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“THEY BURIED HIM
WITH TWO BOTTLES
OF IRISH WHISKEY IN HIS COFFIN.
I THINK HE AND ST. PETER
MUST HAVE HAD ONE
HELL OF A TIME
OPENIN’ THE GATES.”

—MICHAEL

A TALE OF A CAT

FARCE. Set in the remote area of Ireland's heath country, several villagers try to persuade schoolteacher, Michael McDermott, to stop drinking. With teachers' wages so low, they are afraid McDermott will drink himself to death and they won't be able to get another teacher willing to work for so little pay. McDermott not only thwarts their intervention, but his behavior becomes increasingly eccentric as he decides to conduct a secret experiment with a cat named Paddy Shaw. Convinced that McDermott is a lost cause, the villagers are overjoyed to find a substitute teacher, Miss Kilrain, willing to fill in while Mac has a "rest" from teaching. The pretty, literate Miss Kilrain arrives, and things begin to look up until she meets the notorious Paddy Shaw.

Performance Time: Approximately 40 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(4 m, 1 f)

MICHAEL "MAC" MCDERMOTT: 50s, schoolteacher; charmer, a bit of a poet, whimsical, literate.

PATRICK: 40-60, Michael's drinking partner and close confidant, somewhat in awe of Michael and his vast knowledge; would like to please everybody as long as they buy him drinks.

MISS KILRAIN: Young, pretty, literate, charming, and for lack of a better word, pixilated. There is something a bit off center about her.

DOCTOR WALTER DICKSON: 40s, portly, stern, but understanding and fond of Patrick and Michael.

FATHER RICHARD: 30-50s, head of the school; kind, tolerant, but a bit nervous, especially where Michael and his teaching is concerned.

SETTING

Town of Ballygullion, located in a remote area of Ireland's heath country. The time is sometime in the past—a simple time.

SET

The living room of Michael McDermott's thatched cottage is sparse and has furniture of the coarsest nature: a log table, a few chairs, a dilapidated cupboard, an icebox, and a few pots and pans strewn before and hanging over a great stone fireplace.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: Living room of Michael McDermott's thatched cottage.

Scene 2: Living room, the next day.

PROPS

Bottle of whiskey	Tin can
Whiskey glasses	Saucer
Jar with liver immersed in liquid	Rag
Rustic pet carrier (wooden box with a screen door at one end)	Silk handkerchief
	Piece of paper
	Birdcage with cover
	Suitcase

SOUND EFFECTS

Door knock
Cat meowing

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Living room of Michael McDermott's thatched cottage. Patrick is standing at a window, curtains parted, anxious as he awaits the arrival of someone. On the table in the middle of the room is a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. Patrick paces the room for an instant, then walks to the table. He picks up the whiskey bottle and pours a drink. He looks at the glass skeptically as if trying to figure out what's in it. He finally picks up the glass slowly and eyes it warily as he brings it to his lips. Just as he starts to tilt his head backward to drink, he decides against it, looks at the liquid, shakes his head determinedly, and puts the glass back down on the table. He stares at the glass and bottle for an instant, makes a decision, uncorks the bottle, picks up the glass and begins to pour the drink back into the bottle. There is a knock on the door. Patrick puts down the glass and bottle and runs to answer the door. Dr. Walter Dickson enters. He has a jar in his hand in which there is a substance immersed in liquid. Dr. Dickson walks into the room and looks about it.)

DOCTOR: Is he here, Patrick?

PAT: No, sir, Doctor. I be expectin' him any minute, though. I hoped you'd be here a bit early.

(Doctor sees the bottle and glasses on the table.)

DOCTOR: What's in the glass?

PAT: Well, sir. Well, sir, it came by bein' a bit dry waitin' on McDermott, and I was tempted to take a drop to relieve meself, so to speak, but I fought off the temptation.

DOCTOR: My warning applies to you as much as it does to him.

PAT: I swear to you, Doctor, I fought the temptation off tooth and nail and didn't touch a drop.

(The Doctor sets the jar on the table.)

DOCTOR: Well, see that you keep it that way. Givin' your promise to Father Richard and all. Now what about McDermott?

PAT: Well, sir, it's bad enough to keep from it myself, but to fight the temptation for the two of us would take more than a man of my moderate stamina, so to speak.

DOCTOR: He's a dead man if he doesn't stop drinkin'. I'm warnin' you.

PAT: I know, sir. But he's a wild man if he does. And it would take no great strength to wrench a bottle from wrists as thin as the likes of mine.

DOCTOR: You've always got an out, haven't you, Patrick?

PAT: Aw, now. Doctor, sir.

DOCTOR: Wouldn't surprise me if you encouraged him and stood side by side drinkin' here every night. (*Pat doesn't answer.*) Well, do you or don't you?

PAT: Well, Doctor, sir. Like I told you, when I'm alone, I'm a devil of a pillar of determination, and I manage to fight off my share of temptation. But when I get together with Mac, well...sure it would be downright uncomradelike not to share what he so bountifully and generously offers an old crony...especially when he more or less insists on it. I served with Mac in the time of the trouble, you know, and take my word for it, sir, he's not a man to be denied.

DOCTOR: Well, he damn well better be denied. You know, now if we lose McDermott, Ballygullion will be without a schoolmaster. Then what will the children be doin' without a schoolmaster?

PAT: Ah, the poor childers. You could never get another schoolmaster like McDermott, that's for certain. He's a wonder of a man with the sums. That is, if you could get another schoolteacher here at all.

DOCTOR: That's my point. We may not be able to get another one. So we've got to save this man from himself. If

he doesn't stop drinkin', it could be the end of him and the end of the Ballygullion school.

PAT: Yes, sir. I'll do my best.

DOCTOR: Now what was so important that I had to come up here on this black night through the rain and all?

PAT: Well, sir. Mac told me he had somethin' special to show me tonight. An experimentin' he's been doin'. He says he's goin' to show it at school and prove somethin' to the town.

DOCTOR: What sort of experiment?

PAT: I'm not sure, Doctor. But it has to do with Mrs. McClanahan's Paddy Shaw.

DOCTOR: What are you talkin' about? Mrs. McClanahan had no children.

PAT: No, sir. It's a cat.

DOCTOR: Her what?

PAT: Well, you remember she had this giant of a Persian cat. She willed it to Michael. She called it Patishah after some royal sultan or someone...well, Mac couldn't pronounce that too well, and he felt that any cat worth its salt should have a good Irish name. So he calls it Paddy Shaw. Of course, we're not quite sure it's that kind of a cat...for all we know, it maybe should be called Patricia Shaw. No one ever having looked, you see. Oh, Mac wanted me to take a peek one night, but far be it from me to violate the privacy of any of God's creatures, be they man or animal...and besides, you could imagine my embarrassment if it turned out that the name *should* be Patricia Shaw, me a fine upstanding Catholic...and at my age, at that.

DOCTOR: What the hell are you blatherin' about? What's this about a cat? What kind of experiment is McDermott conductin' with a cat?

PAT: I was comin' to that very point, Doctor, sir. I don't know. He's been very secretive. And he said tonight he was goin' to reveal to me the whole goings on. Well, I was a bit concerned, so to speak, and, well, Mac's always been a bit of a strange man. Well, sir, I'm a man of no fear, usually, but,

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experiment with cats...well, sir, especially with a Persian cat...them heathen Easterners with their mummies and curses and all...well, to be perfectly frank, I had a slight trepidation about bein' here the whole night while devil knows what sort of cat experimentin' was goin' on. I thought, you bein' a scientific man and all, you might be interested in this experiment. I mean if Mac's inclined to do a little cuttin' and stitchin', you might be interested in what the insides of a cat, male or otherwise, look like, a bit more than I.

DOCTOR: You mean to tell me he's goin' to dissect a cat. Here? Tonight? What in the hell for?

PAT: Well, sir, I'm not all that sure that's what he's plannin' to do. But I thought if he was, I'd like a little moral support. I've always been a bit queasy about the insides of things, ever since my poor Nora, bless her soul, baked a batch of bread, and on cuttin' open the first loaf, I found a field mouse starin' up at me, as if I'd disturbed its last restin' place. Exhumed it, so to speak. Well, I've not touched fresh bread since. Anyhow you can understand how I feel about a cut up cat at any rate.

DOCTOR: Now listen to me, Patrick Murphy. You know the way he fights with me all the time. He'll never allow me to witness any secret experiments of his. But I'll be damned if I'll allow him to frolic in a Ballygullion classroom with a cat's entrails in front of the eyes of a lot of innocent children. That man takes no heed of the fact that there are certain things in life children shouldn't know about...or see.

PAT: And grownups too for that matter, Doctor, sir.

(The Doctor has crossed and is peering out the window.)

DOCTOR: He's comin'. Now, listen to me carefully. Don't let on that I know anything about this. I'll talk to Father Richard. You report to us first thing tomorrow, so we know what action to take.

PAT: You're not leavin' me alone with him, then? Oh, Doctor, sir, bein' a strong man, it's difficult for me to admit this, but I'm all scared to hell now. And I'd be grateful for a bit more company than a slightly mad Irishman and a slightly exposed cat.

DOCTOR: Be quiet, he'll be here in a second.

PAT: No, sir. No, sir. I'll not stay alone with him.

DOCTOR: You stay. He wanted you here for a reason. He probably needs your help...or at least needs someone to share the experience with him. And we'll need a report from you tomorrow.

PAT: Couldn't I just sort of peek through the window?

DOCTOR: You stay.

PAT: Oh, Doctor, sir. Please.

DOCTOR: Patrick. Just think of the children at Ballygullion. This experiment could be meant for them.

PAT: Well, sir, in that case, why not invite *them* up tonight, sir?

DOCTOR: Be quiet, he's here.

(The door opens and in walks Michael McDermott. He is carrying a rustic pet carrier. It is a closed wooden box with a screen door at one end of it. He takes the box to a far corner of the room and deposits it on the floor.)

MAC: Ah, is it you, Patrick?

PAT: It is Michael. Evenin' to you.

MAC: And Doctor Dickson, himself?

DOCTOR: Good evenin', McDermott.

MAC: It's a bad night out. What would you be doin' comin' all the way up here on such a night, Doctor. Is there sickness in the house?

DOCTOR: There is. The same sickness that's been here these many years past.

MAC: Well, Doctor, before we go into that again, I'll need a bracer after facin' the wet wind and the long climb up the

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hill. These old bones are groanin' and complain more and more each day. *(He picks up the whiskey bottle.)* Will you join me, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Would I join you in hell? Why don't you ask me?

MAC: Well, that's a decision for someone far smarter than meself to make. But I venture to say you'd be less inclined to refuse my offer down there. *(Mac looks at Pat's glass on the table, which still has some whiskey in it.)* Ah, Patrick. I see you've a start on me.

(Pat looks over at the Doctor, who returns his glance with a stern admonishing look.)

PAT: Well, almost Mac. But I decided to wait on you.

MAC: That's a good lad. *(Mac pours whiskey in two glasses.)* Come, now, join me, Patrick. *(Mac sits at one side of the table and Pat comes around to the other side and joins him.)* Doctor, sir, ye're always on to accusin' me of a peculiar kind of sickness. Well, I'm not a scientific man meself, mind you, but I am a religious one. And the Bible says somethin' about, physician, cure thyself. No offense meant to you, Doctor, but I've always taken that particular message as meanin' each of us is his own cure. Or to put it more simply, each of us is his own *cause* and his own cure. That bein' the case, if whiskey is the cause of my sickness, then surely—usin' the analogy of biblical authority—whiskey, then surely, is also the cure.

DOCTOR: You're going to biblical authorize yourself right into the grave.

MAC: Whiskey, my dear doctor, is the universal remedy for the male kind. The female sex seems to get on without it in a most remarkable way, but for a man, there's no medicine to be compared with it.

DOCTOR: I've been your doctor for over 20 years. And all this time, you've not listened to me, but once.

MAC: I've been listening, Doctor Dickson. It's the hearin' I've had trouble with.

DOCTOR: You're makin' light of me and I won't have it.

MAC: I'm sorry, Doctor. But you've been tellin' me the same thing for the past 20 years: "Michael, if you don't quit drinkin', you'll end up like Shawn Hanrahan." Well, I don't know as he had such a bad life. And a sweeter death, you couldn't ask for. They buried him with two bottles of Irish whiskey in his coffin. *(He takes a quick drink.)* I think he and St. Peter must have had one hell of a time openin' the gates.

(The Doctor points to the jar on the table that he had brought in.)

DOCTOR: Do you know what that is, Michael McDermott?

MAC: Jaysus, no, Doctor, but it's a hell of a sight. Do you know what it is, Pat?

PAT: Well, I'm not an educated man like you and the Doctor, Michael, but it looks to me like an imberiy, sure enough.

MAC: A what?

PAT: An imberiy, Michael. One of them little tads what ain't been born yet.

MAC: The word is "embryo," Patrick. The little tad is called an embryo.

PAT: Ah, thank ye, Michael. Ye're a wise man, you are. But you knew what I meant.

(During this exchange, the Doctor becomes angrier and angrier. He picks up the jar and slams it on the table.)

DOCTOR: That, Michael McDermott is what's left of Shawn Hanrahan. That is his liver. And that's what all your drinkin' is doin' to your liver, and that's what's goin' to kill you, and very soon now.

MAC: Well, Doctor, if that's Shawn's liver, sure enough, I'd say you were bein' a bit disrespectful to our dear departed.

PAT: What is that, that it's floatin' in?

DOCTOR: That is pure alcohol.

MAC: Well, thank God, you had the decency to maintain some respect to Shawn's memory. For a minute, I thought it was water.

DOCTOR: Listen to me, Mac. I'm leavin' now. And if you don't take my advice, the next time I come over, it will be to bury you.

MAC: Doctor, I'm 55 years old. I figure I can last till I'm seventy. That's 15 more years. No man can ask for more than that.

DOCTOR: You'll be lucky if you last 15 more days at the rate you're goin'. And it's not only you I'm worried about. Father Richard has the devil's own time tryin' to get a replacement up here when you're sick or drunk. What will happen to those children without a schoolteacher? There's no teacher alive would be fool enough to come to this village at the money we can afford.

MAC: Nobody fool enough except the old fool, McDermott, eh, Doctor?

DOCTOR: I'm warning you, Mac. You'd better take my advice.

(The Doctor walks to the door.)

MAC: Oh, Doctor Dickson. You forgot Shawn's liver. Unless you were plannin' to leave it with me as a reminder.

DOCTOR: That's not such a bad idea. Except you'd probably drink the alcohol right out of it.

MAC: Well, now. That wouldn't be such a bad way to treat the memory of an old friend. It would be like old times. The two of us drinkin' out of the same glass together again.

(The Doctor grabs the jar and storms to the door.)

PAT: Oh, Doctor, sir. Will I be seein' you?

(Mac looks up, curious at the question. He turns to the Doctor. The Doctor admonishes Pat with his look.)

DOCTOR: You'll both be seein' me. And soon. *(He exits.)*

MAC: Is it a conspiracy ye're havin' with the good doctor, Patrick?

PAT: What? Oh, no, Michael. What makes you say that?

MAC: Ye're pretty thick, you two. Him comin' up here and all. Has he won you over to the side of temperance now? And is it influence you're to use on me to give up the grape?

PAT: Well, now Mac, the Doctor's a man of strong purpose, isn't he now? But he means well, certainly.

MAC: He does at that. And maybe there's a point in what he says.

PAT: How's that Mac?

MAC: But I mean to find out for meself!

PAT: I'm havin' a hard time keepin' up with you, Michael.

MAC: Ye'll think it strange, Pat comin' from a man like myself that has been singin' the praises of whiskey these 25 years and more; but the truth is, a kind of doubt about the virtues of the immortal liquor has been risin' in my mind this while past.

PAT: In the name of goodness, Michael, what has put that notion in your head?

MAC: It was partly put there by the Doctor, that has latterly been usin' some alarmin' classical terms in connection with my liver, and partly by the parish priest...a man for whose opinion I have a great deal of respect. Not only from his sacred callin', but in his capacity as manager of the Ballygullion National School.

PAT: There's truth there, Michael. Father Richard's certainly a man of high regard.

MAC: Now, I may tell ye, Pat, that up until lately, any misgivin' the pair of them was able to stir up was always scattered like the mornin' mist before the third half-glass of the pubtender's special.

PAT: I noticed it didn't affect you too strongly, Michael.

MAC: But lately. But lately. And it comes hard for me to tell you this...for this while past, there has been a thraitor in and about the middle button of my waistcoat, basely suggestin' that the effects of our national beverage is not all that beneficent on the system as has been supposed.

PAT: Ye're never thinkin' of givin up the whiskey altogether, are you, Michael?

MAC: I've been meditatin' it seriously for some time, Pat, without gettin' much further than the meditatin', of course. But I see some chance of comin' to a decision now that I've hit on the possibility of a scientific conclusion.

PAT: You're startin' to lose me again, Michael.

MAC: Patrick, I've hit on the great and scientific notion of thryin' the effects of a dhrop on a cat.

PAT: A cat, Michael?

MAC: On Paddy Shaw, himself.

PAT: How in the name of goodness is that going to help you?

MAC: It's as simple as two-times tables. The only difficulty I had was in the adjustin' of what you might call the alcoholic values between me and the animal.

PAT: I don't quite follow you there.

MAC: Wait. I'll explain. I suppose you're aware that the average life of a man is generally taken to about 70 years?

PAT: I'm told they lived a great deal longer in olden times, Michael. Did they take a sip, now and then, d'ye think?

MAC: It's understood, Patrick, that they took a deal of drink before the flood; an' with all they drank, they lived, some of them, to be near a thousand.

PAT: That alone is a strong argument in Ireland's favor.

MAC: It's a consolin' bit of history, for if it proves anythin' at all, it's that too much water is just as bad as too much whiskey. An' the case of Noah, though he made his name by water, shows that he didn't think a heap of it as a drink. However, 70 years is our average these times and 70 years is all a reasonable being need aim at.

PAT: I'll settle for that. Give or take a few years.

MAC: Now, as ye know, I'm just 55. If I can stand it another 15 years, I've had my share. An barrin' maybe in the matter of whiskey, I've never wanted more than my share. Well, the average life of a cat bein', say 14 years, it follows that the vitality of the beast is as five to one compared with a man. Ye got the length of proportion at school, didn't ye, Pat?

PAT: I did, after havin' a few woodsticks broken over me hands.

MAC: Very well. You'll see at once, that if the cat can stand three years whiskey, I can stand 15, an that's all I want.

PAT: I'm with you, Michael. For the moment, at any rate.

MAC: Well, that's my experiment, Patrick.

PAT: It is?

MAC: That's right. Me an Paddy Shaw.

PAT: You mean, you've been imbibing the beast?

MAC: For six or eight weeks now.

PAT: I see. Well, how's he been doin'?

MAC: Well, except in the matter of hair, where the beast is undoubtedly losing ground, he's doin' beyond my wildest dreams. Ye may remember that he used to be a conceited, useless, thing that would sit washin' and polishin' itself the whole day through, with the mice runnin' all over it, and him hardly takin' no notice. And what with him bein' a greedy gorb of an animal, he grew to be a lamentable size with all his laziness, an' could hardly move about. And now after a few short weeks of the universal male remedy, instead of bein' what he used to, a useless drone of a creature, he's skippin' like a young one, killin' mice, aye, and even rats—like a terrier.

PAT: Well, that's certainly a case in point which cannot be denied.

MAC: You know, Pat, I've noticed the same thing with myself, many a time. There I'll be in school, as heavy as a dunce, with even vulgar fractions a bother to me; an' before I've been in the pub a half hour, I can do repeatin' decimals in

my head. I admit, mind ye, that the doctor had me a bit daunted a while back, but the outcome of this experiment has been very reassurin' so far. For anything plain and straightforward like colic or the worms, I'll agree with every old woman in the neighborhood that Doctor Dickson has his points, but when he takes it upon him to lay down how far alcohol is beneficial to the human system, the man goes clean beyond his depth.

PAT: Well, Michael. This is a relievin' revelation, at any rate.

MAC: Relievin'? What do ye mean, Pat?

PAT: Well, ye know, Michael, I've never had but the strongest faith in your abilities and the greatest admiration for your knowledge, but lately there's been talk of your actin' queer, here and there, now and again only, mind ye...course I took no stock in the old wives tales about your nocturnal walkin' through the damp heath and occasionally conversin' with yourself at the top o' your lungs with nary a soul about....so when you told me of experimentin' with a Persian beast...well, ye know me and my foolish imagination...I was conjurin' up all sorts of gory images, with the poor creature bein' all cut up...and to say the least, I was a bit apprehensive about our seemingly clandestine meeting here tonight, so to speak.

MAC: Oh, I'm disappointed in you, Patrick. Losin' faith in me after all these years of friendship.

PAT: Well, Michael, it did seem sort of strange...you carryin' on so secretive, so to speak.

MAC: So you thought I was goin' to cut up Paddy Shaw, the poor defenseless creature. And instead, here it is a blessin' I've given to the poor beastie.

PAT: Ah, Mac, I should have known better. Ye've always had a soft spot for the weak of the world. Where is the lucky creature anyhow? Is it in that box you're keepin' him?

MAC: It is, Patty. And he's fair burstin' to break out for his evenin' ration. It's a wonder he's not just busted the box at

the seams with the new found energy he's had these past eight weeks.

PAT: He's certainly a quiet one for all his anxiety. Could I take a peek, Mac?

MAC: A peek, Patrick? No. More than that. You're goin' to be the first to see scientific history in the makin'. Tonight you're going to be permitted to witness a psychical phenomena. You're going to see a placid, shy type of animal, with no more gumption than a garden caterpillar be transformed into a cavortin' fun-lovin, mischief-makin, uncontrollable beastie. A veritable Jekyll and Hyde of a cat, so to speak.

PAT: Ah, ye've a gift with the spoken work, Michael, I'm fair as anxious as Paddy Shaw himself at this moment.

MAC: All right, Pat, then contain yourself for a moment or two while I set up our evenin' ritual. Startin' tomorrow, I'll be wantin' you to be given Paddy Shaw a ration durin' the day, while I'm at school. Will you do it?

PAT: Well, an' what are friends for?

(Mac goes to a refrigerator or ice box and takes out a tin can containing milk. He walks to the table and sets it down. He walks to a cupboard and takes a saucer and sets it next to the milk. He pours some milk into the saucer.)

MAC: First, I give him a bit of milk. At first I used the milk as a subterfuge, so to speak, so he would get used to whiskey. Then I cut down the milk gradually until it was about half and half...a better mix you couldn't ask for...the idea bein' that the milk provided a base, so to speak...lined the stomach in preparation for the sweet onslaught of whiskey. The milk, you see, provides a lining so none of that good whiskey escapes the stomach, until, of course, the call of nature becomes too strong, then even the strongest of stomachs is no match for the demands of mother nature. But, of course, nature saw to it that this adjustment was a

fair one because once the stomach is deflated, we are ready for another drink, and with a little practice, and determination, the bouts with nature become less and less frequent, and in no time, you're privileged to keep the good whiskey in your stomach for practically a whole evening through. Unless, of course, you become gluttonous about the whole thing. Then nature, wrathful at being taken advantage of and defied, so to speak, forces the whiskey to come out of the other end...and sometimes if she's in a really great rage...both ends at once. *(Mac has now finished mixing the whiskey and milk, which he has been stirring during the preceding speech.)* There, now we're all ready. I place the saucer in the center of the floor, so Paddy will have plenty of room to cavort. Once he gets that warm feelin' in his system, there's veritably no stoppin' him. And I suggest, Patrick, that you stand at the end of the room after he's finished...for Paddy might think you're a kitchen chair...and start to sharpening his claws on your right leg. Course he doesn't know the right from the left havin' never had to make the sign of the cross...so it could be your left leg.

PAT: Oh, don't worry, Mac, I'll give him plenty of room.

(Mac walks to the pet carrier, lifts it, and brings it to just above the saucer.)

MAC: Stand clear now, while he's drinkin'.

PAT: I will that, Mac.

(Pat walks to left stage away from the table. Mac opens the door of the cage and sits at right of it. He sits staring for a moment. Nothing happens.)

MAC: Come now, Paddy. Don't be bashful. *(To Pat.)* It might be he's shy in front of strangers, so to speak. Come on now, Paddy. It's only Pat Murphy here. An old and dear friend. *(There's no entrance of the cat. Mac looks puzzled.)* Well, now

he's never done that before. Usually he's tryin' to squeeze out even before I've got the catch on the door unfastened. Won't you be comin' out now, Paddy, me boyo? *(The cat still doesn't enter.)* Well, he's still a trifle shy, I imagine. I'll help him a bit. Come now, Paddy lad. *(He reaches into the pet carrier and brings out his hand, open, as if he is holding a cat under the front paws. He is on all fours now, and talking to the cat but there is no cat in his hand.)* There now. He was just a bit bashful. Weren't you, Paddy me boy. All right now, that's Pat Murphy standin' there, and he'd be the last to want to frighten you, isn't that so, Patrick? *(Patrick, needless to say, is speechless and stands there bug-eyed, mouth agape. He watches in horrified fascination as Mac strokes and pets the invisible cat. Mac looks up at Pat reprovngly.)* Well, come on now, Pat. Say it's so. Reassure him a bit, so to speak.

(Pat, shaken for a moment out of his transfixed state, hisses in a voice he cannot possibly have the least bit control over.)

PAT: Yessss. Yessss. Yesss, Mac. It. Is. So.

MAC: There now, Paddy. You see it's all right. *(He sets the "cat" before the saucer.)* Go on, drink now. Everything's perfectly all right. Look at him go at the plate, Pat. I think he likes you now.

PAT: Oh, well. I'm glad of that.

MAC: Have you ever set your eyes on such an animal, Pat?

PAT: No, Mac. That I can swear on. I've certainly never set my eyes on such an animal as that.

MAC: And isn't he a proud lookin' thing? Except for the few wisps of hair missin' here and there, he's certainly a most majestic animal. There now, he's finished with the plate. Watch the change that'll come over him.

PAT: Any change, Mac, at this point, I feel would be for the better.

MAC: What's that ye're sayin', Patrick?

PAT: I'm watchin', Mac. I said, I'm watchin'. Oh, begod, am I ever watchin'!

MAC: There he goes, Pat.

PAT: Where? Oh, begod, where?

MAC: There, Pat. See him risin' up on his hind legs and preenin' himself. A true king of beasts, surely.

PAT: Yes!

MAC: Watch him now, Pat. He's startin' to circle the room. *(Mac starts to circle the room slowly as if following the cat. Suddenly Mac stops and jumps into the air.)* Did ye see that, Patrick? Did ye see Paddy Shaw that time?

(Pat is now smack up against the left wall trying desperately to squeeze his wiry body through a grain in the wood.)

PAT: No, Mac. I seemed to have missed that one. What did he do?

MAC: From a still standin' position, all of a sudden he leaped straight into the air and did a flip. As fine as a bit of acrobatics as ever I did see from man or animal. What do you think of that?

PAT: Probably, his Persian background, Michael.

MAC: Undoubtedly. Watch him now. Watch him. Holy saints, he's startin' to run about the room. By God, look at him go. *(Mac is watching the "cat" seemingly run in large circles about the room, and every time the "cat" completes a circumference of the room, he swerves to dodge the racing animal.)* Oh, praise the Lord. Look at him. He must be after a great mouse. Ooops. *(He dodges the cat like a bullfighter with a cape.)* You almost got me that time, Paddy. Keep at it. Go, Paddy. Get the black devil. Isn't he something, Patrick. You'll have to admit, he's really something.

PAT: *(Aside)* By God, I think you both are.

MAC: What's that, Patrick?

PAT: I said, he surely is, Mac, he surely is. *(Mac is now warily circling the room as he seeks out Paddy Shaw who seems to have disappeared for the moment.)* Is something wrong, Michael?

MAC: He's hiding, I think. He always does that when you least expect, then he leaps out at you. He thinks he's a lion in the jungle, and I'm his prey.

PAT: Well, Mac, bein' as I'm not much for the sight of violence, I'll be on my way, and you can tell me tomorrow in the pub the results of this evening's experiment. *(Pat edges toward the door.)*

MAC: But, Pat, I wanted you to see the final grandiloquent climax to his cavortin'. He usually takes a flying leap next to the stove there, and then sits there laughin' to his feline heart's content. And then, from God knows where, he starts harmonizin' a beautiful bit from a well-known opera or two.

PAT: Oh, he does, does he? A well-known opera or two, is it? Well, I hate to miss such a fine spectacle, but it's late Michael, and I do have to be goin'.

MAC: All right, Pat, if you have to. But careful as you go out. It might be you he's stalkin'.

PAT: Oh, I'll be careful.

(There is an ominous silence as Pat gingerly makes his way to the door, sidestepping, step over step, while Mac circles the room, peering intently for the whereabouts of Paddy Shaw. Suddenly, just as Pat gets to the table, center, Mac lets out a scream.)

MAC: Watch out, Patty. He's comin' at you from under the table. Hold your head, down...down...down...

(Mac leaps over the table as if trying to catch the cat. Instead, he pounces on Patrick, and according to Mac's ad-libs, the cat is now in his arms, between him and the captured Patrick. The three of them crash over the table and tumble to the floor. There is a bit of a free for all as Mac tries to subdue the wild Paddy Shaw and Patrick tries to get free of both of them.)

PAT: Holy Christ! *(Patrick has now managed to extricate himself from the wrestling on the floor and jumps to his feet. He looks down at the contest between Mac and the drunken "cat.")* Holy Christ. Jesus, Joseph and Mary! *(He makes the sign of the cross and tears out of the house. There is a blackout in the main area where Mac is still grunting and wrestling on the floor. Patrick is now at the exterior of the house. He stops for a moment to catch his breath and looks upward to the heavens for some sort of divine guidance and explanation to this phenomena. As he is doing this, he hears, from the darkened house, a tuneful meowing, which sounds not unlike an aria from an opera. Patrick turns face front, transfixed. Then looks upward toward the heaven again.)* Patty, Pat, my old saint. My own namesake of Erin. Ye did a hell of a job on the snakes. Didn't it ever occur to you to spare a conversion or two for the curse of Ireland's cats?

(Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: Living room of Michael McDermott's thatched cottage, the next day. Present are Patrick, Doctor Dickson and Father Richard the parish priest and manager of the Ballygullion school. They all seem anxious. The Doctor is pacing.)

DOCTOR: And where is he keepin' himself?

FATHER: School's let out. He should be here anytime now.

PAT: Well, there it is, Father. Michael is imbibin' this Persian animal to prove that drink is beneficial to a living organism, or something on that order. But there is no cat.

DOCTOR: That's the most insanely preposterous thing I've heard in me whole life. The man's surely gone daft.

FATHER: But worse if he's plannin' to display this horrendous experiment to the children at the school.

PAT: But there is no cat.

DOCTOR: What the hell difference does that make?

PAT: Well, I would think it'd make a bit of difference.

FATHER: He's mad of course. But cat or no cat, if he tells the children there is a cat, they will believe him. The man's a spellbinder and the children believe anything he says.

DOCTOR: What's to do, Father?

FATHER: Aside from prayin' at the moment, I don't know.

DOCTOR: Let's look at the problem logically. We want to save the man from drinkin' himself to death, and since we can't afford another, we want to keep him as our schoolteacher.

FATHER: Not if he's goin' to be conductin' mad experiments in front of the children. I've already sent for a substitute. She comes highly recommended, and she's on her way right now.

PAT: Well, Doctor, sir. Could he be cured? Could this be sort of a temporary abortion?

DOCTOR: A what?

PAT: You know, sir. Like he's gone mad just for the moment.

DOCTOR: Aberration! That's good, Patrick. That could be it.

A temporary aberration.

FATHER: He's always havin' a temporary aberration of some kind or another. Last time it was rats.

PAT: Rats?

FATHER: He wanted to show the children that even the lowliest of every living creature has a right to survival. He brought in half a dozen mice for observation. Big ones. More like rats. Scared the hell out of everybody. It took us three months to get rid of them and their progeny. The time before it was the reproductive process of the green lizard. God knows what might be next. I'm after havin' a new teacher. I pray the substitute works out and will accept the position.

DOCTOR: I'm for givin' Michael another chance. You can't throw 25 years of good teachin' down the drain and send him out to pasture. But we do have to get him back to a sane state of mind.

PAT: Beggin' your pardon, Father, sir. But Michael is a good teacher, you'll have to admit.

FATHER: Of course, he's a good teacher. We all know that.

PAT: And he's been so for over 25 years.

FATHER: If his mind's goin', he'll no longer be of any use as a schoolteacher. Presumin' he'll last much longer, what with the drinkin'. I can't chance it.

DOCTOR: Father, he's good for another 10 years if we can get him sober and sane and keep him off the bottle.

FATHER: But how?

DOCTOR: I think this cat dilemma is the worst that Michael has ever concocted. I think if we can get him through this one – get rid of the cat – we might get him on a rational track once again.

FATHER: Explain your meaning, Doctor.

DOCTOR: If the cat were to expire, so to speak, from the rations of whiskey with which Michael has been providing

it, Michael would come to realize the danger of his experimentin' and of his drinkin' as well.

FATHER: Shock him into sobriety, ye're sayin'.

DOCTOR: Exactly.

PAT: But there is no cat. How can a cat which isn't, expire?

DOCTOR: We'll testify to it. All three of us.

PAT: But there is no cat.

FATHER: Be quiet, Patrick. Well, I'm not much for lyin', but if it will help save Michael...go on, Doctor.

DOCTOR: The story will go that Patrick found the beast lying in a pool of Bushmill's. He'd knocked over the bottle and glutted himself. Patrick called us. You delivered the last sacraments, and I made out the death certificate. Death from highly unnatural causes for a cat.

FATHER: That might do it, surely.

DOCTOR: Patrick?

PAT: Well, sir, I would do anything to help an old friend be shrift of an oriental curse.

DOCTOR: Done then. Is the story straight, Patrick?

PAT: Aye. I just hope that Asian creature hasn't done away with all the Bushmill's. I'll need a strong bracer to face Michael with such a story. I'm an awfully poor liar, don't you know!

(Father Richard has wandered to the window and is looking out.)

FATHER: It's a cold problem and a bitter winter the Lord has wished on us.

DOCTOR: Aye.

FATHER: It's a welcome sight, that fire.

DOCTOR: Help yourself, Father. I'm sure McDermott wouldn't object to the use of his fire.

FATHER: He might if he finds out what we're up to. Patrick, keep watch for a moment while I warm meself.

(Patrick walks to the window and looks out nervously.)

PAT: He's comin' up the path, Father.

(Father Richard lays the bottle of Bushmill's in front of the table. He takes out a rag from the pet box and puts it next to the Bushmill's. The Doctor covers the arrangement with a grand, colorful silk handkerchief.)

FATHER: All right. Gather round, and answer me as if ye were a church choir. *(They gather around the arrangement with their backs to the door. Father begins chanting. Michael enters.)*
Kyrie Eleison.

DOCTOR/PAT: Christie Eleison.

FATHER: Kyrie Eleison.

DOCTOR/PAT: Christie Eleison.

FATHER: Kyrie Eleison.

DOCTOR/PAT: Christie Eleison.

(Michael watches in awe.)

FATHER: Dominus Vobiscum.

DOCTOR/PAT: Et cum spiri tu tu oooo.

(Father leans over and gives a final blessing to the soul of Paddy Shaw.)

MAC: Father, what's goin' on here? What's all the keenin' for?

DOCTOR: You tell him, Patrick. You brought the news.

PAT: Well, Michael. I'm truly sorry to be the bearer of such bad tidings. But Paddy Shaw's all dead.

MAC: The hell you say!

PAT: Tis God's truth, Michael. I gave him his ration today, just as you told me. He swiped at me and tried to grab the bottle. He must have had a bit much. He turned a green glob of a color, bugged his eyes a bit, then turned and died, as simple as you please.

MAC: I can't believe it. He was in the top o' condition, an' gettin' stronger every day.

DOCTOR: It's true, Michael. I examined him. He was as dead as a...as a...cat! I issued this certificate just to put your mind at rest.

(The Doctor hands Michael a piece of paper. Michael glances at it, then lets it fall to the floor. He stares at the arrangement.)

MAC: Is it the last rites you were sayin' for poor Paddy Shaw?

FATHER: Seein' as you thought so much of him. The Lord has a place for wee beasties too, don't you know.

MAC: Oh, the poor thing. The poor thing!

PAT: Michael, what does that do to your experiment?

MAC: What?

PAT: You know. Your sense of proportion. For man and beast.

MAC: Oh, yes. Poor Paddy Shaw. It's over for him. It's over for me too, I'm afraid. I suppose you were right all the time, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Well, Michael. It doesn't matter. What matters is your health and well-being. We all care for you, you know.

FATHER: We do, Michael. It's God's truth.

(Pause.)

MAC: We'll be buryin' the poor beastie?

DOCTOR: Patrick will tend to it. Won't you, Patrick?

PAT: What's to tend to?

DOCTOR: Patrick!

PAT: I'll see to it. I promise, Michael. I'll see Paddy Shaw to the grave. I suppose, God help me.

(Pause.)

MAC: What's to do now?

FATHER: What's to do now, Michael, is that you'll be able to take a long rest. Get your health back. A couple of months, you'll be strong enough to start your teachin' again.

MAC: But the children. What will they do? What will they learn? Who will teach them?

FATHER: Well, Michael. Now don't be upset. I've sent for a substitute to take your place while you're convalescin', so to speak.

MAC: A substitute! The hell you say. There's no one can teach them the things I teach.

PAT: I think we're all agreed on that, surely.

MAC: A substitute! After 25 years. The shame of it. I can hold my own with the lot of 'em.

FATHER: We know that, Michael, but you need a rest.

MAC: Tis a conspiracy, I'm thinkin'.

FATHER: Now, Michael.

MAC: And what manner of man is my substitute? Some snot-nose fella with new fangled ideas to try and make me look ridiculous?

FATHER: Well, as a matter of fact, Michael, it's a young lass.

MAC: A lass? Saints preserve the children from lady schoolteachers. Women should know their place, and it's not in the schoolroom.

PAT: That's right, a woman's place is in the home.

MAC: No, not there, either. I haven't yet figured out where the hell they belong.

FATHER: Don't be down on the lass, Michael. She's going to need your help.

MAC: To take my job away? My help! God forbid!

(The Doctor has been keeping watch at the window.)

DOCTOR: There's a lady comin' up the walk.

(Father goes to the window.)

FATHER: It's her. It's Miss Kilrain. Michael, try to be civil.
(There is a knock at the door. Father Richard opens it. Miss Kilrain enters. She carries a suitcase and a covered bird cage. Patrick takes the suitcase, but she holds on to the birdcage.) Ah, Miss Kilrain. A pleasure to see you. I'm Father Richard, this is Doctor Dickson, Patrick Murphy and Michael McDermott, our teacher, for whom you'll be substitutin'!

KILRAIN: A pleasure to meet you, sirs. And Mr. McDermott, I've heard much about your teachin'!

MAC: What could you have heard?

KILRAIN: That you're a bold adventurer when it comes to teachin'. That you go deeper than just the words written in the textbooks.

MAC: And where could you have heard that?

KILRAIN: The whole county has heard it.

MAC: If you're tryin' to charm me out of my job, it won't work.

KILRAIN: I don't try to charm, sir. I try to teach and tell the truth.

MAC: Bother!

(Uncomfortable silence.)

DOCTOR: Won't you have a seat, Miss Kilrain?

(She starts toward the table but notices a handkerchief covering Paddy Shaw.)

KILRAIN: Pardon my curiosity, sirs, but what is that arrangement on the floor?

(The men look at each other. Pause. They are at a loss for an explanation.)

DOCTOR: Well, miss, it's Paddy Shaw.

KILRAIN: Sir?

DOCTOR: It's a cat, lass. A dead cat.

MAC: My cat.

KILRAIN: Oh, the poor thing. And how did he come by his reward?

FATHER: Well....

DOCTOR: Well....

PAT: Well....

MAC: He drank himself to death.

KILRAIN: Oh, dear. Too much milk.

MICHAEL: Too much Bushmill's.

KILRAIN: Whiskey?

(She looks to the men for an explanation.)

PAT: In a manner of speakin'.

KILRAIN: You fed the poor kitty whiskey?

DOCTOR: It was an experiment, lass.

KILRAIN: For shame on youse.

FATHER: Too true.

KILRAIN: When did it happen?

DOCTOR: Just a while ago.

KILRAIN: Well, the poor thing. Perhaps it's in a stupor. It could be still alive.

PAT: Not bloody likely.

KILRAIN: What?

PAT: Excuse me, ma'am.

KILRAIN: Well, let's have a look see. There is such a thing as artificial respiration, don't you know.

DOCTOR: I wouldn't advise it, lass.

FATHER: Yes, lass. Let the poor thing rest in peace.

(She starts toward the "dead cat.")

MAC: Keep your hands off my Paddy Shaw.

[End of Freeview]