

NO SECOND SPRING

By

Alan McLeod

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This is a one-act play, written to be performed in its entirety. However, it can be shortened and has therefore been scripted as a two-part play.

The stage shows the emerging story of Karen and Joe's life; who find in time that a Broken Heart Knows No Second Spring.

Annie, who sits in an imaginary radio studio to the right of the stage, narrates this story.

As the play moves back and forth from Annie's narration to the action, the lights move up and down on stage. Whilst talking, either a simple beam or a table lamp she herself controls at the studio desk lights Annie's studio.

More than most, this play demands a powerful sound system to push out the 'bottom-end' hallmark beat of Runrig.

It is conceivable that the quota of actors can be kept to a maximum of five if Sue plays Karen's mother, the Rev and the pinstriped fighter. If required, Dipper could play the irate customer in the restaurant.

Characters:

*Karen
Joe
Annie
Dipper
Irate customer
Sue
Karen's mother
Pinstriped fighter*

[My directions and movement-points are based on views from out-front].

(Annie): [Annie Osprey sits behind her studio desk, presenting the local Sunday morning radio show on Clyne FM. The dark, dingy surroundings and cheap studio equipment reflect Clyne's precarious financial position. Annie Osprey is Clyne's 'Star' name, having previously presented on Radio 1 and worked the clubs in London during the early 90's dance craze. Her slow, deliberate and husky tone suggests too much acid and too much nicotine.]

Well there you are – the new Runrig single, fresh from the press. Isn't it just fantastic? Oooh! I love that cosy, Runriggy sound – makes me want to dig out my denim jacket, buy a litre bottle of cider and go to a summer festival all over again. Mmm...memories...mmm.....Runrig.....

The time is 10.39 and its Sunday the 24th on a sunny, sultry, Sutherland morning – isn't it good to be alive?

Talking off memories...*[theme for Clyne's our tune]* its time for more memories. *[Interval as we listen to a few bars of the theme].*

This weeks Our Tune is kinda special. Actually very special – because I have received a letter from Karen about Joe – and also a letter from Joe about Karen. Kinda freaky? – Yeh...but so is life – well it certainly is for Joe and Karen.

So – I'm going to read excerpts from both letters and, I hope, do justice to both Karen and Joe who certainly find themselves in *[pause and then a little stutter]* eehm eehm a painful predicament.

It all begins in the summer of 1981 at Dunrobin Castle. *[curtains open].*

[Joe is sitting against a tree, exhausted with the sun, too much dancing and too much Export. Runrig have just finished playing and Joe takes a draught of Export from a warm can. Joe is a petulant teenager, dressed in football trainers, dark jeans, an AC/DC t-shirt and a denim jacket hanging over his shoulder. Between his legs, scattered on the ground, lies a couple of beer cans and a torn plastic bag].

(Joe): Chi Mi'n Geamhradh, da, da, da. [swig from can]. Aah. Magic. [shouts] Runrig!!

[Karen wanders past in a daze, humming Loch Lomond. She is crying with both euphoria and exhaustion. She is wearing red kickers, faded tight jeans, a leopard skin t-shirt beneath a black satin long-shirt. Her blond hair is crimped, her eyes heavily mascaraed and her ears sporting over-large hoop earrings. She is proudly wearing a newly acquired Runrig scarf].

(Joe): Are you all right?

(Karen): [sniffing]. Yes. I'm fine.

(Karen): What d'ya think of that then? Great eh?

(Joe): Aye.

(Karen): Do you like my knew scarf? Mmm. *[she pulls it around her face, Mae West style]* Aren't they the best? They should be on Top of the Pops.

(Joe): Or the Old Grey Whistle Test.

(Karen): Nah! Isn't Dunrobin fantastic? Its so beautiful.

(Joe): Beautiful? Not very beautiful if you were cleared out of the land..... not very beautiful if you...

(Karen): Oh shut up! What's that got to do with Runrig? You're drunk...

(Joe): Na I'm not *[laughing]*.

(Karen): And you're stupid....

(Joe): *[beginning to fool around]* Who you calling stupid?

(Karen): You *[laughing and giggling]* and you're living in the past *[she pushes him]*.

(Joe): Hey! *[he rebounds and pushes her]*.

(Karen): *[goes to grab Joe but he grips her arms]*. Ow! *[softly]* Aah... *[in a whisper]*.

(Joe): You are beautiful. *[he gazes into her eyes]* I've fancied you for a long time.

(Karen): Have you?

[She blushes and pulls him a little towards her. They kiss. He pulls her closer with her scarf].

(Annie): Karen goes onto say:

'...it was love at first sight for me. Joe was the kindest guy I'd ever met and most importantly - he made me laugh. We fell in love when I was 14 – we married in 1985 when I was 18. I could not imagine how happy I was. We had a white wedding and because my dad had died when I was a baby, my mam gave me away.

For the next few years we got on with life. But thankfully we had no kids – for things were about to turn very nasty. You see, Joe was an exceptionally good footballer, playing for various teams in the Highland League as well as been asked to trial with Celtic and Newcastle. But in 1990, when he was 23, he suffered a severe leg break and ligament damage to his knee. He was told he'd never play football again. From then on – his life seemed to fall apart – he stopped working, began drinking and became abusive...'

[Lights up on stage to a 1980's sitting-room. Joe is blind drunk and very abusive].

(Joe): *[Reading the paper, angrily]*. No way! £1m for that turkey! What's the world coming to? I could play better than that bucket of crap with one leg – and my eyes shut!

[He gets up and staggers towards Karen who is reading at the table].

Are you listening to me?

(Karen): Yes *[quivering]*.

(Joe): Aye – chance'd be a fine thing. Sitting there reading your fan letters and stupid magazines! *[He hurls his newspaper on the ground]*. You never listen to me! *[He staggers and kicks a chair across the room]*.

(Karen): Joe – what was that for? Just because you can't play football anymore – it doesn't mean to say that the rest of us have to suffer.

All you think about is yourself. 'Poor me'. 'Poor me'. All you do is sit around here all day, drinking far too much and.....

[Joe pulls up the leg of his trousers to show a severely deformed leg. He grabs Karen by the hair and pulls her off the chair onto her knees with his knee in her face].

(Joe): Poor me? Poor me? You don't know what it's like to have the one thing that meant something to you taken away from ya! Feeling sorry for myself? You'd feel sorry for yourself if this happened to you – you bitch!

[Joe now has her hair in his left hand, with his right fist clenched, preparing to hit her. He swipes everything off the table. He drags her around, throwing things about and kicking things. Eventually he is ready to hit her].

(Karen): *[Screaming]* No!!!!!!!

(Joe): *[Throws her to his side and holds his head in his hands. He has picked up the scarf from the table]*. Oh!... Aah! *[He moves to the chair he was sitting on and picks up a bottle of whisky. He takes a long swig and wipes his mouth with the scarf. He then moves over to her and motions to hit her with the back of his hand. Instead, he looks at her, then shakes his head, throws the scarf at her and storms out]*.

[Karen is cowering on the floor, whimpering with fear and shock. She picks up the smashed wedding photo that Joe had swiped to the floor and pulls it to her breast. She rocks back and forth, sobbing; and then she begins to hum].

(Karen): *[Singing/mumbling]* You'll take the High Road and I'll take the Low Road, and I'll be in Scotland afore yea.

[Karen crawls across the floor to the upturned telephone, Joe had also trashed. She dials].

(Karen): Aunt Molly? *[she is still sobbing a little]*. Aye fine thank you. No, I'm ok. ... Just a little. Its nothing. ... Its just Can I come to Edinburgh Aunt Molly? Its just for a few days.... Tonight No – we're not very happy at all.... No – he'd not harm me... I just need to get away for a few days... ok. I'll be there about 10. Bye, bye then.

[Karen goes to the side of the stage and exits. She returns almost immediately with a travel bag. She fills it with bits and pieces, including the wedding photo. She scribbles a note to Joe and then begins singing Loch Lomond again. She finally picks up her scarf from the floor, shakes it off, and lovingly wraps it around her neck, putting one corner into her mouth like a comfort blanket. She exits; and at the door, turns for one last look, before closing it behind her].

(Annie): Joe has written to say:

“Karen disappeared to her Aunt’s in Edinburgh. I couldn’t afford to keep on the house. I was eventually evicted and ended up moving down to Inverness. But the drink just kept getting a bigger hold on me – and I ended up in the Culnadubh Hostel. My life had reached rock bottom: sharing rooms with strangers and spending the daylight hours sitting on the Old Church steps drinking Special Brew and sherry.”

[Joe and Dipper are sitting on the church steps drinking Special Brew].

(Joe): *[drunkenly]* I wouldn’t merge the clubs. All they’re doing is making way for big superstores. That’ll be the death knell of the wee shoppies in the North.

(Dipper): And the West, coff! Aye – but I’m thinking it’s the best for football and ...

(Joe): And what do you know about football?

(Dipper): As much as you boy!

(Joe): What? Did you play in the Highland League did you?

(Dipper): No! Of course not. And neither did you.

(Joe): I did! I did! I played! Man, I played!! *[He gets up and gives a little dance]*. I played at Parkhead and St James Park – I was going to the top – until some ‘animal’ broke my leg and smashed my knee.

(Dipper): Is that so? You’re a bit of a dark horse Joe boy. I didn’t know that.

(Joe): Oh, there’s not much you know about me. But then there’s not much I know about you Dipper my friend? What’s your story? Is it not about time you were telling me?

(Dipper): Old Dipper’s got no story. Everyone’s got a story – but I’ve just got a *[making imaginary stars]*nothing. I was a shepherd in Assynt: I had the wife, two bairns, a puckle of sheep o’ my own – aye, quite the thing. Then one day the wife and the bairns went shopping to Ullapool. Coming over the top before Elphin, some foreigner came round the corner on the wrong side of the road – *[five second pause whilst shaking his head]* all of them killed.... *[snaps his finger]* just like that.

Mhmm – then the drink got a hold o’ me proper – I was working one day at the sheep-dipper and fell in. Himsel’ at the big house got to hear about it – and that was

me – sacked – no wife, no bairns, no hoose – nothing. That’s why I got the name Dipper. And that’s why I’m sitting here on this cold church-step.

Aye – that’s me son – just a loser without a story worth telling. My only friend’s this *[drinking from a can]*. The sooner it kills me, the sooner I’ll be lying with my Julie, listening to my bairnies singing in the sun.

(Joe): Aye – we’re just VIP’s at the Hostel for Heartbroken men Dipper. These people don’t understand us..... *[waving at the world]*look, there’s a typical example *[pointing]*.

(Dipper): Och aye *[laughing]*. The ch(g)entleman in the stripes wi’ the shiny arse.

(Joe): Hey. Lord Lucan! *[shouting and turning his rear end to the stranger]*. Kiss this you stuck up ponce – come on!

(Dipper): Oh ... Joe boy. He doesna look very pleased.

(Joe): I’ll take him anyday.

(Dipper): *[Getting up in a panic and beginning to make his exit]*. I’d make a run for it if I were you son.

(Joe): *[Begins to follow Dipper but slips and falls]*. Aah ... No ...

(Stripe): *[Runs over and gives Joe a serious kick in guts]*. You loser - look at you *[kick]* Peed yourself *[kick]* you *[kick]* disgusting *[kick]* good for nothing *[kick]* drunk *[kick]* *[Spits on Joe and leaves]*.

(Annie): Karen says that she went to Edinburgh and in her words.... ‘I took a few jobs and eventually settled down in a wee coffee shop in the New Town.’ So whilst it would seem that Karen was getting her life together, Joe’s was quite simply, falling apart.

[At the front of the stage – on floor-level with the audience – Dipper staggers in with some bedding. He lays it out on the floor and sits drinking with his back against the stage. Joe joins him and performs the same routine as soon as he gets off-stage from previous action].

(Joe): Why dya no come back for me?

(Dipper): I’m too old for that nonsense boy. *[sniffing]* Did you pee yourself?

(Joe): Aye – *[starts crying]*. Oh God! This can’t go on. I’m getting outta here. From tomorrow I’m ...

(Dipper): Ssh....ssh man. Don’t talk like that. It just makes things worse talking like that. This is your life boy. This is our life!! Waiting to get the call from the big man upstairs. *[Dipper looks up at heaven]*.

He makes it especially hard for us down here - compared to everyone else – for it'll be a very special paradise for us up there: *[pointing]* a Paradise for you and me Joe boy. Just imagine it Joe, you playing football with the angels and me, the wife and the bairns cheering you on....

[puts his arm around Joe and pulls him so they are shoulder-to-shoulder, head to head].

Come on son – we'll be fine – we just have to be patient.

[Back on stage. Shift to a chic Edinburgh coffee shop. Karen tidies up, singing away, until she gets abuse shouted at her by off-stage [R] gentleman].

(Gent): You there!

(Karen): *[ignoring him].*

(Gent): You!

(Karen): Me? *[pointing at herself].*

(Gent): Yes you. Are you stupid?

[Sue enters L].

(Gent): Bring me out another coffee – and make sure its hot this time! And try and do it in less than fifteen minutes - understand.... Understand!?

[Sue sits down and Karen busies herself pouring coffee from the warm pot at the rear. Sue is a well-dressed, well-built, tomboyish lawyer].

(Gent): Are you getting me that coffee or not?

(Karen): Yes *[desperately].* Can't you be patient?

(Gent): How dare you take that tone with me young lady!

(Karen): *[turns around quickly and spills the coffee]* Oh no! *[she starts crying, wringing her hands in her pinny].*

(Sue): *[rushes to the door]* Who do you think you are? You patronising, condescending, uppity little man. Your tongue obviously rattles about inside your head simply to compensate for what is, no doubt, a crotchful of compromise and mediocrity. Now – you just pick up your briefcase and leave your tip on the table and don't think about coming back here again to upset that poor girl. *[turning around and ushering Karen to the table]* There-there, you sit down. *[she goes and picks up the cup. Then she pours coffee for both of them. She sits down at the table. Karen is crying, wiping her eyes with the apron. Sue puts her hand onto Karen's affectionately. She looks lovingly at Karen].* Have some coffee. Everything will be perfectly alright.

(Karen): *[smiles at Sue and sniffs]* Thank you. You're so kind.

(Annie): Karen continues:

'Sue was so sweet and I really was struggling to to see a way forward for myself. Though I put on a brave face for my aunt Molly, I was not really that happy. But then Sue came into my life - she was a real strength and a ray of sunshine – and she made me laugh. We became lovers and I moved into her flat. It was paradise.

Sue was a partner in a leading law practice in Edinburgh and under a lot of pressure.

After about 3 years together – well, you could say that the grass was not as green as it had been. In fact, as the years passed, things became very difficult for us – well, at least for me.'

[Inside Sue's flat. Karen is tidying up whilst Sue is working at her laptop. Karen is singing a Runrig song. Sue keeps cursing at her laptop, smacking it, slapping the desk and running her hand through her hair].

(Sue): *[curse, slap, smack, frustration]* Come on you - come on, etc, etc....

And can't you stop singing that stupid song?

(Karen): What song *[laughs]* oh. I didn't even know I was singing. Sorry Sue.

(Sue): 'Sorry Sue'! 'Sorry Sue'! You just don't get it do you? Skivvying about here whilst I'm slaving over this vacuous crap... and you, sweet little Highland Karen....

(Karen): Sue? *[bewildered]*

[Sue goes crazy]

(Sue): Sue? Stop it! *[screaming]* Just leave me alone! *[seething]* I hate you! *[holding her head in her hands she staggers towards Karen with beastly eyes. Slowly, shudderingly, she moves her hands to Karen's neck as if to strangle her. Karen is bewildered like a rabbit in the headlights. Then Sue smacks her across the face with the back of her hand. Karen goes reeling].*

(Sue): You teuchter bitch! *[she runs over to Karen, picks her up by the hair and slaps her again and again and then drops her onto the floor. She staggers over to the chair and picks up some of Karen's things and throws them at her].*

(Sue): I'm going back to the office....

[Karen is now weeping profusely].

(Sue): Get this place tidied up! Make sure its fit to live in before I get back you you you pathetic little cow. *[she exits quickly with laptop].*

[Karen is lying cowering on the floor, weeping. She picks up the Runrig scarf from amongst the things Sue threw at her. She wraps it around her neck, puts a corner in her mouth and begins rocking back and forth, humming Loch Lomond and sobbing at the same time].

■■■■ END PART I ■■■■

[As Karen rocks back and forth, Annie explains that her mother calls. Karen acts in the left half of the stage, picking up the phone. Annie explains that her mother has had the results and Karen ought to come home].

(Annie): Karen continues: ‘as I sat in the lonely flat that had been my home, but was now a cold strange place in a far away city, the phone rang. I answered it and heard my mother’s voice. She knew I was crying, but I managed to compose myself. She then asked how I was – and how was Sue, (she always asked for her although she never approved of us living together). Then she calmly told me that she had had the results back from some tests – which I didn’t even know she was having! She had inoperable cancer and asked me if I could come home.’

[Back in Sue’s flat. Karen begins singing ‘An Ubhal as Airde’. She walks around in a daze. She goes to pick up her bag, comes in and packs her things. She scribbles a note - but then scrunches it up as she leaves. She puts on her jacket and wraps her scarf around her neck. She picks up a photo of her and Sue and smashes it on the floor. She turns at the door and without expression or emotion, leaves the door open and exits L].

[Back to Annie].

(Annie): Well, as you can now tell, for some people, life seems to be a living hell. And what I find particularly poignant about this Our Tune, is that it reminds most of us of how lucky we actually are.

But that’s not the end – because – Joe writes:

‘As my alcohol dependency worsened, I grew ever more desperate. If I had been brave enough, I would have killed myself – but I wasn’t; and there was always Dipper – who just kept battling on. That is until one day he didn’t! And then I was alone, completely alone.

[Joe is sprawled over a coffin in a faintly lit room with two candles at the rear. He is hugging the coffin [L] and resting his head on the top].

(Joe): *[crying]* Dipper. I don’t know if you can hear me. I feel kinda stupid talking like this – but – *[sobbing]* I’m gonna miss you. You’re like a father to me – better than the fool that brought me up – that’s for sure.

[trying to compose himself] Tell me what its like up there? *[raising his head]*. Are you sitting with your wife? *[laughter and sobs]* Can you see your children? Is it green? Oh I can see you *[eyes shut]* – sitting beneath a big blue/orange sky with clouds whiter than snow. Oh..... and the heather’s as purple as wine – it really is paradise. You were right. Aah...I can see you kissing her – she looks lovely man...mmm, you said her hair was long and brown, but not...*[gasp]*sherry-oak brown.

[The Reverend enters and turns his back to the coffin as if reading something on the back wall].

(Joe): He's okay Reverend. Aye, he's in paradise now with all the other Soul Travellers. He's finished walking the Olden Road, as he used to call it.

(Rev): Have you been drinking Joseph?

(Joe): No Mr McRae.

(Rev): Well, what's all this then about Soul Travellers? Eh, man? And Olden Roads? Eh, come on man?

(Joe): Dipper's got to where he was going Reverend – he's home now – with his wife and chil...

(Rev): Home! Home! That man's gone to where he belongs alright – damned in hell for the rest of time – and you'll be joining him Joseph – you'll be joining him - look at you man, smelling like a distillery – the devil himself smells better than you! *[tuts and shakes his head and strides out].*

(Joe): Don't listen to him Dipper... I know you're at home now. You just tell the angels I'm on my way to play football for them. *[he gets up and kisses the coffin]* I'm going to dry myself out Dipp! Just for me and you. *[laughs and sobs]* I want to be sober when I turn out for Angel United.

[Back to Annie – when she begins to narrate, the stage comes into play. It is split into two equal halves by a golden rope hanging down from the roof to the front edge of the stage. On either side, sits two gold coloured chairs. Karen is acting on the left, Joe on the right].

[As Annie narrates, both Karen and Joe act their parts – Karen dabbing her mothers forehead; Joe jogging on the spot with a football by his side].

(Annie): Karen goes on to say:

'I came home to watch my mother die a most horrific death. Yet, in her dying I experienced more love and compassion from her in those 9 months than I did from any other person since I first met Joe. I found myself thinking about Joe more and more as I watched my mam slip away in front of my eyes'.

Joe also writes about this time:

'When Dipper was buried, I put my bits and pieces in a bag and came home to Sutherland. I joined the AA and got help from an old friend who I had been in school with. He encouraged me to start coaching kids as a way to stop the drinking. And you won't believe it – we went for a kick about at Dunrobin Castle one day – and it was then that I really started thinking about Karen again. I think of her often now.

[Joe jogs off stage and Karen is left with her mother].

(Mother): *[dying and frail]* – sing to me Karen like a good lassie.

(Karen): Okay Mam. What shall I sing?

(Mother): Anything my dear... anything... so long as I hear you sing.

(Karen): ‘Chi Mi’n Geamhradh.....’

[After 1st verse, she hums whilst our attention is drawn to Joe].

[Joe re-enters and mimes that he is talking to the kids].

(Joe): Keep warm now boys. *[Joe jogs lightly]*. Now it’s a big game tomorrow. All your folks and friends will be there. It’s the first time this team’s ever got to the final. I’m so proud of you! But remember lads – it’s not the winning that matters – its how we play. We’ve got to give it our best; we’ve got to play out of our skins. And no dirty play either. Play hard and play fair – that’s all we can ask of ourselves. Ok? Ok?

Now what is it I always say? *[points]* Mickey? – Aye – that’s right. ‘A time to get and a time to lose - but we shall never, ever be moved’.

Thanks boys *[claps hands]* – you’ll never know how proud you make me.

(Annie): The very next day Karen lost her mother and Joe won the cup.

Karen says:

‘After so many years of melancholy, I came home to my mam and found a love I had forgotten. And then, in an instant, it was taken away forever. And now I am like a rice-paper boat, loose and alone in the Great North Sea..’

[As Annie narrates, Karen weeps over her mother and then pulls the covers up over her face – then she leaves the bed, turns front and drops to her knees, praying for her mother. Simultaneously, Joe clenches his fists, picks up the cup, kisses it, sets it down and then falls onto his knees, praying for thanks].

[Annie continues to narrate, Joe and Karen continue to act].

(Annie): After her terrible loss, Karen found herself trying to get on with her life, albeit almost in a daze. Not even memories would provide sustenance for her battered existence. That is, except for the memory of her first love at Dunrobin.

And even though Joe was achieving more and more success as a football coach, having moved into the senior game, he too had little left in life to comfort him.

[Karen wanders around aimlessly, humming Loch Lomond and hugging her Runrig scarf].

[Joe is out jogging screaming Ho! Ho! from Loch Lomond].

[Annie continues narrating].

(Annie): And so it is – that at the end of each day, both shut themselves up in their lonely worlds, slowly putting together the pieces of their lives that were so brutally torn apart, many, many years ago.

[At this point Karen comes and sits on her chair, touching the chord before clasping her hands in front of her. So too does Joe, after her, doing the same].

[Karen takes a letter from her pocket and reads].

(Karen): And so, I sit alone at night, praying that my dear mother has found peace in heaven. I close my eyes and search for hope; *[long pause]* ...and I always see Joe kissing me beneath the tree in Dunrobin. I smile now when I think of him.

And here I sit for hours – just wondering – just wondering *[she pulls the scarf around her]*.

[Joe takes a letter from his pocket and reads].

(Joe): And so I sit alone at night, praying that my dear friend Dipper remains at peace at the end of the Olden Road.

I close my eyes and search for hope; *[long pause]* ...and I always see Karen kissing me beneath the tree in Dunrobin. I smile now when I think of her – her beauty and her touch. I can even smell the floweriness of her hair; I can even taste the walnut sweetness of her skin. And here I sit for hours – just wondering – just wondering – just wondering.

[Annie continues to narrate].

(Annie): And so now, both Karen and Joe take life one day at a time. And as long as they keep wondering – well – where there's life there's hope.

And so to their Tune. I'm sure it comes as no surprise that both picked Runrig. And yes, both just happened to choose the same song.. so... This is for you Karen and Joe.... We all wish you good luck and happiness....

[She begins playing Loch Lomond live].

[As the music fades into the break before the second verse, both Karen and Joe lean onto each other with the chord behind them. They are shoulder-to-shoulder, head to head and hand in hand].

[They sing along with the music. It then fades out before the principal line].

(Karen & Joe – in harmony): 'But a broken heart knows No Second Spring'.

■■■■ END PART II ■■■■