

THE OTHER LAMB

Written by

C. S. McMullen

Management:

Fictional Entity
Krista Carpenter &
Chris Deckard
krista@fictionalentity.com
chris@fictionalentity.com

Agent:

RGM
Dayne Kelly
dayne@rgm.com.au

EXT. LAKE EYRE - DAY

A sweeping aerial shot - a giant dried-up lake bed.

Small feathered corpses litter the ground like piles of trash. Pelicans, huddled in small, mud-encrusted mounds.

It is desolate. A wasteland.

A biblical, apocalyptic event has occurred here.

As the camera sweeps in from above, towards the centre of the lake bed, we see small white dots - lying unmoving on the ground.

A DISSONANT HARMONY rises in the background, voices wavering in and out, in an eerie combination of hymn and tribal chant.

The sound rises higher, and higher-

CUT TO:

EXT. BILLABONG - AFTERNOON

Two young girls dip their feet at the edge of a billabong.

They are conservatively dressed in plain, white robes - sleeves down to their wrists, hems down to their ankles. Their hair is long, and braided in thick plaits down their back.

SELAH and TAMAR. Sisters.

Selah is the glowing picture of health - on the cusp of teenagehood, but reluctant to let childhood go. Her hair is blonde, almost shockingly so, white even in the dappled shade of the billabong.

Tamar is thinner, and has darker colouring, with long black hair, and a BIRTHMARK that runs like wine down one side of her face.

TAMAR

Do you think something lives in there?

SELAH

Under the water?

They both consider the billabong - it looks peaceful, and still.

SELAH (CONT'D)

I don't think so. What could be down there?

TAMAR

Anything. A giant snake. Or a monster -
to pull us in!

Tamar pokes Selah in the side - tickling her, threatening to push her in. They splash each other, the water flying up in tiny droplets.

There's a DISTANT SOUND - hollow and eerie. They both pause.

SELAH

Must be dinner time.

She gets up and holds out her hand to Tamar.

SELAH (CONT'D)
(mock-formally)
Shall we go, sister-mine?

Tamar smiles at her, and grabs her hand.

TAMAR

(mock-formally)
Why thank you, my sister-mine. I
believe we shall.

They brush off their robes and tidy their hair - making themselves presentable, before setting off through the bush. Still holding hands.

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

The middle of an animated family dinner.

The atmosphere is relaxed - there is the loud hum of chatter, and occasional laughter.

The firelight is warm, and the food is a bounty of simple, country fare - meats, potatoes, bread.

At one end of the table, women talk and gossip, passing food and bread between them.

At the other end, the children sit, slightly rowdy but well-behaved, playing and laughing together as they eat. We see Selah and Tamar whispering together - thick as thieves.

But -

There are only women. And girl children.

These are the WIVES and the SISTERS.

They are all dressed in white robes, and their long hair is up in beautiful braids - ridiculously complex loops and shapes, each braid unique to each woman or girl. (NB: Unless otherwise noted, their hair is always braided.)

At the head of the table, sits SHEPHERD.

Father, leader, prophet - all rolled into one. Father of every sister, husband to every wife.

But -

He's not what you'd expect. Not a stern patriarch, presiding over a table of quiet women. He's charming; laughing with one of the wives, rubbing the arm of another. Smiling constantly.

His hair is shoulder-length, and unbound, and his beard is thick and well-trimmed. Around his neck, we see a glimpse of RAM HORNS ON A NECKLACE, although they are mostly covered by his robes.

At the Shepherd's right hand sits MARIA. She is older, with only a touch of grey to her hair, maybe 35 - although her face is lined from being outside in the sun.

MARIA

But is it the right time for the flock
to grow, my Shepherd? If they won't
trade with us, the grain stores won't
last us till -

SHEPHERD

Lambs are always a blessing, my clever
wife. Never a burden. We will find a
way-

One of the youngest sisters comes up behind the Shepherd's chair as he talks to Maria. He turns and grabs her, tickling her as she squeals in agonized delight.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

(teasing)

Got you, you cheeky thing!

He tickles the child in his arms again, and then releases her, turning to Maria again.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

(jokingly)

I think dinner is over - if I am being
viciously attacked at my own table!

Maria claps her hands, and the older children rise to clear the plates away, Selah and Tamar amongst them.

The Shepherd gets up, and the mood changes.

There is silence, and unexpectedly, tension/anticipation is suddenly in the air-

Without saying a word, he walks along the table, touching two of the wives - stroking his fingers gently over their uniquely braided hair.

One of them is ADRIEL. She looks like she is about 7 months along, but carrying it well - she looks fertile, and glowing. She's 19 at most.

Adriel and the other wife leave behind the Shepherd, as the sisters continue to clear the plates. The chosen wives don't seem sad - if anything, there is a spring in their step.

At the table, the other wives exchange glances - judging his choices, their expressions a mix of jealousy and relief.

At the door, red dust swirls from outside, as the Shepherd and his two chosen wives leave.

INT. SLEEPING HALL - MORNING

Selah, Tamar and another one of the sisters, sleep in a single bed, a warm tangle of arms and legs. The other sisters sleep in single beds beside them. Their hair is braided even in sleep.

In the same room, the Wives sleep too - sleeping double to a bed as well.

There's the same EERIE HOLLOW SOUND - this time it is just outside.

The wives and sisters begin to stir.

EXT. SHEEP STATION - CENTRAL COURTYARD - DAY

The chaos of a busy farm in the morning.

Selah ducks and weaves amongst it all, her robe flapping as she runs. Red dust whirling around her feet.

We follow her amongst the buildings, seeing the layout of the farm. The weavery, the barns, the dairy, the nursery. Made of packed earth, they are basic but functional - their roofs made of thatch, with simple wooden doors. The walls of each building are a riot of primary colors; bright happy murals and bucolic landscapes of green, lush fields. The Shepherd features prominently in many of them, a golden staff in his hands.

Ewes are led from one barn to another, their coats thick and unshorn - while elsewhere, other ewes are milked, bleating pathetically.

Some wives are sorting wool, while others are in an open shed, weaving and singing as they work. They're weaving intricate, colourful rugs, and it is complicated, skilled work.

They sing a CHEERFUL HYMN, in a major key - the harmonies clean and beautiful. The sounds twist and writhe, mirroring their hands as they weave. Maria leads the harmonies.

WIVES

Over the mountains,
(Over the mountains,)
Over the sea,
(Over the sea,)
I have no fear,
(I have no fear,)
For he watches me.
(For he watches me.)
And if I fall,
(And if I fall,)
I fall gladly,
(I fall gladly,)
For I know,
(For I know,)
The Shepherd is with me.
(The Shepherd is with me.)

As Selah runs through it all, the song follows her - dogging her steps.

And everywhere, all around her - are signs of The Flock.

Hanging murals sway in the breeze on porches, made of intricately woven wool and bone.

Ewe's skulls adorn the top of posts, carved until they are more work of art than skull.

Selah reaches the centre of the courtyard, and pauses in the chaos - slowing down. Distracted in spite of herself.

In the middle of the courtyard, under a specially made shelter, sits THE RAM. Next to him is the giant CALLING HORN, polished and gleaming in the sun.

(NB: This is the source of the eerie sound that wakes them in the morning, and summons them to worship.)

The ram is tough-looking, and in its prime. His horns curl back and then come back around, sticking out from his head proudly. This is a magnificent beast - wild, and a bit mad.

Attached to his thick wool are braids of leather and bits of braided hair. Tokens of worship.

Selah observes him through the fence. Awe in her eyes.

This is it. This is their most sacred. A living vessel.

And then - the ram locks eyes with her. Its long lashes framing impossibly deep, dark eyes.

Selah creeps closer, holding the ram's stare for a long moment.

As she holds it, a challenge passes between them -

- the stare is held that beat too long, and the ram stamps once at the ground, readying itself to charge -

There's the SLAM of a door nearby, and Selah looks away.

Adriel, the pregnant wife, has emerged from one of the buildings - the Shepherd's Hut. The outside has been decorated and painted to within an inch of its life with stylised images of the Shepherd.

Adriel's hair is long and scandalously unbound down her back, her feet bare. She has the small secret smile of a woman who has just had very satisfying sex.

Selah watches as Adriel picks her way across the courtyard towards the sleeping hall, and then turns back to the ram -

- but the moment has gone. The ram is now lying down in the corner, its back to her.

Selah looks for a moment longer, disappointed. Then, runs on.

INT. MILKING BARN - MORNING

The inside of the barn is cool and still - especially after the heat of the day.

Selah sits at the side, churning sheep's milk by hand. EVELYN sits beside her. She is about the same age as Selah, with a petulant mouth, and brown hair.

Evelyn churns her butter just a touch faster than Selah does - looking over occasionally to compare their progress.

Selah stops, and looks around, and dips her finger into the churn, tasting the butter with her tongue, closing her eyes with obvious pleasure. Almost sensual. Evelyn sees.

EVELYN
(whispering)
What are you doing?

SELAH
(whispering as well)
I'm just checking it!

EVELYN
You are not! I'll tell one of the
wives!

Selah's face screws up - and she pinches Evelyn sharply on the thigh.

SELAH
Sheep-shit you will! Must you be a
tattle in every way?

Evelyn gasps in outrage, and they scuffle, knocking over one of the churns of milk in the process.

One of the wives, HANNAH, notices, and strides over.

HANNAH
Sisters! What is this?

The girls stop fighting immediately, both looking ashamed.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
Selah? Have you anything to say?

Selah looks to Evelyn, and shakes her head.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
Evelyn?

There's a pause - and then Evelyn snitches.

EVELYN
She tasted the butter, even though it
was only meant to be for dinner, and
then when I said-

Hannah holds up her hands. Selah glares daggers at Evelyn.

SELAH
(under her breath to Evelyn)
Tattle-tale.

HANNAH
What was that Selah?

SELAH
(sullenly)
Nothing.

Hannah looks at her for a moment - this half-child, half-teen, in the throes of adolescent rage.

HANNAH
If you sisters cannot work together, as sisters should, then I guess I will have to separate you.

Selah and Evelyn both look happy at that - no love lost here.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
Selah - can you go to the kitchen please, and get the scraps. And go to the hut.

Selah looks at her in disbelief.

SELAH
But, that's not fair -

Hannah continues as if Selah hasn't spoken.

HANNAH
And Evelyn - seeing as Selah will be going to the hut. You will just have to churn the rest of the butter on your own.

EVELYN
(primly)
I would be happy to.

Selah sneers at her. What a suck up.

Hannah folds her arms, and Selah sighs and gets up - her footsteps dragging reluctantly.

EXT. SHEEP STATION - DAY

Selah makes her way through the shade of the buildings, until she reaches a track, winding its way through the bush. She carries a small bowl, covered with a plate.

EXT. BUSHLAND - DAY

Selah picks her way along the track, her eyes on the path.

Around her is a riot of colours and nature - native birds call to each other in the trees. A bush paradise.

Along the path, there are small signs of The Flock - small tokens of wool and bone in the trees. Marking the way.

EXT. SHACK - DAY

Selah approaches a small, run-down shack - alone in the middle of a small clearing.

It is in sharp contrast to the state of the farm's buildings - it looks shabby, and ill-kept.

Selah goes to the door, and knocks.

SARAH (O.S.)

Come in.

Selah goes inside.

INT. SHACK - DAY

After the bright sunlight outside, the hut is miserable and dark. There's just a small table, and a few thin mats on the ground.

There are two wives inside. One is lying down, with a red binding around her lower abdomen, the bright red contrasting with her white robes - ELOISE.

The other wife crouches in the shadows behind the door.

SARAH

So, you bring us our daily bread,
Selah?

The wife, SARAH, comes into the light, and Selah looks away - uncomfortable.

Sarah's skin is a ruin - untreated skin cancers mottle the side of one cheek, and descend down her neck.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Put it down on the table.

Selah puts the bowl down, and Sarah lifts up the plate. It is slops - worse than you'd feed to animals. Sarah lowers the plate again.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(sarcastically)
The offerings from the Shepherd are
rich today I see.

Selah looks stung.

SELAH
You know the food is meant as penance.
To help purify.
(pointing at wife on the
ground)
Does not the Shepherd tell us, that
this is a just monthly punishment, for
woman's pride?

Sarah laughs, at this young girl preaching to her.

SARAH
Look at you child. So wise, so sure.

Selah soldiers on.

SELAH
And if you are impure, is it not right
to drive out the rot?

Sarah stops laughing, and touches her face - her rotting face.
This child preaching to her isn't so funny anymore.

Sarah grabs Selah by the arm, bruisingly hard.

SARAH
Bring more next time, pious and perfect
sister-child. Don't just bring these
scraps that are worse than what his
dogs get-

Selah breaks free of Sarah's hold.

SELAH
Don't touch me! You are unclean.

Sarah looks as if she is going to say something more, but then in
the distance - that EERIE SOUND from the Calling Horn.

Sarah sighs, the battle gone out of her. She knows what it means.

SARAH
You best go. Don't want to be late.

Selah leaves.

EXT. BUSH PATH - DAY

Selah runs along a bush track - flashes of her white robes appearing and reappearing as she darts through the trees. The charms in the trees swaying as she rushes past.

Her hair comes out of her braid as she runs.

EXT. OUTDOOR CHAPEL - AFTERNOON

An outdoor chapel. Sacred space amongst the swaying gum trees.

It is the style of a travelling church. Rough pews have been made from logs, and more decorations of woven wool and sheep skulls hang from the trees. There is a giant colourful rug on the ground, over the bare dirt, dyed in the colours of a bright sunset.

The Shepherd stands at the front, behind a wooden pulpit. The edges of the pulpit have been carved to look like a shepherd's staff.

To the side sit his FOUR BLACK-AND-WHITE SHEEPDOGS. Well-trained working dogs, they watch the Shepherd constantly. Waiting for their cues.

Selah creeps in, trying to be inconspicuous. She is late, and the sermon has already started.

SHEPHERD

And as we seek to find the true path -
ahh, Selah.

The congregation (all the wives and sisters) look at Selah, and the Shepherd gestures to her.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Come to the front.

There is a moment of tension. The congregation seems to hold its breath -

Selah goes right up to the front, trembling -

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Sit here, child-mine.

The Shepherd points to an empty space in one of the front rows, and the tension passes. He continues his sermon.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

As we seek to find the true path, we
must ask ourselves - do we walk true?

(MORE)

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 (beat)
 Or have we lost our way?

There is a murmur of dissent amongst the congregation.

He leaves his pulpit, walking back and forth. Energetic. Captivating.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 My lost ones. My precious flock.
 You all came to me broken. You all
 came to me lost. Hurt by a cruel
 world, that cared not for you.

He leans down, and grips one of the wives gently by her chin, who holds a young baby in her arms. She looks up at him, both fearful and adoring.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 (to her / to the whole
 crowd)
 And I took you in, and made you
 whole again. Protected you. Gave
 you shelter, and love -

He lets go of her chin, and briefly strokes the soft downy hair of the baby in her arms.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 - and life.

He moves away, and the wife slumps - like a puppet whose strings have been cut. Exhausted from his attention.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 But, we must ask ourselves. Have we
 truly worked hard enough, at
 ridding ourselves of outside sin?

At the front, Selah shines with faith and certainty as she watches him, cross-legged on the ground. His most ardent disciple.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 (louder now)
 Of cleansing ourselves of the
 impurity of the outside world, that
 so stains our souls? Of banishing
 those impure thoughts that whisper
 to us on the wind, in our darkest
 hours?

His eyes seem to drill straight into every wife, every sister. As if he is talking only to them.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

But, do not be afraid, my dear, sweet flock. Only a strong flock, free from sin, can find the true path. But we know that the lambs are weak. We know that the ewes are easily led astray. The ram must be strong.

As he says ram, he grabs the horns around his neck, pulling them free from his robe. The ends of the horns have been cut bluntly, and a hole drilled through each of them for the leather tie.

One of the branches sways in the wind, and a BEAM OF SUNLIGHT briefly illuminates the Shepherd - his hair turning golden in the sun.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

For although the path may be fraught, you will always have your humble Shepherd by your side. Walking with you.

He sits down on one of the logs - right next to Selah.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Let us sit. And pray. And reflect on our blessings.

The Shepherd bows his head, and they all follow.

And for a moment - all that can be heard is the soft rustle of the gum trees, and birds amongst the trees.

EXT. TRACK - AFTERNOON - LATER

Selah and Tamar walk back along the bush track, talking softly to each other.

SELAH

And then Evelyn pushed the milk over, and Hannah completely took her side -

Tamar pulls on Selah's arm gently, cutting her off. Selah looks up.

The Shepherd is waiting up ahead, on the side of the path - his dogs at his feet.

The Shepherd smiles at them both, although it seems strained when he looks at Tamar. Tamar doesn't make eye contact with the Shepherd - scared to be the focus of his attention.

TAMAR
I'll see if Maria needs help.

Tamar walks off quickly - leaving the Shepherd and Selah alone.

They start to walk sedately along the path. Selah is flustered - delighted to get some time alone with her father, but in awe of her Shepherd.

SHEPHERD
Did you like today's sermon, Selah?

Selah nods, tongue-tied.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
I'm glad.
(teasing)
I can always tell when my sermons are boring, for your gaze wanders amongst the trees. I always wonder what you see up there.

Selah is shocked out of her silence.

SELAH
My Shepherd, no, your sermons are always wonderful-!

He laughs, and holds up his hands.

SHEPHERD
I'm only teasing. I know you listen most ardently. More than some of the wives, truth be told.

They walk along in silence again for a moment, Selah demurely looking at the ground in front of her.

Some of her hair has come loose from her tightly woven braid, and the Shepherd lifts a strand of her blonde hair, holding it gently between his fingers.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
(about her hair)
So beautiful. Like sunlight.

He smiles down at her.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Just like your mother's.

Selah looks up at him - excited. Eager.

SELAH

Can you tell me again? The story of
when you first saw her?

But they have come through the trees, out of the still silent
grace of the bush. The buildings and distant paddocks of the
station can be seen in the distance.

SHEPHERD

Maybe another time, child-mine. But
now, I must go gather the flock -
before it gets too dark. A shepherd's
work is never done.

He carefully tucks the strand of hair back into her braid.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

(gently but firmly)

Make sure one of the wives re-braids
your hair.

And with that, the Shepherd walks away, his sheepdogs at his
heels.

INT. SLEEPING HALL - NIGHT

Selah sits on the floor in front of Hannah, her hair being worked
into an intricate braid.

The hair pulls painfully at Selah's scalp as Hannah braids her
hair tightly. Selah doesn't make a sound.

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

The tail end of another communal dinner.

Selah sits with the other sisters, her hair now neatly braided.

The Shepherd consults with Maria who sits to his left. She
consults a tiny book, with a crude moon calendar in it, and then
whispers in his ear. (NB: She is telling the Shepherd which wives
are probably ovulating.)

The Shepherd gets up, and chooses two wives, like before, and
then leaves.

INT. SLEEPING HALL - NIGHT

Selah lies in bed - curled up against Tamar and another of
her sisters.

Then, a sound - the SLAM of a car door. Selah jolts awake.

Through the window, red-and-blue lights strobe over Selah's face.

Selah sits up, and looks through the window. A police car is parked outside, with a POLICEMAN standing next to it, talking to Shepherd. The cop is clean-shaven, and dressed in a country cop's uniform.

(NB: This is the first sense we have had that there is a modern 'outside' world.)

Selah observes through the window for a moment, then gets out of bed, careful to not disturb her sleeping sisters. She creeps to the window, and opens it a crack.

Selah can't quite make out the conversation, although Shepherd is clearly angry.

And then the wind changes direction in a swirl of red dust, and Selah can just hear snatches of their conversation -

SHEPHERD
- this is religious persecution!
We're breaking no laws.

POLICEMAN
Doesn't matter. One of the families
- they say their missing daughter
is underage, and they think she's
here. It's enough of an excuse for
a raid.

SHEPHERD
We just want peace. To live our
lives, how we please.

The policeman shrugs.

POLICEMAN
Not up to me. This was just a
friendly warning. You've got a few
weeks, but I won't be coming round
anymore.

The policeman goes to his car, and opens the door.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)
It's a pity. I always enjoyed my
visits. To 'check up' on your
flock.

The car door slams, and there's the sound of wheels on gravel.

The Shepherd puts his head back, and looks up towards the sky - almost despairing. Looking for answers.

He looks over towards the building briefly, at the window that Selah was sitting at -

There's no one there, but the window is still open a crack.

He strides over, and looks through the window. At the sleeping tangle of childish arms and legs. The back of Selah's head.

Unseen by the Shepherd - Selah's eyes are open in the darkness.

INT. SLEEPING HALL - MORNING

The Calling Horn sounds. The sisters slowly wake in their beds, stretching and yawning.

EXT. SHEEP STATION - CENTRAL COURTYARD - DAY

The sisters and wives come out into the courtyard, ready for the days chores -

But the Shepherd is standing in the middle, next to the horn. Waiting for them.

In one hand he holds his staff, and in the other hand he holds the barbaric Ram, on a leash of braided leather.

His face is stern, and harsh - this is not the smiling patriarch of before.

Silently, the sisters and wives gather around him in a semi-circle - sitting on the dusty ground in their robes. The red dust stains their robes instantly.

SHEPHERD

My Flock. I have good news. Last night - I had a vision.

Gasps from the crowd. Selah's eyes go wide.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

I had a vision of a journey. A journey of many days. With my faithful flock beside me.

His eyes are alight with religious fever, and his voice is smooth and powerful - his words wrap around them, like a snake.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 And at the end of our journey, I
 had a vision of a new place. A
 better place.

There is a fearful murmuring amongst the wives and sisters. Some of the younger ones start to cry.

WIVES / SISTERS	SISTERS
We will leave the farm? / But what of the flock? / Where will we go?	I don't want to go. / I'm scared.

The Shepherd strides into the crowd, but not in anger.

He gentles them, touching one on the arm, stroking another's braid - soothing them, calming them down.

SHEPHERD
 My dear, sweet flock. Leaving our home breaks my heart as well. You must believe me. And yes, the journey will be hard. And yes, we will be tested.

He steps back, and gazes upon them all. Warmth and love in his gaze.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 But, this journey will cleanse us. And we will be reborn without sin. And we shall find our rightful home - a place far away from the cruel sin of the outside world. A place we can be safe, forever.

A beat - and then the wives begin to cheer, and laugh, and cry, embracing each other on the ground. A joyous moment.

Tamar smiles widely, cheering along with the rest of them.

Strangely - Selah isn't cheering. She looks scared and unhappy.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 Once the signs are right, and once the flock is ready - we will leave this place. We have outgrown it. It is time to find our true paradise.

The Shepherd smiles down at them from above - still holding the ram's leash in one hand, and his shepherd's crook in the other.

EXT. BILLABONG - DAY

Tamar and Selah, sit at the billabong's edge.

They are both making TINY LEAF BOATS out of white-grey gum leaves, and watching them float in the water.

TAMAR

I wonder what we will see, on the journey.

Selah shrugs. Her eyes on the leaves.

TAMAR (CONT'D)

I wonder if the wind feels different, out there. Or if the rain will fall a different way on our skin. Or if we will swim in deeper water.

Selah stares out across the billabong - her expression sullen.

SELAH

I wish we could just stay here.

TAMAR

You don't wish to go on the journey, sister-mine?

SELAH

It is perfect here. We have the Shepherd's love. And the grace of the flock. And the perfection of the ram.

(plaintively)

I don't want to leave.

TAMAR

You sound just like him. Saying his words. He might as well be here!

Tamar gets up - her movements angry.

TAMAR (CONT'D)

It's not perfect for me here, Selah. Not like it is for you.

And this is the crux of it. The hidden resentment between the blessed sister and cursed sister.

Tamar points back towards the station.

TAMAR (CONT'D)

You know they whisper behind me. Say
I'm cursed. That my skin shows my sin.

SELAH

You should not listen Tamar. You know
the sisters, the wives - as the
Shepherd says, women are gossips, able
only to think of their vanity-

Tamar touches her face - her birthmark.

TAMAR

(whispering)

But Selah - sometimes I do feel cursed.
When the Shepherd's gaze looks at me,
and then he looks away. As if I am not
worthy.

Tamar looks at Selah - trying to make her see.

TAMAR (CONT'D)

With you - he is all smiles. You
can do no wrong. You are his golden
lamb, and whatever Selah does
cannot be wrong.

Selah stands as well - equally angry now.

SELAH

Well, maybe the Shepherd is right!
Maybe he can sense the hate in your
heart.

TAMAR

Can't you just listen for once, Selah!
Instead of preaching! It is as if you
are his puppet - he pulls on your
strings, and you dance for him.

Selah is stung, and lashes out.

SELAH

Maybe your face is a mark Tamar! Maybe
it is to punish you for your pride, and
your mouth. So all know you cannot be
trusted.

Tamar stares at Selah in shock. Selah seems to realise what she
has said, in her rage.

SELAH (CONT'D)

Tamar, I -

Tamar whirls and runs into the bush.

Selah watches her go, and then sits by the billabong again - her eyes shiny with unshed tears.

In the water, the white-grey leaves of the gum tree boats have partially submerged - and as Selah watches, they sink out of sight.

EXT. BUSH PATH - DAY

Selah walks along the bush track - her arms wrapped around herself.

EXT. OUTDOOR CHAPEL - DAY

The chapel is empty, and silent - only the rustle of leaves above.

Selah approaches, and kneels at the front on the rug, and bows her head. Desperate for the blind solace that faith can bring.

A voice from behind startles her - Shepherd.

SHEPHERD

Selah - ? What are you doing here?

Selah turns, surprised - she has been crying.

SELAH

(hiccupping)

I am sorry Shepherd, I will go-

SHEPHERD

No, no. Please stay.

The Shepherd sits down next to her, on a log.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

What is wrong, my lamb?

SELAH

Shepherd, I - I don't want to leave the station. I love it here.

Selah bows her head again - ready for his anger. The Shepherd just laughs.

SHEPHERD

Our journey is an important one. One that we cannot forsake. But I am glad to know that you treasure our home here.

SELAH

Why can't we stay? Is it to do with
that man?

The Shepherd's eyes turn sharp.

SHEPHERD

What man?

Selah bows her head. The picture of penitence.

SELAH

(whispering)

I woke during the night Shepherd.
And saw that man. Is he why we must
leave?

The Shepherd relaxes, and places a fatherly hand on Selah's
thin shoulder.

SHEPHERD

I did not wish to scare the others,
my Selah. And you must not mention
it to them. But that man - he plans
to bring others. Other men. To take
you away. To take you all away -
from me.

SELAH

No!

SHEPHERD

And I prayed on it, and saw a vision of
a new place. Where those men won't be
able to find us. Unless we leave - we
will never be safe here. Never be truly
free.

SELAH

So we can never come back?

(vehemently)

I hate them. I hate the outside.

SHEPHERD

It is something we must do. Sometimes,
we must sacrifice something for the
good of the flock.

He wipes one of her tears away with his finger, gently.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

I am relying on you Selah. You are one
of the oldest sisters.

(MORE)

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

The younger ones will look to you for guidance during the journey. You must be strong in your faith.

Selah takes a long shuddering breath - pulling herself together.

SELAH

I will be, my Shepherd. I won't let you down.

She smiles at him - sincere in her hero worship.

SHEPHERD

The journey will be hard. But I will be with you, every step of the way. And I promise you, child-mine - the end of the journey, that sight is something worth seeing.

EXT. SHEEP STATION - CENTRAL COURTYARD - DAY

Selah walks through the courtyard, deep in thought.

She passes the ram's enclosure, and pauses.

The ram is standing in the shade in the far side of the enclosure, but at Selah's approach, he comes over.

Selah takes a cautious step closer, and kneels - pulling some grass from the ground, where it grows just out of reach of the ram.

She delicately puts it through the fence, and the ram considers her for a long moment-

Then gently eats the grass from her hand, before ambling away back to the shade.

Selah stays kneeling for a long moment, her hand still stretched through the fence, happy tears trailing their way down her cheeks.

INT. WEAVING SHED - DAY

The sisters are gathered in a circle - sorting through the wool. Picking it apart, and bundling it up. Their small hands sort through quickly and cleanly.

Selah sits across from Tamar. Tamar looks across at Selah, and then away again. Still angry.

EVELYN

But where will we go? Across the
desert?

One of the littlest sisters, LILY, sits next to Evelyn - she is about five.

LILY

I'm scared.

SELAH

We must have faith. Shepherd will be with us.

She smiles at Lily - and for a moment, we see a flash of Shepherd in her eyes. That pure charm and charisma.

SELAH (CONT'D)

And with his guidance - I know that we shall find our way.

Selah looks at Tamar, and seems to aim her words at her.

SELAH (CONT'D)

And maybe the journey will help us remember that sometimes we do things or say things we don't mean. Things that are not generous in our heart.

Tamar looks up. Is that an apology?

EXT. SHEEP STATION - CENTRAL COURTYARD - DAY

The sisters exit the shed - holding Hessian sacks of freshly sorted wool.

Tamar stops next to Selah. They are both silent for a moment, and then-

TAMAR

I shouldn't have said-

SELAH

Sister-
Tamar tries again.

TAMAR

I shouldn't have shouted at you Selah.
Or said those things.

SELAH

Tamar - I was wrong.

Tamar looks relieved-

SELAH (CONT'D)

I spoke to the Shepherd. And he helped me see - the journey will be hard. But it will be worth it. If we trust in him.

Tamar deflates again.

TAMAR

That wasn't what I was -

SELAH

- and I know it has been hard for you here, my sister.

Selah grabs Tamar's hand, holding on tight.

SELAH (CONT'D)

(intensely)

We shall explore together. And do all the things you dream of. Feel the new wind. Taste the rain. Swim in deep water together.

Tamar still looks unsure-

SELAH (CONT'D)

I have many sisters. But-

(she leans in to whisper)

You are the sister of my heart. I cannot go on the journey unless you are with me.

A moment - and then they embrace.

Tamar whispers into her hair.

TAMAR

Of course. I would not let you go without me.

Tamar rests her forehead against Selah's briefly - blonde hair contrasting starkly with dark hair.

Finally, Tamar pulls away reluctantly.

TAMAR (CONT'D)

I must go. I promised Adriel that I would help with settling the little sisters for their afternoon nap.

SELAH

I'll come with you. It'll be quicker if
I help.

A peace offering. Tamar smiles - their fight completely forgiven.

INT. NURSERY - DAY

A nursery, filled with small children - newborns, all the way up to five-and-six-years-old, in cots and sleeping mats.

Selah and Tamar walk among the mats, settling them down, getting them ready for sleep. Adriel is there as well, her pregnant belly huge in front of her.

Selah is crouched next to Lily - trying to lull her to sleep.

LILY

Can't I stay up? Please?

SELAH

(gently)

You have to rest now, Lily. You know
the rules.

LILY

But I'm not tired.

SELAH

Just close your eyes. And imagine our
flock in the field. The ram, and the
ewes. And all their little lambs. See
if you can count them all.

Lily closes her eyes - but opens them again almost instantly, still restless.

LILY

Can't you tell me a story, Selah? A
story about the sisters?

Selah opens her mouth - unsure how to respond - but Adriel has already heard. She bustles over, pushing Selah gently out of the way.

ADRIEL

Lily. We've talked about this.

Lily looks mutinous, her lower lip trembling. Adriel's colouring and Lily's are the same - they are mother and daughter.

LILY

But I want a story.

ADRIEL

Stories can only be about the flock and the Shepherd, Lily. And only the Shepherd is allowed to tell them. You know that.

Adriel points at Selah.

ADRIEL (CONT'D)

You don't want to get Selah in trouble now do you?

Lily shakes her head.

ADRIEL (CONT'D)

Now - I want you to apologise to Selah for asking her to break the rules, and then go to sleep. Can you do that for me Lily?

LILY

(softly)

I'm sorry Selah.

SELAH

It's ok. I know you didn't mean it.

Adriel walks away. Selah strokes Lily's hair softly, waiting for her to drift off.

EXT. BUSH PATH - DAY

Selah makes her way along the track - holding a covered bowl again.

INT. SHACK - DAY

Selah enters the hut - looking around the dim room.

It's just Sarah, alone in the hut this time - Eloise is gone. Sarah is lying down on one of the mats, and she looks thinner. As if she is shrinking away.

Selah places the bowl down. Sarah gets up slowly, and lifts the lid. It is better food this time - there is a half loaf of bread, a chunk of cheese.

SELAH

These are the leftovers today.

It's clear that Selah has made an effort to find better food.

Sarah smiles at her, and brings the bowl back to her mat.

SARAH

Thank you. I haven't had cheese in...
months.

Sarah starts to eat, and Selah looks around.

SELAH

You are alone now?

Sarah shrugs.

SARAH

Eloise's monthly time had ended. But I
don't mind. It is nice to be alone
sometimes.

SELAH

Maria bade me to tell you - the
Shepherd has had a vision. We are going
on a journey.

Sarah looks surprised at this, although she continues eating.

SARAH

Huh. I never thought he'd leave. I
thought he'd die here, in his kingdom.
With us all entombed with him.

SELAH

It is to cleanse ourselves of sin.

Sarah looks out the window thoughtfully, still chewing - then
looks back to Selah.

SARAH

Even the littlest sisters? How have
they sinned?

And with that challenge to the Shepherd's words - the moment of
accord between them is broken. Selah gets up, frowning.

SELAH

You know nothing, cursed-wife.

Selah goes to leave, but turns back as she pushes open the door.

SELAH (CONT'D)

The Shepherd has said. We leave once
the last of the ewes has lambed.

EXT. SHEEP STATION - CENTRAL COURTYARD - DAY

Selah walks through the courtyard.

The Shepherd's black-and-white sheepdogs run up to her - circling her, attempting to herd her. Snapping, aggressive.

A moment of tension -

SHEPHERD
Heel!

They slink away - back to the Shepherd, who has appeared from one of the out-buildings.

He is wearing his robes, but for once, he looks more like a farmer than a prophet. He has sturdy leather sandals, and a wide-brimmed leather hat.

A few wives accompany him, Maria and Hannah among them. They are dressed practically as well.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
My Selah. How fortuitous.

He turns to Maria.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Were you not just saying we needed some more help in the fields?
(to Selah)
The last of the ewes are in lamb. The wives take turns watching over them, and helping if they get into trouble.

Maria looks at Selah - her lips tight.

MARIA
She is too young-

The Shepherd stares at Maria for a moment - his gaze growing cold. His authority is not normally challenged.

MARIA (CONT'D)
(backpedaling)
Although, the sisters must learn the ways of the lamb eventually.

SHEPHERD
And Selah is one of the oldest. And most devout.

SELAH

Whatever Shepherd would have me do - I would do gladly.

SHEPHERD

Excellent.

He gestures to Selah, and walks with her, out of earshot from the wives.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

After our talk yesterday, I thought long and hard, my Selah. Your faith is strong, but you just need a reminder. A reminder of how the flock strengthens and nurtures us. And there is no more sacred task than bringing new members of our flock into the world.

SELAH

I would be honoured, my Shepherd.

SHEPHERD

And if we are to be truly ready for this journey - we must have lambs.

He locks stares with her - intense. Compelling.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

You must open your mind Selah. Be ready for grace. Ready for enlightenment.

SELAH

I - I will try my Shepherd.

SHEPHERD

Good.

The Shepherd and Selah rejoin the wives, who have been patiently waiting for them.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

(to Maria)

Make sure that she is included in the cleansing.

He walks away, his dogs trotting loyally after him. Selah and the wives stare after him.

INT. WEAVING HALL - DAY

The weavery has been transformed, into a primitive sweat lodge. Steam fills the air, obscuring the half-clad forms of the wives.

There's a LOW HUMMING in the air - not a melody, but a single unified sound as they cleanse themselves.

Selah sits next to Maria on a wooden bench. They are both only in undergarments. Strands of hair sticks to the sweat at their temples, although their hair is still firmly braided.

Maria hands water in a bowl to Selah, who drinks deep. She then hands her a small piece of meat - rare, almost bloody.

Selah brings the meat to her mouth and rips off a bit with her teeth. Juice from the under-cooked meat runs down her face.

MARIA

This will be your last food and drink, sister-child. We cannot contaminate the lambing with impurities. We must be as close to without sin as possible, and fasting is how we achieve purity.

There's a SWISH. Through the steam, Selah sees one of the wives whipping herself with a eucalypt branch. Her skin is red, and clearly marked.

Selah's eyes widen. Maria follows her gaze.

SELAH

Do I have to do that-?

Maria takes pity on her.

MARIA

Not this time.

Maria sits back on the bench, leaning against the wall. Selah copies her, still chewing on her piece of meat.

In the steam, she rubs at her stomach - furtively. Grimacing.

EXT. PADDOCK PATH - DAY

The wives, Shepherd and Selah walk along a well-worn track.

Selah now has a hat, attached to a braided leather cord, as well as a small, blunt knife.

EXT. SHEEP PADDOCK - DAY

They stand at the bottom of a steep paddock, where sheep are grazing. The ground is a combination of hard tufty grass, and red dust - a far cry from the green fields depicted in their murals.

There are large rocks scattered through, and sheep are resting in the shade in place.

The Shepherd smiles at the assembled group.

SHEPHERD
And now - I shall leave you. But good luck, my faithful ones.
(to Selah)
You'll be fine.

He leaves, and after a moment, Selah rubs her stomach - the ache is still there. Maria notices.

MARIA
(alarmed)
Are you ill child?

SELAH
Just hungry, I think.

Maria looks sternly at her.

MARIA
You won't eat now until we're done.
This is a sacred duty.

Maria gestures to Hannah, who lies down awkwardly on the ground - as if she is an ewe herself.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I want you to watch closely Selah. You have attended a birth of one of your sisters before, yes?

Selah nods.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Good. It's like that - sometimes we need to help the lamb come out. When the ewe is ready, she goes into the birthing position, to help the lamb arrive. If she isn't, you need to turn her on her side.

Maria touches Hannah on the side, and something passes between them. A moment of sexual tension almost.

MARIA (CONT'D)

If you see the hooves - you may need to reach in, and help the lamb on its way.

Maria mimes doing this against Hannah's stomach - not quite touching her.

Maria looks at Selah.

MARIA (CONT'D)

It is the most natural thing Selah. But also the most sacred duty. The Shepherd is trusting you greatly to ask this of you. If it looks like anything is going wrong, come and get one of us. We will help you.

SELAH

I will.

Maria takes out a water bottle, and the wives all get in a line - Selah at the end.

Slowly, she pours water over each of their hands - ritually cleansing them. None of them drink the water.

As Maria passes each wife, she talks to each one, and sends them to a different section of the paddock. They each bow their heads and leave.

Finally, she reaches Selah. Maria pours water over her hands.

MARIA

Most of the flock is within eye sight, but there are always ewes that wander off. I want you to go right to the upper paddock. Look for any ewes that look like their time is near.

Selah nods - then starts to make her way up the hill.

EXT. SHEEP PADDOCK - UPPER SLOPES - DAY

Selah sits in the shade of a rock - shielding her eyes, and looking down at the paddock below.

Nearby, a few ewes are also lying in the shade to escape the heat of the sun.

In the distance - the small white dots of the wives, and the white dots of the rest of the flock, blur together in Selah's vision.
(NB: the white dots are visually similar to the opening shot.)

Selah sits - alert. Ready.

LATER

In the shade of the rock, Selah dozes - jerking herself awake sporadically.

Red dust swirls around her legs in the wind.

And then - almost human cries fill the air.

Selah jolts fully awake, and looks around, disorientated. The world seems to shift around her, dehydration making her confused. Unable to see where the sound is coming from.

As Selah gets up, she stumbles - dizzy and sweaty.

She looks around for the sound again, heading around the rock to find -

- an ewe in labour. Hidden from view from the rest of the paddock. The ewe is old, and broken-mouthed - her teeth look rotted.

Selah crouches down next to the distressed ewe, and begins to try to help - turning the ewe on its side, copying what she saw Maria do.

Incredibly quickly, the two hooves of the lamb are coming out.

Selah grips the hooves with one hand as Maria showed her, delving obscenely deep into the ewe with the other hand. She cradles the body of the lamb, trying to ease its passage.

The look on Selah's face is fear and wonder combined.

This is new life. New, sacred life in her hands, as she cradles the lamb deep inside.

The ewes cries increase in intensity, but Selah breathes through it - calm and steady.

She can do this.

And then, the lamb is free, sliding onto the dusty ground, encased in a birthing sac.

The ewe nuzzles at the lamb, and Selah steps back - wiping her bloody hands on her white robes. Staining them.

But when she moves forward to get a better look -

The lamb is deformed.

Wrong.

It's misshapen, and contorted - it is a husk of a lamb, its limbs twisted and its body thin.

And worst of all - its face looks almost human. Not like a lamb at all.

Selah stumbles backwards, horrified - tripping over her own feet in the dirt.

Her skirt rides up, exposing her inner thighs. Her inner thighs, which are stained with a red-brown blood.

Selah screams - covering her mouth with her hands (already bloody from the birth).

She is impure. She's gotten her first bleeding - while helping at the most sacred of duties.

This omen, this curse - it is her fault.

Selah leans over and vomits - yellow bile spatters on the ground.

Shaking, she wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, and sinks onto the ground in shock.

LATER

An indeterminate amount of time has passed. Selah looks blankly ahead. Still almost catatonic. Blood on her face, her hands. Flies on her skin.

Finally, she looks up - her eyes focusing on the ewe nuzzling the pathetic form of the lamb for a long moment.

A DULL ROAR suddenly starts to drown out all other sound, and the world becomes TINGED WITH WHITE - right at the edges.

Selah gets up - her hands still bloody. Rigid, moving almost mechanically.

She walks over to the ewe, and gets out her small knife. There is a moment of tension - but she just grabs a hunk of the ewe's pelt, and cuts off a chunk of it.

She pulls up her robe, and shoves the wool in there quickly - a makeshift pad.

Selah gently pushes the ewe's head away from nuzzling the lamb, where it lies bleating pathetically on the ground.

She picks the lamb up, cradling it carefully, walking away as the ewe's frantic bleats follow her.

Selah places the lamb on a small rock. Its small body is almost spread-eagled. She gets her knife from her belt and plunges the knife into the lamb again and again -

- the DULL ROAR increasing in intensity, WHITE spiking the edges of her vision -

CUT TO:

INT. SLEEPING HALL - NIGHT

Tamar lies awake, her eyes wide open and reflective in the darkness.

She looks over at the door, worried - and then stares into the darkness again.

Finally the door opens, and a small figure slips inside, moving carefully, like she's been injured.

It's Selah.

Selah climbs into bed next to Tamar - crying out softly in pain as the mattress hits her back. Tamar lets her settle.

TAMAR
What did he say?

There's a pause.

SELAH
He.. I got the leather braid. 20
strokes. But I deserve it. I-

She draws a deep breath.

SELAH (CONT'D)
I shouldn't have fallen asleep. If I
had, the wild dog wouldn't have got the
lamb.

She lied. She lied to Shepherd. And worse - she lied to Tamar.

Tamar reaches over in the darkness, and entwines their fingers.

TAMAR
It's not your fault.

Selah takes a shaky breath.

SELAH
 (whispering)
 I didn't believe hard enough in the
 flock. In the Shepherd. I was impure.

TAMAR
 What have you done that was impure
 sister? Nothing that I know of. I know
 of none more devout than you.

SELAH
 I... I guess so.

Selah didn't tell the truth about getting her period either - and she is truly trapped in her lies now.

Tamar embraces Selah in the darkness carefully, avoiding her back.

TAMAR
 Sleep now, sister-mine. In the morning
 light, I know you will feel
 differently. And we will go on the
 journey soon, and the Shepherd and the
 wives will think this long forgotten.

EXT. SHEEP STATION - DAY

Selah works outside with the other sisters, in the hot sun. A few days later, she still moves carefully, but her back is now almost healed from the beating.

They're packing food and supplies into backpacks, made from rough material. Getting ready for the journey.

Selah wipes her brow, sweating - just as the Shepherd comes up.

SHEPHERD
 Are you well, child-mine?

Selah looks at the ground - still ashamed.

SELAH
 I am well, Shepherd.

SHEPHERD
 Good, good.

He grips Selah by the chin, gently and forces her to look at him.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 I did not rejoice in your punishment. I
 would have you know that.

SELAH

Yes, Shepherd. I - I know.

One of the wives comes out from the weaving shed, and lets out a piercing whistle.

SHEPHERD

You should go.

He touches her back softly. Tenderly.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

I am glad you are healed. I did not like marking your skin.

The Shepherd lets Selah go, watching her as she walks away, joining the others.

INT. WEAVING SHED - DAY

The wives and sisters sit in a circle - weaving the yarn in time with each other.

As they work in the 'weaving circle', they sing in rounds of chanting. Their voices harmonize in a minor key - it is simple, but beautiful, in the way that only many voices can be.

The song's rhythm guides their hands - their hands guiding the song's rhythm in return.

WIVES (MANY)

When I was a young maid,
I would say to thee,
Will you not sit,
And worship with me.

SISTERS (MANY)

(in response)

When I was an old wife,
I would say to thee,
Why did you not sit,
And worship with me.

WIVES & SISTERS

(all together)

For if you had sat,
And worshipped with me,
We could be together,
Happy and free.

Selah works with them - her hands in perfect time with the others. Tamar next to her. Surrounded by her mothers and her sisters.

It is.. Peace.

A transcendent moment.

And then - Selah looks up. Shepherd is standing in the doorway, watching this deeply female ritual.

The sun is behind him, and his face is cast in shadow - his expression is hard to read.

EXT. SHEEP STATION - CENTRAL COURTYARD - MORNING

The central courtyard is organized chaos.

Sheep mill just outside the gate - the dogs duck and weave, working the sides of the flock effortlessly.

The wives bustle around as well - crude Hessian sacks with straps on their backs, loading up the older sisters with supplies as well.

They are almost on their way.

EXT. SHEEP STATION - FRONT GATE

The entire group stand at the front gate - the Shepherd at the front.

We see the full flock of sheep for the first time. There are about one hundred ewes, and about thirty lambs, of various ages.

And the ram - being held apart from the rest of the flock, being led by Maria. His horns have now been tipped with silver chains - he looks terrifying, and barbaric.

Right at the back, Sarah stands apart, finally free of her hut. Her face half hidden with a scarf, covering her cancer-riddled face.

Shepherd holds up his hands for attention, and they quickly hush.

SHEPHERD

Before we go on this path, know that
our way will be long, and arduous. But
with faith - we will find our way. To
rebirth.

They all bow their heads for a moment of silence.

And then, with a great clamor of hooves, and the barks of the dogs, the flock sets off. On their journey.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - DAY

They walk under the hot sun - the Shepherd at the front of the flock, striding along - his long hair and beard flowing majestically, his robes pristine. He looks like an old testament style prophet.

The sisters and wives chatter to each other as they follow behind him. The mood is upbeat - there are snatches of song and laughter.

Some of the stronger wives have the littlest sisters on their backs, or baby girls strapped to their fronts in slings. Behind them, the dogs wheel and dart, controlling the flock effortlessly.

Behind them, a large cloud of red dust swirls in their wake.

And at the very back - Sarah coughs into her arm, dust in her lungs. Shunned.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DUSK

The sisters and wives gather around a campfire - resting after a long day.

In the background, a few basic tents have been assembled - just mere squares of fabric stretched out over ropes strung from trees.

There is a water pump, and the flock is settled in a nearby corral. (NB: This is a droving track, which means there are regular campsites with watering holes along the way.)

Maria approaches the Shepherd - a newborn lamb in her arms. He takes it from her.

SHEPHERD

For our journey. We give thanks. With
this flesh - we shall be reborn.

Swiftly, he cuts the throat of the lamb. It bleats pathetically as it bleeds out on the ground (NB: it sounds a lot like the death sounds of the deformed lamb).

Selah looks sick, and glances away, looking into the fire instead. There is a FLICKER OF WHITE in the flames as she looks at it. Just like when she killed the deformed lamb.

As she stares into the fire, the background noise around her fades away, until you can only hear the CRACKLE of flames.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT - LATER

The group sits around the fire, eating lamb stew (from the lamb the Shepherd just killed.)

The skull has been picked clean, and put on a flat rock, to the side of the fire. It is surrounded by small bits of ephemera - feathers, rocks, bits of wool. A tiny travelling alter.

Selah eats slowly - looking across at the wives' faces across the flames.

In the firelight, they look sinister - almost demonic.

One of the wives picks a bone with meat on it from her bowl, and bites it - juice running down her chin.

CUT TO:

EXT. EDGE OF CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Selah throws up against a tree - her thin body heaving, as every last bit of the stew comes up. Throwing up the sacred offering.

There's a sound from the darkness, and she whirls around, guilty, caught -

But it's just Sarah. Ostracized from the campfire. Lurking at the edges.

She looks at Selah, but doesn't say anything.

Selah wipes her mouth, hiding the evidence of her illness, and then turns and runs back towards the campfire.

Sarah stares after her. Considering.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - DAY

Another day of travelling.

The wives look a bit more weary, as do the sisters. Only the Shepherd is the same - strong and sure at the front.

Maria and Hannah are at the front too, near the Shepherd, talking together, affection between them.

In the middle of the group, Adriel is soldiering on - every footstep a struggle, her pregnant belly straining at the front of her robe. Her robes wrap around her ankles - dragging at her heels. The hem is stained with red dust.

Selah walks next to Tamar - deep in thought, brow furrowed. Tamar looks over at her.

TAMAR
Sister-mine, what's wrong-

SHEPHERD (O.S.)
Selah.

Selah and Tamar both start with surprise - the Shepherd has come up beside them, abandoning his place at the front of the pack.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Will you walk with me?

EXT. DROVING TRACK - FRONT OF THE FLOCK

Selah and the Shepherd walk next to each other, their steps in sync.

SHEPHERD
I have been thinking, Selah. Thinking
about the nature of truth.

Selah tenses next to him. Has he found out about the lamb somehow?

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
We must be honest with ourselves Selah.
Life is too short to live fearfully.
Without grasping what we want.

SELAH
Shepherd - I don't understand.

He turns to look at her.

SHEPHERD
This journey will test us. But at the
end - I have faith that the flock will
be stronger for it.

SELAH
But how long will it be? The journey?
And where will we go...?

SHEPHERD
All in good time, my Selah. All in good
time.

EXT. ROCKY CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Another campsite - this one a bit more barren.

The wives and sisters are eating lamb stew again. Another tiny alter has been set-up next to the fire.

Selah doesn't eat her meal - instead, she looks up at the night sky above.

There is a FLASH OF WHITE in the atmosphere - a comet burning up? Or another hallucination?

She looks back at the fire.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Selah and some of her sisters are sleeping into one of the tents - huddled together for warmth.

There is a sound from outside - the CRACK of a branch snapping.

One of the youngest sisters, Lily, starts crying.

LILY
I'm scared. Is there a monster?

Tamar comforts her.

TAMAR
Shh. It will be ok. There's no monsters outside.

There's another sound from outside - Lily cries harder.

SELAH
Lily, have I told you - the glories that our Shepherd told me about today?

LILY
(hiccup crying)
I thought you weren't allowed to tell stories Selah. Adriel said only the Shepherd-

SELAH
Don't worry - Adriel wouldn't mind. I promise. I am only repeating what the Shepherd told me.

Across the tent, Evelyn looks unsure.

EVELYN
Selah, it is forbidden -

LILY
(hiccup crying)
What did he say?

SELAH
He told me of a place where we can be
with the flock. Where we will all be
safe.

Selah's voice is soft - but grows as she gains confidence.

SELAH (CONT'D)
He told me of a place where all our
doubts - all our fears - will go away.

Tamar rocks Lily in the darkness - who is watching Selah with
shining eyes. Selah's voice is captivating - charismatic.

Selah reaches across - and grasps the young sister's hand.

SELAH (CONT'D)
(whispering intensely)
We just have to have faith in him.

INT. TENT - MORNING

The sisters wake up slowly in their communal tent - birds singing
loudly outside in the dawn light.

Evelyn looks over at Selah - and screams.

The back of her white robe has a spot of blood. Selah has got her
period.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - BACK OF THE FLOCK - DAY

At the back of the flock, Sarah trudges along, alone.

In the distance, a figure walks towards her. Selah. Banished to
the back of the flock. A red sash wrapped around her waist.

Sarah nods. Without saying a word, she hands Selah a spare scarf,
and mimes wrapping it around the lower half of her face, to shield
her face from the dust.

That done - they start walking again. Two outcasts at the back of
the flock.

EXT. REST STOP - DAY

Selah and Sarah sit in the shade of a tree. The rest of the wives and sisters can be seen in the distance, sharing water and food.

Sarah has unwrapped her face. Her cancer is bare in the sunlight, and looks painful.

Selah passes Sarah some water, and Sarah takes a careful sip.

Sarah passes the water bottle back - looking at Selah's face carefully as she does so. Examining her.

SARAH

You look a lot like your mother.

SELAH

You knew my mother?

Sarah smiles, and the cancer stretches her face - rippled and horrible.

SARAH

Briefly.

SELAH

What was she like?

Sarah thinks for a moment.

SARAH

Beautiful, of course. Wives are always beautiful. But she was smart too, although she worked to hide it.

SELAH

Did you like her?

SARAH

I was jealous of her at first. I had been his favourite. Before her. But after she died, my womb still never quickened. And he grew tired of me.

They sit in silence for a moment.

SELAH

Did that happen after-?

Selah gestures to her own face - where the cancer grows on Sarah's face.

SARAH

It is death. It grows inside of you. It happened after I was no longer his favourite. I used to think it was punishment, for my pride.

(beat)

Now, I am not so sure.

In the distance, the wives and sisters start to gather their things. They are on the move again.

Sarah and Selah get up as well.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I don't think he's ever really forgotten her. His golden wife.

Sarah looks at Selah - at her bright white-blonde hair.

SARAH (CONT'D)

You are a lot like her.

SELAH

Thank you.

SARAH

It is a curse, child. His attention -

She gestures to the sun in the sky.

SARAH (CONT'D)

- it is like the sun. It is bright and glorious, but it will burn you. You will feel yourself being stifled by him, until it feels like you can't breathe when he's around.

Selah shakes her head.

SELAH

You can't - don't talk about the Shepherd that way.

But her protest lacks the heat of their earlier arguments. Something has shifted.

EXT. EDGE OF CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Selah and Sarah lie in their robes, under a ratty looking sheep fleece - next to a tiny fire, its flames guttering and dying.

Without even a tent to shelter them.

In the distance, there is the chatter of laughter and voices, as the wives and sisters eat around the fire.

Selah's teeth are chattering - and Sarah draws her into her embrace. For warmth. For comfort.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - BACK OF FLOCK - DAY

Sarah and Selah trudge along together.

Selah looks tougher now somehow - she's been at the back of the flock for a few days now, and red dust covers her once-pristine robes. She still has the red sash wrapped around her waist.

Up ahead, there is a whistle - and the dogs begin to bring the herd to a stop.

SELAH

Why are we stopping?

SARAH

I think there's a watering hole up ahead. It's been about the right distance.

SELAH

Water! I'm so thirsty.

Sarah looks at Selah.

SARAH

The others will take their water. Then the flock. Then us.

SELAH

How did you know there was going to be water here?

Sarah gestures to the track behind them. It is clearly well-worn, and has been here for years.

SARAH

This road is much older than you or I.
Or the Shepherd.

As she talks, the wind whistles around - whipping the red dust up along the road.

Selah focuses on Sarah intently - colours seem slightly sharper, sounds slightly louder.

SARAH (CONT'D)

There have always been secret roads.
Roads that only drovers or shepherds
know about.

SELAH

Shepherds...?
(There is more than one
Shepherd?)

SARAH

Did you think he was the only one
child? And this the only flock?

Selah digests this revelation, as Sarah continues talking.

SARAH (CONT'D)

They're called the Long Paddock. Secret
roads, that only sheep or cattle can
walk on. Made for large flocks. They
have grassy verges, and watering holes,
and campsites along the way, with
places for rest.

As she talks, Selah hears it - the sound of sheep bleating and cows mooing, and the sound of many hooves, along a long road.

SARAH (CONT'D)

But, most importantly - all the roads
of the Long Paddock are connected. Even
if they're not joined by land.

Sarah smiles at Selah. The sun outlines her face from behind, and its light obscures her cancer for a second - making her beautiful once more.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Those that walk on these roads are
always walking together - even when
they're walking alone.

There is a sound in the distance - and the dogs bark as the flock begins to move. Sarah gets up - the moment is broken.

Selah stares after her for a moment, and then looks down back the road that they have come - stretching far off across the landscape.

EXT. WATERING HOLE - DAY

Selah and Sarah fill up their water skins - the watering hole is muddy and filled with debris, from the flock.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - BACK OF FLOCK - NIGHT

Sarah and Selah settle in for the night.

There is a sound in the darkness - and Evelyn appears.

EVELYN

The Shepherd asks - are you still
unclean?

Selah hesitates- does she want to go back? Back to the Shepherd?

Sarah sees Selah's hesitation, and responds for her.

SARAH

The first bleeding is often erratic.
She is still unclean. A few more days.

Evelyn looks unsure, and looks at Selah. After a moment, Selah nods.

EVELYN

I will tell him.

Evelyn disappears back into the night.

Selah lets out a shaky breath. She just avoided returning to him.
What has she done?

Sarah observes her for a moment - then sets to work building up
their small fire.

SARAH

(to the fire)

Sometimes. Back at the station. In the
hut.

Sarah feeds a small stick into the flames.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I would wait until the moon was full in
the sky. And everything was quiet.

The stick suddenly catches - the bark burning quickly.

Selah stares at the flames - are they tinged with white?

SARAH (CONT'D)

I would take off my robe until I stood
naked. And I would go out, into the
bush or the paddocks. And just - stand.

SELAH

But - the Shepherd. If he had caught
you -

Sarah continues as if she hasn't heard Selah.

SARAH

And I would feel the stars gaze upon
me. And the moon's light upon my skin.
And I would feel free.

Sarah turns to face Selah, finally dragging her gaze away from the flames.

SARAH (CONT'D)

And even when I was in that hut, day in
and day out - I carried that freedom
inside of me.

Sarah puts her hand to Selah's chest - over her heart.

And they sit for that moment - the night sky painfully bright
above them.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - BACK OF FLOCK - DAY

A few days later.

Selah walks away from Sarah, up the side of the flock, back
towards the other wives and sisters - and the Shepherd. The red
sash is off her waist.

Sarah squints into the sun, shading her eyes with her hand -
watching Selah go.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - FRONT OF FLOCK - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Selah walks up to the Shepherd - her hair is bedraggled, her robes
covered in dust.

SHEPHERD

(smiling)

Welcome back my child.

SELAH

(meekly)

Thank you Shepherd.

SHEPHERD

We missed having you in the flock. Your
grace always brings me joy.

With that, he reaches out, and cups her cheek with her hand.

Selah smiles at him - but for once, instead of adoration, it looks a bit forced.

He looks at her a moment longer, then lets out a piercing whistle. His sheepdogs bound over.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Away to me!

The dogs bound away.

He turns away from Selah, striding forward, as the flock starts to move again.

Selah looks after him, her eyes wide - conflicted.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - FRONT OF FLOCK - DAY - LATER

Selah walks next to Tamar and Evelyn, in among the other sisters and wives. They talk quietly.

TAMAR
Did it hurt?

SELAH
Like an ache from bad food? It was not so bad.

EVELYN
(primly)
It is a sign of sin.

Tamar and Selah both look at her. Evelyn looks a bit embarrassed.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
From Eve's original sin. The Shepherd says so.

SELAH
It must be, if the Shepherd says so.

Her tone is ambiguous - outwardly respectful, but with just a hint of sarcasm.

TAMAR
You're the first sister to get her monthly time. I wonder what it means.

Selah shrugs.

SELAH
I am almost the oldest.

TAMAR
(teasing)
But not the wisest!

Selah tickles Tamar's side as retaliation, and Tamar laughs. Evelyn looks on jealously.

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - DAY

The group has stopped in the sparse shade of some stunted trees.

Selah, Tamar and Evelyn are sharing a waterskin - Evelyn tips her head back, drinking the last few drops.

Nearby, Selah sees Adriel - sitting on a rock, looking exhausted. She looks swollen and tired, and her lips are dry.

Selah looks at the waterskin - regretful, and then gets up and goes to Adriel.

SELAH
Do you need some water?

Adriel smiles tightly, looking exhausted.

ADRIEL
That would be lovely.

Her features are taut with pain - she's clearly struggling, especially in the heat.

From behind them, Evelyn pipes up.

EVELYN
I'll go and ask the Shepherd for some.

Adriel's eyes widen, but it's too late - Evelyn has already run off.

Tamar crouches down in front of her - gesturing for her to lift her left foot.

After a moment Adriel complies, and Tamar begins to massage it. Selah crouches down as well, and does the same to the other foot.

ADRIEL
Oh my darlings. That feels heavenly.

But just as she is beginning to relax - she grimaces in pain, grabbing at her stomach.

SELAH
Is it time?

Adriel looks at her - and we finally see how truly, deeply afraid she is.

ADRIEL
(whispering)
It's too soon. It can't be time.

She gestures around at the desolate landscape; the broken trees, the dust.

ADRIEL (CONT'D)
I can't do this here. I wish we were home. I wish we'd never left.

Evelyn returns - with the Shepherd and Maria, who are each holding a water skin. Maria assesses the situation at once.

MARIA
How far apart are they?

Adriel grimaces -

ADRIEL
A few minutes?

Maria stands - trying to hide her fear from Adriel. She turns to the Shepherd.

MARIA
My Shepherd, the babe is coming soon.
Are we near a resting place? With water?

The Shepherd pulls out a leather wallet, and opens it - revealing the FOLDED-UP MAP inside. It is covered with writing and markings - it has been used often. Selah notes the map, and the reverence which the Shepherd gives it.

He consults it carefully - looking up at the sun to judge direction.

SHEPHERD
Maybe an hours walk away?

Maria helps Adriel to her feet - grimly determined. Adriel grips Maria's hand tightly - sweat has started to drip down Adriel's face.

MARIA
(gently)
You can do this.

The Shepherd strides away, whistling for his dogs. The flock starts to move again.

Maria stares after him - disbelieving.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - FRONT OF FLOCK - DAY

Adriel struggles along, Maria supporting her on one side, and Hannah on the other.

Adriel stops and doubles over in pain - trying to breathe through it.

MARIA

Just a bit further. I promise, just a bit further.

EXT. CAMPSITE - GUM TREE - DAY

Selah and the other sisters sit in the shade of a giant gum tree. Tamar is holding Lily.

There's a scream from nearby, echoing across the landscape - Adriel is in labour, and in pain.

LILY

(plaintively)

How long has it been now?

EVELYN

Too long. It's been hours.

Lily starts to cry in Tamar's arms. Tamar glares at Evelyn, and then cuddles the little girl to her protectively.

TAMAR

These things can take time my love.
Sometimes a sister doesn't want to come into the world to say hello.

LILY

(sniffling)

Can't I see her?

Tamar shakes her head.

TAMAR

We must wait here. Until it's over.

Another scream - guttural and in pain. Lily begins crying again.

SELAH

Once, long ago - there was a woman.

Lily stops crying, and looks at Selah - is this story allowed?

SELAH (CONT'D)
 And sometimes, in the dead of night,
 she would leave her hut. To walk
 amongst the trees -

But before Selah can continue - there is the WAILING of a newborn.

Lily squirms out of Tamar's arms - and sets off running, towards the wailing. Tamar looks worried, but lets her go.

EVELYN
 (sighing in relief)
 I didn't think the birth would ever
 end.

And then, from a distance - the PIERCING SCREAM of a little girl.

EXT. PYRE - DUSK

A half-built pyre - almost three metres high.

Adriel's body lies on top of it, her stomach still protruding, the bottom of her robe stained with blood.

She has been placed on top of a colourful woven blanket. Its red and orange colours contrast sharply with the brown of the wood.

Lily lies in the crook of her arm, nestled in, hiding her face in her mother's body - she has clearly been there for some time.

Around her, wives and sisters gather sticks and logs in silence. Carefully building the pyre up and up.

Sheep's wool has been tucked amongst the wood - some has been braided roughly, while other bits are just clumps.

The Shepherd stands a distance away, his hand on his staff, his dogs at his feet.

Beyond him even further - Sarah stands and watches.

Cradling a BABY - Adriel's baby.

Finally, Maria goes over to the Shepherd. She looks angry, although she tries to hide it.

MARIA
 She's ready.

SHEPHERD
 Good, good.

He clasps Maria's shoulder.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Birth, death. They are always two sides of the same coin, are they not? You did all you could.

MARIA

If I had had hot water, a birthing bed, maybe we could have -

The Shepherd shrugs.

SHEPHERD

What is good for the flock, will always ultimately, be what passes. You must have faith, my wife.

Maria looks unconvinced, but says nothing.

The Shepherd looks up the pyre - at the sad, still form of Adriel.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

And after all that - such a pity about the baby.

He strides over and goes to the side of the pyre, where Lily still clings to her mother.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Time to get down, my child.

MARIA

Come on Lily. Come down now.

Lily shakes her head mutely, tears still streaming down her face as she clings to her mother - unable to let go.

SHEPHERD

Child, I said - get down.

He pulls at her arm, and Lily screams - clawing at his hand with her tiny nails.

He rears back, instantly furious - his hand bleeding from a tiny cut. His face twists - cruel and cold.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

You'll get down soon enough.

He walks off, and Maria darts forward to the base of the pyre.

MARIA

(frantically)

You need to get down. Please get down.
Please, please-

SELAH (O.S.)

Lily. Look at me.

The little girl looks over - where Selah stands now at the base of the pyre.

SELAH (CONT'D)

We need you down here. Tamar is so upset. And she says only you can comfort her?

Lily wipes at her eyes, looking over at Tamar - who does look upset.

Then she carefully gets down, climbing down the side of the pyre, using the layers of wood as steps. She goes to Tamar, who embraces her protectively against her side.

Evelyn grabs the sleeve of her robe, and wipes at a smudge on Lily's face - protective too.

The Shepherd returns - a glowing branch from the fire in his hand. Blood runs down his arm in a tiny stream.

He sees Lily standing by Tamar's side, and looks furious - as if he wants to put her back up on top of the pyre.

But the wives and sisters are all standing together.

Almost in a wall against him.

Instead, he stands in front of the pyre. The branch in his hand glowing brightly.

SHEPHERD

The gift of motherhood is the most precious of all. For your sacrifice - we give thanks.

He lights the pyre. The wool doesn't burn quickly, and the air is quickly filled with smoke.

The Shepherd observes for a moment - until the smoke reaches him. It surrounds him almost like it has a mind of its own, moving against the wind currents. He starts to cough and wave at it.

He backs away from the pyre, still coughing and finally leaves - calling his dogs to him with a whistle.

Not even waiting for the flames to reach Adriel's body.

The wives and sisters stay - their eyes streaming from the smoke, and tears.

And then, in the hazy smoke filled air, in the dying light of sunset - Maria starts to sing.

MARIA
When I was a young maid,
I would say to thee,

The other wives join in.

WIVES (MANY)
Will you not sit,
And worship with me.

SISTERS (MANY)
(in response)
When I was an old wife,
I would say to thee,
Why did you not sit,
And worship with me.

Their voices are hoarse in the smoke - but the tune is haunting and melodic over the crackle of the flames.

In the smoke, Hannah comes next to Maria, and embraces her. In comfort - and something more.

Lily's voice is pure and high - and she stares at her mother's face as she sings. Desperate for a last glance.

WIVES & SISTERS
(all together)
For if you had sat,
And worshipped with me,
We could be together,
Happy and free.

There is a WHOOSH as the rug catches on fire - and Adriel's body is consumed by flames.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The wives and sisters sit in silence, eating tiny serves of lamb stew from their bowls. The Shepherd sits in the middle, next to the fire - glowering at them all.

Selah eats hers - looking unwell.

EXT. PYRE - NIGHT

Selah throws up the lamb stew, leaning against a tree - her legs shaking as her stomach heaves. The pyre still smoulders nearby.

The wind whips up suddenly, and ash from the pyre dances around her, like dark snowflakes. Ash speckles across her face, catching where her eyes teared from throwing up.

Painting her face into something dark, and new.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Selah returns to the campfire. But just before she steps back into the firelight, she walks past the tree where the ram is tied up - separate to the rest of the flock.

Selah looks at the ram, ash still smearing her face. It returns her gaze steadily.

Selah takes a step towards the ram, sudden fury in her expression, angry at the ram, angry at the Shepherd, angry about Adriel -

- and it steps back. Eyes rolling in fear.

Selah stops, her eyes wide in her face.

What does it mean? Her god retreating from her?

EXT. DROVING TRACK - FRONT OF FLOCK - DAY

The group marches along - the sky vast above them. Blue and punishing in its cloudlessness.

There is the bleat of the sheep, and the barking of the dogs - they are on the journey again. Leaving Adriel behind, under the gum tree.

Selah walks next to Tamar, who has Lily on her back.

But then - some instinct makes Selah stop and turn.

Behind them, hazy in the dust, Sarah stands in the middle of the road. Adriel's baby in her arms. Watching them leave.

Selah looks confused, and pushes her way back through the flock.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Selah makes her way through the last of the flock, and stands in front of Sarah, panting.

SELAH

What are you doing? Why aren't you
coming with us?

Sarah smiles at her - a beautiful, motherly smile. She looks radiant, better than we have seen her before.

SARAH

He was going to leave him.

SELAH

Who?

SARAH

The Shepherd. He was going to leave the boy here. Said he should be with his mother's ashes.

SELAH

(wondering)

The baby... it's a boy? I didn't know babies could be boys.

Sarah laughs - although there is little humour in it.

SARAH

Only one ram in a flock, child. Only one ram in a flock.

She coos at the baby protectively, then looks up at Selah again.

SARAH (CONT'D)

You go on. If you hurry, you'll be able to catch up.

SELAH

But.. You'll starve. You're all alone out here.

Sarah gestures to her face - where the cancer is eating away at her skin.

SARAH

I didn't have much of a chance to begin with. And this way, maybe the babe will live. Who knows. I'm just going to walk, find another one of the Long Paddock roads. See where that leads me.

She smiles at Selah - more at peace with her actions and her choices than ever before.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Rather be free out here. Than trapped with him there.

She pulls Selah to her in a fierce hug - the baby wailing in between them, hungry for milk that isn't coming.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(whispering fiercely)
Just remember child. Strength isn't in
bone or sinew. It's in the blood.

And then, she pushes Selah away.

Selah runs back towards the flock - through the dust, the figure
of the wife getting smaller and smaller behind her.

EXT. DROVING TRACK - DAY

The flock has been stopped in the middle of the road.

The Shepherd has walked a distance away, and has pulled out his
map - looking up at the sun, trying to orient himself.

The wives and sisters sit baking in the hot sun - waiting for him.

They all look thinner and wearier - several days have passed since
they left Sarah behind.

Finally, he comes back to the group.

SHEPHERD
Our way shall become clear. We must
have faith.

WIFE
Is it very far Shepherd?

He smiles down at her, and at the rest of the group - although
even he looks tired from the heat.

SHEPHERD
I never said the journey would be easy,
my loyal flock.

WIFE #2
Are we lost?

The change is immediate - the wife instantly realises her mistake,
and shrinks back into the crowd, trying to escape.

The Shepherd grabs her by her arm, and hauls her upright -
dragging her like a doll.

SHEPHERD
Do you doubt our path?! Do you doubt
what I say?

He's right in her face - yelling almost against her skin.

Everyone else's eyes are downcast - even Selah's. Like children in a classroom, glad that the teacher is picking on someone else today.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Is it that you think yourself superior
to me? Too good for my flock?

WIFE #2
No! Please, my Shepherd, I didn't mean-

He lets her arm go - flinging her onto the ground in front of him.

SHEPHERD
Strip.

WIFE #2
...what?

SHEPHERD
Strip. Take off your robe.

Slowly - hesitantly - the wife starts to undress.

On the ground, Selah reaches for Tamar's hand, and grips tightly. And then, to the other side of her, Evelyn reaches for the other. Selah looks at her in shock, but grips Evelyn's hand too.

Finally, the wife is standing in front of him, naked and trembling. She's given birth - she has stretch marks striping across her stomach, and she hunches in on herself. Trying to hide.

The Shepherd circles her like a wolf - his eyes raking up and down her body.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
It is strange. For one who thinks
herself so superior - you don't look
like anything special.

His words are cold - cruel.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Your thighs are lumpy. Your breasts
sag. You think you have worth? You
don't. You disgust me.

She huddles in on herself - making herself as small as possible in the face of his wrath.

He spits at the ground, in front of her feet - then gestures for her to pick up her robe. She puts it back on quickly.

He turns to the rest of the group - his charming mask firmly back in place. As if the terrifying psychopath was never there.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
As I was saying. Above all else -
we must not lose our faith.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The wives and sisters straggle across the landscape, walking slowly up a dusty incline - the flock struggling along beside them.

At the front, the Shepherd leads on, more than a hundred metres out in front.

He is Moses, parting the red sea of dust and sand - armed only with a staff and a fury at the world.

Any semblance of a road or path is long gone. All around them, there is only flat, arid land, baked into a hard clay. The ground shimmering in the heat.

Tamar carries Lily on her back - still somehow impossibly strong, seemingly inexhaustible. Moving forward solely on the force of her inner strength.

Selah is near the back, sweat dripping from her brow. Close to exhaustion; hungry, dehydrated.

Something catches Selah's eye, and she pauses for a moment - swaying as she looks across the landscape.

And in the distance - a small white speck on the ground.

She squints across the desert, trying to make it out.

Is it... could it be a lamb? A small, broken lamb?

Selah looks down at her hands - and in the light, it almost seems as if they are covered in red.

Red dust? Or red blood?

And there's a GLINT of white light in the sun, and a ROARING in Selah's ears. Is she having a vision?

And then - a cry goes up. Selah looks away - and when she looks back, the 'lamb' is gone.

The Shepherd has reached the top of the incline, and he stands confidently at the top. His arms reaching towards the sky in victory.

The wives and sisters start to run towards him. Their robes thick around their ankles, dust kicking up around them. There is hope in their footsteps now, as they run faster and faster-

The dogs are frenzied, barking and snapping at the sheep as they start to stampede..

And then, they reach the peak. Some fall to their knees. Others cry. What is it?

It is disaster or salvation?

Selah is the last to arrive, having fallen slightly behind, and as she crests the hill we see-

EXT. RIDGE OVERLOOKING LAKE EYRE - LATE AFTERNOON

- a paradise on earth.

A lush oasis of water and life. Birds wheel up above, diving and darting into the lake, capturing fat fish in their beaks.

It is a giant crater - the hill they have been climbing forms one of its sides. Small river tributaries flow into it from every direction, with the giant lake at its centre.

NB: It is the same shot as in the opening scene, but a direct contrast - the lake is alive and vibrant.)

Selah looks stunned - but then starts to smile. Hope in her eyes again.

They made it. They actually made it.

SHEPHERD
My flock! My dear faithful flock!

He points to the lake.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
As a reward for our faith. For your trust in me. I give you - an oasis. Paradise on earth.

The wives and sisters cheer tiredly again.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Only at the most holy times, does this lake appear. For years, it is dry, and barren, until one day, it fills with water and life. And it is in these sacred waters, that we shall be reborn.

Triumphant, the Shepherd whistles the dogs to him, and starts to gather the flock - before starting to walk down to a small campsite right at the edge of the lake.

The group gathers itself and follows him.

Only Selah is left standing, on the ridge. Legs planted firmly apart. Considering the lake. Her pose mirroring the Shepherd's before.

And in the late afternoon light - it is almost hard to tell them apart.

EXT. LAKE EYRE CAMPSITE - LATE AFTERNOON

They make camp - for a final time. The mood is upbeat again - wives sing snatches of songs, some of the sisters laugh and play.

Selah supervises some of the sisters - directing them as they put up their tent.

SELAH

No, not that branch. Attach it to the other one! The other one!

EVELYN

Well, if you're so sure - why don't you do it then?

Selah smiles at her - mischief in her eyes.

SELAH

Great leaders don't do. They lead.

Evelyn snorts, and looks to Tamar for support, who is sitting on the ground playing with the little ones.

The journey has changed them both - there is a camaraderie between them now.

EVELYN

That's sheep shit Selah.

Tamar laughs, and covers Lily's ears - but then nods her agreement over her head.

SELAH

If I wasn't telling you what to do, how would you know what the right thing to do is?

TAMAR
 (gently)
 I'm sure we'd muddle along Selah.

Evelyn's eyes widen, as she sees something over Selah's shoulder.

Selah turns - to find the Shepherd standing behind her. How much of the conversation has he heard?

He smiles at her - benevolent, but with a hint of something in his smile. Threat? Malice?

He walks to Selah, his steps measured - and the group falls utterly silent. The air is suddenly thick with tension.

He leans down, and cups the back of her head with his hand, and kisses Selah firmly on the forehead. The kiss lasts just a fraction too long.

SHEPHERD
 My Selah. Such a good example to your sisters. Guiding them for me.

It is a rebuke, hidden as praise.

Selah looks up at him, standing tall above her. For once she doesn't smile - doesn't look away. It is a battle of wills - and it is the Shepherd who looks away.

He releases her, and steps away.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
 Make sure that the tent is up before the sun goes down. We will have our last supper tonight - under the stars of the lake.

SISTERS
 (except Selah)
 Yes Shepherd.

The Shepherd walks away, and Selah stares after him. Their dynamic has changed.

EXT. LAKE EYRE - LAKE'S EDGE - DUSK

Selah sits by the edge of the lake, red mud staining the hem of her robe, where it lies in the water. She looks out across the lake, and the birds circling above.

There is a soft cough - and then Tamar sits down beside her.

Their pose is the same as how they were at the billabong - except this time, they are looking out at the vast majesty of one of the world's great wonders.

They sit in silence for a moment.

TAMAR
Are you glad Selah?

SELAH
Glad for what, my sister-heart?

TAMAR
Glad that we left. Glad we came here.
Is it not beautiful?

Selah looks across the lake. It is beautiful. Utterly alien, and so painfully, painfully beautiful.

SELAH
I am glad. Although-

TAMAR
Although?

SELAH
I thought it would feel.. Different. I
thought I would feel different.

Tamar looks at her - questioning. Selah shrugs.

SELAH (CONT'D)
I thought I would feel pure. Or
changed, from the journey. But I still
feel the same.

She looks at her hands, and grips them together into fists.
Remembering the lamb.

Tamar looks at Selah - her gaze troubled.

TAMAR
I think - I think a journey can only be
what you let it be, my Selah.

Selah looks at her.

TAMAR (CONT'D)
You can let it be anger, and pain.

She grips Selah's hand, where it sits in the mud - and brings it to Selah's own heart. Staining her robe with red mud at her heart.

TAMAR (CONT'D)
Or you can let it be peace. And joy.
You can let yourself go free.

They sit together. Watching the sun set slowly across the lake.

EXT. LAKE EYRE CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The sisters and wives sit around the fire. One last dinner.

The Shepherd doles out the stew into their bowls - but only the sisters are fed. Not the wives.

Tamar notices, and goes to give her bowl to Hannah.

HANNAH
(gently)
Thank you, Tamar. But we are
fasting. To make sure we are pure
enough for tomorrow.

Next to her, Maria looks angry but resigned.

Selah observes across the campfire. She looks to the Shepherd - who is eating stew heartily, juice dripping from his beard.

Selah begins to eat as well - hesitantly at first, but then suddenly, she is ravenous. Not ill at all.

She eats her entire bowl, scraping the sides, and sits back - fully sated for the first time since the journey began.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

The sisters are getting comfortable, getting ready to go to sleep. The little ones already half asleep, and Tamar lies curled with Lily.

Selah and Evelyn lie cradling one another - their animosity a distant memory.

From outside - a deep voice. The Shepherd.

SHEPHERD (O.S.)
Selah, Selah. Come outside.

Selah rises in the darkness. Evelyn grabs her wordlessly, telling her not to go-

But she slips away, out through the front of the tent, into the waiting dark.

EXT. TENT - NIGHT

The Shepherd stands outside the tent, outlined under a double moon - the moon in the sky, and the moon on the lake.

The moonlight is bright - and his face is made up of shadows and hollows.

He walks a little distance from the tent, and sits down - patting the ground beside him.

SHEPHERD
Lie down next to me, Selah.

Selah hesitates. Then, in just her under robe, her arms bare, she picks her way carefully across the ground towards him. She lies down next to him on the ground.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Unbraid your hair.

Slowly, hesitantly, Selah sits up and unbraids her hair - until it is loose, and silver down her back in the moonlight.

They lie next to each other for a while - each looking up at the stars.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Your mother was so beautiful.

Selah draws a breath - his words catching her unawares in the dark.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
All mothers are beautiful, of course.
When they are with child, or with a
daughter on their hip, all mothers are
beautiful. The beauty of a thing being
what it is meant to be.

He sighs - reminiscing.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
But even so - your mother was...

The Shepherd leans over, and touches Selah's hair - the blonde has been turned almost silver in the moonlight. He holds it between his fingers. Marvelling at it.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
I remember when I saw her, looking so
lost. Travelling on a lonely road, her
thumb outstretched.
(MORE)

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

And I knew she would be a wife, one of my wives, and I saw what she would look like in robes, and how she would look like with her belly full, and how she would stand with a daughter on her hip.

And then, his hand trails gently over Selah's face - lightly. The most delicate touch. Selah has almost stopped breathing.

The hand trails lower - over her bare collarbone.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

But I think, when I first saw her on the side of the road - that was when she was most beautiful. When she held the promise of being a mother. The promise that all daughters hold.

His fingers trail their way down Selah's bare arms, until they reach her hands.

He entwines their fingers - pressing her hand into the dust, the promise of dominance, of violence - before letting go.

And then, as if nothing has happened, the Shepherd gets up, brushing off his robe.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Good night my sweet Selah. I always enjoy my talks with you.

He leaves her, lying on the cold ground.

After a moment, Selah begins to shake with a delayed reaction. A tear trails out from the corner of her eye.

Lying on the ground - she grips the ground where he pressed her hand into the dirt, and makes a fist.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Selah re-enters the tent. All the sisters are wide awake, waiting for her.

EVELYN

What did he want? Why did he call you out in the night?

TAMAR

(reaching for Selah)
Selah, what happened..?

Selah ignores them, pushing Tamar's comforting hands away, and sits on the ground, cross-legged.

She takes a deep breath - then begins to speak.

SELAH

There once was a woman. And she was a wild woman. Made of moonlight, and teeth.

You could hear a pin drop. The tent is silent. Captivated.

Her voice has the cadence of a sermon, or chant - but older. Almost tribal. It has the feel of an ancient story, long forgotten - and only remembered now.

SELAH (CONT'D)

And her face was half dark and half light - for she was a moon woman, and lived in both worlds.

Tamar touches the side of her face - where her birthmark is. Wondering.

SELAH (CONT'D)

And sometimes, she would roam in the bush. Looking for something. Hunting.

EVELYN

(whispering)

Selah, you can't... this isn't one of Shepherd's stories.

But Selah ignores her. Continues on.

SELAH

And the wind and the dust would speak to her. Talk to her and tell her tales. Tell her where to go. Tell her to be free.

At that exact moment - a gust of wind blows through the tent, bringing dust and leaves from outside.

Some of the girls scream, others shield their eyes.

Only Selah remains unmoving.

They uncover their faces, and there is a new look in their eyes as they look at her.

Faith. And fear.

EXT. LAKE EYRE - LAKE'S EDGE - MORNING

The sisters and wives are gathered at the edge of the lake. The sisters' hair is intricately braided - pulled back from their youthful faces.

The wives' hair is long and unbound. Their unbound hair is shocking, after seeing it braided for so long - it is an intimacy to see the wives this way. They look tired - exhausted and dehydrated from fasting.

The Shepherd stands at the edge of the lake - his arms outstretched theatrically towards the rising sun. His dogs at his feet.

SHEPHERD

A time of rebirth. A time to wash away our sins. A time to reclaim our purity, from this impure, corrupting world.

With that - the Shepherd starts to walk into the lake, using his staff to steady himself, and the wives and sisters follow.

The red, dried mud crunches beneath their feet, until it becomes mud, then shallow water, as they get deeper into the lake.

The dogs stay on the shore. Vigilant.

EXT. LAKE EYRE - SHALLOWS - CONTINUOUS

The sisters are in a line, one by one - with the littlest being carried at the end. The wives stand behind them.

Evelyn is first - the Shepherd gently lowers her backwards, until she is completely submerged - then raises her again.

Selah is next. The Shepherd approaches her, and they lock eyes. Almost a challenge between them.

He lifts a single strand of her blonde hair - looking at it in the sunlight.

Selah tenses, but before she can do anything, she is falling, flailing through the water. His strong hands pushing her down.

She struggles - there is a ROARING in her ears, and she sees the sun FLASH WHITE through the water above her -

And then she is up. Gasping.

Freshly baptized.

The Shepherd has already moved on.

Then he comes to Tamar - looking at her with distaste. But, he folds her back into the water, covering her completely in the lake's waters, before bringing her back up.

Selah watches closely, tense as the Shepherd touches Tamar.

As Tamar comes back up through the water, for a moment - in slow motion - the water is unbroken over her face. Like a second skin.

And then Tamar is up, gasping. The Shepherd has moved on down the line.

Tamar turns to Selah, her eyes bright and shining. Her joy almost infectious.

TAMAR
Did you feel it?

SELAH
What?

Tamar smiles at her - radiant.

TAMAR
I feel different.

SELAH
Like the Shepherd said?

Tamar nods. She leans in to whisper - for Selah's ears only.

TAMAR
(whispering)
I think this is a sacred space. Even before he bought us here. Look at this place - how could this beauty not be sacred?

Selah looks at the calm waters of the lake around them. The birds wheeling overhead.

SELAH
(whispering)
But don't you feel it? We don't belong here. This isn't our sacred place.

Tamar looks confused, and starts to ask why -

There is a baby's wail from the end of the line - the youngest sister has been baptized.

The Shepherd wades back to the middle - addressing all the sisters, and the wives standing behind them.

SHEPHERD

My children. My dear sweet sisters. You have done well - you are now all cleansed. As I submerged you - I saved you.

He spreads his arms wide - charismatic. Handsome. He points back towards the lake's edge.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Sisters - return to the shore. Wait for us there. Wives, we must go out further. Our sin is far too deep for these shallow waters.

The sisters slowly turn, and start to make their way back to the shore. Only Selah lingers. Walking slower than the others. A premonition.

When Selah is almost at the shore, she turns back. The wives and the Shepherd have stopped, and the Shepherd appears to be preaching to them.

The wind whips across the surface of the lake, bringing snatches of the Shepherd's words to her.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

(indistinct)

Must sacrifice.... only way to be safe... The sisters.

Selah shields her eyes from the glare of the lake. Trying to get a closer look. The wives appear to be arguing, and one of them almost turns to go back to shore -

But then, the Shepherd turns, and begins to wade out into the vast lake.

And one by one, the wives follow him.

Maria and Hannah are two of the last to follow. Maria is grasping Hannah's hand. Holding it tightly, as they wade deeper into the lake.

None of them look back.

Their white robes growing more and more indistinct, until they are just tiny white dots in the distance.

Out into the deep water.

EXT. LAKE EYRE - SHALLOWS

The sisters sit at the banks of the lake. Waiting.

The dogs sit a little way off, alert for their master to return.

Selah sits in the water, alone. The tiny ripples of the lake lapping at her wet robes, over her crossed legs.

Selah looks at her hands, covered in red dust and mud, hovering over the water.

The WHITE LIGHT glints off the surface, the colours around Selah starting to white out. The DULL ROAR in Selah's ears begins softly. She is hallucinating again.

But then, Tamar joins her - sitting in the water as well.

SELAH

I was wrong before.

Tamar looks at her.

SELAH (CONT'D)

Maybe I do feel different now. I'm not sure how. But -

Selah puts her hands in the water - the red dust and mud washing away.

SELAH (CONT'D)

I have been carrying this heaviness, Tamar. Like a stone, it sits in my stomach, eating at me.

(beat)

This doubt. About what to do. About - what I've done.

Tamar looks at her - understanding that Selah is finally opening up.

Under the water, Selah's hands now look pale and clean. Pure again.

SELAH (CONT'D)

But maybe - but maybe now they do feel a bit lighter. And I have hope. That I won't always feel this dark heaviness inside me.

Tamar looks at Selah - her expression filled with love, and a bit of sadness.

TAMAR
 (gently rebuking)
 Sister-mine - did you not think?

Tamar reaches over - and kisses Selah on the forehead.

It is the opposite of the Shepherd's display of dominance before - it is so light, and so filled with love.

TAMAR (CONT'D)
 Any burden will crush you, if you do
 not let your sisters help you carry it.
 And any weight you hold, can be shared,
 until it feels like nothing at all.

The DULL ROAR in the background stops - cutting out completely. The colours stop whiting out.

Selah is at peace. Here with her sister.

It is just the sound of the lake, peacefully lapping at both of their legs. The distant sounds of birds above them.

And in the distance - across the water, there is a GLINT of white light - fading, fading.

EXT. LAKE EYRE - LAKE'S EDGE - DAY - LATER

Selah, Evelyn and Tamar are playing a game of chasey with the other girls - shrieking and laughing.

The dogs start BARKING, and the girls all look to the lake, shielding their eyes - looking for the Shepherd and the wives.

But it is just the Shepherd. Slowly making his way back to shore.

Alone.

He reaches them, and leans on his staff - exhausted.

He slicks his hair back from his face - it is long, and tangled from the lake's water. In his bedraggled state, the Shepherd looks less powerful - smaller.

Selah steps forward - pointing out to the vast lake.

SELAH
 (angrily)
 Where are the wives?

He straightens - the old Shepherd once more. Imperious, and in control.

SHEPHERD

I have good news, my dear faithful ones. There has been a miracle.

His voice is smooth, and deep - and he is as calm as if he is standing at a pulpit.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

The sacred lake of rebirth has given the wives the gift of eternal life. They have ascended.

EVELYN

Ascended?

TAMAR

But where..?

SHEPHERD

It is only their earthly shells that have been left behind.

And then suddenly - the spell is broken.

There are screams, as they realise. Their mothers are gone.

Some of the sisters run towards the lake, Evelyn among them, and Selah and Tamar hold them back, trying to keep them from the water's edge.

But then, the dogs are there, black-and-white furies.

Snapping and herding, following the Shepherd's shouted commands, until the sisters are all standing in a little huddle.

The Shepherd stands in front of the group - and then for the first time, kneels.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

(to the group of sisters)

As we travelled, we sacrificed the lambs. They were your death. But this - this is your rebirth.

He places his hands on his thighs, palm up - open, beseeching. Almost begging. His eyes look straight into Selah's.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

It is the only way. For the sisters to become the wives.

And suddenly - it is all so clear. It has always been clear.

It was always going to end this way.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
Selah. My sweet Selah. Come.

As if in a daze, Selah steps forward. Her hair is still in its careful braid for the baptism - from a lifetime ago.

She steps up to the kneeling Shepherd, and he carefully turns her, gently unbraiding her hair, until it hangs long and loose around her. Like it did that night.

He turns her back around, and smiles at the halo of blonde hair around her face.

Selah looks at him, and says something indistinct.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)
What was that, my Selah?

He leans in, and she presses her lips right up against his ear.

SELAH
(whispering)
You are not our Shepherd.

He rears back - shocked.

SELAH (CONT'D)
You are not our Shepherd.
(to the sisters)
Your path is false. Your words are
lies. You cannot be our Shepherd, for
you do not know the way.

She is using his language against him - his own rhetoric.

His face twists, and the ugly darkness that is always just underneath the surface comes rushing up.

He SLAPS her - the sound is shocking. His huge form towering over hers.

Selah is unbroken. Unmoving.

He slaps her again. But Selah remains standing - a tree rooted deep, in the face of a summer storm. Regal.

The Shepherd turns, and looks at the sisters.

They huddle together, still afraid of him and his dogs - but they all look at Selah like they used to look at him. As if she could conquer anything.

Tamar's beautiful, marked face looks out at Selah - pride and love in her face.

The Shepherd is weaker than her.

He SCREAMS - a burst of frustration. Of rage. A child, deprived of his toys.

Then, before Selah can move, he strides into the huddle, and grabs Tamar by the arm, dragging her free, as Evelyn tries to hold onto her.

He strides towards the lake, walking to the water with Tamar in his arms, and it is chaos, and Selah is screaming and clawing at him -

- he flings Tamar into the shallow, red mud on the lake's edge.

And with a shouted word from him, the dogs are on Tamar.

Tamar tries to get up, but they are at her face, at her neck, and she slips and tries to cover her face with her arms.

Selah is struggling to get to her, but the Shepherd is restraining her as Selah kicks and screams -

SELAH (CONT'D)
Tamar! Tamar!!

And then, Tamar lies still in the mud.

The Shepherd whistles, and the dogs return to him.

He releases Selah, and she runs to Tamar - pushing at her, pulling, but she won't get up, she won't move.

The Shepherd stands at the lake's edge - triumphant. Secure in his power again.

As Selah looks at him -

He seems to shrink in front of her. Becoming lesser.

Becoming just a man.

That DULL ROAR sounds, louder and louder-

From the edges in, her VISION FINALLY WHITES OUT COMPLETELY, the madness overtaking her -

A kaleidoscope of images - frenetic, chaotic, so fast we almost can't make sense of them. Over them all, the DULL ROAR of Selah's visions.

- Selah ripping at the Shepherd, pulling at his beard and hair with maniac strength. The wind whipping around them, dust in his eyes, blinding him.

- The sisters helping her, swarming him, madness in their teeth and eyes.
- The Shepherd falling, tripping over his own robes.
- The dogs barking and snapping, as one of the sisters grabs a rock, bringing it down on the Shepherd's mouth, his teeth crunching.
- The dogs barking and snapping, biting Evelyn on her arm - before she flings it off, hitting it with the Shepherd's staff where it has fallen from his grasp, hitting until the dog lies still on the ground.
- Selah, bloodied, standing atop the Shepherd's wheezing body, his breath rattling in his throat. She leans down, and whispers in his ear, her mouth still bloody from where she bit him.

SELAH (CONT'D)

We were always stronger than you.
 It's in our blood to be stronger
 than you. We just didn't know it
 yet.

- FINALLY, She raises her hands to the sky in triumph, in madness - gripping bits of the Shepherd's hair in her hands.

She screams, and the sisters scream with her, and the DULL ROAR in the background harmonizes with her, the two sounds finally merging-

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE EYRE - DAY

A sweeping aerial shot, of a giant dried-up lake bed. (NB: A repeat of the opening shot.)

We hear the same eerie harmonies - realising now that it is the same song the wives sing, but in a haunting minor key.

But this time, the camera pans - and we see a small plume of dust rising. Towards the middle of the lake.

A police car.

The technology is startling, after so long in this world of dust and sky.

We get closer and closer, sweeping behind the car, engulfed by the dust thrown up in its wake.

CUT TO:

EXT. DRIED UP LAKE BED - LATE AFTERNOON

Two cops stand on the dried up lake bed - looking down at something, half buried by the dried up mud. One is OLDER and one is YOUNGER.

They're dressed in modern police uniforms, although the country version - their sleeves are short, and their uniforms look well-worn.

Piles of dead pelicans surround them, sad tufts of feathers - victims of feast turned to famine.

The older cop sighs, and crouches down, making a note on a MAP OF THE LAKE.

The younger cop takes picture after picture - careful to not disturb the evidence.

(NB: the flash on his camera is NOT on.)

OLDER COP
Who reported it?

YOUNGER COP
Tourists. They called the office - I took the call, said we'd check it out. They came to the lake bed for some sightseeing, and found them.

And from another angle, we see what they're looking at.

A dried up body, half encased in mud. Dressed in a once-white robe. A hand outflung to the side. Tufts of its long hair blow in the wind.

The older cop stands up, and looks out at the lake bed - shielding his eyes in the sun. Seeing the other white dots, scattered across the lake bed.

They walk to the next body. And the next. And the next. Until they've seen every last one.

All of the wives. Left where they fell.

The younger cop marks where each of the bodies lies on his map with careful crosses.

OLDER COP

Can't confirm until the autopsies, but
I'd say they all drowned.

YOUNGER COP

So, must have been at least a month
ago. When the lake was flooded.
Surprised that there's this much of
them left.

OLDER COP

The mud must have preserved them, at
least partially.

The older cop looks at the map in the younger cop's hands.

OLDER COP (CONT'D)

Where's the other thing?

YOUNGER COP

At the old campsite. Near the hill.

EXT. LAKE EYRE CAMPSITE - DUSK

The two cops stand on either side of a strange, beautiful tableau.

Looking at the dead body of Shepherd.

He lies naked, spread-eagled on the ground - his hands and legs bound, stretched out impossibly wide.

His hair and beard are bloody and patchy, as if chunks have been ripped out in places, and his hands are covered in defensive wounds. His mouth is bloody.

He has been stretched out over the body of a ram - his back bowing over the carcass, its horns digging into his side. The ram's horn necklace is still around his neck.

At his feet - the dead black-and-white bodies of four sheepdogs. Their jaws unhinged, their legs broken.

A little way away from this macabre, grim site - there is what remains of a pyre. The ash mostly blown away.

And in the centre of the pyre - a tiny skull. A lamb's skull. With a tiny braided piece of wool placed under it.

After a long moment of silence-

YOUNGER COP

Well, this is fucked.

OLDER COP
Yup.

They both consider the scene again. It doesn't look any better.

YOUNGER COP
Got anything to do with the woman out
in the centre?

OLDER COP
(shrugging)
Probably a good bet they're related.

He looks at the rest of the campsite.

OLDER COP (CONT'D)
I'm gonna have a look around.

The younger cop gets out his camera again, and starts to take pictures of the Shepherd.

In the flash of the camera's light, it almost looks as if the man and the ram are one, as if he has sunk into its pelt.

The older cop returns.

OLDER COP (CONT'D)
Something up this way. For your camera.

EXT. RIDGE OVERLOOKING LAKE EYRE - SUNSET

At the top of the ridge - a strange effigy.

It is two dolls - woven from white sheep's wool, and affixed to a shepherd's staff. A braid of black hair dangles from it.

One is of a woman - exaggeratedly feminine, all wide hips and lush breasts, in the style of primitive fertility icons.

The doll's face is bisected - smeared with a paste of red mud and ash, down one side.

By her side is a second doll. A tiny lamb. Tethered to her. Part of her flock.

The younger cop takes pictures of them - then looks out across the desert, where faint tracks can just be seen.

YOUNGER COP
How many do you reckon?

OLDER COP

At least 50, maybe a hundred. And some tracks. Looked like kids' feet - heading north. Back into the desert.

YOUNGER COP

Who'd bring a flock of sheep here...? And kids?

The older cop shrugs.

OLDER COP

Used to be pretty common to come up here, for the lake flooding. Along the old droving roads. Haven't heard of anyone doing it for a while though. Most of the tracks aren't in good shape anymore.

He looks across over the desert again.

OLDER COP (CONT'D)

Something to follow up tomorrow. Getting too dark now.

The younger cop takes one last picture of the doll, before putting his camera away. They start back towards the car.

INT/EXT. POLICE CAR - DUSK

The older cop drives, while the younger cop looks out the window at the lake.

Both lost in their thoughts. About what they saw at the lake.

The younger cop turns around - looking at the sun setting over the desert behind them.

Just as the sun dips below the horizon -

There is a FINAL WHITE FLASH. Only visible for a moment. Lighting up the desert.

The cop turns back in his seat.

They drive on.

Red dust spirals up, forming shapes and whirls in their wake.

THE END