

BLOOD OATH

Screenplay by
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Supernatural/Mystery

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(Note: screenplay is American spelling & grammar).

FADE IN:

EXT-NIGHT, BLACK RIVER FOREST,

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA, DAY FOUR, FLASH FORWARD.

Reflected on the forest floor a hunter's full-moon glows in a clear pool of rainwater. Jagged fingers of tree-branches and leaves reach up and pierce its sphere.

A disturbance is heard of someone thrashing through the forest, being chased. Vibrations of running footsteps cause ripples, disrupting the image of the moon. A trail running shoe, splashes into the pool.

We pull back to reveal an athletic blonde woman of 21, with a grazed bullet wound to the head. Her dirt smeared face is covered in scratches and bruises. She wears trail-running gear, headlamp, padding, and is being hunted.

Gasping for air, she runs repeating an oath.

WOMAN

All for one, one for all, in life
and beyond death.

The toe of her shoe snags a tree-root, and she tumbles forward, flesh and bones impacting solid earth. Sprawled on the forest floor, she waits while catching her breath. Heart pounding in her chest, she listens in the dark for what pursues her.

The woman detects the sound of a beast's muscular body smashing through dense scrub, and foliage. Its relentless snarls and growling propel the terrified woman forward.

Running for her life, she recites the blood oath again.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

All for one, one for all, in life
and beyond death.

Gripping the handle of a retracted trail stun-gun strapped to her thigh, she rips it free from its Velcro straps.

Clambering up an embankment, a stubborn, determined look crosses her face. Turning she stops, like a warrior she digs in her heels. Stun gun held ready, she waits to confront the creature.

The ancient words of the oath, are muttered through clenched teeth.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

All for one, one for all, in life
and beyond death.

Pulling the trigger, blue electric sparks crackle from the gun's tip. Crashing through the bush, the animal brakes, cover. We see a gigantic South African Mastiff. It emerges cautiously into the silvery light, saliva dripping from its sharp canine teeth.

Brown intense eyes stalk its prey, as a reflected glint of moonlight catches a silver crucifix dangling from its collar. Bracing herself for action, she mutters the blood oath under her breath bolstering her faith.

Without warning the dog attacks. The tip of the stun-gun's electrodes strike it directly in the teeth, 950,000s volts of electricity surge through the dogs, nerves, gristle and bones.

Shrugging off the jolt, it attacks again. Thrusting the gun forward, blue electric sparks singe the beast's fur. The Mastiff's sheer stamina and brute strength forces the woman to retreat.

Descending the slope, she glances away checking her footing. Teeth clamp on to the stun-gun. Violently jerking its head, the animal wrenches it from her hand. Losing her only form of defense, the woman turns and runs.

Bolting madly forward, she forces her way through thick foliage, leaping over scrub and rotten tree stumps. Running with wild abandonment, she is now certain of her own impending death.

Bursting into a small clearing, a section of forest floor collapses underneath her weight. Her arms flailing as she drops, her hands frantically grip the edges of an old mine shaft entrance.

The woman hangs precariously above an unknown abyss. And then her fingers begin to loosen their grip, finger-nails repeatedly clawing and gauging at soft earth. She mutters the blood oath one last time under her breath.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

All for one, one for all, in life
and beyond death.

She slips silently into the darkness below.

DISSOLVE TO:

FOUR DAYS EARLIER, END FLASH FORWARD.

EXT-MORNING, CALIFORNIA'S ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST, DAY 1

The sun rises into a delicate pink, burnt orange sky. It's morning light exposes The San Gabriel Mountains sitting low on the horizon. In the sky a bald eagle soars gracefully on hot thermals.

Move in and continue down through the canopies of big-coned Douglas Fir trees to the ground floor of a forest, where we see a well-marked out trail.

Colorfully dressed officials, volunteers, runners and their dogs are lining up in groups at the starting line to the Angel Crest, Canicross 50-km Endurance Run.

In the first group of four contestants we see a determined 21-year old athletic blonde woman wearing runner's kit. A waist belt with bungee cord is attached to her dog's harness. Clearly visible in a Velcro pouch strapped to her thigh, is a retractable stun-gun trail staff.

(Neatly printed bold black letters on her vest spell, GRACE STONE).

She has a colorful patch proudly stitched onto her kit. It is a N.A.S.A.R badge, the highest qualification for the National Association for Canine Search and Rescue. The race official fires a starters' pistol into the air, BANG. The runners and their dogs sprint-forward in competing pairs of four.

Pulling in we focus on Grace Stone's green eyes and determined square jawed face. She runs skillfully, giving key commands to her BLUE HEELER, signaling him precisely in which direction to move along the wide trail.

Sure-footed as a mountain-goat around obstacles and up hills, she easily positions them into the lead. They gradually out-distance the pack, eventually leaving their competitors far behind.

Now running alone, she adroitly scans the trail for colored ribbon markers secured to trees. Tall fir trees, rocks and tough undulating ground rush by them, as they quickly traverse the trail-moving deeper and deeper into dense forest.

Grace flicks on a small headlamp, and a soft illuminated glow helps her to spot the markers on the trail, navigating more easily through the shadows.

EXT- UNMARKED TRAIL, THREE HOURS LATER.

Emerging disorientated out of the dense forest of trees, Grace is annoyed with herself for not remembering to pack spare batteries for her Garmin G.P.S.-and bemoans the fact that they are completely lost.

GRACE
(Australian accent,
labored breathing)
That Angel Crest belt-buckle is
gonna have to wait Sherlock. Looks
like we're the ones lost this time,
mate.

SHERLOCK
(Agreeing with her.)
Whimpers and barks.

From a pouch around her waist, Grace rations water out of a plastic container for SHERLOCK and herself.

While scanning the surroundings for signs of trail markers, they both hear a desperate cry-out for help. Remaining perfectly still they wait until the cries for help repeat.

A snap of her fingers summons Sherlock to her side-removing his bungee harness, she coils it, stuffing it into her backpack. Motioning down-wards with an open palm, her dog sits to attention on his haunches, obediently waiting.

We clearly see an old scar running diagonally along Grace Stone's right palm. She squats down next to Sherlock, giving him a dehydrated vegetable treat then utters a command to the attentive dog.

GRACE

Search and find Sherlock.

Barking excitedly, he fearlessly bounds down the dark trail in the direction of the cries for help. Grace checks her equipment, tightens loose straps and is soon following behind at a steady pace.

Her ear's pricked and ready to detect any signals coming from Sherlock, she quickly covers the uneven ground. At one point she comes to a complete stop, waits for a beat, then instantly turns into thicker bush and foliage-responding to nearby sounds of a viscous struggle.

Grace forges her way through a dense thicket of bush and razor-sharp branches. Shielding her eyes and face, rubber padding on her arms and gloves protect her skin. The sounds of Sherlock growling and barking, alert her to a full-blown dog-fight. Gritting her teeth she springs into action.

Running rapidly down a dark trail, her athletic body is swallowed up in the shadows as her headlamp bounces around in the fir-trees, while the cries for help, and the sounds of a vicious dog fight escalate in intensity.

EXT-LATER, SMALL CLEARING AMONGST THE TREES.

On the ground is a distraught 54-year old male wearing dark-glasses, huddled against the trunk of a tree. Disorientated and wounded he is splattered with blood. A white mobility-cane lies snapped and broken at his feet.

In the center of the clearing, Sherlock's hair is bristled, ears erect, teeth bared and he is confronting a menacing black German Shepherd. Grace Stone runs into the clearing, skidding to a stop.

Taking a brief moment to assess the dangerous situation, she instantly snaps her fingers twice, commanding Sherlock to stand down. Glancing at the wounded victim, she sees blood, and is concerned for his well-being and safety. Turning back, Grace locks eyes with the black dog, maintaining a fixed line of sight.

There is no warning from his eyes telegraphing his unprovoked attack, as he inches forward, head slightly raised, tail rigid, hair bristled, ears directed forward and sharp canine incisors bared back exposing dark pink-gums.

The black dog lowers its head and body, its hind-leg muscles compressed like coiled steel. Unleashing itself, it springs through the air at Grace's throat, jaws extended. From out of shot we hear Sherlock launch a counter-attack to heroically defend his master.

GRACE
(Shocked and concerned,
yells out)
No Sherlock!

Sherlock's body slams into the side of the much heavier German Shepherd, sending them sprawling. The black dog recovers incredibly fast, clamping its jaw's onto Sherlock's leather harness and collar, savaging his partly exposed throat.

Sherlock is held firmly within its vice-like jaws, whimpering as the black dog's canine teeth pierce through his leather collar. Grace automatically grips the handle of her retractable stun-gun strapped to her thigh, ripping it free from its straps, she holds it ready.

She pulls the trigger, testing the 950,000 volts electric blue sparks that crackle from its tip. Assuming a warriors' stance she moves cautiously forward to confront the black dog.

Jaws still clenched around the Blue Heeler's throat, the Shepherd waits for the tell-tale signs of a death rattle, before it releases its hold. The unconscious body of Sherlock drops to the ground, as the black dog maintains a vigilant watch on the approaching blonde woman.

The wounded man stares blankly around him confused by the sounds of the savage struggle. Remembering his emergency beeper hanging around his neck, he repeatedly depresses the button.

Grace pulls the trigger of the stun-gun again, producing arcs of blue electrical power. Without warning, the dog launches another assault. Leaping for her exposed throat area, she blocks the dogs attack. Its jaws clamp tightly onto her left arm, its teeth pierce flesh, encountering muscle and hard bone.

Taking the full impact of 150-pounds of pure meat and hard muscle, she falls backwards. With her free hand, she rams the tip of the stun-gun hard up against its exposed chest and lower abdomen. Blue electric sparks ignite, as she holds her finger tight upon the trigger.

Transmitting 950,000 thousand volts continually to the animal, they both slam down hard into the ground.

At that moment she hits her head against a hard exposed rock, and her world begins darken. Her fingers lock on the stunguns trigger, incapacitating the black dog.

Protected from the electrical discharges by her rubber padding and protective clothing, Grace lies bleeding and unconscious on the ground. The hard blow received to her head causes two events from her past to resurface onto the dark unconscious screen of her mind.

INT-NIGHT, LIGHTHOUSE FARM, BLACK RIVER, FLASHBACK NINE-YEARS AGO.

Dancing firelight reveals three silhouetted figures behind a polygonal glass enclosure of a bell shaped Lighthouse. It is perched on a hill and surrounded by trees. GRACE 12, REBECCA 7 and their Mother MARGARET STONE stand on the top floor by the flickering flames of a cast iron pot-belly stove.

BECKS

But why do we have to use real blood?

Margaret Stone uses a cloth and alcohol to hygienically clean the blade of an ivory handled locking knife. She then ritually prepares bandages, gauze-tape, and mixes water with wine in a richly ornate wooden-carved drinking bowl.

MARGARET STONE

Because it wouldn't be a proper blood oath Becks, the magic wouldn't work. Now I know you're scared, so trust Mummy. Be brave and look away.

GRACE

This is so cool...can I go first?

Margaret turns to look at Grace, and smiles proudly at her.

MARGARET STONE

Always the brave one aren't you Grace. Well I think Becks needs to show you just how brave she is first...okay with that Becks?

Rebecca's frightened green eyes flicker indecisively between the knife, Grace and her Mother. Then shutting her eyes, she thrusts out her hand, and bravely turns her head away.

The Mother tenderly proceeds to perform an incision on each daughter's right palm, while reciting an ancient incantation of a Romany Gypsy blood ritual. The girl's blood is carefully mixed with the watered wine in the bowl, and then their hands are bandaged.

The entranced children watch their mother extract the blood from her own wound, and quickly bandage it up. Margaret then gathers her children in her arms, and hugs them, squeezing them tightly to her bosoms.

MARGARET STONE (CONT'D)

Now to make the magic work and to prepare you for what is to come in the future. Let's sip from the bowl, now lets join our hands and recite after me. And children don't ever forget that I love you both, very much, and will always be with you.

(Eventually speaking all together in unison)

All for one, one for all, in life and beyond death.

The atmosphere in the room seems to shimmer and glow with a subtle supernatural power, as a strong wind blows open a window, causing a candle flame to flicker and extinguish.

DISSOLVE TO:

CONTINUOUS, FLASHBACK.

EXT-DAYLIGHT, SOMEWHERE IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA. ONE-YEAR LATER.

Two blonde sisters, Grace now 13, and Rebecca 8-years old are bickering in the backseat of their parents station wagon. In the drivers seat their tired father ROBERT STONE navigates the vehicle down a wide, solitary country road. His exhausted wife Margaret is asleep seated next to him.

ROBERT STONE

(Weary, and annoyed)

Grace, Rebecca we don't have far to go, can we keep it down in the back. You don't wanna wake up your mother. Do you girls?

The two feisty and argumentative girls pay no attention to what their father has just said. Rebecca the younger daughter continues to chide Grace about flirting and kissing a boy, and Grace is turning bright red, becoming more and more flustered with her younger sister's childish torments.

REBECCA

(cheeky, audacious tone)

I know you did it with him, you're gonna get some horrible disease from it, I bet you will, just wait and see, you'll break out into warts, boils and spots. You wait and see if I'm wrong.

Grace has had just about enough of the last half hour of Rebecca's childish squabbling. She has been trying to quell her temper in the hot car, but has reached, a flash-point.

GRACE

Look Becks, why don't ya just be quiet...or I swear I'm gonna do something about it. So what if I kissed a boy, you're just jealous because you haven't-so just shut up please!

Robert Stone clenches the wheel tighter as he enters a long horseshoe bend that seems to go on forever. The oppressive heat, the broken air-con, the long five-hour journey and the ongoing argument between his daughters, makes him turn for a brief moment, yelling at both of them to stop their constant bickering.

ROBERT

(aggressive attitude
yelling)

Will you both please-SHUT UP!

Rebecca and Grace are immediately stunned into silence, but not by their fathers uncharacteristic outburst. They are both shocked and wide-eyed, staring through the windscreen at a large menacing truck bearing down on them.

As the car continues to drift onto the wrong side of the road they have no time to scream, or utter one word, as their car crashes into the side of a two carriage road train.

MONTAGE OF 6-SHOTS.

We see a rapid succession of jumbled flash frames, terrified faces, sounds of crunching metal and squealing brakes, (SFX).

CONTINUOUS,

INT-HOSPITAL, AFTER ACCIDENT.

The words of the blood oath repeatedly tumble out of Margaret Stones mouth as she lies critically injured in hospital. MALCOLM STONE the Grandfather stoically stands clutching her hand at her deathbed after giving her the glorious news that her children have survived the crash.

MARGARET STONE

(Voice very weak, dying.)

Look after them, Malcolm, be there for them when they need it. Remind them of their blood oath, she will come back to save her when the beast attacks.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE OF 8-SHOTS.

Continue a rapid succession of images as days melt away. We move rapidly into the future again.

We see the two blonde sisters at the funeral standing next to their Grandfather, clutching his wrinkled and weathered hands.

They stare in disbelief at the two memorial grave-stones of their parents. In the near future, the two girls are living on their Dutch Grandfather's Black River wildlife farm, with rescued Australian animals and birds in cages.

DISSOLVE TO:

END OF FLASHBACK, AND MONTAGE.

EXT-PRESENT DAY, CLEAR BLUE SKY SOMEWHERE OVER LOS ANGELES.

10,000 feet in the sky, a rescue helicopter's spinning rotor blades makes a constant loud thwapping sound as its blades slice repetitively through the air. The helicopter enters shot travelling quickly towards us. Clearly marked insignia on side of hull, is Los Angeles Emergency Rescue.

INT- HELICOPTER.

We see Grace Stone lying on a portable emergency gurney, receiving medical aid. The male bandaged victim, wearing dark-glasses is secured in an emergency fold down seat.

Grace Stone stirs and opens her eyes. The air-rescue medic smiles at her, and touches the arm of the wounded blind victim, to alert him that the person who saved his life is awake and has regained consciousness.

Her vision blurred, Grace takes a moment to refocus, blinking repeatedly. The victim's scratched and bruised head moves into view, awkwardly smiling down at her.

GRACE

(still groggy, she recites
the blood oath, in a
whisper)

All for one, one for all, in life
and beyond death.

The victim pivots his head at an odd angle, raising an inquisitive eyebrow he moves in a little closer to Grace, and lifts his pair of dark glasses. We see the tell-tale whites of his orbs, and realize that he is completely blind.

BLIND VICTIM

My names Auburn, JAMES AUBURN Miss.
I would like to sincerely thank you
for saving my life, back there in
the woods.

GRACE

(Still groggy)
S-h-e-r-l-o-c-k!

JAMES

Is that the name of your dog Miss. Well don't worry they told me he's alive and well. He's on route to a top Veterinarian Emergency Clinic. I've already taken care of everything, he'll be just fine. I would like to help you in some way if I could. You see I'm--

GRACE

Help--don't you think you've done enough already?

Grace tries to awkwardly prop herself up on the gurney, assisted by a medic to lean comfortably against the hull of the helicopter. She is reminded not to over exert herself.

Grace stares pensively at James for a long moment, suddenly realizing that he is completely blind. Raising her unbandaged arm, she waves her hand in front of his face, to verify the fact. Her slightly hostile nature is humbled by the knowledge of his disability.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Where did you get that German Shepard from anyway, the Cujo training school for the blind. That dog was trained to kill!

JAMES

I didn't know that. One moment he was fine, and then he just went berserk. He came from a private highly recommended security company. He's an ex-military trained seeing eye dog.

The helicopter hits a patch of rough turbulence as it crosses the Los Angeles city limits, on its way to the nearest hospital. Everyone inside grabs on to straps. Grace helps to keep Mr Auburn steady as they continue to talk.

GRACE

Oh that's just great. Those dogs are trained by very specific key commands. If you don't know a dogs' history, if you don't know what to say, the wrong word is gonna get you killed. But knowing the right word is going to save your life. I bet you didn't know that did you James?

JAMES

(Looking embarrassed)
No I didn't have any idea. I just tried to get the best dog money could buy to guide and protect me.

A pocket of turbulence unsettles the chopper again, as Grace and James hold on tightly to straps. Grace bows her head for a moment thinking, and then looks up at the guilt stricken face of James.

GRACE

Hey, just make sure the next dog you buy comes with a full history of ownership, and a complete list of key commands. If I had a dollar for every dog handler I train for N.A.S.A.R, that makes stupid mistakes like that, I'd be a millionaire.

JAMES

(Excited)

You're a N.A.S.A.R qualified dog handler. Well maybe you can help me get the right kind of dog and train me not to be so damn stupid. What do you say, I'd really like to help you in some way for what you did, if you'd let me. Hey I don't even know your name. By your accent though, I'd say you must be Australian.

The helicopter is hit with another pocket of rising turbulence, and Grace helps James to steady himself, and find a strap. Smiling through the soft pulsating pain on the side of her head, she answers James question.

GRACE

(Casual, laid back)

Giddy, names Grace Stone, good to meet you Mr Auburn. If what you say about Sherlock being okay is true, then you've already done more than enough for me sir. That little Blue Heeler means the world to me.

Grace takes hold of James' hand, shaking it vigorously just as more turbulence rocks the helicopter. They both hold on, sharing a light-hearted moment together.

EXT-LATER, BLUE SKY, LOS ANGELES CITYSCAPE.

We see the sprawling city of Los Angeles and the distant white beaches and blue-strip of Pacific Ocean. The rescue helicopter rockets past us moving rapidly over houses, apartments and buildings, zooming into the distance.

We hear the THWAPPING sound of choppers blades as helicopter descends, setting down at Los Angeles Community Hospitals helipad. Emergency orderlies and nurses, swarm around the aircraft to assist medics in unloading the two patients.

As James Auburn is manhandled gently into a waiting wheelchair and pushed away, he turns, gazing behind him for Grace. She is being maneuvered down in her emergency gurney as he yells out to her over the sound of the helicopter blades.

JAMES

(deep sentiment)

Grace, Grace stone, thanks again
for saving my life. I'll be seeing
you Grace...take care.

Then the sound of the helicopter's rumbling engine and blades taking off again drowns everything out. All Grace can do is raise her head and wave, acknowledging James's last comment to her, as the two patients are rushed off the helipad, and moved into separate lifts.

EXT-LOS ANGELES HOSPITAL, FRONT ENTRANCE.

Much later that afternoon, a relieved Grace Stone exits the turnstile glass doors. She wears her bloodstained Canicross running gear, and bares two bandaged wounds, one to the head, and left forearm. Procuring a seat, she waits at the hospital's cab-rank.

A few minutes later Grace watches a large official looking black Mercedes emerge out of the traffic and park in the patient pick up zone to her left. A large barrel chested chauffeur sporting a cowboy mustache exits the vehicle, standing dutifully at the curbside rear door.

Grace takes note of the car's expensive VIP-plates and then curiously studies the chauffeur more closely. Observing his well-balanced confident posture, Grace imagines he could easily handle himself in a fight.

From out of her peripheral vision she notices a nurse pushing James Auburn down the wheelchair ramp, heading straight towards the parked black Mercedes. The nurse takes note of Grace waiting at the cab rank, smiles in passing, and then continues to the car.

Grace decides it more prudent not to inquire about his well-being, but rather allow the poor man his privacy. As the dutiful nurse and able chauffeur chaperone Mr Auburn into the car, she bends down and politely whispers something in his ear.

The gracious nurse in passing smiles warmly again at Grace just as a cab arrives, honking its horn, alerting her attention. Before she is able to contemplate moving towards the taxi, the burly chauffeur with a cowboy mustache runs up to her.

CHAUFFEUR

(professional and
courteous)

(MORE)

CHAUFFEUR (CONT'D)

Miss Stone, Grace Stone, Mr Auburn would like to see you for a moment please. He's got a surprise for you Miss, if you would be so kind?

Grace is at first taken aback by the unexpected offer, just as another two cabs pull into the hospital rank. Turning to the chauffeur, she pauses, and then politely nodding her head, chooses to accept his mysterious invitation.

Approaching the black car, the burly chauffeur adroitly jumps into the drivers seat as Grace bends down, peering curiously into the rear open window. We see a bandaged Mr Auburn seated in the plush rear leather seats, wearing dark glasses and flashing a wicked Cheshire cat grin on his face.

Also bandaged in the back is a very much alive and well Blue Heeler, Sherlock. He has a shaved patch of hair around his neck, covered by first aid gauze-pads. Alerted immediately to his master's presence, Sherlock leaps forward whimpering with joy smothering Grace's face with animated licks.

GRACE

Oh Sherlock, I'm so glad to see you boy. Mr Auburn I just can't thank you enough sir.

JAMES

Please just call me James. You see, I promised you I'd take care of your dog for you, didn't I?

GRACE

(Overwhelmed)

Yes...you certainly did sir.

Grace continues to pat and greet an over zealous Sherlock, while continuing to listen to Mr Auburn.

JAMES

(slightly annoyed)

Now please, just call me James, sir makes me feel old and so damn useless...and to a blind person that's a red flag for major depression. The only person I allow to call me sir is Max my chauffeur. May I offer you and Sherlock a lift home Grace?

Grace is taken aback for a moment by Mr Auburn's generous offer, overwhelmed by his excellent care of her dog. She continues to let Sherlock lick her face, while weighing-up the prospects of a cramped cab ride home-or the comfort of a sleek, plush black limousine.

GRACE

Okay James I'll accept. We're only a short ride away down in Chinatown, thanks.

Grace smiles. Opening the rear door she easily slides into the roomy plush leather backseats comfortably with Sherlock and Mr Auburn.

The engine of the big black Mercedes ignites and begins to purr smoothly, and then indicates to turn into the slow stream of traffic. Sherlock happily pokes his head out of the rear window, and after a short beat the expensive vehicle pulls slowly away from the curb.

INT-BLACK MERCEDES.

JAMES

Grace, let me give you my card.
I'll be in touch for those dog training lessons okay, and for you to help me find the right dog-oh and how rude of me. Let me introduce you to my chauffeur and bodyguard Max, the man who warned me against walking alone in the Angeles forest today. I'm sure he's never going to let me forget it. Isn't that right Max?

Grace turns' politely nodding to MAX who smiles and tips his black cap. Turning back she smiles and accepts the extended business card from James Auburn and slips it into a side pocket. Max acknowledges Mr Auburn's last comment with a knowing smile while expertly navigating the expensive car through the light traffic.

MAX

(professional manner)
That's right Mr Auburn...It's the reason you hired me remember, so I could protect you. I did warn you about buying that dog sir.

JAMES

(slightly embarrassed)
I remember Max, I swear I'll never do anything like that ever again.

MAX

(slightly bemused)
Okay Mr Auburn...but I want to remind you, it's not the first time I've heard you say that to me, and I bet it won't be the last time either sir.

Pulling up to stop in some heavy traffic, Max turns and places a beefy well muscled arm onto the console, and looks at Grace and Sherlock in the backseat. He flashes her a warm smile.

MAX (CONT'D)

I want to thank you and Sherlock for taking such good care of Mr Auburn Miss Stone.

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

If I can ever repay the debt just
let Mr Auburn know, and I'll be
there in a heartbeat.

Grace smiles awkwardly at Max, taking a moment to fathom the depth and validity of a complete stranger's promise. Mr Auburn raises his eyebrows, surprised at hearing Max's offer of assistance to Grace.

JAMES

Well...you're a very lucky lady
Miss Stone. I've only ever heard
Max promise to repay a debt like
that once, and he's been looking
after me for the past 10-years. Yes
indeed...do give us a call Miss
Stone if you ever need our
assistance, anytime.

Slightly embarrassed by all the attention Grace settles back in her seat. Sherlock eagerly sniffs the air curiously watching the passing landmarks, pedestrians and buildings from the rear window.

Max accelerates the car moving gradually through the traffic as Grace gives directions to her Chinatown Apartment. A dry afternoon L.A breeze blows through her hair. Smiling, she settles back into the plush leather seats. Wrapping her arms around Sherlock she kisses and hugs him.

INT-LATER THAT NIGHT, GRACES CHINATOWN APARTMENT IN L.A.

Bedroom is compact, bathed in soft shadows, and somewhat disheveled. Scattered around the room are framed N.A.S.A.R awards, ribbons, trophies won for Canicross events and numerous pictures of Sherlock.

The ambient glow from a generic dog night lamp reveals a cluttered bedside-table. We see various plastic containers of vitamins, a digital alarm clock, discarded hospital wrist-ID tag, miscellaneous knickknacks, surgical tape and a first-aid kit.

Grace is tossing and turning in bed. We see bandages removed from head and arm, replaced by large medical band aids. A few exposed bruises and scratches mark her face and arms. Rapid eye movement indicates that she is in deep dream state.

The rooms' temperature rapidly plunges to below zero as the digital numbers on the clock go haywire. There is a disturbance in the third dimension as a fourth doorway opens.

We see the form of a slim female materialize out of the shadows, shimmering in transparent 3D-light. She is blonde, dressed in torn jeans, black studded t-shirt, ear-rings and has a dragonfly tattoo on the left upper side of her chest. The ghost stands like a cenotaph at the foot of the bed, staring mournfully down at Grace.

We see Sherlock's head cautiously emerge from around Grace's door-frame.

Blue and white speckled hairs stand on end as he shivers from the cold supernatural presence in the room. Cocking his head curiously to one side, he whimpers softly as he watches the entity.

The ghost's complexion is pallid, her face resembles that of Grace Stone. Teeth and claw marks reveal her throat has been torn-out. Dried blood, dirt, leaves and mud cover her torn clothes and body. Worms and black beetles squirm and crawl from out of her torn apparel.

Raising her right arm, she extends it palm forward, her fingers reaching out to the sleeping figure. We see her thumb has been hacked off, and she bears a diagonal pinkish scar on her palm, similar to Grace's. Her cold lips move.

GHOST

(Rasping, whisper)

All for one, one for all, in life
and beyond death, Grace.

We hear (OS) dog growling, ghost turns quickly and looks behind her. We see Grace's apartment has transformed into Black River forest at night. The ghost watches the scene of her own death play out before her.

Sherlock turns watching the vision his hackles raised, growling softly.

The ghost's doppelganger is running through the forest, her hands bound. Chasing after her is a black beast. The three-quarter moon bathes everything in a nightmarish dream-like glow. She trips and falls, and the black beast silences her screams by tearing out her throat.

A figure concealed in shadows emerges from out of the trees, holding a glinting Bowie knife. Kneeling down next to her body, the young girls thumbs are removed, one by one.

The shadowy figure utters a key command in a strange language, and the savage dog retreats from the body, sits, waiting obediently. The figure then menacingly looks up, staring at the watching ghost. Again uttering one strange command, and the black beast growls, bounding towards the ghost.

Sherlock mimics the growl, lowering his head in anticipation of attack, also watching the beast. The ghost turns away in fright reaching out to the still sleeping form of Grace as if trying to warn her.

The apparition moves forward through matter, dematerializing into the bedroom wall, vanishing. The growling black beast leaps forward, jaws agape, sharp claws extended, mad red eyes flashing.

Sherlock hides, unable to confront the supernatural presence of the beast, he cowers, shaking underneath the bed. As the beast's claws loom close to Grace it too vanishes back into non-corporeal form.

Grace wakes, her skin shivering from the icy chill still lingering in the room. She stares in disbelief around her softly lit bedroom. Finally realizing no one is there, she shrugs off the cold and catches her breath. Reaching for a glass of water, she throw back a few vitamins.

Grace puts down the glass, staring reflectively at her right palm. Scrutinizing the diagonal pink scar on her hand she flexes her fingers, lost for a moment deep in reflective thought about her mother, sister and the blood oath.

Sherlock still shivering, quietly moves from under the bed, curious to check on Grace. The Blue Heeler silently places his paws up onto the mattress. His soft bark alerts her he is there. Startled, Grace catches the breath in her throat, then relaxes, realizing it is only Sherlock.

Grace unable to return to sleep, reclines and stares blankly up at the ceiling. She is uncertain of whether what had just occurred was a dream or perhaps just a vivid nightmare. Sherlock curls up into a ball at her feet, and as Grace falls asleep, we notice the clock, its numbers still flashing randomly.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT-DAY, HIGHWAY, BLACK RIVER, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA.

We see three out of focus black shapes drifting in concentric circles in a summer blue sky. We move in towards them and discover they are crows. Following them down, the carrion birds are drawn to objects left on the shoulder of the bitumen highway.

Alighting on the edge of the highway the Corvids curiously gather around to inspect their prize. Utilizing their beaks as surgical probes they peck and prod at a backpack and a pair of severed human thumbs. The black birds are then frightened away by the approaching sounds of mechanical gears and bike tires crunching on gravel.

Pull back to reveal a helmeted man in spandex, fully kitted-out for long-distance cycling, with an over-stuffed bike pannier. The cyclist changes gears, coming to a complete stop right next to the backpack.

He watches the flight of the black cawing Crows as they fly low across the road, seeking the shelter of a nearby leafy Eucalypt tree. Landing on a branch they huddled together, maintaining surveillance upon their road-find.

Kicking out his stand, the cyclist unstraps his helmet, dismounts, taking a closer look at the objects. The man's lean sunburned features contort into a look of utter revulsion as his stomach twists into tight-knots. Seeing two severed thumbs, he gags, hand quickly to mouth. Pull back as he turns bolting to side of road, emptying his guts.

EXT-SAME LOCATION, ONE HOUR LATER.

Two highway patrol cars are parked diagonally opposite to each other on Black River highway. Strategically positioned orange and black witches hats, direct oncoming traffic safely around the cordoned off area.

A tall senior constable 26-years of age, leans laconically against his highway police car routinely jotting down a long distance cyclist's statement into a black notebook. His female junior officer bags and tags forensic evidence and photographs the crime scene.

FEMALE OFFICER

Steve we've got another set of thumbs, same M.O, plus a blood-stained backpack.

Steve Cochran raises his hand, politely instructing the witness to stop, and take a break for a moment from taking his statement. He lifts a curious eyebrow, waits for a beat, then responds to officer Claire Fitzsimmons.

STEVE

Check the backpack for any ID, and tell me what you find.

CLAIRE

(Searching bag)

Diary, cigarettes, make-up kit, mobile phone...assorted clothing, and toiletry bag...that's it. Oh bingo mate, we've got a wallet.

Constable Cochran raises both eyebrows this time, realizing that the job of identifying the owner of those missing thumbs may have just become a hell of a lot easier for them.

STEVE

Who does it belong to?

Meanwhile the seated cyclist starts to feel light-headed and green around the gills again. He sprints for the side of the road, puking-up over his shoes. Steve turns and watches the poor man, remembering his first homicide case where he did exactly the same thing.

CLAIRE

(more somber tone)

It's old Malcolm Stone's Granddaughter...Beck Stone.

Steve Cochran raises hand up slowly to head, extended broad thumb pushes cap back on head. A glazed faraway expression forms on his features, as memories begin to resurface in his mind.

The Female Officer stands up, continuing bagging evidence, when a thought occurs to her.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
 (matter of fact tone)
 Wasn't there past history between
 you and Grace Stone, sir, her older
 sister?

Steve Cochran turns slightly to look in the direction of
 officer, waits for a beat, then grimaces and replies.

STEVE
 (reflective mood)
 Yeah...we were an item before she
 took off to work and live in the
 states. We were young, you know
 what it's like Claire, long
 distance romances never last. I
 guess the next step is to get a
 DNA-swab from poor Malcolm, and get
 him to check the belongings. It
 will break the old man's heart when
 he finds out one of his
 Granddaughters is one of the
 missing girls.

CLAIRE
 (apologetic, sincere)
 Sorry for stirring up the past sir.
 If you'd like, I can run up to the
 wildlife farm and get old Malcolm?

Senior Constable Cochran appears not to have heard Claire's
 offer, his thoughts reminiscing about his past relationship
 with Grace Stone. Then after a short beat, he refocuses on
 his surroundings, answering her question.

STEVE
 No that's alright Claire, I can
 handle it. You're gonna have your
 hands full here anyway with the
 Sarge away in Queensland. We're
 short-staffed as it is. We'll just
 have to make do. Thanks anyway.

CLAIRE
 Sir where do you think those
 missing girls are?

Cochran folds his arms. Raising an eyebrow he gestures with
 his index finger, indicating the vast expanse of bush and
 forest all around them.

STEVE
 (Morbid tone)
 Most probably buried in shallow
 graves somewhere out there
 Constable, in amongst 20-million or
 so square acres of unexplored bush,
 that's where they are. We can't
 search for them until we collect
 more evidence than just missing
 thumbs.

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

The federal boys would have to throw a bucket load of cash to search that bush...and we know that ain't gonna happen anytime soon.

Turning he visually checks on the sick cyclist still crouched over dry retching by the side of the road.

Senior constable Cochran turns on his heels, and strides confidently over to his car. Sliding behind the wheel of his highway pursuit vehicle, he ignites the engine, checks to see the road is clear, and spins the wheel. Turning in a wide arc he drives up, and parks next to the female officer.

Looking sternly up at her face, he waits while the engine idles.

STEVE (CONT'D)

(serious tone)

Are you positive it's Beck Stone?

CLAIRE

No question...that's her stuff sir, learners license, library card, that sort of thing.

Steve Cochran clenches his jaw, pumps the accelerator, and just before he drives off,

STEVE

(professional manner)

Claire...wrap it up as soon as possible okay, secure the area, notify the Federal missing persons' liaison officer in town...oh and better strap that cyclists bike to your car and give him a lift into town, will ya...I don't think he's up to it...and make certain he signs an N.D.A about the forensic remains. Catch you later.

Senior Constable Cochran accelerates the car, heading in a Westerly direction 10-kms back towards town and the Wildlife Farm of Malcolm Stone.

EXT-15-MINUTES LATER, MALCOLM STONES FARM, 20-KMS OUTSIDE OF TOWN.

(POV)-large Raptor, open blue sky, flying over forested valleys and hills and rugged mountains in distance. (OS)-We hear the cry of wedge-tail eagle. Riding on thermals through wispy clouds, we swoop down lower to ground as bird of prey descends.

Clearly visible 500-metres away, behind Malcolm's farmhouse sits a white lighthouse-perched on a hill between two large leafy trees. We see the deceased property of Malcolm's only son Robert Stone and his wife Margaret. In need of some tender loving care, its gutters are overflowing with dry leaves.

Eagle's flight-path moves towards rundown wooden double-story farmhouse on hill, steel water tanks, wooden windmill, etc. Animal cages and enclosures litter the property. An older white haired man wearing western shirt, jean overalls, a plain black cloth cap and black gumboots stands out in a small clearing. He holds up a gloved hand in the air and is whistling repeatedly.

Bird of prey focuses on old man, foreground images moving rapidly as eagle swoops down towards outstretched gloved hand. Large sharp talons extend forward and grip gloved hand securely.

CUT TO:

White haired man, standing proudly with a giant wedge tailed Eagle, perched on gloved hand. He stares in wonderment at birds majesty, and beauty.

Old man smiling continues making small whistling and soft chirping sounds. Pulls dead mouse out of his pocket with free hand, and tosses it up to bird, who expertly catches it in its hooked beak.

OLD MAN
(Heavy Dutch, Jewish
accent)

That's my boy, eat it up, plenty
more where he came from, the bush
is full of em.

The barking of his two dogs, Echo and Cloud alert the old man to the approach of a visitor. He blinks, then turning away from the large eagle, he looks right, down to the winding dirt road.

Lowering his arm with the eagle, he raises other arm to shield his eyes from the sun. Blinking, he squints focusing all his attention on a single moving object.

We move in closer and follow the progress of a highway police car gradually making its way up to the house, along the dirt road. Clouds of red dust are kicked up by the tires and float in the warm morning air.

White haired old man whistles and motions with gloved hand. Large eagle spreads its wings and takes off. Gliding low to ground the bird flaps its wings once. Quickly covering 25-metres of open ground, he swoops up and enters a large cage, perching on a crooked branch inside.

CUT TO:

(POV)-Wedge tailed eagle focuses on moving police car turning around in clearing, and pulling up alongside old man. We can see features of senior Constable Steve Cochran in driver's seat talking to old Malcolm Stone.

Malcolm Stone at first doesn't react, and then after a few beats, walks awkwardly in his gumboots towards his old rusty 1958 Holden Ute. Sparking the engine, he turns, positioning the old vehicle behind the waiting police car.

We follow police car and Holden as they wind their way past an assortment of caged and rescued wild animals, old tractor, small rusted tin sheds, fencing materials and assorted farm junk. Cars wind back down dirt road kicking up more clouds of red dust.

The two farm dogs Echo and Cloud, bark and chase the car's tires for a while, eventually returning up the dusty track to the farmhouse. Eagle blinks, cut to black.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT-DAY, GRACE STONES APARTMENT-CHINATOWN L.A, DAY 2.

Close-up digital clock, red haywire flashing numbers, low buzzing noise. Pull back to reveal a modest two bedroom white stucco-walled apartment. Cluttered and stuffed everywhere are books and paraphernalia relating to survival training, ultra-marathons, dogs and search and rescue gear.

Grace Stone wakes, perplexed at malfunctioning clock. She taps it a few times, rattles it, then disregards it completely. Grace throws back the sheet, revealing white t-shirt and panties. Slowly sitting up, she tentatively inspects her bandaged wounds, minor abrasions and scratches. Rubbing at her eyes she--yawns, stretching her limbs, she stands.

Sherlock is still comfortably curled up at the foot of Grace's bed. Lifting his head, he yawns, curiously watching the movements of his master.

Moving to the bedside table, she picks up a big bottle of vitamin pills, snatches up half glass of water and swallows a large orange pill. We follow her as she moves towards small en suite to left. She stops in front of dressing room table as a photo catches her attention. She picks it up and stares at it, lost in a deeply reflective mood.

NOTE

We also see on dresser, a photo of Grace on red motorcycle with Sherlock sitting proudly in rear pod. Assorted mementos from Canicross events are positioned near.

Grace stares at a large family photo of her grandfather's farm in Black River, Melbourne. A tall elderly white haired, eccentric man is smiling holding up a bandaged wombat in his arms--while her rebellious little sister Rebecca stands nearby. She wears black, studded goth attire, has a dragonfly tattoo and ear-ring's, hands stuffed defiantly into her pockets.

Startled by the sound of her mobile phone ringing, she accidentally drops the framed picture. It falls face down on the tiled floor, and we hear glass crack. Sherlock jerks his head at the sound of the noise. Barking he watches his flustered master.

Cursing herself for being so jittery, Grace catches her breath, walks over to her phone docked in the charging pod, grabs it answering the call.

GRACE
Hello...Grace here.

OLD MAN'S VOICE
(Frantic, agitated state.)
Grace I've got bad news, your
sister has gone missing!

Grace immediately recognizes the voice of her grandfather, Malcolm Stone, calling from Melbourne, Australia.

GRACE
(Concerned)
Grandad what do you mean...missing?

MALCOLM
She's gone Grace...your Mother
prophesied that this would happen,
she knew...the beast has taken her.

Grace uncertain of how to react to her grandfather's statement, chooses instead to ignore his last bizarre remark, and instead inquires again about her sister Rebecca.

GRACE
Now calm down grandad...how long
has she been gone for?

MALCOLM
(Heightened anxiety)
No you don't understand, the beast
has her, your mother knew that both
of you would be in great danger,
and now that Rebecca is gone...you
must stay away...please Grace--

Abruptly the phone connection goes dead, and Grace is cut-off. Totally flabbergasted, she presses redial, trying to reconnect with her grandfather, but is redirected to his message service.

Perturbed, she sinks onto the bed. For no apparent reason she turns, looking perplexed at the still randomly flashing red-digits on the clock. Grace then shrugs-off her despondent mood, and strides over to pick-up the dropped photo-frame.

Sherlock curiously watches her as she flips it over-revealing a jagged crack in the glass, running through the image of her sister Rebecca. Her fingertips delicately trace over its sharp edges.

Her eyes linger on the face of her sister, as the words spoken to her in last night's vision return to haunt her.

(VO) REBECCA'S GHOST
(Rasping, whisper)
All for one, one for all, in life
and beyond death.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT-EARLY MORNING, INDIAN OCEAN, OFF THE COAST OF AUSTRALIA.

A Boeing passenger liner, 30,000 ft high in the stratosphere is cruising across a dark-orange red sky, close to sunrise.

INT-FUSELAGE OF PLANE.

The plane is packed with international passengers squeezed like sardines in a flying tin-can. Grace Stone looks idly out of her window. She is wearing her trademark, worn brown leather jacket.

Its leather surface is festooned with different stitched patches-her N.A.S.A.R badge for canine search and rescue features proudly amongst them.

Occupying the seat next to her is a vociferous plump American lady, in a multi-flowered dress. She is plying herself with alcohol to numb her fear of flying. Grace has patiently endeavored to endure her constant rhetorical diatribe throughout the long flight.

AMERICAN WOMAN
Say honey...how long did you say
your sister's been missing for?

Grace turns, smiling at the persistently irksome lady.

GRACE
I didn't say.

Lifting her flabby arm, the lady throws back another gulp of white wine from a plastic cup.

AMERICAN WOMAN
Oh that's right...you didn't, well
how long?

Grace conceals her frustration, her patience squirming underneath her skin, but continues to be polite. Resorting to her successful maneuver of feigning sleep, she telegraphs a yawn, rests her head against the fuselage's window frame, closing her eyes.

GRACE
(Yawning)
I don't really know...mam.

The lady lifts her flabby arm again, draining the last of her white wine. Quickly gesturing her empty cup to a nearby stewardess for more alcohol she continues talking to Grace, knowing full well she is not asleep.

AMERICAN WOMAN

Oh...now that's a real shame honey. That seems to be the way of things these days with kinfolk...you only ever really think about em...when they're gone. Yes...a real shame.

Grace is given a brief reprieve as the lady's cup is being refilled, when her mobile phone starts ringing. Grace dives into her carry on bag, rummages around for a beat, pulls it out and thanking the lord for her salvation, answers the call.

JAMES

Hello Grace...it's James Auburn, how is everything going. Were you able to reach your grandfather?

GRACE

Oh Mr Auburn...thank-god, ah everything is fine...yes my grandfather is meeting me at the airport. I can't thank you enough for arranging all of this for me sir.

JAMES

Think nothing of it Grace, family is everything, you just find your sister, I'll take care of anything you need. Ring us anytime, Max will be waiting for your call. Oh and I've cleared Melbourne quarantine regulations for Sherlock...you can pick him up right after you touch down. And don't call me sir...just James will do fine.

GRACE

Oh that's just great...si--I mean James, thank you so much.

JAMES

You saved my life Grace...whatever you need, Max and I are only a phone call away...you go and do what you do best, find Rebecca...keep me informed, bye Grace...and good luck.

Ending the call, Grace displays a recently stored photo of Rebecca on her phone. Totally ignoring her surroundings, she focuses on that one single image until the plane levels off and extends its landing gear.

DISSOLVE TO:

START 8-SHOT MONTAGE, GRACE ARRIVING AT MELBOURNE AIRPORT, MORNING, 8:AM, DAY 3.(THEMED MUSIC)

Plane's hull reflects sun on final descent, moves through morning clouds, and adjusts speed and altitude to land. Wheels touch down, burning rubber, sending puffs of smoke into air.

We follow Grace staring out of window as a colorful pastiche of out-of-focus images: planes, working ground-crew, communication buildings, flight towers, luggage-cars and a big concrete airport, flash by.

The large plane maneuvers to a mobile departure stairway and comes to a stop. Exhausted jet-lagged faces and slow-motion bodies exit the air-craft in a random fashion. We wait for a few beats, then we see the determined face of Grace Stone emerge from amongst the crowd.

She walks to the beat of her own drum, neither pushing ahead, nor lagging behind. Entering the airport terminal, the meandering crowds disperse in all directions of the compass.

Some hurry to make connections, some stop for a coffee or a toilet break, while most of the passengers continue on to the luggage carousels on the ground floor.

Grace scans a digital-directory, then after finding her own bearings' moves on. Riding an escalator to the ground floor she idly gazes at the passing shop-front windows.

Alighting, Grace adjusts her carry-on bag, and walks confidently towards the screen.

END MONTAGE, INT-GROUND FLOOR, LUGGAGE COLLECTION AREA.

A mixed bag of travelers loiter around the automated luggage carousels in a clean white open square space. Grace methodically scans the group of people searching amongst them for her grandfather, Malcolm Stone.

Her keen eyes soon focus upon the tall imposing figure of an 85-year-old white haired man. His body language seems frenetic and slightly unhinged-as he nervously searches the faces in the crowd.

Grace immediately recognizes his trademark black fisherman's cap, long patched black Duffel coat, suspenders, and black gum-boots. An affectionate smile spreads over her face as she politely maneuvers through the crowd to greet him.

Impulsively, she throws her arms around his bony frame, and hugs him with gusto. Her face buries in the soft warm black fabric of his coat and for those first brief moments of embrace, Grace feels like she has come home.

Overcome with emotion, Grace is shocked when she feels her grandfather's muscles tense as he rudely untangles himself from her arms. Large sinewy hands firmly grip her shoulders, and thrusting her back, hold her at bay.

Completely caught off guard by his actions, she is confronted by a man with a haggard appearance, and bloodshot sleep deprived eyes. She stares incredulously at the state of this man who is her grandfather, bereft of words.

Malcolm's agitated and nervous countenance glowers down at Grace.

MALCOLM

I warned you not to come...why
didn't you listen to me, now your
life is in danger too!

Struck numb and ill prepared for this unusual behavior, Grace remains unresponsive to Malcolm's outburst.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Where is your luggage?

Malcolm's large wrinkled hand snatches up Grace's carry-on bag. Maintaining a vice-like grip on her arm, he forcibly directs her towards the rotating carousels to search for her luggage.

Rudely pushing his way through groups of slightly annoyed, and disgruntled travelers, Grace and Malcolm stand awkwardly together in silence, waiting for her bag to arrive.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

We must hurry...there is a lot that
I need to tell you Grace, before
the beast comes...now which one is
yours?

Grace perturbed, waits impatiently for her bags, shocked by her Grandfather's unusual appearance, and uncharacteristic behavior. She feels the tension in his grip tightening on her arm, as she spots her large single suitcase sliding into view on the carousel.

GRACE

That's it there...that one is mine!

Malcolm releases his grip on Grace's arm so she can procure her bag. Once she returns, he manhandles her forward, aggressively forging their way through the unhurried crowds, heading to the exit doors.

As Malcolm pulls a reluctant Grace Stone through the automatic glass doors, she makes a conscious decision to confront him about his behavior. Stepping outside into the fresh morning air, Grace defiantly blocks her Grandfather's path.

GRACE (CONT'D)

(Assertive)

All right Grandad...I've had just
about enough...what the hell is
going on.

(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)

I've just flown over 13,000
kilometers to get here...and you
haven't even said hello!

Malcolm is at first unresponsive, remaining silent. His long sinewy fingers nervously fiddle around adjusting their grip on the carry bag strap he is holding. His dark exhausted eyes try desperately to evade his granddaughter's question.

Shamefully lowering his gaze from her probing stare, he grinds his dentures together, obviously finding it extremely difficult to explain his actions. Grace stares expectantly up at the tall Dutch-Jew, carefully studying his haggard and well-worn features. She waits patiently for an answer as curious passerby's maneuver around them.

The Jekyll and Hide anxiety held suppressed within the old man's aura seems to lift and dissipate for the time-being. He he meekly raises his weary hazel blue eyes to respond to Grace.

MALCOLM

(Sincere)

I apologize Grace...I haven't been
myself since Rebecca went
missing...oh I know she has tried
to runaway before, but I somehow
knew that she would always come
back home...but I'm afraid that
this time...she will never be
coming back.

GRACE

(curious)

What makes you think that?

Malcolm's fear and tension then surges back into his bones and muscles, his eyes popping wide, frozen in a horrific stare.

MALCOLM

(raising his voice)

It is because of the beast. Your
Mother foretold it's coming...she
knew it would take her...and now
you are in danger Grace...because
now it is hunting for you!

Grace is puzzled by her Grandfather's cryptic reply but at the same time, she is gravely concerned for his well-being. She tenderly reaches up and touches his pallid, paper-thin, unshaven cheek. Soft fingertips gently caress his face, as she tries to soothe the poor man's over excited nerves.

Grace's attention upon her Grandfather is suddenly broken by a vociferous, disgruntled European man with an over packed trolley of suitcases trying to exit with his family.

EUROPEAN MAN

Hey...if you wanna talk, do it some place else, we want to get out a here...do you mind?

Suddenly realizing where they were, she courteously apologizes, and they move aside. Taking charge of the situation Grace grabs her luggage, and chaperones her fragile grandfather across the road into the massive airport parking-lot.

Stopping underneath a concrete and glass terminal where queues of people are paying for and procuring parking tickets from machines, Grace extends her hand.

GRACE

Okay Grandad...hand over the car keys and the parking ticket...so I can pay and get us safely out of here. We also have to pick-up Sherlock.

MALCOLM

(belligerently)

No, you don't understand the danger that you're in, and by the way, it's my car. I drove it here, and besides you didn't tell me that you were bringing Sherlock with you. He will have to stay in quarantine for days--

Grace displays one of her most beguiling smiles and reaching up, firmly places two fingers over his mouth successfully sealing his lips. Her other hand gestures, waiting for him to pass over the requested items.

GRACE

Yes I brought Sherlock with me, and no he won't be kept in quarantine. So let's have those keys, and the ticket. And whatever danger I'm in is gonna have to wait until later grandad. Oh-and by the way you owe me a big hug and a hello.

Malcolm stares utterly perplexed for a moment at Grace, as her winning smile and presence transform the old man's slightly unsettled mind. Finally he shrugs his shoulders, locates the items from his black coat pocket, and hands them over to his persuasive Granddaughter.

MALCOLM

How is Sherlock, I've missed him?

GRACE

He's good, I'm sure he'll be happy to see you to pop.

Grace turns and starts to move towards a short queue of people lined up at a parking ticket machine, when Malcolm calls out to her, getting her attention.

MALCOLM

Oh Grace. Hello!

Grace turns casually to look at her grandfather. Her face immediately lights up, seeing him standing with his arms held outstretched, wearing a huge welcoming grin. She rushes back and they warmly embrace each other. Time seems to melt and drift slowly away, as touched passerby's pause and smile at their joyous reunion .

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT-DAY, ONE HOUR LATER, HIGHWAY.

Leaving Melbourne's smog hazed buildings behind, we are on the multi-lane congested Monash Highway heading South. We follow an old faded blue 1959, FC, rusty Holden Ute, in the traffic. It is the slowest moving vehicle on the road, struggling to compete with modern automobiles.

The faded blue Holden is intermittently honked at, and passed by caravans, trucks, road-trains, infuriated motorbikes, and every other kind of vehicle travelling South, even slower holiday motor homes.

INT-HOLDEN UTE.

We see a frustrated Grace Stone using an awkward manual 3-gear column-shift, while simultaneously remembering to drive on the left-hand side of the road. Sherlock is sound asleep comfortably lounged between Grace and her Grandfather.

In the passenger seat, a weary Malcolm Stone smiles while gently stroking Sherlock's coat, whose head rests comfortably on his lap.

The Blue Heeler is groggy, still under the influence of anti-emetic drugs administered to sedate him during the long flight from L.A. Clearly visible is Sherlock's shaved neck, where gauze padding still cover his wounds. Grace curses at herself again for grinding the gear change, forgetting to use the clutch.

GRACE

Shit!

MALCOLM

You forgot to use the clutch again.

Grace stares annoyingly at her grandfather while adjusting her mistake, then refocuses her attention on the road. Her foot compresses heavily on the gas pedal-trying to coax more imaginary horsepower from the ancient 6-cylinder, 2.2-l engine, its top speed being 87-MPH.

GRACE

Grandad why do you still drive this old car?

MALCOLM

Old...she's only 65-years old. I fell in love with her the first minute my hands touched her body, as she rolled off the Production line, at the Fisherman's Bend Plant...where I worked for Holden. I'll never forget her production number...she was number 27, my lucky number. She's the love of my life Grace. When she's sick and broken, my heart is sick and broken...so I have to fix her, so we can keep dancing on the road together...that's how come I still drive this old car. She's the love of my life.

Grace looks over at Malcolm, slightly embarrassed by her flippant remark about the old car, never realizing how much the cars' history had meant to the old man. Then she absentmindedly shifts gears again, forgetting to use the clutch. Cringing as the gears crunch and grind again, she quickly corrects her mistake.

GRACE

Oh shit grandad...I'm so sorry!

Malcolm still calmly stroking Sherlock's head in his lap, smiles as he turns to look at his granddaughter.

MALCOLM

That's alright...the old girl will forgive you...she has a tender heart, but don't forget--

GRACE

I know...I know. Don't forget to use the clutch!

While continuing to stroke Sherlock, Malcolm for the first time notices Sherlock's wound covered by a surgical dressing.

MALCOLM

What happened here?

GRACE

Oh that...don't worry he's fine, It's a love bite from an over amorous German Shepard. In fact It's because of Sherlock's wounds that made it possible for us to get through quarantine, and arrive here so quickly. He's one brave little Blue Heeler that's for sure.

MALCOLM

He's a beautiful dog Grace...and smart too.

Grace then notices the fuel gauge needle is hovering in the red zone. Having just passed a fuel and food sign 200-metres back, she indicates a left turn. Merging through traffic, she joins a queue of other trucks, caravans and cars, pulling into a 24-hour roadhouse car park.

GRACE

We need gas, water and munchies, and Sherlock needs to walk around, to start working those drugs out of his system. We're taking a pit stop Grandad, my shout.

Malcolm is still gently stroking Sherlock's head, when out of the blue he reveals something disturbing to Grace.

MALCOLM

There are two other local young girls, besides our Rebecca...that have gone missing on the Black river Highway.

Frozen momentarily behind the wheel, the indicator flashing intermittently, Grace is confronted by her Grandfather's revelation. Vehicles, waiting to turn into the café-diner to refuel and find parking begin impatiently honking their horns.

Grace, momentarily caught off guard by the cacophony of sounds, uses a flustering hand signal to appease them. She quickly turns into the car park, squeezing the Holden into a tight parking space. Jerking back hard on the handbrake, she stares dumbfounded at Malcolm.

GRACE

What do you mean...other missing girls?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT-HAMBURGER CAFE, 20-MINUTES LATER.

The large square gabled buildings' interior is flooded with natural mid-morning bright sunlight. A steady stream of customers stand in line to order and visit restrooms. They converse with each other in animated, garbled tones.

Grace and Malcolm are huddled together engaged in conversation, seated amongst 20 or so other patrons at small square tables. Thick surrounding windows with signage, provides a clear view of Sherlock waiting outside, resting in the shade.

The left over crumbs of two hamburgers with salad sit on their empty plates. A bowl of quickly disappearing wedges, and two cups of coffee remain on the tiny table. Grace and Malcolm are immersed in a serious conversation.

MALCOLM

The first young girl went missing 3-months ago now, and then one every month since then...Rebecca was the third local girl to vanish.

GRACE

Were all the girls locals?

MALCOLM

Yes that's right...all from some of the oldest families from around Black River.

GRACE

What families Grandad?

MALCOLM

Let me see now, I have all the newspaper clippings at home. First there was the Bailey girl, then Julie Henderson, and then--

GRACE

Rebecca!

MALCOLM

Yes...our little Becks.

GRACE

But why hasn't this been reported on the internet yet, I haven't seen a single thing about any missing girls in Black River...have the Federal police started an investigation into this yet?

MALCOLM

I don't know any more details Grace, just what little has been printed in some local country newspapers, and what the Police have told me...and whatever the other families in town have revealed that's all. After I identified Rebecca's belongings, and gave a DNA-swab...I've been told next to nothing--

GRACE

(Curious)

Why did they ask for a DNA-sample, they usually only need that to identify a body...but there's been no body found...so why?

MALCOLM

(Distressed)

I don't know the answers to all your questions Grace. All I know is that nine-years ago your mother foretold the coming of the beast...and performed the blood oath ritual to protect you. She asked me on her deathbed to look after you both, and I have let you down. I failed Rebecca, and now I am endangering your life too...you should leave Grace, before something terrible happens!

Malcolm is overcome by a rush of deep emotion, as he lowers his head in anguish. The old man begins to quietly sob. Grace becomes aware of the odd stares of some of the seated patrons around them as she places a comforting hand upon her Grandfather's trembling shoulder.

EXT-ROADSIDE CAFE.

Sherlock sits up on his haunches, staring curiously through the thick glass. His keen senses alert him to Malcolm's emotional level of distress. Sherlock licks his lips, as he watches them stand to leave and Grace grabs a left-over bunch of wedges wrapped in a paper napkin from the table.

INT-ROADSIDE CAFE

Grace walks next to her Grandfather, supporting him as they move slowly towards the automatic glass exit doors. While exiting the café, Grace remembers to purchase a large plastic bottle of water to sustain them for the remainder of the trip.

After first settling Malcolm back into the car, Grace breaks up a couple of wedges, feeding them to an eager hungry Sherlock. She takes him for a brief walk, toilet and water break-around the green grassy patch at the rear of the café.

Back at the car, having already refueled earlier, Grace makes sure that Malcolm buckles-up, and drinks a sufficient amount of water. Sparking the old engine, she waits for a moment letting the car sit idling, then attempts to alleviate Malcolm's low spirits.

GRACE

I don't understand what all this has to do with my Mother Grandad...but there're two things you can be certain of, I've never thought that you ever failed to look after Becks and me...not once. I don't want you to worry, Sherlock and I are gonna get to the bottom of all this and find out what happened to Rebecca, I promise.

Leaning over Sherlock to reach Malcolm, she places an unexpected gentle kiss upon his grizzled wet cheek. Releasing the hand-brake, Grace correctly applies the clutch, shifting into gear and expertly maneuvering the car back out onto the highway.

Malcolm settles back into his seat, tired and overwhelmed by Grace's comforting words and kindness. As he and Sherlock watch Grace navigate the car back into traffic, Malcolm reaches up and touches the stubble on his cheek where Grace had kissed him. A sublime smile softens his weary features.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT-FRINGES OF BLACK RIVER TOWNSHIP, THREE HOURS LATER.

Grace yawns as the car passes by open green farming country, long-lines of wooden electrical poles, flocks of bleating sheep, wheat, yellow canola fields, herds of cattle chewing-cud and barns stacked with hay. Malcolm and Sherlock are still fast asleep in the passenger seat, happily oblivious to the world.

She is startled by a loud trumpeting car's horn originating from an orange customized V8-Monaro creeping alongside the old slower Holden. Easily matching her speed, she is ogled at by four virile young men. One of the more brash young Aussie hooligans, spurred on by his mates yells out a derogatory suggestion to Grace.

YOUNG DRIVER

(Cheeky, sexist undertone)

Hey blondie...why are you driving in that old heap-of-shit. Climb on down here with us and take a ride you'll never forget. Isn't that right boys! (accompanied by raucous laughter).

Revving their engine louder, the hooligan yell out a final passing remark as they zoom off, leaving the ancient Holden behind in the dust.

YOUNG DRIVER (CONT'D)

Welcome to Black River Territory, sexy.

As a streak of orange flashes by, one of the boys in the back seat drops his pants and moons her. Grace grips the Bakelite steering-wheel tighter, frowning at the passing larrikin's crass and sexist humor, giving them the finger.

She checks on Malcolm and Sherlock who are still sound asleep. Her grandfather's long sinewy body is curled up against the hard steel frame of the vibrating car. Grace smiles warmly at them and reaches down to fondly pat Sherlock's head, still comfortably resting on Malcolm's knee.

Dismissing the silly incident with the testosterone fueled boys, she wipes her brow of sweat wishing the old Holden had air-conditioning.

She idly watches more undulating green farmland, small hobby farms, tall cylindrical grain-silos-industrial facilities flash by as she follows the signs to Black River.

CUT TO:

EXT-W/S-(EARLY AFTERNOON) ENTRANCE TO TOWN OF BLACK RIVER.

We see a panoramic view of open blue sky with an historical old gold mining town nestled between two forested mountain ranges. The long winding highway runs off in perspective toward the town, where it meets an old jarrah trestle bridge that spans a winding river.

The warm summer wind has dropped slightly in temperature, signaling a cool change coming for the evening. We see the old blue Holden enter shot, and follow the slow moving vehicle as it travels steadily toward the town.

Moving in closer to car, we see it arrive at the bridge where there is a long line of vehicles banked up, waiting to cross. Grace applies the brakes and pulls up to stop, behind a familiar bright orange Monaro, with four male occupants.

As soon as the boys recognized the blonde from the highway behind them, their wolf whistling and obnoxious antics continued with more vigor than before.

Grace waits uncomfortably in the line of traffic, whilst ignoring the immature behavior of the rude young men. She drums her fingers impatiently on the old Bakelite steering wheel as the cars inch over the bridge at a snail's pace.

INT-MALCOLM'S HOLDEN UTE.

Unable to ascertain the reason for the delay, due to an overloaded cumbersome family caravan idling in front of the noisy Monaro, Grace waits stoically. Malcolm and Sherlock stir from sleep, both being woken by the loud caterwauling and foolish antics of the brazen young men.

MALCOLM

Who are they?

GRACE

Nobody grandad. What is going on up ahead, I don't remember it being so difficult to get into town before.

MALCOLM

Oh it's that damn register, I should have warned you about it. It was Rory McAllister's idea to pass it through local council, to start recording every one arriving and leaving town. It's supposed to be of help to the police, who haven't been able to come up with any answers to the missing girls...but I think it's just a big waste of time, and in fact so do the police.

(MORE)

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

The senior constable Steve Cochran breaks one of these up almost every two weeks now.

Grace turns and looks at her grandfather, surprised.

GRACE

You mean Steve's a senior cop now, serving back here in Black River?

MALCOLM

Oh yes, didn't I ever tell you that, it must have slipped my mind. He'll make sergeant soon, he's a good man Grace. He still asks about you, whenever I bump into him, you know.

Grace seems to be lost in thought for a moment, contemplating something in her past, when the boys wild antics in the Monaro escalate, and start to grate upon her nerves.

GRACE

No you didn't tell me that, pop's.

Grace turns, shooting a mischievous smile at Malcolm and Sherlock. Raising an eyebrow she pumps her foot on the accelerator a few times as a determined course of action cements itself in her stubborn mind.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Well grandad I've come along way today, I'm hot, jet-lagged and I've taken just about enough from those goons in the Monaro. So no silly Council register is gonna stop me from getting into town today. Pop, hold on to Sherlock, cause your lucky number 27 is coming home.

EXT-TRESTLE BRIDGE.

Grace pumps the accelerator again, and then flicks on her right indicator checking the right lane of the bridge is clear of traffic, she releases the brake and floors the vehicle. Skidding and burning a little rubber, the old Holden Ute starts rumbling over the wooden planks of the bridge.

INT-HOLDEN UTE.

Grace turns and focuses her attention for a brief moment on the surprised face of her Grandfather, and the curious cocked head expression of Sherlock. She smiles at them both with a mischievous glint in her eye.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Hang on!

Malcolm grips the side of the steel door, and with his other free arm, braces Sherlock, as Grace accelerates fast. The faces of the boys in the Monaro drop as they watch Grace grinning at them as she flashes by.

EXT-BRIDGE.

The rusty Holden picks up speed, and rushes past the surprised and curious faces of the occupants stuck in the slow-moving registration line. A family station wagon is then signaled to enter the right lane of the trestle bridge at the opposite end.

Grace sees the wagon beginning to mount the bridge, and immediately pushes the accelerator down to the floor-board, realizing she has only seconds to safely pass the slim gap between the car and the corner post of the trestle bridge.

A determined steely eyed gaze settles on her face as she hedges her bets, and starts honking repeatedly on her horn, signaling the driver of the entering car, that she is going across first.

INT-HOLDEN.

Malcolm's eyes shoot wide open and he holds onto Sherlock as Grace maintains her speed. They both rattle around, as the vibrations of the wheels shake the steel suspension of the old car, the gap rapidly shortening between the front grill and bumper of the oncoming wagon. Malcolm shuts his eyes.

MALCOLM

Grace...be careful with my girl!

EXT-BRIDGE.

At the very last second, the driver of the wagon shifts into reverse and lets the old Holden rumble past the checkpoint for registration, scratching a little Duco off their paint job.

A lean wiry country boy holding a clip-board, wearing jeans, white shirt and a Stetson, looks on dumbfounded, as the old Holden rumbles past him at the checkpoint. Thinking quickly, the young man rushes to his dirty Toyota and grabs his rifle.

As the Holden bounces over the last remaining planks of the bridge, it moves down a low graded-dirt incline, leading to the entrance to the town of Black River. But before it can reach the winding bitumen road heading into town, the blaring sound of a Police siren flares up from behind them.

Grace gradually applies the brakes, indicates a left turn, and pulls over to the shoulder of the road, just as a highway patrol car angles in front of the Holden. Blocking their path, its spinning wheels kick up a little dust.

Peering through the windscreen, Grace sees the face of her old boyfriend, Steve Cochran behind the wheel of the cop car. A look of past regrets and past baggage, color her slightly embarrassed face.

EXT-ROAD.

Grace taps her fingers impatiently against the Bakelite steering wheel, as the tall dark haired constable walks over to the car. She lowers her head, muttering something under her breath.

GRACE

Oh, shit.

But just before the officer reaches the drivers side of the car, sounds of cowboy boots running fast reach their ears, combined with an out of breath congratulations for the police officer.

LEAN COWBOY

(Gasping, out of breath)

Good bloody work Steve, that old Dutch-Jew broke through the registration line.

Boots skidding to a stop, the angry lean cowboy raises his rifle and points it menacingly at the drivers side window. He immediately is taken aback when he sees the blonde face of Grace Stone sitting behind the wheel.

INT-HOLDEN.

Sherlock's hackles rise up at the sight of the rifle barrel threatening Grace. Growling and bearing teeth, he breaks free from Malcolm's loose grip. Springing past Grace, before she can react or utter a command to stop him, Sherlock has leapt through the open window.

EXT-ROAD.

The cowboy is caught off guard. He uses the rifle to defend himself from the viscous dog. Turning the gun around and holding its stock and barrel tight with two hands, he stops the dog from attacking his throat.

Sherlock's sharp teeth and powerful jaws clamp down on the wooden stock. The momentum of his leap sends the lean cowboy toppling backwards to the ground, dislodging his Akubra hat, and knocking the wind out of his lungs. Landing on all four paws, the Blue Heeler continues to savagely jerk and pull-back hard on the gun.

The constable stands ready contemplating his next move, waiting to see if the dog is going to escalate matters into the next stage, where he will be forced to draw his weapon and intervene.

Grace watches intently from the window of the car, only seconds away from voicing the command for Sherlock to stand down. Malcolm Stone stares in disbelief at the agility, courage, and ferocity of the Blue Heeler as it attempts to disarm a gunman.

The cowboy, back up on his feet, starts screaming for help as Sherlock continues to aggressively tug and jerk the gun from out of his frantic hands. And then just as the constable's hand was slipping his Glock free from its holster, Grace gives the command.

GRACE
Sherlock stand down!

Instantly the highly trained Blue Heeler obeys. Releasing his jaws Sherlock moves back and sits patiently on his haunches. Taken by surprise, the stock of the gun recoils backwards, and strikes the cowboy's nose, spurting blood all over his face and white shirt.

With a stunned expression on his face, the cowboy drops on his arse, hard on the ground. A red fierce anger erupts into the surface of the cowboys mind, and he automatically grips, points and cocks his rifle, ready to shoot Sherlock in the head.

GRACE (CONT'D)
(Yelling)
N-o-o-o...d-o-n'-t!

But before anything happened, the cowboy feels the hard round edged barrel of a Glock pressing hard up against his right temple.

STEVE COCHRAN
Now Kent I'd think real hard about what your next move is gonna be. Because if you shoot that dog...I'm gonna be up to my arse in paperwork for weeks, reporting why I had to discharge my weapon, in public and shoot you in the foot...and after that Internal Affairs are gonna be crawling up my arse for much longer than that mate...so think real hard okay.

Cochran slowly re-positions the barrel of his handgun, pointing it at Kent's right cowboy boot.

KENT
But that dog attacked me first, and they broke through the registration line.

STEVE COCHRAN
Now let me clear something up mate...that register is an honorary information form, that tourists and locals are only obliged to fill out if they so choose to.
(MORE)

STEVE COCHRAN (CONT'D)

It is not a law to be enforced by your Father or any of your town militia okay...so give me the gun, and go up and tell those people on the bridge that they are free to come and go as they please. Do I make myself clear...the gun please!

All eyes were focused on the stand-off between the two men in the street as a warm wind blows gently down from the bridge, ruffling the leaves of the tall green trees lining the entrance to the town. Kent McAllister relents, handing the rifle butt-first to Steve Cochran.

Without comment the lean cocky cowboy rises up from the ground. Grabbing his hat he dusts himself off, and using his shirtsleeve wipes the blood from his face. Turning' he trudges back to the bridge where he waives the traffic jam of visitors through using his hat.

Skulking back into his dirty white Toyota, the vindictive cowboy sparks the engine, spins the wheels of his car kicking up a little dust, and drives quickly down the low incline, coming to a stop opposite the two cars still parked below.

While the steady stream of cars, caravans and motor-bikes slowly pass heading into town, Kent McAllister leans menacingly out of his window, eyeballing the cop and Grace Stone.

NOTE

CLEARLY VISIBLE ON WHITE TOYOTA'S DOOR, IS A RED, WHITE AND GREEN SCOTTISH COAT OF ARMS. THIS IS ALSO ON KENT'S RIFLE BUTT. (MCALLISTER)

STEVE COCHRAN

Well...don't you have to run home to tell your daddy that I broke up another of your illegal register's Kent. Oh and you can pick up your gun later today at the cop shop. there will be a fine to pay too.

KENT MCALLISTER

What bloody fine!

STEVE COCHRAN

Oh...I'll think up something, now get going, and don't let me catch you stopping people from trying to get in or out of town again. It's hard enough trying to get them to stay as it is, without you, your father and the damn council making it any worse...now git!

Swearing rudely under his breath, Kent McAllister pumps the accelerator, but just before he drives off, he shouts out something to Grace Stone.

KENT MCALLISTER

I remember you blondie...you're Grace Stone ain't ya, well you and the old man are gonna get it for this...oh and I bet that's your dog too, be a real shame if someone was to shoot it. See ya round Grace.

Kent McAllister then glares at both Steve Cochran, Grace and Malcolm as he floors the Toyota kicking up more brown dust as his vehicle speeds off into town. Waiting for the dust to settle, Steve Cochran places the rifle into his car, and walks calmly over to the still patiently waiting Sherlock, bends down and pats his head.

Looking up fondly at Grace behind the wheel, Cochran smiled.

STEVE COCHRAN

Nice to see again Grace...you certainly know how to make an entrance. How long has it been, two or three years, since I saw you last?

GRACE

Hello Steve...bout three I'd say.

STEVE COCHRAN

How are you doing Malcolm. Say Grace, what's the name of your little bodyguard here?

Grace swings open the car door exiting, she leans alluringly against the steel frame, wearing a beguiling smile.

GRACE

Don't tell me you've forgotten Sherlock...say I've got some questions I want to ask you Steve. Got time now?

STEVE COCHRAN

(checks his watch)

No problem...let's have a late lunch. How ya doing Sherlock, sorry I forgot you boy.

Steve bends down and gives the Blue Heeler a long vigorous back-scratching, making the dog kick at the air in a ludicrous manner. Grace leans down, poking her head through the open car's window, seeking permission from her grandfather's already warm and consenting expression.

GRACE

Grandad...okay with you if Sherlock and I poke around a bit in town. I like to hit the ground running, if you know what I mean. Oh...you wouldn't have anything of Rebecca's that she wore here... something small perhaps?

A perplexed expression covers Malcolm's face for a brief moment, then a light-bulb thought lights up his mind. Reaching forward, Malcolm opens the old glove compartment, rummages around, and then produces a dark blue bandanna covered in small white dragonflies.

Malcolm hands fabric-headband to Grace.

MALCOLM
This was hers. She had a few like that, will that do?

GRACE
Perfect...thanks Grandad.

Emerging from out of the car, Grace turns quickly, facing Steve Cochran who is patting Sherlock again.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Steve...can Sherlock and I get a lift back to the farm after lunch?

STEVE COCHRAN
Sure why not, I'll drive you back, got to head out to Fat Olives anyway...that's right past your place lets go. See ya Malcolm...take care.(waving)

Grace leans back through the window, stretches out and gives Malcolm another quick peck on his cheek. Malcolm stares puzzled at Grace's actions.

MALCOLM
What was that for?

GRACE
That's me trying to tell you that I love you grandad. Thanks, are you okay to drive back on your own?

MALCOLM
Sure I'm okay...as a matter of fact I'm feeling a lot better...after all that excitement back there on the bridge. Just remember Grace, please be careful.

Grace takes a moment to stare into Malcolm's old weary eyes, blinks and gives him a comforting smile and another kiss on the cheek.

GRACE
Don't worry pop, Sherlock and I can take care of ourselves. I'll call you later when I'm coming home, okay.

Grace blows Malcolm a quick kiss, turns and clicks her fingers, quickly summoning Sherlock to her side.

He obediently follows her athletic form as they walk fast towards Steve's parked patrol car.

Malcolm awkwardly slides over behind the wheel, buckles up and watches Grace and Sherlock through the windscreen jump into the highway patrol car and move quickly away. The old man settles his weary bones into the hard upholstery, ignites the engine letting it idle for a while as he gazes at the entrance to Black River.

Malcolm is lost in the moment dreaming of the old towns yesteryear's. He reluctantly presses the accelerator, moving the old Holden slowly forward past an avenue of tall leafy trees lining the main road through town.

While driving, he stares in wonderment at the historical gables, mansard, and conical wooden shingled roofs, all hand-built structures from the 1800s. Malcolm reminiscing, fondly pats the cars' dashboard.

MALCOLM

Well old girl it's good to be back home...isn't it?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT-BLACK RIVERS CAFE-RESTAURANT, 20-MINUTES LATER.

We see a rustic gable roofed house and open veranda built on thick jarrah stumps. It stands shaded between tall leafy eucalyptus, positioned 20-metres up on a hillside, enjoying majestic view overlooking the small town.

A police car is clearly visible parked below in a crowded car park. We move in closer over the heads of people walking up old sandstone steps towards the café. There, seated at a table on the veranda we see Grace Stone and Constable Cochran engaged in light banter-while Sherlock is comfortably curled up at their feet.

A mixed selection of patrons are scattered around, all seated at hand-made wooden tables and long-stools. The atmosphere is congenial, and not overcrowded. Mounted underneath the gable end of the café is a display of stuffed animal heads.

A well-mannered waitress carries glasses, a fish-basket packed with chips, and a medium-sized flask of beer. She smiles as she places it on Grace and Steve's table.

WAITRESS

Is that all...or are you waiting on anything else?

STEVE

No thanks....that's it.

GRACE

I told you I wasn't really that hungry you know...but the beer looks great, thanks.

STEVE

Well I am...so drink up, its really good to see you Grace....you're looking fantastic.

GRACE

I try and keep in shape, dog training, volunteer rescue work and Canicross events keep the flab off. By the way, you're not looking too bad yourself.

Steve acknowledges the comment with a curt nod, while pouring them both a half pint of low alcoholic beer. Selecting a battered piece of fish, he crunches its soft carapace, tearing into white flesh. He starts casually talking out of the side of his mouth while chewing.

STEVE

Oh yeah...training and racing dogs over cross-country huh, that will keep the fat off for sure. Hey I saw that news story on the internet, about you and Sherlock rescuing a rich billionaire...its gone viral Grace. When are you going to be kicking back in the Bahamas somewhere, bathing in money and retiring?

GRACE

It's not like that, It was nothing, anybody would have done the same, I can't wait till it all blows over, and everyone's forgotten about it. And he's a philanthropist and a hell of a nice guy. I don't know or care about how much money he has...I'm here to find my little sister Steve...that's my top priority. Oh I want to thank you for what you did for Sherlock this morning.

STEVE

No need...nobody threatens someone in the street with a loaded firearm, and then attempts to shoot their dog...not on my watch.

GRACE

I remember the strife and trouble the McAllister boys and their father Rory would get up to years ago in town...it doesn't look like any of that's changed.

STEVE

No...but as usual it's Rory's fault for letting his sons and their hooligan mates run around like some militia, as if they own the bloody town. And now this registration checkpoint, I've had to break one up now almost every 2 weeks for the last couple of months.

GRACE

My Grandfather mentioned that, what's it for?

Steve sips some more light beer, and then grabs a handful of chips, gesturing, and eating one at a time while speaking. Meanwhile Sherlock raises his head, his keen senses aroused by a menacing presence watching him from somewhere inside the café.

STEVE

You remember that Rory's a long time council member, and owns a lot of business properties around Black River...well as soon as young girls started going missing on the highway, he strenuously lobbied and won for this bloody register to be implemented...problem is, it isn't law, but he thinks it should be.

GRACE

Why?

STEVE

He tells everyone it's for safe guarding and protecting the township, but I suspect he's only trying to drive away the tourists, to make businesses' eventually close down, or sell-up.

Grace takes a chip, and using it like a finger, points at Steve while talking. Sherlock growls softly, his line of sight fixated on something ominous moving within the café.

GRACE

So he's lowering the real-estate value, so he can buy at bargain-basement prices.

STEVE

That's about the size of it, Rory wants to be the laird of Black River, and own it lock stock and barrel, always has. Ever since his grandfather and father before him squandered their fortune, and lost ownership of the town over a 150-years ago...he's desperately wanted to get it all back.

GRACE

I'll never understand human beings' obsession with money...doesn't anyone in this town care about finding those missing young girls?

STEVE

Now come on Grace, you know they do. I want to do everything possible to find the missing girls, and your sister...but my hands are tied, I've got my orders.

Sherlock continues softly growling, obsessed by an unknown presence still lurking within the café. After taking a refreshing mouthful of amber liquid, Grace's approach changes to a slightly more direct line of questioning.

GRACE

Why did you take a DNA-sample from my Grandfather Steve?

STEVE

Procedure that's all.

Steve continues to pick apart his fish, and slowly sips at his beer...while his eyes dart nervously around the veranda, and the picturesque scenery. Grace immediately notices the tell-tale signs of someone concealing the truth.

GRACE

It's not procedure for a small country cop shop...and you know it. You only take a swab when you want to match it, when you've found a body part...or a dead body. Well have you?

Steve swallows his food nervously, wiping his mouth with a napkin, he takes another intentionally long-drawn-out sip of beer. Reluctantly focusing back upon Grace's patient determined gaze, the wheels turn in his mind.

STEVE

You know I thought I loved you once Grace, but that was before you left town, and broke my heart. All because I wanted to stay here and be a small-town country cop, just like my dad was, so don't come waltzing back here from the bloody States, and start telling me how to do my job...okay.

We move in closer to Sherlock, and study his heightened sense of impending danger visible on his features. He continues softly growling.

GRACE

That was a long time ago Steve, you always knew that one day soon, I was going to leave Black River, to follow my dreams...it wasn't because you wanted to stay that we broke up, it was because I had to go.

STEVE

Did you ever love me Grace?

GRACE

Oh bloody men, of course I did! But You haven't answered my question, have you found any trace of my missing sister's body, and if so why haven't you passed that information on!

Steve Cochran slowly rises from the table, wearing a look of suppressed animosity towards Grace. Gingerly brushing crumbs from his uniform, he adjusts his heavy regulation leather gun-belt, as if he were a sheriff dispensing justice in a spaghetti-western. Raising a defiant eyebrow, he confronts Grace.

STEVE

The DNA-swab was procedural in case we found anything. Everything thing else we found is not at this time for public comment...is there anything else?

GRACE

Now that you mention it, yes there is. Why has the information about the other missing young girls, including Rebecca, only appeared in small local press, and are the Federal cops setting up a task force to investigate these disappearances properly?

Steve stares incredulously at Grace, he then reaches down to the table and grabs his police cap, slapping it on his head, he adjusts it vigorously. Sherlock's attention remains focused on the presence.

STEVE

Just who the bloody hell do you think you are...Nancy fucking Drew. I think the cute ex-girlfriend thing has played itself out Grace. I can understand you and your Grandfather are both upset and worried about Becks, so am I...but I've got two other missing girls to worry about too, and a tourist town that can't afford to have a bloody scandal blow up in its face!

After raising his voice, Steve Cochran becomes extremely self-conscious of his surroundings, immediately aware of the penetrating gazes of hundreds of curious eyes watching his display of emotion. He adjusts his belt again, and leans over the table, placing his hands firmly upon it.

STEVE (CONT'D)

(lowered hushed tone)

For your information, there is a Federal task force set-up at the local cop-shop in town, and it's made up of one missing persons' liaison case officer...whom you are free to ask as many questions about Becks as you like, and you'll get exactly the same response that you got from me. Now I'm leaving, when you're ready to go back to the farm...give me a call, is there anything else, miss Stone?

Grace pauses for a beat to let the crackling electrical tension between them dissipate completely, before she answers. Sherlock's growling continues, growing louder, still aware of a suspicious presence.

GRACE

Well, yes there is...I want to see the police report on my sister please.

Steve Cochran's eyes widen in amazement at the audacity of Grace's request. His fingers grip the edges of the wooden table, until his knuckles turn white. Still leaning over the table he glances awkwardly around the outdoor space, aware of the customers probing glances.

In frustration he stands up to his full height, adjusts his belt again, and starts to slowly edge backwards away from the table, colliding with the wiry athletic framed body of a woman wearing jeans, a stained white apron, stiff grey shirt, roman priest's collar and a small gold crucifix.

Momentarily caught off balance, Steve turns and helps steady the woman's serving tray, laden with food. Behind the woman, emerging in slow-motion from out of the shadows, steps a tan colored Mastiff. A small silver crucifix dangles from its collar.

The dog stops, its hunter's eyes fixed upon Sherlock.

STEVE

Sorry Mel...that was clumsy of me.

MELANIE

(Heavy South African accent)

Think nothing of it, no harm done Steve...is everything alright, can I get you, or your friend anything else...after I deliver this?

Both Steve and Grace kindly decline Melanie's offer. Wiping her brow, she smiles affably, and proceeds to deliver the order to a nearby table.

Sherlock cautiously rises up onto all fours, hair and head rigid and erect, ears back, baring his teeth, he growls—sending a warning signal to the large Mastiff. In a sudden display of lightening fast savagery, the dogs attack each other.

Grace and Steve flinch, staring at the blur of flashing fangs, visceral popping muscles, bristling tan and blue fur, as the two canine adversaries go berserk. But within seconds after the fight has begun, it is all over.

Shocked by the event, the guests on the veranda are momentarily stunned. Small children burst into tears, while concerned patrons go out of their way to protect family members and friends.

The two dogs stand heavily breathing, their hackles raised, poised and ready to attack again. Steve Cochran, ready to intervene if he must, stands with his palm lightly resting upon his holstered Glock.

Within that pregnant pause, a sharp, shrill whistle breaks the silence, and then the harsh guttural sound of Melanie Drake's commanding voice speaking in Afrikaans, is heard.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
Goliath...inside!(BINNE)

The large muscled Mastiff immediately obeys its masters command, and moves to retreat into the interior of the rustic café. But just before he does, he stops, turns his massive head, and stares menacingly at Sherlock, and then glances up at Grace Stone. The dog then disappears through the open bi-fold doors and is gone.

Melanie's actions immediately placate her patrons, assuring them that any danger has now passed. She also grants everyone affected or upset by the incident a free meal. Melanie calls for extra waitress's to administer to anyone's special needs.

She walks confidently over to Grace seated at her table, who was vigorously stroking Sherlock's fur, de-stressing and comforting him.

MELANIE (CONT'D)
I apologize wholeheartedly...for
Goliath, he's never done anything
like this before. I trained him
personally and I can assure you
this will never happen again.
Steve...don't you think you should
introduce us.

STEVE

Oh...yes of course, forgive me
Melanie Drake meet Grace Stone,
she's just arrived from the States,
to make inquiries about her missing
sister.

MELANIE

Oh dear child, of course...I should
have guessed, the similarities to
you and your sister are quite
striking. May I say how sorry I am,
about your sister's disappearance.
I don't know if constable Cochran
has told you yet, but I was quite
close to your sister...she worked
here off and on, when she needed a
bit of cash. She was a good worker,
until the urge to runaway again
came over her. I believe she had
saved up enough to go to the
states...in the hopes of visiting
you Miss Stone.

Grace casts a knowing glance up at Melanie Drake, recognizing
the truth of her last statement, well aware of Rebecca's
dream of one day being able to come and visit her.

GRACE

Yes...that's true, farm and country
life was never really her thing.
She had often dreamt of escaping
from it.

STEVE

(Slightly nervous)

I'm sure you must have a lot of
questions about Becks...maybe Mel
would be so kind to help you out?

MELANIE

That's not a problem, lunch numbers
are a bit low today...anything I
can do to help.

STEVE

I've got a few things to do ladies,
if you'd excuse me...Grace, call me
when you're ready to go back out to
the farm...okay.

As Steve curtly waves goodbye, and starts to head for the
exit to the stairs, Grace calls out to him.

GRACE

Oh Steve...I'm going to get that
report from you, one way or
another.

Steve Cochran stops momentarily at the top of the sandstone
stairs, hands gripping the jarrah railings.

He turns his head, acknowledging Graces last comment he waits for a beat, and then without reply takes the steps three or four at a time, quickly descending them.

Melanie Drake drags out a chair, sitting down at Grace's table. Signaling to one of her waitress's she curtly orders a cup of rooibos tea. Shifting to a more comfortable position in her chair, the two women size each other up silently for a moment.

MELANIE

I hope your little Blue Heeler is alright.

GRACE

Oh...Sherlock he's fine, we breed them tough down under...If I'm not mistaken Goliath is a South African Mastiff...cross-bred from the lineage of the Dutch and German Corbusier.

Melanie Drake's eyes widened in surprise at Graces statement as one of her waitstaff places her tea on the table. She continues to study Grace intently, while stirring some sugar into her beverage.

MELANIE

That's correct...you know your dog breeds. Captain Jan Von Reibeck first brought them to the Cape in the 1600s. They were bred for hunting, and became invaluable guard dogs to the Boer settlers.

Melanie leans comfortably back in her chair, holding the tea cup in both hands she slowly sips the warm bitter brew. Her piercing gaze inspecting Grace like a pathologist's scalpel.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

The ancient Romans also trained Mastiff's to fight in armor alongside their handlers in battle. They called them the guardians of Rome. There is a legend about one such dog, named Goliath who after its master was slain in battle, tracked the scent of his killer for days...until stealing into the enemies' encampment's at night, and slaughtered every last soldier in their beds...as they slept.

Grace leans back in her chair, sipping at the half pint of left over beer.

GRACE

Now that's loyalty and devotion for you...is that why you named your dog, Goliath?

MELANIE

I thought you wanted to ask me about your sister...Becks.

GRACE

Yes of course...sorry. Did you see Becks before she disappeared?

MELANIE

No...I was late delivering a batch of my soup to the 24-hour café outside of town--

GRACE

Oh...yeah Fat-Olives, it's been an institution out here for ever...Fat Olive's been dead for years, but everyone still calls it that, probably always will. Please go on.

MELANIE

Beck's had asked me to give her a lift out of town that night, but unfortunately she never turned up on the highway...where she said we would meet. That was possibly the last time anyone ever saw her again. But of course all this is in the police report.

GRACE

Yes...I imagine it will be, if I can get my hands on it?

MELANIE

That's about all I know...sorry, I wish I could have been of more help to you.

GRACE

Thank's...is there anything else that you recall about Becks in that last week, anything strange or out of place, did she have a boyfriend, was someone following her...anything at all?

MELANIE

Well no...no long term boyfriends anyway, all she really was concerned about was trying to make enough money to leave this place, she hated Black River...and desperately wanted to get away from your Grandfather and having to help take care of all those animals up on the farm.

GRACE

Yep...that sounds like Becks alright, she never shared our love for animals, and spent most of her time dreaming about running away to far off exotic places.

Grace slowly drains the bottom of her beer glass, puts it down, and rises from the table. She takes a moment to survey the veranda and its beautiful vista overlooking the town. Sherlock diligently watches her actions. Grace then notices the mounted animal heads staring blankly down at her from the wall.

We see wild boar, goats, antlered stag, and a large male water buffalo head.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Isn't it a little disturbing for the guests to be stared at by those stuffed heads while their eating?

MELANIE

On the contrary...we get a lot of great comments about them, and I get to impress everyone by regaling them with stories about how I single-handedly stalked and killed them.

Grace stares down at Melanie's wry smiling face, and then casts her eyes back towards the animal heads in disbelief.

GRACE

You don't mean to tell me that you hunted and shot all those animals, that's...incredible.

Melanie leans back proudly in her chair, draining the very last remnants from her teacup.

MELANIE

Yes I did, my father taught me how to hunt in South Africa...do you hunt Miss Stone?

GRACE

No I'm afraid not...I've had to put animals humanely out of their misery though...once or twice.

Melanie's eyes focus more intently on Grace's face, as her hand and fingers caress the gold chain attached to her pocket watch. She automatically pulls it free, and holds the watch tightly in her hand while finishing her conversation with Grace.

MELANIE

Then you know what it is like to take a life...that makes you a hunter.

Grace smiles awkwardly at Melanie's last statement, without adding comment. Pushing in her chair, she clicks her fingers and Sherlock comes obediently to her side.

GRACE

I want to thank you for your time, Miss Drake, if there is anything else, anything at all that you can recall about Becks, Steve's got my number.

Grace fumbles for her wallet in her back pocket to pay for the bill, and is stopped by an abrupt gesture from Melanie.

MELANIE

Out of the question, it's on the house remember, because of Goliath's un-characteristic performance earlier.

GRACE

Well thanks again...c'mon Sherlock.

Just as Grace and Sherlock are beginning to head for the stairs, she stops and looks enquiringly at Melanie once more.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I have to ask, what's with the priests collar?

Melanie leans forward on the table, starting to chuckle softly to herself at Graces question.

MELANIE

Oh I'm an interfaith minister, you know more like a spiritual counselor for all religious denominations...I'm certainly not a Catholic priest, if that's what you mean.

Melanie stands up from her chair, and leans over extending her hand, which Grace accepts in a firm handshake.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

I'm glad to have met you Grace Stone, I hope that you find your sister. And from one hunter to another...I wish you luck on the hunt...goodbye.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT-BLACK RIVER CAFE, CAR PARK, 20-MINUTES LATER.

Grace Stone is seated in a contemplative mood on the base of the sandstone steps of the café. She stares at Rebecca's bandanna held delicately in both hands, as her mind searches for answers. Sherlock sits dutifully by her side watching her, his features mirroring her thoughts.

A waitress who served Grace and Steve earlier in the café is nearby busily going about her business, emptying out scraps into a garbage bin.

GRACE
(To Sherlock)
Well boy...where do we go from here?

SHERLOCK
(Intelligently)
Whimpers...and barks.

The Blue Heeler using his snout, nudges repeatedly at Grace's hands, trying to sample the scent of Rebecca left on the fabric. Grace's despondent mood alters, as she realizes her dog's intent. Elated, she holds the piece of fabric up to his keen nose, allowing him to identify the particular odor.

Grace then ties the bandanna loosely around Sherlock's neck, covering his gauze-padding and wound to his throat.

GRACE
There you go...now search and find boy.

Spinning eagerly round the Blue Heeler wags his tail, drops his head to the ground and begins diligently tracking.

Grace watches Sherlock as he methodically investigates every inch of the area in the practically deserted car park. After combing the entire lot, Sherlock stops, and raises his head. Sampling and sniffing the air, he then makes a dramatic beeline towards a parked blue Land-Rover.

Also curiously watching the intelligent Blue Heeler work is the waitress, who has just finished throwing out the garbage. Walking over to Grace, she stops and casually leans on the railings next to her.

WAITRESS
What's he doing?

GRACE
Oh...he's tracking a scent trail.

Sherlock starts barking and sniffing at the car's tires and chassis, excitedly.

WAITRESS
Looks like he's found something.

The waitress begins to climb the steps slowly back up to the café, while still observing Sherlock.

WAITRESS (CONT'D)
I don't know whose scent he's looking for...but that's my boss's car, Melanie Drake.

Grace, her curiosity piqued, turns and watches the waitress climb the stairs back up to the café perched on the hillside. Standing on the veranda, Grace can clearly make out the two smaller figures of the woman, Melanie Drake and her Mastiff observing them below in the car park.

GRACE

Good boy Sherlock...lets see where else Becks trail leads us mate.

SHERLOCK

Barking excitedly.

Grace clicks her fingers, calling Sherlock as she tosses a dehydrated vegetable treat which he catches expertly between his teeth.

Within moments Grace and Sherlock have exited the car park, and are walking underneath the avenue of trees, along the winding road heading deeper into town. Sherlock takes point, his nose expertly tracking Rebecca's scent trail.

Meanwhile high up on the cafe's open veranda, Melanie Drake and her large Mastiff Goliath still stand at the railing's edge. They vigilantly wait until the two solitary figures of the woman and her dog have completely vanished into the background of the town.

Melanie Drake automatically reaches for her gold fob-watch chain. Pulling it out, she removes a gold inscribed pocket-watch. Flipping it open, an internal music-box plays a haunting theme from an old South African nursery rhyme.

She stares at two old sepia-tone portraits on the inside cover, one of her great, great grandfather, and one of his daughter, named Melanie, whom she is named after.

The picturesque scene around her begins to fade-away, as she recalls the brutal legacy of revenge, taught to her by her Boer father in South Africa. Goliath also seems mesmerized by the tune of the music box. We move in on Melanie's face as she remembers.

EXT-SOUTH AFRICAN VELD, 1965, (START FLASHBACK)

The hot sun dips low in the dry South African countryside surrounding three solitary figures and two large dogs. Melanie is 8-years old, she stands next to the imposing figure of her Boer father, Wilhelm Drakensberg. Two massive South African Mastiffs wait patiently to hunt their prey, a young black girl kidnapped from one of the nearby shanty towns.

Her father grips the struggling girl by her hair. A German hunting rifle is slung across his back. Leaning down to Melanie, he gives her his Grandfathers gold engraved pocket watch. She opens it and we see the same portraits, and hear the same South African nursery rhyme playing on its miniature music-box.

The struggling girl's hands are bound with leather, and she is straining so hard her hair is almost pulled out by the roots. And then the father releases his grip.

WILLHELM

Now run you little kaffir, run for your life.

As Melanie watches the little black feet of the girl run as fast as they can off towards the setting sun on the far horizon, she hears her father command the Mastiffs in Afrikaans to kill. While the growling dogs paw's kick up dust and bolt quickly after the frantic little girl, Melanie buries her head into her father's pant's leg, averting her gaze.

A thick, course haired, brown calloused hand, grips her skull and forces her head around to watch the moment when the two dogs run down their prey. As the two dogs easily pull the little girl to the ground, her screams of help are silenced forever.

WILLHELM (CONT'D)

(Spoken in slow, vengeful manner)

Now Melanie...remember these names, and never forget them, McAllister, Stone, Henderson, and Bailey...now repeat them after me, and never forget them.

After repeating the names, she is handed a hunting knife and told to bring back the girl's thumbs as a trophy. Melanie's nightmarish reflective vision of the past begins to clear and gradually dissipates, her eyes refocusing on the peaceful, picturesque town of Black River once again.

She reaches down to caress the head of Goliath standing obediently by her side, and then she closes the pocket watch, ending the haunting music. Melanie repeats the names to herself, over and over again in a slow haunting whisper.

MELANIE

McAllister, Stone, Henderson, and Bailey.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT-LARGE HOME OF RORY MCALLISTER.(END FLASHBACK)

Situated at the far Eastern edge of the township, a three-story-modern stone and glass fortress stands proudly on a hill. Kent McAllister's dirty white Toyota swerves and enters a large paved circular driveway at its front.

Staring down at him is an imposing granite water feature of a Scottish bagpiper, wearing a kilt.

NOTE

A LARGE RED, WHITE AND GREEN
SCOTTISH COAT OF ARMS, WITH AN
EAGLE IS AFFIXED TO THE BASE OF THE
STATUE. THE OLD ENGLISH NAME OF THE
CLAN MCALLISTER IS CLEARLY SEEN.

Exiting the car, he glances up to the top balcony where he observes his father preparing to play his own set of real pipes. Quickly checking his watch and realizing the time, he curses himself under his breath, and dashes for the front door of the house.

INT-HOUSE.

Kent McAllister pushes open two thick oak carved doors, and we follow him through a grand reception room, where hanging tapestries, cutlasses, broad swords, war shields and other Scottish memorabilia all adorn the walls.

Moving rapidly towards a grand oak staircase, Kent runs up the stairs, taking two and three at a time. He passes quickly by a series of imposing oil portraits of old family descendants, whose eyes stare morbidly at him as he rushes by.

Kent McAllister enters the top floor den of his father, Rory McAllister, who is standing on the balcony in full Scottish regalia, holding his set of cherished bagpipes. Kent's father turns to face his son, while adjusting his kilt and sporran.

RORY MCALLISTER

(Annoyed, heavy Scottish
accent)

Well what the fuck are you doing here at this hour...you're supposed to be on the bridge, managing the bloody register...hmmm. So what is it this time?

KENT MCALLISTER

(nervous, intimidated)

We've got trouble...from that cop, Cochran, he stopped the registration again...and...and-

RORY MCALLISTER

And what...speak up for fuck sake, it's my hour to play the pipes, c'mon!

Kent keeps his head bowed low, ashamed at having his nose bloodied. He stammers, and then continues.

KENT MCALLISTER

And he confiscated my rifle...there's going to be a fine to pay.

RORY MCALLISTER

What...and why would he do that?

KENT MCALLISTER

Because I was going to shoot a dog.

RORY MCALLISTER

Oh I see...and who's fucking dog was this then?

KENT MCALLISTER

It's that blonde bitch Grace Stone, she's back in town.

RORY MCALLISTER

Oh...the sister of the missing Stone girl, so what.

Kent notices a drop of blood falling to the stone floor, and automatically wipes at his bloodied nose with his shirt sleeve.

The red bearded, barrel chested figure of Rory McAllister, places his bear-like hands on his hips, and glares down at his son. Noticing his son's bloodied nose for the first time, he raises his white and red-haired bushy eyebrows, before he speaks.

RORY MCALLISTER (CONT'D)

(Subtle and menacing tone)

Who the fuck gave you a bloody nose. C'mon speak up you twat, who was it...and if you tell me it was that Stone bitch, I'm gonna give you a hiding you'll never forget...now who was it?

KENT MCALLISTER

(Sheepishly)

It wasn't the Stone woman, it was that damn dog of hers...it's feral.

RORY MCALLISTER

Oh my god...so you tried to shoot the dog, and you let Cochran get the better of ya...and he took your gun away from you, is that what fucking happened?

Before Kent McAllister could meekly answer his father back, the large barrel chested man had crossed the short distance between them, coiled back his beefy, hairy right arm, and released it. Striking his son a glancing blow across his face, he is easily knocked to the floor.

RORY MCALLISTER (CONT'D)

I don't want to hear anymore fucking excuses...not from a son of mine. Now you go and pay the bloody fine, apologize to Cochran, and get Pete and Dingo together, and then laddy find that little Stone bitch, and teach her a lesson, ya hear me.

(MORE)

RORY MCALLISTER (CONT'D)

And don't let anyone see you do it...oh and shoot that dog when no ones around...now git going.

Kent McAllister still sprawled on the floor, quickly finds his feet, and stands up. Red-faced and ashamed, he rubs at his throbbing cheek where his father had struck him. Curtly nodding his head, he steps backwards, turns on his heels and moves hurriedly towards the exit.

EXT-HOUSE.

He runs down the stairs, exiting the large mansion. When he reaches the Ute, he notices that his nose has started bleeding again. Stopping for a moment to wipe it, he uses his dirty shirt sleeve. He flinches from the sound of his father's booming voice, calling out to him from the balcony above.

RORY MCALLISTER

And after that boy, get that fucking registration checkpoint back up and running by tomorrow morning...you leave the cops to me...now fuck off, it's time for me to play the pipes.

Seconds later while driving back into town, Kent McAllister can hear the haunting, eerie drone of his father playing the bag-pipes. Its echoing high-pitched moan and cry drifts slowly down into the picturesque little valley-hovering over the town of Black River, like forgotten ghosts from the past.

EXT-WINDING MAIN ST, BLACK RIVER.

Grace Stone is following just behind Sherlock, as they make their way underneath the long awning of the only pub in town, The Black River Arms, an imposing 1850s four story, dark grey and white historical building.

She stops and leans on an old ornamental cast iron kerosene street lamp, and listens to the echoing sound of mournful bagpipe music, as a thin but steady stream of tourists pass her by. Sherlock stops as well, waiting with Grace as a local old Aboriginal man, seated on a bench outside smoking, dressed in dusty farmers garb, speaks to her.

OLD ABORIGINAL

(Thick Australian accent)

That's Rory McAllister, playing his damn pipes again.

The old Indigenous man scratches his beard, then checks the time on his watch, wrinkling his brow in consternation.

OLD ABORIGINAL (CONT'D)

That's unusual for him he's late...never been late before, hey aren't you Gracie, little Gracie Stone, well I'll be...I remember you and your sister running rings around my ankles when I was working on your father's lighthouse. Don't you remember me Gracie?

Smiling, the almost toothless old soul removes his hat, and strikes a memorable pose. Grace moves in closer, blankly studying the crinkled eyes, and the aged character's sun baked proud features.

GRACE

(Looking perplexed, for a moment)

Oh...my god, Billy, Billy Blue the stone mason, aren't you?

BILLY BLUE

Well I hope so, don't work in the building trade no more, my bloody backs packed it in years ago. I'm a monumental mason now...I carve headstones for the dead, and get paid by the living. And what's the name of this dog Gracie, never knew you not to have a dog around you.

GRACE

It's Sherlock.

Grace clicks her fingers, and Sherlock immediately comes over to greet the old man. While Grace reminisces old times with Billy, Kent McAllister's dirty white Toyota parks unobtrusively in front of the pub, further up the street.

The vindictive son of Rory, jumps out of the car and bounds up the front steps of the pub quickly disappearing inside, going unnoticed by Grace. After another few minutes of polite conversation with Billy Blue, Grace realizes that she needs to heed the call of nature.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Billy I'm gonna leave Sherlock with you for a minute, got to take a leak, don't worry he won't stray...Sherlock stay.

Grace holds out her scarred palm, and motions for Sherlock to stay put until her return. Thanking the old man, Grace rushes towards the front steps of the pub, and enters the old establishment she remembers well.

INT-BLACK RIVER ARMS.

Grace zigzags her way through a maze of young and older patrons seated at chairs and tables, and through the lounge and restaurant section of the old pub.

Rushing past the long polished wooden bar area, an assorted group of tourists and locals watch sport on a large screened TV, play pool and drink.

Out of the corner of his eye, Kent McAllister, playing pool and drinking with Dingo and Pete, two local hooligans, spots the athletic figure of Grace heading quickly towards the toilets. He nudges his mates, whispers to them and in a moment they are soon shadowing her.

INT-FEMALE RESTROOM.

A pre-recorded loop of a series of eighties Australian rock music plays through a tinny pair of old speakers hanging on the wall. Grace pushes open the thick oak door to the toilet, enters and quickly runs to a vacant stall.

Inside the bland, well graffitied stall, Grace takes her time to cover the seat with toilet squares, unzips and sits down. Preparing to urinate, her eyes idly peruse the vivid messages and she takes the time to read some often very funny graffiti.

A pair of fast, searching hands, and strong wiry muscled arms suddenly reach underneath the stalls door, clamp, and grip tightly around her ankles and viscously drag her body out from underneath the stall door. Completely caught off guard, her scream is stuck in her throat.

A second pair of even stronger hands immediately clamp her mouth shut, and subdue her flailing arms behind her back. A third pair of nervous, darting eyes peek through the open door, watching and deterring anyone from entering the room.

Lifting the squirming body of Grace Stone into a kneeling position, her legs, hands and mouth held firmly from behind, Kent McAllister glares down at the helpless young woman. He positions his mouth close to her ear.

KENT MCALLISTER

(Sadistic, vengeful tone.)

Nobody gets the better of me, and makes me look like a fool to my father...fuckin nobody, and don't worry girly...I'll shoot your dog later.

Grace Stone squirms and struggles as she shuts her eyes, trying desperately to scream, when a series of hard striking blows, from Kent's fist's strike her head...eventually leaving her unconscious.

INT-BLACK RIVER, POLICE STATION, 45-MINUTES LATER.

Grace Stone and Sherlock are seen through the double glass doors, of the entrance to the small country police station. She is staggering up the stairs, supporting herself by gripping the stainless steel railings.

Pushing open the doors, she leaves a red blood smear on the glass. Grace wobbles unsteadily forward to the front desk where a concerned officer Claire Fitzsimons is on duty.

GRACE

I want to see, senior constable
Steve Cochran...right now.

Everything then goes black inside Grace's world, as the room starts spinning, and she slumps unconscious to the cold tiled floor. The concerned loud barking of Sherlock echos in her dark mind.

Reviving, Grace feels someone wiping her face using a cold damp cloth. She opens her eyes, and finds herself lying down on a couch inside one of the small back rooms used to store files and as a commissary. The concerned brown eyes of Steve Cochran looks down at her as he continues to wipe blood away from her bruised face.

STEVE

Grace can you hear me, how many
fingers am I holding up. (Steve is
waving and holding up three.)

Grace smiles at him, and amusingly gives him the finger.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Now that's not funny, Grace. I was
just about to call the ambulance,
who did this to you?

Grace manages to sit upright, and finding her balance stares around the room, worriedly searching for Sherlock. Steve catches on quickly, realizing what she is looking for.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Don't worry, Claire has your dog
just outside, he's fine. Now, who
did this to you, and do you want to
make a formal complaint?

GRACE

(Shaking head)

No...that'll only make matters
worse Steve. I've only been back in
this town for a few hours, and I
already want to leave, but I can't.
I'm here to find out what's
happened to Rebecca...and I want
that police report right now, or
else-

STEVE

Or else what...I told you already
no, my hands are tied, now tell me
what the hell happened to you.

Grace stands up, slowly walks around the room like a frustrated cat. She stops, puts her hands on her hips and faces Steve with a steely eyed, determined gaze.

GRACE

(Loud assertive.)

Look...someone beat me up, and I didn't see who it was, so let's just forget about it okay. I need to see that report Steve...I need to know all the facts before Sherlock and I can start trying to track her properly, and possibly find out what the hell's happened to those other two girls...well what's it gonna be?

Steve stands up, glaring back at Grace with the same blank wall response to her inquiring gaze. He turns away from her reluctantly, and walks to the door, stopping with his hand resting on the handle, he turns back to face her again.

STEVE

(Stern, but compassionate)

I've already told you no...Grace, don't make me say it again...now rest up, and if you won't go to the medical center then get yourself cleaned up, and I'll drive you back to your Grandfathers farm. I think you've done enough for one day, don't you.

Steve turns, and opens the door letting an overjoyed Sherlock rush into the room to greet his master. Grace walks back to the couch, slumps down, and welcomes Sherlock as he jumps up, happily licking her face.

Grace continues to pat Sherlock as her eyes stare randomly around the small enclosed room filled with filing cabinets, posters, a wash basin, small humming fridge, mini-microwave and coffee, tea and biscuits in Tupperware.

GRACE

(Thinking out loud)

Well Sherlock, what are we going to do now boy. There's got to be some way to get my hands on that report...there's got to be.

As her eyes randomly move around the room, she settles her gaze upon a poster pinned on the wall. The poster is in black and white, depicting a cold, rain soaked alleyway at night. A single homeless person dressed in op-shop clothes stares back at her in the cold night.

NOTE

*THE BOLD TEXT ON THE POSTER READS,
don't FORGET TO CALL SOMEONE, WHEN
YOU FIND YOURSELF IN TROUBLE, AND
NEED HELP.*

Grace has a light bulb moment, as she digs out her wallet, from her back pocket. Sherlock sits on the coach next to her, curiously watching her every move.

Quickly rifling through some cards in the flaps, she triumphantly pulls out the business card given to her by Mr James Auburn.

Checking her watch, she estimates the time in the states to be about 2-am in the morning. Hedging her bets, she makes a silent prayer and punches the numbers into her mobile. She and Sherlock wait on tender hooks as the dial tone sounds.

VOICE

(A familiar, trustworthy man answers call)

Hello Grace.

GRACE

Is that you Max...I'm so sorry to call so late.

MAX

Don't worry about it, ever since Mr Auburn helped you with Sherlock's permits, and your flights, he's been concerned about you and your missing sister. He's had me on red alert ever since, waiting for any calls...how can we help you Grace?

AN HOUR LATER, IN BLACK RIVER POLICE STATION.

Grace Stone is seated in the front waiting area of the cop-shop. She is anxious, checking the big clock on the wall, while sipping an instant coffee from a Styrofoam cup. Sherlock lays patiently, sprawled comfortably by her feet.

The female officer Claire Fitzsimons diligently works at a computer behind a partially bulletproof glass partition, manning the front desk. Every now and again she glances nervously up at the waiting Grace Stone and Sherlock.

Their eyes both intermittently glance back and forth to Steve Cochran's office, where he can clearly be seen through the glass, talking to a higher superior on his phone. He has an ingratiating expression on his face, as the loud garbled voice continues to harangue him.

Just at that exact moment, the automatic doors open wide, and the cocky, wiry body of Kent McAllister swaggers inside. He stares at Grace Stone's bruised face for a moment as he walks by, confidently sneering at her.

Leaning rudely on the front desk, he smiles at Claire Fitzsimons's cute features, eyeing her up and down.

KENT MCALLISTER

I've come to pay a fine, and get me gun back.

CLAIRE

(Looking closely at Kent's, bruised nose)

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

That'll teach ya to play rough with dogs eh.

KENT MCALLISTER

Just get my gun will ya Claire.

CLAIRE

I've got it down here, Steve's already done the paper-work on it, all you have to do is pay.

Claire reaches under the desk, and produces the tagged firearm, and it's bullets in a separate labelled box. Placing the items on the desk, she prints out the receipt. She slides it under the glass. (Again we clearly see the green and red, McAllister family insignia on rifle butt).

KENT MCALLISTER

Jesus bloody Christ two hundred and fifty smackers, oh Claire.

CLAIRE

That's for waving around a loaded firearm in town, and threatening to shoot a defenseless dog, and you're lucky we didn't confiscate it for three months...and charge you a bigger fine. That'll be two hundred and fifty in cash...or card thanks mate.

Kent McAllister reluctantly whips out his wallet, and produces a credit card, swiping it aggressively over the digital device offered to him. Taking his gun and box of bullets, he glares through the glass at Steve Cochran, still receiving an earful from a much higher authority over the phone.

Turning on his cowboy boot heels, he heads for the exit doors. As he passes Grace Stone and Sherlock, he stops briefly, and leans menacingly down, speaking to her in a harsh, threatening whisper.

KENT MCALLISTER

I hope you're not here to make any trouble for me, because you've got no witnesses' but if you do you'll get more of the same sweetie-pie.

Kent McAllister stands up, and moves to the door as the automatic doors slide open. Kent raises his arm, aims and points his finger at Sherlock like a loaded gun, and pulls an invisible trigger. He exits the door grinning.

Claire Fitzsimons looks at Grace Stone's stoic face, studying it for a moment as Grace continues to stare at the empty space where Kent McAllister had just been standing only a moment before. The doors slide close, rattling together, causing Grace to flinch slightly.

CLAIRE

That low life McAllister didn't happen to have anything to do with what's happened to you, did he Grace, because if he did-

GRACE

(Interrupts Claire)

No he didn't officer...nothing at all.

Grace reaches down and vigorously rubs at Sherlock's hair, affectionately scratching and patting him, expressing her concern and love for her dog. The door to Steve Cochran's office slowly opens, as he motions for Grace Stone to enter.

INT-STEVE COCKRANS OFFICE.

Seated uncomfortably behind his desk, Steve Cochran stares silently at Grace Stone, elbows balanced on the arms of his chair, his fingers interlocked like a church steeple, the tips pressed up against his lips.

Grace sits anxiously waiting, unaware of what is going to happen next. Steve begins talking, while he repeatedly taps his lips thoughtfully with his fingers as he speaks.

STEVE

I don't know how you managed to do it...but I've just had my ass chewed off by the police commissioner herself, who just had a telephone call from the director of homeland security in the states. You'll have to sign a non-disclosure agreement and then you get 45-minutes with your sister's report.

Grace Stone sinks back in her chair, a sense of triumph rushes over her bruised features. An awkward smile spreads over her face.

GRACE

I'm sorry to cause you any problems Steve, but I need this to do a proper search for Rebecca.

STEVE

Jesus Christ Grace...there's over 200-million square acres of unexplored bush out there, what makes you think you and your little Blue Heeler have got any bloody chance of finding her?

Grace stands up from the chair, looks solemnly at Steve's unbelieving face for a moment, turns and walks to the door, opening it. She turns to face him again.

GRACE

Because that's what Sherlock and I
have been trained to do. Now
where's this bloody paper I need to
sign?

EXT-MALCOLM STONES WILDLFIE FARM, LATER THAT AFTERNOON.

A string of wispy clouds float across the 4-30 pm sun, as a cool summer wind blows over undulating hills and tall canopies of forest.

Echo and Cloud, the two farm dogs are the first to officially welcome Grace Stone home. They both playfully chase and bark at the approaching tyres of Steve Cochran's police car as it winds up the dirt drive to the main house.

Malcolm Stone is busy outside, raking out animal enclosures, replenishing food and water dispenser's, while softly humming an old Dutch work song. He stops for a moment and watches the police car turn in a wide arc, reverse, and point its nose back towards the exit.

INT-POLICE CAR.

Steve Cochran's fingers nervously tap onto the Bakelite steering wheel, as Grace finishes scanning through the digital photos of Rebecca's police report taken on her mobile phone.

STEVE

You know I should confiscate that,
I never gave you permission to
remove any information from the
police station.

GRACE

I signed the damn NDS-didn't I. I
need these for reference. What I
want to know is, did you also find
other thumbs belonging to the other
missing girls?

STEVE

You know I can't bloody tell you
that, It's bad enough that we've
got a sadistic psycho somewhere out
there, and my hands are tied up in
Federal red tape. They tell me how
high to jump Grace...and I jump,
get the picture.

GRACE

No I don't Steve, there's worried
parents and friends out there that
deserve to know what you've found.

STEVE

Are you nuts, that's exactly why this information was ordered to be suppressed in the first place, to stop a landslide of bad press, and to prevent a town scandal.

The whimpering and soft barking of the over-excited Echo and Cloud waiting anxiously outside the car, and the approaching footsteps of Malcolm, cause Grace and Steve to postpone their disagreement for the time being.

Malcolm waves, and taps on the window, his warm friendly expression soon changing to one of concern when he sees Grace's bruised face. Opening the car door, Grace greets her distressed Grandfather.

MALCOLM

Grace...what has happened, I told you to be careful.

Embarrassed, Grace avoids direct eye contact with Malcolm as she exits the car. Echo and Cloud are whimpering and wagging their tails with joy, over-excited by the long awaited reunion with Grace.

GRACE

Oh Grandad it's nothing, I got into a fight...and before you ask, I didn't see who it was, okay.

Malcolm's tall imposing frame looms over Grace, while his compassionate hands tenderly cup Grace's face, angling her head gently back and forth closely inspecting her injuries.

MALCOLM

Steve...where were you, how could you have let this happen?

Grace politely evades Malcolm's concerned scrutiny, and engages in play with Echo and Cloud instead. Meanwhile, Steve tries unsuccessfully to placate Malcolm as Sherlock leaps out of the car, eager to meet the other two dogs.

Steve uncomfortable at coping with Malcolm's emotional behavior, idly depresses the accelerator, making the car's engine growl. He releases the hand-brake and starts to carefully edge the car away.

Leaning out of the window, he waves and frustratingly gestures goodbye to the pair, delivering a final message to Grace.

STEVE

Grace...remember what you promised. I hope you find Becks, I really do, but don't stir-up a hornets nest to do it...alright, you've been officially warned.

Grace and Malcolm stand side by side, as they watch the police car slowly begin winding its way back down the dirt track. This time Sherlock merrily joins in on the fun, as the three dogs bolt playfully behind the car, chasing and nipping at its rubber tyres, stirring up dust.

Grace, turning to face Malcolm gives him a big bear hug to soothe his worried nerves about her. Kissing him on his cheek, she flashes him a mischievous smile.

GRACE

Are the keys still in the same place?

MALCOLM

(less agitated)

Yes they are...but you'll also need the shed keys, it's locked up.

Grace plants another quick kiss on his stubbled cheek, runs across to the entrance of the farm house, and disappears through the front door.

A minute or so later she emerges and runs 25-metres across the yard to an old double wooden garage, with two sets of keys jangling in her grip.

Opening the padlock with one set of keys, she disappears into the shed. 30-seconds later we hear the loud machine gun rattling and sputtering of a motorbike engine. Grace emerges from out of the shed, riding her old red Kawasaki 250-cc motorbike.

Pulling up next to Malcolm, Grace tightens the straps on her Helmut, and smiles warmly at him.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Are you going to pay your respects to them?

GRACE

Yep...it's been too long, I'll be back just after dark, what's for supper?

MALCOLM

(Humorously,
condescending)

Whatever you find cooking in the pot when you get back...that's going to be your supper.

Grace smiles and gives her grandfather a playful wink.

GRACE

Hmmm I can't wait, love your cooking Grandad. It's good to back.

Clicking her fingers, Sherlock eagerly jumps into the rear-seat pod.

Flipping closed her helmet's visor, she nudges the bike into gear, throttles back, and spins the wheels-leaving a little dust trail on the winding track as she goes.

Echo and Cloud calmly remain sitting in the yard watching Grace and Sherlock depart the farm, knowing full well that dinner time is not to far away.

EXT-BLACK RIVER CEMETERY, HALF AN HOUR LATER.

Grace Stone reverently stands underneath a darkening bronzed sky on cemetery hill that overlooks the small town of Black River. Her motorbike is left parked, back-up on the shoulder of the road. Sherlock sits obediently by her side, quietly observing.

She stares solemnly at two plain headstones marking her Father and Mother's graves. Grace blankly follows the quickening shadows creeping over wild grasses, flowers and bush-scrub, as they fall upon two empty plots nearby, waiting for herself and Rebecca.

Later in the darkness, we hear the bike kick started to life, and we follow a single headlight weaving back down to the highway-until it becomes a small white dot in the curtain of the night.

EXT-MALCOLM STONES WILDLIFE FARM, AFTER SUNSET.

The mountain landscape, farmhouse, low-lying scrub and tall trees are all bathed in the waxing moon's silvery glow. Bright yellow lights emanate from inside the house, while smoke drifts into the night air from the chimney.

Curious and intelligent sounds of an assortment of animals call out to each other in the early hours of the night. Echo and Cloud are well-fed, and lay on the front porch, their ears pricked and alert listening to the sounds of nature.

INT-FARMHOUSE.

Grace Stone and her Grandfather sit comfortably around a rustic wooden table situated within an open-plan, kitchen-living room diner. An overhead ambient light exposes the left over dinner, cutlery and scraps on the table, as Malcolm pours them both a glass of red wine. Sherlock is happily sprawled out on the floor before the warm fire.

MALCOLM

It was your Mother who insisted on buying those family plots at the cemetery, one night, many years before her and Roberts unfortunate death...just after she had a vision.

Grace takes her wine, and places it on the table in front of her. Malcolm settles himself back into his chair and samples a mouthful of wine.

GRACE

What sort of vision?

MALCOLM

A spiritual vision...your mother was descended from Romany Gypsies. Some even say that she was a witch...and could commune with other worlds that exist beyond this one.

GRACE

I only remember that she would often be taken ill, but Dad would never explain what was really wrong with her.

MALCOLM

She wasn't ill, her soul was peering into other worlds and receiving visions. Your Father wasn't a believer in all of those things...but he loved your Mother very much Grace...so he put up with them, but he kept these things from you two girls a secret. Your mother would often draw and rapidly sketch these visions to record them. The only time you girls were involved was when he was away...and she performed the ritual of the blood-oath with you and Becks. Oh, he was furious when he discovered your wounds. But eventually, as always he forgave her for what she had done. Unfortunately Grace he just wasn't a believer, he was an architect, his world revolved around slide rules, geometric designs and mathematical calculus.

GRACE

We never really thought the blood-oath was real, we were just kids. Were those visions and drawings real grandad...I mean do you believe in the supernatural?

Malcolm eagerly leans forward over the table, and taking another big gulp of wine, his piercing hazel blue eyes stare into Grace's. The overhead light casts a striking shadow across Malcolm's old wrinkled features.

MALCOLM

The drawings were very special to her, they were kept safe. She believed the pictures have power, and leftover residue from her visions of the future.

(MORE)

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Your Mother was forced by your father to keep it a secret from you girls because he didn't want to frighten the two of you because she was visited by and communed with the spirit world. And yes Grace...I very much believe that there exists another world beyond this one.

Grace takes another sip of wine, and leans closer towards Malcolm, her interest piqued.

GRACE

Do any of those drawings still exist Grandad?

Malcolm gulps down the last of the wine in his glass, and refills their glasses. Looking intently at Grace, a large smile spreads across his face.

MALCOLM

I was hoping you were going to ask that. After the car accident, before your Mother passed away, she had me burn all of those drawings, all but the ones that she wanted me to keep for you...when you returned home to search for Rebecca.

GRACE

How could she possibly have known, about Becks going missing...and that I would be returning home to find her?

Malcolm leans in even closer to Grace over the table, the deep haunting shadows etched all over his face looking even more disturbing than before.

MALCOLM

Because nine years ago, your Mother had a premonition of the coming of the beast. She prepared both of you girls for this, by performing the blood oath, one year prior to your parents unfortunate death. It is a ritual that will unite the dead with the living...to save your life.

Grace drains the very last drop of wine from her glass. Leaning back in her chair she takes a moment to reflect on what she has just heard. Turning her right hand over, Grace inspects the long pink scar running diagonally across her palm. After a long beat, she looks up at Malcolm, holding her palm outwards to him.

GRACE

But Grandad what does this all mean?

MALCOLM

I don't really know Grace, all I know for sure is that your Mother had a gift, and she made me promise to show you those drawings. Let me go and get them and perhaps we can figure that out together.

Malcolm studies the astonished look on Graces face for a long moment, before he stands up and gathers together all the used dishes and cutlery from the table. Clearing a space, he quickly leaves the room, climbing the old staircase to his bedroom upstairs.

INT-FARMHOUSE, MUCH LATER THAT NIGHT.

Malcolm tosses another small log into the cast iron potbelly stove, and closes its door. He ambles slowly back to the wooden table, sits down, and stretches out his long arms while yawning. Spread out before them are a series of A2-sized charcoal drawings.

NOTE

THE SERIES OF DRAWINGS ARE NIGHTMARISH AND GOTHIC IN FORM, AND DEPICT A BEAST LIKE CREATURE IN ALL OF THEM.

Grace mimics Malcolm, raising a hand up to her mouth she struggles to refrain from yawning. Unable to do so, she shrugs off the effects of weariness by shuffling randomly through her mother's macabre charcoal drawings. We see a dark forest at night, the town of black river, an old shack in the bush, and all of them have a sinister large animal lurking in the shadows.

Grace screws up her facial features, struggling unsuccessfully not to yawn again. When she looks up at Malcolm, he also is showing a similar tired and perplexed expression on his much older face.

GRACE

I can't make head nor tails out of all this Grandad. I've got to go to bed, tomorrow Sherlock and I are going to start tracking Rebecca's scent trail, and I want to have my wits about me.

Grace pulls her chair out from the table, makes her way over to the stairs, and stops, her hand resting on the old jarrah railing. She turns and looks back at Malcolm, who is still studying the series of puzzling drawings.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You need to get some rest too Grandad. Oh...I almost forgot to tell you, I was able to get my hands on Rebecca's police report today.

Malcolm still carefully examining the drawings, reacts in an understandably lethargic manner, turning to face Grace.

MALCOLM

Oh...is there anything that I should know about?

Grace turns slowly away and places her shoe on the first step. Gripping the railings with both hands, she answers him, while starting to climb the stairs to bed.

GRACE

Ahh no...nothing new.

Half-way up the stairs she stops again, one foot resting on the edge of a step. As the memories of the vision she has had of Rebecca, surfaces to the forefront of her troubled mind.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Grandad...I think I've been seeing Rebecca's ghost in my dreams, and she's been trying to tell me something.

MALCOLM

They are not dreams Grace. Your Mother was just a bit younger than you are now, when she first started seeing visions and communing with the dead. Perhaps you have inherited this gift too?

GRACE

But I don't believe in the supernatural Grandad.

MALCOLM

Grace...I know you have been keeping the fact from me, that our little Rebecca is most probably dead...no don't try and deny it. You are just protecting an old man from a horrible truth... but if your sister is trying to make contact with you from the dead, and tell you something...then you had better start believing.

GRACE

Goodnight Grandad.

Grace clicks her fingers, and Sherlock quickly follows her up the stairs.

MALCOLM

Goodnight.

EXT-FARMHOUSE, EARLY MORNING, DAY FOUR.

The warm rays of the sun filter down through the trees, bouncing off the rusty galvanized shell of the farmhouse.

Smoke from the still smoldering coals in the pot-belly drift up into the crisp morning air.

Malcolm has been up since dawn, feeding and tending to the needs of his menagerie of rescued animals. A chorus of birdsong and a choir of animal calls echos around the farmhouse and the hills. The old man stands not too far from the house, gloved hand raised in the air as his Wedge Tailed Eagle comes in to land.

INT-FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN-LIVING ROOM, DOWNSTAIRS.

The kitchen is flooded by ambient rays of light streaming in from two large sash-windows. A small radiant red glow remains from the still warm coals in the pot-belly stove.

Grace stands comfortably in her running kit, crunching on a piece of dry toast. She throws back a black cup of coffee, while Sherlock chows down on dry food in a bowl. Standing over the kitchen table, her Mother's dark charcoal drawings still lay spread out, covering the table.

Her eyes scan the mysterious drawings while swallowing the last bit of toast, washing it down with the rest of the coffee. She automatically brushes away fallen crumbs from her running vest, as an idea flashes into her mind.

Quickly taking out her mobile phone from her pant's pocket, she positions each of the large A2-drawings, and takes a digital snapshot of each of the six pieces of artwork. Leaving her backpack on the coach, she opens the front door, clicks her fingers, and Sherlock follows her outside.

EXT-FARMHOUSE.

Grace sees Malcolm launch his eagle up into the air, waves and bids him good morning. She grips the front-porch railings and stretches out her leg muscles, and performs some rudimentary calisthenics.

Re-lacing and checking her trail running shoes, Sherlock and Grace jog over to Malcolm. Echo and Cloud resting on the porch, raise their heads, eagerly watching the two of them with anticipating interest.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Are you going to the lighthouse,
for a run?

Grace smiles at her Grandfather, nodding her head, and takes a moment to look up in the air, watching the graceful raptor riding on a high thermal, drifting in the sky above her.

Grace takes off at a slow metered run, and then remembers something, and turns to face Malcolm. Running on the spot, she calls out to him, while Sherlock eagerly jumps, plays and runs circles around her moving feet.

GRACE

Oh Grandad...I almost forgot.
There's a friend of mine flying in
from the States, arriving in town
this morning...his name is Max.

MALCOLM

Max who...is he your boyfriend?

Grace bursts out laughing, while still running on the spot.

GRACE

No...absolutely not, he's coming to
help me search for Becks. Okay if
he stays at the farmhouse?

MALCOLM

Sure, the more the merrier, not a
problem, but Max who...doesn't he
have a last name?

Grace starts slowly jogging backwards away from Malcolm as
Echo and Cloud both leap off the front porch, bolting like
lightening to follow them.

GRACE

Thanks...but I don't know his last
name, It's just Max, see you soon.

Grace waves, turns and picks up speed as she runs over
undulating high ground towards a dense pocket of Eucalypts,
and low scrub.

Echo and Cloud easily outdistance them as they burst through
the trees. They start following a familiar winding goat trail
that leads up the hill behind the farmhouse and towards the
white lighthouse, seen off in the near distance.

EXT-LIGHTHOUSE, LATER THAT MORNING.

The dogs are first to leap over the overgrown grasses, sun
weathered wooden fence, and assume sentinel positions on the
rustic front porch. Grace emerges from between the tall
trees, running forward like a gazelle easily clearing the
fence.

Standing arms akimbo in the front yard, she takes a moment to
catch her breath. She gazes reflectively up at the three-
story structure of the lighthouse and rectangular bungalow
extension her father had built for the family.

INT-LIGHTHOUSE, BUNGALOW.

Millions of dust particles float in slow motion in the dank
still air of the vacant house. Closed wooden shutters block
the light, keeping the house's secrets bathed in deep umbra
shadows.

The sound of scratching finger-tips on wood searching for a
hidden key, emanate from behind the closed door.

Then a metal key is heard forcing free the mechanism of a jammed lock. The door slowly creaks open.

As Grace steps tentatively across the threshold of her old family home, the dogs eagerly brush past her legs, and start exploring the empty rooms. Breaking apart sticky cobwebs, Grace moves in awe around the space eventually prying open the jammed windows and shutters one by one.

As the morning light floods the open-plan living and kitchen area of the wooden home - a few simple forgotten mementos from childhood evoke memories which play upon her face.

Her feet are drawn like magnets following a path straight to the bottom circular stairs of the lighthouse, which she begins to ascend. Sherlock, Echo and Cloud follow at a more prudent distance behind her, their acute senses alerting them to a strange presence lingering somewhere upstairs.

INT-TOP OF LIGHTHOUSE.

Grace emerges into the glazed polygonal shaped lantern room, where nine years ago, their Mother Margaret performed the blood oath with Rebecca and herself.

Moving reverently into the open planned space, her eyes devour her mother's collected spiritual objects of art and ritual, which decorate walls, hang from the roof, and are displayed around the room.

The three dogs remained at the top of the stairs, apprehensively peering into the sacred space. Grace picks up the old ornate carved bowl used to collect their blood, mixed with water, and from which the girls drank.

Immediately the temperature in the room drops to below zero, and an image of her mother flashes into her mind. A split second after the image fades, the spectral form of her mother materializes before her. Sunlight filters through her body as if it was a piece of frosted glass.

GRACE

Mother!

The ghost says nothing, but she gazes back at Grace, an angelic smile upon her features. The dog's muscles start to shiver, and they wince and whimper as they stare at the spectral image.

Raising its arm, it extends out her open palm, there clearly visible is a scar. Without words the spectral image of Margaret impresses a message into Grace's mind.

(VO) GHOST

All for one, and one for all in
life and beyond death.

(MORE)

(VO) GHOST (CONT'D)

When the beast attacks, run to the highway child and call out for your sister, she will be there for you. I will always love you Grace.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT-LIGHTHOUSE, ONLY A FEW MINUTES LATER.

Grace is laying on the long grass outside, unconscious in a fetal position, her dog Sherlock repeatedly licking her face. She whispers something, and then gradually comes back to her physical senses.

GRACE

Run to the highway, when the beast attacks...and call for her.

EXT-FARMHOUSE, HALF AN HOUR LATER.

Grace is pushing the red Kawasaki out of the shed, coming to a stop outside in the clearing, she kicks out the stand. As she slips on her backpack, and straps her helmet on, Malcolm steps off the front porch and comes to say goodbye to her.

MALCOLM

Grace you haven't said a word since returning from the lighthouse, is everything alright.

Grace finishes checking her gear and straps, and throws her leg over the motorbikes seat. Steadying the bike, she kicks back the stand and clicks her fingers. Sherlock eagerly leaps up into his rear pod, and settles in.

GRACE

I don't know Grandad, I'm finding it hard to cope with all of this spiritual stuff. I don't know if they're dreams or really ghosts...I just don't know.

Malcolm moves forward and places a supporting hand upon her shoulder, looking warmly into her slightly confused eyes.

MALCOLM

These things take time Grace, it was that way for your mother too, when she started having visions. Is there anything you want to tell me?

Grace takes a moment to contemplate the question, but decides not to mention the morning's supernatural encounter with her mother.

GRACE

No Grandad...I'd better go. Sherlock and I have to meet Max in town, and then start tracking Rebecca. I'll call you later...love you pops.

Raising her leg, she kick-starts the bike whose engine starts rumbling as she nudges it into gear and throttles back. The spinning tyres churn a bit of hard dirt, and she and Sherlock quickly move down the winding dirt drive.

As always, Echo and Cloud chase playfully alongside, nipping at the bikes tires as they follow the red bike down to the highway, and watch it disappear from view.

EXT-TRESTLE BRIDGE, BLACK RIVER, 9-AM.

A confident, beefy mustached man, Max, wearing dark sunglasses, slowly applies the brakes to a small six-cylinder, white rental car. Coming to a stop, three cars wait in a familiar early morning registration queue, at the entrance to black river.

Jet-lagged and a little irascible from the three-hour drive on the wrong side of the road from Melbourne, Max checks his watch while slowly edging forward in the queue. Reaching the check point, a wiry cowboy with a red broken nose and carrying a rifle, swaggers towards the white car.

KENT MCALLISTER

Vehicle registration...name and destination mate.

Max lowers his sunglasses, and glares up at the rude young Australian, sizing him up. After a few silent seconds pass by, he nudges his glasses back onto the bridge of his nose, and waits to see what the Aussie is going to do next.

KENT MCALLISTER (CONT'D)

Are you deaf mate...vehicle registration, name and destination!

MAX

(Heavy, well-educated American accent)

You're not a cop...so you must be a designated volunteer of some sort, so I don't have to show you jack-shit pal...now I'm going through.

Max releases the handbrake, puts the car in drive, and slowly starts edging his way across the trestle bridge. Kent McAllister rushes to intervene, raising his rifle in a defensive manner.

Without thinking, Max pulls back on the handbrake, reaches through the window, and wrenches the rifle out of Kent's hands. He then throws a quick rabbit punch, hitting Kent square on the nose.

Kent McAllister's knees buckle, wobble and give way as he slumps to the ground, landing on his buttocks. Holding his bleeding nose, he stares up incredulously at Max, swearing like a trooper.

KENT MCALLISTER
 Jesus fucking Christ...you busted
 my nose again!

Pete the roo-shooter and Dingo, another hooligan, sit comfortably in Kent's 4-WD with their scuffed cowboy boots perched up on the front dashboard. When they start to get out of the car-Max immediately spots them...and warns the two off.

MAX
 I wouldn't get involved pals, not
 if I were you...just get back
 inside, right now.

Motioning with the rifle, Max keeps one eye on them, and one on Kent. Looking down, he asks Kent a question.

MAX (CONT'D)
 Listen pal, I'm new in town. Tell
 me where the local sheriff is and
 I'll leave this gun of yours with
 them, so you can pick it up later.
 (Flashing a cheeky smile).

Kent shakes his head in disbelief, as he raises his arm, indicating with his thumb the direction on the left, further into town. Max releases the handbrake again, and shifts into drive, passing peaceably over the bridge.

Pete and Dingo then quickly jump out of Kent's car, rushing over to him on the ground, just as a pair of grey nomads hauling a caravan slip by them, waving as they drive over the bridge.

Kent is helped to his feet, cursing under his breath he kicks at the passing caravan's tires. He stands up to his full height, while trying unsuccessfully to stop his nose from bleeding.

He watches the burly American driving the white rental car with great interest as it disappears around the bend.

INT-POLICE STATION, A FEW MINUTES LATER.

Max's large well proportioned tank-like frame, saunters up the front steps, and waiting for the doors to automatically slide open, he enters carrying Kent's rifle, barrel tip pointed downwards.

Exiting the cop-shop at the very same time, is senior Constable Steve Cochran. He glances curiously at Max, nods in passing, and then notices the family insignia on the rifle, owned by Kent McAllister.

STEVE
 Say mate...where did you get that
 firearm?

Max turns and faces the tall police officer, wearing a bland, guiltless expression on his face.

MAX

I...just confiscated it, officer from a young cocky cowboy, waving it around, stopping vehicles from getting across the bridge into town. Why...do you know him?

STEVE

Do I know him...I've had it up to here with him, he's a McAllister. Don't worry about going in, I'll take it off your hands and take down your details...I'm senior constable Steve Cochran...hey you're a yank ain't ya?

INT-KENT MCALLISTERS, 4-WD.

Kent, Pete and Dingo are parked on a rise, 50-metres away from the police station at the picturesque picnic park. They all take turns peering through a high-powered pair of binoculars from the opposite side of the winding road that leads into town.

NOTE

WE SEE THROUGH A SINGLE BLACK MASKED CIRCLE, FRAMING THE SHOT, AS WE WATCH THE TWO FIGURES OF STEVE COCHRAN AND MAX TALKING IN FRONT OF THE COP-SHOP.

(VO) DINGO

(Heavy, Australian accent)
He's given your gun to the cop mate, now they're talking some more, looks like they're getting along like pigs in shit-(Chuckling)

(VO) KENT

Give me that...fucking thing will ya.

Kent wrenches the binoculars out of dingo's hands. The black masked circle moves haphazardly all over the place, then steadies itself, refocusing on the two figures talking and walking towards a police car.

(VO) PETE

Shit mate...you've had your rifle confiscated twice in two days.
(laughing)

(VO) KENT

Shut-up...It's not fucking funny. I wish I knew what they were bloody saying?

(VO) PETE

They got shit like that in Melbourne mate...high-end directional shit, microphones that can fucking pick up a kangaroo fart...at five hundred yards...expensive shit though, but very, very, cool shit mate.

(VO) KENT

Shut the fuck-up Pete...now where are they going?

We watch as the two small figures engaged in conversation, cross the slow moving traffic across the street, heading towards the Black River Arms pub.

We then see Grace Stone and Sherlock arrive on her red Kawasaki, pull in, parking nearby the two men, and greet them.

(VO) KENT (CONT'D)

Well fuck me...I should have guessed it, that big American and the blond bitch Stone know each other boys!

Kent lowers the binoculars for a moment, deep in thought, then hands them back to Pete and Dingo to take a look.

KENT

Dingo you and Pete go and get some grub, cigarettes and beer. I'll watch our two pigeons. Sooner or later I'm gonna get the opportunity to take a pot-shot at them, when they're alone...and then I'll make good on my promise, and shoot that bitches' dog.

PETE

But you ain't got a rifle no more mate?

Kent turns quickly in the front seat, and using the back of his hand, slaps Pete across his face.

KENT

Shut-up you moron, you guys got guns don't ya. Now go and do what I told ya to do...we're on a fucking stakeout boys.

EXT-BLACK RIVER ARMS.

Grace and Max bid Steve Cochran goodbye, while Sherlock raises his leg, taking a sneaky piss up against the dusty parked tires of a farm pick-up in the street. Grace still wears her bike helmet with the visor raised.

MAX

Not a bad guy...for a cop. Now, am I going to be able to wet my whistle and try one of these Aussie beers I've heard so much about?

GRACE

Oh no, I want you to have your wits about you. I'm going to be putting those 15 years of L.A.P.D experience of yours to the test. You'll be up to your armpits in old newspapers and finding any reference material you can dig up at the local library, on those names.

MAX

Great...that sounds like a hell of a lot of fun, lead the way Miss Stone. Looks like I'll sample one of those beers later.

Grace smiles at Max, and removes her helmet, hanging it securely on the handle bars of the parked bike. Sherlock is curiously sniffing and sampling Max's scent, sniffing all around his boots and jeans. But when Max finally notices the exposed bruises on Graces face, his expression changes to one of grave concern.

MAX (CONT'D)

Grace...what the hell-

Grace immediately lowers her head, averting his gaze for a moment, then quickly regains composure, and cuts him off before he can say anything else.

GRACE

It's nothing to be concerned about...a little trouble with the local wildlife is all...it's nothing, I don't want to talk about it okay?

Max's body language reveals the opposite of her request, but his verbal response acquiesces to her demand.

MAX

Alright Grace...I guess you'll tell me when you're good and ready, so what are you going to be doing while I'm up to my armpits in all that research?

GRACE

Sherlock and I are going to be tracking Rebecca's scent trail. We will be eventually heading out of town, closer to where her forensics and belongings were discovered. We'll keep in contact by phone.

Grace clicks her fingers, alerting Sherlock to follow as she starts walking towards the right. She then stops and turns to confront Max, who still has a concerned expression on his face.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I want you to know how much I appreciate what you and Mr Auburn are doing for me Max.

Max's expression transforms to one of a deep gratitude as he replies.

MAX

Grace...you saved my bosses' life. You did what I should have done, so we're going to do everything to help you find your sister.

Max moves a little closer to Grace, and reaching up, gently holds her chin and jaw within his large bear like hand and round sensitive fingertips. Intently studying the bruises on her face, he grimaces slightly and smiles.

MAX (CONT'D)

I'd still like to know who it was that did that to you...so I could teach them a lesson they'll never forget.

Grace flashes Max a knowing smile, aware of the mans honorable intentions towards her, she briefly touches his hand. And slowly turns away, starting to walk down the sidewalk again. Waiting for a beat till Max catches up to her, she answers his question.

GRACE

Thanks for the offer Max, but I can take care of myself. Let's just keep focused on finding Rebecca, and the person responsible for those missing girls.

MAX

Anything you say Grace, but that offer is going to remain open.

The two figures and Sherlock move confidently down the street together, gradually blending in amongst the small colorfully dressed locals and sight-seeing tourists, unaware that they are being watched.

INT-KENT MCALLISTERS, 4-WD.

Lowering the binoculars, Kent ignites the engine, indicates and does a U-turn. Positioning themselves a little further down the street to maintain some distance between Grace, Sherlock and Max, they maintain surveillance, following their progress as they head towards the town's old library.

Sherlock, hearing the familiar sound of the engine up ahead, barks animatedly a few times. Alerted, Grace notices the movement of the dirty white Toyota, and focuses on the vehicle as it moves slowly away.

Max, following Grace's line of sight, easily identifies the vehicle of Kent McAllister following his encounter earlier this morning.

MAX (CONT'D)

Do you know that fella?

GRACE

Not really...he's one of Rory McAllister's sons.

MAX

Oh...because he's the fella I popped in the nose this morning, for trying to make me sign some stupid register to enter the damn town. I took his gun away from him and handed it over to your friend the cop.

Grace suddenly stops walking, and turns to look up at Max's face, registering a look of total shock and surprise.

GRACE

You did what?

MAX

I told you...I popped the cocky son of a bitch in the face and-

Grace interrupts Max as she breaks out in a euphoric expression of gratitude mixed with utter astonishment. She gives the big man a warm bear hug.

GRACE

Max...consider that offer you made earlier to avenge my honor delivered in spades mate, thank you.

Grace continues to smile and giggle to herself, as she turns on her heels and continues walking with extra vim and vigor in her step towards the entrance of the old sandstone library building.

Max, struck dumbfounded for just a moment, puts two and two together and hurriedly catches up to Grace and Sherlock as they step underneath the jarrah and rusted tin awning outside the library.

MAX

Hey you're not kidding are you...if I'd have known what he did to you, I probably would have broken both of his arms.

GRACE

Believe me...he's not worth it. Hey
by the way...what is your last
name?

MAX

Oh it's...Statzkowski, It's German,
Polish.

GRACE

No wonder everyone just calls you
Max...c'mon lets get to work.

As the burly American, Grace and Sherlock enter the old library, they pass by a sandwich display board advertising the monthly meeting of the C.W.A.L, The Country Women's Association League.

Meanwhile, three men, parked in a dirty white Toyota further down the street, maintain a constant surveillance on the entrance to the library.

EXT-BLACK RIVER BACKPACKERS.

A large two-story sandstone building from the 1850s, stands surrounded by a small clustered group of wooden bungalows on the outskirts of town. Large scattered leafy ghost gums and jarrah trees provide cool shade for the structure, from the morning's dry heat.

A hive of activity surrounds the grounds, as backpackers from all over the world play ball games, wash and hang clothes on lines, clean-out bungalows for departing guests, and generally laze about and have fun.

INT-BACKPACKERS.

Melanie Drake the owner, moves methodically around her upstairs office and apartment where she runs and manages her business affairs. Her dog Goliath attentively watches her movements around the room, while sitting on his haunches, guarding the door.

A pile of neatly stacked folders, legal papers, and solicitor's letters of title and deeds lay prominently placed on her desk. A large brass key ring with an assortment of attached keys, sits next to the mountain of documents.

A light, repetitive wrapping of knuckles on her door alerts Melanie and Goliath to her expected visitor.

MELANIE

Please come in, Suzanne.

The door opens to reveal a bronzed woman in her early thirties, dressed in casual clothes, and wearing a work apron. Goliath watches the woman enter the room. (We recognize her as a waitress from the café).

MELANIE (CONT'D)

Please take a seat. How long have you been working for me now Sue?

SUZANNE

Well, let me see. Maybe almost three years and a bit now, I guess Mel...why?

MELANIE

Exactly three years, two months and 14-days...that's how long. And I know what you're thinking. I'm not going to fire you...I've made arrangements with my solicitor, making you sole owner of all of my business interests, assets, stocks and a rather substantial fortune.

Suzanne's face almost drops to the floor, as Melanie Drake's incredible news slowly filters through to her astonished mind.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

Well, cat got your tongue, what do you say, do you accept or not. You're the best worker here, and I've been watching you over the years...and I've picked you to inherit everything I own. There's only one caveat...I own a 200-acre block 30-kms outside of town, that you must promise to never sell. It is to remain as it is, pristine, and

MELANIE (CONT'D)

untouched...do you except the terms.

Still caught off guard, Suzanne remains frozen in the chair, her body numb with shock.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

Well, speak up...do you accept?

SUZANNE

Yes...I mean yes Mel, I accept...but what are you going to do, I mean-

MELANIE

(Interrupts her)

I am leaving today, don't worry about me. Now, if you will sign these papers I'll give you everything so you can go through it all...okay Sue.

Without any further indecision on her part, Suzanne signs the required pages, and rather humbly accepts the large stack of legal documents and folders in her outstretched arms.

As she turns and walks carefully to the door, Mel opens it for her, smiles and places her hand firmly on her shoulder.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

Just promise me one more thing Sue,
make sure that you do something
worthwhile with all of this...do
something to help other people if
you can.

SUZANNE

(Still daunted by Mel's
generous gift)
I will...you can be certain of it
Mel thank you-

MELANIE

That's all...I don't want to be
disturbed for a while, see to it.
I'll be gone before lunch, oh
Suzanne there's to be no fanfare,
keep this to yourself until I am
gone dear, thank you...and goodbye.

As soon as the door is shut, Mel positions an old antique, wooden leather chair in front of an old South African carved wooden low-boy. Goliath watches on as she opens the two folding doors, takes out her gold pocket watch releasing its spring. Mel settles into her chair.

Placing the watch on a shelf inside the low-boy, she listens to the music boxes' tin melody that has haunted her life since childhood. Her eyes glaze over as she stares at a small shrine of old newspaper clippings, black and white family photos, and souvenirs from Africa.

She focuses on one particular old newspaper clipping and news story from the 1800s. She stares at the old photo of her Boer Grandfather, Heinrich Drakensburg and his small daughter named Melanie.

NOTE

*THE NEWS ARTICLE'S BIG BOLD
HEADLINES READ, DRAKENSBURGS
MISSING, FEARED DEAD, EITHER BY
FOUL PLAY OR MISADVENTURE,
SEARCHING FOR GOLD IN AUSTRALIA'S
BLACK RIVER IN 1858.*

Melanie's eyes move over four other old photos of faces, pinned on the wood. The Henderson's, Bailey's, Stone's and the last one of Douglas McAllister wearing a traditional Scottish kilt, playing the bagpipes.

As the haunting tinny music box music plays, Mel rises and takes an old shoe box, filling it with all of the gathered memento's from a twisted and haunted past.

She takes the last photo of Douglas McAllister, folds it and puts it in her back pocket.

Closing the doors on the now empty shelves, she scoops up her car keys, closes and takes her watch, walking solemnly to the door. Stopping, she looks down at Goliath tenderly stroking his giant head.

MELANIE

And now my friend, after all these years, finally today it can all come to a bloody end.

She makes the sign of the cross against her chest, opens the door, commands Goliath to follow in Africaans, and walking out, they leave, never to return.

EXT-BLACK RIVER TRESTLE BRIDGE, TWO HOURS LATER.

Grace's motorcycle tyres rumble and bump over the old planks of the bridge, as they head to the highway, continuing to follow Rebecca's scent trail out of town.

She smiles and waves nonchalantly as she maneuvers around another four caravans and cars, stopped at another McAllister registration point on the other side of the bridge.

She throttles up the power of the bike, and zooms off further down the almost deserted highway like a red rocket. 500-metres down the road, a large Wedged-Tailed Eagle, tearing at the open entrails of the roadkill of a fox, is startled by the sound of the bike's engine and takes to the air.

The giant raptor beats its wings twice and rises majestically up into the sky, hovering high above Grace as she zooms by. The eagle, fascinated by the irregular pattern of stopping, starting and Sherlock tracking a scent trail along the shoulder of the road, continues to watch Grace from the air for the next half hour.

Also following at a safe distance behind her, is a tenacious dirty white Toyota 4-WD. Arriving at a turn off just before reaching Fat Olives Café, Sherlock barks, indicating to Grace to take a right turn.

The eagle finally loosing interest, angles a large wingtip and climbs higher, eventually becoming a speck in the warm blue sky. Grace proceeds another few kilometers past dense rows of forested trees, until the constant barking of Sherlock signals her to stop.

Pulling off to the shoulder of the graded-dirt road, she takes a moment to read a clearly marked sign attached to a fenced off perimeter. Kicking out the bike stand, she unstraps and pulls off her helmet, while Sherlock eagerly jumps off, taking the opportunity for a much-needed toilet break.

NOTE

LOT-2106 DRAKENSBURG, NO
TRESSPASSERS.

Grace stares up at the sign again, wipes her sweating brow, while she watches Sherlock excitedly sniffing all around the mysterious locked gate entrance to the bush block. Bending down, Grace takes out a flat, square piece of dried vegetable reward-treat from her pocket for Sherlock.

Telling him what a good boy he is, he proudly sits, patiently waiting for Grace to toss his reward. Catching it, he swallows it without much ado. Meanwhile Grace hangs her helmet on the handle bars, and stares curiously at a small winding track that leads off into a dark wall of dense trees.

The early afternoon stillness of the mysterious bushland surrounding them, almost threatens to swallow them up forever. Her mobile phone starts to vibrate and ring just at that moment, causing both Sherlock and Grace to flinch.

Grasping at the phone in her pocket, she quickly takes a call from Max.

NOTE (CONT'D)

WE SEE A SPLIT-VIEW, SHOWING GRACE STANDING IN FRONT OF BLOCK, AND MAX ON THE PHONE IN THE LIBRARY IN TOWN.

GRACE

Hi Max, what have you found out so far?

MAX

I've gone over everything you downloaded to my phone. The

MAX (CONT'D)

Forensic evidence in the police report of the thumbs is a trophy statement Grace, as is the ID-in the backpack...the kidnapper or killer wants people to know what's been done here.

GRACE

Max...do you think there's a chance Rebecca and those girls are still alive?

MAX

After just over three months, and three or four days since your sister went missing...no, I'm sorry Grace.

Grace lowers her head and exhales, looking defeated.

GRACE

Anything else.

MAX

It turns out all these young girls were from well established old families around Black River. The Henderson's, Bailey's and your family, Grace...the Stone's. They all can be traced back to the 1800's gold rush days, including your great, great grandfather, Johann Stoneslavski. But I haven't been able to find anything that links them all together...or something that explains why someone would have a grudge against them, or their descendants. How are you and Sherlock doing?

Grace takes a moment and reaches down, patting Sherlock on the head as she catches a glimpse of something on the periphery of her vision. Turning her head slightly, she spies a familiar dirty white Toyota, parked 500-metres down the road, on the turn off back towards the highway.

MAX (CONT'D)

Grace...you still there, anything wrong?

Grace blinks and turns away, not wanting to let Max know that she might be in some sort of danger. She continues the conversation, while casually scanning the area around her.

GRACE

No...everything's fine here Max. We followed Rebecca's trail meandering-cont.

GRACE (CONT'D)

our way all around town, stopping and asking questions at the Tattoo parlor, cafes, skate park, and just about everywhere else that Becks would have been...no luck. It all leads back out here to the highway, and a turn-off from Fat Olives Café near where Becks disappeared.

MAX

Where exactly are you?

GRACE

We're standing in front of a large fenced off bush property, near the highway. There's a sign and a name, it says...Lot-2106 Drakensburge.

MAX

Send me a pic.

Grace extends the phone and takes a snapshot, immediately sending it to Max.

MAX (CONT'D)

Drakensburge...haven't come across that name anywhere in these old micro-fish files, but I'll keep digging. What's your next move?

Grace thinking she has heard sounds coming from amongst the shadows of the dense forest across the road, hesitates for a moment, as Sherlock starts softly growling.

GRACE

Sherlock and I are going to poke around here for a while. See if he can track the scent trail onto the block.

MAX

Grace...that sign says no trespassing. I don't like it that your out there all on your own, I can be out there in about 30-minutes or so-

GRACE

(Cuts Max off)

No...we can take care of ourselves, you stay there, you never know, something you haven't seen yet is probably right under your nose...good luck.

MAX

I don't like it, but okay, be careful. Oh...what were all those creepy drawings you downloaded on my phone?

GRACE

Oh those...don't worry about them. They're a message from my Mother. Check back in an hour, chow.

MAX

Your mother...I thought she was dead!

NOTE

WE MOVE BACK INTO A SINGLE FRAMED VIEW OF GRACE AGAIN.

As soon as Grace ends the call, she crouches down next to Sherlock who is growling at something slowly moving in the trees across the road. Looking away for just a moment, Grace checks to see if the dirty white Toyota is still parked down the road.

And that's when three bullets are fired in quick succession from a high-powered rifle. The sharp cracks of gunshot, thunder and echo in the sky, bouncing around the expansive forest.

The phone still held in Graces hand shatters, the bullet continuing its trajectory, piercing through Sherlock's flesh, muscle and fur. The second grazes Graces head, causing her to collapse onto the ground.

In a split second of muscle reflex, brought on by the need to protect her dog, Grace struggles to stand on her feet, blood streaming from her head wound. And then the third bullet strikes her motorbike's gas tank, exploding in a huge fireball.

INT-FOREST, ACROSS THE ROAD.

Kent McAllister watches the huge explosion through Pete's rifle scope. The red flare and thick black smoke rising into the air are reflected back in the lenses curved glass. The three men, crouching in the scrub and trees cover their eyes from the blast

PETE

(Shouting loudly)

Jesus Christ.....you've fucking killed her. You said you were just gonna shoot the bloody dog!

Kent McAllister's eyes stare straight ahead through the trees, watching the fireball burn with a devilish glint in his eye. Magnetized, he is unable to lower the gun or unglue his eyes from what he has just done.

DINGO

No...you shouldn't have done that mate. You're going to start a fucking forest fire you idiot. Fuck the bitch and her dog, we got to put that out...right fucking now!

Grabbing the keys from Kent's belt, Dingo scrambles quickly out from the trees and scrub, running as fast as his gangly wiry legs can carry him, heading for the parked 4-WD down the street.

Within moments, the sound of its roaring engine and screeching wheels, burning rubber, stops near the small, smoldering inferno. Hauling out a stowed fire extinguisher always kept in the back for emergencies, Dingo breaks the seal and starts extinguishing the small blaze.

Pete and Kent McAllister slowly emerge from out of the trees, still in shock, unable to think, feel or react. They stand helplessly watching as Dingo manages to quell the small fire, and eventually extinguish it.

Moving closer to inspect the two bodies of Grace and Sherlock laying on the ground, Kent McAllister notices movement. He automatically cocks the rifle, raises it, aims and fires. The movement stops.

DINGO (CONT'D)

You fucking idiot.....we've got to
get out of here, right now.

Pete moving quickly forward, pries the gun loose from Kent's trigger-happy fingers. Gripping his friend firmly by the arm he manhandled him to the waiting car, where Dingo sits behind the drivers seat, anxiously waiting to go.

The 4-WD turns on a dime, its thick tires screeching, sending smoke up into the air. In a few short moments the car becomes a small moving white dot on the dirt graded road, turning back onto the highway, heading back towards town.

Riding on a high thermal, the Wedge Tailed Eagle angles its wing, changing its flight path to investigate the small black smoldering trail of wispy smoke drifting up into the sky.

INT-BLACK RIVER LIBRARY.

Max Statzkowski sits deep in thought at the back corner of the rustic-barn style library. Leaning back in the wobbly, torn office chair, he absentmindedly chews on a pencil while scanned quickly through old news documents on the antiquated micro-fish machine.

Max then feels something repeatedly prodding into his back. Disturbed by the unexpected interruption, he turns around to confront a smiling, sweet old lady-holding a wooden cane.

OLD LADY

(Well educated Australian
accent)

Excuse me young man....but my
colleges and I couldn't help
overhearing part of your
conversation earlier on the phone.
When you mentioned the
Drakensburg's name...are you by any
chance searching for information
about them, and those other old
family names you stated?

MAX

(Curiosity piqued)

Well...I guess so, do you know
anything about them at all,
anything that could help me would
be much appreciated mam.

OLD LADY

Oh yes we do know a little, but I'm
afraid it's not going to be of much
use to you, young man.

MAX

Oh...and why is that mam?

OLD LADY

Well, you see there was a rather unfortunate fire in, let me see now, 1923, and all of the really old documents relating to those names, especially the Drakensburg's were lost you see.

MAX

Is there anyone else that you could recommend me talking to about the information lost in that fire, who could be of some help?

MADGE

Everything about those early days in the town, and the Drakensburg story can be told to you by Rory McAllister...yes he's a third generation, founding member of the town. He can help you young man, I'm positive of it, absolutely positive.

EXT-BLACK RIVER ARMS PUB, LATER THAT AFTERNOON.

Max Statzkowski moves quickly through the mingling tourists and locals along the sidewalk. Just as he is passing the local pub, an elderly Aboriginal man's voice catches his attention.

BILLY BLUE

(Old friend of Grace's)

Hey you big fella, you're that yank ain't ya...friend of Grace Stone?

Max stops in his tracks, turns and sees an old Indigenous Aboriginal man dressed in work overalls, seated at a bench outside the pub drinking a beer. Max saunters over, and greets the man.

MAX

Yeah, that's right, name's Max.

BILLY BLUE

Billy's my name mate, Billy Blue, where you off to in such a hurry young fella, got time for a beer mate?

MAX

I'd love to, but I'm off to see Rory McAllister...do you know him?

BILLY BLUE

Everybody in town bloody knows Rory, on account of his playing his bagpipes...now that's odd.

MAX

What's odd sir?

BILLY BLUE

Well...he didn't play them today. He always blows those damn pipes once every day, on the dot of one o'clock in the afternoon. But not today, that's what's odd...young fella.

EXT-RORY MCALLISTER'S HOUSE, A LITTLE LATER.

Max pushes open the double front doors of the McAllister home, left ajar. He pokes his head curiously inside.

INT-MCALLISTER'S FRONT RECPTION ROOM.

Scanning the airy bright space, Max studies the stone walls, noting the impressive wall tapestries, suits of shiny armor, dark-rich oil paintings, and the plethora of reproduced antique swords and medieval weapons hung on display.

Stepping cautiously over the threshold, Max moves forward and stands at the bottom of the ornate staircase that winds its way upstairs. Taking his time, he decides it is appropriate to call out, announcing that he has entered the private home.

MAX

Hello...is anyone home!

Waiting for a respectable amount of time for anyone in the home to respond, Max proceeds up the stairs, calling out as he ascends the wide steps one by one. At one point Max thinks he has perceived sounds of movement coming from somewhere upstairs...but after a while of more silence, dismisses it.

MAX (CONT'D)

Mr McAllister...hello!

In a relatively short time, Max has reached the eerily quiet top floor landing, and makes his way into what he assumes to be McAllister's man cave. Allowing his eyes to focus in the dimly lit shadows of the room where a set of thick large curtains have been drawn, he stops.

Max perceives what seems to be a large shape of a man slumped backwards in a chair, behind a large antique carved desk. Moving tentatively closer, he steps into a dark wet puddle at the foot of the chair.

Feeling his sixth-sense tingling, the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end as he hears the deep growling of an animal coming from somewhere out of the shadows. Before he can contemplate moving, the sharp cracking blow from a rifle butt strikes him on the head.

Dropping like a sack of potatoes, Max slumps heavily to the ground, a sea of stars floating around his head.

Melanie Drake steps forward, bends down and closely scrutinized the face of the unknown American. Goliath stands obediently behind his master, his muzzle and jaws smeared with the fresh blood of Rory McAllister.

Somewhere floating on the fringes of Max Statzkowski's deep unconscious mind, he perceives the footsteps of hunter's boots on the floor, soft large pads and claws of a large surefooted animal...and then the distant purring of a Landrover engine rapidly diminishing into the distance.

And then as Max Statzkowski's world goes blank, a last faint glimmer of a thought concerning Grace Stone tries to re-surface in his mind, but sinks into the darkness with him.

EXT-BLACK RIVER TRESTLE BRIDGE.

Melanie Drake's light blue Land Rover speeds across the now empty trestle bridge, travelling over 100-km's. Her mind completely numb, she noticed Kent McAllister's 4-WD pass her, travelling back into town breaking the speed limit.

The blue Land Rover disappears quickly into the distance, while other trucks, caravans and passenger vehicles sporadically share the same long highway, leading out of town.

It isn't too long before Melanie Drake's car reaches the familiar turn off to her bush-block property where she discovers the scene of an accident.

Climbing slowly out of her parked car, Melanie Drake and Goliath inspect the scorched earth and the blackened, burnt out shell of a motorbike. Goliath moves closer to sniff at the bodies of Grace Stone and Sherlock lying sprawled on the ground.

Then there are subtle sounds of life and movement as the blood streaked head of Grace Stone opens her eyes and looks up at Melanie Drake.

GRACE
(Trembling, feeble voice)
Please...help us.

EXT-NIGHT-DRAKENSBURG SHACK.

An amorphous single trail of black smoke rises from the chimney, slowly dissipating against the backdrop of a hunters full moon. In a medium-sized clearing set amongst tall silhouetted trees, deep in the forest, Goliath stands guard outside a small rustic shack.

The dark shape of a woman holding a rifle moves behind the yellow glow of a large sash-window. The sound of a voice talking, echoes and drifts out into the stillness of the night. A small diesel generator's motor provides power to the site.

INT-SHACK.

The interior of the two roomed, gable roofed shack is atypical of any shack made with second hand salvaged materials. A lit, old cast iron pot-belly stove sits at one end, and a small kitchen at the other. A ceiling lamp provides an ambient soft yellow light within.

Melanie Drake holds her rifle comfortably in her lap, seated on a chair in front of a hand made small wooden table. Grace Stone lies tied up on the wooden floor, leaning up against the door, listening to Melanie Drake's heavily accented South African voice continuing to tell her a story.

MELANIE

My grandfather Heinrich Drakensburg and his small daughter Melanie were murdered on this property, Miss Stone in 1852. They were hunted down like wild animals, and killed by dogs...and what for, just a few nuggets of gold. He was a humble adventurous Boer farmer, who after his wife's death, took his only daughter half-way around the world...to Australia to search for gold.

Melanie stops talking then, gazing off for a long moment into other deeper parts of her twisted past. The atmosphere in the shack, although warm from the heat of the pot-belly, seems to exude a cold chill in the air left over from Melanie's words.

Melanie then resumes telling her story. Her dark vengeful eyes refocus on her surroundings.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

The names of their killers were drummed into my mind from an early age by my father, again and again, because he knew the story so well. Douglas McAllister, Stephen Henderson, Robert Bailey and your ancestor Miss Stone, Johann Stoneslavski.

Grace repeatedly shifts the position of her body on the uncomfortable wooden floor, to mask her attempts at trying to loosen the leather bonds securing her wrists and ankles. She seizes upon the opportunity in between one of Melanie's long-drawn-out silences to interject with a question of her own.

GRACE

Where is Rebecca, and my dog Sherlock?

Melanie's eyes flare wide, as she leans in closer to Grace and menacingly points the end of the rifle barrel at her head while she speaks.

MELANIE

You're stalling for time Grace, because you think I brought you here to kill you too...well you're wrong. If I had wanted you dead, I would have killed you right after meeting you at the café. Your sister Becks has already paid the price for your families past sins with her blood. You're here simply because of fate Grace. You're a gift offered up to me, just at the right time. You see I've done what I needed to do. All the descendant girls from those families are dead, and because the McAllister's only had sons, I killed Rory McAllister the head of the rotten clan, responsible for instigating the foul murders in the first place. No Grace, you're a hunter just like me.....and I'm going to give you a sporting chance to survive the night...after I blow my own brains out.

Grace stops squirming and struggling with her bonds, momentarily stunned by Melanie's last comment.

GRACE

Where is Sherlock, and my sister?

Melanie shifts her rifle in her hands, expertly sliding back the bolt, she exposes the loading breach clearly showing Grace that only two bullets are left in the chamber.

MELANIE

After I blow my own brains out Grace Stone, there will be one bullet left. I want you to use it to kill my dog Goliath. There is an old mining tunnel that runs underneath this shack in a Westerly direction almost all the way out to the highway. Kill my dog and survive Grace, that's your only chance to get out of this alive, because when Goliath realizes that I am dead, he will go berserk and hunt you down, and kill you. Remember the story I told you about the guardian of Rome's war dog Goliath.....he is relentless and will not stop until he avenges my death.

Grace stares dumbfounded into Melanie Drakes dark bottomless eyes, desperately trying to make sense out of her insane offer to stay alive.

GRACE

Why can't you just shoot your own dog, and let me go?

MELANIE

I could never do that Grace, it's not sporting. At least this way you both have a fifty, fifty chance at survival, and you spare me the cruel indignity of having to poison him. So, that is your only choice Grace Stone if you want to live, because Goliath will chew through wood, or break down that door to get to my body, and then he will kill you.

Melanie closes the bolt, and places the rifle butt on the ground, the barrel pointing to the roof. Reaching into her pocket, she pulls out the gold pocket watch of her Grandfather's, opens it, and places it on the table.

NOTE

THE FAMILIAR TINNY TUNE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NURSERY RHYME STARTS PLAYING SOFTLY IN THE BACKGROUND.

Reaching into her boot, Melanie slips out a familiar locking knife taken from Rebecca. She tosses it to the floor at Grace's feet. She then positions the gun barrel towards her mouth, and rests one finger on the hair-trigger of the rifle.

Just before she applies pressure and is about to discharge the weapon, Grace hurriedly repeats her question again.

GRACE

Wait! Where is Sherlock, and my sister?

Melanie's dark eyes flick downwards at Grace for one last moment as her finger rests upon the trigger.

MELANIE

I'm sorry Grace...Sherlock was already dead, there wasn't anything I could do for him. Your sister lies somewhere down a mine shaft on this property, keeping the bones of my ancestors company with the two other dead young girls. Oh and Grace...when you get out of the tunnel and start running for the highway be careful where you step, there are old mine shafts littered all over this property. Goodbye, Grace...and good luck.

Opening her mouth wide Melanie places the end of the gun-barrel into her oral cavity and pulls the trigger. Grace shuts her eyes as blood-splatter hits her face.

Lowering her chin, she rests it on her chest as she begins shedding tears for both Sherlock and her missing sister.

EXT-SHACK.

Goliath's muscles flinch, and the short hairs running up over his spine tingle, standing on end, as the single rifle shot echoes throughout the forest. Turning his massive head around to look in the direction of the shack's door, he rises up onto all fours and moves quickly towards the small building.

Immediately sensing the departure of his master, Goliath barks and whimpers repeatedly outside the front wooden door. His actions become more savage and intense as his primal aggression boils over the edge.

Using his massive sharp claws and body mass, he launches a savage attack, scratching and ramming against the wooden slats of the old door. His claws penetrate deeply into the old softwood, sending wood-splinters and shavings flying into the air.

Retreating a few meters back from the entrance, Goliath tenses and flexes his muscles, and using his bulk as a battering ram, slams all of his 200-pound weight repetitively against the door, dislodging rusted screws and rattling the old hinges loose.

INT-SHACK.

Grace Stone's body leaning up against the door, vibrates and shakes with the impact of each blow. Her mind struggles to make sense of her dire situation, as the slow tinny music from the watch plays on in the background, and Goliath violently tried to gain access inside the shack.

Remembering Rebecca's knife thrown at her feet, she falls forward onto the floor, and desperately clutches at the folder, her fingers slipping on the ivory handle because of Melanie's splattered blood.

Grace manages to open the folding-knife, and begins methodically cutting through the tough rawhide bonds securing her wrists and ankles as Goliath continues his relentless, vicious assault against the door.

The constant scratching, pounding and impact against the frame of the old shack rattles the objects on shelves and sends particles of dust, grit and old debris falling from the roof-beams.

Finally the sharp blade cuts through the last leather bond, and Grace Stone is free. Scrambling to her feet, she waits for a few beats as she stretches out her tight muscles, and moves some blood back into her limbs.

Goliath maintains his relentless and savage attack against the front door, its rusted screws and hinges now freely hanging loose from the door frame. With each mighty blow, the old wooden door threatens to dislodge itself.

Grace haphazardly crawls around on the floor searching for the trap-door that Melanie has said will lead to the mine shaft tunnel. Unable to locate it, and about to lose hope, she spies a metal handle underneath the table.

Having to shift Melanie Drake's body, and push the table up against the back wall, she clears a space, gripping the handles and swings open the door in the floor.

Leaning forward, her nostrils are permeated with the raw earth smells from the tunnel below. A rough set of hand hewn wooden stairs leads into a dark chasm below. Thinking quickly, Grace rummages into one of her many pockets in her rescue vest, and removes an elastic headlamp.

Testing the batteries are working, she straps it on, and floods the bottom of the tunnel with a pool of white light. Then realizing that the constant pounding against the door has stopped, Grace on all fours slowly turns to look at the battered door, now hanging off very unstable hinges.

There staring right back at her is Goliath's large menacing eye, looking through the angled open space between the door and the wooden frame. A morbid cold silence settles between them as the haunting sounds of the music box in the watch play on.

Thinking fast, Grace slowly reaches for the rifle left laying on the floor. As she raises the weapon and takes aim at the dog's eye through the open space, Goliath doesn't move.

Watching Grace intently, her finger on the trigger begin trembling. She stares into the innocent beast's large orbed eye, and realizes that she can't pull the trigger. Lowering the gun, she prepares to descend into the tunnel, but then something stops her.

For no reason at all, she reaches up and takes the antique watch from the table, closes it and puts it in her pocket. Goliath still watching her through the angled space, begins growling in a deeply disturbing manner.

Grace quickly descends into the tunnel, closing the hatch behind her. Sliding the gun strap over her head, she sling the rifle comfortably on her back. Stumbling a little at first, as she begins moving along the tunnel in a crouched position.

Checking the wound on her head, she realizes that it has started bleeding again. Quelling all thoughts of pain, discomfort, anxieties and fears, Grace begins slowly heading West, down the old tunnel. The light from her headlamp bounces around the old shored up timbers, keeping tons of dirt from collapsing.

INT-SHACK.

The sound of heavy paws can be heard running on the ground outside the cabin, and then the front door bursts free from its hinges.

Goliath stands in the open doorway triumphant, his chest heaving hard. Moving slowly forward, his keen nose seeks out his master's dead body.

Laying down on the floor next to Melanie Drake's bloodied body, Goliath raises his massive head and releases a blood-curdling, long howl of agony. After sufficient time had passed by, the dog reluctantly rises up, and starts tracking the scent trail left behind by Grace Stone.

Goliath's nose works its way patiently all around the cabin, focusing his attention on the edges of the closed hatchway. Finally turning he confidently moves outside, easily following Grace's scent trail as it moves steadily underground, heading West.

INT-TUNNEL.

Grace moves through the tunnel as quickly as possible. She thinks she hears the long-drawn-out howling of a large distressed animal, echoing from somewhere above ground. She wipes blood away from her eye, grits her teeth, and continues inching her way forward through the darkness.

INT-NIGHT, RORY MCALLISTER'S STUDY.

A vague awareness of a room bathed in cool shadows slowly rises to the surface of Max Statzkowski's mind. As he begins to move his limbs and muscles, a sharp, throbbing reminder of the hard blow received to the back of his head electrifies his nerves.

Struggling to sit up, he feels a cold, thick liquid on his hands, and wet-patches soaked into parts of his clothes. Trying to wipe it off in the dark, he smears his face with viscous cold blood. Gripping the solid oak desk, Max finds his feet.

Staggering over to the drawn curtains where the soft glow of a full moon's light tries to penetrate the thick fabric, he pulled them back. There, revealed in the soft light sits the body of Rory McAllister, his throat torn out.

Max blinks, and reaches over to turn on a bankers lamp, positioned on the desk. Leaning in closer he inspects the wounds left in the dead man's neck. After 15-years of visiting homicide crime scenes, he still feels slightly uncomfortable and queasy looking at the gruesome sight.

Grabbing the bankers lamp off the desk, he scans the room, using its yellow spotlight like a square torch beam. Max quickly works the crime scene, discerning his own footprints left in the blood from the other pairs of boots and a clearly visible set of large animal paw-prints.

During his preliminary search, he spies a large alcove in the corner of the room where a mini-bar is set up. Walking over to it, he scans the expensive bottles of scotch, selects one, unscrews the top, tips the bottle and takes a jolt.

Max takes a moment to think, then takes out his phone, and immediately tries dialing Grace's mobile. Unable to get through, he frantically dials the local police instead, and reaches officer Steve Cochran.

MAX

McAllister's dead, and I can't get through to Grace. I'm worried about her. She's out in the middle of the bush all alone with a killer on the loose.

STEVE

You mean Kent McAllister dead?

MAX

No...his father. I'm at the house now...he's had his throat ripped out by an animal.

STEVE COCHRAN

You're at Rory McAllister's now, I'll be there in five, try not to touch anything.

Max ends the call, and then noticing that his hands and parts of his clothes are covered in blood, smiles coyly and takes another jolt of scotch.

INT-TUNNEL.

Grace's calf and thigh muscles ache and burn, as she continues in a crouched walk, working her way gradually down the long dark tunnel. Following the bouncing pool of light from her head-lamp, it pierces the blackness ahead of her.

Now and then the rifle and its barrel slung over her back, would scrape against the roof of the tunnel, causing large pockets of earth to break free. The dank atmosphere in the space makes her breathing more labored, and her sweat mixes freely with the blood from her head wound.

After an undefinable amount of time spent underground, Grace finally comes to the end of the tunnel. She encounters a vertical shaft with an old rotten wooden ladder that appears to lead up to the surface of the forest floor again.

She moves forward as quietly as possible, and stands up to her full height in the vertical shaft. Taking the opportunity to stretch out her sore leg muscles, she forgets to turn off her head-lamp, and it sends a moving beam of soft light up the shaft, lighting the tops of trees.

EXT-FOREST.

Goliath stops moving through the scrub, as he watched the curious beam of light play amongst the branches of trees.

Crouching low to the ground, he watches the light for a few seconds before it goes out. He growls softly and waits about 25-feet away, concealed behind foliage and scrub.

INT-SHAFT.

Grace Stone curses herself for being so amateurish, and quickly turns off her head-lamp. She waits, her hands gripping the old ladder, and one foot ready to climb on the bottom rung.

Her ears perceive the myriad of natural sounds of the forest floor above, the slow creaking branches, a hoot of a hunting barn owl, chirp-ping of crickets, cicada's rubbing their wings together, and a gentle cool night breeze, rustling through the leaves.

She takes that precious quiet moment in the dark to calm her nerves allowing her heart rate to decrease, while picturing the charcoal images of the beast, drawn by her mother. They flash by in her mind like nightmares constantly scratching and pounding at your dream door at night.

NOTE

*IMAGES OF THE CHARCOAL DRAWINGS,
AND REBECCA AND MARGARET, APPEAR
LIKE ANIMATED SLOW MOTION FRAMES.*

And then the visions she had of Rebecca and her mother over the last four days, replace the drawings, and she finds her heart rate and pulse intensifying. Grace takes a long steady deep breath, as she remembered the words said to her by her mother's spirit.

(VO) MARGARET STONE
WHEN THE BEAST ATTACKS, RUN TO THE
HIGHWAY...CALL OUT TO HER AND SHE
WILL HELP YOU, I LOVE YOU GRACE.

Gritting her teeth, she takes another deep breath, and begin quickly ascending the rungs of the unstable old ladder.

EXT-FOREST.

As Grace Stone emerges from out of the shaft, her weight causes the frame and rungs of the old rotten ladder to disintegrate and crumble. Throwing out her arms, her fingers claw hard into soft mulch, earth, twigs, and tough scrub-grass, struggling not to fall backwards into the deep pit.

The impact of her fall and desperate attempts to clamber out of the shaft alert the pricked ears of Goliath, who instantly launches himself forward to attack. Covering the 25-feet rapidly, the vicious snarling dog converged quickly on the struggling form of Grace Stone, floundering on the ground.

Hearing the unmistakable sounds of the dog's impending attack coming from behind, Grace frantically claws her way out of the hole, and rolls sideways.

Finding her feet, she tucks into a crouch, un-slings the rifle, switches on her head-lamp, and taking random aim, fires.

Almost at point-blank range, Goliath's flared teeth and 220-pound body slams into Grace, just as she fires, her only bullet careening off harmlessly into the trees. The wind knocked out of her, she quickly find her footing and confronted the snarling dog, holds the gun like a club.

Goliath stares cautiously at the club-like weapon, and holds his ground. Grace breathing heavily, almost in danger of hyperventilating, nervously steps backwards, slowly edging away, gripping the rifle with two shaking hands.

Then Grace twists her hips, swings back the gun, tenses her muscles and throws the gun at Goliath, and starts to run for her life. Goliath springs sideways out of the path of the gun, giving Grace the time to escape.

Grace's trail running shoes pound hard into the earth, traversing over undulating, unfamiliar ground, as she follows the bouncing trail of light provided by her head-lamp. The sounds of Goliath's growls and snarls chase close behind her.

Her running becomes methodical, automatically slipping into her strict training regime for long distance Canicross events, in which she and Sherlock had competed many times before. The thought of her dead dog, gives Grace the extra amount of grit and stamina she needs to outrun the relentless Mastiff.

Looking down she watches her foot splash into a puddle, disturbing the reflected image of the full moon, as she continues to run in a Westerly direction for the highway. And then the tip of her running shoe snags an exposed tree root, and she falls.

EXT-NIGHT, TOWN OF BLACK RIVER.

The light of the full moon filteres down through the tall leafy trees that surrounded the façade of Rory McAllister's imposing stone Scottish castle. A familiar highway police car sits parked in the circular driveway of the home. The glow of its interior light reveals the figures of two men talking inside.

STEVE COCHRAN

Read out that Lot number again for me.

MAX

2106.

Steve Cochran quickly punches the information into his police GPS-system, ignites the engine, and rests his hands on the handbrake and steering wheel, as he looks over at the concerned face of Max Statzkowski.

STEVE COCHRAN

Don't worry, the system will lead us straight there...we'll be there in twenty minutes.

MAX

What about McAllister's body?

Steve Cochran releases the handbrake, turns on the flashing lights, and presses the accelerator, making the big v-8 engine purr and vibrate.

STEVE COCHRAN

I don't think he's going anywhere do you. I'll report it on the way, belt-up mate, I'm not sparing the horsepower.

Max buckles up his safety belt, automatically gripping the side of the door frame, as Steve Cochran leaves smoke and the smell of burnt rubber in the front of the McAllister driveway. Soon the police car is breaking the speed limit, heading across the trestle bridge on the Black River highway heading out of town.

EXT-BLACK RIVER FOREST.

Grace lies sprawled on the ground, the sounds of the heavy Mastiff crashing through the bush somewhere close behind her. Shifting her weight, she rolls into a runners start position, glanced briefly behind her, and shoots off into the trees.

Running blindly ahead, she uses her padded arms to protect her face from sharp low hanging branches. Ascending to the top of an embankment, she grits her teeth and spins around. Assuming a warriors' stance, her right hand automatically rips free the stun-gun trail staff from its Velcro straps on her thigh.

She listens and waits in the darkness for the sounds of the savage dog's approach, as the beam from her head-lamp scan the bush. Depressing the stun-gun's trigger, the bright glow of blue arcing electricity sparks from its tip.

Breaking through a section of bush not 15-feet away, the animal's large paws and sharp claws close the distance to Grace within seconds. Mounting the small embankment, Goliath approaches Grace, saliva dripping from his teeth.

Immediately Goliath snarls and attacks, his jaws wide open, large curved canine teeth exposed. Grace thrust forward with the stun-gun, sending 195,000 volts through his blue electrified teeth.

Electric blue-arcs of power momentarily stun the massive beast's muscles and nervous system, as Grace repeatedly stuns Goliath. Forced to edge her way slowly backward down the other side of the slope, she turned briefly away to check her footing.

That's when Goliath seizes his chance, clamping his powerful jaws and teeth around the stun-gun, he easily jerks it free from Grace's hand. Eyes wide open in shock, Grace springs backwards, continuing to run.

Bursting through the trees and low-lying scrub, she enters a small clearing in the forest. Running blindly forward, her next step falls through a soft layer of overgrown twigs, leaf-matter, roots and earth.

Falling into an old mine shaft entrance, she drops twenty feet, landing heavily on her back. The wind knocked out of her lungs, she lies sprawled on top of a mound of jagged pointy objects.

As she takes her bearings, the light from her head lamp exposes the dark space around her. Stunned, she takes a moment to recover at the bottom of a junction point of interconnecting tunnel systems that run all points of the compass.

Sampling the air as she inhales deeply, she smells the unmistakable odor of death, mixed with the natural essence of the earth. Her fingers touch and explore the pointy objects digging into her back, discovering them to be human bones of skeletons.

Shifting her weight, she manages to sit up, and as she slowly moves her head lamp in an arc around the space, she sees the bodies of three young girls. They are positioned purposefully, like puppets on a stage.

All have had their throats torn out, and are in various stages of decay. Grace's attention is drawn to the details of one girl in particular, an innocent blonde girl with a dragonfly tattoo, her little sister Rebecca.

Immediately her fingers search and find the corpses right hand in the dark. Raising it up into the light beam, she sees the missing thumb, and then turning it over palm up, her scar. Gripping her hand, she lowers her head and weeps.

After only a brief moment of tearful remembrance of her sister, she hears movement from above, and the menacing growling of Goliath. Lifting her scratched, bloodied and tear soaked face upwards, she sees the silhouette of the head of the dog against a hunters full moon, looking down through the entrance to the shaft.

Goliath then releases a blood-curdling howl. He stares down at the helpless Grace Stone, in the bottom of the pit where Melanie Drake's murdered skeletons of her Grandfather and daughter lay entombed.

EXT-BLACK RIVER HIGHWAY.

The blue flashing police lights of Steve Cockran's car, pulsate and turn in the night, as it speeds along the highway, fast becoming a small white dot in the moons light.

INT-MINE SHAFT.

Grace has managed to find her feet, and stands unceremoniously amongst the skeletons and bodies of the three young girls. Goliath remains like a sentinel, watching her every move from the entrance above.

Grace takes the time to wipe the tears from her face, and stands solemnly staring down at her dead sister. A thought then occurs to her, and reaching into her pocket, she removes the same ivory handled locking knife their mother had used to perform their blood oath nine years ago.

Grace opens the knife, taking another moment to look down at her sister, and then gripping the blade in her right palm, pulls the blade of the knife through, re-opening her old scar.

Blood freely runs down her wrist, dulling the shiny blade. Leaving the blade open, she places it on Rebecca's lap, reaches down and again holds her right hand firmly in her sister's. The words of their oath come naturally from her lips, falling like remembered prose.

GRACE

All for one, one for all, in life
and beyond death.

Grace quietly makes the sign of the cross, turns away and studies all four tunnels leading away from the main burial junction. After making her best decision by dead-reckoning, she choose the tunnel she thinks will lead her West, continuing her run to the highway.

Just before Grace enters the tunnel shaft to leave, she stops, and reaching into her pocket, takes out the old gold pocket-watch. She slowly turns it over, looking at it glowing in the light of her head-lamp.

Releasing the spring mechanism, the watch cover springs open and she carefully places it amongst the old decaying bones of Heinrich Drakensburg, near his daughter. Quickly turning away, she moves down the West mine shaft tunnel and disappears from view.

NOTE

*The haunting, tinny sound of the
South African nursery rhyme is
playing from the watches' music
box. It can be heard echoing down
the tunnels, left forever playing
for the dead, as Grace leaves.*

Goliath watches quietly from above, in which direction Grace Stone's head-light moves, and then he too resumes moving in a Westerly direction. The dog again follows the familiar scent trail left behind of Grace Stone.

EXT-BLACK RIVER HIGHWAY.

Steve Cockran's speeding police car overtakes a slow moving caravan, and its flashing blue lights diminish rapidly into the distance.

INT-POLICE CAR.

Max Statzkowski's eyes are glued to the dashboard's GPS-screen, as a female digital voice informs them of the remaining distance left to travel.

(VO) DIGITAL VOICE
In one kilometer, please turn right.

MAX
Got torches and a spare gun?

STEVE COCHRAN
Yep, in the boot. There's a 12-gauge pump, you can have.

MAX
(Speaking to himself)
We're not far away now Grace, just hang on.

STEVE COCHRAN
We'll be there in under five minutes Max, I'm sure she'll be fine, don't worry.

MAX
I promised Mr Auburn that I'd look after her, I don't make those promises lightly. Anyway I've gotten kind of fond of her, you know what I mean?

As Steve grips the wheel firmly, hands held at 10-o'clock and 2-o'clock on the steering wheel while maneuvering the speeding vehicle along the road, he glances at Max and smiles.

STEVE COCHRAN
Yeah...I know what you mean, Grace has a way of getting under your skin, whether you like it or not.

(VO) DIGITAL VOICE
Turn right in 800-metres, please.

The police car rockets down the highway, a streak of white and flashing blue lights.

INT-TUNNEL.

Grace Stone's head lamp reveals the end of the mine-shaft tunnel, and a thick hanging old rope ladder.

Shuffling forward, she quickly grabs the rungs of the ladder, and tugs on it multiple times, testing its strength.

Satisfied, she starts climbing, remaining as quiet as possible as she ascended each rung carefully. Upon reaching the top, she prods and claws with her hands at the soft layer of earth that conceals the exit.

EXT-FOREST.

Two hands push back the matted dirt, twigs, leaves, roots and earth to reveal a small clearing only 50-metres from the highway. The echoing passage of a rumbling, slow moving big haulage truck alerts Grace to its proximity.

She waits, dangling on the rope ladder listening to the sounds of the forest floor above her, for any signs of movement, until she stirs. Raising her head above ground, she slowly pans her head lamp around the dark area of bush.

The small pool of moving light reveals old tree roots, low scrub, bases of tall Eucalypts, rocks and the monstrous head of Goliath watching her, silently concealed in the low scrub.

Catching her breath, Grace scrambles out of the hole, and begins her run towards the nearby highway, just as Goliath bursts free from the scrub, giving chase. Savagely snarling and growling, his huge paws and claws pound at the ground, kicking up, dirt and leaf matter. As Grace makes her final run for the highway, the words of the spirit of her mother repeat like a stuck record in her head.

(VO) MARGARET STONE

When the beast attacks, run for the highway...and call out for your sister.

Crashing through and over any obstacles in her path, Grace doesn't look back, doesn't hesitate, as she runs for the line of trees ahead. The savage large Mastiff constantly snaps at the heels of her trail running shoes.

Zigzagging in between tree trunks, leaping over footfalls, Grace set her sights for the road, and does not falter. The large dog's 200-pound mass shifts its weight, as it imitated Grace's path through the bush.

Bursting through the thick forested wall of scrub and trees, Grace haphazardly runs madly forward into the middle of the long bitumen highway, exposed in the high-beam headlights of the oncoming police car, with Max Statzkowski and senior officer Steve Cochran at the wheel.

As the sound of squealing brakes echo out into the night, and the smell of thick burnt rubber drift up into the night air, Goliath also bursts free from the tree-line.

Stumbling forward onto the road, Grace waves her hands frantically around in the air trying to ward-off the oncoming flashing blue light's of the police car.

Veering out of the way to avoid her, it drifts by in slow-motion in a cloud of burnt rubber and smoke.

Grace loses her footing and falls backwards onto the bitumen, as the Mastiff races towards her, teeth bared, saliva dripping from its jaws. She closes her eyes, throws her arms up to protect herself, and cries out Rebecca's name, screaming it out to the night.

GRACE

Rebecca.a.a.a.a.ahhhh.

The third dimension shimmers and crackles all around Grace, as she lies helpless on the road. Time expands into slow-motion, and a window into the fourth dimension opens. A chill in the night air drops instantly to below zero enveloping Grace within a protective bubble. Grace calmly closes her eyes as she sees the spectral image of the ghost of Rebecca appear, standing before her.

The police car continues sliding in a haze of smoke, gradually coming to a stop a hundred feet or so further down the road. Rumbling down the highway on the other side of the road comes an eighteen wheeler road-train, honking its air horn, its breaks already locked and depressed.

The big-rig truck swerves out of the way, eventually coming to a jarring stop only feet from the stationary police car. Its bright halogen-headlights, expose a stunned Max and Steve Cochran as they fling open their doors.

Outside the shimmering bubble protecting Grace, the Mastiff's large loping body still runs towards her, his jaws agape, a vicious bloody intent burning within his eyes.

The translucent, glowing form of the ghost kneels down close to Grace, and touching her forehead speaks.

REBECCA'S GHOST

Fear not, I am here to protect you sister. When you awake, Goliath will be yours to command, and shall replace your beloved Sherlock. He will be your protector in the physical world now, and our mother, and I will be your guides in the other. All for one...one for all...in life, and beyond death sister. For this is the way of our Blood Oath.

Rebecca then turns, and standing up confronts the rampaging Mastiff, imitating Melanie Drake's South African voice-command perfectly.

REBECCA'S GHOST (CONT'D)

Goliath...stand down!(VAL-TERUG)

Immediately the dog obeys the key command, spoken in the familiar tongue of his dead master.

Goliath halts his menacing attack, and sitting down on his haunches, stares up obediently at the astral figure of Rebecca as it dissipates and gradually fades away.

REBECCA'S GHOST (CONT'D)

(words a distant whisper)

All for one...and one for all, in
life and beyond death.

Steve Cochran runs as quickly as he can to the back of the police car, flings open the boot and grabs the shotgun. He throws it to the waiting hands of Max, who bolts towards the unconscious Grace Stone and the massive 200-pound Mastiff, further up the road.

Cochran watches the running figure of Max, as he moves to placate the annoyed truck driver and caravan, while alerting anymore oncoming traffic to the incident up-ahead. The burly athletic Max covers the short distance between Grace and the dog in record time.

Adopting a hunters' stance, Max raises the weapon, sliding back the pump-action stock. He injects a fresh cartridge into the guns chamber, aiming it right between the dog's menacing eyes. Goliath growls, as he positioned his body in a protective position in front of Grace.

Meanwhile the flashing lights of the police car, and its headlights pull up fast alongside Max, Grace and the dog. As the passenger door swings open, it reveals the concerned face of officer Steve Cochran pointing his Glock at the Mastiff.

STEVE COCHRAN

Don't shoot until we have to. Is
she still alive?

Max grips the pump-action shotgun tightly in his sweating hands. He moves like a cautious stalking cat towards Grace's inert body. Goliath watches every movement, ready to attack, if she is threatened in any way. Max carefully checks her femoral artery for a pulse, and after a brief moment, emits a sigh of relief.

MAX

(almost whispering)
She's alive, now what?

STEVE COCHRAN

Pick her up, real easy like, and
get her into the backseat.

MAX

Oh yeah...this dog ripped Rory
McAllister's throat out, and god
knows what else, and you want me to
act real easy like.

STEVE

Yeah...real easy like. Put down the
gun, pick her up, and put her in
the back.

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

If he tries to attack, I'll blow
its fucking-head off mate, okay.

Just at that crucial moment, after Max has laid the weapon down, Grace Stone murmurs, shakes her head and sits upright, causing Max and Steve to flinch in mild shock and surprise.

MAX

Jesus Grace, you almost gave me a
heart attack. Are you alright?

Grace props herself up with her hands on the hard bitumen. Slowly turning to face Max, she has a stunned expression on her grazed, bloody and scratched face.

GRACE

Rebecca and Sherlock...are dead.

Grace blinks and then realizing that the massive 200-pound Mastiff stands before her, she smiles and reached out to stroke him. Max tightens his grip on the shot-gun and point it directly at the beast.

GRACE (CONT'D)

It's alright Max, he's harmless
now. Goliath...in the car boy,
let's go.

Hearing his name mentioned, the large Mastiff barks intelligently, and then as commanded, he stands up, and leaps into the open front door. The dog proudly sits in the passenger seat next to an extremely nervous Constable Cochran.

GRACE (CONT'D)

No Goliath...in the back.

Steve Cochran's hands tremble holding the Glock, as he watches the 200-pound dog obey, and shift position, comfortably finding a spot in the back seat of the police car.

MAX

Grace...I don't understand, what
happened to you out there?

Grace nonchalantly brushes herself off, calmly gets to her feet, and opening the rear door, settles in next to Goliath. The large Mastiff nuzzles and licks Grace's smiling face. Closing the door, she stares dubiously at the two nervous men, each of them still holding their weapons at the ready.

GRACE

There's no need for those guns,
Goliath is totally in my control.
I'll tell you all about it later,
after I've had a shower, a beer,
and some of Grandad's home cooking.
Well, lets get going...what are you
two waiting for?

Rolling their eyes in utter disbelief, the two men relax a little, lowering their weapons, and letting their guards down. Max eventually obeyed, climbing into the front seat, and buckling up. Steve Cochran holsters his Glock, and ignites the engine. He releases the handbrake, and while keeping his foot pressed on the break, he turns to gaze at Max, as a knowing quirky smile appears on his face.

STEVE COCHRAN

You see, what did I tell you yank,
she gets under your bloody skin,
whether you like it or not.

All Max Statzkowski could do, was nod his head in agreement with Cochran's last statement. He watches Grace and Goliath in the rearview mirror interacting and playing with each other as if they had known each other for a lifetime.

Steve Cochran then leans his head out of the window, and waives the waiting big rig truck, and the other banked-up traffic ahead of him, before he safely turns onto the open highway.

The powerful highway patrol car's engine purrs and hums, moving quickly along the bitumen road. Its blue flashing lights gradually become small dots of moving color underneath the star-studded black backdrop of the night sky and a glowing hunters full moon.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT-DUSK, BLACK RIVER Cemetery. (THREE MONTH'S LATER)

An exotic pallet of pastel colors, burnt-umber's, soft pink's, vermilion reds and muted oranges drift in the sky of a late afternoon Australian sunset.

Malcolm Stone stands solemnly next to senior officer Steve Cochran on the steep hillside of the cemetery that overlooks the town of Black River. They are paying their respects before two new headstones placed near Malcolm's son, Robert Stone and his wife, Margaret.

NOTE

*THE TWO NEW HEADSTONES ARE REBECCA
STONE AND SHERLOCK'S.*

STEVE COCHRAN

Did Grace say when she would be
visiting again?

MALCOLM

Yes, sometime next summer. She's
busy setting up her canine training
school with the help of her new
benefactor Mr Auburn.

STEVE COCHRAN

And how's her new star pupil
working out?

MALCOLM

Oh just fine, he never leaves her side. Goliath has been transformed from a beast into to her most faithful champion and bodyguard. In fact she's racing with him today, in a Canicross event.

STEVE COCHRAN

I didn't think she'd ever be able to replace a dog like Sherlock.

MALCOLM

Well she has, that dog and her have formed a unique bond together. What one thinks the other seems to already know.

STEVE COCHRAN

Well, I've got to go, I'll be seeing you Malcolm, take care now. Tell Grace I said hello if you think of it, next time you speak to her.

MALCOLM

I will Steve. I'm going to be visiting her soon in the States, as soon as I find someone to look after my animals on the farm...you wouldn't be interested would you?

STEVE COCHRAN

Oh no way, Malcolm I'm real sorry, still up to my neck in paperwork, with the Drakensburge case...see you later old man, take care.

MALCOLM

(Softly chuckling to himself.)

Okay Steve...goodbye.

We move forward and pass in-between the two gravestones. Inscribed on Rebecca's we clearly see the quote with the image of a hand with a scar. (ALL FOR ONE, ONE FOR ALL, IN LIFE AND BEYOND DEATH). On Sherlock's is a chiseled-relief portrait depicting the head of the proud Blue Heeler.

Continuing forward we leave the hillside, and rise up far above the town of Black River. We move towards the pastel hues of a beautiful Australian sunset that metamorphoses into an American sunrise.

Moving down to the rocky outcrops of the majestic San Gabriel Mountains in Los Angeles, we descend through the canopy of thick forests. There we see a well-marked out trail, and the starting line for a Canicross endurance run event, just about to begin.

Clearly visible in the four runners lined up in groups, is an athletic blonde woman, Grace Stone. A large tan Mastiff stands proudly, attached to Grace's bungi-cord harness and then the starter's pistol is fired, BANG.

Running straight to camera in slow motion comes Goliath and Grace. We see James Auburn holding Max's arm, both cheering them on enthusiastically from amongst the crowd. As they continue to run towards us, we hold on a still framed image of Grace and Goliath.

(VO) THREE SPIRITUAL FEMALE VOICES.
All for one, and one for all in life, and beyond death.

THE END