

LEAVING IT ALL BEHIND**by Nick Maynard**

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A barstool is set on stage in a spotlight. A nervous young man called JONATHAN enters, carrying a pint of Guinness. He sits on the stool.

JONATHAN: Hello out there - how's it going? [Beat] It's a quare night, isn't it? [response may be] That's grand. I'm having a good time... A drop of the black stuff. You can't beat it. But, it's not like it is back home thought - that's what they say, isn't it? 'Oh, it's not like it is back home' - Ach! I can't tell the difference. I'm sure the purists amongst you will have some bollocks about the way it's made - but it's all shite! It says of the fuckin' label it's made in Dublin. Don't you know, it travels as far to get here as it does to get there? It's the same stuff as it is as at home - and if it didn't travel well then you wouldn't be able to get it in fuckin' England would you? And you can... I think - what makes it taste different is how you're feeling when you drink it - I think it's that that makes it taste different... And over there it feels different to over here don't you think? [possible reaction - then a beat] Did you know the prefect pint takes 119.5 seconds to pour? Who the fuck timed that? Better still, why the fuck did they time that? Do you remember the advert - 'worth the wait'?

Get a fuckin' bottle! [Beat] And it has less calories than skimmed milk does - and it isn't black - no, it's ruby red! See - you've learnt something tonight... You've been getting it wrong all these years... [Beat] That's it... All my Guinness facts are gone now... But I didn't come here to talk about the Guinness, don't you know.

You see, I didn't just want tonight to be all stories about fuckin' Michael Flatley and The Troubles - Jeez, haven't we suffered enough? Sure they were both travesties that divided a community - I'll leave it up to you to decide which one left the most enduring artistic legacy! No - I wanted tonight to be about things that are happening now. Stories where the end isn't written yet - stories we can change and give a happier ending to... Right enough, we should be looking forwards, not back - we spend too long in the past. No one of my age gives a shite about The Troubles anymore. Sure, we've got troubles of our own that need sorting.

Have you noticed how I keep on dodging the fucking issue here? Sure, that's why I got the Guinness in the first place - to stop the nerves. You see, I'm gay. There, I've said it... No

thunderbolts yet. Not that I'm a Catholic - God forbid - no it's worse than that I'm a fucking Presbyterian. My da was more concerned about what the neighbours would say, than God. Sure they all knew anyways - Belfast's not that big you can hide in. Not that I was. You could always find me right enough - I was either at home or down Union Street. In fact that's where I met my man - it was at the end of July 2015, after the Dander - that's what they call the Pride

March back home - they call it that so it doesn't get mixed with all the other fuckin' marches... For those that don't know, Belfast has a tradition of Pride Marches, so it does. During the Marching Season all the different political groups go for a walk through the city to tell everybody how proud they are to be different... It's like a bigot's version of Gay Pride. The first Dander was back in 1991 - eight years after being gay was

decriminalisation in Northern Ireland - back then it was seen as one of the few things that brought the divided communities together - which is probably why Christian groups tried to get it banned, in 2005. I don't know what the fuck for - the gays never ended their march by petrol bombing a fuckin' housing estate.

It's a hard place to grow up in - sometimes it's like the fuckin' Wild West. There are certain places you don't go to if you're not from that community. Sure, things are getting better - but there's always going to be this unspoken past we have... And being gay there is difficult. Sure, it's probably not easy anywhere - but you hear stories of people being thrown out by their families, and committing suicide and all that. So you tend to just keep a low profile, and try not to attract too much attention to yourself... Sure, you're living like a fuckin' recluse - but you get to keep your teeth and some of your dignity - if you're lucky... My family were grand over it. Indeed the Kennedy Clan stepped up, so they did...so, as I was saying, I met Peter in the Union Street Bar, at the end of Pride... Don't worry, this isn't a love story across the great divide - God forbid - me and Peter aren't your 'star-crossed lovers'. Aye, your man's English, fair enough - but he's not a fuckin' Papist. [Beat] Anyway, I didn't know he was English when we met - I don't think it wouldn't have mattered anyway... [Beat] I fell for him the moment I saw him, so I did. Aye, our eyes met across a crowded bar. I thought to myself, there's a fine looking fella - and he smiled at me - so I smiled back. Ach, next thing I knew your man's come over and bought me a drink. So we goes round The Kremlin and I start getting off with him in the bogs. It was Pride - I didn't

really expect it to see him after that - but to cut a long story short - here we are, still together after nearly three years [Beat] In the end I came over here, so we could be together. My mam's always said, I carry the moon on my back... It's not that I had a choice... [beat]

There's a whole younger generation out there being left behind. It's the only place in Western Europe that still doesn't allow same-sex marriage. [Beat] Usually it's 60 foot high walls separating Belfast from itself... They call them the Peace Walls - it's another legacy of The Troubles - and a big fucking metaphor for how Northern Ireland functions. It's like we can only ever really be happy if we're divided over something... I'm not slaggin' The Lagan. No surrender! I'm a fuckin' Unionist before I'm a gay - that's who I am. It's the way I've been brought up. So in the end I had a choice - I could deny my identity as a gay man, or deny the values and beliefs I was brought up with. [Beat] So I came here and took the moon with me... and we got married last year. In Britain, and in The Republic, we're properly married - but when we go back to Northern Ireland our marriage isn't recognised. Over there we'll always going to be second class citizens - they're saying, 'your love's not the same as our'... But it is - it's like Guinness, so it is? [Beat] It's the same no matter where you are... Don't you know, it all comes from the same place... And that's what I wanted to share with you tonight. So next time you're having a drop of the red stuff - think on - it's just the same for everyone... And some people have been waiting long enough... [Beat] Safe home... Enjoy the rest of your evening.

JONATHAN stands up, raises his glass to the audience and then leaves the stage.