

Dinner with Daddy

Fiona Meehan

IT HAD ALL been going so well. Jonathan had, as instructed, shifted all the food bought from the deli into their own bowls and oven dishes, and set the table nicely with the borrowed tablecloth and napkins. “Daddy likes things to be done properly” she’d explained. Maeve had spent the week obsessively combing the apartment for every trace of her presence and shoving everything into the spare room wardrobe, countering Jonathan’s increasingly exasperated protests “so what if he knows you sleep here”, with a simple, stoical “you don’t know Daddy”.

Daddy was on his best behaviour, or what passed for good behaviour for him. “You live alone then Jonathan?” asked Daddy, pointedly twitching a green silk scarf she’d somehow missed on the coat stand as he passed. “Eh, yes, yes of course, Mr Henley. That’s, aah, my sister’s. She stays over sometimes, when she’s shopping you know. So eh, what can I get you?”

Daddy had been in fine form at dinner, regaling the table with tales of Mummy’s awful cooking, and how he’d nearly starved when he first married. “Had to get my own mother to teach her, show her how I like things done”, he chortled. Jonathan had responded with exemplary patience, if occasionally through gritted teeth, as Daddy trawled through every aspect of his personal and professional history, and then moved on to the family background. “Connected to the Donegal Costellos are you? No? Oh, what a shame, they’re a good family. Still, we have to work with what we’re given, don’t we?” he said graciously.

They were sitting after dinner in the living area, gazing out over the quays, admiring the early Summer sunset gleaming on the Liffey water. “I see you know your whiskey young man”. Daddy watched benignly as Jonathan tipped the 20 year old single malt into the cut glass tumbler, borrowed from the neighbours. Then, “no Jonathan, no, no, don’t, oh God!!!” Maeve cried, darting forward, arm outstretched towards the glass. But too late.

As the large cube of ice splashed and clunked its way through the swirling amber liquid, a dreadful silence filled the room. Mummy covered her eyes with her hand, sighed resignedly, then reached for her handbag. “Is, is something wrong?” quavered Jonathan in bewilderment. “Would you, would you like some more ice?” “No, no thank you Jonathan”, said Daddy in a voice as frosty as the proffered ice cube, gazing at the polluted whiskey with undisguised revulsion. “Come along Mummy, time to go” he said, heaving his considerable bulk out of the armchair. “We’ll have our nightcap at home”.