

PYRO

By

Daniel O'Sullivan

OVER BLACK:

CHRIS (V.O.)  
Do I dream of fire? Of course.

FADE IN:

EXT. RURAL BUSHLAND - DAY

CHRIS DUMONT - early twenties, bright - is soaked in sweat and black streaks of ash colour his face like warpaint.

CHRIS (V.O.)  
We all do. It paints the sky of our fiercest nightmares. But even the most powerful imagination can't get close to the real thing.

Chris stands at the crest of a hill and watches the tree-line below.

An orange glow from the valley lights up the embankment and mixes with the smoke to create a strange, dream-like quality.

CHRIS (V.O.)  
The first thing you notice is the absolute stillness...

Amid thick smoke, the branches of a GIANT EUCALYPTUS TREE hang idle.

CHRIS (V.O.)  
... Like all the air in the world has been sucked out and used up.

The eerie calm is shattered by loud CRACKING and POPPING coming from the valley. They quickly build into a cacophony of violent NOISE.

CHRIS (V.O.)  
That's the sound of a million plant cells exploding from the heat - Mother Nature *literally* screaming.

A group of FIREFIGHTERS quickly retreat up the embankment from the rapidly approaching fire front. They move past Chris who remains transfixed. His face betrays morbid fascination.

CHRIS (V.O.)  
This fire has jumped over highways and travelled up mountains just to get to this point. And here I am - standing in its path.

One of the retreating men grabs at Chris and yells at him to push back. His pleas can't be heard over the deafening ROAR. Chris keeps his eyes fixed on the approaching blaze.

CHRIS (V.O.)

Who can honestly say they haven't sat and watched flames at a campfire or lit a match just to see it burn? It's all a matter of surge and release.

CLOSE on Chris as the ROAR grows louder and louder. The fierce heat and wind pushes him back on his heels.

CHRIS (V.O.)

Other people get it by sticking a needle in their arm or starting a fist fight with a stranger.

(beat)

I wish I was like other people.

The haze and the smoke and the chaos is in complete contrast to...

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

... Relentless fluorescent lighting. Anti-bacterial sheen. The hum of an over-worked air conditioner.

Chris is one of a dozen exhausted victims of the blaze awaiting treatment.

Chris watches a young family. The YOUNG BOY needs help with his shoelaces and his MOTHER drops to her knee to tie them.

A TV in the corner of the room plays a news bulletin.

NEWS PRESENTER (TV)

Authorities are concerned intense weather systems pushing down from the Central Australian desert could provide severe weather conditions similar to this country's deadliest natural disaster - Black Saturday.

Chris ignores the TV and remains fixated on the family interaction - a look of longing.

NEWS PRESENTER (TV) (CONT'D)

Today's Kilmore fire is one of a dozen suspicious fires to have ravaged rural Victoria in the past month. Arson Squad Detectives from the Melbourne Fire Brigade have so far ruled out the possibility of a serial offender.

Chris is snapped out of it by a NURSE.

NURSE

We're ready for you now.

INT. HOSPITAL TREATMENT ROOM - DAY

Chris sits on a bed and looks out the window. He's clothed in only a hospital gown.

A DOCTOR maneuvers a cold metal stethoscope to different parts of his chest.

DOCTOR

Deep breath in for me...

Chris obliges.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

... And out.

Chris lets all the air rush out.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

DETECTIVE NEIL MCKENNA watches Chris through the doorway. Once a handsome and imposing figure, McKenna is feeling the pinch of middle age.

As Chris exhales his gown separates at the back exposing a circular BURN SCAR. McKenna notices but remains impassive.

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Chris sits at a table in the centre of a sparse room. He casually rests a DUNLOP VOLLEY SNEAKER on a chair.

DETECTIVE LISA MASON, young and ambitious, paces the room in a calculated fashion.

McKenna watches his colleague from the shadows with a coffee in hand.

MASON

Things don't look good for you,  
Chris.

Chris stares straight ahead.

MASON (CONT'D)

Everyone at the scene in Kilmore  
was either a firefighter or a local  
attempting to save their home. And  
your place of residence is...

Mason checks her paperwork for effect.

MASON (CONT'D)  
... Some 60 kilometers away.

Mason lets the last line hang in the air. Chris remains stoic - this isn't his first rodeo.

MASON (CONT'D)  
It is our understanding that this fire was deliberately lit--

CHRIS  
(matter-of-fact)  
The Standard Hotel, Fitzroy.  
Between midday and one. Plenty of people will vouch for me.

Mason and McKenna lock eyes. McKenna gives her a nod - a signal to leave the room. Mason defies her superior with a shake of the head.

A stand-off ensues, a silent power-play. McKenna nods with more vigor and Mason eventually relents.

MASON  
(to Chris)  
I'll be back shortly.

Mason exits. The room falls silent. McKenna studies Chris for a long beat.

MCKENNA  
I know you.

Chris maintains his detached facade.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)  
I've seen you before.

Chris can't help himself, he turns his head to try and identify McKenna, but can't seem to place him.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)  
Or maybe I haven't. Maybe you were just in a dream of mine. Do you ever get that feeling, Chris? That we've gone through all this shit in some other life?

\*  
\*

Chris doesn't respond. McKenna moves around the table to confront Chris face to face.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)  
From the speed and direction of today's north-westerly we know that this blaze was deliberately lit just after midday in Whittlesea.  
(MORE)

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

Your very specific alibi - which is being confirmed by my colleague as we speak - conveniently puts you 35 kilometres south of the fire's point of origin at the exact time it was lit. Either you have just taken one hell of a stab in the dark, or you have a complex understanding of wind conditions and fire behaviour.

Chris' confidence is shaken. He struggles to maintain a poker face.

A long, uncomfortable beat. McKenna eventually breaks the silence.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

I may as well tell you about this dream of mine, then. The one you may or may not have been in. It's a recurring one. A fork-in-the-road scenario. Robert Johnson at the crossroads - that type of thing. And in this dream, right, you keep taking the wrong turn. I'm screaming at you to go the other way, but it doesn't matter. You can't help yourself. You're like a kid playing with a sore tooth. It's a *compulsion* for you. Didn't make a difference what I said or did, every night I had to close my eyes and dream about you making the same stupid decision. I gather you've seen the news...

McKenna KICKS CHRIS' FOOT OFF THE CHAIR and moves sharply into his personal space. Crowding him.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

... This is not a time to be stupid, Chris --

Mason enters. She is keenly aware she's walked in on something.

MASON

Everything okay?

MCKENNA

Everything's fine.

McKenna's eyes don't leave Chris. He maintains his position. Uncomfortably close.

MASON  
(to McKenna)  
It checks out.

MCKENNA  
That's great. Chris was just  
leaving.

On Chris - his cage rattled.

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

The steel and concrete of a modern metropolis isn't built to contend with such brutal heat.

Adults and kids find solace in a water fountain. It intermittently blasts water out of the ground and high into the air.

Chris lies on the wet concrete. Water SHOOTS high in the sky, arcs and then crashes to earth - SLAMMING on his head. A baptism from the clouds.

For a brief moment all the noise of the world disappears. The water runs off and Chris opens his eyes to find his best mate AIDO talking to him.

AIDO  
Did you hear me? I said where the  
fuck have you been?

CHRIS  
I've been around.

Aido is the runt of the litter. Excitable puppy dog. An accident robbed him of his right hand so his arm forms a stump a few centimeters below his elbow joint.

AIDO  
You haven't been anywhere. I've  
been lookin'.

Water SHOOTS up from the ground.

AIDO (CONT'D)  
I'm out my half. I'm gonna need a  
spot.

CHRIS  
Again?  
(exasperated)  
Fuck Aido...

AIDO  
Who woulda thought? One-armed man  
is no good at layin' brick.

CHRIS  
Stop the presses. What about  
disability?

AIDO  
(snaps)  
Fuck that.

CHRIS  
It'd help--

AIDO  
I'm not a cripple, Chris. So I'm  
not gonna collect for it.

Chris knows better than to persist. A silence falls over the  
two. Genuine concern.

Chris watches the water SHOOT up from the ground.

AIDO (CONT'D)  
So what else can we do?

CHRIS  
Shit... if you know the answer, why  
do you bother asking?

Chris lies down. The warmth of the sun radiates through the  
wet concrete. He knows what's coming.

AIDO  
You do another burn. But this time  
you take me with you.

CHRIS  
Nope.

AIDO  
You've gotta let me in. Help me  
earn my keep.

CHRIS  
You're not coming. I said that last  
time.

AIDO  
No. Last time you said next time.

CHRIS  
It's too dangerous.

AIDO  
Too dangerous for who? Me? Or  
anyone that isn't you?

CHRIS  
Just you.

Aido fires up.

AIDO  
It's because of my arm isn't?

CHRIS  
No. It's because you're a dumb  
shit.

Aido fumes, Chris enjoys the wind-up.

Aido calmly stands up and walks over to one of the water jets. He squats over the top of it - as if about to take a shit.

AIDO  
You don't think I'm mature enough.  
That's what it is isn't it?

A jet of water SHOOTs out of the ground and STRAIGHT UP AIDO'S ARSE.

The kids nearby collapse in laughter. Chris smiles.

Aido shouts over the sound of water shooting up his arse.

AIDO (CONT'D)  
You underestimate me!

INT. CITY CAFE - DAY

This is a cop cafe. Despite the sticky heat, it's a collegial, backslapping atmosphere. Cops lunching and chatting with other cops.

Except for McKenna. He sits alone at a table with numerous documents fanned out in front of him.

He is focussed on a document that is covered in red ink amendments. He's frustrated and adds yet another red scribble as a WAITRESS approaches amongst the throng.

WAITRESS  
What are you after?

McKenna responds without looking up.

MCKENNA  
Coffee, thanks. Black.

INT. MELBOURNE FIRE BRIGADE HQ (CONFERENCE ROOM) - DAY

JOURNALISTS are gathered. A large projector screen reads:  
*Metropolitan Fire Brigade welcomes members of the press.*

An academic expert, DR KENNETH BRYCE is wrapping up a Power Point presentation. McKenna and Mason stand on stage behind in support.

DR BRYCE

One of the biggest challenges we face in Australia is the adaptability of flora. Plant life in bushfire areas is not only able to thrive under fierce fire conditions but it provides further fuel for an out-of-control blaze. A fallen eucalyptus tree, for example, creates a dense carpet of fire-friendly material.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN BACKYARD - DAY

An MAMMOTH EUCALYPTUS TREE bends in the breeze.

DR BRYCE (V.O.)

Additionally, the eucalyptus oil produced is also a highly flammable substance. Under the extreme heat and pressurised atmosphere caused by a bushfire, this substance boils and eventually explodes, resulting in what we call "gasoline trees".

As the giant tree sways, two heads emerge from behind - CHRIS and AIDO.

They look around for witnesses and then scale the backyard fence.

CUT TO:

INT. MELBOURNE FIRE BRIGADE HQ (CONFERENCE ROOM) - DAY

McKenna is taking his turn at the lectern, reading off his amended script.

MCKENNA

Pyromania is what we call an impulse-control disorder. Offenders usually start fires to induce a state of pure euphoria.

(MORE)

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

Studies have shown that there are five behavioural stages that characterise such a disorder: an impulse, growing tension, pleasure on acting, relief from the urge and finally... guilt - which may or may not occur.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE (BACKYARD) - DAY

Chris leads Aido through the long grass of the neglected backyard.

MCKENNA (V.O.)

Those diagnosed often grow up in households without a father figure present and very little family to speak of. They often fixate on institutions relating to fire control and find work in fire investigation or as volunteer firefighters.

They reach an old, dilapidated shed. Chris jimmys the lock and breaks in.

CUT TO:

INT. MELBOURNE FIRE BRIGADE HQ (CONFERENCE ROOM) - DAY

McKenna hesitates for a moment, then he pushes the document aside and looks out towards the crowd - he's going off-script.

MCKENNA

In this most recent spate of arson attacks I believe we've identified a pattern of behaviour that is particularly disturbing.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE (BACKYARD SHED) - DAY

Chris waves away spider webs and searches through piles of junk.

MCKENNA (V.O)

Not only are there elements of pyromania present but we're seeing a uniquely sophisticated understanding of severe weather conditions.

He spots what he's looking for - a jerry can. He gives it a shake.

AIDO

It's empty.

Chris isn't bothered. He wipes away layers of dust from an old, forgotten lawnmower.

CHRIS

Give me a hand with this.

CUT TO:

INT. MELBOURNE FIRE BRIGADE HQ (CONFERENCE ROOM) - DAY

MCKENNA

And those responsible are using  
this knowledge with reckless - and  
possibly murderous - intent.

Murmurings from the crowd. In the audience, journalists are scribbling furiously. INSPECTOR IAN CLARKE, old school boss, shifts uncomfortably in his seat - unhappy.

EXT. SERVICE STATION - DAY

Aido wheels the banged up lawnmower up to the entrance and busies the attendant with inane chatter.

Chris sneaks to the petrol pump and begins to fill up the jerry can.

MCKENNA (V.O)

It's my opinion that we are  
witnessing a serial arsonist at  
play.

Chris fills up the jerry can. He senses someone watching him. He looks up to see the service station's video surveillance camera.

CUT TO:

INT. MELBOURNE FIRE BRIGADE HQ (CONFERENCE ROOM) - DAY

There's a mild uproar as McKenna finishes. A JOURNALIST rises from his seat.

JOURNALIST #1

Detective, why is this the first  
time we're hearing about a link  
after so many denials?

MCKENNA

Up until this point there hasn't been enough significant evidence--

JOURNALIST #2

Detective McKenna, you were the officer in charge of the disastrous Casey investigation in 2009, were you not? How will this be any different?

McKenna falters for a moment, journalists clamour - they smell blood.

Mason seizes her opportunity and takes over from McKenna at the microphone.

MASON

I can assure you that Detective McKenna's views are his and his alone. So far, this department has no reason to believe one person is responsible for the recent spate of fires...

As Mason rights the ship, McKenna retreats from the lectern, flustered.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Even with the sun down, the heat is inescapable. The city air is thick and heavy.

Chris and Aido stalk a quiet street.

Chris is focused. His eyes dart from one parked car to the next. He's searching for something.

Aido bounces alongside. He has the jerry can in hand, mouth going at 100 miles an hour.

AIDO

Fuck. This is great, this is great--

CHRIS

Take it easy...

AIDO

Alright for you. You're a porn star. I'm just starting out, I'm an innocent virgin. Can you take it easy on me tonight? Be gentle, that's all I ask. I'll always remember my first...

\*

Chris tries his best to ignore Aido. He stops at a car and examines it briefly before moving on down the street.

AIDO (CONT'D)

Not us?

CHRIS

Nope.

AIDO

Shit! Thought for sure that was it.  
Promise to call me in the morning,  
stud? After you pop it?

Chris stops at another car and gives Aido a nod.

Chris kneels down and begins examining the rear tyre. Aido lines up the passenger side window with his elbow and winds back, ready to strike --

CHRIS GRABS HIS ARM.

AIDO (CONT'D)

What?!

CHRIS

It's a job...

Chris holds up the CAR KEYS he's retrieved from the rear tyre.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

They *want* us to steal it.

EXT. SUPERMARKET CAR PARK - NIGHT

Chris and Aido arrive at a large, empty car park in the "stolen" car. Chris slows to a stop on the gravel.

They jump out. Chris surveys the surroundings.

CHRIS

If you're gonna get paid for this,  
you might as well learn something.

Chris opens the passenger door, leans in and winds down the window half-way.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

If it doesn't get enough oxygen,  
it'll just burn itself out.

Chris begins to douse the dashboard in petrol. He does it with panache - an expert at work.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Petrol isn't ideal, but it'll have  
to do...

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 the interior will burn up, it just  
 may take a while because it's been  
 coated in some fire-resistant shit.  
 Once that's gone the flames will  
 eventually get past the firewall  
 and move into the engine block.  
 Plenty of fuel in there--

AIDO  
 Then the fireworks start, yeah?

CHRIS  
 Not exactly.

Chris crawls out of the car and flicks on a lighter.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 But I'm warning you now, don't get  
 too close.

Chris pulls a bunched up newspaper and puts the flame to it.  
 He watches it take a hold for a moment and then throws it  
 into the open window.

Both men take a step back and watch as the tissue ignites the  
 petrol slick and a quick SURGE OF LIGHT AND HEAT envelops the  
 interior.

After the initial flourish, the fire begins to plateau.

AIDO  
 Is it burnin' out? What the fuck?

Aido runs out of patience. He moves in closer --

A SUDDEN BURST OF FLAME as the fire takes hold of flammable  
 fluids in the engine compartment.

Aido stumbles back clutching his face.

AIDO (CONT'D)  
 Shit!

Chris doesn't notice. He is busy watching YELLOW TONGUES OF  
 FLAME reach into the night sky. We've seen this look from  
 Chris before.

The blaze grows stronger, becoming more potent as it envelops  
 the engine compartment.

Aido takes his hands from his face.

AIDO (CONT'D)  
 I think I burnt me fuckin' eyebrows  
 off!

A SPOTLIGHT.

SECURITY GUARD

HEY!

Aido grabs at Chris.

AIDO

Security!

But Chris doesn't flee. He continues to watch the flames gather momentum - *surge and release*.

A torchlight sweeps in their direction, quickly getting closer. Aido grabs Chris forcefully.

AIDO (CONT'D)

Come on!

Finally Chris snaps out of it and the two turn and RUN.

EXT. CITY STREETS/PARK/LANEWAYS - NIGHT

Chris and Aido are pursued by an overweight, hapless SECURITY GUARD. A SECOND SECURITY GUARD swings the car in another direction.

They turn into a carpark and weave between parked cars, LAUGHING, WHOOPING - enjoying the thrill of the chase.

Aido tries to run while feeling his face for any trace of his eyebrows.

Chris approaches a fence and scales it in one nifty maneuver. Aido isn't so lucky. He desperately searches for a foot hold, his one good hand struggling to take his body weight.

The Security Guard closes in. He's about to grab Aido's foot--

CHRIS GRABS AIDO'S TORSO and helps him swing him over the fence and away from danger.

The pair land laughing in a garden bed. They jump up and sprint across the grass to the exit --

THE SECURITY CAR SCREECHES INTO THEIR PATH.

Aido attempts a smooth slide across the bonnet, but misjudges the distance and lands in a heap.

Chris picks up Aido and they run into a busy strip of shops.

They weave through BUSKERS and MARKET VENDORS, laughing and enjoying the camaraderie. Them against the world.

They turn into a laneway where a KITCHEN HAND is hosing down.

The high pressure water hose hits the wall and sprays high in the air, creating a GLORIOUS NIGHT SHOWER.

Chris and Aido get soaked. Sweet relief from the relentless heat. Chris pulls Aido into a darkened doorway.

The security guard runs past and Chris and Aido are in the clear.

EXT. PUBLIC POOL - NIGHT

Aido and Chris sneak through a small hole in the wire fence.

EXT. PUBLIC POOL - LATER

Chris and Aido stand atop adjoining three-metre diving boards. Aido moves to the edge of his and looks down into the abyss. Nothing but blackness.

AIDO

I can't even see where the water starts.

CHRIS

Me neither.

AIDO

How will we know when we hit it?

CHRIS

We'll know.

Chris curls his toes over the edge. He's tempted by the unknown.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Come on, we'll jump together.

Aido closes his eyes, Chris widens his. They both topple over head first into the unknown.

EXT. PUBLIC POOL - LATER

Chris and Aido lie on the plastic covering protecting the 50 metre pool. It has a gentle, waterbed-sway to it.

AIDO

I'm gonna do my own.

CHRIS

Don't be stupid.

AIDO

Why shouldn't I? Tonight was a laugh. Good coin too.

Chris turns to Aido. Serious.

CHRIS

You don't want to get mixed up in that world.

AIDO

It's been pretty good to you.

CHRIS

You don't know what you're talking about.

AIDO

That's exactly my fuckin' point! Let me in, help me earn.

CHRIS

It's not a way to make a dollar. It's too dangerous.

AIDO

What? Those plastic cops? Fuck them.

Chris is steadfast.

CHRIS

I'm telling you, Aido, that was the last one. We'll collect from Bickie tomorrow and that's it - I'm retired. We both are.

AIDO

How can I retire before I even fuckin' started?!

Chris doesn't respond. This isn't open for discussion.

INT. BAR - DAY

Chris leads Aido through a heavily fortified door. The darkness is at odds with the searing sunlight.

The air is thick and fetid. Full of menace and the smell of stale beer and whiskey.

There is an unholy, heavy swoon to this place. Like a psychedelic trip gone awry. Relentless electronic MUSIC heightens the sense of dread.

Chris motions to the pool table.

CHRIS

Stay here and don't talk to anyone. Bickie's out back. I'm collecting and then we're out of here.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

Chris walks past small congregations of punters and  
disappears out of a rear door. \*

Aido picks up a pool cue and begins expertly potting balls. \*

He uses his disfigured arm as a stabiliser. It's unusual but \*

effective. \*

He pots one in the corner pocket. \*

LEE \*

Nice. \*

Aido is joined by LEE, early twenties and wearing a long- \*

sleeved shirt - an unusual choice considering the heat. \*

LEE (CONT'D) \*

I haven't seen you here before. \*

AIDO \*

I've never been here before. \*

LEE \*

You? Come on... \*

Aido eyes Lee with suspicion. \*

LEE (CONT'D) \*

... You're a Burner and you've \*

never been to this place? \*

AIDO \*

What did you say? \*

He motions to Lee's disfigured arm. \*

LEE \*

Sorry. I just assumed... \*

Aido, quickly on the offensive. \*

AIDO \*

Assumed what? \*

LEE \*

Made me think you were someone \*

else, that's all. \*

AIDO \*

A Burner? \*

LEE \*

Yeah. There's plenty of them around \*

here. You know about them? \*

AIDO \*

I've heard a thing or two. \*

LEE

They burn cars for money. Well,  
mostly cars. Insurance scams. Make  
good money, too.

Lee motions to the booth seating in the darker corners of the  
bar.

LEE (CONT'D)

Have a look for yourself. They're  
like a fucked up gang, always  
hanging out, getting high together.

Aido notices for the first time groups of people huddled  
together. They are young, some of them barely out of their  
teens. A small cannister is passed around. They take turns to  
inhale.

After a sharp intake, one after the other their heads fall  
back. Eyes rolling. Listless, lifeless smiles.

LEE (CONT'D)

They chrome on that Poly stuff.  
They'll be scarred too. Usually on  
their hands and arms... it's a  
point of pride for these guys. Like  
they've been branded or something.

Aido focuses on one BURNER huddled in the corner. He appears  
to be watching Aido with an unfocused stare. Aido can see a  
spidery web of SCAR TISSUE winding it's way up his arm.

LEE (CONT'D)

That's why, you know, I thought you  
were one of them.

Aido shakes his head.

AIDO

An accident when I was a kid. What  
about you?

Lee raises his palms in mock surrender so Aido can see.

LEE

Clean-skin.

AIDO

Maybe that just means you're good  
at it.

Lee laughs. Aido gets into position and pots a ball in the  
corner pocket --

CHRIS

Lets go.

Chris appears quickly from the rear of the bar, he tucks an envelope into his pocket. \*

AIDO \*

Hang on-- \*

Aido is still mid-shot but Chris is in no mood. \*

CHRIS \*

We're leaving. \*

Chris moves Aido on. Aido turns to acknowledge Lee but he's disappeared into the shadows. \*

INT. POLICE HQ (OFFICE) - DAY \*

McKenna is collecting documents from a photocopier. Clarke sees from his office and motions to join him. \*

INT. POLICE HQ (CLARKE'S OFFICE) - DAY \*

MCKENNA \*

Sir? \*

CLARKE \*

Some stunt you pulled. \*

MCKENNA \*

I wouldn't call it a stunt. \*

CLARKE \*

You knew the ramifications of what you were doing. It's created a fucking circus. \*

MCKENNA \*

I went with my gut. \*

CLARKE \*

You went rogue. The facts remain we are attributing over 60 percent of suspicious fires to reckless behaviour of citizens or one-and-done firebugs. There was no need to raise the possibility of a serial offender. \*

MCKENNA \*

I believe we have enough to warrant that theory. Similar locations, ignition patterns and forensics are trying to identify a rubber compound we've linked to multiple sites. \*

CLARKE

So you decided to tell every news outlet in the state? I understand some of your concerns but we have to pursue *all* leads presented to us, regardless of personal history.

A loaded beat.

CLARKE (CONT'D)

Colour between the lines, Detective. If you weren't so decorated you'd be in the fucking unemployment line. Now at least give me something positive I can hang a hat on...

MCKENNA

I'm organising a surveillance team for Dumont.

CLARKE

Kid we picked up at Kilmore?

MCKENNA

He's a natural suspect. Or maybe an accomplice, can't get a full read on him yet.

CLARKE

Enough to formulate a charge?

MCKENNA

We're a ways from that.

Clarke isn't happy.

CLARKE

And what about you, Neil? How are you going?

MCKENNA

Me?

CLARKE

Are you still capable of leading this?

McKenna is taken aback.

MCKENNA

Sir, I don't know... has someone said something?

Clarke considers answering the question and then decides against it.

CLARKE \*  
Just get a result. \*

EXT. POLICE HQ (OFFICE) - DAY \*

McKenna exits Clarke's office, he spies Mason across the \*  
room. Their eyes meet for a second. Mason averts her gaze. \*

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY \*

A fierce northerly wind. Chris walks an empty street. He \*  
stops at a shop front and looks in the window, but Chris \*  
isn't concerned with the merchandise. \*

In the reflection Chris clocks a CAR pull up across the \*  
street and linger. TWO MEN watch him. \*

He quickly walks off. \*

INT. BAR - DAY \*

Chris enters. The place has cleared out. There is no music \*  
and very little chatter. Just a smattering of lone drinkers. \*

Everyone in the place eyes Chris with hostility, including \*  
the BARMAN. \*

BARMAN \*  
They're out back. \*

INT. BAR (BACK ROOM) - DAY \*

The room is empty and dark except for the light from a single \*  
TELEVISION. The light reflects off the many mirrors like a \*  
disco ball. \*

The throb of intense, nerve-shredding electronic MUSIC \*  
doesn't seem to be originating from any source, but mainlined \*  
directly into the skull. \*

BICKIE, late 30's, lean and muscular and covered in crude \*  
prison tattoos, pumps out arm curls at high speed. \*

Aido is slumped on a chair in the corner. His eye is \*  
blackened. \*

Burners congregate in the dark corners, watching Bickie's \*  
workout. BURNER #1 breathes in the fumes from a Poly \*  
container. \*

Everyone waits on Bickie as he pumps out rep after rep, \*  
increasing his intensity. \*

Finally, he DROPS the dumbbells and bounces on the balls of his feet. \*

BICKIE  
I feel good! Shit, I could  
roundhouse any cunt right now. \*

BURNER #1  
You could, Bickie. \*

BICKIE  
You bet I could, you dumb fuck.  
(to Chris)  
I'm hungry, should we fire up the  
barbie? \*

Chris shakes his head \*

CHRIS  
I'm good. \*

BICKIE  
Sure? \*

Chris nods. \*

BICKIE (CONT'D)  
Suit yourself. \*

A Burner hands Bickie a glass pipe. Bickie sparks a lighter and takes a HIT. He holds it for a moment and then lets the smoke rush out - instant high. \*

BICKIE (CONT'D)  
Didn't think you'd be back so soon. \*

Chris looks at the sorry state of Aido. \*

CHRIS  
You knew I'd come. \*

Bickie picks up a 10kg weight and tosses it from hand to hand - anything to keep them busy. \*

BICKIE  
Your boy here just got himself into  
some serious shit. \*

Chris looks at Aido for an explanation. \*

AIDO  
I'm sorry, Chris. I thought I could  
earn some money, pay you back-- \*

BICKIE WINDS UP AND SMASHES AIDO IN THE FACE with the 10kg weight. \*

The blow knocks Aido off his chair. Blood SPURTS. \*

Chris instinctively RUSHES Bickie. A group of Burners intervene, he has no choice but to back off.

Aido spits BLOOD.

BICKIE

Forgive me lads. But I don't have the time to sift through your financial affairs. This little cunt just fucked up a job that cost him his hand.

AIDO

(confused)

My hand? It happened when I was a kid--

BICKIE

I meant the other one.

CHRIS

Bickie...

Burner #1 grabs Aido's left hand. Aido struggles.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

... What are you doing?!

BICKIE

Just my little incentive scheme.  
(to Burner #1)  
Give him some Poly.

Burner #1 pours Poly all over Aido's hand. It BURNS. Aido SCREAMS in agony.

CHRIS

Bickie!

Aido moans. His wrist limp. Bickie nods to Burner #1, who eventually pours water on the burn - the pain subsides.

BICKIE

Worst thing is - he used your name, Chris. He fucked with your reputation.

CHRIS

Why did you give him the job?

BICKIE

He said he was with you. That he could get you out of retirement, keep you in the fuckin' game. That means something around here.

CHRIS

How do we fix this?

BICKIE \*  
I don't know if we can, Chris. \*  
Because he fucked up a burn, I've \*  
got one guy in the emergency room \*  
and another in the lock up. \*

CHRIS \*  
Jesus... \*

BICKIE \*  
If we can't find a solution, I have \*  
no trouble eliminating my problems. \*  
You know I'm straight up on that, \*  
don't you? \*

Chris nods. \*

BICKIE (CONT'D) \*  
Then I need you to do a job. A \*  
final one, before you hang 'em up \*  
for good. \*

CHRIS \*  
Bickie... I'm done-- \*

BICKIE \*  
Bullshit! This is a big one, and I \*  
need you for it. It's either that \*  
or the retard here pays with more \*  
than his hand. \*

Bickie WINDS UP TO HIT AIDO AGAIN-- \*

He PULLS OUT at the last second. Aido flinches. The Burners \*  
laugh. \*

Aido cowers in the corner. Chris feels for his friend. He \*  
doesn't have a choice. \*

Chris looks at Bickie and nods - he's in. \*

BICKIE (CONT'D) \*  
That's my boy. \*

CHRIS \*  
But there could be a cop problem. \*

BICKIE \*  
What cop? \*

CHRIS \*  
I think I might be being watched. \*  
Some old stuff, that's all. \*

BICKIE \*  
Do you think I give a fuck? Doesn't \*  
change anything. \*

Bickie sparks up the pipe again. \*

BICKIE (CONT'D) \*

Besides, we're all bein' watched, \*  
mate. Best you can do is hope they \*  
get your good side. \*

EXT. POLICE HQ (BALCONY) - NIGHT

McKenna looks out at the city lights. Mason joins him and offers a smoke. McKenna declines with a shake of his head.

MCKENNA

Gave them up. I just come out here  
to clear the head.

Mason shrugs and places McKenna's cigarette precariously on the edge of the balcony railing.

She pulls out a flashy BUTANE LIGHTER and with a flourish she sparks the JET FLAME. An ignition of fierce BLUES and REDS.

MASON

(looking at the flame)  
It's beautiful.

MCKENNA

The view?

Mason lights her cigarette and abruptly turns her back on the skyline and leans against the railing, facing McKenna.

MASON

Of course.

Mason exhales. The smoke inevitably swirls in McKenna's direction.

MASON (CONT'D)

It all gets a bit much sometimes,  
hey?

McKenna bristles at the implication.

MCKENNA

I wouldn't say that exactly.

Mason takes a long drag, the smallest hint of a smile plays across her lips. She's enjoying the tension. Young pup versus old dog.

MASON

Interesting move. Going off-script  
like that. It's caused a media  
shitstorm.

MCKENNA

Public interaction can help an investigation.

MASON

It can also cause panic.

MCKENNA

What's the point in sitting on what we have? We did that with Casey and look what happened. We need to learn from past mistakes.

MASON

Who's mistakes exactly?

McKenna flashes Mason a look.

MASON (CONT'D)

Look, I know you got yourself messed up back in the day. But that doesn't mean we all have to wear the scars in solidarity.

That's a blow to McKenna. He thinks for a second about a rebuke, but holds his tongue. An awkward silence.

Mason SPARKS the flame again and this time she keeps it lit. She never takes her eye off it as she talks.

MASON (CONT'D)

I guess the burning question here is - are you on the money?

MCKENNA

The similarities in ignition patterns. Key blazes all beginning at the city fringe locations and close to service roads - there's enough there to suggest I am.

Mason doesn't appear to be listening, she just continues to watch the flame.

MASON

Do you know the first question on the fire brigade entrance exam?

MCKENNA

(confused)  
Shit... I don't remember.

MASON

"Do you dream of fire?"

Mason chuckles. McKenna doesn't see the funny side.

MASON (CONT'D)

I always thought that was funny. As if that's going to weed out the pyros. I mean, it's pretty much a job requirement isn't it?

With another click of her fingers, Mason extinguishes the flame. She looks at McKenna's cigarette balancing on the railing.

MASON (CONT'D)

I'll just leave that for you, Neil. If it's not there tomorrow I'll know you either caved in or it fell over the edge.

Mason stubs out her cigarette and moves inside. Leaving McKenna struggling to comprehend his partner.

INT. THE STANDARD HOTEL - NIGHT

Ancient ceiling fans whir in a hopeless bid to cool the punters.

Aido is looking at a compact mirror with his bandaged hand. A \* local GIRL is tending to his eyebrows with her eyeliner pencil. He's loud and well past drunk.

AIDO

I just look fuckin' confused!

GIRL

That's how you told me to do it!

AIDO

Chris, what do you think?

Chris is busy with bartender BROOKE. There is an obvious mutual attraction. They have a thing going on.

BROOKE

Haven't seen you in a while.

Brooke pours a beer from the tap and passes it to Chris.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

You know that makes me sad.

CHRIS

Sad doesn't suit you, Brooke.

BROOKE

Don't disappear on me then.

CHRIS

I'm here now. You couldn't shake you even if you tried.

BROOKE

I know...

Brooke motions to Chris to lean forward. He obliges. She whispers in his ear.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

(whisper)

... You're harder to shake than a wooden cock.

Chris laughs unexpectedly and spits beer out. Brooke smiles.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

You're welcome.

AIDO

(interrupting)

Chris, what do you think?

CHRIS

About what?

AIDO

My eyebrows. What the fuck do you think I'm talking about?

CHRIS

They look fine, mate.

Chris turns back to Brooke.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Honestly, you have the filthiest mouth I've ever heard.

Brooke smiles as she walks off to serve another customer.

BROOKE

Don't pretend like you don't love it.

Chris smiles. He does.

Aido loses his balance and FALLS OFF HIS STOOL. Beer goes everywhere.

Chris has to help him up. Aido is apologetic but Brooke has heard this before.

INT. BROOKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Chris and Brooke sit in the open window of her tenth storey apartment, their legs dangle out over the edge.

\*

Brooke takes a drag of a joint and passes it to Chris. Chris takes a long toke and exhales. They both watch the smoke disappear into the night.

CHRIS  
You're pissed off, aren't you?

BROOKE  
I don't get it. Is it like a brotherly thing?

CHRIS  
It's not a "thing". It's hard to explain, that's all. It's complicated.

BROOKE  
Try me.

Chris takes another toke.

BROOKE (CONT'D)  
It was my turn.

CHRIS  
I was stalling.

BROOKE  
I figured that.

Chris smiles.

BROOKE (CONT'D)  
I just want to understand. It seems like you're always left behind to clean up his mess.

Chris has another long toke. This time Brooke doesn't say anything. She watches Chris as he exhales.

He is deep in thought, struggling to find the words.

CHRIS  
He's like me. He's never had anyone. That's all.

BROOKE  
You think you need to protect him?

CHRIS  
I *know* I do.

Brooke feels for Chris. It's the first time she's seen him vulnerable. She rests her head gently on his shoulder.

They both take in the incredible view. The city lights are like a mess of embers scattered across an endless bed of ash.

BROOKE

I like the city like this -  
glowing.

CHRIS

Me too.

BROOKE

Down there... they don't know what  
we know.

CHRIS

What's that?

BROOKE

All their secrets.

CHRIS

You think?

BROOKE

See that apartment building?

Brooke points to a blinking light below.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

Dirty old man has a foot fetish.

Chris laughs. Brooke points to a different spot.

BROOKE (CONT'D)

And her over there, she steals her  
neighbour's paper every morning.  
Can't help herself. Crazy klepto.  
Go on... your turn.

CHRIS

Okay... see that light?

BROOKE

I see it.

CHRIS

The guy who lives in there is in  
love with his brother's girlfriend.

BROOKE

Ooh. Juicy! You've got an  
imagination on you.

CHRIS

You got no idea. What else do you  
know?

Brooke snatches the joint from his hand.

BROOKE

I know it's my fucking turn.

They laugh.

INT. POLICE HQ (BRIEFING ROOM) - DAY

\*

McKenna, Mason and Clarke are listening to a briefing from forensics officer, RICHARDS.

Fellow detective CAROL LINDSAY, a striking woman in her forties, enters and takes a spot at the back of the room to observe. McKenna notices, they share a glance.

RICHARDS

... In some good news, we've found compounds at a number of sites that could be related to Polysene - a hydrocarbon liquid I'm sure some of you are familiar with.

MCKENNA

Shit.

CLARKE

Meaning?

MCKENNA

Poly.

RICHARDS

A designer accelerant. It's a highly combustible hybrid cranked out in backyard labs. It mainly uses elements of Kerosene.

CLARKE

What do you mean by "could be related"?

MCKENNA

It's practically untraceable after the deed is done. That's why it's so popular. Looks like everyday water, doesn't have a scent, but burns like hell to touch.

\*

RICHARDS

Also means it's notoriously hard to pinpoint for certain.

\*

MASON

So what you've found might not turn out to be Poly at all.

RICHARDS

Technically, that's correct.

MCKENNA

But it *could* be Poly.

Clear tension between McKenna and Mason.

RICHARDS

If it is Polysene, I've never seen it in a rural setting before.

LINDSAY

Where would we usually find it?

RICHARDS

Metro fires. Good for insurance jobs. Cars mainly--

MCKENNA

Burners.

Richards nods in agreement.

LINDSAY

Burners?

Mason looks at Lindsay, clearly not appreciating the outside interference.

MCKENNA

There's been an influx of online-only insurance companies. Cowboys most of them. They set up shop with a credit card and a laptop and operate in a grey area, legally speaking.

RICHARDS

Competition is so fierce for these guys that they drop premiums and fraud protections get watered down. The whole thing has created a black market.

MCKENNA

So, if you're in the need of a quick buck you can get your car torched by a Burner who's off his face on Poly--

LINDSAY

And get a decent payday.

RICHARDS

Very few questions asked.

MCKENNA

This is exactly what we've been looking for - a thread.

MASON

That isn't what this is. This is conjecture.

McKenna ignores Mason and turns to Clarke.

MCKENNA

We need to allocate more resources.

CLARKE

It's promising, Neil. But nothing more than that yet. We maintain the status quo, we still need units in other areas.

McKenna is frustrated.

CLARKE (CONT'D)

And I don't need to remind you - nothing said to the press.

INT. POLICE HQ (OFFICE) - DAY

McKenna leaves the briefing and sits at his desk. Lindsay joins him. There is more than just a familiarity in their exchanges - a hint of a shared past.

They both watch Mason as she talks to Richards.

LINDSAY

She's a charmer.

MCKENNA

Rose fast that one.

LINDSAY

Too fast?

McKenna crosses himself.

MCKENNA

Anointed from up high.

LINDSAY

Never trust anyone with a perfect record.

MCKENNA

Something's not right with her.

LINDSAY

I haven't seen you so rattled by a pup before.

McKenna sighs.

MCKENNA

Maybe I'm getting old then. How are the training wheels at your end?

LINDSAY  
Bit of a wobble.

MCKENNA  
I envy you, you know?

LINDSAY  
You do?

MCKENNA  
You can actually see the crooks  
over on your side of the building.  
I'm chasing ghosts around here.

LINDSAY  
And you think seeing them is a good  
thing?

MCKENNA  
It isn't?

LINDSAY  
Bikies don't give a shit about  
hygiene, Neil. They use their  
bathtubs for meth.

McKenna smiles.

MCKENNA  
And here I was thinking bad boys  
were your new thing.

LINDSAY  
You thought wrong. Maybe you should  
have jumped ship when I did.

MCKENNA  
Wouldn't that have defeated the  
purpose?

LINDSAY  
You could have jumped somewhere  
else.

MCKENNA  
Somewhere else isn't for me.

Lindsay acknowledges a large WALL MAP of Victoria used to  
track fires. There's a number of HEAD SHOTS pinned up next to  
it.

LINDSAY  
Got a favourite?

McKenna points to a head-shot of CHRIS.

MCKENNA

We picked him up at a scene. Solid alibi though.

LINDSAY

What do the brass think?

MCKENNA

You witnessed it. We're unfocussed and I can't get Clarke to trust me.

LINDSAY

You're out on that limb again.

MCKENNA

I just hope they don't end up hanging me from it.

Lindsay can sense his stress. She clocks his beverage.

LINDSAY

Coffee huh?

McKenna nods. Lindsay leans past McKenna to reach for the top drawer of his desk. McKenna secretly savours her scent for a moment.

She slides the draw open for a look. All she finds is a mess of stationary. She seems happy with that.

LINDSAY (CONT'D)

Black?

MCKENNA

Always.

Lindsay smiles and gets up to leave. As she does she places a supportive hand on McKenna.

LINDSAY

Take care of yourself, Neil.

McKenna nods and watches her leave.

As she exits the office, McKenna reaches across to open the SECOND drawer of his desk.

Amongst stationary is a small HIP FLASK. McKenna reaches in, expertly spins the cap off and tops up his coffee.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Chris' car is parked on the side of a road overlooking an industrial precinct.

Bickie and Chris study a LUXURY CARYARD below. Rows of expensive vehicles gleam in the sun.

Aido sits in the passenger seat of the car, his hand in a cast, excluded from the conversation.

BICKIE

Insured up the arse, owner is three years in and goin' under. Big payout. This is it for me, Chris. You're lookin' at Bickie's gold watch.

Aido gets out of the car to eavesdrop.

BICKIE (CONT'D)

Don't act like you can't do it.

CHRIS

Security?

BICKIE

Alarm codes are sorted and I've got a connection with the security mob.

CHRIS

Kitchen?

BICKIE

Yep. You can set up the kettle for ignition.

Aido runs his fingers along the car bonnet. He discovers the car's METAL BADGE. It's cruelly disfigured. As though it's been MELTED by intense heat.

AIDO

What's this?

Aido points out the badge.

BICKIE

(to Aido)

Shut the fuck up. Big boys are talkin'.

AIDO

It's melted--

CHRIS

It's nothing, Aido. Forget it.

(to Bickie, quickly  
changing the subject)

You know I'll need some Poly for this.

BICKIE

You don't have any?

CHRIS

Nope.

Bickie sizes Chris up.

BICKIE  
Bullshit. With your hobbies?

Chris is uneasy.

CHRIS  
I'm all out.

BICKIE  
This isn't a fucking favour  
exchange here, mate. In case you  
forgot.

Bickie walks off, along the way he **SHOVES** Aido against the bonnet of the car.

He calls back to Chris.

BICKIE (CONT'D)  
Drive out there yourself.

EXT. RURAL FARMHOUSE - DAY

Chris drives past an abandoned farmhouse to a large, corrugated **IRON SHED** at the back of the property.

He parks and makes his way towards the shed on foot.

A hot wind blows. Eucalyptus trees strain against a gale force wind. There's a strangeness in the air - an ominous pressure in the atmosphere.

A group of **TEENAGERS** are mucking around out the front with a couple of mangy dogs.

As Chris approaches he can see the teenagers are passing around a cannister. Each kid takes it in turns to huff the contents - it's **POLY**. These kids are **BURNERS**.

With each intake they fall back laughing. One **REDHEAD BURNER** pours some Poly on a tennis ball, lights it and throws the **FIREBALL** at one of the dogs. It **YELPS** and runs away. The kids laugh.

CHRIS  
Hey!

They turn to look at Chris. It's the first time they've even registered his presence.

The Redhead Burner slowly stands up and takes a large huff of Poly. He extends his arm and makes a gun with his finger and thumb. He points at Chris with a hazy smile.

REDHEAD BURNER

BANG!

They all laugh--

LEE

Back off...

Lee emerges from the shed. The Redhead sits down, the teenagers chastened. They go back to passing the Poly around.

LEE (CONT'D)

You here to make a purchase?

CHRIS

Yeah.

(clocking Lee)

You look familiar.

Lee shakes his head.

LEE

Ray's your man. He's out back somewhere.

Chris walks towards the shed. Still trying to put a name to the face, he turns back. Lee and the Burners watch him go.

LEE (CONT'D)

That's it, in there. All the way to the back.

INT. DRUG LAB - DAY

Chris lifts the roller door and discovers a crude, yet sophisticated, DRUG LAB.

BARRELS of industrial chemicals take up the majority of floor space. The walls are lined with an array of GLASS WEAR, TUBES and CANNISTERS.

There's no sign of Ray. Chris looks back at Lee. Lee signals for Chris to keep heading towards the back.

Chris spots another door at the rear.

INT. DRUG LAB (STORE ROOM) - DAY

CHRIS

Hello? Ray?

The small storage unit is full of Poly containers in various stages of being prepped for sale.

A single EVAPORATIVE FAN above the door works hard to clear the air. Chris pulls his shirt up over his face to protect himself from the scentless Poly fumes.

Chris takes a medium-sized Poly container from the shelf --

THE DOOR SLAMS SHUT BEHIND HIM.

Chris turns and tries the handle, it's locked. LAUGHTER can be heard from the other side.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
Okay, you've had your fun. Open the fuckin' door.

Chris tries again, it won't budge.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
Open it!

The LAUGHTER stops. Chris leans in close to the door to try and hear anything else --

THE VENTILATOR FAN GRINDS TO A SUDDEN STOP.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
Fuck!

Chris pulls on the handle of the door with more force. It won't budge. He begins to panic and SLAMS the door with the full force of his shoulder.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
Stop fucking around! Let me out!

No response. Chris is breathing in toxic air. He slumps down against the door.

The Poly fumes begin to take hold. Chris' head is heavy.

He's WOOZY. A total dulling of the senses. Encased in a warm COCOON.

A WHITE GLOW permeates everything. Sounds seem to arrive at Chris from a great distance.

Chris looks up at the ceiling. A light SMOKE begins to filter in. Chris admires its beauty - swirling, complicated cloud patterns shape above him.

The billowing smoke begins to DARKEN and quickly turns from pretty to MENACING. In his altered state, Chris can't make head nor tail of it.

The smoke begins to POUR in. Chris' instincts are in a battle with the dulling affects of the Poly.

Finally - a small WINDOW OF CLARITY.

Chris comes to a realisation - something is not right.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Fuck!

Chris struggles to his feet and tries to shake off the effects of the Poly. He puts a hand on the door but it's BURNING HOT.

Chris looks around the room for a way out. He sees the smoke seeping in through the evaporative fan unit above the door.

Chris grabs an empty steel barrel, picks it up and SLAMS it against the fan. The unit SPLITS a little.

He picks up the barrel and SLAMS again.

And AGAIN. Smashing the fan out of it's metal frame.

Chris SLAMS the barrel a fourth time and the unit FALLS out and dark smoke POURS in.

Chris grabs his Poly container, puts one foot on the shelving and angles his body through the gap.

INT. DRUG LAB - DAY

Chris FALLS on the ground. Taking a heavy HIT to the head.

The lab is filling with smoke. Glass wear EXPLODES around him.

Chris tries to get to his knees, but he's overcome with smoke and Poly fumes.

He falls back, done for. No choice but to watch in awe as the FLAMES grow in stature around him, climbing the walls and beginning to lick at the ceiling --

A FIGURE GRABS CHRIS and hauls him towards the exit. The pair scramble out the roller door and out past the flames.

EXT. RURAL FARMHOUSE - DAY

They collapse on the grass. An elaborate SPRINKLER SYSTEM installed in the shed begins to kick into gear and combat the blaze.

LEE

I warned those kids.

Chris turns to look at his saviour. Still feeling the effects of Poly he sees Lee in a new, sinister light.

Lee's face is WARPED and TWISTED.

Chris jumps back in shock. A FLASH OF RECOGNITION in his face.

CHRIS  
What the--

LEE  
I told them to stop messing around  
with those dogs.

Chris is trying to make sense.

CHRIS  
You...

LEE  
What?

Chris is struck by an intense MIGRANE. He clutches his head. Lee comes to assistance but Chris pushes him away.

CHRIS  
Get the fuck away from me!

Lee puts his hands up in mock surrender. A CROOKED SMILE.

LEE  
Suit yourself...

Chris grabs his container of Poly and scrambles to his feet. Unsteady.

Lee calls out after him.

LEE (CONT'D)  
Come on, come back! We can sit and  
watch the flames together...

Chris heads for his car. He doesn't look back.

EXT. BUSHLAND - DAY

McKenna, looking increasingly haggard, takes a sip of his coffee.

All colour and life has been extinguished by the ravages of fire. A thick layer of ash has drenched everything in black. Pure desolation.

Mason is already well established at the scene.

MCKENNA  
Particulars?

MASON  
Forensics are already in.

MCKENNA

Right.

MASON

Containment line set up a kilometre down the road. Perimeter checks have been completed.

MCKENNA

Already?

MASON

An hour ago.

MCKENNA

But I just got the call out. You didn't think to let me know?

Mason shrugs.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

Don't cut me out of the loop, Detective.

MASON

There's no service road close by so it didn't think it seemed connected with your guy.

McKenna eyes her with suspicion.

MCKENNA

My guy?

MASON

We're thinking some power tools at a property nearby may be the ignition point.

McKenna, not ready to let it go.

MCKENNA

Before Clarke pulled the surveillance, we tracked "my guy" to a bar known to have heavy links to Burners. Did you know that?

MASON

I'm aware of *all* aspects of this investigation.

MCKENNA

Enough with the tone then.

\*

MASON

All I'm saying is that we're in danger of myth-building here, Neil.

MCKENNA

This guy isn't figment of my imagination. Believe me, you get a feeling for these things when you've been in the game longer than five fucking minutes.

Mason is taken aback at McKenna's tone. McKenna realises he's pushed too hard.

Mason registers McKenna's appearance for a moment and then surveys the surroundings. She takes the high road.

MASON

It's kind of beautiful out here...  
in a weird way...

Expecting a fight, McKenna is thrown.

MCKENNA

(unsure)  
If you say so.

MASON

Sort of like new beginnings.

Mason smiles and walks off. McKenna watches her go, increasingly unsure of her motives.

INT. BROOKE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Chris and Brooke lie in bed, post-coital. An incense stick burns at the open window, wafting a thin haze of sweet smoke across the room.

Brooke traces a finger along Chris' back. Like a road map she traces out peaks and valleys until her finger runs across the rough terrain of his BURN SCARS.

BROOKE

There's things you don't tell me.

CHRIS

Like what?

BROOKE

You hold back. It's your standard operating procedure.

CHRIS

Maybe some things are just for me.

BROOKE

But that's not how it works.

Chris rolls over to face her.

CHRIS  
How what works?

BROOKE  
This. Us.

CHRIS  
I'm here right now. You can ask me  
whatever you want.

BROOKE  
I want you to *want* to tell me.

CHRIS  
Don't talk in fucking riddles,  
Brooke.

BROOKE  
I already know about all the good  
stuff. The smooth, perfect parts of  
you - but that's not what really  
matters--

CHRIS  
I don't know what you're getting  
at.

BROOKE  
I want to know what nobody else  
knows.  
(with a smile)  
The weird shit, you know? The stuff  
that makes you you.

Chris withdraws.

CHRIS  
You don't get it.

BROOKE  
Okay. Tell me what I don't get.

CHRIS  
There are things about me that *I*  
don't like. That I fucking hate.

BROOKE  
We all feel like that--

CHRIS  
Not like this.

BROOKE  
Explain it to me then.

CHRIS

No one could understand in a million years what I'm going through. So... what? I'm just going to dump all that on you? Expect you to figure it all out?

BROOKE

Yes! That's what normal human beings do with people they trust.

CHRIS

That can't happen. It's not possible.

BROOKE

You don't trust me?

CHRIS

What makes you different to everyone else?

BROOKE

I'm the one that's here, Chris. What is it? Are you in trouble or something? You need to tell me.

Chris gets up from the bed and begins to put his clothes on.

CHRIS

I need to go.

BROOKE

What?! Now?

CHRIS

I have to.

BROOKE

And off you go... disappearing again. Like you're a ghost. Just a part of some fucking dream.

Chris looks at Brooke. For a moment he looks ready to burst open with everything. He can't do it.

CHRIS

I'm sorry.

Chris turns and leaves. Brooke is shattered.

EXT. LUXURY CARYARD - NIGHT

Chris, with a backpack on, skillfully scales a chain fence. Moving quickly, he rounds the back of the building.

He discovers a small window which has been left ajar. He carefully pries it open.

He maneuvers a nearby wheelie bin underneath the window, jumps on top and climbs through.

INT. LUXURY CARYARD (BATHROOM) - NIGHT

Chris squeezes through the window and drops into the bathroom.

INT. LUXURY CARYARD (SHOWROOM) - NIGHT

Chris opens the door a crack and peers out into the expansive showroom.

The floor space is taken up by dozens of gleaming LUXURY CARS. From his vantage point he spots the ALARM UNIT on the wall across the other side of the showroom.

He gathers himself, takes a deep breath and RUNS across the tiled floor, moving swiftly between cars until he reaches the unit.

The sensors have picked up movement and an alarm BEEPS. Chris flicks open the unit and enters in a six digit pin code.

Three long BEEPS and then silence. A red light turns to green. Chris breathes a sigh of relief.

INT. LUXURY CARYARD (KITCHEN) - NIGHT

Chris searches the cupboards until he finds a CORDLESS KETTLE. He unzips his backpack, pulls out a pair of pliers and peels away the rubber casing around the lead, exposing the wiring.

Chris puts on a pair of gloves and takes out the POLY CONTAINER from his backpack. Carefully he creates a trail of Poly from the exposed wiring of the kettle along the kitchen floor out to the showroom.

INT. LUXURY CARYARD (SHOWROOM) - NIGHT

Chris sprinkles a Poly trail along the tiled floor and around a BMW --

FLOODLIGHTS.

Chris scrambles behind the car. He presses himself up against the chassis --

FOOTSTEPS.

Chris looks at the trail of Poly snaking it's way to the kitchen.

He peers over the car. A SECURITY GUARD is making his way around the showroom and towards the Poly trail.

Chris pulls the lighter out from his bag.

FOOTSTEPS get louder.

Chris readies his lighter close to the Poly trail at his knees --

FOOTSTEPS stop.

Chris watches as the Security Guard kneels down to examine the liquid --

CHRIS SPARKS THE LIGHTER. Poker face. Is he prepared to ignite the trail of Poly and start an INFERNO?

The Security Guard looks closely at the liquid. He puts his hand out to touch --

HE STOPS. The sound of WATER DRIPPING. His attention turns to a WATER COOLER against the wall.

The tap has been left on. The small drain has OVERFLOWED.

The Security Guard believes he has found the culprit. He rises from his crouch position, walks over and turns the tap off. \*

Chris flicks the lighter OFF and breathes a sigh of relief.

INT. POLICE HQ (OFFICE) - DAY

McKenna is staring at a large wall map of Victoria. He's drinking coffee and moving quickly. Hyper-intense.

MCKENNA

Shit!

Mason joins him.

MASON

What?

McKenna grabs a RED MARKER and places one on the map. It's in close proximity to a BLUE MARKER on the edge of the city.

MCKENNA

If blue markers are the ignition points of blazes we deem to be non-suspicious then...

McKenna attaches another RED MARKER to the map.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

... these red ones are deliberately lit.

McKenna steps back for a fresh look. Three RED MARKERS within centimetres of three BLUE ones.

The smallest pattern is beginning to emerge. McKenna attaches another RED MARKER to the map.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

It's reds shadowing blues. And all of these just beyond the city fringes. You see?

MASON

I see.

MCKENNA

It's about timing. All of these blue markers were well established by the time the red ones were reported.

McKenna adds another RED MARKER close to a BLUE.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

In a military sense it's a cluster bomb. You attack a lot of individual areas that are in close proximity to each other so they all eventually interact. He's looking for a teammate.

A beat. Mason ponders.

MASON

For the Dumont kid?

MCKENNA

He's one possibility. All of these fires were started no further than a 20km drive from the city.

MASON

He's making day trips?

MCKENNA

Exactly.

MASON

It's a long bow.

MCKENNA

But it's a fucking bow. We're after a city-dweller.

(MORE)

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

We know he has connections to Burners and therefore Poly. We picked him up at a scene--

MASON

And he had a foolproof alibi.

MCKENNA

For that one, yes... but he has a history--

MASON

Neil, you know full well I could throw a whole mess of red and blue markers on that map and they wouldn't correlate. The whole state is on fire.

McKenna is perplexed.

MCKENNA

Why are you fighting me on this?

MASON

I'm not fighting you, but you've got tunnel vision, Neil. We have over half the unsolved fires grouped as random firebugs and you're not taking any notice.

MCKENNA

If we have any shred of evidence of a serial it takes precedence--

MASON

Your personal crusade is becoming a liability.

Clarke approaches.

CLARKE

What's the problem?

MASON

(ignoring Clarke)

You can't make up for what happened with Casey. It's not gonna play out the same way.

CLARKE

(trying to diffuse)

Mason.

MCKENNA

What the fuck would you know about that?

MASON

I know he was right there in front  
of your face and you let him go.

CLARKE

That's enough, Detective Mason.

MCKENNA

And what about you, huh?

MASON

What about me?

MCKENNA

I know you enjoy fucking with me,  
but is it just my job you're after  
or is there more to it?

McKenna is seething, he's lost control. Clarke steps in front  
of McKenna.

CLARKE

Neil, I think you need to step  
outside. Get some air...

MASON

(to McKenna)

What are you saying?

MCKENNA

You get off on all this shit, "do I  
dream of fire"? What the fuck is  
that?! You've got all the  
hallmarks, Mason. You're probably  
the nutcase out there lighting  
fires for the fun of it! Just to  
watch me run around after you--

CLARKE

Detective! Outside!

Clarke ushers McKenna out of the office.

Onlookers in the office are stunned.

Mason plays dumb for show, but in a private moment she  
dissolves into the smallest of smiles.

EXT. POLICE HQ (CARPARK) - DAY

McKenna walks quickly past colleagues and finds his car.

INT./EXT. MCKENNA'S CAR - DAY

McKenna slams the door shut.

He begins to LASH OUT on the interior of the car with PUNCHES.

After he expends a burst of energy he stops. Breathing hard he looks at himself in the rearview mirror.

A beat. He comes to a resolution and starts the engine.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Chris has his phone to his ear.

CHRIS

He thought it was from the fucking water cooler. I got the hell out of there.

BICKIE'S VOICE

I was told security was going to skip the patrol.

INT. BICKIE'S BAR (BACK ROOM) - CONTINUOUS

Bickie is splayed out in a corner booth. His head resting in the lap of young male Burner. The kid holds a Poly cannister under Bickie's nose.

CHRIS' VOICE

Well it wasn't. It was close. Too fucking close. I almost torched him.

Bickie takes a deep breath in of Poly. Exhales.

BICKIE

And you didn't? Because?

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

CHRIS

What do you mean?! Are you crazy? I had to get outta there--

BICKIE'S VOICE

Okay. This is the point in the conversation where you shut the fuck up, Chris. Nothin' changes from here on in. You go back and do it properly.

INT. BAR (BACK ROOM) - CONTINUOUS

BICKIE

Because if you can't get this done,  
I've got no issue with burying the  
cripple.

CHRIS

Bickie--

BICKIE

I'm serious. This job is *it* for me.  
Too hard basket is no longer a  
fuckin' option. You got me?

CHRIS' VOICE

Okay. I got it.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

BICKIE'S VOICE

Good. Now fuck off.

Chris is left with an empty phone line.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

McKenna's car pushes past city-bound traffic.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

McKenna's car heads further out of town. Through bushland.

A FIRETRUCK roars past with sirens BLARING, LIGHTS FLASHING.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

McKenna's car travels up a windy dirt road to a large house  
on the bank of a VAST LAKE.

INT. FARMHOUSE (LOUNGE) - DAY

McKenna stands alone in a neat lounge room. He studies a  
collection of framed PHOTOGRAPHS on a mantelpiece.

They are mostly of volunteer FIREFIGHTERS. Various group  
shots displaying the type of camaraderie that comes with the  
territory. Every photo has one constant - a smiling,  
gregarious STAN.

Stan enters the lounge room with a bottle of whiskey and two  
glasses.

STAN  
I figure it's never too early.

MCKENNA  
You figured right.

EXT. FARMHOUSE (PATIO) - DAY

Stan is in his mid-60's. These days he's weary. The once-vibrant smile replaced by deep worry lines.

He looks out to the lake. McKenna follows suit.

MCKENNA  
A lot of water...

STAN  
Is that what they call irony?

MCKENNA  
Peace of mind?

STAN  
Maybe.

A beat.

STAN (CONT'D)  
This weather sure doesn't make me nostalgic. And seeing you isn't helping any.

MCKENNA  
Apologies for that.

STAN  
Nah...

Stan waves him off.

MCKENNA  
Any part of it you miss?

STAN  
Out there? On the truck?

MCKENNA  
Yeah.

STAN  
I guess there's always a rush involved. Bit of a thrill maybe... but it's living with the choices I had to make. That's the stuff that sticks.

A beat. Stan takes a sip of his whiskey. Reflective.

STAN (CONT'D)

We were always told "people save houses. Houses save people". And when it comes to a man's home, that's personal. There's meaning in that, you know? It's bloody hard to just walk away when the hell is comin'. So when it did, I had to make the tough call. Like which house do I try and get to in the truck? What's one family's virtue over another?

McKenna doesn't answer. Stan is lost in thought.

A long beat.

STAN (CONT'D)

You see this scar?

Stan holds up his hand to display a thick, jagged line of damaged skin.

STAN (CONT'D)

It's a beauty isn't it? You got anything to beat that?

MCKENNA

Not even close.

STAN

I played Saturday arvo cricket with this guy, Steve, right? He was a bowler. Pretty ordinary he was, to be honest with you. Anyway, he didn't leave back in '09. He decided to stay and fight and protect his home. So when it got the best of him like it did all of us, he had to flee across the oval, the same bloody cricket oval we played on every weekend. But he wasn't quick enough. And when I found him he was curled up in a black ball of ash a few metres away from the pitch - out in the open for the world to see. Of course, I couldn't leave him like that so I found some cricket netting and used a knife to cut a sheet big enough to throw over him. For his dignity, you know? But I was shakin' so bad that I stuffed it up. And that's how I cut my hand, from the knife.

A beat. Stan studies the scar closely.

MCKENNA

I'm sorry. I don't really know why I'm here, Stan.

STAN

You're here so we can hash over all the gory details. Make you feel like you did everything you could that day.

MCKENNA

Did I?

STAN

Listen... the town probably goes up in flames if Dean Casey is on the loose or not.

McKenna doesn't say anything, he seems unsure. He drains the remainder of his whiskey.

Stan looks at McKenna directly.

STAN (CONT'D)

If there's some kind of redemption up for grabs, by all means go for it. But it won't help your struggles, Neil. It won't help you sleep at night. You need to figure out how to live with it, to control what you can control - get some perspective. Then you might get your life back.

McKenna mulls over Stan's words.

STAN (CONT'D)

Steve's dead but at least I get the chance to compare scars.

In the distance a ROAR begins to build. Stan doesn't acknowledge it. He looks out to the lake.

A fierce WIND picks up. It's UNNATURAL.

The ROAR builds and builds, until it is DEAFENING.

McKenna is startled. He looks at Stan who remains passive. His focus remains on a point over McKenna's shoulder.

McKenna turns and follows Stan's gaze to the cause of the disturbance --

A FIREFIGHTING HELICOPTER sweeps over the lake.

It hovers just above the lake's surface. Whipping up water. A LARGE RUBBER TUBE is dropped in to the water. Sucking up gallons and gallons of liquid.

STAN (CONT'D)  
 (yelling)  
 That's Elvis.

McKenna takes in the powerful sight.

STAN (CONT'D)  
 (yelling)  
 We need all the help we can get.

INT. THE STANDARD HOTEL - DAY

Chris takes a seat in the crowded front bar. All attention is focussed on a TELEVISION in the corner.

Dr Kenneth Bryce is talking at a press conference.

Chris gets the BARTENDER'S attention.

CHRIS  
 Brooke here?

BARTENDER  
 She's not in tonight. She hasn't  
 been well lately.

Chris feels guilty, he studies his beer.

The Bartender turns the volume of the TV up. Every face is glued to the address except for Chris.

DR BRYCE(TV)  
 Members of the public should try  
 and stay indoors as much as  
 possible. If you don't have to  
 leave the house, don't. If you  
 don't have to use public transport,  
 don't. If you have elderly or sick  
 family members, be sure to give  
 them a call and check on them.  
 Ensure they are safe...

An OLD TIMER sitting next to Chris clears his throat.

OLD TIMER  
 There's death in the air, you can  
 feel it.

Chris turns to look at the Old Timer. He has a disturbing intensity.

DR BRYCE (TV)  
 ... weather conditions over the  
 next few days are predicted to be  
 nothing short of catastrophic...

OLD TIMER

Like the four walls of hell are  
closin' in.

The Old Timer's conviction unnerves Chris.

DR BRYCE (TV)

We don't want a repeat of the Black  
Saturday tragedy. Everyone must  
heed the warnings and evacuate  
their property early if under  
genuine threat...

The Old Timer turns to Chris. He smiles.

OLD TIMER

Are you ready?

Chris says nothing. He drains the remainder of his beer and  
leaves.

INT. POLICE HQ (OFFICE) - DAY

McKenna returns to his desk. He's contemplative. He reaches  
for his hip flask in his second drawer --

Richards DROPS a file on McKenna's desk.

RICHARDS

We may have something...

MCKENNA

Yeah?

RICHARDS

The remnants of thermoplastic  
rubber that keep showing up.  
We've narrowed it down. Consistent  
with pump seals, washing machine  
couplings, tennis balls, certain  
roofing sneakers--

MCKENNA

Shit!

A lightbulb moment. McKenna snatches the folder and is on his  
feet.

RICHARDS

What?

INT. - POLICE HQ (VIDEO ROOM) - DAY

McKenna leans forward, eyeballing a monitor.

Playing is a recording of the interview with Chris. McKenna controls the playback with a remote.

He pauses the recording.

RICHARDS  
What is it?

McKenna points to the screen --

Chris' DUNLOP VOLLEY SNEAKER.

MCKENNA  
Roofing sneakers.

INT. POLICE HQ (CLARKE'S OFFICE) - DAY

Clarke looks McKenna up and down, unimpressed at the sight.

CLARKE  
Detective.

MCKENNA  
Sir, we've got something--

CLARKE  
(short)  
It can wait.

McKenna's enthusiasm is quashed. Clarke is in no mood.

CLARKE (CONT'D)  
Your investigation is...

MCKENNA  
... Ongoing

CLARKE  
I'm afraid it's not.

MCKENNA  
We've just caught a break with  
forensics--

CLARKE  
You've forced my hand here, Neil.  
I'm taking you off the case and  
recommending you take leave  
immediately.

MCKENNA  
What?!

CLARKE  
I've spoken to Mason and she'll be  
taking charge of the investigation--

MCKENNA

On what grounds?

CLARKE

Neil, you've proven to be an unstable influence on this investigation. You've trained all your focus on only one aspect to the detriment of everything else--

MCKENNA

But Dumont. I think we've got something to link him--

CLARKE

And that is all well and good, Neil, but your standards are unacceptable. You reek of booze and you accused a colleague, Neil... one of our own...

McKenna is stunned.

CLARKE (CONT'D)

... So I have no choice. You're suspended.

Clarke returns to his paperwork, suggesting the meeting is over.

McKenna doesn't leave. Clarke looks up from his paperwork.

CLARKE (CONT'D)

Yes?

MCKENNA

Sir, I urge you to reconsider. These aren't just random firebugs we're dealing with.

CLARKE

And that is now Mason's responsibility, not yours. Be sure to pass on the information to her and she will follow it up.

Clarke takes a moment to size up McKenna.

CLARKE (CONT'D)

Honestly, Neil, the state you're in right now - you're lucky you haven't been escorted from the building.

McKenna recognises he's a lame duck. He turns and storms out of Clarke's office.

EXT. POLICE HQ (CAR PARK) - DAY

McKenna runs into Lindsay.

LINDSAY  
What's happened?

McKenna is dishevelled, fuming.

MCKENNA  
I've been fucked.

LINDSAY  
What?

MCKENNA  
Mason's taking over. I'm now  
suspended.

LINDSAY  
Shit.

McKenna LASHES OUT at a wing mirror.

LINDSAY (CONT'D)  
Neil, you need to calm down.

McKenna composes himself for a moment. He's breathing hard.

MCKENNA  
I went and saw Stan.

Lindsay is taken aback.

LINDSAY  
How is he?

MCKENNA  
Not the best.

A beat. Lindsay can see McKenna is suffering.

LINDSAY  
Neil, I know what you're doing but  
it doesn't work like that. You  
don't get a second chance at this.  
I'm sorry.

\*

MCKENNA  
Casey took everything from me. If  
it wasn't for him--

LINDSAY  
I know.

MCKENNA  
I wouldn't be a mess like I am. A  
fucking alcoholic.

LINDSAY

Neil--

MCKENNA

And I'd still have you.

Lindsay is stung. McKenna looks longingly at Lindsay but the fire is long gone.

LINDSAY

Neil, what happened was terrible and I'm sorry for everything. But, you need to stop and think for a moment. You're in charge of this. You can control where it's headed.

A beat. McKenna calms down.

LINDSAY (CONT'D)

Are you certain on this kid?

MCKENNA

As close as it gets.

Lindsay recognises the resolve.

LINDSAY

Then I know where this is going.

McKenna nods. He leaves and Lindsay watches him leave full of concern.

EXT. BAR - DAY

Chris approaches the entrance of the bar, as he reaches for the handle --

MCKENNA GRABS HIS ARM. He pushes Chris away from the entrance.

CHRIS

What do you want?

MCKENNA

You've been busy.

CHRIS

You're dreaming about me again are you?

MCKENNA

It's the real thing this time.

CHRIS

Are you here to arrest me?

MCKENNA

I'm here to put a stop to it.

CHRIS

I don't know what the fuck you're talking about.

MCKENNA

I know who you are. I know what you've done.

Chris is unsettled.

CHRIS

(uncertain)

You don't know shit.

MCKENNA

I know about how hard it is for you to fight those urges, Chris. I know for a fact you've been fighting them for a long time--

CHRIS

You're off your fucking head, I can smell the booze from here.

McKenna PUSHES Chris up against the wall. Fuming.

MCKENNA

I'm not gonna let you go again.

CHRIS

Again? What are you talking about?

MCKENNA

You don't remember me?

Chris studies McKenna. He's confused.

CHRIS

You're truly fuckin' mad, you know that? What would happen right now if I yell?

MCKENNA

I'm the police officer, what do you think?

CHRIS

You're nothing but a drunk.

MCKENNA

It's your call.

A beat. Chris considers his options for a moment and KNEES MCKENNA IN THE GROIN.

McKenna DROPS to the floor in agony and Chris flees.

EXT. THE STANDARD HOTEL - NIGHT

With his disabled arm and the other wrapped in a bandage - Aido struggles to light a cigarette.

McKenna offers him a light.

MCKENNA  
Aiden?

AIDO  
Yeah?

Aido lights up.

MCKENNA  
Been in the wars, mate?

AIDO  
So what?

McKenna displays his badge.

MCKENNA  
I need to know where Chris is.

AIDO  
So... you've been following him.

MCKENNA  
For a very good reason--

AIDO  
I don't know where he is.

MCKENNA  
You don't want to know why?

AIDO  
I don't give a shit.

MCKENNA  
I think you should give a shit,  
Aiden.

Aido attempts to move past him. McKenna blocks his path.

AIDO  
Is this how it is?

McKenna nods. Aido stops.

MCKENNA  
I know about the cars.

Aido stiffens.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)  
But I'm not here for that.

AIDO  
What then?

MCKENNA  
These bushfires... someone is starting them on purpose. People have died, Aiden...

AIDO  
Yeah?

MCKENNA  
Chris disappears a lot doesn't he?

AIDO  
That's a crime now?

MCKENNA  
You don't ever wonder where he's going, what he's up to?

Aido laughs.

AIDO  
You want to do him for that? Fuck off.

Aido has heard enough. This time he forcibly makes his way past McKenna.

MCKENNA  
I know what happened to you.

Aido stops.

AIDO  
What?

MCKENNA  
You were nine or 10, yeah?

Aido turns to face McKenna, uncertain.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)  
Someone set fire to the grass in the vacant lot next door to your foster home. The whole house went up - you were lucky to get out alive... of course it cost you something.

AIDO  
How the fuck--

MCKENNA

Do I know this? Because I know who started that grass fire. I know who took your arm.

AIDO

He was a juvenile so--

MCKENNA

They suppressed his name.

AIDO

Exactly. You don't know shit.

MCKENNA

I was there.

AIDO

Fuck off.

MCKENNA

I was the arresting officer, Aiden. My first year in arson. He did two years in juvenile detention for what he did to you.

Aido is trying to put the pieces together.

AIDO

Who did?

MCKENNA

Chris has urges Aiden. He can't control them. He couldn't back then and he can't now.

Aido REELS, like he's taken one to the jaw.

AIDO

What?! I don't--

MCKENNA

You think it's totally random that you two found each other? That you have some guardian angel looking over you, watching out for you... like it was some fucking cosmic event?

Aido is mute. McKenna is becoming increasingly desperate.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

Aiden, I need to know where Chris is before anyone else gets hurt.

Aido's world is CRASHING DOWN.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)

Aiden! Where is he?!

Aido looks up at McKenna - his eyes moist.

EXT. LUXURY CARYARD - NIGHT

Chris moves the wheelie bin. He stands on it and pries open the window.

INT. LUXURY CARYARD (BATHROOM) - NIGHT

Chris lands in the bathroom. Opens the door a crack and peers into the showroom --

A HAND LANDS ON HIS SHOULDER. Chris turns in panic - BICKIE.

CHRIS

Fuck! What are you doing here?

BICKIE

Making sure you get it right this time.

Bickie is more agitated than usual. Heavy breathing. Twitching. Chris notices BLOOD on his knuckles.

CHRIS

Are you okay?

BICKIE

I'm fuckin' tip-top, don't worry about me.

CHRIS

You're bleeding.

Bickie looks at his hands, noticing the blood for the first time. He stares at it for a moment, zoning out - he snaps out of it.

BICKIE

I've already taken care of the alarm.

CHRIS

Okay.

BICKIE

Do your thing in the kitchen and then we're out of here. Fuckin' happy days.

INT. LUXURY CARYARD (KITCHEN) - NIGHT

The kitchen is a MESS. There are plates and cutlery strewn everywhere. A chair overturned.

CHRIS  
What happened here?

BICKIE  
How should I know?

Chris studies Bickie. He senses something is not right.

BICKIE (CONT'D)  
What are you waiting for?

Bickie pulls out his GLASS PIPE and sparks up the stove-top to get a light.

Chris retrieves the kettle from a drawer. Wires still exposed.

CHRIS  
Good to go.

Bickie doesn't answer. He slumps down and lands cross-legged on the floor. Eyes closed. Enjoying the rush.

Chris sees an opportunity. He sneaks out of the kitchen to the showroom.

INT. LUXURY CARYARD (SHOWROOM) - NIGHT

Chris looks out upon the rows of luxury cars. Everything is still and silent.

He looks at the tiled floor. A STREAK of RED colours the white tiles - BLOOD.

Chris follows the trail around a BMW --

A BODY.

Chris is stunned. He moves in for a closer look, his torch illuminates --

A SECURITY GUARD.

He's prone on the ground. Beaten severely.

Chris is stunned. He kneels down to check his pulse --

BICKIE  
I told you to stay in the fuckin'  
kitchen.

Chris turns to face Bickie - He's HOLDING A GUN.

CHRIS  
What's going on, Bickie?

BICKIE  
Nothin'. He interrupted me that's  
all.

Chris looks at the Security Guard. He feels a surge of  
nausea.

CHRIS  
I think he's dead.

BICKIE  
Correct.

CHRIS  
Fuck!

BICKIE  
He was supposed to skip this  
patrol, and for the second time he  
fucked up. You don't get a third  
chance with me. \*  
\*

CHRIS  
I think I'm gonna be sick--

BICKIE  
You're not gonna be anything. Plans  
don't change - you burn this place  
tonight. With him in it.

CHRIS  
No way.

BICKIE  
What?

CHRIS  
I didn't sign up for a murder,  
Bickie.

BICKIE  
You signed up so there wouldn't be  
a murder. Fuckin' c'est la vie--

TORCHLIGHT PIERCES THE DARKNESS from outside.

Chris and Bickie FREEZE. Chris turns off his torch.

BICKIE (CONT'D)  
(whisper)  
Who is that?!

CHRIS  
(whisper)  
How should I know?

Bickie puts a finger to his lips: "SHHH". He keeps the gun drawn on Chris.

BICKIE  
 (whisper)  
 Don't you fuckin' move.

The torchlight SWEEPS across the showroom like a SEARCHLIGHT. Gleaming off the polished cars.

Chris and Bickie press themselves hard up against the wall. Bickie's GUN TRAINED ON CHRIS' HEAD.

Both men hardly dare to breathe as the spotlight INCHES CLOSER AND CLOSER...

CUT TO:

EXT. LUXURY CARYARD - CONTINUOUS

McKenna peers through the window. He can't make out anything.

CUT TO:

INT. LUXURY CARYARD (SHOWROOM) - CONTINUOUS

The spotlight traces a path through the showroom only JUST MISSING the Security Guard's body.

Chris recognises McKenna's face as he peers in.

CUT TO:

EXT. LUXURY CARYARD - CONTINUOUS

McKenna can't see anything. He pauses for a moment. His intuition suggests something is up, but he's not sure...

A beat. He leaves.

INT. LUXURY CARYARD (SHOWROOM) - CONTINUOUS

The torchlight begins a retreat. Relief.

CHRIS  
 It was that cop.

BICKIE  
 You brought him here?

CHRIS  
 I lost him this arvo, I don't know what happened.

BICKIE  
 Fuck, fuck, fuck!

CHRIS  
 We can't torch the place now.  
 There's no way.

Bickie is agitated.

BICKIE  
 We need to dump the body.

CHRIS  
 We?

BICKIE  
 You're in this as much as I am. And  
 since you brought the fuckin'  
 cavalry, you better think of  
 something.

Bickie waves the gun in Chris' face.

Chris puts his hands to his head. Reeling, trying to figure  
 out his next move.

A beat.

CHRIS  
 I know a spot out west. Past the  
 suburbs, in the bush.

EXT. LUXURY CARYARD - NIGHT

At the rear of the caryard Bickie strains to lift the body  
 into the boot of his car.

Chris is doubled over, wretching.

Bickie covers the body with a tarp, slams the boot and throws  
 the keys to Chris.

BICKIE  
 You're drivin'.

INT./EXT. MCKENNA'S CAR - NIGHT

McKenna's phone vibrates - It's Lindsay.

LINDSAY (V.O.)  
 What are you doing?

MCKENNA  
 Working. What about you?

EXT. LINDSAY'S HOME (DECK) - CONTINUOUS

Lindsay smokes a cigarette.

LINDSAY  
I'm worrying.

MCKENNA (V.O.)  
You don't have to do that anymore.

LINDSAY  
Call me a glutton.

INT./EXT. MCKENNA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

A beat. McKenna feels guilty.

LINDSAY (V.O.)  
Are you drinking?

McKenna looks at the coffee in his hand. He considers lying for a second, then decides against it.

MCKENNA  
I am.

LINDSAY (V.O.)  
Neil--

MCKENNA  
Are you smoking?

A smile plays across McKenna's face. A beat.

LINDSAY (V.O.)  
I am.

McKenna chuckles.

EXT. LINDSAY'S HOME (DECK) - CONTINUOUS

LINDSAY  
You drove me to this.

MCKENNA (V.O.)  
I always loved the way you smoked.

LINDSAY  
Bullshit. You hated it. I was your "enabler".

MCKENNA (V.O.)  
That's true. But it was the way you did it. Some serious technique involved.

LINDSAY  
Now I'm positive you're drunk.

INT./EXT. MCKENNA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

MCKENNA  
I'm serious! You'd collar a crook,  
cuff him and load him into the back  
of the van...

EXT. LINDSAY'S HOME (DECK) - CONTINUOUS

MCKENNA (V.O.)  
... Then you'd spark up like you  
were some Hollywood starlet.  
Graceful I'd call it. Full of  
grace...

LINDSAY  
Don't overdo it, Neil.

INT./EXT. MCKENNA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

MCKENNA  
A lost art.

McKenna is lost in the memory. He takes a slug of his coffee.

LINDSAY (V.O.)  
Neil...

Lindsay's voice is full of concern. A loaded beat. McKenna  
takes another slug of his coffee.

MCKENNA  
I know...

A CAR STARTS UP. HEADLIGHTS.

McKenna slumps down in his seat as Bickie's car passes by.

LINDSAY (V.O.)  
Neil, be careful--

MCKENNA  
Shit. I gotta go.

McKenna hangs up and starts the car.

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

Bickie's car speeds down an empty freeway.

INT./EXT. BICKIE'S CAR - NIGHT

In the passenger seat Bickie fires up his pipe and takes a hit. He sits back and lets the smoke rush out.

Chris glances sideways at Bickie. He's cradling the GUN.

For a brief moment Chris is in two minds. He could snatch it now and put an end to this...

... He thinks better of it and turns back to the road ahead.

INT./EXT. BICKIE'S CAR - DAWN

The sun is beginning to rise as Bickie's car takes an exit off the freeway.

INT./EXT. BICKIE'S CAR - DAY

Chris stifles a yawn. A small THUD.

CHRIS  
Did you hear that?

BICKIE  
What?

CHRIS  
A noise. I think I heard a noise.

BICKIE  
You didn't hear shit.

CHRIS  
I swear--

BICKIE  
You need to take a hit of this.

Bickie offers his glass pipe. Chris shakes his head.

Chris blinks hard a few times, trying to shake off the fatigue.

INT./EXT. BICKIE'S CAR/CANTON MAIN ROAD - DAY

Chris slows as they enter the main street of a small country town: Canton. Emergency vehicles line the road.

The early morning light struggles to push through a THICK LAYER OF SMOKE.

BICKIE  
What's goin' on?

CHRIS

Bushfires.

Both men peer out at the DESOLATION on both sides of the road. A once thriving country town has been reduced to rubble.

Bickie's car moves slowly amongst the traffic of rubberneckers and emergency vehicles. It has the languid speed of a funeral procession.

The stench of death and destruction permeates everything.

The GENERAL STORE is a smouldering heap.

A former CHURCH is burnt out.

The local SCHOOL has been reduced to a steel frame and charred school books.

Chris' eye wanders to the former school playground. An old swing set has been completely SCORCHED.

A solitary swing CREAKS in the breeze. It's an eerie sight.

Chris is deeply affected.

Close to the playground a group of FORENSIC OFFICERS are congregated around THREE SHAPES under a tarp.

Two are larger, but Chris focuses on a second, smaller shape. That of a CHILD. A FAMILY. He has to look away.

A FIREFIGHTER waves down Bickie's car at a roadblock. Chris slows the car to a stop. Bickie hides the gun.

BICKIE

Make an excuse.

Chris winds down the window.

FIREFIGHTER

You fellas here for a reason?

CHRIS

What happened?

FIREFIGHTER

It's grim, mate. Blaze ripped through here yesterday. Whole town pretty much gone.

CHRIS

Shit.

FIREFIGHTER

We lost a few. Maybe half a dozen. Still a couple unaccounted for.

Bickie digs his elbow into Chris' side.

CHRIS

We're just heading over the hill  
there to Koorup. Checking in on my  
father-in-law.

FIREFIGHTER

Okay. I can't stop you from pushing  
on. But I gotta warn you fellas, it  
was hell on earth out here  
yesterday and it's only gonna get  
worse today.

CHRIS

We'll be moving quickly. Don't  
worry about that.

FIREFIGHTER

Okay, make sure you do. Be safe.

The Firefighter leaves and Chris slowly negotiates the  
roadblock.

The car passes a group of VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS congregated  
on the side of the road.

Amongst the group, one man turns around to face the road. He  
is LAUGHING. It's a strange, CROOKED SMILE. Out of place  
amongst the devastation --

CHRIS RECOGNISES LEE.

CHRIS

What the fuck?!

BICKIE

What is it?

Chris is shaken. He cranes his neck to look back but can no  
longer see Lee's face.

CHRIS

Nothing. It's nothing.

BICKIE

Keep it together for fucks sake.

Chris turns back to the road - rattled.

EXT. BUSHLAND ROAD - DAY

Bickie's car picks up pace out of town and turns down a small  
dirt road.

EXT. BUSHLAND DIRT ROAD - DAY

Chris pulls Bickie's car to the side of the road. There is heavy bushland either side.

The place is desolate and tinder-dry.

BICKIE  
This is a spot.

Bickie pops the boot and removes the blankets. The body of the Security Guard is face down. Chris feels another surge of nausea and doubles over.

Bickie laughs.

BICKIE (CONT'D)  
Grab the shovel out of the back seat would ya?

CHRIS  
I can't do this.

BICKIE  
Yeah you can.

CHRIS  
Bickie, I can't--

BICKIE SNAPS.

He grabs Chris and drags him to the front of the car. He shoves him against the SCORCHING HOT METAL of the hood.

Chris SCREAMS.

BICKIE  
Let me ask ya... what's the difference between you and me right now?

CHRIS  
I don't know Bickie...

BICKIE  
You don't?

Bickie throws Chris to the ground and DRAWS HIS GUN.

CHRIS  
You got the gun?

BICKIE  
Fuckin' right I've got the gun.

Chris relents.

CHRIS  
Okay, okay...

Bickie TWITCHES. His hands go to his temples.

BICKIE  
Can you not fuck with me right now,  
Chris? I've had a really stressful  
night.

Chris picks himself up. Bickie hands him the shovel. Both men  
walk to the rear of the car --

THE BOOT IS EMPTY.

BICKIE (CONT'D)  
SHIT!

Bickie and Chris spin around, desperately searching for any  
sign of the Security Guard - NOTHING BUT BUSHLAND.

BICKIE (CONT'D)  
He was supposed to be--

CHRIS  
I knew I heard something.

BICKIE  
I killed the guy. I beat the shit  
out of him!

CHRIS  
I *told* you I heard a noise.

BICKIE  
He couldn't have vanished into thin  
air!

Chris points at a spot of blood on the dirt road just ahead  
of some bushland.

CHRIS  
He's in there.

Bickie starts to run into the bush, then STOPS.

BICKIE  
Fuck! He could be anywhere...

Bickie runs around the edge of the bushland maniacally,  
looking for a sign.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSHLAND (HILL) - CONTINUOUS

McKenna is parked high up on a hill, overlooking Chris and Bickie. He watches through binoculars.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSHLAND DIRT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Bickie stops pacing. He's sweating from the rising heat.

He looks up at the BLINDING SUN making it's way into the blue sky.

He stares directly at it for a long beat.

Chris watches Bickie. Concerned. Unsure of his mental state.

Finally, Bickie turns and looks at Chris.

BICKIE

You.

CHRIS

What?

BICKIE

You'll light it. Burn the whole fucking thing down.

CHRIS

What?!

Bickie runs back to the car. He reaches into the back seat and grabs Chris' backpack.

He throws it to Chris.

BICKIE

We've got the makings of it right here.

CHRIS

No way.

BICKIE

He's gone for good if we don't do something.

Bickie points in the direction the Security Guard fled.

BICKIE (CONT'D)

This whole area will go up straight away. He won't stand a fuckin' chance.

Chris looks at the bag and then at the bushland. The HOT NORTHERLY WIND has picked up.

BICKIE (CONT'D)

Come on, you were the best fuckin' Burner I had--

CHRIS

Bickie--

BICKIE

You don't think I know what you've been up to? I know why the cops are on your arse. I own plenty of the cunts. They love a chat.

Bickie walks towards Chris - DRAWS HIS GUN.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSHLAND (HILL) - CONTINUOUS

McKenna lowers the binoculars.

MCKENNA

Shit!

\*

He sets off on foot down the grassy slope.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSHLAND DIRT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

BICKIE

Light it, Chris. I'm not fuckin' around.

CHRIS

I can't do it, Bickie. There's a town down the hill there, the whole place will go up.

BICKIE

You think I give a fuck?! This guy has seen my face.

BICKIE FORCES THE GUN BARREL ON TO CHRIS' TEMPLE.

Chris BREATHEs HARD.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSHLAND (HILL) - CONTINUOUS

McKenna RUNS down the steep slope, still a distance away from Chris and Bickie.

The descent is too steep. McKenna STUMBLES.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSHLAND DIRT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

BICKIE

You're a fuckin' pyro, you'll enjoy this!

Chris relents. He searches through the backpack and emerges with a LIGHTER and the POLY CANNISTER.

BICKIE (CONT'D)

If you don't do it I'll put a bullet in your head and burn the whole fuckin' world down anyway.

The hot northerly wind blows into Chris' face. He looks into the bush. TALL EUCALYPTS BEND IN THE BREEZE. He feels it again - *surge and release*.

BICKIE (CONT'D)

(soothing)

That's it. It'll be a beautiful sight.

CHRIS

Okay.

Bickie smiles. He takes the gun from Chris' temple.

Chris SPARKS THE LIGHTER. It flickers in the wind. In these conditions - A DEADLY WEAPON.

Bickie lowers the gun. Chris watches the flame intently.

He lets his finger come off the lighter. THE FLAME FLICKERS OUT --

CHRIS SLAMS BICKIE IN THE FACE WITH HIS FIST.

BICKIE falls backwards, the gun flies into shrubs.

Chris FLEES into the bushland.

Bickie turns to search for the gun.

EXT. RURAL BUSHLAND - DAY

CHRIS

SPRINTS through the thick bushland. He can't see where he's going. Tree branches whip against his face.

BICKIE

Finds the gun and runs into the bush after Chris.

CHRIS

LEAPS over fallen trees. RUNNING FOR HIS LIFE.

BICKIE

Chases Chris. Gun drawn.

CHRIS

TRIPS OVER. He hits the ground with a THUD and looks back to what tripped him --

THE SECURITY GUARD.

Chris crawls closer for a better look. This time he is well and truly dead.

BICKIE catches up.

He laughs.

BICKIE

Two for one. How about that for  
some fuckin' luck, hey?

BICKIE aims at Chris. Chris has nowhere to go. He prepares for the worst --

BICKIE IS STRUCK OVER THE HEAD.

He falls to the ground - unconscious.

Chris looks up to see - MCKENNA.

McKenna and Chris look at each other. Neither man is quite able to believe it. Unsure as to what comes next.

A long beat. Chris finally breaks the silence.

CHRIS

I know who you want.

INT./EXT. MCKENNA'S CAR/BUSHLAND ROAD - DAY

McKenna sits at the wheel of his stationary car. He watches up ahead as Lindsay cuffs Bickie.

With a well-practiced technique, she forcefully guides the much bigger man into the back of the police car without incident.

Lindsay closes the door and instinctively reaches in her suit jacket for a cigarette. With a quick flourish she lights up and takes a drag.

Fearful she'll feel eyes on her, McKenna slinks down in his seat. He doesn't want to ruin the moment.

After a beat, McKenna winds down the window. He considers calling out to her, but thinks better of it.

Instead, he reaches for his coffee and throws the contents out the window.

EXT. BUSHLAND ROAD - DAY

Chris is seated on the side of the road. He's looking at the horizon.

It's BLOOD RED. There's unrest in the air. Pockets of weather clashing. Fronts meeting head on. Pressure building.

McKenna joins him.

MCKENNA

It's moving quickly.

CHRIS

Yep.

MCKENNA

How do you know this guy?

CHRIS

I spent some time with him.

MCKENNA

At juvenile?

Chris looks at McKenna and then turns back to the horizon. He nods.

CHRIS

He's dangerous.

A FIREFIGHTER joins them, holding a map.

FIREFIGHTER

We've done an inventory, it checks out. Confirmed a volunteer has gone off the grid. Total radio silence. Most likely he's somewhere in here...

The Firefighter circles a map.

FIREFIGHTER (CONT'D)  
These are all ablaze. This area  
here...

(points to a spot on the  
map)  
... looks safe for now.

MCKENNA  
That's where he'll be. Looking for  
a teammate. Any homes?

FIREFIGHTER  
Three. There was a compulsory  
evacuation order given this morning  
so we're hoping they're all clear.

A POLICE OFFICER interrupts.

POLICE OFFICER  
Mason is on the phone for you,  
Detective.

MCKENNA  
(ignoring)  
We have to move soon if we want to  
get this guy before he starts  
linking fire fronts.

FIREFIGHTER  
The area you're talking about, it's  
clear, but if there's a sudden wind  
change--

CHRIS  
Right now is our only chance.  
Otherwise he'll be a ghost.

McKenna looks at Chris.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
I know who he is, what he looks  
like. Take me with you.

McKenna contemplates the offer. He's desperate.

MCKENNA  
It could be hell in there.

CHRIS  
This morning in Canton... I've seen  
what he's capable of.

Chris is unflinching. McKenna reaches a resolution - he grabs  
the map from the Firefighter.

The Police Officer is becoming frustrated.

POLICE OFFICER  
Mason is saying you need to stay  
here, Detective. Something about  
being on suspension...

McKenna rises.

MCKENNA  
(to Chris)  
Come on.

Chris joins him. They move to McKenna's car. The Police  
Officer calls out after him.

POLICE OFFICER  
Fuck Neil, what am I supposed to  
say?!

MCKENNA  
Tell her the suspect was showing  
signs of smoke inhalation. So as a  
concerned citizen I've escorted him  
to the nearest medical facility.

McKenna and Chris jump into the car.

INT./EXT. MCKENNA'S CAR - DAY

McKenna is focused on the road ahead. Chris looks out at the  
passing landscape.

There's an uneasy tension. Former enemies now at close  
quarters.

CHRIS  
So he knows?

MCKENNA  
I had to find you somehow. Don't  
you think he had a right?

Silence from Chris.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)  
Trying to make it up to him after  
all these years... I guess there's  
some kind of nobility in that.

Chris continues to look out the window. McKenna keeps probing  
- searching for a way in.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)  
You were a Burner?

CHRIS  
I was *never* one of them. I used  
them to make money, to survive.

MCKENNA  
And the bushfires?

CHRIS  
I've followed them, but that's all.  
So far I've managed to control it.

\*  
\*

MCKENNA  
That's some tightrope you're  
walking.

Chris can't argue that. McKenna is reflective.

MCKENNA (CONT'D)  
But I guess we're all doing our own  
balancing act in one way or  
another.

Common ground. Chris takes some comfort in that. The walls  
come down a little.

CHRIS  
Sometimes I don't know if I can  
stay on top of it. It might get too  
much.

MCKENNA  
You had a chance today. I saw it.  
He had a gun to your head, you made  
a choice...

CHRIS  
But the urge... it's always there.

MCKENNA  
Shit, we're all fighting our own  
battles, Chris. Waging our own  
private, little wars. What you did  
today, what you're doing now -  
it'll make a difference.

Chris is unsure.

CHRIS  
How do you know that?

MCKENNA  
I'll tell Aido what you're doing. I  
promise. Maybe we can both salvage  
something from this.

A beat. Chris looks out the window.

CHRIS  
I just want what everyone else has  
for a change.

McKenna nods.

\*

MCKENNA  
Get in line.

EXT. RURAL BUSHLAND ROAD - DAY

McKenna's car slows to a stop on a road overlooking a large acreage.

Both men get out and take in the vast area of land below. A criss-cross of paddocks and bushland so far unaffected by fire. Dotted between the fields are THREE HOMESTEADS.

The area is hemmed in by thick plumes of SMOKE that are menacing even from a distance. Fire fronts at all points of the compass.

McKenna and Chris sum up the scene.

CHRIS  
A wind change and we're in trouble here.

McKenna pulls out binoculars.

MCKENNA'S POV - THROUGH BINOCULARS

We sweep along the bushland until we land on a WHITE UTE travelling at high speed along a small, unsealed road.

The ute slows to a stop and a MAN gets out. He's wearing the heavy neon overalls as worn by volunteer firefighters.

BACK TO SCENE

McKenna hands the binoculars to Chris.

MCKENNA  
Could be him. What do you think?

CHRIS' POV - THROUGH BINOCULARS

For a brief moment the Man lifts up his heavy, woolen coat to make an adjustment --

His torso is covered in BURN SCARS.

He turns his head towards the direction of Chris and McKenna - LEE.

CHRIS (O.S.)  
It's him.

BACK TO SCENE

McKenna grabs the binoculars.

MCKENNA'S POV - THROUGH BINOCULARS

Lee, searching for something in the tray, retrieves A TENNIS BALL.

He dips it in Poly, lights it and THROWS THE FIREBALL DEEP INTO THE BUSH.

BACK TO SCENE

McKenna looks to Chris.

MCKENNA  
Fuck. We've gotta move. Now!

INT./EXT. MCKENNA'S CAR - DAY

McKenna's car races down the hill road towards the first homestead.

Chris looks out the window, surveying the conditions.

CHRIS  
It's coming on all sides.

MCKENNA  
This is how he operates.

Chris looks through the binoculars.

CHRIS' POV - THROUGH BINOCULARS

Lee's ute is racing back along a parallel road in the distance.

BACK TO SCENE

Chris turns to McKenna.

CHRIS  
We can cut him off at the first house.

MCKENNA  
If hell doesn't get there first.

EXT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (DRIVEWAY) - DAY

McKenna's car SCREECHES to a halt. Lee's ute is parked nearby, next to a third vehicle.

Both men get out.

The air is HOT and THICK. Chris looks at the treetops. The wind is FIERCE.

CHRIS  
See that?

McKenna looks up and nods.

MCKENNA  
It's changed.

CHRIS  
Worst case scenario.

In the distance, there is only the sound of the rolling THUNDER of a fast approaching FIRESTORM.

McKenna draws his gun.

MCKENNA  
You stay behind me, okay?

Chris nods. The two men move towards the house.

The front door is wide open. Gusts of wind whip up dust clouds. The door BANGS relentlessly with the wind.

INT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (HALLWAY/BEDROOMS) - DAY

McKenna leads Chris down the hallway. As he passes each room, he does a secure check - Empty.

The WIND is now thumping the exterior of the house. Doors and windows RATTLE. The house structure is CREAKING from the strain.

Chris cringes from the MIND-NUMBING sound of multiple smoke alarms RINGING in tortured unison.

The front door BANGS an unpredictable rhythm.

Smoke begins to collect at head height. The house feels COMBUSTIBLE.

MCKENNA  
This is the police!

McKenna's words are lost in the RACKET.

Up ahead A LARGE FIGURE runs across the hallway and into the bathroom.

McKenna immediately gives chase. He KICKS OPEN the bathroom door.

INT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (BATHROOM) - DAY

McKenna LEAPS ONTO THE FIGURE.

CUT TO:

INT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (HALLWAY/KITCHEN) - CONTINUOUS

Smoke is EVERYWHERE. Much thicker now. Chris is disorientated. He drops to the ground to breathe. He can't figure out where McKenna went.

CHRIS  
Detective?!

CUT TO:

INT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (BATHROOM) - CONTINUOUS

The taps are on full blast. The bath and sink are overflowing, FLOODING the bathroom.

The two men grapple, but the wet floor makes it impossible to maintain their footing.

They SLIP and SLIDE, both struggling to get the upper hand.

SMOKE pours in.

MCKENNA  
Police! Don't resist!

CUT TO:

INT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (HALLWAY/KITCHEN) - CONTINUOUS

Chris crawls into the kitchen. From the floor he can see the backyard through large BAY WINDOWS.

From his vantage point he sees A FIGURE RUN THROUGH THE GARDEN.

The top window pane is suddenly SUCKED INWARDS.

It SMASHES on the ground. Then a SECOND PANE, and a THIRD.

Chris ducks his head to avoid the shattering glass.

CUT TO:

INT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (BATHROOM) - CONTINUOUS

McKenna finally gets the upper hand. He flips the man over onto his back --

IT'S NOT LEE.

MCKENNA  
Who are you?!

NEIGHBOUR

I'm the neighbour! There's a family  
in here!

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (BACKYARD) - CONTINUOUS

Chris scrambles out into the backyard. Glass shards have  
ripped into his face like razor wire.

He gets to his feet and does a 360 degree spin to take in his  
surroundings.

The FIRESTORM is approaching relentlessly from seemingly  
every direction.

It's a HELLISH SIGHT. The all-pervading smoke is BLOOD RED.  
Smoke sheltering flames.

To his left and right, large eucalypts EXPLODE into flames.

The only clearing is straight ahead. Chris instinctively runs  
towards the open paddock.

CUT TO:

INT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (BEDROOM) - CONTINUOUS

McKenna and the Neighbour squeeze into the bathtub for  
shelter.

Window panes are SUCKED IN and SMASH on the tiles. SMOKE  
POURS IN.

McKenna looks at the tiled floor.

The water on the surface slowly begins to BUBBLE and BOIL.

McKenna puts his hands on the tiles. It's HOT.

MCKENNA

It's under the house. We need to  
move!

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (BACKYARD) - CONTINUOUS

Chris runs towards the opening when he stops in his tracks --  
LEE.

Twenty metres away.

They LOCK eyes. Lee breaks into a CROOKED SMILE.

He has a LIGHTER in one hand and a POLY CANNISTER in the other.

He flicks the flame ON and OFF. ON and OFF. ON and OFF.

Lee yells something at Chris. The HOWLING WIND is too loud. Chris can't make out what he's saying.

Lee mouths the words again. Over and over. In RHYTHM with the FLICKING OF THE LIGHTER.

LEE

Thanks. For. Comin'.

A SPECTACULAR EMBER SHOWER begins to fall from above.

BRIGHT, BURNING MISSILES attack from the sky. A dangerous swarm of fireflies. Chris falls to the ground, attempting to cover himself.

Lee STANDS TALL and looks up to heavens, impervious to the danger. He laughs at Chris and then turns and runs.

Chris gets to his feet and gives chase.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (BACKYARD) - CONTINUOUS

McKenna emerges from the house with the Neighbour.

The smoke is too thick to see anything. The threat of fire is everywhere.

The EMBER ATTACK strikes with fury. But there's nowhere to go.

NEIGHBOUR

The dam!

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (PADDOCK) - CONTINUOUS

Chris chases Lee. EMBERS fall from the sky like a HAIL OF GUNFIRE --

LEE STOPS IN HIS TRACKS.

Chris stops. Unsure of Lee's next move. He can see smoke building behind Lee. TALL SKYSCRAPERS OF FIRE.

Lee turns to face Chris.

He's cornered by fire. Nowhere to go.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (DAM) - CONTINUOUS

McKenna and the Neighbour scramble towards the dam.

Through the thick haze of smoke THREE FIGURES EMERGE. Each figure is completely CAKED IN MUD. Amid the chaos it's a surreal sight.

McKenna is stunned. Unsure of his sanity. One of the MUD FIGURES waves for him to come forward.

NEIGHBOUR

Get to the water!

McKenna helps the Neighbour into the dam. The family help to lather him in mud to protect from the approaching fire.

FAMILY MEMBER

Cover yourself. It's the only way.

MCKENNA

I can't. I gotta go.

McKenna turns and takes off in the direction of the back paddock.

EXT. RURAL HOMESTEAD (Paddock) - CONTINUOUS

Lee smiles at Chris, egging him on --

CHRIS CHARGES LEE

HE LEAPS AND TACKLES HIM TO THE GROUND.

The Poly cannister falls out of Lee's hand.

The two men wrestle in the dirt - a ferocious battle to gain the upper hand.

Chris gains the ascendancy.

Lee ELBOWS him in the face. Chris falls back.

Lee JUMPS on top, hands around Chris' throat.

He SQUEEZES. Chris gags, struggling to breathe.

Chris looks to his left - the Poly cannister.

Chris desperately reaches for the Poly, he can't quite get there.

Lee squeezes HARDER. Chris is losing the battle.

Lee applies more pressure.

Chris' fingers the Poly cannister.

His hand goes LIMP. Lee squeezes again - Chris gives up the fight --

EVERYTHING GOES STILL.

THE WIND DROPS. A SUDDEN CALM.

The SMOKE and DUST has blotted out the sun - plunging the world into a silent, still TWILIGHT.

Lee releases his grip - spooked by the change in atmosphere.

Chris regains consciousness.

In the distance, he can see the branches of a GIANT EUCALYPTUS TREE hanging idle - *absolute stillness*.

This is his chance.

Chris looks to his left, wills his hand to come alive. He stretches just enough to grab the Poly. In one movement he grabs the cannister --

AND FORCES IT INTO LEE'S MOUTH.

Before Lee can react, Chris squeezes the cannister as hard as he can - LEE'S MOUTH FILLS WITH POLY.

LEE SCREAMS. CHOKING. BURNING. HE FALLS BACK.

Chris scrambles away.

He watches as Lee violently CHOKES on the Poly --

THE WIND PICKS UP.

Debris begins to swirl as the FIRESTORM comes alive on top of them.

Chris watches as the Poly CATCHES ALIGHT and LEE IS ENGULFED IN FLAMES FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

Lee lets out a SILENT SCREAM as he perishes.

The grass around Chris' feet catches alight - Chris prepares himself for the same fiery death.

As it spreads closer to his feet --

THE FLAMES ARE EXTINGUISHED BY AN IMPOSSIBLY STRONG WIND --

A MASSIVE FORCE FROM ABOVE SLAMS INTO CHRIS' HEAD

BLACK

Water everywhere. A BAPTISM FROM THE CLOUDS. All the noise of the world has disappeared...

BLACK

Chris is being DRAGGED along the hot dirt. He's saturated. Vicious winds. The smoke above ripped apart by swirling METAL BLADES...

BLACK

McKenna's face. He's dripping with water. He's yelling at Chris but Chris can't hear anything over the ROAR.

BLACK

Being dragged into muddy water of the dam. Receding in the distance are the whirling blades of a helicopter - ELVIS.

BLACK

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Chris awakens in a hospital bed. Confused. Disorientated.

Bandages over one side of his face. He attempts to adjust his position in the bed and is immediately met with SHOOTING PAIN.

Chris CRIES OUT.

A NURSE comes to his aid from an adjacent room.

NURSE

Glad to see you're back with us.

Chris studies the bandages that run down the right side of his body. The Nurse checks them carefully.

Chris lies back in his bed. Trying to piece together what happened.

The Nurse adjusts the pillows. Trying to get him comfortable.

NURSE (CONT'D)

You've done some serious damage to yourself, love. Lucky to be alive.

Chris breathes deeply. The pain overwhelming.

Gradually, he regains his composure.

CHRIS

Has there been any visitors?

NURSE

You had one this morning.

Chris is buoyed.

NURSE (CONT'D)

He was an older bloke. A Police  
Detective, I believe.

Chris sinks back into his bed. Dismayed.

CHRIS

And that's all?

NURSE

If it makes you feel any better,  
he left a card for you... give me a  
minute.

The Nurse begins to tidy up.

Chris straightens up in his bed so he can see out the window -  
an uninspiring view of the hospital carpark.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Sorry, we're not known for our  
harbour-side views. Here you go...

The Nurse hands Chris the card.

Chris keeps his eyes on the car park. His attention is drawn  
to a newly arrived car.

The doors open and a young couple get out. They're a little  
too far away to see properly.

Chris turns his attention to the card.

CLOSE card - There's only one line scrawled in pen: *Good luck  
with what everyone else has...*

Chris is confused. He knows there's some significance. But  
the memory is fragmented.

He looks out to the carpark.

The couple comes into view - It's AIDO and BROOKE.

They stop for a moment.

Chris watches as they interact.

Aido looks down at his feet - his shoelace has come undone.

With his good arm wrapped in a bandage, Aido is unable to do  
it for himself. Brooke drops down on one knee and ties up his  
shoe. Reminiscent of the mother and child at the hospital in  
the beginning.

\*  
\*  
\*

Brooke finishes, stands up and together they walk towards the \*  
hospital entrance. Once enemies, now united for Chris. \*

Chris smiles - this is what he wanted, what everyone else has \*  
- a family. \*

FADE OUT: