

DEATH'S OTHER KINGDOM

by

Richard Stanley

Darkness.  
Sweet oblivion without form and void.  
The tremor of falling water and beneath it a deeper tone  
like the rumble of a distant engine.

NIDGE (O.S.)  
Melissa?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WATERFALL. DAY.

MELISSA MCCARTHY opens her eyes, convinced she heard her fiancée's voice. She starts to turn only to remember where she is, her aching shoulders still propped against the trunk of a stunted rowan tree at the top of the falls, the river foaming brown as heather ale across the rocks below.

And of course she is alone.  
Not merely solitary but truly alone.

It is late in the season, the boughs of the tree thick with berries like drops of blood, the hills rising wild around her, untrodden and unvisited, a wall of snowcaps hanging over the barren valley like an unspoken threat.

MELISSA is still in her mid-twenties but it is as if she has miswandered on her path through life and grown old beyond her years, pale face etched with concern, her tangled auburn hair already streaked with grey.

Noticing a change in the shadows she nervously checks her watch, tears rising unbidden in her eyes as the memories come flooding back. She blinks, focusing on the gliding sweep hand to realize she has lost the best part of an hour.

Struggling to her feet she draws her baggy sweater more tightly around herself. The ugly, dun coloured garment has long since lost its shape, a casualty to weeks of cuff chewing anxiety and deranged, rhythmic stroking yet it serves its purpose, acting as a kind of armour, a clear signal to the outside world to give its wearer the very widest of berths.

Donning her army issue anorak she gives the contents of her pack the once over, making certain her medication, pitons, crampons, ice axe, flashlight and the slender coil of nylon rope are all present and accounted for.

Ejecting three pills from the dispenser she downs them in a single swallow. Then crouching beside the burn to refill her canteen she splashes clear, cold snowmelt across her face, closing her eyes and allowing the white noise of the running water to flow through her, stilling the babble of inner voices.

It is close to mid-day and the best part of the climb is still ahead of her.

CUT TO:

EXT. SNOWLINE. DAY.

A pair of kestrels circle overhead, keeping MELISSA company as she works her way up the valley, toiling across a huge fan of terminal moraine and loose debris to reach the snowline proper, eyes fixed on a cwm or gap in the ridge ahead. Taking a rising traverse she climbs strait up for some eight hundred feet over very good snow until she reaches the mountain's boundary wall where she is forced to unship her ice axe.

The altitude tells badly on her, slowing her pace to a crawl as MELISSA ascends a dangerously steep couloir or ice gully, cursing under her breath from time to time and chanting what sound like bits of half remembered mantras.

Above the couloir the heavens have begun to darken and flurries of snow curl teasingly in the lone climber's wake.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP. DAY.

MELISSA seats herself in the snow beside an ancient cairn, a filmy veil of cloud drawing slowly down over the summit like a mysterious curtain that seems to magnify and distort the sombre ravines and eternal snows that roll away, crest by crest before her.

For a moment everything is silent.

Reaching into her pack MELISSA comes up with a battered cardboard carton. Placing one hand against the cairn as if to steady herself she draws herself to her feet, gazing into the void.

MELISSA

If you can hear me...

That low droning comes again at the very limits of her consciousness and she turns her eyes to the streaming clouds, realizing it is probably just the sound of an aeroplane passing overhead, heading someplace else.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

If you exist...

The droning grows steadily louder although there is still no sign of an aircraft. It is as if the 21st century refuses to leave her in peace, even here.

Reaching into the box she begins to scoop out the ashes. She wants to cry, holding those fire blackened shards in her hands but now she needs them the tears wont come.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Try to forgive me...

A sudden icy wind whips the ashes from her fingers and she watches them curl away into the abyss, too fast for her to say goodbye. Raising her hipflask she sprinkles a dram into the void before taking a swig herself, silently wishing the plane might fall from the sky, that the whole world might crash and burn for the sake of a moment's head space.

The shot tastes good so she takes another, tucking in to the stick of Kendal's mintcake she's been saving for the occasion, chewing pensively as a sound like thunder comes rolling up the valley.

It's not as if she's expecting a sign but she wishes she could feel something. Anything at all.

She finishes the mintcake, carefully slipping the used wrapper into her back pocket before bending to retrieve her pack, not liking the look of those gathering stormclouds one little bit.

Then she notices the greasy column of black smoke belching skyward from the far side of the corniced ridge.

Not really understanding what she's seeing she shoulders her pack and starts to turn away only to realize the droning sound has fallen silent.

MELISSA

Fucksake...

The source of the smoke is less than a mile away and taking a bearing with Nidge's compass she crosses to the edge of the cliff.

Consulting her map she studies the granite outcroppings that push through the snow beneath her, forming a zig-zagging pattern across the north face of the summit like a child's connect-the-dot game. Mentally linking the outcroppings together to form a downward path she lowers herself over the edge, moving sideways like a spider splayed out on the vertical blue slick.

CUT TO:

EXT. GLACIER. DAY.

By three p.m. the sun has begun to vanish behind the ridge, a great curtain of snow wiping out all prospect as MELISSA inches around an icicle festooned cornice, working her way down into the narrow, glaciated saddle on the far side of the summit.

It is already bitterly cold and the long snow slopes at the base of the cliff have frozen hard, creating a perfect climbing surface that speeds MELISSA's descent, deep blue shadows leaping up from the cracks around her as the light dies.

Further down total white out conditions prevail and MELISSA can scarcely see her hands in front of her face as she starts across the lip of the glacier, her path blocked at every turn by a maze of pinnacles and exhausting knee high troughs.

She is about to turn back when her boot strikes something. A jagged piece of twisted metal.

A shadow seems to move behind her and she turns, staring into the flurrying snow.

MELISSA  
Hello? Hey!!

The wind slackens and she catches her breath as the outline of the wreck looms from the grey gloom, the remains of a small jetliner strewn haphazardly across the blackened snow, its tail section shorn completely away, the cockpit dangling precariously over the brink of a gaping bergschrund.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
Hey...

As if in response she hears a low moan and stepping closer notices a uniformed figure hunched beside a rent in the fuselage, curling and uncurling in the slush as if trying to make himself comfortable.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
Hey, it's alright...

She crouches beside him but the air marshal scarcely registers her presence. There are no visible signs of injury on his body but when MELISSA tries to touch him he pulls away, emitting a futile animal sound like a bleating sheep.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
Ssshhh. It's okay...

Something dangles from the dying man's wrist, a jingling length of reinforced chain like one half of a broken charm bracelet.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

It's okay now...

She wants to take a closer look but the man's jerking, senseless movements force her back. Then she sees a second set of tracks in the snow and realizes at least one of the survivors must have already wandered away from the wreck.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

HELLO?

But there is only silence. Silence and the storm howling like some great beast closing on its prey.

CUT TO:

INT. FUSELAGE. DUSK.

MELISSA picks her way gingerly through the wreckage, the failing light slanting through the swirling smoke, making it difficult to see more than a few feet at a time. The beam of her flashlight wavers over two crumpled rows of double seats, briefly illuminating the blood spattered headrests and dangling oxygen masks. She swallows, noticing a pale arm protruding from between two of the seats and impulsively bends to take its pulse, finding it lifeless and already cold to the touch.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hell...

The voice is so low it is almost a sigh.

MELISSA stiffens, the flesh creeping on the back of her neck as she turns to face the door leading to the cockpit.

MELISSA

Hello? Speak up!

She braces herself as a gust of wind buffets the plane and the wreck settles a little in the snow.

VOICE (O.S.)

Help me...

She realizes the voice isn't coming from the cockpit at all but from somewhere on her right. Then a shape stirs in one of the window seats and she sees a dazed, blood streaked face staring back at her flashlight beam.

MELISSA  
Hey, you're going to be  
alright...

The man blinks, his body wedged tight between the seats.

MAN  
We passed Fort William...

The man's voice has an eerie, tape recorded quality as if he isn't really there, as if none of this is really happening. He watches disinterestedly as MELISSA tries to alleviate the pressure on his broken limbs but it is beyond her strength to lift the crumpled frame holding him in place.

MELISSA  
I'm going to get help.

MAN  
Gun...

The cabin tilts abruptly forward and MELISSA is forced to grab the headrest for support.

MELISSA  
What?

MAN  
Get my gun...

He grasps reflexively at an empty shoulder holster but the gun seems to have been flung loose by the impact. MELISSA glances between the seats, seeing only a fallen briefcase. The lid has come loose spilling a sheath of mimeographed transit documents and glossy crime scene photographs. In the half light the details of the photographs are mercifully unclear.

MELISSA  
Just try not to move. I'm going  
to give you a shot...

MAN  
But you don't understand. She...

He struggles to find words, watching dazedly as MELISSA crouches in the aisle, rummaging in her pack for a first aid kit.

MAN (CONT'D)  
She's...

The MAN's face whitens as the cabin rocks, increasing the tension on his legs and MELISSA spins, sensing movement behind her.

MELISSA

Who's there?

MAN

Behind you...

There is a slender, raven haired woman silently watching, her lips and pale, high forehead flecked with blood.

The woman takes a half step towards them and MELISSA instinctively draws back. Steadying herself the newcomer gazes uncertainly into MELISSA's flashlight beam.

CARLY

Who the fuck are you?

MELISSA breathes a sigh of relief, realizing the woman is wearing a ragged air marshal's jacket.

MELISSA

I was over on Ben Mohr and saw the smoke...

CARLY

Is he alright?

She nods towards the groaning MAN in the window seat and MELISSA returns her attention to the first aid kit, coming up with a morphine ampoule and a packet of disposable needles.

MELISSA

He's lost a lot of blood. Nothing arterial though...

CARLY

What are you? Mountain rescue or something?

MELISSA prepares the shot, searching for a pulse in the man's leg.

MELISSA

Mountain rescue won't find you. Not tonight. Not in this weather...

CARLY

Great. Just fucking great. I mean there's gotta be a way out of here, right? A way down?

MAN

We passed Fort William...

The wreck shudders in the glacial wind, cabin listing queasily from side to side.

MELISSA  
 First big storm of the winter.  
 You guys are lucky I was going  
 by...

CARLY subsides into the nearest seat and for the first time  
 MELISSA notices her trouserleg is slick with blood.

CARLY  
 'Lucky' isn't the word for it.

MELISSA  
 Think you can walk?

CARLY  
 Fuck. I dunno. Maybe. Banged  
 my leg pretty hard...

MELISSA  
 Let me take a squiz.

CARLY  
 Take a what?

MELISSA  
 Take a look. Take a quick look.  
 Hold on...

CARLY leans back, somewhat unnerved by her rescuer's matted  
 hair and travel worn clothing.

CARLY  
 Are you a doctor?

MELISSA  
 Sort of. Easy does it now...

MELISSA peels back the leg of CARLY's jeans to find the  
 back of her calf has been almost completely shorn away, the  
 muscle dangling uselessly about her shin, a length of  
 exposed bone glinting wetly in the half light.

CARLY  
 What's that mean? 'Sort of'?

MELISSA  
 Actually, I'm a vet. You know,  
 animals? They're more my thing.  
 Now you're going to feel a little  
 pressure...

MELISSA proffers her hip flask.

CARLY  
 Can't you just give me a shot  
 like the other guy?

MELISSA

Not if you're serious about getting out of here. Go to sleep now and you might never wake up...

CARLY

Maybe it's better that way.

MELISSA

That'd be too easy.

CARLY

I know. I suppose we're in this together now...

MELISSA

And we're getting out of it together. I promise.

CARLY takes a swig, listening to the rattle of wind blown ice pelting against the fuselage. It's been a long time since she's allowed herself a drink and the glow spreads through her body like good news engendering the desire to celebrate nothing for no particular reason.

CARLY

Who did you say you were again?

MELISSA

Melissa...

She waits for CARLY to stopper the flask before taking hold of her trailing muscle and pulling it back into its proper place.

CARLY

Aaahhh! Fuck!! Fuck you, man...

MELISSA

Melissa McCarthy...

CARLY

That fuckin' sucks...

MELISSA

I read human physiology at Uni' if that's any consolation...

She gently squeezes CARLY's hand before binding her leg together with an antimacassar scavenged from the back of the neighbouring seat.

CARLY

Sucks so bad...

MELISSA

A little pain won't do you any harm. You may find it sharpens the senses.

CARLY takes a deep breath, closing her eyes. Then the cabin dips sharply and she opens them again.

CARLY

What was that?

MELISSA

We're on the edge of a precipice and that's a bitch of a storm brewing up out there...

CARLY struggles to sit up but MELISSA gently restrains her.

CARLY

What did you just say?

MELISSA

Just chill for a moment, okay. Try to get your strength back.

But CARLY isn't listening. Clinging to one of the overhead lockers for support she manages to draw herself to her feet.

CARLY

You said 'precipice', didn't you? 'Precipice' is a very bad word...

The MAN in the window seat groans as if in agreement, head lolling as he slides in and out of consciousness.

MAN

William...

MELISSA

Just try to stay put. We need the ballast.

CARLY staggers a half step forward, pain lancing through her useless leg, the floor of the cabin yawing beneath her.

CARLY

Screw the ballast. We need to get the fuck out of here...

MELISSA

It's not that simple...

CARLY pauses, MELISSA's hip flask wavering in her hand as she hears a sound like rolling thunder.

CARLY  
 No good can come of the word  
 'precipice'...

Then the avalanche breaks, a wave of snow surging in through the gap in the fuselage, effortlessly knocking her back into her seat.

MELISSA  
 Right now there is no 'out of  
 here'...

CUT TO:

EXT. GLACIER. DUSK.

A silent spume of snow sweeps the remains of the aeroplane into the abyss, the nose section lodging some fifty feet further down.

CUT TO:

INT. FUSELAGE. DUSK.

MELISSA buckles CARLY into her seat before assuming the brace position.

MELISSA  
 Looks like we're in for a little  
 turbulence...

CARLY  
 The name's Carly...

MELISSA  
 That's a nice name. Where are  
 you from, Carly?

CARLY  
 Dayton... Dayton, Ohio...

CARLY gets her head down, doing her best to imitate her rescuer.

MELISSA  
 How did you get yourself into  
 this mess? I mean you're some  
 kind of cop, aren't you?

CARLY  
 Air marshal. We were escorting a  
 prisoner...

She glances at the MAN in the window seat but he has fallen silent, head hanging forward as if resigned to his fate.

MELISSA

What sort of prisoner needs his own aeroplane?

CARLY

You don't need to know that. There's no point getting into this any deeper than you are...

MELISSA reaches down, taking CARLY's hand in her own and finding it surprisingly cold. She starts to rub it, wanting to share her warmth.

MELISSA

All I want is to get through this, to make it through the night...

CARLY

Why don't we trade? I'll tell you who the prisoner was if you tell me what a fuckin' vet is doing on top of a mountain with a bag full of needles and no bandaid?

MELISSA withdraws her hand, eyes narrowing.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Hit a sore spot, did I? I'm sorry...

Both of them catch their breath at once as the cabin lurches, slipping another couple of feet down the incline.

MELISSA

You believe in God, Carly?

CARLY

Nah. But if I did now would be the time to start praying...

MELISSA

Me neither. Still, it's nice to know we're in the same boat...

CARLY

Yeah. Up shit fuckin' creak without a paddle.

The women cower together, hugging their knees as the fuselage pulls free with a tortured squeal, tobogganning down the slope before launching into space.

MELISSA

We're airborne...

CARLY  
Twice in one day...

MELISSA closes her eyes, trying to keep her head down, not knowing which way down is anymore.

MELISSA  
Ommm....

CARLY  
Mother...

MELISSA  
Padme hum hri...

The impact flings them violently forward, the safety belt burning into MELISSA's shoulder as the cabin rolls over and over before grinding to an uneasy halt.

CARLY  
Fucker...

The sound of cracking ice reverberates like gunfire through the wreckage and CARLY blinks, a little surprised to find herself still alive.

MELISSA  
The loch... we're on ice! We're down!

MELISSA unfastens her belt, dropping upwards onto what used to be the roof. CARLY shakes her head, slowly coming to terms with the fact she is hanging upside down.

CARLY  
Just like fuckin' Disneyland, right?

MELISSA  
The ice is breaking. We've got to get clear!

CARLY  
Only so much... cheaper...

MELISSA starts to unbuckle CARLY but then the wreck lists abruptly to one side and they both end up in a tangled heap in the aisle.

MELISSA  
Come on. I got you...

CARLY  
Next time I'll bring the fuckin' kids...

The aircraft is right side up now but slowly sinking, black water pooling around the legs of the man in the window seat.

MELISSA  
C'mon, for christ's sake. It's going fast...

CARLY  
What about him?

MELISSA  
We'd need a crowbar to get him loose...

The MAN moans, only vaguely aware of what is happening.

CARLY  
We can't just leave him.

MELISSA  
Trust me. He won't feel a thing...

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

MELISSA eases CARLY from the wreck, laying her on the ice before returning to fetch her pack.

All light has faded from the sky and CARLY shivers, staring up into a freezing funnel of eddying snowflakes. The world seems to fade in and out as she struggles to stay conscious, clear one moment and a blur the next, closing in like a camera lens until she seems to be looking out at it through a small round hole.

After a while she becomes aware of MELISSA crouching beside her once more, a fancy, customized compass cradled in one hand as she makes a series of mental calculations.

MELISSA  
We're on Lock Tullish. There's a bothy about a quarter of a mile from the southern shore...

CARLY  
Bothy?

The wind lulls long enough for her to glimpse the faint glow of firelight, so far away it is barely a pinprick in the night.

MELISSA  
 What you guys call a cabin.  
 Either way it's in easy striking  
 distance...

CARLY stares at her in silence, lips working as if trying  
 to form words.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
 You alright?

CARLY  
 I dink I bid my tunga...

The plane has stopped sinking, the nose section jutting at  
 forty-five degrees from the fractured ice.

MELISSA  
 We'll need a stretcher.

One of the curved exit doors has been flung free from the  
 wreck and unshipping the nylon rope from her bag MELISSA  
 improvises a harness, turning it into a makeshift sled.

CARLY  
 Why are you doing this?

MELISSA  
 I don't always have to have a  
 reason for the shit I do.  
 Besides I gave you my word,  
 didn't I?

She helps CARLY onto the sled, gently wrapping her in her  
 dry sleeping bag.

CARLY  
 God. I'm cold...

MELISSA  
 You hang in there, baby. You're  
 going into shock.

CARLY  
 So cold.

Slipping on her goggles MELISSA shoulders the harness,  
 wincing as the nylon bites into her flayed collarbone.

MELISSA  
 C'mon. Help me out here. Try to  
 wriggle your toes...

CARLY  
 I can't.

MELISSA

Just keep 'em moving. We're almost home...

CARLY

Home?

CARLY opens her eyes, seeing nothing save a whirling, monstrous whiteness that hems them in on all sides. Despite her discomfort MELISSA manages to make some headway against the blizzard, dragging CARLY step by step across the ice.

MELISSA

One, two, one, two, wriggle your toes. C'mon.

CARLY

I'm sorry. I said those things to you. I mean whatever it is you're on I wish I had some...

MELISSA

Keep talking. Tell me a story...

CARLY

I can't remember any stories. Not now.

MELISSA

Then let's sing. Sing with me...

The effort of walking warms her and for the first time MELISSA starts to believe they might make it after all.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Swing low, sweet chariot...  
comin' for to carry me home...  
swing low...

CARLY

Terrific. That's all we need right now. A song about fuckin' death...

MELISSA

Next time you pick the track.

MELISSA tries to think of something less funeral, determined to draw her companion into some interaction that might keep them both going.

She launches into a quavering rendition of 'Kum-ba-ya' and although CARLY does not object she still refuses to join in, her consciousness ebbing like the flame on a guttering candle, fading slowly into the shadows of her body.

MELISSA manages to sing the lullaby all the way through, raising her voice in the wilderness and finding it as soothing as a mantra.

After a while she has to stop, kneeling in the snow to get her breath back, still holding on to the harness with her good right hand.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

A log smoulders on the hearth, casting a welcoming glow over the ancient wooden benches that line three of the stone building's smoke blackened walls. Two colossal beams support the open raftered, plaster roof and a set of step ladders stand in the far corner, leading to the loft.

DONAL RUANE, a tousle haired Irishman in his early thirties, sits as close as he can to the fire, strumming aimlessly on a badly tuned guitar, a huge joint clenched between thumb and grubby forefinger.

DONAL

So there's this Frenchman, a Yank, a Brit and an Irishman on this aeroplane that's about to crash, see? And the captain says: 'I've got some bad news for you...'

DONAL's only audience is an unsmiling Frenchman ensconced on the right hand bench, his back to one of the ladders, a pair of designer reading glasses propped on the end of his nose, his attention focused squarely on the tiny computer cradled between his knees.

DONAL (CONT'D)

There's only enough gas for one passenger. The other three are going to have to jump, right?

The young Frenchman nods wordlessly, not really getting it, the touch pen weaving in his hand as he edits and arranges the days audio samples on the screen before him, labelling each soundscape according to the spot it was recorded at.

His name is ERIC RENAULT. He came here for the peace and quiet and right now he's feeling increasingly fed up with the Irishman's rambling monologues.

DONAL (CONT'D)

So the frog yells: 'Long live the Republic' and hops out the plane and the Yank hollers 'Remember the Allamo!' and jumps after him...

The fire gutters on the hearth and ERIC glances up as their guide makes his appearance. CRAIG WILSON steps in from the cold, closing the door behind him, his face covered by a ski mask and goggles, his winter gear caked in ice.

DONAL (CONT'D)

The Brit thinks it's over, then yells 'God save the Queen' and throws the Irishman out in his place...

DONAL smiles at his own joke, watching out of the corner of his eye as WILSON drops his pack on the opposite bench and begins undressing, removing his jacket and shell leggings before pulling off his mask.

WILSON is in his late twenties with the cold, blue eyes of his Anglo-Saxon ancestors and stark features that suggest he's never smiled, ever.

WILSON

Evenin'.

WILSON peels off his gloves, rubbing his fingers before retrieving a two-way radio from his pack. DONAL and ERIC exchange glances as he kneels at the edge of the circle of firelight, tuning for a frequency.

ERIC

We are surrounded by three thousand feet of solid granite, you cannot...

WILSON stands, moving the handheld unit about in the air for better reception, picking up a tangle of fragmented signals.

RADIO (MALE VOICE)

...it's pretty bad... turning back... before someone has to rescue us too, out!

The radio spits a stream of white noise and WILSON turns it down to kill the static.

DONAL

Who was that?

WILSON

Mountain rescue searchin' for an aircraft that went down on the hill behind us, about three hours ago...

ERIC

(shocked)  
Aircraft?

WILSON

Executive jet, two pilots, five passengers. I picked up their distress call just before the storm.

ERIC

We've got to do something...

Unlacing his steaming boots WILSON begins to methodically massage his toes.

WILSON

Yeah. We can sleep it out. No one's going anywhere until this wind drops.

ERIC

And what if you found out afterwards there were survivors? We can't just leave them out there...

WILSON shrugs, propping his feet on the hearth.

WILSON

I know these mountains like the back of my hand and we're talking white out conditions, mate. No one could make it through that shit alive...

DONAL nods soberly, passing ERIC the joint.

DONAL

Take the chill pill, Eric. Your mans got a point.

ERIC

I'm finding this a little difficult...

He closes up his laptop before taking a puff, coughing at the unfamiliar taste.

WILSON

So, don't believe me. Go see for yourself. Even if they did survive the crash they'd be dead by now. Twice dead by the time you reached 'em...

ERIC takes another hit on the joint, holding it in this time.

ERIC

What makes you so sure?

WILSON

Being sure is my business, laddie.

WILSON glances sullenly back, showing the Frenchman the white of his eye. Then something moves outside the cabin and all three fall silent, their gaze magnetized by the twitching door handle.

DONAL

The devil?

Something scratches against the woodwork and an instant later the door bursts open, the flames dancing on the hearth as a ghostly, snow encrusted figure lunges into the room, an ice caked nylon rope trailing from its clenched right hand.

WILSON

The hell is this?

WILSON starts from his seat, ashen faced as MELISSA tears off her goggles, staring with wild, pain maddened eyes at the gaping trio.

MELISSA

I have an injured woman here!

ERIC goes to her aid, helping her pull the improvised sledge across the threshold.

ERIC

That's an aircraft door!

WILSON avoids the Frenchman's eyes, his attention fixed on MELISSA as she falls to her knees before the fire.

WILSON

You found the wreck?

MELISSA nods, bowing her head, the warmth sinking into her.

DONAL

Jesus...

WILSON

Alone?

MELISSA

I came across the loch. About a quarter of a mile as the crow flies...

She watches as ERIC and DONAL unwrap CARLY from her sleeping bag. CARLY's colour is bad and at first they think she's already dead but then her hand moves as they lay her in front of the hearth.

DONAL

Sweet Jesus...

MELISSA starts to unfasten her pack but her fingers are too numb to work the straps. WILSON helps her and she silently nods her thanks as she retrieves her medical kit.

MELISSA

Got any analgesics? And I'm going to be needing hot water and a needle and thread...

The field dressing on CARLY's leg is already soaked with blood, a red stain spreading through the lining of the sleeping bag.

WILSON

Is she the only survivor?

MELISSA

No. Someone else walked out of there. I saw tracks...

ERIC returns with a couple of fresh towels and DONAL relights the spliff as MELISSA scrubs down.

ERIC

Coffee? Anyone?

MELISSA

Black. Two sugars. Thanks...

The coffee is just the way she likes it. Hot, strong and good. She spoons in an extra serving of sugar, relying on the hyperglacemic high to keep herself awake. Reaching for her pill dispenser MELISSA helps herself to 200 milligrams of Tryptizol, throwing in a couple of Diconals for general maintenance.

DONAL watches her swallow, his eyes narrowing as he takes a closer look at the insignia on CARLY's jacket. The ubiquitous all-seeing eye.

DONAL

What is she? A cop?

MELISSA peels back the dressing, not liking what she sees.

CARLY is breathing softly and the lips of the wound tremble rhythmically and gently in the harsh light of the single lamp.

MELISSA

Her name's Carly...

CARLY moans as if in vague recognition of her name, the first sound the trio have heard her utter.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

She said she's an air marshal but judging from what I saw she's probably FBI...

ERIC

I thought the FBI only operate within American borders?

MELISSA

CIA then. I don't know...

She checks CARLY's pulse and finding it weak but steady, prepares a needle, snapping the neck off one of the morphine ampoules.

WILSON

Department of Homeland Security.  
The eye in the fucking pyramid.

MELISSA

Sorry?

WILSON

Homeland Security. Some sort of umbrella organization put together under the anti-terrorism laws. As far as I remember they've got a pretty wide charter...

MELISSA expertly administers the shot, sitting back for a moment as she waits for it to take effect. How smooth and subtle, how complex the wound seems in the shifting amber glow. How vulnerable, how irrevocably naked.

WILSON (CONT'D)

They're Rummy's boys. Licensed to kill. Licensed to do anything they bloody like...

CARLY sighs, drifting into a deeper slumber. Hunkering closer MELISSA sets to work.

DONAL

Yeah. But what's she doing in Scotland?

MELISSA

Right now she's bleeding to death and there's nothing we can do about it. Not without the proper tools...

WILSON

You've got your needle and thread and enough hot water. We should be able to make do.

He places a hand on MELISSA's shoulder but she draws away, busying herself with cleaning the wound and trying to repair as much of the superficial damage as she can.

MELISSA

You'd know, I suppose.

She glances uneasily at the sheathed hunting knife on WILSON's belt.

WILSON

I've seen some lovely messes in my time. Including a few of my own...

He raises the right sleeve of his jacket to reveal a patchwork of pale, pink scar tissue.

WILSON (CONT'D)

Third black watch. Falluja. 2004. Had to use superglue. Anyone got superglue?

ERIC shakes his head, watching silently as MELISSA does her best to close the wound.

WILSON (CONT'D)

Pity, save us a trip.

ERIC

You going somewhere?

WILSON

Our doctor by default needs medical supplies to save her patient.

ERIC

So, off to the local hospital are we?

ERIC stands up with a look of incredulity. Then he sits down again, realizing how stoned he is.

MELISSA

How far is the nearest road?

WILSON

About seven miles but in this weather it'll feel more like seventy and there's at least one gorge along the way I wouldn't want to take in darkness...

MELISSA

So we're fucked basically. That's what you're saying?

WILSON shakes his head slowly, placing one hand over hers, helping to hold the folds of flesh in place as she sutures the wound.

WILSON

I'm betting that Homeland Security plane carries some above standard medical kit. Not to mention all kinds of other goodies.

MELISSA

Assuming the plane hasn't sunk by now.

ERIC

Even if it's there, you'll never make it back. No-one could survive a storm like this. Isn't that what you said?

WILSON clambers to his feet and begins to hastily don his kit, leaving MELISSA to clean the suture and apply a fresh dressing.

WILSON

And when they tell you there were medical supplies out there that could have saved this lady? How will you feel then?

ERIC

Shitty. Now you mention it.

WILSON  
So come for the stroll. I could  
use the help...

ERIC nods, realizing he has no choice.

DONAL  
I hope you're not looking at me.

WILSON  
You're so ripped off your tits  
you'd be a liability out there.

DONAL  
Hey! You should try some of this  
shit. It might help your  
perspective.

WILSON  
I doubt it...

WILSON snorts, gathering an armful of distress flares.

MELISSA  
Gi' us a blast then...

DONAL blinks, passing MELISSA the spliff. She takes a  
grateful toke, admiring her handiwork for a moment before  
covering CARLY with a dry blanket.

DONAL  
I mean you guys are about to go  
out there and risk your lives for  
a total stranger? And a cop at  
that...

MELISSA  
You got it, Sherlock.

She starts to rise, reaching for her jacket but WILSON  
gently restrains her.

WILSON  
Uh-uh. We're good.

MELISSA  
Since when were you in charge  
here, Mr... Mr...

WILSON  
Wilson. Craig Wilson. And I'm  
not in charge of anything,  
missie. I just don't have any  
choice. I'm a climbing  
instructor, not a doctor but like  
it or not that woman's life is in  
my hands.

MELISSA

You can call me Melissa and you're right. You don't have any choice. I'm coming with you.

She takes another toke, finding it surprisingly good.

WILSON

Don't be silly. Stay put. You too, Donal. Do something you're good at like keeping an eye on these ladies.

MELISSA

You'll die out there without me.

WILSON starts to say something but the words stick in his throat as he sees the look in her eyes, realizing she means it.

MELISSA

I know every inch of that trail. Every sodding inch...

WILSON

I appreciate the concern but...

MELISSA

And if you don't make it, she won't make it either.

CARLY groans as MELISSA crouches beside the improvised stretcher, gathering in the nylon cord.

ERIC

You have something in mind?

MELISSA

Rope up and spread out until one of us finds the plane. Donal, I want you to take these flares. About five will do. If we're not back in an hour I want you to light them at ten minute intervals. Think you can do that?

DONAL

Shouldn't I take a few more? Just in case?

MELISSA

If we're not back in two hours it means we're never coming back.

WILSON and ERIC exchange an uneasy glance as she divides up the remaining flares.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
Any questions?

WILSON  
Yeah. Are you out of your  
fucking mind?

MELISSA  
You keep shoving your hand in  
this cage, Mr. Wilson, it's going  
to get bit.

She passes the joint back to DONAL, noticing something  
close to awe in his bloodshot eyes.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
Shit's nice. What is it?

DONAL  
Cut it with a little Salvia.  
Salvia Divenorum. The Mayans  
used to smoke it when they were  
building Machu Pichu. Good for  
altitude sickness. Good for  
other things too...

MELISSA  
Definitely nice. Just keep an  
eye on the time now. We'll be  
counting on you.

WILSON watches dumbstruck as she threads the rope through  
the carabiners on her belt, feeding the other end to ERIC.

WILSON  
Okay. So we'll do it your way.

MELISSA  
If you find the plane give three  
hard tugs. After twenty minutes  
we'll join up and double back.  
Any questions?

WILSON sullenly shakes his head, slipping on his ski mask.  
CARLY shivers as MELISSA opens the door, emitting a low  
sigh as if to remind her of her mission.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
C'mon. We're wasting time...

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

MELISSA surrenders herself to the blizzards embrace, feeling something close to relief as if the storm is her natural habitat, the only lover she can really trust.

ERIC and WILSON watch as she takes a bearing on Nidge's compass, making a series of silent calculations.

MELISSA

Take it as far east as you can,  
Mr. Wilson. You take west, Mr...  
Mister?

ERIC

Renault. Eric Renault.

MELISSA

You take west, Mr. Renault.  
Steady pace.

They nod, the group dispersing into the wall of wind driven snow, spreading out into the night.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

CARLY moans, her quavering voice almost lost beneath the keening of the wind in the rafters, their lamentations intermingling so that DONAL can no longer tell where one begins and the other ends.

Settling himself beside the hearth he begins to nervously build another joint, speaking aloud to break the silence and keep the stricken woman company, grateful at least for the captive audience.

DONAL

Stop me if you've heard this  
before but there's a Frenchman, a  
Yank, a Brit and an Irishman on  
this aeroplane that's about to  
crash, see?

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

MELISSA walks into the storm, the nylon rope running from her left and right hands as she presses against the wind. It is an eerie sight with the rope floating away from her as if somehow levitating.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

CARLY's lips move, trying to form words, cocooned in the scented darkness of MELISSA's sleeping bag, in that void that's highly embraceable during sleep.

She vaguely feels the fire on her face, hearing the Irishman's lilting voice through a warm, opiate haze.

DONAL

And the captain says: 'I've got some bad news for you...'

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

MELISSA feels a sharp tug on the line and a moment later catches sight of the aircraft's nose section protruding from the shattered ice.

WILSON is standing in the lee of the wreck and MELISSA and ERIC join him, huddling in the shelter of the fuselage where the wind and snow are a little more bearable.

WILSON

At least she's still afloat.

ERIC

Only just. How deep is the loch?

MELISSA

About three hundred feet.

ERIC turns his flashlight to the nearest hatchway, a good ten feet above the ice.

ERIC

How do we reach it without a ladder?

WILSON

The army way. Use half the rope, throw it through the open hatch and haul me up from the other side.

MELISSA

Don't you think the lightest person should be the one to go aboard?

ERIC

She's right. Sixty pounds could be the difference to send it under.

WILSON looks unhappy but cannot escape the logic.

WILSON

Have it your way.

CUT TO:

INT. FUSELAGE. NIGHT.

Something moves inside the wreck, shifting away from the probing flashlight beams.

There is a sound like a sigh.

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

MELISSA makes the rope fast.

WILSON

If it moves we're pulling so be ready.

MELISSA

Okay, okay. I'm ready.

She pauses, seeing the look on WILSON's face.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

What?

He makes as if to pat her on the shoulder but then changes his mind, turning to ERIC who is already taking up the slack on the far side of the wreck.

MELISSA gives them the thumbs up and the guys put their backs into it, her boots scrabbling against the sheer icy fuselage. Then her gloved fingers gain purchase on the hatchway and she pulls herself up and in.

CUT TO:

INT. FUSELAGE. NIGHT.

The cabin lurches beneath MELISSA's weight, slipping another couple of feet into the icy tarn. Catching hold of the back of a chair she steadies herself against the incline.

MELISSA  
Gimme some slack!

She scans the slanting aisle with her flashlight. The man in the window seat is no longer moving, head hanging forward, like an abandoned crash dummy.

Feeling a queasy sense of relief MELISSA turns her attention to the overhead lockers, finding one bearing the sign of the caduceus, two snakes coiling around a staff, the logo of the American Medical Association. Inside she discovers a hefty black suitcase containing all the supplies she needs, enough to keep Carly alive until dawn at least.

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

The two men step closer to the wreck as MELISSA appears in the doorway above them.

MELISSA  
Careful. It's heavy...

WILSON opens his arms and she drops it down to him. She is about to follow when she pauses, hearing what might be a low moan coming from behind her. A trick of the wind perhaps?

WILSON  
C'mon! What are you waiting for?

MELISSA  
Thought I heard something...

WILSON  
What?

She cups her hands to her mouth, trying to shout above the storm, the wind snatching away her words.

MELISSA  
Heard something! Just hold on!

WILSON shakes his head helplessly, watching as she vanishes back into the fuselage.

ERIC  
What's going on? I don't understand...

WILSON  
You're not the only one, mate.  
And the more I do understand the less I bloody like it...

CUT TO:

INT. FUSELAGE. NIGHT.

MELISSA starts back through the compartment, using the headrests for handholds. In her haste she accidentally catches hold of the protruding human arm she came across a few hours ago. Letting out a startled yelp she loses balance, slipping to one knee in the tilting aisle. Then, regaining her composure she catches sight of a steel case wedged beneath one of the seats.

The case contains a pair of night viewing goggles and slipping them over her head MELISSA thumbs a switch, hearing a sound like a camera charging.

The interior of the cabin abruptly leaps into heightened relief, the lurid green glare of the night sites stripping back the shadows.

She turns to face the man in the window seat, freezing in her tracks as she sees a ghostly luminescence gleaming from beneath his half open lids. MELISSA catches her breath, taking a beat to realize it is only a side effect of the image enhancement, the agent's glazed eyeballs kicking back the residual light in the cabin like tiny mirrors. Working her way closer to him MELISSA searches in vain for his fallen gun.

The front of the compartment is already flooded, the contents of the fallen briefcase floating before her on an inky tide. MELISSA crouches, scooping up a handful of soggy photographs, trying to get a closer look at the ghastly images they contain. The faces of the dead and the mutilated, so many of them, some so badly disfigured they are barely recognizable as human.

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

It has been a good forty minutes since ERIC left the shelter of the bothy and the cold is already seeping into his bones, his fingers and toes numbing, the wind roaring so loud about his ears he can scarcely hear himself think.

A gloved hand falls on his shoulder and he spins to find WILSON huddling beside him, gesturing frantically towards a bobbing red light that has appeared in the middle distance, weaving like a will o' the whisp through the curtain of snow.

WILSON  
(shouting)  
Someone's out there! Looks like  
a flare!

ERIC  
But it's too early for Donal...

WILSON  
And it's coming from the wrong  
bloody direction!

ERIC narrows his eyes, trying to shield his goggles against the blizzard.

ERIC  
Perhaps it's a search party?

WILSON shakes his head slowly, one hand falling to the hilt of his knife.

WILSON  
Time we got to the bottom of  
this, don't you think...

He starts into the night, eyes turned towards the dancing flame.

ERIC  
Where are you going? Wilson?

The young sound designer thinks it over. Then he lets go of the rope and gives chase.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
Hey!

CUT TO:

INT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

DONAL fixes himself another coffee, keeping one eye on the door as he nervously checks his watch.

DONAL  
Come on, guys. This is getting  
silly...

He starts to lay out the flares, trying to get his head around the safety instructions, utterly oblivious to the shape that moves silently behind him, a silhouetted figure outlined momentarily against the firelight.

DONAL (CONT'D)  
You know how much I hate being  
alone...

CUT TO:

INT. FUSELAGE. NIGHT.

The dripping photographs have the same fascination as a car wreck and try as she might MELISSA cannot look away. The unfamiliar sights are not easily comprehended. Violent death makes visible what was never meant to be seen. The glistening innards, the secret apparatus beneath the skin.

Several prints have the same unintelligible word scrawled on the back. A name perhaps...

MELISSA

Lorcus?

She shivers, glancing over her shoulder at the open hatchway, half convinced she heard a man's voice shouting somewhere out in the dark.

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

ERIC yells at the top of his lungs, pushing into the teeth of the storm, WILSON's figure dwindling into a grey blur up ahead, boots punching through the hoarfrost.

ERIC

Hey! Come back...

He tries to turn around but the wreck is lost in the darkness leaving him no choice but to keep going forward. Grinding his teeth he forces himself on, seeing the grey blur grow slowly closer, the flurrying curtain parting long enough to reveal a running, hooded figure outlined against the dancing light less than a hundred yards ahead of him.

ERIC

Wilson!

But it isn't Wilson.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

DONAL gathers up the first of the flares, pulling on an old Soviet army issue ballaclava before turning to fetch his mittens.

He catches his breath, as he sees CARLY sitting bolt upright beside the fire, staring at him with her strange, haunted eyes.

DONAL

Uhhh...

CARLY

Where am I?

She blinks, a little confused by the red star on DONAL's cap.

DONAL

(stammering)

Loch Tullish. The others have gone to fetch help...

CARLY

You've got to stop them. You've got to warn them...

The wind howls like a hungry wolf at the doorstep and CARLY shudders, drawing the sleeping bag tighter about herself.

DONAL

What are you talking about? Warn them about what?

CARLY

They don't know what's out there...

CUT TO:

INT. FUSELAGE. NIGHT.

The man in the last few photographs might almost be handsome, his features softened by a mane of shoulder length blonde hair and a wispy growth of beard, his eyes like hell and the blue sky all at once.

In some of the pictures he is alone while in others he is accompanied by a veiled woman, her face hidden save for those dark, half familiar eyes.

In one photograph they stand on the lip of a mass grave, a line of unfamiliar mountains rising behind them and although the man wears a threadbare military jacket and an Afghan pachul his face and colouring mark him as a Westerner. In another they seem to be leading a crouched sub-human figure on a leash.

Turning the print MELISSA finds a name stencilled on the back, the first full name she has seen.

MELISSA

Richard Lorcus, a.k.a. 'the falconer', a.k.a. 'Richard al-Rahim' the mercy of God...

Just then someone raps on one of the laminated windows close to the waterline and MELISSA turns to see a gloved hand wiping the snow from the glass.

MELISSA  
(shouting)  
I'll be out in a minute!

The gloved hand offers a thumbs up and she drops the photograph, her eyes lighting on what she has been looking for all along.

The agent's gun lies barely an arms length away, outlined in the green glow of her nightsights.

Breathing a sigh of relief she reaches towards it.

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

A shadowy figure circles the hole in the ice to find a window almost completely submerged in the dark water.

Placing an ice axe against the glass the hooded newcomer prepares to strike.

CUT TO:

INT. FUSELAGE NIGHT.

MELISSA grabs the gun, crying out as the window next to her head explodes violently inwards followed by a spume of icy water, the fuselage sharply increasing its angle as the nose section settles into the loch.

MELISSA  
WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!

MELISSA catches hold of one of the seats, her feet kicking in thin air, the nearest exit now directly overhead more than thirty feet away.

She catches a fleeting glimpse of the gloved hand as it reappears at one end of the windows, wavering goodbye.

Then with a loud bang the cockpit door bursts from its hinges, a fountain of debris and freezing water spraying towards her face, the twisted, uniformed corpses of the two pilots rising to greet her, pale, broken limbs flailing in the current.

MELISSA shoves the gun into her belt, beginning a desperate scramble for her life, using the vertical seat row as a ladder.

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

The remains of the aircraft are sinking fast, sliding into the foaming tarn at the rate of about a foot a second. It would be a dramatic sight if there was anyone there to see it.

CUT TO:

INT. FUSELAGE. NIGHT.

By the time MELISSA reaches the last few rows an icy maelstrom is already swirling about her ankles and in the green glow of her goggles she can see from the surrounding windows that the water level outside is already well above her head.

MELISSA  
C'mon... faster... faster!

She grabs the corner of the hatchway as water from the outside comes pouring and with a barely human cry hurls herself up and out into the freezing night.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
FASTER!!!

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

MELISSA leaps clear, slamming hard against the ice and crawling desperately away on her hands and knees as the remains of the fuselage settle from view.

She makes it about thirty feet before standing up and casting about for her companions.

MELISSA  
Wilson! Eric! Hullo!! WHERE  
THE FUCK IS EVERYONE?!

Then without warning she finds herself knocked flat, hitting the snow face first as if felled by an invisible fist. Within seconds she is sliding inexorably back across the ice towards the churning cauldron.

Only then does she realize the thin, nylon rope attached to her waist harness has become snagged in the sinking wreckage, dragging her after it.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

NO!!!

She manages to unclip the harness about twenty feet from the ice hole, sliding another five feet or more as it unravels only for the rope to become entangled about her left arm, pulling her over onto her back and drawing tight.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Ah fuck you.

Out of the corner of one eye she sees a hooded figure emerging from the tempest at a run, a Scots hunting knife, known as a skean d'hu, glinting in the poisonous green glow of her night viewing goggles.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

GOD!!!

She winces, crying out as the man leaps towards her, landing astride her and severing the rope with a single well placed blow.

WILSON

Always - carry - a - knife.

WILSON yanks off his mask to reveal his craggy, smiling face. It is the first time MELISSA has seen him smile and it is not an attractive sight.

MELISSA

Get to fuck!!!

She pushes him off, struggling to her feet to find she is only inches from the churning abyss.

WILSON

Hey, don't be like that...

MELISSA

Where the fuck were you!?!

WILSON

I was lost in the snow. I...  
watch out!

The corpse of one of the pilots bursts from the water, flung upwards by a gout of escaping air and MELISSA yelps in surprise, almost losing her footing. WILSON manages to get one arm around her, drawing her back from the brink. This time she does not resist.

CARLY (V.O.)  
I thought I was dead...

CUT TO:

INT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

CARLY lies back, studying the shifting pattern of light and shadow that flicker across the rafters as DONAL prepares another needle.

CARLY  
Dead and gone to heaven. Either  
that or the other place...

DONAL  
Worse than that, I'm afraid.  
You're in fekking Scotland.

CARLY  
You're no angel either, right?

DONAL leans over her, the syringe glinting in his hand.

DONAL  
If you close one eye perhaps. At  
least I know how to administer a  
shot...

CARLY  
Lifetime of experience I suppose?

She closes her eyes as DONAL drives the needle home.

DONAL  
Maybe I'll join you. It's a  
pretty wild night for a morphine  
party, wouldn't you say?

CARLY  
Mmmmm. That's so nice...

DONAL  
That's a helluva shot I just gave  
you. I know guys who'd sell  
their own mothers for a shot like  
that.

Tucking CARLY into the sleeping bag he turns to gather his coat.

CARLY  
What are you doing?

DONAL  
Time I let off some fireworks.

CARLY relaxes into the high, a blissed out smile lighting up her face.

CARLY  
I love fireworks...

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

MELISSA clutches Nidge's compass in one hand, leading WILSON through the void, their movements made heavy and laborious by the deepening snow.

MELISSA  
You alright?

WILSON  
Just tired...

MELISSA  
We've got to keep going...

WILSON's eyes search the whirling curtain that encloses them, unable to shake the sensation that they are wandering in widening circles.

WILSON  
Going where?

MELISSA pauses for him to catch up and as she glances back WILSON sees a flare appear in the distance like an incandescent star hovering above her left shoulder.

MELISSA  
We're going home. All of us..

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

The flare gives good value and for the first time since the storm closed in DONAL starts to feel he's getting on top of the situation.

He stands roughly a hundred feet in front of the bothy, the burning torch thrust aloft, the ruddy glare leaping out before him, driving back the dark, a solitary flickering light in a benighted, alien landscape.

Looking up DONAL sees a funnel of eddying sparks, red as drops of blood, frozen by the sudden light as if suspended in a vast, motionless amber. For a moment he feels almost happy, a childish grin creasing his unshaven face.

In the ballaclava he looks like a novelty paperweight, a berserk, socialist parody of the statue of liberty.

Sensing another pair of eyes upon him DONAL turns, catching a fleeting silhouette etched against the skyline, a hunched, shape slinking rapidly away into the shadows as if repelled by the light, disappearing behind the bothy's slanting roof before he can fully focus on it.

Then the flare sputters and dies, DONAL's confidence dying with it as the night comes rushing in with renewed intensity.

DONAL

Ah shite...

Hot metal hisses against slush as he lets the canister fall, standing stock still so his eyes can readjust, the after-image of that crawling figure burned into his retinas.

Gingerly retracing his steps DONAL pulls open the door of the bothy only to be met by a blast of smoke and hot, choking air.

DONAL (CONT'D)

Hey...

CUT TO:

INT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

CARLY splutters, struggling dazedly to extricate herself from the sleeping bag, a greasy plume of smoke belching from the fireplace.

DONAL appears behind her, grabbing the corner of the bag and dragging her back from the hearth.

CARLY

What's happening?

DONAL

Snow's blocking the chimney vent.  
I think...

CARLY wipes her streaming eyes as DONAL wedges the door with his pack. The smoke drains from the room, the last of the hot air going with it.

CARLY

One fucking thing after another.

DONAL

We've got to clear that flue...

He retrieves his joint, relighting it as he surveys the rafters, trying not to think about that creeping silhouette.

DONAL (CONT'D)

I think there's a hatch up there leading to the roof...

CARLY

Kind of a weird time to get high, don't you think?

She shivers, settling back into the bag as the young Irishman scales a wooden ladder, disappearing into the loft.

DONAL

Thing is with Salvia it helps you know stuff before it happens. Kind of like second sight. That's why they call it Salvia Divenorum...

He shuffles on his elbows and knees through the musty crawlspace, finding an ancient trapdoor set in the slanting roof.

CARLY (O.S.)

Will you stop talking shit. I'm freezing my tits off down here.

DONAL pushes against the trapdoor with his shoulder only to find it frozen solid.

DONAL

Like this is preordained. Like I could've seen it coming...

Lying with his back to the rafters he braces the soles of his boots against the hatch.

DONAL (CONT'D)

Getting stuck on this fekking mountain...

He kicks upwards as hard as he can, forcing the trapdoor open about half an inch. The temperature is falling fast and CARLY draws herself deeper into the sleeping bag, trying to make herself as small as possible, only half hearing DONAL's words.

DONAL (CONT'D)

I boarded a boat to Dublin and ended up in Aberdeen...

CARLY  
 Could've happened to anyone, I  
 guess.

DONAL pushes again, snow cascading in around him as he  
 flings the trap wide.

DONAL  
 Took it as a sign. Just said  
 'what the hell, see what sweet  
 fate befalls you, Donal'...

EXT. ROOF. NIGHT.

DONAL pops his head out of the hatch, feeling the kiss of  
 the night air.

DONAL  
 And here I am...

He frowns, noticing a length of canvas tied around the  
 chimney stack, deliberately blocking the vent. Then before  
 he can cry out a pair of gloved hands grasp him by his face  
 and throat dragging him violently up and out into the dark,  
 his feet dancing a silent jig in the icy wind.

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

WILSON sits in the snow, listening to the incessant howling  
 of the blizzard, his head propped against his knees as  
 MELISSA scans the horizon with her goggles, waiting in vain  
 for the second flare.

MELISSA  
 Come on. Where the hell is he?

WILSON  
 Something must've happened...

MELISSA drags on his sleeve, trying to get him upright.

MELISSA  
 We've got to go.

WILSON  
 Lemme rest for a while...

MELISSA  
 No. We've got to go.

He wordlessly shoulders the kit, allowing MELISSA to take  
 his hand, leading him on through the dark, her goggles  
 straining against the gloom.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
I think I can see our tracks...

CUT TO:

INT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

CARLY sighs, catching the acrid smell of paraffin. She tries to open her eyes but their lids seem impossibly heavy.

She senses something coming between her and the light, half aware of the white garbed newcomer as he douses the furniture around her with the contents of one of the fuel cans. Then, crouching beside her, he touches her hair with his blood stained fingertips.

LORCUS  
Sssshhhh...

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

A pillar of fire lights up the night, so bright through the night viewing goggles it is almost blinding.

MELISSA  
C'mon!

She wrenches the goggles from her face, the greasy, orange flames so close now she can see them with the naked eye.

WILSON  
What is it?!

Summoning the last of her strength MELISSA forges a thigh deep path through the snow, WILSON floundering after her.

MELISSA  
Oh God... C'mon!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

The stone walls act as a massive flue, the wind fanning the blazing cottage, funnelling the flames upwards and away into the night in a swarm of angry sparks.

WILSON  
Ah Christ. We're fucked...

WILSON reels dazedly to a halt beside MELISSA, the two of them staring helplessly at the burning ruin, the bothy's blackened walls outlined against the inferno like a grinning, fractured skull.

WILSON (CONT'D)  
We're seriously fuckin' fucked...

Someone coughs and with a surge of relief MELISSA sees CARLY huddled in her sleeping bag at a safe distance from the fire, her curled, semi-conscious form barely distinguishable in the half-light.

MELISSA  
What happened?

She kneels beside CARLY in the snow, discovering her pack and the remaining syringes have been carefully set aside from the blaze.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
Where's Donal?

CARLY groans, cowering away from her, too disorientated to recognize her voice.

WILSON  
That daft Irish prat! I'll bloody kill him...

MELISSA  
I think someone already has.

She puts one arm around CARLY, drawing her shivering body closer so she can share her warmth.

WILSON  
What are you talking about?

MELISSA  
The mercy of God...

CARLY opens her eyes, looking up at MELISSA as if from the bottom of a well, seeing her tangled auburn hair outlined by a halo of fire.

CARLY  
You really are an angel...

MELISSA  
Lorcus was here, wasn't he? He did this...

CARLY nods, half in and half out of a dream, feeling the warmth of the flames against her face, not knowing how she could be burning and freezing all at once.

WILSON

Who the fuck is Lorcus?

CARLY sees WILSON's anxious, frost bitten face peering over MELISSA's shoulder and behind him the outline of a hooded figure emerging from the whirling darkness, a spectral shape as pale as the driven snow.

CARLY

Behind you...

WILSON blinks as MELISSA turns, drawing the dead homeland security man's service pistol from her belt and levelling it at the unseen figure behind him.

WILSON

The fuck?!?

He dives towards her, instinctively raising one hand to protect himself, the muzzle flash almost blinding him as she fires over his shoulder, the first shot going wide. The frost encrusted newcomer flings himself face forward into the snow, as MELISSA tries to draw a bead on him but before she can squeeze off another round WILSON catches her wrist, bending her arm backwards.

MELISSA

No!!! Let go of me...

She sinks her teeth into WILSON's forearm and he curses, backhanding her across the face and wrenching the gun from her clumsy, frozen fingers.

WILSON

Sorry 'bout that, lassie, but you had it comin'.

The hooded figure behind him regains its footing, arms upraised.

ERIC

Connas!

WILSON

That you, Eric? I thought you were dead?

The young sound designer pulls off his goggles, tentatively stepping closer.

ERIC

I'm not but I might've been. You nearly blew my head off...

WILSON

So? Where were you?

ERIC

Lost. Then I saw the light. Now  
I'm wishing I'd stayed lost...

ERIC stares at the flames, trying to take it all in. The burning bothy and WILSON calmly holding the gun on the girls.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Don't suppose anyone bothered  
saving my laptop?

WILSON shakes his head, meeting MELISSA's gaze as she coolly wipes the blood from her swollen lip with the back of her hand.

WILSON

Time you explained yourself,  
don't you think? A little  
honesty might go a long way right  
now.

ERIC

I had a weeks worth of samples on  
that drive!

MELISSA

And you might be the angriest  
sack of shit I've ever met, Mr.  
Wilson. What happened to you  
over there anyway? In Iraq or  
wherever the hell it was?

WILSON

I'm the one asking the questions,  
cunt.

CARLY

Wow.

MELISSA

Survivor guilt?

WILSON

My squad came under fire from a  
yank gunship. They died. I  
lived. No guilt. Just anger...

CARLY

Figures.

CARLY winces as WILSON cocks the pistol, steadying it at MELISSA's unblinking eyes.

WILSON

What they call 'friendly fire'...

ERIC

Hey, cool it. This isn't helping anyone...

WILSON

Who's Lorcus? I'm not asking again.

MELISSA

Some kind of criminal. I saw his file on the plane...

CARLY

All I know is we were meant to pick up an American citizen in Belfast and escort him stateside for interrogation. He's what they refer to as a 'person of interest'...

MELISSA

Which explains why we never heard about him on the news.

WILSON

And now he's out there, right? This 'person of interest'? That's what you're trying to tell me? He's out there picking us off like fish in a bloody bucket...

ERIC

I don't get it. How can he survive in these conditions? We're talking zero visibility.

MELISSA

Probably likes it that way. He's trained for these conditions. According to the file he was deployed in Afghanistan and Chechnya before changing sides and going indie...

WILSON

Going insane, you mean. He walks the path of the psycho.

WILSON slowly lowers the gun, slipping it back onto safety as he glances warily about himself.

MELISSA

He likes the snow. It's his natural habitat.

WILSON

So why doesn't he just fuck off  
and leave us alone?

MELISSA

Because he needs us. Because he  
fell out of the sky and doesn't  
know where the hell he is. He  
can't afford to wait for light  
because with the light comes the  
police. Probably more CIA or  
Homeland Security or whatever you  
guys call yourselves these  
days...

CARLY

That's why he burned the cabin.  
To stop us from sitting out the  
storm. He needs us to show him  
the way out of here...

WILSON

Except there is no way out of  
here. Not until morning...

MELISSA ferrets in her jacket for the waterproof container  
holding the map.

MELISSA

No way down perhaps...

ERIC paces silently, doing the math.

ERIC

It's only just gone one. First  
light won't show until seven. In  
another hour or so we start to  
freeze. Unless we keep moving...

WILSON

What are you people talking  
about?

MELISSA

We have to go up to get down.

She unfolds the map and the others gather round, trying to  
make sense of the whorls and contours.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

If we circle the loch and cut  
across the piste we'll gain about  
five hundred meters. From there  
on it's only another five hundred  
meter's across reasonably good  
snow to the summit...

ERIC

And the ski station! With a bit of luck we might be able to get above the storm. Either way once we're out of the valley we should be able to call for help...

The sound designer checks his mobile, relieved to find there's still enough juice in the batteries to make this a going proposition.

WILSON

Think you can get a signal on that thing?

ERIC

If we had the laptop we could've sent an e-mail. Should be, as you say, 'a piece of cake'!

WILSON

For us maybe. But what about her? She can't even walk!

MELISSA inches closer to CARLY, tightening her grip on her hand.

MELISSA

Then we'll carry her. Either way we'll have to stabilize her first. He seems to have left us everything we need...

CARLY

That's what he wanted. That's why he left me alive...

ERIC

What are you talking about?

CARLY

Classic fieldcraft. Leaving one of the enemy maimed to slow down the others. His way of keeping us on a tight leash...

WILSON checks the clip on the automatic, indignation sparking in his eyes.

WILSON

Well I'm tired of being the prey.

MELISSA

Ah Jesus. Don't even think of going out there looking for him.

WILSON

Last thing he'd expect. Right?

MELISSA

All that matters now is for us to stay awake, stay together and stay alive. Split up and we die. You know that...

She retrieves the medical kit, laying out the necessary supplies beside the sleeping bag.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Now I'm going to need a little help here. You had any medical experience, Mr. Renault?

ERIC

Actually I'm a sound engineer. At least I was until my laptop went up in smoke...

MELISSA

Good enough. Better clean your hands first...

WILSON

What about Lorcus?

MELISSA

He's going to have to wait isn't he. We've got about an hour...

WILSON

I'm not afraid of that son of a bitch.

CARLY

You should be.

A blood curdling, barely human shriek rises above the white noise of the storm and WILSON spins, staring downwind into the dark, seeing nothing.

WILSON

The fuck?!?

The voice cries out again. Although scarcely intelligible it still carries the faint trace of an Irish accent.

DONAL (O.S.)

GOD!!!

ERIC

It's Donal. He's out there.

WILSON  
You stay with her. I'll deal  
with it...

CARLY  
Again textbook fieldcraft...

MELISSA  
She's right. You're playing into  
his hands...

DONAL (O.S.)  
GOD HELP ME!!!

WILSON does up his hood, trying to get a fix on the  
screams.

WILSON  
I'll be the judge of that.

CARLY  
Split up and we die. You heard  
her.

DONAL (O.S.)  
JESUS!!!

WILSON  
Better hang on to this then.

ERIC and CARLY stare dumbfoundedly at WILSON as he hands  
MELISSA the service pistol.

WILSON (CONT'D)  
You'll be needing it more than  
me. If you're right. If this  
really is a decoy to draw me  
out...

MELISSA  
Don't be crazy.

DONAL (O.S.)  
HELP MEEE!!!

Donal's cries taper off into a prolonged wail, long and  
thin as a vein. WILSON turns away, drawing his skean d'hu,  
the warrior glimmer in his eyes growing wayward, blind and  
bright.

WILSON  
Prefer me knife, see? More  
intimate that way...

He shows off the blade, twelve inches of steel glinting in  
the firelight.

CARLY  
Boys and their fuckin' toys...

WILSON  
Stick with what you know. That's  
what I say...

MELISSA  
Wilson...

She reaches out, touching his sleeve as if to draw him  
back.

WILSON  
What?

MELISSA  
Stay alive.

Taking off her night viewing goggles she presses them into  
his hand.

WILSON  
You too.

He smiles. Then pulling on the goggles he marches knife in  
hand into the dark.

ERIC  
Crazy son of a bitch.

MELISSA  
Well he's not a sane person and  
he's not very bright. Sometimes  
people do crazy things. They  
take a chance to help their  
friends. Haven't you ever done  
something like that?

Placing the gun in easy reach she begins to gingerly unpick  
the dressing on CARLY's leg.

ERIC  
Yes and no. I mean I don't know  
what that guy's doing or why he's  
doing it. I don't know what I'm  
doing or why I'm doing it or what  
it's like...

CUT TO:

EXT. GLEN. NIGHT.

WILSON adjusts the goggles, striding through a netherworld  
of fluorescent snowflakes.

He slows, catching sight of tracks and a hundred yards or so further on sees a figure kneeling in the snow like a penitent sinner, gloved hands clasped as if in prayer.

WILSON

Donal? That you, man?

He edges closer, knife at the ready, recognizing the red star on the Irishman's ballaclava.

WILSON (CONT'D)

Hey...

He places one hand on the kneeling figure's shoulder and DONAL manages to get his head around far enough for WILSON to realize he is bound and gagged, hands tied at the wrists, eyes bulging in panic.

WILSON (CONT'D)

Fuck...

DONAL is trying to yell something, staring past him into the storm and WILSON turns, realizing his mistake.

There is a man standing behind him, less than an arm's reach away, a tall figure in a hooded, white parka, a flare clenched in one hand and a length of reinforced steel chain dangling from the other.

WILSON (CONT'D)

You...

Then LORCUS ignites the flare and WILSON cries out, his goggles intensifying the light, wiping away his vision in a blaze of blinding, green iridescence.

LORCUS

You're dead.

WILSON raises his hands to tear off the goggles and the tall man lunges forward, driving a jagged, aluminium shank into his inner thigh.

WILSON doubles up, the breath leaving him in a pained, animal grunt, his assailant grasping his flailing knife hand and bending it effortlessly behind his back, twisting the skean d'hu from his clutching fingers.

WILSON

No...

DONAL moans, thrashing from side to side as he chafes against his bonds.

Wrenching the shank from WILSON's maimed thigh LORCUS tosses him aside as if he were a sack of dirty laundry, administering a vicious side-kick to his head to shut him up while he attends to the Irishman.

DONAL stares wide eyed at his own terrified reflection caught for an instant in the glinting skean d'hu, still trying to understand how the fates could have betrayed him so, how all his dreams could have lead to this shitty, frozen ditch.

The edge of the blade is like ice against his throat, so cold he barely feels the incision, the snow reddening about him as his lifeblood steams away into the endless night.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

CARLY moans as MELISSA strips back the sodden gauze, gently probing the wound.

MELISSA  
Can you feel that?

CARLY  
Lotta pain.

MELISSA  
I can take the pain away. You want that?

She nods, watching MELISSA snap the neck off another ampoule. ERIC crouches beside her, holding the flashlight, one eye on the guttering flames.

ERIC  
We haven't got long.  
Temperature's dropping fast...

CARLY  
Melissa...

MELISSA  
Keep the torch steady.

CARLY gazes at her as she administers the injection, the pieces of the puzzle slowly falling into place.

CARLY  
You know his name. The name of the prisoner...

MELISSA  
Don't talk. Not now.

CARLY  
But you haven't told me what your'e doing here. An animal doctor with all this shit in your bag...

MELISSA  
I'll tell you later.

CARLY  
You came here to die, didn't you?

MELISSA  
So what if I did?

She smiles, squeezing CARLY's hand as the anaesthetic begins to take effect.

CARLY  
Well you sure picked the place  
for it...

MELISSA  
Sssh. It's going to be alright.  
I promise...

CARLY closes her eyes, surrendering to the high.

CARLY  
At least you won't be going  
alone...

CUT TO:

EXT. GLEN. NIGHT.

RICHARD LORCUS crouches over his prey, going through the dead man's pockets, scavenging anything that might get him through the night, coming away with little more than a spare lighter, a pouch of herbal rolling tobacco and a fistful of dubious looking uppers.

WILSON lies shivering in the snow, a few feet away from DONAL's corpse, one hand gripping his wounded thigh, hot fluid pulsing between his fingers. He is losing body temperature as well as plasma, what was once held warmly in his veins pooling into the snow, already becoming ice.

WILSON  
Oh shit... shit...

He notices the discarded shank lying beside him in the slush and gritting his teeth, inches towards it, reaching out with one sticky, blood dewed hand.

Then LORCUS is upon him once more, the skean d'hu descending in a shining arc, slicing clean through the palm of WILSON's hand, pinning it hard against the frozen earth.

WILSON (CONT'D)  
AAAHHH! FUCK!! YOU COCKSUCKER!!!

LORCUS

I severed your artery. Your  
brain will starve of oxygen.  
Try to relax. Try to go with  
it...

WILSON

You fuck...

WILSON turns on his side, glaring up at the masked figure standing over him.

LORCUS

Sssh. Sleep now. It's better  
that way...

For the first time WILSON starts to feel afraid.

WILSON

The fuck d'you think you are?

LORCUS

Call me Richard. It's my real  
name.

WILSON raises his head as if to spit a final insult but the words stick in his throat.

A great tremor runs through his body and he lets his head fall backwards, snow settling in his upturned eyes.

LORCUS waits for the life to go out of him before bending to examine WILSON's pockets, hoping for better pickings this time.

It is his first real mistake of the evening.

Catching his breath WILSON sits up as hard as he can, his forehead connecting with LORCUS's face in a resounding crack. LORCUS reels backwards, staying on his feet for an instant. Then a ribbon of blood and mucous slides from his nose and he pitches backwards into a snowdrift.

WILSON

And you call that a 'Glasgow  
Kiss', cunt!

Grasping the hilt of the skean d'hu with his left hand WILSON pulls himself free, trying not to cringe as pain ripples through his body. Stripping off his belt he fastens it about his calf to form an improvised tourniquet before advancing on his stunned opponent.

WILSON (CONT'D)

C'mon, you big girl's blouse!

But LORCUS doesn't hear him.

WILSON (CONT'D)  
I ain't finished with you yet...

WILSON shakes his head, feeling dizzy.

Slipping to one knee he vomits explosively into the slush.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

CARLY's face looks almost tranquil, pale as porcelain in the waning light.

MELISSA  
I think we stopped the bleeding.  
She's just so cold...

ERIC  
She's not the only one. We  
should get moving soon.

MELISSA  
Have to abandon the pack...

ERIC checks his watch as MELISSA ferrets through her bag, setting aside the remaining ampoules.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
You want to eat first? Before we  
go?

ERIC  
What about the others?

MELISSA  
You feel like going out there and  
looking for them, Mr... Mister?

ERIC  
Eric. The sound man. Remember?

MELISSA  
Of course. I'm sorry. Eric...

Forcing herself upright MELISSA begins to grope for hot stones and bits of debris, piling them around CARLY's feet.

ERIC  
What are you doing?

MELISSA  
Stones hold back heat. Like a  
sauna. Might buy us time...

ERIC  
You think it's worth it? Waiting  
I mean...

She nods, silently gathering stones.

ERIC (CONT'D)  
You're the boss...

ERIC bends to help, digging out a sort of nest from the rubble in the most sheltered corner they can find.

MELISSA  
Suppose you came out here for the  
peace and quiet?

ERIC  
Ambience mostly. I grew up in  
the Ariege, in mountains like  
these. Of course I do most of my  
work out of a studio in the  
seventh arrondissement nowadays.  
It's a lot more comfortable.

There is a smell of singeing flesh and she realizes one of the embers is burning her hand but she holds on to it anyway, too numb to feel pain.

ERIC  
You play any instruments?

MELISSA  
Not really. Some guitar...

ERIC  
What about Lorcus? What if he  
comes back?

MELISSA  
Let him come...

MELISSA settles herself beside CARLY, propping her back against the charred wall, trying to soak up the residual warmth.

MELISSA (CONT'D)  
We're both too wasted to do  
anything about it.

ERIC  
Rest for a while then.

MELISSA  
Yeah. A while...

CUT TO:

EXT. GLEN. NIGHT.

WILSON opens his eyes, not knowing when or where he is, knowing only that he has to get up.

He starts to turn only to find LORCUS is already on his feet, driving the knife from his hand with a single, well placed kick.

WILSON is too phased to even curse.

Instead something like a snarl escapes his lips as he launches himself headlong at his opponent, striking LORCUS in the midriff and bringing him down, the two of them rolling over together in the snow, gouging, kicking and punching, each striving silently for the advantage.

LORCUS is a big man but WILSON has just enough jujitsu to get him in a neck hold, grappling his adversary onto his chest and throttling him steadily into submission.

WILSON

Just try to go with it...

LORCUS reaches down with his left hand, undoing WILSON's tourniquet. The wound is deep and blood comes at once. Gritting his teeth WILSON grinds the big man's head into the slush, trying to choke the life from him before the strength goes out of his fingers.

WILSON (CONT'D)

Yer murdering prat...

LORCUS trembles, making no further effort but WILSON continues to tighten the hold, red and green sparks dancing before his eyes. Then with a sigh he topples across his fallen opponent, lying together close as lovers in the dark, too spent to make another move, a fine dusting of snow settling as a blessing on their cooling bodies.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BOTHY. NIGHT.

The survivors huddle like animals in the ashes, cold seeping into their pores. CARLY is still unconscious, safe in her dreams but ERIC and MELISSA are too uncomfortable to sleep. Instead they sit staring into the dark, lost in their own thoughts like strangers on a bus.

ERIC

We'll have to go soon.

MELISSA

Are you cold?

ERIC nods. Glancing at his watch he tries to make out the sweep hand in the blackness. It is as if time has stopped.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

So am I.

ERIC

Let's go then...

MELISSA reaches into her waistcoat, retrieving her battered hipflask only to find it nearly empty.

MELISSA

In a mo'...

ERIC

If we wait any longer we'll be just as dead as he is.

The wind lulls, the snow going from horizontal to diagonal in less than thirty seconds. Taking a measured sip from the flask MELISSA offers the remainder to ERIC but he declines.

MELISSA

Go in a minute. When the storm blows itself out...

ERIC

I think we should go now. We're in a bad way.

MELISSA stoppers the flask, saving back the last mouthful.

MELISSA

Okay. Let's do it then.

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LOCH. NIGHT.

It is a good four hours before day break and freezing darkness fills the valley like a bowl. Somewhere deep within the gloom two tiny figures slowly pick their way through the formless void, dragging an aircraft door behind them, eyes turned upwards an invisible horizon and a dawn that scarcely promises to come.

ERIC

You should come and visit. You and your friend...

MELISSA

I'd like that. To see Paris. Properly, I mean...

MELISSA strains against the improvised harness, swinging her arms to keep the circulation going, striding as broadly as she can in the snow. The rope chafes against her aching shoulders yet she accepts the burden with equanimity, besides the weight isn't so bad with ERIC to share the load.

The first part of the journey around the shore of the loch is relatively easy going over good snow and although she often stumbles and falls MELISSA is grateful for the tenderness of that snow and its reluctance to injure.

The exercise warms her and she feels her spirits rising as the storm abates. Then a great rent appears in the leaden clouds and she gets her first clear view of the stars.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

God...

ERIC staggers to a halt beside her.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

It's so quiet. Can you hear it?

ERIC shivers. The sudden silence and the proximity of those stars seems to reassure MELISSA whilst unnerving him, making him feel smaller and less capable than before.

ERIC

Know any songs?

MELISSA

Only songs about death.

She shoulders the harness and ERIC mechanically falls in beside her, managing a kind of swaying, rhythmic walk.

ERIC

Sing one for me.

MELISSA

Not now.

ERIC

Later then...

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN MOHR. NIGHT.

A sough of freezing wind comes whirling down off the glacier, blowing spindrift about them as ERIC and MELISSA drag the aircraft door across a jagged fan of moraine, making for a col in the south face.

MELISSA is desperately tired, her arms and legs operating without conscious instruction, propelling her body forward along a groove in the scree, pausing only to change the rope from one shoulder to another, a ritual she has to repeat with gruelling regularity.

MELISSA  
I'm getting old.

ERIC  
It's okay. You're doing good.

She stops to catch her breath hearing something moving further down the slope but it is only the trickle of stones displaced by their passage.

MELISSA  
I feel like an old, old woman...

They wordlessly follow the groove until the groove gives out and unmitigated scree rises ahead with soul-destroying lip after lip appearing in slow succession.

They are literally crawling now, the spindrift coming at eye level. The angle of ascent is greater than sixty degrees and such is the paucity of MELISSA's strength that she clings claw stiff for minutes at a time to any spur that offers more than minimal protection from sliding backwards.

MELISSA  
It's no good. We'll have to rest...

CARLY  
Are we still alive?

MELISSA bends over the makeshift stretcher, touching CARLY's hair.

MELISSA  
We're almost home. We're doing good...

CARLY  
I was dreaming of you...

ERIC crouches a little further up the slope, trying to activate his mobile.

MELISSA  
Think you can get a signal?

ERIC  
Maybe if I get a bit higher. You stay with the sled.

CARLY  
I'm cold...

ERIC turns away, clutching the mobile like a talisman.

MELISSA  
Don't forget to come back.

ERIC  
Hey we'll always have Paris...

She follows his progress as he shins his way up the scree until his outline is lost amidst the lightless jumble of boulders.

CARLY  
Where's he going?

MELISSA  
Across the road for some Gaulois  
and the Sunday papers...

She settles herself beside the stretcher, trying to shield CARLY from the worst of the spindrift, using her own body as a windbreak.

CARLY  
Tell him to pick up a pint of  
milk while he's at it...

CUT TO:

EXT. SOUTH COL. NIGHT.

ERIC is able to move faster now, unencumbered by the stretcher, muscles warming as he hauls himself up onto a granite spur overlooking the valley. For the first time he senses a noticeable change in the quality of the light as if somewhere on the far side of the mountains dawn is already under way.

Perching cross legged on the lip of the spur he bows his head to the roaring void, muttering a prayer beneath his breath before trying the mobile.

To his surprise his prayers are answered.

OPERATOR (O.S.)  
You have reached 999 emergency  
services...

ERIC  
'Allo! Hey!! I'm on top of a  
fucking mountain here...

ERIC blinks, catching sight of something moving amidst the scree below.

OPERATOR (O.S.)  
Your call has been placed in an  
automatic voice mail messaging  
system...

ERIC  
My name's Eric. Eric Renault...

OPERATOR (O.S.)  
Please hit the star button if you  
require immediate assistance...

ERIC hunkers down, trying to remove himself from the skyline, quite certain he can see a human figure picking its way between the boulders beneath him.

ERIC  
There's been a plane crash. I...

His voice tails off as the figure looks up at him, its face shadowed by a frost rimmed hood.

At this distance it could be anyone.

OPERATOR (O.S.)  
Press the star button now.

CUT TO:

EXT. TERMINAL MORAINES. NIGHT.

CARLY curls a little closer to MELISSA, watching as the older woman takes a bearing on her compass. The stars have almost disappeared, the black vault of the firmament softening into a deep, impenetrable grey.

CARLY  
How long? How long before it  
gets light?

MELISSA  
Soon. I promise. I mean it's  
getting brighter, isn't it?

But light has a peculiar quality this high up.

The sky has strange tones more and more intense and more subtle than at lower altitudes and MELISSA is quietly exasperated by the number of shades of grey it has already gone through.

CARLY  
That's beautiful...

For a moment MELISSA thinks she means the sky but then she realizes CARLY is admiring the inlay on Nidge's compass.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Is that mother of pearl?

MELISSA

Yeah.

CARLY

Must have been someone special.

MELISSA

He was.

She turns away, replacing the compass in her waistcoat. The wind is rising again, the valley vanishing in a freezing mist.

CARLY

I'm sorry.

MELISSA

Don't be. In the end it was easy. Dying is the easy part. Anyone can die...

She raises her hood against the storm, the wind resuming its familiar howl, bringing the snow with it as if it had never been away. The eye of the storm seems to have passed right over them, total white out conditions prevailing again within seconds.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Staying alive. That's another thing...

CUT TO:

EXT. SOUTH COL. DAWN.

ERIC huddles in a cleft in the rocks, too terrified to move, eyes turned towards the curious paleness that fills the heavens.

There are no stars now, only an opaque, milky lightness. Only the wind blowing fiercely in the pearly-white glow. No sun, no sky, no mountain, no valley, nothing but fine, icy particles whirling in a crazy thickness, blowing in every direction.

ERIC closes himself into a knot, sinking back into his small, cold space, thoughts whirling in his head. All through the early hours they had followed the stars. It had been clear and now this. It is surreal. A swirling vortex of snow that threatens to pull them in and under.

They have survived the night passage only to be snowed in at dawn.

He thinks he hears a stealthy footfall, pulling in his arms and legs as much as he can, trying not to even breathe. For a while he closes his eyes, the cold permeating him. It is all there is and all he can think about.

When he opens his eyes again he sees something utterly inexplicable.

A luminous butterfly is hanging in midair only a few feet from his face, its translucent wings glowing in the refracted sunlight.

ERIC shivers, catching his breath.

A bank of cloud crosses the sun and the light shifts, revealing the butterfly to be the glass eyeplate of a pair of snow goggles, the visibility improving just long enough for ERIC to make out the details of the figure standing in front of him, an ice axe clenched in its gloved hands.

LORCUS is wearing Donal's ballaclava and Wilson's night viewing goggles dangle from his throat, the all white parka that made him invisible a moment ago encrusted with a thick layer of gleaming frost.

Realizing his hunter still hasn't seen him ERIC cowers back into the cleft. Then he starts to tremble, finding to his dismay he can no longer control his mouth and teeth.

For a moment LORCUS walks right past him only to stop in his tracks, sniffing the air as if somehow sensing ERIC's living presence.

Bowing his head ERIC sinks his teeth into the fleshy part of his own hand, biting down to stop the chattering. Closing his eyes he tries very hard not to exist.

LORCUS sniffs the air one last time and turns away, starting down the trail and ERIC exhales slowly.

Just then the cell 'phone rings in his breast pocket. A cheesy electronic rendition of 'Scotland the Brave'. ERIC fumbles to switch off the handset but by the time he retrieves it from his parka he is already dead, the tip of LORCUS' ice axe passing cleanly through his brain.

OPERATOR (O.S.)  
999 Emergency Services...

RICHARD LORCUS places his boot against the young sound designer's chest and wrenches the steaming ice axe free before bending to pluck the cell from the reddening slush.

OPERATOR (O.S./CONT'D)  
Do you require assistance?

CUT TO:

EXT. TERMINAL MORAINÉ. DAWN.

MELISSA blows on her fingers. In the faint light her hands seem raw and rough, the pores filled with oily grime, the nails broken and the skin an unpleasant shade of fishbelly white. She rubs them against her arms until she can feel her fingers begin to flex.

MELISSA  
Shall we go?

CARLY  
What do you want to do?

MELISSA  
We have to find shelter.

CARLY  
What's the point?

MELISSA  
I want to go on.

She offers CARLY the last mouthful from the hipflask, watching as she swallows.

CARLY  
I can't walk.

MELISSA  
It's okay. I'll carry you for a while...

CARLY  
And then?

MELISSA stoppers the flask, considering her options. Bowling the flask overarm into the void she watches it fall away from her, glinting in the sourceless half-light.

MELISSA  
Then I'll carry you again for a while.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN MOHR. SOUTH COL. DAWN.

Arching her back to take CARLY's weight MELISSA forces her way upward.

In her ruined condition progress is minimal but to simply keep going, incrementally gaining altitude is all her body and mind can encompass, her limbs going through the motions of some built in ritual that keeps them moving long after the pilot has taken her hands from the joystick.

MELISSA

He used to work here in the summertimes. He was a climbing instructor like Wilson.

CARLY

And you came here to be with him?

CARLY wallows in a stupor, quite comfortable in her way, clinging to MELISSA's heaving shoulders.

MELISSA

We both knew the score. I mean M.S. is congenital. We just thought it'd take longer. That we'd have a few more years..

CARLY

Sucks.

MELISSA

Happens so quickly. Like getting old. One minute you're strong and the next...finished. But so quickly...

She hitches CARLY up to stop her slipping, wishing she didn't feel responsible for her.

CARLY

So you thought you'd save me instead?

MELISSA

I hated seeing him that way. It was all I could do to take the pain away, but morphine's good for that...

CARLY

Morphine rocks.

MELISSA

Sort of a midwife. I mean they have midwives to bring you into the world so why not to help you leave it?

CARLY

I think they call it palliative care.

MELISSA tries to summon her resolve from the pit of her stomach but she's too tired to recapture it for more than a moment or two. She doesn't feel angry any more.

CARLY (CONT'D)

You still got any?

CARLY stares up at the mountain looming over them, the slope growing ever sheerer, the rock face taking on the scarred and barren look of the high country where nothing grows and no animal lives for long.

MELISSA

What?

CARLY

Morphine? You still got any?

All around them are endless pits and crags, horny scales of rock, angles and edges that slash at the soles of MELISSA's boots and skin her legs, reducing the lower part of her trousers to bloody shreds.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

We have.

CARLY

Yeah...

The wind lulls, an eerie silence falling over the snowscape. The sky is so close they can almost touch it but there is still no trace of the sun.

MELISSA

Enough. But right now we still have a chance.

CARLY

I know.

Then the snow turns to rain and in an instant the whole landscape becomes fluid, the rain falling with such violence and completeness that for a moment neither of them can really comprehend it.

MELISSA

We have...

The rock wall trembles as water cascades past and down and around and beneath them, the air filling with a tumultuous stinging spray.

MELISSA lashes about herself, clinging at arm's length to the only cracks she can find, eyes tight shut, her boots skidding and sliding as CARLY's weight pulls her backwards, the rain drawing the strength from her limbs.

Her feet make contact with a ledge and she lowers her burden, pressing CARLY to the rock wall and trying to cover her.

MELISSA

We...

CARLY

We have to find shelter.

CARLY points upwards, her head bent against the violence of the storm. Open mouthed MELISSA nods and they set out, not bothering to waste further energy on attempts to talk.

CUT TO:

EXT. OVERHANG. DAWN.

A hundred metres further along the ledge MELISSA finds what they're looking for. A dry space large enough to accommodate both of them.

She turns, helping CARLY into the fissure before ducking under the muddy cascade and huddling beside her, too exhausted to think or speak, the cold permeating her body. Worst of all is the horrible, clammy embrace of her wet jumper and the juddering shivers it induces.

Strange woofing noises puff out of MELISSA every time she tries to breathe and with each onset of shaking she emits a curious, low-pitched moan that she does nothing to produce and seems powerless to arrest. In fact it strikes her as a rather funny sound and after a while they both begin to giggle.

CARLY

I think it's easing off...

CARLY lies back, the contents of a sandwich between MELISSA and the rock, suspended between amusement and suffering, taking a long view of their predicament. She watches as MELISSA produces the pill dispenser from her waistcoat, squeezing another three tablets into the palm of her hand and dry swallowing them.

MELISSA

Come on sun...

She turns to face the curtain of rain to see if it is really getting brighter but the sheer effort of sitting up coupled with the sight of the falling, gurgling water fills her with an intense desire to urinate.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Christ!

In her panic MELISSA tries to rise, knocks her head against the overhang and vomits onto CARLY's legs. Then a ruinous spasm shakes her and she falls still.

When she opens her eyes she finds CARLY looking at her.

MELISSA  
Sorry about that.

MELISSA brushes vaguely at the mess which, difficult to distinguish from the general sogginess, seems far less than it felt.

CARLY  
Doesn't matter.

MELISSA  
Pissed my pants...

CARLY  
Not wet enough already?

CARLY takes MELISSA's hand, massaging her blackened fingertips.

MELISSA  
Do I smell?

CARLY  
I don't know, baby. I can't  
smell a thing...

MELISSA  
I must smell. I must smell  
awful. I peed myself.

She stares dazedly at her claw like fingers before placing her other hand over CARLY's.

CARLY  
I shouldn't worry.

MELISSA  
I feel like I'm a hundred years  
old...

CARLY  
You don't look a day older than  
ninety-nine.

She tries to straighten MELISSA's matted hair, wiping some of the grime from her lips.

MELISSA  
I'm sorry.

CARLY

Me too.

Bending a little closer CARLY lightly kisses her on the mouth.

MELISSA

Don't be.

CARLY

You really wanted to rescue me,  
didn't you?

MELISSA looks away, striving with all her strength to stop CARLY hearing her dry tearless sobs.

CARLY

Didn't you?

For a moment she thinks MELISSA is laughing. CARLY doesn't understand what's so funny but she doesn't let it bother her.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Hey, I'm happy for it to be this way. To be with you, I mean. You know that.

MELISSA

Let's go then.

She starts towards the front of the fissure, half convinced she saw something out there. A shadow outlined in the curling mist.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Go out and meet the fucker...

She manages to get herself upright, relieved to find the rain has stopped after all.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN MOHR. SOUTH FACE. DAY.

The sun drives away the clouds, casting long shadows in the snow, deep blue indentations in the mountains below. The colours seem piercingly clear to CARLY as she stares up at the ice cliff that rises above them. The sun warms her, its rays glowing the deepest, purest vermilion. It seems to suffuse everything, flowing over their ruined bodies in waves, washing them in radiance.

MELISSA

Carly?

She tightens the nylon rope about them, CARLY's weight riding easier now her shoulders have lost all feeling. Besides the American girl is so slender, so much lighter than her.

CARLY

Yeah?

She has such tiny hands.

MELISSA

I'm happy to be with you too.

MELISSA lashes out at the wall of ice with her right fist, punching through the crust, wincing at the resistance it meets. The ice is thick and hard, much firmer than the day before, firm enough to carry both of them she prays.

The ascent is slippery and MELISSA has to be careful, keeping her stomach close in and her butt tucked under to compensate for CARLY's weight.

Slamming the toe of her boot through the crust she repeats the procedure. Kick and hold. Smash with her fist and hang on.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Hang on.

She creeps towards the first outcrop. Another foothold, another handhold and she makes it. It has taken five moves and MELISSA's hands are numb but they are alive.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

We're doing okay.

CARLY

I'm not worried.

When MELISSA can move her fingers again she starts out for the next ledge. Halfway there a gust of cold wind blows up under her sodden jumper and she glances down to see LORCUS standing less than a hundred feet below them.

MELISSA freezes, unable to go up or down. The snow crust under her hand begins to give way and suddenly her body feels unbelievably weak.

MELISSA

He's watching us.

CARLY

Nice to know someone cares.

CARLY finds a handhold on the cliff face, taking some of their weight, helping MELISSA stabilize.

MELISSA

Why doesn't he just come for us?  
Get it over with?

CARLY

He will. When he's ready...

MELISSA pulls herself up onto the next clump of rock, panting for breath and holding on hard until the pain of exertion begins to ebb, until she can breathe again. Looking down she sees LORCUS raise his right hand, wiggling his fingers in a hello wave just as he did when sinking the wreck.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Right now he needs us.

CARLY starts to wave back but then another cloud plunges them into whiteout.

MELISSA

Well, fuck him. I've had it with  
men needing shit from me...

She searches for another handhold, moving cautiously from rock to rock. The reflection of the sunlight off the snow warms MELISSA's body save for her hands and feet that serve as ice picks.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

One day...

The sun is full out, the sky a perfect blue.

CARLY

What?

There is a long silence broken only by the sound of MELISSA's tortured breathing. Then they both hear it at once. The rhythmic beat of an approaching helicopter.

MELISSA

Oh God...

MELISSA hauls herself towards the summit, the throb of rotors quickening like a pulse in her ears.

CARLY

C'mon. We've got to hurry...

CARLY glances back, knowing LORCUS is behind them but the hooded figure has merged with the landscape once more, seeming to be everywhere and nowhere all at once.

CARLY

Please God...

MELISSA begins to chant under her breath, using the last of her strength, letting the vibration build inside her as she hurtles from foothold to foothold, moving so fast it is as if they are falling upwards.

MELISSA  
Om... mani...

CARLY  
Please...

CUT TO:

EXT. SUMMIT. DAY.

Suddenly the sheer face is no longer so steep. The slope levels out into a broad saddle and MELISSA falls face first into the snow, realizing they have finally reached the very highest part of the mountain.

MELISSA  
Padme...

CARLY  
Come on...

Lungs burning MELISSA forces herself upright, taking a half step forward and staring down at the panorama of snow capped peaks that rolls away before then.

CARLY (CONT'D)  
Fuck...

MELISSA  
Hum Hri...

More mountains. Mountains and ravines as far as CARLY can see.

CARLY  
Hey!

A gleaming rescue helicopter is just making its second pass across the north face, gliding forward and then dancing back as it completes its box of search.

CARLY (CONT'D)  
HEY!!!

The mantra becomes an incoherent animal cry as MELISSA propels herself down the north flank towards the circling chopper, their yells drowned out by the thrumming engines.

CARLY (CONT'D)  
No...

To her horror the helicopter abruptly changes direction, banking sharply away from them.

CARLY (CONT'D)  
This is stupid...

MELISSA flounders another hundred yards through knee deep snow before her legs give out.

CARLY (CONT'D)  
This is so fucking stupid...

MELISSA disentangles herself, rolling on her back in the snow.

MELISSA  
I can see the bones of my finger tips.

CARLY  
Look the other way.

CARLY sits up, brushing the snow from her hair, watching helplessly as the helicopter moves into the distance, snouting about and setting up a new pattern of search.

MELISSA  
Tastes salty.

The wind begins to pick up, the sound of rotors fading.

CARLY  
Talk.

MELISSA  
What about?

CARLY  
You're the brainy one.

MELISSA nods towards the line of grey, metal pylons marching away across the piste.

MELISSA  
It's all down hill from here...

CUT TO:

EXT. PISTE. DAY.

Down has a rhythm of its own, bad for discipline because the sloping ground causes MELISSA's body to lurch and lose cadence, breaking her concentration. The temptation is to let her feet find their own way, a sure way of breaking an ankle in this slush. To hold back and descend deliberately is hard work.

She tries to put as much weight on her heels as she can, arching her back to support CARLY as she follows the endless pylons, knowing the real world is at the other end of them.

Out of spite, out of pride, she begins to count the pylons as she passes. When she's in the upper twenties she loses track and has to rest.

MELISSA

That's okay. I can dig pylons.

She notices the glow first on the sleeve of her parka, a ripple of yellow light, a glowing, sparkling, widening band that shimmers about her as she moves her hands.

She watches it, fascinated, noticing an outer band of colour, this one magenta, growing about her arms and by waving them like wands she can cast beautiful ribbons of light in the air.

CARLY

What are you doing?

MELISSA

Can you see that? The colours?

CARLY

What colours?

MELISSA

I dunno. I think I'm going blind.

MELISSA has heard of snow blindness and wonders if this is what is happening, if the reflection of the sun on the snow has finally caused irreversible damage to her optic nerve. As soon as she becomes anxious the colours vanish.

CARLY

Try to rest for a while. We can go on later.

CUT TO:

EXT. PISTE. DAY.

The bottom of the piste is proving to be much farther away than it seemed from above. At least two hours have passed and there is still no sign of the ski station.

MELISSA

He'll be coming again soon.  
I just wish he'd get it done  
with...

CARLY

He will.

It's extraordinary how you get used to the cold MELISSA tells herself, just like you get used to the sickness and the pain. They fall on you from the sky and in the end you don't even notice.

MELISSA

It gets so you lose interest.

CARLY

Just try to stay awake. That's all that matters now...

There are straight lines beneath the snow and CARLY realizes they are walking on the bare beginnings of a road.

MELISSA

Gathered on the beach...

CARLY

What?

MELISSA

Sorry. I must be fucking losing it...

There is a low tremor like the rumble of an approaching engine.

CARLY

You said something about a beach.

MELISSA

Gathered on the beach of the tumid river. T.S. Eliot. A level English lit...

They come to a bend in the road and looking over the edge of the embankment CARLY finds herself staring at the ski station proper, a snow plow moving on the trail below, gouging its way through the silent gorge.

CARLY

Better put me down now.

MELISSA

It's about death...

She relinquishes the burden, gently lowering CARLY to the side of the road, unable to comprehend that the journey is really over.

CARLY

It doesn't matter. Tell me  
anyway. Tell me what you  
remember...

MELISSA

Is it like this in death's other  
kingdom?

There is a stealthy footfall, a sound of crunching snow.

MELISSA

Waking alone at the hour when we  
are trembling with tenderness...

MELISSA feels a tug on the nylon rope about her waist and she turns to see LORCUS standing beside CARLY, the ice axe cradled in his hands.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Lips that would kiss form prayers  
to broken stone...

MELISSA's maimed hand falls to her belt, fumbling for the butt of the service pistol but it is nowhere to be found. Then she notices the gun is already in CARLY's hands.

CARLY

It's what you wanted, isn't it?  
To rescue me?

LORCUS pulls off his mask and goggles, shaking out a mane of blonde hair as he helps CARLY to her feet. They look pretty good together.

CARLY (CONT'D)

It's okay. It's gonna be okay  
now...

LORCUS

You knew I'd never leave you  
here, baby. Not like this.  
Alone in this fucking  
wasteland...

LORCUS glances nervously upwards, hearing the throb of circling helicopters.

MELISSA

Hey, love's the only thing that  
matters, isn't it? In the end...

LORCUS gathers CARLY closer, bending to kiss her on the lips, keeping one eye on MELISSA all the while, the nylon rope threaded through the carabiners on her belt wrapped tight around his right hand, acting as a kind of leash.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Figured you guys were an item when I saw the photograph. The air marshal's jacket was a nice touch but it didn't convince...

LORCUS

But you risked your life for us anyway? How come?

MELISSA

How long have you guys been together?

CARLY

Four years.

LORCUS

Four crazy fucking years...

CARLY

You know they would've killed us if they'd taken us back? They'd have given us gas.

The shining carapace of the helicopter appears above the ridge, circling lazily in the thin, cold air.

MELISSA

So now you're going to kill me instead?

LORCUS

It's not that we aren't grateful...

CARLY

Yeah. Don't get us wrong.

She turns Nidge's compass in her hand for the last time.

LORCUS

You'd do the same. If you knew it was the only way to save your soul...

CARLY

It won't be bad, baby- I promise.

MELISSA

I'm not worried.

CARLY

You're the best.

MELISSA

Better keep this for me.

She tosses CARLY the compass and the American girl reaches to catch it, taking the gun off MELISSA for a vital split second, all the time she needs to launch herself backwards down the incline, dragging LORCUS with her, the rope entangled about his wrist, the two of them rolling together into the path of the oncoming snow plow.

CARLY

NO!

MELISSA tries to get up but LORCUS is already upon her, the blade of the skean d'hu ripping into the shoulder of her jacket, the air filling with flying down.

Then the nylon cord is caught up by the plow blades, wrapping about the axle like a length of thread on a spool, yanking them backwards and sending the knife spinning from LORCUS' hands.

At the last moment the driver realizes what is happening and switches off the blades, pulling the plow to a halt. Winding down the side window the perplexed individual at the wheel stares in confusion at the two figures struggling in the slush.

DRIVER

What the hell is going on?

LORCUS dives to retrieve the skean d'hu as MELISSA pulls herself up onto the snow plow's footplate.

MELISSA

OPEN THE FUCKING DOOR!

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. SNOWPLOW. DAY.

The driver does as he's told, recoiling at the sight of MELISSA's matted hair and blood caked, grime encrusted hands.

DRIVER

WHAT IS THIS?

Just then LORCUS appears outside the windscreen, having climbed over the plow's blade housing. MELISSA screams as he draws back the ice axe and the DRIVER pulls open the far door, diving in panic from the vehicle.

The windscreen implodes, the ice axe whistling past MELISSA's head to embed itself in the back of the seat.

MELISSA tries to follow the driver but LORCUS's hand snakes out, grabbing her by her jumper and wrenching her towards him, her ruined fingers flailing across the dashboard, accidentally turning on the hazard lights.

CUT TO:

EXT. PISTE. DAY.

The helicopter banks, circling lower as it catches sight of the running driver floundering through the snow, starting back down the trail towards the ski-station.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. SNOWPLOW. DAY.

MELISSA hits the dashboard again, sounding the snow plow's klaxon as LORCUS tightens his grip on her throat. Then the blades whirl into life and the plow lurches forward down the track.

LORCUS lets go of MELISSA so he can disentangle himself and she lurches backward, undoing the belt to prevent herself being hauled after him.

LORCUS tries to slice the rope with Wilson's skean d'hu but it's useless. The frozen nylon might as well be a steel cable.

MELISSA  
Fuck you, lover...

LORCUS  
Whore!

The rope snaps tight and he lashes out, catching hold of MELISSA's matted tresses with his trailing hand.

MELISSA  
Let the fuck go of me, asshole!

There is a sharp crack as LORCUS' right leg is dislocated from the hip and MELISSA bellows as her head is slammed hard against the dashboard. She hears something metallic clatter off the bonnet, catching a fleeting glimpse of the fallen skean d'hu out of the corner of her eye.

Gritting her teeth she pulls herself forward, LORCUS' entire weight dragging on her greasy auburn hair. Then her hand closes on the hilt of the skean d'hu and bringing it up she begins to hack at her own tresses. For a moment LORCUS maintains his grip and then MELISSA pulls free, crashing back into a sitting position against the control panel.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Om mani...

She closes her eyes, wincing at the sound of LORCUS' body falling into the teeth of the snow plow, his cries cut short as the jet of slush spewing from the vehicles pump turns from white to pink to red to pink and finally back to white again.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Padme...

She breathes a sigh of relief, reaching slowly up with her gnarled, left hand to shut down the plow.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Hum Hri...

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. PISTE. DAY.

From above the red patch in the snow tells the whole story, the helicopter circling lower as it tries to find a place to land, the rotors whipping up the spin drift, the whole earth seeming to buck and tilt beneath the shadow of its blades.

CARLY makes it to the bottom of the embankment, dragging herself an inch at a time across the frozen soil, long dark hair fluttering in the down-draft. She hears the sound of feet crunching over snow behind her and closing her eyes instinctively raises the service pistol to her forehead.

Then the tip of a boot strikes her wrist, definitively spoiling her aim.

MELISSA

Dying's too easy, bitch...

She turns to see MELISSA standing over her like a divine messenger. She looks different with short hair. Older somehow.

CARLY

Just let me go...

MELISSA

No. You're staying here.

CARLY whimpers, making another little lunge for the gun and MELISSA kicks her in the face, rearranging that perfect bridgework. She rolls onto her back and MELISSA steps down hard on her wrist, pinning her to the slush.

CARLY

Please...

MELISSA

You're staying here with me...

Hopeless tears well in CARLY's eyes and for the first time she looks genuinely lost. MELISSA kneels beside her, stroking her hair with her claw like hands. CARLY tries to cringe away but there is no strength left in her body and instead she gives in to the embrace, hanging on to MELISSA as the chopper touches down behind them, disgorging a unit of armed policemen. Drawing their guns the uniformed newcomers keep their distance for a moment, staring at the two ragged, shivering, half-human figures as if not sure which of them to arrest first.

MELISSA (VOICE OVER)

Those who have crossed with  
direct eyes into death's other  
kingdom think of us, if at all,  
not as lost, violent souls but  
only as the hollow men...

Radio static and gruff male voices come from all sides and gathering CARLY in her arms MELISSA tries in vain to warm and comfort her like the sister she's never known, the child she'll never have.

MELISSA (V.O./CONT'D)

The stuffed men...

FADE TO WHITE.  
ROLL END  
TITLES.