

Out to Wreck

Sunrays dotted the window pane and ran a streak of light down Jay Daly's cheekbone. He squinted his half-closed green eyes, turning over on the pillow. It was a fine July morning, typical for the 2013 summer which was by all accounts a baker. He tilted back his neck and watched the pool of sky drip. He had emptied his credit union account to pay for a ticket to see Anto 'Reaper' Nangle defend his belts in the Dome – roof retracted.

He planted his feet on the wool carpet, yawning and stretching every sinew of his lean six-foot frame. The booze was nestled under his mattress, purchased the previous night after work. He unfurled a damp towel lying on the bathroom floor and turned on the electric shower. Water pellets streamed off his shaven hair and face as he spat toothpaste onto his toes, turning on cold water for a few seconds. He shivered and hugged his arms, slanting the towel along his waistline. Steam coated his fingertips as he wiped the mirror, tensing his muscles to inspect the spiral tattoo on his back.

Jay completed eighty press-ups, then laid on his back for sit-ups. The floorboards creaked as he rushed through the last ten reps then changed into his black Everlast boxers and cut-off blue jeans, throwing his towel across the room. He slipped on a gold-chained bracelet that was loose on his wrist. The black and white striped Lacoste polo was hung in the wardrobe, washed

two days ago. Dust bunnies floated beneath the skylight. He smoked joints out the window at night and listened to rap music in bed before succumbing to exhaustion from the long days on building sites working as a labourer.

A framed photograph of Anto - product of the Rathvale estate – was nailed above his headboard. His chiseled face and muscles, frozen in combat pose, plastered every boy's bedroom wall across north Dublin. He put on his Nike Air Maxes, tucking in the laces at each side, and reached for his twelve cans of cider. The ticket protruded from his wallet as he ran downstairs. His baby brother, Kyle, sat alone at the kitchen table mopping brown sauce off his plate with egg yolk. Jay stuffed two rashers and sausages into a slice of white loaf, squeezing the ketchup bottle.

‘Where’s Ma?’

‘Aunt Sally’s.’

‘Da?’

‘Work.’

‘Better him than me,’ he replied, drinking orange juice from the carton.

‘Ma said to wear sun cream.’

‘She was born a dreamer,’ he said, slapping Kyle’s face on his way out. Heat filled the still air as he sauntered onto Rathvale Crescent, holding the paper bag against his chest. The lawn shimmered as nippers ran topless across patches of mown grass. Colm Byrne grew up three doors down from Jay and Neil ‘Boar’ Kenny lived around the corner on Drive. They lived out of each other’s bedrooms, forced upstairs once their parents arrived home from work despite being out of school for two years. He saw Boar wiping his ginger scalp while Collie ploughed through chin-ups off the crossbar, his broad shoulders gleaming and veins pumping on his muscles. Sleeved tattoos framed his corded torso.

‘Twelve, thirteen,’ Boar counted, taking a sip from his Miller bottle. Collie coined him Boar when they were nippers because of his ferocious appetite and surprising mobility.

‘Save your energy for when some birds arrive,’ he shouted.

‘Get to bollocks,’ Collie replied, touching his runners off the grass before raising himself again.

‘Some day for it,’ he said, opening a can and slurping on the fizzed, amber liquid.

‘Fit for carnage,’ Collie said, brushing back his jet-black fringe, the only boy on the estate who didn’t shave his head for summer. ‘My auld ones told me to not bother coming home for a few days.’

‘Why is the fight on so late again?’ asked Boar.

‘For the hundredth time, they’re obliging the American TV audiences,’ he said.

‘I’ll never understand how you finished school.’

‘At least I have my Leaving Cert...and a job.’

‘If you call stacking shelves a job,’ retorted Collie. ‘You both need to get on those 188 handouts, I’m saving a fortune thanks to the government.’

‘You’re spending all of it on grass and booze,’ Boar said, a cigarette hidden under his thick knuckles.

‘Watch that tongue before I slice it off and feed it to my dog.’

‘Is that the Alsatian or your ma?’

‘Leave the mothers out of it,’ he said, putting his cans in the shade. The sun flashed its white glare over an expanse of terraced houses and shopping units and link roads. They sat on the

grass, tossing cigarettes at each other and drank at a steady pace with crude techno blaring off their phones.

‘What do you reckon about tonight?’ he asked, watching Boar’s stomach rise and fall with his breath.

‘3nd round knockout,’ Collie said. ‘Cotter will be expecting a frantic start and try to make it a dogfight.’

‘I want it to go the whole way, get my money’s worth,’ Boar said. The afternoon drifted and they began slurring their speech. Collie rolled joints for their dim, drowsy minds. He watched teenagers speed by on mopeds and wheelie off the banks between football pitches.

‘Let’s have an early dinner.’

‘Agreed, we need vodka as well,’ he said, standing up and brushing grass off his shoulders. He stepped in front of cars while Collie mooned the drivers, falling to his knees in laughter. The chipper was empty and Boar, his pale face turned scarlet, took the order for snack boxes. He caught a sight of his own sunburnt reflection in the bookie’s window, peeling skin from his nose. Collie picked up a two-litre bottle of own-brand Cola in the Super Valu.

‘Saoirse’s working.’

‘Fuck me,’ he said, putting on his polo.

‘Jaysus, I’d give her granny a lash. Here, hold this.’

Jay stood between the biscuit packets and breakfast cereals as Collie strolled up the aisle. Saoirse Flanagan pressed her palm against the floor to meet his eyes. She dazzled in the drab uniform, her breasts full and perked under a burgundy polo. During school, he used to watch her dance at parties while necking cans on sofa armrests.

‘Alright, Saoirse?’

‘Hi, Collie,’ she said. ‘You’re all dressed up.’

‘The fight of the century is tonight.’

‘Give a girl some credit, I’ve got a ticket.’

‘In that case, you’ll have to join us on the lawn.’

‘I’ll have to check with the girls.’

‘Well, you’ll know where to find us,’ he said, walking back towards the checkout. Jay paid for the vodka, receiving a fifty-cent contribution from Collie.

‘What took you fuckers so long?’ Boar asked, gorging on a drumstick.

‘I was planting the seed with Saoirse.’

Jay gave half his chips to Boar when they returned and opened the vodka. He drank deep, his gums searing as bubbles popped against the glass. Bare-chested boys descended on the lawn, gripping heaving plastic bags. Music was played off portable speakers and resin suffused the air.

‘Anto went out with my sister for a stretch, true gent he was,’ Ro Murphy said.

‘We all acted that way to give your sister a lash.’

Barbeque smoke billowed from plotted gardens and a pink hue burst in the cloudless sky. A circle of thirty boys formed, dressed in pressed polos or cotton shirts. They poured tequila into bottle caps at the falling of a blazing dusk.

‘The birds will be up for it tonight.’

‘Just make sure we get them to Davy’s party,’ Collie said, passing the bottle. Hatchback cars with learner plates pulled up on the curb, girls stepping out in pink mini-skirts and halter tops. The boys’ moist lips parted beholding their slim forms.

‘Evening, girls,’ Collie said. ‘You all look ravishing.’

‘Ever the charmer,’ Paula Ryan said, her cheeks powdered with blush.

‘That charm got me a summer worth of blowies from you,’ he replied, turning to the boys who clapped their hands and sniggered. The guards kept their distance, knowing they were ill-equipped to tame the estate on such a night. Saoirse peeled away from the girls, standing with arms folded over her red dress. He willed himself forward, taking a step as Collie brushed past him and gave her a hug. She smiled, tucking her golden hair behind hoop earrings.

‘Don’t torture yourself,’ Boar said.

‘I’m all bottle.’

He blinked and it was half-past twelve, shuffling to make the last bus. They clustered in small groups, smoking cigarettes and looking out for the 17a’s neon figures. Collie and Saoirse flirted in his peripheral vision, her laughter drowned out in onrushing traffic before the bus pulled in. He was pushed onboard while dropping loose change, pulling free to make his way upstairs.

‘Nobody’s getting on without paying,’ the driver shouted, trying to step out from his booth. Boar and Collie joined him in the back row, Saoirse taking the seat ahead. She raised her knees and leaned back against the window.

‘Give us a can there, boys.’

‘Sorted,’ he said, his forearm trembling as her fingers wrapped around the tin.

‘Thanks,’ she said.

‘Anytime.’

‘Right, let’s get these in now,’ Collie said, producing a small baggie from his pocket. He handed them each a pill and they washed down the compressed powder with a slug of larger.

‘Rathvale is out to wreck, out to wreck, out to wreck,’ they all bellowed, stomping their feet and rattling the steel ceiling. His skin tingled once the Dome came into view, Dublin flickering southwards beyond planes of asphalt.

‘These lads are very strong now,’ Collie said. ‘My cousin’s fella brought them over from England and spoke of seeing unnatural sights.’

‘Thanks for telling us after we dropped,’ he said.

‘Don’t worry, boys, we have enough speed to balance us out.’

They got off in Santry village and walked close together up the arena’s vista, Death at Dawn banners hung from lampposts beside tinted apartment and office blocks. He followed Collie into the bushes and pissed with a cigarette dangling from his lips.

‘You take the whiskey.’

‘Grand,’ he said, taking the bottle off him and cushioning it between his hairless arse cheeks. The guards patted them down while Saoirse waited a few metres ahead, checking her phone. A tall officer with a shovel-shaped face flashed a torch in his eyes.

‘Go on,’ he said in a monotone country accent.

‘Culchie prick didn’t have a clue,’ he said, grinning and slapping the boys’ palms.

He took a sip of whiskey before producing his ticket for a steward. They darted past concessions stands into the pit, securing a spot behind the cage. A low moon emitted its milky glow onto the stifled crowd. In the final undercard, two bruised fighters were awaiting a judicial tally. The Irish challenger won on decision, raising his taut arms and pumping his fists.

‘That Southside fraud doesn’t hold a candle to Anto,’ he said to Boar.

‘Arrogant fuck.’

Collie held keys of speed under their nostrils while he removed the whiskey bottle and rearranged his boxers. Footage from Nangle's previous fights flashed on the big screen, cutting to his dressing room as the trainer wrapped his knuckles. The pit filled with boys and girls, callow hope pumping from their pores. Saoirse stood in front of them, her neck close enough to trace with his breath.

'These lads are legitimate,' he said, seeing Saoirse plant her slender hips back against Collie's belt buckle as the arena darkened. A spotlight fell on the tuxedoed announcer, Bill Tilfer, who held a microphone and cue cards branded with the broadcaster's logo.

'Ladies and gentlemen, it is now time for the main event. First, the 19-year-old challenger from San Antonio, Texas and weighing in at 168 pounds – Bruuuuce Cotter.'

Country music played over the speakers while Cotter and his entourage walked from the tunnel. Boos rang from the surging crowd, cresting like a wave with their blended faces ready to sweep him away. He danced around the cage, relishing their disdain, his gaze clear and fixed waiting for Nangle to enter.

'You're an acne-infested cunt!' he heard behind him.

'Now, the youngest ever MMA Middleweight Champion at twenty-two years of age with a world record fourteen consecutive knockouts,' Tilfer said. 'Born and raised in Dublin city and weighing in at 166 pounds – Anthony 'Reaper' Nangle.'

A rebel ballad reverberated around the arena and buckled his addled mind. People shrieked the lyrics while extending their fingertips for a touch of Nangle, his eyes hidden under a robed hood.

'Folks, the fighters are ready - it's show time!'

The bell rang and he was lifted from his chemical plunge as both fighters stepped towards each other on the callused balls of their feet. Nangle dropped his right shoulder and threw a jab

that hit Cotter on the forehead, blood smattering the mat. He recovered with a few high kicks that made solid contact, Nangle blocking with his elbow and stepping back. Cotter threw himself at the open stance and dragged him to the mat, claspng his hulking thighs over Nangle's pelvis.

'He needs to see this round out,' he shouted at Boar. 'The yank's unbeatable in a wrestle, he won the Olympic Gold two years ago.'

'It would take a crane to shift that fucker!'

They grappled for three minutes and Cotter landed jabs to notch up points, his leathered flesh bulging. The same pattern followed in the next two rounds with Nangle unable to land any clean contact before being dragged to the mat. Jay spat and swore, each drag of a cigarette tasting better than the last. He bought ten pints off a passing vendor and they necked the plastic cups to cool off. Saoirse's skin pulsed and he counted the beads of sweat falling from her regal face.

'This is never going to end,' Boar shouted.

'Just enjoy it,' Collie said, placing an arm around his shoulder. By the fifth round, Nangle required a knockout to save his belts. There was ninety seconds left and Cotter arced an elbow to his nose, smashing the bridge. They heard the dislodging of bone in Fairview.

'That dirty cunt, finish him, Anto! Finish him!'

Cotter's arms were lowered, his left cheek facing away from Nangle who landed a right hook. He managed another two in quick succession, flipping him and rotating his monstrous arms like a propeller. Cotter barely had a face left before the ref called it, sending the Dome into delirium. Nangle climbed the fence, pumping his sculpted chest during a barbaric wail. His nerves imploded as Saoirse swiveled to meet Collie's lips, her twinkling blue eyes reflecting the stars above. Her tongue prodded his friend's gums and crushed his heart. Boar

gave him some whiskey then shoved a joint between his lips. Tilfer handed Nangle the microphone who gave a wry smile and joined in with the chorus.

‘Rathvale’s out to wreck, out to wreck, out to wreck.’

‘This one’s for the Vale,’ Anto said, holding up his belts. They filed out as the lights came on and Jay clicked his jaw to make sure it was still in place.

‘That was heroic the way he landed those two punches,’ Boar said, hugging boys who joined them in the urinals.

‘Mes-fucking-meric.’

‘Nangle keeps his belts and Saoirse Flanagan is primed for a roasting,’ Collie said, his pupils bloodshot and devoid of any soul. ‘I’ve died and gone to heaven.’

She stood with the girls outside, their make-up splintered in the dawn. Empty cans and ticket stubs blew at their high-heeled shoes as they hailed taxis. He got into the front seat, watching them kiss in the rearview mirror while Boar leaned against the window.

‘Rathvale Close,’ he said.

‘How was the fight?’ the taxi driver asked.

‘Death at dawn.’

‘Come again?’

‘Death at dawn, death at dawn,’ he said, turning and laughing at Collie who opened a slit of his right eye, letting Saoirse bite his chin.

‘You better behave yourselves or I’ll leave you out here.’

‘Keep your cool until we get to Davy’s,’ Collie said. ‘Put some music on.’

They drove back to Rathvale with Joe Dolan's greatest hits playing off the stereo, lustrous patterns woven in the sparse clouds. The estate was serene with doors locked from plundering youths. He paid the driver, walking past Davy Kennedy's black Mondeo and held the doorbell.

'Don't break that thing,' he said, strands of a peroxide blonde fringe protruding under his cap. They followed him through the narrow, dark hallway to a white-paneled conservatory. Boys and girls stood over the furniture, shifting their feet as powder was carved. He took a seat on the wicker couch, lighting a cigarette while Davy handed him a tepid Budweiser can. The line renewed him and made his flat beer go down easy, regarding the girls' crossed legs. He wanted any of them now under a musty duvet with blind cords pulled down and left limp on the window sill.

'There's some drip off that,' he said, wincing. The drums built into a crescendo and people danced to the heavy, replicating melody.

'I'll be tasting that for days,' Boar said, handing the magazine and rolled ten-euro note to Collie. He snorted and presented a line to Saoirse who pressed in her nostril chasing the powder, dabbing the remaining granules on her tongue.

'I thought the ground was going to give way between the rounds, like we were all going to be swallowed into the earth,' said Boar. 'You sure pissed off that taxi driver.'

'I don't know what came over me,' he said, flipping a skin and licking the top. He bounced the paper cone off the armrest and sparked as Collie led Saoirse back through the kitchen.

'Stay out of my room,' Davy said, shaking his head. 'That prick would get the only lash in Rathvale.'

'As if you're anything special,' Paula said.

'You hags look like you're auditioning for a zombie movie!'

Over the next hour, girls paired off with boys and led them into spare bedrooms. The unchosen remained downstairs as mid-morning approached, passing joints with regimental discipline. They moved outside and dozed in the sunshine, freckles forming on their cheeks. He closed his eyes, pressing his head against the blades of grass.

‘I wonder where Anto ended up,’ Davy said.

‘Probably in the Merrion snorting coke off a model’s tits,’ someone said, provoking mumbled laughter.

‘Some life he’s forged.’

Collie and Saoirse came back downstairs, snorting lines in the conservatory. She wore nothing but Collie’s creased polo, her fingers coiled around his dark locks. He finished his cigarette and walked over Boar’s sprawled body, standing in the doorway.

‘What’s the craic, Jay?’ asked Collie, stroking her luscious thighs.

‘You should tell us if you’re cutting the gear.’

‘Calm down,’ he said, racking up an extra line.

‘You owe me for the booze as well,’ he said, dragging a chair beside the coffee table.

‘I can give you some money,’ Saoirse said.

‘Don’t mind, Jay. He’s just a bit cranky because it was a fruitless night.’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ he said, snorting the line and drinking from an uncapped vodka bottle. ‘Anto won.’

‘Your little brother will get the ride before you do,’ he said, blowing mirthful rings of smoke.

‘Leave it,’ he said, his eye twitching.

‘The only virgin from Rathvale with a driving licence. You two should be on the news.’

‘Right,’ he said, twisting the bottleneck before lifting it behind his shoulder, vodka spilling over his arm. He stood up and smashed it over Collie’s head, shards of glass flying onto Saoirse as she screamed. Blood streamed down Collie’s face as he launched himself at Jay, tackling him out to the garden.

‘What the fuck are you two doing?’ Davy shouted. Collie pummeled Jay’s face before the boys could pull him off. He laid on the ground, brushing his fingers over purple flesh and shattered bone.

‘What in God’s name is going on over there?’ they heard over the garden wall.

‘Right, everyone clear off,’ Davy said. ‘That auld prick will ring the guards and I have a full stash upstairs.’

‘I think they both need an ambulance.’

‘Get out,’ he roared, ushering them inside as the boys put their shirts back on and gathered their belongings. Jay stumbled to the front door, his vision blurred while engines revved and cars dispersed. Families were packing their boots with ice coolers and parasols for a day on Dollymount. He saw Boar wrapping a dishcloth over Collie’s head by the front gate.

‘Where’s Saoirse?’

‘Inside,’ he said, standing behind them. They walked towards the lawn, quickening their pace with the faint calls of adults behind them. Collie fell to his knees, raising his arms around their shoulders to form a staggering link.

‘We’re almost there,’ he said. They propped him against the goalpost, panting and vomiting on their runners.

‘Light me a joint.’

‘I’m sorry, man.’

‘Just roll one.’

He mashed the skins together and sparked, kneeling to place the joint between Collie’s lips. He sucked on the roach and blew out wisps of smoke, blood seeping through the dishcloth.

‘I’m shattered.’

‘Me too,’ he said.

‘We’ll tell the auld ones Davy jumped me.’

The sun ascended in a limpid sky, pasting the small grey houses together. He wanted to hide in bed and dream of lost memories then meet the boys at twilight for a drive.

‘I hear sirens,’ Boar said.

‘They won’t find us here,’ he said, his hands trembling over Collie who took another drag before offering him the fading remnants.