

DOG

Written by
Lucy Campbell

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lucycampbellsmyth@gmail.com

DARKNESS.

Then - a speck in the black. A small rectangle of light, no bigger than a fingernail. But it is growing larger. And larger.

We are speeding towards this strange doorway.

As we get closer the rectangle is large enough to recognise what is beyond it - the underside of trees. The glint of sky and moonlight.

We are deep in the earth, heading up towards the light --

EXT. BUSHLAND - DUSK

Twilight in the valley. We slowly push through dense trees. Levitating.

Ghost gums reach into a darkening sky. Like hands searching for something to grasp. Mossy rocks. Knots of startling green fern twist through rotting undergrowth.

It is dark, damp country. A thin veil of mist settles.

A BLACK CROW lands on a branch.

The CROW searches for food from up high. And for a moment, we may notice that when the CROW BLINKS its eyes become eerily CLOUDED - A STRANGE, UNREAL MILKY COLOUR.

Somewhere in the distance, a DOG BEGINS TO BARK INCESSANTLY.

Startled, the CROW flaps away.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/BACKYARD - DUSK

THE MACARTHUR HOUSE - a modern, tasteful new build - sits on the edge of the valley. The home is dark.

A large Labrador stares into the valley, barking. He sniffs at the air. *Is there someone or something in the dark?*

A DEEP, DISTANT CRACK sounds from somewhere far into the dark bushland.

A sense of dread in his little doggy heart. He whines anxiously.

OVER BLACK:

The dark, beautiful sound of a sustained cello note.

INT. UNDERGROUND THEATRE - EVENING

Long fingers dance along the neck of a cello. Effortless. Filled with a strange, ethereal menace. Cello, piano and

violin - A TRIO ON STAGE. The only light is the flicker of hundreds of candles burning on stage.

We focus on the cellist - a young teenager in a suit.

This is EZRA MACARTHUR, 17.

He is good. Very good.

An appreciative, formally dressed audience watch, including Ezra's parents - LUKAS, 52 and SOFIA, 44. CHLOE, 13, watches her older brother impassively.

LUKAS is transported. Every note, every breath, is consumed by LUKAS' hungry, proud eyes.

SOFIA's phone buzzes. She surreptitiously checks it. LUKAS registers, just for a moment.

As the trio comes to its devastating conclusion the audience applauds loudly. LUKAS is the loudest. He whoops and pumps his fist in the air, grinning.

INT. UNDERGROUND THEATRE - LATER

The audience mills in the dim light.

LUKAS and SOFIA are chatting to a larger group.

MAN #1

He's got *beautiful* phrasing...
incredibly polished --

LUKAS

He's worked hard. All three of them
have.

SOFIA

We're very proud.

WOMAN #1

And New York for him next year? How
thrilling --

The conversation continues as CHLOE zones out and spots EZRA and the pianist, JOEL, making their way through well wishers, flushed with excitement. CHLOE makes a face at EZRA.

CHLOE

Lukas thinks you're a genius. He's
basically wetting his pants right
now.

EZRA

But I *am* a genius, Clo.

They fist bump, grinning.

CHLOE

Pretty cool show, dickhead.

EZRA
Thanks fuckface.

The larger group congratulate EZRA. SOFIA hugs him tightly.

SOFIA
Oh my God, sweetie, what a performance! Bravo, bravo. And you too, Joel.

JOEL
Thanks, Mrs MacArthur.

LUKAS embraces his son in a warm hug.

LUKAS
Mate, that was... I'm gobsmacked. I'm so proud of you.

EZRA
Thanks Dad.

LUKAS
You deserve everything you're getting. Now - let your old man buy you an ice cream. There's a place round the corner that has Chloe's favourite...

EZRA
(awkwardly)
Actually, I was thinking of going to the pub with Joel and Em --

LUKAS blinks, forces a smile. CHLOE, a little disappointed.

LUKAS
Of course, mate. Another time.

EXT. FREEWAY/CAR - NIGHT

The MACARTHUR STATION WAGON flies down a wide freeway. Headlights flash past them. Dark forest on both sides.

EXT. HILLS/ROAD - NIGHT

The MACARTHUR STATION WAGON winds through dark hills and past a sign reading EASTBOROUGH HILLSIDE DEVELOPMENT.

EXT/INT. STREET/CAR - NIGHT

Long driveways lead off the muddy main road in a partially completed housing development.

The MACARTHUR STATION WAGON bumps and shudders through the mud past a BUILDING SITE. A particularly bad bump and LUKAS winces --

LUKAS
 Didn't they send a newsletter about
 grading this road...?

SOFIA doesn't answer, distracted on her phone.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
 Earth to Sof?

SOFIA
 Just one sec--

LUKAS
 Ian's really busting your balls,
 huh?

SOFIA
 (guilty)
 Curriculum approvals came in and of
 course there's amendments - yet
 again...

LUKAS puts a supportive hand on SOFIA's knee. SOFIA pockets
 her phone.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
 Remind me that we have to talk to
 Tony about the fence this week.

LUKAS
 (hesitantly)
 Well - it's *technically* on our
 property so...

SOFIA
 (teasing)
 You're scared of him!

LUKAS
 Are you kidding me? Of course I am.
 He's got a - look.

SOFIA
 A look?

LUKAS makes a silly face.

LUKAS
 You know the look. Weird stare,
 scary truck - the hills have eyes!

SOFIA
 Uhuh. Some people might say you're
 a snob.

LUKAS
 I just can't understand why anyone
 would need a truck that big, it's
 insanely large --

BUT THEN - THE CAR SHUDDERS AND HEADLIGHTS FLICKER.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
What the hell?

SUDDENLY - the headlights momentarily switch off, plunging them into terrifying darkness.

 LUKAS (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ --

 CHLOE
Dad --

The light flicker on to reveal A FIGURE ON THE ROAD looming just metres in front of them --

 LUKAS
Shit!

LUKAS JAMS ON THE BRAKES and they come to a breathless stop.

The figure is frozen, shielding his eyes against the headlights. It's OLIVER, 13, on his BMX bike.

LUKAS catches his breath, heart hammering in shock.

 LUKAS (CONT'D)
Are you ok?

 SOFIA
 (clearly shaken)
I'm fine. Fine.

In the backseat, CHLOE is watching OLLIE curiously.

 CHLOE
He likes riding at night. I've seen him.

SOFIA and LUKAS ignore her. LUKAS leaves the motor running as he gets out of the car. We stay with SOFIA and CHLOE as they watch him talk to OLLIE.

SOFIA turns to CHLOE.

 SOFIA
Are you ok, sweetie? He shouldn't be out this time of night, what's his mother thinking?

LUKAS returns to the car as OLLIE jumps on his bike and rides out of sight.

 LUKAS
 (rattled)
He's heading home. He's ok. Just a bit of shock.

 SOFIA
It's ok, honey. Nothing happened.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - NIGHT

The STATION WAGON pulls slowly down the driveway.

The MACARTHUR FAMILY get out of the car and head to the house.

LUKAS opens the hood of his car to try and find the problem with his headlights.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - NIGHT

SOFIA turns on lights as she enters. Moving boxes still scattered around to be unpacked. The FAMILY PHOTOS have been hung - a wedding photo of LUKAS and SOFIA, with a toddler CHLOE and a 10-year-old EZRA.

SOFIA
Clo, can you feed Perry? Then
teeth, then bed.

We follow CHLOE as she pads through the house to the kitchen.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

CHLOE opens the pantry cupboard and finds a tin of dog food.

She opens the back door and calls out to the dark backyard.

CHLOE
Perry! Dinner!

She scoops the food into a large dog bowl.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/GARDEN - NIGHT

A large backyard. Grass gives way to darkness and the strange, contorted shape of gum trees. A family of bikes lean up against the wall beside the back door.

CHLOE places the dog bowl down.

CHLOE
Perry!

She waits, peering into the gloom expectantly.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Hello? Doooog? PERRY!

Still nothing. CHLOE disappears back into the house and reappears a moment later with a torch.

She heads into the dark.

The torch light illuminates trees and bushes. CHLOE creeps forward. A little nervous now. Twigs crackle underfoot.

A rustle in the bushes behind her. She snaps around.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Perry?

Nothing.

Then - a little whine ahead.

She sweeps her torch and stops dead--

A shape on the ground under some bushes. Blonde fur. Another whine.

Her breath catches in her throat. *Is that...?*

She steps closer.

The torchlight catches something wet and red.

Blood.

She wants to look away, but she can't. She steps closer again to see--

The shape is A LABRADOR. Laying in a strange, mangled mess. His fur is matted with fresh blood.

CHLOE stares in mounting horror as she recognises what this is.

The torchlight catches blood congealing by his neck. His throat has been slashed. The dog's breathing is laboured. Slowing.

Until there is silence.

CHLOE forces herself to look at the dog. His eyes are glassy. Fixed.

A beat as CHLOE takes this in.

She opens her mouth to scream --

HARD CUT TO:

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Every light in the house is on.

LUKAS and SOFIA sit around the kitchen table. Ashen-faced.

A burly male police officer, JAMES SCHUTTE, enters from the backyard, pulling off forensic gloves.

SCHUTTE

I've called the local vet, they'll come round and take the body for you.

LUKAS nods blankly.

SCHUTTE (CONT'D)
I checked the perimeter. Your
fence...

LUKAS
Tree branch came down a couple of
weeks ago. Haven't had time to fix
it.

SCHUTTE
Right. Well. Wild animal would've
been able to get in. Lotta wild
foxes in that valley out there.

LUKAS
(irritated)
You think a fox did *that*?

SCHUTTE looks at him a moment.

SCHUTTE
You're new in town?

LUKAS nods.

SCHUTTE (CONT'D)
(pointedly)
Lotta foxes around here.

LUKAS snorts. SOFIA puts a hand on LUKAS' arm.

SOFIA
Lukas. It could have been a fox.

LUKAS
His... his throat... that was done
with a knife or something. A human
did that.

SCHUTTE
You'd be surprised what a fox could
do. Or - the dog could've caught
himself on something sharp...

LUKAS
C'mon, mate. Pull the other one.

SCHUTTE sighs. It's been a long night. He sits down, looks at
the couple sympathetically.

SCHUTTE
Well. You seen any kids hanging
around? Weird behaviour? Vandals
and that?

SOFIA
So far it's been very quiet. Good
neighbours, no bother.

SCHUTTE
Nothing untoward at all?

LUKAS
(frowning)
Should there be?

A beat.

SCHUTTE
This is a pretty tight knit
community, Mr MacArthur. Not
everybody likes new city folk
coming in.

LUKAS
You think we could have been
targeted?

SOFIA
Honey, I don't think that's what
he's saying...

LUKAS
Our headlights were flickering on
the way home. Do you think somebody
could have tampered with our car?

SCHUTTE
I doubt that, sir. Do you know if
there's CCTV out on the street?

SOFIA
You'd have to check with the
development manager. I'll see if I
can find his number.

She heads into the living room.

SCHUTTE looks at the house appreciatively.

SCHUTTE
Nice place you got here. Must've
cost you a pretty penny.

LUKAS
(uncomfortable)
We like it.

SCHUTTE
Bit close to the valley for my
liking, but.

But before LUKAS can interrogate this further, SOFIA has
returned with a business card.

SOFIA
Here's his number and email. He
should be able to tell you if
there's any CCTV out there.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - NIGHT

SCHUTTE is hunched under the hood of the car, rifling through a mess of wires and electrics. LUKAS and SOFIA watch.

LUKAS
I had a look but I couldn't see anything...

SCHUTTE locates two wires.

SCHUTTE
This'll be it. Loose wires.

LUKAS
(paranoid)
Did somebody do that?

SCHUTTE
You go over bumpy roads much?

LUKAS - oh, yeah. SCHUTTE smiles.

SCHUTTE (CONT'D)
That'll be it then. Bit of solder'll fix it. Might be worth investing in a proper car out here.

SCHUTTE slams the hood down.

SCHUTTE (CONT'D)
The vet'll be here first thing in the morning and I'll write up a report. Take care now.

As he gets into his POLICE CAR, A BRIGHT BLUE GATOR TRUCK pulls into the driveway next door. The passenger door opens and we see the occupants - TONY SORRENTINO, 40s, a serious, muscular guy in a trucker cap, and the heavily pregnant IDA SORRENTINO, 20s.

TONY gazes at the MACARTHUR HOUSE. IDA gives SOFIA a little shy smile, grabs mail from the mailbox and jumps back into the truck.

The TRUCK drives into the compound, tail lights disappearing into darkness.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

EZRA and LUKAS are in the middle of a long hug. EZRA's friend JOEL hovers awkwardly by the front door.

EZRA
Shit, dad. I should've come home earlier. I'm so sorry.

LUKAS
Not your fault, mate. Nothing any
of us could do. By the time Clo
found him it was too late...

EZRA
I'll go and check on her.

JOEL
(uncomfortably)
I'll leave you guys to it --

EZRA
Thanks, man.

JOEL exits as EZRA heads upstairs.

SOFIA hands LUKAS a beer. He sits down heavily.

LUKAS
We should bring him in.

SOFIA
(softly, kindly)
But sweetie, we can't do anything
for him. We'd have to find a sheet
or a bag or something to put him in
and... he's heavy. I think we have
to let him stay out there.

LUKAS
But he's all on his own.

LUKAS, child-like, vulnerable. SOFIA takes LUKAS' hand.

SOFIA
There's nothing we can do for him
now. It's a shock, that's all. A
horrible accident.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/CHLOE'S ROOM - NIGHT

CHLOE's on her bed, scrolling. Still shocked. EZRA enters,
sits by her.

EZRA
This is pretty fucked up. I'm sorry
you had to see that.

CHLOE considers this for a moment.

CHLOE
Maybe I could've done something...
but there was so much blood...

EZRA
There was nothing you could do.

CHLOE
He was my friend.

EZRA
Mine too.

CHLOE
(hopefully)
Do you think he's in a good place
now?

EZRA
Sure.

CHLOE
I know you don't believe in Heaven,
but maybe there's some other place?

CHLOE, suddenly looking very young. EZRA smiles kindly.

EZRA
Yeah. A big dog park.

CHLOE
With his favourite stick.

Then, quietly:

CHLOE (CONT'D)
You think someone did that to him?

EZRA
(hesitating)
I dunno, Clo. Genuine.

CHLOE
If they did, then something bad'll
happen to them, don't you think?
Like karma.

EZRA
(unconvinced)
Yeah. Maybe.
(then)
Now listen kiddo, you've got to get
some sleep, alright?

CHLOE
I'm gonna have a nightmare. I can
feel it.

EZRA
No you're not. I'll stay here. Then
you can't have any bad dreams.

CHLOE
All night?

EZRA
You betcha.

CHLOE, relieved, settles back into EZRA's chest.

CHLOE
 (quietly)
 What'll I do if I have bad dreams
 while you're in New York?

EZRA
 You can call me. Anytime.

CHLOE
 Promise?

EZRA
 Promise. Go to sleep now, okay?

EZRA leans back against the bedhead, waiting for sleep to come.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

Cold early morning light. Magpies warble in the valley.

The kettle boils.

LUKAS, now dressed in his neat casual work clothes, stares out of the kitchen window into the backyard. In the light of day the garden looks peaceful. But LUKAS is troubled.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/GARDEN - DAY

LUKAS cautiously walks across the grass until he reaches the gums. He winds through undergrowth until he catches sight of PERRY'S CORPSE.

EZRA is crouched a little way from it on his haunches, ashen-faced. Tears in his eyes. LUKAS puts a comforting hand on EZRA'S shoulder.

Flies buzz around the corpse. The blood is now dark and dried.

LUKAS stares at it in horror. He feels like he's about to vomit. But he keeps himself steady and forces himself to get closer. He squats. Looks at the dog's throat carefully.

He then looks around the corpse for clues. He finds nothing obvious.

His eyes rest on the corner of the back fence. It has been partially crushed by a fallen gum branch, leaving a hole that leads both out to the valley beyond and into his neighbour's garden.

LUKAS stares out at the valley beyond his garden fence. Twisted, rocky, punctuated by ancient ghost gums.

A narrow rabbit path winds into the valley.

A DEEP, DARK CRACK echoes across the valley. Perhaps a tree branch falling...

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/GARDEN - DAY

LUKAS is hammering the warped fence back into place, temporarily fixing the hole. EZRA helps.

LUKAS pauses a moment, sweating. He catches sight of a figure beyond the fence, emerging from the valley - TONY, with a rifle on his shoulder.

TONY waves. LUKAS walks to TONY. EZRA watches them from a distance.

TONY

You're up early. Saw a bit of commotion at yours last night.

LUKAS

Our dog... they think a fox.

A beat.

TONY

That's awful, mate. If there's anything we can do...

LUKAS

You haven't seen anyone around, acting strangely?

TONY

(shocked)

You think somebody did it?

A beat as LUKAS weighs up TONY. Not sure he trusts him. A little scared of him, too.

LUKAS

Just considering every possibility.

TONY shakes his head.

TONY

I haven't seen anything, mate.

(then)

Look, why don't you come to dinner this week? The missus has been wanting to invite you over for ages, welcome you to the neighbourhood.

LUKAS searches for a way to decline.

LUKAS

Oh, I don't know - we're pretty busy... we still haven't even unpacked properly...

TONY

Please, it's the least we can do, mate.

TONY watches him, unblinking. LUKAS smiles politely.

LUKAS
Sure. We'd love to.

TONY nods, walks on. LUKAS goes back to his hammering, but now with a new intensity - bang, bang, BANG --

EZRA observes his father.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - DAY

The family watch solemnly as a small, dog-sized body bag is loaded into a veterinarian van by the LOCAL VET. EZRA and CHLOE are in their school uniforms with their school bags.

SOFIA takes CHLOE's hand and gives it a gentle squeeze.

LUKAS watches the van doors shut.

INT. STREET/CAR - DAY

LUKAS drives through the development with EZRA and CHLOE. They are all silent, lost in their own thoughts.

In daylight we can see the piles of dirt, wood, offcuts and machinery laying by the road. Men in fluorescent jackets intermittently dot the rough landscape.

LUKAS squints at a sign a STOP, GO BACK sign on the road up ahead. He slows. A man in a polo shirt and hard hat waves him down, DALE KELLY, 30.

LUKAS
You're kidding me.

LUKAS buttons his window down.

DALE
G'day Lukas. Sorry about this, mate. If you pull a u-y, take the Crescent Hill turn. That's probably the fastest route.

LUKAS
You get a call from the cops yet?

DALE
(confused)
Cops?

LUKAS
There was a uh... incident last night. Our dog was killed.

DALE
... Oh mate --

LUKAS

They want to check if there's any CCTV on our street. Anything that might be helpful.

DALE

Yeah, of course. I'll give them what we have. Geez mate, that's awful.

(then)

I'll check with the boys. They might've seen something.

LUKAS

Thanks, Dale. Appreciate it.

DALE nods, slaps the hood of the car.

As LUKAS drives away, he glances in the rearview mirror to see DALE standing in the middle road, watching them leave, expression unreadable.

EXT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/GATES - DAY

WIDE: CHILDREN spill through the school gates. LUKAS, EZRA and CHLOE walk with them. At a junction, EZRA and CHLOE head towards the secondary buildings. LUKAS walks into the main school building with his roller bag.

INT. UNIVERSITY - DAY

SOFIA walks across a UNIVERSITY CAMPUS with a big folio bag.

We hear her voice over:

SOFIA (V.O.)

I want you to picture this - a guy who spends every waking hour trying to destroy a complete stranger.

INT. UNIVERSITY/LECTURE THEATRE - DAY

SOFIA places her bag on the desk in an empty lecture theatre. Preparing for the day. She hauls folders onto the desk.

SOFIA (V.O.)

His victim is blissfully ignorant; a kind of idiot savant who just speeds through life without a care in the world, while our poor would-be killer concocts a series of ridiculous traps which all inevitably backfire.

Later. STUDENTS file into the lecture theatre. She watches them nervously. She has written 'WELCOME' on the whiteboard behind her.

SOFIA (V.O.)

As the years wear on, the hunter forgets why he wanted to kill this guy at all. It becomes... instinct.

We catch up with her lecture - SOFIA speaks to a small gathering of FIRST YEAR STUDENTS in a darkened LECTURE THEATRE. She gazes out at a glow of laptops.

A video plays - Wile E Coyote plants an ACME bomb in the path of Roadrunner.

A few STUDENTS smile.

SOFIA

He's a fanatic. But like all fanatics, he can't stop. All his fears, hopes and dreams seem to be bundled up in the pointless annihilation of this individual.

THE STUDENTS take notes.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

The philosopher Ernest Becker would say that Wile E Coyote is driven, like all of us, by his fear and anxiety of death. Becker believed that everything we do - thoughts, emotions, action - is a product of managing the terror of our own mortality. The chaos of death. Unpredictable but inevitable.

Wile E Coyote is blown up by his own bomb.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

This need to deny death is the basis of religion, superstition, and just about every organised group with a devoted following you can think of. We seek immortality through charismatic individuals and larger purpose, no matter how futile. We elevate the ordinary into something meaningful, mythical. Our Roadrunner, if you will.

SOFIA smiles.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

So - is it possible to escape this anxiety of death? A place beyond terror? Perhaps the only way is to accept and live side by side with it, acknowledging that chaos can strike at any time. In our first semester we'll explore Terror Management Theory from the perspective of 20th century conflict - and yes, there will be

(MORE)

SOFIA (CONT'D)
 Nazis - and Arthur Schopenhauer's
 view of human and animal --

CUT TO:

SILENCE.

The lights are back on in the LECTURE THEATRE. SOFIA sits in one of the lecture theatre seats, lost in thought. After a moment, a man appears at the top of the theatre, watching her.

This is IAN, 40. They lock eyes.

IAN
 You did great. You'll be fine.

SOFIA smiles, relieved.

IAN (CONT'D)
 Lunch?

SOFIA nods, gathers her things.

INT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/LUKAS' OFFICE - DAY

LUKAS is on the phone, picking at a tray of supermarket sushi. He's on hold.

By the posters on the wall it is clear he is the school counsellor.

LUKAS' attention is fixed outside his window. The quadrangle is clear except for two figures. OLLIE unlocking his bike at the bike rack, his mother waiting - ASHLEIGH, mid 30s. ASHLEIGH is a young looking mother - Ugg boots, Adidas jumper, hair tied back.

The phone connects and a man's voice answers.

SCHUTTE (O.S.)
 Schutte.

LUKAS
 Hi, mate. It's Lukas MacArthur here. You were round at ours last night about our dog...?

SCHUTTE (O.S.)
 (surprised)
 Of course. I remember. I'm sorry, I'm still working on the report.

LUKAS
 Right. It's just you said you'd have it filed by the morning and it's now after 2.

LUKAS watches OLLIE walk his bike with ASHLEIGH, leaving the school grounds.

SCHUTTE (O.S.)
We've been quite busy. You know how
it is.

LUKAS rubs the back of his neck, anxiety creeping. The
persistent sound of a DOG BARKING somewhere in the distance
is distracting him.

LUKAS
Did you manage to find any CCTV?

SCHUTTE (O.S.)
Any what?

LUKAS
CCTV. We gave you the number for
Dale, the development manager.

An awkward pause.

SCHUTTE (O.S.)
Look, I gotta be honest, I just
don't know if we're going to find
answers for you.
We've got a lot of high priority
crimes and unfortunately a dog is
just not...
(he trails off)
I'm really sorry, mate. I'd suggest
you try and move on if you can.

LUKAS' jaw tenses. Irritated. LUKAS looks back to the
quadrangle, but both ASHLEIGH and OLLIE are gone.

FLASH: PERRY BARKS at us, backing away, terrified --

INT. CAR - DAY

Silence. Hum of the motor. LUKAS drives EZRA and CHLOE home
from school. LUKAS glances into the rear view mirror.

LUKAS
How was your day, Clo? You hand in
your pyramid project?

CHLOE
(quietly)
Yeah.

Silence. CHLOE won't look him in the eye.

LUKAS
It's okay to be sad. You know that.

CHLOE
...Yeah.

LUKAS
You can always talk to me about
anything. Or Ez. Or Mum.

CHLOE

...I know.

LUKAS and EZRA exchange glances. EZRA tries to cheer her up.

EZRA

Maybe we should get some ice cream for dessert. What do you reckon?

CHLOE

I'm not a little kid, doofus. I know what you're doing.

EZRA

(shrugging)
Sounds like you don't want ice cream.

LUKAS

Sounds like you want *us* to eat your ice cream.

CHLOE can't help but start to smile.

CHLOE

Shut up, dickheads.

LUKAS and EZRA smile. Up ahead, DALE KELLY is waving the car down, jogging over.

LUKAS slows, opens his window.

DALE

Hey mate, you got a minute?

VIDEO FOOTAGE

A CCTV image. Black and white footage showing the MACARTHUR STREET in daytime. We can see the MACARTHUR DRIVEWAY towards the back of frame.

DALE (O.S.)

We don't have a heap of cameras, but we installed one on the north end of your street. They automatically scrub every month so I thought we could have a quick look now.

A grainy version of EZRA with his cello case, getting into JOEL'S COROLLA.

EZRA (O.S.)

That's me, heading to the show with Joel.

The image fast forwards. Night falls. LUKAS, SOFIA and CHLOE exit the house, CHLOE and SOFIA arguing. The MACARTHUR CAR reverses out of the driveway

The street is empty. Nothing happening. DALE fast-forwards. A few CARS pass, nothing of interest.

And then - a figure on a bike.

LUKAS (O.S.)
There. Stop.

INT. DALE'S SITE OFFICE - DAY

LUKAS, DALE, EZRA and CHLOE are watching the CCTV on Dale's laptop in his grimy, crowded site office. They stare at the figure. It's OLLIE.

He bikes slowly, but with purpose. And stops outside the MACARTHUR HOUSE.

He stares at it openly for some time. There's something a little eerie about it. He puts his hood up.

Eventually, OLLIE gets off his bike and walks around the side of the house, disappearing from view.

LUKAS looks at this incredulously. DALE fast forwards and stops quickly - OLLIE is running back out to his bike.

DALE pauses the video.

LUKAS looks at the paused figure, stunned.

DALE
(quietly)
That's at 10:15pm.

EZRA glances at his DAD, worried.

EZRA
Dad...

With great effort, LUKAS forces himself to calm down. To be rational.

LUKAS
Thank you, Dale. Can you save this
to a hard drive for me?

DALE
Sure.

DALE bites his lip, worried about LUKAS' strangely controlled manner. Something about it feels dangerous.

DALE (CONT'D)
Hey, Lukas, maybe I shouldn't have
shown you this... I don't want to
get this kid into trouble --

LUKAS
 No, you've done the right thing.
 Thank you for showing me. I'll pick
 up the hard drive tomorrow.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/FRONT DOOR - DAY

EZRA follows his father into the house.

EZRA
 Dad, you have to calm down.

LUKAS
 I am calm.

EZRA
 No, you're being weird.

SOFIA emerges from the kitchen.

SOFIA
 What's going on?

LUKAS
 Dale showed us the CCTV.

EZRA
 It doesn't mean anything.

LUKAS
 Which showed that Oliver kid coming
 into the garden last night. We saw
him on the road, Sof. It mustn't
 have been long after he did it.

SOFIA looks at LUKAS in shock.

SOFIA
 What?

CHLOE
Ollie hasn't done anything wrong!

CHLOE is following her father, upset.

EZRA
 Chloe's right. It doesn't mean he -
 did anything.

LUKAS turns on EZRA --

LUKAS
 Why are you so set on defending
 him?

EZRA recoils as though LUKAS wants to hit him.

EZRA
 Because he's a kid! Jesus, Dad.

Something in LUKAS' face - a rage - that causes EZRA to take a defensive step back, confused.

EZRA (CONT'D)
 Seriously?

LUKAS
 (upset)
 It's evil, what he's done. I'm
 sorry, but it is.

SOFIA steps in.

SOFIA
 (softly, calmly)
 Lukas, you don't believe in evil.
 You're jumping to conclusions.

She puts a hand on LUKAS' arm, steadying him and LUKAS visibly calms down. After a moment:

LUKAS
 You're right. I'm sorry, I'm
 overreacting. I'll call the police
 in the morning. They can decide
 what to do.

SOFIA
 Yes. Let them decide.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/EZRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

EZRA opens his window overlooking the valley to get some fresh air. He peers into the trees. Somewhere in the far, far distance is a DEEP, DARK CRACK - like the one that he and Lukas heard before. He listens for a moment, but the trees settle into silence.

CUT TO:

Later. EZRA practices his cello. It's a fast, dramatic piece. His fingers move quickly. The only light source is a cluster of candles on his study desk.

EZRA makes a mistake. He stops. And then patiently starts again. Controlled, well practiced.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/CHLOE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

EZRA's cello continues in B/G.

CHLOE sits in her bed on her phone. Biting her lip. She is composing a text: "What's going on?"

SOFIA (V.O; PRE-LAP)
 I'm not sure how well the
 Roadrunner gag went down.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

LUKAS stands in the kitchen with a glass of wine. SOFIA moves back and forth, bringing dirty plates in from the dining room to the dishwasher, talking as she does.

SOFIA
 But it's just a foundational course. Ian said the last guy was about a thousand years old and banged on about Nietzsche for two semesters and everybody quit midway. Ian's very big on student retention. And modernising. We're hoping to update the readings next semester...

SOFIA notices LUKAS is frowning, distracted.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
 Earth to Lukas?

LUKAS
 Can you hear that?

SOFIA listens. Nothing.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
 The dog.

SOFIA listens again. Maybe the faint sound of a dog barking.

SOFIA
 (unconvinced)
 Maybe?

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/GARDEN - NIGHT

LUKAS walks through the darkness of the trees, listening hard. SOFIA follows, perturbed.

SOFIA
 There's no dog, let's go back inside --

LUKAS
 Shh.

They stop. Listening.

And there it is - a FAINT, EERIE SCREAMING SOUND emanates from the forest. A strange, unnerving yelping screech. It puts their teeth on edge.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
 What the hell is that?

SOFIA
 (quietly)
 Lukas...

SOFIA is peering at the dark gum trees nervously. There's a rustle. *Something is in there.*

LUKAS shines his torch to reveal A PAIR OF BRIGHT EYES.

The creature stares, frozen. It's a RED FOX. After a moment, the FOX slinks away, trotting back into the gloom.

SOFIA almost laughs.

CUT TO:

TORCHLIGHT SHINES ON: The hastily fixed hole in the fence. Part of it has been ripped away. Maybe by the wind, maybe by human hand. Hard to tell.

LUKAS examines it. Uneasy. SOFIA watches. She wraps her jumper around herself.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
It's just wild animals, baby.

LUKAS picks up part of the fence.

LUKAS
How the hell did this happen?

SOFIA
(teasing)
I'll put fifty bucks on you not properly staking it in.

LUKAS smiles. She's probably right.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
I married a rational man, not a crazy one. If I wanted crazy I would have stayed with husband number one.

LUKAS
You're right.

SOFIA
Fix the fence tomorrow. Right now, let's have a drink. I'm freezing.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

LUKAS and SOFIA are fucking as quietly as they can, laughing, a little bit tipsy. SOFIA stifles a moan, LUKAS giggles and puts a finger to her lips. *Shhh, you'll wake the kids.* They intensify.

LUKAS
(whispering)
I love you.

But SOFIA's in her own world --

SOFIA
 (whispering)
 I'm going to come.

A DOG IS BARKING incessantly in the distance - LOUDER AND LOUDER - gaining momentum as LUKAS intensifies, sweating, eyes open --

FLASH: Blood splatters against asphalt; a plant shrivels and dies in superspeed, becoming a tortured blackened thing --

EXT. ST MATTHEW'S SCHOOL/QUADRANGLE - DAY

LONG LENS: Children stream into school. The CAMERA PICKS UP OLIVER pushing his BMX, headphones on, pushing through the kids. OLIVER is locking up his bike when SERGEANT SCHUTTE approaches.

They talk, unheard. OLIVER shocked. KIDS watch him, whispering. OLIVER walks away with SCHUTTE.

REVEAL: LUKAS watches. Expression neutral.

SCHUTTE (V.O; PRE-LAP)
*I'll get straight to the point.
 I've reviewed the CCTV footage.*

INT. ST MATTHEWS SCHOOL/LUKAS' OFFICE - DAY

SCHUTTE sits opposite LUKAS. He has adopted an oddly formal, neutral tone.

SCHUTTE
 And I've spoken to the boy, Ollie,
 and his mother.

LUKAS
 Great.

SCHUTTE
 Ollie says that he went into your
 back garden to play with the dog.
 This is something that's been going
 on for some time while the family
 was out. He liked to play with your
 dog because he doesn't have a dog
 of his own. But that night, he was
 shocked to find the dog dead. He
 was scared, and he made the
 decision - and he's not proud of
 this, by the way - to run away.

Silence, as LUKAS processes this.

LUKAS
 And you believe him?

SCHUTTE

I reviewed the CCTV footage for a few weeks before the event and I saw that Ollie did, indeed, go into your back garden while you and your family were away. Ashleigh also told me that he was very fond of Perry. I really don't think Ollie would do something like this...

LUKAS

(frowning)

Exactly how well do you know Oliver, sergeant?

A beat.

SCHUTTE

It's a small town, Mr MacArthur.

LUKAS

Hardly an impartial investigation then.

SCHUTTE

Mr MacArthur, there's very little to investigate. There's no real evidence to suggest Ollie did this. Or - that there was even anything that was actually *done*, per se.

LUKAS

Come on, mate, have you even spoken to him properly?

SCHUTTE

(irritated)

This is not a good use of police time. Every day dozens of truly awful things happen. Murders, break ins, rapes... they are important.

Silence. LUKAS stands.

LUKAS

Right.

SCHUTTE softens.

SCHUTTE

I've given Ollie a stern talking to and told him that he shouldn't enter other people's property without permission. If you have any more trouble... you know how to get hold of me.

SCHUTTE sticks out his hand. After a short beat, LUKAS takes it.

LUKAS

Thank you for your time.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

We push on the back kitchen window leading into the darkening garden, the valley stretching below.

LUKAS gazes through the window. His anger has turned into something more unsettling.

SUDDENLY - EZRA appears behind him. Claps him on the shoulders, grinning.

EZRA
Ready for the hills have eyes, Dad?

LUKAS forces a smile. *Ready.*

EXT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/DRIVEWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The SORRENTINO ELECTRIC GATE slides across to reveal LUKAS, SOFIA, EZRA and CHLOE.

LUKAS carries a bottle of red. SOFIA carries a plate covered in tinfoil. They head down the long driveway towards low, bunker-like house. Generator. Satellite dishes. Solar panels. Water tank. Quad bike. A faded Australian flag flies. CHLOE looks at it nervously, grabs her mum's hand.

EZRA makes a face and exchanges a pointed look with his father, both mouthing - *the hills have eyes.*

SOFIA catches it and whacks EZRA on the arm playfully.

SOFIA
Stop it, you two. Open minds.

LUKAS and EZRA exchange smirks.

TONY (V.O; PRE-LAP)
So glad you could make it. Me and the missus are sorry it took so long to get you around.

INT. SORRENTINO HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The MacArthurs follow TONY through the house. An Australian kelpie dog, ROCCO, runs excitedly around them.

TONY
Welcome to the castle.

EZRA looks at the photos lining the walls - TONY stands with an arm draped over IDA, laughing. A wedding photo. TONY with a hunting rifle holding up dead rabbits.

LUKAS
This place is... so well hidden.

TONY
 We like our privacy. We got
 everything you could need out here,
 that suits us just fine.

EXT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/DECK - DAY

TONY leads them out onto a BEAUTIFUL BALCONY DECK that hangs over the dark valley. Late day stretches on. The MacArthur family look at the view appreciatively.

IDA enters with wine glasses, smiling shyly.

TONY
 And here's my Queen of the castle,
 Ida.

TONY puts his hand protectively on IDA's lower back.

IDA
 (nervously, grinning)
 I'm so glad you could make it. I've
 heard so much about you all.

LUKAS
 You've got a gorgeous place out
 here. This view is stunning.

TONY
 Been in Ida's family three
 generations, hasn't it, love?

SOFIA
 It's incredible. So quiet.

TONY
 That's the way we like it.

TONY kisses IDA. She holds her tummy protectively. SOFIA notices.

TONY (CONT'D)
 (to LUKAS)
 Brother, you want a beer? Wine?

TONY leads LUKAS and the kids over to the grill, leaving the two women alone.

SOFIA
 (to IDA re the baby)
 Congratulations. When are you due?

IDA
 Next month, all going well. It's...
 exciting.

SOFIA
 Motherhood is such a special thing.

IDA
Yeah. I can't wait.

IDA smiles, but it doesn't quite reach her eyes.

TONY (V.O; PRE-LAP)
*We're so grateful our two families
could meet.*

EXT/INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/DECK - EVENING

Evening descends. The trees rustle in the late summer heat.

A large plate of kangaroo steaks is set in the middle of the outdoor table.

TONY and IDA have clasped hands, signifying that they are about to say grace.

TONY
Do you mind?

LUKAS hesitates.

LUKAS
Oh. Of course not.

With some effort, the table take hands awkwardly. CHLOE makes a face, SOFIA gives her a stern look.

TONY
Bless us, Lord, and let us give thanks for our meal today. We give thanks to the Lord for keeping us from sin, and we pray that we be sober-minded and watchful. Lord, here in the company of friends, we are safe. Amen.

IDA
Amen.

TONY has the look of a true believer about him and a kind of power - a confidence - that seems to emanate. Everybody now automatically seems to defer to him.

TONY smiles.

TONY
Thank you for letting us do that. I know it can be awkward.

SOFIA
Not at all.

TONY
Please, eat.

Everybody digs in.

SOFIA
Lukas grew up in a religious household, didn't you, darling?

LUKAS
(awkwardly)
A long time ago.

TONY
But you left...?

LUKAS
It didn't suit me.

TONY
No?

LUKAS
... I suppose I outgrew it. As I got older, it just didn't sit well. No offence.

TONY
None taken. We each have our own paths in life.

In the background, IDA seeks to distract.

IDA
So Ezra, I hear you're heading to New York next year?

We focus on LUKAS, a little uneasy, guilty, under TONY's gaze.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/BACKYARD - EVENING

Blood oozes on a plate. We realise that --

LUKAS is mopping up the last of a bloodied kangaroo steak.

TONY
That Schutte's an idiot, so was his daddy before him. Should be more than just a slap on the wrist.

Everybody is finishing dinner, drinking heavily. The adults talk - conversation is slightly drunk, easygoing, TONY and LUKAS are in full flight. Whatever concerns LUKAS had about TONY are well and truly thrown aside --

TONY (CONT'D)
Cops should be pressing charges against the boy.

LUKAS
(enjoying it)
Exactly - sure he's a kid, but he killed our dog!

CHLOE
You don't know that.

LUKAS
There's crazy people out there,
Clo.

EZRA gives squeezes CHLOE's shoulder - *hang in there* - but she shrugs it off.

TONY
The mother - I've seen her around --

SOFIA
Ashleigh.

TONY
Right. Weird woman. That's what I keep saying - you bring in these city folk and the balance goes off, you know what I mean?

SOFIA
(drily)
City folk like us?

TONY
(waves her away)
You guys are different. You're good people. But that kid and his mum... I mean, how *dare* he just come into your place like that... hurt *your* dog... who knows what the kid could do next?

LUKAS beams, pleased to have somebody on side --

LUKAS
(to SOFIA)
See? Tony understands. It's a big deal! I'm bloody furious about the whole thing.

SOFIA
(teasing)
All right, all right, you're all very clever. Very big strong men! Lots of muscles!

EZRA and CHLOE laugh at SOFIA's joke. TONY senses she's making fun of him. Doesn't like it.

IDA
Anyone keen for dessert? I've got apple and rhubarb pie, fresh out of the garden.

SOFIA
Wow! You make your own pies?

IDA looks at SOFIA oddly, as though she's never considered the alternative.

IDA

Of course. Don't you?

LUKAS

Sof couldn't bake a pie to save her life. She's a menace in the kitchen. And she's no green thumb, that's for sure. Every plant she touches dies a horrible death.

SOFIA

Wow. Thanks babe. Vicious.

LUKAS makes a face, teasing. Everybody hands their dinner plates to IDA.

TONY

You kids gone hunting yet?

CHLOE

No way. I'd hate to kill *anything*.

EZRA glances at SOFIA.

EZRA

I really want to - and my mate Joel's into it - but... Mum isn't heaps keen...

SOFIA

We don't like guns in our family. And he's a bit young...

EZRA reddens, embarrassed.

TONY

Oh come on - I shot my first rabbit when I was barely at school! And Ida, you were like...

IDA

Maybe 12 or 13. Shot a roo. It was wicked.

EZRA

(to SOFIA)

See? That's what people do out here.

TONY

No, mate - you gotta respect your mum. She's the boss.

TONY winks at SOFIA. Again - that little air of menace. Goading. SOFIA looks to LUKAS for support. He shrugs at her, drunk.

LUKAS

I shot a bird once.

SOFIA

Bullshit! When!?

LUKAS

... Ages ago - before I met you --

SOFIA

You *total liar!*

LUKAS

When I was a really manly man
before I was married - back in my
alpha days...

CHLOE snorts into her phone. A flash of irritation from
LUKAS.

TONY

Before Sof had your balls in a
vice, mate.

LUKAS

Exactly!

LUKAS laughs, teasing SOFIA - *he's enjoying getting a rise
out of her and Tony's encouragement.*

LUKAS (CONT'D)

(to EZRA)

You should go out with Joel, Ez.

SOFIA

(no)

Lukas...

LUKAS

It'll be good for him.

SOFIA relents, a little annoyed. TONY winks at EZRA - *job
done.*

TONY

Just keep your wits about you in
the valley, Ez.

EZRA

Yeah?

TONY

Everybody who's grown up around
here knows that place has a mind of
its own.

LUKAS

What do you mean?

TONY

(shrugging)

Strange things can happen down
there.

IDA

Oh Tony, don't scare Ezra.

TONY

Keep your eyes open mate and you'll be fine.

EZRA

What do you mean, *strange things*?

TONY

This place... the valley... it has a way of staying untouched. Over the years there's been plenty of developments, people trying to cut roads through, or build near, but nothing's ever quite *stuck*. They call it the valley curse.

SOFIA

(snorting)

Oh please!

LUKAS gives her a look - *that was rude*.

TONY

(to EZRA)

Just tread lightly. That's all.

EZRA - just very faintly unnerved despite his bravado.

SOFIA

Sounds like rubbish to me.

TONY smiles tensely at SOFIA and tops up their wine.

TONY

So you don't like hunting and you can't grow food. I'm guessing you didn't grow up rural. Why did you come all the way out here?

An awkward pause. SOFIA and LUKAS look at each other.

SOFIA

We always liked the country... and the local school actually has a great music program for Ezra...

LUKAS puts his hand on SOFIA's - *we can tell them the truth*.

LUKAS

Sof got a job. A good one, right honey? Out of Sydney but a great opportunity...

IDA

So you moved for Sofia's work?

SOFIA

Well, not just that...

LUKAS

Tenure's really hard to get these days. And with the bump in her

(MORE)

LUKAS (CONT'D)
 salary it meant we could afford to
 buy out here so... why not?

SOFIA
 Just a regional university, but
 it's a good opportunity... I was
 lucky.

LUKAS
 Own it, Sof. We came here because
 you're doing awesome.

SOFIA
 Lukas got a great new job too...

LUKAS smiles but it doesn't quite meet his eyes.

CHLOE
 But mum earns more than dad.

Everybody looks to CHLOE. She knows exactly where it hurts.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
 (smirking)
 What? I think it's cool. Very new
 age.

LUKAS and SOFIA exchange tense glances. TONY smiles and
 raises his glass.

TONY
 Amen to that.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/STREET - NIGHT

WIDE: The SORRENTINO GATE slides open. LUKAS, CHLOE, SOFIA
 and EZRA head over to their house. After a moment, the
 SORRENTINO GATE slides back across.

The bushland rustles. The night is silent.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/EZRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

EZRA stands by his open bedroom window. He stares out into
 the forest. Dark. Foreboding. The strange, eerie YAPPING of
 wild animals from somewhere in the centre.

CHLOE (O.S.)
 Ez?

He turns to see a CHLOE at the door. She looks anxious.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
 Can I stay with you tonight?

EZRA
 'Course.

EZRA shuts his window firmly. CHLOE jumps onto EZRA's bed and they settle in. A beat.

EZRA (CONT'D)
What you said to dad was kinda mean.

CHLOE
Well, he was being mean. Why do you always stand up for him?

EZRA
You know how he gets. Just - be nice, okay?

EZRA turns off his light.

LUKAS (V.O; PRE-LAP)
Why did she have to say it like that? "Mum earns more than dad."

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

LUKAS is sitting in bed with a book, distracted by thoughts. SOFIA is removing her earrings at the vanity.

SOFIA
I don't think she meant anything by it.

LUKAS
Is that what she thinks of me? Some idiot who doesn't earn enough? A guy whose dog gets murdered by a fucking 13-year-old kid? A *cuck*?

SOFIA
Lukas, she was provoking you.

LUKAS
(pained)
You don't think that about me, do you?

SOFIA
Of course not! You're a sensitive, sweet guy. Everybody likes you. You have a good job --

LUKAS
But it's not *good* good.

SOFIA
Honey... we said we wouldn't keep talking about this.

SOFIA glances at LUKAS in the mirror.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

(slowly)

Do you think... maybe... you were a little more sensitive about it because you wanted to impress Tony?

LUKAS

I didn't want to impress Tony!

SOFIA gives him a look.

SOFIA

(mocking lightly)

"I shot a bird! I'm a big strong manly man!" Come on, baby, you were basically ready to marry the guy.

LUKAS

Well - I like him! You're the one who wanted me to make the effort. Anyway --

LUKAS jumps up and beats his chest like a cave man. *Hoo hoo hah.*

LUKAS (CONT'D)

I *am* a manly man. A big cave man who believes in curses and strange things in the woods. A big manly man with man thoughts and man *desires* --

SOFIA laughs. He kisses her.

SOFIA

Please, let's just... reset. No more Ollie, no more insecurity, no more any of it. Reset.

LUKAS

Promise. Reset.

He mimes clicking a remote on his brain. Reset. SOFIA smiles.

SOFIA

I want us to all be happy to have made this move.

He kisses her.

LUKAS

I am. I'm happy if you're happy.

But his smile doesn't quite reach his eyes.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/GARDEN - LATE DAY

With some effort, SOFIA lugs potting mix out to the garden to a makeshift garden bed. CHLOE helps.

Later. Afternoon turns to evening. SOFIA and CHLOE are sweating, covered in dirt. They stand back and admiring their handiwork, drinking lemonades.

CHLOE
Mum, look.

CHLOE points to a row of freshly planted basil plants.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
They're already dying.

SOFIA examines the basil plants. Some of them are turning a strange, gruesome black. Shrivelling in the earth.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
I hate this place.

SOFIA doesn't know what to say to that.

EXT. EASTBOUROUGH HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A new school day. STUDENTS teem through corridors.

INT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/LUKAS' OFFICE - DAY

The CCTV video plays on LUKAS' desktop computer. He watches it obsessively. Frame by frame as OLLIE arrives on his bike.

He fast forwards to OLLIE running back to his bike. He pauses the frame - OLLIE's expression - is it fear? Satisfaction? Anger? Hard to tell.

INT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/LOCKER CORRIDOR - DAY

LUKAS walks quickly along an empty locker corridor. He checks that the coast is clear. Everybody is clearly in class.

And then finds a locker. He uses a MASTER KEY to unlock it. The locker is completely devoid of any personal touch, apart from "FUCK YOU" etched into the inside of the door. It seems somewhat fitting.

LUKAS quickly rifles through OLLIE's bag - school books, a blank diary, lunchbox, a tattered old paperback. Then spots A PEN KNIFE in the bottom of Ollie's bag.

Some VOICES in A DISTANT CORRIDOR. LUKAS quickly replaces the locker as he found it --

INT/EXT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/LUKAS' OFFICE - DAY

LUKAS picks at his lunchtime sushi. In one hand he is absentmindedly spinning Ollie's PEN KNIFE. *Could this be the knife that killed his dog?*

KIDS run around and talk in small groups in the quadrangle below. He watches OLLIE, alone, walk through the quadrangle.

A GROUP OF BOYS pass OLLIE with a football. The LEADER, JOSH, says something quietly (unheard) and shoves OLLIE. OLLIE stumbles, knocking his bag.

OLLIE tries to ignore them, walks on to pick up his bike. The BOYS all laugh and shout after him, we can hear this through the open window.

BOYS
Watch it dog killer! You fucking
freaaaaak. DOG KILLER!!

They throw whatever they can find to hand at him. OLLIE turns back to them and says something quietly. JOSH steps back, frowning. Clearly rattled.

OLLIE rides away. The boys look after him, troubled.

LUKAS puts down his sushi.

EXT. STREETS/CAR - DAY

LUKAS drives. He spots OLLIE in the distance, winding his way through the suburban streets.

LUKAS follows at a distance, careful to not be spotted. OLLIE waits on a corner.

LUKAS stops his car, watching him. There's something cold in LUKAS' expression. *He hates this boy.*

And then his stomach drops as he sees: CHLOE, still in her uniform, run across the road to OLLIE. They are friends.

They smile at each other and begin to walk on together, clearly enjoying each other's company as they skip school.

LUKAS stares - *what the hell?*

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

EZRA and his friend JOEL are making their way through the bushland near the MACARTHUR HOUSE. JOEL has a sports rifle with him.

They are hunting.

They stop for a moment. JOEL opens his backpack and gives EZRA a beer.

JOEL
This is fucking awesome. I'm so
happy we could do this, man.

EZRA
Me too.

JOEL

It's cool you moved out here. It's like - finally after all these years there's someone to hang out with.

EZRA

Yeah.

EZRA stretches his back. Takes a beat. He can hear the DEEP, DARK CREAKING OF TREES overhead. The trees sway woozily. Something about this place feels unsettling, unreal...

A beat then EZRA, trying to be casual...

EZRA (CONT'D)

You ever heard weird stories about this place?

JOEL laughs.

JOEL

You don't believe that shit do you?

EZRA

Nah...?

JOEL swigs on his beer.

JOEL

Some people reckon there's a curse. I dunno - people and animals doing weird stuff. Possessed and shit. Like the valley is like this fucking sentient *thing* which is obviously nuts...

EZRA smiles. Crazy. But in the dark, creepiness of the trees, he can't help but wonder...

The two boys move on, deeper into the valley. The trees rustle and the wind whispers.

EXT. ROAD BY VALLEY - DAY

LUKAS watches from a distance as CHLOE and OLLIE cut across tall grass through the empty half built development. OLLIE abandons his bike near a tree.

They wade through the grass, heading towards the thick, dark BUSHLAND and disappear.

LUKAS watches for a while, but they don't reappear. He quickly jogs down --

EXT. EDGE OF VALLEY - DAY

LUKAS arrives at the edge of bushland. He takes a couple of steps into the thick, gnarled bush. There is no path.

He looks for a while but CHLOE and OLLIE have disappeared.

A rustle in the bush startles him and --

A BLACK CROW appears. The CROW cocks its head and looks at him. LUKAS tries to shoo it away, but it doesn't move. Something uncanny about it. It is watching him.

LUKAS frowns, gives the landscape one last look before returning to his car.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

A KANGAROO chews on grass. The landscape is oppressively silent. We are deep in the valley.

JOEL (O.S.)

(whispering)

*Keep still. Up against your
shoulder, that's right. Don't tense
too much or you'll fuck it up. You
want to get it in the head, or the
heart. You don't want it to feel
any pain.*

EZRA and JOEL are laying perfectly still in the bush. EZRA has the rifle trained on the KANGAROO in the far distance. He sweats, nervous.

EZRA's finger tightens on the trigger.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Do it.

EZRA hesitates.

EZRA

What if I don't hit it right?

JOEL

Then we'll deal with it. Do it.

The KANGAROO looks up, chewing slowly. Looks towards them.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Now! You're going to lose him.

EZRA

I can't.

JOEL

Do it!

The KANGAROO's muscles tighten.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Ez!

BANG!!

The KANGAROO drops.

EZRA, rattled, puts the rifle down.

JOEL (CONT'D)
 You hit it, man. You hit it. Fuck
 yeah.

CUT TO:

The KANGAROO twitches slightly, bullet hole in the chest, barely breathing, gurgling an awful death rattle. Its eyes wide, terrified. Staring at EZRA.

EZRA looks at it in horror. Then to JOEL. *What do we do?*

JOEL takes a hunting knife out of his bag.

EZRA watches on in horror as JOEL neatly slits its throat.

The gurgling death rattle subsides.

EXT. VALLEY/CLEARING - LATE DAY

Light is fading.

EZRA and JOEL are skinning the KANGAROO in a clearing. JOEL wipes his forehead, sweating lightly. He cracks open another beer. EZRA still looks a little sick, shaky, worried.

JOEL
 Chill out, Ez. It happens.
 Everyone's first kill is like that.

EZRA looks out into the dense bushland. Ancient, white gums loom in oppressive darkness.

It's silent.

And eerie.

EZRA feels uneasy.

There's a rustle in the bushland. Then silence again.

In the far distance that EERIE SCREECH-YELPING of wild animals. It sets EZRA on edge.

EZRA warily steps back, closer to JOEL.

JOEL (CONT'D)
 It's just foxes, man.

EZRA
 I've got to be back for dinner.

JOEL
 We've got to fillet while it's
 still fresh.

EZRA pauses. He clearly wants to leave.

JOEL hands EZRA the knife.

JOEL (CONT'D)
It's your kill, you do the honours.

After a moment of hesitation, EZRA takes the knife.

CUT TO:

EZRA roughly fillets the KANGAROO. JOEL talks him through it, drinking another beer.

Another rustle in the bushes.

A DEEP, DARK CRACK from deeper within the valley.

EZRA tries to focus on the filleting, but cannot help and furtively glance up to the high treetops.

EZRA
There's something out there.

JOEL
Seriously Ez, just chill.

EZRA tries to focus back on the filleting. The KNIFE cuts along fresh meat with ease. Blood oozes.

Blood covers his hands, dripping onto the grey leaves underfoot.

SUDDENLY, a RUSTLE - so close its almost on us - A SQUAWK and a FLOCK OF CROWS fly out of foliage, flapping hard - EZRA jumps, knife in hand, disturbed and --

A sickening silence, EZRA's breath is knocked out of him.

His hand GUSHES BLOOD.

He turns white.

Clutching at his hand.

JOEL glances at him and sees blood pouring, jumps to his feet.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Oh fuck oh fuck!

EZRA's shock is giving way to excruciating pain.

He tries to look at his hand, to see the injury. And realises his finger is missing. He's cut clean through the bone.

It hits him in horror. He panics.

Ragged flesh and white bone through the seeping blood. JOEL grabs his jumper and tries to wrap it around EZRA's hand.

JOEL (CONT'D)
 Shit, shit. It's going to be okay,
 Ez. We need to get you to a
 hospital.

EZRA is weak, losing blood quickly. Panic is overwhelming him.

EZRA
 My finger. I need my finger.

EZRA looks on the forest floor, trying to find his finger.

JOEL
 We don't have time, Ez.

JOEL forcibly pulls EZRA up.

INT. HOSPITAL/CORRIDOR - NIGHT

LUKAS and SOFIA rush through the hospital under sickly green light. LUKAS is determined, jaw tense --

INT. HOSPITAL/EZRA'S ROOM - NIGHT

LUKAS and SOFIA crowd around EZRA, who is laying in a hospital bed, awake, but ashen-faced. His hand is wrapped in bandages.

JOEL hovers awkwardly by the door.

EZRA
 I heard this sound, like something
 was in the trees--

LUKAS
 Something in the trees?

EZRA
 I dunno, or somebody? I couldn't
 see what but--

LUKAS
 What do you mean, Ezra? Somebody
 trying to scare you?

EZRA looks at his father with wide eyes, stumbling.

EZRA
 I - I don't know, Dad. I can't
 think--

SOFIA
 It's okay, darling. It's okay.

EZRA
 The knife slipped. It was all so
 fast - oh God, oh God, fucking hell
 I can't believe it, it's my left
 (MORE)

EZRA (CONT'D)
 hand, Dad. I need it for cello. My
left hand--

EZRA is panicking, the realisation of what he's lost hitting him hard. LUKAS knows exactly what EZRA is worried about --

SOFIA
 Calm down, deep breaths...

EZRA
 I tried to find my finger, but I
 couldn't - what am I going to do?

LUKAS
 (quietly)
 Hey, buddy. Get some rest. No use
 thinking about that now.

LUKAS soothes EZRA. EZRA gulps back panic and visibly calms. After a moment, LUKAS stands.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
 I'm going to talk to the doctor,
 okay? I'll be back.

As he leaves, JOEL quietly intercepts him by the door. Nervous, worried.

JOEL
 I'm so fucking sorry, Mr MacArthur.
 It was my fault, it's just Ez said
 he hadn't ever shot a roo so I
 wanted to show him, it was an
 accident--

LUKAS puts a steadying hand on JOEL's shoulder.

LUKAS
 (calmly)
 It's okay, Joel. You did really
 well. I'll take it from here, okay?
 Get some rest.

JOEL nods, thankful. LUKAS forces a calm, measured smile.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
 Good man.

INT. HOSPITAL/QUIET CORRIDOR - NIGHT

LUKAS finds a quiet corridor and faces the wall, seething.

And then punches the wall HARD - his complete, overwhelming rage flashing to the surface--

Tears of fury in his eyes.

He punches the wall again, a crack of plaster as it caves under pressure--

SOFIA places the water on his bedside table and pops a couple of pills.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
To help you sleep.

EZRA does not respond.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
Try to get some rest, baby. We'll talk in the morning.

She ushers CHLOE out and gently shuts the door behind them.

After a moment, EZRA places his bandaged hand under the pillow so he doesn't have to look at it, tears in his eyes.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

SOFIA and LUKAS brush their teeth in the ensuite vigorously. Neither look at each other.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

LUKAS and SOFIA lay in bed, stunned after the night's events.

LUKAS
He's never going to play again.

SOFIA
Don't say that.

LUKAS
It's true.

SOFIA
You don't know that - he might...

But she doesn't believe it.

LUKAS
(pained)
He can't go to New York. Everything he worked for --

SOFIA
We'll call them this week.

A pause. Something worming into LUKAS' brain.

LUKAS
Why has Chloe been lying to us?

SOFIA
What do you mean?

LUKAS
 She's friends with Oliver.
 She skipped school with him today.
 They went into the valley.

SOFIA
You followed them?

LUKAS
 And then Ezra had his accident.

SOFIA studies him.

SOFIA
 You don't seriously think she had
 something to do with it, do you?

LUKAS
 She's always been jealous of Ezra.

SOFIA
 (shocked)
 It was an accident, Lukas.

LUKAS
 Like the dog.

SOFIA
 What are you saying?

A beat. LUKAS sees the horror in his wife's eyes. *He's being stupid.* He relents.

LUKAS
 Nothing.

LUKAS turns off the light. SOFIA turns away, uneasy. Distance between them. Both wide awake and thinking.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - MORNING

Dawn over the house. Mist settles in the valley.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - MORNING

LUKAS spoons scrambled eggs onto toast for EZRA, who is still in his pyjamas. CHLOE watches EZRA nervously. SOFIA tries to distract, to allow EZRA some space.

SOFIA
 I think I'll pick up some more
 basil plants at the shops today,
 what do you think?

LUKAS
 Uhuh. Sure.

EZRA tries to slice toast with a trembling hand. He can barely grip the knife with his left hand.

SOFIA

Honey...

But his left hand is slipping. Angry tears form.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

Ez, you don't need to... we can help you--

EZRA ignores her, but with each futile try he becomes angrier and angrier until --

SOFIA (CONT'D)

Ezra --

EZRA

FUCKING HELL! Just shut up, Sofia!

SOFIA flinches at the use of her name. CHLOE puts her hand on EZRA's arm.

CHLOE

Ez, it's going to be okay --

EZRA

Fuck off, Chloe!

EZRA stands up abruptly, upset and frustrated, storms out of the kitchen, leaving a shaken family behind. CHLOE, upset, hurt by her brother. A distant bedroom door slams.

LUKAS looks after his son.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/EZRA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

EZRA sits miserably, staring out the window with angry tears. He hides his left hand under his elbow. LUKAS enters.

LUKAS

Mum really wants you to come back down to breakfast, Ez. Can you do that?

EZRA remains silent. LUKAS tries another tack.

LUKAS (CONT'D)

I spoke to your doctors about physiotherapy, ways to learn how to...

EZRA

(thickly)
How to live without a fucking finger?

LUKAS - yeah.

A long pause, angry tears brimming for EZRA.

EZRA (CONT'D)
I'm ruined, Dad. Cello... it's
never going to be the same again.

LUKAS
You'll be able to adjust...

EZRA
But it'll never be the same. Never.

LUKAS looks at his son in despair.

LUKAS
I'm going to fix it, Ez.

EZRA
(desperate)
Why'd this have to happen to me?

EZRA pauses. He decides to articulate his fears out loud.

EZRA (CONT'D)
I - I don't think it was an
accident.

A beat, as LUKAS looks at EZRA.

EZRA (CONT'D)
Something did this, Dad. There was
someone *out there*. I know it sounds
stupid but I'm not fucking stupid.
I'm not - there was something... or
someone... what Tony said about the
valley...

LUKAS
Come on, mate...

EZRA
Please believe me.

EZRA looks at him desperately, willing him to understand.

EZRA (CONT'D)
(darkly)
Somebody wanted to hurt me.

LUKAS stands.

LUKAS
Just come back downstairs, little
guy. For your mum.

EZRA
(shaking his head)
I'm not hungry.

LUKAS looks at his son for a moment before quietly leaving.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LANDING - MORNING

LUKAS shuts EZRA's bedroom door. He takes a beat. Tears in his eyes. The weight of his son's anger on him. He looks up to see CHLOE watching him nervously from the landing.

LUKAS passes, ignoring her.

EXT. VALLEY PATH - MORNING

LUKAS is alone, walking through the valley, following a rabbit path. His breath crystallises in the crisp air.

The ghostly gum trees tower overhead, creaking in the breeze.

The distant SOUND OF A DOG BARKING. So faint he can barely hear it, but incessant. LUKAS tries to hear direction, but it's impossible.

But then the barking becomes louder, clearer. It is in this world.

A COLLARED DOG appears - we recognise him as ROCCO, Tony's dog. It wags its tail at LUKAS. LUKAS pats it.

LUKAS
(murmuring)
Hey Rocco where did you come
from...

The shape of somebody familiar emerges from the same direction as the dog - TONY. A sports rifle at his shoulder. TONY looks at LUKAS in surprise.

TONY
Out for a walk?

LUKAS shrugs. Sure.

TONY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry to hear about Ez, mate.
He's been in my prayers.

LUKAS pauses. Nods his thanks. Eyes TONY's rifle.

TONY (CONT'D)
(re the rifle)
Never go anywhere in this place
without it. Just in case.
(off LUKAS' look)
You never know what you'll find.

Something in LUKAS' face, TONY peers at him.

TONY (CONT'D)
What're you doing out here?

EXT. VALLEY CLEARING - MORNING

TONY leads LUKAS down the rabbit path into the CLEARING. LUKAS spots dark, dried blood on the ground. The rotting remnants of the kangaroo. The knife. Flies buzz unpleasantly.

LUKAS crouches down, peers through the leaves. TONY watches, uncertainly.

TONY
There's no way you're going to find it.

LUKAS ignores him.

TONY (CONT'D)
Even if you did, it's been too long... they can't reattach...

But LUKAS is searching still and slowly becomes aware of a strange, rhythmic flapping noise coming from somewhere in the bushland. He shares a glance with TONY, who can hear it too. They look for the source of the sound and find:

An injured, sick CROW laying on the ground, wings flapping uselessly against forest floor, a half eaten, grey, bloodied finger beside it.

LUKAS stares at it, repulsed.

TONY (V.O; PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)
You're starting to feel it, aren't you?

INT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/DECK - DAY

LUKAS stands on the deck, distracted by his own thoughts.

TONY hands LUKAS a beer.

LUKAS
Feel what?

TONY
This place... has an energy. Always has, ever since I can remember.

LUKAS
I must be going mad. First the dog, then Ezra... it doesn't make sense.

They contemplate the view of the forest in silence. Dark clouds hang ominously.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
Ezra said he heard something in the forest, but... I don't know.

LUKAS trails off, genuinely at a loss. He tries to find words.

LUKAS (CONT'D)

When his mum died - his biological mum I mean - Ezra wouldn't talk to me for months. He was a little kid and I didn't know how to be a single dad. I couldn't get him to speak, not a word. But then one day, he found music. And that was it - he came back to life. Like a light turned on in him. When he picked up the cello, I'd never heard anything like it. He worked day and night. Music was everything. He gave up friends, school, parties, girls. He made *so many sacrifices*. And I always told Ez that if he worked hard, good things would come... he's a good kid. *We're good people...* what did we do to deserve this?

LUKAS stops himself. In so much pain and anger for his son he could almost cry.

TONY looks at LUKAS.

TONY

I wanna show you something.

INT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/BASEMENT - DAY

TONY clicks on the basement light to reveal a FULLY STOCKED PREPPER BASEMENT. Enough boxes and cans of food to last several lifetimes. Shortwave radio. Gas masks. Radiation supplies. Medical supplies.

LUKAS looks at all of this paraphernalia in shock.

LUKAS

Holy shit.

LUKAS examines a box of radiation meds.

LUKAS (CONT'D)

There's enough here for...

TONY

The apocalypse.

Beat.

LUKAS

Right.

TONY

"A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished."

LUKAS picks up a gas mask.

LUKAS

You've thought of everything.

TONY

I've got enough here for a family to survive for ten years after a global event without resurfacing. Most people only plan for five, but five's not enough.

LUKAS

Why not?

TONY

Once you got chaos, you got chaos. Can't put the genie back in the bottle.

LUKAS nods slowly. Something in TONY's eyes - that religious fever about him. It embarrasses him and fascinates him in equal measure.

LUKAS

Why are you showing me all this?

TONY

You're not going mad, Lukas. Bad things happen round here. Your boy's accident... the dog... it's not just bad luck. You know that, don't you? People like you and me, we see things as they really are.

TONY talks slowly, intimately, confidently.

TONY (CONT'D)

We see the unfairness of life. The bullshit. There are hostile forces out there that want to harm good people. To change them and force them into the devil's work and destroy good, hard working people like us. And one day... all the evil in that valley will be unleashed...

LUKAS

Do you really believe that?

TONY

I do. I've lived here my whole life and I've seen... things that cannot be explained. Evil.

LUKAS, unnerved - but TONY is so serious, so compelling.

LUKAS

If you really believe that, why do you stay here?

TONY
 (passionately)
 This is *my home*. Mine. I'll never
 leave. When the balance is right,
 there's nothing more beautiful than
 this country. But when it's
 wrong...

TONY looks at LUKAS darkly.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Will you do me a favour?
 (then)
 Will you pray with me for your boy?

An uncomfortable beat.

CUT TO:

TONY kneels. LUKAS hesitates before kneeling himself. With a mixture of polite embarrassment and awkwardness, he follows TONY's lead and closes his eyes for prayer.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Father, please watch over Ezra.
 Keep him safe in his hour of
 need...

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/EZRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

EZRA, still in bed, stares miserably at his ceiling. He winces as he tries to wriggle his hand. His mobile phone is vibrating on the bedside table - the caller ID reads 'Joel'. He grabs his phone with his good hand and smashes it against his bedside table until it breaks.

TONY (V.O.)
*May your love settle upon him, may
 he rest in your peace and find
 restoration. We pray for Ezra's
 healing in both body and mind...*

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

Morning. EZRA enters the kitchen in his pyjamas. He grabs a glass from the cupboard and pours a water at the kitchen tap - but the water is a filthy black colour.

EZRA drops the glass in horror.

TONY (V.O.)
*We ask to live in harmony with the
 valley.*

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/WATER TANK - DAY

LUKAS and TONY are investigating the large rainwater tank on the side of the house. SOFIA, EZRA and CHLOE watch.

Eventually the two men manage to unscrew the top of the tank. They recoil at the putrid smell.

TONY (V.O.)
*We beg your forgiveness for our
 sins.*

REVEAL: A DEAD FOX floats in the tank, rotting, flesh blackened.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/GARDEN - DAY

SOFIA and CHLOE dig a small shallow grave in the garden. EZRA watches. Blank. When they are done, CHLOE shovels a body wrapped in a blanket into the grave. She is nauseated by the smell.

TONY (V.O.)
*We offer sacrifice, and ask for You
 to ease our suffering and keep us
 safe against evil.*

They heap dirt on the grave.

LUKAS studies his family from a distance, sipping a beer, troubled.

After they have finished, SOFIA and CHLOE stand back. CHLOE places a tiny makeshift cross on the grave that is labelled "An Unlucky Fox."

INT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/BASEMENT - NIGHT

TONY is finishing his prayer, and we realise that this is another day. LUKAS' eyes are also closed in prayer. And this time, he looks like he means it.

TONY
 Amen.

A beat.

LUKAS
 Amen.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

LUKAS watches pasta boil, thoughts a million miles away. The real world feels oddly distant, a HORRIBLE, DARK HUM is overwhelming him, making him woozy - somewhere a DOG is barking incessantly --

FLASH: A SPADE ploughs into the dark earth, hard --

The pasta boils over - but when LUKAS glances at it, it is boiling with THICK, DARK BLOOD. The BLOOD POURS OVER THE HOB, DRIPPING ONTO THE FLOOR --

LUKAS stares at it, horrified.

SOFIA (O.S.)
Lukas, what are you doing!?

LUKAS jumps and the blood is now water is spilling over the stove. He tries to pull the saucepan off the hob and yelps as he burns himself. He sucks his fingers, wincing.

SOFIA looks at him like he's mad.

CUT TO:

SOFIA dabs balm on LUKAS' hand as she bandages it. SOFIA steals a glance at him, worried.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
Please don't go to Tony's tonight.

LUKAS doesn't respond.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
(softly)
We need you here.

Tension between them. LUKAS stands.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
Hang on, I haven't finished
[bandaging].

LUKAS
(brusquely)
I'm good.

LUKAS walks away.

EXT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

LUKAS enters the driveway with a six pack of beer. The gate closes behind him.

SOFIA watches from the window, worried.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

SOFIA and CHLOE watch television, lit only by the glow of the screen. The program ends and SOFIA turns off the TV. The house is very silent and dark.

SOFIA
Bed time, Clo.

CHLOE
(anxiously)
Can I stay with you and dad
tonight?

SOFIA looks at her daughter in concern.

SOFIA
 You've got your own bed, baby.
 You're too old for things like
 that.

A pause.

CHLOE
 (nervous)
 This place freaks me out. I don't
 like being here.

This annoys SOFIA a little -

SOFIA
 But darling, I've worked so hard to
 get us here. This is our *home*.

CHLOE looks at her mother, unconvinced.

CHLOE
 We had a home already. In Sydney.
 Can't we go back there?

SOFIA
 I've got my job here, honey. We
 just have to make the best of what
 we've got.

CHLOE looks down, upset. SOFIA pulls her into a hug.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
 Darling, there's nothing to be
 frightened of. Nothing at all.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/CHLOE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The house is silent.

Now in her pyjamas, CHLOE quietly pushes a desk across her door, securing it. She locks her bedroom window and fastens it with a bike lock. She lays in bed and pulls the bed covers over her head.

After a moment, we can hear the front door quietly open and close. The sound of somebody stumbling in. Drunk. LUKAS. The sound of him knocking into something and cursing under his breath, before padding upstairs. He is in the hallway outside her room. CHLOE peeks from the bedcovers.

She can hear SOFIA hiss angrily at him:

SOFIA (O.S.)
Lukas, you're drunk.

LUKAS (O.S.)
So what?

SOFIA (O.S.)
You can't keep doing this...

LUKAS (O.S.)
*Oh please - I'll do whatever I want
 - fuck off - you really shouldn't
 needle at me all the time --*

Their voices muffle as they enter their bedroom.

CHLOE pulls the bed covers back over her head.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the dark, SOFIA stares at the back of LUKAS' head as he sleeps. Troubled.

EXT. VALLEY - MORNING

We push through the dark, knotted valley.

A FOX slinks through the undergrowth, hunting.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

SOFIA slowly wakes. The curtains are open. The room is bright, warm, inviting.

 LUKAS (O.S.)
 Rise and shine, baby.

LUKAS brings in a tray of breakfast. SOFIA tries to recalibrate the image of this man with the one from last night. LUKAS smiles sheepishly.

 LUKAS (CONT'D)
 Hey.

 SOFIA
 What's all this all about?

 LUKAS
 I was a jerk. And this is me being
 sorry.

He sits down.

 LUKAS (CONT'D)
 Forgive me?

SOFIA doesn't give an inch. *Maybe.*

 LUKAS (CONT'D)
 Look - reset.

He mimes turning his brain off with the remote. She gives a tiny smile.

 LUKAS (CONT'D)
 Listen - I was thinking we could
 take the kids. Go to the beach?

SOFIA
The beach is hours away, Lukas.

LUKAS
It'll be fun. We'll go swimming.
Let the kids build sandcastles or
whatever.

SOFIA
I have to go to work... and don't
you think the kids are a little old
for sandcastles?

LUKAS
Forget about work. You don't need
to work.

LUKAS is persistent. Nuzzling her. SOFIA feels woozy, odd.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
Just forget about everything. If
you don't do it, I'll cut my
fucking fingers off.

SOFIA
What?

LUKAS is still smiling, but there's something menacing behind
his eyes. He picks up a knife from the breakfast tray.

LUKAS
I'll cut my fucking fingers off,
Sof. I will.

SOFIA
What?

LUKAS begins to saw at his fingers - blood oozes. SOFIA
stands up in horror, sick.

LUKAS
I just want to go to the beach,
honey. That's all.

Blood is oozing. LUKAS smiles woozily.

SOFIA launches herself at the bedroom door. It's locked.
SOFIA bangs on it. Slams her hand over and over - BANG BANG
BANG BANG --

BANG BANG BANG BANG--

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

SOFIA awakes with a start. The BANGING IS COMING FROM HER
BEDROOM DOOR.

LUKAS is in a deep sleep beside her. His fingers are, as far
as she can see, in tact. He barely stirs.

EZRA (O.S.)
Dad! Open the door. Dad! Sofia!
Why's the door locked?

SOFIA stumbles to her door. It's locked, which is strange. She unlocks it and opens the door to find EZRA.

SOFIA
 Baby, what's going on?

EZRA
 You need to come see this --

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - NIGHT

Flames snake along wooden beams. Paint blisters and bubbles. Wood cracks. Sparks fly. The noise is DEAFENING.

A BUILDING SITE 100 METRES DOWN THE ROAD IS ON FIRE. Its blackened frame stark against the brutal orange glow of the flames. Sparks jump and light the building site beside it.

SOFIA and EZRA stand outside the house watching the glow.

The sound of SIRENS in the distance.

LUKAS joins them, pulling on his jacket.

LUKAS
 Jesus Christ...

TONY is running up his driveway in boxer shorts and a t-shirt. LUKAS heads over to him.

SOFIA watches TONY and LUKAS talking, lit by the orange of the inferno.

DALE (V.O; PRE-LAP)
Please, everybody, calm down.

INT. CHURCH HALL - DAY

A CLUSTER OF TWENTY OR SO UNHAPPY, RESTLESS RESIDENTS mill around in a small, dowdy church hall. Waiting for a meeting to start.

LUKAS and SOFIA fill their cups of tea by an urn. CHLOE and a pale, unwell looking EZRA stand by them.

DALE (V.O.)
The fire department are
investigating. We still don't know
what caused the fire, it could have
been a number of things.

RESIDENT 1 (V.O.)
Did somebody start it?

DALE (V.O.)
As I said, investigations are ongoing. I really don't want anyone to get ahead of themselves.

LUKAS spots OLIVER with his mother ASHLEIGH.

OLIVER catches eyes with LUKAS. His stare unwavering.

INT. CHURCH HALL - DAY

We catch up with the meeting. THE RESIDENTS sit on plastic chairs under sickly yellow light. An air of simmering tension amongst them.

DALE
 We're not ruling anything out at this stage. The important thing is that nobody was hurt...

DALE, the project manager, is gamely trying to hold the meeting together.

SOFIA, LUKAS, EZRA and CHLOE stand at the back. We may also recognise JOSH, the school bully, sitting with his parents BEN and KELLY.

SERGEANT SCHUTTE stands beside DALE.

BEN
 When will we know? My wife is very worried.

DALE
 We'll be sending out emails to all residents as soon as the investigation is finalised. I can only offer my sincere --

TONY (O.S.)
 You going to explain why your building site was on fire, Dale, or are you just gonna keep feeding us bullshit?

TONY has entered the meeting hall. He's clearly charged, ready for a fight.

SCHUTTE
 Police are investigating the matter, Tony --

TONY
 Mate, somebody could've got hurt.

DALE
 I appreciate that. I apologise for such a frightening incident. I just... have no idea how it happened at this stage.

TONY shakes his head, addresses the other RESIDENTS. He's bubbling with a kind of charismatic anger. A menace.

TONY
This guy's a fucking joke.
(to DALE)
You're a joke bloke.

SCHUTTE
Steady, Tony.

DALE
Look - if it does turn out to be deliberately lit then obviously we'll find the culprit...

TONY scoffs.

TONY
Sure. How are you gonna keep our streets safe, sergeant? We've had a lotta bad luck recently.

Murmurs of agreement from the residents. SOFIA feels LUKAS shift beside her. His eyes are fixed on TONY, who addresses the RESIDENTS --

TONY (CONT'D)
Animals getting killed. Kids having accidents. Unexplained fires. It's not right. We can all feel it, can't we?

And in this sickly, horrible little hall, the residents *can* feel it. They nod.

TONY (CONT'D)
Something's wrong round here, don't you reckon? There's some evil in this place.

TONY looks directly at OLIVER.

TONY (CONT'D)
Somebody's let the devil in.

Silence. Everybody stares at OLIVER.

Uncomfortable, ASHLEIGH puts her hand on OLIVER's shoulder and ushers him out of the meeting, hot under the gaze of the RESIDENTS.

TONY turns back to SCHUTTE.

TONY (CONT'D)
Seems to me that there's a problem here. So what are you gonna do about it? You gonna protect us?

SCHUTTE remains silent.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Nah, didn't think so. Didn't
 fucking think so.

EXT. CHURCH HALL/STREET - DAY

SOFIA is picking her nails nervously. The meeting has ended.

At a distance, TONY and LUKAS talk outside the church. She's increasingly unsettled. After a moment, SOFIA notices IDA sitting in TONY'S TRUCK.

She heads over and raps on the window.

IDA jumps, nervy. It seems to take her a moment to register that it's SOFIA. She rolls down the window.

SOFIA
 (good naturedly)
 Your husband put on quite a show.

IDA
 Did he?

SOFIA
 In the meeting.

IDA
 Oh. Right.

SOFIA peers at IDA carefully. She looks pale, worn, kind of out of it.

SOFIA
 You okay, sweetie? How's the little one?

IDA touches her belly absentmindedly.

IDA
 They think... maybe she's the wrong way.

SOFIA
 Oh. Well - the doctors can help you with that, can't they?

IDA
 Yeah.

SOFIA
 (worried)
 Are you sure you're okay, Ida? Are you in pain?

IDA
 (slowly)
 I'm going to stay somewhere. My parents, I think. Tony's taking me.
 (MORE)

IDA (CONT'D)
It's all cool. It's better for me
to be away from all the bad things.

IDA seems woozy, out of it, almost drugged. SOFIA glances at TONY and LUKAS who are still deep in conversation.

SOFIA
Why don't you give me your phone
number? I'll check in on you later.

SOFIA hands her the back of a receipt and a pen. IDA nods numbly, scribbles her number down. And as SOFIA takes back the paper, IDA grabs onto SOFIA's hand so tightly it causes SOFIA genuine pain.

IDA
I'm so glad our two families could
meet. Tony's been waiting a long
time to find a friend like Lukas.
Someone who *believes*.

SOFIA smiles tightly, unnerved. SOFIA jumps as --

TONY
Chat chat *chat* - what're you two
ladies chitter-chattering about?

TONY arrives. SOFIA surreptitiously folds the IDA's number into her pocket.

SOFIA
About how Lukas and I owe you two a
dinner.

TONY
Ida would love that, wouldn't you
babe? It'll have to wait a while
though - I'm taking her to stay
with her parents for a bit.

SOFIA
Right.

LUKAS is watching this sharply, suspicious of his wife.

LUKAS
C'mon, Sof. Let's get the kids
home.

SOFIA smiles politely, and heads back to the car with LUKAS. When she looks back, TONY is in the driver's seat, watching her. IDA is sinking into her seat like a frightened animal.

INT. CAR - DAY

LUKAS is driving the family home. There is an air of horrible, excruciating tension between them.

LUKAS glances into the rearview mirror to catch eyes with CHLOE, who looks at him with complete and utter hatred. SOFIA catches this exchange.

INT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/LUKAS' OFFICE - DAY

LUKAS is struggling with the little soy sauce fish for his sushi. His hands are shaking. There is the AWFUL, PERSISTENT SOUND OF A DOG BARKING IN THE BACKGROUND.

He slowly becomes aware of a shouting somewhere in the distance. After a moment he tunes into it. It's the sound of KIDS YELLING - coming from outside.

CHLOE (O.S.)
Get off him! Leave him alone.

He looks out of the window to see a group of students circling, shouting at a figure sprawled on the floor --

EXT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/QUADRANGLE - DAY

CRACK!

OLIVER gasps. He chokes on blood.

JOSH (the same leader that bullied him earlier) is punching him. Hard. He's a big, strong kid - OLIVER's nose cracks under the pressure.

And OLLIE has a peculiar, glazed expression. He does nothing to defend himself. Blood sprays on his shirt --

JOSH
You like that, you fucking freak?

CHLOE is trying to pull JOSH off OLLIE without any success.

CHLOE
Leave him alone - you're going to
kill him. Somebody, help --

She looks around at the students, who are all watching with a mixture of horror and excitement. Nobody moves. She catches her father at the back, watching.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Dad - help!

For a split second, LUKAS hesitates. Transfixed by the violence raining down on OLIVER.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
LUKAS!

LUKAS pushes through the kids.

LUKAS
That's enough, Josh.

JOSH stands, nursing his fist. OLLIE is staring at LUKAS, saying nothing. Blood running down his face. It's unnerving.

LUKAS shoos away the circle of kids.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
Back to your classes - go on, back off.

JOSH
Ollie started it. Talking crazy shit. He's a freak. He started the fire. He killed your dog, Mr MacArthur.

LUKAS stares at OLIVER, unnerved by his odd presence. He pulls OLIVER up roughly.

LUKAS
You. Come with me.

CHLOE
(upset)
What're you doing?

LUKAS
Leave it Clo.
(to JOSH)
I'll deal with you later.

CHLOE
This is insane, he didn't do anything!

But LUKAS ignores her. CHLOE watches LUKAS haul OLIVER away.

INT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/EMPTY CLASSROOM - DAY

LUKAS bursts into an empty classroom with OLIVER.

LUKAS
Sit.

OLIVER looks at LUKAS uncertainly.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
Sit down, Oliver.

LUKAS hunts around the classroom for paper towels or tissues.

OLIVER
I didn't do anything, sir.

LUKAS
No?

OLIVER
(calmly)
I think Josh has an anger management problem.

LUKAS
 You're not like other boys, are
 you?

 OLIVER
 I'm sorry, I'm not sure I
 understand.

 LUKAS
 I'm saying you're a little bit
 different. You freak people out.
 Clean yourself up.

LUKAS throws a box of tissues to OLIVER.

 LUKAS (CONT'D)
 For example, most boys wouldn't
 break into my house to spend time
 with my dog.

OLIVER hesitates.

 OLIVER
 Garden.

 LUKAS
 Sorry?

 OLIVER
 I never broke into your house. I
 only went into your garden. I - I
 was friends with Perry. I liked
 him.

 LUKAS
 You broke into private property.

 OLIVER
 Like you broke into my locker?

A beat. LUKAS blinks, slightly unstuck. He ignores it.

 LUKAS
 You saw my dog was hurt and then
 you ran away? Is that how you treat
 your friends, Oliver?

 OLIVER
 I thought people would think I did
 something wrong.

 LUKAS
 And the building site --

 OLIVER
 I didn't do it! People always think
 I do shit. Think I'm bad.

 LUKAS
 Maybe that's because you are bad,
 Oliver.

OLIVER, shocked. Real venom in LUKAS' voice. No longer the veneer of civility.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
I think you murdered my dog.

OLIVER
(genuinely)
I didn't. I loved him. He was my friend.

LUKAS
What do you do out there in the forest with my daughter?

OLIVER
I don't understand...

LUKAS
You both went in there the other day, didn't you? The same day that my son had a very bad accident.

OLIVER
You think it was *my* fault?

THE SOUND OF A DOG BARKING INTRUDES.

LUKAS
Every time something bad happens, there you are. My dog, my son, the fire. You're a little worm, crawling into people's brains. Wriggling around. Giving them evil ideas. What ideas are you putting into my daughter's head?

OLIVER, aghast - fury building.

OLIVER
That's not fair. You're not being fair.

LUKAS
Life's not fucking fair, Oliver.

A beat.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
You stay away from my family. Are you listening to me? Stay away from Chloe.

The force of LUKAS' voice, his conviction, is unnerving. There is a darkness to him now. But OLIVER is looking at him squarely.

OLIVER
No. We're friends.

LUKAS
Leave Chloe alone.

OLIVER

Fuck you.

LUKAS

I'm serious, Oliver.

His voice is hard. Unwavering. OLIVER stares at him defiantly. Matching him.

OLIVER

I'm serious too, *sir*. Fuck. You.

FLASH: A bicycle wheel spins. The sick CROW on the forest floor, wing beating the ground --

For a moment, OLIVER'S EYES ARE CLOUDED, STRANGE, EERIE - he hisses in a strange, dark, warped voice. His face contorting -

OLIVER (CONT'D)

You can't stop me. You can't stop me. You can't STOP ME --

LUKAS looks at OLIVER in horror --

But then LUKAS blinks and OLIVER has returned to normal. Just a scared boy with real fear in his eyes.

LUKAS

What did you say to me?

OLIVER, confused - unnerved by LUKAS' erratic behaviour, wriggles out of LUKAS' iron grip on his shoulder --

OLIVER

Get off me, you creep.

OLIVER wrenches himself away from LUKAS, slamming the door behind him.

LUKAS takes a beat, sweating lightly. He leans against the wall, dizzy. His breathing becomes thunderously loud, eerie --

FLASH: Dirt piles. A pale hand half covered by soil. PERRY barks towards us - snarling, frightened - then whimpering in pain --

EXT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

STUDENTS pile through the corridors at the end of school. CHLOE makes her way through the students towards OLIVER'S LOCKER in the distance. OLIVER collects his bag.

CHLOE

Ollie!

But he ignores her, keeps walking and disappears. By the time CHLOE reaches his locker, she can see that it's been smeared with the words "WATCH OUT DOG KILLER" in red paint.

EXT. SCHOOL CARPARK - LATE DAY

CHLOE, with her school bag, walks towards Lukas' usual car park, but his car is not there. She frowns.

INT. CAR - DAY

LUKAS drives home. His hands are tight on the steering wheel.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

Dark clouds are clustering over the forest. Wind is pushing through the undergrowth. A late summer storm is brewing.

A deep, dark crack in the distance. It could be a thunderclap. It could be something darker...

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - LATE DAY

SOFIA is digging new earth for her basil plants in her vegetable garden. A breeze hits her, the sound of the unnerving FOX SCREECH-YELPING from the valley beyond the garden fence. It unsettles her.

She realises that she's out of potting mix.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

SOFIA waits as the CASHIER swipes her potting mix along with a few other gardening things. The CASHIER eyes her.

She senses a presence behind her and turns to see a couple of RESIDENTS from the meeting. They could be watching her, it's unclear. Feeling paranoid, SOFIA pays and hurries away.

EXT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

As SOFIA packs her car she notices some commotion across the carpark. ASHLEIGH, distressed, is standing in the middle of the car park. OLLIE is with her, a bandage over his nose from JOSH's beating. ASHLEIGH yells to no-one in particular.

ASHLEIGH
Who the hell did this? You cowards.

Curious, SOFIA approaches.

SOFIA
Hey - what's going on?

SOFIA notices that ASHLEIGH's tyres have been slashed.

ASHLEIGH
(accusatory)
Did you do this?

SOFIA

No!

ASHLEIGH

I left my car for a *second* and look what they did...

A few ONLOOKERS are watching them curiously.

ASHLEIGH (CONT'D)

(to the ONLOOKERS)

Are you happy now, you motherfuckers?

The ONLOOKERS look away, embarrassed for her.

OLIVER

(humiliated)

Mum, let's just go - the ice cream's melting.

SOFIA

This is awful, Ashleigh. Let me drive you home.

ASHLEIGH almost laughs.

ASHLEIGH

With you? I don't bloody think so. Your husband's half the bloody problem.

ASHLEIGH picks up the shopping. OLLIE helps her.

ASHLEIGH (CONT'D)

We'll walk home thanks very much.

SOFIA watches them walk away. ASHLEIGH tosses the melted ice cream into a nearby bin.

EXT. ROAD - LATE DAY

CHLOE trudges down the narrow road home. Upset. She looks at her watch. It's getting late. The forest on either side of her is dark and impenetrable.

She begins to run so that she can get home quicker.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/GARDEN - LATE DAY

THUNK. THUNK --

LUKAS is splitting wood in the backyard. Working through his fury. Trying to calm himself down.

He sweats. The clouds are dark overhead.

He glances at the house - he can see SOFIA through the back kitchen window preparing dinner. He watches CHLOE enter from

school. Clearly upset and angry, explaining something to SOFIA. He can only imagine that she's telling him about the incident with Oliver.

SOFIA glances towards LUKAS, horrified. CHLOE stares at him venomously.

The distance between them has never felt further. He swings the axe and the wood splinters. THUNK --

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/EZRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

EZRA is trying to force himself to play the cello. His hands tremble. It's almost impossible without his finger. The sound is scratchy and awful. It's causing him incredible pain.

He wrings his hand, wincing. And tries again.

He mutters to himself angrily.

EZRA
You piece of shit. You piece of
shit. You piece of--

Angry tears stream down his face.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/HALLWAY - NIGHT

SOFIA is listening at EZRA'S BEDROOM door. Upset. Horrified to hear EZRA in such awful pain.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

SOFIA is watching LUKAS guzzle a beer over dinner. EZRA shifts food around his plate, miserable.

LUKAS
Where's Chloe?

SOFIA
I told her she could eat in her
room.

LUKAS frowns.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
I think you two need a break from
each other. Why didn't you take her
home from school?

LUKAS
I just... forgot.

SOFIA
She's thirteen, Lukas. She
shouldn't be running around by
herself.

LUKAS shovels food. Ignores her.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
I saw Ollie... his face... Clo's
worried about him.

LUKAS
That boy's not right - it was like
he *enjoyed getting hit*. You should
have seen it.

SOFIA
You're picking on him, Lukas.

LUKAS
(sharply)
So what if I am? You shouldn't want
your daughter hanging out with
people like that.

SOFIA looks at her husband with some horror.

SOFIA
Our daughter, Lukas.

Beat. LUKAS turns to EZRA.

LUKAS
When do you think you're going to
go back to school, Ez?

EZRA
I don't know.

LUKAS
You can't leave it too long, mate.
You've got your exams to think
about.

EZRA
Yeah.

LUKAS
Education is important, little guy.
You've had a hiccup. That's all.
There's still plenty of good things
around the corner...

EZRA forces a nod. Tries to make himself happy for his
father.

EZRA
You're right.

LUKAS
Good man.

EZRA pushes his plate aside.

EZRA
Can I please be excused?

LUKAS
No. You've barely eaten anything.

EZRA
I feel sick.

LUKAS
I said no, Ezra. Mum's made all this food, you need to eat it.

SOFIA
It's okay, Ez. You can go if you want.

LUKAS, eyes suddenly flashing -

LUKAS
No. We need to sit here as a family and eat our dinner.

Something on the edge, slightly deranged about LUKAS now.

SOFIA
Lukas...

LUKAS
You want us to be a proper family? We eat together. Ezra needs to eat his dinner.

EZRA
(quietly)
I'm not a little kid, Dad.

SOFIA
Lukas, what are you talking about?

LUKAS
No more lying. No more bullshit. From any of us. We have to protect each other.

SOFIA
Protect each other from what?

LUKAS is seized by a kind of frustrated, paranoid fever.

LUKAS
Bad things are happening. The world isn't good, Sofia. It's mean and it's nasty. It's *evil*. *Open your eyes*. Look at Ezra! Look at our dog. There are forces --

SOFIA
There's no *evil* out there that you have to protect us from!

LUKAS
Can't you feel the energy in this place?

He has a mad glint in his eye. SOFIA looks at him in concern.

SOFIA
What the fuck has Tony been putting
in your head? Sometimes bad things
just *happen*.

But LUKAS shakes his head, frustrated, willing her to understand --

LUKAS
Don't be blind, Sof - just because
you have your job you can't see
this place is --

But that enrages SOFIA, that's a low blow --

SOFIA
Don't you dare - I worked hard to
get where I am. My job puts *this*
food on the table.

LUKAS flinches. Speaks quietly.

LUKAS
I'm trying to fix things. But we
have to work together. As a family.

Silence. SOFIA and EZRA both shaken.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
So eat your bloody dinner.

SOFIA and EZRA hesitate. LUKAS slams his hand on the table, making them both jump.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
EAT.

They both pick up their forks tentatively. SOFIA watches her husband, disquiet growing.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

LUKAS is watching TV. Glassy eyed. Drinking another beer.
SOFIA is marking papers.

THE INTRUSIVE SOUND OF EZRA PLAYING HIS CELLO UPSTAIRS creeps in.

LUKAS turns up the TV, but it's no good. The sound gets under LUKAS' skin. He stands, grabs his jacket.

SOFIA
Please - don't go.

He ignores and the front door slams behind him.

EXT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The SORRENTINO ELECTRIC GATE closes behind LUKAS as he enters Tony's property.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

SOFIA watches the kettle boil. Distracted, thoughts racing.

CHLOE (O.S.)
Why won't you do anything?

SOFIA turns to see CHLOE standing at the doorway, angry.

SOFIA
About what?

Pause.

CHLOE
Dad.

It sounds so simple, so brutal out loud.

SOFIA
Everything is fine, baby. I promise. We're going to be fine.

CHLOE
But that isn't right, mum. You know that.

CHLOE shakes her head, angry.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Why don't you see what's happening?

She runs back upstairs, leaving SOFIA rattled.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

SOFIA stands at her bedroom window. Looking out at the dark valley. LUKAS has not returned home.

She takes the little piece of paper out of her pocket that IDA wrote her number on. She dials, but goes straight to voicemail.

IDA
(voice message)
Yo! You've reached my voicemail -
leave a message and I'll get back
to you!

IDA's voice sounds so cheerful - it puts SOFIA further on edge.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

SOFIA stuffs some clothes into a small go bag. She's careful to cover her tracks as she goes, only takes the socks from the back of the drawer, makes sure the wardrobe looks untouched etc.

She adds her and Chloe's passports, her tax documents, a few necessities.

She hides the duffel bag at the top of the wardrobe, out of sight.

She sits on the edge of her bed, heavy.

FLASH: A beautiful, yellow SUNFLOWER trembles in the breeze.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

SOFIA awakes. She is alone in the bed. She frowns. *Where's Lukas?*

It doesn't look like he came home last night.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - DAY

SOFIA is heaving her work bag into the STATION WAGON. Her mobile phone rings and with some effort she answers.

SOFIA
Sofia speaking.
(pause, surprised)
Oh. He didn't call in?
(beat)
I'm sorry, Abigail, can you
organise a replacement for his
students? Thank you. Sorry for the
trouble. You too.

After a moment, SOFIA hangs up. Bites her lip. Worried.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/STREET - DAY

SOFIA marches over to the SORRENTINO ELECTRIC GATE. She presses the buzzer. And waits. And waits. Nobody answers. She rattles the gate.

CUT TO:

SOFIA is halfway over the fence. She drops down on the other side.

EXT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/DRIVEWAY - DAY

SOFIA knocks on the front door. Waits. No answer. No sign of movement.

SOFIA
Lukas? Tony?

She calls Lukas on her mobile.

She can hear it ring distantly inside the house. She tries the front door. Unlocked.

INT. SORRENTINO HOUSE - DAY

SOFIA carefully pushes her way through the house. She locates Lukas' mobile phone on the kitchen bench. The bench is bachelor pad messy - empty beer cans, plates of old food.

The deck doors are open. A curtain flies in the breeze. The dark valley beyond.

Nobody is here. *Why is nobody here?*

SOFIA feels worried. Something is wrong. A photograph on the wall catches her attention. IDA, smiling at the camera.

SOFIA hovers her hand across the lower half of IDA's face, covering her smile - and suddenly her eyes look frightened.

SOFIA is troubled by it.

INT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/BEDROOM - DAY

SOFIA looks at the master bedroom. A pile of books - "God is Preparing You", "Second Coming," "Antichrist: The Mark of the Beast" on one side table. The other side table is empty.

SOFIA opens the wardrobe - one half is full of TONY's clothes however the other - IDA's half - is empty.

INT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/OFFICE - DAY

SOFIA enters TONY's office. She stops at the GUN CABINET. A row of hunting and sports rifles. And very noticeably - TWO RIFLES ARE MISSING.

She can't help but notice a row of lethal-looking hunting knives.

And a second door ajar, leading into darkness. There is something unnerving about it. Curiosity gets the better of her, and SOFIA pushes it open. Fumbles for a light and...

A small room. The walls have been covered with careful, neat lists and cuttings from local newspapers. We catch details: "*Freak accident leaves three dead*"; "*Flooding destroys homes and claims lives*"; "*Child severely injured after tree fall*"; "*Local building site engulfed in flames.*"

TONY has clearly been keeping files on all the strange occurrences in the town. He has printed out Bible verses:

"The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord."

"He who endures to the end shall be saved."

This collection of clippings is freaky, obsessive, unsettling.

EXT. SORRENTINO HOUSE/DRIVEWAY - DAY

SOFIA marches back towards her car. She slams the door shut. Momentarily cocooned in silence. She digests what she has seen.

EXT. UNIVERSITY - DAY

WIDE: SOFIA walks across the university campus. IAN meets her midway and they stop to talk (unheard) for a moment. SOFIA is upset. He puts his hand on her shoulder.

INT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/CLASSROOM - DAY

CHLOE sits in class. A teacher is handing out course work. CHLOE looks preoccupied, concerned with something. The desk next to her is empty. Oliver's desk.

The teacher stops at the desk.

TEACHER

Do you know where Ollie is, Chloe?

CHLOE shakes her head. Worried.

EXT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

CHLOE stands alone at lunch.

We see that she's sent several unanswered texts to OLIVER over the last few hours.

She catches sight of SERGEANT SCHUTTE, ASHLEIGH and several police officers making their way to the MAIN OFFICE BUILDING. SCHUTTE looks worried.

INT. LECTURE THEATRE - DAY

SOFIA is alone in the lecture theatre. She twists a pen in her fingers nervously. Her phone rings. It's CHLOE.

SOFIA lets it ring for a long time, heavy, until she finally answers --

SOFIA

(on phone)

Clo, baby, this isn't a good time...

(MORE)

SOFIA (CONT'D)
 (pause)
What?

EXT/INT. CAR - DAY

The MACARTHUR STATION WAGON winds through darkening valley roads. SOFIA has picked up CHLOE from school. CHLOE's eyes are red from crying.

SOFIA
 I'm sure he's just at a friend's house. Or he got lost...

CHLOE
 He hasn't been seen *all night*, Mum.

Up ahead they can see a group of SEARCH VOLUNTEERS and POLICE on the side of the road. SCHUTTE and DALE KELLY amongst them. A very ANXIOUS, UPSET LOOKING ASHLEIGH is with them.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
 I want to help search.

SOFIA hesitates - she doesn't want CHLOE out there.

SOFIA
 I think it's best if we let the professionals do their job.

SOFIA catches eyes with ASHLEIGH, who is pale and absolutely beside herself. It unnerves SOFIA.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
 I'm sure he'll turn up, baby. You don't need to worry.

A beat. They drive on.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

SOFIA's car is pulled over. CHLOE vomits on the side of the road, SOFIA comforts. The forest looms either side of them, gloomy and oppressive.

CHLOE wipes her mouth, takes a bottle of water gratefully. After a beat:

CHLOE
 (quietly)
 I need to tell you something.

SOFIA waits. CHLOE, filled with fear and guilt.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
 I did something bad... the fire...

She bites her lip anxiously. It dawns on SOFIA.

SOFIA

Oh Clo...

CHLOE

I just was so angry and you wouldn't listen and I thought that maybe if you were scared we could go back to Sydney... I didn't mean for it to get so big but now everybody thinks Ollie did it and now he's missing --

SOFIA

Why didn't you tell me?

Silence.

CHLOE

I don't know.

SOFIA

Are you keeping anything else from me?

CHLOE

No!

An awkward beat as a thought enters SOFIA's brain and settles.

SOFIA

You can tell me anything, honey. I won't be mad. The dog... or --

CHLOE

(hurt)

How can you say that, Mum!?

SOFIA softens. Pulls CHLOE into a hug.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

(desperately)

Please, please, please don't tell Lukas.

CHLOE, absolutely mortified, terrified.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

SOFIA, CHLOE and EZRA sit for dinner. Nobody touches their food. CHLOE refuses to look at her mother.

SOFIA glances at her watch. LUKAS still has not returned home.

EZRA hand slips and his knife clatters. EZRA exhales, frustrated, tears in his eyes.

SOFIA grabs her knife and fork and begins to violently cut his meat. She pushes his plate to him and sits back, eyes slightly wild.

Her children look at her in shock.

A BANG AS THE FRONT DOOR SLAMS. All three of them jump, nerves on edge.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

LUKAS unsteadily puts his jacket on the hook by the door. He takes a moment. Composes himself. He's a bit drunk, finishing the last of a can of lager. Then notices SOFIA in the doorway.

SOFIA
Why didn't you come home?

LUKAS doesn't answer, takes his boots off. SOFIA notices they are very muddy.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
I went to Tony's. You weren't there.

LUKAS
So?

SOFIA
The cops are going to want to talk to you.

LUKAS looks at her, genuinely confused.

LUKAS
About what?

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

LUKAS grabs a beer from the fridge. Upset.

LUKAS
It's happening. These are all the signs, just like Tony said.

SOFIA
Lukas, Tony's fucking crazy.

LUKAS
He's not crazy. *He's the only person who can see the truth.* Everything that's been happening --

SOFIA explodes.

SOFIA
You wonder who killed our dog? Your new best friend has like twenty
(MORE)

SOFIA (CONT'D)
 hunting knives. Maybe you should
 try looking at him.

LUKAS
 (shocked)
 He wouldn't kill [Perry]. Why would
 he do that?

SOFIA
 (frustrated)
 I don't know! Because he's a
 fucking crazy loner with a big
 truck who saw you coming a mile
 away - a weak, insecure little man
 who feeds his insane fantasies
 about devils and spirits and God
 knows what.

Pause.

LUKAS
 Is that what you think? Jesus
 Christ!

SOFIA flinches as LUKAS slams the fridge door in anger. A
 horrible beat between them. He sees the fear in her eyes.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
 Sof...

He deflates and sits on a kitchen chair. Suddenly vulnerable.
 He puts up his hands in defeat.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
 No more.

SOFIA hesitates, then sits at the chair opposite. Both of
 them quiet. After a moment:

SOFIA
 We need you back, Lukas. You - you
 scare the kids. You scare *me*.

He looks her in the eye. Horrified.

LUKAS
 Don't say that.

SOFIA
 Tell me you didn't do anything to
 that little boy.

LUKAS
 I didn't. I swear. I'd never... You
 know I couldn't do something like
 that.

But that's precisely the problem - she doesn't. SOFIA weighs
 him up, unsure.

LUKAS (CONT'D)

I've been caught up. Freaked out about all the stuff happening around here. And I'm sorry, I haven't spent enough time with you and the kids. I never want to be that guy.

(pained)

I really really don't know what I'd do without you guys. Really, Sof. It would kill me. So - please, just give me a chance. Will you?

SOFIA examines LUKAS for a long beat. He's teary, still a little drunk, desperate for her to agree.

LUKAS (CONT'D)

Say yes, Sof. *Please.*

SOFIA relents. *Okay.*

He smiles, instantly relieved. She looks away, uncertain.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/EZRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

EZRA and CHLOE look out of EZRA'S window towards the VALLEY. In the very very far distance they can see the flash of TORCH FLARES.

EXT. VALLEY - NIGHT

The group of police and volunteers including SERGEANT SCHUTTE and DALE KELLY fan out through the dark bushland, torches waving. Calling out for OLLIE.

They peer through the mist, treading deeper into the VALLEY. The trees shift in the breeze as it begins to rain.

DALE KELLY yells out suddenly - he's found something --

REVEAL: OLIVER'S BMX BIKE in the undergrowth. THE WHEELS SPINNING. Abandoned. But there is no sign of OLIVER.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/BACK DOOR - DAY

CHLOE and SOFIA watch as LUKAS drills a new heavy duty dead lock on the back door.

CUT TO:

He tests the new lock. *Is he locking the world out or his family in?*

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/GARDEN - DAY

The vegetable patch is completely dead. Blackened.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

LUKAS is praying silently. He mutters words but we can't hear them. SOFIA is watching the back of his head from the ensuite as she brushes her teeth. *She doesn't know what to believe.*

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

The family eat breakfast. EZRA and CHLOE are both in school uniform. LUKAS has a renewed energy about him.

SOFIA
(casually)
I think I'll work from home today.

LUKAS
Of course, baby. Whatever you want.
Maybe we can go to the movies
later? Or get some takeout?

SOFIA
Sure.

EXT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/CAR - DAY

LUKAS parks the car. In the backseat, CHLOE jumps out without a word, slams the door hard behind her. LUKAS puts a hand on EZRA's shoulder.

LUKAS
You'll be fine.

EZRA forces a smile.

EZRA
Yeah. It's all good.

LUKAS
Good man. I'm proud of you.

EZRA nods, hiding his pain for his father's benefit. LUKAS gives him a big, radiant smile.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - DAY

SOFIA is on the phone in the study. She's on hold. She looks out of the window and towards the dark valley. Troubled. After a moment, the call connects.

SOFIA
Hi, I'm just calling to inquire how
much I can take out of my account
in one day?
(pause)
Yes, it's a shared account.

INT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/CORRIDOR - DAY

EZRA walks down the school corridor. STUDENTS welcome him back. He plasters on a smile that quickly fades. Numbly walks on.

INT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/MUSIC ROOM - DAY

EZRA's friend JOEL is practicing the violin with the pianist EMILY. There is another cellist with them now - a young man who looks not dissimilar to EZRA.

EZRA watches through the glass door. Their music is completely silent this side of the door. He watches them intently. The way the new young cellist's hands effortlessly run along the strings. In this moment EZRA understands: he has been replaced.

It causes EZRA immeasurable pain.

JOEL glances up and is shocked to notice EZRA - his shock turns to guilt.

As they finish their piece, JOEL looks back up again but EZRA has disappeared.

EXT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

EZRA is looking amongst the bikes at the bike rack. He finds one that hasn't been locked up and takes it.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

EZRA rides home. Upset. He rides past the huge trees in the valley. The clouds are black overhead.

LATER: EZRA has stopped, watching a FLOCK OF BLACK CROWS careen across the sky.

There is something ominous, dark, strange about it.

WIDE: EZRA screams at them, incensed.

INT. EASTBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL/LUKAS' OFFICE - DAY

LUKAS is tapping on his computer. A knock at the door and young secretary ABIGAIL pokes her head into the office.

ABIGAIL

Ms Daniels was wondering if Chloe is off sick?

LUKAS

Sorry?

ABIGAIL
She wasn't in this morning's maths
class.

LUKAS
Oh.
(beat)
I'll call Sof. Maybe she went home.

ABIGAIL
Great. Also, Sergeant Schutte
called. He wants to organise a chat
with you today about Oliver. He
says it's urgent.

LUKAS frowns. Mind whirring.

LUKAS
Tell him I'll call him later.

ABIGAIL shuts the door behind her. LUKAS bites his lip.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/LUKAS AND SOFIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

SOFIA is quietly but quickly packing a suitcase with clothes. She takes only what she needs. Her phone rings. It's LUKAS. She's in two minds about whether to leave it. Eventually she answers.

LUKAS
(on phone)
Have you seen Clo? She's not at
school.

SOFIA pauses.

SOFIA
(on phone)
She's with the search party.

LUKAS
(on phone)
I thought we agreed...

SOFIA
(on phone)
She wants to look for her friend,
Lukas. I told her she could.

LUKAS bites his tongue. Forces himself to stay casual.

LUKAS
Have you spoken to the cops?

Beat.

SOFIA
Not yet.

LUKAS
When you do, tell them I was with
you.

 SOFIA
But you weren't, Lukas.

 LUKAS
 (brightly)
I know but - in the circumstances,
they're going to get the wrong
idea... you know what they're like.

A long beat. SOFIA is willing herself into action. Knowing that once she says it out loud, she can never take it back...

LUKAS is feigning casual, carrying on --

 LUKAS (CONT'D)
I was thinking tonight I'll pick up
some Chinese, we can watch a movie,
just us and the kids...

He trails off. The air is tense and both of them understand that something is irrevocably unravelling.

 SOFIA
 (quietly)
When you come home, Lukas, I won't
be here.

SOFIA hangs up quickly, afraid that she might break down.

LUKAS sits in his office. Alone.

After a moment, he smashes his phone against the desk, over and over again.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

The SEARCH PARTY continues to look for OLLIE through the dense forest. CHLOE is with them. Determined. Frightened.

She watches the CROWS FLYING ACROSS THE STORM CLOUDS.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/CHLOE'S ROOM - DAY

SOFIA has moved into CHLOE's room and is packing a small suitcase for her. After a moment, she senses a presence behind her. It's EZRA. He looks at her with the question.

 SOFIA
Your father's not well.

 EZRA
Chloe's going too?

SOFIA
 Ez... you know I can't take you...
 you're his son, not mine.

It's painful to say, but it's true. It hurts EZRA. He gulps it back.

EZRA, frightened, his world and identity crumbling. SOFIA pulls him into a hug.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
 I'm so sorry, baby. I'm so, so
 sorry.

She pulls back.

SOFIA (CONT'D)
 Things will get better. I promise.

EZRA looks at her. He's hollow. He tries to nod, but there is a sense he doesn't believe it. He is making a decision, unknown to her.

EZRA
 I've run out of painkillers. Could
 you please get me some?

SOFIA examines EZRA for a moment before nodding. *Sure.*

EXT. BUSHLAND - LATE DAY

It's getting late. The search team switch on their torches to peer through the gloom. CHLOE is among them.

Rain begins to fall. Pelting against the dark land.

CHLOE fights back angry tears as she looks for her friend.

A shout from the SEARCH PARTY - somebody has found an item in the mud. It's OLLIE'S PEN KNIFE. The one Lukas stole.

CHLOE's heart sinks.

WIDE: The team huddles. Calling off the search for the day.

INT. SUPERMARKET CHEMIST - LATE DAY

SOFIA waits for the prescription. She notices TONY entering. TONY clocks her and nods hello. There is a grimness behind his eyes. An unfriendliness.

The CHEMIST hands SOFIA her medicine.

EXT. SUPERMARKET - LATE DAY

SOFIA walks out through the rain and sees IDA sitting in the TONY'S TRUCK. She is holding a NEWBORN BABY. SOFIA stops, surprised --

SOFIA
 Ida, congratulations.

IDA smiles thinly. Exhausted. A pale shell of the cheerful girl she was.

IDA
 (small)
 A little boy. Tony's over the moon.

SOFIA
 I - I tried calling you... I was worried...

IDA
 (whispering)
Please don't leave.

SOFIA, rattled.

IDA (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 I'm scared...

SOFIA
 Hey... everything's going to be okay. Promise.

INT. CAR - LATE DAY

LUKAS drives through rain. The windscreen wipers are working overtime, screeching horribly across the windscreen. The sound worms uncomfortably into his brain, repetitive and ear-shattering. The rain makes it hard to see.

EXT/INT. SUPERMARKET/SOFIA'S CAR - LATE DAY

SOFIA sits in the car.

She desperately tries to hold in her emotions. She breathes. Slowly. In. Out. She winds open her window and lights a cigarette with shaking hands.

Silence descends as she closes her eyes, calming - but then --

SMACK!

SOFIA nearly jumps out of her skin.

A BLACK CROW HAS SMASHED HEADFIRST into the passenger side window. The glass cracks in a spiderweb.

Before she has had time to process this, ANOTHER BLACK CROW FLIES THROUGH THE DRIVER'S SIDE WINDOW!

SOFIA screams. It's a moment of PURE CHAOS, the crow flaps maniacally and SOFIA grabs it defensively and smashes it against the car interior. It flaps and screeches.

SOFIA tumbles out of the car, the CROW still maniacally attacking her - she grabs it again and pounds it against the pavement until it is still.

SOFIA, horrified. The CROW twitches on the asphalt, its wing flapping uselessly against the ground until it eventually subsides.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - LATE DAY

CHLOE, in a slick rain jacket, rushes through the rain and down the driveway to the front door of the MACARTHUR HOUSE.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - LATE DAY

We follow CHLOE IN A ONE SHOT as she enters the house.

CHLOE
Hello? Mum?

She puts her keys in the key bowl.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
They called off the search for the bad weather.

We follow her through the house. Something crunches underfoot. She looks down - A SMASHED FAMILY PHOTO. Her own splintered family looks up at her eerily.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Mum? Ez?

We follow her up the stairs. She becomes aware that something does not feel right.

The house is silent, save for a faint, strange banging noise, that sounds faintly familiar.

CHLOE slows as she reaches the top of the landing.

The SOUND IS COMING FROM EZRA'S BEDROOM DOOR. The door is shut.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Ez? Are you here?

A wave of trepidation is hitting CHLOE.

Something is very, very wrong.

CHLOE moves towards the door as if in a nightmare.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Ez? Hello?

She knocks on the door. No answer. She can hear the strange, soft, rhythmic THUMPING NOISE that she can't quite place.

LUKAS rushes to EZRA's bedside and cradles him tightly. But he's too late. EZRA is still. The thumping noise has subsided. LUKAS watches the last light in his son's eyes.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
Please, wake up, Ez. Please...

But EZRA's eyes are frozen, staring at the ceiling as his father hugs him desperately.

LUKAS, utterly bereft, looks up at CHLOE, eyes hardening.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
What the fuck have you done?

CHLOE backs away.

CHLOE
Nothing. I just came in and... he was there...

But LUKAS will not listen to reason. He stands. Menacing and tall. He grabs her arm hard.

LUKAS
What did you do to him, you little bitch?

CHLOE twists out of his grip, terrified, and flees.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/KITCHEN - LATE DAY

CHLOE careens down the stairs and then towards the nearest exit, the back door. She struggles with the BRAND NEW LOCK that LUKAS recently installed. She races to the bottom kitchen door and finds the key.

LUKAS (O.S.)
Clo - stop. Listen - I'm sorry --

But CHLOE doesn't believe him. She can hear him thumping downstairs after her.

She manages to get the key in the lock and flies out of the house, slamming the door behind her and locking it from the outside. She backs away. Terrified.

LUKAS bangs on the door. Tries to reason with her.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, okay? I'm upset. My little guy...

CHLOE backs away, still terrified. LUKAS regains his fury.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
(vicious)
Unlock this fucking door right now.

CHLOE turns her back on him and flees.

LUKAS smashes the window in the door cutting his hand open, trying to reach for the KEY IN THE LOCK... his hand slipping with blood --

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/GARDEN - LATE DAY

CHLOE races down the garden. She passes the wood chopping pile and grabs the AXE.

She heads to the hastily fixed fence and slides through the hole, disappearing into the valley.

EXT. VALLEY - LATE DAY

CHLOE races through the undergrowth, still gripping the axe.

The valley is dark, scary. She runs as far as she dares, before dropping to an army crawl under the undergrowth. She rolls onto her back, mostly covered in ferns and branches, gripping the axe in both hands.

She is hysterical but forces herself to calm, she stays absolutely still. Listening as quietly as she can.

She can hear nothing. No sound of LUKAS chasing her.

Through the rain, she looks up to the sky and can see storm clouds forming in circles. The FLOCK OF BLACK CROWS are flying in strange concentric circles. It's eerie and oddly hypnotic. Nature is doing strange things. She is so intent on this that it takes her by complete surprise when --

SHE IS PULLED HARD BY HER FEET. She slides in the mud. The breath is knocked out of her. The AXE is wrenched out of her hands. LUKAS has found her. He screams at her manically.

LUKAS

What have you done? WHO ARE YOU?

He puts his hands around her throat, pressing hard.

She scratches at him, but he's too strong.

LUKAS (CONT'D)

Get out!

He's ringing her neck as though to expel some evil creature. She gasps for air.

CHLOE

It's me! It's me...

LUKAS

(upset)

You killed my little boy. You killed my little boy --

CHLOE gasps.

CHLOE
I didn't! It's me, please, Dad --

But LUKAS doesn't let go.

CHLOE's terrified eyes look up to the CROWS flying in their lazy circle.

She weakens, losing the fight. The world goes dark...

EXT. VALLEY CLEARING - NIGHT

A spade cuts through the dark earth. LUKAS is digging.

He is focussed, controlled. His breathing is close, loud. We push in on him.

CHLOE lays unconscious nearby. Her hands have been bound with gaffer tape. For a moment, she looks dead. Then her hands twitch. She is alive.

TOP DOWN: LUKAS is digging a grave.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/SOFIA'S CAR - NIGHT

SOFIA arrives back from the chemist. She is still shaken and rattled. She notices LUKAS' CAR in the driveway and curses under her breath. *Fucking hell*. She composes herself before she opens the car door.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - NIGHT

SOFIA enters the house. She notices the broken picture frames on the floor. Something is very wrong.

SOFIA
Lukas? Ezra?

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/EZRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

TIGHT ON: SOFIA'S FACE. She is frozen in horror as she stares at EZRA'S DEAD BODY. The breath is completely knocked out of her.

EXT. VALLEY CLEARING - NIGHT

LUKAS is eerily methodical. Brimming with darkness. He finishes digging. Examines the grave and decides it's deep enough.

CHLOE is still only half awake. She goes completely still and limp as LUKAS gathers her up and places her down into the hole.

He arranges CHLOE in the burial hole with care.

LUKAS
 (softly)
 Forgive me.

He kisses her on the forehead.

He begins to shovel dirt onto her prone body.

But she is waking. Slowly, arduously. The dirt is piling on.

CHLOE's eyes half open. It takes a moment for her to understand what is happening. She's drowsy but then --

Sheer panic hits her. Her breath catches in her throat. She looks up at her manic father in confusion.

CHLOE
 Dad! What're you doing?

LUKAS, shocked, looks at her in surprise, but he doesn't stop shovelling.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
 Dad, stop.

LUKAS
 (hissing)
 You're not my daughter!

CHLOE
 Please --

LUKAS
 You're the shapeshifting little
 cunt who killed my son.

CHLOE tries to struggle against the electrical tape, but it's too tight.

CHLOE
 It's me. It's Chloe. I love you.

CHLOE is twisting the electrical tape, trying to find purchase.

LUKAS
 I'm not listening to you, demon.
 I'm casting you out! I'm casting
 you out!

He's almost hysterical. Driven by mania.

The dirt is piling up.

CHLOE
 I love you! I love you!

But she is drowned out by LUKAS --

LUKAS
(chanting to himself)
I'm not listening to you! I'm not
listening to you!

CHLOE and LUKAS lock eyes and for a moment, CHLOE'S EYES ARE MILKY WHITE. Unnaturally CLOUDED. LUKAS cackles.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
There you are, demon! I SEE YOU.

CHLOE
Dad, what are you talking about --

When he looks back to her, CHLOE's eyes no longer clouded - was it a vision or was it real? The dirt covers CHLOE completely. She struggles under the weight, coughing violently.

LUKAS continues to shovel.

Dirt on dirt on dirt. Filling the hole in.

Until there is no movement. No sound.

And no CHLOE.

For a moment, LUKAS stops shoveling to look at the hole. He blinks back tears.

He kneels and begins to mutter a prayer.

There is a rustle in the darkness near him. He pauses. Listening hard. There is something out there.

SMASH!

Something hits him hard in the back of the head. He slumps onto the ground.

SOFIA has swung the shovel into his skull. Fury in her eyes.

LUKAS is still. Dark red blood pooling on the back of his head.

SOFIA jumps into the grave and begins to scratch desperately at the dirt, looking for CHLOE. She finds CHLOE'S LIMP HAND, she grabs at it, but it doesn't squeeze back. SOFIA rips the tape off her wrists, scratches and scratches at the dirt, fingernails bloodied until --

The breath is knocked out of her as LUKAS pulls her up from the burial plot.

LUKAS is unsteady, foggy through the blood. He is SO STRONG with SO MUCH SHEER DETERMINATION that she struggles to fight him, he pushes her to the ground.

DOGS BARKING in the distance - LUKAS tries to shake it off, but it's persistent --

LUKAS
 What are you doing? I have to
 destroy it.

 SOFIA
 It's Chloe --

LUKAS grabs the spade and holds the edge to her throat. He stands, keeping her down. He's crying - blood and tears mixing, completely deranged, manic --

 LUKAS
 I'm trying to fix it!

 SOFIA
 You're *insane!*

 LUKAS
 I'm a good man! I deserve good
 things!

He raises the spade, edge-side down as though he's going to decapitate her.

 LUKAS (CONT'D)
 You fucking hear me? I DESERVE GOOD
 THINGS.

 SOFIA
 You're weak! You're pathetic!

LUKAS, overwhelmed with fury as SOFIA mocks him - THE DOGS BARKING LOUDER NOW - he's confused, rattled, his muscles tense as he readies to bring the spade down but --

SQUELCH!

He freezes. Something has hit LUKAS hard in the spine from behind. Breaks skin and muscle. He screams in pain.

CHLOE, covered in dirt, looking wild, has swung the axe into his back. She has somehow dug her way out of the grave.

He falls with a sickening thud.

CHLOE hacks again.

Her eyes filled with fury.

LUKAS moans, unable to move. Blood pours from his back. The axe is stuck in muscle. He tries to grab it but the effort is excruciating.

SOFIA kicks him in the face. He stops moving.

SOFIA grabs CHLOE and holds her tight.

 SOFIA (CONT'D)
 Baby, baby. You're safe now. I've
 got you. I've got you.

She pulls CHLOE into her arms and they stumble away from the clearing.

EXT. VALLEY - PRE-DAWN

We follow TONY through the bush. His rifle slung on his shoulder. His dog, ROCCO, is bounding ahead.

TONY is alert, as ever. Looking at the dense bushland suspiciously.

Silence.

EXT. VALLEY CLEARING - PRE-DAWN

LUKAS moans. He can barely move. With enormous effort he wrenches the pick axe from his back. He winces against the incredible pain.

He crawls, agonisingly slow, along the ground. He manages to pull himself upright. He is close to fainting. Blood pours down his back. He mutters under his breath.

The eerie sound of FOXES SCREECHING AND YELPING in the gloom.

LUKAS staggers on his feet, unsteady. He stops. There is something moving in the bush.

EXT. VALLEY - PRE-DAWN

TONY has stopped, watching ROCCO who is peering into the bushland, sniffing at the air. Something is in there.

A CROW lands on a branch. Watching him.

TONY
(quietly)
There you are, you bastard.

TONY crouches, unslinging his rifle quietly. Finger on the trigger. Aiming at the crow. Nonplussed, the crow watches TONY. ROCCO begins to whine anxiously.

THEN - A snap of a twig and a rustle somewhere beyond the crow. Spooked, TONY aims his rifle towards the sound. Another snap of a twig, but closer now and TONY reflexively shoots --

BANG!

EXT. VALLEY CLEARING - PRE-DAWN

LUKAS falls back. He's shot in the throat. He clutches at himself and stumbles, tripping backwards and falling with a thump into the burial hole.

Silence.

LUKAS' eyes bulge with that sudden, awful realisation that he is dying. Blood gushes.

Somewhere in the distance, ROCCO begins to bark incessantly.

LUKAS stares silently up at the dark sky as dawn creeps at the edges of the horizon. Tears run down down his cheeks.

FADE IN:

A BEAUTIFUL, BRIGHT SUNFLOWER. It trembles in the breeze.

INT. MACARTHUR HOUSE - DAY

We float through the MACARTHUR HOUSE. Time has passed. The boxes have been removed and the house is properly furnished. The house has settled. Photographs of SOFIA and CHLOE laughing. A photo of EZRA. But no photographs of LUKAS.

EXT. MACARTHUR HOUSE/GARDEN - DAY

A BABY GIGGLES. IDA plays peekaboo with her now THREE-MONTH OLD BABY in the MACARTHUR GARDEN.

The vegetable garden is flourishing. SUNFLOWERS create bursts of colour. CHLOE picks strawberries, content.

SOFIA digs her trowel into the dark earth. She is creating a new garden bed.

It's a strange, bucolic scene made all the more horrific knowing what we have witnessed before. As SOFIA looks out at the forest it looks strangely peaceful, no longer the terrifying abyss that LUKAS fixated on.

A CROW lands by the vegetable garden. Looks at her curiously. Its eyes are UNNATURALLY CLOUDED, but SOFIA is non-plussed. She waves the CROW away.

SOFIA
Get out of here. Out!

It gives her one last look before flying away. SOFIA continues digging her garden bed.

We pull back, sinking into the garden bed, looking up at her as she digs. The image becomes a rectangle, echoing the opening frame. A flock of CROWS circle lazily overhead

The sound of the women working, the forest - a dog barking, the whisper of the trees - grows dimmer and distant. Fading into memory. The rectangle becomes smaller and smaller and smaller as we sink.

Until it's a speck in the screen.

Until it's gone.

THE END