CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

A GIRL AND A GUN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Screenwriting

By

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ABSTRACT

A GIRL AND A GUN

By

Roger W. Standridge

Master of Arts in Screenwriting

As an Afghan war correspondent imbedded with a special operations unit, Ryker Hemingway witnessed unspeakable atrocities. Catapulted into the spotlight by a successful novel, he finds no satisfaction in the fickle world of Hollywood glamor and longs for the comraderie and integrity of the men who fight and die for freedom and human rights.

Under pressure to produce his next big story, Ryker can’t concentrate. A chance encounter with a beautiful woman, Desiree Amistad, promises a way out.

Unfortunately, Desiree is involved in drug smuggling and hunted by Menage, head of a Columbian drug cartel.

After a gunfight in which Desiree is wounded and nearly dies, the couple bond and start an idyllic life together. Ryker works on his new novel and everything seems to be going well until Desiree’s past catches up. The two are plunged into a world of drugs and gangsters.

Desiree’s uncle, Hernando Ramos, run a smuggling operation from an abandoned silver mine on the border. Menage wants the mine to smuggle Heroin Cocaine and prostitutes.

Using his Army skills, Ryker trains Hernando’s men to defend the mine but Désirée appears to betray them.

In the final battle, the Columbians are vanquished but Désirée is accidentally shot. She dies in Ryker’s arms professing her innocence.
FADE IN:

INT. KABUL HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Shreds of filthy curtains dangle over a cracked window framing a flickering neon sign.

The THUD of an IED explosion shakes the room. Plaster rains down from a cracked ceiling while a naked bulb swings over an unmade bed.

TITLE: KABUL AFGHANISTAN

Sprawled over a rough wooden DESK, an empty whisky bottle near his right hand, RYKER HEMINGWAY (33), Unshaven and unkempt. He gives out with a GROAN.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE:

EXT. AFGHANISTAN VILLAGE - DAY

A Humvee flies into the air driven by a massive explosion. Bodies scatter. Turban-clad MEN fire AK-47s. Smoke obscures the scene.

Men with guns approach a modern, western-style schoolhouse. BOYS and GIRLS scatter and hide.

INT. SCHOOLROOM

A YOUNG WOMAN (20) desperately grabs teaching materials. A burst of GUNFIRE. She’s slammed against a wall and slowly slides to the ground in a pool of blood.

EXT. VILLAGE

Flames into the night sky from the burning schoolhouse.

END SEQUENCE:

On the desk, a little Remington portable typewriter and a stack of paper. In the typewriter, title page:

A WORLD APART.
INT. MALIBU BEACH HOUSE - MORNING

Hunched over a modern chrome and walnut desk, Ryker stirs. Around him, journalism awards and memorabilia. A framed copy of a novel cover - A WORLD APART.

On the desk, his little Remington typewriter and a pile of crumpled paper.

Shirtless and barefoot in pajama bottoms, Ryker stands and stretches.

INT. BEDROOM

Floor to ceiling windows, a view of endless beach. Tangled in sheets on a disheveled, king-size bed, JULIET HEMINGWAY (31), panties and a man’s shirt. She stirs and rolls over. Her eyes open.

    JULIET
    The dream again?

    RYKER
    I need somewhere to write.

    JULIET
    Somewhere you’re getting shot at?

Juliet stands. She’s a handsome woman with a tired face. She puts her arms around Ryker and pulls him close.

Ryker smiles.

    RYKER
    Keeps the juices flowing.

    JULIET
    That’s all behind you.

    RYKER
    The studio wants pages.

Ryker dresses.

EXT. BEACH

Ryker, sprinting hard, his Nike running suit saturated with sweat. He pounds on, not slowing down, determined. A flock of gulls scatter.
EXT. COASTLINE

Extravagant beach houses, palm trees and breakers.

TITLE: MALIBU CALIFORNIA

INT. BEACH HOUSE KITCHEN

Juice from the fridge and a big jar of body building protein in a blender. Ryker strips off his saturated shirt. His chest shows scars of battle.

Juliet prepares bacon and eggs.

    JULIET
    You need to eat something.

    RYKER
    Too much soft life.

Ryker pushes the plate of food away.

    JULIET
    But this is home. This is what you’ve always wanted.

    RYKER
    Leased car, leased house, all on studio money.

Ryker shakes his head.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - LATER

Ryker showers, shaves, then selects fashion jeans and a suit coat.

    RYKER
    I’m going to the lake for a few days. Maybe I can write there.

    JULIET
    I’ll miss you.

A silent Juliet sits on the patio with a book.

EXT. PCH - DAY

Speeding through traffic, Ryker pilots his Maserati Grancabrio with the top down.
EXT. GLADSTONE’S RESTAURANT – DAY

A patio table with an expansive view up the coast. BRUCE GRAHAM (41), loud Hawaiian shirt and deck shoes with no socks lifts dark sunglasses as Ryker walks up.

BRUCE
Ryker, baby.

Bruce holds out a limp hand.

RYKER
The contracts?

BRUCE
World Apart was huge. And the film? Blockbuster!

RYKER
You said you’d have something solid.

BRUCE
Baby. I’m behind you all the way. But the studio?

RYKER
What about the studio?

BRUCE
They want to see pages.

RYKER
Pages? I’ll give them pages. I need to get away from this shit.

BRUCE
Hey, Baby, whatever it takes.

Ryker turns to leave.

BRUCE (CONT’D)
Don’t you want lunch?

RYKER
Fuck it!

A satisfied Graham settles back into his seat and picks up a menu.
EXT. GLADSTONE’S - LATER

Ryker paces by the entrance while a VALET brings his car around. A $10 tip brings a disgusted door slam. Ryker starts to drive away.

Ahead on the curb, DESIREE AMISTAD (23), toned, tanned and beautiful.

    RYKER
    Waiting for someone?

    DESIREE
    Fucker stood me up.

    RYKER
    Ride into town?

    DESIREE
    Sure.

Desiree stretches luxuriously on soft leather as the Maserati merges into traffic.

EXT. PCH - DAY

Palm trees and sandy beaches, the Palisades glide by.

    RYKER
    Where can I take you?

    DESIREE
    Pacific Plaza. Know it?

    RYKER
    Nice.

Ryker looks the beautiful woman over. Armani dress, Vuitton bag, Rodeo drive all the way.

    RYKER (CONT’D)
    What do you do?

    DESIREE
    Actress, model...

Desiree takes off Versace sunglasses and smiles at Ryker.

EXT. PACIFIC PLAZA - DAY

Gliding under the portico, Ryker’s Masarati gets an approving glance from the doorman.
DESIREE
You’re the war hero. The one who wrote that book?

Ryker nods.

DESIREE (CONT’D)
And the movie, that Muslim girl, that was so sad.

RYKER
Ryker Hemingway, pleased to meet you.

DESIREE
Desiree Amistad.

Desiree holds out her hand and Ryker accepts.

DESIREE (CONT’D)
Well, thanks for the ride.

Desiree gets out and starts to walk away.

RYKER
Desiree.

DESIREE
Yes?

RYKER
We’re doing a little publicity bash at the studio tonight. Would you like to come?

Desiree smiles.

EXT. SONY PICTURES PLAZA – NIGHT

Spotlights announce an event at the Culver City studio headquarters. Velvet ropes hold back crowds as limousines arrive at a red carpet.

Ryker helps Desiree out of the Maserati as photographers snap pictures. Dressed in a clinging, low backed gown, she looks ravishing.

In a tuxedo, Bruce Graham.

BRUCE
Ryker, baby, what have we here?

Bruce ogles Desiree from breasts to ankles.
RYKER
I’d like you to meet Desiree
Amistad. Desiree, Bruce Graham.

BRUCE
Nice.

RYKER
Have you seen Jeff Blake this
evening.

BRUCE
I don’t think he’s here yet.
(whispering)
Where’d you get the hottie.

Ryker looks around.

RYKER
Gotta go, Bruce.

Taking Desiree’s arm, Ryker hurries inside.

INT. BALLROOM

Marble floor and crystal chandeliers. Soft MUSIC in the
background. COUPLES in evening dress mingle.

DESIREE
I feel like I need a shower.

RYKER
He’s a bit crude, but he knows
everyone in Hollywood.

CYNTHIA NUNEZ (26), A tall Vogue Model type walks up nursing
a glass of Champaign.

DESIREE
Cynthia.

RYKER
You know each other?

CYNTHIA
Mind if I talk business with Ryker?

DESIREE
If you’ll excuse me, I’ll find us
some drinks.

Cynthia takes Ryker’s arm and leads him to a quiet corner.
CYNTHIA
Off the record, still being treated
for PTSD?

Ryker takes a deep breath.

RYKER
It’s rough.

CYNTHIA
That Muslim girl really got to you.

RYKER
All the death. What a waste.

CYNTHIA
Juliet isn’t helping.

RYKER
She’s still into all the glitter.
She’ll get over it.

Cynthia looks around.

CYNTHIA
That girl you’re with. Be careful.

Desiree walks up with two glasses of Champaign.

DESIREE
Should I read the Reporter
tomorrow?

Cynthia smiles.

RYKER
(to Cynthia)
Have you seen Jeff Blake?

CYNTHIA
I believe he’s in New York.

Ryker takes Desiree’s arm as the two walk away.

RYKER
Let’s get out of here. The guy I
came to see is out of town.

Ryker nods to familiar couples as the two cross the dance
floor.
EXT. SANTA MONICA PIER - NIGHT

Barkers, balloons and organ grinder music. Ryker and Desiree share a big puffy cotton candy.

    DESIREE
You’re married, aren’t you.

    RYKER
How can you tell?

    DESIREE
You have the look.

    RYKER
Long ago and far away.

    DESIREE
Where is she now?

    RYKER
Probably getting smashed at some Hollywood party.

Desiree puts her arm around Ryker’s waist as the two stroll the rickety pier.

EXT. SHOOTING GALLERY

An arcade gallery with air rifles on hoses. Ryker watches bemused as a pimple-faced KID consistently misses. The kid forks over more money and tries again.

Ryker shakes his head.

    RYKER
Sights are off to the right.

    DESIREE
Win me something?

Ryker sets a $20 on the counter and scores 1000 straight.

The ATTENDANT (50), unshaven with a toothy smile hands Ryker a plastic toy and picks up the $20.

Ryker slams the man’s hand back down on the counter.

    RYKER
I’ll take that one.

Ryker points to a big stuffed bear.
RYKER (CONT’D)
Your game’s rigged. You’re cheating people.

The attendant hands over the bear and Ryker keeps his $20.

DESIREE
You really know how to shoot.

RYKER
I’ve had a lot of practice.

Ryker and Desiree walk on in darkness, a big fuzzy bear between them.

EXT. BEACH
Barefoot in the sand, waves lap their feet. Desiree shivers and Ryker wraps his coat around her. The two embrace in a long deep passionate kiss.

FADE TO:

I/E. PACIFIC PLAZA – MORNING
Curtains drift in a light breeze through open patio doors. Far below, surf glistens in morning light. Desiree and Ryker lie naked in a disheveled bed, a stuffed teddy bear between them.

Standing over the sleeping couple, bad teeth and tattoos, a big nasty LATINO (30), with a .45 automatic in his right hand.

RYKER
Opens one eye and looks around carefully without moving.

DESIREE
Stirs, comes wide awake, gives out a GASP then sits up.

LATINO
Buen dia.

Ryker starts to move. The Latino gestures with his gun and cocks the hammer. Ryker raises his hands.

DESIREE
(in Spanish)
Mind if I dress?
LATINO (in Spanish)
I was enjoying the view.

Unashamedly naked, Desiree retrieves her dress along with a little silver cross on a chain. She approaches the Latino, who carefully watches Ryker.

LATINO (CONT’D)
(in Spanish)
Menage wants to see you.

Behind the Latino’s neck, a flick of her thumb reveals a two-inch blue steel blade. She drives it between vertebra and severs the big man’s spinal cord. He drops like a rag doll.

An amazed Ryker gathers his clothes and looks for his cell phone.

DESIREE
You’ve got to help me.

RYKER
You? Need help?

Ryker scans the room shaking his head.

There’s a loud KNOCK on the door.

RYKER’S POV
Through the peephole, another Latino outside with a machine gun.

RYKER (CONT’D)
We’d better leave the way that guy came in.

RETURN TO SCENE

Ryker picks up the dead man’s gun and gives it an approving look.

RYKER (CONT’D)
Army forty-five. I’d rather have one of these for a fight than a modern weapon.

Ryker checks the chamber and clip then tucks the gun in his belt. The two leave via the patio.
EXT. PACIFIC PLAZA - DAY

Nine stories up. Ryker swings from a railing and catches the floor below.

    RYKER
    Your turn.

Short skirt, low-cut dress and heels, clutching her little stuffed teddy bear, Desiree totters on the edge. She swings out, nearly falls. Ryker catches her arms, pulls her in.

    RYKER (CONT’D)
    You don’t need to bring the bear.

    DESIREE
    It was your first gift to me.

Ryker holds her close.

INT. HALLWAY

Stalking the hall, another man with a machine gun. Avoiding his glance, Ryker and Desiree take to the stairs.

INT. PARKING GARAGE

The Masarati and no one around. A fast exit but a tail. Latinos in a Chevy low rider give chase. Weaving through Santa Monica traffic, the Masarati easily outruns the Chevy.

EXT. I-10 EAST - DAY

Ryker pulls over and looks at the woman beside him.

    RYKER
    Before I get involved, you’d better come clean.

    DESIREE
    I need to get away from them.

    RYKER
    Who?

    DESIREE
    The cartel. I can’t get away. You’ve got to help me.

    RYKER
    Who’s Menage?
DESIREE
If I can get to him I can explain.
He’ll let me go.

RYKER
So where is this Menage?

DESIREE
Las Vegas. You’ve got to take me to Las Vegas.

RYKER
I’ll drive you, but after that, you’re on your own.

Top down, wind in their hair, a stuffed teddy bear between them, the couple merge into traffic and roll east.

INT. PACIFIC PLAZA - DAY

Cameras and nitrile gloves, a CSI team goes over the apartment.

DETECTIVE TRUEBLOOD (50) rumpled suit and loose tie CHATS with LIEUTENANT HAYNES (28), jeans, hoodie and sneakers. The CORONER (58), white lab coat examines the body.

CORONER
Neat and clean.

TRUEBLOOD
Apartment belongs a young woman.
Could she have done it?

CORONER
Wouldn’t take much force.

TRUEBLOOD
(to Haynes)
Got a make on the vic?

HAYNES
Bogus Nevada ID. Probably Columbian. Wouldn’t waste any time on this trash.

TRUEBLOOD
How about the girl?

HAYNES
Desiree Amistad. Rising young starlet. Lives high on her uncle’s money.
TRUEBLOOD
Her uncle?

HAYNES
Mexican cartel.

TRUEBLOOD
That explains it.

Haynes gives out with a laugh.

TRUEBLOOD (CONT’D)
Doorman said Ryker Hemingway spent the night here.

HAYNES
The writer?

TRUEBLOOD
Hope he knows what he’s getting mixed up in.

HAYNES
Damn! That’s one for the Hollywood Reporter.

EXT. THE STRIP - DAY

Luxor, Monte-Carlo, the Eiffel Tower.

TITLE: LAS VEGAS

Ryker’s Masarati arrives under the portico of Bellagio as fountains erupt.

I/E. BELLAGIO SUITE

Windows all around a magnificent penthouse. Ryker tips the bellhop while Desiree flings herself on a big plush sofa and GIGGLES. She props the stuffed bear up in a corner.

RYKER
O.K. Now what?

DESIREE
A girl’s got to freshen up.

With a flourish, Desiree takes a little bow, blows Ryker a kiss and disappears out the door.

Ryker finds a desk and sets up his little Remington typewriter. Spreading papers around, he starts to work.
Almost as an afterthought, he hides his gun in a small table drawer.

SERIES OF SHOTS - DESIREE FRESHENS UP

A) She gets a full body massage at the spa.
B) Her hair and nails done at the salon.
C) She shops for an evening dress,
D) shoes, and
E) jewelry at fashion boutiques.

INT. BELLAGIO SUITE - NIGHT

Ryker deep into his story types busily. Desiree quietly walks up behind him and massages his shoulders.

RYKER
Mmmm. That feels good.

Ryker turns and admires the stunning beauty before him.

INT. THE BANK NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A traditional swing band finishes a set at the posh nightclub. An exhausted and sweating Ryker and Desiree collapse into a plush booth, their evening clothes disheveled.

DESIREE
Never thought a man like you would be into swing.

RYKER
A girl like you? A dance your grandparents did?

DESIREE
There’s a lot we don’t know about each other.

RYKER
Like where you learned to kill people?

DESIREE
Ouch. That’s low.
RYKER

Well?

Desiree becomes serious.

DESIREE

My parents were killed. I was raised by my uncle.

RYKER

The drug cartel kingpin.

DESIREE

He’s a kind and wonderful man.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. LONELY ROAD - NIGHT

Desirees FATHER (30) and MOTHER (28) drive a Citroen through fog. Little Desiree plays in the back. They approach facing headlights and stop.

A FAT MAN and a TALL MAN approach.

FAT MAN

Do you have it?

FATHER

Do you have the money?

Tall man pulls out a gun and aims it at Father.

TALL MAN

Get out of the car.

Father complies.

Fat man shoots Father in the back of the head. Mother SCREAMS.

Tall man shoots Mother.

Tall man reaches in back for a suitcase. He opens it to find wrapped packages of drugs.

Desiree gets out and runs. Fat man grabs her and prepares to shoot the little girl.

TALL MAN (CONT’D)

You can’t kill a kid.
Tall man whacks little Desiree over the head with his gun. She falls unconscious.

BACK TO PRESENT

DESIREE
Sometimes I can still see my parents die.

Ryker cradles Desiree’s head on his shoulder.

INT. BELLAGIO SUITE - NIGHT

Exhausted, Ryker and Desiree cling to each other and enjoy a long passionate kiss.

A sap across the back of Ryker’s head.

INT. BELLAGIO SUITE - LATER

Ryker lies on the floor bound and gagged while Desiree TALKS EARNESTLY with a nasty SCAR FACE and a tall skinny TATTOOED MAN.

Ryker quietly works free and makes a dive for his gun in the table drawer.

SCAR FACE
turns and draws his gun.

BANG!

A bullet shatters a lamp.

BANG! BANG!

Ryker’s Army .45 replies.

With a surprised look, Scar Face drops to his knees and falls face down.

TATTOO
screws a gun into Ryker’s back.

TATTOO
Drop it!

Ryker complies and stands with hands raised.
Desiree puts her arm around Tattoo. He smiles as she gives him a gentle squeeze.

TATTOO’s

face turns into a death mask as her little silver cross severs his spinal cord. He hits the floor with a THUD.

DESIREE

You shouldn’t have done that.

Ryker looks incredulous.

RYKER

What did you expect me to do?

DESIREE

Now there’s no way to make a deal.

RYKER

I’m going to call the police.

DESIREE

I’ll go to jail.

RYKER

You never said...

DESIREE

Help me. Please?

EXT. DESERT - MORNING

Ryker’s Maserati raises a ribbon of dust along an endless dirt road.

EXT. CLIFF

High above Lake Mead, road’s end. A trail leads down to a cluster of trees. Ryker and Desiree embrace in the first RAYS of dawn.

RYKER

Remember what I told you, you’ll find friends.

DESIREE

I’ll miss you.

RYKER

Good luck.
Desiree turns and stumbles down a steep trail toward the lake, clutching her little stuffed teddy bear. Still in her evening dress, she takes off high heels and goes barefoot. Ryker begins to drive away.

Suddenly Ryker jams his foot on the gas and spins the car around. He slides to a stop dangerously close to the cliff. Salvaging a small bag and his Remington portable typewriter, he releases the brake and pushes the Masarati over the edge. With a SPLASH the car sinks in deep water.

EXT. LAKE SHORE - DAY

Hidden in a sheltered cove, a high powered JET BOAT. The couple push off just as three BLACK SUVs appear on the rim above. MEN with guns pile out.

EXT. CLIFF

MENAGE (30), short, pasty white skin, dressed entirely in black, slowly walks to the edge. Taking off thick sunglasses, he blinks in the glare.

Below the jet boat roars away.

Menage reaches out and a MAN hands him a rifle. Taking careful aim, he FIRES.

EXT. JET BOAT

Desiree SCREAMS and falls. Ryker kills the engine and goes to her aid. Bullets slam all around them. Ryker, back on the throttle, they’re soon out of range.

EXT. JET BOAT - LATER

Desiree lies bleeding. Ryker tears up his shirt to make a compression bandage for her shoulder.

    DESIREE
    I’m sorry.

    RYKER
    You’ll be O.K., I’ve seen far worse.

    DESIREE
    Promise?
With a SIGH, Desiree’s body goes limp. Ryker checks her pulse then lays her tenderly on a rolled up boat cover. At full throttle, the jet boat heads up river.

EXT. GRAND CANYON - DAY

Cliffs grow higher and rapids swifter. Fighting white water, Ryker drives the jet boat deeper into the canyon. Water over the bow as the boat pounds through monster waves.

Desiree GROANS and twists with pain.

Finally, the river smooths out. Around a bend, smoke from a campfire.

EXT. INDIAN RESERVATION - EVENING

A circle of teepees form a staged Indian village. BRAVES in buckskins and war paint clean up and change into jeans and western shirts. The ROAR of an approaching JET BOAT brings them to water’s edge.

Ryker carries Desiree’s limp body into the group. SAHALE (28), buckskins and war paint steps forward.

SAHALE
Ryker! You got my boat all shot up. What kind of trouble are you in?

RYKER
Get a med kit! This woman needs help now!

SAHALE
Bring her over to the first aid tent.

INT. FIRST AID TENT

Lights and an examining table in an ordinary-looking teepee.

RYKER
When did you get all this?

SAHALE
Tourists come down here. They get hurt. Set this up last year.

RYKER
Got an I.V.? Something for pain?
Ryker gently spreads Desiree on the table.

SAHALE
Sure thing, but she doesn’t look good. Better call a helicopter.

RYKER
Can’t do that.

SAHALE
Oh, I see.

RYKER
I trust all the tourists are out of here?

SAHALE
I’ll make sure this stays a secret.

Desiree MOANS and opens her eyes.

DESIREE
Ryker?

Ryker holds her hand and gently caresses her face.

RYKER
This is Ed Curtis, one of the best medics in Afghanistan.

SAHALE
Ryker likes to tell stories. In the Rangers, we were all cross-trained.

Sahale snips away temporary bandages and swabs Desiree’s wound. She winces in pain.

EXT. CAMPFIRE – NIGHT

MEN head up a trail to the rim. A few stay and build a campfire.

SAHALE
She’s got real problems, Ryker. Temp’s over one-oh-five.

RYKER
Antibiotics?

SAHALE
Mind if I let Choovid have a look?
RYKER
The Shaman? A witch doctor?

SAHALE
Don’t knock it. He’s the product of a thousand years of native medicine.

Sahale gestures to the canyon.

SAHALE (CONT’D)
Herbs and things out there that have yet to be discovered. We’ve been using them for generations.

INT. FIRST AID TENT

CHOOVID (80s) is the genuine article. Stooped and wizened, barely five feet tall, he leans heavily on a rams-head staff.

Shaking a RATTLE over the unconscious Desiree, he MUTTERS incantations.

Face ashen, breathing shallow, Desiree’s condition looks grave. Sahale checks her pulse and lifts an eyelid. He shakes his head.

SAHALE
She’ll be dead by morning.

RYKER
Call the helicopter.

SAHALE
Too late for that. Can’t fly in here at night.

EXT. CAMFIRE

Braves pile wood on a ROARING fire as sparks soar into the night. Drums POUND out a chaotic rhythm. VOICES blend in a hypnotic chant.

Desiree lies on a raised platform in squaw’s buckskins. Choovid works busily with strange gourds. A boiling cauldron hangs over the fire.

SILENCE
Choovid approaches Desiree with a steaming gourd. Four men hold her arms and legs. The Shaman lifts her head and pours a dark liquid down her throat.

Wracked with convulsions, Desiree twists and turns. Her back arches as men restrain her writhing body. With a loud MOAN she settles back, her body limp.

Ryker leaps to his feet and rushes forward. He checks Desiree’s pulse, first her wrist then her neck.

Sahale shakes his head.

Ryker picks up Desiree’s limp body and holds her close.

SAHALE
There’s nothing you can do for her now.

RYKER
I’ll have to bring the police into this.

SAHALE
I understand. Now get some rest.

Ryker carries Desiree’s limp body into a teepee.

FADE OUT.

EXT. INDIAN RESERVATION – MORNING

Dawn reflects a thousand colors across the canyon. Embers of a campfire smolder in a circle of teepees.

INT. TEEPEE

Ryker stirs. Desiree lies next to him under a shroud, her face covered. Only a small hand visible.

A finger moves. Ryker’s attention focuses. Her hand moves. Ryker springs into action. The shroud comes off. She’s breathing.

RYKER
Desiree!

Her eyes open.

DESIREE
I’m cold.
Joyfully, Ryker presses Desiree’s body against his. She winces with pain.

RYKER
Sahale! Give me a hand!

Sahale examines Desiree as she shivers gently under a buffalo-skin blanket.

SAHALE
Looks like Choovid actually pulled one off.

RYKER
What?

SAHALE
Yea, he killed the last three.

Both men explode in gales of laughter. Desiree sleeps peacefully.

EXT. INDIAN RESERVATION

Under a brilliant morning sun, Ryker and Sahale stroll toward the river.

SAHALE
You’re full of surprises.

RYKER
She needed my help.

SAHALE
Never did say how you got shot at.

RYKER
No, I didn’t.

SAHALE
So, what do you want?

RYKER
I need to stay out of sight for a while. Can we bunk in the cliffs?

SAHALE
Old Chief Adoeete will want to know you’re here.

RYKER
Let’s keep it our secret for now.
EXT. JET BOAT

Sahale inspects bullet holes while Ryker retrieves his typewriter. He picks up Desiree’s little teddy bear and gives it a hug.

SAHALE
AK-47, full auto. You keep dangerous company.

In camp, Indians change into native costume and smear on war paint. A line of MULES carrying a mixed bag of TOURISTS winds down the dusty hill.

EXT. CLIFF DWELINGS - DAY

Along canyon walls, steep trails and ladders link hundreds of crude stone dwellings.

Hefting backpacks, Ryker and Sahale climb to a deep cave. Sahale throws back a black curtain.

INT. CLIFF DWELINGS

Ryker looks around at a comfortable apartment.

RYKER
You’ve made some improvements.

SAHALE
You like it?

RYKER
Looks like stuff from your old camper.

SAHALE
I spend a lot of time down here.

RYKER
What happened to Charlotte?

SAHALE
That’s a long story.

INT. CLIFF DWELINGS - LATER

Ryker sits in a window overlooking the canyon. He works busily on his little Remington portable typewriter.
Desiree’s stuffed bear occupies a prominent perch amid the small apartment.

Sahale climbs into view with a backpack full of supplies. A smiling Desiree greets him.

SAHALE
Looking good, Desiree.

RYKER
She’s getting stronger every day.

SAHALE
Let’s see.

With a giggle, Desiree holds her arms in the air and does a dancer’s pirouette.

Sahale examines her scar.

SAHALE (CONT’D)
Surprisingly little damage, considering.

RYKER
Considering she nearly died.

SAHALE
What are you writing?

RYKER
It’s my new novel, “A Girl and a Gun.”

SAHALE
Sounds evocative.

RYKER
It ends badly.

SAHALE
I understand you were sending Desiree up river by herself.

DESIREE
Yea. Why did you come with me? You could be back in Hollywood.

RYKER
You would never have made it alone.

DESIREE
Does that mean you care?
SAHALE
You really think she could handle my boat?

DESIREE
Damn straight!

EXT. JET BOAT - DAY

Wearing a brief bikini, Desiree expertly steers the boat up river. Ryker and Sahale watch with admiration as she backs off around a snag, then drives full power into the current.

RYKER
Where’d you learn to handle a boat like that?

DESIREE
My uncle has some fast boats. I learned to drive when I was ten.

SAHALE
Your uncle?

RYKER
Don’t ask.

SAHALE
(to Ryker)
You’ve got quite a woman there.

RYKER
I know.

EXT. QUIET COVE - DAY

Shady cottonwood trees and a sandy beach. A checkered tablecloth and a picnic lunch. Ryker, Sahale and Desiree share a case of long-necks cooled in the rushing stream.

Ryker’s eyes wander over Desiree’s reclining body as she naps lightly. He smiles.

RYKER
(to Sahale)
A man could get used to this.

SAHALE
Thought you were into the big Hollywood thing.
RYKER
Phonies and leaches.

SAHALE
Where do you call home.

RYKER
Never had one.

SAHALE
Rangers were like family.

RYKER
Bunch of killers on the loose.

SAHALE
What about Juliet?

RYKER
I’ve spent ten months with her in ten years.

Sahale nods at Ryker’s gun.

SAHALE
Where’d you get the Army .45?

RYKER
Took it off a dead Cholo.

SAHALE
Kill him?

RYKER
She did.

Ryker nods in Desiree’s direction.

SAHALE
And you sleep with her?

RYKER
It’s complicated.

Desiree stirs.

DESIREE
You guys talking about me?

SAHALE
Just telling Ryker how lucky he is to have you.
DESIREE
Who says he has me?

Sahale shifts uncomfortably.

SAHALE
(to Ryker)
Adoeeeet wants to see you.

RYKER
So the old chief knows I’m here?

SAHALE
Nothing escapes him for long.

RYKER
Let’s hike up to the rim tomorrow. I could use a change of scenery.

DESIREE
I’m desperateley in need of a facial.

RYKER
You want to get killed? No way.

SAHALE
Sorry, the nearest beauty salon is a hundred miles.

Desiree puts on a mocking pout. Ryker pulls her close.

EXT. CANYON RIM - DAY

Sweating after a long, dusty climb, Ryker and Sahale pause at a spectacular rim overlook. TOURISTS crowd railings, gawking and snapping pictures. Behind them, a panorama of the Grand Canyon. Far below, cliff dwellings and the Indian camp.

SAHALE
You’re getting old, Ryker.

RYKER
Beats the alternative.

The two men take off down two-lane blacktop at a fast jog.

SAHALE
Two old ladies lyin in bed.

RYKER
One turned over to the other and said.
SAHALE
I wanna be an Airborne Ranger.

RYKER
Live a life of sex and danger.

SAHALE
Blood, guts, sex and danger.

RYKER
That’s the life of an Airborne Ranger!

SAHALE
Remember that night in Kandahar?

RYKER
Pitch black, knife fights in the pouring rain.

SAHALE
Something like sixty kills?

RYKER
Gets hairier every time you tell it.

Breathless the men find civilization.

EXT. RESERVATION HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Cinder-block buildings dating from the last war painted drab brown. A school, a clinic, an administrative building and a general store. Surrounding them, a vast asphalt parking lot, long in need of repair.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Around the entrance, TOURISTS fondle Indian rugs, beads and trinkets.

INT. GENERAL STORE

Behind the snack bar, TAKODA (33), pony tail, buckskin shirt and jeans smears mustard on a hot dog for a snotty-nosed KID.

TAKODA
Ryker, long time. What brings you?

RYKER
Thought I might join the tribe.
TAKODA
You? A big Hollywood star?

Takoda thinks for a minute.

TAKODA (CONT’D)
Oh.

Gives out with a delayed laugh.

Toward the back, dusty shelves filled with groceries and hardware.

Through a bead curtain, a soulful bar.

INT. BAR

A river rock fireplace and varnished pine bar. Indian artifacts dangle from rafters.

NASCHA(28), buckskins and braids stands cleaning glasses. Leaning on the bar Hakan (40), sharkskin suit and tie nurses a beer.

NASCHA
Ryker!

Rushing around the bar, she puts her arm around Ryker and gives him a kiss.

HAKAN
I hear you had some trouble down river.

RYKER
Where did you hear that?

HAKAN
Vegas. Word about some drug deal.

NASCHA
Ryker?

HAKAN
No, his girlfriend, Desiree.

Ryker grabs Harkan by the neck and slams him against a wall.

RYKER
What do you know about Desiree?

HAKAN
Everyone’s looking for her.
Ryker draws his .45, holds it under Hakan’s chin.

RYKER
What did you tell them?

Ryker cocks the hammer.

HAKAN
Everybody knows she’s here. Down in the cliffs.

RYKER
And you told...

Ryker’s finger tightens on the trigger.

Through a side door, Chief Adoeete (81), streaming shoulder length white hair and piercing blue eyes.

ADOEETE
Put him down.

Ryker complies and Harkan hustles out a back door.

ADOEETE (CONT’D)
Don’t know how you got involved with that woman but she’s trouble.

RYKER
She’s a fragile innocent girl.

ADOEETE
Some powerful people want her dead.

EXT. CLIFF DWELLINGS - DAY

A patch of sun on a sheltered ledge. Desiree, brief bikini, spreads a blanket and luxuriates in the afternoon warmth.

EXT. CANYON RIM

With a CRUNCH of gravel, a black SUV rolls to a stop. Dark sunglasses and a black briefcase, a sinister MAFIOSI dismounts. A short dusty trail to a commanding viewpoint. From the case, powerful binoculars.

MAFIOSI’S BINOCULAR POV

Desiree rubs on lotion, takes a deep breath, then settles back, eyes closed.
BACK TO SCENE

From the case, a deadly sniper rifle. Resting the weapon on the canyon rim, he concentrates on cliff dwellings far below.

MAFIOSI’S RIFLE POV

Cross-hairs on the beautiful woman’s chest. He watches her slow, steady breathing.

MAFIOSI
(to himself)
What a waste.

BACK TO SCENE

A FINGER slowly tightens on the trigger.

The distinctive DOUBLE CLICK of an Army .45 hammer. Ryker’s weapon inches from the Mafiosi’s head.

RYKER
Slowly.

The Mafiosi sets down his rifle and raises his hands.

A car on the road distracts Ryker.

In a flash, the Mafiosi delivers a kung-fu style kick. Ryker’s gun goes flying. The fight is on.

Wild spinning kicks delivered next to a thousand foot drop. Ryker slips and goes over the side, hanging on by fingers.

The BUZZ of a rattlesnake. The Mafiosi jumps away, loses his footing and goes over the side.

Ryker is left, hanging on, staring at the snake. After a long standoff, the snake slithers away.

EXT. CANYON RIM - NIGHT

Red and blue lights pierce the night. Police and emergency vehicles clog the parking lot. A helicopter hovers overhead spotlighting the scene.

RESCUE WORKERS with ropes and harnesses lift a BODY off the steep cliff.

MARSHAL HOTCHKINS (39), starched shirt with creases and flat brimmed hat zips open a body bag. Sahale walks up.
SAHALE
Marshal, what brings you to the reservation?

HOTCHKINS
Just cleaning up your garbage.

SAHALE
Some tourist fall over?

HOTCHKINS
Bad dude. Columbian. Seen any suspicious activity?

SAHALE
Been down at the river.

HOTCHKINS
This guy didn’t come here for the view. Something’s going on.

Hotchkins gives Sahale a piercing look then walks off shaking his head. A flatbed hauls away the black SUV.

INT. GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

Ryker, and Sahale sit at a table with Chief Adoeete. Nascha brings another round of beer.

SAHALE
Marshal Hotchkins was there.

Ryker chuckles.

RYKER
Still got his underwear in a twist?

SAHALE
He’s suspicious.

RYKER
He’s always suspicious.

ADOEETE
He’ll be back. This time he’ll really look around.

RYKER
I understand.
EXT. GENERAL STORE - MORNING

First tourists of the day arrive in their shiny SUVs. Hyperactive kids vie for slurpees while their parents inspect postcards and souvenirs.

Ryker and Desiree load luggage into Sahale’s 65 Chevrolet pickup.

    RYKER
    I owe you one.

    SAHALE
    I hope you find what you’re looking for.

    RYKER
    I have friends in Colorado.

    SAHALE
    Good luck to both of you.

    RYKER
    I’ll see that you get your truck back.

    SAHALE
    Don’t worry about that.

Sahale waves as the truck moves out down the road.

EXT. LAKE SHORE - DAY

At the end of a long tow cable, Ryker’s Maserati emerges from Lake Mead.

“BILLY” ARMSTRONG (29), Stetson, snakeskin boots and silver belt buckle watches with LAPD detective Trueblood.

    ARMSTRONG
    Looks like your boy got mixed up with some bad company out here.

    TRUEBLOOD
    Bodies?

    ARMSTRONG
    We’ll find em. Trash grates down on Hoover Dam.

Detective Trueblood picks up a shell-casing with the end of a bic pen.
TRUEBLOOD
Quite a shoot-out.

ARMSTRONG
These new boys like to burn ammo.
Probably lined your couple up over there and machine-gunned em.

Armstrong points to a cliff overlooking the lake.

TRUEBLOOD
Any idea who did it?

ARMSTRONG
Bodies back at the Bellagio were Columbian cartel. No class. Not like the old Mafia.

TRUEBLOOD
Motive?

ARMSTRONG
The girl was Mexican cartel. That’s motive enough. Hollywood dude was just chasing skirt.

TRUEBLOOD
Hemingway widow wants closure. Let me know when you have bodies.

Trueblood drives away in a rental Chevy while TOW OPERATOR loads the Maserati on a flatbed.

INT. LAPD HOLLYWOOD DIVISION - DAY

Detective Trueblood chats with Lieutenant Haynes over a cluttered desk. UNIFORMED OFFICERS mill around.

TRUEBLOOD
I don’t buy it. Until I see a body...

HAYNES
You’re just fascinated by the girl.

TRUEBLOOD
She did it again in Vegas. Took out an armed thug. Died with a smile on his face.

HAYNES
How do you know she did it. Could have been Ryker.
TRUEBLOOD
A man can't get that close.

Trueblood starts to put his arm around Haynes who pulls away uncomfortably.

HAYNES
I see what you mean.

Trueblood tosses a publicity photo of Desiree on the desk.

HAYNES (CONT’D)
Beautiful woman.

TRUEBLOOD
Get photos around to agencies in the Southwest. We’ll see what turns up.

Trueblood fondles the picture of Desiree.

EXT. OPEN ROAD - DAY

Two-lane blacktop and trackless desert. In the distance, snow-capped mountains. Desiree sits close with her arm around Ryker, a fuzzy bear on her lap. A familiar song PLAYS on the radio as the two travel on in the old Chevrolet truck.

EXT. OPEN ROAD - LATER

Rocky Mountain foothills. Pine trees dot the landscape.

Beside the road, a hitchhiker. AMBER CATELIN (19), blond hair in braids, torn sweatshirt, backpack and jeans.

Desiree gives a GASP of recognition.

RYKER
You know her?

DESIREE
Just took her for someone else.

Ryker in the cab, Desiree helps Amber stash her backpack.

DESIREE (CONT’D)
(whispering)
Keep your mouth shut.

Back on the road, Amber between Ryker and Desiree. Three plus a bug fuzzy bear crowd the cab.
EXT. GAS STATION – DAY

A rusting sign swings under a dilapidated canopy. Rusting cars, hoods up, dot the scene. Ryker checks the engine while an ATTENDANT (50), scraggly beard and Farmer Johns, pumps gas.

    DESIREE
    Girls gotta freshen up.

She takes Amber by the arm and leads her around the building.

    DESIREE (CONT’D)
    You have no idea what kind of trouble you’re in.

    AMBER
    Guy said he’d pay me a lot of money.

    DESIREE
    They kill people.

    AMBER
    I’m not scared.

    DESIREE
    You’re stuck with us until I can sort this out.

A loud HONK from the truck signals time to go.

EXT. COLORADO COMMUNE – MORNING

A long winding dirt road leads to a cluster of makeshift cabins in a lush valley surrounded by snow-capped mountains. Smoke rises in the chill air as roosters welcome the dawn.

Amber sleeps in Desiree’s arms. Desiree nods awake.

Amid a bizarre conglomeration of windmills and solar panels, crunching gravel signals the arrival of the old Chevrolet truck.

Curious MEN with tools in hand and WOMEN with babes in arms emerge from makeshift structures.

HIRAM DAVIES (55), sandy beard and bushy hair, dressed in homespun wool, staff in hand, walks forward like Moses off the mountain.
HIRAM
Ryker Hemingway! Last time I saw you, you were what? Seventeen?

RYKER
Hiram! You haven’t changed a bit.

HIRAM
So what brings you and these lovely ladies? Doing another story?

RYKER
I’d like to stay for a while.

HIRAM
Know anything about solar panels?

RYKER
A little.

Hiram turns to a timber mushroom sprouting an arrangement of blue glass and SHOUTS.

HIRAM
Eugene!

EUGENE BENNETT (26), beanpole with a scraggly goatee wearing a Farmer John and no shirt emerges carrying a tangle of wires.

HIRAM (CONT’D)
Got you some help.

EUGENE
Don’t need any help.

HIRAM
Sure you do. Meet Ryker Hemingway. He’s a writer.

EUGENE
Don’t need a writer.

HIRAM
Show him your invention.

EUGENE
O.K., but don’t touch anything.

Ryker and Eugene disappear into a maize of timbers and solar panels.

Turning to Desiree and Amber.
If you don’t mind helping out, the ladies are preparing breakfast.

Hiram motions to one of the larger shacks.

INT. GREAT HALL - MORNING

Hewn timbers and pegs reminiscent of a Quaker barn. Men sit at a long table, Hiram at the head, Ryker beside him. Women serve plates of eggs, fried cornmeal mush and bowls of steaming greens.

Hiram makes an expansive gesture across the table.

HIRAM
(t to Ryker)
Here we are, completely off the grid. What we can’t grow or produce, we barter.

RYKER
No stress, no pressure.

HIRAM
Seriously, Ryker, what do you want here?

RYKER
I’d like someplace that feels like home. At least for a while.

HIRAM
If you don’t mind doing some work, you can have the old Ivy storefront.

RYKER
I remember old lady Ivy.

HIRAM
She died last year. Place is a shambles.

EXT. IVY STOREFRONT - DAY

Once a country store, now a dilapidated ruin. Ryker warily mounts a make-shift ladder to the roof while Desiree, Amber and a flock of kids watch.
A few steps and Ryker falls through in a cloud of dust. Desiree gasps. A dirt covered Ryker emerges from the front door.

EXT. IVY STOREFRONT - LATER

Desiree rolls paint on a vastly improved storefront as Ryker drives up with a truckload of building material. Hair done up in a bandanna, she’s wearing work gloves.

DESIREE
Did you bring my things?

Ryker hands Desiree a department store shopping bag.

RYKER
I had no idea cosmetics cost that kind of money.

DESIREE
That’s nothing.

Desiree escorts Ryker inside.

INT. BEDROOM

Desiree motions to a straw bed with a handmade comforter.

DESIREE
Margaret, the woman with the twins, brought it over.

Ryker reclines on the new bed.

RYKER
Not bad.

DESIREE
Not exactly the Beverly Hills.

RYKER
Life on the frontier.

DESIREE
Amber found an old sofa.

Desiree points to the next room.

DESIREE (CONT’D)
She’s going to sleep in there.
RYKER
You seem to get along.

DESIREE
She’s planting a garden.

Desiree takes Ryker’s hand and leads him out the back door.

EXT. IVY STOREFRONT
Out back, a makeshift enclosure with a skinny grey GOAT.

GOAT
Baaaaaa!

An excited Amber shovels amid strings and stakes.

AMBER
Ryker! What do you think of my garden?

RYKER
Nice.

AMBER
I’ve got beans, peas and tomatoes.

Chickens invade the garden and peck seeds. Amber, arms flailing, drives them away.

AMBER (CONT’D)
Check out Gwenevere.

Ryker looks puzzled.

AMBER (CONT’D)
The goat.

Amber picks up a bucket, runs to the goat, grabs a teat and squeezes out a few streams. She proudly hands the bucket to Ryker.

AMBER (CONT’D)
Try it.

Ryker dutifully takes a sip.

RYKER
It’s warm.

AMBER
Well, what did you expect?
Ryker grimaces. He and Desiree walk to the great hall.

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Dinner over, WOMEN clear dishes. A NOISY CROWD circulates.

Ryker sits down at an old upright piano and tests the keyboard. Hiram leans on the piano top as Ryker plays a SOFT MELODY.

HIRAM
You’ve done wonders with the store.

RYKER
Never felt more like home.

HIRAM
You had it all in Hollywood.

RYKER
I’d rather be in a muddy trench getting shot at.

HIRAM
Must have been ugly.

RYKER
You have no idea.

HIRAM
What does Desiree think?

RYKER
She’ll get used to it.

HIRAM
I don’t think so.

Ryker cranks up the TEMPO and the VOLUME. Hiram drifts away. PEOPLE gather around and start to sing along.

Familiar chords of Clapton’s “Layla” echo through the great hall and everyone joins in with the lyrics. The piano plays louder and louder until Ryker POUNDS, sweating, into the crescendo.

Song over, he abruptly stands and marches out into the darkness. Desiree follows.
INT. IVY STOREFRONT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ryker twist and turns in his sleep, beads of sweat on his forehead. Desiree watches, alarmed. A deep GROAN and she puts her fingers to his lips.

DESIREE
Shhh. Shhh. Shhh.

Ryker’s eyes open.

DESIREE (CONT’D)
It’s only a dream.

RYKER
They didn’t deserve to die.

Desiree straddles Ryker and massages his chest and shoulders.

INT. IVY STOREFRONT

Reclined on a sofa near the door, a wide-awake Amber stares at the ceiling.

INT. IVY STOREFRONT BEDROOM - MORNING

Roosters CROW outside. Alone in the house, Amber rifles through Desiree’s clothing. Choosing a red, hand knit wool poncho, she models it in front of a mirror.

Desiree enters.

DESIREE
That’s mine.

AMBER
It’s so beautiful.

DESIREE
Take it off.

AMBER
Can’t I just wear it?

Desiree grabs Amber’s arm.

AMBER (CONT’D)
All right.

Amber pulls off the poncho, drops it to the floor and stalks out.
I/E. IVY STOREFRONT - LATER

With his little Remington typewriter set up on a makeshift desk near the front window, Ryker works diligently.

Outside, a NOISY group of CHILDREN chase chickens in the dirt road.

Curled up on a dilapidated sofa, Desiree reads a well-worn copy of "A World Apart."

DESIREE
Did you love her?

RYKER
Who?

DESIREE
Khatira, the girl in your book.

RYKER
We were never an item if that’s what you mean.

DESIREE
Why did you help her?

RYKER
Afghan women are victims of an oppressive society.

DESIREE
Why this one?

RYKER
I helped her break away.

DESIREE
And they killed her.

Ryker rips a page out of his typewriter, crumples it and throws it across the room. He stalks out the front door.

EXT. IVY STOREFRONT

Desiree catches up.

DESIREE
I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it.

Ryker ignores Desiree and keeps walking.
DESIREE (CONT’D)
I love you, Ryker. Do you love me?

Ryker turns suddenly and faces the woman.

RYKER
Of course I love you. What do you think we’re doing here?

DESIREE
No, I mean do you really love me or am I just another girl you’re trying to save?

Dejected, Desiree stands in the middle of the road while Ryker strides alone to the great hall.

INT. GREAT HALL – DAY

Ryker fetches a beer from the fridge and sits by the fire. Hiram strolls up.

HIRAM
Two women under one roof. You should know better.

RYKER
They have something going on.

HIRAM
Amber’s growing pot.

RYKER
Where?

HIRAM
Check her garden.

Ryker shifts uncomfortably.

RYKER
Solar panels are working.

HIRAM
Eugene admits you’re a big help.

Hiram leans back and looks at the ceiling.

HIRAM (CONT’D)
You know she’s not happy here.

Ryker stands and walks to a window.
I/E. COMMUNE

A longing look.

Outside, a busy domestic scene. Smoke from chimneys, laughing children playing, women hanging laundry.

EXT. COMMUNE

Ryker walks slowly to his truck and drives away. Desiree watches wistfully from the old store.

I/E. AMBER’S SHED - NIGHT

A CRUNCH of gravel signals the arrival of Ryker’s truck.

Behind the storefront, a sturdy garden shed. Gwenevere the goat reclines on a bed of straw chewing her cud.

Amber struggles with a heavy bale of hay as Ryker walks up.

    RYKER
    Can I help?

Amber smiles.

Together the two break up the bale and spread it on the floor. GIGGLING, Amber rolls around on the soft fragrant hay. Skirt hiked up around her waist, Amber grabs Ryker’s arms and pulls him in.

Desiree appears.

    DESIREE
    I want you out of here.

A startled couple separate.

    AMBER
    We weren’t doing anything.

    DESIREE
    From now on you can sleep over at the Smiths.

    RYKER
    It’s not her fault.

Desiree stalks away around the house.
EXT. COMMUNE - MORNING

Bright and clear, smoke rises from a dozen chimneys.

In the distance, the RUMBLE of Harley Davidsons. Ryker looks around. WOMEN snatch CHILDREN and drag them inside to safety. MEN appear with guns.

Rykerfetches his Army .45 and tucks it in his belt out of sight.

EXT. GREAT HALL

Hiram stands cradling a double-barrel shotgun. At least 50 motorcycles appear with a THUNDERING ROAR.

In the lead, CARLOS STRABLER (26), sleeveless jacket, tattoos and long streaming hair.

    CARLOS
    Hiram, you don’t need the gun.
    We’re not here to hurt anyone.

    HIRAM
    What do you want?

    CARLOS
    Just what’s mine. You have my girl.

    HIRAM
    Who would that be?

Amber cowers next to Ryker.

With a flash of recognition, Desiree turns and watches from the shadows.

    CARLOS
    Right over there.

He points to Amber.

    HIRAM
    She’s with us now.

Carlos motions and guns come out of saddlebags. MEN take cover. Ryker draws his .45 and aims at Carlos.

    AMBER
    (whispers to Ryker)
    It’s O.K., Carlos won’t hurt me.
RYKER
I’ll give you the girl but you’ve got to leave in peace.

CARLOS
Agreed.

Nervous MEN point guns in all directions, twitchy fingers on triggers.

Everyone watches the little blonde girl as she fetches her backpack and climbs onto Carlos’ bike. With a ROAR bikers disappear down the road.

Emerging from the shadows, Desiree puts her arms around Ryker’s waist.

RYKER
You know them, don’t you.

Desiree looks surprised.

RYKER (CONT’D)
I saw your face.

DESIREE
Some of them work for my uncle.

RYKER
You’ve got to help me get Amber back. We’ll leave this afternoon.

Desiree slips away while Ryker CHATS with Hiram.

EXT. IVY STOREFRONT

Desiree emerges with the stuffed teddy bear. A TEENAGE GIRL watches. Desiree hands her the bear.

DESIREE
Here, take care of this, I’m done with him.

EXT. OPEN ROAD – DAY

A silent and sullen Ryker and Desiree sit apart in the Chevy pickup as miles grind by.
EXT. BIKER CAMP - EVENING

A rocky canyon surrounded by soaring mountains. Sunset casts brilliant colors across the landscape.

From a rock ledge, Ryker watches with binoculars as Harley Davidsons arrive and depart. Desiree waits in the truck.

EXT. BIKER CAMP - NIGHT

A PULSATING BEAT echoes over the ROAR of engines. Sparks from blazing campfires rise into darkness.

Ryker’s Chevy pickup approaches silently, lights out. Ryker and Desiree dismount near a cluster of tents.

INT. BIKER TENT

Amber lies unconscious on an old sleeping bag. Ryker lifts her head and gently slaps her cheeks.

   RYKER
   (whispering)
   Amber, it’s me, Ryker.

   DESIREE
   I’m going to look around.

Desiree slips out into the darkness.

EXT. BIKER CAMP

Keeping to the shadows, Desiree works her way toward one of the bonfires. From behind, a knife to her throat.

   CARLOS
   Welcome back princess.

Knife still at her throat, Carlos pulls Desiree close and gives her a long passionate kiss. She doesn’t resist.

   DESIREE
   You have the backpack?

   CARLOS
   I’ll give you the honor of delivering it.

From a tent, Carlos produces Amber’s pack. He unzips a secret flap in the bottom to reveal a huge stack of money.
DESEREE
Is it all there?

Carlos smiles and hands the pack to Desiree.

DESEREE (CONT’D)
Tracking device?

Carlos demonstrates a small beeping package with a red flashing light.

CARLOS
In case you get into trouble.

DESEREE
That’s reassuring.

CARLOS
You know the drop.

Shouldering the pack, Desiree rejoins Ryker. She helps a drugged and incoherent Amber to the truck.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

A sprawling collection of roadside services. Dozens of big rigs idle in the night. Lights from an all-night diner beckon as the Chevy pickup pulls in.

INT. DINER

A Formica and Naugahyde booth. A concerned WAITRESS hovers.

With his arm around Amber, supporting her head, Ryker helps the young girl drink a big mug of black coffee. Slowly she comes around.

AMBER
Ryker?

DESEREE
If you’ll excuse me, I need to freshen up.

Ryker nods but doesn’t look up as Desiree disappears out the door.
EXT. TRUCK STOP

Desiree retrieves Amber’s backpack from the old Chevy. She removes the tracking device and slips it in the pocket of her red poncho. She carefully places the poncho on the seat.

EXT. PARKING AREA

Lights glow around a long row of idling big rigs. A DRIVER checks the brakes on a Transportes Aztech eighteen wheeler.

DESIREE
Heading south?

DRIVER
El Paso.

Desiree tosses her backpack up into the cab and climbs in after it. With a huge cloud of black diesel smoke, the rig pulls out.

INT. MOTEL ROOM

Ryker tucks Amber into bed and gives her a kiss on the forehead. He carefully covers her with the red poncho.

RYKER
Sleep well, I’ll see you in the morning.

She smiles as he turns out the light.

INT. DINER

The waitress chats with TRUCKERS at the counter as Ryker looks around.

WAITRESS
Can I help you?

RYKER
Desiree, the tall blonde woman, where did she go?

WAITRESS
She left.

TRUCKER
Saw her out with the trucks. Think she left on one.
Ryker grabs the trucker and pulls him by the jacket.

RYKER
Which truck?

TRUCKER
Easy, buddy.

Two other truckers get up and move toward Ryker.

RYKER
Sorry, I’m a bit edgy.

Ryker eases off.

TRUCKER
I think it was a Mexican truck. Going south.

RYKER
What kind? What color?

TRUCKER
Don’t know. It was dark.

RYKER
Thanks anyway.

Ryker hurries out the door.

EXT. OPEN ROAD - NIGHT

Blinding headlights. A stream of trucks, most with Mexican logos. Ryker drives on in the darkness.

EXT. TRUCK STOP

Parked trucks, a circle of DRIVERS stand TALKING. An agitated Ryker hurries up.

RYKER
A tall blonde woman, traveling south, truck with a Mexican logo?

The men shake their heads in unison. Ryker hurries on to a diner.

EXT. OPEN ROAD - DAWN

Wearing Desiree’s red poncho, Amber hitchhikes alone on a desolate highway. In the distance, a black SUV.
I/E. BLACK SUV

Menage holds a small tracking device. BEEPS and a FLASHING red light.

MENAGE
That’s it.

He points to the young girl next to the road.

The black SUV screeches to a halt.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY

Amber makes a wild desperate run across the desert.

Three MEN get out. Menage takes off dark sunglasses and squints into the morning glare. He reaches out and a man hands him a rifle.

MENAGE’S RIFLE POV:
Cross-hairs on Amber’s back. Menage watches her run then slowly squeezes the trigger.

BLAM!

EXT. OPEN ROAD - LATER

Ryker drives, shielding his eyes from the sun. Out on the desert -- a patch of red.

The Chevy pickup screeches to a halt. Ryker leaps out and runs for the object.

RYKER
Desiree!

It’s Amber, face down in the desert. Ryker gently rolls her limp body over and checks her pulse. She’s dead.

RYKER (CONT’D)
You deserved better than this.

Ryker covers Amber’s face and stands, head bowed, in the morning sun.

FADE TO:
EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

A Transportes Aztech eighteen wheeler wends its way through the commercial district.

TITLE: EL PASO, TEXAS

At a traffic light, Desiree climbs down.

    DESIREE
    (to the driver)
    Thanks for the ride.

Shouldering her backpack, Desiree hurries away down a side street.

INT. BUS STATION

A long row of lockers. Desiree slides her backpack into one and takes the key.

INT. POST OFFICE

Desiree addresses an envelope, drops in the bus locker key and posts it.

EXT. CITY STREET

Desiree walks nervously along a row of dilapidated warehouses. She tries a door. It swings open.

INT. WAREHOUSE

Darkness. Desiree feels her way forward. A naked bulb swings, forming a circle of light.

In the shadows, two MEN lie dead clutching guns. Desiree gives out with a GASP. She turns and makes a run for the door.

Out of the shadows, a HAND grabs the running woman. A big burly LATINO pins her arms behind her and forces her into the light.

Menage steps out of the shadows. With a mocking smile, he drives his fist into Desiree’s gut. She gives out with a GROAN and drops to her knees.

    MENAGE
    Where is it?
Desiree looks up defiantly.

The Latino lifts Desiree to her feet and Menage punches her again.

Desiree’s body goes limp and the man lets her slip to the floor.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE – DAY

Graffiti and cracked plaster. Desiree lies bound and gagged on a bare mattress.

Face close to hers, Menage fondles the woman’s cheek and hair. Her eyes open.

MENAGE
Care to talk?

Desiree struggles in her bonds.

MENAGE (CONT’D)
I didn’t think so.

Menage stands and turns to the door. With another well-dressed MAFIOSI TYPE, Menage prepares to leave.

MENAGE (CONT’D)
Perhaps after lunch.

A lone GUARD, unshaven, bad teeth and tattoos grins from the corner of the room.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE – LATER

Rocking back and forth in his chair picking his teeth the guard watches Desiree squirm on the bed.

GUARD’S POV:

Desiree’s chest rises and falls with her breathing, her blouse stretched tightly over firm breasts.

BACK TO SCENE:

The guard moves next to Desiree. When he touches her she doesn’t resist. Hands explore her body. She nods her approval.

Untied, Desiree puts her arms around the big man. Her silver cross snaps open and she grips the blade.
GUARD’S POV:

A cracked mirror across the room. A knife in Desiree’s hand.

BACK TO SCENE:

The guard grabs Desiree’s arm and twists it behind her. She SCREAMS with pain.

A knee on Desiree’s shoulder pins her to the bed. The guard draws a big Bowie knife add drives it straight down toward Desiree’s chest.

BLAM!

The guard’s brains hit the ceiling in a bloody splash.

Ryker stands with a smoking .45 in his hand.

With a lunge, Desiree wraps herself around Ryker SOBBING uncontrollably.

FADE TO:

INT. MOTEL - MORNING

Shabby but clean, a 50s vintage motel room. Covers kicked on the floor, Ryker in pajama bottoms, Desiree in a man’s shirt and panties.

Ryker spends a long time studying the sleeping woman beside him. Gently he strokes her shoulder, her eyes open.

RYKER

We should get an early start for Colorado.

Desiree rolls over on top of Ryker, pressing her body against him in a sleepy embrace.

DESIREE

I’m all yours, take me anywhere.

The two settle back for a long passionate embrace.

EXT. MOTEL - DAY

Trees shroud a cracked and heaving patio. Ryker and Desiree emerge barefoot wearing shabby motel robes.
ABUELITA (70), ragged dress and a knit shawl, busily sets dishes on an outdoor table.

ABUELITA
You look better today.

On a broken recliner, Desiree rests her head in Ryker’s lap. She smiles as the old woman gently feels her forehead.

ABUELITA (CONT’D)
You should be with your family.

DESIREE
How is Hernando?

ABUELITA
So much trouble. He needs you.

DESIREE
(to Ryker)
Would you like to visit the Hacienda?

Abuelita hands Desiree a glass of fresh juice.

RYKER
I thought we were heading north.

Desiree tosses Amber’s backpack to Ryker.

DESIREE
This is what it’s all about.

Ryker unzips the pack and counts stacks of hundred dollar bills.

RYKER
There’s more than a million dollars here.

DESIREE
For the peasants of Senora.

RYKER
Drug money?

DESIREE
My uncle is old school. He believes in looking after his people.

RYKER
Give me a couple of days in Colorado then we’ll go visit the Hacienda.
DESIREE
I’ll be OK here with Abuelita.

RYKER
I’ll miss you.

Ryker walks back to the room, Abuelita brings Desiree a tray of food.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

A black SUV, lights out, rolls quietly into the parking lot. Three men holding silenced pistols move through the shadows. Glass shatters and a gloved hand reaches through to unlock the front door.

INT. KITCHEN

Abuelita busy doing dishes. Menage approaches from behind. Two muffled shots and the old woman drops to the floor. From her pocket, Menage retrieves a ring of keys.

Men fan out searching.

INT. BEDROOM

Menage quietly unlocks the door and begins to search the room. Running water and a light in the bathroom.

INT. SHOWER

Steaming water. Desiree bathes unaware.

INT. BATHROOM

Desiree’s silhouette outlined on the shower curtain.

Menage throws back the curtain. A panicked Desiree flattens on the tile wall, gives out a GASP, and attempts to cover herself. Menage levels his gun at the middle of her chest. Their eyes lock for a long moment.

Menage abruptly turns and walks out the door.

MENAGE
Nothing here. Let’s go.
INT. BEDROOM - LATER

At the center of a ransacked room, Ryker comforts a sobbing, towel wrapped Desiree.

    DESIREE
    They were here, I hid and they
didn’t find me.

FADE TO:

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - DAY

Trackless desert for countless miles. A dust cloud rises behind the little Chevy pickup on an endless dirt road.

TITLE: SENORA MEXICO

Getting closer, two more dust clouds appear. Tricked-out desert trucks with fat tires and light bars go airborne over obstacles.

EXT. DIRT ROAD

Desert trucks block the road ahead. Four MEN dismount and point automatic weapons.

    DESIREE
    Bandits.

Ryker tucks his .45 in his belt and raises his hands.

    MAN
    On your knees.

With an AK-47 pointed at Ryker’s head, a scar-face man disarms him.

A bearded man with bad teeth digs through Ryker’s wallet.

    BEARD
    Hollywood? You’re a long way from
home, gringo.

He admires Ryker’s Rolex watch.

    SCAR-FACE
    Check the truck.

    BEARD
    There’s a woman in here.
With a grip on Desiree’s arm, bearded man drags her out.

    DESIREE
    Sandro?

A surprised gunman squints at the woman.

    SANDRO
    You’re the niece.

Sandro turns to the others.

    SANDRO (CONT’D)
    Hey! This is Don Hernando’s niece!

Back on the road, Ryker and Desiree have an escort.

EXT. HACIENDA - DAY

An oasis in the desert. High walls shield olive and pomegranate trees. A gravel drive leads to a cluster of tile-roofed adobe buildings.

At the main gate, trucks pull up and join other MEN with machine-guns.

Inside, MEN in white cotton peasant garb and WOMEN in colorful skirts tend their chores. Chickens scatter as the Chevy pickup arrives.

Hernando Ramos (62), white hair and neatly trimmed goatee welcomes the pair with open arms. He offers a hearty handshake for Ryker and a long, fond embrace for Desiree.

    HERNANDO
    Welcome home, my child.

Arm around Desiree, a hand on Ryker’s back, Hernando leads the couple inside.

EXT. PATIO - EVENING

Far away, the ROAR of powerful engines and the flicker of lights as another desert truck heads out on patrol.

Soft music and dozens of glowing candles around a sumptuous table. A WOMAN in a colorful peasant dress pours wine for the trio. Spreading branches from a giant oak tree envelop the scene.

Hernando lights a cigar and offers one to Ryker.
HERNANDO
It’s all about the big corporations. Families living off the land for generations are starving.

RYKER
The money?

HERNANDO
Buy out the big ranchers. Let the people return to the land.

Desiree takes a sip of wine and looks around with a smile.

DESIREE
I love this place, that old tree.

HERNANDO
I remember when you sat in the branches.

DESIREE
One time I climbed all the way to the top.

HERNANDO
Abuelita would scold you.

Desiree hesitates.

DESIREE
Abuelita is dead.

A shocked Hernando sets down his knife and fork.

HERNANDO
How?

DESIREE
The Colombians killed her.

Hernando stands and faces an adobe wall covered with bougainvillea.

HERNANDO
Menage?

DESIREE
Probably.

Hernando straightens himself and faces the group.
HERNANDO
This has to end.

A stone-faced Hernando turns and disappears inside.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Hand in hand, Ryker and Desiree follow a trail of luminarias along a flagstone path to a small cottage behind the main house.

INT. COTTAGE

Soft glow from candles on a four post bed with a hand-made comforter. Ryker and Desiree stand for a long, tender embrace.

DESIREE
We could make this our home.

RYKER
Maybe, just for a little while.

DISSOLVE TO:

I/E. COTTAGE - DAY

At a makeshift desk by an open window, Ryker works busily on his Remington typewriter. Outside, Desiree rides up on a handsome Arabian leading another.

DESIREE
Come on, Ryker, lets go!

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Green hills and scrub oaks. Desiree and Ryker ride on until they find a cluster of trees surrounding a clear pool fed by a rushing stream.

EXT. SHADY GLADE

A hand-woven blanket. Desiree and Ryker lie close together surrounded by the remains of a picnic.

DESIREE
I came here as a little girl.
RYKER
It’s beautiful.

DESIREE
A great place for a swim.

Desiree wiggles out of tight jeans then drops her blouse, bra and panties on her way to the water.

A perfect swan dive off a fallen log and Desiree crosses the pond with a few strokes. She treads water in the middle.

DESIREE (CONT’D)
Waiting for an invitation?

Looking around nervously, Ryker doffs his clothes. Desiree GIGGLES when Ryker drops his shorts then limps over sharp stones in shallow water.

Swimming submerged, Desiree grabs Ryker’s legs and upends him. He retaliates by splashing her as she SQUEALS with delight.

EXT. SHADY GLADE - LATER

Two wet bodies lie pressed together like spoons in the warm sunshine.

EXT. PATIO - EVENING

Ryker, dressed in canvas slacks and an embroidered Guayabera shirt, enjoys brandy and a cigar with Hernando.

A YOUNG WOMAN lights candles, sets the table and prepares to serve dinner.

HERNANDO
You and Desiree seem at home here.

RYKER
I want to get back to Colorado.

HERNANDO
Why there?

RYKER
It’s as close as I’ve ever had to a family.

HERNANDO
Does Desiree play a part?
RYKER
I’d like her to.

HERNANDO
Have you told her that?

Desiree enters wearing a colorful, low-cut peasant dress.

HERNANDO (CONT’D)
Lovely.

DESIREE
Thank you.

Ryker takes her hand and the three move to the table.

EXT. TABLE
Hernando sits at the head, Ryker and Desiree opposite.

HERNANDO
How’s the book?

RYKER
Making progress.

DESIREE
He writes about experiences.

HERNANDO
Are we in it?

RYKER
My characters are all fictional.

EXT. PATIO - LATER
Candles burn low. A YOUNG MAN clears the table while the serving woman pours a last bottle of wine.

HERNANDO
Tomorrow is the first day of festival in the village. We should get an early start.

FADE TO:
EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Smoke rises from a dozen barbecue fires as Mariachi music PLAYS in the background. Food stalls under strings of banners line both sides of a dirt street leading to an old mission.

Hernando’s convoy of two desert trucks and a black SUV make their way through the CROWD. In the trucks, MEN with machine-guns stand alert.

Ragged children surround Hernando as he dispenses handfuls of coins and a big bag of candy. An old beggar woman receives several paper bills.

Jose Morelos (59), claw-hammer coat, green-white-red sash, ushers Hernando into his antique oak office.

Ryker and Desiree stroll market stalls examining colorful handicrafts.

INT. OFFICE

Oak desk and filing cabinets. Certificates on the wall.

HERNANDO
This should take care of the last ranchers.

Hernando pushes a briefcase across the table. Inside, stacks of cash.

JOSE
Finally those who work the land will enjoy the fruit of their labor.

Outside the THUNDER of Harley Davidsons echoes through the village. Hernando stands.

HERNANDO
I’ll see that my men behave.

Jose smiles.

JOSE
Bless you.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A long row of motorcycles in front of the cantina. Desiree takes Ryker’s hand.

66
DESGREE
I’d like you to meet an old friend.

CARLOS
Princess!

DESGREE
He always calls me that. We played together as kids.

CARLOS
(to Ryker)
Working with us now?

RYKER
I’ll have nothing to do with drugs or drug money.

CARLOS
It’s a tradition here. These aren’t bad people.

RYKER
It’s still wrong.

CARLOS
Lighten up. A little weed never hurt anyone.

DESGREE
Break it up, guys. Who’s going to buy me a beer?

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - LATER

In front of the cantina, dozens of empty long-necks clutter a table of dirty dishes. Mariachi music BLARES. Ryker, Desiree and Carlos lean back on wicker chairs watching folk dancers twirl in the dirt street.

CARLOS
Heading north in the morning?

RYKER
We should be getting back to Colorado.

DESGREE
I’d like to stay a while longer.
CARLOS
(to Ryker)
We’re doing a little run tomorrow. Want to come?

Ryker nods.

EXT. TRACKLESS DESERT - DAY

Leaving clouds of dust, Ryker and Carlos drive tricked-out desert buggies. Both wear communication headsets. Lights flash on dash-mounted radios.

CARLOS
(on radio)
Querida, my lady, how’s the view.

QUERIDA (O.S.)
(female voice)
Sunshine all the way.

From his cockpit, Carlos gestures for Ryker to look left.

CARLOS
(on radio)
Give us a sign, pretty girl.

A brief brilliant flash from a mountain top.

Buggies race up a dry river bed. Ahead a rusting border fence. A quick swerve, under the fence and across the border.

QUERIDA (O.S.)
Heads up, boys, clouds in the sky.

Carlos motions to Ryker. The two take a hard left as a helicopter appears in the distance. A paved road and the buggies no longer leave dust trails.

I/E. HELICOPTER

A uniformed border patrol officer scans the desert.

OFFICER
(on radio)
Thought I saw dust clouds but they disappeared.

DISPATCHER (O.S.)
Hang around a bit. They probably holed up.
INT. CULVERT

Two buggies barely fit in a corrugated steel culvert. The loud THUD of a helicopter hovering overhead.

I/E. HELICOPTER

Culvert is clearly visible directly below.

    OFFICER
    (into radio)
    Ground units available?

    DISPATCHER (O.S.)
    Maybe a half hour.

    OFFICER
    (into radio)
    Never mind, probably nothing.

Helicopter breaks off and heads away.

INT. CULVERT

Ryker and Carlos lean on their buggies.

    RYKER
    I’d like to meet that Querida.

    CARLOS
    No you wouldn’t. She herds goats, smells like one and weighs 300 pounds.

With a CHUCKLE both men mount up and head out.

EXT. DESERT HOMESTEAD - DAY

Surrounded by miles of open desert, a dilapidated house, barn and windmill. Dust clouds signal approaching buggies.

I/E. ABANDONED BARN - DAY

Parked under rotting timbers, a brand new dually pickup. Fresh blood drips from a DEAD MAN sprawled in the truck bed. Bales of marijuana surround another MAN lying face down in the dirt clutching an AK47.

Ryker and Carlos survey the scene.
Just then the radio crackles

QUERIDA (O.S.)
You’ve got company, boys.

Rising like a breaching humpback from a hidden gully, a six-wheeled monster truck from hell. A gun turret welded to the back opens fire.

Bullets slam around. Ryker and Carlos mount their buggies and roar away.

I/E. RYKER’S BUGGY

Bounding over rough terrain, Ryker shadows Carlos.

To the left, the six-wheeled monster keeps pace.

Carlos heads down a dry riverbed, Ryker follows.

Above, on the bank, the monster fires a burst from its .50 Cal machine gun. Pieces fly off Carlos’ buggy. Sparks fly. Smoke from the engine. The disabled buggy coasts to a stop.

Ryker roars up a bank to the monster truck’s level, straight at the oncoming machine. Heavy caliber bullets slam into Ryker’s hurtling vehicle but he holds his course. At the last second, the monster swerves away. Hitting a rut, the hapless machine flips, rolls down a bank and explodes in flames.

Ryker pulls up to Carlos’ disabled ride.

CARLOS
Nice work.

QUERIDA (O.S.)
Another one behind you.

Carlos piles in and Ryker roars away just as bullets slam around them.

Weaving down a narrow dry river channel, Ryker gradually pulls ahead of the pursuer.

INT. CANTINA - NIGHT

A CROWDED bar with a LOUD mariachi band. Slouched over a table, Ryker and Carlos surrounded by empty Tequila shots.

CARLOS
They were good men. Both had wives and children.
RYKER
They should know better.

CARLOS
It’s their only life. Farms are gone.

RYKER
And now they’re dead.

CARLOS
Only since the Colombians moved in. Heroin, prostitution...

RYKER
Comes with the drug trade.

CARLOS
 Doesn’t have to. Hernando is a good man.

Carlos tosses back another Tequila shot and looks directly at Ryker.

CARLOS (CONT’D)
What’s your involvement with Desiree?

RYKER
We met in Hollywood and I helped her out.

CARLOS
Is that it?

RYKER
We had a life in Colorado until you came along.

CARLOS
This is her home, her family.

RYKER
Why do you call her princess?

Carlos leans back with a smile.

QUERIDA (O.S.)
Heads up, boys.

RYKER
I know that voice!
Dark piercing eyes and flowing chestnut hair, QUERIDA (23) a vision in skintight jeans and a tangerine halter top stands smiling.

Beside her, boots and jeans, the blonde Desiree.

RYKER (CONT’D)
You said that she...

QUERIDA
Weighed 300 pounds and smelled like a goat?

RYKER
Something like that.

Ryker gives a sheepish grin while Carlos and Querida embrace then opens his arms for Desiree.

Desiree surveys the cluttered table.

DESIREE
That’s a real head start.

From a waiter’s tray, she snatches two tall Tequila shots. Both women sink them with a single move, then, arms around their men, settle in.

INT. CANTINA - LATER

Dirty dishes clutter the table. A few PATRONS remain.

DESIREE
Show me that knife trick again?

CARLOS
Sure, Princess.

There is a barely perceptible flick of Carlos’ hand. A lock blade thuds into the wall across the room.

Patrons stand back.

DESIREE
Let me try.

Desiree carefully folds the knife and slides it into the pocket of her jeans.

CARLOS
Now!

With a lightning move, the knife slams into a far wall.
CARLOS (CONT’D)
Not bad, can you hit anything?

Desiree slaps a wet beer coaster on the wall then stands facing the opposite direction.

CARLOS (CONT’D)
Go!

She spins and nails the coaster dead center.

CARLOS (CONT’D)
Bravo!

Carlos claps loudly and is joined by Ryker and Querida.

Arms around their women, the men stand to leave. Carlos palms the waiter a big handful of cash.

EXT. HACIENDA - MORNING

Rosters crow, chickens scatter, THUNDER of a Harley Davidson approaching.

EXT. PATIO

Breakfast served on the patio table Ryker and Hernando. Carlos enters, hair down, riding leathers.

CARLOS
I could use Ryker’s help out at the mine.

HERNANDO
Ryker?

Ryker pauses and thinks for a moment.

RYKER
Sure, why not.

CARLOS
We lost two good men yesterday.

HERNANDO
This has to stop.

EXT. TRACKLESS DESERT - DAY

Open desert as far as the eye can see. Tricked-out buggies bound over obstacles leaving clouds of dust.
I/E. CARLOS’ BUGGY

Carlos adjusts his headset and presses a radio button.

    CARLOS
    (on radio)
    Morning, pretty girl, how’s your
day?

    QUERIDA (O.S.)
    A little hung over but the
    weather’s clear and sunny.

Carlos looks out at Ryker’s buggy bounding along beside him and gives a thumbs-up.

Carlos heads up a dry river bed and Ryker follows. Dodging huge boulders, the buggies navigate a path barely wide enough to pass.

Ahead, hidden by a huge overhanging rock, motorcycles and trucks parked near a nearly invisible opening.

INT. CAVE

Into the darkness, Ryker and Carlos feel their way.

    CARLOS
    Baboyahuqi cave. It’s been a legend
    in Sonora for hundreds of years.

Carlos hands Ryker a torch and the two set out along a dark passage. Squeezing through a narrow gap, the men emerge into a gallery of crystal stalagmites and stalactites.

Ryker looks around, exploring with his torch.

    RYKER
    It’s beautiful.

Deeper into the cave, the two splash along an underground stream. The only sound, the incessant DRIP of falling water.

Finally, the destruction only a miner can appreciate. Marks from rock drills and dynamite. The natural cave becomes man made.

    CARLOS
    The old La Borda silver mine.
    Hernando blasted through here about
    20 years ago.
A long uphill slog follows mining car tracks. Passages branch left and right.

Finally a huge underground gallery. Stacks of supplies line the walls.

CARLOS (CONT’D)
Careful here, timbers are rotten.

Carlos carefully steps along beams, Ryker follows. Below his feet, darkness of a bottomless pit.

Light ahead but another long climb. Breathless, the men emerge.

EXT. MINE HEAD – DAY

A cluster of ruined buildings form a small mining town.

From the mining office, ANTONIO (36), Stetson, moustache and work boots, strides out.

ANTONIO
Fucking Colombians.

CARLOS
We were there.

ANTONIO
Must be Ryker.

He holds out a hand.

ANTONIO (CONT’D)
Welcome to hell.

The three stroll back to the mining office.

Behind them, MEN load bales of Marijuana onto shiny new dually pickup trucks.

INT. MINE OFFICE

Antonio pulls a half bottle of Tequila from under the counter followed by three dirty glasses. He slops a generous portion in each.

CARLOS
Let’s have a look.
Two heavy-looking backpacks on the counter. Carlos unzips one. Inside, stacks of cash.

He smiles and raises a glass.

CARLOS (CONT’D)
Hector and Mavelio

ANTONIO
Más remedio tiene un muerto.

CARLOS
May who did this rot in hell.

Men toss back the Tequila with a grimace. Carlos and Ryker shoulder packs and head out.

FADE TO:

EXT. HACIENDA - DAY

A shy Sandro leads Desiree to a cluster of garages. Sparks fly from welding torches as MEN work on all manner of high powered desert trucks and buggies.

Sandro proudly swings open the door to a small garage. Inside a shiny red Porsche 911 Cabriolet.

Desiree SQUEELS with delight and dances up to the car.

DESIREE
Rodrigo! You fixed him all up again!

SANDRO
The car was in pretty bad shape but the men all worked wonders.

A peck on the cheek for Sandro and thunder from the Porsche. The red car disappears in a shower of gravel.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Desiree’s red Porsche arrives at a downtown day spa, a stack of packages in the passenger seat.

INT. DAY SPA

ELLIE MAE THORNTON, (34), Rolex on her wrist, diamonds on her hand, receives a full body massage. Desiree, wrapped in a towel, emerges from the steam room.
ELLIE MAE
Desiree, darling, I thought you moved to Hollywood.

DESIREE
Just visiting.

Desiree reclines on a table.

ELLIE MAE
Still waiting for the big part?

DESIREE
My agent’s working on it.

ELLIE MAE
How is Hernando?

DESIREE
Deep in Sonora politics as usual.

ELLIE MAE
I guess you people need to keep local authorities in your pockets.

Desiree glares.

DESIREE
You people?

ELLIE MAE
We all know what Hernando does.

DESIREE
What does Hernando do?

Ellie Mae shifts uncomfortably.

ELLIE MAE
Been to the country club?

Desiree ignores Ellie Mae while a handsome MASSEUR in a tank top does his work.

EXT. BAR - EVENING

Graffiti on a wall, a flickering neon sign, faint MUSIC from inside. Lurching down a filthy street, a slouching COWBOY looks around then pushes through a black cloth curtain.
INT. BAR

Points of light swirl to a thumping DISCO BEAT. A near-naked YOUNG WOMAN gyrates on a brass pole. MEN sucking long-necks leer from the bar.

In a booth near the back, Menage CONFERS with two well-dressed MAFIOSI types. A tall MOUSTACHE man walks in.

    MOUSTACHE
    Saw that Hollywood girl in town.

Menage looks up surprised.

    MENAGE
    By herself?

    MOUSTACHE
    She was.

Menage frowns.

    MOUSTACHE (CONT’D)
    Should I grab her?

    MENAGE
    No, let her alone.

    MOUSTACHE
    You might find her at the country club.

The men go back to their conversation.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB - EVENING

Sunset over a lush golf course. Brightly lighted tennis courts and pool glow behind a sprawling clubhouse complex.

EXT. ENTRANCE

Tailored suit, snakeskin boots and Stetson, a MAN leaves his Rolls Royce to a uniformed VALET. Behind him, the distinctive ROAR of Desiree’s Porsche. Top down, hair flying, she arrives with a SQUEAL of tires.

With a flourish, the valet opens Desiree’s door and holds his hand out in mock chivalry.

    VALET
    M’lady.
DESIREE
Still parking cars, Waldo?

VALET
Don’t call me that.

DESIREE
Waldo.

VALET
See you behind the locker rooms later?

DESIREE
In your dreams.

VALET’S POV:
Desiree’s sheer silk evening gown does little to hide her lush figure as she struts through the front door.

BACK TO SCENE:

VALET
Damn.

With a look of admiration, the valet shakes his head.

I/E. COUNTRY CLUB
Soft music from a jazz band flows over tables and a dance floor to a pool and patio outside. Every eye follows Desiree as she saunters into the room.

ELLIE MAE
Desiree!

Drenched in diamonds, Ellie Mae stands. At the table, JASON ZANUCK (41), shirt open, dressed in black, gold chains.

ELLIE MAE (CONT’D)
I’d like you to meet Jason Zanuck.

DESIREE
The producer?

ZANUCK
Pleased to meet you, Ms. Amistad.

ELLIE MAE
I was telling him all about you.
ZANUCK
You should audition for my new film.

DESIREE
I’d love to.

ZANUCK
We’re filming right here in West Texas.

DESIREE
What’s it about?

ZANUCK
A beautiful woman is caught in a war between rival drug cartels.

ELLIE MAE
Jason is here talking to investors.

DESIREE
Maybe my uncle...

ELLIE MAE
I don’t think so.

DESIREE
Why not?

Ellie Mae squirms uncomfortably.

ELLIE MAE
Those people don’t belong.

ZANUCK
There’s interest from a Columbian group...

DESIREE
Menage?

Desiree leans back and smiles.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB

The distinctive high note of a V12 engine, ECHOES in the night as a red Ferrari pulls up. Menage dismounts.

EXT. PATIO - NIGHT

Ryker and Hernando enjoy their usual evening libations.
RYKER
Desiree joining us?

HERNANDO
She drove into El Paso.

Ryker grabs Hernando by the shoulders.

RYKER
(shouting)
You let her go?

HERNANDO
The men fixed up her old car. She loves to drive.

RYKER
They’ll kill her!

Ryker charges out the door.

EXT. EL PASO - NIGHT
Rainy night traffic on a busy city street. Driving fast and weaving around cars, Ryker pilots an off-road desert buggy. Ignoring a red light, he presses on.

Red and blue lights flash. A POLICE CAR pulls out. Gunning the engine, Ryker speeds off, officers in hot pursuit.

I/E. POLICE CAR

YOUNG OFFICER (20) drives while FAT OFFICER (40) picks up a microphone.

FAT OFFICER
(on radio)
Got a rabbit, south on Main.

dispatcher (O.S.)
Officers in pursuit. South on Main street.

YOUNG OFFICER
Looks like a drug runner.

Sirens wail as POLICE CARS join the pursuit.

FAT OFFICER
Pull up, I’m gonna take him out.

Fat officer picks up a shotgun and rolls down the window.
BLAM!

Huge muzzle flash, fender flies off buggy.

Another red light. Brilliant strobe lights turn night into day.

Ryker turns left and bounds off road. Unable to follow, police watch the desert buggy disappear into the night.

INT. LAPD HOLLYWOOD DIVISION - DAY

Lieutenant Haynes strides up to Detective Trueblood’s desk, a big smile on his face.

HAYNES
Got a hit on your man Hemingway.

He tosses a handful of photos in front of the reclining detective.

HAYNES (CONT’D)
Seems he’s running drugs down in El Paso.

INSERT - PHOTO

A full face shot of Ryker driving a tricked-out desert buggy.

RETURN TO SCENE

HAYNES
Traffic cam.

Trueblood grins.

TRUEBLOOD
Anything on the girl?

HAYNES
She can’t be far.

TRUEBLOOD
Guess I’ll be taking a little trip to Texas.

Trueblood slouches out the door.
EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

Perched on a lone rock outcropping, a modern glass and steel edifice with a Ferrari in the driveway. An infinity pool reflects the lights of El Paso far below. A soft glow and MUSIC bathe an elegant patio. Menage lounges in a plush recliner.

Dressed only in a sheer, ankle length negligee, Desiree emerges from the house carrying two glasses of Champagne.

MENAGE
That’s a Nicolas Feuillatte ninety-six. Fewer than fifty cases left in the world.

DESIREE
You could have killed me.

MENAGE
That would be a shame.

Manage moves over on the recliner. He pats the seat.

MENAGE (CONT’D)
Come here.

Desiree sits and crosses her legs.

DESIREE
I suppose I should be grateful.

MENAGE
You deserve so much more.

DESIREE
You certainly know style.

MENAGE
This is nothing. Come to Bogota and I’ll show you how to live.

DESIREE
What are you doing in El Paso?

MENAGE
I need to secure a reliable crossing.

Desiree looks stunned.

DESIREE
That means...
MENAGE
Yes.

DESIREE
Please don’t hurt Hernando.

MENAGE
That’s up to him.

DESIREE
And Ryker?

MENAGE
Is he special to you?

DESIREE
He just helped me out.

Desiree lies back on the recliner in Menage’s embrace.

EXT. MOUNTAIN – DAY

Three black SUVs pull up on a windswept peak overlooking the old mining town. A dozen men with guns dismount. Menage surveys the scene with binoculars. Desiree clings to his side.

EXT. MINE HEAD

Ryker and Hernando watch while MEN unload boxes from the back of a pickup truck.

HERNANDO
Medicine for the hospital in Nuesto.

RYKER
You’re smuggling medicine?

HERNANDO
Rich people get medicine, the poor die without.

Ryker points to some small boxes marked “URGENT.”

RYKER
What’s so special about those?

HERNANDO
There’s an antibiotic resistant infection. Children are dying.
With a ROAR, a giant six-wheeled monster bounds over a rocky peak and rakes the scene with .50 cal. machine gun fire. MEN fall, drop boxes of medicine, and take cover.

Ryker and Carlos dash for desert buggies parked nearby. Carlos tosses Ryker a bundle of dynamite trailing a fuze.

CARLOS
I’ll distract him, you come in behind.

Carlos’ buggy swerves ahead of the charging behemoth, weaving to avoid a stream of .50 Cal rounds. Ryker ROARS in behind and tosses the dynamite.

BOOM!

The six-wheeled beast flips end-over-end in a cloud of fire and smoke.

Hernando dashes from behind cover to retrieve boxes of medicine. From the MOUNTAIN TOP Menage takes aim.

BAM!

Hernando is hit. Abandoning cover, Ryker supports the old man and drags him to the mine entrance.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A solemn faced doctor administers to a bandaged Hernando. A cluster of friends and household help form outside.

The doctor shakes his head as he leaves.

Ryker and Carlos kneel beside Hernando’s bed. Hernando clutches Ryker’s hand.

HERNANDO
You’ve got to stop them.

RYKER
I will.

Hernando closes his eyes.
EXT. DESERT - DAWN

A dozen desert trucks kick up clouds of dust.

I/E. RYKER’S BUGGY

Ryker drives hard, bouncing over the dunes. In an adjacent truck, Carlos gives a thumbs-up.

Ryker keys his radio,

    RYKER
    What’s up pretty girl?

    QUERIDA
    Cloudy skies, weather’s better south.

    CARLOS
    (on radio)
    We’re going in the rain.

I/E. HELICOPTER

A uniformed border patrol officer watches the speeding vehicles.

    OFFICER
    (into his radio)
    Something big going on down there.

    DISPATCHER
    (on the radio)
    Stay on your side of the border.

    OFFICER
    They’re making for the old La Borda mine.

    DISPATCHER
    I’ll alert ground forces.

EXT. MINE HEAD - DAY

Sentries with machine guns patrol the old mine office. Ryker and Carlos approach. Each grabs a man and slits his throat.

A cave in the side of the mountain with an iron door. Ryker pries the latch and springs the door under a big “DANGER” sign.
INT. POWDER MAGAZINE

MEN crack open cases of dynamite and tape sticks together with detonators and fuzes.

I/E. MINE OFFICE

MAFIOSI TYPES sit around playing cards, guns at their sides. Outside, Ryker lights a fuze and tosses dynamite through a window. Men grab their guns and try to run.

BOOM!

EXT. MINE OFFICE

With a HUGE BLAST the mine office disappears in a shower of splinters.

EXT. MINE HEAD

Shots from guards by the entrance. A well-placed dynamite stick and bodies fly through the air. Ryker and his men rush into the shaft.

INT. MINE SHAFT

Muzzle FLASHES from ahead in the darkness. A MAN is hit and goes down. Ryker sprays the shaft with automatic fire.

Further into the tunnel, a maze of branches and tracks lead in all directions. MEN split up and disappear into the darkness.

Clutching a machine gun in the darkness, Desiree works her way along a smooth rock wall. Carlos, machine gun at ready, feels his way in the dark.

INT. GALLERY

In an open cavern under torch light, stacks of drugs. Desiree and Carlos emerge from opposite sides.

    CARLOS
    Princess! Watch out.

He points to the center of the room.

Rotting timbers hide a shaft plunging into darkness. Carlos carefully negotiates the trap and approaches Desiree.
Desiree sadly shakes her head.

DESIREE
   You shouldn’t be here, Carlos.

BLAM!

A quick burst of automatic fire. Carlos staggers backward with a surprised look on his face, then tumbles into the abyss.

Machine gun at ready, Desiree retreats down a dark tunnel.

INT. BLIND TUNNEL

Ryker moves toward lights down another passage. He fires at torches advancing in his direction.

CLICK!

He’s out of ammunition.

Torches keep coming. Ryker falls back, diving for cover. Muzzle flashes, sparks fly as bullets slam around.

Each time Ryker breaks cover and retreats, more bullets.

MENAGE
   Ryker! You don’t have to die here.
   This isn’t your fight.

End of the line. Ryker faces a solid rock wall. There’s no escape.

MENAGE (CONT’D)
   I know you’re back there. Come on out.

A steel mining car, but it’s off the tracks. Straining, Ryker gets it into position. Menage and his thugs close in.

Out of ammunition Ryker has one last stick of dynamite. He pushes the car to get started, then leaps in.

Menage’s men open up with automatic fire as Ryker roars down the dark shaft. Sparks fly as bullets bounce off the speeding steel car.

Ryker struggles with his lighter until the fuze ignites. Last second, he tosses the dynamite.

BOOM!
Derailed, the mining car slides into darkness.

INT. MINE SHAFT

Shattered timbers. Ryker struggles to his feet and picks up a torch. Arming himself with a gun from one of the dead men, he cautiously advances down the tunnel toward a light.

A silhouetted figure moves in the darkness. A gun. Ryker FIRES. Desiree SCREAMS.

RYKER
Desiree!

Ryker runs to the fallen woman. She’s GASPING, blood on her lips. Ryker picks her up, cradles her in his arms.

DESIREE
(shivering)
I’m sorry, Ryker.

Ryker presses Desiree’s body to his.

The barrel of a machine gun prods Ryker in the ear.

Menage, bruised, bleeding and covered with dirt.

Ryker slowly stands, hands in the air.

Menage advances, gun leveled at Ryker’s chest.

Ryker backs up into darkness. Without looking down, he carefully sidesteps a rotting timber.

MENAGE
Too bad about the girl.

Menage’s foot on the rotting timber.

CRACK!

Menage disappears into darkness.

INT. PIT

Ryker holds a torch. Menage squirms impaled on a steel spike. Their eyes meet. With a GROAN, Menage’s body relaxes.
INT. MINE SHAFT

Ryker struggles to save the dying woman. Tearing up his shirt he presses it to the wound in her chest.

Desiree tries to TALK but chokes on her words. A trembling bloody hand reaches for a gun.

Behind Ryker, a staggering, blood-soaked Menage aims a machine gun at Ryker’s back.

Desiree’s bloodstained hand on a gun. Her eyes meet with Menage. She pulls the trigger.

BLAM!

EXT. MINE HEAD - DAY

Ryker staggers out into sunlight carrying Desiree’s lifeless form. Limp in his arms, she’s clearly dead.

In the distance, SIRENS. Law enforcement closing in. Ryker lovingly places Desiree’s body under a tree and covers her.

INT. POWDER MAGAZINE

Ryker struggles with cases of dynamite.

MINE HEAD

Roads clogged with a string of police vehicles. Red and blue lights FLASH. Sirens WAIL.

SWAT teams dismount and take positions around the mine head.

Detective Trueblood strides forward with a megaphone.

TRUEBLOOD
It’s over, Ryker, you’ve got nowhere to go.

INT. MINE SHAFT

Under torchlight, Ryker sits on cases of dynamite. Around him, the heart of Menage’s drug operation. Heroin, Cocaine stacked in cases.

With his lighter, Ryker casually toys with a fuze.
EXT. MINE HEAD

Earth shakes with a massive EXPLOSION. Dust and smoke pour out of the mine entrance. A rumbling landslide seals the opening forever.

TRUEBLOOD
(shakes his head)
There’s no way anyone in there could survive.

Police mount up and drive away in clouds of dust.

INT. VILLAGE CHURCH - DAY

Surrounded by mounds of flowers, Desiree’s open coffin lies before the alter. PRIESTS in satin robes preside. VILLAGERS pay their respects.

EXT. VILLAGE CHURCH

A solemn procession carries Desiree’s flower-draped, closed coffin. In the village square, a sad Mariachi band PLAYS softly.

Limping and bandaged, Hernando, arm in a sling, emerges from the church. He gives a handful of cash to an old woman begging by the door. Surrounded by a cluster of CHILDREN, Hernando dispenses candy from a paper bag in his pocket.

Ryker emerges from the church and looks around nervously. Leaning against a tree, eating a burrito,

DETECTIVE TRUEBLOOD.

The two men’s eyes lock for a long moment. Trueblood smiles and shakes his head. He hands Ryker a thick file folder.

TRUEBLOOD
Thought you might want this.

A surprised Ryker accepts the package.

TRUEBLOOD (CONT’D)
D.A. asked for an indictment but I told him there wasn’t enough evidence.

Trueblood finishes his food then strolls away into the CROWD.
EXT. COLORADO COMMUNE - EVENING

Ryker and his long-suffering wife, Juliet, walk together at sunset. They watch children play and women take in laundry.

Eugene waves from his solar panel tower.

    JULIET
    Do you suppose there’s still a chance for us?

The two merge in a tender embrace.

Arms around each-other, they walk to the great hall.

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Open arms, Hiram walks out to meet the couple.

    HIRAM
    Welcome home.

    JULIET
    It’s beginning to feel that way.

Sahale walks in with a handful of long-necks. He and Ryker do a manly embrace.

MEN and WOMEN from the commune gather around with hugs and handshakes.

    SAHALE
    Would you play something?

Ryker walks to the piano. Juliet drapes her arm around him as he sits and tests the keyboard.

Familiar chords ring out. Clapton’s “Layla.” Hiram picks up the words, Eugene and Sahale start while the whole room joins in.

    FADE OUT.