

Inkslingers Blended Session

12th August 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“Good Thoughts Make A Happy Person ”

And the Visual



Race Against Rednecks

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

Angela Martinez could not possibly believe her mom had agreed to this trip. For a girl born and bred in New Jersey, this was a nightmare. The heat, the bugs, the lack of wi-fi. It was utterly unbearable to be in the Bayou, Louisiana, or any part thereof in the deep, deep South.

She was well aware of the old movies her Grandpa loved such as “Deliverance” and “Mississippi burning”, neither of which gave off glowing or positive views of folks living south of the Mason-Dixon line. Nonetheless, they sailed silently up a river with plants, trees, and underbrush that could hide all manner of monsters on any given day. It was all for a baptism, that of her younger brother Jonathan. They’d travelled to this place as a church trip but the part about playing Jane and Tarzan had been strangely omitted from the brochure. Sweat now decorated her back and made her Walmart-bought, flower-print dress, cling to her skin like glue.

“Mom, why are we in this jungle? Couldn’t little Johnathan have been baptized in a pool at that nice hotel? You know the one with WI-FI?”, She whispered to her mother.

“Mind your manners dear and try to enjoy this day. It is an honor to be baptized and your Father insisted on this location. Why not have a little faith and support your brother?”, Her mom responded with a smile. But Angela knew all too well that this was a smile which communicated more than words. It was one that said, “Shut up, I know you have to pee, hold it, and don’t embarrass me or you’re going to get it, but good later!”, A smile often accompanied by a look that preceded a good smack or two under normal, private circumstances.

Right there and then Angie decided that she’d press her luck with her mother, peppering her with yet more questions. Some innate, urban clairvoyance was pushing her to do so.

“Mom, we’re Puerto Rican. We’re olive-skinned. We are going to be killed in a damned swamp! Please make Dad turn this boat around, I promise never to ask for anything again and you can beat me silly when we get back, but please, pretty-please, turn back!”

“You watch to much internet, Angie. Hush up this second!”, Her mother snapped with the quivering, involuntary facial gestures that indicated she was close to blowing her lid.

Angela was at her wit’s end. In her mind’s eye, she could almost picture her bloated, self-urinated body floating down the river with some hillbilly’s homemade axe buried in her back. A tasty and unexpected snack for some ravenous, swamp-dwelling alligator.

She pressed on. “Mom, if we’re so safe why does Dad carry a gun?”, She posed, thinking that she’d finally outsmarted her old lady.

“Your Dad is a retired military man who’s turned to Jesus but is well aware that Christians are not bullet-proof.”, Her mother retorted.

Her mom’s somewhat clever answer and insufferable stubbornness were of no comfort to Angela. Her eyes now darted back and forth, embracing the thought of some head-shrinking tribe showering them with poison darts or even Sasquatch himself making an appearance.

Her mind then returned to the more realistic fear of inbred marauders. “Oh great, Mom! When Billy-Bob and Suzy-Mae are done skinning their snake dinner and burning some crosses, we’ll be next on their redneck menu!”, She snapped.

Just then her brother Jonathan, the star pupil and choir singer, the one who never uttered a word without parental permission, spoke.

“Paddle faster, I hear banjos!”, He said.

Mary Oyediran

Love is ...

Love always adds value
even when we argue,
Love is saying sorry,
from the heart-not angry
Love is where God lives
so demons can't dwell.
Love delights in right
exposes what is wrong,
making the weak strong.
Love is mannerly, kind,
never rude or aggressive
Love is diverse- inclusive,
not distasteful or exclusive.
LOVE is God - God is true LOVE!

After

Greg Fields

After he had let it all sink in.....After he had pulled the trigger and watched the boy drop to the floor in front of the counter, after he heard the clanking of the knife when it fell from the boy's hand and skittered several feet toward the freezer section, sent by the force of a body thrown backward insensate and without control.... After his heart wavered wildly between relief and fear and immense regret.....After the police came to view the effects of it all and interrogate him for what seemed like hours.....After the neighbourhood responded to the echo of a shot fired and stormed his store to see what happened.....After the screams of discovery, the sobs and gasps..... After the angry voices that saw a young black boy dead in his own blood.....After the paperwork was filed and the angry voices relented and people went back to their homes muttering and swearing and suitably aghast at another daily act of horror.....

After it all Flinn Murphy locked the door of the store he owned, the one that had sat on this corner for thirty years, then turned to walk the few blocks to the small flat where he lived with Diana the wife and Sasha the dog. Unlike other nights, he carried with him the .45 that he had used in near-panic a few hours before.

At the door Diana greeted him, unusual in itself when on most nights she would be in bed, or close to it, finishing her nightly preparations. Tonight she opened the door as soon as he had entered the key into the lock and before he could turn it.

"I heard there was trouble," she spoke in quick tones.

Flinn sighed, shook his head and walked past her through the entryway. "Yes," he replied in little more than a whisper.

"I heard you shot a boy."

He turned to face her, and anger flashed through him. "I'm always amazed at how quickly news travels through this neighbourhood. It's as if we're all just little birds perched on a telephone wire waiting for

something to happen, then we flap our wings and fly off to twitter to the rest of the flock.”

Diana reached him and placed her arm on his shoulder, gently but with purpose. “Tell me, Flinn. What happened?”

But he could not tell her. Flinn Murphy could not tell his wife, the person who shared his life, his thoughts, his heart and his soul for thirty-five years, where he was at that moment. Or who he was. He could not tell her the astonished look on the boy’s face as the bullet entered his chest. He could not tell her how the drops of blood flying through the air and landed on a display of snack chips behind him. He could not tell her how in that instant, his soul fled his body and, from that moment on, Flinn Murphy, along with the boy that lay on his floor, now failed to exist.

Instead he buried his face in her shoulder and wept. Flinn Murphy never cried, had not shed a tear in memory. But tonight he was no longer Flinn Murphy, and the tears came in huge convulsive sobs. Diana held him there, stroked the back of his head, and added her own tears to those of her husband.

After a time he withdrew from her and entered the bathroom where he pulled down a towel to wipe his face. Diana, behind him, said nothing. He turned to her at last.

“I can’t relive it, woman. Not now. Maybe not ever. I killed a boy.”

“To save yourself,” Diana whispered. “To save yourself.”

Flinn shook his head. “I don’t know. I killed a boy, and now he’s dead. That’s all I do know. And I have to find a way to live with that.”

She reached him again to hold him close. This time he held her as well, his strong arms wrapping around her and massaging the gentle crevice at the back of her neck.

He whispered into her ear, “All the times you’ve told me that good thoughts make a happy person. And I always believed that. I tried, Diana. All the time I tried to find the good thoughts. But what if all those good thoughts are gone now, love? What if there are no more to be found?”

Diana tightened her hold, and whispered in response, “Then we find another way to make ourselves happy, Flinn. We are who we are, and we’re together. What more do we need?”

After a pause, he let go of his wife and headed for the cabinet where he kept his liquor. He remembered little else that night. The next morning he could not recall Diana going to bed ahead of him, or the clinking of the ice in his glass, or Sasha resting her head on his lap, or the frustration he felt when he realized the bottle had run its course.

He remembered only the sound of a gunshot, and with it the ending of two lives.

Rotten Tooth Bill

Matthew Tubridy

Rotten Tooth Bill sleeps beside the river Dodder,
He comes into the Dail,
He wants to be acknowledged,
One TD turns of the lights and puts a light on Bill,
Bill starts mumbling,
King Charles comes to make a speech in the Dail,
But Rotten Tooth Bill takes his place on the podium,
Somehow King Charles morphs into Rotten Tooth Bill,
He starts mumbling,
After the speech Bill is blown up a 100 times bigger than he was, like a
hot air balloon,
But Leo Varadkar holds the rope so he doesn't blow away,
Bill floats over the M50,
All the politicians race after him,
Come back to your usual size,
So you fit inside the Dail,
Bill is given a cup of tea,
Are ye alright now? They ask him.
Before Dail proceedings from that day on Bill rings the bell,
Who needs a prayer?
We understand Bill!
Bill sleeps in his tent in the Dail carpark,
TDs give him maceral,
And hot tea,
Who wants to pray to someone who's dead already?
Support Bill,
Bills smelly mucky clothes,
Or you could support Jimmy McGrain,
Of St Vincents hospital Fairview.
His slurred words broadcasters around the Dail,
Sewed don't need to worship Jesus, we can help everyday Jesus's,
Let the patients of St Vincent's Hospital Fairview run around the Dail,
Give them cups of tea,
Turn off all the lights,

Then then spotlights on the patients.
The nurses would run after the patients,
But then sit down and clap at them,
All all those politicians who thought themselves as high and mighty get
glup on their faces,
It had been brewed by the patients,
In the isolation room of the hospital,
Carried in big bags to the Dail in the back of a few taxis,
The taxi drivers are the family members of the patients,
Glup!
We support Jesus but what about the patients of St Vincent's Hospital
Fairview?
And Rotten Tooth Bill ushers the patients in.

Fear Cures Greed

Michael O'Brien

I left home in search of adventure when I was eighteen years old, I hopped a train down to the south coast and took a job on a fishing boat, it was hard work but the money was good so I stuck at it for six months till we docked in a small fishing village in Mexico, I jumped off the boat there and stayed with a village of beach hippies, fishing all day and drinking and fooling all night, paradise you might say, and it was for a while but too much of anything turns stale.

So, I moved inland and up north near the border with Texas and took a job with the parks department. It was easy money, I was paid to just live in a cabin on one of the highest peaks checking for forest fires and giving weather reports, once a month a mule train arrived with supplies, and I just unpacked my stuff and gave the guy a list for next month.

One day I was sitting at my lookout post when I saw a guy walking through the forest with a rucksack. He starts to dig a hole with a camping shovel and buries the bag. I'd been told that as well as our mule trains there were also drug mules in these parts. We were told to ring it in if we saw anything suspicious but most of the guys just let it slide, we weren't getting paid enough to get in the way of drug cartels. I waited till he was long gone and went down there and dug it up, Twenty-five thousand dollars! I'll never forget it, two years' salary back then, in the dirt.

What to do?, I knew Drug cartels were efficient and they would find out from the forestry board who I was and go after my family. I didn't give a damn about my father, I'd give the gangsters his photo if I had one, but not my mother and sister. Suddenly a rustle in the trees shocked me, I stood wide-eyed, holding my breath.

My God! there it was again, like someone sneaking in the bushes behind me. I was trembling, actually seeing my dead body being thrown into a hole in the forest, probably the same hole my greed had attracted me to. The rustling was louder now, someone was announcing themselves without saying a word and this just terrified me, I turned slowly fully expecting to be hit with a club or a bullet or something awful.

Goddamn!, my mysterious visitor was staring straight at me, but this was no assassin, it was a fox, just sitting there staring at me, he made no attempt to run when I turned, a sigh blew out of my mouth in relief, but my friend wasn't startled and didn't move, we just stood there staring at each other. I'd heard folks who said they were abducted by aliens say that the extra-terrestrials had no vocal chords, that they communicated telepathically, and that's what this seemed like to me. Every reason not to take the bag flashed before me as I maintained eye contact with this fox, every consequence of taking it slowly drifted across my mind, like pictures in shape shifting clouds. If they caught me here there'd be no questions, I'd be dead or strung up and decapitated under a bridge as an example to others.

When the reality of what could happen hit me all feelings of greed just left, I had no desire for the money, and I started burying the cash back in the hole as the fox stood as still as if he'd been placed there by a taxidermist staring at me.

When I had patted the earth flat again and stood to arch away the aches in my back my canine guardian walked uncomfortably close to me and over the earth I had just refilled, as if he was sealing it shut with his tracks. As he disappeared into the darkness a wolf howled, and I longed for the safety and comfort of my cabin.

Wilma Wallpaper Goes on holiday

Mark L'estrange

Wilma had never been on an aeroplane before, so she was both nervous and excited,

The flight was very early so her Mam and Dad said

"You need to head to bed early so you're not tired for our holiday tomorrow," Wilma said

"Ok I will go now!"

It was no use going to bed she couldn't sleep, all she could think of, was the holiday the next Day.

She counted sheep but that didn't work.

Then she counted planes still didn't work.

Then she had an idea maybe I will wallpaper that should tire me out. She said to herself

"What will I wallpaper?"

"I know" she said "My suitcase"

She had no wallpaper, so she printed some nice pictures of Spain, and covered her suitcase with them!

After that she lay back down and drifted off to sleep.

It only seemed like she was asleep for five minutes, when her Mam was calling her,

"Get up, get up, it's time for holidays"

Wilma Jumped out of bed shouting

"Yay holidays."

Her Mam asked?

"Have you got your suitcase packed?"

"Yes, well and truly packed."

They headed off to the airport once they got all the pictures off the suitcase.

Which took a while.

It was a bright sunny day in Dublin when they got there. Mary said

“Can we get McDonald’s breakfast please Mam and Dad?”

“Sure, you can it’s the start of your holiday!”

It was the first time that any of them were going away to a different country.

Wilma’s Dad wasn’t sure what way it worked.

Wilma knew what to do, she saw the tv screens with all the numbers of the gates on them. She spoke

” We better start heading to our gate, because they are boarding people in ten minutes.” Wilma was getting more excited by the minute, as she skipped to the departure gate.

They called out their names over the speaker

“Can the Wallpaper family, please make your way to the gate as soon as possible, because we are going to start closing the gate,”

Luckily, they were just there when they heard the message! They all got onto the plane and took their seats, Wilma’s Dad said

“I think, I will get some sleep on the way I’m wrecked!” Her Mam said

“I’m the same, Wilma no messing if we drift off!”

“Me mess? what would make you say that?”

They drifted off and Wilma started to get a bit bored, she asked one of the air hostesses did they have any magazines, the girl said

“of course, I do, one moment please”

So, she brought her about five magazines saying

“These should keep you going for a while”

She started to read a few of them, but quickly got bored, and thought the chairs on the aircraft looked a bit bare.

Guess what she did? She tore a few nice pictures from the magazines and stuck them on the chairs.

When her dad woke up, he asked her?

“What on earth have you done to the chairs?”

“I just thought they could do with a bit of a facelift, do you not like them?”

“No”

He said as he tried his best to remove the pages off the seats, before any of the aircraft staff could see what she had done.

Thankfully he got rid of them all, before they started to land, Wilma said

“Sorry Dad, you know what I’m like for wallpapering, and I didn’t have any to hand so I used the next best thing,”

“I know Wilma, but you have got to think of what you are doing in future, it was ok at home when you wallpapered your room, and I mean everywhere in your room, but you can’t do it just anywhere especially not an aircraft.”

She promised not to do anything like this again for the whole holiday. She said.

“When I feel like doing it again, I will concentrate on something else I promise!” Wilma’s Mam said;

“Ok we won’t mention this again for the holiday lets go enjoy ourselves guys!”

They all agreed let’s go and have some fun.

They had a great holiday, and Wilma even met a few friends over there, who had funny hobbies too.

Wilma stuck to her promise and didn’t decorate anything for the week, they were there.

Until they were heading home, she did a bit of work on the suitcases again.

The End.

I had a dream

Heloisa Prieto

(Excerpt from The Storyteller)

Next day, Akin and Ifakemi asked me to come to the centre early in the morning. All along the drive they did not share a word. Ifakemi streamed some Igbo music and sang along so beautifully, all I could do was to listen to her and relax.

I must have dozed because I had a dream. I saw myself in a huge savannah, grass swaying to the music, surrounded by strong warriors, both men and women. My mom came to me, holding hands with an elderly lady. They sat by my side and I felt such deep joy. Mom delicately placed her finger on my lips and whispered: “just listen...” I woke up when Akin parked the car in front of the school.

Principal Wagner seemed to be so distressed when he said:

“Kids are terrified! Zeke and his gang have been threatening them on the streets! Come on in, you guys! I really need your help!”

As we walked into the building, he kept on saying that some parents had forbidden their children to come to the centre, that Zeke’s gang was all over the hood, saying the most horrible things.

Kadu and his dogs arrived just after us and the Principal told us:

“I am feeling a bit better now, seeing all of you here, with me, but I’m afraid we won’t have a full class today. Zeke is just a boy, but his gang is so imposing. People forget he is kid...”

Ifakemi did not seem the least frightened. She stared at Principal Wagner for long minutes and asked him:

“Have the kids arrived for our music class?” Claudia was the one to answer:

“They have, yes, most of them...”

Ifakemi walked quietly towards the dance studio and sat at the piano. To my big surprise, Giulia was there, already with the kids, practicing some dance steps. I felt deeply grateful to her. Against all my

expectations, there she was, doing her job the best she could, oblivious of what could happen to her. No threat, no tensions would stop Giulia from being this wonderful teacher she had become. Ifakemi greeted all present with a large smile, bowed to her audience and started playing. While she alternated Igbo music with the blues and some gospel songs, Kadu took his cell and sent messages for the absent students to come and join us. He posted Ifakemi's performance on social media to assure them everything was just ne.

I noticed the overall tension slowly giving space to a feeling of wellness and belonging. All of us started singing along with Ifakemi, either trying to repeat her words or just humming.

Then we heard the screams:

"Nigerian royals, where are you?"

"C'mon! We are waiting for you, guys!"

I had not noticed Akin had disappeared from the studio. I was so enthralled by Ifakemi's songs, I had actually forgotten about the ght, the threats, the street lords. I looked around for Kadu and there he was: just standing in front of the mirror wall, his dogs calmly sitting all over the place. There was a majestic quality about him and such deep serenity, it occurred to me that if violence can be contagious, so can peace.

Zeke barged into the room followed by his beautiful sister and followers. A tall, strong sixteen year old kid wearing large sunglasses, black pants and shirt, black boots. His head was covered by a gray cap, his moves were fast and nervous. All his followers, Jessica included, were dressed likewise. In a ash, my mind was taken by memories of peacemakers, Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, and the famous words by Nelson Mandela: "Our freedom cannot be complete while others in the world are not free." I couldn't see Zeke's eyes, but I noticed his shoulders were so tense and his gestures so harsh. I thought about him as a little boy watching his favourite tv show, all of sudden feeling his mind invaded by alien thoughts. His loss of control. His utmost fear. A wave of tenderness spread all over my soul and I just wanted to hold him tight. I took a step towards him. Kadu noticed my move and, as if he could read my mind, he nodded negatively to me. I halted.

Zeke looked around him, apparently disorientated.

“Why are you guys so quiet? I am ready to fight! I want to punch you in the nose!

C’mon, kick me!

But no one tried to punch or kick him. Kids were just standing there, calm and motionless, the memory of music still echoing around the room. Zeke opened his mouth to scream again. Then he saw Akin coming. It may sound so odd, but at that very moment, I understood what Jessica meant by suddenly not being able to recognize her brother in his own body.

My dear Akin, my own blood, was no longer the one I knew. He crossed the room in slow, heavy steps, staring right into Zeke’s face. I have never seen extraordinary things, although my mother always tried to have me develop a sort of extra sensorial perception. Yet, as Akin and Zeke stood face to face, maybe my mind’s eye finally opened, I don't really know. I had a vision, or was it a daydream? All I can say is that my brother was not alone. Now I could sense some other dimension. I could see Orixas, ancestors, small heavenly children and our Baba surrounding him.

When Akin spoke, his voice sounded much older:

“Hello, Zeke. C’mon in. I want you to tell me your story...”

Fame

Gerard Byrne

Fame's bright candle,
I only wanna spark,
A tiny little ember,
To give me a kick-start.

Mentioned in a paragraph,
Hinted in a line,
A tiny bit of recognition,
To make all my work worthwhile.

Drag me out of the gutter of obscurity,
Wash me down with pride,
Dress me up with hopes and dreams,
Hopefully long before I've died.

Good Thoughts Make A Happy Person

Bernadette O'Reilly

If good thoughts make a happy person
What do bad thoughts do?
Most people have a mix of good and bad
Thoughts
I believe we do not have to act on our every
Thought
How blissful to have only good thoughts
How happy we might be each day
Mindfulness suggests we keep positive
Push negativity aside
This takes practise
Good thoughts make a happy person
This state is worth achieving.

Paddle faster

Clíodhna Joyce-Daly

The evening was settling against the mountain tops as the rain subsided and the fog began to evaporate in the distance. Although, the humidity in the air blanketed her surroundings the splashing of the kayak created a coldness in summer's wrath. It had been a peaceful journey along the lake's shore with the sun's rays dancing throughout the landscape highlighting the most intriguing aspects of nature's beauty. Despite the stillness and isolation

in the mouth of the lake, it was vibrant with sudden only eruptions from the trout.

It was the first time Aoife began to relax after furious months of punishing work. With every stroke of her paddle, the stress and anxiety faded into the ripples. Work, bills and life's complications seemed like a distant memory as she fully embraced the environment around her. Aoife had only gone kayaking a handful of times and each story ended up with a flipped boat or scabby fingers. When Mary recommended the kayaking spot, Aoife admitted she was a little apprehensive to her friend's request. For years, Mary had escaped the city life for a quieter more secluded existence in upstate New York. While the areas had become flourishing communities along the Hudson for city respite, Mary had moved so far into the forest, she resorted to living in a tent for the majority of the summer. In ways, Aoife respected Mary's alternative life, specifically in becoming self-sufficient and reveling in her own solitude. Mary wanted Aoife to join her.

It was these moments in life that despite the blaring obvious simpler life, people can come to a crossroads debating whether or not they are ready for a monumental change. The chaos and hustle of the city consumed her reality and although, Aoife had longed for a shift in her life, Mary's questions continued to go unanswered.

Gardening, making bread, creating, language learning and cooking were the beacon of Mary's life currently. Aoife had barely any time to step foot into a supermarket. All the hobbies Aoife has wanted to accomplish were slowly becoming neglected as time was not as transparent.

"We're nearly at the crossing now," Mary exclaimed as the clearing within the lake became more wooded.

Illuminated before the tip of the boat was a architecturally astute log cabin that stood out from the rest of its counterparts. It's bay window highlighted glorious works of painting that colours matched the tones of its surrounding lake. Further within the depths of the house, Aoife could make out a grand piano with an array of photos and what appeared to be trophies on its throne. As the pair stroked faster to get a glimpse of the extraordinary house, the nagging big future question consumed her mind. What would she do up here? Who lives up here anyway? Could she still work – remotely?

"That's John Glass' house. You know the famous composer?," Mary stated as the door to the house suddenly was ajar. "He's actually really lovely. I met him one day down at the market. He will sometimes perform his normal guitar or banjo pieces for the residents."

Perhaps it was growing impatience of her friend or the look of disinterest, but Mary continuing hoping her next bit would be the silver lining her friend was looking for. "I told him you play banjo and were good at it too," she continued "but I said you are extremely busy with your job and have not had times for the hobbies you love. I told him you write music and surprisingly enough he told me he is looking for a song writer for his new album." Silence. "You interested?"

It had been the final influence to have her friend make the step she needed to gain tranquillity in her life again.

Aoife contemplated...could this be her new life?

"No hassle if you are not interested, but would you at least like to meet him?" Mary asked

With a exhale that seemed to release the last string to her potentially former life, Aoife replied, "yes."

Mary smiled, finally – she thought. "Come on, paddle faster I think I hear his banjos!"