

WHAT'S BURIED BENEATH THE PINES

PILOT

Written by

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EXT. PINE FOREST/TREUTLEN CO. GA - DAY

Long rows of pines accept the morning sun's first rays through gray clouds.

GRAY (V.O.)  
Southern Yellow Pine--

A dragging sound interrupts the silence.

GRAY (V.O.)  
A thirty-five billion dollar industry in Georgia--

A head, hooded with a lime green canvas coat, bobs along.

GRAY (V.O.)  
There's always more than meets the eye--

The dragging - incessant, rhythmic.

GRAY (V.O.)  
Their roots, known as taproots, dive a third of their height into the Earth--

A shovel cuts a white line through the sand and straw. On it's handle, a carving: KEEP DIGGING.

GRAY (V.O.)  
They can withstand tremendous forces when they're in groups. They bend, where other trees fall--

A bloody sleeping bag plops down near a big pine carved with a cross.

GRAY (V.O.)  
But on their own, they tend to SNAP under immense pressure--

The crisp thud of a shovel moving dirt.

CUT TO BLACK.

GRAY (V.O.)  
There's an awful lot of secrets buried beneath the pines--

INT. FORESTRY DEPT/UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA - DAY

GRAY HARRIS(30's), handsome, blond, slender, country boy, looks at his watch. His storytelling's got the best of him.

GRAY  
Like pine beetles--

He looks at his class, raptured by boredom. He smirks.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Ok. Enough torture.

The class erupts.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Remember--Pine Beetles: Their  
Economic Impact. Due next week.

Gray shakes his head as the students leave.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Why do I still do this.

Gray grabs his satchel. His phone rings. He removes it from his pocket. He looks at the screen, rolling his eyes.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Sadie? Don't wanna hear it--

He silences the ringer, reaching the door when--another call. Frustrated, he grabs his phone and answers.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
What is it?!?

Gray's face falls flat.

EXT. WADE HARRIS' TRAILER - NIGHT

From the highway, faint light cuts through dense pines. Isolated at the end of a rutted drive sits a sagging trailer surrounded by heaps of rusted junk.

INT. WADE HARRIS' TRAILER/BEDROOM

WADE HARRIS (40s), jittery and unkempt, sits on the edge of his bed, twirling a smudged pipe.

He inhales deeply. His eyes pinpoint.

WADE

Fu-u-uck, that's good.

LIZZIE KIRKLAND (20s), blond, ratty-haired, and pockmarked, slides onto his lap. She pulls his head back. Their lips meet as he blows thick smoke into her mouth—a grotesque, shared kiss. She takes the pipe.

LIZZIE

You gonna light it, or what?

Wade snaps back, flicking the Bic. Lizzie twists the glass pipe, inhaling deeply before exhaling a plume of smoke.

LIZZIE (CONT'D)

You ready, baby?

She slips off her panties, tossing them aside, as Wade leans back, detached, lost in the synthetic rush.

INT. WADE HARRIS' TRAILER/LIVING ROOM

GARRETT HARRIS (18), brown-haired and sharp-featured, sits at a cluttered coffee table, scribbling in a notebook.

From Wade's closed bedroom door, a clang and clatter cut through the silence, followed by Lizzie's giggles.

Garrett's face twists in disgust. He slings an empty Coke can at the door.

He rolls his eyes and exhales sharply, his frustration palpable.

His phone buzzes. He snatches it up, answering eagerly.

GARRETT

Aunt Sadie!

INT. WADE HARRIS' TRAILER/BEDROOM

Lizzie flicks a near-empty baggie.

LIZZIE

Looks like we could use a little more.

She slides down, unzipping Wade's pants, her movements rhythmic as Wade leans back with a dazed grin.

A knock at the door. Lizzie pops up, wiping her mouth.

WADE

What do you want, dammit?

GARRETT (O.S.)

It's Aunt Sadie. She needs to talk.

Wade storms to the door.

WADE

You tell that bitch I'm busy.

Garrett murmurs something inaudible. Wade turns back to Lizzie, already leaning in for another kiss when--

Another knock - softer.

WADE (CONT'D)

Goddammit!

Wade storms to the door and flings it open. Garrett stands there, head hung low.

WADE (CONT'D)

What the fuck do you want?

Garrett doesn't respond, eyes fixed on the floor.

WADE (CONT'D)

Look at me when I'm talking to you!

Garrett slowly looks up, tears brimming in his eyes.

WADE (CONT'D)

What's going on?

Garrett's gaze shifts into the room, to Lizzie and the drugs.

Wade hesitates, stepping halfway out and pulling the door closed behind him. His tone softens.

WADE (CONT'D)

What is it, son?

GARRETT

Grandpa Harris died.

INT. MORRISON FUNERAL PARLOR/SOPERTON, GA - DAY

Gray stares at a wooden coffin where Harlan will soon rest.

GRAY

This is a good box for you, Pops.

He runs a hand over the polished wood.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Better than an ol' drunk deserves.

Gray slaps the coffin like a mechanic testing a car's durability. He laughs.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
I'll never forgive you for making  
me come back to this shithole.

CALEB MORRISON (20s), in a mismatched JCPenney suit and scuffed work boots, appears in the doorway of a small, dimly lit office.

CALEB  
Ready to join us, Mr. Harris?

GRAY  
Uh--yeah. Sure.

Gray steps back from the coffin, retreating from his thoughts and into the office.

SADIE (HARRIS) GRIFFIN (20s), long black hair, unconventionally pretty, and heavysset, sits across from a cheap pressboard desk.

She rises, embracing her brother with tears. Sadness? Joy? It's hard to tell.

Gray hugs her back half-heartedly.

SADIE  
They think heart attack, Gray.

She rummages in her purse, pulling out a tissue.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
He was working and just fell out.

She snaps her fingers for emphasis.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
Doctors said it was painless.

GRAY  
I always thought the sonuvabitch  
was invincible.

Gray's gaze softens as he looks at her.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Must've hit you pretty hard?

Sadie, caught off guard by Gray's sudden kindness, falters.

SADIE  
Whatever. I'm glad it got you back  
here, though.

GRAY  
That makes one of us.

He stares at her for a moment, a small, reluctant smile  
tugging at his face.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
It's good seeing you, though. You  
look very pretty, sis.

Sadie ducks her head, smiling, unaccustomed to compliments.

SADIE  
Thank you.

She smooths her hands down her dress with a dash of pride.

GRAY  
He's dead. You coulda come in yoga  
pants and a sports bra. You ain't  
gotta impress him anymore.

SADIE  
Please. I stopped trying to keep up  
with you and Wade ages ago.

Caleb clears his throat, stepping back into the moment.

CALEB  
If you'll both have a seat, we'll  
get started?

He slides a folder of arrangement details across the desk.  
Gray and Sadie sit, pulling out chairs.

CALEB (CONT'D)  
Harlan--Mr. Harris--had everything  
picked out.

The siblings settle in, but they're clearly ignoring him.

GRAY  
Speaking of Wade--Where is your  
brother?

SADIE

Hmph. If you know, I know. He's back on that shit again.

Sadie picks up the folder, flipping it open without hesitation.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Of course, he swears he's sober.

She flips through a few pages, her voice steady.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Asking for money. Things going missing on the farm--

Sadie glances at the folder, then at Gray.

SADIE (CONT'D)

You wanna see?

Gray stands, rubbing his hands together.

GRAY

Nah. I'm good. I wanna get out of Treutlen County as quick as possible.

Sadie exhales sharply, turning to Caleb.

SADIE

Fine. Where do I sign?

Caleb leans over the desk, pointing at the signature line.

GRAY

Besides--you got this, Sade.

He strides toward the door.

GRAY (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go check out the farm.

Sadie presses the pen to the contract as the cowbell above the door jingles, marking Gray's exit.

EXT. HARRIS FARM - DAY

Gray's truck rolls to a stop in front of a weathered farmhouse, bordered by thick pines.

A simple plywood sign, neatly painted, reads: Harris Timber Co. - Est. 1992.



Deep tire ruts mark the path from the road to the house and out to the land beyond.

Gray remains in the truck, staring at the farm. The weight of his youth hangs heavy in the air.

GRAY

Ten years. Nothing's changed.

Scattered across the plot, crudely built structures lean in the midday sun - one standing out more than the rest.

EXT. HARRIS FARM/PUMP HOUSE

The old pump house wasn't just for water. It was a place of gathering, memories, and moments - good and bad.

Gray kneels, sifting through dusty remnants of the past. He grazes a fishing pole - the tip splintered and broken.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. BARNES' POND/20 YEARS EARLIER - TWILIGHT

Harlan looms over a young Wade and Gray, his fishing pole raised high.

The crack of the pole meeting flesh echoes. Wade yelps, collapsing in pain, curling into himself.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Gray grips the broken fishing pole, his knuckles white. His breath quickens, anger and pain bubbling to the surface after years of suppression.

GRAY

You son of a bitch.

With a guttural yell, he hurls the fishing pole against the wall. It crashes to the ground with a clatter.

Gray lashes out, kicking a john boat. It flips onto its side, spilling an old tackle box. Hooks scatter across the dirt.

He stands amidst the wreckage, chest heaving, tears streaming down his face. The chaos around him mirrors the storm within.

Gray sinks to the ground, burying his head in his hands. His eyes catch the carved plaque on the pump house wall:

"For Mom. Love, Wade and Gray."

His fingers tremble as he reaches out, touching the plaque tenderly. The rage drains from his face, replaced by sorrow.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry, Mama.

He lingers on the words, his voice soft and broken.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Why do I even care?

The wind stirs, carrying the clean scent of pine. Gray lifts his head, the steady trees grounding him in the present.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
This place--it's ours. No one else's.

He spots Harlan's first chainsaw, crusted with cobwebs and streaked with pine resin. Picking it up, he runs his fingers over the worn grip and lifts it to his nose.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
"Smells like money--"

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. PINE FOREST/TREUTLEN CO. GA - DAY

HARLAN HARRIS (40s), tall, broad, and imposing, pulls his Ford truck to a stop along Harveytown Road, the pavement still slick from rain.

YOUNG GRAY (8), small and curious, sits in the passenger seat, engrossed in a replica John Deere tractor he's driving across his lap.

HARLAN  
I want you to see something.

Gray doesn't look up.

YOUNG GRAY  
What?

HARLAN  
You'll see. Come on.

They step out of the truck and make their way into the woods.

They push forward until they step into a neat pine row.

Harlan stops, his eyes locking onto a specific tree.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Here 'tis.

He pats a rough-carved cross etched deep into the bark of a pine.

YOUNG GRAY

A cross?

Young Gray kneels, resuming play with his tractor in the damp soil.

HARLAN

Well--yeah.

Harlan chuckles softly, crouching beside him.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

But it's more than just a cross.  
It's a marker.

He nudges Gray, pointing toward the towering trees.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

You see that?

Gray follows his father's gaze, squinting.

YOUNG GRAY

Pine trees?

HARLAN

That's right. And it's all ours.

Gray barely reacts, already dragging his tractor through imaginary dirt roads.

Harlan shakes his head with a chuckle. He inhales deeply, closing his eyes as the scents of pine and fresh rain fill the air.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Smells good, don't it? You smell  
it?

Gray sniffs, curious.

YOUNG GRAY

The rain? My teacher said humans  
can smell rain the way sharks smell  
blood in water.

Harlan smiles faintly, shaking his head.

HARLAN

No, son. That's the smell of money.

EXT. HARRIS FARM/PUMP HOUSE

In a cobwebbed corner, Gray spots an old brown shoebox.

Climbing over rusted tools, he grabs it and settles on an antique box blade, brushing off dirt.

Inside, worn photos: a hunting camp, a classic car under repair, and family gatherings.

Beneath them, a creased manila envelope catches his eye. It's heavier than it looks.

Gray opens it and looks inside. He reaches in and removes--

GRAY

What the hell?

Five stacks of banded hundreds - ten thousand each. He glances over his shoulder, then at the money, holding the stacks together.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Fifty grand? Why'd you hide this?

He peers back into the envelope, hoping for more. It's empty, save for a single photograph.

GRAY (CONT'D)

What's this?

He pulls out the photo: Harlan, Evie, AUNT JOJLENE, and a STRANGE MAN in formal wear. The man's unsettling gaze lingers on Evie.

Gray flips the photo over, reading the scrawled names on the back.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Gentry? Hmm.

He stares at the money, then back at the photo.

GRAY (CONT'D)

And why are you in here with this?

He stuffs the money back into the envelope and returns it to the box. Climbing up, he slides the shoebox back into its hiding spot.

He pauses, holding the photograph, looking at the strange man.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Who are you?

The rumble of an approaching car cuts through his thoughts. He looks up, spotting the vehicle.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Sadie.

He quickly shoves the photo into his pocket and steps out of the pump house, throwing one last glance back with a heavy sigh.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Never a straight answer.

Sadie steps out of her car, eyeing Gray curiously.

SADIE  
What were you doing? You look like you've seen a ghost.

GRAY  
Yeah? Something like that.

SADIE  
What'd you put in your pocket?

Gray walks to the porch, pushing open the creaky screen door.

GRAY  
A little souvenir.

He shifts the conversation, glancing around.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Feels strange being back here.

SADIE  
What'd you expect? You've been gone ten years.

GRAY  
Fair. Com'on. Let's go inside.

Sadie opens her car's back door, rummaging through the seat.

SADIE  
Be right in. Grabbing a few things.

Gray pauses for a moment on the threshold, taking it all in. Then, for the first time in a decade, he steps into his boyhood home.

INT. HARRIS FARM/HOUSE

The house feels like a Harris family time capsule—a worn path in the wood floor traces decades of routines from the living room to the kitchen and out the side door.

Gray moves to the kitchen, stopping at the fridge. He pulls out a half-full bottle of Johnnie Walker Black.

Sadie bustles in through the side door, arms loaded with stuffed grocery bags. She sets them on the counter, sighing.

SADIE

Little early, ain't it?

Gray holds up the bottle, smirking.

GRAY

He loved his "Johns," didn't he?

Gray sets the bottle on the counter, grabbing a cup.

SADIE

Yeah. Deere, Walker, and Wayne.

Gray pours a small amount of whiskey and knocks it back in one quick swallow.

GRAY

What's all that?

Sadie starts unloading the bags onto the counter.

SADIE

Daddy's stuff. Caleb gave them to me before I left.

She pulls out a white undershirt and a pair of jeans, both sliced up from being cut off Harlan's body, and a plaid Wrangler shirt.

Sadie removes a bulky item from another bag and sets it down with a thud.

GRAY

He loved that god-awful thing.

Gray picks up a lime green canvas coat his father wore.

SADIE  
He wore it everywhere.

Sadie starts moving through the house, flinging open curtains and flooding the space with natural light.

GRAY  
Reckon it'll fit me?

Gray checks the tag inside the coat, pausing when he spots a name written there: GENTRY.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
You again?

His brow furrows as he pulls the photo from his pocket, flipping it over to reread the names.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Hey, Sade! Who's Gentry?

Sadie's heels click on the floor as she returns to the kitchen. Gray quickly shoves the photo back into his pocket.

SADIE  
I dunno. Why?

Gray holds up the tag inside the jacket.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
That's weird.

She snatches the jacket, pulling it closer to inspect the tag.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
Dad's had this jacket long as I've been alive.

Gray takes the jacket back, his brow furrowed.

GRAY  
Yeah. Me too.

Heavy stomping from the porch draws their attention.

Wade appears at the window, shirtless and disheveled. He bursts through the door, headed straight for Harlan's room.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Well, hello brother.

Gray and Sadie follow the racket as clanging and clattering echo from the other room.

INT. HARRIS FARM/HOUSE/BEDROOM

Wade paces, tearing the room apart - dresser drawers overturned, mattress flipped.

He grabs a small box off the nightstand, pocketing Harlan's heirloom watch.

He dashes into the bathroom, flinging open the medicine cabinet. An orange bottle of oxys vanishes into his pocket before he storms back into the bedroom.

Gray and Sadie watch silently from the doorway.

GRAY

No "fuck you" or nothing, huh?

Wade barely glances up, smirking.

WADE

Fuck you.

Gray folds his arms, leaning against the doorframe.

GRAY

So? Whatcha doing, Wade?

Wade keeps rifling through the chaos.

WADE

It's here somewhere.

Gray steps forward, but Sadie gently stops him with a hand on his arm, shaking her head sadly. Her phone rings, and she steps away to answer.

GRAY

What is?

WADE

Fifty thousand.

Wade pauses, turning over a loose air vent cover.

WADE (CONT'D)

Dad told me about it. Said if anything happened, there'd be fifty k. Cash.

GRAY

Never told me anything.

Wade looks up, sneering.



WADE

Maybe 'cuz you were too busy  
playing college boy up in Athens.

Wade returns to digging as Sadie steps back into the room,  
pulling Gray aside.

SADIE

That was Melvin Turpin.

Gray raises an eyebrow.

GRAY

Who?

SADIE

Daddy's lawyer.

GRAY

What'd he want?

SADIE

The will. He needs us there to read  
it.

Wade stops, now paying close attention.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Yes, Wade. You, too.

Wade grins, quickly slipping on one of Harlan's t-shirts.  
Sadie rolls her eyes and walks off.

WADE

Aight, little bro. Let's go!

Wade brushes past Gray, slapping him on the chest as he goes.

WADE (CONT'D)

I'm riding with you.

GRAY

Great.

Gray follows reluctantly, exhaling as he watches Wade swagger  
out of the room.

EXT. SOPERTON, GA./DOWNTOWN - DAY

Downtown Soperton feels cozy and quaint - a quiet town trying  
too hard to be a city.

A few people mill about, mostly construction workers revolving in and out of the Key ACE Hardware.

Adjacent shops, diners, and offices stretch along the half-mile main street.

Gray and Wade exit Gray's truck in front of Turpin Law. Gray scans the storefronts, his lips pressing into a faint grimace.

GRAY  
Sure has changed.

Wade leans against the truck. He lights a cigarette, his posture relaxed but his expression sharp.

WADE  
Yeah. I guess.

Gray looks across the street at a gravel lot.

GRAY  
Grady's closed? It's like the whole town's been bought out.

WADE  
Yeah. Silverado's now. Honkytonk.

He pulls on the cigarette.

WADE (CONT'D)  
Cool place, though. Kato works there. Remember him?

Gray nods, his lips pressing into a faint grimace.

GRAY  
Yeah.

WADE  
We should grab a beer there tonight. For old time's sake.

Nothing sounds worse to Gray, but he shrugs.

GRAY  
Yeah. We could, I guess.

Sadie sticks her head out of the lawyer's office door.

SADIE  
Y'all comin'?

Wade takes one last drag, flicking the butt into the back of Gray's truck.

WADE  
Tonight, then.

He pulls the office door open and steps aside.

WADE (CONT'D)  
After you.

Gray steps through, but Wade grips him firmly across the nape of his neck, shaking slightly. His teeth clench in a grin.

WADE (CONT'D)  
Miss my little brother.

Gray stiffens, tossing his arm to knock Wade's hand loose. Their eyes lock in a moment of unspoken tension.

GRAY  
Hey, Wade--

Wade takes a step back, raising his eyebrows in mock innocence.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
--behave in here, aight?

Wade nods, and the door shuts behind them.

INT. TURPIN LAW OFFICE

MELVIN TURPIN (60s), mostly bald, slumps behind his cluttered desk, wire-frame glasses low on his nose, bolo tie with Jesus Christ glinting as he reads the will aloud.

MELVIN  
--I leave all rights, title, and interest in Harris Timber, the family land, and any associated assets to be held and managed solely by him--

EXT. SOPERTON, GA./DOWNTOWN

The door to Turpin Law swings open, slamming against the brick vestibule as Wade storms out.

WADE  
Bullshit!

Gray follows, calm but wary.

WADE (CONT'D)  
You? He left it to you? What the fuck?

GRAY  
You're right. Dad was always pulling shit like this.

Wade shoves Gray against the bed of his truck.

WADE  
How the fuck would you know? You ran off, remember? Left me to deal with all his shit.

He releases Gray, pacing.

WADE (CONT'D)  
I was the one who stayed. Me!

Gray steadies himself, pushing back slightly, his body tense. Wade paces, grabbing his head in frustration.

WADE (CONT'D)  
What am I gonna do now?

He stops, sneering at Gray.

WADE (CONT'D)  
You have no idea what this means.

Wade's eyes fill with either tearful rage or worry.

WADE (CONT'D)  
I'm the eldest. It was supposed to be me.

GRAY  
What about Sadie?

Gray's words hit like a match to gasoline.

WADE  
What about her? What? Dad screws some whore in Atlanta, and we gotta pretend she's one of us?

Sadie steps out of the office, stopping mid-stride as Wade spits out his venom.

WADE (CONT'D)  
Screw her. She's only a half-  
Harris.

Sadie approaches, hurt but furious.

SADIE  
Maybe you're right, Wade Harris,  
but--

She digs in her purse for her keys, her voice steady.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
--Daddy must've seen something in  
me. I practically ran this  
business.

Her gaze hardens, alternating between Gray and Wade.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
Not you! Not you! Shit, Wade, he  
didn't even want you around half  
the time.

Wade scoffs, blowing her off as he searches for a cigarette.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
And it should've been me, dammit!  
I've been running the business the  
last three years.

GRAY  
Everyone calm down.

Gray steps back toward the door.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
You're both not wrong. And I don't  
want it. None of it.

He grabs the handle.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Besides, I've got my own life.

SADIE  
Ain't nothing you can do now.

GRAY  
I can sell it. We'll split the  
profits--

Wade freezes, his anger shifting to panic.

WADE

Sell it? You can't do that. It's gotta stay in the family.

SADIE

Yeah. It's Daddy's wishes.

GRAY

So?

Gray opens the door. Everything feels frozen until--

SADIE

Sign it over to me!

Gray stops, turning as Sadie claps a hand over her mouth, surprised at her own outburst.

GRAY

Is that what you want? Keep working for him? Trying to impress him?

He approaches Sadie, pulling her into a big, brotherly hug. She stiffens, then awkwardly leans in.

SADIE

What was that for?

GRAY

You're good enough just the way you are.

He steps back, hand on the door handle.

GRAY (CONT'D)

I'll see what I can do.

The door shuts behind him, leaving Wade and Sadie staring at each other, worried and unsure.

INT. TURPIN LAW OFFICE

Gray sits at Melvin's desk, waiting. He picks up a picture frame, inspecting the photo: Melvin, an older woman, two younger women, and two children.

Melvin's voice echoes from the hallway.

MELVIN (O.S.)

Okay, Mr. Harris. I've got it.

Melvin enters, carrying a thick file. Gray casually sets the photo back on the desk.

GRAY  
Nice family.

Melvin sits, straightening the picture.

MELVIN  
Thank you.

GRAY  
Look, Mr. Turpin. What would I need  
to do to offload this--

Gray gestures toward the folder.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
--curse?

Melvin stammers, taken aback.

MELVIN  
I'd hardly say six million dollars  
is a curse, Mr. Harris.

Gray straightens in his chair, startled.

GRAY  
Did you say--?

MELVIN  
Six. Million. That's right.

Melvin slides an accounting log across the desk.

MELVIN (CONT'D)  
Take a look.

Gray picks up the paper, scanning it.

GRAY  
A thousand acres? Since when? When  
I left it was hardly four hundred.

Melvin nods, stepping closer to point at a figure on the  
sheet.

MELVIN  
This is the proposed value of your  
father's estate.

Melvin returns to his chair.

MELVIN (CONT'D)  
Your daddy's been a busy man the  
pas few years.

A proud smile crawls across Melvin's face.

GRAY

I don't care. I don't want it.

Gray pauses, thinking.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Can't I just sign it over to Sadie?

MELVIN

You could. But--lemme check.

Melvin nervously flips through several pages, stopping at a clause.

MELVIN (CONT'D)

Yeah--Uh--Sure. I guess. But you wouldn't wanna do that, would you?

Gray leans forward, meeting Melvin's eye.

GRAY

Just get it done. I want out.

Gray stands abruptly.

MELVIN

Ok. I'll--Uh--Get the papers started first thing tomorrow.

GRAY

Good. You need me to sign anything? I'm back in Athens the second that man's covered in dirt.

MELVIN

No. Not yet.

Melvin nervously thumbs at the papers. He looks at Gray.

MELVIN (CONT'D)

What's the rush?

Gray glares at him.

GRAY

I hate this fucking town.

He storms out, yelling over his shoulder as he leaves.

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

Call me when it's done.



The door slams, leaving Melvin sitting in silence.

INT. MOTEL 6 - EVENING

Gray pulls into the parking lot as his phone rings.

GRAY

Hello?

LACEY (V.O.)

How's it going, honey?

GRAY

It's a shit show. Classic Harlan.

LACEY (V.O.)

Aw. I'm sorry. You alright?

Gray softens, his guard slipping.

GRAY

Yeah. It's just--

He gets out of the truck and walks to the motel door.

GRAY (CONT'D)

I never thought I'd be back here.  
Dealing with all this.

The sound of kids yelling filters through the line.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Guess I'm lucky I've got you  
holding down the fort.

He fumbles for his motel key, eager to change the subject.

GRAY (CONT'D)

How are things there?

LACEY (V.O.)

Kitchen sink's clogged again.

Gray checks his watch.

GRAY

It's still early. Call Bobby. See  
if he can fix it today.

LACEY (V.O.)

Yeah, I will. Hey, Kanton wants to  
tell you something.

GRAY  
Yeah, one sec.

Gray inserts his key, pushing the door open as he enters.

INT. GRAY AND LACEY'S HOME/ATHENS, GA.

LACEY MARTIN-GRAY (30s), blonde, blue-eyed, attractive, stands at the kitchen sink, holding a plunger.

LACEY  
Kanton? Your dad's on the line.

Kanton thuds down the stairs as Lacey hesitates.

LACEY (CONT'D)  
You sure you don't want us there  
with you?

GRAY (V.O.)  
It's not worth the trouble.

LACEY  
Harlan never liked me anyway.

Gray chuckles.

GRAY (V.O.)  
He wasn't thrilled you dragged his  
boy to "hippie town."

KANTON HARRIS (16), blonde, blue-eyed, holds a certificate.  
Lacey hands him the phone.

KANTON  
Hey, Dad! Guess what?

GRAY (V.O.)  
What, bud?

KANTON  
I got in! FFA. I'm a greenhand.

GRAY (V.O.)  
That's awesome. I'm proud of you.

KOLBI GRAY (10), curls bouncing, runs in, eager for attention.

KOLBI  
I wanna talk to daddy!

Kanton pushes her back.

KANTON  
Knock it off, twerp.

GRAY (V.O.)  
Hey! Be nice to your sister.

KOLBI  
Yeah! Be nice to me.

She brushes her curls from her eyes, her voice softening.

KOLBI (CONT'D)  
When are you coming home, Daddy?

Gray smiles, his heart melting.

GRAY (V.O.)  
They bury Grandpa Harris tomorrow.  
I'll leave soon after. Okay?

KOLBI  
Okay, Daddy.

Lacey shoos the kids off.

LACEY  
Go wash up for supper. I'll finish  
talking to Dad.

The kids leave, bickering as Lacey returns to the phone.

INT. MOTEL 6

LACEY (V.O.)  
Couple days, then? That's good  
news.

Gray pauses, his tone shifting.

GRAY  
He left it to me, Lace.

LACEY (V.O.)  
What?

GRAY  
The land. All of it. It's six mil  
now.

INT. GRAY AND LACEY'S HOME/ATHENS, GA.

A stunned silence, brief, then a laugh.

LACEY  
Six million? Holy shit!

Kolbi's voice interrupts faintly in the background.

KOLBI (O.S.)  
That's a five-dollar bad word!

Lacey covers her mouth, grinning.

LACEY  
(whispering)  
Holy shit, Gray. This could change everything. You could quit teaching.

GRAY (V.O.)  
I'm giving it to Sadie.

Lacey's excitement fades into confusion, then disappointment.

LACEY  
Are you sure?

GRAY (V.O.)  
I can't do it, Lace. Stay here. Soperton. I left for a reason.

INT. MOTEL 6

Gray picks up a pamphlet from the nightstand advertising local businesses. One ad stands out: Silverado's Honkytonk.

GRAY  
I swore I'd never come back.

He glances at the motel clock: 7:47 PM.

LACEY  
Let's talk more when you're home. Okay?

GRAY  
Sure, babe. Love you.

LACEY  
Love you, too.

INT. SILVERADO'S SALOON

The Thursday night crowd is lively and buzzing. A blues band plays on stage while people dance on the sawdust-covered floor.

The air smells of stale beer and cigarette smoke—the perfect bar.

DAKOTA "KOTA" JAMES (30s), half-Cherokee, black ponytail, muscular, slides behind the bar, serving drinks with ease.

Shirt sleeves rolled and arms crossed, he leans back, sizing up Gray as he approaches.

KOTA

What's up?

GRAY

Wade said you worked here. You seen him?

Kota smirks, relaxing.

KOTA

Knowing Wade, he could be anywhere.

GRAY

Yeah. Same ol' Wade.

Kota's grin widens knowingly. He reaches into the cooler and pulls out a Coors Light.

KOTA

The usual?

Gray nods, and Kota sets the ice-cold beer on the bar.

KOTA (CONT'D)

Sorry about Mr. Harris.

Gray takes a sip, wincing slightly.

GRAY

Bound to happen sometime.

KOTA

Yeah. To all of us, I guess.

Kota grabs a towel, wiping down the bar top.

KOTA (CONT'D)

How long you here for?

GRAY

Couple days. Funeral's tomorrow.

A woman slides up, ordering a cocktail with a flirtatious smile at Gray. Kota hands her the drink, and she saunters off, looking back with a playful bite of her lip.

KOTA

Still got it, huh?

Gray taps his wedding ring with a smirk.

GRAY

Not anymore. Retired.

KOTA

Kids?

Gray takes another sip of beer, nodding.

GRAY

Two. A boy and a girl. You?

KOTA

Three. They're a handful.

Kota grins slyly.

KOTA (CONT'D)

Wouldn't trade it, though.

They share a quiet moment, the noise of the bar fading.

KOTA (CONT'D)

Life got real, huh?

GRAY

Real fast.

Gray takes a swig.

GRAY (CONT'D)

But I miss the old days. Simpler times. Tougher people.

Kota pours himself a shot. A customer waves at Kota, flicking his nostril. Kota gives a thumbs-up and points toward the back door.

Gray raises an eyebrow.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Some things never change, huh?

Kota smirks.

KOTA  
Got mouths to feed, brother.

Kota hands Gray another beer, raising his shot glass.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
To the tough ones?

They clink glasses. Kota slams his empty glass on the bar. He puts a strong hand on top of Gray's.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
For what it's worth—

He pauses, holding Gray's gaze.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
I'm glad you're back.

Kota slips into the kitchen.

Gray finishes his beer, leaves a tip on the bar, and walks away.

EXT. SILVERADO'S SALOON

Gray opens the door of his truck when--

WADE (O.S.)  
I got you, motherfucker!

Wade shuffles up from behind. Gray spins just in time to see a heavy fist swinging toward his face. He flinches, bracing.

WADE (CONT'D)  
Nah, I'm just messing with you!

Wade stops inches from Gray's face, laughing - a loud, knee-slapping bray.

WADE (CONT'D)  
Got you, pussy. You always were a sissy.

Wade strides to the passenger door, presumptuously yanking it open.

WADE (CONT'D)  
I'm starving.

He grabs a bag of pistachios from Gray's seat, dumping a handful into his palm.

WADE (CONT'D)  
Where we going?

Gray shuts the truck door hard, making a point.

GRAY  
We ain't going nowhere.

Wade bounces on his heels, grinning like a kid, his energy grating on Gray.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Where you been? What happened to  
your eye?

Wade fiddles with a pistachio shell, revealing a deep purple bruise around his eye.

WADE  
Jail. Got out early. Overcrowding.

Gray smirks.

GRAY  
Just jail, huh? And the eye?

WADE  
Yeah. It's no biggie.

He crunches a pistachio, smirking, winking.

WADE (CONT'D)  
You should see the other guy. Now,  
c'mon. You promised me a beer.

GRAY  
It's late. Funeral's tomorrow.

Wade shrugs, fighting with another shell.

WADE  
I know a place we could go.

A devilish grin spreads across his face, sparking Gray's own smirk.

WADE (CONT'D)  
(tauntingly)  
Oh! He remembers!

Wade's excitement is contagious, but Gray sighs, resigned.



GRAY  
Alright. Hop in.

Wade leaps into the truck, shutting the door with fluid ease. Gray climbs in, buckles up, and hesitates with the key.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Just one.

Wade crosses his heart, grinning wickedly.

WADE  
Cross my heart and hope to die.

Gray cuts his eyes at Wade, sensing mischief brewing.

Gray presses the gas. The road stretches ahead, leading them straight into old memories—and new trouble.

EXT. BARNES' POND - NIGHT

Gray and Wade sit by a small fire at Barnes' Pond. The crisp air carries a Spring symphony of frogs, crickets, and fireflies. Bullfrog calls echo across the water.

GRAY  
You never said anything about moonshine.

Wade takes a deep swig from a Mason jar.

WADE  
Good to have you back, College Boy.

He passes it to Gray.

GRAY  
Kinda missed this, actually.

Gray sips, groaning at the sting. Wade chuckles.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Reminds me of before.

WADE  
Before what?

GRAY  
Things got complicated.

Wade takes the jar back, staring at the grass.

WADE

Things were always complicated.

They sit in silence, the fire crackling between them.

GRAY

Hey, Wade?

Wade passes the jar again. Gray takes another sip, smoother this time. He reflects strongly before continuing.

GRAY (CONT'D)

You ever hear of a man named  
Gentry?

Wade stares at the fire, concentrating. He shakes his head.

WADE

Nah. Not that I 'member.

(beat)

I gotta piss.

Wade walks to the pond, the trickle of pee hitting the water. He looks back at Gray.

WADE (CONT'D)

Why you ask?

Gray walks to the water's edge, pointing to change the subject.

GRAY

Hey. Remember when we were kids?  
The island?

Wade zips his pants, grinning as he walks back to the fire.

WADE

Our races? Yeah, I remember. You  
were one fast sonuvabitch.

GRAY

Dad stood right here--

Gray points to the ground where he stands. A quiet moment passes, the liquor taking hold.

WADE

Yeah. He beat the shit outta me.

Wade laughs bitterly, breaking the tension.

WADE (CONT'D)  
Told me I deserved it. Because I  
lost.

(mocking Harlan)  
You don't wanna get hit, swim  
faster.

Gray returns to the fire, looking at his brother.

GRAY  
You didn't deserve it. There was no  
excuse.

WADE  
Excuse? Harlan didn't need an  
excuse. Not for me, at least.

GRAY  
I'm sorry, man.

WADE  
Don't be. You got your share, too.  
(quietly)  
Just wish you'd stayed.

They sit in silence, the fire snapping between them.

GRAY  
I was so angry with you.

WADE  
Angry with me? Why?

GRAY  
I thought you abandoned me.

Gray reaches for the jar, but Wade's glare stops him.

WADE  
Are you fucking kidding me?  
Abandoned you?

Wade slings the jar across the field, shattering the moment.

WADE (CONT'D)  
You're the one that left. I stayed.  
I dealt with that old man. Alone.

GRAY  
You're right. I did. I had to. I  
couldn't live his life.

Wade stands, walking to the water's edge.

GRAY (CONT'D)

All he cared about was money. What people thought of him. I had to find my own way.

They both stare at the moon's reflection on the pond.

GRAY (CONT'D)

I-I couldn't stay and watch him destroy us.

Wade turns to look at Gray. He shrugs.

WADE

Is what it is, right?

GRAY

I guess so.

Wade walks back to the fire, gathering his cigarettes and lighter. He lights a Marlboro and takes a long drag.

They sit in silence, staring into the fire, its flickering flames mirroring their conflicted thoughts.

EXT. GREENWOOD CEMETERY - DAY

A crowd gathers around a freshly dug grave. Above the hole, Harlan Quinn Harris III's casket hovers, suspended by straps.

Two folding chairs with velvet overlays sit empty, reserved for Gray and Wade.

Sadie scans the crowd, irritated. Her husband, SEAN GRIFFIN (40s) fat, slovenly, and underdressed, slouches in his chair, glued to his phone.

SEAN

(not looking up)  
Have you called them?

Sadie's jaw tightens.

SADIE

Of course, I called them.

She checks her phone. Nothing.

Behind a small podium, BROTHER KENNY THOMPSON (50s) glances at his wristwatch. Three minutes to noon.

Gray slips into his seat beside Sadie.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
Where the hell have you been?

Gray winces, rubbing his temples.

GRAY  
Not so loud.

SADIE  
Are you hungover?

GRAY  
A little. Maybe still drunk.

SADIE  
Today? Of all days?

GRAY  
You expect reverence? For him?

Sadie exhales sharply, shaking her head.

SADIE  
Never mind. Where's Wade?

Gray shrugs. He catches Sean's eye and nods politely.

GRAY  
See you brought the lawnmower  
salesman.

SADIE  
He's the sales manager.

She slaps Sean's arm.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
Put your phone away.

Sean groans, pocketing it. Gray snickers.

GRAY  
There's your favorite aunt.

They glance at AUNT JOLENE DITMER (70s), hunched over her walker, lighting a Benson and Hedges without a care.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Why'd she come? Didn't she hate  
Dad?

SADIE  
To save face.

Sadie smirks.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
Her and Daddy had a big fight  
before he died.

GRAY  
What about?

SADIE  
Shit. Breathing, probably.

Gray chuckles and pulls out the photo.

GRAY  
Check this out.

Sadie grabs the picture.

SADIE  
OMG. Look how young they were.  
That's your mama, right?

Gray nods, pointing at YOUNG EVIE - a vibrant woman in a floral dress, radiant and confident.

GRAY  
And guess who this is.

He points to JOLENE.

SADIE  
No way!

They glance at Jolene, puffing away.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
Can't be the same woman.

Sadie's eyes land on HARLAN in the photo.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
Look how handsome Daddy was.

Then her gaze shifts to the strange man.

SADIE (CONT'D)  
Who's that? And why's he looking at  
your mama like a hungry dog?

GRAY  
This is where it gets interesting.

He flips the photo over.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Read it.

SADIE

Magnolia Club. Savannah. 1969.

It hits her.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Shut up! Gentry?

Gray nods.

GRAY

Yup. Gonna talk to Jolene later.

Sadie hesitates.

SADIE

Why?

GRAY

Curiosity? I mean, the picture, the jacket--

Gray stows the picture away.

GRAY (CONT'D)

But, none of us know this guy?

BROTHER KENNY (O.S.)

Friends, family. We gather here to lay Brother Harlan to rest--

Gray leans closer.

GRAY

Don't you think that's weird?

Sadie nods, gesturing toward the service.

SADIE

Let me know what she says.

EXT. GREENWOOD CEMETERY - LATER

After the service, the gravediggers lower Harlan's casket and clear out, leaving Gray alone by the grave.

Sadie hugs him from behind.

SADIE

Think he'd be proud of us?

GRAY

Maybe. He'd never say it out loud.

Sadie pulls back, smiling faintly.

SADIE

Well, I'm proud of us.

Gray smiles as his phone buzzes.

GRAY

I gotta take this, Sade.

She kisses his cheek, wipes off her lipstick, and walks away.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Hello? Melvin?

INT. TURPIN LAW OFFICES

Melvin sits behind his desk, holding a letter pieced together from magazine clippings. His expression is grim.

MELVIN

Mr. Harris. Glad I got you. I think you need to hear about this.

EXT. GREENWOOD CEMETERY - DAY

Gray paces through the empty cemetery, phone pressed to his ear.

GRAY

What is it?

MELVIN (V.O.)

Well, you'd better see it, actually. Can you come by my office?

GRAY

Now? No. I've got things to handle. I'm headed back to Athens tonight.

MELVIN (V.O.)

It's very urgent, Mr. Harris. It'll only take a few minutes—

Gray stops, pinching the bridge of his nose, frustration boiling over.



GRAY

Look. I'm done, alright? You've got my address. If it's so important, send it there.

He ends the call abruptly, shoving the phone into his pocket, tension etched across his face.

INT. TURPIN LAW OFFICES

Melvin sets the letter on his desk, shaking his head in frustration.

MELVIN

Ain't coming. He hung up.

He slaps the desk, exasperated.

MELVIN (CONT'D)

Why not just deliver it yourself?

Melvin picks up the letter, reading it again. The words KEEP THE LAND, OR ESLE glare back at him.

MELVIN (CONT'D)

You misspelled else.

Kota steps around the desk, snatching the letter from his hand.

KOTA

I know that! It don't matter.

Kota jabs his finger at the letter.

KOTA (CONT'D)

It's about the message. And this--

He holds it up.

KOTA (CONT'D)

--drives it home.

Melvin stands, draping a mentorlike arm over Kota's shoulder, his tone shifting to something more calculating.

MELVIN

We might have to take this further.

Kota slams the letter on the desk, pulling out his phone. He dials.

Someone picks up on the other end. Kota glances at Melvin.

Melvin nods, a slow, satisfied smile spreading across his face.

KOTA

Pick up the brother.

Kota walks out of the office, leaving Melvin alone with his thoughts, his smile lingering as he stares at the letter.

INT. AUNT JOLENE'S/PORCH - DAY

Gray steps through the screen door of Aunt Jolene's porch, carrying a bouquet of daylilies behind his back.

The porch is a cluttered trove of artifacts, faded magazines, and ashtrays overflowing with cigarette butts.

AUNT JOLENE (70s), wiry and sharp-eyed, sits at a small table. A Benson & Hedges dangles precariously from her lips.

She waves, smoke curling around her fingers.

JOLENE

My word. Look what the wind blew in.

Gray scrapes his boots on the mat and steps inside, revealing the bouquet.

GRAY

Good afternoon, Aunt Jolene.

Jolene exhales sharply, yanking the oxygen tube from her face to take a deep drag from her cigarette.

JOLENE

Whatcha got there?

Gray hands her the bouquet. Her lips curl into a tight, crooked smile as she takes the flowers.

GRAY

Daylilies. Figured you'd like 'em.

Jolene sniffs the flowers briefly, then plops them onto the cluttered table.

JOLENE

Well, don't just stand there. Move that stack of magazines and sit.

Gray shifts a teetering pile onto the floor and settles into a faded plastic lawn chair.

GRAY  
Where's cousin Ollie?

Jolene shakes her head, her eyes narrowing as she exhales another puff of smoke.

JOLENE  
Prison. Goddamn drugs. Won't stop.

She leans closer, resting a wrinkled hand on Gray's knee.

JOLENE (CONT'D)  
Shame about your daddy, honey.

Gray nods stiffly, pulling a photo from his pocket.

GRAY  
Thank you, ma'am. But that's not why I'm here.

He places the photo on the table.

Jolene glances at it briefly, her expression unreadable, then flicks her ashes dangerously close to it.

JOLENE  
What's this bullshit?

Gray brushes off the ashes and points to a figure in the photo.

GRAY  
You know this man?

JOLENE  
I'm in the picture, ain't I?

She picks up the photo, squinting. Her fingers trace the faded edges before flipping it over.

She strokes the writing on the back with a mix of fondness and melancholy.

JOLENE (CONT'D)  
Where'd you find this?

GRAY  
In some of Dad's things.

Jolene's lips tighten as she flips the photo back over, her gaze lingering on one figure.

JOLENE

That's Gentry. Gentry Dickson. A friend of your dad's.

Her tone shifts, lower now, laced with something darker.

JOLENE (CONT'D)

Course, that was before your mama disappeared.

Gray's face hardens, confusion flickering behind his eyes.

GRAY

Disappeared? She drowned.

Jolene chuckles grimly, the sound harsh and cutting, as she lights another cigarette with the burning one.

She snuffs the old one out.

JOLENE

That's what they told you, huh?

Her sharp eyes pierce through the smoke curling between her and Gray. He leans forward, his voice dropping.

GRAY

What're you saying?

Jolene exhales deeply, staring into the photo as though it holds all the answers.

JOLENE

I'm saying--things ain't always what they seem.

CUT TO:  
FLASHBACK

EXT. OCONEE RIVER/BANK - DAY

A pair of shoes sits abandoned on the grassy riverbank. Above them, a rope swing sways lazily from a tall cypress.

The river churns below, clawing at the gnarled roots.

The sound crescendos into a deafening roar as a single red satin handkerchief flutters in the breeze.

BACK TO:

INT. AUNT JOLENE'S/PORCH

JOLENE

Tell me this. How does the best swimmer across three counties slip in the river and drown?

GRAY

No, no. Wait a minute. I saw the death certificate. The funeral.

JOLENE

Funeral? That was an empty box.

Jolene leans back, arms crossed, her gaze unflinching.

GRAY

And you think this Gentry fella had something to do with it?

Jolene points to a tied up Dollar General bag atop an old golf bag.

JOLENE

Hand me that yella bag, sweetie.

Gray grabs the bag, handing it to Jolene. She digs inside and pulls out a faded red handkerchief.

JOLENE (CONT'D)

Look at this. You tell me.

She hands it to Gray. He examines the embroidered stitching: To Evie. Love, G.D.

GRAY

You saying Mama and this man were--

JOLENE

Heaven's no. She loved Harlan. And you boys. But Gentry? He was mad about her. Unpredictable.

Jolene leans in closer.

JOLENE (CONT'D)

Like the night your daddy caught him sneaking around the yard.

CUT TO:  
FLASHBACK

EXT. HARRIS FARM - NIGHT

GENTRY DICKSON (40s) lurks in the bushes near a window glowing with light. Inside, Harlan and Evie argue, their voices muffled.

EVIE HARRIS (30s), chestnut hair, weary eyes, defiant, stands near the window, her arms crossed.

A branch snaps underfoot. Gentry tumbles to the ground.

Harlan's face fills the window, his eyes finding Gentry.

HARLAN

You sonuvabitch. I'll kill you.

Moments later, Harlan bursts onto the porch, a pistol in hand, Gentry runs down the drive.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Stop! I mean it!

He fires into the air.

Gentry freezes. Harlan marches toward him, waving a red satin handkerchief high above his head.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

You trying to steal my wife,  
Dickson?

Evie steps onto the porch, trembling but firm.

EVIE

Harlan. Let him go. That's enough.

Harlan grabs Gentry by the lapels, leaning in close.

HARLAN

Nobody steals from a Harris, boy.

BANG!

Gentry crumples into an agonizing pile.

BACK TO:

INT. AUNT JOLENE'S/PORCH

GRAY

Wait. I've never heard this.

JOLENE

This family loves its secrets,  
honey.

Jolene flicks her ash.

JOLENE (CONT'D)

Gentry's lucky your daddy didn't  
kill him. Wasn't long after, your  
mama went missing. Coincidence?  
Maybe.

GRAY

Didn't the sheriff investigate him?

JOLENE

Tried to. Gentry's uncle was a  
judge. But that man ain't been seen  
since your daddy took his land.

GRAY

Hold on. Daddy bought the land from  
the man he thought took Mama?

Jolene smirks.

JOLENE

I never said bought.

She points out at the pines.

JOLENE (CONT'D)

Just know, everything that walks  
into those woods doesn't always  
come out.

GRAY

Yes, ma'am.

She snuffs out her cigarette, a que for Gray to get going.

JOLENE

Remember, these woods don't give up  
their secrets, son. You gotta earn  
'em.

Gray nods, kissing her cheek before stepping off the porch,  
his mind clouded as he drives away.

INT. MOTEL 6 - NIGHT

Gray is lying on the bed, staring at the photo in his hand,  
when the phone rings. He swipes to answer.

LACEY (V.O.)  
Hey, honey. How's it going?

GRAY  
Crazy. Absolutely crazy.

Gray's blue eyes reflect disbelief as he shifts on the bed.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
You remember my Aunt Jolene?

INT. GRAY AND LACEY'S HOME/ATHENS, GA.

Lacey stands in front of the bathroom mirror, the shower running in the background.

LACEY  
The old one who was smoking in the  
Hilton lobby during our wedding?

INT. MOTEL 6

Gray laughs, shaking his head.

GRAY  
Yeah. She just told me some wild  
shit.

LACEY (V.O.)  
Like what?

GRAY  
Like Harlan shooting a fella, for  
one.

The call-waiting beeps—Wade. Gray hesitates, then sends it to voicemail.

LACEY (V.O.)  
That doesn't surprise me.

GRAY  
She thinks Mama didn't drown.

LACEY (V.O.)  
Wait, what? What did she say  
happened?

INT. GRAY AND LACEY'S HOME/ATHENS, GA.

Lacey puts her hair up, glancing at herself in the mirror.



GRAY (V.O.)  
She said Mama disappeared. That's  
all.

A hand from the shower grabs at her playfully. Lacey slaps it  
away, stifling a laugh.

LACEY  
Seriously?

GRAY (V.O.)  
Yeah. Said the coffin was empty.

Lacey smirks as she pulls her focus back to the call.

LACEY  
Come on, babe. Don't you think  
someone would've said something by  
now?

INT. MOTEL 6

Gray exhales, relaxing slightly.

GRAY  
Yeah. You'd think.

He glances at the empty bed beside him, then back at the  
photo on the nightstand.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
This place just has a way of  
sucking people in.

INT. GRAY AND LACEY'S HOME/ATHENS, GA.

Bobby Lee, towel-wrapped, steps out of the shower and kisses  
Lacey's neck. She waves him off with a smile, holding up a  
finger.

LACEY  
(mouthing to Bobby)  
I'm coming.

Returning to the call--

LACEY (CONT'D)  
Just think, this time tomorrow,  
you'll be far away from Soperton.

INT. MOTEL 6

Gray chuckles faintly.

GRAY  
Yeah. You're right.

He picks up the photo again, staring at it.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
I'm tired. Gonna get ready for bed.

LACEY (V.O.)  
Alright, honey. One more night. You got this.

GRAY  
Miss you.

LACEY (V.O.)  
You, too.

Gray sets the photo on the nightstand, his thoughts still tangled.

The phone call ends with a click. Gray scrolls through his missed calls, noticing Wade's name.

GRAY  
(to himself)  
What is it now?

He dials. The phone barely rings before--

EXT. WAL-MART PARKING LOT

WADE  
Gray! Where are you?

Wade paces frantically in a remote corner of the parking lot, sweat dripping as he glances over his shoulder. In the background, thugs linger by a truck, watching him.

GRAY (V.O.)  
I'm in bed. What's up?

WADE  
I'm in trouble, man. They're gonna kill me.

GRAY (V.O.)  
(laughing)  
You're high, aren't you?

WADE

Well, yeah. But that ain't it!

Wade's voice cracks. He looks at the thugs, his breathing ragged.

WADE (CONT'D)

This is serious.

INT. MOTEL 6

Gray sits up, his face reddening.

GRAY

Not my problem.

He ends the call abruptly.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Motherfucker.

The phone rings again. Gray answers, ready to lash out.

GRAY (CONT'D)

I told you--

KOTA (V.O.)

Gray. Calm down.

Gray hesitates, startled.

GRAY

Kota? What's going on?

EXT. WAL-MART PARKING LOT

Kota stands near his truck, phone pressed to his ear. Wade kneels behind him, restrained by two thugs.

KOTA

We need to meet.

Wade jerks against the thugs' grip, his voice hoarse.

WADE

Don't listen to him, Gray!

A thug slams his fist into Wade's gut. Wade crumples, wheezing.

GRAY (V.O.)

What the hell is this?

KOTA  
Go to the gate. Pine Sap Road. You  
remember the way?

GRAY (V.O.)  
Yeah.

KOTA  
Good. Don't be late.

Kota hangs up, drops Wade's phone, and crushes it underfoot.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
Get him in the truck.

The thugs haul Wade into the back of the truck. Kota climbs into the driver's seat, the engine roaring to life as they drive off.

EXT. MOTEL 6 - NIGHT

Gray leaps into his truck, slamming the door. He grips the wheel tightly, his jaw clenched.

GRAY  
Damn it, Wade.

He floors the accelerator, the engine growling as the truck tears out of the lot and onto the dark road.

EXT. CLEARING/PINE SAP ROAD - NIGHT

Gray's truck skids to a stop near Kota's parked vehicle.

From under the dash, he pulls out a pistol, checking the chamber before loading a round.

He leaps out, pistol in hand, eyes scanning the dark forest.

GRAY  
Kota?! Where are you?

The clearing is still, save for the faint rustle of the trees. Gray creeps forward, weapon raised, every sound putting him on edge.

From the shadows, Kota steps into view, dragging a bloodied, barely conscious Wade. Kota shoves Wade to his knees, pressing a pistol to his head.

KOTA  
That's enough. Toss it.

Kota nods toward the tree line. After a tense moment, Gray sighs and tosses his weapon aside.

GRAY

Damn it, Kota. What are we doing here? What is this?

KOTA

We just need to talk.

WADE

I'm sorry, Gray. I didn't mean--

KOTA

The adults are talking.

Without warning, Kota slams the butt of his pistol into Wade's face. Wade crumples to the ground, unconscious.

Gray stares in stunned, motionless silence, mouth agape.

KOTA (CONT'D)

Take a walk with me.

EXT. WOODS/MARIJUANA PATCH

Kota leads Gray through the woods, the dense trees giving way to rows of vibrant, glistening marijuana plants.

KOTA

Smell that?

GRAY

Yeah. I know the smell.

Kota chuckles, rubbing a bud between his fingers, its pungent aroma filling the air.

KOTA

Yeah, I bet you do.

He sits on a nearby log, motioning for Gray to do the same.

KOTA (CONT'D)

This--

Kota holds up the crushed bud.

KOTA (CONT'D)

--feeds my family. Feeds a lot of families.

GRAY  
My dad knew about this?

KOTA  
Knew about it?

Kota laughs, shaking his head.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
He suggested it.

Kota drops the crushed bud to the ground, wiping his hands.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
He'd come out here, take a deep  
breath, and say, "I love that  
smell. The smell of money." Every  
damn time.

Kota grins, but his tone sharpens.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
But enough about Harlan. Let's talk  
about you.

GRAY  
What about me?

KOTA  
Word is, you're leaving. Dumping  
your inheritance?

GRAY  
How do you know that?

KOTA  
Soperton's a small town. Birds  
talk.

Kota glances at the crop, his expression darkening.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
Is it true?

GRAY  
I've thought about it. Maybe  
signing it over to Sadie.

Kota's demeanor stiffens.

KOTA  
That can't happen.

GRAY  
Why not? She's been running things  
anyway.

KOTA  
Not this.

Kota gestures to the marijuana plants.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
Harlan kept her away from this.  
That's why we left it to you.

Kota stands, brushing off his jeans.

GRAY  
You knew? You and him--

Kota chuckles.

KOTA  
Who better? Come on.

Gray follows as they trek back toward the trucks. The night  
feels heavier with every step.

GRAY  
So what is it you want?

KOTA  
Do I really need to say it?

Gray glances at him, uncertain.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
We had a deal, me and Harlan. Fifty  
grand a month. That bought me  
freedom. No interference.

Kota stops, grabbing Gray by the shoulders.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
You're the only one.

Gray shakes his head.

GRAY  
Then I guess you're shit outta  
luck. I don't want it.

KOTA  
I get it. Just know that everything  
has a price, Gray.

Kota grabs Gray's head, forcibly turning it to see Wade crumbled on the dirt.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
Harlan used to say a man could do anything he wanted in this life--

Gray defiantly rips Kota's hands away. Kota smiles.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
--as long as he was willing to pay the price.

Kota points at Wade.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
So?

GRAY  
So, what?

KOTA  
How much is your stubborn pride worth? His life? Sadies?

They reach the clearing and Wade's crumpled body. Kota points his pistol at him.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
What's it gonna be?

Gray hesitates, his eyes shifting between Wade and Kota.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
I don't have all night.

Kota fires his pistol. Dirt plumes inches from Wade's head. Wade groans, coming to.

GRAY  
Wait, wait. No. Just--no.

Gray rattles his mind, thinking.

KOTA  
I'm getting impatient.

Kota steadies his hand, bracing for another shot.

GRAY  
I got it! Listen--

Gray softly pushes Kota's arm down.



GRAY (CONT'D)  
One month. Gimme one month. I  
figure something out. Deal?

Kota laughs, holstering his pistol.

KOTA  
Ok. Deal. One month. But at the end  
of that month, I need a permanant  
answer or--

Kota nudges Wade with his boot. Wade groans, stirring awake.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
Are we clear?

Gray nods reluctantly. He bends down, pulling Wade to his  
feet.

Kota smirks, extending his hand.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
You've got guts, Gray. You're gonna  
fit right in around here.

Gray hesitates, then grabs Kota's hand, shaking firmly.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
One month.

Kota climbs into his truck, the engine roaring to life.

KOTA (CONT'D)  
Don't be late.

With a spray of gravel, Kota drives off, his taillights  
disappearing into the dark woods.

INT. GRAY'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Gray helps Wade into the passenger seat. Neither speaks as  
Gray starts the engine.

Back at the gate, the silence breaks.

GRAY  
There's napkins in the glove box.

Wade digs out a couple, pressing them to his bloodied face.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
You knew about this, didn't you?

Wade nods, eyes cast downward.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Sadie?

Wade shakes his head weakly.

WADE

Don't think so.

Gray exhales, gripping the wheel tighter.

GRAY

Good. Let's keep it that way.

The truck jolts as it hits the rutted red clay road. Outside, the towering pines close in, silent witnesses to the unspoken pact between the brothers.

EXT. GREENWOOD CEMETERY - MORNING

Rain glistens on the tombstones as Gray approaches the family plot. The mound of freshly turned earth marks Harlan's grave.

Gray sits on a bench beside the plot, his gaze tracing the weathered names on the headstones.

GRAY

Nine generations.

His eyes land on his mother's tombstone. He lingers, lost in thought, before looking to Harlan's.

GRAY (CONT'D)

You'll never let me leave, will you?

Gray pulls a photo from his pocket—Harlan and Evie on their wedding day. He stands and places it in front of Harlan's tombstone, then returns to the bench.

GRAY (CONT'D)

All this history. All these stories. You never mentioned—

A faint smile crosses his face as a memory surfaces.

GRAY (CONT'D)

Do you remember the day I left town?

Gray looks skyward, the harvest moon still visible in the morning light. He fights the sting of tears.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
You were wasted, as usual.

He picks up a handful of pebbles, tossing them one at a time, lost in reflection.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
You called me a loser. Said I'd never be half the man you were.

Gray's eyes lock on the tombstone, as if Harlan were sitting there.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
You were right.

He pauses, his hand tightening around the remaining pebbles.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
I'm better than you.

His voice steadies, growing firmer.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
I have a beautiful family. We love each other. That's ten times the man you ever were.

Gray hurls the rest of the rocks at Harlan's tombstone, the sharp clink echoing in the quiet cemetery. He turns to his mother's grave.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Wherever you are... you were the lucky one. You got away.

A single tear slips down his cheek.

Gray stands, his movements deliberate. He walks to his truck, gripping the steering wheel tightly as he sits behind the wheel.

A guttural, primal scream erupts from him.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
FUCK!!

His breathing steadies as he leans back, composing himself. With a heavy sigh, he starts the engine and drives away, leaving the cemetery and its ghosts behind.

INT. MOTEL 6 - DAY

Sunlight streams through the thin curtains, casting a harsh glow over the sparsely furnished room. Gray stirs, groaning as he blinks at the ceiling.

He rubs his face, sighing deeply, before reaching for his phone on the nightstand. He scrolls for a moment, staring at a contact name: MELVIN TURPIN.

Gray presses the call button, sitting on the edge of the bed.

INT. COWART'S CAFE - MORNING

Melvin sits at a crowded table in a bustling diner. Plates clatter, waitresses shout orders, and coffee cups clink.

Across from him, his wife chats with their daughters. Melvin's phone buzzes on the table. He glances at the screen, his expression shifting when he sees Gray's name.

MELVIN

Morning, Mr. Harris. Everything  
alright?

He gestures to his wife, signaling he'll step out. She nods absently as Melvin stands, squeezing past the other patrons.

EXT. COWART'S CAFE - CONTINUOUS

Melvin steps onto the sidewalk, shielding his eyes from the sun. He cradles the phone to his ear.

INTERCUT BETWEEN GRAY AND MELVIN

GRAY

I need you to put a hold on things.

Melvin pauses mid-step, his face tightening in a smile.

MELVIN

A hold? You were pretty clear about  
this last time. Papers are already  
in progress.

Gray stands, pacing the small motel room, his movements agitated.

GRAY

Yeah, well, I need to rethink  
things.

Melvin turns, leaning against the wall of the cafe. He absently pats his shirt pocket for a cigarette but comes up empty.

MELVIN

Rethink things, huh? What brought this on?

Gray stops pacing, gripping the phone tightly.

GRAY

That's my business. Can you do it or not?

Melvin smirks faintly, a flicker of something calculating crossing his face.

MELVIN

Sure. But slowing things down complicates matters. Contracts, logistics--they don't just pause for a rethink.

Gray's jaw tightens, and he narrows his eyes, suspicion creeping in.

GRAY

All I need is a month.

Melvin taps his fingers against the wall, his tone measured.

MELVIN

A month? Fine. Just remember, in a small town, little birds love to chirp.

Gray freezes, the words hanging in the air.

His eyes flicker with realization. He lowers the phone slightly, pieces snapping together in his mind.

MELVIN (CONT'D)

Mr. Harris? Gray? Still with me?

Gray stills his resolve.

GRAY

I'm here. Little birds, huh?

Melvin straightens, his voice low and smooth, tinged with something almost threatening.

MELVIN

Oh, yes. They're everywhere. You'd be surprised how much they see - and say.

Gray exhales, doing his best to calm.

GRAY

Yeah. I'll keep an eye out.

MELVIN

God. That's good. You've got your month. Use it wisely, Mr. Harris.

BACK TO: INT.  
MOTEL 6

Gray ends the call, tossing the phone onto the bed with a frustrated sigh.

He stares out the window, lost in thought, before shaking it off.

He grabs a shirt from the chair, pulls it on, and begins preparing for the day, determination settling into his expression.

EXT. HARRIS FARM/PUMP HOUSE - DAY

Gray steps into the pump house, eyes scanning the cluttered wall of tools. He grabs a shovel but pauses, trading it for an older, weathered one.

His hand lingers on the worn handle, sensing a connection.

Glancing up, he spots a shoebox in the rafters.

Climbing carefully, he retrieves it. The lid shifts, revealing bundles of cash and old photos inside.

EXT. HARRIS FARM/LAND - CONTINUOUS

Gray strides into the dense pines, the box under one arm, shovel over his shoulder.

He weaves through the trees to a pine marked by a crude, weathered cross carved into its bark.

He sets the box down, gripping the shovel.

GRAY

Right here.

Gray plunges the shovel into the sandy soil, working quickly and deliberately. The earth yields easily, as if urging him on.

He lowers the shoebox into the hole. From his pocket, he unfolds an embroidered handkerchief and gently lays it atop the box.

With care, he fills the hole, packing the soil firmly. Pausing to catch his breath, he stands and dusts off his hands.

Reaching into his pocket, Gray pulls out his phone and dials.

INT. CLARK COUNTY MARKETPLACE/KROGER - DAY

Lacey strolls through the aisles, tossing items into her cart.

Her phone buzzes. She glances at the screen, smiling softly.

LACEY  
You on the way home?

EXT. HARRIS FARM/LAND - DAY

Gray stands amid the towering pines, a sense of calm washing over him. The land feels alive, holding its secrets close.

GRAY  
Lace. I love you.

INT. CLARK COUNTY MARKETPLACE/KROGER

Lacey stops mid-step, caught off guard. Her smile widens as warmth floods her face.

LACEY  
I love you too, honey. What's going on?

EXT. HARRIS FARM/LAND

Gray takes a slow, deliberate look around - the house, the pines, the pump house, the sprawling land. His smile grows, faint but determined.

GRAY  
I think we're gonna do it, Lace.

LACEY (V.O.)  
Doing what?

Gray exhales, the enormity of his decision settling in.

GRAY  
Stay a while.

The words feel final. He squares his shoulders, his confidence building.

LACEY (V.O.)  
Are you sure? Why? What happened?

Gray laughs - a raw, unrestrained sound, teetering between clarity and mania.

GRAY  
It happened. Soperton. It sucked me back in.

INT. CLARK COUNTY MARKETPLACE/KROGER

Lacey's smile falters as she hears the edge in Gray's laugh.

LACEY  
Honey? Are you okay? You don't sound good.

EXT. HARRIS FARM/LAND

Gray lowers the phone, staring across the land. His grip tightens on the shovel.

GRAY  
I'll do it right this time. Better than he ever did.

The phone slips from his hand, landing in the soft earth.

LACEY (V.O.)  
Gray? Honey? You there?

Gray leans on the shovel, inhaling deeply. The crisp air carries the scent of fresh pine and damp soil. A smile spreads across his face.

GRAY (SOFTLY)  
Smells like money - and secrets.

Kneeling, Gray rubs his thumb over the etched carving on the old shovel: KEEP DIGGING.



He chuckles, the sound low and resolute.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Keep digging.

Gray rises, his gaze sweeping the vast land.

GRAY (CONT'D)  
Time to see what's really out here.

EXT. HARRIS ROAD - DAY

An old pickup truck idles on the shoulder. Inside the cab, two NEFARIOUS MEN watch from the shadows.

The DRIVER lifts a pair of binoculars, peering through them.

DRIVER  
He's just standing there, looking  
stupid.

The PASSENGER, engrossed in his phone, barely glances up.

PASSENGER  
He ain't nothing like his daddy.

The driver lowers the binoculars and scribbles something into a worn notebook. With a snap, he shuts it and tosses it into the backseat.

DRIVER  
We'll let the boss know. This  
should be easy.

In the backseat, the notebook rests beside a lime green raincoat, its embroidery clear: DICKSON LOGGING CO.

The truck pulls away, its tires crunching against the road.

In the distance, Gray stands among the pines, unaware, the forest holding its breath.

FADE OUT.

**THE END**