

A Family Man - By Eoin Costello

Entry for the PJ O'Connor Radio Drama Competition 1998

Karen: I can't take much more of this. It's ridiculous.

Liam: What's wrong now? What's happened?

Karen: Well, it was bad enough having to look after your father before his accident, but I never reckoned on your grandfather moving in and becoming my daily torment. It's all right for you Liam, you are out at work all day. I have to live in this madhouse 24 hours a day.

Liam: *(with a sigh)* Calm down, Karen. What's he done now?

Karen: He is at the blooming cable for the television again. It was a big mistake to have the cable coming through his room. The bloody telephone has been tinkling all day. Whenever I pick it up, there is no one there.

Liam: What is he at this time? What's he annoyed about now?

Karen: He was complaining earlier that he wasn't being given enough 'pish' here and that the nice people in the nursing home always give him loads of pish.

Liam: The nice people in the nursing home, that's a change of tune. He was abusive about them when they asked us to take him home.

Karen: Exactly. It was the worst thing we ever did. Why couldn't your brother have taken him?

Liam: Look, we've been through all that a hundred times. Anyway what's pish?

Karen: I don't know! It's some sort of food that comes in little rectangular boxes going by the gesticulations he was making to me.

Liam: But what was he annoyed about?

Karen: Oh, because I couldn't understand what pish was. He said I was deliberately being difficult and I told him to get lost and stop being so rude.

Liam: Okay. Okay. I get the picture.

Karen: So he locked himself in his room and disconnected the TV cable. Sean's been moaning all afternoon because he wanted to watch zig and zag, and I just can't take it anymore.

Liam: Okay. Okay. I'll go and talk to him.

Karen: You'd better. I think I'm going to have a nervous breakdown. Since that stroke he's been getting weirder and weirder.

(Sound of door opening)

Liam: Hello Sean. How were things at school today?

Sean: Good, we were playing football.

Liam: Come on, give me a hug. That's it. You're the person that makes my day. Aren't you my best boy?

Sean: Get off. Stop hugging me.

Liam: (laughs) I used to be the exact same with my dad. I hated him hugging me.

Sean: Do you have a present for me today? You didn't bring me anything yesterday. And Billy's dad always brings him home a new Nintendo game every evening, even though he already has 300 of them, and I'm much better than him at most of them...

Liam: Hold up there. Billy's dad doesn't bring him for a walk every evening with Jack, does he? He doesn't even have a dog, not one as special as our Jack.

Sean: Walks are stupid, I want Nintendo.

Liam: What do you want a Nintendo for, haven't we got a lovely big telly?

Sean: Not today. We haven't. Granddad is being stupid with the cable again.

Liam: You know you're not to talk about your granddad like that.

Sean: Yeah. Well, it's true.

Paul: I'm going to speak to him now. The TV will be back on in a minute.

Sean: It's not fair because Den TV is over now and it's no good now.

Liam: Look Sean, uh, if you keep going on like that there will be no TV today at all.

Sean: I don't care.

(Door opens)

Liam: Evening granddad. How are you?

Granddad: What do you mean?

Liam: I mean, how are you feeling? Are you feeling well?

Granddad: Listen here you, you'd better stop asking me how I feel all the time. You're making me feel sick with your continuous questions about my health. Aren't I going to die quickly enough for you? Then you'll be left all alone.

Liam: (under his breath) Jesus. Here we go again. Look, granddad, you know we only want the best for you.

Granddad: I know damn well, what you want. The quare one outside is only after my money.

Liam: Well seeing as most of your fortune will be spent on your funeral, I don't see what you're getting so upset about.

Granddad: You'll probably sling me in a hole in the back garden without telling anyone. Anyway, I've a lot of money in my matchbox and I pay you two pounds a week, and I don't even get any pish. I have a good mind to go back to that nursing home.

Liam: But you said that you hated it, especially the nurse you called hatchet face

Granddad: That's a lie. What are you talking about? It was a lovely face. How can you tell barefaced lies about that lovely matron.

Liam: Okay. Then I must ask them if they would take you back.

Granddad: That's enough about that. When I am going to get some decent pish?

Liam: Okay. What is pish?

Granddad: Pish, pish, you daft idiot. Everyone knows what pish is.

Liam: Do you eat it?

Granddad: Well, what do you think you do with it, fly in it?

Liam: Do you have it in the morning?

Granddad: Of course.

Liam: Is it Eggs?

Granddad: Oh, mother of Divine Jesus. Where did they get you from?

Liam: I'll take that as, no. Is it rashers?

Granddad: That's it. Exactly. Why the hell do you have to play around with guessing games when you knew it all the time? Now where are my dinkles?

Liam: I don't know where your dinkles are. By the way, why have you got the TV cable plugged out and the phone off the hook. That's why the phone's been on the blink.

Granddad: I plugged the TV cable out because there is too much radiation coming from it. It's harmful for Liam.

Liam: Sean you mean, not Liam, that's your old barman's name. What are you talking about anyway? TVs don't give out harmful radiation; we'd all be long dead if they did.

Granddad: That's not the point. Why do you always have to contradict me? You're exactly like your father.

Liam: Well, I have to reconnect it. Sean wants to watch tv (*Sound of TV on loud in next room*) and please put the phone back on the hook.

Granddad: Don't do that (*with fear in his voice*)

Liam: Why on earth not?

Granddad: They're listening all the time.

Liam: (*under his breath*) This is a new one. Who is listening?

Granddad: The Russians are listening all the time you pillock.

Liam: (*suppressed a laugh*) and why would they pick us out to listen to?

Granddad: Go ahead smartass, have a laugh, but I'm going to spike their plans. I know that Karen's friend Fiona is working at the Russian Embassy on the translating.

Liam: For a change you've said something that has some basis in reality,

Granddad: Well, exactly. It's true, isn't it? I know for a fact that Karen is working for the special branch and is getting information from Fiona for the Irish government.

Liam: (*pretending to be serious*) And where did you get this classified information?

Granddad: My girlfriend Dympna heard it in the pub.

Liam: Your dyspomaniac friend from the choir.

Granddad: Yes. Yes. That's her.

Liam: Jesus. I didn't realize that it had become such public knowledge that Karen was a spy.

Granddad. Ah, there you go again. Taking the mickey out of an old man.

Liam: Anyway, what's your, what's your next step?

Granddad: Wait, shush I have to take the phone off the hook. By keeping the phone off the hook. They can't hear my plans.

(*Karen calls from kitchen, Liam*)

Liam: Listen. Granddad, I have got to go. Please leave the phone on the hook and the TV cable plugged in.

(*Door closes*)

Liam: What is it? Karen?

Karen: Your dinner is ready. Sit down before it gets cold. Come on, Sean.

Liam: That looks great.

Karen: Did you sort granddad out?

Liam: To a certain extent, he's coming up with the most fantastic stories.

Karen: Surprise me, are UFOs stealing his colostomy bag again?

Liam: No, actually he is got a bee in his bonnet about Fiona working at the Russian Embassy

Karen: And what's so mysterious about Fiona's work translating for the Russians?

Liam: Well, he's got it into his head that Fiona is a spy and that you are her contact.

Karen: *(laughing)* Jesus. He has a great imagination.

(Fade)

Paul: God, that was great. Karen. OK, Sean. Get Jack's lead and we'll go for a walk.

(Outdoor sounds, waves crashing on the shore. Dog barking. Sean laughing and shouting)

Liam: *(Thinking to himself)*

(What am I going to do about the granddad? He gets nuttier by the day. Although he was always eccentric. I remember dad telling me that he used to insist on planting potatoes in the front garden late at night under an angle poise lamp. Jaysus, I'd say the neighbors loved that.)

That's it. Sean. Throw the ball as far as you can for him.

(Poor Karen has had a belly full of him. I wonder how I would take to her dotty maiden aunt taking up occupation at our house.)

Liam: Don't go too near the water. Sean.

(Sound of train horn Passing)

Liam: *(There goes the Rosslare train)*

Liam: Sean, wave to the people on the train.

(What is it about the passing of the train every evening that fills me with such an empty feeling? Somehow I feel lonely and of no consequence. I mean, here, all these people traveling and doing things and I'm stuck here doing nothing.)

Sean, don't let Jack get wet, he'll destroy the carpets at home.

(God, I love being out here on an evening like this. I will just walk at an angle like this so that I can get the dying sun on my face. What it, Karen says, hi, pasty face!)

Liam: Ouch. When did they put a bin there? Sean? Come here for a minute.

Sean: Yes.

Liam: Look how flat the sea is. It's like glass

Sean: It's like someone didn't turn on the wave machine.

Liam: *(laughs)* That's right. Neptune is probably changing the batteries. Have you read any poems at school yet?

Sean: I had to write a poem about something that makes me laugh.

Liam: What did you write about

Sean: Granddad

Liam: *(laughs)* Well, my favorite poem is by a man called Keats, and it is about the sea. When you go to secondary school, you will probably read it.

Sean: What did he say?

Liam: Well, the bit I like is: “Oh ye, who have their eyeballs vexed and tired, feast them upon the wideness of the sea.”

Sean: Can I go down to the shore now?

Liam: *(Laughs)* I think I've lost my audience. Yeah, go on.

(How did the rest of that poem go? God, I've totally forgotten. It's funny, when I stand here staring at the sea, I have the opposite feeling to that of the Rosslare train. I feel complete and fulfilled. It's as if I'm standing here on the same shore as Keats or Wordsworth. Understanding that the feeling of God in nature is accessible to any man.)

Liam: Come on Sean. It's time to go Home.

(Door closes)

Liam: say goodnight to Jack and get along to bed Sean.

(Door closes)

Karen: Are they both asleep?

Liam: *(in quiet tones)* Yes. They're both fast asleep.

Karen: Did you have a nice walk?

Liam: Yeah, it wasn't bad. It was a lovely evening.

Karen: You seem a bit preoccupied this evening?

Liam: Oh, things aren't going too well at work at the moment. We are not going to make our sales figures for this year.

Karen: Is it that bad? Will there be redundancies?

Liam: Who knows. I work as hard as I can. That's all I can do.

Pause.

Karen: Listen, I'm sorry about what I said earlier about granddad. I didn't mean it.

Liam: Not to worry.

Karen: The problem is that this house is too small for all of us. We should move or build an extension. Fiona's husband, just got a big rise and is moving to the best road on Clontarf next week. They have commissioned top interior designers. She has already bought the doormat. From some designer and it cost her 750 pounds. I mean, just to wipe your feet on!

Liam: Look, Karen, you know anything like that isn't on the cards at the moment. I think I made a mistake getting into insurance. I should have opened a bookies shop like Fiona's husband,

Karen: Yeah. Okay. It's always the same story. You never want to spend a penny. You'd go out shopping with a tinner in your pocket and expect to come back with a three-piece suit and feel badly done by if you don't have enough change for a pint.

Liam: I'm sorry that I've let you down the way you talk. I sometimes feel that you could have done better without me.

Karen: Don't be silly. I don't mean it like that. You know that you're the only man for me. I couldn't be with anyone else the way I'm with you.

Liam: I know. I feel the same about you.

Karen: Come here and pay me some attention. I want to feel you beside me.

Liam: Okay. I'm coming. *(Rustle of bedclothes)*

Karen: Oh leave my top on please. It's cold. You can take off the rest.

Liam: *(muffled from under bad clothes)* It is bloody cold tonight. Ah, but that's not, that's nice and...

(sound of door opening)

Karen: Ah, Christ. Sean, get out and go back to bed.

Liam: Sean, stop lifting up the duvet. You can't get in here.

Granddad: Can I get a pint here, please? Or is it past closing time?

(Karen screams)

Karen: It's not Sean!

Liam: For God's sake. Granddad, would you get out of here and go back to your own room?

Granddad: *(in a peeved tone)* I'm sorry for your trouble. I'll bring my business elsewhere in future.

Karen: Get out.

(Sound of light switch turning on)

Sean: What's going on mommy, who's shouting? Gosh, why isn't daddy wearing any pajamas?

Karen: Turn that light off again. Sean, come on, let's get you back to bed *(in a hiss)* I'll tell you one thing Liam, either he goes or I go. Make your choice.
(Door slams.)

Liam: *(Loud Groan)* Oh, granddad.

(Sound of office)

Liam: Morning Peter. How are you?

Peter: Yeah. Fine.

Liam: Hi lads.

Others: *(muted)* Morning.

Liam: Any news at all? Get up to anything last night?

Peter: No, nothing much. Anyway, Joe, did you get her number? Because she looked mighty keen before I left.

Joe: Not only that, but I've asked her out next week.

Peter: Well give her a good rummage on the first date, make sure she gets the idea from the word go. That's what I always did.

Joe: I'll tell you though, I've got a bit of a head this morning.

Liam: Oh, you went for a drink after work last night?

Peter: Yeah. We didn't think you'd be interested. You're uh, going to watch the United match tomorrow Steve?

Steve: Wouldn't miss it for the world. It's the league decider, isn't it?

Peter: It sure is. O'Dwyers as usual then Steve.

Steve: Yep.

Peter: Joe, are you on for it.

Joe: Tomorrow? Yeah, sure.

Peter: Great. Now Liam, we need to discuss these sales figures

(fades)

Liam: Hello everyone. I'm home.

Karen: Hi Liam. How did it go today?

Liam: Okay. Where's Sean?

Karen: He's skulking in his room. For some reason he hasn't come out. Since he came home from school.

(door opens)

Liam: Hey, big fellow. What's up?

Sean: Nothing.

Liam: Did you have a nice day at school?

Sean: No. I hate school.

Liam: Sean, what's wrong? You're not even playing your Gameboy. Now things must be bad. Did your teacher give out to you?

Sean: No.

Liam: Did you lose at football?

Sean: No, I didn't. Please leave me alone.

Liam: Come here. What's that on your hair? Jesus. It's blood. What happened to you? Did someone hit you?

Sean: I was coming out of school and Bruno and his friends hit me with some stones.

Liam: Jesus. Who the hell is Bruno? Why did he do it?

Sean: He does it every day to me because I come home on my own.

Liam: But why didn't you tell me before? He shouldn't do that. Mom would come and collect you. Karen, come here.

Sean: Yeah, but she wouldn't be able to be there every day so what is the point?

Liam: Sean's been attacked by some bully at school.

Karen: What? Why didn't he say something?

Liam: I'll go into that school tomorrow and sort this out. It's disgraceful.

(Confined sounds of a small room)

Headmaster: I'm very sorry about what happened to your son yesterday. He's in the fourth class, isn't he?

Liam: Yes, he is. But listen here, sorry isn't good enough.

Headmaster: You have my every sympathy. I will look into the matter with the utmost urgency. We don't condone bullying in this School.

Liam: I'm sorry, but that's rubbish. This isn't the first time that this sort of thing has happened to Sean.

Headmaster: Excuse me, but I don't think there is any cause for that sort of language.

Liam: No cause for that sort of language eh! And what sort of bloody language do you do your little prize pupils use to my Sean, when they are kicking the hell out of him. Do you condone that then?

Headmaster: Please, Mr. O'Carroll, please try to retain your self respect.

Liam: You expect me to retain my self-respect while you preside over an institution that systematically deprives little boys like my son of any self-respect. If it is not the bullies in the yard kicking him around the place, it's creeps like you venting your frustrations on them.

Headmaster: Please, Mr. O'Carroll...

Liam: I'll tell you what, I'm going to come over the desk and start kicking you up the backside and see how you like it. You jerk!

Headmaster: Mr. O'Carroll, I think you're being irrational. I think it would be best for both sides if we continue this discussion another time when you are calmer.

Liam: I'll give you Mister calmer. My solicitor will be very calm when he issues summons for the failure by your school to protect my son from that miserable crew that attacked him. Goodbye.

(Door slams. Sound of car door opening.)

Liam: Pompous, arrogant, prat. How dare he talk in such a detached manner. We're talking about my son's life here, not some untied shoelace!

(breathes a long sigh) Irrational, irrational ha! Mmmmm.

That's the first time I've ever lost my temper like that. After all, it's not the headmaster's fault, really?

(Gear change.) Oh God, am I going mad? What have I done? I'm a responsible adult, I can't go around threatening people like some bully.

Why did I do it? Why was I triggered in that crazy way?

(Sounds fade to be replaced by playground sounds. Children running around and shouting.)

Bully: Hah O'Carroll, let's see you fight you chicken. You against us. You Brit.

Liam: *(as a child's voice)* Get lost. Stop messing.

Bully: I'm not messing *(Sound of punches)*. Come on O'Carroll, what are you scared of? Here, grab him by the hair Poncho.

Bully: *(Sound of punch.)* Ouch. Oh, you're dead now O'Carroll.

(Sound of running.)

Try and run O'Carroll but we will get you after school when no one is around.

(Sound of running and door to school Closing)

Liam: Brother Norbert. Brother Norbert. Larry Murphy attacked me and I hit him back.

Brother: Oh dear. O'Carroll, you again. You always seem to be in trouble. He won't bother you now that you hit him back.

Liam: But brother, he said he would get me after school.

Brother: Don't be silly. You are well able for him. Now, get into class.

Liam: But brother, he always has so many boys ganging up on me and I have no gang because I only moved here from London Brother.

Brother: Always moaning, aren't you O'Carroll? A right little moaner. You're supposed to be brave when you're in sixth class. Now get into class before I give you a smack of the Lollywalloper.

(sound of school bell ringing)

Brother: O'Carroll, why are you lurking around the corridor looking out the window. School finished 15 minutes ago. Go on, go home.

Liam: *(in a whiney voice)* I don't want to go home, brother. I want to stay here a while longer, please.

Brother: Go on, get out.

Liam: *(crying)* But brother, I don't want to go. I don't want to go outside the school please.

Brother: What's outside the school? You stupid boy. It's just a gang of boys.

Liam: That's that gang is Larry Murphy and his two brothers from the senior school and Speedy Hoban told me that one of them smashed a bottle in a boy's face last week *(sobbing)*.

Brother: What sort of nonsense is this? Get out there and fight your own battles.

(Shoves him out the school door and it slams.)

Bully - Hey, O'Carroll. Now we have you. Uh, we are not going to hurt you, are we lads? *(Laughs maliciously)* There's no point in trying to wait around for Brother Norbert to go home. He's staying late to meet parents tonight. You can't get out the back gate either because more of my gang are waiting for you there.

(Sound of running and panting)

Liam: They're coming, I must get away. I'll get over the fence into the cattle Mart. If I can get near my house before they catch me....

(Sound of a wallop).

Bully: Now we've got you. Hold him down Christy, you thought you could hit me and get away with it? Did you?

Liam: No, I didn't. I'm sorry. I won't do it again.

Bully: And you thought telling the brother would save you.

(Sound of kicking and tussling.)

Liam: I'm sorry I didn't mean it.

Bully: But you did. Well, you are going to get it now and we are going to be waiting for you here again tomorrow and the day after because my brothers are off school all this week. Oh, and tell your little brother we are going to get him too.

Liam: Nooooo!

(sound of car horn blaring)

Liam: Jesus. That was close, I'd drifted away there. I will drive Sean to school every day if needs be. By Christ he's not going to suffer the way I did.

(Sounds of radio and kettle boiling)

Karen: The kettle's boiled. Fiona, I'll make some tea.

Fiona: So I hadn't seen her for years and she is gone so round it's incredible.

Karen: You're joking. That's really bad, like she was always so big into fitness.

Fiona: It's mad, isn't it? She says, after Hugh how do you think I feel about marriage... eer I don't want to worry you or anything, but, uh, your Hoover pipe is snaking tts way around the kitchen door.

Karen: *(whispers)* Oh, that'll be a spy granddad *(loudly)* So when are you flying to Moscow with the micro dots Fiona...

(Sound of door opening)

Karen: Granddad. What are you doing down there on your hands and knees outside the door?

Granddad: What? Mm, Oh, I was just going out the back to beat the dog with a bat, and I lost my dinkles on the ground.

Fiona: Beat the dog?

Granddad: No. No. Hit the ball for him. Mm. I just want to get something in the cup war here.

Karen: And what are you doing now?

Granddad: I'm putting down pepper, obviously.

Karen: Why on earth are you doing that?

Granddad: I heard mice scratching at the skirting boards all night, and I couldn't sleep.

Fiona: And what's the pepper going to do Mr. O'Carroll? Make them more edible for the cat? *(laughs)*

Granddad: *(with disdain)*. It's a well known fact that mice hate pepper. They can't stand sniffing it.

Karen: Oh, mother of divine Jesus. Give me strength. Now, Fiona, you see what I have to put up with? I'll be the one booking into the nursing home, not him.

Fiona: There are worse places you could go to get a break Karen, like Siberia for example. *(archly)*

Granddad: *(suspiciously)* What's that about Siberia? That's in Russia, isn't it?

Karen: Oh, get out, would you? And beat the dog or whatever you were going to do.

Granddad: Bah, You are as odd as two left feet. Remember madam, who you are talking to, I'm your son.

Karen: What?

Granddad: *(in frustration)* I'm your father... Your uncle...

Karen: Oh, for God's sake, would you go out the back garden and sit in the sun? You've lost it since your stroke!

Grandad: I will.

(Door slams).

Grandad: Hello Sean.

Sean: Hi Granddad.

Granddad: What are you doing?

Sean: I'm going to take Jack for a walk.

Granddad: Come here for a minute.

Sean: What Granddad?

Granddad: I have this invention for walking Jack. You wouldn't have to bring him down the seafront ever again.

Sean: But I like bringing him for walks.

Granddad: Don't be silly. Now, here's what you do. Get his lead.

Sean: Okay

Granddad: Then you attach it to the washing line like so and off he goes Running around in circles as happy as a lark *(barking)*

Sean: But granddad, he's pulling it over. The pole is bending.

Granddad: You stupid dog, Jack stop it. Go around in circles. Don't come over to us.

Karen: What the hell is the dog doing? My washing is being dragged along the ground. Sean! Why on earth do you have to be so bold all the time?

(Office sounds)

Liam: Hey lads. I'm sorry I'm late. There was a little trouble at Sean's school I had to sort out.

Peter: Your boy goes to the same school as my lad Bruno, doesn't he?

Liam: Yeah, that's right

Peter: That's a pain in the neck. I just got a phone call, summoning me to a meeting to discuss my son. Some sniveling drip had complained that Bruno was beating his son up. I believe that the real problem is that if parents get involved in fighting the kids' battles then they can't stand up for themselves. I always encourage Bruno to give as good as he gets.

Liam: Well, that's all very well Peter, but children like your son are only good at standing up for themselves when they're with five to 10 or they're of their little gang.

Peter: Oh, spare me, please. You sound like one of those bleeding hearts. You were probably one of those squealers that went running to the teacher if anyone hit you, what do you think lads?

Joe: Yeah, I reckon that's his style, alright.

Steve: I think you've got him annoyed now Peter.

Liam: (*Thinking*) Jesus. What do I do now? If I do what I want to do and hit Peter, if only for Sean's sake, then they'll all think I've gone mad. If I keep arguing with him he has got them all involved in his side and they are only going to laugh at me.

Peter: Oh dear. I think I've upset him. All right. Yeah, go on walk away O'Carroll.

Joe: Liam, Liam, hold up.

Liam: What is it Joe?

Joe: Don't mind Peter. You react the wrong way to him. He only goes on like that because he gets a kick out of your reaction. Just ignore him.

Liam: Thanks for the advice. You are a real pal! (*sarcastically*)

Joe: Here Liam, you left your keys on my desk during that argument.

Liam: They're not my keys. That's strange. I have seen that keyring somewhere before....

(sound of bunch of keys being slammed on desks)

Bandiy: Did I see you firing a piece of paper at Delahunty through your pen O'Carroll.

Liam: *(in frightened tones)* Yes Father McEvoy.

Father McEvoy: And is that the sort of behavior we expect from boys in our secondary school?

Liam: No Father McEvoy.

Father McEvoy: Well, let's see if *(voice speaking under exertion of delivering two punches)* we can try to knock a bit of respect into you. *(Sound of child falling around in the desk)*

Liam: *(in thought. No matter how hard he hits me, I'm not going to cry)*

Brandi: Now O'Carroll, don't let me catch you doing that again.

(Sound of him turning on his heels and footsteps as he walks to the door)

Liam: Father, you've forgotten your keys. *(Rattle of keys picked up from desk)*

Doctor: Well, Mrs. O'Carroll, the X-Rays show a hairline fracture to the left side of his jaw. He will have a click on that side, which will get worse as he gets older. Will put him on a course of penicillin, which should reduce any inflammation. How did it happen?

Mother: He says he was in a fight with one of the boys at the school.

Doctor: It must have been a big lad to hit him that hard. It's a pity how rough schools have become no discipline anymore.

Mother: Yes Doctor.

Joe: Hello, Liam. Hello, anyone there?

Liam: I'm sorry. I was lost there for a moment.

Joe: Are you all right? You look pale.

Liam: I'm fine. I just feel a bit funny,

Joe: Maybe you should go home early. Take it easy for a bit?

Liam: Yeah, I think I'll do that.

(Sound of the Angelus bell on the radio. Sound of door closing)

Liam: Hello everyone. I'm home.

Karen: Hi. You're early. Your dinner isn't nearly ready yet.

Liam: Don't worry, I'm not hungry. Evening granddad. Everything on the up and up sir?

Granddad: No, it's not if you must know.

Liam: Oh dear. What's wrong?

Granddad: Jesus. All I ever get to eat around this place is pish! I'm sick of it!

Liam: But the other day you said you wanted pish.

Granddad: That's a lie. I never said that.

Liam: Oh, forget it. Hi Sean. How was school today?

Sean: Fine.

Liam: Did you see any sign of those nasty boys?

Sean: No. Headmaster had a meeting with their parents and they aren't speaking to me now.

Liam: Well, that's good. If they ever bother you again, tell me immediately, because you don't have to take any of that. Okay.

Sean: Yes, dad. Are we going to walk tonight?

Liam: I'm afraid we can't because your mother and I are going to a party at work tonight.

Sean: Can I come?

Liam: Now, Sean, you don't want to be at a stupid party where there are only adults, do you?

Sean: No, but they would have peanuts and treats there, wouldn't they?

Liam: Okay, I'll tell you what, I'll bring you back some peanuts and treats.

Sean: Lots of them Dad and some panda pops.

Liam: Of course. And do you know what I was thinking?

Sean: No. What?

Liam: I might go into town this weekend and buy a Nintendo for you because of your sore head.

Sean: Excellent. With the new Batman game.

Liam: With the new Batman game

Sean: Mom. Mom. Daddy is going to buy the new Nintendo game. But Daddy, do you have enough money?

Liam: Of course. What do you mean?

Sean: Granddad told me that he heard on the Hoover mom telling Fiona that she couldn't book her holiday because you were useless at work and that you're going to lose your job, that you're so incon, inconsiderate, inconcietate

Liam: The word is inconsiderate son.

Sean: Yes, that and that he wants his two pounds back.

Paul: Don't be silly. She wasn't talking about me at all. Were you Karen?

Karen: What's that?

Liam: I said that you weren't telling Fiona that I was going to lose my job. Were you?

Karen: Of course not. Don't be silly. Sean, Why did you say that?

Sean: Because granddad told me.

Karen: Don't pay any attention to granddad. God forbid that you ever end up like him. Okay, everyone. Dinner is ready.

(Sound of plates, sounds fade. Sound of doorbell.)

Karen: That'll be the babysitter. Now, Sean, you are to be a good boy and look after granddad and you're not to annoy the babysitter.

Sean: Yes, mom.

Liam: Off to bed now. Sean will go for an extra long walk tomorrow.

Sean: Do you promise?

Liam: Of course I do.

Sean: Will you sing me a song before you go?

Liam: Sean, I haven't time. Sorry, I have to go son.

Sean: Please. Only one verse.

Liam: Okay,okay, now lie down. You are my sunshine. My only sunshine. You make me happy when the skies are gray.

Sean: Will you buy me a magic book tomorrow Dad, one with the magic pictures?

Liam: Yes. Yes. Now do you want me to finish the song or not?

Sean: Yes.

Liam: Why are you frowning?

Sean: I'm scared.

Liam: Scared of what? I have the light on

Sean: I'm scared because everyone is going to die.

Liam: God, the things you come out with, what do you mean?

Sean: You and mommy and granddad are all going to die.

Liam: Not for years yet. Don't be silly. Why are you thinking about that?

Sean: Because if you're going to die, I don't want to love you.

Liam: Why on earth not

Sean: Because it'll hurt me when you die. If I don't love you, it won't hurt.

Liam: Look Sean, we are going to be here for longer than you can imagine.

Sean: Longer than our drive to Italy last year?

Liam: *(laughs)* a hundred times longer. Now look, Sean, I have to go.

Sean: But you didn't finish our song.

Liam: Okay? But then I have to go.

You'll never know, dear, how much I love you. Please don't take my sunshine away. The other night there as I lay sleeping *(fades)*.

(Sound of car driving)

Liam: It's amazing what Sean comes out with sometimes.

Karen: Jesus, it certainly is. He is unnatural for his age.

Liam: I don't think he's a natural. He's just bright

Karen: I wish he was a little less bright sometimes. I mean, he picks up on the most chance remark I might make to Fiona and starts worrying about it.

Liam: You have to be careful what you say in front of him.

Karen: *(laughs)* That reminds me, I was talking to Fiona about Mrs. Duggan. You know, the one who had the womb removed last week. When Fiona left, Sean sidled up to me and says, could Mrs. Duggan become a prostitute now, mom? I was shocked and said, uh, what do you mean, Sean? Well, he said she can never get pregnant now, so she could make a lot of money.

Liam: *(laughing)* He is quite incredible. Do you remember his first day at school when he got his head stuck in the back of his chair and then they had to call the fire brigade to cut him out.

Karen: Or the Christmas, we got him all these flimsy Chinese toys by 10:00 AM on Christmas morning. He had broken every one of them, but he wasn't going to let on.

Liam: That's right. I remember clearly the look on his face as I went into his bedroom. He had hidden every one of them under his bed and was putting on a crying act saying that Santa hadn't come to him at all this year.

Karen: God bless him. He believed in Santa so firmly, so firmly that he thought that we wouldn't have known any better.

Liam: He is a great kid.

(Sounds of party)

Peter: I've had more girls before I got married than you've had hot dinners, Joe, and a few since I don't mind telling you.

Steve: Yeah, but they are usually drunk out of their tree.

Peter: All the better Steve.

Liam: Hi lads

Lads: Hi, Liam. Hi Karen. How is it going,

Peter: Anyway, what would you know about that sort of thing Steve? you're only an auld wimp when it comes to girls.

Karen: I'm just going over to Peter's wife. Liam. I see her over there,

Liam: Okay. I'll see you later.

Peter: So Liam, how many girls have you done in your time?

Liam: A few if you must know.

Peter: A few men more like, I've always thought you were a puff.

(laughter)

Joe: But sure he's married. What are you talking about?

Peter. Ah, but that's just a smoke screen.

Liam: I'll tell you, Peter, I've had just about enough of your crap over the last couple of days.

Joe: Take it easy. Liam. He's only joking

Liam: Why do you always have to apologize for him? You pass off the deepest in insult as a laughable joke. How would you feel if he kept making insinuations about you?

Joe: It's only a joke. You take it the wrong way. Liam,

Peter: Oh dear. I think I am right about the gay bit. I think he doth protest too much.

Liam: Right. That's it. I don't care. That's enough. Crap out of you.

Lads. Here, stop lads. Calm down. It's supposed to be a party.

Karen: What's going on, Liam For God's sake?

Liam: Nothing.

Peter: Good to see you again. Karen, you look very well, if I may say so.

Karen: Oh, you're a real salesman Peter.

Peter: No, I really mean it. You look fantastic.

Liam: (*in his mind*)

Jesus, I can't take much more of that bastard. Why do I do this to myself? I don't think I have ever enjoyed a formal do in my life. I always find them extremely stressful. I always seem to be sitting at the edge of things. Is it my imagination or is no one prepared to listen to anything I say? I feel as if I have to try and please people, why can't I just sit there like Peter does and let other people entertain me for a change.

Peter: Do you mind if I dance with Karen Liam?

Liam: I do actually.

Karen: Don't be silly. Liam. Just one dance now, Peter.

Liam: (*in his mind*)

Karen looks so happy. She's belting the drink down her. I don't know. Is she deliberately trying to get me jealous by flirting with that git, or is she trying to hurt me or does she even notice me? And where does she find those stories? I never heard that story about her friend at college that she was telling the lads earlier.

Liam: Oh Joe, if you are going to the bar, will you get me a pint?

Joe: Okay, Liam.

Liam: Thanks. I'll buy you one later.

I don't understand it. Why is it that couples always reserve their best behavior for strangers and treat each other with mild contempt? It should be the other way around. I've never seen her laughing so much. I bet they're both having a good laugh at my expense looking at me. A lonely figure, glowering. Ouch. From the seat in the corner with the spring sticking out of it.

Karen: Come on, Liam. Get up and dance. It's great fun,

Liam: No thanks. I'm fine.

Liam: *(in his mind)*

Why am I so self-conscious? Why can't I just get up there and dance like everyone else? I want to get up, but I feel everyone is looking at me. Of course, they're not. No one is watching me, but that doesn't help. What is it about Karen that when I need her most to be by my side and attentive to me, she contributes to my insecurity by running around the place for God's sake, why am I thinking like this? I'll have another couple of pints, by christ I'm going to enjoy myself no matter what.

(Fades, sound of car parking)

Karen: I haven't had such a great night in ages. You never bring me out. You'd think you were ashamed of me.

Liam: Yeah, it was okay, I suppose.

(Door opening)

Karen: What's all that noise?

(Sound of lady singing)

Liam: Granddad, where is Granddad?

Babysitter: I'm sorry about this, Mr. And Mrs. O'Carroll, but there was nothing I could do.

Karen: What's going on?

Babysitter: Some old lady arrived at midnight and she said she was an old choir mate of our granddad and insisted on seeing him.

Liam: And where is he now?

Babysitter: I think he's in the bath with her

(sound of door opening, singing and splashing)

Liam: Granddad, what on earth are you doing? You've flooded the floor. Excuse me. I don't know who you are madam, but please make yourself respectable and get out of our bathroom.

Granddad: Ah, bugger off. This is my lady friend from the choir and we always drink a little whiskey together. Here, have some Liam, my boyo.

Karen: Get him out of there. I tell you, he has gone too far this time.

(Sound of bed creaking as they get into it)

Liam: I'm sorry about tonight.

Karen: Sorry isn't good enough this time. He has to go or I go.

Liam: I don't like the way you keep giving me ultimatums all the time and threatening our marriage.

Karen: Ha. That's a laugh. I think you'd just walk out the door if it suited you. I think you'd just laugh it off.

Liam: That's crazy. I'd never walk away from our marriage, even when I'm depressed, the thought wouldn't even enter my head.

Karen: You and your bloody depression. Do you ever think about me? You depress me by moaning about your job, and where your life is going.

Liam: I talk to you about things that are important to me. That's what marriage is supposed to be about.

Karen: Yeah, but you never stop. You're totally introverted and self obsessed.

Liam: That's typical of you. If I didn't talk, you'd be the first person to complain that we don't communicate.

Karen: The only communication you do is intending to drive me to madness. There is obviously madness in your family and I'm afraid that it might infect Sean.

Liam: That's not very logical. Madness isn't something you're born with.

Karen: If I had thought when I met you that you might turn out like your father or your granddad, I don't think I would have married you. I didn't realize the risk I was taking.

Liam: That's a rotten thing to say. I didn't realize that you were so shallow,

Karen: Well, Liam, we have to face the fact, do we really know each other at all? Sometimes I feel that you don't care about anyone. You're so negative. You live in a dream world of your own. I really think you're autistic. What sort of a father are you to raise children?

Liam: That's crazy. Talk. I love Sean. He's the world to me and despite myself, I love you too.

(Moves towards here her)

Karen: Go away from me. I don't like you anymore. There's only one thing on your mind ever.

Liam: Ah, have it your way and go to hell. We can get the divorce papers tomorrow if that's what you want, I can't do this anymore.

(Turns over to go to sleep.) (Sound of a clock ticking loudly)

Examiner: you can turn over your question papers now,

Liam: Okay, this should be a dawdle. Question one. Write a five pages essay on some of the lesser personalities involved in the Biafran War of Independence. Jesus. Where on Earth is Biafra? Answers must be written in classical Greek. What the hell is this? I don't know any Greek. Okay. Okay. What's it that Dad used to say? Keep calm, keep cool and keep going. Okay, let's look at question two, it can be too hard. Using mathematical notation only, for example

integration and the differential calculus, discuss the practicality of Max Plank's theory of rectilinear propagation of light. This must be a joke. I've never studied anything to do with this. Who was Max Planx?

Examiner: You have half an hour to go,

Liam: Okay. Okay, let's go back to question one again. Epsilon, that's a Greek letter. Okay. That's a start. And remember on that candle at Easter, mass, alpha, and Omega. Okay. Okay. Now we are getting somewhere. Now how do I make a sentence with them? Jesus. I can hardly hold my pen with a sweat on my hands.

Examiner: you have five minutes left.

(door slams)

Liam: Oh Christ. There's Father McEvoy. Okay. Okay. Let's see what we've got so far.

(Footstep approaching)

Liam: Okay, I've got my name on the front cover. Good. Now I also have it at the top of each page right now. Jesus, all the pages are blank. I've written absolutely nothing.

(Bell starts ringing)

Father McEvoy: Right, O'Carroll. Time is up. The exam is over. Stop writing. Did you hear me?

Liam: Yes, father

Father McEvoy: Then why don't you listen to me. I'm sick of having to teach you the principles of a good education. What are they O'Carroll?

Liam: *(said through clenched teeth as is being punched)* Respect authority!

Father McEvoy: That's it. It's not so difficult, is it? What else?

Liam: Admire those that beat you. Love those that hurt you.

Karren - Liam. Liam, for god's sake, would you answer the bloody phone? It's been ringing for the past five minutes.

Liam: what? What is it?

(Lift's phone and bell stops ringing).

Liam: Oh... Hello

Man: I'd like to order a taxi, please from Rumours nightclub.

Liam: Well, good for you. Why the hell are you ringing me? This isn't a taxi Company.

(slams phone down)

Karen: We'll have to get the phone checked or the number changed. It's been acting up for the past month.

Liam: What? Oh yeah.

Karen: Are you okay? You're sweating

Liam: Yeah, I was having a weird dream. Since that problem at Sean's school I've been having flashbacks to my school days at the weirdest moments.

Karen: You're probably just too worried about Sean. You shouldn't think about it so much. Do you think you should go and see the doctor?

Liam: I'm not going mad. I'm just under a lot of pressure at the moment.

Karen: Okay. Okay. I'm just trying to help. Listen, I'm sorry about what I said earlier. I didn't mean it. I haven't been able to sleep thinking about it.

Liam: That's okay. I know you didn't mean it.

Karen: Will you give me a kiss?

(Fades door slams)

Karen: Hi, Liam.

Liam: Hello. (*In an unemotional way*)

Granddad: Before you start, I'm not proud about last night. I can't help it. It's the hospitality breaking out in me.

Liam: I think the last time your hospitality broke out grandad people were dying of the black plague.

Granddad: Drank all an old man's liquor she did. Every last drop.

Karen: Give it a rest Granddad. I've spent a day cleaning up after your little orgy with lady Goddiva. The bath was full of nail clippings and the leg hairs, so God alone knows what you were up to in there. Thank god Sean slept through it. You've had the heating on all day, and you deliberately put Jack up sitting proudly on my favorite chair.

Liam: Look, I'm not interested in all this hassle at the moment alright.

Keran: Have you been out drinking?

Liam: I went for a couple with the lads.

Keran: You must have had quite a few. You look sick,

Liam: I'll be all right. I'm going for a walk.

Keran: I don't think that's good idea in your condition,

Liam: I don't care. I'm going for a walk.

Sean: I'll go and get my coat Dad.

Liam: I'm afraid not. I want to walk quickly so I can't bring you,

Sean: Aww, I'll go and get Jack's lead for you then.

Liam: I'm not bringing Jack either. He's always starting fights with other dogs.

Sean: No, he doesn't.

Liam: Yes he does. Be quiet you and don't contradict me always. I'm going, I'll see you later. (in an undertone) Take care of yourself Sean, I love you very much.

Karen: Please, Liam, come back.

Sean: What's wrong with dad mom?

(Door slams. Sound of gale force winds and waves crashing on the shore)

Liam thinking

God, it's stormy tonight. So that's that then, My P45 today was just the right end to the week. And the real sickener is that Peter got a promotion and took great pleasure in telling me so. So I'm a failure and a coward. Well, that's about the size of it. Hmm. There is a way out of this. No (pause) That's what dad did, and that's really the cowards option. I would just be indulging myself for attention like dad when he hung himself in our garage.

(Sleeps and loses his footing)

Ouch. Although on a wild night like tonight, they could blame the elements. A freak accident, a father of one falls on a cliff walk and is washed out to sea. But would it be quick? How long would they be alive in the freezing water? If I change my mind once I hit the water, maybe I would snap out of this drunken stupor and feel there was nowhere better than our little house, no matter how bad things were.

But then again, I won't have the house for long now that I can't pay the mortgage. Whoops!

(he falls again. Sound of rock falling away as he's near the cliff face)

Suicide. Isn't that selfish now? Not if the others never know what happened. I mean, if my body is never found, Karen would just put it down to the fact that I was a coward who absconded to England without saying goodbye when the going got tough. But what was it the counselor used to say to me? Giving up is the easiest thing to do, but to hell with that platitude. Yes, that would be the best outcome for everyone involved. She could spend the rest of her life hating my memory while Sean, Sean, that's not so easily dismissed. Yes, he would be better off.

Karen would marry someone who could provide for them better than I can. They would all be very well off without me. Well, here I am. It's quite natural. Really. I've always felt the sea was a kind of home for me. Well get on with it. You coward? Are you waiting for someone to kick you?

(Sound of hospital)

Doctor - Can you describe how he was when you found him on the cliff walk Mrs O'Carroll.

Karen - He was wandering, talking to himself about 'we've lost everything', he was quite catatonic, he wasn't responding to me, I don't know if he knew who I was.

Doctor - Have things been overwhelming him of late, has he had a lot of pressure from different sources at the same time?

Karen - Yes, I feel bad as I made little effort to comfort or protect him when he was clearly in a fragile emotional state.

Doctor - We will keep him in St John of God's for a week, do you have health insurance?

(Door closes)

(dog barking)

Liam: What's that? It's Sean. Sean. Sean, my son. I'm glad to see you. What are you doing here? Why's Jack barking?

Sean: Mom told me I could come into the hospital to meet you because you left without Jack. And he misses you, I sneaked him in under my coat.

Liam: Sean, Sean, You are my best boy, aren't you,

Sean: Of course. Dad. Why are you crying Dad? Did you hurt yourself on the cliffs last night?

Liam: *(laughs)* No, not at all.

Sean: But why are you crying Dad?

Liam: For one mad moment, I was going to go away from you and Mom.

Sean: But Dad, why would you go away? We would miss you. You are not a bad dad. I think you're better than Billy's dad.

Liam: I know, I know. Sometimes adults are so stupid that they can't see that happiness is standing right in front of them.

Sean: Why didn't you go away Daddy?

Liam: I heard you calling me

Sean: But I wasn't there dad?

Liam: You're always there for me son, in my mind. I suddenly realized that it's not all about jobs or 750 pound designer doormats. Life is all about you, Sean. You are the only thing that matters in life for me, you, your mom, Jack and yes, even grandad!

Sean: Oh? Can we go home for our dinner now? I just got a bit wet down my back coming into the hospital and I've to wear this shirt for school tomorrow.

Liam: *(Laughing)* Of course, Sean, I'll give you a race home but not yet, I'll be out of here soon and we can do it then, like always. Ready, Steady, go Sean.

(Sound laughter fades)