

THE LONG ROAD NORTH

An Original Screenplay

By

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INT. STUDY-NIGHT

A middle-aged man sits at a desk staring thoughtfully at a blank piece of paper. He holds a pen in his right hand, which he taps against the wooden surface. The room is lit only by a desk lamp, which casts a warm glow over the man and his workspace. The mans name is Patrick Kell.

A wooden walking cane leans against the side of the desk.

A purring cat circles the chair, stopping to grind its face against Patrick's leg.

He begins to tap the pen faster and faster, then suddenly slams it down in frustration.

The cat dashes away from underneath him.

He looks up from the paper; a defeated look fills his eyes.

He stares into space. The defeated look suddenly disappears, and is replaced by a look of hope and discovery.

PATRICK V/O

Every night I sit here searching my
mind for a spark to ignite that
wonderful, creative chain reaction.

I think I just found something.

For the first time in ten years I just
took an honest candid look at myself.

It was only for a second, and there was
definitely no spark to be found. But
none the less, I think I just
discovered the fuse.

A lonely writer, searching desperately
for not only an idea, but life itself.
With a little fictional flavouring it
could be brilliant. But without a

spark, it's never going to work.

INT. CITY CAFE-DAY

A trendy rooftop café looks down onto a busy Melbourne street.

Patrick sits at a small table, listening to the woman sitting across from him give vent to her frustrations. The woman, Libby Marchetti, holds a cigarette in one hand, and waves a newspaper around in the other.

LIBBY

I mean, what I hate most about these people is that they make a career by leeching off someone else's. They're vultures.

PATRICK

Come on Libby, there not all like that.

LIBBY

What do you mean there not all like that!? How can you defend them, they are all like that!

The only way arseholes like him can make a living is by feeding off people like yourself.

She points to the newspaper. It is a review of the Patrick Kell book 'Nightmare Laneway'. A photo of the reviewer, Peter Foster, sits at the top of the page.

Patrick shrugs and takes another sip of his coffee.

LIBBY

How can you not be annoyed right now Kell?

PATRICK

Because it's part of what I do Lib, I can't take offence at every bad thing that gets written about me.
It's not like it's personal.

LIBBY

It is fucking personal! Quote 'I wonder how many times Kell can recycle the same mildly scary plot and boring characters before he comes to realise that his writing days are over' End quote! That is fucking personal! That's not a review, it's a personal attack.

PATRICK

Maybe he's right.

LIBBY

Oh bullshit, as if one OK book changes the fact that you've written god knows how many bestsellers. So what, all of a sudden your careers over? Who the fuck is he to think that his opinion is so important!?

PATRICK

It's only one review Lib!

LIBBY

It's not just one review! It's the first review, it's the Peter Foster review! Did you even read it!?

PATRICK

Yeah, I did...

Patrick stares up at Libby, She looks back at him, trying to read his expression.

LIBBY

No way, your serious aren't you?

PATRICK

I know he's right Lib.

LIBBY

How can you say that?

He ignores her question.

PATRICK

And I know that you know he's right as well, otherwise you wouldn't be getting so upset over it.

LIBBY looks as if she's been insulted.

LIBBY

That hurts Patrick.

PATRICK

Well it's the truth Lib.

LIBBY

I've sat here and defended you for the last hour and you thank me by calling me a liar. Thanks Patrick.

PATRICK

I'm not calling you a liar, I'm just saying that I'm not helping myself by hiding from the truth.

He grabs the newspaper off Libby and looks at the article.

PATRICK

'We ultimately see the same group of characters in the same situations that Kell has used for his last three novels'

True, true, true. I'm out of ideas Lib.

I know you don't want to hear it but I've got a severe case of writers block.

LIBBY

Oh don't give me that shit. Writers block, what the fuck is that? Next you'll tell me that you've got depression.

PATRICK

Well call it what you want. The fact is that for the first time in my life I'm finding it difficult to write, I mean

really difficult.
I'm out of ideas, I've been out of
ideas for my last four books.

LIBBY
Last four books? What are you talking
about? I loved your last four books.

PATRICK
You're my agent, it's your job to love
my books.

LIBBY
Oh so that's all I am, a fucking
business associate.

PATRICK
Oh come on Lib, you know that's
bullshit.

LIBBY
Well why say it then? After all these
years I thought our relationship might
have moved into the friendship category.

PATRICK massages the side of his head as he listens to
LIBBYS rant.

LIBBYS
It's not about business!

PATRICK
All right, I'm sorry, now will you
please be quiet for one fucking minute.

LIBBY goes quiet.

PATRICK
The truth is that I haven't written
more than ten pages since I finished
'Nightmare Laneway'
I need a change Lib. I need some
inspiration. I need to get away. I love
the city, but it's sucked me dry.

LIBBY

So what are you going to do?
The whole sea change thing?
Get a dog and travel the country?

PATRICK
I've got something in mind.

LIBBY
What?

PATRICK
A small town up North.

LIBBY
A small town up North?
Your such a fucking artist Kell. Just
pack up and move to the small town up
North, that'll fix everything. This is
about your accident isn't it?

Patrick looks shocked, obviously not expecting Libby's
final question.

PATRICK
No.

LIBBY looks away, takes a drag of her cigarette and then
blows the smoke high into the air.

The two remain in silence.

FADE OUT.

INT. PATRICKS APARTMENT-NIGHT

Patrick looks out over the glittering city from his
apartment window.

He sorts through his wardrobe, throwing clothes onto the
messy bed. The cat jumps up, meowing at him.

The cat waits impatiently as Patrick fills its bowl with
canned tuna.

A bowl of pasta sits in front of Patrick, he picks at it
with a lack of enthusiasm. Four other empty chairs sit

around the table.

He crams the last of his clothes into his suitcase. It bulges as he attempts to close the zip.

He sits back on the couch reading a book. The cat sits comfortably next to him.

A small bin overflows with paper as Patrick hurls rubbish towards it while tidying his study.

He sorts through the drawers of his desk, placing anything of importance into his briefcase. He comes to a sudden halt as he discovers a photo; it depicts a woman kneeling next to a young girl. He picks it up, stares at it thoughtfully, and places it into his briefcase.

Patrick watches himself in the mirror as he brushes his teeth.

The cat sits on Patrick's chest purring as he lies in bed. Its eyes scrunch up in comfort as he pats its head.

PATRICK

You're going to miss me aren't you?

EXT. CITY - MORNING

The city streets are filled with chaotic morning traffic.

Patrick walks down the busy sidewalk carrying a coffee in one hand and his walking cane in the other. We notice a limp in his right leg.

He stops at his parked car and rips a parking ticket from the windscreen. He smiles, screws it in a ball and casually throws it away.

PATRICK

Catch me if you can.

The cat looks up from the backseat as Patrick opens the front door and hops in. He takes a chicken nugget from his pocket and places it next to the cat.

EXT. CITY STREET-MORNING

Endless lines of cars wait to get through the traffic lights.

Patrick's car sits about thirty metres back from the lights.

He turns up the talk back radio station.

The traffic lights turn green.

PATRICK
Come on! Go... Go...

The car in front of him finally accelerates, but the lights turn red before he makes it through.

PATRICK curses to himself.

EXT. OUTER CITY-DAY

Cafes and art galleries line the street. We turn to watch Patrick's car pass by. His indicator flashes on and he turns down a side street.

He parks on the side of the quiet tree lined road.

Large yellow autumn leaves carpet the nature strip and footpath.

The street is full of large expensive houses.

Patrick takes the cat out of the back seat, and walks towards a nearby house.

He enters through the gate, which brings him into a well-maintained courtyard. He walks up the paved footpath and knocks on the front door. A moment later Libby answers.

She looks at Patrick and smiles, then quickly turns her attention down to the cat.

LIBBY
Hello pud!

She scratches it under the chin, then looks back at Patrick.

LIBBY
Hope you don't mind if I spoil him.

PATRICK
No, go ahead.

LIBBY
So are you going to come in for a
coffee?

PATRICK
I think I'll just keep going, I've got
a long drive in front of me.

LIBBY
Scared of having second thoughts?

PATRICK answers the question with a small laugh.

LIBBY
So how long do you think you'll be gone
for?

PATRICK
I don't know. I guess we'll just have
to wait and see. I've got a feeling it
could be a while though.

They look at each other for a moment.

PATRICK
I just wanted to say thanks for
everything Lib.

LIBBY
Jesus Kell, you're not even leaving the
country, don't get too sappy. I'm still
your agent.

PATRICK
No seriously, you've been more than
that. Thankyou.

A flicker of sadness crosses Libby's face.

LIBBY

You can be so fucking corny you know.

She laughs jokingly. Patrick reaches over and hugs her with his free hand. The cat meows as if sensing the emotion.

Patrick holds the cat up to his face and kisses it on the nose. It meows back at him.

PATRICK

So this is goodbye for you to tiger.

He cuddles the cat to his chest, pats its head, and hands it over to Libby.

PATRICK

All right, well I suppose this is it
for now.

LIBBY

Looks like it.

They look at each other and smile.

LIBBY

You know I really did like your last
four books.

PATRICK

I know.

Hopefully you like the next one more
though.

LIBBY

Well I'll be expecting a masterpiece
after all this!

PATRICK

I'll see what I can do.
Take care Lib.

Patrick takes a step backwards.

PATRICK

You two look after each other!
I'll call you soon.

LIBBY

Make sure you do. Good luck!

They wave to each other as Patrick walks off.

Libby and the cat watch as he leaves.

A sudden sadness fills Libby's face, she wipes away a forming tear.

EXT. FREEWAY-DAY

Patrick drives along the freeway, away from the city horizon.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Rolling hills stretch over the horizon. An absolute contrast from the commotion of the city.

An old wooden fence tangled in barbwire lies broken on the ground.

A corroded water tank sits at the top of a hill.

A trail of ants make their way across a rotting piece of timber.

We look out over the horizon through the rusty window of a derelict tractor.

A long road weaves its way through the hills. Patrick's car approaches in the distance

INT. PATRICKS CAR-DAY

Patrick listens intently to a talkback radio station.

He shakes his head and smirks in disagreement with one of the comments.

His phone begins to ring. He reaches over and answers it.

PATRICK

Hello?

...

Yes, who's speaking?

...

Hi, how are you?

...

No, I'm actually going to be away for a while.

...

Well I've just left.

...

Thanks, but I'm already well on my way.

...

No, its fine.

...

I don't know how long.

...

No, I don't know.

...

Look, can you call my agent about this.

...

No, look your going to have to call my agent.

...

No, I've got to go.

...

I've got to go.

...

No.

...

Goodbye.

...

No, goodbye.

He throws the phone down shaking his head.

PATRICK

Moron.

He looks back at his phone, then reaches over and switches it off.

He turns the volume on the radio up, but it suddenly fuzzes out of reception. He thumps it in frustration.

He switches it off after a moment and continues the drive in silence.

EXT. HILLSIDE-DAY

A cow looks over a fence watching Patrick's car approach. It turns its head as he passes by.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE LOOKOUT-DAY

Patrick leans against his car door, looking out over the endless hills while sipping at a coffee. The strong wind brings the long patches of grass around him to life.

A peaceful look fills his face.

He opens the car door and brings out a map. He looks at it for a second, then carefully places it on his bonnet, using the coffee mug to pin it down.

He reaches back into the car, but a gush of wind blows the cup over and takes hold of the map.

Patrick pulls himself out of the car, bumping his head on the door.

PATRICK
Shit!

The map tumbles over the edge of a nearby hill.

He climbs over the small wire fence surrounding the car park and limps after his map.

He reaches the edge of the hill and looks over. The map continues to tumble across the ground, heading towards an old derelict shed. He continues down the hill after it.

The map fly's past the old shed, catching on a piece of mechanical junk.

Patrick quickly follows it, but a loud banging noise brings him to a sudden halt.

He looks towards the shed, which appears to be the source of the noise.

BANG.

The sound is uneven and awkward.

Patrick turns his head, taking in the lonely surroundings. He looks towards his car, but it is blocked by the steep hills. A look of worry and uncertainty fills his face.

BANG.

He continues towards the map, keeping his distance from the shed.

PATRICK
Hello?

No answer.

He slows down and peaks around the corner.

BANG.

A look of relief fills his face as he spots the broken door banging back and forth in the wind.

He dashes over to the map, untangles it and places it in his pocket.

He glances back at the banging door for a moment, it swings open revealing a menacing darkness inside.

He hurries back to the car.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - AFTERNOON

The afternoon sky glows with fiery colours as the sun sets over the horizon. Flat paddocks now surround the road. The accomplished hills lie in the background as Patrick

continues on his journey.

EXT. TOWN-AFTERNOON

A sign reads; Welcome to Derain.

The last light leaves the sky in blue and purple streaks as Patrick drives through the centre of a small town.

An old man sits on his veranda watching Patrick's car pass.

A dog wanders up the road, its stops and looks up as Patrick pulls into 'Terry's Motel'.

INT. MOTEL-NIGHT

An old man sits behind the counter. He looks up as the door swings open.

TERRY
Evening.

PATRICK
Hi, I'm just after a room for the night.

TERRY
You from the city are you?

PATRICK
Sorry?

TERRY
You from the city?

PATRICK
Yeah, just heading up North. I stand
out that much do I?

TERRY laughs.

TERRY
Like a fish out of water son. Don't get
to many coming through, can always spot

em though.

PATRICK smiles awkwardly at the old mans honesty.

PATRICK

What is it? The stress lines?

Terry gives out a patronising laugh.

TERRY

Ain't the stress lines son.

Now I'm no fashion expert, but I'm
guessing you'd be struggling to find a
coat as sharp as that anywhere else.

Terry looks over the counter and down at Patricks shoes.

TERRY

And I'm guessing those shoes cost a
good dollar as well, don't get to many
folk wearing those around here.

PATRICK

You've got a good eye.

TERRY nods in acknowledgement.

TERRY

So you're after a room are you?

PATRICK

Yeah, It's been a long drive.

TERRY

Ain't wrong there.
Single room fine?

PATRICK

Yep, just me.

Terry passes a form over to Patrick.

TERRY

I'll just get you to fill out this and
we're ready to go.

PATRICK
Not a problem.

Patrick starts filling in the form.

TERRY
How you find the drive out here?

PATRICK
Quite relaxing actually. Some pretty
amazing scenery.

TERRY
Ain't a nicer place on earth than up in
those hills son.

And I'm glad you liked it, normally I
get one of three answers to that
question; long, tiring or boring. Kind
of sad really.

Spend too much time in the big city
and you forget how powerful the land
really is. You get a lot of city folk
out here and I think it scares them
more than anything. Scared of getting
stranded in the 'middle of nowhere'.
Funny how they call it that. Other way
around if you ask me.

Patrick looks up at Terry and nods in agreement.

PATRICK
Yeah, I think there's a lot of truth in
that.

TERRY
Damn right there is.

Patrick passes the form back, Terry quickly looks over it.

TERRY
Patrick Kell? Not the author by any
chance?

PATRICK smiles.

PATRICK
That's me.

A look of surprise comes over Terry's face.

TERRY
I'll be damned!
Shake my hand Mr Kell!

Terry reaches over and shakes Patrick's hand.

TERRY
It's a pleasure to meet you!

PATRICK
Likewise.

TERRY
I'd ask for your autograph if I didn't
have it right here.

Patrick gives out a compulsory laugh as Terry waves the
form in the air.

TERRY
You've got a lot of fans out this way.
You probably wouldn't believe me if I
told you I just finished your last
book.

PATRICK
Really? I hope it wasn't too much of a
struggle to get through.

Terry laughs.

TERRY
It scared the shit out of me, that's
for sure.
Fastest read I've had in a long time
though.
You're a talented man Mr Kell.

PATRICK
Thankyou.

TERRY

I know your tired so I wont keep you waiting.

He passes Patrick the key.

TERRY

I just want to say it's a pleasure to have you stay here.

PATRICK

You're a kind man.

TERRY

Now if you head out the door and turn left, it's the third door on the right, you'll see the number on the door. If there's anything you need you let me know.

PATRICK

Thankyou, I'll see you in the morning.

TERRY

You have a good night.

Patrick leaves the room.

INT. ROOM-NIGHT

Patrick lies on the bed staring at the roof.

PATRICK V/O

If there's one question a writer hates being asked, It's 'Where do you get your ideas from?' It's as If you buy them at some small boutique store tucked away in a hidden alleyway.

They can't be bought, only found. You might find one in a photo. Maybe in something you hear at night while trying to sleep. It could be nothing more than something strange you see out the corner of your eye. Often in a dream.

Usually they're found floating
randomly, hidden behind a seemingly
uninspiring situation.

Tonight I found one entangled in a few
striking words.
*Spend too much time in the big city and
you forget how powerful the land really
is.*

My spark has been found. So lets move
on and light that fuse.

EXT. COUNTRY SIDE-NIGHT

We float towards the old rusty shed. The wind howls and
slams the door shut. As it swings open we enter the
darkness inside.

INT. ROOM-NIGHT

Patrick sits at the small table writing madly away on a
piece of paper. The lamp next to him casts an orange glow
over his face. The wind howls outside. Shadows reach
through the window and sway back and forth on the walls.

The paper almost tears under his lightning fast pen.

PATRICK V/O

As usual, I start with the setting, and
then begin creating a character. The
story, that can come later.

EXT. PETROL STATION-MORNING

Patrick fills up his car with petrol.

INT. CAFÉ-MORNING

Patrick sits at a booth eating bacon and eggs while sipping
at a coffee.

EXT. CARPARK-MORNING

Patrick rests the map on his car roof, he traces the direction of his journey with his finger.

EXT. TOWN ROAD-MORNING

Patrick's car drives past an old sign reading; *You are now leaving Derain.*

EXT. COUNTRY SIDE-MORNING

A dying gumtree drips dark red sap from a hole in its side.

The skull of a kangaroo sits between two grey rocks.

A broken windmill creaks as it struggles to spin with the endless wind.

Patrick's car passes by in the distance.

INT. CAR-MORNING

Tall gum trees and flat paddocks sideline the road. Rocky hills lie in the distance.

Patrick's eyes are red.

PATRICK V/O

I told Libby that I was heading to a
small town up North.

I told her the problem was my writers
block.

I've got a feeling she knew I was lying.

In reality, I don't know where I'm
going. I'm getting away from the city,
and that's all that matters. I've
buried my guilt and anguish for too long.

Ten years ago my wife left me after I
was involved in a car accident. My left

leg was broken in three places, my ribs were shattered, and I was knocked unconscious. Our three year old daughter was killed instantly. I was drunk at the time. For ten years I buried that memory with the distractions of a frenzied life. My own daughter became nothing more than a bad dream.

Out here though, she's sitting next to me waiting for an explanation.

EXT. ROAD-DAY

Patrick continues driving down the road as we watch on from behind a row of gumtrees.

EXT. ROAD SIDE-DAY

A small pink flower grows up between two rocks. It stands out against the native grass and plants.

Patrick's car is parked on the side of the road. Behind it, Patrick sits against a gumtree banging away at the keys on a small typewriter.

PATRICK V/O

Thirty rough pages in. I've got a setting, two main characters and a situation. Now, lets just get to know them a bit better so we can move onto the story and see what this idea of mine is all about.

A lizard stands frozen on a rock, staring into the distance. The clouds above quickly zoom past.

PATRICK opens the back door of his car and places his typewriter on top of the luggage. He holds onto a half eaten apple with his teeth.

He hops into the drivers seat, puts on his seatbelt, and

turns the key. The car doesn't start. He turns it again, nothing.

PATRICK

You've got to be kidding me.

He tries it a third time with the same result.

PATRICK

You've got to be fucking kidding me!

The bonnet door swings open and Patrick stares down at the engine.

He fiddles around for a second, searching for an obvious problem.

He walks back and forth while reading the vehicle manual.

He stares blankly at the engine again.

He tries the key with the same result.

He looks at the manual while fiddling with the starter motor. Overcome with anger and frustration he suddenly throws the manual onto the road.

PATRICK

Fuck!

He slams the bonnet shut, continuing to swear to himself.

He digs through a bag in the passenger seat and brings out his phone. He looks at it for a moment, swears again, then throws it back down.

He looks over the map, tracing his finger to a nearby town called Courtney.

He scribbles on a piece of paper 'Car broken down, walking to Courtney. Would appreciate a lift. 17/04 4:37pm. Pat.'

He sticks it to the side of his window.

The car sits on the horizon as Patrick limps down the dirt road. He carries a briefcase in one hand and his walking cane in the other.

The afternoon sun flares through the leaves of a dying gumtree.

A rabbit bounds across an open paddock.

Patrick looks exhausted as he continues his trek down the road. His nice shoes and jacket are now covered in red dirt.

The road behind leads over the distant horizon. Suddenly a car emerges. As it gets closer we see that it is a white four wheel drive.

Patrick stops walking and turns in surprise, he waves his cane in the air.

The car slows down as it approaches and finally comes to a stop next to him.

An attractive lady pokes her head out the window. She appears to be in her early thirties. A welcoming smile fills her face. Her name is Jenny.

JENNY

Hi, I'm guessing that was your car back there?

Patrick stares at Jenny as if hypnotised by her beauty.

PATRICK

Yeah, I couldn't get it started. Did you see my note?

JENNY

Yeah, nice handwriting. Do you want a lift somewhere?

PATRICK

Yeah that'd be a big help.

JENNY

Jump in.

Patrick walks around to the passenger side of the car, puts

his suitcase in the backseat and then gets in the front.
Jenny reaches her hand across the centre console.

JENNY
Jenny.

PATRICK wipes his dirty hand on his top, then shakes her hand.

PATRICK
Patrick. Nice to meet you. Thanks a lot
for this.

EXT. ROAD- DAY

Jenny's car drives off down the dirt road.

INT: CAR-DAY

JENNY
So where are you heading?

PATRICK
I was just on my way up North.

JENNY
Oh okay, where about?

PATRICK laughs to himself.

PATRICK
Sorry. It might sound strange, but I
don't really have a definite
destination in mind. I'm just on a bit
of a trip through the country I
suppose. But if you can just drop me
somewhere convenient it'll be fine.

JENNY
You don't look like the adventurous
type.

PATRICK
Yeah, I kind of surprised myself as

well.

JENNY

Well I'm sure it will be worth it, it's beautiful out here.

PATRICK

Yeah, I'm sure it will be. If I can get that damn car started again.

There's a moments silence.

JENNY

So I'm heading towards Courtney, the garage will probably be closed for the day, but I can drop you at the motel if you want. You can get someone out to look at your car in the morning.

PATRICK

Yeah that'd be great.

JENNY smiles and then starts laughing.

PATRICK

What?

JENNY

Sorry, I don't want to sound rude but I must say I didn't know what to expect when I first saw you. You're not the typical hitchhiker I'm used to seeing around here.

PATRICK sees the humour and smiles also.

PATRICK

I suppose I must have been quite a sight. I'm surprised you didn't stop and take a photo with all those cameras back there.

JENNY

Trust me, I was tempted.
No, normally I don't pick people up out here, you hear a lot of bad stories. You just looked far to interesting

though. You should feel privileged.

PATRICK

Well thankyou again, I was starting to get worried.

JENNY

Well you had a big walk in front of you.

A moments silence.

PATRICK

So you're a photographer I'm guessing?

JENNY

Yeah, I've only been living out here for a couple of months actually. I originally came out to do a small series of landscape photos for the council, but I couldn't bring myself to leave. I haven't stopped taking photos ever since.

So where are you from, Sydney?

PATRICK

Melbourne actually.

JENNY

Melbourne! You have come a long way. So how long are you planning to take?

PATRICK

I really don't know actually. To be honest I haven't even thought about it.

JENNY

I like that. I think it's a good mentality to have out here.

PATRICK

Thankyou.

JENNY

So what do you do Patrick?

PATRICK

I'm a writer actually.

JENNY

Oh Really!? What do you write?

PATRICK

Fiction mostly. Well, just fiction.

JENNY

For a magazine or something?

PATRICK

No, novels.

PATRICK

Really!?. Do you have much published?

PATRICK

Yeah, quite a bit...

JENNY

Anything I might have heard of?

PATRICK

If you read mystery or horror I'm sure
you've seen a few of my books floating
around.

JENNY looks intrigued.

JENNY

Yes, more information...

PATRICK laughs.

JENNY

So you're a famous author but your not
going to tell me your name!

PATRICK

I'm really not that exciting.

Kell.

JENNY looks confused for a moment at the single word clue.

Then her face lightens up.

JENNY
Patrick Kell?

PATRICK
That's me.

JENNY
No!

PATRICK shrugs.

JENNY
You're not Patrick Kell.

PATRICK
Believe it or not, but that's my name.

JENNY
Are you really?

PATRICK
As far as I know.

JENNY
Sorry, I'm being rude. It's just really
bizarre. I mean I haven't read any of
your books to be honest, but my sister
has a bit of an obsession.

PATRICK
Tell her I said thanks.

A worried look suddenly fills her face

JENNY
I mean your not lying are you? Because
If your not Patrick Kell then It's kind
of weird and creepy that your
pretending to be.

PATRICK laughs, reaches into his bag and pulls out his
wallet, he opens it up to his I.D.

JENNY

Oh my god, you are.

I'm sorry. I must sound like an absolute moron! You probably sick to death of getting this sort of reaction. I'm so sorry!

PATRICK

No, it's alright.

JENNY

My sister is not going to believe me though.

PATRICK stares down at his wallet for a moment as he places his I.D. back in. A sudden look of worry comes over his face.

PATRICK

Shit!

JENNY

What?

PATRICK

I left my bankcard in the centre console.

JENNY

Did you need it for something?

PATRICK

I was going to pay for the motel with it and I don't have any cash on me. I've got a nasty habit of leaving it in my centre console every time I buy petrol. Damn it.

JENNY

Oh.

If you want to borrow money for the hotel that's fine.

PATRICK

No, I feel terrible. You've just driven me all this way, I'm not going to ask for money. I'm an

idiot.

JENNY

No, no, no it's fine.

PATRICK keeps searching his bag.

PATRICK

Shit.

JENNY

Look, I'll lend you the money, you can pick up your car tomorrow, then pay me back on your way through. We can meet up for lunch.

PATRICK

I suppose it's the only choice.
Look, I'm really sorry for this.

JENNY acts hurt in a joking way.

JENNY

Am I that bad?

Patrick laughs.

PATRICK

No, I didn't mean it like that.

JENNY

Most guys would jump at that chance!

PATRICK

It'd be a pleasure to buy lunch for you tomorrow.

It's the least I can do.

Pluses, you can show me some of your photos.

JENNY

Yes definitely, I'd love to show you.

There's a moments silence in the car.

JENNY

You know, there's a spare room at my house that you're more than welcome to stay in.

PATRICK

No, the motels fine really.

JENNY

I just realised how sleazy that sounded.

Patrick laughs.

PATRICK

No, It's just that you've already done enough giving me a lift. I don't want to intrude too much.

JENNY

Not at all, It's probably easier for me, saves me driving into town and back.

Patrick considers for a moment.

PATRICK

Well I'll leave it up to you. I'm more than happy to stay in a motel though.

JENNY

Well my sister would literally kill me if I told her I made Patrick Kell spend a night in the Courtney motel when there's a perfectly good spare room at my place.

PATRICK

Well if it's easier for you and it's not an inconvenience.

JENNY

Not at all. Saves you staying in that dump in town.

She looks at him with a slight flirtatious look in her eyes.

JENNY

It just means we can cancel lunch tomorrow and have dinner tonight

instead.

PATRICK
Sounds good.

Patrick looks out the window with a smile on his face.

EXT. ROAD-AFTERNOON.

The sun sets over the horizon.

INT. JENNY'S HOUSE-NIGHT

They sit at the table laughing. Empty plates sit in front of them. They both sip at glasses of wine.

JENNY
I was terrified. We were literally in the middle of nowhere. I honestly thought we were never going to see civilisation again.
Now I don't know if you've ever driven through the Simpson desert but it's pretty intimidating!

PATRICK
I haven't, but I can imagine.

JENNY
It is. It's insanely big. Especially when you're stuck there with your ex boyfriend who happens to be an absolute asshole.

PATRICK
So what did you do?

JENNY
Well, we sat around and wasted half the day while Jim tried to fix the car. I mean it was obvious it wasn't going to start so I was already quite petrified of dying out there.

PATRICK
It makes me feel pretty pathetic

worrying about my car breaking down
where it did.

JENNY

I've got photos, remind me to show you
a bit later. There was literally
nothing as far you could see. Anyway,
Jim finally realised that he had no
idea what he was doing. We got on the
radio and called for help. We managed
to get through to a truck driver, so we
gave him our GPS location and told him
to send out help from the next town.

So anyway, skip ahead four hours. The
sun had gone down, and still no one had
arrived. So we decided to just go to
sleep and deal with it in the morning
when the sun was back up. Somehow I
managed to fall asleep.

PATRICK

You just went to sleep?

JENNY

Don't ask me how.
Anyway, I wake up in the middle of the
night to someone knocking on the
window. I almost died of fright. Well
it turned out to be the guy the truck
driver sent out to help. He turned up
at three in the morning!

Patrick starts laughing.

PATRICK

How the hell did he manage to find you?

JENNY

I have no idea, but that's not even the
weird part.
You're probably picturing a middle
aged, tough as nails, Dundee style
bushman aren't you?

PATRICK

I must say I was.

JENNY

He was a sixteen year old Mexican kid
who could barely speak English

PATRICK

You're joking.

JENNY

No joke, he turned out to be the son of
a mechanic the truck driver somehow
knew.

Two landscape photographers broken down
in the middle of the Simpson Desert
being saved by a sixteen year old
Mexican boy who barely speaks English.

PATRICK

At three in the morning.

JENNY

And at three o'clock in the morning!

It was the most bizarre thing I've ever
experienced in my life. I thought I was
dreaming.

PATRICK

That's unbelievable.

JENNY

I know, and he fixed the car in twenty
minutes.

PATRICK laughs.

JENNY

I couldn't believe it.

PATRICK

And then what happened?

JENNY

Well we gave him a hundred dollars or
so and he disappeared back into the

desert. We went back to sleep.

PATRICK

Hang on, disappeared back into the desert? You mean he wasn't in a car, he just was walked off?

JENNY bursts out laughing.

JENNY

Now that would have topped it off.
No, he was in a car.

Patrick joins her laughter, slightly embarrassed.

JENNY

So there, that's my crazy breaking down in the desert story.

You could write a book about it.

PATRICK

Well it's a good enough idea. Minus the kids car and I think it'd work.

They both let out a final giggle and then begin to calm down.

Patrick takes a slow sip of his wine. He holds the glass up examining the liquid inside.

JENNY

It's nice isn't it?

PATRICK

Very nice.

You know you probably wouldn't believe me if I told you that this is the first drink I've had in ten years.

JENNY

You're joking!

PATRICK

Nope.

JENNY

You haven't had a drink in ten years
and you didn't even mention it when I
poured you a glass!

PATRICK

I know, and I didn't even think about
it.

JENNY

Oh my god! Don't drink it if you don't
want!

PATRICK

No, no.

JENNY

Are you sure?

I don't want to be responsible for
breaking a ten year abstinence.

PATRICK

It's probably about time I enjoyed a
glass of wine again.
It was public news back in the day so
don't feel awkward when I tell you that
I used to have a drinking problem.

JENNY

I'm sorry I shouldn't have brought the
bottle out, I didn't realise...

PATRICK

No, It's fine. I'll be damned if I
can't sit here after ten years and
enjoy a glass of wine.

He sips at the wine and savours it in his mouth.

PATRICK

It make me realise that I'm a different
person these days.

I think the last part of the old
Patrick Kell died when I left
Melbourne.

EXT. JENNYS HOUSE-NIGHT

We watch the two chat comfortably on the couch through the lounge room window.

INT. LOUNGE-NIGHT

They sit at opposite ends of the couch chatting away.

PATRICK

You know I haven't told anyone about it
except for my agent, you should feel
lucky.

JENNY

Your agent, what's he like?

PATRICK

She actually.
But she's great. I suppose you could
say she's my best friend.

JENNY

Oh, are you seeing her?

PATRICK

No, nothing like that, we're just
friends.

JENNY

So is there a lady in your life?

PATRICK

No, I spend far too much time living in
my imagination to keep a woman happy.

Jenny laughs

JENNY

You're doing all right tonight.

PATRICK

Well thankyou.

JENNY

Plus, I find it hard to believe that a man like yourself doesn't have thousands of beautiful women throwing themselves at you.

PATRICK laughs.

PATRICK

I'm sure my writers block wouldn't have bothered me that much if that was the case.

JENNY

So is that what this trip is all about? A spiritual journey in search for the cure to the mysterious writers block? A journey back into the imagination?

She laughs.

PATRICK

Very poetic. But I suppose it's kind of true in a way.

JENNY

Can I ask you what happened to your leg?

PATRICK pauses for a moment.

PATRICK

You can, but I'm pretty sure If I tell you It'll ruin the mood. Ask again tomorrow.

JENNY

Sorry, I didn't mean to...

PATRICK

No, It's fine.

A moments silence between the two.

JENNY

So do you want to see my photos?

PATRICK
Yeah, that'd be great.

JENNY gets up.

JENNY
I'll be back in half a second.

She leaves the room and comes back a moment later with a big photo album.

She takes a seat directly next to Patrick and places it on the table.

JENNY
Alright. So this is my latest project.

She opens the first page. The photo shows a haunting but beautiful photo of a dead gumtree. Patrick stares at it for a moment.

JENNY
It might sounds strange, but this is the main reason why I couldn't bring myself to leave Courtney.

You're the first person to see these photos, but I think as a writer you'll understand them. Especially when I tell you the fascinating but very chilling story behind them.

PATRICK looks up at Jenny.

PATRICK
It's...

They stare into each others eyes for a moment

PATRICK
...Beautiful.

They unexpectedly start kissing.

He brings his hand to her chin and they lean back onto the couch. They continue to kiss passionately.

She pulls away for a moment, breathing heavily.

JENNY

Do you want to go to my room.

PATRICK

Yeah.

INT. BEDROOM-NIGHT

They fall onto the bed kissing, stopping only to undress each other.

They make love on the bed.

EXT. JENNY'S HOUSE-NIGHT

The blue moon sits above Jenny's house.

INT. BEDROOM-NIGHT

PATRICK sits up in bed writing away on a notepad. Jenny lies sleeping beside him. A slash of blue light from the bedroom window highlights his eyes.

PATRICK V/O

So your probably starting to wonder what happened to that idea I had. Well, we've definitely got the setting, the situations there, and I think we know the characters well enough. So lets move onto the next part. Anyone that knows my work may have an idea of what's coming, otherwise, your in for a surprise.

So, lets get into the story.

FADE TO BLACK

BANG

The sound of a banging door.

INT. BEDROOM-DAWN

BANG.

Patrick opens his eyes suddenly as the uneven banging noise continues. He yawns and sits up in the bed. He turns to see that Jenny is gone.

The wind howls outside.

The open bedroom door creaks and moves slightly.

A hollow whistle comes from the hallway.

BANG.

A dead leaf blows into the bedroom door.

Even though the bedroom window is closed, the curtains slowly billow creating ghostly shapes.

BANG.

He looks around the room for a moment then slides out from under the covers.

BANG.

He walks to the bedroom door and looks out down the hallway. The front door is open, it bangs back and forth against the wall.

The wind whistles down the hallway, carrying dust and leaves.

PATRICK looks around; a look of confusion fills his face. He rubs his eyes and begins walking to the front door.

The door creaks closed. As he reaches the end of the hallway the wind suddenly swings the door open again.

BANG.

Patrick catches the door and looks outside.

He jumps in fright at what he sees through the morning mist.

Jenny scrambles up a green and rocky hill in the near distance. Her naked body is covered in mud and scratches. Her movement is fast and desperate.

She turns suddenly and stares back at Patrick.

A lost and wild look fills her eyes. She turns back and continues scrambling up the hill.

PATRICK steps outside and calls to her in confusion.

PATRICK
JENNY!

She doesn't respond to his call.

PATRICK
JENNY!

PATRICK turns back and forth, startled by the strange situation and unsure of what to do. He dashes back inside.

INT. BEDROOM-DAWN

PATRICK quickly slides on his pants, t-shirt and shoes. He Grabs his cane and leaves the bedroom.

EXT. JENNY'S HOUSE-DAWN

Jenny is no longer in sight, but PATRICK quickly follows in her direction.

PATRICK
JENNY!

The morning light paints the landscape in an eerie shade of blue.

Big stone boulders and dead gumtrees sit scattered over the hilly landscape.

Patrick scrambles up the steep hill, every nervous breath visible in the cold air.

He reaches the top and catches a glimpse of Jenny running awkwardly over the next incline in the far distance.

PATRICK
JENNY!

His voice sounds confused and exhausted.

He continues after her towards the next hill.

He moves at a much slower pace than Jenny, obviously handicapped by his limp.

He stumbles over a rock and branch, curses to himself and continues on.

He reaches the top of the incline and takes a step onto the even ground.

He freezes, his eyes become wide with fear.

A frightened murmur escapes his trembling lips.

He stumbles forward for a second.

PATRICK
Jen...Jen...

The dead gumtree from Jenny's photo stands in front of him like a gnarled claw bursting from the earth.

Jenny dangles by a noose from the lowest branch. Her naked body sways back and forth in the screaming wind.

Her toes and fingers twitch as the last signs of life leave her body.

She stares wide eyed at PATRICK.

PATRICK sobs in horror and stumbles towards her body.

PATRICK
Jenny...

He grabs her legs trying to hold her up.

PATRICK
HELP!

The haunting tree towers above him as he screams out.

PATRICK
HELP!!!

His desperate cries echo over the empty morning landscape.

PATRICK
SOMEONE HELP!!!

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. HILL TOP-MORNING

Patrick sits with his head in his hands as paramedics carry away the body.

A police officer takes notes as he talks to a farmer. He finishes up and approaches Patrick with a cup of coffee. His name is Charlie.

CHARLIE
You could probably do with a coffee I'm
guessing.

Patrick either ignores him or doesn't hear.

CHARLIE
You sure?

Patrick looks up. His eyes are red. His face is full of shock. Patrick takes the cup.

PATRICK
Thanks.

CHARLIE
Why don't you go and grab your things,
you can come down to the station and
get some rest if you like.

PATRICK nods.

INT. JENNY'S BEDROOM-MORNING

Patrick slides his coat on.

He slides his writing pad back into his suitcase.

He picks up a photo of Jenny on the bedside table. He takes a seat on the bed and cries for a moment. He puts it back and leaves the room.

He stops and looks around the lounge room. The empty wine glasses sit on the table from the night before. He catches a glimpse of the photo album, open on a photo of the dead gumtree.

He walks over to the photo album and stares down at it for a moment. He reaches down and turns the page.

The next page is an almost identical photo. He continues turning the pages.

On every page the same twisted dead gumtree stares up at him.

He stumbles back in horror. He looks down at his shaking hand, picks up his suitcase, takes one last nervous look at the final gumtree photo and leaves the house.

INT. POLICE STATION-DAY

Charlie sits across the table from Patrick.

CHARLIE

You know everyone loved that girl. It
breaks my heart to see her go like
that.

May I ask how long you have... had known
her for?

Patrick looks up at him.

PATRICK

We only met yesterday. I guess we
didn't know each other very well at

all, but just the way it happened... I don't know... she seemed like such an outgoing woman. She was just so normal and nice. I just don't understand it. To see her running up the hill like that. It was like she was... possessed or something.

Charlie nods, listening carefully.

CHARLIE
I understand.

PATRICK
And the photo album..

CHARLIE
The photo album?

PATRICK
She had a photo album.

Full of photos of that tree, like it was an obsession or something. She told me it was the reason she couldn't bring herself to leave Courtney, I just don't understand it.

There's a moments silence between the two men.

CHARLIE
Now, I don't know how much you know about Courtney, and I don't know if Ms Leyton told you why she was taking photos of that tree.

PATRICK looks up at Charlie.

PATRICK
What do you mean?

CHARLIE
I'm going to tell you something. Now, I don't know if it's a good idea to tell you, it seems like you've got enough on your mind as it is. But I guess it's better finding out from me than someone

else.

The fact is that Jenny Leyton was the eighth person to hang her self from that tree in the last six years.

PATRICK

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

I mean exactly that.

PATRICK

What are saying?

CHARLIE

Eight people. They all hung themselves from that same tree. They were all found naked, they all did it at the same time of day, they were all confirmed as suicides, and they were all creative types, all of them except for one.

PATRICK

I don't understand.

CHARLIE

Majority of people in Courtney wont believe it. They refuse to. But I've been there to see it every time. The local papers will prove it for you.

PATRICK laughs hysterically, obviously not knowing any other way to react.

PATRICK

Hang on, what do you mean? Why would they do that?

CHARLIE

I'm not going to try and answer that.

All I can say that each one was trying to make sense of the last, and that's why I'm going to tell you to pack up,

head back to the big city, and forget this ever happened. Because I'm telling you now, if you hang around and start trying to make sense of it all, and start writing about it, it's only a matter of time before you end up the way she did.

PATRICK

I really don't understand what you're trying to say here sergeant. I'm still not following why they would all do that?

CHARLIE lets out a small laugh.

CHARLIE

Three years ago a local man, perfectly sane, disappeared up in those hills with an axe in his hand. His aim was to cut that tree down and burn it.

You see those hills are aboriginal sacred land so the council isn't allowed to touch it. The man took it into his own hands to get rid of it. If you're stupid enough to go back up there, you'll see the axe marks in the side of the tree.

The man never returned home that night.

I found him hanging naked by his belt. His clothes torn off on the ground. He didn't even make it a fifth of the way through.

Now don't ask me what happened. Because I haven't slept a night since without chilling myself to the bone wondering about it.

CHARLIE (CONT)

Now I'm not the most spiritual of people Mr Kell, I don't believe in ghosts or anything like that. As a police officer it's part of my job to find a logical explanation for things

like this. But I'm telling you now,
there's something wrong with that tree.
I mean really wrong.
If I can give you some advice, it's go
home and forget about all this.

But make sure there's one thing that
you never forget...

That's just how powerful the land
really is.

EXT. HILL-AFTERNOON

The afternoon sun sets behind the old dead gumtree.

A small dandelion seed floats in the wind. It lands at the
bottom of the tree.

INT. PATRICKS STUDY-NIGHT

Patrick Kell sits at his desk staring thoughtfully at a
completed manuscript, the only thing missing is the title.

The room is lit by a desk lamp, which casts a warm glow
over Patrick and his workspace.

He holds a pen in his right hand, which he taps against the
wooden surface.

His wooden walking cane leans against the side of the desk.

The cat circles the chair, stopping to grind its face
against Patrick's leg.

Suddenly Patrick puts his pen against the top of the
manuscript and titles it 'The Long Road North'

THE END

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