

ACTS OF CONTRITION

by

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a screenplay based on  
*Missing*, by Mary Stanley

FADE IN:

INT. DUNVILLES' HOUSE, DUBLIN, 1955 - NIGHT

A party in full swing. Partygoers pick at the remains of a buffet, stand or sit in groups, drink from wine glasses, beer mugs, whiskey glasses. Some couples dance drunkenly to music played from a gramophone.

The décor of the house is not quite complete. In places, packing cases draped with cloth act as makeshift tables.

A banner above the mantelpiece proclaims: "WELCOME BACK LIZ AND JOHN".

RICHARD DELAWARE (27), tall, handsome, lounges beneath the banner. He raises his glass to JOHN DUNVILLE (25) across the room. John raises his in return.

John's wife ELIZABETH DUNVILLE (23) high-heels between guests, deposits her drink on a shelf, and exits.

JAMES FITZGERALD (25), Elizabeth's brother, watches her go. John taps his shoulder, shouts over the noise of the party.

JOHN

Where's she going?

JAMES

Just to check on Baby. Is she all right, John?

JOHN

She'll be better now we're back in Dublin.

JAMES

All her friends are here. Dammit, all your friends are here too.

John flicks a look at the mantelpiece. Richard has gone.

UPSTAIRS

it is much quieter. Elizabeth climbs stairs to a third floor gable room where BABY (BARBARA) DUNVILLE (1) lies in her cot.

Footsteps. Elizabeth turns, surprised. Richard is upon her in an instant, a hand on each shoulder.

RICHARD

Please let me talk to you.

ELIZABETH

Richard, I can't. What if John  
- ?

RICHARD

John's getting pie-eyed with  
your precious brother. Come on,  
Elizabeth. I need to talk to  
you. I need to spend some time  
with you. I need you.

Baby gurgles. Elizabeth turns, grips the side of the cot, looks down at her but makes no move to pick her up.

ELIZABETH

I think we'd better go  
downstairs now.

Elizabeth's skirt presses against the cot. Baby reaches out for it.

RICHARD (OS)

Not until I've kissed you. I'm  
sorry I left you, baby.

ELIZABETH (OS)

Don't call me that. It's too  
late, Richard.

RICHARD (OS)

No. No, it's not.

Baby stops reaching out as Elizabeth's skirt whisks away. A door SLAMS.

OUTSIDE THE GABLE ROOM

in semi-darkness on the small landing, Richard yanks up Elizabeth's skirt, presses her against the wall. He GASPS as he moves urgently against her.

Over his shoulder, Elizabeth's face is a mask of despair.

EXT./INT ST. MARTIN'S SCHOOL, DUBLIN, 1971 - DAY

Bells CHIME with the same rhythm as the sexual encounter. Below the bells, a sign: "ST. MARTIN'S SCHOOL - QUI AUDET CALAT". Below the sign, big double doors burst open. Green-uniformed girls swarm out, shouting excitedly.

SUPER: "Sixteen years later".

Just inside the doors black-dressed, severe MOTHER IMMACULATA scrutinises each passing girl. AILIS BROPHY (14), untidy, and GEMMA DUNVILLE (14), bouncing on her toes, approach.

AILIS

Merry Christmas, Reverend Mother.

MOTHER IMMACULATA

Gemma Dunville, are you chewing gum?

Ailis looks behind, aghast. Gemma chokes.

MOTHER IMMACULATA

May the saints preserve you, Gemma Dunville, you are not even out of the doors.

She holds out a piece of paper. Behind her, Ailis rolls her eyes, draws her finger across her throat, signs a cross. Gemma suppresses a giggle, tongues the gum into the paper.

Two tall girls saunter past, BABY DUNVILLE, now 17, blonde and beautiful, and pretty ANNE-MARIE O'MAHONEY (17).

ANNE-MARIE

Any idea who that child is?

BABY

Probably some poor girl's sister.

Outside, their breathing fogs in cold air.

ANNE-MARIE

Praise be to the Christmas season. Booze and fags.

BABY

And the male anatomy.

ANNE-MARIE

Thus spake the Lord. Want a lift?

BABY

Speaking of sisters.

BECKY (REBECCA) DUNVILLE (15), carrying a satchel, scurries away from the school.

BABY

She runs off like that every Friday, did you notice? I wonder what she's up to?

ANNE-MARIE

Something boring, I expect. Here's Adam. You coming?

A car pulls up. The chauffeur gets out, opens the rear door.

ANNE-MARIE

Baby! You coming or not?

BABY

What? Oh yes. Hello, Adam.

She pulls off her school tie, shakes her hair loose, glides sexily towards the car. She and Adam exchange a smile.

EXT. GARDENS - DAY

Becky hurries along a grassy path, glances at her watch, breaks into a run.

Breathless, she arrives at a tree near an old stone cottage. She looks round, sees nobody. She hangs her satchel on a branch, scrambles up. Balanced precariously, she strains higher to improve her angle of view.

EXT/INT. COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Just visible through a window, the naked back and the top of the buttocks of a young man in the shower.

He drops the soap, curses, crouches down to retrieve it. He turns almost completely round as he does so, then stands up.

EXT. GARDENS - DAY

Becky's eyes widen. Her foot slips. She tumbles out of the tree, lands flat on her back in a cloud of dust and leaves.

The detritus settles. Becky opens her eyes, moves her legs and arms experimentally, feels at her body. Sighs.

BECKY

Thank-you, God.

EXT/INT. DUNVILLES' HOUSE - DAY

Baby opens the front door, replaces the key under a flowerpot.

IN THE DOWNSTAIRS HALL

she eases the door shut behind her, listens intently. There are Christmas decorations up in the house.

BABY

Anybody home?

No reply. Baby sorts through the mail, opens and scans one letter quickly, then reseals it. She runs upstairs.

The front door opens. Becky enters, dishevelled, with leaves in her hair. She drops her satchel, totters into the

LIVING ROOM

where she flings herself onto a sofa, out of sight. Footsteps approach: in tight jeans and sweater, Baby enters, picks up the phone, dials.

BABY

It's me. Are we okay for tonight? No, I haven't said anything yet, there's no-one here. There won't be a problem. No, I checked it, the good sisters have marked me up on last time, even Latin and history, God bless their tiny reverend minds.

She looks up: the front door bangs open, slams shut.

BABY

You hear that? I wonder who that could be?

Gemma appears in the doorway, red-faced and angry.

GEMMA

I missed the bus. You saw me. You just drove off.

BABY

It's not my car.

GEMMA

Oh shut up! You could have stopped. You didn't have to wave out the window.

BABY

It's not my car.

Becky lurches up above the back of the sofa, hair wild.

BECKY

It's not my car.

Gemma bursts into laughter, Baby goggles with disbelief.

BABY

How long have you been there?

They all freeze as car wheels crunch on gravel. Baby slams down the receiver. All three girls dash out of the room.