

## Karaoke

*Fly Me To The Moon....*

With Margaret in hospital I'd run out of excuses. As she slumped against death's door, I was on a budget flight to Faro with a bag of almonds, a gin and tonic, and a head full of gloom. He'd be at the airport, smiling through the fug of cigarette smoke, his lungs blackening, –

They're my lungs Em

- in his white socks and trainers, mid-thigh length khaki shorts and a t-shirt with a suitably inappropriate slogan slung over his belly, the last line or word disfigured in a swill of flesh. Given that the line would be sexist or alcoholic or ridiculous, it wasn't such a bad thing having his distended stomach as obliterator. No idea where he gets them? I can't imagine him pushing through the locals at the Wednesday market, bent over a pile of t-shirts looking for his thought for the day. He hated shopping and Margaret hated the t-shirts. The human billboard, the body as advertising hoarding, branded, spreading the message. *Don't push me I'm close to the edge. I drink therefore I am. My dad went Far, Oh, and all I got was this lousy t-shirt.* I worry about his belly. It can't get much bigger. He must have said goodbye to his feet a long time ago. *This is it toes, I don't know when we'll meet again so hasta el final, au revoir, ciao.* The last two times I'd seen him, I made sure that I could touch hands behind his back, check things weren't spiralling out of control. Who wants to be lugging all that fat and fluid around anyway? Squashed organs pleading for their life, *Help. Please. Please, no more. We're dying in here.* Don't. The bigger he gets, the more I worry about him disappearing. Not dying, just becoming this huge vessel of nothingness. A gigantic sloshing blob mopping up

the drivel, lager and baked beans with his daily bread. And his skin. His feet. I worry about his feet. Feet are a killer for old people. Not that they might get kicked to death, though they might. We're all at risk these days. He'd take some kicking. He's not that old really. But it's balance. If you don't take care of your feet you might topple over any minute. Crash. Bones splinter or break or disintegrate and you never get up again.

Margaret would rest his feet on a towel in her lap, take an ice cube and soothe his aching, cracking soles, like a child tenderly colouring her drawing. Saint Margaret, working the cream into the sores and cracks of his cooled feet. She would talk to him as she toiled, warm laughter with the ice and cream. With her expiring in hospital, his feet would be suffering. Would I chill my fingers to appease his feet? Could I bear to have his feet facing me? These hands touching... I worry about his lifestyle

*All you have to do is call...*

You could bring a friend

Was he joking? I wouldn't drag my upstairs neighbour's screaming cat to witness the robotized excesses of ex-pat life. Unless I was killing two cats with one. Pounding my dad's head with the whining white mog until it finally croaked. Wake him up to something more than a Sunday Roast and a pint in The Crown, "the genuine English pub" on the Algarve. *Another Yorkshire pud with your beef Marky?* Why do they talk to each other like children? They could roast the dead cat and no one would be able to tell the difference between that and the beef.

Why don't you bring a friend?

I grabbed my nose and swallowed to stop myself from choking on shock and a mouthful of wine. If I wanted to keep any friends, I would have to keep them as far away from my family as possible. Dodge the ex-pat patrol my dad had recruited to. Ex-pat? Ex-patriots? Couldn't be further from the truth. These were rabid patriots waving their nostalgic Union Jacks over land and sea, as they carted their cities, villages, and egg and chips around these foreign lands. *We'll have your sunshine but wouldn't touch your food with a maypole.* I could see Marina sitting on a stool in Jimmy's, the sleeves of her Nicole Fahi dress folded over as she stroked her bingo card, waiting for two fat ladies,

Oh my god

Are you all right?

Sorry?

You just said Oh my g–

Out loud?

Yes

Sorry

Are you okay?

Yes

I was worried you might be afraid of flying or that you were –

It's not the flying, it's the destination

Você é louco. Inglês míope, você viaja, mas não tem sensação real de aventura ou curiosidade. Porque se importar

Sorry I don't speak the –

Of course you don't

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