

Inkslingers Blended Session

22nd July 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“Arguing is A Game Two Can Play At...”

And the Visual



*Man Fighting Death
From Danse Macabre*

Arguing

Laura Alves

Arguing is a game that two can play at any time, at any point in life. As in any game, there are rules to be followed. Mutual respect is one, sometimes not easy to follow when one of the parts is too arrogant or excessively humble. We must always be aware that truth is sometimes relative and two people may even be right about the same thing even if they have two different opinions.

For example, if your team finishes a match in a draw and you are angry because they had so many chances, they should have won the match, you don't have to be mad with your mate who follows the same team and is thrilled that they won a point! The other team had a chance to go ahead and actually missed a penalty!

There is only one case there is no argument about. When death comes to get you, no argument will allow you to stay a minute longer. That only happens in fiction. So get doing now what you think is essential that you do in this life or it might just be too late!

Arguing Is A Game That Two Can Play At

Angelina Kelly

Arguing is not my favourite activity – in fact, I hate it. Sharing thoughts, opinions and views is great – that’s productive – but, when it comes to arguing, the game has already been lost because both players have stopped listening and are locked into their own minds.

One very interesting argument I did have though, was with death. I was very ill and apparently only hours from possibly slipping away. I lay in the hospital bed when death visited me and gave me a whole load of excellent reasons to take his hand and walk with him into the abyss. He was very convincing and I almost succumbed but then I argued that I had things to do, places to see and people to be with. He reminded me that I’d already been there and done that so there was no real reason to stay.

I was tempted to go with him but then I asked, “But, what about my family?”

“They don’t need you. They can get by quite well without you.” He replied.

“Oh. I don’t know – maybe they can but, I feel if I die I’ll spend eternity looking down on them, watching them and trying to influence them, so I might as well stay and be with them.”

Death thought about that for a minute and rubbed his bony fingers across his chin, “Perhaps, but then they’ll argue, fuss and fight with you, is that what you really want?”

“Yeah. I think I do; it would be better than being dead and they wouldn’t be able to hear me.”

“Okay. Have it your way.”

With that death left me and I fell asleep. I woke the next morning.

“Ah. There you are. You’re awake.” The nurse said. “We thought we’d lost you there for a minute.”

“No. I’m alive. I was arguing with death but arguing is a game that two can play at... and it appears that I won. So here I am.

“Welcome back. It’s good to have you with us. I’ll inform your family now.”

“Could we hold off a moment? I’d like to have my breakfast and a shower first.”

“We certainly can. Breakfast coming up and then a shower.” She replied airily.

Dr O'Cheallaigh
Matthew Tubridy

Dr O'Cheallaigh says
'I like a word with you!'
Goes into a little room,
With a patient who says
I'm an elephant!
Really, like I'm not making it up,
I need a waterhole! The guy who thinks he's An Elephant says!
Dr O'Cheallaigh clicks his finger in frustration,
Facilitate him! He says to the nurses!
Give him a pen
Give him whole swedes,
Nurse tries to give him cornflakes,
But Elephant guy says
Elephants don't eat cornflakes!
He goes back to his pen,
He thinks Dr O'Cheallaigh is a predator,
a tiger,
He tells the nurses to set up a siren for when Dr O'Cheallaigh comes into
the ward,
Facilitate him! He paid his VHI for many years as a Maths teacher in
Ballymun,
Elephant guy loves to roam around the Phoenix Park,
In the woodland there,
He eats the leaves on the trees,
But that makes him sick because he's not really an elephant!
He's a human being,
So the hospital have to treat his sickness as well as his delusion,
Nurse Jenny tries to reason with Elephant guy,
Elephant guy says I'm sorry it's a squash to get into my room!
Because I'm so big,
Nurse Jenny says
'There's plenty of room in here'

Moon Cop

Miguel Angel Rivera, Jr.

The year was 2345 and Annie McBride was a Cop on the newly formed Police Force of Luna One, the first Moon colony in the history of man. Hers was a lonely existence as she had to maintain some degree of professional detachment from the other twenty thousand or so colonists on what was essentially a mining and science out post. Her only friend now was David. He'd been her best friend and neighbor for years, not a flirt or trying to hit on her, but certainly a man of good looks and a strong body, to be sure.

They'd gone out for drinks, danced, laughed and he was always there, a perfect gentleman. As a bonus, he was a good neighbor. Always ready willing and able to listen to her problems, repair issues with her plumbing, or fix any computer issue that might arise. Although their relationship was not the connection she'd expected from this handsome man, he felt strangely like a brother to her. That was until today. Because she worked for the Lunar Security Police Investigative Division, a D.N.A. "CODIS breach" alert had been sent to her cerebral inbox about him. None of the information that he'd put on his Lunar colony application was real. It was all falsified as was the D.N.A. sample he'd provided. It was a first degree, capital crime.

Facial recognition, molecular algorithm checks, extensive D.N.A. archive traces, fingerprint analysis, and every other conceivable means of quietly identifying a person had been exhausted. Now, in his infinite wisdom, her Lieutenant thought it a novel idea to assign her to covertly investigate her own neighbor, who was of late feeling like a family member. The very thought made her nauseous and she felt the sudden free feeling of rebelling, telling her boss what he could do with this investigation, and just quitting the job she'd struggled for so hard. OR...she could have a conversation with David and clarify a few things off the books. Option B sounded pretty good, and a moment later she was rapping the door of his unit, across the hall from hers.

"Ah, Annie! What a nice surprise! Won't you come in? I just put on some tea and loaded a few cookies in the oven.

“David.... I am not here for tea or cookies! Why did you falsify your application for the colony, why did you befriend me? Has this all been some elaborate ruse, a setup?”, She barked, getting straight to business.

David took note of her tone and the fact that she was wearing her duty weapon and shiny Moon-Detective’s badge. A visual change came over him. Sort of an internal thing, really. He began to speak.

“Annie, I knew this would come up some day and so I wrote a short poem to try, with emphasis on the word ‘try’, to explain it all. I’m not a bad guy nor would I ever wish you any harm.

“Imagine a man who knows no last breath.

A man without age, a man fighting death.

Living many long years, knowing many strange lives.

Drinking oceans of pints and divorcing fat wives.

Such a man am I, such a man am I.

You know it in your soul, you see it in my eye.

Please try to conceive, and just understand,

I am your great, great, very great, Grandpa.

An immortal man.”

Annie took a step back for a moment and smiled, trying to mentally sum up what asylum this rhyming nut had escaped from. Resolve then swept over her.

“Nice poem, Grandpa. You’re under arrest!”

Arguing Is A Game

Bernadette O'Reilly

It is a rare thing for me to argue
I always try to see the point of view
Of others
Yes I get annoyed at injustice
I am no saint
Younger years were witness to
Many arguments
That did not always end well
Losses, hurt feelings, separation
Was the price paid
Arguing is a game two can play at
Is it worth the price sometimes paid?
I would argue it is not.

Danse Macabre

Magda Velloso F. de Tolentino

First thing that came to mind was my father playing Saint Saens' Danse Macabre in his soon to be old-fashioned gramophone. He then used to perform fake skeleton dances and we, as children, would remain open mouthed, paying the greatest attention to his performance. At the end he would utter a terrifying yell and suddenly fall down to the ground, soon afterwards to get up with a great smile on his face, just to show it was all in fun.

Actually the figure I'm contemplating in the prompt gave me a thrill in bringing up the image of my father back, though I can say I remember him most days. He was fun, he taught us children how to face life under an optimistic point of view, and also the uselessness of picking up some fights. He used to tell us arguing is a game that two can fight at, but as an old Brazilian proverb says "when one is unwilling, two will not fight". So think twice whether it's worth your while to pick a useless fight with someone near you. Which reminds me of another Brazilian popular saying "I never face a fight if I can help it, but when I do I'll see it through"

Trampoline

Matthew Tubridy

A bounce on a trampoline,
The downs would be the bank refusing a mortgage,
High bounce, your wife gave birth to a baby,
Then there's the ice creams,
someone throws them onto the trampoline,
Your bouncing up and down,
With the ice creams as well,
Then there's the Telly,
That's important,
A pogo stick,
And a tennis racquet,
A cap you got for wearing in the RDS,
Quiche.

A Game That Two Can Play At

Mark L'estrange

The Super let Paddy go home and he called a few of the guards into the room on of which he suspected had something to do with the spying he said. "I just want to commend you all for your great work getting Paddy and home safe but just so as you know we think someone here is giving away all our details to the Mexican police and the gang and I need you to let me know if you see anything going on.

They all seemed shocked and surprised as they left the office they were arguing amongst themselves the super then said "There is no point in arguing two can play at that but it's not getting us anywhere"

Meanwhile back at home Paddy was having some lunch when the door bell rang it was Stephen. "Sorry to bother you Paddy but I am wondering what is going on can I go home yet, that guy who I am staying with is wrecking my head moaning that I am not cleaning up he has me doing everything in the place, I even had to clean the tiles on the roof, it's unreal."

"Why are you coming here where you followed you got to be careful Stephen these people are dangerous, I will suss out what's going on and will call you as soon as I know, but please don't come here again until I contact you."

"Ok sorry I think I will go and stay with a friend till its sorted." "Ok just be careful."

Meanwhile back in the station the Super was approached by one of the guards who confirmed his suspicions he said. "Every time we are in the car lately he keeps sneaking off to make a call, today I followed him without him knowing, he was speaking Spanish and never knew he could even speak it." "How did he sound?" "Very frustrated sir" "Ok I'm going to call Garda Spin Man down, good work but don't let on anything is going on."

He called Paddy who was out for dinner with Julie. When the phone rang he said. "Do I have to take this I am enjoying my meal." Julie being

very understanding said "You better it's your job and it could be something about that poor friend of yours Stephen."

He answered and the Super explained everything and said. "Can you come down tomorrow and we will get the truth out of this guy." Paddy agreed to call to the station in the morning saying. "At least I can enjoy my meal you always ring when I am in this restaurant I think Julie would kill me if I had to leave now."

To be continued

City Street

Bernadette O'Reilly

Enjoying my Saturday afternoon
On a city street
This tall African man grabbed my arm
I shouted at him
He disappeared down the street
Was he about to steal my bag?
Make fun of me
Because I am four foot three?
Why can't women walk
Our city streets
safe and free?

The Argument

Fiona Deaton

Climate change roared at innovation, "You gave birth to me, with you petrol fumes you nurtured me,

so guess what I am here to stay" Innovation the less venomous of the two grabbed his note pad and

retorted "there is lots I can do/make and or invent to soften your cough" As climate change fanned

more flames in Greece he yelled "we will see"

Unusual for innovation, whilst making notes he threw down the pad in frustration and stated on the

verge of tears "Off shore wind farms, electric cars and solar energy are only the bloody start of my

power"

"You will never keep pace with me, I am unleashed, unhinged and as I wreck India with torrent

downpour of rain, give me your best" Climate change demanded.

At this innovation, new arguing further was futile. He chomped on his tongue in anger. This was an

apocalyptic agreement he had to win, "I don't like your question, ask me another one and perhaps I

will answer it?"

Climate change went into a long monologue, of events that ensued over the past five years. He no

longer in listening mode. Innovation listened to every word Climate Change said and accepted, like

the pandemic, he needed a solution.

Innovation, retorted back "Listening is power, I am noting all you have done and accept it. I not only

scientific genius I bring to the world, it is profit for my patrons". Climate Change took a breath "At

last the truth, we have both been manufactured and manipulated by human greed" Innovation

sighed and accepted this as true and meekly stated "It takes two to tango, but this is not a game

either of us will win"

Theodore
Matthew Tubridy

Theodore was walking along Howth Pier,
He's laughing with chips in his hand,
Suddenly he goes over the pier,
Ahh he shouts,
The RLNI volunteers pagers go off,
They race down,
Henry the volunteer jumps into the water,
Catches Theodore,
The RLNI rib comes around,
Theodore is hauled aboard?
Next day, RTE news interviews Henry,
Reporter says 'So he fell over here?'
Reporter cranes his neck over the side,
Suddenly a big gust of wind pushes reporter over,
Cameraman is following it,
Henry, quickly takes off his trousers and jacket and jumps in too,
Cameraman goes this is an excellent opportunity for me to get some
really good footage!
Henry catches reporter, swims to the ladder,
'Can you climb up?' he asks
'Yes!' reporter replies,
'Oh what great footage!' cameraman says in glee,
Reporter climbs up and onto the pier,
Sits there not saying anything,
Cameraman goes close in,
To watch reporter cry,
Henry brings reporter and cameraman up to the boat house,
Gives him a cup of tea,
'I'll be going back to Donnybrook'
Says reporter,
They get in their jeep,
And drive back along the sea towards the southside.
You'll never guess what happened to me! Reporter says to a colleague,
We do! Was the reply, we saw it on the TV,
It was live!

Sabrina

Deirdre Powell.

Sabrina was so thin that she looked like a skeleton. She couldn't help it – the weeks of chemotherapy and radiotherapy had taken their toll, and she knew that she was something of a woman fighting death, although she would never have admitted this to her bouncy friend Jane who was coming to visit her at home this afternoon.

Sabrina reflected on the friendship that she had with Jane – Jane was the sort of person who would be there for you in a crisis but didn't necessarily share any of her own problems with you. She liked to portray herself as if she had the perfect life. Granted, she always seemed nice and friendly and Sabrina had known her for a number of years. It was a friendship borne out of a common interest in tennis. They had met at the local tennis club about fifteen years ago and had sometimes teamed up as doubles partners and were, in actual fact, quite successful as a doubles' pairing and had won some shields in local competitions. Sabrina had only noticed recently that Jane tended to do most of the talking, while she, Sabrina, did most of the listening. If she were honest, this arrangement would suit her today but Sabrina was feeling so tired that she didn't want to do any talking anyway. She had invited Jane to her home as a courtesy – she knew Jane wanted to help and would chatter about her doings pleasantly and that suited Sabrina on this particular afternoon. Sabrina was worried that there might not be many days left and whatever happened in today's meeting, she had no intention of arguing. As someone once said, "arguing is a game that two can play at," but Sabrina had no intention of getting involved in anything controversial.

The doorbell rang – it was Jane.

"It's only me, Sabrina," she said bouncily.

"Good to see you, Jane," responded Sabrina, and she welcomed her friend to her home.

Sabrina told Jane to settle herself on the sofa.

“Tea’s all ready,” she said to Jane. When the two had arranged themselves comfortably on the sofa, Jane started to prattle away like she always did. She started to tell Sabrina about her husband and two children and how they were planning to go on a skiing holiday this winter, probably to Austria. Her husband was brushing up on his German just to be on the safe side, and Jane said that she had to go to the shops to get a new skiing jacket – she had an old one that would probably do, but she would like a new, trendy one that would look good against the backdrop of the white snow of the Austrian mountains. The family were going to be in Austria for two weeks, and while Jane would like to go to Salzburg, she thought that the much-longed-for train trip to Vienna was probably out of the question. And so, Jane prattled on. Sabrina realized that Jane didn’t know what to say about her illness and was using the holiday talk as a way of breaking the ice and, for the moment, she was happy to go along with this. Sabrina tried to stifle a yawn, as she didn’t want to seem bored, but she couldn’t help herself and out came a big yawn.

“I’m tiring you out,” said Jane, “and here I am chatting about next season’s holiday, when, in fact, I should be asking you how you are feeling.”

“I’m doing ok,” replied Sabrina, a little wearily but glad of the company all the same. “I just take each day as it comes and hope for the best.”

The Lady sings the blues

Heloisa Prieto

(excerpt from The Storyteller)

“Wow!” A piano!!

All heads turned to look at Ifakemi. She came down the cultural centre stairs at the entrance, crossed the room, walking smoothly, her large smile imprinting its beauty all over her ne gestures and body. Ifakemi was the most empowered young woman I have ever seen. Royal, supernatural and mesmerizing.

Girls left their dance class and ran towards her. They wanted to touch her hair, her skin, and hug her. Giulia was left alone, in front of the mirror wall and, for the first time in my entire life, I felt sorry for her. I knew my sibling was overconfident, arrogant, being used to always attracting everyone’s attention. Now, I could tell she felt downstaged, by another girl she could not compete with.

Claudia, Akin and I surrounded the piano as Ifakemi sat on its stool. Kadu turned down the hip hop music and approached Ifakemi introducing himself.

“Hi. I am Kadu. I was told you love to sing the blues!” he said.

Ifakemi raised from the stool to greet him.

“Where are you dogs, Kadu?” she asked. “Akin can’t stop talking about them”!

Kadu whistled and the twin wolves ran and sat by his side.

“Beautiful!! I love them!!”

As Ifakemi bent her knees to pet Romulus shiny fur, we heard an angry scream. A short but strong boy ran across the room. Wagner came in trying to catch him and screamed:

“don’t let him kick the mirror walls, he will break them!”

Kadu jumped next to the boy and held him. The boy bit his hand and he let go. Wagner came near the piano and whispered to us:

“He has broken chairs and kicked his friends. He has just witnessed his father being murdered by a drug dealer. He ran to the school. He escaped. But he is totally out of control now.”

The boy glimpsed at me and his pain shot through my heart. I could feel it. I needed to hold him. Without having second thoughts, I moved very slowly towards him. He stopped and stared at me. I touched his arm. He stood still. I held him tight. He wouldn't move, but he did not hug me back. His arms and back were stiff, his heart raced. I knew I would not be able to hold him much longer. I looked at Ifakemi. She nodded as if telling me to wait a bit.

Sitting at the piano stool, Ifakemi breathed deeply. Looked at the piano keys. Placed her hands over them. But before she started playing she just sang.

In my solitude you haunt me

With reveries of days gone by

In my solitude you taunt me

With memories that never die

The poignant lyrics by Billie Holiday's classic blues sounded so delicate in Ifakemi's melodious voice. She sang them as a lullaby and even if the boy could not understand English, I sensed the song seemed to appease him as a musical balm.

Slowly, I took him near the piano and Akin quickly placed another stool right next to Ifakemi's. She gestured to him to sit by her side and he obeyed as if hypnotized by her warm stare.

Very carefully and slowly, all the kids surrounded the boy and the singer, forming some sort of protective, loving circle. No one dared to take the cell and film the whole scene, nor say a word. Yet, I felt as if that moment would be forever imprinted in the memories of all present, well, at least, it would always be on my mind as a talismanic remembrance. As Ifakemi finished the song, she smiled and delicately held the boy. He did not embrace her back, but his body seemed more relaxed now. He stood still, not wanting to leave her side.

“Manuel, my son!”

A young woman ran down the stairs and crossed the room. She held the boy tight, her face in tears. He finally hugged her back and I saw tears running down his face as well. Wagner and Claudia approached the lady and helped mother and son to go back home. His stool was left empty, no one dared to take his seat. No one knew what else to say. A myriad of feelings seemed to inhabit everyone's hearts now: fear, relief, awe.

Ifakemi in her accomplished showmanship asked: "Can I play one of my favourite songs?" Without waiting for answers, she announced:

"Everyday people, Sly and the Family Stone!"

Kids had never heard it, but the song was so contagious everyone clapped hands and knowing she had her audience in the palm of her hand, Ifakemi moved on to yet another song by Sly.

"Dance to the music" she announced before singing the famous verse that would become the centre students most popular motto.

The lifeboat

Matthew Tubridy

The lifeboat is out at 3am,
They can't see anything,
They were told there's a horse swimming around,
When they get to it they realise it's a unicorn,
Then Billy the lifeboat volunteer wakes up,
Realises he's dreaming,
Walks to the kitchen and gets a glass of milk,
He looks out the window and sees a unicorn looking in at him.

Time

Elaine Reardon

When I was as tall as my Grandmother's bellybutton, I looked up at and asked how old she was. She was the informal matriarch of our household, the final authority, teacher, cook, and boss of all of us.

She told me she was 54. That may have been true. I remember the awe I felt, akin to standing in front of an ancient redwood of impossible girth. I couldn't imagine how I'd get from where I was then, to where she was. I couldn't imagine how my life would change once I was finished with primary school, never mind past that. There was a sense of continuation in life. We all lived together in the house my grandmother found as refugee married into the family via arrangement, in order to allow her into the United States. My mother, aunts and uncles were born and grew up in this house. When my mother and Aunt Bea married, their husbands moved in with them. My principal at school had been my mother's teacher, and she had gone to school with my Great Uncle. There was a strong sense of place and people who lived there.

Life had a rhythm to it. Our days seemed endless to me, both for good and difficult reasons. I saved money for college, in order to find better work, but it all seemed to take so long. Finishing college, done in snatches, when money and opportunity were available, took years. In the meantime those years passed. I went to college full time for three semesters, then switched to night school for finish the two years. I worked for years before returning part time. in my late thirties then. I finally finished college at 42, and then life had different goals. By now my parents and grandmother were gone, and my own daughter was ready to graduate from high school. I began a new career, teaching children in public schools. I was now the older one in classes, and often the older person to be hired, Jobs needed to have retirement benefits, although retirement was aeons away.

Now I've retired from work. That is to say, I've retired from a paid job. Teaching is work that takes as much time as you give it; I worked nights and weekends. Now I have time for my interests, and I'm learning and doing what I wanted to do when I began school at five, writing and painting. But i find now time is not endless. There is an end in sight. if I

live to be 90, that gives me 20 years. I've got a lot of living and learning yet to pack into it.

One Last Dance

Gerard Byrne

“How can they bring Cindy Beale back?”, moaned Pamela before hoovering up yet another line of coke off the lid of the cistern tank, “she died years ago in the soap. They even had a funeral for that anorexic bleach blonde cow”

“Hey!”, cried an upset Deirdre.

“Sorry”, replied Pamela as she went to take another line, “forgot about present company during my rant. It just annoys me when they do stupid shite like that. Ye think they would have learnt their lesson after Dirty Den”

Pamela was trying to forget the events of that day. Actually, she wanted to forget the last eight months. A once strong relationship that had fallen apart after her late miscarriage and then her ex Dylan’s affair with her auntie June. It was bad enough that he had an affair. But with a relative as well. And June was well into her forties with four kids. What had Dylan seen in her. Yes, all young men want to experience a cougar for once in their life. But June was no cougar. More like an angry bear with a bad case of rabies.

Pamela found the negative thoughts that were filling her head were winning over the drugs. All the E, speed, coke or whatever else was thrown her way, couldn’t hide the memories of Dylan. She left Deirdre to finish up the coke and opened the cubicle door. There in front of Pamela was a full length mirror for girls to take selfies of themselves in. She looked herself up and down. Pamela had a thin wirey frame that suited most outfits that were fired out by sweat shops and sold on the cheap streets of Ireland. At nineteen years of age, she still had the look of a schoolgirl in third year. Pamela cupped her breasts through the light material of the dress. Not even a handful, which left her wondering was that the reason Dylan strayed. She had seen him looking at other bustier women over the last few months. Pamela hadn’t said anything but it now played on her mind even more. Could she have done more in the bedroom to keep him satisfied. Gave into all his weird sexual demands

that his porn search history was made up with. Two girls and one cup being the highlight of that. Pamela didn't dare ask what it was about.

"Ye look beautiful Pamela. Stop overthinking what's happened", Deirdre came out of the cubicle, rubbing the excess powder from her nostrils and placed her small handbag on the back of the sink beside the long mirror, "I brought you out tonight to forget. Not to dwell in the past. Not to let that creepy fuck Dylan stay in your head for the night. I brought ye out to party and get fucked up and I don't think yer even close yet", she opened her handbag and pulled out a small see through bag containing some green tablets. She opened it up and popped two of them out on her hand before offering them to her friend, "try these new bad boys out. They'll get ye well fucked up and they'll help ye forget. Promise"

Pamela eyed the tablets suspiciously, "never seen those yokes before. Where'd ye get them?"

"Bobby Stavros"

"That creep!", Pamela didn't know Bobby well, but you didn't need to be around him long to know that he probably got girls fucked up for his own sexual gratification. Most women stayed away from him, but the young naïve girls were always good cannon fodder for the prick, "are ye sure they're even ecstasy?. They could be date rape shit knowing that fucker"

"I've already dropped two of these bad boys", Deirdre announced proudly so that even a good few of the other toilet patrons could hear her, "do I look messed up at all?. And I took that shit over an hour ago. Trust me Pamela, this stuff will help ye forget. Have I ever steered ye wrong before?"

Pamela straight away thought about that time that her friend had told her that hunky Barry Murphy definitely had the hots for her at one of the student discos and she had believed her. Unfortunately Deirdre had got it wrong and it turned out Barry had been talking about another Pamela. Four years older than Pamela and a keen boxer. She had left Pamela with a black eye and two badly chipped front teeth. Thankfully fellas found her new dental features cute, so the beating hadn't been a total loss.

But this was nothing like that time and Pamela really needed to forget, so she took the two tablets and swallowed them without thinking, before putting her mouth to the cold tap in the hope of getting rid of the bitter taste in her mouth, "I really have nothing to lose anymore", she turned to face her friend, "do I?"

"Didn't think ye were gonna drop both of them at once", Deirdre was looking a tad concerned at first, before her face seemed to be overtaken by another wave of euphoria once again, "Ah fuck it. You'll just get fucked up even faster now. Come on, let's go party"

Deirdre dragged Pamela out of the toilets but their speed was quickly slowed down by the density of the crowd of sweaty people that filled the nightclub. Deirdre battered her way through while still dragging her friend along behind her. The dance floor was somewhere on the far side of them and with that, freedom. Freedom to express one's self. Freedom to be who you wanted to be. Freedom to be one with anyone of your choice who had also chosen to step out onto that cheap wooden floor.

Pamela's eyes were swimming in her head. It felt like all eyes were on her. Men and women. Young and not so young. Did they all want her?. Self doubt started to drip in once more but she fired it back out as quickly. Her imagination was too much fun to let be taken over by negative thoughts once again.

"Pamela", suddenly a hand grabbed her free one and pulled hard. With the crowd pushing hard every which way, Pamela lost her grip on Deirdre, or maybe it was the other way round, and the two friends got separated. She wasn't sure what to do right there and then, but the strong hand was still holding her other arm firmly, so she turned to see who it belonged to.

"I thought you'd be here", it was Dylan. All done up in his yellow shirt and black denim jeans. The prick was moving on from her fast enough.

Pamela tried to pull away, but she felt like her body wasn't putting much effort into the task. She wasn't sure whether to put that down to the drugs or her own subconscious feelings for the little prick. In the end it seemed the easier decision just to face the prick and see what he has to say for himself, "what the fuck do ye want?"

“Come on Deirdre baby. Why you so bitter and shit?”, Dylan had a smile that could launch a thousand ships. That smile had won Pamela over all those years ago. Didn’t matter that he had been getting off with a friend of hers only a few minutes before that magical moment or that his breath smelt of stale vomit and kebab meat, Pamela had still wanted him at that very moment and didn’t let those little speed bumps get in her way from bagging the perfect man.

Pamela knew that she’d been a fool all those months ago, but was she gonna forgive this new indiscretion?. There had already been ten before this. Nine if you didn’t count the one that kissed the face off him while he was out of his head on E. When Pamela thought about it a little more carefully, drugs seemed to be a regular excuse for Dylan’s actions over the length of their relationship.

“What do ye want ye two timing granny fucking prick?, she spat out the words as if they were laced with skin melting acid that was aimed directly at his beautiful face.

Dylan’s smile quickly turned into a hurt frown, “I didn’t know June was a granny!”

“She’s not, I just wanted to hurt yer ass”, it had been a hollow insult to throw at her ex, but the brief satisfaction was still worth it.

“That’s understandable Pamela. I fucked up. I know I did. But I need you to forgive me again”, Dylan already had his right hand planted around Pamela’s thin waist and was pulling her nearer and nearer like a hungry spider reeling in its prey, “we’re good together. We meet on a level that is way higher than sexual. Sex with June was just physical. We come together on a higher plain. You feel it and I most definitely feel it. Give me one more shot my little princess”

Pamela was so tempted to just throw caution to the wind and throw herself into his not so strong arms and give into the lust that was now pumping through her body. Memories of their drug fuelled sex sessions filled her thoughts. All those nights together in his single bed in his mam’s house. That poster of a semi naked Miles Cyrus with her tongue hanging out like a thirsty Labrador, hanging on his wall looking down at them all the time. Didn’t help when he admitted to pleasuring himself sometimes to said poster. Really ruined the mood for lovemaking.

Looking up at Miley while they were doing it, was most definitely an ick for poor Pamela. For some reason Miley was now filling her thoughts more than Dylan. It angered her. It enraged her soul to the point that Pamela fired Dylan's had away with disgust and took a much needed step backwards, "why don't ye fuck off home to Miley and wank off over that bitch instead", she ran her fingers down the side of her sweaty body, "because you ain't getting near this ever again", her empowering speech would have gone a lot better if her eyes weren't rolling around her head like a pair of marbles. But Pamela wasn't aware of how fucked up looking she was and marched off through the crowd in search of the dance floor. It couldn't be that far away from her current position.

After a minute of pushing through the busy crowd, Pamela was starting to feel a bit claustrophobic. Well, that's what she reckoned it was. She had never experienced it before, but she was pretty damn sure that it must have been something like that. Her uncle Johnny had been crushed under a lorry years ago and he developed claustrophobia from it. He didn't even like sitting on those trains that have the table in the middle of the seats facing either side. It might have more to do with the fact that he was twenty three stone and less to do with the claustrophobia, but none of the family ever called him out on it.

Finally, Pamela was birthed onto the edge of the dance floor from the sweaty mass of flesh. Other people's bodily flesh and sweat rubbing tightly against her own. She came to the conclusion that this must be what an orgy feels like. All limbs and teeth. She had never even come close to an orgy. Dylan had wanted to try threesomes, but of course it had to include another woman. Another man was definitely off the table. Not that Pamela wanted another man. No, she was quite content with Dylan. Unfortunately he never felt the same way. In body and in mind.

Suddenly a hand turned Pamela around to face the counter that circled the dance floor. It was a worried looking Deirdre, "where in god's name did ye go?. I've been looking for ye ages", she picked up a nearby drink that didn't belong to her and offered it to her friend, "come on Pamela. Get this into ye. Yer eyes are flying around yer head like the fruit on a slot machine"

But Pamela had other ideas as she pushed the drink away, “I don’t need a feckin drink. I need to dance”, she grabbed Deirdre by the hand, “come on you”, and with that, she pulled her friend out onto the dance floor.

“Right then, one dance and we go get a drink. Deal?”, genuine concern was already filling Deirdre’s face.

But Pamela hadn’t noticed as she let the music take her and she bopped around the dance floor, moving to the music, letting random hands touch her in places that she normally would have said no and generally having a good time. Time seemed to stand still as the colours of the lights above filled her eyes and warmed her soul. The beat of the music could be felt in every part of her wanting body. Pamela never wanted this moment to end. She could hear Deirdre trying to talk to her on several occasions, but Pamela just blanked it out like so many other problems in her life. Her alcoholic mother with her constant rants about why Pamela’s father left the family all those years ago. Her stepfather who kept touching her up when he had a few drinks and pretended it was all just play wrestling. Her secondary school teachers who told her that she would never amount to anything more than a single mother to multiple children who’d be living in a council estate. None of that mattered right now as her body swayed to the loud music.

Suddenly something didn’t feel right and the multicoloured lights seemed to pull away from Pamela. Her body hit the floor with a soft thud. She didn’t feel any pain from it. All that stuff was locked away somewhere deep in her mind. Everyone around her stopped dancing and all these faces were looking down at her. She couldn’t make out any of the features. There was just eyes implanted onto oval sheets of flesh. One of them was holding her hand. Pamela soon realised it was Deirdre. Her one true friend. Always there for her through thick and thin. But she hadn’t long to think about such things as her eyes rolled upwards and everything went black. The last thing Pamela ever remembered was the beat of the music, vibrating roughly through the floor and into her tired back.

To The Beach

Greg Fields

“It’s a damn joke, Jim.” Rosie Carter’s blood pressure rose in rapid increments. Small beads of perspiration sprouted across her forehead, and she felt her face grow warm. Her fiery nature had been triggered, and the one who did the triggering stood now before her, arms folded defensively, unsmiling, leaning not so much on the desk next to him as he was on his own authority. That, at least, would hold.

“Not a joke, Rosie. It’s a serious assignment, and you’ll take it seriously.”

“But Jim, the sand castle contest at Ocean Beach? Who the hell cares? A nice contest for the kids, and you want to take up space with it when those same kids are getting shot in drive-bys in Southeast.”

“That’s just it, Rosie. Kids are still kids, even when they’re collateral damage. We’ve got to show that. Put some smiles on the faces of worried parents. Maybe get a few of them to head to the beach and relax a bit.”

“That’s not on our agenda. At least it shouldn’t be. We’re a major newspaper with a national readership. An international readership. We’re supposed to be serious, damn it.”

“Always room for some diversions, Rosie. You’ll learn,” and with that last condescending statement, Rosie’s blood pressure reached new heights. Jim Flaherty, City Editor, turned back to his office and said no more.

Rosie had in fact been learning. She had at first been overwhelmed, two years out of college and now on the staff of the Washington Post. A lucky break it had been, the result of a years-long friendship between one of her professors and an assistant editor. They had taken a chance on one so young and with such thin experience. Rosie had only been writing fluff pieces for a Northern Virginia local. Now she found herself at a city desk near the top of the journalistic pyramid.

She took it seriously, all of it – the arc of local stories that implied larger issues, the subtle unfolding of universal themes of random violence,

racism, social injustice that played themselves out on the city streets, the deadlines, the smell of the newsroom, the hard pavement of the sidewalks, the heat of a summer city that often boiled over in fights, and gunshots, and domestic abuse, and the thousand manifestations of man's frustrations, loss and despair. Rosie revelled in it, revelled in the notion that she had a role to play in bringing it all forward and, in so doing, perhaps changing a bit of it.

She took seriously, too, the direction of Jim Flaherty, her boss, her mentor, and something of a friend. But this time Jim violated one of the precepts she held most dear, that news space was limited, that the reader's attention was brief, and that there was no room to waste on the extraneous, on the lighthearted, on those things that made the individual feel good but did nothing for the collective spirit of a fragile city. Or so she thought.

She took a moment to collect herself. Rosie walked to the small kitchen and brewed a Keurig cup of afternoon coffee. Bitter and hot, mirroring the woman who now held it in her cup. She sighed once, then twice, then headed back to her desk.

'Damn,' she muttered again. It was a three-hour drive to Ocean City. The contest ran for two days at one end of the boardwalk there. Judging was tomorrow afternoon. There were contestants to be interviewed, parents to boast and prattle, and a winner to be crowned. She would have to leave her apartment while dawn was breaking to make it there before everything geared up. A lost night's sleep, followed by a day's tinkering on the far edges of what mattered.

'The King and Queen of the Ocean City Sand Castle Competition,' she sighed to herself. 'Not exactly the royalty I had envisioned under my byline.' She smiled then, shook her head and turned back to her screen. There would at least be the beach, and perhaps a sunset at the end of the day, and maybe a glass of wine at an oceanfront café.

At the end of the day she gathered herself, then stuck her head into Jim Flaherty's office before heading out. "See you in a couple of days, Jim. I'll have a draft for you first thing."

"Thanks, Rosie. You know, this is just something you have to do. What all rookies do. Nothing too great about it, I know."

Rosie smiled again. “Yeah, I know. I just need to learn how to argue with you better.”

And with that, she was into her night, into the next day, and into the deep processes of becoming Rosie Carter.