

Overheard in a Seaside Port Bar by Milo Shapiro

Setting: A little bar in Doolin, a small port town in County Clare, on the western coast of Ireland.

Time: Sept, 1972

Cast

Eamon and Liam: Local fishermen, friends, somewhere between early 40s and late 60s.

Woman: 35, pleasant looking, amiable, might look a bit older.

Cillian: 40-50, bearded, very handsome and rugged, but believable that the sea boating life has aged him some

Set-up: Before the lights come up, we hear the Herb Albert song "Tequila". As the lights come up, that fades enough that it's easy to talk over, but it's still playing behind the scene for a while.

We see Eamon and Liam, sitting at a bar (facing the audience) talking. A woman in her 30s mimes tends the bar near them; initially her back is mostly to us as she does her busywork.

Cillian (pronounced KILL-ee-uhn), a bearded man in glasses and a woolen cap sits further down the bar by himself, silently nursing a drink.

CURTAIN

Liam: So I says to her, I says, "Fiona, don' be like that. You can't take everythin' a man says to heart."

Eamon: True that. Sometimes a man is just talkin' and don't think about the way everythin' could be taken.

Liam: Exactly. But she say, 'Liam, you're a grown man. That might be fine at twenty, but by now, after twelve years married, you ought to know that anything you do or say has its effect on me.

Eamon: She's right there, too, though.

Liam: She is. And I hear it. But I can't take back what I said. I meant no harm. I was just talkin'. And I'd had a bit of the whisky in me at that point.

Eamon: Oh, that never helps.

Liam: Not a bit. I mean I wasn't blotto by any means...

Eamon: But you were feelin' it.

Liam: I was. So I says, "But cha know I was jus' kiddin', don'cha?"

Eamon: "Kidding?" Oh, Liam. No.

Liam: Stupid, I was. Who am I to joke about a woman's aging? She's looking more like she did back then than I do!

Eamon: They most do, the women. Boatin' life is hard on a man's face.

(Woman, whose back has mostly been to us thus far, moves off to the side so that we can see in profile when she soon joins the conversation)

Liam: Yeah. An' she says, "Well, aren't ya just a comedian. A regular Dave Allen, y'are."

Eamon: I saw Dave Allen on stage years back! On a trip to Limerick. At the Savoy. Back in '64 or '65 maybe.

Liam: Not the point, Eamon.

Eamon: Right. Sorry.

Liam: Anyway, she's been really cold ever since. Hardly talkin' to me since night before last. Tension as thick as butter straight out of the fridge, I tell ya.

Woman: Did ya say you was sorry?

Liam: What, love?

(Woman faces the audience for a moment to turn off the radio and Tequila stops playing)

Woman: Did ya say you was sorry? So far I heard you explainin' away the comment about her looking old as "man talk". And you then switched to tellin' her you was just jokin', but I'm yet to hear ya say you told her you was sorry. Or that you still find her beautiful.

(pause)

Liam: I...figured I'd only make things worse.

Woman: No, Liam. She needs to know you realize it was a stupid thing to say and that you're sorry ya said it.

(pause)

And it couldn't hurt to say that, to you, she's only the more beautiful for all the time you know her.

(pause)

Liam: But she ain't. We married back in '60. She's twelve years older now...an' it shows!

Eamon: Liam, I ain't never had a girl for more than eight months in my life, but even I can hear that she's right here. Don't matter if Fiona's lookin' a little rougher for the years, like the sea wind's been hitting her awfully hard...

Woman: Huh! And you've never had a girl, Eamon!

Eamon: ...but what matters is that she believe it, comin' from ya.

Woman: Yes. An' it's your job to *make* her believe it, true or not. After the apology. Because then she might actually believe you was jokin'.

(pause)

Liam: Miss Unmarried here. How'd you get so smart in the ways of romance?

Woman: List'nin' to the likes of you since I were 17 in here...and tellin' people to do the opposite.

(Eamon laughs hard; Liam chuckles)

Woman: Plus I'm a woman. I'm not immune to knowing how a man can make you feel.

Liam: Yes, we know...

Eamon: *(very gently mockingly imitating her)* "He made me feel like the only woman on earth."

Liam: *(joining in with Eamon)* "He could tell stories in such a way that I could see everyone and everything there."

Eamon: "I felt something with him I've never felt before or since."

Liam: "I wish there were a man who could hold a candle to his memory, but...

Liam and Eamon in unison: ...not a one has passed through this town of Doolin that comes close."

(She smiles as the two men laugh at themselves.)

Woman: Many is the night, though...I've wished someone could.

(That sobers their laughter)

Woman: Fiona's a good woman. And by now, she's put the wains to bed. Go home while you still have only the one whiskey in you. Apologize and tell her she looks magnificent as ever and that she'll always be the only beauty you care about.

Eamon: Aye to that. C'mon, I'll walk you home.

Liam: *(to Woman)* Thanks, love. *(he leans in with a pucker. She leans in and puts her cheek where he can give it a kiss)* There's m' fine girl. You look more like your mum all the time.

Woman: One of the few graces of getting older. I could do worse.

Eamon: You could indeed. A fine lady that Kathleen, she was.

Liam: *(To Eamon)* Amen to that. A sinner's shame to see her go. None like her. *(To Woman)* Likely see you tomorrow.

(The two men start to leave)

Woman: *(calling out to them)* Bring Fiona around. It'd be good to see her.

Liam: *(as they exit)* I just might.

Woman: *(to herself, with a chuckle)* No...you won't.

(pause)

Cillian: Seems like you know him inside and out.

Woman: Ah, the stranger has a voice. Well, sure. Known him all my life. Grew up here. Ain' no one who lives in Doolin that I don't know. People come *through* Doolin – tourists, fisher folk like you, but nobody moves here. Oh people leave, but no one moves here.

Cillian: If people keep leavin', how is it Doolin ain' a ghost town?

Woman: Cause between there bein' nothin' to do here and Pope Paul rulin' the roost, there's always enough babies growin' up to keep this town makin' up for whoever leaves.

Cillian: Plenty of work on the docks for 'em as well.

Woman: Thank God for that. Not much town work to speak of, but if you can hoist a sail, drop a net, or fix a rudder, you can earn a living in Doolin.

Cillian: How'd you peg me for...whadja call me...fisher folk.

Woman: Well, I don't know you so you ain' a local. You're not in guard uniform, so it ain' about trouble in the town. Nothing about this get-up says "Tourist".

Cillian: *(chuckles)* Agreed.

Woman: And... *(she stops herself)*

Cillian: And?

Woman: Nothing.

Cillian: You've come this far. Say it.

Woman: It's not bad, but...*(she stops herself)*

Cillian: But...

Woman: ...a whiff of mackerel.

Cillian: Ha!

Woman: Really, it's not bad!

Cillian: But, as a local all your life...

Woman: ...you just know. And it's the smell of family and friends here. You almost stop noticing it.

Cillian: *(he hoists he drink like a toast)* Eau du Doolin!

Woman: *(she mimes grabbing a shot glass in response)* Atlantic Aqua Velva.

(they laugh; he drinks; she puts it down. A long pause.)

Cillian: You're alone here?

Woman: If you mean do I have bar help, I do. But on a Tuesday there's not enough business that I can't handle it alone. If you mean are we alone, I can promise you that with one good shout, three men renting upstairs would be down to make sure you couldn't get on that boat tomorrow.

Cillian: Easy. Sorry. I was trying to ask if it were your family business or if you work for someone else here.

Woman: Oh. Yes. My family business.

Cillian: And...again no trouble intended...just yours?

Woman: Me Da opened the place in '41. We lost him in '66. An' I'm sure you caught that Mum passed long before that...and that there's no husband to help. No one sits down a bar that long without eavesdropping, so no need to act like you didn't hear or feign an apology.

Cillian: Wouldn't dream of it. This man they spoke of...must have been quite the husband. He's passed, too, I take it.

(pause)

Woman: No. Not a husband. Just a man.

(pause)

Cillian: Just?

Woman: *(smiling)* Not just.

Cillian: But he's passed?

Woman: *(pause)* I...don't know.

Cillian: He sounds like quite a story and I have no right to it. But as a sailor with nothing more at sea than the men I travel with, there's nothing I value more than a good tale, and I have nothing but time this evening, if you'd indulge me.

Woman: Oh. I don't know...

Cillian: Please.

Woman: *(pause)* It's not going to sound like much if you weren't there. He came through Doolin in the summer of '63, when I was just 26. It was supposed to be a two-night stay, but there was some serious problems with the boat so the crew was stuck here for nearly four weeks during the repair. We became...close.

Cillian: I'm not Pope Paul. I'm not here to judge you.

Woman: *(laughs)* Since you're so worldly, I won't bore you with *those* kind of details. But that was the smallest part of it. It was...something in the way that I felt *heard*. Other men listen so that they can impress you with the fact that they listened. An' don't get me wrong...that's a lot better than the ones who never listen. But with him, I dunno...it was when he laughed in exactly the right places...asked the right questions...and....

Cillian: And?

Woman: *(pause...maybe a little choked up)* And how everything I said, reminded him of a story, too. But always a richer, more fascinating one, of places I'd only heard of and people who...who don't come through Doolin. Such beautiful stories. I've always been a pretty content woman, but the grace he had to his tales made me want to leave! To see what I'd been missing. What I'm still missing.

Cillian: But you stayed.

Woman: Oh. Well, yes. Me Da was still very able but I was all he had. I couldn't leave him. No, I couldn't. And besides...

Cillian: Yes?

Woman: *(pause)* Leaving with him wasn't an option.

Cillian: Did he not feel the same connection?

Woman: No! That's not what I mean. I'm not going to claim I can put love in words or define what it is, but I know that we were the closest thing to a great love that *either* of us had ever had. It's just...he was a poor sailor. Working ships with men. Going where the work was. There was no place for me in that world. We both knew that. Each morning, he'd hope the ship wouldn't be ready and each day it wasn't was another day we got together. *(pause...pasting on a brave smile)* Until those days ended.

Cillian: And...there's been no one since?

Woman: How could there be? I know all the locals...

Cillian: But tourists? Other fishermen? You must meet so many men here.

Woman: Not so many. And as Eamon and Liam teased me earlier, "None who..."

Both in Unison: "...could hold a candle to his memory."

(silence for a moment as she starts to step away from him to go back to tasks)

Cillian: I'm....I'm SO.....sorry.....Brandy.

(she stops at hearing her name. Long pause as she takes in who he is)

Woman: Cillian?

Cillian: I know. The glasses...the beard...a lot of years of sun, wind, and snow on my face. Not the face of the boy you met. Plus finally cutting of that shoulder length hair you knew. No one recognizes me over time.

Woman: *(turning to face him, in disbelief)* Cillian?

Cillian: I came in here only intending to get a glimpse of you. To refresh my memory. Expecting to see a husband behind the bar. Or maybe learning from some stranger that you'd moved on. But when I came in and saw you talking to those men, what could I say? So I sat. And to my shock, I heard you say that no one had ever come after me.

Woman: Of course they didn't! We professed our love for one another! I knew you had to leave, but I always thought you'd come back sometime. In a year. Maybe two.

Cillian: And now it's been more...

Woman: Nine! Not "more". Nine years! And two months!

Cillian: I didn't know you were waiting. I felt what you felt at the time, but I was landbound for the longest time I'd ever been since I was 13. It wasn't real to me. I told you then: I'm married to the sea. it's not just what I do. It's who I am. I went back to it. And **you** were supposed to get on with **your** life.

Woman: Why would you think I could? You made me aware of feelings I didn't know I could have. I'd never looked into someone's eyes for hours. I'd never been spellbound by stories like yours of faraway places. The dance in Bellmullet! The pie tossing in Donegal! The fortune teller in Ballyliffin.

Cillian: My God. You remember everything. I haven't thought about the fortune teller probably since I mentioned her to you.

Woman: You didn't "mention" her. You told me every detail. Her glittering blue and gold scarf. The chickens clucking loudly behind her. The mixed smell of wet tobacco and honey cakes that were baking.

Cillian: Jesus. You remember so much more than I do.

Woman: Everyone in Doolin knows these details...because I've told them so many times...and you don't remember them?

Cillian: Ballyliffin is no place special...

Woman: It is to me! I've been there a thousand times in my mind. Where have you been?

Cillian: Everywhere. And no place. Mostly, I'm at sea helping us plan the next place we'll stop – where all I get are a few trinkets and stories before getting back on the water.

Woman: Trinkets. Was this one of your trinkets?

(she pulls on the locket she's wearing on a silver chain)

Cillian: (pause) The lockets from Spain! Oh my god. I haven't seen those in...

Woman: ...in nine years. But I've worn it around my neck all that time.... (turning the locket around) ...with your name on the back, Cillian...so I wouldn't start to wonder if I dreamt the whole thing.

Cillian: Brandy...I don't know what to say. I never asked you to wait for me. I even told you that you'd make someone a good wife.

Woman: I...I know you said that, but...

Cillian: ...but what did you think I meant by that?

Woman: I thought you were giving me permission to love someone else. But I didn't think you believed I'd ever try. Not after what we had. I just couldn't.

Cillian: No one. In all these years?

Woman: No! You were my first...in the empty tenant room upstairs...

Cillian:Room 3. With the yellow curtains and the photos of horses. I haven't forgotten our time together.

Woman: You just thought it was over when you left.

Cillian: Well...

Woman: Wait! (pause) A minute ago, you said locketsssss.

Cillian: What?

Woman: You said "Locketssss from Spain"...and that you hadn't seen "those". Plural.

Cillian: *(hesitantly)* Yeeessss....

Woman: Were there others?....Did you give lockets with your name on them to other women?

Cillian: *(long pause)* Not...to any who mattered to me like you did...do.

Woman: *(long pause)* You gave the others out before...or after you gave that one to me?

Cillian: *(hesitantly)* Before.....mostly.

Woman: *(long pause)* Never once a false word from you. Can't fault you that.

Cillian: I'm an honest man, if nothing else.

Woman: Are you planning to stay?

Cillian: What?

Woman: Are you planning to stay? You said you came here hoping to see me, but you didn't say if you were planning to stay if you did.

Cillian: Oh. No, I can't. I did choose this job because I saw that it had a stop in Doolin, but....

Woman: ...but it's just a stop.

Cillian: *(hesitantly)* Yeeessss. Brandy, I'm really sorry that...

(she raises a hand to stop him)

Woman: Stop. I'm *not* sorry.

Cillian: What?

Woman: I'm not sorry. My stomach is in knots. I have a feeling I'm going to cry a lot after you go. But I'm glad you came. I didn't know that it's what I needed, but mixed in with frustration, anger, and hurt...there's a strange sense of...freedom? And I think that's actually going to grow. Sometimes, maybe it's good to find out that what you had wasn't real.

Cillian: It was real!

Woman: Mmmmm...to you it was. Ya...your experience of it *was* real. I was the dreamer. And I thank you for waking me up. (pause) I think maybe it's best if you go now.

Cillian: I...understand. Can I say something before I leave?

Woman: Of course.

Cillian: You look magnificent as ever. And you'll be the only beauty I ever care about.

(after a pause, she laughs)

Woman: *(gently)* And you look a little rougher for the years, like the sea wind's been hitting you awfully hard.

(he laughs)

Cillian: Goodbye, Brandy.

(he starts to leave)

Woman: Wait!

(he turns surprised. She comes around bar, walks up to him, puts her arms around him, gives him a sweet kiss)

Cillian: I...uh...

Woman: I waited over nine years for that. And I don't know when the next one is coming. I wasn't going to miss the chance. Goodbye, Cillian.

(after a moment, looking at each other, he turns and leaves. She ambles over to behind the bar and turns on the radio again. We hear the song "Brandy", starting 45 seconds in, with first chorus, but she's not really conscious of it as she cleans up the bar. After the line about the "the man that Brandy loved", she stops, takes off the necklace, looks at it, tucks it in a drawer, and just before the next chorus, she looks out at us. Lights fade as we hear the song continue into curtain calls)

If you don't know this famous song or aren't sure you do, you can hear it and read the words at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gl1GeauAzcg>