

# **Betrayed**

by

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# Betrayed

A one-act play

There are two scenes with no changes in the set.

The setting: London 1916 with action moving back and forth between the 1890s and the 1916

## The Players

George Washington Williams

King Leopold

The 3-person Chorus\* speaking as either

All

#1

#2

#3

Edmund Morel

Sir Alfred

Roger Casement

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\* The chorus play a variety of roles in various simple costumes. The three-person Chorus most often speaks in a uniform voice using different accents as the scenes demand; sometimes only one or two choristers speak. The choristers are like nasty demons that fly at you and nip at you.

## Maurice

*All players are on the stage from the beginning; they sit or stand at a distance from one another on three different levels. The stage is bare; the only props are a stool on the lowest level center, a low table next to it on which are papers and writing materials, and a thick rope that hangs from the ceiling just to the right of the low table.*

*Casement is seated on the stool. Throughout the play Casement never moves more than three steps in any direction from his stool; it is as if there is an invisible wall around him. He is in dim light creating a prison type atmosphere; only when he is directly involved in the action does a brighter light shine on him. The starting positions of the other players are as follows: On the third level: left, Morel, center, the Chorus, right, King Leopold; second level; left, Maurice, center, Sir Alfred, right, George Washington Williams.*

*As the play opens all is in darkness except for Casement sitting on his stool and reading in the dim light. A bright light comes up on George Washington Williams, a black man. He is ailing, supporting himself with a cane; periodically his speech is halted with hacking coughs. He is frail physically but strong in spirit; he uses his cane sometimes for support and sometimes as a menacing weapon. Williams speaks to the audience; he is an impassioned orator; he is periodically interrupted by the Chorus. Casement is unaware of Williams; he reads, pausing from time to time to consider what he is reading or to idly tap the rope.*

## Williams

So this is how dreams must end. No rainbow, no promised land. Gold turns to ashes, the rose transmogrifies into the stink of blood and corruption. *(beat)* Ah, but what a dream it was. The promised land, where this time the promise would not be broken. To transform the very lives of my black brethren. From oppression to freedom. From despair to hope. From cruelty to mercy and justice. There would be no lynchings in this promised land! *(beat, reflective)* All my life I have been in search of such a mission. *(proud)* I was a soldier, a colonel in the Union Army, wounded, fighting to free my brethren from slavery. I was a minister, a founder of a newspaper, a *(muffled, could be mistaken for Harvard)* Howard graduate. I have consulted with the President himself. I have written the first and greatest history of my people. Yes I did, you can look that up. I traveled from city to city, searching, searching for myself, for my mission. I have succeeded in all that I laid my hand to, yet success has brought my soul no comfort. It

could not replace the emptiness in my heart. *(pause)* And then I found it. The meaning of my life. I found it in that great man.

*(pointing his cane toward Leopold who comes to life relishing the image of "great man.")*

A king. No, no, I kid you not. A king. A *real* King. He too was in search of *his* mission. He had a dream...and a great fortune to nourish it. Or so I thought. A fortune and a dream. A Christian dream. To bring civilization, Christian civilization to the heart of Africa. *(pause)* It drew me like the most powerful of magnets. I knew where I must go. *(pause)* I suppose I should have been suspicious.

*(Leopold shakes his head, dismissing the thought.)*

No sooner had I made known my plans to visit this promised land, no end of obstacles was placed in my way.

*(Leopold shrugs indicating the reasonableness of the following considerations.)*

The climate is unhealthy, transportation is still primitive. The food is not fit for white men. *White men?* Delay. Wait, wait. Five years. In five years all will be ready for you. Suitable facilities. The railroads will be built. The King himself pleaded with me. Wait. *(pause)* But I could not wait. I made my way to the promised land.

*(Leopold throws up his hands.)*

*(depressed)* There was no promise in the promised land. Only ugliness, savagery. Slavery, by God!

*(The light comes up on the Chorus; they speak to an audience offstage.)*

All Chorus

*(carrying business briefcases, angry, pounding their fists in the air)*

The man is right.

We join his fight.

The king is greedy

While we're so needy.

*(slowly and with contempt)*

Where is the free state

where all nations would meet

and freely compete?

Williams

*(angry, brandishing his cane to drive out the sound)* I am not talking about *business*, you fools. I am talking about a human catastrophe.

Chorus #1

*(briefcases gone, now peering through records, chorister #1 speaks.)* Colonel? I find no record of a *colonel* George Washington Williams in the Union Army. *Hmmmm?*

Williams

*(shaking them off, then to Leopold)* Where are the schools? The hospitals? *(disgust)* These filthy sheds, these breeding grounds of disease. Is *this* the civilization you promised?

Chorus #2

*(speaking in a sweet southern accent, while the other choristers pore through records, shaking their heads.)* Did you say *Harvard* University? More like *Howard*, I suspect. We find no record of you at *Harvard* University.

Williams

*(shrugging them off, then back to the audience)* For every accusation I make, there are witnesses. Witnesses to unspeakable atrocities.

Chorus #3

This woman who is to be your wife. Does she know you already have a wife...and a grown son?

Williams

African women are being kidnapped and used by the whites for their pleasure...Chain gangs. Chains tight around their necks. Like dogs....And Stanley! The *hero*. Hah! He is far from the hero he makes himself out to be. More like a beast. An angry, uncontrollable vicious beast. The civilization he brings is one of blasphemy and brutality...Beatings. Trickery. Stealing people's lands. Burning their houses. *(pause)* Is it possible that mine are the only eyes capable of seeing this? Whites come and go, yet no one sees that which is right before their eyes. Missionaries. *(disgust)* Uh.

All Chorus

*(pious poses, wearing ministers' caps, in holy tones)*

Ours is not to question the state.

Ours is a higher calling.

Williams

*(to the chorus)* Damn you and your piety! *(back to audience)* Myself, I saw a villager shot. For sport. Two officers, sitting on the deck of a steamer. Making a bet. Shot him right through the head. Never gave a thought that this was a human being. *(beaten)* There is no justice. Their homes, their lands, their lives are simply stolen from them.

Chorus #1

*(pompous, talking to the other choristers)* It's always this way with great enterprises. Small people *(gesturing to Williams)* hearts bleeding over some alleged injustice in far away lands. *(shaking their heads at the unfairness of it all)*

Williams

What is it that others see as they look upon these atrocities? When I see brutality, what is it that *they* see? When I see slavery, what is it that *they* see? When I see beatings and lies and theft and cold-blooded murder, what is it that *they* see? *(Coughing spasm comes on.)* What *do* they see?

*(The light fades on him as he staggers off coughing fitfully, making his way to the third level right where he sits and observes.)*

*(As he moves off, the light comes up on the Chorus, arm in arm as in a chorus line, swinging their feet out rhythmically as they chant in immediate response to "What do they see?" A dim light comes up on Morel who sits intently poring over a large ledger.)*

Chorus All

I see glory  
I see niggers  
I see souls to save.  
I see ivory, lots of ivory  
rubber, rubber, tons of rubber  
I see money, lots of money  
tons and tons and tons of money

*(stopping, turning, and dramatically point to Morel)*

And what do *you* see, Morel?

*(Morel, unaware of them, continues to pore over his ledger.)*  
*(back to the dance)*

I see glory  
I see niggers  
I see souls to save.

I see ivory, lots of ivory  
 rubber, rubber, tons of rubber  
 I see money, lots of money  
 tons and tons and tons of money.

*(Chorister #2 goes over to Morel and gives him a shove, then returns to the others.)*

*(all pointing)* And what do you see, Morel?

*(Morel stands and carrying his ledger he walks toward Sir Alfred, his superior, who is on the level below him. Sir Alfred jockeys for position, moving Morel down a level and himself up a level. Sir Alfred is very stiff, very proper.)  
 (Casement turns on his stool and watches the following interaction intently)*

*(There is a dance as Sir Alfred tries to avoid Morel, but Morel blocks his path.)*

Sir Alfred

Not again, Morel. Please not again. I'm sure...

Morel

No, sir, *I'm* sure.

Sir Alfred

That's your problem, Morel. You are *always* sure.

Morel

Slavery, sir. Can I put it any more bluntly?

Sir Alfred

*(looking around to see if others heard the ugly word)* Don 't you dare use that word.

Morel

if you would just look at these ledgers. There is no other explanation.

Sir Alfred

Morel, we are dealing with gentlemen. We are talking about transactions with a *king's* domain.

Morel

This is beyond business, sir. It's...

Sir Alfred

It *is* business, I assure you.

Morel

I insist that you look at these books.

Sir Alfred

*(brushing away the ledger)* And I insist that you stop this nonsense. We are involved in trade. That is our business. And that's what's going on here. And I'd advise you to get back to it.

Morel

Just look. It is all there.

All Chorus

Don't look  
Don't look  
You'll be sorry if you look.  
Remember this: Seeing is deceiving.

Williams

*(angry)* How easily we turn our eyes from the truth.

*(Sir Alfred starts to leave.)*

Morel

*(Shouts)* Sir Alfred! *(Sir Alfred stops)*

If you don't take care of this I will.

Sir Alfred

Are you threatening me, Morel?

*(They stand for a moment glaring at one another.)*

Morel

There is no trade going on here.

Sir Alfred

Of course there is.

Morel

I beg to differ. They send huge supplies of ivory and rubber...

Sir Alfred

(rubbing hands together) A sweetheart of a product.

Morel

It's what we send *back* to the Congo that troubles me. And what we *don't* send back. (pause) We don't seem to be *paying* for this.

Sir Alfred

Of course we are.

Morel

Nothing, sir. Nothing. (pause) Let me tell you what we *are* shipping. And shipping in great quantities. Guns, sir. And ammunitions, sir. Guns and ammunition, in return for ivory and rubber.

Sir Alfred

Well, of course, they'll need guns and ammunitions. They are dealing with savages, after all. Don't be naïve.

All Chorus

(doing a little "native" dance)

Booga booga booga

Booga booga boo

Booga booga booga

Booga booga (shout) BOO!

Williams

(to Chorus) Booga yourselves, you fools.

*(Sir Alfred walks across the stage to Leopold; again there is a brief dance over level. The two meet on the same level, but Leopold maneuvers Sir Alfred down. We do not hear their conversation that continues throughout the following; Leopold does most of the talking with Sir Alfred nodding obsequiously.)*

*(A brighter light comes up on Casement; he rises, starts to walk toward Morel, but is able to take only three steps, reaches toward him.)*

Morel

(warmly, reaching out) So good to see you, my friend. (pause, taking in Casement's condition) But this...

Casement

*(waving it off)* It can't be helped. *(pause)* So Sir Alfred took care of it.

*(Sir Alfred pays close attention to this conversation.)*

Morel

You know better.

Casement

*(irony)* The man has his priorities.

Morel

Damn! There is right and wrong after all.

Casement

*(playing with Morel)* Of course, and you've always been quite clear about that..

Morel

Am I wrong?

Casement: Time will tell.

Morel

*(Not sure as to how to take this conversation.)* Well. *(pause)* Do you know that, after considerable prodding on my part, Sir Alfred actually *did* take my case to Leopold? Oh yes, about the guns. And the good King assured Sir Alfred that all was in good order. The natives needed to be subdued. For the short haul. But, at the end of the day, this would all be in their best interest.

All Chorus

*(loud) Boom! (They all fall down dead.) (One sticks his head up.)* Get it. It's the end of the day.

*(Williams raps his cane.)*

Casement

And Sir Alfred bought that?

Morel

*(disgust)* Business. Nothing so trivial as slavery was to stand in the man's way. *(pause)* Damn! Damn! Where was the man's Christianity?

Casement

In his wallet I suspect.

Morel  
How can you treat this so lightly?

*(Casement shrugs)*

*(Sir Alfred rises and moves as if to intervene;  
Leopold pulls him down.)*

Oh, and one other thing. The good king advised Sir Alfred to caution this young clerk to learn some discretion.

Casement  
I'm sure you took kindly to that fatherly advice.

Morel  
Less so than when Sir Alfred offered me a promising career move.

Casement  
Ah, let me guess. Move on from the Congo desk. With a nice pay raise to smooth your way.

Morel  
Exactly. And when I refused *that* growth opportunity, the bribes became more blatant.

Sir Alfred  
*(rises, makes to move downstage.)* Slanderous, simply slanderous. *(Leopold pulls him back to his seat.)*

Casement  
Which you parry with a lecture on Christian conscience, I imagine.

Morel  
*(blushes)* Some of that. And then I took to the pen.

Casement  
And what a pen it was.

Sir Alfred  
*(looking over at Morel, sorrowful)* A beautiful business. And what a mess he made of it.

Leopold  
*(patting Sir Alfred on the head)* And that wasn't the worst of it.

*(Williams rises and shakes his cane menacingly at both of them.)*

*(The light dims on Morel; in what follows, he is manic, busy at his typewriter cranking out sheet after sheet..)*

*(On the screen behind are flashed lurid headlines and photos – men in chains, severed limbs, SHOCKING NEWS, SLAVERY IN THE CONGO, HORROR TALES FROM THE HEART OF DARKNESS.)*

#### Casement

*(turning to Morel)* Well, as you can see, there was no stopping him. On fire, he was. Quit his job just like that. Picked up the pen and never put it down. Articles, books, *(Morel tosses him a copy of his book.)* speeches. One didn't sit calmly through one of Morel's shows. Photos. Chain gangs, mutilations. There was no sparing your tender feelings. Even got Her Majesty to sit up and take notice. Which brought me into the picture.

#### Queen

*(voice only)* Get down there, Casement, and give us a good old British report. Facts, man, facts.

#### Casement

*(looking up to the Queen and bowing gently)* Yes, Your Majesty.

*(There is a liberating change in Casement, the gay man coming out.)* Well, this was just dandy with me. Africa!. Good to nip off from civilization now and then; loosen up some. *(giving a wink to the audience)* Things a man can be in Africa that don't go down quite so well in our more polite society

*(A light comes up on Maurice; he is a handsome muscular black man.)*

*(Casement stretches out both arms longingly, tries to move toward Maurice, but can only take two steps.)*

*(lovingly)* Maurice.

#### Chorus all:

*(shaking their fingers)*  
Naughty boys,  
naughty boys  
Watch yourselves, naughty boys.

Williams

*(to the Chorus)* Love – *in whatever form* – would do *your* rotten souls considerable good.

*(The chorus gives him the finger.)*

Maurice

*(to Casement)* Your passion overwhelms you. Beware, Casement, it could destroy you. *(pause)* I hear stories. I am not the only fruit you pluck from the tree. If I hear stories so do others.

Casement

*(brushing it off)* And how are you, my love?

Maurice

I am most blessed as you can see. *(holding out both hands)* I have both my hands; that alone is a great blessing.

Casement

I have done all that I could to protect you.

Maurice

As you see I am well protected. The demands on me are few. No ivory to collect. No quota of rubber to fill. My wife already raped and murdered, so there is nothing to concern myself at that end. Life is easy. My only requirement is to kiss the white man's arse whenever he deigns to display it. *(pause)* and to suck his cock when it pleases him too.

Casement

Are you angry with me?

Maurice

How can I be angry with *you?* *(sarcastic)* You are our savior. Roger Casement has been sent by her holiness the Queen to tell the world the truth and to deliver us poor Blacks from evil.

Casement

It's her *highness* the Queen. His Holiness is the Pope.

Maurice

*(ignoring him)* And when Mr. Casement tells the world the truth, all Black men will enter into paradise. *(pause)* A good *Christian* paradise to be sure.

Casement

You make it sound ugly. *(throwing up his hands)* I don't want to talk about it.

I *do* want to talk about it. Maurice

(*defeated*) Talk if you must. Casement

You'd prefer a change of subject. Our sex life perhaps. Maurice

A more interesting topic. Casement

And about your preferences? Maurice

They don't please you. Casement

They puzzle me. Your preference for the subordinate position. Is that a personal statement...or a political one? Maurice

You just can't stop, can you? Casement

Just a curiosity. Is this a courtesy to me, an apology for your otherwise dominant position? Maurice

Go on like this and I'm leaving. Casement

That in my bed at least you can give the African his rightful place. Very noble, very liberal of you. Maurice

(*angry*) Must everything be political? Casement

(*equally angry*) In Africa everything *is* political. Maurice

(*defeated*) I come to you for peace Casement

Maurice

Lust.

Casement

So let it be: lust and peace. An hour or two. Free of ugliness, hate, atrocities. Just peace...and lust.

Maurice

I am sorry my friend. Only the blind and the evil can find peace in the Congo.

Casement

Am I the enemy?

Maurice

No...yes...no...well let me think. You are... and you are not. In your eyes, I'm sure you are very different from the others. You cut off no hands, you rape not, pillage not, murder not. And yet you are still one of *them*. A benign variation to be sure, but, still, one of *them*.

Casement

(*annoyed*) If this is to be political then let us talk political. Is it also not possible that you use *us* as an excuse for the failings of your own civilization?

Maurice

Ah, so now we hear it. The voice of the savior.

Casement

Is there *not* some saving to be done here?

Maurice

Thank you, master. Thank you.

Casement

Must we go on this way? We are not White man, Black man. We are Maurice and Roger. Two friends, two lovers...sometimes.

Maurice

White and Black. Free and slave.

Casement

Oh for God's sake.

Maurice

Yet another bonus from the White man.

Casement

God?

Maurice

Your God. The good Mr. Christ. Prince of peace. Love one another. The meek shall inherit the Congo. If you will only turn the cheek again...and again...and again.

Casement

What do you want?

Maurice

Look to your heart, Roger Casement. As different as we are, what I want is what you want. I am Congolese, you are Irish. The white man promises me civilization, what does the Englishman promise you? Glory? A partnership in empire? The opportunity to fight and die in *their* wars? What are you without the English? A brawling, vengeful, drinking, superstitious lot. The English, they bring order to your lives. They have civilized you. So be grateful for all their gifts, just as I must be grateful for all of yours.

*(pause)*

Are you grateful, Roger Casement? Are you grateful to your English lords for all their wonderful gifts? Think about it.

Chorus all

Casement,  
Do yourself a favor.  
*(emphasis)* Do not think about it.

Williams

*(to chorus)* Is there anything to fear when one seeks the truth?

Chorus

Damn right there is. You'll see.

*(Williams shrugs them off; they give him the finger.)*

*(Maurice fades.)*

*(Casement returns to his stool and addresses the audience.)*

Casement

I wrote my report. It was calm, very British, straightforward, facts. *(pause)* But the facts were grotesque.

*(A bright light comes up on Leopold.)*

*(to Leopold)* And you had an answer for everything.

*(Sir Alfred pats Leopold on the knee; Leopold pulls back revulsed.)*

Leopold

*(brushing off Sir Alfred, to the audience)* See if you can grasp the, uh, organizational complexities I was faced with. Tapping vines for rubber is not what a gentleman would consider a vocation of choice. This is difficult work. Slice the vine, extract the latex, climb higher, slice again, and up and up and up you go. So now, why would anyone engage in such difficult work? For money? Of course. But there, precisely, was my dilemma. For money is power. With money, one can purchase - well, just about anything! Undesirable things - *guns*, for example. So that wouldn't do. Other motivational means needed to be employed.

Sir Alfred

Just as I said. It's *business*.

Casement

*(to the audience)* So here's how you handle that *motivational problem*. You send your soldiers into a settlement. You steal all the animals. You destroy everything of value. You burn all the buildings. You imprison all the women and children. You hold them for ransom. So much rubber, you get your people back.

Leopold

Paint it as you wish. One sees it as a straight business deal. A negotiation. This for that.

Chorus #1

I took that course in Business School. GETTING TO YES! Very enlightening.

*(Sir Alfred nods vigorously.)*

Casement

Of course, you find that, while you were gone, your women have been raped. Some have died of starvation or disease.

Leopold

A failure at the middle management level.

Chorus all

Oh those middle managers;  
they are *always* the problem.

Sir Alfred

*(looking to Morel)* I knew *that* problem only too well.

Casement

And then there was the matter of bullets.

Leopold

Oh, here we go. Again with the bullets. Bullets and severed limbs. Lurid tales to increase the circulation of your London newspapers.

Casement

*(to Morel)* Your records tell the story. This Leopold was not one to waste money.

Leopold

*(angry)* I knew *nothing* about this.

Casement

Bullets were to be used sparingly. One bullet for every resister.

Leopold

And we had plenty of those. This was not one of your polite cricket matches!

Casement

Bullets were for killing people. No wasting bullets on target practice or hunting for game.

Leopold

This is ludicrous. You're dealing with savages, for God's sake - It. - it's all a matter of husbanding one's resources, keeping one's inventory under control. Business, man, business.

Casement

So to prove your bullet wasn't wasted, you cut off the right hand of the *resister*, and smoked it.

Leopold

Well, you didn't want those... *things* rotting.

Sir Alfred

Excellent judgment.

Casement

Some agents became suspicious. What if the soldiers were cutting off *women's* hands?

Leopold

People are always finding loopholes.

Casement

So they cut off penises. *(pause)*

Chorister

*(popping up)*

*(brightly)* So much for unwanted pregnancies.

Leopold

Now you've done it. You *had* to include that, didn't you.

Casement

And then there was the matter of heads.

Leopold

So now *I'm* the cause of head-hunting? Please. These savages have been collecting heads as trophies from time immemorial. (dismissively) Not my idea.

Casement

Cutting off heads was a way a soldier could prove his mettle.

Chorus #3

(*all now wearing pith helmets; only #3 speaks*) Sometimes you save lives by killing people.

Leopold

Even I want to hear this.

Chorus #3

When villagers failed to bring in their quota, I decapitated one hundred of them.

Williams

My God!

Chorus #3

After that, there's been no trouble filling quotas. So I killed 100; but this allowed 500 to live.

Chorister #1

Tough Love.

Leopold

(*approvingly*) There you have it.

(*The light comes up on Morel.*)

Casement

(*to Morel*) So that's when you and I went to town. Your righteous fury unbound.

Morel

(*not knowing how to handle the irony; gathers himself and moves on.*) The Congo Reform Association.

(*rapid fire*)

Casement

A virtual blizzard of an attack.

Leopold

More like a mudslide.

Morel

We prodded the conscience of parliament.

Casement

Takes more then a bit of prodding to stir that old pudding.

Morel

And the U.S. Congress

Casement

Their righteousness was aflame...so long as it wasn't *their* problem.

Morel

Churchmen. Politicians. Businessmen.

Casement

His book comes out. Red Rubber.

Leopold

Brutal.

Casement

Dozens of reports documenting atrocities committed on Congolese natives.

Leopold

I demanded censorship. (*beat*) No child should have to see such things.

*(puzzled glances from all)*

The end was approaching. Even I could see it.

Casement

*(pointing to Morel)* Burning with the righteous fury of the Almighty. Over 3500 letters in one six month period.

*(pause)*

Leopold

*(to Casement with venom)* But it was you, Casement, you who sunk in the knife ...and twisted,,and twisted. You and your damn report...so cool...so factual...so very British. Every stinking detail. Page after page after page. Dates, locations, times, witnesses. Severed hands, severed penises, rape, slavery. And you spread that fetid document across the world. *Across the world!* Damn you. *(calm)* So I did what only a righteous man would do. *(pause)* I appointed a committee.

Morel

Stacked with sympathizers.

Casement

But even they couldn't hide from the facts.

Leopold

I studied that report for some time.

Casement

Suppressed it as long as you could.

*(Leopold shrugs.)*

Morel

And then it was over.

Leopold

*(slumps comically)* I fell from grace.

Casement

And managed to come away with a goodly bundle of cash while you were tumbling.

Leopold

In payment for my humanitarian efforts.

Chorister #1

With all those hands and penises, you could call it a severance package.

Casement

Ten to fifteen million people dead.

Leopold

*(angry)*Enough with your weeping.

Chorister #1

That's it, Leo baby, stand up and fight. No regrets.

Chorister #2

Did I ever tell you the one about the guy who caught his wife in bed with another guy?

Chorister #3

Give us a story, Leo. A story we can believe in.

Leopold

I am the one to weep. (*petulant*) I have lost my colony. (*angry*) You have stolen it away from me. Bleeding heart liberals. Crying over savages. What are they to you? And if they lived, what? I grew rich, yes. But what did I do with my wealth? Squander it? I advanced civilization.

Sir Alfred

(*pompous*) The very meaning of empire, the very justification...

Chorister #3

There you go, Leo. Got yourself your first believer.

Leopold

(*brushing him aside*) I built buildings, monuments. I beautified and glorified my country. And what would *they* have done, those ten to fifteen million you weep for? It is mine. It is mine and you have ripped it away from me. (*sadly*) A beautiful thing.

Casement:

(*to Morel*) A beautiful thing. You see, Morel. It's never done out of meanness - or greed. It's always about a beautiful thing.

*(The stage goes black except for the dim light on Casement. He sits on the stool, subdued, thoughtful. We hear Morel's voice but we do not see him.)*

Morel

You have always done what you thought was right...always.

Casement

(*brightens*) Well, Her Holiness the Queen apparently thought so.

*(A blazingly bright light comes up on Casement; all else is in total blackness. He turns toward the invisible Queen, kneels slowly, and bows his head. He holds this position throughout the speech below. At the appropriate moments, Casement makes the slightest shoulder and head movements indicating the knighting actions of the sword.)*

Queen

Because of your actions - honorable, wise, and humane -  
 In the devoted service to God, Queen, country, and mankind,  
 Behold this sword as a token of knighthood.  
 One edge to cut to the truth  
 one edge to administer justice.  
 In remembrance of oaths given and received. *(Strikes the right shoulder)*  
 In remembrance of your obligations. *(Strikes the left shoulder)*  
 Be thou a good knight. *(Strikes the head)*  
 Rise, *Sir Roger Casement.*

*(He rises slowly; the brightness slowly  
 diminishes; he is again in dim light; he returns  
 to his stool, sits quietly for a moment or two,  
 reaches out to the rope and gives it a playful  
 tug.)*

Lights out

## SCENE TWO

*(A dim light comes up on the Chorus, third level  
 right; they are now wearing police helmets. It is  
 nighttime; #3 is on his knees, peering over the  
 back; it is as if they are on a cliff looking down.  
 #1 and #2 stand shivering in the cold. Number  
 2's accent is light Cockney, and #1 light Irish.)*

#1

You think he's really comin'?

#2

I am. The sneaky barstard.

#1

Who is this bloke we're freezin' our arses off for?

#2

His lordship. And a fine catch he is. The treacherous barstard. Nothin' lower than a man  
 what betrays his country.

#

Still, ya wonder. What ever gets into a man to turn against his country?

#2

He's a traitor. That's all you need to know.

#1

Slow this down for me. What's with this *his lordship* stuff?

#2

Don't know. Whatever it was, the Queen musta thought it was a big enough deal to make him *his lordship*.

#1

Musta been *somethin'*. The Queen don't make someone *his lordship* for nothin'. *(pause)*  
And now they're gonna hang him. *(pause)* You sure the Queen is okay with this?

#2

There's this other stuff. The word is *his lordship* is a pansy.

#1

They're gonna hang him cause he's a *pansy*?

#2

That ain't it, but maybe that explains how come he's a traitor. Ya never knows about pansies. They is dangerous. That's how come we puts 'em in jail.

#1

Jail's one thing. I don't know about hangin'.

#2

*(angry)* You're confusin' the whole thing. We don't hang him cause he's a pansy – might as well though. We hang 'im cause he's a traitor.

#1

Tell me again. What was it he did?

#2

Well, he didn't really *do* nothin'. It's what he *tried* to do. Tried to raise an army... against us English, he did.

#1

Now why'd he do such a thing?

*(#3 apparently sees movement below; he signals to the others.)*

#2

*(Peers intently down below.)* You hear that? *(pause)* Clam up your mouth and just listen. *(#1 peers in the same direction.)* This could be it. *(excited, points below)* See that. Would ya look at that!

#1

*(Looks down, is amazed at what he sees)* It's a sub!

#2

And it ain't one of ours. *(pause)* The Huns, and they're bringin' his lordship right into our hands. *(excited yet trying to keep quiet.)* Are you with me now? You needin' any more evidence? *(He pulls his gun out from his belt.)*

#1

*(still questioning)* About this army?

#2

*(looking over the side)* Here he comes, rowin' hisself ashore. Just dumpin' him off they are.

#1

*(persistent)* The army?

#2

Irishmen.

#1

*(puzzled)* Whoa! Irishmen? You mean like *us*?

#2

Here's the story as I got it. He figures it this way. He'll make a deal with the Huns. They got a bunch of Irishmen prisoners a war. Free 'em, he says, and they'll fight *against* England. He tells 'em *These Irishmen hate England*. He figures on turnin' these boys into fighters for a free Ireland. An Irish Brigade he calls it. Somethin' like that.

#1

*(deeply puzzled)* A free Ireland? *(nodding)* Sounds all right to me. Free and all that. *(pause)* And they're hanging 'im for *that*? *(scratching his head)* I don't get it.

#2

*(pulling out his gun)* It ain't our business to get it. The big boys, they do the getting it. You and me, we do the doing it. *(pause, focused on His Lordship making his way up)* Look, look. This couldn't be better. He's clawing his way right into our waitin' arms.

#1

*(impatient)* What happened?

#2

Hush! Keep it down. Don't want to scare off the royal rat. *(pause)* Oh, the Huns, course they think it's a wunnerful idea. Why not? Get us fightin' against one another. What could be better?

#1

So?

#2

So our boys think he's nuts, that's what. Tell 'im to take a flyin' whatso for hisself. They tell 'im *We ain't no traitors, we're Englishmen*. Course he don't see it that way. He says why should the Irish be fightin' for *us*? *We're* the enemy, he says. Always have been. Free Ireland, he says.

*(#1 is nodding like "Free Ireland" makes sense to him.)*

Well, the boys, they ain't havin' none of it. *(Intent on the movement below)* Anyhow, that's the story that's come back to us. We get the word the Huns are shipping him home so he can stir up some trouble here. But that ain't gonna happen, am I right, boyo? *(pause)* Ready now. Here comes his lordship.

*(The lights go out; in the darkness we hear #2.)*

Welcome back, your lordship.

\*\*\*

*(The dim light comes up on Casement; he picks up his pen and pad and begins to write.)*

*(A light comes up on Maurice; he is holding a pad identical to Casement's and is reading Casement's letter. In time it will be his voice reading Casement's words.)*

Casement

My dear Maurice. *(pause)* My *dear* Maurice. I am well. *(pause)* If not well, then clear. Yes, clear will do. This is a time, my last opportunity perhaps, to explain myself to myself...and to you, dear Maurice. *(pause)* It's a mistake for an Irishman ever to mix himself up with the English. He is bound to do one of two things. Either remain Irish and go to the wall *against* the English...or become an Englishman.

Maurice

*(reading)* Or become and Englishman. For so much of my life I chose the latter. Not so much chose as, like so much else, *fell* into. I had been away from Ireland too long, out of

touch with everything native to my heart and mind. Trying hard to do my duty, and every fresh act of duty brought me ever nearer to the ideal of the Englishman.

Casement

I had accepted imperialism. Fully. Without a scintilla of doubt. (*hesitates, rises, ponders, paces, yet in his pacing there is the swagger of the assured superior colonialist.*) No, that's not it. Can you understand, I never *saw* imperialism. It was so much a part of me, and me of it, that there was nothing to see. It was simply the way things were. British rule was to be accepted at all costs, because it was the best for everyone under the sun, and those who opposed it were to be *smashed*.

Maurice

(*reading while Casement, the swagger gone, continues to pace.*) *Smashed*. Then came the Boer War. At first I felt it heroic. In our best tradition. This was *our* Africa after all. Who were these Dutchmen, these *farmers*, these Boers, to stand in the way of the British empire? Crush them. Crush them. (*sits*) But, ever so gradually, *seeing* crept into my heart. A different seeing. A seeing *you* insisted on.

Maurice

(*movingly, stretching his arm out to Casement*) See through the blackness.

Casement

See through the blackness. See through the Boer. Who *were* these farmers that I could so easily oppress them? *See them.* (*His pace becomes more frenetic, agitated.*) Oh, Maurice, my world was shattering, my sanity. I saw everything from a distance, no longer a part of it. Alone. Watching. Powerless. Seeing, for the first time *seeing*. (*pause*) I saw their farms destroyed. I saw their animals slaughtered. I saw their women and children left homeless and vulnerable in the open fields. I saw the camps. I saw the lies we told. (*sarcasm*) Our *humanitarian* intentions. (*pause*) I saw, and once the Imperialist sees, empire is lost. (*pause*) The Englishman in me slowly made his way toward the exit. I have no part in this. No membership. No loyalty. No allegiance.

Morel

This was your beginning. To see through patriotism. To see painful truths.

Chorus all

Traitor!

Williams

(*to the audience with great power*) What do others see when they look upon these atrocities? When you see brutality, what do they see? When you see beatings and lies and cold-blooded murder, what do they see?

Maurice

(*continues reading*) So the war ends. Empire triumphs. Hoorah! The Boer republic comes under British rule. And it is here that history becomes a joke. A puzzle.

Unfathomable. Laughable. Tragic. However you wish to write it. *(slowly and with emphasis)* Comes the Great War and these Boers...crushed by the Englishman...are recruited to fight in *his* behalf...against the Germans...these Germans who are favorably disposed to the Boers.

Casement

*(throwing up his hands in disbelief)* And the Boers join up by the thousands!*(shaking his head)*What can one do in the face of such insanity? And what of me? Ex-Englishman. Fully Irish now. Totally reconstituted. *(anger)* *Am I not now a conquered man? Are not my people, the Irish people, sorely oppressed by the Englishman? And, now, am I, conquered man, expected to fight in behalf of his conqueror?*

*(calm)* By God, no. I could not do it. I could not live with the shame of it.

Chorus all

Traitor!

Williams

Truth teller!

*(The chorus and Williams stare hostilely at one another)*

Chorus

Traitor!

Williams

Truth teller.

Chorus

We'll see. For Justice is not blind.

Chorister #1

Never blind...Corrupt maybe

*(All choristers don white wigs and black robes. Leopold and Sir Alfred hastily don wigs and robes so that they too can join the judges although they remain clearly distinguishable as Leopold and Sir Alfred. The Judges are dispersed across the upper level and throughout what follows they pepper Casement from all directions.)*

Judge #1

Roger Casement...

Casement

*(to the audience)* How quickly he forgets *Sir. (to a judge)* My lord, may I speak?

Judge #2

No

Casement

This court has no jurisdiction over me.

Judge #3

It appears otherwise.

Casement

If there is to be condemnation, let this be a condemnation not of me but of English rule...of English law...of English government in Ireland.

Leopold

Hang the bastard!

Sir Alfred

Right on! *(He is taken aback by his own language.)*

Casement

English rule that has from its birth rested on restraint and not on law. I am an Irishman. Fully Irish. Protestant on my father's side, Catholic on my mother's. I demand to be judged by a jury of my peers, an Irish jury.

Judges all

Denied! I am the judge *and* the jury.

*(beat)*

*(all continuing reading from documents)* High treason...in time of war... collaborating with the enemy...instigating an uprising against your own government. *Disloyalty.*

Casement

I beg to differ, my lord,

I am most loyal

I am loyal to God.

I am loyal to *my* country.

I am loyal to justice.

*(All the Judges come together and play cards during the following)*

What is the difference, my lord, in what I have attempted elsewhere and what I have striven for here? Is oppression in England by Englishmen to be judged differently from how it is judged elsewhere?

*(Judges continue their card-playing.)*

*(shouting, attempting to gain their attention)* My lord, a report!

Leopold

*(panicky, to the other judges.)* Oh, no! Not one of his reports. They can be deadly. I know.

*(Sir Alfred vigorously nods his agreement.)*

*(The judges cover their ears for a moment then return to card playing.)*

Casement

Let me understand the basis of this loyalty of which you are so deserving.

Did not the British conquer my country not with love, but by force?

Did not you first ingratiate yourselves to us by massacring two thousand Irishmen in Saint Peter's church?

Did not your Cromwell portray that murderous act as God's righteous judgment on us barbarous wretches? *Barbarous wretches?*

Should these and other such gifts have earned my loyalty?

Judge #1

*(Slams down his cards down)* Gin! *(The others shake their heads and count their points as Casement continues.)*

Casement

Did not you outlaw our Gaelic language?

Did not you murder our Catholic priests?

Did not you grant your landlords the right to take our wives and daughters to bed?

Should these and other gifts have earned my loyalty?

Judge #2

Whose deal? *(After a moment's hesitation, Sir Alfred begins to deal.)*

Casement

And then there is the matter of settlers. Was this not your most wicked manipulation?

Bringing in settlers from England and Scotland. Largely Protestant. Settling them on our land, driving Irishmen from their homes, and driving an evil wedge that divides us to this day?

And didn't the British in their benevolence give the Irish a land of their own, a rocky desolate patch of land fit only for the growing of potatoes?

And when that crop failed didn't you still claim entitlement for all our other crops. And so we had nothing to eat. *Nothing!* (*in helpless rage, holding back tears*) And then the dying began. And the dying continued. And continued. And what did you do then to earn my loyalty?

Judge #1

Should we have sent them relief?

Judge #2

Unthinkable! It's wrong to interfere with market forces.

Judge #3

Besides, it was simply God's righteous punishment of those uneducated, unwashed, rebellious wretches...and all those children! Uh!

Judge #1

Yes, yes, God. Quite forgot about him...judgment...etc..

*(All nod their agreement.)*

*(Back to playing cards)*

Casement

Come fight along with us in this war', you say. And if we are good boys you might...just might...grant us self-government. (*anger*) My lord, self-government is not yours to give. It is our right. A thing born in us at birth. A thing no more to be doled out to us or withheld from us by another people than the right to life itself (*tenderly looking toward Maurice and Morel*) no more than the right to feel the sun or smell the flowers or love our kind.

Judge #1

Is this the time?

*(Others nod, then look up from their cards.)*

Judges all

Treason! (*then back to their cards*)

Casement

*(Throws up his hands in defeat, turns away from the Judge, returns to his stool.)*

*(subdued)* My only regret, dear Maurice, is that I failed. What seemed so logical to me, so right, so moral, so historically inevitable, was unthinkable to others. (*pause*) What is it in the oppressed that makes them loyal to their oppressors? That is a puzzle.

Morel

That is a puzzle.

Casement

*(writing)* Maurice, there is much anger over this. The Englishman is at his jingoistic best. I fear and I beg caution for all who consider themselves my friends.

Chorus all

*(no longer in wigs and robes)* Hang the traitorous bastard!

*(Casement does not see the following interaction. He writes, he paces, he plays with the rope. Williams rises and observes the interaction intently.)*

*(Maurice is approached by two choristers. They tug at him, slap him, knock him down, then search the area, looking, looking. )*

Maurice

*(On the ground, crying out and reaching toward Casement)* Oh you sweet trusting man, have I not warned you? Your passion would destroy you.

# 1

*(Menacing)* Where is it?

# 2

*(Kicks Maurice.)* Disgusting black pig.

Maurice

*(to Casement)* That sailor. Oh, Roger, he was no lover. An agent. A spy. Sent to betray you.

# 1

Save us the trouble, nigger. *(He kicks Maurice.)* Where is it?

Maurice

There is nothing here *(sarcastic)* master!

# 2

Fuck you, you cheeky nigger. *(Kicks him.)* *(To # 1)* What's say we cut his black dick off. Make a nice trophy.

*(They laugh and continue searching.)*

# 1

*(Finds what he is looking for, searches through it, laughs)* This will do nicely. *(Maurice reaches for it; they push him off and leave. Maurice reaches helplessly toward Casement.)*

*(The light comes up on Morel; he has a folder in his hand; he looks around stealthily and slowly makes his way toward Casement. He is the first to enter Casement's space.)*

Morel

*(grasping Casements' hands)* It is good to see you.

Casement

*(freeing his hands)* You shouldn't have come.

Morel

There's work to be done.

Casement

It's over.

Morel

*(tapping the folder)* Not yet.

Casement

I'm surprised they let you...

Morel

They found it harmless. *(Pause, then with a smile.)* We'll see.

Casement

Maybe they know...better than you.

Morel

Read it.

*(Casement pushes it away.)*

Read it.

Casement

It's futile.

Morel

*(Annoyed)* Just read!

Casement

*(Reads, shakes his head in appreciation.)* The usual power. *(smiling)* I particularly like the *Christian* touch, the quality of mercy and all.

Morel

It will matter.

Casement

*(putting the paper down, patting it fondly)* It is a gift most beautiful . And I am grateful to you for it. There is no greater gift than to be seen by another. *(Holds the paper to his heart.)* I shall treasure this all the days of my life...both of them.

Morel

This is not like you.

Casement

I've had my say...and now it's done.

Morel

There is a point that can't be lost. *(Pause.)* It mustn't be lost. Yours is a special...a rare...form of heroism. The point *can't* be lost.

Casement

*(Smiles.)* I'm that special type of hero they call traitor.

Morel

That is precisely the point that *must* be made. Can one be a traitor if one speaks the truth?

Casement

*(Smiles.)* That may be the first requirement. *(Pause.)* Edmond, it's dangerous for you to be here. *(pause)*

Morel

The real danger is *your* being here.

Casement

This is not the time for support, my friend...Let it go.

Morel

We have been linked from the beginning.

Casement

Best that is forgotten. The game has changed. Now they are less concerned with what I *did* than with what I *am*. *(pause)* And that's what makes it dangerous for you.

Morel

How did it come to this?

Casement

The diary. I'm sure of it.

Morel

Will it matter that much. It *can't*. Not after all you've done.

Casement

To betray your country...

Morel

But that is the conversation that *must* be had. (*tapping his folder*) It's not so simple as good or bad. There are questions that must be discussed. We have to get past this...this simple-mindedness.

Casement

Simple-minded is precisely how they want it.

(*beat*)

But now, this other. This takes it beyond conversation. Traitor to one's country...maybe they can handle that. Not likely, but possible. But this, I'm afraid is another form of treason. Less rational. Less discussable. This cuts to the core of their ... what?...

Morel

(*Uncomfortable.*) It's not easy for *me*.

Casement

I never intended to bring you in on this.

Morel

(*apologetic*) I am just a man of my times. (*Casement tries to stop him.*) The church...my upbringing.

Casement

But, you see. Therein lies your strength, that it is not easy, that you struggle past something powerful in you, and only then can you still love me. You are a special man, Edmond. A cherished friend. I never expected more from you.

Morel

I do see past this.

Casement

I know you do.

Morel

Why can't others? (*tapping his folder*) This...this will help *them* see past this.

## Casement

Edmund, just think about it. *(He holds the paper in one hand and his imaginary diary in the other.)* They read your paper. They read my diary. Huh? What do you think? One is aimed at the mind...the other at the.... Well... Which do you suppose will make the final judgment?

*(beat)* Think, Edmund?

It's over.

*(Morel approaches Casement; he hesitantly reaches out, and then fully embraces him. They hold for a long moment, then Morel leaves, returns to his space and watches.)*

*(Casement fiddles with the rope; he begins to fashion it into a hangman's noose. The choristers arrive, now wearing black masks.)*

*(A bright light shines down as if from a high prison window. Casement rises and stares up at the light. He continues looking to the light as one chorister places the stool beneath the rope. Two others hold his arms behind his back. He climbs on the stool.)*

*(Still gazing at the light)* It is a beautiful day to die.

*(The stage falls into total blackness. There is a very loud, shocking cracking sound.)*

*(The light comes up on Williams. All else is in total darkness. He is seated; he looks around to where all the players have been and, finally, to where Casement was last seen.)*

## Williams

They're gone now. Casement, he is long gone. A good man? A bad man? *(He shrugs, his gestures suggesting the ambiguity of his thoughts regarding the man.)* The colonialists are gone – the white man. All gone.

*(pause)*

What remains in the Congo? *(rising, moving shakily toward center stage)*

Gold remains.

And timber

And precious minerals.

*(shaking his cane in fury)*

And greed remains. Dammit! Greed!

And where there is greed, there is no paradise.

Not for Leopold, not for us.

So now my brother kills my brothers

And my sisters

And my sons and daughters.

Leopold himself might be shocked – or impressed - at the extent of our capacity to murder one another.

*(beat, as he walks off, then turns)*

The final betrayal.

Lights out

END

In 1912 Roger Casement was knighted for service to King and country in recognition of his reports on the exploitation of Blacks in the Congo and, subsequently, the Putamayo Indians in Peru.

In 1916, as a result of his failed efforts to form an alliance with Germany and instigate an Irish revolt against England, he was found guilty of high treason and hanged at the Pentonville Prison.

From its outset and throughout World War I, Edmund Dene Morel published numerous anti-war pamphlets demanding the end of secret diplomacy and the prohibition of post-war actions that would humiliate the defeated and eventually lead to later wars. These activities earned him much public abuse and six months in prison for violation of the Defense of the Realm Act.

In 1922, in a local election, Morel defeated a young Liberal party candidate by the name of Winston Churchill.

In 1924, he died in London

#### Author's Note

Although *Betrayed* is based on real events, it should not be considered an historical document. In the service of drama, considerable license has been taken with both characters and events. The play was inspired by Adam Hochschild's marvelous book, *King Leopold's Ghost*, which describes in devastating detail the 20<sup>th</sup> century's first and least well-known genocide. George Washington Williams, Roger Casement, Edmund Dene Morel, and King Leopold are all historic figures but I have taken great liberty in their characterization. Maurice is a fictional character. Roger Casement's final speech to Maurice is based on a letter he had written to a Mrs. J.R. Green. Portions of Casement's speech before the judges were taken from the trial record. Despite these bases in fact, the play is fiction. The lives and destinies of Casement and Morel represented for me the painful complexities of truth, justice, loyalty, and patriotism; and it is those complexities I have attempted to dramatize.