

The Flower Hunter

Written
by
Danny Sheehy

Based on a true story

Danny Sheehy
2/24 Herbertson Road
Carina Heights Q 4152
Brisbane, AUSTRALIA

+61 7 002 185
dannysheehy@hotmail.com
WEB dannysheehy.com

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FADE IN:

EXT. NEW ZEALAND - LAKE TEKAPO - DAY (1872)

24-YEAR-OLD ELLIS ROWAN, a vivacious redhead, heavily pregnant, sits at an easel painting a wildflower - one amongst a sea of PURPLE RUSSELL LUPINS flowing down to a turquoise colored lake, backed by the snow-capped peaks of the Southern Alps.

SUPER: "Lake Tekapo, New Zealand, 1872"

Ellis wears a full-length maternity dress, a broad straw hat. A horse and buggy tethered close by.

ELLIS (V.O)

The change in my circumstances has allowed me to devote more time to my painting. The wildflowers of New Zealand are many and varied, and it's a constant thrill...

Ellis's husband, FREDERICK ROWAN, 28, hovers over Ellis. He has a full black beard and mustache, wears a New Zealand army captain's uniform. Nearby, a surveyor's tripod with theodolite, and a folding table holding notepads.

ELLIS (V.O) (cont'd)

... for us to discover new indigenous species together, and bring them to life through my paintings.

FREDERICK

This is a new species, Ellis. You'll need to take more care with the detail, and I would suggest you -

Ellis pushes up, pulls off her hat, glares at him.

FREDERICK (cont'd)

My dear, I was only trying to -

ELLIS

I'm fully aware of your botanical expertise, Frederick.

Ellis drops her brush, spins on her heel, waddles away.

FREDERICK

For God's sake - Ellis!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS
(waving back
dismissively)
No, no. If it's not up to Captain
Rowan's lofty standards.

FREDERICK
(as she continues
walking)
ELLIS!

Ellis stops, still with her back turned, hands on hips.

ELLIS (V.O.)
Frederick is a very severe critic,
and although it can be hurtful at
times, I find myself striving for
something better, more accomplished.

She turns to look back at Frederick. She smiles, strolls
back to join him. They embrace, kiss.

INT. RYAN MANSION - STUDY - NIGHT

Ellis's father, 48 year-old CHARLES O'BRIEN, dressed in a
stylish tweed suit, sits at an imposing mahogany desk,
reading Ellis's letter.

The well-appointed study boasts extensive collections of
beetles, moths and butterflies, positioned around the walls
in glass cabinets. Framed photographs of prize cattle and
sheep take pride-of-place on the wall behind Charles.
Potted palms and wildflowers all around.

ELLIS (V.O.)
And now, some exciting news.
Frederick has accepted the management
position in Melbourne, so our baby
will be born at home. I can hardly
wait to see you all again.

EXT. ROWAN HOME - DAY

Frederick and Ellis's modest two-story timber house seems to
float on beds of autumn flowers.

SUPER: "Melbourne, Australia"

INT. ROWAN HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ellis sits in a chair, breast-feeding baby ERIC. Ellis grimaces as the baby sucks, chews at an already inflamed breast. She shifts him to her other breast, but he appears finished. Ellis BURPS Eric, cradles his head.

BLANCHE O'BRIEN, 23, comes into the room, wiping her hands on a dishcloth. Blanche is plainer, but reflects Ellis's hour-glass figure.

BLANCHE
P-O-O... little Eric needs a change.

ELLIS
(as Blanche takes
Eric)
Thank you, Blanche... thank you.

INT. ROWAN HOME - LAUNDRY - DAY

A sweaty Ellis bends over a dual wash tub, scrubbing sheets while Blanche lifts steaming nappies from a wood-fired boiler. Ellis looks thoroughly exhausted.

EXT. ROWAN HOME - GARDENS - DAY

ELLIS stands painting at an easel, fully engrossed with the half-finished image of a SUNFLOWER. Eric sleeps in a pram next to her. He stirs, begins CRYING. Ellis uses her free hand to rock the pram. Eric starts BAWLING.

Ellis stops her painting, lifts Eric from the pram. Ellis holds the baby close, HUMMING to him. She rests Eric against her neck, resumes her painting.

Eric grabs the brush, drops it. She lightly smacks his hand. He WAILS.

Ellis bends down to pick up her brush. Eric makes another grab for the brush, but Ellis holds it away from him. He breaks into CHOKING SOBS. Ellis gently sets Eric back into the pram, begins rocking it.

Ellis walks away, pushing the pram. She stops, glances back at her unfinished painting - then continues on to the house.

FADE TO:

EXT. O'BRIEN ESTATE - CARRIAGE ON APPROACH ROAD - DAY

An open horse-drawn carriage with a DRIVER and THREE PASSENGERS, TRUNDLES along a winding gravel carriageway, heading to a three-story COLONIAL MANSION, partly obscured by a well-ordered wilderness of native trees, shrubs and wildflower gardens. Bird TWITTERING, butterflies flitting about.

SUPER: "The O'Brien Estate, Mount Macedon.
 5 years later"

INT./EXT. HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE - DAY

Ellis wears a long-sleeved, full-length white cotton dress, holds an open parasol. She sits with Frederick who's dressed in a dark three-piece suit. FIVE-YEAR-OLD ERIC presses into Ellis, fidgeting.

 ERIC
I'm afraid when you're away, mama.

 ELLIS
I always come back to you, don't I?

 ERIC
You promise?

 ELLIS
Of course - and then we have lots and
lots to talk about.
 (as Eric sniffles)
Mama has a gift for you, my darling.

Ellis lifts a a parcel wrapped in gift paper from her traveling case, passes it to Eric. He grabs the parcel, TEARS it open - a toy cavalry horse and rider crafted in colored tin. He clutches the toy.

 ELLIS (cont'd)
And I'll have more nice presents when
we return.

Eric bites his lip, looks up at his mother.

 ERIC
You always leave me behind.

 ELLIS
 (holding Eric's knee.)
I need to care for daddy while he's
away. It's my duty to -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Eric grabs Ellis's hand, holds it against his cheek.

ERIC
Mama, please.

ELLIS
It's my duty to accompany papa, and
this allows mama to -

ERIC
Let me come, too - just this once.

ELLIS
This allows mama to paint wonderful
wildflowers from all over the
country.

Eric jumps over to climb onto Frederick's lap. Frederick holds Eric, bounces him on his knee.

Eric wriggles away from Frederick, presses against his mother's side again. Ellis puts her arm around him.

EXT. O'BRIEN MANSION - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

The Rowan's carriage driver REINS-IN his horse, and the carriage CRUNCHES to a stop.

Charles, ANNE O'BRIEN and Blanche walk out from the main-entry doors to meet them. ANNE, Ellis's mother, is a graceful 47-year-old with graying red hair. Two excited IRISH SETTERS slip-slide past them, race over to the carriage, BARKING.

Eric clambers over the closed carriage door, runs over to Charles, who lifts him into his arms.

Frederick steps out of the carriage, turns to assist Ellis. They stroll over to say their farewells to the family, as the two dogs bound around, jumping at them.

Ellis kisses her parents. She tries to lift Eric from Charles, but he tightens his grip on his grandfather. Ellis struggles to pry Eric loose, he clings on. She gives up, pats his head.

CUT TO:

The Rowan's carriage MOVES OFF from the mansion. Ellis waves to her family, they all wave back. Ellis watches Eric wriggle away from Charles, run over and cling to Anne.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLOSE ON ANNE WAVING

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

FLASHBACK INT. O'BRIEN MANSION - SITTING ROOM - DAY

ANNE, 33, waves a letter at 15-YEAR-OLD ELLIS who sits on a sofa, patting a CAT. Ellis wears a private school uniform.

ANNE

Mrs Murphy tells me you willfully
left your landscape painting
excursion, and went off on your own
to paint some scraggly wildflowers.

ELLIS

Yes, mama, but...

ANNE

Well?

ELLIS

I want to spend my whole life
painting wildflowers and I won't
waste precious time with -

ANNE

Enough!

Anne stuffs the letter into a pocket. She picks up a textbook, opens it, pushes it in front of Ellis's face.

ANNE (cont'd)

And here's your school textbook,
ruined with your childish scribbles
filling every space.

Ellis takes the textbook, flicks through, stops at a page.

ELLIS'S POV: delicate INK DRAWINGS of wildflower fairies, goblins, frogs sheltering under umbrellas, elves playing banjos, weird looking birds, flowers and insects.

THEY COME ALIVE, dancing and prancing off the page. ONE WILDFLOWER FAIRY floats in front of Ellis. She reaches out.

ANNE (O.S.)

Ellis?

(a beat)

ELLIS!

Anne snatches the textbook. Ellis jumps, her cat takes off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE

It's the height of irresponsibility,
and the result of your constant
daydreaming. Mrs Murphy should be
getting your full attention.

ELLIS

Yes, mama.

Anne sits next to Ellis, takes her daughter's hands.

ANNE

My darling girl. You'll be married
in the not too distant future, and
to marry well, you must complete a
good education. That will include
discipline and obedience. You will
obey your art teacher in future.

ELLIS

Yes, mama.

ANNE

Now - off to your piano practice.
(as Ellis groans)
An eligible young woman will have
this as part of her accomplishments.
(as Ellis stands)
One hour, Ellis. Our recital's only
two weeks away. There will be
important families in attendance.

EXT. O'BRIEN MANSION - GARDENS - NEXT DAY

CHARLES sits next to Ellis on a low stone wall, watching her
sketching a dazzling array of purple fringed LILIES, using
colored pastels. An Australian TERRIER sits watching her.

Melodious PIANO PLAYING floats down from an open upper
window. They both glance up.

ELLIS

Mama plays so beautifully.

CHARLES

Indeed, she does. When I met mama
in London, she was making quite a
name for herself...

(a beat, reflecting)

Your mother told me she spoke with
you yesterday.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

(leaning on him)

I do want to be married, papa.

(tumbling words)

But I want to be an artist, and travel, and have adventures, and be famous, and dance at elegant balls.

CHARLES

(taking the sketch)

You have a true talent, my dear, and a spirit as alive as these wildflowers. It's a wonderful combination, and I feel certain you'll use it to your advantage.

END FLASHBACK

A STEAM WHISTLE O.S. TAKES US TO

INT. PASSENGER STEAM-TRAIN - ROWAN COMPARTMENT - DAY

Frederick sits with Ellis as she sorts through wildflower watercolor sketches. He reaches up to an overhead compartment, brings down a leather-bound book.

FREDERICK

I have a surprise for you, darling.

He drops next to Ellis, passes her the book. On the cover, printed in gold, the words "PICTURESQUE FLOWERS OF AUSTRALASIA".

FREDERICK (cont'd)

Open it at the bookmark.

Ellis turns to the marked place, finds several color lithographs of her paintings reproduced across two pages.

ELLIS

This is remarkable, Frederick.

FREDERICK

I've been collaborating with Baron Von Messner to have a collection of Australian flora published. We decided your paintings of new wildflower species should be included.

ELLIS

It's wonderful, my love. Thank you.

EXT. THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA - WILDFLOWER FIELD - DAY

Ellis, alone, climbs a steep, flower-covered slope. She shoulders her painting materials, including a leather satchel, a portable easel, and holds a Gladstone bag.

Ellis stops to breathe in the rich fragrances wafting to her on a summer breeze - then spots a striking array of rich-pink WATERFALL ORCHIDS. She hurries over, drops down, buries her face and hands amongst the flowers.

FADE TO:

EXT. O'BRIEN MANSION - GARDENS - DAY

Ellis sits at an easel painting a cluster of CHRYSANTHEMUMS. She holds a palette with water-color mixes, painting directly onto lightly tinted paper without relying on pencil outlines. A portable table holds brushes and paints. ERIC, NOW 7, sits on a PONY close by, patting its shaggy neck.

Anne has Frederick's arm as they stroll in the b.g.

ANNE

We delight in having Eric with us, Frederick my dear, but he does miss his mother while you're both away.

FREDERICK

Ellis has found quite a number of new wildflower species. This is important work, Anne and we -

ANNE

But Ellis is often away on her own, sometimes for weeks on end.

(no response)

I don't wish to cause you any unnecessary distress, but there is gossiping going on about Ellis neglecting her family obligations.

FREDERICK

Indeed?

ANNE

People are saying...

FREDERICK

Yes?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE

Frederick Rowan can't manage his own household.

This pulls Frederick up. He looks at Anne.

ANNE (cont'd)

They're saying...

EXT. A NEIGHBOR'S MANSION - PATIO - DAY

Anne at afternoon tea with THREE FEMALE FRIENDS, all in their mid-forties, dressed to impress.

FRIEND #1

... having only one child is both selfish and self indulgent, Anne.

FRIEND #2

It's always been a mother's Christian duty to the nation, to help populate the colonies by -

FRIEND #1

By having large families.

FRIEND #3

'The Habit of the Rabbit'!

Short GIGGLES from the other two.

FRIEND #1

You've fulfilled your duty with your six children, Anne, so why should Ellis neglect hers? In any event, your daughter's clear duty is to nurture the one child she does have.

ANNE

Ellis is a frail thing. The severe Melbourne winters force her to spend time in the warmer north - means leaving Eric on some occasions.

FRIEND #2

She always looks quite robust to me.

FRIEND #3

The governor's wife, understandably, is often away from her children, due to her many social and charitable commitments, but she's -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRIEND #1

- she's certainly not gallivanting around the countryside indulging her own self-interests.

ANNE

The governor's wife has a considerable staff to attend to her domestic affairs - a luxury not afforded to most of us.

FRIEND #2

'Most of us' seem to manage.

FRIEND #1

Who's in charge in that home, Anne? That's the issue, surely.

BACK TO SCENE

Anne waits as Frederick fidgets.

ANNE

If you had more children, my dear, that would help alleviate poor Eric's loneliness - and Ellis would focus more on her maternal duties.

Anne pats Frederick's arm, wanders off. He walks across to where Ellis is painting, looks over at Eric.

FREDERICK

Eric. Go to grand-mamma.

Eric slides off the pony, scampers off after Anne. Frederick raises Ellis, holds her hands, looks at her. He releases Ellis, paces for a moment, hands behind his back.

ELLIS

What is it, my love?

FREDERICK

The boy misses you when we... when you're away. I believe it would be in his best interests, if you stayed at home in future.

ELLIS

I don't understand. I thought we -

FREDERICK

There's also the added expense.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ELLIS
That's never been a problem before.

FREDERICK
Eric needs you with him, and I need
you to... to be a good mother.

ELLIS
(pulling away)
WHAT?

FREDERICK
People are talking.

ELLIS
I've never cared for idle gossip.

FREDERICK
I don't have the same luxury.

Ellis sweeps past him, strides away.

She catches up with Anne, with Eric running ahead of her.
Ellis pulls her mother to face her.

ELLIS
What we do concerning Eric is our
affair, and I'll thank you mother,
to stop interfering in -

ANNE
I'm tired of inventing socially
acceptable reasons for your long

ELLIS
Then don't.

EXT. ROWAN HOME - NIGHT

Light from two upper windows illuminates the flower-beds.

INT. ROWAN HOME - ERIC'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The soft glow from a ceramic night-light shows Ellis sitting
on the edge of Eric's bed, watching him sleep. She gently
strokes his thick black hair. He stirs, remains sleeping.

Ellis rests her open palm on Eric's little chest, feeling
the steady rhythm of his breathing.

INT. ROWAN HOME - MAIN BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ellis and Frederick lie together in their double-bed with Ellis turned away from Frederick, wide awake. Frederick's up on an elbow, playing with Ellis's loose red hair. Both their bedside-lamps are on.

Frederick reaches inside Ellis's dress, starts massaging her breasts. She stirs at this. He turns Ellis onto her back, straddles her. He works at Ellis's breasts, bends down to caress her neck. They kiss passionately.

Frederick pulls up Ellis's dress, reaches down to position his hard-on. She struggles against this.

ELLIS

No, Frederick.
(looking to one side)
Use the... in the side-table.

Frederick sighs, drops next to Ellis.

FREDERICK

It would be nice for Eric to have a baby brother... or sister.

ELLIS

We can't afford any more children.

FREDERICK

That's simply not true. The housekeeper's full-time now, and with the -

Ellis twists away.

FREDERICK (cont'd)

With the income from the new railway contracts, we'll be able to -

Ellis pulls the sheets over her shoulder.

FREDERICK (cont'd)

We can certainly afford to employ a nanny.

Frederick reaches over, holds Ellis's shoulder. She shrugs it off. He rolls over to blow out his bedside lamp.

CLOSE ON ELLIS, STARING INTO HER GLOWING BED-LAMP.

FLASHBACK: INT. O'BRIEN MANSION - FAMILY ROOM - DAY.

Ellis's FIVE YOUNGER SIBLINGS play NOISILY together.

TEN-YEAR-OLD PETER struggles to separate ADA, 9, and DAVID, 6, SCREAMING and FIGHTING over a toy. BLANCHE, 8, makes a mess on the carpet with scissors, paper and glue. The baby, CECIL, 18-MONTHS, wriggles on the floor, WAILING. Under the raucous sounds, A PIANO PLAYING O.S.

Peter jumps up, SHOUTS at them.

PETER
I'm going to tell mama, and you'll
all get the BRUSH! Just you wait!

This brings a brief respite. David snatches the toy from Ada. She belts him. He SCREAMS. The O.S. PIANO PLAYING STOPS ABRUPTLY - they all freeze.

Moments later, a furious Anne storms into the room, one hand on her hip, the dreaded hair-brush held up in the other. Immediate silence - except for Cecil, BAWLING and kicking on the floor.

Anne pockets her brush, strides over to pick up the distressed baby, looking daggers at the others. She cradles Cecil, trying to calm him.

ANNE
Peter! Where is Ellis?

PETER
It's not fair, mama. Why should -

ANNE
QUIET! Where is Ellis?

PETER
She just took off and told me to
keep the children quiet until she
came back.

ANNE
And when was that?

PETER
It's been over an hour, mama.

O.S. the SOUND of a galloping horse being reined-in.

PETER (cont'd)
That's her now!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The children race to an open window, jostle each other for the best view. Still holding Cecil close, Anne pushes through them, looks down into the yard.

THEIR POV: 11 YEAR-OLD-ELLIS nurses an injured POSSUM in one arm, as she drops down from her SADDLED HORSE, her hair bouncing in a series of dark red curls. Her long cotton dress is muddy, covered with burrs and brambles.

As Ellis drags a bulging jumble of plants and flowers from a saddle bag, she becomes aware of the family group watching her. She looks up.

ELLIS'S POV: Her siblings smiling and waving - and her mother pulling back from the window.

EXT. O'BRIEN MANSION - BACK ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Ellis stops short of the back entrance when she runs into her mother, who is fuming. Ellis, still nursing the possum, holds up her tangled flowers.

ELLIS

I... I wanted to gather some things to show the children. I -

ANNE

NO - you did not. You wanted to go off on your own and waste time with more daydreaming. Leaving the children alone like that - you lazy, irresponsible girl.

ELLIS

It's all so boring, mama.

ANNE

The life of a wife and mother is full of drudgery - get used to it!

ELLIS

I don't wish to get used to it.

ANNE

Then no discerning man will marry a woman with your attitude - a lazy daydreamer.

(pointing)

Now, off to your piano!

ELLIS

I don't want to, mama.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE
 You're too young to know what you
 want. Please do as you're told.

END FLASHBACK

FADE TO:

EXT. MELBOURNE RAILWAY STATION - DAY

A STEAM TRAIN HISSES to JERKY STOP at the CROWDED platform.
 The carriage doors BANG open.

Ellis steps down from a second class carriage, carrying a
 traveling case and struggling with a big leather art
 portfolio, slung over her shoulder.

Ellis's brother, PETER O'BRIEN, NOW 25, waits there with
 NINE-YEAR-OLD ERIC. Peter holds Eric up as they search
 through the crowd, looking for Ellis. Eric spots her first.

ERIC
 MAMA! MAMA!

Peter lets Eric down, he runs off. Eric bumps through the
 crowd, rushes up to his mother, pulls at her dress.

Ellis puts down her case and portfolio, lifts Eric into her
 arms. He holds tightly around her neck.

Peter walks up to Ellis, kisses her. He looks grim.

ELLIS
 Peter - is it Frederick?

PETER
 It's... pneumonia. I'm afraid he's
 very ill, Ellis.

Ellis lowers Eric next to her. He clings to his mother.

PETER (cont'd)
 We have him at home. There's
 a nurse with him.

EXT. PETER O'BRIEN'S MELBOURNE HOME - LATE AFTERNOON

A modest city house. Peter's wife, DAPHNE O'BRIEN 24, in
 some distress, waits at the front gate. A horse-drawn TAXI
 REINS IN at the curb.

Ellis clambers out, trailed by Peter and Eric. She sweeps
 past Daphne, hurries into the house.

INT. PETER O'BRIEN'S HOME - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ellis appears at the open door, just in time to see the NURSE pull a sheet over Frederick's face.

Ellis flies over, rips the sheet away, grabs at her husband's pale body. The startled nurse stands back.

ELLIS

Dear God - NO!

Eric and Peter appear at the open door. Peter holds Eric, struggling to go to his mother.

Ellis hauls Frederick's deathly pale body into her arms. She rocks him for a moment... then SCREAMS.

The SCREAM TRAILS OFF into the O.S. SOUNDS of organ MUSIC and the SUBDUED SINGING of "Abide with Me", TAKING US TO

INT. MELBOURNE CHURCH - DAY

A CASKET rests near the front, draped with an Australian wildflower wreath. An ORGANIST PLAYS as a SMALL GROUP, all dressed in mourning clothes, SING the hymn at Frederick's funeral. They include Ellis, Eric, Blanche, Charles and Anne, Peter and DAPHNE.

Ellis holds a single blood-red rose. A red-eyed Eric clings to her. The music and singing stop. The mourners all sit.

ON DAPHNE whispering to Peter.

DAPHNE

I cannot comprehend, Peter, how she could leave her husband and son the way she's done. She knew Frederick was ill and -

PETER

She came as quickly as she could.

DAPHNE

I could never -

PETER

She needs our support now, my dear.

DAPHNE

The way she's given support to her own family?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis steps out, walks up to the casket. A moment of reflection. She places her rose atop the wreath.

ELLIS

"The sweetest flower that grows, I
give you as we part. For you, it is
a flower, for me... it is my heart".

INT. BANK MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Ellis, dressed in mourning black, sits nervously before an imposing desk covered with a jumble of documents. Eric fidgets on a nearby couch, using a tarnished cavalry toy to fight on an imaginary battlefield.

The grossly overweight 55-year-old BANK MANAGER enters from a side door. Ignoring Ellis, he drops heavily into his chair, starts rummaging through the piles of paper. He glances disapprovingly at Eric, who's now using his tin soldier to attack an umbrella stand.

ELLIS

Eric! Stop that. Come to mama.

Eric runs over to Ellis. She lifts him onto her knee, holds him. The bank manager finally locates a document.

BANK MANAGER

Your husband's been speculating -
unwisely, as it turns out. He's
left a debt of two thousand pounds.

Ellis turns pale, tightens her grip on Eric. He squirms.

BANK MANAGER (cont'd)

We're forced to foreclose on your
house, Mrs Rowan. You're a month in
arrears with your repayments.

ELLIS

If you... if you could give me more
time. My husband's death has -

BANK MANAGER

I sympathize, of course. However,
as your circumstances leave you
without a regular income -

ELLIS

I need a few more weeks, please.
I've written to my sister in London,
and I'm certain she'll help.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BANK MANAGER

No, no - that will never do. Your father has a grand estate at Mount Macedon. Surely he can accommodate you and the child?

ELLIS

His... his pastoral company has collapsed... the drought. He...

BANK MANAGER

What? Speak up woman.

ELLIS

The drought, it... he's had to... to sell the family home. He -

BANK MANAGER

Yes, yes. Most unfortunate. Well then, you'll need to vacate the premises by the end of next week.

EXT. FORMER O'BRIEN ESTATE - ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - DAY

The estate manager's cottage, a modest weatherboard home surrounded by overgrown gardens, long grass. On the hazy summit of a wooded hill, we can still make out Ellis's original home - the former O'Brien mansion.

Ellis arrives with Eric in an open horse and buggy. Charles, Anne, Blanche and the family DOGS hurry out to greet them.

INT. FORMER O'BRIEN MANSION - DRAWING ROOM - THE SAME TIME

The well-to-do MR and MRS CARTWRIGHT watch Ellis's distant arrival at the estate manager's cottage.

MRS CARTWRIGHT

Must we have them around, Henry?

MR CARTWRIGHT

Well, the father's usefully employed as the keeper of the estate - designed the gardens himself, I believe.

(off her look)

I've restricted the family to the grounds attached to the estate manager's cottage.

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Blanche and Ellis, in night attire, sit together on a double bed. Eric dozes in Ellis's lap while Blanche strokes a cat. Tied-up piles of Ellis's unframed paintings rest against one wall.

BLANCHE

Papa's seen hard times before, Ellie. And besides, he's enjoying the manual labor for a change. Mother's taking it badly - the loss of face, the drying up of invitations.

ELLIS

Now we're invading your tiny bedroom.

BLANCHE

(embracing Ellis)

It's a joy to have you both.

EXT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - GARDENS - DAY

Charles, Anne and Eric labor together in a freshly-dug vegetable garden, planting, watering. Two trellis's already in place. Ellis and Blanche clean out the weedy flower beds in the garden. The family dogs ROMP around in the B.G.

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Ellis, Eric, Blanche, Anne and Charles sit on rickety chairs around a rough dining-room table, finishing up a meager MEAL of bread, cheese, vegetables. Freshly picked wild flowers add some color to the table. Eric fidgets, plays with his food. A baby grand piano has been pushed into one corner,

Charles touches Ellis's arm.

ELLIS

Yes, papa?

CHARLES

As I recall, the Stevensons paid you for one of your paintings when you were last in Brisbane.

ELLIS

Yes - a birthday present for the Premier.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNE

What of it Charles?

CHARLES

Ten pounds, I believe it was?

ANNE

An entirely appropriate response.
No need to get carried away.

ELLIS

I confess I had a little thrill when
the Premier's wife wrote to say how
much she enjoyed the painting.

ANNE

Perfectly understandable. However -

CHARLES

I want to show you something, Ellis.

Charles lifts a leather-bound book from a sideboard.

CHARLES (cont'd)

This is an illustrated book by
Marianne North, the noted English
flower painter.

ELLIS

Flower painter?

Ellis jumps up, sits with her father as he clears a spot on
the table for the book. He opens the volume, starts turning
the pages - a series of lithographic reproductions of
wildflower paintings. Ellis is wide-eyed.

Ellis takes over turning the pages as Blanche moves around
to join her.

ELLIS (cont'd)

ERIC! Come look at this, darling.

Eric flies over to press in with Ellis. Anne watches them,
shakes her head.

CHARLES

This talented woman has made a
living through the sale of her
paintings, Ellis, and she has -

ANNE

Good Lord - Charles!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHARLES

She's built a successful career that's given her international recognition.

ANNE

Oh, yes - and how many 'talented' women have foolishly tried the same thing and failed?

CHARLES

It's certainly true, Ellis, that this woman has had many advantages that you don't share, the best -

ANNE

Exactly!

CHARLES

- the best art tuition, society connections, and a popular acceptance of floral art amongst the well-to-do.

ANNE

None of which Ellis has.

CHARLES

Ellis?

ELLIS

It's an intriguing suggestion, papa.

BLANCHE

Oh, yes! Such beautiful paintings will appeal to the moneyed class in Melbourne.

ANNE

(pushing back her chair)

I'll not listen to any more of this nonsense!

Anne sweeps away in a huff.

INT. MELBOURNE CITY ART GALLERY #1 - DAY

Ellis and Blanche have four unframed paintings spread on a desk behind which sits the MALE GALLERY OWNER. Ellis wears her widow black outfit, now tastefully offset with dark blue and violet embroidered flower motifs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GALLERY OWNER #1

Pretty little illustrations. Just no demand.

(gesturing)

Look around you, madam - landscapes, seascapes and cityscapes... all professionally framed, I might add.

(looking at Ellis)

Of course, perspective and proportion are far too complex for women to comprehend.

ELLIS

The English artist, Marianne North makes a good living through the sale of her flower paintings in London. I'm certain these would sell well here, in Melbourne.

GALLERY OWNER #1

No, madam. Flower painting's a nice little craft for a woman. But as a way of creating an income? Absolute nonsense.

The gallery owner stands, shoves the paintings back at Ellis, causing them to spill onto the floor.

Ellis and Blanche deliberately take their time picking up the paintings, dusting them off carefully.

GALLERY OWNER #1 (cont'd)

Please! I'm very busy.

As Ellis and Blanche stroll away, he calls after Ellis.

GALLERY OWNER #1 (cont'd)

You would do well, Madam, to look to your household!

ELLIS

(calling back)

That is exactly what I am doing, sir.

INT. MELBOURNE ART GALLERY #2 - DAY

Charles has two Ellis paintings in a similar context. GALLERY OWNER #2 shakes his head, pointing to the landscapes and still life paintings that dominate the walls.

Charles lifts up his Marianne North book, opens it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLES

In London, these flower paintings regularly fetch prices in the range of twenty to fifty pounds.

GALLERY OWNER #2

And who is Ellis Rowan? What's her reputation? I've never heard of her. We only stock paintings from recognized painters and our clientele only buy from established artists.

Undeterred, Charles slides out a print from the book - a postcard-size tinted image of a Renoir flower painting.

CHARLES

Auguste Renoir regularly sells these flower paintings to wealthy Parisians, in order to fund his -

GALLERY OWNER #2

This is not Paris, and this woman is most certainly not Renoir! Good day to you, sir.

INT. MELBOURNE ART GALLERY #3 - LATE AFTERNOON

Ellis and Blanche, exhausted, dejected, trudge out of another art gallery, this one located in a suburban house, holding armfuls of wrapped paintings.

Ellis flops down on the footpath, surrenders to a big SIGH. Blanche sits next to Ellis, puts an arm around her sister's shoulder.

EXT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Charles, in sweaty working clothes, drinks tea with Ellis, Anne and Blanche. Eric lies on the floor leafing through an illustrated book on horses. The despondent mood is palpable.

ANNE

I knew it, Charles. The effort would be far better spent introducing Ellis back into polite society. We should -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLES

We need some acknowledgment, Ellis that your wildflower paintings can be just as appealing as the more traditional works. So then...

(a conspiratorial
look at Ellis)

... how to find a way to bring your work to the attention of the public.

ELLIS

(responding too
quickly)

I should enter some paintings in the Victorian Art Exposition.

CHARLES

End of next month, isn't it?

BLANCHE

Entries are still open, aren't they?

ANNE

For God's sake! It can only mean further disappointment.

ELLIS

(looking at Charles)

It would certainly help to have my paintings nicely framed.

CHARLES

You can leave that to me, Ellis.

ANNE

Charles! We can't afford that.

ELLIS

And there's something else I can do - I'll add landscapes as backgrounds for my wildflowers.

BLANCHE

That should widen their appeal.

ELLIS

(jumping up)

Well then - there's work to be done!

They all take off, leaving Anne alone. She starts clearing the tea cups. She stops, looks over at the baby grand piano.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Anne strolls over, lifts the piano lid, TAPS out a tune on the keys. The single notes SWELL into a full on MENDELSSOHN PIANO CONCERTO, TAKING US TO

FLASHBACK: INT. O'BRIEN MANSION - PARLOR - NIGHT

Anne and 15 YEAR-OLD Ellis sit opposite each other at baby grand pianos, playing a duet. In attendance, the well-to-do NEIGHBORS and some Melbourne FAMILIES with YOUNG SONS.

The duet is going beautifully with Anne lost in the music. Then, a quick DISCORDANT NOTE from Ellis's side. Anne stares at Ellis, keeps her cool.

INTER-CUT: Shots of GUESTS, whispering, TWO YOUNG MEN smiling, ribbing each other.

The music continues seamlessly, until - a SECOND discordant note. Ellis watches her mother. Anne jumps up, races around to Ellis.

She pulls Ellis from the piano, bundles her into an adjacent room. Intense WHISPERING from the audience.

INT. O'BRIEN MANSION - ROOM OFF PARLOR - MOMENTS LATER

Anne shuts the door quietly. She turns on Ellis, furious.

ANNE

After everything I've done for you,
the time I've spent -

ELLIS

I was nervous.

ANNE

GO TO YOUR ROOM!

(as Ellis slinks away)

I'm confiscating your art materials -
ALL your art materials.

Ellis leaves, closes the door with a BANG. Anne puts her face in her hands, fights back some tears.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. MELBOURNE TOWN HALL - DAY

Well-dressed PEOPLE stroll in and out of the entrance. A banner reads "THE 1883 VICTORIAN FINE-ART EXPOSITION".

INT. MELBOURNE TOWN HALL - EXHIBITION ROOM - DAY

Ellis, wearing her mourning outfit, receives a bronze medal from an OFFICIAL. They're standing in front of a framed watercolor painting of a WEEPING BOTTLE-BRUSH set against a background landscape of hazy blue hills. A "THIRD PRIZE" ribbon drapes over one corner.

Ellis, Charles, Eric, Blanche and the Victorian government botanist BARON FERDINAND VON MESSNER, 32, join the small group in CLAPPING.

Eric, restless, keeps looking around. He spots a huge oil painting - a British cavalry charge from the battle of Waterloo. He takes off, runs right up to the painting, starts swinging an imaginary saber. His family's preoccupied, oblivious.

Melbourne artists, TOM ROBERTS, 26, and FREDERICK McCUBBIN, 27, hover around the CHIEF JUDGE, a graying 60-year-old.

ROBERTS

I thought we'd agreed, George, only members of the Victorian Artist's Society would be awarded official prizes.

CHIEF JUDGE

Well, Tom... the panel felt Mrs Rowan's artwork was -

ROBERTS

Illustration, George. It has no place in a fine art exhibition.

MCCUBBIN

Belongs in a handicraft fair.

ROBERTS

You're creating a dangerous precedent here - elevating a useful female pastime to the level of Fine Art. Won't help your reputation, old man.

CHIEF JUDGE

It's only a third prize - in the watercolor section. No harm done.

Ellis bounces over to her supporters. She wears a distinctive pearl brooch.

VON MESSNER

Congratulations, Mrs Rowan.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

Thank you, Baron - and thank you
so much for your invaluable support.
(to Charles)
Oh, papa - third prize!

CHARLES

A wonderful beginning, my dear. Now,
the real work begins.
(holds up her medal)
And this should prove very useful.

Ellis looks around for Eric - is horrified to see him
prancing around in front of the gory battle painting. She
strides over, grabs his hand and ushers him away.

EXT. MELBOURNE ART GALLERY - DAY

A small, purpose-built gallery, set in a leafy Melbourne
suburb. A well-dressed YOUNG COUPLE emerge holding a
wrapped painting.

INT. MELBOURNE ART GALLERY - DAY

Ellis sits at the entrance signing copies of her catalogue,
CHATTING AD LIB with the PATRONS. A smattering of PEOPLE,
some very animated, examine Ellis's paintings. Over half of
her thirty paintings have 'SOLD' signs attached. Eric
wanders around, looking at the paintings.

Blanche joins a well-to-do MIDDLE-AGED COUPLE, as they
scrutinize a mounted watercolor of GOLDEN WATTLE BLOSSOMS.

BLANCHE

Mrs Rowan tells me that in future
she intends to make copies of all
her works. However...
(leans in, whispering)
... on this occasion, due to time
constraints, these will all be
sold as originals. Might prove to
be a very good investment.
(straightening up)
Well, if you will excuse me.

Blanche wanders off, leaving the couple looking a lot more
closely at the painting, and the seven-pound price tag.
Eric appears at their side. He points at the painting.

ERIC

My mama painted that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The couple smile, stroll away.

The gallery owner, DAVID HART, 45, dressed in a flamboyant outfit, finishes up with the sale of a painting. Hart shakes the MALE CUSTOMER'S hand.

He saunters over to Ellis, still seated at the entrance. He bends down to whisper.

HART

Almost one hundred pounds, so far.
I confess I had my reservations, Mrs
Rowan, but this is marvelous!

ELLIS

That's most gratifying, Mr Hart.

HART

I'd be eager to assist you with
another exhibition - at our larger
gallery in the city.

ELLIS

(standing)

I'd be very happy to oblige.

Ellis offers her hand, Hart shakes it vigorously. He moves off to work another patron. Eric runs over to Ellis, grabs her hand.

ERIC

They really like the pictures, mama.

Ellis smiles, pats his head. He looks up at his mother.

ERIC (cont'd)

I love you, mama.

Ellis hold Eric's face, about to respond.

HART (O.S.)

MRS ROWAN!

Ellis turns to see Hart with another patron, beckoning to her. She kisses Eric on the forehead, strides off.

EXT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - VEGETABLE GARDEN - DAY

Anne digs out carrots in the now thriving vegetable garden. An excited Ellis appears, skips over to her mother.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She plonks down next to Anne, starts peeling out bank notes into a pile on the ground. Not even a cursory look from her mother.

ELLIS

Oh, Mama - it was so thrilling seeing my paintings being sold. The enthusiasm of Mr Hart - and the joy displayed by the patrons. It was positively infectious!

ANNE

That's nice, dear.

A sudden breeze scatters the bank notes. Ellis, alarmed, chases after them. Anne stays with her carrots.

Ellis finishes retrieving the banknotes, stuffs them into her pockets.

She walks back and looks down at her mother, still preoccupied with her vegetable garden.

ELLIS

There's the family debts, mama.
(a beat, waiting)
The quite considerable family debts. At least... I'm doing something. And I'm determined to do more.

Anne puts extra effort into digging out a carrot. Ellis bends down, gets right in her mother's ear.

ELLIS (cont'd)

MORE wildflower painting, MORE exhibitions, MORE money, MORE -

Anne jumps up, struts off. Ellis calls after her.

ELLIS (cont'd)

- more... SUCCESS!

Anne stumbles, keeps moving. Ellis shakes her head, fighting some tears.

EXT. IN THE DANDENONG MOUNTAINS - DAY

Ellis, accompanied by Eric, stands at her easel painting from a cluster of blue-spotted SUN ORCHIDS. She wears her usual full-length white cotton dress, broad hat and laced-up leather boots. A horse and buggy tethered nearby.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Eric stands next to Ellis at a portable table, washing brushes in a bowl of water. He holds out a clean brush to his mother, waits. Ellis misses it, keeps working.

Eric drops the brush, wanders over to the tethered horse.

ELLIS (O.S.)
(calling out)
THANK YOU!

Eric turns, but Ellis has already resumed her painting. He walks up to the horse, clings to its neck.

INT. MELBOURNE ART GALLERY - NIGHT

Ellis signs catalogues inside the packed city gallery, while she's being interviewed M.O.S. by a REPORTER. Mr Hart mixes with the PATRONS, who are enjoying wine and cheese platters.

Blanche, Von Messner and a work-weary Charles CHAT AD LIB with the patrons. Red and white 'SOLD' tags everywhere.

FADE TO:

EXT. BRISBANE RAILWAY STATION - DAY

A STEAM LOCOMOTIVE HISSES, CLANKS at the CROWDED platform. A sign reads "SOUTH BRISBANE STATION - SYDNEY PLATFORM".

Ellis waits there with ERIC, NOW 12, who holds tightly to a tattered Cavalry book. A small suitcase sits next to him.

ELLIS
It was a joy to have you with me in
Brisbane, my darling, but the rest
of the journey will prove very
demanding.

ERIC
I want to go with you.

ELLIS
I'll be exploring in places much too
hazardous for young boys.

ERIC
I'm not a child, mama.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS
 Uncle Peter will be waiting for you
 at the station, and he promises to
 take you riding. It'll be a lot
 more fun than -

ERIC
 I'd much rather go with you.

ELLIS
 (crouching down)
 It'll be more enjoyable than tramping
 through the jungle with mama - the
 heat, the flies and the mosquitoes!

Eric shakes his head. Ellis lifts his chin.

ELLIS (cont'd)
 Sweetheart, I simply cannot afford
 the extra expense.

ERIC
 That's what you always say.

PORTER (O.S.)
 ALL ABO-O-O-OARD!

Ellis stands. Eric tugs at her sleeve.

ERIC
 Just this once, mama... please.

Ellis picks up Eric's suitcase, takes his hand, leads him
 towards his carriage. He pulls away, stands his ground.

ELLIS
 Darling...

Eric starts SNIFFLING. Ellis puts down the suitcase,
 reaches out to him. He falls into her embrace, hangs on.

ERIC
 Don't go, mama. Come with me.

ELLIS
 I'll be back before you know it.
 And I'll write... as often as I can,
 and tell you all about my -

ERIC
 I'm afraid, mama. I've lost papa...
 (holding tighter)
 I don't want to lose you, too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Ellis calls out to a PORTER.

ELLIS
Some help here! Please!

INT. 2ND CLASS RAILWAY CARRIAGE - MOMENTS LATER

A CONDUCTOR points, prods Eric to a window seat. Eric flops down into his seat, opens his cavalry book, flips distractedly through the pages. A sharp TRAIN WHISTLE O.S.

INTER-CUT:

A HISS of steam and the train JERKS into motion.

Eric jumps up, looks out, spots Ellis. He drops his book, presses his face and hands against the window.

Ellis sees him, runs over to stay close to the carriage, watching her distraught boy pressed against the glass.

The train wheels SCREECH, GATHER MOMENTUM.

Ellis bites her lip, walks with the MOVING TRAIN, waving to Eric, trying to keep him in sight. She bumps into other BYSTANDERS, gets jostled aside.

Eric loses his mother in a sea of unfamiliar faces.

Eric slides off the window, slumps back into his seat. He opens his book again, buries himself in the pages.

EXT. STONY CREEK FALLS - TRAIN AND BRIDGE - DAY

A PUFFING STEAM TRAIN, pulling three wooden carriages, CRAWLS along a curved steel-bridge built across the side of a steep, rocky ravine. A massive waterfall THUNDERS down the moss-covered slope.

SUPER: "Kuranda Railway, North Queensland"

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

Ellis floats down the aisle, darting from side to side, trying to see everything. A determined look comes over her face. She lunges at the emergency cord - PULLS HARD.

The train JERKS to an abrupt stop, HISSING, SCREECHING. The passengers lurch forward in their seats. Ellis tumbles down the aisle.

A SHORT TIME LATER

Several PASSENGERS lean out of their open carriage windows, watching Ellis standing on the edge of the bridge, next to the TRAIN-DRIVER'S CABIN. Steam PUMPS, swirls around her.

She SHOUTS AD LIB comments up to the TRAIN-DRIVER as he hangs out of his open cabin, straining to listen over the ROAR of the waterfall.

Ellis pulls off her broad hat, shakes her long hair loose. The train-diver jumps down to stand next to Ellis. She grabs his arm, pulls him close. She points down to the front of the train, gesturing, SHOUTING AD LIB.

EXT. STEAM TRAIN - COW-CATCHER - A SHORT TIME LATER

Ellis sits on a large cushion, tied across a steel platform built over the cow-catcher at the front of the SLOW MOVING train. Her big hat's back on, tied down with wide ribbons.

INT./EXT. STEAM TRAIN - DRIVER'S CABIN - THE SAME TIME

The TRAIN DRIVER leans out of his cabin, straining to keep an eye on Ellis, while his sweaty ASSISTANT SHOVELS coal.

ASSISTANT

Lose our jobs over this one, an'
I reckon that's f'sure. Can't
say 'no' to a pretty skirt, can ya?

TRAIN DRIVER

Shuddup an' shovel the bloody coal!

EXT. STEAM TRAIN - COW-CATCHER - THE SAME TIME

Ellis grips the steel platform as the train EASES down a steep, winding section, BELCHING black smoke.

HER MOVING POV: Towering above, masses of granite rock, wild tropical vegetation. Below, deep rocky ravines. A plethora of colors and textures.

CLOSE ON A BRAKE-CABLE CRACKLING, just behind the front wheel. A BURSTING SOUND... then A LOUD BANG.

CUT TO:

Ellis jumps. Her cushion slips. She tugs at the cushion, shifts her position. The train GATHERS SPEED.

CONTINUED:

CUT TO:

The train driver frantically APPLIES the brakes. The big wheels LOCK, SCREECH - give way to the building momentum.

TRAIN DRIVER

BUGGER! The main brakes ar' gone!

ASSISTANT

Bloody hell!

They both lean out, peer down to the front of the train. Ellis's HAT comes flying towards them. The assistant catches it, pulls it into the cabin. The driver yanks the hat from him, hangs onto it.

CUT TO:

Ellis's long hair comes loose, sweeps back in the wind. Her dress and petticoats lift, fly over her face. She flails around, grappling with the tangling mess.

The cushion works loose. Ellis grabs at the cushion, slips to one side of the platform - and the cushion is gone in a heartbeat. Ellis's long skirt catches in a front wheel directly beneath the platform, is RIPPED AWAY.

She bumps against a steel frame directly behind her, clings to it. Ellis stares out at trees and rocky outcrops hurtling past in a blur, her face drained of color.

CUT TO:

The train stopped on a level section of track, HISSING, CLANKING. The rail-men run down the side of the train engine TO FIND

Ellis, breathing heavily, still clinging to the cowcatcher, her face red and sweaty. Two black stockings holed and running, her dress, petticoats ripped and shredded, a bodice torn open, bare shoulders, bulging breasts.

The assistant gawks at this fleshy display. The train driver SLAPS him over the head.

Ellis clambers down from the cow-catcher, drops in front of the two rail-men. She puts her hands on her hips, stares at them in mock anger. They cringe.

The driver holds out Ellis's crumpled sooty hat. She snatches it, he cowers back. Ellis bursts into LAUGHTER.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ELLIS

This will make an exciting tale for the newspapers! Thank you gentlemen - thank you for a most exhilarating ride!

EXT. BUSH TRACK - DAY

Eric and his uncle, PETER O'BRIEN, 50, ride horses while cradling Martin-Henry rifles.

PETER

You did well today, Eric my boy. Only missed one bottle.

ERIC

(lifting the rifle)

It's a beauty, Uncle Peter. When can we start hunting some game?

PETER

All in good time, lad.

Peter REINS in his horse. Eric does the same. His uncle leans over, takes hold of Eric's shoulder.

PETER (cont'd)

We need to keep this strictly between us men. Your mother wouldn't approve of this, I can assure you.

ERIC

Well, bugger that. I don't -

Peter clips Eric over the ear.

PETER

Watch your language! The swearing you've picked up at that blood... at boarding school has got to stop.

ERIC

Yes, yes, all right.

They kick their horses, move off.

ERIC (cont'd)

They've formed a contingent of army cadets at Grammar. I'm old enough to join, but mama won't -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETER
- won't give her permission. It's
because of Frederick. He...

ERIC
What? Why?

PETER
It doesn't matter. Never mind.

EXT. BARRON FALLS HOTEL - DAY

A rustic hotel surrounded by misty rain-forest. The SOUNDS
of waking kookaburras O.S.

INT. HOTEL FOYER/TEA ROOM - DAY

The DESK CLERK reads a newspaper as Ellis bounds down the
stairs from the upper bedrooms.

A metal sketching kit dangles from her waist, rolls of paper
protrude from a leather satchel strung over her shoulder.
she carries her specimen-collecting case with holes cut into
both sides, holds a Gladstone bag.

DESK CLERK
Going out already, Mrs Rowan?

ELLIS
Yes, yes - lots to see and do.

Ellis stops when she hears a PIANO PLAYING in the adjacent
tea-room. A familiar sound - a Schumann piano piece.

Ellis walks over to the tea-room, looks in. A YOUNG WOMAN
PLAYS the piano, while a SMALL GIRL stands next to her with
her hand on the woman's shoulder. Ellis puts down her gear,
stops to listen.

The piano playing TAKES US TO

FLASHBACK: INT. O'BRIEN MANSION - MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Anne plays the same piece at her grand piano with
considerably more dexterity and expertise.

On the wall in front of her, a faded poster advertises a
piano recital for Clara Schumann at a London venue. A
stunning younger Anne features as the supporting act.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She wears an evening gown, stands behind an elegant Clara Schumann, seated at a Steinway grand piano.

15-YEAR-OLD ELLIS enters quietly. She tip-toes up to her mother, puts a hand on her shoulder. Anne stops playing.

ANNE

Well, Ellis - what is it?

ELLIS

It's so beautiful, mama.

ANNE

I've told you before, Ellis. When I'm practicing - no interruptions.

ELLIS

I've put the children to bed, mama. I wanted to come and -

ANNE

There are other chores, aren't there?

Anne turns back to her piano, resumes PLAYING with renewed gusto.

Ellis bites her lip, walks away.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - GARDENS - DAY

Charles, dressed in sweaty working clothes, sits at a garden table with Anne while Blanche serving lemonade. two DOGS doze close by. Charles reads a letter.

CHARLES

"My dearest Papa, Mama and Blanche. I miss you all so very much. I'm only thankful that my mind is preoccupied with the work at hand".

EXT. RAIN-FOREST STREAM - DAY

Ellis struggles across a fast-flowing rain-forest stream, holding her bag and case aloft.

ELLIS (V.O.)

In accordance with your wishes, I take no unnecessary risks in the hunt for my colorful prizes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis SLIPS - sweeps off downstream. She bobs up and down, fighting to keep her head above water, desperately holding up her bag and case.

The holed specimen case fills quickly, pulls her down. She reluctantly lets it go, watches it sinking.

CUT TO:

Ellis crawls to safety on the opposite bank, soaked, bruised and bleeding, clinging doggedly to her Gladstone bag.

She staggers to her feet, reaches down, yanks up her skirts. A LEECH sucks at her thigh.

She opens her bag, pulls out a vial of kerosene, pours some onto the leech. She scrapes it off, uses a cloth to wipe the blood away.

EXT. BARRON FALLS HOTEL - VERANDA - DAWN

A patched-up Ellis sits at an easel, painting by the light of hurricane lamps and several candles. A baby BILBY dozes in her lap. Several wildflower specimens, some wilted, sit in jars of water. Three completed watercolors rest along a cane settee.

ELLIS (V.O.)

I often work through the night. I
need to have enough paintings to sell
at each stop along my journey.

Ellis stretches when she sees the first light gilding a line of gum trees. She picks up the sleepy Bilby, strolls to the veranda railings, reveling in the colors of the new dawn.

ELLIS (VO) (CONT'D)

But I do love the early morning
hours. "There was a time when
meadows, grove and stream, the earth,
and every common sight, to me did
seem appareled in celestial light,
the glory and freshness of a dream".

BACK TO SCENE

Charles slips a money order from the letter, keeps reading.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLES

"I have enclosed a money order. It isn't much, but I'm hoping it may be sufficient to hold off the debt collectors".

Charles glances at Anne. She sighs, sips her lemonade.

EXT. RAIN-FOREST WATERFALLS - DAY

Ellis collects wildflowers near the top of a THUNDERING waterfall.

She moves closer to the edge, looks down into the rising mist. Something catches her eye.

She kneels, then lies down to stretch out over the edge of the muddy moss-covered rocky ledge.

HER POV: A RAIN-FOREST ORCHID, sprouting from a rocky crevice.

She jumps up, runs off.

INT. HOTEL FOYER/TEA ROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

Ellis tumbles into the foyer, runs passed the startled desk clerk, dashes into the open tearoom. She pauses to catch her breath. The GUESTS drop their newspapers, stare at Ellis with her muddy dress and grubby face.

ELLIS

I need some strong men to help me.
I am the painter and naturalist Ellis Rowan, traveling to record the flora of Queensland. I've just found an unknown species of rain-forest orchid. I need your help - PLEASE!

EXT. RAIN-FOREST FALLS - SOMETIME LATER

Ellis hangs in a makeshift seat, as FOUR MEN slowly lower her on CREAKING ropes down along the cliff-face, with the ropes secured around a sturdy tree trunk.

Ellis BUMPILY approaches the orchid. The waterfall THUNDERS, STEAMS just three yards away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

(shouting back)

That will do, gentlemen! If you could make fast the ropes, please. It'll be about an hour before I'll need you again.

Ellis pulls paper and crayons from a satchel, starts working. She's seems oblivious to the swaying and creaking of her make-shift harness - and the 200-yard sheer drop to the rocks below. Ellis pauses to look around, drifts off.

ELLIS (V.O.)

"Sometimes, while he hung listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise has carried far into his heart, the voice of mountain torrents".

CUT TO:

The four men lounge on the grass, pulling out tobacco, rolling cigarettes, stuffing pipes.

CUT TO:

Ellis feels her neck, discovers an engorged tick. She pulls out a vial of salt, shakes it over the tick. As she works the tick free, blood trickles down onto her white dress. She uses a rag to wipe her bloodied neck and hands.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-ON A KNOT gradually loosening in the ropes fixed around the tree trunk. one rope slowly unwinds... then WHIPS FREE.

CUT TO:

Ellis feels the harness go slack - sees the loose rope flying over the edge. She yanks the orchid from its perch, stuffs it into her blouse.

THE MAKESHIFT SEAT COLLAPSES. Her art materials drop away, CRASH onto the rocks at the foot of the falls.

Ellis grabs at the remaining tangled ropes, her face white with fear. She hangs by two hands, swinging, banging into the waterfall face, hammered by the choking cascade.

CUT TO:

The four men smoking and CHATTING AD LIB.

CONTINUED: (2)

CUT TO:

Ellis COUGHING, GAGGING, fighting for breath. She SHOUTS frantically.

ELLIS
Help! HELP ME!

CUT TO:

ONE of the men stops smoking, sits up, listening.

MAN #1
QUIET! Listen!

They all quieten down.

ELLIS (O.S.)
HELP ME!

They rush to the edge of the waterfall, look down. Ellis SHOUTS again.

ELLIS
Thank GOD! HELP ME!

The four men grab up what's left of the ropes.

MAN #1
HANG ON! We'll pull you up!

INTER CUT:

Ellis slowly moves upwards.

TWO MEN SLIP on the wet grass.

Ellis bumps back, partly losing her grip. she GRUNTS, grimaces, regains her hold, sweating profusely, her hands raw and bleeding.

Ellis, her dress soaked, torn and muddy, is heaved to safety. The men steady Ellis, as she staggers to her feet.

Ellis pulls the crushed orchid from her muddy blouse, LAUGHS, holds out her exotic treasure. The men glance at each other, then collapse, exhausted.

INT. MELBOURNE GRAMMAR SCHOOL DORMITORY - ERIC'S ROOM - DAY

Eric writes a letter at his study desk, MUMBLING to himself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A pile of opened letters sits next to him, held down by a toy rifle. Tiny sketches of wildflowers and animals border pages of neatly written paragraphs. Letters from Ellis.

Eric stops writing, drops his pen. He opens the desk drawer, pulls out a half-finished sketch of a black stallion. Eric resumes his sketching.

CHUG-CHUGGING SOUNDS O.S TAKE US TO

INT. COASTAL STEAMER CABIN - NIGHT

Ellis writes at a table in a grimy cabin. Big cockroaches scurry about. She stops, picks up a photograph - a group of people, including Ellis, relaxing on the veranda of a tropical bungalow.

ELLIS (V.O.)

I've made new friends in Cooktown,
and they've invited me to stay at
their plantation on Thursday Island.
Their vivid description of the
tropical wildflowers in the Torres
Strait has proved irresistible...

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Charles reads aloud, with Anne and Blanche listening.

CHARLES

" ... so I'll spend several more
profitable weeks there. Then on to
Brisbane where the Stevenson's are
arranging a ball in my honor. Eric
hasn't replied to any of my letters.

Charles shifts uneasily - and catches a CHEQUE falling from the letter. He passes it to Anne, resumes reading.

CHARLES (cont'd)

I have enclosed a cheque to cover
Eric's fees for the remainder of the
term. I hope to send more after my
Brisbane showing.

INT. MELBOURNE GRAMMAR SCHOOL DORMITORY - FOYER - DAY

Charles and Anne wait in the foyer with several gift-wrapped parcels. Eric bounces down the steps, races over to them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERIC
Grand-mama! Grandpa!

He embraces them, glances around, looking for someone else.

ANNE AND CHARLES
(over each other)
Happy birthday, my dear/Happy
thirteenth, Eric my boy.

CUT TO:

The three sit together in a LOUNGE AREA. Already unwrapped, a model sailing boat, a parcel of books, a cricket bat.

Charles hands Eric his own present. Eric unwraps it, pulls out a hand-carved colored wooden statuette of a British Calvary Soldier. He looks at Charles, pleased, excited.

CHARLES
I love you, Eric.

ANNE (O.S.)
We all love you.

Charles hands Eric a big parcel.

CHARLES
And there's special birthday gifts
here, from mama.

Eric grabs the parcel, TEARS it opens - a boomerang, a wooden shield, a bark painting, all with Torres Strait Islander markings.

CHARLES (cont'd)
Given to mama by a some aborigines in
the Torres Straits.

Eric tries the boomerang, using it like a weapon.

CHARLES (cont'd)
Mama loves you very much.

Eric drops the boomerang, picks up the statuette.

EXT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - DAY

A distressed Blanche and a tearful Anne watch FOUR WORKMEN struggling to load Anne's baby grand piano onto the tray of a horse-drawn wagon. A kitchen table, two wardrobes and a four-drawer lowboy are already tied down on the wagon tray.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A FIFTH WORKMAN waits in the family horse and buggy directly in front of the wagon. Charles pats the horse as a repossession OFFICIAL pushes a document into Charles' free hand. The official jumps up on the buggy, drops next to the workman.

OFFICIAL
(yelling)
Awright - LET'S GO!

The buggy driver shakes the reins, and they move off. The wagon driver CRACKS a whip, follows the buggy. Charles holds Anne as she SOBS quietly.

INT. STEVENSON MANSION - FOYER - NIGHT

SIXTY GUESTS in evening-wear, mingle in the spacious foyer, where Ellis has set up her Queensland wildflower paintings. Most of the paintings have a 'SOLD' tag attached. A prominent placard reads "ELLIS ROWAN EXCLUSIVE EXHIBITION - RARE QUEENSLAND WILDFLOWERS".

A SERVANT sits at a table, accepting cash and cheques from GUESTS, writes out receipts. Three other SERVANTS move around, serving drinks and hors d'oeuvres.

Ellis is with her friends JOHN STEVENSON, 40, and his wife Jane, 36. Ellis wears an evening gown with embroidered wildflower images and matching long-sleeve gloves. A sparkling tiara crowns her red hair - a Wildflower Princess.

Ellis also wears her distinctive pearl brooch attached to a black velvet choker. John calls to the guests.

JOHN
Ladies and gentlemen.
(waiting for quiet)
We welcome you to our home on this important occasion. We're honored to have with us as our special guest, the noted Victorian naturalist and wildflower artist, Mrs Ellis Rowan.

John gestures to Ellis. A spontaneous burst of CLAPPING. Ellis waits until the clapping subsides.

ELLIS
Thank you, Mr and Mrs Stevenson.
Ladies and gentlemen. My paintings displayed here, all portray local native flora and fauna.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS (cont'd)
 I've explored the wildest parts of
 your state, encountering many
 dangers - jungle snakes, poisonous
 spiders and ferocious crocodiles.
 (arms extended)
 But as you can see, I have
 weathered my adventures very well!

Another burst of CLAPPING.

ELLIS (cont'd)
 Thank you. Please enjoy the evening,
 and my exhibition. A few paintings
 still remain unsold. Money orders
 and cheques are both welcome.

ON A YOUNG MAN looking closely at one of the paintings. The
 tall watercolor depicts Ellis stranded on an exposed tree-
 root in a flooded river - with a half-submerged crocodile
 floating menacingly close by. A title above the painting
 reads "SUSPENSE".

YOUNG MAN #1
 (calling to Ellis)
This painting, Mrs Rowan. Is that a
 crocodile swimming next to you?

All the guests turn to look.

ELLIS
 Indeed it is, sir. Would you care to
 hear the story of this encounter?

YOUNG MAN #1
 I would like that very much!

Other curious GUESTS gather around, voicing AD LIB
 AFFIRMATIONS. A REPORTER starts jotting down some notes.
 He's accompanied by a PHOTOGRAPHER.

ELLIS
 Very well! We will all need to
 repair to the ballroom.

Ellis strides off, the guests fall in behind her.

INT. STEVENSON MANSION - BALLROOM - NIGHT

Ellis stands in the center of the expansive ballroom,
 circled by the curious guests. Several potted palms line
 the walls of the two longest sides of the ballroom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

Now! I will need the assistance of everyone present. I need to re-create the two banks of a rain-forest stream.

(arms out, pointing)

Would you all move into two parallel lines, one on either side of the room.

The guests shuffle NOISILY into two groups. They finally settle into two loose straight lines, about ten yards apart.

ELLIS (cont'd)

I'll ask you now to move into the spaces between the potted palms, which will act as our jungle foliage.

The guests comply, LAUGH as they RE-SHUFFLE, settle in the spaces between the palms. The photographer begins setting up his camera and tripod.

Ellis points to a coffee table.

ELLIS (cont'd)

Could two gentlemen collect that table for me, please.

TWO MEN pick up the table. Ellis points to where she wants it set down, about a yard out from one of the 'banks'.

ELLIS (cont'd)

Very good. Next, I will need seven strong, male volunteers.

SEVERAL MEN step forward. Ellis quickly points, counting out SEVEN MEN. The others, disappointed, return to the 'banks'.

Ellis pulls and pushes at her volunteers, positioning them in an evenly spaced line across the 'stream'.

ELLIS (cont'd)

Thank you, gentlemen. Now - I need you to play the part of seven fallen trees. Please prostrate yourselves, and lie on your stomachs.

A ripple of LAUGHTER. The men crouch down to lie on their stomachs. FOUR stay slightly raised on their elbows, while the other THREE rest their heads on their arms.

Ellis waits a moment for her audience to settle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ELLIS (cont'd)
 (raising her voice)
 I'd spent the morning hunting for wildflowers in the remote jungles of the Bloomfield valley. On my return, I found myself back at the banks of the Bloomfield river.

Ellis steps into one of the 'banks', next to a potted palm, directly in front of the first prostrate 'tree'. She gestures along the length of the 'stream'.

ELLIS (cont'd)
 I could see the tide was rising, and what had been a simple crossing on fallen trees in a shallow stream, now looked extremely hazardous.
 (raising her skirts)
 But, not wishing to be delayed, I decided to attempt the crossing.

Ellis jumps out onto the first 'fallen tree'. A jovial GRUNT from the 'tree'. Some LAUGHTER. Ellis hops across to the NEXT MAN, who GRUNTS audibly. She makes a show of balancing 'precariously'.

Holding up her skirts, Ellis leaps onto the next 'tree', then continues jumping across the 'stream' accompanied by exaggerated GRUNTS, GROANS, more LAUGHTER.

Ellis reaches the coffee table, leaps on, almost losing it on the polished surface. A CRY of alarm from the spectators. She steadies herself with outstretched arms.

She looks at the photographer, freezes her posture.

A FLASH OF PHOTOGRAPHIC POWDER.

ELLIS (cont'd)
 And now I need the services of a crocodile. John! Would you care to volunteer?

John smiles, steps forward. A burst of CLAPPING. Beads of perspiration glisten on Ellis's face. She hesitates... takes a deep breath, recovers, smiles.

ELLIS (cont'd)
 Please lie down here - next to my elevated tree trunk, Mr Crocodile.

John crouches onto his elbows and knees.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ELLIS (cont'd)
 (pointing at John)
 Then, right next to me, I saw a loathsome crocodile, that paralyzed me with fear. Its horny back slid under my raised tree trunk.
 (as John slides under the table)
 I felt the vibration as it pushed up on the other side.

John 'bumps' at the coffee table with his back. Ellis rocks around acting as if she's about to fall off - a collective GASP. John slides out, Ellis straightens up. An 'AAAH' of relief.

ELLIS (cont'd)
 The crocodile turned to look at me -
 (glancing over herself)
 - trying to decide whether or not my slight personage would make a satisfactory meal.

Some LAUGHTER.

ELLIS (cont'd)
 (pointing at John)
 The monster rose up suddenly, and clashed its jaws!

John leaps at Ellis, SLAPS his arms together. She CRIES OUT.

ELLIS (cont'd)
 Then it slid slowly under the water - and disappeared.

John, 'slithers' away, stands to his feet, breathing heavily.

ELLIS (cont'd)
 A clap for our crocodile!

A burst of CLAPPING. John bows theatrically.

ELLIS (cont'd)
 But WAIT! A new danger. The water was now splashing around my feet.
 (points to the 'bank')
 To my horror, the distance between my present position and the bank had increased alarmingly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

The 'bank' obligingly SHUFFLES back from the palms so they're almost with their backs to the walls. Still on the coffee table, Ellis pulls up her skirts.

ELLIS (cont'd)

The water was now around my ankles.
If I tried to swim in the fast
waters, I'd most certainly be dragged
to a watery grave. I was trapped!

(points to the 'bank')

To my great relief, I saw an
aboriginal girl wandering in the
jungle. Now frantic, I cried out.

(hands around her
mouth)

COOOO-EEEEEE! The girl stopped to
look - and then instantly responded.

Ellis points at a YOUNG WOMAN amongst the enthralled
listeners, who quickly picks up her cue.

YOUNG WOMAN #1

(hands around her
mouth)

COOOOO-EEEEEEE!

ELLIS

Then she disappeared. But, a few
moments later, I heard cries from the
bank of the stream. The young girl
had returned with three aborigines,
all calling out and waving at me.

(a beat)

I need a three more, strong male
volunteers.

THREE MEN quickly step forward.

ELLIS (cont'd)

If you are to play your part
convincingly, gentlemen, you will
need to appear naked to the waist.

They look at each other. LAUGHTER from the sidelines. MAN
#1 shrugs, strips off his coat and shirt. MAN #2 and MAN #3
follow, fling their garments into the bystanders.

The discarded clothes are eagerly scooped up by SEVERAL
WOMEN, TITTING and nudging each other.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

ELLIS (cont'd)
Using sturdy vines, the natives then roped themselves together, to form a human chain.

Quick-thinking WOMEN 2# and #3 drag long cords from nearby drapes, toss them to the three volunteers.

Ellis's three 'natives' catch the long cords, start roping themselves into a chain, edging out to Ellis.

ELLIS (cont'd)
I was so taken with their antics, that I'd lost sight of the fact that the water had now risen to my knees!

Ellis yanks her skirts up to her knees. Some GASPS. She Drops her skirts, sways a little. More perspiration glistens on her forehead.

ELLIS (cont'd)
The brave natives then edged out to me... leaving a gap between me...
(fading)
...and the outstretched arms...
of... the...

MAN #1, closest to the coffee table, reaches out expectantly to Ellis. She stares at him, lines of sweat trailing down her face. She slips from the table.

MAN #1 jumps forward, catches Ellis, then passes her along the 'chain', her head flopping like a rag doll. Each volunteer struggles with the unexpected dead-weight.

A BURST of CLAPPING, THEN

A SUDDEN HUSH, as MAN #3, realizing Ellis is actually unconscious, eases her to the floor.

LOOKING FROM ABOVE ON THE SPREAD-EAGLED ELLIS

MATCH DISSOLVE:

DELIRIUM SEQUENCE - A MAGICAL GREEN MEADOW - DAY

Princess Ellis, wearing a garland of wildflowers, lies prostrate on a bed of grass and colorful petals.

Ellis's fanciful school text-book doodles hang above her in inky outlines. They COME ALIVE - wildflower fairies and elves, with bizarre floral hats and outfits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They NOISILY settle down around their Princess's unconscious form and start urgently fanning her with big palm leaves, or wiping her sweaty face with soft petals.

A worried CHANT of 'PRINCESS ELLIS' begins slowly, then grows into a THUMPING CHORUS.

Princess Ellis wakes suddenly, with a RASPY COUGH. Her attendants drop back, fall silent, their wings drooping.

A GUTTURAL SOUND O.S. TAKES US TO

INT. STEVENSON MANSION - BEDROOM - NEXT DAY

Ellis DRY-REACHING, waking in a canopied bed with JANE STEVENSON taking a wet cloth from Ellis's forehead.

JANE
Malaria, Ellis. The doctor's given you quinine to stabilize your condition. He says you have to rest.

Ellis struggles onto an elbow.

ELLIS
Jane... there's so much more to do. I have to prepare for the Centennial Exposition. I need to -

Ellis GAGS. Jane scoops up a basin, holds Ellis's forehead as she VOMITS, COUGHING and CONVULSING.

INT. BANK OF NEW SOUTH WALES OFFICE - BRISBANE - DAY

Ellis, pale, weak, sits at a desk with a senior BANK CLERK. He's finishing tying up bundles of bank notes and cheques. He smiles, looks at Ellis.

CLERK
Six hundred and twenty pounds, Mrs Rowan. A very profitable evening.

ELLIS
Thank you, sir. If you could issue me with a book of cheques, that would be greatly appreciated.

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - SITTING ROOM - DAY

Ellis, dressed in traveling clothes, comes into the room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Anne paces around, in obvious distress. Ellis drops her suitcase, starts removing her hat.

ELLIS.
Mama. What is it?

ANNE
It's Eric. He's been getting ready to go back to grammar school, but...

ELLIS
Mama?

ANNE
He's found Frederick's things.

ELLIS
What! But...

ANNE
He smashed the lock.

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - ERIC'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

14-YEAR-OLD-ERIC, dressed in his grammar school uniform, sorts through an assortment of military paraphernalia, laid out across his bed. An officer's full dress uniform with dress-sword and scabbard, a holstered revolver and ammunition belt, an array of military medals.

Ellis comes into the room. Eric turns to her, gripping the sword and scabbard and thrusts them out at Ellis. She takes an involuntary step backwards.

ELLIS
I made - I asked Frederick... your father promised me he would not speak about his military history. I was concerned that... we didn't want you encouraged in the direction of so dangerous an occupation.

ERIC
You did not want it, you mean.

ELLIS
I felt... we both agreed that it would be in your best interests, if... he almost died of his wounds during a battle with the Maoris.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERIC
That's an exaggeration.

Eric puts down the scabbard, picks up a small book.

ERIC (cont'd)
I have his personal diary here.

ELLIS
What? A diary? Where did you -

ERIC
Locked in the storage shed -
(gesturing at the bed)
- with all of this.

Ellis steps up to Eric, reaches for the diary. He holds it away from her, starts reading from a marked page.

ERIC (cont'd)
"I regret leaving the army. My wounds were not serious enough to warrant my retiring, but continuing will only bring further distress to my wife".
(scowling at her)
All this time I was given to believe papa had worked as an engineer.

ELLIS
And your father accomplished so much. It was a very fulfilling career.

ERIC
(gesturing at the paraphernalia)
This was a fulfilling career.

Still holding the diary, Eric picks up a medal, holds it up.

ERIC (cont'd)
Father was awarded the New Zealand Cross. This was the highest military honor for those soldiers who fought in the Maori Wars. Father would've wanted to show me this -
(gesturing again across his bed)
- ALL of this. And the stories...
... the stories he could've -
- that he would have shared with -

Eric chokes up. Ellis steps up to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ELLIS

Eric...

ERIC

I want to be alone.

EXT. MELBOURNE ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING - DAY

The glittering new Melbourne Royal Exhibition building with a domed facade, fronted by a gushing classical fountain.

SUPER: "The Australian Centennial International
Exposition, Melbourne, December, 1888"

INT. MELBOURNE EXHIBITION BLDG - FINE ART GALLERY - DAY

Ellis stands next to a FOUR-PANELED SCREEN of Queensland wildflower paintings, receiving a gold medal from an OFFICIAL. A purple ribbon with the words "FIRST PRIZE" printed in gold, drapes over the screen. CLAPPING O.S.

Once again, Ellis wears her pearl brooch. We're now getting the impression that she wears this only on significant occasions.

Charles, Anne, Blanche, Eric, Von Messner, his WIFE, 28, watch from the front of the onlookers.

TOM ROBERTS, FREDERICK MCCUBBIN, CHARLES CONDER, huddle at the back.

ROBERTS

It's an insult. They award Louis Buvelot's landscape second prize, while this amateur gets the watercolor gold medal for -

CONDER

For some pretty illustrations slapped onto colored paper!

MCCUBBIN

A gifted illustrator at best. It's inappropriate to exhibit her work at an international art exhibition.

ROBERTS

Or any fine art exhibition.

INT. MELBOURNE EXHIBITION BLDG - FINE ART GALLERY - NIGHT

A REPORTER, SIMPSON, 28, interviews Ellis, taking notes. Ellis wears her gold medal, stands next to her prize-winning four-paneled painting. A prominent 'SOLD' tag is attached. A PHOTOGRAPHER sets up in the b.g. Some curious PATRONS have gathered around.

SIMPSON

They say you shouldn't have the gold medal, Mrs Rowan. They're labeling your work 'botanical illustration'. They claim it's not Fine Art.

ELLIS

I've simply followed my heart, Mr. Simpson.

(starts drifting)

"We build up the spirit of our human soul..."

FLASHBACK: BRIGHTON BEACH, MELBOURNE - DAY

A bright, windy day. 15-YEAR-OLD ELLIS stands with ADA, 12, and BLANCHE, 13, at the top of a grassy beach cliff, looking out at the pounding SURF. The gusty sea breeze tugs at their long summer dresses.

ELLIS (V.O.)

"... not with the mean and vulgar works of man, but with high objects, eternal things..."

Ellis stretches out her arms. The sea-breeze WHIPS at her long red hair.

ELLIS (V.O.) (cont'd)

"with life and nature, purifying thus the elements of feeling and of thought..."

A SEAGULL drops in front of them, hangs silent and steady in the updrafts. They all watch, transfixed.

ELLIS (V.O.) (cont'd)

"... and sanctifying both pain and pleasure, until we recognize a grandeur in the beatings of the heart".

SIMPSON (O.S.)

Mrs Rowan? MRS ROWAN!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

END FLASHBACK Ellis comes out of it.

SIMPSON

The 'illustration versus art' debate?

ELLIS

'Biological illustration' implies a cold, scientific detachment. Through my art, I have a communion with wild-nature that's intensely personal. Because I paint what I love, I feel no need to justify -

SIMPSON

There seems to be a moral issue too, about having to represent the sexual organs of plants.

Ellis looks askance at Simpson, shakes her head.

SIMPSON (cont'd)

And... the accusation of neglecting your domestic duties?

Ellis turns, strides away.

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ellis, Charles, Anne, Blanche and Eric all together. Eric, dressed in rumpled clothes, polishes a pair of riding boots. Ellis reads a newspaper.

ELLIS'S POV: A *Melbourne Argus* second page headline - "VOCIFEROUS PROTESTS OVER ROWAN GOLD MEDAL".

ELLIS

Listen to this, papa.

(reading)

"A storm of protest from Tom Roberts and the Victorian Artists' Society has resulted in a revision by the judges, and the awarding of a second gold medal to Louis Buvelot. He had previously received second prize".

(jumping up)

It's outrageous - a slap in the face!

ANNE

It's perfectly understandable. Buvelot's a notable Australian artist and the judges are no doubt wanting to 'keep the peace'.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

Political expediency should play no part in the decision process.

ANNE

That's a little naive, Ellis.

CHARLES

In any event, Ellis - look at the publicity. Your name, and photographs of your painting, have been published in all the major newspapers.

ELLIS

(calming down)

Yes, well... I have received letters from more private galleries, wanting to exhibit my work.

CHARLES

You see? This current debate suits our purposes very nicely.

ELLIS

But this whole affair may have damaged my reputation, papa, and -

CHARLES

No, no, my dear. This's perfect. Couldn't be better!

(jumping up)

Fan the flames of controversy, I say!

Ellis and Blanche burst out LAUGHING. The infectious laughter even pulls a reluctant smile from Anne. A brooding Eric seems to be the only one unaffected.

FADE TO:

INT. COUNTRY HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Ellis grasps an envelope as she enters. An unfinished painting of a BOUGAINVILLEA sits on an easel. Several completed watercolor paintings hang around the room, pegged on string.

Ellis shrugs the specimen bag from her shoulder, eases it onto her bed. she pulls off her backpack, lowers it to the floor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis crosses to a window seat, sits down. She opens the envelope, unfolds the letter, begins reading.

ANNE (V.O.)

I have some disturbing news, Ellis.
Eric has been sent home after being
expelled from Grammar school.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLEMINGTON RACECOURSE - MELBOURNE - DAY

16-YEAR-OLD-ERIC and his ROOMMATE hang over a track fence, smoking. A STRING of race horses GALLOPS towards them.

ANNE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

During class time, he and another boy
took horses from the college stables,
and rode out to Flemington on
Melbourne Cup day.

The two boys CHEER, YELL AD LIB as the horses THUNDER past.

ANNE (V.O.)

They spent the day smoking and
attempting to place wagers, which was
their undoing.

A burly POLICE CONSTABLE and a RACE OFFICIAL stride up to the boys, grab them roughly, haul them away. Both boys squirm, CURSE AD LIB.

BACK TO SCENE

Ellis continues reading her mother's letter.

ANNE (V.O.) (cont'd)

This was the third serious incident
and Eric's been refused re-admission,
despite our best efforts.

Ellis shakes her head, takes a deep breath.

ANNE (V.O.) (cont'd)

Charles has arranged an
apprenticeship with a saddler in
Melbourne, but this's not what any of
us had in mind for Eric. We're all
very disappointed.

Ellis drops the letter, stands, shuffles over to slump across her bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She covers her face with an arm. Exhausted, she drifts off into a fitful dozing...

DREAM SEQUENCE - ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE GARDENS - DAY

Ellis struggles with Eric, trying to get him to finish dressing in his Melbourne grammar uniform. Next to her is an easel, holding a half-finished watercolor portrait of Eric wearing his school uniform.

Eric pulls off the school blazer. Ellis drags it back on. A snorting black stallion suddenly appears, trots over to Eric, nudges him.

Eric leaps onto the horse, tosses his school hat. He tears off his school blazer, flings it away. He GALLOPS off, riding bareback.

Ellis scoops up the blazer and hat, chases after Eric, breaks into a frantic run. BUT THE MORE SHE RUNS, THE MORE SHE SEEMS TO BE STANDING STILL.

Eric and his horse THUNDER away, further, further... then vanish. Ellis stops, clutches her chest, CRIES OUT.

SMASH CUT TO:

Ellis jerks awake in DARKNESS, still lying across the bed in her country hotel room. She drops back, holds her forehead.

FADE TO:

EXT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - GARDENS - LATE AFTERNOON

Ellis, Charles, Blanche take morning tea at an outdoor table. A SKY-LIGHTED STUDIO, jutting out into the gardens, has been added as an extension to the cottage.

Charles, in soiled overalls, looks bone-tired. The two family DOGS sit with him. In the b.g. Anne labors in her well-established vegetable garden.

ERIC, NOW 18, stands close by, rubbing down a shiny black stallion. He has thick black hair with a close-cropped beard and mustache, wears riding clothes. Eric pats the horse affectionately. The stallion nudges him.

ELLIS

It was so sad to hear about the death of Baron Von Messner's wife, papa. I know they were close.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLES

He's taking it very badly. And he's left with three children under five.

ELLIS

He's been our greatest supporter. I do feel for him - and the children.

An audible SMIRK from Eric. Ellis reacts, ignores it.

CHARLES

Well my dear, I have some happier news, which, I believe, you will find of particular interest.

ELLIS

Yes, papa?

CHARLES

I didn't want to tell you, until I was certain I'd been successful.

ELLIS

Papa, stop this! What news?

Eric leads his horse closer to listen.

CHARLES

Marianne North is working in Western Australia, and I've arranged for you and Blanche to visit her in Albany.

ELLIS

(jumping up)

Oh, papa - that's wonderful!

CHARLES

I wrote to Miss North, and enclosed three of your watercolors. She replied with extremely favorable comments, and has agreed to see you.

Ellis and Blanche are ecstatic. Eric turns, leads his horse away.

Ellis moves to go after him, but Charles restrains her.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Eric's apprenticeship, Ellis. He just needs a few more months.

EXT. ALBANY WILDFLOWER FIELD - WESTERN AUSTRALIA - DAY

The breathtaking fields of the famous ALBANY WILDFLOWERS, stretch away in every direction.

SUPER: "Albany, Western Australia"

Ellis and Blanche are with a plain, straight-backed woman, MARIANNE NORTH, 50, simply dressed, who stands at an easel, painting before an array of Forest Mantis ORCHIDS. She has one of Ellis's watercolors displayed on a second easel.

MARIANNE

It's such a pleasure to spend time with Australians who share the same passion for flora.

(gesturing at

Ellis's painting)

This's exquisite work Ellis. I'm most impressed, particularly when Charles wrote that you're largely self-taught.

ELLIS

Thank you, Marianne.

MARIANNE

We could spend some time discussing your technique, Ellis, if you think that might prove useful.

ELLIS

Of course. That's why I'm here. But before we do that, Marianne, you must tell me about your adventures in foreign lands.

MARIANNE

Certainly! Where shall I begin? Ah, Yes - South America, I think.

EXT. COASTAL STEAMER - PASSENGER DECK - DAY

Several PASSENGERS stroll the deck, the women holding open parasols against the summer sun. Blanche lazes in a deck chair, while an excited Ellis bounces on the edge of hers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

Marianne's descriptions of her adventures was so vivid, so thrilling. I believe I've become hopelessly infected!

(jumping up)

Marianne only gained recognition in England when she started traveling and painting overseas.

Ellis races to the railing, SHOUTS OUT over the waves.

ELLIS (cont'd)

I'll travel the world and explore in wild, exotic places, hunting for rare, wonderful wildflowers.

Curious looks from the strolling passengers.

ELLIS (cont'd)

I shall make a name for myself so my work cannot be ignored.

Ellis skips back, plonks down next to Blanche.

ELLIS (cont'd)

Ada's been urging me to visit with her in London - and now I feel the time is right.

BLANCHE

Ada's society connections... could prove invaluable.

ELLIS

(gripping Blanche's arm)

Indeed, dear sister - indeed!

EXT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - FRONT PATHWAY - DAY

Ellis and Blanche arrive by carriage. The family DOGS race out to greet them. Ellis sees another carriage waiting, loaded with travel cases.

Anne hurries over as they alight. Charles follows, hangs back.

ANNE

Thank God you're back in time. Eric's leaving - he's going to Africa!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis looks at her father. Charles shrugs his shoulders.
Ellis strides off into the cottage.

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - ERIC'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ellis appears at the open door, sees Eric smiling and HUMMING, packing a final suitcase on his bed. He's dressed in an Australian Light-Horse military uniform, with polished riding boots, wears a feathered slouch hat.

Ellis strides over, grabs Eric's arm.

ELLIS
Eric! What's this all about?

Eric shrugs her off, turns back to his packing.

ERIC
I've volunteered with the First Light Horse. We'll be taking on the Boers in the Transvaal.

ELLIS
What! You can't... I won't -

ERIC
You won't what? I'm of age, mama. You can't stop me.

ELLIS
You never spoke to me about this.

ERIC
Not easy when you're never around.

ELLIS
You could've written, made me aware of what -

ERIC
Someone finally listened to me - asked me what I wanted.

ELLIS
WHAT? Who?

ERIC
Grandpa's been spending a lot of time with me - and so has Uncle Peter.

Eric presses closed his suitcase, shuts it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

But... I wanted - I want to take you with me to London. I have some wonderful plans for us. I was -

ERIC

No questions about my plans? I just said I'm going to South Africa to fight the Boers, and -

ELLIS

It's far too dangerous.

ERIC

- and you start in about your plans - which will amount to me washing more brushes and keeping the flies away.

ELLIS

Of course not! Don't be so flippant.

ERIC

Oh, for God's sake! It'll be the same old routine, mama. You'll have me around for a week or two, then pack me off home like all the other -

ELLIS

Eric, no, I... there were the family debts. I couldn't afford to -

ERIC

It's wearing thin, mama - the family debts have been paid off.

ELLIS

Yes, well... I couldn't just take you out of boarding school. I had to consider -

ERIC

The summer holidays, when I was home?

Ellis touches her face, looks down.

ERIC (cont'd)

And my junior school graduation. Everyone was there - except you.

Ellis looks away. Eric pulls her to face him.

ERIC (cont'd)

I haven't finished. I -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

His voice catches. Ellis reaches out to him. Eric holds up his hand to stop her, tries to compose himself.

ELLIS
Your grandparents, your aunts and
uncles... have always... they've been
devoted to -

ERIC
It's not the same... it's never been
the same.

Ellis moves to embrace him, but it comes across awkwardly. Eric pulls away, lifts his suitcase off the bed.

ELLIS
Eric, please... try to understand.

ERIC
(as he strides away)
No, mama. You go off to London and
win a few more medals.

Eric pauses at the open door, his back still turned. He seems frozen. He finally turns, looks at his mother, biting his lip. Ellis takes a step towards him. Eric shakes his head... then he's gone.

EXT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Eric fare-wells the family, the two dogs jumping, BARKING.

A distraught Ellis runs out of the cottage, rushes up to Eric as he climbs into his carriage. She grips his arm.

ELLIS
Eric, please. Don't leave like this.

Eric pulls away, drops into his seat. He taps the DRIVER'S shoulder. The driver flicks the reins, the carriage MOVES OFF.

Ellis shuffles after the carriage, trailed by the dogs. She waves limply, watching the carriage TRUNDLE off through the cottage gates.

At the last moment, Eric turns, waves to his mother. Her breath catches. She waves back, holding off a flood of tears.

The carriage disappears around a clump of trees.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis wipes her tears as she walks back to the others. She strides up to Charles, gets right in his face.

ELLIS (cont'd)
How could you do this? If he comes to any harm, I'll -

CHARLES
It's what Eric wanted.

ELLIS
I should've been consulted. I'm his mother, for God's sake.

CHARLES
Eric wanted it that way.

ELLIS
Why? Am I such a bad mother, that -

CHARLES
You're bad at listening - his words.

ELLIS
WHAT!
(as she absorbs this)
But, he... he knew his father was wounded during the... why would he still choose to -

CHARLES
Because that's what he wants. Look at your adventures, Ellis, the path you chose - risky, dangerous, even reckless at times.

Ellis turns away, walks off.

INT. LORD SCOTT'S HOUSE - LONDON - BALLROOM - NIGHT

A BLACK-TIE BALL in full swing, with a chamber orchestra playing. Ellis's paintings are noticeably displayed around the walls, all with price tags, many with prominent 'SOLD' signs.

SUPER: "Lord William Scott's house, London, 1894"

ADA SCOTT, Ellis's second sister, a stunning 42 year-old, dances with EDWARD, 51, the PRINCE OF WALES, while Ellis dances with Ada's husband, WILLIAM SCOTT, 46, who wears a British Admiral's dress uniform.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis wears a stand-out pale-green ballgown tastefully embroidered with a myriad of wildflowers images. Her sparkling tiara and the tiny blossoms woven through her red hair complete the picture, again, of a Wildflower Princess.

ON Ada and Prince Edward

ADA

All the wildflower paintings you see in this room, Sir, have been painted by my sister, Ellis Rowan.

PRINCE EDWARD

They're quite impressive, Ada.

ADA

Yes, and it would be so nice if -

The music CONCLUDES and the dancing stops. The guests wander off to socialize. Quite a number walk around examining Ellis's framed paintings.

Ellis has William's arm as they stroll over to join Ada and Prince Edward.

ADA (cont'd)

Your Royal Highness, I would like to introduce my sister, the celebrated Australian artist, Mrs Ellis Rowan. Ellis - His Royal Highness, Edward, the Prince of Wales.

Ellis dutifully curtsies.

PRINCE EDWARD

I'm very pleased to meet you, Mrs Rowan. Ada speaks highly of your artistic work.

(glancing around)

And perfectly justified, it appears.

ELLIS

Thank you, Your Royal Highness.

ADA

Ellis has an exhibition at the Dowdeswell Galleries in two weeks time. It would be so nice, Sir, if you and your family could attend.

PRINCE EDWARD

We'll certainly make the effort, Ada.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WILLIAM

Ada is Ellis's best and fondest sales representative. If her paintings weren't of such a high standard, I would think the number we have in our home to be -

Ada nudges William, glares at him. Ada takes Ellis's arm.

ADA

If you will excuse us, gentlemen.

Ada walks off with Ellis, trying to contain a growing excitement. She leads Ellis out onto a balcony.

EXT. LORD SCOTT'S LONDON HOME - BALCONY - NIGHT.

The two sisters huddle together.

ADA

I have some very good news, Ellie.

ELLIS

What is it, Ada?

ADA

I've arranged for an appointment...

ELLIS

Yes... where?

ADA

At...

ELLIS

Ada!

ADA

At... Windsor Castle!

ELLIS

NO!

ADA

YES! With the Queen!

They hug excitedly. Ellis's beaming face turns somber. She extricates herself from Ada's arms.

ADA (cont'd)

Well, dear one - I did expect a little more excitement about my news.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis smiles thinly, walks over to the balustrade, looks out over the moonlit gardens. Ada joins her.

ADA (cont'd)
What is it, Ellie?

ELLIS
I've had a reply from Eric. He -
(faltering)
He says... a visit would only
embarrass him with the other
soldiers.

Ada embraces her sister.

EXT. BRITISH ARMY ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT

A sea of ARMY TENTS. Open CAMP FIRES scattered about.

SUPER: "British encampment, Transvaal, South Africa"

INT. TWO-MAN ARMY TENT - NIGHT

Eric sits on the edge of a bunk, puffing on a cigarette. Another SOLDIER sleeps nearby.

Eric picks up a crumpled letter lying on a side table, next to a lighted hurricane lamp. He smooths out the letter, begins re-reading.

ELLIS (V.O.)
I was so distressed, my darling
son, by the nature of our parting.
Your resentment is understandable.

INT. LORD SCOTT'S LONDON HOME - ELLIS'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ellis sits writing the letter at a desk.

ELLIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Ever since I can remember, there have
been constantly competing passions
and pressures, vying for my attention
pulling me this way and that.

Ellis pauses to look at her reflection in a full length free-standing mirror set close by.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS (V.O.)
I've never really understood it all
myself, so how could I expect you to
do so?

BACK TO SCENE

Eric finishes his mother's letter.

ELLIS (V.O.) (cont'd)
Only believe me when I say I have
always loved and adored you, and I
miss you terribly.

Eric stubs out his cigarette. He drops the letter back onto
the side table, falls back onto his bunk, stares at the
canvas ceiling.

INT. WINDSOR CASTLE - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

A smiling Ellis, a somber QUEEN VICTORIA, 77, and THREE
expressionless FEMALE ATTENDANTS, stand with a TRIPLE-SCREEN
of Ellis's Australian wildflower paintings. They hold for
the photographer.

A FLASH OF PHOTOGRAPHIC POWDER

WHITE OUT TO:

INT. BERLIN PALACE - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

Ellis poses with a UNIFORMED VON BISMARCK and a gilded framed
painting of WILD TULIPS. They hold for the photographer.

A FLASH OF PHOTOGRAPHIC POWDER

WHITE OUT TO:

INT. CALCUTTA - CITY ART GALLERY - NIGHT

Ellis wears a silver medal as she stands with a regally
outfitted MAHARAJAH and a SWEET-SNOW wildflower painting.

A FLASH OF PHOTOGRAPHIC POWDER

WHITE OUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK - FIFTH AVENUE - DAY

Huge election banners flutter from cables hung across the
street - an image of the US flag bottomed with the words
"MCKINLEY - HOBART".

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUPER "New York, 1896"

EXT. KNOEDLER & COMPANY GALLERY - DAY

The impressive facade of the famous Knoedler & Company Art Gallery. A distinctive window SIGN reads "ELLIS ROWAN EXOTIC WILDFLOWER EXHIBITION - ONE WEEK ONLY"

INT. KNOEDLER & COMPANY GALLERY - DAY

The gallery BUSTLES with well-to-do MEN and WOMEN. Ellis's 200 or so paintings are divided into Australian, Asian and South American sections. 'SOLD' TAGS everywhere.

CUT TO:

Ellis and a US MARINE SERGEANT in full dress uniform stand either side of an Ellis painting, which sits on an easel.

The huge painting shows the USS MAINE battle cruiser tied up at the Havana waterfront, engulfed in flames. Ellis has depicted herself being carried away by a dashing US marine.

She is just finishing up the acting out of the story for a gathering of the PRESS.

ELLIS

... I felt the terrible heat from the exploding warship as the brave - and handsome - United States marine scooped me up, and carried me to safety. I was saved!

A burst of CLAPPING.

A FLASH OF PHOTOGRAPHIC POWDER

WHITE OUT TO:

A well-dressed man, JAMES HARRIS, 36, approaches Ellis.

HARRIS

Mrs Rowan. I'm James Harris,
President McKinley's Press Secretary.
May I have a moment of your time?

EXT. THE EXECUTIVE MANSION (WHITE HOUSE) WASHINGTON - NIGHT

The colonnaded facade of the Executive Mansion, dimly lit.

INT. THE EXECUTIVE MANSION - LINCOLN SUITE - NIGHT

57 year-old PRESIDENT MCKINLEY sits with James Harris and his campaign manager, MARCUS HANNAH, 63. A disgruntled McKinley reads a copy of *The New York Times*.

HIS POV: A Page 3 headline: "THE FLOWER HUNTER IN NEW YORK".

MCKINLEY

(reading aloud.)

"At her Fifth Avenue sell-out exhibition, the Australian naturalist and wildflower artist, Mrs Ellis Rowan, who shows - " ummm...

HANNAH

(reads from his copy)

" ... who shows all the pluck and endurance of an explorer, told of plans to search out and paint the wildflowers of the United States".

MCKINLEY

Yes, yes. What in heaven's name am I reading this for, Marcus?

HANNAH

I believe we should have Mrs Rowan present one of her paintings here at the Executive Mansion, Mr President.

MCKINLEY

What the hell for? I don't have time to waste with some foreign female flower painter. There's an election on, if you hadn't noticed.

HANNAH

The issue of conservation is getting a lot of press. So, we have you photographed accepting an American wildflower painting from Mrs Rowan.

MCKINLEY

WHY for God's sake ?

HANNAH

You'll be identified with a popular naturalist who supports current conservation efforts.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANNAH (cont'd)

(off McKinley's
skeptical look)

This's seen as a Democrat policy area, but they're preoccupied with the Free Silver issue. This will steal a march on Bryant and his camp.

MCKINLEY

Ah, yes, I see. Very astute, Marcus. Arrange it, then.

HANNAH

I've taken the liberty of having James approach Mrs Rowan.

HARRIS

Yes, Mr President. I spoke with Mrs Rowan in New York, and she, ahhh...

MCKINLEY

Well? Spit it out man!

HARRIS

She said she'd be delighted to present you with a painting...

MCKINLEY

Excellent.

HARRIS

... for a thousand dollars.

MCKINLEY

What! Goddam it! Who the hell does this woman think she is? We're offering her a golden opportunity for free publicity and she wants money from us?

HANNAH

Yes, Mr President, but -

MCKINLEY

Hell, Marcus - there would be a hundred American artists that would kill to have that kind of exposure.

HANNAH

Yes, Mr President, but Mrs Rowan is about to embark on a mission to paint the wildflowers of the United States, and she's making headlines in the major newspapers.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANNAH (cont'd)

That's what's important for our campaign.

MCKINLEY

Yes, well, I'm beginning to get the picture. In this case, some damned wildflower picture, it seems.

HANNAH

Let's just say, Mr President, this will be a useful contribution that doesn't come out of our own campaign funds.

INT. EXECUTIVE MANSION - PRESS ROOM - DAY

Ellis, dressed in a stylish full-length dress with a fitted jacket, both tastefully embroidered with wildflower images, poses with McKinley for the PRESS and PHOTOGRAPHERS. Hannah and Harris watch close-by.

Ellis and McKinley stand either side of an ornately framed watercolor painting set on an easel - a colorful compilation of popular NORTH AMERICAN WILDFLOWERS. McKinley reaches over to shake Ellis's hand. They hold for the photographer.

A FLASH OF PHOTOGRAPHIC POWDER

WHITE OUT TO:

Ellis walks back to the press-room exit. A slender, elegantly-dressed woman of 25, JASMINE LOUNSBERRY, approaches her.

JASMINE

Mrs Rowan? My name's Jasmine Lounsberry. I work as a botanist - an adviser for the New York Botanical Gardens, amongst other things.

Jasmine holds out her hand in greeting. They shake hands.

ELLIS

I'm pleased to meet you, Jasmine. Call me 'Ellis', please.

JASMINE

'Ellis'. I wanted to speak to you about a possible collaboration. I need a botanical artist to assist me with cataloging the flora of the United States.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

Well, Jasmine - that sounds most intriguing.

INT. WASHINGTON CAFE - LATER THAT DAY

Ellis and Jasmine, wearing the same outfits from the presidential presentation, sit together at a cafe table.

JASMINE

You look so young for a woman of forty-eight years, Ellis.

ELLIS

Thank you, Jasmine. I've always taken great care with my appearance - it's an often undervalued asset.

Ellis pulls off her leather gloves, starts patting her face.

ELLIS (cont'd)

I devote one hour a day to massaging my eyes and mouth, and patting my face with the finger tips. This stimulates the circulation of the blood, and keeps the skin free of wrinkles. Also...

Ellis stops the massaging, leans closer, whispers.

ELLIS (cont'd)

I now dye my hair using a bright red Henna.

JASMINE

It's beautiful, Ellis... and so natural looking.

ELLIS

And - for the benefit of the Press, you understand - I have been somewhat flexible with my birth date.

JASMINE

Ah!

ELLIS

(leaning back)

Anyway, Jasmine, enough of my beauty secrets. Tell me about this collaboration concept.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JASMINE

I saw your wildflower paintings at the Chicago World Exposition, Ellis. The accurate rendering of your wildflowers was impressive.

ELLIS

Thank you.

JASMINE

Then I read about your plans for a painting expedition across America, and that ambitious plan happens to fit nicely with my own.

ELLIS

Oh, yes?

JASMINE

My publisher has asked me to produce two volumes on the flowers and trees of the United States. I was hoping you would produce the sketches and paintings, while I write the text.

ELLIS

And... how long would this take?

JASMINE

We'd make our journeys during the spring and summer - to capture the flowers blossoming. Then we'd spend the winters in New York, cataloging.

(a beat)

I would think... two years, perhaps three.

Ellis tilts her head - *'tell me more'*.

JASMINE (cont'd)

The publishers will meet all the expenses.

(a beat, waiting)

And, particularly exciting... for the first time, the illustrations will be reproduced in full color.

(watching, waiting)

You'd receive full acknowledgment and you'd retain ownership of your original paintings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ELLIS

A most attractive proposal, indeed!
Well then, Jasmine - when and where
do we begin?

JASMINE

I believe we should travel first to
South Carolina, then on to Florida,
and finally north through Georgia,
into Tennessee...

EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA MEADOW - DAY

An easel and chair sit in front of an array of striking
pink-scarlet CATCHFLY WILDFLOWERS. A folding table holds
painting materials. GIGGLING SOUNDS O.S.

Further along, another portable table covered with
notebooks, writing materials. Two sun umbrellas spread
shade over the tables. A water bag hangs on a branch.

Behind a large shrub, Ellis and Jasmine bunch up their
skirts, pull down their pants, GIGGLING. They both wear
wide-brimmed straw hats. As they squat to relieve
themselves, their long skirts billow around them.

JASMINE

Ahhh... that's better. I couldn't
have waited any longer.

Both women raise the brims of their straw hats, peek at each
other. They break into more infectious GIGGLING.

ELLIS

Perhaps I should avoid this tale in
my next interview with the Press?

JASMINE

Or, perhaps not.

They both LAUGH as they stand, hitch up their pants.

EXT. THE FLORIDA PANHANDLE - ROWING BOAT - DAY

Jasmine and Ellis sit in a rowboat with Jasmine pulling
steadily on the oars, gliding them through SHALLOW WETLANDS.

JASMINE

You mostly travel alone, Ellis?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

I loved my husband, Jasmine, and we often traveled and worked together. But he understood my need to...

JASMINE

Yes?

ELLIS

There's something intoxicating about going alone into unexplored places, discovering new wildflower species.

JASMINE

You miss being married?

ELLIS

At times. Frederick's companionship, his constant support.

JASMINE

Marriage was a terrible experiment for me - burdensome and distracting.

ELLIS

No children, then?

JASMINE

Good god, no.

Ellis takes up a wooden pole as they approach a huge floating palm leaf. Jasmine dips the oars, slowing the boat. Ellis uses the pole to lift big palm.

The boat BUMPS something in the water. A huge SNAPPING TURTLE jumps up at the pole, tipping the boat. Ellis tumbles over the side, SPLASHES into the water.

The turtle turns to attack Ellis. Jasmine BELTS the turtle's head with the pole, distracting it. The turtle BITES the pole clean in two, THRASHES about.

Ellis pulls at the side of the boat, trying to bet back on-board. The turtle bites at Ellis, latches on to her skirts. Ellis SCREAMS. Her skirt is ripped away as Jasmine hauls her into the boat. The turtle drops back, disappears.

They fall back together, soaked, breathless. They break into nervous LAUGHTER.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Ellis and Jasmine, dressed in night clothes, lie side by side on a patchwork quilt draped across a double bed, chatting ad lib. Logs smolder, crackle in the fireplace.

ELLIS

I miss my son, more than I imagined.
The times we've been separated, I
knew he'd be there when I came home.
But now...

(tearing up)

And I can't forget the way we parted.
There's so much I wanted to say -
needed to say.

Ellis rises on an elbow, holds Jasmine's arm

ELLIS

I have to go to South Africa,
Jasmine, as soon as we finish our
cataloging in New York.

Jasmine reaches out. Ellis falls into an embrace.

EXT. THE TENNESSEE HILLS - DAY

Jasmine grips Ellis's boots, as she dangles dangerously over a ROCKY LEDGE, tugging at a stubborn MOUNTAIN LETTUCE BLOOM. Below Ellis - a 300-YARD sheer drop to expansive woodlands.

A LOW GROWL. Jasmine turns - a tawny colored BOBCAT, SNARLING, foam bubbling around it's mouth. Jasmine freezes.

ELLIS (O.S.)

(calling back)

GOT IT!

The bobcat pricks up his pointed ears, lopes over to peer over the edge.

Ellis sees the bobcat SNARLING at her. She wriggles, stifles a CRY. Jasmine almost loses it.

Jasmine hauls Ellis up onto the ledge. They tumble together, breathing heavily. Jasmine jumps up, YELLING and WAVING at the bobcat. It backs up, stands it's ground. Ellis joins in the YELLING. The bobcat GROWLS, lopes away.

JASMINE

Poor thing has rabies, Ellis - the
only time Bobcats are dangerous.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They shake out, dust down their dresses, nervously glancing around for any more bobcats.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY APARTMENTS - NIGHT

A New York apartment building. Heavy snow falling.

INT. NEW YORK CITY APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ellis and Jasmine sit together near a crackling fireplace. A radiator gives off periodic CLANGING noises. Jasmine HUMS quietly as she works on her cataloging, while Ellis pastes newspaper clippings into her bulging cuttings book.

A KNOCK at the door. Jasmine walks over to answer it, accepts an envelope from a MESSENGER. She moves back to join Ellis.

JASMINE

A telegram for you, Ellis - from Australia.

Ellis quickly takes the envelope, rips it opens. As she reads, she turns pale, slumps to her knees, dropping the telegram.

Jasmine crouches next to Ellis, puts an arm around her shoulder. Ellis stares into space, her face drained of color. Jasmine picks up the telegram.

CHARLES (V.O.)

Terrible news. Eric has died in Africa. Don't have full circumstances. Will send on when we have more. Great sorrow here. Prayers with you.

JASMINE

Oh, Ellis... your son.

INT. NEW YORK CITY APARTMENT - BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Ellis and Jasmine lie together in a double bed under a pile of blankets. Jasmine sleeps fitfully. Ellis, wide awake, stares at sleet pelting at the bedroom window.

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Anne has just finished reading a letter from Ellis.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blanche looks on, dabbing at some tears. A weary Charles enters, sees their anguish, sits with them. Anne passes the letter to him. He starts reading.

ELLIS (V.O.)

Eric was only just twenty-two. It was a bitter, heavy blow. I never should've let him go. Now he waits in heaven to greet the mother from whom he has been so cruelly parted.

Charles pauses to look across at a framed black and white studio photo of Eric and Ellis, propped on a side board.

CLOSE ON THE PHOTO. ERIC, 13, stands next to a seated Ellis with his arm around her neck, while she holds his hand, leans against his chest.

ELLIS (V.O.) (cont'd)

I cannot help wondering now, how I could've left my beloved son on so many occasions.

EXT. RHODE ISLAND - WILDFLOWER MEADOW - DAY

Ellis, dressed in mourning black, wanders through a shimmering field of RHODE ISLAND VIOLETS, letting her hands drift through the blossoms.

ELLIS (V.O.)

Even as a child, I felt the need for solitude with my blessed wildflowers. They've always been a comfort, my only opiate in times of grief...

Ellis touches something on her bodice - THE PEARL BROACH.

ELLIS (V.O.) (cont'd)

... and energizing me in times of doubt.

FLASHBACK: EXT. O'BRIEN ESTATE - WILDFLOWER FIELD - DAY

15-YEAR-OLD ELLIS sits cross-legged in a field of YELLOW CANOLAS, sketching with pastels. A small TERRIER jumps around close-by, chasing moths.

Charles approaches. Ellis smiles as he sits with her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Charles takes something from his pocket, presses it into Ellis's hand. THE PEARL BROOCH - a single white pearl set in a bed of intricately shaped overlapping silver petals. Now we know its origin.

ELLIS

Oh, papa - it's so beautiful.

CHARLES

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one Pearl of Great Value, went and sold all that he had, and bought it".

(closing her fingers)

Keep your dreams alive, Ellis, no matter what.

ELLIS

No matter what.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

Ellis returns with a handful of VIOLETS, strolls up to where Jasmine is working at a fold-down table, sorting through sketches and notes. Jasmine stops her work, looks at Ellis.

JASMINE

I'm grateful, Ellis, for your continued commitment. Our work is important, certainly, but you shouldn't feel -

ELLIS

I need to keep my mind occupied, Jasmine, and this is perfect for that...

(smelling the violets)

... a blessed distraction.

FADE TO:

EXT. LONDON ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS - DAY

Ellis has Marianne North's arm as they stroll through the gardens, holding open parasols. FAMILIES, TOURISTS wander in the B.G, enjoying the summer ambiance.

SUPER: "The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, London"

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARIANNE

I was so sorry to hear about your son's passing, Ellis.

(as Ellis winces)

You're a stronger person than I am. I made the decision early on never to marry, never to put myself -

Marianne hesitates. They continue on in silence.

They pass an extensive garden filled with WHITE TULIPS. Ellis stops, and they both look out over the white expanse.

ELLIS

Grief has a gravity I can't escape. It weighs me down with uncertainties, plagues me with doubts.

(looking at Marianne)

My work has given me direction, purpose... then grief comes, like a specter, and brings... misgivings.

MARIANNE

There's something I want to show you.

EXT. ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS - MARIANNE NORTH GALLERY - DAY

They come up to a small building surrounded by flower beds. A SIGN reads "THE MARIANNE NORTH GALLERY". They enter through the entrance portico.

INT. MARIANNE NORTH GALLERY - MOMENTS LATER

They come into a two-room gallery, well lit by a continuous row of high-set windows. The entire display area is packed with mounted wildflower paintings.

ELLIS

This is magnificent, Marianne. How many paintings do you have here?

MARIANNE

Eight hundred and thirty two to be exact. The government purchased the collection, and then the Botanical Gardens built this wonderful gallery to house them.

Marianne leads Ellis to sit down with her in a viewing seat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARIANNE (cont'd)

Sometimes I come when no one is here,
and let the memories flood back.
Then I say a little prayer of
gratitude...

(looking at Ellis)

...for the depth of this recognition.

ELLIS

I envy you Marianne.

EXT. KEW GARDENS - THAMES ENTRANCE - LATER THAT DAY

A TOURIST BARGE MOTORS away from the river entrance. Ellis stands at a railing on the open deck, waving to Marianne, who waves back from the Kew gates.

Ellis turns to watch PEOPLE walking along the riverbank. She sees a MOTHER hand-in-hand with her YOUNG SON.

Ellis watches the mother lift the little boy into her arms, and kiss him. They become aware of Ellis watching, and they both wave to her. Ellis smiles, waves back.

ELLIS'S SMILE DISSIPATES

She turns away abruptly, strides to the opposite side of the deck. She grips the railing, sets her face like a flint.

FADE TO:

EXT. CITY ART GALLERY - MELBOURNE - DAY

A three-story gallery in a Melbourne city street. A SIGN reads "ELLIS ROWAN WILDFLOWER EXHIBITION - FINAL WEEK".

SUPER: "Melbourne, Australia, March, 1902"

INT. CITY ART GALLERY - ROWAN COLLECTION - DAY

Ellis strolls through the CROWDED gallery on the arm of Baron Von Messner. Now 53, Ellis still has the look of a woman in her early 40s. In the b.g. Blanche and Anne speak AD LIB to the patrons. Anne appears just as enthusiastic as Blanche.

ELLIS

I must confess, Ferdinand, I'm
greatly saddened at the intensity of
the opposition to my proposal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VON MESSNER

Indeed, indeed. Julian Ashton is insisting that...

INT. ASHTON ART SCHOOL STUDIO - MELBOURNE - DAY

Art lecturer JULIAN ASHTON, 51, a somber man in a dark suit, with thinning hair, a bushy white mustache, is with his life-drawing CLASS. A young NAKED MALE poses for the students. Ashton speaks TO CAMERA.

ASHTON

...the Federal Government's purchase of Mrs Rowan's Australian collection would be a very great mistake. To purchase a thousand paintings, all of the same subject matter, is ridiculous and wasteful in the extreme.

Ashton looks at his students. They dutifully nod, MUMBLE affirmations. He turns again to speak TO CAMERA.

ASHTON (cont'd)

They're botanical illustrations, for god's sake - not fine art. I'll be making my views known to all the major newspapers.

BACK TO SCENE

ELLIS

That will only help to publicize my intentions to the public - at no cost to us.

VON MESSNER

And Norman Lindsay -

INT. NORMAN LINDSAY STUDIO - SYDNEY - DAY

NORMAN LINDSAY, 22, thin, scrawny, wearing a paint spattered smock, works on a sprawling canvas displaying erotic, cavorting nymphs. THREE BUXOM NAKED FEMALE MODELS lounge together with classical props.

VON MESSNER (V.O.)

- with his lewd subject matter - had the gall to describe your work as...

Lindsay pauses in his painting, speaks TO CAMERA.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LINDSAY

... populist and vulgar. The fact that these insipid, girlish illustrations are so readily accepted by the masses, is a deplorable commentary on public taste.

BACK TO SCENE

VON MESSNER

And Tom Roberts and his Victorian cronies are having an impact in government circles. They're determined to stop the sale.

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - STUDIO - DAY

Ellis finishes an arrangement of GLADIOLI in a ceramic vase. Her studio is crammed with mementos of her many adventures - native headdresses, masks, shrunken heads, Maori handcrafts, didgeridoos, boomerangs, Asian and Indian costumes, spears, swords, shields, crocodile skins.

EXT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - GARDENS - A SHORT TIME LATER

Ellis strolls over to Charles, who lounges in a wicker chair. An IRISH SETTER WHIMPERS at his feet. The dog WHINES as Ellis approaches.

Ellis sits next to Charles. He isn't moving. She reaches out to touch his pale face. Her eyes fill.

ELLIS

Papa... oh no, no.

Ellis rests her head on her father's shoulder, holds his arm.

EXT. MELBOURNE CEMETERY - O'BRIEN PLOT - DAY

Ellis and Von Messner place a wildflower wreath on Charles' fresh grave. Anne and Blanche stand nearby, looking at their own wreaths nestled against the new headstone. Once again, Ellis wears mourning black.

Blanche sits down on a viewing seat, waits as Anne strolls over to Von Messner and Ellis.

ANNE

May I borrow my daughter, Baron?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Von Mueller nods. Anne takes Ellis aside. She seems to be struggling, trying to find the right words.

ELLIS
What is it, mama?

ANNE
I'm so sorry, Ellis.

ELLIS
Mama?

ANNE
Your father constantly encouraged
you. He was unwavering. And all I
ever did -
(faltering)
- all I ever did...

Anne puts her head in her hands. Ellis pulls her mother into a close embrace.

A SHORT TIME LATER

Von Messner and Ellis stroll away from the graveside.

ELLIS
As I held father for the last
time, Ferdinand, I felt overwhelmed
with a sense of how short life is.
(as she stops)
I want to travel again to Papua
New Guinea, to paint the Birds of
Paradise - while there's still time.

VON MESSNER
But... New Guinea's still a savage
place, Ellis - and the yellow
fever... malaria. It seems so
dangerous an enterprise.

ELLIS
Those magnificent birds are
slaughtered for their plumes, just
to satisfy the heartless dictates of
fashion. My paintings will create a
public awareness that could help
stop the barbaric practice.
(touching his arm)
And this New Guinea expedition will
give me the unique subject matter
I'll need - if I'm to have any
chance of success in November.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VON MESSNER

The Birds of Paradise - of course.
Unique subject matter, to say the
least. That could give us the
momentum we need.

(taking her shoulders)

Please be careful, dearest Ellis, and
come back to us. Come back to me.

They fall into their first kiss, and a lengthy embrace.

RHYTHMIC NATIVE SINGING O.S. TAKES US TO

EXT. PAPUA NEW GUINEA - RAMU RIVER - DAY

A muddy river snakes through dense, steamy jungle. A long,
DUGOUT CANOE, with a carved crocodile head in the prow,
slices through red-brown, leaf littered water.

EIGHT MALE PAPUAN ROWERS stand in a line in the shallow
canoe, expertly balanced, stabbing the water with sharp
tipped oars. The spirited SINGING of a mission hymn helps
them keep time with the PULL of the oars.

Ellis sits in the center of the canoe holding an open
parasol.

SUPER: "Ramu River, Papua New Guinea"

Mosquito netting stretches over Ellis's broad hat. Sweat
and dirt streak a white cotton dress and long-sleeve gloves.

Her luggage sits back and front of her, covered by grubby
tarpaulins.

EXT. FEDERAL PARLIAMENTARY BUILDING - MELBOURNE - DAY

An austere four-story sandstone building fronts a city
street, surrounded by high palm trees.

SUPER: "Federal Parliamentary offices, Melbourne"

INT. PARLIAMENTARY BLDG - PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE - DAY

Von Messner sits with the Prime Minister's Secretary, HAROLD
FULLER, 55, in a well appointed, expansive office.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FULLER

Well, Baron. I'm happy to report the Prime Minister's appointed a committee of experts to look into the proposed acquisition of Mrs Rowan's collection.

VON MESSNER

For God's sake, Harold - this's been going on far too long.

FULLER

The formation of the committee's a major step for her cause. But Roberts and his mates are on the advisory board to the Department of the Arts. They hold a lot of sway, I'm afraid.

(leaning back)

I can tell you, she'll never get her asking price of twenty-one thousand pounds. Confidentially, the Prime Minister's talking about five-thousand pounds.

VON MESSNER

What! Christ, Harold - there's nearly a thousand paintings in the collection. I can't tell her she's being offered five-thousand pounds for her life's work - it's disgraceful... a bloody insult!

(hopeful)

The Queensland government purchased a hundred of her paintings for two and a half thousand pounds, so -

FULLER

For the Queensland Museum - not the Art Gallery. Certainly, winning a medal at the Melbourne International Exposition, would prove significant.

(leaning forward)

But a word of advice, Baron. You should be more concerned about your own position. You're making a lot of enemies - powerful enemies.

EXT. NOBONOAB MISSION COMPOUND - NEW GUINEA HIGHLANDS - DAY

Ellis's sweaty party toils into the compound. An entrance SIGN reads - "NOBONOAB LUTHERAN MISSION".

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis holds her open parasol, rides in a dilapidated BAMBOO CHAIR, supported on two bamboo poles carried by FOUR PAPUAN PORTERS. Other PORTERS shoulder her luggage, carry a freshly killed wild pig strung from a pole.

INT. MISSION COMPOUND - MAIN HOUSE VERANDA - DAY

PASTOR MARTIN SCHOLTZ, 32, his wife FREDA, 28, watch Ellis's approaching party. They wear white linen clothes and Martin has a clerical collar. Their converse in German (English subtitles).

FREDA

Is it still necessary to carry out Gorman's instructions, Martin? Seems a little extreme.

MARTIN

I am, Freda. Why must we pander to this obsessive woman? Gorman made it clear to her about the importance of the funds from the paradise plumes, and it made no difference.

Ellis waves as she's set down at the bottom of the stairs.

MARTIN (cont'd)

Fortunately, Gorman's plan should put a stop to our little adventurer.

INT. VICTORIAN ARTISTS' SOCIETY ROOMS - DAY

A DOZEN MEN sit around a long table, CHATTING AD LIB. Among them, McCubbin and Condor. Tom Roberts waits at the head.

Landscape paintings are mounted around the walls, some with fading ribboned awards attached.

SUPER: "Victorian Artists' Society rooms, Melbourne"

Roberts BANGS the table with a gavel. They quieten down.

ROBERTS

Gentlemen. I need to update you on the matter of Mrs Rowan's entries.

Voluble GROANS, GRUNTS float around the table.

ROBERTS (cont'd)

Relax, please.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBERTS (cont'd)

Because the Society's been given the honor of organizing the Fine Art competition, we have the authority to approve, or disapprove, any entries.

CONDOR

Then we just say 'no' to the woman.

ROBERTS

I've already sent letters off refusing a number of her pretty illustrations.

MCCUBBIN

Well, then?

ROBERTS

She can still make representations to the state governments - and New Zealand - to show her paintings through their courts' displays.

MEMBER #1

So... trying to sneak her entries in.

ROBERTS

I've written to all the officials, urging them not to embarrass their governments by even considering her entries. If she charms her way around this, then it's just a matter of the judges.

CONDOR

In eighty-eight it was a bunch of sentimental old men.

ROBERTS

Yes, but still susceptible to Mrs Rowan's carefully cultivated charms. On this occasion, however, we've been given the authority to choose the six panelists - all from overseas.

MCCUBBIN

Hasn't she won a few overseas medals?

ROBERTS

I've drawn up a list of six judges that weren't involved in those exhibitions.

EXT. NOBONOAB MISSION COMPOUND - NIGHT

Several open cooking-fires spread about. Stronger lights from the main house.

INT. MISSION COMPOUND - MAIN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The German couple dine with Ellis, the room lit with hanging hurricane lamps, candles in candelabras. TWO NATIVES in attendance.

WE ENTER THE SCENE at the tail-end of a heated discussion.

MARTIN

My dear Mrs Rowan, it has -

ELLIS

More than eighty-thousand are slaughtered every year, just so their feathers can adorn the -

MARTIN

Please listen. It's long been the habit of the highlanders to kill the Birds of Paradise - as a source of food, but mostly to use the feathers to decorate their head-dresses, and -

ELLIS

And this traditional habit has not endangered their numbers. But the demand by European women for the fashionable feathers has.

MARTIN

Nonsense! What would you -

Ellis holds up her open palm at Martin.

ELLIS

Allow me to be clear, Pastor Schultz.

Martin's face reddens. Freda becomes agitated.

ELLIS (cont'd)

I'm here to paint and record all the species of the Birds of Paradise, and I will not add to the self-serving slaughter. I'll have the birds captured alive, and once I have completed my paintings, I shall release them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Yes, yes. Pastor Gorman wrote to me about your plans. However, madam, this approach -

(gesturing at at the waiting natives)

- will be impossible for these savages to comprehend. They've never hunted these birds with the intention of keeping them alive.

(leaning forward)

Allow me to be clear. We're doing God's work here. The money raised from the sale of the plumes is vital for the support of the Lutheran missions.

ELLIS

And how much of that money do the Highlanders see?

MARTIN

They benefit in having their souls saved - and in learning how to live clean, decent lives.

A tense pause. Freda beckons to NATIVE #1.

FREDA

Jeremiah - more wine please.

EXT. MISSION COMPOUND - DAY

Ellis has her easel set up under a shady tree, waits there with Freda. A canvas water bag hangs from a branch next to her. Martin watches from the veranda.

FREDA

The natives believe you're taking the spirits of birds and plants and pinning them to your paper, Ellis. According to them, only a God has that power - you are 'tapu'.

ELLIS

In the best sense they're correct, Freda. I give my transient wildflowers the gift of immortality - they'll continue to live and give joy to their beholders, long after I'm gone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TWO NATIVES approach Ellis, each holding a badly mangled BIRD OF PARADISE. The natives bow low, then dump them at Ellis's feet. She recoils from the bloody carcasses.

A smiling Martin strolls down to her.

MARTIN

As I predicted, Mrs Rowan, they've been unable to comprehend the instructions I passed onto them.

Ellis turns to the natives, and to Martin's consternation, speaks to them in fluent Pidgin English. The dialogue continues in Pidgin (English subtitles).

ELLIS

Did the pastor tell you I wanted the birds brought to me alive?

NATIVE #1

No, Tapu. He say kill birds and bring to you.

NATIVE #2

Yes. Make very, very dead.

NATIVE #1

And make very, very messy.

ELLIS

(to Martin, in English)

Did he? And after Pastor Gorman went to all that trouble to advise him of my needs.

Ellis turns to the natives, and the dialogue continues in Pidgin (English subtitles).

ELLIS (cont'd)

The Pastor has made a mistake. I want the birds caught alive, and brought to me.

Ellis lifts rows of colorful beads from her bag, dangles them at the two natives. They gawk.

ELLIS (cont'd)

And I want no harm to come to the birds. Can you do all that?

NATIVES #1/#2

Yes, yes, Tapu! YES!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

They both jump forward with their hands out. Ellis drapes the rows of beads over their hands and arms.

DISSOLVE TO:

A BLUE BIRD OF PARADISE struts in a crude bamboo cage built around the base of the shady tree. Ellis sits at her easel working on an almost completed painting.

SIX CHATTERING NATIVE CHILDREN run up to crowd around Ellis and watch her work. Ellis wets a piece of charcoal black, stripes ONE boy's nose.

They all break into HYSTERICIS, jostle to be next in line to receive a nose stripe. Ellis LAUGHS at their innocent antics. They crowd in, climb all over her.

She lifts the SMALLEST BOY and sets him on her knee.

INT. MELBOURNE MEN'S CLUB - READING ROOM - DAY

Stylish MEMBERS read newspapers, smoke cigars, drink expensive spirits. Von Messner drinks port with Harold Fuller.

VON MESSNER

They're talking about not renewing my membership, Harold.

FULLER

Well, there's something else you should know. The position for Head of the Department of Lands comes up in November, and I've -

VON MESSNER

I'm first in line for that position.

FULLER

Indeed you are. But I've been told to warn you, if you keep on with this obsession about the Rowan collection, then you'll be passed over - and in the longer term, you may even lose your current position.

(leaning in)

It'd be a high price to pay for an infatuation, my dear Baron.

VON MESSNER

I don't expect you to understand.

EXT. NOBONOAB MISSION COMPOUND - DAY

Ellis, deeply engrossed, paints a WESTERN PAROTIA bird of paradise, as it struts about in the bamboo cage.

Freda strolls over with a tray of tea and cakes. Ellis lifts her canvas water bag, takes a thirsty gulp. The bag slips from her hands, THUMPS to the ground. Ellis sways in her seat.

She faints, topples to the ground, KNOCKING over her easel. Freda rushes over, drops her tray onto a table, calls out to two nearby NATIVES.

FREDA
(in Pidgin, English
subtitles)
We must get her into the house!

INT. MAIN MISSION HOUSE - ELLIS'S ROOM - DAY

Freda crouches at Ellis's bed inside a mosquito net, using a wet sponge to wipe down Ellis's pale face and arms. Ellis MUMBLES incoherently. A number of Ellis's completed bird of paradise and butterfly paintings are pinned about the room.

Martin comes in, moves to the bed side.

FREDA
Malaria. I was afraid of this.

MARTIN
Foolish woman! Look at her.
middle-aged, tossing with malaria,
miles from nowhere. And for what?
A few stupid paintings!

Freda jumps out from under the mosquito net.

FREDA
Martin! She's extremely ill.

MARTIN
She knew the dangers, Freda. Gorman
warned her before she left Madang.
(looking at Ellis)
Well, I suppose that's the end of Mrs
Rowan's little adventure.

CLOSE-ON ELLIS'S MOISTURE COVERED FACE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DELIRIUM SEQUENCE. A THICK, INKY BLACKNESS SLOWLY ENGULFS ELLIS. She tosses to and fro, GROANING, reaching out, trying to push back the smothering shroud. A CHILD'S VOICE, cracking with emotion, echoes in the darkness.

ERIC (O.S.)
 Mama... I'm afraid.
 (louder)
 I'm always afraid.
 (screaming)
 I'M TIRED OF BEING AFRAID!

Ellis JUMPS UP, clawing at the mosquito net, PANTING, sweat-soaked, her heart racing. The room's now dark, except for a single flickering candle. Freda dozes in a chair close-by. The single candle flutters, dies. Ellis drops back onto her pillow, pulls the sheets around her shoulders.

The SOUND of a POUNDING STEAM ENGINE O.S. TAKES US TO

INT. COASTAL STEAMER - ELLIS'S CABIN - NIGHT

A sweaty Ellis hunches at a table, writing a letter. Parcels of wrapped paintings are piled on top of a cupboard. A hanging hurricane lamp swings in front of her, casting moving shadows about the cabin.

Ellis pauses to wipe her neck with a damp cloth, resumes writing.

ELLIS (V.O.)
 Before I fell ill, I painted forty-five of the fifty-two known species of the Birds of Paradise. Most of these have never been seen before by European eyes. I'm inclined to think, dearest Ferdinand, that if I had strength enough, I'd return to New Guinea to finish my work.
 (wiping her brow)
 But it may mean a shroud of banana leaves, and a little cross to mark the resting place of Ellis Rowan.

EXT. MELBOURNE RAILWAY STATION PLATFORM - DAY

A bustling CROWD, including several REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS, mills around a stationary RAILWAY CARRIAGE. Some MOTHERS have excited young CHILDREN on their shoulders, waving little Australian flags.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis, wearing her favorite wildflower outfit, holding a traveling case, OPENS her carriage door, steps down -

- into the welcoming arms of Blanche and Anne. They're both shocked by Ellis's gaunt appearance. The reporters press in, SHOUTING at Ellis. The children CALL OUT, wave their little flags.

Blanche and Anne struggle through the jostling crowd, supporting Ellis, trying to fend off the reporters.

A TWIRLING NEWSPAPER ZOOMS UP TO FILL THE FRAME, FREEZES on a *Melbourne Argus* headline - "THE FLOWER HUNTER RETURNS - TALES OF CANNIBALS, CROCODILES AND PAINTED SAVAGES".

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - STUDIO - DAY

Ellis, still very pale, stands at an easel working on a wildflower watercolor painting, using a cluster of BANKSIA BLOSSOMS as her reference. She's a little unsteady, and there's an edge of urgency to her movements.

Several framed and unframed paintings are scattered around the studio. Blanch enters with a tray of tea and cake.

Someone hides behind Blanche. As Blanche places the tray on a table, ADA jumps out. Ada, now 52, fashionably dressed, retains her stunning beauty. She holds out her arms to Ellis.

ADA

ELLIE!

ELLIS

ADA!

They grab each other, hug, kiss excitedly.

ELLIS (cont'd)

We weren't expecting you 'til Christmas!

ADA

Well, I didn't want to miss all the excitement - so here I am! Oh, Ellie, darling - you do look a sight. You're sorely in need of my face powder, and a touch of rouge.

(looking around)

Well, dear sister - it appears you're progressing well with your preparations.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

I'm afraid not, Ada...

BLANCHE

We have letters from The Victorian Artist's Society, refusing Ellis's entries into the Fine Art Competition, including...

ELLIS

Including my latest paintings from New Guinea.

ADA

Oh, bother! On what basis?

ELLIS

They claim my work isn't of a high enough standard.

ADA

The audacity! Your international medals - what've they got to say about those?

BLANCHE

They won't even acknowledge them.

ADA

God's truth! I don't believe this.

BLANCHE

There's a lot at stake here.

ELLIS

There's one last possibility - I can submit my paintings to the State governments and New Zealand officials, to display in their courts.

BLANCHE

And each court can choose one painting to represent them in the Fine Art Competition.

ADA

Ah! My clever sisters - a little artifice there.

ELLIS

However...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Ellis dabs at her forehead with a handkerchief, wipes the back of her neck. She looks to Blanche.

BLANCHE

We have to submit a specific number of paintings to each court, to qualify for consideration.

ADA

And how many more do you...

BLANCHE

Eight more for Queensland - and the closing date is October the tenth.

(off Ada's look)

Seven days.

Anne enters, her face grim. She holds out a tattered envelope, covered with post-marks.

ANNE

A letter, Ellis... from Eric.

Ellis turns ashen, reaches for the letter.

ANNE (cont'd)

Almost three years old, Ellis. It's been following you on your journeys.

Ellis takes the envelope, glances over the myriad of post-marks. She looks at the others, her eyes moistening.

ANNE (cont'd)

You'll want to be alone, my dear.

ELLIS

No... please stay.

While the others wait close-by, Ellis settles uneasily into her studio chair, opens the frayed envelope. She removes the letter, smooths out the rough edges, begins reading.

ERIC (V.O.)

My dearest mama. I do hope this letter finds you.

FLASHBACK: INT. SOUTH AFRICAN PRISON HOSPITAL - NIGHT (1899)

An emaciated ERIC ROWAN, 22, languishes in a hospital bed, writing feebly. Wounded Boer prisoners fill the ward. intermittent COUGHS, GROANS. Uniformed English nurses move around, checking the patients.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERIC (V.O.)

I grew to sympathize with the Boers,
and fell in with their militia. I'm
incarcerated in a British prison
hospital, and I've been told I'm
dying from consumption.

(pausing to cough)

I've never told you before, but I
loved your paintings, and I took some
pride in your accomplishments.

BACK TO SCENE

Ellis smiles, then continues reading.

ERIC (V.O.) (cont'd)

But all I wanted, was you to just be
my mother, to be waiting for me after
school, to be held every day. Those
are the things I missed the most.

(as she clutches her
chest)

There were too many good-byes and
every time you went away, I was
afraid you might never come back.

CUT TO

INT. SOUTH AFRICAN PRISON HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Eric struggles to stay focused, keep writing. A terrible,
raspy COUGH. Eric scratches away at his letter.

ERIC (V.O.)

But I do understand you better
now, mama. My passion for the
cavalry led me to this hazardous
adventure, and I came to realize
that, like me, your obsession
possessed you too, and took you
on your journey.

BACK TO SCENE

This draws a strained half-smile from Ellis.

ERIC (V.O.)

I'm only sorry you never found
time for me to share that journey
with you, and that in the end, we
never really knew each other.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis buries her face in her hands, still holding the letter. A choking, gut-wrenching SOBBING.

Her sisters move quickly, drop next to Ellis.

Ellis shakily holds out the letter. Ada takes it and she and Blanche stand, read through it together.

After they've finished reading, they crouch back again with Ellis, hold her arms. Ellis wipes at her flooded face, tries to compose herself. She shakes her head.

ELLIS

I lost him... a long time ago.

ADA

Ellie...

ELLIS

Always so detached, so... ambitious.

(clutching at Ada)

Oh, dear God - my son! How my heart yearns for him now... too late, all too late.

(leaning on Ada)

I was never the mother he needed - I neglected him so unfairly.

Ellis resumes a quiet SOBBING. Ada rubs Ellis's arm, fighting her own tears. Anne watches, helpless.

ELLIS (cont'd)

I don't think... I can go on.

BLANCHE

(holding Ellis's face)

Ellie. Listen to me. We're so close. You've worked incredibly hard for this. It's what papa would have wished for... and Eric too, I'm certain.

(gesturing around)

You once said these paintings are like your little children. You created them, and each one has a place in your heart.

ELLIS

And what have I learned from them? They've never taught me how to be a good mother... a more caring wife, a better sister.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ELLIS (cont'd)

I can't help but wonder - has it all been really worth it?

BLANCHE

Of course it has. Ellie, dearest - please. Eight more paintings - for the Queensland Court.

ELLIS

I'm tired, Blanche... so tired.

Ellis sways in her seat. She COUGHS up blood onto Blanche's dress, slumps forward. Blanche catches Ellis, holds her.

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - ELLIS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ellis tosses in bed with Blanche watching over her. A DOCTOR is with Anne and Ada.

DOCTOR

It's malaria again. She's extremely ill, and her heart's now affected. If she's to recover, she must have complete rest. Complete rest - tie her down if you have to.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE NEXT DAY. Ada and Blanche tend to Ellis, wiping down her arms, getting her to sip some water.

Anne shows Von Messner into the room, and then leaves. He moves to Ellis's bedside. Her face lights up.

Ada and Blanche smile at the German, leave him alone with Ellis. Blanche pauses to listen at the partly open door.

Ellis reaches out to Von Messner. He bends down, takes her hand, avoids eye contact. He releases her hand, starts pacing around.

ELLIS

What is it, Ferdinand?

He stops, looks back at Ellis, fidgeting.

VON MESSNER

I've had to come to a very... an extremely difficult decision. I'm no longer in the position to support our - your campaign.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ellis looks bewildered.

VON MESSNER (cont'd)
My livelihood's at stake, and
with the three children... private
schools. Regretfully, I can't afford
any further association with the
campaign. I'm terribly sorry.

He moves back to Ellis's bed, takes her hand again.

VON MESSNER (cont'd)
You know I've always admired and
supported your work, and I'll always
be there in spirit, my dear.

Ellis pulls her hand away, slumps back, ghastly pale.

VON MESSNER (cont'd)
Well, you need to rest. I should go.

Von Messner turns to leave - bumps into Blanche.

BLANCHE
Nicely done, Baron.

Ellis GROANS. Blanche turns to Ellis. Von Mueller takes
off.

Blanche rushes to Ellis's side, feels her forehead. Ellis
clutches at Blanche, her eyes frantic, pleading. Ellis
drops back, slips into a delirium...

DELIRIUM SEQUENCE: INT. EXHIBITION BLDG - DOME AREA - NIGHT

Ellis, gaunt, alone, stands directly under the big glass
dome. Moonlight streams in from the high-set windows.
Shimmering wildflower fairies float down along a moonbeam,
settle around Ellis.

Ellis looks around, dismayed to see EIGHT, WARPED BLANK
WATERCOLOR PAPERS stuck haphazardly on DISTORTED, SHIFTING
EASELS, surrounding her - a SALVADOR DALI NIGHTMARE.

Ellis scoops up her paint brush, starts painting. THE BRUSH
SEEMS TO HAVE A LIFE OF ITS OWN, like the possessed broom of
the sorcerer's apprentice, from Walt Disney's 'FANTASIA'.

It TUGS her hand around, forcing a chaos of SHAPELESS BLOBS
and LINES across the watercolor papers. Her dress becomes
SPLATTERED, STREAKED with garish colors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As Ellis wrestles with her possessed brush, a GROTESQUE, OVER-SIZED TOM ROBERTS, MATERIALIZES. Ellis GASPS.

Roberts LAUGHS, points at Ellis's out-of-control brush. The brush JUMPS out of Ellis's hand, turns to FLICK, FLICK paint at her face.

Ellis CRIES OUT. Roberts CACKLES. The WILDFLOWER FAIRIES DART at Roberts. He SWATS them away, like annoying flies.

Ellis, stumbles back, CRASHES into a twisting EASEL, falls heavily. The rogue easels CLOSE IN, like predatory, relentless terminators. Ellis struggles to her feet.

ELLIS
HELP! HELP ME-E-E-E-E!

Robert's mocking laughter mixes with Ellis's desperate CRIES. The mind-numbing sounds echo off the high dome, bounce down along the four, vast exhibition halls.

The terrible echoes finally TRAIL OFF, leaving only the SOUND OF ELLIS'S POUNDING HEART...

... then EVERYTHING DISSOLVES AWAY, leaving only DUST dancing in the beams of moonlight. For a few moments, the cavernous hall is empty and silent, like an ancient tomb...

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

... the MAIN EXHIBITION HALL AT MIDDAY, CROWDED and bustling, filled with a CACOPHONY of sounds and voices. MASSES of handicrafts, engineering artifacts, art works, rural produce and other commercial items are on display in lavishly appointed courts.

SUPER: "The Melbourne International Exposition
 November, 1902"

INT. MAIN HALL - QUEENSLAND COURT ENTRANCE - DAY

A striking MOORESQUE STYLE FACADE with columns, arches and flags. Well-dressed CHATTERING PEOPLE enter and exit.

INT. QUEENSLAND COURT - DAY

CLOSE-ON the horrified face of Charles Conder.

CONDER'S POV: A 3x4 foot wildflower painting showing a basketful of white, pink, red and yellow CHRYSANTHEMUMS, including insects and butterflies.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A banner hangs above the painting, with gold lettering set against a crimson background. It reads "THE OFFICIAL QUEENSLAND ENTRY IN THE INTERNATIONAL FINE ART COMPETITION".

ON a smiling Blanche, whispering to Ada.

BLANCHE

The Queensland Museum has been very helpful with their collection.

ADA

(taking Blanche's arm)

Well done sister!

EXT. EXHIBITION BUILDING ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Condor strides out, stops to look around. He spots Tom Roberts with a group of other ARTISTS enjoying a leisurely picnic lunch. He runs over.

CONDER

Queensland's chose one of the Rowan woman's paintings for the Fine Art Competition.

Just then, a panting Frederick McCubbin arrives.

MCCUBBIN

New Zealand's displaying Mrs Rowan's work as their official entry.

ROBERTS

Yes, yes - two entries, displayed in the State Courts, not the main art gallery. And there's still the matter of the judges.

(patting his pocket)

And they're all right in here.

INT. MAIN HALL - THE FINE ART GALLERY - DAY

A big CHATTERING CROWD, including REPORTERS, has gathered to hear the announcements for the main prizewinners in the Fine Art Competition.

Six JUDGES, including the chief judge, LORD LEIGHTON, 55, sit in chairs on a slightly elevated platform, with a podium set at the front. They're dressed in formal coats and tails, wear shiny top hats. THREE PAINTINGS stand near them, set on easels, concealed with blue satin covers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Roberts, McCubbin, Conder and their fellow artists are positioned at the front. Ellis, Blanche, Ada and Anne wait at the rear. Ellis still looks weak and pale, supports herself on Anne's arm.

An OFFICIAL steps to the podium. The crowd quietens down.

OFFICIAL

Ladies and gentlemen... the chief judge, Lord Leighton, president of the Royal Academy in London.

Light CLAPPING as Leighton walks up to the podium.

LORD LEIGHTON

Allow me to open by stating that the standard of painting has been exceptionally high indeed. This, of course, has made our task especially difficult.

Lord Leighton glances at his fellow judges, who nod in affirmation. He removes a piece of paper from his inside coat pocket, carefully unfolds it.

LORD LEIGHTON (cont'd)

After considerable deliberation, we have arrived at our decisions.

(a beat)

Ladies and gentlemen, it affords me the greatest pleasure to announce the three main prize-winners.

Leighton crosses to the first painting, removes the cover - an AUSTRALIAN RURAL LANDSCAPE.

LORD LEIGHTON (cont'd)

The Third Prize bronze medal is awarded to Mr Frederick McCubbin, for this handsome oil painting entitled "Spring".

APPLAUSE breaks out as a delighted McCubbin steps up onto the presentation platform to receive his medal and certificate. He moves off to return to his friends.

Leighton removes second covering. Another RURAL LANDSCAPE.

LORD LEIGHTON (cont'd)

We've awarded the silver medal to Mr Tom Roberts, for a masterful landscape painting he's entitled, "Winter morning, Gardiner's Creek".

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

More CLAPPING. A smiling Roberts steps up quickly to accept his medal and certificate.

He moves off the platform, walks back to the others. Some back slapping.

LORD LEIGHTON (cont'd)
And now, the winner of the first-prize gold medal, in the Fine Art Competition of this great, International Exposition.

Lord Leighton moves to the THIRD COVERED PAINTING. Using a little flare, he slides off the cover.

ELLIS'S QUEENSLAND WILDFLOWER PAINTING.

An elegant purple ribbon, with the gold letters "FIRST PRIZE" emblazoned on it, drapes over one corner.

LORD LEIGHTON (cont'd)
The grand first-prize gold medal is awarded to Mrs Ellis Rowan for this magnificent wildflower study, which she has entitled "Chrysanthemums". This was the official selection by the Queensland state government.

The crowd breaks into LOUD CLAPPING. Conder and McCubbin grimace. Roberts looks incensed. Leighton holds out his top hat to Ellis.

LORD LEIGHTON (cont'd)
Mrs Rowan. If you would, please.

Ellis works her way to the platform, proudly supported by her ecstatic family. As they pass Roberts and his two friends, Ellis pauses to glance patronizingly at their medals, hanging limply by their sides.

ELLIS
(hoarsely)
Congratulations to you both.

Anne waits behind as Ada and Blanche help Ellis step up onto the platform. It's painfully slow. A concerned Leighton moves to help them assist Ellis, until she's standing next to her painting.

Leighton takes the first-prize gold medal hanging from a gold chain, hands it to Ellis. Ellis smiles as she feels the shiny medal. Blanche takes up the medal, secures the gold chain around Ellis's neck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Leighton moves back to the podium.

LORD LEIGHTON

Ladies and gentlemen. Mrs Rowan's exquisite painting exhibits an extraordinarily strong pictorial sense, in the best traditions of English romantic painting.

More CLAPPING. Leighton raises his hand, waits until the appreciative crowd quietens down.

LEIGHTON

We've also awarded Mrs Rowan the overall gold medal, for her collective wildflower paintings exhibited in the various courts - without question, a truly remarkable body of work.

Leighton hands Ellis the second gold medal. This time, Ada secures the medal around Ellis's neck. More CLAPPING.

ON Roberts, Conder, McCubbin and some additional shaken SUPPORTERS, huddling at the rear of the gallery.

CONDER

I'ts absurd! The woman's an amateur.

MCCUBBIN

An insult, plain and simple - an affront to all professional artists.

ROBERTS

The question is, gentlemen - what are we going to do about it?

INT. MAIN HALL - FINE ART GALLERY ENTRANCE - DAY

Roberts has called an impromptu press conference just outside the Fine Art Gallery entrance.

He steps up onto a long wooden seat, waits while SIX REPORTERS assemble and a sizable CROWD gathers, Lord Leighton among them. Ellis and her supporters appear at the rear of the crowd.

Roberts raises his hand, waits for quiet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBERTS

Ladies and gentlemen. As President of the Victorian Artists' Society, I wish to express the strongest dissatisfaction that the work of an amateur illustrator has been placed above the more worthy landscapes, portraits and figure studies from the professional members of our -

SIMPSON

(shouting)

But isn't it true, Mr Roberts, that the panel of judges was chosen personally by you and The Society?

ROBERTS

Ah, yes... that's correct. However, we wish to -

REPORTER #1

(shouting)

You want to sack the judges and make up another panel?

A burst of LAUGHTER.

REPORTER #2

(shouting)

Perhaps the judging panel should've been made up of members from the Victorian Artists' Society.

More LAUGHTER. Lord Leighton is not smiling.

ROBERTS

Please - allow me to finish!

The crowd quietyens down. The reporters have their notebooks at the ready.

ROBERTS (cont'd)

The painting by Mrs Rowan, though technically well executed, is not art. It is illustration - botanical illustration. And this would best serve the community by being housed in a museum or a school, for the teaching of botany lessons.

(smirking)

Or perhaps as a decoration in fine ladies' boudoirs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Some light LAUGHTER.

ROBERTS (cont'd)

But it has no place in an international art exhibition. Steps will be taken to secure a revision of the awards, so that justice can be done to professional artists as a body.

A TORRENT of AD LIB questions. Roberts shouts back.

ROBERTS (cont'd)

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. That's all I have to say, for the present, about this unfortunate matter.

The crowd starts to MOVE OFF.

SIMPSON bumps through the DISPERSING CROWD, making his way to Ellis. The other REPORTERS see this, follow him.

He reaches Ellis, touches her arm.

SIMPSON

And what do you say, Mrs Rowan?

Ellis waits to ensure all the reporters are present.

ELLIS

Gentlemen - please follow me.

A re-invigorated Ellis saunters back into the Fine Art Gallery, trailed by the reporters, Ada, Blanche and Anne. Robert's previous audience has quickly re-formed, tags along.

Lord Leighton moves in with the SWELLING CROWD. Roberts and his cohorts follow, hang well back.

INT. MAIN HALL - FINE ART GALLERY - DAY

Ellis strolls across to an ornately framed life-size painting of a RECLINING FEMALE NUDE. A resourceful Blanche places a wooden chair to one side of the big painting.

Ada and Anne help Ellis to stand up on the chair. Ellis waits while the ANIMATED CROWD gathers around. Lord Leighton has positioned himself at the front.

Ellis raises her gloved hand. An immediate HUSH.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLIS

Ladies and gentlemen. To use Mr Roberts' reasoning, this painting -
 (gesturing)
 - though technically well executed, is not art, it is illustration - medical illustration. And this would best serve the community by being housed in a medical school for the teaching of anatomy.

A burst of LAUGHTER.

SIMPSON

(shouting)
 Or as a decoration in the Melbourne Men's Club!

More LAUGHTER. Ellis raises her hand again. Instant quiet.

ELLIS

Mr Roberts has referred to landscapes, portraits and figure studies as being 'more worthy' - whatever that may mean. But I believe a painting should be judged on its inherent artistic merits, not its content. And the distinguished judges have agreed with me, by awarding me this -
 (holding up her medal)
 - my sixth international gold medal.

Ellis stretches out her arms like a conquering queen.

LORD LEIGHTON

(shouting)
 Bravo, Mrs Rowan, BRAVO!

THIS SETS OFF WILD CLAPPING AND CHEERING.

INT. ESTATE MANAGER'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Two IRISH SETTERS watch Anne and Ellis sitting together on a couch. Ellis reads a newspaper. Anne smiles as she reads along with her.

THEIR POV: A headline from *The Melbourne Argus* - "DAVID AND GOLIATH - MRS ROWAN DEFEATS THE 'PROFESSIONALS'".

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blanche and Ada hurry in waving newspapers, grinning, beside themselves. The dogs jump up, ROMP around.

BLANCHE

Ellie! The story's been published in the interstate papers!

ADA

ALL the interstate papers.

Blanche hands Ellis a *Sydney Herald* newspaper. Ellis puts aside the *Melbourne Argus*, takes Blanche's paper.

ELLIS

(reading aloud)

"The international panel of judges has refused to make any revision of the Fine Art awards. They were adamant that Mrs Rowan would retain her gold medal... "

Ellis reads ahead - stops. She lifts her eyes, smiles.

BLANCHE

What?

ELLIS

(resumes reading)

"The Chief judge, Lord Leighton, has urged the Victorian Artists' Society to recognize the international standard of Mrs Rowan's work".

THEY ALL BURST INTO LAUGHTER AND CLAPPING.

FADE TO:

A COLORED PAINTED PORTRAIT OF THE REAL ELLIS ROWAN, centered against BLACK. Just below this image...

SUPER GRAPHICS

"During her prolific career, Ellis Rowan received ten gold, fifteen silver and four bronze medals at various national and international exhibitions.

"Her prodigious output resulted in the completion of almost 3000 paintings during her lifetime.

"Just before turning 70, Ellis Rowan made her third and final expedition to Papua New Guinea to complete her work with the Birds of Paradise - and was struck down again with malaria.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

"In 1922, she succumbed to the disease which had dogged her most of her life. She was 74.

"One year after her death, the Australian Federal Government finally purchased her definitive collection of 952 Australian wildflower paintings for £5000".

THE GRAPHICS FADE TO BLACK, THEN

DISSOLVING IN-AND-OUT AROUND THIS PAINTED PORTRAIT

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES from Ellis's adventures and triumphs, vivid COLOR SHOTS of her extraordinary WILDFLOWER, BUTTERFLY and BIRD OF PARADISE PAINTINGS.

ELLIS (V.O.)

"Therefore am I still a lover of the meadows and the woods and mountains; and of all that we behold from this green earth; well pleased to recognize in nature and the language of the senses, the anchor of my purest thought, the nurse, the guide, the guardian of my heart and soul, of all my moral being".

FADE OUT

THE END