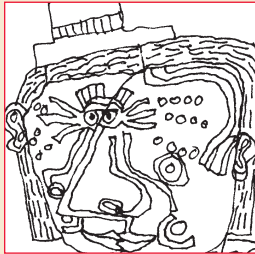


# The Rise and Fall of Dennis Mitchell



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paperbytes

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## The Rise and Fall of Dennis Mitchell

**M**Y FATHER always told me the same thing: whatever you do, it's going to come back to you. You may escape your mistakes for the moment, but they'll be back. He'd snarl and he'd lash, "Oh, you ungrateful puke. They'll be back."

He said this as well to Dennis Mitchell.

There was only one constant in my life before I left for Europe, and that was Dennis Mitchell. Other things were never constant. At school I would do fine one semester and awful the next. At lunch-hour, the same girls who would sneak behind the portables with me one week would try to beat me the next. Friends that I blew bubblegum with on one porch would chase me with their bicycle chains

off another. On the way home from school, old-man Carroll would lock me out some days, let me in and beat me other days, and on his AA days, would speak a few sentences to me.

“How was school?”

“Fine.”

“Wha’ di’ ya do?”

“Nothing.”

“*At all?*”

“What did you do?”

“Well, I ... eh shit. Same thing I guess.”

Dennis was constant, though. He was always there. He was always rude. He was always mean. He was always strong. And he was always stupid.

WE MET IN a playground, where we took turns throwing sand in each other’s eyes, and eventually made an executive decision to beat

each other senseless. We were so impressed with each other's abilities that afterwards I, my nose bleeding and my elbows and knees cut up, invited Dennis, his nose also bleeding and his ankle twisted, into my house for lemonade.

Dennis, in his way, limped in first, scaring my mother out of her frequent comatose into her not so frequent yet somewhat common screaming pill mode. Yours truly strolled in after him, smiling like a Prozac client and covered in dirt and blood. We both sat ourselves down at the table despite mom's protests, and I declared, "Ma, this is Dennis. He's my friend. Can we have some lemonade?"

Dennis smiled widely, his black hair matted with sweat, his body covered in dirt, his overalls ripped, his face scratched, his ankle twisted and his nose still trickling blood.

Ma screamed for Da, and Da, drunk, came storming in. "Wha' tha hell's tha problem here?" he asked, alternating his gaze between us.

Dennis, driven more by balls than brains, blurted out, "Hey, man,

I'm just here for some lemonade.”

“Just here for some lemonade, eh?”

“That's right. So is there a problem or what?”

For the next nine years, it was the bane of my father's life that it was illegal to beat other people's kids. Dennis was such an asshole that my father had a hell of a time figuring out why his parents didn't speak French, or even just English with an Oxford accent.

Because Dennis was Irish. A Protestant maybe? Some old, Orange Order assholes? Whose ancestors fought the Freestaters and the IRA in 1921? Sell-outs? Whores to the English? Gmen?

“Catholics.”

From Belfast, County Cork or some other wretched hole in the northern six?

“Galway.”

For this reason, and this reason alone, my Da, though he hated the boy like hell, decided to allow him to visit, if only very, very briefly.



The only big difference between our two families was that Da was a heinous drunk and Old Man Mitchell was not, which cast somewhat of a rift between us. Whenever we met, my father would polish off a pint of whiskey within the first two hours, and go on from there with stories of the rolling hills of the west coast, of the pubs in County Down, and then, if he was REALLY hammered, he'd start talking about when he immigrated.

“So there I am, right? And I've just spent eight days fillin' tha Western Ocean with puke, and we land in 'alifax, and I get off tha boat, and of course, I'm just pissed.”

“Ye don' say.”

“No, really. And so we ge' in, and it's bleedin March, an ya think we'd landed in goddam Antarctica or somethin', because it's snowin' like a FUCK outside. I couldn't believe it ...”

In the meantime, Dennis taught me how to graduate from being a minor nuisance at school to a full-blown son-of-a-bitch. The first

thing he taught me was how to correctly use the F-word; that is, that the F-word should be a substitute for most adjectives and even some nouns. I, who had always been strictly raised to believe that the F-word was only for use by inebriated adults, took to my new word with quite a bit of flair, only to be sent home three times with notes from the principal asking that my father immediately inform me that such language is completely inappropriate at school, even a Catholic one. My father always said the same thing.

“Were ya drunk?”

“No.”

“Then ye aven’t got much of a fucken excuse now, ’ave ya?”

At parent-teacher interviews, the old man didn’t have much of an excuse either. “To be perfectly honest with ye,” he’d exclaim, “I know exactly where the fuck he gets it from. Tha little shit Mitchell.”

It was true, but Jesus ...

Dennis was an expert in other areas though, apart from verbal

communication. At an early age he taught himself a great deal about bacteriology and human nutrition. He had learned, for instance, that if he took a carton of milk that had been underneath his porch all summer, and mixed it with his teacher's milk that had yet to expire, his teacher mysteriously vanished for two weeks only to be replaced by a substitute unaware of Dennis' record.

He was interested in carpentry as well; though he preferred taking things apart rather than putting anything together. This included screws from chairs, legs from desks, and supports from playgrounds. Auto mechanics excited him as well, like removing distributor caps from cars and punching holes in tires.

Dennis, the Irish Brute, was strong, as afore mentioned, and he frequently brutalized the public school kids who ventured onto the yard of St. Michael's Separate School. Especially those who teased him.

“Hey, you know what Irish are?”

“What?”

“Retarded Scots.”

One sunny day in February, while Dennis was holding a Protestant’s head down in the snow, singing the national anthem of Ireland, I ventured to ask, “Dennis, why do you hate Protestants so much?”

Dennis released the Protestant so he could go fleeing back across the schoolyard on which he had strayed, and Dennis sat down in the snow and said, “You’ve heard of Northern Ireland, right? And the IRA? And the British?”

“Not really.”

“Well, the Protestants live in Northern Ireland, and they want it to stay British, just like all of Ireland used to be. I mean, how the fuck would you like to be a Catholic up there under a Protestant queen?”

“I’m a Catholic here under a Protestant queen.”

“Don’t test my patience, Carroll.”

TWO

THEN, SUDDENLY, Dennis was no longer interested in Protestants, or microbiology, or carpentry, or auto mechanics. Dennis had discovered his moral compass that would point his way, and it stretched about eight inches from his groin and rarely stopped pointing.

It started with him sitting on park benches in the Downtown Market his twelfth summer, and watching women walk by, drooling at bare shoulders, long, scented hair and sharp, perky breasts. He'd watch at night too for the tight ribbed shirts, the ice-blue mascara and the stink of Chanel's newest brand of Parisian toilet water. When he got back to school in the Fall he accepted that he couldn't have the bar women, at least not for another year or two, and that he'd have to settle like everybody else for girls his own age.

And so Dennis spent little time deliberating over what he wanted: he just went for it. He spent most of his time in the schoolyard talking

girls into taking “walks” with him, and they’d go make-out behind the Parliament Buildings, the Chateau Laurier, on Nepean Point, the roof of the Rideau Centre, and other such private locations. He modeled himself as some kind of Junior Casanova, and although he couldn’t afford the clothes, he had the looks and he sure as hell had the drive.

He first got laid when he was thirteen. Young, maybe, but not really for Dennis. There was nothing strange about it, except that she was my girlfriend and the bastard shagged her in my bedroom while my Dad was passed out in the bathroom next door.

“But my old man would have heard us,” Dennis reasoned to me.

“You stupid fucking gobshite son-of-a-bitch asshole motherfucker. She was my girlfriend.”

“Well, obviously I gave her something you couldn’t.”

I beat the living shit out of Dennis that day, the first and last time I had ever beaten him in a fight. I think he let me win. I was his only friend and we both knew that he would never be able to make others.

I told him never to talk to me again, but two days later we were swilling the Old Man Carroll Guinness together in my basement, singing “Star of the County Down” and “North Americay”, jamming jigs and reels on pennywhistles.

He stopped trying to shag my girlfriends and he only occasionally shagged his own in my bedroom, and then I didn’t really mind, because it meant that at least someone was getting laid in that bed. I felt badly for his girlfriends, though, because Dennis manipulated them so much. One move that sometimes worked for him on dates was to bring his young charges behind the wooded vale that stretched from the Ottawa River to Wellington St., west of Major Hills Park. There, he would show his special ladies of the evening the sun setting over a river bubbling with tritium and phosphate, the E.B. Eddy plant heaping smoke into the skies, and Hull. And often, well, more often than not, they fell for it. “Oh, wow, Dennis,” some would say, “most guys just take me for a hot-dog and to a hockey game. You’re really special.”

Dennis would then reply, in his best impression of meekness and shyness, “Well, it’s just so pretty that I didn’t want to hog it all to myself.”

Once the ladies became a little too old for the Ottawa River trick (roughly thirteen, fourteen for Eastenders), Dennis had to be a little more resourceful.

He brought them to isolated pieces of NCC land in the Gatineau in the Fall while the leaves were changing colour. He brought them to trendy cafes in the Glebe where people talked about socialism and animalism and occultism and, hopefully, sex. He brought them to all sorts of places that he completely hated but he knew they liked, because there was nothing he liked more than sex, and these things usually led to sex.

Meanwhile, while Dennis was busy with his extracurricular activities and research, my father had decided to fly me out to Ireland. Permanently.



He hated Dennis. My grades were awful. My mother was such a vegetable that he had to water her with tranquilizers, and Old Man Carroll blamed me. He found pot in my room. He heard me screwing in there. (I didn't have the guts to tell him it was Dennis.)

So he spent his money, threw my stuff in a bag, and told me that I was leaving in two days for Dublin, and he would see me off at the airport.

“There's but one problem with that,” I told him.

“And that is?”

“Who the fuck are you going to get to beat me in Ireland?”

Dennis and I spent my last night drinking in the basement, but we had given up singing “Star of the County Down” or “North Americay” and jamming on pennywhistles. I now played guitar and we sang Tragically Hip and Pearl Jam songs, and instead of drinking Guinness we drank Labatt Blue. I dispensed my last bits of sixteen-year-old advice to Dennis, and told him to always wear a condom and never to

forget the clitoris.

“Christ Carroll, I’m not a fucking idiot.” he said.

“Yeah, well then why are you always wondering where you’re going to take girls? It seems kind of amateur, doesn’t it? ‘Oh, gee, where am I going to take her tonight? Where will she go where she’ll be sooooo impressed that she’ll spread for me the moment we get home?’”

I felt empowered now. I had plans and I knew that I would never see Dennis again, and I thought that I should tell him something, anything. Leave behind some piece of invaluable advice. Be his Siddhartha for the evening.

“Carroll, just because you’re leaving in six hours does not mean I won’t smash you in the face.”

“Be a fucking man, Dennis. Don’t think of where to take her, go where they already are. You’re old enough now. Go where they already are.”

“Well, where the fuck are they?”

Of course, I had no idea. “Try the bars.” I told him.

“The bars all card.”

“Try the bars in Hull.”

Dennis thought for a minute. This would mean going into Quebec, going OVER THERE.

“Well,” he snorted, “I suppose I’ll try it.”

He pretended to dismiss me, but I knew that it was reverberating inside his hollow head, nestling in whatever brains he had.

“Go where the women are.”

### THREE

I THINK DENNIS would have been impressed.

Old Man Carroll saved fifty dollars by flying me through Amsterdam on KLM, rather than sending me straight to Heathrow and on to Dublin, which in turn saved me a whole lot of time getting to France

because there was no way in hell I was spending the rest of my formative teenage years on that goddam rock, no matter how green, if I knew that I might see my child-beating, wife-abusing, whiskey-guzzling, projectile-puking, sorry-ass excuse for a father again.

I cashed my ticket to Heathrow and Dublin for two-hundred guilders, and then I cashed my two-hundred Irish pounds, twenty pounds-sterling and fifty dollars Canadian, at the airport exchange. I took the bus into Amsterdam itself, and bought three ounces of hash and a bus ticket to Paris.

I wore a flashy European track-suit on the bus, one with really baggy pants so that the gendarmerie hopefully wouldn't notice that my balls were swollen to about the size of, oddly enough, three ounces of hash. They searched the bus but not the people on it, and they stamped my passport without any trouble.

“Canadien?”

“Oui.”

“Francophone?”

“Non, Anglophone. Irlandais. Mais j’ai appris le français à l’école.”

“Ah, très bien.”

I found a flat on Rue Gambetta in the nineteenth district. I bought a scale at a second-hand store and I made money. French became my language of speaking, reading, thinking and dreaming. I found connections, customers, friends, girlfriends. Dennis and Old Man Carroll were both across the ocean and could not find me. I was free. I was in control.

Dennis had taught me so much about how to get into trouble that I became an expert at how to avoid it. Dennis was, however, enjoying his own brand of French culture: on Portage St., in Hull, Quebec. True, Hull was the ugliest city in Quebec, but that’s like saying that somewhere was the hottest place in Hell, or the wettest part of the ocean. Portage St. was Dennis’ dream come true. It was a bar-strip that ran for four blocks through downtown, and it had everything: women, booze,

music and fights, all things Dennis was keenly interested in. It had slack bouncers, if any bouncers at all, uninterested in things like identification cards. This was better than anything Dennis had known before. He was where the women were.

They were on the dance floors next to him. They were at the bars, drinking with him. They were in the washrooms, smoking drugs with him. And, eventually, they were in the alleys, doing whatever he wanted with him. It was a place frequented by three types of people: kids under eighteen looking to drink and get laid, perverts over the age of forty looking to drink and get laid, and ape-like Carleton U fratboys looking to drink and get laid. It was Dennis' Valhalla; everyone was a pig like him.

But it was expensive, good God was it expensive. To get him and a girl drunk, plus door, plus coat, plus cab, it cost him nearly fifty dollars a night. Dennis had to get a job.

Of course, Dennis didn't realise this at first: no, Dennis had to learn it

the hard way. Sure, I was a criminal, but at least I was a good criminal. Dennis wasn't even mildly competent. He tried selling weed, but he smoked too much of it to make any kind of profit. He tried shoplifting, but he stole all the wrong things. Nobody wants Eaton's cardigans and Hudson's Bay Company quilts on the black market. (Which prompts the question: how the hell did he ever figure it would be easier to get a quilt out of a store than a watch or a walkman?) He even took some of that scientific ingenuity he had put to use in grade school into building black boxes, but the only channel the damn thing ever got went "ssssssssss" all day and night. If people wanted to listen to that there was CBC stereo.

He finally just got a job at McDonald's. It hurt him to sink to such a level, and he hated every minute of it. But, he figured, it was a small price to pay. His folks, happy that I was gone, were ecstatic that the boy was getting a job, because that meant no more money missing from the Mitchell Scotiabank account. No more glassware mysteriously

disappearing. No more family memorabilia showing up at the Irish hawk shop on Montreal Road. I'm guessing, but probably no more letters from The People's Republic of China refusing offers of freshly frozen dog meat. No more phone calls from the Rotary Club with complaints that Dennis was not qualified to be treasurer. No more chains and bolts on the stereo equipment and the television set.

But, of course, employee of the month Dennis was not. He could never grasp the flipping burgers thing, the dunking fries in hot grease, the showing up on time, the not hitting on other employees, the respect for managers, the pissing in the employee toilet bowl, the smiling at customers or the blowing his nose in a kleenex. He could not grasp any of these things, and they threw him out on his ass.

It came down to this: all he could do is drink, fuck and irritate people. He couldn't steal, he couldn't study, he couldn't work. Dennis became despondent. He became depressed. He drank for different reasons now. He was in a rut, and he had to get out. He fought more



often in bars and got barred from more and more of them. There was nowhere left for him to go, so he fought and drank in the street. He didn't get laid anymore. Dennis Mitchell had nothing.

#### FOUR

I WOULD HAVE killed to see it. He told me all about it, later, when he was married and settled and fixing dishwashers for a living. "We never played high school football," is all he would say. "And now we're twenty-one and washed up."

Actually, he was washed up. Sure, we never played high school football, but who would want to live the high school football life anyway when there were places to visit and drugs to be sold? I never played high school football and it stung when I was in university and everybody else had. It was weird for me not ever having a first real date but having slept with countless women. I never played hockey on a frozen

pond but I drank coffee and beer in Montmartre and Wellington for three years. Sure, we never played high school football, but who cares?

Dennis did. Of course I had a bright future ahead of me and he had two kids and a psychotic wife who threatened repeatedly to take the kids back to the Emerald Isle without him if he didn't shape up and fix more dishwashers and drink less whiskey. That was twenty-one for Dennis.

Dennis finished Grade 12 with only one credit, Grade 10 gym, and Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell didn't know what to do.

The high school guidance counselor, however, had an idea of her own.

“Send the boy to Ireland.”

“Are you bleeding fucking nuts?” Gregory Mitchell replied. “They did that to the Carroll boy and no one has heard from him in nearly a year and a half.”

Exactly.

“Well, really, what’s the worst the Carroll kid could be doing right now?”

“He could be fucking dead, that’s what he could be doing.”

Even better.

They thought it over and they decided that they had better send him. Wherever he ended up, could he really do any worse than where he was? How far could this go?

Well, pretty far actually.

Dennis was lukewarm at first to the idea of going away, but he was in a deep depression, and he had to get out of it somehow, and anyway, he didn’t have much choice in the matter. He was originally going to the farm in Galway, but two days before he was supposed to leave, the Mitchells got a phone call from Cork. “Tha land’s bin sold. Two years ago,” Gregory Mitchell’s uncle told him. “Tha boy can come stay with us in Cork if he likes, or he can go to Dublin.”

“He’ll go to Cork.”

“Yer not gonna ask him?”

“Hell no.”

Dennis was relieved that he wasn't going to a farm but instead to a town, where he would be wiping down tables in a bar instead of milking cattle. This seemed okay.

And then Dennis' spirits started to rise. He felt like a new person, ready to make a fresh start in a new land, just like his father had when he left Ireland at sixteen to settle in Canada. Dennis made two resolutions when he left: The first, to stop drinking. The second, to stop womanizing. From now on, he was going to wait for that one special girl. There would be no more back-alley encounters and no more drunken advances. There would be no more puking over bridges or ripping off Sears reading glasses. He was finished with piss that burned like hell and a liver that he could feel with his hands. Enough was enough. He was now a new Dennis. A good Dennis. A Catholic Dennis.

New, good, Catholic Dennis committed suicide on the plane over. He consumed all the liquor he could steal, puked in the aisles, puked on a stewardess, and puked on his neighbour. He then broke resolution number two when he started hitting on the stewardess whose uniform he had just puked on, as well as an entire exchange group from Elmore Girls School (who were spared Dennis' discharges). He was dropped in Heathrow, denied permission to connect to Dublin, and banned for life from ever flying British Airways again.

The piss of it was that I was in London when he was in London, but he didn't find me, at least not then; in fact, there was no way he could have known I was there. I was back in school of all things, back to being a citizen. The Paris scene was getting dangerous, and I figured that I would run out of luck somehow, eventually. I had a small sum in The Bank of Zurich, and I pulled my Irish background to get me a residency in England, which was granted. I was completing my O levels in London and thinking about going back to Canada,

but I didn't think too hard about it. I worked four days a week sweeping the streets and then did classes at night. I lived in a rooming house near Picadilly and I was content to be living some kind of normal life. I even decided to list my name in the phone book.

Dennis didn't phone and he got drunk alone. He took a shuttle from the airport to Charing Cross Road, where he started in on the pubs. He went to five, and met no woman who would even look at him twice.

“Hey, honey, I'm Canadian, don't you find that attractive?”

“Get the fuck away from me, you slobbering American twit.”

So much for English *politesse*.

What was once a fierce, if misguided, pride of his Irish heritage soon became a fierce, even more misguided, pride of his Canadian birthplace and nationality. Now, he made it a point of carving into every toilet he stuck his face into: “I'm drunk, I'm Canadian, life's great.” He terrorized the pub patrons with his talk of Canada, until

he finally met someone who had in fact been to Canada. A lovely young lady, although maybe she wasn't that young, and maybe she wasn't even attractive because I was not there and Dennis would have been wearing the thickest beer goggles anyone had ever worn. In any event, she wrote him a note on a cocktail napkin expressing her love for Canada: "I find your country as exciting as a meeting of the Socialist International; its weather as warm as French hospitality; its people as sharp as a pregnant Yak; its scenery as breathtaking as a puddle of puppy vomit. You are a fitting ambassador for your country."

After three days, Dennis decided that he had better get out of England before he ran out of money. He caught a bus to the coast and a ferry to Dublin. He drank as much as he could on the way, and carved into the toilet seat on the ferry: "I'm drunk, I'm Canadian, life's great," though this time he didn't puke into it.

Dublin reeked when he got off the boat. It smelled like a sewer and the streets were dusty and dirty. The rolling green hills were in fact

mountains of garbage and if it weren't for the beer and the accents, Dennis would have thought just as well that he was in Calcutta.

He made it to a payphone and put his calling card into it, and phoned the Great Uncle from Galway who now lived in Cork.

"I'm in Dublin."

"Ya were supposed te come ta Cork."

"Oh. I thought I could choose between Cork and Dublin."

"Yer father chose for ya. But if ya want ta stay in Dublin, call yer Aunt and she'll arrange ta put ye up. Fer the while at least."

"Okay."

He phoned his Aunt and was put up in her house in the southend, stretched out on the living room floor. "'ave ye got enough money?" she asked.

"Well, you know," Dennis replied. "I had to take the ferry over, because British Airways thought that I was drunk when I switched planes. But do you know what I think?"



“Wha’?”

“They wouldn’t let me on because I was Irish.”

“It was a fucking flight to Ireland, you stupid git. If they’d thrown every Irish off tha plane they wouldn’t ’ave had a bloody flight. Jesus, boy, no wonder your father sent ye here.”

“Maybe they threw me off because I’m Canadian.”

“And God knows how we hate it when ye beat us at hockey. Most people here don’t even know where Canada is.”

“Could I just borrow twenty bob already?”

“Here.”

Substitute Ireland for England, Guinness for Harp, and the rejections of a red-headed lass for a brown-haired one, and that’s what Dennis did with the twenty bob.

Dennis did phone. I had forgotten that world, I had forgotten that place. I had forgotten the mother I never knew and the father I wish I never knew. I had forgotten the school and the girls and the few

friends. I had forgotten the city. I had forgotten Dennis.

And then one day, I was sitting in my house, reading my Economics text, when the landlady called up to me. “Bradford?”

“Yeah.”

“You have a telephone call.”

“I’ll phone them back.”

Pause.

“It’s long distance.”

“From where?”

Second pause.

“Ireland.”

I dropped my book. Ireland. Blood rushed to my face and I started to sweat. Ireland. My parents. They were the only people who could possibly be in Ireland. I felt like I was ten years old again and in trouble and about to get my ass kicked, and I had to think up some elaborate excuse. “You see, Da, the plane got delayed, eh. By about two

and a half years. They say it'll be on its way tommorrow." Nothing scared me like the thought of having to speak with him.

"Brad," the woman called. "He's waiting."

"Just a moment," Brad choked out.

He pushed his chair back, rose slowly and walked down the stairs to the living room. He picked up the phone, and strangled out a barely audible, "Hello?"

"Carroll?" the voice called. "Carroll, speak up, I can't hear a word you're saying."

"*Mitchell!*" I cried. "Where the fuck are you?"

"I'm in Dublin, and I've phoned directory assistance for about every city in the British Isles. Do you know how much that costs? And how come you've been gone two and a half years and I haven't gotten a single fucking postcard?"

I stood there, dumbfounded. Over and over I repeated it to myself, "Dennis is in Dublin. Dennis is in Dublin. Dennis is in Dublin.

Dennis ...”

“Brad, are you awake?”

“Yes,” I whimpered.

“So when are you coming out to Dublin?”

“Soon?”

## FIVE

I HATED DUBLIN and I had never even been there. The thought of that island just made me want to retch, because the only person I knew who talked about it was my father. I didn't want to go because I knew that Dennis had not changed: I could hear it in his voice. He still had that sound of: *I am better than you because I can fuck more and drink more and beat you senseless if I so choose.*

I left the house and walked down to the High Street, picked up a bog and leafed through it at the pub. I ordered one beer, two beer,

three beer, shot of whiskey on the side ... I didn't know how long I was there. One hour, two hours, four hours, eight hours ... . By the time I left I was stinking drunk, for the first time in several months. I puked in the gutter and passed out on the street.

I dreamed that Dennis was standing above me with a bottle in his hand, laughing at me. "Why haven't I gotten a postcard, Carroll? Wanna hear about all the girls I've fucked, Carroll?"

"Oh God, get me out of here."

"Where have you been, Carroll?"

A few hours later I was woken by a strong, mean, Dennis-like, irritating little man in my head with an enormous jackhammer, drilling through my temples. Two little men, three little men, digging, drilling, an army of little men in my head doing some very clumsy construction and rebuilding. I bought some ASA from a chemist and trudged home, passed out in my bed and was late for work.

And then two weeks later I found myself hitching through

England and Wales, to be dropped off finally at the ferry terminal. I got out, dazed after twelve hours of travel, and caught the ferry to Dublin. The whole way there I wondered what Dennis was doing in Dublin. I thought that his parents might have sent him, but that seemed stupid, given what had happened to me.

I thought that maybe he had pulled his life together. He had fulfilled a dream and gone out to Ireland and opened a business or something. He'd pulled himself together and pushed ahead. He'd conquered his vices. He'd succeeded.

No.

The moment I saw Dennis on the harbour my spirits sank again. He had that same huge smile that he wore the day we beat each other up when we were seven. He looked almost exactly the same as he did when I left and told him to go to Hull. I wondered if he had gone.

He had.

I didn't want to get off that boat, I wanted it to turn around and

take me back to England. This was not how I wanted it to happen; no, this was something I never wanted to happen at all. I knew that one day life would catch up to me, but not Dennis, I prayed not Dennis.

But then, Dennis was the only constant. He was the only thing that stayed the same before I rocketed off to Europe. And now here he was, in Europe. Well, this was my territory. Ireland, England, France, same hemisphere. My hemisphere.

Wrong.

From the moment I got off the boat, and greeted him, he took control. “Mitchell,” I said, “what the fuck are you doing here?”

“Well, shit, it’s nice to see you too. So are we going to the pub, or what? Gonna get us some nookie? Quaff some pints, I think I can score us some hash too. Let’s head out, you can throw your bag in an alley or something, or maybe we can stop by my Aunt’s if you’ve got enough money for a cab.”

I couldn't believe it. Nothing had changed. "I'm only here for four days, eh."

"Four days? Well, we'll see what we can do to extend that."

I wasn't going to argue with him. Fuck that. I was just going to get hammered, that's it. I'd flood my veins with booze and stay sloshed for four days. Yeah, I'd feel awful, but it was either that or talk to Dennis sober, and hear about this girl and that girl and that pussy vs. this pussy and I did not want to deal with it.

Oceans of lagers and stouts, shots of rum and Irish whiskey, wine straight out of the bottle. Sing Irish songs, dance Irish jigs, until I could not stand any more and then sing and dance sitting down. Just fire them back one after another; and if I died, well, I wouldn't have to talk to Dennis anymore.

Quickly, booze, go to ...



## SIX

I SURVIVED. I completed my O and my A levels and moved back to Canada. I went to school in British Columbia to be as far away from my old man as possible. But I despaired leaving Dennis alone in Ottawa with that hag and his one and then two evil offspring.

He got his training at Algonquin College to fix dishwashers, and then worked for a company in the westend. We would write and he'd tell me about it. Apparently the money was okay, but the family life was killer.

At first he would just write that Kayleigh was having trouble adjusting to the cold and to the people. She hated blacks; she couldn't understand how Somalian refugees could get citizenships as easily as her. She didn't much like anyone else, either. She even complained about the TV programming.

"There's nothing on the tele," I heard her whine once, while

Dennis and I were drinking in the living room over Christmas.

“How can there be nothing on the tele?” Dennis replied.

“There’s nothing on. It’s all shite.”

“You only got three channels in Ireland. There are fifty-six here. You’re telling me the tv was better there?”

“Yeah. And that shite you call dinner is giving me heartburn.”

“Okay, well firstly it’s a tv, not a tele. Secondly, it’s shit, not shite, and thirdly, the only reason you have heartburn is from wringing your own tit all the time.”

She stayed home to raise the children. She was depressed a lot because she felt that she had no prospects, which was entirely the case: she had no prospects whatsoever. She was tied down to two children that she felt were forced upon her, a loveless marriage, and a one-hundred-and-fifty thousand dollar Bell’s Corners mortgage that her old man in Ireland had to cosign.

She would occasionally be good to Dennis; apparently, she was a

tiger in bed. But afterwards she would just stare at the ceiling, probably doing math in her head to find out when her youngest would be eighteen so she could dump Dennis and move back to Ireland. She was going to do that, it seemed almost certain. Of course, it didn't stop her from threatening Dennis every day that she was going to take the kids and move back right away.

When she was pregnant with Daniel, the second, Dennis wanted her to get an abortion. She was furious, Dennis said. "She went fucking crazy, saying she would pray for my soul and shit. I couldn't believe it. But once she gave birth she ran off to the hospital and got her tubes tied. Tell me how fucking Catholic that is, for Chrissake."

I went to school, school was fun. I made a lot of friends.

People considered me exotic because I didn't do things conventionally, living in Europe, having no communication with my family, and moving to B.C. I worked co-op jobs in the summer and usually made enough so that I could visit Ottawa for Christmas and stay

with Dennis. I had a future, I had prospects. Dennis' greatest dream was running his own dishwasher repair company, and I knew he'd never do it.

He still drank; Jesus, he still drank, but it was not like before. He may have slept with other women, but I don't know for sure and I didn't want to know the answer. He'd prod me often about my sexual exploits, and I'd tell him, and sometimes I'd embellish a little just to bring a little more smile to his face. But Dennis was a different kind of drunk now. When Dennis had enough he just passed out. He drank slower but his bouts lasted longer. I was worried that he might beat his wife or his kids when he was hammered, like he used to beat other bar patrons, but he didn't. He loved his kids and he might have loved his wife, I don't know. Whenever she pissed him off though, he took it out on his liver.

I was back in England when I found out that Kayleigh was pregnant, back when she was just another girl Dennis picked up in a bar. I

was shocked but not surprised; I supposed that something would have had to happen eventually. He said the condom broke but I severely doubt that he wore one at all. The embassy was getting her passport ready; they were heading back to Canada in five days. We spoke for a long time; I had never had a conversation like it with Dennis before. He told me how he felt; he had feelings all of a sudden. He almost cried, but I just couldn't feel sorry for him, not after all he'd done.

In my first year of university I was living in residence. Somebody knocked on my bedroom door and said that there was a man to see me in the television lounge. I went down there and my father was standing in the door, looking ten years older than when I had last seen him, surrounded by eighteen-year-old kids.

*“What the fuck are you doing here?”* I cried.

“Jesus, son, I jus' wanted ta see ye. I'd heard –”

“Get out. Get the fuck out and don't come back.”

“Yer mother and I were worried sick when ye didn’t show in Ireland ...”

“I don’t want to talk to you.”

“Where have you been?”

“*I told you to get out.* And no one here let him back in.”

“Jus ave one beer with me.”

“You’ve never in your life just had one beer.”

“Yer mother left me.”

“I don’t care. Good.”

“Where have ye been?”

“One beer. That’s it. I’ll tell you where I’ve been. And at the pub. Not here.”

“At the pub then.”

We left, all forty-seven of my housemates watching us cross the residence courtyard. He was stumbling and I could tell that he was already drunk. We got to the pub.

“Two pints of Blue.”

“Two coffees.”

“Fine, two coffees.”

So I told him. I told him how I switched planes and dealt drugs and then did my O and A levels in London. I told him everything because I had nothing to lose. “What’s Paris like?” was all he asked.

“It’s dirty.” I replied.

“I always wanted to go.”

He asked about Dennis and if I’d spoken to him. I told him that he was married with one kid and another on the way. He was surprised of course, but after he thought about it he guessed that it made sense.

“What does he do?”

“He fixes dishwashers.”

“Oh. Is there money in that?”

“I guess.”

“I’m going to have a pint, is that okay?”

I spat out the answer: “I suppose.” But then I started crying. He put three dollars down on the table and we went outside and started walking. He didn’t know what to say, I guess, but he so obviously needed a drink that I felt bad taking him from the bar. I stumbled around and hoped that nobody would see me crying like that with my father. We finally found a bench and sat down but I didn’t want him to be so close to me. I dried my tears after a bit but I didn’t look at him.

“Did he knock ’er up?”

“What?” I said, sniffing.

“Dennis. Did ’e knock ’is wife up?”

“Yeah,” I said. “He knocked her up when I visited him in Dublin.”

“He was in Dublin?”

“His parents had sent him.”

My father laughed, I laughed too.

“Stupid gits.”

“He phoned me after he got married. He didn’t know what to tell



her about Canada. He was depressed because he couldn't fuck around any more, conscience got the better of him. So I told him to tell her about the majesty of the Rocky Mountains and shit like that. Pines reflected in clear, crisp lakes, lush green plains, thick, rust-coloured forests. Vibrant, exciting cities, friendly people, the mosaic of cultures, you know. Stuff like that. I even told him to talk about the glory of Canadian beer. I told him to lie and say there were all these jobs, the bright eyes of the nation's youth, and that he had to say all of this in the grandest of speeches, his arms wide, his voice full of love of country, and he would declare to her that this was a nation and a civilization that would accept Kayleigh into it with the warmest of hearts." I sniffed and dried the last of my tears.

"Dennis said all this?"

"Are you fucking kidding? He just told her to bring a winter coat."

## About the Author



Dave Hazzan was born and raised in Ottawa and educated at the University of Victoria. He currently lives in Princeton B.C., where he is editor of the *Similkameen Spotlight*.

Dave Hazzan's fiction and journalism have been published in *The Inner Harbour Review*, *broken pencil*, *Offbeat*, *Canadian University Press*, *Salmon Arm Observer*, *Arrow Lakes News*, *Vernon Country Star* and *Lake Cowichan Gazette*.

