

We Are All Dust In The End

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OVER BLACK:

PARTS OF AUSTRALIA ARE EXPERIENCING THE WORST DROUGHT SINCE 1900

EXT FARM - AFTERNOON

Brown paddocks surround a homestead and outbuildings. The blue sky is vivid, cloudless, the sun a small yellow disc.

SUPER - NORTHWESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES

SUPER - JULY 2018

EXT.FARMHOUSE - AFTERNOON

The front door opens. The FARMER(50)steps onto the verandah. He's tall, wiry, dressed in jeans and a workshirt. The rolled up sleeves show muscled forearms bronzed by past summers. A battered Akubra sits on his head.

The farmer holds a rifle, a Stirling .22. He glances up at the sky as always, searching for some miracle chance of rain. But even in the winter the temp is a mild 20 Celsius, and its so dry...

The farmer walks across the small yard devoid of grass, past flower beds long dried up. Out the gate and across to a Ford utility parked near a large shed.

He places the rifle in the back of the ute. Heads into the shed, comes out carrying two jerrycans of fuel, which he puts in the ute next to the gun.

Back into the shed, and out with several boxes of ammunition for the rifle. As he gets in the vehicle and starts it, the front door of the house opens again.

The FARMER'S WIFE(48)steps out. She wears jeans as well and an old denim jacket. Her hair is tied back, hints of grey at the temples. A fine looking woman but her eyes are sad.

Her husband meets her gaze, shows no emotion before the ute moves off towards the back paddocks one hundred metres away.

EXT.DAM - AFTERNOON

The dam is big...fifty feet by thirty, five feet deep. Its bone dry, not even a muddy puddle at the bottom. A steel windmill towers over one end; no breeze at all to move vanes coated with dust.

A Bobcat compact track loader with a wide bucket sits near an excavation - a shallow pit dug into the earth.

Sheep surround the dam, sixty or seventy of them. A few are dead, already dessicated, mere bags of bone and wool. The rest are barely alive, drawn by instinct to drink.

The ute pulls up. The farmer gets out, takes in the pathetic scene. He carries the fuel cans over to the Bobcat and fills the fuel tank. Then he climbs onto the machine, starts it.

The Bobcat begins churning into the pit, enlarging it. Shaping it into a mass grave...

LATER

The farmer gets out of the machine, surveys his work. He gazes back at the homestead; his wife is still watching.

He carefully loads the rifle.

He begins his grim task. Walks to the nearest sheep. It smells him, bleats, hoping for food. The farmer pauses, looks back into the pained eyes. Then his lips harden and he points the rifle...BANG

EXT.FARMHOUSE - AFTERNOON

The farmer's wife flinches at the first shot. A single tear rolls down her cheek. She wipes it. And waits.

EXT.DAM - AFTERNOON

The farmer walks unhurriedly from animal to animal.
BANG...BANG...BANG...

Crows gather, cawing to their kin to join the feast. One lands, hops close to a carcass. The farmer turns, aims and blows it to pieces - BANG - before resuming the slaughter. The other crows disperse - for now.

Overhead a pair of bush eagles circle. The shots continue, the sound echoing in the still air. After every five shots, the farmer reloads from the ammo boxes in the ute.

EXT.FARMHOUSE - AFTERNOON

The farmer's wife sits on the verandah steps. With each shot, she gives a slight nod, mentally ticking off another of their flock.

She's tired, oh so tired of this struggle to survive the drought. She dozes, head drooping, the shots in the background becoming a low thud in her brain.

Suddenly the silence hits her and she's alert.

EXT.DAM - AFTERNOON

The farmer stops shooting, surveys the carnage. There's still about twenty animals living. His boots are flecked with gore and dirt. Sweat forms on his neck. His head hangs, shakes.

He walks to the ute, lays the rifle in the tray before pausing. He glances at the dead sheep then up at the homestead. His wife is standing now, watching him carefully.

The farmer takes the rifle again, checks the load, gets in the ute. Just sits there.

EXT.FARMHOUSE - AFTERNOON

A beep and vibration from the farmer's wife's jacket pocket. She takes her mobile out quickly - a text message.

As she presses it open, she looks back up to see her husband lock his door, then reach over to lock the passenger door. Pushing the phone back into the pocket, she runs...

INT.UTILITY - AFTERNOON

The farmer places the rifle at his feet, barrel sitting along his chest. He stares down the black hole for a moment.

Then he nods, lifts his eyes to the rear view mirror. His wife runs across the paddock, dust kicking up from her feet.

He takes out a CD from the glovebox. The cover is cracked but the disc is fine.

Its the classic album 'Who's Next' by The Who...

He inserts the disc, presses the skip button, turns the volume up full. 'Behind Blue Eyes' fills the vehicle. The farmer rests his head back, moves the barrel under his chin.

No one knows what its like, to be the bad man, to be the sad man...behind blue eyes

His wife gets to the ute, screaming noiselessly, pleading. She's at his window, goes to bash her fist on it but sees his thumb resting on the trigger. Her face dissolves into a pantomime of anguish, taking deep breaths.

But my dreams, they aren't as empty, as my conscience seems to be...

The farmer turns his head to look at her. His eyes are dead...like a shark's eye...like a doll. She places a hand on the glass, striving for any connection. Tears roll down her face, as she strokes the glass.

No one knows what its like to feel these feelings...

Suddenly she rises, looks into the back of the ute, searching. The farmer blinks, turns his head to look in the rear view. Sees her reaching for a crowbar. He shakes his head, the barrel moving as well. She runs around the ute.

No one bites back as hard, on their anger...none of my pain and woe...can show through

Now shes at the passenger window, crowbar raised. He looks at her with deep regret...and pulls the trigger. The shot is muffled in the music but she hears it, and sees his head blown back. Brain and blood splatter the back window.

I have hours, only lonely...my love is vengeance, thats never free..

EXT.DAM - AFTERNOON

The farmer's wife slumps against the ute, the crowbar hits the ground. She gazes in at her dead husband. Angry at first, so damn angry with him. But seeing his body at peace, well..she can see past the shattered face.

Bleats rouse her. And the cawing. She lifts her head to look at the dam. The remaining sheep feebly try to avoid the pack of crows amongst them. A rage grips her. She picks up the crowbar and smashes the side window, unlocks the door, opens it. The music blares...

When my fist clenches, crack it open, before I use it and lose my cool...when I smile tell me some bad news, before I laugh and act lie a fool...

She wipes the glass from the seat, not feeling it cutting her. She sits on the seat, gently eases the rifle away from her husband. Wipes the barrel with an old rag on the floor and gets back out.

She checks the load. Grabs the ammo boxes from the ute tray.

And if I swallow anything evil, put your finger down my throat...if I shiver please give me a blanket, keep me warm let me wear your coat

She reaches back in to eject the disc - the sound of the sheep and crows is instantly louder - before shutting the door and walking towards the dam. Places the ammo on the dry ground.

The crows eye her but are made brave by the banquet they have. The farmer's wife begins shooting and takes out a heap of them before stragglers can wing off...BANG...BANG

Then she methodically shoots the remaining sheep, pausing only to reload...BANG...BANG...

LATER

The sheep are all dead. Empty ammo boxes around her. She drops to her knees. The crows regroup at the sudden silence - the bush eagles have landed nearby and watch.

The farmer's wife - widow now - takes the last ammo box, wanting more bullets for the crows. But there's only a single one left now. She SIGHS, loads it in the rifle.

Looks back at the ute. Then in a fluid movement, she reverses the rifle, stock into the ground, barrel in her mouth and thumbs the trigger...BANG...the shot echoes across the barren land.

Her body falls back onto the dusty earth. The mobile phone tumbles from the jacket pocket.

CLOSE ON:

A crow lands near her body and pecks at the phone, pushing it over. The screen is open at the text message:

'Your Centrelink farm relief payment has been approved and processed. Funds will be electronically transmitted to your nominated bank account.'

FADE OUT