

LETTERS TO OLIVE

Adapted screenplay

by

Darragh Patrick Quinn

Based on

Sea of love, sea of loss

: Letters to Olive

By

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EXT. ROSSLARE STRAND. JUNE 29TH 2001. DAY.

A married couple in their fifties are standing on the beach. JOHN, a tall, heavy-set man, and OLIVE, a tall, slender elegant woman in sunglasses. John, fully clothed and smoking a cigar, is wearing sunglasses and a towel is draped over one shoulder. Olive takes off her sunglasses and together with her sarong hands them to her husband to mind.

He holds his wife's hand as she steps over the rope onto the sand. Smiling broadly at the sight of the waves she strides towards them. She dons her swimming cap and looks back at her husband as she tucks her hair underneath. Tip-toeing across the hot sand, Olive's hands wave madly in the air, signifying the heat of the soft white sand against the soles of her bare feet. She shouts back at him :

OLIVE

I'll probably be back in a minute if the water's too cold.

She enters the water, wades out to find her depth and then launches into a gentle breast stroke. Once. Twice. Then nothing . . . Her body is floating face-down, motionless.

JOHN (V.O)

No! Jesus no! Something is wrong. *You're not moving.*
Please God no!

EXT. BEACH. WATER'S EDGE. DAY.

John runs towards the water shouting his wife's name over and over. People look up, noticing something is wrong. He runs into the waves and pulls his wife's body back to the shore. People run to assist him -two doctors, a nurse and a lifeguard.

JOHN (V.O)

I'll never forget how light you felt as I pulled you limp and unconscious from the water. Help arrives as I reach the water's edge. Two doctors. A nurse. A lifeguard. They take over. I watch helplessly, clutching your shower cap. I want to protest that they're hurting you. Please don't go Olive! Please don't leave me. You can't be dead. You can't be! But I know you are.

INT. AMBULANCE. EVENING.

John sits staring at Olive. Numb, shocked, he repeats the mantra "Sacred heart of Jesus, I place her in your eternal loving care."

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM. EVENING.

John sits stroking Olive's arm as the staff try to resuscitate her. Then he strokes her bedraggled hair. People offer their support, everyone is so kind. The chaplain gives her the last rites.

INT. HOTEL ROOM. NIGHT.

John sits with the chaplain. He is at his wits' end with the day that has been. But phone calls have to be made. He picks up the phone in his left hand and takes the receiver off its cradle with his right.

JOHN (V.O)

This is unreal. It can't be happening, but it *is* happening. Now the phone calls must begin. My brother Noel. Your brother Peter. The kids. *Oh Jesus, the kids.*

EXT. BEACH HOTEL. NIGHT.

A thunderstorm breaks and it begins to pour down.

JOHN (V.O)

Now the phone calls I dread making. The children.

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

John lies awake in his bed, unable to sleep. He looks at the clock by his bed. Five A.M. and not a sign of sleep

or tiredness in the near future. He gets up and finds a writing pad and a pen. He sits down and begins writing. The thunderstorm outside mirrors the coming storm of pain and loss now beginning to grip him.

JOHN (V.O)

This is unreal. Surreal. Unbelievable. It is the end of the most unimaginably traumatic day of my life. My wife of thirty three years, my beautiful one, is gone. When I close my eyes and think of you, I can see only the vision I first laid eyes on all those years ago. It feels not like yesterday, but now, *the here and now*. A vision unattainable. Above *my station*, were ladies like you, I had no right to entertain thoughts of being anything other than your secret admirer. You were so lovely then, and we were so young, and everything was possible ...

(BEAT)

EXT. BLANCHARDSTOWN SANATORIUM. DAY.

Montage of images of the hospital and grounds : Twelve, single-storey units in the outlying wooded grounds of the main, three-storey hospital building. Each unit consisted of 6 x 6-bed wards, 2 singles and a double, with a common room for television. Lollipop stick models are prominent in all interior shots of the units (throughout the whole piece). Simple boats, fruit baskets and houses. Some more adventurous attempts such as bridges and towers can be seen.

JOHN (V.O.)

The James Connolly Memorial Hospital was established in the 1950s along similar lines to the other Sanatoria of the time ; Merlin Park, Galway and Ardkeen, Waterford - in order to combat the rampant Tuberculosis of the time. It consisted of a three-storey main hospital building, with twelve forty-bed units in the outlying woodlands - segregated by gender (except on childrens wards) but representing all strata of society. Not exactly a *des-res*, but it was where I would meet the love of my life.

INT. BLANCHARDSTOWN SANATORIUM. DAY.

Montage of shots : A nurse attending sleeping patients in a ward with the verandah doors open. Lollipop stick models in abundance again; A shot of one patient

listening to an illicit radio transmission ; A shot of a patient listening to their headset and reciting German ; A shot of patients intently gluing their lollipop sticks together ; A shot of some patients playing cards.

JOHN (V.O.)

Treatment consisted of medication, rest and fresh air - lots and lots of fresh air. Dead of winter and the verandah doors would be left open at night. Patients were allowed to smoke - in a hospital for a disease of the lung - and with the doors left open, we were evidently encouraged to catch double pneumonia also. But rest did indeed mean rest. Transistor radios were banned. Some services were available over the hospital radio however. French and German lessons to keep the brain keen. A request show on a Tuesday, which would play a key part in the wooing of Olive McKeever. The importance of lollipop model-making (and the accompanying glue fumes) was no doubt of paramount importance in the battle against Tuberculosis. Lollipop sticks were made abundantly available to us. Penny-in games of cards punctuated the boredom and frustration of being incarcerated for nine months, and courtesy of an understanding porter - we had a direct line to the village bookmaker. It reminded me of my boarding school days, from which I was only six years removed. It was a half-life in the half-light. A melting pot of frustration, loneliness, lingering death, fun, friction, bonhomie. And only a field away was Unit 4 ... and the vision in the black leather coat ...

INT. UNIT 2. Ward 5. JOHN'S WARD. DAY.

Feeding time at the zoo. The residents of John's ward are all by their beds awaiting their evening meal. ANDY, a big burly Dublin man in his forties. SRI, a slightly-built Indonesian, also in his forties. PIERCE, another Dubliner in his twenties, also slightly-built. DANNY, a stocky Dub in his thirties. BRENDAN, a quiet, overweight Corkman who wears glasses, is in his late fifties. BRIDIE, the dinner lady arrives with her trolley and begins removing the lids from their hot plates. She serves Sri first, taking secret pleasure in the knowledge of the upset she is about to cause him. He shakes his head.

SRI

What a *huge* surprise ... what a shock ... potatoes again! I am truly blessed to be eating *potatoes* for breakfast, dinner and tea. Never boring, no way. And this is *pork*!

This is *pork*, I am Muslim! This is not joke *I am Muslim* !
No! No! Bring me something else I cannot eat this!
Please!

PIERCE

(Shaking his head)

Bring him a thimble of rice and a rat, will ya Bridie?
Get 'im a length o' rope too so he can hang himself ! ye
don't get spuds for bleedin' breakfast, ye never got
spuds for breakfast, cop on !

SRI

(Pointing his finger at Pierce)

Shut your face and piss your bed. Pissy! Go on! Piss your
bed again like baby !

Brendan looks shocked.

ANDY

Pipe down Pierce! Sri, watch your language in front of
ladies!

BRIDIE smiles at Andy.

ANDY
(softly)

That's the second time this month they've given Sri pork
Bridie, will ye have a word with them pet ? He went
without last time.

Andy holds Bridie gently by the elbow. Bridie blushes,
she's fond of the burly Dub and Andy knows it.

BRIDIE

I will Andy ... sorry about that Sri (looking at Sri)... ah
you're a good man Andy ... we could use more like ye in
this world ... there was a poor young girl raped in the
Phoenix park the other night. What's the world comin' to?

JOHN

God that's terrible, did they catch him ?

BRIDIE

Did they wha', the cops are bleedin' useless.

DANNY

Do ye know what I'd do with fellas like that ?

Danny doesn't often say more than he has to, his head generally buried in a book or a crossword - but when he speaks, the ward listens.

BRENDAN

What's that Danny ?

DANNY

I'd give him the PPG ... (he pauses for dramatic effect) ... the Public Penile Guillotine ... you've got the lad in stocks right, like medieval times, yeah? He's got his hands and head locked up like this into the stocks right?

Danny cocks his head forward so that he looks as though he's riding a chopper but looking down at his crotch.

There's a mini guillotine in front of his chest, right? And his pecker pops out the little hole there. But here's the thing. There's a little crocodile in the basket down below ... so not only does he have to watch his langer get lopped off, but he has to watch it get gobbled up by a baby crocodile as well ...

Pierce and Bridie roar laughing. The rest just smile.

INT. LOBBY. BLANCHARDSTOWN HOSPITAL. DAY.

The lobby of the main hospital building is busier than usual. A group of patients are awaiting *grade* - to see if they have improved sufficiently to be allowed more freedoms and privileges, including brief trips outside the hospital grounds.

JOHN (V.O)

Trips to the main building for a swab test were every few weeks. Not exactly art class, but it broke up the otherwise monotonous tedium of sanatorium life. Coughing up samples of sputum, which would then be tested

positive, or hopefully, negative. Only for reasons pertaining to one's *grade* - or one's suitability to leave the grounds on day trips - or for something as mouthwatering as a lung abscission, would one be summoned to the hospital.

INT. LOBBY. BLANCHARDSTOWN HOSPITAL. DAY.

Two 'normals' enter, a man and his wife, holding handkerchiefs to their mouths. They look lost, and walk hesitantly towards Andy, the big, burly Dub. Keeping his handkerchief to his mouth, the visiting man enquires as to the whereabouts of Patient X.

VISITOR

Excuse me, could you tell me where I could find James O' Connor please?

Andy quickly whips a handkerchief out of *his* pocket and puts it over *his* mouth, mimicking the visitors.

ANDY

Sorry sir, no, they had to move him out of here. Too much infection, yeah. Very bad here, yeah.

Looking horrified, James O'Connor's visitors leave in a hurry. John barrels through double doors in the background, not realising Olive is behind them. The swinging doors almost make contact with her. He doesn't stop to apologise as he races to hear the conclusion of the Leopardstown Chase.

JOHN (V.O.)

Rarely were such trips exciting ... but one day ... I saw the new force of gravitation in my universe. I saw Olive for the first time. A vision in a black, leather coat. I'd like to say that time slowed down and there was only you, dear heart ... but I slammed a door in your face rushing to hear the climax of the Leopardstown Chase. Arkle defeated Height of Fashion by a neck.

INT. UNIT 2. JOHN'S WARD. DAY.

NURSE DILLON enters the ward, a stout, large-chested middle-aged woman, on the prowl for radio devices, contraband, and to encourage the men to rest. The lads are all playing cards. Except for Danny the optimist. Danny writes a letter once a week courting the beautiful women of the world.

NURSE DILLON

C'mon now lads ... *rest means rest* ...

She notices Danny is the only one not playing cards.

NURSE DILLON

Writing to your mother Danny ?

(Jeering from the lads)

ANDY

Did ye not know about our Danny, Sister ? Danny the optimist!

NURSE DILLON

What's that?

Danny smiles but says nothing.

ANDY

Every week our Danny writes a letter, courting the most beautiful women in the world, don't ye know. He reckons it's just mathematics, just a matter of time before he snags a winner. Isn't that right Danny ?

NURSE DILLON

(Laughing)

Who is it *this* week, Danny ?

The card game stops briefly and the lads all look over expectantly at Danny.

DANNY

Jackie K.

(Gasps of astonishment from the lads)

ANDY

Ah Jaysus Danny, she's just had her husband's brains
blown all over her dress.

DANNY

Exactly my man ... she's feeling *vulnerable*.

The lads all laugh, Nurse Dillon just smiles, shaking her
head. The card game continues.

ANDY

Who's it into ?

John catches Nurse Dillon's eye.

JOHN

Afternoon, Nurse Dillon!

NURSE DILLON

How are you today, John?

JOHN

Oh, very well, Nurse. Very well *indeed*.

NURSE DILLON

Ah! Why so chirpy? Who are we in love with today then?

(More jeering from the lads, Andy sings "On-lyyy
youuuu!")

JOHN

Who's that glamorous blonde over on Unit 4?

NURSE DILLON

Smitten by Sister McKeever are we John? Oh dear...

The lads are all hunched around a makeshift card table.
John looks absolutely stunned upon hearing the object of
his desire has taken up a vocation. He doesn't spot Nurse

Dillon's mischievous wink to the rest of the lads. A final round of betting is completed and three hands are laid down. A dispute ensues as Pierce reaches for the pot.

PIERCE

Y'beauty! Waitin' fer that all day ... ho-hoh!

ANDY

Hi Ho Hoh! Where are you goin' son? What's this?

SRI

Oh no, not again! *Please* be stopping this!

PIERCE

Hah? I have a run to the jack sure.

ANDY

Ah jaysus Pierce since when does a run beat a blue? Look! Ace high blue ... *my pot* ... all right?

Andy puts his hand down for all to see.

SRI

(looking at Pierce in astonishment)

How can you not be knowing this? I am playing poker for two months and I know this order of hands! You are Irish, you gamble since baby!

PIERCE

Who asked you? What'd you got? Two feckin small pair? What're ye like ... had you beaten 'n' anyway! Feckin' eejit.

INT. LOBBY. BLANCHARDSTOWN HOSPITAL. DAY.

John stands talking to a Doctor.

JOHN (V.O.)

Like many an impressionable young fellow, I had fallen in and out of love with a succession of nurses during my first three months in the sanatorium. This was different. The vision in the black leather coat had completely bowled me over and knocked me for six. I quickly moved into detective mode. Her name was Olive McKeever. The only people I knew of that surname were the Parish priest in Trim, and Peter, the former Meath footballer. As it transpired she was related to both. An uncle and a brother. Good start.

EXT. BLANCHARDSTOWN HOSPITAL. DAY.

John stands talking to a nurse, pumping her for information.

JOHN (V.O.)

She had worked for Cunard and Aer Lingus. Not so good. Out of my depth here, I thought. What would a glamorous, jet-setter see in a gauche, reclusive fellow like me ? I was smitten. Sweetly ... and completely.

EXT. SANATORIUM GROUNDS. DAY.

JOHN and DANNY are standing outside Unit 2 observing Olive and a friend out walking. DANNY is training his imaginary 'binoculars' on Olive and giving commentary in BBC English.

DANNY

And the Oaks favourite looking absolutely smashing on the gallops this morning, just out for a light breeze with her lead horse. Looks to be clipping along nicely there I should think, beautiful action. Rode her mother as a two year old, gorgeous filly, bags of stamina ... just the kind of beast a good jockey wants underneath him.

John blushes and shoves Danny - but pushes himself away in the process, Danny giving away stones in weight.

INT. UNIT 2 LAVATORY. DAY.

John is performing his morning ablutions when through an open window he spots Olive and friend out walking again. He scrambles up to the window and tries desperately to think of something witty to shout out and catch her attention.

JOHN
(shouting and waving)

Hello!

Two heads look up, at first startled, then Olive recognizes her admirer and returns the wave.

OLIVE

Hello you!

The girls giggle, exchange quick words and continue on walking, but not before Olive looks back once more and gives John a big smile and another little wave. He looks ecstatic with this.

INT. UNIT 2. DAY.

Now Danny is not the only letter writer on the ward. John writes frantically, having found a new lease of life within his prison walls. Sri is teaching Danny how to play chess. Pierce is building an indistinguishable lollipop structure, feigning disinterest in the chess lesson in progress, but casting the occasional glance over nonetheless.

JOHN (V.O.)

Time to fire the first volley. Finally, the gift of letters would prove useful to me in matters other than academia. In matters of the heart, the pen was indeed mightier than the sword, and would be key in wooing my intended. A first effort - in simple German - would be hastily followed by an English version just in case.

INT. UNIT 2. DAY.

Andy and Sri are both constructing new lollipop structures. Andy is working from a photo of the Acropolis, Sri from a photo of the Eiffel tower. Both men have looks of serious concentration on their faces. Without looking up, Sri suddenly smiles.

SRI

I am always loving the smell of this glue.

Andy looks at Sri, and also breaks into a smile, nodding and voicing his agreement without saying a word.

Nurse Dillon enters and all except John say hello. John motions with his eyes for her to approach and he slips her a letter.

INT. UNIT 2. NIGHT.

Nurse Dillon is doing a Midnight soup run for the lads of Unit 2. When she reaches John's bed and hands him his bowl of soup and bread roll, she reaches into her pocket with a smile and produces a letter. John inspects it grinning from ear to ear. It is addressed 'Herr Quinn' and is *postmarked* 'No postman! Now rain! Life!' Then she produces a framed photograph of a greyhound and looks for a place of prominence to put it.

NURSE DILLON

Now lads, don't say I don't look after the gamblers! This is my brother's dog in London - *Fondest Hope* - and Peter says he'll win the Derby next year. I had a pound on at 250/1.

The Irish lads flock around Nurse Dillon with questions, but John carefully opens his letter from Olive and begins reading. He smells it - the letter is scented! Sister McKeever indeed!

INT. UNIT 4. DAY.

Olive sits up in bed. She is writing a letter, occasionally looking out of the window, lost in thought.

OLIVE (V.O.)

Dear John,

Thank you for both your letters. The second one was not requested (who was casting aspersions on my ability to understand German!), but welcome nonetheless. It saved me from having to compose a missive auf Deutsch. The grapevine has obviously been hard at work. Full marks on your detection work to date regarding county of birth, employment record, et cetera. Thank you for your good wishes concerning my conference next Wednesday. Yes, I do hope to get grade. Naturally, the upsetting news of the long wait to your grade and obviously interesting company has made the prospect not as exciting as it might be ? It's nice to know I have brought some brightness into your life. My term in Blanchardstown will not be in vain after all! Full marks for the closing line in your letter - I don't intend to compete!

Olive.

JOHN (V.O.)

I wish I could remember that closing line.

INT. UNIT 2. DAY.

The patients are all resting except John and Danny. Danny is reading a book. John is reading Olive's second letter

Olive (V.O.)

Paradise Island.
Wednesday, 7 P.M.

I feel utterly on top of the world today and see everything through a gorgeous haze. Yes, the door has begun to open - OLIVE HAS GOT GRADE!

Why can't I hear the cheers from Unit 2 ? Never mind, I'm cheering enough for everyone. Eileen says if I don't stop grinning my face will never be the same again. On two occasions I have trekked to the bathroom for the

express purpose of signaling the news to you. What happened ? Nothing - absolutely no response. In disgust I retreated to share my joy with a more receptive audience. Their enthusiasm is beginning to wear thin, hence my decision to shout my news to you. Aren't you lucky ?

Oh. I have just remembered my big grudge and subsequent decision not to write to you again. How could you share my tender passages with other people(sob!) In my present expansive mood I have decided to forgive you. Stop! Andy is looking over your shoulder - nasty, nasty, nasty!

Yesterday my first big thrill of the day was a letter from you. Then (my hand is shaking with emotion) I actually saw you pass my window ! Phew - it was almost too much - not quite though - why didn't you come in?? No, you didn't upset my meditations, merely changed their course.

My feelings are too effervescent to express on paper - pity you aren't here! Do you think I'm naughty? I feel wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. Must go, the celebration party is starting ...

Yours sincerely,

Sister Mary Olive McKeever!!

JOHN (V.O.)

How I loved those letters. How I suddenly loved life in the Blanch. How I was growing to love Sr. Mary Olive. Grade 4 could not come quickly enough for me. In the meantime there was the promise of being allowed out for Easter mass - our first proper meeting!

BEAT.

EXT. DAY. 'OTTERBROOK', GALWAY. JULY 2001. A LEAFY LANE LEADING INTO THE GARDEN OF A THATCHED COTTAGE.

A car pulls into the driveway of the family home. Down a little breen. A lovely big thatched, two stepped cottage, fronted by a small field. The two equine inhabitants present themselves with interest.

INT. COTTAGE. DAY.

John enters the house and closes the door behind him. His wife's long black leather coat, his favourite, shares the hook with her beloved mink. He holds her coats to his

face, and inhaling their aromas ... he breaks down crying uncontrollably.

INT. COTTAGE KITCHEN. EVENING.

John sits reading letters at the table of a kitchen. A glass of wine and a lit cigar lies in an ashtray on the table, a glass of wine beside it, near empty. Teary, he studies them intently now, as if he's looking for something ... for *her* ... just looking for ... *Olive*.

JOHN (V.O.)

This place has seen so many happy occasions, wonderful parties thrown by Olive, where people within the neighbourhood were made welcome, and came in numbers.

I find a box of your letters. The letters you wrote to me daily in the sanatorium. Ours was a relationship founded and built on purely intellectual terms. The art of letters. I can cringe at some of it - the innocence - but it was the truth! I was, and *remain* ... so madly in love with you Guz Guz. My Eddie Duchins. *I miss you*. I miss you so.

EXT. MARY MCGEE'S HOUSE. DAY.

John approaches the cottage. A seated 92 year-old lady is issuing instructions to a man knelt in a rose bed. John greets them and gives Mary a kiss on the cheek.

JOHN (V.O.)

It's a hard and lonely road without you. Family and friends have been supportive, and although it is ultimately a road I have to walk alone ... I need to talk this out with someone ... and I feel myself drawn to the wonderful wisdom of Mary McGee and her 92 years on this earth.

INT. DAY. MARY MCGEE'S KITCHEN.

John and Mary are sitting at the kitchen table. A pot of tea, cups and some fruit cake are on the table. An old kettle is boiling more water on the range oven. John places his cup back on its saucer, his hand visibly shaking. He himself looks shook.

JOHN

God forgive me Mary, but I feel like I'm done here. My work is done, I don't feel that there's anything left to do. The kids don't need me ... although I'm sure they'd disagree (Mary nods)... I just want to be with her wherever that is.

MARY

Heaven is nearer than Galway, John. Heaven is just a few inches above the tallest man. Olive is with you now all the time, loving you, all knowing. You are closer now to each other than you ever were. God is perfecting your relationship.

JOHN

I should have perfected it while she was still here! God I was so stupid, stubborn like me father, I ended up being just the same. We were in a deep freeze for so long ... and I can't go back and change it now...I only ever wanted to make her happy ...

Mary touches John's arm.

MARY

He didn't take Olive away, John. He lifted her to a higher plane, that's all. She is edging closer and closer to God. ... you only ever wanted her to be happy, so now you must learn to accept hers is the ultimate happiness. It will be painful - very painful - but she is closer now than ever. There is no physical separation anymore - her in Galway, you in Dublin - she is with you, she knows."

INT. OTTERBROOK. GALWAY. NIGHT.

John is sitting in his study writing. A lit cigar is lying in the ashtray. An opened bottle of wine guards a drained glass.

JOHN (V.O.)

26th July. 27 days after.

There's nothing else for it but to start writing to you again after a 33 year break. Pardon the long delay, re-

reading your wonderfully witty, clever and loving letters of 35 years ago, I am just totally, madly, crazily in love with you all over again. I love you, I love you, I love you my beautiful one. I feel exactly as I did when I first read those letters so long ago. Am I just clinging to the past ? No. NO. A thousand times no. I want to believe and do believe this is all your doing. Please stay with me, don't ever leave me again. Please protect me, please, please. I just want to know that you're happy and you're here ! There too - wherever *there* is.

I'm madly preparing for your party, because that's what you wanted and that's what you'll have.

INT. COTTAGE KITCHEN. DAY.

John sits at the kitchen table drinking tea and talking to his namesake, JOHN JOE, an older man. The ashtray is filling up.

JOHN (V.O.)

Poor John Joe Quinn came in with a mass car earlier and stayed for five cigarettes with his coffee. 'Ah Jeez, she was awful fond of this place...' ... and they were awful fond of you. By the way I love you - did I mention that ? Your photos are on display all over the place, I know you'll be mortified, but I want everyone to see them and talk about you and say how beautiful you were.

EXT. UNSPECIFIED COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.

John is out walking with his son. Walking and talking.

JOHN (V.O.)

This time 25 years ago you were in the throes of labour, giving birth to our son. Thank you for him. He misses you terribly. Please help him. Your letters are a wonderful source of consolation for me. They capture that time so well - innocence, discovery, tenderness, unfolding love. Read one today where you gave me instructions on how to get to your home in Stackallen. My first visit ! I was so nervous. No wonder your father had me down as a hundred to one shot. I think he thought I was one of your lost causes. You were you are and you will be my one and only love. It was a beautiful, beautiful love story and nothing can ever change that. We went off the rails ... went on different tracks completely ... and I so much regret that now. Please forgive me for all my stupidity, now and for always. Need you so badly. Love you, love you, love you. Stay, please stay. Be all about me. Miss you so terribly.

All my love.
J. x

EXT. DONNYBROOK. BUS-STOP. DAY.

John stands waiting for a bus. It arrives and he gets on.

INT. BUS. DAY.

John goes upstairs and is startled to find his son, DECLAN, on the same bus (a tall slender boy with a blonde mop of hair). They smile and embrace. They sit down together and John produces a small photo album and they begin leafing through it, making comments as the pages turn.

JOHN (V.O.)

Tuesday 7th August, 2001.

My darling,

Three most extraordinary things to tell you about, you know already but I'm telling you anyway!

1. Went from work into town on the bus. Declan happened to be on the same bus! We spent the journey going through my mini photo album of you. He is such a lovely lad everyone says it. There is so much of you in him. What other 25 year-old lad would stand there in D'Olier street and kiss his father goodbye?

EXT. D'OLIER STREET. BUS STOP. DAY

Father and son alight, and embrace once more. Declan kisses his father on the cheek and they part. Declan turning towards O'Connell street, his father towards Trinity college.

EXT. ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN. DAY.

John is feeding the ducks with the remainder of his chicken sandwiches. He sits back down on the bench, a solitary soul, and watches as they scrabble amongst themselves for soggy crusts of bread. There is no one else in the vicinity, it is late afternoon and the lunchers have long since returned to work.

Out of the corner of his eye he sees a tramp approaching from where he has been sitting with two others. He looks off into the distance, intently observing the activity on the other side of the pond, hoping the tramp doesn't come over to him. He does. John mentally checks if he has any loose change he can get rid of him with. The tramp has been observing him on his slow amble along the path. As he reaches John he gives him a wink.

DOWN-AND-OUT

Any chance of an auld cigar boss?

John reluctantly reaches into his pocket and offer the man a cigar. Instead of walking off, the man sits down, lights up and begins to talk.

JOHN (V.O.Cont'd)

2. Decide to walk back to RTE for the exercise (who's good?). Coming through St. Stephen's Green. I remembered a glorious autumn day last year when we sat down on a bench and just enjoyed the contentment of it In memory of that I sat down for a smoke and was leafing through the photo album again when I was accosted by a down-and-out. 'Any chance of an aul' cigar boss?' says he. I gave him one, hoping he would go away, but instead he sat down beside me, lit up, and told me his story. A former jockey who had ridden for all the big names. Threw a few races, was brought before the stewards and lost his licence. Everything went downhill from there. Hit the bottle, marriage broke up and here he was living rough, on the touch in Stephen's Green. He was a really likeable guy - witty and articulate. ('I have no intention of leaving this planet just yet.') You would have enjoyed him - one of your 'lost causes'. I gave him a few bob and got up to leave. He embraced me (I can hear you laughing!), leaned forward and whispered in my ear : 'The seed in your heart shall blossom ...' Just that! Extraordinary! Weird! Wonderful! He stunned me initially. When I looked back he gave a little wave and mimed the words again - 'The seed in your heart shall blossom.' Poetry. It was you, surely? It could have only been you. Thank you.

INT. NIGHT. FLAT IN BRAY.

John sits smoking and reading letters.

JOHN (V.O.)

3. Later, listening to your favourite ABBA song, the words jump out -

When the time is right
I'll cross the stream
I have a dream
I believe in angels

Are you talking to me or what?

Love
John x.

INT. OTTERBROOK. NIGHT.

Olive's month's mind party. The house is jam-packed full of people of all ages. There is food everywhere. Trifles, puddings, finger-foods, sandwiches, crackers and cheeses, salads, scotch eggs, spuds, cold meats, tray after tray of sumptuous delights and myriad bottles of wine. The house is in sing song mode. Aiveen sings "BE not afraid".

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

John sits up in bed, reading glasses on, writing on a ruled pad. Cut back and forth between the party downstairs and John writing.

JOHN (V.O.)

2.35 A.M.,
Sunday, 29th July, 2001.

My darling,

The young ones are still partying down below, but the rest of us have collapsed. O my darlin', what a day! Did you enjoy it? Let me know. A wonderful, bittersweet day. Beautiful mass. Aiveen and her singers carried out all your wishes - 'Amazing Grace', 'Ag Criost an siol', 'Like the deer', 'Be not Afraid' - I did the reading and spoke about your love for Killeenaran. It was more difficult than at the Funeral Mass, but I got through. Then down to Bernie's pub for 'A drink for Olive'. Back to prepare for the party. The food! All your women friends came up trumps again. You would - correction, did - love it. I sang 'Try to remember' - our wedding-day song - for my

lost bride, and we toasted the Champagne Lady with Cava. The singing was great - but poor Mary O'Toole just couldn't sing, she was too emotional about you. I gave it my best shot for you poochens. I love you so very much. That's all I can repeat, like a mantra.

Listening to Shirley Bassey singing 'What are you doing for the rest of your life?' Me too. What am I to do for the rest of my life, but cling to you ? I love you so very much. Totally exhausted. Totally in love with you. night night.

Guz guz x
John x.

(BEAT)

INT. CHURCH. EASTER SUNDAY MASS. DAY.

As everyone sits listening to the priest, John steals glances at Olive, who doesn't return them. There is a cacophony of snorts, throat clearings and people coughing. A child wails somewhere within the throng.

JOHN (V.O.)

You drove me to distraction at Easter Mass. But it would be another week before we could be properly alone together.

EXT. BANDSTAND. PHOENIX PARK. EVENING.

John has finagled his way into sitting near Olive. As the concert ends, a light drizzle falls. He produces and opens an umbrella, holding it above Olive. They walk along together slowly.

JOHN (V.O.)

At last. The 1916 commemoration concert. Left alone to our own devices, albeit so briefly. A few stolen moments where no chaperone could overhear us or interrupt, and we could be ourselves. I was walking on air ... until a cruel ambulance driver stopped and whisked you away from me ... but not before you slipped me a letter.

EXT. PHOENIX PARK. EVENING.

An ambulance pulls over and the driver gets out. Olive must be driven back due to the rain, although there is no room for John. Ladies only. She slips John a letter

before being helped up into the ambulance. John floats home.

EXT. LOUGHNAPHOOEY. GALWAY. AUGUST 2001. MISTY DAY.

John sits in his car looking over the lake. His photo of Olive sits on the steering wheel as he weeps.

JOHN (V.O.)

My darling, my darling, my darling. Here I am 34 years later - almost to the minute, back in Loughnaphooey - lake of the winnowing winds - on a dreary, misty afternoon.

EXT. LOUGHNAPHOOEY. GALWAY. AUGUST 1966. DAY.

John and Olive sit together hands clasped, looking absolutely flush with love, overlooking the lake.

JOHN (V.O.)

Here on the most beautiful day of my life. I held you in my arms and asked you the only question I could ask you. "Will you marry me?" And you said "Yes. Yes. Yes." And I kissed you so tenderly and looked so lovingly on your beautiful, beautiful face. And I was so unbelievably happy. Unbelievably. And I loved you so indescribably much. We looked down at a cottage on the riverbank, where you were so concerned at the sheepdog who seemed to be locked out or abandoned. And I kissed you again and I loved you even more.

EXT. LOUGHNAPHOOEY. GALWAY. AUGUST 2001. MISTY DAY.

John sits in his car looking over the lake. His photo of Olive sits on the steering wheel as he weeps.

JOHN (V.O.)

There was no plan. It was just you and the place and the moment. Never was a question so obvious. Never was an answer so immediate and so certain. Thank you so much, my beautiful darling. No regrets. I only delight in the memory of it all. Now - the tears flow as freely as the mountain stream cascading down behind me. "I'm here you're saying. I'm here darling and I love you too. That's what you're saying. Why did we never come back

here? Why? There are so many Whys. Forget that now. We're here. So close that your presence envelops me. And I am so, so happy. So lonely but so happy. So, so much in love with you. The cottage is derelict now. And the dog is gone. The rain sheets across the valley and the radiance of your photo on the steering wheel shines through the gloom. Hold me now, my beautiful one. Hold me and keep saying Yes, Yes, Yes! I will give my life and my love to you, for all of that life. And beyond. Hold me. Love me. Stay with me. I love you so very, very much. That's all I can say - want to say - forever and ever.

John x

EXT. BEACH. ROSSLARE STRAND. DAY.

Montage. It's a sunny day and families picnic on the long beach. Children dig sandcastles and play in the surf with their parents.

JOHN (V.O)

The twenty fifth of June. The Irish summer has given us a glorious gift for our special day. Today is Christmas day. Our *alternative* Christmas. A return to Rosslare, a place close to our hearts. We first took a house here in 1981, and we would return 6 years in a row, only able to do so by renting out our family home in Greystones. Happy days. And finally, after years of trouble and strife, we return, closer than ever we were before, and with you on the mend.

EXT. HOTEL GARDEN. DAY.

John and Olive take tea in the shade. A waiter takes their lunch order as they inspect the newspapers.

JOHN (V.O.)

The real Christmas has been stricken from history, a nightmare. You had a horrible fall down those stone steps. You broke your neck ... and then they incarcerated you in that terrible *halo*. You lost your ability to swallow. You were suicidal. Then four days after leaving hospital your sister Derry died. Oh Olive, what a time. "This is not Christmas," I told you. "Christmas will be when you are better." And, thank God, get better you did.

EXT. BEACH. ROSSLARE STRAND. DAY.

JOHN, fully clothed and smoking a cigar, is now wearing sunglasses and a towel is draped over one shoulder. He holds his wife's hand as OLIVE steps over the rope onto the sand. Smiling broadly at the sight of the waves she strides towards them. She dons her swimming cap and looks back at her husband.

OLIVE

I'll probably be back in a minute if the water's too cold.

Olive walks towards the water. Her husband looks on as she tucks her hair underneath her cap.

FADE OUT TO BLACK ['Stardust' by Nat King Cole]

(TEXT ON SCREEN)

And it was lovely then
And you were lovely then
And we were young
And so in love
And it was lovely then

And will be so again,
And will be so again ...