I don't know about that, Mr. Woodsman. We've been on your Yellow Brick Road for the past twenty-four hours. On foot, killing ourselves, thank you very much.

GUIDE

I was actually enjoying myself before you came along.

WOMAN

Killing Bambi, yeah, that would give your kind a hardon, wouldn't it?

She turns away.

GUIDE

Where you going?

WOMAN

Away from you!

He enters the cabin with a disgruntled look.

INT. CABIN

He searches the room. He picks up a box of Quaker oats, shakes it first then opens the lid. More weevils than oats.

There's a bureau that looks relatively intact, but a quick look through the drawers shows that there's nothing he can use.

He passes a broken window, comes back for a double take.

INTERCUT HIS POV - EXT. LAKE

She's at the shoreline, a sight to behold, peeling off her clothes. Eyes wistful, he takes in the graceful slope of her back and buttocks. But then he shakes off any longing.

GUIDE

Who needs 'em?

He turns to the bed, a tattered mattress with a blanket on it. He picks up the blanket, disturbing a nest of mice. He shakes out their droppings.

EXT. LAKE

She's knee deep in water, shivering. She laps up a handful to drink. Wonderful but freezing. She splashes water onto her chest and under her arms. It pimples her skin, sucks her breath away. Panting, she moves deeper into the water, gingerly squats, pops right up. She wills herself to dip down to her shoulders. She ducks her head under and quickly scrubs her fingers through her hair. Enough. She turns for the shore, gives a start.

He's standing with the blanket, sawing a hole in the middle with his knife.

WOMAN

Enjoying yourself?

Crouching, she hurries out of the water. He tosses her the blanket.

She covers herself and dries.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

God, this smells. Why'd you cut a hole in it?

GUIDE

To use as a pancho if you like.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She snatches up her clothing and moves away with-

WOMAN

You could use a bath, you know.

GUIDE

Thank you. You're welcome.

He sits to pull off his boots.

INTERCUT WOMAN

calling over her shoulder as she moves to the cabin.

WOMAN

Can we fish that lake?

GUIDE

No fish at this altitude.

WOMAN

You sure can pick 'em

He's stripped off his shirt and is dropping his trousers as if to moon her.

GUIDE

Thank you.

EXT. CABIN

She finishes pulling on her sports bra, turns, and sits on the steps to put on her socks and shoes.

INTERCUT HER POV - EXT. LAKE

She observes that his arms and the back of his neck are the color of brown shoe polish whereas his body and butt are fishbelly white. He steps gingerly into the water then dives. He comes up like a sounding whale.

GUIDE

Yes!

He swims strongly then dives under again.

WOMAN

Men.

Something catches her eye.

INTERCUT A LIZARD

sunning itself. A big ugly lizard. An idea begins to churn behind her eyes.

She finishes lacing her shoes and gets up to look closely at the reptile. It scurries away.

She follows it around the back of the cabin. She's lost it. No, there it is.

Big and fat and juicy.

She looks around. A pitchfork-tines rusted, handle broken-lies in the weeds.

She picks it up. The idea is becoming an obsession.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - DAY

The man is cinching his belt when the woman marches up with lizard speared on the pitchfork.

WOMAN

Can we eat this?

GUIDE

You hungry?

WOMAN

No. No, I'm not hungry. Why can't you just answer a question directly?

GUIDE

Sure. You can eat it if you want.
(pulling out his knife)
Want me to gut it for you?

WOMAN

I can do it.

She takes the knife, lowers the lizard, looks at it for awhile, then hands the knife back.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

But show me how first.

He just looks at her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Please.

He takes the pitchfork.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADHOUSE - DAY

The sign on the frontier-like facade says Gold Strike. Below, the woman's HUSBAND gets out of a sports utility vehicle that's never been in four-wheel drive. He sports some athletic shoes without a mark on them and an Armani blazer over a polo shirt. Handsome dude. A little gray in his hair. Or could be some dyed highlights.

INT. ROADHOUSE

He enters the cool and dark bar, takes in a mournful JUKEBOX, and a dance floor that might get crowded come Saturday night. He sees the lone customer nursing a long neck, not his first, and walks over to him.

HUSBAND

Lester Sorensen?

DESERT RAT

Yeah?

HUSBAND

We talked on the phone.

Desert Rat still looks puzzled.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)

About my wife's car.

CUT TO:

EXT. CABIN - END OF DAY

Dry tinder creates a nearly smokeless fire. Flames snap at the lizard which the woman has spitted on a green branch.

The guide lies on his side, head propped on his hand, watching with a twinkle in his eyes. She keeps up a line of patter to convince herself that this is going to be a feast.

WOMAN

You know the Pilgrims. The First Thanksgiving? I read that sometimes they ate eagles. Tasted like mutton, one of them said.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She withdraws the lizard, plucks a piece of meat from its crisp haunch.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Our bodies are here to serve us,
right? We need nutrition, right?
I'm so hungry I could my parakeet.

She pops the morsel in her mouth, chews tentatively, then faster.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Not bad. Not really. Just burnt
tasting.

She holds the stick out to him. He rolls a bit to get a hand in his pocket. The better to pull out a can of Spam. He tosses it to her.

GUIDE

There's some weevily old oats in
the cabin, but this looked better.

He starts to laugh. It rumbles from his belly until she slaps him, loud and hard. It's his turn to be stunned, but tears spring to her eyes.

WOMAN

I think I hate you.

GUIDE

It was a bad joke. I'm sorry.

She starts to cry. She stands and turns so he won't see. He gets up and takes her from behind by the shoulders.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

You're strung out.

WOMAN

Hey, no kidding.

She turns, puts her arms around him, and rests her face against his chest. They hold the embrace until she looks up at him. The whole world has turned upside down. Him with it. Just the same but so different. He kisses her. A long romantic kiss that he abruptly breaks.

He throws himself on the ground, propping his back against the wall of the cabin.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

What's the matter?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GUIDE

For starters you're a married woman.

WOMAN

Oh wow, you are a dinosaur.

She comes to sit next to him. He puts an arm around her, and she nestles into him, their chemistry simmering.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

My husband doesn't act married. It's as good as over.

GUIDE

You don't know that.

WOMAN

Please don't tell me what I don't know.

GUIDE

So what happens when we get out of here? I come a-calling, visit you on weekends, bring flowers?

WOMAN

Wildflowers. On the endangered list.

GUIDE

Then you introduce me to all your friends?

WOMAN

How can I introduce you to all my friends when I don't even know your name?

GUIDE

I'm serious.

WOMAN

I don't know why I'm attracted to you. I mean, I've seen you naked, but you're no Mr. Universe, and I've spent better nights with stomach flu.

She kisses him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GUIDE

I'm your ticket out of here.
That's all that's attractive.

WOMAN

There has to be worse than making
love to the man who saves your
life. What's the mattress like on
that bed in there?

GUIDE

Dirty.

He kisses her.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

We really need to show some
control.

WOMAN

I swear to God, we're not doing
anything until you tell me your
name.

GUIDE

(freezing)
Don't move.

WOMAN

What?

GUIDE

Shh!

Her features pale.

INTERCUT RATTLENAKE

within a yard or so of their feet.

WOMAN

Oh God, oh God.

GUIDE

Don't move. They sense movement.

The rattles buzz.

She's going to bolt. His fingers dig into her skin. He
speaks through clenched teeth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUIDE (CONT'D)

You can do it. Don't move. You can do it.

Finally, the snake slithers away. She clings tightly then relaxes with utter relief.

CUT TO:

THE KILLERS

half drag their gear. Boss Man stops, looks around then just plops to the ground. Porky follows suit.

Soldier Boy stumbles on a few yards before curling into the fetal position to sleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHERIFF'S STATION - SUNSET

INT. SQUAD ROOM

Deputy 1 is in the midst of interviewing the husband and Desert Rat.

HUSBAND

We had this...this disagreement. You know how women can get. Overly possessive?

Desert Rat nods.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)

Anyway, she made this big deal out of it, like we were on the verge of divorce or something. And she just took off. I didn't know where. I was worried sick.

DEPUTY 1

And that was how long ago?

HUSBAND

Three days now. But she's really an independent woman. I was sure I'd hear from here when she came to her senses.

DEPUTY 1

(to Desert Rat)

You said there were two vehicles up there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DESERT RAT

Yeah.

DEPUTY 1

Did you happen to get a license number on the second vehicle?

DESERT RAT

No.

The dep shakes his head.

DEPUTY 1

Could be people helping her out.

DESERT RAT

Why wasn't nobody around?

DEPUTY 1

I don't know, Lester. Why wasn't there?

DESERT RAT

I dunno.

DEPUTY 1

Well, I guess we have to check it out.

He pushes back from his desk and stands.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - NIGHT

Clouds scud across the sky.

INT. CABIN

The guide and the woman lie on the mattress, spooned together under the blanket, clothed. She's asleep, and he's awake, troubled. Finally he decides on a course of action. He eases out of bed and moves quietly to the door.

EXT. CABIN

He strides purposefully away.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

The guide has backtracked about a mile and now moves stealthily, knife out. He stops as he comes in view of:

EXT. KILLERS' 2ND CAMPSITE

A fire roars, silhouetting the killers. Two are lying down; one is sitting up.

THE GUIDE

sits down, crosses his arms over his knees, and simply watches.

CROSS CUT WITH:

LATER - INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The woman wakes with a start. Panics. She starts to rush for the door, comes back for the blanket.

EXT. KILLERS' 2ND CAMP

Soldier Boy cradles a rifle in his lap, eyes half mast. The guide's left hand clamps his mouth. The guide's right wields the knife. He's going to rip it from carotid to carotid, across Soldier Boy's larynx, but the guide has never killed another man before, and Soldier Boy isn't going to die without a fight.

EXT. MEADOW

The woman has thrown the blanket over her head as a pancho. She moves in a frantic circle.

WOMAN

Where are you? Where are you
godamnit?

EXT. KILLERS' 2ND CAMP

The struggle between the guide and Soldier Boy takes seven long seconds, is isometric, the movement mostly in their eyes. Then the hot rush of Soldier Boy's blood throws steam into the cool air.

INTERCUT THE OTHER TWO KILLERS

sleeping like babies. They don't wake to the clatter of Soldier Boy's rifle hitting a rock. What disturbs their slumber is the guide. He's been holding his breath.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As he lets Soldier Boy gently slump, he has to rasp in a great heaving lung full of air. He drops his knife to grab Soldier Boy's rifle.

Boss Man can choose between his rifle and his Baretta. Porky has a Glock to play with.

The guide gets to pull the trigger first. He's aiming from the hip; his heart rate is up to 150-plus; the shot goes wide.

Boss Man and Porky fire back.

EXT. MEADOW

The woman gives a start to the OS GUNFIRE.

EXT. KILLERS' 2ND CAMP

The guide bolts another round into the action, turns tail.

Stops. Fires. Runs again.

EXT. MEADOW

The woman whirls away from the dull crack of OS PISTOLS and runs toward the cabin.

EXT. TRAIL

The killers lumber after the guide.

The guide runs like a jackrabbit, both scared and smart. He zigzags, looking for cover.

He drops to one knee. Chambers a third round. Takes aim over the scope at the men pounding in his wake. Shoots.

The killers blast away at the muzzle flash.

The guide runs again. Then he turns for a fourth shot. Return fire.

The guide suddenly trips, stumbles on.

FEATURE THE KILLERS

moving up, hearts racing. Stop. Reload. Wait to catch their wind.

BOSS MAN
Do you hear anything?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Porky shakes his head, eyes wide with fear.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)
Could be anywhere.

THE GUIDE

stumbles through foliage, breathing hard. He stops to check his rifle.

One bullet in the chamber, none in the five-round magazine.

He throws a look back, his features clammy with excruciating pain.

CUT TO:

HEADLIGHTS

from the deputy's 4X4 illuminating the compact and the woman's car. Her husband has his hands in his pockets and is leaning forward at the waist to look into it.

DEPUTY (OS)
Mr. McKenzie identifies it as his missus. But we don't see hide nor hair.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

The dep stands next to the open door of his utility vehicle, speaking into his radio's mike. Nearby Desert Rat rocks from one foot to another, trying to keep warm.

DEPUTY 1
License on the compact is Victor Charlie 9734.

DISPATCHER (OS)
Victor Charlie 9734.

DEPUTY 1
That is correct. No sign of its occupants either. I think we're going to need some trackers and dogs up here come first light.

DISPATCHER (OS)
Copy, Mobile 3.

CUT TO:

THE GRAY BEFORE DAWN

The guide crashes through a thicket, holding his left side. He doesn't seem to care how much noise he makes. But he is brought to his senses as he nearly impales himself on the pitchfork.

The woman is on the other end. She gasps.

WOMAN

Are you OK?

GUIDE

Yeah, yeah, I'll make it.

WOMAN

Where are they?

GUIDE

Closer than I thought.

He slumps against a tree.

WOMAN

I was so frightened. I thought you abandoned me.

GUIDE

Thanks for the vote of confidence.

WOMAN

But why'd you do it? They have guns. Are you crazy? Yes. We established that yesterday. Or the day before. I can't remember any more.

She sees the blood seeping through his shirt.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

My God, you're hurt.

GUIDE

Feels worse than it is. Took out part of a rib maybe. Janey, you need to get out of here.

WOMAN

What about you?

GUIDE

I got a rifle. It'll buy you time. On the other side of the lake.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Keep that domed peak to your right.
You have to cross another range,
but you can make it.

WOMAN

Make it where? What are you
talking about?

GUIDE

A fire lookout. They'll have a
radio and a helicopter pad.

WOMAN

I can't just leave you here.

GUIDE

I'm no good to you on the trail.
You're the only one who can make it
to that lookout. The afternoon
sun. Keep that to your right. At
night you want the Big Dipper- You
know the Big Dipper?

WOMAN

A bunch of damned stars.

GUIDE

You want to keep the tip of the
handle about four o'clock. And for
the rest, feel the terrain-how it's
formed, how it flows-and go with
it, like you're a stream of water.
Now go.

WOMAN

How long?

GUIDE

Until you get there.

WOMAN

At night you said.

GUIDE

Don't think about that. Don't
think about how you feel. Just do
it.

WOMAN

No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GUIDE

Janey, you've got what it takes to do it. There's no reason to be scared.

WOMAN

There are plenty of reasons to be scared, but you've been showing me how to get over that. You circled back because we're as good as trapped here.

GUIDE

Not now. Not with this rifle. I could hold off an army. Now please go.

She shakes her head.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

There are seven people dead. Haven't they taught you yet that you need to live?

WOMAN

And what do you need?

GUIDE

A doctor would be nice. Now get me some help, OK?

(seeing her waver)

No more second thoughts. Just do it.

She hesitates. A moment of truth. Then-

WOMAN

What's your name?

A slight smile crinkles his eyes.

GUIDE

Horace.

WOMAN

You're kidding.

GUIDE

I wish.

She kisses him tenderly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WOMAN

Don't die on me, Horace.

GUIDE

Help me to higher ground.

She struggles to help him move to a better zone of fire.

WOMAN

You know, we argue just like we're
fucking married.

CUT TO:

DAWN

breaking over the mountains.

EXT. KILLERS' 2ND CAMP

Boss Man rolls Soldier Boy over and fishes through the
pockets of his coat.

BOSS MAN

How many rounds did you count he
fired?

PORKY

A dozen or more.

Boss Man tosses a box of rifle cartridges at Porky.

BOSS MAN

That would make him a magician,
asshole.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH GROUND - DAY

The guide lays behind cover, watching. He's lost a lot of
blood, is dizzy.

EXT. THICKET

Porky cautiously appears, Boss Man a step or two behind.
They come up on the tree where the guide slumped.

PORKY

You can't be sure his rifle's
empty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Boss Man wipes his fingers against the trunk, shows Porky the fresh blood.

BOSS MAN
I'm sure he's had it.

Boss Man nods to another splatter on the ground. They move forward.

PORKY
What about the bitch?

BOSS MAN
What can a fancy girl like that do?
Throw rocks?

INTERCUT THE GUIDE

as they press forward. He waits until they're twenty yards away. Takes aim. Fires.

CROSS CUT WITH:

EXT. MEADOW

The OS RETORT stops the woman cold.

EXT. TRAIL

Boss Man and Porky have ducked behind cover. They look intently toward where the shot came from.

INTERCUT THE GUIDE

rolling painfully then stumbling to his feet to move to new cover. Boss Man points. Porky fires.

EXT. THE MEADOW

The woman flinches to Porky's three OS PISTOL SHOTS. Everything in her wants to run. Nothing in her will allow her.

EXT. TRAIL

Boss Man grabs Porky's wrist. The guide is crawling upward like a crippled spider. The killers move after him.

EXT. HIGHER GROUND

The guide turns to throw a rock. No strength in it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The killers come up to the guide as he's reaching for another rock. Boss Man's boot flops the guide onto his back like an overturned tortoise.

BOSS MAN
You caused me a lot of trouble,
buddy. Where's your girlfriend?

The guide glares at him. Boss Man leans down to slap to his face.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)
I'm talking to you.

The guide sets his mouth closed.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)
Where is she?

Another slap.

PORKY
Let me try.

Porky pushes his shoe against the guide's bullet wound. He cries out.

PORKY (CONT'D)
He asked you a question, asshole.

More pressure from Porky's shoe.

GUIDE
She's gone to a fire lookout. Not
far from here. She should be there
now.

BOSS MAN
You'd better hope not, buddy.
She's the only thing that's keeping
you alive.

Boss Man straightens and cups his hands to his mouth.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)
Girlie, you'd better come out of
hiding!

Porky screams at the top his lungs.

PORKY
Bitch!
(to Boss Man)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PORKY (CONT'D)

Call her bitch. That's what I call her.

(screaming again)

Bitch!

EXT. CABIN

The woman hears the echoing OS taunts, but she is looking at the ground, stepping cautiously but surely, her eyes as intent as a wild animal's.

THE KILLERS

are as desperate as their prey, and sound crazier and crazier.

BOSS MAN

C'm'on, girl! It doesn't have to be this way! Let's talk! We can pay you! We have money!

PORKY

Bitch! Bitch!

THE RATTLER

moves slowly, looking for sun to warm up. The pitchfork stabs into the ground, a space between the tines trapping its head.

BOSS MAN (OS)

Come out, girlie, or Charlie here is gonna make your friend hurt something terrible! You can stop it! You can stop the pain now!

THE WOMAN

reaches down, grabs behind the snake's head, pulls up the fork. She holds up the rattler with triumphant menace.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHER GROUND - DAY

The killers have hog tied the guide. Boss Man uses the guide's knife to prod his cheek.

BOSS MAN

I think you should call her, buddy. I it might help if she heard your sweet voice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PORKY

Let me convince him.

BOSS MAN

You don't want this asshole to convince you, do you, buddy? He's had too much jail time. You don't look like the kind of dude who would go for what Charlie's got in mind. Call her. Save us a lot of trouble. Just shout her name.

Boss Man gives the guide a final prod.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)

Convince him.

While Porky eagerly begins to unbuckle his pants, Boss Man moves away with a disgusted look.

BOSS MAN (CONT'D)

Make it fast.

(turning his back to them)

It's not too late, buddy. You could save yourself. What the fuck's her name? Just say the girl's name.

WOMAN (OS)

Janey's my name.

Boss Man whirls to the side where the woman steps out of some bushes.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I don't like to be called girl.

She tosses the snake. A lady-like underhand throw.

Boss Man shrieks as the rattler digs its fangs into his face.

With a scream of rage, the woman now charges Porky with the pitchfork.

He's trying to go for his gun. Gets a belly full of rusting metal instead. Porky looks surprised, like a hurt little boy, and she stands nearly nose to nose, her eyes just as surprised.

PORKY

Bitch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She rams the pitchfork deeper. Yanks it out as he falls away. She turns to Boss Man.

He runs blindly, his shrieks shrill, high-pitched, hysterical, as the snake pumps venom into his face.

The woman drops down beside the guide and begins to untie him. Tears come.

WOMAN

I couldn't just leave you. You wouldn't leave me, so I couldn't leave you. I'm not sorry either.

GUIDE

Thank God.

CUT TO:

A HELICOPTER

roaring over treetops. As it swoops upstream, PAN DOWN TO

EXT. THE HUNTING CAMP - DAY

There are horses, dogs, uniformed men, so the scene of the carnage has been cleaned up. The husband, bedraggled and tired, casts an anxious look at Desert Rat.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CORRIDOR OF COUNTY HOSPITAL - DAY

The woman and her husband move up the hall. A beautiful couple. He carries a tasteful bouquet of flowers; she, some magazines and a box of chocolate. They stop at the open door of a four-bed ward.

WOMAN

I'd like to see him alone.

HUSBAND

But, darling, I want to thank him too.

WOMAN

I just want to talk to him first.

She takes the flowers from him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HUBAND
(irritably)
Too bad he can't afford a private
room.

INT. WARD

She enters. There's a patient watching TELEVISION in the bed
closest to the door, two empty beds, then the guide near the
window. He is looking out at the desert.

CLOSER

as she comes up to his bedside.

WOMAN
Hi.

His face lights up at the sight of her.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Brought you some presents.

She puts the magazines and chocolates on the rolling tray
over his bed.

GUIDE
Thanks.

WOMAN
I'm with my husband.

She turns toward the window sill with the flowers while he
fiddles with the new copy of Guns & Ammo.

GUIDE
How is he?

WOMAN
(looking around fretfully)
Fine.

GUIDE
I'll call for the nurse to get a
vase.

She sets the flowers on the sill, turning.

WOMAN
No, not just yet. Lance thinks we
can work it out. He's promised to
give up the affair.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Fling, he calls it. He wants us to go to counseling.

GUIDE

What do you want?

WOMAN

He thinks you and I slept together. Not just slept but you know. It worries him.

GUIDE

What did you tell him?

Her eyes flit to the far bed. The other patient is looking at them.

The guide yanks the hanging curtain, and the woman pulls it all the way around its track.

WOMAN

I didn't tell him anything. I like leaving him guilty and jealous.

The guide smiles wryly, the smile dying to-

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I'd like you to tell him.

GUIDE

Tell him what?

WOMAN

Tell him that your name is Tom. I know, I know, you're not supposed to change a person, but I'm sorry, I just can't imagine introducing you to all my friends as Horace. You look like a Tom. I'll even settle for Fred, but...

She drops her shield of flippancy, is vulnerable.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I just want you to tell him. I want you to tell him that you fucked me till I was blue in the face, and you don't want another man to ever touch me again.

He turns his head away. Mortified, she suddenly wishes there were a hole that would swallow her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I was just hoping maybe... You and I... Of course it could never work. Just a crazy whim.

He touches her hand.

GUIDE

Maybe not so crazy if we had met under different circumstances.

WOMAN

Right. I wouldn't have given you the time of day.

GUIDE

I might have chased you around the block anyway.

WOMAN

Because I'm so your type.

GUIDE

All I know is, you're his wife. If he really wants to change, you're the one who could make it lasting and true. You can't run away from that. I think you know it too.

She pulls her hand away.

WOMAN

This is worse than the ending to Casablanca. I can't tell whether you're being noble or patronizing.

She turns away from him, takes hold of the curtain, but she pauses, back to him.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I need to know something. Your religion. It requires you to love someone like me, doesn't it?

GUIDE

It turned out to be fairly easy.

She braves a slight smile then snaps back the curtains and walks toward the door.

His gaze follows her footsteps with pain-filled longing.

INT. CORRIDOR

She coolly comes up on her agitated husband.

WOMAN
He's asleep.

HOLD ON THEIR BACKS

as they walk away. After a distance, she speaks again.

WOMAN
You should know that I didn't have
sex with him.

After a few more paces he answers.

HUSBAND
I'm glad.

A few more and he tries to close the emotional gulf between them.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)
And I'm sorry I let you down,
sweetie.

WOMAN
You better be.

He reaches out, and she allows him to take her hand.

CUT TO:

THEIR HANDS CLASPED

on the map well of the husband's SUV.

WIDER - SUV, TRAVELING - DAY

She looks at him. He glances at her. After a while he takes his hand away to turn on the RADIO then drive with both, the better to tap out the beat of Tom Lillo's "Lost In L.A."

CUT TO:

EXT. HOMECOMING MONTAGE - FROM DUSK TO NIGHT

Lights twinkle on hills and in canyons while the SONG PLAYS OVER. The SUV moves into a freeway snarled with cars and trucks and busses.

It travels down a boulevard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Up a residential street.

Stops in the drive of a nice big home. END MONTAGE and

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Marble and brass, a sunken tub with whirlpool, and steam rises from still water in which lazes a chimera of delight. OS comes the RINGING of the bedroom phone. It's picked up. The woman faintly hears her HUSBAND'S URGENT VOICE. She turns on the water jets, reaches for a towel, and rises like a cautious Venus from the sea.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM

He's on the bed in bathrobe and silk pajamas, back to the bathroom door and the OS sound of CHURNING WATER.

HUSBAND

We all need time to settle down, so we can act like adults, for Christ's sake. I'm going to suggest that we buy you out.

(after listening)

No, I'm not trying to dump you. Please, darling, just listen.

The bathroom door opens a crack.

CLOSE ON THE WOMAN

listening.

HUSBAND

I want you to get top dollar, and when it comes my turn, I don't want to have to deal with a bunch of lawyers and the possibility of Janey going crazy again. So we need to chill it for a while, that's all.

INT. BATHROOM

The woman eases the door closed. She sinks slowly to the floor, back to the wall, and hooks her arms around her knees to hug herself tightly against the world.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She nearly made her escape only to face more duplicity, and this time she feels trapped by that ugly old friend because she knows she has to walk it all the way to the bitter end.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE LAZY, LOOPING FLASH OF ORANGE LIGHTENING

In other words, a fly line that the guide casts like easy grace.

EXT. TROUT STREAM - DAY

A hand-tied mayfly hits the water with barely a dimple. The gentle current carries it downstream to meet its destiny with a speckled flash of brown and silver.

The man feels the hit, sets the hook and eases the fish to the shore.

He wads into the water to net it, adds the fish to the two in his creel and heads up the bank toward home.

EXT. ROAD

He comes off the bank to a narrow road. It curves toward a clearing where there is a log box with corrugated iron roof that he calls home. Trees partially block the sight of it, but he can make out an old Dodge pickup.

EXT. CLEARING

As he draws closer, a touch of class comes into view next to the truck—a Mercedes M3. It gives him pause.

INT. CABIN

The austere one room with loft is made comfortable by a fireplace, now cold, and lots of books on plank shelves. The woman stands at a table that serves as a desk. There's a framed photo of four or five Explorer Scouts with the guide posed somewhere in the back of beyond, but she's paying attention to the open drawer she's going through.

EXT. CABIN

He comes up, sets his rod against the wall and mounts the two creaking steps to the door.

INT. CABIN

As he enters, she turns with a brightly forced greeting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

Hey there.

GUIDE

(guarded)

Hi.

WOMAN

Door was unlocked. I went through
your desk.

GUIDE

Make yourself at home.

He crosses to her with a wry look and extends his hand.

GUIDE (CONT'D)

Good to see you.

She shakes then-

WOMAN

That picture of your first wife? I
assume she's the ex. She's a
stacked little thing.

GUIDE

Is that a compliment?

WOMAN

If it's so good to see me, why
didn't you answer my letters?

GUIDE

I didn't think that would lead
anywhere.

WOMAN

But you read them?

He moves to a sink with a hand water pump.

GUIDE

Are you hungry?

WOMAN

Pissed off, actually.

GUIDE

(unloading his creel)
I'll make us some dinner.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WOMAN

I didn't see them around here. Not a one.

(picking up the outdoor photo)

But I see you're a Boy Scout.

GUIDE

Mm.

WOMAN

Pretty ragged looking crew.

GUIDE

We'd been out for a while.

WOMAN

You've been out it for a long while.

Even as she speaks, she regrets it.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

GUIDE

That's OK. You're probably right.

He takes a whetstone to hone the thin blade of a fishing knife.

WOMAN

No, you're right. Letters wouldn't have gotten us anywhere. I needed to do some thinking. Real thinking. Like you've done.

He nods toward a shelf in the kitchen area.

GUIDE

There's a jug of wine up there. Glasses in the cupboard.

She gets the Gallo down and fills two jelly jars. This while-

WOMAN

That first day, when you were going on about leaf blowers and tree huggers, I called you crazy, and you just said, "Yeah," like you knew you'd been in the sun too long. But that wasn't it. You'd thought about it.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WOMAN (CONT'D)

You'd counted the cost of what it is to turn you back on what the whole world says we're supposed to be. And you were right when you said that down there, where all the power lunches take place, we just call you names. That's easier than doing any real thinking about why this world is so fucked up. Sorry. Little French shorthand there.

With a deft cut he splays open the first trout.

GUIDE

Sometimes it's appropriate.

WOMAN]

So I can't blame you for living up here like a monk. But you can't stay a monk forever, you know. You have to come down off the mountain. Maybe not for long periods, but sometimes you have to come down.

He flicks a handful of guts onto a spread out newspaper.

GUIDE

Why?

She takes a hearty drink from one of the glasses.

WOMAN

That was a picture of the ex, wasn't it? I mean, that's not some current bimbo?

GUIDE

What difference does it make?

WOMAN

If you read the papers, you'd know I was divorced too.

GUIDE

I read them.

WOMAN

Really?

GUIDE

It's not an easy thing to go through, is it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

WOMAN

Easier than you think. Lance was never serious. Either was I really. It isn't all his fault or Tish's either, but to hell with them. Sorry. What about us?

GUIDE

I'll build a fire.

WOMAN

(under her breath)

Jesus.

He pumps water onto his hands and dries them on a towel while she takes another drink and blusters on.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Look, I want to build a lodge up here. A nice place. I'm not going to live without electricity or water. And I don't see myself giving up filmmaking either. Not completely. You could help me make wildlife documentaries.

He crosses to the kindling box next to the fireplace.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

What the fuck's with the fire? Do you know how hard it was for me to come here? After a whole year of silence. Why the hell don't you say something?

He speaks while wadding up old newspaper and placing kindling in the hearth and three logs on top.

GUIDE

There hasn't been a minute of the day or night that I haven't thought about you, Janey. If you had looked under my mattress, you would have found your letters there. I should have burned them. I kept telling myself it wasn't right to even hope because I wasn't my place to influence anything you did. It had to be your choice, free and clear.

WOMAN

Horace, what's the fire for? It's not that cold.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

GUIDE

(striking a match)

It'll be night soon. Fire's always
cozy at night.

He blows gently on the small flame. Suddenly she is kneeling next to him, puffing harder to get the fire to catch. He looks at her full on, touches her chin and turns her face so that she is looking at him. Then he kisses her.

FADE OUT.