

SEE BELLA

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. TREE PLANTATION - DAY

PEARL (8), pink and white bob-hat pulled over her long blonde hair, thick duvet, leggings and mittens, runs with her sister PRIMROSE (4), identical clothing, through row after row of growing Christmas trees.

PRIMROSE
This one?

PEARL
Too small.

PRIMROSE
That one?

PEARL
Too fat.

PRIMROSE
There!

They stop running. Primrose points at a very big tree.

PEARL
It's very nice, Prim, but it won't fit through the door.

PRIMROSE
Oh, I never thought of that. Do you think we will ever find one?

PEARL
Of course we will and when we do you can tie the ribbon on it. You have still got it in your pocket, haven't you?

Primrose takes off a mitten and pulls a long pink ribbon from her coat pocket.

PRIMROSE
Yes, see?

PEARL
Good. Let's keep looking.

PRIMROSE
Which way?

PEARL

It doesn't matter, there are trees
everywhere.

The girls begin to run again. Behind them, MUM (34) and DAD
(36) keep a close eye on them.

MUM

Don't go too far.

DAD

Hey, how about this one?

Pearl and Primrose run ahead.

Mum and Dad inspect the nice, evenly-shaped tree that the
girls had ran past.

MUM

I think they want to keep
searching.

DAD

Let them carry on. I'll tie a
marker on this one and we'll come
back for it later, but let them
think they found it.

Dad ties a small brown ribbon at the top of the tree.

Mum and Dad follow the girls.

LATER:

Mum takes a photograph of Pearl and Primrose beside the same
tree now with her pink ribbon tied around its trunk.

Dad walks between the rows of Christmas trees with the
plantation OWNER (50's), who carries a saw, following close
behind.

They watch as he cuts down the tree.

EXT. CAR PARK, TREE PLANTATION - DAY

MUM, PEARL and PRIMROSE walk towards their estate car
followed by DAD who is carrying the tree wrapped in white
plastic mesh.

PEARL

I wish we could have brought Roxy
with us.

PRIMROSE

She would have had a great time
running through all the trees.

Mum and Dad exchange glances.

MUM

She was very tired this morning,
she needed to rest.

PEARL

I still missed her though.

DAD

We all did. Maybe another day she
will be better.

PRIMROSE

Then we could all go for a walk
together.

MUM

Yes, we could, Prim, that would be
lovely.

PEARL

I'm going to get her a special
Christmas present to make up for
her missing today.

PRIMROSE

And me.

MUM

That's very nice of you both.

DAD

It is, I'm sure she will like that.

Dad lifts the tree onto the roof rack.

PEARL

Can we decorate the tree as soon as
we get home?

MUM

Tea first, and Dad needs to go on a
short errand. When he's back we'll
get the boxes of decorations and
ornaments down from the loft, then
we'll start.

PRIMROSE

And can we have Christmas songs playing? I really like them.

MUM

Of course you can, Prim, I really like them as well. Now, into the car and seat belts on.

EXT. PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

MUM opens the front door as PEARL and PRIMROSE take off their boots.

DAD unties the tree from the car roof rack.

MUM

Straight up to the bathroom and wash your hands before tea.

The girls hurry inside.

DAD

I'll take the tree into the garden to put into the stand.

Mum goes into the house. Dad watches the door close. A wave of sadness comes over him. He sighs.

INT. KITCHEN, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

ROXY (14), a brindle English Bull Terrier, lies fast asleep in her basket.

The door CLICKS. She opens her eyes and lifts her head. MUM walks in. Roxy wags her tail. Mum's eyes fill with tears. She crouches next to Roxy.

MUM

My beautiful Roxy.

Mum gently strokes Roxy's head. DAD walks in through the back door.

DAD

How is she?

MUM

Tired.

DAD

I'll take her now, before they come down. Tell the girls Roxy wanted a walk. They don't need to know I'm taking her to the vet's. Not yet, anyhow.

MUM

Come on, Roxy, you need to get up.

Slowly Roxy stands, steps out of her basket and stretches. With all the grey hair on her face, she looks a very old dog. Dad fastens the lead to her collar.

DAD

Fingers crossed it isn't too bad.

EXT. GARDEN, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

DAD fixes the Christmas tree, still wrapped in white plastic mesh, into an ornate brass stand then carries it through the patio doors and into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

DAD sets down the Christmas tree in the centre of the bay window watched by PEARL, PRIMROSE and MUM.

MUM takes a pair of scissors and cuts away the white plastic mesh. The branches of the tree all fall out into shape.

PEARL

Wow!

PRIMROSE

It almost touches the ceiling.

MUM

It's lovely.

ROXY, lying on her beanbag by the fire, pricks up her ears and sniffs at the scent of the fresh pine tree.

Pearl and Primrose open the two boxes of decorations and ornaments. Dad puts on the Christmas music.

They all begin to decorate the tree.

LATER:

Decorating the tree is almost finished.

MUM (CONT'D)
Okay, Primrose, time for the newest
decoration.

Primrose carefully hangs the hand-decorated pinecone on the
branch where an identical pinecone already hangs.

DAD
They look lovely together, Prim.
What do you think, Pearl?

PEARL
It is just like the one I made when
I started school. It's brilliant
Prim.

Primrose proudly smiles. Pearl gives her a big hug.

MUM
And now it's time for the fairy.

Mum takes the fairy from the box.

MUM (CONT'D)
We definitely need Dad's help with
this one. Are you ready, Pearl?

PEARL
Mum, I've put the fairy on top of
the tree every Christmas. I think
Prim should do it this year.

Primrose's eyes are wide in surprise. She smiles broadly.

MUM
Pearl, how lovely of you to say
that.

PEARL
Do you want to, Prim?

Primrose nods her head eagerly.

Unseen by anyone the fairy in Mum's hand smiles at Pearl for
her act of kindness.

Mum gives the fairy to Primrose. Dad lifts her up and she
puts the fairy on the top of the tree.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Hooray! Prim did it.

MUM
Yes, she did. She's a big girl now.

Pearl sees Roxy watching. She walks over to give her a hug.

PEARL

Dad, Roxy looks all right now,
maybe we can take her for a walk?

Dad is uneasy.

DAD

I already took her for a little
walk when you were having tea,
remember? We should let her rest.

PEARL

But she looks okay and I want to.

PRIMROSE

Me, too.

Mum looks at Dad and sighs.

MUM

I'm sorry but Roxy can't go for a
walk tonight because she isn't
well.

Pearl holds Roxy tight.

PEARL

No, she's not ill.

Roxy wags her tail.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Look! She wants a walk.

Pearl buries her head into Roxy's neck. Primrose, unsure what is happening, looks at Mum.

DAD

I took Roxy to the vet's earlier
and he has given her some medicine.
She has to rest.

Primrose runs to Mum, arms outstretched. Mum picks her up.

MUM

Don't worry, she just has to take
her medicine.

PRIMROSE

Will it make her better?

MUM

Yes.

Mum, unsure, glances at Dad.

LATER:

Pearl sits with Roxy by the fire. She lovingly strokes her head.

PEARL

You look sad, Roxy, and I don't want you to be sad, especially at Christmas. I know you're not very well, but we all get poorly sometimes. Just don't be sad because it makes me sad as well.

Roxy looks at Pearl, lifts her paw rests it on Pearl's arm.

PEARL (CONT'D)

I love you too, Roxy. I wish there was a present I could get for you that was so very special it would make you happy. That would be good, wouldn't it? I'd give up all my Christmas presents in exchange for a present like that.

Pearl's eyes fill with tears. She hugs Roxy.

The fairy on the top of the Christmas tree watches sadly. She bows her head then looks upwards. She lifts her hand high and waves her wand.

A cloud of silver stars appear and the fairy directs the stars to fall on Roxy's head.

Roxy sees the stars falling towards her then disappear as they touch her head. Her ears stand up in surprise.

Pearl pulls back.

PEARL (CONT'D)

What is it Roxy?

ROXY

I want to see Bella.

Pearl stares in amazement, unable to move, until:

PEARL

Muuuuuuuum!

The SOUND of footsteps upstairs.

MUM (O.S.)

Pearl! What? Are you all right?

Pearl just stares at Roxy.

The SOUND of footsteps hurrying down the stairs.

The door to the living room bursts open. Mum rushes in.

MUM (CONT'D)

Pearl, what is it?

Mum looks round the room. Nothing has moved. Nothing is broken. Pearl sits staring at Roxy.

PEARL

Roxy just spoke to me!

MUM

What? Don't be silly, dogs can't talk. Pearl, you gave me such a fright.

PEARL

She did, Mum, she did. Say it again, Roxy.

Roxy looks quietly at Pearl.

PEARL (CONT'D)

She did speak, honest she did.

Mum walks to Pearl, crouches and puts her arm around her.

The SOUND of more footsteps on the stairs.

MUM

Maybe you drifted off to sleep while you sat with her. It was probably a dream.

PEARL

No, Mum, I wasn't asleep, I was talking to her. I asked her what she would want if she could have an extra special present for Christmas.

MUM

And she told you, did she?

Mum smiles lovingly. Dad walks in carrying Primrose.

PEARL

Yes, she said she wanted to see Bella. Who is Bella?

Mum and Dad exchange shocked glances.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Mum, I asked who is Bella?

Mum looks at Dad again.

MUM

Have you mentioned her?

DAD

No, never.

MUM

I certainly haven't.

DAD

We agreed not to.

Mum kneels to look directly at Pearl.

MUM

How can you possibly know about Bella? Have you found some old photographs?

Mum quickly turns to Dad.

MUM (CONT'D)

You haven't moved them, have you, or looked at them and forgotten to put them away?

Dad shakes his head.

PEARL

Who is she, Mum? Why is it a secret?

MUM

It isn't a secret, there was simply no point in you knowing about her.

PEARL

Then tell me.

Mum, unsure, looks at Dad again. He nods his head.

MUM

Let's all sit down. Primrose, do you want to hear as well?

PRIMROSE

Yes, Mum.

Dad, still holding Primrose, sits on the settee. Mum sits in the large armchair.

MUM

Come and sit with me, Pearl.

Pearl cuddles next to Mum but does not take her eyes off Roxy.

MUM (CONT'D)

A long time ago, before you were born, Roxy had two puppies.

PEARL

Roxy had puppies?

MUM

Yes. Unfortunately Ruby was very small and weak; she died before she was a week old.

PEARL

Awr, poor Ruby, and how sad for Roxy.

MUM

Yes, it was, but the other puppy, Bella, was very healthy and strong. She was a lively little thing.

Roxy lifts her head at the sound of Bella's name.

PRIMROSE

Look, Roxy knows her name.

DAD

Yes, she does, doesn't she?

PEARL

So what happened to Bella? Why can't Roxy see her. I don't understand.

MUM

Bella was stolen.

Pearl gasps, her mouth drops open with shock. She stares at Roxy.

PEARL

How? How could that have happened?

PRIMROSE

I don't like this.

Primrose buries her face against Dad's neck.

MUM

Once Bella had all her injections she could go out for walks and each day I used to take Roxy and Bella along the path by the river, then call at the shops on the way back home. I would tie them up outside while I went into the shop. I did it lots of times, but one day I heard Roxy barking really loud. I ran outside straight away but Bella had gone. Someone had stolen her.

Mum begins to cry. Pearl gently wipes away her tears.

PEARL

Oh, mum, and poor Roxy.

Pearl looks at Roxy who lies with her head in her paws, eyes half shut.

Pearl moves from the armchair, lies next to Roxy and strokes her head.

PEARL (CONT'D)

I love you, Roxy.

Roxy lifts her paw to touch Pearl's hand.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Did you look for Bella?

MUM

We did and we also reported it to the police.

PEARL

How long did you look? You didn't give up, did you?

Mum looks guiltily at Dad.

MUM

We had to.

PEARL

What? Why? Bella was Roxy's puppy.

MUM

Pearl, we didn't want to give up,
we had to.

PEARL

Why? What could have been more
important?

Pearl looks at Mum then at Dad, searching for an answer.

MUM

You were.

PEARL

Me?

DAD

Mum was pregnant with you. The
shock of Bella being stolen caused
Mum to go into labour early. You
were lucky to survive. I had to
look after you and Mum.

PEARL

So it was my fault!

MUM

No! You must never say that!
Someone stole Bella, it was their
fault.

PEARL

Bella would have been eight years
old, just like me.

MUM

Yes, she would.

Pearl looks at Roxy. They are both sad.

PEARL

That is a long time not to see your
little girl.

INT. PEARL'S BEDROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

PEARL lies in bed. The bedside light is on. MUM walks in quietly. She holds photographs.

She sits on the side of the bed.

MUM

I thought you might like these.

She passes the photographs to Pearl. Pearl's eyes open wide with surprise as she quickly looks at them. She smiles and hugs Mum.

PEARL

Thanks, Mum.

Mum has an uncertain look on her face.

MUM

Sleep tight.

Mum kisses Pearl on the forehead and walks out. Pearl sits up and looks at the three photographs more closely.

Two of the photographs are of Roxy and Bella. The third is of Bella sitting alone and shows her big brown ears still bent over and her paws looking too big for her little body.

PEARL

You are beautiful, Bella.

Pearl's eyes fill with tears as she stares at the photograph. Decisively she gets out of bed.

INT. STAIRS, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

PEARL creeps down the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

PEARL walks in quietly closes the door. She turns on the light.

ROXY, lying in her basket, squints in the bright light and looks up.

Pearl walks over to Roxy and lovingly strokes her head. Roxy's ears go back with affection. Pearl looks directly into Roxy's eyes.

PEARL
I'm going to find Bella.

INT. KITCHEN, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PEARL, PRIMROSE, MUM and DAD sit round the table eating breakfast. Pearl picks at her food, distracted. Mum is concerned.

MUM
You know, Pearl, you can tell me the truth about the photographs. Me and Dad know you must have found them in the bottom of the wardrobe.

PEARL
But I didn't! I'd never seen them before last night.

Primrose, equally surprised at the accusation, stares at Mum.

DAD
Come on, Pearl, you know you should always tell us the truth.

PEARL
But I am telling the truth.

MUM
No, there is no other way you could have known about Bella.

PEARL
If I had only seen the photographs, how would I have known her name? Roxy told me.

MUM
No!

PEARL
She did, she did!

Pearl begins to cry.

PRIMROSE
I believe you, Pearl.

DAD
Stop this, now! Dogs can't speak. I am not hearing this again.

Dad, annoyed, leaves the table and walks out of the kitchen.

MUM
Pearl, look at me.

Mum takes hold of Pearl's hand.

MUM (CONT'D)
You must tell the truth, always.

Pearl stares at her breakfast.

PEARL
I am telling the truth and I've
made a promise to Roxy.

Mum frowns.

MUM
Tell me what you have promised.

PEARL
I'm going to find Bella and I want
you to help me.

MUM
This has to stop! Bella was stolen
eight years ago and right now you
are not in your Dad's good books,
or mine for that matter. Drop it!

Mum angrily pushes her chair backwards and marches out of the kitchen.

Primrose sits looking at the table uneasily.

PEARL
What do you think, Prim?

PRIMROSE
I'll help you.

PEARL
How can you help?

Primrose looks up.

PRIMROSE
I can count to twenty and I am good
at colouring in.

PEARL
Prim, how..?

PRIMROSE
I just want to help. Please.

PEARL

Okay, but we need more of us. Let's ask Milly and Reggie to help.

Primrose grins. The girls hold up their right hands.

PEARL/PRIMROSE

High five!

They clap their hands together.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PRIMROSE looks out of the bay window. She sees PEARL, MILLY (8) and REGGIE (8) walking up the path. She runs to the hall.

The doorbell RINGS.

INT. HALL, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

MUM walks from the kitchen as PRIMROSE rushes to the door.

PRIMROSE

It's Pearl.

Mum opens the door to see PEARL, MILLY and REGGIE.

PEARL

It's too cold to play out. Is it all right if Milly and Reggie play in my room?

MUM

Of course it is. Come on in. Anything planned?

PEARL

Not yet, but we'll pick something that Prim can join in.

MUM

That's nice of you.

Pearl, Milly and Reggie take their coats and shoes off and together with Primrose they go up the stairs.

Mum walks down the hall to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

DAD is measuring the wall to put up the shelves that lie on the kitchen table. MUM walks in.

MUM

She's forgotten about it already.

DAD

She'll tell us the truth eventually.

MUM

Yes, I suppose, but you know, those old photographs of Bella were exactly where I had left them. They hadn't been touched. And how did she know Bella's name? It is a bit strange.

Mum sits at the table.

MUM (CONT'D)

Plus I feel a little bit guilty about not looking for Bella more than we did.

Dad puts down the metal tape measure and pencil and sits next to Mum. He takes her hand.

DAD

We couldn't, I couldn't. I had to look after you, and you had to look after Pearl. Babies born early need a lot of care.

MUM

I know, but what about Roxy? How must she have felt? And now that she is ill...

Mum begins to cry.

MUM (CONT'D)

Do you think we will lose her?

Dad puts his arm around Mum.

DAD

I don't know. Maybe the medicine from the vet will work. I hope it does.

MUM

Me, too.

INT. PEARL'S BEDROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PEARL, PRIMROSE, MILLY and REGGIE sit in a ring in the middle of the room.

PEARL

First we need a name.

PRIMROSE

Why?

REGGIE

All teams have a name, Prim.

MILLY

That's easy, we're Team Bella.

REGGIE

I like that.

PEARL

Team Bella to find Bella.

MILLY

So how do we do that?

REGGIE

We need a plan, and we all need to know what we know.

PRIMROSE

What does that mean?

REGGIE

It means we have to write down everything we know about Bella being stolen.

PEARL

And we need to put it somewhere where we can all see it.

REGGIE

That's right, like at school when we put our posters on the wall.

PRIMROSE

But if we put them on the wall, Mum will see it and be angry again.

PEARL
You're right, Prim, she would.

MILLY
So what can we do?

Pearl looks around her room and at the things on the walls.

Her eyes fix on the large corkboard that hangs above her bed. It is covered in photographs, all pinned to the cork. She points at it.

PEARL
We'll use that, my corkboard.

MILLY
But if we take off all your
photographs your mum will still see
what we are doing.

Pearl climbs onto her bed and lifts the corkboard off the two hooks.

PEARL
No she won't, look.

Pearl turns the corkboard over. The reverse side is clear. Reggie smiles broadly.

REGGIE
We can pin everything on the back
and when it is hung up again, no-
one will know. Brilliant!

Pearl props the corkboard against her bed and from her desk she takes some white cards, a pen and drawing pins.

PEARL
Milly, you have really neat
handwriting. Can you write the
cards?

MILLY
I'd love to.

Pearl hands the cards and pen to Milly.

PEARL
Okay, so what shall we start with?

REGGIE

I think we should put the photograph of Bella in the centre, just like we do at school. The main thing is always in the middle.

PEARL

Yes, and then pin everything else around her.

Pearl gets the photograph of Bella from the drawer in her bedside table. She stares at the photograph.

PEARL (CONT'D)

But I don't want to stick a pin in it.

REGGIE

You don't have to. Make a copy of it on your computer printer.

Reggie looks around the room.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

Where is it?

PEARL

Downstairs in Dad's study. I'll have to creep down to copy it.

MILLY

Okay, we'll think of things to write while you go.

INT. STAIRS, PEARL'S HOUSE

PEARL creeps down the stairs.

The NOISE of an electric drill comes from the kitchen. She quietly opens the door to Dad's study.

INT. DAD'S STUDY, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PEARL places the photograph of Bella on the printer screen and quickly makes a copy.

INT. PEARL'S BEDROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PEARL, watched by PRIMROSE, MILLY and REGGIE, pins the photograph copy of Bella in the centre of the corkboard.

PEARL
Bella looks lovely.

Pearl smiles and sits with the others.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Let's start. Ready, Milly?

MILLY
Ready.

PRIMROSE
Can I go first, because I know something?

PEARL
Okay, Prim, what is it?

PRIMROSE
Bella was stolen just before you were born, you are eight so she was stolen eight years ago.

PEARL
Very good, Prim, that's right, she was.

Milly writes '8 years old' on the first card and Pearl pins it on the corkboard.

PEARL (CONT'D)
And she was stolen from outside the big shop on the estate.

REGGIE
You can still tie dogs up outside, the rings are still on the wall. We should go and have a look, you know, like detectives, visit the scene of the crime.

Milly writes 'Outside shop' on the second card and passes it to Pearl.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
Was Bella chipped?

Primrose frowns at Reggie.

PEARL
I don't know.

MILLY

I thought all dogs had to be
chipped?

REGGIE

They do now, but it wasn't always
like that.

PRIMROSE

Reggie, what does 'chipped' mean?

REGGIE

They have a chip put in their neck.

PRIMROSE

A chip? You're making this up.

Pearl, Milly and Reggie begin to laugh.

PEARL

Prim, Reggie doesn't mean a chip
that you eat, he means a tiny
electronic thing that has the dog's
name and registration on it.

PRIMROSE

Oh.

REGGIE

It's about the size of a grain of
rice, but I think if she had been
chipped your Mum and Dad would have
found her.

Milly writes 'Not chipped' on the next card and gives it to
Pearl.

MILLY

Do they have security cameras
outside the shop? I can't remember.

REGGIE

It doesn't matter, because even if
they have they would never keep
footage from that long ago.

MILLY

'Course not; Doh! I was just
thinking out loud.

PEARL

Doesn't matter. We have to think of everything. If you had been right it would have been like having an eye-witness.

REGGIE

That is exactly what we need, an eye-witness. Someone must have seen something. Maybe we should go knocking on the doors of the people who live across from the shops.

MILLY

But what if people have moved away and new people have moved in?

REGGIE

We won't know until we ask.

Milly writes 'Ask neighbours' on the next card.

PRIMROSE

I don't want to go knocking on doors, I would be too scared.

PEARL

You won't have to, we'll do it.

MILLY

We could take this photograph of Bella to show people. We could even use it to make a poster to put up in the shop in case anyone has seen her since.

PRIMROSE

That would be good.

Pearl and Reggie shake their heads.

MILLY

Why not? It's a good idea.

PEARL

No, it isn't. Bella doesn't look like that now. She is eight years old, she isn't a puppy any longer, and we don't have a picture of her as a grown-up.

MILLY

I hadn't thought of that.

REGGIE

We can make a picture of her.

PRIMROSE

How do we do that?

REGGIE

We find a picture of a pure white female English Bull Terrier, copy Bella's markings onto it and then colour it in. That would be how Bella would look as a grown-up because markings don't change.

PEARL

That's a brilliant idea, Reggie!

PRIMROSE

I could colour it in.

PEARL

Can you find one? You can use my computer.

REGGIE

Easy. Log in and I'll have one in minutes.

Pearl jumps up, and goes to her desk. She logs in to her computer and Reggie begins to search.

Pearl, Primrose and Milly watch over his shoulder as he rapidly taps the keys.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

There. Shall I print it now?

Pearl goes to the door and opens it slightly. The NOISE of an electric drill can be heard.

PEARL

Yes.

Reggie clicks 'Print' and Pearl rushes out of the bedroom.

Reggie, Primrose and Milly watch the door in silence.

In seconds Pearl is back with the A4 print.

Using the old photograph Pearl carefully copies the outline of Bella's markings onto the white dog. She gives the picture to Primrose.

PEARL (CONT'D)

There you are, Prim, it's up to you now.

Primrose sits at the desk with the picture in front of her.

Pearl takes her box of coloured pencils from the drawer.

Primrose looks at her in surprise.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Use these.

PRIMROSE

But those are your favourite pencils.

PEARL

This has to be the best it can be.

EXT. THE SHOPS - DAY

PEARL, MILLY and REGGIE stand outside the row of shops and takeaways.

The large general store is in the centre of the row. The sign outside says 'Open 6am-11pm daily'.

There are two dog rings fastened to the walls either side of the main doorway.

The car park in front of the shops is almost full. PEOPLE walk to and fro, using the shops.

PEARL

I've never really noticed how busy it was before.

MILLY

And look at all the cars and vans driving in and out of the car park. It would be so easy to steal a dog from here.

PEARL

Who would know it wasn't their dog?

REGGIE

Someone would have seen something, we just need to find out who.

PEARL
That's easier said than done,
Reggie. Where do we start?

MILLY
Inside the shop. Ask the people who
work there.

REGGIE
I don't think it would help. They
would've been inside and wouldn't
have seen and besides, they might
not be the same people working
there.

PEARL
Reggie's right, but maybe...

Pearl looks at the five houses that face the shops on the
other side of the road.

MILLY
We should wait for Prim's picture.

REGGIE
Milly's right.

PEARL
No, I want to start now. Let's do
it.

Pearl begins to walk across the car park.

Milly and Reggie look at each other, shrug their shoulders
and follow behind.

EXT. FIRST HOUSE OPPOSITE THE SHOPS - DAY

PEARL, MILLY and REGGIE stand nervously at the front door.

MILLY
Who is going to speak?

PEARL
I will, because Roxy is my dog and
I made the promise.

Reggie RINGS the doorbell.

MRS HAINES (40's) opens the door. She is surprised to see the
three youngsters standing in the cold.

MRS HAINES

Hello?

PEARL

Hello. We wonder if you can help us. We're trying to find a dog that was stolen from outside the shops.

Pearl turns and points to the shops.

MRS HAINES

Someone stole your dog! How awful. Has it just happened?

PEARL

No, Bella was stolen eight years ago but I only found out yesterday. My Mum and Dad didn't tell me before.

MRS HAINES

Eight years! That is a long time ago.

PEARL

Yes, it is, but my dog Roxy is her mummy and she wants to see her.

MRS HAINES

Awwr, I bet she does, but I'm afraid I can't help; I didn't live here eight years ago.

Pearl's face drops with disappointment.

MRS HAINES (CONT'D)

I'm very sorry.

PEARL

Thanks, anyway.

MRS HAINES

You're welcome. I do hope you find her.

Pearl, Milly and Reggie walk back down the path. The door CLOSES behind them.

MILLY

She was nice.

REGGIE

Yes, and she would have helped if she could have. You could tell.

EXT. 4TH HOUSE OPPOSITE THE SHOPS - DAY

PEARL, MILLY and REGGIE walk up the path to the front door of the fourth house opposite the shops.

REGGIE
All three houses had new people in them. This is not looking good.

PEARL
No, but we have to try.

MILLY
Yes, we do, Reggie!

REGGIE
I didn't mean for us to stop.

MILLY
Then don't say things like that,

REGGIE
Okay, I'm sorry.

Reggie KNOCKS on the door. They wait.

He KNOCKS again, this time harder.

MR STANLEY (O.S.)
All right, all right.

The door opens. Reggie immediately steps back when he sees MR STANLEY, a frowning old man with grey hair.

REGGIE
Mr Grumpy!

MR STANLEY
What? What did you call me?

REGGIE
Erm, nothing. No, I didn't say anything.

Reggie is scared. Pearl gives Reggie an angry look.

MILLY
He meant to say 'Hello'.

MR STANLEY
Did he indeed! Then he should have said 'Hello, Mr Stanley'.

Mr Stanley stares at Reggie, waiting.

PEARL

Hello, Mr Stanley. We need help.
Have you lived here long?

MR STANLEY

What do you want to know that for?

PEARL

Because a puppy was stolen from
outside those shops eight years ago
and we are trying to find her.

MR STANLEY

After eight years? Impossible!

PEARL

But did you live here?

MR STANLEY

Yes, I did.

The youngsters smile at the news.

PEARL

Great, you're the first one.

MR STANLEY

What do you mean I'm the first one?

PEARL

The first out of these four houses
to have been living here when Bella
was stolen.

MR STANLEY

You're going door-to-door?

REGGIE

Yes, like a proper investigation.

MR STANLEY

That's only effective in the first
few hours or days after the event.

PEARL

How do you know? We might get
lucky.

MR STANLEY

You won't. It's too long ago. I
know I'm right because my wife was
a police detective.

PEARL

Was she? That's brilliant! Can we talk to her?

My Stanley suddenly looks sad.

MR STANLEY

I'm afraid that's not possible. My wife died some years ago.

PEARL

Oh, dear, I'm sorry, I've made you sad.

MR STANLEY

Don't apologise, you weren't to know. In fact she died eight years ago, just before Christmas. She loved to take photographs and one day she went out with her camera and never came back. She had a heart attack. It was quite a shock.

PEARL

Can I just ask you one question.

MR STANLEY

Go ahead.

PEARL

Do you remember ever seeing my dog Roxy and her puppy tied up outside the shop? They are English Bull Terriers.

MR STANLEY

I'm sorry, I didn't, but you know, it's far too long ago for you to stand any chance of finding her.

PEARL

I have to try. Thanks anyway. We've got one more house to go. Maybe they will know something.

Pearl points at the last house in the row.

MR STANLEY

I'm afraid they won't, they only moved in last year.

Pearl's eyes fill with tears.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)
I'm really sorry I couldn't help.

MILLY
Thanks, anyway. Come on, Pearl.

Milly puts her arm around Pearl's shoulders and, together with Reggie, they turn and walk down the path, heads lowered.

Mr Stanley watches them walk away then quietly closes the door.

INT. HALL, MR STANLEY'S HOUSE - DAY

MR STANLEY stares at the closed door for a few seconds before slowly walking down the hall deep in thought.

INT. DINING ROOM, MR STANLEY'S HOUSE - DAY

MR STANLEY walks round the dining table to the old-fashioned glass-fronted cabinet where his wife's favourite photographs are on display and where he keeps his treasured photograph of her.

He opens the centre doors and gently brushes his hand over her face in the photograph.

MR STANLEY
Mr Grumpy? Is that what I've become?

He shakes his head sadly, glances at his wife's digital camera beside her photograph then closes the doors.

INT. HALL, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PEARL, MILLY and REGGIE are downhearted as they take their coats and shoes off. MUM is concerned.

MUM
Is everything all right?

PEARL
Yes, it's just a bit too cold outside.

MUM
It certainly is, I'm not surprised that Primrose wanted to stay in and finish her colouring.

Pearl, Milly and Reggie look at each other in horror.

MUM (CONT'D)

What?

PEARL

You didn't see what she was colouring, did you, Mum?

MUM

No, why, is it a secret?

REGGIE

Yes, it's a big secret.

MUM

Don't worry, I only popped my head round the door to see that she was all right when you went out. I didn't see anything.

PEARL

Are you sure?

MUM

Of course I am. Primrose told me I couldn't look at it or it would spoil the surprise.

Mum goes into the living room. Pearl sighs with relief.

REGGIE

That was a close call.

PEARL

Yes, good old Prim.

MILLY

But what do we do now? We didn't get anywhere knocking on doors.

PEARL

We have a look at Prim's colouring in and then we think of something else.

Pearl walks up the stairs followed by Milly and Reggie.

INT. PEARL'S BEDROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PRIMROSE glances over her shoulder as the bedroom door opens and PEARL, MILLY and REGGIE walk in.

PEARL
Is it finished?

Primrose stands and turns with the picture held in front of her.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Prim, it's brilliant!

MILLY
So good, it looks like a real photograph.

REGGIE
Better than I expected.

PEARL
Reggie!

REGGIE
No, Pearl, I mean it in a nice way.

PEARL
Then say it in a nice way.

REGGIE
I think it is very good, Prim.
Sorry, Prim.

PRIMROSE
It's all right, Reggie, I know what you meant.

Pearl kneels down beside the corkboard and takes down the print of Bella the puppy.

PEARL
Prim, we should have your picture in the centre now.

Primrose hands Pearl the picture and Pearl pins it on the corkboard.

PEARL (CONT'D)
This is who we are looking for,
this is Bella.

INT. 3RD BUILDING, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - NIGHT

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (70's) painfully walks his final round of the night with his two Doberman guard dogs at his side.

He checks the bolts on the doors as he walks through the alley of dog kennels.

He briefly looks through the grills into each kennel, even though most are empty.

When he approaches the third kennel on the right, the Dobermans SNARL and bare their teeth. The hackles stand up on their backs.

Suddenly Jack, the champion English Bull Terrier, hurls himself at the wire netting and bars of his kennel. He BARKS fiercely.

Startled, the two Dobermans jump back before lunging at the kennel, SNARLING viciously.

Old-Man Hopley keeps a tight grip on their leads and prevents them from pounding on the bars to get at Jack.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY

You two really don't like him, do you? Mind you, I don't think he likes you two, either. Come on, Jack, settle down, you need your rest. We've got a big show coming up and I want you to be looking at your best.

He pulls the Dobermans away. Jack SNARLS defiantly at them.

Old-Man Hopley stops at the adjacent kennel.

The dog inside lies curled up with its back to the kennel door.

The Dobermans SNARL at the bars.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)

What is it with you two? Do you hate all English Bull Terriers?

He peers through the bars on the door.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)

Just you make sure everything is fine this time, my girl. If those pups you're carrying aren't fit and healthy things may not be very nice for you.

Jack HOWLS and GROWLS.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)
I've already told you, Jack, get
some rest. We've got an early start
in the morning.

Old-Man Hopley hobbles back along the alley, checks that the spare key is in its place behind the door, then takes out the bunch of keys from his jacket pocket.

The two Dobermans look back and flash their teeth at Jack.

Old-Man Hopley CLICKS the light switch off leaving the alley in darkness. He leaves with the two dogs and locks the door.

INT. 3RD BUILDING, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - DAY

OLD-MAN HOPLEY stands in the doorway and CLICKS the light switch on in the early morning half-light.

The lights illuminate the alley. He squints, walks to the third kennel and opens the door.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY
Come on, Jack, we've got a show to
go to.

Jack lays still. He stares at Old-Man Hopley.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)
You come here, now!

Jack does not move.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)
If I have to come in for you it
will be with a stick.

Jack stares defiantly.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)
If that's what you want!

Old-Man Hopley takes the birch stick from the nearby shelf and SWISHES it through the air.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)
You'll move this time.

Jack springs to his feet and GROWLS.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)
 Don't show your teeth to me, Jack,
 or it will be twice as bad. Now
 come here!

Jack slowly walks forward, his eyes firmly on the stick.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)
 Good, we don't want any marks on
 you before the show, do we?

Old-Man Hopley roughly grabs Jack's collar and CLICKS on the lead without letting go of the stick.

He angrily pulls on the lead, jerking Jack's head and drags him from the kennel.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)
 That's for making me late.

Jack GROWLS again, but when the stick is raised his ears go back.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)
 Last chance.

Jack slowly starts to walk.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)
 Faster! We haven't got all day.

Old-Man Hopley tugs at the lead and drags Jack towards the door.

Through the bars of the adjacent kennel the English Bull Terrier with identical markings to those on the picture Primrose had coloured in, watches with sadness at the harsh treatment of Jack.

INT. HALL, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PEARL quickly kicks off her shoes, puts her back pack in the corner and hangs her school coat on the rack.

PRIMROSE does all the same things but slower.

MUM walks down the hall to the kitchen carrying a small bag of shopping. Pearl turns the handle to the living room door.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PEARL stares at the vacant beanbag by the fireplace.

PEARL

Roxy?

Pearl looks around.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Roxy!

Pearl runs out of the living room.

INT. KITCHEN, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

MUM unpacks the shopping. PEARL looks round the kitchen, puzzled.

PEARL

Mum, is Roxy in the garden?

MUM

No, she's not.

PEARL

Where is she? Is she all right?
Mum, tell me.

Mum kneels. She looks directly at Pearl.

MUM

Dad has taken her to the vet's
again. It seems like the medicine
she was taking isn't working.

PEARL

No, it's got to work. It has to.

Pearl begins to cry. Mum hugs her.

MUM

Maybe there will be some other
medicine the vet can give her.

PEARL

Do you think so?

MUM

I'm sure he has lots of things he
can try.

PRIMROSE walks into the kitchen.

PRIMROSE

Mum, why is Pearl crying?

MUM
She's all right now.

PRIMROSE
Tell me, Pearl.

PEARL
I didn't know where Roxy was and I
thought something bad had happened.

Primrose is alarmed. Mum puts her arms around both girls and gives them a big hug.

MUM
I'm sure everything will be fine.
Let's wait until Dad gets back with
her and see what he says.

PRIMROSE
Mum, can I ask a question about
Bella?

MUM
I suppose so, what do you want to
know?

PRIMROSE
Was she chipped? Because if she had
been, wouldn't you have found her?

Mum is taken aback. Pearl's eyes open wide with shock.

MUM
How do you know about chips?

PRIMROSE
I just do.

Mum is cross.

MUM
Is this your doing, Pearl?

PRIMROSE
Mum, was she chipped?

Mum shakes her head slightly and SIGHS.

MUM
No. At that time dogs didn't have
to be chipped, but even if she had
been she would still have had to be
found. The chip only tells you who
the dog is, not where she is.

PRIMROSE

Oh, I thought...

MUM

This is you, isn't it, Pearl? You have been saying things to Primrose. Why are you still thinking of Bella? You need to forget about her.

PEARL

But I don't want to.

PRIMROSE

Nor do I.

MUM

Oh, Pearl, Primrose, it will only make you sad if you don't. And me. And Dad. We all have to think about Roxy now and give her all our love to make her better. Let's all do that, shall we?

Mum hugs the girls.

PEARL

Okay.

PRIMROSE

Okay.

Pearl and Primrose look at each other, unsure.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

PEARL, PRIMROSE and MUM sit on the settee watching the television.

The SOUND of the front door opening and closing.

MUM turns off the television. They stare at the door.

DAD walks in and holds the door as ROXY slowly walks in and goes to lie on her beanbag by the fire.

DAD

We all have to talk. It isn't good news about Roxy.

MUM puts her arms around Pearl and Primrose.

DAD (CONT'D)

There is nothing else the vet can do if this medicine doesn't work.

PEARL

But I don't want Roxy to die.

DAD

I don't want her to die either, Pearl, I love her every bit as much as you do.

Tears run down Dad's face. Pearl runs to hug him. Dad kneels.

PEARL

But, Dad, Roxy wants to see Bella, that's her Christmas wish.

DAD

Pearl, it was too long ago. We could never find her. What we have to do now is look after Roxy, spend more time with her. This will be her last Christmas and we mustn't waste our time chasing after something that will not happen.

PEARL

Dad, I promised her.

Dad's face becomes stern.

DAD

Pearl, you have to listen. Forget about Bella!

Pearl sobs. Dad is downcast.

Roxy watches sadly from her beanbag.

Two LOUD KNOCKS at the front door. Dad quickly wipes the tears from his face. He looks at Mum.

DAD (CONT'D)

Are we expecting anyone?

MUM

No, not that I know of.

Another KNOCK at the door.

Pearl runs to the bay window and looks out. Her mouth drops open in surprise.

PEARL
It's Mr Stanley!

MUM
Who?

DAD
I'll go.

INT. HALL, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

DAD opens the front door. PEARL stands beside him.

MR STANLEY stands holding his wife's camera and a brown folder.

MR STANLEY
Hello, I'm William Stanley.

Pearl rushes to Dad's side.

PEARL
Hello, Mr Stanley.

MR STANLEY
Hello, I bet you didn't expect to see me.

PEARL
No, not at all.

DAD
How do you two know each other?

MR STANLEY
Your little girl and her two friends called at my house yesterday.

DAD
You did what?

Pearl hesitates. Mr Stanley frowns.

MR STANLEY
Didn't you tell your mum and dad what you were doing?

Pearl shakes her head.

DAD
What were you doing?

MUM walks into the hall carrying PRIMROSE.

MUM
Is everything all right?

DAD
That depends. Pearl?

PEARL
We were looking for Bella.

MR STANLEY
And I have something you must see.

Pearl, Dad, Mum and Primrose stare at Mr Stanley in shock.

DAD
Then you had better come in.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MUM sits between PEARL and PRIMROSE on the settee. DAD and MR STANLEY sit in the two armchairs. ROXY is on her beanbag.

PEARL
Me, Milly and Reggie went to visit the scene of the crime and then decided to go house to house, like they do on the television.

MR STANLEY
And like they do in real life, because you never know what may turn up.

PEARL
Mr Stanley's wife was a police detective, that's why he knows.

DAD
How do you know that?

MR STANLEY
I told her. And I also told her it was far too long ago for anything to turn up.

DAD
I told her that as well.

MR STANLEY
But I was wrong.

Pearl's eyes open wide in surprise. She moves to sit next to Roxy.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)

After the children left I felt more than a little sad. My mind was filled with the memories of my late wife.

MUM

Oh my goodness, it's coming back to me now. Mrs Stanley died on the path by the river. I was in hospital

Mum glances at Dad.

MUM (CONT'D)

Do you remember?

DAD

I do, it couldn't have been more than a week after Bella was stolen.

MR STANLEY

It does seem that way. My wife, Elizabeth, was a keen photographer and she took photographs almost every day. On that particular day she had said she wanted shots by the river, but she never came back. This was her favourite camera.

MR Stanley held up her digital camera.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)

After she died I couldn't bear to use it and it has been beside her photograph ever since. Until yesterday, when I was wondering how I had turned into Mr Grumpy.

The colour drains from Pearl's face.

MUM

Surely you didn't say that, Pearl?

MR STANLEY

No, no, she didn't, it was the little boy.

MUM

Reggie? That's typical of him.

MR STANLEY

Perhaps there is more than a little truth in it. But anyway, the children had been brave enough to ask for help and a very long shot occurred to me. I knew that I hadn't seen anything when Bella was stolen, but what if my wife had? What if there was something on the camera?

PEARL

There is, there is, otherwise you wouldn't be here!

MR STANLEY

You are right, there is something. I downloaded all of the photographs on the camera and I found this.

Mr Stanley takes a sheet of paper from his folder.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)

It is a photograph of Roxy and Bella tied up outside the shop.

Pearl and Primrose both rush to have a look.

PEARL

It is, it is! It's Bella!

Pearl took the photograph and showed it to Roxy.

PEARL (CONT'D)

Look, Roxy, there she is, there's Bella.

Mum starts to cry. Dad moves to sit beside her and gently takes her hand.

DAD

Let us see, Pearl.

Pearl shows them the photograph. Primrose sits next to Mum.

MUM

Oh my, that is exactly as they were when I went into the shop.

MR STANLEY

My wife must have walked by on her way to the river. She loved dogs and I have to say this is a lovely photograph.

DAD

Yes, it is, but how can it possibly help?

MR STANLEY

I think it holds a very big clue.

DAD

It does? Where?

Dad stares at the photograph, puzzled.

MR STANLEY

Look at the large shop windows and the reflections in the glass. Especially look at the one above Bella.

DAD

I see a van, that's all.

MR STANLEY

Look closer at the van. The front passenger window is down.

DAD

Yes, I see. And I can see an elderly woman in the seat. She's looking out.

MR STANLEY

Yes, she is, and what is she looking at?

DAD

She's looking at Bella!

MUM

Do you think she was the one who stole Bella?

MR STANLEY

I have no doubt about it and I know my wife would have said the same.

DAD

Perhaps it is just a coincidence.

MR STANLEY

No, there is no such thing. It is a word often used when all the facts are not known. Look at the woman's eyes. That look tells me she is up to no good.

MUM

Who on earth is she?

MR STANLEY

I've no idea, but we do have something to go on.

DAD

We do?

MR STANLEY

Look closer. On the side of the van you can see two letters, 'H' and 'O'.

PEARL

HO? What does that mean.

MR STANLEY

I don't think it means anything. Only part of the word is reflected in the window. I think it is the beginning of a business name, you know, advertising on the van.

MUM

So what do we do now? Only a few moments ago we were telling Pearl it was all a waste of time, but then we didn't have this photograph.

DAD

I know.

Dad looks from Mum to Roxy.

DAD (CONT'D)

What do you think, Roxy?

Roxy slowly gets off her beanbag and sits beside him.

Dad lovingly strokes her head. To his surprise Roxy lifts her paw and touches his arm.

PEARL

She wants us to look, Dad.

DAD

Where would we start?

Mr Stanley points at the photograph.

MR STANLEY

Here, like Pearl says, at the scene of the crime. You need to write down everything you know.

PEARL

We've already started that, haven't we, Prim?

Primrose nods in agreement.

MUM

Have you? And when was that?

PEARL

Yesterday, with Milly and Reggie. We made a picture of Bella. Prim coloured it in.

PRIMROSE

Shall we show them?

PEARL

Okay.

Pearl races up to her bedroom.

MUM

Prim, how did you make a picture of Bella?

PRIMROSE

Reggie searched for a picture of a grown up female white English Bull Terrier, we printed it, Pearl drew on Bella's marking and I coloured it in. Easy.

MR STANLEY

What a good idea. So simple.

Pearl returns with the corkboard.

She shows the side with her normal photographs then turns it over to show the picture of Bella surrounded by cards.

MUM

Very clever, so I wouldn't see it!

Roxy stares at the picture.

PEARL

That's Bella now, Roxy, isn't she lovely?

MR STANLEY

This is very good, you certainly have done it the right way with all these cards.

PEARL

Thank you, but we don't know what else to do.

MR STANLEY

Well, we need to find the woman in the van. Oh, excuse me, I mean you need to find the woman in the van.

Disappointment on Pearl's face.

PEARL

But aren't you going to help us?

Mr Stanley looks at Mum and Dad.

MR STANLEY

Would you like me to help?

MUM

I think we would all love you to help.

They all nod in agreement.

MUM (CONT'D)

Do you think it was a random theft or planned?

MR STANLEY

If the woman lives a long way off then it was planned and she must have known about Bella.

MUM

How?

MR STANLEY

Did you register Bella with the Kennel Club?

DAD

Yes, we did, Bella's full name is Bella Snow Queen.

MR STANLEY

So we have a starting point. I could check for English Bull Terriers with similar names and look for registered dog breeders. She may have been stolen for breeding purposes.

MUM

Oh dear, poor thing.

DAD

And what can we do?

MR STANLEY

We need to try and find out what the word on the van is. You could look at businesses in a thirty-mile radius. Also, you could look out for any dog shows, see if you can find any with English Bull Terriers entered.

PEARL

Mum! What about the Walk in the Forest? It's next Sunday.

MUM

Oh, yes, good idea, Pearl, I'd forgotten about that.

MR STANLEY

What's that?

MUM

It's held every December in Delamere Forest and it's just for owners of English Bull Terriers. We meet up for a three-mile walk. It's lovely to see so many dogs together. We weren't going this year with Roxy being ill.

Roxy gives a low BARK at Mum.

MUM (CONT'D)

Do you want to go, Roxy?

Roxy BARKS again.

DAD

Looks like we're going to the forest on Sunday.

PEARL

What do we think we'll find?

MUM

We won't know until we are there.

MR STANLEY

That's right, and in the meantime
we have things to do.

INT. STUDY, MR STANLEY'S HOUSE - DAY

MR STANLEY sits at the ornate writing desk with the leather inlay and opens his notebook computer. There is a pen and blank paper on the desk.

He taps in his password and goes to his Google home page.

On the top sheet of paper he writes the heading: NAMES.

Underneath he writes : BELLA SNOW QUEEN

In the search line he types: Pedigree Dogs Register

The top three hits are all related to The Kennel Club. He looks in amazement at the brief facts.

He writes: 250,000 dogs registered every year!

MR STANLEY

Oh, my goodness!

He writes:

Breed Register Pedigree and Assured Breeder Scheme.

He sits back in his chair.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)

This is not going to be easy.

INT. PEARL'S BEDROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - EVENING

PEARL and MILLY sit on the floor and look at the corkboard.

PEARL

We've split the searches. We're
going to look for the company name
on the van.

MILLY

How do we start?

PEARL

I don't really know because there are so many businesses in this part of the country.

MILLY

How many?

PEARL

More than half a million.

MILLY

What! How do you know that?

PEARL

I had a look online. Don't worry, Dad will help us when he gets in from work.

INT. REGGIE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

REGGIE sits at his desk with his desktop computer opened up at a second-hand car dealers web page.

His notepaper by the side of the computer is headed:

VAN MAKE/MODEL?

He clicks through the different types of older vans for sale.

He frequently glances at the photograph of Roxy and Bella with the white van partially reflected in the shop window.

INT. HALL, PEARL'S HOUSE - EVENING

MUM stands at the foot of the stairs.

MUM

Pearl, this is the third night in a row. You have to stop now, you have school tomorrow.

PEARL (O.S.)

Five minutes, Mum?

MUM

No, Milly has to get home otherwise her mum will be mad at me.

DAD (O.S.)

Okay, we're finished now.

INT. PEARL'S BEDROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - EVENING

PEARL hangs the corkboard on the wall.

MILLY piles the sheets of notepaper neatly on the desk.

DAD stands with his hands in his pockets, shoulders slumped.

DAD

I don't know how we are going to find her, nothing fits.

PEARL

We can't give up, there must be something else we can do. What do you think, Milly?

MILLY

We have to widen the search. There will be something out there.

DAD

But look at how many we've checked already.

He picked up the neat pile of papers, flicked through them and shook his head.

EXT. THE SHOPS - DAY

DAD and MR STANLEY stand by the dog rings outside the main shop. They look out at the busy car park.

MR STANLEY

Reggie has done well, he has identified the van.

DAD

Good lad, at least one of us is on the ball.

MR STANLEY

I hadn't realised just how many dogs are registered each year. I haven't made a single connection. These people must have changed her name or if they are breeders who's to say they are registered?

DAD

And the number of businesses to look at is staggering. I've restricted it to a thirty mile radius and we have worked on it every night this week without success. It could take weeks, months maybe, and we don't have that much time.

MR STANLEY

We need a bit of luck, don't we?

DAD

We certainly do.

EXT. CAR PARK, DELAMERE FOREST - DAY

DAD drives the estate car into the very busy car park.

FAMILIES with their English Bull Terriers of different ages, colours and sizes head to the start of the Walk in the Forest.

PEARL and PRIMROSE eagerly get out of the car and wait with MUM while Dad lifts ROXY out of the back of the car. They head to the start.

Behind them a white van hurriedly pulls into the car park.

INT. WHITE VAN, CAR PARK, DELAMERE FOREST - DAY

OLD-MAN HOPLEY, the driver, argues with his front-seat passenger, MRS HOPLEY (70's).

OLD-MAN HOPLEY

I'm not walking three miles, you can go on your own.

MRS HOPLEY

It was you who wanted to come in the first place.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY

No, it was you who said we needed to show him off, not me, and you know my gout is playing up.

MRS HOPLEY

Not that excuse again.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY
Get out and walk him. I'm staying
here and reading my paper.

EXT. CAR PARK, DELAMERE FOREST - DAY

MRS HOPLEY gets out of the van, SLAMS the door, and walks
round to the back.

She roughly opens the rear door and pulls out JACK.

MRS HOPLEY
You had better behave as well
because if you don't, you know what
you will get.

She holds the lead tight as she reaches into the van for her
stick. Jack gives a low GROWL.

MRS HOPLEY (CONT'D)
Yes, you know what it's for. Now
come on, we're late already.

She jerks the lead and pulls Jack to the start of the trail.

EXT. TRAIL, DELAMERE FOREST - DAY

PEARL, PRIMROSE, MUM, DAD and ROXY follow at the back of the
other walkers. They walk much slower because Roxy is old.

PEARL
Now that we know what Bella looks
like as a grown-up do you think we
might see her here?

DAD
It's possible.

MUM
I wonder if we've ever seen her in
previous years and not realised?

PEARL
That would be spooky. Dad, if we
did recognise her, what would we
do?

DAD
I don't know, Pearl, we couldn't
just take her.

As Pearl speaks, MRS HOPLEY briskly walks past with JACK.

PEARL

But Bella was taken from us.

At the sound of Bella's name Jack stops walking and turns on the spot, jerking the arm of Mrs Hopley. She turns.

Jack BARKS at Pearl.

MRS HOPLEY

You stupid dog! Keep walking.

Jack BARKS louder. Mrs Hopley raises her stick and strikes Jack on his back leg.

Roxy looks at Mrs Hopley, GROWLS and starts to BARK furiously.

MUM

Roxy, whatever is the matter?

Pearl freezes on the spot when she sees Mrs Hopley's face.

Primrose points directly at Mrs Hopley.

PEARL

Mum, Dad, she's the woman! She's the one in the van. She stole Bella!

At the sound of Bella's name again Jack BARKS louder and louder. He pulls at his lead, trying to get to Pearl.

Mrs Hopley savagely hits Jack again. He YELPS in pain.

PEARL (CONT'D)

She is, Mum, look at her. Look at her face.

Mrs Hopley quickly turns back down the trail pulling Jack roughly with her.

Roxy pulls and BARKS, trying to get to her.

Mum and Dad stare in shock as Mrs Hopley rushes away.

PEARL (CONT'D)

It is her, Mum, Roxy recognises her as well. We have to follow her before she gets away.

Mum looks at Dad.

MUM

What if it is the woman? We need to be sure.

DAD

You go after her.

PEARL

Me, too.

DAD

I'll bring Primrose and Roxy. Quick, she's almost at the car park.

Mum and Pearl run back down the trail.

EXT. CAR PARK, DELAMERE FOREST - DAY

PEARL and MUM reach the car park just as MRS HOPLEY gets into the front passenger seat of the van.

They run to the van.

PEARL

Mum, it's the same van!

Mrs Hopley looks out of the window and scowls at Pearl and Mum as the van pulls away.

MUM looks at her in shock.

MUM

Oh my goodness, it's her! You're right, Pearl.

The van speeds away.

Mum and Pearl see the advertising sign on the side. It reads: HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS.

EXT. PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

MR STANLEY KNOCKS at the door just as REGGIE runs up the path.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - EVENING

PEARL, PRIMROSE, MUM, DAD, MILLY, REGGIE and Mr STANLEY sit around the room.

MR STANLEY

This is excellent news. Has anyone searched for them yet?

MUM

No, I wanted everyone to be up to speed.

MR STANLEY

Okay, Pearl, Reggie, get on the Internet and search for Hopley's Boarding Kennels; they will almost certainly have a website. We need to know the address, how far, telephone number, whatever you can find.

Pearl and Reggie jump to their feet and head to the door.

PEARL

You do it, Reggie, you'll be quicker.

PRIMROSE

Come on, Milly, we'll go as well.

Primrose and Milly follow Pearl and Reggie out of the room.

DAD

If we find them, what can we do? We don't know they have Bella. If it was them who stole her, they may not have her now. She could have been sold.

MR STANLEY

All of these things are possible and we need to eliminate them one by one.

MUM

How?

MR STANLEY

We need to visit the kennels.

MUM

But the woman has seen us. If we go she will suspect something.

MR STANLEY

You're right, especially you and Pearl, but she hasn't seen me.

INT. PEARL'S BEDROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

REGGIE TAPS furiously on the keyboard watched by PEARL, PRIMROSE and MILLY.

REGGIE
Here! Got it.

PEARL
That's brilliant, Reggie.

REGGIE
Okay, it's printing.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

The SOUND of footsteps coming down the stairs.

MUM, DAD and MR STANLEY watch as PEARL, PRIMROSE, MILLY and REGGIE hurry into the room. Pearl holds a sheet of paper.

PEARL
Hopley's Boarding Kennels are out
in the country, forty miles west of
here.

DAD
That's why we didn't find them. We
had set a thirty mile search
radius.

MR STANLEY
Very good, Reggie, you were fast.
Now, have they got Bella?

PEARL
There's one more thing.

MUM
What is it, Pearl?

PEARL
They also breed dogs, English Bull
Terriers, and they have puppies for
sale, or will have very soon. Mum,
what if it is Bella?

Pearl, upset, runs to Mum for a hug. Mum looks at Mr Stanley.

MR STANLEY

I'll go. I'll make an appointment as soon as possible. I'll pretend I want to buy a puppy but I want to see the mother first in order to see if she is strong and healthy: to see if she is Bella.

EXT. DRIVE, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - DAY

Heavy snow is falling. MR STANLEY turns his car off the country road and into the drive.

The sign points to Hopley's Boarding Kennels.

EXT. FARMYARD, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - DAY

MR STANLEY pulls the car to a halt in the small farmyard.

The TWO DOBERMAN guard dogs BARK and jump at the wire netting of their enclosure next to the old, run-down farmhouse.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY ignores the dogs and hobbles over to the car.

Mr Stanley gets out of the car.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY

Good that you are on time. I hate people being late when I've got other things to do. And this snow doesn't help.

MR STANLEY

I'm Mr Stanley.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY

I know that, seeing as there is no-one else coming today.

Old-Man Hopley begins to hobble away.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)

Let's be quick, I've got a lot of cleaning and painting to be getting on with before the Christmas and New Year bookings start to come in. She's over in the third building, round that corner.

Mr Stanley follows him round the corner.

EXT. DOOR, 3RD BUILDING, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - DAY

OLD-MAN HOPLEY selects the old brass key from his big bunch of keys, unlocks the door and goes inside followed by MR. STANLEY.

INT. 3RD BUILDING, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - DAY

OLD-MAN HOPLEY and MR STANLEY stand at the end of the alley.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY

There's only two dogs in here at the moment. These weeks before Christmas are always quiet, then it gets packed. People away, holidays, visiting family, you know how it is.

Mr Stanley nods.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)

She's in there, the fourth kennel along. She probably won't get up, she's only got a couple of days before she gives birth.

Old-Man Hopley looks at the third kennel.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)

He'll be watching you though, won't you Jack?

JACK stares through the bars on the gate of his kennel.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)

He's very protective, not surprising really, they're his pups. He's the dad.

High-pitched BARKING, like an angry dog yapping, fills the air.

Old-Man Hopley takes his mobile phone from his pocket.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)

It's the wife, a yapping dog. I thought it was a good ring tone for her. I'll have to see what she wants. She's away at her sister's for a few days and if I don't answer she'll keep pestering.

MR STANLEY
Can I take a photograph.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY
Do what you want.

Mr Stanley watches Old-Man Hopley hobble outside, phone to his ear.

Mr Stanley sees another brass key hanging on the back of the door.

He kneels by the fourth kennel door. Jack stares at him.

MR STANLEY
Bella, is it you?

BELLA is curled up at the back of the kennel.

She lifts her head. Her ears prick up.

Jack gives a low BARK. Mr Stanley turns to Jack.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)
Jack, is this Bella?

Jack BARKS again. He takes a photograph of Jack.

He turns back to the other kennel where BELLA now stands and looks at him though the bars.

A look of recognition on Mr Stanley's face.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)
(Softly)
Bella!

Bella's ears go back. She gives a low BARK as the door to the building opens.

Old-Man Hopley hobbles in.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY
Well, that's a surprise. She normally doesn't get up for anyone, not that it will do her much good now. She's only carrying two pups; that's no good to me. This is her last litter then she'll be put down. Make way for a new dog. Anyway, what do you think?

MR STANLEY
Yes, I'll have one.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY
Have you taken your photograph?

MR STANLEY
One more?

OLD-MAN HOPLEY
Be sharp. I'll wait outside.

Old-Man Hopley barges out through the door. Mr Stanley takes a photograph of Bella and leans towards Bella.

MR STANLEY
We are coming for you.

Mr Stanley stands and leaves, watched by Bella and Jack.

When the door closes behind him the brass key is missing from the hook.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

PEARL, PRIMROSE, MUM and DAD wait attentively for MR STANLEY to begin speaking.

MR STANLEY
There is no doubt they have Bella.
The dog I saw is identical to
Primrose's picture.

PEARL
Then we have to get her back.

DAD
Wait, Pearl, there is more, isn't
there?

MR STANLEY
There certainly is and it's not all
good.

PEARL
Why, what's wrong? She isn't
poorly, is she? Not her as well.

MR STANLEY
No, she isn't ill.

Pearl sighs with relief.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)
But Bella is going to have pups
very soon.

DAD
How soon?

MR STANLEY
Days.

DAD
That's bad.

PRIMROSE
Why is it bad?

PEARL
Yes, why is it bad?

Dad looks at Pearl and Primrose. He chooses his words carefully.

DAD
If Bella has pups we can't go for her, it would be too dangerous for the puppies. They could die if they are moved too soon.

PRIMROSE
We don't want that.

PEARL
But we can't wait, Roxy is ill, remember.

DAD
We haven't forgotten, Pearl, but Bella won't be able to move much either. She will have to recover and nurse the puppies.

PEARL
I know, but if we wait...?

MR STANLEY
We can't wait, we mustn't wait. There is something else.

Mum holds Pearl's and Primrose's hands.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)
The man told me that this would be Bella's last litter of pups. He said she would be put down afterwards.

PEARL

No, no! Not now we've found her.
Dad, don't let this happen, please!

Dad looks directly at Mr Stanley.

DAD

You said she had days.

MR STANLEY

I did.

DAD

That doesn't give us much time.

MR STANLEY

No, it doesn't.

DAD

We need a plan.

MR STANLEY

I already have one.

DAD

You do?

MR STANLEY

Yes, I scouted the surrounding area
before I left. If you are up for
it, we go for Bella tonight.

INT. KITCHEN, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

PEARL, dressed in pyjamas, takes the glass of milk from MUM.

PEARL

I can't go to bed, Mum, not
tonight. I have to wait up.

MUM

I know, Pearl, me too. Primrose is
fast asleep on the settee, I think
we'll leave her there, then if she
wakes up we will be with her.

PEARL

And Roxy.

MUM

And Roxy.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

PRIMROSE lies fast asleep on the settee. MUM and PEARL sit together on the large armchair. ROXY is on her beanbag by the fire.

The door slowly opens. DAD and MR STANLEY walk in. They are both dressed completely in white overalls.

DAD

It's time to go. Wish us luck.

MUM

Be lucky for all of us.

PEARL

Good luck, Dad.

MUM

Mr Stanley, I don't know how to thank you.

MR STANLEY

Thank me if, no, when we get Bella home.

MUM

Yes, I will. Good luck and drive carefully.

Mum stands and gives Dad a hug.

PEARL

Please bring her back, Dad.

Pearl stays seated on the armchair. Roxy moves to sit at her feet.

DAD

Look after everyone, Roxy. If all goes well we will be back by midnight.

INT. MR STANLEY'S CAR - NIGHT

MR STANLEY drives. DAD sits in the front passenger seat.

MR STANLEY

After I left the kennels this afternoon I drove round the back lanes looking for another way into the farm.

DAD
And you found one?

MR STANLEY
Eventually. The good thing is that his wife is away and the kennels are quiet at the moment; not many dogs at all.

DAD
So less noise.

MR STANLEY
Yes, the third building only has Bella and another dog called Jack in it. If we are very quiet we may not set off the other dogs barking in the other buildings.

DAD
Even if they bark, he may not suspect anything. All dogs bark.

MR STANLEY
Yes, but he has two Doberman guard dogs near the house.

DAD
Are they tied up?

MR STANLEY
Oh, yes, they're in a small compound, surrounded by wire fencing, but they are outside. Round the corner from the third building, but still outside.

DAD
And you have the key?

MR STANLEY
I do indeed. That was a stroke of luck.

DAD
And quick thinking, thank goodness.

Mr Stanley slows the car as he peers into the darkness.

MR STANLEY
There! There it is.

In the car headlights they see a stile over the hedge. Mr Stanley pulls the car over and turns off the headlights.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)
This is it. Ready?

DAD
My heart is pounding, but, yes,
ready.

MR STANLEY
Then let's go.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - NIGHT

DAD and MR STANLEY get out of the car, quietly close the doors and climb over the stile.

EXT. FIELD, REAR OF HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - NIGHT

MR STANLEY leads the way along the path by the hedge. DAD follows close behind.

The full moon casts bright light then shadows as clouds pass over it. Across the snow-covered field are the kennels.

Mr Stanley halts and stares at the sky.

MR STANLEY
We need to cross the field. We should wait until that big cloud passes over the moon and then we can cross in darkness.

Dad looks across the undulating field at the distant buildings.

DAD
I agree.

MR STANLEY
When we get to the third building I will open the door and wait, keeping watch, while you get Bella.

DAD
Understood.

Dad takes a forehead torch from his pocket and puts it on his head.

MR STANLEY
Only turn it on when you are inside and don't look up. We don't want anyone seeing the light.

DAD

I won't.

MR STANLEY

We'll be in and out in minutes. He won't know Bella has gone until the morning.

The big cloud slowly drifts across the moon.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)

(Hushed)
Now!

The snow CRUNCHES underfoot as they run across the undulating field. Dad holds back so that Mr Stanley can keep up.

DAD

Come on, nearly there.

They reach the side of the third building just as the moon reappears from behind the cloud.

MR STANLEY

Made it! But I need a minute to get my breath back.

DAD

Take your time.

MR STANLEY

The Dobermans' compound is round the corner from the doorway so they won't be able to see us. As long as we don't make a noise we should be all right. Let me go first and unlock the door.

Dad nods in agreement. Mr Stanley disappears round the corner.

Dad waits for a minute then follows.

EXT. DOOR, 3RD BUILDING, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - NIGHT

DAD walks towards the door to the third building. It silently opens as he approaches.

INT. 3RD BUILDING, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - NIGHT

DAD walks through the open doorway. MR STANLEY pushes the door almost shut leaving a small gap so that he can look out.

They stand in the darkness that is broken only by the few shafts of moonlight coming through the small windows in the sloping the roof. (They talk in whispers).

MR STANLEY

Bella is in the fourth kennel on the right. I'll keep watch at the door.

Dad looks down at the floor and turns on the light on his forehead.

He walks past the two empty kennels then jumps with surprise when he sees JACK staring at him through the bars of his kennel.

DAD

You gave me a fright, you must be Jack.

Jack GROWLS uneasily.

DAD (CONT'D)

Good boy, good boy. Please don't bark.

Dad moves along to the next kennel and peers inside.

DAD (CONT'D)

Bella, Bella, wake up, time to go.

Jack GROWLS again. Dad turns to him.

DAD (CONT'D)

No, no, please don't, I'm not going to hurt her, I'm here to take her away.

Jack GROWLS louder.

DAD (CONT'D)

Wait, I know you. You were in the forest, you barked when you heard Bella's name.

Jack gives a low BARK.

DAD (CONT'D)

No, I'm here to save Bella, you know that.

Dad turns to Bella's kennel. She is staring right at him.

Dad slides across the catch and opens her kennel door.

DAD (CONT'D)
Come on, Bella, quick as you can.

Bella steps outside. She looks at Jack.

DAD (CONT'D)
We have to go, Bella.

Bella will not move past Jack's kennel.

Dad takes hold of Bella's collar to pull her along.

MR STANLEY
Careful, look how big her tummy is.
Her pups are ready to be born.

Jack begins to scratch and bite at the bars on his kennel door. Dad crouches down and looks into Bella's eyes.

DAD
Please, Bella. You have to come
now.

Bella turns to Jack as Dad gently pulls at her collar.

Jack begins to GROWL and BANG at the kennel door. Bella pulls back.

MR STANLEY
She's not going to leave him and I
know why. She's carrying his pups!

DAD
Bella?

Bella gives a single low BARK to Dad.

Jack hurls himself at the kennel door and GROWLS louder and louder.

MR STANLEY
The Dobermans will hear him if he
doesn't stop. Let him out, she
isn't going to move without him.

DAD
We can't just take him.

Jack BANGS at the kennel door.

MR STANLEY
Yes, you can, that's what they did.

From outside comes the sound of the Dobermans BARKING. Mr Stanley glances outside.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)

That's torn it. A light has come on upstairs in the house. We have to go now.

Dad reaches for the bolt on Jack's kennel door.

DAD

Look's like you're coming with us.

Jack is outside the kennel in a flash. He goes straight to the entrance door to look out. He GROWLS.

Dad starts to walk but sees that Bella can hardly move.

MR STANLEY

She'll never make it, you'll have to carry her.

Dad sweeps up Bella in his arms and along with Jack and Mr Stanley hurries out of the building.

EXT. 3RD BUILDING, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - NIGHT

In the moonlight DAD, BELLA, MR STANLEY and JACK run quickly round the corner of the building.

The Dobermans BARK furiously at the SOUND of RUNNING FEET.

EXT. FARMYARD, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - NIGHT

Lights come on downstairs in the house. The door opens.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY hobbles past the BARKING DOBERMANS.

With his torch he shines a light on the doors of buildings one and two. They are closed.

He hobbles to the corner and shines the torchlight on the third building. He sees that the door is open and footprints and pawprints in the snow.

He quickly turns back and hobbles to the Dobermans' compound.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY

Come on, boys, we've got work to do.

He quickly opens the compounds, puts the leads on the Dobermans and heads for the third building.

The Dobermans, BARKING and flashing their teeth in rage, pull and jerk at their leads to get ahead.

EXT. DOOR, 3RD BUILDING, HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - NIGHT

OLD-MAN HOPLEY, holding the DOBERMANS who strain at their leads, reaches through the open door, flicks on the light switch and sees that kennels three and four are open.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY

Nooo!

EXT. FIELD, REAR OF HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - NIGHT

The SHOUT of Old-Man Hopley ECHOES in the night.

DAD, carrying BELLA, MR STANLEY and JACK are three-quarters of the way across the undulating field.

MR STANLEY

He's onto us.

DAD

I can't run any faster, she's a heavy dog.

MR STANLEY

I can't run any faster and I'm not carrying a dog!

DAD

We'll make it, we have to.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY and the DOBERMANS appear round the back of the third building.

In the moonlight he sees them running in the distance.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY

I may not be able to catch you, but my dogs will.

He releases the Dobermans.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY (CONT'D)

Go get them, boys.

The Dobermans BARK and YELP as they race across the open field, kicking up the snow behind them.

Dad stops running and turns.

DAD
Oh, no, he's let the Dobermans
loose, we'll never outrun them.

Without hesitation Jack BARKS once at Dad and Mr Stanley then runs back in the direction of the Dobermans.

DAD (CONT'D)
No, Jack, no!

MR STANLEY
He's made his choice. He wants to
save Bella and his pups. We have to
run.

They run to the path, the stile is less than 100 yards away.

Behind them in the distance is the terrible SOUND of dogs fighting.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - NIGHT

At the car DAD gently lays BELLA on the back seat. MR STANLEY starts the engine.

MR STANLEY
Get in, get in!

Dad rushes round to the passenger side and opens the door. As he steps in he hears a PIERCING HOWL.

DAD
That was Jack, I know it was!

MR STANLEY
Get in before they get here! We
can't fight them.

Dad looks across to the stile and the field beyond. The BARKING continues.

DAD
He's still fighting!

MR STANLEY
We must go!

DAD
No, I can't leave him. I need
something, a stick, anything. I
can't leave him to fight alone.

MR STANLEY

The boot, my fishing tackle for the match; the keep net! The net's big and the handle extends. Swing it at the dogs!

Mr Stanley presses a switch, the boot CLICKS open.

Dad grabs the keep net, extends the handle and leaps over the stile.

EXT. FIELD, REAR OF HOPLEY'S BOARDING KENNELS - NIGHT

DAD, carrying the keep net, runs from the path into the field.

OLD-MAN HOPLEY is a quarter of the way across the field.

Dad sees JACK a short distance away. Jack stands unsteadily, shaking, his back leg bitten and bleeding.

One DOBERMAN lies flat out in the snow, PANTING, its breath making small clouds in the cold night air.

The other DOBERMAN SNARLS and bares its teeth as it creeps forward.

Jack holds his ground as the Doberman pulls back onto its hind legs. Its evil eyes narrow and he pounces at Jack.

Dad swings the keep net and catches the Doberman's head and front legs in the net.

The dog SNARLS and falls to the ground.

Dad moves quickly and pulls the net over the dog's back legs.

The dog is trapped. The more it struggles, the more tangled it becomes.

DAD

You're not going anywhere.

Dad sweeps Jack up into his arms and run to the stile.

Old-Man Hopley reaches the two PANTING Dobermans as the car pulls away.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Loud BANGING on the front door. PRIMROSE wakes with a start.

ROXY sits up on her beanbag. PEARL runs to the bay window and puts her head round the curtain.

PEARL
They're back!

MUM rushes into the hall.

INT. HALL, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MUM opens the front door. MR STANLEY pushes the door wide open to reveal DAD standing with BELLA in his arms.

Tears run down Mum's face.

MUM
You've got her, you've got Bella!

Mum gently strokes Bella's head.

MUM (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Oh, Bella, I'm so very sorry.

Dad walks in.

DAD
No time for tears. Pearl, Primrose?

MUM
They're waiting with Roxy.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

DAD puts BELLA down on the floor. PEARL and PRIMROSE hold hands and watch nervously.

Bella stands completely still and stares at them.

PRIMROSE
She is just like my picture

PEARL
Exactly. We really have found
Bella.

Pearl walks forward to stroke her. Bella's ears go back as Pearl strokes her head then gently puts her arms round her neck and hugs her.

From her fireside beanbag ROXY slowly stands and sniffs the air.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Roxy, come and see Bella.

Bella and Roxy move towards each other until their noses meet. Roxy moves her head so that their cheeks touch and Bella nuzzles her head into Roxy's neck.

Their tails begin to wag, slowly at first, becoming faster.

PRIMROSE
Look, Mum, they recognise each other.

MUM
They certainly do.

Dad smiles and WHISPERS into Mum's ear.

They walk into the hall, closing the door behind them.

INT. HALL, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MUM
What else is there?

DAD
I want you to clear the kitchen table and get the first aid kit.

Fear fills Mum's eyes.

DAD (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
It isn't for Bella.

MUM
What?

DAD
It's for Jack.

Dad walks out of the house. Mum walks down the hall.

EXT. PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MR STANLEY stands back from the car door as DAD reaches in to get JACK from the back seat.

With Jack in his arms Dad walks back into the house.

INT. KITCHEN, PEARL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MUM gasps when she sees the blood-soaked scarf tied round JACK'S left hind leg. DAD lays Jack on the table.

MR STANLEY looks on.

MUM
How bad is it?

DAD
I don't know, we haven't looked. We used the scarf to stop the bleeding.

MUM
How?

DAD
He saved us.

MR STANLEY
He certainly did. Two Dobermans were set on us and he kept them at bay.

MUM
He's the dog from the forest, the one we followed.

DAD
Yes, he is, and he's the father of the pups Bella is carrying.

Mum lovingly strokes Jack's head.

MUM
He was saving his family.

DAD
I believe he was, and now we're going to save him.

INT. STAIRS, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PEARL and PRIMROSE, both dressed in snowman pyjamas, sit on the stairs waiting.

PRIMROSE
I wonder what Father Christmas has left for us?

PEARL

For you. I made a wish and said I would give up all my presents if Roxy could see Bella. It came true, so I won't have any presents, but I don't mind, we've got Bella.

PRIMROSE

And Jack and Pip and Patch!

The girls laugh.

PEARL

Yes, I never thought we would have a house full of English Bull Terriers.

PRIMROSE

Nor me. Great, isn't it?

DAD (O.S.)

Ready!

Pearl and Primrose run to the living room door and go inside.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

The first thing PEARL and PRIMROSE see is ROXY, surrounded by her family.

BELLA lays in her basket next to Roxy with her two puppies, PIP and PATCH, while JACK stands proudly behind them, his leg bandaged.

PEARL

Merry Christmas, Roxy.

Pearl kneels down and hugs Roxy.

MUM

This is all because of you, Pearl.

PEARL

No, Mum, it was all of us.

PRIMROSE

Pearl, look!

Primrose points to the Christmas tree.

On either side of the tree are two sacks full of presents.

PRIMROSE (CONT'D)
Father Christmas has brought your
presents, I knew he would.

PEARL
But my wish?

MUM
Maybe he thought it was such a
selfless act that he wanted to
reward you.

PEARL
Do you think so?

MUM
I'm sure of it. What do you think,
Dad?

DAD
Definitely.

Dad gives a knowing smile to Mum.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - LATER

All the presents have been opened and MUM clears the
discarded paper.

There is a KNOCK on the door. PRIMROSE runs to the bay window
to look outside.

PRIMROSE
It's Mr Stanley!

PEARL follows DAD to the hall.

HALL, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

DAD opens the front door. MR STANLEY stands smiling in the
falling snow.

DAD
Come in come in. Merry Christmas.

Dad and Mr Stanley shake hands as he steps inside. Mr Stanley
offers his hand to PEARL.

MR STANLEY
Merry Christmas, Pearl.

PEARL
Merry Christmas, Mr Stanley.

MR STANLEY
I hope I'm not disturbing you, but
I wanted you to have some news.

DAD
Good news?

MR STANLEY
Very good.

DAD
Then come and tell us all.

Dad takes Mr Stanley's coat. They go into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

MR STANLEY'S face lights up when he sees ROXY, BELLA, JACK,
PIP and PATCH.

MR STANLEY
What a lovely sight!

MUM
We couldn't have done it without
you.

MR STANLEY
I'm just so happy I was able to
help. And now I've got this.

Mr Stanley takes a newspaper clipping from his pocket.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)
It was in the regional news section
yesterday, only a small headline
but hugely important.

He holds up the clipping and reads it out.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)
Following a tip-off from a member
of the public it has been found
that Hopley's Boarding Kennels has
allegedly been acting as
unregistered dog breeders.

(MORE)

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)

It appears that the boarding kennels have been used as a front to mask their true business for the past ten years and it is believed that stolen pets were used for breeding purposes. The elderly husband and wife owners are now being investigated for tax evasion and the kennels have been shut down forthwith.

DAD

So they won't come looking?

MR STANLEY

No, I don't see how they can. Anything they may say would incriminate them further.

MUM

It really is over then?

MR STANLEY

Yes, I believe it is.

PEARL

Mr Stanley, can I have the clipping, please?

MR STANLEY

Of course.

Mr Stanley hands Pearl the clipping.

MR STANLEY (CONT'D)

And now I must go. My daughter is coming for me soon. Christmas dinner at her house.

MUM

How lovely.

MR STANLEY

Yes, it will be, and I hope Roxy is feeling better. She certainly looks well.

DAD

She has perked up enormously. I think the medicines must have started to work.

MUM

Or something like that. By the looks of her she will be here for a good while yet.

No-one noticed that the fairy on the tree was smiling.

INT. HALL, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

MUM and DAD see MR STANLEY out and close the front door.

PEARL and PRIMROSE head up the stairs.

PEARL

We have something to do.

MUM

Don't be long, we need some breakfast.

INT. PEARL'S BEDROOM, PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

PEARL, watched closely by PRIMROSE, takes down the corkboard and pins the newspaper clipping under the picture of Bella.

She takes a bright red marker from her desk, smiles at PRIMROSE and writes across the clipping: CASE CLOSED.

THE END.