

GUN SHY

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A gray mist lifts as the sun pushes through to the thick bed of autumn leaves. The mass integration of maples, oaks and smattering of birches tower over the brooding, heavy figure of BILL, late 40s, as he holds the stock of his rifle with his right hand. It's butt nestled between his arm and torso.

His son, TIM, 16, as skinny as he is young, arms himself with a different kind of shot; the camera on his smartphone. He crouches for a close-up on the stark green blanket of moss lying atop a rotting tree trunk.

Both hunch slightly under the weight of their daypacks. In his orange vest, Bill's shoulders sag further when he turns to find his son falling behind. In a harsh whisper -

BILL

Tim! What the hell are you doing?
We're supposed to be hunting,
remember?

Various birdsong peppers the air as Tim rises and makes way toward his father, dragging his lack of enthusiasm with him.

TIM

Do you see me holding a gun, Bill?
You're the one who's hunting. I
told you, I detest guns, but you
just refuse to listen to me. Like
always.

BILL

You can't know you don't like
something until you actually try
it.

TIM

Oh, so I should I test out heroin
to find out if I like it first?

Bill shakes his head.

BILL

(to himself)
Jesus.
(to Tim)
Call me 'Bill' one more time and
I'm going to bury you in these
woods.

With that, he moves deeper into the forest. Tim maintains a seven foot buffer behind him.

Tim snaps a few more photos of the green and brown landscape before framing up his boots as they crack twigs and crunch leaves beneath him.

He switches the phone off and buries it, and his hands, in the oversized pocket of his yellow sweatshirt.

TIM

We're not even supposed to be in here. Didn't you see the No Trespassing sign?

Bill spins and locks eyes with his son. Tim falls back a step.

BILL

Can't you even attempt to keep quiet here??

Tim endeavors to hold his father's gaze, but let's it drop to the ground seconds later. Bill turns his back and continues on. Defeated, Tim follows.

TIM

We've been out here for four hours, Dad. Can we please head home now?

BILL

So you can play four hours of video games, pretending you're in the woods, instead?

Tim says nothing.

BILL (CONT'D)

My father took me hunting here all the time. Just because someone decides to throw up a couple of signs isn't going to stop me from enjoying what God created for all of us.

TIM

So you can blow a hole through what God created for all of us?

BILL

I've explained it before. If you don't thin the deer out, they'll all be short of food come winter, and then even more die.

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

That's where you refuse to listen
to me. Lovely two way street, isn't
it?

Bill trudges up a steep hill. They both anchor onto saplings
along the way to aid their ascent.

BILL (CONT'D)

We'll perch up here for a while.
Took nearly three hours to drive up
here, so just give me a couple more
hours, okay?

Tim's shoulders fall at the news. He glances at his phone:
11:37 a.m. He shrugs his backpack off and lets it fall to the
ground.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Bill sits beside his son in a small, canvas lean-to, made for
one very large man, or two very small ones. It's tight. Tim's
chin rests on his chest as he's fallen asleep with all the
excitement.

Bill tips his camouflage watch into view: 12:30. He rises,
arching his back. Tim stirs. He regards his vigilant father;
like a loyal sentry protecting his beloved king and queen
from outside invaders.

Just as Tim scoffs to himself, he catches the fire in his
father's eyes. Bill's a lion, ready to pounce. He readies his
rifle with a careful, almost graceful cadence.

Tim scans the lower elevation to find the object of his
father's electrification. It took him a few seconds, but
there it was: the entire left side of an oblivious 10 pointed
buck. As majestic as it was vulnerable.

The scene slows. Tim watches his father incline his head to
the scope. Tim hears his own breathing rate increase as Bill
places the crosshairs just to the right of the buck's left
shoulder, aiming for the magnificent beast's heart.

Tim leaps from the ground.

TIM

No, Dad! Don't!

Bill can't manage a single squeeze of the trigger before the
buck swings his head up toward the disturbance and launches
himself in the opposite direction. Bill whirls on his son.

BILL
 Jesus Christ, Tim! Are you fucking
 crazy!

Tim stands there, eyes wide with terror. Bill's body can't contain the energy. Energy that's begging for explanation.

BILL (CONT'D)
 I'm serious! What the hell is wrong
 with you?

Bill inhales deeply. He waves his hand out toward the area the buck had been only a minute before, and let's it fall by his side in defeat. He turns back to his son.

BILL (CONT'D)
 A hunter's first duty is to make
 sure the shot is absolutely clean.
 We owe that to the animals. What if
 I accidentally pulled the trigger
 during this liberal fit of yours?
 Could have hit him way off the
 mark, then he'd be down there
 suffering until we made our way
 down to put him out of his misery.
 Is that what you wanted?

Tim slowly shakes his head - terror still rooted in his face.

BILL (CONT'D)
 Nothing to say now, huh?

Tim crosses his arms.

TIM
 Dad, I don't think you understand.

BILL
 (scoffs)
 Just because your generation
 doesn't grasp the need and beauty
 of hunting, doesn't mean you have
 to ruin it for those who do.

Terror develops into agitation.

TIM
 It's not that, okay?!
 (beat)
 I really don't like guns. I don't
 even like being around one, never
 mind one being shot five feet from
 where I'm sitting.
 (MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

For such an observant guy, it's
amazing how blind you can be.

Tim drops his gaze to his feet.

TIM (CONT'D)

I'm the pussy son of a great
hunter. What legacy will I leave?

Bill takes in his son's words. His forehead creases. He opens his mouth, ready to counter, but closes it before any words escape.

Bill leans the gun against a massive oak beside them, then slips a folded military shovel out of his daypack.

BILL

I have to take a shit. Start
packing up.

Tim watches his father walk away. When he moves out of sight, Tim kicks the metal rod out from the lean-to - half of it collapses. He draws a deep breath and closes his eyes. And that's when he hears it.

He opens his eyes to see the brush below vibrating in the distance. With clenched teeth and anger, Tim snatches the weapon, aims it at the shaking thicket, and fires.

The recoil slams the rifle butt into his shoulder. He drops the weapon in pain. The blast of decibels seem to attack Tim's ears like fire ants.

Though Tim winces, he just catches a large section of vegetation toppling below. He rubs his shoulder when his father runs up behind him.

BILL (CONT'D)

What happened?!

TIM

I think I got 'im.

Tim continues rubbing his shoulder.

BILL

Got what?

Bill snaps up the gun and looks around.

TIM

The deer.

BILL

Where?

Tim points down the hill. Bill follows direction of his son's finger. Seeing nothing, he says -

BILL (CONT'D)

You sure?

TIM

It fell in the bushes.

Bill looks again. Though he doesn't see proof yet, a smile cracks through his stubble.

BILL

(chuckles)

You really shot it?

Tim nods. Bill wraps his son in a bear hug. The chuckle morphs into near hysterical laughter.

TIM

Ow, ow.

Bill steps back and pats his son more gently on the back.

BILL

Holy shit, Tim. First shot and you get a kill? That's un-fucking-believable!

Bill shakes his head in pleased disbelief.

BILL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry for anything I've ever said about those video games being a complete waste of time.

He bends to roll up the lean-to.

BILL (CONT'D)

Come on. Help me pack this up. Let's go get a good look at your handiwork.

Bill lifts his head to the sky and roars -

BILL (CONT'D)

Woohoo!

Tim shakes his head and allows himself a slight smile.

Packed up, they make their way down the hill - slipping a few times as thick pockets of leaves became ice skates on the steep incline. Birds chirp away again.

TIM

So, you're happy now? Does this make me the son you always wanted?

BILL

This is a moment to be proud of, Tim. Don't ruin it now.

TIM

At least you won't complain about video games anymore. That's something.

As they make it to the hill's base, Bill asks -

BILL

So was it definitely the same one? The 10 pointer?

TIM

Guess we'll find out soon enough.

Bill stops and looks at his son.

BILL

You did get a good look at it though, right?

Tim hesitates, then shrugs.

BILL (CONT'D)

What the hell does this -
(shrugs)
- mean?

Tim crosses his arms.

TIM

I don't know...just didn't see it too well.

BILL

Tim, I just told you that a hunter's first duty -

TIM

- is to make sure you have a clean shot. I know.

Bill leans into his son.

BILL

Did you see the deer or not?

Tim pauses before shrugging his shoulders again. Bill's eyes go wide. He breaks into a run. Tim furrows his brow, but runs after his father. His daypack sways violently across his back.

TIM

What are you running for? I told you it fell. It has to be dead by now.

Upon reaching the depression in the vegetation, Bill falls back several steps as though he slammed into a wall.

TIM (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

Tim slows, cautiously bringing his gaze to the ground. The shot was clean through the heart all right...but it was the heart of an old man.

Again Tim's eyes widen in horror. Dark blood stains fan out all over the old man's light green plaid shirt. The bright blue eyes of the old man's seemed a deep contrast to his wizened face and wisps of white hair.

Tim spins away from the body. His hands shoot to the top of his head.

TIM (CONT'D)

Oh fffuck. Oh fuck, fuck, fuck.

He turns to his stone-faced father. Tears fall stream down Tim's cheeks as he shakes his head -

TIM (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Dad. I'm so sorry. I thought it was the deer, I swear. Oh fuck!

BILL

We're leaving.

Bill strides away. Tim, confused, runs after his father, and pulls his shoulder. Bill's yanks from Tim's grasp.

TIM

Dad, we can't just leave him here. We have to tell someone.

BILL

We're not telling anyone. Let's go.

His father stomps away again. Tim doesn't move.

TIM

Dad!

Bill stops. Slowly he turns. His harsh whisper returns as he closes the gap on his son -

BILL

You were right, okay? We're *not* supposed to be in here. If we were allowed to hunt here, then it would just be a tragic accident. But it's not, so now we're looking at criminal charges. Do you understand that?

Tim shakes his head.

TIM

But, Dad -

Bill waves his hand at the body -

BILL

He's an old man, Tim. He's got to be at least 80. He already lived his life, so don't feel bad. You have your whole life ahead of you. I'm not letting you ruin your life because of some stupid mistake. A mistake that *I* allowed to happen!

The birds fall quiet again. Bill trudges away.

TIM

We can't just leave him!

BILL

(over his shoulder)
It's better if the animals erase the evidence. Now come on!

Tim watches his father in disbelief. He doesn't even turn to notice that his son isn't following.

Tim's daypack fall to the ground once more. He takes out his own shovel, unfolds it, and stabs the point into the ground ten feet from the old man.

He digs slow and deliberate at first, then increases to a furious pace. The tears fall from his eyes as quickly as the dirt leaves the hole.

Ten minutes later, about a foot down into the job, Tim startles as his father grabs his arm.

BILL (CONT'D)

Go sit.

The boy's face and hands are now caked with dirt.

TIM

I can't.

Bill sighs.

BILL

Move over, then.

He steps into the hole with his own shovel, and together they dig in silence.

EXT. WOODS - DAY - LATER

They cover the mound with leaves and branches. Tim stares at the grave.

TIM

We should know his name. We should have opened the wallet.

Bill shakes his head.

BILL

Knowing his name would make it even harder.

When his son doesn't show any sign of moving, Bill places his palm on Tim's back.

BILL (CONT'D)

We'll be okay, Son. I promise you.
We're in this together, and we'll be okay.

Exhausted, Tim allows his father to guide him away from the grave - neither holding the gun. Tim glances once more over his shoulder -

TIM

Rest in peace.

FADE OUT.