

"GOLDEN GODS"

by

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GOLDEN GODS

FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

Wilted potted plant on a window sill. Light rain is hitting the outside of the window. Raindrops merge and roll down the glass surface.

Just below the window, a small table is against the wall.

A black mug filled with coffee is untouched in the middle of the table. Nearby, a smartphone with its screen off.

JOHN, early 40s, with a short beard, is at the table with eyes wide open and a beyond worried expression. He is staring intensely at the phone. His head shakes slightly from time to time.

PHONE DINGS.

John quickly grabs the phone, taps on the screen a few times, and brings it close to his eyes. The light from the bright screen illuminates John's worried face as he is engrossed in reading.

John stands up. Knocks over the mug on its side.

Coffee spills on the tabletop.

John walks away in a hurry.

Free of its mug, the coffee travels along the tabletop. Reaches the edge.

FOOTSTEPS DEPARTING.

The brown liquid builds up at the edge of the table.

DOOR CREEKS OPEN.

The surface tension breaks. Coffee spills over the table's edge.

A stream of coffee hits the floor.

DOOR SLAMS.

The stream of coffee transitions into drips.

CAR DOOR OPENS.

The dripping spaces out in time.

CAR DOOR CLOSES.

The dripping of coffee becomes even less frequent.

CAR ENGINE STARTS.

INT. DRIVEWAY/JOHN'S CAR - TRAVELLING

John is turning the wheel to the right.

Hiking shoe stepping on the gas pedal.

TIRES SCREECHING.

John straightens the wheel. Changes gear and steps on the gas.

ENGINE ROARS.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

John's car speeding away.

On the horizon, the rising sun is breaking through the clouds.

EXT. FOREST/DIRT ROAD - DAY

John's car approaches. Pulls over to the side of the road.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - DAY

John turns off the engine. Grabs his phone from a holder mounted on the dashboard.

EXT. JOHN'S CAR - DAY

John gets out of the car and closes the door behind him. He looks ahead.

A forest begins not far from the dirt road.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

John is walking amongst the trees.

BIRDS SINGING.

John stops walking. Looks up.

The crowns of the trees are dense. Some light passes through the canopy. A bird flies off. The thrust of the take-off shakes the branch and its leaves.

BIRD WINGS FLAPPING.

John looks at the trees around him.

Next to a hiking shoe, fresh mushrooms grow from an exposed tree's root covered in vibrant green moss.

The shoe steps forward, barely missing the shrooms.

John walks by a large tree trunk.

EXT. FOREST/CLEARING - DAY

John is standing in the middle of a small clearing in the forest with hands on his waist, looking at the surrounding area and nodding his head.

INSECTS BUZZING.

EXT. DIRT ROAD/JOHN'S CAR - DAY

John opens the trunk of his car. Huffs. Reaches inside.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

John is walking, carrying an overwhelming amount of baggage.

A bug lands on John's cheek. He stops walking and tries to get rid of it with a quick head shake. The pesky bug remains on John's face. He begins moving the muscles on his face and shaking his head until, at last, the insect flies away.

Just as John resumes walking, he unintentionally drops a bag. Looks down.

The bag on the forest floor. Caterpillar wriggling nearby.

JOHN SIGHS ANGRILY.

In an attempt to pick up the bag, John drops another.

JOHN

Fuck!

John releases all the baggage on the ground.

Ants are crawling up and down a moss-covered tree trunk.

JOHN GRUNTING.

John looks up and closes his eyes. He makes fists with his hands. Releases and spreads his fingers. Takes a deep breath. Exhales.

INSECT DRONING APPROACHING.

A bug lands on John's nose.

DRONING STOPS.

John opens his eyes and looks at the bug creeping on the tip of his nose.

JOHN
(cross-eyed)
Motherfu--

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The tree line. John comes out of the forest carrying bags.

EXT. CLEARING/THE PILE - DAY

A pile of bags and boxes is in the middle of the clearing. John walks up and puts down his bags.

INSECTS BUZZING.

John wipes the sweat off his forehead.

EXT. DIRT ROAD/JOHN'S CAR - DAY

John is standing near his car, drinking water from a plastic bottle.

A black backpack is on the roof of the car.

John finishes drinking, opens the car's door, throws the empty bottle inside, and closes the door. He takes the car key out from the back pocket of his pants and presses on it with his thumb.

CLICK.

John puts the backpack on. Walks away toward the woods.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

John is standing behind a tree.

DRIBBLING.

John peaks ahead.

A squirrel is crawling, sniffing the forest floor.

John is peeping at the squirrel from behind the tree.

SLOW ZIPPING.

The squirrel spooks. Quickly climbs a tree trunk.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The black backpack is on the ground. John is sitting next to it, looking at a paper user manual.

A packed tent is in front of John.

JOHN

All right. This should be easy.

John puts the manual down, gets up, walks up to the tent, lifts it, unzips it, and throws it on the ground.

The tent begins to unfold. Stops halfway through.

John shakes his head.

JOHN

Never easy...

John takes a few steps toward the tent, leans forward, reaches--

The tent resumes unfolding.

John startles. Recoils back.

The tent unfolds on its side.

JOHN

Tch! Okay...

THUNDER GRUMBLING.

John looks up.

Storm clouds are gathering in the sky above the tree line.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY - LATER

Light rain is falling over the clearing.

Water drops hanging, dripping from blades of grass.

EXT. THE PILE - DAY

A plastic tarp covers the baggage. Light rain is falling. Small pools of water are forming on the surface of the tarp.

EXT. CLEARING/JOHN'S TENT - DAY

Rain is falling on the fully set up tent. John is inside.

INT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John is sitting on the tent's floor with the backpack next to him, holding a box with a gold panning kit on his lap.

RAIN FALLING.

John takes the gold panning kit out of the box. Puts the empty box near the backpack.

On John's lap, multiple dark green plastic pans are stacked on each other. The smallest is on top with a booklet, a small magnifying glass, and a couple of vials inside.

John picks up the booklet and looks at its front cover.

A hand lays the booklet on the tent's floor.

John picks up the snuffer bottle. Squeezes it a couple of times.

JOHN

Hm.

A hand places the bottle on top of the booklet.

THUNDER RUMBLES.

John collects the vials and the magnifying glass. Leaves them near the booklet.

Only the green plastic pans stacked on one another are now on John's lap. The smallest pan on top has four riffles. John takes the pan and places it on the tent's floor.

RAINFALL INTENSIFIES.

John picks up the next pan, which is bigger and has three riffles. Puts it on top of the small one.

Next in John's lap is a sifting pan with a bottom made of a net. John lifts the pan, looks at the bottom, then sets it aside on the tent's floor.

The last pan on John's lap is the largest. It has two deep riffles.

Fingers touch and run across the deep riffles.

John moves the snuffer bottle. Picks up the booklet. Opens it and begins to read.

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

Rain is falling. John is sitting inside the tent, reading the booklet.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The sky is mostly clear, with a few clouds scattered across.

BIRDS CHIRPING.

The morning sun shines on the clearing.

INSECTS BUZZING.

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John comes out of the tent. Stretches nice and long. Yawns while looking into the distance with sleepy eyes.

Birds are flying over the tree line.

John goes inside the tent. Comes back with a bottle of water. Opens it and drinks it all at once. Takes a deep breath. Exhales.

STOMACH CHURNING.

John puts his hand on his stomach.

JOHN

Oh, shit!

John throws the empty bottle inside the tent and heads for the trees in a hurry.

EXT. THE PILE - DAY

John is standing, finishing eating a sandwich wrapped in foil. He takes the last bite. Crumples the foil and puts it in his pocket.

The tarp protecting the baggage is in front of John. Small pools of water are across the surface.

John begins to remove the tarp slowly and with care. As he lifts the tarp, the water pools travel along and merge.

Water goes off the tarp's edges and spills on the ground.

John is spreading the wet tarp on the grass near the baggage.

The sun is shining in the clear sky.

John takes one of the duffel bags out of the pile. He sets it aside and unzips it halfway through.

Cans of food inside the bag.

John lifts the bag. Begins to carry it toward the tent.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Beyond the tree trunks, in the distance, John walks inside his tent.

BREATHING.

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John comes out of the tent. Looks into the distance.

The clearing with the pile of baggage in the middle and the tarp drying nearby.

John looks at the tree line to his left.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Through the trees, in the distance, John is looking at the forest.

BREATHING.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

John is looking at the tree line, itching his neck.

The clearing is oddly calm and silent.

PHONE RINGING.

John startles. Frantically pulls out his phone and looks at the screen.

JOHN

Shit...

John taps on the screen.

RINGING STOPS.

John brings the phone to his ear.

PATRICK (V.O.)

(breaking up)

Hey...when...in...

JOHN
 What? I... uhh... I'm not going
 to--

PATRICK (V.O.)
 (breaking up)
 I can't...wh...you...

JOHN
 I can't hear you, Pat! Let me call
 you back!

PATRICK (V.O.)
 (breaking up)
 We...you...

JOHN
 I'll call you back!

PATRICK (V.O.)
 (breaking up)
 ...can...me...

JOHN
 I'll call you in a while, okay!?
 Just wait for my call!

John taps on the screen.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Fuck!

John looks ahead.

The pile of baggage in the middle of the clearing.

PHONE RINGING.

John looks at the screen.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 (grunts)
 Stop calling me, man.

John taps on the screen.

RINGING STOPS.

John puts the phone back into his pocket and walks toward
 the baggage.

PHONE RINGING.

John stops walking. Rolls his eyes. Huffs and puffs.

RINGING CONTINUES.

John takes the phone out. Looks at the screen. Holds the power button.

RINGING STOPS.

The phone turns off.

EXT. THE PILE - DAY

John is circling the pile of baggage, looking down at the bags. He leans forward, grabs a bag, and drags it out.

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

A signal booster is attached to the top edge of the tent. Portable solar panels plugged into the signal booster are resting on each side of the tent. John is standing nearby with the phone in his hand.

John taps on the phone's screen and brings it to his ear.

PATRICK (V.O.)

John! Can you hear me?

JOHN

Yeah, I can hear you. How about you? Can you hear me well?

PATRICK (V.O.)

Yes, crystal clear, my man. What was that? What's going on?

JOHN

Uhm... I was having some issues with my phone.

PATRICK (V.O.)

Okay... Are you coming in or what?

John itches his beard.

JOHN

Yeah... no... About that... uhh... I'm going to need some time off.

John clenches his teeth, bracing himself for an answer.

PATRICK (V.O.)

What do you mean? Is everything okay?

JOHN

I got some things I need to take care of, and uh--

PATRICK (V.O.)

Okay... But you've got to let me know in advance. That's how it works. You can't just... not show up. You know that, right?

JOHN

I know, I know. I just... I wasn't sure if or when I'd need the time off exactly. It was all a bit unexpected. I'm sorry... Look, I'll make it up to you.

PATRICK (V.O.)

John...

JOHN

Pat, it's important. Am I ever off? When was the last time I wasn't in?

PATRICK (V.O.)

True. I guess it's been years. I think since your daughter was born...

Sadness takes over John's face.

PATRICK (V.O.)(CONT'D)

I'm sorry... Still, you are making my life very difficult here, John.

(sighs deeply)

Okay. I mean, I'll give you a week. Is that going to be enough to do whatever it is you are doing?

John clears his throat.

JOHN

I'm not sure. Maybe, more like two weeks...

PATRICK (V.O.)

Fuck! Okay... Two weeks it is!

With his free hand, John does a light fist pump in celebration.

JOHN

Thank you, Pat!

PATRICK (V.O.)
Don't mention it.

JOHN
No, I really appreciate it.

PATRICK (V.O.)
All right. I'll talk to you soon,
John. Take care.

JOHN
Okay. Bye, Pat.

PATRICK (V.O.)
Bye, John.

John taps on the phone's screen. Puts the phone into his pocket.

BIRD SINGING.

John rubs his eyes.

BIRD WINGS FLAPPING.

John looks up.

A bird flies over the tree line.

John's eyes follow the bird's flight.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Beyond the tree trunks, in the distance, John is in the clearing, looking up.

BIRD WINGS FLAPPING.

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John sits on the ground. Leans to the side, stretches his leg, and pulls out his phone. He taps and swipes on the screen a few times, then stares at the screen.

John's eyes water. The sadness slowly transitions into anger. His breathing accelerates.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

John is walking through the forest. He has the backpack on his back with a sleeping bag attached to it, a heavy-duty folding shovel in one hand, and his phone in the other.

EXT. FOREST/CREEK - DAY

A small creek is running through the woods.

WATER FLOWING.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

John stops walking. Looks at the phone. Corrects his course a little to the right and resumes walking.

EXT. CREEK/BANK - DAY

A rocky river bank. John emerges from the tree line above. Begins descending to the creek.

BIRDS SINGING.

John approaches the bank carefully, measuring each step as he descends.

WATER BABBLING.

John gets to the bank. He throws the shovel on the ground.

The blade of the heavy-duty shovel hits a rock, bounces, and lands on the ground.

JOHN

Shit.

John picks up the shovel. Looks at it briefly, then carefully places it back on the ground. He takes the backpack off, lays it near the shovel, leans over, unzips it, takes the gold pans out, and lays them on the ground.

EXT. BANK - DAY - LATER

John walks along the bank, carrying the pan with the two deep riffles, the classifier pan, and the shovel. He is looking around, exploring the area.

Ahead of John, the creek turns. On the inside of the bend, rocks are popping out of the water.

John approaches the bend.

As John is about to get in the water, he stops and looks down at his feet.

Hiking shoes are stepping on the ground.

JOHN

Damn it! I brought boots...

(MORE)

JOHN (cont'd)
(sighs deeply)
Why didn't I...

John puts the pans and the shovel on the ground. Takes his shoes and socks off.

Bare feet step on the ground. Hands roll the pant legs up.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

John slowly steps into the water.

JOHN
(as he is walking)
Augh!
(grunts)
My feet... Ugh! Not used to this...

John gets behind the rocks, popping out of the water. He is pensive for a moment. Turns to the bank.

EXT. BANK - DAY

The pans and shovel are on the bank. In the background, John is in the creek, staring at them.

JOHN
Fuck me...

John begins to walk toward the bank.

JOHN
Argh, shit!

John loses balance and falls into the water.

JOHN
Fuck!

John gets up with effort. Water runs down his head and clothes. He resumes walking toward the pans and shovel resting on the bank.

John arrives soaking wet. Water drips down his clothes. He picks up the pans and the shovel, turns around, and heads toward the water.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

Carrying the pans and the shovel, John gets behind the rocks popping out of the creek. He places the pans on top of one of the rocks.

The pans slip and fall into the water. Begin to travel downstream.

Holding the shovel in one hand, John spreads his arms out.

JOHN
What the fuck is going on!?

John starts to walk downstream, chasing the pans, moaning and grunting as he steps on the rocky bottom.

JOHN
This is not going as I imagined...
Argh! Fuck! Shit!

EXT. CREEK - DAY - LATER

John is behind the infamous rocks, clutching the heavy-duty shovel in his left hand.

The gold pans are stacked on each other on one of the rocks. The classifier pan is on top with a stone inside.

John scoops a shovel of dirt and rocks from the river into the pans. He does another big scoop and places the material into the classifier.

A third scoop of material goes into the classifier and fills it.

John carefully places the shovel behind a rock in the creek.

JOHN
(points at the shovel)
You stay there, okay?

With effort, John lifts the pans filled with material. Submerges them into the water. Shakes and rotates the classifier over the gold pan.

John lifts the pans close to the surface, removes big rocks, and submerges the pans again. Vigorously shakes and rotates the classifier over the gold pan.

EXT. CREEK - DAY - LATER

The gold pan filled with sifted material is on top of a rock popping out of the water.

John sets the classifier pan on a different rock and puts some gravel inside.

The classifier slides off the rock, but the gravel inside keeps it in place in the river.

John huffs. Chuckles.

JOHN

You're not going anywhere, asshole.

John lifts the gold pan filled with the sifted material off the rock and submerges it into the water. Begins to shake it backward and forward.

EXT. CREEK - DAY - LATER

John is sweating. His hair is wet. His face is dripping.

Very little material and water are in the gold pan held by John's hands.

John swirls the pan in a circular motion. Brings it close to his face and looks at it in the sunlight. Sand and small rocks are glittering at the bottom of the pan.

John angrily throws the pan into the river.

JOHN

Fuck!

The plastic pan begins to travel downstream. John watches with disgust as the current carries the pan away.

EXT. BANK - DAY

John is sitting with his bare feet on the ground and hands covering his face. The pans and shovel are next to him. His shoes, socks, and the backpack are close by.

WATER BABBLING.

John removes the hands from his face to reveal his upset.

JOHN

I can't do this. I don't know
how...

(gets up)

An entire day is gone. And nothing?
How am I supposed to... I'm not
a... gold digger. I can't do this.
You hear me motherfucker!?

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The forest canopy.

Birds take off from the tops of the trees.

BIRD WINGS FLAPPING.

EXT. BANK - DAY

John is breathing heavily, looking up.

BIRDS WINGS FLAPPING.

GENE

I sure do.

JOHN

(turns around startled)

What the...

GENE, late 60s, a scruffy man with a grizzled beard and a vintage backpack on his back, is behind John. A sleeping bag and an old-timey metal gold pan are attached to Gene's backpack. He's got a beat-up straw hat on his head.

Gene has a long wooden stick in one hand and is carrying a bundle of fish on a rope in the other hand.

GENE

I didn't mean to scare you. Got me some fresh fish here. Too much for by myself anyways. You hungry, mister?

John is staring at Gene with eyes wide open.

EXT. BANK - DAY - LATER

Over the trees, the sun is close to setting.

Fish impaled on sticks is cooking over a campfire.

Gene and John are sitting by the fire opposite each other.

John watches the flames spellbound.

GENE

You don't say much, do you?

John clears his throat.

Gene shakes his head and smiles.

GENE (CONT'D)

Mhmm. When I was a youngling, I used to be like that. These days, not so much.

Gene checks on the fish.

GENE (CONT'D)

Almost done. You like fish?

John gives Gene a quick glance.

JOHN

Sure.

Gene takes his straw hat off. Puts it on top of his backpack, lying on the ground.

GENE

Some people don't like fish. Can you believe it? My daddy didn't like fish. He was a mean son of a bitch, I tell you. He's dead now.

John looks at Gene.

Gene feeds the fire pieces of wood.

GENE (CONT'D)

Got hit by a truck. Drunk out of his mind. Not the truck driver. Him. Wandered off on the highway. Truck hit him so hard it tore him in half. Snapped him like a twig. Have you heard of stuff like that? At the time, I didn't know this could happen. Let me tell you, it does. People get their heads decapadated... or whatever they calling that. Scary stuff, I tell you.

John stares at the fire.

Gene picks up one of the sticks with impaled fish.

GENE (CONT'D)

Fish looks good to me. Go ahead, then.

John leans forward and takes a stick with a fish.

GENE (CONT'D)

Don't be shy about it, either. Half of these are yours. The other half is my business.

Gene tears off a piece of fish with his fingertips and eats it.

GENE (CONT'D)

(smack his lips)

Mmm. I love me some fresh fish.

EXT. BANK - NIGHT

Gene is relaxed, lying on the ground on his side. The long stick is beside him.

GENE

That was some good eating, I tell you. What do you say?

John is sitting on the ground, leaning back on his hands.

JOHN

Oh, yeah. It was great.

GENE

Life sure looks better when you're fed. Nothing good comes out of hunger.

Gene itches his beard.

GENE (CONT'D)

So, how's it going with the digging? You finding?

JOHN

What?

GENE

Gold, boy! That's why you're out here, ain't you?

John sits up. He cleans his hands from the debris stuck to his palms.

JOHN

Yeah, I... uh... Let's just say that it's not going great.

GENE

Hmm.

JOHN

I spent almost the entire day looking... and nothing. Not a single spec.

Gene chuckles. Shakes his head.

GENE

Oh, it takes more than a day to learn a trade, friend. You don't want that beginner luck, either. That will get you all wound up in

(MORE)

GENE (cont'd)
 your head, making all types of
 plans.
 (pokes the fire with the
 long stick)
 I've seen folk lose their minds
 real quick. You don't want that.
 Trust me. Oh, no, mister, you sure
 don't.

JOHN
 Is there even any gold left out
 here?

GENE
 Sure is. Not much. These lands have
 been ravaged and scavenged for
 generations. You can't expect no
 big bounty or nothing. Unless you
 get real lucky and hit the
 motherload. I wouldn't bet on that.
 But there is gold left. Hard to
 find, though. Most times, real hard
 to find. It takes honest work.

John nods.

GENE (CONT'D)
 Hmm...

Gene reaches into his jacket. He takes something out, hiding
 it inside his palm.

GENE (CONT'D)
 Get a look at this beauty.

Gene throws it to John.

John catches it between the palms of his hands.

A vial filled with specs of gold is in John's palm.

GENE (CONT'D)
 That's a beauty, ain't it? There is
 something about gold. It's no
 wonder folk been chasing it around
 since the olden days.

Gene reaches into his jacket and pulls out a small, worn-out
 leather pouch. Throws it to John.

John catches.

JOHN
 What is it?

GENE

Open it up. See for yourself.

The pouch is in John's hand. It's tied up with a string on top.

John pulls the string and unites the pouch. He grabs the bottom and spills its contents into his palm.

Gold nuggets roll onto John's palm.

JOHN

Ooh, wow!

John looks at Gene.

GENE

That right there is the real deal, friend. The dust is good and all, but unless you got heavy machinery, you're not getting very far with that. If you want to make real weight, that's what you should be going after.

John nods. Shakes his palm up and down.

JOHN

They are so heavy.

GENE

Gold is heavy, son.

John brings his palm closer to his face. He gazes at the nuggets in the light coming from the fire.

GENE (CONT'D)

You like that, don't you?

JOHN

I'm not going to lie...

GENE

Nothing's prettier than a gold nugget. Well, perhaps a lady could be...

(chuckles)

Well, I figured if you are looking for something, you should at least know what it looks like up close. You don't want to miss it out there in the land, do you?

John carefully pours the nuggets back into the pouch.

JOHN

No, I wouldn't want to miss one of these.

GENE

No, you wouldn't.

JOHN

How do you even find these? Of course, if you don't want to talk about it, that's fine. I get it.

GENE

Nah, I'm not one of them secretive types. There is plenty of land to go around for everyone.

Gene sits up.

GENE (CONT'D)

I'll have those back now.

JOHN

Sure. Of course.

John gets up. Walks up to Gene and hands him the vial and the pouch.

Gene takes the gold.

GENE

Sit down here for a moment.

John sits on the ground next to Gene.

Gene puts the vial and pouch back into the inside pocket of his jacket.

GENE (CONT'D)

I'll tell you what, I can see you're green to this stuff. Am I right?

JOHN

Yeah. Very.

GENE

I can help you out. Teach you how to find gold. Everything I know. In return, you'll give me twenty-five percent of your findings. What do you say?

John raises his eyebrows and smiles.

JOHN

I need help. I'll admit that. But twenty-five percent is a little steep.

GENE

Well, knowledge ain't free, friend.

JOHN

No, it's not. It's not worth twenty-five percent, either.

GENE

Well--

JOHN

How about ten?

Gene laughs.

John smiles and shakes his head.

Gene stops laughing and gives John a stern look.

GENE

You serious?

John looks into Gene's eyes.

JOHN

I am. Ten percent of everything I find is a lot.

GENE

Well, all your findings when you're out here. I ain't gonna hold you to it years from now when you are out there in the wide world.

JOHN

Okay. I get it. Fifteen, then?

GENE

You drive a hard bargain, friend. I might've estimated you all wrong.

John offers his hand for a handshake.

Gene looks at John's hand.

GENE (CONT'D)

You some kind of a businessman out there in the civilized world?

JOHN
Something like that.

Gene smiles.

GENE
Hmm. Okay.

Gene takes John's hand.

Both men shake hands while looking into each other's eyes.

GENE (CONT'D)
We start early tomorrow.

JOHN
All right.

GENE
I get up with the first light. And
I'm not one for sitting around too
much.

JOHN
I'll be ready.

GENE
You better be. Things are about to
get real dirty. And I mean that in
the most literal sense of things.

Gene smiles.

John smiles back.

EXT. BANK - DAY

John's dirty face is pressed hard against a rock. His right
hand is deep into a crevice.

Gene is standing over John.

GENE
That's it, boy! Scrape that dirt!
Get it out of there!

JOHN GRUNTS.

GENE (CONT'D)
That's where them gold nuggets
hide. You got to get all that dirt
out. Scrape it down to the bare
bone. You got to hear that scraper
scratching bedrock and then scrape
some more.

JOHN
I'm scraping...

GENE
You ain't scraping hard enough!

John tries to get his hand deeper into the crevice.

GENE (CONT'D)
All right. Get out of there, and
let me see what you got.

John takes his hand out of the crevice, holding an old
crevice tool.

GENE (CONT'D)
Move over.

John makes room for Gene. Leans back against the rock,
looking exhausted.

Gene peaks inside the crevice.

GENE (CONT'D)
I can see loose rocks packed hard
in there.

JOHN
Wait... What?

GENE
You got to pry them out, son. We
need to get to the bedrock.
(looks at John)
Otherwise, all the work you've done
was for nothing.

JOHN
I've been trying...

Gene gets in John's face.

GENE
And what do I say to that?

JOHN
I ain't trying hard enough?

GENE
You goddamn right, you ain't! Get
back in there.

John positions himself in front of the crevice and reaches
inside.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

John is holding a gold pan filled with material. Gene is standing in the water next to him.

GENE

Go on. Drown that sucker in.

John submerges the pan.

GENE (CONT'D)

Now, shake it in a circle.

John shakes the pan.

GENE (CONT'D)

Get your hand in there. Mix it up a little. Get that material moving.

John puts his hand in the pan. Disturbs the sand and rocks.

GENE (CONT'D)

Grab them larger rocks, wash them over the pan, and take them out.

John washes a couple of rocks over the pan.

GENE (CONT'D)

Throw them in the river.

John drops the rocks into the water outside the pan.

GENE (CONT'D)

Good. Keep going...

EXT. CREEK - DAY - LATER

John is holding the pan tilted forward, with the front end submerged. Very little material and water remain inside.

GENE

That's it. Now, go back and forwards. You got to lose some of that dirt. Let it go and return it to the river.

John moves the pan backward and forward. Some of the sand and tiny rocks escape into the creek.

GENE (CONT'D)

Gentle, son. Not too much at once. Don't mess up now.

John slows down the movement.

JOHN
How's this?

GENE
That's good.
(pointing)
See that black sand.

JOHN
I see it.

GENE
That's a good sign right there.
It's heavy and often comes with
gold. Not always, though. Don't be
getting too excited.

John continues the movement.

GENE (CONT'D)
You didn't do any kind of studying
before getting out here?

JOHN
I did, but...

GENE
But what?

JOHN
Let's just say that watching
someone doing something and
actually doing it are not the
same--

GENE
And you're learning that the hard
way, ain't you?

JOHN
I guess I am.

Gene taps John on the shoulder.

GENE
You'll get the hang of it.

John continues to move the pan.

GENE (CONT'D)
All right, that's enough of that.

John stops.

GENE (CONT'D)

Now, here comes the most funnest part.

JOHN

Okay...

GENE

The great reveal, as I like to call it. Gold or no gold? And how much? You excited?

JOHN

Yeah. Excited and... uhh... a bit afraid.

GENE

Of what?

JOHN

All that work we did was for nothing?

Gene chuckles and looks at John.

GENE

It wasn't for nothing, son.

(smiles)

Go on. You must've seen this part before. You know what to do, right?

John begins circular motions, driving the water through the material and forcing the black sand backward.

At the front edge of the pan, a good amount of gold is revealed. The gold is mostly flakes, with a couple of tiny nuggets mixed in.

John raises his eyebrows and looks at Gene with eyes wide open.

Gene nods and smiles.

GENE (CONT'D)

How about that, huh?

JOHN

How did you know?

Gene grabs John by the back of the neck and squeezes.

GENE

Us old folk know a thing or two.

John looks at the gold in the pan. A big smile appears on his face.

The gold in the pan is glittering in the bright sunlight, while in the meantime, the men's voices are slowly drowning in the FLOWING RIVER.

JOHN (O.S.)
How much do you think this is?

GENE (O.S.)
I have an idea. But ain't gonna know for sure 'til we measure it.

JOHN (O.S.)
Okay.

GENE (O.S.)
It's a good catch, son. You did good. Now, let's do it again.

JOHN (O.S.)
Do it again?

GENE (O.S.)
That's right.

JOHN (O.S.)
Fuck yeah! Let's do it again!

GENE (O.S.)
You ain't tired no more, ain't you?

JOHN (O.S.)
No, I'm not. I'm good as new. Ready to go.

GENE (O.S.)
I bet you are...

John laughs. Gene joins and laughs with him.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The evening sun is just over the tree line.

John and Gene are walking through the clearing. Both men are dirty and look beat.

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John gets in front of his tent. Takes his backpack off and lays it on the ground.

Gene does the same.

Both men sit on the ground opposite of each other.

John takes a deep breath. Exhales with relief.

JOHN

This is it. My camp.

Gene turns his head, checking the area.

GENE

You've got a nice thing going here,
son.

Gene looks to his left.

GENE (CONT'D)

What's that fancy thing on your
tent?

JOHN

What?

(looks at the tent)

Oh, that. That's a signal booster.
And some solar panels to keep it
running.

GENE

A signal what?

JOHN

It helps your phone get service out
here.

GENE

Really?

JOHN

Yeah. It's great.

GENE

That's neat stuff, son. Can you get
it to work on my phone? I have to
walk a ton to get my phone working.

JOHN

Sure, check your phone. This close
to the booster, you should be
getting full bars.

Gene reaches inside his backpack. Takes his phone out.

GENE

(looking at the screen)

Well, I'll be damned!

JOHN
Pretty cool, right?

GENE
These new gadgets, I tell you...

Gene puts the phone back into his backpack. Looks at the pile of bags and boxes.

GENE (CONT'D)
What's with all that stuff you got over there?

JOHN
Just all kinds of things I brought with me. Wait! I got something there.

John gets up with effort.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Fuck me... I'm absolutely trashed. Everything hurts, but my back is killing me.

GENE
It will pass, son. You'll get used to it.

John clears his hands from debris.

JOHN
Tomorrow is going to suck. I know it.

GENE
A human being can get used to almost anything. All types of comfort and all kinds of suffering.

JOHN
Yeah, well, it doesn't mean you should.

GENE
True. But most times, when it comes to the suffering part, you don't get a choice, do you?

JOHN
I guess not.

Gene gets up.

GENE

Go on. Show me what you got.

EXT. THE PILE - DAY

John and Gene are standing over the baggage covered with a tarp.

John yanks the tarp off.

Something in the pile catches Gene's eye.

GENE

Holy moley! Is that one of them fancy detector machines?

JOHN

Oh, yeah, that thing cost me a small fortune.

GENE

What's it doing sitting in a box, then?

JOHN

I haven't got to it yet.

Gene shakes his head.

GENE

Son...

JOHN

What?

GENE

What do you mean "what"? You're out here looking for gold. That thing is like a hungry pig with truffles. It won't dig a nugget out or eat it, but surely sniffs one out better than a porker. I used to have one myself back in the day. Nothing fancy like that. But I found some nuggets with it, boy, I still tell stories about. Get it out, and let's get that nugget sniffer running.

John is distracted, looking at the pile of baggage, trying to find something.

JOHN

I will. I was actually looking for this scale I bought...

GENE

Well, get that too, but let's--

JOHN

There it is!

John leans forward. Reaches into the pile and grabs a small box.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(looking at the box)

This wasn't cheap, either. And I got two, just in case.

(looks at the pile,
searching)

Where is the other one hiding?

GENE

You did what?

JOHN

What?

GENE

You got two of them scales?

JOHN

I like to be prepared.

GENE

Son, I'd tell you how much gold we got, and I ain't gonna charge you for it.

John turns to Gene.

JOHN

Really? You can guess how much gold we found just by looking at it?

GENE

You wanna have us a bet?

JOHN

No way...

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

A high-end gold scale is on top of a plastic gold pan's bottom. The pan is placed on the ground. John is hovering over them.

JOHN

I'm not sure if it's leveled.

Gene is sitting nearby.

GENE
Just measure it already, will you?

JOHN
I got to make sure--

GENE
Come on, son. It's gonna get dark soon. We got to get a fire going. I'm telling you, it's just shy of an ounce.

JOHN
Okay. Let's see if you are indeed correct.

John unzips a side pocket on his pants and reaches inside.

GENE
You'll see.

John brings a vial filled with gold in front of his face, holding it between his index and thumb fingers. Turns to Gene.

JOHN
How shy, though?

GENE
What? I don't know. A little.

JOHN
How much is a little? That's the question, isn't it?

Gene adjusts his old straw hat and lets out a huff.

GENE
A couple of grams tops.

JOHN
All right.

John's is about to open the vial.

JOHN (CONT'D)
But wait... What are the stakes?

GENE
The stakes?

JOHN
Of the bet. Wrong or right. Who
gets what?

Gene rolls his eyes. Huffs and puffs.

GENE
I don't know. How about you tell
me?

John smiles excitedly.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

A campfire burning in its full glory.

Gene is lying on his side, holding the vile filled with
gold. He shakes it a couple of times. Puts it inside the
front pocket of his shirt.

GENE
Don't look so grim, son.

John is sitting on the ground with hands resting on his
knees.

JOHN
I'm a fucking idiot.

GENE
Well--

JOHN
No, I am.

GENE
I wasn't gonna argue with you.

JOHN
Tch! You shouldn't.

GENE
I'll tell you what, you can have
this gold back. All of it.

Gene takes the vial with gold out of his pocket.

JOHN
No. A bet is a bet. I don't want
any handouts.

GENE
It's not a handout, friend. Look at
it as payment.

JOHN

For what?

GENE

For that gadget of yours that got my phone running. And I'd like to camp out here with you. I love having some company. We can help each other out. I'll teach you the ropes. If you could lend me your fancy gadgets every now and then, that would be sweet. What do you say?

JOHN

That's fine. You can camp anywhere you want. It's public land, anyway. You don't need my permission to be out here.

GENE

Well, still, I don't wanna be a bother. So, what do you say? Partners?

JOHN

Okay.

Gene is about to throw the vial at John.

JOHN (CONT'D)

But don't give me that gold. I don't want it.

GENE

A deal's a deal, son.

JOHN

No. That's not part of the deal. I lost it, and I need to learn a lesson. Teaching me how to find gold is more than enough on your end.

GENE

You sure about that?

JOHN

Yes. I'm sure. Keep it, please.

GENE

Okay. Whatever you say.

Gene puts the gold back into his pocket.

JOHN

By the way, when we were at the creek, you said we wouldn't know how much gold we got until we measured it.

GENE

Well... I said we won't know for sure. Didn't say I had no basic idea. And I didn't want to be no show-off. You got your own self into trouble, son. Don't be throwing the blame at me.

JOHN

Yeah, you're right. Gold really does play tricks on you, doesn't it?

GENE

It does, son. I've been trying to tell you... It makes me very glad you are finding yourself the way you are.

The flames of the campfire are dancing, flickering.

CRACKLING. SIZZLING.

GENE (CONT'D)

Some folks lose their minds and never get to come back. It consumes their soul. They become shells of men. Nothing can fill those shells. Nothing. An endless hole. A dark pit wanting to swallow all that comes its way.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The morning sun shines through the crowns of the trees surrounding the clearing.

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John gets out of his tent. Stretches. Looks into the distance.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

A simple forester tent is set up on the clearing near the baggage. The tent is put together with a tarp and wooden poles.

EXT. GENE'S TENT - DAY

John is standing in front of Gene's tent.

A crumpled sleeping bag is on the ground inside the tent.

John turns back and looks at the tree line.

JOHN

Hm.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

John is sitting near a metal detector lying on the ground with a pair of large over-ear headphones around his neck. He is fiddling with the end of the headphones' cable.

VEGETATION RUSTLING.

John looks up.

Gene emerges from the tree line.

John gets up.

Gene approaches.

GENE

Morning, son. I see you're up early.

JOHN

Morning. I thought we were getting an early start today. What happened? You've been gone for a while.

GENE

Well, I had to take care of some stuff. I'm here now.

Gene looks beyond John.

GENE (CONT'D)

I see you got the machine out. Did you get it running and all?

JOHN

Kind of. I was waiting for you... I'll need you to give me some gold to test it properly. I have nothing left, remember?

GENE

Oh, I see. Let me check what I got.

Gene checks his pockets. After finding nothing in the pockets, he takes his backpack off and searches inside.

John squints, looking at Gene with suspicion.

GENE (CONT'D)

Shoot! Where did I put it? Oh,
there it is!

Gene takes a vial out and hands it to John.

A vintage vial with a few tiny nuggets is between John's fingers.

John looks up at Gene.

JOHN

What is this?

GENE

It's gold, son. What do you mean?

JOHN

What happened to the rest of it? I wanted to try to detect different sizes. Get a good handle on the detector before we go out there.

GENE

Not that it's any of your business, but I hid the rest. That's right. I put it away somewhere safe.

JOHN

What? Why? Do you think I'll steal your gold or something?

GENE

No! That's not what I meant, son. I'm old. I lose things all the time. That's why I put the gold somewhere safe. That way, I don't have to worry about it falling off my pockets or, I don't know, taking it out and forgetting it somewhere. It's happened before, I tell you. It wasn't a good feeling. Uh-uh.

JOHN

Okay... What if you forget where you put it, though? Or if someone finds it?

GENE

No one will find it. You can trust me on that. And I'm not that old. I can remember where I left a bounty on purpose. It's the little things that escape me sometimes.

JOHN

Okay. If you say so.

GENE

Hey, don't take it personally, will you? It's got nothing to do with you.

JOHN

Yeah, okay. I'd never steal your gold or anything else from you or anybody, you know that, right?

GENE

I know. I can see you are a good kid, son.

JOHN

Sure...

GENE

All right. Now that we got that cleared, how about we try out that nugget sniffer. What do you say?

EXT. CLEARING - DAY - LATER

John is wearing the headphones on his head, swinging the metal detector. Gene is standing nearby watching John metal detect.

GENE

You got something?

John stops swinging and looks at Gene.

JOHN

What?

John moves one of the earcups away from his ear.

GENE

You got something?

JOHN

I got nothing.

GENE

Well, I guess it's as small as it gets, then.

John takes the headphones off and rests them around his neck.

JOHN

Yeah, it won't find a flake that small. And I can't make it more sensitive than this. If it's too hot, it's starting to give false positives all the time and--

GENE

I get it. As small as it gets. Still, this thing is a goddamn beast, son. Holy moley!
(rubs his hands together)
Let's go out there and get to hunting.

EXT. CREEK/BANK - DAY

A metal detector's coil swings left to right, moving forward along a cracked rocky surface.

John is holding the metal detector, swinging it smoothly from left to right. He has the large over-ear headphones on his head.

Gene is nearby, holding a crevice tool, watching John as he is metal detecting.

The coil passes over a wide crack.

HIGH-PITCH BEEP.

JOHN

I think I got something.

The coil passes over the same spot.

HIGH-PITCH BEEP.

John moves one of the headphones' earcups away from his ear. Looks at Gene and points at the ground.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's right there.

Gene gets closer. He squats over the crack in the rock.

An index finger pointing at a spot in the crack.

GENE

Here?

JOHN

A little further.

Gene moves his finger a bit further away from John and points.

GENE

Is it here?

JOHN

Yeah, it has to be right there.

Gene brings forward the crevice tool.

GENE

All right, let's get this split cleaned out.

The tip of the crevice tool lodges inside the crack.

Gene is holding the crevice tool with both hands. Begins to work it.

GENE GRUNTING.

John rubs his eyes.

Gene stops working and looks up at John.

GENE (CONT'D)

Well, don't just stand there. Get in here.

John takes the headphones off and puts them around his neck.

JOHN

You know, I'll do whatever you say and not even argue about it, but you could be just a little bit nicer--

GENE

I ain't got no time for being polite, son.

John shakes his head. Carefully puts the metal detector down on the ground.

Gene is working on the crack with the crevice tool.

GENE (CONT'D)

Bring the pan and start collecting
all this dirt and rocks in it.

JOHN

Okay.

John walks away slowly.

GENE

Are you all right?

John stops walking. Turns around.

JOHN

What?

GENE

You've been dragging your feet all
day.

JOHN

Yeah, well, my entire body hurts
now. And it's starting to get to
me.

GENE

Pull yourself together, will you?
We still got a long day ahead. If I
can keep up at my age, you've got
no excuse.

JOHN

I know. I know. I'll get through
it.

GENE

Toughen up. If you ain't serious
about it, there is no need to be
out here.

JOHN

Why are you being like this all of
a sudden? Give me a break, okay?
I'm not used to this. I'll need a
few days to adapt, and then I'll be
fine.

Gene gets up.

GENE

Sure. But whatever we find today,
we split it in half. Maybe that
oughta teach you a lesson.

JOHN

Okay. Fine. That's fair. We are working on it together. We should divide whatever we find in half anyway. Once I'm on my own, I'll give you your cut as we previously agreed.

Gene nods. Itches his beard.

GENE

All right. At least you're being reasonable. If only you weren't so darn lazy...

JOHN

What the fuck, man?

Gene laughs.

JOHN (CONT'D)

That's not funny.

GENE

Relax, I'm just pulling your leg, kid. You're all right. A bit lazy...

JOHN

I'm not lazy! You just said you were joking, and then--

GENE

Well...

JOHN

I'm not. Okay?

Gene looks at his feet.

GENE

Dirt is still on the ground...

JOHN

I'll go get the pan.

GENE

Well, go ahead, then.

JOHN

I'm going.

GENE

Don't let me keep you.

John shakes his head, turns around, and starts walking away.

At first, Gene is smiling as he watches John walk away, but then his smile transitions into a cold look.

EXT. BANK - DAY

A hole in the ground.

John crouches over the hole. His clothes and face are dirty. His beard is slightly longer.

With a pinpoint in hand, John reaches inside the hole and pinpoints.

JOHN

It has to be right there.

HIGH-PITCH BEEP.

The blade of a pick. Gene is behind John's back, holding a pick firmly with both hands.

GENE

Move aside.

John makes room for Gene.

JOHN

That's a big one. I can tell.

Gene swings the pick.

The blade pierces into the soil.

Gene works the pick, loosening the compacted dirt.

GENE

You're starting to be a real smartass, son.

JOHN

I'm telling you...

Gene throws the pick to the side. Begins to examine the dirt with his hands.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Did you get it?

GENE

Hold on.

Gene looks at a muddy something in his hand. He gets up and rubs the thing on his pants.

JOHN

Is that it?

Gene brings the object in front of his face.

Between Gene's fingers, a large muddy gold nugget.

GENE

Holy moley!

John smiles wide.

JOHN

What did I tell you!?

GENE

You called it.

Gene throws the nugget to John.

John catches the gold. Opens his hand and looks at it.

The large gold nugget in John's dirty palm.

GENE (CONT'D)(O.S.)

Let's get back into it. Might be
more hiding in this hole.

Fingers close tight around the precious metal.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The large gold nugget is shiny and clean on the gold scale.
John is squatting over, mesmerized by it.

JOHN

What a beauty! This thing is
just... fucking gorgeous.

Gene is crouching near a small pile of wood on the ground,
holding a match.

GENE

Mhm.

John turns to Gene.

JOHN

How are we splitting this one in
half?

Gene is about to light the match.

GENE

You keep it, son. Just give me the equal weight in gold. Shape and size... it don't matter to me.

John picks up the nugget with the tips of his fingers.

JOHN

Are you sure?

Gene lights the match and brings it to the kindling stuffed under the larger pieces of wood.

GENE

I am. It's your machine that sniffed it out anyways. It's yours bounty to keep.

The kindling ignites.

John gets up.

JOHN

All right.

John tosses the nugget into the air and catches it in his palm.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I ain't gonna argue with you.

Gene stands up and straightens his back.

GENE

Well, look at you. All grown up.

John smiles and shakes his head.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Campfire burning.

Gene is lying on his side, gazing at the flames.

John is uneasy, sitting on the ground. Back and forward, he glances at Gene and the burning wood.

GENE

Spit it out, son. What's on your mind?

JOHN

Well, I was thinking...

Slightly smiling, Gene looks at John.

GENE

What?

John takes a deep breath and exhales.

JOHN

Okay. Well, I think... I think I'm pretty much ready to do this on my own.

Gene sours for a second.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And I know that's not good news for you...

Gene clears his throat.

GENE

Don't worry yourself about it. I knew this day was coming sooner rather than later.

JOHN

Still, I feel bad. You've taught me so much in such a short span of time. If it wasn't for you... It just feels wrong to--

GENE

It's all right.

JOHN

Are you sure?

GENE

I am. I'll miss your company, that's all.

JOHN

Really? I thought I was, and I quote: "A whiney lazy city boy that has no business being out here looking for gold."

GENE

Well...

JOHN

You told me that about four hours ago.

GENE

Well...

John smiles at Gene for a moment, then gets serious.

JOHN

Look, I feel bad about leaving you to roam the land with just an old pan, and... to show my appreciation for everything you've done for me, I wanted to sweeten our deal a little. I was thinking another five percent. We previously agreed on fifteen. How about we make that twenty?

GENE

That's nice of you, friend. Are you certain about this? I ain't one of them shy ones. If you offer me something, I'll take it. I won't put up much of a fight.

JOHN

Yeah, I'm sure.

Gene nods.

GENE

Okay, then. It's not the twenty-five I asked for--

JOHN

Seriously!?

Gene chuckles.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I mean...

GENE

I'm just messing with you, kid.

JOHN

Yeah, I'm sure you are.

GENE

We'll get there eventually.

JOHN

We're not getting there.

GENE

Well...

JOHN

We are definitely not getting there.

GENE

Umm...

JOHN

Ever.

GENE

All right. All right. Message received loud and clear. Appreciate it a ton, son. You're a good kid.

JOHN

Oh, come on. Don't make me regret this, okay?

GENE

I'm serious. You didn't have to do this, but you did, and I won't forget it, I tell you.

John smiles at Gene, then looks at the fire.

Gene sits up and feeds the flames a piece of wood.

CRACKLING. SIZZLING.

The fire burns.

INT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John is sleeping.

BIRD WINGS FLAPPING.

John opens his eyes.

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John gets out of the tent.

BIRD WINGS FLAPPING.

John looks up.

The sky is gloomy. Birds are flying across.

BIRDS CROAKING.

John looks ahead.

EXT. GENE'S TENT - DAY

John's walks up and peeks inside.

An empty sleeping bag is inside Gene's tent.

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John comes out of the tent, holding the black backpack. He puts it on and walks away toward the tree line.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

John is walking amongst the trees with the backpack on his back and the phone in hand.

EXT. FOREST/THE BOX - DAY

Dead leaves are covering the forest floor.

FOOTSTEPS APPROACHING.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

John is walking, glancing at his phone.

EXT. THE BOX - DAY

Hiking shoe is stepping on the dead leaves.

John is standing over the leaves with his foot on them. He takes a step back and looks down.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The forest canopy is still.

BIRD SINGING.

EXT. THE BOX - DAY

John kneels on the ground. Takes the backpack off and puts it beside him.

A palm runs along the forest floor, sweeping the leaves to the side, revealing a dark metal surface embedded in the ground. Debris are scattered across.

John cleans the debris off the surface with his hand. Blows off the dust.

Dust particles are floating in the air.

John touches the metal with his fingertips.

VIBRATING.

John's hand flinches away.

VIBRATING STOPS.

CLICK.

A thin lid opens at a ninety-degree angle, revealing an empty square box.

John is staring at the empty box.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The forest canopy begins moving in the wind.

BIRD CROAKING.

EXT. THE BOX - DAY

John looks up.

The crowns of the trees are swaying.

VEGETATION RUSTLING.

John turns his head left and right, checking his surroundings.

BIRD CROAKING.

John grabs the backpack, unzips it, and pulls out vials with gold and a pouch.

The empty box with the lid open.

John opens a vial filled with gold and pours the gold inside the box.

Gold dust is falling, sprinkling on the bottom of the box.

John opens a second vial and pours its contents inside the box.

In the box, gold dust falls on top of the dust already there.

John opens a third vial.

Small nuggets fall on top of the gold dust.

John has a large nugget on his palm. He moves his hand on top of the box and turns his palm over.

The large nugget drops on top of the gold dust and small nuggets.

John takes a deep breath. Exhales. Puts his hand on the lid and closes the box, keeping the tips of his fingers on top of the metal surface.

CLICK.

VIBRATING.

John takes his fingers off the lid.

VIBRATING STOPS.

CLICK.

The thin lid opens at a ninety-degree angle.

A small shiny metal sphere is standing still in the middle of the box.

Fingers grab the tiny metallic ball about the size of a blueberry.

Holding it with the tips of his fingers, John brings the sphere close to his face and looks at it.

JOHN

What the fuck...

In the background, the lid closes by itself.

John looks down at the box.

CLICK.

A leaf floating in the air falls near the box.

John looks to his left.

Tree trunks.

John looks to his right.

Tree trunks.

John puts the sphere inside the pouch.

Hand collects the empty vials from the ground.

John shoves all the stuff inside his backpack, zips it up, and puts it on. With his right foot, he moves dead leaves over the box and covers it. Looks back.

Tree trunks.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

John is walking. Passes by a large tree trunk.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

John walks out of the forest. Stops walking abruptly and stares ahead.

EXT. THE PILE - DAY

CLEO, a woman in her early 20s with long blond braided hair, and ALISTAIR, a man in his late 20s, tall, with a shaved head, are standing near the baggage. Both have large backpacks on their backs with sleeping bags attached.

Cleo and Alistair turn and look at John. Alistair waves his hand in the air.

John approaches.

ALISTAIR

Hey man, how's it going?

John stops walking a few feet away from the couple.

JOHN

Okay.

ALISTAIR

We've been waiting for you.

JOHN

Yeah?

ALISTAIR

Yeah, man. I'm Ali, short for Alistair, but no one calls me that except my grandma. The bitch won't quit.

(forced laughter, pokes Cleo with his index finger)

And this here is my partner in crime and other extracurricular activities, if you know what I mean. Right, Cleo?

Cleo waves her hand close to her body. Gives John a shy smile.

JOHN

Hey. I'm John.

ALISTAIR

Well, hello there, John.
(spreads his hands)
Is all this your fine establishment?

JOHN

Yeah, a friend and I are camping out here.

ALISTAIR

Cool. Very cool. This place is a vibe, my man. Are you guys hunters or something?

JOHN

Not exactly.

ALISTAIR

Okay... A man with some secrets. A private man. I can respect that.
(turns to Cleo)
Right?

JOHN

What are you guys up to?

ALISTAIR

Just exploring the land. Taking it all in.

(takes a deep breath,
exhales sharply)

Like you're supposed to, am I right?

JOHN

Sure...

ALISTAIR

Well, listen. We are off on an adventure. But how about we touch base later tonight, huh? How does that sound to you?

John squints his eyes, perplexed.

ALISTAIR (CONT'D)

We'll come back at dinnertime. Share our resources and some stories. Just hang out, you know? What do you say?

JOHN

Okay. That's... cool.

ALISTAIR

Cool, my man. Can't wait!
(points at John with his
index fingers)
See you later, alligator.
(forced laughter)

John nods and fakes a smile.

Alistair wraps his arm around Cleo's shoulders and leads her away toward the tree line.

John watches the couple walk away, itches his beard, looks at the baggage, then back at the couple walking away in the distance.

Cleo and Alistair walk across the tree line and disappear into the vegetation.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Boots are stepping on the forest floor.

John is walking with the backpack on, headphones around his neck, and is holding the metal detector with his right hand.

EXT. BANK - DAY

John is walking, metal detecting. The headphones are on his head with one earcup away from his ear.

The metal detector's coil is swinging left to right across a cracked rocky surface.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

John is in the water with the detector's coil submerged. He swings the machine left to right, keeping the coil in the water.

EXT. BANK - DAY

John is sitting on the ground with the metal detector and backpack next to him. He is holding a spoon and a can of beans.

WATER BABBLING.

With the spoon, John scoops beans from the can and eats.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

Water is flowing. In the background, John is sitting on the bank, eating beans.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

John is walking amongst the trees, carrying the detector, the headphones around his neck, and the backpack on his back.

LAUGHTER.

John stops walking.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The tree line.

LAUGHTER.

VEGETATION RUSTLING.

John walks out of the forest.

ALISTAIR (O.S.)
You're a funny man, Gene-o! My
stomach hurts...

Alistair and Cleo are sitting around a campfire opposite
Gene.

John approaches.

GENE
There he is!

Cleo and Alistair turn back and face John.

ALISTAIR
Hey, man.

Cleo waves.

CLEO
Hi.

John nods and half-smiles.

GENE
Come on, son. Join us.

ALISTAIR
Gene-o here was telling us about
your slacking on the job. Am I
right?
(forced laughter)

GENE
Well...

John gets to the campfire. Leaves the metal detector on the
ground.

JOHN
What? What kind of shameless lies
have you been spreading about me?

GENE

Well...

John sits down next to Gene.

JOHN

Well?

Gene adjusts his beat-up straw hat.

GENE

One man's truth is another man's
lie, son.

JOHN

Oh, really? Is that how they
justify it in liar school?

ALISTAIR

Wow! Shot's fired, bro!

John smiles.

Gene shakes his head.

GENE

Well, to prove me wrong, how about
you go collect some more wood for
the fire. I got me some fresh fish
today. Our new friends here have a
bounty of mushrooms. We're gonna
make ourselves a little feast
tonight.

JOHN

Okay. Sure. I can do that. It's not
like I had a long day out there...

John gets up.

JOHN (CONT'D)

See? He tells me to do something,
and I do it. Every time...

GENE

And he never complains about it,
either.

Gene winks at Cleo and Alistair.

JOHN

What? I'm not complaining.

GENE

Well...

ALISTAIR

You kind of are... Very passive-aggressive.

JOHN

What? I'm just saying-- You know what? I'm just going to go get the wood, all right?

(nods)

Okay?

ALISTAIR

Cool.

GENE

All right, son. You do that.

John shakes his head and walks away.

GENE (CONT'D)

As I've been telling y'all - very moody, touchy-feely.

JOHN GRUNTING.

GENE (CONT'D)

See? What did I tell you?

Gene bursts into laughter.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Gene is laughing. His red face is lit by burning wood.

The campfire rages. The flames are dancing around fish and mushrooms impaled on sticks, cooking over the fire.

John, Gene, Alistair, and Cleo are sitting around the campfire.

ALISTAIR

You really do that?

GENE

Yes, I did. I wrestled a giant wild boar with my bare hands. Twenty years ago to the day!

ALISTAIR

No way...

Gene reaches inside his shirt. Pulls out and shows off a necklace with a boar tusk hanging at the end of it.

GENE

I got the evidence right here.

CLEO

Oh, wow!

GENE

See?

JOHN

You could have got that from
anywhere.

ALISTAIR

Oh, come on! Don't do that.

GENE

Why so negative, son?

JOHN

I'm not. I'm just saying... It's
not much of a proof. That's all.

Alistair shakes his head.

GENE

Well, it happened, I tell you. I
fought a wild boar and won the
battle to tell the story, and I
have its tusk right here to prove
it.

ALISTAIR

I believe you, man.

CLEO

I believe it.

GENE

Appreciate that.

Gene hides the necklace back into his shirt.

GENE (CONT'D)

I've always had history with swine.
I remember one time when I was a
small child. Must've been not more
than five years old when I got into
the old hog pen. There was this pig
lying on the ground, minding its
own business. Might've been
sleeping too. And what do I do? I
sat on it.

ALISTAIR

You did what?

CLEO

No...

GENE

Oh, yes, mister. I sat on its back. That thing didn't like that at all. It got up. Before I knew it, my short feet were up in the air, my crotch stuck on its fat back.

JOHN

What?

GENE

That pig started running around, squealing out its narrow mind, with me stuck on its hairy back.

ALISTAIR

You rode a pig when you were a kid?

GENE

I sure did, mister. My father ran inside and grabbed me off the pig's back. Gave me a whooping I'd never forget.

CLEO

Oh, wow! You really do have a history with pigs.

GENE

I sure do, and it ain't a good one either.

Gene laughs. Alistair and Cleo laugh with him.

John shakes his head. Grabs a stick with mushrooms.

JOHN

I think these mushrooms are almost ready.

Cleo checks on the mushrooms.

CLEO

Yeah, they're almost done.

JOHN

Are you sure these are safe to eat?

ALISTAIR

Yeah, my man. We know our stuff.
These are edible, and they are very
delicious.

CLEO

They are so good. We've had them
many times. We found this beautiful
patch today. It was in the perfect
stage.

ALISTAIR

Yeah. But, in case you want to get
a little adventurous, we got you
covered.

Cleo smiles at Alistair. She reaches inside her backpack and
pulls out a plastic bag with mushrooms.

Alistair takes the plastic bag. Shakes it in the air.

ALISTAIR (CONT'D)

These right here are the fun ones.

CLEO

Oh, yeah.

Alistair opens the bag, takes a mushroom, and eats it.

ALISTAIR

They don't taste the best, though.

Cleo reaches inside the bag, takes a shroom, and puts it in
her mouth.

CLEO

I like them.

Alistair offers the bag to John.

JOHN

Oh, no. I can't...

CLEO

Why not?

ALISTAIR

You've never done shrooms, bro?

JOHN

Nope. Never done any shrooms.

ALISTAIR

Really? What a surprise...

John stares at Alistair with a cold look.

Alistair stares back at John with a smirk.

GENE (O.S.)

Are these what they're calling
magic mushrooms?

Alistair breaks eye contact with John and turns to Gene.

ALISTAIR

That's right, Gene-o. You wanna
try?

Alistair offers the bag to Gene.

Gene reaches and takes the bag.

JOHN

What are you doing? Have you done
this before?

ALISTAIR

Hey! Let the old man live a little,
will you?

Gene peaks inside the bag.

GENE

How much do you eat?

ALISTAIR

Just take a couple for starters.
Let's not go too crazy with it, all
right?

GENE

All right. Don't mind me if I do.

Gene reaches inside the bag.

John shakes his head.

GENE (CONT'D)

Should I cook them on the fire
first or--

CLEO

No, you just eat them.

ALISTAIR

Just eat it, my man. Straight up as
it is.

Gene sniffs the mushrooms.

GENE

Hm.

ALISTAIR

Don't worry about the flavor.

CLEO

Yeah, it's an acquired taste.

Gene eats.

GENE

(smacks lips)

Not bad.

ALISTAIR

Really?

GENE

I like it. It's chewy.

ALISTAIR

Yeah...

CLEO

Most people don't like the taste or the texture. You and I are an exception, Gene.

GENE

Well, I've had worse stuff in my mouth.

ALISTAIR

So has she.

(turns to Cleo)

Am I right?

(forced laughter)

Cleo slaps Alistair on his chest.

CLEO

Hey!

ALISTAIR

Sorry, babe. That was too much, wasn't it?

CLEO

Yeah. It most definitely was.

ALISTAIR

I'm sorry. I go too far sometimes. It's what I do.

Alistair puts his arm around Cleo.

ALISTAIR (CONT'D)
Do you forgive me?

CLEO
(playful)
No...

Gene swallows. Offers the shrooms to John.

GENE
You sure you don't want some, son?

JOHN
Yeah, no, I'm sure.

Gene offers the bag to Alistair.

Alistair takes the bag. Cleo reaches inside and takes a pinch of shrooms. Alistair does the same. They eat. Both chew the mushrooms, giggling and looking at each other.

Alistair swallows.

ALISTAIR
Down the hatch, they go.
(forced laughter)

John rolls his eyes. Rubs his face.

Cleo puts the bag with shrooms back into the backpack.

GENE
Now what? How long before the fun starts?

CLEO
It could take at least half an hour.

ALISTAIR
Yeah, it depends.

GENE
And uhh... what's gonna happen, then?

JOHN
Maybe you should've asked that before you took the drugs?

Gene laughs.

GENE

Where's the fun there?

Alistair laughs.

ALISTAIR

I like your style, Gene-o!

GENE

I like you two. You two live a life. Walking around the forest, picking up mushrooms...

CLEO

We love nature.

ALISTAIR

And our little side hustle keeps us afloat. If you know what I mean...

JOHN

So, you're drug dealers?

CLEO

Hey!

ALISTAIR

What the fuck is your problem, bro!?

JOHN

I'm just saying... Technically, you kind of are.

ALISTAIR

Whatever, bro. This shit should be legal anyway.

JOHN

Maybe. But it's not, so...

ALISTAIR

Whatever, man. I won't let you ruin our trip with your sour attitude and your... bad vibes. I don't know what the fuck your problem is, but you are probably the one that needs to trip the most.

Cleo nods.

CLEO

It could really help you.

JOHN
Yeah, I don't think so.

CLEO
Okay.

ALISTAIR
Whatever.

Gene puts his hand on John's shoulder.

GENE
Son, let's be civilized and not
attack our guest here.

John takes a long look at Gene.

JOHN
You know what? You're right.
(turns to Cleo and
Alistair)
I'm sorry. I've been kind of an
asshole to you guys. I'll admit
that. And I apologize for it. Okay?

ALISTAIR
Okay. Apology accepted, my man. We
don't hold on to the negative
stuff. We let it go. Now, tell us
about yourselves? Are you guys
hunting for lost treasures or what?

Gene and John look at each other.

INT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John wakes up. Sits up and rubs his sleepy eyes. Yawns.
Stretches. Drinks water. Gets out of the sleeping bag. Grabs
the backpack and reaches inside.

In John's palm, the small metallic sphere. The tip of his
index finger rolls the shiny sphere along his palm.

GENE (O.S.)
Argh!

John looks up.

GENE (CONT'D)(O.S.)
Motherfuckers!

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John gets out of his tent.

GENE (CONT'D)

I uhh... I want to apologize, son.
I lost my cool for a bit back
there. I...

Gene adjusts his straw hat.

JOHN

Don't worry about it.

GENE

Well... That wasn't pretty, was it?

JOHN

Nope. It was not.

GENE

I said some ugly things that no man
should say or think, for that
matter.

Gene sighs deeply. Looks into the distance.

GENE (CONT'D)

It is what it is, I guess. People
are what they are, and they gonna
do what they gonna do. I should
know better than let it get to me
the way it did.

JOHN

They took your gold. I get it. You
worked hard for that.

Gene looks at John.

GENE

Hm. Well, with that said, let's go
find those bastards, bring them
back to camp, and cook them for
dinner. What do you say?

John raises his eyebrows. Opens his mouth.

Gene smiles. Chuckles.

GENE (CONT'D)

I'm messing with you, kid.

John shakes his head.

JOHN

I don't know...

GENE

No, screw them. They'll get theirs.
One way or the other.

JOHN

You believe that?

GENE

I do. Maybe not right away. That's
why it don't always seem like it.
But sooner or later... we all do.

Gene gets up.

JOHN

Wait.

John gets up.

GENE

What?

JOHN

Let's look together today. We'll
split whatever we find.

GENE

No. I don't want any handouts
today, son. Appreciate the offer,
though.

JOHN

It's not a handout. I hate to admit
it, but I found less gold yesterday
than what would've been my cut
working with you.

GENE

It could be bad luck. Or it's
because you suffer from what's
called a chronic laziness.

JOHN

Tch!

GENE

And there's no one there to give
you a hard time for it.

JOHN

I mean...

GENE

Just admit it already. You'll feel
better.

JOHN
No, I'm not admitting to something
that is simply untrue.

GENE
All right. Bad luck it is, then.

JOHN
That's what it is exactly.

Gene walks away. Chuckles.

GENE
It sure is.

JOHN
Are we going together or what?
(to himself)
I'm not lazy.

EXT. CREEK/BANK - DAY

John is inside a large hole, holding a pick.

Gene's backpack with the straw hat on top is on the ground
near the water. His boots and a shirt are nearby.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

Gene is in the water, wearing only pants rolled up to his
knees. With eyes closed, he is facing up, basking in the
sun. His hands are resting on his waist.

WATER FLOWING.

Gene takes a deep breath. Exhales.

BIRDS CHIRPING.

THUMP.

EXT. BANK/THE HOLE - DAY

John's forehead is covered in sweat. He rests the blade of
the pick on the ground and leans on the top of the handle.
Looks at Gene in the water.

JOHN
(to himself)
I should take a video of this.
Calling me lazy all the time...
Just look at him... having a spa
day while I'm digging a giant hole
in the ground.

John shakes his head. Grabs the pick by the handle and hits the ground with the blade.

CLANK.

John throws the pick on the ground. Begins to dig with his bare hands.

Hands remove dirt, uncovering a thick gold vein in the bedrock.

John's eyes widen.

Hands clean more of the dirt and further uncover the gold vein.

JOHN
(to himself)
What the fuck...

With his forearm, John wipes the sweat off his forehead. Turns back and looks at Gene standing in the water.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

Gene is facing up with eyes closed, basking in the sunshine.

GENE
You hit bedrock yet?

JOHN (O.S.)
What? Yeah.

GENE
Find something?

JOHN (O.S.)
Still looking.

GENE
Take your time, son. We ain't in no hurry today.

EXT. THE HOLE - DAY

John is looking at the gold vein, breathing heavily. Swallows nervously. Looks back at Gene, then back at the gold vein.

JOHN
(to himself)
This could be it.
(MORE)

JOHN (cont'd)
(takes a deep breath,
exhales sharply)
I'm sorry, old man. I have to do
this. I have to.

Hands cover the gold vein with dirt. Clean the bedrock to
the side.

JOHN
(to himself)
Okay. Wait...

John reaches inside a pocket in his pants. Takes a rusted
metal bit out. Throws it on the ground.

A hand grabs the pinpointter lying on the ground just outside
the hole.

John is holding the pinpointter. Turns it on and pinpoints on
top of the metal bit.

HIGH-PITCH BEEP.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

Gene is basking in the sun with eyes closed.

GENE
Hm.

HIGH-PITCH BEEP.

Gene opens his eyes. Looks to the side.

JOHN (O.S.)
I got it!

GENE
What is it?

JOHN (O.S.)
Wait for it... Damn it! It's
nothing. Just a rusted old piece of
metal.

GENE
Really? I had hopes for this one,
son.

JOHN (O.S.)
Yeah. Sounded promising, but--

GENE

I stepped all wrong. My foot...
It's bad, son.

JOHN

What do I do?

GENE

Help me up, will you?

John gets behind Gene. Grabs him under the armpits and lifts.

JOHN

Careful. Try not to step on it.

Gene gets up with great effort.

GENE

I wasn't planning on it. Argh!

JOHN

Come on. Lean on me.

Gene puts his arm around John's shoulders.

EXT. BANK - DAY

John is helping Gene lie on the ground.

JOHN

We got to get you to a hospital.

GENE

No. No hospitals.

JOHN

What? What are you talking about?

Gene sits up. Looks at his left ankle.

GENE

It's just a sprain. I need to rest
it for a bit.

JOHN

What? Are you a doctor now? Let's
get you to my car--

GENE

I've had it before. I've broken an
ankle, too. I know the difference,
son. It will be all right. Might
need a few days to get back to full

(MORE)

GENE (cont'd)
strength. But it'll be all right
eventually, I tell you.

JOHN
Fuck. Okay. Let's get you to camp,
then.

GENE
Just give me a minute, will you?

JOHN
Right. Okay.

John sits next to Gene.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You can't catch a break, huh?

GENE
Oh, you don't know the half of it,
friend.

John sighs deeply.

GENE (CONT'D)
I'll be all right. You need not
worry about me.

JOHN
Okay. Well, tell me when you're
ready to go.

GENE
You sure there's nothing in that
hole?

JOHN
What? Yeah, I'm sure. How many
times... I checked it. I already
told you there's nothing in there.

GENE
All right. Don't be getting all
touchy-feely about it.

John shakes his head.

JOHN
I'm not...

GENE
Just making sure. That's all.

JOHN

Okay. Sure.

John looks ahead. Gene stares at John for a bit, then looks at the creek.

EXT. THE HOLE - DAY

Dirt falls off the rock and reveals the gold ore underneath.

EXT. BANK - DAY

Gene and John are resting on the bank, gazing at the running water.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

John and Gene are walking through the forest. Gene is limping, leaning on John.

GENE

I need a rest, friend. Help me to that tree over there.

A fallen tree trunk covered in moss. Gene sits on it. Catches his breath.

GENE (CONT'D)

Go on. Sit down for a minute.

John sits next to Gene.

Gene takes a deep breath. Exhales.

GENE (CONT'D)

You never really told me... Why are you out here, son?

JOHN

What do you mean? Looking for gold. Same as you.

GENE

Hm. Yes, I gathered that much. But--

FOOTSTEPS APPROACHING.

Gene and John look ahead.

A middle-aged MAN and a young BOY approach. The man is carrying two fishing poles.

MAN

How are you guys doing?

GENE

We are all right, mister. You heading out there for some fish?

The man and boy stop walking a few feet from Gene and John.

MAN

Yes, sir. I'm taking my nephew here on his first fishing trip.

GENE

Is that right?

The boy gives Gene a shy smile. Looks up at the man.

GENE (CONT'D)

I love me some fish myself. I know all the good spots around these parts.

MAN

Well, we found just the right man to talk to, then.

GENE

You sure did. There are a few places I'd recommend.

(points)

A good one is over that way.

John swallows nervously.

GENE (CONT'D)

You walk for about--

JOHN

Uhm... we were just there, right? Probably scared all the fish away.

GENE

Right.

JOHN

How about downstream?

GENE

Sure. Downstream is good. There's a neat spot not far from here.

(points)

You head on that way. There is a boulder in the middle of the creek. You won't miss it. When you see that, go further downstream until the river turns left. I've caught

(MORE)

GENE (cont'd)
plenty of fish around there. It's a
great spot to try your luck.

The man nods. Puts his hand on the boy's shoulder.

MAN
All right.
(looks down at the boy)
Let's thank these kind men.

BOY
Thanks.

GENE
You got it, young fella. Good luck
catching your first fish.

JOHN
Make it a big one.

MAN
Okay, guys. Appreciate it. See you
around.
(at the boy)
Come on.

GENE
See you, mister. Take care.

JOHN
Bye.

The man and boy walk away.

GENE
Hm. I remember my first fish--

JOHN
Let me guess, you rode it or
something?

Gene shakes his head.

John chuckles.

GENE
You can be a real mean son of a
bitch sometimes.

JOHN
(smiles)
What?

GENE

I didn't ride no fish. How does one even ride a fish?

JOHN

Well, I'd guess you are in the river, and suddenly, an enormous fish pops out of the water between your legs. Your crotch gets stuck on it, and you ride it upstream, where it goes to spawn. And--

GENE

That's crazy talk right there.

JOHN

You rode a pig, right?

GENE

That happened, son.

JOHN

Okay. Why not ride a fish, then?

GENE

I don't wanna talk about this no more. Help me up.

JOHN

I'm just messing with you. Come on, you call me lazy all the time. Can't I have a little fun?

THUNDER GRUMBLES.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Okay, let's take you to camp.
(gets up)
Come on.

Gene stands up with effort. Puts his hand around John's shoulders.

INT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John is sitting in the tent, looking down.

RAIN FALLING. WIND WHISTLING.

The shiny metallic sphere in John's palm.

THUNDER RUMBLES.

EXT. BANK/THE HOLE - DAY

Bedrock covered in mud. Rain washes off the dirt, exposing the gold vein.

THUNDER RUMBLING.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The sky is blue and clear.

INSECTS BUZZING.

EXT. JOHN'S TENT - DAY

John comes out of the tent. Something catches his eye. He hurries ahead.

EXT. GENE'S TENT - DAY

Smoke is coming out of Gene's tent.

John approaches.

Gene is sitting inside the tent with his legs straight, holding a smoking pipe. His vintage backpack is beside him.

JOHN

I didn't know you smoked. I thought you were on fire or something.

GENE

Nah, I don't do it often anymore. Thought I'd give it a try. See if it helps with the pain.

JOHN

How's the ankle?

GENE

Better.

JOHN

Okay.

Gene pulls on the pipe. Exhales.

John shakes his head.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You can smoke and then just... not, right?

GENE

What do you mean?

JOHN

I think there are two types of smokers. One is like you. You can smoke or not smoke. You feel the cravings and all that, but no major withdrawal. And then, there are the ones like me.

GENE

You smoked?

JOHN

Oh, yeah. Fifteen years.

GENE

Hm. I can make you a pipe if you like? I got me a spare around here.

Gene reaches for his backpack.

JOHN

What? No!

GENE

Take it easy, son. I was only offering...

JOHN

That's what I was about to tell you. People like me go through hell to quit. And we tend to stay that way. We don't just smoke every now and then when the mood strikes. We don't want to go through that hell ever again.

GENE

If it was that bad, how did you get by it, then?

John takes a deep breath. Exhales.

JOHN

I mean, you have to go through it, I guess. I thought of it as a bad flu. There really is no instant cure. You just have to go through it until you feel better. Same thing is with nicotine withdrawal.

GENE

Hm.

JOHN

I had two types of headaches going on at the same time. One at the back of my head. One at the front. Felt dizzy all the time. And this weird hunger... I couldn't think clearly. If you asked me to do basic math, I couldn't do it to save my life. It was bad.

GENE

I'm sorry to hear that, son.

JOHN

Yeah... I kept cigarettes nearby. Just to put my mind at ease and not freak out. And every time I was about to smoke one to put an end to this horrible suffering, I thought about how all this torturous time I had endured so far would be for nothing. See, because I didn't want to be a smoker anymore and surely didn't want to die as one, I'd have to go through it again. That kept me going. I didn't want my suffering to be for nothing. That's how I got through it, I guess.

(itches his beard)

It's funny. When you are in it, you think of all these stupid things. Like that life will be boring and empty without smoking. But it really isn't. It's just a habit. You break it. And you get used to not doing it. Pretty fast, I'd say.

GENE

Well, I'll be damned. Good for you, friend.

Gene bites the pipe. Pulls deeply on it. Exhales. Smacks his lips.

JOHN

Yeah, I see you took all that to heart.

GENE

Hm?

John shakes his head.

JOHN

You're not going anywhere today,
are you?

GENE

Nah, I got to give the old ankle a
rest. Otherwise, I can get into
much bigger trouble.

JOHN

Smart. Okay, well, I'm going out
there. You're going to be okay on
your own, right? Do you need
anything?

GENE

No, son. You go ahead.

JOHN

Okay.

John turns around. Begins to walk toward his tent.

GENE

Wait!

John stops. Rolls his eyes. Turns around.

JOHN

What is it?

GENE

Can you make me a cane?

JOHN

What? I'm not a--

GENE

Just find me a thick stick long
enough to lean on and get around if
needed. I had one, but I must've
left it someplace.

JOHN

Sure. I can do that.

GENE

Appreciate it, son.

Gene bites the smoking pipe.

EXT. THE PILE - DAY

John is looking down, crouching near a toolbox. He looks up.

In the distance, behind the baggage, Gene is in his tent, looking at a long stick.

John looks down. Opens the toolbox. Grabs a hammer and slides it into his backpack. Zips the pack. Closes the toolbox. Looks up.

In the distance, behind the baggage, Gene is in his tent, smoking the pipe.

John gets up. Puts the backpack on and walks away toward the tree line.

EXT. THE HOLE - DAY

The exposed gold vein.

John jumps inside the hole. Gets close to the vein. Reaches for it.

Fingertips touching the gold.

John unzips the backpack. Pulls the hammer out.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The forest canopy.

CLANG ECHOES.

Birds fly off the tops of the trees.

BIRD WINGS FLAPPING.

CLANG ECHOES.

BIRDS CROAKING.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

Water is running over smooth rocks.

WATER BABBLING.

CLANG ECHOES.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Clear skies. A full moon shines brightly over the trees.

EXT. THE BOX - NIGHT

Dead leaves cover the forest floor.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

John is walking, sweating, breathing heavily, looking dirty and exhausted.

The backpack on John's back is distorted by a heavy load inside pulling it down.

EXT. THE BOX - NIGHT

John walks up to the leaves covering the forest floor. Takes the backpack off with great effort. Lays it on the ground.

JOHN
(breathing heavily)
Whew. Okay.

John kneels in front of the leaves. Uncovers the box with his hands. Leans forward and blows on it.

Specs of dust are floating in the air, glittering in the moonlight.

Fingertips touch the clean metal lid.

VIBRATING.

John removes his hand.

VIBRATING STOPS.

CLICK.

The lid opens.

John unzips the backpack and reaches inside with both hands. Takes his palms filled with gold out. Moves them toward the box and pours the gold inside. John rubs his palms together over the box. He closes the lid, keeping his hand on top.

CLICK.

VIBRATING.

John removes his hand.

VIBRATING STOPS.

CLICK.

The lid opens.

A metal sphere, about the same blueberry size as the first one, is in the center of the box.

John takes the pouch out from a side pocket on his pants. Unties it. Reaches inside and takes the sphere out. Lays the pouch on the ground and places both spheres on top.

Gold is pouring inside the box.

John closes the lid.

CLICK.

VIBRATING.

John takes his hand off the box.

VIBRATING STOPS.

CLICK.

The lid opens.

Fingers grab a much bigger sphere, the size of a large cherry.

John places the sphere on the pouch next to the others.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The forest canopy is still.

CRICKETS CHIRPING.

The moon shines bright.

OWL SINGING.

EXT. THE BOX - NIGHT

Eight spheres are on the pouch. Two of them are the size of a blueberry, two are the size of a big cherry, one is slightly bigger than the other, two are the size of a lentil, and two are smaller than that.

VIBRATING.

The metal box.

VIBRATING STOPS.

CLICK.

The lid opens.

A large sphere, big as a peach, is in the box.

John grabs the sphere. Brings it close to his face and looks at it.

RUSTLING.

John slowly moves his gaze away from the sphere, then suddenly turns back.

Gene is standing behind John, just a few feet away, leaning on a stick.

John gets up.

 GENE
That must be the last one.

 JOHN
What?

 GENE
 (pointing)
That ball in your hand. That big...
Must be the last one, right?

John looks at the sphere in his hand, then back at Gene.

Gene reaches inside his jacket. Pulls out a pouch.

 GENE (CONT'D)
I'm up to five. Which one is that?

 JOHN
Uhh... nine, I think.

 GENE
I got ways to go, then.

 JOHN
Wait... You...

 GENE
Yes, friend. Same as you.

 JOHN
I'm sorry...

 GENE
Hm. You found the motherload in
that hole, didn't you?

 JOHN
Yeah... I'm sorry about that.

GENE

Don't be. Would've done the same thing.

PHONE DINGS.

John pulls out his phone. Looks at the screen.

Gene smiles.

GENE (CONT'D)

Hm. I guess you better get going.

John looks at Gene.

JOHN

Uhm... yeah... You can have my gear. All of it. It's yours.

Gene nods.

GENE

Much appreciated, son. Well, go on now. What are you waiting for?

John squats and collects the spheres from the pouch on the ground. Gets up. Takes a long look at Gene. His eyes water.

Gene is looking back at John, happy for him.

John turns around and begins to run.

Sadness takes over Gene's face.

EXT. HILL - NIGHT

John runs out of the forest into a grassy hill. Slows down. His running transitions into a fast-paced walk.

Tall grass swaying in a gentle breeze.

John is walking, looking at the phone in his hand. He stops walking and looks down.

Grass covers the ground.

John kneels on the ground. Moves the grass in front of him away to reveal a metal plate with a peach-sized circular indentation in the middle and eight grooves of different sizes around it.

Fingers touch the large indentation.

John has the pouch in hand. Reaches inside and brings out the large sphere. He places the sphere in the middle of the

plate. Applies pressure.

CLICK.

John moves his hand away.

The sphere begins to rotate in place.

John pours all the spheres from the pouch into his palm.

Fingers place the blueberry-sized sphere into the groove furthest from the center. Applies pressure.

CLICK.

The sphere starts to rotate on itself and travel along the groove, orbiting the large sphere in the middle.

John continues placing spheres in the grooves. His eyes are focused on the task.

Hand places a sphere on the metal plate. Applies pressure.

CLICK.

The hand moves away, revealing all the spheres are now on the grooves, rotating on themselves and orbiting around the central sphere - the solar system depicted.

JOHN

Okay. What now?

John gets up.

Bright white light appears and illuminates John.

John looks up.

The bright light intensifies.

John closes his eyes and puts his hand up, shielding his face.

The light begins to dim and disappears.

John puts his hand away. Opens his eyes. Blinks and squints. His eyes are adjusting to the low light.

LAUREN (O.S)

John?

JOHN

Lore... Lauren?

A woman's hand touches John's face.

LAUREN, mid-30s, holding a small GIRL, is next to John.

LAUREN
What happened to you?

JOHN
Nothing.

LAUREN
Why do you have a beard? What's
going on?

JOHN
It's uhh... It's a long story.

John smiles. Chuckles. Gently puts his hand on the child.

LAUREN
I feel weird.

JOHN
Yeah? It's okay now.

LAUREN
We were in the car... and then...
What happened? I--

JOHN
It doesn't matter. It's over now.

LAUREN
What do you mean? What's over?

JOHN
Let's just go home. Talk about it
later.

LAUREN
Okay...

John puts his arm around Lauren and the child. Leads them
off the hill.

Grass swaying in the wind. Shooting star streaks across the
sky.

In the distance, the morning sun breaks.

FADE OUT.

THE END