

BREAKING THE WAVES

by

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(Often Bess will, as the only person, look directly into the camera during the film. She will look without leaving her mood or motivation)

SCENE 1: EXT. PATH BY THE CLIFFS. DAY

A small woman walks along a path on a sea cliff. It is Bess. She is tiny but there is something strong and intense about her. She looks at the water. She is lost in her own thoughts and the image of the water. Suddenly, she wakes up.

BESS

Are you still there?

(in a gruff voice)

What is it now, Bess?

(in her own voice)

There is something else ...

(in a gruff voice)

Yes?

(in her own voice)

I would like to marry Jan ...

(in a gruff voice)

You have already asked the elders, haven't you?

(in her own voice)

Well, yes ... I just wanted to tell you.

SCENE 2: INT. CHURCH. CHURCH HALL. NIGHT

The twelve elders are sitting around a big table. There are all men. One of them is the Minister. One of the twelve is rocking on his chair. Otherwise, there is silence. William, an elderly, greying, rather tormented-looking man, looks around a little. He looks at the rocker, but the chairman of the council of elders does not return his glance. William clears his throat.

WILLIAM

I must submit to the council that my grand-daughter
has expressed her desire to be wed.

The gathering is astonished by this intelligence. A couple of its members smile as if William's words were a joke. The chairman looks at William.

CHAIRMAN

William McNiell, your grand-daughter is a half-wit. No local man has ever experienced any desire to marry poor Bess, and I cannot conceive of any man in his right mind ever doing so.

WILLIAM

(quietly)

He is not a local man.

The elders look at one another.

CHAIRMAN

(sharply)

I appreciate your desire to see your grand-daughter wed, William. We are all very fond of her, but marriage to an outsider would only bring her sorrow and bitterness. I suppose he is from the rig?

WILLIAM

Bess's faith is strong, and no man can deny it. I am also against matches to outsiders, but fate has nevertheless decreed that for a second time I must ask this council to look kindly on just such a match. To date God has not granted Bess much happiness or brain power ...

CHAIRMAN

Has the man agreed to enter into holy matrimony, under the articles and conventions of our church?

WILLIAM

Yes.

CHAIRMAN

Which church does he belong to?

WILLIAM

None, so far as I am aware.

CHAIRMAN

None?

AN ELDER

(with a smile)

You'd prefer Catholic, perhaps?

CHAIRMAN

Has it occurred to you, William, that if the Lord were to bless such a marriage with offspring ...

WILLIAM

Bess cannot have children.

CHAIRMAN

(nods slightly)

Is she present?

WILLIAM

(straightens)

Bess is here!

CHAIRMAN

Fetch her in.

William gets up slowly and goes out. He returns with Bess. She is small, but she radiates strength. She stands calmly before the council. She smiles.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)

Bess McNiell, I understand you wish to wed?

She nods. She smiles.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)

Wed whom?

BESS

His name is Jan.

CHAIRMAN

I do not know him.

BESS

He is from the rig.

CHAIRMAN

(nods)

You know that we do not enter into matrimony with outsiders.

BESS
Dodo's from outside!

CHAIRMAN
Yes, we consented to that match, as she had embraced our church, and we saw that she could become one of us.

AN ELDER
Bess McNiell, can you even tell us what matrimony is?

The councillors wait tensely for Bess's answer.

BESS
(after a long pause for thought)
When two people are joined in God.

AN ELDER
Do you realise that you will have to take responsibility for this man too, should the council of elders consent to this marriage? Bess McNiell, do you really believe you are capable of bearing the responsibility not only for your own marriage in God, but also another's?

BESS
(with absolute certainty)
I know I am!

CHAIRMAN
Your petition is a grave matter, Bess McNiell. We seldom consent to these mixed marriages. I have to say that none has ever proved a happy one. Can you think of anything of real value the outsiders have brought with them?

BESS
(smiles)
Their music?

The chairman looks at her angrily. She beams up at him. He cannot break her smile. He shrugs his shoulders.

CHAIRMAN

Out you go, Bess, and be seated.

Bess leaves slowly, beaming all the way.

SCENE 3: INT. CHURCH. VESTIBULE. NIGHT

Bess emerges from the church hall. Smiling, she closes the door behind her and sits down on a bench in the deserted vestibule. She goes on smiling for ages.

(Suggested music: 'A Whiter Shade of Pale', Procol Harum. Underlies the following scenes, ending on a panorama scene 12--helicopter platform)

SCENE 4: PANORAMA SCENE

The church, the minister's house, and the telephone kiosk, deep beneath us in the mountains. Morning.

OPENING CREDITS

WHITE LETTERING ON A BLACK BACKGROUND

SCENE 5: PANORAMA SCENE

The oil rig, a tiny dot in the endless sea. Morning.

SCENE 6: INT. RIG. JAN'S CABIN. MORNING

Jan is putting on morning dress. Terry and Pits are already in theirs. Jan's cabin is small. They are smoking a joint. There offer Jan a drag. He does not take it. They go out together.

SCENE 7: INT. RIG. CHANGING ROOMS. MORNING

Jan, Terry, and Pits pull survival suits over their morning dress.

SCENE 8: EXT. RIG. MORNING

The three men wander towards the helicopter platform. The other members of the rig crew know what's going on. They wave and smile.

SCENE 9: EXT. RIG. HELICOPTER DECK. MORNING

The three men wait for the helicopter.

SCENE 10: INT. HELICOPTER. MORNING

The three men laugh and josh on the helicopter. Jan is the oldest and the calmest.

SCENE 11: PANORAMA SCENE

The helicopter on its way across the sea. Day.

SCENE 12: EXT. HELIPORT. DAY

Bess is shivering as she waits in her wedding dress at the heliport beside the shipyards where they repair the rigs brought in from the ocean. Dodo is holding a raincoat round her shoulders. Bess shakes her head.

DODO

He will come. Take it easy now.

Dodo looks at her seriously. Bess is angry. Dodo looks at her watch, then she puts her arms around Bess and holds her tight. A couple of cars and other members of the wedding party are waiting. Someone puts up an umbrella to protect Bess's lovely dress. Everyone is shivering. At last they hear the helicopter, far away. Infinitely slowly it approaches and lands. Jan is the first off in his clumsy survival suit. He waves. Bess looks at him from her shelter, a little way off. She loves him. Suddenly she tears herself away from Dodo. She rushes across to Jan while the rotor-blades are still spinning. She is furious. She beats at him with her fists.

BESS

Late, late, late!

He fends her off. Terry and Pits climb down from the helicopter, laughing. They remove their survival suits in the shelter of umbrellas, revealing their morning dress. Jan is given a break to get his own suit off. Everyone gets into cars and sets off.

SCENE 13: PANORAMA SCENE

Helicopter platform and some of the shipyards. The chopper takes off and the cars roll away. Day.

SCENE 14: INT. CHURCH. DAY

They are inside the church now. Jan can't restrain a laugh when he sees Terry. Bess hits him again. Jan is in his place and Bess is ready to be given away by Grand-dad William. He puts a protective arm around her and gives her a little hug as the organ strikes up.

SCENE 15: INT. CHURCH. DAY

Bess and Jan get married. In the middle of the service Bess begins to cry too soon, making the ceremony hard to complete. Jan scowls at Terry. Bess leans on Jan. He is puzzled by all these tears. Dodo sniffles, too. All the girls look at Bess as she passes. She embraces them all at once. She also embraces her mother.

BESS

Oh, Mother ...

SCENE 16: EXT. CHURCH. DAY.

Outside the church is the little forecourt with the minister's house and the red telephone kiosk. When BESS comes out to throw her bouquet, all the girls flock round her. She gives it a big throw, too high because the wind catches it, and sends it sailing onto the top of the red telephone kiosk, where it looks odd and out-of-place. Jan embraces Bess. Terry and Pits has followed them out of the church. They are in a good mood now out of the embrace of the church room. A verger is waiting outside the church.

TERRY

(merrily, to the verger)

Ring the bells then!

VERGER

(courteously)

Our church has no bells.

Jan looks up and sees that the bell tower on the church roof is indeed empty. Bess smiles and pulls Jan away with her.

SCENE 17: INT. HOTEL. ASSEMBLY ROOM. DAY

The wedding reception is taking place in the hotel assembly rooms. Bess is circulating, her arm draped round Dodo. A small electric band is accompanying--badly--a man in a kilt who is playing the bag pipes. Bess and Dodo bump into Sybilla, another girl from the town, dolled up unlike almost everyone else in a super short mini dress and tight blouse. They tease her a little, she grins back. They greet Dr. Richardson, who has his arm round another girl. They look at Jan, who is engaged in conversation with an elderly lady.

BESS

(giggles)

He's had a hundred women.

DODO

(frowns)

Sure!

Dodo looks Jan up and down. She looks severely at Bess.

BESS

I am so happy!

Bess embraces Dodo again. They go over to Jan.

BESS (CONT'D)

This is my sister in law. She works at the hospital.

Jan extends his hand to Dodo.

JAN

I don't believe we've met.

DODO

(a little shyly)

No, everything happened so quickly!

BESS

What makes you say that?

Bess frowns.

DODO

You know very well what I mean. Not a word do you tell me, and then all of a sudden you're getting married to this fellah.

Dodo walks away from them, tears in her eyes. Bess is vexed.

BESS

Oh, so I'm not old enough, maybe?

She watches her and is lost for a second in her own thoughts. Then she seeks out Jan's eyes.

SCENE 18: INT. HOTEL. ASSEMBLY ROOMS. DAY

The party is in full swing. Jan arm-wrestles with several guests. He wins every time. Bess laughs. A crowd of children has gathered round them. They laugh. The only beverage to be seen is fruit juice. William and four other elders are sitting in the background behind a table. They watch Jan and Bess's table. William and Bess exchange glances. Terry pulls a few bottles of beer out of a bag. He opens one and pours out a glass. He offers it to Jan, but Jan looks around and shakes his head. Bess smiles at Jan and leads him away from the table proudly. She embraces a couple of bride's maids on the way.

SCENE 19: INT. HOTEL. ASSEMBLY ROOMS. DAY

Bess dances with Jan. He looks at her smiling while she is moving to the music. She is in a childish kind of trance. Most people smile at her way of giving in to the rhythm. Dr. Richardson is among the guests. He also looks at her, smiling.

SCENE 20: INT. HOTEL. TOILETS. DAY

Bess pulls Jan into the Ladies. Then into one of the cubicles. Jan looks at her, laughing. They kiss.

BESS

Have me now.

JAN

(astonished)

Here?

Bess nods and smiles.

BESS

Have you never done it like this?

JAN

If it was so important to wait until we were married
... maybe you'd like it a bit more ... romantic.

BESS

(pulls him to her, giggling)

... this is a place ... and the sheets are made of silk ...

She has closed her eyes. He looks at her while he makes love to her carefully. She smiles all the time. Now he closes his eyes. She looks at him as he comes. He opens his eyes and notices that she is looking at him with a smile.

JAN

(smiling)

You are a silly little thing ...

BESS

(severely)

Not silly!

JAN

Not silly ... funny ...

BESS

(brightens into a smile)

That's right, funny!

She kisses him. She goes out to the wash basins. He stands there, rather nonplussed, and watches her. She peeps out of the door to see if anyone is coming. She waves Jan out with a grin. He runs past the wash basins as he does up his trousers. Bess pushes him out of the door. She turns on the tap and begins to wash blood off her dress. Dodo is on her way in. She notices Bess and the spot of blood. She closes the door again quietly.

SCENE 21: INT. HOTEL. ENTRANCE. HALL. DAY

Dodo is waiting for Bess outside the door. When Bess comes out, Dodo puts her arms round her. They cry together.

SCENE 22: INT. HOTEL. ASSEMBLY ROOMS. DAY

Dodo is standing near the stage with a piece of paper. She is nervous.

ONE FROM THE BAND

(into the mike)

Ladies and gentlemen, some loving words from
Bess' sister-in-law.

Dodo speaks from the floor in front of the stage.

DODO

Where I come from there is always a speech for the
bride. Since nobody else seems to have anything to
say, I will.

(looks at her cribsheet)

Dear Bess. You have a good heart. You proved that
to me when I came here and married your brother. It
was not easy coming from the outside as you know,
but your warm welcome made me believe that there
was a way. You have a good heart and sometimes it
is a little too good. Like when you gave your ticket
away to somebody who, I'm sure, needed it badly,
and had to walk all the way home. I yelled at you
then and many times more and now I'm sorry for
that, because every time I myself almost gave up
living in this cold place, that very generosity of yours
helped me through. Thank you for that Bess. When
Sam died and I had no husband and you had no
brother we promised to look after one another. You
have always made me feel like a part of this place
and this family. Your good heart is to blame for me
staying here and now for somebody else joining the
family. His name is Jan. I do not know him. But I
must accept his right to be here because I believe in
you, Bess. He must be all right. And if he is not, and
if he does not take care of you and give you all the
things that you need, and keep you warm at nights ...

(smiling)

I think I will kill him. -- Thank you Bess for all that
you have given me. I love you very much.

There has been a little laughter here and there in the crowd, but mostly the words have been received with little joy, especially at the table with the elders. Bess is crying now and is hugging Dodo. Jan looks at the two.

SCENE 23: INT. ASSEMBLY ROOMS. DAY

Terry gets up from his table. He goes to the table where the elders are sitting. He sits down in front of them. He opens a can of beer and empties it in one go with beer running over his face. One of the elders raises and empties a glass of fruit juice the same way. Terry looks at him smiling. Then he squeezes the can flat with his hand. The old man looks calmly at Terry. He raises his empty glass and squeezes it till it breaks. His hand is bleeding but he does not for a second take his calm eyes away from Terry. Terry sits for a second, then he starts to laugh. Nobody else at the table laughs.

SCENE 24: EXT. HOTEL. EVENING.

Outside the hotel, which is on the outskirts of town, Jan's big car is waiting. It has been decorated. Tin cans have been tied to the bumper. Jan and Bess are led out of the car by guests from the reception. Jan looks at the car.

JAN

Just a minute.

He unties the cans from the bumper. He ties them to his belt. Then he picks Bess up. To him she is as light as a feather. He begins to carry her. Some guests accompany them, cheering him on. Bess laughs. Jan breaks into a run. Gradually their train drops away. Bess is spellbound by his strengths.