

THE LOST PEARL OF THE MOJAVE – EPISODE 5 JACKSON'S GAMBLE 1900-1917



EXT. BARCO MINE – NIGHT (1902)

A cold desert wind howls across the mouth of the mine. Moonlight cuts across rusted carts, stacked timbers, and half-abandoned equipment. The once-booming Barco Mine lies quiet—its silence deeper than darkness. Suddenly – a **clang of metal** echoes through the hollow. Two figures in rough coats and torn boots creep along the fence line, dragging sacks of stolen tools from the storage shed. Then—a **third figure steps into the light. SCOOTER STEPHENSON**, 37, burley and fast like a desert coyote, steps off a boulder with a miner's lamp on his belt and a shovel in his hands.

SCOOTER

Put it back. Now.

The two men freeze. One drops his sack – the other charges. Curtis meets him head-on. A **vicious brawl erupts**: fists fly, boots stomp, metal scrapes gravel. Curtis blocks a punch, slams the man into the tool shed wall, then **drops him with the flat end of the shovel**. The second man swings a crowbar. Curtis dodges, counters with a **gut-punch, a knee, and a throw** that leaves him groaning in the dirt. Curtis breathes hard. It's over.

But then – **a grunt behind him**. The first man's back on his feet. He charges again, pulling a broken pick from the ground. Curtis **spins, raising the shovel** – rage flashing across his face. He **swings, full-force**—then stops inches from impact. He squints. The moon catches the man's face.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

...Jeb?

EXT. OASIS PALMS – MAIN ROAD – CONTINUOUS

SCREEN OVERLAY: "Two Years Earlier – 1900"

A convoy of battered wagons creaks along a dusty road with the fading town of Oasis Palms in the background. Men and their families huddle inside, clutching a few tools, a worn hat, and faded photographs. The sound of creaking wheels blends with muted, despairing voices.

MINER #2

(grimly, to

another) They say
New Dale's got
work... but it's just
swapping one misery
for another.

The camera pans over shuttered storefronts and
rusted mining equipment. A weathered sign hangs
crookedly: "Barco Mine – Closed."

EXT. OASIS PALMS – TOWN EDGE – CONTINUOUS

A small group of miners gathers near a dilapidated
storefront. The mine foreman SCOOTER STEPHENSON, his
voice heavy with loss, addresses them with EMMET
SMITH standing by his side.

SCOOTER

We had a good run
at that rock—but
now all that's left
is dust and
memories. I hear
there's work in New
Dale, or even
factories in Los
Angeles if you're
willing to follow
the sunset.

A young miner's daughter clutches her mother's hand
tightly as they watch the departing wagons, tears
glistening in the dim morning light.

EXT. BARCO MINE – WASTELAND – CONTINUOUS

The camera lingers on a solitary miner standing at the edge of town, his eyes fixed on the trail of dust disappearing into the horizon. In that quiet, desolate moment, his gaze speaks of not just the loss of a livelihood, but of a way of life shattered beneath the unforgiving sands of the Mojave.

MALIKA (V.O.)

(soft, mournful)
The mine, once a
wellspring of
promise, now lies
silent. Our town
has been forced to
wander into the
desert, our dreams
buried beneath the
endless, unyielding
sands.

EXT. OASIS PALMS TRAIN STATION – NIGHT (1900)

A lone **train whistle** pierces the still desert air. The **locomotive grinds to a halt**, its **steam hissing and swirling** across the platform like ghostly fog. The station lights flicker—barely illuminating the emptiness. The train doors **creak open**. From the dimly lit passenger car, **JACKSON SMITH**, 54, disembarks. He is refined—tailored suit, polished boots, silver watch chain glinting—but his face bears the subtle weight of years and worry. Jackson pauses. The platform is **silent**. No porter. No family. No

welcome.

The train hisses again and pulls away, **its glowing lantern vanishing into the darkness**. Jackson's reflection lingers in a grimy window as the cars roll past—then disappears. He clutches his **leather satchel** tighter, the soft thud of his boots echoing unnaturally as he steps down into the night.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. OASIS PALMS TOWN – NIGHT

Jackson walks up the deserted main street. Boarded windows. A shutter creaks. An abandoned wagon lies half-toppled near the general store. The town is **eerily still**—a place that once had ambition, now holding its breath. He climbs the hill toward the bluff, where the soft outline of the **Smith family home** sits under moonlight, quiet and waiting.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. SMITH HOME – NIGHT

The door opens slowly. The air inside is still. A lamp burns low in the corner. In the rocking chair, **Malika Smith**—matriarch of Oasis Palms—sits motionless, her hands folded gently in her lap. Her eyes are closed. A shawl rests across her shoulders. There is a kind of peace in her final stillness. Jackson stops in the doorway, breath caught. A close-up: **his hand trembles on the doorknob**.

JACKSON

(voice cracking)
Mom... not now... not
like this...

From behind him, **Emmet enters**, brushing dust off his coat.

EMMET

Hey, Jack—sorry I
missed you at the
station—

He stops cold when he sees her. His voice falters.
His breath leaves him.

EMMET (CONT'D)

Mom...

Silence. A beat. Just the old clock ticking on the
mantle.

JACKSON

She's gone, Emmet.
I came back when I
got your letter.
The mine's gone...
and now this. A
beat. So tell me...
what are you going
to do?

EMMET

I don't know, Jack.
With the gold gone,
there's no more
reason for the
trains to come up
here. This might be
the end.

Emmet sinks into a nearby chair, rubbing his eyes.
Jackson looks back at their mother, then out the
window toward the empty town.

JACKSON

We are here because
of her. I didn't
come all this way
to bury our family
legacy.

EMMET

Will you stay? Help
me sort out what is
next?

JACKSON

We'll lay her next
to Dad – let the
two of them keep
watch over this
place. I'll stay
for a little while,
but my life is in

San Fransisco. I'm
not sure the Mojave
is willing to let
us stay.

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)
They laid my body
to rest... but my
spirit walks with
them still. But the
world was changing...
and the Mojave
remained
unforgiving.

FADE TO BLACK.

**INT. SMITH FAMILY HOME – STUDY ROOM – OASIS PALMS –
NIGHT (1900)**

A storm brews outside, wind rattling the shutters. Inside, **JACKSON SMITH** sits at an old writing desk littered with maps, mining reports, and faded letters. A kerosene lamp flickers beside him, casting long shadows on the walls. He flips through a stack of brittle documents tied with a sun-faded red ribbon. One page, water-stained and yellowed, stops him. He leans in, eyes narrowing.

JACKSON
(reading softly)
“Dense magnetite-
bearing skarn...
surface staining

indicates high iron
concentration...
northeast of Barco
Plateau."

He sets the page aside and picks up a small cloth pouch. He unties it – inside, **three dark, heavy rocks**, shot through with metallic veins. He pulls one close, then tests it against a hanging nail on the side of the desk. The rock **clings magnetically** to the iron.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Black rock...
bleeding iron.

Just then, **EMMET SMITH** enters, rubbing his eyes and fastening his suspenders.

EMMET

You're still up?
You chasing ghosts
now?

JACKSON

No, Emmet. I'm
studying what the
railroad left
behind. This came
from a survey crew
back in '86 – found
it while building

the spur up to the plateau. They flagged it as “non-precious” and moved on.

EMMET

So... what is it?

JACKSON

Iron. High-grade. And plenty of it. Not shiny. Not soft. But strong. The kind of rock that feeds mills, bridges, rails – maybe even a war machine. The East is hungry, Emmet. Steel mills from Pittsburgh to Chicago are screaming for ore. This... this could be our second chance.

Emmet picks up one of the rocks, weighing it in his hand. It's heavier than it looks. He looks at Jackson – not skeptical this time, but intrigued.

EMMET

We're not miners

anymore, Jack.
Everyone has left,
we have no crew.

JACKSON

No... but maybe we're
something else.
Landowners with
something the world
wants again.

Jackson leans back in his chair, tapping the rock
lightly on the desk. The weight of it echoes with
possibility.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I know an investor
in San Fransisco –
he's in steel. I'll
give him a call.
Maybe he'll know
someone who would
like to lease the
land. I'm not ready
to build a new
mining operation...
but maybe somebody
else is.

Emmet nods slowly, the pieces beginning to shift in
his mind. Outside, the storm rumbles again – and
through the window, the first drops of rain hit the
desert floor.

FADE OUT

EXT. THE OASIS – EDGE OF OASIS PALMS – DAY (1900)

The midday sun cuts through a grove of towering **California fan palms**, their fronds swaying gently in the breeze. At the center, a crystal spring bubbles from the earth, feeding a shallow pool surrounded by sandstone and weather-worn boulders. The **murmur of water** is soft, sacred. **EMMET** and **JACKSON** sit on a stone bench at the water's edge, both quiet, both heavy with thought.

EMMET

Our parents didn't
come here for gold.
They came for this.
This water is ten
thousand years old.
It runs deep –
beneath all this
rock, beneath this
whole damn desert.
God didn't put it
here for us to
sell. He put it
here for us to
guard.

Emmet gestures toward a weathered stone embedded in the earth – ancient **Mojave petroglyphs** etched into its face. The symbol of guardianship barely visible beneath moss and time.

EMMET (CONT'D)

It's an old
covenant. One we
don't break, no
matter how
desperate we get.

Jackson studies the spring, eyes calculating but not
unfeeling.

JACKSON

I know what this
place meant to
them. I know what
it means to you.
But the mine's
gone, Emmet. The
train doesn't stop
unless there's
freight. And the
world's moving on
whether we like it
or not. We either
find a way forward...
or this town
becomes another
ghost pinned to a
map.

A long beat. Wind rustles the palms. Water trickles
past their boots.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I've been looking
at the numbers.
Hastings gets us
through this year –
maybe two. But it's
not enough. Not for
a town. Not for
your kids. If we
want to save this
thing, we don't
just need iron. We
need something
bigger.

He stands, dusts his coat. Looks out across the
spring like he sees something that isn't there yet –
but could be.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Tell me, Emmet... you
ever heard of Hot
Springs, Arkansas?

A long silence. Emmet turns slowly to look at him –
not understanding yet, but curious. The camera **pulls
back**, revealing the full scope of the oasis: **the
glint of water, the defiant green of the palms, the
parched edges of the desert beyond**. A sacred place...
and maybe a new beginning.

FADE OUT.

EXT. BARCO MINE – DAY (1900)

A dilapidated Santa Fe box car—dubbed “Old No. 5”—rests in a secluded section of the cave beyond the Barco Mine entrance. Dim lantern light reveals a makeshift distillery: copper stills, brass pipes, and crude concrete platforms, all accompanied by the gentle murmur of water in the background.

SCOOTER

(with a Scottish
lilt) Sorry, Drew,
with the mine
closed there's not
much work left for
you.

Andrew leans in, glancing at the still.

ANDREW

(with a Scottish
lilt) Well, Scoot,
I could head down
to New Dale with
the rest, but I'd
rather stick around
with you. Maybe we
can scrape out a
living together on
this whiskey.

Scooter nods his head in agreement.

SCOOTER

Aye, we can give it
a run as long as
Smith leaves us be.
But mark my words
Drew, nothing in
this desert lasts
forever.

EXT. VULCAN MINING SITE – NIGHT (1900)

A dim orange glow from a nearby lantern casts long shadows across the dusty landscape. In the distance, the outline of the **Barco Plateau** rises like a sleeping giant. A wooden sign reads: **“VULCAN MINING COMPANY – W.L. HASTINGS, PROPRIETOR.”**. **EMMET SMITH** and **JACKSON SMITH** stand beside a rough-hewn table stacked with maps and a folded lease agreement. Across from them is **WALTER L. HASTINGS** – late 40s, well-dressed but hardened by profit, a calculating glint in his eye.

HASTINGS

I'll lease your
mineral rights. My
crew will work
deeper into the
ridge – under the
Barco – and your
family still takes
a cut.

EMMET

And if you hit the

springs?

HASTINGS

That's the chance
you take or you can
sell it all to me
outright, take your
money, and let the
desert have it
back.

Emmet doesn't answer. His hand trembles slightly as he picks up the lease papers. A long beat.

JACKSON

What if we split
it? Lease the lower
section – stay
clear of the
springs. You work
the iron, we
protect the water.

HASTINGS

(considering) If
I'm bringing in
men, wagons,
blasting powder – I
need to know it's
worth the cost. I
can't gamble half
the load.

EMMET

That water is the
only reason this
town still
breathes. If you
foul it, we lose
everything. You
want ore – fine.
But not at the
price of killing
what's left of
Oasis Palms.

HASTINGS

(sighs, then nods
slowly) Looking at
the maps... it's
shallow enough near
the spur. I can
take a surface cut
below the Barco –
stay clear of the
springs. But I'm
not paying full
freight for half a
mountain. I'll
offer half of what
you're asking – and
I'll put boots on
the hill by spring.

A long silence. Emmet looks to Jackson. Jackson
lifts an eyebrow – not quite a nod, not quite a no.
A maybe. Emmet sets the papers down – slowly,
carefully. His voice is quiet, but ice-cold.

EMMET

You could offer
double... and I still
wouldn't trust you
with my land.

JACKSON

Emmet? Are you
sure? It's a fair
deal.

EMMET

We're sure. Good
night Mr. Hastings.

Hastings stares at them, stone-faced. But there's a flicker – insult or calculation, it's hard to tell. Emmet and Jackson turn and walk away, their silhouettes disappearing into the desert dark. Behind them, the Vulcan lantern flickers – and for a brief second, the ridge seems to breathe in.

FADE OUT.

**EXT. SAN FRANCISCO – PACIFIC HEIGHTS MANSION – NIGHT
(1901)**

SCREEN OVERLAY: San FRANCISCO 1 Year later 1901

Gaslamps flicker along a cobbled drive as sleek carriages pull up to a sprawling mansion high above the fog-kissed city. The glow of electric chandeliers spills from tall windows, casting gold onto manicured hedges and white stone

columns. Inside, a **lavish soirée** is in full swing. Gowns glimmer. Laughter ripples. A string quartet plays in a marble foyer beneath an oil-painted ceiling. Champagne flows like water, and the scent of rose perfume hangs in the air. Through the crowd moves **JACKSON SMITH**, 54, dashing and deliberate, cutting a charming figure in a black evening coat with desert dust still on his boots – though only he would know it.

At a marble-topped bar surrounded by cut crystal and polished brass, Jackson approaches a small group of **well-dressed guests** – two SOCIALITES and a pair of INVESTORS, one is **WILLIAM VANCE**, 50s, a seasoned investment banker with a gold pocket watch. All the pert-goers are nursing half-finished drinks and eager curiosity.

VANCE

(curious, half-skeptical) Mr. Smith, they say your family comes from somewhere out in the Mojave – Oasis Palms, is it? Some kind of mythic spring in the desert. Any truth to that?

Jackson flashes a roguish smile, setting his whiskey glass gently on the bar. His tone is casual – but his eyes gleam with intention.

JACKSON

Not only is it
true... it's better
than you've
heard. Picture this:
a natural hot
spring, older than
memory. Water rich
with minerals,
bubbling up beneath
a grove of ancient
palms. A place
where the air is
clean, the silence
golden, and every
guest leaves
younger than they
arrived.

He gestures with effortless flair, sketching a world
in the air – a canvas of heat, healing, and high
society.

SOCIALITE #1

(sipping her drink)
Sounds like Eden...
how do you get
there?

JACKSON

Luxury travel on
the Santa Fe line.
Our rail station

rivals Del Monte in
Pacific Grove.

INVESTOR #2

And you believe
there's a market
for this? In the
Mojave?

JACKSON

Los Angeles is
booming. And every
one of the new rich
are looking for an
escape in the
desert. Three hours
by rail, and
they're soaking in
natural pools under
desert stars. We're
not just offering a
resort – we're
offering
transformation.

A ripple of intrigued murmurs passes through the
group. The music swells, the air sharpens with
interest.

VANCE

(leaning in) So
what's the plan?
What does this

transformation
cost?

JACKSON

We build a grand
hotel above the
spring. Carved
stone baths,
redwood verandas,
private rail
access. Guests come
for the water – but
they stay for the
experience. You
won't just be
investing in
property. Oasis
Palms will be the
Mojave's crown
jewel.

He glances around the room, then back to the
investors, lowering his voice slightly – drawing
them closer.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Getting in on this
will be like
getting in on the
ground floor of the
Hotel del Coronado
in San Diego –
before the

carriages ever
pulled up and the
gaslamps were
lit. Oasis Palms is
next. But this
time, we're not on
the coast – we're
in the heart of the
desert. And we've
got something they
don't: Ancient
water. Endless sky.
A place where
people will come to
remember who they
are.

SOCIALITE #2

(charmed) You
should consider
politics, Mr.
Smith. Or theatre.

JACKSON

(smiling) In my
line of work,
there's not much
difference.

The group laughs, captivated. Vance hands Smith his
card.

VANCE

Mr. Smith when
you've got some
real numbers, give
me a call. I know
some people who
might be able to
help you.

Vance signals the bartender for another round.
Jackson lifts his glass in a casual salute, eyes
glinting.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

To the desert... and
what lies waiting
beneath it.

FADE OUT.

INT. BARCO MINE OFFICE – DAY (1902)

The light through the cracked windows is dusty and pale. The walls are lined with ledgers, yellowing maps, and fading photographs of the mine's golden years. **EMMET SMITH** sits at the desk, sleeves rolled up, his brow furrowed as he flips through the account books. The numbers don't lie – and they don't look good. A soft knock, then the door creaks open. **SUSAN SMITH**, late 40s, carries a small parcel wrapped in brown paper.

SUSAN

Emmet... you're not

gonna like this.
St. John at the
market turned in
his lease. Says
he's shutting down
– packing up and
heading for San
Bernardino.

Emmet doesn't look up. Just exhales slowly, eyes
still on the failing numbers in front of him.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

You know that's our
post office too,
right? What now –
have the mail
delivered to the
saloon? Only
business still open
is that sorry
excuse for a bar...
and even that's
hanging on by its
fingernails. Only
reason it sees life
is when the New
Dale miners come up
weekends for cheap
whiskey and a poker
game.

EMMET

Jackson's working
on something. He's
lining up
investors.

SUSAN

Oh, I've heard that
tune before.
Investors for what?

EMMET

A hotel.

SUSAN

We already have a
hotel. If you can
call it that – the
Hotel is basically
a whorehouse.

EMMET

Not a boarding
house. A resort.

SUSAN

Resort?

EMMET

Up on the hill. He
wants to tear down
my parents' house
and build it up on

the hill. Jackson
wants to build a
hot springs retreat
– real mineral
baths, verandas,
guest rooms, the
whole thing. He
says it'll bring
tourism.

SUSAN

Tourism? Out here?
(beat) That better
be one hell of a
miracle spring.

EMMET

He's coming down
next week. To show
the investors the
land. It's not just
talk, Susan. We've
got things working.

Susan sets the parcel down on the desk. Her face
softens, but only slightly.

SUSAN

It better happen
soon. Or the sand's
gonna swallow us
alive out here –
buildings, whiskey

barrels, and all.
In the meantime...
you need to get off
your butt, you are
our new
postmaster.

Emmet finally looks up from the books. Their eyes meet. No more words. Just a long moment of truth between two people who've built something... and are watching it crumble grain by grain.

FADE OUT.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO BANKING OFFICE – DAY (1902)

A well-appointed office high above Market Street. Through the tall windows, fog rolls in off the bay, softening the skyline. Bookshelves lined with ledgers and framed photographs of railroads and mining ventures fill the walls. A gleaming mahogany desk separates **JACKSON SMITH** from **WILLIAM VANCE**, 50s, a seasoned investor in tailored pinstripes and gold cufflinks. A silver watch chain gleams as he taps a polished contract folder.

VANCE

I've reviewed your
proposal, it's
impressive. Your
oasis looks like a
gem in the Mojave.
I've put together a
group that's
prepared to fund

the resort –
design,
construction,
operation. You put
up twenty-five
percent of the
construction funds
and the land... and
we'll be equal
partners.

JACKSON

(nodding) The land
under the hotel, I
assume?

VANCE

(pauses) Uh, no Mr.
Smith. The town.
All of it.
Including existing
buildings – depot,
saloon, boarding
house. We need to
secure our
investment. After
all... it's a risky
location.

Jackson sits back, absorbing the weight of it. The
creek of the leather chair fills the silence.

JACKSON

That land's been in
my family nearly
fifty years.

VANCE

And it'll still be
standing in another
fifty – with a
hundred guests
soaking in spring-
fed baths and
ordering whiskey by
the crate. But only
if someone builds
it. Someone with
capital. And
vision. Like
yourself.

Vance slides the contract folder forward with a
quiet finality. His smile is pleasant, practiced –
merciless.

VANCE (CONT'D)

You want a future
for Oasis Palms?
This is how you
secure it. We don't
build on sand and
dreams. We build on
land and money.
We'll set up a
corporation and

call it **Oasis**
Resort Partnership
Inc. When you
deposit your funds
and sign the
agreements, we'll
put in our money
and you can build
your resort.

Jackson stares at the folder, his expression unreadable. The faint sound of a streetcar bell rings outside. Somewhere far off, a foghorn moans – as if warning him of what's ahead.

FADE OUT.

EXT. BARCO MINE (CONT.) – NIGHT (1902)

...Jeb?

The man—**JEB CALDWELL**, late 30s, dirty, sunken cheeks, eyes full of shame—lowers his weapon. Curtis slowly drops the shovel.

SCOOTER

I pulled you out of
a shaft last
summer. You used to
joke you'd die
underground before
stealing a damn
thing.

JEB

(small, broken)
Ain't no shafts
left. Ain't no
shifts left. I got
three mouths at
home and no
firewood.

Curtis looks down at the tools in the dirt. At the broken lock. At the mine behind him – hollow, echoing, spent.

SCOOTER

Take the tools.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

You'll need 'em to
feed your family.
Just don't come
back. Not like
this.

The men gather their sacks – silent, ashamed – and disappear into the night. Scooter stands alone at the edge of the dead mine, shovel in hand, breathing deep. A gust of wind stirs dust through the empty carts.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. CADIZ TRAIN STATION – DAY (1902)

The midday sun scorches the open desert. Heat waves

ripple off the steel rails. A **Santa Fe passenger train** hisses to a stop beside the modest depot marked **CADIZ** in bold, sun-bleached letters. At the edge of the platform, **EMMET SMITH** waits in a **dusty wagon**, the paint faded and one wheel creaking slightly under the weight of time and hope. The train door opens. **JACKSON SMITH** steps off – sharp as ever in a light suit and tie, carrying a leather satchel. But... he's alone.

Emmet watches, squinting. His face is unreadable, but his hand grips the reins just a little tighter.

EMMET

No investors?

JACKSON

(straightening his jacket) Ah, no. They're not coming out this trip. Everything's basically wrapped up – I just need to tie up some loose ends.

EMMET

(wary) Funny. You said they'd be here to see the land.

JACKSON

(smiling, brushing
it off) They saw
enough. I sent
maps, water
surveys, early
sketches. Big city
men don't like to
get dust on their
shoes if they don't
have to.

Emmet nods slowly. He says nothing at first. Just
clicks the reins, and the horses start to move. The
wheels creak.

EMMET

Guess I'll believe
it when I see the
money.

JACKSON

(grinning, still
easy) Oh, you'll
see more than that
soon enough. Just
trust me – we're
close.

Emmet doesn't respond. They ride off toward the
ridge, the sound of the wagon fading as the train
behind them exhales steam – then pulls away, empty.
The desert wind kicks up dust across the tracks,
swirling like a secret not yet told.

FADE OUT.

**INT. HASTINGS' OFFICE – VULCAN MINING SITE – DAY
(1902)**

The office is built from corrugated iron and sun-darkened timber, a frontier structure made permanent by profit. A map of the **Ship Mountains** dominates one wall. A half-empty glass of bourbon rests beside a worn ink blotter. **JACKSON SMITH** stands across from **WALTER L. HASTINGS**, who sits behind the desk, reviewing a lease-purchase agreement stamped with surveyor's coordinates.

HASTINGS

Northeast parcel.
That's where the
black rock's
bleeding. We drill
through that ridge,
we'll have all the
iron we can move –
and the spur's
already cut close.

JACKSON

That's the play. If
you give me your
word that your men
won't drill beneath
the Oasis it's a
Lease-to-own. Two-
year term with
guaranteed rights

to operate starting
next quarter. The
purchase clause
activates with your
third royalty
payment – unless
you default.

HASTINGS

(smirking) And your
brother signed off
on this?

JACKSON

(beat, calm) I've
got power of
attorney. He's...
fine with it. We've
discussed it
plenty. He wants
the town to
survive. (leans in)
Make the check out
to **Oasis Resort
Partnership Inc.**

Hastings raises an eyebrow but doesn't question it.
He pulls out a checkbook and begins writing, the
scratch of his pen filling the tense silence.

HASTINGS

You always struck
me as the

reasonable one,
Jackson.

JACKSON

I'm the one who
knows time's
running out.

HASTINGS

You sure about that
power of attorney?

JACKSON

If I wasn't, I
wouldn't be
standing here.

Hastings finishes the check and slides it across the desk. Jackson unfolds the agreement and points to the last line.

JACKSON

Your men won't
drill beneath the
Oasis, right?

HASTINGS

You have my word.
We've got no use
for your water –
only the ore. This
is what's best for

your family. What's
left of this town,
too.

Jackson picks up the pen and signs – his name a confident streak across the last clean line. The paper absorbs the ink like sand drinks blood. He folds up the chack and puts it in his pocket. Outside, the wind picks up, whistling through the frame of the building. A distant train wails as it curves through the valley – steady, mechanical, inevitable.

FADE OUT.

INT. SMITH RESIDENCE – EVENING

In a modest dining room, EMMET SMITH sits with his wife, SUSAN, and his son, CURTIS—a thoughtful young man on the verge of shouldering family responsibility. The soft glow of a lamp casts long shadows over the table. Emmet leans forward, his voice low and troubled. He lays an illustrated brochure on the table that reads “Hot Springs, Arkansas”.

EMMET

Don't worry honey,
Jackson is close to
securing the deal
to build the Hotel.

SUSAN

Jacksons a good

man, with good intentions but it's been two years. You need to do the deal with Vulcan we need to start generating some income. The town is dying.

EMMET

We can't trust Hastings, and Jackson says he's close. He said the funding is coming in on Tuesday.

SUSAN

Emmet. Even if he actually gets the money, what if something goes wrong? We can't risk losing everything on Jackson's gamble. We need a backup plan—a safety net.

Curtis shifts in his seat, his tone measured yet reluctant.

CURTIS

Dad, we already
have other
businesses in town.
That can't be the
only way to secure
our future.

Emmet runs a hand through his hair, torn between
idealism and the harsh Mojave reality.

EMMET

Curtis, all our
businesses in town
depended on the
mine. The mine is
bust, but Jackson
swears the healing
water will work
miracles. The Hotel
will bring
tourists, and
tourists will make
the businesses
thrive.

Susan leans in, voice firm yet gentle.

SUSAN

We need a plan that
doesn't hinge
solely on the
resort's success.

Curtis's eyes light up as he offers a tentative

suggestion.

CURTIS

What about
Scooter's Old No.
5? It's good,
really good. And
whisky-making runs
in his blood. If
you could expand
his production, it
might be the backup
we need.

Emmet studies Curtis for a moment—wondering just how much he understands of Scooter's craft and product—then, as the weight of the idea sinks in, his expression softens with renewed determination.

EMMET

Whisky... that's not
a bad idea. It
could create a
steady stream of
income we control.
If the resort
falters, at least
our water—and our
whisky—could carry
us through.

Susan's face shows both relief and concern as she considers the feasibility.

SUSAN

But what do we know
about making
whiskey and isn't
whisky illegal? Can
you even turn it
into a legitimate
business?

Emmet nods, his resolve firming. A pause follows as the family exchanges determined looks—a silent promise to fight for their future, come what may.

EXT. OASIS PALMS – OASIS – DAY (1903)

A wide, cinematic sweep of the **revived oasis**. Towering fan palms sway over vibrant Chuparosa blooms. Workers in dusty shirts move with purpose, laying pipe, carving pools, shaping stone. A freshly painted sign reads: **“Oasis Palms Hotel & Hot Spring Resort – Coming Summer 1905”**

Nearby, **JACKSON** and **EMMET** stand at the edge of a newly dug well. Warm spring water flows down hand-cut stone channels into a series of terraced pools – a desert paradise in the making.

In the distance, the **timber framework of a grand hotel** climbs into the sky where their parents' home once stood.

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

The water was the true treasure – a gift from the earth, destined for our family to protect... and to share.

Jackson and Emmet walk slowly along the edge of the pools, the sounds of hammering and flowing water surrounding them. For a moment, it feels like victory.

EMMET

(smiling,
impressed) Gotta hand it to you, Jack. You actually pulled it off.

JACKSON

(grinning) It's going to be big. Really big. People will come from all over – not just for the water, but the experience.

EMMET

(pause) I was thinking... maybe we should revisit that

deal with Hastings.
I still don't trust
him, but it would
give us something
to fall a back on,
if the Resort
doesn't work out.

JACKSON

(beat) Yeah... about
that. There is no
"deal" to revisit.
I already signed
off.

Emmet stops walking. The construction sounds seem to
dim as the weight of Jackson's words sinks in.

EMMET

(turning, stunned)
You did what?

JACKSON

We needed capital.
Real capital.
Investors wouldn't
move without land
security – I had to
put up cash and the
deed to the land.
The northeast
parcel. The ridge.

The spur. The
deed's in escrow
until the resort
opens. We're all
in.

EMMET

(breath shallow,
incredulous) You
bet the whole damn
town?

JACKSON

No one else was
stepping up, Emmet.
You said it
yourself – we were
one dust storm from
disappearing. This
was the only way
forward.

Emmet stares at him, jaw tight, heart sinking. Then
he turns and walks away – not angry, not yelling –
just deeply wounded. He looks toward the cave ridge
in the distance.

EMMET

Then it's time I
found a way to make

sure something up
here still belongs
to us.

FADE OUT.

INT. BARCO MINE CAVE – DAY (1903)

Inside the cool, shadowy heart of the Barco caves, **copper stills gleam like buried treasure**. A low fire crackles beneath one of the kettles. The sweet, sharp scent of fermenting mash lingers in the humid air. **SCOOTER** and **ANDREW** move with practiced rhythm—checking temperatures, stirring grain, adjusting valves. In the background, a **narrow pipe snakes from a spring** in the cave wall, feeding crystal-clear water into a holding barrel. **EMMET SMITH** steps into the chamber, lantern in hand. He pauses, taking in the operation. His face is a mixture of skepticism and something close to admiration.

EMMET

(earnest, serious)
Scooter... with
Jackson's resort
taking shape, we're
going to see
outsiders pouring
into town.
Tourists. Railroad
men. Lawmen. Sooner
or later, the
state—or worse, the

feds—are going to
catch wind of this
little moonshine
operation of yours.
And shut it down
cold.

SCOOTER

That'd be a damn
shame. This ain't
moonshine, Emmet.
This is California
Rye – made with
heritage grain,
double distilled,
and aged in charred
oak. My granddad
made single malt in
the old country.
But this? This
might be better.

Emmet walks past the bubbling still to where “**BARCO
DISTILLERY**” is hand-painted on a curved copper
plate. He runs his fingers across it, thoughtful.
Scooter gestures toward the spring pipe.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

You want the
secret? It's the
water. Ten thousand
years underground.
Never seen light,

never touched by
man. The desert
gave us gold once.
Now it gives us
something smoother.

EMMET

(nods, considering)
That's why I'm
here. I have a
proposal. Let me
secure a federal
bonded
permit-through the
Department of the
Treasury. We
register the
distillery, get a
bonded warehouse
number, and start
paying tax per
barrel.

ANDREW

Tax?

EMMET

Just hear me out.
Once we're legit, I
can line up
distributors in Los
Angeles and San
Diego. Real buyers.

Hotels, saloons,
rail depots. You
will soon be
loading cases and
barrels onto
trains—the same as
as did with the ore
back in the day.

A silence. Only the steady drip of water in the background. Scooter watches Emmet's face, then glances at Andrew, who nods silently.

SCOOTER

What does your
brother think about
this partnership?

EMMET

Don't worry about
him, this is none
of his concern.

SCOOTER

All right then. If
you can get us
those permits... I'll
scale up
production. We'll
build a proper
rickhouse, double
the stills. Hell,
we'll even label

the damn bottles.
Barco Rye. (beat)
Could be our second
gold rush.

ANDREW

Nope. We'll call it
Scooters Old No.5.
And it **will** be our
second gold rush.

They shake hands—calloused fingers sealing a new
kind of frontier pact. The faint clink of glass
echoes behind them as the still releases another
slow drip of clear, potent spirit.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. HOTEL SITE – DAY (1904)

SCREEN OVERLAY: "1 year later – 1904"

On the hill overlooking the town a new hotel stands.
Its design is grand, yet the wooden frame betrays a
cost-cutting compromise. Jackson, Emmet, and his son
Curtis, now 27 years old, stand before the
structure, its half-finished walls and exposed beams
catching the harsh desert light.

EMMET

(voice low,
anxious) Jackson,
this hotel... it's a
gamble. A grand

vision built on
nothing more than
hope. There's no
brick like our
Father would have
used... what if this
is just temporary
and all goes to
dust?

Jackson steps closer, eyes fixed on the rising structure as if it held the promise of a better future.

JACKSON

(steady,
determined) Emmet,
every great dream
demands risk. Our
parents built this
town on water—on
the promise that
life could flourish
here. This hotel is
our chance to
transform Oasis
Palms into a
resort, a haven in
the desert.

Emmet runs a hand through his hair, his expression torn between doubt and resolve.

EMMET

If the hotel fails,
if the investors
pull out, if the
desert consumes
this fragile
structure... we'll
lose everything our
parents fought for.

Jackson places a firm hand on Emmet's shoulder, his
gaze unwavering.

JACKSON

(softly, with
conviction) We've
always known that
fortune in the
Mojave isn't
given—it's taken.
Our parents risked
everything for this
land, now it's our
turn.

If we play it safe,
this town will die
a slow death. We
must bet on our
future, even if it
means risking our
past.

Emmet stares at the half-constructed hotel, then back at his brother, the weight of their choice heavy in the desert air.

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

Jackson's dream was
built on the spot
where our three
sons were born, but
would it be enough?

Emmet nods, resolve building within him. The camera lingers on Emmet's thoughtful face.

CUT TO:

EXT. OASIS PALMS – SPRING OUTLET – SUNSET (1904)

The spring trickles quietly between the rocks, the water level just a little lower than usual. **Jackson and Emmet stand over it, silent.**

JACKSON

It's running.
That's something.

EMMET

Yeah... but for how
long?

A gust of wind rustles the palms. From deep in the earth, barely audible – a low, distant rumble. Not thunder.

EXT. BARCO DISTILLERY RAIL PLATFORM – MORNING (1904)

Steam coils around the **Barco Distillery's cave-side loading dock**, nestled within the ridge. Wooden crates and **oak barrels marked "CALIFORNIA RYE – OASIS PALMS"** are stacked high on a flatcar. The train sits idle, the rails humming faintly from the heat. **EMMET SMITH** steps out from the shadows of the cave, checking his pocket watch. **ANDREW** paces near the loading ramp, furious.

ANDREW

That train
should've rolled
out an hour ago. If
this shipment
misses the boat in
San Diego, we're
not getting paid.

EMMET

Where's the
engineer?

The **CONDUCTOR** climbs down from the caboose, clipboard in hand, hat low, steps quick. He's clearly uncomfortable.

CONDUCTOR

You're not gonna
like it, Emmet.
Vulcan's pushing
another ore run.
They've locked up

the south switch –
said we hold here
until they're done.
Orders came down
direct. Hastings
pulled rank.

EMMET

(gritting his
teeth) That spur
was built on gold.
Not iron. You go
back and tell them
I'm coming – and
I'm not bringing a
clipboard.

Andrew moves in close, eyes sharp with something
darker than frustration.

ANDREW

It's not just the
line. Water
pressure's dropped
again in the lower
cave. If they're
blasting near the
spring–

EMMET

(quiet, furious)
They swore they
wouldn't touch the

spring.

ANDREW

I say we take a few
of the boys tonight
and remind them how
close this cave
sits to their ore
carts. Real close.

A long silence. Emmet exhales slowly, his fingers twitching near the cuff of his jacket. He looks at the train, the crates, the barrels, the spring dripping inside the cave.

EMMET

Let me try it my
way first. But if
Hastings won't
listen...(beat)
tonight you can
take three men,
quiet ones and shut
down that mine.

Andrew nods – once – then turns, disappearing back into the cave.

CUT TO:

EXT. VULCAN MINING LOADING SITE – LATER

Ore carts rattle as **Vulcan laborers** load another heavy iron shipment into battered freight cars. The

air smells of sweat, rust, and dynamite. **WALTER L. HASTINGS**, hat low over his brow, supervises from a shaded tent with a glass of lemonade in hand. Emmet rides up hard on horseback, dismounting before the dust settles.

EMMET

I thought we had a deal.

HASTINGS

(polite but firm)
We do. But demand shifts, Emmet. Steel mills are paying premium, and the east wants iron, not rye.

EMMET

You blocked my spur and even worse your blasting dropped our water pressure by half. Don't play coy—we both know you're working too close to our spring.

HASTINGS

(grimacing) Your spring's fine. It's

deeper than
anything we're
hitting. The
vibration's
harmless. Just
noise.

EMMET

We can't afford
"just noise,"
Hastings. That
water is the
everything. Back
off the spring... and
get your damn ore
cars off my spur or
else...

HASTINGS

Or else, what? I
have a lease.

EMMET

(lowers his voice,
intently) I'll send
Andrew down here to
shut you down once
and for all and you
can shove your
lease up your ass.

Hastings studies Emmet's face, calculating. Then—he gives a slight nod.

HASTINGS

Settle down. We'll
move the cars and
hold the load 'til
you're clear.

HASTINGS (CONT.)

(condescending) But
let me give you a
bit of advice,
neighbor to
neighbor— instead
of pouring concrete
pools and building
bathhouses, maybe
you ought to spend
a little money on
infrastructure. You
bring in a steam
rig, punch down
five, six hundred
feet — you'll tap
right into your
precious water
source. And for
God's sake, use
galvanized steel

casing, there's no
reason to go cheap.

Emmett turns and starts to slam the door behind him.
Hasting raises his voice to get in a last jab.

HASTINGS

(beat) If that
spring dries up... it
won't be because of
me.

FADE IN: EXT. OASIS PALMS – 1905

SCREEN OVERLAY: "One year later – 1905"

A bustling train station now greets tourists
arriving by rail. The daily Santa Fe service has
cemented Oasis Palms as a destination for relaxation
and recreation—a vibrant oasis in the desert.

- Workers hammer the last wooden beams into
place, the final touches on a dream realized.
- A silk banner unfurls from the hotel's balcony:

GRAND OPENING – OASIS PALMS RESORT & SPA HOTEL

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

Jackson's gamble
paid off. Oasis
Palms grew into a

haven—a place where
water brought new
life, even as
echoes of the past
reminded us of our
fragile beginnings.

INT. CAVE BARCO DISTILLERY – DAY (1905)

Trains unload rye and coal onto platforms built along the tracks in the cave. A still is fired by coal and burns hot, cooking Scooter's Rye Whisky. Scooter smiles and pours a measure of golden liquid into a small glass, handing it to Emmet.

SCOOTER

This isn't just
whisky, Emmet—it's
a promise. A
promise that even
in the harsh
Mojave, innovation
can turn water into
gold.

Emmet takes a slow sip. The whiskey catches the flicker of lantern light, a symbol of hope amid the shadows.

The two men exchange a firm, determined nod as the camera pans over the distillery—a humble Santa Fe boxcar reborn into a tasting room, gleaming copper stills, barrels, and crates of whisky being loaded

into boxcars. The distillery is in full production. The steady flow of ancient water would redefine their future.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN: EXT. OASIS PALMS – EARLY MORNING, 1915

SCREEN OVERLAY: “Ten Years Later – 1915”

The first rays of sunlight stretch over the Mojave, gilding the landscape in gold. The once-barren hills now brim with life—a grand hotel perched like a jewel above the desert. A montage unfolds: A train pulls in, tourists in fine suits and dresses stepping onto the platform, wide-eyed at the oasis before them. A Model-T rounds the circle past the statue of Wilbur Smith. Palm trees sway in the desert breeze, their leaves whispering of change.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The oasis was a
paradise where
water again brought
new life. Once
more, the desert
sang with the
promise of
reinvention.

EXT. OASIS PALMS HOTEL – DAY (1916)

The sun gleams over a desert paradise. On the hotel terrace, **guests sip champagne** beneath white

parasols. The **steaming mineral pools glisten** as elegant socialites soak in the healing water. The sound of clinking glasses and distant music drifts on the dry breeze. A stack of fresh newspapers from Los Angeles rests on a lounge chair: **"WAR IN EUROPE", "OASIS PALMS: THE MOJAVE'S HIDDEN PARADISE", "DAY-TRIP DELIGHTS AWAIT IN THE DESERT"**

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. OASIS PALMS HOTEL – NIGHT – NEW YEAR'S EVE
(1917)**

The terrace now lies still under a star-filled sky. White linens hang limp. The laughter has paused. A banner flutters in the wind: **"HAPPY NEW YEAR – 1917"** The desert holds its breath, just for a moment.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OASIS PALMS TRAIN STATION – EVENING

A **train from Los Angeles** pulls into the station, steam hissing as **well-dressed passengers disembark**. A jazz trio plays as the resort stirs to life. The **open-air bars overflow** with revelers. **Whiskey flows freely** under strings of lanterns. Glasses clink. Laughter rolls across the resort like thunder.

EXT. OASIS PALMS RESORT – HOTEL BAR TERRACE – NIGHT
JACKSON SMITH (70) and **EMMET SMITH (72)** lean at the bar, bathed in the warm glow of gaslight. Each holds a glass of aged California rye. **CURTIS SMITH (41)**, sharp in a freshly pressed WWI officer's uniform, stands beside **JACK SMITH (39)**, dressed in a suit and

tie.

JACK

(teasing) Twenty years in the reserves and now they're shipping you across the ocean. Don't worry, brother – I'll keep the home fires burning.

CURTIS

(smiling) This place is thriving, you'll be alright for a couple years without me. The boys going over need me, its time for me to do my part.

EMMET

(chuckling) I've got to hand it to you, Jackson – I didn't think you'd pull it off. Trains are full. Rooms booked solid.

JACKSON

(grinning) We built
this together,
brother. The hot
springs bring 'em
in, and the whiskey
keeps 'em here. And
that rye? It's gold
in a bottle. Who
needs a mine when
you've got a still
and a dream?

A desert wind gusts through, lifting napkins,
rattling the lantern chains. The flame in one lamp
flutters, then steadies.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. OASIS PALMS HOTEL BAR

A bartender leans in close to a concerned patron.

BARTENDER

(whispering)
Temperance? Not in
Oasis Palms. The
desert's always
been wild. We're
fine.

PATRON

(low, tense) They
say the

government's ready
to strike. They say
prohibition will be
ratified by the end
of the month. After
that its just a
matter of time
before the do-
gooders shut this
place down. I don't
know it could
change things out
here.

FADE TO BLACK.