

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, **Love**reading will help you find new
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Montpelier Parade

Written by Karl Geary

Published by Harvill Secker

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to **Love**reading.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

KARL GEARY

**Montpelier
Parade**



Harvill Secker

LONDON

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Harvill Secker, an imprint of Vintage,
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1V 2SA

Harvill Secker is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com



Penguin
Random House
UK

Copyright © Karl Geary 2017

Karl Geary has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this
Work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

First published by Harvill Secker in 2017

penguin.co.uk/vintage

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781911215455

ISBN 9781911215462

Typeset in India by Thomson Digital Pvt Ltd, Noida, Delhi

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives PLC

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our
business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest
Stewardship Council® certified paper.



For Laura

1

‘The world’s a frightening place.’ Joe McCann scooped up a lump of minced beef with his fingertips and pushed it inside a small white plastic bag. ‘True as God,’ Joe says. ‘True as God.’

You stood beside Mrs Anderson, cleaning the glass meat counter using folded newspaper and water mixed with a couple of tablespoons of vinegar. At the side of Mrs Anderson’s head where the bandage stopped, you could see the bruising, black and blue.

‘That’s just over a pound’s worth, Mrs Anderson. Is that all right for you?’

He didn’t wait for an answer. He sealed the little bag with a string of red tape and set it on the counter like a white balloon.

Mrs Anderson’s hand trembled when she reached across the counter with some coins. It was an effort for her to pick up the bag of meat and rearrange her shopping bag to accommodate it.

‘I hope they find them,’ says Joe. ‘I know they will, I know they will,’ he says. ‘Get that door for Mrs Anderson, will you, Sonny?’

You tucked the wet newspaper into your armpit and ran and opened the shop door for her. The bell over the door made a thin sound as she left the shop and you felt the sodden paper through your shirt.

‘Listen, good luck to you now, good luck,’ says Joe.

Mick came from the back room and stood beside him. ‘Dreadful,’ says Mick as he slowly ran his hands out over his apron. You could never tell if he meant something or if he was winding you up. You just weren’t good at that sort of thing. He winked at you when he knew Joe wasn’t looking.

They stood in silence, Joe and Mick, side by side like bookends, suddenly still, as if their last thought was important, something they didn’t want to forget.

Joe was tall, fifty, or something like fifty. A face so mild that you couldn’t look at it for long without turning.

There was a new supermarket less than a mile away. Mick never said anything about it in front of Joe; how it was only the old people who didn’t drive that came to the butcher shop, how the shop stood between a post office and a Chinese takeaway like a jilted lover unable to account for its misfortunes.

When the glass counter was clean, you walked into the back room to get the brush to sweep up the stale sawdust. Mick was bored, you heard him come into the room behind you. He stood in front of the chipped mirror that was hung by a run of rusted wire, wrapped around a nail over the sink. He pulled his comb out like a cowboy with a six-shooter.

'You ever touch one, Sonny?' he says.

'What?'

His hair was brown and thin and greasy, the fine comb easily found its way through. 'Touch one, did you ever touch one?'

'Touch one what?'

'A fanny.'

'A what?'

'A gee . . . A growler?'

'A what?'

'Are you deaf?'

'No.'

'Well?'

'Yeah,' you say, 'course I have.'

'Where is it?'

'Where's what?'

'You don't know, do you? Show me, show me where you think it is.'

You felt your face flush.

'It's not where you think it is,' you say.

'Where? Where do I think it is?'

The skin across Mick's face was mottled; he'd been told not to scratch at it when he was young, but he had scratched.

'You don't know, you don't,' he says.

He put his comb into his back pocket and stood with his hip against the sink a moment, then pushed off it and pulled his apron aside.

'Here,' he says. 'It's lower than you think . . . It's . . . Do you know where your balls are?'

'Yeah.'

‘Do you?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Right, well, it’s between where your balls stop and your arse begins.’

Mick was bent over himself showing you when Joe came in and told him, ‘Knock it off, you.’

Mick winked. Says, ‘We’ll learn you, lad.’ He walked out front and you heard him say, ‘Mrs O’Brien, you get younger every time I see you.’

Joe looked at his watch and then at you. ‘Come on, you, shake a leg.’

‘That’s right, Miss O’Sullivan.’ ‘Will that do you now, Miss O’Shea?’ ‘Good enough, Miss McCormick.’ ‘That’s it now, as the fella says, that’s it now.’ And on it went, Mick and Joe, their voices came and went all day like a background radio.

You were paid ten pounds a week, one hour after school, except Wednesdays when you’d mince the sheep’s lungs for dog food and that took an extra hour. You’d worked there over a year and had saved two hundred and sixteen pounds.

The light had almost emptied from the sky, and in the shop glass you could sense your reflection under the fluorescent light, brush in hand. Beyond, the car lights streamed past.

It was near closing time when the bell chimed again and Mr Cosgrove, holding the amber smell of Higgins pub, nearly fell in the door. He was drunk and Joe was afraid of drunks. He left Mick to serve him.

Mr Cosgrove put his hand on the counter and fanned his fingers out to steady himself. It was only later when you

thought about his fingerprints, you had no recollection of cleaning them off the glass. But you must have. They were gone for sure.

Mr Cosgrove dipped his chin to his chest and seemed to be waiting to stop swaying, his smeared newspaper pressed into the side of his old man's overcoat.

'Is it something for your tea, Mr Cosgrove?' says Mick. He stood with his arms folded and his head cocked to the side.

'Mr Cosgrove! Something for your tea?' Mr Cosgrove raised his head and gathered Mick in his level stare.

'Something for my tea. Yes.'

'Well,' says Mick, 'I have some nice liver there. You can fry that up with some onions, lovely. Or, eh . . . I have some burgers, fresh made. Ya can buy two, eat them yourself and give the wife one when you get home.'

Mick glanced over to make sure you'd heard.

'Have you a heart?' says Mr Cosgrove.

'Jesus, I couldn't sell you the heart, Mr Cosgrove. The wife would never speak to me again.'

'I'd say I'd be hungry after it,' says Mr Cosgrove, but Mick didn't like that.

'Come on now,' says Mick. 'I'm closing up, stop wasting me time.'

'Fucking leave me starving, it would.'

'Do you want the liver?' says Mick, without looking at Mr Cosgrove.

'Go on.'

'Do you want the liver?'

'Didn't I just tell you I did?'

‘Look it, if you’re going to be thick about it you can go somewhere else.’

‘Give us fifty pence worth,’ says Mr Cosgrove.

‘Break the bleeding bank, why don’t you?’

Mick reached into the tray of livers. It was fully dark outside and the cars had their wipers on. Rain clung like ivy to the shop glass. Mick dropped a bag of livers on the counter tied with perfect red tape.

‘Give us fifty pence for that, Mr Cosgrove. And there’s an extra piece in there for you, all right? So you won’t be talking about me?’

You thought you heard Mr Cosgrove say something like ‘Good one,’ or ‘Good man yourself.’

Mr Cosgrove pulled a pile of coins from his pocket, spilling tobacco dust to the floor, and peered into his open hand, lost. Mick took a silver fifty pence.

‘Right-ho,’ he says without a hint of failure. He saluted Mick and noticed you. ‘All right, young sweepy boy.’ His milky eyes washed over you and he says, ‘You start out a sweepy boy, you’ll end up a sweepy boy . . . Unlucky.’ And he chuckled then.

He pushed himself off the counter and went to the door like he was walking the length of a small rowing boat. The copper bell rang, and Joe re-emerged from the back room.

You were closest to the door when the crash was heard. Time slowed, you’d heard how that happened, it really did, time slowed and you were given the accident in instalments. A car horn first and then, underneath, the sound of rubber dragged at great speed across tarmac. And then the

sound you'd imagine a wet heavy overcoat would make if you dropped it on a hard floor.

Mick, Joe and you all froze, like the characters in a cartoon, looked to the sound, to each other and back to the sound. You heard the wooden brush handle hit the floor and then you were out on the wide path, in the rain, the wind.

A small van had jumped the line and sat facing the wrong side of the traffic. You could hear the put-put-put of its diesel engine gently turning over. It was perfectly intact, save one lit headlight swinging helplessly by its wire. You couldn't find the driver's face, just his white knuckles on the steering wheel.

Mr Cosgrove's misshapen body lay across the wet tarmac. His plastic bag had been flung a few feet away from him; it was burst, empty. You couldn't help wondering where the livers might have been, when you felt a hand on your shoulder. You could feel the cold of the wet shirt pressed to your skin.

People were shouting. Joe was standing in the middle of the road, a hand raised to traffic. The driver from the van had emerged and was on his knees in front of it, his fist was pressed to his forehead, and with a splash on the road he was suddenly sick.

A small group fixed themselves to the path and compared what they knew from the telly, while round the corner came the flashing blue lights of a Garda car, as if it had been hiding back there, waiting for this moment. And all the while under Mr Cosgrove's head a blood pillow, rich and dark and thick, ebbed slowly from some unseen crack.

You found yourself standing over his body, bending your knees as you dipped closer. Rain collected in the pockets of Mr Cosgrove's half-closed eyes, his yellow teeth bared in a grimace, and you thought if you were to touch his skin, it would feel like chicken too long out of the fridge.

A packet of ten Sweet Afton poked from his shirt pocket, still sealed in plastic. 'Get out of that, the bloody hell you think you're doing?' Two Gardaí were coming towards you. You stood quickly, but not before your fingers surrounded the cigarettes and silently pulled them from the man's pocket.

Joe stood behind the Gardaí. He caught your eye and at once you knew he had seen you take the cigarettes. It was too late, you'd slipped them into your pocket. A Garda pulled you by the elbow to the path and when you tripped on the kerb, he caught you. 'Go on about your business,' he says.

You stood alone inside the shop. You'd heard the door chime shut, and it surprised you, everything in the shop unchanged. You were not sure what you thought would be different, but it seemed mean that it was the same.

You picked up the wooden brush from where it had fallen and swept the last of the sawdust towards a small pile you had made earlier. Then, using a metal shovel, scooped up the pile. You put the brush and shovel aside and began to lay fresh sawdust big fistfuls at a time, sprinkling it like seeds across the linoleum floor.

The bell chimed behind you, and you felt the quick rush of night air.

'Sure you just never know, as the fella says, you just never know,' says Joe, tapping his boots on the doormat that only he ever remembered.

‘That’s it,’ says Mick.

Their voices were low and mature and then silent. They shared a glance at you and then a knowing look to each other.

‘Right,’ says Joe. ‘That’s grand, lad, that’s grand, just leave it there and go on home.’

You still held a fistful of sawdust when you got to the back room. You threw it to the floor and took off your apron. Only then, after you had put on your coat, did you notice your hands were shaking. You felt the hard lines of the cigarette packet through the pockets of your jeans as you walked past Mick and Joe. The bell chimed, and you turned left out of the shop.