

# BYE-CHILD

A SCREENPLAY FOR A SHORT FILM

by

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(after a poem by Seamus Heaney)

## 1. INT SHED DUSK

It is dusk. In the silence a dog from a distant housing estate can be faintly heard barking. Close up of a white downy feather in moonlight stuck to a beam of wood. The fluttering movement of the feather seems to be in response to breath. The camera is uncertain. The interior dark of the shed is seen but not understood. During one of its moves the camera slows down and passes on a full moon seen through a gap in the wooden wall or roof. It snags and goes back to see it properly. It remains on the circle of the moon for just slightly more than too long.

## 2. EXT HOUSE DUSK

Outside a remote dilapidated two story farmhouse sits a grocery van. A WOMAN in her 30's has just made some purchases, which she holds in her arms. As she turns to go into the front door of the house the grocery van drives away.

## 3. INT SHED DUSK

There is the sound of the van driving away. The camera tilts down from the darkening sky to a house, to an upstairs window, yellow with light from an electric light bulb. There is some angular distortion of the image (like the skull in Holbein's painting, 'The Ambassadors'). The landing light goes off and after a moment a light comes on in the kitchen and the camera turns quickly to investigate it. Faint sounds of dishes and cutlery rattling come from the house. The POV is low - again the angular distortion. It is as if it is trying to adjust the distortion - first to one side, then the other. It finally settles on normality. The WOMAN comes into view in the window carrying her groceries. She is glimpsed as she crosses. She disappears. The camera focuses on the empty window. The woman comes into view again and this time she stops (at the sink). She sets the groceries down and stares out into the darkness.

4. INT KITCHEN NIGHT

The WOMAN stands at the sink staring out the window. She moves her head this way and that as if she sees something. But it is nothing. She wears a putty coloured cardigan over a shower-o-hail dress. She wears an apron and flat shoes. The imagery of the room is poor and Catholic and 60's/70's.

5. INT LIVING ROOM DUSK

A man in his 50's in a wheelchair sits at a drop-leaf table. He is staring across the table at a 60's television set in the corner. The programme is some review of man's journey into space. An astronaut is seen bouncing on the surface of the moon. The WOMAN comes in with a damp cloth and wipes the table. She picks up a plate with left-overs and carries it away to the kitchen.

6. INT KITCHEN DUSK

The WOMAN comes in and sets the plate with leftovers on the draining board. She washes and cuts up some raw carrot. The sound of the carrot chopping on a stainless steel draining board is loud.

7. INT SHED NIGHT

The sound of the distant chopping is faint but audible.

8. INT KITCHEN NIGHT

The WOMAN pauses chopping.

WOMAN  
(shouts) Daddy, I'll make the tea  
in a minute.

The WOMAN fills the kettle.

9. INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

The WOMAN comes in and puts the filled kettle on the range and goes out.

10. INT KITCHEN NIGHT

The WOMAN takes the dish of food to the back door. There is a mirror hanging on the wall. She looks at herself, adjusts her hair with her free hand, putting it back behind her ear. Then with the same hand she takes a torch hanging from a nail. She opens the door quietly - as if she doesn't want her FATHER to hear her going out. But the door makes a noise. She has done all this before many, many times.

11. INT SHED NIGHT

The door opening is heard distantly. The POV tries to get looking through the chink in the wood.

12. EXT PATH NIGHT

Light comes from the door which disappears when the door is closed. The WOMAN comes out and switches on the torch. The beam swings about like a sword. She walks down the path carrying the dish.

13. INT. SHED NIGHT

The breathing and straw noises are just about heard. The distortion of the view of the woman stooping. The flashlight waving about. It flares into the camera blindingly. Close up of the dish being pushed beneath a gap in the door into the shed on the wooden floor. The dish remains untouched but in the darkness it is a luminous circle of white. A strange high-pitched inarticulate noise of distress as the woman moves away.

14. INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

The FATHER stares ahead listening to the scream of the kettle which has grown from noise of distress in the shed. Hearing it the WOMAN hurries in and lifts the kettle off the heat. She proceeds to make tea.

15. INT SHED NIGHT

The dish. A brown rat in the dish begins to feed. Something frightens it away.

16. INT KITCHEN NIGHT

The WOMAN carries tea to the table where her FATHER sits slumped. As she sets the cup on the table his hand comes up her dress. She waits , shudders and steps back with a look almost of exasperation. She walks out of reach to pour her own tea.

17. INT BEDROOM NIGHT

The WOMAN in her night-dress lies awake. Her bedside light is on.

18. INT SHED NIGHT

The lit bedroom window is seen from the shed.

19. INT BEDROOM NIGHT

The WOMAN reaches over to switch off the light.

20. INT SHED NIGHT

The light disappears. Darkness. Distress noises followed by a mysterious drumming sound - like wood being pummelled.

21. INT BEDROOM NIGHT

The WOMAN in the darkness of her bed hears the pummelling on wood from the shed outside and closes her eyes in despair. She puts her hands over her ears.

22. INT KITCHEN DAY

Close up of an illustration of a 10 year old boy. The WOMAN sits turning the pages of a well thumbed clothes catalogue. Her FATHER sits staring at her. She stops at a page for Warm Anoracks. Then she looks up - down the overgrown garden path. In the daylight we can see the dilapidated shed in the garden.

23. INT SHED DAY

In daylight more of the interior of the shed can be seen. Light comes from an improvised horizontal window whose

glass is a car side window. Outside the glass is greenery. There are roosts covered in hen's droppings with the occasional feather clinging to them. The POV moves to the back of the house. The vision is still distorted in the daylight. It adjusts. There is the sound of a carrot being slowly but noisily chewed.

#### 24.INT KITCHEN DAY

The FATHER sits slumped - 'Calendar Girl' by Neil Sedaka. (1961???) is playing on the radio. The WOMAN comes into the room carrying a distinctive red Fair Isle man's cardigan. She holds it up to look at it.

WOMAN (to herself)  
No elbows left.

She demonstrates by poking her fingers through the holes. She sits down with a pair of scissors.

#### 25.EXT ROAD DAY

Three 10 yr old BOYS CHRIS, PADDY and FRANKIE are clowning around. They saunter and whack the heads off nettles with sticks. They decide to play Hide and Go Seek. CHRIS turns to a wooden fence, covers his eyes and begins counting. The boys shout 'Hide your eyes.' 'He's not hiding his eyes.' 'Count to 100.' 'He's looking' 'You're cheating' 'Count slower' Chris counts quickly 'One two three' 'Slower' 'Five six seven eight' 'Start at the beginning again.' 'One two three...' When he reaches one hundred he shouts in sing song voice 'Here I come - away or not.'

#### 26.INT SHED DAY

The sound of a carrot being chewed stops. Very faintly in the distance PADDY and his friends are heard arguing and counting.

#### 27.INT KITCHEN DAY

The WOMAN scissors off the lower half of the sleeves.

28.EXT FIELD- BACK OF SHED - DAY

FRANKIE runs across the field, PADDY runs down the field, looking back over his shoulder. He stops and wonders where he can hide so's he'll not be found. He decides to hide down in leafy cover beside the shed. He hunkers down.

29.INT SHED DAY

Through the window we catch a glimpse of PADDY brushing past and hunkering down. A sound half girning, half excitement.

30.EXT - BACK OF SHED - DAY

When PADDY gets down and is crouched there he looks idly around him. It is a partial dump. Rusted tins of beans, magazines, a busted armchair, a naked doll with head and no arms, some nettles which he is careful to avoid. The naked doll's head has blonde nylon hair. PADDY is laughing a bit, thinking nobody'll ever find him here. He crouches beside the shed window. He looks around and a couple of inches away sees a face on the other side of the glass very much like the doll's face but the glass is dirty and the face unclear. It might not even be a face. PADDY looks up and sees CHRIS coming looking for him.

CHRIS

I can see ya. Come on out.

PADDY crouches even lower and smiles.

31.INT KITCHEN DAY

The MOTHER, holding the cardigan, stands to throw the cut sleeves in the range - a circle of fire. She puts the lid back on the range, looks out the window and stiffens. She sees or hears something. It is CHRIS heading down through the field towards their back garden. She moves quickly to the door.

32.EXT PATH DAY

The WOMAN carrying the remains of the cardigan, comes hurrying out of the doorway. CHRIS is in the field larking around, hunting the others.

WOMAN

Hey you - get away from there - yes you.

CHRIS stands defiantly.

33.EXT - BACK OF SHED - DAY

PADDY is aware that something is going on. He hears the woman's voice faintly.

WOMAN

This is not a public park. You're not allowed here.

He looks again at the obscured face inches away from him in the dirty window . It is staring at him, from its tangle of matted hair. He looks closely at what looks like an eye. PADDY wets his finger and cleans the glass. It makes squeaking noises.

34.INT SHED DAY

Outside PADDY tries to clean the glass his finger still squeaking against the glass.

35.EXT - BACK OF SHED - DAY

PADDY can't quite make out what he is seeing. Is it another doll ? He stares at the eye. The eye blinks. And the mouth howls. He is startled. It's alive. PADDY is up and on his feet and half running, half clawing his way out of the garden.

36 EXT PATH DAY

The WOMAN - still holding the cardigan - sees the three boys running off and shouts after them.

WOMAN

Away ye go. You've no right to be here.  
I know who yis are(to herself) Bloody wains.

37.EXT FIELDS DAY

PADDY stops , panting, knowing he can't be caught, and looks back.

38.EXT PATH DAY

The WOMAN stares across to the field shading her eyes against the light. PADDY will know her again. She hears the drumming of heels on the shed floor. The WOMAN looks unsure what to do next. She realises she has the cut down cardigan in her hands. She moves forward.

39 INT SHED DAY

The WOMAN unfastens the door and pulls it open. She stoops and comes in. She speaks as if to calm an animal.

WOMAN

It's only me. It's only me. There now.

She squats in front of the HEN-HOUSE BOY who is not seen. In the confined space the camera is behind him facing the MOTHER. The camera stays on the MOTHER but is aware of out of focus hair and arms being raised from the hunched position. The MOTHER reaches out to take off the ragged thing he is wearing and replace it with the cardigan. Her murmurings are to calm the boy. He is excited by her presence and is making a sound, a strange high pitched throat noise.

40 FLASHBACK INT BEDROOM DAY

A cardboard box for margarine sits on a dressing table. The dressing table has three mirrors facing each other so that it results in multiple images. The cardboard box contains a crying baby . A slightly younger WOMAN enters, closes the door, picks the baby up with resignation and pulls a three legged stool towards her with her foot . This is seen in reflection in the mirrors.

WOMAN

Shh You'll only annoy him. Shh

She sits down, turns away from the door and begins to breast feed the baby. All her movements are guilty. The



door opens and the FATHER a fit man in a vest storms in. He is shaking with anger.

FATHER  
If you don't get rid of it. I will.

41 INT SHED DAY

The place smells very bad and this shows on the MOTHER'S face. She sniffs in and wrinkles her nose and looks critically at the HENHOUSE BOY.

WOMAN  
(to the smell) Oh dearie me. (putting the cardigan on the child) There you are. There you go. Lift. Lift up. That's you. There you are now.

Close up of the MOTHER's face.

42 INT LIVING ROOM DAY

The WOMAN comes in with some ragged grey clothing which she throws in the range. The FATHER's eyes stare at her.

FATHER  
Unggh ?

WOMAN  
Just a coupla boys. Messin.  
They're away now.

She stares at her father.

43 FLASHBACK INT BEDROOM DAY

The FATHER in his vest and braces is bent over the cardboard box with a pillow in his hands trying to suffocate the baby. Again the multiple images in the dressing table mirrors. The WOMAN opens the door and enters. Immediately she realises what he is doing and screams and tries to wrestle him to one side screaming 'What are you doing?'. But he is too strong and big and intent on what he is doing. She picks up the three legged stool and hits him as hard as she can with it over the head. He is stunned and lurches forward over the

cardboard box. She has to hit him again and again. He slides down blood coming from his head. She picks up the baby and runs. He roars after her. He tries to rise - but goes down again like a bullock with BSE - and he roars. Not words, but a roar.

44 FLASHBACK INT STAIRS DAY

The WOMAN races down the stairs with her baby.

45 FLASHBACK EXT BACK DOOR DAY

The WOMAN comes running out the door. It is raining. She doesn't know where to go. Some white hens pick about the path. She hears a roar from inside the house. She dashes down the path, stoops and pushes her way into the henhouse. A hen squawks and flutters out. She leaves the baby in the henhouse and turns to run back to the house.

WOMAN  
Oh Daddy ? Daddy.

46 EXT CHURCH DAY

The church sits in a rural landscape - a ragged hymn is audible. The WOMAN hurries up to the church.

47. INT CHURCH DAY

The priest, wearing a chasuble, climbs up into the pulpit or addresses the congregation from the steps to one side of the altar. The congregation sit and look up at him. At the top left hand side of the church sits PADDY (in different clothes - ie his Sunday best) with his father, HUGH. PADDY is bored. The PRIEST brings to his preaching a casual show-offery. He is the intellectual superior to anyone in his congregation.

PRIEST  
My dear Brethren, on television this week they were re-running Man landing on the moon. There is a school of opinion which says that science and religion are opposed, are at loggerheads, if you will. I do not subscribe to that, my dear brethern. The more science finds out about

the Universe the more awe inspiring it is  
and the MORE it makes me believe in the  
Almighty who made it.

Women, wearing hats, are to one side, the men with their  
hats off to the other. The WOMAN on her own and wearing a  
hat walks up the aisle. She genuflects and slides into  
her pew. She blesses herself and kneels.

PRIEST

Man is a wonderful creature - capable of  
greatness, capable of great evil. He has  
the technology to cross space, to touch  
down on the surface of the moon, to return  
to the earth. He can even shine pictures  
of it all back to us, sitting in our  
living rooms. But he cannot stop us  
committing sin - the million daily  
insults, in sins of the flesh, in sins of  
the mind, in sins of the heart that are  
offered up to him instead of prayers ?

PADDY looks idly round and sees the WOMAN. He stares  
across at her. The WOMAN looks at him but does not  
recognise him. She looks away at something else. HUGH  
gently but firmly turns PADDY's head and makes him face  
the altar.

PRIEST

There's a great book by an Italian poet (smiles,  
pronounces the name with flamboyance) Ariosto, who  
imagined the moon long before we could ever get to it.  
On his Moon they treasured everything that was despised  
on earth - such as misspent time, squandered money,  
broken promises, unanswered prayers, fruitless tears.  
They kept wasted talent in a vase, voz, vaz labelled with  
the person's name...

#### 48. EXT CHURCH DAY

The congregation spill out, the young ones running.  
After the release from the boredom the children are  
manic. Two middle aged men in hats collect money in large  
St Vincent de Paul boxes. PADDY and his father come out.  
HUGH puts a coin in the box then lights a cigarette.  
People get on bicycles and ride away. PADDY stares ahead

waiting for the WOMAN. She comes out. PADDY reaches up to tell HUGH an important secret - what he thinks he saw in the WOMAN's Hen-House yesterday. HUGH stares, looks at the boy, raises an eyebrow, inhales and blows out the smoke. The figure of the PRIEST in clerical black hurries past. HUGH steps forward. The WOMAN stares hard at PADDY.

HUGH  
Excuse me, Father. Could I have a word.

They talk with bowed heads and look after the WOMAN.

50. INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

Car headlights swing across the ceiling and a car crunches to a halt. The WOMAN and her FATHER both look up. No one has called here in years. Footsteps approach. There is a loud banging from the knocker. The WOMAN and her FATHER look at each other. The FATHER rolls his eyes to the door.

FATHER  
Uhhhung.

WOMAN  
Who could it be ?

She is so poorly practised at answering the door she doesn't know what to do.

FATHER  
Uhhhung mmu.

The WOMAN looks towards the door.

51. INT STAIRWAY NIGHT

The WOMAN runs up the stairs.

52. INT LANDING WINDOW

There is no light on. The WOMAN stares down through net curtains.

53. EXT FRONT OF HOUSE NIGHT

There is a car parked. HUGH moves around trying to see if anybody is at home. The PRIEST looks up at the house sufficiently to see his white collar.

54.INT HALLWAY NIGHT

Another loud banging of the knocker. The WOMAN comes down the stairs and speaks into the kitchen

WOMAN (relieved)  
It's the priest.

She goes to the door and opens the Yale lock. She opens the door fractionally squinting against the car headlights. The PRIEST stares at her.

WOMAN  
Oh Father. It's yourself.

The WOMAN is loathe to invite him in. She stalls.

PRIEST  
Could I have a word ?

The WOMAN cannot now refuse. She steps back to admit the priest. As he steps inside the WOMAN squints at the car. She shades her eyes from the glare. Seeing the priest go in HUGH gets into the passenger seat.

55 INT VW NIGHT  
HUGH sighs.

HUGH  
You'd better be right.

PADDY stands in the back seat to see what is happening. The WOMAN closes the door. Blackness.

56.INT SHED NIGHT

Blackness. There is a sound of movement in straw and open mouth breathing. The HEN HOUSE BOY's hair is seen (so it is not precisely a pov image) The HEN HOUSE BOY stares towards the kitchen window. The WOMAN comes into sight and the HEN HOUSE BOY becomes excited. The PRIEST comes into view. A Discussion takes place. The only sounds are the ones the HEN HOUSE makes.

56.EXT PATH NIGHT

The PRIEST in some agitation comes out the door carrying the torch.

PRIEST

It's not that I don't believe you - but if you'll excuse me, I think I'll have a look for myself. They're a very reliable family...

The Priest walks along the path. The WOMAN sits down on the doorstep. She puts her head in her hands. Her legs fall wide open but she is covered by her dress. The PRIEST moves towards the shed sweeping the light to and fro.

57.INT SHED NIGHT

The PRIEST approaches. The torch flashes. He stoops and shines the torch at the shed. The HEN HOUSE BOY is disturbed and begins loud breathing and drumming with his heels.

58.EXT PATH NIGHT

The PRIEST opens the shed door with some difficulty and squats and looks in. He wrinkles his nose and winces at the smell.

PRIEST

(breathed only) Jesus Mary and Joseph.

He reaches forward with open arms. The WOMAN sits on the back doorstep distraught - watching as the PRIEST discovers the child in the shed. The PRIEST emerges with the HEN HOUSE BOY in his arms. The WOMAN stands unsteadily to clear a way for the PRIEST. The PRIEST elbows past her into the kitchen. The FATHER can be seen slumped at the table. It is difficult to tell if he is sullen or stunned. The PRIEST barely stops to show him what's in the bundle.

PRIEST

(shouts) Who's responsible for this ?

59. EXT FRONT DOOR

The PRIEST backs out into the white harsh light of HUGH's car headlights carrying the HEN-HOUSE BOY. He turns slowly to reveal what he is carrying. The WOMAN follows and stands in the doorway trying to grasp what is happening. She is stunned and bereft.

60. INT CAR NIGHT

HUGH leaps out of the car to assist the PRIEST. PADDY stands in the back seat , unable to take his eyes off what the PRIEST is carrying. A zoom from PADDY's POV to the PRIEST's bundle. The camera is unsteady and restless. The HEN HOUSE BOY is about 9 years of age but very small, utterly white, wizened and thin. There is a lot of hair and a glimpse of long nails on his bare feet. He is wearing the Fairisle cardigan with the cut down sleeves over some greyish indistinguishable clothing. He is obviously terrified. The PRIEST keeps muttering.

PRIEST

You're okay, lad, you're okay. You're safe now. Everything's

Going to be allright.

Close up on the HEN HOUSE BOY's gaping wide open mouth. He looks bizarre in the bleached out blue light of the headlights. PADDY's reaction is one of horror and guilt which he tries not to show on his face. It's an image burnt into his mind. Freeze frame of the HEN HOUSE BOY's mouth. The image rotates and gradually goes to black and white. Then gradually the image turns to negative. The black orb of the mouth becomes white. Gradually becomes the full moon. Then the moon begins to recede as if in space, with the blue and white earth behind it until it is a mere speck.

CREDITS

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