

## GOODBYE FOR NOW

### CAST: 3M 1F

**LIZ  
PIERCE** The deceased's secretary. Young. Recently married. Is now caring for ex- employer's cat while the funeral wake is in progress. The cat is currently with her husband and mother .

**JOHN  
SCATCHARD** Son of the deceased. Married but his wife did not accompany him to the funeral. Is allergic to his father's cat which is why it's not there today.

**OLD MR  
SCATCHARD** John's deceased father. An English Classicist and poet. Currently watching events from the afterlife with interest.

**FATHER  
MALONEY** Priest. Devout. Honest. Good at dealing with family relationships. addresses Liz, one of his congregation, formally as 'Elizabeth'

and finally, heard about but not present:

**IPHIGENIA (JEANNIE)** The cat. Currently cared for by Liz's husband and mother-in-law. Reprinted by either a cat statuette or a large photo

**LOCATION:** Lounge of a luxury penthouse flat. Door off to rest of flat and a door off to the roof garden, where a wake is in progress. Fourth wall is a large picture window. There's a photo of the deceased, and nearby is a large statuette or a large photo of a cat (at least as big as the one of John's father). A sofa. A chair. Coffee table. Side table with bottles, mostly empty, a water jug and dirty glasses. The remains of the wake party. A stack of books on the coffee table, including the *Iliad* (on the top and the *Agamemnon* under it). Neatly folded up on a chair is a throw rug which is used to cover a chair. Liz's handbag in a corner.

**STAGING:** The main set is the penthouse lounge. Sitting apart from the set, raised up above his photo, The late Mr Scatchard sits sipping whisky and watching everything with interest from the afterlife. Mostly indicates how he feels about events without speaking, but does comment now and then, and recites from his letter.

**MUSIC:** The title is taken from Richard Rodney Bennet's song 'Goodbye for Now' and, if possible, could be used as the intro music, inter-scene music and concluding music for the play

### SCENE 1: THE LOUNGE, AFTERNOON

Opening music, such as the opening lines of Bennet's 'Goodbye for Now' – 'When I for reasons of my own see fit to quit this sphere, to those of you I leave behind, some please and some peace of mind, to all who follow here ...'

*Buzz of noise as Liz enters from the roof garden talking on her mobile. Dressed in black for a funeral. Noise ends as she closes the door*

LIZ I'm not making a fuss ... all right, I am, but Jeannie doesn't know the area. She might get lost ... I know we've had her stay lots of times, but ... *(cross)* Of course she'll wander off. .... *(sweetly)* Sorry. Yes, everything's fine – well, as fine as it can be after a funeral. ... *(gazes out of the fourth wall picture window)* There's a wonderful view from up here. You could be anywhere in the world. No smells from burger bars, no car fumes - you can hardly hear the traffic. Must be a great place to live. *(door to roof garden opens)* Look, I've got to go. I'll call you back when we're through. Just – keep an eye on her, OK. Bye.

*Liz ends the call and starts to tidying up as John enters from the roof garden. He's dressed in black. Once inside, he immediately sneezes. He grabs a tissue.*

JOHN Damn cat. *(to the photo of his dad)* Sorry dad, but you know - knew- how it is.

*John raises an ironic toast to his dad.  
At the side of the stage, above the photo, John's father raises his own glass in return  
Liz gathers up the dirty glasses*

JOHN *(to Liz)* Leave that for the caterers.

LIZ *(with a big smile)* Fine.

*John pours himself a drink.*

LIZ We're running low on clean glasses, I'll take these to the kitchen and wash them in case someone needs a clean one.

JOHN Have a drink first. You've earned it. *(Checks the wine bottles)* We're out of white. Rose?

LIZ Thanks.

JOHN You should be out there, sitting in the roof garden, not acting as a stand-in waitress.

LIZ Swapping stories about your Dad with your Aunt Eadie? Is she all right?

JOHN Bearing up well, but ... keep an eye on her, would you?

LIZ Sure. Cheers ... *(drinks)* I'm so sorry, Mr Scatchard. Your father was such a character.

JOHN It's John. I'm not your employer's son any more.

LIZ That's OK. To me it's your Dad who'll always be Mr Scatchard, anyway. You need to relax, Mr ... John. You'll start hyperventilating again. Come and sit down. (*he goes to sit on the settee*) Not there – Jeannie sits there. Here – in father's chair. (*She takes the rug, and throws it over the chair with a flourish*) That should stop you breathing in cat hairs.

*John sits and immediately sneezes. Liz sits on the sofa*

LIZ And I was happy to help out till you could make it up here. Your father was rather a poppet. It's a shame you're all on your own today.

JOHN What – don't Aunt Eadie, my stepmothers, and Dad's drinking pals count? Every poet who ever penned a line seems to have turned up.

LIZ That's fame for you. I'd been looking forward to meeting you and your family. Your wife sounded nice on the phone. Pity she couldn't make it.

JOHN Mrs Pierce ...

LIZ Liz, please. As you say, I'm not on the staff any more.

JOHN (*smiles*) Liz then. You only worked for dad for a few months. Next week, you'll walk through that door and I'll never see you again. We don't have to pretend to each other. You know how it was.

LIZ He could be very difficult to work for.

JOHN 'Artistic temperament', Dad called it. Most people just call it **bad** temper.

LIZ I think he got on with women better than men.

JOHN Oh, yes. A real charmer. So thanks for all you did for him. Hope he wasn't too demanding.

LIZ Not at all. As well as his correspondence and other secretarial stuff, I'd read to him for hours. I was happy to do it. Poetry mostly.

JOHN (*dryly*) His own?

LIZ No. I didn't have the voice for it, he said. (*picks up copy of the Iliad from the coffee table*) This one. bloodthirsty stuff. Really old. Greek. About some war. (*shows him the book*)

JOHN Ah yes. The *Iliad*. Trojan War.

LIZ He'd choose a part and I'd read the rest. He knew it off by heart.

JOHN Before fame and fortune, he taught Classics. This is his favourite translation.

LIZ I never knew that.

JOHN No – it tended to be his own poetry he focussed on.

SCATCHARD Of course. The *liad* was just my inspiration.

JOHN (*tosses the book onto the sofa*) Anyway ... I just wanted to say thanks for staying on another week. Getting the place ready.

LIZ That's OK. It's a cosy little flat. Besides, someone had to stay and look after Jeannie. And it's nice to get away from Andy's mum for a bit.

JOHN Right – you live with your mother-in-law, don't you?

LIZ Mmm. Top floor. She's OK - but it does feel a bit crowded sometimes.

JOHN Well, thanks for taking it ... sorry, **her**, away today.

LIZ Oh, we get on well, me and Jeannie. She's a beautiful cat. Brings me presents. Mice and things. Rather sweet really.

JOHN Sweet?

LIZ Well, usually. Last week it was a pigeon. She'll be fine. And how are you coping?

JOHN The asthma's OK. As for the rest .... (*he shrugs*)

LIZ It's always a sad time – a funeral. I'm so sorry.

JOHN After all he'd been through, I'm sure he was glad to go.

LIZ Oh, no. I was here when .... the last thing he said was "Life's done too soon, Fanny". (*beat*) The end was very sudden. We all thought he had a bit more time.

JOHN Yes.

LIZ Sometimes they're just ready to go, Happened with my dad. It was all over when we got there.

PAUSE

JOHN We said our goodbyes a month ago.

LIZ Yes.

PAUSE

LIZ I wanted to pass on that last message. Only, I don't know who Fanny is, so ... (*shrugs*)

JOHN My mother. Died years ago.

*Liz mouths an "oh" of understanding. John raises his glass in a toast*

Cheers mum. I hope you're pleased to get the old sod back.

*John's father raises his own glass in an amused response.*

LIZ I wonder what'll happen to Jeannie, now?

JOHN (*sneezes again*). Can we talk about something else.

LIZ (*jumps up*) Are you all right?

JOHN No, I feel lousy. That throw isn't much protection. (*uses inhaler.*)

LIZ Maybe you should go outside again.

JOHN With the poets? I'll survive.

*He goes to the drinks table and gets another drink. As they talk Liz rearranges the throw with a quick flick.*

LIZ Did you know that the day before he died, your Dad asked his ex-wives round for tea?

JOHN (*startled*) What - all of them?

LIZ He just picked up the phone, and said if they wanted to see him one last time to come immediately. Everything was going great. Then Louise arrived.

JOHN She's peeved.

LIZ He noticed.

JOHN After putting up with him for years, she let him get under her skin. Divorced him too soon to become the merry widow and scoop the pool. Not so much "done too soon" as "done"... Sorry. I didn't get on with any of them. Especially her. What on earth possessed him to bring the whole lot down on you?

LIZ He wanted to say goodbye. Gave them all the same message. He'd seen them in hell in this world, and he'd see them in heaven in the next. And meantime, 'Goodbye for Now'.

JOHN (*surprised*) He still believed then?

LIZ Oh, yes. *(beat)* John – your father really is looking down on us, and not up.

*John sneezes again. Knocks it back his drink as Father Maloney enters bringing a briefcase with him.*

MALONEY The poets have drunk us dry. If experience is anything to go by, I'd say the party's breaking up.

JOHN *(stands)* Father Maloney. *(Shakes hands.)*

MALONEY Ah. good for the chance to have a really long chat in person with the voice on the phone, Mr. Scatchard.

JOHN John, please.

MALONEY Well, I've dispensed sympathy on all of them, I think.

LIZ I'll just go and check on your Aunt Eadie, shall I?

*Liz exits to the roof garden. John pours himself another drink, and offers one to Father Maloney.*

MALONEY Thanks. I've drunk enough tea to sink a battleship. A little wine would be welcome. ... Cheers.

*They sit, Maloney on the sofa and John on the throw. John promptly sneezes. Maloney raises his eyebrows as John says:*

JOHN Blood ... Blasted cat.

MALONEY *(beat)* Any news from your wife?

JOHN Nothing good. Let's face it – her parents are getting on.

MALONEY You spend years raising your children. Then they leave home and you look forward to a bit of freedom, only to find you're looking after the parents that raised you. It'll be your turn soon enough.

PAUSE

JOHN I know I couldn't visit Dad as often as I'd have liked ...*(sneezes)* But we did talk now and then. Till last month.

PAUSE

MALONEY I'm glad to see you get on well with Mrs Pierce. Was it her put that rug over the chair for you?

JOHN Yes. Nice of her. Dad liked her.

MALONEY Mmm. She's a hard worker. And she has great courage and tenacity. Think of her home situation. *(beat)* You know about that?

- JOHN Only that she and her husband live with her mother-in-law. She's one of your congregation, then?
- MALONEY Mmm. Their greatest wish is a home of their own.
- JOHN (*dryly*) These days they'll need a hefty deposit.
- MALONEY And the only way they'll they get **that's** to live somewhere rent free for a few years. (*beat*) They have great faith that one day the Good Lord will grant them their wish.
- PAUSE
- And how are you bearing up. With your allergy?
- JOHN I'll live. It's only for an afternoon.
- MALONEY And apart from your that?
- JOHN I'm not sure, to be honest. .... Father ... Thank you. There was only time for a few words at the church, and I've been surrounded by people ever since.
- MALONEY That's where your duty lies. With the family and friends of the deceased.
- JOHN Even Louise? (*He sneezes again. Father Maloney hands him the box of tissues. He keeps coughing and sneezing regularly from now on.*) What does she count as? Technically? Family? Friend of the family?
- MALONEY Weeell, that's an interesting point. Since your father and Emily – his fourth, er, "wife"...?
- JOHN Second, after Mum. And **then** fourth again – just after mum died.
- MALONEY Ah, yes, for a moment I forgot their brief ...
- JOHN re-marriage?
- MALONEY (*noncommittal noise*) Mmmm... What complicated lives people seem to live nowadays. Anyway, in the eyes of God, it's Emily who is now his widow. Mr Scatchard – John – your father was a man with a lot of love to give.
- JOHN Oh, yes! (*beat*) I was twelve years old when mum found out about Emily. Old enough to remember how it felt, even now.
- MALONEY "For better, for worse".
- JOHN And he got the best of the deal. Always did. As for Emily ... he didn't stop at her, did he?

MALONEY No.

PAUSE

JOHN I really tried. For three years, me and Dad (*pinches finger and thumb together*) - we were that close!

MALONEY It's natural to want someone to love. A father. And he loved you. Look how readily he accepted his responsibilities.

JOHN He could afford it.

MALONEY You'd be surprised how many men, richer even than your father, don't.

JOHN Well, he saw me regularly. I'll give him that. But when he rejected mum, he rejected me.

MALONEY And now he's dead.

PAUSE

JOHN I thought I'd be angrier.

PAUSE

I'm not. Just empty.

PAUSE

So many memories. Not all of them bad. (*sigh*) But a long way from being close enough to say I loved him. Or the other way round, come to that.

MALONEY Ah, memories. Concentrate on the good ones. Then you'll find it easier in your heart to reconcile yourself with him.

JOHN (*hesitates*) I don't know about that. Six months ago – after he told me he wasn't going to get better – that it was terminal – we seemed get on quite well. Then, last month ... He had some mad idea about the cat.

MALONEY Jennie, you mean?

JOHN Iphigenia. Yes.

MALONEY Good name for a Classicist's cat. And it shortens nicely.

JOHN Yes, well I'm not fond enough of her to call her 'Jeannie'. He wanted me to hold the thing. He knows ... knew... I'm allergic.

MALONEY Only to **his** cat. Not to others.



JOHN Told you that, did he?

MALONEY Yes, and that you were never ill except when you were here.

JOHN All true. Though the cat allergy's real, enough. But he wouldn't listen. Even when I was gasping for breath. Kept telling me to "just try harder". (*angry*) Why couldn't he realise I couldn't do it? That I was **really** ill.

MALONEY He believed it wasn't the cat you couldn't get close to. That it was actually him. That if you could only hold the cat – get over your allergy – you'd get over your hostility. (*beat*) A big quarrel?

JOHN What – didn't he tell you? ... No, we just got very polite with each other.

MALONEY Pity. Sometimes a really good row can help.

JOHN So can a bottle of whisky. Believe me, we tried everything over the years. I'd start out with good intentions, then we'd end up shouting at each other. Afterwards, we'd go all cold and formal. This time we just skipped a step and got straight down to frigid good manners. I said goodbye, wished him well, and left. And I never saw him again. If there was anything left between us – well, it's too late now.

MALONEY It's never to late. Even in death. He asked me to give you something.

*Father Maloney picks up the briefcase and hands it to John*

JOHN What's this?

MALONEY He wanted you to have it. Open it and see.

*John opens the briefcase, takes out a big photo album,. And opens it.*

JOHN All these photos. Me – as a baby.

*John flips through the album.*

nursery - primary school – secondary school ... My class photos – he kept them all ... graduation ....– me in my first suit – (*laughs at himself*) What do I look like...

*He puts down the album, and takes out a clutch of old drawings*

(*smiling*) . I drew these. (*turns it over*) To Daddy. (*stunned*) he kept all this? John Scatchard, this is your life.

MALONEY If Greek drama taught him nothing else, it's that family betrayal's the worst of all betrayals. (*spots the Agamemnon*) Ah, *The Agamemnon*. (*Picks it up.*) Only think of the betrayal of the Iphigenia found in that little drama. (*puts it down*) He knew what he'd done to you. He tried and failed to get you to love him. To forgive him. I told him that first, he must show you how much **he** loved **you**.

JOHN He had a strange way of going about it. (*hunts through the photo album and mutters as he looks for a particular one*) My wedding ...my wedding ... (*finds it*) Look! He didn't even have the decency to come alone, and Mum hardly cold in her grave. (*to the picture of his Dad*) You think you can pull my heart strings, even after death?

*To the side his father nods and toasts him*

JOHN (*to Maloney as he tosses down the drawings and points to the briefcase*) So - to convince me, he compiled that?

MALONEY A large part of your life was stuck to his. And it's all there. He kept it all. Doesn't that tell you something?

JOHN It tells me he was a control freak, right to the end. When he wanted to believe something, nothing would convince him otherwise. Certainly not the truth.

MALONEY At the very end he said to me, "Father, if I can't convince him of it in life, I'll damn well find a way after death".

JOHN You were there, then? At the end?

MALONEY Of course.

JOHN And he wants to be reconciled after death?

MALONEY **Everyone** does.

JOHN So he prepared all this in advance?

MALONEY Yes.

JOHN To show me how much he loved me?

MALONEY He did love you.

*John indicates the photo album and the drawings*

JOHN And you think this shows me how much?

MALONEY It's a start. (*beat*) John, you're a good man. Try and spare a little love for him.

JOHN Perhaps. In a year or two. Or maybe in heaven. ... I'll let you know when the left shoe drops.

MALONEY I don't follow you.

JOHN I mightn't have got on well with Dad. Or liked him much. Though I tried. But I knew him. None better. (*points to the contents of the briefcase*) If he wanted ... all that - as much as you say - well, he'd have tried a lot harder than this.

MALONEY He was quite genuine. The dying frequently are.

*Maloney takes a letter out of the briefcase*

MALONEY And he asked me to give you this.

JOHN (*looks at the writing on the envelope*) A message? From dad?

*John open it and reads the short letter. Father Maloney discretely retreats and has another drink. Scatchard leans forward in anticipation.*

JOHN Hand written. Enclosing a letter from the solicitors. (*opens the solicitor's letter and reads it*) ...Your father, being of sound .....(*reads on, in growing concern*) ...This accompanies a letter of explanation from your father ...

*John switches to his father's letter. Reads it silently. At the side, his father watches with great interest John, startled, addresses the picture of his father*

Sound mind? You were stark staring round the twist.

*Scatchard is amused. John hands Maloney the letter*

JOHN (*angry*) You'd no idea what's in it?

MALONEY None. It was sealed when he gave it to me. What is it?

JOHN The left shoe.

*Gives Maloney the letter and he scans it, rapidly.*

MALONEY Oh dear.

JOHN He changed his will! All that stuff about how much he loved me - and he pulls a trick like this. (*beat*) Was he clear in his mind - at the end?

MALONEY Very clear. He wanted to be reconciled with you,

JOHN And THAT'S his way of doing it?

MALONEY (*reads*) "By the time you read this ...

*Maloney reads silently. At the side, Scatchard recites the contents of the letter.*

SCATCHARD By the time you read this, I'll be in my grave. If you've read any of my poetry, you know I still believe in the after-life. After all the ups and downs in this one, we'll have to trust in God's mercy, and hope the journey to the next world's in the right direction.

*Maloney makes the sign of the cross*

But wherever I end up, I hope you find it in your heart to forgive me. You found it difficult to like me. That's more my fault than yours. I freely admit I wasn't always a likable man. You could not like your stepmothers. That's understandable. But you could not love my cat – couldn't even bear to be in the same room as her. That was the symptom of a disease, my boy, not a cause. I was the cause, and the distemper. It was dislike of myself, and the life I led."

JOHN God, he's read those bloody Greek plays of his too well, and not wisely.

MALONEY Perhaps. Or perhaps this is just God's way of lighting the fires in his conscience. He knew what he'd done. Now he wants your forgiveness.

JOHN Oh, I forgave him a long time ago. Why d'you think I kept on trying to get through to the old b astard. But forget? Love? I don't think so.

*Scatchard puls a face*

MALONEY Then you truly haven't forgiven. Don't give up now. ... So - he's left the flat, and a hefty trust fund, to Jeannie the cat - and he hopes that you live here with the cat, and reconcile yourself, through her, to him.

*Maloney returns to the letter. Scatchard reads on*

MALONEY Why just ...

SCATCHARD Why just Iphigenia that made you ill? Why just my home? If you can find a way to live with my cat - offer her the affection I wasn't able to inspire in you - I'll know you've forgiven me. I hope you find yourself able to do it in this life. It'll save a lot of bother in the next. I'll be watching with interest.

MALONEY (*finishing reading the letter*) Meantime - Goodbye for now. Dad.

*Scatchard leans back and awaits events.*

JOHN The old ... (*words fail him*).

MALONEY Well, well. You asked for more proof, and now you have it.

JOHN The question is “can I live with the cat?”

MALONEY No. The question is whether or not you’re willing to try.

PAUSE

*John starts to sneeze again.*

JOHN Well I’m not staying in here. There’s some whisky in the kitchen.

MALONEY Mixing the grape with the grain?

JOHN Right now a bloody good hangover sounds just what the doctor ordered. *(heads for the door – stops and turns)* Coming?

MALONEY Would I leave you alone at a time like this? The whisky awaits.

*They exit stage right, to the kitchen. His father leans back and waits for events to unfold.*

LIGHTS DOWN

**Music:** if possible use the lines from within the song ‘my modest flat, goes to my cat, to keep her tucked away from beasts of prey and cars’.

LIGHTS UP.

## SCENE 2: THE LOUNGE, EVENING, A FEW HOURS LATER

*The guests have all left. Liz enters from the now quiet roof garden, talking on her mobile*

LIZ ... so you see, it’s all a bit of a mess. But ... No, I’m really am worried about her, Andy. Poor Jeannie. The number of times I’ve rescued her from that yappy little monster downstairs. If a cat has nine lives, then eight of them are queuing up and waiting their turn on that landing, poor little mite. If John moves in ... he can’t go within six feet of her. Who’ll snatch her from the jaws of hell? What made Mr Scatchard think John could possibly take care of her? He won’t. He’ll ... neglect her. But what’s the alternative – a stranger? I can’t let that happen, Andy. I just can’t.

*She looks out of the fourth wall window*

It’s so peaceful up here. *(beat)* Jeannie could live such a long and happy life with the right care. ... got to go.

*She ends her call as John comes in from the roof garden, carrying a half full glass and a whisky bottle. He empties the glass then pours another stiff drink. Inhales. Coughs a bit, drinks a bit more.*

JOHN You’ve know? About the will?

LIZ Yes.

JOHN Maybe Dad was right. Maybe I can do this. (*stares at the whisky bottle, as if trying to get it into focus*) With a little help.

*John pours another drink. Liz picks up her handbag, takes out some aspirin and pours some water into a clean glass from the water jug. Hands the aspirin to John with the water and a sympathetic smile.*

LIZ Here, take these. By the time they kick in, you'll need them.

*John takes the aspirin. Coughs a bit, then tops the glass up with whisky. By now he's a bit maudlin.*

JOHN Of course, it isn't about the cat, is it? I have to decide whether I can let go of the past. Today, it seems I can. Five minutes with Father Maloney would make a Christian martyr out of Judas. But tomorrow ...

LIZ Tomorrow you'll have the mother and father of all hangovers and unable to make any decision at all.

JOHN Sounds wonderful.

*Tosses off his drink. Pours himself another.*

JOHN Maybe I'll get less allergic to the thing-

LIZ -Jeannie.

JOHN Yeh. Maybe if I persevere ... (*sways*) On the other hand, maybe I should think it over.

LIZ I think you should sit down.

JOHN That's the ticket.

*Liz gives the rug a quick flick and straightens it. John coughs. Resorts doesn't sit but hunts through his pocket for his inhaler. When he does he drops it because he's drunk. He tries to bend over to retrieve it, but can't keep his balance. Liz retrieves it and gets him to inhale.*

JOHN (*hoarsely*) Thanks.

LIZ And a hot drink for that throat. Don't move.

*Liz exits to the kitchen. John, still on his feet, turns to the photograph of his father and the statuette/photo of Jeannie.*

JOHN *(very drunk, to the statuette/picture of the cat)* Chee... Cheers lph... Iphiginnnnn ... Iphiginea... Jeannie. Now I know why they shortened your name. *(salutes the picture)*. I think you win.

*John turns his attention to the picture of his Dad. At what he hears, Scatchard is a bit concerned. He reacts to what John says*

Didn't think of that did you, Dad? For a smart man, you could be awfully thick. *(tries really hard and gets the name right)* lph ... lph-fi-jean-near. Now **that** was "done too soon". *Picks up liad*) Poor lphigenia. Your life was sacrificed to the gods so Agamemnon could call up the winds, then sail away and conquer Troy. And now, dad, you want to sacrifice another lphigenia - your cat. ... mmmm? ....Oh, yes you do. You think she wants to live with me any more than I want to live with her? But **you** want .... *(he's lost track of what he was thinking)* the gods know what, I'm damned if I do. ... Yes, I do – you wanted to have your cake and eat it. All right – that's a cliché. How about ... how about ... you wanted to walk over rose petals in this life, but not over hot coals in the next. Not as good a line as you could turn, but we can't all be prize winning poets. Thank God. You wanted to live life to the full, then reap the rewards of the life you should have lived, with none of the sacrifices. Except for us – lphigenia and me. Well ... we choose not. So enjoy your hot coals for the time being. We'll thrash this one out, face to face, when I get up there.

*John points to heaven, but wobbles and has to sit down in the chair with the throw over it. Father Maloney enters from the kitchen with a hot cup of coffee. He hands it to John, who drinks it.*

MALONEY Better?

JOHN Yes, thanks.

*But he's far from sober. During the following, he takes out a pack of cards from the briefcase and builds card houses on the coffee table. And from now, as John discusses his relationship with his father in some detail, he stops coughing and sneeing. Maloney sits on the sofa.*

JOHN He was a great card player. Did you know that? *(goes on as Maloney nods)* Poker was his favourite. Never won. Too emotional. He tried to teach me. That was in ... *(thinks for a moment)* Emily's second time around. We were trying to get re-acquainted. Me and Emily.

MALONEY I was acquainted with your father for 20 years, did you know that?

JOHN *(surprised)* No.

MALONEY When he retired for teaching, to write, and then moved into this flat, I called to see him.

JOHN Bet you never got him into church.

MALONEY No, but I lived in hope. (*beat*) And order was restored to chaos, and the prodigal sheep returned to the fold.

JOHN Chaos. Yes, that just about describes Dad's life. Ever read his poetry?

MALONEY (*grimly*) In the last month - all of it.

JOHN You didn't like it?

MALONEY Let's just say I disagreed with his world view.

JOHN Dad was like Byron. Mad, bad and dangerous to know.

MALONEY I've seen all three over the years, and he was a long way from that. His philosophy of life was to ask "what do you want" and then go for it, even if what he wanted wasn't particularly good for him.

JOHN Hah – what he wanted was very good for him. It just wasn't any good for anyone else. His relationships were about as stable as that. (*knocks over the cards*)

MALONEY He felt he had a vocation. I can understand that.

JOHN Yeh, well Dad's vocation was artistic license. That meant he could live any way he liked, then tell the world how it all felt.

MALONEY And how do you define your own identity? Who are you?

JOHN Anyone you like. Except that.

MALONEY Oh.

PAUSE

*John picks up the photo album.*

JOHN Come here. Look at these. ...

*Together they look into the album*

That's Emily. The best of a bad bunch. She tried so hard to bring Dad and me together after he left mum for her.

MALONEY But you sided with your mother.

JOHN Couldn't side with both. ... She took Dad from mum. I wasn't going to let her take me as well.



*John turns the pages of the album*

That's me as a boy. And yes, that's a cat I'm holding. My cat. Wasn't always allergic. This was just before mum and Dad broke up. Read what he wrote underneath

*Hands Maloney the album, who holds it up to the light and reads the inscription.*

MALONEY (reads) "When the heart's desire turns to dust, and pours its gold on the ground, how does the tiger tell true worth from the dirt when he rolls in the black earth." (under his breath) Sweet Jesus.

JOHN Yes, he had a way with words, all right

*He takes out a bundle of handkerchiefs from the briefcase*

JOHN I sent these to Dad when he split with number three. As a joke. He actually kept them! If wonder if-

*He puts them on the table and rummages through the briefcase. Takes out a garish tie*

JOHN My last Christmas present to him. I was as confused as these colours. Told him to wear it and see how it felt ... He went through six marriages, so he probably enjoyed it.

PAUSE

*John puts it by the handkerchiefs, gets up to get another drink, wobbles, sits down again. Father Maloney gets up and takes John's glass.*

MALONEY The grape or the grain?

JOHN I'll stick to the grain. It's been ... ooh. (looks at his wristwatch, tries to calculate time, but loses track) Anyway, the grape'll be wearing off by now.

*Maloney hands him a drink and takes one for himself.*

JOHN I'll regret this in the morning.

MALONEY It's your father's wake. You're entitled. (beat) So – when did this allergy start?

JOHN Very suddenly, just before Dad married Christine.

MALONEY Ah, and she was, er, number ...

JOHN Five. After Emily, before Louise. Not ifi- jean. Different cat.

PAUSE

JOHN She had three cats. I used them to try and build a few bridges. I'd visit, and cat-sit while they went off holiday.

MALONEY You wanted him to be with you, and not her.

JOHN Didn't need me. The women lined up to look after him. Every visit, we'd just argue.

MALONEY And he wanted you to accept her. Christine.

JOHN He wanted to change me. Make me more like himself. Said I was ... For him, I was like a bowl of cold custard. Bland to the eye, and dull to the palate. I said he was feckless. I told him. "I don't want to be like you." I still don't.

MALONEY Yet you have his way with words. For all you try for plain language.

*John opens the briefcase and takes out a cat collar. Look at his glass. Wrinkles his nose.*

JOHN Is there any more coffee?

*Maloney goes to the kitchen door*

MALONEY *(calls)* Elizabeth, could we some more coffee, please?

*Maloney returns. John shows him the cat collar.*

JOHN Louise's legacy. As you say, it's always been just dad's cat. She and Dad decided it was all psychosomatic. We'd tried everything else – tests, diet, the works. So Dad paid for therapy. I carried this round for a year, even to the office. Made no difference.

MALONEY It wouldn't. Only reconciliation could do that.

JOHN So - there you have it – our life in three movements: tears, confusion and temper.

MALONEY And yet, talking about the problem, you haven't coughed or sneezed once.

*Liz enters with the coffee. John gets unsteadily to his feet.*

LIZ Here's the coffee.

JOHN I think I'll have it outside, in the fresh air. It'll either kill or cure me.

MALONEY Elizabeth, why don't you take it out for him?

LIZ I think I better had.

MALONEY And Elizabeth – could you come back here for a moment afterwards. I've something to discuss, with you.

LIZ (*A bit puzzled*) Yes, of course, Father.

*John and Liz exit to the roof garden. Maloney gets another drink and then crosses to the chair with the throw. Stands behind it and runs his hand over the throw and plucks at it. Grimaces. Liz re-enters.*

MALONEY How long have you known?

LIZ Sorry, father?

MALONEY That Mr Scatchard was planning to leave his flat to his cat. How long have you known?

LIZ Since the day his solicitor came round. He'd no sooner walked out of the door than Mrs what's-her-name downstairs came round. Visiting the sick she called it. Being nosy, Mr Scatchard called it. ... bringing a bunch of grapes and that yappy little monster with her. Mr Scatchard was in pleats. There was Jeannie sitting on top of the bookcase, and yappy at his feet - sending little semaphore messages to each other with their ears.

MALONEY (*dryly*) I'd no idea you were so poetic.

LIZ (*chuckle*) It's the way Mr Scatchard described it. (*beat*) He didn't want anything to happen to her. To Jeannie. It's her home. Her territory.

MALONEY He certainly lavished a lot of time and attention on her. As I'm sure you did on him.

LIZ It was part of the job, father. Type his letters and keep him cheerful.

MALONEY Yes, he was certainly a man to be kept cheerful by the ladies.

LIZ He was a poppet.

MALONEY He was an egotistical self-centred old sinner.

LIZ He was dying father. And I've worked for worse.

PAUSE

*Maloney gives Liz an unsettling look*

MALONEY So - you knew that John was allergic to the cat?

LIZ Well .... Yes.

MALONEY And **you** thought Jeannie would be better of living with you? Told him you'd look after Jeannie when he was gone.

LIZ There isn't room for a cat at Andy's mum's.

MALONEY But if you accepted the responsibility to look after Jeannie, you wouldn't be living with Andy's mother any longer, would you? You'd be living here.

PAUSE

LIZ It doesn't matter, Father, because Mr Scatchard made other arrangements. I made his appointments. And yes, I knew that the solicitor was calling to change the will.

MALONEY And you knew what those changes were?

LIZ The walls are quite thin. I was just next door, in the kitchen. I never said a word to anyone, Father. I was very discrete.

MALONEY I'm sure you were ... Elizabeth, I've known you since you were a girl. You're a good woman. I know how hard it all must be for you. Waiting for your own home.

LIZ No father, you don't. You can't. Waiting and waiting ...I want someone of my own to care for.

MALONEY A baby.

LIZ How can I, stuck at Andy's mum's?

PAUSE

MALONEY (*sigh*) Elizabeth Pierce, it's time to be open with each other ..., how many times this month have I been in this room? (*she doesn't answer*) ... And how many times have I seen Jeannie's blanket in here?

PAUSE

(*picks up the blanket John's been sitting on*) This blanket, in fact.

PAUSE

LIZ If something suits you, it doesn't make it wrong.

MALONEY No. But if something's wrong, you cannot make it right just because it suits you.

LIZ Mr Scatchard loved Jeannie. He wouldn't want anything to happen to her. He loved her. And so do I. Truly. And you can see for yourself ... John's allergic. He can't will himself not to be. All I've done is show him that.

MALONEY (*emphatically*) What you have done is to come between a dying man and his son. Your role was to work for, and support, him and his family.

LIZ That role's a luxury I can't afford. Mr Scatchard lived his whole life doing what he wanted. Just for once – just once - so did I.

MALONEY And as a result, you've ... never mind, when you began this, you weren't to know.

LIZ Confession brings forgiveness.

MALONEY Only with repentance. (*sigh*) You'd better ask John to come in.

LIZ (*alarmed*) You're going to tell him what I've done?

MALONEY Something said strictly between ourselves? Certainly not. But I'll see you in confession tomorrow. (*beat*) Be off with you.

*Liz exits through the door to the rest of the flat. Maloney crosses to the picture. Above it, Scatchard pays attention. Because it doesn't seem he'll get what he'd planned for.*

MALONEY Well, my friend, you sowed your seeds and now you're reaping the crop. Let that be a warning to you. But it's early days yet. We've all eternity to sort it out. (*sigh*) Meantime, I've got to **do** something about this.

*Scatchard reacts to that. Pulls a face. John enters. John's not reeling any more, just a bit sleepy. He stops at his father's photograph.*

JOHN Why cats? Why did you have to develop this affinity with cats?

SCATCHARD They like me and never judge me.

JOHN (*to Maloney*) I'm allergic to the thing. Nothing's going to change that.

MALONEY Perhaps.

PAUSE

JOHN It isn't so easy. I can see he loved me. Must have done to have kept all that ... but as for me .... (*sigh*)

MALONEY You're your father's son. Everything you are, he made.

JOHN Heaven help me.

MALONEY He's proud of what life made out of you. Of what you made out of your life. Your Dad ... how did he put it ... he was a gourmet feasting on life, and always hungry. You are-

JOHN -Emotionally anorexic?

MALONEY No, no! You ... You're the cook, he said. He ate, then found he was empty. You're filled with life's essentials, in abundance. And you never refuse a man a meal. When your father was ill, you came.

JOHN And missed the last course. I wasn't there at the end.

MALONEY But you came. You're like St Peter. A rock. Dependable. I think, in the end, your father envied you.

*Scatchard smiles at that, nods, and toasts Maloney for getting it right.*

PAUSE

MALONEY He doesn't just want your love, John, he needs it.

PAUSE

Your Dad had a great gift. That also brought great weaknesses with it. **You**, on the other hand give so much to other people. Think of your patience with the poets. Your consideration for your Aunt Eadie.

JOHN I think my mother had more to do with that.

PAUSE

It's a scary thought. That there's a lot of my father in me. To tell the truth, I'm afraid of what I'll find when I start looking. I can see why he began all this, though. It's the sort of emotional journey he'd have relished.

PAUSE

MALONEY Every memory is painful. I'll tell you what I told him. It won't all happen at once. It'll be slow. Until he torpedoed it, your father built a life around you, slowly. Memories, built piece by piece. You'll only learn to accept them – and him – slowly ... piece by piece.

JOHN The full 12 step programme, in fact.

MALONEY But you'll get there. Eventually.

PAUSE

He's left you plenty of time. That moggie could live for quite a while.

PAUSE

JOHN And in the meantime ...

MALONEY That's up to you.

PAUSE

JOHN Liz – she's very fond of the animal.

MALONEY Elizabeth? Yes.

JOHN Someone's got to look after it. Her, I mean. But not me.

MALONEY Hmm.

JOHN Liz seems available. (*hesitant*) If I visited from time to time... do you think she'd agree to move in?

MALONEY (*rapidly grasping the opportunity*) I'm sure she'd be only too delighted.

JOHN (*picks up the tie*) I don't have a bad taste in ties, do I?

*Maloney for once is lost for words. Scatchard laughs.*

*John puts the handkerchiefs into a pocket, picks up the cat collar, then drops it again.*

JOHN Leave that for Jeannie. ... I'd better go and get it over with.

MALONEY You're not having a tooth out. .... Go and ask her. I'll tidy all this away.

*John exits. Maloney smiles and crosses to the photograph of Mr Scatchard.*

MALONEY (*to the photo*) And that little sin lies firmly on your plate, not mine. You loaded that gun, not me.

*Scatchard reacts to that again. Makes a rude 'jaw jaw' gesture. Maloney returns to putting everything back in the briefcase.*

*Liz enters*

MALONEY Did he ask you?

LIZ Yes, Father. ... I really do think it's for the best. Jeannie has to taken care of. And it would have broken Mr Scatchard's heart if John moved in and something awful happened to her. (*beat*) I must get home. Can I give you a lift, Father?

MALONEY No, no. I'll share a taxi with John. We've things to discuss. You and I ... we've our own discussion to have in the morning.

*Maloney exit to the roof garden. Liz gets a drink. Toasts the picture of the old man, who toasts her back*

LIZ            Andy and me really will look after Jeannie properly, so you rest in peace. That yappy little monster downstairs will never lay a paw on her. She'll live to a ripe old age. But I'll get your son to visit. Regularly. You'll get what you wanted. Eventually. That's a promise. Night, Night, poppet.

*They drink their toast to each other.*

*Music – Conclusion to 'Goodbye for Now' (which just repeats the phrase as the song tails to its conclusion)*

*Scatchard leans back in satisfaction. He HAS got what he wanted. Again.*

BLACKOUT.