

# **NO BLACKS, NO DOGS, NO ~~IRISH~~ POLES**

By  
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## **Characters**

**JIMMY**.....swarthy, dark complexion, 30yrs  
**CON**.....Irish, a bull of a man, mid 50's  
**MARION**.....poised, slightly matronly, mid 50's  
**JJ**.....Anglo-Irish, well groomed, late 40's  
**MICHAEL**....athletic, interesting, 30yrs  
**CATHY**.....aborigine 30yrs approx.

**Time**.....recently  
**Length**.....90mins approx.

## **Synopsis**

The dysfunctional Kennedy clan are having a re-union. There's the father, Con, a successful building contractor in London who has had to relocate back in Ireland because of tax irregularities in the UK. Con is secretly bisexual, although not-so-secret from his wife, Marion, who has known it all along and kept quiet about it. His estranged son, Michael, turns up after five years in Australia with Cathy, his new aborigine wife. To say his parents are surprised would be putting it mildly. His nephew, Jimmy, also turns up and it is soon apparent that his racist, bigoted views haven't mellowed any as he has got older. We learn that he is there at Con's invitation; his real reason being to spy on Marion, who Con suspects of having an affair. Jimmy also has his own agenda, selling crack/cocaine to the local drug users – a plan which backfires when the drugs, which he has buried in the back garden, are discovered by Michael, heightening the already tense atmosphere in the house. Add in JJ, construction manager for Con, whose attraction to Marion must be obvious to everyone except Con.

## ACT ONE

### scene one

**A well-presented living room. Armchairs, coffee table, lamp-stand, bookcase etc. An old mantel clock is on a shelf. French doors leading to the garden. The garden is part-visible; grass, shrubs, a tree right at the back. A door leads to the stairs. We hear a voice singing, loudly and badly, in the garden.**

**VOICE:** We will take him up the Arse...  
We will take him up the Arse...  
We will take him up the Arse...n...al

**CON DWYER appears from within the house, shaking his head. He is in mid/late fifties, a bull of a man. He moves to the French doors and looks out.**

**CON:** Jimmy, would you mind moderating your vocal delivery...you prat.

**His reply is a ball kicked in the direction of the doors.**

**CON:** Oi! It's not Saturday down the North Bank with the rest of the morons.

**JIMMY DWYER appears from the garden. He is in around thirty, swarthy, dark complexion. His head may be shaven. He wears an Arsenal jersey, and is carrying a can of lager.**

**JIMMY:** What was that, Con?  
**CON:** Put a sock in it. You're among civilised people now.  
**JIMMY:** No, before. The intellectual bit.  
**CON:** I asked you to moderate your vocal delivery.  
**JIMMY:** That's good, that. (*drinks*) Where'd you pick that up?  
**CON:** Some literary magazine  
**JIMMY:** The Sun? Hey Psycho, could you moderate your vocal delivery.  
**CON:** And if he didn't?  
**JIMMY:** We'd kick his head in.  
**CON:** You'd do that anyway.  
**JIMMY:** Yeah. But not with such style. (*beat*) Must remember that. Use it the next time.  
**CON:** And when are you likely to see a game again?  
**JIMMY:** Yeah, well...(brightens) I can watch the highlights tonight.  
**CON:** Not on my telly, you can't.  
**JIMMY:** Aw Con. Just because you support the Jewboys...  
**CON:** It's the reception. We can't get BBC here.  
**JIMMY:** I forgot I'm back in the fucking bog again.

**CON:** Better than being back in the nick.  
**JIMMY:** Yeah, you're right. Look...thanks again for putting me up. I'll get out of your hair in a few days.  
**CON:** Aren't you forgetting something?  
**JIMMY:** I ain't forgetting. I'll be out'a your hair soon as I finish that little job.  
**CON:** Don't take too long about it. *(pause)* Nothing too drastic, mind.  
**JIMMY:** Gotchya. *(finishes the beer)* Think I'll take a stroll. You know, stretch the legs.

**He heads back into the garden, and we hear singing.**

**JIMMY:** We'll take 'em up the Arse.....Take 'em up the Arse...

**Con watches Jimmy depart, unaware that MARION, his wife, has been watching the last few exchanges. Marion is early fifties, good-looking in a matronly sort of way.**

**MARION:** A few days! I can't stand five minutes more of that...that sort of vulgarity. He'd better go.  
**CON:** How long have you been there?  
**MARION:** Long enough. There's no excuse for that kind of language. It belongs in the gutter. And so does he. What little job?  
**CON:** I don't know.  
**MARION:** Sounded to me like you did.  
**CON:** Someone owes him money I think. Ah... you know Jimmy.  
**MARION:** That's what worries me. Get rid of him.  
**CON:** I can't do that.  
**MARION:** I'll do it then.  
**CON:** He's my sister's son for God sake!  
**MARION:** And that gives him the right to be foul-mouthed? Though maybe that's where he gets it from.  
**CON:** Josephine? Bad language?  
**MARION:** She could swear for Ireland, England and Europe when she had a mind to. How would you know anyway? You've hardly seen her in twenty years.  
**CON:** Neither have you.  
**MARION:** I'm not her brother. Anyway, I spent enough years sharing a room with her. So don't tell me what language she could or couldn't use.  
**CON:** Oh yes. I remember now. Harlesden Gardens. Round the corner from St Marys Church. Mrs McGinty was your landlady. Ex- Gestapo, wasn't she?  
**MARION:** There was nothing wrong with Mrs McGinty.  
**CON:** Nothing that a firing squad couldn't cure.  
**MARION:** You never liked her.  
**CON:** She never liked me!  
**MARION:** And whose fault was that? You terrified that poor woman.  
**CON:** She had no sense of humour.  
**MARION:** Oh yes. Let me see now...five ton of building sand dumped in her front

drive...

**CON:** She needed a new patio...

**MARION:** A load of unasked-for horse manure...

**CON:** Her roses were looking a bit poorly...

**MARION:** Catalogue furniture, carpet fitters, undertakers, funeral wreaths....  
Hilarious, that. She must have been laughing her head off.

**CON:** She was a fucking bitch.

**MARION:** Just because she found you in bed with...

**CON:** I wasn't in bed with him. I was only in his room. (*pause*) I had nowhere to sleep for Christ sake!

**MARION:** I thought it was pretty funny at the time.

**CON:** I'm glad someone did. Did you know she told Fr. Cleary? He was round like a shot. You know how that lot are about...things like that.

**MARION:** The church frowns on homosexuality, Con. He was only doing his job.

**CON:** Huh! Half of Willesden knew about it before the week was out.

**MARION:** Now, where's **your** sense of humour?

**CON:** I can take a joke like the next man...but that wasn't funny. Bloody narrow-minded ould biddy. Did she really think I was like that? All I did was sleep in a friend's bed for a few nights when he was on night shift.

**MARION:** You overslept that night, Con. (*laughs*) I was finishing my cornflakes in the kitchen when she came in. She was in a right state – about the four legs she saw sticking out of the bottom of the bed. *And I think they're men's legs*, she whispered, blessing herself. 'Course I knew two of them were yours...

**CON:** I should'a stayed in your room.

**MARION:** God no! That would have been worse still in her eyes. Anyway, you didn't really know me then. It was only after that we started going out.

**CON:** Oh yeah, that's right. I swept you off your feet soon afterwards.

**MARION:** (*a forced laugh*) She was very good to me, the time I spent there. God rest her soul.

**CON:** She's dead?

**MARION:** She died last year.

**CON:** I never knew

**MARION:** Why should you?

**CON:** You could have told me.

**MARION:** What for?

**CON:** So as I could go and get drunk.

**MARION:** Since when did you need an excuse to do that?

**CON:** I would have raised my glass to her...(*he raises an imaginary glass*)  
Your good health Mrs McGinty. May you continue to feed the hungry worm population....

**MARION:** See what I mean? I thought all that was forgotten.

**CON:** It's not just elephants who never forget. She made a laughing stock of me. I didn't dare show my face in the Galtymore for ages afterwards...

**MARION:** You made sure you got your own back, didn't you?

**CON:** *(an uncomfortable silence)* Ah, it's all history now. *(pause)*

**MARION:** Is it? *(another pause)*

**CON:** I'll have a word with Jimmy....get him to tone it down a bit.

**MARION:** I don't want him here at all. There's bound to be a room at the inn.

**CON:** And if there's not, they might have the use of a stable, eh?

**MARION:** What? *(realising)* Michael's going to be here in...*(she looks at her watch)*...less than three hours.

**CON:** Better dig out the red carpet sharpish then, hadn't I?

**MARION:** If that's the way you're going to...I can see now it's going to be a fine homecoming...

**CON:** And whose fault is it if I'm not exactly over the moon?

**MARION:** He's our son for heaven sake!

**CON:** Oh yes...our son.

**MARION:** For God sake! He's been away five years, Con.

**CON:** I know that.

**MARION:** You could show some enthusiasm at least. You never even...enquired about him *(beat)* He could have died for all you cared

**CON:** No! Don't say that. Don't bloody say that. I do care.

**MARION:** Show it then. Show him.

**CON:** I'm not like you.

**MARION:** You don't talk to him. You never talked to him.

**CON:** I did. I tried to. He's the one who wouldn't speak. After the...well...after what happened. *(pause)* Besides, you do enough talking for both of us. All those phone calls...

**MARION:** Oh well, if you're going to complain about a few little phone calls...

**CON:** I'm not complaining. Jesus!

**MARION:** Are you going to speak to him?

**CON:** He's the one who wouldn't speak to me, remember?

**MARION:** I don't want him arriving and finding you won't speak to him.

**CON:** I said I would.

**MARION:** It's not just him now.

**CON:** That's another thing. Getting married in the wilds of Woomabera – or wherever it is. What's wrong with here? His home?

**MARION:** This isn't his home. London is.

**CON:** You know what I mean.

**MARION:** We got married in Willesden Junction.

**CON:** It's not out in the bloody wilds.

**MARION:** It's Katoomba. And it's not in the wilds. It's just outside Sydney. I'm sure they are civilised there.

**CON:** Bloody upside-downers. I remember when I worked in Earls Court...

**MARION:** They remember you too, I bet...

**CON:** No one ever said a bad word about me. It's in the breeding. The Kennedys can go anywhere and hold their heads high. Civilised people every one of them.

**MARION:** Apart from your nephew Jimmy.

**CON:** Funny how he's **my** relation all of a sudden.

**MARION:** He's no relation of mine.  
**CON:** Ah come on, he's not that bad.  
**MARION:** He's a thug. A foul-mouthed, nasty piece of work. And I don't want him round my house. What's he doing here anyway? You haven't seen him for years.  
**CON:** He just turned up.  
**MARION:** Just like that?  
**CON:** Yeah. I couldn't turn him away.  
**MARION:** On the run, then. A rat's natural habitat is the city sewers, not the countryside. Not enough victims *(pause)* I don't want the police coming round here.  
**CON:** What police? What are you talking about?  
**MARION:** Where he's concerned they won't be far behind. I can see why Josephine washed her hands of him.  
**CON:** She never washed her hands...  
**MARION:** Abandoned then, if you want a better word.  
**CON:** She did her best.  
**MARION:** Josephine always did her best. For Josephine. Not that I blame her too much. I might have done the same myself. I mean, when your own son tries to burn your flat down - with you inside... *(pause)* He's a psychopath; a bigoted, racist, nasty...  
**CON:** He needed a father, someone to keep him straight...  
**MARION:** And that would have solved all his problems, would it? God, aren't fathers great altogether! *(pause)* Does he know Michael is coming home?  
**CON:** I didn't get round to telling him.  
**MARION:** Oh, that's grand.  
**CON:** It won't be an issue.  
**MARION:** No, it won't. And do you know why. Because Jimmy won't be here. And you had better make sure he won't. I'm going out for an hour now...that should give you enough time to sort it out.  
**CON:** Out? Where are you going?  
**MARION:** A policeman wouldn't ask me that question.  
**CON:** You've done the shopping.  
**MARION:** Yes. And now I'm going out again. *(she exits)*

**Con watches her go, a look of thunder on his face. He takes out his mobile phone and makes a call.**

**end of scene**

scene two

**Con is speaking to JJ HOGAN. JJ is in his late forties, and is Con's construction manager. He has worked for Con on and off for twenty years**

**JJ:** He's making more than a nuisance of himself. There's fellas in Hennessey's won't put up with too much of his carry-on.

**CON:** He never could take his drink.

**JJ:** It's more than that. Other stuff.

**CON:** What other stuff?

**JJ:** Drugs. Up to his eyeballs by the look of him.

**CON:** Jesus! That's all we need. Marion doesn't want him here. Can we get him into the hotel?

**JJ:** Not a chance. They'd take one look at him and ring the Guards.

**CON:** What about you? Couldn't you fix him up?

**JJ:** Are you kidding! 'Tis a fucking straightjacket I'd put him in. *(pause)* He seems worse than I remember. Where's he been?

**CON:** Inside. Six months in the 'Ville for kicking someone's head in.

**JJ:** Bet he was black. *(pause)* What's he doing round here anyway

**CON:** Everyone deserves a break.

**JJ:** You getting charitable! Must be old age.

**CON:** He phoned me up. Wanted to get out'a London for a while. I said I'd fix him up with something. How is he getting on anyway?

**JJ:** He wouldn't work up a lather to shave himself.

**CON:** Ah, give him a chance. He's family when all's said and done. And blood is thicker than water, no matter how you bottle it.

**JJ:** I put him with Clyde.

**CON:** Brave man.

**JJ:** You said 'Get him tending the brickies, that will quieten him down'. *(chuckles)* So I put him with Clyde.

**CON:** Oh Jesus, yeah! I can just see him *(he puts on a Jamaican accent)* "Hey, you bloodclot...you say one more bad ting about black people, and I put you in the mixer and mash you up good." He would too. *(pause)* I remember...way back...it must be the mid sixties....I wasn't much more a lad anyway...walking down the Kilburn High Road, looking at the noticeboards, desperate to find a room for the night, and all I could see were the words NO IRISH...NO IRISH...NO IRISH. There was this young black fella standing next to me, looking for a room too, I suppose...'Look', I said to him, 'we built this bloody kip, and now they don't want us to live in it'. 'Same here, man', he replied. Look...NO BLACKS...NO BLACKS...NO BLACKS...That was how I met Clyde. Then we saw another sign...NO DOGS...*No dogs, no Irish, no Blacks...*we had a good laugh about it. Then we went across the road to Biddy Mulligan's and got drunk. Well, it wasn't called Biddy's then, I forget what it was, the Red Lion or something. We've been friends ever since. What does the colour of a man's skin matter? We're all the same colour inside.

**JJ:** Tell that to Jimmy. Or the guy whose head he kicked in.  
**CON:** Jimmy's a...a...  
**JJ:** Psycho? Cunt?  
**CON:** I think he got dropped on his head a few times when he was young. Probably scrambled his brains.  
**JJ:** He hasn't got a brain.*(he raps his knuckles on the table)* Solid as that.  
**CON:** Clyde saved my life once. Did I tell you? *(doesn't wait for an answer)* I've never forgotten. The Catholic Club. You know that one in Stonebridge Park? Fr Cleary's place. It was before I met Marion. We'd been drinking in The Orange Tree all day. I think Ireland had won at Twickenham. Anyway, I was legless. A couple of us decided to finish the night off at the club...  
**JJ:** You and Clyde?  
**CON:** Ah no...not the club. He was....  
**JJ:** Black?  
**CON:** No! He wasn't a member. *(pause)* It wasn't like that.  
**JJ:** Who are you kidding? A decent suntan and you'd have difficulties getting into that place  
**CON:** The club wasn't racist.  
**JJ:** No? How many black members did it have?  
**CON:** I don't know.  
**JJ:** You were on the committee, you said.  
**CON:** One or two.  
**JJ:** Out of hundreds?  
**CON:** They had their own...places.  
**JJ:** They had them in South Africa too. It was called apartheid.  
**CON:** Clyde could have come in any time he wanted. As my guest. *(beat)* He never asked.  
**JJ:** Maybe he saw the notice over the door.  
**CON:** What notice? *(pause)* Fuck sake, JJ...whose side are you on?  
**JJ:** You never offered?  
**CON:** What?  
**JJ:** You said Clyde never asked. And you never offered? Why? Maybe you were both afraid of the consequences.  
**CON:** Look...I don't know. It didn't seem...important. *(pause)* Jesus, all I'm trying to do is tell you how he saved my life.  
**JJ:** Go ahead.  
**CON:** Ah...the humour is off me now. You know it anyway. You heard it before. *(he goes to the cabinet and takes out a bottle of whiskey)* Do you want a whiskey?  
**JJ:** Go on then. Just a large one, mind.

**They both laugh at this, then drink each others' health.**

**CON:** Do you think I'm a miserable ould fucker?

**JJ:** Eh?  
**CON:** Go on, you can tell me. You've known me more than twenty years now, so tell me, have you noticed me getting more miserable in the last few?  
**JJ:** What's brought this on?  
**CON:** Marion, that's who. She says I have become a right miserable ould fucker.  
**JJ:** Those were her words?  
**CON:** Something like that.  
**JJ:** Her exact words?  
**CON:** You know Marion. *(he mimics her)* "I think, now, Con, it's about time You had a makeover. Get rid of that miserable face you've been wearing for a while. Put some spice back in both our lives. Otherwise..."  
**JJ:** Otherwise what?  
**CON:** That's it. She never said. But you know Marion. Her pauses are worse than her words.  
**JJ:** She was probably joking.  
**CON:** Humour isn't one of her vices. Novenas, now, she's big on novenas. And collecting. Bits of glass...and bottles. We've bottles here that would baffle Einstein...*(he picks up an unusual piece of glass)* What would you use something like that for?

**During this last speech, Marion returns. She listens in amusement**

**MARION:** Hello JJ. I see Con has been amusing you.  
**JJ:** Hello Marion. We were...  
**MARION:** I heard...*(she takes the piece of glass from Con)* That's Lalique.  
**CON:** I hope it's not contagious.  
**MARION:** Oh, very funny.  
**JJ:** Lalique...you have expensive tastes.  
**MARION:** But very good ones.  
**JJ:** Oh, the best. Maybe you should open a shop.  
**MARION:** Maybe I should. But it wouldn't be appreciated around these parts. It would have to be Dublin or Cork, or even London. *(pause)* What do you think, Con?  
**CON:** Stick to what you are good at. That's what I do.  
**MARION:** And what am I good at? *(no reply)* So, how much would you say?  
**CON:** Ten pounds.  
**MARION:** Come on dear, you can do better than that.  
**CON:** What do I know about glass? Ask me the price of plastering a house... or building a wall round Ireland ten feet tall, and I'm your man... *(pause)* go on then...fifty?  
**MARION:** Nearer two hundred. There was a time when we both got pleasure from visiting fairs and boot sales, hunting for bargains.  
**CON:** I'm a busy man these days.  
**MARION:** Not too busy to spend boozy evenings in the pub.  
**CON:** That's business.

**MARION:** Silly me...I thought boozing was pleasure. It's nice to do things together...don't you think, JJ? As a couple, I mean.

**JJ:** I'm sure it is. I haven't had that...pleasure lately myself.

**MARION:** I keep forgetting you and Stef aren't together anymore.

**CON:** We do things together. Go places together.

**MARION:** He thinks going to a hurling match is doing things together.

**CON:** What's wrong with a hurling match?

**MARION:** A bunch of sweaty men in shorts, waving a lot of funny sticks in the air. Chasing a ball that hardly anyone can see.

**CON:** The clash of the ash. You can't beat it. Isn't that right JJ?

**JJ:** Oh now, leave me out of it! I was never keen to be honest...

**CON:** A Kilkenny man who doesn't like hurling! Now there's a rarity.

**MARION:** Did you and Stef do things together, JJ?

**JJ:** Yeah, I suppose we did. Well, until we... *(pause)* Sundays were kinda sacrosanct. Sundays were ours to do what we wanted and go where we wanted. It might just be a visit to a museum, or along the Bayswater Road to look at all the pictures for sale. They were all hanging on the railings, with the artists sitting nearby maybe finishing another painting. It wasn't until I visited Paris a few years ago, and went to Montmartre that I saw anything like it. Or we might go to Kew Gardens or Richmond Park and spend the day just wandering about...

**MARION:** See? And all you can offer is an ould hurling match! *(she exits)*

**CON:** And ne'er betwixt shall meet. That's how it goes between us lately. She hates hurling, I hate Coronation Street. She hates football, I hate East-enders. Mind you, I hate all that soap shite. What's that other one...the Aussie one?

**JJ:** Neighbours. It's good

**CON:** You watch that tripe?

**JJ:** I like tripe. It helps me unwind after a day among...*(he indicates with his head)*...that pack of hounds.

**CON:** We're different...I was going to say people...these days, but it's not that. We're the same people, but something's different...and I can't for the life of me put my finger on it. Can you understand it? It's as if we're from different planets.

**JJ:** Women are from Venus, Men are from Mars.

**CON:** What?

**JJ:** It's an expression I heard one of those feminists use. Women are from Venus, men are from Mars. Or is it the other way round? The battle of the sexes, that's all it is. Only, as you're getting older, your personalities are becoming more defined. And traits are beginning to show that weren't apparent before.

**CON:** Give over!

**JJ:** I'm telling you. Marion's copped on. You were always a miserable ould fucker, only it's taken her all this time to see it.

**CON:** Bollocks! *(the two men chuckle and drink some more)* Seriously. We're in trouble.

**JJ:** You and Marion? No!

**CON:** Yes. *(pause)* I think there's someone else. *(pause)* Don't ask why. I just know it. There's something...I don't know...something about her lately. A kind of glow. You know how it is with horses? They get their bucket of oats once a day and they look a picture of health. I'd say Marion is getting her oats from somewhere.

**JJ:** But not from you?

**CON:** Ah, you know how it is. It's hard to get enthusiastic at my age.

**JJ:** Marion's not the type.

**CON:** Oh? And what is the type? Go on, tell me.

**JJ:** Ah...Jesus...I don't know.

**CON:** There you go, talking through your arse again. All women are the type... given half a chance.

**JJ:** Like men.

**CON:** Well, you know that saying... A standing prick has no conscience. *(laughs)* Women haven't got that excuse, have they?

**JJ:** It a poor sort of excuse, if you ask me.

**CON:** I agree. A man should be capable of controlling his prick just as he would a...well, a gang of workmen under him. *(pause)* I've used mine with... circumspection all my life.

**JJ:** Circumspection?

**CON:** I may not have went to school, but I met the scholars- what? What's wrong with circumspection? Too fancy for you?

**JJ:** No, circumspection's fine. It just doesn't sound like you.

**CON:** There you go again. Pigeon-holing. That's all right if you're a pigeon.

**JJ:** There's something I'm missing.

**CON:** Probably one of them thieving bastards on site. Sack a few is my advice. That'll put a stop to it.

**JJ:** You know what I mean. What game are you playing?

**CON:** No game. I'm deadly serious where Marion is concerned. *(pause)* It's not you is it? *(pause)* Come on, spill! They say that confession is good for the soul. *(laughs)* Though not for the body, 'cos I'd break every bone in it.

**JJ:** Now whose talking through his arse?

**CON:** Ah, I know it's not you.

**JJ:** How do you know?

**CON:** You like them with a bit less mileage.

**JJ:** Maybe I made an exception.

**CON:** Is it you?

**JJ:** No. But I could be lying

**CON:** Are you?

**JJ:** Fuck you, Kennedy.

**CON:** No, fuck you. *(like De Nero in Taxi Driver)*

**JJ:** No, fuck you. *(the same)*

**CON:** Thirty years we'll be married next week. *(beat)* Thirty years.

**JJ:** That's something to be proud of.

**CON:** Most of our friends have either divorced or split up.

**JJ:** Like me. Fell by the wayside.  
**CON:** How long is it now?  
**JJ:** Four years or more. It was the move that did it. She could never settle here after London.  
**CON:** She never gave it a chance. How long did she last here?  
**JJ:** A couple of months.  
**CON:** And how did you feel when she left you?

**JJ sings a verse of THANK GOD AND GREYHOUND (c Roy Clark)**

**JJ:** (*sings*) Thank God and Greyhound she's gone  
That load on my mind got lighter when she got on  
That shiny old bus was a beautiful sight  
With the black smoke a rolling up around the taillights  
It may sound kind-a cruel but I've been silent too long  
Thank God and Greyhound she's gone

**CON:** You didn't mind?  
**JJ:** Well, I did and I didn't. It's hard to explain. We...well, we weren't missing each other enough. I was...as you know...away a bit. But it didn't seem to bother her. Or me. Not that much anyway. Not seeing each other during the week, was only a short step from not seeing each other at all. (*shrugs*) People grow apart. Besides, I enjoy the freedom.  
**CON:** Sometimes I wonder. Maybe it's us. We haven't adapted...moved with the times. Or maybe it's just me. And that's why Marion is...(*pause*) I don't think I could bear for her to leave me for someone else. I really think I'd swing for the bastard...

**end of scene**

**scene three**

**A little later. MICHAEL and his wife CATHY have arrived. Michael is tall and slim, tanned and fit-looking. He is about thirty years old. Cathy is in her late twenties, of aboriginal appearance. Both are pulling suitcases. Con and Marion are greeting them. Both Con and Marion have been trying to conceal their surprise at Cathy's aboriginal appearance. Marion reacts first, embracing her.**

**MARION:** You poor things. Them heavy cases...Con...(*they take the cases and place them by the wall*). Why didn't you let us pick you up?  
**MICHAEL:** It's okay mum. The taxi was fine...(*they embrace and exchange pleasantries*) Hello dad.  
**CON:** Welcome home, son. (*they shake hands*) How was the flight?  
**MICHAEL:** It was...long. (*he laughs and there is a pause*) This is Cathy.  
**MARION:** Cathy, my dear. You must be exhausted. Come and sit down. I'll make you a nice cup of tea.  
**MICHAEL:** Cathy doesn't drink tea.

**MARION:** Really? I thought everyone drank tea.

**CON:** How about a tinny then? We've some Fosters in the fridge.

**MARION:** Con! You'll have to forgive my husband, Cathy.

**CON:** A joke, my dear. Where's your sense of humour? *(pause)* I suppose I'll have to introduce myself.

**MICHAEL:** Sorry, this is...

**CON:** She knows who I am. I'm very pleased to meet you Cathy. *(they shake hands)*

**CATHY:** I am pleased to meet you, Mr Kennedy.

**CON:** Oh, Con please. Everyone calls me Con.

**CATHY:** Let me guess. It's short for...Conrad?

**MARION:** No, Cornelius.

**CON:** Nobody calls me...Cornelius.

**MARION:** Your father used to.

**CON:** Yeah, well...he's dead.

**MARION:** Now, Cathy, what would you like to drink? Coffee?

**CATHY:** Mineral water, please. Sparkling if you have it.

**MICHAEL:** The same for me, mum.

**MARION:** *(is about to say something but changes her mind and exits to the kitchen)*

**CON:** What was the weather like?

**MICHAEL:** Where?

**CON:** When you left?

**MICHAEL:** Dad, it's Australia...the middle of summer.

**CON:** Hot, then.

**MICHAEL:** Yes, hot.

**CON:** You've got a nice tan, anyway.

**MICHAEL:** Yes, well, thirty degrees all year round tends to do that. *(pause)* And Cathy? Don't you think she's got a nice tan?

**CON:** *(embarrassed)* Well, yes. I expect she has....

**MICHAEL:** Jees! Is that all you can say?

**CON:** It's a surprise, is all.

**MICHAEL:** I thought you knew.

**MARION:** *(returns with a tray of food and drink)* I hadn't got round to telling him.

**CATHY:** *(looks out over the garden)* This is a beautiful country. I was, like, mesmerised coming from the airport. Everywhere is so green.

**MICHAEL:** That's because of all the rain!

**MARION:** It doesn't rain that much! We are fortunate to have such a mild climate...

**CON:** Didn't get round....! *(Con shakes his head)*.

**MARION:** I expect you're hungry after your journey...*(she hands them each a glass of mineral water)* Sparkling, you said. Lucky I had some in... Now, there's ham, sausage rolls...

**CATHY:** No, really...I'm not hungry right now.

**MARION:** *(slightly put out, she turns to Michael with the tray of food)* Michael? It's your favourite steak burger.

**MICHAEL:** Mum, I...we...

**CATHY:** We're vegetarian.

**CON:** What?

**MICHAEL:** It's not a crime – is it?

**CON:** You were never...vegetarian.

**MICHAEL:** I am now.

**CON:** He used to devour steaks this size...And pork chops. You loved pork chops.

**MARION:** You never told me. You never said you were vegetarians.

**MICHAEL:** Mum, I'm sorry. It never occurred to me. *(to Cathy)* We don't think about it anymore, do we? It's second nature to us.

**CON:** But Australia is the home of the sheep. You don't eat lamb chops? It's their main export over here.

**MICHAEL:** I think you'll find that's New Zealand, dad.

**CON:** Same difference.

**MICHAEL:** Tell that to an Aussie. And then pick yourself up off the floor.

**MARION:** I'll have to go to the shops again. Get something suitable. Though what I'll manage I don't know...What should I get?

**MICHAEL:** Mum, look...it's all right. Please. Sit down. Don't worry about us. We're fine with whatever you've got.

**CON:** So long as it doesn't include meat.

**MICHAEL:** That goes without saying.

**CON:** You could have shown some consideration. Your mother went to all this trouble...

**MARION:** It wasn't any trouble. If they don't eat meat, they don't eat meat.

**CON:** I don't get this vegetarian thing. I've eaten meat all my life and it's never done me any harm.

**CATHY:** What about the animals? What harm has it done to them?

**CON:** Sheep, cows, pigs? Harm? They are bred for food.

**CATHY:** They don't know that.

**CON:** What kind of statement is that? You'll be saying next they're like humans. That they have feelings, emotions...

**CATHY:** They feel pain, I know that. Their unnecessary slaughter...

**CON:** Unnecessary? Would you have us all starve instead?

**CATHY:** A fair percentage of the world's population is already starving...in case you hadn't noticed. What has eating meat done to alleviate that problem?

**CON:** And vegetarianism is the answer?

**CATHY:** I didn't say that.

**MICHAEL:** Can't you just accept that we don't eat meat, and leave it at that.

**MARION:** Con...

**CON:** Alright, alright. I was only asking.

**Con goes to the drinks cabinet and pours himself a short. Marion is not too pleased.**

**CON:** Son?

**MICHAEL:** No thanks. *(he takes the glass of mineral water and drinks)* This is fine.

**CON:** Let me guess...no alcohol either?

**MICHAEL:** That's right.

**CON:** You're having me on...right?  
**CATHY:** No. It's true. Alcohol has a corrosive effect on your internal organs. And that's just for starters.  
**MARION:** *(as Con drinks)* You know the doctor doesn't approve...  
**CON:** Ah yes, good old Doctor Crowe. Bloody hypocrite. You should see him down at the Inn at closing time...Staggering like a cow with BSE...  
**MARION:** He doesn't have a heart condition.  
**CON:** That's a good one. Heart condition. I have a clapped-out ticker and they call it heart condition. I suppose it sounds less...deadly that way.  
**MARION:** Don't exaggerate. Your heart is nowhere near that state. You mustn't overdo things is all.  
**CON:** One drink is overdoing things?  
**MARION:** What about earlier with JJ?  
**CON:** Alright, a couple then. Where's the harm in a couple of drinks? A man is entitled to celebrate the homecoming of his prodigal son.  
**MICHAEL:** Prodigal? PRODIGAL?  
**CON:** A figure of speech. Jesus, why are you still so prickly?  
**MICHAEL:** Maybe it's because you're still a prick.  
**MARION:** Michael! That's no way to speak to your father.  
**MICHAEL:** He started it.  
**MARION:** *(to Cathy)* They were always like this. It doesn't mean anything.  
**MICHAEL:** It does.  
**MARION:** No, it doesn't.  
**MICHAEL:** Why are you always making excuses for him?  
**CON:** What? What did I do?  
**MICHAEL:** Careful...or they'll put that on your gravestone. *(pause)* If anyone's prodigal in this house it's you...*(he picks up the cases)* Come on Cathy, I'll show you our quarters.  
**MARION:** It's the first room on the left at the top of the stairs.

**Cathy finishes her drink and they exit.**

**CON:** I thought it was the spare room?  
**MICHAEL:** *(off)* What?  
**MARION:** It's all right, Michael. That room is ready.  
**MICHAEL:** *(off)* We'll lie down for an hour or so.  
**MARION:** You get your rest. The bed is freshly made-up *(she rounds on Con)* The spare room indeed!  
**CON:** I never got round to speaking to Jimmy.  
**MARION:** Do you think I don't know that. *(pause)* It's just as well somebody did. *(pause)* All that guff about vegetarians...you just can't shut up, can you?  
**CON:** Well, it's true. Vegetarianism my arse!  
**MARION:** You have got a big mouth, Con. All your life your mouth has been your problem.  
**CON:** He's too thin-skinned, that's his problem.  
**MARION:** Huh! What must Cathy think of us...of you?

**CON:** She can think what she likes. I'm past caring what other people think of me. *(pause)* Maybe she should worry about what we think of her.

**MARION:** She's a lovely-looking girl. I'm sure Michael is lucky to have her.

**CON:** Haven't you noticed anything...different about her?

**MARION:** Different?...You mean dark-skinned...

**CON:** Dark...! She's bloody black. Which you forgot to mention.

**MARION:** I'm not sure I...

**CON:** She's an abo for God sake! You can't get any blacker than that. He went all the way to Australia, he could at least have married a native.

**MARION:** She is a native...

**CON:** Too true she's a bloody native...straight from the bush...

**MARION:** Keep your voice down...

**CON:** I'm not Bob the Builder. The best sound-proofing money could buy went into those walls. *(pause)* Don't tell me you expected him to bring back a wife like that.

**MARION:** Like what? You are beginning to sound a lot like Jimmy.

**CON:** You think that's racist. To talk about people because they are black? How else should I describe her? It's a shock, I tell you.

**MARION:** I'm just as surprised as you are.

**CON:** How could you be surprised? You knew she was aboriginal, didn't you?

**MARION:** Well yes. But I thought she'd be more like the tennis player..ah... Evonne...Evonne Goolagong. *(pause)* We should be happy for them.

**CON:** You don't look happy. Didn't he give you any inkling? Any inkling at all?...The phone calls...

**MARION:** He said she was a country girl. That she'd feel right at home here.

**CON:** He pulled a right fast one there. Getting his own back, no doubt.

**MARION:** Don't be ridiculous! *(pause)* I wonder how they got together?

**CON:** It's obvious, isn't it? She used her undoubted charms on him. The way you women always do with men - when you want something from them.

**MARION:** And what did I want from you? And if I did itself, who is to say I got it? Oh, forget it. I think you are being....

**CON:** For Christ sake! Look at it. She... her people...Well, if the Irish were once described as the blacks of Europe, then they're the blacks of Australia.

**MARION:** But they are!

**CON:** You know what I mean. He's her meal ticket out of the ghetto.

**MARION:** I don't believe you're right at all. She is highly educated. A university degree as far as I know.

**CON:** Huh! A degree in what? Playing the didgeridoo?

**MARION:** That's not funny. I think she's...fine. I think they'll be fine.

**CON:** You'll be singing a different tune when you're bouncing a grandchild on your knee. What if it's black?

**MARION:** Oh!....

**CON:** A little black baby? That will go down well with your...friends at the club.

**MARION:** They wouldn't say anything.

**CON:** Not to your face, they wouldn't. But I can just imagine the mauling going on behind your back. Some of those bitches could get paid work as guard dogs. A pack of Rottweiler's...

**MARION:** All right, so they've never liked you. But you have to meet them half-way...

**CON:** I don't want to meet them at all...

**MARION:** You don't really like women, do you, Con?

**CON:** What's that supposed to mean? Eh? What's that supposed to mean?

**MARION:** It's just a joke, Con. What else would it be? (*Con looks at her but doesn't reply*) Besides, the children need not necessarily be black...

**CON:** But if they are! What then...?

#### End of scene

#### Scene four

**Later that evening. Con, Marion, Michael, Cathy and JJ have finished a meal, and are now relaxing after it. Michael can just be seen in the garden with Marion, the others are in the sitting room.**

**CATHY:** Were you born in Ireland Mr Hogan?

**JJ:** JJ please. I'm as Irish as Kilkenny marble.

**CON:** And as dense

**CATHY:** Your accent has more of an...English sound.

**CON:** That's because he is English. . His ancestors, anyway. Blow-ins the lot of them.

**JJ:** Better than staying all your life in the bog anyway

**CATHY:** Bog?

**CON:** We have an expression in Ireland. You can take the man from the bog, but you can't take the bog from the man. (*laughs*) I think what he's trying to say is that I'm an ignoramus

**JJ:** Don't forget your lack of class.

**CON:** Working class is good enough for me. I suppose you have similar sayings in...your country?

**CATHY:** You don't seem too sure what my country is.

**CON:** Well...Australia of course

**CATHY:** Not New Zealand?

**CON:** I was only talking about sheep. (*pause*) Look, I know that the native New Zealanders are Maoris, but if you asked me the difference between them and your...people, I'd find it difficult to answer. (*beat*) I mean, it's the same continent, isn't it?

**CATHY:** But not the same people. We – my people that is – can be found in Australia as far back as 50,000 years ago. Some say we came from the Indian sub continent, but nobody can say for certain, whereas the Maoris came to New Zealand not much more than 1,200 years ago from Polynesia. (*pause*) Ireland and England are the same Continent too. Would

you mistake an Irishman for an Englishman?

**CON:** No. But we're two different races.

**CATHY:** Likewise us. *(pause)* What is the difference between being English and Irish?

**CON:** Oh, that's easy. We're a gregarious, warm-hearted people - the English have ice in their veins. Besides, it's easy to tell an Englishman in Ireland - he's the one with all the best land. Isn't that right JJ?

**JJ:** Well now, it all depends on where you're coming from - as Churchill said to De Valera. Bit touchy on the subject, aren't you Con?

**CON:** Too right I am. Eight hundred years of oppression tends to make you that way.

**JJ:** Whereas my ancestors were part of the oppressors eh?

**CON:** They came over with Cromwell - you can't say they didn't, and were given half of Kilkenny as a reward for all their butchery. Go on, you can't deny it.

**JJ:** I am not denying it. My only regret is that they didn't manage to hang on to it. I wouldn't be building houses for a bogman like yourself if they had. *(laughs)* The head on him!

**CON:** Ha, ha.

**CATHY:** But what is the essential difference? What is the one...characteristic, more than anything else, that says to you he is English, or he is Irish?

**CON:** Ah, now... you've got me there.

**JJ:** It's the heads. The bloody heads. All the Irish have mutton-heads...the English are more...horsey.

**CON:** You can't tell people by the look of their heads!

**JJ:** Why not?

**CATHY:** And what about us Koori? What sort of heads have we got?

**JJ:** Koori?

**CATHY:** We prefer to call ourselves Koori. Aborigine is the name you Europeans gave us.

**JJ:** Koori...Koori...now, that's a much nicer word. *(pause)* I think, now, your head is more of a...gazelle.

**CATHY:** And Americans, how would you describe Americans?

**JJ:** Pigs heads

**CATHY:** Germans?

**JJ:** Wolf heads *(it has become a bit of a game now)*

**CATHY:** Indians?

**JJ:** Monkey heads

**CATHY:** Japanese?

**JJ:** Chicken heads

**CON:** Ah jaysus, how can you say Japanese look like chickens?

**JJ:** They have chicken legs. Whenever did you see a fat Jap?

**CON:** What about Sumo wrestlers?

**JJ:** They're not human! They're specially bred in...in Sumo farms...and kept locked up and battery reared until they are ready to appear in public.

**CATHY:** They are people...just like you and me. Why should how they look count against them?  
**JJ:** It was just a bit of fun. Sorry.  
**CATHY:** Is that it? Your contribution to the debate?  
**JJ:** What debate?  
**CATHY:** I thought we were exploring the human condition.  
**JJ:** Not me. I thought we were having a bit of fun. I leave that to the people who know what they are talking about. The only human condition I know about is my own.  
**CATHY:** And what does it tell you?  
**JJ:** At the moment it's telling me I'm neglecting a very important part of it....(*he looks around*) Where's my jacket? (*he sees it and grabs it*) Right, I'm off....Say thanks to Marion for the food...(*he exits*)  
**CON:** Don't worry, it wasn't you...

**At that moment Michael and Marion come in from the garden.**

**MARION:** JJ's gone?  
**CON:** I'm not the only one with a drink problem.  
**MARION:** I wanted to speak to him. (*beat*) How long?  
**CON:** How long what?  
**MARION:** How long since he bloody left?  
**CON:** Just now.

**Marion rushes from the room.**

**MICHAEL:** JJ's an alcoholic?  
**CON:** I wouldn't say that – but he likes a drink. Don't we all?  
**MICHAEL:** That's all this bloody country does...drinks!

**He produces two empty lager cans that he has picked up in the garden. He chucks them in the waste bin.**

**CON:** Must be some passing lager louts  
**MICHAEL:** Or some resident ones.  
**CON:** I don't drink that...urinal water.  
**MICHAEL:** And somebody's been digging a hole by the apple tree....  
(*Con looks at him*) There's a fresh mound. You got a dog now?  
**CON:** No dogs in this house. Ah, it's probably those badgers.  
Nothing that a bit of rat poison won't cure.  
**CATHY:** You intend to poison those beautiful animals?  
**CON:** They're digging holes in my garden! You want that I should wait until the whole tribe moves in?  
**CATHY:** Perhaps the badgers were here before you.  
**CON:** If they were, they were squatting.  
**MICHAEL:** There's always been badgers in the neighbourhood.

Long before you built this house...

**CON:** How would you know? You never lived here.

**MICHAEL:** You conveniently forget that I spent many of my summers here when I was growing up. You couldn't wait to get rid of me.

**CON:** That's not true.

**MICHAEL:** It is. You shoved me on that plane and washed your hands of me for five or six weeks every summer.

**CON:** Your mum needed a break. Anyway, I thought you liked it.

**MICHAEL:** I loved it. It was the best time of my life. I remember how granddad loved to watch the badgers late at night. (*laughs*) He was very superstitious about them. It was good luck if one crossed a path you had just walked on, but bad luck if one crossed a path in front of you.

**CON:** Ah, bloody pishrogues!

**MICHAEL:** I recall you telling me about the fairy fort on the other side of the village, and how people doffed their caps when they passed it.

**CON:** Not me, boy. Not me. It was just one or two auld fellows. It's carry-on like that that has the country a laughing stock. And why I left it in the first place.

**CATHY:** So this is your ancestral home...Con?

**CON:** Not this house obviously. But this is the site of the old place. It was derelict for nearly ten years before I moved back home about five years ago.

**MICHAEL:** And razed everything to the ground.

**CON:** It was the cheapest option. I think it turned out pretty well. A derelict house and a few boggy fields – and now look at it. (*pause*) The badger sett was clearly documented as being the other side of the stream...well away from the housing development.

**MICHAEL:** Of course. How else would you have got planning permission?

**CON:** Permission was approved. That's all that matters. Everything was done by the book.

**MICHAEL:** What book was that?

**CON:** You're saying it was fixed?

**MICHAEL:** Well, wasn't it? That's how you usually work. Or used to.

**CON:** What's that supposed to mean? Badgers are vermin. They carry disease, infect cattle. Most farmers would shoot them as soon as look at them. I managed to save the sett from extinction.

**CATHY:** I am just trying to work out what you are saying.

**CON:** Look, this is Ireland, Cathy. You don't know how things work here. Stick around a while and you might find out. (*pause*) Maybe you would do things differently in your country... I don't know, but here we...well, a few badgers aren't going to stop progress.

**CATHY:** Progress being...?

**CON:** A decent roof over your head, for a start. Look around you; this is the new Ireland; mansions for everyone...and feck the begrudgers.

**MICHAEL:** For everyone who can afford them, you mean.

**CON:** Well, naturally. You can lead a horse to water, Michael, after that it's up

to the horse.

**MICHAEL:** That's a poor analogy. *(to Cathy)* My father here has made a fortune building large houses for the well-heeled in this 'idyllic backwater'. Isn't that how your brochures describes it? Well-heeled blow-ins I should add. Most local people can't afford your...mansions.

**CON:** Those same people couldn't afford them if I was giving them away. The Lord helps those who help themselves, isn't that what they say? *(pause)* Look, I grew up in a thatched cottage. Distemper inside and whitewash outside. The toilet was the ditch in a nearby field, and the water came from a well a hundred yards away. And we were one of the lucky ones; we had electricity. Some of those further up the breen had to make do with candles and paraffin lamps. But I didn't have to settle for that, didn't have to stay here, so I got out early. *(pause)* My mother died when I was fifteen. She was...well, it doesn't matter...but her going made it easier for me to go in a way. Josephine had already gone, and father was...well...he was making heavy weather of everything. I couldn't have stayed here the way things were, so I made my way in the world, made something of myself. Others could have done likewise. So don't talk to me about progress...*(to Cathy)* Anyway, you must know what I'm talking about - coming from...well...

**MICHAEL:** The bush, is that the word you're looking for?

**CON:** They know about poverty. What it is to go without. Cathy can at least understand what I'm driving at.

**CATHY:** What makes you think I come from... 'the bush'?

**CON:** Your people are deprived. Driven off their land... You have to live on the edges of...

**MICHAEL:** Dad, you don't know what you are talking about...

**CON:** They have. They've been driven off their land...Haven't you....? *(pause)* I have lots of sympathy with you. We were driven off our land too. My people. Just like yours. By absent English landlords.

**MICHAEL:** Oh Christ. *(pause)* Look, it's an entirely different situation...

**CON:** They were English, weren't they? Well...weren't they?

**MICHAEL:** Yes.

**CON:** Well then, what's different about it?

**MICHAEL:** Well, for a start they populated Australia with convicts and criminals.

**CON:** And Ireland wasn't? Those brave soldiers of Cromwell's Model Army were nothing more than rapists and murderers of innocent civilians. And don't forget they had plenty of practice in their own country beforehand. They ransacked the churches and monasteries of England, butchering their own people, before moving on to Ireland. Not much difference there. I expect there were plans to do a fair share of pillaging, raping and murdering in Australia too.

**CATHY:** No, I don't believe that was ever their intention. The convicts, I mean. Most of them were just glad to make a new start in a new country, away from the dreadful conditions in the English prisons. What was the major problem was the epidemic of measles, smallpox and TB they brought with

them. It killed a lot more of our people than guns ever could. *(pause)*  
We Koori never had any problem getting along with England's convicts. Although the Convict heritage might be a problem for some Australians, it was liberating for us. Status can only be stripped from people who have it. And we didn't have any.

It became much more of a problem later on of course, in the Great Gold Rush, when many more thousands of prospectors arrived. Within ten years the population went from less than half a million to a million. Many were unwelcome, particularly the Chinese, and they were persecuted even more than we were.

**CON:** But you couldn't even vote until recently. The English always wanted to keep you down.

**CATHY:** We were granted the right to vote in 1972. *(pause)* I don't believe it was much better in Northern Ireland, was it? – where one man, one vote, was only introduced after 1970?

**CON:** Yes. But under British Rule! They never gave anything away but it had to be dragged out'a them. The English have a lot of history to live down. A lot to answer for. You reap what you sow. And they are reaping theirs now. Centuries of brutal domination have made them hated throughout the world. Do you want to hear a story?

**MICHAEL:** No.

**CON:** I'll tell it to you anyway. You might learn something about your ancestors.

**MICHAEL:** Here we go again. We might as well sit down.

**They sit down. Before Con can begin, Marion returns.**

**MICHAEL:** You might as well sit down too, mum. We are about to hear one of dad's stories.

**MARION:** Don't be silly, Con. They don't want to listen to your tall tales.

**CON:** Urgent, was it?

**MARION:** Was what urgent?

**CON:** Your...little chat.

**MARION:** Well, yes it was...if you want to know.

**CON:** And...?

**MARION:** And...it's all sorted now.

**Con clearly expects her to elaborate, but she doesn't**

**CON:** That's nice to know. Couldn't I have helped?

**MARION:** Not really, no.

**CON:** Not - really - no.

**MARION:** God give me strength! You're determined to find out, aren't you? Don't I have a life of my own? Can't I do one thing without you...interfering?

**CON:** Alright, alright...I don't want to know.

**MARION:** Yes you bloody-well do. Why don't you ask JJ then? *(she throws her mobile phone at him)*

**Con catches the phone then laughs. He then places it on the table and shrugs.**

**CON:** Thirty years and we're still fighting. That says something.  
**MARION:** Oh, it definitely says something.  
**CON:** We're always like this. It doesn't mean anything...  
**MARION:** Doesn't it?  
**CATHY:** Thirty years...!  
**CON:** Next week. I remember it like it was yesterday...  
**MARION:** You can't remember what happened last week...  
**CATHY:** Will you be celebrating?  
**MARION:** Celebrating what?  
**CATHY:** Next week. Your anniversary.  
**MARION:** I'm not sure we've anything left to celebrate. *(laughs)*  
But I'm sure we'll find something.

**Michael looks pointedly at his watch.**

**CON:** Alright, I'm coming to the story...

**Lights fade**

**End of scene**

**INTERVAL**

**ACT TWO**

**Scene five**

**Immediately afterwards.**

**MARION:** Ah, no story, Con...  
**CON:** Ah yes. Anyway, you haven't heard this one. *(pause)* Picture this place a hundred and fifty years ago. The river, this valley, the mountains in the background, all teeming with people – many more than you see today – most of them tenant farmers, grubbing away on a few acres, making enough just to pay their rents and feed their families. They grew their own vegetables, maybe had a pig for meat, and a cow for milk. But most of all they had the spuds. It was a hard life; many had soulless landlords to contend with, or their agents in the case of the absentee ones – and there were many of these – whose only interest was in getting as much revenue as possible from their estates.

But it was a living, and they survived. Then, overnight, a great frost or

plague passed over the land – call it what you will - and where there were vibrant green stalks flourishing on top of the drills, overnight there were black spotted ones with leaves drooping and dying everywhere. Before long the whole crop had failed and the spuds were rotting in their drills. We all know about the famine that followed and the effect it had on the population; people dying by the roadside in their thousands, the green-grass spittle running down their cheeks; thousands more taking the coffin ships to America and –yes- Australia. One of my great-great-great grandfathers was one such; his name was Con Kennedy too, and he took his wife and surviving three children away with him to Canada.

**MICHAEL:** We know all this already. It's local history.

**CON:** Yes, you do. We all learnt about it at school. But what you don't know is that the blight wasn't the result of any act of God or nature, it was man-made, the end result of an experimental fertiliser manufactured by John Bennett Lawes in England. Lawes was the cause of our misfortune.

**MARION:** Not another of your conspiracy theories, Con.

**CON:** It's true. Rather than try it out on English farms it was shipped over here, hundreds of tons of it. Nobody knew how it would behave, what the side effects might be. Everybody knows **now** what they were. We were the guinea-pigs for a reckless experiment. *Try it out in Ireland first; what does it matter if it kills thousands?*

**MICHAEL:** I'm sure it wasn't like that at all.

**CON:** What would you know about it? I have seen letters, written at the time. This whole area, for miles around was one vast estate owned by an English bastard by the name of Rathbone. He controlled hundreds of tenant farmers and was instrumental in getting this fertiliser distributed throughout the country. It came in by ship and he had it stored in a big warehouse on Limerick Docks. There were stories that other ingredients were being added; ingredients that became airborne when spread on the land – and that it was these that caused the blight. God knows what this extra ingredient was, but it left pestilence and disease in its wake. *(pause)* Don't you see? It was all a plot by the landlords to get rid of the tenant farmers and reclaim their lands.

**MARION:** Jesus, that's a terrible story. Do you know what you're saying?

**CON:** I'm saying it was mass murder on a scale never seen before or since. That the potato famine was deliberately induced.

**MICHAEL:** If you told that story to a policeman he'd have you committed.

**CON:** Hah. Little you know!

**MICHAEL:** There had been previous famines, so they were deliberately induced too?

**CON:** Probably. But they were only partial famines so I expect it was a bit of trial and error.

**MICHAEL:** God, dad, America has nothing on you. Look under a stone in any State over there and you will find a nest of conspiracy theorists. Well, you beat the lot of them. What do you think, Cathy?

**CATHY:** It sounds a crazy idea to me.

**CON:** I knew you'd all be doubting Thomas's. I had a lot of research done on

this and I know otherwise. *(he produces a letter from his pocket)*  
Rathbone sent this letter to all his tenants when the crop had failed.  
*(he hands it to Marion)* Here, you read it out.

**MARION:** What the devil do we care about you or your black potatoes? It was not us that made them black. You will get seven days to pay the rent, and if you don't you know the consequences.

**MICHAEL:** That suggests the exact opposite to what you are saying. That he had nothing to do with the blight

**CON:** Ah, but that wasn't the real reason for the letters. Because a few days later every tenant was visited and told that if they were willing to relinquish their land they would be given free passage to America. He wasn't the only landlord to do it; all those in the neighbouring counties did so as well. And probably in most of the country. Don't you see it was all organized - all a plot to reclaim the land? Most of the tenants couldn't afford the rents of a few pounds; how could they afford the price of their passage - which had been set at around seven pounds a head? And most of them took up the offer, including my great, great, great grandfather. As soon as they signed on the dotted line they were whisked off to waiting ships at Queenstown - Cobh as it is now - and their cottages pulled down behind them. That way, the big Estates were put back together again and the land put back to pasture. Animals were a lot easier to handle than humans. And sure the few humans that were left, the famine did the remainder of the work for them. What did bastards like Rathbone care if they poisoned the potato crop anyway? They were only interested in reclaiming their fields.

**MICHAEL:** I think you're sick in the head, dad. Nobody engineered the famine, it just happened

**CON:** An act of God, I suppose.

**MICHAEL:** Well, maybe an act of nature would be more accurate. There are still famines happening in the world, and many of them a lot worse than what happened here. All our progress and technology hasn't stopped them, has it? You see conspiracies everywhere. When you deserted England...

**CON:** I didn't desert it. I had to get out or I would have been ruined.

**MICHAEL:** When you....left England, you were convinced there were undercover police and tax officials following you around for months beforehand....

**CON:** They were. You saw them yourself.

**MICHAEL:** Only those you pointed out to me. They could have been anybody.

**CON:** They were fucken tax inspectors. They were looking for half a million quid which I didn't owe them.

**MICHAEL:** So you done a runner and left me holding the baby.

**CON:** They had nothing on you.

**MICHAEL:** It would have been nice to have been warned though. Your own son. Treated like a criminal.

**CON:** Were you charged with anything?

**MICHAEL:** No.

**CON:** Well then, what are you complaining about?

**MICHAEL:** Jesus! If you can't see...

**Michael gets up and leaves. Cathy follows him. Con helps himself to drink.**

**CON:** I did it all for him. If I hadn't, what would have been left for him to inherit?

**MARION:** For Michael? Stop deluding yourself. You did it for Con.

**CON:** Why would I do that?

**MARION:** The big man, isn't that how you always saw yourself? Even when you didn't have anything to be big about.

**CON:** For Christ sake woman! I worked hard to make something of myself in London. It took more than twenty years – and then her fucken majesty's -

**MARION:** Less of that language please, Con.

**CON:** And then her majesty's henchmen tried to take it all away.

**MARION:** You should have paid your proper taxes like everybody else.

**CON:** Like everybody else! Hah. That's a good one. If everybody paid their proper taxes England would be the Promised Land. That's why the top companies employ tax avoidance specialists.

**MARION:** And Con Kennedy Ltd was a top company, was it?

**CON:** I didn't say that.

**MARION:** It's only employees were a couple of site managers and an engineer. All the rest of the work you subbed out.

**CON:** Don't forget the accountant.

**MARION:** O'Looney! I knew more than him – what I had picked up at night school. But that wasn't good enough for you, was it? Dennis O'Looney called himself a tax avoidance consultant, so you engaged him.

**CON:** He sounded impressive.

**MARION:** Was that why you employed him? (*Con doesn't reply*) He was a con man. The only thing O'Looney was good at was tax evasion. Well no, correction, he wasn't even good at that, because he was sentenced to five years for his efforts.

**CON:** I thought what he was doing was legal.

**MARION:** No Con, you didn't care whether it was legal or not. So long as it saved you paying taxes. We are only back in Ireland because the alternative would probably have been five years in jail for you too.

**CON:** Do you regret moving back, is that it?

**MARION:** I spent over thirty years of my life in London. You can't wipe that away. And the Ireland we left no longer exists. We are strangers in our own country. (*pause*) You would think that Ireland would be the last place to find racial prejudice, wouldn't you? Considering the Irish experiences abroad you would think that tolerance would be a byword here. Well, not in Limerick at least. The other day I had to listen to a woman I know telling me about 'all these effing Poles coming over here and taking our jobs. Why don't they go back to their own effing country and leave the jobs to us Irish'. Never mind that they are doing the jobs that none of the Irish want to do anyway. This woman never did a day's work in her life. She didn't have to, she has plenty of money behind her, but the point is

this; the Polish workers in this country are facing the same prejudice in Ireland as the Irish were in England or America forty years ago.

- CON:** You don't need to tell me about it. I was in the thick of it for most of me life. It was Paddy this, Paddy that, Paddy you thick fucker. And wog, nig-nog, and Paki not far behind...
- MARION:** I didn't escape either.
- CON:** I'm not saying you did. But you had to work on the building sites to see full extent of the racist attitude of the English working man.
- MARION:** Not true! There were bitches in places like McVities and Walls who would win the gold medal every time if there was a racism Olympics in London.
- CON:** I found that Northerners were the worst, especially those from Yorkshire. Bigots the lot of them. Mind you, they hate everyone south of Manchester! *(pause)* I expect it is probably the same in Poland now with – say – Albanians, or Romanians.
- MARION:** It probably is. Racism is endemic. It's everywhere you go. It always was, and it always will be. But that doesn't make it right.
- CON:** We still have friends here.
- MARION:** Have we? We have a lot more in London.
- CON:** We can always visit them.
- MARION:** I can. You might be locked up if you showed your face.
- CON:** Ah, I expect it has all blown over by now. Anyway, I don't mind too much. I'm settled here now.
- MARION:** Good for you.
- CON:** You do have regrets then!
- MARION:** I'll tell you what I regret most of all – I regret Michael being left the fall guy...
- CON :** He was never that. Never! They could see he had no involvement with the company's day to day work.
- MARION:** He was the one left to face the music when the manure finally hit the fan though!
- CON:** What music? A few hours of questions and then he was free of it.
- MARION:** You shattered his illusions, Con. He looked up to you. You were his idol.
- CON:** I didn't have time to be anybody's idol.
- MARION:** No, you didn't. You were too busy making your escape.
- CON:** What would you have me do? Let them take everything I had? I was too old to start again.
- MARION:** You did that here.
- CON:** No, I didn't. I brought a ready-made company with me. Well most of it, anyway. *(pause)* I didn't notice you putting up much of a battle to stop me at the time. If you felt that strongly, why didn't you?
- MARION:** Maybe I also felt too old.
- CON:** Hah! Well, stop bloody whinging then.
- MARION:** I stuck with you through thick and thin. And there were times when it was very thin. Times when the only thing that paid the rent and the bills was my wages. I also put myself through endless nights of accountancy

classes at night school so as I could do your bloody books for you. For years I took Michael to school- first to nursery school, then to Holy Family College – and did a day’s work at the factory before picking him up again. Then cooking dinner for all of us, before going out again to learn accounts practice two nights a week. So don’t accuse me of whinging.

**End of scene**

**Scene six**

**A little later. Marion is seated. JJ knocks and enters.**

**JJ:** Con not around?  
**MARION:** He’s at the doctor’s. A check-up. He won’t be long.  
**JJ:** Clyde’s been hospitalised. Fucken Jimmy.  
**MARION:** What do you mean JJ?  
**JJ:** It’s my fault. Con asked me to find Jimmy a job on site. I put him with Clyde, thinking it would be okay. From what I gather he clocked him with a brick. Split his skull.  
**MARION:** Oh no!  
**JJ:** (*shakes his head*) He’s known Clyde for years, worked with him before.  
**MARION:** But why?  
**JJ:** I have no idea  
**MARION:** I can’t believe he did that to Clyde. Is it because he’s black?  
**JJ:** Normally, I’d be thinking that, but I don’t think that’s the case this time. Clyde managed to say a few words to me before they whisked him away. According to him it came totally out of the blue  
**MARION:** Josephine, has a lot to answer for. She let him run wild when he was growing up. Let him run with the wrong crowd.  
**JJ:** You can’t always blame parents for the way their children turn out. Jimmy is just a racist thug, period. Nationality doesn’t come into it. I think there’s something seriously wrong with him. Mentally, I mean. There’s a kind of football terrace thuggish-ness about him, the bravado, the posturing, the racism, that in the majority of cases gets left behind on the terraces. But not with Jimmy. He carries it round with him every day. Like a badge. It’s his life. It’s all he talks about. That and the FFP. It’s his religion.  
**MARION:** FFP?  
**JJ:** The Football Fanatics something or other. A bunch of savages who organise fights between rival groups of supporters. A good day out is calculated by the number of battered and bleeding left behind in their wake.  
**MARION:** And Jimmy is part of them?  
**JJ:** I think it’s from afar more than anything else. He’s too much a loose cannon even for them.  
**MARION:** Where is he now?  
**JJ:** I phoned the police, so I guess he’s on the run again. Probably heading

back for London.

**MARION:** I hope he has gone. *(pause)* I'm not sure we did the right thing coming back here to Limerick JJ, after all those years in London. It's not the same place.

**JJ:** How could it be? You were a long time away.

**MARION:** But we used to come back on holidays, you know. We kept in touch. It wasn't a complete break. You're a Londoner. Do you miss London?

**JJ:** D'you mind! A Londoner!

**MARION:** You spent the first three years of your life in Kilkenny. That's all. You can't even remember the place!

**JJ:** You're right. Do I miss London? Not really. But then, I'm only a few years away, not thirty.

**MARION:** There's a saying we have. 'You can never go back'. You can't, really. Something is missing. Something you can never get back. I don't know what it is, but it's gone. *(pause)* Con had to get out of England, of course. But I am sure you know that. The taxman was after him. That was the real reason we left. He was looking at the possibility of going to gaol if we stayed. There's probably still a warrant out for him over there.

**JJ:** I think everyone knew that. You don't load up all your best machinery and equipment in the dead of night and take off just like that. Still. It didn't take him long to get back on his feet over here, did it?

**MARION:** He left Michael to face the music, that's what I can't forgive.

**JJ:** I didn't know that.

**MARION:** Well, you were working in Barcelona at the time. *(pause)* There's a lot you don't know about Con. A lot I didn't know about Con.

**JJ:** *(smiling)* There's a lot Con doesn't know about you.

**MARION:** He will find out soon, won't he? *(pause)* Look, Con is a...he is a...oh it doesn't matter. *(pause)* He had made Michael company secretary. Michael thought nothing of it; it just meant attending a few meetings during the year, signing a few papers. And he only did it to help his father out. He didn't even work for him. And then when all the ...stuff happened he was the one left to answer all the questions. Where was the money from this bank account? That bank account? Where were all the company assets? By then of course Michael knew. They were all over here with Con.

**JJ:** Did you know?

**MARION:** I knew some of it. Con had been preparing the move for months. I didn't know how much Michael would be implicated otherwise I would have stayed in London.

**JJ:** What happened to him?

**MARION:** Nothing...criminal. Well, he hadn't done anything. It was Con they were after, but he was out of their reach. But it left a sour taste in Michael's mouth. So he decided to go far away. Hence Australia.

**JJ:** It was a good move. He has found himself a nice girl in Cathy.

**MARION:** Do you think so? I am worried she won't fit in.

**JJ:** Being black you mean? I suppose there will be one or two with nasty

minds, but nobody will say anything. Most people here will love her.  
**end of scene**

**Scene seven.**

**The next day. Con and JJ are chatting.**

**JJ:** Well, what did the doctor say? Last night. Marion said you visited him  
**CON:** (*looking at JJ for a moment*) Did she now? It was nothing, just a check-up to see if the new tablets were working alright.  
**JJ:** And were they?  
**CON:** Oh yeah. Better than expected it seems. What did Marion want JJ?  
**JJ:** Eh?  
**CON:** The other day. When she followed you out.  
**JJ:** Oh, that. She didn't want Jimmy coming back here and asked me to make sure that he wouldn't.  
**CON:** I would have dealt with that.  
**JJ:** She didn't think so. In fact she believed you wanted him to come back and find Michael and Cathy here.  
**CON:** Ah Jaysus. If that's all that worried her...  
**JJ:** Jimmy...and Cathy in the same room?  
**CON:** No problems there. I'd have kept a tight rein on him.  
**JJ:** Like you did with Clyde? You know he has a fractured skull? (*pause*) Have you even been to see him?

**Con doesn't speak for a moment. He goes to the drinks cabinet and fixes himself a drink.**

**CON:** You want to know about Clyde? He's a two timing bastard and deserved everything he got. (*pause*) Jimmy was over here at my invitation. I told you I suspected Marion was having an affair. Well, that's what Jimmy was doing here, keeping an eye on Marion.  
**JJ:** Marion was right – you are paranoid.  
**CON:** Is that what she thinks? She is confiding in you a lot lately.  
**JJ:** Not really. I think she was just worried about Jimmy and felt you weren't taking her seriously enough.  
**CON:** He found her and Clyde together. Jimmy.  
**JJ:** Clyde and Marion?  
**CON:** Yes.  
**JJ:** And you believed him?  
**CON:** Why shouldn't I. Thirty years. We've been friends for thirty years. I even bring him back to Ireland and set him up with a job here. And now I find the black bastard's been shagging my wife all along.  
**JJ:** Jimmy's been stringing you along. Why, I don't know, but it's all a pack of lies. Clyde and Marion...not in a hundred years.  
**CON:** It's not a lie. It's the truth. He caught them at it. Why would he lie?  
**JJ:** 'Cos he's a head case. You got him to batter Clyde!

**CON:** Not to smash his head in for Christ sake. He didn't need to go that far.  
**JJ:** Very generous of you! You know, you are just as bad as Jimmy. You're a bloody racist too beneath all the 'what does the colour of a man's skin matter' bullshit.  
**CON:** Me racist! Never!  
**JJ:** Know what I think. It's not so much the affair that bothers you as the fact that Clyde is black. A black man and your wife – and the idea that she might prefer him to you – that's what really gets up your nose, isn't it?  
**CON:** Fuck off JJ. She's my wife. And I won't have her and any bastard – black or otherwise – making game of me.  
**JJ:** You're wrong about Clyde.  
**CON:** You sound sure about that.  
**JJ:** I am sure that whatever is going on it's not an affair with Clyde.

**End of scene**

**Scene eight**

**Sometime later. Con, Marion and Michael are present.**

**CON:** Yoga? You practice yoga?  
**MICHAEL:** What's wrong with yoga?  
**CON:** What's wrong with it! A lot of oriental hocus-pocus . Pretending to be something spiritual when all it amounts to is a set of physical exercises. Twenty sit-ups and thirty press-ups would be just as good for you. Maybe even better. *(he shakes his head)* Vegetarian, teetotaler, now yoga. Jaysus, what happened to ya at all down under? It's like someone entirely different...

**Con is distracted by a lot of noise and swearing coming from the garden. Jimmy enters, dishevelled and clearly the worse for wear.**

**CON:** What the fuck...?  
**JIMMY:** That's what I said a minute ago, Con. What the fuck is goin on...*(he sees Michael)* Well, if it isn't my long-lost cousin himself. I heard you got spliced. Aussie bird, ain't she?  
**MICHAEL:** That's right, Jimmy  
**JIMMY:** Introduce me to the bride then. It's only right innit?..Cous.  
**MICHAEL:** She's resting right now.  
**MARION:** Get out, Jimmy. You're not welcome here.  
**JIMMY:** Not welcome? Con?  
**CON:** It's a bit tricky, Jimmy.  
**JIMMY:** Too right it is. I wouldn't be in this pickle if it wasn't for you.  
**MARION:** What do you mean?  
**JIMMY:** Ask him.  
**MARION:** I will. *(pause)* The police are looking for you.

**JIMMY:** Fuck the old bill. They can wait a while longer.  
**CON:** How did you get in?  
**JIMMY:** Over your fence. *(laughs)* I can tell you now, Con, it's not burglar proof.  
**CON:** I mean why? The front door's over there. All you had to do is knock.  
**JIMMY:** I was looking for something. Something belonging to me.  
**CON:** In the garden?  
**JIMMY:** Yeah. And it's not there now.  
**MICHAEL:** Buried, was it?  
**JIMMY:** What?  
**MICHAEL:** What you have mislaid.  
**JIMMY:** Yeah, as a matter of fact it was  
**MICHAEL:** And we were blaming the badgers.  
**JIMMY:** You've got my gear? My bloody gear? Hand it over if you know what's good for you.

**Jimmy rushes towards Michael and confronts him. Michael laughs and stands his ground.**

**MARION:** I'm phoning the police. This has gone far enough.

**Marion picks up her mobile, which is on the table. Jimmy slaps it out of her hand and it skitters along the floor. He pulls out a knife as Con rises to his feet.**

**CON:** I'm not havin' this in my own house...

**He struggles with Jimmy. Jimmy pushes him away, slashing him on the upper arm as he does so. Michel gets ready to intervene.**

**JIMMY:** Come on then. You want some too...?  
**CON:** He's stabbed me. Jesus, he's stabbed me!  
**JIMMY:** Sorry about that, Con, me hand slipped...  
**CON:** *(seeing blood coming through his shirt)* Jaysus, I'm leaking! Give me somethin' to stop it... *(this to Marion)* Your scarf or something.  
**MARION:** I'm not ruining a good silk scarf.  
**CON:** Jesus fucking Christ. I'll bleed to death...  
**MARION:** Show! *(she looks)* You'll live. Here, use this. *(She produces a handkerchief from her pocket)*  
**CON:** Oh great, a snotty handkerchief. *(pause)* I'll tie it meself, shall I?

**Marion ties the handkerchief over the wound. Jimmy, meanwhile, has been threatening Michael with the knife.**

**JIMMY:** Where's my gear? Just hand it over and I'll be on my way.  
**MICHAEL:** Don't push it, Jimmy.  
**CON:** Threatening the family now. That's it, Jimmy, you're finished in this house, this town, this country. You're a bloody animal.  
**JIMMY:** Ha, ha. Showing your true colours now, Con.

**CON:** After all I done for you...  
**JIMMY:** Oh yeah. The big man. What did you ever fucking do for me? Or for anyone that didn't benefit Con. *(pause)* Tell you what, get Crocodile Dundee here to return my property to me and I'll be off. That's fair, isn't it?  
**MICHAEL:** I can't do that Jimmy.  
**JIMMY:** Just hand it fucking over...  
**MARION:** Give it to him, Michael. Whatever it is. Just get him out of here.

**During this exchange, Cathy appears. Nobody notices her for a moment, and by then she has seized Jimmy in a half-nelson and forced him to drop the knife. Michael takes the knife and they force Jimmy to sit down.**

**JIMMY:** Ah, Jaysus, my arm. Let go! You'll pay for this.  
**MICHAEL:** Shut up, Jimmy. Have you got any rope? Or tape? *(this to Con)*  
**CATHY:** I saw some on a shelf out there. I'll get it.

**She exits briefly then returns with a roll of masking tape.**

**JIMMY:** You can't fucken do this...  
**MICHAEL:** Yes, we can – and we will. Do you want to, or shall I? *(this to Cathy)*

**He hands the knife to Cathy then wraps the tape around Jimmy's chest and arms, and round the back of the chair.**

**JIMMY:** Stop waving that fucking thing *(the knife)* in my face you black bitch. Who the bloody hell are you, anyway?  
**MICHAEL:** Oh, you haven't been introduced, have you? This is Cathy, my wife.  
**JIMMY:** They'd let anyone into this fucken country nowadays.  
**MICHAEL:** She is a black belt in judo by the way. *(pause)* I taught her.  
**CON:** Excuse me interrupting, but I'm leaking over here.  
**MARION:** I am not sure you should be doing that *(she indicates Jimmy)* I mean, there's all these human rights laws these days...  
**JIMMY:** Yeah. What about my fucken human rights?  
**MICHAEL:** He stabbed dad for God's sake!  
**MARION:** Even so. The police won't want to see him tied up like that.  
**MICHAEL:** Here! *(he takes the knife and offers it to her)*  
Cut him free then if it makes you feel better. His... property is in back of the clock over there - if you want to give him that as well. But he will have to go through me to get out.  
**MARION:** Michael! I don't know you anymore. What's come over you?  
**MICHAEL:** I'm just sick of people taking advantage.

**During this exchange Cathy has gone to help Con.**

**CON:** Are you sure you know what you are doing? Hey! That hurts.

**MICHAEL:** I also forgot to mention, Cathy is a qualified doctor.  
**CATHY:** It's only a flesh wound, but it will need stitching. (*she reaffixes the bandage*)  
**CON:** She's a what?  
**JIMMY:** You heard the man, cut me free.  
**MICHAEL:** I said – she's a qualified doctor.  
**CON:** And a judo expert. Maybe we should call her Superwoman...  
**MICHAEL:** Yeah, maybe we should. Lucky for you she was here.

**Jimmy is shaking and rocking in his chair, trying to escape.**

**MICHAEL:** Right, I have enough of this...

**He takes the roll of tape, wraps it around Jimmy's legs and the chair legs, securing him firmly**

**MICHAEL:** Now you can rock away – cousin. And if you don't behave I will tape your mouth shut as well. (*a pause*) Understand?

**Marion, meanwhile, has gone to investigate the back of the mantel clock. She takes out a clear plastic bag which is filled with tin-foil wraps.**

**JIMMY:** That's my property. Give it here.  
**MARION:** What is in the bag, Jimmy.  
**JIMMY:** What do you fucken think!  
**MARION:** I don't think. I want to know.  
**MICHAEL:** It's probably cocaine, mum. Crack cocaine. That's the real reason he's here.  
**MARION:** You are selling drugs from my house? How could you let him bring such filth into my house? (*this to Con*)  
**CON:** Don't blame me. I knew nothing about it.  
**MARION:** I do blame you. You are the one who invited him. (*pause*) You told me he just turned up.  
**JIMMY:** That's a good one. Why would I 'just' turn up in this shithole? He phoned me and told me he had a little job for me. A bit of private detective work...wait for it...spying on you. Money for old rope, he said. And I thought 'why not' -I am not too welcome around Highbury at the moment so the thought of a couple of weeks holiday sounded attractive. And while I was here I decided to make it worth my while with the...(*indicates the drugs*)  
**MARION:** (*shaking her head*) Spying on me Con? That's a new low, even for you. And what did you find out?  
**CON:** I found out you were shagging that....that....  
**MARION:** Who? (*she thinks it's JJ*) Come on, spit it out  
**CON:** Clyde. You were shagging Clyde.  
**MARION:** Me and Clyde? That's what he reported to you?

**CON:** Yeah.

**MARION:** (*laughing uproariously*) Oh my dear, I think he's more your type, don't you?

**CON:** I'm glad you find it funny.

**MARION:** It's hilarious. I've been married to you for thirty years. You think a woman doesn't know when something isn't right? You think I didn't know about your little...peccadilloes?

**CON:** Peccadilloes?

**MARION:** Alright – your attraction to men as well as women. You think it wasn't apparent all those years ago? Even at Mrs' McGinty's?

**CON:** Nothing happened at Mrs McGinty's.

**MARION:** Then why did it still bother you all those years later? When you made her life a misery with all those 'unwanted presents'?

**CON:** She needed paying back. (*pause*) Despite my 'peccadilloes' you still married me.

**MARION:** I thought you might turn out to be a good catch. As good as I was likely to get, anyhow. I thought it was a phase – that you might grow out of it.

**CATHY:** If Con is bisexual...well, it is not something you grow out of.

**MARION:** I know that now.

**CON:** That's it, carry on. Just pretend I'm not here.

**CATHY:** You think it helped, pretending all those years?

**CON:** It was nobody's business but mine.

**CATHY:** Not even...your wife?

**JIMMY:** My own uncle – a bloody queer. I should'a known.

**MICHAEL:** Watch your mouth, Jimmy.

**CON:** Why did you tell me it was Clyde, Jimmy?

**JIMMY:** I hate queers almost as much as blacks, that's why. And when I saw you and him the other night, at it in that old site caravan, I thought I would have some fun.

**MARION:** At it...is that how you describe it? You disgust me, Con, do you know that?

**MICHAEL:** Can we change the subject, please? I came here expecting a week of peace and quiet before we settled in London, but we're only here a few days and I'm regretting it already. It was a mistake. I knew it would be. What do you think, Cathy – shall we try and re-book the London flight?

**MARION:** You can't leave just like that!

**MICHAEL:** Why not? There's nothing to keep us here. This place is like...I don't know...it's like waking up in a parallel world – where all the people we know are bizarre caricatures of themselves. None of you are the people I used to know. And I certainly don't want to know what my ...dad was getting up to in a bloody caravan! I just want to get away. Away to London.

**CATHY:** It's just as well we didn't unpack then.

**Cathy brushes Jimmy as she passes him.**

**JIMMY:** Don't touch me! Don't touch me!

**CATHY:** I am not an infectious disease!

**JIMMY:** You're a Blackie. I fucking hate Blackies. (*viciously*)

**CATHY:** I see. I guess that makes you a...whitey, doesn't it? It's just a name. Just a colour.

**JIMMY:** You're the wrong bloody colour.

**CATHY:** Such hatred. And you're Irish?

**JIMMY:** Not fucking Irish! I'm a Londoner born and bred.

**CATHY:** Your mother is Irish.

**JIMMY:** Being born in a stable doesn't make you a horse.

**MICHAEL:** In your case it's an ass.

**JIMMY:** You're not Irish either. You're a Cockney just like me.

**MICHAEL:** The difference is it doesn't bother me.

**CATHY:** What nationality is your father?

**JIMMY:** Don't know, don't fucking care. He wasn't Irish anyway.

**MARION:** I believe he was Jamaican.

**JIMMY:** You lying bitch! Take that back.

**MARION:** It's true as far as I know. Josephine alluded to it more than once. I met the fellow in question a few times. His name was Jimmy too. He wasn't seen around much after you were born. In fact I think Josephine said he had gone back to Jamaica before the birth. Not that she cared anyway. All she was after was a council flat and her benefits.

**JIMMY:** Do I look fucking black?

**MARION:** (*shrugs*) He told me his mother was Irish - that she had come to Kingston to work as a maid in some big colonial house before the war.

**JIMMY:** It's all fucking lies! Jesus, you'll pay for this. I'm no fucking black man's son. I'll burn your house down. Just wait and see.

**MARION:** Like you tried to burn your mother's flat down?

**JIMMY:** She deserved it.

**MARION:** Why was that?

**JIMMY:** Because she... lied about everything. She put that bastard's name on my birth certificate when anybody could see it wasn't true. (*pause*) You wait. You'll all pay for this. You just wait. (*long pause*) Rivers of blood. That's what we need. Enoch Powell was right. He knew what was wrong with England. The Paddys and the nig-nogs - and later the Pakis - coming over taking all the jobs. And now it's all the Poles and Yemenis, or whatever. That's the problem, all this multi-cultural shite. Not to mention all the free national health on top. The welfare state has ruined England. Made people soft. What we need is another world war two - give them some backbone again.

**MICHAEL:** That only made people dead, not soft.

**CATHY:** (*shaking her head*) No, Michael

**JIMMY:** And then there's all the other weirdoes. The queers and the lesbos, crawling out from under their stones. Everywhere you go they are parading themselves. On telly and film, simpering and strutting. The Church is right; no gay marriages or other unnatural unions. And all these other religions, goin' round with bags over their heads and guns under their smocks. They should all be rounded up; the gays, the religos, the fornicators, the paramilitaries, and all the other fanatics, and dumped somewhere like the Isle of Man or Wales - and a large bomb dropped on the lot them from a great height. Now, are you goin' to let me out of this fucking strait-jacket so as I can be on my way!

**During this speech Jimmy has become more and more agitated. Marion can be seen dialling on her mobile as he finishes. Michael and Cathy look at each other and head off upstairs.**

**MICHAEL:** *(softly)* Let's get out of this madhouse.

**End of scene**

**Scene nine**

**JJ's flat. There are two suitcases on the floor upstage. JJ and Marion are dancing close together. The music is RAINY NIGHT IN SOHO (c Shane McGowan. They dance for a minute or so. We can see a couple of large suitcases to one side.**

**JJ:** This is nice.

**MARION:** Mmmm.

**JJ:** Do you know who the ginger lady by his bed is?

**MARION:** What are you talking about?

**JJ:** The song. Shane. The lyrics.

*(sings)* Sometimes I wake up in the morning  
The ginger lady by my bed...  
Covered in a cloak of silence  
I hear you talking in my head

**MARION:** Don't look at me! Anyway he's not my type.

**JJ:** It's the drink he is talking about you amadan! The ginger lady is the whiskey bottle.

**MARION:** I thought it was a woman.

**JJ:** She wouldn't be **by** his bed, would she? She'd be **in** his bed!

**MARION:** *(thinking about it)* Very subtle, JJ. Too subtle for me. Talking about beds...

**There is a banging outside then the door is kicked open and Con rushes in.**

**CON:** Hah. I knew it!

**MARION:** It took you long enough.

**CON:** You turncoat. You bloody turncoat (*this to JJ*)

**JJ:** You busted my door.

**CON:** I'll bust more than your door.

**JJ:** Steady on now, Con. Remember your heart condition.

**CON:** How long has it been going on?

**JJ:** (*shrugs*) On and off for years. Since Stef left.

**CON:** Why?

**JJ:** Oh, come on...

**CON:** I wasn't asking you.

**MARION:** How long have you got? I look at you these days, Con, and you're not there anymore. Oh, your body is but your soul is somewhere else. I'm just a stranger to you. If you had been able to look through that door a few minutes ago and seen me dancing you would have seen happiness. Felt happiness, known happiness. And I haven't been that for a long time with you. I look in the mirror sometimes and I think 'I must have been young and happy once', but I can't remember it anymore. And even when you were there, you weren't fully there, were you? There was always a bit of you that was with Clyde – or somebody like him. How do you think that made me feel? To know that I was competing against a man some of the time. Maybe most of the time. (*pause*) I followed you on occasions...

**CON:** Jesus, woman!

**MARION:** Yes, I followed you - hoping that I might be wrong. But I wasn't. You weren't interested in other women, as far as I could tell. In a way it might have been easier if you were. But a man. How do you deal with a husband who makes love with another man? And maybe prefers it for all you know? You see what you did to me for all those years, Con. And you ask me why.

**CON:** It never affected how I felt about you.

**MARION:** But it affected how I felt about you. Feel about you. A woman likes to think she is special, but your JCB or your Dump Truck was more special than I was. (*pause*) How many has it been?

**CON:** How many what?

**MARION:** Men. How many men has it been over the years?

**CON:** Jesus, I don't know!

**MARION:** Dozens? Hundreds?

**CON:** Not hundreds!

**MARION:** Dozens then. (*she turns to JJ*) When you were with Stef, how many other women were you seeing?

**JJ:** Apart from you, none that I recall.

**MARION:** I always suspected that promiscuity was rife among the gay community.

**CON:** I told you I'm not bloody gay!

**MARION:** Bisexual community then.

**CON:** (*pause*) Anyway, look who's talking about being promiscuous.

**MARION:** JJ's marriage was over long before we became...lovers. (*we see Con's face*) And it was only one man – not dozens.

**CON:** You!...lovers!...lovers! You're a fucken trollop!

**JJ:** Ah now, Con...I think....  
**CON:** You keep out of it. She's still my wife. My slut of a wife.  
**MARION:** And you are my bigger slut of a husband. All those men over the years...  
**CON:** It wasn't all those men. I t was just an occasional...thing.  
**MARION:** What's occasional about going off and having sex with a series of men behind my back?  
**CON:** There was never another woman, Marion.  
**MARION:** That makes it even worse. I thought you had merely gone off sex. But it was me you had gone off.  
**CON:** That's not true.  
**MARION:** We haven't made love for six months. We sleep in separate beds.  
**CON:** (*pats his heart*) It's my medical condition, that's the only reason.  
**MARION:** Funny how I put a strain on your heart and Clyde doesn't.  
**JJ:** (*laughs*) You're not gay Con eh? You just like riding men more than women  
**CON:** Jesus! (*he rushes JJ and pushes him across the room*) I told you I'd swing for you, didn't I.

**JJ pushes Con back, forcing him to give ground.**

**JJ:** You're not man enough, Con  
**MARION:** Oh, stop it, the pair of you.

**Con spots the suitcases.**

**CON:** Who's are these?  
**MARION:** That one is mine.  
**JJ:** And that one is mine.  
**MARION:** I am leaving you, Con  
**JJ:** And I am leaving you, Con. You don't need us but we need each other.  
**MARION:** And more importantly, we want each other.  
**CON:** And where are you going?  
**MARION:** London - where else?  
**CON:** You'll starve in London.  
**MARION:** You would like to think that, wouldn't you? That I couldn't survive without you. Well, everything is already taken care of.  
**CON:** You haven't done a day's work in twenty years.  
**MARION:** I am going into business – with JJ as my partner.  
**CON:** You know fuck all about business!  
**MARION:** That's where you are wrong. We will be dealing in antique glass and ceramics. Pieces like that Lalique glass that you had in your hand the other day.  
**JJ:** We have already found a premises. On Camden Lock. We move in next week.  
**CON:** You! What do you know about anything that doesn't involve a wheelbarrow and a pile of bricks!  
**JJ:** I'm a quick learner. And I'm getting a bit too old for that game now. Like

yourself.  
**CON:** You'll get nothing off me. I'll make sure you don't. Not a fucking penny.  
**MARION:** Thirty years, Con, I think that's worth more than a penny, don't you? But we'll let the divorce court decide, shall we?  
**CON:** Divorce! You want a divorce! You'll get no fucking divorce off me either. Do you hear? Do you hear?  
**MARION:** Oh, I think I will, Con. When they learn what I have had to put up with. Don't you?

**End of scene**

**Scene ten**

**Con on his own in the house. A big banner saying HAPPY 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY hangs lopsidedly on back wall. Con looks a bit on edge, walking about quite a lot. He pours himself a whiskey.**

**CON:** Happy wedding anniversary, Con. Thirty years and it comes to this. Thirty bloody years wasted. She's gone. Back to London with...him. JJ was always slippery, I knew that. But being slippery with a friend's wife that's a different kettle of cod. Besides, he had his own wife. I wasn't a bad husband; she can't say I was. She didn't want for anything, well, not after the first few years. I mean, how many could build a company worth over a million from nothing? And I performed my husbandly duties, didn't I? Alright, maybe not as often and as diligently as some, but I had...issues.

*(pause)* Jimmy is locked up again, God knows for how long this time. They might decide he's insane – and maybe he is – and send him to Broadmoor...no not Broadmoor, but its equivalent here in Ireland. Josephine and me...we never got on. Like chalk and cheese. I think she resented my success. Not being part of it, I expect. I think she missed not having a mother around when she was growing up. Well, I did too. The last I heard she was in Edinburgh. Or was it Glasgow? As far away from Jimmy as she could get anyway. And who would blame her?

*(pause)* And Michael – well Michael despises me now. I could see it in his eyes when the word bisexual was mentioned. Bisexual...it's a strange word...sort of medical in away. A medical condition? Is that what they think I have? Ah jaysus...it's a mess. I suppose he will keep in close touch with...her...now that he is back in London again. No doubt I will be painted the father and husband from hell before they're finished.

*(pause)* But the biggest surprise was Cathy; I had her figured all wrong. A thoracic surgeon no less- and with a post already fixed up in one of the top London teaching hospitals. She listened to my heart after the guards had carted Jimmy away and said that I might need a pacemaker one of these days. A bit erratic, she said. I'm not surprised with all that's been goin'

on!

*(pause)* Oh God, what am I going to do?

*(pause)* You know the loneliest feeling in the world? Not having anybody to talk *to*. Not having a bit of company.

*(pause)* All I ever wanted was a bit of company.

**He picks up his mobile and dials**

**CON:** Clyde. It's Con. Ah, shure I know that. I feel the same meself. How are you feeling now....? Yeah, I know, he's a bastard...I should'a come and seen you before, but.....

**Curtain**

**end**