

Inkslingers Blended Session

19th August 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“What She Said After She Said Goodbye ”

And the Visual



Excerpt from The Storyteller

Heloisa Prieto

Rap verses by Victor Scatolin)

“The poet is a griot in search of a village” Kwame Dawes

Inner peace.

There was a subtle quality in my brother’s demeanour that seemed to radiate peace. He gestured to Zeke and all present to follow him to the backyard. His moves were much slower and imposing than usual, imprinting a new pace and rhythm. I am not sure if everyone was mesmerized by his command, I know I was.

He sat at the roots of the mango tree and told all present to do the same. Our students immediately did so, they were already used to our storytelling breaks. Zeke’s gang stood all around the tree and although they did not join my brother at the roots, their posture seemed much more relaxed. Jessica smiled as if she had been taken by surprise.

“Tell me your story, Zeke...” my brother said.

Zeke moved like a hurt, wild cat. He circled the tree, came closer, and stood up. Akin did not say a word, just waited, patiently. Zeke wouldn’t start talking. Yet, seeing them both, one calmly sitting on the roots of our tree, the other clumsily resisting his obvious desire to share space, did not frighten me.

Akin did not insist verbally, but he nodded at Zeke and made a welcoming gesture with his hands.

Zeke took his seat.

Now, they were face to face.

Silence.

Zeke’s gang slowly sat around the tree forming a circle and I felt as if we were about to take part in a timeless ritual.

“My true name is not Zeke,” the boy said.

Still, my brother made no comments, just nodded and his eyes were generous.

“I have taken over the boy you call Zeke, but I am not allowed to say my real name...” “I won’t ask your name, no worries...” said my brother and asked, “Where do you come from?”

“I was born on a distant planet. I came on a mission. All of you here, on Earth, practice destruction. So I want to teach you...”

“What do you want to teach us?” asked my brother.

“I hate this land of yours. All I can see is pain, violence, social injustice, unhappiness. I came to teach you self destruction, so that you perish quickly and we can take over your minds and bodies...”

I was beginning to feel terrified, but Akin just laughed and said:

“Why don’t you teach us peace? Wouldn’t it be much easier?”

For the first time during the exchange, Zeke smiled as a child caught in the act. He took out his sunglasses. I noticed his eyes and they belonged to a sad boy’s face.

“I think you are too dumb to learn... I hate the human race... I belong to a superior kind. After we take over the Earth, the planet will be a much better place...” Akin smiled back at Zeke and told him:

“Have you ever considered the idea that most conflicts on Earth happen because someone feels superior to someone else?”

“Not really...” said Zeke. The boy looked down and I realized this was probably the first time he faced someone he had to reason with. All his followers were so young, kids who probably shared his revolt and anger.

Akin went on:

“Have you ever thought about the needs of this boy, named Zeke?”

“Zeke needs me to fight for him..” was the answer.

Akin leaned over, coming closer to the boy’s face.

“Would you let me speak to the boy?”

Next, without waiting for an answer, Akin stared into the boy's eyes and told him. "You feel foreign. I know you feel powerless. I can sense your despair. You feel cut o from your fellows, from your family, from your motherland. Dissociated. This is how your ancestors must have felt when they were thrown here, on the Brazilian shores. This could be a lingering family memory, don't you think?"

The boy was at a loss for words. When he spoke, his voice seemed younger. All he asked was:

"Is that so? I never thought about it..."

"You have the blood of survivors..."

Zeke crossed his legs now, took out his cap, seeming entirely at ease. He kept silent so Akin went on:

"These are not my words. This is a sentence by a famous Ghanaian poet and writer named Kwame Dawes. I have some of his books, I can bring them here, if you want to read them..."

Ifakemi came around and sat by Akin.

"How about the hip hop planet? Would you like to join me?" Ifakemi stood up and started moving around while singing:

I raised at dawn, and I knew I had grown

I was a seed, now I'm a tree, then I'll be a thought

And I just feel the stars blowing me down

But I'm the shelter my entire life I have sought.

What She Said After She Said Goodbye

Bernadette O'Reilly

Well, it was not quite like that. I was the person who said goodbye, though I said it silently. An emotional battering from outside forces made it difficult to cope with her in later years. We were friends since our younger days, we enjoyed going to concerts and shows together then life pushed its ugly mug between us when she met her husband and moved to an apartment on the far side of the city. Visiting her once, I thought I was on a trip to the country. Eventually our connection dwindled to a couple of phone calls every so often. Then a phone call from the husband telling me she had died in her sleep. No more texts asking me to phone her asap, No last words to remember.

Disco Roger

Matthew Tubridy

Roger enters the disco,
But instead of people dancing,
There's human sized flies,
Buzzing around Rogers head,
Dammit he says,
I'm in the wrong disco!
The buzzing is infuriating,
Where's the exit?
He manages to open a fire door,
He walks down Main Street,
He sees a pub with the rugby on,
That's more Rogers cup of tea.

Escape From the Untrained Heart

Greg Fields

“On your own tonight, Carrie?” A Saturday evening turned empty by the course of a long week and a lonely day. Carrie Donovan sat quietly in a booth near the corner of the restaurant, a safe place to end this run of days and begin another.

Sliding into the seat across from her, her friend of fifteen years, met that first day at university when a brash and brassy young woman flung open the door to her dorm room and declared herself to be Carrie’s newest best friend. And so it had been. They roomed together for four years, the last two in an apartment off campus that became the focal point of weekend celebrations, spectacles and the occasional debauchery. Sarah Peters, her name was, and like the Greek linguistic derivative of her last name, she had indeed been a rock, seeing Carrie through the early drift of a career, the loss of parents, the shifting of friendships, and the vagaries of doomed relationships. Sarah was bold, to be sure, but she held a wisdom of experience that complemented the genuine affection she felt for Carrie, who slowly emerged from a quiet shell borne of a sheltered childhood into an increasingly confident and self-aware woman.

“On my own, Sarah. As are you, I take it. Just a couple of single women creeping toward middle-aged respectability.”

Sarah snorted a laugh. “Nothing respectable about either of us, Carrie. I never lived my life to be ‘respectable’. Or respected,” and with that her laugh became genuine. “God, look at us. Two hot women with no one but each other on a warm Saturday night. What’s to become of us, girl?”

The wine that Carrie had requested on her arrival came to their table. She had anticipated Sarah’s entry, and timed it perfectly. Two glasses poured, then raised together in a clink.

“To whatever comes next,” said Sarah. The first sip warmed its way down Carrie’s throat, then settled into an unsettled stomach. It would be the first of many such sips this night, that she knew.

“So tell me,” Sarah began. “Willie Meadows. That cute reporter you’ve been seeing. And are seeing no more. Why the hell not? And if you’re really not interested, could you give me his number?”

Carrie looked away and frowned. “Yeah, he was cute.” She sipped again. “But not a strong man.”

Sarah giggled a response, “I don’t know, Carrie. Those arms looked strong enough to wrap around this tender frame.”

“The arms were fine, Sarah. But the heart was weak.” She sipped her wine. “Maybe not weak. Maybe just untrained.”

“What do you mean?”

“Willie didn’t know how to hold back. On anything. He was a little boy running between playing fields, loving the feel of the sun and the grass and the wind, and never realizing that the sun could burn him, and the grass might hold rocks, and the wind could parch his skin. He loved what he wanted to love, unconditionally.”

“And you were the object of one of those passions?”

“One of those obsessions, yes. I can’t be the centre of any man’s universe. Not now. No man should base his happiness on his woman. I won’t carry that burden.”

“How’d you end it?”

“We were sitting in a jazz club a few nights ago. He was about to tell me that he loved me. I froze inside. And I knew I couldn’t love him back. Better to rip the bandaid off quickly, don’t you think? So I did.” She sipped her wine, more deeply this time. “I haven’t seen him since.”

“He was pretty hurt by that, I’d guess. And surprised?”

“Yeah, he was surprised. The kind of guy who usually finds the pot of gold at the end of the rainbows he’s chasing. I just wasn’t there at that rainbow’s end, that’s all.”

“So, should we even be talking about him? What’s done is done, right?”

“You asked, Sarah. And it’s always good to take stock. To think about the whys and the wherefores. In the end we all fail, don’t we?”

Eventually we all find ourselves alone on Saturday nights and buying take-away dinners for one and sleeping in untangled sheets.”

Sarah Peters finished her wine and gestured for another. She reached across the table and grabbed Carrie’s hand. “So it is, girl. But here we are, and here Willie isn’t, or any man for me. And I’m not sad about it. Not sad at all to be sitting here, basking in what you said after you said goodbye”

Michael O'Brien

What She Said After She Said Goodbye

That was it, Marion gently put the old phone back on the receiver. Thirty years she had known Dave, and now she would see him no more. She felt as lifeless and numb as the wall she was staring at. There would be no more lunchtime phone calls, no more off colour jokes by text, no more birthday cards with last year's date scratched out, and the new date written in its place, twenty years in a row they sent each other the same card,.

This friendship that was so much a part of her, that seemed so permanent in her life was gone. . She looked out the window to see John next door tinkering with his car like he did every Saturday, kids laughing and screaming with excitement as they squirted water pistols at each other in the sun,, birds singing, two excited young holidaymakers laughing, as they put their suitcases into the back of a taxi to join traffic on the highway that ebbed and flowed as it did every day, whether Dave was alive or not. She sat silently staring thinking, the cruelty of it, the inevitability of it, the power of it. Maybe even the beauty of it.

What She Said Before She Said Goodbye

Mark L'estrange

When he got back from the call Julie was gone from the restaurant he thought she was just gone to the bathroom so he just took his seat to wait for her, he sat there for about ten minutes and then he started to get a little concerned, he asked the waitress. "Excuse me did you see where my girlfriend went I had to leave for a moment and she wasn't here when I got back?"

"I thought it was a bit strange someone who looked exactly like you came and sat down beside her and they both left." Paddy was in shock he ran out the door looking all around to see if he could find Julie he couldn't see her anywhere so he decided to get a cab home he got out of the cab and reached into his pocket for his key to find they were not in his pocket then he found his wallet was also missing he knocked on his door there was no answer so he continued to ring the bell.

He was about to go to his neighbour to ask for the spare key when he saw the light come on in the hall it was Julie she looked in shock she said. This is weird are you playing a trick on me how could you be in bed and at the door at the same time?" "He said whoever that is in our bed is not me there is something strange going on here." The imposter came down the stairs saying to Julie who is at the door Julie" When Paddy saw him it was like looking in the mirror he said to Julie. "Don't believe this guy somehow they have cloned me and this guy is my clone. "What are you talking about, I think you have that the wrong way round you are the imposter now leave here before I call the guards or spin you out on to the road." Julie said "I am totally confused don't know who to believe."

Next thing the imposter went to give Paddy a spin but Paddy was too quick to react he did it first and while he was spinning he said to Julie "Listen I can tell you exactly what you said to me before you left you told me to take the call it's your job it could be to do with Stephen your friend. Ask this guy what we were having for dinner today and I bet he can't tell you trust me I am Paddy your boyfriend and I love you." Paddy stopped him spinning and Julie asked him what they had for dinner. He was stuttering saying I can't remember it's been a long night.

Julie then knew who was telling the truth Julie roared at him "Get out of my home now" He was not leaving without a fight he went for Paddy again to spin him and this time he did but Julie ran into the house to ring the cops.

To be continued.

After He Said Goodbye

Laura Alves

What really matters is what he said after he said goodbye. And he said nothing! He just said goodbye and off he went. Not a word of explanation about it.

Every day after breakfast he said: "See you later, Alligator" and went to work.

How was I supposed to guess that just because he said goodbye instead of see you later, that meant he would never come back again, not that evening, not the following week, never again?

Didn't I deserve some kind of explanation about it after such a long time together seemingly in a fine relationship? If he thought there was a problem with it, wouldn't it be better to ask about it? To have a discussion about what he thought was wrong and why?

Well, never mind about it now! After I realised what was really going on, I also noticed I was better off by myself and still surrounded by very good friends and a caring family.

We must always see the good side in all bad (or unexpected) situations and as I started to think about it in a few minutes I saw a million ways it could have been worse. And if it happens that I find someone special one day, there will be a wardrobe full of clothes that fits him, I'll just keep an eye for someone of a similar size.

Well, we can always mend it to fit him!

The Phone

Gerard Byrne

Eoin stared at the strangely shaped lump of plastic that sat on the old woman's bedside locker. He'd never seen one before but it seemed to be running off the electricity because a wire was coming out of the back. He feared it was some kind of an alarm system for the elderly. That it might go off if he touched it.

His colleague Dermot entered the bedroom with his bag of swag. He knocked a few ornaments over with his crowbar. He loved the sound of breaking items, "will you get a move on and check the lockers for any valuables. We haven't got all night. The olde bitch will be out of hospital in the morning. Time is of the essence"

"What's that thing on the locker?", Eoin pointed at the phone.

Dermot laughed loudly, "it's a feckin phone you dopey bastard. Don't tell me you've never seen a one that old"

"I know what a phone looks like", protested Eoin as he built up the courage to start searching the drawers of the locker.

"Besides", continued a big headed Dermot, "I cut the phone lines before we entered. No one is calling in or out of this house"

Eoin didn't take long to bag up all the jewellery and money that was in the locker. A few good rings and a solid gold bracelet. They'd make a tidy profit for a good drug session at the weekend.

"Come on", Dermot fixed his swag bag on his tired shoulder, "think we've got all that we came for. Time to make like a tree and leave"

Eoin stood up quickly and knocked the phone off the locker with his bag. It hit the floor hard, causing the receiver to topple off the top. Suddenly a dial tone could be heard, echoing around the small room. Both men stood silently for a moment.

"Thought you cut the phone line", Eoin backed away from his mistake.

"I did", protested Dermot as he went over to pick up the phone to put it back where it belonged, "must be a second wire that I missed"

“Hello”, said the voice that was weak and sickly sounding. Definitely a man or a woman with a bad case of asthma.

“Who the fuck said that?”, Eoin backed his way towards the door of the bedroom.

“Calm the fuck down”, Dermot waved the receiver in his hand, “it’s only some old fucker on the other end. The phone must have just rang when you knocked it”

“Hello”, asked the voice again. This time much louder and more demanding.

“Hello to you olde fuck”, joked Dermot, “have I caught you making a booty call to the old biddy that lives here?”

“You should leave before I get angry Dermot”, replied the voice.

Dermot froze on the spot, “who the fuck is this?”, he thought for a moment as he went through the suspects in his head. No one knew they were there except Dave out in the car. It had to be Dave. He opened the curtains a crack and observed the getaway car parked out on the street. Dave was supposed to be keeping watch while he waited. Looked like the little prick was bored and now taking the piss, “is this you Dave?. We haven’t time for this shit”

“Dave’s got all the time in the world now”, replied the voice.

“Oh fuck me”, roared Eoin who was looking out the other side of the bedroom window in the opposite direction of the getaway car.

Dermot turned his gaze to see what his colleague was looking at. There was twenty five stone Dave, hanging by his neck from the phone lines. His feet swaying in the breeze, “what the fuck is going on?”

“Your death”, replied the voice on the phone, “you mess with my wife, you mess with me”, the phone suddenly went dead.

Dermot dropped the receiver, “it’s the husband doing this shit. We can take that old fucker if he tries anything”

“Are you sure it’s the husband?”, asked Eoin as he pointed at an urn on a small shelf on the wall. It was of someone’s ashes and there was a photo of an elderly couple beside it.

“Someone’s fucking with our heads”, Dermot smashed the urn with his crowbar and marched out of the room. He ran down the stairs and tripped head first on a phone lead running across the bottom step. It sent him head first through the pane of glass bedside the front door, slicing his neck open in the process.

Eoin sat down on the top step of the staircase and dropped his swag bag. He stared at the full horror of his friend’s death. The blood pooling in the hallway. He now feared for his own life, but wasn’t sure which way to try and escape. Then the phone rang again.

Eoin picked up the receiver, “hello?”

“Hello Eoin”, announced the old voice on the phone, “are you gonna do the right thing and hand yourself in?”

“Yes”, Eoin dropped his swag bag and watched every dark corner of the bedroom, for fear that an attack could come from anywhere, “please let me go”

“I will”, replied the voice, “all you have to do is hang up the phone, ring the police and tell them what you’ve just done. Then sit here and wait for them to come. Can you do that Eoin?”

“Yes”, replied Eoin.

“Then do it”

Eoin hung up the phone, made the call and sat down to wait for his arrest. He couldn’t make sense of any of this. Was there someone else in the house with him.

Suddenly the phone rang in his hand again. Eoin put it to his ear and the ringing stopped to be replaced by heaving breathing. The voice didn’t speak this time. Eoin felt he should say something to appease the old man, “I’ve done what you told me to do”

“Good boy”

“So can I go now?”

“You may leave”

The phone went dead in his hand. Eoin sighed with relief as he hung the call back up. Just then a surge of electricity ran through his body. His skin fried and his brain boiled.

Innocent Witness

Sharon Hutchinson

The year is 1968. I am at the window of my grandmother's house, a tiny bungalow, looking out to the back garden. It's getting dark and it's very cold inside and out. My head just about (came) comes up to the sill. I've just heard a noise that I'm not sure about. I am (about) three years of age. I see something lying on the grass at the bottom of the garden, it's against the back wall which is about 20 feet from where I'm standing. Suddenly it moves and I realize it's my mother. My grandmother, who has also heard the noise, is pacing up and down the very small living room (we're in), suddenly runs to the scullery and I can hear her locking the back door. There is no key, just a bolt and it is very loud. I know something is not right and I pick up a terrible fear. It hugs me tight and gives me a pain in my tummy.

"Why is my mama on the grass?"

My grandmother tells me to come away from the window and to be (quite) quiet – Now!

I don't move and she is too occupied at the back door to notice. I watch my mother who is lying on her side, turn herself over and raise herself to her hands and knees. She places her hand on the back wall and tries to use it to stand up but she staggers back and falls down again.

On her hands and knees she starts to make her way up the garden towards the back

door. I can't take my eyes off her. I can see her face which is contorted with the effort of trying to place one hand in front of the other. Twice she misses where she was supposed to put her hand and she slumps face down in the grass. Each time she picks herself up and continues.

She's mumbling something but I can't make out what she's saying. She stops for a minute and hunches over. I can see something coming out of her mouth. Finally she reaches the coal shed, the outside toilet and then the back door.

As she approaches, I can hear my grandmother shouting out from the scullery

“You’re not coming in here, stay out there. You’re drunk and you’re not coming in”.

She begins to knock on the bottom part of the door. I’m only feet from her but she cannot see me.

“Let me in, let me in”. It sounds like she has a sore mouth.

I call to my grandmother and ask her to let my mama come in, she must be cold out

there.

I can hear my grandmother shouting through the locked door "You’re not getting in, I told you, you’re not getting in here. Sleep in the toilet for all I care".

I have to help her so I run to the back door to try to open it but my grandmother pushes me back into the living room. “Get back in there you little rip, and keep away from that window” she says to me in a voice that is not hers.

I run back to the window and see my mother is sitting against the back door.

Her clothes are dirty and not on her properly, her hair is stuck to her face. I don’t like to touch her hair. She tries to get up but she is not able to. She turns onto her hands and knees again. She is begging to be let in but she’s not allowed. My grandmother won’t let her. I feel sorry for her, I want to help her but I am also terrified of her. I’m glad I’m inside with my grandmother. I’m running from the window to the back door and back to the window, quite beside myself.

My grandmother shouts at me “I told you to get back in there, I’m not going to tell you again”. I know that look and stay where I am – faced pressed to the window. I can now see my mother attempting to open the toilet door which is next to the back door. It’s a wooden door that’s missing a top and a bottom part. As it opens out she leans back to get around it and I see her fall backwards. As she lies sprawled on the ground her eyes look towards the window where I’m standing. Our eyes lock and as one we both wail. I can hear her saying “I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry”. I can hear my grandmother saying “dumped over the wall by

some queer fella, what are you like? Don't come into my house in that state. Oh God, what am I going to do with this one?

My mother finally righted herself and, on her hands and knees shuffled her way into the toilet. That outside toilet scared the life out of me. All sorts of unknown monsters could creep in under the door when you were in there. My grandmother join(ed)s me at the window and as she peer(ed)s out I (could)can feel her shaking beside me. I (knew)know she is terribly worried. I can hear my mother sobbing drunkenly or bitterly (I'm not sure which) in the outside toilet with my grandmothers' harsh words raining on her "Feck off back to where you came from - bringing ruin on my poor son's head".

What She Said After She Said Goodbye

Angelina Kelly

The next morning, my phone rang but I declined the call. A few minutes later I heard a knock on my door. I answered it, Darren stood in the corridor with a folder containing travel documents. I gestured for him to step into the room.

“I’ve made arrangements to get you home safely. It’s not much but it’s the best I can do for you. Alberto is waiting for you downstairs in the car; he’ll bring you to the airport.”

Silently I took the folder, tears rolled down my face as we looked into each other’s eyes. Nodding I whispered, “Thank you for this. And thank you for everything. Goodbye, Darren. It’s been a wonderful experience.”

“Is there nothing I can do, or say, to get you to stay and work this out?”

“No, you can’t. Go back to The Waterproof People, Darren. They are your family, not mine. Go back to your life of fun in the sun, merriment and champagne. Thank you for bringing me into your pod but... I’m not in your league... and I don’t think I ever will be.”

Darren nodded then stepped out of the room. I gathered my things, took a last lingering look around the room, and a few minutes later we walked down the hall, shoulder to shoulder, out of the hotel and into the awaiting limousine. Standing beside the car we brushed cheeks in a goodbye that broke my heart, but I had no words to share. He assisted me into the car then stood back and watched as we drove away.

I stared out the window as the car took me to the airport. I wanted to feel something but all I felt was numb. I took out the folder and inspected its contents. A ticket for a Lear Jet, and VIP Lounges, both here, in Gran Canaria, and in Dublin, and Chauffeur driven home to my apartment. It would be the last time I would ever travel as one of The Waterproof People. I hung my head and cried. Hot, stinging tears flowed down my face. I did nothing to hold them back.

At Las Palmas Airport Alberto assisted me with my luggage and escorted me to the VIP Lounge.

“Goodbye, Alberto. Thank you for everything,” I said through my tears.

“You are most welcome, Senorita. It has been a privilege and a pleasure. Take care and be kind to yourself.”

Silently I nodded. We shook hands then he turned and walked away.

The Black Patch

Max McCoubrey

What she said after she said goodbye was the reason we will never say hello again.

If she had stopped at the farewell, we would still be talking but it's hard to get past a barrage of vitriol. She had to add the poison; she's a last work freak. It was as if she had written a tick box of insults and she couldn't end the conversation without firing every tipped arrow.

I know why and it helps me to understand, and that makes it easier. They say we are a product of our upbringing and hers was difficult. She was a black patch baby. She was born into a travelling show. The black patch is the circle of ashes that remains when the family have performed their final show and douses the flames and move on.

It's a life giving fire, the one that heats the water that cooks the food and warms the suds that clean the clothes, is ever present when the family are.

So, when they are ready to go, the fire is extinguished and all that remains to prove they were ever there is the black patch.

She moves on physically and mentally and I know that when a relationship is no longer of interest or use, she throws water on it and leaves.

The phone sits in my bedroom. It was because she did not return it to the receiver that I overheard what she said after she said goodbye.

All I have to do now is dial, I have a pencil so that I don't break a nail, and I have her number in my little black book.

I don't call.

I don't want to because I heard what she said after she said goodbye.

There's no need to tell her.

For some people friendship is too long.

My Wife, The Clepto

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

Despite his car's air-conditioning roaring away at its uttermost, icy, "full blast" setting, Arnold Mezner sat in his car bathed in sweat. Watery, blood-shot eyes decorated his face. They hung above dark circles like blood on tar. On the custom-made leather passengers' seat of his black Mercedes, were white, crystalized, powdery remains. Next to the cocaine remnants lay an empty bottle of prescription meds for which he had no prescription. In Los Angeles such vices were easily acquired by anyone with the right financial reach. Equally easy to acquire for the monetarily endowed were firearms. Two of which were currently loaded and in his possession.

She was his everything. A woman he'd loved from the moment they met on one of the movie lots and whom he showered with gifts and luxuries as often as possible during their eight years of marriage. Then came that damned letter followed by a disturbing phone call from the police.

"Mr. Mezner, Sir. We have your wife in custody, please come down to the station...."

It was all a blur to him now. The arrest, the trial, her refusal not only to see him but to accept a lawyer on his behalf. She'd plead guilty to the theft of a black rotary phone. Not just any phone but the one utilized in the first "Matrix" movie. One that was insured by the studio for over five million dollars thereby elevating her theft to grand larceny, a felony punishable by 3 to 5 years of incarceration. When the judge sentenced her to a term of three- and one-half years she smiled as though she'd just won a stuffed bear at the state fair. Her refusal to look at him or communicate in any way both during and after the trial was a hellish source of torture, a puzzle that his mind could neither digest nor solve.

"All men have a breaking point.", His late father's words echoed in his mind. Only on his death bed did his old man admit to being one of The Mossad's advanced interrogators, and now strangely enough, Arnold realized that the loss of his beloved wife to the criminal justice system was undoubtedly his breaking point.

The information he'd paid for was bearing fruit. The dusty, lonely road was perfect for an ambush. The prisoner transport van was approaching, and Arnold readied himself. His damp fingers clutched the AK-47 as he lunged the car from behind the road sign, striking the van and sending it off of its wheels to slide some 40 feet down the highway. Smoke rose from the crash as one stunned Deputy tried to crawl out of the wreckage. Arnold struck him with the butt of his weapon and then turned his attention to the prisoners. He walked to the back of the van and placed an explosive charge on its lock. It did the trick just as the shady arms dealer who'd supplied him promised it would. Inside eight women hung sideways, still wearing the metal restraints meant to prevent escape. His wife's head was unmistakable in the second seat from the front.

Just then Arnold felt a sharp pain as a bullet tore through his shoulder and he realized one Deputy was still in the van. He raised the AK and with one burst four bullets left its barrel in a blaze. The Deputy's brains and blood now decorated what remained of the shattered windshield. A sharp pair of teeth then sunk into his ankle. One of the crazed prisoners was biting him. She had gang tattoos on both sides of her neck and greasy blond hair. He tore away from her and pulled the pistol he had in his waistband. He cocked back the hammer and a voice said "No."

It was his wife, Penelope. He un-cocked the weapon and settled for giving the biter a stern kick to the face. He walked toward the Deputy, snatching the handcuff keys from his now headless, uniformed corpse, thereafter, undoing his wife's manacles and foot shackles. He dragged her out of the van and stared at her for a moment.

"Why, Penelope. Why in God's name has it come to this? Look what you've driven me to! Those two men did not have to die!", Arnold roared.

"I found the underwear, Arnold.", She let out with a blank stare as blood poured from her nose due to the accident.

"Underwear? What fucking underwear? What are you talking about??", He shot back.

"Silky, red, thong, Arnold.", She whispered and then shut her eyes. Arnold recognized she was injured worse than he thought, possibly

concussed. Then it all came to him. He'd lent his truck to his driver that weekend.

"That fucking horny, Mexican, bastard!", He thought to himself as he began hearing sirens in the distance. "Red panties", It was what she said after she'd said goodbye.

Goodbye

Deirdre Powell.

It was a meeting I had been dreading. Lottie had been my best friend in school, and we had been through the ups and downs of life together as teenagers, but life had intervened and had driven us apart. I went abroad as a teacher in Kenya and spent five years there. It had been an informative and exciting time. I was at the start of my career and I knew the experience would be good for me. Lottie had gone to secretarial college and worked for a banking firm. To be honest, I hadn't thought much about her, as after a while, I became very engrossed working with my students in Kenya and for some reason, Lottie stopped writing. I just assumed she had become busy with her life back in Dublin and, meanwhile, I was enjoying all that Kenya had to offer and was unconcerned.

After my five years were over, I returned home to the rain and the hum-drum of life back in Dublin, although I was grateful to return to the familiar. Imagine my surprise, when I was on the bus one day on Nassau Street and Lottie was on the same bus. She looked pale and tired and I wondered what the matter was. She later explained that she had a debilitating illness and asked if we could renew our friendship and would I like to visit her at home sometime. Sensing the urgency of the situation, I said of course, I would be happy to visit. Privately, I thought that Lottie could be a bit of a trial – she was always socialising and flitting off to some party or other, meeting men and being a general “girl-about-town.” I sensed that this was now a new Lottie who needed some moral support and whose party days were over for the moment.

The first couple of meetings at her home were something of a trial – it was obvious that Lottie was in a great deal of pain and there she was, prattling away as if there was nothing wrong. She never mentioned her illness anymore and, in the beginning, talked a lot about our school days and how we had both done in our exams at school, what the teachers were like and what cliques we did or did not like. I thought to myself that this was fluffy, insignificant conversation, but I was unsure of how to reach out to what might have been really bothering her. But today, I felt a churning in my stomach, and a sense of blackness overwhelmed me.

Lottie was in a quiet humour and didn't talk much - she twiddled her fingers with her long brown plaits and then she twiddled her thumbs, and though I made an effort at conversation, she looked at me somewhat vacantly.

"Thank you for coming to visit me today," she said, with a sincerity that I had not heard from her since our school days. Then she continued, "I have really loved our chats together," and she pressed her hand into mine. I muttered a reply of not at all, yet for once, I got the impression that no words were needed. There was a break in the moment, as her mother burst into the room with a cup of tea for each of us and my attention was distracted. But I had a sense that this was a turning point in my life, and I was dreading the moment when I would have to say goodbye to Lottie.

We finished our tea, and Lottie stood up and gave me a big hug, but there were tears in her eyes. It was the moment I had been dreading, although I hugged her back and said that I would be back to see her next week. She pressed her hand into mine, and I as said goodbye, my heart sank. And I pondered the question, what do you say after you say goodbye? What would the future hold for us both – maybe Lottie's days were numbered, as I feared, and as I left Lottie's home, I became wrapped up in my own reverie.