

OUTSKIRTS

Treatment by Niall Byrne © 2019

CILLIAN and JACK arrive at a block of council flats at night. They exit their car, stroll around, eyes scanning. They are looking to score some hash.

They are two 20-something professionals. Cillian is a shy, withdrawn subeditor for a newspaper, Jack is a brash, athletic, successful salesman and amateur rugby player from an upper-class background. They're an unlikely pair of friends but are actually very close - they met in college and have remained friends since.

One thing they have in common is sneering at the skangers who inhabit the flats – they believe the only thing these people are good for is buying drugs from.

They wander around until they find a local who is able to sort them out. He brings them down a dark tunnel, produces a lump of hash and takes their money. As the exchange is taking place, a voice shouts down the tunnel that the police are coming. They all scarper. Cillian and Jack hop over a ditch and leg it back to their car. When they get back they check the hash they've bought and discover they've been conned. The lumps were switched in the confusion – they've just bought a lump of turf.

There was no police – it was just a ploy.

Cillian reckons they should cut their losses. Jack, however, is furious. He doesn't like not getting his way, especially with people he considers to be his inferiors. He decides he's going back to find the guy and get his money back or some hash. Cillian can't believe he's serious, but when he sees Jack going off, he decides to tag along with him.

After searching the area they find the guy who ripped them off. Jack pounces on him. Cillian is reluctant to get involved. However, the drug dealer gets the better of Jack. Cillian sees his friend getting pummelled. He has no choice. He jumps in. He knocks the guy over, gets the better of him. Cillian, who was never in a fight in his life, gets a rush out of this. Jack joins in and they give the guy a kicking, his just desserts for trying to rip them off. They are spotted by some other locals and have to make a run for it.

As they run, Cillian grabs a satchel bag the drug dealer was carrying. They run back to their car and drive out of the area to safety, delighted with their success. Adrenaline is high for both of them – when pressed by Jack on how he's feeling, Cillian admits that it was a bit of a rush. Jack says it's natural to get that feeling when you dominate someone physically, when you vanquish your enemies. It's primal, he says. Natural. Darwinist.

They stop the car and examine the bag they've stolen. When they open it up, they get a shock – the bag is full of bags of heroin.

This changes everything. While Jack and Cillian enjoy a bit of weed, heroin is a different matter entirely. This is another level, a level they're not comfortable dealing with. Cillian suggests going back, finding the guy and returning his merchandise. Jack refuses.

A sister of his died in a car crash. A junkie was behind the wheel. He says they have to turn the heroin into the police, to take it off the streets. He calls it poison. He says they can't go back and return it anyway or else they'll be beaten up or worse. And if they're caught with it by police, they would be in serious trouble. He suggests they dump it somewhere, then make a phone call to tip off the police.

In the end Jack wins out, as he usually does. They dump it and ring the police. Jack says they did the right thing, that someone could have died from an overdose, got addicted and destroyed their lives from that junk.

They spend the next weekend in Cillian's house in the country. Jack's girlfriend CLARISSA and her friend MELANIE come too. Cillian has a new swagger about him since giving the skanger a kicking. He feels more assertive, more rugged, more masculine. He impresses Melanie and they make love. Later, Cillian and Jack talk. Cillian admits he got a rush from beating up the skanger. Jack tells him that's natural – it's what he feels when he gets in a fight on the rugby pitch. He says women respond to it subliminally.

Over the coming days Cillian's new confidence earns him some positive attention from his boss at work. Even the way he walks down the street seems different. He has a swagger about him, a seriousness of intent. He imagines people respect him more, are even scared of him.

A few days later, he's editing a news story in work. The story is about a young man from the council flats whose been found murdered – just another run of the mill gangland shooting. Except this time Cillian recognizes the face of the named victim, LAWRENCE PHELAN.

Cillian stares at the photo. The eyes in the grainy photograph seem to be staring directly at him. Lawrence Phelan's eyes. Eyes Cillian last saw looking up at him from the ground in the flats.

It's the drug dealer they beat up. The drug dealer they stole the bag of heroin from.

Cillian has a flashback to the night. Kicking Laurence Phelan on the ground, stealing his bag. He nearly gets physically sick at his desk and has to run to the toilets.

He knows why Phelan was murdered – the heroin wasn't his, it belonged to someone else. Somebody bigger. Somebody dangerous. Someone who decided Laurence Phelan had to pay for the loss with his life.

Cillian is overcome with nausea and dread. All of a sudden the world is a different place. All of a sudden he is a different person. The wind seems to whisper the word in his ear – “murderer”.

Cillian leaves work early, not able to concentrate, his mind a torrent.

The next day he arranges to meet Jack. He shows him the photograph in the newspaper. Jack doesn't make the connection immediately. Cillian spells it out for him. Jack's reaction is very different to Cillian's. Jack shrugs. He is totally blasé about it. Cillian is gobsmacked at Jack's nonchalance, but Jack says it's just a coincidence this guy got shot – happens all the time among drug dealers he says.

When Cillian protests it's obvious why he was killed, Jack says they don't have any responsibility for what happened – they can't be sure why he was shot. And if it was because of the bag of drugs he lost, then he deserved it – he played with fire and got burned.

Jack reasons that if the heroin had been seized by the police, the end result would be the same. Does that mean the police are guilty? Of course not, he reasons. Jack says they did what the police would have done, that they've done society a service, that they're the good guys. He says this Phelan guy chose the life he did and it's not their fault that it turned out badly. Cillian is shocked by Jack's blasé attitude, but Jack won't accept any responsibility. Jack urges Cillian to forget about it and leaves.

But Cillian can't heed Jack's advice. Guilt is gnawing at his soul. He can't think about anything else. He calls in sick the next few days.

He attends the funeral of Laurence Phelan. He sees Phelan's family - his inconsolable mother, his two anguished sisters. He joins the line of people shaking their hands, offering their condolences. When his turn comes, Laurence's mother stares at him and he feels dead inside. One of the sisters, SAMANTHA, stares at him with glazed eyes as he pathetically shakes her hand and recites the meaningless 'sorry for your trouble' mantra. Racked with guilt he lurches out of the church.

Cillian hatches a plan. Cillian goes to SEAN CUDDY, the newspaper's crime correspondent. Cuddy is the journalist who reported on Laurence Phelan's death, as he does all gangland crime. Cillian pretends to be idly curious and asks Cuddy about the murder. Cuddy tells him Laurence Phelan was almost certainly killed by JIMMY SPAIN, the area's gangland chief, a brutal mobster. Cuddy tells him no drugs move in the area without Spain's say-so.

Cillian reads up on Spain. He becomes obsessed with him. He starts to hang around Spain's legitimate business fronts – a bookies, a pub, a poolhall - observing him from a distance. He

tails Spain in his car, finding out where he lives, where he hangs out. He writes Spain's movements down in a detailed itinerary.

Cillian searches for Spain around the flats. He sees a new guy, barely out of his teens, selling where Lawrence used to. New blood. He watches him. He sees Spain come up to him in a car, give the new dealer instructions, then drive off.

He's walking back from the flats when a voice calls him. He turns around. It's SAMANTHA, Lawrence's sister. She recognizes him from the funeral, talks to him.

He is stunned, doesn't know what to say to her, but bluffs it that he was a friend of Lawrence's. He remembers Lawrence's Manchester United top and bluffs he knew him through football. Samantha mentions a team Lawrence used to play on, and he wings it and says that's how he knew Lawrence – he was his team-mate.

She invites him up to the flat, saying her mother wanted to give everyone who went to the funeral a mass card as a memento of Lawrence. Cillian doesn't want to go, makes an excuse. It would mean a lot to her mother, she says. He feels pity for her and relents when he sees how much it would mean to her. He plays the role of Lawrence's friend, indulging her. He follows her up to her flat.

When they go up to the flat, Cillian enters warily, crossing the threshold reluctantly. Samantha calls out for her mother. No reply. The mother and other sister are not there. Cillian takes in the small, cramped flat. He sees the family photos on the wall – Lawrence staring out at him from the frames. He awkwardly accepts a cup of tea and makes vague chit-chat with Samantha.

She brings him into a room to look for a mass card for him.

It's Lawrence's bedroom

Cillian sees his clothes, his posters. A childish bedroom of an overgrown teenager stuck at home. A chill runs down Cillian's spine. He is in the eye of the hurricane here.

Samantha roots through drawers looking for the mass card. She can't find it. She gets really upset, cursing her mother for moving them. She breaks down in tears.

He goes and comforts her, putting his arm around her, sitting beside her on the bed. She sobs in his arms. She pulls herself together, apologises. He says it's all right. He understands she's been through a tough time. He agrees to give her his number so she can send a mass card on to him. He makes his excuses and leaves, desperate to get out of the flat.

Outside he takes in deep lungfuls of air. He's able to breathe again, away from the claustrophobic walls of Lawrence's home, a home the dead man will never see again.

Clouds seem to amass over him. He's had a taste of Laurence's world – a taste of what he's helped destroy.

He goes home, drinks to forget, to numb himself, to stop the thoughts running through his mind, the mental reel of him kicking Lawrence on the ground, of picking up the bag and running....

That night he gets a phone call. He sees it's Samantha. He doesn't answer. He can't be reminded of it anymore. He can't lie to her face. He lets it ring out.

Instead he rings Jack. He tells Jack they have to do something. He needs to clear his conscience. He needs to get justice for Lawrence.

Jack tells him he's crazy, to forget about it.

Cillian tells him they won't get any peace until they do something. Jack tells him his conscience is fine, and to cop on to himself before hanging up.

Melanie tries to contact Cillian as well, but he doesn't return her calls. She stops calling, leaving a voice message on his phone. He is too numb, too absorbed in his thoughts, to notice.

In work, he makes a serious error, letting something libellous almost slip through to the front page. He is reprimanded, but he replies disproportionately, quitting on the spot. His boss tries to get him to stay, but he departs the office for the last time. He's obsessed now with his plan only, and thinks of nothing else, soothing his mind with increasing bouts of heavy drinking.

He goes back to the flats, observing the new dealer in Lawrence's place, observing the comings and goings of Spain and his cronies. He follows Spain's car in his own one. He sees Spain turn into a gated estate. He watches through the gates. Now he knows where Spain lives, but it's heavily guarded, with cameras all over it. No way in.

One day after observing the dealers around the flats he is walking back to his car when he sees Samantha walking down the street. He pulls up his hood and puts his head down, not wanting to be recognized. As he passes her he sees she has a black eye.

He stops, calls after her. She turns, sees him.

He brings her to his flat and they chat. She says she confronted Spain about Lawrence's death. Spain hit her.

Cillian apologises for not answering her call, but he comes clean that he didn't really know her brother and didn't want to lie to her. He was a 'customer' only. He's not even sure why he attended the funeral.

She says it's okay. She says she felt so lonely after his death she needed someone to talk to. Someone new. She says she and Lawrence didn't get on. She was embarrassed of him and his lifestyle. Now she feels guilty that he is gone before they could ever establish a rapport, ever really get to know each other. That's why she was so eager to talk to someone who knew Lawrence, as if she might get a new perspective on him, get to know what he was really like. She says when you mourn for someone you don't really know, never really got a chance to get to know, you don't really know how to mourn. She just feels numb at the moment.

The doorbell rings. Cillian answers. It's Jack. He walks in and sees Samantha. Cillian introduces Samantha, not explaining who she is. Jack is shocked just by the look of her. She looks straight out of the flats with her tracksuit on, hoop ear-ring and a black eye. He tries to hide his surprise to see someone like that in Cillian's flat. After introductions, Samantha says she'd better go and leave them to it.

After she leaves, Jack asks Cillian who the hell that was. Cillian tells him it was Lawrence's sister. Jack goes crazy, berating him for getting involved in something that isn't his business. He urges Cillian again to leave well enough alone.

Jack asks Cillian if he's told her about their involvement with Lawrence. Cillian says no, she doesn't know anything. Jack says good, to keep it that way. This isn't their world, they've no need to get involved.

Cillian says it's too late. They're already involved, whether they like it or not.

Cillian tells Jack about his plan, the plan he wants Jack to help him. He says they have to do something to get justice for Laurence Phelan. The police won't do it, they don't have enough evidence, but he thinks that he and Jack can get justice. That way they can earn redemption for their part in Phelan's death.

He shows him pictures he's taken of Spain, of his haunts, of his house. He tells Jack this is the guy responsible for Lawrence's death. He elaborates on his plan. They're going to kidnap Jimmy Spain. They're going to force Spain to confess to Lawrence's murder and then turn him in to the police.

Jack tells him he's heard Cillian is acting weird, ignoring Melanie and quitting his job, but now he knows he's gone totally crazy. He tells Cillian to knock this idea out of his head.

Cillian explains he needs to hear Spain confess to the murder. He needs Spain to admit that he's the one responsible – not him, not Jack. He wants to put a face to his guilt, to his dread. If justice is done, if Spain accepts responsibility, it'll be a weight lifted off of his shoulder.

Jack tells him he's nothing to feel guilty about, to forget about this crazy plan. He says the plan is too dangerous anyway. He wants no part of it and leaves. He advises Cillian to drop it and return to the normal world. He notes the empty whiskey bottle in the bin and says Cillian better pull himself out of his downward spiral soon.

Jack goes home and returns to his normal routine. But things aren't as they were. Lawrence's death is eating away at Jack too. He has nightmares. He's having rows with Clarissa over nothing. In his sales job he's losing customers. He's not as unaffected as he lets on.

Things come to a head for him in a rugby game when he gets sent off for lashing out at an opponent. Thoughts of beating up Lawrence flood his mind. His mood becomes increasingly volatile. Guilt is gnawing away at Jack too, contaminating him.

Cillian carries on tailing Spain, jotting down the gangster's itinerary in detail, looking for a vulnerability. One day he is tailing Spain and an associate when their car turns down a street.

Cillian turns down after them. He realises the street is a cul de sac and their car is nowhere to be seen. He drives up to a roundabout at the top of the cul de sac to turn around. Spain pulls out from a side lane and parks behind Cillian, blocking his retreat from the street. Cillian is trapped.

Spain and his associate pull Cillian from the car and beat him up. Spain wants to know why Cillian is following them. His associate checks Cillian's wallet and sees a National Union of Journalists card. Spain guesses Cillian is a journalist looking for a story. He gives him a few more thumps and tells him to stop following him or he'll get worse if he does. They leave Cillian lying crumpled on the road.

Cillian gets stitched up at the hospital and returns home. Samantha visits. He lies to her about what happened, telling her he got mugged by a group of thugs. She's upset and nurses him. Unexpectedly she kisses him. He kisses her back. They fall into bed and make love.

As they lie in each other's arm, she reveals she's thought about getting revenge for Lawrence. She knows Spain was behind it. She reveals she knows he visits his ex-wife's grave once a month by himself. She fantasized about waiting for him with a knife, killing him there and then. But she doesn't have the guts. She can't bring herself to. She wonders what good it would do anyway. Cillian listens, not saying anything. This is the nugget he needs, Spain's vulnerable point. A way to execute his plan.

The next day, he brings her to his parent's house in the country. They walk around. She's never been in the country, she says. He can't believe it. She says she's driven past it, looked at it. But never set foot in a field, in a meadow. She's never spent any time away from the city, away from the noise, the hubbub. This is an alien world for her. But she likes it. Their relationship grows. For a while Cillian forgets his worries, forgets his plan. They're simply happy in the countryside for a few days.

A few days later, back in the city, Jack comes to visit Cillian. This time Jack's attitude is very different. Jack makes a confession to Cillian – he can't think about anything else but Laurence Phelan. Everything in his life has gone downhill since he's found out about the murder. He thinks they've both been cursed for what they did. He tells Cillian he will agree to his plan. They will kidnap Spain and try and force him to confess to the murder and to turn himself in.

But Jack has one condition. If Spain refuses to turn himself in, Jack and Cillian have no other option - they have to kill him.

Cillian waivers. He doesn't want to kill anyone, but he suggests that if Spain doesn't hand himself over, they will blind him. Jack agrees. This is how they will get justice for Laurence. It's the only way to clear their own conscience.

They kidnap Spain when he's visiting the grave of his ex-wife. They knock him out in the graveyard and bundle his body into Cillian's car. They bring him to Cillian's country home. It's a quiet, isolated spot where they won't be bothered.

In Cillian's, they tie Spain to a chair and set about the task of trying to force him to confess to Lawrence's murder. They wear balaclavas so he can't recognise them. They use a Dictaphone to record his confession.

But there's no confession forthcoming. Spain is a tough nut to crack. He denies any involvement, challenging them to prove it.

Over the coming days Cillian and Jack put all they've learned from the internet to use – waterboarding, sleep deprivation, extremes of temperature, extreme volumes.

But it's no use. Spain won't budge. He sneers at their attempts.

When they strip him they see several scars in his torso where he was shot. Spain says he was the victim of an assassination attempt. But he lived through that and saw his enemies perish. And he'll live through amateurs like Cillian and Jack as well, he says, sneering at them.

He directs them to the rings on his fingers. He said when the doctors took the bullets out of him, he got them melted into the rings he's wearing.

Cillian and Jack are worried. They're out of their depth and Spain shows no sign of cracking.

Jack speculates maybe Spain didn't kill Lawrence, that they've made a mistake, that they should let him go. Cillian won't hear it. He knows Spain did it. He has to hear Spain say he was the one responsible – that's the only way his own sense of responsibility will be leavened. Cillian is willing to do anything to get a confession.

He has an idea. He scores some LSD. They feed it to Spain, hoping the sensory overload will make the torture more effective.

It works. Tripping out of his mind, Spain hallucinates he's in hell being tortured by demons. We see a vivid flashback of the assassination attempt on him. He is shot in his car. In the car beside him is his wife. She died in the attack, caught in the crossfire meant for him. He hallucinates she is being tormented in hell, that she turns to him and blames him for her death.

He breaks down into a gibbering wreck. He confesses to murdering Laurence Phelan.

Cillian and Jack stop the torture. They've gotten their confession on tape. They go outside and discuss what to do.

They've achieved their first step of making him confess. However, they know it won't be permissible in court. Their next step is convincing him to turn himself in. If he doesn't, they'll have to exact justice themselves – they'll have to carry through with their plan and blind him so he can't recognise them or come after them.

As they are discussing their options, they argue about whose fault it is that they're in this mess.

Jack blames Cillian for taking the bag in the first place. Cillian blames Jack for starting the fight, for handing the bag over to the police. Things get heated. Push comes to shove and they get in a tussle. Soon they are throwing punches and wrestling on the ground – a full-on fight.

It gets vicious. They start knocking seven lumps of shit out of each other. It's masochistic. It goes on for ages – like they're using each other's bodies to punish themselves. The fight has a weird, ritualistic, confessional, cathartic nature to it. As it goes on they're both exhausted, bruised, bleeding. They both look like Lawrence did as it goes on.

Meanwhile, Spain comes to his senses slightly. He manages to free his bonds and escape the room he's in. He's disoriented from the drugs still but he finds an envelope with the address of the house on it. He locates a phone and rings his friend. He gives him the address, tells them to come and get him. A group of four of his henchmen pile into a car and drive to the address.

At the same time, Samantha arrives at the house. Cillian hasn't been answering her calls. She's called to his flat but got no response. On a whim, she's driven to his house.

When she arrives, she sees Spain wandering outside disoriented outside. She recognizes him and screams. He sees her, goes to her and grabs her.

Cillian and Jack hear her screams. They stop their fight and go running out the front of the house. They restrain Spain again.

Samantha is in hysterics. She wants to know what is going on.

Cillian brings her into a room to talk privately. He comes clean. About Lawrence. About the fight. About the drugs. About everything.

Samantha can't believe it. She calls him a liar. She beats against his chest, bawling crying. He doesn't put up a fight. He deserves it, he says.

He tells her now is her chance for revenge. Spain is in there. If she wants, she can go in with a knife and finish him.

Samantha takes the knife, goes into the room where Spain is tied to the chair. He looks up at her groggily, tells her he killed her stupid brother. Just another piece of rotten meat to him.

She puts the knife to his throat.

But she can't go through with it. She drops it, runs out of the room. He laughs.

Jack goes to Cillian. He tells Cillian what Cillian already knows. He tells him blinding isn't enough now. He's recognized Samantha. They have to kill him. Jack hands Cillian the blade.

Just then, four of Spain's henchmen arrive in a car. They're armed and looking for blood.

They are spotted approaching the house. Cillian has an old shotgun. He fires a warning shot, but they're armed too and fire back. They surround the house. It's a siege.

They bide their time, then swarm in.

Cillian lets fire, killing one. Jack and Samantha lay in wait for the others with knives, sticking two guys coming in through a door and window.

It's a bloodbath.

The last guy gets in and frees Spain. They escape, getting in the car and driving down the country road.

Jack jumps in Cillian's car and chases after them. Cillian and Samantha get in Samantha's car and follow him.

Jack tries to run Spain off the road. As he pulls up beside him, another car comes around a bend. The other car swings to avoid them and careens over the side of a hill. Jack's and Spain's car crash and careen over a side.

Jack gets out of his crashed car, dazed. He looks at the car that swerved to avoid them. He recognizes the car. His face goes ashen. He goes to the car, sees Clarissa lying half out of it. He runs to her.

She's dead. She must have been looking for him, decided to drive to Cillian's when she couldn't reach him.

He looks to Spain's car. He sees Spain crawling out of it. The henchman is dead. Jack picks up a shard of broken window-glass, goes over to Spain. He comes up behind him, grabbing him by the hair as he crawls, pulling his head up, exposing his neck. He plunges the shard into Spain's throat. Spain bleeds out.

Cillian and Samantha arrive on the scene. They see Clarissa lying dead.

They then see Jack hunched over Spain's dead body. They go to him. Jack has something in his hand. A handgun he's taken from the dead henchman. He turns to them, smiles before putting the gun to his head. Cillian shouts no, runs to him.

The gunshot rings out through the night and Jack's lifeless body falls to the ground.

Cillian surveys the scene. The bloody aftermath of a stupid mistake.

Samantha puts her hand on his shoulder. He looks at her. She's with him. It's over now, she says. They turn away from the scene.

-ENDS-