

OF GOLD AND MURDER

Written by

Tom Stohlgren

Writer:
tjstohlgren@gmail.com
(970) 217-4498
Representation:
Eleni Larchanidou, LLM
Literary & Talent Manager
managerelenilllm@gmail.com
Copyright 2023

FADE IN:

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - NIGHT

A calendar reads 1932. Two men play poker in a Tavern lit by a few dim lightbulbs. The poorly dressed grifter has a pile of gold coins on his side of the table. The well-dressed man smoking a cigar has only a few gold coins remaining, with a large pile of coins in the middle of the table. One empty bottle of whiskey on the table stands next to a near-empty bottle. Cigar smoke fills the air as the men glare at each other.

We HEAR the voice of ELLE JACKSON (35), an eloquent but bitter African American Assistant Professor of History.

ELLE (V.O.)

The average adult has short daydreams every couple of minutes adding up to 25 to 50 percent of our day.

(beat)

When I daydream, I dream about gold and murder like in the film, "The First Great Train Robbery" with Sean Connery, Donald Sutherland, and Lesley-Anne Down.

(beat)

But the most mysterious murder in America happened here, in the shadow of Donner Summit at the Rustic Tavern in the early-1930s.

The well-dressed poker player discards one card. The grifter discards three cards. The grifter deals one card to the well-dressed man and takes three for himself.

ELLE (V.O.)

For two years, I searched for historical records, newspaper accounts, police records, interviews, everything. Only one paragraph survived.

The poker players glare at their cards and at each other. The rich man tosses in his remaining gold coins and discloses two pair (queens and kings).

The Grifter shows his cards containing three duces! He pulls the gold coins toward him without emotion as the rich man glares at him.

ELLE (V.O.)

The rich man lost \$25,000 in gold coins that night!

(beat)

An amount, adjusted for inflation, is equivalent to a half-a-million dollars today.

Later, the Rich Man slams his palms on the table and then RACES out of the Tavern.

ELLE (V.O.)

In the one paragraph, it states, "He was upset. He went home for a while and then came back."

The Rich Man storms back into the Tavern but doesn't see the Grifter.

The Grifter returns to the Tavern with his boots and pants wet to the knees.

ELLE (V.O.)

"The man to whom he'd lost had also left and then returned with wet legs and apparently without the gold."

The Rich Man angrily sits down at the table and demands (with his hands) to be dealt cards.

ELLE (V.O.)

"The loser demanded that the game be continued. The winner refused."

The Grifter refuses to deal the cards.

The Rich Man shoots the Grifter dead.

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

We SEE an old photo (SLIDE SHOW) of the exterior of the Rustic Tavern with a few old cars in front of it.

Elle PACES as twelve uninterested STUDENTS (various types) doodle and glance occasionally at the screen.

Elle stops and reads the story from the Donner Summit Historical Society.

ELLE (V.O.)
 "The loser took out a gun.
 (yells)
 and shot the winner dead!"

The Students glance at Elle.

ELLE
 (reads calmly)
 "The gold coins are still
 presumably in the neighborhood and
 with a river running for miles in
 either direction, there are a lot
 of places to look for where the
 winner could have gotten his legs
 wet and deposited the gold."

A CHIME rings in the room, and students gather their things
 and head to the door.

ELLE (CONT'D)
 We have to ask ourselves why so
 little has been written about this
 monstrous murder.

The Students are nearly gone.

ELLE (CONT'D)
 And why no one has found the gold
 coins?! No sheriff's report? The
 murderer goes free? Hell, no names
 of the shooter or victim? No mini-
 gold rush for the money? That's
 bullshit!
 (mumbles)
 But all I need is one more
 successful field study to get
 promoted.

INT. SEDAN - AFTERNOON

Elle drives up Highway 80 and sees the billboard for the
 "Rustic Lodge." She is dressed in hiking clothes and has a
 pair of binoculars, a water bottle, and an iPad on the
 passenger seat. She stares at the billboard.

ELLE (V.O.)
 The Rustic Lodge: the land of gold
 and murder!

She checks her smartwatch which reads, "5:23."

ELLE

He sounded like such a self-absorbed idiot on the phone. I gotta bad feeling about this.

She shakes her head in disgust and drives on.

EXT. RUSTIC LODGE - EARLY EVENING

Elle pulls up to the Rustic Lodge, exits her car, and stares at the building.

ELLE

Tavern on the ground floor. Lobby above that, and guest rooms another floor up.

She looks to the left.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Yuba River runs for miles in either direction.

(mumbles)

You could get into water up to your knees anywhere!

BRETT PARKS (35), a big, brawny man walks from the river to the lodge like a model for LL Bean outdoor ware. He holds an upscale gold finder with his hands close to his chest like he's holding a rifle. He also has a holster with a small pistol on his belt.

He glares suspiciously at Elle and slyly rests a hand on his holster. He glares at Elle.

BRETT

I gotta conceal and carry permit, ya know.

ELLE (V.O.)

(sarcastic)

Mr. Brett Parks is proving to be everything I expected and less. Like the football player John Matuszak as Sloth in *"The Goonies."*

He sees the Professor is a black woman and his face shows disappointment as he lowers the gold finder to his waist.

BRETT

I thought you'd be here earlier. You don't look like the professor who called.

ELLE

(smiles)

I'm sorry I'm late. This is just a quick stop on my way to Reno tonight. I'm Associate Professor, Elle Jackson. And you're not far from wrong. Over 75% of professors are white and they're hesitant to promote me so the trend can continue.

Elle looks away.

ELLE (V.O.)

Shit! Didn't mean to play the race card out loud.

Elle disarms Brett with her continued smiles.

BRETT

That don't sound good.

ELLE

Don't worry about me. They gave me a year to clean up my act and write one more great history paper to get tenure.

BRETT

Is that why you're here? To write a story?

ELLE

I'm here to understand our past. To learn from history so we don't repeat our mistakes.

Brett looks away, upset.

BRETT

That's a crock of shit. All we do is repeat history. Men and women have been fighting like cats and dogs since the Garden of Eden. Greed leads to war over and over again!

ELLE (V.O.)

Like Jack Nicholson in "The Shining." You're a living testament to why we can't break the cycle!

He looks back and sees Elle looking away.

BRETT

I'm a man of my word. I promised you an hour of my time.

Elle turns and pauses to study Brett.

ELLE (V.O.)

Better go with a submissive but intelligent approach, like Julia Roberts in "*Pretty Woman*."

She tilts her head with another disarming smile and points at the road.

ELLE

You know better than me. Your Rustic Lodge brochure says this was the old Emigrant Trail. The Donner Party, those who didn't die, walked this route to safety. A few thousand Chinese railroad workers and tunnel builders trudged through here to help forge our nation.

(points to the lodge)

This is the crossroads where California history meets destiny!

Brett finally smiles as he puts the gold finder down.

BRETT

You called about the 1932 murder and the \$25,000 in gold. What do you want to know?

ELLE (V.O.)

Win him over first, Julia.

Elle surprises Brett and points to the gold finder.

ELLE

(girlish smile)

Show me how that thing works.

Elle races up and pets the gold finder.

Brett picks it up and holds it to his chest.

BRETT

It's a delicate piece of equipment and I hate to use it in the dark.

He turns it on. Elle acts amazed.

BRETT (CONT'D)
It beeps when it finds gold or
other metals.

ELLE
Can you demonstrate? Please.

Brett reluctantly heads toward the Yuba River twenty yards
away, sweeping the ground with the gold finder.

ELLE (CONT'D)
And the legend of the buried gold
coins?

BRETT
Nobody knows jack-shit! A grifter
won the gold coins in a poker game
from a rich guy who went home after
losing.

ELLE
Where did he live?

BRETT
Maybe Hampshire Rocks, a mile west,
but nobody knows.

Brett stops and glares at Elle.

BRETT (CONT'D)
You can't hear the gold finder with
all this yapping.

Elle whispers.

ELLE
The big winner buried the gold
before the rich guy came back and
shot him?

BRETT
That's the legend. The winner had
wet pants to his knees and there
was no sign of the gold.

ELLE
But you must think it's still
buried out here?

Brett turns off the gold finder and starts to trudge back to
the lodge.

BRETT

It's too dark now. Me and hundreds, maybe thousands, of people have searched up and down the Yuba for miles since 1932. It ain't here. There is no story!

Elle follows Brett while thinking.

ELLE (V.O.)

New tactic. Cautiously assertive like Agatha Christie.

Elle tugs lightly on his shirt sleeve and he stops.

ELLE

Why wasn't there a sheriff's report of the murder?

BRETT

Beats me!

ELLE

And nobody knew the names of the victim or murderer who lived a mile down the road? That sounds unbelievable to me.

Brett keeps walking to the lodge.

BRETT

I'm a lodge owner, not a detective. I don't care about the people involved.

ELLE

But you care about the gold.

BRETT

(dark, serious)

My lodge is faced with financial difficulties. I'm gonna have to sell it if I can't find the gold.

Elle stops and faces the river. Brett stops and turns to her.

ELLE

But the river keeps changing, making your job much tougher.

(points to the river)

The Yuba has seen major floods in 1950, 1955, 1986, and 1997. Those coins could be covered with several feet of sand, gravel, and rocks.

(MORE)

ELLE (CONT'D)

How far down does the gold finder register?

BRETT

Eight to ten inches, max!

ELLE

You're in big trouble, Mr. Parks. Maybe I can help.

BRETT

(doubtful)

You got x-ray vision or a time machine?

ELLE

(laughs)

A background in science, math, history, and critical thinking.

Brett turns and trudges to the lodge.

BRETT

No thanks. You best be on your way to Reno. Donner Pass gets tricky at night.

Brett reaches the door and starts to wave goodbye.

BRETT (CONT'D)

If that will be all...

ELLE

You said you were a man of your word, and you gave me an hour.

(glances at her watch)

You owe me a bit more time. Show me where this infamous card game and murder took place.

Brett shakes his head in disgust.

BRETT

Fine! This is the Tavern.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Elle follows Brett into the dimly lit Tavern which is decorated in original 1930s style.

Elle wanders around marveling at the old photos of the lodge and Tavern.

ELLE
This is incredible.

BRETT
All the previous owners wanted to
keep it this way.

ELLE
Can I ask you a big favor? Could we
re-create the infamous poker game
and murder?

BRETT
I don't think so.

ELLE
It might help you find your gold.

Brett pauses and sees that Elle is serious. He takes a seat
at a table and pretends to hold up playing cards.

BRETT
This is stupid.

ELLE
You be the winner. The grifter.
I'll be the rich guy from up the
road.

Elle sits. Excited.

ELLE (CONT'D)
Set the stage for me. Time of year?
Day or night? Drunk or sober?
Witnesses...?

BRETT
(interrupts)
Slow down. Time of year? We don't
know.

ELLE
(laughs)
Not the dead of winter. Even if the
rich man had a new 1932 Ford, it
wouldn't make the drive in snow.

BRETT
Good point. Night. It was
definitely night because the lodge
owner claimed to be asleep.

Elle pretends to shoot Brett with a pistol.

ELLE

Shot would have woken him up?

BRETT

There's no record of the lodge owner seeing the shooter or the victim. Maybe he opened the Tavern for the card game and went down to Truckee or Reno. Nobody knows that either.

Elle points to the door.

ELLE

Then how did he learn about the murder?

BRETT

'Round here, word spreads faster than evidence.

Elle nods 'yes' with a smile.

ELLE

Back it up for me. Before he was shot, the winner ran out the door with the gold, buried it, and returned with wet pants to his knees.

Elle looks out the door.

BRETT

Yeah, so?

Elle returns to the card table.

ELLE

That wouldn't be easy.

BRETT

Why?

Elle stands and paces as she calculates.

ELLE

Because \$10-gold coins in 1932 contained a half ounce of gold each. 32 coins to a pound. \$25,000 or 2,500 coins would weigh 78 pounds.

BRETT
Geez! 78 pounds? I had no idea,
Professor.

ELLE (V.O.)
No shit, Sherlock!

Elle stops to examine Brett and smiles.

ELLE
You're a big man, Mr. Parks, but
how far could you carry 78 pounds
of coins, probably in a grain sack,
out that door and up or down the
river?

Brett stands in defiance.

BRETT
Some distance if I have a mind to.

ELLE
In the dark? I suppose he could
have carried a lantern or made two
trips.

Elle paces again.

ELLE (CONT'D)
But he would want to get away from
the Tavern as far as he could so
the gold wouldn't be easily
discovered.

Brett walks to the door and looks out.

BRETT
(mumbles)
78 pounds? Who knew?

Elle pushes past Brett and exits the Tavern.

ELLE
I've taken up enough of your time.

Elle saunters seductively toward her car.

Brett pauses and then yells to her.

BRETT
You've come all this way. Don't you
want to see the rest of the lodge?

Elle pauses before turning around.

ELLE (V.O.)
Winning him over, Julia. Keep him
interested.

She stops, turns, and smiles.

ELLE
I could use a glass of water or a
cup of coffee.

BRETT
(smiles weakly)
I'll put on a pot of coffee and
give you a quick tour.

INT. RUSTIC LODGE, LOBBY - EVENING

The lobby has a "mountain west" look with comfortable couches
and chairs.

BRETT
We don't rent nightly rooms. We
host weddings, retreats, and
corporate meetings.
(beat)
I'll put on the coffee.

Elle sees the place is empty and in need of dusting.

Brett exits to put on the coffee.

ELLE
Business has been slow? I'm sorry.

BRETT (O.C.)
Not as many people getting married
these days.

ELLE
Are you married?

BRETT (O.C.)
Why do you ask?

ELLE
No family photos on the
registration desk.

Brett saunters in with a suspicious look.

BRETT
I keep my private life, private.

ELLE

I've been waiting for the right man to come along too.

(laughs)

Maybe you've seen him? Handsome, rich knight riding a white stallion looking to rescue a damsel in distress?

Brett chuckles.

BRETT

Nothing seems to bother you. That's nice.

Elle takes a seat on a comfortable couch.

ELLE

Missing details bother me. No sheriff's report for the 1932 murder? The killer goes free? No IDs on the shooter or victim? No mini-gold rush for the money? Very different from your 1935 murder just three years later.

BRETT

You know about that one?

ELLE

Everything there is to know. A local slot machine owner, Lawrence C. Christensen, was shot in the chest in the Tavern by the bartender. On a winter night, I believe.

We HEAR light footsteps upstairs and to the left, but only Brett looks up with a worried look.

BRETT

Did you hear that?

Elle looks around and answers as the footsteps cease.

ELLE

I didn't hear anything.

BRETT

(distracted)

Mountain man Lonnie Jones. Totally drunk at the time of the shooting.

We HEAR light footsteps upstairs and to the right, but only Brett looks up with a worried look.

BRETT (CONT'D)
Did you hear that?

Elle looks puzzled at Brett.

ELLE
(laughs)
Old buildings creak. Are you okay?

Brett looks shaken and runs upstairs.

He returns moments later.

BRETT
Probably Mary.

Elle tilts her head.

ELLE
Mary?

BRETT
(serious)
Mary. Room 23 There have been countless reports from guests hearing cries and seeing a woman sitting by the window.

ELLE
(chuckles)
You're kidding, right?

BRETT
(angry)
Even I have experienced drastic temperature changes around her room. There is definitely a presence. Gives me the shakes!

ELLE (V.O.)
Anger issues.

Elle points to a couch, changing the topic.

ELLE
Christensen died right here on the first floor while Jones fled on foot to a nearby cabin.

Brett points to another couch.

BRETT

Right there! The next day, the sheriff followed his footprints in the snow to the cabin. What a dummy. He got life in prison.

Elle stands and paces, in controlled anger.

ELLE

It was in a dozen newspapers. Full police report. This random drunken murder got all the attention, when three years earlier, a viscous premeditated murder worth a half-a-million dollars today, adjusted for inflation, was totally ignored! I don't get it!

BRETT

I'll get you some coffee, Professor. Black okay? No milk delivery this week.

Elle collapses back into the couch and pouts.

ELLE (V.O.)

I failed to check to see if the same sheriff and deputies were on duty. I'm such an idiot.

Brett enters with two cups of coffee and hands one to Elle.

ELLE

Very kind of you, Mr. Parks.

BRETT

Call me Brett.

Brett studies Elle.

ELLE

If you call me Elle.

Brett turns away, embarrassed, as he pulls a flask out of his back pocket and pours a shot of whiskey into his coffee cup.

BRETT

The Tavern was a speakeasy during prohibition.

ELLE

January 17, 1920, to December 5, 1933.

BRETT

Some things don't change.

He offers the flask to Elle but she politely declines.

ELLE

That's another detail that bothers me.

BRETT

Prohibition?

ELLE

One man carrying that much gold around.

BRETT

Lot of scoundrels around here then: gamblers, houses of prostitution, opium dens...

ELLE

Toll road operators, real estate shysters, crooked railroad and highway surveyors...

BRETT

And your typical thieves, blackmailers, and organized crime bosses, I suppose.

Elle sips her coffee and smiles at Brett.

ELLE

You're very knowledgeable, Brett.

Brett's and Elle's eyes meet and they share a moment.

ELLE (CONT'D)

It must get lonely in this big place when you're not hosting a wedding or something.

BRETT

To be honest, it gets lonely when I see couples getting hitched and they're all laughing, giggling, and smooching.

Elle studies the man, and he studies her.

BRETT (CONT'D)

I... I... I... don't know what to say next.

He smiles and looks away

Elle wiggles seductively in her seat.

ELLE (V.O.)

Tone it down, girl. Gotta be more careful with strange men! You're not Julia Roberts in the bubble bath.

She checks her watch and stands up. So does Brett.

ELLE

I've taken up enough of your precious time. I should be going. I enjoyed our visit.

Brett frowns as she begins to exit.

BRETT

I enjoyed our visit, too. Perhaps...

ELLE

And good luck with that gold finder of yours. I'm sure it will work fine.

Brett's smartphone RINGS.

He answers the phone and puts up a finger indicating for Elle to stay put for a minute.

BRETT

Rustic Lodge.

His eyes open wide in horror and his hand shakes. He turns his back to Elle.

The call ends.

Brett turns slowly and sadly.

BRETT (CONT'D)

My daughter, a Junior away at college...

(beat)

She's been kidnapped. If I call the authorities, she'll be killed. What do I do?

Elle takes one step closer to Brett and then freezes.

ELLE

What did the voice sound like?

BRETT

Like a dark machine kind of voice.
Alien, not human.

ELLE

They disguised their voice. True professionals. Call the FBI!

BRETT

(angry)

I can't be responsible for my daughter's death!

Elle is as frightened as Brett.

BRETT (CONT'D)

You'll have to excuse me. I have to call my wife!

ELLE

Daughter? Wife? I'll say goodbye.
You have my...

BRETT

(interrupts, tears up)

Please stay! I need your brains.
I'm in big trouble.

Elle gazes at Brett compassionately.

ELLE

I'm sure you're a good man, but I can't get involved. I've gotta get to Reno.

There is a hint of hesitation and doubt in Elle's voice.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Good luck with your gold finder.

Brett jumps to the door to stop her from leaving.

He turns darkly serious.

BRETT

I need ransom money! You don't think it will work?!

ELLE

(looks away)

If the gold is near the surface and
wasn't buried by flood sediments,
you should be fine.

BRETT

(angry)

You don't think I'll find it!

Elle smiles weakly, waves goodbye, and turns to exit.

BRETT (CONT'D)

(yells)

Help me! I'll give you twenty-five
percent of the gold!

Elle stops but doesn't turn around.

BRETT (CONT'D)

The kidnapppers want one hundred
thousand dollars. The gold coins
must be worth five times that, you
said so yourself!

Elle turns.

ELLE

I can't be held responsible for not
finding the gold. Does that make
sense?

(their eyes meet)

Not finding it could get your
daughter killed too! You've got to
call the FBI!

Elle turns to leave again.

Brett paces, confused and depressed.

BRETT

I'm begging you to help me. My wife
doesn't have this kind of money! I
gotta call her.

Elle turns back.

ELLE

Is she close? Can she help you?

BRETT

I don't know where she is. We're
not on speaking terms.

(MORE)

BRETT (CONT'D)

I haven't talked to her in months.
My guess is, she'd like to help
Nora.

ELLE

Nora. Your daughter.

BRETT

My wife, Lisa, doesn't trust me.
She'll want to call the FBI to rip
out the one joy I have left in my
heart.

ELLE (V.O.)

Take control. It's "Lara Croft,
Tomb Raider" time.

Elle walks face-to-face with Brett.

ELLE

Call your wife. Put it on speaker.
Don't tell her I'm here. If she
doesn't want to help you, I will.
Got it?

BRETT

Got it.

His hand shakes as he punches the speed dial number. It
RINGS.

TENSE MOMENTS

We HEAR the firm, confident, and yet soft voice of LISA PARKS
(early-30s).

LISA (O.S.)

To what do I owe this call,
Asshole?!

Elle's eyes open wide.

Brett turns a little, but Elle turns him back by the sleeve.

Brett's voice trembles.

BRETT

It's Nora. I have some bad news.
Nora's been kidnapped!

Lisa SCREAMS.

LISA (O.S.)
 No child support, no college support, and now this! I'm calling the FBI. Who contacted you? What did they say, exactly?

BRETT
 They said if we contacted the authorities, she'd be...

LISA (O.S.)
 I'm hanging up and calling the FBI now! Are you at the lodge or at a whorehouse?

Brett looks away from Elle and answers meekly.

BRETT
 I'm at the lodge, but don't call the FBI. I'll come up with the money. A hundred grand. We've got 24 hours.

LISA (O.S.)
 I'll give you four hours! Call every banker you know, now!

BRETT
 (yells)
 Four hours! The banks are closed! Lisa, where are you...

CLICK. Lisa ends the call.

Elle glares at Brett.

ELLE
 I'm out of here.

She turns to leave and takes big steps toward the door.

He pleases her and yells.

BRETT
 Half the gold!

She freezes but doesn't look back.

ELLE
 I shouldn't get involved...

BRETT
 But you could use the money too. You might lose your job!

Elle pauses.

ELLE
 Meet me in the Tavern, and bring
 something very heavy.
 (beat)
 About eighty pounds.

Brett smiles for the first time since the phone calls.

BRETT
 I've got just the thing.

ELLE
 And bring two pillowcases too.

Brett nods okay and races off.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - EVENING

Elle is typing on her iPad when Brett enters the Tavern with a pair of 40-pound dumbbells.

ELLE
 What's your Wi-Fi password?

BRETT
 Why?

ELLE
 I want you to print and sign our
 contract.

BRETT
 Contract?

ELLE
 To ensure you give me half the gold
 I'm going to help you find.

LATER

Brett trudges into the Tavern with a single piece of paper and a pen.

BRETT
 I'll sign it.

ELLE
 Good. I'll sign it next and we'll
 get to work.

Elle puts her hand out.

ELLE (CONT'D)
Driver's license, please.

Brett reluctantly hands Elle his driver's license.

She takes a video of Brett signing and her signing.

ELLE (CONT'D)
No duress?

BRETT
No. This is legit. I need to get my
daughter back, and I need the gold
to do it.

Elle sends the video to two email addresses, which Brett
sees.

ELLE
This is a precaution. If anything
happens to me, my trusted friends
will show this to the police.

BRETT
Nothing's going to happen to you.
(angry)
Now, help me find the goddamn gold!

EXT. RUSTIC LODGE - NIGHT

Brett and Elle wear warmer pants and jackets as they trudge
back to the Tavern door from the river. Brett carries a
pillowcase containing a 40-pound dumbbell in each arm.

BRETT
Why do I have only two and a half
minutes from the Tavern?

ELLE
That's the time it would take for
the loser poker player to travel
one mile to Hampshire Rocks to get
his gun.

BRETT
How do you figure?

ELLE
I assume he's an angry rich man in
a new 1932 car traveling 30 miles
per hour.

BRETT

He gets home. Grabs the gun and drives back here in about five minutes.

ELLE

Right. That's all the time the winner has to hide the gold. Two and a half minutes. I figure he could get about less than 200 feet away from the Tavern door.

BRETT

That's not very far. Except when you're carrying eighty pounds.

ELLE

Your pants are still dry. We need more simulations to see a pattern!

They reach the Tavern door.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Again.

BRETT

I've got a heart condition.

ELLE

(yells)
Again!

Elle starts her smartwatch time and yells.

BRETT

Go!

Brett trudges in a slightly different direction toward the river.

Elle studies her timer and yells.

ELLE

Thirty seconds.

Brett looks for a place to toss the heavy pillowcases.

BRETT

I see my spot.

Elle runs to the river's edge with her iPad.

ELLE

Let's map it.

She adds a "pin" on a mapping application. We see three other pins on the digital map.

Brett is breathing hard.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Again.

BRETT

My heart.

ELLE

Your daughter. We need a dozen potential locations to map the centroid of the distribution.

They begin to trudge back.

BRETT

The what?

ELLE

The centroid is the geographical center of the distribution. The more points we have, the greater the confidence we have that the gold will be found nearby.

BRETT

Assuming me and the winning poker player walked in the same direction to the river.

ELLE

Both of you are tired grown men carrying a heavy load. Most predators contour as they hike rather than take steep routes. Energy conservation.

BRETT

Predators, huh!

ELLE

Why did your wife and daughter leave you?

BRETT

None of your business.

ELLE

Was it the warehouses?

BRETT
 (angry)
 None of your business.

They reach the Tavern. Elle sets her stopwatch.

ELLE
 (yells)
 Go!

Brett trudges toward the river in a slightly different direction.

LATER

The door of the Tavern is wide open.

Brett is exhausted and breathing hard as he walks in.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Elle stares at her iPad (12 pins on the map) as she walks in.

She closes her iPad as she gets conked on the head with a souvenir baseball bat. She collapses to the ground.

Brett spins to see his angry wife, Lisa, behind the door holding the bat in her gloved left hand. Lisa is a shapely woman in fashionable clothes with a pair of lady's white gloves on.

BRETT
 Lisa?

LISA
 Asshole?

BRETT
 What have you done?

Brett squats down to check Elle's pulse.

He breathes a sigh of relief.

Lisa points the baseball bat at Elle.

LISA
 Who is your newest tramp?

Brett stands and rips the bat from Lisa's grasp with his bare hands and gets his fingerprints all over the handle. Lisa smiles in a sinister way.

BRETT

That's Professor Elle Jackson who's helping us find the gold!

LISA

Your time is almost up!

Looks at her watch.

LISA (CONT'D)

I'm calling the FBI in one hour.

Brett puts the bat under one arm and takes out his phone.

Lisa sees that his pants are wet to the knees.

BRETT

I'm calling the Sheriff right now.
I'm reporting you for...

Lisa grabs the handle of the bat with her gloved left hand and knocks Brett's phone out of his hands.

LISA

Go ahead, I'll tell him you did it.
You're the one with a domestic
violence record! And I'll tell them
Nora was kidnapped.

Brett picks up his phone and checks it.

BRETT

You're lucky it still works. This
is the phone the kidnapers called
me on.

LISA

Let me see it.

Brett hands the phone to Lisa.

BRETT

What for?

LISA

Reverse phone lookup!
(frustrated, shaking)
I don't know!

BRETT

I bet the professor would know.
She's smart about a lot of things.

LISA
A polymath?

BRETT
Math, history, hydrology, gold. A
lot of things.

LISA
(yells)
That's what polymath means!

Brett tries to pick up Elle.

BRETT
My arms are sore. Help me get her
into a chair.

Brett and Lisa move Elle to a comfortable chair in the
corner.

LISA
Get me some ice.

BRETT
You hit her. You get the ice.

Lisa walks behind the bar and returns with a bar towel filled
with ice cubes.

BRETT (CONT'D)
I don't see blood.

LISA
I wasn't trying to kill her, but I
am going to stop her until I find
out what her game is!

BRETT
Her game?

LISA
You don't think it's odd that this
evil tart shows up on the same day
your daughter is kidnapped?

Brett glares at Elle, confused.

BRETT
I didn't...

LISA
(interrupts)
Shut up and get me some rope.

Brett paces, angry and wild.

BRETT
Are you nuts? That's false
imprisonment on top of your assault
charge.

Lisa gets in Brett's face and screams at him.

LISA
You did that to try to stop me from
leaving so she could help you find
the gold! Get the goddamn rope.

Brett races out.

Lisa examines Elle who is as lifeless as a rag doll.

Brett returns with a climbing rope and tosses it to Lisa.

BRETT
I won't be a part of this.

Lisa begins to tie Elle to the chair.

LISA
You're already a part of this. Who
is the Sheriff going to believe,
wife beater?!

Brett has a look of horror shifting to shame.

LISA (CONT'D)
And who is Nora going to stand
behind when we get her out of her
mess?

BRETT
I've been trying to call Nora's
phone all night.

LISA
She won't pick up from you,
deadbeat!

Brett panics and feels his chest.

BRETT
Have you... have you called?

Lisa is frightened to tears.

LISA

She hasn't answered. No roommate.
No emergency contact. We're
screwed.

BRETT

Local cops.

Lisa slaps Brett across the face.

LISA

The kidnappers called me before
they called you. Deep scary voice
said they put cameras around her
studio apartment. Any sign of
police and they'd...

Lisa collapses to the floor.

Brett tries to help her up but she swats his arms away.

BRETT

I could have been...

LISA

(interrupts, glares)

More supportive of me and your only
daughter! She could have been in a
dorm room with roommates and a
security guard.

Brett paces in despair.

BRETT

I messed up. I thought I'd find the
gold by now, you'd come back to me,
and Nora would love me again.

Lisa helps herself up.

LISA

You struck out, Asshole!

SILENCE

Lisa glares at Elle as she and Brett tie Elle into the chair.

LISA (CONT'D)

Were you two out digging for the
gold?

BRETT

We were doing scientific
simulations.

LISA
With the gold finder and shovel, I
hope.

BRETT
No. With mapping and dumbbells.

Lisa is furious.

LISA
You're the dumbbell! We don't have
time to fool around! The kidnappers
want to be paid in 21 hours!

Elle is fully tied to the chair, when Lisa leans down to pick
up Elle's iPad. She examines it.

BRETT
I'll show you the map. It's why I
promised her some of the gold.

It lights up, but a passcode is needed.

Lisa SCREAMS.

LISA
You what?

BRETT
We just need her passcode.

Brett stops pacing and they stare at Elle. Lisa is boiling in
anger.

LISA
How much of the gold did you
promise this witch?!

Brett paces again.

BRETT
Half.

Lisa SCREAMS again.

LISA
Half? You wouldn't even give me
half of this lodge. You made me
sign that prenup!

Lisa calmly stares at her gloved hands and grabs the baseball
bat with her right.

BRETT

What are you doing?

LISA

You're going to strike me on my left arm, bruising it terribly, maybe breaking it, before I call the Sheriff and report domestic abuse and the torture and murder of an innocent guest.

Lisa swats her left arm with a mighty swing of her right hand.

Lisa SCREAMS in pain.

Brett dives at her and knocks her down, but it's too late.

Brett grabs the bat (with his bare hands again) and pulls Lisa up.

He searches for her smartphone and puts it in his back pocket.

BRETT

You're not calling anyone until we find the gold. Have you gone nuts... again?!

Lisa whimpers and holds her left arm.

LISA

You caused all of my depression, Asshole. The marriage counselor, the psychiatrist, the pills...

BRETT

The...

(air quotes)

Home. The hospital. The retreat, Whatever you called them.

LISA

They were called safe houses.

BRETT

You admitted yourself to those places. I never made you go!

Lisa turns away. She looks back calmly.

LISA

Until I got smart. Until I called the sheriff every time you passed out drunk after beating me with something!

BRETT

You know I don't remember...

LISA

They remember. It's called an arrest record.

Brett looks away.

LISA (CONT'D)

You remember the judge sending you to counseling and rehab.

Brett has an epiphany.

BRETT

You set me up because of that damn prenup! You conniving...

LISA

(interrupts)

I never forced liquor down your throat every day.

Lisa points to Brett's back pocket.

LISA (CONT'D)

Time for another fill-up?

Brett points the baseball bat at Lisa.

BRETT

You hitting the professor and yourself like that? You're the crazy bitch. When this is all over, they're going to put you away for good!

Lisa grabs the gold finder and heads to the door.

LISA

Grab a shovel and a flashlight, Asshole.

(glances back at Brett)

You'll need it to bury me after I find the gold, but I gotta daughter to save first!

Lisa races out. Brett follows her with a flashlight and grabs a shovel at the doorway.

They mumble as they race to the river.

When it's silent and still, Elle opens one eye and looks around.

She tests the ropes that tie her to the chair.

She looks up at her forehead and GROANS in pain.

ELLE (V.O.)

Shit!

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

Lisa is frustrated with the gold finder.

LISA

Worthless piece of...

BRETT

It's the best they had.

LISA

Less than 200 feet from the Tavern door. That's what you said.

BRETT

That's what she said.

LISA

Why doesn't it beep?

Lisa shakes the gold finder.

BRETT

Sediments from the floods, the professor said.

LISA

What's she know?

BRETT

More than us, apparently.

LISA

Start digging then!

Brett jumps in up to his ankles and starts digging. He throws gravel and sand toward the far side of the river.

BRETT
Try the gold finder over here
again.

Lisa waves the gold finder over the spot without success.

LISA
My arm's killing me.

BRETT
(sarcastic)
Maybe you shouldn't have beat
yourself so hard.

Brett looks up and down the river.

BRETT (CONT'D)
Your four-hour time limit is up. We
can't dig out the whole riverbed!
We need the professor!

Lisa starts trudging back to the Tavern.

LISA
I'm telling her you hit her, then
me.

BRETT
She won't believe you. And when she
gets to know you better, she'll
never believe a word you say!

LISA
Shut up, Asshole. I'll do the
talking.

BRETT
What are you going to say about
your gloves?

LISA
I'll tell her I came from a fancy
party. You mess with me and I'll
hit you over the head with a
shovel.

BRETT
Then you get nothing! No lodge and
no life insurance payout.

LISA
I forgot about your life insurance.

BRETT
(snickers)
I doubt that! Death by natural
causes or accidental death only.

LISA
Shut up or I'll make it look like
an accident.

As they reach the door, they see Elle still has her eyes
closed and looks unconscious.

Lisa races to the bar and grabs a glass of water.

LISA (CONT'D)
This should work.

She tosses the water in Elle's face.

Elle pops awake, sees she's tied up, and yells.

ELLE
Why am I tied up? And why is my
head so sore?

BRETT
I'll get some ice for your head.

Brett walks behind the bar.

LISA
I thought you were robbing my
husband of our gold.

ELLE
We haven't found the gold.

LISA
(angry)
But he offered you half of it if
you found it!

ELLE
He needed to find it for ransom.

Elle tries to twist out of the ropes.

ELLE (CONT'D)
Untie me! I'm calling the Sheriff!
Then, I'm getting out of here.

Brett returns with a bar towel filled with ice and rests it
on Elle's head.

LISA

You're not going anywhere. I'll swear you broke into our lodge and...

ELLE

(interrupts rudely)

Phone records will show that I was invited here, and inside. A video I took will show your husband made a contract with me to find the gold. You'll go to jail for assault and false imprisonment.

BRETT

(to Lisa)

I told you she was smart.

Lisa paces.

LISA

Shut up! The two of you! I need to think.

ELLE

You need me to find the gold for the ransom.

(compassionately)

You must be worried sick about your daughter. Did you get a call from the kidnappers too?

Lisa stops.

LISA

The voice didn't sound human.

ELLE

They probably used a voice disguising app.

LISA

Can't they trace the call?

ELLE

Probably a burner phone. Walk into a store, pay cash for a pre-paid plan, use a fake name, and they're home free.

LISA

Can the police determine the location where the call was made?

ELLE

Yes, but smart bandits are always on the move. And they could have ditched that burner phone and bought another!

Lisa looks away worried.

BRETT

You see, Lisa? She's smart! We need the professor to find the gold and pay the ransom.

ELLE

No. After I find the gold, I'll be on my way.

(angry)

Now, untie me! And hand me my iPad! We've got work to do!

Lisa, angry, gets in Elle's face.

LISA

You'll help us for one-third of the gold after the ransom is deducted!

(glares at Brett)

This wife-beater over here made me sign a prenup. I got nothing but bruises when I left the bastard.

Lisa turns back to Elle in a calm voice.

LISA (CONT'D)

Do we have a deal?

Elle glares at Brett and smiles at Lisa.

ELLE

We have a deal.

Brett unties Elle.

LISA

Show us how that mathematical model works to find the gold. We haven't got much time.

Elle looks suspiciously at Lisa and Brett as Brett hands her the iPad.

Elle turns her body to put in her passcode to open the iPad as Lisa and Brett glare at each other.

A map of the area from the lodge to the river shows up, along with 12 red "pins."

ELLE

The twelve dots represent the simulations with Brett carrying the 80-pounds from the Tavern to the river.

BRETT

(to Lisa)

She knew it would be crazy to try and dig out all those locations.

ELLE

It couldn't be done in one night.

LISA

(unconvinced)

But your little tablet computer can tell us where to dig?

Elle sounds hopeful.

ELLE

Let's see what the model says.

Elle types in a few commands on the iPad and it shows tables of numbers scrolling on and on.

ELLE (CONT'D)

It's calculating the probabilities of each spot Brett pretended to drop the gold, relative to the energy costs of him going to one of the other spots.

Lisa and Brett are captivated by the model.

Their eyes open widely as a map appears with several red blobs, orange, and yellow.

Elle leaps in front of Brett to shield him from the results.

Brett tries to peek as Elle explains.

ELLE (CONT'D)

The models show promise but the uncertainty levels are too high.

LISA

Why?

ELLE

We need more simulations, probably a dozen more before the model stabilizes and we know exactly where to dig.

LISA

Let's do it.

BRETT

I can't. My heart's still pounding from the last set.

LISA

You'll do it for your daughter! It's your only chance to get her back alive! Get your weights and let's go!

Elle heads out the door with her iPad. Lisa carries a lantern.

EXT. RUSTIC TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

ELLE

No lantern. The grifter couldn't carry it and the gold, and he wouldn't want to tip off an onlooker.

BRETT

Onlooker?

ELLE

The lodge owner or other guests.

LISA

There's no record that anyone else was here. I checked.

Brett stands at the Tavern door holding the two 40-pound pillowcases.

Elle checks her watch.

ELLE

Two and a half minutes to dump the gold. Go!

SERIES OF SHOTS

-- Brett does six more simulations from the Tavern to the river. He trudges more slowly each time.

-- Each time he comes back more exhausted than the time before, huffing and puffing.

-- Each time, Elle adds another pin to her map.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

Brett looks like the walking dead as he trudges back with the heavy sacks toward the Tavern.

BRETT

The grifter... didn't have to...
carry the gold back to... the
Tavern.

ELLE

If he didn't toss it in the river,
he might not have been shot.

LISA

He's right, Professor. We should
carry it back to the Tavern for
him.

Brett stops and drops the sack in his right hand to put it over his chest.

BRETT

It feels like an elephant is
standing on my chest.

LISA

Does your left arm hurt?

Brett drops the sack in his left arm. He sounds miserable.

BRETT

Everything hurts.

ELLE

We probably only need a few more
points to improve the predictive
model!

Brett picks up the two sacks and trudges to the Tavern.

The moment Brett reaches the Tavern door, Elle yells.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Go!

LISA

Come on, Asshole. We gotta find
that gold.

Brett trudges to the River while glaring at Elle and Lisa.

Brett trips and falls forward on his face. He GROANS.

Lisa bends to help him up.

LISA (CONT'D)
Get up, Brett. Think of Nora.

ELLE (V.O.)
She's like any bad guy fighting
Sylvester Stallone in "Rocky" one
through five! At least she didn't
call him, 'Asshole.'

Elle moves to help him up.

ELLE
You doing fine, Brett. You got
this!

Brett violently pushes Elle away.

BRETT
Get away from me!

Brett glares at the river. He huffs and puffs.

BRETT (CONT'D)
(to Lisa)
Fetch the shovel.
(to Elle)
You can leave. We don't need you.

Lisa's eyes open wide. She glares at Brett.

Elle throws her arms up and stomps to her car.

ELLE (V.O.)
That's it! These folks are insane.
Norman Bates kind of "Psycho."

LISA
(to Brett)
You think you're smarter than a
sophisticated computer model,
Asshole?

BRETT
I think I'm going to die if I keep
this up! I'm gonna have a drink.

Brett disappears into the Tavern.

Lisa panics, chases after Elle, and violently grabs her by the arms from behind. Lisa whispers angrily.

LISA

You're going nowhere, bitch. We had a deal.

Elle struggles to free herself, as Lisa steps between Elle and her car.

ELLE

Your husband and I had a deal. Without me, you'll never find that gold!

LISA

It's not about the gold!

ELLE (V.O.)

Nuttier than Will Ferrell in "Elf" if you believe that shit!

Elle looks away perplexed.

LISA

It's about probabilities, and you're the only one here who knows about statistics. Is that it?

Elle turns back to Lisa.

LISA (CONT'D)

You have to admit that the odds of finding the gold in the next few hours are one in a million.

Elle is forced to agree and nods 'yes.'

ELLE

Then how do you get your daughter back?

Lisa leans in kissing close and whispers softly.

LISA

Asshole has a bad ticker. No health insurance. And he drinks. A lot.

ELLE (V.O.)

I don't like where this is going. Like Rachel McAdams in "Mean Girls."

Elle steps back from Lisa.

ELLE

What are you suggesting?

LISA

I'm the sole beneficiary, but it only pays out if Asshole dies of natural causes... say a heart attack or drowning after drinking himself into another stupor.

(steps closer)

Four-hundred thousand dollars.

ELLE

That wouldn't pay out for months, and only after an autopsy and investigation.

LISA

I know a loan shark in Reno that would pay out fifty percent tonight in cash if Asshole had a little accident.

(beat)

By natural causes. And I had a witness.

Elle steps around Lisa to get to her car.

ELLE

I'm tired of working for free.

Elle opens the car door, but Lisa kicks it shut.

LISA

Fifty-thousand dollars cash tonight.

ELLE (V.O.)

Damn it! Why do I always need money?! I'm back to being the lousy prostitute friend in "*Pretty Woman*."

Elle looks away.

ELLE

So, I get 50K, you get 150K, and use 100K to ransom your daughter, and the lone shark gets 200K when the insurance company settles.

LISA

Exactly.

ELLE

What if they deny the claim?

LISA

They won't once they hear who the loan shark is!

ELLE

He sounds dangerous.

LISA

You have no idea. I'll pay him to do the ransom drop. Those kidnappers will disappear, and the lone shark will split the finders fee with me.

ELLE

Do you know him that well?

Lisa looks away, worried.

LISA

I'm afraid I owe him a little cash now.

ELLE

(worried)

What if the loan shark comes after me?

LISA

He doesn't have to know your name. I sure as hell won't tell him, if you help me with Asshole.

They both look back toward the Tavern.

ELLE

I don't know.

LISA

You probably need the money. Everybody needs money. Hell, with 50K you could afford to hire a team to help you find the gold starting tomorrow morning.

Elle looks at her iPad map, then over to the river.

ELLE

I could do that!

LISA

You go back to the Tavern and kiss
and make up with Asshole.

ELLE

I never kissed...

LISA

(interrupts)

Well, start kissing him then! And
keep him drinking booze and
convince him that we need a dozen
more points to find the gold to
save his daughter.

(smiles)

I'll go make some salty treats for
his heart.

Lisa heads off upstairs into the Lodge.

Elle stares at the map on her iPad, then at the river, and
heads back to the Tavern.

She unbuttons a top button on her shirt on the way in.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Brett sits exhausted and panting at a table. He has a half-
empty bottle of scotch in front of him.

He takes another gulp of whiskey from the bottle.

As Elle enters with a sad face, Brett slowly pulls out the
pistol he carries in his holster and rests it on the table.
He doesn't remove his hand from the pistol.

BRETT

I told you to get lost. You lied to
me. You made it sound so easy to
find the gold.

ELLE

I never said it would be easy.

He glares at Elle and starts to catch his breath.

BRETT

Folks have been looking for it for
over 90 years. You waltz in here
with your tablet computer and
mathematical model and promise the
moon!

Elle paces, stalling for time.

She circles behind Brett and gently massages his shoulders.

He moans softly.

ELLE
I said I'd help.
(beat)
Your wife is upstairs making
sandwiches.

Brett stands and aims the pistol at Elle.

BRETT
My wife! That's a laugh.

He takes another gulp of whiskey from the bottle.

He looks deeply into Elle's eyes.

BRETT (CONT'D)
Let me tell you a little secret
about Lisa...

Elle leans forward and kisses Brett softly on the lips.

He lowers his pistol and kisses her wildly.

EXT. RUSTIC TAVERN - SAME

Lisa sneaks up to the Tavern door with a plate of sandwiches.

She stops short of entering to listen in. She smiles fiendishly.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - SAME

BRETT
I have a drinking problem.

ELLE
I'm okay with that.

BRETT
Lisa still has a huge gambling
problem.

EXT. RUSTIC TAVERN - SAME

Lisa's eyes open up.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - SAME

Elle is stunned. She backs up a step.

ELLE
How do you know?

BRETT
I had her checked out by a private investigator in Sacramento when I started getting serious about her five years ago.

ELLE
Everyone has a few skeletons in the...

BRETT
(interrupts, whispers)
She was taking weekend trips to Reno to gamble away her weekly wages and tips as a cocktail waitress and escort at a high-end nightclub where we met. I overlooked everything in a long report except two pieces of advice. Give her only a small cash allowance every week, no credit cards, and...

ELLE
Having her sign a prenup.

BRETT
My life savings went into this place. I couldn't lose it in one of her poker games in Reno.

Elle steps closer to Brett to whisper back.

ELLE
Do you know how big of a gambling problem she has?

Before Brett can answer, Lisa coughs and steps in with the plate of sandwiches to see Brett and Elle are kissing-close.

LISA
Back to whoring again, Asshole?

Brett and Elle glare at Lisa, who fixates on Brett's pistol.

BRETT
(glares at Lisa)
I gave you a year to get therapy
and kick the habit.

LISA
I did.

Brett charges Lisa and cocks the pistol.

BRETT
That's not what my private
investigator says. It cost me a lot
of money to keep an eye on you, but
I still have my lodge, don't I?

LISA
I played a little poker while you
brought home every sexually
transmittable disease known to
humans and the animal kingdom,
Asshole!

Elle steps between them, with her face in Brett's face.

ELLE
It's a wonder you two had time for
your daughter.

Elle turns to Lisa.

LISA
Nora's his daughter. My step-
daughter. I came into the picture
when Nora was fifteen. After his
first wife died in an accident!

Brett paces and waves the pistol up by his head.

BRETT
She went crazy and drowned in the
river.

LISA
Tell her the rest.

BRETT
She searched for the gold every
day.

LISA

She ignored the two of you to hunt for that stupid gold until she went delirious, slipped, hit her head on a rock, and drowned in a shallow pool.

Brett holds the pistol uncomfortably close to his temple.

BRETT

That's what the coroner said, but we weren't there. I had taken Nora to a girl scout function in Truckee. I still hear her.

LISA

Mary.

ELLE

Mary? Like the ghost...

Elle's eyes open wide, and she bursts out of the Tavern shaking her head in disgust.

ELLE (CONT'D)

I'm leaving. See ya, Brett, Lisa, and... Mary.

Brett and Lisa follow Elle to the door of the Tavern. They watch as Elle struggles to find her car keys in her coat pockets. Elle panics.

ELLE (CONT'D)

My keys. My keys. Where the hell are my damn keys?!

Lisa yells from the Tavern door.

LISA

I may have taken them after I knocked you out.

Brett laughs fiendishly.

ELLE

I'm calling 9-1-1, Assholes.

Elle searches for her phone. Comes up empty. Glares at Lisa and Brett and SCREAMS!

ELLE (CONT'D)

I'm being kidnapped too?

Brett fires his gun in the air. BOOM!

BRETT

In case you're wondering. We're a little desperate here!

LISA

Now, let's get another half-dozen or a dozen points for your statistical model.

BRETT

Then we'll let you go with one-third of the gold like we promised.

Elle is stunned and in shock.

She looks down the road, contemplating a run for it, then looks back at Brett with a pistol.

She trudges back to the Tavern.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Let's grab ourselves a sandwich and a drink first!

Lisa turns to head into the Tavern.

LISA

Salami and cheese on sourdough bread.

Elle trudges in behind them.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Elle walks in to see Brett and Lisa sitting across the table from one another with two \$5 bills in the middle of the table.

As Elle walks in, Lisa slams her hand down on the bills.

LISA

I win!

Lisa stands, struts over to Brett, and pulls his face into her ample breasts. She wiggles them in his face.

Elle's eyes open wide.

LISA (CONT'D)

Can I have my phone back, dear?

Brett hands Lisa her phone and pours himself another drink, as Lisa returns to her seat.

ELLE
You were betting on me?

BRETT
She bets on everything. She once
bet me...

ELLE
(interrupts in anger)
The only reason I'm in here is
because you stole my car keys and
my phone!

SILENCE

ELLE (CONT'D)
And that after conking me on the
head with a baseball bat!

LISA
Nope. You're here for the money!

BRETT
For the gold. You need a little
money like everyone else.

Elle sits down, places her iPad on the table, and pounds her
fists on either side of the iPad.

ELLE
You have no idea what that gold is
worth.

BRETT
You told me \$25,000 adjusted for
inflation would be worth \$500,000
today.

Lisa looks suspiciously at Elle.

LISA
What aren't you telling us,
Professor?

ELLE
It's not just the value of \$25,000
in 1932!

Brett pulls out his pistol from his holster.

Elle stands and paces angrily.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Put that gun away or I'll add that to your list of felonies and you'll both spend the rest of your lives in prison. I told my mom and a friend where I was going tonight. I told both of them I would call by tomorrow morning. This will be the first place the police come, so don't think of anything funny!

LISA

Just tell us how much the gold would be worth, minus the \$100,000 ransom.

Elle sees that she has their full attention.

ELLE

Because they were probably \$10-gold pieces in 1932, each coin is a collector's item.

Elle pulls up a saved eBay page on her iPad and shows it the Brett and Lisa.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Remember that the government confiscated privately held gold starting in January 1933. This created...

LISA

Rarity... which raised their value?

ELLE

Exactly! Each coin might fetch as much as \$1,500 to \$2,000, maybe more.

Brett sobers up fast.

BRETT

Oh my God, that means...

ELLE

A conservative estimate of \$1,750 per coin suggests the collection of 2,500 coins might be worth over \$4.3 million.

Brett stands and grabs the two heavy pillowcases. He wobbles a bit but is overly enthusiastic.

BRETT

Let's go. Six or twelve more points for the model.

LISA

That's the boy, Ass..., Brett! I'll help carry the weights back.

ELLE

Me too.

Elle pulls up the map with the pinpoint.

EXT. RUSTIC TAVERN - LATER

Brett is exhausted and panting hard. Lisa is by his side.

LISA

You got this, Brett. For Nora! Only a few more points!

Brett glances at Lisa but is unable to speak.

ELLE

This will make 15 points. I can rerun the model after 18 points.

Elle gets her timer ready to start.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Go!

Lisa slaps Brett hard on the butt.

He wobbles away from the Tavern.

Elle and Lisa whisper as they slowly follow Brett to the river.

ELLE (CONT'D)

He doesn't look so good.

LISA

That drunken grifter who got shot after the poker game was probably in worse shape than Asshole. But now I kinda hope we find the gold before he dies.

Elle freezes as Lisa heads to the river.

ELLE (V.O.)

There's that "Mean Girls" play.

Lisa turns back to smile at Elle.

LISA
You coming?

ELLE
Yeah, I'm coming.

Elle yells to Brett.

ELLE (CONT'D)
Twenty seconds to find a spot!

Brett struggles to go on but finds a spot in the river to drop the heavy pillowcases.

SPLASH!

Lisa is furious with Brett.

LISA
You weren't supposed to actually drop them, Asshole! Just pretend to drop them in!

ELLE
We need those weights. Let's go!

Elle places her iPad down on the bank of the river.

Lisa shimmies close to Brett.

Brett's pants are wet to his knees.

Lisa's phone RINGS.

LISA
I don't recognize the number.

BRETT
May be spam! Don't answer and help us find the weights.

ELLE
Might be the kidnappers on another burner phone.

Everyone freezes as the phone continues to RING.

BRETT
The Professor's right. Better answer. Put it on speaker.

An angry CASINO OWNER (60s) is a man of few words.

CASINO OWNER (V.O.)
Miss Parks. My money. By dawn,
remember...

Lisa ends the call. Brett is furious.

BRETT
You're gambling again, Miss Parks!

ELLE (V.O.)
There it is, the Agatha Christie
moment! The motive.

Brett collapses into a deep depression on the riverbank.

BRETT
Reno? Gambling? I thought your
allowance went for your apartment
in Grass Valley, gamblers therapy,
and food.

Elle takes a step toward her car.

ELLE
I should go.

Lisa grabs Elle's arm and pleads with her.

LISA
I owe a little money on a casino
marker. It's no big deal.

Brett looks away, deeply saddened.

BRETT
That's what she said when she
gambled away the money I gave her
for Nora's college textbooks last
semester.

Lisa is frozen in guilt. Elle looks on with pity.

Lisa sobs and speaks.

LISA
I tried to make it up to her.

ELLE (V.O.)
It's like "Bad Moms" for real.

Lisa glares at Elle.

LISA
I'm not a Bad Mom. I'm a generally
good person with a bad problem.

ELLE
(to Lisa)
I'm not here to judge...

Brett leaps up defiantly, glares at Elle, and interrupts.

BRETT
But you've been judging us all
night! My drinking, whoring around,
and verbal abuse.
(points to Lisa)
Lisa's abandonment issues, gambling
problem, and her lying about
physical abuse.

Brett removes a flask from his back pocket and takes several
gulps of whiskey.

Lisa stands defiant, and charges at Brett.

LISA
You're not only an asshole, you're
a drunken asshole!

Elle pushes Lisa back two steps.

ELLE
We have work to do!

Brett steps into the river, digs his hands into the water,
and pulls up the two wet pillowcases with the weights in
them.

Elle turns and trudges toward the Tavern.

ELLE (V.O.)
I'm sensing a "*Gone Girl*" feeling.

As Brett attempts to trudge past Lisa, she steps in front of
him, sees his hands are burdened with the weights, and she
kicks him hard in the groin.

Brett howls in pain.

Elle turns around immediately and glares at Lisa before
running to help Brett to his feet.

ELLE (V.O.)
Or "*Gone Guy*."

Brett, groaning in pain, recovers slowly.

He glares at Lisa and trudges to the Tavern.

BRETT

I'm not giving you another dime.
I'm filing for divorce.

Lisa stomps after him.

LISA

It's two large! I don't know why he
wasted a phone call. They usually
turn it over to the bank or a D.A.!

ELLE (V.O.)

Two large? That's "Get Shorty"
mobster lingo!

Elle glares at the couple as she follows them.

ELLE

Four more points should do it.
(upbeat)
For your daughter, Nora. Stay
focused.

Elle looks back at the river.

ELLE (V.O.)

Shit! She needs money more than I
do.

Brett yells at Lisa as they walk.

BRETT

That's why you can't call the
police or the sheriff! There's a
warrant out for your arrest. Fraud!
Passing bad checks!

LISA

It's only a misdemeanor if it's
under twelve-hundred dollars.

BRETT

But it isn't! It's a felony!

Brett glares at Lisa who looks away.

Brett looks sadly at Elle.

BRETT (CONT'D)

Four more points.

LISA

I'll get you both water.

Brett stands ready at the Tavern door.

Elle starts him with her watch.

Lisa disappears into the dark Tavern.

Brett wearily trudges to the river.

Brett freezes.

BRETT

I think my phone vibrated.

ELLE

Dump the weights first. You can
call them back.

Brett, tipsy and confused, heads to the river.

Lisa steps out of the Tavern with three bottles of water in
her hands and saunters down to Brett and Elle.

Brett dumps the weights into the river further downstream.

Elle marks the spot on her iPad, and Brett hunts for his
phone in his pockets.

BRETT

Text message.

LISA

Was it Nora? Is she okay?

BRETT

I don't recognize the number.

Brett presses on the number and views the text so everyone
can see it. It reads, "Now demanding \$200K."

Brett's hand shakes.

LISA

Oh my God!

Lisa collapses to the ground and puts her hands over her
face.

ELLE

Call the number back right away.

BRETT
They wouldn't...

LISA
Damn it, Brett. Do what she says!

Brett dials.

Elle glances at Lisa's phone suspiciously as Brett waits.

SERVICE PROVIDER (V.O.)
The number you have dialed has been
disconnected...

Brett ends the call and exchanges his phone for his flask.

He takes a huge gulp as Elle gazes suspiciously at the Tavern, Lisa, and three bottles of water.

BRETT
(to Elle)
You thought Lisa's phone would
ring?

Lisa gets in Elle's face.

LISA
You think I'm behind all of this?

ELLE
It is curious, that you...

BRETT
(interrupts)
Showed up so soon after the first
time the kidnappers called me.

Lisa spins and gets in Brett's face.

BRETT (CONT'D)
And now I find out you're gambling
again and you need money too.

Lisa points at Elle.

LISA
She showed up today too. Out of
nowhere. Coincidence?

SILENCE. They glare at Elle.

Brett trudges to the Tavern door.

BRETT

Elle was next to me when the kidnappers called.

Lisa trudges after Brett.

LISA

And I was next to you when you got that last text message. It's possible to delay the sending of a text or voice message, you idiot!

Elle follows, shaking her head in disgust.

ELLE

(mumbles)

I can see how you two deserve each, but I can't see why they still love each other!

Lisa and Brett freeze and face Elle in anger.

Elle is stunned and apologetic.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Did I say that out loud?

She looks away, embarrassed.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Sometimes I say things to myself to filter things. You know, catch myself. That slipped out. Sorry.

BRETT

What else hasn't slipped out, Professor?!

LISA

Yes, what else is bothering you, bitch?!

Elle studies Lisa and Brett, who have murderous looks.

ELLE

It's curious why you're not reminiscing about all the good times you've had with your daughter. You talk a lot more about the gold.

Lisa and Brett glance at each other and look down.

BRETT

Not too many good times to recall,
I guess.

LISA

We were busy running the lodge.

ELLE

I'm not judging you...

The argument heats up and they interrupt each other.

LISA

He was always drinking.

BRETT

She snuck off to gamble.

Lisa and Brett are about to come to blows, then they freeze, turn to each other, and hug. Sadness descends on all.

BRETT (CONT'D)

It's my one chance to make it all
up to her.

LISA

Me too, I guess. We weren't there
for her.

ELLE

I don't think it works like that.
One grand gesture doesn't atone for
years of neglect.

Brett and Lisa look away.

BRETT

If we can save her with the ransom,
we might be able to make it up to
her in the future.

LISA

And if we don't, our lives will
continue to be total failures.

SILENCE

LISA (CONT'D)

(pleading)

Please, Professor, help us find the
gold.

Elle looks away.

ELLE

We've gone this far. Let's get two more points.

(to Brett)

But only if you're up to it.

Brett clutches his heart.

BRETT

I think I can do it.

LISA

I'll help carry the weights back this time.

LATER

Lisa trudges back to the Tavern with one pillowcase in her arms.

Elle is behind her looking at her map with over twenty points.

ELLE

I think this should be enough points for the model.

Brett is trudging behind them looking very weak.

Lisa drops her pillowcase of weights.

Lisa and Elle turn to look at Brett who drops his weights, clutches his left arm, and collapses to the ground.

LISA

Oh my God!

ELLE

Call 9-1-1.

Lisa grabs Elle's hand.

LISA

No. Help me get him into the Tavern. He bounces back. He always does!

Brett is barely conscious as he tries to help himself up. He's weak and heavy.

Elle is curious and suspicious as they help him into the Tavern.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

ELLE

How often has this happened?

LISA

Three dozen times or more since his first wife died. That I saw. Maybe more.

They rest Brett in a seat. Brett fades in and out of consciousness.

LISA (CONT'D)

We'll monitor him. Get your mathematical model running so we can start digging.

Elle looks sideways at Lisa as she gets her iPad ready.

ELLE

Back in 1951, Danie Krige, a South African used weighted averages of the distances of shallow gold pits to determine where to dig for gold with the highest probability of return.

Lisa is baffled, uninterested, and angry.

ELLE (CONT'D)

The highest probability site will show up as red on the map of the river.

Lisa and Elle stare at the iPad screen, and a bright, large red spot occurs in one area. With a second, smaller, red spot showing up downstream.

ELLE (CONT'D)

Gotcha!

LISA

Are you sure?

ELLE

Let's find out! We'll need two shovels, a bright lantern, and the gold finder.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

Elle lines up the map and points to a spot.

ELLE
(confident)
There! But check it first.

Lisa runs the gold detector over the spot.

No response.

LISA
Nothing!

ELLE
Dig out a foot of sediment and
we'll try again.

Lisa jumps in and digs like a madman. The water is one-foot deep.

LISA
This better work!

Elle grabs the gold detector and turns it on.

Lisa stops shoveling and Elle passes over the spot.

No beeps from the gold detector.

ELLE
Dig deeper and wider. I'm sure it's
here!

Lisa glares at Elle and continues to dig.

Lisa quickly tires.

ELLE (CONT'D)
I'll dig.

Elle grabs the shovel.

ELLE (V.O.)
(sarcastic)
She never worked on the chain gang.
I'll tell you that.

Elle shovels fast and hard.

LISA
There are big rocks, and the water
keeps bringing in more sand. That
South African gold hunter probably
dug on dry land!

Elle digs but with less enthusiasm.

ELLE

Or the grifter who won the gold in a card game could have buried it in the river bank while standing up to his knees in the river.

Lisa and Elle stare at the river bank.

Lisa moves the gold detector slowly over the river bank.

Tense moments.

Nothing.

Lisa sets down the gold detector.

LISA

I've been going about this all wrong.

Elle turns her head, puzzled.

Lisa reaches behind her back and removes her husband's pistol. She aims it at Elle.

LISA (CONT'D)

My Asshole husband won't be needing this.

(threatening)

Dig.

Elle sees the threat is real, and digs fast.

ELLE

How will you explain shooting me?

LISA

Robbery attempt gone wrong. My husband had a heart attack defending his lodge from an intruder. Fearing for my life, I had to shoot you with his gun.

ELLE

You collect his life insurance, pay your daughter's ransom, and she's so grateful she lets you run the lodge. Is that it?

LISA

Not quite. Nora and I never liked each other. She thought her Asshole father killed his first wife so he could marry me.

Elle glares at Lisa.

ELLE

You had no intention of paying her
ransom?

LISA

Hell no!

Lisa's phone RINGS. She fumbles with her hands to hold the phone and the pistol and finally answers it (on speaker).

LISA (CONT'D)

Hello, who is this?

NORA PARKS (20) uses a voice disguiser (dark, machine-like voice of an old woman) to speak.

NORA (V.O.)

It's Mary.

Lisa freaks out and turns to look back at the lodge.

LISA

Mary? You're... you're... you're
back?

Elle and Lisa see a small light turn on in an upstairs bedroom in the lodge.

NORA (V.O.)

I'm watching you. Pay the ransom.

The light in the lodge goes out.

Lisa shakes in fear, and then faints. She collapses on the riverbank, hits her head hard, and drops the gun.

Elle tosses the shovel aside and grabs the gun. She stomps toward the lodge with an eye on the upstairs window that lit up.

ELLE (V.O.)

Mary, my ass. There's no such
things as ghosts, and that voice
was no old dead woman!

Elle detours to the Tavern.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Elle races in and checks Brett's pulse.

ELLE

You're alive. So is someone else.

(looks up)

And you haven't been totally honest with me. Could your daughter have told her kidnappers about the buried gold?

Elle exits the Tavern.

INT. RUSTIC LODGE, LOBBY - NIGHT

Elle enters the lobby aiming the pistol like a seasoned police officer looking for an armed suspect.

She "clears" each room on the way to the stairs.

She climbs the stairs but stops at the last one. She listens for noises down the long guest room hallway.

She readies her pistol.

TENSE MOMENTS

Elle takes a step and peeks down the hallway to see Nora, huddled in fear at the end of the hall and wearing a gray tattered hoodie sweatshirt.

Elle puts the pistol behind her back and inches toward Nora, who is homely and her neck twitches nervously every five to ten seconds. Elle's eyes soften as she approaches.

ELLE

I'm Elle Jackson. My guess is you're Nora.

(beat)

And maybe Mary the ghost?!

Nora slides back her hoodie and sounds scared and abandoned. She doesn't make eye contact.

NORA

Guilty on both counts.

Elle inches closer to see that Nora is clutching an iPad.

ELLE

I'm not gonna hurt you.

NORA

I know. My facial recognition app says you're Professor Elle Jackson.

(MORE)

NORA (CONT'D)

Students love you but you were denied tenure.

(establishes eye contact)

Did failure feed your gold fever?

ELLE

No. It was curiosity.

NORA

Really?

ELLE

This lodge has already seen two murders unless you know of more.

NORA

I don't know.

(sad, slow)

I think my stepmom faked my kidnapping. I snuck up here from college to see if it was true.

ELLE

What makes you say that?

NORA

I knew she was gambling again when she quit passing on my tiny allowance from my dad.

Nora pulls out her cellphone and tosses it to her feet.

NORA (CONT'D)

Then, two days ago, my phone was reported stolen, and service was discontinued. I knew something was up, so I slipped home last night.

ELLE

Your dad doesn't know you're here?

NORA

He drinks himself into a stupor every afternoon and he's afraid to go upstairs because of my mom's ghost. Whenever he hears the slightest noises up here, he gets the shakes.

ELLE

How do you know that?

Nora turns on her iPad and shows it to Elle.

NORA

My dad has two tiny Wi-Fi security cameras in the Tavern and lobby, but he never checks them. I'm not sure he knows how. I've heard you three all day. I'm surprised my dad's still alive.

Elle looks worried.

ELLE

You're spying on your parents?

Nora twitches nervously.

NORA

Since my mom died, they've been my parents in name only. I got my allowance if I didn't ask questions.

ELLE

About your mom?

NORA

About anything! My mom's death, my dad's drinking, my stepmom's gambling, and the declining business of the lodge.

ELLE

Declining business?

NORA

Almost bankrupt. Can't pay his taxes. My mom and dad wasted their lives looking for the lost gold. Hundreds of others too. If it kills my dad, my stepmom won't have to.

ELLE

Lisa?

Nora stands and gets in Elle's face.

NORA

You don't get it. I'm convinced my dad and stepmom murdered my mom. Lisa wanted my dad to support her gambling habit, and he wanted her for... you know.

ELLE

He must love you. He's been running with heavy weights all night to pay for your ransom for the kidnapping your stepmom faked.

NORA

Follow the money!

(beat)

My psychotic, scheming stepmom faked my kidnapping to give my dad a heart attack and collect his life insurance when he...

(uses air quotes)

"dies of natural causes." My dad's been drinking himself to death out of guilt.

ELLE

Your dad and stepmom say your mom drowned.

NORA

The coroner said she slipped and hit her head and drowned. It was ruled an accident. The water was two feet deep. It was no accident.

Elle looks away, horrified and sad.

ELLE

What can I do to help?

Nora points to her iPad.

NORA

I want a confession from them on video.

ELLE

How do I do that?

NORA

Wear them down. Keep my kidnapping story alive. Ask questions about where Mary drowned. Keep talking about Mary's ghost. Say you heard her too.

ELLE

What do I get out of it?

NORA
 (smiles weakly)
 I know where my stepmom hid your
 car keys and purse.

Elle pauses to think.

ELLE
 That's blackmail. How do I know I
 can trust you? How does all this
 end?

NORA
 I don't know how it ends. All I
 know is you're not like them and
 neither am I.

ELLE
 God, I hope not!

NORA
 (excited)
 What if you could solve my mom's
 murder and find the gold? That
 would make a nice history lesson.

ELLE
 If I live to tell the story.

Nora pauses and glances out the window.

Nora sees Elle is having second thoughts. She gets in Elle's
 face.

NORA
 They killed my mom. I want to know
 how. If they confess, they'll go to
 prison, and I'll own the lodge and
 any gold on the property. I'll
 share it all if you help me.

ELLE
 You hate them that much?

NORA
 They ruined my life. Do you know
 what it's like to grow up in a
 lodge like this with two murderers?

ELLE
 Like living in The Shining every
 day?

NORA

Especially at night! With two Jack
Nicholsons downstairs.

Elle hugs Nora briefly and with some hesitation.

ELLE

I'll do what I can.

As Elle starts to exit, Nora holds out her hand for Elle's
gun.

NORA

No guns, please. I hate guns. I'm
so sorry my stepmom conked you on
the head.

Elle reluctantly hands over the gun to Nora.

ELLE

What will you do with it?

NORA

My dad got me a small safe to hide
my valuables from my stepmom.

ELLE

She is a piece of work, huh?

Nora takes the bullets from the pistol, opens a window toward
the back of the lodge, tosses the bullets out, then looks
away.

NORA

I'll lock it up.

(turns to Elle)

By the way, I like your scientific
approach to finding the gold, but
it fits right into my stepmom's
plans to get Dad's life insurance
and the lodge if he dies.

ELLE

Do you think the gold is there?

Nora lowers her eyes.

NORA

Maybe, but hundreds have looked for
it.

ELLE

So you think I'm crazy for looking
for it too?

NORA

Maybe a little. And when you tell them you came upstairs because you heard Mary the ghost, they'll know you're as crazy as they are.

(smiles, whispers)

But, you're not. Are you, Professor?

Elle turns and slowly walks away, glancing back at the strange young adult.

Nora steps into a bedroom holding the pistol barrel carefully by her thumb and fingertips.

INT. RUSTIC LODGE, LOBBY - NIGHT

Elle walks into the lobby and stops.

She looks around and finally spots a small camera lens in a Wi-Fi Booster.

ELLE

Brilliant.

Elle shakes her head in disgust as she exits outside.

EXT. RUSTIC LODGE - CONTINUOUS

Elle trudges down to the river to help Lisa stand up.

ELLE

Come on. We gotta talk.

Lisa is groggy but defensive.

LISA

Get your hands off me.

Lisa is wobbly and needs Elle's help making it to the Tavern.

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Elle helps Lisa in the door and immediately spots a second Wi-Fi Booster behind the bar.

She looks across the room to see and hear Brett struggling to get behind the bar.

He pulls out a sawed-off shotgun and aims it at Elle. His hands tremble.

BRETT
What were you doing upstairs?

ELLE (V.O.)
I'm gonna die.

Elle glances into the camera and then looks up at the ceiling.

ELLE
I heard noises. But I didn't see anything.

Brett looks to the ceiling and shakes.

BRETT
Mary!

ELLE
Don't be silly. There's no such thing as ghosts.

Brett aims the sawed-off shotgun at Lisa.

BRETT
Oh, it's Mary. She can never rest as long as you're around. I'm beginning to think you staged Nora's kidnapping. She's probably camping with friends.

Lisa backs up, fearing for her life.

ELLE (V.O.)
No! She can't die before confessing!

LISA
Nora doesn't have any friends!

Brett lowers the barrel in sadness.

Elle stares sadly into the tiny camera.

LISA (CONT'D)
And, what about you, Brett? Mr. Alcoholic? Mr. Erectile Dysfunction. Mr. Worst Father in History?

Brett is livid. His hands shake more as he cocks the shotgun and raises it to Lisa's head.

Elle panics and steps in front of Lisa.

ELLE

Please don't, Mr. Parks! Tell me about Mary.

Brett slumps his shoulders and then sadly looks up at the ceiling.

BRETT

Mary and I were married 22 years ago. She loved me until Nora came along, then it was all Nora for a few years until Mary got the fever.

ELLE

The fever?

BRETT

Gold fever. She spent the rest of her days hunting for the gold.

LISA

While you drank yourself to sleep every night. Until I rescued you five years ago right after Mary died.

BRETT

I thought, what if the professor and I find the gold and pay the ransom? Then things can go back to the way they were...

(sobbing)

Except without Mary.

LISA

They'll never go back...

ELLE

(interrupts)

I agree. It's best to look to the future.

Lisa and Brett glare at Elle.

LISA

You stay out of this!

Brett aims the shotgun under his chin.

LISA (CONT'D)

No!

ELLE (V.O.)

Hell no!

LISA
Nora will never forgive you!

Brett looks away but keeps the rifle under his chin.

BRETT
She'll never forgive me anyway!
(glares at Lisa)
Or you?

Elle sneaks a glance at the camera.

ELLE
Forgive you both for what?

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSTIC LODGE, BACK - SAME

Nora is angrily watching the camera video from the Tavern while using the flashlight on the iPad to look for the bullets on the ground below the window. We see the pistol in her back pocket.

She watches Elle on the iPad.

ELLE (V.O.)
I could use some help here!

BACK TO:

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - SAME

ELLE
I mean, help me understand how Mary died in the river that day.

BRETT
Like I told you, Nora and I yelled goodbye to her. She was behind the rocks so we didn't see her, but we both heard her yell, "Drive safe," before I drove Nora to her last scouting meeting in Truckee. When we got back, we found her, face down in the river.

LISA
With a bump on her head from slipping.

Elle snaps her head to Lisa.

ELLE
Were you there too?

LISA
I dropped by for support after
Brett called me.

Elle glares at Lisa.

LISA (CONT'D)
I see that look.
(yells)
Their's was not a happy marriage!
(yells louder)
We were just friends!

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSTIC LODGE, BACK - SAME

Nora frantically searches for the bullets while listening to the video.

NORA (V.O.)
Just friends, my ass!

BACK TO:

INT. RUSTIC TAVERN - SAME

Brett aims the shotgun at Lisa with one hand and holds his chest with the other.

Brett glares at Lisa like a killer.

BRETT
It was you! I forgot how quickly
you arrived. You couldn't get here
that fast from Grass Valley.

LISA
Shut up, Asshole! You wanted her
dead too!

BEGIN FLASHBACK

SUPER: "Five years ago."

EXT. RIVER - AFTERNOON

MARY (40s) bends over a shallow pool in the river. She has a gold finder in one hand and a small shovel in the other.

While Lisa speaks we see her sneak up behind Mary and conk her on the head with a rock. Mary falls back, knocked out.

LISA (V.O.)

You just left with Nora to drive to Truckee, but it wasn't for scouts, it was for a two-hour psychotherapy session and to pick up her very strong medications.

ELLE (V.O.)

What the fuck?

Lisa holds Mary's head under the water until she drowns

LISA (V.O.)

You called me from her appointment to give me the go-ahead, and establish your alibi, Asshole! Nora was completely out of it when you got back, and you rushed her into the lodge to call 9-1-1.

Lisa positions the bloody rock under Mary's head.

END FLASHBACK

BRETT

You said you'd carry that secret to your grave!

Brett's hands shake uncontrollably. He turns and reaches for a bottle of Scotch in the back of the bar.

ELLE (V.O.)

Shit! Another panic attack like Jimmy Stewart in *Vertigo*!

Brett takes a gulp of scotch and aims at Lisa.

BRETT

Now I gotta kill you!

Nora swings open the door with Brett's pistol in her hand and aims it at Brett.

NORA

I knew it!

Brett has a panic attack upon seeing Nora and he starts to fall back. The shotgun remains aimed at Lisa, though Brett looks away.

BRETT

Nora, sweetie, forgive me.

Lisa seizes the opportunity. She runs toward the bar and leaps over it and onto Brett.

The shotgun goes off. BAM!

Elle leaps to the bar and looks over it to see Lisa atop Brett on the floor. Brett is out cold and covered in blood. The shotgun is in his hand. Lisa also isn't moving.

ELLE

Nora, get my phone! We need to call
9-1-1.

Nora pauses as Elle turns to glare at her.

Nora turns the pistol on Elle.

NORA

Dad would have shot you after he
shot Lisa.

Elle pauses to think and moves in the room so the camera has a better view of Nora.

ELLE

You got your confession.

Nora aims at Elle's head.

NORA

I can't have you telling everyone
that my dad and stepmom are
murderers.

Nora peeks behind the bar without expression.

NORA (CONT'D)

You shot my stepmom, so I shot you.
That's what I'll say!

ELLE

A good detective will follow the
money.

(paces left and right)

I bet you get your dad's life
insurance if Lisa is dead and he
dies of a heart attack.

NORA
(snickers)
Natural causes.

ELLE
I also bet you inherit the lodge if
you're dad and Lisa are dead.

NORA
The property alone is worth \$2
million.

ELLE
That should allow you to pay off
the Casino, and have plenty to
share with me.
(laughs)
No. I knew all along it was you who
staged your own kidnapping to get
the confession out of Lisa and your
dad. It was your voice on the
burner phone with a voice disguiser
app. You knew Lisa would try to
kill your dad somehow to make it
look like 'natural causes' so she
could pay off her marker. You knew
your dad would kill himself trying
to get your ransom money.

Nora stares at the gun.

NORA
I can't afford any loose ends.

ELLE
There's one thing you don't know!

NORA
What's that?

ELLE
That your mother found the gold
before she was killed. My
mathematical model found two areas
of high probability for the gold.
Your dad and Lisa ignored one of
the spots. I'm guessing that was
where your mom was murdered.

NORA
I never saw where she was found,
and I was forbidden to ask about
it.

Nora gets more nervous and twitches uncontrollably.

Nora aims at Elle's heart.

ELLE

But I know where the gold is!

NORA

That's what they'll call motive!

Elle suddenly points to the mirror behind the bar and SCREAMS.

ELLE

It's your dad. He's alive.

Nora shakes uncontrollably and panics and shoots Elle in the side (BAM) before turning and aiming the pistol at the mirror where she sees her reflection and empties the chamber of the pistol. BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM.

The mirror SHATTERS.

Nora turns back to see Elle holding her bleeding side with one arm, and the baseball bat in the other.

Elle conks Nora on the head and she collapses to the floor.

LATER

The Tavern is lit up with bright lights. We see police tape at the doors and around the bar.

Elle has a thick bandage around her waist as she speaks to the female Detective (50s).

Nora, with a heavily bandaged head, is being handcuffed by the Sheriff (50s).

The Sheriff has the pistol in an evidence bag. He pulls a burner cellphone out of Nora's back pocket and bags it.

Elle shows the Detective Nora's iPad as Nora is guided to the Tavern door.

Nora stops to glare at Elle. She speaks in a sinister voice (like a voice disguiser).

NORA

This isn't over, Professor. I'm crazy, remember? I'll be out in five. I'll find you. Believe me. I'll find you.

Elle points to the tiny camera and smiles at Nora.

ELLE
I don't think so.

Nora is pulled out of the Tavern by the Sheriff.

Elle looks out the door with a worried look.

EXT. RIVER - MORNING

We see Elle with a shovel and the gold detector standing where Mary was murdered.

Behind Elle, we see the police tape on the Tavern door and the Lodge entrance.

Elle rests the gold detector on a rock and digs furiously for a few minutes.

She tosses the shovel and picks up the gold detector.

SILENCE

A quiet BEEP.

A louder BEEP.

A consistently LOUD BEEP.

Elle smiles.

FADE OUT.

THE END