

THE LIVING FOSSILS

Pilot: "Uong Nước"

by

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Series

A young biochemist must face her wild past and challenge her scientific future when she teams up with a Vietnamese horseshoe crab to find her mother, who was lost at sea near Fossil Island.

Episode

A Vietnamese girl's trip to her ancestral island takes a dark turn when its ancient creatures leave her and her mother lost at sea.

Revised Draft
12/12/2025

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PROLOGUE

NOTHING... Then we hear the diverse sounds of the SEA: waves crashing against sharp rocks and the famished calls of gulls.

A QUOTE APPEARS OVER BLACK:

"UONG NUỐC NHO NGUON." - VIETNAMESE PROVERB - MY PARENTS

SUBTITLE: WHEN DRINKING WATER, REMEMBER THE SOURCE.

FADE IN:

EXT. SEA - NOON - SEPTEMBER 22, 2034

Through the bright, misty surface of the water, we see a mother HORSESHOE CRAB. She serenely rests on the sandy bottom.

Dialogue in *italics* is spoken in Vietnamese and will be subtitled in English.

We hear the warm voice of a Vietnamese woman, Cát. Then the voice of her four-year-old daughter, Acadia.

CÁT (V.O.)

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

The shore feels safe, but the open sea knows truth.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)

No souls lost on my watch. Splash!

A gleaming JUVENILE horseshoe crab, full of energy, flips out of the mist and dives into the churning open waters.

CÁT (V.O.)

Gentle currents change nothing. The powerful crashes of waves are what reshapes sand.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)

Does it make a loud noise?

The mother horseshoe crab rises from the sand, diving in after her young.

CÁT (V.O.)

Very loud. A kinetic clash that shakes us creatures awake.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)

We are creatures? Like monsters? With sharp claws? Hard shells?

CÁT (V.O.)

*We're armored for a reason, little
one. The world has sharp teeth.*

The mother lifts her offspring high on her broad shell,
effortlessly guiding her.

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

We follow the horseshoe crabs as they submerge and glide
through the water. Their movements are majestic compared to
the frantic fishes around them. They soon settle in a bay.
The daughter swims in tight spirals.

CÁT (V.O.)

*A calm bay must break its own
shoreline to stay an open sea.*

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)

Change won't wait for us?

A sudden, aggressive, mechanical roar of a boat motor cuts
through the water.

CÁT (V.O.)

(in English)

Change says... Out with the old...

A vast, looming boat's shadow swallows all the light. The
mother looks up in pure terror.

A massive, heavy iron ANCHOR drops, an overwhelming object
that fills the frame as it plunges directly towards her baby.

CÁT (V.O.)

...In with the-

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)

New!

The mother instinctively shields her baby just as the anchor
slams down with a deafening CRUNCH, stirring up a violent,
blinding cloud of silt and sand that obscures everything.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ACADIA'S BEDROOM - DAWN, EARLIER THAT SAME DAY

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW is a distant BILLBOARD advertising two
horseshoe crabs for an aquarium. The graphic reads "Hóa Thach
Song" and "Luc Nay 2034." Below, appears the title:

THE LIVING FOSSILS

SUBTITLE: Earlier that day...

"LIFE NEVER GETS OLD" SONG

ACADIA'S POV: Acadia Tran (8) holds up a VIETNAMESE LEAF HAT (nón lá) to her window, perfectly framing the horseshoe crabs billboard. She pulls up a phone and snaps a photo through an animal app. The screen displays the Latin: *Tachypleus gigas*.

YOUNG ACADIA

New word of the day. Tac-hi-

CÁT (O.S.)

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

Trời ơi, con nho này!

(Oh goodness, this girl!)

Acadia turns to face her mom CÁT LÝ (32) at her bedroom door. Still in Acadia's POV, the hat Acadia holds obscures Cát's face. All we see is Cát decked out in a physician's coat.

Cát cascades "love" that only a Vietnamese mom would give.

YOUNG ACADIA

Oh my goodness, today is-

CÁT

*Troi đất ơi, cai phòng nhu heo,
thôi quá trời!*

(Oh my god, you live like
a pig, it stinks to high
heaven!)

SUBTITLE: Oh god, you smell like heaven!

YOUNG ACADIA

Me (Mom). It's MY day today, okay?
We ain't speaking none of that.

CÁT

Thức dậy thê ôm PHONE!

(You wake up hugging that
phone!)

SUBTITLE: Please waste your life on your phone!

YOUNG ACADIA

It's YOUR phone- For my special
day, we're speaking ALIEN.

CÁT

Cadi. Huh. *Ngang nhu cua.*

(Stubborn as a crab.)

You're speaking my *second* language.

Well... *Nhìn gì?*

(What are you looking at?)

Acadia drops her hat. Cát vanished from the doorway.

CÁT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Saddle up! Put on your shoes!

YOUNG ACADIA
Love you!

We see her room full of science posters and advanced gadgets. On the 2034 calendar, September 22 is marked "Sinh nhat."

From a wardrobe, she grabs a SAILOR-STYLE school uniform and puts it on. We see a framed photo of a mysterious U.S. COAST GUARD serviceman holding a baby. He wears a NAUTILUS SHELL NECKLACE and has a HORSESHOE CRAB TATTOO on his left wrist.

Acadia wraps a RED NECKERCHIEF around her collar, playfully making a beard out of it. We see her face for the first time.

A motorcycle revs up, as well as the percussion.

CÁT (O.S.)
Cadi (ka-dee)! ACADIA BANYU TRAN!!!

YOUNG ACADIA
THAT NEVER GETS OLD!

She straps her hat on her back and hops out the window.

EXT. TRAN HOUSE IN HAIPHONG, VIETNAM - CONTINUOUS

Acadia slides down the roof tiles. On the street level, Cát sits on an old motorcycle. We don't yet see her face.

Acadia lands behind her.

CÁT
Keep playing with my neckerchief,
dear. It's stretching its limits.

YOUNG ACADIA
Whatever floats your boat. Hey! No
scooter today?

CÁT
We're running errands in style!

Cát puts on her own leaf hat, concealing her face. The motorcycle speeds off.

THIS IS WHERE THE MUSIC KICKS IN!

EXT. THE CITY OF HAIPHONG - CONTINUOUS

MONTAGE.

Cát drives Acadia through bustling markets and ports. The city is a vibrant clash of tradition and 2034 modernity.

Acadia sings over the engine noises and honks.

YOUNG ACADIA
WE'VE COME ALONG
WAY
FROM FEELING WRONG.
BUT NOT TODAY
IN OUR CITY OF-

CROWD
HAIPHONG!

YOUNG ACADIA
THIS IS VIETNAM TO THE WORLD
WITH ITS
BANH MI SOLD
SHIPS TO BEHOLD

CROWD
IT NEVER GETS OLD!

YOUNG ACADIA
THIS IS VIETNAM TO THE WORLD
AT ITS BEST WITH ITS
HOT POTS THAT BOIL
TO SUGARCANE, ICE COLD

CROWD
IT NEVER GETS OLD!

CÁT
NOTHING IN VIETNAM FITS THE WORLD
WE ARE A WEIRD BUNCH
FROM THESE WILD PEOPLE
TO THE CITY CROWS

As Cát drives and sings, we get a quick shot of a NAUTILUS TATTOO on her left wrist and HORSESHOE CRAB on her right.

INT. KARAOKE BAR - CONTINUOUS

A crowd is singing along to this song. The lyric of the televisions reads "Chúng ta sẽ không bao giờ già đi."

CROWD
WE NEVER GET OLD!

EXT. KARAOKE BAR / CERAMICS STORE - CONTINUOUS

Acadia sits alone on the parked motorcycle on the sidewalk.

YOUNG ACADIA
EXCEPT THE KARAOKE, SING-ALONGS.
THAT GETS OLD~

CÁT (O.S.)
This is not my kid...
Ăn đòn không, muốn ăn đòn không?!
(Want a beating? Are you
asking for one?!)

SUBTITLE: I love you so much, it hurts.

YOUNG ACADIA
Troi đất oi! THAT NEVER GETS-

Cát hands Acadia a gift-wrapped bowl. Acadia deflates.

YOUNG ACADIA (CONT'D)
BOWL? ANOTHER CÁI BÁT (BOWL)?

CÁT
They never get ol-

YOUNG ACADIA
I got one for each day of the week.

CÁT
Now you have eight.

YOUNG ACADIA
(Mockingly)
And when I'm old like you, I'll
have one for everyday of the month.

CÁT
Darling. The point of this song is:
I NEVER GET OLD!

Acadia turns the motorcycle's mirror towards Cát. We see her whole face for the first time, a warm smile full of life, but-

CÁT (CONT'D)
BUT MY SMILE HAS FOLDS?!
Well, motorcycles can make anyone
look younger.

Their motorcycle drives out and joins a flock of motorists. The KIDS on nearby scooters laugh at them. Acadia's playful energy fades, observing the surrounding scooters packed with parents and many kids.

CROWD

THIS IS VIETNAM TO THE WORLD
AT ITS BEST WITH IT ARE
LARGE FAMILIES THAT ARE BOLD
SHARING LOVE THAT FEELS FULL

CÁT

WITH YOU AND ME ALONE
LIFE NEVER GETS OLD.

For Acadia, everything is suddenly getting very old.

END OF "LIFE NEVER GETS OLD" SONG

Cát sees the horseshoe crab billboard in the rearview mirror.
Acadia raises the phone in the mirror for Cát to read.

CÁT (CONT'D)

I can't read backwards.

Duh, it's a mirror. Acadia horizontally flips her screen.

CÁT (CONT'D)

Tachypleus gigas. "Tachypleus"
means horseshoe crab in Latin. But
gigas? No way they get that huge.

YOUNG ACADIA

Uh... Fifty centimeters big.

CÁT

Ha! I've baked longer baguettes.
"Gigas." Ah since you got my phone,
call and book our reservation!

YOUNG ACADIA

Why not you?

CÁT

I got to stop *reserving* all the
joys of *reserving* for myself!

YOUNG ACADIA

Please dial back the puns, mom.

CÁT

You actually need to *dial*.

Acadia rolls her eyes and dials +8 on the phone. The "8" on
the screen morphs into...

END OF PROLOGUE

ACT I

INT. BAKERY - DAWN

...an "8" piped in white icing on a cake. A BAKER places fresh fruits on top.

EXT. FISH MARKET RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Outside the bakery window, Cát and Acadia are seated at a table across the street, in front of a restaurant.

The camera looks down at the table, focusing on a paper placemat, featuring twelve zodiac animals with their respective years. The Tiger and "2034" is in the center.

An untouched bowl of PHO sits on Acadia's side. Cát's side is littered with empty plates of fishes, crabs, and mollusk shells. Their leaf hats lean against the table legs.

Cát pulls Acadia closer for a selfie and holds up the placemat. Acadia is grumpy.

SNAP.

Cát looks at her phone. She places the photo in a digital album titled "Sinh nhật của Cadi."

SUBTITLE: Cadi's birthday

Cát scrolls through past photos. All at the same table, taken yearly with Cát holding placemats with animals of the year descending from 2034 to 2027 (when Acadia was one). The 2027 photo shows them with an Indonesian man in a U.S. Coast Guard shirt. *Le khai truong / Grand opening* ribbons hang around.

Cát sighs, with anguish clouding her.

YOUNG ACADIA

Nhìn gì, mẹ?

(What are you looking at, mom?)

CÁT

(Snapping back to reality)

Nothing. You- you still have so much in your bowl.

YOUNG ACADIA

I'm not hungry.

CÁT

Empty stomach, empty head.

YOUNG ACADIA

And you have a big belly.

Cát looks insulted.

YOUNG ACADIA (CONT'D)

So big brained.

Cát picks up some chopsticks and points them at the contents of the pho bowl: slices of beef, rice noodles, green herbs.

CÁT

Fine. If it gets you to eat, I'll show you what's been on my mind.

She points the chopsticks at the tiny, floating beef slices.

CÁT (CONT'D)

There are 367 islands...

She points to one large, single piece of beef.

CÁT (CONT'D)

...off the coast of Vietnam...

She dramatically twirls noodles between the beefy "islands."

CÁT (CONT'D)

...and a whirlpool that hides...

She uses a spoon to raise a bone fragment from the broth.

CÁT (CONT'D)

...our ancestral island.

She shoves the spoon into Acadia's open mouth.

MONTAGE.

Vietnamese puppetry paints a picture for the sequence.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)

(Mouth full, disgusted)

Ew! Mom! That's a bone-

Puppet Acadia spits out Fossil Island.

CÁT (V.O.)

Exactly. The bone is Fossil Island. It's a spiritual place where we can reconnect with lost family members. They live among horseshoe spirits.

Glowing, blue-blooded horseshoe crab puppets appear.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)
Horseshoe crabs are invertebrates?

CÁT (V.O.)
I never said they had bones. Their
life force is actually in their
blue blood, which heals wounds.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)
What if you lose an arm? Does it
grow back?

CÁT (V.O.)
Wow. A sick sense of humor like me.

The crabs are snatched by shadowy puppets holding syringes.

CÁT (V.O.)
But such power makes them a target.
Our island must be kept secret from
outsiders who want to exploit the
blood for their own selfish gain.

Fossil Island gets hidden within the hundreds of islands.

CÁT (V.O.)
This island goes way deeper than
bones and blood. It's our SOULS.
This was where me, my mom, my
grandfather, his mother, her mom,
every generation before us... This
was where we were born.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)
And I was born on mainland...

We travel to mainland Vietnam.

CÁT (V.O.)
Maine.

Then we go all the way to Maine in the United States.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)
Why wasn't I born on Fossil Island?

CÁT (V.O.)
I loved someone far away very much.
I met him in my exchange program
during a dark time in Maine. If I
left, I may never see him again.

Puppet Cát looks sadly at a puppet man in naval uniform.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)

Dad?

CÁT (V.O.)

We didn't see eye to eye at first,
an island there made us put our
differences aside.

Puppet Cát and the naval puppet hold baby puppet Acadia.

CÁT (V.O.)

The law kept us apart. We thought
having you on Relic Island might
keep us together. It didn't work.

MILITANT PUPPETS push puppet Cát, her baby, and other puppets
onto a boat to Vietnam. They are the inverse boat people.

CÁT (V.O.)

I became the only option for you.
And now you're here.

Puppet Cát holds a baby puppet Acadia.

BACK TO REALITY.

EXT. FISH MARKET RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Acadia is playing with the bone she spit out earlier.

CÁT

I'll bring you the whole world.
I'll bring you algae. I'll bring
you mollusk shells. I'll bring you
clams. I'll bring you fishes-CRABS!
I'll bring you everything but...

ACADIA & CÁT

...peace...

They giggle together.

The WAITER comes out and places the bill on the table.

WAITER

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
*Sorry to disturb the peace. How was
everything?*

The waiter sees that Acadia's bowl is untouched.

WAITER (CONT'D)

You haven't touched your pho?

The waiter neighs like a horse, pointing to the placemat.

WAITER (CONT'D)

*Them things make me so hungry, I
could eat a horse in my pho!*

Acadia walks off, unamused.

WAITER (CONT'D)

*Ah, come on. It's an expression!
Horse ain't on the menu. It's on
request... What grade is she now?*

CÁT

*(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
7th grade. She's four years ahead.*

WAITER

Teen or genius, they love horses.

CÁT

*She's never been a horse girl like
the other school kids...*

CUTAWAY TO:

EXT. KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM - DAY

The classroom wall is covered with drawings of horses. Four-year-old Acadia hangs her platypus drawing. A KID mocks it.

KID

*(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
That's an ugly-looking horse.*

YOUNG ACADIA

*(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
He's a platypus! And every platypus
are beautiful.*

RETURN TO:

By the fish market, Acadia stares at a tank of seahorses.

WAITER

She's more of a seahorse girl.

The waiter walks away, proud of their pun.

CÁT

Only the open sea lands with her.

Cát opens an email app on her phone.

CÁT (CONT'D)

Cadi! How you like them seahorses?!

Acadia heads back to Cát.

YOUNG ACADIA

They're cooler in water than land.

CÁT

Well, I'm a 2002 water horse.

Cát gets a pen and circles 2002 by the HORSE on the placemat.

YOUNG ACADIA

You're an old horse. I'm the newest-

Acadia nabs the pen and circles 2026 by the HORSE.

The BAKER from earlier hands them the cake in a ribbon box.

CÁT

Look who's talking, my fire horse.

YOUNG ACADIA

Cake! It's not super sweet, right?

CÁT

You know it. And here's the icing on the cake: I told your teacher you're not feeling well. Cool of me, huh? *Question mark?*

YOUNG ACADIA

Not real- I'm not really sick- Well, on second thought-

Acadia takes Cát's phone and boots up *Animal Crossing*.

Cát takes back her phone. She places cash on the bill.

CÁT

Let's spend today horsing around.

YOUNG ACADIA

Don't you have a job?

CÁT

I also called out sick.

YOUNG ACADIA

But you're not sick!

CÁT

I'm sick of my boss.

The waiter takes back the bill without the cash.

WAITER

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

A boss always finds out. I would know. The food's on me just in case you lose your job.

The waiter heads back into the restaurant.

CÁT

My child...

Cát and Acadia wear their leaf hats, take their cake, and get on their motorcycle. It ramps up and they drive off.

EXT. LAN HA BAY - CLIFFSIDE - MIDMORNING

Cát and Acadia park the motorcycle by a cliffside overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The beach has a port with several motorboats and a single motorized sailboat.

CÁT

Today is the gift of a lifetime!

Acadia slides down the cliffside and lands in the sand. Cát cautiously follows. They go to the port.

EXT. LAN HA BAY - PORT - CONTINUOUS

YOUNG ACADIA

Am I getting swimming lessons?

CÁT

Not from this water horse, not from the seahorses, the horseshoes!

YOUNG ACADIA

Horseshoes?

They reach a weathered sailboat, the name *VAST* etched on its hull. Cát helps Acadia into the boat. She then steps in and pulls out a ring of keys. She uses a *VAST* key to open a compartment to activate the red sails and ramp up the motor.

They sail away from the mainland.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

EXT. GULF OF TONKIN - CÁT BÀ ARCHIPELAGO - MOMENTS LATER

The boat sails towards hundreds of islands.

CÁT (V.O.)

You're actually getting the gift of many lifetimes. You're going to reconnect with your ancestors!

EXT. THE SAILBOAT - CONTINUOUS

Acadia points to a beautiful island.

YOUNG ACADIA

On that island?!

CÁT

No dear... Not Monkey Island...

YOUNG ACADIA

Oo oo ah ah! My classmates go to Monkey Island for their birthdays!

CÁT

Cause they're a bunch of monkeys-

YOUNG ACADIA

And you're a fossil.

CÁT

Don't make me turn this boat around!

They sail into a mist.

YOUNG ACADIA

Do you even know where we're going?

CÁT

My parents named me after the archipelago. The first thing I ever felt was its sand and seawater. I know this region more than myself.

YOUNG ACADIA

Every island looks the same to me.

CÁT

Fine... We'll visit Monkey Island on the way back.

YOUNG ACADIA

Yay!

CÁT

Just memorize this route.

YOUNG ACADIA

Monkeys are cringe anyways. Phone.
(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
Tell me where Fossil Island is!

PHONE

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
No signal here.

CÁT

You kids cannot survive without
technology.

YOUNG ACADIA

Beats being a hermit.

Vietnamese puppetry paints a picture for the hermit story.

CÁT

I never quite understood that
metaphor. Hermit crabs are the most
open to change.

YOUNG ACADIA

No way.

CÁT

Hermit crabs are like us. They move
to new homes, they immigrate, they
are never satisfied.

If you won't remember the way, at
least, don't downplay my story.

In a tide pool, where the sea and
shore whisper secrets to each
other, lived a shy hermit crab
named *Paguroidea*.

YOUNG ACADIA

Mom, can you stop being so nerdy?

CÁT

What's your favorite *Animal
Crossing* character?

YOUNG ACADIA

Blathers! He's the best!

CÁT

Not Tom Nook? Whatever.

Their name's *Blathers* who grew too big for their shell. It was like a hoodie that became too small! They needed a new home, one that may let them stretch out and grow bigger.

At the same time, a human named Nook felt the same way about their house. It was a nice house, but it felt old and didn't fit who Nook was anymore. The house felt like a big boat stuck on the land.

Encouraged by the high tide, Nook and Blathers started looking for new homes. It was a little scary!

Blathers looked and looked until they found a shiny, smooth shell. It was perfect! They left an tight shell behind and slipped into the new one. It wasn't perfect yet, but they knew they could make it home.

Nook also moved their boxes into a new house. They felt happy and a little sad to leave the old one. As they drove away, they looked back at the empty house, then focused on the new adventure ahead.

They learned a home isn't just wood or a shell but a place where you can become who you're meant to be!

BACK TO REALITY.

EXT. THE SAILBOAT - AFTERNOON

YOUNG ACADIA

And all these other islands are like shells nobody wanted.

Cát shifts the sails around to disperse away the mist.

CÁT

But not ours...

A shadow passes over them. They look up to see massive, horseshoe-shaped cliffsides.

CÁT (CONT'D)

We have arrived at Fossil Island!

Through the mist, an awe-inspiring island comes into view.

EXT. FOSSIL ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

The entire island is shaped like a horseshoe crab! We close in on the island, soaring over its enchanted forest and cliffs. The view descends to the bay and beach.

CÁT (O.S.)

Happy birthday, Acadia...

The MOTHER HORSESHOE CRAB and her DAUGHTER, from earlier, resurface. They hastily submerge when the sailboat's shadow casts over them. We hear the same scary mechanical motor.

Cát takes the anchor and drops it into the bay.

EXT. FOSSIL ISLAND - UNDERWATER BAY - CONTINUOUS

The anchor CRUSHES the mother horseshoe crab upon saving her daughter. Her blue blood rises to the surface.

EXT. FOSSIL ISLAND - BAY - CONTINUOUS

Acadia sees the circle of blue blood by their sailboat.

YOUNG ACADIA

Mom! That water is super duper
blue. More pretty than the ocean.

Cát looks on, worried, realizing she's made a grave mistake.

EXT. FOSSIL ISLAND - UNDERWATER BAY - CONTINUOUS

The young horseshoe crab tries to free her mother.

CÁT (O.S.)

Let's hope the sea cries tears of
joy seeing us rather than sadness.

Once the blue blood stops spilling, the horseshoe crab realizes her mother is gone.

EXT. FOSSIL ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

From above, the horseshoe crab-shaped island is bleeding blue.

EXT. THE SAILBOAT - BAY - CONTINUOUS

Cát watches the blue blood interact wildly with the water.

Acadia is about to leave the boat, but Cát stops her.

CÁT

To set eyes on our sacred island is
a great honor. To set foot on its
shores needs a special blessing.

YOUNG ACADIA

Mom! I wanna play on the beach!
It's my birthday!

CÁT

It's not for me to decide. That's
your ancestors' choice.

YOUNG ACADIA

Hey ancestors! Can I play on your
beach?!

CÁT

Look in the water. The spirits are
upset. They don't want us to here-

YOUNG ACADIA

I don't care what dead people think-

CÁT

No one truly dies if we continue to
care!

YOUNG ACADIA

Still don't care!

CÁT

Don't speak about them in that way.

YOUNG ACADIA

Fine! I'll play nice if I see them!

CÁT

You're not ready. It was a mistake
to bring you here.

Acadia enters the cabin.

INT. SAILBOAT - CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Acadia dislodges the keys from the controls and heads out.

EXT. THE SAILBOAT - CONTINUOUS

Acadia dangles the ring of keys.

YOUNG ACADIA

Leaving is the mistake. You can't
make me go! I have the keys!

CÁT

ACADIA BANYU TRAN. Hand me the keys!

YOUNG ACADIA

Can we grab coconuts first? It'll
go great with my cake!

CÁT

You still need to finish your pho.

Cát steps aside to show a plastic bag with a container.

YOUNG ACADIA

If we eat the gross pho, can you
promise to come back here every
year? Like, for real?

CÁT

Well, Monkey Island's bigger.

YOUNG ACADIA

How old were you when grandma
showed you this place?

CÁT

When I was twice your age.

YOUNG ACADIA

(With a sour face)
Sixteen is forever away...

Cát gets the box with the cake and opens it. She lights its
single candle with a match.

CÁT

Trust me, 8 more cakes will go by
real quick. The spirits will
welcome you as the woman you're
meant to be. Now, make a wish.

YOUNG ACADIA

I wish to meet my ancestors. NOW.

CÁT

That's sweet of you to say.

Acadia blows out the candle.

YOUNG ACADIA
Not too sweet!

Cát sets the cake down and hug.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. FOSSIL ISLAND - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

The young crab entangles her tail with her deceased mother's.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)
Promise me you'll be here with me.

CÁT (V.O.)
When the time comes. Promise.

EXT. THE SAILBOAT / UNDERWATER - MOMENTS LATER

Cát pulls the anchor up, dipping her left arm in. The bitter baby horseshoe crab slashes her wrist and nautilus tattoo, making her drop the anchor.

CÁT
OW! *Nước cắn tay!*
(The water bit me!)

YOUNG ACADIA
ME (Viet: "Mom")?!

The water in the bay turns red. Cát pulls up her bloody hand.

Acadia seethes with anger and dives in. She pulls up the horseshoe crab and thrashes her around.

CÁT
Let her go!

The horseshoe crab coughs up blue blood, freaking out Acadia. She steps back into the mother horseshoe crab's blue blood mixed with Cát's red. She sees flashes of visions.

A rapid montage of images SLAMS onto the screen:

MONTAGE: ANCESTRAL MEMORIES

A first couple settling in Vietnam 65,000 years ago. Their palms bleed, wiping the frame red.

Two ancient warriors brawl with swords through a forest.
Their hands cut, slashing toward the viewer.

A merchant negotiates with a Portuguese trader in the 1600s.
Their hands cut. A scroll written in Chu Nho characters rips.

A contract in the Latin alphabet is signed. A French soldier,
holding a bayonet rifle, accepts a Vietnamese politician's
unconditional surrender in the 1800s. Their hands cut. The
French soldier swings their bayonet into the frame.

Two Vietnamese soldiers run into a 1950s battle together.
Their hands cut. A grenade blast.

The same Vietnamese soldiers now fighting each other in the
Vietnam War. Their hands cut. Napalm fire.

A pair of rice farmers, mother and father. The mother holds a
baby. The baby transforms into Cát as she is today; the
parents vanish.

BACK TO REALITY.

Cát's hand is still bleeding.

CÁT (CONT'D)

We don't need the powers that be to
reincarnate you into a plankton!

Acadia, shocked by the fury in her mother's tone, reluctantly
lets the horseshoe crab go.

Acadia gets back on the boat.

YOUNG ACADIA

Where's first aid?

CÁT

In the compartment, dear.

Acadia goes to the locked compartment and feels her pockets.
THE KEYS ARE MISSING.

YOUNG ACADIA

The keys are gone!

CÁT

Those who steal can never keep.

YOUNG ACADIA

Mom?!

CÁT

It must have fallen in the bay...

Acadia dips her face into the water to look. She hears an ANCESTRAL CACOPHONY.

Under the water, sand reanimates into the spectral faces of the ancestors, staring up.

Acadia freaks out, almost drowning.

Cát pulls Acadia back to air.

CÁT (CONT'D)

Breathe, Acadia. I can't lose you, too.

Forget the keys. We don't need the motor. We must go manual. We've got two hands to sail. I got my second best hand to point.

YOUNG ACADIA

What about your best hand?!

CÁT

Right-

Cát takes Acadia's red neckerchief and wraps it around her bloody hand.

CÁT (CONT'D)

All hands on deck!

YOUNG ACADIA

I got this, mom.

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

Phone, how do you sail a boat?

The phone lays out instructions by text on how to sail a boat. The first line reads: "Lay lai neo."

SUBTITLE: Retrieve the anchor.

Acadia painstakingly retrieves the anchor.

YOUNG ACADIA (CONT'D)

Let's go home.

As the boat sails away slower than ever, the crab resurfaces.

Acadia looks at this lonesome horseshoe crab with disdain. The crab turns away with a ring of KEYS ON HER RAISED TAIL. Acadia stares on in shock as the creature swims away.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

EXT. GULF OF TONKIN - CÁT BÀ ARCHIPELAGO - EVENING

The sailboat sails through heavy fog, a lone speck.

EXT. THE SAILBOAT - CONTINUOUS

Acadia is behind the wheel with the eaten cake beside her.

Cát slumps against the cabin's exteriors. Her leaf hat is hiding her illness.

YOUNG ACADIA

It's way past my bedtime. Where to?

Cát raises her rashy arm with intense tremors. Drool escapes the corner of her mouth.

YOUNG ACADIA (CONT'D)

Mom, mom, mom. Like you always said, drink enough water.

Acadia goes to the water jugs. ALL EMPTY. She looks at the plastic bag.

YOUNG ACADIA (CONT'D)

Pho juice will do.

Acadia opens the bag and hands the container to Cát.

CÁT

Broth...?

Cát puts the container aside.

YOUNG ACADIA

It's been forever. You sure we're going the right way?

CÁT

The stars know the way.

YOUNG ACADIA

I can't see the stars. Fog?

Cát is dizzy, looking dazed.

CÁT

I see the stars real fine.

YOUNG ACADIA

Circum-um-navigation is a thing of
the past...

Acadia tries to open the map app on the phone to no avail.

CÁT

Living in the future may be more
harmful than living in the past...

Acadia lights a lantern with a match.

YOUNG ACADIA

But when we see nothing with our
own eyes, how we know where to go?

CÁT

Use your ears, child.

YOUNG ACADIA

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
Phone, what do you hear?

CÁT

You can't rely on technology to use
your senses for you.

PHONE

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
*I hear a moderately turbulent sea
at 75 decibels, having increased 15
decibels in the past hour. At such
rate, we can expect-*

A lightning strikes a nearby island. Then THUNDER.

PHONE (CONT'D)

180 decibels. A storm is imminent.

The storm releases a sudden downpour.

Acadia puts on her leaf hat and rushes into the cabin to stay
dry. She peeks out. Cát is unmoved.

YOUNG ACADIA

It's nowhere near your bedtime!
Mom, are you ignoring me?

Cát pukes all over the phone. The phone FROWNS then shuts
down. They both become unresponsive.

YOUNG ACADIA (CONT'D)

Mom! Ew! You're the seasick one now-

Acadia notices the rashes on Cát's arms.

YOUNG ACADIA (CONT'D)
Please don't have scurvy, mom.

Acadia drags Cát into the cabin.

INT. SAILBOAT - CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Acadia lays Cát down and sets a tarp over her like a blanket. She rushes out.

EXT. THE SAILBOAT - CONTINUOUS

Acadia goes and sets the jugs right side up to collect rainwater. She holds one jug up high.

YOUNG ACADIA
I got one birthday wish. And that
is for everyone to stay hydrated!

An absurd gust of wind blows out the candle in the lantern, like it's messing with such mortals. Then the wind suddenly becomes typhoon level. It blows away the jugs, including the one Acadia is holding. That one impacts a mast, denting it.

Acadia grabs the knocked over closed container of pho and runs into the cabin.

INT. SAILBOAT - CABIN - AN HOUR LATER

Darkness, save for the faint glows of lightning. Acadia watches over Cát, twirling noodles with a pair of chopsticks.

YOUNG ACADIA
Eat. Please.

Acadia looks out the window to see a ship-eating whirlpool.

CÁT
(Half-awake)
Who are you asking? *Question mark?*

Cát coughs. She grabs a chopstick with noodles from Acadia. She playfully rubs Acadia's nose with it, then drops it. The dropped noodles form a swirl design on the floor.

CÁT (CONT'D)
I told you to remember the
whirlpool, silly noodle.

YOUNG ACADIA

You didn't tell me it was THAT big!

CÁT

The big things never get me. So
it'll be the small things that'll
do.

YOUNG ACADIA

That doesn't make sense!

CÁT

Whirlpools are nothing. I've sailed
mere meters by it. But I cannot
walk, swim, sail... another meter.
Today was a real sick day.

YOUNG ACADIA

You'll feel better.

CÁT

I shouldn't haven't taken you here.
You weren't ready.

YOUNG ACADIA

I've been ready. And this is
nothing. I had the flu, cold, um-

CÁT

It's unlike the cold. Absolute
zero, love.

YOUNG ACADIA

But you're no zero. You have
friends. You're a hospital doctor!

CÁT

I don't think my hospital have much
to work with even if we get there.

YOUNG ACADIA

They need you! I need you!

Cát unwraps Acadia's neckerchief from her injured hand. She
wraps it around Acadia's collar.

CÁT

Cadi needs an armor more than mom.

YOUNG ACADIA

Me (Viet: Mom), no!

CÁT

Wherever you go, I'll bring you the whole world. I'll bring you algae. I'll bring you mollusk shells. I'll bring you clams. I'll bring you fishes, CRABS! I'll bring you everything but...

ACADIA & CÁT

...peace...

Cát rests.

Acadia runs out, determined.

EXT. THE SAILBOAT - CONTINUOUS

Acadia steers the helm away from the whirlpool. IT'S WORKING.

YOUNG ACADIA

No souls lost on my watch!

The dented mast suddenly gives way and falls towards Acadia.

Acadia dodges it and plunges into the violent sea. An enormous wave rolls towards her. Filling her lungs with air, she dives under, dodging the force of the raging storm.

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Silence falls as Acadia floats below the surface, arms wide, grasping at calmness. She swims towards the camera, then freezes seeing the phone sink in front of her. She grabs it. Then freezes once more but in terror.

It might be a shark. Who knows? It's really a coelacanth but Acadia doesn't know that. As the surface flashes and sparks, a floating mast makes itself present. Acadia swims up.

EXT. THE SEA - CONTINUOUS

Acadia bursts out of the water in total panic, throwing her arms around the floating mast, coughing up seawater. She exhaustedly pulls herself onto the splintered mast.

Acadia watches in horror as the lightnings cast blazing white veil over the sailboat, who seems attracted to the whirlpool. She bursts into tears as the whirlpool welcomes her mom.

ACADIA

Me (Viet: Mom)!

Cát stands at the helm, calmly looking up one last time. She raises her injured arm and turns to face Acadia. A look of acceptance. Her wound gradually grows into an exoskeleton.

CÁT

Uong nước nho nguồn.

Cát stands still as water swirls around her. She is enveloped by an ethereal BLUE GLOW erupting from the water. The light pushes the storm back. The entire sailboat glows blue before plunging into the vortex.

WIDE SHOT: Looking down into the water, the sailboat sinks beneath the surface. A mast falls, giving the boat a tail. The sail-less boat is now shaped like a horseshoe crab.

Acadia seethes with rage as the waves from the sinking vessel pummel her mast. She sees only the loss, not the sacrifice.

YOUNG ACADIA

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

It's all your fault! I hate you,
horseshoe! I will end you! Every
single one of you!

The boat groans. Its currents push her mast away from the whirlpool. She watches as blue lights escape the whirlpool's grasp, before succumbing to the violent storm.

Acadia weeps uncontrollably as the waves take her mast away.

Cát's leaf hat floats up from the whirlpool. It joins Acadia's beaten leaf hat on the surface of the water.

From underneath the hats, a mystical, glowing HORSESHOE CRAB SPIRIT and a NAUTILUS SPIRIT rise from the water. They swim to Acadia's mast and begin to push it towards a distant shore. Acadia doesn't see them.

The two leaf hats float on the shaky sea.

PRE-LAP: The sound of gulls overhead.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. MONKEY ISLAND - BEACH - DAWN

On the beach are the two leaf hats. The storm has ended. Waves spill gently on the sand.

Out in the waters, the Horseshoe Crab Spirit and Nautilus Spirit push the mast until it reaches dry land. Acadia is resting on it.

The spirits check if Acadia is breathing. The tide gently rocks Acadia. She chokes. She slowly gets to her knees.

This startles the spirits away. They vanish into the water.

Acadia vomits seawater. She rolls over, sits. Dazed and confused. Where am I? Importantly, where's mom? She lies on her back. With whatever energy she has left, she weeps.

ACADIA'S POV

A couple of golden-headed langur monkeys curiously loom over Acadia. They coo to get her attention.

The waterlogged phone miraculously flickers to life nearby.

PHONE

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

That's the call of a Trachypithecus poliocephalus, or Cát...

Acadia goes back to weeping upon hearing her mom's name.

PHONE (CONT'D)

...Bà langur, the rarest primates in the world with a population size of less than 100 individuals.

We see Acadia sit up to meet the langurs at their level.

YOUNG ACADIA

Your family is gone, too?

The langurs coo, happy that Acadia stopped crying.

A langur gets on Acadia's shoulder. The other helps Acadia get up. They lead her into a forest.

EXT. MONKEY ISLAND - INLAND - ALL MORNING

MONTAGE.

Acadia and the langurs hike through dense woods.

They cross streams and uncover hidden trails.

They climb boulders and run through sunlit meadows.

They take breaks to eat vibrant fruits together. Acadia is messy-faced and laughing for the first time.

EXT. MONKEY ISLAND - CAMPSITE - NOON

Acadia stumbles upon some CONSERVATIONISTS. Their attention is directed mostly at the rare langurs until Acadia collapses, passing out from exhaustion.

They rush to her aid.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HAIPHONG HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

ACADIA'S POV

Acadia opens her eyes and sees herself lying in bed in a hospital gown. The doorknob jiggles. She closes her eye.

We see Acadia rest in the hospital bed while a NURSE enters to check her vitals. As soon as they complete their assessment, they leave. Acadia wakes up and walks out.

INT. HAIPHONG HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Acadia strolls through the hectic hallway where many patients also fell victim to the recent typhoon. She looks up to see a monitor with footages of floods and news broadcast declaring: HÀNG NGÀN NGUOI MAT TÍCH.

SUBTITLE: THOUSANDS ARE MISSING.

ACADIA'S POV

Her nurse is in sight. She hides away in the nearest door.

INT. HAIPHONG HOSPITAL - LAB - CONTINUOUS

Darkness. Eerie darkness. The faint glow comes from a large circular fish tank on the floor.

Acadia tiptoes towards the tank. She looks down to see water twirling, a miniature whirlpool. Suddenly, a horseshoe crab surfaces, startling her.

FLASHES of the horseshoe crab-shaped boat sinking.

Acadia stumbles and knocks over a blue liquid jar on herself.

Cát rises from the fish tank.

CÁT

ACADIA BANYU TRAN.
(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
Clean up your mess!

YOUNG ACADIA

CÁT LÝ.

CÁT

Don't speak to mom in that way.

YOUNG ACADIA

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
I wish we never went to Cát Bà.

CÁT

I hope you return.

YOUNG ACADIA

What about the whirlpool?

CÁT

A vortex can't keep me down, kiddo.

Cát violently coughs.

CÁT (CONT'D)

But germs can do a lot of damage.

YOUNG ACADIA

*To the world, I'm small as a germ.
But they still found me on Monkey
Island. I can- I will find you,
too. The future... um- needs you.*

CÁT

*I don't know what the future holds.
What I do know is your heart holds--*

YOUNG ACADIA

Blood.

CÁT

...the wisdom of our ancestors.

Cát feels Acadia's blood-soaked neckerchief.

CÁT (CONT'D)

You should wash the blood off.

YOUNG ACADIA

Nah...

CÁT

Not the red. The blue.

Acadia notices her blue-stained school uniform and hospital gown. She wipes her head and finds blue blood on her hands.

Acadia and Cát hold each other's hands.

CÁT (CONT'D)

*You promise to find me at Fossil
Island when the time comes?*

Acadia looks at a clock that glows: 8:16.

YOUNG ACADIA

When I'm twice my age.

Cát slowly sinks into the tank.

CÁT

*The two of us together in good
health, in horseshoe's mercy...*

Cát's hand loses every ounce of color, contrary to Acadia's warming hands. Cát dies in her daughter's arms.

The fluorescent lights click on. Cát vanishes. Instead, Acadia has been holding a horseshoe crab above a fish tank.

We hear the voice of a Vietnamese biochemist DR. DÀN XUÂN THANH (40s) with her brilliant and supportive demeanor.

DÀN XUÂN THANH (O.S.)

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

Like what you see?

YOUNG ACADIA

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

Loved who I saw...

Acadia drops the horseshoe crab.

WIDE SHOT: Looking down we see several other fish tanks, containing live horseshoe crabs. Acadia stands up and looks on with fear and amazement.

DR. DÀN XUÂN THANH (40s) joins Acadia's side. She wears a lab coat and glasses.

DÀN XUÂN THANH

Cute, aren't they?

YOUNG ACADIA

An ugly bunch.

DÀN XUÂN THANH

*We're not much to look at either.
Before you get kicked out, you
should look presentable.*

Dàn brings out a stool and a rag. Acadia sits on it. Dàn wipes the blue blood off Acadia's face and hair.

Acadia looks at Dr. Dàn Xuân Thanh's name badge.

YOUNG ACADIA

*Dr. Thanh. Why the blue horseshoe
crab blood?*

DÀN XUÂN THANH

*This. Blood is the blueprint of
tomorrow.*

Dàn drops the rag into a trash can.

DÀN XUÂN THANH (CONT'D)

*Horseshoe crab blood saves lives.
It detects contamination in
vaccines and medical devices. This
ensures these products are safe for
human use.*

YOUNG ACADIA

But don't they...

DÀN XUÂN THANH

*Die? We try our very best to be as
harmless as humanly possible.*

ACADIA

(Irritated)

Why?

DÀN XUÂN THANH

*What do you mean why? It's our
oath. Do they not ethics on your
third year in school?*

YOUNG ACADIA

I'm in 7th grade.

DÀN XUÂN THANH

*Woah. Halfway to graduation. You
wouldn't mind getting even further
ahead?*

Acadia shrugs.

Dàn goes to an office, turning the lights on. Acadia follows.

INT. HAIPHONG HOSPITAL - DR. THANH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Acadia reads Dân's framed diploma of her 2033 PhD in Biochemistry from Bowdoin College.

DÀN XUÂN THANH

By the way, I never got your name.

YOUNG ACADIA

Acadia.

DÀN XUÂN THANH

(in English)

Too many syllables for a Vietnamese name. You speak English?

Acadia nods.

Dân pulls out a couple of books from her bookshelf. She hands Acadia two novels, one titled *Biochemistry for the Lonely* and another titled *How to Teach Biochemistry to a Germ*.

DÀN XUÂN THANH (CONT'D)

Very good.

YOUNG ACADIA

Very well.

DÀN XUÂN THANH

Show off. You wouldn't happen to be named after the forest? In Maine?

YOUNG ACADIA

I was born there. But, I call our mainland home.

DÀN XUÂN THANH

Nothing like mainland Vietnam. Nothing like Maine either. My colleague Bomi and I used to hike Acadia when we studied at Bowdoin. I hope you find yourself there.

YOUNG ACADIA

Before anything and everything, I gotta find mom...

Acadia leaves the lab with books in hand. But not before taking the blue-stained rag out of the trash can.

DÀN XUÂN THANH

Don't we all.

Dân sits on her desk, perplexed.

INT. HAIPHONG HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - HOURS LATER

Acadia is in bed. Having finished one book, she speed-reads the next at lightning speed, a true genius.

The nurse enters and hands Acadia a phone.

NURSE

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

There is someone on the line for you. An overseas call.

The nurse exits.

Acadia sets the phone on speaker. A Vietnamese flag lies flatly on the wall behind her.

On the phone is the voice of a stern American man.

MORGAN (V.O.)

Acadia. Xin chào.

YOUNG ACADIA

So formal...

MORGAN (V.O.)

I've been very proud of you. I'm sincerely sorry for being a hermit all this time. I didn't expect the hospital to have it easier getting ahold of me rather than your mom.

YOUNG ACADIA

Who are you?

The phone conversation becomes intercut.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM / U.S. NAVY OFFICE - INTERCUT

At the U.S. Navy Office, we see the back of Morgan Tran (32). An American flag lies flatly on the wall in front of him.

The intercut splits and aligns the Vietnamese flag and American flag together, showing Acadia's dual citizenship.

MORGAN

Morgan Tran. Bo. How's mom?

YOUNG ACADIA

Dad...?

Acadia's eyes widen, bittersweet. Her eyes swallow us.

INT. GOVERNMENT OFFICE - LATER

Acadia waits in line behind many heartbroken adults.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)
She's sick. Seasick.

BACK TO PRESENT.

Acadia stares at the blue-stained rag on her nightstand.

MORGAN (V.O.)
She there?

INT. GOVERNMENT OFFICE - LATER

We see Cát Lý's identification certificate. It is written in Vietnamese. Her date of birth is 20/3/2002 (d/m/yyyy).

MORGAN (V.O.)
The typhoon... took her?

A clerk stamps MAT TÍCH and 22/9/2034 on Cát's certificate.

SUBTITLE: Missing on the 22nd of September, 2034

INT. AIRBUS - DAWN

Acadia unfolds a paper map of northern Vietnam across her flight tray table. She tries to retrace Cát Bà Archipelago.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)
I will find her.

MORGAN (V.O.)
If you don't...

Acadia opens a paper map of Northeastern United States.

INT. BANGOR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - ARRIVAL GATE - DAY

Acadia, alone in her school uniform, walks out of the gate.

MORGAN (V.O.)
...find me.

No one is here to greet her. Welcome to small town Bangor.

Acadia looks at a map of Maine and sees Acadia National Park.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

EXT. ACADIA NATIONAL PARK - DAY

A quiet, overcast day.

Acadia, walks along the scenic path. She carries a backpack with her two biochemistry books.

She spots a lone figure sitting on a cliff edge overlooking the crashing waves. He is Morgan in plain clothes, looking out at the Atlantic Ocean. He holds a small, iridescent object in his hands. He has a HORSESHOE CRAB TATTOO on his left wrist and a HERMIT CRAB TATTOO on his right.

Acadia approaches silently. Morgan runs his thumb along its spiral pattern of a Nautilus shell.

After a beat, he speaks with a voice both quiet and heavy.

MORGAN

They say you can find your way home
with one of these. It grows a new
chamber as you grow, but you always
carry the old ones with you.

Acadia sits down beside him. They stare out at the water.

"FORMERLY KNOWN" SONG

The music begins softly under the sound of the waves.

Morgan reaches out a hand, hesitates, and then gently rests it on the rock between them. Acadia looks at his hand, then the ocean, then back at his hand.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)

Due to dad's Navy service, he's
always absent.

Morgan's hand vanishes. Acadia stays looking out at the ocean as the song swells into her next 8 years in Maine.

MONTAGE.

Time flies as Acadia studies hard, skips grades, succeeds in sports and extracurriculars, receives many scholarships, and wins national science awards. She graduates high school as valedictorian at age 10.

Acadia has video calls on a tablet with Dr. Thanh from her Haiphong lab. They pour over diagrams and chemical formulas.

YOUNG ACADIA (V.O.)

I however had perfect attendance in
school. Middle and high school
together was 2 years too long.

Acadia goes to the podium. It is too tall for her.

YOUNG ACADIA

I DON'T KNOW WHO I'LL BE
I DON'T KNOW WHERE WE'LL GO
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO BELIEVE
I DON'T KNOW WHY I DON'T KNOW

I DO KNOW THE PERSON I AM
I DO KNOW THE PLACE I COME FROM
I DO KNOW MY FEELINGS ARE NO SHAM
I DO KNOW PAIN CAN'T KEEP ME NUMB

Acadia goes to Bowdoin College for medicine where she does
lab work, experiments, and becomes a biochemist by 13.

Dr. Thanh looks on with pride during a virtual live feed of a
graduation ceremony on a lab wall in Haiphong. Acadia waves
to the camera and gestures a thanks to Dr. Thanh.

YOUNG ACADIA (CONT'D)

I'M FORMERLY KNOWN AS...
THE KID TOO SHORT FOR THE RIDE
A COLLEGE STUDENT WHO STILL NEEDS
PARENTAL CONSENT
THE YOUNGEST IN THE FRIEND GROUP
THE MED STUDENT WHO CAN'T DONATE
BLOOD YET

Acadia hangs out with her fellow graduate students, who are
mostly in their 20s or 30s. She cannot go to bars, R-rated
movies, and is too short to ride amusement park rides.

EXT. NEW ENGLAND RACETRACK - DAY

Acadia watches the horses race on a track with her peers.

ACADIA

BUT NEVER WAS I A HORSE GIRL

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. AQUARIUM - DAY

An Atlantic horseshoe crab swims in view. Acadia watches.

ACADIA

INSTEAD, A HORSESHOE CRAB'S WORST
NIGHTMARE!
I'LL END EVERY LIVING FOSSIL IF IT
MEANS SAVING EVERY MOM IN THE
FUTURE

EXT. CARNIVAL - DAY

Acadia is in zombie face paint, like the *I like Turtles kid*.

REPORTER

"Back here live at the Waterfront
Village with my friend the zombie,
Acadia. You're looking good,
Acadia. Acadia just got an awesome
face paint job. What do you think?"

YOUNG ACADIA

I hate horseshoe crabs!

INT. LAB - DAY

Acadia draws blue blood from an Atlantic horseshoe crab.

ACADIA

AND FOR THAT, ONE DAY
I'LL BE FORMERLY KNOWN AS
THE SCIENTIST WHO SAVED THE WORLD!

Acadia holds up a reflective vial of blue and green liquid.

END OF "FORMERLY KNOWN" SONG

The vial transforms into...

INT. GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

SUBTITLE: 8 YEARS LATER... 2042

...a mirror Acadia uses to adjust her looks for a talk show.

PRODUCER (O.S.)

You're on in 15.

ACADIA

Whoo... 16 in a month.

Acadia pulls out her blue-stained rag and red neckerchief.
Behind those, Cát briefly shows up in the mirror.

ACADIA (CONT'D)

I wish you were here to see this.

Acadia gets up and heads out to the backstage area.

INT. TALK SHOW SET, STAGE - NIGHT

A TALK SHOW HOST sits on an armchair next to an empty sofa. Above them is a sign that reads: "This Has Been a Week."

HOST

Formerly known as Maine's youngest high school valedictorian, she's now the youngest biochemist in this nation's history. Please welcome, Dr. Acadia Tran!

The audience applauds.

Acadia walks out across the stage and sits on the sofa. She crosses and uncrosses her legs, unable to get comfortable.

HOST (CONT'D)

Chào Dr. Tran.

ACADIA

You can say "hello Acadia."

HOST

Just trying to be respectful of your roots. Any song you've like since living here?

ACADIA

Barracuda.

HOST

I'm guessing that's your favorite animal too. Your least favorite?

ACADIA

Horseshoe crabs!

The audience laughs. A few boos.

HOST

Those prehistoric things?

ACADIA

No cap. Nothing personal.

Acadia rubs her hands together, remembering her mom.

EXT. BANG-LEVIN BIOLOGICAL STATION - DAY - FLASHBACK

On this summer day, Acadia walks away from a departing car.

ACADIA (V.O.)

It's all part of the job at the
Bang-Levin Biological Station.

Acadia heads to a manor house surrounded by acres of land and lakes that allow for large-scale studies by biologists.

INT. BANG-LEVIN BIOLOGICAL STATION - LAB - MOMENTS LATER

In her lab coat, Acadia performs experiments. She draws blue blood from many HORSESHOE CRABS into vials.

ACADIA (V.O.)

I'm their researcher specializing
in Lipopolysaccharide. My work
focuses on the biochemical
principles of the Limulus test for
detecting bacterial endotoxins. The
way to do that is for our team to
draw blue blood of horseshoe crabs.

The audience murmurs in fascination.

HOST (V.O.)

Do they... *die* when you do that?

Acadia's silence draws nervous giggles from the audience.

HOST (V.O.)

Real suss, my generation would say.

ACADIA (V.O.)

For each horseshoe crab's
discomfort, a mom lives on.

Acadia discards countless Atlantic horseshoe crab shells.

INT. BANG-LEVIN BIOLOGICAL STATION - LIBRARY - NIGHT

Acadia reads an evolutionary science book on a couch. She soon notices a globe perched on a shelf.

HOST (V.O.)

Well, if it makes them more of a
wonder to tonight's audience. Fun
fact is that horseshoe crabs are
only located in East Asia and East
North America in the whole world.

ACADIA (V.O.)

So? Why bring that up?

HOST (V.O.)

I found it fascinating. It makes no sense tectonically. Why there outta all places? Have you ever felt that way with two places you call home?

ACADIA (V.O.)

This is a little on the nose.

HOST (V.O.)

Not the nose. In your blood. In your soul.

She turns the globe away from America and has it face Asia.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CÚC PHUONG NATIONAL PARK, VIETNAM - ANOTHER DAY

SUBTITLE: CÚC PHUONG NATIONAL PARK, VIETNAM

We travel to one of the world's most biodiverse forest reserve with roaring hills, tranquil trees, and clear water. In the water is a quirky teenage HORSESHOE CRAB.

ACADIA (V.O.)

Well, there's only one saying: only the strong survive.

RESEARCHER 1 (O.S.)

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

You shouldn't be here...

An unseen RESEARCHER nets the horseshoe crab.

EXT. CÚC PHUONG NATIONAL PARK - DOCK - MINUTES LATER

2 RESEARCHERS put the horseshoe crab in a box of water. The CRAB tries to escape, but she flips upside down.

RESEARCHER 2

I can't believe her kind lived this long without evolving.

RESEARCHER 1

It explains how she made it all the way out here.

The second researcher looks at a map on their phone.

RESEARCHER 2

*She must have traveled 170
kilometers west of Cát Bà.*

The first researcher sees a play icon hover the phone.

RESEARCHER 1

What were you listening to?

RESEARCHER 2

*You know Acadia Tran, the world's
youngest biochemist? She was on the
This Has Been a Week talk show.*

The first researcher taps the play icon on top of the phone.

HOST (PHONE)

Is your dad still backstage?

ACADIA (PHONE)

No, but he'll pick me up after.

HOST (PHONE)

(Sarcastically)

He seems to always be there for you-

ACADIA (PHONE)

His firstborn is the Coast Guard,
so no time for anyone.

RESEARCHER 1

*This horseshoe crab is a perfect
gift for our sister across the sea.*

RESEARCHER 2 (V.O.)

*Now she'll be traveling 14,000
kilometers east.*

In the box, the upside down horseshoe crab twists and turns
to no avail. Her whole world is about to change.

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

INT. DELIVERY TRUCK - DAY

We see a shipping container labeled: "fragile." The container shakes in a delivery truck before it abruptly stops.

EXT. BANG-LEVIN BIOLOGICAL STATION - CONTINUOUS

The delivery truck is parked out front.

INT. PHO RESTAURANT - SAME TIME

At a table, Acadia, wearing a Bowdoin College sweatshirt, stares at a tablet. Her bowl of pho is untouched, of course. Many Viets would wonder how pho could look so unappealing.

A waiter of Chinese origin stops by Acadia's table.

WAITER

If you don't mind me asking: where
your parents? Typically kids eat
free... or work.

The waiter points to a child doing homework and taxes behind the cash registers.

ACADIA

I work in the lab down the block.

WAITER

How is everything?

ACADIA

(Lying)
Tastes like home...

The waiter taps himself on the back and walks away.

ACADIA (CONT'D)

...if I lived in an airport.

The waiter goes to the child at the register.

WAITER

(in Chinese)
Study hard and you'll eat like her.

SUBTITLE: Study hard and you'll get to eat? (Rough Chinese)

Acadia did not understand what they said.

On the tablet, Acadia roams through satellite software to locate a horseshoe crab-shaped island in Cát Bà Archipelago. Next to the messy bowl of pho, the map images come out blurry or cloudy in the region. It leaves her feeling defeated.

Acadia hears a mixture of Chinese and English around her.

SUBTITLE: ???Gibberish???

With a spoon, Acadia picks up a bone from the bowl.

ACADIA

When will my bones feel at home?

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. BANG-LEVIN BIOLOGICAL STATION - AN HOUR LATER

As Acadia walks, the bone shakes in her hand with her red neckerchief.

INT. BANG-LEVIN BIOLOGICAL STATION - LAB - MOMENTS LATER

Acadia puts on a grey lab coat over her charcoal cargo pants. She walks in, lost in thought. She almost trips over a stool.

The container lies on the workstation. She walks past it, then steps back and reads its labels.

ACADIA

"Cúc Phương National Park, Vietnam."

She pockets her red neckerchief, keeping the bone in hand.

ACADIA (CONT'D)

Who else to give this cultural offering than the only Viet in a hundred square miles!

She YANKS the lid off the container. She looks inside with a mix of disdain and curiosity.

ACADIA (CONT'D)

I forgot how ugly Vietnamese horseshoe crabs are.

She pokes the creature with the bone and gets transports to...

EXT. FOSSIL ISLAND - BAY - DAY - FLASHBACK

...a sailboat docked by her mom's secret island 8 years ago.

Acadia sentimentally touches the water. Horseshoe crabs swarm her hand. She slaps them away.

CÁT (V.O.)
(in Vietnamese; subtitled)
*That's no way to treat the spirits
of Fossil Island.*

Acadia spins around. Nothing but sea mist.

CÁT (V.O.)
*You must offer them the whole
world. Offer them algae. Offer them
mollusk shells. Offer them clams.
Offer them fishes, CRABS! Offering
everything will bring you...*

Acadia sees a human-sized, glowing blue shadow in the mist.

MATCH CUT TO:

BACK TO PRESENT.

INT. BANG-LEVIN BIOLOGICAL STATION - LAB - CONTINUOUS

Acadia holds up the real horseshoe crab, in a trance.

The horseshoe crab, dubbed KOOKY (15), TWITCHES, grabbing the bone from Acadia's hand and scarfing it down.

KOOKY
(Sweet familiar voice)
Ngon quááá!!!!
(Tasty!!!!)

Acadia cannot believe what she is hearing.

KOOKY (CONT'D)
I mean... *Woof?*

ACADIA
Ahhhhhhhh!!!!!!

Acadia DROPS Kooky, who lands silently and SCUTTLES gracefully across the floor with a cat-like tread.

ACADIA (CONT'D)
Security!

She dials a landline phone. The line is DEAD. She pulls the phone towards her-

The cord is severed. Kooky sits nearby, the bone MUNCHEDED in half. She flicks her tail, observing Acadia with curiosity.

KOOKY

This tastes nothing like a worm.

Kooky crawls UP THE WALL towards Acadia, a mirror of Cát's sass and a kitty. She corners Acadia near a fume hood.

ACADIA

I'm no worm either! Ya voice's fam-

KOOKY

We may be ugly, but we are smart.

Kooky cleans her shell with a leg, like a cat grooming.

ACADIA

We? Who you callin' ugly?! How are you talking?!

KOOKY

We had 445 million years to practice!

ACADIA

How old are you?!

KOOKY

My latest molt was 1000 days ago.

ACADIA

You're almost 16. My age...

KOOKY

I'm a molt away from maturity. I'm not ready to give up my childhood yet. Where are we? Is this Cát Bà??

Kooky stares out the window at the lake.

ACADIA

How do you know Cát Bà...?

KOOKY

I was born there!

ACADIA

Which island?

KOOKY

Don't know. I've visited all 367. This must be the 368th, it smells like antiseptic and regret.

ACADIA

It's no island. This is America!

Kooky eyes the water tanks.

KOOKY

No wonder the horseshoe crabs here
have such strange accents!

The Atlantic horseshoe crabs tap the tank glass aggressively.

HORSESHOE CRABS

She makes a killing out of us! A
KILLING!

KOOKY

You make a killing out of what?!

ACADIA

(Panicked)

No killing here! That mid-Atlantic
dialect can be so dramatic!

She grabs an evolutionary science book, SLAMS it open on the
workstation to the horseshoe crab section.

ACADIA (CONT'D)

You're a tri-spine! There are three
species in Asia! An Indo-Pacific
horseshoe crab... *Tac-hi-*

KOOKY

Tachypleus gigas...

Acadia wells up remembering her mom say those tough words.

KOOKY (CONT'D)

(Squinting at the book)

Look inward, troglodyte!

ACADIA

Shut up, trilobite!

Acadia sees her reflection in the tank. The angry Atlantic
horseshoe crabs swarm the glass.

HORSESHOE CRABS

Don't speak about your ancestors in
that way! This generation's stupid!

Acadia SCREAMS, drops the book, and BOLTS out of the lab.

KOOKY

You're not stupid, you're just
very, very ugly!

Kooky slowly follows behind, munching the last bit of bone.

INT. BANG-LEVIN BIOLOGICAL STATION - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Acadia sprints down the staircase and through the lobby
towards the exit, past several ACADEMICS.

EXT. BANG-LEVIN BIOLOGICAL STATION - CONTINUOUS

Acadia runs away from the manor along a lake, late afternoon.

EXT. SWING SET - EVENING

As dusk approaches, Acadia grows exhausted. In the distance
is a swing hanging from a tree by the lake. She sits on it.

In the lake, KOOKY swims upside down towards Acadia. She gets
on land and leaps onto the base of the swing set with
surprising agility but remains upside down.

KOOKY

Little help *question mark*?

Acadia sighs in frustration. She kicks Kooky right side up.

Kooky scuttles up and attaches herself to Acadia's leg, like
a cat rubbing its face against a leg.

ACADIA

For a recently mature horseshoe
crab, you seem elderly.

KOOKY

That's why we're called "living
fossils." Evolving never made us
swing one way or the other. But, my
pals always said I was a kooky
horseshoe. I never quite fit in.
I'm always swinging from one nest
to another. Do you have a community
question mark?

"MOOD SWING" SONG

ACADIA

I'M NOT IN THE MOOD

KOOKY

WHY NOT?

ACADIA

I EXPERIENCE SWINGS

KOOKY

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THEY ARE?

ACADIA

I DON'T
YEAH NO, I DO
ACTUALLY NO YEAH
WELL...

KOOKY

YOU'RE UNWELL

ACADIA

THESE PAST YEARS
IT'S BEEN A SICKNESS

KOOKY

MOOD SOUNDS LIKE A SPELL
WHOOSH, YOU'RE HAPPY

ACADIA

POOF, YOU'RE SAD

KOOKY

ZAP, YOU'RE MAD

ACADIA

SWISH, FLABBERGASTED

KOOKY

BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS
IT'LL ALWAYS SWING BACK TO *HAPPY!*

ACADIA

POOF, HERE'S SAD

KOOKY

ZAP, HERE'S MAD

ACADIA

SWISH, FLABBERGASTED

KOOKY

BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS
IT'LL ALWAYS SWING BACK TO *HAPPY!*

ACADIA

THOUGH ONE TIME, I STAYED SAD
FOR WHAT SEEMS LIKE FOREVER
NO ONE IS HERE TO PUSH MY SWING

Kooky crawls around and leaps onto Acadia's back. She perches on her shoulders.

KOOKY

I HAVE TEN LEGS
THOUGH THEY'RE NOT GREAT AT PUSHING
PHYSICAL THINGS
THEY'RE HERE TO PUSH YOUR SPIRIT

Kooky nudges Acadia's head gently with her shell, then pushes Acadia's spirit out. She looks back and sees something in Kooky but cannot make out what she means. Acadia comes back to her body.

ACADIA & KOOKY

MOOD SOUNDS LIKE A SPELL
WHOOSH, YOU'RE HAPPY
POOF, YOU'RE SAD
ZAP, YOU'RE MAD
SWISH, FLABBERGASTED
BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS
IT'LL ALWAYS SWING BACK TO *HAPPY!*

KOOKY

SWING ONE WAY OR THE OTHER
YOU'RE PERFECT ONE WAY OR ANOTHER!

END OF "MOOD SWING" SONG

ACADIA

I hereby declare you... *KOOKY*...

KOOKY

That's sweet!

ACADIA

Like all cookies! Except raisins...
Now, Kooky.

KOOKY

Yes, caddie *question mark?*

ACADIA

Whoa.

KOOKY

What?

ACADIA

No one calls me... well... um.

KOOKY

I call all my friends that. I'm an addict of golf, okay?

CUTAWAY TO:

SHACK - DAY

Kooky sneakily watches a golf tournament on TV in a shack.

ACADIA (V.O.)

Who's your favorite player?

KOOKY (V.O.)

Nah, I just like to watch balls fall in the water.

KOOKY

That golf swing!

Kooky watches a replay of a golf ball landing in a pond with gators.

RETURN TO:

EXT. SWING SET - CONTINUOUS

ACADIA

Golf's the national sport of retirement homes. You are a living fossil.

KOOKY

(Mockingly)

Pffffff... You are a living fossil.

ACADIA

Now's a perfect time to swing by Fossil Island...

KOOKY

Perfect! Let's swim there.

ACADIA

Too far. We need to get to a seaport. Dad once took me to Port Newark. That's our best option.

KOOKY

Walk us there.

ACADIA

It's not walking distance. We need a ride. We have to steal the research ATV.

KOOKY

Stealing is bad.

ACADIA

When did your species have morals?

KOOKY

(Rapidly)

Just cause you don't understand our quiet ways doesn't mean we don't feel things deeply, it means we've had more time to think about them.

ACADIA

445 billion-

KOOKY

Million! We're not that old! You'll give this ATV thing back?

ACADIA

It'll find its way back because...

Acadia swings out, launching herself off the swing.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. BANG-LEVIN BIOLOGICAL STATION - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Acadia jumps into the driver's seat of the 2-seat ATV. She wears her leaf hat. She puts Kooky in passenger. She adjusts the seatbelt for her.

ACADIA

...it's self-driving!

KOOKY

You mean "alive?"

ACADIA

Sure.

Acadia taps a card on the ATV keypad. The ATV roars to life.

KOOKY

Is that a treatttttttt?

ACADIA

It's the program coordinator's
card. Snuck it outta their bedroom.

Kooky looks up, puzzled.

ACADIA (CONT'D)

Yes, it's a treat. Now the trick is
to get past security...

KOOKY

I got a trick up my sleeves.

ACADIA

Horseshoe crabs don't have sleeves?

KOOKY

They do.

A pack of Atlantic horseshoe crabs scuttle out towards the
security booth, waking up the unphased security guard.

GUARD

Got IDs?

HORSESHOE CRABS

We got tags! Now let's bag them up
and throw them in the tank!

GUARD

This has to be a dream. I'm never
eating a crab sandwich before a nap
ever again!

The horseshoe crabs kidnap the guard and take them away.

KOOKY

Looks like your lonely friend there
made a dozen more tonight!

ACADIA

Who needs friends when you've got
horseshoe crabs like that.

KOOKY

Now put on your exoskeleton strap!

Acadia puts on her seatbelt.

ACADIA

It's a seatbelt. ATV, take us to
Port Newark!

The ATV accelerates, faster than Acadia expects.

EXT. ATV - MOMENTS LATER

"DOWNSTREAM" PIECE

The ATV drives out into the unknown.

KOOKY

ATV sure is faster than a sailfish!
But why not a falcon *question mark*?

ACADIA

What's with your question marks...?
And what about falcons?

KOOKY

I flew here. So, why don't we just
fly to Vietnam? I want a window
seat this time!

ACADIA

Window seats cost extra, Kooky.
This lab doesn't pay me enough for
even one economy ticket. And plus
you wouldn't count as a pet-

KOOKY

Oh please. I can fit under a seat!

ACADIA

You're a wild animal with no
passport, no visa, and you talk.
That's a biohazard risk.

KOOKY

(Takes it as a compliment)
I'm a biohazard, huh... So? I'm a
living fossil, not a germ!

ACADIA

Yeah. People in my dad's government
would snatch you the second we hit
an airport scanner. Air traffic
control no longer exists. It ain't
safe flying. Plus, a cargo ship is
sneakier.

KOOKY

Sneakier... I like that. We're like ghost crabs or pistol crabs!

ACADIA

Sure... Wanna put on some music?

KOOKY

No one has asked me that before. I have mine to put on. I just wrote this song:

KOOKY AND CADI!

KOOKY AND CADI!

KOOKY AND CADI!

KOOK AND CAD!

INT. GOVERNMENT OFFICE - SAME TIME

We see a framed photo of Cát and Morgan holding baby Acadia.

MORGAN (O.S.)

I can't believe the sea took you too...

Morgan looks down at a large map of Southeast Asia.

ACADIA (V.O.)

Is that all?

KOOKY (V.O.)

That's all I got.

There are marks in Indonesia written for his missing parents.

ACADIA (V.O.)

All I got too.

(in Vietnamese; subtitled)

Nước biển đang ăn vào bài hát.

(The sea shall eat into the song.)

Morgan circles Cát Bà Archipelago and writes "My horseshoe."

Nearby are folders and documents labeled "THE LIVING FOSSILS." He seems to be on a personalized Coast Guard mission.

"THE LIVING FOSSILS" text phases into the closing image.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

TITLE: THE LIVING FOSSILS

The ATV drives towards the camera, slightly off the ground.

KOOKY
KOOKY AND CADI!!!

FREEZE ON: A happy-go-lucky Kooky and questioning-life-choices Acadia in their weird ATV.

Kooky's tail flicks.

Kooky and Cadi's wild adventure begins.

END OF "DOWNSTREAM" PIECE

END OF PILOT