

FADE IN:

EXT. LAKE EUCUMBENE, NSW, AUSTRALIA - DAY

The lake's surface sparkles silvery, rimmed by lush-green weeds and Eucalyptus trees.

A small village not far from the waterfront. Several houses, partly hidden under trees.

EXT. HOUSE AT THE LAKE - DAY

On the porch, Lara's MOTHER lays the table for afternoon tea.

Seven-year-old LARA steps out on the porch carrying a pitcher of juice. She stops and looks at the floor.

A huntsman spider runs towards her. Lara steps on it and squashes it. The tips of its thick legs still visible.

Her mother turns around smiling. Lara takes her foot off the spider and studies it with interest.

LARA

Look, Mommie.

Her mother looks at the crushed animal. Her face contorts with anger.

She hits Lara in the face.

Lara drops the pitcher. It shatters on the wood floor.

MOTHER

Bad girl!

EXT. LAKE EUCUMBENE - FIFTEEN YEARS LATER - DAY

A drawing of Lake Eucumbene, dead black trees stick out of the water and are reflected on the silvery surface, the waterfront is barren, dry mud.

Lara's hand sketches a black dog into the picture. The dog sits and stares out on the lake.

LARA (22), sits at the waterfront. We see her back, her slim figure, the dark-blond hair tied in a pony tail. She draws on her sketch pad.

A black Labrador comes running to her.

Lara turns her head to look at him. We see the profile of her pretty face.

LARA

Hey, buddy. How are you? All alone out here?

The dog wags its tail and nudges her. She pats him and scratches him behind his ears.

INT. MARKETING AGENCY - DAY

Lara sits across from JANET, a fashionably dressed woman in her thirties. Janet holds papers in her hands and goes through them. Lara looks nervous.

JANET

Charles Sturt University.

She looks skeptical.

JANET

You studied at home mostly?

LARA

And on campus in Wagga Wagga.

Janet suppresses a grin.

JANET

Why economics?

Lara looks embarrassed. Janet scrutinizes her.

LARA

It seemed more reasonable than studying art.

JANET

Right. Well. You got good grades. Show me your work.

Lara opens the folder in front of her and slides it over to Janet.

Janet smiles at the picture of Lake Eucumbene.

JANET

That's where you from?

Lara nods.

JANET

Do you always talk so much?

Lara blushes and casts her eyes down.

LARA

Sorry, I'm just really nervous. I really want this job. I think I can do great work for you.

Janet laughs.

JANET

Sure, kid. Let's see if you have some idea of what marketing is. Imagine you have to come up with a concept for a perfume advertising campaign. TV commercials, posters, everything.

Lara looks panicky. She scans the desk grabs the paper in front of Janet and reaches in her satchel for colored pencils.

She adds a woman with long hair to the picture of the lake. She wears a flowing dress and walks along the waterfront. In her wake dead nature spings to life.

The drawing becomes animated. Dead trees grow leaves and buds. The grass grows where she sets her foot. The woman morphs into Lara, smiling and floating along.

JANET

Excellent.

Janet grabs the paper and grants Lara a shark's grin.

LARA

Do I get the job?

Janet puts on a reluctant expression.

JANET

I'll give you a chance. You'll start with an internship. Mainly small jobs, but you'll also get a stab at some art work. A temp contract for three months. Then we'll see.

Lara beams at her.

LARA

That's wonderful, Ms. Bricks.

JANET

Call me Janet. You can start on Monday.

Lara's panic returns.

LARA

This Monday? But I need to find a flat and all and ...

JANET

I think George has a room to rent. Let's see. You won't make much money in the beginning anyway.

LARA

Thank you so much, Janet.

Another shark's grin appears on Janet's face.

EXT. LAKE EUCUMBENE - DAY

Lara walks along the waterfront. The lake's surface ripples with the approach of a motor boat. She walks towards the mooring, where the dog sits and waits for the boat.

A small group of seagulls sits nearby, looking uncertain.

EXT. MOORING - DAY

Lara's FATHER jumps off the boat. The dog jumps up on him in greeting.

FATHER

All packed?

Lara nods with a faint smile on her lips.

LARA

Yep, all set.

The corner of her father's face twitches.

FATHER

I still wish you'd come work in the shop with me.

LARA

I know, Dad. But it's time for me to get away at least for a while. I don't want to spend my whole life here.

FATHER

I know. But marketing? Lying for a job?

Lara sighs with frustration.

LARA

I'm doing the art work.

FATHER

A lie is a lie, no matter if it's a picture or words.

LARA

If you'd let me go to the College of Fine Arts in Sydney, I wouldn't need to take a marketing job.

Her father snorts with disgust.

FATHER

You probably wouldn't have a job now at all.

INT. LARA'S OLD ROOM - DAY

A single bed, closet, desk, all in light blue. Drawings on the wall. Lara walks in and grabs a box. She looks around and sees a frame on the night stand.

LARA

Shit!

She takes the frame - we catch a glimpse of a hairy spider in the photograph - and tosses it in the box.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Lara comes out of a two-story brick house, carrying a suitcase in each hand. She is wearing a knee-length, cornflower blue skirt and a white blouse, too old-fashioned for her age. In the background we see the lake.

She walks up to a new, red Mini Cooper with a white roof parked in the driveway. Her MOTHER appears in the door frame and follows her.

Lara puts the suitcases down and opens the trunk of the car.

MOTHER

You'll be back for the weekend?

LARA

Not this one, Mom. I need to get settled, get to know the city and people.

Lara pulls over the backseats and crams the suitcases in.

MOTHER

But the one after. You know your father will be worried. Our baby in the big city alone.

LARA

Yes, Mom. I know.

Lara kisses her mother on the cheek and climbs into the car. A big box sits on the passenger seat.

Lara starts the engine and waves at her mother.

MOTHER

Be a good girl, Lara.

LARA

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

She closes the door.

INT. IN LARA'S CAR - DAY

Lara follows a narrow country road and smiles as she looks in the rear view mirror. A last glimpse of the lake spiked with dead trees fades into a blur. Her smile broadens. She turns on the radio and drums the rhythm to a pop song on the steering wheel.

EXT. SNOWY MOUNTAINS - A CURVY MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

(DRAWING OF THE MINI RACING THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS BECOMES ANIMATED AND MORPHS INTO THE REAL SCENE)

Lara's white Mini emerges on a crest, takes the dip and swerves into the next curve. Loud music from the radio. A forest of charcoaled trees rims the road.

INT. IN LARA'S CAR - DAY

Lara sings along to UB40's "I Want To Make You Sweat".

LARA

Sweat until you can sweat no more.

EXT. SNOWY MOUNTAINS - A CURVY MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

The Mini races down the last curves and reaches the foot of the mountain and the township of Talbingo. The landscape turns a lush green watered by lake Jounama. Lara's face brightens at the sight.

She rolls down the window and puts her nose in the wind.

EXT. HUME HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON

Lara's Mini follows a shiny red truck. Bald hills spiked with the occasional eucalyptus tree form the background.

The Mini swerves around a dead kangaroo.

It pulls onto the overtaking lane and passes the truck.

INT. LARA'S CAR - BARTON HIGHWAY - EVENING

Lara looks tired, dulled by the long drive.

The road climbs another crest. Ahead the Telstra tower in Canberra emerges with the climb.

EXT. CANBERRA, RESIDENTIAL AREA - EVENING

Lara pulls into a driveway and parks the Mini next to a VZ Spac Holden 1 ute and sits still for a moment.

She opens the door and sets her right foot on the ground looking at the one-story house.

LARA
Home, sweet home.

She slips out of the car, pushes the door shut and locks it. The Mini blinks at her. Slowly she walks up to the door.

Her hand moves towards the door bell, stops mid-air and runs through her hair instead. Lara takes a deep breath then rings the bell.

A cockatoo screeches behind her. She ducks and turns. The white bird lands on a tree in the garden and perches on a branch, watching her. The door opens, GEORGE smiles at the back of her head.

LARA
(to the bird)
Hey, gorgeous!

GEORGE
Hey yourself!

Lara swivels around and blushes.

LARA
Didn't mean you.

GEORGE
Too bad. I'm George and you're the new girl?

LARA
Yes, I'm Lara Anderson.

She sticks out her hand. George grasps it and pulls her inside, still grinning.

GEORGE
Come on in, I'll show you your room.

Lara stumbles in, George following right behind her.