

‘Where Is The Life?’

by

Martin Paul Roche

Audition Pack

Synopsis

The Beeches is a residential home for retired gentlemen of the stage. It is run by Julie, the officious owner who is married to Tony, a letch who is nice but a little dim. Tom, Colin, Alan and Don are residents who have spent their lives in theatre and equally, working together. Despite their ups and downs they have created their own family in The Beeches to replace the families they no longer seem to be a part of.

They have come from a bygone world and have now created a new world in The Beeches which is bound together by images, reflections, memories, longings of the past but equally, yearnings for a future.

Tom is a camp old hooper who could not be more affected. Alan is a neurotic and frustrated gay man who will not speak of his sexuality. Don is everybody's granddad, warm caring and gentle.

Colin is, well, Colin. He is angry, acerbic, cutting and sarcastic: a past master in schadenfreude. He is the old queen of this castle and resents everything and everybody for reasons that even he no longer understands. His time is spent finding new prey and when Kelly, the new care assistant arrives, he focuses in on her straight away with resentment, anger and jealousy and all because she has the things he can no longer have: youth... and time.

Despite the challenges created by them, Kelly soon comes to appreciate that the men have become part of a family of their own making and moreover, she finds in them a family she has never really known. And in doing so she sheds light into their forgotten world – a world where relatives are just a word and true family is four old men whose lives are inextricably bound together and in time, a young girl who realises that some jobs have the facility to teach you more than you think. She may have years of her life left, but she gives them a priceless gift... by helping them come to terms with the life in their remaining years.

Characters (7m, 3f)

- Kelly** Newly appointed Care Assistant at The Beeches. Her age depends on how the director wants to play it. Innocence/naivety is not necessarily a function of age so it is reasonable for her to be as young as 20 and as old as 40. What clearly matters above all is characterisation, sincerity and believability. She is naïve yet street hardened. Her dress and demeanour indicate a rawness which is not necessarily 'common' but more 'modern' and therefore at odds with the residents of The Beeches. She is painfully honest, easily affected by emotions and a complete stranger to the truth of old age and bereavement. She has a passion which emphasises her rawness. Accent is northern (she is from Oldham after all). Early script notes mention outrageous makeup and clothes at the interview. Although subsequently toned down, this should not altogether disappear until her reappearance in the final scene. The best description of her is early on in the script notes: an innocent abroad.
- Julie** 40/50. The manager of The Beeches. Married to Tony. A larger woman. Officious, dominant. Smart in appearance and business like in manner. She despairs at times of the residents and their attitudes/behaviour but in the main does not 'get' them. She is dismissive of her husband, Tony, and there is no love/affection/respect ever displayed towards him. At times, the story displays her being ill at ease with the residents or anything 'touchy – feely'. There are also times when she clearly demonstrates an inability to deal with conflict: she is not as hard as she makes out.
- Mary** 30/40 or even slightly older. Don's daughter and married to Kevin. Very plain, cold, dismissive, disrespectful to her father. Neutral local accent. She clearly has no time for him and wants to spend as little time with him as possible. The reasons for this only become clear after his death at the wake. She is an angry and bitter woman and very pointed in her delivery.
- Colin** 60/70. Resident. Retired actor. Gay, but the character is not fully explored in that respect. Well spoken, articulate. He is cold, a loner but craves company. The notes on the piece sum him up: Colin is Colin. He is angry, acerbic, condescending, aloof, cutting and sarcastic. He resents everything and everybody but when with his lifelong friends (the other residents) he sometimes mellows, although at any time he can treat them badly. He enjoys his status as the 'matriarch'. His bitterness is vented at Kelly and her like and he revels in demeaning her at

every opportunity. A complex and challenging character who eventually respects Kelly and what she represents, revealing his demons and how they have hidden humanity.

- Tom** 60/70. Resident. Well spoken. Retired actor. Tom is an old theatre luvvie who could not be more affected. He hits the bell of many theatre stereotypes but at his core is a warm, genuine, funny, full-of-life, fiercely loyal, affectionate man. He is the great rescuer of the piece and of the characters in it. He is sensitive but can pack a punch when challenged, using his humour and sexuality to good effect. He needs to be a man of mannerisms, of poses, of facial expressions. However, he is not a clown and this is not a pantomime. There is a need for boundaries in his playing which prevent it from being over the top and constantly playing for the laugh. An intelligent and sensitive characterisation is essential.
- Don** 60/70. Resident. Retired stage manager. Father to Mary. Dies half way through Act 2. Articulate and gently spoken. He is a gentleman; warm, caring, intelligent, open, uncomplicated, understanding, thoughtful, honest, respectful, fair. He is a granddad figure who provides the normality to this group, the grounding for them.
- Alan** 60/70. Resident. Retired actor. Well spoken. A complex character. There is discussion about his sexuality but it is never actually demonstrated; but the fallout is evidenced. He is at times nervous, insular, vulnerable but in Act 1 he is clearly part of the family and the spirit of its unique humour and attitudes – its pack mentality! In Act 2 his age and condition become apparent, some of which is illustrated by what other characters initially say. Tom in particular is very protective of him. He dramatically ‘melts down’ in Act 2 due to age related dementia which is a demanding ask of the actor in such a relatively short sequence.
- Gordon** 50/70. Gardener, maintenance, odd job man at The Beeches. He is very hard of hearing and most of the time, he struggles to articulate anything. When he does say something, it counts! He is very much the victim of circumstance. In the first act in particular, the residents use him as a foil for their humour. He begins very ill at ease with them, around them. But circumstances bring him into the fold as by default, he becomes part of the family. A true character role. Achieves so much by doing very little. Animated, understated, naturally funny without ever trying.
- Tony** 40/50. Similar in age to Julie, his wife. Co-owner of The Beeches. Very well spoken, nice but dim type. A little far back so to speak. Always derided by everybody as they appear to see him as a non-entity in the set up and somebody to insult. Julie in particular is very demeaning towards him; there is certainly no hint of affection. He is clearly a supporting role to the piece so therefore needs to be a strong ‘off the page’ actor who can hold his own outside of delivering dialogue and maintain a presence when not the focus of attention.
- Kevin** 30/40, but similar in age to Mary. Husband of Mary, son-in-law to Don. Neutral local accent. Boorish, ignorant, uninterested, rude, ill mannered. A man with a bad attitude who has no respect for anybody, especially Don and then the other residents. He is not difficult to dislike.

EXTRACT #1 – Julie and Kelly

- Julie** And what experience have you of work in a retirement home?
- Kelly** Well, my grandparents were very old. I spent a lot of time with them. Oh, and I like old people. I find them very interesting; their stories, their lives, so I thought that having got on so well with my grandparents...
- Julie** ... so having spent time around people the same age as our residents, it automatically qualifies you to...
- Kelly** No, well. When you put it like that, no; it doesn't appear that I'm overly qualified ...
- Julie** Try 'not at all qualified'.
- Kelly** Yes ... I mean no, I mean yes, (*pause*)... I mean, but I just thought that it would be so interesting to...
- Julie** Miss... (*she looks at the papers she is holding*)... Cosgrove. We run a retirement home, not the Big Brother House. This is The Beeches, an exclusive retirement residence for gentlemen formerly of the stage.
- Kelly** What Theatre?
- Julie** Yes my dear, Theatre.
- Kelly** That's brilliant! I want to be an actress and...
- Julie** (*Speaking over her*). ... we are not here to provide you with an interest to further your genuine career aspirations. You must provide support, care, engagement, interest to our residents. But before you can interest them, you have to interest me. Added to which, our residents are... how shall I say... challenging
- Kelly** Oh, I don't mind wiping up shi... sorry, mess
- Julie** Shit. The word is shit. And I have managed this home long enough to also know when somebody is talking it. We don't dress it up here Miss Cosgrove and yes, at times there are plenty of occasions to engage with shit. Similarly, there are just as many occasions when you feel like it and – to be honest – are treated like it.
- Kelly** I don't mind. Really I don't. Having three older brothers and a chocolate Labrador with Crohn's disease, I've had my fair share of sh...
- Julie** Yes, I think I am getting the idea...
- Kelly** You see with our Labrador being chocolate coloured you sometimes couldn't tell what was Labrador and what was actually sh...
- Julie** (*Interrupting with urgency*). Yes. As I said, I get the idea. What you clearly lack in professional experience, you make up for in, well, other ways. If you are given this position, I'll expect you to find time to speak one-to-one with each of our residents as soon as possible. Get to know them. Understand them. Discover what makes them tick. Right, let me show you around, you can meet some of our residents and we can take it from there.
- Kelly** Thanks. (*Pause. Both take a step apart and then turn to face each other*). But I do want to be honest with you. I don't intend to spend the rest of my life here.
- Julie** (*She looks at Kelly and then looks front*). Neither did I Miss Cosgrove. Neither did I.

EXTRACT #2 – Julie and Gordon, Kelly and Tony

Julie *(She calls out).* Kelly! *(Muttering).* Bloody music left on again. *(She turns off stereo – track stops abruptly).* Kelly! *(There is no answer. She goes to the window and opens the curtains. LX: the room lights up).* Kelly! Kell... *(She is interrupted by the entrance of Gordon).*

Gordon *(He sees Julie).* Oh shit! *(He does an about turn – but too late).*

Julie Gordon, a word please. Have you seen Kelly? *(Gordon doesn't respond).*

Gordon *(He looks intently at her and then as if he is concentrating on the greatest question ever asked of him. He stands pondering, facially contorted, mulling over the answer to the meaning of life and then).* Eh?

Julie Have you got your hearing aid on, oh forget it, Kelly? The new care assistant? I told you about her this morning? *(Gordon slowly shakes his head as if lost on this subject).*

Julie Outrageous makeup? So high? Late 30's? Spikey hair? *(Gordon doesn't answer).* Large breasts?

Gordon Oh yes!

Julie Have you seen her?

Gordon Eh?

Julie Kelly?

Gordon Who? *(Julie gestures Kelly's proportions).* Ah, yes, yes, yes, yes!

Julie You have seen her then?

Gordon No.

Julie But you do remember me telling you about her.

Gordon Who?

Julie Gordon, when will you sort out a battery for that bloody hearing aid? *(Kelly enters. She is now wearing 'the uniform' comprising some loose-fitting trousers and the standard nursing/residential home top and sensible shoes. The make-up and hair are the same – as is the cleavage).* Ah Kelly, there you are. Can I introduce you to Gordon? Gordon, this is Kelly.

Gordon *(He moves to her and stares at her cleavage).* Bloody Hell ... hello boys.

Julie Gordon, this is clearly Kelly who has just started with us. She is the person stood closely behind the breasts you have just met. Gordon is our maintenance man, odd jobs, looks after the grounds etcetera. Very hard of hearing.

Kelly Alright? *(Gordon doesn't respond).* Alright?

Gordon *(He stares at her intently, through her, lost. Then looks behind himself).* Who?

Kelly You can't hear proper, I don't speak proper, what a pair eh?

Gordon *(He is still transfixed by her cleavage).* Y'tellin' me.

Julie Kelly, that's meant to be humour. Don't worry about it. He promises never to do it again.

Tony *(Entering and moving between Gordon and Kelly).* Julie, can I have the chequebook please, I need to pay for some... *(He stops dead).* I say. And who are you?

Kelly I'm Kelly, the new care assistant.

Tony And what a pretty little filly...

Kelly No, Kelly.

Tony And where, pray, have you come from ... Kelly? *(He advances on her, eyes transfixed on her breasts).*

Kelly Oldham.

Tony Really.

Julie Tony, that's a place, not a request.

Tony What? Oh, I say, very funny, very ...

Julie Tony can you rearrange something for me?

Tony A meeting?

Julie No, a phrase: off...sod.

Tony What?
Julie Off.
Tony *(He pauses as it sinks in)*. Right-O. *(He goes to leave and then)*. About the er...
Julie Off.
Tony Gone. *(He exits)*.
Julie My husband. Ancient. Bit simple. Family money. In bred. Pig shit. Thick as.
Kelly Lovely.
Julie Not really. *(Loudly)*. Gordon!
Gordon *(He is startled)*. Huh?
Julie Bed! *(He looks horrified. Julie advances on him)*.
Gordon What?????
Julie The one under the bay window? Needs watering. *(She exits)*.
Gordon *(He is relieved)*. Thank god for that.
Kelly *(Speaking quite pronounced as if on holiday speaking to the locals)*. It was lovely to meet you Gordon. I'm sure you and I are going to be good friends. I can tell you're a really nice person and I hope we get the chance to have a proper chat sometime.
Julie *(Off stage)*. Kelly!

EXTRACT #3 - Alan

Alan *(Speaking to the audience).* Please Kelly. Must we do this? Why is there a need to have 'confession'...alright, sorry, not confession: 'a one to one getting to know me session'. *(He starts singing, theatrically).* Getting to know you, getting to know all about you. Getting to like you ... Sorry. Occupational hazard here. Now and again we all just burst into one of many scripts, songs, roles we have all played. Pathetic, I know. Musicals are a particular favourite - The man that hath no music in himself nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils. Anyhow, beats playing 'me', whoever 'me' is. Not Don though. He doesn't do luvvie. Years as a stage manager were like a shot of immunity. He lives in the real world and grounds us all. He's as normal as it gets in here. Our rock. Our conscience. Our memory. Mine's bloody awful. *(He laughs and then speaks the lyrics).* Getting to like you. That's rich. That's what all of us really want. To be liked. The great character flaw of all luvvies. The need to be loved. The need to be yourself never crops up thankfully. Too frightened to be yourself. Shit scared to be me. Bugger. No confessions I said. So, 44 years on the stage and 5 years 3 months and...13 days penal servitude in here. No family. No marriage, no children... no goods, no chattels, no ox, no ass... Lots of yesterdays, who knows how many tomorrows. *(Singing again).* Too many mornings... Stephen Sondheim. Musical Theatre. Seemed appropriate somehow. Right, I'd like to speak to my solicitor now. *(He laughs).* Sorry. Humour. Fills the void created by awkwardness. They're all a good bunch here. Apart from, well. Colin can be...well ...hurtful. He picks. Finds flaws. Takes pleasure. Discovers weakness. Exposes secrets. Teatime I think. Must do this again. White. One sugar. There's a love. *(He picks up his paper and begins to read. The interview is most certainly over).*

EXTRACT #4 - Tom

Tom *(He is stood in the dressing gown and slippers from earlier. He is drying a tea cup with a tea towel).* What do you mean Kelly do I mind talking about myself? You can clearly see from my conservative attire I am a violet of the shrinking variety. *(He strikes a camp/OTT pose).* Not. Don't worry love, I don't bite. Don? I met Don when he was ASM at the Vic. By god he was attractive in those days. Surprised aren't you? Thick wavy hair and steely eyes. Utterly wasted on an unappreciative, heterosexual world. If he told you to be quiet in the bloody wings you did. Moved here when his wife died. That nearly killed him. He spent the first six months keeping himself to himself. You could tell every day he had been crying though. Still does now and again without any warning. Emotional type. He has a daughter and son-in-law you know. Right pair of gobshites. It kills him that they ignore his calls and when they do visit, it's clearly a real hardship for them. *(Sarcastically).* Not. Can't wait to get out the bloody door. But he won't have a word said against them. He worships her. You just want to cry. You can understand family ignoring the likes of me. No? Well I can. Trust me. But not Don. He says I should still be working. Says there's still at least one good drama left in me.

Me. An old fag-been. I only ever wanted just one serious role. Panto, soaps and shitty adverts was my fayre. The low point was being a dancing courgette on the Benny Hill show. But at least it paid for this. This. *(He looks around).* Colin? We've known each other for years, loved each other, hated each other. Alan? Alan, Alan, Alan. An enigma, wrapped up in a puzzle and dressed in a sequin ball gown of the 'Emperors' New Clothes' variety. He's that far back in the wardrobe he's in bloody Narnia. Alan will never be at peace. *(He's distracted).* Christ I've nearly rubbed the bloody glaze off this cup. Alan, yes. If you do nothing else Kelly, look out for him. We take him and his baggage for granted but he worries me. There's something else going on inside him. No, I've said enough on the subject. But if you hide something for that long, it's got to take its toll somehow, some time. And it's a toll we will all pay... and if you stay here long enough, so will you. Because at some point we will either be one of two things to you: your living or your life. And one way or another, it will come at a price.

EXTRACT #5 – Tom, Colin, Alan, Don, Kelly

Alan Oh, there must be something else on TV than this. What is entertaining about people showing their bits to a doctor and several million people watching?

Tom I suppose if it helps them. It's made me feel better just knowing I've not got a willy like that.

Colin No comment.

Tom What happens on tour stays on tour!

Colin Precisely.

Kelly Shall I tell you from the TV guide what's on?

Colin Deep joy.

Kelly Seven o'clock is that new reality talent show about bus drivers wanting to be rock stars.

Alan Why do they call it reality TV when everybody is pretending to be something they're not, in the hope they will end up being something they don't have the talent to be?

Colin You managed it for 40 years.

A/K/Tm Ooooo!

Tom Bitch.

Colin Queen.

Tom Slag.

Colin Whore.

Alan Enough, for goodness sake.

Don enters, fully dressed except for his trousers. Alan, Colin, Kelly and Tom are concentrating on the TV.

Don *(He also concentrates on the TV).* Evening all. *(All continue to watch the TV and don't look at him).*

Tom Don?

Don Yes?

Tom Trousers.

Don *(He doesn't look down).* Bugger. *(He exits).*

The others continue watching TV whilst talking.

Kelly Is Don alright?

Alan Don't worry, he's not lost his marbles.

Colin And even if he had, under no circumstances do we mention it to VT, understand?

Kelly Yes but?

Colin Understand?

Kelly Yes!

Tom To answer your question Kelly: because this is a retirement home, not a nursing home.

Alan And first sign of 'barmy'...you're out.

Kelly It seems like most people here have got their marbles. You know, there are no real barmy ones.

Colin Well. Thank you for your clinical assessment.

Alan I don't know though. You remember that quite dapper chap last year?

Tom Oh yes. Very well to do. Ex RADA teacher. Room 11. A Capricorn on the cusp. We thought he was very intelligent until Don found him struggling with the remote control.

Kelly Were the buttons too small?

Alan No, he was trying to get BBC 1 on the fish tank.

Tom Bless. He thought he was watching 'Wildlife on One'. Thought the little deep sea diver was David Attenborough on location.

Colin Oh come on. There must be something to watch. Are there no films on?

Kelly (Reading). The Great Escape?
A/C/Tm No, bloody hell, how old is that, how old are you! etc
Tom Oh I don't know. Might give us some ideas!
Kelly What about that film, 'The Queen'?
Tom I could have been me in that.
Alan Wouldn't that mean calling it 'The Old Queen'?
Tom Careful what you wish for.

Gordon enters carrying a box.

Kelly Here's one. What about 'Free Willy'?

Pause. It's all in their silent expressions.

Colin (He realises Gordon is there and pounces). What do you think Gordon? Gordon?

Gordon Eh?

Colin (Walking close up to him). You look like the type of man who'd like a bit of free willy.

Pause and then stifled giggles. Gordon is embarrassed – again – and bumbles out to safety.

Kelly (Calling after him). Gordon. (To Colin). Why must you be so cruel to him?

Colin (Pointedly and very deliberate to Kelly). Because I can. (He sits).

Alan goes as if to speak. Colin cuts him dead with a look. Kelly changes channels on the TV and after a few uncomfortable seconds.

Colin No. Leave it on this. The Remembrance Parade.

Tom Oh, look at the Queen. Good for her age. God save the Queen! – no, God save all Queens!

Alan I can't find me glasses what is she doing?

Tom She's laying a wreath at the senokot.

Colin Taph, Taph! For God's sake.

Alan The Queen's Scottish?

Tom No, she's never Scottish. Anyhow, 'Taff' would make her Welsh. But she does wear a lot of tartan.

Alan Och aye. Sometimes she looks like bloody Lorna Doone! And what was that musical?

Kelly Macbeth?

Alan, Colin and Tom immediately respond, screaming wildly OTT, bizarrely camp, frenetically theatrical at the mention of 'The Scottish Play'. Tom kneels down and blesses himself with the sign of the cross over and over again repeating to himself: "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!". Alan shouts out: "break a leg" over and over. Colin spins around on the spot, spits on the floor and repeats this saying "Thrice around the circle bound, evil sink into the ground". Kelly watches them bewildered.

Tom (Breaking the moment and snapping them back to their pseudo-reality). Oh, I remember. It wasn't Lorna Doone, it was Brigadoon! (He starts singing). Brigadoon, Brigadoon...

A/C (Joining in). Brigadoon, Brigadoon...

Kelly is lost by it all. Alan, Colin and Tom resume their seats and start watching the TV again.

Colin Who is that dreadful woman who's stood next to Princess whats-her-face?

Alan She's got some money.

Tom She's got some testosterone as well by the look of that 'tache.

Colin She's only rich because she's had a few husbands.

Alan Aye, but none of 'em, were hers!

Kelly Is she a bit of a slag then?

Tom Oh no, no. More of a lot of a slag.

Don *(He enters now wearing his trousers and looks at the TV. He collects a dining room chair and sits next to Tom).* Lovely, I do like a bit of good old British state occasion. Oh look Tom, that woman looks like you in, what was it called when you played the female impersonator?

Tom La Cage Aux Folles.

A/C/D *(Singing).* Oh Tranny Boy, the tights, the tights are calling.

Tom So funny.

Kelly Glad to see you never dress up like a woman now.

Tom Not on my own then am I?

EXTRACT #6 – Tony

Tony

Well, well. I didn't expect to receive the same pleasurable treatment as the residents, Kelly. Don't think Julie included me in your one to ones, but I'm not complaining. It won't take long. Been here for ten years now. Bought the place for Julie. Was an old sanatorium-come-asylum when we got it. Not changed much in that respect. Still full of bloody lunatics. Present company excepted. They don't like me very much. The residents. They've inherited that from Julie. Sorry, I won't insult your intelligence. Doesn't take a genius to figure that we are no longer love's young dream. Never were actually. Marriage of convenience was the old fashioned term that was used. She should have married somebody her own age not an old git like me. She used to refer to me as her soul mate – for a short while. It didn't take me long to realise that there were two ways of spelling 'soul'. And by the time I did, I didn't have a 'sole mate' left. Bad joke. Just like us. One twelve-year-old bad joke. But at least the business needs me. And do make sure you stay on the right side of old VT ... ah, sorry. Yes, I do know what they call her. Bloody funny if you ask me. If you need anything, just stop by. My door is always open as they say. And if you're lucky, it might not stay open. *(He gives a rather slimy laugh, whilst adjusting his tie as if he has finished. He continues).* I do try hard with them all you know. Try to help them belong. That's all one can ever hope for. To belong. Just being useful isn't enough sometimes. Don is an old gent isn't he? Tom, well, is Tom. But harmless. Alan is, God knows; he certainly doesn't. And Colin is a man with whom you have to achieve the impossible by staying on his right side. And if you can figure which aspect of the nasty old bastard that is, then you're a better man than me Gunga Din. Well, not 'man' ... clearly. Steer clear of him Kelly. You'll only end up being the loser and believe me, one member of that club is enough. I should know. And thank you for one thing, you're the only one in this place not to have told me to sod off. Yet. I believe the world is a stage where every man must play a part, but my part is a sad one. Shakespeare. Playwright. Apparently. Don't really understand a word of it. Just like life really. Don't you think?

EXTRACT #7 – Tony

Don

I think I might make a phone call to see if I can make it happen. *(He picks up a cordless phone on the side table by Tom's chair and dials a number. As the conversation gradually develops, the others stop chatting and listen).* Hello Kevin its dad. Dad. Donald. How are you? Oh. Are you feeling...right...can I just have a very quick word with...hello love, it's your Dad. Well, you know thought I'd give you a call today. Why? With it being my birthday of course. No love, I don't want anything. I just thought it would be nice to have a quick chat and...I'm sorry...just thought I'd save you calling and...yes, I know how busy you are...no, I didn't realise you would be eating...sorry...how are the children? Would it be possible to have just a very quick word with...no, alright. Will there be any chance of you calling to...no, sorry, I understand. I'm just having a little party here for my...well, I paid for it...don't get worked up dear, it was only a few pounds...I didn't think I needed to check with you and...it's just sandwiches and...but I only wanted to say...hello. Hello? Hello? *(The call has clearly been terminated. And then, in a much brighter voice when he realises he is being observed).*

Oh, that will be lovely. Oh, you didn't need to spend that much. Course you can come around. Anytime. Yes, super. And I love you to. Goodbye love, goodbye. *(He ends the call and turns to find everybody in silence staring at him. He realises that his charade has not convinced anybody. He begins buoyant but gets upset, a little breathless by the end).* Mary and Kevin send their love to you all. Sorry that they can't make it. They've been trying to get through on the phone you see ... all day to wish me happy birthday but the line was engaged. So lucky to have family aren't I. *(He turns and looks out of the window. He is distant).* So lucky to have... people, who care. And that I mean so much to...a great comfort. Knowing you are remembered, loved. Not a burden. Not ignored. Useless. Forgotten. Already buried. *(He turns back to them).* Think I'll just nip to my room for, for.. I think I need my spray. Won't be very...please excuse me. *(He exits quickly, clearly distressed).*

EXTRACT #8 – Kelly and Don

Kelly I didn't take that money – and you didn't put in my apron.
Don I know.
Kelly Why? Why did he do it?
Don Anger, loneliness, habit, power, but above all of them, fear.
Kelly And I've caused all that?
Don Oh no. *(Smiling)*. Kelly, how have you managed thus far in life so innocent? *(They hug each other. He breathes out, as if a little breathless)*. Think I need my spray. *(He goes to exit. Then stops and turns)*.
Don And thank you.
Kelly For what?
Don I saw you Kelly, after everybody had gone last night. I saw you cleaning the seat Alan had been sitting in; saw you this morning, first thing, fitting a new cushion cover which I assume you bought on your way home.
Kelly I...
Don And I knew then the change in you. Like was said to you all those months ago. If we're not your living, we become your life. We're not just a job any longer are we Kelly? You care. Care enough to conceal that Alan is incontinent... *(he gets a little overcome)*... and care enough to protect the most important thing of all. The one thing that all of us fight to retain above all else. Dignity. *(Kelly is speechless)*. And I knew if I claimed to have put that money in your apron, the truth would out.
Kelly I don't know what to say.
Don Then doesn't that prove we have both done a good thing. Welcome to the firm my love. *(He kisses her on the forehead, breathes out heavily again)*. Think I need to nip to my room. *(He goes to exit, pauses without turning back)*. What would I have given for a daughter like you. *(He exits)*.

EXTRACT #9 – Colin

Colin

Good morning everybody. Following the death of his son, Wordsworth wrote in a letter to a friend - For myself, dear friend, I dare not say in what state of mind I am; I loved him with the utmost love of which my soul is capable, and he is taken from me - yet in the agony of my spirit in surrendering such a treasure I feel a thousand times richer than if I had never possessed it. And it was with that sentiment and with a very heavy heart that we all heard of the passing away of this very dear friend to us all. He was one of those rare breeds in theatre who had no acquaintances, just friends. And in Don's circle of influence, there were no strangers, just friends he was yet to make. Don contributed something to all of us in his own unique way and acknowledging and remembering that one thing, ensures that the memory of such a fine man never fades. (*For a moment, briefly, he is a little overcome*). The last time Don and I spoke, well, it was not how I would have preferred. So I dare not leave him with words of mine, but with words from one we shared a life with and a love of.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,

On my black coffin let there be strown.

Not a friend, not a friend greet

My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown.

A thousand thousand sighs to save,

Lay me, O, where.

Sad true lover never find my grave,

To weep there.

EXTRACT #10 – Julie, Mary, Kevin, Gordon, Julie, Tom, Colin, Alan, Tony

Julie ... And so in closing, I just wanted to say that Don will be a great loss to us all, and The Beeches will not be the same without him. Thank you. Oh, and the buffet is in the dining room when you are ready. *(Polite applause. No response from Mary and Kevin who remain as unmoved as ever. As Julie passes them, she speaks with them).* I do appreciate the family accepting our invitation to come back to The Beeches for this small reception. I know the residents feel...

Kevin You did say there was no charge didn't you?

Julie Oh yes, yes.

Kevin Then it's alright then.

Gordon approaches with two glasses of orange juice.

Mary *(Abruptly).* We don't want anything. Especially that.

Gordon *(Chuckling).* Pity.

Julie Well, if you need anything before you go, just let me know.

Mary Such as?

Gordon Toilet?

Julie That will be all thank you Gordon.

Gordon *(Walking away).* Gobshites.

Julie I mean, if there is anything of your fathers you might want to take with you today?

All are now clearly listening as they quietly chat.

Mary Does he have any money here?

Tom Disgusting.

Julie I don't think so, unless he had any in his room. We don't handle cash for the residents. They manage their own financial affairs. Kelly, did Don ever mention anything about money to you?

Kelly No, I don't think so.

Kevin And why would you know about his money?

Kelly I don't.

Kevin I bet.

Mary We will want to go through his things to remove anything of value – security you see.

Tom Oh, we see.

Kevin Eh?

Tom Still struggling with those letters? Bless.

Julie No problem at all. Just let me know and I will take you up there.

Mary Which room is it?

Kelly Which room is it? You mean you don't know which room your father was in. He'd lived here for seven and a half years!

Tom Leave it Kelly.

Kelly No I won't leave it.

Colin Yes she will.

Kelly I don't need your help.

Colin No. But they do. *(Kelly is taken aback by this).*

Alan *(In his own world).* Don was a dear friend, a surrogate family to me. You see I never really hear anything from my family because ...

Kevin What are you going on about you stupid old fool?

Kelly Don't you speak to Alan like that.

Colin Right. You just listen to me.

Mary No. We've had enough of you lot and your rubbish. It was because of you and your precious theatre that I never had a father. It was because of you and your precious theatre that Mum and me were always on our own. Off he went, gallivanting around the country. Only came back to give her money, get her pregnant and tell his big stories about the people he met, the famous people he knew and talk about you lot. You lot. Pathetic. A bunch of old has beens who live in your own little world.

Alan But we love Don.

Mary Aye. I bet you did. And its 'loved'. He's dead. Freaks. Living in your own little cess pit getting up to god knows what.

Julie Can I just say...

Kevin My wife's talking so shut up.

Tony I say...

Kevin Shut it!

Mary We want nothing of his, just whatever money he's got and anything that can be sold.

Tom But what about his collection? His programmes, memorabilia, a life time's worth of memories?

Mary His memories, not mine. Burn it.

Everybody is mortified and begin to protest.

Kevin *(Shouting)*. Shut it!

Everybody stops talking.

Mary 'The firm'. I know what he called you. You all make me sick. We scrimp and save for a living and he lives here being waited on hand and foot.

Colin Don paid his way.

Mary With money that should have been mine! My mother dies and who got it all? Him. What did I get? Nothing.

Kelly Don would have given you anything.

Mary Well I didn't want anything off him.

Tom Well make your bloody mind up.

Kevin One more word out of you. *(Gordon walks into the middle of it all)*. What do you want freak.

Gordon Don was my friend too.

Kevin What? Shut it. Come on Mary. Let's get out of here as soon as we've been through all his things. At least it's the last time we'll be in this dump.

Colin Ironic that it's the longest time you've spent here. Don't let us delay your grave robbing.

Kevin *(He turns and starts walking towards Colin. Instinctively, they all step between them to protect Colin)*. Pathetic.

Mary Come on love. They're not worth it.

Gordon He left something y'know. For his favourite son-in-law. Something he could never give you himself.

Kevin What?

Gordon Over there. *(He points in the direction behind them with his thumb. Mary looks in the direction in which Gordon is pointing and walks to the back. All the others, except Kevin, also turn and move to join Mary. To Kevin)*. An overdue present from Don, Gobshite. *(He promptly punches Kevin in the stomach causing him to reel back and fall in a chair, dazed)*.

Mary I can't see anything.

Gordon Neither can bollocks here

Mary *(She hears Kevin's groans and goes to him)*. Kevin! Kevin! What's the matter?

Gordon *(Theatrically and very OTT)*. Overcome with emotion.

Tom Oh Gordon, you old queen!

Colin *(Realising what has just happened)*. Would I be correct in thinking Gordon, that with all that's gone on, it's all, how shall I say, 'just hit him'?

Gordon Where?

Kelly I don't think you're as daft as you make out.

Gordon Who? *(He winks at Kelly)*.

Tony *(Helping Kevin up and out)*. Come along Kevin. Let's get you some fresh air... and maybe a glass of orange.

Kevin *(Groggily)*. No!

Tony Certainly. Bring you around in a flash ... or should that be a flush. *(They exit)*.

Mary You lot won't get away with this. *(Backing away)*.

Colin Get away with what Mary? Love?

Tom Caring?

Julie Respect?

Alan Dignity?

Kelly Friendship?

Gordon Kindness?

Colin Belonging?

Tom Happiness?

Julie Family?

Alan Laughter?

Kelly Security?

Gordon Home?

Julie You know what Mary? There is something he could never say to you, but I feel that we should do now that he has gone.

Mary What?

All Piss off! *(Pause. Mary exits in a rush)*.

Julie Is this what it always feels like? You know, how you lot always are?

Colin A little bit.

Julie Bloody marvellous! *(She exits)*.

Tom Come on Alan, let's get you some buffet. You too Gordon. *(They exit leaving Colin and Kelly alone, looking at each other)*.

Kelly I'm going to the dining room. God knows what will happen with those three in there. *(She goes to exit)*. Would you like something to eat? *(Colin nods and as she is about to exit)*.

Colin Yes – please. *(Kelly turns to him. He is perhaps embarrassed at himself and speaks like the old Colin, abruptly)*. Bring it to the conservatory. *(He exits)*.

Kelly *(She smiles. To herself)*. You're welcome.

EXTRACT #11 – Alan

Alan Hello, is that directory enquiries? Hello. I'm trying to contact my family who live in the Gloucester area. What name is it? I suppose you must get a lot of older people calling who can't. Name please? You see I haven't seen them in such a long time and I just want to...their name please? Yes. That's the problem. You'll think this is most peculiar. I woke up in the middle of the night and that was my problem, I can't remember...their name please? You see, I have the phone book in front of me and I know this sounds bizarre, but I've been looking through it all night thinking it might jog my memory about what they're called. I think I've looked on every, single ... are they the same surname as me?

Yes, I think they are, they must be, why didn't I think of that, but that's the problem you see, I'm just struggling a little to remember...which name please? (*He becomes upset*). Look, just saying over and over the same question won't help because I can't, I can't ... what? Which town please? Which one did I say? Did I say one? I went to school in Lincoln if that helps. Father had a grocer's shop on ... Mother had beautiful blonde hair and had a voice like ... and my eldest brother was a rear gunner for bomber command and died during the ... (*His demeanour changes. He becomes angry and distraught*). ... I just need to speak to someone, anyone ... anybody, somebody please tell me who I, who I...hello, hello.

EXTRACT #12 – Colin (Tom and Gordon)

Colin *(Slowly gathering pace, getting more pointed, sarcastic, more vitriolic).* So clever, so wise, so mature. You waltz around here expecting floods of tears, wailing old fairies air kissing memories and yearning to be understood. Sliding around like some pain-snail, carrying your little house of angst on your back and trying to off-load it on us. Because you understand, because you've experienced. And now somebody you know has died, we all have to play out a soap episode that allegedly paints a picture of real life. What a farce. The telly parodies life and we re-enact the parody because we have forgotten what it is to live. And now, you stand there expecting the world to be the same as the telly because to you, that's life. Well. No. We are life, this is life. Life is about dying. Death is about living. You live with your own pain and don't infect us with it. *(Kelly begins to cry).*

Tom Colin...

Colin *(Angrily).* Shut it! *(He pushes Tom, who falls to the floor and then he turns back to Kelly again).* Oh, have I upset you? Have I spoilt your little illusion of what a crock of shit living can be? Well, this isn't Citizen's Advice or The Samaritans. I'm not here to listen and stroke your hand about how bad you feel; how upset you are. This is a rest home for old fuckers that are waiting for heavenly 'ring and ride' to turn up. And you are the minimum wage girlie employed to brew up, mop up sick and spray air freshener to mask the smell of death. *(Kelly sits, still crying).* Get up! *(Grabbing her arms and making her stand – he is in a rage).*

Gordon *(Approaching Colin from behind).* Colin, just...

Colin Get off me! *(He pushes Gordon who falls heavily into the armchair behind him, next to Tom. Julie enters having heard the commotion).* You're not upset for Don, you're upset for yourself. You expect everybody else to play along and carry your baggage on the guilt trip you've set out on. Grief is about loss, but with the likes of you, it's not for the one who's snuffed it. It's the loss of the opportunity to do all the things you meant to do and now can't do because the selfish bastard has gone and died. You're not ridden with grief you're ridden with guilt like all of us are. Your tears aren't for Alan, they're for you. *(Kelly screams and lets rip with a slap across his face. He falls into the armchair onto Gordon).*

EXTRACT #13 – Tom

Tom

Good morning everybody. Here we are again. Same people, different tears. I have been asked to deliver a tribute at today's service concerning our dear friend, Alan. Before doing so, I must pass on the apologies of Colin. He is not very well and has asked me to do this on his behalf. Not like him to be under the weather or to miss this service, but he has been told to stay in bed by the doctor. In addition, Kelly asked to be remembered to you all as she has an interview for a job in London. Well, an audition actually for a part in a play. Lucky cow. Sorry Reverend. As you know, Colin has always written something when one of the firm has passed away. Shit, I best double check he's not written one for me already. Sorry Reverend. It seems strange standing here in front of a wooden box, knowing it contains one of the best friends I ever had. He always said he wanted me to say something when this day came because he said I made people laugh; more importantly, I made him laugh. I hope to Christ he doesn't laugh now. Sorry Reverend. Alan and I met when we were both playing pantomime dames at Morecambe. So please, if I say anything like: "I can't believe Alan is dead", I don't want anybody shouting out: "Oh no he isn't"; and certainly not: "He's behind you". Sorry again Reverend. Can't help it. Well, at least I haven't said 'fuck'. *(He couldn't help himself. He mouths the words: "Sorry Reverend")*. Shakespeare was as much part of our lives as we were to each other. So from us all I simply say - Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

EXTRACT #14 – Kelly

Kelly

Not having a normal family always made me feel like a freak, like I deserved to be in a home when I was a kid. I had that feeling for years. That was until I came here. Seeing the family, you had all made for yourselves because you had none. And then the ones who were family were more like strangers because they only came to see you when they could be arsed. Visiting for them was a duty, a burden. They didn't care and because of that neither did any of you. The only thing you had in common with family was a name. I came to despise them for what they represented, how they could treat something so precious with such disregard. At first, I wanted to make up for what they weren't doing for all of you because I felt it was my job. But without any warning, the job disappeared and I crossed the line.

Don said it would. This, all of you, you weren't a job any longer. This home became my home and none of you were residents any more. You became the nearest to family I could ever have and without warning, without planning, without knowing, you became family; my family. I know, in your own way, you never meant the things you said to me. I could see it in your eyes. But no matter what ever passed between us, I knew that you were trying to toughen me up in a way. Prepare me for making my own way. I only realised that when I had to stand up for myself and realised I could. I'm rambling, but what I meant to say is, it's not just respect, it's not just caring; you're not just a friend. You must have written to me every week since I left. I really do love you Colin. You've given me so much and you don't even know it. Somebody once said that you're the sum of all the people and things that you experience in your life. And because of that, I know you're a part of me and always will be. Just like Alan, Don and Tommy. You can't forget something that's a part of you. And no matter how low or hard things might get, I can always think of four old buggers who were the nearest to a family I could ever hope for; and any one of them that I would be proud to call Dad. *(Colin's hand drops to the side)*. You know, when, if, I ever get married, I want Tommy to give me away, apart from the fact that he'd end up having a posher frock than me... what do you think Colin? Colin? *(She stands in front of him. She is quiet for a moment. She turns to the window and draws the curtains. She kneels/sits next to him, takes his hand and places it on his lap)*.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.