

EXT. BEACH - SUNSET

A violet horizon. Water rolls across the sand. It gushes over a GIRL'S LEGS, HANDS... her FACE, smiling, stars in her eyes.

INT. HANGING CHAMBER - NIGHT

DARK LEATHERY HANDS. With surgical precision they --

Measure a rope. Hang a noose. Pull a lever. A trap door falls. A single rope drops!

INT. VARIOUS / PRISON - NIGHT

WE FOLLOW FROM BEHIND: a set of keys hang off the HANGMAN's belt as he walks down various prison hallways.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

THE HANGMAN (40s), Indian, not a hair out of line, in a pressed blue uniform. A dutiful confidence masks a lifetime of pain. He stops at a cell door, opens the viewing slat --

INT. DEATH ROW CELL - NIGHT

POV: LIU (33), Chinese, sits shirtless on the floor. His body is a canvas of ink as he stares at a photo of an OLD WOMAN.

HANGMAN (O.S.)
Liu Xian Hua?

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

TERRENCE, a young Chinese guard, approaches the same door --

INT. DEATH ROW CELL - NIGHT

POV: The Hangman embraces Liu.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Terrence leads Liu, clothed in a hospital gown, and the Hangman down a stark hallway. Liu mutters in Mandarin:

LIU
*Wo laizi hei an chieng wong hei
an.*

INT. HANGING CHAMBER - EARLY MORNING

The Hangman ties a noose around Liu's neck. He blindfolds him. Liu continues muttering as the Hangman walks back.

THE MUSLIM CALL TO PRAYER echoes in the distance.

The first rays of Sunlight illuminate the stark chamber. Terrence, next to a DOCTOR, checks his watch, looks to the Hangman, nods.

HANGMAN

Liu Xian Hua. I am going to send you to a better place than this.

He pulls the lever. The trap door. The body falls.

EXT. PRISON YARD - MORNING

The Hangman stands s against a barb wire fence, a jungle behind him. He lights a cigarette, inhales, lost in thought.

INT. COURT HOUSE - DAY

SOPHIE (23), young, frazzled, nervously stands in black suit at a defense table. An INDIAN BARRISTER (50) is next to her. Her mother ABIGAIL (55) holds Sophie's hand in trepidation.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Sophie Leigh Whitehouse. On the count of trafficking a class A narcotic, this court finds you guilty and sentences you to death.

Sophie doesn't register as Abigail CRIES OUT and grips her.

INT. JAIL CELL - AFTERNOON

Sophie sits on a small bed reading a Hallmark card: "Luv, mum." A care package: chocolates, sweets, a children's book.

JUDGE (O.S.)

I hereby remand you to Changi Prison where you will spend the remainder of your days on death row until the time of your execution.

Sophie eats a chocolate, throws the wrapper to the wall where a SPIDER scurries across to the cell-bar corner.

INT. MALE LOCKER ROOM - AFTERNOON

An effigy of the Hindu God Vishnu stuck to an inside locker, next to an old photo of a YOUNG INDIAN WOMAN.

The Hangman combs his hair. He overhears CHEN WEI (33), a cocky prison guard changing next to Terrence.

CHEN WEI

Hey, you don't think it's bizarre?
Why make friends ah--

TERRENCE

-You're *new*. It's just his way la.
It helps them.

CHEN WEI

Hung a woman before or not?

TERRENCE

Never. Wait! You saw her? The
Ang-mo? How la?

CHEN WEI

Saw. Pretty. No problem. Can make
friends.

He breaks into laughter as the Hangman shuts his locker. Terrence and Chen Wei are surprised but Chen Wei smirks.

INT. CELL BLOCK - NIGHT

The Hangman walks past rows of empty cells, stops. Wrappers have collected outside a cell. He approaches, picks one up.

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

POV: Sophie is on the toilet peeing. She wipes, notices --

INT. CELL BLOCK - NIGHT

Embarrassed, the Hangman averts his eyes. He turns to leave.

HANGMAN

I'm sorry.

SOPHIE (O.S.)

Got a smoke? Any menthols?

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

The Hangman comes to the bars. Pulls out a pack.

HANGMAN
No menthols.

She hesitates, but takes one.

SOPHIE
It's been hours. Where is everyone?

HANGMAN
You are the only woman. You got the whole block to yourself.

SOPHIE
Gee. Lucky me. And you have to go home to your *nice plush bed*.

HANGMAN
I didn't mean--

SOPHIE
-Listen mate. There's no mirror in here. D'you reckon you could--

HANGMAN
No, no. Cannot. Suicides.

Sophie looks blank, then cracks up in LAUGHTER. He backs up, confused, morbid. Sophie offers a chocolate.

SOPHIE
Wait. For the ciggie. It's chocolate. From Australia. Might cheer you up.

He looks at her perplexed, takes the chocolate.

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

SOUNDS of an empty cell block: endless squeaks, bangs, dints.

Sophie lies on the bed, sweating, weeping. She lowers her hand below her waist. Touches herself. She MOANS...

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Hangman wakes up. The bedside clock: "2:30AM"

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Hangman leans out the window smoking. He stares at Singapore's illuminated concrete skyline, majestic, modern.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Incense burns next to a small shrine. A wedding photo of a YOUNG HANGMAN and WIFE in a red sari.

HANGMAN (O.S.)

She was such a kind woman.

The Hangman pours whiskey, ponders a game of checkers.

HANGMAN (CONTD)

And smart. But good heart. A very good heart. That's hard to find.

WE REVEAL his opponent Liu, sitting ghostly pale. His neck, red from rope burns.

The Hangman moves a piece, taking several of Liu's - he's won. Liu stands up.

HANGMAN (CONTD)

My friend. One more game la. Don't leave me hanging.

Liu steps back, vanishing into darkness. The smile drops from the Hangman's face. He sips his whiskey, plays with his wedding band.

HANGMAN (CONTD)

Very kind.

INT. REFECTORY - DAY

The Hangman stands out of sight watching Sophie lining peas on a plate. The stark refectory hosts a DOZEN INMATES: CHINESE, AFRICANS, MALAYS. Along the walls, UNIFORMED GUARDS.

HANGMAN (O.S.)

Can I sit?

SOPHIE

It's a free country.

She cracks up. He sits, oblivious.

(CONTINUED)

SOPHIE (CONTD)

Lighten up mate. They let you fraternize with the rabble?

HANGMAN

I try to help people accept their fate.

SOPHIE

Jesus. Don't get all philosophical on me.

HANGMAN

It's my duty--

SOPHIE

-Yeah, well it's boring. Look around. We're in a fly-thru funeral parlor. I don't need reminding.

HANGMAN

It can be... lonely if you do not--

SOPHIE

-Isn't loneliness next to Godliness?

HANGMAN

You believe in God.

Sophie's annoyed with his questioning. He tries another way.

ACROSS THE ROOM Terrence taps Chen Wei's shoulder. They watch the Hangman and Sophie.

HANGMAN (CONTD)

You knew the risk. Why did you do it? Money? [*Beat.*] What was he called--

SOPHIE

-Just stop it!

FANDI, an older Malay inmate, passes the Hangman.

FANDI

-*Apa khabar 'cik?*

HANGMAN

Khabar baik.

(CONTINUED)

FANDI
'Cik rokok ada tak?

The Hangman stands, passes Fandi a cigarette. Fandi smiles at Sophie, he moves on.

SOPHIE
What are you, the smokes dealer?

HANGMAN
I forgot. I have something for you.

The Hangman places a pack of Menthols in front of Sophie.

SOPHIE
Trying to charm me are you?

You'll have to laugh at my jokes first.

She smiles at him - a small victory. He smiles back.

CHEN WEI
Hangman, warden wants to see you.

Terrence pulls Chen Wei back. Sophie looks to the other prisoners, business as usual.

SOPHIE
Why did he call you that?

The Hangman looks to Chen Wei then Sophie. He sinks, speechless.

SOPHIE (CONTD)
He's joking, right?

The Hangman just stares abashed. He's lost this round.

Sophie can't believe it. She gets up and darts away.

The Hangman, incensed, looks back at Chen Wei. The smirk from Chen Wei's face drops.

INT. JAIL CELL - DAY

Sophie MUMBLES to herself on the bed. She takes a chocolate, waffles it. The nostalgia burns inside her.

THOMAS (O.S.)
(echoing)
No! Please. Let me go. Let me...

(CONTINUED)

Sophie goes to the bars. Terrence and Chen Wei manhandle THOMAS, a well-built Englishman (30s), kicking and screaming. Thomas breaks away to the bar, takes Sophie's hand.

THOMAS (CONT'D) (CONTD)
Don't let 'em take me. I'll do anything. I just want to go home. I promise I won't do it again.

Chen Wei and Terrence can't pull Thomas off the bars.

SOPHIE
 I... I'm sorry. Where are they taking you?

THOMAS
 Don't let 'em take you. Don't let him take you. He'll--

Chen Wei SMACKS Thomas on the head. Thomas drops. Chen Wei laughs as he and Terrence catch their breath.

Chen Wei winks at Sophie as they drag Thomas O.S.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

A HANDFUL OF GUARDS congregate to one side as a DOZEN INMATES wander. They stare at Sophie, who sits by herself.

She watches the Hangman with a NEW YOUNG PRISONER.

Fandi prays on the ground. He stands and walks past Sophie, sits down next to her. He notices her gaze.

FANDI
 (Malay, English, smiling)
Hatinya di tempat yang betul sekali. Hatinya baik. Good man.

SOPHIE
 Him? You don't know who he is? The Hangman. He's going to kill you.

He stands up, grabs her shoulder.

FANDI
Lu akan memahami cukup tidak lama lagi.

Fandi peels away. He crosses the yard. Sophie watches him embrace the Hangman like two old friends. She's dumbfounded.

INT. JAIL CELL - DAY

Sophie brushes her hair. Her hand is covered in stray hairs.

Terrence accompanies a docile Fandi past her cell until they exit. She looks out after them but the Hangman enters.

SOPHIE

Where are you taking him?

HANGMAN

(stopping)

To another cell. The last place he will sleep.

SOPHIE

What's your deal? You make everyone your friend and then you hang them?

HANGMAN

I reduce suffering. It's my duty--

SOPHIE

-Or is it how you get off?

The Hangman steps forward to a weary Sophie. He places the menthols on the bar rail. She watches him skeptically as he walks away.

Sophie looks at the cigarettes with apprehension, takes them.

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Sophie mumbles in her sleep as a MALE FIGURE stands watching.

She opens her eyes, turns over --

The figure pins her to the bed. She SCREAMS but he covers her face - it's Chen Wei. She struggles but he's too strong.

Chen Wei splits her legs, undoes his pants.

THUMP!

He drops to the floor. Sophie pulls herself up, staring at her unlikely hero's silhouette - the Hangman.

She's beside herself, afraid of what he might do.

(CONTINUED)

HANGMAN (O.S.)
Are you scared?

INT. REFECTORY - NIGHT

The Hangman lights Sophie's cigarette, walks to the wall. Sophie is lost in a daze, her body turned away from his.

HANGMAN
They say fear is the truest emotion. Love, hate, guilt... all comes from fear. [Beat] Sophie, I believe people come here for a reason. They come here to learn to accept fate.

SOPHIE
Is that what this country calls justice? Fate?

HANGMAN
We can only do our best with the circumstances--

SOPHIE
Circumstances? You ever met someone you'd do absolutely anything for? [Beat.] You know what he said to my mum when she tracked him down? "She'll be right. They won't hang a white girl." [Beat.] I'm not supposed to be here. I should be at home, on a beach, with mum or some... boy who's not going to... Not here... with your *circumstances*. I don't deserve this.

The Hangman watches Sophie breakdown into incoherent tearful MUMBLING.

HANGMAN
My wife died when she was very young. The doctors were helpless. I was helpless. But she... she was fearless. She took the lot she was given and was kind, funny, courageous. She went with a clear mind, with grace. She knew in her heart what lay on the other side. After death.

She turns to him, looks into his promising eyes.

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Sophie lies on the bed staring at the ceiling red-eyed.

HANGMAN (O.S.)
They come to me... after death.

The SPIDER spins silk, builds a web.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Hangman and Liu play checkers.

HANGMAN (O.S.)
When I meet them here, they come
with their pain, fear and
suffering.

The photo of the Hangman's wife in a red sari.

HANGMAN (O.S.) (CONTD)
...Because of your suffering.
You've suffered in this life. You
suffer still.

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Sophie lays in bed crying.

HANGMAN (O.S.)
Salvation exists when you are able
to surrender yourself, to become
absorbed into the universe
independent of time and space.

OMITTED

INT. JAIL CELL - DAY

Sophie unwraps her final chocolate, slowly devours it.

HANGMAN (O.S.)
We must learn to detach ourselves
from the material world.

EXT. PRISON YARD - SUNSET

The yard is filled with the usual inmates and guards. AN
OLDER CHINESE INMATE introduces the Hangman to a NEW INMATE.

Sophie watches from across the way, hugging her knees.

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Sophie lies in bed, reading. The SPIDER crawls up her leg.
She watches it, unflinching, unnerved.

HANGMAN (O.S.)

From fear, pain, suffering. Give in
to the will of the universe. This
is what we call love.

The light flickers. Goes out.

INT. REFECTORY - NIGHT

Sophie and the Hangman play checkers alone.

She moves her piece, keeping her finger on it. He moves his
piece, taking hers, brushing her hand with his wedding band.

Sophie looks up. He stares back nervously.

INT. JAIL CELL - DAY

The SPIDER sits in a fully constructed web.

ABIGAIL (O.S.)

Germaine started primary school.
Darrel's off to Vanuatu - some sort
of job in construction.

Sophie looks considerably thinner as she stares up at the
web. Her mother Abigail brushes her hair.

ABIGAIL (CONTD)

Ron sends his love. You remember
Ron? He's in Ballarat with his
girlfriend. Well, Mrs I s'ppose.
Got her preggers.

She chuckles. But her laugh breaks down into a cry, she hugs
Sophie.

ABIGAIL (CONTD)

I'm so sorry Soph. I'm so so
sorry--

SOPHIE

-It's not your fault mum.

ABIGAIL

If your dad hadn't--

(CONTINUED)

SOPHIE

-Shhhh... It's not yours. It's not dad's. We had laughs, didn't we?

ABIGAIL

Yeah.

SOPHIE

Remember the first day of kindie? I wouldn't get out of the car.

ABIGAIL

Practically had to shove you out on the road kicking and screaming, "I wanna go home."

Abigail quietly breaks down. Sophie smiles, wipes her mother's tears away. Takes her into her arms.

INT. DEATH ROW CELL - AFTERNOON

Sophie's in front of Terrence with a folded dress. She gives it a once over - it's a downgrade.

INT. DEATH ROW CELL - NIGHT

Sophie lies on the bed. An untouched meal tray is on the floor. The Hangman enters, slightly dressed down for the first time. He pulls out a whiskey bottle.

INT. DEATH ROW CELL - LATER

Sophie lies on the floor. The Hangman against the wall smoking, spinning his wedding band. The whiskey is well dented as sweat collects on their faces.

SOPHIE

He had brown eyes, small mouth, a gorgeous smile. He'd look at you like he owed you the world. Thought I was in love. Turns out I fooled myself into believing something that wasn't real.

Sophie notices the Hangman tapping his wedding ring.

SOPHIE (CONTD)

What about *her*? Does she visit you?

HANGMAN

She was such a kind woman...

The Hangman stops mid sentence, drops his smile.

(CONTINUED)

HANGMAN (CONTD)

She was not happy with my work.
With me. Before she got ill she...
was going to leave me.

The Hangman puts his ring on.

SOPHIE

You ever think... maybe the ghosts
don't come to you? That maybe,
maybe you put them there?

HANGMAN

Why would I do that?

SOPHIE

I dunno. Guilt? Are you scared--

HANGMAN

-I do the best I can with my--

SOPHIE

-Yeah, yeah with your lot. But here
you are teaching others how to die,
when you're the one living like
you're on death row.

He ponders this anxiously. Sophie lies back on the floor.

SOPHIE (CONTD)

When I was a kid, mum and dad would
fight all night. I'd steal some
weed from 'em and my mates and I
would go to the beach and get
stoned. It was the only thing to do
in a *bogan* beach town at thirteen.
Easier than getting grog. We'd swim
in the waves for hours. The water
was so heavy, it'd come down on you
like bricks. But we still kept
swimming, ya know. Again and again.
Eventually we'd give up, just lie
on the sand, look up at the stars
and dream about the future. Not a
care in the world.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Stars twinkling. The ocean. Sophie whips past laughing --

INT. DEATH ROW CELL - NIGHT

WE RETURN: the Hangman hangs off Sophie's every word.

SOPHIE

Silly shit like that I remember
more than anything. You know what I
mean?

Sophie turns to him, their gaze penetrates each other --

SOPHIE (CONTD)

I'm going to die in these clothes.

She smirks, takes a sip of whiskey. He's lost in her.

INT. DEATH ROW CELL - LATER

The Hangman stubs out a cigarette and gulps down the last drop of whiskey. He picks up a sleeping Sophie and places her on the mattress. She rolls to her side.

He kneels down, kisses Sophie's lips. He pulls away --

Her eyes are open. They stare intently. Silent.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

A bulb snaps on.

The Hangman sweats, eyes red. He washes his face. Stares into the deep recess of his reflection.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Fandi's ghost looks at the checkerboard then the Hangman lost in thought, playing with his ring.

HANGMAN

She's just a girl. She doesn't
deserve this. You think I'm crazy,
don't you? You *ALL* think I'm crazy!

THE GHOSTS! Liu, Thomas, ANOTHER GHOST. They haunt the spaces between light and dark.

HANGMAN (CONTD)

ARGHHHH!

The Hangman smacks the checkers, falls to the ground.

(CONTINUED)

HANGMAN (CONTD)
 Sorry. I'm sorry!

The Hangman sobs in a fetal position. The ghosts are absent.

INT. HANGING CHAMBER - NIGHT

The Hangman, a ball of anxiety. He measures the rope. Hangs a noose. Ties a knot. Pulls a lever. A trap door.

He wipes balls of sweat off his brow with a handkerchief.

INT. DEATH ROW CELL - NIGHT

The Hangman looks through the slat, opens the door.

HANGMAN
 Sophie Leigh Whitehouse.

Sophie already stands. He gives her a newspaper wrapped package along with a small mirror.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sophie wears the Hangman's wife's red sari. She walks confidently behind Terrence. The Hangman follows.

INT. HANGING CHAMBER - NIGHT

The Hangman leads Sophie up the gallow stairs.

He places the noose around Sophie's neck, tightens it.

Sophie's eyes, watery. He looks just as anxious. He starts to blindfold her but she nestles her cheek into his hand.

He wants to speak but the words don't come.

SOPHIE
 Cheer up.

The Hangman blindfolds her. Sophie's arms, body, legs shake. He goes to the lever, turns back, looks at her.

THE MUSLIM CALL TO PRAYER echoes in the distance.

The first rays of sunlight. The Hangman hesitates as if pulling teeth:

HANGMAN
 I am going to send you to a better
 place than this.

Sophie forces a faint smile. The Hangman is frozen. Silence.

(CONTINUED)

Terrence approaches the Hangman, takes his arm.

TERRENCE
Hangman? Boss?

The Hangman's red eyes, dripping of perspiration. They close!

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. PRISON YARD - SUNSET

THUNDER! The prison yard is empty on an overcast day. A pile of cigarette butts litter the Hangman's usual spot.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

WE GLIDE SLOWLY OVER:

Burning incense. The wife's photo, cracked.

Over the table. A full ashtray. The whiskey tipped over. The liquid puddling around the wedding band. The checker pieces scattered across the floor.

WE PULL UP to see the living room empty. Except for a FIGURE sitting by the window in silhouette.

WE PUSH CLOSER to the Hangman, solemn, staring into space, the chocolate wrapper in his hand.

WE GLIDE OVER the top of his head as he closes his eyes.

DIP TO BLACK.

OMITTED

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A slash of light. The bedroom seems unreal, otherworldly. A red sari, draped across the bed.

WE TRACK ACROSS TWO BODIES: BROWN + WHITE.

Naked, covered by sheets, the Hangman embraces Sophie, exceptionally pale. A red rope burn around her neck.

He kisses her neck as she strokes his cheek.

WE TRACK TO BLACK.

THE END.