



QUARE MAN, M' DA

Place: Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim, Northwest of Ireland

Time: Easter Sunday

Characters: Conall, a Catholic

Éibhear, a lapsed Catholic

Dad, Éibhear's father

Aiden, a soldier

Glossary:

Carrick: the tiny capital of Ireland's most sparsely populated counties sits on the banks of the Shannon River and the Shannon-Erne Waterway and is Ireland's main recreational boating center. Many 19th century churches and abbeys mixed with the Georgian architecture attract a thriving tourism to its theaters and marinas. The Shannon is the longest river in Ireland.

Quare: queer, odd

M' Da: my dad

Connacht: Connaught, spelled both ways, is a province, in the west of Ireland, to which Catholics were banished in the 1640s.

Dylan Thomas: Welsh poet

The Host: Holy Communion

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MICHAEL WYNNE

QUARE MAN, M' DA

Like a mother, proud, Conall kissed the closed, sleeping eyelids, nibbled them with pu-pu-puckering lips, felt the hooded mounds tremble with the pressure. Naked, he slid outside the single cover, superimposed himself along the lithe, sheeted sleeper, breathed: “Éibhear, it’s Sunday, Éibhear, Éibhear.”

Propping pale arms, full-length, on each side of the prone motionless shape, soft groins pressing through thin white linen, he dipped his neck, drew the point of his tongue the length of the grainy trenched chin, across the closed mouth expiring in the meditation of slumber, precisely through the strait of the philtrum, straight without pause to the tip of the smooth broad-tipped nose.

“Yes, Éibhear,” Conall said in response to a short snort of a stir; again dipped his head to nip the side of the taut throat, nose-nuzzle the underchin, whispering calm urges.

Buttery sunlight tinting the wisps of his thigh, his buttocks, Conall chin-butted the other’s chin, flipped his tongue along the underflaps of the warm moist lips. A shoulder rose, slipping from the sheet. Tenderly, Conall nestled his armpit socket on the shoulder, blowing on the eyelids that, flinching and creasing, opened finally over grey eyes, dream-dazed, blinking at the sunny brilliance of the spring morning ablaze in the window.

“Are you going, Conall, heading now?” Éibhear mumbled, flexing his neck on the pillow.

“I’ve a bit, a bit of time,” said Conall lowly, rolling from him, stroking the sleep-slackened jowl.

Heavily, Éibhear turned from him, eyes again lapsing.

Conall, hands clasped at his nape, went to the sun-filled window, his shrivelled sliver, the head silver-scaled, shivering at a draught. From the window he watched the bend of the river beyond the green sloping bank, boats floating down the Shannon. He looked away, yawning, to the walls of the room, white-washed, monastically bare, then back at the nitid ripples and wavelets of the wending current. "The longest," he murmured, eyes riveted on the river, the heel of his hand kneading the root of his pudenda, pressing the crisp pubes longest in Ireland, and he laughed with no slow priapic irony across his shoulder toward the bed.

Éibhear, lifting his head from the cratered pillow a little, listened for what he'd missed, caught instead a steady inhalation, then a tentative restrained recitative:

"Oh the holly she bears a berry..."

Conall repeated certain bars rendered with a facetious formality. Parody, parodic, parodial. Declension. Very clear-headed, it's a wonder. Éibhear's head sank back, languid eyes on the clutter covering the locker: sundry time-pieces; a phial of nitrite; tissue and foil scraps; Dylan's *Poems*; a supine gin-naggin, bone-dry. Dragging the sheet close so that it twined about his upper arms and thighs, he felt separate folds lodge in his posterior cleft, caress his underbody, form a firm sack around his scrotum.

"...And Mary she bore our Saviour for to be,
And the first tree that's in the Greenwood..."

What did I dream of? The word *tolly* stands out, all it entails. A *goo-goo* word, safe babbling baby slang speak. So-called protective nonsense term, substituting one thing with the same thing essentially. Pretty, pointless, only results in having to relearn. Any benefits? *Tollywolly*. Good to exercise formation of sounds. Who coined it?

Burying his head deeper in their pillows, Éibhear breathed from the tick his, Éibhear's smell, and his, Conall's smell, emanations exhaled and exuded, intimate, mildly mucid, identical essences commingled.

And the tolly tightens, thickens, twitches towards tumescence. Am well awake now.

He stretched, loosening the sheet's embrace, low-hummed to Conall's continuing carolling. From himself Éibhear swished the sheet so it billowed a little, shifted his thighs so

his arousal sprang from constraint. Argus-eyed he watched Conall approach: silently smiling, tight-lipped; hands hipped; sharp-pileated penis horizontal, a demanding flushed arrow. At the same moment that Conall's shins rested against the bed-end, Éibhear switched position swiftly, like a lizard, so his head lay across the foot, stretching his neck, his arms out-splayed. Upwards Éibhear gazed directly at the knitted dendritic gonads, the quivering levelled member.

"Have we time? Conall said, his fingers like tendrils reaching to the thighs. For consuming consummation.

"Yes, yes," came the answer, restive.

Conall sank, sinking his face, his expectant maw onto Éibhear's fired, wire-drawn sex, his own likewise sinking into Éibhear's wet receptive mouth.

Connected, they swivelled to the middle of the billowing huge mattress, their penises sliding piston-like, smoothly synchronous, past slimy inner cheeks, lubricious palates, the ready entrances of seasoned gullets. Arms looped around each other's lower back, with heads undulating from side to side, mechanically impassioned, they took each other whole at each stroke, hands gripping, groping along tensed spinal trenches, furred buttocks and furrows: one fused, pulsing organism, the mutual consciousness sensually drenched. Simultaneously they felt the other tremor, surge, and surging, urgently quicken, then erupt, bolting curdled gobfuls of gobs which, hungry, unthinking, they swallowed like it was their own phlegm, nuzzling each other's softened hardness with soft porcine sighs.

As Conall slipped alongside him, Éibhear murmuring kissed his shins, lapped the darkly filamented flesh, the broad bones, hands clamped in the constricted houghs. *Did the owl man do this in his day?* In the mouths of men, in our mouths: a clandestine oral tradition, tacitly carried, time out of mind. Hushed human music, mouth-organed, rootsy. His earliest sentence, almost: the first remembered, said with father's pride as he searched my reaction for same: "You're like me. How like?"

Disengaged, Éibhear turned on his back, crossed his wrists at his abs, eyes loosely closing.

A little drained. Sex is arduous.

He felt the bed dip at his left, felt Conall rise up, felt parted

lips press on his eyebrows, his eyes, felt the flat of a tongue sweep his flank. Conall's words: "I'll get ready downstairs and head off. See ya, love." Éibhear heard Conall leave, sonorously humming his hymn.

And the mousey as blood it is red. Playful terms for the dirty parts of the dirty body, dirty, dirty. The naiveté of common verbiage. Dad fell for it, of course. Some funny coinages of his, must have been his, the way he thought. What I dreamt of in part. *Crack for fart, mousey, wolly*, so on. And something else, my whole sonship encapsulated in a vision, seen from his eyes, his mind. Something very sexual in it. Looking down at his calloused hands, the veinal arms, that had become mine, mine through him, a dream-blent version of us, the arms and hoe-holding, hod-holding hands focused on because exposed mostly. And me in miniature centering him, not forgotten for a second, my child's mind concentrated on by him, a new universe expanding, requiring a clean flippant lingo. Like breaking into, raiding his brain. Was it like that?

He reached to squeeze the wispy testicles.

Wet dreams induced by my father's suppressed potential, unrecognised otherness. Knowledge is impossible. Limits as it builds, reduces. Start out with all it takes, have our strengths whittled down as we advance. Delightful desires that make us gods if given free rein: nipped, lopped at from the word *go*. Pitiful.

Sleepily sitting, he lazily stroked his glans till the penis lifted from the pubis.

Begotten, not dead for ever. No necessity, however, for me to beget. Not now, no.

Delicately he worked his length with a ringed finger and thumb, a licked index searching beneath him for the rucked anus, the post-coitally tingling tract. Head lolling, his digit sinking to the middle joint between the snappy walls, he held himself more securely, the palm facing outwards, and pumped himself with steady speed re-envisioning the vision seen inside his father's memory.

Dad's Aiden (ah!) in civvies in the brown-yellow photograph always by the marriage bed throughout my childhood in Sooeey with black greased hair in waves like slick liquorice *who was he* was never explained a *dead friend killed in his prime* Dad said a *fine man* seen as *sexy* then with oiled locks

shoulders wide (ah!) a curved crotch distinct from the sepia tints like an icon on my mother's doily locker next to rosary-case psalter ribboned sprigs big mouth open a big smile a fine man *all fine men back then* (ah!) working the land till their backs nearly broke all red meat eaters.

Aiden, his name was, I knew it before mine, a mystery man historyless with wide shoulders widelegged stance hands like scythes *what a man* bumped off in the prime of his prowess (ah!) writhing big-buttocked in my father's mind's eye through the build-up to my actual conception why not (oh!) shag a dead stud.

In two quick shots, Éibhear came, fetched deep-lunged breaths, his shoulders and neck flexed; rising at length from the bed, he stalked across to a basin by the double-hung window, soaked his hands, pat-dampened his face and axillae, flicked glinting globules at his torso, his crotch. Over his shoulder to the purling Shannon he crooned,

“Woe betide you, Shannon water!

By night you are a gloomy river,

And over you I'll build a bridge,

That never more good sex may sever.”

He turned back to study thoroughly in the frameless facewide wall-mirror his dark gums, his tongue and quite even teeth, his hispid chin and jaws, the bleared bulging eyes.

Eyes dark-rimmed, fawny. “You're like me,” says Dad. Opening wide his mouth he peered in deep at the shiny uvula pink-tinted where Conall and the others, strangers, had poked.

Éibhear remembered that years since, remembered last night. *Good night last night. First time for me to fuck at a club. Not Conall's first.* Something wonderfully primordial about it, hands gripping cold porcelain, the pubis and rump colliding, compressing against the other with the pall of piss around us, the fallen folds of denim at our ankles, all consciousness of self and nurture sublimely abandoned with the wrestling, wrenching intenseness, privates on show to the sleazy strobe-streaked dimness, all holes bared with the heedless, happy hunger, shameless and helpless, the shared enormous hunger of us. Us. Concealed by nothing but the pumping lasered dark, our moans merging with the muted tub-thumping beat and the fervid butt-thumping alongside us somewhere, the smell of men so fetid and heavy we could taste it nearly.

Reaching down, Éibhear raised the lower window sash to its height, aimed a bright yellow jet, obliquely arced, so it plashed splashed on slabs edging the embankment beneath. All last night's tipples drained off: pissed at the club, nips swiped as we drove, driving all night from the capital to Carrick, full of the hard stuff and stiff, stopping off for a feel outside Longford, to fondle our longs. How horny we were. And reckless.

Éibhear brayed a laugh, his wrists crossed against the window frame above him, his sungilded trunk leaning forward with the stream from his dick jerking to a dribble on the outer sill. Taste of Conall still lingering. Beautiful to see him again, in the exact same spot standing, shouldering the pillar, his foot on the step. Classy man he is, massive, as they have it, wherever they got the wordy word words in the porno magazines, protective erotic nonsense, this, massive, and all those goo goo toly wolly substitutes. Greeting each other with extended tongues, memories of the last westward trek rousing. Took no time to get back to. And remembered my name, Éibhear, Éibhear, so good to hear him freely use it, often. Introduce it at Mass perhaps, most ceremonious: If we may say a prayer, folks, for Éibhear my fuck-chum. Renaissance is right. I'll dress.

From a chair by the bed, Éibhear removed a pair of black jeans, a grey form-fit teeshirt, a polyvinyl waistcoat, dark socks. He donned them in seconds and, stepping into crumpled boots, he left the room, descended a short flight to a cramped hall. In passing, he lifted from the newel post a faded green bomber jacket with an outline of Connacht cresting one breast, a red ribbon pinned askew to the other. Smiling wryly, but smiling all the same just in case, he dipped a finger in a Cross of Calvary font mounted by the light switch, lightly tipped the Holy Water on the bridge of nose, his lips, his breastbone. Stepping out of the house, he carefully clicked the door after him and turned down the bright street whistling, his thumbs looped. He entered a squat shop on the corner and bought a tabloid which he wedged into the jacket under his arm as he crossed the dusty deserted road to the church.

Antiquated shells, these, before long now. Anachronisms. Already hear of many chapels and abbeys turned into offices and galleries, secularised wholesale. And high time. Much

more practical. Leave their outsides ornate, curiosities, bitter reminders to the last of the repressed.

Passing through a side-gate, Éibhear walked, tensed, into the church, through to the shadowed, stout-pillared nave, through to a sombre chilly susurrating stillness.

The handsome priest stood in white vestments reciting the prayers.

His view of the altar obstructed, he watched the leaning attentive bodies of the aged kneeling hearers lean into the vitality of the priest. *Very strange scene to me now. How I've grown out of the embarrassing solemnity of Mass.*

Éibhear leaned forward, old habits dying hard, at the sound of the priest's homily concluding, rhythmically paced, mildly commanding, delivered in the resounding sonorous monotone of a divinity scholar. Intellectually off and not too much spiritual comfort either with no one noticing or complaining or demanding anything anymore. Then the priest, wishing them kneeling in their own prayers and thoughts and fears a peaceful easy Easter Feast. And to him, "A Happy Easter, Father," from the flat-toned supplicants, dutiful, Godfearful.

Offer up the bloody body here. And as blood the willy's red. My childish pronouncements dreamed of, seems to suggest what we're fools to try sublimating: our carnality, its facets. Gas too, that hairy, weird episode, weird, dad making a pass at me in his senility, me just out of the bath and he approaching, stroking my sternum, and the seminal smell of him, and pleading, "*Aiden, why, Aiden?*" And me wondering how far they went, how far, and how, and wondering how well did m' Da once know how a man smells, tastes, how he sounds when in heat, and wondering how the hell had I ever suspected before I knew what there was or that there could be something to.

Standing by the side pillar, on the gospel side of the church, Éibhear levelled his eyes on his fuck-chum, his Conall, high-collared, roman-collared, and robed, standing commandingly, his person pressed to the altar-edge, holding the Host at arms-length above him.

"And what do you do?" Conall had asked.

"I take striplings for Music and as I advise them on their crotchets, I do cross-surveys on their crotches. And you? What do you do?"

And the land I had when Conall told me.

“You’re what?” I said.

Quare man, m’ Conall, handing out the Host, “Body of Christ.” Mmmm. Quare man, m’ Da. The Ulster expression, shows disbelief. Strange it is. But it’s apt.

Éibhear stood, hands pocketed, watching on, watching inhibitions flagrantly rescind, history change, the Shannon roll brightly on carrying tourist boats against the current while churches turn into performing arts centers.

