

HELL'S CANYON

Written by

Jo Hannah Afton

246 Puncheon Lane
Mars Hill, NC 28754 USA
828-689-8742

FADE IN:

MONTAGE: EXT. HELL'S CANYON - SUNRISE

- The morning sun rises over a rugged autumn landscape of mountains, pines, and delicate meadows filled with wildflowers.
- Water LAPS against the coarse sand and rocks of the Hell's Canyon basin as a turquoise river idles by. The rising sun dances and plays on the water.
- A small boy (7) plays at the water's edge while his parents sleep in a tent nearby, unaware of his absence from the tent.
- The boy looks into the water at his own reflection.
- A morning dove COOS softly in the distance.
- A chipmunk hops up on a fallen tree, eating a sunflower seed, and watches the boy as
- he pounces into the water, after a frog.

END MONTAGE

The boy stops, watches, waits, then pounces again, catching the frog, SPLASHING knee deep into the water. A section of mild rapids looms nearby.

The parents STIR inside the tent.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Where is he? Steve. Wake up.

FATHER (O.S.)

I'm awake. It's okay. I see him.
Look.

The mother appears, takes the boy by the hand and leads him out of the water.

BOY

Mommy! I got one! Look!

MOTHER

(calm, decisive)
I see that. Very good. Come on away
from the water now.

They approach the front of the tent when the frog escapes, hopping inside the tent.

FATHER (O.S.)
 (laughs)
 Oh, hey there!

BOY
 Dad! Get it! Get it! There it is!

The boy dashes in, the tent sways and nearly collapses as the father and son chase the frog inside the tent.

The father emerges victorious, frog cupped in his hands, and walks his catch over to the campfire pit.

FATHER
 Get the skillet, honey. I LOVE frog
 for breakfast. Don't we just love
 frog legs?

MOTHER
 Ooooo, yes! My favorite!

BOY
 Nooooo! Dad! Stop it. I found him
 first.

The father hands the frog back over and ruffles his son's head.

The frog escapes and the boy GIGGLES and pursues the frog once again.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - MORNING

Children LAUGH and chase each other across an elementary school playground. LAILAH JAMES (29) stops to watch, jogging in place.

A young boy trips and falls. He lies motionless.

Lailah stops jogging and looks around, and seeing a gate entrance, runs over and opens the gate, just as -

- a teacher's aid helps the boy up and brushes him off.

Lailah watches, then resumes her jog. She wears a heart monitor on her upper arm and checks it. She is a picture of perfect fitness. Even as she runs, barely a hair is out of place.

Lailah jogs along a quiet suburban street, up to her front yard, slows to a walk, reads her monitor, and enters her house.

INT. LAILAH'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

BENJAMIN JAMES (31) stands in the kitchen, with bed head, and ruffled boxers, holding the refrigerator door open. Ben is kind faced, laid back and adoring of his wife.

Lailah enters, out of breath.

LAILAH
Twenty eight minutes, fifteen
seconds. Kept it under 130 the
whole way.

She bends over and stretches her back and legs, taking deep breaths.

BEN
Congratulations.

He looks in the refrigerator.

BEN (CONT'D)
Did we finish the coffee cake? I
don't see it.

LAILAH
Yeah. I don't know. I don't eat
that garbage.

BEN
I know. I know. Oookay. How about
some...

He reaches inside, surveying the food situation.

BEN (CONT'D)
Blueberry ... Granola?

A golden retriever, GYPSY, paws at the sliding glass door in the kitchen to come in.

Ben walks over to let her in.

LAILAH
No. Leave her out please.

BEN
D'awwww! Look at her. She's hungry.

LAILAH
Feed her outside, *please*. I don't
want her in here.

She looks at her watch again.

LAILAH (CONT'D)
I need to get a shower.

Ben opens up the door and lets Gypsy inside.

LAILAH (CONT'D)
Ben! What did I just say?

BEN
She can't live outside forever,
Lailah.

Gypsy wags her tail and jumps on Lailah. Annoyed, she turns her back on the dog.

Gypsy barks at her playfully.

LAILAH
No! Gypsy! Down. Ben! Please.

BEN
I'll feed her and then let her back
out.

LAILAH
No. Actually. We already discussed
this. You were supposed to put an
ad on Craig's List last week. But
you didn't.

BEN
Yeah, I don't know.
(to Gypsy)
Here, pretty girl. She doesn't mean
it.

He sets the food down on the floor for the dog.

LAILAH
Yes! I do mean it. Either you do it
or I do it, I don't care, but
either way, she's got to go.

Ben leans against the counter and folds his arms.

BEN
Look. I know this is hard. It's
hard for me, too, but she's a good
dog.
(to Gypsy)
Isn't that right, girl?

Ben pets the dog. Lailah slams the refrigerator door closed.

LAILAH
 Why do you insist on leaving this
 door open all the damn time?

She walks over and grabs the dog by her collar and hauls her out the sliding glass door.

LAILAH (CONT'D)
 OUT!

Ben takes the dog dish outside and places it on the ground, and then walks over to Lailah, holding his arms open to her.

LAILAH (CONT'D)
 Just. Don't.

She looks at her watch again, and turns on her heels to leave.

LAILAH (CONT'D)
 I have a ten o'clock over at the
 Marshall's place. I'll see you this
 afternoon. Don't forget about the
 extra keys for Steve's condo. He's
 leaving in two days.

BEN
 What about breakfast?

LAILAH
 Granola. Fine. I don't care.

She exits and walks into the hall bathroom to shower.

EXT. MARSHALL'S HOUSE - LATER

Lailah and SHARON MARSHALL (62) stand on the back deck of a luxury log home with million dollar views. Sharon sports a casual denim dress and sandals, salt and pepper hair and a large, expensive turquoise necklace. She drinks coffee. Lailah is dressed in a smart, linen suit.

SHARON
 I was thinking more like, I don't
 know, a hand carved tree sculpture
 along this wall. What do you think?

She gestures to an exterior rear wall.

SHARON (CONT'D)
 Mahogany. Relief-ish. You know?

LAILAH
 Uh huuhhh. I think so. Up over the doors here? Maybe draping down the other side. I can see a few planters along the bottom here, with climbing vines. Clematis, maybe.

SHARON
 (delighted)
 Yes. Perfect.

She stands back and imagines it.

SHARON (CONT'D)
 I can see it.

LAILAH
 Okay. And what about the rails for the staircase? Same wood?

SHARON
 Absolutely. All of it. The rails, the mantle, and the tree, of course. All dark, mysterious. Earthy. But classy, not "rustic."

She makes quotation marks with her fingers in the air.

LAILAH
 Got it. Classy. Not rustic.

She makes notes on a clipboard.

LAILAH (CONT'D)
 I'll have an estimate for you by Friday, then.

Sharon puts her hand on her arm.

SHARON
 Are you doing okay? You seem a little, I don't know, distracted today.

LAILAH
 No, I'm fine.

Lailah half smiles but Sharon sees through it.

SHARON
 I'm sorry. I'm being rude. Come inside and I'll pour you a cup of coffee, dear.

LAILAH

No, thank you. I have to be -

SHARON

Oh, come inside. Sit your busy self down for a minute. It won't kill you.

Sharon opens the french doors leading inside.

An owl, camouflaged by leaves in a tree near the house, peers out, watching.

INT. MARSHALL'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The Marshall's house, contemporary, with leather sofas, original paintings of horses, panthers, sweeping pastures and mountain themes, is comfortably elegant.

Sharon busies herself in the kitchen getting Lailah coffee. Lailah sits on a sofa. A small Lhasa Apso jumps about enthusiastically and follows on Sharon's heels.

SHARON

Everything's okay on the home front?

LAILAH

Yeah, fine. You know. We have our fights, but it's all good.

SHARON

Up and down. Round and round. That's marriage. You know, my grandmother gave me the best marriage advice I ever heard.

LAILAH

Oh, yeah?

SHARON

She said. Think of it as ninety-ninety. Not this fifty-fifty nonsense. It's not about fairness. Bottom line. You give more than you think you should. Both of you. Great advice.

Sharon pours hot coffee into mugs.

SHARON (CONT'D)

And the business? How's that going?

LAILAH

Very well. We signed three more properties that Ben's managing now, so that's picking up some. But, Ben, I don't know, it's not his thing I guess.

SHARON

Oh. That reminds me.

She grabs a pen and a sticky note.

SHARON (CONT'D)

I need to call Trudy for you. She's closing on another rental. She'll need you on that one, too.

(writing)
Call Trudy.

She puts the sticky note on the telephone receiver.

SHARON (CONT'D)

Cream and sugar?

LAILAH

Honey, no cream. Thanks. Hey. I really appreciate everything -

SHARON

No trouble. Listen, we've all been there. Would you like a muffin?

LAILAH

No, thank you. Vegan. Remember?

SHARON

Vegan. Right. Banana? Apple? What's the rule? Nothing with a face, right?

LAILAH

Right.

She cuts up bananas and apples in a small bowl while she talks, then carries a tray out and sits down on the sofa with her.

SHARON

So. How are you? Really.

LAILAH

I don't know. Good days and bad days. But, overall, I'm good. Busy.

SHARON
 Busy is a band-aid, you know. It's
 all right for a little while, but
 sooner or later you'll need -

LAILAH
 Ben and I had a fight this morning.

SHARON
 Oh? What about?

LAILAH
 The dog.

SHARON
 What about the dog?

LAILAH
 Ughhh. The hair, the drool, the
 barking, everything. I can't stand
 it. He wants her inside, I want her
 outside, blah, blah, blah.

Sharon isn't buying it.

SHARON
 Uh hummmmm. Do you think maybe
 she's a reminder?

LAILAH
 I don't know.
 (takes a sip of coffee)
 Maybe. I don't know. But seriously.
 The hair. It's everywhere. He lets
 her sleep in the bed!

Sharon reaches down and picks up her dog, stroking her head
 affectionately.

SHARON
 I let my little muffin sleep with
 me, don't I doodles?

The dog settles down in her lap and licks her face.

SHARON (CONT'D)
 Well, bring her up here for a bit.
 She'll get along with Trixie I'm
 sure, and if you change your mind,
 you can. Okay, darling?

LAILAH
 Sure. Thanks.

Sharon stands and walks over to her mantle and picks up a small piece of pottery and brings it over, holding it in her lap.

SHARON

Landon made this for me in camp years ago. Twenty... no, twenty five years ago. Goodness. Time flies!

She smiles.

SHARON (CONT'D)

Reminders can be a good thing.

She hands it over to Lailah, who does not take it. Sharon puts it on the coffee table and pats Lailah on the knee.

SHARON (CONT'D)

Did I tell you about my idea for the gazebo?

LAILAH

No. You didn't.

SHARON

Come on. I'll show you.

The women stand and exit through the front door.

ZOOM IN on the pottery, a small bowl with a heart etched in the side, a child's handwriting says, "Mom". In b.g., a portrait photograph on the mantle of a young man in military dress. Dog tags hang over the corner of the frame.

MONTAGE: EXT. TWO LANE MOUNTAIN ROAD - LATER

- Lailah drives her Subaru Forrester along a narrow mountain road. Wide, sweeping vistas emerge around every corner. She plays MUSIC on a CD, loud.

- She accelerates on a curve, nearly losing control.

- She pulls into the center, riding the double yellow on a blind curve, playing chicken with fate.

- An oncoming vehicle narrowly misses her, HONKING as it passes. She moves back into her lane.

- Lailah turns off on Hell's Canyon Road, following the canyon's edge, then,

- after a few more twists and turns, she pulls over and parks at a small parking lot just after passing the Hell's Canyon dam. End of the road.
- She leans over and grabs a gym bag from the back seat and pulls out her jogging outfit and changes her clothes in the front seat, watching for onlookers.
- She exits the car, and peers out into the spectacular valley, taking deep breaths, willing her emotions into submission.
- She steps to the rear of the car, and pulls out a small backpack, putting it on.
- She retrieves a water bottle from the front seat, opens the glove box and finds a small hiking manual with maps of the area and examines it.
- She looks at her cell phone. No signal. She tosses it on the front seat.
- Satisfied, she stuffs the maps in her backpack, locks the car,
- and ascends into Hell's Canyon, scampering along the terrain, climbing, bouldering, pushing herself to her physical limits.
- The exercise invigorates her, renews her. She climbs to a vista and looks out.
- She fishes through her backpack and takes out a protein bar and eats it.
- Hiking back down along a steep trail, a rock gives way under her feet, sending Lailah over the edge of a small cliff.
- She grasps at the edges, clinging to a tree root, but loses her grip and falls.