

The Acorn  
by  
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EXT. LA PEROUSE HEADLAND - NIGHT, 26 YEARS AGO - DREAM

BLACKOUT

SFX: Waves lapping a rocky seashore under...

SFX: Long, plaintive call of a seagull MORPHS into distorted, barely discernible words of a nursery rhyme.

CHILDISH VOICE (V.O.)  
(Distorted singing)  
Black... is...  
... Night ...  
Wrong...  
Evil...  
Evil...  
EVIL!

FADE IN

Dark, gloomy, blurred and out-of-focus images in close-up.

A HAND, clutching a rock, slams down.

A MAN'S BODY rolls off a rocky ledge.

A SLENDER FIGURE runs off.

FADE TO BLACK

SFX: Last word of the song MORPHS to

SFX: A seagull's call and

SFX: Lapping waves MORPH to

SFX: Heavy rain on wet soil.

SFX: Thunder.

FADE TO

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT, NOW - DREAM

Pitch black. Raining heavily.

One spot only on TWO CONSTRUCTION WORKERS wearing safety gear, heavy raincoats and muddied wellies, as they spade out runny mud from either side of a shallow trench while a mechanical digger scoops out shovelfuls of rain-sodden earth.

One of the Construction Workers sees something in the trench.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER  
Whoa!

He signals the operator of the mechanical digger to stop and peers into the trench, horrified.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER'S P.O.V.:

The face of a HUMAN SKULL, a jagged rent in the frontal bone, being pelted clean by the rain in the trench.

The Human Skull ANIMATES, fire in its eye sockets. The Human Skull bursts into flames, the drenching rain having no effect.

SFX: An horrific scream/screech of seagull resonates over:

END OF DREAM

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT, NOW

CLOSE ON CLOSED REM EYES.

They open, startled, terrified as...

ELIZABETH (O.C.)

No!

PULL BACK

to see ELIZABETH SHAW (43), in bed, sweat forming on her forehead, panicked and breathing erratically.

DANIELA BROUGHTON (46), sleeping beside her, stirs. Daniela turns to Elizabeth, snuggles up behind her and flops an arm around Elizabeth's waist.

DANIELA

(Drowsy)

It's all right, honey. I'm here.

Shhhh...

Daniela falls back into a sound sleep, softly snoring.

Elizabeth stares into the distance trying to control her breathing.

FADE TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE, CHILDREN'S SECTION - DAY (THURSDAY)

Elizabeth, smartly dressed in slacks-suit and T-shirt, her short white-streaked, champagne-blond hair stylishly combed, sits on a kiddie's chair, surrounded by a group of young CHILDREN, most dressed as mediaeval princesses, jesters or knights, sitting cross-legged, enthralled by her reading of a story from the LARGE PICTURE-BOOK on her lap.

Surrounding them are some ADULTS, listening and watching, some hold a copy of the large picture-book.

PETER KING (50), energetic and business-suited, stands to the side, in concentrated conversation on his mobile phone. As Elizabeth reads, he snaps his phone shut and watches her, hardly able to contain his excitement.

ELIZABETH

(Reading)

Little Princess Serenity looked into the tiger's eye and saw all the wickedness in the world. She knew what she had to do. But, before she could take another step, the evil Count materialised before her. His army of immortals surrounded her. There was only one way to escape - and it was far too dangerous...

Elizabeth puts down her book and looks to see the Children enthralled by her story as Peter picks his way through the quiet bunch and stands next to Elizabeth.

PETER

(To the Children)

That was exciting, wasn't it?

The Children call out their approval.

CHILDREN

Yay!

Peter takes the book, "PRINCESS SERENITY AND THE TIGER'S EYE by ELIZABETH SHAW" from Elizabeth as...

PETER

Does little Princess Serenity escape and save the kidnapped elfin children or will the evil Count finally capture and destroy her?

The Children stare gape-mouthed. Some whimper as Peter holds the book aloft.

PETER (CONT'D)

I think if you ask nicely, your mum or dad may get you your very own copy of Princess Serenity and the Tiger's Eye. You can be the first to find out.

CHILDREN

Yay!

Elizabeth stands up.

PETER (CONT'D)  
And, if you're really quick, Miss Elizabeth will sign your copy for you.

The Children scream in delight as they jump to their feet.

CHILDREN  
Yay!

PETER  
Just take your book to the table and Miss Elizabeth will be there shortly.

Elizabeth and Peter watch on as the Children, chatting, laughing, pull their respective Adults to a table set up with promotional signs of Elizabeth and her new book. The Adults and Children form an excited straggly line.

PETER  
Fabulous work, Liz.

Elizabeth smiles.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Only two more days and the school holidays will be over. Ready for the big one on Saturday?

ELIZABETH  
It actually does get easier.

PETER  
It should. Five hits in a row, each one bigger than the one before.  
(beat)  
How's number six coming along?

ELIZABETH  
It's close.

PETER  
Good.  
(beat)  
Guess who that was on the phone.

Elizabeth reacts with delight and surprise.

ELIZABETH  
Pixar?

PETER (CONT'D)  
Tuesday. Nine A.M. If you've got a finished draft, we're as good as signed.

Elizabeth is overjoyed. Peter checks the waiting queue of restless Children and Adults.

PETER  
Come on, your public awaits.

Peter and Elizabeth move towards the table.

PETER (CONT'D)  
After we close the deal, I was thinking we should celebrate. There's a great restaurant at La Perouse?

ELIZABETH  
No! ... Not there... I, er... I don't like seafood.

PETER  
Okay, we'll find some other place.

Elizabeth takes her place at the table, smiles at the first Child who hands her a book.

As she takes the book and removes the slip of paper with the Child's name on it, a slim, attractive, middle-aged, dark-haired WOMAN near the end of the straggly queue catches Elizabeth's eye. The figure disappears behind the crowd.

Elizabeth strains to catch another glimpse.

PETER  
Something wrong, Liz?

ELIZABETH  
Huh? Er... no...

Elizabeth resumes her autograph-writing, glancing up at the Child in front of her.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
There you go, Briony. I do hope you enjoy it.

The Child and Adult move off.

The Woman peeks from behind another Adult. Elizabeth and the Woman make momentary eye contact.

The Woman turns and leaves, hidden by the crowd.

Elizabeth watches her, aghast.

Another Child and Adult stand in front of Elizabeth.

Beat.

PETER

Liz... ?

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT (THURSDAY)

The table is set with elegant tableware and a bottle of wine, all examples of good taste and moderate wealth, as is the room.

Daniela, power-dressed, her long dark hair pulled back into an elegant cignon, sits at the dining table, pouring wine into two glasses. In everything she does, Daniela is measured, analytical, temperate and restrained.

Elizabeth, wearing the same T-shirt and slacks as at the book launch, comes in carrying two dinner plates laden with pasta and sets one in front of Daniela.

DANIELA

Hmm, something smells good enough  
to eat... Food smells good, too.

Elizabeth playfully nudges Daniela with her hip then goes to her own seat. They begin to eat and drink.

ELIZABETH

Peter should be shouting me lunch  
next week.

DANIELA

It's the least he can do. You must  
be his number one client by now.

ELIZABETH

Possibly. He's only got three. But  
that's not the reason.

(beat)

They're interested.

Daniela stops, looks up at Elizabeth and is ecstatic.

DANIELA

That's fantastic news, baby!

ELIZABETH

I've just got to put the finishing  
touches to Little Princess number  
six and present it to them on  
Tuesday. No biggie.

DANIELA

Animation feature?

ELIZABETH

That's what they're talking.

DANIELA  
Wow... I'm so proud of you. A  
toast.

Daniela lifts up her glass.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
To my lover, my love, my life, may  
your success bring you much  
deserved happiness.

She sips from her glass then resumes eating as...

ELIZABETH  
Thank you, Danny.

She resumes eating.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Speaking of success, how's the  
case?

DANIELA  
Summing up tomorrow. Maybe even a  
verdict.

ELIZABETH  
Surely they'll find him guilty?

Daniela shrugs her shoulders hopefully.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
He can't be allowed to get away  
with it.

DANIELA  
If I've done my job well, he won't,  
Liz. Don't worry, I've done my job.

ELIZABETH  
He deserves to die...

DANIELA  
Lizzie...

ELIZABETH  
The lives he's ruined --

DANIELA  
Lizzie, don't let it get to you.  
(Beat)  
He won't have it easy in prison...  
and he is going to prison.  
(Beat)  
The guards turn a blind eye. He'll  
be punished for what he did. He'll  
be lucky to survive.



Long beat.

ELIZABETH  
I saw her again today.

Daniela looks up concerned.

DANIELA  
Are you sure?

Elizabeth shrugs an apology.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
Well, did she speak to you?

ELIZABETH  
No.

DANIELA  
Maybe it wasn't her.

Elizabeth looks irritated.

Beat.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
Twice in two days. Maybe you should  
--

An annoyed look from Elizabeth stops Daniela's train.

They resume eating.

Beat.

DANIELA  
Was it the same nightmare? Last  
night?

Elizabeth looks up at Daniela, cautious, and gives a barely discernible nod.

Beat.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
I think you should call her.

Elizabeth glares at Daniela.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
It might stop the nightmares.

ELIZABETH  
Danny!

DANIELA  
Honey, you need to fix this. With everything that's going on, you don't need --

ELIZABETH  
Nothing to fix. Eat.

Daniela begins to say something -

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
No!

Daniela looks chastised.

DANIELA  
I was going to ask you to pass the Parmesan. Dear.

They look at each other unable to stay upset or angry.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - NIGHT (THURSDAY) - LATER

The studio is a small well-lit room, crowded with fully-stocked bookshelves, desk and computer, drawing table and all the accoutrements of a graphic artist. A TELEPHONE is nearby.

On the table are a number of completed panels of a brightly-coloured children's graphic novel sitting in a well-ordered stack.

Elizabeth is seated at the table, a drawing pencil in hand and staring into space. Her thoughts appear to be dark as a worried look crumples her brow.

Absentmindedly, she doodles. The drawings are of seagulls, acorns, happy children's faces.

Daniela, dressed in pyjamas, comes in and goes to Elizabeth. She stands behind Elizabeth, draping one arm over Elizabeth's shoulder. She picks up a completed drawing from the stack and admires it. Elizabeth snaps out of her bemusement.

DANIELA  
(Reading)  
Princess Serenity and the Eternal Hope. Have it finished by Tuesday?

ELIZABETH  
Yeah. Yeah.

Daniela notices the doodled sheet and puts her page down.

DANIELA  
Everything okay?

ELIZABETH

Huh? Yeah.

DANIELA

You're not still upset, are you?

ELIZABETH

About?

DANIELA

You know, dredging.

ELIZABETH

No. Not your fault. Can't live  
hoping things will remain... buried  
for the rest of my life.

Daniela searches Elizabeth's face and resists bringing up the  
past.

DANIELA

Coming to bed?

Elizabeth looks at the stack of completed panels, wearied.

ELIZABETH

Soon.

DANIELA

You need to rest, honey.

ELIZABETH

Just a little longer.

DANIELA

Okay.

She leans over and kisses Elizabeth on the mouth.

ELIZABETH

Danny, I'm sorry about before. I  
didn't mean to snap.

DANIELA

You can do your apologising in bed.

Daniela kisses Elizabeth again.

ELIZABETH

You'll probably be asleep.

DANIELA

Then you'll have to wake me.

Kiss.

ELIZABETH

I will.

DANIELA  
See that you do.

Long kiss.

Daniela leaves. Elizabeth watches her go then turns in her seat and stares into space.

Her face shows confusion; she appears to be reliving a bad event. She closes her eyes to the horror in her imagination.

MONTAGE OF HORROR IMAGES

Images and sounds all distorted - dark and in quick succession.

The HUMAN SKULL in the rain-drenched trench. Rain pelting down.

CLOSE UP of a GOLDEN ACORN charm.

CLOSE UP of a LAUGHING MOUTH - shrieking laughter.

TWO LITTLE GIRLS playing Chasings, laughing and giggling.

END OF MONTAGE

BACK TO:

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth pulls a clean sheet of paper in front of her and furiously sketches. As she sketches, pain and anger show on her face.

With a few deft strokes, she finishes and picks it up.

CLOSE ON THE DRAWING

The black on white drawing morphs to full colour.

The title, "THE ACORN", is emblazoned across a verdant field with a dirt track traversing it upon which is a silhouette of a mule-drawn wagon carrying two adults and two children.

MORPH TO

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - FIELD - DAY

The scenery is bright, high-contrast, primary colours.

The MULE-DRAWN WAGON trundles along as the silhouettes MORPH to real-life MOTHER (30), FATHER (35), OMBRA (12) and LUCIA (9). They wear bright, colourful rustic peasant's dress. They are all laughing and giggling.

A stand of trees is not far off.

Ahead of them is an intersection with another track that leads out of the forest and joins theirs at right angles.

On the track emerging from the forest and riding a donkey is FELIX (14). He has wispy facial hair and is similarly dressed. Around his neck is a silver chain and stylised eight-pointed star pendant.

A signpost at the junction reads: "BALANUS VILLAGE 3" and "FOREST ACERBUS 1".

The Wagon stops at the signpost.

FATHER  
Look girls! Almost there!

Ombra and Lucia shriek with delight.

Felix meets them. He appears happy and confident although a little apprehensive.

FATHER  
Good day, young man.

FELIX  
Hello, sir, madam.  
(Noticing the girls)  
Hello.

Ombra and Lucia giggle coyly.

FATHER  
These are my two little girls.  
Ombra, my little shadow, follows me everywhere, and Lucia, my sunshine.

FELIX  
Lucia. Ombra. I'm Felix.

FATHER  
Felix. This is the way to the village Balanus, correct?

FELIX  
Yes, sir. Are you the new tenant farmer the village elder told us about?

FATHER  
Yes, indeed I am. Elder Fimus told us that hard work is rewarded with magical acorns.

FELIX  
That's true, sir. I've just come from the Forest Acerbus.

He glances back to the forest with a flash of anxiety, quickly regaining his high spirit.

FELIX (CONT'D)  
I collected my father's reward.

Felix takes some acorns from his pocket and shows them.

FATHER  
You collected the reward? I thought  
the magic worked only for those who  
are... ahem... mature. You don't  
seem to have had your first shave  
yet, young man.

FELIX  
That's true, sir. But the acorns  
are only magical if they are  
collected by children.

Once again, he glances back towards the forest.

FELIX (CONT'D)  
Um... technically, until I shave,  
I'm still a child... or so my  
father says.

FATHER  
Oh, I see, I see. Tell me, son,  
what do you know of our allotment?

FELIX  
Not much, sir. It's big. It backs  
onto the forest, on the other side.  
Best you go around, though.

Thank you. FATHER

MOTHER  
I do hope you'll drop by to see us,  
Felix.

FELIX  
Thank you, ma'am, I will. Good bye.  
Bye.

He waves to Ombra and Lucia. They wave back.

Bye. OMBRA Bye. LUCIA

Felix trots off, again darting a glance towards the forest.

LUCIA  
(To Mother)  
Why was Felix wearing a star around  
his neck?

MOTHER  
He belongs to a different sect to  
us.

(To Father)  
But he seems happy here.

Father looks pleased and turns to Mother.

FATHER  
Mother, I think we've found our  
future here.

END OF GRAPHIC NOVEL SEQUENCE.

FADE TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (THURSDAY) - MUCH LATER

Dark except for a pale glow from the thinly-curtained window  
contrasting the silhouettes of Daniela and Elizabeth, naked,  
making love.

MONTAGE OF LOVE-MAKING

The sounds of their love-making become more intense, climax,  
then subside.

END OF MONTAGE

Elizabeth kisses Daniela passionately and slowly, then  
breaks. She looks into Daniela's eyes.

ELIZABETH  
I love you, Daniela Broughton.  
Don't ever forget that.

Daniela smiles but Elizabeth remains stoic and lies down  
beside Daniela. They stare at the ceiling.

Daniela turns to Elizabeth.

DANIELA  
You're very serious tonight.  
(Beat)  
You're wondering what she wants?

No reaction from Elizabeth.

Daniela reaches over and caresses Elizabeth's face. Elizabeth  
rolls into Daniela's arms and cuddles close.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
I'm here for you. Always.

Elizabeth's face screws up with restrained emotion.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
Sleep.

Elizabeth looks up to see Daniela has drifted off to sleep.

Elizabeth snuggles back and resumes her musings and closes her eyes.

FADE TO BLACK.

DREAM SEQUENCE.

Dark, barely discernible image of seagull's flapping wings under

SFX: Flapping wings

SFX: Sharp, strident call of a seagull followed by

SFX: Thud of a heavy rock hitting bony flesh.

END OF DREAM SEQUENCE

BACK TO:

INT. BEDROOM - ABOUT 4.12 AM (FRIDAY)

Elizabeth's eyes snap open. She appears panicked.

CLOSE ON clock showing 4:12

She disengages from Daniela's embrace and looks at the clock. She carefully rolls out of bed as Daniela stirs.

Putting on fluffy dressing gown, she leaves the room.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The kitchen, like the rest of the house, is stylish, neat, tidy and well appointed. The lights are a little too bright for Elizabeth as she stands near the kettle on the gas cook-top waiting for it to boil. On the counter is an empty mug with a tea bag in it.

She stares through the kitchen window into the darkness of the courtyard garden.

SFX: The boiling kettle whistles.

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

Elizabeth is at her desk, the cup of hot camomile tea on the side. She begins to draw.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - FELIX'S GARDEN - DAY

Felix's garden is a mass of brightly-coloured rose bushes and multicoloured shrubs and flowers bordering a rich grassy-green lawn.



In the middle, two adolescent figures, each holding a wooden sword and shield are battling each other, grunting their exertions and laughing.

One is Felix, his face clean-shaven and shiny, the other is AMABILIS, (15), a strapping girl dressed in colourful page boy clothes with her hair tied back and hidden under a colourful plumed hat. Around her neck is a silver chain and stylised star pendant similar to Felix's.

Ombra and Lucia skip up to the shrubbery and then stop to watch the action in amazement.

Amabilis lands a flurry of blows upon Felix sending him reeling backwards into the bushes. Amabilis is upon him, her sword at his throat.

AMABILIS

Do you yield?

FELIX

(Laughing)

I yield! I yield!

Amabilis backs off grinning as Ombra and Lucia approach cautiously. Felix stands upright. He notices them, exuberant.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Ombra! Lucia! Just in time for round two!

Ombra appears confused; Lucia stares at Amabilis.

LUCIA

You've got a star, too.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Oh! I'd like you to meet my vanquisher - for this round - my cousin, Amabilis.

Amabilis smiles warmly at Ombra and Lucia, returning her gaze to Ombra.

Ombra gazes back, her brows furrowed in confusion.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Amabilis is from the Civitas.

(To Amabilis)

Amabilis, this is my good friend and neighbour, Ombra and her little sister, Lucia.

Amabilis removes her hat with a flourish and bows deeply.

AMABILIS

Your servant, my ladies.

Ombra and Lucia gasp.

OMBRA  
You're a girl.

LUCIA  
Why are you dressed like a boy  
we're not allowed to do that here.

Amabilis laughs.

Ombra is captivated by Amabilis and remains speechless.

AMABILIS  
Where I come from, Lucia, we are  
allowed.

FELIX  
Amabilis is going to be a knight.

LUCIA  
Really?

FELIX  
Yes. We were just practising.  
(To Amabilis)  
Ready for round two?

AMABILIS  
Are you sure? I thrashed you pretty  
soundly.

FELIX  
I tripped!  
(Idea)  
Hey! Why don't we do it like a real  
tourney? Fair ladies and their  
champions? And the winner gets a  
kiss from their lady.

Felix looks pointedly at Ombra.

AMABILIS  
All right by me but I think you  
should ask the ladies if they want  
to play.

Ombra is undecided.

LUCIA  
Yes! Yes! I want to be a lady. I  
choose --

FELIX  
Ombra should choose her champion  
first. She's the older... And the  
winner gets a kiss.

Ombra looks at Felix, then at Amabilis, then at Felix.

OMBRA  
I choose... I choose...

Beat.

LUCIA  
Hurry up. Choose!

OMBRA  
(Soft)  
Amabilis.

Felix is disappointed.

Amabilis's face softens as she looks into Ombra's eyes.

LUCIA  
Yay! I get Felix!

Felix smiles at Lucia then jumps to an aggressive stance.

FELIX  
En garde!

Ombra and Lucia fall back to the bushes as Amabilis takes up a defensive position.

With a clash of shields and swords the fight is short as Amabilis's strength and expertise quickly drives Felix to the ground once more. Amabilis's knee is on Felix's chest, her shield pinning his sword arm to the grass and her sword against his throat.

FELIX  
Stop! Stop! I yield!

With a satisfied smirk, she jumps up and pulls Felix upright. They approach Ombra and Lucia as...

AMABILIS  
Good try, cousin.

FELIX  
I tripped again.

AMABILIS  
If you say so.

Amabilis bows deeply in front of Ombra.

AMABILIS (CONT'D)  
My lady.

Ombra's befuddled and bewildered look amuses Amabilis.

AMABILIS (CONT'D)

My reward?

Beat.

Ombra quickly goes to peck Amabilis's cheek just as Amabilis turns to catch Ombra's lips with hers. Ombra shrinks back embarrassed.

AMABILIS (CONT'D)

Your champion forever, my Lady  
Ombra.

LUCIA

Mine, too?

AMABILIS

Of course. Lady Lucia.

(To Ombra)

When you're of age, I'd like you to  
visit me in the Civitas.

FELIX

It's a great place.

(To Lucia)

There's lots more people there who  
wear stars.

(Laughs)

People are more accepting there.

(Beat)

That's what my father wished for.  
For us to be accepted.

OMBRA

Did the magical acorns work?

FELIX

I guess. You accept us, don't you?

Ombra looks at Felix and Amabilis, confused.

AMABILIS

You must both come. To the Civitas.  
There, we're free to do anything  
the boys can do. Except one.

(To Felix, laughing)

Right, cousin?

Amabilis caresses Felix's face. Ombra peers at Felix's face.

OMBRA

What happened to your face?

FELIX

(Embarrassed)

I had my first shave.

Ombra reaches out and feels Felix's face. She is amazed.

OMBRA

So smooth.

FELIX

Father says I'm a man now.

ELDER FIMUS (O.C.)

(Indignant, menacing)

Don't touch that boy!

They all turn around to see the angry ELDER FIMUS (75), resplendent in colourful robes and hat, sitting on a small brightly-decorated two-wheel carriage pulled by a donkey, stopped at the grassy verge. Around Elder Fimus's neck is a shining gold amulet encrusted with glittering gemstones.

ELDER FIMUS (CONT'D)

He is unclean. Stay away from him if you know what's good for you.

(To Felix)

And you, boy, keep away from those little girls.

(Looking at Lucia)

They are pure. Not meant for the likes of you.

Felix trembles.

FELIX

Yes, sir... I'm sorry, sir.

AMABILIS

Who the hell are you?!

ELDER FIMUS

How dare you address me in that tone! You! You are an abomination. The sooner you get back to the Civitas where disgusting creatures like you belong, the better.

AMABILIS

You have no right to speak to me, to us, like that!

ELDER FIMUS

(Booming)

Here, I have every right!

Felix, Ombra and Lucia flinch. Amabilis takes a step forward but Felix pulls her back. Ombra garners courage from Amabilis.

Beat as Elder Fimus stares down Amabilis.

ELDER FIMUS (CONT'D)

You have no idea of the powers I hold.

Elder Fimus gives each a stern look and a sneer then flicks his whip at the donkey and trots off.

Felix and Lucia watch him in silence and fear, Amabilis and Ombra defiant.

OMBRA  
Who was that?

FELIX  
The village Elder, Fimus.

OMBRA  
I don't like him.

LUCIA  
Me, too.

AMABILIS  
He reeks of something vile.

FELIX  
(Conspiratorial)  
I've... I've seen things...

They close in around Felix.

FELIX (CONT'D)  
I shouldn't say anything... but,  
when I went to get the magical  
acorns...  
(Looks about)  
In the Forest Acerbus... I saw... a  
monster... some say it's *his*  
monster... and it harms children.

OMBRA  
But. But it didn't harm you.

FELIX  
I didn't go the way Elder Fimus  
told me. I didn't follow the sign.

OMBRA  
Maybe there isn't a monster.

FELIX  
There is. I saw it. It was huge.  
Repulsive. It stank.  
(beat)  
And the sign...

Ombra appears alarmed.

FELIX (CONT'D)  
When it's your turn, just... just  
*don't* follow the sign.

INT. BEDROOM - 5.17 AM (FRIDAY)

Dark.

Daniela, naked and alone in bed, stirs and feels around for Elizabeth.

Not finding her, Daniela awakens fully and gropes around for the clock. She finds it and notices the time: 5:17.

With a resigned sigh, she stumbles out of bed.

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - FIELD - DAY

Father is sharpening his plough as Elder Fimus trots up in his donkey carriage. Father stands up in deference as Elder Fimus gets down and approaches Father.

FATHER

Elder Fimus?

Elder Fimus peers down his nose at Father and nods as Father extends his hand.

FATHER (CONT'D)

A pleasure to finally meet you,  
sir.

Elder Fimus stingily shakes hands.

ELDER FIMUS

Yes, yes. Settled in?

FATHER

We have, thank you, sir. This field  
is quite large. It will take some  
hard work to plough and reap a  
harvest.

ELDER FIMUS

Your hard work will be amply  
rewarded.

(Looking about)

Tell me, your daughters, do you  
know where they are?

FATHER

They're visiting the neighbour's  
boy, Felix.

ELDER FIMUS

Hmm...

FATHER

Something wrong, sir?

ELDER FIMUS

The boy has reached maturity. And we know what occupies the thoughts of a boy when he becomes a man, don't we?

He looks pointedly at Father. Beat.

FATHER

My girls are very young... but they're good girls.

ELDER FIMUS

I'm sure, I'm sure.

(beat)

You've a lot invested here. Not just in your crops.

Father is puzzled.

ELDER FIMUS (CONT'D)

Your little one. The pretty one.

FATHER

Lucia?

ELDER FIMUS

Yes, pretty little Lucia. She'll grow to be a beauty. She'll attract princes and dukes like moths to a flame.

(beat)

The other one...?

FATHER

Ombra.

ELDER FIMUS

Rather plain. A farmer's wife, I imagine. Just the same, I don't want to see either of them lose their... value.

(Beat)

To a farm boy. Damaged goods are worthless. Wouldn't you agree?

FATHER

Surely not Felix.

ELDER FIMUS

He is of age...

(Vindictive)

... and very clever. She... ahem, they need our protection.

FATHER

How?



ELDER FIMUS

How? What sort of farmer are you?  
Do you allow your sheep to ford a  
swollen stream? No! You keep them  
away from it. Well away! Do you  
understand?

FATHER

Yes... yes. If you say so, Elder  
Fimus. If you say so...

ELDER FIMUS

Good man!

Elder Fimus places his arm around Father.

ELDER FIMUS (CONT'D)

Together, we'll see that your  
pretty little Lucia... and, of  
course, the other, er, Ombra, will  
give their charms to the one who  
will benefit you the most.

Elder Fimus laughs. Father joins in reluctantly. Elder  
Fimus's laugh becomes screechy, evil. Father's heartier.

CLOSE ON Father's laughing grimace-like mouth as it MORPHS to  
CLOSE ON a DRAWN GRAPHIC of Father's ugly laughing grimace as  
Elder Fimus's screech overpowers Father's as it MORPHS to  
SFX: The screech of a seagull.

END OF GRAPHIC NOVEL SEQUENCE

EXT. LA PEROUSE HEADLAND - NIGHT - DREAM

Dark, gloomy, blurred and out-of-focus images in close-up.

SFX: The screech of a seagull.

A HAND smashing a rock down.

SFX: Solid thud and crunch of bone.

Same image and sound repeated several times.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT - DREAM

Pitch black. Raining heavily.

A single SPOTLIGHT illuminates the scene.

A mechanical digger stands idling on the side of the trench.

In the shallow trench, a CONSTRUCTION WORKER, wearing safety  
rain gear and wellies, stands aghast, shovel in hand.

He is horrified to see

CONSTRUCTION WORKER'S P.O.V.:

CLOSE ON the face of a HUMAN SKULL, a jagged rent in the frontal bone, being pelted clean by the rain in a trench.

PULL BACK to see a partially DECOMPOSED HUMAN HEAD with an horrific grimace set on its face.

CLOSE ON the Decomposed Human Head, its sunken eyes staring out, as it ANIMATES and the mouth opens and utters:

DECOMPOSED HUMAN HEAD  
You did this! You! You!

END OF DREAM

BACK TO:

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - NIGHT

CLOSE on Elizabeth's panicked face, her head cradled by her folded arms on the desktop. She is breathing erratically, panting, sweating, eyes wide with fear. She has just woken in fright.

The DRAWN GRAPHIC of Father's ugly laughing grimace lies nearby. Elizabeth slowly straightens up, dazed and mildly shocked.

DANIELA (O.S.)  
There you are --

Elizabeth is startled and turns to see Daniela standing in the doorway, dressed in her fluffy dressing gown.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
When did you get up?

Elizabeth pushes away the sketch of Father's ugly laughing grimace. Daniela notices but lets it go.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
Are you okay?

She approaches Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH  
Yeah. I... I couldn't sleep. I wanted to get --

DANIELA  
Princess Serenity finished?

ELIZABETH  
... Yeah.

Elizabeth stands and embraces Daniela, snuggling her face into Daniela's neck.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Let's go back to bed.

Daniela holds on to Elizabeth as her gaze wanders over the pile of drawings. Her eyes fall upon the title page, THE ACORN" and her face registers query and confusion.

EXT. A STREET IN VAUCLUSE - NIGHT (FRIDAY)

A late-model Mini Cooper pulls up in front of a well-kept house.

Daniela the driver, and Elizabeth get out. Both are elegantly attired in dresses and high heels. Elizabeth carries two bottles of wine (PINOT GRIS).

Daniela walks to Elizabeth's side of the car.

ELIZABETH  
You are not to talk about the nightmares, okay?

DANIELA  
I promise not to bring it up.

ELIZABETH  
That's lawyer-speak. I don't want you to talk about it.

Elizabeth's MOBILE PHONE rings in her handbag. She fishes it out as

DANIELA  
Why would I? Unless you bring it up, my love.

ELIZABETH  
(Answering phone)  
Peter.  
(beat)  
Monday?  
(beat)  
I... yes. Yes, it's... it's finished.  
(beat)  
Okay.  
(beat)  
I said okay!  
(beat)  
Yeah. Bye.

They walk to the front door as Elizabeth switches her phone off and slips it back into her bag.

A questioning look from Daniela.

ELIZABETH

The meeting's been brought forward.

Daniela rings the DOORBELL and watches Elizabeth who keeps her eyes transfixed on the door.

DANIELA

Have you renamed it?

Elizabeth shoots her a glare.

The door is opened by JOANNA BROUGHTON, 69, elegantly dressed and coiffed. She beams at Daniela and Elizabeth and kisses each on both cheeks. Elizabeth warms to Joanna.

JOANNA

Shabbat shalom.

DANIELA

Shabbat shalom.

JOANNA

Shabbat shalom.

ELIZABETH

Shabbat shalom.

(She hands the bottles)  
For you.

JOANNA

Oh, you really shouldn't Elizabeth.  
Thank you. Come in. Come in.

INT. BROUGHTON DINING ROOM - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

The Broughton's home is richly decorated and a little old-fashioned.

The table is set for Shabbat.

PAUL BROUGHTON, 71, smartly dressed, a little portly and wearing a yarmulke, fusses over the table setting as Joanna, Daniela and Elizabeth enter.

Paul's face lights up as he sees them.

PAUL

Elizabeth! Shabbat shalom.

He embraces Elizabeth and kisses her on both cheeks.

Joanna disappears into the kitchen with the bottles.

ELIZABETH

Shabbat shalom. The bottles went  
that way.

Paul giggles.

PAUL

Drat!

(Embracing Daniela)  
Shabbat shalom, darling.

DANIELA

Shabbat shalom, daddy.

PAUL

I hope Elizabeth chose the wine  
this time?

A look between Elizabeth and Daniela.

PAUL

What? I speak only the truth.  
Fortunately, your excellent taste  
in women far exceeds your  
questionable taste in wine.

DANIELA

Thank you... I think. Um... I'm  
going to see if mum needs any help.

Elizabeth reacts with a warning look to Daniela as she goes  
to the kitchen. Paul continues his re-arrangement of the  
tableware.

PAUL

Daniela tells me the launch of your  
new book is going very well. Mazel  
tov.

ELIZABETH

Thank you.

PAUL

And Hollywood wants to make you  
rich?

Elizabeth smiles.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Fantastisch! A famous barrister and  
a famous author in the family. What  
more could a man want?

ELIZABETH

Those bottles of Pinot Gris?

Paul giggles.

INT. BROUGHTON KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Joanna is spooning out a casserole into a serving bowl as  
Daniela tries to help.

JOANNA  
I can manage, dear. I'm not ready  
for Montefiori just yet.

Daniela steps back and looks distracted. Joanna notices.

JOANNA (CONT'D)  
Everything all right, dear?

DANIELA  
Hmm?

JOANNA  
You seem distracted.  
(Beat)  
You and Elizabeth all right?

DANIELA  
Yes, mum, we're good.

JOANNA  
Your work, then.

DANIELA  
No, mum.

JOANNA  
Elizabeth's?

DANIELA  
Mum!

JOANNA  
You know I'll find out. Why not  
save time and just tell me?

Joanna stops and examines Daniela's face, much to Daniela's annoyance.

Beat.

JOANNA (CONT'D)  
It's Elizabeth and you're worried  
about her.

Daniela slumps in defeat.

JOANNA (CONT'D)  
The nightmares have returned.

DANIELA  
Mum, please don't say anything. She  
doesn't want to talk about it.

JOANNA  
After all these years? What brought  
on this episode?

Elizabeth bursts in.

ELIZABETH  
What's keeping the... food? What's going on?

JOANNA  
Food's ready. Grab a plate, girls.

Joanna picks up the casserole bowl and leaves. Daniela turns to pick up a plate.

ELIZABETH  
Well?

DANIELA  
I didn't bring it up.

ELIZABETH  
Lawyer-speak again?

Elizabeth grabs a plate and gives Daniela a stern look.

DANIELA  
She guessed.

ELIZABETH  
I don't want your mother psychoanalysing me.

DANIELA  
She's retired.

Elizabeth turns and leaves.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
Liz!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BROUGHTON DINING ROOM - LATER

The main course has been consumed.

Joanna and Paul sit at each end of the table, Elizabeth and Daniela face each other along the sides. The mood is jovial and lively although Elizabeth is a little reserved. Paul and Daniela are a little drunk.

Paul taps his fork against his wine glass.

PAUL  
A toast. A toast to my two favourite girls --

DANIELA  
You have others?

PAUL  
To Elizabeth, may your imagination  
never leave you and may success  
find you in whatever you do.  
LeChayim!

JOANNA DANIELA  
LeChayim! LeChayim!

They sip from their glasses.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
To Daniela, a better barrister than  
I ever was, may your life with  
Elizabeth be as happy in your next  
twenty-five years as they have been  
in your last.

ELIZABETH  
It's not our anniversary.

PAUL  
No. Just practising.

JOANNA  
Paul...

PAUL  
May you rejoice in each other's  
love forever.

Daniela lifts her glass to Elizabeth.

DANIELA  
Forever.

Elizabeth lifts her glass to Daniela and sips from it.

Paul and Joanna take a sip from their glasses.

PAUL  
(To Daniela)  
Tell me, how did the summation go?

DANIELA  
I may have got carried away. The  
jury looked like they wanted to  
jump the rails and beat the  
defendant to death. In fact, they  
brought down a verdict in less than  
two hours.

PAUL  
Guilty?

DANIELA  
He won't have it easy in prison, I  
know that.



PAUL  
Paedophiles rarely do.

JOANNA  
They'll segregate him, surely?

ELIZABETH  
Why? Let justice really be served.  
For once.

Awkward glances between Joanna and Daniela.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
A rap on the knuckles then he's out  
to do it all again. What about the  
victims?

JOANNA  
That's why I'm here.

ELIZABETH  
Forgive me, Joanna, but you can't  
protect his future victims. Men  
like him don't deserve to live.

JOANNA  
Bring back capital punishment?

Elizabeth shrinks a little.

JOANNA (CONT'D)  
The killing of any human being for  
any reason is wrong.

PAUL  
Sometimes true justice is meted out  
by the Almighty, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH  
Sometimes waiting for God, praying  
to God to do something, isn't  
enough.

DANIELA  
Dad, mum, this is getting way too  
heavy for Shabbat.

Everyone settles.

PAUL  
Did you hear the one about the two  
kinderlekh who are in bed? One says  
to the other, Hymie, close the  
window, it's cold outside. And  
Hymie says, If I close the window,  
will it be warm outside?

Daniela laughs raucously, Joanna groans, Elizabeth remains stoic.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What about the one --

JOANNA

Enough. Paul, I think you've had too much to drink.

DANIELA

Mum, that was funny --

JOANNA

And so have you.

(To Elizabeth)

The Broughton curse runs right through the both of them.

PAUL

You mean being top notch barristers?

JOANNA

No, I mean being dreadful joke tellers.

PAUL

(To Elizabeth)

You should be grateful she takes after me. Joanna's side... Big ears and smelly feet.

(To Joanna)

But I still love you, darling. As long as you stay up wind and out of gusting breezes.

Paul makes a gesture to illustrate large ears becoming airborne. Daniela laughs, Elizabeth can't help a snicker.

JOANNA

I don't have big ears.

PAUL

Not now, you don't.

(To Elizabeth)

Most pedicurists wear a dust mask. Joanna's wears a full hazmat suit.

Elizabeth, Paul and Daniela laugh.

JOANNA

I'll be hiding those little blue pills if you're not careful.

DANIELA

Oh, mum, please!

(To Elizabeth)

(MORE)

DANIELA (cont'd)  
 Maybe it's a good thing we don't  
 have children, then. Right, my  
 love?

ELIZABETH  
 Big eared, smelly-footed kids who'd  
 tell bad jokes?

Daniela chortles.

PAUL  
 (To Elizabeth)  
 Don't forget what your family would  
 bring into the equation.

Paul laughs. He notices no one else laughing.

Awkward silence. Elizabeth is lost for words but good-natured. Daniela's look of reassurance eases Elizabeth.

DANIELA  
 Beans and onions is all I can say.

Elizabeth feigns objection. Awkward tittering from Joanna, then giggles from Paul. Daniela laughs.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
 My beloved wife, my Queen of Farts.

JOANNA  
 Oh, please! No flatulence jokes.  
 (To Elizabeth)  
 Would you help me, dear? We'll  
 leave these two to ponder the  
 boundaries of good taste...  
 (To Daniela and Paul)  
 ... if they want dessert.

Joanna gets up and leaves followed by Elizabeth, gracious but reluctant. She glances back to Daniela as she enters the kitchen.

PAUL  
 (To Daniela)  
 I'm...

DANIELA  
 It's okay, dad, she's under a bit  
 of pressure right now.

INT. BROUGHTON'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Joanna is cutting portions from an almond and orange cake as Elizabeth takes out four dessert plates and forks.

JOANNA  
 There's tofu ice cream in the  
 freezer.

Elizabeth goes to the freezer and takes out the pack of tofu ice cream and brings it to the table as...

JOANNA (CONT'D)  
We haven't had a chance to talk all evening, Elizabeth. How have you been?

ELIZABETH  
(Guarded)  
Well. Really well.

JOANNA  
You seem a little drained.

No reaction from Elizabeth.

JOANNA (CONT'D)  
The promotional thing, I expect. Then the meeting being brought forward...  
(Beat)  
How are you sleeping?

ELIZABETH  
Fine...

Joanna stops working at looks up at Elizabeth.

JOANNA  
Sometimes things we thought we had come to terms with have a way of insinuating themselves back into our subconsciousness. We dealt with it once...

Elizabeth seems lost for words, then

O.S. the sounds of raucous laughter from Paul and Daniela.

JOANNA (CONT'D)  
Better get back and feed them. At least, while they're eating, they're not telling those awful jokes.  
(Beat)  
You know I'm here for you if ever you need to talk?  
(Beat)  
You're like our second daughter.

Joanna's earnest look makes Elizabeth demure.

O.S. More laughter from Daniela and Paul.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

I do hope that's the sound of those two getting all their intestinal vapour jokes out of their system.

Elizabeth laughs.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Honestly! Put those two together, and they're like two naughty little gremlins.

ELIZABETH

But we love them madly anyway.

Joanna smiles, picks up the plate of cake slices and wraps her other arm around Elizabeth's shoulder. She draws her in and kisses Elizabeth tenderly on her cheek.

JOANNA

Yes, we do.

I/E. DANIELA'S CAR - NIGHT

Elizabeth drives. Daniela, head back, eyes closed, drunk and almost asleep is in the passenger seat beside her.

DANIELA

(Drowsy)

You're very quiet. The food or the jokes?

Elizabeth turns to Daniela and smiles.

ELIZABETH

I wish I'd had a mum and dad like yours.

DANIELA

We may never have met. You may have ended up marrying David.

ELIZABETH

As much as I like your cousin, he's still a boy and I'm still gay.

Daniela manages a chuckle.

Beat.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Who knows how things would have turned out.

Daniela reaches across and squeezes Elizabeth's hand.

DANIELA

They've turned out perfect.

A look of guilt washes over Elizabeth's face.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM - NIGHT

Dark.

SFX: Keys rattling in the lock.

Daniela, a little tipsy, wobbles in followed by Elizabeth.

Daniela reaches out and switches on the lights as Elizabeth places a doggy-bag of food on the side table and heads to her studio. Daniela grabs her arm and pulls her into an embrace.

DANIELA  
Where are you off to?

ELIZABETH  
My studio. I --

Daniela kisses her. Elizabeth wraps her arms around Daniela.

DANIELA  
Come to bed.

ELIZABETH  
Soon. I want to --

Daniela kisses her again.

DANIELA  
It's late, honey. You've got a big day tomorrow. Come to bed.

Elizabeth pulls herself out of the embrace. Daniela holds on.

ELIZABETH  
I've got to finish off Princess Serenity. Tomorrow's a write-off and that just leaves Sunday.

DANIELA  
You told Peter Serenity was finished.

ELIZABETH  
Almost.

Beat.

DANIELA  
What's The Acorn?

Beat.

ELIZABETH  
A new book.

DANIELA  
Shouldn't you be concentrating on  
Serenity?

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
I've got to get it out of my head.  
You know what it's like.

Daniela's look questions Elizabeth.

DANIELA  
Okay. Go and finish Serenity. And  
not too long. Or I'll start without  
you.

Elizabeth steps out of the embrace.

ELIZABETH  
After all the wine you drank?  
Dearest Danny, you'll be asleep  
before your head hits the pillow.  
Good night.

Elizabeth pecks Daniela's lips and heads for her studio.

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - NIGHT

Elizabeth is at her desk drawing. Pages of Princess Serenity are pushed well away, neglected. Closer to Elizabeth are more completed panels of The Acorn. These panels are not as colourful as the first.

Elizabeth stops and picks up the first page of the newly completed folios of "THE ACORN" and reads it.

CLOSE ON FIRST PANEL

The panel is the same as the opening panel, without the title, but it is not as bright; more greys in the sky and grass.

The speech balloon is printed with: "TIME PASSED. THE HAPPY FAMILY WORKED HARD BUT THE SOIL WAS ROCKY AND THE WELL WAS DRY. STILL THEY PERSISTED, FOR THE PROMISE OF THE MAGICAL ACORNS DROVE OMBRA'S FATHER ON..."

MORPH TO

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - FIELD - DAY

ELIZABETH (V.O.)  
(Fading in)  
...but the soil was rocky and the  
well was dry. Still they persisted,  
for the promise of the magical  
acorns drove Ombra's father on...

PAN TO SEE

Father and Mother on a dusty, stone-filled field using picks and shovels making little headway in the hard soil.

Over this, Lucia (O.C.), sings a melancholy nursery rhyme:

LUCIA (O.C.)  
(Faint, getting louder)  
Day is night  
Black is white  
Wrong is right when  
Evil has might (repeat)

Father's expression is hard and uncompromising as he attacks the unyielding earth with a mattock.

Mother's demeanour is wearied and stooped, burdened by Father's uncontrolled rages, as she turns shovels-full of rocky dirt.

Nearby, Ombra is scratching away at the soil with an oversized shovel, doing her best but having much difficulty.

Their clothing is duller and their complexions sallow.

Lucia, in contrast, is still brightly coloured and radiant as she plays nearby on a patch of grass, oblivious to the hard exertions of her parents and sister, and singing her nursery rhyme.

Father looks up to see Ombra's ineffectiveness.

FATHER  
Put some back into it, girl!

Ombra is startled and looks up to see Father glaring at her; his face a menacing contorted snarl.

Mother turns fearfully towards Ombra, then looks at Father. She finally plucks up her courage...

MOTHER  
She's doing her best, Father.

FATHER  
She can do better. She's not trying.

Father stares Mother down. Mother resumes her shovelling. Father turns his attention to Ombra who hasn't taken her eyes off him.

FATHER  
Are you?

Beat. Ombra is lost for words. Father takes a few steps towards Ombra.



FATHER (CONT'D)  
Someone told me you've been seeing  
that wretched farmer boy, Felix.

Ombra shakes her head fearfully. Mother notices.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
Don't lie --

He raises his arm to strike Ombra. Mother drops he shovel and races towards Father.

FATHER    MOTHER

I told you never to see him.

Father!

Father brings down his arm just at Mother catches it.

No!

MOTHER

Father pushes Mother away.

FATHER  
(To Mother)  
Get back to work!

Beat.

MOTHER

What's come over you? These past weeks... I don't know who you are --

Father back-hands Mother.

Shut up!

FATHER

Mother, Father and Ombra freeze, each stunned.

Lucia continues singing as she plays.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
Don't back-talk me.

ELDER FIMUS (O.C.)  
Ho, there! Everything under  
control?

Father looks up surprised to see Elder Fimus nearby on his donkey carriage. Mother turns her back in shame.

FATHER  
Elder Fimus! Sir... well enough, I  
suppose --

ELDER FIMUS  
Not complaining, I hope. You're  
very privileged to work this field.

Elder Fimus sees Lucia.

FATHER

No, no, sir! The soil is a little harder than I expected and our tools are --

ELDER FIMUS

And how is our little beauty coping?

They all look at Lucia playing and singing.

FATHER

Well, sir, very well. We all take care of Lucia very well.

Elder Fimus leers at Lucia.

Ombra peers at Elder Fimus, protective of Lucia.

Elder Fimus notices Ombra and stares back at her. Ombra does not flinch.

Beat.

ELDER FIMUS

(To Father)

I'm pleased to hear it. She'll fetch you all a very handsome reward some day.

FATHER

Er... speaking of reward, Elder Fimus... ?

ELDER FIMUS

Yes, yes, that's why I'm here. Once you have tied the last sheath of wheat, and not before, you are to send your daughter for the magical acorns.

FATHER

Ombra will be honoured --

ELDER FIMUS

Not Ombra. Lucia.

Mother is shocked by this. Shaking her head, she looks at Father, Elder Fimus and Lucia incredulous.

ELDER FIMUS (CONT'D)

Lucia.

He leers once more at Lucia. Ombra has a fierce look.

ELDER FIMUS (CONT'D)

Good day.

Elder Fimus taps his donkey with his whip and trots off, watched by Father, Mother and Ombra.

Father turns to them and snarls.

FATHER

Get to work!

(Noticing Ombra)

Get that look off your face. Elder Fimus is our protector and benefactor.

Ombra glares at Father then stares after Elder Fimus with determination and dirt clinging to her sweat-soaked face.

OMBRA

(Sotto voce)

No-one will hurt my little sister.

END OF GRAPHIC NOVEL SEQUENCE.

MORPH TO

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - NIGHT

CLOSE ON GRAPHIC PANEL of Ombra's DETERMINED FACE.

Elizabeth stares at this panel.

INT. LARGE BOOKSTORE SIGNING TABLE - DAY (SATURDAY)

Saturday morning rush and another book launching session - a large one.

Elizabeth is seated behind the book-signing table surrounded by a large crowd of CHILDREN in fancy dress and ADULTS, waiting their turn for Elizabeth to sign their copies of her book, "PRINCESS SERENITY AND THE TIGER'S EYE". Stacks of the book are piled high about her, together with promotional posters etc.

She looks a little tired but is polite and chatty with each child.

Elizabeth is assisted by the BOOKSTORE MANAGER (28).

INT. LARGE BOOKSTORE CHILDREN'S SECTION - CONTINUOUS

At a distance, Daniela and Peter, sipping coffees from take-away cups, watch Elizabeth.

PETER

Liz looks very tired, Danny. You haven't been keeping her up, have you?

Daniela gives Peter an indignant look of disapproval.

DANIELA

She's been working hard to finish Princess Serenity for Monday. Why did you bring the meeting forward?

PETER

I didn't, they did. Danny, this deal will not only make Elizabeth Shaw a bigger name than J.K. Rowling but very, very rich. A lot is riding on number six being ready on time.

DANIELA

It will be.

PETER

It has to be.

DANIELA

Peter. It will be.

PETER

Yeah?

DANIELA

Yes.

Daniela's attention is caught by someone in the crowd.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

Hold this would you, Peter? Back in a sec.

Daniela hands Peter her cup and heads towards the crowd.

FOLLOW DANIELA THROUGH THE CROWD

INTERCUT

INT. BOOKSTORE, ANOTHER SECTION - CONTINUOUS

The same mysterious woman as before, slim, attractive, dark-haired, HANNA (40), stands behind the crowd, obscured from Elizabeth, staring at her as she signs autographs. Hanna's face is hard and unreadable.

DANIELA (O.S.)

Hanna.

Hanna is startled.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

HANNA  
Nothing that concerns you.

DANIELA  
Anything that concerns Elizabeth  
concerns me. Why are you stalking  
her?

HANNA  
Stalk --? How dare you!

An Adult turns and gives them a look of annoyance. Hanna and Daniela move away from the Adult.

HANNA (CONT'D)  
I need to talk to her.

DANIELA  
Why?

HANNA  
I've got news for her.

DANIELA  
You can tell me.

HANNA  
What are you? The self-appointed  
head of the lesbian protection  
league?

INT. LARGE BOOKSTORE SIGNING TABLE - CONTINUOUS

ELIZABETH'S P.O.V.

Elizabeth catches sight of Daniela speaking to someone at the back of the crowd. She can't see Hanna.

A CHILD stands in front of Elizabeth and draws her attention back to book-signing.

She glances up to see Daniela leaving with Hanna and now recognises her. Elizabeth seems dismayed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LARGE BOOKSTORE SIGNING TABLE - 2 HOURS LATER, DAY

The crowd of Adults and Children has thinned to only one Adult and Child: JORDAN (9), and YOUNG MOTHER (29). The stacks of books have mostly disappeared.

Peter takes a photo of Jordan and Elizabeth posing and smiling as she signs a book while Young Mother stands alongside looking on.

Peter checks the shot as Elizabeth hands the book to Jordan.

ELIZABETH

There you go, Jordan, I do hope you enjoy it.

JORDAN

Thank you, Miss Elizabeth.

Peter hands the camera to Young Mother.

YOUNG MOTHER

Thank you. And thank you, Miss Shaw.

Elizabeth smiles. Jordan and Young Mother leave.

BOOKSTORE MANAGER

Whew! That was one of the busiest launches we've had. Congrats, Miss Shaw.

Elizabeth is gracious, smiling at the Bookstore Manager as he gathers up the remaining books and leaves.

Daniela returns alone, carrying a small, WHITE ENVELOPE. She looks concerned as she approaches the table.

Peter helps Elizabeth pack up her gear.

Elizabeth scowls at Daniela.

DANIELA

Later.

I/E. DANIELA'S CAR - DAY

Daniela drives. She pulls out of the shopping centre car park. Elizabeth, annoyed and impatient, sits in the passenger seat beside her.

Beat.

ELIZABETH

Well?

Daniela is hesitant, lost for words.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

What did she want?

Beat.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Damn you, don't play games, Danny!  
What the fuck did my sister want?

Beat.

DANIELA  
Your mother's dying.

Elizabeth is left breathless, stunned.

Long pause.

ELIZABETH  
Good.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM - DAY

The front door is flung open. Elizabeth storms in and heads for her studio. Daniela follows, helpless.

DANIELA  
(Calling)  
Liz! Liz --

SFX: The crash of a door slamming.

Daniela takes out the small, white envelope and looks at it.

INT. OUTSIDE ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Daniela, the small, white envelope crunched in her hand, cautiously approaches the door and tries the handle. Locked.

Daniela gently raps on the door.

DANIELA  
Liz? Lizzie?

ELIZABETH (O.C.)  
I'm working.

Daniela has a look of controlled desperation.

DANIELA  
Don't lock me out.  
(Beat)  
I'll leave you alone but please  
don't lock me out.

Pause.

Defeated and with a sigh, Daniela releases the door knob and retreats.

SFX: The sound of the door being unlocked.

Daniela stops. She turns, looks at the door, grateful and relieved.

She leaves, contemplating the envelope she clutches.

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth holds onto the door knob, agitated, unable to think clearly. She turns and slumps into her chair, staring into nothing.

She snaps out of her self-pity and picks up a clean sheet of paper and begins to draw, her face and movements filled with rage.

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - FIELD - DAY

The colours are only a wash. Greys and black predominant.

Father and Mother are tying sheaths of wheat. Ombra is helping. They are tired and morose, sweaty and dirty, and their clothing ragged and soiled.

Lucia is pristine, colourful, happy and laughing, sitting down nearby on a patch of emerald grass, playing and HUMMING the tune of the nursery rhyme. She is oblivious to the rest of the world.

Father finishes tying the last sheath of wheat. He stretches up, cracks his back and wipes the sweat from his brow.

He glowers at everything he sees as he looks about.

FATHER  
That's the last of it.

Father looks off to the near horizon and is surprised to see Elder Fimus there in his donkey carriage.

Elder Fimus gives him a deliberate nod of the head, then drives off.

Father, satisfied, turns and looks at Lucia.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
(To Mother)  
Time she went.

Ombra snaps her attention to Father.

OMBRA  
No, Father! Not Lucia! I'll get you  
the magical acorns.

FATHER  
Quiet! Lucia's going. Just like  
Elder Fimus said.

OMBRA  
No, Father!  
(Beat)  
There's... there's a monster in the  
Forest Acerbus.



Father looks at her then snorts with derision.

OMBRA (CONT'D)  
It guards the path to the acorns!  
It will harm Lucia!

FATHER  
Who told you such lies?

Beat.

OMBRA  
Felix --

Father grabs Ombra's blouse and pulls her up to him.

FATHER  
You saw this boy?

OMBRA  
No. No, Father.

Father slaps Ombra's face.

FATHER  
Liar!

OMBRA  
Mother! --

MOTHER  
Father --

FATHER  
Keep out of this, unless you want  
more of the same?

Mother withdraws, cowering. Ombra's pleading eyes follow her.

OMBRA  
Mother...

Mother averts her eyes. Father lets go of Ombra.

FATHER  
(To Mother, re Lucia)  
Get her ready.  
(To Ombra)  
There is no monster.

OMBRA  
Father, send me! Please. Send me!

Beat.

FATHER  
(Vicious)  
NO!  
(MORE)

FATHER (cont'd)  
(Beat)  
I forbid you to leave to go!

OMBRA  
Father... Please...

Ombra is distraught. Father turns to Mother.

FATHER  
Well?!

Mother takes Lucia's hand and ushers her towards Father.

OMBRA  
Don't send Lucia --

FATHER  
Not one more word!

Lucia runs to Father and wraps her arms around him.

LUCIA  
Daddy!

Father's attitude changes; he smiles at Lucia.

FATHER  
My sweet, pretty Lucia. Are you  
ready to collect the magical acorns  
for Daddy?

LUCIA  
Yes!

FATHER  
Good. Now go. Be quick and do what  
Elder Fimus instructed. Follow the  
sign!

Ombra stands silent, shaking her head, pleading eyes wanting  
Lucia to look back at her.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
Bring back as many magical acorns  
as you can carry!

Mother appears powerless, wringing her hands, her face  
showing desperation and concern.

Lucia skips off towards the forest wall not far off.

LUCIA  
Bye!

OMBRA  
(Soft)  
No...

Ombra turns to Mother, silently pleading for help. Mother turns her back on Ombra and, head bowed, trudges towards the cottage.

Father snarls at Ombra then follows Mother to the cottage.

Ombra turns to see Lucia entering the forest.

EXT. FOREST ACERBUS - DAY

The forest is sparsely populated with tall trees. The ground is littered with fallen twigs and leaves. Sunshine streams down through the canopy of tree boughs.

SFX: Birdsong - varied and plentiful

Lucia, still colourful and bright, picks her way through fallen leaves and twigs, humming the nursery rhyme, occasionally looking about in awe.

EXT. FOREST ACERBUS, FURTHER IN - MOMENTS LATER

The trees are a little more densely packed with less sunlight streaming through.

SFX: Birdsong - one or two calls only

EXT. FOREST ACERBUS, FURTHER IN - A LITTLE LATER

The forest is now dark and densely populated with tall trees. A little blue sky above pierces the gloom with irregular shafts of pale daylight.

Lucia treads carefully but is still happy as she searches for the sign.

SFX: Birdcall - menacing screech

Finally, Lucia sees a sign, "TO THE MAGICAL ACORNS", nailed to a tree and indicating a narrow pathway.

She giggles with joy and breaks into a run towards it.

Ombra, panting from running to catch up to Lucia, watches in horror as Lucia approaches the pathway.

OMBRA

No! Lucia! Stop!

Lucia doesn't hear and continues racing towards the sign.

OMBRA (CONT'D)

It's a trap!

Ombra chases Lucia as she disappears into the dense undergrowth beyond the sign.

OMBRA (CONT'D)  
 Lucia! Stop! Lucia!

They are both swallowed up by the dismal woods.

EXT. FOREST ACERBUS - CONTINUOUS

Lucia running away, giggling, through a dense and very dark part of the forest.

Ombra follows a short distance behind.

OMBRA  
 Lucia! Stop!

Suddenly, Lucia stops dead in her tracks, dumbstruck and awed.

Ombra stops a few paces behind and stares at the horrific sight before them.

OMBRA  
 (Whisper)  
 Lucia... don't move...

Ombra carefully closes the gap between them as...

the MONSTER, ugly, scabby, deformed and slaverling slime from a gaping mouth filled with rotten, yellowed and jagged teeth turns and leers at them. It is twice as tall as Ombra, its voice deep, resonant and menacing.

The Monster lurches forward a few steps.

Ombra, scared but brave, pulls Lucia back a step. Lucia is stunned and silent.

MONSTER  
 (To Ombra)  
 What are you doing here?

OMBRA  
 Come on, Lucia...

MONSTER  
 She stays.

OMBRA  
 No!

MONSTER  
 No? And who are you to tell me no?

OMBRA  
 I won't let you hurt my sister!

The Monster laughs an evil, mocking sound then grabs Lucia's arm and pulls her towards it.

The sudden jolt jars Lucia from her petrification.

Lucia screams.

Ombra rushes the Monster.

OMBRA

Let go of her!

The Monster grabs hold of Ombra's arm and holds her away.

Lucia screams and struggles to free herself, doing everything she can to escape the Monster's grip.

Ombra struggles, then realising the futility, stops.

OMBRA

Let her go. Please... don't hurt her.

The Monster fixes its gaze on Ombra. Lucia continues to struggle and cry.

The Monster sneers.

MONSTER

You're a brave little warrior but I will have her. She is so pretty.

OMBRA

Please. Let her go. Please. I'll do anything you want, just let Lucia go.

MONSTER

Anything?

OMBRA

Yes.

(Frustrated, anguished)  
Please... Why are you doing this?

MONSTER

I have a hunger and it must be sated.

It looks at the still-struggling, shrieking and sobbing Lucia.

MONSTER (CONT'D)

There'll be time for her... later.

(To Ombra)  
You are not to scream

OMBRA

I won't.

MONSTER

And you'll do whatever I say.

OMBRA

Yes. But you have to let her go first!

The Monster laughs a horrendous shriek. It lets go of Lucia's arm.

Lucia stops screaming and crying and backs away a few steps, looking at Ombra, horrified, uncomprehending.

OMBRA

(To Lucia)

Run, Lucia! Go! Wait for me by the sign! Run!

The Monster tugs at Ombra's arm.

Ombra tries to hold back her tears as she watches Lucia turn and push her way back through the thicket.

MONSTER

Come, my plain little Ombra, time for you to pay for your devotion.

The Monster pulls Ombra along.

OMBRA

(Shocked)

How did you know my name?

(Beat)

You're... you're ...

EXT. FOREST ACERBUS - LATER

Lucia, no longer afraid, sits on the ground near the sign, "TO THE MAGICAL ACORNS", nailed to a tree, playing with two thick sticks, knocking them together in an uncoordinated rhythm as she sings the nursery rhyme, happy and unconcerned.

LUCIA

Day is night  
Black is white  
Wrong is right when  
Evil has might (repeat)

A rustle of footsteps dragging through the undergrowth draws her attention to a small shambling shadow coming closer.

Lucia scrambles to her feet, still clutching the sticks.

LUCIA

Ombra! Where have you been?

She takes a few steps towards Ombra.

LUCIA (CONT'D)  
You disappeared into the forest.  
I've been waiting for you forever!

Ombra stumbles towards Lucia, Ombra's eyes unseeing, her face tear-streaked and her lips swollen. Her dress is even dirtier and more ragged than before, her hair dishevelled and she walks with pain.

Ombra limps past Lucia towards home.

Lucia tags along behind, knocking the two sticks together.

LUCIA (CONT'D)  
I hope you've got the magical  
acorns. I couldn't find any.

CLOSE on Ombra's devastated face.

SFX: Irregular tapping of two sticks against each other.

END OF GRAPHIC NOVEL SEQUENCE.

MORPH TO

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - NIGHT

CLOSE on a black-and-white drawing of Ombra's devastated face, held in Elizabeth's trembling hand.

SFX: Two sticks tapping together MORPHS into

SFX: A gentle knocking on the studio door.

Elizabeth sits at her worktable, her head cradled in her hand. She is sobbing.

Daniela lets herself in carrying a hot beverage.

She sees Elizabeth's distress. Dismayed, she wraps her arms about Elizabeth, places the mug on the table and comforts her.

Daniela takes the drawing from Elizabeth and looks at it.

DANIELA  
Oh, my love.

Tears fill Daniela's eyes. She continues consoling Elizabeth as her eyes wander across the table. It is strewn with many sheets of quickly drawn black-and-white panels. They mostly show the horror of Ombra's ordeal: Ombra's struggling to pull away from the Monster; the Monster looming over Ombra; Ombra writhing in pain; the Monster's look of hateful ecstasy.

Daniela holds Elizabeth, gently rocking her.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

The bathroom is steamy, lit by numerous candles. Delibes' "Dome Epais le Jasmin" from Lakme plays in the background.

Daniela and Elizabeth share a bath, Elizabeth cradled in Daniela's arms. Both are languid, the sudsy hot water lulling them almost to sleep.

Each is lost in deep thought.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM - LATER

The lights are dimmed and another slow, soft track plays in the background.

Elizabeth and Daniela, each in fluffy bathrobes, lie nestled in each other's arms, sprawled on the lounge, feet up on the coffee table, entwined, relaxed.

An almost empty bottle of wine and two half-filled glasses sit on the coffee table.

Elizabeth is remote and matter-of-fact but not callous.

ELIZABETH

It's inoperable?

Daniela nods her head.

DANIELA

She hasn't got long.

Beat.

ELIZABETH

I still don't want to see her.

DANIELA

You may regret it... later.

Elizabeth shakes her head almost imperceptibly.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

What about talking to Hanna?

No response.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

There's a box for you at your mother's house. Your mother wants you to have it --

ELIZABETH

There's nothing I want from --

(Beat)

Did Hanna mention anything about...?



DANIELA

She has her own version of the past.

Elizabeth scoffs.

Beat.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

Talk to Hanna.

Elizabeth shakes her head.

ELIZABETH

What for?

DANIELA

If anything, to sort this out once and for all.

ELIZABETH

Nothing to sort out.

DANIELA

She's all the family you have left.

ELIZABETH

I've got you.

Elizabeth pulls away from Daniela.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Haven't I?

Daniela pulls her back into an embrace.

DANIELA

For eternity.

(Beat)

Hanna gave me the key to the house.

Elizabeth shakes her head.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

She said your mother is desperate to see you.

ELIZABETH

So she can tell me one last time what an abomination I am? You are?

DANIELA

Or she may want your forgiveness.

ELIZABETH

She may also want me to admit that I killed... my father.

Daniela's look of admonishment stops Elizabeth.

DANIELA  
No-one believes that, Liz. You  
couldn't harm anyone if your life  
depended on it.

Elizabeth sits upright, confused, angry.

ELIZABETH  
Drop it! I don't want to see her!  
Or Hanna!

Daniela sits up and tries to calm Elizabeth down.

DANIELA  
Shhhh... It's okay.

Elizabeth calms down.

ELIZABETH  
Why now? Why fuck it all up now?  
Why couldn't she just...

DANIELA  
Die? Maybe she regrets what  
happened. She may need closure,  
Liz.

ELIZABETH  
I don't. I've moved on.

DANIELA  
Have you?

Beat.

Daniela leans into Elizabeth and whispers in her ear.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
I will be with you every step of  
the way.

ELIZABETH  
No...

DANIELA  
Put the past to rest. No more  
nightmares...

Elizabeth's resolve diminishes.

ELIZABETH  
You're starting to sound like your  
mother.

Daniela smiles.

DANIELA

We don't have to see your mother if  
you don't want to. Let's just  
collect the box.

(Beat)

Let me call Hanna and tell her.

Daniela kisses Elizabeth's cheek, gently, tenderly. Elizabeth  
looks pained, conflicted.

Beat.

Elizabeth snuggles into Daniela, pulling her into a tight,  
shuddering embrace.

ELIZABETH

Oh, Danny...

DANIELA

You're my brave little warrior,  
remember?

ELIZABETH

Yeah. And you're my champion  
forever. I remember.

DANIELA

I won't let anyone hurt you again.  
Ever.

Daniela kisses Elizabeth's forehead tenderly.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

I'll call Hanna in the morning.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - FIELD - EVENING

The field is shadowy, the dismal sunset painted in washed out  
greys.

Mother is pacing back and forth, watching the road. She is  
concerned, her face contorted with worry.

LUCIA

Mummy!

Mother peers into the gloom and sees Lucia, bright and  
colourful, running towards her from the shadows. Relieved,  
Mother crouches and opens her arms to catch Lucia.

MOTHER

Lucia!

(Looking about frantic)  
Where's Ombra? Is she with you?

Lucia turns back to the shadows to see Ombra stumbling and staggering towards them.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Ombra. Child...

She puts Lucia down and is shocked as Ombra draws near.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Ombra... What... The mon -- ?

Ombra sobs as she nods, her eyes pleading. Mother hesitates, looks nervously back over her shoulder, then back to Ombra.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
No! No, your father won't hear of it.  
(Beat)  
You shouldn't have run away.  
(Beat)  
The acorns. Where are the magical acorns?

Ombra takes something out of her pocket. She opens her palm to Mother revealing one small ordinary acorn.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Only one? Oh, Ombra...

Ombra is silent, eyes downcast. Heavy plodding footfalls from behind causes Mother to whirl around, terrified, to see Father, grim, implacable, approach.

FATHER  
Where have you been? You disobeyed me.

Ombra falters. Lucia launches herself at Father's legs.

LUCIA  
Daddy!

Father looks down at Lucia and smiles. He snaps back up to Ombra.

FATHER  
Well, girl? I asked you a question.

Ombra quakes, breathless with fear; Mother's eyes wide with apprehension.

MOTHER  
She... she has the magical acorns...

Father's eyes burn into Ombra. Ombra shows him the acorn in her hand.

FATHER

One?!!

Furious, Father pushes Lucia away and lurches towards Ombra, his towering frame intimidating. He grabs the acorn.

FATHER (CONT'D)

One!

(Beat)

Look at you! I know where you've been. You went to play with that godless barbarian, Felix, didn't you?

Ombra, terrified, shakes her head, pleading. Father removes his belt.

FATHER (CONT'D)

And I can see what you were playing at, you whore!

OMBRA

No! No, Father!

FATHER

Don't lie to me, you slut!

Father strikes Ombra with his belt. She cowers. Mother makes a move but backs away. She and Lucia look on, frightened.

OMBRA

No, Father, no! It was the monster! The monster did this to me!

Father strikes her again.

FATHER

There is no monster!

OMBRA

It was... Elder... Fi...

Father strikes her again. Mother is shocked.

FATHER

Liar!! How dare you!

He strikes her again and again.

FATHER (CONT'D)

He helped us when no one else would! He is a good man!

Ombra sinks to the ground in frustration, crying, sobbing.

OMBRA

It... was... him... It... was.

Father stands over Ombra.

FATHER

You will not lie about Elder Fimus.  
Understand? Never!

He hits her one last time. He scowls at Ombra, turns to see Mother and Lucia huddled tightly together, then turns back to Ombra.

Ombra, sobbing, eyes tear-filled, looks up at him, her face set with hatred and defiance. Father snorts his contempt, then storms back towards their cottage.

Beat.

OMBRA

(Quiet)

You knew. Why didn't you stop him,  
Mother?

Mother disengages herself from Lucia, looks at Ombra bewildered then lowers her head and retreats toward their cottage, Ombra's questioning eyes following her.

Ombra's gaze returns to Lucia who stands motionless, her face devoid of any emotion.

Lucia stares at Ombra. Ombra's pleading eyes, begging for understanding and sympathy, have no effect on Lucia.

Lucia turns and follows Mother back to the cottage, skipping.

Ombra watches Lucia disappear into the shadows. With great difficulty, Ombra stands, her sobbing abated.

She puts her hand into her pocket and retrieves another acorn and stares at it.

Nearby and unseen by Ombra, Lucia peers at her from behind a shadowy tree trunk.

OMBRA

If you are truly magical, I wish  
that you make all the men who have  
ever hurt me die a slow and painful  
death.

Lucia is appalled by Ombra's wishful curse. She begins singing her nursery rhyme softly to herself...

LUCIA

Day is night  
Black is white...

... as Ombra closes her hand around the acorn.

END OF GRAPHIC NOVEL SEQUENCE.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (SATURDAY)

Dark.

LUCIA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 ...Wrong is right when  
 Evil has might.

In bed, Elizabeth lies wide awake, on her side facing away from Daniela. Daniela is sound asleep, spooning Elizabeth.

Lucia's sing-song nursery rhyme repeats as...

INT. SHAW HOUSE, KITCHEN - FLASHBACK 29 YEARS AGO

MONTAGE OF CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Blurred or out-of-focus, close-up and in quick succession.

LUCIA (V.O.)  
 (Fading in)  
 Day is night  
 Black is white  
 Wrong is right when  
 Evil has might. (Repeating)

ELIZABETH 14, sits slouched on a kitchen chair.

MR SHAW (40), stands over Elizabeth 14, threatening.

CLOSE ON Mr Shaw's hand as it slaps Elizabeth 14's face.

ELIZABETH 14  
 (Pleading)  
 Mummy...

MR SHAW  
 Slut!

CLOSE ON Mr Shaw's hand slapping Elizabeth 14's face again.

MR SHAW  
 Whore!

CLOSE ON Mr Shaw.

MR SHAW  
 You've been with that jew-boy,  
 haven't you, Elizabeth?!

CLOSE ON MR BISHOP'S (75) wicked, laughing face. He wears a fedora hat.

CLOSE ON Hanna 11, playing with a pile of golden acorns, laughing.

CLOSE ON Elizabeth 14, crying.

ELIZABETH 14  
Why didn't you stop him, mummy?

CLOSE ON Mr Bishop's laughing face.

CLOSE ON Mr Shaw's laughing face.

CLOSE ON Hanna 11 laughing, singing:

HANNA 11  
(Fading out)  
Day is night  
Black is white  
Wrong is right when  
Evil has might.

END OF CHILDHOOD MEMORIES MONTAGE - FLASHBACK.

BACK TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Elizabeth, spooned by Daniela, stares into the darkness.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - MORNING (SUNDAY)

PULL BACK FROM BLACK TO A CLOSE UP OF

A single storey cottage on a computer screen, Google Maps, Street View of 21 Bryant Street, Botany.

Elizabeth, dressed in casual wear, stares at the screen, her eyes distant, reliving the past.

DANIELA (O.C.)  
Hey, I thought we were going to  
sleep in this morning.

Elizabeth turns to see Daniela, bed-haired, yawning and with her dressing gown haphazardly thrown about her naked body, leaning against the door jamb.

Elizabeth switches off the screen.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
What are you doing?

Elizabeth sheepishly shakes her head, gets up and leads Daniela out.

ELIZABETH  
Let's get some caffeine into you.



EXT. PATIO - MORNING (SUNDAY)

A leafy outdoor extension to Elizabeth and Daniela's residence, filled with potted plants and a glass-top garden table setting.

The table is set with breakfast for two with toast on the plates and empty cups.

Daniela is slouched, legs spread, eyes closed, in a chair, sunning herself, her dressing gown barely keeping her modest. The Sunday paper lies neglected nearby as well as her mobile phone.

Elizabeth comes in with a hot pot of coffee. She notices Daniela asleep as she pours out two cups as...

ELIZABETH

I hope you don't sit like that in front of Justice Freeman.

Daniela smiles, eyes shut.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

And, if you do, I hope you wear knickers.

Daniela guffaws.

DANIELA

Sometimes, that's the only way to win a case.

Elizabeth pushes a cup toward Daniela and sits down.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

Good to see you smile again.

Beat.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

Why did you get up so early?

ELIZABETH

Wanted to get a bit more of the book down. And it's almost eleven.

Daniela takes the cup and peers at Elizabeth over its rim.

DANIELA

Which book?

Elizabeth freezes.

ELIZABETH

Princess Serenity.

Elizabeth re-animates.

DANIELA

Hmm-hmm.

(Beat)

Does the princess manage to bring  
the child molesting monster in the  
forest to justice?

Elizabeth looks up at Daniela, speechless.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

Somehow, I don't think it's quite  
what Pixar's looking for.

Beat.

ELIZABETH

It needs editing.

DANIELA

It needs exorcising. Some of those  
panels are pretty horrific.

(Beat)

Have you finished Princess  
Serenity? The meeting's tomorrow  
morning. Peter's pretty anxious  
about it.

ELIZABETH

It won't take long...

DANIELA

What's distracting you?

Beat.

ELIZABETH

I don't know. Something comes over  
me, Danny. I have this urge... It  
just pours out of me like...  
like...

DANIELA

Demons tumbling from hell?

Daniela reaches across the table and holds Elizabeth's hand.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

You can't continue like this, Liz.  
See your mother --

ELIZABETH

No!

DANIELA

If I could change the past, I  
would. I'll stand by you whatever  
happens. I promise.

Elizabeth softens. A look of remorse washes over her face.

ELIZABETH  
I've got work to do.

Elizabeth stands up.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Call Hanna. But I don't want to see her.

Elizabeth leaves.

DANIELA  
I love you, Lizzie.

Daniela watches Elizabeth then picks up her mobile phone. Finding "HANNA WALKER", presses "CALL" and steels herself.

DANIELA  
Hanna?

INT. HANNA'S KITCHEN - CONCURRENTLY

Hanna's kitchen is spacious, light-filled and modern and expensively fitted out.

Hanna is preparing lunch, chopping vegetables with a large knife on a chopping board. The phone is jammed between her ear and shoulder as she continues the preparations.

INTERCUT BETWEEN LOCATIONS.

HANNA  
Yes?

DANIELA  
Daniela Broughton --

Hanna stops working. Her posture changes to rigid and severe.

HANNA  
Is she going to see her mother?

DANIELA  
Ah --

HANNA  
She hasn't got much longer.

DANIELA  
Elizabeth has agreed to collect the box from your mother's place.

HANNA

Well, hurrah for her. Obviously the contents of the box is more important to my illustrious sister than her mother is.

Hanna resumes her vegetable chopping with more vigour.

HANNA (CONT'D)

Maybe I should take it to the hospice. Kill two birds with one stone. So to speak.

DANIELA

Your mother's place would be more convenient. What time is suitable?

Hanna stops chopping.

HANNA

If you mean what time won't I be there, I won't be there at all today.

DANIELA

We should be there early this afternoon.

HANNA

We? She can't manage alone?

DANIELA

You have an objection to my being there?

Contemptuous huff from Hanna.

HANNA

Ever the dyke in shining armour. Are you afraid I'll pop in unannounced?

Hanna resumes chopping the vegetables, punctuating each sentence with a forceful blow from the knife.

HANNA (CONT'D)

What do you think I'll do to her? Brainwash her into giving a shit for what her mother's going through? Hah! She's the expert at brainwashing.

(Beat)

And you're the laundry, Counselor Broughton.

DANIELA

Where shall I leave the key?

HANNA

I should be more afraid of her than she is of me. She's wacko.

DANIELA

I'll leave it in the letter box.

Hanna stops chopping.

HANNA (CONT'D)

Tell me, Counselor Broughton, after all this time, has she changed much? Or is she still spinning those ludicrous, monstrous lies?

DANIELA

Someone said the relativity of truth lies in the mind of the observer.

HANNA

What crap! The relativity of truth lies in the police reports.

DANIELA

What are you talking about?

HANNA

Ask your wife. Ask her why she was suspended from school before she could sit her H.S.C. Ask her why the police were involved. Ask her why the school counselor wrote in his report that she is a pathological liar.

(Beat)

You don't know any of this, do you?

(Beat)

Once this is over, I won't have a mother... or a sister. You can tell her that.

Hanna disconnects the call.

BACK TO:

EXT. PATIO - CONTINUOUS

Daniela appears confused, befuddled.

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth sits at her desk, staring at the same computer screen of a single storey cottage on a computer screen, Google Maps, Street View of 21 Bryant Street, Botany.

EXT. 21 BRYANT STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK 33 YEARS AGO

# MONTAGE OF MOVING IN

All blurred or out-of-focus, long shots and in quick succession.

A moving van pulls up.

MUSIC plays on its radio - Cat's In The Cradle by Harry Chapin

An old 1965 Holden station wagon pulls up behind the moving van. MR SHAW (35), ISSIBIT 10, and ANNIE 7, get out.

MR ORSINI, 51, and MRS ORSINI, 49, come out of the front yard of number 19 and greet Mr Shaw, Issibit 10 and Annie 7. Happy introductions all round.

MR BISHOP (71), and MRS BISHOP (70), come out of their house at 20 across the street and join the group. They introduce themselves to the Shaws. Mrs Bishop is a small, pleasant woman, neatly dressed. All smiles.

The two REMOVALISTS begin unloading furniture.

CLOSE ON Mr Bishop as he smiles, laughs and pays special attention to Issibit 10 and Annie 7.

CLOSE ON Annie 7 and Issibit 10 as they laugh and smile back at him.

SFX: Ringing telephone

LONG SHOT Another MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE from number 17 joins in. The house at 21 is in the background.

SFX: Ringing telephone again

END OF MOVING IN MONTAGE AND END OF FLASHBACK

BACK TO:

## INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - MIDDAY

Elizabeth at her desk, still staring at the computer screen of a single storey cottage on a computer screen, Google Maps, Street View of 21 Bryant Street, Botany.

SFX: Ringing telephone again.

Annoyed that Daniela hasn't picked up, she picks up the nearby telephone.

ELIZABETH

Hello?

PETER (V.O.)

Liz. G'day. Peter.

ELIZABETH

Peter...

PETER (V.O.)

No, no, I'm not hassling you. Just catching up. All good?

ELIZABETH

Ah... yes...

Elizabeth shuffles through the discarded pile of Princess Serenity drawings at the far end of her desk.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

... Practically done --

PETER (V.O.)

Good. Good. Tomorrow's the day. Big day. Excited? Nervous?

ELIZABETH

Peter --

PETER (V.O.)

Um, any chance me coming over? To strategise?

ELIZABETH

No... Look, it'll be fine. I'll leave you to do all the talking.

PETER (V.O.)

You're sounding a little tense. Sure you're okay?

ELIZABETH

Yes...

PETER (V.O.)

Sure I can't help?

ELIZABETH

Peter, please! Just let me get on with it, okay?

PETER (V.O.)

Okay. Okay. Tomorrow, then. I'll pick you up at nine.

(beat)

Bye.

ELIZABETH

Bye.

She hangs up the receiver.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Fuck.

DANIELA (O.S.)  
Everything okay, Liz?

Elizabeth is startled and looks up at Daniela as she approaches. She switches off the screen.

ELIZABETH  
Yeah. Peter.

Daniela sits on the corner of her desk.

DANIELA  
You weren't suspended from school?

ELIZABETH  
What?  
(Hesitant)  
No. I left. Before the finals. You know that.

DANIELA  
Why would Hanna say you were? And that the police were involved?

Elizabeth appears shaken.

ELIZABETH  
I have no idea.

DANIELA  
Hmp! What's she playing at?  
(Beat)  
Any time this afternoon. She won't be there.  
(Beat)  
I'm going to take a shower.

Daniela gets up to leave.

ELIZABETH  
You believe me, don't you?

DANIELA  
Of course.

She leaves. Elizabeth appears rattled as she watches Daniela disappear.

Beat.

Elizabeth's thoughts appear to be in turmoil. She becomes restless, unable to concentrate. She pulls the stack of Princess Serenity drawings towards her, shuffles through them then pushes them away.

She fingers the scattered drawings from "The Acorn". A look of regret and discomfiture washes over her.



She stands up and wanders around her studio, lost in thought.

INT. BATHROOM - 10 MINUTES LATER

Daniela is taking a shower. The bathroom door is open.

Unseen by Daniela, Elizabeth appears at the doorway and watches Daniela. Elizabeth has an anguished look, her breathing shallow and laboured and her hands tremble. She is edgy.

The shower stream stops, pulling Elizabeth back to reality.

Daniela steps out of the shower recess and takes her towel. She notices Elizabeth, smiles and approaches her as she towels off. She notices Elizabeth shivering.

DANIELA

You cold?

ELIZABETH

No. Um... what would you like for lunch?

DANIELA

You. But I don't think we'd get to your mother's place.

(Noticing)

Sure you're okay? You're very pale.

Elizabeth fobs Daniela off with a shake of her head.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

We should go and see your mother.

ELIZABETH

No!

Daniela pulls Elizabeth into her arms to soothe her.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Just leave it!

DANIELA

Hey. Hey, I'm sorry.

(Beat)

You're trembling.

Elizabeth pulls away.

ELIZABETH

I'm fine. I just want to finish with all this shit.

(Beat)

If you're not hungry, I'm going to my studio. Call me when you're ready to go.

Elizabeth, barely able to control her rage, storms out.

DANIELA

Liz...

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - ABOUT 1 PM

Elizabeth is drawing another series of panels. The colours are predominantly reds and blacks.

CLOSE on first panel of Ombra and Mother.

MORPH TO

INT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - OMBRA'S BEDROOM - DAY

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

Time wore on. The seasons changed.  
Lucia became more beautiful. Ombra  
more defiant. Her father hardly  
spoke to her. Her mother only when  
her father was not around. And  
Lucia became more beloved.

Mother and Ombra (13), are in Ombra's bedroom.

Mother is pulling off a blood-stained sheet from Ombra's bed  
as Ombra looks on. Ombra is pallid.

Mother rolls the sheet up as ...

MOTHER

You're a woman now, Ombra.

She stops, looks earnestly at Ombra.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Well, at least Father knows you're  
not pregnant by that boy, Felix.

OMBRA

I've never been with Felix or any  
boy, Mother. You know that --

MOTHER

Father will still expect you to  
work in the fields, today. He's not  
very well, you know.

OMBRA

Perhaps Lucia can help.

MOTHER

No, Father said Elder Fimus has  
plans for her.

OMBRA  
 I'm sure he has.  
 (Beat)  
 If that was a magical acorn, why  
 hasn't it worked? Why are things  
 still the same? Worse.

MOTHER  
 It's a matter of faith. Elder Fimus  
 said we must believe.

OMBRA  
 He's evil. He wants Lucia. Why  
 can't you see that?

Mother stops, then hastens out. Ombra, broody, watches her leave.

OMBRA (CONT'D)  
 What hold does he have on you?

Ombra turns to look out of her window towards the fields.  
 She sees Father working there alone.

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Father is planting seedlings. His face shows the strain of his current exertions and pent up rage and resentment.

Mother and Lucia (10) bring out a tankard of water and stop when

In the distance, unseen by Father, two donkeys and riders approach. They separate and go in different directions.

Felix (15), one of the two riders, races up on his donkey towards them.

Father notices. He is very angry.

FATHER  
 Get off my land, you whoreson!

Felix, heedless, jumps off his donkey, breathless.

FELIX  
 Have you heard what happened?

Father stops, interest piqued.

FELIX (CONT'D)  
 In the village. Just now. Elder...  
 Elder Fimus...

INTERCUT OMBRA'S BEDROOM.

Ombra, from her window, can just make out what Felix is saying.

FATHER

What about Elder Fimus? Speak, boy!

FELIX

Elder Fimus is dead!

FATHER

What? How... how?

Father begins to sweat, his face grimacing in pain.

Ombra is stunned. She is scared and disbelieving. She winces with discomfort and cradles her abdomen in her hands.

MOTHER

What happened, Felix?

FELIX

This morning, in the village, a mob called on him to do something about the monster in Forest Acerbus--

FATHER

There is no monster!

FELIX

That's what he kept telling them...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - VILLAGE STREET - MORNING - FLASHBACK

The colours are predominately reds and blacks.

The village comprises several thatched-roofed huts lining a dusty street.

Felix and Amabilis walk in leading their donkeys and approach the centre of the village as...

FELIX

Ami, I don't think this is a good idea.

AMABILIS

I won't let what happened to Ombra go unpunished.

FELIX

But we can't be sure...

They stop to see a number of VILLAGERS, men, women, boys and girls of varying ages cluster around Elder Fimus, all talking at once, in loud, demanding voices. A GUSTING WIND blows about them.

JANUS (35), carry a sword at his side, stands close to Elder Fimus, protecting him, threatening to unsheathe his sword.

Felix and Amabilis stop and watch the disturbance.

JANUS  
Stop! Quiet! Quiet!

The crowd quietens down to a low murmur.

JANUS (CONT'D)  
Let Elder Fimus speak!

ELDER FIMUS  
I tell you this so-called monster  
is a fabrication of an imaginative  
young mind.

MAN  
My daughter doesn't lie!

WOMAN  
Nor does mine! Something real  
attacked her!

MAN  
You're the Elder, do something!

The crowd roars with demands that something be done.

Felix and Amabilis push their way through the throng and face Elder Fimus.

Elder Fimus notices them and stops. He is disgusted.

ELDER FIMUS  
(To Amabilis)  
Get out! Both of you!

The Crowd is abuzz. They quieten.

AMABILIS  
Not until justice is served.

ELDER FIMUS  
Justice? I serve justice!

AMABILIS  
You serve evil.

The Crowd murmurs with confusion.

AMABILIS (CONT'D)

Explain why it is you who chooses  
which child is to go into Forest  
Acerbus.

The Crowd echoes the question.

AMABILIS (CONT'D)

Explain why it is always the  
prettiest, the handsomest of  
children.

The Crowd becomes more vociferous.

AMABILIS (CONT'D)

Explain why you are always absent  
when --

The Crowd is clamorous and surrounds Elder Fimus. He raises  
his hands.

ELDER FIMUS

(Shouting)

Quiet! Quiet!

He is drowned out by the uproar from the Crowd, pushing  
forward.

JANUS

Get back! Don't touch him!

Amabilis draws her sword, the resonant sound of tempered  
steel ringing clear.

The Crowd stops, stunned by the look of grim resolve on  
Amabilis's face.

Everyone, except Amabilis and Elder Fimus moves away, leaving  
a clear circle of space around them.

Beat.

ELDER FIMUS

You have the nerve to draw a weapon  
on me?

(Beat)

What do you intend to do? Murder me  
in cold blood.

AMABILIS

Give him a weapon.

No-one moves.

AMABILIS (CONT'D)

Give him a weapon! Or I will kill  
him in cold blood.

Felix panics and grabs the sword from Janus's scabbard and tosses it to Elder Fimus. He easily catches it by the grip then appraises its weight and flexibility.

ELDER FIMUS  
(Deprecating)  
You're only female.

AMABILIS  
And you're an old man. So, we're even. Defend yourself.

Elder Fimus makes the first strike, easily parried by Amabilis.

They rain blows on each other, each blow being countered. Amabilis appears to be the stronger, making Elder Fimus retreat backward.

Blow after blow and Elder Fimus begins to show signs of tiring, his face dotted with perspiration.

Amabilis's face shows only detached determination as she continues her barrage.

With a mighty swipe, she disarms him.

Elder Fimus stops abruptly.

ELDER FIMUS  
Hold!

Amabilis is momentarily caught off guard and stops.

Elder Fimus, out of breath, cautiously approaches, one hand held up in truce.

ELDER FIMUS (CONT'D)  
There is no honour in killing an unarmed defenceless opponent.

He draws nearer to Amabilis. She stands her ground, muscles coiled, ready to pounce.

ELDER FIMUS (CONT'D)  
Lower your weapon. Don't you trust me?

Amabilis lowers her sword.

With speed belying his age, Elder Fimus's upheld hand grabs Amabilis's sword arm while the other retrieves a lethal dagger from his robe and brings it down onto Amabilis.

She catches the dagger hand in hers, falling backward with Elder Fimus on top of her. She loses the grip of her sword and grabs onto the dagger with both of her hands as they wrestle on the ground.

Elder Fimus gets the advantage and rolls her onto her back as he straddles her. Grasping the dagger with both of his hands, he prepares for the fatal thrust as Amabilis gropes the ground for a weapon.

She finds a large rock and, just as Elder Fimus is about to deliver his blow, her arm swings up and the rock in her hand connects with Elder Fimus's forehead, stunning him and sending him reeling away from her.

Amabilis get to her feet, discards the rock and picks up Elder Fimus's dagger.

With unwavering single-mindedness she approaches Elder Fimus who has been badly wounded by the blow to his head and lies there on his back, bewildered.

ELDER FIMUS

No... no... don't hurt me...

AMABILIS

You must have heard that so many times.

The crowd stands in stunned disbelief looking down at him.

AMABILIS (CONT'D)

Did you show any mercy?

The adults look at each other not knowing what to do. Janus looks on aghast.

Amabilis kneels down beside Elder Fimus, always keeping eye contact with him. She raises the dagger.

The crowd becomes silent.

Elder Fimus screams.

JANUS

What are you doing?

AMABILIS

Serving justice.

JANUS

You can't --

Elder Fimus looks up wide-eyed at her and screams once more. She is unsympathetic and unyielding.

AMABILIS

For every child that has ever been harmed by evil and depravity.

She thrusts the dagger into Elder Fimus's chest. Rich red blood oozes from the wound.



Elder Fimus gasps. He looks at Janus, stunned.

ELDER FIMUS  
The amulet...

Janus falls to his knee and leans closer.

ELDER FIMUS  
The amulet... d... take it...

Elder Fimus expels his last breath and becomes limp.

Amabilis stands and steps back next to Felix. Felix hands her sword to her.

Janus looks about. He clasps the amulet around Elder Fimus's neck.

JANUS  
Elder Fimus commanded me to take  
his amulet.

FELIX  
No! He said don't take it!

The crowd agitates again.

JANUS  
You are wrong, boy. He said take  
it. I am in charge now.

Janus pulls the amulet off and admires it.

The body of Elder Fimus begins to smoulder, the robes wither and rot, his flesh yellows, wrinkles and forms ugly scabs. A stench fills the air.

The crowd gasps and steps back in disbelief and horror.

LITTLE GIRL  
That's it! That's the monster!

The Little Girl is comforted by an Adult.

The amulet in Janus's hand begins to smoulder. Janus can hardly hold the rapidly heating jewel and finally tosses it to the ground. The amulet explodes.

Amabilis looks on, feeling vindicated. Felix is astounded.

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - FOREST ACERBUS - THE SIGN - FLASHBACK

The sign, "TO THE MAGICAL ACORNS", smoulders and detaches itself from the tree, falling to the ground in a ball of fire and smoke.

BACK TO:

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - VILLAGE STREET - MORNING - FLASHBACK

The crowd stands silent and in horrified awe at the smouldering pile of dead monster.

FELIX (V.O.)  
The amulet kept the monster's  
secret.

END OF FLASHBACK

BACK TO:

EXT. GRAPHIC NOVEL - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Mother, Father and Lucia stand in stunned disbelief.

FELIX (CONT'D)  
The monster wore it when he was in  
the village.

INTERCUT OMBRA'S BEDROOM

Ombra watches in stunned silence.

Amabilis steps up and stands beside Ombra, wrapping an arm about Ombra's shoulder as they watch the field...

MOTHER  
Ombra was telling the truth.

FATHER  
No!! She lied and you lie, you son  
of a heathen! The great Elder Fimus  
is not dead!

Mother tries to calm Father.

MOTHER  
Don't upset yourself, Father.

Father tosses Mother aside.

FATHER (CONT'D)  
(To Felix)  
Get off my land! Never set...  
foot...

Father clutches his chest, an horrific grimace on his face.

Mother and Lucia try to hold him up. Felix helps them.

MOTHER	LUCIA
Father! Father!	Father!

Ombra is shocked, Amabilis stoic.

Father is too heavy for Mother and Lucia and he falls to the ground. Dead.

CLOSE ON Father's ugly grimace, the exact replica of the grimace on the second body uncovered by the Construction Worker.

Mother is distraught. She cries.

MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Father... No, no...

Lucia is stunned.

From her bedroom window, Ombra and Amabilis look on, wordless.

Beat.

LUCIA  
(Pointing to Ombra)  
She killed them! It's all her  
fault! She killed Father! She  
killed Elder Fimus!

Ombra reaches into her pocket and retrieves a small, dried acorn.

CLOSE ON Ombra's hand and the acorn.

END OF GRAPHIC NOVEL SEQUENCE.

MORPH TO

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE/STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE of drawing of Ombra's hand and the acorn.

Elizabeth stares at the drawing in her hand as...

LUCIA (V.O.)  
She killed them! She killed them!

Elizabeth's face is cold and hard.

FADE TO:

EXT. 21 BRYANT STREET - 2 PM (SUNDAY)

The street is a short, narrow quiet suburban street with cottages and houses built between the Wars. Few cars are parked on the street.

I/E DANIELA'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Daniela drives, Elizabeth in the passenger seat. They are quiet and introspective, Elizabeth looking out of her side window.

Elizabeth has a look of trepidation as they drive slowly along, Daniela looking for street numbers on her side of the road.

She pulls the car over to the curb and parks opposite number 21, in front of number 20.

Elizabeth stares at the house at number 20, her mouth agape and her breathing shallow.

EXT. 20 BRYANT STREET - CONTINUOUS

INTERCUT I/E DANIELA'S CAR

ELIZABETH'S HALLUCINATION

Mr Bishop (73) and Mrs Bishop (70) come to the front gate and wave at Elizabeth.

Two small children, LITTLE GIRL 11 and LITTLE GIRL 8, race out to the front gate, laughing, and run to Mr Bishop's side. They hug him. Mr Bishop smiles at them and then looks up to Elizabeth and smiles at her.

Elizabeth looks on horrified.

Daniela's attention is on the house, number 21, across the road.

DANIELA  
Hasn't changed much in twenty-five  
years.

END OF ELIZABETH'S HALLUCINATION

Elizabeth looks at Daniela who is preoccupied with number 21.

The sound of CHILDREN LAUGHING whips Elizabeth's attention back to number 20.

Little Girl 11 and Little Girl 8 are laughing and giggling at Elizabeth. Mr Bishop and Mrs Bishop gone.

Daniela looks over to Elizabeth who is still staring at number 20.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
Lizzie?

Elizabeth turns to Daniela. Elizabeth has a frightened look. Daniela takes Elizabeth's hand in hers.

DANIELA (CONT'D)  
We'll just get the box and go,  
okay?

Elizabeth nods imperceptibly.

Beat as Daniela watches Elizabeth, the sound of CHILDREN LAUGHING filling the silence in the car.

Daniela retrieves her handbag from the back seat and searches inside it for the envelope and key as

Elizabeth turns to number 20. She is silent, her eyes distant and unseeing.

Daniela finds the envelope and removes the key.

DANIELA (CONT'D)

Ready?

Elizabeth turns back to Daniela.

Beat.

Elizabeth takes the key.

ELIZABETH

I'm going by myself.

Daniela is stunned. She goes to protest.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

No.

Elizabeth unbuckles her seat belt and gets out as...

DANIELA

Lizzie...

Elizabeth closes the car door and heads off across the road to

EXT. 21 BRYANT STREET, FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

INTERCUT I/E DANIELA'S CAR

Elizabeth approaches the locked door and hesitates.

Daniela watches her, concerned.

SFX: The laughter of children from across the road.

Elizabeth, with shaky hand, inserts the key into the lock and turns it. She pushes the door inward and stares into the darkened hallway as...

SFX: Two children laughing and playing Chasings, running through the corridor.

ISSIBIT 10 (V.O.)

(Giggling)

Tag! Can't catch me!

(Laughs)

ANNIE 7 (V.O.)  
 Yes I can! Issibit! Wait!  
 (Laughs)

ISSIBIT 10 (V.O.)  
 Come on, Annie!

Elizabeth is frozen in time. She takes a tentative step into the hallway.

INT. SHAW HOUSE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The hallway is clean and tidy and gloomy, the only light streaming in from the opened front door.

Elizabeth steps through the hallway, absorbing every detail with both dread and reverence.

The sound of laughing and playing children dies away to silence.

INT. SHAW HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The lounge room's venetian blinds are partly drawn; sombre, muted lighting.

Elizabeth steps in and views each wall in astonishment. Her eyes dart from frame to frame in the collection of photographs and clippings of her and her achievements, on one wall.

They flit to another wall where a small bookshelf displays only a few books on it but, in a prominent position, standing alone, are Elizabeth's four earliest graphic novels. Lying flat next to them and partially covered by a Borders carry bag, is "PRINCESS SERENITY AND THE TIGER'S EYE".

Elizabeth appears determined not to allow her hard resolve to falter. She looks to the doorway leading to the dining room and kitchen.

INT. SHAW HOUSE, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The shaded room is formal and elegant with everything neatly placed. A thin layer of dust covers the French-polished table.

Through the doorway to the kitchen, Elizabeth sees a solitary chair placed against the wall.

SFX: A slap of hand on flesh.

MR SHAW (V.O.)  
 Whore!

ELIZABETH HALLUCINATES

Her memories materialise as she looks on from the Dining Room.

ELIZABETH 14, sits slouched on the kitchen chair, sobbing.

MR SHAW (40), stands over Elizabeth 14, threatening. He slaps her face.

ELIZABETH 14  
(Pleading)  
Mummy...

MR SHAW  
Slut!

He slaps her again.

MR SHAW (CONT'D)  
You've been with that jew-boy,  
haven't you?!

ELIZABETH 14  
No! He's lying!

Mr Shaw slaps her once more. He looks at her in disgust. He storms out of the kitchen, snarling at an unseen person.

Beat.

Elizabeth 14 looks towards the unseen person.

ELIZABETH 14  
Why didn't you stop him, mummy?

END OF ELIZABETH'S HALLUCINATION.

ON ELIZABETH as she moves towards the kitchen doorway.

INT. SHAW HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth approaches the empty kitchen chair and stares at it.

SFX: Children laughing, playing games.

Elizabeth's attention is drawn to the window to the back yard. She moves towards it as...

CHILDREN (V.O.)  
(Singing)  
Happy birthday to you, happy  
birthday to you, happy birthday  
dear Annie... dear Annie...  
Annie...

She stops at the window, looking out to see

EXT. SHAW HOUSE, BACK YARD - FLASHBACK 32 YEARS AGO

Annie's eighth birthday party. Annie (8) is surrounded by EIGHT CHILDREN aged between 8 and 12, wearing party hats and singing to Annie.

SFX: Loud children's songs from a record player

Mr Shaw is preparing food and drinks and is happy and singing along.

Only glimpses of Mrs Shaw: the edge of a colourful skirt, a hand giving a child a drink, a sandaled, painted-toenail foot stepping over a discarded toy.

Mr Bishop and Mrs Bishop are hovering around with a soft drink in one hand and a party pastry in another.

The singing ends and Annie hoes into the small stack of presents on the table next to the birthday cake.

Mr Bishop looks towards the kitchen window as sees Issibit (11) staring back at him from inside the kitchen.

MR BISHOP  
(To Mr Shaw)  
What's the matter with Issibit?

MR SHAW  
Don't mind her, Norman, she's  
feeling a bit moody.

MR BISHOP  
Is she... ? Has she started her...?

MRS BISHOP  
Norman! You can't ask that sort of  
question!

MR BISHOP  
What? It's perfectly natural. A  
girl her age.

A SQUEAL from Annie.

ANNIE  
It's beautiful!

She holds a small opened box. She looks up and races over to Mrs Bishop and gives her a hug then hugs Mr Bishop who holds on to her a little too long and too tightly.

ANNIE (CONT'D)  
Thank you! I love it! Thank you!

Mr Bishop looks over to Issibit and smiles at her as if proving a point. Issibit appears jealous then flounces away from the window.



END OF FLASHBACK

BACK TO:

INT. SHAW HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

ON ELIZABETH as she stares out the kitchen window into the empty back yard.

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
Issibit! Issibit... !

She turns towards the back door leading into the back yard and follows the SOUND of Mr Bishop looking for Issibit.

MR BISHOP (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(Fading away)  
... Where are you, sweetie... ?

Elizabeth follows the hypnotic voice out of the kitchen and into

INT. SHAW HOUSE, HALLWAY, ELIZABETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

the hallway outside the closed door to her former bedroom. Elizabeth stands there, mesmerised. She hears muffled voices and puts her hand on the door knob and hesitates.

CLOSE ON ELIZABETH listening at the door, reliving the emotions of the pain and horror Issibit went through, as she hears in distant tones:

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
(Muffled)  
There you are.  
(Beat)  
Let's close the door.  
(Beat)  
What's upset you?

Beat.

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
(Muffled)  
The way you hugged Annie.

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
Is that all?  
(Laughs)  
Don't be jealous.

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
I'm not jealous! I don't want you to hurt her!

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
Hurt her? Have I hurt you?  
(Beat)  
(MORE)

MR BISHOP (V.O.) (cont'd)  
 Don't you like the games we play?  
 (Beat)  
 Come here. Give me a hug.  
 (Beat)  
 There. Isn't that better?  
 (Beat)  
 Hmm. That feels good. Doesn't it?

Elizabeth becomes distressed as she hears Mr Bishop becoming more sexually excited.

SFX: Recorded children's songs becoming louder.

MR BISHOP (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Put your hand here. Yes.  
 (Laboured breathing)  
 Come sit on my lap, sweetie.  
 (Beat)  
 No, horsey. Mmmm, you like that,  
 don't you?

Beat.

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
 I wish daddy would hug me.

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
 Yes. Put your arms around my neck.  
 What a pretty dress you have on.  
 (Beat)  
 Mmmm.  
 (Beat)  
 Ahhh...  
 (Beat)  
 Oh, look what I found hiding under  
 your frock!  
 (Beat)  
 Go on, touch it. Like before.  
 (Beat)  
 Yes, that's good... yes...  
 (Beat)  
 Do you want to play a new game?

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
 I... I don't know...

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
 Of course you do. We'll play  
 mummies and daddies. Let me just...  
 there.

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
 No... no Mister...

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
 It's all right, Issibit. It won't  
 hurt. You'll feel good --

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
No... Let me go --

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
Keep still!

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
You're hurting me! Let me go!

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
Quiet.

SFX: Very loud recorded children's songs.

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
No!  
(She screams)  
You're hurting me! No! ... no ...  
no ...

Long beat.

SFX: The recorded children's songs become softer.

Elizabeth, her face screwed up in anguish, leans against the door, crying.

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
(Sobbing)  
I hate you.

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
Don't be such a cry baby, Issibit.  
That's something one man or another  
will be doing to you for the rest  
of your life. Get used to it.  
(Beat)  
And don't bother telling your  
father. He won't believe you  
anyway.

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
I don't care. I'm telling...

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
Too bad. You'll be taken away and  
put in an orphanage. And Annie?  
She'll need someone to comfort her,  
won't she?

ISSIBIT (V.O.)  
No, not Annie.

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
Then it's our little secret. All  
right?

Long beat as Elizabeth tries to compose herself. Mr Bishop's words echo and fade out.

MR BISHOP (V.O.)  
... Our little secret... Our little  
secret... Our little se--

Her hands are trembling as she turns the door knob and pushes the door open to see

INT. SHAW HOUSE, ELIZABETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A teenage girl's bedroom. While the bed, dressing table and wardrobe are from a style 30 years ago, there are some modern additions as well. Along one wall is a stack of sealed cartons with "SALVOS", "STORAGE", "GARAGE SALE" written on them.

On the bed rests a cardboard carton, about the size of an overnight bag, with an assortment of knickknacks and ephemera in it. On the side is scrawled "ELIZABETH". Also in the carton, with a corner poking out, is a thick, sealed ENVELOPE. On the envelope, written in a shaky hand are the words, "TO MY DARLING ELIZABETH. PLEASE OPEN YOUR HEART."

Elizabeth tentatively steps in and stops near the bed. She looks about the room, wiping the tears from her face.

SFX: The patter of a child running, coming closer.

Elizabeth turns to see

ELIZABETH'S HALLUCINATION

Annie (8), running in, elated and carrying the small gift box.

ANNIE  
Issibit! Issibit! Look what Mr  
Bishop gave me!

Annie looks up at Adult Elizabeth and stops.

ANNIE (CONT'D)  
What's wrong? Why have you been  
crying?

ELIZABETH  
It's nothing, Annie.

MR BISHOP (O.S.)  
That's right, Issibit, it's  
nothing.

Elizabeth looks around to see Mr Bishop. He smiles.

Mr Bishop leaves.

ANNIE  
Look! He said it's magical!

Annie shows Adult Elizabeth the opened box.

CLOSE ON a golden ACORN charm.

ANNIE (CONT'D)  
I'm going to make a wish... I  
wish... That Mr Bishop will always  
be our friend. I love Mr Bishop.

Elizabeth seethes. She loses control.

ELIZABETH  
I don't! I don't! I hate him!

END OF ELIZABETH'S HALLUCINATION.

Elizabeth is alone in the room.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
And I hate dad for believing him!

She sees the cardboard carton and sweeps it furiously off the bed, scattering the contents far and wide.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
I hate mum for never being there  
for me! And I hate you, Annie! I  
hate you for... for...

She collapses on the bed, rocking back and forth, arms wrapped around herself and crying for her lost innocence.

Long beat as her fury subsides. Once calmed, she opens her eyes and sees the envelope lying near her feet.

She looks at it, recognises the quivery handwriting.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
(Voiceless)  
Mum...

She looks away, refusing to acknowledge the letter.

CUT TO:

I/E DANIELA'S CAR - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Daniela is agitated as she waits impatiently for Elizabeth, looking towards the house across the road, at her watch, up and down the street.

With resolve, she unbuckles her seat, removes the ignition key and steps out of the car and crosses the street.

EXT. SHAW HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Daniela strides to the front door and slows down to peer along the hallway and into the darkness.

She steps into the hallway.

INT. SHAW HOUSE, HALLWAY, ELIZABETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Daniela approaches the open doorway to Elizabeth's room and stops to see

INT. SHAW HOUSE, ELIZABETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Elizabeth seated on the bed, a torn-opened envelope scrunched in one hand and a few written pages clutched in her other trembling hand. Elizabeth is choking back tears as she reads the letter.

Daniela is overcome with grief seeing Elizabeth's state and strides over to comfort her. She sits next to Elizabeth and cradles her in her arms. Elizabeth collapses into Daniela, distraught.

ELIZABETH

She didn't know...

Daniela takes the pages from her hand and begins reading them.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SHAW HOUSE, ELIZABETH'S ROOM - SHORT TIME LATER

Daniela caresses and consoles Elizabeth, both still seated on the bed, Daniela's arms encompassing Elizabeth. The written pages are on the bed.

Daniela has a determined look.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPICE WARD - DAY - EARLY EVENING (SUNDAY)

The single-bed ward is sparsely furnished and dimly lit.

MRS SHAW (67) lies in bed. She is pale, gaunt and motionless. Her hair is only stubble and a long healing wound traverses her skull. All medical assistance has been removed.

A PRIEST, ready to administer the last rites, sits on the solitary chair facing her, reading from his bible.

An RN opens the door allowing Elizabeth and Daniela to enter. The RN leaves and closes the door behind her.

Daniela and Elizabeth stop at the door and look at Mrs Shaw.

The Priest stands up and approaches them.

PRIEST  
Mrs Walker?

DANIELA  
Er... no. This is Elizabeth, Mrs  
Shaw's older daughter.

The Priest takes Elizabeth's hand.

PRIEST  
I am so sorry. Your mother has  
suffered much these past few  
months. She will find peace in the  
arms of God.

Overwhelmed by emotion, Elizabeth goes to Mrs Shaw's side.  
The Priest moves the chair to Elizabeth.

Daniela pulls the chair close to Elizabeth and helps her into  
it.

Elizabeth takes in Mrs Shaw's frail form, her gaze returning  
to search Mrs Shaw's face.

With a shaky hand, Elizabeth reaches out to touch Mrs Shaw's  
cheek. She gently caresses it. Her other hand finds Mrs  
Shaw's and she holds on to it.

Mrs Shaw's eyelids flutter and open a slit. She can just  
barely focus on Elizabeth.

MRS SHAW  
(Raspy, breathless,  
hesitant)  
Issibit?

Elizabeth loses all control of her emotions. Daniela finds it  
difficult to keep from crying.

ELIZABETH  
Yes, mum.

Mrs Shaw flinches a tiny smile.

MRS SHAW  
Issi... I'm sorry...

Mrs Shaw loses consciousness, her breathing is laboured.

ELIZABETH  
Mum! Mum...

Daniela comforts Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Oh, mum. I'm so sorry... I'm so...  
Please... forgive me...

The door opens and the Priest quietly greets Hanna and MICHAEL WALKER (44), Hanna's husband. He is trim and neatly dressed in sporty attire.

PRIEST

Mrs Walker? Mr Walker.

Hanna is aghast to see Elizabeth and Daniela but remains silent. Michael's look to Hanna questions her.

Michael warms to Elizabeth and approaches her, hand outstretched.

MICHAEL

Elizabeth.

Elizabeth hesitates, then offers her hand.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'm Michael Walker. Hanna's  
husband. I'm truly sorry...

He turns to Daniela and extends his hand.

MICHAEL

You must be Daniela.

(Shaking hands)

Nice to meet you at last.

Awkward glances pass between the four of them.

DANIELA

Michael.

Michael moves to the other side of the bed and stands beside Hanna.

The Priest stands at the foot of the bed and prepares to administer the Sacrament of the Sick and Dying. He kisses the stole and whispers the vesting prayer as he places it about his neck.

PRIEST

(Susurrant)

Restore to me, O Lord, the state of  
immortality which I lost through  
the sin of my first parents and,  
although unworthy to approach Thy  
Sacred Mysteries, may I deserve  
nevertheless eternal joy.

As the Priest softly intones the prayer, Hanna glances between Elizabeth and Daniela, annoyed and resentful.



Elizabeth concentrates on Mrs Shaw as Daniela hardens towards Hanna.

Michael appears helpless.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPICE WARD - ABOUT 7 PM (SUNDAY)

Elizabeth and Daniela stand on one side of the bed, Hanna and Michael at the end of the bed, heads bowed. Elizabeth sobs.

The Priest is on the other side and is finishing the ritual.

Everyone, except Daniela makes the sign of the cross.

PRIEST  
In the name of the Father and of  
the Son and of the Holy Ghost,  
amen.

HANNA  
Amen.

MICHAEL  
Amen.

The Priest shakes Michael's and Hanna's hand, acknowledges Elizabeth and Daniela then leaves.

Hanna stares at Elizabeth.

HANNA  
Lovely crocodile tears.

Michael is taken aback; Daniela and Elizabeth dismayed.

MICHAEL  
Not here, Hanna.

DANIELA  
(To Elizabeth)  
I think we should go home.

Daniela and Elizabeth gather their belongings to leave, Elizabeth giving one long last look at Mrs Shaw.

INT. HOSPICE CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Daniela and Elizabeth emerge from Mrs Shaw's ward room and turn to leave, Daniela's arm draped around Elizabeth.

Hanna follows them out and stops.

HANNA  
Made your peace, then?

Daniela and Elizabeth turn to face Hanna. Michael emerges from the ward room.

MICHAEL  
Hanna, let it go.

He tries to persuade Hanna to return to the ward room by taking her arm. She shrugs it off.

HANNA  
No.

DANIELA  
You wanted Elizabeth here.

HANNA  
(To Elizabeth)  
You think that making this grand gesture at the eleventh hour absolves you from what you've put us through for all these years?

Elizabeth approaches Hanna. Daniela follows behind.

ELIZABETH  
What *I've* put you through? You have no idea, Annie.

She stops in front of Hanna, barely a breath away.

DANIELA  
Liz --

HANNA  
Don't call me Annie. We're not kids anymore.

Michael notices a nearby closed door that is marked, "VISITORS' LOUNGE".

MICHAEL  
Please, Hanna...

Elizabeth and Hanna eye each other, seething. He indicates the Visitors' Lounge.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
... let's go in here.

Hanna and Elizabeth follow Michael; Daniela follows them.

Michael holds the door open for them. Hanna stops and glances at Daniela.

HANNA  
(To Daniela)  
This concerns family only.

Awkward moment.

MICHAEL

Er...

(To Daniela)

We should grab a coffee.

Daniela is angry. She glares at Hanna. Elizabeth softens her.

ELIZABETH

I'll be all right, Danny.

Hanna snorts contemptuously. Elizabeth and Hanna enter the Visitors' Lounge.

INT. HOSPICE VISITORS' LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

The Visitors' Lounge is small and comfortable, the walls lined with upholstered chairs, a cool-water dispenser and potted plants. A box of tissues and magazines are scattered on corner tables. Another door leading off is signed, "VISITORS' TOILET".

Once Hanna and Elizabeth enter the room, Michael, O.C., closes the door behind them.

Hanna and Elizabeth stand apart, eyeing each other.

Beat.

HANNA

I will fight you if you contest the will.

ELIZABETH

Is that what this is all about?

HANNA

Mum and I paid off that house after you pissed off and dad died. You're not getting any part of it.

ELIZABETH

I don't want anything from mum. Or you.

(Beat)

Did you know what was in the box you were so adamant I collect?

HANNA

Mum packed it. Just old crap that you left behind. Should be worth a bit now. It's practically antique.

ELIZABETH

The letter?

Hanna appears confused.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
The letter mum wrote.

HANNA  
Don't talk in riddles. I haven't  
got the time or the patience.

ELIZABETH  
What do you remember of our  
childhood?

HANNA  
Oh, please!

ELIZABETH  
Specifically, your eighth birthday.

HANNA  
You ruined it. You always were the  
attention-seeker.

Hanna anxiously brushes her hair aside. On her wrist is a  
charm bracelet. One of the charms is a gold ACORN. Elizabeth  
notices it and is a little disconcerted.

HANNA (CONT'D)  
You behaved like a jealous precious  
little princess. Crying.

ELIZABETH  
You still have it.

Hanna looks at the bracelet.

HANNA  
Why shouldn't I? Unlike you, I  
liked the dear old guy. Mr Bishop  
was like the grandpa we never had.

A scornful huff from Elizabeth.

HANNA (CONT'D)  
One that you went out of your way  
to hate.

(Beat)  
After everything he did to help mum  
and dad.

ELIZABETH  
After everything he did to me.

Beat.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
He raped me.

Disbelief from Hanna.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
Your dear old Mr Bishop raped me.

Hanna laughs uneasily.

HANNA  
Still shovelling shit.  
(Beat)  
Okay. Why didn't you tell dad?

ELIZABETH  
He threatened to do the same to you  
if I did.

Long beat.

HANNA  
Oh, that's such bullshit! If he was  
such a threat, why did you run away  
after he died? The threat was gone.  
He was dead.

Elizabeth becomes uneasy and paces. She stops facing Hanna  
and with her back to the door.

HANNA (CONT'D)  
And the way he died... You weren't  
even a bit sorry.

Elizabeth gives Hanna a scornful look.

HANNA (CONT'D)  
You could have told the cops. God  
knows, they came round often  
enough. Instead, you practically  
hid from them.

Hanna notices Elizabeth's agitation.

HANNA (CONT'D)  
Why didn't you tell the cops what  
he did to you? What were you scared  
of?  
(Beat)  
He was dead.

Long beat as Hanna seems to be remembering the past.

HANNA (CONT'D)  
You knew, didn't you? You knew he  
was dead. Before the cops came.  
(Beat)  
That night. I thought you snuck out  
to be with that... Daniela.  
(Beat)  
You didn't, did you? You went...

Long beat. Slow realisation from Hanna, then stunned disbelief.

HANNA (CONT'D)  
You killed him...

Cold, hard stare from Elizabeth.

Beat.

Elizabeth falters as bad memories and anger roil in her. Tears well in her eyes.

HANNA (CONT'D)  
Does Daniela -- ?

Hanna is quiet and confused.

Elizabeth steps closer to Hanna and takes the crumpled envelope from her handbag and hands it to Hanna.

ELIZABETH  
Mrs Bishop's son found the old bastard's journal when he moved her into a nursing home a few months back. Nothing like an egotistical paedophile diarist. His conquest of me features in it, apparently. The son told mum - God knows why - and mum wrote this.

Hanna takes it, confused.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
That's why I came. She finally acknowledged -- Read it. You may experience the biggest revelation of your life.

Long beat as they search each other's eyes.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
And, yeah. I did kill him. I did kill the old bastard. Smashed his repulsive, disgusting head in. To save you, Annie.

Hanna's mouth drops open in shock.

Elizabeth looks at Hanna for understanding, sympathy.

Elizabeth turns to leave. She stops, stunned to see Daniela and Michael standing at the doorway to the Visitors' Lounge, both flabbergasted.

With immense resolve, Elizabeth looks squarely at Daniela and walks past her as she leaves.

Daniela, bewildered by Elizabeth's words, looks to Hanna, then follows Elizabeth out.

Michael looks on then goes to Hanna and wraps his arm around her shoulder.

HANNA  
(Whisper)  
Issibit...

FADE TO:

EXT. LA PEROUSE HEADLAND - NIGHT - FLASHBACK 26 YEARS AGO

Dark, gloomy night at the edge of a low rocky outcrop facing the bay near Bare Island, lit only by distant street-lamps and reflected lights from Brighton-le-Sands.

SFX: Seagulls' intermittent calls.

SFX: Waves lapping against the rocks below.

A shadowy figure, an elderly man, wearing a jaunty fedora, sits on the edge, fishing.

Another shadowy figure, a lithesome teenage girl in slacks and blouse, approaches from behind and stands over him.

The elderly man, startled, turns to face her. It is Mr Bishop and she is Elizabeth (17).

On recognising Elizabeth 17, his cynical smile turns sour.

MR BISHOP  
What are you doing here? It's late.

Elizabeth 17 looks down at him with disdain.

MR BISHOP (CONT'D)  
Your dad'll give you a hiding when he finds out.

ELIZABETH 17  
And I suppose you'll snitch.

MR BISHOP  
Your dad and I have an understanding.  
(Beat)  
Amazing how a man blinded by debt can see truth clearly by the reflected light of money.  
(He laughs)  
How many more times do I have to prove to you that he won't ever take your word over mine?

ELIZABETH 17  
Won't be for long.

Mr Bishop screws his face with questions.

ELIZABETH 17 (CONT'D)  
Once I've sat my H.S.C., I'm  
leaving. For good.

MR BISHOP  
Oh?

ELIZABETH 17  
I'm moving in with... a girlfriend.

Mr Bishop scoffs derisively.

MR BISHOP  
The jew-boy's queer cousin?  
(Scoffs)  
I didn't turn you, did I?

ELIZABETH 17  
You've been spying on me.

MR BISHOP  
Just protecting our... secret.

Beat.

ELIZABETH 17  
You won't ever make me feel like  
this again.

MR BISHOP  
And how's that, Issibit?

ELIZABETH 17  
Dirty.

Mr Bishop laughs.

MR BISHOP  
Good, good for you!

He looks at his fishing line, then back to Elizabeth 17.

MR BISHOP (CONT'D)  
Plenty more fish in the sea.  
(Beat)  
Some closer to home.  
(Beat)  
One swims at your place.  
(Beat)  
Pretty little fish.

ELIZABETH 17  
Annie...



Mr Bishop turns back to his fishing.

MR BISHOP  
Once you're gone...

ELIZABETH 17  
No...

MR BISHOP  
Your dad will always be in debt.  
(He laughs)

ELIZABETH 17  
No.

MR BISHOP  
Good luck with your exams,  
Elizabeth.

Impulsively, Elizabeth 17 picks up a fist-sized rock and slams it down on Mr Bishop's head, knocking off his hat.

ELIZABETH 17  
NO!

He is stunned by the blow but manages to stumble to his feet.

MR BISHOP  
Bloody hell!

His hand goes to the bleeding wound to his head; he looks at his bloodied hand in disbelief.

MR BISHOP  
What the fu... ?

Elizabeth 17, eyes wide with fright, stands there, stunned.

Mr Bishop, enraged, lunges at Elizabeth 17.

MR BISHOP  
Bitch!

He catches her in a bear hug.

She struggles to free herself. They lurch and stagger over the uneven rocky ground, Elizabeth 17 still holding onto the rock.

In desperation to free herself, she strikes him again on his head. Again, he is stunned. She strikes him once more.

ELIZABETH 17  
(Panicked)  
Let me go!

He releases his grip on her and drops to one knee.

Elizabeth stumbles backward, barely able to keep from tripping on the uneven surface.

Dazed but recovering, Mr Bishop gets to his feet and howls with anger and rushes her.

Elizabeth 17 backs off, now precariously close to the precipice.

Mr Bishop lunges at her, she steps aside, he loses his balance and teeters on the edge.

His arms flailing, he manages to grab onto one of Elizabeth's arms.

Terrified, she takes another mighty swipe at him with the rock. Trying to evade the blow, Mr Bishop loses his grip on Elizabeth 17 and he falls over the edge and out of view.

Long beat.

Elizabeth 17, shocked, stunned and trembling, approaches the edge and peers over it.

About 3 metres below, on the rocky shore just above the lapping waves, she sees Mr Bishop's limp body, blood seeping from his head, in the same place as the Human Skull in her dreams, lying motionless, his unseeing eyes staring up at her.

SFX: Seagulls' calls.

Voice over the following sequence:

ELIZABETH (V.O.)  
The police interviewed everyone in the street. Mum and dad. They came to our house. So many times. The Coroner eventually ruled death by misadventure. I was a mess. I wagged school. The school counselor interviewed me. He called me a pathological liar. Well, I could hardly tell him the truth, could I?...

Elizabeth 17 panics. She looks at the rock in her hand. It is blood-stained. With a mighty force, she flings it far into the water.

She is trembling uncontrollably. She looks about skittish, then runs back across the grassy slope and out of sight.

CUT TO

INT. LOUNGE ROOM - LATE EVENING (SUNDAY)

Daniela and Elizabeth sit on the lounge facing each other, Daniela in stunned silence, Elizabeth solemn and calm. Both have reddened eyes.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

The nightmares began. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't study. Couldn't concentrate. I couldn't do the H.S.C. Everyone seemed to hate me. Annie. Mum. Dad. I hated everyone. If only they had...

(Beat)

I wanted to die. I killed someone!

(Beat)

I've killed someone.

(Beat)

You can't imagine what it's been like living with that.

Daniela caresses Elizabeth's face. Elizabeth leans into her caress and cups her hand over Daniela's. A tear falls from Daniela's eyes.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I don't know what I would have done without you, Danny. You saved my life. You are my life.

(Beat)

I've never wanted to lie to you. But how could I ever tell you the truth?

Long beat as Daniela's face shows the turmoil she has.

Elizabeth sees this conflict and releases Daniela. Daniela's hand drops back into her lap.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Say something.

Daniela hesitates.

DANIELA

I... I love you Elizabeth...

Beat.

ELIZABETH

But...

DANIELA

Hanna... Michael... If they...

ELIZABETH  
 If they what?  
       (Beat)  
 Tell?

Daniela hesitates again unable to face the truth.

DANIELA  
 Your career... your books... your  
 future. All in their hands.

ELIZABETH  
 And in yours.

Daniela bows her head in remorse.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
 I know you have an obligation.

Long beat as they look at each other, searching, questioning.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
 I love you too, Danny.

She gets up and goes to the door. They look at each other.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)  
 You've got to do what you think is  
 right. I did.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END