

THE LOST PEARL OF THE MOJAVE – EPISODE 3
GILDED SACRIFICE 1860-1883



EXT. DESERT TRAIL – DAY

SCREEN OVERLAY: “MOJAVE DESERT, CALIFORNIA – 1862”

A rugged stagecoach creaks and rattles over a sun-scorched trail, flanked by jagged hills and dust clouds. Four horses strain at the reins.

On the buckboard, CAMERON SMITH grips a weathered rifle, eyes sweeping the horizon. The DRIVER urges the team forward, sweat running beneath his brim. At the rear, JUAN GARCÍA and a TRUSTED MAN brace crates of gold—each stamped with the mark of Barco.

CAMERON

We need to reach
San Diego before

nightfall. No more
stops.

CAMERON

(to Juan, quiet but
firm) Eyes sharp,
both of you.

The trail winds between two hills. The wind dies.
The silence turns heavy—until a sudden thunder of
hooves erupts from the ridgeline. **GRINGO BANDITS**
burst from a rocky outcrop—faces masked, rifles
raised, horses charging hard.

BANDIT LEADER

Seize the gold!
Leave no man
standing!

Juan and the Trusted Man fire back with pistols. The
stagecoach rocks under gunfire. A wheel
splinters—but holds. Cameron takes aim, steady
despite the chaos. He fires once—one of the bandits
falls, kicked backward off his horse.

EXT. OVERLOOKING RIDGE – CONTINUOUS (1862)

High above, WILBUR (18) lies prone with a long
rifle, cool-eyed and controlled. Beside him, a YOUNG
MOJAVE WARRIOR in a tattered Union soldier's jacket
loads a spare round. Two horses are tethered behind
them. Wind flutters Wilbur's bandana as he squints
into the heat shimmer below.

WILBUR

(low, focused) Not
today.

He fires. Then again. **Two bandits drop in quick succession**, their horses scattering. Confusion erupts below.

EXT. DESERT TRAIL – CONTINUOUS (1862)

Cameron hears the shots and looks up—just long enough to see Wilbur's silhouette against the sky.

CAMERON

Hold the line!

Wilbur and the Mojave warrior gallop down the slope with disciplined fury. Their rifles crack in sync, driving the surviving bandits into retreat. Juan reloads, breathing hard. The dust settles. A final shot rings out—Wilbur's, hitting a fleeing rider's saddlebag, sending it spilling across the sand. The remaining bandits scatter. The stagecoach wheels forward, wounded but moving, gold still intact.

Cameron meets Wilbur's gaze. A quiet nod passes between them—**a warrior's bond. A father's pride.**

The camera pulls wide, revealing the burning horizon beyond. A line of dust trails westward. The gold rides forward. So does destiny.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The desert gives
nothing freely.
Every coin bought
with sweat. Every
mile paid in blood.

EXT. OASIS PALMS – DAY

SCREEN OVERLAY: “Two Years Earlier – 1860”

The town bustles with activity. A blacksmith hammers at his forge. Merchants hawk wares from stalls. A clapboard general store, hardware store, hotel, and saloon mark the vibrant beginnings of a prosperous mining camp.

EXT. BARCO MINE – DAY – 1860

Deep in the rugged Ship Mountains, the Barco Mine churns with life. Wagons creak under the weight of loaded crates. Tools clang. Dust rises from newly dug shafts and rock-strewn trails.

CAMERON SMITH, weathered and commanding, oversees the loading of another shipment of gold ore. Nearby, JUAN GARCÍA supervises two men hoisting sacks onto a mule-drawn cart. WILBUR, now eighteen and muscular, rolls a wheelbarrow full of rock toward a growing pile. EMMET, now 16 packs bags into a cart.

MALIKA (V.O.)

Wealth was coming
to the plateau, but
the winds of war

swept across the
land—dividing
brother from
brother and
wrenching sons from
their fathers.

Cameron walks over to Juan and Wilbur, wiping sweat from his brow. They stand at the mouth of the mine—its entrance now fortified with timber braces and pulleys rigged overhead.

CAMERON

That's the third
load this month.
And we're still
stockpiling ore
faster than we can
ship it.

JUAN

The new shaft is
rich—too rich. It's
heavy with quartz,
but we can't crush
it here. We're
losing time and
gold with every
wagon we send
south.

WILBUR

We can take more to

the stamp mill in
San Bernardino.

EMMET

What we need is our
own stamp mill.

CAMERON

(nodding slowly)
I've been thinking
the same. We can't
risk hauling ore to
a public mill. We
build our own—keep
it here, keep it
quiet. Set it up by
the lower creek—use
the waterwheel to
power the cams.

JUAN

That'll take money.
Iron. Tools. A
blacksmith.

CAMERON

And trust. The more
we build, the more
eyes will come
sniffing.

WILBUR

Then we only build
what we can guard.
And we guard it
with everything
we've got.

**Cameron looks at his son—grown, steady, fire in his
voice. He nods with restrained pride.**

CAMERON

The stamp mill will
double our yield.
Maybe more. It's
the only way to
keep up.

JUAN

Then we'll need
more men. But only
the kind who know
how to keep a
secret.

**They all glance toward the canyon below, where the
trail snakes off toward the distant horizon.**

MALIKA (V.O.)

The deeper they dug
into the mountain,
the more the world
outside tried to
follow.

EXT. BARCO HOMESTEAD – EVENING – 1860

The sun sets behind the Ship Mountains, casting long amber shadows over the oasis. CAMERON and MALIKA sit near the edge of their porch, watching their sons in the distance—WILBUR lifts a wagon axle while EMMET, 16, pores over a notebook, sketching a gear system with charcoal.

MALIKA

He doesn't belong
to this land like
Wilbur does. He is
strong—but his mind
never stops
working.

CAMERON

I know. He sees the
mine like I never
could—its future,
not just its walls.

MALIKA

He's already
outgrown this
place. I see it in
the way he stares
at maps. The way he
asks about machines
and books I can't
give him.

CAMERON

Then we send him.
East. (beat) He can
attend a prep
school there—get
ready to attend the
University.

MALIKA

(softly) You'd send
our son across the
country? So far
away?

CAMERON

He will live near
my parents. It's
not forever. The
boy will come back
a man—and he'll
help us build
something that can
last for
generations.

MALIKA

(quiet, aching)
It's a long trip,
and it is
dangerous.

Cameron reaches for her hand, his voice steady but gentle.

CAMERON

We'll put him on a
stagecoach in Fort
Yuma. The Cavalry's
—escorting
travelers through
the desert. They
are keeping the
Apache and Comanche
at bay. Once he
reaches St. Louis,
the rails will
carry him the rest
of the way. When he
arrives in
Philadelphia, my
family will be
there waiting. He
won't be alone.

MALIKA

Cameron, it's too
dangerous.

CAMERON

I'll write to
Sherman—you know
we've been
corresponding. He's
hung up his sword
and taken a
position as
headmaster at the
Louisiana State

Seminary. He still
carries weight in
the Army and will
do us a favor. I'll
ask him to send
word down the
line—let them know
our boy is heading
east. (beat) Not
for war. For books.
(beat) He will keep
him safe between
Yuma and the rails.

EXT. FORT YUMA — MORNING 1861

CREEEN OVERLAY: "One Year Later — Ft Yuma, AZ 1861"

The first light of day spills across the adobe walls of Fort Yuma. A STAGECOACH waits outside the gates, horses restless, leather harnesses creaking. EMMET, dressed in a tailored jacket and carrying a worn satchel, beams with excitement. He hugs MALIKA tightly—she holds on longer than he does. CAMERON shakes his son's hand, then pulls him in for a brief, proud embrace.

CAMERON

Make us proud, son.
And write your
mother—every week.

EMMET

I will. I promise.

The coachman gives a sharp whistle, snapping the reins. The stagecoach lurches forward, wheels kicking up dust. Emmet leans out the window one last time—eyes full of wonder, his leather-bound journal clutched tight against his chest. He waves with one hand, the wind tugging at his hair.

MALIKA and CAMERON stand side by side, silent as the coach shrinks into the horizon. Her hand finds his, fingers intertwining like roots in dry earth.

Cameron's eyes linger—on the coach, the team of four horses, and the smooth rhythm and the speed with which it vanishes into the wild. A thought begins to form behind his weathered eyes.

CAMERON

If we had one of those... (beat) We could run gold ourselves. Quiet, fast. Through the desert to Yuma, to San Diego... maybe even Los Angeles.

MALIKA (V.O.)

We sent him east, not to leave us—but to carry our name further than we ever could.

EXT. BARCO MINE – EARLY MORNING – 1862

SCREEN OVERLAY: "One Year Later 1862"

The rising sun casts golden light over the rocky peaks of the Ship Mountains. At the mouth of the Barco Mine, CAMERON SMITH, JUAN GARCÍA, a TRUSTED MAN, and a STAGE DRIVER oversee the loading of a reinforced stagecoach. Crates marked with false labels—"Mining Equipment," "Tools," "Iron Goods"—are carefully stacked inside, heavy with hidden gold.

MALIKA stands nearby, arms crossed, her eyes narrowed as she watches the final crate sealed and covered in canvas.

MALIKA

Why take the gold
to San Diego? It's
four days of bad
roads and worse
men.

CAMERON

I have a buyer.
He's paying double
the rate they are
paying in Yuma.

MALIKA

(quietly, pointed)
Why trust him? Why
take the risk?

CAMERON

He's an old friend.
And its the right
thing to do.

Wilbur tightens the saddle on his horse nearby. A YOUNG MOJAVE WARRIOR stands beside him, rifle slung over his shoulder. Malika watches them both, a flicker of unease in her gaze.

MALIKA

You're taking
Wilbur?

CAMERON

They'll follow from
a distance. Eyes in
the hills. No one
will know they're
with us—unless
trouble shows up.

EXT. QUAKER MEETING HOUSE – DAY (FLASHBACK, 1830)

Screen Overlay: "30 Years Ago – Philadelphia 1830"

A group of QUAKERS sits in silent contemplation. A young CAMERON SMITH, in simple Quaker attire, listens intently as his MOTHER, MARGARET SMITH—a strong, compassionate woman—rises to speak.

MARGARET SMITH

Cameron, all men
are born free under
the eyes of the
Lord. To own
another is to sin
against the soul of
humanity.

Cameron nods, absorbing every word. Across the room, he sees an UNDERGROUND RAILROAD CONDUCTOR slip a note to his mother. She reads it, then gives a firm nod. Cameron watches her, admiration in his eyes.

EXT. PHILADELPHIA ALLEY – NIGHT (1830)

Margaret leads a GROUP OF RUNAWAY SLAVES to a waiting wagon. Cameron helps drape a tarp over them as the sound of approaching horse hooves grows louder. A pair of SLAVE CATCHERS ride past, eyes narrowed in suspicion.

SLAVE CATCHER

Seen any runaways,
boy?

Margaret steps forward, her voice steady and resolute.

MARGARET SMITH

Only those the Lord
has set free.

The riders hesitate, then ride off. Cameron exhales slowly, his respect for his mother deepening—a moment that cements his lifelong belief in justice and equality.

**EXT. DESERT TRAIL – VARIOUS – FOUR-DAY MONTAGE
(1862)**

The stagecoach moves across sun-bleached terrain.

- **Day one:** – cracked flats, loping jackrabbits, distant dust devils. The heat is relentless.
- **Day two:** – twisted canyons and sharp ridgelines. At night, they camp with the horses tethered, taking turns keeping watch. Wilbur and the Mojave warrior shadow the coach from above, never seen but always near.
- **Day three:** – a dry arroyo suddenly turns violent—a flash flood surges after a desert thunderstorm. The coach nearly tips, water rising past the wheels. Cameron and Juan strain to push it free, soaked to the bone, mud clinging to their clothes.
- **Day four:** – the land begins to flatten, brush thickens. The ocean breeze is faint but rising. They're close.

EXT. DESERT RIDGE – LATER THAT DAY (1862)

From a rocky outcrop, ARMED BANDITS lie in wait. Their horses are ready. Guns loaded. They eye the

coach as it crests a distant rise. The ambush begins. Gunfire erupts. The stagecoach shudders as a wheel splinters but holds under pressure. Cameron returns fire with calm precision. Juan and the Trusted Man blast back with pistols from cover. From the high ground, Wilbur and the Mojave warrior strike—rifles cracking with deadly accuracy. Bandits fall. The rest scatter. Dust swirls and the echoes fade.

Cameron reloads, his eyes searching for Wilbur. Their eyes meet across the ridge—a nod, wordless and powerful. They have survived—again.

EXT. SAN DIEGO SHIPYARD – MORNING (1862)

Fog lifts from the quiet bay as early sun breaks over the masts. The battered Barco stagecoach—its canvas patched and one wheel visibly newer—rolls into the gravel yard beside a weathered warehouse. Dockworkers glance up from crates and nets, sensing something unusual.

CAMERON steps down, dusty and road-worn. He straightens his coat and looks up—two men wait near the warehouse doors.

GENERAL WILLIAM T. SHERMAN, in Union blue, now grizzled but sharp-eyed, steps forward with a rare grin. Beside him stands KEATING, 50s, in sea-worn leathers and a canvas duster—arms folded like a man who's seen the edge of the world and came back with a hammer.

Cameron smiles at his old friend and reaches to shake his hand.

CAMERON

I see Grant pinned
some stars on you.

Sherman smiles and pulls Cameron into a firm
embrace—their bond forged in desert heat and hard-
won trust.

SHERMAN

How's your boy
Emmet? Heard he's
Ivy League now. I
told you I could've
got him into West
Point.

CAMERON

Emmet's fine—better
than fine. But he's
not Army material.
Got a head for
figures, not
formations.

Sherman turns to Wilbur, shaking his hand firmly.

SHERMAN

(smirking) Well,
your eldest looks
like a warrior.
Wilbur—the Union
Army's looking for

a few good men.

CAMERON

Bill, this isn't
the time for
recruiting. And his
mother would skin
me if I let him
sail off with you.
Let's get to
business. Who's
your friend?

SHERMAN

This is Keating.
He's building ships
that don't ask
questions.

KEATING

Pleasure, Mr.
Smith. We've built
a two-masted
coastal sloop
prepped to sail
before sundown.
Built her lean and
fast. (beat) She'll
run back and forth
to Panama. From
there the gold goes
overland, then
it'll steam up the

coast. Every load
should reach
Philadelphia in
about a month—quiet
and clean.

Cameron watches as the crate is unloaded—still
disguised as mining tools—and rolled toward the
warehouse. The weight of it is more than gold. It is
trust. And risk. And cause.

CAMERON

I'll sleep better
when it's across
the water.

SHERMAN

We'll take another
shipment next
month. And you'll
have a Union
contract for
everything you can
pull from that
mountain—but this
stays quiet. Our
friends in Los
Angeles are not
sympathetic to our
cause.

They follow Keating into the warehouse, the echo of
hammering masts and crying gulls behind them. The

door swings shut—closing them into the machinery of a war fought not just with bullets, but with secrets and gold.

EXT. BARCO HOMESTEAD — PORCH — EVENING — 1862

Golden light pours across the Ship Mountains as the sun sets. The wind whispers through the dry mesquite. MALIKA sits on the edge of the porch, a sealed envelope in hand, stamped with the U.S. War Department insignia. CAMERON, stands beside her, brow furrowed.

She breaks the wax seal carefully, unfolds the parchment, and reads aloud.

MALIKA

“By authority of
the United States
Government, under
the Pacific Railway
Act of 1862, a land
survey team will
assess all parcels
in the Cadiz Basin
for potential use
in national
infrastructure...”

Cameron takes a step back, shaking his head. The words sting worse than a bullet.

CAMERON

They're coming for
us, not rifles—but
just as deadly.

MALIKA

We held back the
prospectors. Even
ran off the Landmen
once before. But
this... this comes
with flags and
stamps.

CAMERON

What do they want?

MALIKA

(reading again,
slower) "Land
parcels deemed
suitable may be
acquired by federal
charter, to be
allocated for use
by the Central
Pacific or other
designated rail
interests." (beat)
It means... they
don't just want to
cross the desert.
They want to own
it.

CAMERON

And everything in
it.

Malika folds the letter and stares toward the distant horizon, where the desert fades into haze. Her voice softens, edged with foreboding.

MALIKA

It's signed by a
deputy from the War
Department... under
advisement from one
Collis P.
Huntington.

Cameron's hand grips the porch railing, knuckles white.

CAMERON

He tried taking our
land once before.
He'll stop at
nothing. I'm not
sure our friends in
Washington will be
able to stop this
attack.

The desert wind rises. In the distance, a faint dust plume marks the arrival of someone—or something—on the move.

MALIKA (V.O.)

We protected this
land with blood,
with silence, with
faith. But the
silence has drawn
attention. And
gold... gold always
sings to powerful
men.

EXT. SAN DIEGO – DOCKS – DAY (1863)

SCREEN OVERLAY: One Year Later – 1863

The harbor bustles with wartime activity—sloops unloading crates, soldiers drilling near the shoreline, and merchant ships rolling in on ocean swells. A weathered coastal sloop waits at the end of the pier, sails half-lowered.

CAPTAIN JAMES KEATING, sea-scarred and always a step ahead of the wind, stands with arms crossed as CAMERON SMITH arrives alongside a stagecoach bearing crates disguised as mining equipment.

KEATING

Smith. I'll hand it
to you—every crate
you send east makes
the Union richer...
and you too. This
war's been good for
your pockets.

(beat) Just hope
you've chosen your
side wisely.

Cameron steps down, glancing back at his son WILBUR, now 20, his jaw firmer, his shoulders squared. He wears the look of a young man torn between worlds.

CAMERON

You and I both know
I'd make twice as
much selling to the
Confederate buyers
in Los Angeles. But
some things weigh
more than coin. Make
sure this shipment gets
there fast. There are
freemen's lives depending
on it.

Keating signals to his crew. Dockhands begin
hoisting crates into the hull as Cameron and Wilbur
step aside, overlooking the harbor.

CAMERON (CONT.)

You've been quiet,
son.

Wilbur hands his father a flyer and Cameron reads it
deliberately before looking up.

WILBUR

The First
California is
recruiting out of
Fort Yuma.

CAMERON

You don't have to
do this. You've
done more for the
Union Army than
most men. Your
fight is here.

WILBUR

You raised me to
stand for
something. If I
stay while others
fight... what does
that say about me?

Cameron looks at him for a long beat, pride and fear
warring silently across his face.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The gold kept the
Union fed. But our
son was the price.
And the war had
only just begun.

INT. OASIS PALMS – WILBUR’S ROOM – NIGHT (1863)

Wilbur, now 21, stands resolutely before his father as he methodically packs his Union uniform into a worn leather bag. Cameron watches from a corner of the room, his eyes reflecting a mix of pride, anguish, and deep concern.

CAMERON (VOICE THICK WITH EMOTION)

Are you certain,
son? There’s no
shame in staying
here—to help your
mother and your
brothers. Your
family needs you
here in the desert.

Wilbur pauses, his hands steady despite the weight of his decision.

WILBUR (QUIET YET FIRM)

I have to do this,
Pa. This fight
isn’t just for our
family—it’s for
every man denied
freedom, every soul
silenced by
oppression. I can’t
stand by while our
country is torn
apart.

Cameron's face contorts with internal conflict as he steps closer, placing a trembling hand on Wilbur's shoulder.

CAMERON

The thought of
losing you... it
would destroy your
mother.

Wilbur meets his father's gaze, his eyes burning with both determination and sorrow.

WILBUR

I'll be alright,
Pa. And besides,
you raised me to
know that sacrifice
builds a better
future.

They clasp hands tightly—a silent, poignant farewell heavy with unspoken promises and the cost of liberty.

MALIKA (V.O.)

His youthful
conviction blinded
him to war's true
risks—and to the
heartbreak his
conviction could

unleash upon those
he loved.

**EXT. CADIZ VALLEY – NEAR THE BASE OF THE SHIP
MOUNTAINS – DAY – 1863**

The sun beats down on the wide desert valley. A SURVEY TEAM in crisp vests and dust-covered boots sets stakes into the ground. Long metal chains stretch across the dry plain. A tripod and level mark elevation lines. Behind them, a Central Pacific Railroad wagon creaks to a stop.

COLLIS P. HUNTINGTON, 40s, calculating and confident, dismounts from a fine black horse. His suit is dusty but tailored, and his boots are polished despite the desert. He scans the plateau above, eyes narrowing slightly at the distant ridgeline of Barco land.

CAMERON SMITH approaches from horseback, flanked by JUAN and his son JACKSON, now 17. They stop just outside the main camp. Cameron rides forward alone.

HUNTINGTON

Mr. Smith. So this
is the man who
sells gold to
Washington. You've
got grit—and better
lawyers than most.

CAMERON

You're a long way
from San Francisco,
Mr. Huntington.

HUNTINGTON

And closer than you
think. (beat,
turning to gesture
across the valley)
We'll be laying
track through this
basin. It's the
only viable grade
between Needles and
the pass. But the
plateau... (turns
back, measuring
him) That's yours.
For now.

CAMERON

For now?

HUNTINGTON

I'm a man of
compromise, Mr.
Smith. I'm not
asking for your
land. Just your
water. (smiles
faintly) The
desert's thirsty.
Steel and steam

won't move without
it.

CAMERON

And if I say no?

HUNTINGTON

Then someone else
sells it to me. Or
someone else claims
you're withholding
a national
resource. (beat)
I'll leave your
land alone, Mr.
Smith. You help
keep my men alive.
Simple as that.

Cameron dismounts slowly. Dust kicks up under his boots. He looks toward the ridgeline—his homestead just out of view. Then back to Huntington's eyes—cool, unwavering.

CAMERON

One stop. We'll
keep a water full
in Cadiz and you
stay off our
mountain. You come
one inch higher, we
bury your steel in
sand.

HUNTINGTON

(grinning) Fair
enough. I like a
man who stands his
ground.

They shake hands, a handshake made of tension and
calculation. Neither smiles for long.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The railroad didn't
need to take the
land. It only
needed what ran
beneath it. And men
like
Huntington—they
never stop at fair
deals.

**EXT. UNION ENCAMPMENT – GETTYSBURG – NIGHT – JULY 2,
1863**

The sky hangs heavy with stars, a quiet veil over
the fields of Pennsylvania. Soldiers gather in small
circles around low-burning campfires, sharpening
bayonets, writing letters, smoking in silence.

WILBUR SMITH, 21, sits cross-legged near the embers,
in full Union blues, his rifle laid beside him like
an extension of his body. He tightens the leather
strap on his cartridge pouch with slow, deliberate
hands.

A fellow soldier, PRIVATE HAWLEY, 30s, gruff and Missouri-born, tosses a twig into the fire and squints across the flames.

PRIVATE HAWLEY

You're a long way
from the gold
coast, soldier.
(beat) Thought
California leaned
gray. Lotta folk
out there are Rebs.

Wilbur pauses, then looks up—his voice even, his gaze steady.

WILBUR

My grandmother's a
Quaker from
Philadelphia.
Taught my father
and he taught me
that all men
deserve to be free.

WILBUR (CONT.)

In California, we
live on land that
belonged to the
Mojave. We don't
own them—we live
beside them. (beat)
And the man who

taught me to shoot...
was Mexican-born.

WILBUR (CONT.)

My family stands
for something.
(beat) And I stand
for that—here, now.

PRIVATE HAWLEY

(raising a brow)
You think the rest
of California'll
catch up to you?

WILBUR

Someday. (beat) And
if we do our job
here... we can help
them see the light.

Silence returns. The fire pops quietly. Across the field, a distant cannon thunders—just a reminder of what's coming. Wilbur stares into the flame, his face lit by a flickering mix of fear, faith, and fire.

EXT. UNION ENCAMPMENT — GETTYSBURG — NIGHT — LATER

The fire burns low. Most soldiers are asleep or staring silently into the dark. Wilbur sits on a small wooden crate, pen in hand, scribbling by lantern light. His uniform is half-buttoned, sleeves

rolled. The paper trembles slightly—not from fear, but from the weight of what needs saying.

He finishes the letter, folds it slowly, and seals it into a small wax-stamped envelope. On the front: “Emmet Smith – University of Pennsylvania.”

WILBUR (V.O.)

If I don't make it
home, you need to
take care of Mom
and Dad. And
Jackson. (beat)
Tell them I stood
for something good.
That I honored the
Smith name.

He rises and walks through the sleeping camp until he finds the COMPANY CLERK—young, wiry, boots half unlaced, sipping weak coffee by a cart of mail pouches.

WILBUR

Hey—can you get
this to my brother?
He's in school in
Philadelphia.

CLERK

(taking the letter)
Noticing the Ivy
League school. I'll

make sure it moves
with the officers'
dispatch. Safe as a
general's orders.

WILBUR

Good.

The messenger nods and tucks the letter into his satchel. Wilbur watches the flap close over it—like a curtain. Then he turns back toward the tents, toward the waiting battlefield beyond.

MALIKA (V.O.)

He sent his name
forward, across the
earth and into the
hands of his
brother. A name
carried not by
gold, but by honor.

EXT. UNION ENCAMPMENT – GETTYSBURG – DAWN – JULY 3, 1863

The field is still. The early light breaks across tents, trees, and trembling cannon barrels. Soldiers murmur prayers, check powder, tighten belts. In one row, WILBUR SMITH, now 21, stands tall in the blue of the 71st Pennsylvania. His boots are caked in Pennsylvania mud. His rifle is clean. His hands do not shake.

Across the lines, the Confederate artillery stirs.
The low moan of war drums begins—slow, rising like
thunder from beneath the earth.

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

Some battles are
fought with rifles.
Others, with ink
and law. And some...
with the blood of
our sons.

Wilbur closes his eyes. A whisper of memory—a Mojave
chant, once sung to him as a child. He steadies
himself with it.

A cannon fires. Then another. The sky tears open
with smoke and flame. Union lines shift, commanders
shout orders. The 71st is called forward. Wilbur
moves with his unit, musket in hand, cartridge pouch
ready. Around him: chaos—men screaming, stumbling,
surging. But Wilbur's gaze is focused, clear. He
charges not for glory, but for conviction.

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

He stood not only
for his nation... but
for his father's
justice, and his
mother's truth. And
for a grandmother
who taught him that
land cannot be
owned—only

protected.

Smoke rolls like a wave. Wilbur fires, reloads, fires again. Around him, comrades fall. A Confederate soldier raises his rifle and takes aim. Wilbur sees him—but doesn't flinch. The shot cracks. Wilbur stumbles. His musket falls. His body drops into the churned earth of Gettysburg—bloodied, but not broken. The sounds of battle thunder on.

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

The land drank
deep. The cause was
righteous. But the
cost... the cost was
carved into our
bones.

**EXT. BARCO PLATEAU — HOMESTEAD COURTYARD — DAY —
LATE 1863**

The wind cuts across the plateau. Dust swirls around the stone well where CAMERON splits firewood. JACKSON plays nearby, his laughter echoing faintly in the empty air.

A RIDER approaches—dust-covered, uniformed, waving a yellow envelope. Cameron rises. MALIKA steps from the house, already knowing.

The RIDER pulls up hard, breathless. He hands Cameron the envelope—creased, sealed with the red wax of the U.S. War Department.

RIDER

Came down from the
telegraph station
in San Bernardino.
Signed by a General
Sherman.

Cameron opens the envelope. Inside: a **telegraph slip**, its words stark against the yellow paper.

CAMERON (READING)

"Wilbur Smith.
Killed in action,
July 3rd,
Gettysburg.
Displayed bravery
under fire. Letter
to follow.
—W.T. Sherman,
Major General, Army
of the Tennessee."

His hands go still. The paper flutters. Jackson stops laughing.

Malika steps closer. She takes the telegram from Cameron's trembling hand and reads it silently. Her face doesn't break—but her soul shudders.

MALIKA

The plateau will
know. The warrior
is not alone

anymore.

She presses the paper to her chest. The horizon stretches wide, silent, waiting.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The news came not
by crow or storm...
but by wire,
humming across iron
rails—bearing death
in black ink.

EXT. OASIS PALMS CEMETERY – SUNSET – FALL 1863

The sun bleeds into the horizon, painting the plateau in hues of amber and blood. The wind stirs the palms gently. A new grave stands freshly turned, the stone bearing the name: **WILBUR SMITH 1842–1863**
“Son. Brother. Defender.”

Ten feet away, the land is marked by a simpler mound—stones arranged in a Mojave circle. A Warrior, buried in secret years before. Between the two graves, the ground is sacred. Watched over. Claimed by blood.

CAMERON stands stiffly in his worn coat, face hollow but unbroken. MALIKA stands beside him, her shawl drawn over her shoulders, hair braided with crow feathers. Beside them, JACKSON, just a boy, holds onto her hand.

JUAN GARCÍA and his family stand in quiet

solidarity, hats removed, heads bowed. His children clutch each other's hands, their eyes wide, taking in the weight of what has been lost—and what remains.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The war took more
than just men—it
stole time. It
stole futures.
(beat) And it
returned our son to
us not as a hero,
but as a stone in
the earth.

Malika kneels beside the grave, brushing her fingers along the carved stone. She speaks softly, but it carries.

MALIKA

You are not alone,
my son. The warrior
sleeps nearby—his
spirit watches this
land still. (beat)
And now, you watch
beside him.

She stands. Her voice strengthens as she speaks to the circle of family and friends.

MALIKA

This land—our
home—has never been
taken by force. It
has only ever asked
for sacrifice. And
now, it is gilded
in the blood of
those who kept it
safe.

JUAN

He died with honor.
He knew what was
right. He knew what
was worth
protecting.

CAMERON

He gave his life
for something
larger than
gold—for justice.
For this land. For
all of us.

Silence falls. The wind carries the scent of sage.
The last rays of sunlight trace the ridgeline above
the plateau—where Wilbur once stood, rifle in hand.

MALIKA (V.O.)

Some treasures are
measured not in

coins or dust... but
in the weight of
what is lost to
protect them. It
was a gilded
sacrifice.

They lower their heads together as dusk deepens. The plateau watches silently, bearing witness once more to the cost of silence, and the sacred burden of the Smith name.

**EXT. BARCO PLATEAU – STABLE YARD – EARLY MORNING –
1864**

The first light of dawn creeps over the Ship Mountains. JACKSON SMITH, 19, stands beside a loaded wagon, adjusting the strap on a leather satchel. His eyes are sharp, filled with anticipation and nerves. A rolled-up blanket and books are tucked under one arm.

CAMERON fastens the cinch on the mule's harness. MALIKA lingers near the adobe wall, arms crossed beneath her shawl.

CAMERON

You'll head west to
San Bernardino,
catch the steamer
north out of Los
Angeles. It'll take
you straight into
the Bay.

MALIKA

And from there?

CAMERON

Ferry across to
Berkeley. College
of California's
right on the hill.
First class starts
in September.

Jackson adjusts the strap on his satchel. Malika
steps forward and hands him a small woven pouch.

MALIKA

For luck. And for
remembering. (beat)
The desert wind
doesn't forget its
own.

Jackson smiles, trying to hide the emotion rising in
his throat. He hugs her, quick but strong.

JACKSON

I'll write you
Mother. I promise.

CAMERON

Just don't write
anything you
wouldn't want your

mother to read
twice.

MALIKA

At least he's not
headed back East.

CAMERON

It's a fine school
but he's still
going far enough to
make us miss him.

They watch as Jackson climbs onto the wagon seat. He waves once, then snaps the reins. The wheels creak, and the mule trots forward down the dusty trail, into the wide golden valley.

EXT. BARCO PLATEAU – PORCH – SUNSET (1865)

SCREEN OVERLAY: "1 Year Later 1865"

The sun settles low over the Ship Mountains. Long shadows stretch across the plateau. The grave markers on the ridge catch the light like silhouettes of memory. MALIKA sits alone on the porch deeply depressed, shawl around her shoulders, her eyes red but dry. The wind stirs her hair. The air smells of sage and silence. CAMERON joins her quietly, handing her a cup of warm tea. They sit in stillness for a long beat.

MALIKA

They're all gone
now. (beat) Wilbur
to war. Emmet to
the East. And now
Jackson... north
chasing books.

Cameron looks toward the trail, then back at her.

CAMERON

They're not gone.
Just further down
the road than we
can see.

Malika wraps her shawl tighter, as if holding on to
more than fabric.

MALIKA

We gave them wings.
now... the wind has
carried them away.

CAMERON

We gave them roots.
Emmet will come
back soon. You'll
see. (smiles
faintly) He'll help
me run the mine.
Jackson needs to
finish his

education and he'll
be back you'll see.

MALIKA

(softly) The last
one came home in a
wooden box. I'm
afraid I'll never
see my boys again.

Cameron gently takes her hand. They sit together as
the last of the sun slips behind the desert hills.
The wind hums through the palms. The land is
quiet—but not empty.

CAMERON

We built something
here. Not just with
gold or iron—but
with love. And
though they ride
far from us, their
roots remain in our
oasis.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The mountain
watches—it holds
every name, every
step, in its quiet
stone heart.

**EXT. UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD TERMINUS – PLAINS WEST
OF ST. JOSEPH – DAY – 1866**

A steam locomotive hisses to a stop on a barren, wind-swept plain. Workers unload crates, barrels, and sacks beside a crude depot—half wood, half tent. The sign reads: “END OF THE LINE.”

EMMET SMITH, 22, dressed in an Eastern wool coat and well-kept boots, steps off the train carrying a small satchel and a leather journal. He removes his cap, squinting into the sun. Dust curls along the tracks that vanish west into nothing.

A CREW FOREMAN barks orders at laborers stacking iron rails and timber ties. Emmet watches him for a beat, then approaches.

EMMET

When will you reach
California?

FOREMAN

If the weather
holds... and no more
Indian raids... maybe
three more years.
We're pushing west
from Omaha (beat)
You'll know we made
it when you hear a
hammer strike gold
in Sacramento.

Emmet nods, thoughtful. He turns west toward the

empty horizon. Then he shoulders his bag and walks toward the waiting stagecoach, bound for the Mojave.

EXT. BARCO HOMESTEAD – LATE AFTERNOON – 1866

The wind hums over the plateau. Golden light paints the stone walls of the homestead. A rider appears on the trail—dusty, tired, but upright. MALIKA sees the figure and steps out from the adobe doorway, shawl flapping in the breeze. CAMERON follows her, holding a water pail. They squint into the light. As the rider draws closer, MALIKA gasps.

MALIKA

Emmet?

EMMET dismounts slowly, weathered from travel. He carries himself with the posture of a man changed—but rooted. He smiles, not wide, but deeply felt.

EMMET

I told you I'd come home.

MALIKA embraces him tightly. CAMERON hangs back a moment, then walks forward, placing a firm hand on his son's shoulder.

CAMERON

Welcome home, son.

They walk toward the house. Juan's children run out to see him. Wilbur's old rifle hangs above the door. Emmet pauses, looking towards the grave markers on the ridge beyond—Wilbur's, and the warrior's.

EMMET

This place hasn't
changed. But I
have.

MALIKA

The mountain will
wait for you. As it
waited for your
father.

They enter the house. Behind them, the desert stretches toward the setting sun—and far beyond it, the rails are coming.

INT. BARCO HOMESTEAD — LATE AFTERNOON (1866)

Inside, the cabin walls are still. The fire crackles softly in the hearth. Emmet sets down his satchel and looks around—at the woven baskets, the faded maps, the worn table carved by hand.

EMMET

The East is
building fast.
Tracks, factories,
cities. (beat) The
railroad is coming.

If we don't build
something permanent
here—something
stronger than
stories—we'll be
run over by
progress.

CAMERON

Then we'd better
get to work.

MALIKA

The desert will
give you what you
ask... if you're
willing to pay the
price.

They share a long look—father, mother, son—each
changed, each holding a piece of what must be
protected, and what must be built.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The mountain had
taken from us. But
now it asked for
more: not gold, not
blood—but vision.

EXT. SAN DIEGO BRICK YARD — MIDDAY — 1866

The sun casts long shadows across stacked bricks—deep red and weathered from kiln fires. A brickyard on the edge of San Diego hums with quiet labor. Kilns smoke in the background. Rows of clay bricks sit drying on racks under muslin shades.

CAMERON SMITH, dusty and sun-worn, stands beside his son EMMET, now neatly dressed but clearly a man of the frontier. They speak with PHILANDER COLTON, 60s, stocky and sun-leathered, sleeves rolled and eyes sharp. A man of faith, function, and fire.

CAMERON

I understand you
are the man who
supplied the bricks
for the courthouse
here in San Diego.
That building looks
like it will stand
100 years. Most of
this coast would
blow away if you
leaned too hard on
it.

COLTON

That's true. Wood
burns. Clay
crumbles. (beat)
You want something
built to last, Mr.
Smith?

CAMERON

Not just a home. A
town. (beat) A
place with stone
and story—something
that doesn't rot.

EMMET

Most mining camps
go up fast and burn
down faster. We
want brick.
Streets.
Foundations.

COLTON

(smiling) Ah, you
want permanence way
out in the desert?
That costs more
than money.

CAMERON

We'll haul the
bricks ourselves.
Mule train through
the valley. You
make them—we'll
stack 'em.

COLTON

You're serious.

CAMERON

The rails are
coming and with
them progress. When
they arrive, I want
them to find more
than dust and
tents. I want them
to find a town.

Colton studies them both. He glances toward the old
courthouse rising in the haze behind them—a building
he helped set in stone years ago.

COLTON

I'll give you
bricks. Same mix as
the
courthouse—clay,
sand, straw, and
faith. (beat) But
you'll owe me a
promise.

CAMERON

Name it.

COLTON

Don't let your town
be built on gold.
Let it be built on
people and faith.

CAMERON

Yes, but you still
want to be paid... in
gold.

COLTON

Of course.

They shake hands. Emmet watches as the first bricks are loaded onto a waiting wagon. Dust rises—and with it, the first foundation of what Barco might one day become.

MALIKA (V.O.)

A wall can keep men
out. Or it can hold
something together.
We were building
neither a fort nor
a monument—but a
home.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. BARCO PLATEAU – TOWN – LATE AFTERNOON – 1873

Heat ripples off the dry road west of town. Dust swirls beneath wagon wheels. Masons lay bricks with rhythmic precision as saws whine from within. A **completed brick building** stands proudly—a MARKET with open shutters, baskets of citrus and dried beans on display, and next to it a second HARDWARE STORE, is almost complete. The town hums with quiet

industry.

CAMERON SMITH stands near the construction site in a broad hat, sleeves rolled, surveying the structure. Beside him, EMMET, now 29 and confident, reviews a set of rolled building plans. A FOREMAN in suspenders steps down from the scaffolding and wipes his brow.

A small Mojave family – an ELDERLY WOMAN, a YOUNG MOTHER, and two CHILDREN – walk barefoot along the edge of the plateau, leading a mule loaded with woven baskets and tools. Their clothes are worn. Their pace, slow.

A WAGON rolls up behind them, flying a faded U.S. flag. Two MEN ride it – one in a government-issued coat, the other in a rancher's hat with a ledger in his lap. A DEPUTY rides behind them on horseback, rifle slung. The wagon slows. Dust curls in the sunlight.

GOVERNMENT AGENT

You folks headed
back to the
reservation? Or are
you squatting on
federal land again?

YOUNG MOTHER

We were told we
could pass through.
We have family near
the water. We
aren't staying.

RANCHER

(to the deputy)
Under the Act of
'52, she's vagrant.
Unregistered. That
means she can be
indentured.

The DEPUTY rides forward, dismounts. The CHILDREN
cling to their grandmother's skirts. The mother
steps forward, protective.

YOUNG MOTHER

Please. We were
born on this land.
We mean no harm.

DEPUTY

That's not how the
law sees it.

He reaches for her arm. She jerks back. The children
scream. The deputy grabs her roughly.

From across the street – MALIKA and CAMERON watch.
She stands frozen. She knows this family. She steps
forward, but stops short – eyes burning. Emmet
appears beside her, silent, helpless.

MALIKA

This is what they
call order. This is
what they call

progress.

EMMET

I thought this town
could be different.

MALIKA

Then fight for it.
Because the desert
remembers – even if
they don't.

As the deputy begins to lead the mother toward the wagon, a voice cuts through the dry air like a blade.

CAMERON (O.S.)

That's enough.

The deputy turns. CAMERON SMITH steps forward, storm in his eyes. The deputy stiffens.

CAMERON

What did we fight
that war for?
(beat) What did my
son die for—if not
for freedom?

DEPUTY

She's violating

federal—

Cameron looking at the rancher.

CAMERON

She's walking home.
That's not a crime.
And YOU are not
welcome here.

Silence. The deputy looks between Cameron and the government agent. The moment stretches. Finally, the deputy lets go of the mother's arm.

DEPUTY

Fine. But don't say
I didn't try to do
it by the book.

The wagon turns, pulling away. The mother stumbles back into her family's arms. Malika reaches them first, kneeling beside the children. She helps steady the grandmother.

Cameron watches the wagon vanish in the haze. His jaw tightens, but his voice stays low.

CAMERON

We are building
this town on
something better.
Let's keep it that

way.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The law did not
protect us. The
state did not see
us. But every now
and then, a voice
rose loud enough to
stop the wind.

MALIKA (V.O.)

They called it
civilization. But
it was conquest by
another name. And
like the wind, it
did not ask who it
touched – only what
it could take.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. BARCO TOWN CENTER – DAY – SPRING 1876

The sun blazes over a maturing town. Red clay dust swirls beneath wagon wheels. A three-story BRICK HOTEL rises on the corner—its bones nearly complete, timber scaffolding climbing its side. Masons lay bricks with rhythmic precision as saws whine from within.

Across the street, **two completed brick buildings** stand proudly—a MARKET with open shutters, baskets

of citrus and dried beans on display, and a HARDWARE STORE, its windows lined with glinting tools and oil lamps. The town hums with quiet industry.

CAMERON SMITH stands near the construction site in a broad hat, sleeves rolled, surveying the structure. Beside him, EMMET, now 30 and confident, reviews a set of rolled building plans. A FOREMAN in suspenders steps down from the scaffolding and wipes his brow.

CAMERON

Will it be finished
by July? We've got
folks riding in
from all across the
valley.

FOREMAN

The bricks'll be
set by end of June,
Mr. Smith. Finish
carpenters'll work
right up to the
bunting. She'll
open for the
Centennial
celebration. You
have my word.

Cameron nods, satisfied. Emmet shades his eyes and looks toward the hill where the old homestead still sits, now framed by new roads and street lamps. The wind shifts slightly—warm, dry, familiar.

CAMERON

When Jackson sees
all this progress...
he'll move back
from San Francisco.
He'll want to run
the hotel, maybe
even settle down.

EMMET

(half-smiling) He's
managing resorts
now, big places on
the coast with
fountains and gas
lamps and twenty
staff in white
gloves. (beat) You
really think he'll
want to be stuck
out here in the
middle of the
Mojave—wasting his
charm on ten rooms
and desert wind?

CAMERON

(shrugs) He's still
a Smith. Maybe he
just needs to be
reminded what that
means.

Emmet doesn't reply—just stares out at the half-finished hotel, the growing town, the far-off ridge where his brother is buried. The future rises around them, brick by brick—but not without ghosts.

MALIKA crosses from the Market, holding a folded newspaper under her arm. Her shawl is lighter now, embroidered with desert flowers. She is not happy and hands the paper to Cameron.

MALIKA

Have you seen what
Sherman is up to
now?

Cameron raises an eyebrow, unfolds the paper. The headline reads: *"GENERAL WILLIAM T. SHERMAN: Westward Expansion and Indian Policy Address"*

CAMERON

(gruffly amused)
He's still bending
the country to his
will with bullets
and trains.

MALIKA

He treats our
people as obstacles
to his progress.
(beat) He will burn
our people to the
ground in the name
of progress.

EMMET

Progress is not all
bad. We are
building a future.
This oasis will
become a town where
people can be free
to work and raise
families. This is
an oasis we can
share.

MALIKA

The land remembers
what it was before
either of you came.
And it will
remember what you
leave behind.

Cameron folds the newspaper slowly. The words weigh
heavier now. Across the street, children run past
the market. A dog barks. The wind carries dust, but
not silence.

CAMERON

Then let's make
sure what we leave
behind was worth
the cost.

They all look toward the hotel. Workers hammer. A
sign is being painted above the doorframe: "*HOTEL
CALIFORNIA – EST. 1876*"

MALIKA (V.O.)

The nation turned
one hundred years
old that summer.
Some raised flags.
Others raised
armies. Emmet
raised brick
walls—thinking he
could tame the
desert.

EXT. BARCO PLATEAU — TOWN SQUARE — NIGHT — 1883

The desert night is warm and still. A string of lanterns arches across the square, their glow casting soft halos over a crowd of settlers, families, workers, and children. The square is alive with murmured conversation, clinking glasses, and quiet awe.

Substantial BRICK BUILDINGS line the square: a bustling GENERAL STORE, a HARDWARE SHOP with gleaming tools, a TWO-STORY SALOON, a busy BARBERSHOP, and the proud HOTEL CALIFORNIA, its sign lit by gaslamps. Streetlamps line the dirt roads like watchful sentinels.

From a raised wooden platform at the center of the square, a brass BAND plays a slow, reverent tune. A draped STATUE stands beneath a red cloth. CAMERON SMITH, 68 now, white in the beard and slower in step, stands with MALIKA and EMMET at his side. JACKSON, visiting from San Francisco, stands tall in

a tailored suit.

The town gathers silently as the music fades.
Cameron steps forward to the podium.

CAMERON

Ten years ago, this
square was just
dust and rocks. A
trail where
travelers passed
and sometimes never
returned. (beat) We
built this town
from that dust and
replaced the rocks
with bricks.

Twenty Years ago,
our firstborn son
gave his life so
all men could be
free. With hands,
hearts... and loss.

He gestures. Emmet and Jackson step forward and pull the red cloth from the statue—revealing a bronze likeness of WILBUR SMITH, dressed in his Union Army uniform, rifle by his side, eyes lifted toward the horizon.

A hushed breath falls over the crowd. Lanterns flicker. Children gaze upward. Some hold small American flags. The statue shines beneath the gaslamps—proud, young, eternal.

MALIKA (V.O.)

In honor, and in
grief, riches can
never replace a
son. The desert
remembers its
debts. So must we.

Cameron steps down. He kneels before the statue, weathered hand resting on the base. Tears streak his face. Emmet stands behind him, holding a folded flag. Malika watches, quiet and regal, her shawl embroidered with Mojave symbols.

The CROWD disperses slowly into a celebration—music rising again, pies set on tables, dancing beginning on the outer edges. But the square itself remains sacred, centered on the statue.

MALIKA (V.O.)

We traded a son for
freedom, we traded
the mountain's gold
for bricks. The
desert will decide
if it was worth the
cost.

High on the ridge, the grave of the Mojave warrior and Wilbur remain well-kept, and undisturbed. Below, Wilbur's statue now stands watch over the Barco Plateau—where progress, pride, and pain walk hand in hand.

INT. BARCO MINE OFFICE – LATE AFTERNOON – 1883

The sun slants low over the Ship Mountains, casting long, golden shadows across gravel-cut trails and timber-framed tunnels. A warm wind sweeps dust across stacks of ore, rusting tools, and idle carts.

Inside the modest mine office—half stone, half timber—**CAMERON SMITH**, 68, sits at a table layered with maps. His sleeves are rolled, his face weathered from years of battle with this mountain.

Beside him, **EMMET SMITH**, 39, leans in, responsibility etched into every line of his face. Across from them, **SCOOTER STEPHENSON**, 20, wiry and flame-haired, unrolls a hand-drawn cross-section of the shaft.

CAMERON

(anxious) Scooter,
talk to me—what do
you see in the
rock?

SCOOTER

(Scottish lilt,
sober) Aye, Mr.
Smith... she's near
bled dry. I've
walked every shaft.
The quartz is
changin'. We're
diggin' deeper for
less each day.

Emmet glances at the ore yield log—last week's output, half of the month before. His jaw clenches.

EMMET

So what's the move?
How do we pull
enough rock to keep
the stamp mill
going?

SCOOTER

At this pace? We
won't. Not unless
we start movin'
rock by the
ton—open cut, full-
scale haul. (beat)
That means
blasting.

CAMERON

We've always mined
clean-hand tools,
sweat. You're
saying... explosives?
We can't risk the
springs.

SCOOTER

I've got a man for
that. Knows how to
talk to the
mountain before he

makes her scream.
Came over on the
same boat as me.

The door creaks open. A long shadow stretches across the room. **ANDREW THOMPSON**, 20s, enters—long coat, battered hat, grit in his face and sulfur in his wake. He carries diagrams and the quiet edge of someone used to risk.

SCOOTER

(grinning) Speak o'
the devil. Cameron,
Emmet—this is
Andrew Thompson. He
laid track through
granite for the
Southern Pacific.
Knows how to make
the rock dance.

THOMPSON

(nods) Afternoon.
Heard you've got
stubborn stone and
soft returns. That
about right?

EMMET

We need more ore
than the mountain
wants to give. The
mill's hungry.

THOMPSON

You give me enough
powder, and nobody
breathing down my
neck...(beat) I'll
give you more rock
than you can haul.

CAMERON

(wary) The springs
feed this town. We
cannot disturb
them.

THOMPSON

(shrugs) The
springs'll run
clear. Scooter and
I will see to that.
(smirking) We've
got plans for that
water, anyway.

A beat. Wind rattles the tin roof. Cameron looks to
Emmet, then through the window—toward the distant
ridge, where Wilbur's statue catches the last of the
sun.

CAMERON

Alright, Mr.
Thompson. Let's see
what your powder
can do.

Thompson tips his hat. Scooter beams. Emmet exhales—half relief, half dread.

MALIKA (V.O.)

They traded picks
for powder. Sweat
for thunder. The
mountain would
give—but never
without a price.

INT. BARCO MINE OFFICE – NIGHT – 1883

The lamplight flickers. Cameron and Emmet sit at the same desk, books open, worry hanging in the air like mine dust.

CAMERON

Will it be enough?
We built this town
on the promise of
that mine. Everyone
here is counting on
it.

A heavy silence. Emmet looks up, an idea catching fire in his eyes.

EMMET

The Southern
Pacific—they're
laying track north

of here. What if we
hailed ore to
Cadiz? Load it onto
railcars, ship it
to San Bernardino.
They can process
tons of ore a day.
If Scooter and
Andrew can deliver,
we can make the
numbers work.

Cameron's eyes widen slightly.

CAMERON

(soft, but
resolute) That
might be the
lifeline we need.
(pause) But first,
you need to figure
out how to move
tons of ore off
this mountain.

They sit in silence, minds spinning. Two
generations—one with history in his bones, the other
with future in his eyes.

EXT. CLIFFHANGER LOOKOUT – DUSK

Cameron and Malika overlook the valley. To the West,
the Southern Pacific carves through the Mojave.

Crews move like ants across the barren plain.
Cameron coughs softly, leaning on Malika's arm. The
wind lifts the edge of her shawl.

MALIKA

They are coming.

CAMERON

(quietly) Yes. But
this time... we need
them.

He coughs again, raspy.

FADE TO BLACK.