

A Screenplay
By Lauren
Hackney



*It's time to
love yourself.*

In the
House
That
Elle Built

INTRODUCTION

A lonely woman struggling with past trauma finds solace in an unwavering love - only to discover the man she adores and the friends she relies on exist only in her mind. As reality unravels, she must confront her fractured identity and learn to love herself before she loses everything, including her own sense of self. A story about learning to love yourself before finding love in the wrong places.



IN THE HOUSE THAT ELLE BUILT - Set in the bayside, South of Brisbane

Images of Raby Bay Harbour, the library, the run-down house where Elle grew up and local café's that set the scene for this feature film.



STORY

Elizabeth has always felt like an outsider—adrift in a world that never quite made sense. Struggling with loneliness and the scars of a painful past, she finally finds love in Josh, a kind and understanding man who sees her in a way no one else ever has. With him, she feels safe. Whole. But when cracks begin to form in their relationship, and people around her start questioning Josh's existence, Elizabeth is forced to confront a devastating truth—Josh isn't real.

As Elizabeth spirals, her trusted psychiatrist, Dr. Johnstone, and social worker, Sarah, guide her toward an earth-shattering realization: she has dissociative identity disorder. The people she has depended on—Josh, Betty, Lizzy, and Elle—are not separate individuals, but fragments of her own mind, created to protect her from past wounds. Barbara and Matt, the harshest voices in her head, reflect her deepest insecurities, reminding her of the love and acceptance she never believed she deserved.

Devastated, Elizabeth wrestles with the idea that her greatest love and strongest friendships were merely manifestations of her subconscious. But as she sifts through memories—revisiting moments where she once saw Josh by her side, only to now see herself alone—she realizes that the love she's been searching for has always been within her.

In a powerful journey of self-acceptance, Elizabeth learns to embrace all parts of herself, not as separate beings but as pieces of the woman she is meant to become. As she lets go of Josh with one final goodbye, she steps into the world not as someone seeking love, but as someone who finally understands that she is worthy of it. And for the first time, she is learning to love herself first.



CHARACTERS

ELIZABETH

Elizabeth (42) is a woman quietly carrying the world's weight. With long blonde hair and a soft presence, she puts her energy into caring for her two foster children - Elle (6) and Lizzy (15) - while trying to maintain a complicated but meaningful friendship with their supportive roommate, Betty (24).

She dresses with quiet practicality, rarely considering her appearance, even when she crosses paths with Josh (38) - a man who seems to offer the love and connection she craves. But Elizabeth isn't just looking for romance. Deep down, she's searching for forgiveness, acceptance, and the courage to love herself—something she's never truly learned to do.

Empathetic and nurturing, Elizabeth is fiercely protective of the younger versions of herself living within - her alters - but forgets that the woman she is now deserves that same compassion. Her journey is one of healing, self-discovery, and the powerful truth that you can't fully love others until you learn to love yourself.

CHARACTERS

ELLE (6) and LIZZY (15)

Elle and Lizzy are not just children under Elizabeth's care - they are the younger versions of herself, given another chance.

Elle, innocent and wide-eyed, clings to the joy of playgrounds and bedtime stories.

Lizzy, defiant and wounded, flirts with danger and disappears for days.

Both girls come from a place of neglect and trauma, and both are desperate for the one thing they've never truly known: unconditional love.

Through quiet gestures - holding Elle's hand at the park, guiding Lizzy away from the train tracks - Elizabeth begins to show them the safety and stability they never had.

Their healing depends on her. And in saving them, Elizabeth starts to heal herself.



CHARACTERS

BETTY

Betty (24) is a young woman trying to rebuild her life while carrying the weight of past trauma. She's determined to move forward - studying, working, and striving for independence - but the scars of abuse still shadow her progress. Her journey is one of resilience, as she balances the hope for healing with the reality of how deeply pain can linger. Betty is Elizabeth in her 20's and this is revealed at the end of Act 2.





CHARACTERS

Josh

Josh (38) is gentle, grounded, and emotionally intelligent – a well dressed, professional who's successful in his career.

When he meets Elizabeth, he's drawn to her complexity and vulnerability, sensing the strength behind her struggles.

Though calm on the surface, Josh is navigating his own past, one marked by fractured relationships and a longing for connection. He's not the hero of Elizabeth's story - but he becomes her companion when she needs to become her own.

CHARACTERS

Matt (39) and Barbara (65) - Josh's best friend and mother - are united in their concern over his growing relationship with Elizabeth.

Matt, fiercely loyal and protective, sees Josh as someone who's always given more than he's received. He worries that Elizabeth, with her complicated past, will only bring more heartache. Barbara, pragmatic and quietly controlling, has long envisioned a simpler path for her son - one with stability, children, and someone "easier to love."

They both believe Josh deserves a fresh start, not another rescue mission. But neither fully understands the depth of connection and healing that Josh finds in Elizabeth.



ACT 1

ACT 1 – SETTING THE SCENE

- The film opens in the warm chaos of a busy morning routine - Elizabeth juggles parenting duties as she gets her two foster daughters, Elle and Lizzy, ready for school, with support from her loyal friend Betty. Later that day, Elizabeth crosses paths with Josh outside the local library, where a shared interest in four-wheel driving sparks an unexpected connection. A few casual dates follow, and while feelings begin to blossom, Lizzy struggles with the shift in family dynamics. Elizabeth's social worker, Sarah, gently questions the timing of a new relationship, hinting at deeper emotional risks. Act 1 introduces the heart of the story - complex characters, fragile hopes, and the quiet tension between healing and change.

Act 2

As Josh begins to fall for Elizabeth, his fiercely protective mother, Barbara (late 60s), and his loyal best friend, Matt (late 30s), grow increasingly wary. Both express deep concerns about Elizabeth and urge Josh to rethink his choices. At home, tensions escalate when Lizzy runs away, desperate to keep Elizabeth's full attention. In the wake of this turmoil, Elizabeth continues confiding in Sarah, who eventually refers her to Dr. Johnstone - a psychiatrist with unsettling insights. Dr. Johnstone believes that the new people in Elizabeth's life - Josh, Barbara, and Matt - may not be who they appear to be.

Act 3

Through guided journaling and gentle therapy, Dr. Johnstone helps Elizabeth uncover a profound truth: she is living with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) - a condition in which distinct identities, or "alters," exist within one person, often as a response to severe trauma.

Each alter in Elizabeth's home represents a buried part of herself. The girls are younger versions of Elizabeth, frozen at the ages when the abuse was most severe. Josh embodies the unconditional love she has always yearned for but believed she didn't deserve. Barbara and Matt - alters she has never consciously met - manifest her deepest fears and insecurities, appearing only when Josh is alone.

In the film's powerful final act, Elizabeth begins to accept these fragmented parts of herself. She chooses healing over hiding, self-compassion over shame. The story closes with a quiet triumph: Elizabeth, now an author, holds her published book *In The House That Elle Built*—a symbol of survival, self-discovery, and the home she's finally made within herself.

CINEMATOGRAPHY FOR *In The House That Elle Built*

The cinematography in *In The House That Elle Built* is intimate, haunting, and deeply psychological - mirroring Elizabeth's fractured inner world. A muted, natural color palette underscores the emotional weight of each scene, while soft, diffused lighting gives the house an almost dreamlike quality - at once comforting and unsettling. Handheld camera work places the viewer inside Elizabeth's experience, blurring the line between what is real and imagined. As the story unfolds and Elizabeth's truth comes into focus, the visual style subtly shifts - bringing in warmer tones and steadier framing to reflect her growing clarity and self-acceptance. Symbolic use of mirrors, doorways, and empty spaces enhance the film's exploration of identity, memory, and the quiet resilience of the human spirit.

GENRE AND SIMILAR FILMS

Genre: 'In The House That Elle Built' A raw and emotional psychological drama exploring trauma, identity, and unconventional healing through a found-family bond.

Think Silver Linings Playbook meets Room, with the raw emotional depth of Precious.

***Silver Linings Playbook* (2012)**

- Themes: Mental illness, unconventional love, family dysfunction, redemption.
- Why it fits: A messy, heartfelt romance between two emotionally damaged people trying to heal.

***Room* (2015)**

- Themes: Trauma, mother-child bond, recovery, resilience.
- Why it fits: Focus on a mother figure (Elizabeth) helping vulnerable children heal from abuse.

***Precious* (2009)**

- Themes: Abuse, survival, mentorship, systemic neglect.
- Why it fits: A young girl navigating abuse with the help of an older guide.

About Lauren Hackney

My name is Lauren, and I'm a writer from a seaside suburb of Brisbane, Australia. I love exploring with my family, traveling, trying new things, laughing out loud, and being outdoors. A favourite pastime of mine is storytelling, whether it be a bedtime story, a campfire story, or a road trip story. I love combining these into my work and sharing them with people creatively.

I started writing after a horrid year in 2020. Covid put an end to my aviation career and only a few months later, my husband of 41 suffered a life-threatening heart attack that left him diagnosed with heart failure. Refusing to have those events as my main memories, I made up stories with my children and together we created, wrote, illustrated and published our family bedtime story 'The Lolly Shop' and later I wrote a short story. 'Land Angels', which has now been turned into a screenplay

Recently 'The Lolly Shop' received an honourable mention in the StoryMonsters awards in both middle grade and children's chapter books. This screenplay made it into the Quarterfinals in the New Voices in Animation Screenplay awards through Stage 32. My script 'Land Angels' received an Honourable Mention in the New York Script Awards 2024 and gained a place as a Quarter Finalist in the Los Angeles International Screenplay Awards 2025.

It doesn't matter how old you are, imagination can save the day!