

## **'TRAPPED ON ALL SIDES' (OR A FORTIORI)**

### Treatment

Logline: When a well-respected civil rights professor comes face to face with a gang of rapists who act above the law, she must rethink her reliance on the criminal justice system and take matters into her own hands.

Synopsis: Civil rights professor Audie Partem, who faithfully upholds the edict that all suspects are innocent until proven guilty, must resort to vigilante justice when she finds herself trapped on a fort with a gang of dishonorably discharged military veterans who've developed a taste for rape and torture. Fort Monroe is a seven-sided stone fort, the largest stone fort ever built in the United States, surrounded by an eight-foot deep moat and there's only one way out. 'Trapped on All Sides' is about courage, self-reliance, and survival by any means necessary.

### Act 1

Well-respected civil rights law professor Audie Partem appears on a crossfire style news program with other pundits. They discuss public responsibility for maintaining peace and safety in their own communities and she insists people should let the criminal justice system do its job and stay out of the way. She's accused of advocating for apathy and "standing by", but she insists the risk of infringing on the civil rights of the suspect is too great.

Audie finishes addressing a packed lecture hall of college students from a podium. Her luggage sits nearby. A student asks why she doesn't practice as an attorney and she states that she prefers theory over practice. A voice in the audience quips that she doesn't like getting her hands dirty. The voice belongs to a student wearing a police badge. He references Audie's recent TV appearance, challenging her position as protecting the rights of suspects over the rights of citizens. She quips that, while he brings up an interesting point, a suspect is still a citizen with the right to presumed innocence and maintains that her position is neutral. Before he can rebut, she adds that unfortunately this is a lecture, not a debate, and they're out of time. Audie's phone rings and she knows it's her friend Melissa by the ring tone. Melissa tells her she's waiting in a Toyota Corolla outside the campus lecture hall. Audie finds her friend's car and hops in. Melissa is recently divorced and dreading the dating scene. Audie is a workaholic and rarely makes time. They decide to have dinner out and look for cute guys to flirt with.

Audie and Melissa have drinks at a local bar and grill. In the background, a TV broadcasts a news report about several women who've gone missing in the past year. Two men interrupt to flirt with them. One is the officer from the lecture. He and Audie have a lively debate, but she doesn't budge from her philosophy. Several men in a nearby booth get rowdy and hassle a waitress. A bartender asks them to leave, but they call his bluff and no one intervenes. The men are ex-military, dishonorably discharged veterans with a chips on their shoulders. Audie stiffens, military culture makes her uncomfortable, despite her support for authority. Melissa notes the men's reputation for sexual harassment, but that their connections keep women from pressing charges. There are unsubstantiated rumors that they were discharged for misconduct on one of their tours of duty. The officer starts to intervene, but his friend stops him. Eventually, the ring leader gets the others to calm down and the men leave. Audie and Melissa quip that the officer should have done something and he muses that he can't arrest someone just for being an asshole. He turns to Audie and jokes that perhaps this was a good case for a citizen's arrest.

The next morning, Audie wanders out of Melissa's guest room to make tea. Melissa walks in to make coffee and Audie jokes about the guys they met last night. Her friend clears her throat as one of the guys walks out of her bedroom, having spent the night. He kisses her and leaves. Audie raises an eyebrow and smirks. They discuss plans for the morning, Melissa needs to run errands, Audie wants to run off last night's alcohol. They debate whether that's scientifically accurate... Melissa drives her to a local park that once served as a fort, noting its great running trails. Audie is dubious, recalling her discomfort around military authority, but Melissa reassures her the fort was decommissioned years ago. They drive into the beautiful but imposing fort, surrounded by a moat of water, with only three tunnels in and out. Melissa drops her off and says to call when she's finished her workout. Audie runs on a path atop the fort overlooking the moat. She's admiring the scenic beauty of the water and the trees when she stumbles. She looks down and spots some old grave sites hidden in the grass. She stops to inspect the headstones and notices some of the mounds look fresh. Just as she looks up, she gets hit over the head and blacks out.

## Act 2

Audie awakes with her clothes missing and two men outside the door. One comes in to assault her again and she fights him. His friend comes in to help and she injures one by accident and incapacitates the other. She runs out of the room and locks the door behind her. She's in a abandoned bunker at the fort. Audie runs down a hall looking for an exit when she hears the ring tone for her friend Melissa and follows it to an office. The room is decorated with hunting and military paraphernalia. Deer and other animal heads are mounted on the walls. Audie searches frantically for her phone. The ring is coming from a locked drawer which she breaks open to find the phone and her clothes in a ziplock bag.

She answers and it's Melissa anxious to know where she's been and why she hasn't been answering. Audie tells her what's happened, that she incapacitated her two captors. She's about to escape when she sees an open photo album with a polaroid of her undressed and unconscious body. She flips the pages to see polaroids of other women's tortured and murdered bodies. Underneath is a map of the fort, marked with where each victim's body is buried. She sends Melissa cell phone photos. Her friend is terrified and says she's coming to get her, but Audie tells her not to come near the place and to share the images with the police instead. Audie estimates they'll be there in 10 minutes based on national average response times, but Melissa is dubious - there's a storm coming and it's rush hour on the bridge - she's stuck in traffic herself.

Audie hears feedback from a nearby walkie talkie and turns up the volume - there are five other men inside the fort, the accomplices of her two captors. They know something's up since no one's answered the walkie. One man orders two guys to secure two of the tunnels, while he takes the third. He orders another two to return to the office to check on things. Audie curses, Melissa asks what just happened. Audie explains that there are more of them and they're blocking the entrances. Her friend asks if she can swim and she answers, "not that well." She's trapped. She glances at the polaroids again. Melissa asks her what she's going to do. She spots a shot gun in a chair, chambers the first shell and responds, "hunt some red necks."

### Act 3

Audie uses the walkie talkie to stalk each of her assailants. She tracks two men approaching the office by car to check on their unresponsive comrades. One goes inside, while the other checks around the back. She follows the first man around the back with the shotgun, but she's unfamiliar with the trigger mechanism and he manages to get close and wrestle the gun away. He shows her the proper way to pull the trigger before aiming the gun at her. Deathly afraid, she begs for her life and he jokes that she's no different from the other women. He gets close and whispers in her ear and she bites it. She gets scrappy, wrestling with him for the gun until it fires by accident and kills him. She's startled by his sudden death, but regains her composure. She pulls a belt with a hunting knife off his waist and secures it around her own. Four more to go...

His partner runs out of the office at the sound of the shot and heads for the car. She fires on him and misses. He ducks and turns around. She tries to fire again, but she's out of bullets. She throws the gun down and reaches for the knife. The man laughs. She waits for him to approach. She tries to stab him and he redirects her hand and disarms her. She dives for the shotgun and uses it to block his jabs, finally resorting to kicking him in the groin and striking him in the jaw with the butt of the gun. She keeps bludgeoning him with the gun butt until he stops moving and his face is unrecognizable. Three to go...

The leader hears the gunshots from the other side of the fort. He instructs his men to stay at their posts, while he heads to the office on foot. One of the men annoyed at being left out of the action, leaves his post to take a piss. Something in Audie has snapped. Blood is spattered across her face, but she doesn't bother to wipe it off. Instead, she reaches for the knife, she holds it in her teeth, while she searches the man's pockets. She finds an even larger hunting knife and attaches them both to her waist. She puts his car keys in her pocket and listens for the voices on the walkie talkie... By now it's dark and raining. The drops come down heavy, pelting the pavement. She pulls up to one of the tunnels and turns on the hazards. The third man returns from his piss and approaches the car, expecting to find his friends inside. Instead, it's empty. When he passes through the tunnel to look for him, she ambushes him, dropping from the roof of the tunnel to stab him in his chest several times. He flails, gasping for air in surprise before stumbling over the railing and into the dark waters of the moat. Two more to go...

The leader is midway to the office when he gets a call from the fourth man who, realizing his partners are dead based on the radio silence, is scared and jumpy. The leader tells him to calm down and stay off the walkie talkie. The fourth man nervously chain smokes. She's stalking him in the tall grass on the top of the fort when her phone vibrates, giving away her position. Despite losing the element of surprise, she mounts an attack. He knows what she's capable of and doesn't hold back. He wounds her, forcing her to retreat. She manages to escape, cutting off her walkie talkie and hiding. The fourth man reports in to the leader that he's wounded her and the leader tells him to hold her. He admits that he let her escape and the leader demands that he find her, but keep her alive so he can make her suffer. Audie finds a cool dry place inside one of the crawl spaces of the fort's stone walls. She does her best to bind her wounds and stem the bleeding, but she thinks she's dying. She turns on the walkie talkie to determine the men's locations and makes a break for the tunnel.

Audie runs along the top of the fort and stumbles over a woman's corpse that the men were preparing to bury. She lays there beside the corpse, the rain pelting her face and waits to die. Audie looks in the dead woman's face and tells her she tried. She made them pay and the corpse speaks back, telling her she's not finished. Audie explains that she's done, she's dying.

The corpse corrects her, stating that she's dead, but that Audie isn't yet. The walkie talkie crackles nearby. It's the fourth man taunting her, saying they're going to find her and finish the job. He claims that no one will ever find her or the others. The corpse stares at her. Audie sighs and looks up at the night sky. She tries to wipe away her tears, then remembers it's raining. She rolls over and grabs the shovel sitting near the corpse and waits. The fourth man wanders atop the parapet with a flashlight. He sees the fresh foot steps in the mud and unlocks the safety on his gun. He follows the steps past two unburied corpses and keeps walking, until he realizes the steps stopped at the corpses. It's at this time that he realizes there should only be one corpse, not two. He turns and the woman smacks him in the face with the shovel. She rolls his body into an open grave. His unconscious body splashes into the rainwater quickly filling the hole. He awakes in time to find her burying him alive in dirt and mud. She holds him down with the shovel until he drowns. She sets off for the office in the distance. It's light a faint glow in the night rain.

Inside the cabin, the leader frantically searches for the photo album of polaroids, which Audie has apparently hidden. He calls the fourth man's cellphone and she answers. He's livid. He claims that he's destroyed the evidence and that without proof, it will be her word against his. He states that she still has a chance to leave now, but that there's nothing stopping him from tracking her down and making her pay for the lives of his soldiers. He adds that he won't need a polaroid for her, because what he'll do to her will be unforgettable - it will be the last thing she ever remembers. She watches him silently from outside the window. He can't find the album and walks out of the room. She continues to watch from the window, trying to decide what to do. He returns with something - a can of gasoline. This flushes her out and she attacks. They struggle and she manages to knock a lighter out of his hand. She breaks a window and throws it outside. They square off and he hunches his shoulder and charges into her, knocking her back first out the window. She lands outside on the wet pavement amid the broken shards of glass. She gasps and chokes for breath as he steps outside and stands over her. He taunts her as he hovers menacingly. When he reaches down to close his hands over her neck, she stabs him with a shard of glass, saying "remember this." He staggers back, holding his neck and she kicks him to the ground. She straddles his body and plunges the shard in again.

She hears the shouts of police behind her. She slowly drops the shard of glass and raises her hands above her head. She shuts her eyes, bracing for the shower of bullets. But instead she hears a familiar voice shout for the officers to hold their fire. Audie feels a blanket being thrown over her shoulders and hears a whisper in her ear. It's the young police officer from her lecture telling her that she's not a suspect, she's clearly the victim - a victim who's just survived her first citizen's arrest. He tells her to stand so they can get her checked out and helps her to her feet. She immediately goes into shock and collapses from exhaustion and stress. The police round up the two men locked in the cell and all the evidence in the office. They exhume the bodies of the missing women, taking photos of their shallow graves as evidence.

### Epilogue

Afterwards, her actions are accepted as self-defense, triggering a viral sensation of women taking corporal extremes against their would be rapists and assaulters. Audie wears an orange jumpsuit and sits in a prison library going through some paper work with another inmate about her legal case. Behind them is a line of inmates, all waiting their turn for legal assistance. Someone asks her about her hearing - it's coming up in a few weeks. She looks at the line of women and says she's got a lot of work to do until then.