

TALES OF ESTORIA

Pilot Episode
"FALL"

CBBC Competition
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ANIMATED: ESTORIA
INT. CREEPY CRYPT - NIGHT

Flaming torches cast eerie flickering light across grey flagstones. Tall roman pillars line the circular crypt, which is full of dusty sarcophagi.

In the centre of the crypt, FAITH - 11, dressed in a white flowing dress, a clip of white flowers tucked into her long brown hair - is tied, hand and foot, to a stone altar. She struggles in vain, as much with anger as fright.

A scraping sound, loud in the silence - and out of the corner of her eye, she sees the lid start to slide off a sarcophagus. She opens her mouth to scream -

SHAI o/s
 Faith, sssshhhhh! It's only me!

FAITH
 Shai?! If that's you I'm going to kill you for scaring me like that!

SHAI - 11, bronzed half Brazilian, looks rather like Peter Pan in green leather trousers and an open v-necked shirt - slips out of the sarcophagus. A plain gold ring hangs on a chain around his neck. He's somewhat affronted at her ungracious attitude.

SHAI
 But - I'm here to save you.

FAITH
 Well hurry it up, would you? Geri and Frik will be back any minute - and they're hungry.

Shai, all manly quiet confidence, despite his tender age, swiftly cuts her ropes with a knife.

FAITH
 This is clearly a trap for you anyway, which you've blundered into like a fool.

SHAI
 You're welcome. I suppose a 'thank you' is out of the question?

Faith sits up, turns to her rescuer. Smiles teasingly. Their heads come closer. Now Shai actually looks a little frightened by the prospect of intimacy - he's showing his age. Nervously closes his eyes -

FRIK (o/s)
 I think this is an excellent time to interrupt, Geri.

Shai's eyes fly open. FRIK and GERI - early 20's, pale, black-clad, be-fanged vampires - saunter out from behind two

of the columns. They are like a caricature evil double-act - it's all very over the top.

GERI

I couldn't agree more, Frik.

FRIK

Shai Starcross. Finally we have you right where we want you.

GERI

We will take you to our Dark Mistress, Queen Mab, to do with you as she will.

FRIK

(grabbing Faith)

And have Faith here for dinner.

FAITH

Not likely, sunshine!

Faith pulls the flowers out from her hair and stabs Frik in the heart with the sharp shaft of the clip - but it dissolves into nothing in her hand. She and Shai look baffled, as Frik and Geri laugh cruelly.

FRIK

Surprise!

SHAI

Try this on for size then!

Shai leaps forward, uncorking a delicate glass bottle and throwing the water inside across Geri. It fizzes and steams on impact, but he is unharmed.

GERI

Holy water? Your little party tricks won't work on us anymore, Starcross. Not while our Mistress protects us.

Frik loads a dart into a small funnel and blows hard, shooting it at Shai - who skilfully snatches it clean out of the air. Winks cheekily to Faith.

SHAI

Nor can you capture me so easily, Frik.

Geri and Frik look worriedly to one another.

FRIK

You said that would work!

GERI

You're the one who missed him!

FRIK

Plan B?

The vampires grab Faith, one on each side, and ignoring her protests, they fly out an open double window.

GERI
Catch us, Shai Starcross -

FRIK
- if you can!

FAITH
Shai!

EXT. OVER A WATERFALL - NIGHT

It's a clear night outside as Frik and Geri fly over a derelict graveyard and past an enormous waterfall. Faith struggles angrily in their joint grasp.

FRIK
There's no-one to rescue you now, Faith,
so relax and enjoy the ride.

GERI
Starcross can do many things, but the one
thing I know he can't do is fly.

Is that the distant sound of laughter? Faith pauses in her struggle. It sounds like it's coming from behind the waterfall.

Geri and Frik look anxiously to one another.

GERI
Uh-oh...

There's a loud *wooooooshing* - and an enormous, brightly coloured dragon shoots out of the falls, shaking spray all over Shai, riding upon its back.

He laughs wildly as the dragon loops elegantly below the startled vampires.

FAITH
Shai! Stop showing off and hurry up and
rescue me!

The dragon shoots up towards the vampires, who hastily confer.

FRIK
Plan C?

GERI
Plan C.

They let Faith go.

She screams as she drops down the waterfall, flailing wildly -

- and then she's landed safely on the dragon's back, right behind Shai.

SHAI

This time do I get a thank you?

Faith glares - she doesn't know whether to hit or kiss him - but before she can make up her mind, the dragon suddenly changes course, turning to race down the waterfall, dipping in and out of the water, throwing spray up on the now-frightened children.

Close on Shai as the dragon gracefully loops, so that he is now upside down. He's terrified. Darkness closes in, Faith is gone, it's just him, clinging upside down to the neck of the dragon, falling, falling, falling -

EXT. NIGHTMARE - FLASHBACK

- but now it's the neck of a horse, his fingers knotted in the wild mane, and he's shouting and it's still dark all around as the horse falls down and down and down upon him -

SHAI'S MOTHER v/o

(terrified but distant, like an echo)

Shai!

LIVE ACTION, REAL WORLD

INT. SHAI'S BEDROOM, EDINBURGH - NIGHT

With a gasping shout, Shai sits sharply upright in bed, waking from the nightmare.

His wide eyes take in the safe normality of his room, which looks like a new age store. The walls are plastered with posters of witches, wizards and mythological creatures. A broken dream catcher turns slowly above the bed and the shelves are cluttered with fantasy books and kitsch statues.

One whole wall is devoted to a large, hand-drawn mythological map of the world. It's called ESTORIA and covered in illustrated statements like 'here there be Dragons', 'here there be Vampires' and places like Camelot and the Tower of Babel. Stuck to the wall all around it are dozens of beautiful hand-drawn illustrations of monsters, gods and heroes.

Shai huddles back down under the blankets. Eyes wide open.

INT. SHAI'S KITCHEN - MORNING

At the kitchen table, Shai absently spoons cereal into his mouth while completely preoccupied by an illustrated book about vampires. He turns the page - and bites down on the spoon in surprise. It's a double-page glossy illustration of exactly the crypt from his dreams.

A wheelchair is pushed into the kitchen by his father. In it sits SHAI'S MOTHER - 30's, Scandinavian, red hair, her beauty now lost in her loose features and vacant expression. The lights might be on, but there's no-one home.

SHAI'S FATHER

You going to eat that spoon too, kiddo?

Shai chokes and hastily removes the spoon - in his surprise, he hadn't noticed them coming in.

SHAI

Sorry, morning.

He carefully rises, and with a heavy limp on his left leg, grabs a brush from a drawer in the counter and goes to his mother. She looks right at him, but without recognition. Shai avoids her blank gaze.

SHAI

(forced cheer)

Morning, mum!

Starts carefully yet swiftly brushing her hair. His father gently takes the brush from his hand.

SHAI'S FATHER

School trip today, isn't it? You're going to be late. I'll look after her this morning.

SHAI

Are you sure?

SHAI'S FATHER

Uh-huh. But you'll be straight home after school for her check-up?

SHAI

(hopefully)

Maybe they'll find something this time, dad? Some sign of improvement?

They both look to Shai's mother, limp and unresponsive in her chair. Shai's father's eyes are drawn to a family portrait on the wall.

It couldn't be more than a few years old. The three of them crowd into the frame, faces lit with laughter, Shai's mother looking adoringly on her son.

SHAI'S FATHER

(false optimism)

Yeah. Maybe this time.
Off with you.

Shai pecks his mother on the cheek. Watches her for a moment - but her vacant gaze never changes.

He hides his disappointment by quickly throwing down the last of his juice and flinging the book into his bag.

A smooth, sturdy wooden stick is propped by the door - not exactly your average walking cane, more like a magician's staff. Shai approaches it with reluctance, like it is a malignant thing. When he finally grasps it though, it lessens his limp substantially.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

A bright, peaceful morning on a quiet, normal road - but otherworldly, mad red eyes watch Shai's slow progress from behind a garden hedge.

The bus turns down onto the road ahead. Shai tries to speed up, but it's difficult with his limp and staff.

From the hedge: a low, throaty growl. Shai freezes, then spins around anxiously - but can see nothing.

Hesitantly, he begins to limp rapidly towards the bus stop - when suddenly a HUGE BLACK DOG leaps over the garden hedge, baying madly, shattering the peace. More like a small panther than a dog, its long coat is matted, eyes red and jaws slavering.

Shai shouts in terror, stumps back and falls to the ground. The dog advances, nipping at his ankles as he tries to scabble backwards -

- but OLD MAN QUINN - 70's, greying and bent - steps over his legs, brandishing his own walking cane right between the dog's eyes. It crouches down, growls again.

Cycling past, schoolboys GERI and FRIK - who look just like younger versions of the animated vampires from Shai's dream! - see: an old man brandishing his stick at thin air, while Shai cowers on the ground.

From Shai and Quinn's perspectives though, the dog is very much real, and ready to attack again.

OLD MAN QUINN
(magnificent intonation)
Get thee back to thy dark mistress,
beast!

For a moment, the dog looks as though it will pay Quinn no heed. He glares powerfully at it, daring it to attack - and indeed, it finally backs down, whines, and turns tail.

Geri and Frik jeer at the two of them as the old man helps Shai up.

OLD MAN QUINN
Up with you, Shai.

SHAI
 (still reeling with shock)
 Mister Quinn!

Down the road, Geri unaccountably veers his bike into Frik's, and they both fall down with a spectacular clatter.

FRIK
 What did you go and do that for?

GERI
 I didn't do nothin'!

Quinn allows a small, satisfied smile, as though he were responsible for the accident.

OLD MAN QUINN
 I ain't no 'mister'.

As Shai shakily stands, he looks around nervously. Suddenly realises the bus is passing the stop ahead.

SHAI
 The bus!

He waves his staff, limping forward at a rate of knots, but the DRIVER makes a good show of ignoring him. Quinn shakes his head, extends his own cane. The driver obstinately looks the other way - but suddenly seems to change his mind, pulling the bus over so sharply all the passengers are thrown to one side.

It stops right next to Shai and Quinn.

SHAI
 How did you do that?

OLD MAN QUINN
 (cheerfully)
 I think the driver just suffered an unexpected attack of conscience.

Shai hovers uncertainly as he boards the bus, uncertain of what to think or say about the strange man. Quinn just winks conspiratorially.

As the bus pulls away, the old man stands up straighter. His straggling grey hair lengthens into a regal white mane, and his walking stick lengthens into a gnarled staff. He grins widely straight at the camera, before stepping lightly off on his way.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

A sign haphazardly staked into the turf reads: **Waterfall Gully Excursion**. Next to it, Shai and rest of his boisterous class are lined up by the school bus.

Shai stands awkwardly apart, enviously watching the other kids interact. From time to time, he glances up to watch FAITH, who looks just like her animated dream self, still with a beautiful white flower clip tucked into her hair, still with the spirited look in her eye. She doesn't seem to notice him though.

Frik and Geri saunter up to Faith. See Shai. Grin cruelly.

FRIK

Hey Faith. Wanna hear what we saw this morning?

FAITH

Oooo, let me think about this: no.

GERI

But it's funny. You'll laugh.

FAITH

Try me.

FRIK

Shai Cross-eyed fallen on his ass -

GERI

- while mad Old Man Quinn waved his stick and shouted at -

Both boys drop their voices conspiratorially:

FRIK & GERI

- absolutely nothing.

They pack up laughing. Faith glares. Shai flushes red.

FRIK

Ain't that right, Shai?

SHAI

N-no - there was a dog...

GERI

Must've been a real small one then - cos we didn't see it!

Mortified, Shai slinks around to the front of the bus.

FAITH o/s

You think that's funny?

FRIK o/s

But Faith, if you'd seen the look on his face -

FAITH

You two are horrible.

The outraged sympathy in her tone is almost worse for Shai. He sinks to the ground, hugging his knees. He couldn't look further from the bold boy of his dream.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DRIVING THROUGH WATERFALL GULLY - DAY

Shai and his staff are jammed up in the front seat of the school bus next to teacher MS KELLEY - mid 20's, idealist but sharp.

The bus is trundling through mundane forestry, but through Shai's eyes, the scenery is full of ANIMATED ASPECTS OF HISTORY/MYTHOLOGY. Elegant Elven folk crouch in trees, druids gather around a stone circle, a centaur gallops through the trees, bow and arrow in hand, a lion and unicorn fight and the turrets of a castle can be seen over the treetops.

Animated KING ARTHUR and LANCELOT ride past on great chargers, nodding politely to the boy; Shai grins, waves back.

What he does not see though is the black dog - very much real - loping along through the trees behind the bus.

EXT. WATERFALL GULLY - BELOW THE FALLS - DAY

At the base of a beautiful waterfall - much like the one from Shai's dream - the class gathers around the teacher. Picnic benches dot the area and everyone is drowsy in the afternoon sun.

MS KELLEY

Alright guys, this is our lunch spot. We have one hour, and then we will be identifying flora and fauna.

(beat, sarcastic)

I appreciate your enthusiasm. Stay in this area, ok.

The class dissolves into its many cliques. Shai doesn't belong to any of them. Looks to Faith, but she's preoccupied with her friends.

He looks longingly to the top of the falls. Grins, as he imagines: ANIMATED King Arthur and Lancelot duelling at the top of the waterfall, sword blades flashing in the sun.

Nearby is an enticing sign: FALLS WALK. Shai looks down to his staff and lame leg. Considers. Decides. He sets off.

Behind, Gerry nudges Frik, points to Shai. They nod, grin, start to follow.

Behind them, something large and black with mad red eyes also follows Shai through the trees...

EXT. WATERFALL GULLY - WATERFALL TOP - DAY

It's peaceful at the top of the waterfall, and the class looks a long way down below. Shai limps - heavily now, it's been a hard climb for him - out of the trees. Proudly takes in the view. The falls themselves are obscured by a wooden safety railing.

Shai spins his staff upside down, brandishes it like a sword. Imagines: ANIMATED King Arthur and Lancelot breaking off their combat. Lancelot graciously stands back as Arthur steps forward, bows to Shai. They circle cautiously. Shai thrusts with his staff; Arthur evades, steps around in a half circle; Shai spins with him, thrusting again -

- right at Geri and Frik, standing in front of him, their faces lit with anticipation of the taunting ahead. Shai gasps, clean drops his staff in embarrassed surprise.

GERI

What do you think Shai Cross-eyed is fighting this time, Frik?

FRIK

I'm not sure, Geri. Old Man Quinn, perhaps?

Both boys laugh mockingly while Shai, reddening, awkwardly fumbles for his staff. In shadows of the trees behind, the large dark shape stalks silently closer.

GERI

Of course! A worthy adversary.

Shai alone hears a low grow. His eyes shoot to the trees.

SHAI

Did you hear that?

GERI

Now he's hearing things too, Frik.

FRIK

Tut tut. Going to be Bedlam for you, Cross-eyed.

Now Shai spies the dark shape in the trees. Sees the flash of mad red eyes.

SHAI

No, seriously guys... there's something in the trees.

Shai sees: the big black dog, fully visible now.
Frik and Geri see: nothing there at all.

GERI

Did you bring your invisible dog again, Shai?

FRIK

Shall we find Old Man Quinn to beat it
off with his stick?

The dog starts to lope forward in slow, menacing bounds.

SHAI

Seriously! Behind you! Can't you see it?

The dog passes the boys - who can't see it at all. Eyes wide, Shai stumbles back, right against the wooden safety railing. Geri and Frik look uncertain for the first time.

GERI

Steady on Cross-eyed -

Shai cowers in terror as the black dog, all teeth and slobber and angry eyes LEAPS straight at him. The boy shouts, holds the staff defensively in front him -

FRIK

Er - Geri...

Frik and Geri see: Shai's body shudder as though taking a great impact from some invisible force. The railing groans - and splinters -

EXT. WATERFALL GULLY - WATERFALL BASE - DAY

Faith and her friends are sitting by the water's edge. She glances up to the top of the waterfall - seeing Shai break through the safety rail.

FAITH

Ms Kelley? Ms Kelley!!

All the girls scream now as they see Shai falling, falling, falling down the waterfall -

MS KELLEY

Shai!

EXT. WATERFALL GULLY - WATERFALL - DAY

There's farce with the fear as Shai falls through thin air, the dog still tackling him. Face to slavering snout, Shai yells. The dog snaps at him. Shai pushes it away, tries to swim away through the air. Looks down. Sees the lake rushing up towards him.

SHAI

Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!

And then the ring around his neck floats in front of his eyes. He reaches out, holds it. Rolls in the air onto his back -

EXT. NIGHTMARE

- but now he's under the neck of a horse, and he's screaming and it's dark all around as the horse falls down and down and down upon him -

SHAI'S MOTHER v/o
Shai!

FAITH v/o
Shai!

EXT. WATERFALL GULLY - BELOW THE FALLS - DAY

- and the whole class is gathered together, watching as Shai hits the water. Hard. A huge splash sprays up from the impact -

- but deep below, under the water, Shai is sinking, eyes wide, bubbles streaming up from his mouth, and still clutching the ring -

SHAI
(silently mouthing)
Muuuuuuuuuum!

ANIMATED: ESTORIA**INT. CAVE - NIGHT**

- as with a loud CRACK and flash of light, he lands with a *thunk* on his back on the hard stone ground, soaked to the skin and coughing up water. There's a whisper of falling water all around.

Shai groans, but pulls himself up to his elbows. He's in a large spartan cave, lit by bracketed torches. The ground is just dusty hard stone. In the centre is an immaculate but small anvil; a hearth is embedded into one wall; another is covered in cave paintings; a small darkened doorway leads into the cave; and at the other end...

Entranced, Shai rises, wincing, and walks - without a trace of his limp - to the sheet of water that forms the fourth wall of the cave. He gingerly extends one hand, and laughs as the water sprays off it. He's behind a waterfall.

Suddenly there's a loud CRACK and flash of light as his staff appears from the middle of nowhere and falls - right onto Shai's head! It clatters to the floor a few feet away.

SHAI
Owww!

He steps forward to pick up the cane - and realises his left leg is carrying his weight.

SHAI
No way...

He steps again, and again, and jumps, and crouches - and he can do all of it! Delighted, he cavorts over to investigate the paintings.

There are seven, each somehow made sinister by the low flickering of the torchlight. There's a palpable change of atmosphere now - this is a sacred place.

SHAI
(reads)
'The Seven'...

The first is of knight, sword in hand, slaying a dragon.

The second is of a young lad setting out from a small shack with a jaunty step, a single bag across his back, heading towards a distant castle.

The third is of a man on a boat at sea, looking through a telescope to land on the distant horizon -

- but he gets no further, because there's another flash of light and resounding CRACK - and the very angry black dog falls from thin air!

For a long moment, boy and dog stare at one another, mutually surprised - but the dog gathers its wits first, uttering a huge, throaty growl.

It leaps forwards. Shai shouts, sprints for all he's worth across the cave, snatching up his staff as the dog snaps at his heels, and leaps for his life - through the waterfall -

INT. CREEPY CRYPT - NIGHT

Vampires Geri and Friek blink in polite surprise as, with a flash of light and loud CRACK, Shai and the black dog hurtle into the crypt from thin air.

Shai stumbles to his knees. Adrenalin charged, he grabs his staff and wielding it like a baseball bat, takes a desperate swing at the dog - miraculously managing to knock it right across the muzzle.

The black dog is cross-eyed stunned for a moment, before whimpering and turning tail, leaping through a window with a stream of shattering glass. Shai leaps up.

SHAI
(intoxicated by his victory)
Yeah! You better run, buddy!

And then turns around, jumping at the sight of the three other people already in the crypt. Seeing the vampires:

SHAI
You! And you!

As in his dream, Shai has clearly interrupted them menacing a woman, again tied to the central altar. This time though, it isn't Faith.

CAPER looks to be in her 20's, a wild beauty, and like Faith, dressed in the same flowing white gown with flowers in her hair. Also like Faith, she's very pissed off, glaring at her would-be rescuer.

SHAI

And, er, who are you?

CAPER

Who am I? I'm an innocent defenceless young woman being menaced by vampires. What does it look like?! The pertinent question is: who are you to barge in - and what was with that dog?

Shai looks hesitantly from the bound but bad-tempered maiden in apparent distress to the grinning vampires. The picture isn't quite right, but nonetheless, he squares his shoulders and tries to be a man.

SHAI

Oh, um, never fear, I will... save you?

CAPER

Don't you dare even try!

FRIK

Shai Starcross. Finally we have you right where we want you.

SHAI

(looks around nervously)
Who, me?

CAPER

Hang on - that's the great Shai Starcross? But - he's just a kid.

GERI

He is a mighty warrior, disguised as a child.

Realising that his fantasy world and real life are colliding, Shai starts to look embarrassed.

SHAI

This really is Estoria, isn't it?

CAPER

(testy)
Was last time I checked.

SHAI

(excited)
Oh my god. I'm really in Estoria!

Caper collapses back down on the altar.

CAPER

Great. I'm being 'rescued' by a fool.

FRIK

We will take you to our Dark Mistress,
Queen Mab, to do with you as she will.

Shai starts to realise the potential danger of his situation.

SHAI

Um, actually, that doesn't sound so good
this time around...

FRIK

And have this innocent defenceless young
woman for dinner.

CAPER

(disgust)

Oh please. Not likely, mate.

She sits right up, the ropes around her arms and legs
ripping free as though they were made of nothing more than
cobwebs. Grabs Frik by the shirt.

CAPER

I was going to surprisingly stake you
right when you tried to bite me, but the
prank's up now.

Frik hisses and bars his teeth. Completely unfazed, Caper
reaches for the flowers in her hair, pulling out the clip,
just as Faith did in Shai's dream.

SHAI

Watch out, it won't work!

Caper stabs Frik with the shaft of the clip - and indeed, it
crumbles to dust. She looks to Shai, mildly impressed.
Punches Frik out instead and slides off the altar. Shai is
awestruck by her brazen confidence.

SHAI

Who are you?

CAPER

Caper's the name, trouble's the game.

SHAI

(impressed)

Cooooool.

(catches himself)

Ahem. So, er, what do we do now?

CAPER

You're the big hero. You tell me.

SHAI
Um, actually, about that -

CAPER
(disinterested)
Whatever. I was banking on some stake
action. Got any holy water?

SHAI
Not going to work on these two.

Caper rips her white dress up the centre, tears the elegant
sleeves right off. Cracks her knuckles loudly.

CAPER
Plan B then. Let's see the great Shai
Starcross in action.

Shai looks panicked. Attempts to brandish his staff like
some from of weapon. Looks like a complete plonker.

Frik and Geri advance, hissing, fangs on full show.

CAPER
(doubtfully)
You sure you know how to use that?

SHAI
No!

Frik and Geri leap at Shai, who waves his staff randomly at
them. Frik hisses loudly, baring his fangs. Shai yelps,
drops his staff and rushes backwards, falling over a
sarcophagus.

CAPER
I thought you were a 'mighty warrior'!

SHAI
Not exactly! Long story.

CAPER
(shaking her head)
Gimme that -

She snatches up his staff, twirls it impressively then
sharply belts both Geri and Frik. Geri rises, scowling, and
clicks his fingers.

Suddenly all the sarcophagi start to rumble and the crypt
is filled with the scraping sound of lids being pushed off.
Dozens more vampires climb from their coffins.

Shai looks around in terror, sidles towards the relative
safety of Caper, who appears only mildly concerned.

CAPER
I think perhaps it's time for Plan C.

The vampires form a snarling, threatening ring around Caper and Shai.

SHAI

Which is?

Caper hands Shai back his staff, grabs him by the hand and drags him through the closing ring.

CAPER

Run!

They run for the crypt doors, Friik and Geri and the other vampires hot on their heels -

EXT. GRAVE YARD & MANOR HOUSE - NIGHT

- into an overgrown, properly gothic graveyard. Ahead looms a sinister looking manor house. Shai heads straight for it, weaving through the decrepit headstones. Friik and Geri take flight, buzzing around the two of them, while the other vampires spill out of the crypt behind them.

CAPER

(as she runs, evading Friik)

Kid - where - are - you - going?!

SHAI

(clumsily batting off Geri with his staff)

The - house! Vampires can't go - where they're not - invited!

CAPER

But that only works -

Too late! Shai reaches the heavy wooden door, hauls it open and flings himself in. Caper shakes her head, punches Friik hard as he buzzes by and follows the boy in.

INT. QUEEN MAB'S HOUSE - NIGHT

CAPER

- if it's not already their own house.

Shai looks around the creepy black-and-white flagged entry hall and its magnificent grand staircase. There's an ethereal quality. The house doesn't quite seem to be in focus.

SHAI

Oh. Guess I didn't think of that. Is this their house?

CAPER

(grimly)

It's the dream-house of their mistress, Queen Mab.

SHAI

Oh. Doesn't sound so bad.

CAPER

That depends on whether you have nice dreams... or nightmares.

SHAI

Don't suppose you know why Queen Mab is looking for me?

At the top of the stairs, a swirl of darkness manifests.

CAPER

Why don't you ask her yourself?

The swirling darkness resolves itself into QUEEN MAB - youthful 40s, tall, pale, sharp beauty, clothed in dark robes lined with deep purples and blues. Her eyes are a dark violet. She slowly begins to descend the stairs.

She looks quite like Shai's mother.

QUEEN MAB

(cold, deep, velvety voice)

You are unwelcome in my realm, Caper. You tease my servants. You barge uninvited into my home.

At the bottom of the stairs, she looks appraisingly upon Shai.

QUEEN MAB

So, what gift have you bought to appease me?

CAPER

Wotcha, Mab. May I present the alleged warrior Shai Starcross. Shai, Queen Mab of Faerie, bringer of dreams and nightmares.

QUEEN MAB

(slow, savouring the words)

Finally, Shai. You return to me. To your beloved mother.

SHAI

I'm sorry?

Queen Mab looks upon Shai with a frightening hunger in her eyes. He looks anxiously to Caper, who watches Mab coldly.

SHAI

My... mother?

QUEEN MAB

Yes, dear. You were stolen from me as a child, and taken to another world. A world far from here.

SHAI

How could you know about my world?

She reaches forward to brush his cheek with her cold fingertips.

QUEEN MAB

(softly)

I know everything about you.

Shai flinches, steps back. Glances at his watch.

SHAI

Gosh, is that the time? Do you know what? I think there's been some mistake. I'm not Shai Starcross. I mean my name is Shai, but Shai Crossley, and I'm no hero, and I'm certainly not your son, and actually, I'd really like to go home now.

QUEEN MAB

Dear child, you don't understand. This is your home. You belong here, in my dream realm.

SHAI

(firmly)

I need to see my mother. Dad and I have to take her to hospital today.

QUEEN MAB

I told you. I am your mother.

SHAI

No. You're not.

Queen Mab pulls herself up to her full height, towering over the boy. Darkness seems to flow all around her.

QUEEN MAB

You dare reject me?!

CAPER

Mab, that's enough. You're not exactly selling yourself to the kid. And you know that you can't keep a child in Faerie against his will.

QUEEN MAB

Oh, he will choose to stay with me. For I control his dreams - and his nightmares.

Darkness swirls up from around Queen Mab, consuming the entire entrance hall.

EXT. SWIRLING DARKNESS - NIGHT

There's nothing left of the house now, just this strange world of mist and shadows. In the eerie darkness, the sound of galloping hooves draws near.

CAPER

Uh-oh. That does not sound good.

SHAI

It's a... horse?

A magnificent black horse bursts from the darkness, a single pin-prick of red light within each eye.

CAPER

No, it's a Night Mare! Run!

Caper grabs Shai's hand and starts to drag him away through the swirling darkness, the horse hot on their tail.

QUEEN MAB o/s

(triumphant)

You cannot outrun my mares, Caper!

Shai trips and falls to his hands and knees, almost lost in the swirling dark clouds. Caper stops also, hauls him back to his feet.

CAPER

She's right, we can't outrun it.

The Night Mare closes in on them, snorting and shaking its wild mane -

SHAI

Then what are we going to do?

CAPER

We're just going to have to face it.
Close your eyes.

Shai looks to her in fear. She squeezes his hand.

CAPER

Trust me.

Shai closes his eyes - the mare is still galloping full tilt at them - he grimaces, anticipating the impact - but the horse just turns translucent as she passes through the boy, and then disappears altogether. As do Caper and Shai.

EXT. FARM YARD - DAY

It's a peaceful, sunny afternoon. In a neat farm yard, CHILD SHAI, aged 8 years, leads a spirited black horse into a round yard. The horse is bridled, but there's no saddle. He probably couldn't reach.

Shai and Caper appear by the round yard fence. They open their eyes: Caper is curious, but Shai is mortified.

SHAI

No. Not here. Anywhere but here.

Once inside the round yard, the horse becomes more nervous and fidgety. Child Shai soothes it gently. Climbs carefully onto the fence.

Shai walks slowly to the round yard fence. Grips with the rail with whitened knuckles.

Caper steps up to the rail next to him.

SHAI

Why are we here? I don't want to be here again.

CAPER

This is your worst nightmare, Shai. Mab has sent you here to punish you.

SHAI

We have to leave. Now.

CAPER

We can't. Unless you agree to surrender yourself to her. But trust me - you don't want to do that.

Child Shai climbs, bareback, from the fence onto the horse. It snorts, jumps away. He's a good rider - stays quiet, strokes the horse's neck.

SHAI

(quietly)

Caper? Have you ever done something really terrible?

In the distance, his mother, riding back into the yard on another horse, sees Child Shai in the round yard.

SHAI

Something you knew you shouldn't do?

The restless horse rears. And rears. And rears again.

CAPER

Of course. Everyone has. It's called living.

Shai's mother is running towards the round yard now.

SHAI'S MOTHER

(distant echo)

Shai!

SHAI

Did it... did it hurt other people?

The horse over-balances at the top the rear. Starts to fall backwards. Child Shai clings to its neck, his fingers knotted into the wild mane - this is the moment of his recurring nightmare. He's pinned underneath the animal as they crash down, his left leg crushed.

CAPER
(sadly)
Yes. It did.

Shai's mother takes the reins, tries to pull the horse off her son. She's caught across the head with a wildly thrashing hoof. Behind, her Shai's father leaps the fence.

CAPER
All the important ones.

Caper blinks hard, pulls herself back from her own memories. Takes Shai by the shoulders, hauls him around to face her.

CAPER
Shai. Listen to me. It's only a nightmare. This isn't really happening.

SHAI
(tears welling)
Yes it is! It's happening all the time, Caper! In my head! Every time I look at her!

The horse rolls off Child Shai and lurches away. He tries to drag himself to his mother. She lies perfectly still. Blood runs down her face. There's a definite resemblance to Queen Mab.

Shai pulls away from Caper, runs into the round yard. Crouches by his mother, tears running down his face.

SHAI
I'm sorry, mum. I'm so sorry...

Shai's mother's eyes snap open - he scrabbles back in shock - but they're not her eyes. They're dark violet.

SHAI
Queen Mab?!

Caper follows him into the round yard.

CAPER
Shai, it's an illusion!

SHAI
(breathless)
You're... really my mother?

Shai's mother sits up, her eyes locked onto his.

QUEEN MAB/SHAI'S MOTHER
Look at what you did to me, Shai.

SHAI
No, I didn't - it was an accident. You're not my mother!

QUEEN MAB
If not for you, Shai, your mother would be fine.

SHAI
Wh - what?

QUEEN MAB
What must your father think of you, when he looks upon his broken wife every day?

SHAI
That's... that's not true. He loves me.

QUEEN MAB
It is true, and you know it. You think it every time you look in the mirror.

That's below the belt. Shai drops to his knees, defeated.

CAPER
(glaring furiously at Mab)
Shai, don't listen to her -

QUEEN MAB
But I will always love you.

CAPER
Shai -

SHAI
Please... stop...

QUEEN MAB
It can stop anytime. I can take it all away.
Shai looks up, tears in his eyes, his face imploring.

SHAI
(whisper)
I don't want to feel bad any more.

CAPER
Listen to me, she's going to take away your mother. Your family. Your life.
Caper crouches next to Shai, takes him by the shoulders.

CAPER
For all the pain, do you really want that? To forget her?

Caper's eyes beg Shai to reconsider. Gradually, he does.

SHAI

No.

(slowly looks straight at Mab)

I don't want to forget my mother.

Queen Mab frowns. Darkness swirls from around her once more. She looks less beautiful now. Behind her comes the distant drum of galloping hooves.

QUEEN MAB

Although your love for your mother is strong, Shai, I will make you forget her.

A Night Mare plunges from the gathering darkness, froth down its neck, it's red pin-prick eyes wild. Shai clutches Caper as it charges right through them -

EXT. WATERFALL - NIGHT

It's the same waterfall from Shai's opening nightmare - and he's falling down it again, this time with Caper. Mab hovers far above them, further away by the second. Below, huge bone-crushing rocks await.

QUEEN MAB

Think about my offer, while you fall!

CAPER

(shouting over the wind as they drop)

Shai, you gotta get us out of here!

SHAI

(desperate, looking down in terror)

But it's only a dream though, right?

CAPER

Trust me, we still don't want to die, even in your dreams!

SHAI

Well what do I do?

CAPER

There are only two choices when you're falling, Shai. You die - or you fly!

SHAI

Well how do you expect to do that?!

CAPER

I don't know, we're in your dream!

Shai is baffled for a moment - then grins. They are only moments from hitting the water and rocks below, when there's a *wooooooshing* sound -

- and a brightly coloured dragon plunges out from behind the waterfall! Caper and Shai fall onto its back, narrowly

saved from certain death-by-rocks. They both laugh with hysterical relief.

CAPER

Now this is what I call flying!

Shai crouches low over the dragon's neck and urges it back up the falls towards Mab, waiting in disbelief above.

CAPER

Go get her, kid!

The dragon shoots up, right at Queen Mab. For a moment it looks like she'll stand her ground - but at the last moment, with a terrible scowl, she disappears.

QUEEN MAB o/s

This isn't over yet, Shai!!

The dragon disappears, the waterfall disappears -

INT. QUEEN MAB'S HOUSE - NIGHT

- and back in the entry hall of Queen Mab's house, Caper and Shai tumble to the ground, still laughing at their audacious escape.

This time though, the house is fully in focus, but derelict and dusty, as though undisturbed for years. As the laughter subsides, Shai looks around, confused. Every movement leaves dark shapes in the dust.

SHAI

What's happened to this place?

CAPER

We were never really here. We were in Mab's realm. This is real Estoria now.

SHAI

She's not... she's not really my mum though... is she?

Caper shrugs and stamps about, enjoying making a mess in the dust.

CAPER

Dunno. She does look like your mum though. Come on.

Shai follows Caper to the towering front doors. She throws them open - and expectedly finds herself face to face with a HOODED ROBED FIGURE. Frowns:

CAPER

King Herla?

The old man sweeps down his hood. Shai gasps. We too have seen this man before.

SHAI
Old Man Quinn?!

Shai immediately blushes at his rudeness. QUINN nods courteously. This is Quinn as we saw him at the bus stop, with his magnificent silvery mane and tall wooden staff.

QUINN
At your service, Caper, Shai.

CAPER
(touch of hostility)
Why are you here, Herla?

QUINN
When I heard he was in Estoria, I came to meet our young hero, Shai Starcross.

SHAI
Qui - King Herla, you know that's not my name. That's just something I... made up. You know I'm just an ordinary kid. A coward and a cripple, in the real world.

QUINN
I think our understanding of 'the real world' may differ somewhat, Shai. In this place, you are Shai Starcross, a name known all across these lands.

Quinn taps his forehead lightly.

QUINN
In Estoria, it's your imagination that matters.

SHAI
But why I am here? And how can I go home? Sir?

QUINN
I suspect the same thing that bought you here will take you back home.

Quinn reaches out, gently draws out the ring around Shai's neck. Looks upon it reverentially.

SHAI
I don't understand.

CAPER
That better not be what I think it is, Herla.

SHAI
But - it's only my mother's ring. It's not magic. It's from my world.

QUINN
And how did you get here from your world,
Shai?

SHAI
Well, I was falling...

FLASHBACK: WATERFALL GULLY:

As Shai falls down the waterfall, the ring floats into his line of vision. He holds it.

END FLASHBACK

SHAI
And I was holding it. But that's all.

QUINN
Is it really?

FLASHBACK WATERFALL GULLY:

- but deep below, under the water, Shai is sinking, face up, terror across his face. He's still clutching the ring -

SHAI
(silently mouthing)
Muuuuuuuuuum!

END FLASHBACK

Shai frowns with concentration.

SHAI
I called for her...

CAPER
(gently)
Your mother?

QUINN
I'll let you work out the rest.
(to Caper)
Your sisters send their regards, Caper.

Caper's face turns carefully neutral. Shai takes a double take between Quinn's challenging tone and her lack of response. In the stiff silence:

SHAI
Well that's nice.
(beat)
Isn't it...?

CAPER
It's not important.

Awkward pause.

SHAI

Quinn... Queen Mab isn't really my mum,
is she? Only... she does kind of look
like her.

QUINN

I do not have all the answers you seek,
Shai. But I can tell you who will know.
Join Caper in her search for The Seven.

CAPER

Heeeey -

King Herla winks mischievously at Caper's protest. He regally lifts one arm, disappearing as though sweeping himself away. Baffled, Shai steps out of the house, looking around for him.

EXT. GRAVE YARD & MANOR HOUSE - NIGHT

In the graveyard, the sun is starting to rise on the horizon. Everything seems less frightening now.

SHAI

Caper? Who are The Seven?

CAPER

Oh. Well, they're like... the foundation
on which Estoria is built.

SHAI

So... they're like gods?

CAPER

Goodness no. Estoria is full of gods,
last thing we need is more. No, it's more
like... you know how you keep seeing
stories repeating?

SHAI

Yeah.

CAPER

Well there are seven.

SHAI

Oh.

(remembers)

I think I saw pictures of them. In a
cave.

INTERCUT:

The first of the cave paintings from the waterfall cave:

SHAI o/s

There was a knight slaying a dragon.

The painting comes to life in glorious full colour, predominantly oranges, as the Knight, having killed the beast, rests his blade tip to the ground, his cloak swirling magnificently around him.

CAPER o/s

That's Orus, the story of Overcoming the Monster.

INTERCUT:

The second painting:

SHAI o/s

Then there was a young man setting out, like on a journey, towards a castle.

The painting comes to life in full colour, predominantly reds, as the young man, aging to middle age, walks towards an unusual chair: its left side is plain wood, its right side throne-like. He sits, in his left hand a horseshoe, in the right a bejewelled goblet.

CAPER o/s

Raya, the essence of Rags to Riches.

INTERCUT:

The third cave painting:

SHAI o/s

And a man on a boat, looking towards land.

The painting comes to life in full colour, predominantly greens, as the boats speeds to the shore and the man's waiting family. At the prow of the boat, he holds his telescope in his left hand, an anchor in the right.

CAPER o/s

(reluctant pause)

Varet, who represents Voyage and Return.

NORMAL VIEW:

In the graveyard, Caper and Shai companionably stroll through the gravestones.

SHAI

There were more, but I was a bit busy being chased by the dog by then.

CAPER

Yes, that's no ordinary black dog. I shudder to think of what beast you have bought into Estoria, Shai.

SHAI

It was an accident! I didn't mean to. It had been chasing me all day.

Shai readies himself to ask an invasive question.

SHAI

Caper - why are you looking for The Seven?

Caper hesitates before answering. Pauses her stride. In their preoccupation, neither of them notices the sinister black shape creeping through the gravestones behind.

CAPER

Because I want to ask them to change my story.

SHAI

I don't understand.

CAPER

I have the misfortune of knowing my future, Shai. I'm not foolish enough to think I can evade it, but The Seven have the power to change it.

SHAI

Could they... could they change my mum's story? Make her well again?

CAPER

If anyone can, it's them. But they're not easy to find -

She breaks off as, shockingly, the huge black dog leaps right over a gravestone, tackling Shai to the ground. Caper grabs his staff and beats the beast off. It bounds away a few steps, turns, snarling viciously.

CAPER

Shai - I think this would be an excellent time to learn to use that ring again.

SHAI

Um, I don't really know how, last time I was under a lot of pressure -

The black dog rocks onto its hind legs, ready to leap at them again.

CAPER

I don't really think that's going to be a problem...

Shai grasps the ring in both hands - closes his eyes - the dog prepares to come in for the kill - Caper stands protectively in front of the boy, staff at the ready -

CAPER

Shai! Do it! Now!

The dog leaps - Shai's lips silently form the word 'mother...' - and they disappear! The black dog leaps right through thin air.

INT. CAVE - DAY

With a CRACK and flash of light, Caper appears, alone, Shai's cane still held up, in the cave.

CAPER
What the - Shai?

She looks all around. Recognition dawns. She knows this place.

CAPER
Oh dear.

She looks to the paintings on the wall of The Seven. Looks to one we haven't seen closely before -

MUSIC: Sound of Silence

*Hello darkness my old friend,
I've come to talk with you again...*

It's of a weeping woman holding a dead man across her lap.

*Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping...*

Caper turns away, saddened. Walks slowly to the waterfall. Takes a deep breath. Steps through.

*And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains -*

LIVE ACTION - REAL WORLD

EXT. LAKE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WATERFALL - DAY

MUTE - MUSIC ONLY

Within the sound of silence...

Back in the real world, silence and water close in over Shai, trapped under water, his eyes shooting open then closed, his limbs flailing wildly -

*In restless dreams I walked alone
Narrow streets of cobblestone*

- and then four arms are grabbing him, drawing him back up. Shai surfaces, spluttering wildly, Faith and Ms Kelley treading water at his sides.

*'Neath the halo of a streetlamp
I turned my collar to the cold and damp*

Shai looks around, stunned. Back in the real world? He panics.

SHAI
 (mute)
 Caper?
 No! Take me back!

ANIMATED: ESTORIA

EXT. DESERT - DAY

*When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of
 A neon light
 That split the night*

With a CRACK and flash of light, Caper steps from nowhere out into a vast desert. Pyramids can be seen far on the horizon.

And touched the sound of silence.

Music fades to background.

Caper looks out, curiously. Unafraid. But behind her, a giant sphinx crouches down menacingly.

SPHINX o/s
 Well hello there, Caper.

Caper turns slowly.

CAPER
 Ah.

SPHINX
 It's been too long. I believe we still have a score to settle.

The sphinx bares its great teeth and shakes its mane angrily.

CAPER
 (as if this is all his fault)
 Shaaaaaaaaai!

THE END... UNTIL NEXT WEEK...