

VERMIN

Written by

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Inspired by true events

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FADE IN:

EXT. JONES FARM - NIGHT

Legend: Inspired by true events

A full moon rises above the Flinders Ranges. Near the horizon, the moon shines big, round, bright -- an impressive sight.

At the base of the ranges is farming land. Paddocks as far as the eye can see.

In a patch of native scrub is a rabbit, sitting, nose twitching.

The rabbit inches forwards, sniffing inquisitively. All is quiet and peaceful.

The rabbit nibbles native grasses. Stops. Alert. Listening.

A gunshot echoes through the night. The rabbit scampers in fright.

Startled birds launch from a nearby tree and fly away.

More gunshots, getting closer.

Spotlights light up the scrub. Blinding. They strobe the native scrub, hunting.

The rabbit is caught in the beam. It hops away. The spotlight chases it. A gunshot rings out.

EXT. COUNTRY HIGHWAY - DAY

A highway surrounded by farmland. Cars and road trains head north and south.

A five-year old SUV comes into view, heading south.

INT. SUV - DAY

In the passenger seat is SARA LOCK, 15, light brown shoulder length hair, pretty make-free face, a bit of a tomboy. She glances up from a mobile phone, frustrated.

SARA
Still no reception.

JUDY LOCK, 43, is driving. There's an obvious resemblance between mother and daughter. Though Judy's shoulder length hair is dyed blonde and her make-up is skillfully applied.

JUDY

Some children are starving.

SARA

I know. And there wasn't any internet when you were my age.

Sara's heard it all before. Many times.

JUDY

Or mobile phones.

SARA

Your favourite toy was a cardboard box.

Judy smiles, pleased that Sara remembers.

JUDY

I used to get bored too. And pester my parents. As if that would get us there faster.

SARA

I don't pester.

Judy's expression says otherwise.

JUDY

As we go round this bend, look out the window, straight ahead to the left.

Sara stares out the window.

Judy glances in the rearview mirror to...

KYLE LOCK, 13, short brown hair, quiet with sad eyes. A deep cut above his right eye is healing, possibly leaving a scar. The inner scars are yet to heal.

Kyle peers out the window, straight ahead to the left. His right hand rests on FREDDIE, 5, a Jack Russell Terrier, snuggled up on the seat beside him.

SARA

So what?

JUDY
Keep watching. As we go round this
bend...

As the highway rises and bends, so too does the SUV. Up
ahead, to the left, a town comes into view.

JUDY (CONT'D)
I used to get excited when I saw
the stack.

Sara looks incredulous, as if her mother is crazy.

SARA
The what?

JUDY
The stack. The tall chimney
towering above the town. Seeing it
meant we were almost home.

Sara is unimpressed.

SARA
Is that where we're living?

JUDY
That's where I lived as a child.
Now look to the right.

Sara and Kyle look to the right.

JUDY (CONT'D)
See those hills. The Flinders
Ranges. Our house is at the base of
the Flinders Ranges.

Kyle doesn't react. Sara smiles.

SARA
Cool! When do I get my horse?

JUDY
Oh, in about five minutes.

Sara's face lights up.

SARA
Really?

JUDY
Of course not. Let's get settled in
first.

SARA
Fine. Tomorrow then?

EXT. COUNTRY DIRT ROAD - DAY

The SUV drives along a dirt road, farms on both sides of the road.

The SUV slows, turns into a long driveway lined by trees.

EXT. SANDSTONE VILLA - DAY

The SUV drives past a row of tall pine trees and a green corrugated iron fence.

SARA
Is this it?

JUDY
Home sweet home.

Judy parks the SUV under a carport and silences the engine.

Sara is first out of the car, followed by Judy, Kyle and Freddie.

Freddie heads for the closest patch of grass. It's been a long drive.

Sara and Kyle walk toward the large return verandah sandstone villa, taking it all in. Impressive.

A head appears on the other side of the fence. DAVE LOCK, 45, blond hair with a number 4 army-style cut, fit and athletic, gold-framed glasses.

SARA
Dad!

Dave opens a wooden gate, painted green. He's all smiles, pleased to see his family

DAVE
Hey. Nice trip?

Kyle shrugs. Sara aims a kiss at his cheek as she rushes past, through the gate. Judy hurries over to Dave for a hug.

JUDY
We missed you.

He kisses her on the forehead.

DAVE

Me too.

Sara hurries up the path toward the house.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Everything okay?

Judy gives him a tired look. He rubs her back.

KYLE (O.S.)

What's this?

Kyle stands near a wire fence, checking out the crop in the adjacent paddock. Between the fence and the paddock is a dirt road -- a private farm track. Freddie sniffs at weeds along the fence-line.

Arm in arm, Dave and Judy approach Kyle.

DAVE

Wheat, I think. And before you ask, it's not ours. It belongs to our neighbour.

KYLE

Who's that?

DAVE

Old MacDonald.

JUDY

Really?

Dave smiles, shrugs. He's kidding. Judy realises she's been had. She laughs.

Kyle stares across two paddocks to the closest neighbour's house. Judy watches him, her humor turning to worry.

SARA (O.S.)

Wow! It's awesome.

INT. POOL AREA - DAY

The family stand on the deck overlooking a large swimming pool. The pool is enclosed by an enormous shed-like structure with windows and sliding doors at both ends.

SARA

Can I go for a swim?

JUDY

After you've unpacked your bathers.
Do you know where they are?

Sara has no idea but she isn't so easily put off.

SARA

I don't need bathers.

JUDY

Oh, yes, you do.

No one notices Freddie at the edge of the pool, curious about the lake of fresh (unchlorinated) water.

DAVE

Hey, Kyle, you looking forward to a swim?

KYLE

Yeah. Great.

His enthusiasm is under-whelming.

JUDY

Come on, let's check out the view.

The family stand in front of floor to ceiling windows, looking out to the Flinders Ranges.

SARA

How much is ours?

Dave points to the rear of the property.

DAVE

See beyond the shed, there's a fence?

Sara nods.

DAVE (CONT'D)

That's the back of our property.

He turns and points to the side of the property.

DAVE (CONT'D)

See the second fence over there? On the other side of the creek.

SARA

Where's the creek?

DAVE

Where the line of trees are.
They're growing in the creek. It's
a dry creek. Don't think it's seen
water for a long time.

Off-screen -- splash!

The family spins around to see Freddie swimming in the pool.
They rush to the edge.

KYLE

Freddie!

Sara and Kyle kneel down by the pool's step.

SARA

Come here, Freddie.

KYLE

Freddie. Freddie.

The little dog swims to them. He finds the step but the water
is too deep. He can't stand up. Sara reaches down...

JUDY

Be careful.

...and grabs Freddie. She stands, holding the drenched
dripping but very happy dog, getting soaked herself.

SARA

Who needs bathers?

INT. PERGOLA - DAY

Dave and Judy walk down the steps, leaving the pool area.
Kyle follows. Sara is at the rear, still holding Freddie.

Under the pergola, Sara lowers Freddie to the ground. He
immediately shakes. Kyle and Sara cop the spray.

Judy stops before reaching the back door.

JUDY

Listen to the birds. It's so
peaceful. I won't miss the sound of
traffic.

Dave takes a deep breath.

DAVE
Smell that fresh air. Come on,
guys, breath it in.

Their enthusiasm isn't contagious.

SARA
Where's my new bedroom? The guest
house.

JUDY
Sara, you're not staying in the
guest house.

SARA
Oh, Mum, why not?

JUDY
Do I really need to repeat myself?

Sara pouts. Not happy.

DAVE
Kyle. Want to pick your bedroom?

Dave and Kyle walk to the back door. Sara rushes after them,
the guest house forgotten.

SARA
Hey, I get first pick as the
oldest.

DAVE
Maybe Kyle gets first pick as the
youngest.

Sara shakes her head.

SARA
The oldest picks, that's the rules.

KYLE
Dad, I don't care.

SARA
Dad, he doesn't care.

DAVE
Well, he might care when he sees
the rooms.

INT. KYLE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Kyle stands in a bedroom, empty apart from built in cupboards and a mantle with an open fireplace.

Sara enters.

SARA
I can't believe you picked.

KYLE
I like this one.

Sara sighs.

SARA
That's because it's the best room.
I can't believe they drag me out to
the middle of nowhere, then give me
a shitty room.

KYLE
Sorry. You can have this one.

Sara brightens.

SARA
You mean it?

Kyle nods, then leaves, out of sight and out of mind.

Sara peers out the front window. Trees and paddocks for miles. In the distance is Port Pirie with the stack rising to the heavens.

Pleased with herself, Sara retrieves her mobile phone from a pocket and checks the screen.

Dave enters.

SARA (CONT'D)
Yay. A signal.

DAVE
It's a bit temperamental out here.
We might need a booster.
(beat)
Where's Kyle?

SARA
The other bedroom, I guess.

DAVE
I thought he picked this one.

SARA
He said I could have it.

Dave is skeptical.

DAVE
Voluntarily?

Off-screen -- the sound of an engine alerts them to the arrival of the removal truck. Sara peers out the window.

JUDY (O.S.)
The truck is here.

INT. KYLE'S BEDROOM - DAY

A box labelled "Kyle" sits in a room. Next to it is another box labelled "Kyle".

Kyle unpacks a box in the front bedroom, the one he gave to Sara. The room is Kyle's again, now containing his bed, desk and bookcase. Freddie lays on the bed, watching Kyle unpack.

INT. SARA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Kyle definitely has the best room out of the two. Sara's room is smaller, darker. There's a mantle with a fireplace but no built in cupboards. A small window looks out onto the side garden.

Sara unpacks a box of clothes. Her room contains a bed, desk, bookcase and wardrobe, along with an assortment of boxes labelled "Sara".

EXT. SANDSTONE VILLA - DAY

Sara, Kyle and Freddie walk out the wooden gate, past their car. Sara leads the way, walking in the direction of the Flinders Ranges, to the back of the property. Kyle and Freddie follow.

Birds, wind and the occasional fly are the only sounds they hear, which prompts Sara...

SARA
It's quiet.

She stops and looks around her. Nothing but miles and miles of wheat. Freddie wanders over to the pine trees at the edge of the property.

SARA (CONT'D)
Is this what you were expecting?

KYLE
Dunno. There's no one around.

SARA
That's good?

He nods. The peace and quiet relaxes him a little. For the first time, he almost smiles.

SARA (CONT'D)
It's just so quiet. Peaceful.

The loud roar of motor bikes breaks the silence.

KYLE
What's that?

SARA
Motor bikes, I think. On the road.

They stare in the direction of the road. There's nothing to see but they hear the roar getting closer.

Kyle tenses. Sara heads back to the house.

SARA (CONT'D)
Come on. Freddie! Let's go.

The dog dashes from the trees to run after Sara and Kyle as they return to the house.

They reach the carport at the same time as three motor bikes come into view on the dirt road next door. The noise is deafening. Freddie barks defensively while rushing at the invading bikes.

Sara scoops Freddie up into her arms.

The motor bikes slow, then stop, engines idling, opposite Sara and Kyle.

On the bikes are BLAKE JONES (18), BRAYDON JONES (17) and BILLY JONES (16). They're dressed in jeans and T-shirts, no helmets. Their brown hair is wind-blown. They are tanned, fit. These boys are used to working on the land.

BLAKE
You moving in?

SARA
Yep. Shouldn't you be wearing
helmets?

BRAYDON
You from the city?

Sara nods. The boys laugh.

SARA
What's funny?

Sara is confused by what seems to be an inside joke. Blake
nods to Freddie.

BLAKE
Who's the rat?

SARA
If you mean our dog, his name is
Freddie. Who are you?

BILLY
This is ours. I helped plant this
crop.

BRAYDON
Might make a farmer out of you yet.

BILLY
I'm a better farmer than you.

BRAYDON
Pigs.

BLAKE
You want some fresh kill?

Sara stares at him, uncertain.

SARA
What?

BLAKE
You know, fresh meat.

BRAYDON
She's probably a vegetarian.

Sara recognises an insult and a pointless conversation.

SARA
Okay. Gotta go... And cook my bean
soup.

She turns to Kyle, shocked to see him looking pale and sick.

BRAYDON
Have a gawk at him.

BILLY
What a veg.

SARA
Kyle, let's go.

Kyle doesn't move.

BLAKE
Come on, Kyle, off you go.

Sara hurries to Kyle's side, points him in the direction of the gate and gives him a gentle nudge. He runs away, crying.

BRAYDON
Good job, Kyle.

BILLY
Is he blubbering?

SARA
Leave him alone.

She sighs, stressed. Before they can say another word, she asks...

SARA (CONT'D)
Do you live in that house over there?

She gestures to the house two paddocks away.

BLAKE
Nah. That's the Jefferson place.

SARA
You don't live near here?

BLAKE
You're quick. Must be those city schools.

Thank God. Relieved, Sara heads inside with Freddie in her arms. As she walks away, the motor bikes rev to life and roar away, in the direction of the Flinders Ranges.

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Furniture is positioned in the family room -- a lounge suite, coffee table, TV on a small cupboard, and wall units. Four boxes sit off to one side, waiting to be unpacked and fill the wall units.

A small wooden table and chairs fill the same space near the kitchen breakfast bar.

Judy stands by the table, looking out the screen door. She throws the door open as Sara and Freddie reach it. Freddie runs inside.

JUDY
What happened?

Sara enters, closing the door behind her.

SARA
These guys turned up--

JUDY
On motor bikes?

Sara nods.

SARA
Dickheads. They own the wheat field.

Judy is dismayed. These boys aren't part of the plan.

SARA (CONT'D)
But they don't live in that house.

Judy frowns.

JUDY
Where do they live?

SARA
Jungle? Cave? Swamp?

Sara notes that her mother isn't appreciating her humour.

SARA (CONT'D)
As great as their charming small talk was, I didn't hang around to find out.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Dave exits Kyle's room, closing the door behind him. Tired and troubled, he heads down the hallway...

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM - DAY

...to where Judy and Sara are waiting.

JUDY

How is he?

DAVE

He didn't want Valium, which is something. He's resting, doing a meditation.

(to Sara)

Why didn't you bring him inside?

SARA

I did, once I worked out our neighbours are wankers. I thought country people were supposed to be nice.

JUDY

Well, I thought so too.

SARA

People are morons everywhere.

Judy would like to argue, to be the idealistic mother, but she'd only be lying.

DAVE

As soon as I heard the motor bikes, I should've gone outside. I should've--

SARA

(interrupts)

For crying out loud! This sucks. It all sucks. But none of it is your fault or Mum's fault or my fault or Kyle's fault. I'm sick of it. I hope Trevor Fowler rots in jail for the rest of his life because he's ruined all our God-dammed lives.

Sara storms off down the hallway to her bedroom.

Judy and Dave watch her go. Then Dave glances to Judy.

DAVE
Hey. Welcome to our new home.

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Judy stands at the kitchen window, preparing a salad for the evening meal. While she works, she glances out the window. Something catches her eye. She smiles, captivated.

She leaves the half-prepared food and heads...

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

...to Sara's open door, where she pauses.

JUDY
Quick. Come and look.

Judy hurries to Kyle's bedroom.

Sara appears in the hallway. She looks around for Judy and sees her standing in Kyle's doorway.

SARA
What?

EXT. SANDSTONE VILLA - DAY

Sara, Kyle and their parents creep across the yard.

SARA
Is this really necessary?

Judy holds a finger to her lips, silencing Sara. Sara rolls her eyes.

They reach the fence and gaze into the paddock to see...

EXT. PADDOCK - DAY

...kangaroos. The kangaroos alternate between being watchful, ears twitching, alert, and nibbling grass. Nibble. Alert. Nibble. Alert.

Watching over the fence, the family take delight in the kangaroos grazing on their property.

SARA
(whispers)
Cool!

KYLE

Wow!

This is the first time Kyle has looked genuinely happy.

DAVE

Now, these are neighbours I like.

KYLE

Me too.

SARA

They're so beautiful.

Sara reaches into her pocket for her mobile phone. She finds the camera and lines up a photo. CLICK. Another one. CLICK. More. CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

In the distance, the roar of motor bikes. The kangaroos stop eating. Look to the noise. Alert. The roar comes closer.

SARA (CONT'D)

Oh no!

She turns toward the sound. They all do. The spell of the kangaroos is broken.

The motor bikes roar past the top paddock and down the other side of the property. Fast and loud. Annoying.

JUDY

I hope they don't do that too often.

DAVE

They already have.

Kyle turns back to the kangaroos. His face falls. He hurries to the fence, looks everywhere. But the kangaroos are gone.

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY - DAY

Freddie happily greets them as they enter the house. Kyle bends over to pat the excited dog, who clambers at his legs.

KYLE

Hey, Freddie.

Off-screen -- the sound of motor bikes draws closer. The motor bikes speed past the house toward the Flinders Ranges.

Judy picks up the TV remote from the coffee table and switches on the TV. The volume increases on an episode of Star Trek the original series.

Dave glares out the window. Kyle sits in front of the TV, trying to ignore the motor bikes. Sara joins him. She changes the channel to a movie. Horror. A Nightmare on Elm Street.

JUDY

Sara. Change the channel. Please.

Sara reluctantly changes the channel, back to Star Trek.

SARA

Beam me up, Scotty.

Off-screen -- the sound of motor bikes draws closer. The motor bikes speed past the house toward the main road.

Dave clenches his fists and storms to the door.

DAVE

I'll kill them.

Judy grabs his arm, stopping him.

JUDY

Please don't. It's our first day.

DAVE

And their last.

Judy nods towards Kyle sitting on the couch.

JUDY

Let's have a quiet word with their parents when we meet them. Okay?

It's not okay but Dave nods.

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

It's still light outside. Daylight Savings.

Sara hands Judy dirty dishes. Judy loads the dishwasher.

Dave and Kyle approach the bench.

DAVE

Hey, Freddie's taking us for a walk. You coming?

JUDY
Not me. I still have a few things
to do before I collapse.

She smiles tiredly.

Eager to go, Sara looks to Judy for permission.

JUDY (CONT'D)
You go.

Sara is out of there.

EXT. Paddock - NIGHT

Freddie walks and sniffs, fascinated by the unfamiliar country scents. Dave, Sara and Kyle walk to where the kangaroos were grazing earlier in the day.

Dave stops and points to fresh, small, black droppings in amongst the grass.

DAVE
There you go. Kangaroo pooh.

SARA
That's it?

Dave nods. He crouches down, followed by Sara and Kyle. Freddie trots over to see what has caught their attention.

DAVE
You find that around the place and
you know kangaroos have been here.

Dave stands.

DAVE (CONT'D)
We should check the water trough to
make sure the kangaroos have water.

They walk away, toward the water trough on the other side of the pine trees.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Kangaroos' urine and pooh are
natural fertilisers essential to
the health of the soil, which is
why many species depend on
kangaroos.

SARA
Cool.

KYLE
They're fertilising our soil.

DAVE
Aren't we lucky.

Kyle nods.

Sara watches birds fly overhead. Magical.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Kangaroos' soft padded feet and long tail are vital to the environmental health of our land because they regenerate native grasses.

KYLE
How?

Dave tries to remember.

DAVE
I think they spread seeds, for one thing. Their feet aerate the soil. They don't destroy plant roots when they eat, so the plant keeps growing and keeps supplying food.

SARA
How do you know these things?

Dave smiles sheepishly.

DAVE
The Internet. I had a quick read while your mum was making dinner.

KYLE
I'd like to learn about kangaroos.

Dave is thrilled by Kyle's interest.

DAVE
Me too, buddy.

SARA
Me three.

They reach the water trough. It's dry as a bone.

EXT. PADDOCK - LATER

The water trough is a quarter full. Sara finishes pouring her bucket into the trough. Dave and Kyle stand nearby, watching, holding empty buckets.

DAVE

Good job. I reckon that should be enough for now.

EXT. PADDOCK - NIGHT

Black. Darkness. No lights in the house or around the property. Pitch black.

SARA

I can't see a thing.

KYLE

Wow, it's dark.

In the sky, thousands of stars twinkle. The stars aren't dimmed by the moon or artificial lights. Another benefit of the country.

JUDY

Aren't the stars amazing?

SARA

Awesome.

In the darkness, we can just make out four figures. Dave and Kyle stand to admire the stars. Judy and Sara sit on an iron bench under a tree. All is quiet except for the rustle of the wind through the trees.

DAVE

I don't think I've ever seen so many stars. What about you, Kyle?

KYLE

This is the most I've seen. A lot more.

Behind the row of pine trees, the lights of Port Pirie glitter in the distance.

EXT. PADDOCK - LATER

The beam of a flashlight cuts through the darkness. The flashlight is held by Sara. Kyle walks at her side.