

The Elemental  
by  
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Current Revisions  
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FADE IN:

1 INT. A VERY DARK PLACE - BARELY DAYLIGHT

1

Early 1980s. A YOUNG GIRL, 7 years old, clings to a tenement bannister with both hands as she steps slowly, fearfully downwards. Her eyes dart about, terrified of what might be in the shadows. She freezes as a woman shouts angrily from above.

WOMAN

(Unseen, echoing)

Karen! Are you down there? How many times have I told you? It's not safe!

KAREN puts her hands over her eyes and freezes, rooted to the spot.

CUT TO:

2 EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

2

The time is the present. The weather is damp and blustery - the sky leaden. A lurid poster in a window protests against cruelty to animals. Shoppers fill the pavements, some striding purposefully, some standing around, all ignoring the Evangelist on a box waving a Bible and ranting at passers-by...

EVANGELIST

...your neglect will spawn the demon of guilt, and it will feed on your sin and grow strong and seek you out, and the guilt will find you...

The rant can still be heard as we move down the street. A young woman, KAREN, studies the cards in the Job Centre window, then wanders off aimlessly through the crowds. An Alzheimer's CHARITY COLLECTOR holds out a collecting box. A pang of guilt crosses Karen's face. She hesitates.

EVANGELIST (CONT'D)

...and seize you, and gnaw at you...

Karen hesitantly puts a coin in the box.

EVANGELIST (CONT'D)

(distant)

...and eat at your heart and your soul...

Karen takes a few steps, stops again. She wrestles with her conscience. Then she takes out her mobile and keys a number.

OPERATOR

The number you have dialled is no longer in use. Please check the...

Karen cuts the call off, swearing under her breath. Then she heads down the road, in a new direction, reluctantly, but with a growing sense of purpose.

CUT TO:

3 INT. MOVING BUS - DAY 3

Earphones in, KAREN looks out at scruffy streets.

CUT TO:

4 EXT. CITY STREET - DAY 4

KAREN trudges down the road, hands stuffed in her pockets, shoulders hunched - a dismal figure in a dismal scene. A block of tenements is being demolished. Karen stops, watches with dismay. Then she moves on.

Just down the street the tenements are still standing, but with metal shutters over the lower windows. KAREN heads towards a large stair entrance and unlocks the door with one of a bunch of keys with a label attached.

CUT TO:

5 INT. STAIRWELL - DAY 5

KAREN starts cautiously up. We recognise the stair. There are worrying sounds of roosting pigeons, scurryings in the dark, creaking noises as if the nearby demolition is weakening this building too. Dust filters down from above, through the vertical beams of light. Karen stops as she reaches the first landing.

Faintly, we hear a child crying, a woman shouting, echoing as if from the past - perhaps her own.

Karen stops and takes out one of her earpieces, not sure what she's hearing. Nothing but the distant rumble of demolition. She wrinkles her nose, at a faint unpleasant smell. She hates this stair.

CUT TO:

6 INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

6

POV of KAREN seen from the flight below. She replaces her earpiece and moves forward again. She walks along the landing then starts up the second flight of steps. The stair light here is off, and the only illumination comes from the front door below and a lamp which flickers above her.

Suddenly there's a deafening screech of static from her headphones and she yanks them out of her ears...

KAREN

Aaaahh....

...and as she does it she gets a sudden imagined flash of an old couple, lying dead in their armchairs. She looks around again, and for a moment she seems to see something right on the edge of her peripheral vision, down at ground level. Faintly, we hear the sound of a child's voice...

CUT TO:

7 INT. HALLWAY - DAY

7

Back in the 1980s - the YOUNG GIRL looks up to an unseen adult.

YOUNG GIRL

If I think I see one... Why do I have to look away?

CUT TO:

8 INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

8

KAREN finishes the sentence.

KAREN

...cos if you look right at it - you'll die! Thanks Mum...

Unnerved, KAREN sets off upwards again. She hears an ever-so-faint rustling, and she speeds up. A shadow appears momentarily on the level below her, in time with her own movement - but not quite in the right place for her to be casting it. She starts to get a sense that something's moving up after her, exactly beneath her one floor down. She speeds up, and it seems to get faster too...

CUT TO:

9 INT. STAIRWELL BELOW KAREN - CONTINUOUS 9

POV as we follow her up, closer now, as she heads upstairs more and more briskly, then runs up the last flight. She batters on the door, and listens for movement in the flat. She shouts through the letterbox.

KAREN

It's me!

CUT TO:

10 INT. STAIRWELL TOP LANDING - CONTINUOUS 10

KAREN glances over her shoulder, and senses something coming rapidly closer. She strains to hear any sounds from within the flat.

KAREN

Fuck's sake!

She fumbles for her own bunch of keys.

CUT TO:

11 INT. STAIRWELL BELOW KAREN - CONTINUOUS 11

POV as we head faster and faster up towards her, lurching, erratic, jerky, faster still, but just as we hurtle up the last flight towards her KAREN manages to open the door and without looking back she pushes in and slams it behind her.

CUT TO:

12 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 12

Hesitantly KAREN crosses the hall and enters the living room. Her parents are sitting in their chairs. Karen takes in their gaunt emaciated forms, dimly silhouetted against the light from the window, and her face crumples in shock.

KAREN

Mum. It's me. Are you OK?

There's a long pause. Then BETTY's eyes open. Her eyes are milky-white, blind. She peers sightlessly in Karen's direction.

KAREN (CONT'D)

God you're thin! I was worried.  
How's Dad?

BETTY

We're both fine, thank you.

But clearly they are anything but. CHARLIE continues to sit, looking vacantly into space. Betty starts to stand up. She is frail and unsteady in her movements. Karen steps forward as if to help her mother, but seems reluctant to touch her.

KAREN

Are you eating all right?

At this Charlie turns to see who is speaking, but there is no recognition in his eyes as KAREN crouches down level with him. He looks frightened.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Hi Dad. It's me, Karen. Your wee girl.

She puts her hand on his. He looks alarmed.

KAREN (CONT'D)

How're you keeping Dad?

CHARLIE struggles to find something to say to this stranger who's treating him with such confusing familiarity.

CHARLIE

I've got a wee girl. But she's too busy to come and see us.

BETTY

He talks rubbish...

KAREN

(Looking deeply pensive  
into his vacant eyes)  
Where are you away to Dad?  
(Then more briskly)  
Come on, let's get the kettle on.

Karen stands up and walks through to the kitchen.

CHARLIE

She's too busy now... to come and see us...

CUT TO:

13

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

13

BETTY follows as fast as she can, scared of what KAREN will find. Karen opens the fridge. It is empty.

KAREN

You're out of milk... What about powdered?

She opens a cupboard, but there's nothing there except an old salt container and some empty jam jars. She opens another cupboard door, then another.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Mum, where's the food? What have you done with things?

Her mother bursts into tears.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Is it the stairs? Can you not manage? Christ, this is awful...

BETTY  
I try to open the door - but...  
...your father goes mental...

KAREN  
Why didn't you tell a neighbour?

BETTY  
I never hear anything downstairs anymore. I don't think there's anyone...

Karen gives her Mum a big hug, in tears herself now.

KAREN  
Why didn't you ask for help?

BETTY  
Aye, that'll be right! "You can't manage any more, Mrs Wishart!"  
An' he'd be in a home, and God knows where I'd be...

KAREN  
But you're not managing!

BETTY  
There's nothing wrong with me!  
It's him! I just want us all to stay together like a proper family.

From the living room they hear her father's voice, talking to himself.

CHARLIE  
They build their homes like woodlice,...

KAREN  
It's not been that long...

CHARLIE  
 ...in dark corners... beneath the  
 earth...

Karen looks questioningly at her mother, who pulls the door closed, to shut off his ramblings.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)  
 (still just audible)  
 Betty says she's a selfish little  
 cow. She broke her mother's  
 heart.

KAREN stamps through to the kitchen, while Betty goes back to the front room to shut Charlie up. Karen fills the kettle and switches it on.

KAREN  
 I can't believe this! I'm going  
 straight down to the shop. I'll  
 get tea and milk and food.

BETTY  
 Don't go!

CHARLIE  
 (from next door)  
 Who is she? Where is she going?

BETTY  
 She's not going anywhere!

Karen hisses crossly at her mother.

KAREN  
 You need help!

BETTY  
 You never listened to me! You'll  
 look - I know you will...

Karen is aghast that her mother seems to believe this nonsense.

CUT TO:

14 INT. HALLWAY - DAY

14

BETTY follows KAREN to the hall door, pulling at her sleeve. Karen looks furious. Her father's voice continues to rant on from the living room.

CHARLIE  
 (Out of vision)  
 They come in through locks with  
 no keys in them...

KAREN

Distract him. I'll be back in a minute.

Karen quietly unbolts the door and turns the mortise lock, then she opens the Yale and eases the door open.

CUT TO:

15

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

15

KAREN hears worried questions from the living room as she shuts the door on her mother's terrified face.

BETTY

(As the door shuts)  
Dad says don't look at it!

KAREN

(hisses at the closed door)  
Old cow.  
(Shakes her head angrily)  
Uh uh.

(As if to say - No more you don't...)

Karen sets off down the stairs. But after striding down the first landing, she falters. Judging by her frightened glances, her old fears are right back - she can't struggle free of them.

There's a rustling below her.

KAREN continues down, but out of the corner of her eye she thinks she sees something on the landing below, moving. She wants to look, and leans towards the rail, but realises she mustn't. She shields her eyes and starts down again.

A fleeting shadow flits closer to KAREN, who instantly looks away, shielding her eyes with her hands till she can only see a small gap ahead of her. The light seems to shift, and the shape of the stairs seems unstable.

Again she gets searing momentary images in her head of awful things which could have happened to her parents - and their grotesque putrefying flesh.

Little shadows seem to move where they shouldn't, and she stops again. Her breath is coming faster and faster - she's hyper-ventilating in blind panic. She takes a step down again, and the rustling and fleeting shadows intensify with more flashes of horrific images of her parents.

A faint voice echoes from above - shouted, but from behind the closed door.

CHARLIE  
(Out of vision)  
Let her go!

KAREN tries to scream but the sound she makes is more a blind panicky whimpering. She stands rooted to the spot with her eyes covered.

She is pinched, tugged at, taunted, scratched - by something we cannot see properly - anything to make her look. A scratching, scraping, scrabbling noise builds to a crescendo.

From above we hear the sound of a door opening - and suddenly, it is dead quiet.

Half-way down KAREN stands, rooted to the spot, her face behind her hands.

Then Karen's mother's voice echoes down the stair, weak, fearful...

BETTY  
(Out of vision)  
Karen!

Karen doesn't move.

BETTY (CONT'D)  
(OOV)  
Are you down there?

Karen remains standing, paralysed, hands over her eyes, in the same place and the same position we saw her as a little girl. Her breathing comes in shudders.

Her mother calls out, into the darkness.

BETTY (CONT'D)  
(OOV)  
It's OK pet. Yer mammy's here.

Slowly, Karen removes her fingers, her eyes still clenched shut.

BETTY (CONT'D)  
(OOV)  
Karen? I was just telling stories!

Slowly, Karen opens her eyes.

Big mistake.

Her eyes bulge in stark terror, and then for the briefest of moments with a tumult of noise another pair of eyes flash open - bloodshot-green, terrifying, inhuman - and a monstrous face lunges directly towards us.

CUT TO BLACK.

A long pause. Then we hear flies buzzing.

CUT TO:

16 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

16

The room is dusty, abandoned. The buzzing gets louder. Very slowly, we move past the corpses of BETTY and CHARLIE. They sit in their chairs, just as they were when KAREN arrived. Their bodies are heavily decomposed, desiccated. They have been dead for a long time.

Beyond them, in the kitchen, steam rises from the spout of the kettle.

CUT TO:

17 INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

17

KAREN lies sprawled on the stone steps, dead. Her eyes are wide open.

CUT TO:

18 INT. KITCHEN - DAY

18

The switch on the boiling kettle clicks off.

CUT TO BLACK.