

FOOLS' GOLD

FADE IN:

EXT. HOUSE IN THE DESERT - EXTREME LONG SHOT - DAY

Off in the distance, an isolated house and some ramshackle outbuildings. The place resembles a midwestern farmhouse, except that where there would be fields of corn and wheat stretching to the horizon, here there's nothing but sand and sagebrush and cactus. CAMERA begins to MOVE IN SLOWLY on the house.

OLD MAN'S VOICE (OVER)
(calling)
Eleanor?... Supper ready?

Closer now, we can see that the house is old, solidly built, a little rundown. Soon we begin to make out a figure on the front porch - an OLD WOMAN in a rocking chair. CAMERA CONTINUES MOVING IN.

OLD MAN'S VOICE (OVER)
(calling)
Eleanor...?

Closer still. The old woman has been shelling peas. A bowl and a pile of pea pods are in her lap. CAMERA comes to rest in a MED. CLOSE SHOT of the woman - head slightly back, eyes open, pupils rolled back into her head - obviously and unspectacularly dead.

OLD MAN'S VOICE (OVER)
(calling)
Where in blazes are you?

MED. SHOT - SCREEN DOOR

Through the screen, we see the old man in the house coming toward the door.

OLD MAN
Eleanor! You out here?

The old man opens the screen door and comes out onto the porch. He turns toward Eleanor -

CLOSE SHOT - HIS FACE

as her condition registers. He stares for a long moment, his brow furrowed, mouth slightly open, then -

OLD MAN

Well, hell! Now what am I supposed to do for supper?

The old man is BILLY STOAT, and he-- well, if you can't say something nice about someone...

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY OF LOS ANGELES - ESTABLISHING SHOT - DAY

BEGIN CREDITS

EXT. VACANT FACTORY - FULL SHOT - DAY

A large piece of prime real estate in an industrial part of town. Two cars are parked in the otherwise empty lot - a sedate Buick sedan and a Rolls-Royce Corniche.

MED. LONG SHOT - TWO MEN

BENJAMIN COBB is inspecting the building with the PROPERTY OWNER. Ben has the unmistakable look of success - the tailored clothes, the confident demeanor, and, not least, the \$100,000 convertible. The two men are discussing the property - its size, location, possibilities. They come to an agreement, shake hands. Ben goes to the trunk of the Corniche and removes an oversize signboard - carries it to the building and hangs it from the wire mesh grating on the windows. CAMERA HOLDS on the impressive sign -

Offered by
THE BENJAMIN COBB COMPANY
Residential - Commercial - Industrial

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

ANOTHER SIGN -

Budget Rent-A-Car
Luxury and Exotic Division

CAMERA PANS DOWN and PULLS BACK to encompass the Beverly Hills lot of this company, crowded with Rolls and Ferraris, Mercedes and Maseratis. Ben pulls the Corniche into the lot, turns it over to the LOT BOY, and goes into the rental office.

ANOTHER ANGLE - RENTAL OFFICE

Ben emerges folding his receipt, crosses the lot to his beat-up twelve-year-old Mustang, and drives off.

EXT. REAL ESTATE OFFICE - MED. SHOT - DAY

A seedy one-room bungalow in a questionable part of town. The peeling gold leaf on the window reads "The Benjamin Cobb Company". The blinds are drawn - the office closed. We HEAR a PHONE RING, then the CLICK of an answering machine coming on the line -

BEN'S RECORDED VOICE (OVER)

This is the Benjamin Cobb Company.
I'm out showing property at the
moment. Please leave your name and
number and I'll return your call
as soon as I can.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD PARK - HORSES COMING DOWN THE STRETCH - DAY

The frontrunners are fighting for the lead.

MED. SHOT - BEN IN THE GRANDSTAND

Cheering on his horse without a care in the world.

EXT. MODERN HOSPITAL - EMPLOYEES' ENTRANCE - DAY

End of shift. WORKERS are filing out of the building.

CAMERA COMES TO FAVOR CAROLE COBB

- bright, capable, extremely appealing in her white nurse's uniform. She walks purposefully toward the parking area - a woman with a lot to do and never enough time to do it.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Carole waits in a long, long line at the checkout counter, her face a study in pained resignation as she eyes the overflowing carts of the people ahead of her.

INT. SHOE REPAIR SHOP - DAY

Carole is showing the REPAIRMAN what needs to be done to the men's shoes she is leaving.

EXT. DRY CLEANING STORE - DAY

Carole comes out of the store struggling under the load of two large bundles of cleaning and several men's and women's garments on hangers.

EXT. THE REAL ESTATE OFFICE - MED. SHOT - DAY

The PHONE RINGS, the answering machine comes on.

BEN'S RECORDED VOICE (OVER)
This is the Benjamin Cobb Company.
I'm out showing property at the
moment. Please leave your name and -

INT. NEIGHBORHOOD BAR - DAY

Ben is engaged in a raucous dart game, cheered on by a Happy Hour crowd of KIBITZERS. He shoots for the double-fifteen - misses - the crowd reacts - money changes hands. Ben checks his watch - it's time to go - he polishes off his drink and bids a cheery farewell to his cronies.

EXT. CAROLE AND BEN'S HOUSE - EVENING

A modest, well-kept tract house on a quiet residential street. The sprinklers are going - Carole's car is in the driveway. Ben pulls to a stop in front of the house - dodges the sprinklers as he makes his way up the walk with a spring in his step.

CREDITS END

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Carole, still in uniform, is cooking dinner. The long day is beginning to tell on her. She brushes back a drooping forelock as we HEAR Ben come in the front door.

BEN (O.S.)
(calling)
He's home!

CAROLE
She's in the kitchen!

Ben enters taking off his suit coat, every bit the weary breadwinner returning from a hard day's work.

BEN
God, what a day.

He gives her a greeting kiss.

CAROLE
I tried to call you a couple of
tines but you were out showing
property.

BEN
That's the kind of day it was. One
damn thing after another.

CAROLE
Maybe business is picking up. God
knows we can use the money.

BEN
(blithely)
All we can do is give it our best
shot.

Carole is making a salad. He steals a piece of carrot out of the bowl - she slaps his hand away.

BEN

(continuing)

Got a good listing this morning.
Know anybody who wants to buy an
abandoned ball-bearing factory?

CAROLE

Gee, I don't think so. Everybody I
know already has one.

As she turns away, he quickly raids the salad again.

CAROLE

(with some concern)

We got another letter from the
bank.

BEN

What kind of letter? Polite,
nasty, or threatening?

CAROLE

Polite, I guess.

BEN

Forget it. We're good for two more
letters before they start doing
anything.

CAROLE

Ben, I don't like being behind. It
worries me.

BEN

Hey, what happened to our
agreement?

CAROLE

What agreement?

BEN

The agreement dividing up the
responsibilities of this marriage.
Remember? I do all the worrying...

(beat)

... and you do everything else.

CAROLE
(laughs)
Well, I'm holding up my end of the
bargain.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Carole is comfortably stretched out on the couch with her
head propped up, going over the household budget.

CAROLE
(musing to herself)
We've got to cut down somewhere. I
suppose I can quit going to the
hairdresser for a while...

Ben comes into the room, sees her on the couch, casually
crosses to the front window and peers out -

BEN
Well, will you look at that!

CAROLE
What?

BEN
Come here, quick, you've got to
see this!

Curiosity piqued, Carole gets off the couch and crosses to
the window. Just as she reaches him, Ben sprints across the
room, leaps over the coffee table, and sprawls onto the
couch, stealing her spot.

BEN
Got it!

He clicks on the TV with the remote control and scrunches
down into the soft cushions, getting comfortable.

CAROLE
You rotten underhanded cheat!
(crossing back to him)
I'll get you for that, Benjamin
Cobb.

Ben slides over a bit and pats the cushion beside him.

BEN
Share?

She sits down next to him. He reaches out his arms to her -

BEN
Come to me, wife...

He pulls her down to him -

BEN
You husband's had a hard day and
needs soothing...
(kisses her lightly)

CAROLE
We just soothed last night...
(kisses him back)

Getting into it now, she stretches out full length on top of him and they continue exchanging light kisses. This is not a sexual episode, but simply unadulterated affection and the pleasure of being close. Ben is concentrating on the business at hand when Carole suddenly breaks off and stares into space, musing again-

CAROLE
What if I worked some of my days
off? They need the extra help at
the hospital.

BEN
Why would you want to do that?

CAROLE
It's time and a half. We can use
the extra money, Ben.

BEN
The hell with the money. I don't
want you giving up your days off.
You work hard enough as it is. Now
will you please get your mind out
of the balance sheet.
(kisses her)

They resume where they left off. And now, as the kissing becomes more heated and intense -

CAROLE
Ben?

BEN
(nibbling her ear)
Mmmm...

CAROLE
(sensuously)
Let's try something different...

BEN
Mmmm. I'm game...

CAROLE
Good. Tonight you take out the
garbage.

BEN
Huh?!

She rolls off him and gets to her feet, hanging him out to dry.

CAROLE
That's for stealing my couch!

She punctuates the sentence by tossing a throw pillow in his face.

BEN
Miserable wench!

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - NIGHT

A car draws to a stop across the street. Inside, two shady-looking HOODS look over at the Cobb house. One is big and beefy, the other trim and well-dressed, with cold eyes and oily good looks. The mood is decidedly sinister.

OILY
That's the place. Come on.

EXT. STREET

The hoods get out of the car and cross the street toward the house. Up the driveway, Ben comes out of the back door carrying a couple of trash bags, heading for the curb. Oily puts out his hand, silently stopping Beefy. The two men slip into the shadows behind a bush and wait for Ben.

ANGLE ON BEN

He places the trash bags at the curb and turns back toward the house. The hoods step out from the shadows into his path-

OILY
Hello, Cobb -

Ben starts - then recognizes them.

BEN
You startled me.

BEEFY
That's just the beginning.

OILY
You know why we're here, Cobb.
Let's go in the house.

BEN
Look, fellas, I told you you'd get
your money...

OILY
You told us, you told us. A dozen
times you told us.

BEN
There. Would I say it so often if
I weren't sincere?

OILY
In the house.

BEN
Look, my wife's in there. I'd
rather she didn't know about this.

Beefy grabs Ben's shoulders and spins him toward the house,
then gives him a little shove to start him moving -

BEEFY
Move!

As they walk toward the front door -

OILY
I tried to warn you, Cobb. A
man makes bets, a man loses, a
man's gotta pay off. If he
don't, we gotta take drastic
steps.

They reach the door. Ben opens the door, then stops
and turns to them.

BEN
This isn't going to do you a
bit of good. Like the man said
- you can't get blood out of a
turnip.

OILY
 (very menacing)
 Maybe not, but we can get
 blood out of a turnip's wife.

Ben reacts, for the first time alarmed. The hoods firmly escort him into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM AS THEY ENTER

CAROLE
 Were you talking to someone
 out--
 (breaks off as she
 sees the two
 strangers)
 Oh, hello...

OILY
 (to Beefy)
 Georgie, take Mrs Cobb into
 the kitchen.

BEN
 Now wait a minute...!

Beefy crosses to Carole -

CAROLE
 Ben, who are these people?

BEEFY
 No trouble, lady. Just come
 with me.

He takes her firmly by the elbow -

BEN
 (makes a move toward
 him)
 I said hold it!

Oily grabs Ben by the arms and holds him in place as Beefy leads Carole through the swinging door into the kitchen.

OILY
 Easy, Cobb. He ain't going to
 hurt her.

BEN
 So help me, Harry, if he lays a
 hand on her...

OILY
I told you, nobody's laying
hands on nobody.

BEN
Then what's he doing in there?

OILY
He's just telling her you owe
your bookie six thousand bucks.

BEN
Oh God, you're kidding!

CAROLE'S VOICE
(from kitchen)
He what!?

Ben cringes at the knowledge of how Carole's going to take this.

OILY
It's been my experience that
wives always find a way to pay
off.

BEN
Couldn't you have just broken my
legs?

The kitchen door bursts open violently and Carole takes two steps into the room like a gunfighter entering a hostile saloon. She stands staring at Ben with barely controlled fury.

CAROLE
How could you?

Ben looks back at her sheepishly - there's nothing he can say. Oily beckons to Beefy to join him at the front door.

CAROLE
You'll get your money. I'll
see to that.

Oily simply nods at her and the two hoods leave, Beefy giving Ben a sympathetic pat on the shoulder as he passes him.

MED. SHOT - CAROLE

glaring at him in cold fury. CAMERA MOVES IN on her arm as she reaches down for a large ceramic ashtray -

BEN (O.S.)
Now, Carole, I know you're probably upset...

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

as Oily and Beefy cross the lawn toward the street. From inside the house we hear a muted CRASH! - ceramic smashing against plaster. We also HEAR snatches of Carole's tirade, unintelligible except for the very peak decibels, all punctuated by the smashing of other breakable objects -

CAROLE'S VOICE (OVER)
... mmmmghmmha hairdresser!
(crash)
... mmmmghmmhm overtime!
(crash)
... mmmmghmmhm son of a bitch
bastard!
(crash crash)

Oily and Beefy glance at each other, shake their heads sadly, and continue on toward their car.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY OUTSIDE BEDROOM DOOR - NIGHT

Ben listens at the closed door, hears nothing, knocks gently.

BEN
Carole, can we talk?

There's no answer. He opens the door slowly, tentatively, and peers in.

BEN
Look, I know you're angry...

INT. BEDROOM

as he steps in. Two suitcases are open on the bed. Carole is calmly, methodically packing.

CAROLE

(as she continues
to pack)

I'm not angry. Not any more. We've been through this too many times. You're just the way you are and you're never going to change.

BEN

What are you doing?

CAROLE

You know what I'm doing. What I said I would do if this ever happened again.

BEN

Oh, come on, you can't be serious. We have a great marriage.

CAROLE

No, Ben. You have a great marriage. I have one fiscal crisis after another. Well, I am not the Federal Reserve. That's not the way I want to live.

BEN

Is that all you ever think about is money?

CAROLE

Yes, Ben. When we're behind in our house payments, and creditors keep calling me at work, money tends to be uppermost in my mind.

BEN

Carole, I'm not going to let our marriage break up over a few lousy dollars.

CAROLE

It's not the few lousy dollars, Ben - the six thousand lousy dollars. It's the next six thousand, and the six thousand after that. I need some security in my life, and you're just too irresponsible and lazy and childish and I don't know what else...

BEN

You want to get the thesaurus? I'll wait here.

CAROLE

Can't you ever take anything seriously?

She closes up the suitcases, snatches them off the bed and turns to leave the room. Ben is standing in the doorway.

CAROLE

Excuse me...

Ben steps aside - she walks past him out of the room. He takes a deep breath and follows her.

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE - NIGHT

Carole comes out the door with Ben following on her heels.

BEN

Where are you going to you go? It's the middle of the night, for God's sake.

She heads for her car, ignoring him - throws the luggage inside -

BEN

Carole, please don't do this.

She turns to him and touches his cheek with surprising tenderness.

CAROLE
It's not that I don't love
you, Ben. I Just can't
afford you.

She gets in the car, backs out of the
driveway, and drives off. Ben watches as her
car disappears down the street.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - DAY

A modest office in a small desert town.
CLIFFORD BILLINGS, a rumpled country lawyer,
removes a document from the filing cabinet.

CLOSE ON DOCUMENT

Across the top are the words "Last Will and
Testament."

MED. SHOT - BILLINGS

seated at his desk. He turns on the
dictaphone.

BILLINGS
This'll be a letter to...
(refers to
document)
... Mrs Carole Cobb - 3146
Kensington Road, Los
Angeles. Dear Mrs Cobb - I
have been appointed
administrator of the estate
of your great-aunt,
Eleanor Goodwin, who passed
away in this city last
month. Paragraph. According
to Mrs Goodwin's Last Will
and Testament, you are the
sole beneficiary of the
proceeds of her estate.
Paragraph...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE COBB HOUSE - FULL SHOT - DAY

A few weeks since last we saw it. The lawn is overgrown and turning brown, throwaway newspapers have accumulated in the flowerbeds. A post office jeep pulls to a stop in front of the house.

INT. SERVICE PORCH

A slovenly, unshaven Ben stands at the controls of the washing machine, reading the appliance's instruction manual, trying to figure out how to work the damn thing. The DOORBELL rings.

EXT. FRONT PORCH

The door opens - Ben looks out at the MAILMAN.

BEN

Yes?

MAILMAN

Registered letter for Mrs
Carole Cobb.

BEN'S POV - THE LETTER

in the Mailman's hand. Stamped across the bottom of the envelope are the words "PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL."

BEN (O.S.)

Yeah. I'll take it.

INT. BEN'S KITCHEN - CLOSE UP - TEAKETTLE - DAY

It's whistling on the stove, steam pouring out of its spout.

WIDER ANGLE

Ben holds the letter in the stream of escaping steam, trying to work the flap open with his free hand. It's not as easy as they say it is. He gets a steam burn and jerks his hand away - changes hands - burns the other one - changes back again. Finally he gets it open, but it is a thoroughly unprofessional job - the envelope warped and wilted, the flap torn in several places. He unfolds the soggy letter and reads it. His eyes light up at what he reads.

BEN

(re-reading the key sentence)

"... the sole beneficiary of the . proceeds of her estate." Bless you, Aunt Eleanor - whoever you were.

EXT. MODERN APARTMENT BUILDING - ESTABLISHING SHOT - NIGHT

Carole's new home. Modest, comfortable.

INT. BATHROOM

Carole is luxuriating in the bathtub, head back, eyes closed, at peace with the world. Not for long. The doorbell RINGS. She opens her eyes, pained at the intrusion. Resigned, she moves to boost herself out of the tub -

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE HER DOOR

Ben stands there a moment, then knocks. The door opens revealing Carole in a robe, dripping and glaring.

BEN

Hi. I wasn't in the neighborhood, so I thought I'd drive over to the neighborhood and drop in.

CAROLE

As usual, your timing is exquisite.

She opens the door wider and bids him enter.

INT. APARTMENT

as he enters looking around at her new digs.

BEN
This is nice. Very nice.

CAROLE
Is this a social call or
should I get my purse?

BEN
No, actually I have
something for you.
(he produces the
letter and hands it
to her)
This came to the house
today.

Carole looks at the mangled, wilted envelope with
its flap hanging brazenly open.

CAROLE
Registered mail. That's the
kind it's a federal offense
to tamper with, isn't it?

BEN
I wouldn't have opened it
except it was marked
"Personal" and I was afraid
you wouldn't tell me what it
was.

CAROLE
Well, are you going to tell
me or is it too personal?

BEN
I'm afraid it's bad news,
Carole. Your Aunt Eleanor
died.

CAROLE
Aunt Eleanor! I didn't even
know she was still alive.

BEN
She isn't. I just told you.

Carole removes the letter and becomes absorbed in
reading it.

BEN

You never mentioned her to me...

(hopefully)

A woman of means, was she?

CAROLE

I have no idea. I haven't seen her since I was a little girl. She was my grandmother's sister.

BEN

You'll notice it says she named you her sole heir.

CAROLE

That doesn't mean anything. I was your sole dependent and I never got a dime.

Ben gives her a little shrug of "touché".

CAROLE

I have to meet with this lawyer next week. In Brawley - wherever that is.

BEN

I looked on the map. It's a little town out in the desert. It shouldn't take us more than a couple of hours to get there.

She looks at him sharply.

CAROLE

Us?

BEN

You don't think I'd let you face this alone, do you?

CAROLE

Forget it, Ben.

BEN

Now Carole, I really think I ought to be there with you in your time of need.

CAROLE

My time of need was the five years we were married. You went through my salary, my savings, my government bonds, my Christmas Club, and my I.R.A. You are not going to get your hands on my inheritance, whatever it is.

(softer)

Ben, we're still friends. So I'm asking you as a friend - please stay out of this. Because if you don't, I will cheerfully castrate you.

Ben cringes at the word. Then -

BEN

Well, if you're going to put it on a friendship basis...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAROLE'S CAR EN ROUTE TO BRAWLEY - DAY

The top is down as she speeds along the Interstate through the Imperial Valley. The highway is flanked by endless acres of farmland in full production. CAMERA COMES TO FAVOR a freeway SIGN indicating that Brawley is 22 miles ahead.

EXT. BRAWLEY MAIN STREET - DAY

A hot, monotonous, dingy little city. Traffic is sparse as Carole drives along slowly, looking for her destination. She spots the building in the middle of the block and pulls into an angled-in parking slot at the curb.

INT. BILLINGS'S OFFICE - MED. SHOT - BILLINGS - DAY

Billings pours a cup of coffee from an electric percolator and brings it to the table next to Carole's chair.

BILLINGS
Cream and sugar, Mizz Cobb?

CAROLE
No, thank you. This is fine.

BILLINGS
(going back to his
desk)
Were you very close with
your great-aunt, ma'am?

CAROLE
No, I hadn't seen her in
many years.

BILLINGS
Well now, she must have
thought mighty highly of
you. As I mentioned in my
letter, she left you
everything.

CAROLE
What exactly is
"everything"?

BILLINGS
(opens a file
folder)
I have the probate report
right here. There are no
liquid assets to speak of...
it's just her house and the
land it's on, some personal
belongings. Unfortunately,
there's several years' back
taxes owed on the place.
Comes to near thirty-eight
thousand dollars, with
interest and penalties. I
imagine once everything is
settled, you'll come out a
few thousand to the good.
I'm afraid your great-aunt
wasn't a wealthy woman.

CAROLE
It runs in the family.

BILLINGS
Now, we do have one little
problem.

CAROLE

That runs in the family too.

BILLINGS

Frankly, it's Mr Stoa. He's being less than cooperative about granting us access to the premises. I was hoping you could be of some help there.

CAROLE

I'm not sure what you mean. Who are we talking about?

BILLINGS

I beg your pardon?

CAROLE

Who's this Mr Stoa?

BILLINGS

(surprised)

Why, Mr Stoa is your uncle.

CAROLE

I beg your pardon?

BILLINGS

(referring to his file folder)

Oakley William Stoa. He's your Aunt Eleanor's brother. Surely you know that.

CAROLE

Her brother? No, that can't be. Aunt Eleanor did have an older brother... but his name was...

(thinking back)

... Uncle Billy.

BILLINGS

Oakley William Stoa?

CAROLE

My god. I remember hearing stories about him. But he couldn't still be alive. He must be a hundred years old.

BILLINGS

All I know is he's been living with your aunt for years. I assumed you knew.

CAROLE

Mr Billings, I've been out of touch with that side of my family since I was a child. Don't assume I know anything.

BILLINGS

I'm terribly sorry. It just never occurred to me...

CAROLE

I just thought of something. Didn't your letter say I'm the sole heir?

BILLINGS

That's right, you are.

CAROLE

You mean Aunt Eleanor didn't mention her own brother in the will?

BILLINGS

Oh, she mentioned him, all right.

(reads from the will)

In no event are any of the proceeds of my estate to go to my brother, Oakley William Stroat, who's been living off me for the last 40 years. It'll be worth dying just to be rid of the son of a bitch.

(looks at Carole apologetically)

Unquote.

INT. BRAWLEY LUNCHEONETTE - MED. SHOT - DAY

Ben sits at the counter sipping coffee, keeping an eye on the front window.

HIS POV

Through the window he has a clear view of the entrance to the office building across the street. Carole and Billings come out of the building.

BACK TO SCENE

Ben gets up, drops a dollar bill on the counter, goes to the door of the luncheonette and watches the scene across the street.

HIS POV

Carole and Billings get into Billings's car. It backs out of the parking space and heads off down the street.

EXT. LUNCHEONETTE - DAY

Ben comes out the door. CAMERA FOLLOWS as he runs down the block to his car - parked far enough away from the building not to have been seen by Carole. He gets in the car and takes off after them.

EXT. MAIN STREET - LONG SHOT - DAY

Way off at the end of the block, Billings's car turns off Main Street. CAMERA HOLDS for several seconds - then Ben's car comes INTO FRAME and heads off down the street, following at a discreet distance. At the end of the block, Ben's car makes the turn.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - BILLINGS'S CAR - DAY

The car rolls along the two-lane road through the gently rolling hills of this completely desolate country.

INT. CAR - CAROLE AND BILLINGS - DAY

CAROLE

You know, I'm actually nervous about this.

BILLINGS

I'd say that's understandable... going to meet a relative you never met before.

CAROLE

What's he like?

BILLINGS

Let's just say that I'm nervous too... and I have met him before.

EXT. BEN'S CAR

Following them about a mile behind.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Billings's car turns off the road onto a dirt track leading off into the desert. Alongside the road a telephone company TWO-MAN CREW is working on a telephone pole.

EXT. BACK ALONG THE ROAD - DAY

Ben's car crests a small rise.

INT. CAR - BEN'S POV - THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD - DAY

Off in the distance we see Billings's car make its turn.

EXT. AUNT ELEANOR'S PROPERTY - DAY

The desert house we saw in the opening scene. A sagging wire fence surrounds the front yard with a gap for the dirt driveway. Two rows of desert stones define a path to the front steps. A lone Joshua tree, gnarled and old, stands in the front yard. Billings's car pulls into the yard and stops at the foot of the path.

MED. CLOSE ON - FRONT DOOR OF HOUSE

Behind the screen door the front door opens slowly. We HEAR it CREAK on its hinges. It's dark inside - we can't see through the screen.

ANGLE ON - CAROLE AND BILLINGS

They get out of the car and walk toward the path.

ANGLE ON - SCREEN DOOR

Stillness, except for the crunch of their footsteps on the path. Then - a shotgun BLAST rips through the screen door, blowing a six-inch hole in it.

ANGLE ON - CAROLE AND BILLINGS

The shotgun pellets ricochet off the stones on the path just ahead of them, sending shards flying in all directions. Carole and Billings freeze in their tracks.

CAROLE
(loud and heartfelt)
Shit!

BILLINGS
A-men!
(looks around
quickly)
Quick! Over here!

In one quick motion he ducks behind the Joshua tree with Carole immediately on his heels.

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - TELEPHONE CREW

One worker is atop the telephone pole, the other on the ground below, eating a sandwich.

CREWMAN ON POLE
Did you hear that?

CREWMAN ON GROUND
Hear what?

CREWMAN ON POLE

I don't know. Sounded like a shot.

CREWMAN ON GROUND

So someone's shooting at rabbits.

(takes a bite of his sandwich)

Come on, let's get this done so's we can get some lunch.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - CAROLE AND BILLINGS BEHIND THE TREE

The Joshua tree isn't wide enough to shield them both, so they hide behind it in single file - the tree, then Billings, then Carole.

ANOTHER ANGLE - TO INCLUDE THE HOUSE

Another SHOT rings out. Like the first, this one hits the ground a few feet in front of them.

CAROLE

For God's sake, do something!

BILLINGS

(calls)

Mr Stoat! Mr Stoat, it's Clifford Billings. Remember me? I'm your sister's lawyer.

BILLY

(from inside the house)

Get off my land!

BILLINGS

Mr Stoat! I've brought someone to see you. It's your niece. We just want to talk to you.

CAROLE

(calls)

Uncle Billy - it's Carole. Enid's daughter.

BILLY
Step out where I can see
you.

She takes a nervous step out from behind the tree. Then another. Then a third and a fourth until she is on the walk, directly in line with the front door.

BILLY
You say you're Enid's girl?

CAROLE
Yes, I'm Carole. You
remember Enid? Enid was my
mother.

BILLY
I remember Enid.

She relaxes slightly and starts to take a step toward the house -

BILLY
I never liked Enid. Enid was
a smartass.

Carole stops dead.

CAROLE
Look, Uncle Billy, I can see
that you don't want any
visitors. So if you'll just
let us go back to the car -

BILLY
Who else you got with you?

CAROLE
No one. There's nobody. It's
just me and Mr Billings.
There's nobody else. You can
see that.

BILLY
If it's just the two of you,
you can come ahead.

Carole turns and motions for Billings. He steps out from behind the tree and joins her on the walk. They cautiously approach the house. Suddenly there is the merry BEEP-BEEP of a car horn, announcing its arrival -

ANGLE ON - BEN'S CAR

- as it blithely pulls to a stop behind Billings's car. Ben gets out -

BEN
Hi, folks. What's this - the family homestead?

ANGLE ON - CAROLE AND BILLINGS

Frozen in their tracks, cringing. They know what's coming.

ANGLE ON - BEN

ambling down the walk toward them. Billy's shotgun RINGS OUT, blasting the walk in front of them.

BEN
Jee-sus!

Carole and Billings dive for the Joshua tree again. Ben turns and runs for his car -

BILLY
Nobody's putting me off my land!

There's another BLAST - it hits between Ben and his car. Ben's only cover now is the crowded Joshua - he flattens and lands on his gut alongside Carole and Billings. The three of them lay sprawled there, hugging the ground.

EXT. ROADSIDE - CREWMAN ON TELEPHONE POLE

He has his handset plugged into the junction box and is dialing a number.

CREWMAN ON POLE
(into handset)
Let me have the Sheriff's office, quick!

CREWMAN ON GROUND
Can you see anything?

CREWMAN ON POLE
Bodies everywhere! It's a
goddam massacre!

EXT. HOMESTEAD - THE THREE "BODIES"

- breathless but unhurt. They rise to their knees
maintaining cover behind the tree as best they
can

BILLINGS
That crazy old bastard's got
us pinned down here.

BEN
Relative of yours, Carole?

CAROLE
It's my Aunt Eleanor's
brother - Uncle Billy.

BEN
Not real glad to see you, is
he?

CAROLE
We were doing fine until you
showed up.

BILLINGS
Mizz Cobb, who is this man?

CAROLE
(introducing them)
Benjamin Cobb, Clifford
Billings.

BEN
Pardon me for not getting
up.

BILLINGS
Well, young fella, you
really balled up the works.
Now someone's got to go in
there and get that gun away
from him.

BEN
Why on earth would someone
want to do that?

BILLINGS

Well, we can't stay here.
That's a crazy old man with
a shotgun. There's no
telling what he might do.

BEN

If that's supposed to be the
case for someone going in
there, you're a lousy
lawyer.

CAROLE

Ben, remember what I said
I'd do to you if you showed
up here? Right now you're a
lot safer in there than you
are with me.

BEN

There's something in what
you say.
(looks over at the
house, considers)
All right. I'm not making
any promises - but I'll have
a look around back. See if
you can divert his attention
for a few minutes.

Ben crouches, ready to run for it. Carole calls
to the house -

CAROLE

Uncle Billy? Are you still
there?

BILLY

I'm still here and I ain't
moving.

Billings motions to Ben to get going.

CAROLE

Uncle Billy, I'd really like
to talk to you -

Ben takes off across the short open area and
safely reaches cover at the side of the house.

CAROLE
(continuing)
We have a lot of catching up
to do. Can't we talk from
right here?

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE - DAY

Ben moves along the back wall of the house, avoiding windows, straining to hear any sound from inside. He gets to the back door, listens for a moment, then tries the doorknob. It's unlocked. He starts to pull the door open. Its hinges SQUEAK LOUDLY. He opens it a fraction of an inch at a time, keeping the squeaking to a minimum, and steps into the house.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ben tiptoes into the room - looks around to get his bearings - moves slowly, carefully - tense - nerves taut. He hits a CREAKING FLOORBOARD and almost cries out at the sudden sound. Now he must test each floorboard with an outstretched toe. It's like walking through a minefield.

EXT. FRONT YARD - ANGLE ON CAROLE

Still trying to keep Billy's attention.

CAROLE
(mid-sentence)
- that was, oh, about ten
years ago... and I haven't
seen them since.

She looks over at Billings desperately and mimes "Where is he?" Billings shrugs.

INT. KITCHEN

Ben tiptoes the last few steps to the closed swinging door that obviously leads to the living room - and the man with the shotgun. Now he very gently pushes the door open just the tiniest crack and stands very still, listening. In the distance we can just barely HEAR Carole's voice.

CAROLE (O.S.)
 Uncle Billy? Can you hear
 me?

Ben girds himself for action, takes a deep breath, then slowly swings the door open, a little at a time lest these hinges squeak too. They don't. The door opens silently and smoothly in one effortless motion, and as it comes fully open it reveals -

BEN'S POV

Uncle Billy is waiting for him, his double barrel shotgun aimed point-blank at Ben's head.

BILLY
 Looks like I caught me a
 burglar.

He draws his thumb across the hammers of the big gun, cocking both barrels with a sinister CLICK.

EXT. FRONT YARD

In the distance, police SIRENS can be heard, drawing nearer.

CAROLE
 Uncle Billy? Are you there?

There is no reply, just momentary silence. Carole looks over to Billings questioningly, and then - a SHOT rings out. A double barreled blast from inside the house.

BILLINGS
 Oh, my lord. He shot him.

CAROLE
 Come on!

They race for the house, mount the steps to the porch.

BILLINGS
 Stay clear of the door.

They hug the wall beside the door and edge toward the living room window. Cautiously, they peer in.

THEIR POV - THROUGH THE WINDOW

Ben and Billy are wrestling on the floor. Billy has an iron grip on the shotgun, Ben is trying to get it away from him. Some of the furniture has been overturned in the scuffle.

ANGLE ON LIVING ROOM CEILING

A large hole has been blown in the plaster from the errant shotgun blast.

ANGLE ON BEN AND BILLY ON FLOOR

Ben is younger and stronger - theoretically. He has Billy on his back and is sprawled over him with one arm in a bear hug around the old man's waist. His other arm is pinning Billy's shotgun hand out to one side. Billy, despite his age, is extremely wiry and Ben is having a hell of a time subduing him - like trying to overpower a snake.

BEN
(calling outside)
For chrissake help me!

EXT. PORCH

Carole and Billings leave the window and rush to his rescue.

INT. LIVING ROOM

- as they enter. Billy is wriggling under Ben's grasp, pummeling him with his free hand. Billings rushes to them and pries the shotgun out of the old man's grip.

BILLINGS
It's okay, I've got the gun.

BILLY
Turn me loose, you son of a bitch...

BEN
(tiger by the tail)
Stop wriggling and I will!

Billy continues to writhe and twist, pounding Ben's head with flailing arms. Ben, simply trying to subdue him, is getting much the worst of it.

CAROLE
Don't hurt him, Ben.

BEN
Hold still, god damn it!

CAROLE
Uncle Billy, no one's going to hurt you. I promise. Just calm down.

Billy reluctantly settles down. Outside, the SIRENS are very near.

BILLY
All right, all right, I'm calm. Now tell him to turn me loose.

Ben releases his grip and gets to his knees. Immediately, Billy kicks out at him, catching him on the cheek with his boot.

BILLY
Got you, you peckerwood!

Ben reflexively picks up a broken chair leg and brandishes it threateningly.

CAROLE
Ben! He's an old man!

BILLY
Who's an old man, you skinny-ass two-bit whore?

Carole's mouth drops open. Ben offers her the chair leg.

BEN
Care to use this?

EXT. FRONT YARD

Three deputy sheriffs' cars scream into the yard and screech to a halt, their SIRENS WINDING DOWN.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Carole and Ben are helping Billy to his feet. He is uncooperative, ranting and raving.

BILLY

Get your hands offa me! No one is putting me offa my land! I been in this house for forty years and no sonofabitch lawyer is taking it away from me...

During this, Billings opens the screen door for an approaching DEPUTY.

DEPUTY

Morning, Mr Billings. What's the problem?

BILLINGS

It's all right, officer. Everything is under control.

The Deputy enters the room and takes a few steps toward the ranting Billy, who has had his back to the door and would seem not to be aware of the Deputy's presence. But that's not the case -

BILLY

... and I don't care if you call a hundred damn deputies!

And without a hint of warning, Billy whirls on the unsuspecting deputy with his closed fist and-

DEPUTY'S POV

as Billy's fist smashes him (CAMERA) squarely in the face. The SCREEN bursts into an explosion of stars and lights and colors, and then goes BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. FRONT YARD

Billy is in handcuffs, being put into the back seat of a patrol car by the Deputy, who with his other hand holds a wet towel over his nose.

CAROLE
Are you all right?

DEPUTY
(in a comically
nasal, broken-nose
voice)
Fine, lady. Just fine.

BILLY
Take these bracelets offa me
and we'll see how fuckin'
fine you are, asshole!

DEPUTY
Is he always like this?

CAROLE
Ever since I've known him.

INT. COURTROOM - MED. SHOT - JUDGE - DAY

He's a white-haired, slow-talking old-timer.

JUDGE
(reading charges)
Oakley William Stoaat...
assault with a deadly
weapon, resistin' arrest,
assaultin' a police officer,
battery on a police
officer... Nice to see our
senior citizens keeping
busy.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Billy and Billings are standing before the judge.
Carole and Ben are seated in the first row of
spectator seats.

JUDGE
What do you say, Oakley?
Want to tell me about it?

BILLY
I didn't mean no harm. I
just want everybody to leave
me be.

JUDGE

We'd all like everybody to leave us be. But firin' off shotguns at folks is one pretty sure way not to be left be.

BILLY

Hell's afire, I didn't hit nobody.

JUDGE

And you're very lucky you didn't.

BILLY

Lucky, my ass.

The few SPECTATORS laugh. The Judge gavels them to silence.

JUDGE

Now, do you suppose you can tell me just why you were firin' on them?

BILLY

'Cause they were coming to throw me out of my house and take my land away from me.

JUDGE

That so, Clifford?

BILLINGS

Your honor, the property belonged to Mr Stoa's sister, who is recently deceased. It's being sold to settle the estate.

JUDGE

I see. Does the estate make any provision for this man's maintenance during probate?

BILLINGS

No, sir. As a matter of fact, he was specifically excluded from the will.

JUDGE

Is that a fact? Who gets the proceeds?

BILLINGS

The entire estate was left to
the decedent's niece.

Billings turns to spectators, gestures for Carole to
identify herself.

CAROLE

That's me, your honor.

JUDGE

And your name is -?

CAROLE

Carole Cobb.

JUDGE

Come on up here, Carole.

She joins Billings and Billy.

JUDGE

Now, Carole, have you made any
provision for the care and
housing of Oakley, here, after
your aunt's property is sold?

CAROLE

Of course not. I didn't know he
existed until this morning.

JUDGE

Well, now you know he exists.
What are you going to do about
it?

CAROLE

I'm not sure that's not my
responsibility, your honor.

JUDGE

I see. You just can't be
bothered, is that it?

CAROLE

No, It's not that.

JUDGE

Oh, I understand. I got a daughter of my own ~ she feels pretty much the same about me.

CAROLE

Your honor, that isn't it at all. I just don't think I'm legally responsible for someone I barely know.

JUDGE

Oh, legally? You want to talk about the law. Well, the law says that this old man could go to the penitentiary for about five years. Is that what you want, Carole? To lock Oakley away and forget about him?

CAROLE

No, of course not. But, your honor, I live in Los Angeles... I've got a job... it's just not possible for me to take responsibility for a virtual stranger.

JUDGE

Well, I wouldn't want to inconvenience you. But here's what it comes down to. It seems to me what this man needs most of all is supervision. So I'm going to set a high bail and keep him here or I'll release him to your custody with the understanding that supervision will be provided.

CAROLE

I just can't do it. It's impossible.

JUDGE

I don't expect you to give up your job - or take him your home. I just want you to make provisions for his care.

He stares at Carole, waiting... she looks back at him, pained, considering, but doesn't speak. Finally -

JUDGE

Okay - bail is set at fifty thousand dollars. Prisoner remanded to custody.
(bangs the gavel)

BILLY

(bewildered)
You sending me to jail?

JUDGE

No sir. She's sending you to jail.

As the bailiff leads him off, Billy looks back pathetically.

BILLY

I'm an old man. Why are you doing this to me?

Carole looks after him miserably -

CAROLE

I'm sorry.

Billy is led out of the room and door is closed behind him. All eyes in the courtroom are fixed on Carole - glaring. She looks around at the spectators.

CAROLE

(addressing them)
I just can't take care of anybody but me.

She starts for the exit - she can feel the eyes still on her. She stops at the door and turns back to the room -

CAROLE

I just don't want the responsibility.

She turns and opens the door, takes one step, stops -

CAROLE

God damn it!

She turns to face the judge.

CAROLE

All right! I'll take him.

The spectators burst into applause.

JUDGE
 Atta girl, Carole.
 (bangs the gavel)

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Carole and Ben come down the steps.

CAROLE
 Help me, Ben. What am I going to
 do with him?

BEN
 I'd be glad to - but I promised
 I wouldn't horn in on your
 inheritance.

CAROLE
 (with a look)
 Benjamin, if you have any hope
 of ever getting back in my good
 graces -

BEN
 All right. How about some sort
 of retirement home?

CAROLE
 That certainly would solve the
 problem. But will he go for it?

BEN
 It beats jail.

CAROLE
 It's all in how we bring it up
 to him. Look, we'll take him
 home, feed him, get a few dozen
 drinks into him...

In the near b.g. we see Billings and Billy come out of
 the building, Billings takes Billy's elbow to help him
 down the steps.

BILLY
 (wrenching his arm
 away)
 Keep your hands offa me! I can
 do it!

TWO SHOT - CAROLE AND BEN

BEN

And while you're wining and dining him - I'm going to be hiding his shotgun.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - NIGHT

Carole's and Ben's cars are parked in the yard. The lights are glowing in the house.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Carole, Ben and Billy are at the table, the remains of a wonderful meal before them. The room has been cleaned and straightened - it's a homey scene. Ben takes a nearby whiskey bottle and refills Uncle Billy's glass.

BEN

Here you go, Uncle Billy. Have another shot.

BILLY

Don't mind if I do. This stuff's not bad.

Billy picks up the glass and takes a man-sized swig. While he drinks, Carole looks over at Ben to see how many drinks this makes for Billy. She holds up five fingers questioningly. Ben holds up six fingers, correcting her. They look to Billy, who is completely unaffected by the booze, and shrug in bewilderment.

BILLY

Yep, not bad at all.

CAROLE

Uncle Billy, we have to have a serious discussion.

BILLY

Go ahead. Don't mind me.

CAROLE

We have to decide what we're going to do about you.

BILLY

You mean after supper?

CAROLE
I mean forever!

BILLY
Don't snap at me, girl. Forever
is after supper, ain't it?

BEN
Billy, you remember what the
judge said this morning about
making some plans for you?

BILLY
I remember. Seems damn silly to
me - but I suppose I got no
choice.

CAROLE
I'm glad you realize that.
That's a very realistic
attitude.

BILLY
I'm not saying I like the idea,
mind. But, well, I do like a
clean house - and you seem to
cook good enough -
(indicates the meal)
I suppose I can get used to you.

Ben chokes with delight on his coffee. Carole's eyes
widen in horror.

CAROLE
God, what a thought -
(shudders)
Uncle Billy, I can't stay with
you. I've got a job to get back
to.

BILLY
Okay by me. Just so that
peckerwood judge don't find out.

CAROLE
Look, there may be an
alternative you haven't thought
of. It could be the perfect
thing and we'd just like you to
consider it.

BILLY
Ain't going to no old folks'
home.

Carole and Ben exchange surprised looks.

CAROLE

Some of them are very nice...

BILLY

I got a friend lives in one and he don't think it's so nice. I'm staying right here.

BEN

Billy, the judge made Carole responsible for you. You don't want her to get in trouble, do you?

BILLY

Can't see that I should care one way or the other. I didn't invite you people here to begin with.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

A sweltering, moonlit night. The three of them sit on the porch.

CAROLE

Don't you understand? We can't keep this house. We've got to sell it.

BEN

Billy, there's big taxes on this property. They've got to be paid.

BILLY

Then pay them.

CAROLE

Believe me, at this point, if I had the money, I would. But I just don't have the money.

BILLY

What about you?

BEN

Don't look at me. I get all my money from her.

CAROLE
Now do you understand?

BILLY
Yeah. I guess I'm stuck.

CAROLE
We all are.

BILLY
Okay. I'll pay for the taxes
myself.

Carole and Ben exchange amused looks.

BEN
Billy, the taxes are a lot of
money.

BILLY
Yeah? How much do you figure is
a lot?

CAROLE
More than you could possibly
pay.

BILLY
How much?

CAROLE
Close to forty thousand dollars.

BILLY
Christ, all that just for taxes?

BEN
Afraid so, partner.

CAROLE
Now do you see what we've been
up against?

BILLY
Now after I pay these taxes, can
I stay here and you'll all leave
me be?

CAROLE
He still doesn't understand.

BILLY

Dammit, woman, don't keep saying that. I understand this whole thing comes down to money. Well, I've got money.

BEN

You've got forty thousand dollars

BILLY

More 'n that. I've got a hundred thousand dollars.

This stops Carole and Ben cold.

CAROLE

(extremely skeptical)

Where do you have a hundred thousand dollars?

Billy eyes her suspiciously, trying to determine how much to tell her.

BILLY

I got it, that's all. I been keeping it in a safe place in case I ever needed it. I reckon I need it.

BEN

Let me understand this. You've got a hundred thousand dollars hidden away somewhere - in cash?

BILLY

Never said it was cash.

CAROLE

Well, then, what is it?

BILLY

Gold.

CAROLE

Gold.

BILLY

Gold bars.

BEN

Gold bars.

BILLY
Ten gold bars.

Ben and Carole exchange glances. This is just an old man's fairy tale. It must be. Mustn't it?

CAROLE
This is crazy. We're getting off the point here - which is where are you going to live?

BILLY
Now who don't understand? I told you - I'm going to pay your damn taxes and live right here.

CAROLE
(scoffing)
With your gold bars.

BILLY
Damn rights.

Carole shakes her head, dismissing it. Ben continues to humor the old man.

BEN
Tell me, how big are these bars?

BILLY
How big? They're about yay by yay.
(describes the dimensions with his hands - about four by eight inches)

BEN
(testing)
And how much do they weigh? One pound? Two?

BILLY
Two pounds? I'm talking about gold, boy! They weigh maybe twenty-five pounds apiece.

CAROLE
And they're worth a hundred thousand dollars?

BILLY

Figure it out. Twenty-five pounds apiece times twelve ounces -

(he digresses for a moment, showing off his expertise)

- gold is Troy weight, twelve ounces to the pound - is three hundred ounces. Times thirty-five dollars an ounce is ten thousand five hundred dollars. Times ten bars is a hundred and five thousand dollars. I worked it out so many times I know it by heart.

CAROLE

Well, your arithmetic may be right, but I still don't believe it. Where would you get a hundred thousand dollars worth of gold?

BEN

(thinking hard)

No... the arithmetic isn't right... He said thirty-five dollars an ounce.

CAROLE

(realizes)

That's right. He did!

BILLY

That's the price of gold, ain't it?

BEN

Not any more.

BILLY

Well, damnation! How much has it gone down?

CAROLE

Not down, Billy. Up.

BEN

It's about three hundred and seventy-five dollars an ounce... times three hundred ounces is...

(calculating in his head)

CAROLE
(immediately)
A hundred and twelve thousand
five hundred dollars.

BEN
(quietly)
Per bar.

CAROLE
My god, you're right.

BEN
For a grand total of...
(figuring)

CAROLE
(again immediately)
One million one hundred and
twenty-five thousand dollars.

BILLY
That ought to cover them taxes.

CAROLE
(coming down to earth)
I don't believe a word of this.
Where did you get this gold?

BILLY
It's mine, that's all.

CAROLE
It's yours. But you won't tell
us where it is and you won't
tell us where you got it.

BILLY
Why should I tell you anything?

CAROLE
Because through no fault of my
own I'm stuck with you. And if
there's the remotest possibility
of getting unstuck, I want to
know about it.

BILLY
I know just what you mean,
because I feel exactly the same
way about you. And I'm still not
telling you.

CAROLE

Then you can start packing -
because tomorrow you're moving
to a retirement home!

BILLY

(getting to his feet)
The hell I am!

CAROLE

Then you can go straight back to
jail and rot!

BILLY

Then that's just what I'll do!

He storms into the house and slams the door.

INT. AUNT ELEANOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's hot in the desert. The window is open, but there's not a hint of a breeze. Carole is asleep in Eleanor's bed, just a sheet covering her. She stirs. Even the thin sheet is oppressive. In her sleep, she kicks it off. She continues to sleep, lying on her stomach, completely naked.

The door bursts open and Billy barges in -

BILLY

(speaking as he enters)
All right! If you must know, I
stole the goddam gold!

Carole screams and jumps a mile, flipping onto her back, exposing her bare front. She realizes her state and grapples with the sheets and blankets, trying to cover herself.

BILLY

I stole it from the United
States Army. Now I hope you're
satisfied!

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - GROUND LEVEL SHOT (MOVING) - GALLOPING
HORSES' HOOVES - DAY

An explosion of sound - the sudden DEAFENING ROAR of dozens of racing hooves which now fill the screen. The picture is in SEPIA TONES.

WIDER ANGLE - MOVING WITH THE RIDERS

It is a COMPANY of U.S. Cavalry, circa 1917, riding at full gallop, led by a LIEUTENANT and a SERGEANT. The SEPIA FADES back into FULL COLOR. The Lieutenant is young, spit and polish, fresh out of West Point. In marked contrast are the rest of the men - hard-bitten workaday troopers with no better prospects than a desert garrison for twenty dollars a month. The Sergeant is young, maybe 25, tall and lanky, thin as a reed, and tough as they come.

EXT. TRAIN STALLED ON TRACK - MED. LONG SHOT - DAY

It has been stopped by a barricade of timbers piled on the track. The troopers slow to a trot as they ride alongside the train surveying the grim scene --

TROOPERS' POV - TRUCKING ALONG THE LENGTH OF THE TRAIN

The ENGINEER is hanging out the side window of the engine, shot dead... In the tender, the FIREMAN is sprawled on his back atop the coal heap, dead, a rifle still clutched in his hand... Alongside the tracks are more bodies - the CONDUCTOR, the BRAKEMAN, some MALE PASSENGERS. The corpses are in an incongruously neat row - they had been lined up and shot in cold blood. Frightened FACES peer out of the passenger car windows - mostly WOMEN and CHILDREN... A well-dressed ELDERLY GENTLEMAN sits on the steps of the car while a YOUNG WOMAN ministers to a gash on his forehead.

MED. SHOT - EXPRESS CAR - DAY

A detail of troopers removes three more bodies from the express car - an EXPRESSMAN and two young uniformed SOLDIERS. Just outside the car, the Lieutenant and the Sergeant examine a wooden crate -

MED. CLOSE ON THE CRATE

It has been broken open and is empty. Stenciled across its side: "U.S. MINT - SAN FRANCISCO."

EXT. DESERT - LONG SHOT - LATE AFTERNOON

The cavalry company again on the move, riding full out into the lengthening shadows, on the trail of the train robbers.

EXT. CROSSROADS IN THE TRAIL - DUSK

The Sergeant kneels on the ground, studying the hodgepodge of hoof prints, reading the trail.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CLEARING - MED. SHOT - NIGHT

Two MEXICAN BANDITS sit by a campfire, passing a whiskey bottle back and forth, laughing drunkenly. One of them is wearing a sombrero... the other a railroad conductor's cap. Then - from out of nowhere -

A VOICE (O.S.)
(loud and clear)
Qué pasa?

The startled bandits whirl reflexively toward the sound - it seemed to come from behind them. They scramble unsteadily to their feet and fumble for their guns -

BANDIT #1
Quién vive?!

And immediately, from the opposite direction comes -

ANOTHER VOICE (O.S.)
Qué pasa?

The bandits whirl frontwards, disoriented, confused. Now from the left -

A THIRD VOICE (O.S.)
Qué pasa?

And from the right -

A FOURTH VOICE (O.S.)
Qué pasa?

And from all around -

ALL THE VOICES (O.S.)
(in rapid succession,
not quite in unison)
Qué pasa?...
Qué pasa?...
Qué pasa?...

WIDER ANGLE

As the bandits' heads whirl from side to side to side in alcoholic confusion, the Sergeant steps into the clearing from behind and trains his rifle at their heads point blank -

SERGEANT
 Qué pasa, assholes?

The other troopers step into the clearing from all directions, guns pointing at the hapless Mexicans.

EXT. EDGE OF CLEARING - FULL SHOT - NIGHT

The bandits are on their horses - seated backwards - hands tied behind their backs. Each has a noose around his neck. The Lieutenant rides up -

SERGEANT
 I was just about to question the prisoners, sir.

LIEUTENANT
 Carry on.

SERGEANT
 (to the Mexicans)
 All right, how about it? Where's the rest of your outfit?

The Mexicans shrug, look blank, they simply don't understand.

SERGEANT
 Where's Quintera? Where's his camp and how many men does he have?

He cocks his rifle menacingly.

BANDIT #1	BANDIT #2
(simultaneously,	
panicky)	
Por favor, sargento!	No entendemos.
No hablo ingles...!	Dios me salve! Le
	ruego, senor...!

LIEUTENANT
 Forget it, Sergeant. They don't speak English.

SERGEANT

Sir, I believe I can teach them
right quick.

And with no further preamble, he whacks Bandit #1's horse in the hindquarters with his rifle butt. The horse bolts, leaving the bandit gurgling and dancing at the end of the rope.

SHOT - THE LIEUTENANT

Wide-eyed in horrified wonder.

BACK TO SCENE

While #2 stares dazed at his compadre twisting slowly slowly in the wind the Sergeant whirls on him and barks into his face.

SERGEANT

Where's Quintera's camp?

BANDIT #2

(without hesitation)

There - up the mountain. There is a small canyon with many caves. The entrance is hidden. You cannot see it from the trail.

SERGEANT

Then I guess you just
volunteered to show us.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - LONG SHOT - NIGHT

In the moonlight, the company rides single-file up a precipitous path along the rim of the mountain.

EXT. ROCKY PLATEAU - NIGHT

The party arrives at this wide, flat shelf on the rim of the mountain. On one side of the shelf is a sheer drop to the valley below, whence they have just come. On the other side are vertical columns of rock that form the rising face of the mountain.

BANDIT #2
 (indicates the columns)
 Through there is the entrance to
 the canyon.

LIEUTENANT
 How far in there is Quintera
 camped?

BANDIT #2
 Not far. Maybe one mile.

LIEUTENANT
 Sergeant, we'll go in on foot.
 Have the men dismount quietly.
 With any luck, we'll catch them
 all asleep.

EXT. ROCKY PLATEAU - THE TROOPERS

One by one they disappear behind the rock columns into
 the entrance to the canyon. The Sergeant calls one
 TROOPER out of the line - a youngster, maybe 17 years
 old.

SERGEANT
 Stoat. You stay here with the
 prisoner.

YOUNG TROOPER
 Aw, Slim... I wanna go, too.

SERGEANT
 You stay, Billy. You ain't gonna
 miss nothing.

EXT. ROCKY PLATEAU

The troopers have been gone for a while, now. The Young
 Trooper and the Bandit sit facing each other near the
 rim of the ledge. The Bandit still has his hands tied
 behind him. The Young Trooper has his rifle cradled
 easily across his lap. He looks down into the valley
 below -

YOUNG TROOPER
 How's come you and your buddy
 was down there and not camped
 with the rest of your guys?

BANDIT #2
 We were the lookouts.

YOUNG TROOPER
 (laughs)
 You did a hell of a job.

The Bandit just shrugs.

YOUNG TROOPER
 Quintera ain't gonna be too
 happy you didn't let him know he
 has visitors.

BANDIT #2
 We were only to signal if
 everything was quiet. Once every
 hour. If we did not signal, he
 would know there is trouble.

YOUNG TROOPER
 (doesn't quite get it)
 What do you mean?

BANDIT #2
 (smiles)
 Quintera knows he has visitors.

YOUNG TROOPER
 (it finally sinks in)
 Why, you peckerwood son of a
 bitch!

EXT. IN THE CANYON - THE TROOPERS

They stealthily move toward the area that appears to be
 Quintera's encampment - bedrolls, saddles, a glowing,
 banked fire. The canyon is quite small, boxed in on
 three sides with high rock walls. The walls are riddled
 with caves at varying heights.

ANGLE ON A CAVE

In the shadows of the cave's entrance, a BANDIT draws a
 bead on the troopers below.

SHOT - ANOTHER CAVE

And another BANDIT taking aim.

SERIES OF SHOTS

QUICK CUTS to five or six additional caves, each with at least one rifle-wielding BANDIT at the ready. The thing's going to be a turkey-shoot.

MED. FULL SHOT - THE TROOPERS

One SHOT rings out and in a split-second the canyon walls are alive with rifle fire. Pandemonium. The troopers run every which way for cover - they are mowed down - the Lieutenant is hit and falls - he is trampled by the fleeing men - they begin to fire back blindly at the canyon walls - some of them make it to cover, but it's imperfect cover, exposed to at least some of the caves. They are fish in a barrel, and there's no escape.

CLOSE HEAD-ON SHOT - RIFLE MUZZLE

We see the muzzle FLASH as the gun is fired TOWARD CAMERA. PULL BACK TO REVEAL the Young Trooper holding the smoking rifle. We're out on the rock shelf now, outside the canyon. We HEAR the gun battle continuing in the canyon.

WIDER ANGLE

to include the body of his prisoner, Bandit #2, whom he has just shot dead at point blank range.

EXT. CANYON - MED. SHOT - THE SERGEANT

crouching behind a rock formation, returning fire at the caves. He is shooting frantically, as fast as he can, trying to cover a 270 degree field of fire. It's a lost cause. Shooting in one direction, he is hit in the leg from the opposite side. He turns to fire that way, and is hit from a third direction. He goes down.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CANYON - MED. SHOT - DAWN

Troopers' bodies lay everywhere - the entire company has been wiped out. QUINTERA and his seven MEN drift back from the caves. One by one they lay down their rifles and congregate in the center of the encampment. They are in high spirits as they survey their handiwork. A couple of them begin looting nearby bodies. CAMERA PULLS BACK RAPIDLY to an elevated vantage point in the surrounding rocks, and REVEALS the Young Trooper hidden there, watching the scene below. He lifts his rifle -

POV

sighting down the barrel - a clear shot at the unsuspecting bandits. The Young Trooper's going to have a little turkey shoot of his own.

CLOSE ON HIS TRIGGER FINGER

It tenses, squeezes --

MED. SHOT - THE BANDITS

The SHOT rings out - a Bandit falls. And now in rapid succession, another SHOT, and ANOTHER - three clean shots - and three hits - before the bandits can react. They scramble as the Young Trooper continues firing. A fourth Bandit falls, a fifth. The three remaining Bandits hit the ground and fire back. On their bellies, they fan out, finding good cover behind boulders and dead bodies. The exchange of fire continues, but it appears to be a standoff. Until --

MED. CLOSE SHOT - THE SERGEANT

sprawled behind his rock formation. His wounds - in the leg and the shoulder - are painful but superficial. He boosts himself onto his good leg and peers out from behind the rock. About twenty feet away are the bandits, their backs exquisitely exposed to his position. He draws his sidearm and picks off one, then the next. The third - Quintera himself - instinctively rolls, and the Sergeant's third shot misses. Quintera whirls to fire at the Sergeant - and in that instant exposes himself to the Young Trooper.

CLOSE ON THE YOUNG TROOPER

He aims and fires.

MED. SHOT - QUINTERA

as he's hit in the back of the head. His body pitches forward and his rifle fires as it goes flying. And that quickly, it's all over.

CLOSE UP - GUNNY SACK

A hand holding a Bowie knife comes INTO FRAME and neatly slits the sack up the middle. Several gold bars tumble out.

SERGEANT'S VOICE (O.S.)

Will you look at that!

WIDER ANGLE

REVEALING we are in one of the caves. The sack is one of several stacked against the cave wall - which the Sergeant and the Young Trooper now gaze upon in awe.

YOUNG TROOPER

Too bad we gotta turn it in.

He looks to the Sergeant questioningly.

SERGEANT

We are soldiers in the United States Army, boy. O' course we gotta turn it in,

(a long beat, then)

Most of it.

YOUNG TROOPER

I'll get a shovel.

EXT. CAMP MCGEE - FULL SHOT - DAY

We HEAR a martial DRUM ROLL - unobtrusive but continuing throughout all of the following. A military awards ceremony is underway. (This is a small desert outpost - a more or less temporary cavalry base in the middle of nowhere. A few dusty wood-frame buildings, a corral and some stables.) The post's entire contingent stands at attention while a MAJOR reads the citation to the two heroes - the Sergeant and the Young Trooper.

MAJOR

... for conspicuous bravery in
the face of grave physical
peril.

TWO SHOT - SERGEANT AND YOUNG TROOPER LOOKING
SUITABLY SOLEMN.

MAJOR

Sergeant Hiram Waterman and
Trooper Oakley William Stroat,
finding themselves the sole
survivors of their company...

QUICK DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE BOX CANYON - FULL SHOT - DAY

Now quiet and serene.

MAJOR'S VOICE (OVER)

(continuing unbroken)
... nevertheless held their
position and engaged their
adversary in an exchange of
fire...

QUICK DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - MED. SHOT - DAY

ESTABLISH and HOLD as -

MAJOR'S VOICE (OVER)
 (continuing unbroken)
 ... leading to the successful
 completion of their mission.
 The actions of these men bring
 credit to the United States
 Cavalry...

QUICK DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAVE FLOOR - HIGH ANGLE MED. SHOT - DAY

As the Major's speech continues, CAMERA ZOOMS IN on
 the spot where the gold is buried - marked by a
 pattern of neatly arranged stones.

MAJOR'S VOICE (OVER)
 (continuing unbroken)
 ... and our proud tradition of
 leaving no stone unturned in
 the performance of our duty.

COLOR once again FADES to SEPIA TONES, and we -

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BILLINGS' OFFICE - DAY

Once again in normal COLOR. Billings is behind his
 desk, facing Carole, Ben and Billy.

BILLINGS
 And you're saying that gold is
 still up there in that cave,
 to this day?

BILLY
 Gotta be. Never went back for
 it.

BILLINGS
 Didn't the Army notice it was
 missing?

BILLY
 They figured some of
 Quintera's men made off with
 it before we got to them.
 Least, they never could prove
 otherwise.

BILLINGS

And what about your friend -
the Sergeant?

BILLY

Slim? Got shipped over to
France in the First War.
German bayonet finally got
him.

BILLINGS

Well now, that is just about
the damndest story I ever
heard.

CAROLE

That was pretty much our
reaction.

BEN

What we'd like to know are the
legalities of all this. Who
does the gold belong to?

BILLINGS

Well, that's a tricky one.
Technically, I suppose it
still belongs to the
government. Although after all
these years, you might make a
case for finder's rights. Why
do you ask?

CAROLE

(a little sheepish)
Oh, no reason, really...

BILLY

No reason, hell. We're going
after it.

BEN

(correcting quickly)
We're only thinking about it.

BILLINGS

Now look here, folks - you're
talking about things that
happened maybe 60, 70 years
ago - if they happened at all.

BILLY

Just what does that mean?

BILLINGS

Now really, Mr Stoat. Do you honestly recall all these things taking place? All those details? The location of that cave? You know darn well you have trouble remembering what day it is.

BILLY

I could take you to it right now! And it's Wednesday.

BEN

(mildly to Billy)
It's Thursday.

BILLINGS

Look, folks, I've been around prospectors and treasure hunters all my life. I know how tempting a story like this can be. It's natural for you to want to believe it. Hell, I'd like to believe it. But even if it's all true - even if that gold is sitting in those hills just waiting for someone to come along and cart it off - there's no way you're ever going to find it. Take my word for it - the only place where there's buried treasure is in story books.

EXT. AUNT ELEANOR'S HOUSE - ESTABLISHING SHOT - DAY

A real estate broker's For Sale sign has been added to the premises.

INT. AUNT ELEANOR'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

CAROLE

So, what do you think?

BEN

I don't know what to think. Maybe he made the whole thing up. Maybe he's trying to recapture his youth.

CAROLE

It would be understandable. He feels deserted, ignored. It's like a kid, wanting to be the center of attention. He just wants to be taken seriously again.

BEN

I mean that story is full of holes. Why didn't he ever go back for the gold? Who keeps a million dollars stashed in a cave his whole life? Who's got that kind of will power?

CAROLE

He only thought it was fifty thousand.

BEN

Does it make any more sense for fifty thousand? Billings is right. The whole thing's a fairy tale. A pipe dream.

CAROLE

It's got to be.

BEN

Absolutely.

CAROLE

So how do you explain this?

She produces an ancient scrapbook open to a middle page and places it on Ben's lap.

INSERT - THE SCRAPBOOK

On the left page is a snapshot of young trooper Billy and his sergeant, Slim - on the facing page Billy's medal and a copy of the citation.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. IMPERIAL COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - DAY

A small bungalow on the edge of Brawley with a modest sign identifying the place. Carole and Ben walk up the path toward the door.

CAROLE
This is ridiculous, you know.

BEN
I know it is.

CAROLE
I'm telling you, Ben, it's a total waste of time.

BEN
I'm sure you're right. Think of it as a matter of historical interest. Forget the million dollars. It's worth learning about, even if it's just - half a million.

They go inside.

INT. HISTORICAL SOCIETY - DAY

A single room resembling a small public library. Carole and Ben are seated at one of the tables, each poring over a separate bound volume of old documents, turning pages rapidly as they look for references to Billy's story. A Historical Society VOLUNTEER - a sprightly little old lady - brings them another large volume.

VOLUNTEER
I think I've found something -

CAROLE
Good! What do you have?

VOLUNTEER
(enthusiastically)
A bank robbery! August 1924-
Three people killed in the
shootout.

She shows them the book. Ben and Carole exchange tolerant looks.

BEN
(gently reminding
her)
Dear, we're looking for a
train robbery in 1917. With
about a dozen killed.

VOLUNTEER

(in a huff)

Well we just don't seem to have that. My goodness. After I've gone to all this trouble, you might be courteous enough not to be so particular.

EXT. HISTORICAL SOCIETY BUILDING - DAY

Carole and Ben come out of the building.

CAROLE

Well, what now?

BEN

We could try the local library.

CAROLE

Okay - the local library.

EXT. LOCAL LIBRARY - DAY

Carole and Ben enter the building -

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LOCAL LIBRARY - DAY

Carole and Ben come out of the building. Ben looks up and down the street, contemplating his next move.

BEN

The newspaper morgue?

She nods and silently gestures for him to lead on.

EXT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

Carole and Ben enter the office --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

Carole and Ben come out of the office.

CAROLE
Any more bright ideas?

BEN
How about if we just stop old
people on the street and ask
them if they remember it?

INT. AUNT ELEANOR'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ben is leafing through the scrapbook.

BEN
What if we got in touch with
the Pentagon? The Army must
have a record of the missing
gold.

The PHONE RINGS. Carole crosses to answer it.

CAROLE
(as she goes)
Sure. And when they ask why we
want to know, we'll tell them
we know who stole it.
(answering phone)
Hello...

INT. BILLINGS'S OFFICE - BILLINGS ON PHONE

BILLINGS
Hello, Ms Cobb, Clifford
Billings. It occurred to me I
wasn't too convincing in
trying to talk you out of this
gold business.

CAROLE ON PHONE

CAROLE
Oh, you were very convincing.
We're just not too bright.

BILLINGS ON PHONE

BILLINGS

(laughs)

I realize the idea of all that money's hard to let go of. There's somebody I'd like you to talk to. He's something of an expert on local history. I've already spoken with him and he'd very much like to meet with you. His name is Julian Cisneros.

EXT. BRAWLEY STREETS - BEN'S CAR - DAY

The car crosses the railroad tracks into the poorer section of town.

INT. CAR

Carole and Ben in front, Billy in back.

BILLY

How many sonsabitches you going to let in on this, anyway?

CAROLE

We're doing this for you. He could corroborate your story.

BILLY

Just let's go get the gold. That'll corroborate my story.

BEN

It won't hurt to listen to what he has to say.

BILLY

The more people who know about this, the more chance there is of being bushwhacked. You don't know what gold'll do to a person.

CAROLE
He's not interested in your
gold. The man's some kind of
historian.

BILLY
What's his name, anyway?

CAROLE
Julian Cisneros.

BILLY
Ain't nobody named "Cisneros"
is a historian.

EXT. STREET - THE CAR

It turns off onto a residential street. This is a lower class neighborhood - small cracker-box houses, beat-up pickup trucks in driveways. Ben's car pulls to a stop in front of Cisneros's house. It's a little rundown, the lawn littered with children's toys.

ANGLE ON CAROLE, BEN AND BILLY

looking at the house.

CAROLE
Are you sure this is it?

BEN
It's the right address.

They get out of the car and walk to the house. From various parts of the neighborhood we hear DOGS BARKING.

BILLY
(heavy sarcasm)
Looks like a historian's
place, all right.

They get to the front door and ring the bell. After a moment, the door is opened by a harassed YOUNG WOMAN with a baby in her arms and a tot hanging on her leg.

CAROLE
Mrs Cisneros?

MRS CISNEROS

Yes.

CAROLE

I'm Carole Cobb. I think Mr
Cisneros is expecting us.

MRS CISNEROS

He's out back.

CAROLE

Out back?

Inside the house two KIDS start fighting loudly

MRS CISNEROS

(over her shoulder)

Silencio!

(to Carole)

Behind the garage. Just go up
the path, you'll see the door.

CAROLE

Thank you.

Mrs Cisneros smiles pleasantly and closes the door.

BILLY

Looks like a historian's wife.

They make their way along the path between the house and garage as instructed. The garage has what appears to be an addition, an extra room annexed to its rear. The garage and addition are in the same mildly disreputable shape as the house. They get to the door of the addition and Carole knocks.

The door is opened by JULIAN CISNEROS, a Mexican-American about 35, dressed in chinos and a white t-shirt.

JULIAN

Mrs Cobb?

CAROLE

Yes.

JULIAN

Please come in.

They step into the room.

INT. THE ROOM - SHOT OF BEN, CAROLE, AND BILLY - AS THEY ENTER.

Their eyes widen in awe.

THEIR POV - THE ROOM

It is magnificent - the oak-paneled study of an Oxford don or Harvard professor. Floor to ceiling bookshelves line the walls, filled to capacity with rare volumes and historical documents. A large, elegant, glass display case contains artifacts of the southwestern past. The furniture is heavy polished wood and pungent leather.

ANOTHER ANGLE - INCLUDING THE THREE GUESTS

Even Billy is impressed.

CAROLE

What a wonderful room!

JULIAN

I picked a lot of lettuce to get this room.

BILLY

(truly amazed)

I never seen a Mexican with so many books. What are they all - bibles?

JULIAN

Don't tell me. This is the old soldier.

CAROLE

You'll have to excuse Uncle Billy. Or strangle him. Your choice.

JULIAN

Why don't we all sit down.

He leads them to the long leather couch.

JULIAN

Cliff Billings tells me you claim you killed Alejandro Quintera.

BILLY

What do you mean, "claim"? You calling me a liar?

JULIAN

I'm not sure yet. Possibly.

BEN

Then there really was such a man?

JULIAN

Oh, yes. Quintera was a notorious bandit in his day. The train robbery is well documented. There's even some material about that final shootout.

(to Billy)

You were in the Ninth Cavalry, is that right?

BILLY

That's right. I was in the Ninth Cavalry...

Julian raises his eyebrows...

BILLY

(continuing)

... and before that I was slave.

Julian breaks into a grin.

CAROLE

What are you talking about?

JULIAN

The Ninth Cavalry was an all black regiment.

BILLY

Damn rights. This sneaky sonofabitch is trying to trick me.

JULIAN

All right, Mr Stoat. No more tricks. As a matter of fact, I've done some checking and most of your story is perfectly plausible.

BEN

What about the gold? Do you think it's there?

JULIAN

That's one thing that isn't documented. There's no record that any gold was missing from the recovered shipment.

BILLY

The gold is there, I tell you. And if you had any sense, we wouldn't be sittin' here discussin' it, we'd be on our way to gettin' it.

JULIAN

Another thing that's not in the records is the exact location of that canyon where the shootout occurred. Do you suppose you could be a little more specific about where it's located.

BILLY

I could but I ain't gonna.

CAROLE

Uncle Billy, you said you'd cooperate.

BILLY

Why should I? I don't know this peckerwood from Whistler's sister.

CAROLE

So far this peckerwood is the only one who's backed up your story. And as far as I'm concerned, it's up to him whether we take this any further.

BILLY

(snidely, to Julian)
What do you want me to do, draw you a goddam map?

CUT TO:

CLOSE SHOT - A WALL MAP

A large topographic map. Julian is pinning a clear plastic overlay onto it.

WIDER ANGLE

JULIAN

Your unit was stationed at an outpost called Camp McGee. Is that right?

BILLY

You know damn well it's right.

JULIAN

That was located right about... here?
(indicates a point on the map)

BILLY

It looks okay, I guess.

JULIAN

(handing him a marking pen)
Fine. Now, I want you to start there and show me the route you took into the mountains.

Billy goes to the map and slowly draws a path, concentrating intently, stopping now and then to search his memory, consider a turn this way or that.

CAROLE

Take your time, Uncle Billy.
We want you to be sure.

When he's finished, he hands Julian the pen smartly, mission accomplished.

JULIAN

That's fine. This ought to help a lot.

CAROLE

Very good, Uncle Billy.

BEN

(patting him on the back)
Good job, partner.

Julian studies the map for a moment, then takes down the overlay and replaces it with a clean one.

JULIAN
(holds out the pen)
Now do it again. The same way.

BILLY
Why should I?

JULIAN
Why shouldn't you?

Billy grabs the pen testily and redraws the route, more quickly this time. Julian looks at the result.

JULIAN
That's what I thought.

CAROLE
What's the matter?

He places the first overlay up against the map, lining it up over the second overlay.

CLOSE SHOT - THE MAP

The two routes that Billy traced are completely dissimilar, each taking a different path and ending at different locations.

BEN (O.S.)
They're completely different!

BACK TO SCENE

JULIAN
Completely. He just drew them at random.

CAROLE
You old devil!

BILLY
Well, hell's bells - I start drawing maps, we'll all end up with our throats cut - and Cisneros here'll be adding another wing to his library.

JULIAN
How did he live to be so old?

BILLY

By not drawing maps for
strangers.

(to Carole and Ben)

You just get me to Camp McGee.
I'll take you the rest of the
way from there.

BEN

(to Julian)

Do you think he can do it?

JULIAN

On a scale of one to ten...?
Probably not.

Carole and Ben are visibly disappointed.

JULIAN

But I'd like to make one
point. Even if there's only a
slight chance of success, it's
worth a try. Look at the
potential payoff.

CAROLE

Well, now I don't know what to
do.

BILLY

Listen to the man. He's a
historian. He knows what he's
talking about.

JULIAN

If it will help you decide,
I'd like to offer my services
as a guide. You're going to
need one.

BEN

Why would you want to do that?

JULIAN

If that gold is there, we'll
be uncovering a piece of local
history. That's something I'd
like to be in on. Also, I'm
going to charge you five
hundred dollars.

CAROLE

Five hundred dollars!

JULIAN
That's what I get.

BILLY
I didn't need no guide the
first time and I don't need no
guide now.

JULIAN
There's more to this than
knowing the way. You're
talking about a hard trip
through very hostile country.
Take my word for it, you can't
do it on your own.

BEN
How about instead of a fee you
take a percentage of what we
find?

JULIAN
What kind of percentage?

BEN
Say, ten?

He looks to Carole and Billy for confirmation.
Carole nods, Billy Just glares.

BEN
If that gold is there, you
could end up with a lot of
money.

JULIAN
And if it isn't there, I end
up with nothing.
(considers)
Okay. You've got yourself a
guide. When do you want to go?

CAROLE
First I've got to get back to
Los Angeles and arrange for
the time off work. Say in
about a week?

JULIAN
Good. That'll give me time to
round up the equipment, rent
some horses... You do ride?

BEN
 (temporizing)
 Oh, sure... we ride.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GOLDEN STATE FREEWAY - LONG SHOT - DAY

The usual heavy traffic moving at breakneck speed. CAMERA PANS to the rustic contrast of Griffith Park alongside the freeway, and ZOOMS IN on a sign there:

GRIFFITH PARK STABLES

-Boarding-

-Rentals-

-Lessons -

EXT. TRAINING RING - MED. CLOSE SHOT - DAY

A children's horsemanship class. CAMERA HOLDS POSITION as one by one the seven- and eight-year old KIDS bounce across the screen, cute as hell. And bouncing right behind them comes Carole, easily the most awkward student in the school's history, followed by Ben, the runner-up. Both are suffering mightily. But not as much as -

MED. SHOT - BILLY

leaning against the corral fence, chewing a twig, shaking his head with fascinated dismay as they set horsemanship back a hundred years.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Billy is seated on the couch, playing with the TV's remote control, changing channels, going louder and softer, on and off. Ben brings two TV dinners in from the kitchen - sets them on the coffee table.

BEN
 I got Salisbury steak and
 turkey. Take your pick.

BILLY
 What in hell is Salisbury
 steak?

Ben peels back the foil on one of the trays and shows him.

BILLY
I'll take turkey.

Ben switches trays with him. Billy digs his fork in, lifts up a piece of turkey, peruses it, looks over at the other tray -

BILLY
I'll take Salisbury steak.

Ben shrugs - switches trays again. They eat.

BILLY
Seems to me that Carole could have cooked us up something before she went home. I mean, that's a woman's job, ain't it?

BEN
You don't know how many times I've hit her with that same cogent argument.

BILLY
If you knew how to treat her, she wouldn't be off living by herself in the first place.

BEN
(meaning it)
There you may have something.

BILLY
When's the last time you really belted her one solid?

BEN
Somehow I don't think that would work with Carole.

BILLY
No? You tell me, then.

BEN
What Carole needs is a sense of security. Which happens to be the one thing I'm constitutionally unable to supply. That's why I'm counting on that gold of yours. There's nothing like a large infusion of money to put the romance back in a marriage.

BILLY

Then you got nothing to worry
about, son.

EXT. FRONT OF CAROLE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - PRE-DAWN

Carole, dressed for camping and holding a duffel bag, shivers in the early morning cold as she waits on the sidewalk.

Ben's car pulls up. Carole throws the duffel bag in the trunk - gets in the car with Ben and Billy - the car moves off.

EXT. HIGHWAY TO BRAWLEY - DAWN

Ben's car speeds down the highway into the rising sun.

EXT. FRONT YARD OF AUNT ELEANOR'S HOUSE - DAY

Ben, Carole, and Billy help Julian load his jeep - a rugged old off-roader hooked up to a four-horse trailer. Billings's car comes up the driveway and stops alongside them.

BILLINGS

Morning, folks.

CAROLE

Hi, Mr Billings. Come to see
us off on our adventure?

BILLINGS

You're really going through
with it.

BEN

All packed and ready to go.

BILLINGS

Julian, I suppose you advised
these folks they're on a wild
goose chase.

CAROLE

He's been almost as
discouraging as you.

BILLINGS

Then I guess all I can do is wish you luck. How long do you figure this excursion's going to take?

JULIAN

We should get to the old Army base by tonight. After that, it's up to the old man.

BILLY

And the old man ain't saying.

BILLINGS

It might be a good idea if you left me a copy of your route - as much of it as you know. Just in case.

CAROLE

Just in case what?

JULIAN

He's right. Anything can happen in the desert. The car could break down...

(with a teasing look
to Billy)

... we could get lost in the mountains...

BILLY

Ain't gonna get lost.

JULIAN

Come on over to the car, Cliff
- I'll show you the map.

EXT. YARD - MED. SHOT - THE JEEP

It's packed and ready to go. Billy is aboard in the back seat as Julian makes a final check on the trailer hitch. Carole and Ben are locking up the house.

BILLY

Come on, let's get this thing moving.

CAROLE
 Goodbye, Mr Billings. Thanks
 for everything.

BILLINGS
 Have a safe trip. And be sure
 to call me as soon as you get
 back.

Carole looks at the spartan, beat-up jeep, jammed
 with their gear.

CAROLE
 I know I'm going to love
 riding in this thing.

She climbs in.

INT. JEEP

— as Carole maneuvers her way into the cramped back
 seat next to Billy.

BILLY
 Watch it! You're on my foot.

CAROLE
 Sorry.

BILLY
 Dammit, woman. Go easy.

She wedges herself into the seat among Billy and the
 equipment, but has to keep her body compressed in
 order to fit: elbows close to her sides, knees up at
 about chest level. This is going to be a very
 uncomfortable ride.

BEN
 (peering in)
 How is it back there?

CAROLE
 (heavy sarcasm)
 I was afraid there wouldn't be
 much room.

Ben climbs into the passenger seat, Julian gets
 behind the wheel and off they go.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - LONG SHOT - DAY

With Billings waving goodbye, the Jeep heads down the driveway and stops for traffic at the road then pulls onto the road and the trip is underway.

MONTAGE - THE JEEP EN ROUTE

VARIOUS SHOTS of the jeep making its way along a variety of roads: road outside Brawley, freeway on-ramp, speeding along the freeway, freeway off-ramp, two-lane desert road.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - GROUND LEVEL SHOT - DAY

The roadway is an undulating series of dips and rises. SHOOTING UP THE ROAD, we see nothing at first but the heat waves rising from its hot surface. Then, in the distance, the jeep appears heading toward us, coming into view as it rises from a dip. Then, cresting the rise, it gradually sinks out of sight into another dip. CAMERA HOLDS for a few moments, the jeep appears again, coming out of the dip, a little closer now, then once again sinking out of sight.

HIGHER ANGLE - THE JEEP

- undulating its way down the road.

INT. JEEP - JULIAN AND BEN

The wave-like motion is apparent inside the jeep, its monotony lulling Julian and Ben into a half-torpor. FOCUS SHIFTS to the back seat, where Carole is just plain miserable. Billy is asleep, leaning on her. She shifts position, trying to get comfortable, but there's just no way. The jeep's motion and the midday heat are beginning to get to her. She reaches out and slides open the small side window - so tiny it can't possibly make a difference. Billy stirs. Still asleep, he reaches out into the pile of equipment and brings out a blanket, which he drapes around himself, then cuddles into deeper sleep against Carole.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

An old, dilapidated place in the middle of nowhere, complete with a hand-lettered "Last Chance" sign. The jeep is at the gas pump being fueled by an old ATTENDANT. Carole, Ben, and Julian are stretching their legs, drinking soda pop from the station's vending machine. Billy is still asleep in the jeep.

BEN

Do you suppose we ought to wake him up and see if he wants anything?

CAROLE

I already tried. I think he died about a hundred miles ago.

Julian drains the last of his drink and replaces the empty bottle in the rack.

JULIAN

We'd better get moving.

Ben opens the jeep door and waits for her to get in. Carole stands firm and points to the back seat.

CAROLE

Your turn.

BEN

What are you talking about? I can't sit back there.

CAROLE

Then you can ride with the horses. This time I get the front.

BEN

Carole, be reasonable. My legs are a lot longer than yours.

CAROLE

After a couple of hours back there, they won't be.

She jabs her thumb toward the back seat. The point is non-negotiable.

SHOT - THE JEEP

as it pulls out of the station onto a narrow two-lane desert road.

INT. JEEP

In the back, Ben is terribly cramped, squirming around trying vainly to find a comfortable position. Carole watches out of the corner of her eye, enjoying his torture.

EXT. ROAD - THE JEEP - DAY

Another location, many miles later. The jeep slows, then comes to a stop at the intersection of a dirt path leading off into the desert. We see Julian check his map, then the jeep turns onto the dirt path. CAMERA PANS WITH IT and HOLDS on its rear as it heads off into the desolation, kicking up a cloud of dust as it goes.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - LONG SHOT - THE JEEP - DAY

The jeep bumps slowly along the rough, rocky surface.

INT. JEEP

The ride is horrendous, like a stagecoach - or a cocktail shaker. The passengers have all they can do to stay upright in their seats. Billy awakens, sits up, looks out the window.

BILLY

Where are we?

JULIAN

Look up there - on that ridge.

POV - THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

In the distance, on slightly raised ground, is Camp McGee, the abandoned Army post, circa 1917. Just a few ramshackle buildings surrounded by the vestigial remains of a wire fence.

BACK TO SCENE

BILLY
That's it, all right.

CAROLE
It doesn't look like much.

JULIAN
I think it looks pretty good,
considering that it's been
abandoned for about sixty
years.

BEN
Is that so? Well, somebody
forgot to put out the fire,
because I see smoke.

POV - THE CAMP

Sure enough, a column of smoke is curling upward
from the site.

EXT. CAMP MCGEE - DAY

The jeep enters the grounds and continues toward the
buildings. A pack mule is tied to a fence post of
what was once the corral. A small campfire is
burning in a cleared area, with an old tin coffee
pot heating on it. The jeep pulls to a stop.

INT. JEEP

JULIAN
Somebody's here, all right.

EXT. JEEP

They get out, stretch their weary bodies. Billy
looks around at the dilapidated, falling-down
structures, the broken fence posts, the strands of
rusty wire.

BILLY
Hasn't changed much.

JULIAN

(calls)

Hello, anybody here?

(no answer)

I'd better have a look around.

He goes to the closest building and puts his foot on the front step to test it. The wood is rotten, his foot goes right through. From the ground, he leans over and pushes open the door. The door's motion causes some timbers inside to come crashing down. Julian reflexively jumps back from the building as a cloud of dust spills out of the doorway and broken windows.

ANOTHER ANGLE

From around the side of the building comes a grizzled old PROSPECTOR. He's a big, pot-bellied, weatherbeaten old-timer.

PROSPECTOR

That building ain't safe.
Timbers is rotten.

JULIAN

Thanks, I'll remember that.

PROSPECTOR

Fact is, this whole area ain't safe, 'less you know what you're doing.

BEN

That's all right. We know what we're doing.

PROSPECTOR

Yeah? What might that be?

BILLY

None of your damn business.

CAROLE

Billy!

BILLY

We don't have to tell him nothing.

(he takes a menacing
step toward the
Prospector)

Outta my way.

The Prospector reaches under his jacket and pulls out an enormous Colt .45 - the old-fashioned, long-barreled kind, at least a hundred years old and menacing as hell.

PROSPECTOR
Hold it right there, sonny.

They all freeze.

PROSPECTOR
You don't come barging into a man's home without some kind of explanation.

BILLY
You don't own the damn desert.

In reply, the Prospector clicks back the hammer on the big Colt and draws a bead on Billy, looking for all the world like he intends to fire.

BEN
For God's sake, Billy, keep quiet!
(to Prospector)
Look, we didn't know you lived here.

PROSPECTOR
Well I do. For today, anyway. Now what are you doing around here?

JULIAN
We're rockhounds. We were planning on camping here for the night and then heading up into those hills in the morning.

The Prospector looks dubious.

PROSPECTOR
Rockhounds, huh?

CAROLE
You sound as though you don't believe it.

PROSPECTOR
Well, I might - and then again I might not. It all depends.

BEN
Depends on what?

PROSPECTOR
On what a rockhound is.

CAROLE
We collect rocks.

The Prospector stares at them for a long moment,
incredulous.

PROSPECTOR
What for?

CAROLE
For fun. It's a hobby.

PROSPECTOR
(now he's heard
everything)
Honest to God?

BEN
It's the truth.

PROSPECTOR
(chuckling)
Rockhounds!

He uncocks the gun and stows it back under his jacket.
He has nothing to fear from people who collect rocks.

PROSPECTOR
Well, sir, how would you
"rockhounds" like to join me for
supper?

CAROLE
We don't want to impose. Are you
sure you have enough?

PROSPECTOR
Hell, lady, that's no problem.
This place is crawling with
prairie dogs, and they's easy
enough to catch...

Carole goes white.

BEN
(a little green
himself)
I'll tell you, why don't you be
our guest for dinner. We've got
plenty of food in the car.

PROSPECTOR
(slyly)
That's what I figured.

EXT. CAMP MCGEE - NIGHT

It's late and all is still. No crickets, no coyotes,
just deathly, desert quiet. Bathed in the moonlight,
Ben, Carole, Billy, and Julian are in sleeping bags
around the glowing remains of a campfire.

SHOT - THE PROSPECTOR

In his bedroll off by himself away from the others.

MED. CLOSE SHOT - CAROLE

Sleepless, eyes wide open.

CAROLE
(whispers)
Ben, are you awake?

CLOSE SHOT - BEN

He is indeed. They converse in whispers, so not to
wake the others.

BEN
More or less.

TWO SHOT - CAROLE AND BEN

CAROLE
I can't sleep.

BEN
You'd better try. Tomorrow
you'll wish you had.

CAROLE

That old prospector is making me uneasy. I don't think we should all be asleep while he's here.

BEN

Carole, he's not going to sneak up on us and slit our throats.

JULIAN (O.S.)

He might.

Surprised that he's awake, Carole and Ben look over at --

WIDER ANGLE

to include Julian. He whispers so not to wake Billy.

JULIAN

Carole's right. One of us should stay up. I didn't want to alarm you, but you never know about these old hermits. And this one's a little free with that gun of his.

BILLY (O.S.)

(whispering)

Hell, we shoulda took the damn thing away from him.

Surprised again, they all look over toward --

WIDER ANGLE

to include Billy. The whole contingent is wide awake.

BILLY

(still whispering)

Damn thing's an antique anyhow. Bet it don't even fire.

And on that cue a shot cracks through the silence, the round smashing into the fire a few feet from their heads, sending sparks and embers flying. They literally jump from the shock of it.

MED. LONG SHOT - THE PROSPECTOR

In his bedroll, resting on one elbow, admiring his sixgun.

PROSPECTOR
She fires, all right!

SHOT - THE FOUR OF THEM

JULIAN
Right. We'll take turns staying awake and keeping an eye on him. Who wants to stay up first?

BEN
Stay up? Who can sleep?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMP - MORNING

As if in answer to the previous question, Ben, Carole, and Julian are sound asleep. Billy is tending the fire, stirring up the banked embers to ignite new kindling. He glances at the others, annoyed that they're still sleeping. He bangs a few pots around, hoping the noise will rouse them. They continue to sleep. He takes the coffee pot and slams it down hard.

WIDER ANGLE

The others stir, then slowly come awake. Julian glances over to where the prospector was.

JULIAN
The old guy - he's gone.

BILLY
Left just before sunup. Didn't steal nothing. I was watching.

CAROLE
You watched him all night?

BILLY
(with disdain)
Somebody had to.

JULIAN
Which way was he heading?

BILLY
(indicates west)
Thataway.

CAROLE
Which way will we be going?

JULIAN/BILLY
(together, indicating
east)
Thataway.

BEN
He could double back and try
to follow us.

JULIAN
Not likely. These old desert
rats keep pretty much to
themselves. That's why they're
out here to begin with.

BEN
We've got a big day ahead of
us. Let's have breakfast and
get started.

BILLY
Coffee's all ready.

CAROLE
(pleasantly
surprised)
It is?

BILLY
(holds out the coffee
pot and can of coffee
to her)
Yep. All's you got to do is
make it.

MONTAGE - LOADING UP

QUICK CUTS:

MED. CLOSE SHOT - THE CAMPFIRE

A bucket of water is unceremoniously dumped on it, dousing it.

THE JEEP BEING UNLOADED.

Bucket-brigade style - the boxes of supplies handed from Julian to Ben to Carole, for whom they are a bit heavy.

CLOSE SHOT - HORSE'S BACK

A saddle is slapped onto it.

CLOSE SHOT - HORSE'S HEAD

The bridle is put on.

MED. SHOT - CAROLE

ineptly trying to load goods onto a horse's back and getting it all wrong. Ben steps in and takes over, shaking his head at her ineptitude. He struggles with it for a moment, finally Billy steps in, elbows Ben aside, and quickly and deftly does the job.

MED. LONG SHOT - THE WHOLE PARTY

as they mount up - Ben and Carole in not quite the most professional manner.

EXT. CAMP - MED. LONG SHOT

With the locked jeep in the foreground among the buildings, we see the party move out with Julian and Billy in the lead, Ben and Carole bringing up the rear.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME ANGLE - LATER

The party is off in the distance now, making their way toward the mountain.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME ANGLE

The party is now very far away, just barely visible as they start up the mountain.

CLOSE SHOT - A LIZARD ON A ROCK

It looks this way, then that, then darts for cover as our party's horses' legs come into the shot.

MED. SHOT - THE PARTY

Higher in the mountain. The sun is high in the sky and it's hot on the trail. Ben wipes his brow with a handkerchief. Carole is trying to drink from a canteen while keeping her balance on unaccustomed horseback.

ANGLE ON - THE TERRAIN

Higher still. It's rocky here, and beginning to get steep.

EXT. A SMALL PLATEAU

The trail forks into two directions. Julian reins to a stop.

JULIAN

Any of this look familiar?

BILLY

(with certainty)

It's familiar.

CAROLE

What about the caves?

BILLY

Up yonder.

(points up)

HIS POV

The area he's pointing to - high, high up the mountain. It's rough terrain, seemingly inaccessible.

BACK TO SCENE

The left fork in the trail leads into a cut in the hills, the right goes dangerously along the side of the mountain, with a sheer drop to one side.

JULIAN

All right. Which way?

CAROLE

(whispering to
herself)

The left. Please, the
left...

BILLY

To the right.

Carole throws God a dirty look. Julian leads them off to the right. They follow, spreading into single file as the trail narrows.

SHOT - SHEER CLIFF FACE

SHOOTING UP from below - it's at least a hundred feet.

At the top of the cliff is the trail, and we see the party making its way precariously along.

JULIAN'S POV

The trail in front of them. It's less defined now, just a more or less flat, rocky area with the mountain on one side and a sheer drop on the other.

ANGLE ON JULIAN

carefully steering his horse along the areas of firmest footing.

CLOSE SHOT - JULIAN'S HORSE'S HOOVES

close to the edge. An outside rear hoof misses its footing and comes down just over the edge, knocking loose a few rocks on the rim and sending them scuttling down the cliff.

ANGLE ON BILLY

riding easily, unconcerned. CAMERA PANS to Ben and Carole, petrified, willing themselves to look straight ahead and resist the temptation to look down. The falling rocks attract Ben and he involuntarily glances down. He immediately looks up, regretting the move.

CAROLE
(repeating to
herself)
A million dollars... a
million dollars...

EXT. CLEARING IN THE MOUNTAINS

A rest stop. The horses are grazing on the sparse vegetation. Ben, Carole, Billy, and Julian are seated on rocks, finishing a spartan lunch of backpacker's fare. CAMERA PULLS BACK AND PANS UP to include an outcropping of rock overlooking the clearing. And there, looking down on our group (and unseen by them), enjoying a spot of lunch himself, is - the Old Prospector.

EXT. ON THE TRAIL - THE PARTY

Now moving along a dry stream bed in the hills. The stream bed follows a deep cut with rocky walls on either side as it snakes its leisurely way up a shallow incline toward the mountain's crest.

EXT. ROCKY PLATEAU - DAY

A flat shelf near the crest of the mountain. The morning's ride has taken its toll on Ben and Carole, who have fallen behind the others. Julian looks back over his shoulder.

JULIAN

We'd better slow down. I think we're losing them.

BILLY

It don't matter. We're here.

He heads toward the rising rock face of the mountain, seemingly a dead end. But the rock face is really a freestanding vertical column, a natural false-front, hiding a passage between it and the mountain itself. Billy leads the group into the passage.

EXT. IN THE PASSAGE - SHOOTING DOWN ON THEM AS THEY EMERGE AT THE FAR END -

CAROLE

Look!

THEIR POV

It's the small box canyon hidden in the mountain, where the shootout took place years ago. Up one side and down the other, the canyon's walls are lined with caves.

JULIAN

It's the canyon!

BEN

He did it! The son of a bitch found it!

ANGLE ON BILLY

on his horse, nonchalant, ignoring them. But if you look close, you can see a tiny smile on his lips.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - MED. SHOT - DAY

The party's horses have been tied up nearby. The group stands at the entrance in eager anticipation, while Julian lights a mine lantern. The others hold flashlights. Billy carries a spade.

BEN

How can you tell this is the one?

JULIAN

Hey, if he said this is the one, then this is the one. The man knows what he's talking about.

BEN

I don't doubt him. I just want to know how he can tell. They all look exactly alike.

BILLY

That's wrong, peckerwood. They all look exactly different. You just got to know what to look for.

INT. CAVE

The party makes its way into the cave, Julian's lantern dimly illuminates the area immediately surrounding them. They shine their flashlights on ahead, revealing this to be a large cavern, with branches going off in many directions.

ANGLE ON THE CEILING

The beam of a someone's flashlight illuminates hundreds of bats sleeping upside down,

BACK TO SCENE

Carole and Ben looking up at the bats.

CAROLE

Omigod!

BEN

Me too!

Billy takes the lead and moves on ahead, walking with the easy gait of someone strolling along a sidewalk. Julian turns to the others -

JULIAN

Make sure you keep the entrance in sight. It's easy to get lost in a place like this.

He turns forward again and discovers he has lost sight of Billy.

JULIAN

Where'd he go? You see where he went?

ANGLE ON - THE INTERIOR OF THE CAVE

Their beams of light search, but Billy is gone.

CAROLE

Uncle Billy?

BEN

(calls)

Billy, where are you?

Billy steps into view from one of the branching tunnels.

BILLY

Right here.

JULIAN

Hold up a minute. Wait for us.

They catch up with him.

JULIAN

How much farther?

BILLY

No farther at all.

He indicates the tunnel. They turn and look.

ANGLE ON THE TUNNEL

But it's not a tunnel, it's a room-sized alcove. And in one corner against the rock wall, a mound of stones clearly marks the spot where the gold is buried.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - DAY

The Old Prospector is on foot, leading his mule. He stops at the entrance to the cave, peers inside and listens. He doesn't see or hear anything. He moves to Julian's horse and looks through the saddlebags. He finds a couple of sticks of dynamite, examines them curiously, replaces them in the saddlebags, then moves on further into the canyon.

INT. CAVE - MED. CLOSE SHOT - A SHOVEL

as it scoops out a shallow hole in the floor of the cave. Billy reaches down and brushes away a final layer of earth, revealing a smooth, lustrous object.

WIDER ANGLE

He removes the gold bar, dusts it off with his sleeve, and holds it out to Carole.

BILLY

There you are. Just like I said.

(a little told-you-so)

Does this "corroborate" my story?

CAROLE

I will never doubt anything you say again.

(takes the bar)

It's heavy. What did we say it was worth? Just this one?

BEN

Hundred and twelve thousand dollars. Give or take.

CAROLE

It's hard to believe...

JULIAN
Come on, let's get the rest
of them.

INT. COUNTY RECORDER'S OFFICE - DAY

Billings is waiting at the counter as MORT GREENE steps up next to him and takes some papers from his leather portfolio. Mixed in among the papers is a small red-lettered "Sold" sign, identifying Greene as the local real estate broker. He nods a greeting to Billings.

MORT
Clifford.

BILLINGS
How's business, Mort?

MORT
It's been worse. Been
better, too.

The CLERK returns to the counter.

CLERK
That'll take a few minutes,
Mr Billings.

BILLINGS
That's all right. No hurry.

CLERK
What you got, Mort?

MORT
(hands him the
papers)
Transfer of title. Seller's
name is Cisneros, Julian.

The clerk begins filling out a form.

BILLINGS
(picks up on this)
Cisneros? You sold his
house?

MORT

I bought his house. Or stole it, would be more like it. Not that I took advantage of him, mind you. You know me, Cliff. I treat those people just like anybody else. I told him I could get him a lot more on the open market, but he wanted me to cash him out right here and now.

BILLINGS

When was this, Mort?

MORT

Last week. That boy was sure in a hurry to unload. More 'n likely running from the law, wouldn't you think?

EXT. JULIAN'S STREET - DAY

Billings's car comes up the street and stops in front of Julian's house. Greene Realty's For Sale sign is on the front lawn. The place looks deserted.

EXT. REAR OF HOUSE

The signs of a family having moved out are visible in the pile of refuse in the yard - an old mattress, a broken lamp, some kitchen utensils. Billings peers through the back window.

POV - THROUGH THE WINDOW

The rooms are empty.

BACK TO SCENE

Billings goes to Julian's study at the rear of the garage, tries the door. It's unlocked. He opens it and looks in.

BILLINGS

Damn!

POV

Empty except for some discards in a cardboard box on an old table. Books, display cases, maps, furniture are all gone.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - DAY

Julian removes two empty gunny sacks from his saddlebags and hands them to Ben and Carole.

JULIAN

I'll have to rig some kind of carrier to handle the weight. Divide the gold into these two sacks. I'll be in in a minute to help you carry them out.

Carole and Ben go back into the cave, Julian watching out of the corner of his eye. As soon as they're out of sight, Julian goes into swift action.

He takes the saddlebags off his horse and slings them over his shoulder, then grabs a military-type entrenching tool and runs to the slope alongside the cave.

MED. SHOT - JULIAN

He quickly scales the slope - climbs to the crest of the small hill that overlooks the cave entrance. He drops the saddlebags and begins digging with the entrenching tool. He works furiously, with an occasional nervous glance to the cave entrance below.

MED. CLOSE SHOT - JULIAN'S WORK

He has dug a small pit in the ground. He reaches into the saddlebag and removes two sticks of dynamite, a blasting cap, and a spool of doubled wire. He shoves the dynamite into the pit, attaches the blasting cap, and twists the ends of the wire onto the leads from the cap.

WIDER ANGLE

Sweating profusely now, Julian tamps dirt into the pit to secure the dynamite, then covers it all with a few large rocks. He grabs the entrenching tool and the saddlebags with one hand, and, with the other holding the spool of wire, slides backwards down the slope, stringing the unspooling wire behind rocks and twigs as he goes.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Back on the ground now, Julian removes from the saddlebag a wire cutter and a small electronic detonator, about the size of a transistor radio. He cuts and strips the wire from the spool, attaches it to the terminals of the detonator, then hides the device behind a rock. Finally, he kicks dirt and dry brush over the running wire to camouflage it. He returns his equipment to his horse and dusts himself off, ready to join the others. CAMERA PANS to the opposite side of the canyon, high up in the rocks, to a gnarled oak tree -

CLOSER ON TREE

In the shade of its branches, the Old Prospector sits chewing on a twig, taking in Julian's activities with interest.

EXT. GAS STATION IN BRAWLEY - MED. SHOT - DAY

Billings sits in his car as it's being filled with gas, gently tapping the steering wheel with his fist in a gesture of impatience. He looks back to the gas pump, willing it to pump faster.

MED. LONG SHOT - THE STATION

SHERIFF MANUEL OCHOA'S patrol car pulls into the station and stops at the pump just across the island from Billings. The STATION ATTENDANT replaces the hose in the pump and picks up the squeegee to get the windshield.

MED. SHOT - BILLINGS

holding some cash out the window.

BILLINGS

Never mind the windshield.
Here you are.

The Attendant takes the cash and goes to get his change.

OCHOA

You in a hurry, Cliff?

BILLINGS

Yeah, Manny. Gotta see a client.

CLOSE SHOT - CAR KEYS IN IGNITION

Billings turns the key and starts the car. CAMERA FOLLOWS his hand to the seat beside him - where he slides a newspaper over to cover the .357 magnum resting there.

MED. SHOT - THE CAR

Billings grabs his change from the attendant and burns rubber, screeching out of the station. Ochoa looks back, chuckles, addresses the Attendant -

OCHOA

I think old Cliff's pushing himself too hard.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - DAY

Ben helps Julian tie the final sack of gold bars into place on Julian's horse while Carole and Billy load the remainder of the equipment on the other horses.

BEN

That's all of it.

CAROLE

(holding up the lantern)

Where should I put this?

JULIAN

Hold onto that for a minute.
I want to take one last look
in the cave to make sure we
didn't leave anything
behind.

BILLY

We didn't leave nothing.

JULIAN

It won't hurt to double
check. There's always
something that gets
overlooked.

BILLY

Go ahead, if you want to.

Julian strolls over to his horse and ever so casually removes a coil of rope and then begins sliding his rifle out of its sheath. His actions are more or less shielded from the others' view by the horse's body.

JULIAN

I think we all should have a
look... just to make sure.

CAROLE

Not me, brother. I've had my
fill of caves.

Julian steps out from behind the horse.

JULIAN

I said we'll all go.

He points the rifle in their direction and cocks it, producing a loud CLICK that draws their attention.

BEN

Hey, what are you doing?

JULIAN

Use your imagination.

BILLY

I knew it! I knew it! Soon
as there's gold around,
people start pointing guns
at you.

CAROLE
I don't understand...

JULIAN
Billy seems to.

Carole and Ben look to Billy.

BILLY
Your amigo here is
bushwhacking us.

Carole and Ben look at Julian incredulously.
Julian simply nods.

CAROLE
Oh, come on. He's kidding...
Julian, you're kidding,
aren't you?

She takes a step toward him, he tenses. Ben grabs
her arm and stops her. It's clear he's not
kidding.

CAROLE
Why are you doing this?

BEN
I think it has something to
do with money.

JULIAN
Okay, everybody into the
cave.

CAROLE
What if we give you a bigger
share?

BILLY
What's bigger than a hundred
percent?

Julian brandishes the rifle and they start moving
into the cave.

INT. CAVE - DAY

They enter the alcove where the gold was found.

BILLY

If I said it once, I said it
a thousand times, you can't
trust a Mexican.

BEN

Smart, Billy, antagonize a
man with a gun in your back.

BILLY

He's going to kill us
anyway. Ain't that right,
Jose?

CAROLE

Will you please shut up!
(beat, then to
Julian)
Although I'd be very
interested in hearing your
answer.

JULIAN

No, I'm not going to kill
you. Unless you force me to.

BEN

I'm for not forcing him to.
What do you say, gang?

Julian tosses Carole the coil of rope.

JULIAN

Tie them up... hands behind
their backs...

Billy puts his hands behind his back and Carole
begins wrapping the rope around them.

BEN

Want to let us in on your
plans?

BILLY

(muttering)
The son of a bitch is going
to kill us, that's his
plans.

Carole yanks the rope tight around his wrists to
shut him up.

BILLY

Ow!

CAROLE
(to Julian,
indicating Billy)
We're not with him.

She moves on to Ben -

CLOSE UP - BEN'S WRISTS BEHIND HIS BACK

As Carole wraps the rope, Ben holds his wrists slightly apart so that the rope appears taut, but will come loose as soon as he relaxes the tension.

JULIAN (O.S.)
It should take you about
twenty minutes to work your
way out of these ropes. I'll
leave you water and supplies
outside the cave.

BACK TO SCENE

Carole and Ben exchange a brief conspiratorial glance as she finishes with his wrists.

JULIAN
Now wrap their ankles
together.

Carole does this.

BEN
What about the horses?

JULIAN
I'm taking the horses.

CAROLE
You mean we have to walk?

JULIAN

You'll make it. Just don't get stuck on the mountain in the dark. My advice would be to spend the night up here and get started first thing in the morning. It'll take you a while, but you'll get there.

Carole has finished tying up Ben and Billy with the continuous length of rope. Julian takes the end of the rope from her -

JULIAN

Now you.

She turns her back and Julian quickly and tightly wraps her hands and ankles and ties off the end.

CAROLE

Just out of curiosity, was this a spur of the moment idea or did you have it planned all along?

JULIAN

Right from the start.

BEN

So you believed Billy's story?

JULIAN

Who could doubt a sharp old guy like that? So long, my friends.

Leaving the lantern, he backs out of the alcove. They wait until he's out of earshot, then Ben quickly works his wrists free, and proceeds to unwrap his ankles.

BEN

We've got to get out there.

CAROLE

Shouldn't we wait until we're sure he's gone?

BEN

Do you feel like walking home?

CAROLE

But he's got a gun. And he
said he'd kill us if he had
to.

BEN

Don't confuse me. I'm new at
this.

Having freed himself, he starts untying them.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - DAY

Julian comes out, moving quickly. He slides his
rifle into its saddle-sheath, then goes to
retrieve the secreted electronic detonator. He
ducks behind the safety of a boulder, flips on
the toggle switch to arm it, then, with a brief
look over at the cave, he twists the spring-
loaded knob, detonating the dynamite.

INT. CAVE ALCOVE

Carole, Ben, and Billy, startled by the explosion
- heads whirl - eyes widen - just their physical
reaction before the significance sinks in.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - MED. LONG SHOT

The blast sends an avalanche of rock and soil
down over the entrance, filling and sealing it.

INT. CAVE ALCOVE

The whole mountain trembles and the SOUND of the
falling rock deafens the three in the alcove.

CAROLE

(shouting over the
roar)

What is it? What's
happening?

BEN

(shouting)

I'm not sure -

The meager light from outside begins to dim as
the entrance fills with rock.

BILLY
Dynamite!

BEN
He's sealing off the
entrance!

BILLY
(not without
satisfaction)
I told you the son of a
bitch was going to kill us.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE

The entrance becomes completely filled, effectively sealed forever, as Julian watches from horseback with the other horses tied behind him in a train. As the avalanche trickles to a stop, Julian turns his horse and leads the train out of the canyon.

INT. CAVE ALCOVE

Now dimly lit by the lantern only, which illuminates just a small area around it. The three people huddle close in that small area.

CAROLE
(calmly)
Ben. We're trapped, aren't
we? We're not going to get
out of here.

BEN
Just don't panic. Panic is
our biggest enemy, here. So
just take a deep breath and
whatever you do, stay calm.

CAROLE
I am calm.

BEN
I'm talking to myself. Now
look, the first thing to
do... the thing we've got to
do... Hell, I don't know
what to do.

BILLY
We got to check the
entrance. We might be able
to dig out.

BEN
Right. Good plan.

INT. CAVE - SHOOTING FROM THE ENTRANCE

Blackness, except for the dim gray light of the
lantern and the three silhouettes surrounding it,
making their way toward CAMERA.

CAROLE
Can you see anything?

BEN
If I had a little more light
I think I could just make
out solid blackness.

BILLY
Put out the lantern.

BEN
I don't think that'll give
us more light.

BILLY
Put it out. Then we'll be
able to see light coming in
if there are any cracks in
the wall.

CAROLE
That's extremely clever. I
think I've been following
the wrong leader.

Ben kills the lantern, throwing them (and the
screen) into total darkness.

CAROLE'S VOICE
I don't see any cracks.

BEN'S VOICE
Looks like a solid wall to
me.

Behind them, deep in the tunnel, another light
appears. It starts to draw closer.

BILLY'S VOICE
It's solid, all right. We're
in a real pickle.

CAROLE'S VOICE
Can't we dig our way out?

The light behind then continues to draw closer. We can't make out exactly what it is. The three in the cave don't notice it. Yet.

BILLY'S VOICE
With what? There could be ten,
twenty foot of solid rock
there.

CAROLE'S VOICE
Ben, remember when I told you
how calm I was? I'm not any
more.

The light behind them has come much closer. It keeps coming.

BILLY'S VOICE
Might as well light that
lantern again.

BEN'S VOICE
If I can find it.

As he fumbles for the lantern, he sees the light behind them.

BEN'S VOICE
Hey, look over there! Behind
you.

CAROLE'S VOICE
Which way is behind me?

BILLY'S VOICE
I see it.

CAROLE'S VOICE
So do I. It's coming closer.
What is it? Some kind of
animal?

The light is now close enough so that it just begins to illuminate, ever so dimly, the area where our three are standing.

BILLY
Animals don't carry lanterns.

BEN
The one who just blew us up
did.

And indeed we can now see the light is a lantern and
furthermore we can just make out the silhouette of a
person carrying it. The scene grows brighter with
his each step.

PROSPECTOR
Howdy.

He is now close enough to be seen.

BEN
You!

CAROLE
What are you doing here?

PROSPECTOR
Maybe I'm lookin' for rocks,
like you. Find any?

BILLY
Yeah. There's a whole pile of
them, right where the cave
entrance used to be.

PROSPECTOR
(holds up lantern,
surveying the scene)
Yep, looks like you're
trapped, all right.

BEN
(realizes)
Wait a minute. How did you get
in here?

PROSPECTOR
I come through the back door.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - BILLINGS'S CAR - DAY

It speeds along the deserted backroad, going 75, 80,
85 miles an hour.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - MED. LONG SHOT - DAY

From an opening in the rocky face of the mountain, the Prospector appears, followed by the rest of the party from the cave. About twenty feet of steep rock face separates them from a ledge below, where the Prospector's mule is tied up.

CLOSER ON THEM

PROSPECTOR

We got to make it down to that ledge.

CAROLE

(looking down
dizzily)

How?

PROSPECTOR

Fall, if you have to. Me, I'm going to walk.

He steps onto the rock face and half walks-half runs down the impossibly sheer incline, somehow managing to keep his balance. Billy goes next, scurrying down the ledge only slightly less sure-footed than the Prospector. Carole and Ben stand at the edge gathering their nerve.

BEN

If they can do it, we can do it.

CAROLE

It's easy for them - they're old.

THEIR POV

Billy and the Prospector on the ledge below, with the forbidding expanse of slippery rock in between.

PROSPECTOR

Come on! We haven't got all day.

BACK TO SCENE

CAROLE

Oh, what the hell.

She steps over the edge and sits down on the incline, then slides down like a three year old. It's a rough trip but she makes it intact. Now it's up to Ben. But he's damned if he's going to slide down like a girl. He boldly steps over and walk-runs down like the two old-timers did. About halfway down he loses his footing and falls the rest of the way.

CLOSER ON BEN

As he tumbles to a stop among the others. It's not a catastrophic fall - nothing broken - but painful bumps and scrapes. Carole rushes to him.

CAROLE

Why didn't you slide down?

BEN

(through teeth
gritted in pain)

I thought rolling would be faster.

PROSPECTOR

Come on, we got to get moving.

Carole helps Ben pull himself painfully to his feet.

BEN

What's our damn hurry?

PROSPECTOR

We're going to head off that friend of yours. Get your horses back.

CAROLE

Why are you helping us?

PROSPECTOR

I don't think you're going to all this trouble just to find some rocks. Let's just say I'm prospectin'.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - MED. SHOT - JULIAN ON
HORSEBACK - DAY

He's leading the other horses, making his way slowly through a cut between high boulders. As he rounds a bend he is startled by --

ANOTHER ANGLE

Carole is standing on top of a boulder alongside the trail.

CAROLE
Hi, Julian. Long time no see.

Julian, startled and confused, reins to a sudden stop.

JULIAN
(flabbergasted)
How did you- ?

Immediately, a lasso comes flying out from behind a rock on the opposite side of the trail and loops over his head and down over his shoulders, pinning his arms to his sides. The Prospector comes out from behind the rock, pulling the rope taut as he comes, followed by Ben and Billy, the latter leading the Prospector's mule.

BEN
Sorry, Julian. We got ourselves a new guide.

CAROLE
By the way, you're fired.

PROSPECTOR
(handing Ben the rope)
You hang on to this while I get his rifle.

The Prospector unties the train of horses, then moves to Julian's saddle sheath and slides out his rifle. Julian suddenly spurs his horse - it takes off with a lurch. Ben grips tightly on the rope, instinctively trying to hold Julian back -

BEN

I got him!

- and is pulled off his feet and dragged along the ground.

BILLY

Let go the rope, you damn fool!

Ben is dragged a few more yards before he can react - he finally lets go and rolls to a bumpy stop.

MED. LONG SHOT - JULIAN

On the move. He pulls the lasso over his head and tosses it aside, then shifts into high gear and gallops out of sight.

MED. SHOT - BEN

as he gets to his feet.

BEN

(to Prospector)

Listen, I don't know if the subject's ever going to come up again, but if it does - you hold the rope and I'll get his rifle!

BILLY

We'd better get going. We've got to get back to the jeep before he does.

CAROLE

We'll never catch him.

PROSPECTOR

We'll catch him.

They all mount up.

BEN

He can ride a lot better than we
can - and he's already got a
head start.

PROSPECTOR

Maybe so... but he's going to
stay on the trail.

He turns his mule away from the trail and into the
rocks, toward the precipitous face of the mountain,
Carole and Ben react, look at each other with
apprehension...

EXT. TRAIL

Julian riding as fast as he can, but hampered by the
weight of the gold. He glances behind to see if he's
being followed. He isn't.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE

No trail here, just the rocky face of the mountain. Real
mountain goat terrain. The Prospector leads Billy,
Carole, and Ben down the impossible incline, picking his
way carefully through the rocks. Carole and Ben are
terrified - and the horses look none too happy - but
they're making it, and at a surprisingly fast pace.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - BILLINGS'S CAR - DAY

Speeding along the route the jeep took, now past the
"Last Chance" gas station.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - DAY

The group is out of the mountains now, riding full out
along the foothills on the home stretch for Camp McGee.

INTERCUT WITH -

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - JULIAN

Riding hard from the other direction. The trail is
flatter here, and he's making better time.

EXT. CAMP MCGEE - MED. FULL SHOT - DAY

Our four heroes arrive first, and as they come riding in-

CAROLE
(pointing off)
Look!

HER POV

Billings's car tearing up the dirt road.

BACK TO SCENE - FULL SHOT

They ride to meet Billings as he pulls to a stop alongside the jeep.

BEN
What are you doing out here?

BILLINGS
Where's Cisneros?

CAROLE
He tried to kill us! The son of a bitch is a thief.

BILLINGS
Then you found the gold!

PROSPECTOR
That's right. They found the gold.

BILLINGS
Who's he?

BEN
Tell you later. Julian has the gold and he'll be here any minute. So let's be ready for him.

BILLINGS
All right. Let's get this car out of sight.

EXT. CAMP MCGEE - SHOOTING TOWARD MOUNTAIN - DAY

Julian gallops into camp, looking around to see if they've beaten him there. Seeing nothing, he heads straight for the jeep. He dismounts - unties the two bags of gold - opens the jeep's tailgate and wrestles the first bag in. As he hefts the second bag, Ben comes out of the main building, training the rifle on him -

BEN

You can just put that bag in there with the other one.

Carole, Billy, and the Prospector step out onto the porch behind Ben.

JULIAN

What if I don't? You going to shoot me, Ben?

BEN

Why not? You tried to kill us.

JULIAN

I'm not saying I don't deserve it. I just don't think you can do it. You're too nice a guy.

BEN

You know, you may be right.

Julian smiles - and appears about to make a move. Ben casually hands the rifle to Billy - who cocks it and aims right square at Julian's face.

BILLY

(exuberant menace)

You were saying, peckerwood?

Julian's smile fades. He shrugs and leans in to place the bag in the back of the jeep.

MED. CLOSE SHOT - THE FLOOR OF THE JEEP

as Julian places the sack down. Next to it is a rolled blanket. Julian carefully reaches into the blanket and slides out a shotgun.

BILLINGS VOICE (O.S.)

Don't do it, Julian.

CLOSE SHOT - JULIAN

He freezes, reacting to the voice behind him with genuine surprise.

JULIAN
Billings?

- and behind him, Billings, who has just emerged from inside the horse trailer. Billings is pointing his .357 magnum at him.

BILLINGS
Step away from the car...

Julian steps into the clear. Billings retrieves the shotgun from the jeep.

JULIAN
Can't count on anybody any more.
You were supposed to stay in
town and wait for word.

Billings walks Julian over to the rest of the group. Billy lowers the rifle to his side.

BILLINGS
And I'd have a long wait,
wouldn't I? You sold your house.
Your family left town. Nice
little double-cross you had
planned.

Something registers in the Prospector's eyes. He very slowly begins inching away from the group.

CAROLE
He wasn't just going to double-
cross us - he was going to kill
us.

BILLINGS
Oh, he's still going to kill
you... but you're also going to
kill him in the process.

CAROLE
Don't think I wouldn't like to -
(abruptly)
What did you say?

Billings is standing opposite the rest of them, pointing the shotgun - and it's suddenly evident that he's not just pointing at Julian, but at all five of them.

BEN

Something tells me we don't know the whole story here.

BILLINGS

And sooner or later they'll find your bodies here - and I suppose they'll figure there was an argument and some gunplay and you all just killed each other. Most likely it'll go down as another one of those mysterious episodes in the mythology of gold fever.

PROSPECTOR

That's pretty good, mister. But I see one flaw in your plan.

BILLINGS

What flaw?

PROSPECTOR

How are you going to explain your gunshot wounds.

BILLINGS

My what?

And on the word "what", the Prospector fires his ancient Colt right through his jacket. The bullet hits Billings in the shoulder and throws him backwards, knocking the shotgun out of his grip. Momentary chaos as a number of things happen at once:

Billings hits the ground and scrambles to retrieve the shotgun, but Billy is instantly on top of him, wrestling for it;

Julian takes off heading for the jeep;

Carole picks up the rifle and goes to Billy's aid, joined by the Prospector, who has his Colt out;

Ben takes off after Julian.

ANGLE ON BILLINGS AND BILLY

wrestling on the ground for control of the shotgun.
Carole and the Prospector move in with their guns -

PROSPECTOR
Give it up, mister!

Carole jabs the rifle into Billings' back -

CAROLE
(nervously)
You'd better, Mr Billings -
'cause I don't know what the
hell I'm doing and I'm liable to
shoot you.

ANGLE ON THE JEEP

Julian gets the door open just as Ben catches up to him.
Julian whirls to challenge him -

JULIAN
Okay, you caught me - now what
are you going to do with me?

Good question. Ben is perplexed for an instant, then -
because he can't think of anything else - he hauls off
and smashes Julian in the face, knocking him back
against the jeep. The blow is excruciatingly painful -
to Ben.

BEN
(grabbing his knuckles)
Ow!
(surprised, outraged)
That hurts!

Now the thing to do in this situation is to follow up
with a few more punches and finish the guy off. But Ben
is too amazed at his unexpected pain to press his
advantage. As Ben examines his injured hand, Julian
shakes his head clear, then pushes off the jeep and
lands a hard right to Ben's ribs. He follows immediately
with a left to Ben's midsection, knocking the wind out
of him. Ben collapses forward, instinctively grabbing
Julian around the neck for support. Ben struggles to
catch his breath as Julian tries to pry his hands loose
from their death grip.

JULIAN
Get offa me, damn it!

Julian finally pulls free and shoves Ben backwards to the ground. He jumps into the jeep and starts it up - Ben struggles to collect himself - Julian throws the jeep in gear and feeds gas, digging into the sand before the tires finally grip - Ben is on his feet - the jeep peels out - Ben leaps onto the open tailgate and scrambles aboard.

INT. JEEP

Ben starts pushing the sacks of gold out the back. Julian sees him in the rear-view mirror.

JULIAN

Hey, what are you doing? Stop that!

ANGLE ON JEEP

with the second sack falling out the rear as it moves past the buildings. Watching it go by are Carole, Billy, the Prospector, and their prisoner, Billings. CAMERA HOLDS on them. Billy hands her the magnum -

BILLY

(indicates Billings)
Watch him.

- as he and the Prospector rush out to collect the sacks...

MED. SHOT - CAROLE AND BILLINGS

Carole watches them go, taking her eyes off Billings for jus a moment. It's long enough. In one quick motion, Billings grabs the gun from her and steps behind her. He wraps one arm around her waist, pinning her against him with her arms flat at her sides, and holds the gun to her head.

BILLINGS

(calling)
Get away from those sacks.

MED. LONG SHOT - THE JEEP

It screeches to a stop in a skidding 180 degree turn.
Ben jumps off the tailgate -

ANGLE ON BILLINGS AND THE OTHERS

BILLINGS

I mean it. I'll blow her head
off.

Billy and the Prospector back away. Billings moves out
toward them, with Carole held tightly in front of him.

CLOSE ON CAROLE'S ARMS

pinned to her side. She makes a claw with one hand and
reaches for Billings's crotch and -

CLOSE ON BILLINGS'S FACE

All in an instant, Billings goes blue - his eyes widen -
pupils roll back into his head - he lets out an agonized
scream.

WIDER ANGLE

Carole breaks free and runs to Billy and the Prospector.
But now the jeep is racing toward all of them - hell
bent to run them down. They scatter for cover. Billings
regains his composure he looks up to see the jeep
bearing down on him. He lifts the gun and fires at
Julian through the windshield - once, twice, three
times.

MED. CLOSE ON JULIAN - THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

as the shots shatter the glass all around him - missing
him, missing him, missing him -

JULIAN'S POV - THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

The shots landing as Billings grows nearer in his
sights. At the last moment, Billings tries to jump out
of the way, but he's waited an instant too long. Julian
jerks the wheel toward him -

MED. LONG SHOT - THE JEEP

A fender catches Billings at 40 miles an hour. It doesn't hit him head-on, but it's enough. Billings is spun to the ground, mortally injured. He summons his strength for one last earthly act. He lifts the .357 magnum, takes aim at the receding jeep, and -

CLOSE ON THE OPEN TAILGATE

and just inside, the box marked "Dynamite." We HEAR Billings's shot and -

WIDER ANGLE

An enormous EXPLOSION. The jeep disappears in a spectacular red-orange fireball.

PANORAMIC SHOT - CAMP MCGEE AND SURROUNDING MOUNTAINS

As a column of black smoke rises in the distance, the SOUND of the explosion ECHOES and RESOUNDS through the hills, fading gradually. Finally, there's silence.

MED. SHOT - BILLINGS'S BODY

Carole and Ben, Billy and the Prospector crowd around it.

BEN

He's dead.

CAROLE

My god. What should we do?

BILLY

What should we do? Take the gold and haul ass. That's what we should do.

CAROLE

But what about them?

BEN

(shrugs)

One of those mysterious episodes in the mythology of gold fever?

CAROLE

Ben, we can't. We've got to report this to the authorities.

BILLY

Are you crazy? If we do that we'll have to tell them about the gold, and they'll sure as hell confiscate it.

CAROLE

I don't care about the gold. For God's sake, two men are dead.

BILLY

And I want to make sure they didn't die in vain.

CAROLE

No, Ben. This is too serious to cover up. Even if we have to give up the gold. The truth is going to be hard enough to explain.

BILLY

Ain't yours to give up, God damn it! It belongs to me and Slim.

CAROLE

Well, since Slim isn't here, it looks like you're out-voted.

During this exchange, the Prospector has quietly collected the rifle, the shotgun, and Billings's magnum.

PROSPECTOR

That's wrong. Lady. Slim is here and he votes with Billy.

They turn to him and see he is holding his gun on them.

PROSPECTOR

Sorry, Billy. I know I agreed to split with them, but not if they're just going to give it all away.

Carole and Ben stare with their mouths agape as all of this sinks in.

CAROLE

I don't believe this.

BEN

Are you telling me this is Slim?
Your old sergeant? The one who
was killed in the World War I?

BILLY

Never said he was killed. Said a
German bayonet got him.

CAROLE

This was all arranged? You knew
he was going to meet us out
here?

BILLY

Well, hell's afire - you can't
leave something like that up to
chance. He was getting tired of
that old folks' home, anyhow.

PROSPECTOR

What about it, Bill? We're only
a couple hours from the border.
We can get lost pretty good in
one of them out-of-the-way
Mexican villages.

Billy considers, but only for a moment - then crosses
over to stand beside the Prospector.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMP MCGEE - DAY

The Prospector waits on horseback while Billy secures
the last of the bags of gold onto the mule. Then he
mounts his own horse and turns to Carole and Ben -

BILLY

Well, you had your chance,
peckerwoods.

And with that, he jerks his horse around and he and the
Prospector ride off toward the hills.

BEN

I hate these sentimental
goodbyes, don't you?

EXT. CAMP MCGEE - FULL SHOT - NIGHT

The area is flooded with artificial light from several police vehicles on the scene as well as a helicopter hovering overhead. The bodies are being removed to a coroner's van.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The sign on the desk reads "Sheriff Manuel Ochoa". Carole and Ben are seated across the desk from him.

OCHOA

Well, it's one hell of a story,
that's all I can say.

CAROLE

It's the truth, every word of
it. You can check it out.

SHERIFF

You better believe I'll check it
out.

BEN

What about the old guys? Are you
going to look for them?

OCHOA

We'll look, but we won't find
them. If they've got all the
money you say they have, they
can buy a lot of silence down in
Mexico.

CAROLE

What about us? Can we go back to
L.A.?

He looks at them long and hard, considering.

OCHOA

You'll sign your statements and
leave me your phone numbers in
case I need to get in touch.

INT. BEN'S CAR - NIGHT

Ben and Carole on the trip back to L.A. Carole's head is resting on the seat-back, her eyes closed. It's been a long day.

CAROLE
(sighs)
It would have been so nice.

BEN
What would?

CAROLE
Being rich, you twit.

BEN
Twit. Is that anything like a peckerwood?

Carole smiles.

CAROLE
A million dollars, Ben. We were so close.

BEN
(with a shrug)
There are other things in life besides money.

CAROLE
Name two.

BEN
You and me?

CAROLE
Oh, Ben. You're not going to start that again?

BEN
Who, me? Of course not.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The car continues along the deserted road.

EXT. SUBURBAN FREEWAY - THE CAR - NIGHT

Getting closer to civilization.

INT. CAR

Carole is now sitting up, wide awake, looking squarely at Ben.

CAROLE

... I'm not saying we didn't have fun this week. We've always had fun together. But you can't build a marriage on that. We tried and failed. It's as simple as that.

BEN

(benignly)

Facts are facts. There's no getting around it.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

The car moves through the city streets.

INT. CAR

Carole has slid over close to Ben. She is turned sideways in the seat, her left arm resting on the seat back, her legs tucked under her. It is a much more intimate arrangement.

CAROLE

... it's not as though we can't still be friends. I never said we couldn't. But it can't go any further than that. It just wasn't meant to be. We have to accept it.

BEN

You're absolutely right.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The car turns into the driveway.

INT. THE PARKED CAR

Carole and Ben are locked in a long, passionate kiss. When they finally break off -

CAROLE

This is only for tonight, you understand? In the morning, you go your way, I'll go mine.

BEN

I couldn't agree mo-

She grabs him and resumes the kiss, cutting off his last word.

EXT. FRONT WALK - NIGHT

They walk toward the door, Carole clinging to his arm.

CAROLE

... But I'm not giving up the apartment. We'll try it for a few weeks, and if it doesn't work out, I'm going back there.

BEN

I think that's very wise.

They stop at the door - Ben takes his key and puts it in the lock. They find themselves facing each other - and are once again drawn into a fiery kiss. When they break off --

CAROLE

Oh, what the hell. No sense paying two rents.

They open the door and step into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Billy and the Prospector are seated at the poker table playing cards.

BILLY

Well, it took you long enough.

Carole and Ben are absolutely flabbergasted. They look at each other, then back to Billy, then around the room.

SHOT - THE COFFEE TABLE PILED HIGH WITH THE GOLD BARS.

BACK TO SCENE

BILLY

Don't look so surprised. Did you think I'd run out on you?

CAROLE

Why you old son of a bitch!

BILLY

Damn rights!

CAROLE

(to the Prospector)

That goes for you, too.

The Prospector smiles and touches his forehead in a salute of acknowledgment.

BILLY

Don't just stand there, woman. We haven't had our supper yet.

Carole glares for a moment, then with good-natured acquiescence -

CAROLE

Yes, sir. Coming right up, sir. She takes off her coat -

PROSPECTOR

(cutting the cards)

You play poker, young fella?

BEN

No thanks. I've got to help my wife in the kitchen.

Carole throws him a melting look - he joins her and they exit into the kitchen.

SHOT - BILLY LOOKING AFTER HIM

BILLY

There's no hope for the
peckerwood. None whatsoever.

He starts to deal the cards -

FADE OUT.

THE END