

EXT. FIELD - NSW, AUSTRALIA, 1846 - NIGHT

A barn is on fire. White hot flames rage out of control. Hoards of people rush around the inferno with buckets of water, throwing them onto the flames.

Smoke billows out of the second floor window, and illuminates the night sky with a ghostly haze. Echoes of shouts and orders from one person to the next, panicked and frantic, fill the night air.

INT. BARN - AUSTRALIA - NIGHT CONTINUED

Inside the barn one man, MICHAEL (early 30s), stumbles around amongst the flames looking for something. He shields his face as flames erupt in front of him and cries out in pain as he is burned. He recovers quickly, a man on a mission.

MICHAEL
(shouting)
Katie?! Katie!

A few moments pass.

KATIE (O.S)
Father? I'm here!

He rushes as fast as he can through the fallen, charred debris to find KATIE (10), who is trapped under a beam. He tries to lift it but it is too heavy.

EXT. FIELD - AUSTRALIA - NIGHT CONTINUED

At the center of the blurring, crazed motion sits three young girls. They are EMILY (8), CHARLOTTE (6), and NORA (3). They are frightened and crying. Their mother, SARAH (early 30s), rushes towards them out of the crowd.

SARAH
Girls! You need to move. Come with me!

The young girls are frozen with fear. Sarah reaches for their hands and pulls them to their feet quickly. She begins to guide them away when an explosion suddenly erupts from the second story window of the barn behind them, sending debris flying out onto the surrounding crowd below. Sarah stops short and spins quickly toward the barn.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(frightened whisper)
Michael!

As another explosion blasts from the window, all four of them jump at the sound.

A loud crash comes from inside the barn and the doors blow open and off their hinges. The second floor has collapsed.

SARAH (CONT'D)

No!
 (to the children)
 Stay here!

Sarah runs towards the barn in a panic. People from the crowd shout to her:

'Sarah, no!'

'Stay back'

'Don't get any closer!'

Sarah doesn't hear them, just continues to run blindly towards the barn and disappears amongst the flames.

The three girls stand silent amongst the chaos, crying. Emily hugs Charlotte and Nora reassuringly, facing them away from the fire, but the worry is evident in her expression.

Another loud crash and part of the back side of the roof collapses in, spraying sparks up into the night sky. Charlotte gasps and Nora pulls back from her and turns to face the barn. Charlotte breaks away suddenly and time seems to slow down.

CHARLOTTE

Mamma!

Charlotte takes off toward the barn. One man in the crowd moves to intercept her and holds her back but she struggles and breaks free of his grip and continues running. As she enters the barn in a vain attempted rescue the rest of the roof collapses in and more debris and sparks erupt from the inferno.

Everyone stops and stares. It is evident to all that Michael, Sarah, Katie and Charlotte are now lost to them forever.

Nora is frozen in fear. Emily hugs her tightly, crying. A couple, THOMAS and MARIE BISHOP (late 20s), kneel down next to the girls quietly and hold them tightly.

Thomas and Marie look at each other as if deciding what to do and then pull the girls closer and try to shield them from the horrific sight before them.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM, BISHOP HOUSE - AUSTRALIA - DAY

NORA (6) and Marie sit by EMILY's (11) bedside. Emily is very ill and currently sleeping, Marie constantly mops her forehead with a damp cloth from a nearby bowl of water.

Nora goes to the other bed in the room and retrieves a soft toy, which she brings back to Emily and places it on the bed next to her.

Emily wakes, opening her eyes and trying to smile reassuringly at her little sister. Nora takes her hand and Emily squeezes it weakly before her arm goes limp and falls from Nora's grasp, her hand dangling off the side of the bed.

Nora becomes distraught and tries to shake Emily awake again. Marie looks stricken and leans over to see if she is still breathing. When it is confirmed that Emily has passed on, Marie closes Emily's lifeless eyes sadly, and then pulls a crying Nora into her lap and they both cry together.

INT. NORA'S BEDROOM, BISHOP HOUSE - AUSTRALIA - DAY

NORA (16) sits in her room looking out the window. A knock at the door catches her attention and Thomas Bishop enters. He walks over to where she is sitting and places a firm hand on her shoulder, and a finger under her chin, turning her face to look up at him standing over her.

Outside the window, in the background, Marie stands in the garden and is looking towards the window. She can see her husband and Nora in the room.

INT. PARLOUR, BISHOP HOUSE - AUSTRALIA - EVENING

Nora (18) is standing alone in the parlour. Thomas enters the room and she turns to look at him. He holds a hand out to her and she takes it sadly, allowing him to lead her out of the room. As they near the hall, Marie watches from another doorway. She wears a look of contempt as Nora looks up at her and then quickly away before disappearing into the hall.

INT. NORA'S BEDROOM, BISHOP HOUSE - AUSTRALIA - DAY

Thomas pulls on his boots and casts a last glance at Nora, still sitting in her bed, covered up by the sheets, before opening the door and leaving the room.

Nora opens the bedside drawer and pulls out a letter opener. She looks at it for a moment then holds the point to her wrist. She squeezes her eyes shut and presses it against her skin for a moment but then she pulls it away and lets it go. She's not committed to suicide. It's not who she is.

Nora leans against the wall and a large bruise on her shoulder is exposed. She closes her eyes and tears begin to fall. She reaches up to wipe them away and there are more bruises around her wrists.

INT. PARLOUR, BISHOP HOUSE - AUSTRALIA, 1865 - DAY

GEORGE RADCLIFFE (mid 40s), tall and with a few grey hairs littered through his hair, sits in the parlour of the Bishop's house. Thomas Bishop (early 40s), sits opposite him.

THOMAS

Enough business, tell me more of your family.

GEORGE

My family are wonderful. My eldest, Nicholas, is studying law at Oxford now. He will finish his diploma within the year.

THOMAS

Sharp boy. As they say, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

GEORGE

He looks so much like his mother. It's nice to still have something of her with us.

Nora (22) enters with a tray of tea. She sets it down on the table and begins to pour the cups.

THOMAS

Yes, indeed. And your other children?

GEORGE

My daughter, Katherine, and my youngest son, Matthew, are doing well, as is their mother, Anne. I carry their photographs with me everywhere I go.

George pulls out a few photographs and hands two to Thomas. One is of Nicholas and the other of Anne, Katherine and Matthew. He tucks the third photograph back into his pocket, which doesn't go unnoticed by Nora. Nora hands George a cup of tea.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Thank you, -?

THOMAS

Nora. She is our ward, her parents tragically left this life when she was three. Marie and I have cared for her for the last nineteen years.

GEORGE

(to Nora)

I am very sorry to hear that.

Nora smiles politely at him and moves to hand Thomas his cup. As she does, George notices the bruised on her wrists and how she withdraws her hands quickly. He says nothing and Nora takes the tray and leaves the room.

THOMAS

I'm terribly sorry that Marie could not join us today, you know women and their groups.

George just smiles politely.

EXT. GARDEN, BISHOP HOUSE - AUSTRALIA - DAY LATER

In the garden, Nora and a young house maid are working on a flower bed. George and Thomas exit the house on to the back porch.

THOMAS

We are trying to grow crops here, but the drought is making it difficult. The farm land here could be wonderful if only it would rain once in a while.

GEORGE

Yes, it is quite hot. How do you keep cool?

THOMAS

(smiling)
Open windows and a lot of water.
(to Nora)
Nora?

Nora gets up and approaches them. When she is near he places a hand on her shoulder, causing her to become rigid and George can almost see her shake slightly.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Can you please fetch some water for our guest?

She nods and escapes as quickly as she can. A tense atmosphere is left in her wake, which George tries to deflect.

GEORGE

Quiet girl, isn't she?

EXT. BACK PORCH, BISHOP HOUSE - AUSTRALIA - NIGHT

George and MARIE (early 40s), stand out on the back porch looking out over the farm. Cicadas chirp loudly, adding a symphony of music to the night. George turns to Marie.

GEORGE

Well, I must say, I'm quite impressed by what you have created here. I wasn't expecting the new settlements to be so-

MARIE

(smiling)
Settled?

GEORGE

(laughing)
I suppose. I'm sorry.

MARIE

No, don't be. It's not what you are used to and it is nice to have impressed someone.

(beat)
When do leave for England?

GEORGE

Tomorrow evening. I must check in by late afternoon.

MARIE

Take her with you?

GEORGE

(surprised and confused)
I'm sorry? Who?

MARIE

Nora. Please, take her with you. I want her gone. You have to have noticed they way she is with Thomas?

GEORGE

Well, yes, but it's not my place-

MARIE

But it is mine. Thomas has been taking Nora to bed for many years and she has never once refused him.
(starting to cry)
She is stealing my husband from me.

GEORGE

I'm sure if she felt she had a choice, she would turn him away in an instant. I've noticed the bruises and how timid she is.

MARIE

Then you will be saving her, and helping me. Please, I beg you. I wouldn't ask if I wasn't desperate.

GEORGE

So, what do you propose?

MARIE

Look around. The drought has been harsh on our crops. Until the rains come, the farm is failing. Money will be his only incentive to keep us afloat. One less mouth to feed.

GEORGE

I see your point. I will speak to him. It will have to be tonight, when he returns from the neighbours'.

Marie nods and wipes her eyes. George places a reassuring hand on her arm and she smiles up at him.

MARIE

Thank you. I am forever in your debt.

EXT. FRONT PORCH, BISHOP HOUSE - AUSTRALIA - DAY

Nora exits the Bishop house on to the front porch with a travel case, which is swiftly taken by the coach driver and loaded onto the horse drawn carriage standing on the side of the dirt road.

George is engaged in conversation with a very unhappy Thomas. Thomas casts a glance sideways at Nora who catches his eye and looks away quickly, then turns back to George.

Nora turns to face Marie. Marie looks at Nora with contempt.

NORA

Thank you-
(beat)
-for giving me a roof over my head and family.

MARIE

We are not a family Nora. We just took you in when you had none.

NORA

I don't remember my mother, but I hope she was like you. You saved me, I will never forget that.

Marie's contemptuous expression fades as she understands the double meaning of Nora's words. George shakes Thomas' hand and bids Marie farewell, starting down the garden path toward the coach.

NORA (CONT'D)
 (nodding to Thomas)
 Mr. Bishop.

Thomas starts to say something but Nora quickly turns and strides down the path toward the coach where George is waiting to help her into the carriage.

Once they are both in and the door is closed, George waves back to the house as they pull away.

INT. COACH TO HARBOUR - DAY LATER

George and Nora sit in the coach in silence. Nora stares out the window at the passing landscape and George glances at her every so often.

GEORGE
 You're very quiet, aren't you?

NORA
 I don't like to draw attention to myself.

GEORGE
 You don't need to be afraid. Not of me. I won't hurt you. You'll be safe in my house.

Nora just nods silently.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 I think you'll like London. It's a sight more established than this land, and much less dusty. It's colder-

Nora has stopped listening and turned back to look out the window, the last she will ever see of her homeland.

INT. GEORGE'S CABIN, SHIP - DAY LATER

A door swings open to reveal a cabin steward, SEAMUS (16). He holds the door open as George and Nora follow him inside. The room is very basic, but spacious. Sunlight streams in through the porthole, next to which is a sailor's map of the world and a single bunk bed off to the side against the wall. Below the map sits a small writing desk and chair. George's main luggage trunk sits at the foot of the bed. On the opposite side of the room is a single door.

SEAMUS
 (holding out keys to George)
 You're keys, Sir. Please tell me if you need anything else.

GEORGE
 (taking the keys)
 Good lad. I'm sorry, your name?

SEAMUS
 Seamus, Sir. Thank you, Sir. It's
 not often you find someone who
 takes the time to learn the name of
 a steward.

GEORGE
 I like to know who to credit with
 good work. Thank you, Seamus.

SEAMUS
 I'll leave you to get settled in.
 (nodding first to George
 and then Nora)
 Sir. Miss.

Seamus leaves the room, closing the door behind him and leaving George and Nora alone.

GEORGE
 (indicating to the room)
 What do you think?

NORA
 (nervously, looking
 around)
 Where am I to sleep?

George smiles to himself and walks over to the other door. He pushes it open to reveal another, smaller room adjoining his. Nora walks over and looks in, smiling when she sees her travel case at the foot of the bed. She breathes an audible sign of relief.

GEORGE
 You didn't think I'd have you
 sleeping on the floor for eight
 months, did you?

Nora looks slightly embarrassed for a moment before looking up at him in surprise.

NORA
 Eight months?

GEORGE
 Yes, we are traveling to the other
 side of the world. You do know
 where England is?
 (off Nora's shake of her
 head, indicating to the
 map)
 Come, I'll show you.

Nora follows him to the map and George points to the general vicinity of Sydney on Australia.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 We are here, now.
 (dragging his finger
 across the map to
 England)
 And this is our destination.
 England.

Nora looks bewildered and George just smiles to himself.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 Why don't you take a moment and
 settle yourself into your room. It
 has been a long day and we are in
 for an even longer journey.

Nora nods and disappears into her room, closing the door behind her.

EXT. UPPER DECK, SHIP - DAY

Nora is standing out on the upper deck, looking out over the water. The deck is mostly empty, with just a few crew scattered about doing daily duties. There is nothing but water in all directions, as far as the eye can see.

One of the crew, SAILOR (mid 20s), approaches her casually.

SAILOR
 Afternoon, Miss. Enjoying the fresh
 air?

NORA
 Yes, thank you.

SAILOR
 You look a little confused, lass.
 Something troubling you?

NORA
 It'll sound silly, but how do you
 know which way to sail? There is
 nothing to mark our path.

SAILOR
 (coming closer to her)
 Not silly at all, lass. We navigate
 by the stars and a compass. We
 travel by compass during the day
 and at night we check our course by
 the star constellations in the sky,
 and correct course if need be.
 (moving closer again)
 (MORE)

SAILOR (CONT'D)

But you are right, it is very empty
out here and it does get very
lonely.

Nora suddenly notices how close he has become and tries to
move away but he grabs her by the arm. She struggles to pull
her arm free but his grip is so tight it is hurting.

NORA

Let me go!

He laughs and pulls her toward him. She swings her arm up,
scratching him across the face with her nails and he stumbles
back. He loses his grip on her and Nora tries to escape,
running straight into George in her panic.

GEORGE

(off her expression)
Nora? Are you all right?

George looks up and sees the Sailor trying to move away. He
looks up at Nora and George sees the bloody gashes on his
face.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

What is the meaning of this?!

SAILOR

Just talking, Sir.

GEORGE

You're injuries suggest otherwise.
This girl is my ward and under my
protection. If I so much as see or
hear that you have glanced in her
direction again I will have you in
irons. Am I understood?

SAILOR

(through gritted teeth)
Yes, Sir.

GEORGE

Good.
(to Nora)
Come, Nora. I don't want you coming
up here alone again.

George leads Nora back across the deck to the cabin.

INT. GEORGE'S CABIN, SHIP - DAY CONTINUED

George and Nora enter the cabin and he closes the door behind
them. He turns to her quickly.

GEORGE

Are you all right? What happened?