

Untitled Klondike Project

Pilot Episode

"The Claim"

*"Do not follow where the path may lead. Go, instead,
where there is no path and leave a trail."*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Paul T. Scheuring
5.30.12

ACT ONE

EXT. FROZEN WILDS - DAY

Camera looks skyward from under a frozen sheet of ice. Tracking. Finding above: boots, legs, finally the whole of a man. One BILL HASKELL, 20s. Bearded and freezing to death.

He's lying prone atop a frozen river in the wickedest of blizzards. Nothing but whiteness and death out there. His breaths come slow. Near death. Calmly, in v.o.:

BILL (V.O.)
You're looking at a rich man.

A long beat as his life starts to ebb before our eyes...

BILL (V.O.)
I wasn't that once.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MIDDLE CLASS HOUSE - NIGHT

--young BILL HASKELL, 10. Middle class house. Standing before a mirror in his bedroom, clad in Sunday's finest. He's looking uncomfortably at himself as he holds a tie before his throat. You get the impression the child's never even seen a tie before.

Chyron: "Windham County, Vermont, 1887."

Camera drifts over, reveals through the window, coming up the driveway, a HORSE & CARRIAGE. Something unsettling about that to young Bill...

INT. MIDDLE CLASS HOUSE / FOYER - CONTINUOUS

His father, BENJAMIN HASKELL, on the first floor, has an entirely different response. He straightens his own tie, eyes the coming buggy, calls anxiously to his WIFE:

BENJAMIN HASKELL
Look prim, Elizabeth. Is our boy ready? First impressions are everything. Everything dominoes from that first impression. I want him in a tie if he's not already--
(calling upstairs)
William!

ANGLE. WILLIAM. In his room. This all too much, too officious...

ANGLE. FATHER. Surveying the glimmering appointments of the buggy through the window:

BENJAMIN
Good God, look at that buggy. What do you think something like that costs?

ANGLE. BILL'S MOTHER--ELIZABETH--ascending the stairs,
calling out to Bill--

ELIZABETH HASKELL
William, Mr. Chandler's here--

Following her as she steps into Bill's room. It's empty.

ELIZABETH HASKELL (CONT'D)
William?

Her eyes falls across the window. It's open...

EXT. VERMONT COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

FIND Young Bill, running off through the darkness. Sans tie.

Running. Running. Til he finds a familiar haven. A towering oak over a river. He knows this tree well. Where the footholds are. He climbs deftly.

Finds respite in the boughs. Sits there. Catches his breath.

We are with him for a beat. This place: his hideout, refuge. And whatever was back there...was *not* what he wanted.

After a moment, he senses a presence. Someone else in the tree. A few boughs up. Silhouetted there: another boy. Young BYRON EPSTEIN, also 10.

They sit there in silence together. You get the sense they've done this a lot over the years. Finally:

YOUNG BILL
They're sending me to boarding school. I didn't think they were actually going to do it--

YOUNG EPSTEIN
What's at boarding school?

YOUNG BILL
They keep saying it's gonna get me manners.

YOUNG EPSTEIN
You got a shit-ton of manners.

YOUNG BILL
They say it's gonna get me prepared for preparatory school.

YOUNG EPSTEIN
Isn't that what prep school's for? To prepare you? For whatever it is you're supposed to be prepared for?

YOUNG BILL
College.

YOUNG EPSTEIN (INCREDULOUS)
You're 10.

YOUNG BILL (SURVEYS RIVER)
Doesn't matter. Everyone's doing it
earlier and earlier now. And my
dad, if there's one thing he hates,
it's being left behind.

YOUNG EPSTEIN
But it's not about him--

Bill gives him a knowing look.

YOUNG BILL
It's not about *me*.
(considers the night)
Feel like I'm in a box. Locked up
in my own life. Without a key.

YOUNG EPSTEIN
No way. Me and you...we're free.
Look at us. They can put you in
school for a bit, but that ends. Me
and you, the world can't hold us.
Anything we wanna do, anywhere we
wanna go...when we're older, we can
do it. Me and you.

YOUNG BILL
Not *anywhere*...

YOUNG EPSTEIN
Yes anywhere. Like there. We could
go there.

Said with a nod up at the full moon.

YOUNG BILL
No we couldn't.

YOUNG EPSTEIN
You just gotta think you can.
That's the point.

YOUNG BILL
Even if there's no chance we could
ever get there. The moon.

YOUNG EPSTEIN
Way I see it, if you aim for it,
and you don't get there...I bet you
still get somewhere interesting.
Somewhere you never woulda thought--

He's interrupted by the appearance of a lantern, bouncing
toward them in the darkness--

BENJAMIN HASKELL
William! Get down here!

Bill eyes Epstein in the moonlight.

YOUNG BILL (CRESTFALLEN)

Coming.

As he dutifully descends the tree--CUT TO--

EXT. VERMONT COUNTRYSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Bill's Father, hurriedly ushering him back toward the house.
Epstein follows at a small remove--

BENJAMIN HASKELL

I have saved every penny I have to
afford you this opportunity. You
will not embarrass your mother and
myself--

His eyes fall across MR. CHANDLER--the spitshined buggy
driver--in the yard.

BENJAMIN HASKELL (CONT'D)

Mr. Chandler! So sorry. A small
indiscretion. My profound apologies--

As he hastens forward to shake Chandler's hand, camera
lingers behind with Bill & Epstein...

This is it. Goodbye time for best friends.

YOUNG EPSTEIN

Me and you. We shoot for the moon.
Got it?

YOUNG BILL (DUBIOUS)

Even if we've got no chance of
getting there...

Epstein nods with a grin. Exactly the point.

YOUNG EPSTEIN

Even if we've got no chance of
getting there.

A final wan smile between them. Then they separate, cutting
off toward their respective houses. Linger on Young Bill--

BILL (V.O.)

*My whole life: planned out for me.
Fast-tracked to get me to the
Promised Land. My father told me
not to complain, because guys like
Byron Epstein...didn't have that
same sort of opportunity...*

And we see: Epstein's house--as he moves for it--slightly
better than a hovel.

INT. UNIVERSITY - DAY

Quick hits: tracking from other students reading math texts, business texts....to a COLLEGIATE BILL flipping through "travel lit", 1890's-style--Bret Harte's accounts of the California Gold Rush, W.L. Stevenson's south seas stories--

BILL (V.O.)
They prepared me, all right. For 10 years, I read every book under the sky.

EXT. BIG CITY - DAY

Quick hits: Epstein in the broad-shouldered industrial world of American cities in the 1890s...

BILL (V.O.)
And while I was reading...Bill was living. He saw the world. The unvarnished one that was not in books.

Epstein: exiting a Loan Shop with a turn-of-the-century version of a payday loan in hand--PROPRIETOR emerging behind him, watching him go with the eyes of a shark...

BILL (V.O.)
The one filled with bank failures, with families being tossed out of homes, 4 million men wandering the continent looking for work...

As Epstein stands in an impossibly long unemployment line:

BILL (V.O.)
This couldn't be it. There was no possibility in it. There had to be more. A place where there was nothing but possibility.

INT. BALLROOM - DAY

A banner fills frame: CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 1897! Camera booms from this down to a coat-and-tie affair. A bit stiff, if we may call a spade a spade. It's "May 1, 1897."

We find Bill here, newly graduated, being introduced to various movers-and-shakers by an enthusiastic COLLEAGUE.

COLLEAGUE
 Captains of industry everywhere you look. Guy over there's in the horseless carriage game. Guy over there: telephones. Supposedly he's figured out how to lower rates so the common man can afford it. And if the common man can afford it...sky's the limit. Those are the games we wanna be in.

While all of this is going on, we are with Bill: amicable, if uncomfortable. These people: the 1%. Not, at the end of the day, his people. Colleague, noticing:

COLLEAGUE (CONT'D)

I'm not detecting ambivalence am I?

Misinterpreting Bill's silence:

COLLEAGUE (CONT'D)

God, of all people, you shouldn't be nervous. Your dad's been pulling strings with all of these people. Candidly, I'm a bit jealous...

Bill's demeanor changes when he *does* spot one of his people. Arguing with the Concierge at the door.

A scruffy guy with a poor suit. Epstein.

BILL

Excuse me.

Before Colleague can respond, Bill excuses himself, pardons his way through the crowd to Epstein & the Concierge.

BILL (TO CONCIERGE, REASSURING)

(CONT'D)

It's okay. He's with me.

Concierge relents. Bill and Epstein step inside the party. Epstein's got a shit-eating grin. Bill, pleased as hell to see him:

BILL (CONT'D)

See you wore your finest.

(re Epstein's natty wool suit)

Are there actually *moths* in there?

EPSTEIN

This coming from a guy who looks like a constipated penguin.

They embrace with a sincere pat on the back.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)

Congratulations, brother.

They separate. Colleague has appeared.

BILL

Richard. Meet Byron Epstein.

Colleague nods affably, but you can tell the man's a bit confused about Epstein's low-brow presence here.

COLLEAGUE (TO BILL)

Come over. I want you to meet the telephone guys.

Bill meets eyes with Epstein. A knowing look there.

BILL
Actually, we've got a train to catch.

A waiter passes. Epstein procures two glasses of champagne. As he hands one to Bill:

COLLEAGUE
Where're you headed?

EPSTEIN
West.

COLLEAGUE
West? Why west?

BILL (WRY)
Because that's where every young man goes...

COLLEAGUE
Yeah, but what's out there?

BILL (SUBTLE GLEE)
I don't know.

EPSTEIN
And that, my friend...
(swallows champagne)
...is exactly the point.

As Bill and Epstein clink glasses--CUT TO--

EXT. URBAN TRAIN STATION - DAY

--the duo moving quickly through the bustling downtown station. Around them, the advanced urban sprawl of 1897 America. They reach the train just as it's set to depart. As they climb aboard, settle on the steps--

EPSTEIN
Can still back out. You did, after all, have more opportunity back in that room than most human beings will have in a lifetime.

BILL
Wouldn't be on my terms.

EPSTEIN
(invigorated)
All I know is you may be high-falutin school-boy, and all that, but soon as we hit on that train, and we're about 2000 miles that way, that diploma of yours won't be anything more than a piece of paper. Just be us, a couple of men on the land.

(MORE)

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)
And damn if it's not gonna be me
with the idea that makes us rich.

BILL
We wanna bet on this?

EPSTEIN
1000 bucks.

BILL
You don't got 1000 bucks.

Epstein unfurls a cocky grin.

EPSTEIN
Not yet I don't.
(puts a hand out)
1000 bucks. I'm the guy the comes
up with the idea that makes us
rich.

Bill's eyes, though, are on the COMMUTERS hurrying by in the station with their suits and valises. Brow-furrowed, stressed-out ants, all of them.

BILL
What if I say it's not about
getting rich for me?

EPSTEIN
Then I'd say you're full of shit.

The train chugs to life. Begins to leave the station. Epstein gazes into Bill challengingly.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)
We got a bet or don't we?

As Bill meets his gaze, shakes his hand with a knowing smile--

EXT. FROZEN WILDS - DAY

We are back in the frozen wild. Bearded Bill's near-frozen lips curl a half a percent in bemused, wizened reminiscence.

BILL (V.O.)
*1000 dollars. Seemed like a million
then. Like something that
actually...mattered.*
(beat)
*But even then, whether we knew it
or not, the bet wasn't about the
money. It was about the bet itself.*

Around him in the whiteness...shouts, euphoric, unbridled...

INT./EXT. TRAIN - DAY

Various shots of Bill & Epstein, young men emancipated upon the land:

· Hanging heads out the window, shouting exultantly out at the passing America landscape.

BILL (V.O.)
Epstein wanted to prove he was the dog with the runny nose, the poor man that society couldn't keep down. And to him, even though I was his best friend...I was society.

Camera drifts back to Bill in the window behind him--

BILL (V.O.)
Thing he didn't get was that was the last thing I wanted to be. All I wanted was to get away and find my own thing. Something that was real, bare-boned...

CUT TO--BILL & EPSTEIN--in the back of the dining car, tossing dice and drinks with negro porters and cooks.

BILL
A place to set up shop...and carve out my future with my own two hands.

INT. TRAIN - LATER

CASH--being tossed into a hat. Widen. Bill & Epstein--forming a "kitty" for their coming endeavor.

BILL
 That's all of it. 350. Every cent I got for graduation.

EPSTEIN (CONSIDERING CASH)
 (mild disappointment)
 Huh.

BILL
 Huh what?

EPSTEIN
 Thought it'd be more, that's all.

BILL
 Don't look a gift horse in the mouth, brother. I'm putting all that into the kitty.

It's then that Epstein unfurls his own wad of cash and tosses it into the kitty.

EPSTEIN
 Just...I got, what, 400 here. Thought it'd be me that'd be the one light on the contribution.

BILL (INCREDULOUS)
 What, you rob someone?

EPSTEIN

Funny. That there is legally acquired tender, brother. Which I prefer to call capital investment, if we're going to be business men about things.

BILL (COUNTING)

So we're looking at...750.

EPSTEIN

Ain't much of a nest-egg, but it's something.

BILL (NODS)

Who we kidding. It's nothing.

EPSTEIN

Makes the story all the more beautiful though, doesn't it? When we're millionaires...we can say we started with nothing.

Bill nods. Liking that.

BILL

Here's to nothing, brother.

Epstein smiles. Nods.

EPSTEIN

To nothing.

Off their smiles, CUT TO--

EXT. TRAIN - DUSK

--the DUO, sitting topside, the wind in their hair, looking out at an illimitable sunset over the Buffalo-swollen prairies of middle America.

BILL (V.O.)

In that moment, we were one of the most potent and foolish forces in the world. Two men shooting for the moon...even if they didn't have a chance in hell of getting there.

INT. BAR - DAY

"Colorado Springs, Colorado. May 7, 1897." Bill & Epstein idle over beers, the latter reading classified ads in a paper.

EPSTEIN

Thought the west was supposed to be about opportunity. Ain't seeing Jack for opportunity. It's all menial stuff.

BILL
 Don't mind menial. If that's where
 we gotta start and work our way
 up...

EPSTEIN
 Always amuses me how the rich man
 romanticizes the menial life.
 Thinks it's closer to the earth.
 Like it'll deliver him.

BILL
 I am *nowhere* near rich.

EPSTEIN
 All I'm saying is, I've *lived* the
 menial life, brother. Ain't nothin'
 romantic about it.

BILL (RE NEWSPAPER)
 How 'bout you stop sermonizing and
 start telling me what you're seeing
 in there.

EPSTEIN (READING)
 Let's see...they're looking for
 cowherds.

BILL
 Don't know about the first thing
 about animals.

EPSTEIN
 Railroad men.

BILL
 Coulda done it back home.

Epstein orders 2 more beers, returns to the classified.

EPSTEIN
 We could be soldiers, go to the
 Philippines...

BILL
 Got no interest in dying anytime
 soon.

EPSTEIN
 Not for a dollar a day.

The new beers come. Bill moves to pay for them.

BILL
 What do I owe you?

Bartender nods up the bar.

BARTENDER
 Our man down there's fronting
 drinks til closing time.

And it's here we meet a crucial figure in our story. A man the end of the bar: The One Who Kept Going. An impossibly weathered veteran of the gold fields. Call him BECKETT.

Bill & Epstein cross to him.

BILL
Wanted to thank you for your generosity.

BECKETT
It's only generous if it hurts. And buying drinks...ain't no pain in that for me ever again. Sorta beyond that phase, if you get me.

BILL
Thanks all the same.

BECKETT
Telling you, thanking a rich man for a nickel's like thanking the sky for air. Drink up. Take a coupla bottles with you.

Bill and Epstein meet eyes. The man's clothes bespeak a hard life. The only thing currently with him is a rusting coffee tin on the bar before him.

EPSTEIN
Mind us asking what sorta business you're in--?

In answer, Beckett produces a gold nugget, drops it on the counter before them.

This is a big moment. The first time we see gold in the series. And goddamn if it isn't beautiful.

The size of a man's thumb. Radiant with a deep luster native only in the purest of gold.

Bill's putting two and two together in his head. Ah...

BILL
Colorado. That's right. They been saying in the papers for a while now miners've been pulling all sorts of gold out of the ground...

BECKETT (KNOWING SMILE)
If it's in the newspaper, it's over.
(beat)
Colorado's panned out. Has been for a long time. Just like Black Hills and California before that.

EPSTEIN
Then where were you?

BECKETT

Just like anything else, if you really wanna be the trailblazer, you go as far as everyone else does...then you keep going.

BILL

And that gets you where exactly?

Beckett mulls, finally nods.

BECKETT

The Yukon.

(beat)

Placer fields have been locked beneath permafrost for thousands of years. Only now are people starting to realize what's down there.

He finishes his beer. Nods knowingly.

BECKETT (CONT'D)

But...you gotta get there before the newspaper does.

He hefts his coffee tin, moves to leave.

Epstein & Bill quickly realize the man's left that beautiful nugget on the counter.

EPSTEIN

Forgot something, boss.

Beckett looks back. Shakes his head with a subtle smile.

BECKETT

No. I didn't.

He lifts the lid off the coffee tin. Revealing within, crammed all the way to the top, more gold nuggets. Bigger and more beautiful than the first one. A knowing smile from him.

BECKETT (CONT'D)

Keep it.

Then he's gone.

EXT. COLORADO SPRINGS TRAIN STATION - DAY

Bill & Epstein sit on their satchels. Consider the nugget. Mulling the man's advice.

BILL

Just so you know, technically, if we were to go up there, and were we to strike it rich, it's wouldn't have been your idea. It was his. So don't think you're getting the thousand.

Epstein hefts the nugget Beckett gave them.

EPSTEIN

We land coffee cans full of
this...I'll give exactly half a
damn about a thousand bucks.

Off that nugget, glinting in the sunlight--DISSOLVE TO--

EXT. ALASKAN STRAIT - DAY

...foam dancing in the wake of a ship. Rise to find Epstein & Bill on dock. Looking out at yet another world: black cliffs with jagged peaks, coastline shrouded in fog. We are a long way from anything they've known.

This is "The Lynn Canal, Alaska, June 2, 1897".

As Bill considers the foreboding allure of the landscape, he turns his attentions to the curious assortment of other passengers. A diverse ship of fools and aspirants. A fat SOCIETY LADY in tailored garb. Drinking tea being served to her by a SERVANT.

A priest (later, FATHER JUDGE, 40s), with a rifle slung over his shoulder. Consorting with a young native HAN WOMAN in Western clothes. The woman, an early example of the local population being "civilized". Their relationship, seen in pantomime, is a head-scratcher. What exactly are the terms?

As Bill absorbs it all in contemplative silence...he notices a snaky little pickpocket (later, SOAPY SMITH, 30s), trying to get into the Fat Lady's purse while her back's turned.

Yet every time he's about to consummate the nab, she shifts just enough to almost notice him and he retreats. This happens 2 or 3 times, Soapy being silently and humourously frustrated...then...

STEWARD (O.C.)

DY-E-A!

Everyone turns their gaze to the shoreline ahead. What materializes from the mist is technically a 'town', but one about as far removed from civilization as you can get. Dyea.

EXT. DYEA STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Bill & Epstein disembark amongst the others, regard the foreboding end-of-the-world town.

Visible in the streets, a surprising amount of MINERS. Hastily rigging sleds, gearing up. Almost like one might expect to see before the start of a modern Iditarod.

Bill nears Father Judge, who's some ways ahead of them, investigating the commotion.

BILL

What's going on?

FATHER JUDGE

Evidently, the Pass has been locked
up for last 4 weeks with storms.

Said with a nod to the imposing mountain range behind town. The Chilkoot Pass climbs up through a narrow shoot. It's heavy with snow. Impossibly steep. Intimidating.

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)

This is apparently the first window they've had in the weather. So now everyone's heading out. Trying to get over before the next storm hits. Which, by the look of it...
(he considers his portable barometer...)
...won't be long.

EXT. DYEA STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Bill & Epstein, moving through the miners--

BILL

Obviously, we wait.

EPSTEIN

What do you mean? Obviously we go. Remember what our boy back in Colorado said. *Get there first.*

BILL

You don't get anywhere first if you die on the way.

Epstein nods to a nearby VENDOR, hawking provisions & gear.

EPSTEIN

What's it cost to kit up?

VENDOR

300'll get you a sled, provisions, shelter, clothes. Cover you for the next six months.

EPSTEIN (PROFFERS MONEY)

Sign us up--

Bill coolly guides Epstein aside--

BILL

No, no. Hold up. We've got to think about this. I'm serious.

EPSTEIN

So am I. You wanna wait here til it's summer, be my guest. But I'm buying that kit, even if I got to separate out my own money to do it.

BILL

Oh don't do that. We're doing this together. That was the agreement.

EPSTEIN

Then you better put on your climbing shoes. 'Cause I am going up that, today.

Said with a nod toward Chilkoot. Upon which a thin river of ascending miners can be seen.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)

Every miner up there stakes a plot ahead of us. First guy chooses the best claim, second guy the second best...all the way down the line til we get there. You really want the hundredth best claim? The thousandth?

(to Vendor)

I'll take the kit.

Bill simmers. Knowing he can't stop Epstein's impulsiveness--

BILL (TO VENDOR)

We'll take half the kit. For 150.

EPSTEIN

'Hell you talking about? Now's not the time to be *saving money*--

BILL

Full kit's gonna slow us down. And if you want to go up that...we're gonna have to hustle our ass. Less time we're on that mountain, better chance we have at actually living.

He shakes his head. More to himself than anyone else:

BILL (CONT'D)

Goddamn I don't believe this.

EXT. CHILKOOT PASS - LATER

XCU...the skids of a sled, as it's slowly dragged up a snowy slope. Very slowly dragged. Widen. Find Bill & Epstein straining to pull their heavy kits up the mountainside.

BILL

You're a son of a bitch, you know that.

EPSTEIN

If it weren't for me, You'd be sitting behind a desk somewhere, selling stocks. Getting old and cynical before you ever even lived.

BILL

And if it weren't for me, you'd be dragging that crap up the mountain.

Said with a nod ahead to the Society Lady and her Servant, the latter struggling mightily to coax the heavy fully-kitted sled up the mountainside.

BILL (CONT'D)
Sitting goddamn ducks for the storms.

EXT. CHILKOOT PASS - DAY

More strain. More struggle. Bill & Epstein have left a number of the more heavily-kitted groups behind. Ahead, they spot Judge and his female colleague. Putting up a tent in the shelter of a solid rocky crag.

BILL (RE TIME OF DAY)
Folding up early there, Father.

FATHER JUDGE
You put a month's worth of snow up on that ridge, sooner or later it's coming down. Heat's sinking into it by the hour. Best travel at night. When the snow's frozen back up. Less likely to come roaring down on you.

Bill & Epstein smile, continue onward.

EPSTEIN
See you on the other side, Father.

FATHER JUDGE
Assuming that's the ridge you're talking about.

A nod and a smile as Bill & Epstein move on.

EXT. CHILKOOT PASS - NIGHT

A string of lights is distributed sparsely up the mountainside. Hikers, climbing at night according to Judge's logic. Come in on one of those lights...the lantern clasped in Bill's hand. Epstein's gassed by the cold and altitude.

EPSTEIN
I'm shot.

BILL
Keep moving. Every hour we move is an hour sooner we're off this mountain.

As they move on, someone comes into view, appearing at the peripheries of their lamplight. A HALF-MAD MINER, blackfaced and ghastly in the night. His tattered kit beside him. Rubbing something again and again over that blackened face.

BILL (CONT'D)
You all right there?

Miner looks up. Sees the looks of consternation.

HALF-MAD MINER (RE HIS FACE)
Charcoal. And I'd do it too if I
were you. 'Less you wanna lose your
lips and nose to the cold.

EPSTEIN
Get the sense you been out here for
a while, boss--

HALF-MAD MINER
Shh...
(beat)
Hear that?

EPSTEIN
Hear what?

HALF-MAD MINER (REVERENCE)
The sound of life.
(beat)
The sound of nothing. And that's
exactly what you wanna hear on
Chilkoot. Nothing. Soon as you hear
a rumble up there in the darkness,
you got about 10 seconds til you're
dead. You gotta listen. Otherwise
the mountain'll eat you in the
night.

BILL
Sure you're all right?

HALF-MAD MINER
Sooner you shut up and start
listening I will be.

He glares at them. Bill nods. He & Epstein move on.

EXT. CHILKOOT PASS - DAY

"June 13, 1897. Chilkoot Pass."

Beneath a cluster of rocks, Bill & Epstein's tent. The latter
inside, stirring uncomfortably in his sleeping bag.

EPSTEIN
Goddamn half-kit. Coulda had real
blankets. Instead, I'm an ice cube
in an old wet sock. I'm serious,
Haskell. This is a deal-breaker for
me.

Bill's outside. Eyeing the train of ascending miners below.

BILL
You're the guy that wanted to get
there first. I'd say on that
front...we're doing a pretty good
job.

He turns his gaze then from the miners to the sky. To the sun
burning brightly there.

Lastly, he turns to look up at the cornice high on the ridge above. It looms there, wind-swept, way-too-steep and high. Off it, glistening in the heat...

EXT. CHILKOOT PASS - NIGHT

"June 20, 1897. Chilkoot Pass."

The slope: now a near-impossible 45 degrees. Bill & Epstein: persevering, their faces frozen constellations of beard, charcoal, and snow.

Below, the ever-present string of lights in the night, connoting the other miners as they climb.

Bill's eyes are on the sloping darkness above. *His ears, per earlier wisdom, are trained on the silence.* It's different out here in the wilderness. Illimitable. Behind him:

EPSTEIN

10 days we been on this hill.

(beat; off Bill's look)

And you thought I couldn't count.

BILL (DISTRACTED)

Nope. Yesterday you told me it was 9. Day before that, 8. You're a counter.

EPSTEIN

Feel like that Greek king--the one pushin the boulder up the hill for eternity--what's his name--
Slyphilis...

BILL

Sisyphus.

(eyeing mountain above)

Difference is we chose to be here.
For him it was punishment--

EPSTEIN

Sure as shit feels like punishment
about now, Haskell--

BILL (LISTENING TO DARKNESS)

Shh....

Epstein pauses. Sees Bill listening...

BILL (EAR UPSLOPE) (CONT'D)

Hear it?

EPSTEIN

Hear what--

And then it comes. The rumble.

Half-beat. No doubt about. Something above. Roaring down toward them unseen in the darkness. Something massive.

Epstein turns to run downslope. Bill, though, spots, 15 feet above, a rock outcropping--

BILL
Not down. Not down!

EPSTEIN
What?!

*
*

BILL
UP! UP!

RUMMMMBLLLLLEEEE!

EPSTEIN
You outta your head--

Bill yanks Epstein upward. They scramble up toward the rock outcrop--

--JUST AS THE AVALANCHE HITS. A HUGE WAVE OF SNOW ROARS PAST--
CRESTING OVER THE ROCK OUTCROPPING--

It just gets a hold of Epstein's shoulder, spins him away--

BILL
EP!

But for a moment, all he can do is press himself against the outcropping--

--then it's past.

Bill leaps into action. Pushes downhill through the swirling mist, his light refracting eerily in the snowy haze.

Epstein's visible--his legs are, anyhow. Half-buried.

Bill descends on him. Feverishly begins digging...

BILL (CONT'D)
Ep...Come on, Ep....!

And out comes Epstein, gasping, shocked.

EPSTEIN
Jesus Christ...Jesus Christ!

As he catches his breath, the mist settling, Bill holds up his lantern, looks downslope. Epstein follows his gaze.

Below, where seconds before there had been a trail of lights connoting the miners...there is only darkness.

No lights. Not a single one.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. CHILKOOT PASS - DAWN

Death.

The rising sun illuminates the aftermath of the avalanche: bodies--already in rictus--being pulled from the snow by those lucky enough to survive. Townspeople, working their way up to the torn, pockmarked slope.

And Bill & Epstein--assisting--seeing familiar faces being pulled from snowy tombs--the Fat Society dame, her Servant...

Epstein can barely speak. Aside, to Bill:

EPSTEIN
 If we'd still been down here...
 (...we'd be dead, but...)
 You and your goddamn half-kit,
 brother.

He looks to Bill. That small choice likely saved their lives.

EPSTEIN (HEARTFELT) (CONT'D)
 Thank you.

EXT. CHILKOOT PASS - LATER

Bill & Epstein move through the carnage--bodies being loaded onto sleds once designed to carry these people and their dreams to the promised land--now conscripted to carry them downslope to their grave.

Bill watches as Father Judge says prayers over the half dozen or so fallen. Epstein, sensing the thoughts behind Bill's ashen demeanor:

EPSTEIN
 You're not thinking about quitting,
 are you?

Bill doesn't respond.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)
 It ain't gonna bring them back.
 It's not.

Epstein turns, looks up at the ridge. They're that close. Bill looks to him, then back down at the dead...

EXT. CHILKOOT PASS - LATER

The slope, a near-impossible 45 degrees. Bill & Epstein strain against gravity as they pull their sleds ever higher.

Behind Bill's goggles: eyes hollow, haunted, on auto-pilot.

He presses on, ever harder--the ridge just above--the mud and rocks calving beneath his feet.

Below, Epstein senses Bill's dogged drive:

EPSTEIN
Go easy, brother. Maybe you oughta
slow it down...

But Bill presses on--

EXT. CHILKOOT RIDGE - DAY

--and moments later crests the ridge. As does Epstein beside him a moment later. Both men pulling away their goggles from their blackened faces. Tears come to Bill's eyes. A near-broken man. But unbowed.

Both men look ahead, o.s., with astonishment...

EXT. CHILKOOT RIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Camera rises behind them, revealing on the other side, a chasm in the clouds, allowing the sun's full radiance to fall on the basin on the other side.

Everything is visible: the splendor of far-off snow-capped mountain ranges. The fluid magnificence of the caribou herds. A string of frozen lakes like diamonds on the land.

It is nature unfettered. So sublime it seems incapable of the raw fury it unleashed just pages earlier.

For a long time, they just behold it.

EXT. CHILKOOT RIDGE - LATER

Epstein, peering down the far side of the ridge. A long, steep pure slope of snow slants away toward the valley floor below. 100 years later, this is a snowboarder's dream. A long, untrammelled ride...

EPSTEIN
Takes us almost 2 weeks to get
up...what do you reckon it'll take
to get down?

BILL
If we walk it, few days...

EPSTEIN (NODS TO HIS SLED)
And if we sled it?

Bill considers his sled, then the steep slope.

BILL
10 minutes. If we don't break our
necks.

EPSTEIN
Maybe we walk it then.

Bill eyes the black-diamond slope again.

BILL (WEARY)
 Goddamn am I tired of walking.

EPSTEIN
 Hoping you would say that.

They share a look. Ease their sleds toward the cornice.

And for the first time in 3 weeks, let gravity claim them.

Two sleds & two men drop down onto the slope. And in moments are roaring valley-ward...

It's a short-cut. A thrill-seeker's move. Simultaneously an adrenaline rush and horrifying...

Down they go, white-knuckled, runnels of tears streaming from their wind blown eyes--

EXT. FROZEN LAKE / MAKESHIFT COMMUNITY - MOMENTS LATER

CRASH! A few beats later, Bill's sled finally careens, catches an edge, and flips, spilling him onto the snow in a tumble.

He's at the bottom, though. Flat land. For a moment, he just sits there, a smile threatening to cross his lips for the first time in days. The mountain, in that moment, beneficent...

Then a pair of boots appears beside him in the snow. Shiny, well-polished Balmorals. Delicate. A woman's.

He looks up to see something so wholly anomalous upon this landscape that he can scarcely process.

A woman. SABINE, 20s. Good-looking, too.

SABINE
 I trust you had a good ride.

Bill stands. Fresh off 3 weeks of blizzard, fatigue, and near-delirium, he's wholly unprepared for witty rapport.

BILL
 I, uh, I did.

Bill quickly takes in the surroundings, a couple other prospectors are visible, bivouacked for the day.

Bill fumbles a bit, both with his tongue and the glove he tries to remove to shake her hand:

BILL (CONT'D)
 Bill, uh...Bill...

You get the sense that Sabine's accustomed to this. Men fumbling before her beauty. Playfully:

SABINE
 Nice to meet you Billa Bill.

He finally gets his glove off. Shakes her hand. There's a great asymmetry here--she in her fineries, he looking like he's just returned from polar exploration--

BILL
It's Haskell, actually. Bill
Haskell.

SABINE
Sabine.

There's a half beat in which they meet eyes with enough mutual appreciation that we think this might be the start of something--down the road, perhaps--then--

EPSTEIN (O.S.)
Lady, you are either a dream or a
mirage.

Reveal Epstein, a weather-beaten abomination like Bill, tramping across the snow toward them. He thrusts a mitt toward her.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)
But either way, I'm going with it.
Byron Epstein.

As she clasps his hand, nodding politely--CUT TO--

EXT. FROZEN LAKE / MAKESHIFT COMMUNITY - LATER

Along the river, a makeshift camp: two dozen people, toiling to build boats--essentially from scratch--along the shoreline...

Bill & Epstein follow Sabine through it all.

SABINE
Heard about the avalanche.
(it's a shame)
Third one this year.
(knowing exhale)
Can only reckon you two're bound
for Dawson City like the rest of
us. "Paris of the North".

BILL (SURPRISED)
Wouldn't expect a Paris anywhere up
here.

SABINE
There's a lot of things up here you
wouldn't expect.

Said as they pass the first of the many self-styled entrepreneurs they will encounter going forward--a weathered vet--call him BOATSELLER--

BOATSELLER
Got a vessel: tarred, sealed;
proven workhorse that's already
made the journey up and back.
(MORE)

BOATSELLER (CONT'D)
Put a hundred in my hand and I'll
give you the oars.

As they pass, to Sabine--

BILL
100 bucks. Boat's worth 5 tops!

SABINE
Not if it gets you upriver first
and you get your hands on that
million dollar claim.

Bill's intentions are of course elsewhere--

BILL
If you don't mind me saying, miss--
I wouldn't've expected to find
someone so...*cultivated*--this far
north.

SABINE (PLEASED)
Cultivated. That's got more
syllables and sentiment than
anything I've heard in months.
Thank you.
(wry smile)
But...I'm as derelict as the rest
of you, trust me. Come this
ridiculous long way to make a whole
bunch of money in a very short
while.

She nods to a compatriot across the way.

SABINE (CONT'D)
Nice meeting you Billa Bill. Byron.

She smiles warmly at them, heads off. Bill watches her go.
Epstein looks over at Bill. Sees the fixity of gaze he's
following Sabine with.

EPSTEIN
Oh don't go gettin' *that* look.

He moves off. Leaving Bill there, cool as a cucumber, but
smitten nevertheless...

EXT. FROZEN LAKE / MAKESHIFT COMMUNITY - LATER

Bill & Epstein, moving through the workers, surveying the
fairly impressive progress they've made on the boats--given
that the wood's not milled and their tools are limited.

EPSTEIN
How in the hell we gonna build a
boat?

BILL
Just like everything else, I
reckon. You start...and you don't
stop til you're done.

They're interrupted by a familiar face. Soapy Smith.

SOAPY SMITH
Gentlemen. S. Rochester Smith.
Enchanted to make your
acquaintance.

Bill & Epstein meet eyes.

SOAPY SMITH (CONT'D)
I am not a mincer of words, and as
such, will get to the point. I can
safely assume that you two men are
bound for the Paris of the North.

A nod from Bill.

SOAPY SMITH (CONT'D)
Well then, I'm here to tell you
that, land-wise, it is feedin'
frenzy up there. Fortunately, I am
a representative of the only
certified real estate company up
there at present. I have on offer
gen-yine deeds to prime real
estate, as well as claims to
millionaire-making mining concerns
on the creeks in the Yukon.

Soapy: diminutive, dumb as a log, though convinced he's a mover like none other. He presses DEEDS into Bill & Epstein's hands. Bill & Epstein consider them. Written there, in big letters, "Lawson City..." It's such an oversight, it's almost laughable.

BILL
Think you might mean 'Dawson City'
here, boss.

Soapy gives the deeds a gander, quickly comes to realize he's made a rather big mistake here.

SOAPY SMITH
Well, Alackaday. That is a grade-A
head-scratcher, ain't it?

Epstein crowds him.

EPSTEIN
And brother, you are grade-A lucky
there ain't a woodshed around here.
'Cause if there were, my partner
and I'd be obliged to take you
'round back and give you a princely
ass-whooping.

Soapy, in life preservation mode, makes a realist plea--

SOAPY SMITH
It's nothing personal--

EPSTEIN

And how is that--

SOAPY SMITH

I don't you know either of ya's from Adam. And if that's the case...think about it. How could it be personal?

Bill & Epstein meet eyes again--is this guy *kidding*--?

SOAPY SMITH (CONT'D)

It's just how it goes up here, you understand? It's the Game you're in now.

EPSTEIN

Ain't seeing nothing about this that's a game.

SOAPY SMITH

Then boy, you don't know people. Up here, the mask is off. You're either gittin', or you're gittin' got.

Epstein slowly lets go of him.

EPSTEIN

Try to rip us off again, and I'll build that woodshed myself, got me?

A big, dumbass Labrador smile from Soapy--

SOAPY SMITH

No, we're boys now. We're boys. We understand each other. Right?

He pats both men on the shoulder, quietly tucks the deeds under his arm, retreats.

Bill looks to Epstein. Both men quietly shake their heads. Soapy's dirty as they come. But strangely, in his stupidity, without malice.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE / MAKESHIFT COMMUNITY - LATER

ON FATHER JUDGE & THE 'SQUAW'--arriving at the encampment. Bill, seeing this. Curious couple, these two. As he sorts, re-packs his gear--

SABINE (O.S.)

Guess that's it for me.

Bill turns to see Sabine standing there. She nods to her compatriots, loading their newly constructed boat.

SABINE (CONT'D)

They're telling me she's seaworthy.

(smiles)

Maybe we'll see each other.

(MORE)

SABINE (CONT'D)
 Supposedly, up there, for such a
 big place, it's a small world.

BILL
 Hope so.

They share a smile, She turns to cross to her boat. As Bill
 watches her go, he takes notice of something else, a few
 yards downriver from her boat. Epstein, haggling with the
 earlier Boatseller.

ON BILL--crossing to Epstein--hearing--

BOATSELLER
 Hundred's the price.

EPSTEIN
 You think I'm going north of
 eighty, you are one shithouse loon--
Eighty...

As Bill moves to intercede--

BOATSELLER (TO EPSTEIN)
 Put eighty US in my hand right now
 and we're dutch.

Epstein quickly does so before Bill can arrive.

EPSTEIN
 Gimme the oars.

BILL
 Wait--

But the Boatseller takes the cash, presses the oars into
 Epstein's hands before Bill can do anything. As he turns to
 other business, Epstein turns to Bill, sees the look of
 anguish on his face.

EPSTEIN
 What's that look for? We got a
 boat. We're in the game--

BILL
 You gotta stop pissing our money
 away--we make these decisions
 together, always--

EPSTEIN
 Yeah, no shit--

BILL
 We're gonna be living here
indefinitely, and we're down
 already, what, half our money?

EPSTEIN
 Ah, once our stake's up and rolling--
 -we'll be fine--

BILL
*We are in the middle of the Yukon,
 brother. We run outta money we are
 dead.*

Epstein gives him a look. Yeah, no shit. Like I don't know that? Bill puts out his hand.

BILL (CONT'D)
 I want it. The money. I'm treasurer now.

EPSTEIN
 Says who?

BILL
 Says logic. Of the two of us, who's just a tad less likely to run off and spend it than the other?

Epstein rolls his eyes. Fine. Whatever. Hands him the cash.

BILL (CONT'D)
 Is that all of it?

Epstein nods. Yes! Bill folds it up, puts it away.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE / MAKESHIFT COMMUNITY - LATER

As Bill & Epstein slide their new purchase into the shallows of the river--

EPSTEIN
 And don't act like you're secretly not happy. Imagine us sitting here for a month trying to figure out how to carve a boat out of that goddamn forest. Then getting upriver and finding out the claims are all full. You know what you would've said to me then?

BILL (GOOD-NATUREDLY)
 "We shoulda bought the boat."

EPSTEIN
 You're goddamn right.

The men smile, of one mind again. As they lay the boat into the shallows--CUT TO--

EXT. RIVER - DAY

"Yukon River, June 27, 1897."

MONTAGE: the men, navigating downriver. Around them, the majesty of the Yukon Territory in summer. An illimitable riot of jagged topography and color. Sky, land, and water teem with life.

As the boat glides along, camera looks down at it, finds it ensconced in a sea of salmon, massive like they were 100 years ago, spawning tentousandfold from bank-to-bank.

Bill's absorbing it all like a silent, awed pilgrim.

He pauses then. Up in the trees, people. The Tlingit. Watching them as they move down river. A couple of the tribesmen, faces partially painted, shadow them through the trees 40 feet away on the shoreline. Their faces impassive, ancient.

BILL

Ep.

Epstein looks up. Sees what Bill sees. In the tribesmen's hands...weapons.

EPSTEIN

Sonofabitch. Why didn't I buy a rifle?

BILL

Just wave.
(doing so)
Make nice.

Both men wave. Smile. But the Tlingit, reaching a crop of boulders that impede their movement, stop, just stand there, watching with their dark, impassive expressions.

Then the raft's around the bend and they're gone from view.

But the feeling they've left in the pit of the men's stomach remains.

For a long time, Bill & Epstein say nothing.

EXT. RIVER / RAPIDS - DAY

Class 4 rapids fill frame. A nasty, deadly white water roller coaster. Camera rises to find, upstream: Bill & Epstein's boat approaching. "July 1, 1897."

ON BILL--spotting the rapids ahead. Coming on fast. Over the roar of rushing water:

BILL

We gotta portage!
(beat)
Portage! Get to the side--!

They scramble like hell, rowing madly, trying to get out of the current--

--but they're too late.

The churn claims them. They fight to keep the boat balanced--

--but there's a stomach-turning drop--the boat clips a rock, spins, lurching from the water at 45 degrees--

--dumping Bill into the icy water.

ON BILL--struggling against the churn beneath the surface-- it's like being inside of a washing machine on 'spin'--

ON EPSTEIN--the boat miraculously slamming back down, rightside up, with him still aboard. He tries to arrest its progress as it races out of the chute, at the same time trying to spy Bill in the frothy water--

He accomplishes neither. Before he knows it he's 100 yards downriver, hopeless in the intense flow, yelling back:

EPSTEIN

Bill! BILL!

His POV--that wicked churn, diminishing upriver by the second--the water's surface there belying no sign of his friend...

CUT TO:

--BILL, gasping, pushing through the surface, slamming into rocks, reaching for anything, any purchase--

--his fingers barely seize hold of a heavy boulder. He pulls himself into the shallows. Look downriver in vain for Epstein. Nothing visible--

BILL

Ep! EP!

Nothing. Just him, the river, and the stream of blood that runs from a gash over his eye.

He spots something then, eddying briefly before him before cascading away downstream. One of the \$10 bills he'd pocketed earlier. A couple more are visible quickly coursing away. Bill quickly turns out his pockets. Empty.

Their money's gone. All of it. Lost to the river.

He takes stock then, considers the foreboding wilderness around him. He may have far more immediate concerns...

EXT. RIVER BANK - LATER

ON BILL--shaken, trying to negotiate his way downriver along the banks. But the shoreline's an impassible tangle of rocks and foliage. No choice but to go inland and around...

As he pushes through the dense greenery, rain starts to fall. This is the first time we've seen Bill alone on the land, without human company or equipment. It's a sobering thing.

He thinks Tlingit thoughts. Discomfiting. He presses on, the rain blending with the blood coursing from his head wound...

CUT TO:

...Bill, pressing ever onward. Exhausted. Shivering in the falling rain. The sound of the river has diminished here. He tries to push back toward it, but it's difficult.

He stops. Listens for the river. The falling rain's not helping on this account. Everything is hissing whispers and susurrations. An auditory maze.

And night is starting to fall.

CUT TO:

Bill, moving ever onward. Listening...

Sounds distinguish themselves from the falling rain.

It's not the river, though. It's something else. At first he thinks it's the Tlingit...but soon realizes it's something *bestial*.

Bill stops. Sees, barely--through the darkness and downpour and foliage--the rain-slickened form of a GRIZZLY, sniffing the air...

An icy wall of fear slams into Bill. He tries to move away.

The Grizzly looks up, aware...olfactory nerves locking in...

ON BILL--the forest labyrinthine around him in the darkness. He's reduced to feeling his way through. He can't see the bear anymore. Is instead reduced to listening to the darkness behind him...

THE GRIZZLY--though it's not yet lain eyes on Bill--seems to know unfailingly where he's going. Sniffing the air. Smelling...the blood?

And it goes on this way, a game of blind man's bluff...neither using sight...but the bear grows ever nearer...

Bill can hear him now. The snorts. The heavy footfalls. Those claws on the rain-slickened rocks...

Bill breaks out into a flat, panicked run...pushing everything out of his way--

--the bear hears this of course--

--and a few beats later, Bill wends through the forest, and sloshes down into a summer-thawed marsh. *Swamp's* a more apt description. All mud and standing water.

The mud locks up around him. He struggles. Can move no more than a few inches at a time--

He turns. Behind him, the Grizzly comes into view. For the first time laying a direct sightline on Bill.

It's not the roar that you'd expect that comes out of the Grizzly's mouth, but instead a gnashing of teeth. Hungry. Feral. Razor sharp.

Bill struggles. The Grizzly comes down into the marshwater. Begins trudging powerfully and inexorably toward Bill.

Bill yells at him. A primal bit of nonsense that does nothing but unsettle himself all the more.

The bear, 10 feet away...8 feet away...

Bill yells again. Tries to get 'big'. Which only incenses the bear. 6 feet. 5 feet...

A shot rings out in the night, filling the surrounding terrain like thunder. The bear roars, hit.

Bill spins. Sees a darkened shooter in the trees. Another muzzle flash--

--another bullet slams into the bear.

But the bear keeps coming for Bill. Bill tries to back up. Good God, what does it take to stop one of these things?!

A third shot strikes home. The bear keeps coming. Scant feet from Bill now, a blood thing delirious with pain and fury.

Then a fourth shot rings out, and the bear goes down for good. Splashing in the mud right before Bill.

Bill looks up, shocked...

The shooter circles around the edge of the marsh. Holding a hooded lantern up. In the radiance, we see Father Judge, rifle in hand.

Judge extends Bill a branch. Bill reaches it...pulls himself up out of the swamp.

Off Bill--collapsing with muddy, shocked gratitude at the priest's feet--

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Judge guides the shaken, bloody Bill back through the trees.

FATHER JUDGE
 Heard a boat'd gone over.
 (beat)
 Lucky I was able to get through to
 you.

Bill: still collecting himself.

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)
 What's the matter, boy? That bear
 take your tongue?

BILL
 Just...don't know if I'm more
 shocked to be *alive*...or seeing a
 man of the cloth with a *gun*...

We get our best look at Judge yet. The priest: definitely no
 mountain man. Patrician, wire-rim glasses, a slight build.

FATHER JUDGE
 I of course don't agree with Darwin
 on much...but up here, there's a
 certain credence to his idea of
 survival of the fittest.
 End of the day, you can't negotiate
 with nature. You either best it, or
 it bests you.

Hefting his rifle ever so slightly:

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)
 However that may be.

EXT. RIVER BANK - LATER

ON JUDGE & BILL--reaching the shoreline an hour later. Sun's
 coming up. Judge's boat is visible, with the Han woman
 waiting stoically. Downriver, across the flow, there's an
 elated whoop:

EPSTEIN
 Son of a bitch!

Visible on the opposite bank: Epstein & their boat. Epstein
 looks like he's going to piss himself with happiness at the
 sight of Bill.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)
 Son of a *bitch*, you made it!
 (re language in Judge's
 presence)
 Sorry, father!
 (to Bill)
 How are you, you old halfass?!
 (MORE)

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)
 (to Judge)
 Sorry again, father!

Bill gives Epstein a wave. I'm good. I'm good. You just work on shutting up. To Judge:

BILL
 I don't know how to repay you...

FATHER JUDGE
 Just pay me a visit at my chapel
 sometime when you're in Dawson.

BILL (IMPRESSED)
 You got a chapel in Dawson?

FATHER JUDGE
 Not yet. But I'm fixing to.
 (knowing smile)
 Man's gotta have a dream, doesn't
 he? Otherwise...what in God's
 name'd any of us being doing up
 here just a chip shot away from
 Hell?

Off their shared smile--CUT TO--

EXT. RIVER BANK / RAFT - MOMENTS LATER

Bill boards the raft. Epstein embraces him.

EPSTEIN
 Thought I lost you.

A nice moment for Bill. But he's troubled.

BILL
 Got an admission to make. Maybe I
 shouldn't've been treasurer.

EPSTEIN (SURVEYS HIM)
 You didn't.

BILL (NODS)
 I did. Lost it all when I was in
 the river.
 (shakes his head)
 I don't know if we've got to sell
 the boat and head back...but
 without cash, we can't get gear,
 can't get a stake...I'm sorry,
 brother...I was just being, I don't
 know, righteous, thinking you were
 the untrustworthy one.

EPSTEIN
 Well...you were right about that.

He sits back. Smiles. Digs into his sock.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)

And God Bless me for it. God Bless
both of us.

From his sock, he withdraws a small "reserve" wad of bills.

BILL

You sneaky son of a bitch--

EPSTEIN

Only a fool gives all his money
away.

(looks up into rain)

Never know when a rainy day's
coming.

Bill embraces him again, both chagrined and relieved.

BILL

You sneaky son of a bitch.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

--rain. Relentless. The landscape is brutally beautiful around the boat. Bill shivers. His clothes, unable to dry in the unrelenting downpour, are clammy and wet. Epstein's erected a makeshift shelter with his oilcloth parka, has built a small fire in a coffee tin, but Bill's failing. Shivering, fetal.

"Yukon River, July 7, 1897."

Bill's spirits: shot. Epstein: trying to buoy him.

BILL

Be a shame...to come all this way
just to die.

Epstein shakes his head confidently.

EPSTEIN

You ain't dying.
(beat)
Know why?

BILL

Why?

EPSTEIN

You're too damn responsible.

BILL

How's that figure into things?

EPSTEIN

See, if you die, then it's just me
out here on this river. Million
miles from home. No clue how to
mine for gold, no clue how to get
back once the cash runs out.

(shakes head)

(MORE)

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)
 Bill Haskell I know...wouldn't
 screw a man like that.

Bill smiles at the sentiment.

BILL
 Hang around long enough, I just
 might.

EPSTEIN
 Nah. You're not gonna die. All you
 need is a nice, warm bath.

BILL
 Now you're just being an asshole.

Epstein's eyes are on the river ahead. Philosophically:

EPSTEIN
 I acknowledge I'm not exactly the
 reading type, but if I'm not
 mistaken...that does say "Bath"
 doesn't it?

Bill weakly looks up. Incredulity washes over his face.

Reveal ahead, massive letters painted on the side of a
 building. **HOT BATHS - 5\$.**

Around it, a visage so welcoming it verges on impossible...

A CITY. With wharves. A mainstreet. Saloons. Brothels.
 Electric light in places.

It's a chunk of civilization carved impossibly out of the
 foreboding landscape.

It's Dawson City. Paris of the North.

Off the music and laughter, the people in clean clothes
 moving back and forth on the sidewalks--and Bill & Epstein's
 faces, regarding it all in dumbfounded amazement--

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - DAY

BILL & EPSTEIN--coming up from muddy wharves into the main artery of Dawson City. Everywhere is signage, every thing and service imaginable for sale. Around them, a babel of languages: Russian, German, French.

They pass a REALTOR touting a lot in the middle of the block.

REALTOR

This is prime real estate, my fellow pilgrims! Location, location, location. You open your concern here, you will have no more 'concerns'! More foot traffic here than anywhere in the entirety of the Yukon Territory.

HECKLER

Not 6 months ago that chunk of mud couldn't even sell for 5 bucks!

HECKLER #2

And not only that, it's next to a whorehouse!

Which, Bill & Epstein see, is true. A brothel, right there.

REALTOR (UNFAZED)

Finest views in all of the northwest territories, gentlemen!

There's raucous laughter all around.

Bill & Epstein pass by, absorbing the aforementioned views: COURTESANS, advertising their wares from balconies and windows of the brothel.

Like that first glimpse we got of the gold earlier in Colorado, there is something so beguiling about these women--seen as they are through the eyes of men that have long been in the field--they are in a word, like that gold, sumptuous.

Off Bill & Epstein, as mesmerized by the women as they are by the high-strung energy and possibility of the town--CUT TO--

--a POV of them--from a window across the street...

INT. BUILDING - DAY

Reveal BELINDA MULRONEY, 30. Stolid. Prepossessing. Watching their arrival with silent consideration. With eyes that overlook nothing--or anyone--that comes to Dawson...

INT. DAWSON CITY HOTEL - DAY

Epstein & Bill enter. Approach the CLERK.

EPSTEIN (GOOD MOOD)
Room and a bath.

An uncomfortable beat as the CLERK surveys Epstein.

CLERK
No Jewboys.

EPSTEIN
What?

CLERK
You want a room, go tent up with
the niggers outside of town.

Epstein & Bill look at him incredulously. He's a big nasty bastard. A hardened Yukon vet. He turns away from them to other business, as if they don't exist.

CLERK (CONT'D)
Go on now. Get out of here.

Epstein, incensed, produces a fistful of cash. Insistent:

EPSTEIN
My friend wants a bath.
(beat)
He's a god-fearing
Catholic...pretty sure he won't
sully your water.

Bill gives him a look--don't be a spendthrift--

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)
Not a word, squeaky pockets.

The clerk begrudgingly takes the cash. Epstein grits his teeth, looks to Bill.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)
I'll be in the saloon.

He exits. Bill looks back to the Clerk. No love lost there. His eyes say: Jew-lover. But his hand begrudgingly slips Bill a set of keys.

INT. DAWSON CITY HOTEL ROOM - LATER

ON BILL--standing unmoving in his room. Simultaneously miffed by the Clerk and in a state of disbelief over the amenities he stands amidst.

A TLINGIT WOMAN, slave-like, finishes filling the bath with buckets of heated water. Departs.

Bill slowly unpeels the wet clothes he's worn for 6 straight days. Slips into the water. To say it's exquisite is an understatement. It's tremulous, skin-prickling as his flesh hits the water...

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - DAY

Epstein moves through the streets. Still fuming. He considers his wallet. In his anger, he's probably plopped down a little more money than he should have. His wallet's looking very light...

Across the street: a loan shop. Off Epstein--CUT TO--

INT. LOAN SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Epstein enters.

EPSTEIN
What's it take for a loan?

The PROPRIETOR eyes him. Coolly, simply:

PROPRIETOR
Collateral.

Off Epstein--CUT TO--

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

--Bill, emerging out in the streets, cleaned up, rejuvenated.

EPSTEIN (O.S.)
Hey. Hey!

He turns to see Epstein motioning him excitedly from the saloon. *Get your ass in here!*

INT. SALOON - MOMENTS LATER

A veritable zoo in here. Gambling. Drinking. Whores. Burlesque show. Epstein pulls Bill through the crowd.

EPSTEIN
I have never been to Paris, but
this has gotta out-Paris Paris...

BILL
Hey, about that guy back there--

EPSTEIN
What? You think I'm gonna let some
anti-Semite piss on *this* parade--?

He stops, finding the guy he was looking for--an excitable, impressionable 19-year-old--JACK LONDON--

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)
Hey Bill, I want you to meet my new
buddy--
(forgetting)
W...what was your name again?

JACK LONDON
Jack London.

Bill & Epstein share a look. Kid's apparently dead serious about 'branding' himself.

EPSTEIN

By the looks of you, I wouldn't peg you as the formal type. How 'bout tossing in your middle name while you're at it?

JACK LONDON

Jack, you won't remember. London, on the other hand, that's indelible.

(drinks)

Fair number of men'll come out of here rich, but only a handful will be *remembered*.

A good-natured chuckle from Epstein.

EPSTEIN

Right on, you nut.

JACK LONDON

Give it a chuckle if you want, but you are looking at a walking, talking novel here.

(re environs)

A shelf full of novels. Penwright there: dumber'n a crate of turnips. Goes on a drunken bender upriver at 40 Mile, sobers up a week later and he's stakeholder to the hottest claim on El Dorado Creek. No clue how he got it. But he's sitting on a half million in nuggets and it hasn't even been a month yet.

BILL

El Dorado Creek. That's the place then.

JACK LONDON

Sure. Only if you don't wanna get rich. El Dorado's already panned out.

BILL

Already panned out--

JACK LONDON

Staked anyhow. So unless you're gonna jump someone, I wouldn't put any mud on your boots heading up that way.

London: fully immersed in all that he says. He's a junkie for the hardscrabble Yukon life. A prodigious drinker, too, though at 19, it's yet to show a downside. Instead only fuels his excitement. Epstein, meanwhile, can only be interested so long, and gets distracted by a courtesan across the way.

EPSTEIN (RE COURTESAN)
 She's giving me the love-eye. I'm
 telling you. That right there is
 the love-eye.

London nods in another direction--to an elegant-looking 40-
 year-old GERMAN man with a retinue around him.

JACK LONDON
 Take the Count over there: German
 nobility. Got all the equipment,
 the men...and they've been pulling
 nothing but mud for almost 6
 months. Not a spot of color. Just
 goes to show...Yukon's the only
 place in the world where a dumbshit
 can be a king and a king can be a
 dumbshit.

He decides he likes that last line. Scribble it on the back
 of a scrip of paper.

BILL
 So if it's not El Dorado Creek,
 where is it?

JACK LONDON
 Bonanza.

BILL
 Where's that?

JACK LONDON
 Oh, Bonanza's easy: just go looking
 for the cloud of smoke...

He pauses as a FRIEND comes over, whispers something to him.

JACK LONDON (CONT'D)
 No...

Friend gives him an enthusiastic, silent nod. Yes...

London stands. To Bill & Epstein--

JACK LONDON (CONT'D)
 C'mon.
 (off their looks)
 Swiftwater Bill is here.

EPSTEIN
 Swiftwater who?

JACK LONDON
 Swiftwater Bill. Richest prospector
 in all of north America. Maybe the
 world. Spends it faster than he
 makes it. And they're telling me
 he's got a girl upstairs.

EPSTEIN
 There's girls down here.

London swallows the rest of his drink. Grin.

JACK LONDON
Not in a tub of champagne there's
not.

INT. SALOON / UPSTAIRS - MOMENTS LATER

FOLLOWING LONDON, BILL, EPSTEIN as they crest the steps--

EPSTEIN
And what do you mean a 'girl', by
the way?

JACK LONDON
A courtesan. A whore. A hooker. One
that *hooks*--

Ahead: men clamor, trying to get into a room, get a view of
the spectacle.

London pushes past with Bill & Epstein in tow.

Buoyant music cranks from a phonograph. People are dancing,
drinking, laughing. Very much the penthouse crowd, Dawson-
style. SWIFTWATER BILL, 50s, holds court. He's a rugged, low
IQ, high-enthusiasm, high-net worth Zorba of the North. He's
passing around champagne:

SWIFTWATER BILL
Drink up. Drink up before the
bubbles escape!

He pours for everyone--even Bill, who accepts it with ready
enthusiasm--

Bill pauses, seeing Swiftwater's next stop. The girl in the
bathtub who becomes visible as the crowd shifts.

Swiftwater Bill pours her a drink. Bill beholds, for a moment
caught up in the strange burlesque elegance of it.

Seen from behind, she's a dorsalist's dream, the way the
champagne and water hang on her bare back. A courtesan
evidently, she seems perfectly comfortable nude amidst the
drunken masculinity around her. Her carriage: confident...

Then she turns. And meets eyes with Bill.

Bill dies a bit.

It's Sabine.

INT. SALOON - NIGHT

Bill, crestfallen, descends the stairs with Epstein in tow.
Epstein, though, doesn't have intentions of hanging around.
His eyes fall across his earlier COURTESAN. She of the love-
eye. He claps Bill on the shoulder.

EPSTEIN

Think I'm gonna go do some
prospecting.

He peels off. Bill returns to the bar. Orders a drink from
the bartender (later, JOE MEEKOR). Beside him:

BELINDA MULRONEY (O.S.)
Dawson City. Where naivete comes to
die.

Bill looks up to see Belinda there. Imposing despite her
stature. It's the confidence. The gun strapped to her leg.
She swallows a mouthful of booze, eyes the place.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
Everybody comes a saint, and leaves
as something less than that.
(off Bill's silence)
Give him another, Joe. Man's
tongue's still too tight.

Meekor serves up Bill a drink. Bill nods politely.

BILL
Thank you, ma'am--

BELINDA MULRONEY
Don't "ma'am" me. I'm still south
of 30. Despite what these northern
climes have done to my otherwise
youthful, pearly skin.

BILL
Thanks all the same.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Belinda Mulroney.

BILL
Bill Haskell.

They shake hands. She eyes him.

BELINDA MULRONEY
You labor or management, Haskell?

BILL
How's that?

BELINDA MULRONEY
Only two types come up here: the
guy with the shovel and the guy
with the business plan. Shovel
guys, they're welcome. One thing
Yukon's not short on is dirt to dig
in. Boys wanna be boys and play in
the big old sandbox, that's up to
you. Guy with the business plan, on
the other hand...Dawson's full-up.

(MORE)

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 We got more middle-men and business-
 men and hucksters than we know what
 to do with. Blight on the
 landscape, if I can be perfectly
 honest.

BILL
 Nope. Shovel guy. Looking to get
 into the sandbox. And pull out a
 future.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 You keep believing that, and you
 and me are gonna be just fine.

BILL
 How's that?

BELINDA MULRONEY
 'Tween the two of us--and not to
 rain on your parade in advance--
 there's no money in gold.

She nods to the revelry around her.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 Soak it up, Haskell. How much of
 that gold being pulled up out of
 those hills is ending up in their
 pockets?

She motions vaguely to the elegant BURLESQUE DANCER on stage.
 Exquisitely lit. Spellbinding.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 Gold's a whore, Haskell. Just like
 her up there. More beautiful than
 the rest. Can't take your eyes off
 her. But she gets passed around.
 And that's the thing about whores:
 you may lust after them--you may
 even think you love them--but you
 don't need them.

Said as she draws a toothpick from her mouth. Considers it.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 This, on the other hand...you need.

Bill looks to her curiously. The way she holds that tiny, 2"
 span of wood.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 And when you need something up
 here, there's nothing you won't do
 to get it. No price you won't pay.

She turns it in her fingers slightly so the wood's fibers
 buckle slightly. In XCU we see wood like we have not before.
Like the gold and courtesan before, sumptuous, elemental...

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 To build a fire so you can survive
 the winter. To build these precious
 buildings. To melt the permafrost
 so you can get to your gold in the
 first place.

She looks to Bill.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 Without wood, there's no Dawson
 City. And if there's no Dawson
 City, there's none of you boys
 foraging out there in the dirt for
 your future.

BILL
 And you're telling me this why?

BELINDA MULRONEY
 I own the mill, Haskell. Everything
 in Dawson comes through me.

Bill smiles inwardly. Of course.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 You stay out of the wood business,
 I'll stay out of your sandbox,
 how's that strike you?

She smiles at him when she says this. But the implicit threat
 is clear. Bill isn't cowed. He returns the smile.

BILL
 Strikes me fine.

Belinda nods to herself like she's gotten what she wanted.
 She nods to Meekor for 2 more drinks.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Then you and me, Haskell...we might
 be copacetic yet.

As they drink--CUT TO--

EXT. SALOON / BACK HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

--Epstein and the Courtesan, slamming up against the wall,
 hot and heavy.

As they're getting into it--both of them harebrained, excited--

EPSTEIN
 Just so you know...I can't pay.

COURTESAN
 That's okay.
 (kisses)
 For the ones I like, I'll go
 gratis.

A little more escalation--

COURTESAN (CONT'D)
 You are a rabbit. I must really
 like you...'cause I don't even give
 it to my boyfriend for free--

Which makes Epstein take pause.

EPSTEIN
 You got a boyfriend?

Seeing him regard her dubiously--

COURTESAN
 Sorta yes. Sorta no.

EPSTEIN
 There's no sorta. It's one or the
 other.

She kisses him again. And damn is she hard to say no to.

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Bill--finishing his drink--Belinda, wrapping up too--

BILL
 Say I wanna stake up on Bonanza.
 How do I go about doing that?

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Like anything else up here. You
 just go up and do it. Then come
 back, drop a few bucks at the
 Recorder's office, and you're
 official.

(beat)
 Word of warning, though. There's no
 law up there, Haskell. And you
 leave a bunch of men alone to their
 own devices, and there's money
 involved, suddenly they aren't men
 anymore.

BILL
 You get a gun, you only end up
 using it.

Belinda moves as if to respond--but they're interrupted by--

--a gunshot--somewhere in back.

Everyone looks up.

A moment later, Epstein runs out, pulling his pants up. As
 he nears Bill, excitedly:

EPSTEIN
 Think I jumped someone's claim!

Belinda eyes him, darkening. To Bill:

BELINDA MULRONEY
Best get him out of here.

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Bill & Epstein spill into the street--

BILL
Just had to go get into it, didn't
you--

EPSTEIN
I didn't know!

Screaming behind them. A Russian pimp, known locally as
TOLSTOY, comes out of the saloon, a stream of others in tow.

He discharges a double-barreled shotgun into the air,
freezing Bill & Epstein in their path.

They turn to see Tolstoy reloading. He's drunk, fingers
coursing with booze and adrenaline as they fumble to slide 2
new shells into the shotgun.

TOLSTOY
I will kill you once, then kill you
again, son of a bitch!

All around them, people materialize from buildings. Keep a
safe distance, but watch the spectacle with interest.
Epstein, still buckling his pants, looks ready to bolt. Bill
though, is strangely calm:

BILL (TO EPSTEIN, QUIETLY)
Go easy.

Epstein gives him a look--*the hell you talking about--?!*

BILL (CONT'D)
He put that one in the sky when he
coulda put it in your back. He's
trying to scare you.

Tolstoy: cursing, reloading, spittle flying--

EPSTEIN
He's doing a hell of a job.

Epstein almost bolts again--Bill seizes his arm--

BILL (SOTTO)
Do not run.

Epstein looks back at him. Bill, aware of all the eyes:

BILL (CONT'D)
Only one chance to make a first
impression, brother. And we got all
of Dawson looking at us.

Tolstoy's fingers, getting those shells in. Closing up the shotgun. Growling. Approaching.

EPSTEIN

So does he.

BILL (COOLLY)

All bark, no bite. Trust me.

Tolstoy snaps the shotgun to his shoulder. He's scarcely 10 feet from them. Gun leveled right at their chests.

Around them, the whole town bristles.

Tolstoy bristles, fingers uncertain on the trigger--

There's subtle commotion to their left. Bill & Epstein turn to see--along with Tolstoy--Father Judge stepping forth calmly from the crowd.

Sitting down on the steps nearest them, as if to get the best seats in the house.

A beat as everyone looks at him incredulously. He shrugs to Tolstoy, as if apologizing for the interruption.

FATHER JUDGE

Proceed. Please.

A chuckle or two emanates from the crowd.

Tolstoy dithers. Discomfited by the nearness of a priest to his homicidal intent.

Does he really want to gun two men down in the street? In front of a man of the cloth?

The crowd begins to laugh, knowing what his intent will be before he does.

Finally, Tolstoy lowers the gun.

People erupt into laughter, jeers, cheers. The public arena: tickled, as always, by spectacle.

As everyone begins to disperse, Tolstoy lingers briefly. Gives Epstein the stink-eye.

TOLSTOY

God looks after you, does he?

(pure spite)

But even God, one day, must turn his gaze elsewhere...then you'll be in God's blind spot, my friend...God's blind spot...

He retreats with a glare. Epstein breathes for the first time in about 3 minutes. Bill looks appreciatively to Judge sitting there calmly.

BILL
That's twice you've saved us.

Judge shrugs, stands.

FATHER JUDGE
Saving a man's hide's not saving
him.

He smiles, bleeds away into the crowd. Leaving Epstein and Bill there in the street. Epstein looks to Bill.

EPSTEIN
What'd he mean by that? Saving a
man's hide isn't saving him?

Off Bill, faintly bemused--CUT TO--

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - LATER

--Bill, tossing Epstein a satchel.

BILL
We'll get the rest of our kit once
we've staked.
(beat)
Best we put Dawson in our
wake...and get on with the business
we came here for.

As they head out into the dawn landscape, shovels and gear clanking from their packs, a handful of people watch from sidewalks and windows. People aware of them now before of that earlier drama in the street.

A few we don't know. But a few we do. Not the least of which is Soapy Smith, who's apparently made town. He considers the young men with his usual opportunistic eye.

A few windows down, up in window, is another: a bleary-eyed Tolstoy, watching. He gives them a twice-over, then closes the curtains, turning in after the long night. Saving his ire, and intentions apparently, for later.

Off the boys--oblivious to this--disappearing into the landscape--

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. LANDSCAPE / "BONANZA CREEK" - DAY

The men move through the early morning swampy landscape, fording rivers across fallen logs.

Bill surveys the landscape ahead. A knowing look on his face.

BILL
"Just look for the cloud of smoke."

Reveal, ahead: the sprawling madness that is Bonanza.

10 miles of back-to-back claims. It's a strange marriage of the industrial and the primitive: windlasses, sluices, a permanent haze hanging over everything from the ever-burning fires thawing the permafrost. Dried food hanging in trees, litter of empty tins. In microcosm, we are looking at Man, butchering the land in search of resource...

EXT. BONANZA CREEK - LATER

FOLLOWING THE PAIR--further upriver--passing a claim. A familiar face there. The Clerk from the hotel, visiting who'd appear to be his brother.

Both men, no fans of the Semite, scowl at Epstein.

Bill & Epstein press on.

Everywhere, though, men look at them with gaunt, distrustful eyes. A foreboding pervades. To these men, they are competition. And they are not welcome.

Bill's got the geology book in his hand, dog-eared by now from travel and study.

BILL
Look for alluvia. Natural dams. All gold needs is a calm spot to rest. Swiftwater'll carry it for a bit, but gold, I've learned, is 19 times heavier than water, and as such, it's gonna wanna rest. And all it takes is that calm little spot...
(beat)
That's all we're looking for, brother. That calm little spot.

EXT. "BONANZA CREEK" / UPRIVER - LATER

Many hours later, Bill & Epstein arrive at the end of the claims. It's less than ideal. No more flatland. Just steep rising knuckles of granite and scree.

The LAST CLAIMANT beside them, a bitter man hardened by too much time work and too little reward, eyes them darkly. His eyes survey them. Their nearness to the tattered string he's erected to demarcate the limits of his claims. Might as well be the Great Wall of China.

THE LAST CLAIMANT

You come to do some vulturin' off
my claim, you ain't welcome.

BILL

Trust me. We respect the sanctity
of your claim. Which lies, if I'm
not mistaken, everywhere within
that finely expressed bit of string
you got there.

Motioning to their side of the string:

BILL (CONT'D)

Here now, if I'm again not
mistaken, is No Man's land. Staked
by no one and thus available.

Bill turns his eyes to the jagged land, surveying.

THE LAST CLAIMANT

Flap em all you want. Doesn't
matter no how, 'cause there's no
creek left anyhow. Not unless you
wanna haul up 100 tons of equipment
and do some lode mining up in them
cliffs!

Said with a motion up the impossibly steep slope beyond them.

THE LAST CLAIMANT (CONT'D)

Do everyone a favor and go back to
the Outside, you jackholes.

He goes back about his business. Epstein shakes his head.
Bill's eyes, though, are intent upon what he was looking at
earlier.

He quietly guides Epstein's gaze to a faint *undulation* in the
creekbed just upriver from the Last Claimant's site. At the
foot of the escarpment. It's...

BILL

...a carve-out. Like there's a turn
in the creek there...

EPSTEIN

Even though there isn't...

BILL

Unless...there is.

He traces the carve-out in the streambed with his finger, the
way it arcs across the creek's flow, as if joining the creek
at a 90 degree angle from an unseen source...

Both men's eyes rise up the far bank...to the massive field
of scree there, sloping down from the high palisades above.

Unclaimed space. By all appearances worthless.

BILL (CONT'D)

If there's a flow under those rocks, and we can get to it, we'd be upriver from everyone else. With God knows how much unexposed creekbed waiting for us. Untouched for God knows how many years.

Epstein looks at the daunting field of scree.

EPSTEIN

If we can get to it.

EXT. "BONANZA CREEK" / UPRIVER - LATER

Hours later. Bill & Epstein, toiling. Struggling to clear the sizeable chunks of scree. Back-breaking work, this. Last Claimant casts a constant glare at them.

As they work, Bill's thinking aloud:

BILL

Figure, what, 100 years ago, 1000 years ago, there's a landslide. Covers the creek. Which by the looks of it is pretty damn near its source. And if run-off's slowly pulling gold out of the mountains over the century...depositing it along the creek...there are all sorts of obstructions here...be first stop for a lot of that gold...gold'd sit right here, in that calm little spot, waiting for a couple of halfasses like us to come around and show it the light of day...

EPSTEIN (STRAINING)

You're. Just. Guessing.

Bill nods downriver to the primitive-industrial string of claims.

BILL

We're. All. Just. Guessing.

EPSTEIN

Ain't exactly a convention of academics, is it?

BILL

Which means, couple of halfasses like us...

Bill moves a final stone, then peers down into the darkness between the stones below.

BILL (CONT'D)

...might just have a chance.

He reaches down between the thick stones...stretches...and we're with his hand in that moment, straining into the darkness, away from the light...fingertips just barely reaching...

...wet, unadulterated sand.

He slowly pulls it up into the light. It scarcely covers the tips of his fingers. But it's beautiful and pure in the light. A promise there might indeed be creekbed below. He meets eyes with Epstein.

BILL (CONT'D)

We may just have creekbed down there, brother.

They clasp hand, that bit of wet paydirt sliding down between their palms. Genuinely excited, though not exactly sure what it all means just yet.

Nevertheless, Epstein looks around at the incredible amount of scree around them.

EPSTEIN

Creekbed or not, we're gonna need a locomotive to move all of this.

EXT. DAWSON CITY - DAY

Bill & Epstein move back through town, their excitement palpable. Both men checking their wallets--

BILL

What do you got?

EPSTEIN

Cobwebs.

BILL

I'm sittin' on a fiver. Which should just get the claim recorded.

EPSTEIN

Gonna wrap a few things up. Meet back in 20?

A nod from Bill. He steps into the Records Office.

Epstein peels off.

We follow him. Up the street.

To the Loan Shop. As he steps inside--CUT TO--

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - LATER

--Bill, emerging from the recorder's office with claim in hand. That piece of paper: empowering, legitimizing. He looks up, sees Father Judge on the sidewalk.

BILL
Wanted to thank you again, Father.

Judge nods. Bill hefts his claim:

BILL (CONT'D)
I'm in business.

Judge smiles knowingly:

FATHER JUDGE
So am I.

Said as he nails a sheet of paper to a pole in front of that primo plot of land mid-street, next to the brothel.

"Future Site of St. Mark's Catholic Chapel."

Bill eyes the declaration, the brothel, then Judge.

BILL
You bought it.

FATHER JUDGE (PLEASED)
Got thoroughly ripped off, too.

An appreciative chuckle between them.

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)
We come with different yearnings.
But perhaps we're equally foolish
in our ambition.

They share a smile. Bill looks up.

BILL
You seen my friend anywhere?

Judge shakes his head.

BILL (CONT'D)
I'll come see you when you're up
and running. And I'll promise not
to look at your neighbors when I
do.

FATHER JUDGE
First part, I believe. Second part,
I don't believe for a minute.

He smiles. So does Bill. Bill peels off.

FOLLOWING BILL--surveying the streets for Epstein. No sign of him. A brief sense of anxiety burgeons...

Then Epstein comes into view. Rounding a corner. He's got a wide, proud smile.

EPSTEIN
Meet our Locomotive.

As he slowly guides a meek-looking BURRO into view--CUT TO--

EXT. DAWSON CITY / MILL - LATER

--'LOCOMOTIVE'--harnessed now with a wagon. Bill & Epstein load milled wood into the wagon-bed.

Bill crosses to Belinda, who's considering his claim document.

BELINDA MULRONEY
It's official. Which mean's you're
official now.

BILL
You say that like it's a bad thing.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Not necessarily. People know where
to find you, that's all.

She produces a REMINGTON ROLLING BLOCK RIFLE. Slips it into his wagon. Off Bill's look, she nods over to Epstein:

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
Your friend here bought it.

BILL
We ain't gonna be doing the firearm
thing--

EPSTEIN
After the things I seen,
brother...I'm not taking any
chances. We can do it with *my* money
or *our* money, but either way I'm
buying it.

BELINDA MULRONEY (NODS)
Hundred.

Epstein pays her out as Bill eyes her.

BILL (WAY TOO HIGH A PRICE)
Hundred.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Suppose you're gonna tell me it's
grand larceny.

BILL
It is.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Not if it saves your life it's not.

BILL
It's just the good samaritan in
you, is it?

BELINDA MULRONEY

Nope. I just stock the things desperate men need. And watch 'em shell out ungodly amounts of money to get them. It's up to them to say no.

(to Epstein)

You saying no there, mister?

Epstein shakes his head. He's all good. Bill eyes her a moment longer, then climbs aboard the wagon. As he & Epstein head out, Belinda watches.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)

Good luck.

Something not insincere in that. As if she's watching yet another young troop go to war, unaware of what's about to hit them...

EXT. THE CLAIM - DAY

A week later. "August 2, 1897." Bill & Epstein's fledgling claim is coming together. Loco's methodically moving away stones, revealing the first hints of prime alluvial creekbed beneath the scree.

Bill's midway through building a cabin. He senses eyes, however far away, on him.

He looks up, sees high on the ridge, spectral forms in the treeline. The Tlingit. Pushed to the peripheries by all the prospecting. For a moment, he locks distant gaze with them. Their faces, impassive.

He turns then, looks down Bonanza's expanse behind him.

The permanent haze. The fires burning. The denuded hillsides. The equipment and detritus cast about. White Man, and his industry, has definitely staked its claim.

He turns then, looks back at the Tlingit, but they're gone.

EXT. THE CLAIM - NIGHT

For Alaska, a 'pleasant' evening. Bill and Epstein, idling before the campfire. Epstein, introspective:

EPSTEIN

Tell me again why you came up here.

BILL

Told you. Just trying to find a piece of something that's mine. Carve out my future with my own hands.

EPSTEIN

I got a different take.

Bill gives his an inquisitive look.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)

Think you did it for me.

Bill smiles. Absurd.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)

I'm the halfass here, we both know it. A man of no prospect. You on the other hand, sky's the limit. And you knew, guy like me, only way he was gonna come out this way and make something of his life, is if you went with him.

Bill smiles. There's truth there, even if he didn't fully realize it at the time. He nevertheless coolly demurs:

BILL

I like my theory better.

They share a knowing smile.

EPSTEIN

Thank you all the same, brother.

It's as sincere as we'll ever see him. He's genuinely moved by Bill's friendship.

Bill nods. You bet. Epstein hefts his cup.

EPSTEIN (CONT'D)

To aiming for the moon.

Bill hefts his own.

BILL

Even if we don't have a chance in hell of getting there.

Off them, clicking cups--CUT TO--

EXT. THE CLAIM - LATER

--Bill, later, going out into the creek for ablutions. He rinses his mouth. Washes his face.

Standing ankle deep in the creek, he pauses. Looks down.

A glint there in the dark water.

He squats to get a closer look. Realizes it's not *below*...but instead a reflection on the water of something above.

Camera pivots as he slowly looks up--Dear God what a show--

The Northern Lights. Flickering into existence across the night sky.

And for a moment we revel in it along with Bill. It's staggering.

If only for a moment, alone worth coming this entire way...

BILL(V.O.)

It's hard to describe. The feeling of arrival, of accomplishment, of having come this whole way and staking a small piece of the world for yourself, however tiny that stake was. It was ours. Down to the center of the earth, we'd earned that plot of land. It gave you a sense of potentiality that was as vast as the sky itself. If you could do this, what else could you do? And perhaps in that was the real wealth to was gained: The sense that nothing in the world could stop us.

We linger with Bill, his wonder at that sky above...then...

A gunshot rings out.

Bill wheels, sees that FLAMES are starting to kick up around their cabin.

He races back across the creek, but before he can get to the cabin, he finds Epstein, mortally wounded on bank before him.

Epstein struggles to say something, but he can't. Bill simultaneously tries to stem the flow of the mortal wound and scan the surrounding for the assailant.

Nothing. Only darkness.

Around them, flames lick up the cabin's timbers, consume their fledgling sluice.

Epstein struggles, fading. As a last act, he reaches up, seizes Bill's hand, the one he's attempted to stanch the blood's flow with.

In those hands, that scant beats before together held the promise of newfound paydirt, now only blood.

Then Epstein expires.

Bill, horrified, scans the environs again.

He scrambles across the dirt, grabs the Remington. Returns to Epstein's body.

OFF BILL, a tiny man with his friend dead in his arms, a gun unfamiliar but necessary in his hands, surrounded by the illimitable expanse of night and all its unseen threat...

END PILOT

KLONDIKE - EPISODE 2

"Epstein's Boots"

by

Josh Goldin and Rachel Abramowitz

(Second draft

Created by: Paul Sheuring
Discovery Channel
Scott/Free Prods.

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FADE IN

Nothing but fog as far as the eye can see. We could be anywhere. The Himalayas, Norway... Heaven.

Our view drifts with the fog as it curls over a puddle of BLOOD (we are definitely not in heaven)... Words appear on screen:

OUTSIDE DAWSON - ALASKA TERRITORY

WE MOVE UP the body of EPSTEIN. Eyes open and glassy. A figure stands over him.

It's Bill. Eyes bloodshot. There are tears somewhere back there. He leans over his friend. Puts his head on his chest.

ANGLE ON THE TWO BEST FRIENDS

Bill's breath is visible, coming out in short bursts. No breath comes from Epstein's mouth.

The living and the dead.

Tenderly, Bill closes Epstein's eyes. He loves this man. He lifts him and places him on a makeshift cart.

Now there are truly tears in Bill's eyes.

EXT. TRAIL TO DAWSON - LATER

Bill emerges from the fog, dragging the cart on which lies his best friend. Exhausted eyes filled with ragged determination.

A blanket covers Epstein's body. A single booted foot sticks out.

EMBOSSSED ON THE LEATHER OF THE BOOT

is the image of a *cowboy whirling a lasso*--an emblem of the adventurous creed Epstein lived by.

ANOTHER SWADDLED FIGURE

passes in the fog. A HARD-FACED woman, also dragging a cart. Cargo covered with an oil cloth. Her cart hits a bump.

A DEAD hand drops out from under the oil cloth. Small. White. A child's hand.

Death a common occurrence here.

Bill looks away... rattled. This is not the world he wants the world to be.

EXT. TOWN OF DAWSON - LATER

Weak early morning light cuts through the fog. Bill pulls the cart through the near-empty street. He pauses to stare around him.

A BAR

is the only commercial enterprise open at this early hour.

INT. BAR

LAUGHTER and LOUD TALK dims as ...

... a Bill enters, walks up to THE BARTENDER.

BILL
(quiet)
Where can I find the law?

THE BARTENDER--skinny, sweaty, drunk--heads toward him from behind the bar.

BARTENDER
Ain't no law around here.

Voice of a patron, "You're *IN* the Town Hall."

The bartender notes Bill's bulky cart through the window. Doffs his dirty woolen hat in deference.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
Mortuary ain't open yet. Animals
gonna get him, you leave him
outside.

BILL
(intently)
He doesn't need a mortuary. I
intend to take him home.

PATRON
Don't look like he's got a lotta
walking in him.

Bill turns... Stares with searing eyes at the patron who made a joke about his dead friend.

BILL
You make jokes about funny things.

PATRON
You're supposed to make jokes about
funny things.

Man's amped up on booze. A kid nearly, but grown big and strong. Rises from his stool. Legs shifting, everything about him shifting.

Just Itching for a fight.

A hand grabs Bill's shoulder. It's Soapy.

SOAPY

Hey, hey... Don't let him in, don't let him in. Your brains'll be mixing in with the sawdust.

Bill allows himself to be pulled toward a stool a bit further down the bar.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

(to bartender)

Give my friend a drink.

The bartender pours. Soapy pushes away the glass.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

Not that cedar bark shite. The good stuff. Only the good stuff for my friend.

Turns ingratiatingly to Bill.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

You pay me back later, huh?

A drink is put before Bill, He gulps it down. It lightens him a bit.

He turns to the window. Outside, a few stragglers pass on the packed clay street. Across the street, stand a row of stores... all shut down.

BILL

Why's all the stores closed up?

Soapy stares at Bill. Does he really *not know*?

SOAPY

Because it's midnight.

Bill's fatigued eyes wince in the sunlight coming through the window. *A world where even the sun's upside down.*

BILL

(some urgency now)

When's the next boat out of here?

SOAPY

I'll answer you straight. I see you're an honest man and your query deserves an honest answer. Boat comes in two days...

Soapy makes his face go sad in an almost Kabuki way.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

... but *your friend* won't be on it.

Referring to *the cargo* just outside the bar. A tremble of anger goes down Bill's spine.

BILL

Why's that, grifter?

SOAPY

(to bartender)

Give my friend another drink.

Bill pushes away his glass. Doesn't want another drink.

BILL

(anger beginning to boil)

Why won't he be on the boat?

Soapy can't contain his giddiness any longer.

SOAPY

Because he's DAY--ED!

Soapy CACKLES with laughter. A few other patrons join in. Bill whips around him.

Bill only now takes in his surroundings. Patrons all staring at him. A dream-like hostility palpable in the dusky light from kerosene lanterns.

Bill is definitely the outsider here.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

Death brings death. I for one try to stay away from it lest I catch what it's got. Boat captains think like I do. All of us here and I'm including you in my arithmetic, we don't leave when we're healthy?

He pauses for dramatic emphasis... then speaks ominously.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

We gonna be *buried here*. That's a fact. You look hearty now, but no one can speak to the future.

A threat there. Soapy stares at Bill with what he thinks is a *wise expression*.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

The future's *wanton*.

BILL

You take the scenic route, get where you going, don't you? Let's hear your pitch, grifter.

SOAPY

I got the gift of gab. A curse and a blessing. Here's how it is.

A different look in Soapy's eyes now. Business excites him. He lives for it.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

Just because your partner's gonna be buried in this hard, cold clay, don't mean a man such as you, with other options, got to.

BILL

What *other options*?

Soapy's eyes are afire with the sexiness of this opportunity... *for him*.

SOAPY

Your claim.

Bill glances around him. Everyone seems to be listening to the conversation. Awaiting his response

BILL

It ain't even been dug on. Might yield nothing.

SOAPY

You used a great word there. *Might*. Might be something. Might be nothing. That's the beauty of a claim such as yours, staked up in the hill, the only one so far. It could be anything.

Soapy's eyes are searing. He may not be the brightest guy in the world, but he has an uncanny understanding of what we call *the bottom line*.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

What you got to understand is, the folks around here are hungry for gold. They've travelled a thousand miles for it. Nearly died for it.

(MORE)

SOAPY (CONT'D)

Images of gold pass before their
eyes before they sleep.

Soapy lowers his voice so he will not be heard by the patrons
around him, all straining to hear their tete e tete.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

A great deal of money will be
invested in ignorance when the need
for delusion is deep. And what you
got in your claim is a beautiful
delusion. Right now, it's un-
examined. As you say, un-dug...

Bill is staring hard at Soapy. This has been a revelatory
conversation.

BILL

And you want to be the middle man
for my delusion? Sell it when it's
hot.

SOAPY

My proposition is this, and the
deal is over the moment your spade
touches soil. I will pay you one
hundred dollars for your claim AND
I will pay your boat fare out of
Dawson. In legal tender, or gold.
Your choice. Maybe you want gold.
Tell the folks back home, you dug
it out yourself. Be a bit of a
hero.

There may have been a whiff of temptation to the offer... but
Soapy's last statement is beyond offensive to him.

BILL

Listen to me and tell this to
anyone wants to know my intentions.

Soapy had been talking in a whisper, but Bill makes his voice
loud enough for all to hear.

BILL (CONT'D)

(eyes searing)

I'm not leaving Dawson until my
friend gets justice.

PATRON

Jew already got his justice.

This from the patron who tried to pick a fight with Bill
earlier. He's been waiting for this moment.

Bill has reached what he thinks is the end of his rope
(actually it's a long, long rope).

The pugnacious patron grins a grinny grin grin. Which evaporates as Bill tackles him.

THE TWO MEN

CRASH over a table, splintering it. Bill's opponent lashes out at Bill with a broken beer mug... It hits the side of his forehead.

The patron has the upper hand. Punches Bill hard in the face, grinning. He loves this shit. But Bill scissors his legs around the patron's legs, flipping him.

BILL'S OPPONENT

is *under* Bill now. But in the tumult, he's pulled a knife. The knife is at Bill's throat. Bill holds the blade back with his left hand.

BLOOD

seeps out onto the blade as it cuts through the flesh of Bill's palm. Excruciating to watch. In seconds the knife will cut through his hand.

Bill elbows the patron in his face with his free arm... and the knife drops. Bill punches his opponent in the face so hard, the man nearly passes out.

Bill rises, kicks the knife across the sawdust-spattered floor.

Bill's hand is bloody. So is his forehead. He glares at the patrons, all gathered around watching. Bill looks half crazed.

BILL

(growls it out)

You're not getting rid of me that easily. You're not getting rid of me.

But the patrons are no longer staring at Bill. They are staring past him... at a commotion out the window. Bill whips around.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

we see A SMALL CROWD surrounding Epstein's body. Vultures over carrion.

EXT. SALOON - SAME TIME

Bill SLAMS his way through the crowd. Dispersing them.

EPSTEIN'S CORPSE

is half off the cart now. Jostled. Picked over.

HIS DEAD FEET

wear only socks.

Bill shouts impotently at the now-empty street

BILL
Goddamit, you took his boots!! What
kind of man would steal a dead
man's...

But he doesn't bother saying the rest of the sentence.

BILL'S EXHAUSTED EYES

say it all. He's in the third circle.

ANGLE ON BARTENDER

behind the sanctuary of his bar.

BARTENDER
(cracked smile)
Animals got him.

END OF TEASER

ACT TWO

ANGLE ON EPSTEIN

lying on hard, frozen earth now. OUR VIEW loosens to reveal he's lying in a veritable garden of bodies. We are:

EXT. MORTUARY - MORNING

THE MORTICIAN--the plumpest man in Dawson--stands with Bill over the corpse. Wind whips his hair. We can feel the chill.

MORTICIAN

I'm sorry, sir. No way we can bury him today. No way, no how. Too many, um... *passengers* ahead of him.

Bill puts two more coins into the mortician's hands. The mortician nods gravely.

MORTICIAN (CONT'D)

We will hasten to dispatch him to the angels.

ON BELINDA

entering the area as Bill is leaving. She is dressed somberly for the occasion, but her dress clings. It can't help itself.

BELINDA

I heard about what happened. I came to pay my respects.

BILL

I hope he's in a better place.

Glances with distaste at his surroundings. Remembers his manners.

BILL (CONT'D)

Thanks for coming. He would have appreciated it.

Belinda holds him with her very presence. She enjoys this kind of power. Belinda wipes a tiny bit of oil under her nose. Offers her vial to him.

BELINDA

Mint oil. For the smell.

Knew he'd refuse. Puts the vial back in her purse.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

May I ask your intentions? Will you plunge into your virgin claim, or will you be going home? Back to Maine is it?

BILL

Vermont.

BELINDA

Vermont. First state in the union
to allow female suffrage.

(musing)

Seemed important when I lived in
the lower 45. Now seems quaint.
Voting for which man will have
power over you.

She stares appraisingly at him.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

I like you. Selfishly I'd like you
around. But your friend drew fire
on account of, I believe, where you
and he staked your claim. I worry
about you.

BILL

Your worry will be my good luck
charm.

BELINDA

I hope it works.

Bill nods, gives her a quick smile and heads out. Belinda
stares after him, in no hurry. She's never in a hurry.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

He was a good friend, wasn't he?

Bill turns. Something different about Belinda now. Genuine
feeling in her eyes.

BILL

(emotionally)

Yes he was.

Belinda moves toward him. She takes his hand in hers.

BELINDA

(almost to herself)

I haven't had many true friends.

She touches her whole palm to his chest. Feeling him. Not
really sexual... but a touch is a touch.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

(means it)

Good friends are more valuable than
gold.

Belinda moves off. She likes making her own exit rather than
being *exited upon*.

EXT. DRY GOODS STORE - DAY

The door opens to reveal Father Judge, face red from work. Behind him, we see shelves smashed, new lumber stacked. He's building his church.

Bill stands before him. Father Judge stares intensely at him, as if trying to figure him out.

BILL
You've probably heard that my
friend is no more.

JUDGE
I have heard.

BILL
If it's not too much trouble,
Father, would you conduct a
ceremony over his grave? It would
be very meaningful to his family...
and to me.

Father Judge hesitates. Compassion in his eyes.

FATHER JUDGE
I can't do a Christian rite for a
Jew...

Bill's upbringing allows no disrespect for a member of the church.

BILL
I understand.

He turns away, trying not to show his anger. Father Judge holds him back with the rest of his sentence.

FATHER JUDGE
... But I will perform the Jewish
rite of Kaddish.

Bill stares at Father Judge. This is the first real human moment he's had since Epstein died.

And it brings tears to his eyes.

CUT TO:

ANGLE ON EPSTEIN

lying on a block of ice at the end of the dry goods store. Bill touches Epstein's cold face. Possibly his last touch.

And then he does what he's been avoiding doing. He reaches into the lining of Epstein's vest.

All the blood leaves Bill's face. Bill frantically checks Epstein's other pockets.

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)
What are you looking for, son?

Bill stares at father Judge but he isn't listening. He hurries off. Father Judge's eyes are searing.

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)
God has been aloof. The hands of men have battered you. Take heed when god touches you.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BILL AND EPSTEIN'S TENT - LATER

Bill frantically whips through the tent, checking every possible hiding place. Shakes out the sleep wear. Empties the packs. Rushes outside.

EXT. CLAIM - SAME TIME

Bill searches the outside environs. Examines the saddlebags on Loco (he and Epstein's donkey. Turns, sensing something.

A FEW FEET AWAY

A MAN sits with his back against a tree. Big brown mustache, crinkled blue eyes, smoking a corn-cob pipe. Like one of those faces from a Klondike photo. MEEKOR.

He seems to be enjoying the day.

MEEKOR
(casually)
You smoke?

Bill stares at him, wide-eyed, rattled.

BILL
No, I do not.

Goes back to searching.

MEEKOR
Should take it up. Helps with the mosquitos.

Bill is running out of areas to search.

MEEKOR (CONT'D)
(faintest interest)
What you looking for?

Bill responds without looking up.

BILL
My partner's claim.

MEEKOR
(nods)
Got it.

Bill rummages around the spent fire... is totally caught up in his search. Slowly stops. Looks back up at Meekor.

BILL
That mean you understand what I just said?

MEEKOR
Nope. Got it.

He produces the claim from his vest pocket.

Bill lunges at Meekor. Pushes him up against the tree.

BILL
You take it out of a dead man's pockets?

Meekor doesn't seem the tiniest bit rattled.

MEEKOR
No, sir. Wouldn't do that.

Bill lets him go. He stares at Meekor as if staring at someone not quite of this world.

BILL
Stay right there.

Bill backs up toward his tent without taking his eyes off Meekor. Reaches in... fumbles around, pulls out a pistol.

Something stops Bill from actually pointing it at Meekor though. He holds it at his side. Threat enough.

BILL (CONT'D)
I'm going to give you exactly three seconds to tell me how you got a hold of that claim.

MEEKOR
Don't know if I can do that in three seconds.

Bill's eyes widen with growing frustration.

BILL
You can take more time.

MEEKOR

Around yesterday, your partner, Mr. Epstein, came into a loan shop for a loan. For supplies and such.

BILL

And the owner of the loan shop took his claim for collateral? That it?!

Meekor is a bit thrown by Bill's genius.

MEEKOR

Answers come faster when the questioner helps 'em along I guess.

BILL

And you have some kind of controlling interest in this loan shop?

MEEKOR

Control and interest are two separate things in my book. I'm *interested* in fish... but can't make 'em bite.

Getting answers from Meekor is like punching a marshmallow.

BILL

Who do you work for?

MEEKOR

I don't work for anyone. Just do things on my own that people pay me for.

Meekor's logic is starting to make Bill's head explode. He is close to doing violence to him.

BILL

Who owns the goddam loan shop?

MEEKOR

Would have saved some time you'd asked that question to begin with. Since you're in such a hurry.

He is in the process of re-lighting his pipe. It takes a moment.

MEEKOR (CONT'D)

Belinda Mulroney owns the loan shop and thus, your partner's half of the claim, which I am being paid to work.

BILL

So Belinda's my new partner.

(eyes searing)

Convenient for her my first partner
got killed.

ACT OUT

ACT THREE

A BLACK SKY

glowers over the infinite expanse of Spruce and rock that is Alaska in spring. A human-less wilderness of virgin nature. God's country...

... and God is angry. Thunder BOOMS as...

DIAGONAL SHEETS OF RAIN

puncture a million holes in the water of the Klondike river.

ON THE BANKS OF THE ROILING RIVER

the miners look tiny, putting up sandbags--a bulwark against flooding.

The rain connects everything. It consumes the universe.

THE CEMETERY

is a furiously pocked pond, grave stones sticking out like teeth in a huge mouth.

ON BILL

moving quickly through the street of Dawson. Rain-slammed... but so consumed with his mission of the moment, he hardly notices.

He passes Jack London heading in the opposite direction, holding up a ladies parasol, his mangy dog walking beside him. Yes, a ladies parasol.

Jack sees Bill and does an about face. Walks with Bill, holding the parasol over both of them.

JACK LONDON

The man of the moment. Man who can put me in liquor for a week.

(thinks better of it)

A few days anyway.

BILL

How can I help you?

(amused despite himself)

You know that thing doesn't work?

It's paper.

Referring to the parasol... water gushing right through.

JACK

Gives me something to blame for getting wet though. Which way do I bet, friend?

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

Soapy has a pool going. One says you're staying in Dawson. The other says you're gone on the next boat. Remember, I'm no good without my liquor and I am the closest thing to civilization for ten thousand miles. Civilization depends on your answer.

BILL

What are the odds?

JACK

Even odds. You're inscrutable. Unguessable. Not to mention important. You're the most important man in town right now. Next to me. At least while the betting pool is on.

BILL

I'm not anything.

Whirls on him. A charged emotion in his eyes.

BILL (CONT'D)

I'm just another man burning daylight and wasting gravity.

Speaks to the mood he's in. He charges forward into "The Dawson Grande Hotel..."

... leaving Jack in the middle of the street with his wilted parasol. Jack pulls out a notebook, hunches over it so it doesn't get wet.

JACK

(muttering)

"Burning daylight."

Scribbles the words down.

EXT. BELINDA'S PRIVATE CHAMBERS

Several large men of the bearded variety guard the door. Bill stands there, dripping wet. Pissed at having to be kept waiting.

One of the bearded men gestures for Bill to come in and Bill pushes past him, accidentally on purpose jostling him.

INT. BELINDA'S PRIVATE CHAMBERS

Bill enters and pauses. The room is grandly feminine, with hand-carved curlicues in the wainscoting and mother-of-pearl chandeliers. A FANTASY of heaven in the third circle of hell.

Bill stands in the center of this femininity--a rain-soaked man in muddy boots.

Belinda emerges from another chamber.

BELINDA

Sorry to keep you waiting. I was making myself fragrant.

She is spectacular. Her dress looks like it was made out of gold hammered so thin it could shimmer in a breeze.

She looks like the Goddess of Gold.

Bill came here pissed as hell. He has to fight to hold onto his drive.

BILL

I like to know when I'm getting a new friend. I'm too old to have someone dropped off at my house to play with.

BELINDA

So you met Meekor.

She drapes herself on the couch near him.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

Don't be petulant. I own half of your claim. I need to protect my investment.

(beat)

Meekor was an inevitability. Why warn someone about an inevitability?

BILL

Is that what *you* are? An inevitability? Who lives, who dies. You decide with a fetching wave of your hand.

BELINDA

Are you accusing me of something?

A slight break in her voice. He stares at her. Her green-blue eyes show just a hint of hurt.

Still staring at her, he shakes his head.

BILL

No.

Belinda folds her feelings back into herself.

BELINDA

Gold is a fool's errand, honey. I wouldn't kill for it.

Her manner is casual, but not her eyes.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

I'm building Xanadu.

(off his look)

I thought you were an educated man.

(quotes)

"In Xanadu, did Kubla Khan, a stately pleasure dome decree." Gold has brought people to this uncivilized wilderness but it's civilization gonna make 'em stay.

(off Bill's look)

And, no, I'm not building an ice palace in Dawson. I'm building a hotel. The largest, grandest hotel in America. Baccarat crystal, velvet couches. It's all been ordered. While you dream of gold, I use gold to make dreams.

She heads to her marble-topped desk. Opens the lid of a blue cloisonne jewel box. Inside are stacks of (gold backed) hundred dollar bills. Holds up a wad of bills.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

Know why these are better than gold?

No Bill doesn't know.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

(smiles)

Easier to count.

She leans against her desk, staring at Bill.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

You should take Sope's offer. Sell your mud hole and head back to Maine.

BILL

Vermont.

BELINDA

It doesn't matter. Both are away from here.

She stares emotionally at him.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

You don't belong here.

BILL
I don't think so.

Belinda simmers... fetchingly.

BELINDA
What's your game? Justice?
Vengeance?
(quietly strong)
Men always have a mission. Make up
for the fact they can't give birth.
Women are born with a mission. Men
gotta make them up. Do you write to
your mother?

She puts herself between him and the doorway, knowing he
won't just push her away.

BELINDA (CONT'D)
World is divided between men who
write their mothers and men who
don't.

BILL
Do you write to yours?

BELINDA
I killed my ma.
(beat)
She died as I exited her womb. Left
me to the vagaries of the world.

Bill gently lifts her up and places her out of his way. He
heads toward the door. Stops... amused by something.

BILL
Your mother birthed you... and
you're birthing a *hotel*. I think
your mother has the edge.

BELINDA
It's not a competition.
(hits her)
Was that a compliment?

BILL
You'll know when I'm making a
compliment.

BELINDA
(beat)
You really don't know, do you?

Bill pauses in the doorway.

BELINDA (CONT'D)
If you're staying or going.

Bill holds her gaze for a moment. His gaze is unwavering... but it does not give answers. He walks off.

She stares after him. Her blue-green eyes shine with tears.

BELINDA (CONT'D)
I wish it had been a compliment.

CUT TO:

ON BILL

charging forward, head bent, as the rain lashes down with renewed brutality on the now-mud-sloshed streets of Dawson. OUR VIEW whips away from him to...

A COCK-EYED SIGN

nailed against a dilapidated structure. Faded words read (without irony) "DRY GOODS". ROUGH HANDS pull off the sign. The hands belong to Father Judge.

The Dry Goods store is officially no longer a dry goods Store.

INT. FORMER DRY GOODS STORE - SAME TIME

Father judge tosses the sign onto a large heap of rotten wall-boards. He's been single-handedly turning the store into a church.

It's a bit of a disaster now. All that's left of the store is the counter. The shelves have all been splintered and tossed into a heap.

There are maybe a hundred leaks in the ceiling. It's all but raining in here.

A KNOCKING on the door. Father Judge turns, surprised. Who would be calling in this storm?

THE DOOR

is opened to reveal A TALL MAN with a patchy black beard, wearing a black, seal-skin rain coat and strange looking rain-hat.

He is "THE COUNT".

COUNT
(slight German accent)
I am Charles Eugene Schultz. But my friends... and enemies... call me The Count.

FATHER JUDGE
What can I do for you?

Histrionically, the count removes his hat. A gesture of-jokey deference.

COUNT
 (humble voice)
 Forgive me but I have sinned.
 (beat)
 I would like to make a confession.

CUT TO:

INT. FATHER JUDGE'S "CHURCH" - MOMENTS LATER

Father Judge sits across from *The Count* as rain pours down around them from the leaky roof.

FATHER JUDGE
 What do you have to confess?

The Count's face is all penitence and sorrow.

COUNT
 Arson and murder.

FATHER JUDGE
 (reacts)
 When did you commit these acts?

COUNT
 I haven't committed them yet.

He smiles a humorless smile. Stares at father judge until he understands the implicit threat.

FATHER JUDGE
 Do you care to be more forthright,
 sir?

Father Judge's eyes burn. We haven't seen him angry yet. But he *does* get angry.

The Count stares around him.

COUNT
 This watering can will be your new church, huh?

FATHER JUDGE
 If God's willing.

COUNT
 God *is not* willing, Father. This is prime real estate. Right in the middle of Dawson. Many others have had their eye on it. I am a Lutheran, friend.

FATHER JUDGE
We are not friends.

COUNT
(stares him down)
During my lifetime, I will not have
a papal atrocity built in my back
yard. My future *sins* will attest to
that.

Father Judge stares him down.

FATHER JUDGE
You intend to burn down my church
and murder me in it.

COUNT
So you see, *my mortal soul* is at
stake.
(beat)
You have a day to vacate.

The Count heads toward the doorway... then pauses.

COUNT (CONT'D)
(slow smile)
Aren't you going to offer
penance... for my future sins.

Father Judge's eyes are red. Old Testament eyes.

FATHER JUDGE
Your penance is being who you are.

The Count stares back. Eyes take in the water pouring down
through the sieve of a roof.

COUNT
Your roof is leaking, *Father*.

Stares intently at father Judge. Making his last words sound
personal.

COUNT (CONT'D)
Too many *leaks* to be fixed.

And he heads off into the rain, sleek as a seal.

ON FATHER JUDGE

returning to his "church," lost in thought, eyes harrowed.

Alone (very much alone) Father Judge goes back to work ,
smashing in the broken-down counter of the former Dry Goods
Store with an axe.

Hard labor making him sweat. He removes his vestments revealing...

A VERTICAL SCAR

It goes down his chest from neck to navel. Like he was gutted... and it didn't take.

ON FATHER JUDGE

Rage in his eyes now... SLAMMING the axe harder and harder against the old splintering wood of the former store counter.

Grey hair wild. Scar reddening.

A different kind of priest.

CUT TO:

ANGLE ON HEAVY BOOTS

sloshing through mud. Soaked through and through. The owner of the boots may as well be barefoot.

ON BILL

heading toward his *claim* through visible sheets of rain... eyes alert now. Every part of him alert.

OUR VIEW passes along the mining encampments along the swollen Klondike. Everywhere, miners are bustling about, putting up sandbags, reenforcing their structures.

Almost everyone looks up as Bill passes. Pause in their work to stare. It's unnerving.

ONE MAN (standing just outside his structure)

regards Bill with an extra challenge in his gaze. OUR VIEW drifts down to his feet.

He is wearing Epstein's boots. (We recognize the embossed cowboy with the lasso).

A charge comes into Bill's eyes. He starts to move toward this man as...

... THE MAN'S BROTHERS emerge from the tent, cold eyes on him. One is whittling a piece of wood with a large knife.

Two boys have also emerged from the tent and are clinging to the men's pants. Big, curious... unfriendly eyes.

BILL

(to booted miner; growls it out)
We'll talk alone sometime.

Continues on, glaring back at the man with Epstein's boots.

ON BILL

arriving at his claim.

Meekor is in the midst of tying forked sticks on the base of his structure with triple wrapped bark. He smokes his corn cob pipe as he works. Glances at Bill.

MEKOR

Oughta move your structure to higher ground.

Bill is in no mood for Meekor. *He's just seen a man wearing his dead friend's boots.*

Bill storms toward him (Meekor remains standing and smoking; has a kind of Zen quality). Bill has to shout above the rain.

BILL

This is the way it's gonna work. You stay in your area, I stay in mine! You don't say anything to me, you don't make small talk, you don't give me advice! Far as I'm concerned, you're part of the mountain.

MEEKOR

Which part?

Bill stares at him in disbelief. Did he really ask that?

BILL

The part that's quiet and don't move!

Bill storms toward his tent.

MEEKOR

Not all parts like that.

Bill turns... is about to let Meekor have it, but pauses at the image of the mining camp spread out before him. Bill and Meekor's *quarrel* had been louder than Bill thought.

A HUNDRED HOSTILE EYES

are fixed on him, one of them probably a murderer.

Bill pulls out a pistol, puts it into his pants for ready use. He stares right back at the miners, ready for anything. He goes back into his tent.

CUT TO:

INT. BILL'S TENT - NIGHT

Bill is in his tent. A single candle is burning. It sounds like a thousand thumb tacks are hitting the canvas of his tent. The rain. With each gust of wind the canvas of the tent billows and shifts, threatens to blow over.

Pen in hand, Bill is writing a letter to, yes... his mother.

OUR VIEW moves through the detritus of the mining settlement past gaunt, tired faces, and rugged nature (spruce trees, lashed by wind and rain, growing out of cracks in rocks), as we hear Bill's voice.

BILL (V.O.)

Dear Mother, I find myself a stranger in a strange but beautiful land. This is a place they say where the gold fairly sticks out of the dirt. I saw a man recently carrying a nugget the size of an apple. Like one of those on our trees out back....But sadness has followed us. Epstein is dead. Murdered by a savage, and cowardly man. I know not who. I know not how. The Klondike seems hardly real without him. "To Go for the Moon whether we get there or not"-- that's what we promised each other. An optimists's giddy plan or a fool's journey? I fear the latter now. All is rendered hollow as I write this. I expect to see you soon. As soon as I can lay my friend to God's care, and bring the perpetrator to justice, if there is justice to be had up here where no law has yet reached. Your face brings me comfort. In my mind. And soon in my sight.

He hesitates, then writes the last words.

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

... I will be home soon.

A BOOMING CRASH OF THUNDER

breaks the silence.

THROUGH A GAP IN THE TENT FLAPS

we see the top of the denuded mountain BLEACHED in a flash of lightning. A single spruce tree stands on the summit like a flag.

ANOTHER FLASH OF LIGHTNING

makes instant daylight out of the mountain peak. *The spruce tree is no longer at the summit.* It is several yards down the slope now.

It's like the mountain is moving.

Suddenly, there's A TERRIBLE RUMBLING. This can't be good. Beneath the sound, we hear the TINY SHOUTS of other miners.

Bill exits his tent just in time to see...

THE MOUNTAIN

slide away from itself... rushing inexorably downward. Bill grabs at his tent as A TSUNAMI OF MUD hits...

...carrying him, the tent, everything in its path down the slope with the force of a hundred freight trains.

ON BILL

struggling in the fast-moving mud as it pulls him down the slope. He goes down, sunk in it.

The mud settles a bit... and miraculously, Bill rises--mud covered, pounds and pounds of mud cloaking him. He stares at the slope above him and sees the horrific sight of...

MINERS

scattering as another SEA OF MUD slams down off the mountain. We glimpse the horror of a mother clutching her seven year old's hand hardly having the time to react as the mud engulfs, making them part of the earth.

Other miners are carried off like sticks in a waterfall.

Bill struggles frantically up the hill.

THE ENCAMPMENT

We're in the first moments after the disaster. CHAOS everywhere. The injured SCREAMING. Miners pulling other miners out of the mud. OUR VIEW whips to...

A MAN COVERED HEAD TO TOE WITH MUD standing stock still (a mud snowman) a jagged piece of wood piercing his shoulder. He doesn't appear to know where he is.

A mud-covered Bill (barely recognizable) claws through the mud at the structure where he saw mother and child engulfed.

Grabs a hand. Pulls A WOMAN out from under a heavy blanket of mud. Barely alive. She gestures frantically. Her eyes the only thing human in her mud visage.

WOMAN

My boy! My boy!

She stares frantically at Bill.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I was holding his hand! I couldn't hold on! He slipped away!

Bill pushes aside feet of mud... sees a broken structure beneath. Slides down.

ON BILL

looking through a disaster of broken pilings and thick walls of mud. He hears A CHILD'S SHOUTS. The kid's alive.

Bill plunges deeper. Reaches through a hole in the cedar smaller than a head.

FINGERS touch his fingers. It's the kid, stuck in a blocked-in crawl space. The kid is CRYING.

OUTSIDE THE COLLAPSED STRUCTURE

OTHER MINERS have gathered, trying to console the hysterical mother.

MOTHER

I can hear him! He's alive!

Bill rises up. All action now.

BILL

(eyes wild)

I need oil. Something slippery. Anything.

Most of the miners are too stunned to react. Bill goes over to a gunnysack, rummages through it.

WOMAN MINER'S VOICE

I have mineral oil.

Bill grabs it, starts to strip while heading back to the collapsed structure. Doing a dozen things at once.

BILL

Caves in Vermont. Folks got stuck, we got 'em out like this.

MOTHER
 (hysterical)
 I don't hear him no more.

Looks desperately to Bill who, completely naked now, lowers himself into the shaft. It's true, we no longer hear the child's SCREAMS. He might not have made it.

ON BILL

wriggling his way through the underworld of mud toward the crawl space. A CEILING OF WOOD cracks audibly above him. Bulges downward. Mud oozes through the crack.

In seconds the structure will cave in. Bill wriggles further.

He's made it to the crawl space. He fumbles for a match. Breathing heavily. Lights the match.

THROUGH THE SMALL HOLE IN THE CRAWL SPACE

we see A LITTLE BOY OF SEVEN sitting hunched against a cracked cedar wall. In his underwear. Terrified. Big eyes staring at Bill.

BILL
 Listen to me. I need you to listen to me, okay?

The boy nods at Bill. He's in shock.

BILL (CONT'D)
 I need you to come toward me.

The boy inches toward him. Bill hands him the mineral oil through the hole. Something behind Bill collapses. Fuck. Bill turns frantically back to the boy.

BILL (CONT'D)
 Pour this over you like it's water. That's right, that's right.

The boy has obeyed, drenched in oil now.

BILL (CONT'D)
 Now you're going to have to push yourself through that hole.

The boy stares terrified at the hole. It's so small.

BOY
 (pale)
 I can't fit.

BILL
 Yes you can. It just looks like you can't.. You ever see a sea otter?

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)
 (off the boy's confusion)
 A sea otter's bigger than you, but
 it can get through gaps in rocks
 you don't think a guppy can get
 through. You're a sea otter.

The boy stares at Bill. Bill holds the boy's gaze. Can see
 the boy trusts him.

BILL (CONT'D)
 Say it, "I'm a sea otter. I'm a sea
 otter."

Tentatively the boy moves toward the hole. Scrunches his head
 into it. Grimaces in pain.

THE CEILING OF THE CRAWL SPACE

CRACKS OPEN behind the boy, dropping down a huge mass of mud.
 More to follow in seconds.

Bill grabs the boy's ears, using them like handles... and
 using every ounce of strength... scrapes him through.

THE CRAWL SPACE

caves in with a CRASH behind him.

OUTSIDE THE STRUCTURE

Everyone waiting and staring. There's not a sound from
 underground.

And then... there's a movement in the mud. An arm. The boy's
 father rushes over and pulls his son to his feet.

The boy emerges from the sunken mine to tears and applause.

BOY
 (smiling)
 I'm a sea otter.

A DOZEN MINERS

rush over to help Bill out of the mud.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - LATER

The camp is in a frenzy of work. Bill working amongst them.
 People shoveling mud into the roiling river. Getting as much
 mud out of there as possible.

Everyone mud-sludged. A uniformity of being.

AERIAL VIEW - CAMP

Miners place sandbags in a triangle ABOVE the camp. If the mountain crumbles again, the mud will SLIDE around the settlement. *Hopefully.*

CUT TO:

A TIN PLATE

filled with hot steaming brown goop is handed to a miner.

MINER'S VOICE
Shit on a plate.

That's exactly what it looks like. The miner who just spoke hoovers it down though. We are:

INT. GORNA'S CABIN - LATE NIGHT

Bill sits with a dozen other half-cleaned-up miners. The place is cramped, stained with smoke. Bill's bright eyes taking everything in.

GORNA (the owner) moves through the structure handing out the food--a small ageless woman with a thick Kentucky accent.

Hands a tin plate of food to Bill.

GORNA
Wolf!

Like it's an order.

GORNA (CONT'D)
I like eatin' critters that wanna eat me.

LAUGHS a too loud laugh. Shrewd brown eyes cracks in shoe leather.

GORNA (CONT'D)
Open that winder! Warm as spit in here.

The miner she just yelled at quickly opens a slat in a makeshift window. Gorna queen of her domain in here.

A miner hands Bill a mason jar filled with a clear liquid. Bill takes a sip. Winces.

MINER
Home made moonshine, brother. From Spruce bark. Special Yukon recipe.

BILL
Back home we gotta word for that.

MINER
What's that?

BILL
(grins)
Turpentine.

The miner LAUGHS and LAUGHS.

MINER
Turpentine.

Saying it in his native southern accent now. Making it sound even funnier. Spits some of *the moonshine* into the fire and a gust of flame rises.

MINER (CONT'D)
Maybe so. Turpentine.

Bill turns from him, his bright eyes taking in everything about this brave new world.

Notes A GAUNT MAN staring at him with the saddest eyes we've ever seen. A RAW RED SCAR goes down his face. His name is GOODMAN.

Goodman sees he's got Bill's attention. He pushes a kit of mining tools toward Bill.

GOODMAN
You might get some use of these.
Belonged to my son. He don't need
it no more.

Goodman's eyes are filled with warmth... and liquor.

BILL
Why's that?

GOODMAN
(quiet)
He didn't have a guardian angel like
the boy you saved. He just had me.

The mug of moonshine drops from Goodman's right hand. He scrambles, embarrassed, to pick it up with his left.

ANGLE ON RIGHT HAND

Goodman's thumb is gone. From the scars, it looks like it had been exploded off his hand.

BILL
 (quiet;compassionate)
 What happened to your thumb,
 friend?

GOODMAN
 War.

Doesn't want to talk about it. Goodman drinks, stares with moist eyes at the tools he just gave Bill.

During this interlude, people have been talking around him. The conversation has grown heated. Something being talked about with great interest.

But it's like listening to people talking in a foreign language, they've been in each other's company so long.

We hear disparate phrases. "Justice for hire..." Gorna: "Ain't live up to heaven."

BILL
 What're they talking about?

Meekor has just sat heavily down beside Bill with his chow.

MEEKOR
 Law coming to town tomorrow.

BILL
 (stunned)
 What law?

MEEKOR
 Mounties from Canada.

YOUNG MINER
 (grins)
 Gonna crack down on us sinners.

Bill stares through a slit in the wall boards.

THROUGH THE SLIT

we make out A FULL MOON hanging over Dawson... where *justice* is perhaps on its way.

ON BILL

There's a new (hopeful) fire in Bill's eyes.

CUT TO:

A BIG PLUMP HORSE TURD

dropping onto the muddy street. We are:

EXT. DAWSON - DAY

OUR VIEW rises from the steaming horse turd to its owner. Not a horse actually, but a burro. Just larger than a dog really.

ATOP THE BURRO

sits INSPECTOR STEELE (50s), a tall man dressed in full Mountie uniform, including the famous puffy fur hat. Handlebar mustache. Hard metallic eyes. He rides, stately and erect.

King of the fools.

A SQUADRON OF MOUNTIES march behind him.

A number of townspeople have gathered on the edges of the street, watching this bizarre parade... and drinking.

A male bystander takes a grab at Sabine's ass. Sabine slaps him away...

... moves off with great dignity. Making a big show of being above this tomfoolery. Above *all of this*.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTIES HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The Mounties are in the midst of building their headquarters... and the barracks behind it. All are dressed in their distinctive red British Army Jackets, and breeches.

ON STEELE

moving through the area, occasionally giving a directive, eyes serious. They're always serious. Flanked by two Mounties carrying SHOTGUNS.

A MOUNTIE approaches Steele, says something discreetly to him. Steele turns to see...

BILL

at the forefront of a crowd of residents here with their petty problems. Two mounties are holding them back. Bill has clearly been arguing with them.

Steele makes a gesture and the mounties move aside to let Bill in.

INT. HEADQUARTERS - A BIT LATER

Steele sits at his desk now, a Mountie on either side of him. One of the mounties busily scribbles notes.

Bill sits across the desk. Steele appears to be taking Bill very seriously.

STEELE

When did this *murder* take place?

Hurls all his contempt into the word "murder." He seems to be angry on Bill's behalf.

BILL

Yesterday. We had just staked our claim. Uphill from the river.

Steele reacts as if he's just been hit in the face. Goes back to being poker-faced.

STEELE

You say the shot came from the North east?

BILL

It's where I saw the smoke.

One of the seated Mounties confers with Steele quietly. Steele nods.

STEELE

Rifle shot?

Bill nods. What the hell is going on?

STEELE (CONT'D)

Likely the Tlingits.

Never has a man seemed more sure of himself.

STEELE (CONT'D)

Two specimens of that tribe were seen near where your friend was killed. They will be found.

BILL

Tlingits?

STEELE

The Indian tribe that used to dominate this region. In their savage ignorance, they think this land is theirs. They have an invisible boundary, beyond which folks who venture have been harassed and threatened. I'm referring to the hillside where you and your friend Mr. Epstein staked your claim.

BILL
 (stunned realization)
 The second we staked our claim we
 were marked men?

Steele stares at Bill with his hard metallic eyes. Yes,
 that's what Steele thinks.

And *thinking* and *knowing* is the same for Steele.

SMASH CUT TO:

ANGLE ON BILL

walking fast down the main street of Dawson--an extra charge
 in his eyes now. Jack London sidles up to him. Keeps pace
 with difficulty.

JACK
 I might be able to help you in your
 newest endeavor. Hear you're
 heading for the Tlingit camp.

BILL
 Your information is correct.

JACK
 I'm told they're just East of Wolf
 Paw trail.

Jack's beginning to get out of breath keeping pace with Bill.

JACK (CONT'D)
 It'll be my pleasure to guide you there.

Bill whirls on him.

BILL
 Why? To fill more scribbles in your
 notebook. This is my battle.

JACK
 You'll need someone who can speak Tlingit.

Bill stares at him. His eyes are harrowed. The moment of
 truth is coming. He nods, charging forward...

... Jack hurrying to keep pace.

ACT OUT

ACT FOUR

EXT. BELINDA'S LUMBER MILL - DAY

Father Judge has just bought lumber, and finished loading it into his cart.

He heads down the street, when suddenly the Count steps out in front of him. SEVERAL EMPLOYEES of the Count's stand beside him. Threat in their eyes.

COUNT

Looks like our conversation earlier did not make enough of an impression, your holiness.

FATHER JUDGE

I am not holy. I am a servant of God.

Father Judge tries to move on, but the Count puts a hand to his chest. The time for subtext is over.

COUNT

Let me make this very clear, your holiness. If you do not leave your *dry goods store* by tonight, you will not live to see the morning.

Glances at A MOUNTIE passing on the street.

COUNT (CONT'D)

Possibly the presence of these ponces masquerading as the law embolden you.

The Count moves so close to father Judge we can practically smell his whiskey breath.

COUNT (CONT'D)

I have money and power. If the Canucks come after me, they will meet the same fate as you. And their blood will be on your hands. You will be the hand that kills them. I will just be, as you say, *the servant*.

He turns and walks off with his men.

CLOSE ON BELINDA

watching this exchange from the lumber site. She has her own compelling interest in this affair.

ON FATHER JUDGE

moving down the street, eyes searing, rimmed in red. LOUD ANGRY BUZZING comes on the soundtrack as if coming from the raging emotions inside Father Judge's head.

SMASH CUT TO:

WIDE VIEW - TWO TINY FIGURES

walk in the valley between snow-capped mountains... followed by moving black clouds of mosquitos--the source of the buzzing.

CLOSER - MEN

The BUZZING is insanely loud inside this insect war zone. Bill and Jack have smeared their faces with clay against the flying predators.

JACK

Whatchu gonna do you deem the savages guilty?

BILL

(searing)

The first thing is to know.

Bill is lost in thought. A man with one direction right now.

BILL (CONT'D)

Have you seen the tribe's leader?

JACK

Know *of* him. A half breed. They say his white ma threw him in the woods when he was born. He survived two weeks in the snow and frost until his tribe found him. Legend is he thrived on rage. Rage instead of mama's milk. Grew strong on it and is now their leader.

ON A RIDGE ABOVE THEM

we glimpse a shadow flit past... followed by another. They are being tracked.

BELOW

Jack has stopped. Takes a long draught from his flask of sour mash. Stares confusedly around him.

BILL

Are we lost, scribe?

Jacks's answer is to take another long drink from his sour mash.

BILL (CONT'D)
 Might want to take it easy with the
 booze.

Jack turns to Bill, eyes lit... everything about him lit.

JACK LONDON
 Dog knows.

It's only now we notice Jack's mangy dog and constant
 companion... sniffing his way forward.

Jack, (Bill following) moves in the direction of the dog.

BILL
 (mutters it)
 We're following a dog.

Jack lights up a cigarette with trembling fingers. Offers one
 to Bill who refuses.

JACK
 Might want to take it up. Helps
 with the mosquitos.

Bill smiles. Heard that one before.

THE DOG

has stopped. Bill and Jack stop beside him. Their fearless
 canine leader smells the air.

BEFORE THEM

lies a forested expanse framed by a cliff on the left, from
 which pours a cascading waterfall.

JACK (CONT'D)
 That forest before you, hero, is
 sacred Tlingit hunting ground.
 Abandon hope all ye who enter here.

He grins a lopsided missing-tooth grin and stumbles forward.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Ye are no longer in the land of
 your father.

Bill follows... but doesn't like this.

WIDE VIEW OF EXPANSE OF ALASKA WILDERNESS - DAY

The sky is entirely black, except for a single SLASH OF
 LIGHT... like a signal from God. Thunder GROWLS.

INT. TLINGIT FOREST - SAME TIME

We're in a world of green. Puffy wet moss everywhere. It covers the rocks, the trunks of the huge CREAKING trees.

IN THE FOREGROUND

A FIGURE whisks past. Soundlessly, like an animal. Unseen by...

BILL AND JACK

trekking through the dark, ominous forest. Jack continuing to drink.

JACK
Lie on the leaves, close your eyes,
might feel the cold paws of wolves
passing over you. And you're one of
'em here. A wild... human...
animal. No difference.

Jack offers the flask to Bill. Pushes it on him.

For the first time, we sense a glimmer of real fear in Bill's eyes. He takes a long draught from the flask. And then another.

The moment is interrupted by LOUD GROWLING.

JACK'S DOG

stands frozen before them, staring into the thick trees. Tail down, back arched. Ready to pounce.

JACK (CONT'D)
(whispers it)
We're being tracked.

BILL
By what?

JACK
Could be wolves.
(beat)
Could be men.

BILL
(almost to himself)
No difference.

Bill pulls out his gun. Jack stops to stare at him.

JACK
That'll only help with wolves.

No drunkenness in Jack's eyes now. He's scared himself sober. Bill puts away his gun.

They move tentatively forward through the dark, sacred woods. They freeze at the sound of a BREAKING TWIG.

AN ELK

stands less than ten feet from them. Not moving a muscle. Just staring. More curious, than afraid.

Bill and Jack continue forward... alert to every sound. Knowing how vulnerable they are.

BILL
(a whisper)
You ever seen an Indian?

JACK
Yes, I have seen Indians and talked to them--

BILL
What is their complexion?

JACK
They are like all the colors of a mountain, run together and dripped in a jar.

He suddenly stops walking.

AHEAD OF THEM

A MAN is standing absolutely still. As still as the elk. God knows how long he's been standing there.

JACK (CONT'D)
(quiet)
They are the color of nature.

Bill and Jack turn.

EVERYWHERE THEY LOOK

stand TLINGIT WARRIORS. They have come silently and taken up positions, surrounding them. Still as the trees.

Their eyes are *not friendly*.

ACT OUT

ACT FIVE

EXT. TOWN OF DAWSON - NIGHT

It's just beginning to rain again. Not much... but a storm is coming. Something different about this storm. It's more *rageful*.

A ROARING WIND blows an awning off a closed-up store. The awning is hurled down the street as if thrown by a giant.

INT. FATHER JUDGE'S DRY GOODS STORE/CHURCH - NIGHT

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING bleaches the straight-backed figure of Father Judge sitting on a freshly made bench. His first pew. He looks devastated.

BEFORE HIM

is his packed suitcase. He's made the decision... but can't quite get himself to leave yet.

Finally, he hoists the suitcase. Heads disconsolately toward the door. He pauses at the door to cast one last look at his would be church. His eyes fall on...

A WHITE-WASHED WOODEN CROSS

lying on a plank of white-smearred plywood on the floor. Just painted.

He can't leave a cross on the floor.

FATHER JUDGE

lifts the cross. HIS HANDS are smearred white from the fresh paint. This gets to him. The cross leaving a mark on his hands. A deep emotion passes over his features.

CUT TO:

FATHER JUDGE

climbing a ladder to the peaked roof of the store, holding the heavy cross. Eyes determined, hair blowing in the wind. His coat is smearred white with the holy burden.

FATHER JUDGE

balances himself astride the pitch of his roof. A skeletal wooden structure has already been placed there.

LIGHTNING flashes. Wind and rain whip his harrowed face as he lifts a hammer and nails his cross to the roof.

CUT TO:

INT. TAVERN - SAME TIME

A small crowd has gathered around TWO PEOPLE KISSING. The young, pretty (might be under 18) SABINE and a GRIZZLED MINER. Sabine pulls out of the kiss,.

SABINE

That's your dollar's worth.

Gold dollar in her hand, she moves with a slinky, confident grace through the tavern. We hear other laughing miners, "I got a dollar too." etc.

SABINE

turns to stare at them with sleepy eyes. Conscious of her effect.

SABINE (CONT'D)

I'm tired of kissing.

Continues forward with forced arrogance. A little leather pouch is dropped at her feet.

MALE VOICE

This should get me more than kissing.

Sabine picks up the leather pouch. Looks inside. Gold dust.

She looks at the MAN who tossed it at her feet. He is neither attractive or unattractive. Neither appealing or unappealing. He is nothing.

SABINE

Have you ever heard of buying a lady a drink?

MAN

What would the *lady* like to drink?

Sabine ignores the mocking tone. Sidles (with a touch of regret) up to the man.

SABINE

(to bartender)
Red wine. Merlot.

She turns to her *new customer*. Smiles an exaggeratedly elegant smile.

SABINE (CONT'D)

Enchantee.

Her eyes are sad.

INT. BELINDA'S PRIVATE CHAMBERS - SAME TIME

Belinda stands at her boudoir window combing her hair... all alone. We sense she spends a lot of time alone.

VIEW OUT WINDOW

By the stables near the Hotel, two people are all but going at it. Sabine and the man who just approached her. Sabine hardly moves. Her eyes are open.

BELINDA

starts to turn away when she reacts to something new in the landscape of Dawson.

Something akin to (but not quite) panic crosses her features.

HER POV - TOWN OF DAWSON

The cross--a distance away... but shining brightly through the night.

CUT TO:

THE COUNT

He is playing poker with a few of HIS MEN. He is holding out his forearm, while talking, making his muscle taut.

A MOSQUITO

is sucking the blood on his forearm, bloated red almost to bursting.

COUNT

(boasting)

You hold the muscle, he can't fly off. He tries but he's stuck--

The Count suddenly goes quiet. Through the window, he sees the cross. His eyes flash and (in his moment of distraction) the blood-bloated mosquito flies off.

WIDE SHOT - TOWN OF DAWSON - NIGHT

In the darkness there is only one thing that stands out. It can be seen from anywhere in town.

THE WHITE CROSS

on Father Judge's just sanctified... *church*.

CUT TO:

A DARK FIGURE

comes toward us out of the storm moving into the entrance-way of a tall lean-to-like structure. This is CHEYEHO, chief of the Tlingit tribe.

He comes into clearer focus. Blue-grey hair, decorative scars on his cheeks. DEEP BLUE EYES a jewel-like surprise in his Indian features. Strong eyes. No promise of mercy or vengeance there. A survivor's eyes.

IN THE TENT BEFORE HIM

sit Bill and Jack (not bound), guarded by the Tlingit hunters who brought them here. Cheyeho sits across from them, making himself an equal of sorts.

CHEYEHO

I did not ask you here but I welcome you.

BILL

(to Jack)
He speaks English.

JACK

That's good because I don't speak Tlingit.

Bill gives Jack a look. Cheyeho stares only at Bill. Bill is the man who interests him.

CHEYEHO

I know about your friend. I mourn him with you.

A charge comes into Bill's eyes.

BILL

What do you know about him?

CHEYEHO

I know everything in these woods. I am like an owl. You and your friend have what you call "a claim." In the hills. You buy land you don't own from a man who doesn't own it.

BILL

We have different principles of commerce.

CHEYEHO

Why don't you buy waves in the ocean? Pieces of sky. Somewhere, there is a white man who thinks he owns the moon.

There are tears of anger in Bill's eyes.

BILL
Did you kill him?

CHEYEHO
We kill only for a purpose.

BILL
That's not an answer.

CHEYEHO
Are you a God fearing man?

BILL
(a challenge)
I am.

CHEYEHO
And God is everywhere. He is in
everything?

BILL
Yes.

Cheyeho smiles. It's a surprisingly easygoing smile. It lightens his face. He turns to his fellow tribesmen. He speaks in Tlingit, but subtitles translate.

CHEYEHO
You see? The white man fears
everything.

He turns back to Bill. No longer smiling, the storm whipping the trees behind him.

CHEYEHO (CONT'D)
Your fear is misplaced here.

Cheyeho's eyes are tinged with rage.

CHEYEHO (CONT'D)
You are in Tlingit territory and
this is the land of no God. I'm
sorry for the loss of your friend,
but we did not kill him.

BILL
Who killed him?

Bill's eyes burn. The question that haunts him. That might haunt him to the grave.

Cheyeho stares at Bill. Two men. That's all they are. Two men. Something passes between them. Some sort of understanding.

CHEYEHO
The sky killed him.

CUT TO:

A CRACK OF THUNDER

EXPLODES in the sky. The sky is murderous.

OUR VIEW drifts down from THE RAIN-SPATTERED CROSS to the image of Bill and Jack arriving back in Dawson.

CLOSER - BILL AND JACK

The two taking leave of each other.

JACK
You think they killed your friend?

BILL
They didn't act guilty.

JACK
Maybe they don't *feel* guilty.

A conundrum. Bill feels it. The two men take leave of one another. Jack heading to the tavern.

Bill alone with his stormy thoughts.

ON BILL

walking along the main street of Dawson. His mind churning. He glances at the display window of a supply store. What he sees makes him stop.

ANGLE ON WINDOW

Bill's reflection is a spectral presence. He looks ragged, harrowed, pale. He almost doesn't recognize himself.

ON BILL

He sees something else in the window. Something that sends a chill down his spine.

THE WINDOW

We RACK FOCUS from Bill's reflected image to reveal the *goods on display*. Prominent amongst the other items are...

... *EPSTEIN'S BOOTS*.

Etched in the leather, we make out the cowboy whirling a lasso.

CLOSE ON BILL

The emotional vagaries of his own adventures are brought home to him by the strange journey of his friend's boots.

Bill turns emotionally from the sight... and he sees something else...

THE WHITE CROSS

standing like a beacon on the roof of Father Judge's *church*.

Bill approaches the store, eyes blazing. His gaze falls on a heavy piece of rotted lumber in the street.

He picks it up... heaves it against the store window, shattering the glass.

CUT TO:

EPSTEIN'S BODY

lies on a the makeshift knave of the church, lit in trembling lightning. He's been arranged carefully on a table. Hands folded.

Boots back on his feet. Where they belong. We are:

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Father Judge and Bill stand over the body, sharing a Kaddish prayer book. Father Judge has not slept in a long time, but his voice is firm.

He is doing what he came here for.

FATHER JUDGE

May his great name go exalted and sanctified.

BILL

(quiet)

Amen.

FATHER JUDGE

In the world that He created as He willed. May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetimes of the Family of Israel... swiftly and soon.

Bill's cue.

BILL
 (tears in his eyes)
 May His great Name be blessed
 forever and ever.

FATHER JUDGE
 May His great Name be blessed
 forever and ever.

Father's Judge's VOICE breaks. This next passage has great, great meaning to him.

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)
 ... Blessed, praised, glorified,
 exalted, extolled, mighty,
 upraised, and lauded be the Name of
 the Holy One, Blessed is He.

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING

bleaches Epstein's face in white light...

... It also lights up the window near the body where...

A DARK-BEARDED MAN

is staring in at them. Sees Bill and father Judge staring at him and backs off, grinning.

Bill turns with suddenly alert eyes to father Judge.

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)
 (a growl)
 This is not your fight. They are
 here for me.

COUNT'S VOICE
 (shouting)
 The Pearly gates beckon you, *your*
holiness!

Father Judge's eyes are wild. Instinctively, he turns toward the AXE sitting on a small table.

Bill sees the moment. Father Judge sees Bill see.

A defining moment. It's like we're between the ticks of a clock.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

we see The Count, with A DOZEN OF HIS MEN. Several hold flaming torches.

COUNT
 You have three seconds to show
 yourself, your holiness!

Bill pulls out his pistol. Father Judge grabs his wrist with surprising force. He stares searingly into Bill's eyes.

FATHER JUDGE
 Leave this place. If you're a man,
 leave this God forsaken place...
 before it unmans you.

Bill pulls his arm away. Moves with his pistol toward the door.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Bill exits. Before him stand The Count and his murderous gang.

THE COUNT
 Who the hell are you?

BILL
 This is a place of worship.

THE COUNT
 Hell it is. It's a goddam *Dry Goods*
 store.

Father Judge exits the church too. Father Judge and Bill stand together facing the gang of thugs.

The Count lifts his rifle, aiming it right at Bill.

COUNT
 I urge you to drop your fire-arm.

Gives just the faintest gesture. The man standing beside him lifts his rifle to aim at Bill as well. Suddenly...

... we hear the COCK of another rifle... and another... and another...

ALL AROUND THEM

MEN come out of the shadows, all with guns.

The Count continues to aim at Bill, but his eyes are wild. What the fuck is going on?

FROM THE DARKNESS

comes Belinda, dressed in a long leather rain cloak. The most gorgeous female bad-ass the world has ever seen.

BELINDA
 Not tonight, Count.

THE COUNT'S MEN

are still pointing their rifles at Bill and Father Judge. But Bill has eyes only for Belinda.

BILL

Strange to see a woman flourish in such an environment.

BELINDA

Every day I'm alive is a stroke of luck.

She pulls out her own rifle, aims it at The Count.

Fuck this. The Count COCKS his rifle... pointing it right at Bill.

COUNT

No matter how this goes down... you die.

BILL

I'd say the same goes for you.

The Count's eyes are black with anger. He's got *this intruder* (Bill) in his sights. He likes him in his sights.

COUNT

Depends on the lady's aim. I have several paces on her.

It's true. Belinda is quite a bit farther away from The Count than The Count is from Bill.

BELINDA

Just to show you what a good sport I am...

She lowers her rifle just a little.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

... I will aim at the smallest target on your person.

She's aiming at his crotch.

THE COUNT

still stares at Bill. Eyes black fires. He wants so much to kill him.

Finally, he turns to Belinda.

COUNT
 (eyes black coals)
 It will be a long winter. You and I
 will meet again.

BELINDA
 I look forward to it.

The Count lowers his weapon.

COUNT
 (to his men)
 Lower your weapons. We won't kill a
 female.

The Count's men lower their weapons.

THE COUNT AND HIS MEN LEAVING IN THE BACKGROUND

Father Judge has a moment with Belinda.

FATHER JUDGE
 I owe you thanks. You are a woman
 of virtue.

BELINDA
 Virtue's got nothing to do with it.

She heads off with her people.

BELINDA (CONT'D)
 This is about real estate. Your
 church is temporary, father.

Turns to give him a last smiling look.

BELINDA (CONT'D)
 Don't do too much praying in it. It
 ain't gonna be for praying.

Father Judge stares after her. A half smile in his eyes. Like
 he knows who she is better than she does.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The yellow eyes of a gigantic beast comes toward us through
 the darkly swaying trees.

The image resolves into TWO MOUNTIES holding lanterns. TWO
 MINERS walk alongside them. One is the miner we saw earlier
 wearing Epstein's boots. The miners freeze.

MINER #1
 (quick whisper)
 There they are.

BEFORE THEM

is a campground. A butchered deer hangs from a tree. A spent fire next to a leather tent.

MOUNTIE #1

How do you know it's them?

MINER #1

They were in the hills across the river the night that man was shot.

MOUNTIE #1

You saw them?

MINER #1

He did.

Referring to his friend. The friend nods. The Mounties don't seem sure what to do. They are very young.

INSIDE THE TENT

sleep TWO TLINGIT hunters. We hear THE COCK of a rifle. And both Tlingits are immediately awake.

THE TWO MOUNTIES

stand before them, rifles aimed right at their heads. They look scared.

CUT TO:

EXT. TINGLIT CAMP - NIGHT

The same camp where Bill and Jack were brought by the Tlingit. A TLINGIT WARRIOR rides in... SHOUTING in Tlingit.

CHEYEHO

emerges from his shelter. He moves toward us, taking in what his fellow tribesman is telling him, growing angrier and angrier.

CLOSE-UP - CHEYEHO

He nods, understanding what's happened. There's a storm in his eyes.

OUR VIEW rises to the sky. Here *the storm* is clearing.

BLACK CLOUDS

part (like curtains) to reveal the full moon in all its luminous glory... lighting up...

THE MINERS' CAMP

lying under the same sky. Under the same moon.

AN EXHAUSTED BILL

arrives to find Meekor outside his tent, gazing down the slope. A sweaty Soapy is here too. Moves obsequiously toward Bill.

SOAPY

I came here to yap with you.

But Bill has turned to follow Meeker's gaze down the slope.

OTHER MINERS

are awake too. Everyone staring down the slope.

BILL'S POV - DOWN THE SLOPE

THE TWO TLINGIT HUNTERS are being led in chains by Steele and a posse of his men. Clearly a statement to the miners.

They've caught Epstein's killers. *The law is here.*

SOAPY (CONT'D)

Your sitch-ation's changed. Justice
has been rightfully served. God
bless us all.

Bill stares and stares. Something about this is just too simple.

CLOSE ON TLINGIT CAPTIVES

One of them turns, sensing eyes on him. He seems to be staring right back at Bill. It can't be true, but it's like a personal moment is taking place between Bill and this captured Tlingit.

The Tlingit's eyes are filled with the *rage* of injustice.

THE OTHER MINERS

are eying Bill to see what he'll do. Gorna amongst them.

SOAPY (CONT'D)

A man changes when his sitch-ations
changes. I expect, as discussed
earlier, you will return to the
green pastures of Maine and the
embrace of your loved ones.

BILL

Vermont.

SOAPY
An equally bucolic locale.

Soapy drags a pail toward Bill.

SOAPY (CONT'D)
It is my honor to act as
facilitator to your return to the
bosoms of your loved ones.

Soapy's eyes have a special light now. The love of the deal.

THE PAIL

is filled with nuggets of gold. It's beautiful. A glowing
treasure yanked from the earth at terrible cost.

SOAPY (CONT'D)
Pure gold. In exchange for your claim.

There's a fire in Soapy's eyes.

SOAPY (CONT'D)
Four hunderd dollars worth. More
than most of these here miners will
make in two years.

Bill picks up the pail. It's heavy.

The young miner who talked worshipfully to Bill earlier,
stares from the background... hoping his hero does not have
feet of clay.

Bill turns to look at the Tlingit being led away into the
distance. Just dots on the landscape now.

A clear reminder that justice has not been done.

A deep emotion passes over Bill's his features. He stares at
Soapy with burning eyes.

BILL
It's not enough.

ANGLE ON GORNA

staring... a hint of a smile in her shrewd blue eyes as...

Bill puts down the pail. Moves to his claim and...

... *DIGS.*

Doing what all of them have done. Picking up the mantle of
adventure and challenge at the root of manhood... *of
humanhood.*

We begin to hear the distant BOOM of Tlingit war drums. The Tlingit reaction to what we've just seen.

CLOSE-UP - BILL

plunging in his spade over and over... bending out of frame and then rising back in.

Every time he bends out of frame, we see the full moon (the moon that played such a role in his and Epstein's dreams). We hold on the moon...

... the BOOM of Tlingit war drums and CHANTING in the background. And in Bill's eyes, we see an echo of that cry.

The rebel cry from the dawn of man.

FADE OUT

Untitled Klondike Project

Episode 103

"Paystreak"

Paul T. Scheuring
12.31.12

ACT ONE

EXT. KLONDIKE WILDERNESS - DAY

HELICOPTER SHOT...following wide-open, untrammled the wilderness...a creek, tumbling carefree and pure out of mountains; it's gaining in size as it assimilates other tiny tributaries...around this flow, at least at the beginning, a preponderance of trees, but as we course valley-ward--

--the trees turn to stumps. A small but growing sea of them. Denuded, muddy hillsides everywhere, like a World War I battle field after a year's worth of fighting.

In the distance, the cause of this. MAN. His work. Windlasses, massive sluice boxes and permanent fires burning. Industrial-like smoke rises in a way it never has over this land. We're looking at Bonanza Creek. Its thousandfold claims.

And Nature above seems to be giving first signs of resistance to the intrusion. The sky: pewter. Full of rain and wind.

JACK LONDON (V.O.)

The Klondike in October.
2 things are going south right now--
the weather...and people smart
enough to get the hell out before
winter comes.

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - DAY

Bill. Busting his ass to shore up his maturing operation. He and Meekor: bench-mining, carving into the hillside. Which requires tons of wood for superstructure. Said wood is failing against the sag of the rain-swollen earth.

MEEKOR

Foundation's going.

BILL (PERPLEXED)

Soil's wet but not *that* wet.
Shouldn't be giving like this.

MEEKOR

Tell that to the mountain.

Bill eyes the constant seep...the way the earth is almost trying to *suck* the superstructure down into it.

BILL (UNSWAYED)

Something's not right. Something's
we're not seeing.

He reaches back for some of his timber reserve. Secures a piece. But lingers. *There's very little left.*

MEEKOR

I'm gonna do some reckonin' here,
and my reckonin's that we need more
wood. In a bad way. But I reckon
you already reckoned that.

BILL (SOLEMN KNOWING)

Yep.

Off that wood, tracking with it in Bill's hand as he moves to
reinforce his framing--MATCH CUT TO--

EXT. CLAIM / SHELTER - MONTAGE

--another piece of wood, being carried to, and tossed into a
radiant, if rudimentary, fire.

JACK LONDON (V.O.)

Wood. Brings light to men's night.
Warmth to their bones.

INT. MINE - MONTAGE

An 8x8, standing sturdily as superstructure deep in a mine--

JACK LONDON (V.O.)

Hope to their digs.

Rack focus--to legion more 8x8s--a virtual forest down here,
every plank needed, as a MINER appears at the end of the
mine, steps into its solid shelter--

JACK LONDON (V.O.)

It is the only essential up here,
other than food. And a man can go
days without a meal...but without a
fire, he'd not make it through a
single night to see breakfast the
following day.

(beat; sober)

The smart ones know this.

EXT. MILL - DAY

Belinda. At the mill. Business booming. Men practically
begging her for milled lumber. As she and her Manager--FOLEY--
juggle all the activity--

JACK LONDON (V.O.)

They know it all boils down to the
flow of resources. Because up here,
on the razor's edge that is the
existence of the miner, to lose
access to resources leads not only
to failure...but states far
worse...

EXT. KLONDIKE ROAD - DAY

CU: THE CORPSE OF A MINER--desiccated, lying forgotten on the land. Reveal London, squatting by corpse, cribbing down the notes that are to be this v.o.

He looks up to see Bill, bound for town. Solemn moment as the two men consider the corpse.

JACK LONDON

World feeds off itself up here,
doesn't it? Man dies. Birds get his
flesh. Poachers get his boots.
Someone gets his claim...and I get
a story.

Off the two men, acknowledging that cold truth--CUT TO--

EXT. DAWSON CITY - DAY

--Bill and London, slogging through the impossible mud of rain-flooded downtown Dawson. Men are literally bailing the streets. Waging war with biblical clouds of mosquitos. Dawson City in the rain: a cesspool.

People wear scarves over faces. Bodies are being transported to a makeshift ward "uptown". London nods knowingly, begins fastening a bandana around his face.

JACK LONDON

Canadians call it nervous fever.
Europeans seem to call it muttering
delirium. Bunch of colloquialisms
that all get to the same
thing...typhoid.
(fixing bandana)
Recommend you do the same.

Bill nods. Presses a small bandana to his mouth. London begins to peel off, head toward the "ward". Bill looks at him with some incredulity. London nods, yeah it's stupid, but--

JACK LONDON (QUIET SHRUG; BRAZEN)
(CONT'D)

More stories.

Bill watches him go. Kid's fearless.

EXT. DAWSON CITY / MILL - MOMENTS LATER

Bill approaches the mill, finds Belinda on the boardwalk. Surveying the muddy, nasty mess in the streets.

BILL

Got that thinking look on your
face.

BELINDA MULRONEY

Thinking about whoever it was that set up that tent at the confluence of these two rivers. Started Dawson. Genius. Couldn't be more perfectly situated to capitalize on all the trade coming through.

(head shake)

But whoever decided to double-down on that idea...turn tents into a city--on a chunk of what's effectively swampland--now that person's dumber than a Kentucky sow.

BILL (SMILES SLIGHTLY)

If it's not too far outta line...you're the one holdin' a good piece of this real estate. Don't see that as dumb.

BELINDA MULRONEY

Oh, I wasn't the one who doubled-down. I'm the one who doubled-down on *their* double-down.

Said wryly with reference to her own ambition.

BILL

Ms. Mulroney...we gotta talk.

INT. MILL - LATER

Bill paces slightly before Belinda, outlining his case--

BILL

Without more wood, that bench is gonna give, and that's 8 weeks of digging gone south. I'm up against a vein. I know it.

BELINDA MULRONEY

Miners are always up against a vein. If even a tenth of em were right, we'd be paving a road back to the States with gold dust.

BILL (CONFIDENT)

This claim's different.

(beat)

That superstructure falls in on itself...what with the winter coming and the land about to freeze up...I'll be set back so much, I don't know I'll have the ability to wait it out til Spring--

BELINDA MULRONEY
By ability you mean money.

BILL (CORNERED)
There's some of that, sure.
(beat)
Way I figure it, if you stake me 2
cords for fuel, 50 8x8s to shore up
the build--

BELINDA MULRONEY
He wants credit. Again.

BILL
I fully intend to pay you for the
last delivery of wood--

BELINDA MULRONEY
When.

BILL
Soon as the mine starts yielding.
You're first one up--

BELINDA MULRONEY
I'm not in the business of charity.

BILL
Farthest thing from what I'm
asking.
(beat)
You got a stake in that claim too.
Half ownership. Be a bad
stewardship of capital to let it
just go south when it's this close--

BELINDA MULRONEY (CHARMED; BEMUSED)
Stewardship of capital. Man, you do
pump out syllables, don't you?

Bill gives her a look--goddamn, we gonna talk about this--

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
In terms of my stake in that claim:
I've got no interest in mining, as
I've always maintained. Buncha boys
digging in a sandbox, throwing good
money after bad, trying to prove
their manhood. What I do have is a
stake in Joe Meekor.

Belinda goes to the window. Looks out over the street.

BILL
What exactly *is* your arrangement--

BELINDA MULRONEY

There's no arrangement. He's a cousin. So many times removed he almost ain't on the family tree. But he's a walking, talking two-legged labrador, isn't he? Doesn't need much more than a bone to be happy. And if that bone's a half-stake in a claim somewhere--which I got for ten cents on the dollar, mind you--I'm not averse to keeping the labrador happy. But ten cents on a dollar's as far as I go.

Bill nears her at the window. Resolute. Presents his claim documents to her.

BILL

What if I put up my half?

BELINDA MULRONEY

Two halves of nothing. Just what I need.

BILL

Lot of speculation about that claim. Even if you don't believe in it, it'll sell for something on the open market. For more than the price of the wood I'm asking. You'll get your money back. Plus something.

BELINDA MULRONEY

You're either stupid or got way too much faith.

BILL (KNOWING NOD)

Little of both.

(re claim)

Hold it for a week. That's all it's gonna take to get to that vein.

Belinda's eyes--on someone below in the street. The COUNT. With a REAL ESTATE AGENT & SURVEYOR. Concern on her face.

BELINDA MULRONEY (DISTRACTED)

You're lucky I like you.

(beat)

But, a week comes...and I haven't been paid, I will sell it. To your point of *stewardship of capital*--

(eyeing Count darkly)

--capital does me no good tied up out there in the claims. Capital needs to be here in Dawson.

(re: Count)

(MORE)

BELINDA MULRONEY (DISTRACED) (CONT'D)
 Otherwise...we're all gonna be
 wearing Kaiser helmets.

INT. MAKESHIFT WARD - DAY

Typhoid patients, in the wracked, advanced states of the disease. The muttering deliriums. Calling out in madness as London slowly moves through them, absorbing, looking up to see...Father Judge, across the sea of cots, with the silent HAN WOMAN, offering ministrations to the afflicted:

FATHER JUDGE

Ye 14 Holy Helpers, Auxiliary
 Saints at the throne of God,
 Protect and help them who need
 help. Saint Blase, invoked against
 diseases of the throat, Protect and
 help them who need help. Saint
 Acathius, invoked against
 headaches, protect and help them
 who need help. Saint Christopher,
 invoked in storms & plagues--

FRANK

Enough.

Judge turns to see the FRANK, one of Count's cohort. Not terribly smart, eyeing him bitterly.

FATHER JUDGE

When it comes to prayer, friend,
 there's no such thing as enough.

FRANK

When it's Catholic voodoo, there
 is.

(off Judge's curious look)

Only God has the capacity to answer
 prayer. Not man. Not saints. Not no
 14 Holy Helpers...

FATHER JUDGE

I think these men'll take whatever
 solicitations they can on their
 behalf--

FRANK

You're *mistaken* if you think you
 can come to this town and
 proselytize. Ain't a Catholic town
 in case you haven't seen.

Judge eyes the PATIENT before him. Trying to be above this. But Frank persists. London, all the while, watching...

FRANK (INSISENT) (CONT'D)
 You're a man of God, so I'm gonna
 try delicacy. Nobody wants you in
Dawson. Or the Squaw. So how 'bout
 you git on gittin' on.

Judge turns to him, and for a beat, we see a darkness in his
 eyes as he looks on the smaller man. Like in a previous life,
 he would have opened him up for talking to him like that.

FRANK (TAUNT) (CONT'D)
 We gonna have a problem, Father?

Then as quickly as the darkness came, it's gone.

FATHER JUDGE (READ: NO)
 Like you said, I'm a man of God.
 I'd encourage you to explore at
 some point just how razor thin the
 difference is between Catholics and
 Protestants actually is.

WARD KEEPER
 Know we got different Bibles, and
 that's enough for me.

FATHER JUDGE
 Words just scrambled up in a
 different order. Both lead to the
 same place. God's holy Grace.

Frank nears Judge. A smaller man thinking he can browbeat a
 priest because of the latter's non-violent commitment:

FRANK
 How 'bout you get scarce?

Judge nods politely, and with the Han Woman, exits. As he
 does, camera pulls back to London, in turn watching...

JACK LONDON (V.O)
 In the Klondike, there's a million
 ways to hell...but precious few to
 heaven. And this one...they were
 kicking to the curb...

Off Judge, shunned--PRE-LAP--

MEEKOR
 I'm talking paradise on earth, Mr.
 Haskell.

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - DAY

Begin on a tropical scene. A painting. Very *bad*. Widen. Find the artist: Meekor. Seems he fancies himself a Gauguin. Bill approaches, regards the girl in the grass skirt that is central to the painting. Meekor muses:

MEEKOR
 Heard the ladies don't wear no top
 in the South Seas. Bare-chested
 like a man but minus all the
 ugliness.

Bill nods appreciatively.

MEEKOR (CONT'D)
 Figure a handful of gold'll git me
 down there and set up for life. A
 worshipped island god.

Bill runs his fingers along the timbers of their bench mine. Mud seeps in around them. Planks, flexing, a few days away from breaking perhaps...

Then Meekor hacks. Something gurgling and ugly in his throat. Bill hears this. *Typhoid...*?

BILL
 You sick--

MEEKOR
 When *isn't* a man sick up here?

BILL (DAMMIT)
 I mean *sick-sick--*

They're interrupted by a sound high over the darkening landscape. Drums. Chants. The Tlingit. Unseen.

MEEKOR
 Only thing I sicka is *that*.

As both men scan the hillsides--along with numerous miners around them--all eyes to the gloaming and horizon--the distant drums somehow part of everywhere.

MEEKOR (CONT'D)
 How many Tlingit you reckon are up
 there? Thousand?

BILL (UNEASY)
 More.

MEEKOR
 Thousand men watching us digging up
 their backyard. Watching us take
 two of theirs for killin one of
 ours.

(puts down his brush)
 (MORE)

MEEKOR (CONT'D)

That's what I'm sicka. All that hate. Just sitting out there in the air. Invisible. And sooner or later...comin this way.

As he wipes his hands, heads into the shelter--camera stays with Bill, looking up again at those mysterious, darkening hillsides...

EXT. HILLSIDES / FOREST - CONTINUOUS

POV. The wide expanse of Bonanza Creek below, with all its detritus and scarring from the mining efforts.

Widen out. A TLINGIT form crouches in the shadows of the trees, watching. There's another. And another. And another.

They don't move. Just observe. Their stillness, patience unsettling...

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - DUSK

Camera rises from the muddy, cesspool streets of downtown, through buzzing insects, to Belinda, moving up the boardwalk with Foley. She's subtly surveying the Count ahead, visible with his retinue. Surveying outlying lots of land.

FOLEY

The hell's he up to...

BELINDA MULRONEY (CALMLY)

Looks to me like he's buying dirt. And I don't like people buying dirt next to my dirt.

Belinda's Accountant, DAN CONDON, approaches through the crowd. Having come from the Count's direction. Quietly:

DAN CONDON (RE COUNT)

He's making offers. Talking about putting up saloons, a hotel...

FOLEY

He wants to piss away his money, let him. Don't matter if it's now or ancient Egypt--location's location. And that up there...ain't location.

A quiet, uneasy dawning in Belinda.

BELINDA MULRONEY

But it is dry.

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

The trio moves back toward Front Street--

BELINDA MULRONEY

Get the salesmen up to the mill.
Whoever reps that property.

FOLEY

Look, real estate's in a high fever, but you got Front Street. 80 percent of the buildings. Those prices go up too, even faster. It's like Park-front property in New York Central Park--they're not building any more of it-

BELINDA MULRONEY

But they can move the Park.
(nods to streets)

Look around. People are tired of living in the mud. He ain't dumb. He's an asshole...but he ain't dumb. Reckon he's figuring a city-- a city built to last--needs sanitation, hygiene. Which of course I knew...just didn't think it'd come on so sudden. Wasn't part of this stage of the speculation.

She shakes her head. Like she should've known better.

DAN CONDON

What're you getting at?

BELINDA MULRONEY

Front Street ain't exactly a model of sanitation, is it now? That's why he's buying up there.

Dan eyes her, reads her thoughts.

DAN CONDON

You think he's planning on making a new downtown.

BELINDA MULRONEY

Yep.
(pains her to say)
'Cause it's exactly what *I'd* do.

EXT. MILL - LATER

Belinda enters, Condon & Foley following--

BELINDA MULRONEY

...wasn't for nothing we beat down every competitor these last 2 years-- levered em, cajoled, *influenced* em.

(MORE)

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 (deciding)
 We'll do what we always do. Outbid.

DAN CONDON
 Not gonna be easy--

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Oh yeah it is. He says 5, we say 6.
 He says 7, we say 8--

DAN CONDON
It isn't just numbers now--that's
what I'm trying to tell you.
 (serious)
 Sellers aren't taking notes on the
 properties anymore. No mortgages,
 nothing. They're demanding cash.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Ridiculous. Credit's what this
 entire economy's built on. What
 every economy's built on. Pawn shop
 over there.

(motions)
 How do you think they keep moving?
 Credit arrangements, with interest.

(motions to bank)
 Bank: credit arrangements, with
 interest.

(saloon)
 Saloon: bartabs from here to
 Saskatchewan. Hell, even the
 whores'll take it on lay-away if
 you're nice enough.

Condon nods. True. All of it. Still.

DAN CONDON
 Count pays cash. 100%.

Belinda eyes the millyard. The wood being planed, put onto
 carts in the drizzle.

DAN CONDON (CONT'D)
 You're asset-rich...but you're cash-
 poor. You've taken too many notes
 from miners. Too many IOUs.

BELINDA MULRONEY (FRUSTRATED)
 Well maybe it's 'cause I'm a
 goddamn softy.

Condon nods deferentially. Speaking quietly to power:

DAN CONDON

Unless you get those non-performing loans off your books--convert em to whatever cash they're worth--you're not gonna have the firepower to compete.

A MILL WORKER nods to Belinda. Hands her a clipboard.

MILL WORKER

Load's ready to go up to 152.
Haskell Claim.

(re weather)

Should we send em up, or wait on the roads?

As Belinda eyes the clipboard--Condon quietly reminds her:

DAN CONDON

You've never believed in the claims, Belinda.

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - DAY

Over Bill & Meekor--both men's clothes covered in muddy slime as they dig deeper into their bench mine--nasty work this, and yet Bill & Meekor, somehow *hopeful*--

DAN CONDON (V.O.)

1 in 100 men pulls any real color out of the ground. Rest of em just keep paying you the chase their dream. That's your own words.

Bill nods to Meekor, smiling through the mud--

DAN CONDON (V.O.)

The real jackpot's in feeding those dreams. Sellin em shovels and wood and food. Because men's hope and folly is guaranteed. Finding gold ain't.

Bill, trying to get to that vein he knows is there--but as of yet--only a muddy mess that continually fills in on itself--

EXT. MILL - DAY

Condon nods solemnly, matter-of-factly:

DAN CONDON

There's a reason you've put your money in services. 'Cause you know. You don't invest out there in the mud, on some longshot. You invest here, where the money's guaranteed.

(beat)

(MORE)

DAN CONDON (CONT'D)
Everyone in Dawson thinks 152 is a whale. That there's a motherlode down there. Let em think it. Only makes the price go up. Which is exactly what you want...because you're holding the whole note now.

Said with a vague nod to the wagon, wood. Belinda demurs:

BELINDA MULRONEY
Only as collateral. Haskell's still got a week to make good on his debt-

DAN CONDON
He's already in arrears, according to the books. Credit he's late paying you for.

Which stops Belinda. A technicality she'd rather not acknowledge.

DAN CONDON (CONT'D)
Legally, at this very moment, *you can sell that claim. It's yours.*

Belinda, uneasy at where this is going--

DAN CONDON (CONT'D)
You have the right to sell it. Truth is, you wanna compete with the Count...you gotta sell it.

As Belinda's eyes drift up the road, spy Count and his men busily surveying, marking off the new lots he's buying-- something on her face tells us...Condon's right, and she knows it...

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. KLONDIKE - VARIOUS

Time lapse: weather coming in illimitable angry waves over the land. A sequence of never-the-same phenomena: rain cells backlit by distant sunlight; lightning fusing sky and earth in jagged streaks; clouds in muscular columns all the way up to Heaven.

JACK LONDON (V.O.)

Weather in the Klondike comes in a thousand shapes. From a thousands places. Just like the men. And they all each have their own reaction to it...

EXT. BONANZA CREEK / CLAIM - DAY

A MINER, drenched and pissed off, calling up out of his tent--

MINER (TO SKY)

Give a goddamn rest you son of a bitch!

INT. SALOON - DAY

SWIFTWATER BILL--center of the party--hoisting a glass to the crowd as the rain pours outside--

SWIFTWATER BILL

To Mother Goddamn Nature!

PATRON

You outta yer mind, Swiftwater?
It's like the end of the world's
starting out there!

SWIFTWATER BILL

Yeah and if the end of the world's
coming, I sure as shit don't wanna
be sober when it gets here!

Laughter all around. Camera finds London, alternating between a beer and writing in his journal. The young man: already buzzed and in fine fettle. Swiftwater Bill grabs him.

SWIFTWATER BILL (CONT'D)

Come on London, get the face outta
the book--

JACK LONDON

It's not a book, it's a journal--

SWIFTWATER BILL (NO; BULLSHIT...)
 It's got pages and a cover and it's
 turning you into the guy missing
 out on all the tickle-tail in here.

Said with a nod to various wenches.

SWIFTWATER BILL (CONT'D)
 The proper function of a man ain't
 to exist, it's to live. Don't waste
 your days trying to prolong them.
Use your time.

The sentences land with London (and will in fact become one of his most famous passages). Swiftwater pushes a decidedly beautiful Courtesan toward him.

SWIFTWATER BILL (TO COURTESAN)
 (CONT'D)
 How 'bout you help him use his
 time, darling?

Courtesan nuzzles to London. London relents. She's a piece of work; in the good kind of way. Swiftwater take a pull from a bottle of whiskey, hands it to London. Walks off with the other Courtesan, happily irascible:

SWIFTWATER BILL (CONT'D)
 Ain't gonna waste a perfectly good
 storm like this for you to do
homework...

Off London--taking a pull of whiskey, adding to his buzz, pulling the Courtesan to him, surrendering to booze-addled experience--the day outside strobing with lightning and rain--

EXT./INT. CONSTABLE'S OFFICE - DAY

--a leaf, rain beading on it. A gnarled hand deftly folds the leaf in on itself--so that it holds the water like a cup-- then pulls it from its branch. And in through the bars of the fledgling jail...

The hand's owner: one of the 2 Tlingit "killers" ID'd as Epstein's murderers in 102 (OLD TLINGIT, 50s, and young TLINGIT, 12). Old Tlingit considers his makeshift cup.

Reveal, Bill eyeing him through the bars.

BILL (TO STEELE)
 You shoot my friend?
 (no answer)
 Why?

No answer.

CONSTABLE STEELE
 Likely territorial. Some sort of
 unsaid line your claim was on the
 wrong side of.
 (beat)
 He'll see justice.

BILL
 Problematic word.

CONSTABLE STEELE
 How so?

BILL
 Justice for us is hanging a killer.
 Justice for them's maybe fighting
 off someone taking their land. All
 we get is a couple of dead men and
 who's the wiser.

CONSTABLE STEELE
 Pretty even-keeled response. Think
 you'd be seeing red.

BILL (DARKENS, EYES TLINGIT)
 Oh, I'm seeing plenty of red. Just
 not sure if it's here.

As Bill eyes him, Old Tlingit slowly reaches that leaf/cup
 through the bars toward him. Mutters something in Tlingit.

CONSTABLE STEELE
 He wants to know if you want some.
 Says he prefers it to the White
 Man's water.

Bill: faintly impressed by the man's largesse, despite being
 jailed. But nevertheless demurs. He instead surveys the man's
gnarled hand.

BILL
 Must've been a hell of a shot with
 a dead trigger finger like that.
 (beat)
 Isn't exactly made for
 marksmanship, is it?

CONSTABLE STEELE
 Kid's hands might be.

Bill considers the downy-faced kid with some doubt.

BILL
 Pretty young.

CONSTABLE STEELE
 Like you said...maybe there's not a
 'too young' when it comes to
 protecting your land.

Bill eyes the Tlingit.

CONSTABLE STEELE (NODS) (CONT'D)
 One way or another, we're gonna
 find out the truth.

Bill nods, preps to leave.

CONSTABLE STEELE (CONT'D)
 If it's them, or someone else...you
 tell me first.

Steele nods. Off course. Bill stops at the door, looks back.

BILL
 And Constable...I don't know you've
 got a ton of time. 'Cause the
 Tlingit are out there. And I think
 they got justice on their mind too.

As he exits--CUT TO--

EXT. BONANZA CREEK - DAY

Rain. Sagging hillsides. Swarms of Typhoid-carrying insects.
 Men vainly fight back--tar their tents; create insect-free
 interiors by sealing off their shelters with blankets,
 filling them with campfire smoke (which of course just about
 kills *them*; but anything in the name of survival).

Through all of this comes Soapy Smith. Shameless opportunist.

SOAPY SMITH
 Cash dollars! 50 bucks! Any man
 wants to give up on his horrible
 toil and get his claim off his back--
 -I'm offering 50 dollars!

A forlorn-looking Miner (GOODMAN), shakes his head.

GOODMAN
 Wouldn't pay for the equipment,
 Soap, you low-grade sonabitch.

SOAPY SMITH
 God's own truth...but it's better'n
 bein dead now, isn't it? Take a
 look yonder. Whattaya see?

GOODMAN (LOOKS DOWNSTREAM)
 Nothin'. Same as every day.

SOAPY SMITH

No, what you *don't* see is what's slowly creepin' up the creeks. *Nervous fever*. Kill you like the 100 men they already put in the ground in Dawson.

Goodman looks downstream once more. Unnerved. Still:

GOODMAN

Take my chances.

SOAPY SMITH

I did mention the Tlingit, too, didn't I?

Goodman gives him a look. Eat shit.

SOAPY SMITH (OKAY...) (CONT'D)

Guess you just gotta ask yerself which is greater...*chance* you hittin a paystreak in one of these prospect holes...or chance nervous fever gets you...or the Tlingit get you...

He smiles, moves on--off Goodman--CUT TO--

--Soapy, joined a moment later by Bill, falling into step with him as he returns from Steele's.

Both men, headed the same way. Bill: faintly bemused, but mostly nonplussed at the sight of Soapy:

BILL

You.

SOAPY SMITH

Yep, me. And I know the look: shameless opportunist, right?

BILL

That my look or your conscience?

SOAPY SMITH

I see it a whole different way: I'm savin' lives.

They stop before Bill's claim. Soapy waves a \$50 at Bill.

SOAPY SMITH (RE CLAIM) (CONT'D)

What do you say? 50 U.S.

BILL

Wouldn't get me 100 miles. Which out here, is just another part of nowhere.

SOAPY SMITH

Au contraire. It'd get you out of the radius of the Fever. And the Tlingit. I'm offering you nothing short of a ticket to life.

Meekor approaches from the claim with a gurgling cough and hack. Soapy gives Bill a look. See? To Meekor:

SOAPY SMITH (CONT'D)

How bout you steppin back--putting a few paces between us, friend?

MEEKOR

How bout you growin a coupla feet. So I can knock you sideways and not feel guilty about it.

SOAPY SMITH

No way to talk to a man trying to liberate you.

Bill & Meekor eye him resolutely. Get lost.

SOAPY SMITH (CONT'D)

Fine by me. Just gonna be cheaper for me when you all die.

(unctuous smile)

Do have a fine day though.

He exits, hawking to the next Claimants. Bill eyes the bench mine. No new wood. The mud continuing to sag into the dig.

BILL

No wood.

MEEKOR

Hear Ms. Mulroney's waitin' on the roads to get better 'fore she delivers it.

BILL

Roads ain't gonna get better. Pretty soon they won't even be roads--

Meekor hacks again. Something nasty. Bill looks at him with some concern.

BILL (CONT'D)

You gotta get that looked after.

MEEKOR

Ah, I'm fine. Lungs just ain't agreein' with me--

BILL

Uh-uh. If that's typhoid you're wearing, they got to get to it early. Before it gets into your head. Soon as your *brain* stops agreeing with you...you're done, got it?

A nice moment between the two as Meekor surveys him, sees the almost paternal concern in Bill's face. He nods.

MEEKOR

I'll hitch into town with Goodman's team.

BILL

And while you're at it--get that goddamn wood from Belinda.

Meekor nods. Begins crossing toward Goodman's site. Bill looks after him, concerned.

INT. SALOON - NIGHT

Belinda, drinking a whiskey. Eyeing the Count across the room. With his clique. The only man in this whole muddy hell-hole who doesn't have a speck of dust on him. Whiling away the night belittling courtesans. Specifically: Sabine.

COUNT (TO SABINE)

Come here.
(squeezing her, surveying)
I like you. No sharp edges yet.
Skin's smooth, innocent--

SABINE (FLIRTATIOUS)

Easy now, Count...

COUNT (REACHING UP HER DRESS)

How 'bout we get a feel of that paystreak--

SABINE (QUIETLY, UNCOMFORTABLE SMILE)

We're in public...

COUNT

That's sort of the point, isn't it?

SABINE (DIPLOMATIC SMILE)

Prefer to be a bit more classy than that--

COUNT (SMILES)

Oh, you have an opinion?

He stuffs a bill into her cleavage.

COUNT (CONT'D)

Well, I just bought it from you.
 (more bills)
 And the next one in your head. And
 the next one. And the next one.

It's a significant amount of money. Which for the moment
 stills her hesitance. Acquiescing:

SABINE (UNEASY SMILE)

Then perhaps I can humbly request
 we finish this upstairs--

COUNT

Ah, but darling. To make a request
 requires you to have an *opinion*.
 And I've bought all your opinions,
 remember?

She sees the look on his face. Patrician, used to getting
 what he wants.

SABINE

What...do you want me to do?

COUNT (BELITTLING)

You're a whore. *Be a whore.*
Dance.

As Sabine complies, begins dancing, if a bit disquieted,
 Belinda watches from the bar. Winces. *Ya dumb wench. Why're
 you in with this son-of-a-bitch?*

COUNT (TO SABINE) (CONT'D)

Take the clothes off.

Sabine takes pause. Sees all the lascivious eyes on her.
 Dirty, yellow-toothed miners licking their chops. Count,
 seeing her dither, stands, tosses a coin at her feet.

COUNT (CONT'D)

Let's relieve you of that pride.

She picks it up, dances. Count crosses to her. Everything
 heightens--her unease, the looks, the music. She pulls down
 her shoulder straps--

COUNT (CONT'D)

More.

Another coin. Men pressing in. More flesh revealed by her--
 Count, moving toward the door, tosses another coin--

COUNT (CONT'D)

More.

She now has a fist-full of cash, half her flesh revealed--and as she picks up the latest coin--

Count shoves her outside--into the rain!

EXT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

She slips out into the street, nearly loses her feet. Turns to see that everyone's pouring out of the saloon in high heat--

Count tosses yet more coins at her feet!

COUNT

More!

Sabine, intimidated, picks up the muddy coins; we're with her--utterly humiliated--in a half-state of undress, her hands and flesh spattered with mud, quickly growing soaked--

--and she slowly rises, regards the Count, still under the eave. As are the rest of the MEN. Perfectly dry, while she alone is the muddy spectacle in the street.

A beat. Something changing in Sabine's eyes. Gone suddenly is the recalcitrance. Instead, she darkens into...a temptress.

She sheds her dress. Lets it fall into the mud around her feet. She stands there in her undergarments in the rain--

SABINE

That enough whore for you, Count?

COUNT

Does it look like it, young lady?

Laughter. She moves toward him, slowly gyrating, putting on the Full Whore. Unbuttoning, pulling away her bodice--

SABINE

Just kinda curious how much is enough whore for you in a woman... Little bit ain't enough, is it?

Sabine: a siren. Dark. Sexy. And beneath it all, scorned.

SABINE (CONT'D)

You want *more* whore.

She begins peeling away the rest of her undergarments--til she's nude--the men at first in a high frenzy--

SABINE (CONT'D)

All of you all. You want *more* whore, don't you?

She's scarcely 2 feet from Count now--she outside the eave in the pouring rain--he, spit-shined and dry beneath it--

SABINE (CONT'D)
 Woman who'll check her soul at the
 door--

She runs her muddy hands along her body, smearing her wet
 flesh, her crotch, in an ever muddier caress--then along his
 crisp-white clothes--toward *his* crotch--

SABINE (CONT'D)
 --do whatever you want--let you do
 whatever you want to her--let your
friends join in, too--

The Count, rendering silent. Feeling that she's sullied not
 just his clothes, but also *his* soul. The whore is suddenly
 too much of a whore. And by being so...suddenly human.
 Deserved of more than this.

SABINE (CONT'D)
 That...enough whore for you, Count?

As the moment hangs in the air--this naked half-muddy,
 completely drenched woman before the entire town--Count and
 all the men feeling so dirty they want to take showers--

BELINDA (O.S.)
Enough.

They turn to see Belinda has emerged. A coat in hand.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Lady's done for the night.

Count tries to compose himself. Shakes his head nevertheless.

COUNT
 That's not for you to say. She and
 myself have a contract.

Belinda, uncowed, tosses Sabine the coat, then hands her a
 large wad of cash.

BELINDA MULRONEY (DARKLY, TO COUNT)
 You've been *outbid*.

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Belinda marches Sabine up the street in a huff. Not entirely
 sure what to do with the courtesan. Belinda: not so great at
 personal relationships.

SABINE (DEFIANT)
 Showed him.

Belinda turns on her, exasperated.

BELINDA MULRONEY

You didn't show him shit. Standing out there buck-naked in the rain with money in your hand. He's right. You're a goddamn whore.
(takes money back)
And gimme that.

Seeing Sabine look back surprised--like the money's hers--

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. I just saved you.

SABINE

Who says I need saving?

Belinda nods to her, standing garishly wet and half-clad in the rain.

BELINDA MULRONEY

You shitting me, woman?

SABINE

(Somewhat ashamed; half-defiant)

We all do what we do.

She nods to the money. Matter-of-fact:

SABINE (CONT'D)

I need that money.

BELINDA MULRONEY

Well, guess what. So do I. And I earned it. Legitimately.

SABINE

You don't understand. I'll sleep *outside*. Hotel I stay in is by the night. No man is gonna pay for it tonight, not looking like this, not after making that spectacle...

BELINDA MULRONEY

Not my problem.

Belinda turns to go. Sabine quietly panics. Stops her.

SABINE

Please, Ms. Mulroney. Please. I'll do whatever you want...

She tries the siren bit again. Seduction. Silently comes to Belinda. Puts her hands into her coat. Belinda looks at her incredulously. *You're really gonna try this? Dear God are you desperate.* But she...opts to play along:

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Yeah? Then you keep reaching down.
 Down by my waist there.
 (as Sabine does)
 Yeah, that pocket...

Sabine, thinking she's the one manipulating, pauses.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 Reach in there. The compact. Pull
 it out.

Sabine slowly does. Retrieves Belinda's pocket mirror.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 Now look. See. See what you are.

As Sabine slowly holds it up, looks upon herself--sees the disheveled whore looking back at her--she recoils.

SABINE
 You...go to hell.

BELINDA MULRONEY (COOLLY)
 Might get to it one day...but I
 reckon you're already there.

SABINE
 You righteous bitch. Righteous *rich*
 bitch--

Wham! Belinda suddenly slaps her. Sabine looks shocked.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 You watch how you talk to me.
 Righteous is one thing. You call me
rich again...
 (holds up money)
 This right here is a lifetime to my
 family, you understand? Every red
 cent. Every red cent *matters*. But
 you, you just blow through cash
 every night, like it grows on
 goddamn trees. How's that? Tell me
 how's that? How's it you disrespect
 money so much?

SABINE
 Better'n worshipping it like you--

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Oh no. I respect it. 'Cause if I
 got it...I don't got to do what you
 do. *Ever again*.

She pauses, as if she's spit something out she didn't mean to. Sabine sobers at the inference. What?

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 That's what men got over you.
 Money. Once they don't, they got no
 sway. And you get to keep your
 integrity. Which is worth more than
 all the gold in this goddamn,
 frozen shitbox.

SABINE
 I'm...sorry.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Don't say sorry to me. Say it to
yourself--

SABINE (LONG BEAT)
 I...I...can't.

She nears Belinda, breaks slightly. All of this drama. The
 rain and the cold. She starts to cry.

SABINE (CONT'D)
 I can't say sorry to myself...not
 for the things I've done...
*because I wouldn't be able to
 forgive myself if I did...*

She moves to be comforted. Belinda dithers. Doesn't want to
 go to the hugging place. She nevertheless embraces the broken
 woman. As her eyes drift to Judge's makeshift chapel across
 the street--

BELINDA MULRONEY
 That's a bigger sorta problem.

INT. JUDGE'S CHURCH - NIGHT

Belinda marches Sabine in. Surprises Judge.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
 Where's the sermon?

FATHER JUDGE (COOL SHRUG)
 Need a flock for a sermon.
 Otherwise may as well talk to God
 directly.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 You wanna flock? Well you got one
 now.

She pushes Sabine forward. Then, in a silent aside to Judge:

BELINDA MULRONEY (WHISPER) (CONT'D)
 God may be bullshit. But the fear
 of God ain't. You put that into
 her, understand?

Off the two of them--an understanding--CUT TO--

INT. CONSTABLE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Steele. Looking up to see a Canadian Government Official enter. CAVENDESH. Expensive furs. Bureaucrat through and through. Not made for this land.

CAVENDESH
You look vaguely surprised.

CONSTABLE STEELE
Just a long way for a deputy
minster of the interior to come,
that's all.

CAVENDESH
We do tend to hibernate in Ottawa
at the first sign of winter. But
the Dawson problem's apparently too
pressing to let wait til Spring. At
least according to my superiors.

Steele eyes him a beat.

CONSTABLE STEELE
The Dawson Problem?

INT. CONSTABLE'S OFFICE - LATER

Camera rises from the 2 Tlingit, sleeping in their cell, to Cavendesh, pacing slowly and calmly before Steele.

CAVENDESH
...as you know, the Yukon's a
serious boon for Canada. The
government's encouraging
Canadianing companies to come up,
develop the land. Her resources.
But said companies are uneasy about
committing capital to a lawless
region. Word's gotten back--
justified or not--that the "natives
are restless".
(nods to Tlingit)
You wanna scare a white guy in a
corporate board room? Tell him he's
investing in a land full of angry
brown people.
(meets gazes with Steele)
So, obviously, they need to
understand that the Klondike is *not*
lawless.

He surveys the sleeping Tlingit impassively.

CAVENDESH (CONT'D)

If they're killers...they need to die.

CONSTABLE STEELE

Granted. But as of yet, I'm not 100% certain that they're the ones.

Cavendesh looks to him. Come on, that's not what this is about. Have you heard anything I've said? Coolly:

CAVENDESH

Then *get* 100% certain.

A long beat as they eye each other. Cavendesh, trusting his point's gotten across, collects his coat somewhat cheerfully.

CAVENDESH (CONT'D)

We'll sup tomorrow night. I understand there are some remarkable restaurants in Dawson. Lobster from the Pacific, Angus from Winnipeg, which you wouldn't think, given the godforsaken landlocked nature of this place. No offense.

Steele smiles--all decorum, but still--*you're a dick*--

CONSTABLE STEELE

None taken.

Cavendesh gives a final nod to the Tlingit.

CAVENDESH

I trust this matter will be dealt with in an...expedient fashion. Which will allow us to discuss more pressing matters. Like the expansion of your force. Over a tawny port, of course.

He exits. Leaves Steele there, torn, his eyes drifting back to the sleeping Tlingit...

Over this, we hear Latin--a plaintive liturgy--

INT. JUDGE'S CHURCH - NIGHT

We find Judge, preaching to his flock of one: Sabine. Doing it Catholic Old-school: his back to congregation, the mass conducted in Latin toward the pulpit. Extraordinarily impersonal. Sabine, uneasy.

CU: Judge as he intones the dry Latin...fully aware of the echoing gap between the two souls in this place. Finally, he stops. Drops the formality. Smiles inwardly, steps down:

FATHER JUDGE

Probably enough of that, isn't it?
Don't wanna give you the sense that
a love of God requires a man to
have a stick up his ass.

The frankness catches Sabine unaware. She smiles uneasily.

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)

How can I help you?

SABINE

Who says I need help.

FATHER JUDGE (WRY SMILE)

That mascara running down your face
does.

He retrieves a beer. Opens it. Offers it to her. Again,
informality. Which surprises her. She takes a sip.

SABINE

Guess I'm wondering if God hates
me.

FATHER JUDGE (TAKES BEER BACK, DRINKS)

Why's that?

SABINE

Cause *I* hate me.

(beat)

And if I hate me, He must hate me,
right? For being a whore...

Judge takes a long pull of beer, thinks.

FATHER JUDGE

Ain't no such thing as hate in this
world or the next. Only love and
fear.

He hands her back the beer. Nods assiduously:

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)

You just got to ask yourself which
of those two places you're
operating from.

EXT. BONANZA CREEK - NIGHT

Half the claims lie empty in the rain. Miners have fled the
weather; run out of resources; sought shelter in Dawson. And
through this come the thieves, stealing everything in sight.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT

An old, semi-infirm miner shivers. GOODMAN. Pressed up close to the dying embers of a fire. Easy pickings for the "wolves" out there. He looks up, damp and scared.

Someone's on the claim. Coming at him through the shadows.

He raises his small-bore shotgun. Calls out with fear:

GOODMAN
Shoot you down right there you so
much as take another step.

But...Bill steps into the light. From his neighboring claim.

BILL
Me, Goodman. What're you doing
still out here?

GOODMAN
Keepin' the thieves on the right
side of that claim line.

BILL
Go on. Get into Dawson before it's
impossible. You don't got the wood
to do another night out here.

GOODMAN
I skip this claim...them shitcakes
gonna take anything not nailed
down. And I worked too damn hard.

BILL (RE HIS GUN)
.410 birdgun like that won't even
give em a shave. Just piss em off.
Make em all the more certain to
kill you.

He approaches. Nods matter-of-factly:

BILL (CONT'D)
Go on now. I'll watch it. Along
with mine, I'll watch it.

GOODMAN
And why are you so noble?

BILL
'Cause I got wood coming and you
don't.

Goodman eyes him uncertainly. Smiles slightly despite himself.

GOODMAN
 Makin' it real hard for me to hate
 you, Bill Haksell.

Off them, an understanding--CUT TO--

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM / ENCAMPMENT - LATER

--Goodman, mounting a pair of horses with another CLAIMANT.
 Looking back to Bill. Nodding. Heading off into the night.

Bill watches them go, turns back to his own fire. Sits down.
 Lays his bolt-action single-shot rifle in his lap.

Listens. Hears the hoots and cackles of the thieves out there
 in the night, getting ever closer...

JACK LONDON (V.O.)
 Problem with an idealist is he
 tries to have it all ways. Keep his
 dignity. His wood. His mine. His
 life. Sooner or later...one of
 those gives.

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - LATER

CU: The 8x8s in Bill's sagging bench mine...one of them
 giving slightly...a large chunk of mud sliding down.

Bill rushes up. Tries to steady the tilting, sagging wood--

Shit. *Mud courses in. Threatens to snowball, fill the shaft.*
 He needs wood! Something to stem the flow--a stopgap!

ANGLE. HIS CAMPFIRE. All his remaining wood now committed to
 the life-giving flame.

Decision time...

Bill yanks two planks from the fire--tosses them into the wet
 mud to arrest the flame.

TIME CUT--

Bill, forcing the two planks into the gap in his bench mine--
 stopping the mud's flow, if only temporarily...

Behind him: the fire, dying...

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - LATER

CU: Bill's fire, diminishing to embers.

Bill: shivering, struggling against fatigue--must stay awake,
 stave off the thieves howling unseen in the night.

The last flame of the fire: winking out.

Bill's breaths punch the air in tiny frozen clouds. His body temperature starts to plummet.

He makes a decision. Grabs an ax. Slings his gun over his shoulder. And stomps up into the dark, muddy hills--

EXT. BONANZA CREEK - NIGHT

FOLLOW Bill on his slog. Through the denuded landscape. Stumps everywhere. He alternates his attention on the fallen wood--the stumps picked clean--and the creek far below--where thieves surely must be descending upon his claim. Interminable shivers that wrack his body. He needs wood. Now.

EXT. BONANZA HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Which he comes upon. A pathetic, soaked, fallen trunk someone left behind in their own clear-cutting efforts. It's like week-old carrion to a vulture. If the vulture's desperate enough, he'll tear into it. Which Bill does.

He slams his axe into it. Cuts chunks away. Then stops...

...sees, approaching, what may as well be his doppelganger. Another MINER. Muddy, desperate. Keyed in on that wood.

MINER

I'm stronger than you.

Said in a way that he hopes the words will avert what will otherwise come next. In the Miner's hand, an axe.

A long beat with Bill. Freezing.

BILL

There ain't enough to share.

MINER

I never killed no man...but if you don't get wide of that wood, I might have to start.

BILL

Don't make it about that.

Nothing doing. The Miner circles. Hefting his axe in a way that isn't about cutting wood.

As the two men lock up--as muddy, desperate predators might over a fallen carcass--their axes quickly neutralized, the two men slamming down into the slippery mud, trying desperately to claw each other's eyes--camera racks slowly through the melee to that sad, water-logged piece of wood...

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. BONANZA HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

The struggle continues.

Bill comes out on top. But the desperate miner, with nothing left in the tank, persists. He's that distraught.

MINER (GASPING, STILL FIGHTING)
 You...gonna have to split me wide
 open to stop me.

Bill, axe in hand, knows that for the most part, that's true. He hefts the axe. Then flips the head around.

And drills him in the temple with the flat of the axe.

The Miner--wham--out like a light.

Bill dithers, as if to go about his business. Then, you can see it on his face. *Son of a goddamn bitch. Can't just leave the guy up here in the mud to die.*

PRE-LAP:

FATHER JUDGE (O.S.)
 Fear's fear only so long as it
 makes you wanna run and you listen.
 But you wanna do the right thing,
 you do the opposite: you sit your
 ass down right in the middle of it.

INT. JUDGE'S CHURCH - NIGHT

Judge, ministering to Sabine. Looking up at the Cross.

FATHER JUDGE
 'Tween us...I think Hell's
 bullshit. Ain't no fiery brimstone
 cave under our feet. No devil.
 (taps chest)
 If Hell's real, it's in here. When
 we're believin' that fear's
 something other than just a
 feeling. And that's all it is. A
feeling. Your bones buzzing, your
 blood pumping. And once you see
 that--you're through the looking
 glass. It can't steer you no more.
 (meets her gaze)
 And if there's only 2 things in the
 world--love and fear--what's left?

She smiles, knowing the answer, but not necessarily buying--

SABINE

Love. But I ain't seeing it.

FATHER JUDGE

But maybe you do see the fear. Why people are doing the things they do. 'Cause they're scared. That they don't got enough. That they'll lose.

She shrugs. She'll buy that.

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)

And if you see someone afraid, they ain't no different than seeing a kid that way, right? You can't have anything but love for them.

Sabine absorbs this. Wants to believe it. Judge eyes her:

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)

What're you afraid of?

A genuine look of dread on her face.

SABINE

That man finding me. Making me pay for making him look little.

(polite, but frank)

And for him, I'm seeing the fear, Father. Why he doesn't want to look that way in front of the others. But that doesn't mean he won't still slit my throat. And I have a tough time loving any man that wants that.

Judge nods. His prudence equal to his idealism.

FATHER JUDGE

Understandable.

SABINE

Then what am I gonna do?

Beat. Judge deciding.

FATHER JUDGE

You're gonna stay here.

Off Sabine--getting her mind around the idea of staying with a man--albeit a priest--in his private space--

EXT. BONANZA HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Close on that LOG, now cut into pieces, being dragged on a tarp. The fallen, unconscious miner next to it.

Widen to Bill. Straining against the increasing rain and mud, trying to get this impossible payload down the hill.

He doesn't say anything. But his eyes do: *Goddamn me. No...Goddamn God. For given man a conscience. Gonna be the death of me.* As he perseveres--CUT TO--

INT. MILL - NIGHT

Meekor, pale, sick, relaying Bill's need to Belinda:

MEEKOR
He's expecting the wood.

BELINDA MULRONEY
(looking out window)
In this weather.
(head shake)
Half-wit's got way too much faith
in fellow man. Thinkin' someone
like me's just gonna saddle up and
ride out into that. To deliver him
wood. That he wants on credit.

MEEKOR
Was thinkin' the same thing. But I
figured he didn't wanna hear it,
and if I did say it, your ears'd be
burning somewhere. So I didn't say
it.

BELINDA MULRONEY (BEAT, DECIDING)
I ain't doin' it.

MEEKOR
Plenty of men've died in the Yukon
outta the wrong kinda courage. Be a
shame, though. He's a good one.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Don't you put this on me, Meekor.

MEEKOR
I don't put nothing on no one. I
just talk.

BELINDA MULRONEY
How much firewood does he have?

MEEKOR
Not enough.

Belinda shakes her head. Eyes the storm. Knows this is all on her. She has every right to say no. And still. With quiet, knowing chagrin:

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Why couldn't I have been in the
 goddamn rubber business?

EXT. MILL - NIGHT

Belinda, in the rain, prepping horse-and-wagon. The load of wood on the back. Meekor follows her:

MEEKOR
 Reckon I oughta tell all those
 people that say you ain't got a
 heart...that you really do.

BELINDA MULRONEY (SMILES INWARDLY)
 Man do you got a way with words,
 Joe.

As she mounts the cart.

MEEKOR
 I'll come with you--

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Hell no, if that's typhoid on your
 breath, I don't wanna be sucking
 the same air as you. Get to the
 hospital. Do one thing smart.
 (snaps reins)
 HA!

The wagon lurches forward, heads out into the storm, leaving Meekor behind in the muddy street. As her wagon passes a window--lit up in the night--camera pushes in, find--

INT. CONSTABLE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

--Steele. Contemplative in the night. Looking at those sleeping Tlingit. He grabs his rifle. Awakens them.

CONSTABLE STEELE
 We're going for a walk.

As the Tlingit awaken, mobilize uncertainly...

EXT. BONANZA CREEK - NIGHT

Bill struggles back to the creek with his last reserves. There's a shriek up ahead of him. A WOMAN coming out of her tent, recognizing the fallen man on Bill's tarp--

WOMAN
 My husband--! What...what--

Bill pauses. Sees beside her, 2 terrified children. Not your typical "frontier" family--but instead an 1897 version of suburban yuppies that have bit off more than they can chew in the wilderness.

Bill looks back to the fallen man with new eyes. He pulls the semi-lucid man to a sitting position.

BILL
He's still with us, ma'am. Don't
you worry--

But the woman and the kids are already on him--hugging him, wiping away the blood--

WOMAN (PANICKED)
What happened? How'd he get hurt--?
(to miner)
You okay, baby? You okay?

Bill doesn't answer her, because no words serve. Instead, seeing the meager, fading embers of the fire inside their shelter...he pauses, separates out some of his newfound wood, crosses to the fire, and tosses them atop the dying flame.

The moment is not lost to the woman. The children. They look at him, somewhere between shocked and confused.

Then he takes his muddied, weary frame and disappears into the night, pulling the remainder of his wood behind him.

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - NIGHT

Bill, thoroughly soaked, exhausted, gets back to his claim...

...and finds it's been looted. Some of the better equipment, gone. Yet...all that matters in this moment is fire.

As he vainly tries to ignite his "haul" from the hillside, it becomes clear that no matter what he tries--carving away the wet bark, etc.--it won't light. It just produces taunting swirls of smoke.

BILL (FREEZING)
Light...you son of a bitch...

But it will not. We've seen Bill in many a miserable state, but this: the worst. He sinks to the mud. Hope and will fading...then...

Someone appears at the edge of his claim. A wagon-load of dry, tarped wood behind her.

Bill looks up...and sees through the rain...Belinda.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - NIGHT

As Bill and Belinda hurried shuttle the wood to his claim through the increasingly nasty weather--

BILL
If I were a bit more of a religious man, I'd say you were an angel.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Been called a lot of things, but never that.

She looks surprised when Bill marches some of that dry wood down to the suburban couple's claim.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
What're you doing--

BILL
Gave em wet wood before.

EXT. ADJACENT CLAIM - MOMENTS LATER

Bill drops a stack of wood at the feet of the suburbanites. The man--his erstwhile foe--looks up incredulously. Belinda observes from the periphery.

BILL
This oughta burn right.

MINER
Can't believe...you'd do this...

BILL
Need more, you come find me.

He's out the door. Off Belinda, lingering behind, ever so briefly--

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - MOMENTS LATER

Belinda follows Bill through the rain as they move more wood--

BELINDA MULRONEY
The man tried to take an axe to you?

BILL (CONTINUING TO WORK)
Wasn't him swinging it.
(beat; as much about himself)
Was something inside of him.
Something the weather put there and he'd rather not of seen.

They're interrupted by whinnying. Groaning wood. The wagon-- on the unsteady mud of the hillside, its cargo balance now shifted with the offloading of wood--starts to slide.

Bill & Belinda rush to it. Try to arrest it--

BELINDA MULRONEY
Oh no you don't--

But it's inexorable. Too much weight. The slope too muddy.

The horses snap free.

Bill and Belinda struggle to stop the cart's slide--their feet slipping in the mud--

The cart drives them downward, tipping, threatening to crush them--

Bill yanks Belinda away just as the wood crashes over the edge of the cart--

--and smashes down into the creek in a thunderous roar of splashing water, tumbling rocks, and splintering wood--the wheels and frame of the cart cracking, collapsing.

Beat. Bill & Belinda regard the broken vehicle in the rain. The wood strewn about the bank and stream. Not good. Not at all.

INT. BILL'S CLAIM / SHELTER - LATER

Belinda looks out at the weather. Both of them: wet, muddy.

BELINDA MULRONEY (PISSED)
Son of a goddamn. Goddamn son of a Man, you are one stupid, stupid woman.
(re weather)
Thinking you could get back before it went 100% to shit.

BILL (EYES WEATHER)
May be stupid, but like I said, you saved my ass. Wish I could offer you something.

Belinda looks around at the damp, rudimentary shelter that houses Bill and Meekor. Knowing full well the impossibility:

BELINDA MULRONEY
Hot shower'd be good. Dry bedding.

BILL (YEP, NO SHIT)
Like I said: wish I could offer you something.

BELINDA MULRONEY

Remind me never to do anyone a
solid. Dig someone outta a hole,
all you end up doin' is throwing
dirt on your own grave.

Bill smiles a 10% smile. This woman: dost always protest too
much. As he considers a bottle of Meekor's rotgut:

BILL

Gettin' yourself in shit-state
ain't gonna do nothing. You're in
shit-state enough.

He offers her the bottle. She looks faintly amused:

BELINDA MULRONEY

And 5-cent rotgut's gonna get me
out?

BILL (RE BOOZE)

Meekor's. Something just this side
of rubbing alcohol. Drinks it when
he wants to knock the sharp edges
off the world.

He nods to the rain outside.

BILL (CONT'D)

Gonna be that kinda night. Full of
sharp edges. What do you say we
knock em off together?

Long beat. Then, as she relents, brings the bottle to her
lips--Bill eyeing her--

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Judge, sleeping on a pew, awakens to a knock. He gets up,
regards Sabine, still sleeping in his cot. Goes to the door
to find: The Count. Re Sabine:

COUNT

You've got something of mine.

Beat. Judge deciding how to play this. He steps fully into
view. Reveal: he's holding the ax. Leaning against it,
balancing his fingertips on it. Calm. But it's there.

FATHER JUDGE

Show me a claim and I'll yield her
to you.

(off Judge's stink-eye)

You claim ownership, I wanna see
the paperwork.

Count: faintly bemused by the gall. Nearing, darkening:

COUNT
I'm a bad individual, father. You
know that don't you?

FATHER JUDGE
Is that a threat, or a desire to
join my flock?

COUNT
A threat, most assuredly.

A tense beat.

COUNT (CONT'D)
That's the second time you've
denied me.
(quiet menace)
Don't think that collar will save
you, Father.

Judge eyes him back--calm, defiant--

FATHER JUDGE
Who says it's me it's saving?

Count smiles. Nods vaguely to the pistol at his hip.

COUNT
Hate to tell you, Father, but a
pistol's a whole lot more efficient
than an ax--

And wham--lightning-fast--Judge drives him against the
doorjamb--neutralizing the gun before Count can reach for it.
He crowds Count, a death grip on that gun.

FATHER JUDGE (WHISPERING HISS)
In the right hands maybe.

Count--surprised into inaction for a half beat--

FATHER JUDGE (CONT'D)
Funny thing is you're playing the
bad guy and I'm playing the holy
man. But both of us know only one
of us has got to facility to kill.

Count looks at him in a sort of amazement. Half-titillated:

COUNT
It's true, isn't it? What they're
saying about you.
(dark smile)
That you're the killer-priest.

FATHER JUDGE
Just priest now.

COUNT (CHALLENGING)
But you could be tempted.

Judge pulls away. With the pistol.

FATHER JUDGE
There are plenty of other women in
this world.

COUNT
You gonna shoot me, holy man?

FATHER JUDGE
Rather have you in my flock.
(beat)
But whichever one gets you off my
doorstep and outta that woman's
life...I'll take.

Count mulls a half beat. Complex feelings. Some fear. Some pride. But knows full well he's the physical inferior here. Especially without his pistol. He beats a strategic retreat. Ever feigning elegance:

COUNT
Difference between us is I don't
need to kill you to win.
(re Sabine)
She'll spit the bit. Wild horse
like that doesn't stay in the
corral, even if it is a "house of
God". Sooner or later, they hop the
fence and run. And who do you
think's gonna be waiting for her
outside that fence, Father?

He lays the stink-eye on Judge, retreats into the night...

INT. BILL'S SHELTER - NIGHT

Rain. Pissing down outside. Bill & Belinda: well into Meekor's bottle collection. Belinda considers the handful of books Bill's brought along. Sir Walter Scott, etc.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Too damn smart to be digging in the
dirt.

Bill: drying his shirt over the fire.

BILL
You know, you keep talking to
someone like they're a rookie,
you're liable to alienate them.

BELINDA MULRONEY

All the better. Then they don't get the wrong idea about things.

BILL

You got, what, all of one season more up here than I do.

BELINDA MULRONEY

Yeah, but all it *takes* is one season up here.

(beat)

To undo 5,000 years of civilization.

(nods outside)

Don't know if you noticed, but men up here aren't too far from the neanderthal. Huddled before fires. Killing each other. Fighting over things Mother Nature randomly scattered on the land. Only difference, far as I can tell, is that cavemen weren't burdened with the idea of *money*. That digging shiny rocks outta the ground was somehow part of the equation.

Bill drinks whiskey. Has his own point of view. But holds it.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)

So in that sense, you'd have to say the species has actually regressed.

Bill surveys his attempts to dry his shirt. Likes what he sees. And surprises her by giving it to her so that she might kill off her shivers once and for all.

BILL (SMALL SMILE)

Oh, we come a ways.

Off her--touched--CUT TO--

EXT. LANDSCAPE - NIGHT

--Steele, marching the 2 Tlingit through the rain. The Tlingit: uneasy. Steele stops, surprises the elder, thrusts the rifle into his hand. Nods to a stump 40 feet distant.

STEELE

Stump over there. Put a hole in it.

The elder Tlingit dithers. Steele snaps. Pulls his revolver.

STEELE (CONT'D)

Put. A. Hole. In. The. Stump.

The Tlingit, cowed, sights up the rifle after a beat. Takes a shot--and with his bad paw, *misses by a mile.*

STEELE (CONT'D)

Again.

Elder Tlingit dithers again. Why are they doing this--
Steele presses the revolver to Tlingit's head.

STEELE (CONT'D)

Again.

Tlingit sights again. Fires again. Misses horribly again.

STEELE (CONT'D)

You're trying to fool me, aren't
you? Know full well I'm testing you--
-to see if you took that shot that
night. If you were capable--
(beat)
Maybe I've got to put some real
stakes to it.

Steele turns the gun on the young Tlingit teenager.

STEELE (DARKLY) (CONT'D)

Now make the shot. Just like you
did that night.

The visibly shaken older Tlingit tries. Can't. Tries again.
Can't again! Everything crescendoing--

STEELE (CONT'D)

Make it like you did that night or
he dies!

Older Tlingit takes one more shot, misses worse than ever.
His body begins to shake. With sobs. That he'd rather hide
from his son. But cannot.

Steele has his answer.

He relieves the man of the rifle. Briefly offers the rifle to
the younger Tlingit...but sees, in the tears in the latter's
eyes, proof of what he already knows. The kid's too young and
scared to know how to handle a gun.

Steele kneels in the mud beside the shaken, sobbing elder
Tlingit. Assiduous.

STEELE (CONT'D)

It's okay. It's okay...

Off this tableau--lawman stoically consoling terrified native
in the rain--CUT TO--

INT. BILL'S SHELTER - NIGHT

Bill & Belinda, Pressed close to conserve warmth.

BELINDA MULRONEY (WRY)
 You know you're not getting
 anywhere with any of this, don't
 you?

BILL (QUIET, CONFIDENT)
 Who says it's me that's trying to
 get somewhere.

Belinda sits back. Eyes Bill. Big moment.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 I didn't kill your friend.

BILL (CALM SMILE)
 Why the need to defend yourself?

BELINDA MULRONEY
 'Cause I see that look in your eye.
 Torn between something you wanna
 like and something you don't trust.

She's radiant in the light. And knows it. Bill finally shakes
 his head.

BILL
 No, you didn't kill him. Otherwise
 you wouldn't be up here alone with
 me. Then again, maybe it's your
 twisted way of making amends. Or
 maybe, because you're sitting on
 the entirety of that claim now, you
 brought the wood to make sure your
 investment doesn't collapse on
 itself.

BELINDA MULRONEY (BEMUSED)
 You've worked all the angles,
 haven't you?

BILL
 Man sits alone in the wilderness
 long enough...he covers all the
 bases.

BELINDA MULRONEY (SHAKES HEAD)
 You are different, Haskell. I'll
 give you that. What makes you so
 different?

BILL (SHRUG)
 Try to bathe at least once a week.

She considers his damp body beside hers.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Ain't doing you any favors.

He smiles. She surveys him as he does.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
But you do still got some white in
your mouth.

He looks at her. She continues to consider his teeth:

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
Still got the teeth of
civilization.
(beat)
First thing that goes. Hygiene.
Man's insides start showing up in
his mouth. The malnourishment. The
corruption. All the things he think
he's hiding from the world, but
ain't--

Bill takes the bottle. Drinks with a dismissive smile:

BILL
Ah, civilization ain't gone up
here. Not if you don't want--

BELINDA MULRONEY
It ain't what you want. It's what
Nature wants. She'll pull the
animal out of you, even if you
don't know it's there. Just takes
time.

BILL
Nah. She can rage and piss and turn
the world to mud all She
wants...but way I see it, the world
can only kill you once. Thing it
can't do is take away what you
don't want it to.

BELINDA MULRONEY
And that's...

BILL
Sense that tomorrow's got things in
it that today don't. And they're
better.

She rolls her eye. You goddamn, insufferable greenhorn.

They both smile. She surveys him as he returns his focus to
the campfire. She eyes those relatively healthy teeth again.

The bottle letting loose her deeply-buried yearning.
Wistfully, re teeth:

BELINDA MULRONEY
But damn if Civilization ain't a
beautiful thing.

He looks to her. She leans in. Kisses him. Nothing serious.
It just sort of happens. They regard each other. She shakes
her head, knows she's a damn fool.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
You pass any of this on to town,
I'll deny it.

She kisses him again.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
I'm just drunk and cold...and in
need of a little bit of
civilization.

As they kiss--moving on to something possibly more--camera
drifts outside, into that ominous autumn storm...

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - MORNING

Next morning. A window in the weather. No rain. Belinda preps to leave. At her horses, tethered under the eave of the shed:

BELINDA MULRONEY
Hangover, I'm used to. Two
hangovers, that's a whole 'nother
thing.

BILL (CURIOUS)
Two.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Lot of intoxication in the air last
night. More ways than one. It'll
wear off. It always does.

Bill's surprised. She's getting ahead of it. Nipping any type of emotion in the bud before it can develop between them. She eyes him apologetically:

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
I'm too far gone, Haskell. Too many
closed up places in me that need to
be open for something like this to
work. Woman's got to be like that
up here.

Bill nods gamely. Knows she's lying as much to herself as to him. She regards him one last time, appreciative.

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
Keep that civilization burning
bright, will you?

BILL
You do the same.

As she preps her steed:

BELINDA MULRONEY
Oh it's been beat outta me. Think I
made dunthat pretty clear, with all
that pontificating last night.

Bill subtly disagrees--nods to the wood she brought--

BILL
And yet that wood's here and not at
the mill.
(off her look)
It doesn't show up last night, I'm
out there in the mud, dead. And I
think you knew that.

He offers her a small grin.

BILL (CONT'D)
So don't talk to me about
civilization.

She smiles inwardly, mounts up. Splits without looking back.

EXT. DAWSON STREETS - DAY

Belinda. Returning to Dawson. Her face telling us she's still got the evening before on her mind. How to deal with it? Then she notices--visible in the saloon--Sabine, *dancing*--

Off Belinda, shaking her head--*goddamn wench*--

INT. SALOON - MOMENTS LATER

Belinda enters. Perturbed to see Sabine, apparently right back at it. Drinking. Laughing. Dancing.

Belinda's about to lay in to her--

BELINDA MULRONEY
Halfwit's supposed to be on the
straight and narrow--

BARTENDER
Calm it, Belinda. She is.
(off Belinda's confused
look)
She's just celebrating.

BELINDA MULRONEY (SUSPICIOUS)
Celebrating what?

BARTENDER
If I'm not mistaken...woman's in
love.

He nods up the bar, where Judge enjoys a drink. Watching over Sabine. All innocence. At least from his end.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
With the Divine, Holy light.

Belinda shakes her head.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Something happen and I didn't
notice last night? World flip on
its head? I'm out there
whoring...and she's found God.

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - LATER

Belinda, headed toward the mill--her accountant Dan Condon falling into line with a sheaf of paperwork--

DAN CONDON
 There you are. Just need some signatures.
 (off her curious look)
 Liquidation papers. For all the claims on your books.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Who's our buyer--

Condon shows her on the paperwork. She looks half-amused, half-about-to-wretch.

DAN CONDON
 I know. But he's got cash on hand, and that's what we need right now.

Belinda stops at the sight of Bill's claim.

BELINDA MULRONEY (SUBTLE UNEASE)
 152.

DAN CONDON
 We talked about it. Haskell's claim is crown jewel to the buyers in terms of speculative value.
 (beat)
 You want hard cash, to compete with that man...this is the way to do it.

Said with a nod up the block. Where the COUNT is visible, overseeing new construction on his newly acquired block.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 He's building *already*? Where's he getting the wood?

DAN CONDON
 Bringing it in from upriver. And...
 (solemn)
 ...this last boat, he had milling equipment brought up as well.

BELINDA MULRONEY (SHOCKED)
 Milling equipment? Uh-uh. That is crossing the line. There is only one mill in Dawson, and that is mine.

DAN CONDON
 If he has his way, there will only
 be one. And it won't be yours.

Condon returns his attention to the paperwork. The claims.

DAN CONDON (CONT'D)
 Sign it. We've got to start turning
 some of these assets into cash. Now
 is the wrong time to be having a
 heart, Belinda.

Off Belinda--

EXT. DAWSON CITY STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Belinda rounds the corner, spitting mad. Condon behind her.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Don't ever pander to me about
 conscience, you ledger-lovin' son-
 of-a-bitch.

Condon stops her. For the first time fighting back.

DAN CONDON
 And don't you go that way with me,
 Belinda. I am this close to
 walking.

BELINDA MULRONEY
 Where you gonna go?

DAN CONDON
 Where do you think?

He looks back at the Count. Who nods to him--and Belinda--
 from afar. Like he's *enjoying* this. Belinda: shocked her arch-
 foe has made inroads with her inner circle.

DAN CONDON (SOTTO) (CONT'D)
 He's offering me twice what you're
 paying. But out of fidelity--out of
heart, Belinda--I've been saying
 no.

Which stops Belinda briefly. Condon continues, dead serious:

DAN CONDON (CONT'D)
 You have hired me for a *reason*. To
 keep you on your business plan. I'm
 just a facilitator. If you don't
 want the things you told me you
 want, let me know, and I'll stand
 down.

(beat)

(MORE)

DAN CONDON (CONT'D)

But you're the one who told me in the very beginning, it isn't about the mines. Mines are just a bunch of mud with maybe a year's worth of payback in em.

He motions at all the construction. The commerce around them.

DAN CONDON (CONT'D)

But Dawson--Dawson's a town. Beginning of a city. Paris of the North. Meant to last not a year...but *centuries*. That's where the money is. You know it and I know it.

(re Miners)

What those guys pull out of the ground just paves our streets.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Belinda & Condon, moving up a poorly-lit stairwell. Low-end whores pass. Someone's got morphine in their arm in an adjacent room--

DAN CONDON

Haskell can recover. Hell, hire him. Let him tend bar. Let him mill wood. I guarantee it'll be higher paying than that fool's errand he's currently on.

On the next landing, they push open a door--revealing Soapy Smith. He's got a young Tlingit girl with him. Enough booze and drugs to sedate an army.

SOAPY SMITH

Ms. Mulroney. I trust you've come to consummate the deal.

He approaches, half-clad. Sees the paperwork in Condon's hands. Trying to be amusing--

SOAPY SMITH (CONT'D)

Not 'consummate' in that way, but you do get my point--

BELINDA MULRONEY

Shut it, Soap. Don't make this any more sordid than it already is.

Off Soapy, eyeing her, knowing he's on the verge of deal--

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - DAY

CU: The new load of wood, having shorn up Bill's sagging bench mine. Widen.

Bill, the rebuilt superstructure above him. Pleased. Back in business. The superstructure's given the site stability. Now allows him to clear away the constant seep, the unstable, soupy mud on the mine's "floor". Below, a hollow space has been revealed. He puts his hand into it...feels a flow of water. Not stagnant, but a constant flow, unseen til now beneath the surface. Visible through that limpid water: placer. Gorgeous. Untouched for millenia. As he marvels at it--

--Meekor appears. A conflicted look on his face.

MEEKOR

Goods news is I got walking pneumonia.

BILL

Not a whole lot of people'd qualify that as *good* news--

MEEKOR

When it means I don't got typhoid it is.

BILL (HONESTLY HAPPY)

Well now, congratulations.
(further excited)
You'll also be elated to know...I figured out why the site's been fillin' in on itself. There's flow under the surface. Small subterranean creek, river. I don't know. Placer soft as clouds.

He takes a scoop of that beautiful, light gravel.

BILL (CONT'D)

Meaning, if there's science to any of this...that...is optimum, gold-bearing soil.

MEEKOR (STRANGELY RESERVED)

Might want to hold up on that. I started with the good news.

Bill looks up at him. Sensing something bad's coming. Meekor takes a deep breath. Almost funereal:

MEEKOR (CONT'D)

Ready for the bad?

Off Bill, knowing another shoe's about to fall--CUT TO--

INT. MILL - DAY

--Bill, busting in on Belinda. Glares at her. She pretends to go about paperwork, unfazed.

BILL
It true? You sell up that claim
from beneath me?

Belinda shakes her head dolefully, finally looks up at him.

BELINDA MULRONEY
Told you there weren't no
civilization in me.

She gets up. Goes to the window. Matter-of-factly:

BELINDA MULRONEY (CONT'D)
Sold your note to Soapy. He's not
gonna give you the week I was to
pay back the loan. He's gonna
foreclose. Today.

She can't bear to look at him.

PRE-LAP: Over Bill--his dream shattered--

JACK LONDON (V.O.)
Sometimes a man's dead on his feet
and he doesn't know it.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LANDSCAPE - DAY

--that desiccated corpse, a little further along in its decay--

INT. CONSTABLE'S OFFICE - DAY

--and the Tlingit in their cell, mournful, drained looks on
their faces. Steele watching. Cavendesh entering, surprised
to see the Tlingit still amongst the living.

CAVENDESH
Thought we had an understanding.

STEELE (MATTER OF FACT)
I'm formally requesting a judge be
sent up to Dawson. So a proper case
can proceed. 'Cause if you want
justice up here...then we're gonna
need a justice.

Cavendesh: silently enraged.

CAVENDESH
You don't want to do this.

STEELE (CALM RESISTANCE)
Don't tell me what I want to do.
(beat)
(MORE)

STEELE (CALM RESISTANCE) (CONT'D)
I can call for the judge or you
can. Up to you.

Cavendesh: incredulous. You dumb son of a bitch!

CAVENDESH
Government'll eat you for lunch,
you know that don't you?

STEELE (NODS)
Reckon it's likely. Still want the
judge.

Cavendesh shakes his head with quiet ire.

CAVEDESH
Wrong fight to pick, constable.
Wrong fight. But you picked it.

He lays the stink-eye on Steele, departs. Off Steele, slowly
looking back to the Tlingit...

EXT. BILL'S CLAIM - DAY

Meekor--rolling up his horrible painting of the polynesian
dream girl. Getting ready to fold up shop.

MEEKOR
Man puts his shovel in the ground
that many times, God's gotta reward
him. Just got to.

Then, shifting to his labrador-optimism:

MEEKOR (CONT'D)
We'll just find another one.

Bill shakes his head. Knows all the claims are staked. Knows
he's broke. This one was the one. Meekor moves down the road
to pack up the wagon.

Bill simmers. Finally snaps, rages with his shovel against
the injustice of nature, of Belinda, of fate. He smashes the
windlass. Smashes all his hard work. Beams and frames.

He drops in the mud in huffing frustration.

As he looks on at the muddy, collapsing mess of his mining
operation--*something about his expression draws us in...*

ANGLE. MEEKOR. 70 yards away. Finishing packing up the wagon.
Soapy approaching.

SOAPY SMITH
Don't give me that look. I gave you
a chance. You coulda cashed in;
(MORE)

SOAPY SMITH (CONT'D)
instead, you threatened me with
pugilism.

MEEKOR
Nah. I just wanna kick yer ass.
(no love for the man)
Fer being a *leech*.

SOAPY SMITH
Rather be a leech than an idiot,
friend. Leech is never hungry.
Idiot, well...go find yourself
lunch.
(nods off claim)
Somewhere besides my claim--

But the moment's interrupted. By Bill. Both men turn, see him
stumbling down the mud toward them. Saying something about:

BILL
--girl in the grass skirt. Meek!
The girl in the grass skirt!

Yep, as he nears, he's in a high, excited frenzy. We've never
seen Bill like this. Almost crazy with elation.

BILL (CONT'D)
You're gonna get her! *Swear to God*
you're gonna get her!

As he pulls Meekor up the hill--Soapy follows in protestation--

SOAPY SMITH
No no, *wrong* direction, my friend!
This is *my* claim now--you are in
arrears--

ANGLE. THE BENCH MINE. Bill pulling Meekor up. Motioning to
the results of his destructive rampage.

A palisade of saturated earth has fallen away where he
smashed the frame of the mine.

Gold is visible. A vein. *Thick and long. Emerging from the*
mud. As the trio looks on, dumbfounded, Bill says quietly:

BILL
Consider that note paid, Soap. And
while you're at it...I think it's
you that needs to get the hell off
our claim.

As camera pushes in on the vein, the gold iridescent,
tantalizing...

END EPISODE 103