

The Battle of Boxhill

By

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FADE IN

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A lone young adult male PEREGRINE FALCON dives towards the fields and tries to catch insects flitting in the morning sunshine. He pulls up just before the ground having failed to catch any bugs.

A beautiful forest borders one side of the field. It's spring and the trees are regaining their leaves. A dark and menacing wood lies opposite. Its trees are pine and conifer.

The falcon heads for chalk cliffs in the distance. The sun warms his back and replaces the shadow on the cliff face.

RYKER approaches the nest he shares with his MATE, SAFIYYA. Ryker's FATHER (ALGAR) and MOTHER (MERCIA) nest on the cliff face a short distance away.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Ryker flares his wings and lands on the ledge by his nest.

Safiyya is a migratory bird: she retains her accent.

SAFIYYA

Ready for your big day?

RYKER

We can live off my parents for now,
SAFI.

SAFIYYA

If you're serious about raising a
family, you must learn to hunt. I
won't rely on your dad for food.

Ryker glances at his parents' nest and shudders.

RYKER

Catching a mouse on the ground is
easy. Taking a bird in flight is
different.

SAFIYYA

Live with me or stay with your
parents. Your choice.

Algar approaches, his wing beat heavy. He lands on the ledge. He's a pompous, powerful falcon with a deep, authoritative voice. He looks down his beak at his son.

ALGAR
It's time, RYKER.

RYKER
I'm not ready for this, DAD.

ALGAR
When will you grow up? There's not
enough food here to support all of
us. You must find your own home.

Algar stands on the edge of the cliff and spreads his wings.

RYKER
(to Safi)
S'pose I'll see you shortly.

ALGAR
(to Ryker)
We'll pass by REDLANDS FOREST
first. Keep up.

Algar leaps off the cliff and glides towards the beautiful forest. He plucks a stick from one of the topmost branches before climbing sharply.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - DAY

The two birds circle in the sunshine.

ALGAR
You know the drill. Let's try and
get it right today, huh?

Algar drops the stick.

ALGAR
Well? What are you waiting for?

Ryker dives after the stick but he can't catch it. He doesn't give up and careers towards the ground.

Algar exhales noisily and gives chase. At the last possible moment, he wraps his huge talons around his son's body.

Ryker screeches in terror so Algar drops him into the long grass where he tumbles head over heel.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Ryker stands, shakes himself off and looks at the ground.

ALGAR
That wasn't too clever.

RYKER
I didn't want to give up.

ALGAR
I hope you're learning from your mistakes.

Algar collects the stick and they climb back into the air.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - DAY

Ryker's MOTHER flies down to join Safiyya in the nest. She's a graceful, slightly older falcon who oozes confidence and sophistication.

They look across the field towards Ryker and Algar.

MERCIA
Don't worry, Dear. He'll get the hang of it.

Safiyya smiles thinly.

SAFIYYA
He must be able to fend for himself, MERCIA. For us!

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - DAY

Algar and Ryker circle on the updrafts once more.

ALGAR
Let's go again.

RYKER
I can't do it, Dad.

ALGAR
Follow me. Take over when I move aside. And don't mess up again. Understand?

Algar drops the stick and dives after it. He folds his wings into his body for greater speed.

Ryker follows him. He waits for his father to pull out of the way before striking at the stick. He catches it, celebrates, loses concentration and drops it into the field.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The wind wafts the long grass in lazy patterns. Algar lands next to his son and shakes his head.

ALGAR

It didn't take me this long.

Ryker looks up at Safiyya in the nest but she turns away.

RYKER

Perhaps your father was a better teacher.

ALGAR

Don't bite the talons that feed you, Son.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD ESTATE - DAY

A powerful one-eyed jet-black adult RAVEN with a pitted beak (DILLON) and a sickly white CUCKOO (FLINT) are perched above a fence bordering the fields at the base of the cliffs.

Barbed wire tops the fence and electricity hums through junction boxes. There is a hunter's hide among the pine trees inside the boundary and every few metres there are signs saying 'NO TRESPASSING ON THE ESTATE'.

The birds watch the falcons return to the cliffs.

A young adult female PIGEON (SINNIE) feeds on the ground below. The raven and cuckoo do not notice her.

DILLON

Gather your flock, FLINT.

The pigeon hops beneath the fence and cocks an ear in their direction. They still don't notice her.

FLINT

We can't strike while the father's there.

Dillon fixes the cuckoo with an evil stare.

DILLON

I've arranged a diversion. Go!

Dillon watches him leave, then glances back up at the cliffs. He flies along the fence and cuts into the trees.

The pigeon waits until they've gone before leaping into the air and heading for the cliffs.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

The pigeon approaches the falcon nests but Algar spreads his wings defensively and refuses to let her land.

ALGAR

Be off with you.

SINNIE

DILLON's planning something.

ALGAR

He respects our truce.

Algar dismisses Sinnie with a wave of his wing.

SAFIYYA

I don't trust that raven.

Ryker looks nervously towards the estate.

ALGAR

We don't take advice from pigeons.

(to Ryker)

Time to continue your training.

Algar shoos the pigeon from the nest, then leaps off the cliff with Ryker close behind. Ryker glances over his shoulder and returns Safi's uneasy look.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - DAY

Ryker draws alongside his father.

RYKER

What was that about?

ALGAR

Never you mind. Just steer clear of the RAVENSWOOD ESTATE. I don't want you mixing with the birds there.

Algar spots a lone cuckoo beneath them and cocks his head.

ALGAR
Time for your first kill.

RYKER
Can I follow you?

ALGAR
I won't always be there to help
you. Use your hatred of the cuckoo.

Ryker takes a deep breath and dives after the cuckoo, but he misses it with his first strike. It races further from the cliffs in panic. Ryker tries again and misses again.

He looks to his father but Algar is circling high above. Ryker follows the cuckoo as far as the fence surrounding the estate but then gives up the chase and rejoins his father.

Ryker opens his mouth but Algar cuts him off.

ALGAR
I saw, but we've more important
things to worry about.

Algar nods towards the distant nests and catches an updraft.

A black thunder cloud masses above the cliffs. As they draw closer, they realise it's an enormous flock of crows. Ryker and his father exchange worried looks as they hurry back.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

A heavysset FARMER (GORDON) of about 40 lives in an old English character house with low ceilings and wooden beams. He looks longingly at a woman's photograph. A tear rolls down his cheek.

He opens a drawer in the living room dresser and puts the frame inside face down. He takes off his wedding ring and places it in a box next to the photo. He pushes the drawer closed and bows his head.

A loud BARKING from the farmyard makes him jump. He wipes the tears away and looks out of the window. A bushy tail disappears behind one of his barns.

Gordon pulls his brightly coloured waistcoat around his midriff and puts on a pair of hiking boots. He pulls on a jacket, collects a shotgun from a strong box behind the front door and leaves the house.

EXT. FARMYARD - DAY

Gordon checks the gun is loaded and peers around the barn. The tail vanishes behind his stables. He creeps across the yard and raises the shotgun when he reaches the corner of the stable but the FOX is nowhere to be seen.

A loud SQUAWKING pierces the air. Gordon rushes back into the yard to find the fox chasing a chicken.

A COCKEREL runs for cover under one of the hen-houses and quivers in terror.

The fox spots Gordon and bolts for the field at the bottom of his garden.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Gordon chases the fox into the long grass and fires a single shot. He misses, and the fox heads for the woods opposite. As Gordon lumbers after it, breathing heavily, he notices the flock of crows gathering above the cliffs.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - DAY

Algar and Ryker approach the cliffs. Hundreds of crows are diving towards the nests in waves. Behind them the cuckoos are darting in and trying to grab Safiyya and Mercia.

EXT. CLIFF - DAY

The females defend themselves valiantly but their alarm SCREECHES pierce the morning.

A cuckoo nips in to distract Safiyya. She stands to fight it off and exposes TWO SMALL EGGS incubating in the nest.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - DAY

Algar turns to Ryker and shakes his head.

ALGAR

They're breaking our agreement.
Stay out of trouble.

Ryker watches his father enter the battle. He climbs above the cliffs but is immediately confronted by more crows. He kills two with vicious strikes from his talons but the flock surrounds and confuses him.

Dillon spots Ryker and arrows in for an attack. He slashes at the falcon's chest and draws blood, then circles back for another strike.

The squawking overwhelms Ryker's senses and he becomes disoriented. But still he fights.

Algar is attacked by six or seven crows. He fights ferociously but his tail feathers stream out behind him. As he falls towards the ground, they continue slashing at him.

Ryker escapes from Dillon and dives towards his father.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Gordon sees the fox leap the fence on the far side of the field. He follows it but gives up when he realises the crows are attacking the falcon nests. He shoots into the flock. Three birds fall. He reloads and shoots again.

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

Before Ryker can reach his father he's surrounded once more. He breaks free momentarily and spots Safiyya battling the cuckoos. He races to help her but Dillon darts in and kicks him full in the face.

Ryker falls to the base of the cliff in a long, slow spiral.

SAFIYYA

Ryker!

The battle rages around Ryker but he's oblivious to it, and, as his vision darkens, Safiyya's cries also fade.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Flint joins Dillon in the remains of the falcons' nest.

DILLON

Bring me the other one. We must
banish them all to claim this land.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Gordon approaches the scene of the battle. There are dead birds on the ground at the base of the cliff. He spots Ryker lying in the grass next to the footpath.

As three cuckoos swoop down towards the falcon, Gordon shoulders his shotgun and takes aim.

GORDON
Oh, no you don't.

The cuckoos all pull up and return to the nest.

Gordon kneels beside Ryker.

EXT. CLIFF - DAY

Flint rejoins Dillon in the nest and shakes his head.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Ryker comes to his senses. He's bleeding from cuts across his chest and one eye is closed. He flaps his wings feebly and winces. Tears form in his good eye.

He tries to resist as Gordon places him in his hat and covers him with his scarf, but he eventually gives in.

GORDON
Let's get you to the vet.

INT. GORDON'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

Gordon sets the hat on the kitchen table. His DOGS smell the bird and try to get at him. Gordon raps them on their rumps.

GORDON
Get into your baskets.

When Gordon disappears into the study, the dogs climb out of their baskets. They eye Ryker up and lick their lips, and the falcon sinks lower into the hat.

Gordon re-enters the kitchen and collects his car keys from the table.

EXT. GORDON'S FARM - DAY

Gordon ties his dogs to a post outside a huge kennel in the garden and leaves them some food and water.

Then he collects the falcon and places the hat on the seat in his car. He climbs in and drives onto the main road.

EXT. WILDLIFE SANCTUARY - DAY

Gordon's car pulls in and parks. He climbs out and retrieves the falcon.

The sanctuary is a stone building with lots of cages stacked outside. The car park is busy with TV crews packing trucks.

The sanctuary owner (SIMONE) meets Gordon outside. She is in her 30s, young and vibrant. They kiss on both cheeks.

SIMONE

They're filming a special on the vineyard in BOXHILL for this year's festival.

Gordon pats his generous stomach.

GORDON

My stock ran out months ago.

They walk past the cages to the front door. The animals chatter excitedly.

SIMONE

You should cut down.

INT. MEDICAL CHAMBER - DAY

Gordon and Simone enter. The cupboards are crammed with medicines. Gordon places the hat on the work surface and peels back the scarf.

Simone lifts the falcon out and begins her examination.

Ryker half-heartedly pecks at her hands but stops and cringes when he spies her unusual instruments.

SIMONE

(whispers)

I'm not going to hurt you.

(to Gordon)

The mayor wants the town to have a new coat of arms for the festival. Someone will have to design a shield that reflects our wildlife.

GORDON

But we've had the cockerel on ours for a hundred years, SIMONE.

Gordon notices several animal paintings on the walls. He studies them and nods approvingly.

GORDON

Why do some people have to meddle
with tradition?

Simone rubs the bird's back, a warm look in her eyes.

SIMONE

Just cuts and bruises. He's going
to need some TLC.

She makes the falcon comfortable in a padded box.

SIMONE

Then you can release him.

Gordon points to the paintings.

GORDON

Who's the artist? These are
exquisite.

Simone's eyes light up and she glows with a mixture of pride
and embarrassment.

SIMONE

Actually, they're mine.

GORDON

If the mayor's serious, you should
try designing the new coat of arms.

She blushes and squeezes his hand.

SIMONE

You're a good friend, GORDON.

GORDON

Please call when he's ready.

They kiss on both cheeks and Gordon leaves.

INT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

There are two animal boxes on the counter. Their openings
face each other.

When Ryker wakes, he hears noises from the other box. A
young adult male KESTREL appears at the grate.

KESTREL

This is the point where you tell me
I should see the other guy.

RYKER

I think they came off better.

KESTREL

Must be tough being a falcon, no
one liking you.

Ryker stretches his wings, but the pain is evident on his face. He blinks and his swollen eye finally pops open.

RYKER

What would you know about it?

KESTREL

Birds of prey, mate. We're the
enemy. You especially.

RYKER

Crows attacked my nest. I haven't
seen my family since.

KESTREL

Some of the folks 'round here are
mighty greedy. PEREGRINES are rare,
and rare makes you valuable. Them
crows might be working for someone.

Ryker notices the other bird is missing a leg.

KESTREL

Got careless with a light aircraft.
Would have made a right mess if I'd
Gone through the propeller.

RYKER

I'd be hopping mad.

The kestrel rolls his eyes and sighs, then teeters on his good leg and collapses onto his side as if dead.

RYKER

What's your name?

The kestrel's eyes flick open. He stands and bows his head.

KESTREL

HAWKINS. But you can call me...
Hawkins.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - DAY

GAMEKEEPER NIGEL walks through the woods to his FARM with his ROTTWEILER (RORY). He is thin, with a hooked nose. He wears dirty work clothes and a peaked cap, and carries a shotgun. His boots squelch in the mud on the path.

He takes aim and wings a pheasant. It rustles through the bushes and disappears. Nigel unloads the second barrel at a blackbird and drops its remains in a bag.

The trees close in overhead and the light fades. They enter a small clearing.

The dog stops suddenly, peers into the bushes and sniffs the air. Then it raises its hackles and growls.

NIGEL

I've no time for this, RORY!

Nigel tugs the lead but the dog won't budge. He whips its hindquarters and Rory YELPS.

A pair of yellow eyes watches them from the undergrowth.

Nigel doesn't notice the animal and eventually manages to drag Rory through the clearing

EXT. FARMYARD - DAY

Nigel opens the gate and ties Rory to it. Chatter from the animals in several outbuildings dies down.

Mud lies thick on the ground and the yard is in a state of disrepair. Some of the barn windows are broken and tiles are missing from the roofs.

INT. STABLE - DAY

Nigel enters. It's dark inside. He sits on a hay bale.

Cuckoos drag Safiyya, Mercia and Algar inside while six crows guard the door.

Nigel examines the birds: they all have minor injuries after the fight on the cliffs.

NIGEL

Where's the fourth?

The cuckoos bow their heads in shame.

Nigel locks the falcons in cages and drops the blackbird's remains on the floor.

NIGEL

You'll get nothing more until you
bring me the last falcon.

INT. BARN - DAY

Nigel enters and checks on lines of battery chicken cages. He looks for eggs in trays under the cages. There are only two. He picks them up and shakes his head.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Nigel crosses the yard to the main house. It's a vast grey mansion with streaked windows and the odd loose stone.

INT. NIGEL'S KITCHEN - DAY

The gamekeeper removes his dirty boots. His holed socks are grimy and damp and leave outlines on the stone floor.

There are dirty pots and pans in the sink and crumbs of food on the ground. A rat scurries across the floor and vanishes into a crack in the wall.

Nigel touches the surface of an old range cooker. He gets a holdall from a cupboard and places it on one end. Then he packs the bottom of the bag with tea towels.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Nigel enters a tiny office in need of a coat of paint and sits at an old wooden desk. He picks up a phone and dials.

While he waits for it to be answered, he glances round the room at several stuffed animals mounted on the walls.

A man eventually answers his call.

NIGEL

I have three more peregrines.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

You said there were four, NIGEL.

NIGEL

One got away.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

I need it to make a breeding pair.

NIGEL

If I can't catch him, you'll have to mate the female at the ZOO.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

That's not what we agreed. I need a fresh bloodline. And migratory birds are the best for sport.

Nigel grips the phone, his knuckles white. He shifts uncomfortably.

NIGEL

The mature adults are worth sixty thousand each.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

I don't have that much yet.

NIGEL

Do you still want their eggs?

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

Yeah. Poached.

NIGEL

Then find the money. You're guaranteeing my offer, so you can't back out.

Nigel replaces the receiver and takes a deep breath.

EXT. NIGEL'S CAR - NIGHT

The gamekeeper drives his battered car to Gordon's farm.

EXT. GORDON'S FARM - NIGHT

There's a pond in the well-kept garden. The house is old, with red brick and external wooden beams. Birds are roosting in the trees. They fall silent as Nigel's car pulls in.

The gamekeeper climbs out of the car and rings the doorbell.

Gordon answers. He finishes a mouthful of food and wipes his lips with a napkin.

GORDON
(impatiently)
How much this time?

NIGEL
A million and a half. It's an
extremely generous offer.

Gordon waves his hands over the fields.

GORDON
I've been lobbying Parliament to
have this declared a nature
reserve. It's not for sale.

NIGEL
I saw you'd posted MP BIGGS'S
rejection letter on your website.

GORDON
The man's an idiot. He thinks it
should be used for battery farming.
Someone's got to take a stand
against these city boys.

NIGEL
Tell him at the weekend. He's the
guest speaker at the festival.

Nigel lights a cigarette and blows the smoke towards Gordon,
who almost chokes.

NIGEL
Anyway, my offer still stands.

Gordon folds his arms defensively. His dogs join him in the
doorway and growl at the gamekeeper.

GORDON
My family have lived at POND FARM
for three hundred years. Now, leave
before I set the dogs on you.

Nigel prods Gordon in the chest with his finger.

NIGEL
I will get your farm. And if your
dogs come anywhere near me, I'll
shoot them.

Nigel drops his butt on the ground, storms back to his car
and slams the door.

Gordon extinguishes the cigarette, picks up the butt and shuts his front door.

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Gordon drops the butt in the kitchen bin.

GORDON
And good evening to you, too.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Nigel accelerates out of the driveway, throwing gravel into Gordon's dining room window, smashing it. He smiles.

INT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

Ryker's eyes are bloodshot with tears as he drinks from a water bowl. He then sees Hawkins wake in the next cage.

RYKER
Will you join me in the fight
against the crows?

HAWKINS
I've got to get back to my job
keeping birds out of the airport's
flight-path.

RYKER
(sullenly)
How many of you are there?

HAWKINS puts his wing to his mouth and thinks deeply. Then he spreads his feathers and begins to count them. He looks up at the ceiling and whispers.

HAWKINS
Umm...one...two...errr...three
...four. With our families of
course.

Simone and Gordon enter. She places a tray of food in each cage.

SIMONE
(to the birds)
Get your strength up. I need this
box for a wounded pheasant.

GORDON

Will you join me for dinner?

The question catches Simone off guard and she blushes.

SIMONE

I didn't think you were ready.

GORDON

I've packed the photos away.

SIMONE

I'm busy with the festival.

GORDON

Monday it is then.

Simone hands Gordon the travel box with Ryker inside.

The falcon waves goodbye to Hawkins, who nods in reply.

SIMONE

I have a date Monday. Some other time perhaps.

INT. GORDON'S KITCHEN - DAY

Ryker pokes his head out of the box and drinks from a water bowl. He notices one of the windows is open. He stretches his wings but they're still stiff and he winces.

Suddenly Ryker hears a noise and cocks his head. A kitchen stool at the end of the table wobbles. It moves again. He can't see what's on the stool but an animal's tail flicks above the table's surface.

Ryker's feathers ruffle up and his talons clench. He hears a low HISS. He looks to Gordon but the farmer is making a cup of tea and has his back to him.

A ball of fur leaps over the edge of the table towards Ryker. He jumps back into the box in surprise. The animal lands in the saucer, spraying water everywhere, and slides off the table.

The saucer breaks, so the animal vanishes into the living room and hides under the sofa.

GORDON

AVELLANA! Blasted cat.

(laughing)

She won't bother you again.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ryker is woken by the sound of Gordon's dogs BARKING. He climbs out of his box and cocks his head. The barking continues.

Ryker stands on the kitchen table and spreads his wings. He manages to take off and flies out of the window.

EXT. FARMYARD - NIGHT

Ryker lands on the gatepost. A SHADOW darts across the yard. The chickens SQUAWK in terror.

RYKER

Fox!

A scuffle breaks out under a half moon and an automatic light comes on. Ryker sees the cockerel battling with the fox. He swoops down and strikes at the fox but it leaps up to defend itself.

Ryker strikes again but the fox ducks and sinks her teeth into the cockerel, which SCREECHES.

Ryker lands on the fox's back and pecks at its head. It lets go of the cockerel and turns on him instead.

Gordon runs into the yard with his shotgun. He takes aim but doesn't shoot in case he hits one of the birds.

Ryker at last gets the upper hand and whacks the fox on the nose with his foot. She jumps in surprise and escapes into the field.

Ryker breathes a sigh of relief and checks on the cockerel.

COCKEREL

Thanks.

RYKER

(panting)

Couldn't watch you get eaten.

Gordon runs after the fox and takes a pot shot but misses. He shakes his head, lifts his glasses and examines the gun.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMYARD - DAY

The farmer leans his gun against a stable door. He collects a bucket of grain and scatters it in troughs. It's a crisp morning and his breath swirls and dissipates.

He opens the pen. The chickens cluck excitedly and feed but the cockerel waits his turn.

COCKEREL

(to Ryker)

Thought I was breakfast.

RYKER

(nods at the hens)

What would they do without you?

Gordon approaches and drops more grain on the ground.

GORDON

You need to start on the hens,
EADRIC. The farm's survival depends
on you now that Old Tom's passed.

Gordon crosses the yard and fills up the water troughs.

EADRIC looks up and down the line of bobbing chicken rears and shudders.

EADRIC

I'm not sure I'm ready. I mean,
where do you start?

Ryker raises an eyebrow.

RYKER

Just jump in headfirst.

EADRIC

All in good time.

Ryker pecks some grain and makes a face. He washes it down with some water from a trough and shakes his head.

RYKER

Give me meat any day.

EADRIC

Now you're talking.

Ryker gives him a strange look, then cocks his head towards the dark woods beyond the field.

RYKER

Who owns the Ravenswood estate?

EADRIC

Nigel. Gamekeeper. He wants this farm for his sheep but Gordon won't sell. We're pretty pleased about that because we've heard bad things about Nigel's place.

RYKER

Like what?

The cockerel notices the chickens have finished feeding and eyes up the remaining grain.

EADRIC

I need to eat. Find CUTHBERT. He knows all about the estate.

RYKER

Who's Cuthbert?

EADRIC

Follow the stream to Redlands. He lives there with his BROTHER.

RYKER

You haven't told me who he is.

The cockerel scoops up a mouthful of grain.

EADRIC

(mumbles)

PHEASANT. One with the limp.

Gordon replaces the feed bags in the stable and joins them.

GORDON

(to Ryker)

I think you're ready for home.

RYKER

Well, Eadric, see you.

The cockerel brushes his wing against Ryker. The falcon raises an eyebrow and steps back.

EADRIC

I hope so.

Gordon picks up Ryker and carries him to the bottom of the garden on his wrist.

GORDON

The exercise will do you good.

Ryker rubs his head against Gordon's neck. Then he leaps into the air and heads across the field towards the nests.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Ryker searches the sky but there are no birds on the cliffs. He lands by the nest, his face a mask of despair.

There are falcon feathers everywhere, and even a spattering of blood. But there's no sign of Safiyya or his parents. Ryker collapses and starts to cry.

Eventually he stands and wipes away the tears, then puffs his chest out. He flies across the field to where the stream enters the serene and beautiful Redlands Forest.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - DAY

Ryker alights on a branch overhanging the corner of the field. A pheasant feeds below.

RYKER

Excuse me, CUTHBERT?

The pheasant ignores him so Ryker drops to the ground.

RYKER

Hello!

The startled pheasant jumps and turns.

PHEASANT

By God, have you no manners?

RYKER

You ignored me.

The pheasant backs off and stands ramrod straight, clearly wary of this bird of prey.

PHEASANT

I'm quite deaf, you know.

RYKER

(raises his voice)

Are you Cuthbert?

PHEASANT

Good heavens, no. I'm his brother
WILBUR.

RYKER

Have you seen my family?

Wilbur nods slowly.

WILBUR

SINNIE tried to warn you but you
wouldn't listen.

RYKER

It's my father's fault.

WILBUR

Blame someone else then. There's no
excuse for arrogance.

RYKER

Will you help me find them?

Wilbur shakes his head and backs away.

WILBUR

I'm stocking up. There's a storm
coming in.

Wilbur turns and marches into the forest, leaving a
distraught Ryker alone.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - NIGHT

Ryker curls up in the remains of his nest. The moon rises
and casts a shadow across his face. A tear drops onto the
ledge.

In the distance he hears a bird SCREECH. He ignores it but
the commotion gets louder and more frantic and eventually he
stands.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker leaps off the cliff and flies to where the stream
enters the forest. He can hear the birds more clearly now.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Ryker flies through the trees by the light of the moon. Soon the branches become too thick and he lands. He runs to a clearing as the sounds of battle intensify.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

A fox confronts CUTHBERT and Wilbur. It crouches as if ready to spring.

They jump out of its way and it misses. It picks itself up and shakes off the dirt.

WILBUR

Thank the Lord, you're here.

Ryker gives him a dismissive look.

RYKER

Your knight in shining armour, I'm not.

The fox squares up to Ryker.

FOX

Not you again.

Ryker cautiously approaches.

RYKER

Why can't you leave us alone?

Ryker and the fox circle each other while the pheasants look on. Ryker's razor-sharp talons glint in the moonlight.

FOX

A girl's got to eat.

RYKER

Plenty of sheep on Nigel's farm.

FOX

He shot my father.

RYKER

Where's the rest of your family?

The fox continues padding in a circle while the pheasants cower under a fallen tree.

FOX

I've no brothers or sisters, and Nigel's dog killed my mother on an illegal hunt.

RYKER

You could always help us.

FOX

I don't usually make deals but I'll leave you alone tonight. If I can't find anything else to eat, I'll be back in the morning.

RYKER

I'll be waiting.

The fox retreats into the shadows and disappears.

Ryker exhales sharply and leans against the tree. He's shaking with fear.

CUTHBERT

Thank you, kind sir.

WILBUR

My brother. Cuthbert.

CUTHBERT

You've obviously met.

Ryker can't look Wilbur in the eyes.

RYKER

I asked him if he'd seen my family. He didn't want to help.

Wilbur shifts uncomfortably and splutters.

Cuthbert looks at his brother and shakes his head.

CUTHBERT

How quickly times change, eh?

WILBUR

Umm, yes, well, err...

RYKER

Gordon's cockerel said you might know why the crows attacked us.

The pheasants lead Ryker to a tidy nest under the tree.

CUTHBERT

Poor Eadric. I think he's going through a phase.

He drinks some water from a knot in one of the branches.

CUTHBERT

We've tried to get on with you but your father won't have anything to do with us.

RYKER

He's set in his ways.

CUTHBERT

Redlands birds must stick together to stop the crows terrorising us.

Ryker waits for Wilbur to drink, then sips from the knot.

RYKER

I'll listen.

CUTHBERT

The estate's owned by Nigel. He runs a battery farm. Nasty piece of work. Treats his animals like, well, you know.

RYKER

Is that how you got the limp?

CUTHBERT

No. I distracted a hunter in the Highlands years ago to stop him shooting a friend.

The pheasant shifts to a more comfortable position.

CUTHBERT

I saw the crows take your wife and parents from the nest.

WILBUR

And cuckoos took your eggs.

Ryker chokes at the news. He shakes his head but then becomes more defiant.

WILBUR

Don't even think of going there. The place is guarded by hundreds of crows and a vicious dog.

RYKER

How come you know so much?

CUTHBERT

Nigel breeds HOMING PIGEONS.
Whether by luck or judgement, I
suspect the former, one escaped. Of
course he's homeless now, which
doesn't help.

RYKER

Can I meet him?

CUTHBERT

With you as an ally we might be
able to take on those crows.

Cuthbert starts up a faint track in the forest as clouds
scurry across the moon and the breeze picks up.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Cuthbert stops at the base of a huge oak tree as it starts
to rain. He clears his throat and looks up.

CUTHBERT

Spare a moment, mon ami?

A young adult PIGEON appears in the crook of the tree. He
looks left and right, then shrugs and returns to his nest.

CUTHBERT

We've at least three dimensions,
HATCHER. Try looking down.

The pigeon reappears but doesn't notice the falcon in the
shadows. He speaks with a thick Welsh accent.

HATCHER

Cuthbert! I didn't see you there.
How are you?

CUTHBERT

Mellowing with age.

HATCHER

I didn't know you had jaundice.
You'd better come up.

CUTHBERT

I've brought a friend.

Cuthbert nods to Ryker and they take off.

EXT. HATCHER'S NEST - NIGHT

Ryker is more agile than Cuthbert and lands on the bough first. Hatcher gets an almighty shock and jumps up and down in terror.

HATCHER

You've turned into a bloody great falcon, Cuthbert!

Cuthbert lands on the branch a moment later.

CUTHBERT

Relax, Hatcher, this is the friend I was just talking about.

HATCHER

(sheepishly)

Just letting him know who's boss.

RYKER

Sorry to disturb you, Hatcher, but I'd like to pick your brain.

HATCHER

For what? A prize?

CUTHBERT

(mutters)

No chance of that.

Hatcher's MATE joins them on the branch. She shakes her head at Ryker.

SINNIE

I tried to warn you.

RYKER

Sorry.

SINNIE

Your loss.

RYKER

(to Hatcher)

How did you escape from Nigel's?

HATCHER

Easy! I got lost during a race. Glad I did. That farm, whew.

CUTHBERT

The crows took Ryker's family.

The pigeon nods as if this is common knowledge.

HATCHER

He wants to breed falcons so he can
sell the chicks to the zoo.

One of Hatcher's CHICKS climbs out of the nest. He's much
bigger than the others and looks like a juvenile cuckoo.

CHICK

Where's my dinner?

HATCHER

I'm busy, boyo.

CHICK

I have to eat, you know.

CUTHBERT

Good grief, Hatcher, haven't you
noticed anything odd about your
chicks?

Hatcher looks the chick over and shrugs.

HATCHER

Only that this one appeared from
nowhere, then changed colour and
grew four times bigger. I thought
he was eating a bit more.

RYKER

He's a cuckoo chick, a parasite!

CUTHBERT

You must get rid of him so you can
raise the others.

Hatcher looks distraught. He glances at Sinnie but she
shakes her head in exasperation.

HATCHER

Shame. I rather liked him.

CUTHBERT

Ryker, do the honours.

CHICK

You wouldn't dare. I belong here.

RYKER

No. You don't.

Ryker grabs the cuckoo chick in his talons and throws it out of the nest. It isn't old enough to fly and spirals down to the forest floor.

CUTHBERT

They're trying to take over the forest. Spread the word, Hatcher.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Flint watches Hatcher's nest from a nearby tree. He sees Cuthbert and Ryker disappear up the path and then lands on the forest floor to collect his chick.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Ryker follows the pheasant back through the trees. There's no visible path but Cuthbert never takes a wrong turn.

Thunder rumbles in the distance and the rain patters off the leaves. A fork of lightning brightens the sky.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Cuthbert shows Ryker to the nest under the fallen tree. Wilbur is already snoring.

CUTHBERT

Try to get some sleep.

Ryker closes his eyes and waits for Cuthbert to drop off.

The rain stops and the moon comes out from behind the clouds. Ryker leaves the nest and uses the light to find his way back to the field but he doesn't notice Flint flitting through the trees behind him.

Ravenswood appears dark and menacing in the distance.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

As Ryker flies towards Nigel's farm, he trembles with nervous energy.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Ryker lands on a branch above the fence separating Gordon's land from Nigel's. The crows roost in the trees above. Their nests are everywhere.

He drops to the floor and uses the moonlight to follow a faint path. Every so often he cocks his head and listens for trouble.

Flint lands at Dillon's nest. He nods towards the path below. The raven's one beady eye narrows and he smiles menacingly.

DILLON

A lamb to the slaughter. Soon all
this will be mine.

Ryker tiptoes the last few steps to the gate leading into Nigel's yard.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARM - NIGHT

Ryker leaps onto a windowsill and peers inside one of the barns. There are cages of all sizes holding rare bird species. The window is ajar.

INT. NIGEL'S BARN - NIGHT

As Ryker enters, the birds fall silent and look at him with suspicion. He flies among the cages but he can't see his family so he lands next to a TAWNY OWL's cage.

OWL

(in a soft Indian accent)
You're either brave or stupid. Pass
me the keys on that hook.

Ryker glances towards the door where a set of keys hangs.

OWL

Chop chop. Nigel often comes round
at night. And you never know where
Dillon is.

Ryker flies across the barn and returns with the keys. He passes them through the bars.

RYKER

The raven?

The owl selects a key and puts it in the lock. The cage door swings open and he drops the keys back on the hook.

OWL

A nasty piece of work.

The other birds have taken an interest in them now that the owl's cage is open.

RYKER

Should we free them?

OWL

No time now.

Ryker follows the owl to the windowsill and waits while he checks outside.

RYKER

Why do the crows obey Dillon?

OWL

They attacked his family in a territorial dispute. He was the only survivor. No one was strong enough to take him on and he became their leader by default.

RYKER

And the cuckoos?

The owl shakes his head and glances across the yard again. Clouds obscure the moon, plunging them into darkness.

OWL

I haven't got time for this.

The owl flies outside and lands on the roof of the barn.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Ryker follows the owl and lands next to him.

RYKER

I helped you escape.

OWL

(whispers fiercely)
Keep it down. Dillon can't stand them, wants the right to control the woods himself. But Nigel uses the cuckoos to take over the nests

OWL
and steal rare eggs. If he didn't
force them to work together, they'd
be at war.

RYKER
They took my family.

The owl cocks his head towards one of the bigger barns.

OWL
Try next door.

RYKER
Show me?

OWL
I've done my bit.

The owl leaps off the barn roof and flits into the night.
Ryker looks around nervously, then darts to the next barn.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

Ryker lands on a windowsill and peers inside. A dog BARKS,
making him jump. He prepares to fly to safety, but it's a
false alarm.

The barn is crammed with battery chickens in tiny cages.
They look undernourished and miserable. Ryker moves on to
the next barn and lands on the windowsill.

He spots his father in one of the cages on the far side, but
Algar doesn't notice him. Ryker checks the latch and tries
to undo the window.

He hears a noise behind him and whirls round. Dillon has
been waiting quietly on the roof above. The raven opens and
closes his beak in evil anticipation, his beady eye fixing
Ryker with a malevolent stare.

DILLON
Look who's here.

The moon comes out from behind the clouds. A hundred crows
are suddenly illuminated. They're lined up in ranks on the
roofs. The owl is held securely in their grip. Flint looks
on triumphantly.

OWL

Tried to warn you, Buddy.

Ryker looks for an escape route but it appears he's trapped.

DILLON

Seize him!

Four crows leap off the roof and scythe in at RYKER. Ryker spreads his wings and leaps up, knocking them aside with his talons and beak.

Then he takes aim at the crows holding the owl and hurls them to the ground.

OWL

Let's get the flock out of here.

The owl overtakes Ryker and leads him across the yard. The crows swarm in but Ryker and the owl strike hard and break through their first line.

DILLON (O.S.)

Don't let them escape!

The birds dart into the trees.

OWL

(to Ryker)

Stay close. They can't see in the dark.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Ryker sticks to owl's tail. They flit through the branches like wraiths, dodging this way and that.

Ryker finds it hard to keep up and the crows strike at him, CAWING loudly to confuse him.

But the crows can't get close enough and most fly into branches in the darkness. Dillon will not be put off, however. He chases them through the trees and closes in.

OWL

Split!

Ryker nods and breaks right while the owl turns hard left.

Dillon doesn't know which one to follow. His indecisiveness costs him and he flies directly into a tree. His beak gets caught in the bark and the vibrations rattle his head.

He has to use all his strength to pull himself free. He eventually pops out, tumbles backwards and lands on the ground in a heap.

He shakes himself down and glares after Ryker and the owl.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Ryker and the owl rejoin each other above the meadow. They exchange knowing looks and land by the stream.

RYKER

Your turn to follow me.

They make their way through the trees to Cuthbert's nest.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

The pheasant opens one eye and is immediately on full alert. He crawls out of the nest and joins them.

CUTHBERT

Where've you been?

Ryker bows his head.

CUTHBERT

Remember what I said about working together? That means looking out for each other too.

Wilbur wakes, yawns and stretches his wings.

WILBUR

Who's your friend?

RYKER

I'm afraid I don't know his name.

The owl spreads one wing like a cape and draws it in front of him while bowing.

OWL

NAZ, TAWNY OWL, at your sevice.

CUTHBERT

What's your story?

NAZ

I escaped from FEATHERED-FRIENDS ZOO but then got caught in one of Nigel's traps.

CUTHBERT
Feathered-Friends. That brings back
memories.

The pheasant appears deep in thought but he eventually nods
and gathers them in close.

CUTHBERT
You need to go back.

NAZ
Not with a raven on the warpath.

CUTHBERT
To the zoo.

NAZ
They'll lock me up again.

CUTHBERT
An old friend is there and I owe
him one. He's our only hope to
liberate Redlands.

The owl walks away.

NAZ
Too dangerous. And I need to get
home to my family.

CUTHBERT
If you don't go, those birds'll
overrun the forest in a few days.

NAZ
Not my problem. And I escaped a
long time ago, at night. I don't
know the way.

RYKER
Please, Naz. We could leave at
sunrise, with Hatcher as our guide.

CUTHBERT
Wilbur and I are too old to fly
that far.

The owl throws his wings up in exasperation.

NAZ
Why should we take all the risks?
And who's Hatcher?

CUTHBERT
Homing pigeon.

The three birds form a semi-circle around the owl.

NAZ
Come on, we're even.

CUTHBERT
You're right. You've no reason to help us. Sorry I asked.

RYKER
But, Cuthbert, we need him. He's strong and has night vision.

CUTHBERT
Let him go.
(turning back to the nest)
Goodbye, Naz.

EXT. CAR PARK - NIGHT

Nigel pulls in next to a stone tower high on a hillside and waits in his car. Pine trees sway in the breeze while lights from towns on the plains below twinkle in the night.

Another vehicle pulls alongside a minute later and extinguishes its headlights. The driver winds his window down but stays in the shadows. He reaches across and hands Nigel a sheet of paper.

GRUFF MAN
A list from my clients.

NIGEL
You could have emailed it.

GRUFF MAN
They can be traced. Let me know as soon as you have what they want.

Nigel flicks on the light and glances at the list.

NIGEL
You're in luck.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Ryker and the pheasants sleep in the nests.

A creature enters the clearing opposite and approaches, its footfall soft, the leaves barely crunching. It steps on a twig, which snaps.

Ryker's eyes flick open. The feathers on the back of his neck stand tall. He shakes as the shadow moves closer.

A ray of moonlight suddenly bathes the clearing's centre. Ryker leaps out to attack the creature, but it's only Naz.

RYKER

You scared the life out of me!

Ryker leads Naz away from the nest.

NAZ

Count me in.

RYKER

Why the change of heart?

NAZ

Truth be told, I don't have many friends.

RYKER

You just made some. Let's get some sleep.

NAZ

Spoken like an owl, bro'.

INT. NIGEL'S STABLE - NIGHT

The gamekeeper approaches Algar and Mercia's cage. They look weak. He turns a screw that compresses the cage walls until the birds are held tightly.

NIGEL

Don't worry, you'll be out of here very soon.

MERCIA nips Nigel's thumb through the bars, drawing blood.

NIGEL

You'll pay for that! Don't go anywhere now.

He cackles at his own joke, turns the screw once more and leaves the stable.

EXT. FARMYARD - NIGHT

Nigel enters another stable and returns with a bag of feed. He carries it into the woods towards the field.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Nigel is about halfway along the path when he hears a noise ahead. He freezes, drops the bag. The noise stops, then starts again. It sounds like someone crunching ice-cubes between their teeth.

Nigel shudders and wipes the perspiration from his brow. He wanders into a clearing, hears a commotion in the bushes. Something runs away.

He drips with sweat. He takes a few paces and finds the carcass of one of his sheep. It's been partially eaten. He shivers and wipes the sweat from his brow.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - DAY

Sun pours into the clearing. The birds roosting above the pheasants' nest twitter contentedly.

CUTHBERT

It's time.

WILBUR

Godspeed, young sirs.

Cuthbert follows the faint path to the field. Some trees are down after the last storm.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Hatcher waits by the stream. He's delighted to see them and jumps up and down.

HATCHER

Alright, a barn owl.

NAZ

I'm tawny.

HATCHER
 (surprised)
 A Geordie? Wey hi, Tony.

Naz looks skywards and clasps his wings in front of him as if praying.

NAZ
 (mutters)
 One of the villages round here must
 be an idiot short.

Cuthbert puts a fatherly wing around Ryker's shoulders.

CUTHBERT
 Stay safe.

Ryker nods and follows Hatcher and Naz into the air.

EXT. SKY ABOVE REDLANDS FOREST - DAY

Hatcher's light grey colour blends into the scattered cloud, whereas Naz's vivid brown coat is clearly visible. The pigeon looks around, confused.

HATCHER
 Zoo, zoo, zoo?

He circles a couple of times to get his bearings, then heads off south. After a short while, he looks around again. Ryker draws alongside.

RYKER
 Everything okay?

HATCHER
 I don't recognise these fields.

There's a whine in the distance that gradually grows louder. The birds look around but can't see anything.

RYKER
 Have you been to the zoo before?

HATCHER
 No.

Ryker is about to reply when a passenger jet roars past. Naz gets caught in its jet-wash and tumbles end over end.

Eventually he rights himself and rejoins them, his face like thunder.

NAZ

Can I get a one-second warning next time?

HATCHER

If you think it'll help.

NAZ

(to himself)

I should have gone home.

Ryker spots a bird flying towards them at high speed. He grins broadly when it pulls alongside. The kestrel nods to the plane now landing in the distance.

HAWKINS

You could have been killed. What brings you here?

RYKER

Not 'what', but 'who'. Hatcher's guiding us to the zoo.

The kestrel leads them down to a hide in a field at the end of the runway.

EXT. HIDE - DAY

The birds land in the grass and gather round.

HAWKINS

Then he's lost. The zoo is out west. Perhaps I can help.

NAZ

I'm all ears.

HATCHER

How on earth do you fly?

Hatcher looks him over and leaps into the air. He waggles his tiny ears and crashes face first into the ground.

HATCHER

You must think I'm stupid.

RYKER

(ignoring Hatcher)

But you have a job and a family.

HAWKINS

It's still worth asking.

Hawkins enters the hide while the others wait quietly outside. He rejoins them moments later, a grin on his face.

HAWKINS

I just resigned.

HATCHER

From marriage? I didn't know you could do that.

RYKER

Don't ask.

NAZ

Then we're the four musketeers.
Onwards and upwards.

EXT. IN THE AIR - DAY

The birds join Hatcher as he circles above the hide.

HATCHER

Northwest? Any ideas?

HAWKINS

Due west would be better. The zoo is out beyond the ancient stones.

HATCHER

You're getting the hang of this navigation thing already.

NAZ

(muttering)

Wait 'til the stars are out. Then we won't have to rely on Captain 'Sense of Direction'.

EXT. LONDON - DAY

The birds spot buildings in the distance and a vast urban sprawl soon appears below. The city is bathed in a light haze. There are people and cars everywhere.

NAZ

(sarcastically)

This zoo's enormous. They've even got people cooped up in it.

HATCHER

It does seem a bit big.

NAZ

This, Hatcher, is London.

HATCHER

But I plotted the route in my head.
We must be east of where we are.

The birds circle a tall office building and fly west along the river. They pass the London Eye and St Paul's Cathedral.

RYKER

Let's rest on that clock face.

The birds alight on the Houses of Parliament.

EXT. BIG BEN - DAY

A loud click startles the birds, all except Hatcher, who's wandering up and down muttering to himself.

The three of them cover their ears and wait expectantly. Hatcher turns and notices them standing in their odd poses.

HATCHER

Why are you -- ?

A deafening BONG shatters the peace. Hatcher's eyes wobble and he stumbles back. A second chime knocks him off the ledge.

The others watch as Hatcher spirals towards the ground. He recovers in time, rejoins them on the ledge and covers his ears. Twelve chimes eventually fade in the distance.

HATCHER

How often does it do that?

NAZ

Five times a day.

HATCHER

Every two hours. Thought so.

A JACKDAW lands on the ledge. The dark bird with a silvery nape struts over with a cocky gait. He's got mischievous eyes and an East End accent.

JACKDAW

'Ello, lads, nice day for it. I'm the DUKE.

NAZ

Duke of what?

DUKE

Duke of Westminster of course. You're on my patch.

RYKER

We're lost. Do you know where the Feathered-Friends zoo is?

DUKE

Pope catholic, is he?

HATCHER

Ah, it's a test.

The pigeon paces up and down scratching his head.

HATCHER

I'll say he probably is.

NAZ

Amazing. And the odds were only fifty-fifty.

HATCHER

What are the chances of that?

DUKE

I'll point you in the right direction if you give me a hand.

The pigeon searches himself and then shrugs.

DUKE

Ravens took my KIDS to the TOWER OF LONDON. You're gonna help me rescue 'em, aren't ya.

RYKER

We haven't got time. My family's in trouble.

Duke waves his wing in a huge circle.

DUKE

Zoo could be anywhere. Good luck.

As the jackdaw turns and walks away, he subtly glances over his shoulder to make sure Ryker is feeling guilty.

HAWKINS
(to Ryker)
Now you've done it.

INT. NIGEL'S STABLE - DAY

Mercia and Algar are still clamped in their cage. Some of Mercia's feathers fall out as she tries to get comfortable.

MERCIA
(gasping)
We've got to get out and find Safi.

ALGAR
We can't do anything until the
gamekeeper gets back.

MERCIA
And what's happened to our boy?

ALGAR
If he was alive, he'd have been
brought here.

MERCIA
Don't say that.

Algar looks her in the eyes and shakes his head slowly.

EXT. CLOCK FACE - DAY

Hawkins pushes Ryker along the ledge towards the jackdaw.

HAWKINS
Find out where that zoo is.
Whatever it takes.

Ryker bows his head and shuffles over to Duke.

RYKER
Why did they kidnap your kids?

DUKE
If them ravens leave the tower,
rumour 'as it, it'll fall down.
They put the littluns to work
rebuilding the foundations in the
'ope that it'll save 'em from their

DUKE
fate. The more we protest, the
nastier they get.

They rejoin the others.

RYKER
How many ravens are there?

DUKE
Only six of 'em left. That's why
they're worried.

NAZ
Ravens and us don't mix.

DUKE
Got a conscience, have you?

NAZ
I'm not big on suicide missions.

DUKE
Don't worry, I 'ave a plan.

They wait for him to elaborate but the jackdaw just smiles.

DUKE
(seriously)
Fly there. Break in. Rescue the
kids. Escape. Nothin' to it.

Ryker checks with the others and they nod resignedly.

NAZ
Doesn't exactly smack of genius.

HATCHER
It's what I'd do.

EXT. LONDON - DAY

Ryker leaps off the ledge and follows the jackdaw up the
river.

NAZ
(to Ryker)
Better be more to it than that.

Duke looks over his shoulder and fixes Naz with a stare.

DUKE

Is there.

INT. STABLE - DAY

Mercia shifts again to try and get comfortable but the pain is evident on her face.

MERCIA

He's stronger than you think. Why can't you believe in him?

ALGAR

Because last time I trusted him with anything we lost a daughter.

MERCIA

You should never have left him alone with her. The difference is that I've forgiven you.

ALGAR

If he'd learned how to hunt, he could've protected her.

Mercia twists to face Algar, her anger tempered by their predicament.

MERCIA

You thought he was too young. Put it behind you. You've a son who needs his father.

They fall silent as Nigel puts his head round the door. He carries a cage covered in cloth.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - DAY

The birds alight opposite the Tower of London on top of the magnificent bridge. The old stone prison looks forbidding.

A couple of ravens circle above. One stands on each corner turret as a lookout.

DUKE

That was the easy bit.

RYKER

How do we get in?

DUKE

It's getting out you wanna worry about. They know we're 'ere so we need to distract 'em.

Duke cocks his head down towards the river.

DUKE

We've been loosening the bars covering that storm drain for weeks. I'll slip through and bring the kiddies out while you fly cover. They'll never know what's hit 'em.

RYKER

I don't know how to take a bird down in flight.

Duke can barely conceal his astonishment.

DUKE

Led a sheltered life, 'ave ya?

Ryker bows his head.

Duke sighs and stands in front of him. He looks over his shoulder and lines his wing up with the falcon's beak. Then he sights on a landmark across the river.

DUKE

Keep the other bird lined up with a fixed point on the ground. Fastest bird in the world, ain't ya, so you can't miss.

He steps left and right. Ryker moves with him and keeps Duke in line with the landmark.

DUKE

Easy when you know how.

NAZ

We'll lead the ravens upriver on a wild goose chase.

HATCHER

I've never heard such nonsense.

DUKE

Like it.

(to Hatcher)

This is no place for a pigeon.

The pigeon gives him a knowing glance that the other birds don't notice. Duke acknowledges him with a wink.

Naz and Hawkins leap off the bridge and fly round the tower.

EXT. TOWER OF LONDON - DAY

The ravens immediately notice the other birds. Two leap off their turrets, CAW loud warnings and see them off up the river. Another two dive in from above to give chase.

Duke nods at Ryker, then dives for the storm drain far below. He's extremely agile and slips through the remaining bars undetected while the ravens are preoccupied.

Ryker jumps into the air and circles the tower. One of the two remaining ravens takes off and climbs to intercept him.

Ryker spots it and dives towards it. He keeps it lined up with a streetlamp on the river bank, making small adjustments when the raven jinks left and right.

He strikes hard at the raven's neck on the first pass. The raven SCREECHES in terror but Ryker squeezes his talons and drops it in one fluid motion. Then he lands on the bridge next to Hatcher.

Duke suddenly bursts from the drain. A flock of young birds erupts after him and spreads out across the river to escape.

Naz and Hawkins drop onto the walkway between the towers on the bridge as Duke lands with his two sons. Duke glances over his shoulder as the ravens regroup.

DUKE

Time to make like an egg!

RYKER

Huh?

DUKE

Beat it!

All the birds jump off the walkway in unison. They drop low under Tower Bridge and head west along the river in an arrowhead formation.

Ryker pulls up as one of the ravens draws close. He then dives back on it, striking and killing it instantly.

When he rejoins the flock, Duke nods his approval.

DUKE

And there you 'ave it.

RYKER

You'd make a great teacher.

DUKE

Jackdaw of all trades, ain't I.

The flock passes the London Eye, weaving in and out of the spokes on the wheel.

All but two ravens give up the chase. They get caught in the wheel's spokes and fall to the ground.

Duke's flock pull up hard and cross the river to the Houses of Parliament.

EXT. TOWER OF LONDON - DAY

A small crack appears in one corner of the tower. Part of the stone shatters and a little piece drops to the ground.

EXT. HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT - DAY

The birds land on the ledge next to the clock face. They're all out of breath after their escape.

DUKE

Piece of cake.

HATCHER

No thanks, I've eaten.

The jackdaw points towards the afternoon sun.

DUKE

The zoo's a hundred miles west.
It'll take you all day. Follow the
main road outta town and keep an
eye out for them stones.

RYKER

Thank you, Duke.

The jackdaw puts his wing round Ryker's shoulders.

DUKE

Don't mention it.

HATCHER
Why ever not?

Duke gives Hatcher a strange look, then turns back to Ryker.

DUKE
Confused, is he?

EXT. LONDON - DAY

The birds leap off the tower and fan out in a diamond.
Hatcher takes the lead and turns to Naz.

HATCHER
That was the Houses of Parliament,
right?

NAZ
I believe so.

Hatcher suddenly bursts out laughing.

NAZ
What's so funny?

HATCHER
Don't you see? You, an owl, at
Parliament. I'm surprised there
weren't more of you about.

Hatcher carries on chuckling to himself while the others
shrug in bemusement.

EXT. IN THE AIR - DAY

The birds cross the city and follow a motorway running
through rolling hills and open fields.

INT. STABLE - DAY

Algar and Mercia try to see what's inside the cage Nigel's
carrying but it's covered in cloth. The gamekeeper opens a
door into another stable and pushes it closed behind him.

INT. ADJOINING STABLE - DAY

Nigel sets the cage next to Safiyya. She looks defiant.

NIGEL
Meet your new mate.

He removes the cloth and a mangy falcon shuffles forward.

Safiyya's calm exterior cracks and she backs away.

The old falcon's grey feathers are falling out and there's a lecherous gleam in his eyes. A bead of saliva drops from his mouth and she can't help shuddering.

NIGEL
Don't worry. I'll let you get acquainted first.

He laughs maniacally, pushes the cages closer together and leaves the stable.

EXT. STONE MONUMENT - DAY

The birds fly towards the stones as the late sun bathes them in a red/gold glow. Crowds gather below. They walk among the huge rock pillars.

Ryker leads the birds over the attraction and soon leave it behind. A brown sign with a 'Big white cockatoo' on it appears below them.

NAZ
Almost there. Let's rest.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The birds land in a copse near the main road. Heavy traffic RUMBLES in the background. A light breeze fans the grass.

RYKER
The park's only a couple of miles.
We should check it out now.

NAZ
We should wait 'til it's dark to avoid being seen.

HAWKINS
Then we'll split into two groups of two to search the zoo.

Hatcher cocks his head as if thinking deeply.

HATCHER

Why not into a group of four and a group of nought? No one would notice a group of nought.

NAZ

And you could lead it.

Hatcher swells with pride.

HATCHER

I'd be delighted, Tony.
(pauses)
Wouldn't I?

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The roar of traffic has died down. Car headlights still pierce the night periodically. Naz stretches his wings and looks them over.

NAZ

It's time.

RYKER

Let's make it quick. I must get back to Nigel's to rescue Safiyya.

HATCHER

I thought he'd only taken your parents.

RYKER

I think he has Safi too.

Hatcher suddenly turns serious, which seems out of character.

HATCHER

You'd better hope not. He'll force her to mate with another falcon if he can't catch you.

Ryker can barely conceal his emotion. He looks at Naz but the owl turns away.

RYKER

Did you know about this?

NAZ
I had my suspicions.
(shakes his head at Hatcher)
But didn't want to upset you.

HAWKINS
(cynically)
He'd never have come with us if
he'd known.

Ryker chokes and slumps to the ground.

RYKER
You've been using me.

NAZ
You volunteered us for this.
Remember?

RYKER
I'd live in captivity if it meant
saving her from a life of slavery
to another falcon.

Naz puts his wing round Ryker's shoulders, then glares at Hatcher but the pigeon doesn't appear to notice.

NAZ
We all need each other.

Ryker stands but he's shaking and tears roll down his cheeks. He eventually wipes them away.

RYKER
I'm going back.

NAZ
Not on my watch. We're finishing
this together.

The owl leads them into the air but Ryker lags behind and gazes longingly to the east. Naz slows and circles round behind him, ushering him on with a stern look.

They follow the cockatoo signs and land in a clearing just inside the park's perimeter fence.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

A refreshments kiosk stands in the centre while paths lead to other exhibits.

Behind the kiosk, a huge billboard with a man's face on it advertises a new 'Birds of Prey' enclosure.

The caged birds eye the group warily. A PARROT hops over.

RYKER

What's your name?

PARROT

(in a West Country accent)

Who's askin'?

HATCHER

Did your parents not like you?

RYKER

I am. I'm looking for an eagle.

PARROT

(cocking her head)

Up the path to the left. Watch out for them keepers though.

RYKER

No need to split up.

He gestures at the billboard as if remembering something.

RYKER

Who's that?

PARROT

Owns the park. Member of Parliament or summat. Name's BIGGS.

The birds start up the path. Climbing plants cling to the cages and form a tunnel. Some of the birds twitter warnings.

EXT. EAGLE'S CAGE - NIGHT

A giant eagle appears to be asleep in a nest built between two dead branches at the top of the cage. He looks old. One of his eyes flicks open.

EAGLE

(in a soft Irish accent)

There's keepers coming. Hide.

Ryker notices a torchlight approaching from beyond the cage. There's another coming from the direction of the Exotic Birds enclosure. Thick plants have them penned in.

RYKER

Where?

EAGLE

(standing)

Jump in. I'll cover you.

HATCHER

No way! It's a trap.

EAGLE

Suit yourselves.

Torch beams flicker around them. The birds look at one another and then check the bars of the cage. They might just fit through!

Ryker, Naz and Hawkins slip through sideways but Hatcher tries to force his way in headfirst. He gets stuck and looks to the others for help, but they're leaping into the nest.

He pushes as hard as he can and squeezes through another inch. Just as he's about to be spotted by the keepers, he pops through, hurtles across the cage and slams into the bars opposite.

The eagle lifts a wing and a dazed Hatcher plops neatly under it into the bottom of the nest. Then the eagle settles on top of them.

The keepers meet outside the cage and play their torches over the eagle. He's SNORING loudly.

Naz hears a JANGLING of keys and cautiously peers over the edge of the nest. He spots the bunch attached to the keeper's belt.

The keepers nod to each other and continue on their rounds so the eagle stands and lets them out. Hawkins gulps at the size of his talons.

HAWKINS

Stone me, you're a big so and so.

RYKER

We need to get you out of here.

EAGLE

I'm not going anywhere.

RYKER

But we need your help.

EAGLE

I don't know who you are, and even
if I wanted to help I couldn't.
I've forgotten how to fly.

The eagle steps out of the nest, flaps his enormous wings with a distinct lack of co-ordination and lands hard on the ground. He drags himself across the floor to his feed bowl.

NAZ

Your diet might have something to
do with it, Chubby.

EAGLE

The name's SEAMUS actually.

RYKER

You're going to re-learn fast.

SEAMUS

You couldn't even get me out of
this cage.

NAZ

Wanna bet?

EXT. FARMYARD - NIGHT

Nigel enters a stable and reappears a moment later with a steel animal trap. Its gleaming jaws are razor sharp.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Nigel carries the trap and his gun into the woods. He sets the trap at the foot of a tree and conceals it with vegetation. Then he drags the carcass over and places it next to the trap. It has all but been devoured.

NIGEL

This'll teach you to take my
livelihood.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz slip through the bars of the eagle's cage and follow the keeper up the path.

RYKER

I'll distract him for you.

Ryker takes off and flies directly at the guard while Naz follows close behind.

The guard soon spots Ryker and takes a swipe at him. He misses and then gives chase.

FIRST KEEPER

Come here, you!

Naz waits until the keeper's back is turned, then plucks the keys from his belt. He's too busy chasing Ryker to notice.

The keeper removes a radio from his pocket.

FIRST KEEPER

Some of the birds are escaping.

An alarm sounds and lights go on throughout the park.

The keeper replaces the radio and notices his keys are missing. He spins round and spots Naz disappearing back down the path towards the eagle's cage. He gives chase.

The owl glances over his shoulder at the keeper.

EXT. EAGLE'S CAGE - NIGHT

Naz fumbles with the keys until he has the right one. He inserts it in the lock and twists but it won't budge.

Hatcher and Hawkins help drag Seamus to the cage door.

SEAMUS

Now you're in trouble.

Ryker flies up the path from the opposite direction and helps Naz twist the key but it still won't turn. He can see Seamus is deliberately dragging his feet, and his stomach.

HAWKINS

Hurry!

RYKER
 (to Seamus)
 You're not doing this for me.
 You're doing it for Cuthbert.

At last the tumblers click into place and the door opens.

Seamus bows his head and shuffles forward.

SEAMUS
 Then you know why.

RYKER
 His leg gets worse by the day.

Torchlight flickers over them as the guard runs to the cage.

RYKER
 Time's flying.

The birds haul Seamus down the path away from the keeper.

HAWKINS
 (panting)
 How are we going to get him into
 the air?

RYKER
 (winks)
 Leave that to me.

INT. NIGEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is lit by a single lamp that casts eerie shadows across the walls. Nigel pours himself a brandy from a bottle on his bedside cabinet and draws the curtains. Water has dripped onto the sills and mould grows across them.

As Nigel gets into bed, the floorboards creak as his weight settles. He pulls the blankets up and downs the brandy. The phone rings so he answers it.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
 My clients will pay a quarter of a
 million for your birds but they
 need them for a falconry event in
 the Far East next week.

Nigel looks uneasy, wipes his brow.

NIGEL
Lucky I caught the other male.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
You have him already?

NIGEL
Caged.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
Excellent. I'll collect them at the
usual place tomorrow evening.

Nigel hangs up and pours himself another drink.

EXT. BIRD PARK - NIGHT

The keepers charge down to the perimeter fence as a bizarre collection of birds leaps into the air.

Hatcher is holding Seamus's head, while Naz and Hawkins each have one of his wingtips. Ryker stands on his back, his talons gripping the eagle's middle.

The four birds flap their wings as hard as possible. Seamus bounces once before soaring ungracefully over the fence.

FIRST KEEPER
Did I just see that?

SECOND KEEPER
Pigs I might have believed.

The birds disappear into the night.

INT. NIGEL'S HOUSE - DAY

The gamekeeper pulls on a dressing gown, goes downstairs and slips into his grubby Wellington Boots. He collects Rory and heads into the yard.

INT. STABLE - DAY

Nigel approaches Algar and Mercia. Their feathers litter the bottom of the cage and sores are appearing on their bodies where the bars are digging into them.

NIGEL
You'll be out of here tonight.

Algar tries to bite him but his beak won't fit between the bars.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Nigel switches on his computer. Before the screen flickers to life, the phone rings so he answers.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
My eagle has escaped.

NIGEL
The zoo is supposed to be secure.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
He had help. CCTV picked up an owl,
a kestrel, a homing pigeon and a
falcon of all things.

NIGEL
How's that possible?

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
Because you lied to me, Nigel.

Nigel takes a deep breath, his face contorting with anger.

NIGEL
Your keepers are incompetent.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
I can shut you down with one call.

NIGEL
Then you'll never get that falcon
and you'll be looking over your
shoulder every day.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
Is that a threat?

NIGEL
Just reminding you of the facts.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
You know what to do if they head
for Ravenswood. Lie to me again and
I'll put you out of business.

Nigel hangs up, smiles evilly and leaves the study.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE STONES - DAY

The birds are still carrying Seamus. The strain shows on their faces so Ryker gives them a sign and they drop him.

SEAMUS

Wh-wh-what are you doing?!

His voice fades as he plummets towards the monument.

When Seamus realises help isn't coming, he flaps hard and pulls up just in time. He rejoins the others but he's wheezing like an unfit runner.

RYKER

Wasn't that hard.

INT. GORDON'S KITCHEN - DAY

Gordon is making tea when a GUNSHOT echoes in the distance. A few moments later, he hears a dog YELPING outside.

EXT. FARMYARD - DAY

Gordon rushes across the yard. One of his dogs has been shot. It's bleeding from wounds in its rump.

GORDON

Oh, BUSTER.

He lifts the dog into the car and leaves the farm.

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

Nigel's car is in the car park as Gordon drives in. He parks and carries the dog inside.

INT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

Gordon lays the dog on the counter. Nigel and Simone leave her office and join him in the foyer.

GORDON

(to Nigel)

What's the meaning of this?

Nigel shrugs and turns his back on the farmer.

NIGEL
Simone and I have matters to
discuss. Do excuse us.

GORDON
What matters?

Nigel casually half-turns, a lecherous glint in his eyes.

NIGEL
Our dinner date.

GORDON
(to Simone)
You're not seeing him.

SIMONE
Gordon, please.

NIGEL
(derisively)
Yes, Gordon.

Gordon looks over Nigel's shoulder.

GORDON
When did he arrive?

SIMONE
About ten minutes ago.

GORDON
(sarcastically)
Is that all?

SIMONE
I must tend to Buster.

She carries the dog into a medical chamber, leaving the two men alone in the hall.

GORDON
I suggest you leave now.

NIGEL
Gonna make me?

The two men stare at each other but Nigel suddenly throws his head back and laughs hysterically.

NIGEL
You haven't heard the last of this.

GORDON
I can see through you, even if she
can't. No wonder your wife and
friends deserted you.

Nigel leans closer and Gordon wrinkles his nose when he
smells the gamekeeper's breath.

NIGEL
But we're going out for dinner.

Nigel turns and leaves.

INT. MEDICAL CHAMBER - DAY

Gordon joins Simone and strokes Buster.

SIMONE
I don't want to talk about it.

Gordon looks at the floor.

GORDON
Is he going to be okay?

SIMONE
(business-like)
Some shot's passed through his
hind-quarters but it'll clean up.

GORDON
Nigel did it.

SIMONE
Don't be ridiculous.

GORDON
If I had my way, he'd be arrested.

SIMONE
I don't like this jealousy. Wait
outside until I'm done.

EXT. IN THE AIR ABOVE BOXHILL - DAY

Ryker and the other birds fly over the town. There are signs
everywhere advertising the 'Pray for a Warm May' festival.

They pass over the town emblem, a huge silver cockerel, and
head across the fields to Redlands.

There are no other birds in the sky.

EXT. SANCTUARY CAR PARK - DAY

A large shadow passes above Gordon and Simone as he places Buster in the back of the car.

GORDON

Now there's something you don't see every day.

Simone shields her eyes from the sun as the birds head for the horizon.

SIMONE

Golden Eagles are extremely rare.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Ryker leads the birds to the stream and they land. They're exhausted and drink deeply. Everything is quiet.

HATCHER

Lucky I know where I live.

NAZ

(mutters)

Thank God for small mercies.

RYKER

I need to find Eadric.

Ryker takes off and heads for Gordon's farm.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - DAY

Naz leads the other birds into the clearing in the woods.

NAZ

(loudly)

Morning, Wilbur. Where's Cuthbert?

WILBUR

Praise the Lord, you made it.

Wilbur RAPS on the fallen trunk with his beak. It sounds like a distant DRUM.

WILBUR

Collecting food. He'll be back any moment.

As he speaks, Cuthbert enters the clearing. The pheasant trots over and embraces the eagle. He pulls back and looks at his overgrown stomach.

CUTHBERT

I hope you've some of that Highland fighting spirit in there, mon ami.

NAZ

And quite a lot more besides.

SEAMUS

It never dies.

CUTHBERT

Where's Ryker?

HAWKINS

Getting help.

WILBUR

We don't have much time. Tell them the plan, Cuthbert.

CUTHBERT

We need to use Seamus as bait.

NAZ

Hope you've got a big hook.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMYARD - DAY

Ryker lands and searches for the cockerel. A red-faced Eadric pokes his head out of one of the henhouses.

RYKER

If it isn't the shy rooster.

EADRIC

Just seeing what all the fuss is about.

RYKER

About time.

The cockerel shakes his head and shivers.

EADRIC

I'm not sure it's all it's cracked up to be.

RYKER

At least you gave it a shot.
Listen, Cuthbert has drawn up a
plan to liberate Ravenswood. We
need your help.

Eadric shrinks back into the henhouse.

EADRIC

I'm not comfortable with physical
confrontation. And I'm not much
good in the air either.

RYKER

You can be our eyes on the ground.

Eadric looks longingly at the henhouse.

EADRIC

I'd rather get back to the hens.

RYKER

We both know that's not true.

EADRIC

When?

RYKER

Now.

Eadric gulps but follows Ryker into the air.

EXT. IN THE AIR - DAY

As they cross the field, Ryker takes a long look at his nest
on the cliffs.

RYKER

Meet you by the stream.

Eadric shrugs as Ryker breaks off and heads for the cliffs.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

There's no sign that Ryker's family have returned. His face
is set, grim. He's about to rejoin Eadric when he hears a
cry of pain from Ravenswood. It's the same cry the fox made
when he fought with it in the farmyard.

Ryker looks back to the stream, then to the dark and
menacing woods on his left. He flies off towards the noise.
There aren't any crows around so he darts into the wood.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - DAY

Ryker finds the fox with her tail caught in Nigel's trap. She's trying to free herself but only managing to draw blood. Ryker lands next to her.

RYKER

Need a hand?

FOX

I told you before, I work alone.

As Ryker turns to leave, the fox's face changes.

In the trees above, Flint and his cuckoos quietly take up positions behind leaves and branches while Dillon and his crows mass in the shadows.

FOX

Wait. What was it you said about co-operation?

RYKER

We can only beat Nigel and his crows if we work together.

FOX

Will you help me?

RYKER

If it makes us allies.

The fox eventually nods.

RYKER

I guess you owe me one then.

Ryker breaks a small branch off the tree and wedges it in the jaws of the trap. He jumps down hard and levers the trap open for a brief moment.

The fox pulls her tail free, although the end remains caught, and the jaws clamp shut with a steel clang.

Dillon checks his crows are ready to swoop but several are still gathering on the branches.

FOX

Thanks, Ryker.

RYKER

How do you know my name?

FOX

Everyone knows you're trying to find your family. I'm LUFU.

RYKER

I hope we can be friends.

LUFU

It's not in my nature to trust anyone, but I'll try to make an exception.

Ryker suddenly sees movement in the branches: a raven peers out from behind a tree trunk. He freezes, then checks the clearing.

Dillon's crows are still getting into position.

LUFU

What is it?

RYKER

Time to trust me. Run!

They both tear off through the woods towards the field.

Dillon holds a wing up and shakes his head.

DILLON

Let 'em go. We'll get another chance, and when we do, leave the kill to me.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Ryker nods to the fox and they go their separate ways. He flies across the field and lands next to the cockerel.

EADRIC

What took you?

RYKER

That can wait. Follow me.

Ryker leads Eadric into Redlands Forest.

EXT. NIGEL'S CAR - DAY

As the gamekeeper drives home, he spots the eagle heading for the cliffs in the distance and cracks a thin smile.

NIGEL
(mutters)
Sorry, Biggs, but that's one for
the trophy cabinet.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARM - DAY

Nigel grabs a tranquilliser gun from behind his front door.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - DAY

Nigel meets Dillon by the gate leading into the woods.

NIGEL
They think they can use an eagle to
draw us out. If the barns are
undefended, they'll try to rescue
the other birds.

Nigel checks the breach and loads the gun with a dart. He drops the remaining darts into his pocket.

NIGEL
Send your weakest birds into the
field to herd the eagle towards me.

Dillon nods slowly, an evil glint in his eye.

NIGEL
Then get back here in case the
falcon shows up.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - DAY

Nigel walks up the path to the field. He notices the trap has been sprung. He approaches cautiously and checks it. An animal has left a bloodied piece of its tail in the jaws. He searches the undergrowth, shrugs and heads for the field.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Crows are massing in the trees above Nigel. He takes aim through the scope at the cliffs, then gives Dillon a signal.

EXT. GORDON'S FARM - DAY

Gordon parks his car and picks up a set of binoculars from the passenger seat.

He walks to the bottom of the garden and peers through the glasses at the cliffs. He spots the eagle and the gathering storm of crows.

Gordon collects his shotgun and enters the field.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - DAY

Ryker waits for the eagle to land on the cliff, then gathers the other birds round.

RYKER

When they make their move, we'll head to Nigel's.

WILBUR

I'm too old for this.

RYKER

You can help Eadric look after the injured.

The pheasant and the cockerel look at each other and nod.

HAWKINS

Can Seamus take care of himself?

CUTHBERT

Crows'll think twice when they meet him close up.

HATCHER

What can I do?

CUTHBERT

Nothing for now.

HATCHER

You can rely on me to do that pretty well. I'm something of an expert.

As Seamus settles on the distant cliff, the crows suddenly erupt from the trees and surround him.

RYKER

Let's go.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Ryker, Naz, Hawkins, Hatcher, Eadric and Cuthbert swoop low across the field as the sun sets. Seamus is fighting ferociously, distracting the crows.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Ryker enters the wood. Everything is quiet. He leads the birds down the path towards Nigel's farm.

Nigel watches the action from his hide by the fence. The birds don't notice him as they fly past. He then shoulders the tranquilliser gun and takes aim at the cliffs.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARMYARD - NIGHT

Ryker and the other birds land on a barn roof.

RYKER

Mum and Dad are in the barn over there. I need to find Safi and the eggs first.

HAWKINS

Let's split up. I'll help Cuthbert free your parents.

NAZ

(to Ryker)

Eadric and I'll come with you.

HATCHER

That leaves me as the lookout. You're in luck.

Hatcher trips over a loose tile and bangs his beak on the roof. The birds freeze but no one spots them.

RYKER

Meet here before we release the battery chickens and rare birds.

Ryker steps off the roof and flies to one of the other barns. A window at the far end is open.

EXT. BARN - EVENING

Ryker peers inside. He can't see Safi or the eggs because a large number of caged birds fills the barn. He doesn't notice a catch on the outside of the window.

INT. BARN - EVENING

Ryker and Naz step inside while Eadric waits on the windowsill. They speak in whispers.

RYKER

They must be here somewhere.

NAZ

Looks like the window was left open.

RYKER

No turning back now.

The two birds hop onto the floor and examine the captive birds. Not one twitters a "hello". They are strangely silent and some even turn away as Ryker and Naz pass.

NAZ

I'm getting a bad feeling about this.

EXT. NIGEL'S ROOF - NIGHT

Dillon watches the birds enter the barn. Then he gives a signal to the mass of crows by his side.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz continue through the maze of cages.

Suddenly Safiyya calls out from a cage on the far side.

SAFIYYA (O.S.)

Ryker, it's a trap!

RYKER

(catching a glimpse of her)
Safi!

SAFIYYA

Get out!

Ryker is about to join her when the crows burst through the doors and windows. The anguish shows on his face.

Ryker and Naz race for the nearest window. Eadric is outside but he's flanked by two more crows. One of them kicks the window shut as Ryker reaches it.

Ryker and Naz stand their ground but the crows fall on them. They fight back but are soon subdued and surrender.

The crows grip them by their wings and bring them to Dillon.

DILLON

It was almost too easy.

RYKER

You've won a battle, but you'll never win the war.

Dillon walks round Ryker, forcing him to crane his neck.

DILLON

If it's cliché time, try: the game is up. You've drawn dead.

RYKER

I'll never bow to you.

DILLON

You will when you realise what I can do to your precious Safi.

Dillon leads them across the barn. He flies up to Safiyya's cage. It's linked to the cage containing the old falcon.

DILLON

All I have to do is pull this lever to remove the partition.

The mangy falcon turns to Ryker and licks his beak. Another drop of saliva falls to the cage floor.

Safi cowers in the corner of her cage.

Ryker struggles to break free from the crows.

RYKER

Please don't do it, Dillon.

Dillon toys with the lever, then turns to Ryker and laughs.

DILLON
I've reduced you to begging
already. You're so weak.

Ryker is on the verge of tears.

RYKER
If it was just you and me...

DILLON
But it isn't, is it?

Suddenly the stable door is thrown open. Nigel enters, gun slung over one shoulder, inert eagle over the other.

He holds the door open while the other crows march Eadric, Cuthbert, Hatcher and Hawkins inside. Then he locks Seamus in a larger cage.

The birds look at Ryker and bow their heads apologetically.

NIGEL
Hook, line, and sinker. Throw them
in cages.
(to Dillon)
Leave her for now.

Nigel leaves the stable while the crows lock all the birds away. There aren't enough spare cages in the barn so Ryker, Cuthbert and Naz are taken next door.

Ryker looks longingly after Safiyya. She's crying.

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Gordon pulls into the car park as Simone is locking up for the day. He's clearly upset.

SIMONE
What's wrong?

GORDON
I just saw Nigel shoot that eagle.

The sanctuary owner throws her hands up, then folds them.

SIMONE
I thought we'd been through this.

GORDON
What will it take for you to
believe me?

SIMONE

The truth.

Gordon takes her by the shoulders and looks into her eyes.

GORDON

Relationships are based on trust.
Come to Nigel's with me. If I'm
wrong, you'll never hear another
bad word about him.

She eventually nods with conviction, respect.

SIMONE

Shouldn't we call the police first?

Gordon removes his mobile phone from his pocket.

GORDON

In case of emergency.

She locks the door and follows Gordon to his car. They climb in and leave the sanctuary.

INT. NIGEL'S BARN - EVENING

Ryker is locked in a cage next to his parents. The crows put Cuthbert and Naz in another cage and leave.

Algar and Mercia try and find a comfortable position but they are still held tightly.

Mercia's face falls when she notices the scratches on her son's chest.

MERCIA

You're hurt.

RYKER

I'm fine.

ALGAR

It was obviously a trap.

Ryker stands tall and meets his father's glare.

MERCIA

Give it a rest, ALGAR. He's trying
his best.

RYKER

Nigel's selling falcon eggs to the
zoo for a new enclosure.

Cuthbert clears his throat and fixes Algar with a steady
stare.

CUTHBERT

Ryker's been the bond holding us
together. You should be proud of
him.

NAZ

He risked his life for us and would
have taken on the crows alone if we
hadn't stopped him.

The owl hears a noise outside and cocks his head.

ALGAR

Working together hasn't helped.

Lufu suddenly appears on the sill. She reaches inside and
pulls the window open a fraction, then leaps onto the floor.

Algar loses his composure and presses himself against the
cage bars as if trying to slip through.

Lufu glances around nervously before standing on her hind
legs and lifting a set of keys from a nail by the barn door.
She passes them through the bars to Ryker.

He selects one and slides it into the lock with his feet. As
his cage door swings open, Ryker looks at his father.

RYKER

You were saying.

ALGAR

We'll talk about this later.

Ryker releases them so Mercia embraces her son, but Algar
has regained his composure and stands alone.

RYKER

(to Lufu)

Make us even?

LUFU

No need to keep score.

RYKER
Let's get the others.

LUFU
They're outside.

RYKER
Dillon?

LUFU
I heard Nigel telling him to round
up the crows. We haven't much time.

The birds follow Lufu onto the windowsill.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

The birds gather in the light of a dull moon. Ryker embraces Safiyya warmly. Tears roll down her cheeks.

RYKER
What's he done with our eggs?

SAFIYYA
I haven't seen them.

ALGAR
It's too risky to look now.

RYKER
I'm not leaving without them. Where
are Hawkins and Hatcher?

EADRIC
They headed south.

ALGAR
So much for calling themselves
friends.

Ryker squares up to his father.

RYKER
They must have had a reason.

Again the pheasant steps in to restore peace.

CUTHBERT
We should get back to Redlands
before Dillon reappears.

RYKER

I will not abandon my unborn chicks
again.

There is a loud CAWING from the woods as the crows gather.

MERCIA

We'll come back for them.

Naz leaps into the air and the rest follow. He leads them
over the barn and away from the path through the woods.

Ryker and Safiyya exchange disconsolate looks before
following.

NAZ

What about Seamus?

CUTHBERT

He's still knocked out.

Car headlights approach Nigel's farm as they pass.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARM - NIGHT

Gordon pulls up at the house and knocks on the front door.
Nigel opens it, his eyes narrowing with suspicion.

NIGEL

What do you want?

GORDON

What happened to that eagle.

NIGEL

No idea what you're talking about.

GORDON

I saw you shoot it.

SIMONE

Is it true, Nigel?

Nigel snorts derisively.

NIGEL

I told you, I don't know anything
about a golden eagle.

GORDON

Who said it was golden?

Simone grips Gordon's arm and pulls him close.

SIMONE

Call the police.

Nigel reaches inside his front door, grabs his shotgun and holds it across his chest.

NIGEL

Get off my land.

EXT. GORDON'S CAR - NIGHT

As Gordon and Simone drive off, she squeezes his hand.

SIMONE

I'm sorry I doubted you.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

The gamekeeper crosses the yard as Dillon flies in from the wood. The raven waits on the gatepost while Nigel checks on the cages.

The moon appears from behind the cloud and bathes the yard in an eerie light.

Nigel notices some of the cages are empty.

NIGEL

Hunt them down. No survivors.

The raven leaps off the post and Nigel follows him into the wood with the shotgun.

EXT. REDLANDS CLEARING - NIGHT

Ryker flies into the forest. He dodges the branches, lands and runs the last few yards to the clearing. The other birds are waiting for him.

RYKER

(to Algar)

We're going to need your help.

Algar takes a deep breath and faces Ryker.

ALGAR

I'm surprised you're talking to me.

RYKER

I only wanted you to believe in me.
But I was never good enough.

ALGAR

It was my fault to leave you in
charge of the nest. I blamed you to
justify my own grief. Sometimes we
need to learn to forgive ourselves.

RYKER

I still should have saved her.

Algar pats him on the back and pulls him close.

RYKER

We'll cope together.

EXT. IN THE SKY ABOVE REDLANDS - NIGHT

Naz keeps watch. He glances across the field and spies a
flock of birds massing over Ravenswood in the moonlight. He
heads into the forest and lands on the fallen tree.

NAZ

I hate to break up the reunion but
they're coming.

WILBUR

Control the air, dictate the
battle.

Safiyya joins them. She pulls Ryker close. There's a look of
determination on both their faces.

SAFIYYA

Fight for us all.

RYKER

Stay here where you'll be safe.

The birds set off through the forest. They glance at each
other when they hear the crows CAWING in the distance.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker leads the birds to the field. The crows circle above.

RYKER

Naz and I will fly together. The
same goes for Mum and Dad.

CUTHBERT

Eadric and I'll finish them off if
they fall into the field.

EADRIC

We'll also tend to your injuries.

EXT. IN THE SKY ABOVE REDLANDS - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz leap into the air. Algar and Mercia follow.
Four birds dive to intercept them.

Flint notices how big the falcons are and pulls up. A crow
also avoids the confrontation but the other two crows
continue their attack.

Ryker swipes at them with his talons, killing them both, and
their bodies spiral down to the ground.

Algar looks at his son with new-found admiration.

ALGAR

Nice going.

RYKER

I had a good teacher.

(to Naz)

Herd them towards me and I'll
finish them off.

NAZ

Like a collie rounding up sheep.

Algar and Mercia soon become embroiled in their own battle.

The owl marshals two more crows towards Ryker. The plan
works and he kills them both, but there are many more crows.

They fly in, squawking to distract and isolate the Redlands
birds, but Ryker and Naz stick together.

Then Ryker singles out a cuckoo and rolls into a steep dive.
Naz follows. Ryker strikes the cuckoo hard, breaking its
neck. It falls to the ground. Naz dispatches another in the
same moment.

NAZ

We're evening things up.

Ryker checks on his parents. They're fighting hard.

RYKER

So many of them though.

Even as he speaks, a mass of crows falls upon them. They put up a tremendous fight, slashing with their talons and gouging the crows with their beaks.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Nigel joins Dillon at the fence. He watches as the crows attack a bird. They swipe at it and it eventually drops into the field. He rubs his hands together.

NIGEL

Lead the rest of your flock into
battle and finish them off.

Dillon leaps into the trees. Moonlight streams through the branches and bathes the field in a surreal glow.

Nigel watches the owl fend off four more crows. The fight takes the birds close to the fence. He shoulders his shotgun, crouches in the hide and takes aim.

The crows chase the owl over the fence. Nigel pulls the trigger. The owl and one of the crows tumble to the ground.

Nigel watches as three crows single out the young falcon. They scythe in at him, launch a vicious attack at his head, and knock him to the ground.

NIGEL

Another one bites the dust.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Naz rolls in the long grass and groans. Blood drips from a puncture wound under his ribs.

Eadric parts the grass and appears at his side. The cockerel then inspects the damage.

NAZ

Can you get to it?

EADRIC
It might sting a bit.

Eadric eases the tip of his beak into the wound and removes the lead shot. He wipes the area clean with some grass.

Naz stands and flexes his wings.

NAZ
You'd make a great nurse.

EXT. IN THE SKY ABOVE THE FIELDS - NIGHT

Naz leaps back into the air. Ryker had also been knocked to the ground and joins him. Blood drips from a couple of small gashes on his head.

NAZ
Got you too, did they?

RYKER
Twisted my wing and knocked me senseless but I'm okay now.

NAZ
Apart from the senseless bit. Stay away from the fence.

RYKER
You hit?

NAZ
Just a scratch.

RYKER
Draw the cuckoos to the cliffs so my parents can deal with them.

Ryker and Naz pretend to flee from the flock.

The cuckoos sense victory and close in with their crow escort. As they reach the cliff, Algar and Mercia re-enter the battle.

Ryker and Naz also turn to face the Ravenswood flock.

NAZ
The empire strikes back.

They decimate the cuckoos and strike ferociously at the crows. They kill at least ten, but many more crowd in from behind. Naz is struck again and he falls into the field.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The moon is brighter than ever. Naz is lying in the long grass with scratches across his chest and feathers missing from his tail.

Cuthbert approaches.

CUTHBERT
You alright?

NAZ
(struggling for breath)
I'm indestructible. Pluck some
feathers from my tail for balance.

Cuthbert removes the feathers.

Naz stands, stretches and gets ready to rejoin the battle.

NAZ
How are we doing?

Cuthbert suddenly looks much older.

CUTHBERT
Not good I'm afraid.

NAZ
Retreat into the forest if you have
to, but don't let them take you
alive.

As Naz leaps into the air, two crows single him out and begin their attack.

NAZ
You don't give up, do you?

EXT. IN THE SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker spots the crows closing in on Naz and rushes to help. He dives and kills one and the other retreats. He sees his father fending off at least ten more in the distance.

NAZ
That's two I owe you.

RYKER
We have to help my dad.

As they race across the field, they see Algar's feathers billow out behind him and he tumbles into the field.

Ryker and Naz dive after him. They grab him by the wings and flap desperately but they're not strong enough and the three of them crash to the ground in a heap.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Naz cries out in pain, Algar knocks his head on a tree stump and lies still, and Ryker is winded.

Cuthbert, Eadric, Wilbur and Safiyya join them while Mercia limps along behind.

Dillon leads the crows and cuckoos as they circle above, CAWING triumphantly.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The moon illuminates the battleground. The Redlands birds gather by the stream in defeat.

Mercia and Ryker check on Algar: he's not moving and blood drips from his head.

MERCIA

Algar, wake up.

RYKER

(to Cuthbert)

Please take a look at him.

Cuthbert studies a deep cut behind Algar's ear. He listens for his breathing, then stands back and shakes his head.

MERCIA

But he can't be...

She covers her mouth with her wing, turns away and whispers.

MERCIA

...dead?

Cuthbert puts his wing around Ryker's shoulders and leads him to the stream.

CUTHBERT

I'm sorry, my boy.

Ryker allows himself to be led as if in a trance. Then he shakes his head defiantly, shrugs Cuthbert off and runs back to his father.

Ryker wipes away the blood and looks into Algar's sightless eyes. Then he massages his father's chest.

RYKER
(whispers)
Come on, Dad.

Mercia turns away, her eyes filling with tears.

MERCIA
Leave him, Ryker.

A drop of blood spills from Algar's beak.

Ryker wipes away his tears and bangs on his father's chest.

RYKER
No.

Ryker slumps on the ground next to Algar and wraps his wing around his body. He nuzzles into him and sobs.

INT. PARLIAMENTARY OFFICES - NIGHT

MP Craig Biggs is a big man of about 50. He has a bushy grey beard and a belly that overhangs his belt. He wears a rumpled, sweat-stained suit.

He shuffles a stack of papers on his desk, collects his briefcase and opens the door. He turns out the light and pulls the door closed but then the phone on his desk rings.

Biggs glances at the light blinking on the receiver, sits back down and picks it up. He speaks in the deep, coarse voice that Nigel so despised.

BIGGS
What is it?

The office door slowly swings shut, the thin strip of light from the corridor shrinking around the MP.

BIGGS
He has them. I can vouch for it.

Biggs listens intently, his face mirroring his unease.

BIGGS
(gulps)
Liquidation? There's no need for that. You'll have them in time for the competition.

Biggs fiddles nervously with his tie.

BIGGS
You have my word, OMAR, as a
respected MP.

Sweat appears on Biggs's brow and drips into his eye.

BIGGS
What do you mean, there's no such
thing?

Biggs suddenly hangs up the phone, his face pale. The light
draws across his face as the door closes and blackness
envelops the office.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker lies next to his father when Algar suddenly shudders.
The light returns to his eyes.

Ryker stiffens, then leaps to his feet.

Algar forces a thin smile but he's still groggy.

ALGAR
Did we win?

RYKER
Mum, he's alive.

Algar rolls over, shakes his head to clear it, and stands.

Mercia rushes over and hugs him.

MERCIA
Careful now.

RYKER
I'm going back up.

CUTHBERT
It's suicide to go it alone.

RYKER
I vowed to defend my family.

Naz joins him.

NAZ
If we're going down, we're going
down fighting.

ALGAR

You'll get yourselves killed.
Surrender and we still have our
lives in front of us.

RYKER

I'll not live by Dillon's rules.
You're going to have to trust me.

Ryker and Naz are about to leap into the air when Hatcher swoops in low over the field and lands next to them.

HATCHER

Sorry, we got a bit lost.

NAZ

(mutters)
Surprise, surprise.

RYKER

We?

Hatcher nods skywards as Hawkins and the kestrel families from the airport steam into battle. The crows scatter and two drop from the sky. The kestrels turn their attention to the cuckoos and the battle erupts once more.

NAZ

Wonders will never cease.

HATCHER

We found someone else too.

The birds hear the HEAVY BEAT of an eagle's wings as Seamus joins the battle. He SCREECHES terrifyingly and tears into the crows with a vengeance. More drop into the field.

ALGAR

(to Ryker)
Let's finish this, Son.

Ryker notices another three birds join the fray. He arches the feathers above one eye but says nothing.

NAZ

(to Hatcher)
Stay close. We'll confuse them with
numbers.

HATCHER

Clever.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker leaps into the air and spots Flint. He angles in and strikes at the cuckoo's underbelly with his beak.

Flint SCREECHES and plummets in a long slow death spiral.

Hawkins and Hatcher draw alongside.

HAWKINS

Nice work.

RYKER

Thought you'd deserted us.

HAWKINS

Never.

The three birds give chase to another cuckoo. Hawkins strikes at it and it drops out of the sky.

Ryker pulls alongside the three mystery birds.

RYKER

Didn't expect to see you again.

DUKE

Them ravens get everywhere. Sooner we're rid of 'em and their crows the better.

RYKER

How did you know?

Duke is about to reply when he breaks off and follows his sons after a cuckoo. He glances over his shoulder and winks.

Ryker shrugs and checks on Naz. The owl takes out another couple of crows, then barrel rolls while saluting with one wing.

RYKER

Show off.

As Ryker and Algar join forces to take down two more crows, Seamus strikes viciously at the remaining cuckoos and the Ravenswood birds scatter to all points of the compass.

In the confusion, Dillon escapes.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

The raven lands next to Nigel's hide and shuffles nervously.

NIGEL

You had surprise and superior
numbers on your side.

The gamekeeper surreptitiously flicks off the safety catch on his shotgun.

NIGEL

You know the price of failure.

Dillon glances at Nigel's trigger finger and leaps off his perch to escape, but he's too slow. A single GUNSHOT rings out and Dillon falls to the ground.

A magpie lands next to Dillon's body. She looks around and then picks at his flesh.

INT. NIGEL'S FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Nigel closes the front door and opens an alarm control panel. He presses a series of buttons and shuts the panel. He enters the kitchen, his face like thunder.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nigel takes two falcon eggs out of a holdall resting on one end of a range cooker. He stares blankly at them for a moment before placing them in his jacket pocket.

He then undoes the gas supply from a propane tank outside the back door.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Ryker lands by the stream and hugs Safiyya. All the birds are celebrating. Naz claps him on the back and smiles.

CUTHBERT

I hate to break up the party but
we're not out of the woods yet.

HATCHER

Clearly.

RYKER

We need to free all the birds.

SAFIYYA

I'm going with you.

RYKER

You'll be safer at Gordon's.

CUTHBERT

Take Hawkins, Naz, Seamus and
Hatcher.

Ryker hugs Safiyya once more. She holds him tightly, worry lines creasing her forehead.

ALGAR

Be careful, my boy.

SAFIYYA

Bring them home.

Algar wraps a wing around his shoulders. When he releases him, Ryker winks at Safiyya and leaps into the air.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Ryker leads the birds across the field into the wood. It is quiet. Moonlight casts long shadows amongst the trees.

Hatcher takes over and they alight
on one of Nigel's barns.

EXT. NIGEL'S BARN - NIGHT

Ryker gathers the birds in close.

RYKER

Hawkins, you see in ultraviolet.
Stay here with Seamus and Hatcher
while we take a look round.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARMYARD - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz drop into the yard. There is mud on the ground. The birds cautiously approach the barn door. A sliver of light spills across the yard from inside.

The birds pull the door open. It creaks softly on rusty hinges and they freeze.

INT. STABLE - NIGHT

Nigel walks among the cages pouring petrol on the ground. He reaches a door at the far end of the barn, lights a match and drops it into the petrol. Then he closes the door and disappears.

The petrol ignites with a loud whoosh and the rare birds squawk in alarm. Naz and Ryker grab sets of keys from a nail behind the stable door and desperately open their cages to set them free.

Ryker then herds them towards the door and forces them through. The birds stream into the night before the fire manages to kill any, with Ryker dragging the last few to safety just in time.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARMYARD - NIGHT

Naz escapes into the yard as flames consume the barn. He joins Seamus on the roof and searches anxiously for Ryker.

The barn is on the verge of collapse when Ryker appears through the flames, his feathers smouldering in the heat. He heads straight for a water trough and leaps in.

RYKER
Out of the fire.

He emerges a moment later with his feathers steaming.

RYKER
Into the frying pan.

He shakes himself dry and lands on the ground.

Hatcher and Hawkins leap off the roof and join him.

They can hear SIRENS in the distance, and FLASHING BLUE LIGHTS reflect against the trees.

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

Nigel creeps towards the birds and shoulders the shotgun.

NIGEL
Look who came home to roost. It's
time to put you out of my misery.

Naz leaps off the roof and flies towards Nigel, SCREECHING to distract him.

The gamekeeper spins around, trips over a feed trough and falls into the mud.

EXT. ROOF OF NIGEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The birds escape to the roof and hide in the shadows but they don't hear gas escaping from the propane tank below.

RYKER

Back where he belongs.

The SIRENS get louder.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

Nigel stands and wipes himself down. Then he notices the open stable door and runs over. The fire is tremendous but the birds have all disappeared.

NIGEL

My insurance money!

Two police cars pull into the yard. Armed officers take cover behind the doors. Shadows flicker by the firelight.

POLICEMAN

Drop the gun and put your hands on your head!

NIGEL

Never!

POLICEMAN

Last chance.

Gordon climbs out of one of the police cars.

GORDON

Let's talk this through, Nigel.

NIGEL

I expected better from you, Gordon. If this is your way of taking over my farm --

GORDON

Save your breath. As for taking over the farm, I think you've taken care of that.

NIGEL

You've no idea what you're getting into.

GORDON

You've been poaching eggs to try to save the place but the birds decided to fight fire with fire.

NIGEL

Are you trying to tell me their word will hold up in court?
"Squawk, squawk, your honour!"

Simone joins Gordon and slips her hand through his.

NIGEL

Very cosy.

SIMONE

To think I nearly trusted you.

GORDON

(softly)

The police have everything they need to charge you. Animal rights' violations, illegal dealings, financial irregularities.

Nigel lowers the gun and appears defeated.

NIGEL

You'll never prove anything.

GORDON

Selling rare birds was a tidy business. You needed the money to buy my farm so you could catch the migratory falcons on the cliffs.

Nigel's shoulders slump. The gun barrel rests in the muck.

A policeman approaches and holds out his hands for the gun.

POLICEMAN

Nice and easy, Nigel.

Gordon turns and hugs Simone.

Nigel suddenly pushes the policeman to the ground and raises the gun. He sights on Gordon and squeezes the trigger.

Seamus and Ryker leap off the roof and SCREECH loudly.

Nigel glances towards the birds, momentarily distracted. He tries to fend Ryker off but the falcon's talons carve long scratches into his hands.

In the confusion the gun goes off, the BLAST deafening. Nigel drops the weapon and grips his bloody hand. Then he runs for the gate into the woods.

Lufu watches from the woods and follows him.

There is an EXPLOSION in the main house as the gas tank blows up. The policemen, Gordon and Simone all dive for cover as the fire rapidly takes hold.

POLICEMAN

You're making things worse, Nigel!

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Nigel vaults the gate and vanishes into the woods but the police give chase, their torches casting flickering shadows.

They reach the base of the cliff as Nigel scrambles up the steep slope.

EXT. CLIFFTOP - NIGHT

Ryker flies after Nigel but the gamekeeper soon reaches the top of the cliff and runs for the woods beyond.

Ryker catches him and strikes at his head and neck.

During the struggle, a police helicopter appears. It uses a searchlight to illuminate the pair.

The gamekeeper tries to fend Ryker off but he trips and falls over the edge of the cliff. He grabs shallow tree roots near the top and holds on for dear life.

The roots slowly slip from his grasp. A rock tears a hole in his jacket pocket and the fragile eggs roll down the slope.

Nigel falls but he grabs another root and holds on.

SAFIYYA

Ryker!

Ryker watches in horror as the eggs tumble end over end towards the base of the cliff.

He dives after the eggs and is about to reach them when they smash on the path at the bottom.

EXT. CLIFFTOP - NIGHT

The police helicopter closes in on Nigel.

He's clinging on in a death grip, but his hold is weakening. Just as the roost slips from his grasp, the chopper fires a landing net over him and winches up.

EXT. BASE OF THE CLIFF - NIGHT

The moon bathes the footpath in a soft light. Gordon, Simone and the birds arrive at the smashed eggs. Ryker stands aside, a broad grin on his face, his eyes watering with joy.

The chicks were ready to hatch and crawl out of the shattered eggs alive.

SAFIYYA

Thank the Lord.

Ryker and Safiyya nuzzle the tiny white chicks, which immediately open their mouths and CALL for food.

Tears form in Safiyya's eyes.

RYKER

Beautiful. Like their mother.

SAFIYYA

A family at last. Let's go home.

A policeman approaches.

POLICEMAN

(to Simone)

One of the birds needs help.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

Fire engines douse the flames but the main barn is beyond repair and collapses in a cloud of sparks.

One of the firemen runs to another barn and releases the battery chickens.

Simone crosses the yard to Seamus. The other birds gather round. The eagle is motionless. The shotgun blast has taken him in the chest. Simone kneels and examines him, then looks at Gordon and shakes her head.

SIMONE

Sorry.

GORDON

He saved our lives.

Simone stands, hugs Gordon and wipes her eyes.

SIMONE

I know how we can remember him.

GORDON

Let's head home. The police will finish up here. The birds can stay in my stables.

The fox slides into the yard and rubs herself against the farmer's leg.

SIMONE

And Lufu?

GORDON

That's one fight Avellana won't be picking.

INT. GORDON'S KITCHEN - DAY

Gordon enters and puts the kettle on. He collects the paper from the doormat and reads while the kettle boils. He makes two cups of tea and takes them upstairs.

INT. GORDON'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The farmer comes downstairs and looks under the sofa.

INT. GORDON'S PANTRY - DAY

Gordon puts his head round the pantry door and checks on Lufu. She's sound asleep. Avellana is curled up next to her.

GORDON

Now I've seen it all.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMYARD - DAY

Gordon crosses the yard. It's another beautiful summer's morning. He opens the stable door to where the birds have been staying.

GORDON
Good morning, my friends.

He scatters a bag of grain into a trough.

GORDON
I'd like you to meet someone.

The farmer stands aside and another cockerel struts in. He's a cocky little chap.

COCKEREL
Mornin'.

GORDON
He's not here to replace you,
Eadric, but he might be a bit
keener on the hens.

Gordon leaves the stable.

EADRIC
Glad he understands.

RYKER
You'll always be one of us.

Gordon returns with a watering can and fills the trough.

GORDON
We'll bury Seamus in the family
plot. Please join me.

Gordon leaves the stable door open and feeds the hens.

EXT. GORDON'S GARDEN - DAY

The birds gather at Gordon's plot. Small crosses mark the graves of his previous pets. The farmer has already dug a hole. He lowers the casket and stands back, his head bowed.

Ryker pulls Safiyya close.

RYKER
Some think that as birds we live a
life of freedom, that we are not

RYKER
 bound by the laws of the earth. But
 life for Seamus was different. He
 was held in a zoo for years, yet he
 still gave his life for a human. We
 can all learn from his sacrifice.

Ryker bows his head and Cuthbert puts a wing around his
 shoulders.

CUTHBERT
 Well said, mon ami.

Ryker swells with pride.

RYKER
 It hasn't been easy for you either.

CUTHBERT
 Lifelong friends pick up where they
 left off. I'm glad we had some time
 together.

Cuthbert smiles at last.

CUTHBERT
 I may be getting on a bit, but
 there's life in the old bugger yet.

Algar gestures for quiet and joins his son.

ALGAR
 If it hadn't been for you, things
 would have turned out differently.
 I'm very proud of you.

They hug and then stand back from one another.

ALGAR
 (nods towards the nests)
 We should join your mother. She's
 enjoying playing grandma now.

EXT. GORDON'S TRACTOR - DAY

Gordon drives his tractor and trailer into Boxhill. The
 festival is in full swing under a cloudless sky.

Stalls straddle the high street and a folk band plays MUSIC
 on the pavement.

EXT. BOXHILL - DAY

Gordon parks the tractor, undoes the tailgate and helps Simone down. She hands a large, covered canvas to the MAYOR.

The mayor is about 60 and is dressed in full uniform.

MAYOR

Thank you, Simone. Best of luck.

Simone joins Gordon in the wine-tasting tent. They notice MP Biggs shuffling papers next to the rostrum on the other side of the street.

GORDON

Time to introduce ourselves.

SIMONE

(grips his hand)

Don't lose your temper.

GORDON

I don't like scenes.

He puts his arm around her and they cross the street. Gordon holds his hand out to Biggs.

GORDON

Pleasure to meet you, CRAIG.

The MP's ruddy face is partially obscured by his beard. His eyes flit from Gordon to Simone as if suspicious.

BIGGS

And you too, Mr...?

GORDON

You know who I am.

There's an uneasy silence as the men shake hands.

BIGGS

You're on my turf now, Gordon.

Biggs's moustache twitches.

Gordon's strong farmer's hands easily match the MP's grip.

GORDON

That's where you're wrong, old boy.
This is my home and these are my
friends. I suggest you re-think
your speech.

Biggs tries to pull his hand away but Gordon has him in a powerful grip.

BIGGS

You don't scare me. You're about to lose your business. Now unhand me.

Gordon increases the pressure and pulls Biggs closer.

GORDON

I received a letter from your former secretary this morning.

BIGGS

What do you mean "former"? Who sacked her?

GORDON

It's not her who's been fired. Simone.

The animal sanctuary owner hands Biggs an envelope and Gordon finally releases him.

The MP massages his hand while reading the opening pages. His face drops.

GORDON

Nigel confessed. Enjoy the festival but watch out for those nasty Arabs.

Biggs suddenly lashes out at the farmer but he's barely moved when two policemen, who'd been standing behind him unnoticed, clamp his arms by his side.

As they handcuff him, Gordon picks up the MP's speech.

GORDON

This had better be good.

The policemen march Biggs to a waiting car and bundle him into the back seat.

Gordon approaches the mayor and whispers in his ear.

EXT. BOXHILL - DAY

A crowd gathers in front of the rostrum. The mayor takes the stand.

MAYOR

Unfortunately MP Craig Biggs has been struck down by a bout of food poisoning.

The crowd murmurs.

MAYOR

But we're lucky to have a stand-in speaker. Most of you know Gordon.

The farmer takes the stand to polite applause.

GORDON

The news you've been waiting for. Nigel's birds survived the fire thanks to Simone and the good sense of the birds themselves.

There is a round of applause. Gordon holds up a piece of paper to quieten them.

GORDON

My initial request to have our land declared a nature reserve was declined, but I'm delighted to announce that this decision's been overturned.

There is a tumultuous round of applause. Gordon makes as if to step down but the mayor joins him.

MAYOR

Before you leave for the wine tent, would you unveil the town's new coat of arms, voted for by the public here today?

Gordon nods and pulls the cover from the canvas.

Simone's painting is the winner. It shows a peregrine falcon next to the town's cockerel, while a shadowy golden eagle stands guard over them both.

The crowd applaud once more. Gordon joins Simone and embraces her.

GORDON

Magnificent. The perfect blend of modern and traditional.

SIMONE

Let's get back to the farm.

Gordon climbs onto the tractor and starts the engine.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMYARD - DAY

The birds gather in the yard. They watch Hatcher wander around aimlessly pecking at grain.

Ryker hugs Safiyya.

RYKER

If it hadn't been for Hawkins,
gammy leg and all, we'd never have
won the battle.

HAWKINS

Don't forget Duke.

RYKER

Or Seamus.

SAFIYYA

What are you saying?

RYKER

Our wayward guide was the key.

Cuthbert, Hawkins, Duke, Eadric and Naz join them.

Hatcher cocks his head to listen but makes a show of looking for more grain.

RYKER

Without him, we'd have been
fighting a lost cause. Makes you
wonder, doesn't it?

NAZ

You don't think he could act that
stupid. I'd almost feel guilty for
ribbing him.

RYKER

If he was clever enough.

ALL THE BIRDS

Nah!

Hatcher smiles to himself and carries on feeding.

NAZ
Some of the things he said.
Ridiculous!

RYKER
You have a point.

CUTHBERT
And what about the cuckoo chick in
his nest?

NAZ
Feeding him disinformation?

HAWKINS
What information?

RYKER
Disinformation.

DUKE
(winks)
Oh... That information.

The birds laugh so Hatcher ambles over to join them.

HATCHER
What's so funny?

HAWKINS
Just wondering about you.

HATCHER
I do that all the time.

NAZ
See what I mean.

RYKER
Thanks for your help, Hatcher.

SAFIYYA
I want to thank you, too.

Hatcher looks over his shoulder.

HATCHER
Thought there was only one of me.

The pigeon trots back to his feed.

SAFIYYA
 (to Ryker)
 Join me on the cliffs?

The falcon turns to the other birds.

RYKER
 Duty calls.

EXT. IN THE SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - DAY

Ryker follows Safiyya into the air. They fly side by side towards the cliffs. Every so often they glance into each other's eyes and smile.

As they approach the nests, Ryker suddenly rolls over, dives and plucks an insect out of the air.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Ryker and Safiyya land at the rebuilt nest at sunset. Mercia and Algar take a step back.

MERCIA
 They're beautiful.

Ryker feeds the insect to the chicks while his family glow with pride.

Algar puts his wing around Mercia.

ALGAR
 I've an announcement to make.
 You've earned the right to live at
 Redlands. Your mother and I will
 find a new home.

RYKER
 But, Dad!

ALGAR
 Not another word. Your future is
 here. So are your friends.

Ryker and Safiyya take their place in the nest.

RYKER
 I'll never leave you alone again.

Safiyya pulls back and her eyes light up.

RYKER

What is it?

She leans over and whispers in his ear.

SAFIYYA

Our family is about to grow even
bigger.

FADE TO BLACK