

FADE IN:

EXT. VILLAGE- DAY

A small village nestled in a valley. A single road runs from end to end. Rugged dry stone walls separate fields yielding various crops.

The village consists of an imposing Gothic church, rustic medieval cottages, and scattered farmhouses.

EXT. RIVERSIDE FIELD- NIGHT

An age-old stone bridge crosses a shallow river, flanked on either side by lush, grassy fields.

A young girl, MATILDA (17), crosses the bridge. A muscular black Labrador trots by her side.

Matilda wears a long summer dress, her sinuous auburn hair shimmers under the clear, moonlit sky.

She stops at the edge of the bridge and unleashes the dog who then scampers off into the darkness.

Matilda stands and gazes into the murky, fast-flowing water below.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

And a dreadful thing from the cliff did spring, and its wild bark thrill'd around. His eyes had the glow of the fires below, 'twas the form of the spectre hound.

The moon's reflection in the water appears to broaden and distort into a vibrant red glow.

Matilda steps back aghast. The dog begins to BARK and HOWL in the field behind her.

She turns and searches the field for her companion but he's nowhere to be seen.

She moves further into the open field and calls out into the darkness.

MATILDA

Shuck! Here boy! Shuck?

Her words fade into SILENCE.

She spots a shadow up ahead, a barely perceptible movement.

She approaches, breaks into a run.

Her foot catches something and she almost falls. She looks down. Her eyes widen in terror.

The body of the Labrador lies motionless at her feet. She bends and runs a hand around its collar. Her fingers wet with fresh blood from the dog's neck.

She SCREAMS.

A gloved HAND clasps around her mouth and drags her off her feet.

EXT. UNDER THE BRIDGE

A DARK FIGURE forces Matilda into the shadows beneath the bridge and pins her to the ground. Her MUFFLED SCREAMS merge with the sound of gushing water below.

The figure forces himself upon her. He tears at her blouse, revealing pale white flesh.

She struggles defiantly but eventually succumbs as the man's hulking frame envelops her.

As their bodies writhe beneath the moonlight, a pair of smoldering, fiery eyes watch them from afar.

A blood-curdling HOWL echoes across the valley.

EXT. THE BLACK DOG INN- NIGHT

A 16th century public house. White-washed stone walls, a thatched roof. The wrought-iron sign CREAKS in the wind.

The sign displays the pub's name: "The Black Dog Inn" below an image of large black hound with pointed fangs and piercing crimson eyes.

INT. THE BLACK DOG INN

An old-fashioned English pub. A fire roars in the hearth where a group of FARMERS drink ale and exchange stories in the flickering light.

The bar itself is deserted but for MARCUS BLAKE, pale-faced in his early thirties with short dark hair and round spectacles.

He sips from a pint of Guinness and stares at a large stuffed dog mounted behind the bar. The dog stares back with glassy eyes, its face frozen in a contorted snarl.

MARCUS

(to himself)

Hardly a man's best friend.

The BARMAN, a bulky man in his 70s, takes note of the visitor's comment and walks over.

BARMAN

Yer not from round 'ere are yer?

MARCUS

Actually, I just moved out here from Cambridge, I'm the new practitioner, Marcus... Marcus Blake.

Marcus offers his hand, the barman shakes it firmly.

BARMAN

Yer in the old miller's cottage.

MARCUS

Yes, that's right.

The barman nods, picks up a glass and polishes it with a bar towel.

Marcus motions to the stuffed dog.

MARCUS

Friend of yours?

BARMAN

He were me grandfather's dog.

Your grandfather was a taxidermist?

The barman stares blankly at him.

BARMAN

No.

MARCUS

I see.

(looks around the bar) Quite a history, this place. I imagine.

BARMAN

Aye, that be right.

MARCUS

I read in the guidebook there was a local myth about a black dog that roams the meadows.

BARMAN

The spectre hound.

MARCUS

Yes, that's it. Have you ever seen it?

BARMAN

If I'd seen it, I wouldn't be 'ere talking to you.

MARCUS

Oh?

BARMAN

So the legend goes. Anyone lays eyes on that hound, be dead within a year.

Marcus chuckles.

MARCUS

Is that so?

BARMAN

That's what they say.

Marcus sips his beer.

MARCUS

And what do you say?

The barman ponders this for a moment.

BARMAN

I believe what my father taught me, and his father before him.

MARCUS

And what is that exactly?

BARMAN

The spectre hound brings doom upon all who cross its path.

EXT. RIVERSIDE FIELD- NIGHT

Matilda dashes across the field. Tears stream from her eyes, her blouse is torn and muddy.

A dog HOWLS in the distance as Matilda crosses the bridge.

She trips and falls hard on the cobbled ground, grazing her knees.

She turns to see the dark figure behind her. He walks slowly, silhouetted in the moonlight.

Matilda springs to her feet and continues to run. A farmhouse is visible up ahead. A single lamp burns in the window.

Matilda runs towards the house, doesn't look back.

She bursts through the door and slams it shut behind her.

EXT. VILLAGE- DAY

The sun rises over the village.

EXT. SURGERY- DAY

A converted cottage. Stone walls, exposed wooden beams, a thatched roof.

Marcus enters.

INT. SURGERY, RECEPTION

Marcus wipes his feet and hangs up his coat on an old-fashioned coat stand.

An elderly RECEPTIONIST sits behind a desk.

MARCUS

Morning, Mrs. Carter. In bright and early I see.

MRS. CARTER

Only way to catch the worm, Dr. Blake.

MARCUS

Indeed.

She hands him an appointment card.

MRS. CARTER

First patient's at eight o'clock.

MARCUS

Right you are.

(reading the card)

Mr. Appleby.

(to Mrs. Carter)

Anything I should know?

Mrs. Carter smiles.

MRS. CARTER

Baptism of fire there, doctor. He's quite a character, no doubt about that.

MARCUS

Well, let's see how we go, shall we?

Marcus enters his office.

EXT. RIVERSIDE FIELD- DAY

A spade hits dirt.

NOEL PARSONS, a short stocky man in farmer's attire, digs a hole in the ground.

Beside him is Matilda. A somber expression on her face.

They stand in a wooded area adjacent to the field. The stone bridge is visible across the meadow, the farmhouse lies beyond.

Parsons steps back, satisfied, and shoves his spade into the dirt.

He picks up the dog's body, wrapped in a blanket, and lowers it gently into the hole.

He shovels dirt into the grave and pads it down with the back of the spade.

He turns to Matilda.

PARSONS

(softly)

Matilda.

Matilda takes a small wooden cross and pushes it into the dirt. The words "Old Shuck" are crudely carved in the wood.

INT. SURGERY, MARCUS' OFFICE- DAY

Marcus sits at his desk opposite Mr. Appleby, a middle-aged man with a saggy, weathered face. He wears a scruffy woolen sweater.

APPLEBY

I been havin' nightmares, doctor. Visions, voices...

MARCUS

I see. And how long have you been having these dreams?

APPLEBY

You think I'm lying, don't you? What's she told you about me?

Appleby points towards the reception area.

MARCUS

I can assure you I don't think you're lying. Nor has anyone told me anything about you. I have your medical record and that is all.

Appleby relaxes back into his seat.

APPLEBY

I've had nightmares before doctor, terrible nightmares. But nothing like this. Last night... I... it were so... real, like it were really there.

MARCUS

Like what was really there?

Appleby sits forward. He's sweating, fear in his eyes.

APPLEBY

The dog, Black Shuck, the Spectre hound. Whatever you want to call it. I saw it...

His words hang in the air.

MARCUS

And this was in your dream?

Appleby shakes his head.

APPLEBY

It were no dream, doctor. I saw it out in the meadows, at the bridge by the farmhouse over on Dog Lane.

Marcus glances at his notes.

You have a mild fever, Mr. Appleby. Hallucinations are not unheard of. I can prescribe you something for...

APPLEBY

...you don't understand. I saw it. Its eyes were like fire, burning into my soul. You know what it means, don't you doctor? You know of the curse?

MONTAGE

- Marcus walks through the High Street, stopping to admire the ancient architecture.
- Marcus cleans out the gutters on the roof of his house. He sees a weather vane. A black dog cast in wrought iron.
- Marcus stands on a stepladder and paints his living room.
- Marcus in a library, reading various books about myths and legends.
- Marcus walks along a country lane with his dog, a red setter. He waves at passers by.
- Marcus sits in the Black Dog Inn, talks comfortably with the locals.
- Marcus in his newly decorated living room. He relaxes into a chair to read a book.

EXT. CHURCHYARD- DAY

A large Gothic church with elaborate pointed arches, surrounded by unkempt grass and crumbling gravestones.

Marcus walks along the gravel path which leads up to a large oak door. He goes to open it but stops when he sees

markings in the ancient wood. Several long black marks appear to have been scorched into the door

He pauses for a moment, when the door suddenly opens and a middle-aged WOMAN exits the church. She smiles.

WOMAN

Can I help you, doctor?

MARCUS

I was just looking at these markings on the door. Do you know where they're from?

WOMAN

You mean you don't know? You've been here what, six weeks now?

MARCUS

Give or take.

WOMAN

Well, I'm sure you've heard the stories, Dr. Blake.

MARCUS

Not all of them it seems.

She slowly runs a finger along one of the scorch marks.

WOMAN

Records say these marks date back to November 14th, 1587, the night of a ferocious storm. Three parishioners died that night. It's said that a vicious black dog entered the church as they were praying... killed them one by one. These are supposedly the claw marks he left.

Marcus examines the marks.

MARCUS

You believe all those stories about the black dogs, the apparitions?

WOMAN

I'm assuming you don't?

MARCUS

To be quite honest, I find it difficult to swallow. It is fascinating though. Part of the reason I moved out here.

WOMAN

You came here looking for the spectre?

Marcus laughs.

MARCUS

Not exactly, but this place is steeped in history. The legends have certainly piqued my interest.

WOMAN

You'd be wise to look no further, Dr. Blake. You've heard the tales. Whether you believe the legend or not, I advise you to be cautious.

MARCUS

What's your interpretation of the myth?

WOMAN

Some say the dog is a guardian to the afterlife, others believe it's a consumer of spirits, a deity of hell. Most folk round here would agree with that one.

MARCUS

And what do you believe?

WOMAN

Me, I believe it to be a guardian, a protector of lost

souls. Neither good nor evil, merely lost... misguided.

EXT. RIVERSIDE FIELD- DAY

The sun sets on the horizon. A thin veil of mist hangs in the air.

Marcus walks along the cobblestone bridge. He breathes deeply, revels in the country air. His red-setter, Lucy, walks by his side.

He reaches the edge of the bridge and unleashes the dog.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

Matilda appears in an upstairs window. She looks down over the river and watches as Marcus crosses the bridge into the field.

EXT. RIVERSIDE FIELD

Marcus WHISTLES for his dog, looks around, calls out:

MARCUS

Lucy!

EXT. OLD SHUCK'S GRAVE

Paws dig into the soil. Lucy pants heavily as she burrows into the grave.

MARCUS (O.S.)

Lucy!

Marcus grabs the dog by its collar and fastens the leash. He notices the cross, reads the name "Old Shuck".

APPLEBY (V.O)

The dog, Black Shuck, the Spectre hound...

Marcus sees Matilda standing close by. Her eyes are swollen from crying.

She looks back at him, then turns and runs away.

Неу...

Matilda disappears into the trees.

Marcus yanks at the dog's leash.

MARCUS

C'mon, mutt.

They walk back towards the bridge. The dog looks back at the grave. In the trees beyond, two glowing eyes penetrate the darkness.

INT. FARMHOUSE- DAY

Matilda walks down the stairs and into the kitchen. She wears pajamas. Her face is flushed, her hair matted with sweat.

She walks to the window, sees her father in the garden, talking to Mr. Appleby.

Matilda goes over to the sink, holds her hair back from her face and vomits into the basin.

INT. SURGERY, MARCUS' OFFICE- DAY

Marcus sits at his desk. He looks uncomfortable.

Seated opposite is Mr. Parsons and his daughter, Matilda. She stares at Marcus, resentment burns in her eyes.

MARCUS

Matilda, could you wait outside for a moment. I'd like to speak to your father alone if I may.

Matilda nods and exits the room.

Mr. Parsons watches her go, then turns back to Marcus.

PARSONS

She's no' been the same since her dog died. That were six weeks ago now. She's no' sleeping, she's havin' nightmares. It's no' right.

As far as I can tell there's nothing physically wrong. Certainly nothing to be overly concerned about. My guess is that it's psychological. I'll prescribe some tablets to help her sleep. Come back in a few days and we'll see how she is. For now, I think she'd benefit from a good night's sleep.

PARSONS

I'm worried about her, doc. She barely says a word no more.

MARCUS

I can understand your concern, Mr. Parsons. This kind of trauma can affect people in different ways. There's really not much more I can do until I get the results of the blood test.

PARSONS

It's just... I've never seen her like this before.

Marcus thinks for a moment.

MARCUS

Is Matilda sexually active?

PARSONS

What kind of a question is that?

MARCUS

A simple one, yes or no?

PARSONS

No! Bloody well not.

Marcus scribbles down a prescription and hands it to him.

MARCUS

One tablet about an hour before she goes to bed. I'll see you both on Friday. INT. FARMHOUSE, MATILDA'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Matilda stands at the window and gazes out over the field.

A dark shape moves across the bridge and stops half way. The shape turns towards the farmhouse and reveals itself as a huge black dog. It stares up at the window with blazing crimson eyes.

The dog HOWLS.

Matilda quickly draws the curtain and climbs into bed.

She pulls the covers up to her neck and squeezes her eyes shut.

EXT. RIVERSIDE FIELD- NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Matilda stumbles across the bridge, barefooted, still dressed in her pajamas. She clutches her abdomen as if in tremendous pain.

She hears HEAVY BREATHING behind her.

She turns back, squints into the darkness.

A giant black dog approaches. Its footsteps make no sound, as it races towards her.

Matilda runs.

She reaches the end of the bridge and doubles back beneath the stone arch and into the shadows.

She lays on her back, measures her breathing, holds her abdomen as another wave of pain washes over her.

Her breath quickens, she whimpers quietly.

ON THE BRIDGE

The dog paces up and down, its keen eyes dart across the field.

Silence... then... a baby starts to WAIL.

The dog cocks its ear... listens.

UNDER THE BRIDGE

Matilda lies there, breathing rapidly, sweat running down her face, she tries to move but she's paralyzed.

The newborn child continues to WAIL.

A shadow creeps over Matilda's face. The dog is upon her in an instant. It GROWLS then begins to rip and tear at the flesh between her legs.

Matilda SCREAMS.

(END DREAM SEQUENCE)

INT. FARMHOUSE, MATILDA'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Matilda wakes up with a start. She's pale, sweaty.

She looks down at the bed between her legs. The white bed sheets are stained dark with blood.

She covers her eyes and sobs quietly.

INT. MARCUS' COTTAGE, BEDROOM- DAY

Marcus is asleep in bed. He tosses and turns.

An alarm clock BUZZES.

INT. KITCHEN

Marcus pads into the kitchen, bleary-eyed. He wears a bathrobe and slippers.

He grabs a coffee cup from the cupboard and turns. He stops dead in his tracks.

The cup falls from his hand and SHATTERS on the tiled floor.

Lucy lies on the kitchen floor, a pool of dried blood around her mouth.

Marcus crouches next to her, checks for a pulse, finds none. He quickly examines the body. Black scorch marks are visible around the neck. Marcus looks puzzled.

The phone RINGS.

EXT. FARMHOUSE- DAY

A grey, cloudy morning.

Marcus parks his car on the gravel driveway and approaches the house.

INT, LIVING ROOM- LATER

Marcus sits on the sofa, drinks a cup of tea.

Parsons stands at the window, gazing out over the fields.

PARSONS

You knew, didn't you?

MARCUS

I... suspected, yes.

PARSONS

She's a good girl, doctor. She's not the type to...

MARCUS

I can see that, Mr. Parsons... Has she told you what happened?

PARSONS

She says she were... raped.

MARCUS

Have you informed the police?

Parsons turns away from the window and faces him. He has tears in his eyes.

PARSONS

They're coming this afternoon. She won't talk to 'em. She won't talk to no-one. Not even me.

An awkward moment passes.

MARCUS

Would you mind if I spoke to

her?

PARSONS

Don't see no harm in it.

INT. MATILDA'S BEDROOM

Marcus sits on a chair next to Matilda's bed.

MARCUS

I know this is difficult, Matilda, but the only way we can find the person who did this is if you tell us what happened.

She looks at him, barely a trace of emotion on her face.

MATILDA

I know who it was.

MARCUS

You... know him?

She nods.

MATILDA

But I'm not tellin' you. I'm not tellin' no-one.

MARCUS

I want to help you, Matilda. I can't do that if you won't talk to me.

MATILDA

I don't need your help. Old Shuck'll take care of it. Just like he took care of your dog.

Marcus is taken aback.

MARCUS

How... how could you know about that?

MATILDA

You've heard the stories, Dr. Blake. Maybe now you'll believe 'em. I wasn't sure at first but now I know that it's true. Old Shuck will handle it, I know he will.

EXT. THE BLACK DOG INN- NIGHT

Torrential rain. THUNDER RUMBLES in the distance.

INT. THE BLACK DOG INN

The pub is unnaturally quiet.

Marcus sits alone at the bar. A large whiskey in front of him.

He takes of his spectacles and wipes them clean. He squints at the stuffed dog above the bar.

The dog's eyes are wide, ablaze. They seem to stare right through him.

Marcus replaces his glasses and looks again. The eyes appear normal.

THUNDER roars overhead.

Marcus swallows his whiskey.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE- NIGHT.

A man sprints along a lane, drenched from the pouring rain. His face is pale, distorted with pain and terror. It's Mr. Appleby.

Fiery red eyes pierce the darkness behind him. A dark black dog races towards him. It GRUNTS and GROWLS.

INT. THE BLACK DOG INN

The door bursts open and Appleby staggers inside.

He makes his way towards bar but falls to the ground at Marcus' feet.

Marcus bends down to help him. Appleby's eyes are wide, his face drained of color.

APPLEBY

I warned you... I told you it would come...

Appleby's body he jerks and shakes uncontrollably. He tries to speak, but only blood spews forth from his mouth.

He rips open his jacket, then his shirt, revealing scorched black claw marks on his chest and neck.

Marcus glances at the stuffed dog, its eyes ablaze with fire.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O)

For he was speechless, ghastly, wan. Like him of whom the story ran. Who spoke the spectre hound in man.

EXT. FARMHOUSE- NIGHT

Matilda appears at the window and looks out over the bridge below.

The river swells from torrents of rain.

A large black dog crosses the bridge. It looks up at the window. The fire in its eyes dies out as the apparition fades into the darkness.

Matilda draws the curtain.

FADE TO BLACK.