

The Walking Wounded Pilot (2026)

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PROLOGUE

SUPER: PROLOGUE

SUPER: WAGGA WAGGA NSW AUSTRALIA 1986

SUPER: PHIL DOBSON AND LI MA ZHANG

Another oppressive Australian summer is drawing to a close, as the school year begins. LI MA ZHANG, A small boy of five is excited to be starting school. His grandmother, ZUMU, is losing her patience.

ZUMU

Li. Calm down.

Li's voice squeals in excitement as he bounces on the spot.

LI

New friends' day.

ZUMU

Yes. Who knows? You might meet your best friend. Time to go.

Zumu walks with him to the school gate. The song of the cicadas is deafening as they herald the heat of the day. It is already 28 degrees and Zumu sweats as the heat rolls in. They arrive at the school, and Li stops her at the gate.

LI

I'm a big boy now. I'll be fine.

ZUMU

OK. If you're sure.

He starts to walk away but returns to her arms. Li gives her a big cuddle and kiss. He thinks to himself; she is the best Zumu in the entire world. Li darts across the scorching asphalt, the sun beating down on his back as he races toward the school building. Turning a corner, he halts abruptly, heart pounding in his chest. Before him, three boys have trapped a Wiradjuri classmate in a tight circle, their voices sharp with jeers and cruel laughter. One boy shoves the frightened child, bouncing him back and forth between the others as they bombard him with hateful words. Even at five, Li's protective instincts flare—he shouts at them to stop, his voice cutting through the din. In response, one of the bullies grabs Li by his collar, yanking him into the ring.

The taunts shift focus, morphing into a different vocabulary of racism, as the boys now direct their scorn at Li. The cicadas' relentless song seems to rise with the tension, echoing the turmoil unfolding beneath the glaring sky. Li stands his ground, determination flaring in his young eyes as the next shove comes his way. Without pausing to think, he reacts—a swift, forceful kick, surprising in its intensity for someone so small. The bully is knocked backward, landing hard on the ground, his wails rising above the already deafening chorus of cicadas. Just then, a teacher bursts onto the scene, swiftly grabbing Li by the arm and pulling him away from the fray. The hot air is thick with tension, the dusty scent of asphalt rising as they cross the playground toward the office.

Trailing behind them is the Wiradjuri boy, his steps tentative yet purposeful. There's a flicker of something new in his expression—cautious gratitude, tinged with disbelief. In all his time, no one outside his family had ever intervened on his behalf. As he follows, he hears Li's voice, muffled and earnest, echoing through the half-open door as the principal's sharp reprimands fill the air. The teacher gestures wordlessly for the Wiradjuri boy to wait outside, leaving him alone in the corridor, heart pounding, wondering at the bravery of his unexpected ally.

PHIL

Mr. Teacher, sir, he was helping me. Those boys were pushing me and calling me horrible names. This boy came to help me, not to join in.

Li's voice softens, resonating with a gentle but unwavering warmth—a tone that speaks of protectiveness, echoing the fierce loyalty he feels for anyone in distress. He has gone into protection mode. In that moment, the timbre of his words carries the quiet courage of someone much older, a subtle shield extended to both himself and the boy he defended.

LI

It's true, sir. They were pushing him. My Zumu says I should never put up with people hurting people.

The teacher draws a breath.

TEACHER

I see. What are your names?

LI

I am Zhang Li Ma. Or just Li.

PHIL

I am Phillip Dobson. Phil for short.

NORTH

Alright Mr. Dobson and Mr. Zhang, I'll let you off with a warning, but for future reference, no fighting.

PHIL

Please tell the boys not to be mean.

He looks through his enrolment forms and can't find either of them on it.

NORTH

Can you boys just step outside and wait on the bench? Your teacher will come for you.

PHIL/LI

Yes Sir.

They settle onto the bench, the hard wood cool beneath them, legs swinging freely as they wait. Around them, the corridor hums with distant footsteps and muffled voices, but for a moment, the two boys share a quiet pause—a space carved out from the chaos of the playground, where solidarity feels almost like a secret pact.

PHIL

Thank you for your help Mr. Zhang.

LI

You're Welcome, Mr. Dobson. Don't tell the teacher, but I've been studying martial arts since I was 3 years old. I got us covered. If it happens again, I'll simply make him cry again.

PHIL

Are you a ninja?

LI

You're funny.

Phil reaches over and clasps Li's hand in a friendly shake, their palms small and warm in the hush of the corridor. They sit side by side, smiles growing, a quiet camaraderie blooming between them as sunlight filters in dusty rays across the polished floor.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: Who's looking after the Children?

FADE IN:

SUPER: Wagga Wagga NSW Australia 1999.

INT. DOBSON FAMILY HOME - AFTERNOON

Phil Dobson, eighteen years old and worn thin by the grind of a day's labour, comes home as dusk presses against the windows. The house is heavy with silence, broken only by the muffled hum of television leaking from the lounge room. He pauses in the hallway, dropping his battered backpack at the door, and calls out, his voice uncertain in the hush.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM - AFTERNOON

He can hear a GAME SHOW on the television in the lounge room. His gaze flickering toward the dimly lit stairs, searching for any sign of movement or familiar reply.

PHIL

Mum?

MOTHER (O.S)

I'm just upstairs. There's a letter from the NSW Police for you on the kitchen bench.

PHIL

Cool.

Phil steps quietly into the kitchen, his heart thumping in his chest. The letter waits for him on the cool, laminate bench, its official crest stark against the white envelope. With trembling fingers, he tears it open, the paper crackling in the stillness. He unfolds the letter, eyes darting hungrily across each line as he tries to make sense of the formal words printed in neat black ink. "Shit! Shit! Shit!"

PHIL (CONT'D)

Shit! Shit! Shit!

MOTHER (O.S)

Is everything O.K?

PHIL

I've been accepted into the cops.
I'm going over to Li's.

EXT. DOBSON FAMILY HOME - AFTERNOON

Phil bolts across the street to Li's house, his heart hammering so hard it blurs the world at the edges. He doesn't notice the dull thud, or the way his mother's feet dangle in silent mid-air above the stairwell, a toppled chair nearby and a faint, acrid scent rising in the hallway. On the narrow table sits a note—his name spelled out with careful strokes, waiting for eyes that won't see it in time. Phil bursts through Li's front door without so much as a knock, feet pounding the hallway in a blur of panic and adrenaline. He stumbles into Li's bedroom, breathless, sweat glistening on his brow. Li sits hunched on the edge of his bed, pale beneath the harsh overhead light, an envelope gripped tightly in trembling hands. His wide-eyed stare betrays a storm of dread and anticipation, as if the paper itself holds the power to shape their futures.

INT. LI'S CHILDHOOD HOME - AFTERNOON

Phil runs through Li's front door without knocking. Phil runs into Li's bedroom. Li is sitting on his bed with an envelope in his hand. He has a look of complete fear on his face.

PHIL

Open it.

Li passes the envelope to Phil, hands trembling slightly as anticipation and dread swirl between them. Phil inhales, feeling the weight of the moment press on his chest, then carefully tears open the envelope and smooths out the letter. His voice is unsteady but clear as he begins to read: "Dear Mister Zhang, it is with deep regret that we inform your application to join the NSW Police Force has been successful." The words hang in the air, sharp and incredulous, echoing in the cramped bedroom brightened only by a flickering desk lamp and the anxious thrum of their hearts.

LI

Damn it. I wanted it so bad. --
Wait. What did you say?

He arches an eyebrow at Phil, a flicker of dry humour crossing his face. The gesture, subtle but loaded, says more than words: disbelief mingled with a reluctant admiration, as if trying to mask the nervous energy that crackles between them in this charged moment.

PHIL

We regret to inform you that you
have been accepted...

Li snatches the letter from Phil's hand, his eyes darting over the lines as a flush of emotion rushes beneath his skin.

LI
(scanning the letter)
Bastard.

He gives Phil a light smack to the side of the head, but there's a crooked smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

LI (CONT'D)
I hate you sometimes.

Phil can't control his excitement any longer.

PHIL
We both got in!

The boys embrace, arms tight, thumping each other's backs in an explosive outburst of joy and nervous energy. Phil's mobile phone suddenly buzzes in his pocket, the harsh sound cutting through the fizz of adrenaline. He glances at the screen, confusion pinching his brow.

PHIL (CONT'D)
Why is Aunty Mel ringing me?

EXT. DOBSON HOME FRONT PORCH - EVENING

Rain patters softly on the tin roof as Phil and Li sit shoulder to shoulder on the front veranda, the world blurring beyond the haze of water and porch light. Dampness creeps up their jeans and seeps beneath the blanket draped over Phil's trembling shoulders. Phil clutches his mother's note, the paper flimsy and damp between his fingers, knuckles white as the gravity of loss presses down. The wail of sirens fades into the distance; two paramedics manoeuvre a stretcher through the shadows, the zipped body bag stark and final beneath their gloved hands.

PHIL
I can't read this.

LI
Do you want me to read it?

Li shifts beside him, his own face drawn tight with worry and helplessness, gentle as a hush in the rain.

PHIL
I don't know. I just don't know.

LI

O.K. When you're ready. I gotta go home. Ring if you need me. 3am if necessary.

Phil reaches for Li's hand. Li squeezes his arm, grounding them both in the moment's ache.

PHIL

Love ya, bro.

LI

Love you too.

Li says, quietly, before rising and disappearing into the soft rain, leaving Phil alone with the letter, the echo of footsteps, and the steady, sorrowful pulse of the night.

INT. PHIL'S BEDROOM 2AM

A digital clock blinks over to 2:00 AM, casting a faint, neon-blue glow across the cluttered room. Phil's bedside lamp flickers on, its soft, amber light pooling over the familiar mess—dog-eared books, a mug with a cold tea ring, the envelope propped against the lamp's base. Phil's fingers shake as he lifts it, the paper crackling in the stillness. Outside, rain drums a slow rhythm on the darkened glass

Li lies awake, staring at the lazy swirl of water on his windowpane. The flick of Phil's lamp catches his eye across the street, a beacon in the sodden silence. A vibration. He sends Phil a message.

SUPER: "DO YOU WANT ME TO COME OVER?"

Phil replies.

SUPER: "YES."

Li, still in pyjamas, slips out of bed and into his coat, footsteps muffled on the hallway carpet.

Phil sits hunched at the edge of his mattress, letter open in his lap, when Li pushes open the door. Their eyes meet—no words needed. Li steps inside, the scent of rain clinging to his hair and jacket.

PHIL

I was just about to read the note from Mum.

Li sits on Phil's bed. Phil shuffles aside, making room for Li in the circle of lamplight and shadow.

LI

Move over.

Li climbs onto Phil's bed beside him and Phil notices Li is getting an erection. He pokes it with the note.

PHIL

What's that?

Li blushes.

LI

Please ignore it. It's embarrassing. It just happens sometimes.

Phil grabs a cushion from the floor beside his bed.

PHIL

Cover it with this. You're a bit old for spontaneous erections, aren't you? I haven't done that for years.

LI

Can we please move on?

Phil puts his arm around Li's shoulders.

PHIL

Sorry. I didn't mean to embarrass you.

INSERT - THE LETTER

Phil opens the note. He reads it aloud.

"My dear boy. I kept certain truths from you, believing I could shield you from the darkness of my past. But after your grandfather's death last month, the weight of these secrets became impossible to bear. There's no gentle way to share this: for years, I was abused by Pa. I endured it to shield your Aunt Mel, my little sister. Yet after Pa was gone, Mel told me she suffered the same. I carried the pain thinking I was protecting her, and it was all for nothing. Now, I'm overcome by anger and regret and guilt. I want you to know that I love you, and I wish I could have done more. Sometimes parents fail, despite their best intentions. Tell Li that I love him as family. Stand beside each other."

Phil's hands clench the note tightly before he crumples it and tosses it across the room, grief and frustration etched in every motion. "Damn it!" he mutters, voice raw.

He presses his palms to his eyes, chest heaving. "What does she mean, 'she wishes she did more for me'?" His words are thick with confusion and hurt.

Phil and Li lay side by side in the quiet, the heavy weight of the letter settling between them. Shadows flickered across the ceiling as night deepened, their breaths soft in the dark. Neither found words to dispel the ache of revelation, so they let silence cradle them, comfort and tension mingling in equal measure. Slowly, weariness overtook them, and they drifted into uneasy sleep.

Phil screws the note up and throws it across the room. Distraught.

PHIL

Shit! What does 'she wishes she did more for me' mean?

Li's heart breaks for his friend.

LI

I don't know.

Phil and Li lay side by side in the quiet, the heavy weight of the letter settling between them. Shadows flickered across the ceiling as night deepened, their breaths soft in the dark. Neither found words to dispel the ache of revelation, so they let silence cradle them, comfort and tension mingling in equal measure. Slowly, weariness overtook them, and they drifted into uneasy sleep.

For Phil, dreams had often carried images of Li, but never had they shared such physical closeness. Now, with the gentle warmth of Li's body only inches away, his subconscious wandered further, kindling an urgent longing that surprised him. By morning, Phil awoke disoriented, sheets tangled, heart pounding from a vivid, intimate dream of Li that left him unsettled, embarrassed, and confused by the intensity of his own feelings.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: N.S.W POLICE ACADEMY GOULBURN - PARADE GROUND 2000

The graduation parade is concluding. They throw their hats into the air and cheer. The Police Recruits are dismissed. Phil and Li, now 19, are among the graduates. They have joined Li's family. Li hugs Zumu.

LI

Thank you Zumu for coming.

Zumu expresses her pride for both boys. She can't hold in her emotions.

ZUMU

I am so proud of you. I wouldn't
miss this for the world. Phillip, I
am proud of you, too.

As the last echoes of the ceremony drifted across the parade ground, the crisp afternoon sun caught on the polished badges of a hundred new uniforms. The crowd erupted as the recruits flung their hats skyward, laughter and cheers filling the open air with the electric promise of a new beginning. Phil and Li, just eighteen, stood shoulder to shoulder amid the jubilant chaos, both flushed with pride and the weight of all that had brought them to this moment.

Nearby, Li's family gathered—a small cluster of warmth and colour in the sea of blue. Zumu, her silver hair caught in a gentle breeze, opened her arms wide as Li rushed to embrace her.

Phil thanks her in mandarin.

PHIL

Zumu. *Xiexie Nin.*

SUPER: THANK YOU

Phil's older brother Terry emerged from the crowd, his wife Sharyn beside him cradling their cherubic baby, Sammy. Laughter danced in the air as hugs and congratulations were exchanged, the warmth of family wrapping around Phil like a favourite jumper. Bending down, Phil gently tickled Sammy's tiny foot; the baby's delighted giggle rang out, a bright note in the afternoon. Li soon joined, and, to Phil's mock dismay, Sammy's eyes sparkled with recognition, his arms reaching for Li, the chosen "uncle."

Li pressed a gentle kiss to Sammy's forehead, shooting Phil a playful, triumphant grin.

LI

Sorry Uncle Phil, I'm still the
favourite.

The affection in his voice undeniable. Phil blows Li a raspberry. Fellow graduates Jenny Hill and Gavin Walters arrive. There are more congratulations, hugs and hand shaking. Gavin Walters introduces them to Davina Jacoby.

WALTERS

Since we're all going to the same place, let me introduce Davina Jacoby, my brother Keith's wife. Davina, a newly graduated social worker, is also returning home to Newcastle. We will probably come across her from time to time as she will work in close collaboration with the police.

Hill, ever the mischief-maker, seized the moment with a sly grin.

HILL

Please to meet you, Davina. Congrats on the graduation and the wedding.

(She addresses Phil and Li.)

See you two, it's not that hard.

Phil rolled his eyes, but couldn't quite hide his smile.

PHIL

For the fifty millionth time, we're not a couple.

His voice coloured with both exasperation and good humour.

Zumu's eyes sparkled mischievously as she leaned in, her words ringing out above the din.

ZUMU

Phil, if you ever decide you want to marry my grandson, you have my wholehearted blessing

A flush crept up Phil's neck, and he shot Li a pleading look, feeling well and truly cornered by the good-natured teasing.

PHIL

Li, a little help here.

Li laughs.

LI

You're doing just fine.

Detective Dale Pettigrew, 32, wove his way through the crowd with the quiet assurance of someone well-accustomed to both chaos and ceremony. His handshake was firm, each greeting accompanied by a quick, appraising glance.

PETTIGREW

Welcome to the team. I'm afraid I
bring some unwelcome news. Hill,
your orders have changed. You're
being sent to Waratah, not
Newcastle.

Hill let out an exaggerated sigh, rolling her eyes with
theatrical resignation.

HILL

That's OK Sir. I've more than had
enough of this terrible Beatles
tribute band. I'll be glad to be
rid of them.

PETTIGREW

Congratulations.

With a brisk nod, Pettigrew melted back into the throng, his
presence lingering like the echo of a bell.

The moment the detective disappeared, the girls wrapped each
other in a tight embrace, laughter bubbling up between them
as the boys swept in for a group hug, arms flung carelessly
around shoulders, drawing everyone close in a tangle of
warmth and shared triumph. Davina found herself in a quiet
pocket of the group beside Li, who offered her an earnest
smile.

LI

So, Davina. How long have you and
Keith been together?

DAVINA

Around six years. We connected
instantly when we met at school.
Haven't left each other's sides
since that day.

Hill, never one to miss an opportunity for mischief, leaned
in with a sly grin, her gaze locking on Phil.

HILL

That's so sweet. I guess when you
know, you know. Never let it slip
away, I always say.

The air shimmered with the easy camaraderie of friends old
and new, each word and gesture weaving another thread into
the tapestry of the day's celebration.

Sharyn pressed Sammy gently into Dobson's waiting arms,
urgency etched across her features.

SHARYN

Gotta pee.

Sharyn walks away. Sammy, perched comfortably in his uncle's embrace, offered Li a delighted squeal, eyes bright with instant recognition.

HILL

He knows.

Li, cheeks creased with warmth, extended his hands toward the little one.

LI

Gimme.

Dobson obliged, carefully transferring Sammy to Li. Instantly, Sammy erupted into a cascade of cheerful babble, tiny hands reaching for Li's face as if eager to continue their private conversation, his joy infectious amid the hum of celebration.

END FLASHBACK START MAIN STORY

SUPER: Early 2017

INT. ST MAGDALENE'S SCHOOL OFFICE - MORNING

Doreen Carter, a woman in her early forties, stands barely above five foot, her small frame blending into the dim confines of the St Magdalene's School Office. Her demeanour is mild, almost self-effacing—an assistant to Father Johnson, she moves with the quiet efficiency of someone accustomed to being overlooked. Yet beneath her unassuming exterior lies a darker self.

DOREEN

Why isn't he picking up?

Clutching a rattling ring of keys, she locks the office door behind her, every click echoing in the lonely corridor of St Magdalene's. The sharp scent of rain on hot pavement follows her as she hurries across the empty campus, her small figure dwarfed by the looming silhouette of the presbytery. With trembling fingers, she selects the right key, its brass edges worn smooth, and slips it into the lock. The door groans open on protesting hinges, releasing a breath of stale air tinged with candle wax and old dust.

Inside, the silence is oppressive, thick as velvet. Pale morning light filters through grimy windows, casting fractured shadows on the polished floorboards.

Her footsteps are muffled as she moves from the entrance hall to the lounge. There, chaos arrests her: shards of glass glitter like ice across the rug, the coffee table shattered, and beside it, the fire poker lies discarded and darkly stained.

INT. FATHER JOHNSON'S RESIDENCE - MORNING

Entering Father Johnson's home, she finds him lying on the floor. His glass coffee table is in pieces and a discarded poker from the fire lies in the shattered glass.

DOREEN

Father? Are you alright?

He has suffered a blow to the side of his head and his eye socket smashed. She stifles her scream as she checks his pulse and breathing. Rigor mortis has set in. She notices that the father's pants are open and his genitals are visible.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM - MORNING

She retrieves her mobile from her pocket and makes a call to the Bishop of the Diocese, BISHOP BACH. A tremor runs through Doreen's hand as she finally connects with the Bishop. His voice is terse, coldly efficient.

INTERCUT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

DOREEN

Bishop, it's Doreen Carter. Father hasn't shown up at school, so I came to check his residence... Someone's attacked him, Bishop. The fire poker—there's blood, and he's gone. The boys are nowhere to be seen.

Her composure finally crumbles, and she dissolves into muffled sobs, the phone slick in her palm.

BACH

I am in Maitland. I'll come down straight away. Just to be on the safe side, remove all traces of the boys, and only then call the police.

DOREEN

Yes Bishop.

She swallows hard, her voice barely more than a thread.

He terminates the call.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

She walks the central hallway to the kitchen, opens a drawer and removes several large garbage bags. She leaves her mobile on the counter.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM - MORNING

With a breath drawn taut with anxiety, she moves to the second bedroom, the door creaking open to reveal a jumble of children's clothes—small shirts patterned with faded cartoon animals, socks rolled into balls, a pair of sneakers with broken laces. She scoops handfuls of fabric into the first bag, the sound of rustling plastic oddly loud in the stillness, then drops the heavy sack just outside the doorway.

INT. THIRD BEDROOM - MORNING

Her movements are mechanical as she enters the third bedroom, repeating the ritual: underwear, T-shirts, a navy school jumper, all vanishing into the bag's dark maw. She drags both bulging sacks to the front door, the friction of plastic against carpet leaving faint, wavering tracks.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Doreen collects the bags together at the front door. She has a quick walk around making sure all the drawers are closed, and no sign remains of the children. Beneath the edge of the shattered coffee table, she spies a teddy bear, she lifts it gently, as if touching something sacred, and lays it atop the heap of bags now crowded in the boot of her small car. Rain spatters against the windscreen, filling the silence with its restless percussion.

EXT. JOHNSON'S RESIDENCE - MORNING

Lingering in the quiet kitchen, Doreen stands motionless for a moment, her hand trembling above her mobile before she finally gathers enough courage to pick it up. The emptiness of the house seems to press in from every shadowed hallway and silent corner, the oppressive hush broken only by the faint ticking of an unseen clock.

Her breath comes shallow and fast, heart pounding so fiercely it feels as though it echoes in the linoleum beneath her feet.

INT. JOHNSON'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Doreen, her nerves frayed to the breaking point, forces herself to call emergency services. Summoning every ounce of poise—honed from years treading theatre boards at Naida—she slips into the role of bereaved confidante. Her voice wavers with authentic distress.

INTERCUT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

DOREEN

I've just come to check on Father.
He's lying here on the floor... his
body is cold and stiff.

The anguish in her words gives way to wracking sobs. On the other end, the operator remains patient and soothing, their tone a gentle tether. Take your time. Can you tell me the address when you're ready?

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Take your time. Can you tell me the
address when you're ready?

She wipes away her tears and takes a deep breath.

DOREEN

I'm at the residence attached to
St. Mary Magdalene's church and
school.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Thank you, I have your location.
Please remain where you are. The
police and ambulance are on their
way.

The world narrows to the echo of her own heartbeat and the ceaseless drip of rain outside, each moment stretching between her and the approaching sirens.

She retrieves a sheet from the hallway linen press to cover his body and dignity.

EXT. JOHNSON'S RESIDENCE - DAY - LATER

Rain still traces ghostly rivers down the windscreen as two police vehicles—one marked, one unmarked—stand sentinel at the kerb, their flashing lights flickering over the slick bitumen. An ambulance idles nearby, its presence a silent promise of both help and aftermath. Detective Senior Sergeant Phil Dobson emerges from the unmarked sedan, his movements crisp, his posture straight-backed. Every detail of his appearance is meticulous: sharply pressed charcoal suit, polished shoes, a tie knotted with exacting precision. His hair is sculpted immaculately—he is a man for whom discipline and order are tools of both trade and self-presentation.

At his side is Detective Senior Sergeant Li Zhang, known on the force as Turbo. Athletic and broad-shouldered, Turbo carries himself with an unstudied confidence, each step betraying the ease of someone accustomed to both gym routines and high-stakes interviews. His features are clean-cut, every line of his navy suit suggesting careful attention. Together, they stride through the chill morning air, shoes crunching faintly on the wet gravel, until they join Detective Constable Gavin Walters waiting beneath the shelter of the verandah, rain stippling the concrete around their feet.

TURBO

Morning Gav.

Walters, rain still glistening on his jacket, gestures for them to draw closer beneath the veranda's meagre shelter.

WALTERS

Turbo. -- We got a strange one here. Nobody saw or heard anything. Our victim, one FATHER WILLIAM JOHNSON is dead on the lounge room floor.

Dobson's brow furrows, a flicker of recognition in his eyes as he murmurs.

DOBSON

Johnson... That name rings a bell.

Nearby, the air hangs heavy with the scent of damp earth and old eucalyptus, mingling with the faint metallic tang that always seems to accompany tragedy. Onlookers cluster at the boundary of police tape, their faces pale and stricken in the morning light.

Walters leads Dobson and Turbo up the creaking steps, their shoes marking trails of water across the veranda.

They pass Doreen Carter, now seated stiffly at the outdoor table, knuckles white around a damp tissue, her gaze fixed somewhere far beyond the present moment. Walters leans in, his voice softened by professionalism.

WALTERS

(To Doreen)

We will be with you shortly.

INT. JOHNSON'S LOUNGE ROOM - day

Walters, Dobson, and Turbo step inside, the hush of the lounge broken only by the soft drip of rain from their coats and the faint crackle of cooling embers. The once-orderly room now bears the scars of chaos: a blackened scorch mark mars the carpet, and soot fans out along the hearth like the shadow of some vanished bird. The acrid scent of smoke clings to the air, mingling with the unmistakable tang of blood. At the centre of it all, the shrouded body lies on the faded rug—the sheet drawn taut over limbs stilled by violence.

WALTERS (CONT'D)

It was called in by Doreen Carter, his personal assistant. Someone has hammered him in the head with a poker from the fire.

Walters lifts the corner of the sheet to show them the father's injuries. Turbo is a little squeamish. He touches Dobson's shoulder.

Turbo rests a steady hand on Dobson's shoulder, a silent gesture of support before he squares his own shoulders and steps back into the rain-washed morning.

TURBO

I'll talk to Ms Carter.

He approaches Doreen Carter, who sits rigidly at the weathered outdoor table, fingers clenched around a tissue now sodden with worry. Eucalyptus-laden air swirls between them, mingling with the distant wail of a siren. Turbo lowers himself onto the bench opposite her, his presence grounded and patient.

EXT. JOHNSON'S RESIDENCE PORCH - DAY

TURBO

Take your time—tell me everything that happened this morning, from the first moment you suspected something was wrong.

DOREEN

Father is never late to work. When the clock edged past his usual hour, I felt an unease settle in my chest. I tried his mobile—once, twice, three times—but each attempt greeted me with silence. Dread blooming, I fetched the spare key from the church office, the cold metal heavy in my palm, and hurried over. The house felt wrong from the moment I arrived—quiet, as if holding its breath. I let myself in, and there he was, just lying there. I called emergency services straight away, my hands barely steady enough to dial.

TURBO

Did you touch anything?

DOREEN

I unlocked the door and stepped inside, only to find him sprawled there, so still it seemed the world had stopped. The sight was unbearable—when you lift the sheet, you'll understand why I had to cover him. My hands were shaking so badly I could barely dial for help, but I called emergency services straight away.

Turbo jots a quick note, the scratch of pen on paper loud in the late morning hush.

TURBO

Did you see anyone hanging around?

DOREEN

No.

TURBO

Have you noticed anything strange or unusual in the days or weeks leading up to this?

DOREEN

No.

TURBO

Is there anyone you can think of
who might want to harm Father
Johnson? Anyone who's made threats,
or seemed angry with him?

DOREEN

No. Everybody loves Father Johnson.

Turbo senses the cadence of a rehearsed answer in Doreen's tone, her words shrouded in deliberate vagueness. His gaze drifts past her, settling on a figure hovering at the periphery—a teenager, gaunt and restless, swathed in a faded Manchester United hoodie. The youth's sunglasses reflect the steadily growing crowd, a mosaic of curious neighbours and onlookers edging closer, voices swelling in nervous anticipation. The air thickens with the murmur of speculation as local news vans roll up, their satellite dishes gleaming, reporters bustling to set up amidst the controlled chaos.

In the midst of this gathering circus, Walters and Dobson emerge into the blinding midday sun, the sharp light forcing them to shield their eyes. Dobson's attention catches on the bishop, now deep in conversation with a determined journalist who jots frantic notes, every gesture exuding urgency. The scene outside the residence pulses with tension—grief and curiosity intertwining, while the hush inside is soon to be broken by the medical examiner's arrival.

The medical examiner, Olly Reinhardt, arrives with the unhurried confidence of someone used to chaos. Despite her small frame, she commands attention, swaggering out of her towering Dodge Ram that now straddles half the kerb and audaciously blocks the ambulance. Her boots strike the sun-scorched pavement with a purposeful rhythm as she shoulders her bag, eyes scanning the gathering crowd with clinical detachment. Dobson intercepts her at the gate, arching an eyebrow.

DOBSON

Morning, Olly. Still terrorising
the streets with your monster
truck?

Olly flashes a grin, sunlight glinting off her aviators.

OLLY

Morning Phil. Morning, Phil. Just
bringing a little piece of home
with me. Besides, when folks see
that beast in their rearview
mirror, they move over—fast. Kinda
like my own siren. So, what are we
looking at?

Olly hates long winded introductions, so Dobson gives her the bare bones description.

PHIL

Father Johnson. Found by his
assistant. Head wound. Come and see
me when you're finished.

Olly and her team enter the residence.

INT. FATHER JOHNSON'S RESIDENCE - DAY

OLLY

O.K Team. The usual plan of
attack.

With meticulous care, a forensic technician sets down numbered evidence markers, transforming the chaotic scene into a tableau of controlled observation. The crisp snap of latex gloves echoes as the sheet is pulled back, unveiling the sombre repose of Father Johnson's body. Every detail—limp hand, blood-matted hair, the unnatural stillness—registers beneath the harsh glare of the work lights. Nearby, an evidence bag is opened, and the fire poker is sealed away, its surface glinting dully despite the gravity of its role. Olly, ever the eccentric medical examiner, continues her tradition of conversing with the deceased—a quirk that never fails to amuse Dobson, who, for fear of letting out an irreverent laugh, wisely keeps his distance from the unfolding ritual. Olly crouched beside the late priest, her tone casual yet oddly respectful. She offered a faint grin, talking to the body as if it might answer, then nodded for her team to move in.

OLLY (CONT'D)

Father Johnson, help me out
here—what story are you hiding?

She pressed a gloved hand to his wrist, checking his temperature, then glanced up at her team.

OLLY (CONT'D)

Alright, looks like we're at about
twelve hours. Hope you'll forgive
us for what's next, but we need a
quick swab—you know, for science.

With gloved precision, a member of Olly's team steps forward and carefully collects a swab from Father Johnson's genitals, documenting the process with clinical detachment. The sterile cotton tip hovers for a moment before being sealed in a labelled evidence tube—a small, necessary indignity in the pursuit of answers.

OLLY (CONT'D)
Sorry about that, but I'm sure it
didn't hurt a bit. Nails please.

She nods to her tech with an easy confidence, her accent clipped and casual, like she's talking shop in a diner booth rather than over a body bag. The air hums with the quiet efficiency of folks who've done this a hundred times—boots shifting on polished floorboards, the snap of latex, every move matter-of-fact but never careless.

EXT. JOHNSON'S RESIDENCE PORCH - DAY

Meanwhile, Turbo continues his interview with Doreen Carter, his tone measured but insistent.

TURBO
I would like to take your
fingerprints, if that's OK

Doreen hesitates, confusion flickering across her face.

DOREEN
Why do you need them?

TURBO
Just routine. We'll be dusting the
house for prints, and having yours
on record means we won't waste time
chasing down unknowns that turn out
to be yours.

He offers a faint, professional smile, then leans into the doorway, catching the attention of a forensics team member with a crisp, purposeful wave. The late-morning sun casts a pale light across the porch as the technician approaches, carrying a compact kit and exuding quiet competence. Turbo steps aside, boots scuffing softly on the weathered boards, creating a respectful distance for the procedure. The team member directs their attention towards Olly. Following her nod, the team member goes outside with Turbo.

TURBO (CONT'D)
Can you take Ms Carter's
fingerprints please?

Turbo steps back, allowing the forensics technician to take centre stage as they methodically roll each of Doreen's fingers across the ink pad—black lines etching her identity into bureaucracy. The soft rasp of latex, the faint chemical tang of the kit, and the far-off drone of cicadas create a moment of meticulous calm amid chaos.

Turbo glances toward the gutter, where a local youth lingers, eyes wide with uncertain fascination. Their gazes meet; the youth startles, ducking out of sight behind a battered mailbox as if the simple act of being noticed might entangle them in the unfolding drama. Once her prints are secured, Turbo offers Doreen a crisp business card, the edge glinting in the sunlight. "If you need us, you'll find me at this number," he says, his voice low and steady, the card a small anchor in the churn of uncertainty.

TURBO (CONT'D)

I think that's all for now.

DOREEN

If you need to talk to me again,
you can always contact me through
the church or school offices.

He hands her his business card.

TURBO

Thank you.

EXT. JOHNSON RESIDENCE - DAY

The bishop concludes his terse exchange with the reporter, his brow furrowed, and jaw set with steely resolve. Without hesitation, he crosses beneath the fluttering police tape and strides directly toward Dobson, his cassock sweeping the dew-damp grass.

DOBSON

Sir, you can't enter my crime
scene.

BISHOP

I am the bishop of this diocese. I
will inspect the body and the scene
myself.

Dobson's voice belies his annoyance.

DOBSON

We can't say for sure it was
murder. At this point, it's a
burglary gone wrong.

Bach becomes irritated.

BACH

My priest is dead in his own home
with a poker stuck in his head.
Sounds conclusive to me.

The bishop leans forward and presses his finger against Dobson's chest. Turbo knows this will only antagonize Dobson.

TURBO
Phil, breathe.

Turbo steps between them and offers Bach his hand.

TURBO (CONT'D)
Bishop. Senior Detective Zhang.
Call me Turbo.

Bishop Bach's irritation is showing.

BACH
I would like to see the body.

TURBO
The medical examiner is with him.
Trust me, you don't want to get in
her way while she's working—she'll
run you out of here faster than you
can blink.

As the tension lingers, Turbo's sharp gaze catches a flicker of motion: the boy in Man U hoodie lingers at the edge of the street. Before Turbo can call out, the youth slips away.

Meanwhile, the ambulance crew moves with quiet efficiency, solemnly lifting Father Johnson's body—now shrouded in a white sheet—and carrying it toward the waiting ambulance. The wheels crunch softly across the damp grass, leaving faint tracks that quickly begin to fade in the strengthening sunlight.

BACH
Senior Detective Zhang, make sure
you call me when the autopsy is
finished. I'll expect this wrapped
up quickly.

TURBO
We'll do our best.

BACH
Make sure you do.

Turbo steps in, firmly positioning himself as a barrier between Bishop Bach and Dobson, his posture radiating calm authority. With the bishop's glare still searing the air behind him, Dobson turns away, jaw clenched. Under his breath, he mutters, voice low and rough as gravel,

DOBSON

Arsehole.

Olly walks over to Dobson.

OLLY

OK, boys. We're finished here. Time of death was around 10:00 PM last night. I have swabbed his penis. We may find anomalous DNA. I'll have the prints passed along and get straight into the autopsy. I'll be in touch.

DOBSON

Thanks Olly.

As Olly and her team pack up the last of their equipment and depart, the heavy hum of their vehicle fades into the morning. Just then, a marked police car pulls up, and out steps Detective Constable Jenny Hill a striking figure, her presence at once cool and commanding. With her willowy frame, vivid red hair, and the sharp features of a young Nicole Kidman, she strides toward the group with a confident air that commands attention. Her eyes, quick and discerning, take in the tense scene as she joins Dobson and Turbo, her sassy wit just visible beneath a professional veneer. Walters arrives alongside her, the two seamlessly folding into the investigation's rhythm, ready to take on whatever the day throws their way. Dobson surveys the street, its lawns still damp with morning dew, sunlight crawling across rooftops and glimmering in scattered puddles. He hands out instructions with crisp authority.

DOBSON (CONT'D)

Let's tap on a few doors and talk to a few more neighbors. Turbo, I guess we better talk to the journo.

Turbo smirks, the edge of a weary smile ghosting his lips.

TURBO

It's moments like this I'm happy to yield to your seniority.

DOBSON

Chicken.

Dobson and Turbo walk over to speak with the journalist. The reporter starts with a rapid-fire interview.

REPORTER

Is it true the victim is the parish priest?

DOBSON

I cannot comment on any details.
The victim will need to be formerly identified and relatives notified.

REPORTER

The Bishop told me one of his priests has been murdered.

Dobson rolls his eyes.

DOBSON

I will not confirm or deny anything said outside of this investigation.

Something in the reporter's question chills Dobson, a flicker of unease running beneath his steady composure. For an instant, his jaw tightens and his posture stiffens, as if a shadow has crossed the morning's rising light.

REPORTER

Is it true there were children living with him? Is it true the children have gone missing?

Dobson's fingers tap an unconscious rhythm against his thigh, the reporter's questions needling at his composure. Turbo senses the shift and intercepts, voice cool and measured.

TURBO

We have found no evidence of children living in the residence. As these things are part of an ongoing investigation, there is nothing more to say.

Dobson's relief is almost palpable as they step away from the press, tension easing from his shoulders.

DOBSON

Thank you. She was pissing me off.

Turbo offers a wry half-smile, clapping Dobson on the back

TURBO

Welcome, bro.

EXT. NEIGHBORING HOMES - DAY

Walters and Hill begin canvassing the neighbourhood, the quiet street punctuated by their brisk footsteps and the low murmur of distant traffic. At the first house, Walters raps on the door, knuckles echoing in the chilly morning air. After a moment, a bleary-eyed young man answers, his hair tousled, the faint aroma of stale beer drifting from the hallway behind him.

WALTERS

Gavin Walters, Newcastle Homicide Squad. What can you tell me about Father Johnson?

The young man squints into the daylight, wincing as if the world is too sharp.

DONALDSON

Donaldson. Sean Donaldson. Honestly, mate, I was up for a piss—couldn't sleep. Out of nowhere, I heard someone shouting outside. Couldn't make out the words, just... anger, maybe panic. Then I caught a glimpse of a dark S-Class sliding away down the street. Barely made a sound.

WALTERS

What time was that?

DONALDSON

Just before 10.

WALTERS

How sure are you of that?

The young man gets his mobile phone out of his pocket.

DONALDSON

Hang on—yeah. My girlfriend texted me while I was in the bathroom. Here, it's timestamped 21:59. So, just before ten."

WALTERS

Anything else?

DONALDSON

They didn't switch their lights on.

WALTERS

So dark coloured Benz, no lights,
drove away quietly?

DONALDSON

It all felt strangely quiet for a
commotion. Sorry, that's all I've
got.

Walters hands him his business card.

WALTERS

Thank you, sir. If anything comes
to mind later, please call me. Have
a good day.

EXT. NEIGHBORING HOMES - DAY

At the neighbouring house, Hill pauses outside a battered
front door, taking in the faded paint and the windchimes
jangling softly in the morning breeze. She knocks, and the
curtains twitch, a pair of wary eyes peering out before the
door swings open. A young woman, wrapped in a worn dressing
gown, steps out with defensive posture.

YOUNG WOMAN

Who are you?

HILL

(She shows her I.D.)
Jenny Hill with Newcastle Homicide
Squad.

YOUNG WOMAN

I have nothing to say to you. I saw
and heard nothing.

She closes the door in her face. Hill slips her business card
through the letterbox before turning away, her boots
crunching on the gravel path as she rejoins Walters beneath
the tangled limbs of a leafless jacaranda.

WALTERS

This isn't netting much.

HILL

Let's check in with the boss and
head back.

EXT. JOHNSON RESIDENCE - DAY

Together, they cross the street toward the old church, the morning air sharp with salt from the distant sea and the faint tang of wet asphalt. Turbo and Dobson are lingering near their unmarked car, mid-conversation, when Turbo's attention sharpens. His eyes lock on a figure slipping past the end of the block—a youth in a faded Man U hoodie, shoulders hunched, face half-veiled by the hood's shadow.

TURBO

There. The kid in the Man U hoodie.
Grab him. You! Stop!

He breaks into a brisk stride, Dobson close behind, boots pounding on the pavement as the city stirs around them. The youth reacts instantly, swiveling on his heel and slipping down a side lane just as Turbo and Dobson launch into pursuit. Their boots thunder against the waking city's pavement, but by the time they round the corner, the alley is empty—only the echo of retreating footsteps and the distant rattle of a loose bin lid remain. As the adrenaline of the chase fades, Dobson and Turbo slow their pace, boots scuffing to a halt against the uneven pavements. The city's early light casts long shadows along the empty alleyway, the remnants of their pursuit lingering in the air. Dobson glances over at Turbo, who is still catching his breath, irritation flickering across his features.

TURBO (CONT'D)

Dammit.

DOBSON

Who was he?

TURBO

He wandered by earlier.

Walters and Hill return.

TURBO (CONT'D)

Did you see the kid in the hoodie?

WALTERS

I saw one earlier. Man U hoodie?

TURBO

He was just about to wander by again. If you see him again, grab him.

WALTERS

Will do.

Breaking the silence, Dobson offers a lopsided grin.

DOBSON

You know, after all that running, I think we've earned a proper night off. What do you say—come over to mine tonight? Beer's cold, pizza's hot, and after this morning, we could both use it.

Turbo manages a tired chuckle, the tension easing from his shoulders. Together, they turn back toward their vehicle, the promise of greasy boxes and frothy pints ahead, their footsteps echoing with a new, lighter rhythm as the city continues to wake behind them.

INT. DOBSON RESIDENCE - EVENING

SUPER: PIZZA NIGHT - 6PM

It's just past six in the evening when Turbo arrives at Dobson's house, arms laden with this week's haul for their ritual pizza night. He steps into the wide, softly lit hallway, the mingled scent of lemon polish and last night's coffee lingering in the air. Dobson's home is a testament to orderly comfort—a sleek leather sectional sprawls across the sunken lounge, and the dining space is anchored by a heavy mahogany table whose intricate carvings catch the golden light. Dobson, already at ease in his own domain, glances up and grins as Turbo enters.

DOBSON

Hey, mate—pizza's on its way

TURBO

I got a slab and a bottle of black.
I think the jar is getting low, so
I stopped for black jelly beans.

Turbo drops the scotch and jelly beans onto the dining table. He puts the beer carton on the coffee table.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM - EVENING

Dobson's nephew, Sammy, now eighteen, sweeps into the room—a flash of youthful confidence and easy charm. He's the unmistakable image of a younger Phil, down to the sharp lines of his jaw and the spark in his eyes. Openly gay and refreshingly at ease in his skin, Sammy radiates an infectious cheerfulness, his affection for Phil and Turbo shining through in every gesture and mischievous grin.

SAMMY (O.S)

Uncles?

Sammy walks into the lounge room and drops the pizza on the coffee table.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I'll be back after I finish work.
Try not to get totally smashed,
yeah?

With a grin, Turbo hands Sammy a generous tip, the crisp note exchanged with a wink.

TURBO

I won't. He gets touchy feely when
he gets drunk.

DOBSON

I do not.

Dobson, feigning indignation, scoops up the jelly beans and heads toward the kitchen, his mock protest trailing behind him. Sammy leans closer to Turbo, lowering his voice to a conspiratorial whisper.

SAMMY

(Whispering)

You wish.

Turbo smiles.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Dobson disappears into the kitchen, a space gleaming with stainless steel and awash in bright, inviting light. He empties the bag of black jelly beans into a tall glass jar, the glossy candies clicking against the glass in a cheerful cascade. The kitchen, outfitted with every modern convenience, hums quietly in the background—the subtle whir of the fridge, the faint tick of the wall clock. The kitchen is a very modern chef's kitchen with all the mod cons and is well lit. Dobson fills the jelly bean jar. As he returns to the dining room, Dobson catches the end of the conversation. Turbo can't help but smile, the warmth of found family and the comfort of old jokes settling into the evening, promising laughter and easy companionship. Once the jar is full, Dobson returns to the dining room, footsteps soft on the polished floor, just in time to catch the tail end of the banter echoing from the lounge.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

SAMMY

Tell him.

DOBSON

Tell me what?

SAMMY

Big booger hanging off your nose.
See you later, Uncles.

INT. LOUNGEROOM - EVENING

As Sammy disappears down the hallway, Dobson quickly checks his nose, just in case, while Turbo lets out a long, contented yawn. The two settle onto the plush, soft carpet, legs folded beneath them, and begin to unpack their impromptu feast. The hiss of the cardboard carton being torn open is followed by the musical clink of glass as they line up stubby beer bottles, the golden liquid catching the glow from the overhead lights. The aroma of hot pizza mingles with the faint sweetness of jelly beans lingering in the air, creating a cozy, lived-in warmth.

DOBSON

How's Zumu?

TURBO

You really should visit—she's driving me up the wall about you. Tell Phil I want a visit, she says every other day.

DOBSON

I know I've been slack. Time just gets away from me.

TURBO

As far as she's concerned, you're her grandson too.

DOBSON

Yeah, I know. Feels like I hardly ever see my own family lately.

Turbo's voice is gentle, threading through the mellow hush of the room.

TURBO

Mum and Dad's 40th anniversary is coming up. Can I promise them you will be there?

DOBSON
Already accepted.

TURBO
Thank you.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: 9PM

As the evening unfolds, the clock's hands drift toward 9:00 PM. The atmosphere grows hazier with laughter and the honeyed glow of lamp light. Empty beer stubbies accumulate, their amber glass reflecting the scattered warmth of the room. A loose stack of pizza boxes sits askew on the coffee table, a few crusts peeking out, and the scent of cheese and oregano still floats above the chaos.

Sammy drifts back into the lounge, pausing in the doorway. He surveys the carnage—nearly half a carton of drained bottles and the remains of their feast.

Turbo, ever the gracious host, slides a fresh beer across the table toward Sammy.

TURBO
Drink up.

His tone equal parts invitation and challenge, the bottle's cold neck catching a golden glint from the overhead light.

SUPER: 10PM

DOBSON
I'm honestly wiped. Think I'll
surrender to an early night. Turbo,
you're not going anywhere—you've
had too much to drive.

Turbo grins, slouching back into the battered couch cushions.

TURBO
I'll snag the spare bed, then. No
complaints here.

Sammy seizes the moment, feigning innocence but his eyes sparkling with mischief.

SAMMY
Well, I've already claimed the
spare bed. Guess you're bunking
with Uncle Phil, Turbo.

DOBSON

I suppose I'll survive—as long as
you keep your hands to yourself.

TURBO

Can't promise anything.

Turbo shoots back, laughter rumbling deep in his chest.

DOBSON

Funny fucker, aren't you?

Turbo polishes off the last of his beer, setting the empty
bottle down with a hollow clink.

TURBO

Night, boys. I'm going to bed.

Dobson lifts his bottle in silent salute.

DOBSON

I'll just finish my beer.

INT. DOBSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Turbo pads softly down the dim hallway, the floorboards
creaking under his weight, before slipping into Dobson's
room. He toes off his shoes with a lazy flick and sprawls
across the unmade bed, sinking into the familiar tangle of
sheets, the scent of Dobson's cologne still lingering on the
pillow.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM - NIGHT

Meanwhile, Sammy corners Dobson near the kitchen doorway,
frustration simmering in his tone.

SAMMY

I'm tired of this charade.

Dobson, hands braced on the counter, keeps his gaze fixed on
the linoleum. His voice barely above a murmur, feigning
ignorance.

DOBSON

Tired of what, exactly?

Sammy's eyes narrow, the overhead light throwing sharp angles
across his face. "" His words hang in the air, thick with
accusation and a begrudging kind of care.

SAMMY

You two pretending you're just
friends when it's obvious you both
want-need-something more.

His words hang in the air, thick with accusation and a
begrudging kind of care. Dobson snaps at Sammy.

DOBSON

You're way out of line there,
kiddo. Back off.

Sammy snaps back.

SAMMY

Fuck you. I'm going to bed too.

He has a big smirk on his face as he walks the hall to the
spare room.

DOBSON

Fuck you back.

Sammy knows the way to get under Phil's skin

SAMMY

Night Phillip.

DOBSON

Don't fuckin' call me Phillip.

INT. DOBSON KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dobson wanders into the kitchen, the overhead light casting
long shadows on the faded linoleum, and pours himself a
generous measure of scotch. He grabs a handful of black jelly
beans, their anise scent sharp in the dim air, and leans
against the counter, watching the blur of headlights passing
outside the window. The pedestrian crossing outside emits its
familiar locator tone, a staccato backdrop to his restless
thoughts. After draining his glass, Dobson leaves the empty
kitchen and heads to the sanctuary of his bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Turbo is already sprawled on the mattress, breathing slow and
heavy in the half-light, sheets twisted around his legs.
Dobson hesitates, then crawls in behind him, the mattress
dipping under his weight.

He lies there, rigid, fighting the hope and terror jostling inside his chest, until—almost involuntarily—he slides an arm around Turbo, the warmth and solidity of another body both a comfort and a torture. His heart thuds hard, pulse echoing in his ears.

INT. SPARE ROOM - NIGHT

Across the hall, Sammy stirs. He pads to the bathroom, feet muffled against the threadbare rug, and stands at the toilet in nothing but boxer shorts.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Turbo shifts, pressing back into Dobson's chest. Caught off guard, Dobson coughs—a ragged, nervous sound—then abruptly pulls away, untangling himself and stumbling from the room.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

He runs to the bathroom. Sammy is urinating, but Dobson can't stop himself and throws up all over Sammy's back.

SAMMY

Fuckin hell. That's a mood killer.

Sammy steps straight into the shower.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Can you get me a towel?

Dobson drapes a clean towel over the rack, careful with trembling hands as he mops up the sour remnants of his mistake. The acrid scent of sick mixes with the lingering anise from the kitchen, making his stomach churn anew as he scrubs the tiles. After the bathroom is restored to grim order, he lingers by the door, listening to the hush of running water and the faint, muffled curses from Sammy behind the shower curtain.

Fifteen minutes later, Dobson returns to the bedroom, his body heavy with exhaustion and a residue of embarrassment. Turbo is sprawled across the mattress exactly as before, limbs tangled, face serene in sleep, oblivious to the dramas of the night. Dobson stands in the doorway for a moment, watching the gentle rise and fall of Turbo's back, fighting the urge to reach out and touch that peace. Instead, he slips under the covers, careful not to disturb the other's slumber, lying rigid and silent.

He keeps his back to Turbo, staring at the shadowed ceiling, frustration and sorrow pressing at his chest until tears prick his eyes. He withdraws into himself, the warmth of another body just inches away both a balm and a torment, as the night outside grows deeper and the house settles into uneasy quiet.

SUPER: DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND - EARLY 2016

SUPER: LEVI AND NOAH HOLBERT

EXT. HOLBERT FAMILY HOME REAR DECK - SUNSET

Donna Holbert, thirty-two, sits hunched on the rear porch of her weatherworn Dunedin home as the sunset bleeds gold and rose across the sky. Her twin sister, Dawn, perches beside her, the evening colours painting both their faces in shifting shades. The air is cool, tinged with distant sea salt and the earthy scent of mown grass. Donna's shoulders shake with silent, stubborn sobs, her tears glinting briefly in the last light. Dawn reaches out, fingers brushing Donna's sleeve in gentle concern, but Donna turns away, jaw clenched, holding her grief close.

DONNA

It's been two years, and it just
doesn't get any easier. I'm haunted
by his contorted face as the pain
of the heart attack hit him

DAWN

It's not all bad. You've got your
boys.

The front door SLAMS.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - SUNSET

The front door bangs shut, reverberating through the quiet house. Donna's sons have returned. Levi, thirteen, strides in first—lanky and angular, his movements protective and deliberate. Noah, eight, trails beside him, smaller and wiry, his eyes wide and quick with the unfocused curiosity of childhood. Unzipping their worn jackets, they hang them carefully on the faded rack by the entryway, boots thudding softly to the mat as they shed the outside world. The hush of dusk settles around them, their presence filling the porch with a gentle, restless energy.

NOAH

Mama, we are home.

EXT. PORCH - SUNSET

Levi and Noah step onto the dimly lit porch.

LEVI
What's for dinner Mama?

DONNA
Leftovers.

DAWN
Hi, boys.

She blows them a kiss, the gesture catching the last rays of sunlight as Levi, ever playful, pretends to snatch it from the air and tuck it in his pocket. Noah, bubbling with restless energy, clambers into his mother's lap and buries his head against her. Donna wraps her arms around him, drawing him close, absorbing his comfort and letting her breath steady. Noah's words tumble out, animated and hopeful.

NOAH
We saw a video at school today
about a place called Australia. The
beaches are huge and the sky goes
on forever. Can we move there,
Mama?

DONNA
You know what, my munchkin? That
might just be the best idea ever.

Noah sits up.

NOAH
Really?

DONNA
Mama just might like a new start.

LEVI
I'll heat dinner. Noah, start your
homework.

DAWN
I better get home, too. Bye Boys.

Dawn brushes a farewell kiss across Donna's cheek and slips out into the cool, lengthening shadows, her footsteps fading down the path as evening deepens around the house. Noah, restless, darts toward his small bedroom, scattering the last of the daylight in his wake.

In the kitchen, Levi pauses at the sudden shrill of the phone, its ring sharp in the hush of the settling home. He lifts the handset with a theatrical flourish, his voice adopting an exaggerated poshness:

LEVI

Good evening. This is the Whole
Bear residence. I'm Levi Bear. With
whom would you like to speak?

Without waiting for an answer, Levi pads into the living room and presents the phone to his mother, eyes gleaming with mischief.

LEVI (CONT'D)

It's her Royal Highness, Princess
Aunty George the First.

He declares, bowing with a grand sweep before retreating.

Donna cradles the phone, sinking into her favourite armchair as she begins to speak. Levi drifts back into the kitchen, the linoleum cool beneath his feet, and rummages through the fridge until he finds the container of leftover bolognaise. The comforting aroma of tomatoes and herbs fills the air as he spoons the sauce into a chipped ceramic bowl and pops it into the microwave. The appliance hums and clicks, a familiar soundtrack to the domestic quiet.

Levi, curiosity piqued, pauses by the kitchen door, half-concealed by the frame. He listens intently as his mother's voice drifts through the air, low and thoughtful, tinged with a note of longing. From the fragments he catches, Australia slips softly into the conversation, that far-off land already shimmering with possibility in the dusk-laced room. Levi presses closer, the warmth of the kitchen at his back, eager for any hint of what the future might hold.

EXT. PORCH - EVENING

DONNA

Noah saw a video today about
Australia. He's all charged up
about moving there. What do you
think of the idea of me taking the
boys to Australia for a fresh
start? I couldn't live in Sydney.
Too many bloody people. I've heard
Newcastle is nice and quiet. I
might sit down with the boys and
have a serious talk about this.

INT. EAT-IN KITCHEN - EVENING

The microwave's insistent beeping slices through the quiet, and Levi carefully lifts the steaming bowl, the aroma of rich tomato and herbs swirling around him. He sets the table with deliberate care as Noah bounds in, his socks skidding on the worn linoleum, eyes bright with anticipation.

LEVI

Mama, dinner is ready.

DONNA (O.S)

Coming.

Donna appears moments later, ending her phone call, her footsteps slow but steady as she eases herself into a chair and offers the boys a tired but genuine smile.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Did you boys have a good day?

Noah lights up, his words tumbling over each other in excitement.

NOAH

Yes Mama. I really enjoyed the video about Australia. I love those big, bouncy rats.

He springs up from his seat, arms tucked in, mimicking a kangaroo's hop.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Boing! Boing! Boing! What are they called? Kakapos?

Levi bursts into laughter, the sound quick and bright against the hush of the kitchen.

LEVI

Kangaroos, you wally. Kakapos are birds.

NOAH

Yeah, that's it. -- Those koalas are just the cutest things ever. They're so fuzzy and sleepy-looking. I wish I could hold one--just once, for real.

Noah grins, a gap-toothed smile lighting his face, then wraps his arms around himself and begins bouncing in his chair.

DONNA

What do you think of the idea of moving to Newcastle in Australia?

NOAH

Can I have a pet kangaroo?

LEVI

You can't keep them as pets. --- Newcastle might be nice. I could take up surfing.

DONNA

Give it some serious thought.

He tries to sound offhand, but his mind whirls with shifting images of sunlit beaches and rolling waves.

Her speech is slightly slurred, and Levi's stomach twists with unease as he counts the empty wineglasses on the counter.

LEVI

How was Aunty Dawn?

DONNA

OK. But she didn't get the loan for the new car. We had a couple of wines to make her feel better.

LEVI

That's a shame. That little red car was totally awesome.

Donna's mouth quirks into a grin.

DONNA

Dawn joked that she wanted to drive with the top down, tits out, just for the thrill.

She lets out a raspy laugh.

Noah's eyes widen, then he claps a hand to his mouth, giggling uncontrollably.

NOAH

Mama said tits! Oops, I said it too!"

The laughter, bright and innocent, ripples through the kitchen, briefly lifting the shadow that always seems to lurk just beneath the surface.

Levi laughs. Noah isn't paying attention and accidentally knocks the salt pot across the table. It clunks on the table as the lid pops. Salt spills everywhere. The air in the room immediately changes and the boys tense up. They watch Donna's face change with her mood. Donna stands up and walks around the table.

LEVI

Mama, don't. It was an accident.

Levi stands up and circles the table in the opposite direction.

NOAH

(pleading)

I'm sorry Mama. I'm sorry Mama.

Donna backhands Noah across the face, knocking him from his chair. The cupboard bangs as Noah bounces off the kitchen cupboard. He lands in a crumpled heap, nursing a very painful arm. Donna turns to Levi. She backhands him off his feet. The door cracks as he falls against it. He cuts his head as he falls. Donna storms out of the room, yelling as she leaves.

DONNA

That's for listening in on my
private conversations.

Noah is sitting in the corner, cradling his broken arm, rocking back and forth. Levi crawls across the floor to his brother. Noah whimpers.

NOAH

I think she's broken it again. Levi
uses their secret code. In times of
severe stress and upset, Levi calls
Noah "Monkey" to reassure Noah he
is there for him.

LEVI

I love you, Monkey. Levi cradles his
brother, blood drips onto the floor
from a cut on his head, and they
cry together.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

SUPER: IAN CHASE ANN DAPHNE CHASE - 2006

INT. NEWCASTLE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS OFFICE - MORNING.

Ian Chase, a troubled teen, seems to radiate a sense of darkness through his personality. When standing next to others his age, he seems diminutive. His mother, Daphne Chase, is known for her frumpy attire and a constant sense of anxiety. They are meeting with Principal Henry North, a stern-looking man with a commanding presence. Oblivious to the raging storm he is about to create, North starts the conversation.

NORTH

Ian is a constant disruption. Is everything O.K at home?

She attempts to reassure North.

DAPHNE

Everything is fine. It's just growing pains. We have a happy, loving home.

Ian is taken aback by her response, and he instinctively smacked himself on the side of the head. He grimaces and presses the palm of his hand against his head, as if a sharp pain is throbbing within. He stands up and immediately starts pacing, his restless energy filling the room. He pauses, his mind racing as he tries to organise his thoughts. Ian smacks the side of his head again, his frustration building, and explodes into a verbal tirade.

IAN

How the fuck can you sit there and say that with a straight face? You stupid fuckin' mole? -- You've taken one too many blows to the fuckin head! -- I swear to you Mister Principal he comes home fuckin legless around 2am, usually smelling like someone else's cologne. -- He beats her senseless while she screams her tits off. -- He comes into my room and fucks me senseless. I've learnt to stay quiet, otherwise he punches the shit out of me as well. She just lets it continue. -- World war three doesn't even begin to describe it, but she says it's all pretty flowers and puppies, -- Rainbows and lollipops. I live in a Disney movie. -- Yeah, that's it. A fuckin Disney movie. -- A loving home? -- FUCK ME!!!

North's expression turned to one of utter astonishment. Daphne's cries were loud and desperate, filling the room with her raw emotion. Ian smacks himself on the side of the head, the sound reverberating through the air. North stands up and walks around the desk. He gently reaches out and places his hand on Ian's shoulder. Ian pulls away violently and lifts his fists.

IAN (CONT'D)

Don't!

North pulls back.

NORTH

Ian, try to calm down. We can get child services involved.

Daphne stops crying, but doesn't utter a word.

IAN

Well, Mum. Can we get some help?

She sits in silence.

IAN (CONT'D)

Mum?

Daphne looks up at North.

DAPHNE

You don't know what he's like. He will kill me.

Ian lets out a visceral moan. He slaps the side of his head. He explodes a second time.

IAN

I can't give a fuck anymore. Don't bother suspending me, coz I won't be back. Might find a hole to crawl into and just start poking the world with a big stick. Maybe the rest of the world might pay me what you lot owe me. I can barely tolerate humans anymore. You better call an ambulance for the stupid mole, coz she's going to need happy pills to stop her passing out. And she's in no state to drive. With the prescription meds she's on, she never is.

He holds his palm to his head.

IAN (CONT'D)
FUUUUUUUUCCCKKKK! Thanks for
nothing, Mummy. As of now, your son
is dead. Tell micro dick he's going
to have to fuck himself. And in the
words of a great philosopher, ME,
ya can all get fucked!

Ian storms out of the room. Daphne hangs her head and cries
again. North watches him go, jaw on the floor.

INT. CHASE HOME - LATER THAT NIGHT - 1 AM

Ian arrives home at 1:00 AM. The house is dark. He locks the
front door, the sound of the deadbolt clicking echoing
through the hallway. He calls out to his mother, his voice
tinged with a mix of frustration and desperation. The lack of
response created an eerie stillness in the air. With each
step, he can hear the soft padding of his feet against the
carpet as he walks to her bedroom. The glow of a distant
streetlight spills into the room, casting long shadows on the
walls. She is lying on her back. Resting under her elbow was
an empty Temazepam bottle, a silent reminder of sleepless
nights. Ian holds his palm to his head, feeling the slight
dampness of sweat on his skin. He smacks his head.

IAN
Mum?

The lack of response creates an eerie stillness in the air.
With each step, he can hear the soft padding of his feet
against the carpet as he walks to her bedroom.

INT. CHASE HOME MOTHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

IAN
Oh, Mother. What have you done? You
couldn't even get that right, you
stupid mole! No help for you,
mummy."

INT. CHASE HOME IAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - AN HOUR LATER

Ian walks out on his mother and heads to his bed. A child's
nightlight sits on his bedside table. The room is lit by its
strange green glow. Ian cannot sleep because of the impending
storm. He watches the time change over to 2:00 AM.

EXT. CHASE HOME FRONT DOOR - NIGHT 2AM

SUPER: MONTY CHASE

Monty Chase, an enormous bear of a man, is an angry drunk. He bangs on the door. Ian hears his father rattling a key in the lock. Monty's anger builds.

INT. HALLWAY NIGHT

Monty's voice is heard through the door.

MONTY (V.O.S)
Jesus fuckin' Christ! How many
times have I gotta tell that little
prick to leave the fuckin' door
unlocked?

The door opens and SLAMS into the wall. Monty's anger builds.

INT. CHASE HOME IAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Monty walks straight into Ian's room. With a sinking feeling in his gut, Ian braces himself for what is coming. He's reached his limit, his body exhausted and unable to endure any more physical strain. In a desperate act, he pushes his father to his breaking point, hoping it will lead to his own demise. The physical difference in size can work in Ian's favour this time. Suicide at the hands of his father.

IAN
You smell as delightful as you
usually do. Eau De Alcohol. Best
stench ever.

Monty kicks his shoes off and removes his trousers.

MONTY
The last thing you need to be right
now is a smartarse, you horrendous
little shit stain. After your
effort at the school today, you're
going to pay big time. How dare you
tell the principal that I rape
you?

IAN
You fuckin do.

MONTY
He doesn't need to know that.

IAN

Monty, I don't care how, but this
shit stops tonight.

MONTY

Stand up. Take your undies off.

IAN

No Monty

Ian attempts to punch his father. Monty blocks the punch and
leans forward and removes them.

MONTY

Daddy wants a good look at what you
got. That's growing nicely. That
looks better than what I just had
behind the pub.

IAN

Was he a micro dick too?

MONTY

Pull the horns in.

Monty rocks like he is going to fall over. He closes his eyes
to refocus.

MONTY (CONT'D)

Maybe you'd like to finish what
blondie in the alley started and
give Daddy a good hard...

IAN

I'll pass on that, Monty.

Ian spits the words. Monty moves towards Ian with a look of
anger in his eyes.

MONTY

What's with calling me Monty?

IAN

We are lovers, aren't we? I think
I've earned the right by now.

Monty SLAPS Ian across the face. Ian tries to escape his
father, but Monty grabs him by the hair.

MONTY

You ain't going anywhere, you
little bitch.

Ian cries out.

IAN

Let go fuck head.

Monty tries to kiss Ian and Ian squeezes his father's testicles. Monty pulls on Ian's hair.

MONTY

Let go, you little arsehole.

With a swift motion, Monty grabbed Ian by the throat and effortlessly lifted him off the ground. Ian's body becomes completely limp, resembling a rag doll tossed aside. Monty's grip loosens, and Ian takes a desperate gulp of air as he collapses onto the bed. Monty's powerful punch lands squarely on Ian's jaw, causing an audible crack. His body lands in a seated position. Head forward. He crumples onto the bed, his body slumping onto its side as he loses consciousness. Monty's hands firmly clutch Ian's hips, as he forcefully drags him across the bed, bringing him closer. Monty's voice broke the silence as he verbalised his thoughts

MONTY (CONT'D)

I'm going to enjoy this.

INT. CHASE HOME IAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 4AM

Two hours later, Ian jolts awake, startled by the feeling of wetness seeping through the sheets. With a pained expression, he struggles to move, letting out a cry as his bottom lifts off the bed. He lays there for a few minutes gathering his head. As he lies on his side, tears roll down his cheeks. .

IAN

Fuck you Monty. It's over.

Monty is sprawled out, unconscious, on the floor. He steps over him, careful not to disturb his peaceful slumber. He grabs his school bag and starts stuffing it with clothes, making sure not to forget anything. Monty grabs his leg as he steps back over him.

MONTY

Where are you going?

After a wheeze escapes his lips, he falls unconscious and starts snoring heavily.

INT. CHASE HOME SHOWER - NIGHT

As Ian showered, he closed his eyes and let the water wash away the stresses of the day.

With each passing moment, the drain became stained with the vivid red colour of blood. As he washes his bottom, a sharp twinge of pain makes him wince.

INT. CHASE HOME MOTHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Despite his best efforts to rouse her, his mother remains completely unresponsive. In a rush, he rifles through her bedside table, locating a female sanitary pad, which he quickly secures in his shorts. Standing over her, he gazes down with a menacing glare. A low, guttural moan escapes her lips. She is fully aware of her surroundings. As he looked into her eyes, he could see the fear lurking within

IAN
Enjoy the smoke Mummy.

INT. CHASE HOME GARDEN SHED - NIGHT

Ian walks to the outdoor shed, the sound of his footsteps echoing in the quiet morning air, and retrieves the mower fuel and chemical mask. Back at the house, he puts on the mask.

INT. CHASE HOME IAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

He empties a can of petrol inside the house. In his bedroom, he pours petrol directly over Monty's body.

IAN
(little boy voice)
Daddy?..... Daddy?

Monty stirs.

IAN (CONT'D)
(raised voice)
Daddy!.. Daddy!

MONTY
What's that smell?

Ian removes the mask briefly.

IAN
Daddy, I thought we might try something new and bit kinky.

MONTY
What did you have in mind?

Ian replaces the mask. Ian urinates over his father's chest and belly. Monty averts his head as Ian takes aim at his mouth, then falls unconscious again.

INT. CHASE HOME KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ian hastily grabs a glass bottle from the cluttered kitchen counter and snatches a rag from a nearby drawer. He carefully assembles a Molotov cocktail, the smell of gasoline filling the room.

INT. CHASE HOME MOTHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Leaving the fuel can open in the middle of his mother's room, he leaves the house.

EXT. CHASE HOME IAN'S BEDROOM WINDOW - NIGHT

Monty averts his head as Ian takes aim at his mouth, then falls unconscious again. Ian hastily grabs a glass bottle from the cluttered kitchen counter and snatches a rag from a nearby drawer. He carefully assembles a Molotov cocktail, the smell of gasoline filling the room. Leaving the fuel can open in the middle of his mother's room, he leaves the house. With a swift motion, he removes the mask and repurposes it as a tool to smash through his bedroom window. With a flick of his lighter, he sets the Molotov cocktail on fire and swiftly tosses it through his bedroom window, igniting the fuel. In a horrifying spectacle, his father's body becomes engulfed in a blazing fire. Monty struggles to stand, only to crumble under his own weight.

EXT. PARK OPPOSITE CHASE HOME - NIGHT

Sitting on a swing, he watches the house explode. Debris rains down on nearby houses. He folds his hands as if praying.

IAN

Dear Mummy and Monty. I love you so much. I hope you rot in hell. Ya pair of arseholes.

He can hear the SIRENS closing in. Ian SMACKS himself on the side of the head. He talks to himself as if he's two people.

IAN (CONT'D)

Good job babe. I think it's time to go. -- Agreed. -- Let's go.

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He cradles the side of his head.

END OF PILOT