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LEOPOLDVILLE

BY JAKI MCCARRICK

Including the short story

The Congo



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The Congo short story by Jaki McCarrick taken from *The Scattering* (Seren, 2013)

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Author's Note

I wrote my short story *The Congo* before I wrote *Leopoldville*. I don't usually write plays based on my short stories but in this instance I did, simply because I could not get the characters from *The Congo* out of my head. Either I had not done with them – or they had not done with me. I remember seeing a middle-aged junkie in Dundalk (Ireland) in early 2008 and thinking he could be an older Terry Mansfield. Terry Mansfield is a fictional character (though his crime is based on a real-life crime) so obviously this is impossible. There was just something about the sadness in the man's eyes that reminded me of Terry, a character I had invented. So I knew then that I had yet to exorcise this gang of youths, and their story, from my imagination.

Around the same time, I read an essay by Edward Bond, his preface to *Saved* (Methuen), in which he correlates violent crime at home with war abroad (in the case of *Saved*, Vietnam) and police violence. I began to wonder why the real-life young men, upon whom *The Congo* is based, committed their crime, a matter explored more deeply in the play than in the short story. I came to the conclusion that geography and economics had everything to do with it: By 1990 Ireland had just suffered a decade-long recession to which there was no end in sight. Dundalk, an industrial town on the northeastern seaboard, was laid to waste and had unprecedented levels of youth unemployment. Described by the writers of the *Rough Guide to Ireland* (1989) as 'El Paso', this border town was also something of a buffer zone to the Troubles throughout the 1980s. So in many respects, *Leopoldville* is a political play, and in it I propose a socio-economic explanation for a very particular

crime that occurred in a very particular part of Ireland.

I wrote the short story after some research; for *Leopoldville* I did much more, and pored over newspaper archives in my local library. The names of the boys who committed the crime were never published, and I guessed that two were brothers – which turned out to be the case.

In the short story I imagine Mansfield as an unreliable narrator who has returned to Dundalk to seek revenge on Devlin, who he believes has ruined his life. In the play, Mansfield is more innocent. So a few details shifted between story and play. And, as I was writing *Leopoldville*, I became aware that there was something ritualistic about the crime itself, and to develop this I turned to the pub's real name, 'The Congo', which of course was a gift in terms of expounding upon my theme of the roots of violence.

Many coincidences haunt both play and story. For instance, on the opening night of the play, in London, a member of the audience (who had, apparently, wandered in by chance) claimed to be the lawyer for the original boys who committed the crime. I was in Ireland at this time so did not get a chance to speak to him. In fact, I thought he might have been in attendance to check the play out for possible libel! Then, three years later, I read from my collection of short stories, *The Scattering* (Seren), at the 2013 Electric Picnic Festival in Stradbally. For some reason I chose to read *The Congo*. After I finished, a man came up to me and introduced himself. He was that very lawyer who had wandered into the play in London. His attendance at the reading was, he said, also accidental, as he had no idea what writers had been programmed to read that night. We discussed the crime. He said it was one of the worst cases of cruelty he'd ever seen and

that after sentencing he gave up practicing law and became a craft brewer.

Also, at the first *Leopoldville* reading, at the Old Red Lion Theatre in London, in attendance were four people who had travelled over from Ireland to see the play. They were old friends of the real-life publican. They said I had somehow managed to capture the man's spirit – despite the fact that much of the story is fictional. They said that their friend would have most likely chatted and joked with the lads who had burgled his pub, as Prentice does in the play.

I wrote both works just before the most recent recession in Ireland, which began after the banking crash of September 2008. Seven years on there are towns all over the country still suffering from this recession and the devastating effects of austerity. If the story of *The Congo* and *Leopoldville* has a message at all it is this: the persistently depressed environment, particularly if it is also politicised, is a dangerous place for human beings; we simply don't do well without hope or prospects. In that respect the story is also something of a warning.

Jaki McCarrick
September 2015

Winner of the 2010 Papatango New Writing Prize, *Leopoldville* was produced by Papatango Theatre Company at the Tristan Bates Theatre, Covent Garden, London, on 7th April 2010. The cast was as follows:

JONAH DEVLIN . . . . . Jack Ashton
PRENTICE BLACK . . . . . Richard Hawley
GASCOIGNE . . . . . Joe Sims
TERRY MANSFIELD . . . . . Drew Webb
MIKEY CRILLY . . . . . Russell Simpson
JOE CRILLY . . . . . Chris Aylmer

Director . . . . . George Turvey
Designer . . . . . Helena O'Nions
Lighting . . . . . Gary Bowman

What huge imago made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

'SEPTEMBER 1, 1939'
W.H. Auden

The Congo

A short story

When I awoke the first thing I did was check my bag. I took from it what I needed then tucked it back under the bed, placing my father's slippers neatly in front. I went to the window and opened it, amazed as I did that I remembered the bottom pane was loose. A grey cloud hung over the town, and three mallards the colour of barley flew in a line towards the Ramparts River. I wondered if I had been away at all, for everything was as it had been when I had left, twenty odd years before, except I could no longer hear the lowing of cows from Quincey's field, which was home now to a new housing estate. It had been like this since my arrival: encounters with my old self, a strange sensation of continuum, of picking up where I had left off. As if my London self was there still, walking through Richmond on his way to Kew, while my younger self, that ghost, was here in this damp house, staring out at the dawn weather.

I closed the door behind me, the smell of the eggs I'd fried for my father's breakfast still clinging to my nostrils, and walked to the corner of the tree-lined Avenue. The edges of my holster chafed at my ribs and sweat beads formed on my forehead making my face feel cold. I carried on down the Echo Road, past the freshly mown playing fields, on towards the Grange.

The place was as tranquil as I'd ever seen it. In the pale morning light even the houses with the smashed-in windows and weed-run gardens looked serene, so that the ragwort passed almost for daisies. There was a fabulous assortment of colours too, from the many flower baskets, filled as they were with petunias, begonias, violets. There had always been people in the Grange who would try to pull themselves up; always a mother or father prepared to stand up to the gangs.

From where I stood, I could see Devlin's place. The house seemed much the same: the satiny fuchsia hedge, the faux-Tudor windows gleaming like mirrors, the tall palm soaking up the rays of the early sun. Had he really returned, I wondered? Or had he gone, upon his release,

to Kilburn, as some had said he had, where it was possible he'd been living under my nose all these months?

Grace had always been proud of her home. I'd always considered it a testament to her resourcefulness that when she'd found herself stuck in this estate on a widow's pension with six sons (two of them gang members), Grace had still managed to keep an attractive house. Fortress Devlin, she would call it, as she'd felt so safe within its walls. Built in the seventies, the Grange had promised the families that came to live in it – modernity: bathrooms, spacious bedrooms, central heating. But within a decade it had become a festering sprawl, filled with gangs, drugs, violence. And her husband's death before her boys were full grown ensured that Grace and her sons remained there, such is the quicksand nature of the ghetto, which requires money, time and strategy to get out of (and none of these had been much available to Grace). The air up on the Avenue had always been rarified and easy, while here, even now, I could feel the deadweight of Grange air in my lungs.

As I proceeded to the corner of the car park for the new Dunnes Stores (where once there had been a hill – 'the clump' – where gangs such as ours would meet for prearranged fights), I saw a figure walk towards the bottleneck opening of the estate. I moved in behind a van and, for a second, thought I might have been seen for the figure did not pass. A match was struck and tipped to the ground, a cigarette sucked upon. The man continued past the van and a row of wood-panelled houses, stopped at the end of the street by the tall palm, opened the gate. It was Devlin. And apart from the close-clipped hair and greying sideburns he'd hardly changed: the same casual self-assurance, the almost effeminate gait.

I became perturbed by something: my heart, pounding against my ribs. This was not how it was to have gone. Think of The Congo, I kept telling myself. Think of The fucking Congo. I closed my eyes, and for a few chilling moments supposed I was actually there.

*

"Where d'yez think you're goin', you lot?" Staunton leaned into the car and thumped the glove compartment open. He rummaged inside, probably looking for drugs or drink, and pulled out my book. *War and Peace*, he read out, venomously. Devlin stared straight ahead. None of us spoke. "Yez have been drinkin', am I right?"

"Aye. We're all under the affluence of incahol, Sergeant," Devlin replied, deadpan, at which the rest of us cracked up. Staunton bit his lip. Devlin reached out, grabbed the book, threw it back to me. At this I knew the cop would do one of two things. Either pull us over and quiz us, maybe roughly, with a slap to the back of Devlin's head, or he would leave it, sensing what so many others had: the stirring power of this young man with ink-black hair and obsidian-like eyes who spoke with alarming authority. Then Devlin drew close, whispered something inaudible into Staunton's ear. Something he had on him, something we could tell was sexual. The cop paled, was breathless, his appointed authority gone like a mirage, so much so that when he asked what had happened to the missing wing of my Hillman Hunter, I confidently responded that it had 'flown away'.

"Well, go on. To wherever you're off ta, but yez can't stop here," Staunton said, oblivious to the fact that we had just left the publican in a torrent of blood, his rooms upturned, his cash register emptied, his skull in pieces under a corn-yellow canister of gas.

We had not gone to bed that night. Under Devlin's orders, the twins had taken the simpleton, Gascoigne, into the cemetery and tied him with rope to a stone Celtic cross. Devlin had wanted to teach Gascoigne a lesson. To get him to keep his mouth shut about things he'd seen in his mother's B&B: somebody else's girl, somebody's wife. Mikey peeled the bananas while Joe forced them, one by one, into the lad's mouth. It was my job to watch over all of this. Watch, as the Crilly twins pissed on the poor

wretch, bound and stuffed like a pig on a spit, the piss-steam rising off him like smoke. Under Devlin's orders we left Gascoigne in full-dark, wailing and crying for his mother. Then, later, when I'd slipped back to let the boy go, I saw Devlin walk him out of the cemetery, his arm around the boy. I imagined Devlin saying to Gascoigne that it was *he* who had saved him, that he would look out for him, like he'd done to me. That was how Devlin operated. Like all bullies, he sought out the feeble-minded, misfits and outsiders, who, having experienced the ferocity of his power also knew its narcotic warmth and radiance.

Later, after we'd left the bar and its publican for dead, I drove to the Cooley hills. All the way up the meandering lane, Adamski's *Killer* boomed (as if accusingly) from the car stereo. I parked the car by the gates. We clambered out and walked into the bog, sat high up on the plum-coloured heather.

I looked down at the town, all amber in the evening light, at the Irish Sea below us winding around the stark blue Mournes across the border. I felt cold. The hills filled with an icy sea-wind that closed around us like a cloak. I thought immediately of the Russian winter and the frostbitten Napoleonic soldiers of my book. And for the first time I doubted Devlin's leadership. Why had he let it go so far? The reality of the murder we'd just committed under his feverish spell suddenly hit me. I looked around. The twins had felt it too. They were both pale and slumped, huddled together on the mizzling day, like two spent sunflowers in October. Then Devlin walked up to us. I will never forget the way he did that. He churlishly took the twins' knives and twisted them into a bank of turf, hard and skinned-over since the council had prohibited cutting it a few years before. (The knives had not even been used that day.) Then he said he was *hungry*, that the cold mountain air had made him ravenous. I wanted to puke when he said that, and suddenly what we had done down there in the town began to seem as real and terrible a thing as Devlin's hunger.

I cannot remember exactly why he chose The Congo. I just remember that after the cemetery, Devlin said he wanted *to do some damage*. I had no idea he meant 'people damage'; I thought he meant burning something, or trashing some old house up, and I was ready, as ever, with my car.

"Where you thinking of goin'?" Mikey asked.

"Park Street," Devlin said.

"Class!" Joe said, and went on about being in for a day's drinking.

"No. No drink. That's not what I meant," said Devlin.

"What did you mean?" I asked.

"Well, somethin' will come. Somethin' will come and we will know." That was Devlin all over. So damned enigmatic. As if he had commune with someone other than his own present self. I would learn in court that this was a trait common to the likes of Charles Manson and Ian Brady, a means to avoid all guilt: *blame it on the voices, the signs, some force outside oneself.*

He was younger than me by two years, so by rights we should never have been friends. Only he saved me once. One night, up the alley by MJ's (where he and the twins drank), he'd stopped me from being kicked to death by a bunch of shit-kickers from Ardee. Only for that night I'd never have been part of the gang, or come to know him or the Crilly twins, or any of the lads from the Grange (after all, I went to the Grammar, and lived on the Avenue). I remember looking up, half-expecting the tall, dark-eyed interloper to join them, and, instead, he flung them off me like a wild cat. Then the twins charged in, dragged my two hick assailants towards the river. I never asked Devlin why he pulled me from that beating. I presume he saw in me what he later saw in Gascoigne: an exploitable weakness, such as the shame I wore like a badge as son of the town's most notorious drunk.

I sheltered in, and even came to like, the 'hard' reputation the Grange boys had. I hoped that by

association it would rub off. Until my involvement with Devlin, I'd had to suffer all manner of quips about my family's change of fortune. From millionaires to hungry up in the big house (followed by the passing of my mother, who did what she did, some said, because she had felt so disgraced). So, by the time I fell in with Devlin, I was that fed up I no longer cared if people thought me a chip off the old block or not (and they definitely did). I began to justify their thoughts, became well and truly Mad Mansfield, the Drunken Solicitor's Son. I began to drink heavily, mindlessly sometimes; to gamble (anything – cards, horses, dogs, the slots*), so that I must have seemed like rich pickings indeed to Devlin with the amount of insecurities I had. Whatever way it happened, the way two people find their fate in one another, I was a troubled young man from the Avenue one day, and the next bewitched by a lout (albeit a beautiful lout).

Devlin called in to the bar. No one answered. The signs he'd been waiting for: no one around, middle of the day, cash register open.

For the first few minutes inside, the twins joked and pretended we were in the bar of a Western. The Congo was high-ceilinged, had never been updated. The wooden floors were dull and decorticated in places. The bar itself was breast-high with a gleaming brass rail hanging just beneath the rim of the bar top. Devlin sat on one of the red leather seats and lit up in his usual girlish way, slow and light, his little finger apart (erect almost), and watched the twins as they fooled around. I have never since met anyone, however duplicitous or skilled in the craft of acting, who could smile as sweetly as he – the smooth white baby-fangs, the gentle crescent dimples – yet possess a simultaneous deadness in the eyes. It was, I understand now, the overlapping of two people in one. He was night and day in one, and it was, for me, I recall, a hopelessly magnetic contrast.

"Mikey leave it!" Devlin said.

---

*= slot machines

"But Jesus man, the place is fuckin' empty!"

"You're tanked up enough. We might need to run for it. Use your head."

"Well, come on then!" Joe said. "We've got the money, what we waiting for? Let's go."

Devlin placed his long legs on top of the table, and crossed his feet. He put his arms behind his head, wrist to nape.

"Why would someone leave a place like this for scumbags like us to come and fuck around inside it, hah?" Devlin said.

"Maybe he's gone to get somethin'," Mikey replied.

"Who's he?" Devlin asked Mikey, who was now scared.

"Who's he?" Devlin repeated.

"Prentice Black he means," I said, 'the owner.' My father had known Prentice Black. People who came to the bar thought Prentice a survivor from an Irish UN battalion massacred in the Congo in the 1960s, and Prentice would let them think it. The truth was Prentice had bought the pub from a man named Cyril White in the same year the Congo had gone from being a Belgian colony to a Democratic Republic. Prentice (who had himself been a member of the 'old' IRA, i.e. pre-Bloody Sunday IRA), could not resist what he saw as a parallel between his purchase and the establishment of the African state, hence the pub's name (there was even a map of Africa in the shape of Patrice Lumumba's head in the men's toilets). When I suggested that Prentice might be over in the bookies opposite, it set something off in Devlin.

"Well, then we'll wait," Devlin said, coolly.

"Fuck's sake, why?" asked Joe. He and Mikey had become bored and restless in the dingy veneer-panelled lounge, the light a muddy olive colour from the stained-glass tiles above the windows. They had begun writing, with a black felt-tip marker, obscenities, on the wide mirror at the back of the bar.

"Hey, we'll wait, fuckwit, because a man that'd leave his bar in the middle of the day is a careless man. And in

my experience, a careless man always has easy access to money."

It was then I started to become afraid. Mikey and Joe had between them taken over fifty pounds from the till. My pockets were stuffed with cigarettes, crisps, a bottle of Bombay Sapphire. We could have walked. That's what I wanted to do. Even the twins looked worried. For Devlin had implied something way beyond our usual messing. Even beyond the worst we, as a gang, had done up till then (which, apart from Gascoigne, had been the bottles we'd stolen for the Provos for petrol bombs). Yet we remained. Compelled as ever by that smile, by those black unforgiving eyes, by the magnetism I loved but had already begun to resent. And so minutes passed and we waited. I remember the silence. I remember wondering what he would do and how he might do it. I remember not knowing if I should run, or throw myself down and bathe in his glow. The room was like a theatre, all hush and darkness, as we, the actors (chorus and lead), waited in the wings for our audience to enter. And somehow I knew, through some inner sense, that when Prentice Black returned to his bar from wherever he had been, he would never leave.

Disturbed by a flapping sound, I quickly opened my eyes to find that I was a long way from those dark, unforgiving days of my youth: it was the leaves of the tall palm whipping at the air as if they would break loose. I watched the ravens caw over the rooftops of the Grange on their way to the Avenue's tall cedars where they nested. Again, I noticed it: the sensation of continuum. A trickle of smoke from the chimney of Devlin's house – though it was a warm morning, and I imagined Devlin in there looking after Grace.

I'd gotten seven years for my part in the murder of the publican. Devlin and the twins mandatory life. I'd blamed Devlin for all that had gone wrong with me since: my discovery of opiates, my involvement in importing scams.

I'd even learned how to use a gun; there are many such places in London. But standing here at the edge of the Grange, despite my anger, my hand would not reach into my holster, nor would my legs (as if in some kind of physical rebellion) carry me to his house. The dreams of retribution that had seen me through the years in London seemed suddenly impotent here. There was a sameness to the place that was obdurate, and I saw that my rage belonged entirely to the man who walked to his job at Kew each morning, whose only deliverance from this self and that, was time spent with the flowers and plants of the hothouses.

Of all the chilling details of that afternoon in The Congo bar, one image in particular stands out for me. Crossing the lounge to exit, I recall I'd looked across at the mirror, covered in the twins' spidery scrawls, and seen a skull-like face: eyes bloodshot from crying, blood on the hair and cheeks. I saw that the face belonged not to me, but to Devlin, who was looking in horror at something, or someone else, who or what, I could not fully see, for the light was poor. Perhaps, he looked at nothing in particular. Perhaps, he looked at me. I have often suspected as much. I remind myself on such occasions that though it was I, in the end, who had dropped the canister on the publican, neither Devlin nor the others had tried to stop me. In fact Devlin had screamed "down, Mansfield, down". His claims in court that he had meant for me to place the canister out of harm's way did not stand up under cross-examination (my own lawyer, a long-standing associate of my father, had emphasised my vulnerability, 'the fragility of one so young without a mother').

Finding solace in Devlin's greying hair, and in the fact he now lived an obviously uneventful life in the same wretched council house in which he had grown up, I walked back to the Avenue. But I felt bereft, too, knowing I would never again experience the intoxicating spell he had cast upon my youth. Grace had blamed 'the middle-class boy from the Avenue' and claimed that if anyone had been the protégé it was her son. But Grange people

have always been (understandably) jealous of the affluent suburb that looks down upon them, and, I suppose, with all the harshness life had meted out to her, Grace is no exception.

CHARACTERS

JONAH DEVLIN – 18/19, unemployed son of a local Republican figure; cocksure, intelligent.

TERRY MANSFIELD – 18, student son of a local solicitor; intelligent, sensitive.

MIKEY CRILLY – 19, appears tougher than he is; has a job but wants to do better.

JOE CRILLY – 19, Mikey's brother. Joe is an unemployed barber.

GASCOIGNE – 21, has the mental age of ten; mother owns a local B&B.

PRENTICE BLACK, mid to late 50s, recently widowed publican. A man of vast experience.

A stroke (/) denotes the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue.

Set in 1990, in a border town, Ireland.

Note: If there is a health and safety issue in theatre concerning use of gas cylinders then barrels may be used instead.

Scene One

Cemetery. Old and overgrown. A summer's night, moonlit. A young, heavy-set man, **GASCOIGNE**, *is tied to an iron Celtic cross.* **MIKEY** *and* **JOE CRILLY** *are standing beside him, a box of bananas between them, skins scattered everywhere, a banana mess on* **GASCOIGNE***'s clothes.* **JOE** *and* **MIKEY** *have just forced two half-peeled bananas into* **GASCOIGNE***'s mouth. The skins drape over his chin.*

JOE Yah-hoo! That's it Gascy. Just. A couple. More.

JOE *smashes both bananas into* **GASCOIGNE***'s face.* **GASCOIGNE** *groans.*

Downstage, **DEVLIN**, *smoking. He looks disapprovingly between* **JOE** *and* **MIKEY**, *then out at the surrounding fields.* **TERENCE MANSFIELD** *smoking downstage also. He is keeping watch, looking towards the road, while clandestinely drinking from a bottle of whiskey. Both are isolated in their own pools of light.*

Mikey. Bananas, please.

MIKEY *throws a banana to* **JOE**. *They each peel a banana, force them into* **GASCOIGNE***'s mouth.* **GASCOIGNE** *starts coughing.* **JOE** *puts his hand over* **GASCOIGNE***'s mouth.*

Swallow.

MIKEY Do it.

JOE Ya hear me, bitch?

MIKEY Do it.

JOE Yah-hooh!

DEVLIN *rushes over, takes* **JOE***'s hand off* **GASCOIGNE***'s mouth, pushes* **JOE** *against the wall of a vault.*

DEVLIN Said nothin' about chokin' him. Said nothin' about 'asphyxiation'. Know what that is dumbo?

MIKEY *laughs.*

Shut up! Keep it simple 'n neat yez morons. One. At a fucken. Time.

DEVLIN *lets him go, grabs a banana, goes up to* **GASCOIGNE**.

Now ladies. Watch. Peel. Hold the nose. Mouth opens. In ya go. Two inches. Close mouth. Wait. Right? That's better. Eh Gascy? That's it. You stupid fuckers.

JOE Yah-hooh!

MIKEY Dumbo!

JOE *and* **MIKEY** *continue the force-feeding, one banana at a time.* **GASCOIGNE** *groans.*

DEVLIN *takes the bottle off* **MANSFIELD**, *throws it aside.*

DEVLIN Some fucken sentry you are, eh? Drinkin' on the job. Shame on ya. Young buck like you. What's the world comin' ta, huh?

MANSFIELD Don't get it.

DEVLIN What?

MANSFIELD He's grand. Gascoigne. No trouble at all. He can't be much else as he's fucken retarded.

DEVLIN Not to do with you.

MANSFIELD I know his mother. She knew mine. She's all right.

DEVLIN She's a cunt.

MANSFIELD No, she…

DEVLIN She's a cunt and that's it. *(beat)* Unwritten rule in B and B, ya know? Unwritten rule about the biddy what owns it keepin' her pie-hole shut 'bout what she sees. Who she sees. Who she sees you with. Confidentiality it's called.

MANSFIELD That's Confession Dev. Not B and B.

DEVLIN Listen, our business is no one else's.

MANSFIELD He's retarded! He's hardly gonna be able to control his Ma and what she says, is he?

DEVLIN Well we'll see about that. *(long pause)* Ah, come on! Ya big… *(grabs* **MANSFIELD** *in a bear hug).* Wanted to play, didn't ya? Wanted to play with the bad children, isn't that it?

MANSFIELD Yeah.

DEVLIN Then tough up fuck's sake. No one's dyin'. No one's gettin' killed. Right, Gascoigne? Right?

GASCOIGNE *moans a response.*

Alive and well, see? Too fond a that piss you are. Brings ya down, that. Brings ya right down. *(raises voice)* People will talk, won't they Mikey.

MIKEY Talkin' already.

MANSFIELD Like what? What they saying?

JOE That you're a chip a the oul block. Just like him. Wino Mansfield.

MANSFIELD *kicks at a stone, turns away.*

DEVLIN Oops. Hurt its feelin's boys.

MIKEY Joe, Jesus fuck!

MIKEY *jumps back.* **JOE** *is pissing on* **GASCOIGNE**.

JOE Eh-hey! What about this, Gascy, what about this! Cool ya down now, what? Wooh-hoo!

MANSFIELD You're disgusting. Lot a yez. Nothing but pigs.

DEVLIN Pigs is it? Now you want ta play – or pontificate? *(raises voice)* Or would ya rather me bend over and then ya pontificate?

MIKEY *and* **JOE** *make 'wooh' and 'sissy' sounds and whistles.*

MIKEY He might take you up on that offer, Dev.

JOE Aye. If ya drop an'ting make sure you kick it the whole way fucken home, Dev. *(***MIKEY** *and* **JOE** *laugh)*

MANSFIELD Fuck off.

DEVLIN *(to* **MANSFIELD***)* Just keep your eyes on the road boy and your head straight and you'll thank me for it tomorra. *(to* **MIKEY** *and* **JOE***)* Come on pigs. Put that back in your trousers pig. Leave it now. That's it.

DEVLIN, **MIKEY** *and* **JOE** *walk off, lighting up cigarettes, laughing, screaming "wooh – hooh".* **GASCOIGNE** *is still tied to the cross, moaning and crying.*

MANSFIELD Shut up. *(beat)* Shut the fuck up, Gascy. You shouldn't have come, d'ya hear? Why'd you come?

GASCOIGNE *still crying.*

Oh, man. Come on, I'll get you home.

Undoes the rope and releases **GASCOIGNE** *from the cross.*

Here. *(gives* **GASCOIGNE** *a used tissue from his pocket)*

Clean yourself, fuck sake. Say nothing about this to your Ma, right? If it's not dry by time you get home tell her you fell in a puddle, all right? That's what you say.

GASCOIGNE *sobs. Sings a song to himself: 'He's the King of the Universe. J – E – S – U –S, yes! He's the King of me.'*

We're going home now, Gascy. That's it. Over.

Enter **DEVLIN** *with a coat. He wraps it around* **GASCOIGNE**, *softly wipes his hair and face.*

DEVLIN Now, now. Come on fella. *I'll* take ya home. See what Uncle Dev brought in his car for ya, huh? Better now, eh? What happened here… well, it will teach ya, yeah? *(***GASCOIGNE** *nods)* What will it teach ya?

GASCOIGNE I don't know, Dev. I'll say nothin' about stuff I seen I 'spose. And my Ma. I'll tell her say nothin', like.

DEVLIN And what did ya see?

GASCOIGNE *(laughs)* Joe and some lady. You Dev, and you… *(beat)* Nothin'. I saw nothin'.

DEVLIN Aye. And what else does tonight teach ya, Gascy? Somethin' the same as not tellin' – only bigger.

GASCOIGNE Don't know Dev, don't know.

DEVLIN It'll teach ya not ta *betray* us. Which is the point of everythin' here this night, ya see? Especially not to your fucken cunt Ma. Who is a biddy bitch. It'll teach ya not ta take the piss outta the bad children.

GASCOIGNE I won't do that no more. I won't do that no more. You betcha.

DEVLIN Good. And who is your friend now and forever and ever?

GASCOIGNE You are Dev, you are.

DEVLIN And what will I do for ya from now on, Gascy?

Beat. **GASCOIGNE** *thinks.*

GASCOIGNE You'll watch over me.

DEVLIN That's it. Just like a…

Beat. **GASCOIGNE** *thinks.*

… somethin' with wings.

GASCOIGNE Is it an angel Dev, is it?

DEVLIN That's it my friend. *(he kisses him on the cheek and looks at* **MANSFIELD***)* Just like an angel.

DEVLIN *goes to the edge of space with* **GASCOIGNE***, points him off towards the car,* **GASCOIGNE** *exits.* **MANSFIELD** *looks for, and finds, his bottle. Drinks remains.* **DEVLIN** *stands in the darkness, watches for a few seconds.*

You'll not find her at the bottom a that.

MANSFIELD What you know about it?

DEVLIN Should be gettin' used to the idea by now, I'd say. Gettin' *over* it like. Been a year at least I reckon.

MANSFIELD I don't be thinkin' of her at all.

DEVLIN Good. Because if she was anywhere she'd be up there, wouldn't ya say? *(points to the sky)* Lookin' down on this shitehole town. Nose up, lookin' down on us all.

MANSFIELD I'll catch up with yez later.

Beat.

DEVLIN What ya lookin' at?

MANSFIELD Ah. The houses down there. With the lights. The people – all tucked up, happy and warm.

DEVLIN Ya know nothing about lives of those people. Grass-is-greener-itis you have, that's what. You're outside. Inside always looks good from there.

MANSFIELD *laughs at this, turns to* **DEVLIN**. *They catch each other smiling.*

That's it. Start – enjoyin' yourself. Have. A. Laugh. No one will think less of ya, Terry. We – I – won't think less a ya. That's all I'm sayin'.

MANSFIELD Yeah.

DEVLIN Well then, lets go.

Beat.

MANSFIELD Did ya – did ya ever watch the little moths that flit around streetlamps, Dev?

DEVLIN No.

MANSFIELD Just that – sometimes I think I'd be like one of those moths. Wherever the light is – I follow. Like I'm compelled, or hypnotized, or somethin'.

Beat.

DEVLIN Yer as queer as fuck, Terry Mansfield, that's what. The way you talk sometimes.

MANSFIELD Well, ya know what they say, Dev… *(he turns round and looks at* **DEV**. *The look is held for a few seconds)*

DEVLIN *(stern)* C'mon now. Gascy's waiting.

MANSFIELD *turns around and exits,* **DEVLIN** *waits, looks at him, then out at the fields, at the houses with the lights. Exits.*

Fade lights.

Scene Two

Next day. Inside of a bar. Through the window the outside sign can be seen: 'The Congo' is written in large black letters. The background image on the sign is of mountains – with an image of a drum, fore-grounded. The sign swings in the breeze for a few seconds, an audible squeak. Inside: a breast-high bar with a brass rail; a silver faux-antique cash register; assortment of drinks at the back; red leather seats, red-velvet-topped bar-stools, a faded wooden floor; a number of black and white photos of a man in exotic places, getting off planes and ships etc, lining the walls. In some pictures the man is depicted with African tribesmen. On one wall there are two small drums, hanging high up. Downstage right, on the wall, where the bar ends, is a dartboard and blackboard – with a little ledge, which holds pieces of chalk and a case of darts. A face – **MIKEY***'s – peers through the window, joined by* **JOE**. *They both disappear – then the door is opened slowly by* **DEVLIN**. *The bell of the bar rings out.*

DEVLIN *stands in the doorway, alone. The light picks out no detail of his face or figure, so that his momentary stance in the doorway is shadowy and ominous.*

DEVLIN Hello? *(beat)* Hey! Hello?

DEVLIN *indicates to others.* **MIKEY** *and* **JOE** *enter – with* **MANSFIELD** *last.* **MANSFIELD** *checks that no one has seen them enter the pub, then closes the door behind him.*

JOE Hell-o?

MIKEY *and* **JOE** *go to door leading upstairs, shout up 'Hello? Hello?'*

MIKEY Place is fucken empty.

JOE Wah-hoo!

DEVLIN Pull the curtains.

MANSFIELD *walks over and pulls the half-curtains.* **JOE** *and* **MIKEY** *go to the bar and start messing around, jumping on the bar, getting excited, doing gun-slinging moves as if in the saloon of a Western, banging the bar-top like a drum, grabbing at the crisps.* **JOE** *stands on the edge of the leather seats, starts tapping the small drums that hang from the wall. Bangs out the drum intro to Joy Division's* 'Atrocity Exhibition'. *Sings the words of that song: 'This is the way, step inside. This is the way, step inside'. Then jumps onto the floor.*

JOE *(acting)* Stop yer hemmin' and hawin' and draw why don't ya?

MIKEY *(acting)* Pow! Pow! Pow!

JOE *screams and falls over the bar.*

Stop yer squallin' little fellar.

JOE *(as himself)* Don't call me that. I'm bigger than you, Mikey. By a long shot.

MIKEY *(as himself)* Ah fuck you. No good playin' cowboys with you when you can never just die. Just like Ma says. You can't keep still for shit.

DEVLIN Hey Mikey, check upstairs will ya? Joe, go with him.

The two grab a couple of beers from behind the bar. They snap the caps off; guzzle on beer, exiting stage right, towards 'upstairs'. **DEVLIN** *sits down on one of the seats, places his feet on the table. Looks at* **MANSFIELD**.

Stinks in here. *(pause)* Said it stinks in here. Don't you think it stinks?

MANSFIELD His wife died. Maybe she was the one kept it clean or something.

DEVLIN Could do with a polish. Some flowers, maybe. Wouldn't ya say?

MANSFIELD Dunno. I don't drink in here. Nor my da. Far as I know.

DEVLIN Your da doesn't come here.

MANSFIELD That's it.

DEVLIN Doesn't drink in here.

MANSFIELD That's it.

DEVLIN Drinks in Vinegar Man's.

MANSFIELD Sometimes.

DEVLIN With the wife-beaters and alcoholics.

MANSFIELD Leave it alone will ya?

DEVLIN Alls I meant was it's a bit smelly, that's all. Mr. Black's not been lookin' after his pub.

MANSFIELD Only afternoon, Dev. Plenty of time ta be cleaning it.

Sounds of the other two stamping around the room upstairs.

DEVLIN Never been in here before. Well, we missed nothin'. It's a right oul kip.

MANSFIELD Shop-owners round this way – they come in. Chamber of Commerce heads. He's travelled round, Mr. Black has. Tells people about it. Talks all the time about his travels.

DEVLIN Who gives a fuck about it? Listen to music I say. Some Acid House. The Mondays. That's what ya want.

MANSFIELD Anyway, he's not upstairs. Ya can call them two off for a start.

DEVLIN Where's he then? *(***MANSFIELD** *sighs and goes towards door.)* Where ya think yer going?

MANSFIELD Fucking home! I need to go. We all do. This is daft. Come on, my head's wrecked.

DEVLIN What I say before we came in?

MANSFIELD You said 'go hard or go home'.

DEVLIN After that.

MANSFIELD One more adventure.

DEVLIN One more adventure and that's it. We'll call it a night then.

MANSFIELD It's the next fucken day, Dev!

DEVLIN So it is.

MANSFIELD What can we do here anyway, tell me? What? Booze? I've any amount of it. Don't need to put ourselves at risk for booze.

DEVLIN Who said anythin' about booze? I know I didn't.

JOE *and* **MIKEY** *can be heard screaming and roaring as they fool around in the living-quarters area of the pub.* **MANSFIELD** *goes to the stairs. Calls:*

MANSFIELD Come on down the fuck you two! We're leaving.

DEVLIN *goes to* **MANSFIELD**, *pulls a knife and viciously points it at his throat.*

DEVLIN Don't you ever call a shot like that in front of me, ya hear fucker?

MANSFIELD Yeah.

Beat.

DEVLIN You shouldn't make me do that to ya. Why'd you do that?

MANSFIELD I don't know.

DEVLIN S'pose you can't help it. Your Ma and all. *(pause)* Ya know, I was thinkin' a callin' ya what they called ya in school, yeah? Before they kicked you out, like.

MANSFIELD Yeah?

DEVLIN Tolstoy. Wasn't that it?

MANSFIELD Aye. Yeah.

DEVLIN War and fucken Peace. You read that book when you were how old?

MANSFIELD Twelve.

DEVLIN You clever fucking bastard.

MANSFIELD I liked reading. My Ma –

DEVLIN She's dead, Tolstoy.

MANSFIELD She wasn't that time.

DEVLIN No. *(pause)* You said he's not here. What d'ya mean by that?

MANSFIELD Nothin'.

DEVLIN Nothin'? Well get this, Terry. Terry Tolstoy who is supposed to be so fucken smart. Any man that'd leave his pub open and empty in the middle of the day is pretty fucken careless, wouldn't ya say? I mean it stinks. He hasn't cleaned it right. Everything's done halfways kind've. Yet he went out. Out without closin'. Look, I bet he *(interrupts himself, rushes over to the till, presses several keys, it bounces open, holds up a few notes)* … ya see Terry, what I'm tryin' to get across ta ya is – a man that'd leave his pub open, his curtains open, his cash register unlocked – for the likes of us scumbags to come in and fuck around inside is obviously a careless type of a man. And a careless type of a man, I'd say, would have easy access to money.

Beat.

MANSFIELD Say that again. A careless type of a man…

DEVLIN … would have easy access to money. Money lyin' around. Money hidden. Money someplace.

MANSFIELD How do you know? I mean… /Jesus.

DEVLIN *(rapidly)* Look, he owns a pub so the man has money. He didn't lock it so the man is careless. Clear enough, no? So my feelin' is, the chances of somethin' like a stash of money lyin' somewhere, hidden somewhere… and not this piddlin' shit, a few quid… are pretty high, wouldn't you say?

Pause.

MANSFIELD Let's take the till money and go. Come on.

DEVLIN What I say two minutes ago?

MANSFIELD You said don't call the shots.

DEVLIN And what ya doin'?

Silence. **MANSFIELD** *shuffles around awkwardly.*

Yeah. And you're tryin' my patience doin' it. And I don't like ta hurt ya, Terry. Ya know that.

Pause.

MANSFIELD So maybe he's careless. His wife died. Maybe he's griefstricken. And maybe he has money lying somewhere. So what! A few bob. We should still just walk. In my humble fucking opinion Dev, that's what we should do. *(***DEVLIN** *says nothing. Pours himself a coke, adds ice)* You don't care do ya? Well you're goin' a long ways on a *feelin'* Dev. That's all I'll say.

DEVLIN Confident of my understandin' of people and how they tick, Terry, that's all. Call it an instinct, if ya like. Now. Where would a careless man hide his secret stash of cash, I wonder? What would ya say about that, Terry?

MIKEY *and* **JOE** *enter laughing and drinking.* **MIKEY** *spews a line of beer between his teeth.*

Put the fucken booze down. *(they do)* What I say about booze?

MIKEY Not yet, ya said.

DEVLIN That's it. Ya want ta be found drunk on the floor by the cops, do yez? Caught red-handed like the stupid fucken cunts yez are? What's the story?

MIKEY No one up there boss.

JOE No one and no thing.

DEVLIN What d'ya mean 'no thing'?

JOE He has fuck all things.

MIKEY No telly, no music.

JOE No dirty magazines.

MIKEY Nothin'. Just an oul bed, whole load of books, fucken ornaments, maps, crappy radio, weird shit, fucken pictures, some kinda fucken spear, fucken lion skin…

JOE Leopard…

MIKEY Some fucken animal anyway. Travel shit. Shit ya see on wildlife programmes. Nothin' worth anythin' at all.

JOE Nice day out there, Dev, ya know? We should get outta this stink-hole.

MIKEY Give it a rest, Joey.

JOE *(to* **MIKEY***)* Well, isn't that what you said on the stairs? 'I think we should get out of this stink-hole.' Isn't that what you said?

MIKEY I said it to you.

DEVLIN We're goin' nowhere lads.

Pause.

MIKEY Fuck all here, Dev. That's the truth.

DEVLIN Tell them the conclusion we came ta about Prentice Black. Go on Terry. Tell them the conclusion.

Beat.

MANSFIELD Well… he… we… reckon… a careless man… the like of Prentice Black… must have… would have… could have… easy access to money. More than what's in the till, anyway.

JOE What the fuck does that mean?

MANSFIELD Means it's – here. Maybe. Somewhere. Money. Somethin'. Probably. But –

DEVLIN No buts or I'll gut ya, Tolstoy, I promise ya that…

MANSFIELD … but maybe we won't have ta go to the bother of looking… was what I was going to say. Because I, because I know where he is.

MIKEY Where then? Where is he?

JOE Yeah! You some sort of, whadyamacall, sidekick?

DEVLIN Psychic! Ya moron!

MANSFIELD Look: I seen him often enough. Sitting across the road in Tote. Talking about back-in-the-day and all his travels. Likes to do big bets, yankees. Knows about form and such. Gets all quiet when he loses. Big racing

day today, see. And the main races are over in a couple of hours. In about two hours. So I say he'll be back. I say he'll be back in not much more than that.

Blackout.

Scene Three

MIKEY *and* **JOE** *playing Darts.*

MIKEY Bulls fucken eye!

JOE Fuck ya. Give it here.

JOE *grabs the dart off* **MIKEY** *and fires it at his foot.* **MIKEY** *screams.* **MANSFIELD** *and* **DEVLIN** *laugh. The dart has penetrated* **MIKEY***'s shoe.*

Wooh-hoo! Double fifteen to me y'oul pig.

MIKEY You bastard. Get it outta me.

JOE Going nowhere now, are ya? Not the big darts player now, are ya? Not the big anythin'.

DEVLIN Take it out, Joe.

JOE Can take it out himself, big show-off.

DEVLIN Take it out!

Pause.

JOE *walks over and takes the dart out.* **MIKEY** *screams.* **MIKEY** *pushes* **JOE***, who is knocked back and starts to cry.*

JOE You're fucken for it. Wait till Da gets ya. Your lights'll be knocked out. He'll fucken kill ya, he will.

DEVLIN *(walks up to* **JOE***, picks him off the ground an inch or two)* Not if you keep your mouth shut he won't. Ya big girl's blouse ya! *(the others laugh. Throws* **JOE** *down)* Two Cokes. Plenty of ice. Two packets of crisps please, Joe.

JOE *gets up.*

JOE Yez are always pickin' on me. Fucken sick of it.

JOE *goes over to the bar, gets the Coke-on-tap, flings it into two pint glasses, puts ice in. Stops.*

Two cokes. What flavour crisps?

DEVLIN What d'you reckon, Terry? You a cheese and onion – or a salt and vinegar man? What d'you say, Mikey? *(who is moaning in a corner)* What d'you say Mikey, 'bout Terry's crisps?

MIKEY Salt and vinegar.

DEVLIN Joe?

JOE What the fuck do I care?

DEVLIN Because you need to know what crisps to bring us, useless prick. We're customers.

JOE Well, on pain of death I'd say he was salt and vinegar.

DEVLIN As would I.

MIKEY After all, vinegar's in his blood.

DEVLIN Like Jesus. *(they laugh)*

MANSFIELD Jesus didn't have vinegar in his blood. He was just given it on a sponge – by a centurion.

Beat.

DEVLIN But that's what I meant, Tolstoy. That's what I meant.

MIKEY Would ya listen to it. I hate fucken students.

JOE *rolls down his sleeves over his wrists, throws his hair over his eyes, sucks in his cheeks, becomes slumped.*

JOE Man, I'm so superior. I'm so depressed. Give me fucken money. Who gives a shite about ya?

DEVLIN Cokes Joe please!

MIKEY Ya hurt my foot, Joe. Feels infected. *(***JOE** *brings over the cokes and crisps)*

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