

THE RESTORATION

by

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FADE IN:

INT. ST. ISTVAN'S CATHEDRAL SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Votive candles flicker. Encased in red glass, they cast an eerie glow across the ancient cathedral.

Tinged by the candlelight, a **HOODED FIGURE** crouches behind a pew, then skulks toward a massive **FRESCO**, shrouded in shadow on the wall behind the altar.

The Figure's gloved fingers touch the lower right corner of the fresco, where three wolves circle a lamb coated in blood. *

From a pocket, the Figure draws a knife. The blade glints as the person gouges deep fissures in the plaster. The knife all but obliterates the wolves and dying lamb.

A frightened **SCREAM** breaks the silence. *

The Figure, face obscured by a macabre **RAVEN MASK**, glances back. Vanishes into the shadows as an **AGED PARISHIONER** hurries down the center aisle. *

The Parishioner stops - stares at the damaged fresco behind the altar. Fear ravages her face. She raises both hands in the air, falls to her knees and **PLEADS TO HEAVEN**. *

INT. INTRICATE FRESCO - DAY

The plead is engulfed by a haunting Concerto. Colors swirl. Shapes form as intricate details of another, age-worn fresco come into focus.

The music crescendos until the painting's details evolve into a breathtaking whole. A beautiful nude reclines at the center - her graceful form surrounded by angels.

INT. LINCOLN COLLEGE, LINCOLNSHIRE UK, CLASSROOM - DAY

The fresco fills a projection screen at the front of a full classroom of **STUDENTS**. The red beam of a laser pointer outlines the torso of the nude woman.

RACHEL (O.S.)

This is the focal area of the restoration. The skin alone contains six different pigments.

DR. RACHEL SIMONE, 30, American and almost too attractive to be a PhD, stands in an aisle between desks.

She taps her engagement-banded hand on the shoulder of a sleeping **MALE STUDENT**, 22.

*

The Young Man jerks awake. Dr. Simone's beautiful eyes peer into his glazed pupils.

RACHEL

Rise and shine Mr. Nichols.

His cheeks flame red.

RACHEL

Anyone else find naked women this sleep inducing?

The class busts up as the bell rings.

RACHEL

Don't forget I'm on holiday 'til the 7th.

Students gather their coats and gear.

RACHEL

Have a fantastic Halloween and Guy Fawkes... Do your homework.

As the Students file out, **DR. SOPHIA TOLAND**, 60's, ambles forward with a cane and limp. Flashes Rachel a warm smile.

SOPHIA

(slight Eastern European accent)

I wanted to get a hug before you go.

Rachel gives her friend and fellow instructor a big squeeze.

RACHEL

I was gonna stop by your office on my way out.

SOPHIA

Nervous?

Rachel twists the engagement ring on her finger.

RACHEL

A little.

SOPHIA

They're going to be thrilled.

RACHEL

I just want his parents to like me.

*

SOPHIA

They're Scottish - not ogres.

Rachel laughs as she sheathes her computer.

*

SOPHIA

If they give you a hard time, tell them you're leaving to do a project in a remote Hungarian cathedral.

Rachel freezes. Glances to discern whether Sophia is telling the truth.

RACHEL

Really?

Sophia grins. Nods.

SOPHIA

Dr. Britton gave his approval. Said it's yours if you want it.

INT. RACHEL'S FLAT - NIGHT

The flat is artsy - cozy and uncluttered. Out of the windows, an unusual winter storm brews. An icy wind rattles paper goblins taped to the inside of the glass. A plate of Halloween soul cakes sits on the coffee table.

Rachel pulls her knees to her chest. Tucks a blanket around her legs as she and **JEREMY**, 30, lounge on the couch and drink wine. He is her fiance - her Scottish Romeo.

*

RACHEL

It's an amazing project. Sophia offered to help with any translations. I'll get more details when we get back, but what do you think?

JEREMY

(Scottish brogue)

I think every lad and lesbian in that class must be in love with you.

RACHEL

(smirks)

Jealous?

JEREMY
Especially of the lads.

Jeremy leans in and kisses her. It's one for the ages.

LIVVIE (O.S.)
Ew!

LIVVIE, 8, pads in wearing pink footy pajamas. A silver
LOCKET hangs around her neck, and a head band with rabbit
ears keeps long blonde hair from her eyes. Pursing her lips,
she makes a kissy face to her stuffed bear. *

Rachel reaches for her daughter. *

RACHEL
Pretty soon you won't say Ew!

Livvie giggles as Rachel gathers the girl into her lap.

JEREMY
Your Mum's right as usual, Livs.

Livvie eyes Rachel with disbelief.

LIVVIE
Pinky swear.

Rachel sticks out her pinky finger. Livvie hooks Rachel's
pinky with her own. Pinkies entwined, mom and daughter kiss
their thumbs.

LIVVIE
Can I have one more cake?

Rachel smiles at the attempt at extortion.

RACHEL
No! But if you're good, you can
have one for breakfast.

LIVVIE
Yay!

Livvie bear hugs her Mom.

RACHEL
Now back to bed, Young Lady! We're
heading out early...

Rachel dazzles Jeremy with a smile over Livvie's head.

EXT. RACHEL'S FLAT - DAY

Jeremy shleps a bag out the door as Rachel packs the car.

Livvie flaps her arms - makes a snow angel on the pristine ground. *
*

LIVVIE
Jeremy, look! It snowed!

JEREMY
That's fantastic.

Livvie rises. Wads a snowball and throws it at Rachel.
Misses.

Hands on her hips, Rachel pretends to be upset.

RACHEL
Hey, what are you doing?

JEREMY
(to Livvie)
Need a little help?

Livvie nods like crazy. Jumps up and down as Jeremy packs a snowball. *

RACHEL
No fair. Two against one.

Jeremy lobs it at Rachel.

Livvie squeals as Rachel's catches it - repacks and heaves it back at Jeremy. It's a direct hit.

INT. RACHEL'S CAR - DAY

Rachel drives a snowy road. Jeremy rides shotgun, his laptop open on his lap.

In the back, Livvie finishes a soul cake and fidgets with her seat belt.

JEREMY
I bet you got picked first for
teams at recess.

RACHEL
Came in handy when I had to fend
off all those boys.

JEREMY

My family's going to love you guys.

RACHEL

I hope so. We're taking their only son from them.

Rachel slows a bit due to the ice, then checks her rearview mirror. The lorry driver behind her is almost on her tail.

RACHEL

I wish that guy would back off a little.

LIVVIE

Mommy, my belt is pinching me.

Jeremy undoes his seat belt - turns to help Livvie.

LIVVIE

Owww!

Rachel reaches an arm back to help.

JEREMY

It's okay. I got it.

Suddenly a horn BLARES. Rachel looks up. She's over the center line - swerves from the oncoming truck.

The car fishtails in the snow - barely misses the truck. Rachel works to gain control, then exhales as she straightens onto her side of the road.

JEREMY

You okay?

RACHEL

God, that scared the shit out of me.

LIVVIE

Mommy, you're not supposed to swear.

RACHEL

Sorry, sweetie. It just really shook me.

(to Jeremy)

Okay if I pull over for a minute?

JEREMY

Of course. I can drive if you want.

Rachel parks on the shoulder. Climbs out. Her feet leave deep prints as she walks out in the snow for fresh air. *

Calmer, she turns back. SCREAMS as the LORRY SLAMS INTO HER CAR. *

Steam pours from the car engine. Blood smears the shoulder.

Snow clutches at Rachel's ankles as she runs back. She reaches out to her family as the car bursts into flames.

FADE TO BLACK.

BEGIN HEALING MONTAGE:

- Rachel lies in a hospital bed - her arms bound in gauze. Sophia comforts her as a **MALE DOCTOR** tries in vain to administer a sedative.

- Rachel stands apart from **JEREMY'S FAMILY** at Jeremy's funeral. Around her, people whisper and point. *

- An **OLD PRIEST** makes the sign of the cross over a small white casket. Rachel turns away as the little coffin is lowered into the ground.

- Rachel, Sophia, Department Chair **DR. COLIN BRITTON**, 55, Students and **FACULTY** crowd around a raging bonfire. **DRUNK BOYS** cart an effigy of Guy Fawkes and cast it into the flames. Unable to endure, Rachel bolts. Devil on her heels, she runs until she's spent.

- Rachel stands in fading light at the mound of Livvie's grave. Holds tight to Livvie's locket, which now hangs like a rosary from a chain around her neck.

INT. LINCOLN COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

Rachel stands in projector light - a macabre fresco covers the screen behind her. Though her arms are nearly healed, her voice is flat, and the light is gone from her eyes. *

RACHEL

In most religious works, common symbols were used to convey meaning to those who couldn't read.

She points to two pillars and an arch framing a figure in the fresco.

RACHEL

In others, universal symbols or codes known to cabals like the Freemasons or the Vatican were concealed in the art.

The BELL RINGS. Rachel watches, glazed, as Students file from the classroom.

RACHEL

Do your homework.

From the back of the room, Sophia shakes her head.

SOPHIA

I didn't believe Dr. B when he said you were back.

Rachel tracks the voice of her friend. Instant tears well.

RACHEL

The silence at home was driving me crazy.

Sensing the dam's collapse, Sophia limps forward.

RACHEL

I never should have gotten out of the car...

Sophia holds Rachel as she breaks...

SOPHIA

You couldn't have known.

RACHEL

It's like my parents all over again.

SOPHIA

Shh, my girl. It's okay.

Finally, Rachel takes a deep breath. Angrily wipes the tears from her face.

RACHEL

I thought being here would help.

SOPHIA

It's probably just too soon.

Rachel pulls away and paces.

RACHEL
Everything's too soon.

SOPHIA
Maybe you should get out of here
for a while.

Sophia gives Rachel a cautious look.

SOPHIA
What about taking that project in
Hungary?

Grasping for a lifeline, Rachel's face lights up a little.

INT. LINCOLN COLLEGE, LIBRARY ARCHIVAL EXAM ROOM - DAY

Rachel enters a well lit room used for examining art prints
and ancient tomes.

Sophia and Dr. Britton stand before a wide cabinet adorned
with a miniature Christmas tree. Sophia gives Rachel a hug.
Dr. Britton bestows a fatherly smile.

DR. BRITTON
You're sure you want to do this?

Rachel nods with complete conviction.

RACHEL
Yes.

Britton removes a large print from a cabinet drawer.

DR. BRITTON
I asked Sophia to join us. Tell
you more details about the area.

He lays the scaled-down replica of a 400-year-old HUNGARIAN
FRESCO on a low table in the room.

SOPHIA
I'd go with you myself if it
weren't for this...

She indicates her leg.

Dr. Britton smooths a corner of the art print.

DR. BRITTON
This is VÉR a...

He looks to Sophia for the pronunciation.

SOPHIA

Vér a Bárányok - it means *Blood of the Lambs*.

DR. BRITTON

This was printed before it was vandalized.

Rachel relaxes as she surveys the reproduction. In it, a cathedral spire pierces a row of SKELETONS entwined in a dark sky. The hollow eyes of each skull stare down on a lone SHEPHERD who cradles a lamb and walks among his flock.

SOPHIA

It was originally painted in God's honor for sparing the village of Sechava from the plague.

Sophia indicates the lower right hand corner where the wolves surround the bleeding lamb.

SOPHIA

This is the area that was damaged.

RACHEL

It's eerie.

DR. BRITTON

They need it finished before their Passover celebration on December 21.

RACHEL

Passover?

DR. BRITTON

Not the Jewish kind.

SOPHIA

Sechava is isolated. The people believe God will inflict the plague if their faith, in this case their icon, isn't perfect.

Rachel focuses on the painted ANGEL that stands watch over the shepherd. Wielding a sword, the Angel holds the skeletons at bay with her weapon.

RACHEL

Oh C'mon. There's been a cure for the plague for like 60 years.

SOPHIA

Belief is in the eye of the beholder.

RACHEL

Now you sound like one of them.

SOPHIA

That's because I am...

She touches her bad leg.

SOPHIA

I grew up in that village.

Suddenly BLINDING LIGHT STROBES across the fresco. Like a heartbeat somewhere far away, hear the SHHH CLACK CLACK CLACK of a train.

INT. EASTERN EUROPEAN TRAIN - DAY

Sunlight STROBES through bare trees OUTSIDE the train windows. FLICKERS like an old movie reel on an image of *Blood of the Lambs* on Rachel's laptop.

A stooped Hungarian, **RUZLIN**, 70, shuffles from the back of the almost deserted train car. Wearing a TALISMAN around his neck that resembles a GLASS EYE, he lays a gnarled hand on Rachel's seat. Stares in fear at the image on the laptop.

RUZLIN

Vér a Bárányok.

Rachel is excited by his recognition.

RACHEL

You know it?

Avoiding eye contact, Ruzlin hurries forward to his seat.

RACHEL

Wait! Please.

Rachel digs in her backpack. Pulls out an electronic translator.

RACHEL

Can I ask you a question?

Ruzlin turns back. Raises his eyes to meet Rachel's.

Near the front of the train car, a **SCARRED MAN**, early 20's, leans into the aisle. Watches the exchange.

With an arthritic hand, Ruzlin grasps his eye talisman - holds it out toward Rachel.

The Scarred Man gives Rachel an uneasy stare.

Rachel drops her gaze to the safety of the image on her laptop. Chances a last glance as Ruzlin finds his seat. The old man grasps the arm rest so tight his knuckles turn white.

EXT. EASTERN EUROPEAN TRAIN - NIGHT

Daylight wanes as the train CHUGS through snow-covered mountains.

INT. EASTERN EUROPEAN TRAIN - NIGHT

SHHH CLACK CLACK CLACK... Keeping to herself, Rachel stares at her computer screen and struggles to stay awake.

Her eyes grow heavy as the slow, deliberate sound of the train lulls her into the sleep of a dream.

EXT. BLIZZARD - RACHEL'S DREAM

SHHH CRUNCH CRUNCH CRUNCH... The SOUND of boots punching through snow overlays the rhythm of the train.

Labored BREATH joins the cadence as Rachel strains to follow a child's bare footprints through a blinding blizzard.

She squints to focus on the footprints as a white out engulfs her. CRIES OUT as the last small print disappears.

INT. EASTERN EUROPEAN TRAIN - NIGHT

The train WHISTLE BLOWS.

Rachel bolts awake. Her heart hammers as she reaches for her locket - clasps the charm in her hand.

Over the speaker, the Hungarian **CONDUCTOR** announces...

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)
Sechava!

...as the train slowly CHUGS to a stop.