

**TITLE: SHEILA: Outback Vengeance.**  
(c) December 2025 Gregory J Round  
FORMAT: Movie Script

Based on the novel  
**SHEILA by Gregory J Round**  
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FADE IN

EXT. QUEENSLAND OUTBACK – DAY

A vast, merciless semi arid desert. Hotter than hell. Flat land covered in gibber stones of all sizes.

A single rider moves across the land – tiny against the immensity. Flies swarm.

Sheila (14) Blonde beautiful, lean, sometimes limping beside her mare Piebald.

SHEILA (VO)

Psalm 38:1–22) (softly like a distant background noise)

O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your  
anger or discipline me in Your wrath.  
Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am  
frail; heal me, O LORD, for my bones  
are in agony. My soul is deeply  
distressed.

[begin to fade]

How long, O LORD, how long?  
Turn, O LORD, and deliver my soul;  
save me because of Your loving  
devotion.

[end fade]

EXT. OUTBACK TRACK – DAY

She reins in. Dismounts stiffly. Her hands tremble as she opens her canteen.

Water almost empty. She tips some drops into Piebald's mouth before taking a single sip herself. She scans the horizon. Nothing. She swallows panic.

SHEILA

(with urgency and  
despair, almost in  
tears)

Where are you Uncle?

She leads her horse up a rise. At the crest – a red jacket flaps violently on rusted wire.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
Look Pie, a red jacket

The wind howls through a dark opening at her feet. An opal mine shaft with no mullock heap.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
Should I go take a look Pie?

She hesitates. Fear. Curiosity. Instinct. She peers down. Blackness. She steps back – then notices something else. A small red shoe, just visible below.

She catches her breath.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
Don't go way girl. I'll be back.

INT OPAL MINE SHAFT – DAY

The ladder creaks ominously as Sheila descends. Her breathing echoes. She reaches the bottom. The air is stale. Wrong.

She edges forward into a roughly-hewn cavern.

Just enough light reveals – two young aboriginal girls. Lying side by side. Perfectly still. Sheila freezes. Her breath stops.

CUT TO:

EXT OPAL MINE SHAFT TOP – CONTINUOUS

Sheila bursts into daylight, gasping. She scrambles away from the shaft, almost on all fours like a scared animal, retching, shaking.

She grips Piebald's bridle. Forces herself upright. Looks back at the mine.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. MARYSVILLE TRAIN STATION – MORNING

Steam erupts as a locomotive screeches to a halt. Sheila Hamilton, stands on the platform holding a small disheveled travel bag.

Her dress is old. Stained. Sweat-darkened. She looks confused. Agitated.

A stock car door clangs open. Piebald is led down, snorting, eyes wild. Sheila exhales for the first time.

She presses her forehead to the mare's neck. A quiet vow passes between them.

SHEILA  
(Whispers)  
I'll keep you safe Pie.

Sheila straps gear to the saddle with practiced efficiency. The Station Master, Big Tom (50s, sweaty, sleeves rolled up watches.)

BIG TOM  
Be very careful Miss. The outback can kill.

She meets his gaze.

SHEILA  
It will not beat me Sir.

EXT. EMU CREEK JUNCTION — DAY

A crude rail shed. Telegraph wires hum faintly. In the distance a lone riders caught in the dancing mist of a mirage. Keeps coming until revealed. Sheila rides in, barely upright.

REGINALD WILLOUGHBY (40s potbellied) squints.

REG  
Wha tha?

A Beat

G'day Missy.

Sheila frowns.

SHEILA  
Hello. What place is this.

REG  
This is Emu Creek Junction Missy

SHEILA  
 (admonishing)  
 Look here Sir, my name is not Missy!  
 I am Sheila Hamilton from Brisbane  
 and I am looking for Emu Creek.

REG  
 Well that's twenty miles further  
 north, Miss...ah...

SHEILA  
 Hamilton. Sheila Hamilton.

REG  
 Yes Miss Hamilton. How can I help  
 you?

SHEILA  
 I am very tied Sir. I need water for  
 myself and my horse.

She tries to dismount, but half falls out of the saddle. Reg catches her fall.

REG  
 Woo there girl, I've got ya.

Sheila stands albeit unsteady. Rocks backward, away from Reg.

REG (cont'd)  
 I have water out the back of the  
 shed.

EXT BEHIND THE RAIL SHED — LATER

Sheila waters Piebald first. Only then herself. Her hands shake violently now. Unsteady on her feet.

SHEILA  
 Sir, are there police here?

Reg studies her — really sees her. Offers her an old chair. She sits.

REG  
 No. Why?

A Beat

SHEILA  
 Are any children missing?

A long beat.

REG  
 Yes my God there are.  
 The Warren twins.  
 Been missing for days now.  
 Ave you found 'em?

SHEILA  
 I am afraid that I have made a very  
 gruesome and chilling discovery Sir.

REG  
 So where are they? Are they alive?  
 I'll have to send a telegram for  
 help.

She closes her eyes.

SHEILA  
 P..lease Sir, I am trying to tell  
 you. They are in an old mine shaft.  
 They are both dead. So beautiful and  
 so very dead.

She lowers her head, in distress. Reg stands stunned – then reacts.

REG  
 Don't despair, love.  
 I'll call for help. I have a  
 telegraph machine.

INT. RAIL SHED – CONTINUOUS

Reg sits at the telegraph key, hands shaking. He begins tapping.

REG: TELEGRAM (SENDING)  
 Reg Here STOP Girl says she found  
 Twins STOP Very distressed need help  
 urgently STOP

TELEGRAM (REPLY)  
 POLICE ON WAY STOP MUST DETAIN GIRL  
 STOP

EXT. RAIL SHED - CONTINUOUS

Sheila pours water over Piebald and herself. Much to Reg's disgust.

REG

We don't waste water doin that Miss!

Sheila doesn't reply she just collapses onto her swag in the shade. Her Remington by her side. She sleeps.

DREAM SEQUENCE — INT. OPAL MINE — DAY

The girls again. Closer now. Sheila reaches out — Their ankles are bound with rope. She tries to wake them.

SHEILA

Wake up girls.

There's no breathing.

SHEILA (cont'd)

Who would do this? Why is there rope  
tied around your legs?  
Why do I feel so faint-like?

She begins her ascent to the top but slips back several runs.

SHEILA (cont'd)

I must, get, to, the top!

END DREAM

EXT RAIL SHED — DAY

Sheila wakes suddenly. A man stands over her.  
Sargent HORTON (50s weathered).

HORTON

Wake up girly, wake up!

SHEILA

Wha' what's happening!

She's aiming the revolver at his chest.

HORTON

(Arms up)  
Easy..girlie. Easy.

She lowers and decocks.

SHEILA

What uh, Oh I'm sorry. Where am I?

SHEILA CONT.

Wait! I found them. I found the twins.

Horton's face changes.

HORTON

Are you big enough to carry that thing?

(pointing at the Remington 44)

SHEILA

I'm 14 nearly 15 and I know how to use this, thing, sir.

HORTON

Yes I'm sure you do girly.

SHEILA

My name is not girly! It is Sheila Hamilton.

REG

Feisty ain't she.

HORTON

Okay young Sheila Hamilton, my name is Sargent Horton. I hear you, think, you've found the Warren twins.

SHEILA

I did find twins sir, that I am sure of. They looked to be about ten years old.

HORTON

Sounds like them. Are they alive?

SHEILA

No. I'm so, so sorry. They are dead.

HORTON

How far into the mountains are the girls?

SHEILA

It's about a three day ride. Well

A beat

At least it was for me.

HORTON  
 Hmm, somewhere near Nick's place.

SHEILA  
 You know my Uncle!?

CUT TO:

EXT OUTSKIRTS OF SOUTHERN BRISBANE - DAY

Shelia, rides through winding dirt tracks. She waves to passers-by, ignoring the young men who whistle and blow kisses.

Her focus is on nature, her surroundings and Piebald, her loyal companion. She waves to Tommy her school friend he is moving dairy cows in a paddock. He smiles a return.

SHEILA  
 (wistfully)  
 I wish I could fly Pie

A Beat

(her arms open wide  
 fingers pointing to  
 the sky head held  
 back still in the  
 saddle)  
 like a Wedge-tail Eagle, soaring  
 free!

SHEILA (cont'd)  
 (softly)  
 There's so much to see, so much to  
 learn Pie.

A Beat

But home always calls me back.

EXT. SHEILA'S FATHERS HOUSE - SUNSET

The sun sets, casting golden hues across the sky. Sheila rides Piebald back toward her home. She hesitates at the gate, a sense of dread in her eyes as she looks toward the house.

INT. HAMILTON FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

DR. Hugh Hamilton, Sheila's father, is a tall, thin man, standing rigid and severe. His demeanor is cold and commanding. He stands over Sheila, his presence oppressive.

DR. HAMILTON

(sternly)

It's time you learn the ways of the world, Sheila. You are not a child anymore.

Sheila looks at him with fear, her body tense.

SHEILA

(shaky)

I just want to be left alone.

She leaves.

HUGH HAMILTON

Sheila! Get back inside.

SHEILA

No! I'm going for a ride.

HUGH HAMILTON

I'll have that mare shot if you disobey

SHEILA

Touch my horse **DADDY**

A beat

And I WILL kill you!

She kicks Piebald into as gallop.

HUGH HAMILTON

(shouting)

You have to come back. What will you do when you come home?

EXT RIVER BANK NEAR THE HAMILTON HOUSE - NIGHT

Sheila carves her initials in a tree: SH

She sleeps outside in her swag. With Piebald close. The Mare enjoying some lush river bank grass.

SHEILA

(a soft whisper)

Should I stay?

SHEILA (VO)

(very soft)

I wish I were a bird Pie, floating in the air. I wish I were an eagle Pie, swimming in the sky.

(MORE)

SHEILA (VO) (cont'd)  
 I wish I were a lizard Pie, rustling  
 in the grass. I wish I were a lizard  
 Pie, trying not to die. Trying not to  
 die Pie, trying not to die.

She looks at her Remington revolver.

SHEILA  
 You could save me for good...

EXT FRONT PORCH - DAY

Sheila sits on the front porch of her father's house. She's facing Tommy. The atmosphere is tense, the weight of silence hanging heavy between them.

SHEILA  
 (quiet, hesitant)  
 You know, Tommy, I often find myself  
 sleeping under my bed.

TOMMY  
 (concerned)  
 Why Sheil?

SHEILA  
 Because my hypocritical father is  
 always trying to touch me.

A Beat

And Tommy

A Beat

He had his way with me last year.

TOMMY  
 (shocked, stammering)  
 W-What?! No!

SHEILA  
 (bitter, angry)  
 You don't get it, do you? No one  
 believes me.

TOMMY  
 (hurt)  
 I'm sorry, Sheil. It's just

A Beat

That's hard to understand.

She lifts her head, staring at Tommy. Her anger is palpable, but she knows he can't truly comprehend her pain.

SHEILA  
(fighting tears,  
whispering)  
I know it's hard. But he's so strict.  
He goes on about how God is within  
him and I have to obey everything he  
tells me.

TOMMY  
Shit, Sheil! You can't let that  
happen! I'll shoot the fucker!

SHEILA  
(calm, shaking her  
head)  
Quiet. He will hear. Good God No,  
Tommy we can't do that.

A Beat

Can't we?  
(turning her head to  
face Tommy)

TOMMY  
(adamant)  
But we have to do something!

SHEILA  
(resolute, quiet)  
I'm leaving, Tommy. I'm leaving this  
place, and I'm never coming back.

TOMMY  
(surprised, concerned)  
But where will you go? You're only  
fourteen, it's dangerous out there.

SHEILA  
(softly, with a  
forced smile)  
It's more dangerous inside, Tommy. If  
I stay, I won't survive.

TOMMY  
(nodding, worried)  
I know you can take care of yourself,  
but what if someone attacks you? What  
if—?

SHEILA  
 (interrupting,  
 serious)  
 I'll protect myself. My uncle taught  
 me how to use my Remington and I have  
 a Winchester.

TOMMY  
 But where will you go?

SHEILA  
 I can't say. You may let it slip  
 Then he will find me.

TOMMY  
 (vowing, standing  
 firm)  
 No, Sheila Hamilton. I will never  
 betray you.

Tommy hesitates, his emotions fighting with reason.

TOMMY (cont'd)  
 (whispering)  
 But I don't want you to leave.

She stands they stare at each other for a brief moment, Then  
 turning and looking out into the distance, her decision  
 solidifying.

SHEILA  
 (resolute)  
 Maybe just maybe they'll think I  
 drowned in the river.

Tommy looks at her, devastated.

INT HAMILTON HOME - LATE NIGHT

Sheila slips quietly through the house. Her movements are  
 purposeful. The cool night air welcomes her as she steps  
 outside.

Ext Hamilton home - continuous

The moon casts eerie shadows on the ground, distorting  
 everything around her (Hitchcock like). She looks up, seeing  
 the vastness of the star-filled sky.

Her gaze falls on Piebald, grazing just beyond the house.

SHEILA  
 (softly, to Piebald)  
 You're the only one who truly  
 understands me.

The mare nuzzles her, offering comfort in silence.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

EXT EMU CREEK JUNCTION – DAY

It was a blistering morning. Sheila Hamilton rides alongside Sargent Horton.

HORTON  
 Ladies ride side saddle Sheila.

SHEILA  
 (tucking her dress in  
 so she could ride  
 astride)  
 I'm not a lady and I refuse to be  
 seen as one.

They ride on into the distance.

EXT. CAMP – NIGHT

A crackling fire burns. Horton works with practiced ease, sitting on a fallen branch, brushing grit from his boots.

Senior Constable Patrick McBride stacks branches as a cool breeze rattles the canvas of their swags.

HORTON  
 (grunts)  
 Uh! Lost twins turning up in the  
 middle of nowhere, and you – only  
 fourteen – found them, Sheila.  
 What were you doing out here on your  
 own?

SHEILA  
 I left Brisbane because I was in  
 danger. I needed to get away.  
 I am looking for my Uncle Nick.

She wipes soot from her cheek. McBride half-smiles over a tin mug.

MCBRIDE

How did you manage to follow their tracks through that windstorm?

Sheila glances toward the dark bush, embers reflected in her eyes.

SHEILA

What windstorm? I told you how I found them. Are you trying to trick me? Or don't you believe what I told you, sir?

Horton leans in, lighting a cigarette with a burning twig.

HORTON

Should've been in school, not out hunting lost kids!

Sheila turns to him, firelight sharpening her determination.

SHEILA

School couldn't teach what I needed to learn out here. And sir - I found those poor girls, not you! And I wasn't hunting children. I was looking for Nick.

Silence returns. A dingo howls. The fire crackles.

EXT. CAMP - DAY

More dingo howls. Sheila is first awake. She stokes the fire back to life. She blows carefully on the coals. They flare orange, then yellow. Smoke chokes her eyes but she grins through the sting.

Horton snores conversationally, then suddenly stops. He lumbers upright, grabbing a canteen.

HORTON

(looking at Sheila)  
You sleep at all?

Sheila just gives him a look. He smiles crookedly - teeth too big for his mouth.

HORTON (cont'd)

McBride up?

Sheila shrugs.

When the water boils, she adds coffee grounds.

HORTON (cont'd)  
You want to get going?

SHEILA  
We wait for him?  
(She nods toward  
McBride)

As if summoned, McBride appears – angular, hollow, already chewing a hunk of dry bread.

MCBRIDE  
After some coffee, sarge', I'll saddle up and be ready to go. How about you, Sheila? Ready for a ride?

Sheila says nothing.

HORTON  
Watch the tone, McBride.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTBACK SULTANS OPAL FIELD – EVENING

SHEILA  
(lifting herself in  
the saddle and point  
with an out-  
stretched arm)  
Look! The red jacket!

Sheila, anxious and breathing hard, reins in her horse beside Horton.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
(whispering)  
Do you think they're still here, Sir?  
It's been more than six days.

She stares down at the dark opening.

HORTON  
We have to get your Uncle Nick. His camp's not far. We'll need his help to retrieve the twins.

SHEILA  
So where is Uncle Nick, Sir?

HORTON  
Two miles due south.

They spur their horses into a gallop toward Nick's camp.

EXT. NICK'S CAMP – EVENING

Tall trees loom over the clearing. A lantern glows inside the cabin. Sheila spots the silhouette of her Uncle Nick on the porch.

SHEILA  
Uncle Nick!

She dismounts, nearly stumbling, and rushes to him.

NICK  
Sheila? That you? Good God, What are you doin' here, darlin'?

She embraces him fiercely, crying softly.

NICK (cont'd)  
What's wrong, darlin'?

SHEILA  
(voice shaking)  
We, ah, I need you, Uncle Nick. I found the twins and they're dead.

HORTON steps forward.

HORTON  
G'day mate.

NICK  
Brian.

HORTON  
She says she found the Warren twins in an old shaft. They have been missing over a week now. I haven't seen you in town lately.

NICK  
No. I've been too busy digging to travel.

SHEILA  
Can we go now? Please? They're in an old opal mine only two miles from here.

NICK  
Yeah, I know it.

Sheila's urgency burns.

NICK (cont'd)  
I'll get ropes and a pulley and the wagon. Is there a ladder?

SHEILA  
Yes, but it's old. Broken.

NICK  
And you climbed down it? Sheila—  
(stern)  
You could've died. I told you never to go into a mine alone.

Sheila lowers her head in shame.

EXT. MINE SHAFT — NIGHT

They arrive at the shaft. The red jacket still flutters. Nick rigs a pulley. He moves to climb down. McBride stops him.

MCBRIDE  
This is a police matter, Nick. We'll go down.

SHEILA  
I want to go down. I must see them again!

NICK  
Definitely not, darlin'. Let the constables do their work.  
(She points at the ground)

SHEILA  
Look! Tracks!

Nick crouches. Footprints. One missing a little toe.

NICK  
Bloody Black Pinky eh.

Nick looks into the distance.

INT. MINE SHAFT — CONTINUOUS

Horton descends first. The ladder creaks dangerously. Suddenly — Crack! He plunges out of sight. A dull thud follows.

MCBRIDE  
 (shouting)  
 Damn it Sarge!

McBride ties himself off and slides down. Horton lies twisted, barely breathing.

MCBRIDE (cont'd)  
 Nick! Get down here - now!

Nick descends quickly, scraping rocks from the shaft wall as he descends.

NICK  
 (checks Horton)  
 He's alive. Leg's gone. Ribs too. Let me check the ballroom drive.

Nick crawls into the narrow tunnel with the lantern.

NICK (cont'd)  
 Sheila! The twins, there not here!

SHEILA  
 W-what!

A groan of shifting earth. A violent crash of rock!  
 Darkness.

NICK (O.S.)  
 (muffled)  
 I'm here - pinned - can't move!

MCBRIDE  
 (shouts up the drive)  
 Sheila! Fetch the tools!

EXT. MINE SHAFT SURFACE- CONTINUOUS

Sheila searches frantically.

SHEILA  
 (crying out)  
 I can't find them! Is my uncle alright?!

MCBRIDE (O.S.)  
 I don't know! Look in the wagon!

She searches again.

SHEILA  
They're not here!

A beat.

She steadies her breath.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
(Loud)  
I'll ride back for the tools!

She mounts Piebald and charges into the night.

Sheila rides like fury across rugged terrain. Wind tears at her hair. The mare stumbles once - Sheila clings tight.

The moon guides her.

EXT. MINE SHAFT - LATER SAME NIGHT

SHEILA (cont'd)  
I'm back with the tools!

She lowers the pick and shovel on a rope. A voice echoes up.

MCBRIDE (O.S.)  
Sheila? That you?

SHEILA  
Yes! I brought tools and water!

She lowers a canteen.

MCBRIDE (O.S.)  
Good girl I've got to dig Nick out.

Sheila grips the rope, knuckles white.

INT. MINE SHAFT - NIGHT

McBride digs furiously. Nick's dust-covered face emerges through the rubble. He's alive. McBride frees him, but Horton is fading.

MCBRIDE  
Sheila! Get a horse ready!

EXT. MINE SHAFT — CONTINUOUS

Sheila hooks the rope to Piebald's saddle.

MCBRIDE (O.S.)

Easy! Easy!

Horton rises slowly, screaming as the rope scrapes him upward. Sheila guides Piebald with steady hands. Horton reaches the top. Sheila kneels beside him.

MCBRIDE

Now Nick.

Piebald hauls again — sweat dripping. Nick reaches the edge. Sheila pulls him into her arms.

SHEILA

Uncle Nick—you're safe.

NICK

Baby girl you saved me. I love you.

SHEILA

I love you too, Uncle.

INT. SHAFT — BELOW

Only McBride remains. He ties the rope around himself.

MCBRIDE

One more haul! Get me up, Sheila!

Sheila hesitates — a moral crossroad. Piebald strains. McBride emerges, collapsing beside them. Silence, broken by heavy breathing.

EXT. OUTBACK — DAWN

Horton's leg is splinted by Sheila and he is loaded into the wagon. Sheila sits beside him, treating him tenderly trying not to cause pain. Nick drives. McBride rides behind.

INT. NICK'S CAMP NIGHT

Horton sleeps inside fill with whisky for the pain. Nick motions Sheila over to sit by the fire.

NICK

Darlin' why are you here? Has something happened in Brisbane?

Sheila hesitates.

SHEILA  
yes or No I'm OK

A beat

I'm OK.

Nick softens.

NICK  
You can always talk to me darlin.

SHEILA  
I know, Uncle. But it hurts too much.

NICK  
I'll respect that, darlin'.

He wraps an arm around her. They gaze at the night sky together.

SHEILA  
It's beautiful. So calm.

NICK  
I love this land.

EXT. CARSON FARM SOUTH BRISBANE DAWN

A faint orange glow touches the small farmhouse south of Brisbane. Tommy Carson, small for his age, but strong and wiry, helps his father milk fifty dairy cows. His movements are practiced, solemn.

He glances toward his mother.

INT. TOMMY'S FATHER'S SHED - NIGHT

Tommy opens a tin box. Inside, a COLT .45.

FATHER (V.O.)  
Guns are dangerous and should never  
be touched.

Tommy lifts the revolver with trembling resolve.

TOMMY  
(looking at the gun)  
I am the Judge and jury and you'll be  
the executioner.

He loads the gun, stuffs cloth and a small loaf of bread into a sack, and heads into the bush.

EXT. BUSHLAND – CONTINUOUS

Tommy stands alone, testing ideas for a silencer.

Cloth doesn't work. He places the loaf of bread on the ground, imagines Hugh Hamilton's head, and pushing the barrel onto the loaf, fires.

Puff.

He tries again.

Puff.

Tommy stares in astonishment.

TOMMY  
(whispering)  
Success!

EXT. HAMILTON COTTAGE – NIGHT

A dark, moonless sky. Tommy moves silently across the yard, confident – he knows this house well.

No dog. No lights.

INT. HAMILTON COTTAGE – CONTINUOUS

He slips through the sleep-out door into the small square room. To his left the parents' bedroom, shielded only by a curtain.

The floorboards whisper underfoot. He parts the curtain and enters.

INT. HAMILTON BEDROOM – CONTINUOUS

Dr. Hugh Hamilton and MRS. Vanessa Hamilton sleep.

Tommy circles the bed. Vanessa shifts – rustling linen. Tommy freezes. Then continues.

He kneels beside Hugh Hamilton, pulls the loaf from his nap-sack, places it gently above Hugh's head, fits the gun barrel into the crater he carved.

Puff.

Hamilton stops breathing. Vanessa sleeps on, unaware. Tommy stares at the stillness – horrified, relieved, shaking.

EXT. BRISBANE RIVER – NIGHT

Tommy throws the revolver and loaf into the dark water.

He disappears into the night.

CUT TO:

EXT. MARYSVILLE STATION – DAY

A train exhales steam as it stops. Tommy steps off train. A government-issued pass sticks out from his pocket.

The town is dusty, busy, alive. Two free loafers chew tobacco nearby, wiry and unless looking; Big Tom, the station master, pushes a barrow.

Tommy approaches them.

TOMMY

G'day, gents. I'm lookin' for me cousin Sheila. She rides a piebald. Seen her?

They exchange glances – too long for comfort.

BIG TOM

Aye, lad. Came through five or six days ago. Hard in the saddle that one. Headed west toward the Ranges, lookin' for her uncle.

Tommy's body tightens.

TOMMY

(mutters)  
I've no horse...

A loafer smirks.

LOAFER #1

That's your misfortune.

Laughter

Tommy walks away, scanning for hope. He spots three geldings tied behind the hotel – saddles, reins, and a Winchester rifle in a cracked scabbard.

Opportunity.

EXT. HOTEL SIDE PADDOCK – CONTINUOUS

Tommy swings a saddle onto a bay gelding, it moves slightly, he calms it with some words, breath trembling.

He grabs the Winchester – loaded. A shout erupts from the hotel.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hey you! Yes you, by the horses!

Tommy kicks hard. The gelding bolts down the street. Men shout after him, boots pounding. Tommy rides west, dust swallowing his tracks.

EXT. OUTBACK TRACK – LATER

Tommy rides into the ghost gum bush.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Somehow...

A beat

I gotta lose 'em in the Never-Never.

He disappears into the vast, unforgiving wilderness.

EXT BUSHLAND - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

TOMMY

(under his breath)

They ain't quittin'. Not for murder.  
Not for horse stealin' neither.

Looking around.

Shit what would Sheil do?

He pats the horse's neck.

TOMMY

Easy, boy. We rest when it's dark.

The gelding snorts, uneasy.

EXT. DRY CREEK BED — EARLY EVENING

TOMMY  
 (speaks to his horse)  
 They're commin boy I can hear them.

He looks west — endless bush. He looks at the creek bed — a maze of gullies and roots. He chooses the maze.

EXT. GULLY PASSAGE — CONTINUOUS

Tommy urges the gelding into a narrow, twisted path where ghost gums lean overhead like pale, watching giants.

Branches scrape. Leaves whisper. Tommy winces with each noise. Suddenly! A shot rings out in the far distance.

Then a shout:

CONSTABLE (O.S.)  
 Ho! Spread wide! He's near, lads!

Tommy's breath quickens.

TOMMY  
 Jesus...

He kicks the gelding forward.

EXT. RIDGE ABOVE THE BUSH — SUNSET

Two constables on horseback crest a ridge. Their silhouettes cut against the dying sun. They spur their horses onward.

EXT. GULLY DEAD-END — NIGHTFALL

Tommy's path narrows until the gully walls rise around him like a trap. The horse snorts anxiously.

TOMMY  
 (shaking head)  
 No, no not now.

He leaps down, pulling the gelding by the bridle, searching for any escape. The constables' voices echo faintly.

CONSTABLE (O.S.)  
 We got him boxed if he's in the  
 gully!

The horse stomps, panicked. Tommy presses his forehead against the gelding's neck.

TOMMY  
I ain't dyin' here. Not before I find  
Sheila.

He spots a twisted root system forming a half-hidden incline. Tommy leads the horse upward — slipping, scrambling, pushing.

EXT. BUSH ABOVE GULLY — MOMENTS LATER

Tommy crests the top, dragging the gelding free. Below, lanterns bob as constables enter the gully. Tommy crouches low, barely breathing.

CONSTABLE #1 (O.S.)  
Tracks end here. But he ain't here.  
Not now.

CONSTABLE #2  
Fan out! Check the walls!

Tommy's eyes widen. He throws himself flat against the his mount, hand over it's mouth. Lantern light sweeps dangerously close across the ridge above.

Silence. Finally the men move on. Tommy releases a trembling exhale.

TOMMY  
(whispers)  
Just a shadow. Just a bloody shadow.

EXT. OUTBACK PLAIN — NIGHT

The land opens wide under a star-studded sky. He mounts again. The gelding is exhausted but willing.

TOMMY  
We go west, boy. She rode west.  
And I'll follow her. Come hell or  
rope.

He nudges the horse into a slow canter. Moonlight paints the Never-Never as a vast, silver ocean. Behind Tommy the constables' lanterns flicker like distant fireflies to the rear.

EXT. NICK'S BUSH CAMP - DAWN

Crows chatter in the early light. Sheila tends to Horton, giving him food and water. His wounds are beyond her skills to treat. She glances toward Nick as he saddles his horse.

NICK  
(mounts his horse  
reassuring Sheila)  
I'll find Black Pinky, dead or alive.  
Be back by dusk.

Sheila nods, worry etched deep.

MCBRIDE  
(looking at Sheila)  
I'm off to Great Wall to send a  
telegram.

He gallops out. By mid-morning, he returns far too soon, hunched, gripping his belly. He slides off the horse with melodramatic effort.

MCBRIDE (cont'd)  
(Groaning)  
Must've been the water.

Sheila frowns but hands him clean water. Horton watches silently, pale and weak. McBride drinks, wipes his mouth - and lets his eyes linger too long on Sheila.

He grabs her arm.

MCBRIDE (cont'd)  
(grinning)  
Don't be shy now-

She jerks away.

SHEILA  
That's enough, Mister!

Horton struggles upright.

HORTON  
(strained)  
Leave her alone.

MCBRIDE  
(snapping)  
Stay out of it old man. You can't  
even stand.

Horton summons his last strength, grabs a hunting knife, and plunges it into McBride's leg. McBride roars in pain, pulls his revolver, and fires. Horton collapses backwards onto the dirt floor, gut-shot.

McBride, wild and obsessed, drags Sheila to the bed. She screams. She reaches under the pillow – finds her revolver. She cocks it and fires backward under her left arm.

McBride falls back, dead.

EXT. NICK'S CAMP – SUNSET

A war zone. Horton lies barely alive. McBride's corpse swarms with flies. Sheila is attending to Horton as best she can.

Nick rides in, dismounts.

NICK

Jesus! Sheila – what happened?

SHEILA

(pointing to McBride)  
That bastard McBride tried to rape me. He shot Mr Horton. I **had** to shoot him.

EXT. NICK'S CAMP – NIGHT CONTINUOUS

They sit near the fire drinking coffee.

NICK

I must bury McBride.  
Then load Horton into the wagon. I'll leave tonight. Someone must reach Great Wall to send a telegram.

SHEILA

I'm afraid Uncle.

Nick turns to Sheila.

NICK

Its OK darlin. There is no more danger here for you. You'll have to ride to Great Wall. They have the telegraph. Get Abi, she is very nice, to send a message to Reg at the Junction. Stay there – no exceptions.

SHEILA  
 (She nods,  
 determined.)  
 I'll stay tonight here. Piebald needs  
 rest. You won't reach Reg for days  
 anyway.

Nick smiles gently.

NICK  
 You're a smart kid.

SHEILA  
 (to herself head down)  
 You could say women.

Nick has strapped Horton into his wagon and harnessed two horses.

NICK  
 (looking at Horton)  
 The leg's bad, but we'll make it. The  
 bullet is too deep to get out. We  
 need Doc Martin.

NICK (cont'd)  
 (to Sheila)  
 Two days to Reg. I'll keep pushing  
 through the night.

NICK (cont'd)  
 (waving)  
 Take care. Head South, and don't push  
 that mare too hard.

SHEILA  
 Stay safe, Uncle. I'll be fine.

EXT. GREAT WALL STATION - DAY

Sheila rides up to the gates of a weathered, low set  
 homestead with wide verandas.

SHEILA  
 (shouting)  
 Hello! Anyone home?

She knocks several times.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
 (softly to herself)  
 What if no one's here?

She walks around to the back of the house and calls out.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
(hopeful)  
Hello, anyone there?

ABIGAIL  
(from inside)  
G'day there! Who are you?

Sheila turns, relieved to see a woman approaching.

SHEILA  
I'm Sheila Hamilton. My uncle's is  
Nick from Sultans.

ABIGAIL  
Oh, I see. I'm Abigail. We own Great  
Wall. How can I help you?

SHEILA  
I need water for my horse.

ABIGAIL  
Of course. Follow me.

The horse watered.

INT. GREAT WALL STATION - KITCHEN - DAY

The large, functional kitchen opens to the back veranda. A small potbelly stove heats water. Shelves hold enamelware, and meats hang from hooks in the ceiling. Sheila and Abigail step inside.

SHEILA  
(teary)  
Lovely place you've got.

ABI  
Thanks.

Abigail pours tea as Sheila sits, exhausted.

SHEILA  
I've got bad news. My uncle he's  
taking Mr. Horton to Reg. Horton is  
really badly hurt. First he fell down  
a mine shaft and then McBride shot  
him. They need a doctor. And then I  
had to shoot McBride he...he tried to  
rape me.

Abigail listens, stunned.

ABIGAIL  
Good Lord! What a mess.

INT. TELEGRAPH ROOM HOMESTEAD - DAY

Abigail, an expert, works the telegraph key. Dots and dashes fill the air.

TELEGRAM (SENT)  
Reg Abi' here STOP Girl here named  
Sheila says she knows you has arrived  
with bad news STOP Nick on way to you  
via wagon with badly injured Horton  
STOP Doc Martin urgently required  
STOP

INT- EMU CREEK JUNCTION SHED- DAY

TELEGRAM (REPLY)  
Reg here, STOP. Will send message to  
Emu Creek immediately STOP.

EXT. OUTBACK ROAD - DAY

A wagon rattles over deep ruts as horses hooves strike a steady rhythm against the hard earth. In the back, Brian Horton groans faintly, his blood-soaked shirt clinging to him.

Smoke curls above gum trees near a ridge. Nick slows the wagon. Voices drift on the wind, laughter, clap sticks. A small aboriginal camp appears. Families sit around a fire.

Among them - thinner, older, but grinning wide - is Tommy Carson.

Nick reins in sharply.

NICK  
(disbelieving)  
Tommy! What in God's name?  
Tommy jumps to his feet, eyes bright.

TOMMY  
Nick! I thought I'd never find you.

Elders watch in silence, spears and woomeras resting beside them. Horton's ragged cry breaks the moment.

Tommy's smile fades.

TOMMY (cont'd)  
He's bad off. And Nick? Sheila might  
be lookin' for ya.

NICK  
I know. She okay?

NICK (cont'd)  
Climb aboard and tell me what the  
hell is goin' on.

Nick steers away from the camp. Dust swirls as the wagon  
rolls on. Horton moans occasionally.

EXT. WAGON — MOVING — LATER

Tommy gives Horton water, then sits beside Nick, staring at  
the bleeding horizon.

TOMMY  
(soft, shaken)  
Nick the blacks saved me from certain  
death. But there's something you need  
to know. About Sheila.

Nick stiffens.

NICK  
Go on. Spit it out.

Tommy swallows hard.

TOMMY  
Her father he's no man to be called  
that. He raped Sheila when she was  
thirteen. Kept touchin' her for  
years. Her mother did nothin'.  
(voice breaking)  
And I, I

Nick's knuckles whiten around the reins.

NICK  
That bastard. I'll kill him!

TOMMY  
Nick you can't kill Mr. Hamilton.

NICK  
Why the hell not?!

TOMMY  
Because I already did.

Nick snaps a look at him.

NICK  
What the fuck?!

Tommy trembles.

TOMMY  
I shot him. While he was sleeping.  
Vanessa didn't hear, it was a  
silencer, sort of.

NICK  
Bloody hell. Bloody FUCKING HELL!  
We'll get to Reg. Good men need to be  
saved.

EXT. EMU CREEK JUNCTION — DAY

REG stands on the platform as Nick arrives.

REG  
You've picked up a passenger, Nick.

NICK  
Yeah. This is Tommy a friend of  
Sheila's.

Reg examines Horton.

REG  
Don't worry, Brian. Help's on the  
way.

But Horton is barely conscious.

Reg shakes his head.

REG (cont'd)  
You should go on Nick and meet the  
doc half way.

NICK  
No, we have to rest here. The horses  
are spent, and Horton needs care.

REG  
I'll get the medical bag

NICK  
You've got a medical bag?

REG  
Sure do.

Reg returns with a medical bag and treats Horton, as best he can. Gives him much needed pain relief.

REG (cont'd)  
(to Nick away from  
the wagon)  
It's grim Nick. Horton's leg is  
rotting, the gunshot is still  
bleeding.

Nick knows the truth: Horton is too far gone.

INT. JUNCTION TELEGRAPH ROOM — DAY

Reg taps out a message.

REG: TELEGRAPH (SENT)

Reg here STOP Nick arrived with  
Horton and some kid called Tommy STOP  
Brian too far gone will not last the  
night STOP.

TELEGRAPH (REPLY)  
Help on way must detain the boy STOP

Reg pulls Nick aside.

REG  
I have to detain the boy. He's killed  
someone in Brisbane.

NICK  
I know. Sheila's father. After he  
raped her. I can't hand him in for  
that.

REG  
But they'll put me in irons if I let  
him go!

Nick puts an arm around him.

NICK  
 Reginald me old mate if Tommy  
 overheard us and ran, what could we  
 do? We've Horton to care for.

REG  
 (hesitates)  
 For Sheila's sake when I come back  
 with the cuffs, he'd better be gone.

NICK  
 You've got handcuffs?

Tommy has already overheard.

TOMMY  
 (terrified)  
 Nick what'll I do?

NICK  
 Go back along the trail. Find a place  
 to wait overnight. And for fuck's  
 sake DON'T light a campfire.

Tommy flees into the wilderness.

EXT. JUNCTION — DAY

REG  
 Riders comin.

Inspector McGuire arrives, furious.

He storms toward Nick.

MCGUIRE  
 Where's McBride? Why wasn't I  
 informed? None of this follows  
 procedure.

Nick leans against his wagon, unimpressed.

NICK  
 Not my problem, mate. I'm no  
 policeman. Black Pinky's tracks were  
 found near the mine where my niece  
 swore she found the twins, dead.  
 McBride tried to have his way with  
 her. Horton stopped him. Then McBride  
 shot Brian.

McGuire falters.

MCGUIRE

And McBride?

NICK

Dead. Sheila shot him after he tried to rape her.

MCGUIRE

And what of the boy?

NICK

He's gone. Ran off into the bush.

MCGUIRE

Mary Mother of mercy. What a bloody mess. My superiors will flay me alive!

INT. JUNCTION SHED — DAY

Flies buzz. Doc Martin stands near Horton's body. Its too late.

DOCTOR

He's gone Nick.

NICK

OK. We can take Brian's body back to The Creek for his wife.

EXT. EMU CREEK TOWN — SAME DAY

The quiet of the town is broken by the sound of hooves and wagon wheels. Nick drives the horses in grim silence beside Inspector McGuire. In the back of the wagon, Horton's shrouded body slightly bounces.

TOWNSFOLK (muttering)

Grim-faced men, women, and children gather in the street. The sight of the wagon makes them fall into an uneasy hush.

McGuire (dismounts, stiff in his uniform) He tries to speak, but before he can, the townsfolk close in, their voices sharp with fear and anger.

TOWNSMAN

They're still out there!

ANOTHER TOWNSMAN  
They're murderers! Black Pinky and  
the boy!

CROWD (SWELLING)

Fear and anger grow. The word "attack" is whispered, then  
shouted.

NICK (COMMANDING SILENCE)  
(Firmly, but with  
authority)  
Steady on! Let the Inspector speak.

MCGUIRE  
(Trying to maintain  
order)  
Thank you Nick. The Marysville police  
pursued the boy, but without food or  
water, they couldn't press the chase.

BURLEY TOWNSMAN (STEPPING FORWARD)  
(Furious)  
So they've run free into the Never-  
Never, and we're left to wait for  
them to come cuttin' our throats in  
the night?

Nick watches the exchange.

CATTLEMAN (WAVING A RIFLE)  
(Determined)  
If the Marysville men won't chase  
them, we'll ride ourselves. Black  
Pinky and the boy—we'll track them  
down and string them up like dingoes.

MCGUIRE  
And don't even try to taking The Law  
into your own hands. I will arrest  
any man or women who does so.

TOWNSFOLK  
Yeah arrest us and leave the  
criminals out there, free to do as  
they please. Come on men saddle up!  
Lets get those bastards!

NICK (SPEAKING TO MCGUIRE)  
This will lead to death on both sides  
unless your men get here quick. And  
we still have to bury Brian.

The mob rides out of town at full gallop

EXT THE JUNCTION SAME DAY

TOWN MOBSTER #1  
Reg, have ya seen the kid or black  
pinky.

REG  
No-ones been here since Nick left  
with McGuire. If ya all thinkin of  
going to the Ranges you had better  
rest your horses. Looks like you've  
galloped most of the way here. And  
the track is at least three days  
long.

TOWN MOBSTER #1  
Well, okay then. Dismount men!

As the men dismounted more began to arrive. It wasn't long  
before there was a small army at the Junction.

EXT. OUTER BUSHLANDS - EVENING

Nick rides out of town at the gallop with an extra horse. He  
heads across country.

Nick approaches the outer bushlands of The Junction. He can  
see the mob talking to Reg, but no sign of Tommy. Then he  
sees him, large as life, sitting on a rocky outcrop.

NICK  
(whispering)  
Tommy...

Nick throws a small rock, which lands with a crack on a  
larger rock. Tommy turns, startled, but sees Nick signaling  
for silence.

NICK (cont'd)  
(whispering)  
Quick, Tom. Onto this horse, and  
let's ride.

They begin to ride slowly, avoiding the tracks, staying on  
the grass muffling the noise of the horses' hooves.

TOMMY (TO HIMSELF)  
Just like a loaf of bread.

NICK  
Shoosh Tom. Keep movin.

They move across country at the gallop.

INT GREAT WALL STATION HOUSE - DAY

Nick arrives at Great Wall Cattle Station, alone.

NICK

Hi Abi.

Abi standing on the porch one hand shading her eyes.

ABI

Hello Nick. Come inside.

NICK

Where's Sheila?

Sheila enters from the veranda. Nick is taken-a-back at her appearance. Her hair tucked under a wide-brimmed hat, loose shirt, belted trousers.

NICK (cont'd)

Darlin', you look great.

SHEILA

(cheerful, but  
slightly hesitant)

Thanks, Uncle Nick. It feels far more natural than that dress.

NICK

And lets drop the uncle thing. It makes me feel as old as this country itself.

SHEILA

(hesitantly and  
smiling)

Okay, Nick.

ABI

I've got fresh scones and tea, so lets tuck in before you go. Ah, I assume you'll be heading off. You can stay.

NICK

Thanks Abi but I have a surprise waiting back at Sultans for Sheila.

SHEILA

For me?

NICK

Yup

SHEILA

What is it?

NICK

Well if I told you that darlin' it  
wouldn't be a surprise.

EXT. NICKS CAMP - NIGHT

Nick and Sheila return to camp. Tommy waits, his face drawn  
tight with the weight of the news.

SHEILA

(surprised)

Tommy! Hello, Tommy!

Tommy's voice breaks as he speaks.

TOMMY

(sadly)

Sheil. How are you?

SHEILA

That's very formal Tom. Your strange.  
What's wrong?

TOMMY

I'm sorry Sheil.

SHEILA

Sorry for what?

TOMMY

It's your father. Es gone.

Her breath stops.

SHEILA

(gasping)

Gone? What do you mean, gone?

Tommy looks to Nick for reassurance, then back at Sheila.

TOMMY

(quickly)

It was me. I shot him to protect you.

The silence is suffocating. Sheila stares at him,  
incredulously.

SHEILA  
(shouting and  
thumping Tommy's  
chest with both fist)  
What? Don't put this on me, Tommy  
Carson. I hate my father, but I  
didn't want YOU to kill him!

Tommy confused looks to Nick again.

NICK  
(intervening)  
Sheila darlin', it's a terrible  
thing. I'm sorry.

SHEILA  
(angrily)  
What!? This is my surprise!? You're  
both fucking mad! I hate you both!

She runs to her horse, mounting and rides off into the dusk.

TOMMY  
(sighing)  
Should I chase her?

NICK  
No, No, she'll be okay. She just  
needs a moment to take it all in.

TOMMY  
What if she doesn't come back?

NICK  
I'll give her an hour or two then I  
go look for her.

Nick walks few paces towards his horse then turns and walks  
back to Tommy.

NICK (cont'd)  
I didn't think you would tell her for  
days mate.

TOMMY  
Sorry.

EXT. DUSK - NIGHT

Sheila rides off into the distance, her breath ragged as she  
struggles to calm herself.

SHELIA (V.O.)  
 (Melancholic)  
 Mummy... What about Mummy?

EXT. OUTBACK - NIGHT

The campfire is nearly out, just a few glowing embers left. Sheila, wrapped in Piebald's blanket, gazes up at the vast, star-filled sky. The Milky Way stretches across the heavens, like a pale river, while the Southern Cross stands sharp and steady.

SHEILA  
 (whispers to herself,  
 distant with teary  
 eyes)  
 Why?

She focuses on the stars, trying to escape the weight in her chest, but memories surface unbidden. A flashback begins.

EXT. FIELD - DAY - YEARS EARLIER (FLASHBACK)

Young Sheila (5/6) clings to the reins as her father lifts her onto the back of his chestnut mare. They laugh together.

YOUNG SHEILA  
 (giggling)  
 I'm holding on!

CUT BACK TO  
 PRESENT:

Sheila rolls onto her side, clutching Piebald's blanket tightly, tears falling. Her face shows a mix of grief, anger, and confusion wet with rivers of tears.

SHEILA  
 (whispering with  
 tears)  
 Why is my life so wretched?

The bush around her answers with silence, save for the distant howl of a dingo.

EXT. OUTBACK SHEILA'S CAMP - DAWN

SHEILA (VO)  
 If I could fly...I would fly away so  
 far it would be a different world.  
 (MORE)

SHEILA (VO) (cont'd)  
A place where I could be free and  
truly safe.

She looks toward Piebald, then toward the approaching  
sunrise. Her determination is clear.

SHEILA  
(to herself)  
I must rise with it.

EXT - NICKS CAMP - MORNING

Sitting on Piebald out of sight on high ground in the trees  
above Nicks Camp sheila sees a group of troopers on  
horseback waiting. Then Tommy appears from inside being  
dragged from a hut in chains.

Tommy is dragged like a trophy, and Sheila's worry grows.  
She looks around.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
(quietly)  
Where are you Nick? Shit, he's out  
lookin' for me.

EXT. BURNING PLAIN - DAY CONTINUOUS

Tommy, stumbling, chains clanking at his ankles, the iron  
collar biting into his skin with every tug from the man who  
holds him.

Traces of blood trickle down his neck. A hundred miles to  
Marysville. Sheila, perched among the stringy bark and  
scrub, watches, dressed in rough boy's clothes.

TROOPER #1  
What's that, up there on the hill?

TROOPER #2  
Just an old stockman passing by. No-  
one to worry about.

Sheila's eyes stay fixed on the chain, the sun flashing off  
the iron like a signal. She steadies her rifle against a  
tree trunk. Her heart thunders.

SHEILA (VO)  
I'm not passing by. I'm hunting you.

TROOPER #1  
 (watching the  
 stockman)  
 What the devil's this?

His hand hovers near his revolver. But it's too late.

Sheila shoots. A crack rings out across the desert.

For the briefest breathless moment, no one moves. Then the man holding Tommy's chain jerks to one side, crimson blooming on his under-shirt as he topples one left foot court in a stirrup.

Tommy blinks through sweat and bloodshot eyes, feeling the slack on his neck and staggering forward.

SHEILA  
 (shouting)  
 Run, Tommy! Run!

Tommy scrambles, half-falling up the hill. Sheila lays down covering fire over their heads. And, as if choreographed, a large dust devil twirls through the troopers.

Vision was limited on both sides of the front-line.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
 Mount up Tommy, quickly

They ride off on Piebald beyond the sight of the police. Sheila pulls Piebald to a stop.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
 Dismount Tommy and we'll remove that collar and chain.

TOMMY  
 I can't breath Sheil' the dust in my throat.

SHEILA  
 There's water here some where. I hid it yesterday. But where, where is it?

NICK (OS)  
 Looking for this?

SHEILA  
 Nick! My God. The water!

NICK  
 Come tom mount this horse. Lets go before the troopers find us.

EXT. IRONSTONE-CAPPED RISE - DAY

Nick urges the riders on until the land breaks into an ironstone-capped rise, its crown hard as steel against the western sky. Beneath that cap, tucked into the shadow, yawns a shallow cave.

NICK (cont'd)  
(nodding toward a  
branch)

Tie the horses there. Then see what  
sort of shelter fortune's left us.

INT. WIDE MOUTH CAVE - DAY

The cave forces them to stoop as they enter. Its air is cool, smelling faintly of dust and age. There's a large discarded snake skin on the floor - a King Brown, not to be messed with.

Nick's thoughts churn.

NICK  
OK. First, food and water for you  
both. Then a telegram to Reg. So its  
on to Great Wall for me. You two  
stay here and try to keep out of  
trouble.

EXT. THE GREAT WALL - DUSK

Nick arrives at the homestead as dusk settles, an eerie atmosphere surrounding the yard. The silence is heavy. The yard is empty, doors shut, no horses in sight. Nick's horse shivers beneath him, ears pricked, nostrils flaring. Nick trusts the horse's unease.

He skims low along the house, eyes sharp, watching for any sign of life.

INT. BARN HOMESTEAD - DUSK

Nick crouches low inside the barn, eyes narrowed. He spots movement - four troopers emerge from the house. One is being helped by two others. The troopers leave.

105. EXT. VERANDA HOMESTEAD - NIGHT

Nick climbs over the veranda rail, slipping into the house. He enters the main room where Abi is waiting.

INT. MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

ABI

Jesus, Nick! You startled me.

NICK

Sorry. The troopers. Why did they leave?

Abi stands, tension in her voice.

ABI

They received a telegram from Reg. They're heading to The Junction. Trouble there. Armed and dangerous.

NICK

Might be the town mob juiced up on rum.

ABI

Where's Sheila?

NICK

She's safe.  
I've come for supplies, if you can spare them.  
Meat, flour, tea... the usual.

Abi nods immediately.

ABI

Yes, of course. Take what you need. She studies him, concerned.

ABI (cont'd)

I am worried about Sheila though. The troopers said she shot the wounded one.

Nick shakes his head.

NICK

Don't really know, Abi. I wasn't at the scene. I saw her later today.

NICK (cont'd)

Did the troopers keep you locked up while they were here?

ABI

Oh, no. They just said I had to remain quiet.

She steps closer.

ABI (cont'd)  
If I'd seen you or Sheila, I would've  
found a way to sound the alarm.

A beat.

ABI (SOFTLY)  
I'm just glad you're both okay.

NICK  
Yeah. Thanks.

A beat, then—

Can you send a telegram to Reg?  
Don't tell him I'm here.  
Just say the troopers have left...  
Ask if there's any new developments.

Abi nods.

ABI  
Yes, Nick. Right away.

INT. TELEGRAPH ROOM — MOMENTS LATER

Abi taps out the message. Nick watches, puzzled.

NICK  
I don't understand dots and dashing.

ABI  
Reg says all is well.  
So... I'm not sure what the fuss was  
about.  
Nick considers this.

NICK (TO HIMSELF)  
The plans of mice and men...

Abi pours tea.

ABI  
Tea?

NICK  
Arr... yes please, Abi.  
Good idea.

She hands him a cup, then—

ABI  
 You know, Nick...  
 You can always stay the night.

A loaded pause.

ABI (cont'd)  
 I'm sure the fugitives can survive  
 until tomorrow.

NICK  
 Sure.  
 I'm in need of a rest.  
 So is the horse.

He rises.

NICK (cont'd)  
 I'll just go outside and feed the  
 poor fella.

EXT. VERANDA - LATER THAT NIGHT

Nick and Abi sit in the soft evening air. Lantern light flickers, and their silence is broken only by the faint chirp of night creatures.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - DAWN

A lone rider enters the grounds of the homestead. The sound of cockatoos screeching loud commands fills the air.

NICK and ABI are lying in bed, side by side, as lovers do.

The front door opens. Boots thud along the polished floorboards. The bedroom door creaks as it opens.

NICK  
 (half-awake)  
 Sheila? What are you doing here?

SHEILA  
 I was looking for you, worried the  
 troopers might have caught you. But  
 it seems your safe and well bedded.

She turns angrily and walks outside. Nick gets up quickly, dressing and heading outdoors.

ABI  
 Who's that?

NICK  
(sighs)  
Sheila.

Sheila was just about to mount Piebald when he stopped her.

NICK (cont'd)  
Your going to kill that horse with  
all this hard riding. It needs a week  
in a paddock.

SHEILA  
I've got to get back to Tommy.

She had her head down not making eye contact.

NICK  
Come inside sweet pea. I'll get you  
some breakfast and you can leave the  
mare here and take a fresh horse back  
to the cave. I'll be coming with you.  
Abi has got plenty of supplies for  
you and Tom.

Sheila pauses.

SHEILA  
Tommy's waiting I have to go.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
Bye!

She rides out with tears in her eyes.

EXT. HIDEOUT CAMP - LATER SAME DAY

Sheila rides hard into the hideout camp, dismounting quickly. She stokes the fire aggressively, causing embers to fly.

TOMMY  
(looking up)  
Hey Sheil', want some coffee?

She doesn't answer right away but finally accepts.

SHEILA  
(softly)  
Yeah, okay.

TOMMY  
I'll see to Pie.

Tommy goes about grooming the horse, pouring water over its foamed skin and drying it by dragging a rope across it's body.

TOMMY (RETURNS)

Something on your mind Sheil? Spit it out then.

SHEILA

Its just Nick and Abi. They are...  
hmm...seeing each other. And now he  
might forget about me.

TOMMY

Not in a million years Sheil'. Nick  
loves you.

SHEILA

Really?

TOMMY

You'll better believe it!

EXT. HIDEOUT - AFTERNOON

Nick arrives at the hideout with fresh supplies. He hands the sacks to Tommy and sits down next to Sheila, putting his arm around her shoulders.

NICK

(softly)

We okay, sweet pea?

Nick kisses the top of her head.

NICK (cont'd)

I love you more than life itself.

SHEILA

(softly)

All good, Uncle. I love you too.  
Sorry.

NICK

No worries darlin.

He changes the subject.

NICK (cont'd)

You know I have to find out what the troopers are doing. They were in hiding at the Wall. Waiting for one or all of us to show.

(MORE)

NICK (cont'd)

Then they were called back to The Junction. But I can't send a telegram to Reg because if McGuire is there he knows Morse.

SHEILA

Who's McGuire?

NICK

He's the police inspector. I suspect the troopers were called back to control the 'town mob' they want to capture you and Tom. But don't worried. I will never allow that to happen.

Black Pinky appears from no-where.

BLACK PINKY

You bloody white-fellas got any tea?

NICK

Shit! Pinky. I've been lookin' for you.

BLACK PINKY

Yeah me know Nick. You can't track a black-fella. You too white.

Pinky laughs and shows a cheeky grin.

NICK

Where in Gods name are the twins?

BLACK PINKY

Oh... twins big big sorrow time. Them spirits will chase me across the dream-time if I don't get corroborree for them.

Pinky was tryin' to save them from tha otha men. They want to do the pokie pokie with them girls. But Pinky says no. Them kids not gins. So Pinky take dem kids to safe place.

SHEILA

So why were their legs tied.

BLACK PINKY

Well, they say they will climb out of hole because the devil lives in there. So Pinky tie their legs together but leave their hands free.

(MORE)

BLACK PINKY (cont'd)

Then Pinky say e'll be back with water and food. But when return, see that girl climb down hole. Pinky hide on hill. Girl come back out and ride away. When go down again, twins are dead. That girlie kill them!

SHEILA

That's a lie! They were already dead. You killed them you bastard, just like all men.

NICK

Steady darlin'. I think what has happened is the girls ran out of good air. That's why Pinky, Sheila, found no blood on them.

SHEILA

(Sheila's face  
screwed looking at  
Pinky.)

So where are the girls now then?

BLACK PINKY

They are still there. In a noo tunnel Pinky was diggin'. That's why the big ballroome thinge crashed down on you Nick.

SHEILA

Can we get them out Nick?

NICK

I think so Darlin, yes. But we will need to know what's happening with the troopers.

BLACK PINKY

Pinky will find black-fellas and see where cops are. My mob roam round near Junction country.

BLACK PINKY (CON'T)

Pinky go look for them. Then wen find will set bloody-big smokey grass fire if dem cops are commin.

NICK

Okay. Off you go then. But we can't get the girls bodies out until we are sure the troopers are far away. They want these two.

BLACK PINKY

Yeah. Pinky want that one. She be Pinky's gin. Me saw 'er shoot the cop. She make good gin that one.

Sheila draws her pistol pointing it at Pinky cocking the hammer.

SHEILA

You come anywhere near me you black bastard and I'll shoot you dead.

NICK

Easy Darlin' easy.

Tommy walked over between Sheila and Pinky. Looking Pinky direct in his eyes.

TOMMY

And I'll cut the other pinky off and I don't mean the other foot if you touch her. So fuck off and do your job.

BLACK PINKY

Pinky might spear this one in the leg later. (pointing at Tommy)

Pinky turned and started to run in the direction of the Junction Road.

NICK

Okay we can't stay here I intend to burry the twins in the cave. Its their custom. We will need a new camp. I know of an old miners hut about five miles west of my place. That's were we will make a stand, if necessary.

TOMMY

What? Like do or die shit!

NICK

If we have to Tom. But my aim is to get Sheila to Brisbane and clear her name. Your name is not so easy to clean.

SHEILA

I'm not leaving this country. I hate Brisbane and never want to be there again. I would rather die here than risk being locked up in some stinking prison. And Tommy stays with me Nick!

NICK

Okay Darlin', we'll take one thing at a time. Lets go and get the girls out.

EXT OPAL MINE - DAY

NICK

OK. Here's how it works. I will climb down to the base of the shaft and free the twins body's then roll them up in these blanks and tie them up. Then we should be able to haul them to the surface and burry them in the cave.

NICK (cont'd)

Tom you ride to the top of the hill and watch for smoke.

Tommy obeys

SHEILA

Maybe I should go down Nick and wrapped the twins. After-all, if you get trapped again we are doomed.

NICK

I appreciate the thought Sheila but it will take a lot more strength than you have to get the girls out of the mess they are in. I am sure the mine is safe enough and you wouldn't be able to climb Pinky's foot holes.

Nick gouged the dirt out with his hands as Sheila watches from ground level.

He drags each twin out to the floor of the shaft. Their bodies were beginning to rot and he rolled each one in a blanket, tied them up like a bundle with two separate ropes and climbs back out.

TOMMY

Smoke! Pink smoke!

SHEILA

How far off!

TOMMY

Don't know can't tell but their  
commin!

NICK

Sheila, get up that hill with Tom and  
tell me where the smoke is.

SHEILA

OK Nick!

SHEILA (cont'd)

Nick! Nick! There coming. Troopers  
and towns folk at the gallop about  
one and half miles away!

NICK

Come on then you two! Follow me!

EXT. THE NEW HIDEOUT - DAY

After riding hard.

NICK

There!

Nick was pointing to a ramshackle shed that was no more than  
some rusted roofing iron leaning against what looked like  
fallen tree limbs. They dismounted near the structure.

NICK (cont'd)

Okay. I am reasonably sure that Pinky  
will not think of this place.

TOMMY

That's because its not a place. It's  
a pile of junk.

SHEILA

But that junk will do for now.

NICK

Too right Sheila. We can fix it up a  
little but one of us will have to be  
on the lookout all the time. So  
Sheila, you take first watch. About  
three hundred yards to the east.

SHEILA

On it Uncle.

NICK

And you and I Tom, we have some work to do.

Tommy nodded and began to clear fallen limbs from around the tin, while Nick set about hiding the two remaining horses.

TOMMY

How did the troopers get to use so fast Nick.

NICK

I think it's a case of wire tapping. They must have a portable telegraph machine and tapped the wire from The Wall to The Junction. I think it may all have been a luring trap to get all of us, not just me at Abi's place.

TOMMY

Bastards!

Ext lookout - day

On arriving at her lookout position. Sheila notices blood on Piebalds right leg.

SHEILA

Just a scratch Pie.

Tommy arrives at the lookout by foot.

TOMMY

Hey Sheil' my turn. Nicks got some fresh damper for you.

SHEILA

Yum. No horse Tommy?

TOMMY

Na, I'll walk back when Nick replaces me.

SHEILA

Okay. The smoke is starting to clear so stay low so you can't be seen.

TOMMY

No worries Sheil'. See ya.

INT. HIDEOUT – CONTINUOUS

SHEILA

Gee that smells so nice Nick.

NICK

Thanks Darlin. Here take some. But carefully it's hot.

Sheila eagerly took the bread and began eating, washing it down with creek water.

SHEILA

Are the horses okay Nick?

NICK

Yes sweet pea. They are happy to be resting and there is plenty of grass and water in that little swamp.

Tommy is still on lookout duty and smelling the damper, thinking only of food.

Suddenly – a flash of movement. A spear whistles low and bites into his leg. Black Pinky has used his woomera to make the spear hit hard and fast.

Tommy's cry rips across the camp.

TOMMY

Arr Fuuuck!

The scrub explodes with gunfire. Bullets cut into the stringy bark exposing white flesh and red sap.

Sheila runs outside plants a boot on a fallen log, shoulders the Winchester, and snaps the lever – once, twice, clean, practiced. Shots kick dirt at the troopers' feet.

Nick slides to Tommy, drags him behind a boulder, fires quick rounds.

NICK

Stay with me Tom.

He yanks the spear out. Tommy screams. From the flats below, the posse boils up. Wild shots. Chaos.

Sheila fires – troopers scatter. Black Pinky stalks the center, hurling spears that bounce off the iron stone boulders. Nick returns fire. Pinky laughs and vanishes.

Troopers try to flank. Sheila rakes the gully with rifle fire. Nick drags a spare bandoleer. The wind rises.

Chaos of gunfire. Horses spook. A canteen explodes. More shots echo off stone.

Pinky tries the dry wash and surprises the horses – they bolt.

Sheila listens, fires a shot that forces Pinky to cover.

The ridge becomes a box of ricochets and dust. Tommy, pale, ties off his wound. Ammo runs low. Shots slow. The troopers' push falters. The posse withdraws.

Silence grows. A wary truce settles.

EXT. RIDGE – MOMENTS LATER

The crack of thunder drowns the silence. Rain floods down. Nick crawls to Tom, drags him down the hill. Sheila follows.

They escape into the storm.

EXT. BREAKAWAYS – TWILIGHT

They find a man-made cave. They crawl inside. Tommy's leg is badly injured.

SHEILA

Nick Tommy's leg is bad, with all this mud it could be badly infected.

NICK

Okay Darlin. The best option is to take Tom to Great Wall.

SHEILA

But, no, he will get caught.

NICK

Yes. And that's the plan. They will have to take him to Doc Martin. Its the law.

SHEILA

Well OK. But Tommy might say no.

TOMMY

(with his eyes closed)

I'm not dead yet you two. But I agree to the plan and give my full consent.

SHEILA

Tommy it will be so dangerous. If they lock you up I swear I will get you out to freedom.

TOMMY

I know you will Sheila Hamilton. I know you will. And I love you for it.

NICK

If ever you need help Sweet Pea and I am not around, seek Digger out, in the room behind the whore house.

SHEILA

There's a whore house? Shit... So fuck it... lets went!

EXT. CHANNEL COUNTRY — DAY AFTER STORM

The land glistens. Frogs croak. Budgerigars wheel overhead.

Sheila carries swags. Nick carries/draggs Tom. A dingo watches from a ridge.

SHEILA

Do you think we will find the horses Nick, I mean Piebald, I'm lost without her.

NICK

Yeah it's possible. But try not to be too positive because the let down will hurt more if your mare is lost forever.

SHEILA

I don't even want to think about it.

EXT. GREAT WALL HOMESTEAD — LATER

They approach cautiously. Nick taps on the rear door. Abi appears, distressed. The troopers suddenly swarm Nick and Tommy. They are chained to post in the barn. Its only then that Nick sees the troopers horses.

NICK  
 (through clenched  
 teeth)  
 Why didn't I look in the fuckin barn!

Sheila, hidden in the trees, sees everything. She retreats into the dark, alone.

EXT. BUSH — NIGHT

Sheila struggles through mud in the humid night, guided only by the stars. She slips, tumbles down an embankment into a muddy puddle. Coughs. Nearly chokes. A dingo watches from a ridge.

She continues on until she sees the shape of a horse on its side. She approaches — her beloved Piebald is dead, peppered with thin spears. Sheila screams in emotional pain, collapses, devastated. The dingo bolts. She wipes mud on her face washed with tears.

SHEILA  
 (beating the ground  
 with her fist)  
 No Pie! No!

A Beat

Why is my life so fucking agonizing!

INT. BARN — DAWN

A boot slams into Nick Hamilton's ribs. He jolts awake.

TROOPER  
 Get up. You and your boyfriend are  
 off to the magistrate. You'll likely  
 be hanged in a few days.

He laughs. Inspector McGuire enters, tapping a short whip against his riding boots.

MCGUIRE

Right, Nickolas Hamilton. Why you tangled yourself in this treachery is beyond me.

NICK

The boy needs a doctor at once.

TROOPER

He'll get one - so he's healthy enough to be hung.

MCGUIRE

Precisely. He murdered a good and righteous man.

NICK

My brother was no good or righteous man. He raped his own daughter. He was a monster.

MCGUIRE

That may or may not be. Regardless, your runaway niece - the notorious female bushranger - The Fille - should have gone to the authorities instead of starting a wild killing spree of police.

A Beat.

MCGUIRE (cont'd)

We'll catch her, trial her, and hang her too.

NICK

God will send you all to hell if you touch my Sheila.

MCGUIRE

God, my dear fellow, is on my side. And He demands justice.

Troopers strap Nick and the wounded Tommy to the back of a wagon. Tommy writhes as the rough journey toward Emu Creek begins.

EXT. BOGGY PLAIN - DAWN

10 miles north.

A murder of crows crows out from a tree.

SHEILA  
 (sheila looks up at them)  
 Not yet you maggot eaters.

Sheila spots a saddled horse grazing. She circles wide, thinks of how Horton was so calm with horses, she soothes it gently. Recognition strikes – it's Nick's horse.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
 Steady... beautiful, steady. It's me.

She takes the reins, mounts, the horse jostling once before settling. She rides on – an outlaw silhouetted against the morning mist.

EXT. EMU CREEK – REAR OF BROTHEL – DAY

Sheila stands behind a weathered hotel, uncertain.

She knocks. The cracked door swings open to reveal The Gold Digger.

DIGGER  
 Yes can I help you. Wait on... aren't you Sheila Hamilton, the notorious bushranger? There's a poster of you in town.

SHEILA  
 My name is Sheila, sir... but I'm no bushranger. I've only been protecting myself. Uncle Nick is in custody – and my friend Tommy – and they're coming here and Tommy's wounded by Black Pinky and–

DIGGER  
 Slow down, little one. Come inside before the Traps see you.

Sheila steps in, relieved.

INT. DIGGER'S ROOM – CONTINUOUS

A modest table. Tea boils. Bread is cut.

DIGGER  
 Have some bread, love.

She devours it hungrily, eyes brightening.

DIGGER (cont'd)  
I can arrange a bath. You're filthy.

Sheila almost smiles.

SHEILA  
(To herself)  
Heaven, real food and a bath.

Digger exits to arrange the bath. Sheila curls up in a corner and drifts into a dream.

EXT. MUDDY FLATS – DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Dark clouds. Insects. Sheila carries spears.

A dingo stalks the ridge line. Black Pinky appears appears like a phantom.

PINKY  
Ullo there, whitey girl.

SHEILA  
What the fuck you doin' here? You  
killed Piebald, you cunt!

She cocks her mud-covered Remington.

PINKY  
You sure that thing'll shoot, whitey?  
S'full of mud.

She fires. Pinky flies backward, gut-shot. Sheila steps forward, cold and vengeful.

SHEILA  
These are for the twins and Pie.  
She drives spears one after the other  
into him as he screams.

The Dingo watches.

CUT TO:

INT. DIGGER'S ROOM – MORNING

Digger shakes Sheila awake.

DIGGER  
Oi, settle.

SHEILA

Oh!

DIGGER

You were dreamin' somethin' fierce.

SHEILA

Just dreaming of my horse...  
Piebald. She's dead. Black Pinky  
killed her — and the twins.

Digger whistles low.

DIGGER

Jesus.

Charlotte enters.

DIGGER (cont'd)

Oh this is Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

You certainly need a bath, girl. Come  
with me.

INT. BROTHEL — BATHING ROOM — LATER

Sheila soaks in hot perfumed water.

SHEILA

Heaven again.

Later, she dries off, dons a dressing gown. A knock. Sheila  
grabs her Remington.

SHEILA (cont'd)

Who's there?

CHARLOTTE

It's me. Charlotte

Sheila lowers her gun.

SHEILA

Where are my cloths Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

Here on the floor dear. But they need  
a wash.

So they scrub Sheila's filthy clothes together in the tub —  
the whore and outlaw, side by side.

EXT. EMU CREEK — MAIN STREET — NOON

The wagon rattles into town under brutal heat. Nick and Tommy sit shackled, exhausted. Flies swarm Tommy's blood-caked wound.

Troopers form a perimeter. McGuire rides in front. A hostile crowd gathers — ropes, chains, rage.

A bottle smashes in front of the wagon.

CROWD

Murderers! Savages! Hang 'em!

The wagon stops a trooper opens the tail gate.

TROOPER #1

On your feet you two.

Nick slides off the back, landing awkwardly with his hands bound, half-turning to brace Tommy's elbow.

Tommy's boots hit the ground and his knees buckle, a white wash coming over his face.

NICK

Easy man easy, don't let them see your vulnerable. Stand up, brother.

Troopers push through the mob.

MAN

The law's too slow! Hang 'em now!

MCGUIRE

If you can't hold your tongue, hold your ground. Any man that tries to default the law here today will be shot!

WOMAN

Yeah, shoot us but not the murderers? Where's the justice?

McGuire stays stone-faced.

MCGUIRE

You'll have your say at the hearing.

EXT. LOCKUP – MOMENTS LATER

MCGUIRE  
Sargent, Fetch Doctor Martin to the  
goal.

INT. LOCKUP – CONTINUOUS

A cooler, dim room. Dusty window. Bucket. Bench. Cuffs removed. Nick eases Tommy down. Gives him water.

TOMMY  
(almost delirious)  
Remember White Gums Nick... the  
creek... the way the water talked...

Nick smiles faintly.

Doc Martin enters and examines Tommy's leg.

DOC MARTIN  
Lucky lad. The Bone's not broken.

He numbs and stitches the wound. Tommy barely flinches.

DOC MARTIN (cont'd)  
Never thought I'd see you in irons,  
Nickolas.

NICK  
Shut the fuck up and fix the kid.

McGuire stands in the doorway.

MCGUIRE  
You'll see the magistrate tomorrow.  
Counsel, if you can name any who'll  
stand for you.

Nick chuckles bitterly.

NICK  
We can barely name a friend.

MCGUIRE  
Sergeant – lock them in.

The cell door clangs shut. Silence – then the muffled roar of the waiting mob. Nick sits beside Tommy, staring at the small window, counting heartbeats.

NICK  
Come on sheila. Come on.

EXT. BROTHEL - NIGHT

Sheila, hiding behind the curtain upstairs, peers out the window. The bush clothing dries on a line outside. When it's finally dry, she retrieves changes and muttering to herself.

SHEILA  
(musing)  
A Bushranger doesn't wear a dress.

INT DIGGERS ROOM - DAY

A plan is being hatched.

DIGGER  
Tonight, Charlotte get all the troopers into the saloon. Sheila and I will pull the bars off the goal cell window using the horses. It's only an old wooden wall, shouldn't take much force. Then the four of us - Sheila, me, Nick, and the kid, will ride out of this prison town. You're with me on this, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE  
Sounds great to me, Digger. Half-price night, right? That'll grab their attention.

The brothel's lanterns flicker on, and the sounds of laughter spill onto the street. Inside, Charlotte leans on the bar, eyes on the clock, a pencil tucked behind her ear.

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)  
(loudly to the troopers)  
Half-price starts now, boys. Spread the word!

The piano plays. Dancers move through the haze, calling the constables by name. A sergeant tries to look stern but gets swept up, drifting toward the rooms.

INT. DIGGER'S ROOM - NIGHT

SHEILA  
(Looking at Digger)  
You sure you can trust Charlotte?

DIGGER  
She owes me. Besides, she knows where  
the troopers keep their weaknesses.

DIGGER (cont'd)  
Ropes ready love?

SHEILA  
Two coils and a crowbar. We haven't  
come to knit, Dig.

DIGGER  
Then let's get our boys.

EXT. LANE WAY BACK YARD - NIGHT

The horses are ready in the yard. Four stocky bays chew on hay. Sheila strokes one of the horses gently, whispering to it.

SHEILA  
Easy, lovely. You're about to earn  
your supper.

DIGGER  
The window's around the rear.

Sheila taps lightly on the window sill with the crowbar.

A whisper

NICK  
Sheila?

SHEILA  
Yes. Grab the crowbar uncle. Digger  
said to pry some of the wood open to  
weaken the window frame.

NICK  
Yes. Okay, on to it.

INT. POLICE HOUSE - NIGHT

Nick is working with the crowbar on the window timbers, and Tommy stands nearby, watching the police station door.

Sheila ties the ropes to the window bars.

SHEILA  
(whispering)  
Shit! Someone's coming!

Digger quickly ties the other end of the ropes to the horses' saddles. With a tug, the iron bars are pulled free, crashing to the ground. The escape begins.

Tommy slips out first. He lands like a cat, favoring one leg. He flashes Sheila a grin that doesn't reach his eyes.

TOMMY  
Nicks coming.

TOMMY (cont'd)  
Missed you Sheil.

Sheila answers with a rye smile. Nick follows - broader through the shoulders. He sticks halfway. Sheila braces, hauls him out.

Nick spills out with a gasp, knees hitting the dirt.

A door bangs open at the front of the building, overlapping voices, laughter, an argument.

Sheila's looks toward the corner of the lane.

SHEILA  
They're done early. Typical men.

TOMMY  
Or someone kept his trousers on.

DIGGER  
Move!

Digger slices the ropes with his knife. The horses skitter - ropes dropping like shed snakes. They mount fast. The front lane fills with sound - boots, laughter, shouts.

VOICE (O.S.)  
Who left the side door unlatched?

Sheila points down an alleyway.

SHEILA

Over there. Then north along the  
creek.  
Keep low.

Nick nods, still panting.

NICK

You've got a talent, my girl,  
for understanding peril.

Sheila raises a hand.

SHEILA

Come on — let's go. One... two—

A beam of light knifes across the lane as a door opens  
nearby. They all freeze.

The light slides over the ropes... pauses on scuffed dust...  
then drifts toward the flat black hole of the window.

SHEILA (WHISPER)

Three.

They kick. The horses launch forward. Behind them — boots  
slap, a lantern rattles, a rifle bolt clicks.

TROOPER (O.S.)

Escape!

Another trooper bursts out, still belting his trousers.

TROOPER (O.S.) (cont'd)

Escape! They've escaped!

The riders vanish into the night.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - NIGHT

The outlaws ride into the channel country. Then slow to a  
canter.

NICK

If they bring a black tracker, he'll  
make us earn our freedom. But it'll  
cost him time, and time's all ours  
tonight.

As they ride on, the conversation turns darker.

NICK (cont'd)

Where the hell is Piebald?

SHEILA  
 Black Pinky killed her not far from  
 the battle ground. So I shot and  
 speared him dead.

TOMMY  
 You're becoming a real outlaw, Sheil.

NICK  
 We're all outlaws now Tom. Harrh!

They ride on at the gallop.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The group encounters a coach in the distance. They quickly  
 change course, using spinifex to hide their tracks.

SHEILA  
 (Looking behind)  
 Nick! Troopers. North, about a mile  
 away.

They change direction to evade capture.

At the head of a shallow gully digger finds a trace - wheel  
 marks, fresh and narrow, cutting across the downs toward the  
 east road. He had found a Cobb & Co coach again.

Reporting to the others, Sheila's mouth worked once before  
 the words came.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
 If-if they've got mail, they'll have  
 coin. Enough for flour. Beans if  
 we're blessed. Coffee if we're  
 saints.

Nick eyes the rear as far as he could see. There was dust in  
 the air. Horses maybe three or four being ridden hard.

NICK  
 And enough to make bushrangers of us,  
 sure as Sunday.

Sheila met his look with a stern reply.

SHEILA  
 I'm already starving Uncle! You want  
 to preach morals to me in the grave?

DIGGER  
This is Fuckin' risky!

In a minute the coach comes dipping between the scrub – six bays working hard, a driver hunched, a single guard asleep with his shotgun propped like a third passenger. Nick walked his horse out onto the middle of the road with his gun arm outstretched and shouted:

NICK  
**Stand and deliver!**

The driver reaches for the brake. The guard's eyes snap open. Digger's Colt is already trained on him. That says enough.

DIGGER  
No foolishness!

The Driver mutters under his breath, hauling back on the reins.

DRIVER  
You want the mailbags, take 'em.  
There's a widow in the coach, headed  
for her sister – don't scare her.

Sheila rides forward, her voice pitched low, boyish.

SHEILA  
There's nothing to be scared of.

She swings down from her horse.

The guard slides a small, strong strongbox one-handed across the footboard. Sheila takes it.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
We only want coin. We'll leave the  
letters. People need their news.

The guard snorts – then flinches as Digger's pistol twitches. The driver flicks his eyes to Nick.

DRIVER  
You're the lot from Emu Creek.

NICK  
News travels faster than a horse.

The driver gives a tight smile, tips his chin east.

DRIVER

Faster than you, today. Troopers are pushing everything toward Brisbane. Telegraph's singing. They don't need to catch you. They just need to make you choose where to hang yourselves.

(A beat)

But in the meantime — and for the girl's sake — take my pack.

Tommy steps in and takes the pack. Shelia draws her pistol and shoots the padlock off the strongbox. It snaps open. She grabs the coin bag, then carefully slides the letters back inside.

SHEILA

Thank you.

For a heartbeat, the outlaw's mask slips. Relief lights her face. Then the bandanna is back up.

The driver cracks the reins. The coach surges forward at full gallop, dust wrapping around it like a shawl as it disappears down the road.

EXT. DRY BUSH DAY

Sheila rides on the far right flank. She reins in sharply, scanning the ground.

She dismounts, crouches, studies the dirt.

SHEILA

(low, focused)

Tracks.

The others pull up. Horses snort, restless. Sheila traces the prints with her fingers.

SHEILA CONT

Horses. And a man.

(She pauses, frowns.)

Bare feet. No shoes.

(She leans closer)

And the right foot's missing a little toe.

SHEILA CONT (cont'd)  
(She stands abruptly.)

SHEILA  
Fuck it!

TOMMY  
What?

They all dismount and gather around her.

SHEILA  
Tracks, Nick. It's him.

SHEILA CONT  
Bloody black pinky.

NICK  
So you didn't kill him?

Sheila shakes her head.

SHEILA  
I was so sure. I shot him, speared  
him, left him for the dingoes.  
(Her voice cracks.)

SHEILA CONTD)  
How could I be so wrong? I put six  
spears into him.

Nick considers this, measured.

NICK  
Well... you were exhausted. Likely  
delirious after your ordeal, darlin'.

He looks down the trail.

NICK CONTD)  
At any rate, the bugga's alive and  
tracking us.

A beat.

NICK  
But guess what?

Digger grins.

DIGGER  
We're behind them now.

NICK  
Too true, Dig.

He looks between them.

NICK CONTD)  
So we can veer around them, or-

TOMMY  
Or what?

Sheila doesn't hesitate.

SHEILA  
Take them on.

Digger nods, approvingly.

DIGGER  
I like her style, Nick.

Nick exhales.

NICK  
Yeah, but it could be reckless.  
Costly.

TOMMY  
But tha buggers'll follow us all the  
way into New South Wales.

Sheila steps forward.

SHEILA  
We should put it to a vote.

Nick reacts instantly.

NICK  
No time for democracy, darlin'.  
We stay alive. And Tom's not one  
hundred percent.

He looks at Tommy.

NICK CONTD)  
Certainly not well enough for another  
battle.

Decision made.

NICK  
We move slightly eastward. Stay clear  
of them.

Digger mounts up.

DIGGER  
For now, anyways.

They remount. Horses turn east. The tracks disappear behind them.

EXT. VINEGAR WASH CANYON - NIGHT

The group finds shelter in a rocky canyon for the night, just as the troopers' pursuit nears its end.

DIGGER  
We rest here tonight. Its called  
Vinegar Wash. The troopers will have  
to wait until tomorrow.

The group camps under a bent coolibah tree on the western lip of the Downs. Far off, the distant lights of the rail line glow like a snake through the landscape. The sound of troopers is absent.

Sheila grinds coffee beans. Fingers brown as bark.

NICK  
We've got fifty shillings and some  
food. That'll carry us for a while.

Sheila stirs flour into a sticky mess and flattens it on the ashes to bake.

SHEILA  
(muttering)  
If they push us toward Brisbane,  
we're done for.

NICK  
We'll swing south to Toowoomba, then  
head down to New South Wales. Plenty  
of places to lose a man.

SHEILA  
And a women!

They all laugh as Sheila chews on the ash damper and drinks burnt coffee.

NICK  
Tomorrow, we'll re-provision. No one  
got hurt today. Lets hope same for  
tomorrow.

EXT. VINEGAR WASH - DAY

Tommy flicks ants off his wounded leg as the first shot rings out.

DIGGER  
(alert and firing)  
Where are they?!

NICK  
(dropping to the  
ground)  
To our rear, two hundred yards.

The troopers edge closer, using boulder rocks and trees for cover. The group returns fire as the horses panic and bolt.

DIGGER  
The bloody horses!

NICK  
(urgently)  
Forget the horses. We wait it out.

DIGGER  
(smirking)  
And how long will that last?

TOMMY  
I've only got six bullets left.

NICK  
(surprised)  
I've got twenty. Sheila! Head for the horses. We'll give you covering fire.

SHEILA  
OK!

MCGUIRE  
(voice carrying over  
the gunfire)  
Throw down your guns. Don't be so reckless!

A Beat

Think of the girl!

Sheila begins to move toward the horses, staying low and silent.

She reaches the horses calming them with a hand raised in the universal signal: I am no trouble.

SHEILA  
 (whispering)  
 Good horses... we're going now.

She turns to head back toward the gunfire when Pinky appears from behind a tree. He lunges at her, tackling her to the ground.

The horses panic, but Sheila fights back. She grabs her knife and drives it into Pinky's side, twisting it deep. His grip loosens, and he falls back, defeated. She drives his own spear deep into his gut. And stands over his body, breathing heavily. She wipes the blood from her knife and looks toward the gunfire.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
 (firmly)  
 I am justified in what I've done. God has forgiven me.

TOMMY  
**Sheila!**

Sheila turns and leads the horses toward the battle, running. McGuire sees her first, swearing as he shifts his position. The outlaws fight back as they make their escape.

NICK  
 (urgently)  
 Get to the horses boys!

The battle rages on as Nick, Sheila, and Tommy are making their escape.

SHEILA  
 Digger!

He looks at her and in doing so loses concentration and is gunned down by the troopers. Sheila tries to dismount to save him but Nick pulls her back onto her horse.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
 (screaming)  
 No! Let me go!

NICK  
 (firmly)  
 We have to go. Now!

The group rides through the darkening landscape, leaving the scene of the battle far behind them.

SHEILA  
 (dismounting head  
 down arms expressive)  
 Why does it have to happen? I killed  
 him. My stupid fault. All of it is my  
 fucking fault!

NICK  
 (supporting her)  
 It's not your fault, darlin'. It was  
 a battle. People die.

SHEILA CONT  
 I miss him already. I miss Sargent  
 Horton. Don't you go too Nick. I love  
 you.

NICK  
 I love you too my little darlin. Lets  
 mount and get movin.

Tommy hangs back a little.

TOMMY  
 (very quietly)  
 Why not love me?

EXT BUSH CAMP - NIGHT

NICK  
 OK I have given this a lot of  
 thought. We will head north east to  
 Brisbane and catch the a steamer to  
 Townsville and then overland to  
 Charters Towers.

TOMMY  
 Why?

NICK  
 Because Digger once told me if I  
 needed a place to work go to Charters  
 Towers. Its the second largest city  
 in the Colony and there will be  
 plenty of work for all of us. And  
 they mine gold in the thousands of  
 pounds. Tons of gold.

SHEILA  
 Brisbane will be a problem for me  
 Uncle.

NICK

I know darlin. But I will be beside you all the way. And once we board the steamer, well that's that. We will leave the past behind.

SHEILA

Forever?

NICK

Yes sweet pea, forever.

TOMMY

Don't I get any say in this.

SHEILA

Yes Tommy. You can come with us or stay to face the courts.

TOMMY

Very, fucking funny, Sheila Hamilton. And no more bushrangers!

EXT. PADDLE STEAMER - DAY

The paddle steamer is large and imposing, floating against the dock like a houseboat, waiting for the passengers.

INT. STEAMER - PURSER'S OFFICE

The Purser takes their tickets with no smile. The group proceeds to their cabins.

INT. STEAMER CABIN - NIGHT

Sheila settles into her cabin, looking out the porthole.

SHEILA

(whispering to herself)

It's been too long... What happens now?

She picks up a small revolver, checking it before placing it back in her coat. She looks to the door where Nick stands, watching her.

NICK  
(stern)  
We need to keep this quiet Sheil.  
Discreet.

She nods, her gaze hardening.

SHEILA  
(quietly)  
And Tommy?

NICK  
We'll handle him.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Tropical heat makes the enclosed dining area stifling. Passengers fan themselves, picking at their meals. Tommy sits too close to a Merchant's daughter, gesturing wildly.

TOMMY  
(excited full of rum)  
You should see the country up north,  
Miss. Wild as anything. A man can  
disappear completely and start fresh.  
Even a bushranger could.

MERCHANT  
(suspicious)  
And what would you know about needing  
to disappear, young man?

Nick's freezes, his fork hovering mid-air.

SHEILA  
(whispering, to Tommy)  
Stop talking.

The merchant's daughter giggles.

MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER  
(giggling)  
Oh, that's very exciting! Have you  
ever seen a real bushranger?

Tommy opens his mouth but Nick kicks him under the table.

NICK  
(clearing throat)  
Only in the newspapers, Miss. They're  
always exaggerated anyway.

Sheila stands to leave.

SHEILA

Tommy's always been dramatic. Reads far too many penny novels about bushrangers and such nonsense.

EXT. DECK - NIGHT

The bushrangers stand on the deck, the wind whipping at them. Sheila grabs Tommy's arm, her nails digging in.

SHEILA

(whispering urgently)  
What's wrong with you? We're in danger on this ship.

TOMMY

(pulling away)  
Don't touch me like that. You're not my keeper!

Sheila's face twists with frustration.

SHEILA

(loud)  
I am your keeper when you're about to get us all hanged!

Tommy moves away from them, looking cold and distant. He speaks, his voice breaking.

TOMMY

Maybe I'm tired of pretending. Maybe I want the whole world to know what I did.

Sheila stares at him, torn between anger and guilt.

SHEILA

(surprised)  
You think I asked for that? You think I wanted my mother to suffer?

TOMMY

You wanted him dead. Don't lie.

SHEILA

(Sheila is whispering)  
Wanting and seeing are different things Tommy.

NICK

Both of you, please be quiet. We've got bigger problems.

(MORE)

NICK (cont'd)  
Police were asking questions at the dock. Specifically about a girl, an older man, and a young fellow traveling together.

SHEILA  
How specific?

NICK  
They mentioned Emu Creek and South Brisbane. They mentioned your father Sheila.

TOMMY  
Good. Let them know. I'm not ashamed of what I did. That beast had to die.

SHEILA  
Not Ashamed? You killed a man, Tommy. My father. You think that makes you a hero?

TOMMY  
I saved you!

SHEILA  
You destroyed everything! My home, my life, any chance I had of-

Sheila stops with her head hung low.

NICK  
Any chance of what, darlin.

She looks at Nick, and something passes between them that makes Tommy's face darken.

TOMMY  
Right. I see how it is. Kill the bastard who hurt you, but Uncle Nick gets the grateful looks.

SHEILA  
(Sheila's voice becomes dangerous)  
Nick never asked me to be grateful.

TOMMY  
No, he just takes it, doesn't he?  
Takes everything.

NICK  
Boy...don't over step the mark. Lets get rational.

(MORE)

NICK (cont'd)  
 If we are going to stay together then  
 we must trust each other.

TOMMY  
 I'm not a fucking boy! I'm the one  
 with blood on his hands for her!

SHEILA  
 Shut up. Both of you.

Sheila hisses as other passenger walk past, side glancing at the bushrangers.

INT. SHEILA'S CABIN - NIGHT

Sheila is staring out of the porthole, moonlight casting a ghostly glow on her face.

NICK enters, sitting beside her.

NICK  
 Can't sleep, darlin'?

Sheila remains silent, lost in thought. After a long pause, she turns to him.

SHEILA  
 I keep seeing his face... Tommy's  
 face, when he did it. Did he look  
 pleased with himself? Or was he  
 filled with guilt?

NICK  
 (sighing)  
 He'll be fine, darlin'. He's just  
 drunk. He doesn't mean it.

Sheila looks away, conflicted.

SHEILA  
 But I... I can't escape this. It's  
 like I'm in a prison. A prison I'll  
 never get out of.

NICK  
 He's young. He thinks violence solves  
 things clean. Like burning rubbish in  
 a fire. But he also loves you and  
 he's getting upset over his feelings  
 and he thinks everyone is trespassing  
 on his girl. But it's just the rum  
 that's talking. He'll be fine in the  
 morning.

SHEILA

But I'm not his girl. I mean I like him very much but he is not my boy friend.

NICK

Yeah I can see all that darlin. But if I can't get him to see sense then he's going to get us all hanged.

A long Beat

Darlin...

SHEILA

I know what you think Uncle. That I'm confused. That I don't know the difference between safety and... other things and that I have feelings that may be inappropriate.

But, I don't know why I can't resolve the problems between my conscience and my morals. I hate Tommy and I love him as a friend and that tears at me deep inside. It keeps me awake. Why do you think I am always up before dawn getting ready for the day. It's because if I just lay there thinking, I will go mad.

NICK

You've been through hell. It's natural to -

SHEILA

To what? To want the one man who never hurt me? Who never took anything I didn't offer?

Tommy, drunk, bursts into the room.

TOMMY

(agitated)

Very cosy, huh? You two having a good night?

Nick stands up, trying to control him.

NICK

(slowly)

Tommy, go sleep it off.

TOMMY

(sneering)

I killed for her, Nick. What have you done?

Sheila's voice becomes icy, her resolve hardening.

SHEILA

You killed for yourself Thomas. To get revenge against a man that did that thing to me and he did it twice. Yes twice Tom. Just after you left when we were talking and I said I was going to leave. Look at my back.

Sheila turns and lifts her shirt up her back.

SHEILA (cont'd)

Look what the monster did to me, He did that to his own daughter.

Sheila raises her shirt to expose her back. *It is covered in whipping marks*

Yes I wanted him dead. Oh my God I wanted him dead.

SHEILA (cont'd)

But...I did not ask anyone to do it for me. I was going to do it my self after I had found Nick. I wanted to save my mother...save my self from the torture that his dreams give me. And Hell is still all around me and I am being suffocated by my past.

Tommy staggers forward

TOMMY

That's not true! I did it to get revenge for you because I love you and care about you but you just treat me like I don't exist.

SHEILA

You wanted to be my savior. My hero. But heroes don't demand payment!

(MORE)

SHEILA (cont'd)

Your my friend and I will always be grateful for what you did even though you shouldn't have risked your future just for me. I didn't ask you to do it.

TOMMY

I love you!

SHEILA

No. You love the idea of owning me.

NICK

(gun drawn)

Sit down, Tom. Now!

Tommy bitterly laughs.

TOMMY

Ah there it is. The real Nick. You'd shoot me for her, wouldn't you?

NICK

Yes I will if you keep this shit going. Sheila is my niece, my family Tom. You are my friend. My brother in arms. So please mate have a sleep and you will feel more at ease in the morning.

TOMMY

No. Choose, Sheila. Right now. Him or me. Because I'm done pretending we're all friends here.

SHEILA

If you do this we will be caught, tried and hung. There goes our dreams. And is hanging worst than rape? How will you save me from that Tom?

TOMMY

Fuck it! I'm goin to bed.

Nick walks over to Sheila. Depressed, saddened, ashamed.

NICK

I am so so sorry sweet pea. What your father, my brother did to you. My heart is broken.

They embrace gently. Nick has visible tears.

INT. SHEILA'S CABIN - MORNING

Nick brings the hung-over Tommy into Sheila's cabin for a talk about a plan.

NICK

We need to leave this steamer before it docks. So here's how the plan will unfold. I along with Tom will take the wheelhouse and hold the crew. Tom will disarm all of them and then proceed to you Sheila, who will be waiting on deck outside the dining room.

You both will burst in, Tom will grab a passenger as a hostage and force any crew who may have guns to hand them over.

Then you will tell all the passengers to place wallets and handbags on the table. Sheila you will collect the money from those wallets and handbags.

SHEILA

OK Nick.

NICK

We don't want the physicals wallets and bags. But, and this is very important, we will not take personal jewelry. We don't want to break peoples hearts just take their money. And when you have all the cash, Sheila you will come and tell me.

She nods

NICK CONT

And then with the dining room passengers and crew held hostage, with false threats to murder them, I will force the Captain to run the ship aground. Now it's a lot to think about. But I know with clear heads and patience... we can achieve this without the loss of life. So how are you today Tom.

TOMMY

Not too good. But 'hair of the dog'  
might help.

NICK

No! (Whispering) I'll find you some  
powders for you to take.

EXT. PADDLE STEAMER — WHEELHOUSE — DAY

Sheila checks her weapons: a Winchester slung over her  
shoulder, a derringer tucked close.

Tommy grips a COLT .45, plus Sheila's Remington.

Nick carries a COLT .45, eyes sharp.

Nick and Tommy burst into the wheelhouse.

NICK

Right! Everyone stay calm. This is a  
hijack! Move when not told to and I  
will shoot you.

The Petty Officer and the Boatswain freeze.

NICK (cont'd)

Put any firearms on that table. Now.

They comply, placing their Colts down.

NICK (cont'd)

If you try for those weapons, I — or  
my brother in arms here —  
(points to Tommy)  
— will shoot you dead.

The CAPTAIN stands firm.

CAPTAIN

What do you want?

NICK

We want you to run this ship aground  
before Rockhampton.

CAPTAIN

Never. I can't do it.

Nick's voice hardens.

NICK

Then I'll shoot one of your crew.

A beat.

NICK (cont'd)  
Kid. Return to the fille.

Tommy exits.

INT. STEAMER — DINING ROOM — DAY

Sheila and Tommy burst in, theatrically violent.

SHEILA  
Stand and fucking deliver! This is a  
robbery!

Passengers panic.

SHEILA (cont'd)  
Hands on the table. Now.

Some hesitate.

TOMMY  
The fuckin' lady said NOW!

He fires into the ceiling.

Screams. Chaos settles into terror.

SHEILA  
We only want cash. Not your jewelry.  
Do what we say and no one gets hurt.

Tommy leans in close to the Merchants daughter.

TOMMY  
You've seen real bushrangers now —  
turned pirates.

She cringes closer to her father.

Sheila gathers wallets and purses, dumping cash into a  
carpet bag, then exits.

INT. WHEELHOUSE — DAY

Nick still holds the Captain and officers hostage.

Sheila enters.

NICK  
Run her aground.

The Captain folds his arms.

CAPTAIN

No.

Nick shoots the Petty Officer in the shoulder – fast, brutal.

The Captain still refuses. Without hesitation –

BANG!

Sheila fires her Winchester.

The Captain collapses, shot midships.

NICK

Jesus, Sheila!

SHEILA

Well the longer we debate, the more chance Tommy loses control.

She steps forward.

SHEILA (cont'd)

I can steer this heap myself.

Nick points at the Boatswain.

NICK

You. Steer the ship into the swamp.

Terrified, the Boatswain complies, turning the massive ship toward the mangroves at full speed.

NICK (cont'd)

Fille, go tell tell Tom.

INT. STEAMER – DINING ROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Passengers and crew are huddled together.

Sheila whispers to Tommy.

SHEILA

We're about to hit mangroves. Full speed.

Tommy turns to the room.

TOMMY

Everybody hold on!

EXT. MANGROVES — CONTINUOUS

The steamer slams into the mangroves with a catastrophic shudder.

Wood Explodes. Paddles Shatter. Funnels Collapse.

Passengers Scream as tables, glass, and bodies fly.

Mayhem. Smoke, dust, fire. Cries for doctors. Children screaming. Boilers rupture.

Nick finds Sheila and Tommy.

NICK

Come the fuck on. We go now.

They find rope ladders beneath lifeboats.

Nick lashes one to the rail.

NICK (cont'd)

Sheila first.

She climbs down with the carpet bag.

The First Officer and armed crew appear.

FIRST OFFICER (O.S.)

Shoot them!

Tommy fires back instinctively.

The crew hesitate.

SHEILA (O.S.)

What the fuck's happening?

NICK

Stay down!

Nick fires warning shots.

NICK (cont'd)

Save your passengers. Don't die for nothing.

The crew retreat.

EXT. MANGROVES — DAY

The trio flee through mud as the ship burns behind them.

Sheila stops.

SHEILA  
Should we help them?

NICK  
No, darlin'. There's plenty of crew  
to help and locals are already  
heading this way. Push on.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHARTERS TOWERS - DAY

It's a clear winters day. The sound of horses' hooves  
cracking the frost underfoot. The Hamilton Gang rides into  
town. The Steamer now weeks behind them.

Kids are playing with fireworks. A sharp crack echoes. Then  
another.

A string of red paper tubes erupts outside a Chinese Import  
Store. Smoke snaps and curls. Bright flashes tear the quiet  
apart. Sheila's horse rears violently.

SHEILA  
Whoa—!

Too late.

The horse panics, bucks sideways. Its hooves skid on loose  
dirt. The animal goes down hard.

Sheila is thrown.

TIME SLOWS.

She hits the ground with a sickening thud, her head snapping  
back. Dust explodes around her.

Silence.

NORMAL TIME

Nick and Tommy rein up fast.

NICK  
Sheila!

Nick leaps from his saddle and drops beside her. Tommy  
scrambles down, frantic.

Sheila lies motionless, eyes closed. Blood trickles from a cut at her temple, disappearing into the dust.

The fireworks pop again in the distance – hollow, cruel.

Nick gently turns her face.

NICK (cont'd)  
Sheil... come on, darlin'.

No response. Tommy looks up, furious toward the town.

TOMMY  
Jesus Christ!

Nick gathers Sheila into his arms, fear barely contained. The town continues – unaware. Smoke drifts.

Sheila does not move. A passerby directs Nick to the hospital. Nick carries Sheila all the way. Tommy brings the horses.

INT. HOSPITAL PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

Sheila lying in a bed, head bandaged and surrounded by ice packs. Nurse and doctor in the room.

NICK  
I'll like to stay awhile Doc. If that's OK.

DOCTOR  
Yes you can Mr. Perkins because you paid for this private room. That was good of you, because your daughter need rest.

TOMMY  
Will she be OK?

DOCTOR  
Your sister has what we call contusio cerebri.

NICK  
Sounds bad.

DOCTOR  
Yes. But we don't know a lot about brain injuries. However we will monitor her vital responses and keep her head cold with ice packs until she regains consciousness.

NICK

How long will it take for her to come round?

DOCTOR

Its unknown at this stage.

NICK

OK thanks Doc.

INT. SMALL COTTAGE IN GILL STREET - DAY

NICK

(at dinner)

You know Tom, I was talking to a fella in the store earlier and he told me about how the gold from the mines is stored in the Post Office.

TOMMY

Why the Post Office?

NICK

Apparently the Post Office has a stronger safe than the bank. And, now that Sheila is ill and may need expensive medical treatment back in Brisbane or even Sydney...

TOMMY

You want to rob the Post Office.

NICK

Very quick of you brother.

TOMMY

Well I am all for it to save Sheila.

NICK

Great I will need to explore the Post Office from the inside tomorrow.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Nick enters the post office to post a letter to a no name in a no name street in Brisbane. He cases the surroundings. There is a large walk in safe. Letter posted he leaves.

INT. RENTAL COTTAGE GILL STREET - NIGHT

At dinner.

NICK

OK mate. We can't do a robbery. It will have to be a burglary.

TOMMY

Why?

NICK

Because Tom, the safe is locked during the day. So trying to get the manager to open it, will be like getting the steamer captain to run the ship aground. And ya know what that cost us.

TOMMY

So...there's no Sheila to shoot the manager.

NICK

Funny Tom. You really are becoming a comedian.

TOMMY

I try.

NICK

So we will do what I do best. Dig a tunnel.

TOMMY

Wha, under the street?

NICK

Exactly Thomas!

**Montage of digging over 5 days.**

Driving the tunnel

Hauling dirt bags to the surface

Candles, pick and pulley noises

Sun light in windows turns to moon light

INT. SHEILA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Nick and Tommy are sitting by Sheila's bed.

Sheila moves one eye lid. Tommy sees it.

TOMMY  
Nick! Did you see that.

NICK  
What?

TOMMY  
Sheil just moved an eye lid.  
And it happens again. Then again.

NICK  
Tom call the nurse.  
Nick is leaning on the bed stroking Sheilas forehead.  
The nurse and Doctor enter. Sheila wakes.

SHEILA  
(groggy)  
What are you lot gorking at?  
Nick and Tommy are all smiles and move to hug Sheila from  
either side of the bed.

NICK  
Thank God your OK darlin.  
(He whispers in her  
ear)  
Call me dad.

She understands.

SHEILA  
I feel fine dad. When can I leave.

NICK  
When the doctor says so darlin.

DOCTOR  
Lets give it another day or so.

SHEILA  
I'm starving!

CUT TO:

INT. RENTAL COTTAGE GILL STREET - DAY

Nick and Tommy have dug a shaft through the living room  
floor and are driving a tunnel under Gill Street.

Rock and dirt are stored in the rooms of the cottage.

INT. HOSPITAL PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

TOM  
Sheil... we've got a plan.

SHEILA  
What kind od plan?

TOM  
The kind that makes us rich enough to  
never rob again.

Her eyes brighten with hope.

SHEILA  
Tommy... I wanna go to America.

TOM  
Then that's where we'll go.

SHEILA  
Where's Nick?

TOM  
Back at the cottage.  
And Sheil

A Beat

we're digging a tunnel into the Post  
Office vault.

She smiles widely.

SHEILA  
I'm coming with you.

They slip into the dark back streets, pretending to be  
ordinary townsfolk.

INT. TUNNEL UNDER GILL STREET - NIGHT

A lantern flickers, casting jittery shadows.

Nick digs relentlessly.

Tom claws through dense clay, coughing, retreating often for  
fresh air.

NICK  
Another six feet...  
then we're under the strongroom.

Above them, the sandstone post office stands proud – unaware it's being hollowed out.

INT. COTTAGE – NIGHT

Sheila hauls heavy bags up the shaft, arms shaking. She hides dirt under the floorboards and behind cupboards.

She never complains.

INT. TUNNEL – NIGHT

Nick's shovel STRIKES STONE.

NICK

That's it...  
We've hit it.

Tom kneels beside him.

TOM

The wall?

NICK

(smiles)  
The vault.

They break through concrete. Breaking into cupboards. The site of all the wealth makes Tommy jaw drop. Gold and bank notes spill into their waiting bags.

EXT. COTTAGE – DAWN

Four heavy saddlebags rest behind the cottage.

Nick rubs dust from his face, triumphant.

NICK

Told you, Tom.  
This town's built on gold –  
and now some of it's ours.

INT. POLICE BARRACKS – DAY

MCGUIRE.

Missing timber. Missing saddlebags. A  
quiet Gill Street. Somethings wrong.

A clerk bursts in.

CLERK

Sir – the vault won't open at the  
Post Office.

McGuire snaps upright.

MCGUIRE

Mount twenty men!  
Sweep the south end!

Troopers rush out.

EXT. COTTAGE – DAY

Nick, Tom, and Sheila. Three mounts and a pack horse.

NICK

To the Broughton.  
We'll lay low till it cools off.

A commanding voice echoes:

MCGUIRE (O.S.)

Stop there Nicholas Hamilton!

McGuire and twenty troopers block the road.

Silence. A gunshot. Chaos erupts. Bullets smash wood. Women  
scream. Dust clouds everything.

The pack horse collapses.

NICK

Keep riding!!

The trio flee toward the Burdekin River, troopers close  
behind.

EXT. BURDEKIN RIVER GORGE – DAY

A sheer cliff drops to the raging river.

Nick's horse stumbles. Nick slams onto the ground, blood  
soaking his shirt.

Tom kneels beside him.

TOM

We can make it, Nick!  
Hold on!

Nick grips his arm weakly while Tommy fires rounds to the rear.

NICK  
You're a good lad, Tom...  
Look after her for me...

**Nick dies.**

Sheila trembles, stunned, wide open eyes in disbelief. Runs to Nick and tries to drag him on, screaming.

Troopers close in. Bullets hit the ground around Sheila. Tom yanks a saddlebag from a horse, runs to Sheila and grabs her in one motion.

Together they fall off the cliff – swallowed by the white roar of the Burdekin River. Police rush to the cliff face and look into the swelling flood waters.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. A BANK OF THE RIVER - DAY

A figure is lying half out of the water with a partially buried saddle bag. A gold bar has dropped from the bag.

Sheila stands slowly, unsteady, covered in sand and clay. She looks around the vastness of the bush. The river has swept her miles from the gorge.

SHEILA  
(Moving in half  
circles back and  
forth, screaming,  
confused)  
Tommy. Tommy!... Tommy! Tommyyyyy!

Overhead an eagle moves in a circle pattern and then flies on.

The End