

The Highland Aunt

John Graeme McLean

MA by Research

University of York

Arts and Creative Technologies

January 2022

Abstract

This screenplay is a wholly original piece of work in the genre of family comedy-drama, with an anticipated appeal to a wide audience age range. It's set during Christmas in Scotland in 1984 and would require a mid-range budget but no special effects, CGI or animation. The story centres around nine-year-old Danny who is left home-alone when his granddad is taken into hospital in a coma. To avoid getting put into a children's home, and fearing his mother being unable to find him when she returns to the family home, Danny pays a homeless woman to briefly pretend to be his auntie from the Highlands of Scotland to convince the authorities that he's being cared for. After the first deception, however, she refuses to go back out onto the freezing streets. As they learn to co-exist, Danny comes out of his shell and makes new friends with the classmates who previously bullied him and, finally, learns to stand up for himself against the biggest bully of them all, his granddad, who has been using Danny as his personal carer, to the detriment of his childhood, whilst filling his head with the notion that, one day, his mother will return for him, even though she hasn't been heard of since just after Danny's birth. The film ends on a high note, with a colourful and joyful Christmas meal with Danny and Granddad's new lodger and live-in carer, the no-longer-homeless woman. Better still, Danny's new friends come to take him out to play. As the credits roll, we see Danny's long-lost mother spot a story in the newspaper about a homeless woman moving in with a family, her family, to take care of them, hinting at a sequel in which she returns for Danny.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

EXT. STREET, SUBURB OF GLASGOW, 1984 - DAY

A council workman wobbles on a ladder against a lamp post, tweaking flickering Christmas lights suspended across the road. Children in posh, private school uniforms point excitedly at them as they board the "Glasgow Central" bus.

A shop assistant sticks tinsel above a Christmas window poster declaring "Make Christmas 1984 the best ever with our premium turkeys, farm-reared in The Highlands of Scotland".

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

DANNY PRENTICE (9), skinny, messy brown hair, in his pyjamas, spoons porridge into two bowls. The kitchen door flies open as GRANDDAD, JOHN PRENTICE (60s), a proud but physically ailing working-class man, stumbles in.

DANNY

I was about to come get you.

GRANDDAD

I'm fine, laddie.

Danny helps Granddad to sit down at the little table.

GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

Aye, your mother always loved her porridge first thing.

DANNY

I'll make sure we've got plenty in for Christmas, Granddad.

GRANDDAD

No one makes it the way your grandma did, mind, God rest her.

He pushes away the bowl of porridge and has a coughing fit.

INT. SHUG'S BEDSIT - DAY

SHUG (20s) is shoving clothes into the washing machine as SADIE (30s) sits down at the table and positions a mirror in front of her. Her long, blond hair is wet. She's wearing a man's shirt, which is way too big for her slim figure.

SHUG

I picked your clothes off the floor. Again.

She turns on the hairdryer and ignores him.

SHUG (CONT'D)

Are you gonna pay me back some cash today?

She turns the hairdryer up to full and waves it around her head exaggeratedly.

SHUG (CONT'D)

Look, we had a bit of fun, but I just think that, maybe...

He turns on the washing machine. It works for a split second before stopping. The hairdryer stops and the lights go out.

SADIE

Got any change for the meter, Shug?

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Danny clears the breakfast dishes into the sink, squirts in some washing-up liquid and turns the tap on.

GRANDDAD (O.S.)

Danny? Danny?

DANNY

Coming Granddad!

Danny walks hurriedly out and then runs back in again to turn the tap off before dashing back out of the kitchen.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Grandad is sitting in his chair as Danny bursts into the old-fashioned, plain room, devoid of Christmas decorations.

GRANDDAD

You couldn't just make me another wee cup of tea, laddie? And it's freezing in here, is it not?

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE - DAY

Danny, in his pyjamas and slippers, struggles with a metal bucket of coal down the side of the house.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Danny puts a few coals on the fire. Granddad coughs violently. Danny carefully wipes coal dust off of his hands.

DANNY

Was it that bad down the mines,
Granddad?

GRANDDAD

It's not something your
generation'll have to worry about.
Turn the television on before you
go and we'll see how that
Thatcher's getting on with trying
to shut them all down.

DANNY

Granddad? Mum's definitely coming
back this Christmas, isn't she?

Danny and Granddad stare at each other for a moment before
Danny turns to walk towards the tv.

GRANDDAD

You've grown up a bit now.

Danny spins back round with excitement to face Granddad.

DANNY

I'll be ten in January.

GRANDDAD

Put it on to BBC Scotland for me.

DANNY

You'll tell her I've been good,
won't you? So she won't leave again
because of me?

GRANDDAD

Aye, well, you're not the trouble
you were when you were younger.

Danny looks ashamed.

DANNY

I'm sorry, Granddad. I can't
remember...

GRANDDAD

Aye, aye, get it turned on would
you? I'm missing the news.

Danny turns on the TV. Images of picketing miners outside a
colliery. Granddad angrily waves him out of the way.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Danny is hurriedly putting his shoes on. His school uniform is clean but well-worn, un-ironed and ill-fitting.

GRANDDAD (O.S.)

And mind get the shopping on your way home.

DANNY

Yes, Granddad.

GRANDDAD (O.S.)

And keep your head down and stay out of trouble.

DANNY

Of course, Granddad!

GRANDDAD (O.S.)

Folk around here seem to think that Christmas is a time for poking their noses into other peoples' business even more than usual.

Danny bursts out of his front door, putting on his tie. His satchel swings off one arm over his winter coat.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Danny sprints through the school gates as lots of mothers disperse, some waving to their kids. Ahead of him, the last of the children disappears into the school building.

EXT. JOB CENTRE - DAY

Sadie is in a long queue. Her hair is wet and scruffy. The Job Centre Assistant comes outside.

JOB CENTRE ASSISTANT

We're a bit short-staffed and very busy so theres's going to be about an hour's wait.

There are general moans and murmurs from the queue.

MAN IN QUEUE 1

Hen, can you lot not tell the truth? If you say one hour it'll be two. If you say two, it'll more than likely be three.

SADIE

First time I was here it took me
three and a half hours.

MAN IN QUEUE 1

That's mental. As if we don't have
better things to be doing.

SADIE

And if you're that short-staffed
give some of these people a job!

JOB CENTRE ASSISTANT

I did your induction two weeks ago,
didn't I? Two weeks and one day
ago, to be precise. So you should
have been here yesterday.

There's a sharp intake of breath from the queue.

JOB CENTRE ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

Which means you're now sanctioned.
So, no need for you to waste any
more of your precious time. Come
back in a fortnight.

SADIE

It'll be past Christmas by then!

MAN IN QUEUE 1

Come on, hen, it's a sin to leave
folk wi' nae cash at Christmas.

JOB CENTRE ASSISTANT

Rules are rules!

SADIE

Come on! No one will notice if you
just put me through today?

JOB CENTRE ASSISTANT

I'm sure someone would. The truth
always comes out in the end. Merry
Christmas.

Job Centre Assistant turns and walks back into the building.

INT. SCHOOL, DANNY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Danny and the other children are in small groups, each with a
large abacus. MRS CRAWFORD (40s), stern and immaculately
coiffured, is walking as she talks. She glances at the clock.

MRS CRAWFORD

Because some bright spark at the Scottish Education Board has decided that tried and tested methods of learning are somehow wrong in this technological age, it's time to put these away.

She waves a hand and one child from each group gets up and puts their abacus onto the shelf at the back of the room.

MRS CRAWFORD (CONT'D)

Instead, I'm obliged to permit you to waste time playing pointless video computer games.

The children's cheers are silenced when she claps her hands.

MRS CRAWFORD (CONT'D)

But there'll be no BBC Micro for anyone if I hear a single peep!

Mrs Crawford leaves the room and closes the door behind her. Immediately, MARTIN (9), KENNETH (9) and CAMPBELL (10) walk around Danny's chair like wolves circling prey. Campbell grabs Danny's satchel, tipping out his gym shoes.

MARTIN

Where'd you get your plimsolls, the charity shop?

KENNETH

Or the lost property box?

CAMPBELL

He won't answer you. He thinks he's too good to talk anyone else.

Campbell walks away with Danny's satchel. Danny tries to get up but Kenneth and Martin push down on his shoulders. Campbell holds the satchel open above his head.

CAMPBELL (CONT'D)

Another charity shop special. It's even got a girl's name written inside it! Or is Cassandra your real name?

Danny breaks free and launches himself towards Campbell, who throws the satchel to one of the other kids. Danny is soon losing at pass-the-parcel against the whole class.

DANNY

It's my mum's. Gimmie it!

CAMPBELL
He can speak after all!

Danny gets hold of his satchel and has a tug-of-war with Martin. Martin sees Mrs Crawford backing into the room with the computer trolley and lets go. Danny falls over and the satchel slingshots across the room and smacks Mrs Crawford in the face. She falls, and the computer crashes to the floor.

INT. SCHOOL, HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

HEADMASTER, GORDON CHAMBERS (40s), too soft to be head teacher in a working-class area, sits at his desk as Mrs Crawford storms around his office.

MRS CRAWFORD
Look at me! I'm bleeding!

She dabs her nose with a tissue. There's a tiny bit of blood. Headmaster plays with tinsel draped around his Newton's Cradle executive toy to avoid her stare.

MRS CRAWFORD (CONT'D)
He doesn't know how to interact with the other children. With anyone, actually. He's constantly late, he hardly ever does his homework...

Headmaster presses an intercom button. SCREECHING NOISE then the voice of SCHOOL SECRETARY MRS REID (60s).

MRS REID (O.S.)
Yes, Headmaster?

HEADMASTER
Can you bring me the file on Danny...er, Danny?

MRS CRAWFORD
Danny Prentice!

HEADMASTER
That's the soldier!

Headmaster releases the button on the intercom and it SCREECHES with a howl of FEEDBACK.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

Mrs Reid, overworked and seen-it-all-before, passes Danny and briefly disappears into the Headmaster's office before reappearing and walking straight past him. Mrs Crawford storms out after her.

MRS CRAWFORD

Don't you even look at me! I'm sick of the sight of you today.

Danny isn't sure where to look as she stares directly at him.

HEADMASTER (O.S.)

Danny? Come in now, please. And shut the door behind you.

Danny squeezes past Mrs Crawford, trying not to look at her.

INT. SCHOOL, HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

Danny sits quietly as Headmaster studies his file.

HEADMASTER

Your mother was a pupil here and then she dropped out of the high school just before you were born. And your grandmother died four years ago. Oh, er, passed away, sadly. And now it's just you and your grandfather at home?

DANNY

My mum's coming home at Christmas.

HEADMASTER

Lovely! Christmas is a time for family, isn't it? Unless it's my family. Why did you end up a teacher? You could've been a doctor like your brother. Look at your brother's new car. Erm, Mrs Crawford isn't very happy with you today, ey? Rough and tumble? Boys will be boys? And it got a bit out of hand the way it sometimes can?

INTERCOM SCREECH.

MRS REID (O.S.)

Mr Sinclair says it's fine, Headmaster.

HEADMASTER

Well, there you go. The janitor has fixed the BBC computer micro thing. No harm done, then, on the whole.

SCHOOL BELL RINGS.

HEADMASTER (CONT'D)

Saved by the bell! Go on, playtime.

Danny hurriedly leaves the office, confusion on his face.

EXT. SHUG'S BEDSIT - DAY

Sadie approaches. She looks inside a black bin bag on the doorstep. It's her wet clothes. A note on the door reads:

Had to go away to see family. Don't know when I'll be back. The Council guy came and changed the locks. Wishing you all the best for the future. And Merry Christmas!

Sadie tries her key in the lock but it won't turn.

INT. SHUG'S BEDSIT - DAY

Shug is lying on the floor beneath the letterbox, stretching his hand up to grip his own key on his side of the door to stop it being pushed out or the lock from turning.

EXT. SHUG'S BEDSIT - DAY

Sadie rips the note off the door and pushes it, and her key, through the letterbox.

INT. SHUG'S BEDSIT - DAY

Shug winces as Sadie's key lands on his eye.

EXT. DANNY'S FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Headmaster parks on the drive and then gets out of his car.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Granddad wakes in his chair to the DOORBELL RINGING.

EXT. TOWN CENTRE - DAY

Sadie crosses the high street carrying the bin bag of wet clothes. A bus clips the bag, splits it open and drags some clothes off down the road, wrapped around its wheels.

SADIE

Oh come on!

She picks up a pair of her tyre-marked knickers. Some passers-by snigger and traffic is held up on her side of the road.

SADIE (CONT'D)

What are you lot looking at?
Actually, anyone got some spare
change? Or a spare room?

The onlookers quickly disperse.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Merry bloody Christmas to you, too!

A police car draws up alongside her.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Granddad is sitting in his chair. The room is silent. Danny enters and looks at the tv, which isn't turned on, then back at Granddad. Granddad stares deathly at Danny.

DANNY

What is it?

GRANDDAD

How many times have I told you?
Keep your head down and stay out of
trouble. Teachers with bloody
noses?

DANNY

It was an accident.

GRANDDAD

People on my doorstep asking me
what's going on in my own home?

DANNY

What people?

GRANDDAD

Your snooty headmaster! Do you want
to be put into a children's home?
Cos that's what'll happen.

(MORE)

GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

And I'll get carted off to an old folks' home with all those brain-dead fools just sitting around all day waiting for someone to wipe their backsides one last time before they snuff it.

DANNY

It wasn't my fault!

GRANDDAD

And how's your mum going to come back to us when they've given our house away to strangers and we're locked in care homes at opposite ends of the country? She'd think we didn't want her to find us.

Granddad lifts the photo of his wife off the side table.

GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

Your grandma made me promise to look after you until your mum comes home. It was the last thing she ever said to me.

DANNY

I know, Granddad.

GRANDDAD

That and making me promise her sister wouldn't try to bury her in their family plot in the Highlands. We're her family, not that lot!

Granddad coughs violently and puts the photo down.

GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

And what's this about being late for school and not doing your homework? You're bringing shame on this family, so you are.

DANNY

How is that my fault? Every two minutes you're wanting this that and the other. And you always need help in the mornings when I'm trying to get ready for school.

GRANDDAD

Who the hell do you think you're talking back to? No wonder your mum left and hasn't come back!

(MORE)

GRANDDAD (CONT'D)

And your grandma will be turning in
her grave, god rest her.

Danny runs out of the room. Granddad has a coughing fit and slumps back into his chair.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DANNY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Danny falls onto his bed, crying.

INT. POLICE CELL - NIGHT

Sadie is snoring in bed.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny wakes on top of his bed, fully clothed. He shivers and slowly comes to his senses.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - NIGHT

The light is on but the fire is out. Granddad is in his chair, motionless. Danny enters.

DANNY

Granddad? It's freezing in here.

Danny walks over and shakes him, but he is lifeless.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Granddad? Granddad? Wake up!

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Danny, in his pyjamas and school shoes, runs down the street and into a phone box. He frantically dials 999.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

Danny is sitting alone. NURSE MITCHELL (20s), efficient but constantly overworked, enters.

NURSE MITCHELL

Are you the wee laddie who came in
with John Prentice?

Danny nods and a yawn catches him by surprise.

NURSE MITCHELL (CONT'D)
Have you been here all night on
your own? Where's your mum and dad?

Danny gets to his feet quickly.

DANNY
Can I see my granddad now, please?

Danny looks away from her as he walks towards the door.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Danny and Nurse Mitchell are standing beside Granddad's bed.

NURSE MITCHELL
So, your papa...

DANNY
Granddad.

NURSE MITCHELL
We think your granddad's had what
we call a bad stroke. And that's
why he's in a coma now.

DANNY
What's that?

NURSE MITCHELL
Well it's kind of like he's just
sleeping; but a really deep sleep.
You can hold his hand if you want.

DANNY
That won't wake him up?

NURSE MITCHELL
No. But if you talk to him, well,
he might just hear you.

DANNY
Even though he's sleeping?

NURSE MITCHELL
Yes, we think so. And I need to
talk to your parents. Where did you
say they are exactly?

An EMERGENCY BUZZER SOUNDS and Nurse Mitchell runs off,
pointing her finger at Danny as if to say 'stay there'. Danny
sits down and reaches out a hand towards Granddad.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Nurse Mitchell walks up to Granddad's bed. She turns to the PATIENT-IN-NEXT-BED.

NURSE MITCHELL

Did you see a wee boy here?

PATIENT-IN-NEXT-BED

Oh aye, aye. He was here a minute ago. Did he no just go down there towards the toilet?

Nurse Mitchell walks off and Danny crawls out from under Patient-In-Next-Bed's bed, smiles at him, and runs in the opposite direction. Nurse Mitchell turns to look at the swing door as it BANGS shut. Patient-In-Next-Bed looks sheepish.

NURSE MITCHELL

I need to have a word with someone about that boy and then I'll be back to have a word with you!

Patient-In-Next-Bed looks scared as she storms off.

EXT. HOSPITAL MAIN ENTRANCE - DAY

Danny hurriedly walks out of the hospital and runs off.

INT. POLICE CELL - DAY

WPC BRODIE (20s), kind and enthusiastic, is sitting opposite Sadie, who is sitting up in bed drinking a cup of tea.

SADIE

It was a few weeks back in a bar in Edinburgh. He was there for the football. Totally hammered.

WPC BRODIE

And you just got on the bus back here with Shug and his mates?

Sadie nods and sips her tea.

WPC BRODIE (CONT'D)

Can't you just go back home to Edinburgh now, though?

SADIE

It wasn't a home. Just a squat.

WPC BRODIE
Where did you say you came from?

SADIE
Lerwick. Shetland Islands.

WPC BRODIE
So can't you go back there?

SADIE
You paying for the flights? But
nah. Got kicked out the house when
I was seventeen. Haven't been back.

SERGEANT GRIEVES (60s), world weary, walks past the cell.

WPC BRODIE
Sarge? Do you think we could get
her into the shelter in the city?

SERGEANT GRIEVES
This boyfriend of yours. Did he hit
you? Or even threaten to hit you?

SADIE
He wouldn't dare!

He shakes his head at WPC Brodie and walks off.

WPC BRODIE
Erm, I'll go see what we've got to
fit you in the lost property box
before you go, okay?

She looks apologetically at Sadie as she stands up.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Danny ambles through the park. Sadie is wearing the Park
Keeper's hat and ill-fitting, badly matching clothes. She
stops people as they walk past the Park Keeper's hut.

SADIE
Fifty pence entry fee. Or two for
sixty pee. Christmas special.

An elderly couple stop near her, a little wary.

SADIE (CONT'D)
These trees don't just grow
themselves, you know.

The man reluctantly hands over a few coins at arm's length and his wife pulls him hurriedly away. The PARK KEEPER (70s) starts running around the pond as fast as he can.

PARK KEEPER
Oi! Get that off your head!

Sadie throws the hat like a frisbee through the open door of the hut and trots away. She stops at the water's edge to help a duck caught in a plastic shopping bag. The Park Keeper's face softens as he sees the duck being gently released.

PARK KEEPER (CONT'D)
Brown paper bags never did anyone
any harm.

Sadie walks towards where Danny has stopped to watch.

SADIE
Do you lock that hut at night?

She puts the carrier bag into the bin near Danny.

PARK KEEPER
Locked and then padlocked on top.
So don't even think about it.

SADIE
Thanks for the hat.

She taps her pocket and it jangles with coins, then turns and walks off. The Park Keeper looks questioningly at Danny and he flinches and walks off in the opposite direction.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Danny finishes eating dinner and looks over at the empty chair opposite him with sadness.

EXT. TOWN CENTRE - NIGHT

Danny passes shops, all shut apart from a convenience store.

INT. HOSPITAL RECEPTION - NIGHT

Danny is standing at the desk. The HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST (60s) puts the phone down and then looks up at him.

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST
 Ward Sister says there's been no
 change. But doctor will be doing
 his rounds in the morning.

Danny turns and walks away, head bowed.

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
 Why did you say your mum couldn't
 be here with you?

Danny pretends he doesn't hear and keeps walking towards the door. The Hospital Receptionist picks the phone up and dials.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Sadie is lying on the bus shelter bench with cardboard all around her. The bus stops, showering her with puddle water, just as Danny walks past. A well-dressed man gets off the bus. She sits up, scattering the cardboard off of her.

SADIE
 I hope you're pleased with
 yourself! Look at the state of me!

The man scurries off, confused. She calls after him.

SADIE (CONT'D)
 You got any change, mate?

Danny brushes some of the fallen sheets of cardboard towards her with his foot, then walks on.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Child protection officer AGNES BELL (20s), frumpy, oversized glasses, convinced of her own self-importance and abilities, walks down the path, clipboard in hand, looking all around.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - DAY

Distant sound of DOORBELL. Danny turns off the shower, showing no sign of having heard the doorbell.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Agnes steps back from the front door and peeks through the window at the front of the house.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, STAIRS - DAY

Danny walks down the stairs in a bath robe. He flattens up against the wall when the letterbox is pushed open.

AGNES BELL (O.S.)
Hello? Agnes Bell, child protection officer. Open the door please. I'm here to help. Are you there?

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE - DAY

Agnes straightens up, lets go of the letterbox with a SLAM, steps back and walks to the side of the house.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE - DAY

Danny cautiously creeps through the downstairs hallway. He looks into the kitchen towards the back door. Agnes' face appears at the kitchen window and he ducks out of sight.

He runs up the stairs and looks out of the back bedroom window. He then runs to the front bedroom and squints out.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Agnes walks down the path towards the gate. At the end, she spins around quickly and looks up at the window.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

Danny ducks quickly down. He creeps up again but stops short of looking out of the window and slumps back down.

INT. SCHOOL, DANNY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Mrs Crawford is at the blackboard. Danny bursts in.

DANNY
I'm sorry I'm a bit late Mrs Crawford, I...

MRS CRAWFORD
Headmaster wants to see you. Right away. Go on.

DANNY
I would have got here on time but, erm, I had to, er...

She walks towards him, but looks at the children.

MRS CRAWFORD

The rest of us will keep learning about what happened to the people who were driven out of their homes during the Highland Clearances.

She pushes Danny into the corridor and shuts the door.

INT. SCHOOL, HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

Danny is standing. Headmaster is looking out of the window.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Agnes drives her car out of the school gates.

INT. SCHOOL, HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

Headmaster turns from the window and walks to his seat.

HEADMASTER

I'm sorry to hear about your grandfather. Who knows what causes a stroke? A shock or upset of some kind or other? I saw him myself only yesterday.

Danny looks accusingly at Headmaster. Headmaster sits and beckons Danny to do the same, which he does.

HEADMASTER (CONT'D)

That woman from social services, erm, children's protection officer, erm, that Agnes Bell woman, said your grandfather could be in hospital for quite some time. A nurse phoned her, apparently.

Headmaster fumbles with some paperwork.

HEADMASTER (CONT'D)

I promised we wouldn't let you leave until a family member comes for you. But you must be completely on your own, I've just realised?

DANNY

No no, I'm not. My, erm, my auntie's looking after me.

HEADMASTER

Oh, good. What's her name?

Headmaster is poised with his pen. Danny's eyes dart around the room and settle on a picture of the Queen.

DANNY

Elizabeth.

HEADMASTER

But why didn't she answer the door this morning? Agnes Bell said she hammered and shouted.

DANNY

She's still on her way.

HEADMASTER

Where from, Canada?

DANNY

The Highlands.

HEADMASTER

So you were home alone last night?

DANNY

I stayed at a neighbour's. I phoned my auntie from there.

HEADMASTER

Oh very good. I've heard there's a real community spirit in these little housing estates.

DANNY

Erm, yes, Headmaster.

HEADMASTER

But your Aunt Elizabeth is definitely arriving today?

DANNY

Yes, Headmaster.

HEADMASTER

And presumably the nurse will meet her tonight?

Danny looks confused.

HEADMASTER (CONT'D)

You'll be visiting your grandfather in hospital with your aunt tonight, surely? I can tell Agnes Bell to check in with the nurse she knows.

DANNY

Did you know people in comas can hear you when you speak to them? Granddad might wake up when he hears Auntie Elizabeth's voice tonight. They're really close.

HEADMASTER

Good then, well give him my love. I mean, I hope he gets well soon. Go on now, back to class.

Danny jumps up and hurries to the door.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, GRANDDAD'S BEDROOM - DAY

Danny takes Granddad's wallet and cash from his bedroom dresser then puts them in an old shoe box.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DANNY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Danny pushes the shoe box far underneath his bed.

EXT. BUS SHELTER - DAY

Danny looks around; only one tiny piece of cardboard remains.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Danny looks all around the park. The Park Keeper watches him.

EXT. TOWN CENTRE - DAY

Danny walks down the street, looking despondent. He spots Sadie outside the convenience store and his face lights up. He approaches as she talks to two people leaving the shop.

SADIE

You must have some change! What did you do? Keep buying stuff until you used up every single penny you had?

The two shoppers walk away and Sadie's eyes meet Danny's. But she walks off, too, and he follows behind her. After a few steps, she senses him and quickly spins around.

SADIE (CONT'D)

What are you up to?

DANNY

I'm not up to anything! I just...

SADIE

Didn't your mum teach you to stay away from strangers?

DANNY

Not yet.

She screws her face up in confusion.

DANNY (CONT'D)

I want you to do something for me.

She walks away as though the conversation had never happened.

DANNY (CONT'D)

For money. I'll pay you!

She turns around again with a look of disgust on her face.

SADIE

What kind of girl do you think I am? And you're far too young to be thinking like that anyway.

DANNY

What do you mean?

SADIE

It's actually a relief that you don't know. Keep it that way. Now get lost, weird kid.

DANNY

No, listen, please.

SADIE

Have you got no one else to talk to? Get away with you. You're past boring me already.

DANNY

You'll make more money than you do at the park keeper's hut or, or, or begging outside the shop.

She folds her arms and studies him.

INT. CHARITY SHOP - DAY

The CHARITY-SHOP-ASSISTANT (70s), like a kind old granny but sprightly and confident, bids farewell to a customer.

CHARITY-SHOP-ASSISTANT
Thank you so much. Do please,
please call again, won't you?

Danny steps into the shop as the customer leaves. The Charity-Shop-Assistant looks dismissively at him.

CHARITY-SHOP-ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
There's nothing for you the likes
of you in here! We don't sell the
Space Invaders or Pac-Men!

DANNY
We need some new clothes. Well,
some cheap, second hand ones,
obviously, for my, er, for my
auntie.

Danny looks behind him but no one is there. He opens the door, sticks his hand out and pulls Sadie into the shop.

CHARITY-SHOP-ASSISTANT
Your auntie looks very much like
the homeless woman who came into my
shop this morning wanting money out
of my cash register.

SADIE
It's a charity shop, isn't it? Give
the cash straight to me and cut out
the middle-man. Doing you a favour!

CHARITY-SHOP-ASSISTANT
Just get out. I'm not interested in
whatever nonsense this is between
the pair of you.

DANNY
She's not really my auntie. But
I've been told to treat her like
family for a school project.
Teacher says that, with a little
help and kindness, everyone can be
a good member of the community.

CHARITY-SHOP-ASSISTANT
A leopard can't change its spots.

DANNY
I don't really know what that means. But could we change her clothes for ones that don't smell like the school toilets?

SADIE
Oi!

CHARITY-SHOP-ASSISTANT
Perhaps you and I are going to get on fine after all, young man.

DANNY
I've got money. My class raised it to help the homeless.

CHARITY-SHOP-ASSISTANT
We're friends already.

She picks up a can of air freshener in each hand and advances upon Sadie, spraying liberally as Danny retreats, coughing.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Danny and Sadie are carrying bags, walking away from the charity shop. Danny stops outside the chemist's shop.

DANNY
She recognised you straight away.

SADIE
Who did?

DANNY
Her in the shop. Wait here.

Danny puts his bags at her feet and goes into the chemist's.

INT. CHEMIST'S SHOP - DAY

Danny walks away from the counter, holding hair colourant.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Danny, pacing, shouts through the closed bathroom door.

DANNY
What are you up to now?

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - DAY

Sadie is standing at the sink, rubbing brunette hair dye into her short hair. The sink is full of chopped hair and a pair of scissors sits between the taps. She looks in the mirror.

SADIE
Upon reflection, I don't think
you're paying me enough for this.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

DANNY
Would you just hurry up! You can
use my room. But don't go into the
other rooms, okay? Okay?

SADIE (O.S.)
Okay!

Danny pulls Granddad's door closed and lingers outside a third door, which is already closed, but he checks it anyway.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DANNY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sadie, wrapped in towels, puts the hairdryer down on the chest of drawers alongside a mirror and digital alarm clock. She takes a long look at herself and gets lost in the moment.

DANNY (O.S.)
We're going to be late!

SADIE
Okay!!

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Danny paces around. Off Screen HAIR DRYER NOISE starts and stops over and over. There's a pause in the noise, then the sound of FOOTSTEPS coming down the stairs. Sadie appears at the doorway in her 'new' clothes and hair, transformed.

DANNY
So, are you ready, auntie, erm,
Auntie Elizabeth?

She smooths down her skirt as she walks awkwardly across the room in her 'new' heeled shoes. She takes a long look in the mirror, touching her hair and fiddling with her clothes.

ELIZABETH

Elizabeth? Like the Queen?

Danny screws up his face in the background, which she doesn't notice. Eventually, she nods.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - NIGHT

Danny and Elizabeth walk out the front door. He closes and locks it and steels himself before turning to see 'Elizabeth' almost fall as she walks down the garden path in her heels.

EXT. TOWN CENTRE - NIGHT

MONTAGE

- Danny and Elizabeth walk down the high street in a 'Pretty Woman' style montage, though she's a little shaky in her low heeled shoes. Passers-by note how attractive she is.

- She enjoys her reflection in shop windows.

- Danny follows behind her, confused by the attention she receives and annoyed when guys walk into him because they're too busy staring at her.

- They traverse the pelican crossing, with Elizabeth enjoying the attention of the men in the cars stopped on either side.

- She flicks her hair but goes over on her heels, falling into Danny, knocking them both over.

- Elizabeth roars with laughter and is soon helped to her feet by a couple of men who run from the pavement.

- Danny gets himself up and manages a little smile as he watches Elizabeth laughing with the two strangers.

END MONTAGE

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - NIGHT

Danny and Elizabeth sit in silence at Granddad's bedside.

DANNY

She's coming!

ELIZABETH
The same one?

DANNY
Yes, Nurse Mitchell.

NURSE MITCHELL
Well, well, here he is! The
disappearing boy!

DANNY
Hi.

NURSE MITCHELL
And you are?

ELIZABETH
I'm Auntie Elizabeth.

NURSE MITCHELL
But you don't mind if I just call
you Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH
I mean that I'm his Auntie
Elizabeth. Danny's, I mean.

NURSE MITCHELL
I think I've got it. And how are
you doing this evening, Danny?

DANNY
I'm fine, thanks. But how's my
Granddad?

NURSE MITCHELL
Well, there's no change. But that's
not a bad thing, mind. It just
means he's catching up on his
sleep. The best medicine is always
rest, after all.

DANNY
Honestly?

NURSE MITCHELL
Just give him time. I'm keeping a
close eye on him for you.

DANNY
Thanks.

NURSE MITCHELL

And who's keeping an eye on you exactly? Where are your parents?

ELIZABETH

(robotically)

We don't know who his father is. His mother will be home for Christmas. His grandma died about four years ago. I'm his grandma's sister's daughter Elizabeth.

NURSE MITCHELL

Is that right?

DANNY

She came all the way down from the Highlands to look after me.

ELIZABETH

Yes that's the rest of it. Erm, that's what I did. Well, family is family, isn't it?

NURSE MITCHELL

Yes it is, isn't it.

Nurse Mitchell ponders for a moment and then walks away. Danny scowls at Elizabeth and she shrugs her shoulders.

ELIZABETH

Well if you hadn't stressed me out by making me repeat it over and over a million times!

Danny looks at her with incredulity.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I'm off to the canteen.

She gets up and leaves him sitting at the bedside.

INT. HOSPITAL CANTEEN - NIGHT

Elizabeth is sitting at a table with a few empty tea cups and chocolate wrappers. Danny and Nurse Mitchell approach.

NURSE MITCHELL

And here she is right enough. Been here most of visiting hour, I see?

ELIZABETH

Hospitals give me the creeps. No offence.

NURSE MITCHELL

None taken. Danny. Are you sure you're okay now?

Danny nods. Nurse Mitchell looks back and forth between him and Elizabeth and then walks away, glancing back at them.

INT/EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Danny opens the front door and steps inside. He grabs a black bin bag, overflowing with Elizabeth's old clothes, and passes it out to her on the doorstep. He takes a neat bundle of notes from the hall table drawer and hands it to her.

DANNY

That's the rest of it.

ELIZABETH

Right. Thanks.

DANNY

Bye then.

Danny closes the door. Heavy rain starts falling.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, bye then...

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - NIGHT

Danny walks over to Granddad's chair. He sits down and curls up under Granddad's blanket, wrapping it tightly around him.

INT/EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Heavy rain. Light is shining out of the lounge window. A flash of lighting and CLAP OF THUNDER. Danny wakes with a start and a shiver, in Granddad's armchair, and then looks up at the clock. It's gone midnight.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny kicks off his trousers as he flops into bed. Rain lashes against the window. More THUNDER and lightening.

EXT. SCHOOL CAR PARK - DAY

Headmaster gets out of his car as the SCHOOL BELL stops.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DANNY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Danny wakes sleepily, gets out of bed and walks over to his alarm clock on the chest of drawers. It's not turned on. He follows the flex and finds that it has been unplugged. The hairdryer is plugged-in in its place.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

Headmaster strolls past classrooms, already full of children.

INT. SCHOOL, HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

Headmaster dreamily enters his office and shrieks in fright.

AGNES BELL

Good morning, Headmaster.

HEADMASTER

Good morning, Child Protection Officer, erm Agnes.

AGNES BELL

Ms Bell, please! Let's keep this professional, shall we?

HEADMASTER

I'm sorry I'm late. I er...did we have an appointment?

AGNES BELL

No. But I've already been to talk to Danny Prentice's teacher.

HEADMASTER

Oh, okay, very good. Tea?

Headmaster presses the INTERCOM and it SQUEALS.

AGNES BELL

No it's not good.

HEADMASTER

Coffee, then?

Mrs Reid enters.

MRS REID
Good morning, Headmaster?

AGNES BELL
I'm just about to inform the
Headmaster that Danny Prentice
didn't turn up for school again
this morning.

MRS REID
Right enough. I've just been over
his class register.

AGNES BELL
What did you make of Danny's aunt?
The nurse felt something amiss.

HEADMASTER
Well we didn't actually meet her,
as such, did we? But...

AGNES BELL
I see!

Agnes gets up and leaves the office.

AGNES BELL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I assume you're coming with me?

Headmaster looks at Mrs Reid, then gets up hurriedly.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Danny pulls a school shirt off the clothes pulley and puts it
on quickly. He fashions his tie in his reflection in the
window. Something catches his eye outside.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BACK GARDEN - DAY

Danny navigates through a few empty lager cans on the lawn
and approaches the shed, the door of which is slightly ajar.
He cautiously looks inside. Elizabeth, on the floor, is woken
by the sunlight that floods in as he opens the door wide.

ELIZABETH
Turn the bloody light off!

DANNY
I can't turn the sun off, can I?

ELIZABETH
Uh? Oh. It's you, weird kid.

DANNY

Of course it's me! And I'm not the one who's weird. You're the one sleeping in a shed. My shed!

She looks at him dismissively and gets up off the floor, pushing aside the clothes layered on top of her.

ELIZABETH

You didn't want me sleeping without a roof over my head, did you? I'd freeze to death out in that.

DANNY

That's not my problem!

ELIZABETH

Charming.

She pushes past him and heads across the grass.

DANNY

And you can't leave your stuff here, either.

She heads for the back door of the house.

DANNY (CONT'D)

What d'you think you're doing?

ELIZABETH

I'm bursting.

Danny runs after her and they both arrive at the back door step just as they hear the distant sound of the front DOOR BELL RING. They both freeze.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Agnes hammers on the front door. Headmaster stands behind her, on the garden path.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BACK GARDEN - DAY

AGNES BELL (O.S.)

Danny? Agnes Bell, Child Protection Officer, here. Again!

Elizabeth smiles and Danny looks shocked.

AGNES BELL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 But you can call me Agnes, if you
 like.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

HEADMASTER
 (mumbling to himself)
 Oh, so it's okay for him to be on
 first-name terms?

AGNES BELL
 And your headmaster's here, too.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BACK GARDEN - DAY

ELIZABETH
 It just keeps getting better for
 you, eh?

DANNY
 Shush!

AGNES BELL (O.S.)
 We can wait here all day if we have
 to.

ELIZABETH
 Well I can't wait another minute.
 I'll just wander on down the street
 to find somewhere I can go.

Elizabeth walks towards the side of the house. Danny pulls
 her back.

DANNY
 Okay, okay, you can go to the
 toilet but please don't make a
 sound. Ok? Get in, quick.

They both go in the house and Danny closes the door softly.

Agnes appears and hurries over to the empty lager cans. She
 picks one up, smells it and then tips it over to watch the
 remains dribble out. She hears the back door being LOCKED.

AGNES BELL
 Hello? Danny? Is that you?

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Danny stands in the hallway staring through the kitchen towards the back door. Behind him, the letterbox on the front door pops open and Agnes' eyes appear.

AGNES BELL (O.S.)
(out of breath)
Gotcha!

Danny spins around in fright.

AGNES BELL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Are you going to open this door now
or do I have to call the police to
break it down for me?

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Agnes turns to look up from the letterbox at the Headmaster.

AGNES BELL
I can do that, you know!

Agnes smiles smugly as the door is unlocked and opens slowly to reveal Danny standing sheepishly in the hallway.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - DAY

Elizabeth is about to flush the toilet but stops herself. She quietly opens the bathroom door and leans her ear out.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Danny has his back against the wall, with Agnes close up to him, her clipboard and pen at the ready. Headmaster is hovering in the doorway, a step back.

AGNES BELL
A Child Protection Officer always
gets her man. Or child, erm, just
go grab your overnight things.
You're coming with me.

SOUND OF TOILET FLUSHING. Headmaster, Agnes and Danny look at each other with surprise. Slowly, Elizabeth comes into full view, coming down the stairs, dressed only in a bathrobe and with a towel wrapped around her head.

ELIZABETH

Danny! What have I told you about letting strange people into the house?

AGNES BELL

And you would be?

ELIZABETH

I already am.

AGNES BELL

What?

ELIZABETH

What?

AGNES BELL

Who on earth are you?

DANNY

This is my Auntie Elizabeth.

AGNES BELL

Auntie Elizabeth?

HEADMASTER

(swooning a little)

Auntie Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH

Did I mention that I'm Danny's Auntie Elizabeth?

HEADMASTER

Well you're just great. I mean, I mean, that's just great. And I'm Gordon...Danny's headmaster.

AGNES BELL

Well, erm, so why isn't Danny at school?

ELIZABETH

He was getting ready, before you appeared out of nowhere! Are you in the habit of forcing your way into private homes and scaring young children?

AGNES BELL

I'm an expert in child care, it's what I do! And he's already late!

ELIZABETH

An expert would know well enough that a child whose granddad is lying in hospital in a coma might be pretty upset about it. He's been up and down all night, bless him. So a few minutes late for school is hardly a crime, is it?

HEADMASTER

No of course not, it's really not a problem...

ELIZABETH

He'll be on his way soon enough. Once I've had a wee chat to make sure he's okay after the fright you've given him. Barging in here like a common burglar! So, if you don't mind, er?

AGNES BELL

Agnes Bell, specialist child protection officer!

Elizabeth ushers them out of the door. As she steps out, Agnes turns around and looks closely at Elizabeth.

AGNES BELL (CONT'D)

Why are there fresh lager cans on the back lawn?

DANNY

Granddad says the neighbours don't sort their bins properly. Stuff keeps blowing into our garden.

AGNES BELL

Strange, with such high fences and hedges all around.

Elizabeth starts shutting the door.

AGNES BELL (CONT'D)

I'll be back again very soon. Don't you worry.

ELIZABETH

Perfectly calm here.

AGNES BELL

This case isn't closed!

ELIZABETH

This door is.

Elizabeth smirks slyly at Danny as she shuts the door.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Headmaster and Agnes retreat down the driveway. She's fuming but he's smiling wildly and skipping a little.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Elizabeth starts walking back up the stairs.

ELIZABETH

I think I'll go relax in a hot bath.

DANNY

What? You, you...

ELIZABETH

You heard the woman, she's coming back! So you're gonna need your Auntie Elizabeth to stick around for a while, aren't you? Do you want to talk about my payment now or after you get back from school?

Danny looks flummoxed. Elizabeth smiles slyly.

EXT. OUTSIDE TOWN LIBRARY - DAY

Mrs Crawford watches as her class files through the double doors. Danny is last and she scowls as he passes her.

INT. TOWN LIBRARY - DAY

LIBRARIAN (60s), stern but with too kind a face to be scary, holds her hands out to herd the children.

LIBRARIAN

Shush, please. There are adults reading. Right to the back, children's section only, please.

DANNY

Excuse me? Do you have books about medicine?

MRS CRAWFORD

Danny Prentice. Will you stop annoying people and join the rest of the class. I don't know why you think you're so special that...

LIBRARIAN

So, you're thinking about becoming a doctor when you grow up? Let's see what we can find to help!

She puts her hand on Danny's shoulder and guides him into the main library, whilst Mrs Crawford scowls in the background.

DANNY

I need to find out about strokes and comas. Like how long they last. And, and if they. If they, erm, if everything's okay after them.

Librarian's smile fades and she looks at him with concern.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS - DAY

Elizabeth is in Granddad's bathrobe, with a sandwich hanging out of her mouth and a mug of tea in her hand. She enters a bedroom and looks around. There are faded posters of male popstars on the walls, and teenager's magazines on the shelf.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Danny walks into his driveway and throws himself onto the grass, dropping his satchel, to avoid being knocked over by Granddad's car bursting out of the garage. Elizabeth slams the brakes on and shouts through the open window.

ELIZABETH

Road trip!

DANNY

That's Granddad's car!

ELIZABETH

Well I didn't think it was yours, did I? You coming or what? Think fast, weird kid...

EXT. STREET, INSIDE THE CAR - DAY

Danny is fuming in the front passenger seat. Elizabeth is trying to cover her embarrassment at driving so badly.

ELIZABETH

How long did you say it was since he drove it? I think it needs the pipes clearing out, or something.

DANNY

It never used to bounce!

ELIZABETH

I'm starting to get the hang of it, though, eh?

DANNY

Yeah, sure, you're really good at it, ok? So can we just go back now before you crash Granddad's car?

ELIZABETH

Where's your sense of adventure?

The car pulls up alongside a sign for the coast.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

When were you last at the seaside?

Danny looks at her blankly. She puts her foot down and he's thrust back into his seat as the car leaps forwards into the path of a truck that slams on its brakes to avoid them.

EXT. ROAD IN SEASIDE TOWN, INSIDE THE CAR - NIGHT

Danny has the window down and he excitedly smells the sea air. Elizabeth drives down the approach road to the beach.

DANNY

Are you sure we can do this?

ELIZABETH

There wouldn't be a road if they didn't want you to drive on it.

The car stops on the sand.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Go on then!

Danny jumps out of the car and runs to the water.

DANNY

You coming?

She watches with a smile on her face, as he hops around at the water's edge, lit by moonlight.

EXT. PROMENADE - NIGHT

A dog walker stops and squints over the promenade wall into the darkness. Loud ENGINE NOISES can be heard.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

The car's wheels spin on the sand and then it lurches forwards and stops. Inside, Danny is in the driving seat.

ELIZABETH

Not as easy as it looks, is it?

DANNY

It's harder on the sand than it is on the road!

ELIZABETH

Rubbish. There's nothing to crash into. Go on then. Keep trying.

Danny starts the car and it bounces forwards then stops.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

What have you done this time?

DANNY

Nothing. It just stopped.

ELIZABETH

Maybe you've flooded the engine.

DANNY

What does that mean?

ELIZABETH

I don't know. I just remember my dad saying it to my mum all the time.

DANNY

Did he say anything about checking the petrol before going on a long journey?

Danny points at the illuminated petrol warning light.

EXT. PROMENADE - NIGHT

Danny is struggling with the weight of a petrol canister.

ELIZABETH
The cost of that wee glug of
petrol! Stinks, too.

DANNY
I know! I'm the one carrying it!

ELIZABETH
Oooh, smell that instead then.

They stop outside a fish and chip shop.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Wait here with the petrol and try
not to set fire to yourself.

A woman walking past scowls and tuts.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Just chuck the petrol down
somewhere and come into the shop.

A man walking past scowls and tuts. Elizabeth thinks for a
moment.

EXT. PROMENADE - NIGHT

Elizabeth is sitting on a bench with the petrol canister at
her feet. Danny exits the fish shop, arms full, and walks
towards her. They smile warmly at each other.

EXT. PROMENADE - NIGHT

Elizabeth and Danny are tucking into their fish suppers and
polystyrene cups of tea. Danny yawns.

ELIZABETH
Sea air makes you sleepy.

DANNY
I'm fine. But I can't be late for
school again cos that Agnes Bell
will be right round. We should hit
the road.

ELIZABETH
Hit the road!

DANNY
What?

ELIZABETH
You're talking like a driver after
five minutes behind the wheel.

DANNY
Shut it.

Danny playfully throws a chip at her. He waits expectantly for her to throw one back, but she looks stern.

ELIZABETH
Food's not for wasting.

She picks the chip off the bench and eats it.

EXT. STEPS DOWN TO THE BEACH - NIGHT

The tide is coming in. Elizabeth and Danny walk down to where the water has risen to meet the steps. The car is surrounded by water, rising up its sides. They look horrified.

ELIZABETH
I did say I thought the engine was
flooded.

Danny doesn't share the joke and shoots daggers at her.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Too soon?

EXT. CHRISTMAS MARKET - NIGHT

Danny and Elizabeth walk through the closed market. She's carrying the can of petrol.

ELIZABETH
It'll dry out.

Danny ignores her, quietly fuming.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
And we put the windows up when we
left. So, with a bit of luck...

DANNY
Luck? Granddad's car is floating
half way to Canada...

ELIZABETH
Bit of an exaggeration. But good
geographical awareness.

DANNY

...and we've got no money and
nowhere to sleep and you said
there's no chance of hitch-hiking
back at this time of night.

ELIZABETH

Talking of money, we still haven't
discussed how much you're paying me
to stick around.

He scowls at her.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Ok, bad timing on that one, too.
But you know, technically, you were
the last one driving so I don't
know why you're so angry at me.
Look, there's a little fairground
over there.

DANNY

So what?

ELIZABETH

Where there's waltzers there's a
way.

DANNY

That's not a saying. And a way to
do what? Spin and freeze to death
at the same time?

EXT. SMALL FUN FAIR - NIGHT

Elizabeth pulls back the thick tarpaulin on top of one of the
waltzer cars whilst Danny climbs in.

DANNY

Do you think there'll be spiders in
here?

ELIZABETH

No, they'll all be on the dodgems.
Just get in. It's got a padded seat
and a heavy tarpaulin. All the fun
of the fair.

DANNY

You're still not getting the hang
of sayings.

Elizabeth lets go of the tarpaulin and Danny's head sticks up into it in the middle of the waltzer car.

DANNY (CONT'D)

What am I supposed to do with my head?

ELIZABETH

What do you usually do with it when you sleep?

DANNY

I usually have a pillow. And a bed!

ELIZABETH

Welcome to my world. Just lie down.

Danny's shape disappears inside the waltzer car. Elizabeth starts clawing at the tarpaulin on the next waltzer car.

DANNY

Erm..?

ELIZABETH

What?

DANNY

Nothing.

Elizabeth looks at Danny's car and then looks around at the dark fairground. Then she thumps on the taught tarpaulin above Danny like it's a drum. He roars at her from within.

ELIZABETH

Oh get over yourself, I was only having a laugh.

Elizabeth scans the surroundings again for a moment.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I'm in the next one. Right beside you. Okay?

DANNY

Okay...night.

EXT. PROMENADE - DAY

The sun is rising. Elizabeth and Danny lean on the promenade wall, looking down onto the sand. The tide is out and the car is nowhere to be seen. Elizabeth turns away. She stops a car in the road, waving the petrol canister in front of it.

ELIZABETH
I'll fill your tank up if you take
us to the bypass?

The driver nods and Elizabeth waves Danny over.

EXT. BUSY ROADSIDE - DAY

Elizabeth and Danny are standing at the side of the road with their thumbs up. Danny is not happy.

ELIZABETH
What did you honestly expect? The
tide would go out and the car would
just be sitting there, ready to
drive home?

DANNY
I suppose I was kind of hoping.

ELIZABETH
Yeah, I know. Look. We had a car
accident, kind of, but we walked
away. That makes us two of the
luckiest people in Scotland. So
cheer up, you miserable little git!
No one's gonna give us a lift with
your face tripping you like that!

Danny fakes an exaggerated smile. Just then a truck pulls over. She looks smug but he's too excited to care.

EXT. TRUCK PARK - DAY

Elizabeth and Danny wave as the truck drives off.

DANNY
Wish he was going all the way. That
truck was amazing.

ELIZABETH
C'mon. We'll find the next one.

They turn to walk towards the service station building.

INT. TRUCK STOP DINER - DAY

Truckers, carrying huge plates of fried breakfasts, walk past a drooling Danny and Elizabeth.

DANNY

Never felt so hungry in my life.

Elizabeth gestures towards a table where some truckers are gambling with cards. He looks at her with confusion.

ELIZABETH

Survival trick number one. Keep some money hidden until you're so totally desperate that you have no choice but to use it.

DANNY

We've got money? You said the fish suppers cleaned us out!

ELIZABETH

I've got money! But not much. Not yet anyway.

Elizabeth backs against a wall, glances around then buries her hand inside her knickers. She pulls out a pound note.

DANNY

I think I just lost my appetite.

INT. TRUCK STOP DINER - DAY

Elizabeth wins a card game against a huge trucker who shakes her hand magnanimously, in front of a crowd of onlookers. She scoops up the prize money and smiles at Danny.

INT. TRUCK STOP DINER - DAY

Danny and Elizabeth are finishing off big plates of food. TRUCK DRIVER (30s), bearded and wallowing, approaches.

TRUCK DRIVER

Need to hit the road.

Danny and Elizabeth run after him. Danny doubles back to the table, grabs a sausage and then catches them up. He snaps the sausage in two and gives half to Elizabeth.

DANNY

Food's not for wasting.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE DANNY'S SCHOOL - DAY

Danny and Elizabeth stand at the school gates. A truck pulls away in the background. Headmaster's car pulls up alongside. He smiles broadly at Elizabeth as his window lowers.

HEADMASTER

Well good morning!

ELIZABETH

Good morning to you! We got a flat on the way to the supermarket on an early morning shop and had to hitch-hike back. Look at the state of us!

HEADMASTER

Oh you poor thing! So where's the car? I could swap over that tyre for you. Possibly.

ELIZABETH

It's stolen already! I mean, we were walking to the emergency phone box and, next thing, our car goes steaming right past us. You couldn't make it up! I was just worried about Danny being late.

HEADMASTER

Yes, Danny, straight to class. But what a shock for you, poor thing! Coffee to steady your nerves? Go on Danny, you're fine, hurry now!

Danny turns and walks off, slightly confused.

EXT. HIGH STREET - DAY

Elizabeth looks through the charity shop window. She walks onwards and goes into a high street fashion store.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Danny enters. MUSIC is BLARING.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Elizabeth is dancing to loud pop music and doesn't notice Danny enter. There are shopping bags on the floor and clothes draped around. She admires herself in the mirror. Danny turns off the cassette player, stopping her in mid dance.

DANNY

What's all this?

ELIZABETH

I need something to wear to the dance. Oh I brought your satchel in off the grass. It's in the hall. Who's Cassandra, your mum?

DANNY

Thanks. Yeah. What dance?

ELIZABETH

Gordon asked me to the school Christmas Dance!

DANNY

Gordon? The Headmaster? Then tell him you can't go!

ELIZABETH

Why wouldn't I go? I'm supposed to be your auntie. And it sounds fun.

DANNY

It's not meant to be fun! It's the school Christmas dance. The clue's in the word 'school'.

ELIZABETH

How do I look in this?

DANNY

Who cares? And how much did all this lot cost?

ELIZABETH

Auntie Elizabeth is a classy lady. Well, Gordon seems to think so, which is good enough for me. So I have to dress the part, don't I?

DANNY

You'd better not have spent all the money on this stuff?

ELIZABETH

Pretty much. It's my money anyway. I won the card game, not you!

DANNY

Using money that I gave you!

ELIZABETH

That I earned! Talking of which, on the way to the dance we can discuss how much you're paying me to stick around. Will there be food there or are you making me dinner now?

She returns to admiring herself in the mirror.

EXT. SCHOOL GATES - NIGHT

A sign on the noticeboard says "Primary 7 Christmas Dance TONIGHT. Parents, guardians and family welcome."

INT. SCHOOL HALL - NIGHT

There's a large Christmas tree in the corner and the room is bedecked with fairy lights and home-made decorations.

Danny and the other Primary 7 children, dressed in their smartest clothes, are dancing to the 'Canadian Barn Dance' (traditional Scottish country dancing song) on the PA SYSTEM. On stage, Mrs Reid is sitting by the record player and Mrs Crawford, resplendent in full tartan, is at the microphone.

MRS CRAWFORD

(through the microphone)

Keep it tight! I don't know why I bother. One two three four one two three four. It's not difficult!

Some parents, Elizabeth and Headmaster (dressed in a kilt) are sitting on benches along the side of the hall, clapping, tapping and whooping.

ELIZABETH

The kids are doing great!

HEADMASTER

They've been taking lessons all term to get ready for tonight.

ELIZABETH

Oh aye, I remember those days. Best part of school. Well, that and being taught how to play cards by the janitor. Best lesson I ever learned. And the worst.

He shakes his head, puts his hand to his hear and moves closer to Elizabeth. She shakes her head dismissively.

HEADMASTER

Yes we have a great janitor here.

The song ends and the children bow/courtesy to each other.

MRS CRAWFORD

(through the microphone)

That wasn't the absolute worst effort we've seen over the years. But it wasn't far off it!

ELIZABETH

(to Headmaster)

Just like every other ceilidh dance caller, then, never happy!

MRS CRAWFORD

(through the microphone)

Now, would any of the parents like to join the children for the Dashing White Sergeant?

The children discourage their parents, who stay seated. But Elizabeth jumps to her feet and grabs Headmaster's hand.

MRS CRAWFORD (CONT'D)

(through the microphone)

So no parents, then. Just Danny Prentice's Aunt Elizabeth. And our Headmaster! Mrs Reid, if you would?

Mrs Reid starts another record. MUSIC and the dance start. Headmaster and Elizabeth laugh as they try to keep up with the children, who soon warm to them both. Except for Danny!

MRS CRAWFORD (CONT'D)

(through the microphone)

Top pairs move forwards, cross hands and spin two three four down the line two three four one two three four. Keep in time, please!

The children help to guide Headmaster and Elizabeth. Elizabeth is unbalanced in her heels during the spins and she wobbles, often leaning on whomever she's partnering with at the time to keep her upright.

MRS CRAWFORD (CONT'D)

Two three four keep it together, three four down the outside three four and top pair together three four. How hard can it be?!

Elizabeth and Danny find themselves as partners during a spin at the end of the line. She spins him too quickly before tripping and catapulting him into the Christmas tree, which topples onto him. Mrs Reid stops the MUSIC.

Elizabeth bursts out laughing as Danny crawls out from beneath the tree, covered in tinsel.

ELIZABETH

(to Danny)

I told you it'd be fun!

Headmaster runs to help Elizabeth up. Martin and Kenneth pick Danny up and the parents lift up the tree. Mumtaz picks up Elizabeth's shoe and takes it to her. The heel flops off.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Thanks?

MUMTAZ

Mumtaz.

ELIZABETH

I think this has had it though!

Elizabeth kicks her other shoe off.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

(looking at Mrs Crawford)

Right then. What's the next dance?

Mrs Crawford storms over to the record player and snatches at the needle arm, scraping it across the disk with a SCREECH. She claps her hands and all the children run around picking up the fallen decorations. Elizabeth joins in with them.

INT. SCHOOL HALL - NIGHT

Everyone is mingling around buffet tables. Mumtaz pulls a tiny piece of tinsel out of Danny's hair and giggles. MISS GOLD, (20s) hip young teacher, approaches Elizabeth.

MISS GOLD

So you're Danny's aunt?

ELIZABETH

That's right, hi, Elizabeth.

MISS GOLD

He obviously feels very comfortable with you around.

ELIZABETH
Oh, you think?

MISS GOLD
It's good to see him interacting
with the other children.

ELIZABETH
Doesn't he usually..?

MISS GOLD
Oh no. Never.

Elizabeth contemplates this for a moment and then bounds onto the stage.

ELIZABETH
Everyone, everyone? Hi. Party at
our house tomorrow night! At
Danny's house. Everyone's invited.

The children cheer but Danny looks mortified.

*Some of the parents murmur: sounds good to me, free
babysitter, I'm sending all my kids.*

Headmaster joins Elizabeth on stage, smiling warmly at her.

HEADMASTER
And I'll come, too. To keep an eye
on all the kids, I mean, of course.

There are audible *groans* from the children. Danny looks
furious. Janitor enters, JANGLING his keys.

HEADMASTER (CONT'D)
It looks like we need to wrap
things up soon, unfortunately.

Janitor RATTLES his keys louder, holding them above his head.

HEADMASTER (CONT'D)
Oh, erm, very soon, I think. So, er
Mrs Reid, if you would be so kind?

Mrs Reid starts a RECORD. Everyone other than the Janitor
takes to the dance floor, forming a large, tight circle. Mrs
Reid starts singing in time to the music.

MRS REID
Should auld acquaintance be
forgot...?

Everyone, except Janitor, joins in singing Auld Lang Syne.

Headmaster ensures he's beside Elizabeth so that, when the lyrics "*and here's a hand my trusty friend, and gies a hand o' thine*" are sung, he's in position to take her hand.

Danny scowls as he sees Elizabeth and Headmaster 'forgetting' to let go their hands as the song ends.

There's a SCREECHING sound as Janitor turns off the record and then flicks the lights off one-by-one.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - NIGHT

The table is covered with cakes, crisps, sandwiches, fizzy pop etc. Elizabeth smiles as Danny paces the room.

ELIZABETH

Stop your fussing, it looks great.

DANNY

Fussing? I'll have to explain to Granddad why I spent his money on all this stuff and, and the house will end up getting trashed and...

ELIZABETH

You really need to learn how to let your hair down, don't you?

DOORBELL RINGS.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

No time like the present! Now cheer up, you miserable little git. It's party time around here!

She looks serious for a moment.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

When was the last time anyone said that in this house?

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GAREN - NIGHT

Kids are running around Danny's front garden, playing. LOUD MUSIC IS BLARING from inside the house.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - NIGHT

Danny picks bits of food off the carpet and runs after the other kids, offering them napkins. Elizabeth scowls and then nods at him. He puts the napkins down and joins in the fun.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Headmaster is at the window as Elizabeth enters.

HEADMASTER

They're climbing in the trees now.

Elizabeth shuts the door then closes the venetian blind.

ELIZABETH

They're safer playing here than out
on the streets. Trust me.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Danny hears people inside his mum's bedroom, on the door of which is a 'keep out' sign in his scrawled handwriting.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DANNY'S MUM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny bursts in and sees a cola puddle fizzing on the carpet and Martin, Kenneth and Campbell lounging around. One of the pop posters on the wall is loose and is flopping down.

DANNY

This is my mum's room! Get out!

KENNETH

Alright, keep the head!

DANNY

I mean it. Now!

Danny grabs and pushes the three boys towards the door, his strength and determination taking them by surprise.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Headmaster leans in towards Elizabeth for a kiss just as Danny bursts in. They pull back awkwardly as Danny grabs some cleaning products and runs back out.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny feverishly scrubs at the cola puddle on the carpet.
LOUD CRASHING SOUND and a HIGH-PITCHED SCREAM off screen.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BACK GARDEN - NIGHT

A few children stand in shock and then run out of sight.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Headmaster stares at the football entangled in the blinds and the broken glass in the sink and then looks at Elizabeth.

HEADMASTER
I could've been killed.

ELIZABETH
It's just one little pane of glass.

She starts giggling at him.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
It's a wonder you didn't break the
rest with that high-pitched scream.

They kiss. Danny bursts in and catches them in the act and sees the broken window and the crumpled blind, with horror.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - NIGHT

Kids walk down the driveway with their parents whilst cars pull away from the roadside. Elizabeth waves them off. Headmaster waves at her from the roadside, beaming.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Elizabeth walks in and finds Danny looking shocked.

DANNY
My mum's room's ruined. She's going
to hate me. Everywhere's ruined.
Granddad's going to hate me.

ELIZABETH
On the plus side, the kids from
school no longer hate you. You did
good. Well, until your little hissy
fit over spilled cola and a wee bit
of broken glass.

He is suddenly calm with rage.

DANNY
You wouldn't understand.

ELIZABETH

She's going to hate you? So she's
really coming back?

Danny's face turns to rage and he clenches his fists.

DANNY

Of course she's coming back. We're
a family. What would someone like
you even know about that?

They stare at each other until she shrugs her shoulders.

ELIZABETH

It'll soon clean up.

She turns and walks into the hallway.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Night then.

He watches with astonishment as she saunters off, singing the
current No 1 song, "Do They Know It's Christmas?"

ELIZABETH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

We can spread a smile of joy. Throw
your arms around the world, at
Christmas time....

Danny looks around the messy room and sighs and yawns.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

DOORBELL RINGS. Danny slowly awakes in the armchair. Neat
piles of rubbish are on the table and floor. He gets up
sleepily and stumbles into a stack of empty plastic bottles.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR STEP - DAY

Two large policemen watch as Danny opens the door to them.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

The policemen survey the room, scattered plastic bottles.

POLICEMAN 1

Big night was it?

POLICEMAN 2

Go get your papa for us, would you?

DANNY

My granddad's in hospital.

POLICEMAN 2

So who's at home with you?

DANNY

My Auntie Elizabeth. But she's not here just now.

POLICEMAN 1

At this time of the morning? And she's left you in on your own?

DANNY

She's out for her early jog. I'd usually be with her but, erm, but she's angry at me for not tidying up properly after the party.

POLICEMAN 2

What was the party in aid of?

DANNY

My birthday.

POLICEMAN 1

Your auntie runs a tight ship. Talking of which. Have you any idea why your granddad's car just sailed onto a beach on the Isle of Bute?

DANNY

It was stolen.

POLICEMAN 2

By pirates? We're going to have to talk to an adult about this.

DANNY

My headmaster knows all about it.

The officers look at each other.

POLICEMAN 1

Fine. We'll call him from the station. It's an insurance job anyway.

POLICEMAN 2

Exactly. We've got better things to be doing with our time.

The police officers leave the room, kicking one of the empty plastic bottles between them like a football.

POLICE OFFICER 1 (O.S.)
Can't do that with the old glass ones, eh? That's progress for you.

Danny stares after them. FRONT DOOR SLAMS.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Danny stands outside Granddad's bedroom. He can hear Elizabeth snoring loudly inside. He rolls his eyes.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Danny enters the ward and immediately sees Nurse Mitchell.

NURSE MITCHELL
Look who it is!

DANNY
I know it's too early for visiting.

NURSE MITCHELL
It is a bit.

DANNY
I just needed to see Granddad.

NURSE MITCHELL
Waking up early must run in the family.

Danny looks at her with confusion and she beams back at him.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Danny is sitting at Granddad's bedside.

DANNY
She told a child protection officer. Agnes Bell.

GRANDDAD
Aye, they wouldn't let you stay home on your own, right enough. So, your great aunt Doreen's daughter? I've not set eyes on her since she was a wee girl. I could've sworn she was called Margaret, though.

DANNY

Er, she hates people calling her Maggie, so she uses her middle name, Elizabeth, like the Queen.

GRANDDAD

Aye, sounds about right. That lot always had ideas above their station. So where is she now?

Nurse Mitchell suddenly appears and looks interested in hearing the answer. Danny looks straight at her.

DANNY

Well, you know how much she hates hospitals.

GRANDDAD

I know the feeling. No offence.

NURSE MITCHELL

None taken. Again. Off you go, someone around here needs to rest.

She yawns and wobbles a little on her feet.

NURSE MITCHELL (CONT'D)

And so does your granddad. We're keeping him in for a while yet to make sure he's strong enough before he goes anywhere. Go on.

Danny opens his mouth to speak but she looks so sternly at him that he thinks better of it and gets up to leave.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - DAY

Elizabeth is luxuriating in the bath. DOORBELL RINGS.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR STEP - DAY

Headmaster cocks his ear towards the side of the house.

ELIZABETH (O.S.)

I'm in the bath! Who is it?

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, BACK GARDEN - DAY

Headmaster appears around the back of the house. Elizabeth pokes her head out of the bathroom window.

HEADMASTER

There you are! I've just had the police round.

ELIZABETH

The police?

HEADMASTER

Oh everything's okay. Bless you, you worry about Danny so much.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, yeah, of course.

HEADMASTER

Danny told them I knew about the car being stolen and they just wanted me to confirm it. They said it's not worth their time worrying about it, I'm afraid, because the car was so old that it's worthless.

ELIZABETH

Oh right, thanks.

HEADMASTER

How was your jog?

ELIZABETH

I don't have one? It's full-time just keeping an eye on Danny.

HEADMASTER

You do make me laugh. What are you doing tonight? You could get a babysitter for Danny, I thought. That is, if you say 'yes' to my next question...

She blows bath bubbles down onto him and they both smile.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, GRANDDAD'S BEDROOM - DAY

Elizabeth studies herself in the mirror, holding a blouse up to her chest, and touches her bare neck.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Nurse Mitchell is at her desk, on the phone.

NURSE MITCHELL

He's been back in again. Bit tired looking, maybe. But seems fine otherwise. No sign of her.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Elizabeth is watching loud TV in the lounge. Danny enters.

DANNY

I've got some news.

ELIZABETH

Be better if you had some breakfast. I'm starving. And I've got some news, too! Got a date tonight. So I need some cash to buy new clothes.

DANNY

As if!

ELIZABETH

You still in a mood about last night? We threw a great party! And people will soon forget about your little meltdown at the end. Oh, I'm going to need new shoes, too. Gordon's taking me to a posh restaurant.

DANNY

Get lost!

ELIZABETH

I've got to look the part, haven't I? We've had this discussion before!

DANNY

No I really do mean, get lost! Granddad's coming home so you have to go.

Danny looks at her with smug determination.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR STEP - DAY

Agnes Bells rings the door bell. LOUD TV can be heard.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

DOORBELL RINGS but Danny and Elizabeth don't react to it.

ELIZABETH

When?

DANNY

Maybe tomorrow.

ELIZABETH

But not tonight?

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR STEP - DAY

Agnes Bell hammers on the door.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Danny watches Elizabeth open the fridge. Sound of TV BLARING.

ELIZABETH

Guess it's party left-overs for
breakfast then.

She slams the door closed and then walks to the window and looks at her reflection, touching her neck.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

And you know, a lady should have
some jewellery. At least a
necklace. Something elegant. And
earrings.

DANNY

You wish! You're not getting
another penny.

ELIZABETH

I fixed the window.

She nods towards a bit of cardboard sellotaped over the missing pane of glass. She looks at him for praise, which she doesn't receive.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

So I'll definitely need a decent
amount of cash off you.

DANNY

I don't need you here any more so
pack your stuff up and go!

Agnes appears on the other side of the broken window.

AGNES BELL

What's all this shouting about? And what happened to this window exactly?

Danny glances at Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Oh, Arlene Bell?

AGNES BELL

Agnes!

ELIZABETH

Look, Danny! Look who's still taking such an interest in you.

DANNY

(whispering)

Cheap jewellery and we're keeping the receipt.

AGNES BELL

What did you say, young man?

Danny shakes his head.

AGNES BELL (CONT'D)

And why did you have to go to the hospital alone this morning?

DANNY

She hates them.

ELIZABETH

I really do. It's the smell of dying people. Freaks me out.

DANNY

She freaks out.

AGNES BELL

I can picture that. Which makes me all the more worried about your home situation, Danny. I think we need to talk in private.

DANNY

What? Why?

AGNES BELL

Your grandfather's nurse said it could be some time yet before he's well enough to be released.

ELIZABETH

Oh really?

AGNES BELL

You didn't know that?

ELIZABETH

Seeing the reality of a situation isn't always Danny's strong suit.

Agnes taps the cardboard on the window.

AGNES BELL

I'm asking myself if it wouldn't be better for Danny to be looked after in the children's home for a little while.

ELIZABETH

Well, I mean, if you think that really would be best for him...

DANNY

No, no. We need to be here for Granddad and my mum coming home.

ELIZABETH

Yes, of course. They can't come back to an empty house, what was I thinking! So, don't you worry Aileen.

AGNES BELL

Agnes!

ELIZABETH

I'll be staying right here with Danny for as long as I can. I mean, for as long as my family needs me to. Isn't that right, Danny?

DANNY

Yes, yes, absolutely.

ELIZABETH

Now, if you don't mind me saying, Agnes, sneaking around our house and peeking through windows is a little bit creepy. Are you sure this is all part of your job?

AGNES BELL

Don't you dare tell me how to do my job.

ELIZABETH

Fine, but I'll tell you to get out of our family's garden and to stop harassing us. Goggling through windows like some crazed madwoman.

AGNES BELL

Something about this doesn't feel right to me. I'll be watching you both very closely!

Elizabeth drops the broken window blind down with a clatter, folds her arms and looks menacingly at Danny.

EXT. HIGH STREET - DAY

Danny taps the PIN into a cash machine. He presses the 'see balance' button and then reacts negatively with a big sigh.

ELIZABETH

And enough for a babysitter, too.

Danny screws his face up at her.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Gordon might ask who's looking after you.

DANNY

I'm sure you can bring yourself to tell him another lie.

ELIZABETH

When did your granddad start saying your mum was coming home for Christmas?

DANNY

What's that got to do with anything?

She looks at him intensely as the machine beeps and whirs.

DANNY (CONT'D)

I don't know. The first Christmas
after Grandma died, I think.

She grabs the cash as it comes out of the machine and walks
off. He watches her, thinking deeply, until the beeps remind
him to take the card out of the machine.

INT. POSH RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Elizabeth and Headmaster, both dolled up, relax at their
table. The WAITER, 50s, removes the dinner plates.

HEADMASTER

What d'you fancy for dessert?

ELIZABETH

I really shouldn't.

HEADMASTER

You absolutely must.

ELIZABETH

Oh yeah, why's that?

HEADMASTER

Because I don't want this night to
end.

ELIZABETH

So you're going to fatten me up?

HEADMASTER

We can stop for a fish supper on
the way home, too, if you like?

ELIZABETH

So we're going home together are
we?

HEADMASTER

Oh no, sorry, I didn't mean, I just
meant that, of course, I'm driving
so I'm not going to leave you to
walk home on your own. I'll give
you a lift, is all I meant, I...

WAITER

Ahem. Dessert menu?

HEADMASTER

Yes, please, quickly, thank you.

WAITER

And we can, of course, call a taxi
for the lady, should she require
one at the end of the meal.

The waiter walks off with a smirk on his face.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Danny eats left-over party food out of the fridge.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A nurse hands Granddad a cup of water and some tablets and
watches whilst he swallows them.

INT. POSH RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The waiter places a bag on the table before walking off.

WAITER

The doggy bag for your nephew,
madam.

ELIZABETH

I hate letting food go to waste.

HEADMASTER

Well I'm sure Danny will appreciate
it...you're such a great auntie.

ELIZABETH

It's just left-over dessert and
you're paying for it. Er, I mean, I
hope you are because I didn't...

HEADMASTER

Of course, tonight is my treat.

ELIZABETH

It's a real treat. I can't remember
when I last felt like this.

He looks at her quizzically. She ponders for a moment.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Just so, I don't know. Like I'm not
out of place, for once. Look, I
need to tell you something.

Charity-Shop-Assistant gets up from a table and walks slowly across the restaurant, doing a double-take of Elizabeth.

HEADMASTER

Go on?

ELIZABETH

It's, nothing. Nothing that can't wait another day or two. Now what about that nightcap?

Elizabeth takes a sip of water, looking over her glass as Charity-Shop-Assistant disappears through the door.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Agnes is sitting by Granddad's bed.

AGNES BELL

It's just for my records, so I can close the file. Because you'll be home before I've even had time to process the paperwork, I hear?

GRANDDAD

Oh right, yes, should be.

AGNES BELL

So, Elizabeth...

GRANDDAD

Actually, it's Margaret. Elizabeth is her middle name.

AGNES BELL

That'll be why we couldn't find her file again! You must think we're idiots!

GRANDDAD

Not at all!

AGNES BELL

So, what is her full name exactly, please? And what town did you say her family all live in?

Agnes looks pleased with herself.

INT. SCHOOL, HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

Headmaster is looking out of the window as Danny enters.

DANNY
You wanted to see me, Headmaster?

HEADMASTER
Danny boy, come in, come in. How are you?

DANNY
I'm...

HEADMASTER
Sit down, please. How are you?

DANNY
I'm...

HEADMASTER
Good, good. Me, too, thanks. Now. Has she said anything about me?

DANNY
Who?

HEADMASTER
Your Aunt Elizabeth, of course!

DANNY
She hasn't said much about anything.

HEADMASTER
It felt like she wanted to tell me something in the restaurant.

DANNY
There's nothing to tell.

HEADMASTER
Oh.

DANNY
Well, we've really just been thinking about Granddad.

HEADMASTER
Oh yes, of course, of course. And how is he?

DANNY
He's great, should be home any day!

HEADMASTER
Oh that's bad news.

DANNY

What?

HEADMASTER

No, no that's great news. But, it means I need to get a move on.

DANNY

Do you want me to go back to class?

HEADMASTER

No, I mean a move on with, er, erm what will happen with your Aunt Elizabeth when your granddad gets home? Will she be staying..?

DANNY

She'll be leaving. Right away.

HEADMASTER

Right I see. Yes. Back to your class now Danny, off you go. Quickly. I can't hang around chatting to you all day, can I?

Danny awkwardly hurries out of the room.

INT. SCHOOL, DANNY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Danny enters. Mrs Crawford stops talking at the blackboard and watches him with daggers as he crosses in front of her and sits down at his desk. Mumtaz whispers to him.

MUMTAZ

Any news about your granddad?

MRS CRAWFORD

Danny Prentice. You've not been in the room two seconds and already you're disrupting my lesson.

Mumtaz looks at Danny apologetically.

MRS CRAWFORD (CONT'D)

And I'll tell you all something. If any one of you isn't on best behaviour at the carol concert tonight, there'll be real trouble.

She turns her back on the frightened children.

INT. SCHOOL HALL - NIGHT

The hall is packed with kids and their families sitting in ordered rows facing towards the stage. Danny and Elizabeth are seated around the middle of the room. On stage, Mrs Crawford is conducting the choir of children. Mrs Reid is playing the upright PIANO. 'Silent Night' comes to an end.

MRS CRAWFORD

Now, in finest Scottish tradition,
it's time for a wee bit of a sing-
along. Headmaster and Ms Miller
will divide you up into
rows...watch out for them to signal
when it's your row's turn to sing!

Mrs Reid starts PLAYING "The 12 Days of Christmas" and the CHOIR of children sings, with the audience prompted to join in. When Headmaster indicates that it's the turn of the row Danny and Elizabeth are sitting in, she jumps to her feet:

ELIZABETH

Five gold rings!

People look with surprise and admiration at her voice.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Light snow begins to fall. SINGING of The 12 Days of Christmas can be heard. Agnes and two woman police officers walk across the playground and into the building.

INT. SCHOOL HALL - NIGHT

The 12 Days of Christmas progresses and parents get more confident as Elizabeth encourages them to their feet to sing. Danny even starts singing and smiling along with her. When the song ends, there are claps and cheers all round, mostly focussed in Elizabeth's direction.

Agnes trots up onto the stage, stands in front of the choir.

AGNES BELL

Agnes Bell, child protection
officer. I have both good and bad
news. Firstly, Danny Prentice?

Agnes scans the room, as Danny slides down in his chair.

AGNES BELL (CONT'D)

I'm pleased to say Nurse Mitchell told me that your grandfather is being sent home from hospital tomorrow. The bad news is there's an imposter amongst you.

Agnes points dramatically and the two policewomen walk to where Elizabeth is sitting.

AGNES BELL (CONT'D)

You are under arrest for child neglect, endangering a child, fraud, theft and driving without a license or insurance. You have the right to remain silent, you...

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER 1

We'll take it from here, thank you.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER 2

(to Elizabeth)

You're not under arrest at all. But could you come with us please? We'd like you to help us with our enquiries at the station.

AGNES BELL

This imposter isn't related to Danny Prentice in any way.

HEADMASTER

She's his Aunt Elizabeth!

AGNES BELL

She doesn't even know him.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER 1

Leave this to us, would you? This woman has rights.

Elizabeth and the officers make their way towards the front of the room. Elizabeth glances desperately back at Danny.

CHARITY-SHOP-ASSISTANT

Hang on. I knew you looked familiar. Didn't you come into my shop for new clothes with the boy? You had longer hair, and it was blonde, I'm sure of it.

KENNETH

Gran! Don't be daft.

MRS. DORAN

Danny bought brunette hair dye in my shop! I thought it was strange.

Everyone stares at Elizabeth as she fumbles with her hair.

HEADMASTER

No. No. Don't be ridiculous. Now come on, everyone, let's just stop this nonsense, please.

AGNES BELL

Oh but I'm afraid it's not nonsense.

General murmurs: Didn't she ask me for money outside the shop? Me, too! Isn't she the woman who was sleeping in the bus shelter? I saw her in the dole queue.

PARK KEEPER

She's the homeless woman who used my hat to con people in the park!

MARTIN

Danny's been living with a homeless woman from the park?

MUMTAZ

Leave Danny alone!

MRS. DORAN

Yes how was poor Danny to know? She fooled the rest of us, didn't she!

CHARITY-SHOP-ASSISTANT

That's right! Taking advantage of the poor wee boy! What a terrible thing to do! How could you?

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER 1

Please don't harass the suspect. She has rights.

HEADMASTER

The suspect? Elizabeth? Please, answer me, please, Elizabeth?

AGNES BELL

Do you think she'd use her real name to abuse a young boy?

There's a collective sharp intake of breath. People look at Elizabeth and then at Danny and then back at her.

ELIZABETH

Abuse? Danny, put a stop to this.
Tell them the whole thing was your
idea.

Danny freezes when he sees the whole room staring at him and both Agnes and Mrs Crawford advancing menacingly towards him.

WOMAN POLICE OFFICER 1

(to Elizabeth)

Come on. Let's get you out of here
before this turns nasty.

The police officer pulls Elizabeth through the door and out of the hall. Danny wobbles on his feet a little.

MRS CRAWFORD

Don't you move an inch, young man,
until we get to the bottom of this.

AGNES BELL

Actually, he's coming with me.

Agnes reaches out and grabs hold of Danny's shoulder.

EXT. SCHOOL CAR PARK - NIGHT

The police drive off with Elizabeth. Danny gets into Agnes' car. Headmaster clings to the handrail as everyone else bursts down the steps around him to get a good look.

JANITOR

Well that cleared the room.

The Janitor pulls the doors closed at the top of the steps, locks them and then walks away across the playground. General murmurs: *My coat's still in there. I left my bag inside with my car keys in it. Where's gran?*

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOME ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A sign reads "Dundonald Road Children's Home, Glasgow City Council". A large security door opens in front of Danny and Agnes. They move into an 'airlock'. Danny looks terrified. A uniformed woman pulls Danny towards her. Agnes retreats.

INT. POLICE CELL - NIGHT

Elizabeth is sitting on the bed. The door opens and Sergeant Grieves enters, carrying a tray of food and a mug of tea.

SERGEANT GRIEVES

We must be making this place too comfortable. You keep coming back.

She shakes her head but he puts the tray down anyway.

SERGEANT GRIEVES (CONT'D)

Starving yourself to death won't make things any better, will it?

He turns and walks away, but looks back at her from the door.

SERGEANT GRIEVES (CONT'D)

And I can't be doing with the extra paperwork.

He nods encouragingly at the food before locking the door.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME, SMALL BEDROOM - NIGHT

The door is locked loudly behind Danny. He sits down on the bed and looks around the bare room. He pulls the pillow close to his chest and sobs into it quietly.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME, SMALL BEDROOM - DAY

MRS PANTON (50s), gentle and jolly, enters and puts a neat bundle of clothes down on the little table and opens the curtains. Danny wakes with a start.

MRS PANTON

You'd freeze to death out in that.

Danny looks frightened and exhausted. She smiles at him.

MRS PANTON (CONT'D)

I'm pretty good at guessing sizes. But there's plenty more in the donations box if they don't fit. Up you get then. Quick wash and then breakfast. Hungry?

Danny can't help but smile back at her.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME, DINING ROOM - DAY

Danny enters timidly with Mrs Panton. Ten children of various ages are sitting around a large dining table.

MRS PANTON

Everyone, this is Danny.

There's a chorus of *Hi Danny, morning Danny etc.* Mrs Panton nods and the ten kids bound over to the hatch where plates of bacon, sausage, egg and beans appear. She nods at Danny.

MRS PANTON (CONT'D)

You've got to be quick to get your share around here.

Danny joins the queue and visibly relaxes and starts smiling.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

The children work together to wash up, dry, and put things away. Danny smiles warmly as he interacts with the other children. Suddenly, Agnes Bell appears, to his horror.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

An out-patients ambulance reverses out of the drive. Granddad walks slowly towards the house but notices that the garage door is ajar. He looks inside. His car is missing!

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR STEP - DAY

Granddad lifts the "No salesman or callers" sign from the wall to get to the door key taped to its rear.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN- DAY

Granddad inspects the broken blind and window, anger growing.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, GRANDDAD'S BEDROOM - DAY

Granddad looks around his room, messy with women's clothing.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Agnes' car draws in, with Danny in the back seat.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, DANNY'S MUM'S BEDROOM - DAY

Granddad is on his hands and knees furiously and emotionally scrubbing at the carpet stain with his handkerchief, spitting on it occasionally. Danny appears behind him.

DANNY

It was an accident.

Granddad gets to his feet, slowly pulling himself up using the bed as support.

GRANDDAD

You think she'll come back to this?

Agnes appears menacingly in the doorway behind Danny. Granddad wobbles on his feet in surprise.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Agnes, Danny and Granddad are sitting around the table.

GRANDDAD

So where exactly were you lot when she was running riot? Stealing my money and my car and god knows what else she was up to? And I bet the whole town knows? The shame of it.

AGNES BELL

I'll be dealing with her at the hearing this morning, don't you worry about that. The sheriff already has my full report.

Danny's ears prick up at this but Granddad doesn't react.

AGNES BELL (CONT'D)

But the point is that she wouldn't have been able to do any of those things if Danny had had a suitable support network in place around him before you took so ill.

GRANDDAD

So it's my fault for getting sick, is that what you're saying?

AGNES BELL

Actually, that's exactly what I'm saying. He's just a little boy.

Granddad looks at Danny with a contemplative stare.

AGNES BELL (CONT'D)

Because you're back home I had no choice but to return Danny to you today. A court order will be needed to take him permanently into the care system. I'll see myself out.

She gathers her things and stands up in one motion.

DANNY

A what?

Agnes is already half way across the room.

GRANDDAD

Now you hang on a minute! Don't you dare even think about trying to break up my family...

Agnes has already left the room before his words finish.

AGNES BELL (O.S.)

Danny? I'll drop you at school.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Agnes watches Danny go into school and then drives off.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

Danny runs past his classroom.

INT. SCHOOL, DANNY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Mumtaz's eyes flash towards the slightly-open door. Mrs Crawford notices this and goes to investigate.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

Mrs Crawford looks round her door and shouts after Danny.

MRS CRAWFORD

Where do you think you're going?

DANNY

To see the Headmaster.

MRS CRAWFORD

Whatever's been going on with that homeless woman, you need to wake up to reality young man. Children do not just wander in to see the Headmaster any time they feel like it. And you're late! Now sit down at your desk this second.

She disappears back into the classroom.

INT. SCHOOL, DANNY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Mrs Crawford is almost back at her desk when she realises that Danny isn't following her.

MRS CRAWFORD

Danny?

She walks quickly back towards the door when Mumtaz screams and jumps up, pushing her desk over in front of Mrs Crawford.

MRS CRAWFORD (CONT'D)

Mumtaz! What on earth are you doing?

MUMTAZ

I thought there was a spider.

Mrs Crawford skirts around the fallen desk and storms out.

INT. SCHOOL, HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

Danny, Mrs Reid and the Headmaster are all standing.

HEADMASTER

All of it was your idea? And you watched me falling for her?

DANNY

You can't blame me for that bit.

Mrs Crawford storms in and looks daggers at Danny.

MRS CRAWFORD

How dare you walk away from me!

HEADMASTER

A headmaster being seen around town with a homeless woman!

DANNY

She wasn't homeless when she was living with me, was she? And what difference does that make anyway?

MRS CRAWFORD

Danny! Don't you dare ignore me. And just who do you think you are to talk to the Headmaster that way?

HEADMASTER

You're too young to understand.

MRS CRAWFORD

Oh so everyone's ignoring me now,
are they?

DANNY

Well I understand this much. The
sheriff will have to let her go if
I tell them it was all my fault and
if you tell them that she's nothing
like that Agnes Bell says she is.

Mrs Reid looks at the clock on the wall.

MRS REID

Well, you never know. It could
work. But standing around here all
day talking about it isn't going to
be much help to anyone, is it?

Danny runs out of the room before anyone has a chance to
react. Mrs Crawford looks at the other two for answers.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Danny bursts out of the school doors.

INT. SCHOOL, HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

Headmaster starts playing with the Newton's Cradle executive
toy on his desk, which makes a loud CLICK CLACK noise.

MRS REID

Gordon! Do you honestly think I can
put up with you moping around here
like a love-struck teenager?

HEADMASTER

She lied to me.

MRS REID

If that's all she did to you,
you're no worse off than most
people in a relationship at some
point or other.

Mrs Crawford rolls her eyes and then looks out of the window.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Danny runs out of the school gates at full speed.

INT. SCHOOL, HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

MRS CRAWFORD

That boy is out of control.

HEADMASTER

In fairness, she was about to tell me something in the restaurant...

MRS REID

And while we're at it, that thing drives me round the bend! All I can hear through the wall is click clack click bloody clack all day.

She slams her hands around the Newton's Cradle, smacking its balls into one another, then stares into Headmaster's face.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Danny runs to a taxi rank. DRIVER looks wary.

DANNY

Courthouse, please.

Danny puts his hand into the back of his trousers and produces a rolled-up pound note. The driver winces.

INT. SCHOOL, DANNY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Mrs Crawford enters and the children fall silent.

MARTIN

Mrs Crawford? We were all wondering. Is Danny okay?

CAMPBELL

Did something happen to his Granddad? Can we help?

Mrs Crawford is taken aback and looks hard at the children.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

Mrs Crawford strides through the school doors, held open by two kids, with the rest following behind like a fire drill.

INT. SCHOOL, HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

Headmaster turns from his window to look at Mrs Reid who holds up her hands with exasperation.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

THE SHERIFF (60s) is sitting bolt upright at her bench, seriousness etched into her face. Elizabeth, Agnes, a court clerk and a policewoman are also present in the small, wood panelled courtroom, with public seating like church pews.

SHERIFF

The list of allegations is unusually long and varied.

She pauses to look at Agnes.

AGNES BELL

All fully documented in my report, ma'am. I've never seen such a...

SHERIFF

Theft of a motor car, driving without a license or insurance, other allegations of theft, fraud, impersonation, breaking and entering, squatting etcetera etcetera and that's before we've got to the most onerous of all, allegations of child neglect and endangering a child. And Mr John Prentice, the child's guardian, is not here today and hasn't provided a statement, for some reason?

AGNES BELL

He's only just got out of hospital, ma'am. The shock of learning about what happened to his grandson, and his home, when he was in a coma has, well, it's enough for him to deal with for now, I think. And his nurse agrees with me.

The Sheriff notices Agnes and Elizabeth swapping nasty looks.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Headmaster's car screeches to a halt opposite the courthouse as Danny gets out of his taxi. Their eyes meet and they run inside together, storming through the double doors.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Headmaster and Danny burst into the courtroom, panting.

HEADMASTER

Stop. Er, your honour, please, if you don't mind, that is, erm, we er, if it pleases the court...

Elizabeth laughs and she and Danny share enthusiastic smiles.

DANNY

We're here to take her back, please, Miss?

AGNES BELL

This is the child. And his headmaster.

SHERIFF

And they think they can appear unannounced in my courtroom any time they feel like it, do they?

AGNES BELL

I think they should be removed immediately!

SHERIFF

I have very little interest in hearing how you think I should run my courtroom. Now shush!

Danny and Elizabeth snigger and the Sheriff shoots them both a stern look, though her face softens a little. She points at Headmaster and Danny, and gestures to them to sit down.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

But keep it zipped.

Danny and Headmaster hurriedly take the nearest seats.

EXT. HIGH STREET - DAY

Mrs Crawford leads the class down the high street, rudely brushing shoppers aside. Mrs Reid runs to catch them up. Mrs Crawford looks at her quizzically.

MRS REID

I left the janitor in charge. Why should I miss all the drama?

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

SHERIFF

We may not have Mr Prentice senior with us, but young Daniel Raymond Prentice...

Elizabeth sniggers.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

...is now here. Along with Mr Gordon Chambers, I presume?

HEADMASTER

Yes Sheriff.

SHERIFF

Ma'am!

HEADMASTER

Mum, sorry, Ma'am.

Danny and Elizabeth snigger.

SHERIFF

And I see that, in spite of the seriousness of the occasion, young Daniel, Danny, and the accused seem to find much amusement in the proceedings of my court.

The Sheriff looks at Danny and Elizabeth in turn as if to dare them to laugh again. They dare not.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Mrs Crawford storms into the courthouse and stands in front of the reception desk, ignoring the receptionist, as she looks at the board showing which room is hosting which case.

MRS CRAWFORD

Ok class, courtroom number 2.

The receptionist looks in astonishment as the school party march through the building, with Mrs Reid struggling behind.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

SHERIFF

Now then. Ms Constance Sadie Aberdeen?

Danny and Headmaster snigger.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Silence!

ELIZABETH/SADIE

Er, ma'am, it's Sadie.

The Sheriff looks sternly at her.

SADIE

Or whatever you think best.

SHERIFF

Sadie. In fact the whole lot of you. I will not tell you again. I demand seriousness, respect and utter silence in this courtroom.

The doors burst open as Mrs Crawford strides in, followed by her children and Mrs Reid. Danny is astonished to see them.

MRS REID

(slumping into a chair)

I'm too old for this nonsense.

SHERIFF

Finally, someone who understands how I feel. But what I do not understand is what on earth you all think you are doing in my court? Rooms in session are not open to educational visits!

MRS CRAWFORD

We're here to lend our support to, erm, to her and to Danny. And to the headmaster.

General murmurs from the children: we're not going anywhere.

SHERIFF

Silence in court! I want everyone out of here this instance!

Sadie stands up.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Not you!

Danny laughs out loud as Sadie sits back down, embarrassed. The Sheriff looks as if she's about to explode.

MRS CRAWFORD

Sit down now children, quickly,
please.

The noise of the children fighting amongst themselves as to who sits where and besides whom is deafening for few moments but is silenced when Mrs Crawford claps her hands.

SHERIFF

That's how it's done, is it? Now then, some calm, please, whilst I try to get to the bottom of exactly what is going on here.

MRS CRAWFORD

Well, as I said...

The Sheriff claps her hands and Mrs Crawford stops talking. The children snigger. Even Mrs Reid can't hide her smile.

SHERIFF

I would like a chance to say something in my own courtroom, if you don't mind!

Sheriff and Mrs Crawford stare at each other until Mrs Crawford gives way and sits down.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Now, Ms Bell. This report of yours...

AGNES BELL

Yes, Ma'am.

SHERIFF

It implies that Ms Constance Sadie Aberdeen...

The children all snigger at her real name when they realise who the Sheriff is talking about.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

...is a danger to society of the most terrible kind. And yet, there is no statement from the man whose grandson she allegedly took advantage of and whose home she supposedly wrecked. And I see with my own eyes that the man whom she apparently duped and wronged in love is smiling like a goon at her every time he thinks no one is looking at him...

Headmaster blushes and the children snigger.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

And the child, who is quite clearly unharmed and in good spirits, appears to be swapping smiles, smirks, glances and private jokes with her at every given opportunity, in spite of me constantly reminding everyone in this room how serious an occasion this is! And quite what all of these other children are doing here I do not know!

Mumtaz stands up, holding her hand in the air for attention.

MUMTAZ

Miss, we're here because we're Danny's friends now.

SHERIFF

You're his friends *now*?

KENNETH

Miss, we, er, we weren't friends with Danny before his Auntie Elizabeth came along.

SHERIFF

None of you?

MARTIN

No, but when, auntie, erm, she's around Danny's different.

CAMPBELL

Well, not totally different, remember he lost the head when I spilled cola on the carpet...

MUMTAZ

Shut it, Campbell!

SHERIFF

Yes, Campbell, do please shut it!

The Sheriff looks at Agnes expectantly.

AGNES BELL

Well, I hardly think that what a bunch of kids say...

SHERIFF

Oh, you shut it, too.

The Sheriff points at Mrs Crawford's raised hand.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

You may rise.

Mrs Crawford stands up.

MRS CRAWFORD

We didn't know about Danny's home circumstances.

SHERIFF

But you're his teacher?

MRS CRAWFORD

Yes.

SHERIFF

And you're his headmaster?

HEADMASTER

Yes, ma'am.

SHERIFF

And you are?

MRS REID

The school secretary.

SHERIFF

And none of you knew anything about the difficulties in Danny's home life? Really?

The Sheriff looks in turn at Mrs Crawford, Headmaster and Mrs Reid. And then at the children. Then at Danny.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

So there was no one you could turn to when your grandfather was taken into hospital?

DANNY

There was one person, ma'am.

Danny and Sadie smile openly at each other.

SHERIFF

According to this report Ms Aberdeen broke into your house after smashing the kitchen window.

DANNY

As if she could climb through a window!

SADIE

Hey!

HEADMASTER

The kids broke the window playing football in the back garden, m'am.

SHERIFF

Playing? Now there's a word. Do you realise, Ms Bell, there's no mention in this report of Danny doing anything one would expect a child of his age to do? That is, not until his association with Ms Aberdeen. Parties, Christmas dances, playing football, carol concerts, making friends. Before your grandfather went into hospital, Danny, what was a normal day like for you?

DANNY

I just looked after Granddad.

SHERIFF

In what way?

DANNY

Helping him get around the house. Doing the housework and the shopping and stuff.

Danny turns to Mrs Crawford.

DANNY (CONT'D)

That's why I was late for school so much and why, sometimes, I didn't have my homework done. It wasn't because I wanted to make you angry. Or to make you all hate me.

He looks at his classmates.

DANNY (CONT'D)

And why my clothes weren't always clean cos I just didn't have enough time to do the laundry if Granddad was having a bad day.

SHERIFF

And so you turned to a homeless woman you'd seen around the local area to help you? So that you were not home alone?

DANNY

I was scared of losing our house. And my mum not being able to find us when she comes back.

SHERIFF

I'm going to return to the issue of your mother in a few moments. Now you, Mr Chambers, what do you have to say for yourself?

HEADMASTER

Erm, er. That I. Well. I erm.

SHERIFF

Oh spit it out, man!

HEADMASTER

I, I think she's amazing!

All the children woo! Sadie blushes.

SHERIFF

But didn't she trick you?

HEADMASTER

She tried to tell me everything. I know that now. But how could she? She had to protect Danny from being put into a children's home. That would've been awful for him.

Danny shakes his head and Sheriff waits for him to speak.

DANNY

I was only there one night but, in some ways, it's better than being at home. Before Sadie came anyway.

SHERIFF

There's quite a lot to unpack in what you just said, there, Danny. But won't things improve once your mother returns home?

Danny shakes his head.

DANNY

Can I tell Sadie something, please?

The Sheriff nods.

DANNY (CONT'D)

I should've stuck up for you when you needed me to. I'm sorry.

Sadie shrugs her shoulders. Danny looks at the Sheriff.

DANNY (CONT'D)

That's why we're all here. Because I was scared of telling the truth.

SHERIFF

Well, no, Danny, it's not that simple. And however we look at it, none of this is your fault.

DANNY

Scared of the truth.

SHERIFF

Go on.

DANNY

I think if you tell a lie for long enough you start to really believe it. And it makes it easier for everyone else to believe it, too.

SHERIFF

Do you mean your grandfather telling you that your mother will return to the family home?

Danny nods. The Sheriff glances at her paperwork.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

It says in my notes that she left home just after your were born. And hasn't been heard of or seen since?

Danny looks desperately sad as he gently nods.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

That's enough, Danny. I'm calling a halt to these proceedings.

Agnes jumps to her feet. Sheriff holds out her hand to silence her and then looks at Mrs Crawford.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

I assume the school will be keeping
a closer eye on Danny from now on?

Mrs Crawford nods. The Sheriff then looks at Headmaster.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

And I assume that I can release the
accused into your safe keeping, and
that she will remain in the local
area, whilst I work out what
exactly is going on here?

Danny jumps to his feet.

DANNY

She can stay in my mum's old
bedroom.

The Sheriff holds her hand out to silence Agnes again as
Headmaster nods vigorously. The Sheriff looks at Sadie.

SHERIFF

I need to talk to Danny's
grandfather before I can decide if
you have anything to answer for.

The Sheriff suddenly stands and walks towards the side door.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

This hearing is adjourned. Ms Bell
I'll see you in my chamber. Now!

The Sheriff, Agnes, court clerk and policewoman all leave. A
few seconds later, the school group senses victory and bursts
into applause. Sadie is overwhelmed with gratitude.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Granddad is in his chair as Danny enters. Danny turns the tv
off and stands in front of it.

GRANDDAD

Hey! Get that back on!

DANNY

No, Granddad, we need to talk.

GRANDDAD

You'll do as you're told!

DANNY

I said, no.

Granddad tries to get to his feet but can't.

DANNY (CONT'D)

See? We can't live like this.

GRANDDAD

What on earth has got into you? I thought you'd be pleased to see me home. But, no...all I get is...

DANNY

Do you honestly think I didn't miss you? And it's time to be honest about something else, too.

Danny looks at the photo of his mum on the mantelpiece.

DANNY (CONT'D)

She's never coming back. Not this Christmas, not next Christmas, not any Christmas. She didn't want me, Granddad. That's why she didn't take me with her when she left.

GRANDDAD

No, no now don't say that...

DANNY

I just spent the night with some kids like me. The only difference is they weren't lucky enough to have a granddad to stick by them.

Granddad's face softens and he stares silently at Danny before a smile starts to appear across his face. DOOR BELL RINGS. Sadie runs into the room and gives Danny a huge hug. Headmaster sheepishly enters behind her.

HEADMASTER

Hello, I'm sorry. It was unlocked.

DANNY

Granddad, this is Sadie. She's going to stay with us for a bit. At least until she gets back on her feet and you and me sort ourselves out.

GRANDDAD

(roaring with anger)

Sadie? You! How dare you waltz into my house after...

Agnes storms into the lounge.

AGNES BELL

What sort of a mad house is this?
Front door wide open and all this
shouting in front of a child?

GRANDDAD

And how dare you let yourself into
my home!

AGNES BELL

I have the right to enter any house
if I think a child is in danger.

DANNY

The only dangerous person around
here is you. What do you want?

SADIE

You tell her, Danny!

HEADMASTER

Danny, please, now remember your
manners when talking to an adult.

Sadie looks sheepish.

HEADMASTER (CONT'D)

But, yes, point well made. What the
hell do you want, Agnes?

AGNES BELL

I'm here to assess the ongoing
needs of this child and I'm pretty
certain they'll be best served by
putting him permanently into a
children's home.

DANNY

No way!

GRANDDAD

No, please, you can't do that to
us. We're all we both have.

AGNES BELL

Could I have a private word, Mr
Prentice? In the kitchen, perhaps?

She walks across the room towards the kitchen. Everyone
watches as Granddad struggles to get to his feet until Danny
instinctively goes to help him. Agnes smirks.

AGNES BELL (CONT'D)

Too late, Danny. But nice try. Mr Prentice, I'll recommend that you move into a care home and the child into a children's home. You cannot expect a nine-year-old boy to be your full-time carer. What sort of a life is that for a child?

DANNY

Leave us alone!

Granddad sits silently for a moment, before looking at Danny.

GRANDDAD

Oh but Danny, she's right, though, isn't she?

AGNES BELL

Danny, you've got five minutes to pack some clothes to take with you.

SADIE

Not so fast...

AGNES BELL

This has nothing to do with the likes of you!

SADIE

The likes of me knows what a crime it is to force apart a family that wants to stay together.

AGNES BELL

This child cannot be a full-time carer for an adult who needs substantial help and assistance.

SADIE

I agree.

AGNES BELL

Oh, right, well good then.

SADIE

That's why I'm moving into the spare room. I'll be helping around the house from now on. You can do your job properly and get a home

(MORE)

SADIE (CONT'D)

assessment done so we can have a stair lift fitted, a shower that John can get in and out of and expert care worker support when we need it. And a carer's allowance for me. I know how the system works, don't you worry.

AGNES BELL

You, a carer? Don't make me laugh. Just another one of your scams. Wait 'til I tell the sheriff.

SADIE

I reckon she'll be quite happy when John tells her it was his idea and that he has no problem with everything me and Danny did when he was in hospital. Just a few wee accidents, that's all.

Danny looks pleadingly at Granddad.

GRANDDAD

(playing along)

Yes. Yes, that's right and you can't prove I ever said otherwise.

HEADMASTER

Well, I'm certainly happy to testify that I haven't heard you say a bad word about Sadie.

Headmaster turns to Agnes.

HEADMASTER (CONT'D)

Close the door on your way out. I'm embarrassed to say it was me who left it open. Silly headmaster.

Danny walks to the door and holds it open for Agnes. Sadie nods her approval. Agnes is astonished and flummoxed.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Danny is stirring pots on the stove. Granddad, leaning on his stick, opens the back door to let some steam escape.

GRANDDAD

That smells great, laddie. Are you sure I can't help you now?

DANNY

It's all under control. Has it stopped snowing?

GRANDDAD

Aye, but don't worry, I see your snowball pile hasn't melted!

Sadie enters and playfully nudges Danny gently aside.

SADIE

Let me have a look at it then!

DANNY

It's fine! It's about done.

SADIE

How's your stuffing?

Danny holds a bit on the end of a wooden spoon for her.

SADIE (CONT'D)

Hot hot hot! But perfect! Can't imagine there's many houses in Scotland where a nine year old...

DANNY

Almost ten year old!

SADIE

...is cooking Christmas dinner.

She looks at him with admiration and then at her watch.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Headmaster turns off the engine, gets out of his car and is immediately bombarded with snowballs. He runs to the rear of the car, pops the boot lid open and hides beneath it.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Danny and Sadie giggle as they run back into the kitchen.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Headmaster lifts a big colourful bag of presents out of the boot. He cautiously walks towards the house.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Danny, Granddad, Sadie and Headmaster are at the table. Their plates are almost empty and they're wearing Christmas paper hats. There's a Christmas tree lit up in the corner and the room is warm, bright and colourful.

HEADMASTER

I genuinely can't believe you cooked that. It was incredible.

GRANDDAD

My wife, God rest her, would be proud to see her old cookbooks being put to such good use these past few years. Great job, laddie!

DANNY

Sadie helped.

SADIE

All you'd let me do was peel the tatties and carrots.

HEADMASTER

Maybe you need to come into school earlier every morning to help the dinner ladies out.

GRANDDAD

Let's just work on him getting there at the normal time to start with for now! Oh, look, Danny!

Granddad points towards the window.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Mumtaz, Martin, Kenneth and Campbell come ploughing through the snow chasing each other with snowballs.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Granddad turns away from the window, smiling.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Danny, Mumtaz, Martin, Kenneth, Campbell and Sadie run around playing snowballs.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Granddad lingers at the mantelpiece over a photo of his late wife. And there's a new photo in a frame: of Sadie and Danny at the school dance. Sadie enters.

SADIE

Fancy a cup of tea?

She shivers and some snow falls out of her hair.

GRANDDAD

How about something a wee bit stronger to warm you up?

She smiles and nods.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Headmaster is washing the pots as Sadie pops her head in.

SADIE

Leave them to soak, would you? John wants you to come through a minute.

INT. DANNY'S HOUSE, LOUNGE - DAY

Granddad, Headmaster and Sadie are standing at the fireplace. Granddad wobbles a little on his walking stick as he pours single malt whisky into three glasses.

GRANDDAD

I've had this hidden away to celebrate her coming back. It's time it got drunk.

He tips the bottle towards the photo of his daughter. Then nods to the glasses and Headmaster and Sadie pick them up.

HEADMASTER

This must be your daughter?

GRANDDAD

Cassandra, aye. Taken just after she had Danny. And not long before I drove her away. I made her so ashamed for getting pregnant so young. Now, I'd give anything to have her back. And I wouldn't trade Danny for the world.

Sadie looks intensely at Granddad for a moment.

SADIE
 Maybe it's Danny you should be
 saying this to?

Granddad nods solemnly, holding back tears.

SADIE (CONT'D)
 Merry Christmas.

HEADMASTER
 Merry Christmas.

As they all clink glasses and smile, a snowball thumps off the window and Headmaster jumps and squeals in fright.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE, FRONT GARDEN - DAY

Headmaster and Sadie burst out of the door and start throwing snowballs at the kids. Granddad laughs in the doorway. Danny runs over and gives him a big hug.

DANNY
 Merry Christmas, Granddad.

GRANDDAD
 Merry Christmas, Danny.

Granddad nods to Danny and he runs back to join the snowball fight. Granddad smiles proudly as he watches everyone play.

CREDITS ROLLING

INT. FACTORY, STAFF ROOM - DAY

CASSANDRA, 20s, wearing overalls, sits at a small table. Sound of TOILET FLUSHING and a man, BRENDEN, 30s, enters. The door closing behind him has 'Toilet' on it. He frisbees a rolled-up newspaper at Cassandra and walks out of the room.

BRENDEN
 Back on the factory floor in ten
 minutes, Cassandra, no longer!

Cassandra brushes the newspaper away and reaches for her mug of tea. But then an article catches her eye. 'Homeless Woman Moves in to Take Care of Family' with a picture of Sadie, Danny and Granddad standing in the doorway of their house. She taps on the photo, with her finger lingering on Danny.