[Snap Judgement intro]

**Glynn:** Hey, Snappers. We know you enjoy your storytelling in the bright light of day, but if you also like your storytelling crafted in the dark of night, this is for you. Right now, we're hiring two freelance stories scouts for our incredible sister show, Spooked. In our efforts to bring you more supernatural stories from around the globe, Spooked is searching for someone who has lived in or has deep cultural knowledge of the Caribbean or the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the American South, Southeast Asia, or West Africa. This amazing story scout will find and pitch original first-person stories, and will work closely with the Spooked team and work closely with me. Is this person you? Do you know someone who might be interested? For more information, go to *snapjudgment.org/careers*.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Okay, as a kid, after some [unintelligible 00:00:22], my parents moved us to a town called Mount Pleasant, the home of Central Michigan University. And there, they released me to my own recognizance, to the mean streets of Mount Pleasant, where I meet a pack of similarly situated youngsters. And every day, we run feral. I leave in the morning, return some time as the sun set. Occasional stop off for peanut butter and jelly. We're wild, lost boys, unbridled freedom of a type that is absolutely illegal today. We played with fire and explosives, and knives. Climbed random ladders. Darted out in front of cars. It's glorious. But there is an economy, even to childhood freedom. Candy, videogames, baseball cards, soda pop still cost money. And my parents, they never heard tell of this magical concept of an allowance. I'm young and broke. Three squared [unintelligible 00:01:16], no popsicles, no comic books, no Detroit Tigers baseball caps. But just as I start to feel sorry for my 10-year-old self, the Michigan Legislature steps into revolutionize my personal finances. They mandate that every can of soda, beer, or water can now be returned to the store for a 10-cent deposit, 10 cents a can. Suddenly, the streets are littered with aluminum gold.

[upbeat music]

They're for the taking. I roll up to the campus, snatching money out the trash where college students throw away untold piles of loot. Listen, local authorities banned kids from raiding dormitories and [unintelligible 00:01:57], but this just adds to the fun. Roly-Poly security guards can't catch me, too slow. Lost Boys, Westside. My pleasure, what? Just my bike and a garbage bag. Case the joint, roll silent, strike quick, then race out to count my winnings, Jack. The best spots to make a killing are the fraternity houses the morning after a party. Ka-ching! And lickety-split, I'm rich, Tricks! Buying an hour later, candy, Snickers bars, Green Lantern comic books, potato chips. I'm rocking lifestyles of the rich and famous.

One day, I leave in the wee morning hours to go make that cheddar, get to my first and favorite spot right behind the student center. And strangely, not a can or a bottle do I find. Weird. I ride my bike down fraternity row. Every place I check, nada. No beer bottles, no soda cans, no nothing. Ah? Did these college students suddenly embrace sobriety? I don't think so. No, I don't think so. Then I see them. Grown man, corny mustache, uniform, with a patch reading City Sanitation Something-Something-Something. And there, in the back of his truck, beautiful bags of freshly collected cans. My cans. And just like that, the gravy train comes crashing to a halt. It's over. No more candy bars. No more comic books. Done. It's finished. Until he glances over, sees me, a skinny black kid on a bike holding a plastic trash bag. Looks me up and down. Sneers. Spits. Flicks his hand as you would to a dog. "Git down! Git on! Git down!"

[upbeat music]

For a moment, heat burns my face, I see red. Git? Git? Oh, no. As he sits there, I pull up beside him, yank a couple of freshly packed bags off the back of his truck, and I'm off. "Hey! Hey! Hey!" I laugh just thinking about how much more money I'm going to make with someone else out there, collecting cans for me.

[upbeat music]

Today on Snap Judgment, we proudly present The King's Ransom. Amazing story about the best treasure hunt you've never heard of. My name is Glynn Washington. Always remember, mo' money, mo' problems. Well, you're listening to Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

Now, our story begins at a jewelry store outside of Detroit and takes us on a hunt for the northern forests of Michigan, all the way to the shores of Lake Superior. Reporter Will McCarthy, he was there to watch as the whole thing, the bears, the pontoon boats, the thunderstorms played out. Now, this story does contain explicit language. Sensitive listeners are advised. Snap Judgment.

**Johnny:** I took my entire store, everything in my safe and we buried it. As crazy as that sounds, we did it. [laughs] John Perri, I've been in the jewelry business for 23 years.

**Will:** One day last July, Johnny Perri and his wife Amy drove to their family jewelry store and began packing up everything. The gold bars, the silver coins, the jewelry itself. They started driving up and down Michigan bearing the Luton pine forests, neighborhood parks, game reserves. And then they put out a press release charging $50 a pop for clues to the buried treasure. It took off, and Johnny's Treasure Quest was born.

**Female Speaker:** You won't find gold, diamonds, or rare coins inside J&M Jewelers, it's Johnny Perri's shop in Washington Township. That's because he hid it all over the state of Michigan.

**Female Speaker:** The boredom and financial strain of COVID-19 has prompted a Washington Township man to design a treasure hunt for the ages.

**Will:** Throughout the year, it seemed like this might be a good business model. He made promotional videos, set up a slick website. He made Johnny's Treasure Quest merchandise, like JTQ casual leggings and square polyester pillows. But the treasures he had hidden around Michigan were relatively small. Worth maybe $5000, $7,000. He wanted to hide something bigger, something really life changing.

[retro music]

**Johnny:** Hey, guys, how you doing? Johnny from Johnny's Treasure Quest. I've got something very awesome to show you today. I'm over here--

**Will:** Last winter, Johnny Perri started selling $10 chocolate bars across the country.

**Johnny:** This is about one of a kind limited-edition gourmet chocolate bar.

**Will:** Just like the Willy Wonka story, 10 of them contained a silver ticket.

**Johnny:** [crosstalk] -is that 10 people are going to find a silver ticket that's going to gain you entry into the Great American Treasure Hunt.

**Will:** The bars sold as far away as West Virginia and California. If you found a silver ticket, you were promised an all-expenses paid trip to a resort in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and a chance to search for treasure, a $100,000 treasure.

**Katrina:** When I heard about this Willy Wonka thing, I was like, "Let me get in there."

**Will:** This is Katrina Fernandez. She has eight kids. She got into treasure hunting during the pandemic, largely as a way to keep them entertained.

**Katrina:** And I kept sitting there thinking like, "If that was me and I went through that whole factory, I'll be just like Charlie." I won't give into the temptations or cheat. I will just keep going, and I will win it. And I never had that opportunity.

**Will:** She's from West Virginia, and she heard about Johnny's $100,000 treasure hunt online. She is immediately hooked. Katrina only bought four chocolate bars. At $10 a pop, that was about all the family could afford to spend. When they showed up at her house, she got one of her sons open them up.

**Katrina:** So, it's your birthday, and you're in luck. You open--[crosstalk]

**Jerry:** Oh, my God! Oh, my god!

**Katrina:** Jerry, you fricking did it.

**Jerry:** [screams]

**Katrina:** Jerry, I can't believe you got the [crosstalk] ticket. Look.

**Kid:** Oh, my God.

**Katrina:** It's for two people. This is for the Great American Treasure Hunt. You have been chosen. A new seed that's been planted. A new tree grows. Choose wisely, your companion, you can only bring one.

**Jerry:** I love you.

**Kid:** Can I come?

**Will:** On June 5th, all 10 of the winners and their partners were packing up their bags and making their way to Northern Michigan to search for $100,000. The all-expenses paid trip they were promised turned out to be at a motel called The Konteka Black Bear Resort. It's a sprawling brick building, in the middle of an even more sprawling parking lot. The welcome sign at the front door is plastered over with a big "For Sale" sign. Inside, there's a defunct seven-lane bowling alley and a bar. This will be the home base for all the searchers. It's midday when everyone starts to arrive at the Konteka. A silver ticket winner named Chad Foster shows up. He has Great American Treasure Hunt and *johnnystreasurequest.com* airbrushed on the back windshield of his truck. He spent close to $1,000 on chocolate bars, slowly opening and eating each one before he finally found his silver ticket.

**Chad:** It's hard to even fathom. This is literally a once in a lifetime thing. Who can say that they won a raffle to go find $100,000 worth of gold and silver?

**Will:** As Chad orders up a cheeseburger from the bar, I ask him what he wants to do with the money if he wins.

**Chad:** I've always wanted to have physical gold and silver that's going to get locked in my gun safe with everything else.

**Will:** That's what the winner would ultimately bring home. Physical treasure, not just a check for 100 grand. And that's what Chad was in it for. He wanted that tangible gold in hand, like a pirate, a tomb raider, a leprechaun.

[country music]

**Will:** Mike and Donna are from Ann Arbor, the college town. And they have at least one big reason to drive all the way out here. They want to help put their kids through school.

**Donna:** Yeah, our child is starting at Northern Michigan University in the fall, and we're going to help him.

**Mike:** Use some money for his education.

**Will:** Mike works for a small publishing company and Donna does graphic design for a local pizza restaurant. The money would go a long way. And then, there was Katrina. With her eight kids, she could definitely use the cash.

**Katrina:** This hunt to me is not about winning more money. Don't get me wrong. If you tell me, if I go out there and I won $100,000, I'm going to be beyond excited and I'm going to be beyond grateful. But we started this treasure hunting for different reasons. I'm here for the experience. I'm here for the friendships that we make. I'm just here to have a good time.

**Will:** Just the week before the hunt, one of Katrina's sisters had passed away. She almost didn't come at all. But a thousand miles away from West Virginia, she was trying to stay in the moment. So, there was Chad in it for the treasure. Mike and Donna doing it for the tuition money. And Katrina, just trying to live a little bit. The other searchers, they told me they don't even want to think about what they'll do with the money until they win.

That night, Johnny, the guy who sold all the chocolate bars who was running the event, gathered everyone in the dining room of Konteka to lay out the rules of the contest.

**Male Speaker:** I forgot the bear spray. Is that him?

**Female Speaker:** Yeah.

**Will:** He's a short guy with graying hair.

**Johnny:** Well, you guys all made it.

[applause]

**Johnny:** [unintelligible 00:13:05]. Seriously, this is going to be an awesome time. Are we ready for the maps?

**Will:** It's past 7:00 PM, but the sun is still high in the sky. Teams sit on plastic chairs in a vague semi-circle round Johnny, like some sort of weird summer camp event. Outside, two black bears amble past the windows and snack on a trash pile. Johnny hands out the maps.

**Johnny:** This map here, this is your lifeline. This is a very important map. Hold on to this with your life. Okay, there are five riddles on the map, and there are six rocks throughout the Porcupine Mountains. Every riddle leads to a rock.

**Will:** Basically, the map has five riddles that each team has to solve. The riddles will lead you to rocks with special engravings. Each rock you find can be exchanged for word and a key. Once you've filled out that key, it'll tell you the location of the final treasure. When you find it, you win the $100,000.

**Johnny:** Once you solve all the riddles, it'll lead you to that rock. It'll spell out where it is basically. So, the more rocks you find, the more the key will uncover and unlock.

**Will:** The treasure map is rolled up inside a faux leather scroll case with the phrase, "If you chase two rabbits, you'll lose them both," written on it. On the left side are five handwritten riddles arranged around a compass. On the right side is a little tree. In the middle of the search area, where the treasure is hidden. Johnny's wife made the map herself. He lays out a couple quick rules. Everyone leaves at 9:00 AM, you have to be back by 8:00 PM.

**Johnny:** We're going to have to go look for you guys. [laughs]

**Will:** And then, he spends the rest of the orientation talking about what to do depending on which animal you're being mauled by.

**Johnny:** Whatever you have to fight the bear, sticks, fists, whatever you can do, hit him in the face, the nose area. Hopefully, you'll never play dead around a black bear because he'll make sure of it.

**Will:** People are giggling, and Johnny has a flair for the dramatic, but it's not like there's search and rescue on standby either. There's no service out here. The searchers are not exactly wilderness enthusiasts. And they would be going pretty deep into the woods. It's hard to tell if this is just some harmless good, fun adventure that ends in a big payoff or a Hunger Games starting in a motel dining room.

The next morning, everyone's getting ready to head out searching. It's day one of the hunt. A bunch of people have their backpacks on, hiking gear, huge bug masks.

**Katrina:** I really, really just want to get out there, do my best and see if I can do it. I'm so ready.

**Will:** Katrina is not used to this type of treasure hunting. So, she brought a friend to help her on the trails. He's a big burly guy with a beard, a treasure hunting fanatic. Katrina actually met him on Facebook, and everybody calls him The Ringer. His name is Jason.

**Jason:** Pregame jitters. This is the feeling I got before college football games. Okay, here we go."

**Will:** As teams started to head out towards their car a few minutes before 9:00, Katrina tries to get one more quick phone call to her family. One of her kids picks up the phone.

**Katrina:** Good morning, baby. I want to tell you I love you.

**Kid:** Love you too. How you're doing?

**Katina:** I'm doing good. I'm getting ready to go out today for the first time, so I just wanted to say, "See you later." Love you.

**Kid:** I love you.

**Katrina:** All right, let me get Genia.

**Will:** As everyone scrambles to get ready, Johnny's sitting on a bench and smoking a cigarette.

**Male Speaker:** Can we go?

**Male Speaker:** I guess we can go, right?

**Female Speaker:** My clock says 9:02.

**Male Speaker:** Yeah.

**Female Speaker:** Hasta la vista, babies.

**Will:** See you out there.

Jason and Katrina step out of his yellow Dodge Challenger and into the woods. It's almost 90 degrees.

**Jason:** The one E, riddle E, "No such mine." That's where we're going, "There's no such mine."

[heavy breathing]

**Katrina:** I think if a bear come out, I'm going to beat the shit out of it.

**Jason:** Oh, really? [laughs]

**Katrina:** Are you looking to the left or to the right?

**Jason:** For what?

**Katrina:** You looking right and I'm looking left? Are we looking both ways?

**Jason:** Both ways.

**Will:** They walk along a flat trail past aspen and pine trees, eventually making their way downhill towards a creek. This is where they're expecting to find the first rock.

**Jason:** Okay, yeah, we're at our first location. We've been here a few minutes, and some other hunters just showed up. So, that's kind of a good sign. Unless they're just as lost as us, it's a real good sign. Hey, girl. You doing okay?

**Katrina:** Yeah. The riddle said something to the nature of being able to hear the fall. I'm thinking that it would be somewhere where you can hear it. You can hear the falls and hear the water.

[water running]

**Will:** Jason and Katrina search along the creek in old mining buildings nearby. Other teams wander around the area as well. Everyone sort of vaguely shuffling through the underbrush around the trail as if they have lost their keys or something. One couple is wearing orange hunting shirts, carrying rakes and shovels and they have their bear spray locked and loaded on front of them. A couple hours pass like this.

**Katrina:** This is the lightest trail? [laughs] Okay, red frog. Okay, that was just a frog. Just doing a little yelp. Okay, that’s just a frog. A little frog ain't going to kill nobody. Yeah, just the woods, all right.

**Will:** Katrina stands on a rock by the creek. The water pouring past her. At one point, her cell phone rings.

**Sister:** Katrina?

**Katrina:** Yes?

**Will:** It's her sister who's watching her kids.

**Katrina:** How the hell of all people, your ass get to call me in the middle of nowhere? Are you kidding me? All right. Well, listen, I'm searching for treasure, and you're not supposed to be calling me. [laughs]

[phone beeps]

**Will:** While Team Bear Spray is messing around by the creek. Mike and Donna, the couple from Ann Arbor hunting for tuition money, they have a different plan. Before the hunt, Johnny had posted a picture of himself in the Johnny's Treasure Quest Facebook group. In it, he was studying the official trail map for the Porcupine Mountains. They figured he must have come up with all the riddles just by looking at that map.

**Donna:** And one thing we knew about this is two weeks ago, we saw a picture of Johnny in his house-

**Mike:** Looking at the map.

**Donna:** -looking at this particular map. So, everything that has a clue related to it--

**Will:** As the sun starts to drop behind the Porcupine Mountains, the teams emerge from the woods and head back towards Konteka. They trickle into the dining room one by one. Jason and Katrina had found two rocks, a few other teams had found some too. The first day had gone off without a hitch. Except Johnny, Mr. Treasure Hunt, was nowhere to be seen.

**James:** We've got a situation and I'm trying to figure out what that is. She's trying to tell me a long story.

**Will:** This is James, a friendly smack-talking kind of guy who's helping Johnny organize the event.

**James:** Johnny is caught out on the rock, Lone Rock, and I'm trying to figure out where the hell that is.

**Will:** The rock was 15 miles away and in the middle of Lake Superior. James went out to find help for Johnny.

**James:** Well, I stopped at the guard shack. I told him I have somebody stuck out there on a boat we've got to get to, and he's like, "What kind of boat?" We said a pontoon boat, and he started laughing, he's like, "Oh, no, no, no. You don't take pontoon boat out onto Lake Superior."

**Will:** Apparently, with everyone else out hunting for treasure. Johnny and his wife had taken a pontoon boat onto Lake Superior for an afternoon date, and it got beached near a big rock emerging from the lake. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources or the DNR, they weren't able to rescue them until around 10:00 PM that night. Johnny was up until 2:00 in the morning trying to retrieve the boat from the rock, but he was still at breakfast the next morning for the second day of the hunt. Nobody really seemed to care.

I asked some people like, "This all seems kind of strange, right?" But the answer was generally, "No. It's all good. It's fine." They were all really focused on winning. Everyone was approaching the hunt with their own strategy. Some took the rules to heart, spending all their time trying to decipher where they might lead. Others approached the hunt as a test of endurance, hiking as many miles as possible, trying to follow every hunch. By the second morning, Mike and Donna had already found three of the five rocks. It looked like they might be in the lead.

[country music]

**Glynn:** In just a moment, Mike and Donna try and beat everyone else of the $100,000 when Snap Judgment, The King's Ransom episode continues. Stay tuned.

[country music]

**Glynn:** This is Snap Judgment. When The King's Ransom episode left off, two of the searchers, Mike and Donna, were headed back out to look for the final clues. Snap Judgment.

[country music]

**Donna:** We got three things yesterday and checked them off. And today, what we're looking for is, "If you lose your way, you'll find your direction. If your ears are keen, they will guide your detection. Caught in the snare brings you close to the rock. And another piece of the key will unlock." We thought it would be something Lost Creek. So, there's a Lost Lake Trail. There's a Lost Creek, a Lost Creek outpost, and we just drove to the Lost Creek outpost and found out that it's just a campground.

**Will:** They only needed to solve two more clues and they hop on their mountain bikes, they can cover more ground. While some teams are starting to pull ahead, others are falling behind. Back at Konteka, Katrina's sitting outside by herself. Jason is nowhere to be seen.

What’s up? What did you guys do so far today?

**Katrina:** We argued. He's alive though. He's alive and he's still my partner. We came back here for a bit to break. What would you like to ask me? Because I'm ready to tell-all. [Will laughs] This is a tell-all portion.

**Will:** Katrina said that Jason was pissed that while the other teams were racing ahead of them, she was slowing them down.

**Katrina:** I was going to push him off the cliff.

**Will:** He was tired dragging around the trails.

**Katrina:** I can't make my body go any faster than what I'm trying. I never went so far as the kids' bus stop or the mailbox, and I'm over here hiking over trails that are miles long. I'm exceeding my personal best, in my opinion.

**Will:** Katrina's ankles are sore and her knees are swollen, and she's away from her entire family, one week after her sister's death.

**Katrina:** I thought we'll bury her and I would come over here, and we'll get it, but after the funeral, it kind of hit me and I just determined that, "Okay, I'm not emotionally well to come." I battled with it. I really feel my kids are emotionally distraught losing their auntie, and my surviving brothers and sisters, they could use a phone call from me or they could use me being there, physically be there for them right now, and I'm not. It's catching up. [chuckles]

**Will:** Johnny's sitting on a metal bench, smoking a cigarette, drinking a Cannonball IPA. Just then, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources truck pulls in.

**Johnny:** Not really. Not in good terms, but the head of the DNR, she hates me.

**Will:** Because of something else?

[western music]

**Johnny:** She wanted me to tell her where all my treasure was. "I want to know where all your treasures are, exact location." I'm like, "No."

**Will:** Two men in official looking uniform step out and start walking towards the Konteka, hands on hips. Johnny walks over to greet them. The three of them laugh a little bit. Then, they move over to the picnic table. After about 20 minutes, they leave and Johnny comes walking back. They just told Johnny he has to call off the entire treasure hunt.

**Johnny:** They're threatening to shut down the event unless I get a permit to do this event. Permit for what? For people to go into the Porcupine Mountains?

**Will:** This isn't the first time Johnny's had a run in with the DNR. They've been going at it ever since he started hiding treasure last spring.

**Johnny:** Unfortunately, the head of DNR is throwing everything at me until she gets her way.

**Will:** When Johnny originally buried the stuff in his jewelry store, it wasn't just because he thought it'd be a good time to start a treasure hunting business. Johnny was also scared.

**Johnny:** We really thought it was like the country was collapsing, it was done, all over. I said, "Well, only we will know where the treasure is, if we need it, we can go get it." That’s the safest place. If you want to put your money in a bank or put the treasure in a safe deposit box, because they're going to steal it too.

**Will:** It was the early days of the pandemic, when everything seemed pretty tenuous.

**Johnny:** So, it was to protect us at the same time. The world didn't go to hell, we would do something else, I don't even know how it worked.

**Will:** When the world didn't end, he started the treasure hunt instead. At first, no one believed it was real.

**Johnny:** When I was trying to post treasure groups and stuff on Facebook and tell everyone what I'm doing. Everyone was like, "Yeah, sure, you do. This is a scam." Next thing you know, news station starts showing up. Word got out, it just went viral, dude. Finished the payment thing, I had to process payments, the news went on. All these stations started airing. All we saw was the-- [chuckles] it makes a little ding when someone buys something, it's like ting, ka-ching. It sounded like a frickin' casino, dude. All my--[crosstalk]

**Will:** Hundreds, thousands of people were purchasing riddles that they hoped would lead to the jewels Johnny had buried in the ground.

**Male Speaker:** One man's dream to change his life and the lives of strangers, forever. Johnny's Treasure Quest, an epic hunt across Michigan for real buried treasure.

**Will:** The DNR was unhappy that he was out digging holes around Michigan. According to Johnny, they asked him where he had buried all the stuff in his store. But if Johnny thought that society was on the verge of collapse, he definitely wasn't going to trust the DNR. So, he refused. And they've been on bad terms ever since.

**Johnny:** And they claim that they just want to make sure it's not in an endangered part of the park, or I'm not going to step on like an endangered mushroom or something.

**Will:** Now, after two dozen people have driven all the way out to the UP, two DNR guys in combat boots in full ranger regalia were threatening to tank the whole thing. Johnny says he might call off the hunt. Split the $100,000 between each team and send everyone home with 10 grand. He just needs a few hours to think it over.

[indistinct conversations]

[western music]

**Will:** Car start pulling back into Konteka around 6:00 PM. By 7:00 PM, most everyone is drunk.

[indistinct conversations]

**Male Speaker:** We've got a new interviewee here.

[overlapping conversations]

**Male Speaker:** What do you got there?

**Male Speaker:** He knows where the treasure is. He knows where the treasure is.

**Male Speaker:** Just audio?

**Will:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**Male Speaker:** So, up here in the Great North Woods.

**Will:** At this point, it no longer feels like your neighborhood scavenger hunt. Less people are searching. More people are drinking and hanging out around the motel. Katrina has taken off on an ATV ride with some wasted dude from town. I wasn't sure if Johnny was being serious about ending the treasure hunt early. When I asked him, he says it wouldn't be fair. Apparently one team had solved all five riddles. It was on the verge of finding the final treasure, Mike and Donna. If they find it and get back on time, they will have won. But by 7:30, they still haven't shown up at Konteka. Johnny told me they were probably out trying to find the final rock and the $100,000. He said they would be on the Lake Superior trail, a 20-mile route that takes you from the hills, down to the shore, and eventually to the mouth of the big Carp River.

So, it's about 7:30--

I drive over to the trailhead. If they find the final treasure, I want to be there. And I figure if I run, I can catch up with them.

[upbeat country music]

I broke it down the trail with my backpack and recorder, expecting to bump into Mike and Donna pretty quickly. The trail is swampy, dense. At times, it's kind of unclear where the trail is at all. I'm three miles in and the sun is going down. After five miles, it starts to get dark. It's already way past the 8:00 PM. Mike and Donna are out here somewhere, very far out in the woods, very late at night, searching for some insane treasure situation. And now I'm out here, running after them, and I'm not even going to win any money.

"If anything happens out here, I just want everybody to know it's not Snap Judgment's fault."

[footsteps]

I think that's when the whole thing kind of clicks for me. The adventure, maybe it's for real. Maybe this is something that everyone, even Johnny, has been missing for the past 15 months. Feeling that you're right on the edge of solving the whole thing. All the corny stuff about the treasure lying and the adventure, maybe I get that. But it's also almost pathological, like an addiction, where it's easy to go too far. After about nine miles, it's pitch black. And still, I haven't found Mike and Donna.

Down at the shore of Lake Superior, it's getting cold. Considering how rugged these trails are, how hard it would be to get help if something goes wrong, I'm starting to worry that someone might get hurt tonight. Sometime past 10:00 PM, I give up. I turn around, start to head back.

[footsteps]

When I finally get back to the trailhead, Mike and Donna's car is still parked there. Either they hiked and even further than I did, or they're lost.

[upbeat country music]

**Mike:** At that point, we weren't thinking real straight probably-

**Donna:** Yes.

**Mike:** -we were thinking go in, grab it, and we're done. That's a burst of energy at that point. So, it was time ago.

**Will:** Mike and Donna solved the last two riddles. With all the clues put together, they knew that the treasure was between somewhere called Lafayette Landing and the mouth of river. When they checked the map, they saw that it was on the Lake Superior trail. They knew it was a long trail, but they had their mountain bikes with them. So, they figured they'd have an advantage.

**Mike:** By the time we figured it out, it was getting late. And it was a mile-- how many miles, we knew it was a big trail. We're so geeked at that point, too. And we made a decision that-- we didn't fill our water jugs. You said, "Do you want to put on your bike helmet?" And I'm like, "No. Let's go." We just jumped on the trail, like, "Let's go."

**Will:** Treasure drunk, Mike and Donna set down the trail in the late afternoon.

**Mike:** We're sweating and going, and going over all these downed logs. And it was a full-on race, go time, and then we run into another team. And we thought, "Uh-oh." There's no reason for anybody to be on this trail unless they know the final clues.

**Will:** It was Chad, the gun safe guy, heading back towards the trailhead.

**Mike:** He said, "Well, we're after the final one. We're out here looking for the treasure." And I said, "Well, if you found it, can you tell us now so [laughs] we don't have to keep going?" And he said, "Yeah, I wouldn't do that to you. We didn't find it."

**Will:** Chad was going back to beat curfew and fight another day. Mike and Donna, were just going for it.

**Mike:** He said, "This is the worst trail I've been on. There's logs everywhere. There's swamps, we got muck, we had to make our own trail around the swamp." At that point, I said, "Man, I know we're going to be late at this point." We started walking, and just looking and I said, "We've got to pick it up a little bit and do some speed looking." And then, she gave it right back to me, like, "No." [chuckles] At that point, I'm thinking we're going to run out light. We knew we were still in the vicinity of where it could be, but we were running out-- We couldn't really look, we had to go. [crosstalk]

**Will:** They knew that they could be just feet away from the final rock. But it was too dark to see.

**Donna:** I was getting panicked. We didn't find it, and now we can't get out of the woods.

**Mike:** Probably getting close to 10:00 at that point, but there was no moon whatsoever.

**Will:** They were alone out in the woods with no coats, dead phones, not even a flashlight. It was completely pitch black. And they were who knows how many miles away from anyone.

**Mike:** I mean, it is so black, I can hardly see-- I'm worried about it's getting darker and darker, and there's roots under our feet.

**Will:** They had sent off a text to Johnny and the treasure hunters asking for help, but they had no idea if that had gone through or not. Just when it seemed like they would have to give up, they came across a group of kids camping near the lake. The kids gave them a headlamp, but they still had miles to go.

**Mike:** I have the headlamp, and she's falling behind me, and it is pitch black. So, I keep turning my head to try and give her light when I step over something or trip on something. Just pure exhaustion at that point. We were literally spent.

**Will:** It was 1:00 in the morning when they finally emerged from the woods, 30 miles from their car. They had been hiking in the wrong direction for hours. The text had somehow gone through before their phone died. Johnny and another searcher figured out where they were headed, and were there to greet them, and bring them back to the motel. Back at the Konteka, Mike and Donna slept hard. At some point that night, they had walked directly past the final rock, and $100,000.

**Johnny:** Are you ready?

**Will:** The next morning, I sit down with Johnny at breakfast. He's eating a big plate of eggs and hash browns, seemingly completely unconcerned.

**Johnny:** Well, basically I got a letter from the nice lady in charge of the DNR from Lansing, and she wants me to cease and desist operations immediately. So, that's what we're doing. We've got to respect the state of Michigan and their wishes. [laughs] And so everything is cancelled. But I've all folks here, they still got their vacation, and they're free to walk the trails and do whatever they want. So, it's all on them, because that’s what they tell me. "You can't force these people to go into the woods." I say, "I'm not forcing them," but they said I couldn't do it.

[country music]

**Glynn:** Coming up, the race begins to tighten. And searchers are getting closer to the 100 grand, but the treasure hunt is showing signs of stress. The question is, will someone get the money before the whole thing falls apart? Snap Judgment, The King's Ransom episode continues. Stay tuned.

[country music]

Welcome back to Snap Judgment, The King's Ransom episode. My name is Glynn Washington. When we left off, Johnny said he was calling off the hunt. Now, this story does contain explicit language. Sensitive listeners are advised. Snap Judgment.

**Johnny:** That’s what they tell me, "You can't force these people to go into the woods." I say, "I'm not forcing them," but they said I couldn't do it. Everything's canceled, but I've all folks here. They've still got their vacation, they're free to walk the trails and do whatever they want. So, it's all on them.

**Will:** Johnny had called off the hunt, but he hadn’t. None of this has ever been by the book anyway. So, everyone is driving toward the Lake Superior trail, word spread that that's where Mike and Donna were rescued.

You want to give me a quick update on what your guys plan is?

**Jason:** This is like the pitch hit moment where it's like, what do you got to do? We looked at the map and we figured out where we're going to go, and the most obvious spot. I think there's several teams that are just going to go all in for it, try to hit that location.

**Will:** Jason, Katrina's treasure hunting partner, has an idea about Johnny's pontoon boat crash. He figures that Johnny might have taken the pontoon boat to actually try to hide the final treasure. That way, he wouldn't have had to do the whole 20-mile hike.

**Jason:** Our theory is not really based on the riddle or anything. Our theory is based upon the boat wreck, because we feel that they were watching where the big money was. So, if our hunch is right, we kind of understand where they're at.

[chuckles]

[indistinct chatter]

**Will:** As all the other teams leave the motel, Donna and Mike wait out their penalty. Because they were out so late the night before, Johnny ruled that they couldn't start searching until 1:00 PM.

**Mike:** Unfortunate part is all the other people heard where we ended up, where we got picked up from. And that's our biggest concern, is they've got such a big jump on us now for the day.

**Will:** Mike and Donna are raring to go. It's like being in detention. As soon as the clock hits 1:00, they hop in their truck and speed back towards the Porcupine Mountains.

[indistinct chatter]

[engine starts]

**Mike and Donna:** Okay.

**Will:** When they make it down to the mouth of the river, they see another team searching on the banks, but Mike doesn't think they're on the right track.

**Mike:** They're blind. They don't know the clues.

**Will:** He doesn't think that that team has solved all the clues.

**Mike:** They just know we're down here.

**Will:** Right.

**Donna:** Maybe we'll just sit on here.

**Will:** So, they just guessing where it's at based on where Mike and Donna got rescued. They climb up a hill, trying to cut across to get away from the other teams.

**Donna:** Okay, go. Go, go.

[footsteps]

[waves crashing]

**Donna:** [pants]

**Mike:** That's a good move.

**Donna:** Let's see if there's another team. [pants]

**Will:** Mike walks over to the side of the hill and peers through the trees. They lost the other team. They keep searching, sure that this was the area Johnny had hid the final rock.

**Mike:** I do remember, Donna, this was about the spot where we just started whole thing. I'm just saying that just so you know. I'm not saying anything else.

**Will:** Waves crash beside them, and the late afternoon sun reflects off the water. Donna and Mike seem tense and hopeful. But then, the text comes in.

**Donna:** Oh, so close.

**Mike:** Actually, just trying to find a spot where we were going to pick up the trail tomorrow. We just established that. And she looked at her phone and saw the message that somebody else had found the treasure.

**Donna:** James had said, "It was found."

**Will:** Someone else has found the treasure, but the text didn't say who.

**Mike:** Again, we came in thinking, we've got a shot, 1 in 10. Those aren't the greatest odds. It sucks we were the only team that solved all the clues.

**Donna:** All the clues.

**Mike:** And then, kind of led everybody else here while we had a penalty. That'll leave some sour grapes.

**Donna:** We're the second-place team. We're the first losers.

**Mike:** First losers, yeah.

**Donna:** [laughs]

[country music]

**Will:** Back at Konteka, I run into Katrina walking from Jason's car back inside. It's 8:00 PM and she looks absolutely exhausted, muddy, sweaty. They had just gotten back too. Some locals call out to her.

**Male Speaker:** Looking for a rock?

**Katrina:** A rock.

**Male Speaker:** Somebody found it, I heard they got $100,000.

**Katrina:** Shit.

**Female Speaker:** If y'all was still out there looking, it was already gone. Don’t that make you mad?

**Katrina:** [unintelligible [00:43:48] got me. The longest trail I ever walked on.

[door opens and shuts]

**Will:** Inside, everyone is celebrating. The bar is filled with searchers. And everyone is grabbing beers, laughing. "Drinks on this guy," someone yells out, pointing down the bar. I look over. It's Chad, the guy with the gun safe.

**Chad:** We had a game plan when we came up, to not overthink it, to keep it simple. And it's like it was meant to be because we knew where it was at yesterday before anyone else. We decided to quit because of the rules, and literally we found it, from where we turn around yesterday was less than 200 yards.

**Will:** While Mike and Donna were still in detention and the rest of the teams were scrambling around the brush, Chad hiked down to the big Carp River in the morning and found the final rock. The gold was Chad's, will get to feel the weight of it in his hands, eventually squirreled away in his safe. That night, everyone gathers in the dining room one last time.

**Johnny:** All right, guys, we're going to go over the map. This is the map, as you all know. [chuckles]

**Will:** Johnny walks through the riddles as everyone looks on.

**Johnny:** And so, we've got the name of this place is to allure, like an infrastructure where something stored is safe and secure. That was the infrastructure of the cloud, the data stored in the cloud, you know?

**Treasure Hunters:** Oh.

**Johnny:** So, it was little harder than the other ones.

**Will:** Eventually, he shows how the map unravels to reveal the final treasure location.

**Johnny:** The treasure lies between the mouth in Lafayette Landon. Mm-hmm.

[applause]

**Johnny:** And that's where you would have found the treasure on the trail. It was closer to the mouth. I hope you guys you all had a good adventure. Congratulations to the winners, Mr. Chad Foster and Nikki-- what's your last name?

**Nikkii:** Crane.

**Johnny:** Nikkii Crane. $100,000 in golden and silver.

[cheers and applause]

**Will:** Johnny and Chad are joking around, figuring out a time for Chad to come pick up his gold and silver. Some searchers linger and take pictures of the final rock. A few others walk outside and sit in the parking lot of the Konteka, smoking and drinking beers under the motion sensor lights.

**Katrina:** My family knows just coming here was big. Not just because of the trip, it was because I left my children behind, I had a death in the family, that was big. For me to be sitting there, competing and actually somewhat keeping up with the others, that's a big deal to my family. I've already made them proud and that's what I strive for in life, period.

[raining]

**Will:** On the last morning, it rains as hard as I've ever seen. Johnny offered to give a small silver coin to anyone who went and retrieved one of the clue rocks, but most people just head home splashing through the puddles out of Konteka's parking lot. But Mike and Donna set out on the trail one last time, trekking through the downpour, determined to leave with something, anything, even if it was only a silver coin.

[country music]

**Glynn:** Thank you, thank you, thank you, Johnny, for sharing your story with us at Snap. You can learn more about Johnny and his treasure quest on our website, *snapjudgment.org*. Original score for this story was by Derek Barber. It was produced by Will McCarthy.

[upbeat music]

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[upbeat music]

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