

CHRISTMAS IN SEPTEMBER

A Screenplay by Dave Hawkins

1. INT THE LOUNGE ROOM AFTERNOON 1
BECKIE, NICK, MONIQUE, RHONDA.

THE ROOM IS A PIG-HOLE! **BECKIE** IS TRYING TO TIDY UP AND IS NOT ENJOYING IT. **NICK** ENTERS VIA AN INTERIOR DOOR. HE HAS JUST GOT OUT OF BED AND APPEARS DISHEVELLED AND HALF-ASLEEP.

NICK

Thank God it's you. I thought we had burglars.

BECKIE

Sure! Like we've got so much worth stealing. And even if we did, who the hell could find it in this pig sty without a native tracker?

NICK

I reckon it looks kind-of lived-in.

BECKIE

So does Sing Sing probably, and I bet they're less fussy about their tenants than our landlord. Why don't you apply for a cell? I'll give you a reference. Gladly.

NICK REFUSES THE BAIT AND BEGINS FORAGING AMONG THE MESS.

NICK

I'll sleep on it. Meanwhile, you haven't come across some left-over pizza in your travels, I suppose?

BECKIE

I chucked it in the bin along with all the other disgusting green, furry things that are starting to grow legs.

NICK TURNS AND HEADS FOR THE KITCHEN.

(Cont Scene 1)

BECKIE
(continues)

You're not going to eat it, surely?

NICK

I need the penicillin boost. I think I'm coming down with something.

BECKIE

Well, if you feel about to die, jump in the wheelie-bin before you do. I've got enough mess to clear up. I don't plan making a career of it.

THE FRONT DOOR OPENS. **MONIQUE** ENTERS AS **NICK** EXITS INTO THE KITCHEN. **BECKIE** CONTINUES WITH THE CLEARING UP.

MONIQUE

Hi, Beck. What are you doing home so early?

BECKIE PAUSES TO ANSWER. **MONIQUE** DROPS HER BAG BY THE DOOR AND WALKS A FEW PACES.

MONIQUE
(continues)

Hey, I'm really glad you talked me into going to Uni.

MONIQUE DRAGS OFF HER JUMPER AND DROPS IT ON THE FLOOR, THEN ADVANCES FURTHER INTO THE ROOM. **BECKIE** WATCHES FOR A MOMENT, TUTS, THEN HEADS FOR THE JUMPER.

MONIQUE
(continues)

We had this sort-of welcome-to-campus lecture...

MONIQUE HOOKS OFF ONE SHOE, TAKES A COUPLE OF STEPS AND HOOKS OFF THE SECOND LEAVING BOTH BEHIND HER AS SHE HEADS FOR THE SOFA AND THROWS HERSELF ONTO IT. **BECKIE** FOLLOWS AND STARES DOWN AT THE SHOES. **MONIQUE** STARTS PULLING OFF HER SOCKS. SHE SNIFFS THEM PRIOR TO TOSSING THEM OVER HER HEAD BEHIND THE SOFA.

(Cont Scene 1)

MONIQUE
(continues)

... all about study practices and time-management. You know, like being totally organised and focussed. And I thought...

BECKIE IS COMING TO THE BOIL AS SHE POINTS TO A SPOT ON THE FLOOR.

BECKIE

My God! Look!

MONIQUE

What?

BECKIE

There's a space you haven't used yet! And there's another one over there!

MONIQUE

Pardon me for breathing. Who trod on your tail?

BECKIE

You did! All of you! What I don't get is why you always stop before you've done a complete job! Strip off, why don't you? Be my guest. Who wants to see the bloody carpet anyway?

MONIQUE PATS THE SOFA.

MONIQUE

Let's talk.

BECKIE

I don't have time.

MONIQUE

You never used to say that. You always had time before.

BECKIE

That was then. It's different now. Things have changed. We've changed.

(Cont Scene 1)

MONIQUE

I haven't. I'm still your little sister and you're still looking out for me. That's why I came here to live with you. I thought you wanted it too.

BECKIE

I did. I do. It's just that you're so damned... casual about everything.

BECKIE DECIDES TO SIT.

BECKIE

(continues)

Look, Monique, we're not kids any more. The country town we were brought up in is a million miles away. The city isn't as tolerant. It bites back. And believe me it hurts.

MONIQUE

Something's happened, hasn't it?

BECKIE

It's no big deal.

MONIQUE

What is it? Something between you and Peter?

BECKIE

No, nothing like that. It's the job - the one I used to have. They closed the office today. No warning. Just paid us all off and shut the doors.

MONIQUE

But that's terrible!

BECKIE

No, little Sis, that's life. It's what I was trying to tell you. The big city lights dim and the shine wears off eventually. It'll happen for you one day. Just be ready when it does.

MONIQUE CLINGS TO HER FORMER JUBILANT MOOD, LAPSING INTO DREAMS AS SHE EXPLAINS.

(Cont Scene 1)

MONIQUE

I can't believe that. As long as I want it enough it'll be there for me, just the way it is now. And forever. All busy and exciting... covered with tinsel and twinkling lights and... and little presents and candy canes and cotton wool for snow...

IT SUDDENLY DAWNS ON **BECKIE** WHERE **MONIQUE** IS COMING FROM.

BECKIE

Ah, the old security blanket - Christmas. It was always your favourite time.

MONIQUE IS TRYING HARD TO REMAIN COMPOSED, BUT BECOMING TEARFUL.

MONIQUE

The best.

BECKIE

I remember you always used to go hyper.

MONIQUE

I couldn't help it. After waiting all year, wondering if it was ever going to get here. Never absolutely convinced it would. Always hoping, though. Because if it did, when it did, it made up for all the bad times.

BECKIE

Were they really that bad?

MONIQUE

The last three years weren't the greatest.

BECKIE

After I left home. But I did come back. To visit.

MONIQUE

At Christmas, Beck! And that's the whole point. Christmas made it happen. It was magic. Everything was right. We were together again. All laughing and happy...

(Cont Scene 1)

BECKIE

Yes, well...

MONIQUE LOOKS IN DESPERATION AT **BECKIE**.

MONIQUE

It's gone, hasn't it? That's what you meant. I can wish all I like, but it's never going to come back. No more magic. No more Mum and Dad...

TEARS ARE NOW STREAMING DOWN **MONIQUE'S** FACE.

MONIQUE

(continues)

I miss them, Beck. I miss them so much...

MONIQUE BURIES HER HEAD IN **BECKIE'S** SHOULDER. AS SHE TRIES TO COMFORT HER SISTER, **BECKIE'S** SELF-CONTROL DISSIPATES.

BECKIE

I know. I miss them too...

AS **BECKIE** GIVES IN TO HER EMOTIONS, THE FRONT DOOR OPENS AND **RHONDA** BREEZES IN.

RHONDA

Hi, guys. What's up? Did Keanu Reeves have a sex change, or something...?

BECKIE GLARES AT **RHONDA** WHO SUDDENLY REALISES SHE HAS BEEN INSENSITIVE.

RHONDA

(to herself)

Bad timing, Rhonda. Foot out of mouth. Set course for foreign parts.

RHONDA HEADS FOR THE KITCHEN.

RHONDA

(continues)

I'm gone, okay. I was never here.

NICK IS AT THE BREAKFAST BAR EATING LEFT-OVER PIZZA. RHONDA ENTERS.

NICK

Very subtle, Rhonda. Donald Trump couldn't have done it better.

RHONDA

You don't have to rub it in. I know I'm stupid.

NICK

Only most of the time.

NICK OFFERS THE PIZZA BOX.

NICK
(continues)

Want some?

RHONDA PEERS INTO THE BOX AND TURNS AWAY IN DISGUST.

RHONDA

A leap from a tall building might be quicker and less traumatic. Isn't that a hair?

RHONDA POINTS AT SOMETHING ON NICK'S PIZZA. NICK EXTRACTS THE HAIR AND EXAMINES IT CLOSELY.

NICK

You're right. Obviously there's nothing wrong with your eyesight. That's an unexpected bonus.

NICK IS ABOUT TO TAKE ANOTHER BITE.

RHONDA

How can you, after finding that in it?

NICK

Why not? At least it wasn't short and curly. Nor was it attached to anything remotely identifiable. I do draw the line at toe-nails, though.

(Cont Scene 2)

RHONDA

You really are gross sometimes, Nick! With people like you around who needs a diet plan?

NICK

I just tell it like it is.

RHONDA

In that case, maybe you'd care to fill me in.

RHONDA LOOKS TOWARDS THE LOUNGE-ROOM DOOR.

NICK

Thanks for the offer, but not while I'm eating.

RHONDA

You know what I mean. What's with Beckie and Monique?

NICK

I'd have thought even you could have worked that one out for yourself. Their parents died, remember?

RHONDA

But that was months ago. I thought they'd got over it.

NICK

Maybe they did. The memorial service last week probably brought it all back.

RHONDA

Yes, I suppose. It was awful that, wasn't it? Not finding the bodies. I think if I were them I'd want to bury something, or scatter ashes. You know - like finally close the book and just keep the memories.

NICK

They are working on it. Christmas is under the hammer at the moment.

(Cont Scene 2)

RHONDA

Why Christmas?

NICK

Their folks never made it to the last one. From what I can gather it was always a monster bash. Peace and goodwill, five cent pieces in the plum pudding, Dad in his Santa-suit falling off the gutter and breaking his leg.

RHONDA

Sounds to me like you don't think much of Christmas.

NICK

Sure I do. It was Christmas when I was first discovered on the doorstep of the orphanage. For the whole of the next week they kept putting me out with the cat and the milk bottles. Even offered free distemper shots and a case of Pal. But you know how it is - there are some things even Anglicare can't give away. Then, I have vivid flashbacks of a second-hand Tonka truck with some other kid's name scratched into the paint. And I remember standing by a huge window looking out, wishing for my mother - or anyone's mother - to come and take me home. Then the garbage truck drove up and I thought - yeah, that'd be right!

RHONDA

I'm sorry, Nick. I didn't realise.

NICK

Nothing to be sorry for. Shit happens.

RHONDA

And I usually manage to step right in it.

NICK

Some people do seem to have all the luck.

FADE OUT

RHONDA, SHELLEY, FRAN, NICK, INGRID.

RHONDA, SHELLEY AND FRAN ARE SEATED AT A TABLE DRINKING COFFEE.

RHONDA

So, what do you reckon?

SHELLEY

I don't know...

FRAN

Maybe it's not such a good idea.

RHONDA

It's a great idea! I'm surprised I even thought of it.

FRAN

That's what's making us a tad wary.

RHONDA

What - me thinking of it?

SHELLEY

No, you being surprised by it. Usually you drop your bomb-shells without even batting an eye.

FRAN

And you don't give warnings, never mind conducting an opinion poll.

RHONDA

Thanks for the vote of confidence.

NICK AND INGRID ARE MAKING THEIR WAY TOWARDS THE TABLE. RHONDA NOTICES.

RHONDA

(continues)

Ingrid's here. Let's see what she thinks. Ingrid, I need moral support. I've had this fantastic idea for solving Beckie's and Monique's problem.

(Cont Scene 3)

INGRID

Oh, are you leaving town?

RHONDA SCOWLS.

NICK

Having your jaw wired shut?

RHONDA

Why are you all so rotten to me? I thought you were my friends.

INGRID CASTS A FURTIVE, THEATRICAL GLANCE AROUND.

INGRID

Of course we are, Rhonda. It's just safer to keep our options open.

RHONDA

Alright. I know my faults. You don't have to keep ramming them down my throat.

NICK

Wouldn't do any good. They never stay there long enough to defuse themselves.

RHONDA

Right. Fine. I know when I'm not wanted.

RHONDA STANDS. SHELLEY CATCHES HER ARM AND COAXES HER TO SIT.

SHELLEY

I think that's enough guys, don't you? Rhonda's only trying to help. At least she's come up with something, which is more than can be said for the rest of us.

FRAN

It wasn't really a bad idea. We just couldn't decide if it was good or not.

INGRID

Isn't that a bit Irish?

(Cont Scene 3)

NICK
(Irish accent)

Not at all, at all.

SHELLEY

Shut up the pair of you and listen. Go ahead, Rhonda. Tell them about your plan.

RHONDA

I don't think I want to, now.

A WEIGHTY PAUSE. **NICK** AND **INGRID** ARE TRYING HARD NOT TO LAUGH.

RHONDA
(continues)

Well, alright. But just remember you forced me. And if you dare tell me it's stupid, Nick, I'll murder you.

FADE OUT

4. INT THE LOUNGE ROOM DAY 4
NICK, INGRID, V/O SHELLEY (SINGING).

NICK AND **INGRID** ARE HANGING DECORATIONS. **SHELLEY** CAN BE HEARD WORKING IN THE KITCHEN, SOFTLY SINGING CHRISTMAS CAROLS THROUGHOUT THE SCENE. **INGRID** ACCIDENTALLY BRUSHES AGAINST **NICK'S** ARM AND HE FLINCHES.

INGRID

Sook. Rhonda didn't hit you that hard.

NICK

She shouldn't have done it at all.

INGRID

Why not? You were given fair warning.

NICK

I never said her idea was stupid.

(Cont Scene 4)

INGRID

No, but bursting out laughing and spitting Black-Forest cake all over her dress came pretty close. Then you had the nerve to take the cherry back.

NICK

I like the cherry. It's the best part.

INGRID

You're just a big kid.

NICK PAUSES TO LOOK AROUND THE ROOM THOUGHTFULLY.

NICK

I guess I am, really. It's funny you know, but all this - the secrecy, the trimmings - I feel kind-of excited. Like it's my very first real Christmas. I've got butterflies just thinking about it. Is that childish, or what?

INGRID

Yes it is, Nick. And it's the best way to be. The only way. You know, this might not be such a bad idea after all. Not just for Beckie and Monique, either.

NICK LOOKS IN THE DIRECTION OF THE KITCHEN AND NODS AT IT.

NICK

Sounds like someone else agrees with you.

FADE OUT

5. INT THE LOUNGE ROOM NIGHT 5
NICK, INGRID, FRAN, RHONDA, SHELLEY.

SHELLEY AND RHONDA ARE FERRYING MINCE PIES ETC. FROM THE KITCHEN AND ARRANGING THEM ON THE COFFEE TABLE. NICK IS CHECKING OFF THE STOCK OF DRINKS. FRAN IS DECORATING A SYNTHETIC CHRISTMAS TREE WITH TAMPONS.

FRAN

I still don't feel right about these. It's kind-of sexist.

(Cont Scene 5)

NICK

So's the tree, when you think about it.

RHONDA

Shouldn't it really have big silver balls?

NICK

Shouldn't we all, but some of us can only weep and dream.

THE FRONT DOOR OPENS. **INGRID** ENTERS. SHE TOSSES A PAPER CHEMIST'S BAG AT **NICK**.

NICK

Great! You got the balloons.

INGRID

All the shops were shut. That was the best I could do.

NICK LOOKS IN THE BAG.

NICK

Condoms? Hey, does this mean I'm going to be a busy lad tonight?

INGRID

Not the way you think, mister.

SHELLEY

Better start blowing, Nick. We've got half an hour, then we're out of here.

FADE OUT

6. EXT THE BACK GARDEN NIGHT 6
NICK, INGRID, SHELLEY, FRAN, RHONDA, EXTRAS X 2.

INGRID IS ON A LADDER PROPPED AGAINST THE GUTTER. SHE IS PASSING UP A BUCKET TO **NICK** WHO IS ON THE ROOF. **SHELLEY** AND **FRAN** ARE LOOKING ON. **RHONDA** IS AT THE FENCE KEEPING WATCH ON THE ROADWAY.

(Cont Scene 6)

FRAN

I thought Nick's suggestion was a really nice touch - us singing carols at the door while he scatters snow from the roof.

SHELLEY

(sigh of derision) Breadcrumbs.

FRAN

It's the thought that counts.

SHELLEY

Brown breadcrumbs...?

FRAN

At least the birds will get a feed out of it.

SHELLEY

Not to mention certain long-tailed rodents of the genus Rattus. I reckon it's all a bit over-kill.

FRAN

Don't say that, Shell. What if he falls?

SHELLEY

You're right, kiddo.

(to Nick)

Stay where you are, Nick. Don't move a muscle.

SHELLEY USHERS FRAN BACK A PACE AS NICK LOOKS DOWN.

SHELLEY

(continues)

Okay, we're clear. You're free to plummet whenever you like.

NICK

(to Ingrid)

This is what you get for employing amateurs.

(Cont Scene 6)

INGRID

Never mind the knockers, darling.

NICK

I don't. It's the people wearing them that piss me off. Let me have the bells.

SHELLEY

Watch it with them. Remember what they did to Quasimodo.

INGRID PASSES UP A HAND-BELL TO NICK.

NICK

Pardon? Did someone say something? ...Excuse me, but what's this?

NICK ISN'T AT ALL HAPPY AS HE RINGS THE BELL A COUPLE OF TIMES.

NICK

(continues)

I'm supposed to be Santa riding a sleigh drawn by my trusty reindeer bringing cheer to the people of this fair abode, not some shit-encrusted rat-bag with a handcart collecting bloody plague victims!

RHONDA IS RUNNING TOWARDS THE OTHERS FLAPPING HER HANDS MADLY.

RHONDA

Quick! I think they're coming!

INGRID

Places everyone!

RHONDA, FRAN AND SHELLEY HIDE IN THE BUSHES.

INGRID

(continues)

And you be careful, please, Nick.

NICK

What are you worried about? Do I look like a loser?

(Cont Scene 6)

INGRID

Er, well just be careful, anyway, okay?

NICK TUTS THEN DISAPPEARS AS HE CLIMBS THE ROOF. **INGRID** SHINS DOWN THE LADDER AND JOINS THE OTHERS IN THE BUSH.

SFX: BELL RINGING ON THE ROOF

V/O NICK

Bring out yer dead Bring out yer dead

A LONG SILENCE ENSUES. EVENTUALLY **RHONDA** POKES HER HEAD OUT AND WATCHES TWO STRANGERS WALK PAST ALONG THE STREET.

RHONDA

It's okay. It wasn't them. Sorry.

THE WOMEN CLIMB OUT OF THE BUSHES. **RHONDA** BEGINS HEADING FOR THE FENCE. **INGRID** CALLS UP TO THE ROOF.

INGRID

False alarm, Nick!

V/O NICK

What?

INGRID

You can relax. They're not here yet...

SFX: SLIDING NOISES ON THE ROOF, THEN A THUMP. MORE SLIDING.

V/O NICK

Bugger!

SFX: BUCKET ROLLING DOWN ROOF

THE BUCKET FALLS OFF THE ROOF, SPRAYING BREADCRUMBS.

FRAN

Oh, my God!

(Cont Scene 6)

SHELLEY

No. Somehow I don't think so.

V/O NICK

Oh ssshhiiii...!

SFX: RUMBLING AND SLIDING ON THE ROOF. BELL BOUNCING AND RINGING

A LARGE DARK SHAPE FALLS OFF THE ROOF INTO A FLOWER BED. **FRAN, SHELLEY AND INGRID** RUSH OVER AND STARE DOWN. **INGRID** DROPS TO HER KNEES BESIDE THE PROSTRATE **NICK**. **RHONDA** RUNS BACK.

INGRID

Oh, Nick, Nick...!

NICK

(groans)

NICK SITS UP WITH **INGRID'S** HELP.

FRAN

Thank God he's not dead.

SHELLEY

Dole-bludgers' Bible, chapter fifteen, verse ten: Thou shalt not cark it on weekends and public holidays.

RHONDA

But isn't it still Friday?

NICK GROANS, ROLLS UP HIS EYES AND FAINTS.

INGRID

Good one, Rhonda. Like we really needed that.

FADE OUT

7 INT HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM NIGHT 7
INGRID, NICK, DOCTOR.

SFX: SOUNDS OF CONVERSATION FROM AN ADJOINING ROOM

INGRID IS COMFORTING **NICK** AS THEY SIT WAITING. THE **DOCTOR** ENTERS. SHE SMILES AT **INGRID** AND **NICK** THEN CONTINUES ON TO EXIT THROUGH THE DOOR TO TRIAGE.

8 INT HOSPITAL EMERGENCY RECEPTION NIGHT 8
RHONDA, SHELLEY, NURSE, DOCTOR.

RHONDA AND **SHELLEY** ARE GIVING DETAILS TO THE TRIAGE **NURSE** AT THE DESK. THE **DOCTOR** ENTERS. SHE GOES TO THE DESK AND PICKS UP A CLIPBOARD WHICH SHE BEGINS TO READ. SHE IS GRADUALLY DRAWN IN BY THE CONVERSATION.

NURSE

Next of kin?

RHONDA

He doesn't have any. But I live with him.

NURSE

Okay. Can I have your name?

RHONDA

Sure. But what about Beckie and Monique?

NURSE

Beckie and Monique?

SHELLEY

He lives with them, too.

THE **DOCTOR** AND **NURSE** EXCHANGE SURPRISED GLANCES.

NURSE

No wonder he's having difficulty walking. So, which name shall I put?

(Cont Scene 8)

RHONDA

Better use Ingrid. She's his girlfriend.

DOCTOR

My God! Four women on the go! I'm surprised he's alive at all.

SHELLEY

Most of the time he's not. This is one of his better days.

THE **NURSE** WRITES IN THE REGISTER. THE **DOCTOR** GLANCES AT THE DOOR TO THE WAITING ROOM IN AWE.

DOCTOR

Dare I ask how the injury occurred? Could it er... be classified as remotely work-related?

THE **NURSE** SNIGGERS.

SHELLEY

Nick, work! You've got to be joking!

RHONDA

Actually, he fell off the roof.

DOCTOR

The roof ... Does he, er... perform up there often?

SHELLEY

Only when he's having an aberration.

NURSE

It's the first time I've heard it called that.

RHONDA

He was supposed to be bringing cheer and goodwill to all men.

NURSE

Not to mention a few understanding women.

(Cont Scene 8)

SHELLEY

Our Nick likes to share it around.

DOCTOR

Well, let's hope for procreation's sake that he's left "it" to a deserving someone in his will. We'd better have a look at him.

SHELLEY AND RHONDA TURN TO LEAVE.

NURSE

Er, pardon me for asking, but why the roof?

RHONDA

With a bell and a bucket of brown breadcrumbs, where else would you expect him to be?

NURSE

Yes, of course. Silly question, really.

SHELLEY AND RHONDA EXIT THROUGH THE WAITING ROOM DOOR. THE DOCTOR STARTS AFTER THEM. SHE PAUSES IN THE DOORWAY TO LOOK BACK AT THE NURSE.

DOCTOR

Friday nights! Don't you love them? I've got to trade shifts. My sanity's beginning to suffer, not to mention my sex life.

NURSE

I wouldn't worry too much. If all else fails your latest patient could probably fit you in somewhere in his busy schedule and not even notice.

DOCTOR

I'll bet he could. But on the roof?

NURSE

And with a bell and a bucket of breadcrumbs. I'd really like to see that.

FADE OUT

A LIGHTED CANDLE ON THE TABLE HAS BURNED WELL DOWN NOW. BEYOND, THE CHRISTMAS-TREE LIGHTS FLASH. THESE ARE THE ONLY ILLUMINATION. THE DOOR OPENS. **BECKIE** BEGINS TO ENTER FIRST.

BECKIE

(back over her shoulder) Sshh! Nick and Rhonda must be asleep. Hey...!

BECKIE STEPS INTO THE ROOM LEAVING THE DOOR WIDE FOR **MONIQUE** TO ENTER.

BECKIE

(continues)

What's this?

BECKIE STEPS TOWARDS THE LIGHT SWITCH AND REACHES OUT FOR IT.

MONIQUE

No, don't. Leave it for a minute. Just look... it's almost like...

BECKIE CLOSES THE DOOR QUIETLY.

BECKIE

I guess it is, a bit. Aren't you glad we stayed for the late show, now? They did it for us, you know.

MONIQUE

I know. We've got some good friends, haven't we?

MONIQUE WALKS TO THE TREE FOR A CLOSER INSPECTION.

BECKIE

Better than we deserve, I expect.

MONIQUE

(disappointed)

Oh.

BECKIE APPROACHES AND JOINS **MONIQUE** BESIDE THE TREE.

(Cont Scene 9)

BECKIE

What's wrong?

MONIQUE

No silver balls. Look what they've used instead.

BECKIE

Did you notice the balloons? Someone's got a one-track mind.

MONIQUE LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM. SHE WALKS TO THE SOFA AND SITS.

MONIQUE

I don't care. There's still the cotton-wool snow. They even wrapped some little presents. Damn! I'm think I'm going to cry...

BECKIE WALKS OVER TO INSPECT THE FOOD ON THE TABLE.

BECKIE

Hey, mince pies and sausage rolls. And shortbread... I think.

BECKIE TAKES A PLATE OF MINCE PIES AND SITS ON THE SOFA. SHE OFFERS THE PLATE TO MONIQUE WHO DECLINES WITH A SHAKE OF THE HEAD.

MONIQUE

I just want to sit a look.

THEY SIT IN SILENCE FOR A WHILE. MONIQUE IS TRYING DESPERATELY TO CONTROL HER EMOTIONS.

BECKIE

Don't take this the wrong way, Monique, but no amount of wishing's going to bring them back.

MONIQUE

I know. But there's nothing wrong with re-living memories, is there?

BECKIE

None at all. You may not believe this, but I do it all the time. You know the thing that always sticks in my mind? Dad putting the presents under the tree.

(Cont Scene 9)

MONIQUE

Wearing his raincoat and wellies.

BECKIE

And his Bulldogs beanie with the bobble on top.

MONIQUE

And he'd be whistling that favourite song of his.

BECKIE

White Christmas.

MONIQUE

And when he'd finished putting out the presents, he'd stand back and look at the tree and start singing like that old guy.

BECKIE

Bing Crosby. Well, he'd try to.

MONIQUE

But that's what it's all about, isn't it? Trying? Like Dad with his singing, and Mum with her knitting and all the button-holes ending up in the wrong place. It's like all of this that our friends have done. There's a little bit of each of them in it and that's what makes it better than perfect. Reality doesn't have to be cruel like you said. Not all the time.

BECKIE

I was feeling sorry for myself when I said that. I didn't really mean it.

SFX: A SOFT THUMP OUTSIDE THE FRONT DOOR

MONIQUE

What was that?

BECKIE

What? I didn't hear anything.

(Cont Scene 9)

MONIQUE

Well I did. Someone's out there.

BECKIE

You're imagining it...

SFX: SINGING OUTSIDE THE FRONT DOOR (CHRISTMAS CAROL)

BECKIE AND MONIQUE RISE AND WANDER CAUTIOUSLY TOWARDS THE DOOR.

10. EXT THE FRONT PORCH NIGHT 10
NICK, INGRID, RHONDA, SHELLEY, FRAN, BECKIE, MONIQUE.

WHILE **SHELLEY** AND **FRAN** STAND BEFORE THE DOOR, **RHONDA** AND **INGRID** ARE BEHIND SUPPORTING **NICK** WHO IS STANDING ON ONE LEG WITH THE OTHER FOOT AND ANKLE HEAVILY BANDAGED. **INGRID** IS HOLDING THE BUCKET. **RHONDA** IS DIPPING IN WITH HER FREE HAND, TOSSING A MIXTURE OF BREADCRUMBS, LEAVES AND GRASS-CLIPPINGS IN THE AIR TO CASCADE OVER THEM ALL AS THEY SING.

THE DOOR OPENS. **BECKIE** AND **MONIQUE** STAND IN THE FRAME AMAZED. **NICK** RINGS THE HANDBELL.

NICK

Trick or treat.

INGRID

Idiot!

BECKIE NOTICES **NICK'S** FOOT AND STARTS TOWARDS HIM.

BECKIE

Nick! What happened?

FRAN

It's a long story.

RHONDA

If we can come in we'll tell you all about it.

(Cont Scene 10)

BECKIE

Oh look, of course. I'm sorry. You just caught us by surprise.

THEY ALL START TO FILE IN. **RHONDA** WAITS INSIDE TO CLOSE THE DOOR.

V/O SHELLEY

Which do you want first - Nick's version or the truth?

FADE OUT

11. INT BECKIE'S AND MONIQUE'S BEDROOM NIGHT 11
BECKIE, MONIQUE.

MONIQUE IS LYING IN HER BED. **BECKIE** IS JUST ABOUT TO CLIMB IN HERS.

MONIQUE

I wish the others could have stayed tonight.

BECKIE

I think the all-night party at Brendan's was an excuse to give us our own space.

MONIQUE

That was Nick's idea. Poor old Nick. He was lucky he fell where he did.

BECKIE

There's a couple of dozen petunias who might be inclined to disagree with you.

MONIQUE

The garden gnome wasn't impressed either, but it turned out good, eh?

BECKIE

Almost the best Christmas we've ever had. Well, maybe not the best...

MONIQUE

The best we've ever had in September.

(Cont Scene 11)

BECKIE

The only one. 'Night.

BECKIE SWITCHES OFF THE BEDSIDE LIGHT.

MONIQUE

'Night.

A BRIEF SILENCE.

MONIQUE
(continues)

I love you, Beck... You didn't mind me saying that, did you?

BECKIE

No, Sis. I love you too.

THEY LAY QUIETLY FOR A WHILE.

SFX: FAINT WHISTLING FROM THE LOUNGE ROOM (WHITE CHRISTMAS)

THE WHISTLING BECOMES A LITTLE LOUDER. **BECKIE** AND **MONIQUE** HEAR AND SIT UP. THEY STARE AT EACH OTHER IN DISBELIEF. AS THE WHISTLING CONTINUES, **BECKIE** CLIMBS OUT OF BED, GOES TO THE DOOR AND LISTENS. **MONIQUE** COMES TO JOIN HER. THEY ALTERNATE BETWEEN LISTENING AND STARING AT EACH OTHER IN WONDER.

BECKIE
(whispering)

The others aren't here. So, who...?

MONIQUE LOOKS KNOWINGLY AT BECKIE.

MONIQUE

You know who, Beck.

BECKIE

No. Not... It can't be!

(Cont Scene 11)

MONIQUE

Yes it can. In here... (touches Beckie's head with a finger)... and in here...
(places a hand over Beckie's heart)... if we really believe.

BECKIE IS NERVOUS AND UNSURE.

BECKIE

In what? Delusions? He's dead, Sis. Come out and I'll show you. It must be Nick! It's not Dad. No way! It never can be, ever again. That's the truth and you've got to learn to face it. We both have.

MONIQUE

No we don't, Beck.

MONIQUE STARTS TO LEAD BECKIE BACK TO THE BED. SHE PAUSES TO LISTEN.

SFX: A MAN SINGING WHITE CHRISTMAS

MONIQUE

The truth will be there forever, but we won't always have this moment. Let's hold it while it lasts. Just the two of us.

THEY SIT ON THE BED TOGETHER.

BECKIE

You mean... the magic...

MONIQUE

Yes, big Sis. The magic...

BECKIE AND MONIQUE SIT LISTENING TO THE SONG.

12. INT THE LOUNGE ROOM NIGHT 12

SFX: MAN SINGING WHITE CHRISTMAS UNACCOMPANIED

THE ROOM IS DARK EXCEPT FOR THE FLASHING CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTS. NOTHING HAS BEEN DISTURBED. AT FIRST IT SEEMS NO-ONE IS THERE UNTIL A SPECTRE (THE SILHOUETTE OF A MAN) DRIFTS SLOWLY FROM BEHIND THE TREE AND STOOPS TO PICK UP A WATER BUBBLE ORNAMENT. THE SINGING STOPS.

.../12

(Cont Scene 12)

HE SHAKES AND REPLACES THE BUBBLE ON TOP OF ONE OF THE PRESENTS. THE SPECTRE STANDS FOR A MOMENT TO REVIEW THE SCENE. ONCE SATISFIED THAT ALL IS WELL, THE MAN CONTINUES SINGING WHERE HE LEFT OFF, HEADS FOR THE DOOR TO THE HALLWAY AND DISAPPEARS THROUGH IT.

SFX: WHISTLING WHITE CHRISTMAS. SOUND OF FRONT DOOR OPENING. THEN CLOSING. WHISTLING IS SUDDENLY QUIETER AND FADES GRADUALLY.

TRACK IN TO CHRISTMAS TREE, CLOSING ON ECU OF WINTERSCAPE SCENE IN THE WATER-BUBBLE - THE SNOW IS FALLING. HOLD

SFX: ORCHESTRAL VERSION OF WHITE CHRISTMAS CONTINUES AS CREDITS ROLL

END