

*The Porch Room presents*

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*Early Morning in  
the Tenement*

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A Short Play

By

Pete Barry

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THE CHARACTERS

DANNY, 19  
PETEY JOE, 20  
The MAN

SETTING

An Irish tenement building, early morning. Present day.



*DANNY sits in a dark and dirty room, playing Hearts on his laptop.*

**Danny:** Ah, ye sure ye want to do that, Pauline? Well, look who's coming to visit ye now? Aoow.

*PETEY JOE walks in from the door. Nervous.*

**Danny:** Oh, tough hand, Pauline, but sometimes ye just need a good fucking.

**Petey Joe:** Time?

**Danny:** Sixteen after.

**Petey Joe:** After what?

**Danny:** Three. Ah, it's yer turn, Michelle. No, Ben. Noo, Benny. Good boy. AH MICHELLE YA BITCH!

**Petey Joe:** Ye think yer loud enough?

**Danny:** I can be louder.

**Petey Joe:** You're not on instant messenger are you? Yer not online.

**Danny:** Oh, Pauline. I don't think you know who yer playing with, here.

**Petey Joe:** Danny.

**Danny:** Everything's fine, eh?

**Petey Joe:** I just wish you'd stop playing that fucking game. You don't know when they'll call.

**Danny:** Can't this thing's like heroin. Worse. Sometimes I shut it down, don't even think, I pop it back up again. You played this? Hearts? It's like euchre but it's fuckin crazy cutthroat. No teams. Queen a spades is the bitch, she gives ye thirteen pints.

**Petey Joe:** Thirteen pints in euchre'd win the game. Some bitch.

**Danny:** Nah, in this game you don't want the pints. You stick someone else with em, it's all reversed. And is he going to shoot it now? I think he's done it. AH FUCK YOU MICHELLE!

**Petey Joe:** Who's Michelle, now?

**Danny:** They give em little names. Make ye think yer playin real people. And what's yer name? What's yer name? It's Bastardly Fuckface, that's what it is.

**Petey Joe:** Are you gonna hush the fuck up? What's yer time?

**Danny:** You just asked.

**Petey Joe:** I'm askin again.

**Danny:** Ah, suck it, Michelle! Suck it, ye silicon cunt.

**Petey Joe:** Will ye stop it? It's not even a person. If you're gonna get mad, will ye get mad at a fuckin person?

**Danny:** I never get mad at people. That's a waste.

**Petey Joe:** A waste.

**Danny:** If I played this with real people, I'd be tame as a kitten. The computer's not gonna hold it against me.

**Petey Joe:** Yer a pissin fool. It's just doin what the programmer told it to do. The computer doesn't care if it wins or loses. The computer doesn't care what you think. It's people who fuck you sideways knowin full well they're doin it.

**Danny:** Look there's enough hatred in the world as it is without OH FER GOD SAKES PAULINE THAT'S NOT YERS!

**Petey Joe:** Yer fuckin mentally retarded, Danny.

**Danny:** Look they built this computer, chess computer. It beats all the masters, it beats the best master in the world, the grand master. And now everybody's, oh, this proves it. Computers are as smart as human beings. No it doesn't. It proves that chess is a stupid fucking game. Of course the machine can calculate and emulate, cycle through all hell and possibility, but that's not thinkin. A bulldozer can knock down a stone wall an a man can't, but the thing doesn't know why. And a computer can play Hearts, but ye figure the program, and it's all over for it.

And I think it's Ben's turn. Oh, yes, Benny.

*A thud. Both look up instinctively, watching the door. After a long silence, Danny goes back to his game.*

**Petey Joe:** You never gave me the time.

**Danny:** Twenty two after. *(Pause.)* That's what makes me mad, not people. Fucking computerized mindlessness. A human being is a masterwork of God's artistry, Joe. When we start to hate the people and see computers as salvation, that's a sacrilege, that's a perversity. *(He continues to play. He starts to grin.)* Oh. Oh. OH. OH. *(He basks in his victory.)* Ireland one. Microsoft- *(He makes a zero with his hand.)* See? Ye know why ye lost the game? Because you're FUCKIN STUPID COMPUTER BITCHES.

*He sits back, content. He stares off for a few seconds before starting another game.*

**Petey Joe:** And ye just start playing again. Like a reflex. Mechanical.

*Danny shoots him a look, then returns to his game.*

**Petey Joe:** When I was eight I fell through the ice at McCullagh's pond. The thing froze up once in a blue moon, so my old da took me down to see it. Ma put him up to it, doubt he'd a done it himself. Kickin round the house for weeks with no work and his only activity is to pluck me up from behind the telly and drag me down to McCullagh's. Now the kids come from up the road and they're nasty bad. Two big ones take me to the ice. Me da's not watchin, he's lookin in the dirt and driftin. Well the ice crumples like cheap plastic and in I go up to me eyeballs in wet dark chill. It's funny no matter how much you swim you don't know how hard it is with three layers of coats and shoes and everythin. And I'm screamin bloody murder and me father still don't hear nothin, the archangel Gabriel from heaven and the blessed host in full revelation wouldn't stir that man any more. And these big boys, these were monsters a minute ago and now all they can do is gawp. They're frozen, like the storm came up suddenly and froze em in their spots. That's what the human beings of this world are like. They're bullies and they love to cause trouble, but when the hurricane hits they piss their shoes and pretend it's sunny weather. *(Pause.)* How could you think otherwise? I mean, if you don't hate anybody, what are you doing here?

**Danny:** Actually, I was just gonna ask you the same thing. What are you doin it for if you hate everybody.

*A loud chirping tone. Both men jump. Petey Joe withdraws a mobile phone from his pocket. He breathes deeply and flips it open.*

**Petey Joe:** Talk to me. *(Pause.)* All right, then.

*He snaps the mobile shut.*

**Danny:** What'd they say?

**Petey Joe:** "We do not negotiate with terrorists."

*Pause. Danny nods and pulls out a pistol. He exits through the door. He returns, dragging behind him a bound, gagged and bleeding MAN. The man struggles; Danny forces him to the ground. He puts the pistol to the man's head. Petey Joe never moves.*

*Blackout. Gunshot.*

