

Inkslingers Blended Session

5th August 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“I Showed Up Late For The Cannibal Party, I Got The Cold Shoulder ”

And the Visual



Love Is

The Heart's Illusions

Greg Fields

It had not gone well, and William Meadows knew it to be so. And so, because it had not gone well, because she had not listened to either his heart's simple explanation or its implied entreaty, Meadows now walked an empty late night street in Georgetown, far enough outside his own neighbourhood that he would exhaust himself on the return and make himself tired enough to steal a few hours of sleep.

Her name was Carrie, and he had been smitten from the start. Through four decades of both close and casual encounters, he had known scores of women in all demeanours, from the pensive to the exuberant to the flashy, ostentatious sycophants of consumption and image. Their morals were tight, or they were loose, or they did not exist at all. They were writers and shopkeepers and communications professionals, and God knows what-all. One had even been a reporter, just like him.

But then there came Carrie, almost unknowingly absorbing into his life, at first a whisper, then a hint, then a pursuit, and lastly something of an obsession. Meadows had been drawn to her quiet voice, which, when used, most frequently carried thoughts worth hearing, insights that surprised him. It was on their second night together, over dinner at a restaurant he could barely afford, that she told him she would break his heart.

"Or rather," she said, "You'll break it yourself."

He had looked at her quizzically, and said nothing.

"You overextend yourself, William. You do nothing in moderation, or so I've noticed. No halfway measures. Not your work, not your apartment, not the way you look at the world in tones that are far too black-and-white, and, presumably, not your heart. You're an emotional whirlwind that will eventually blow itself out. Be careful, Willie. Please."

He shook his head slowly at this, and smiled to his napkin, then looked up to see her eyes, as green as the sea. "You know all this," he said.

"And we just met a few days ago. Are you a seer? Or maybe a witch?"

"I'm not a witch," she laughed. "But I do see things. Things that matter to me."

And with that, William Meadows dashed a few turns deeper into the labyrinth of the human heart, his very human heart, the one that he had protected all these years, and in response had protected him.

But there was no protection this time. Carrie, whose last name was Donovan, consumed him, and he sought her time, her attention and, despite himself, her love.

It had gone on so for a few months, and that night, the night he would find himself walking distant streets from his Connecticut Avenue apartment, he had ventured into new territory. They had been at a jazz club, had had an early dinner at a soul food restaurant on U Street, and now sat across from each other at a small table in a dark bar. William sipped his scotch, felt the glow of good food and great jazz. Mostly he felt the glow of Carrie Donovan.

"You know, lady," he leaned forward and said in a soft voice, "I think I may be falling in love with you."

Carrie listened, said nothing, sat back in her chair. "Please don't, Willie."

"Seems I can't help myself."

She turned her head to look away, then muttered something William could not hear. He cocked his head, and she turned to him. "I don't even know what love is," she said slowly. "An illusion, maybe. A passing fancy of the imagination. A biological heartbeat rather than a romantic one. We tell ourselves all sorts of things, don't we, Willie?"

He finished his scotch and said no more. Carrie sipped the end of her wine, then rose. "Take me home, Willie. I think we've had enough night."

As he stood, William Meadows touched Carrie's hand, which caused her to freeze. "Have I disturbed you?"

"No, Willie. I'm afraid you've lost me."

At the curb William flagged a cab, and as Carrie ducked inside, he stayed behind. She said nothing, but turned to look up at him, there on the curb, and gave a soft and sad smile. At last she whispered, "Goodbye, Sweet William. But don't think I hadn't warned you." The door shut, the cab drove off, and William knew in the moment that he would never see her again. There was no point.

Now, in the early morning darkness, lit only by a handful of street lamps and the lights of thinly passing traffic, William Meadows sought to expunge his soul of his worse tendencies. Again, he had overreached. Always, it seemed. Always grasping too hard at the things that rose just beyond him.

Guillotine

Matthew Tubridy

Could Leo Varadkar Guillotine Ricky?

On Kildare Street.

Anyone who didn't do their job right....

Is hung off a Liffey bridge.

Or driven up to the Wicklow mountains in a big truck, stripped of their clothes and blindfolded so they can't take the blindfold off,

Dumped in the wilderness.

Or forced to cycle a bike threw Africa like Derek Cullen,

It's a choice for Ricky and his like,

Be Guillotined or the trained by Derek Cullen to ride a bike through Africa.

Cold Shoulder

Angelina Kelly

The local cannibal group met in the forest, as usual, for their monthly Friday night meeting. It was a warm night and a bright, full moon shone overhead in a clear, cloudless sky.

I was late arriving so the party was in full swing when I got there. I don't know who the 'delicacy' was this time, but most of the poor unfortunate had been consumed already. Bits were strewn everywhere – a half chewed foot lay abandoned by the lake. A bone - from god know where - dangled out of a tree. Several party people gathered on the ground around a torso greedily snacking, and one of the guys sat with his back against another tree cradling a half-eaten head in his lap muttering to himself. The open, sightless eyes dangling on sinews.

Slurping, gulping noises could be heard within the group and someone let out a loud burp of satisfaction, rubbing his full, swollen tummy with content. The twins sat in an open space gnawing on a leg each and the arms had been stripped down to the bone by another twin set over in the corner.

I looked around to see what was left for me, but all I got was... the cold shoulder.

Love is...

Clíodhna Joyce-Daly

Emma sat hunched over her temper pedic chair grasping at the last possible strings of her sanity. It had been two years since her last novel and her publishers were eager to have her write the epic sequel to the chaotic love triangle the protagonist Jane was left in. Emma was exhausted. She found romance novels bored, dated and ultimately a sell-out buckling to the intrigue of money and the desperation of teeny boppers and lonely housewives.

A lonely sentence laid bare across her screen illuminating the failure of the past few hours of locking herself in her box office room that was buried under boxes of books, clothes to take to the charity shop and an old rug that was in a desperate need of a clean. Emma sighed while rereading the pitiful sentence – “Jane could not decide between the two - one rich successful, the other offering true love. Love is....” pathetic Emma began to fiercely type. The thought of writing another mindless 300-page novel or rather fluff piece had her spiralling.

The idea of this sequel came barrelling down as she was attempting to write a biopic of the new band gaining fame in her area. Emma began following Coldwater around for the last couple of months getting shots of what it’s like on the road along with video footage of bands rehearsals and concerts. The band projected into fame in the last year and became something of “hometown heroes”. As Emma had grown up with them, she was graced with the opportunity to be the first writer to highlight the band’s success despite humble beginnings. The issue with writings from a roadie was the pay was limited – in fact it was non-existent and only funded by backstage meals and whatever cash was left over from paying out the band, managers, sound managers, and equipment staff. Rolling Stone was not yet knocking.

After the sliver of success of the first novel “Love is just Ticking Time” – the influx of money, book tours and favours dwindled with it and so did her agents bank accounts. She was eager to see her pot full again. Despite her love for music, Emma was forced to return home and write the dreaded novel. The sequel would guarantee pay for the next few

months and would not amount to her desperately searching for out of date oxtail soup for dinner.

Emma loathed the first novel success. In fact, she thought it was stupid and she contemplated whether to put her real name on it – hoping the novel would be a failure. Despite the call for powerful female heroines, she made all the main characters wholly unlikeable and unforgiving. No one with half a brain cell would behave in such a disappointing manner as Jane (the narrator). In spite of, her concocted plan – the novel became a huge success. Reviews read “Jane was a tormented character living in a brutal man’s world” . Emma could relate to the main character’s depiction and felt after writing this first novel she was truly living in a man’s world.

Emma spent her time in university wanting to write serious pieces that invoked thought and feeling her in her audiences - shifting the dynamic to powerful woman writers toppling the male patriarchy. To her dismay, she was encouraged to write about things which women could relate to - romance. All those years she spent proving she could be a serious journalist faded into obligation. Instead she gained a new title “the novelist who really understands love.” What was so inspiring about dysfunctional characters involved in a love triangle? She thought. Despite her protests her agent told her to “not bite the hand that feeds you” and to write the sequel to Janes dilemma.

She inhaled her cigarette with the window locked shut noticing the yellow stains starting to appear on the walls behind her laptop. The days were now consumed in inhaling boxes of cigarettes a day and bathing in her misery. Ten years ago, she would have never thought writing would become such a chore. Although 10 years ago, she didn’t think she would write romance novels.

A first draft was due in a months’ time and Emma had only managed to type up a whole sentence – in spite the advance in lieu of the novel being completed. The smoke from her cigarette blurred the light streaming from the laptop and the whole room began to reek of nicotine.

With another breathe out, Emma began to type – “Love is Love is encompassing, soul wrenching, inconsolable, the most powerful feeling

in the world." What a bunch of tripe she thought, she felt uncomfortable even sitting there reading it. With one final miserable sigh, Jane's dilemma was becoming unravelled.

Pacific Crest Trail

Matthew Tubridy

Its 2 days until Gillian is supposed to start hiking the Pacific Crest Trail,
She gets a call from a long lost boyfriend,
Shay,
He says meet me in 2 days' time in Eddie Rockets,
I'll give you some Jewellery,
What does Gillian do?
Video call! She decides to give Shay a video call,
From the Trail,
Tell him to post the jewellery to her next village,
She starts walking,
Thinking about Shay,
As she lies in her tent,
When she gets phone signal she rings him
'Hi Shay? The way you broke up with me was not cool'
But please still send me the jewellery'

What Is Love?

Gerard Byrne

What is love?. A lot of people ask themselves that very question, feeling that they've never experienced it. But we all have at one point in our lives. Might not always be romantic. Definitely maternal in some shape or form. But romantic love doesn't touch us all. Some people don't want it, others crave it while even more people take it for granted.

Love is something that needs to be worked on. Yes, you meet your partner through mostly lustful eyes. Society can't do much about that. You only have to look at love island to see how shallow the youth of today has become. It's all tits, arses, a good tan and sometimes even personality comes into the equation.

Nobody below thirty can truly understand love. Shoot me, I've said it. You're too young and too horny to see the true value of a soulmate. Certain qualities you look for in a partner can sometimes only matter for the next twenty years if you're lucky. But there's other qualities you need if you want that relationship to last well into your eighties. That's unless we're all still here with global warming on the horizon and mad Putin with his one man war on the rest of the world. Makes you realise that a lot of the things you worry about each day, don't really matter much when you look at the broader picture.

So my advice to you is to look at what you want from a partner and then try and think what the fifty year older version would say. Yes, you'll get teenage fellas who'll joke about using Viagra at that age, but their minds still haven't matured yet. They say girls mature faster than guys but I struggle to see it with some of the teenagers now. They all wanna be Instagram stars or sell their naked pics on only fans. It's a worrying trend that doesn't seem to be ending anytime soon.

Dick pics seem to be the normal way of searching for a partner. It doesn't make sense. Do you really want naked parts of your body floating around the internet for eternity?. Bring me back to the days of cheap chat up lines and witty one liners. My best one was about showing up late to the cannibal party and getting a cold shoulder. Oh

how the women laughed at that joke years ago. Now the youth of today would look at you in horror or pity if you came out with a joke like that.

I think I've gone off course here. What was the question again?. Oh yes, what is love?. It's when you can't see life without someone in it anymore. That's the simplest way of putting it. Can be a relative, lover or pet. It's when you can't bare for them not to be around anymore in your life, that's when you realise it.

Paediatric Doctor

Matthew Tubridy

Paediatric Doctor says she gets great job satisfaction,
Little Rory needed his appendix to come out,
Doctor does the job,
After she sits in the hospital canteen
Ahh she says see what I did?
I kept Little Rory alive!
And a hundred other children,
The little angels I call them,
I have dreams of them,
Next day I come skipping into the Hospital,
I know the teacher I had in Primary School would be beaming down on
me,
I grab a coffee,
What have we got today? I ask my secretary.
5 children with inflamed appendixes,
Right let's get to it!
I say,
I get out my cutting knife
And roar Where's my Antitheist?
Put little Johnny to, sleep!
His appendix is about to explode!
After that day Doctor is on a slave auction,
All the staff in them hospital are betting on her,
A 100 euro!
200 euro!
Paediatric Doctor wears a suit of pure silver,
She blows kisses as she stands on the stage,
She remembers a time in medical school when she wanted to drop out,
Little did she know she would be saving children's lives,
And paid 200 euro at the slave auction,
And have a company car, a Tesla!

Gender Confusion Continued

Michael O'Brien

Gary, Vanessa and Albert

A sharply dressed man in his early forties rushed into a city building, as he entered the main office one of the legal secretaries tapped an imaginary watch on her wrist, he smiled at her and continued past reception. He took a deep breath as he entered his office to greet the elderly couple who were waiting.

"Good morning sorry I'm late, traffic", he smiled.

Vanessa and Albert were unworried by his lateness and smiled their understanding,

Gary glanced at his legal qualification that hung from the wall, Gary P Philips, Lawyer, had a nice tune to it and always gave him a boost when he was feeling down or stressed, the fact that he was an elected councillor also pleased him, and his current plans if they came to fruition would definitely fulfil him, Mayor Philips had a nice ring to it.

Gary started the meeting with his elderly clients,

"Now I know why you're here and I apologize that I haven't been able to get back to you, but the only reason I didn't ring you is because I had nothing new to tell you, I have been on to the police department and they tell me they are doing all they can, but these things take time,"

"Some of our neighbours feel that members of the police force are colluding with these people Mr Philips, they think the sheriff particularly is taking money or at least turning a blind eye to them", Vanessa's voice as always was soothing and gentle despite the gravity of her remarks.

"Well Vanessa they are very serious allegations",

Vanessa's husband Albert spoke as softly as his wife, "It certainly is very serious Mr Philips, Drug dealing, protection rackets, prostitution, we are only a small town, these activities impact our community especially hard, not to mention motorbikes racing up and down the main street at all hours of the night",

Gary was about to speak when Vanessa leaned forward gently interrupting him, "The fire in Doozy's garage was started deliberately because he wouldn't pay these biker people protection money, we told you about that last month do you have any news on that?"

"Well, they are still investigating that I ...", Gary's excuse was gently shortened as Vanessa smiled before making her point.

"You mean the sheriff who is friends with the bikers who started the fire is investigating it".

Albert continued where his wife left off, "There was a party in the biker's clubhouse last week for one of their members who got off on a drug running charge".

Gary shifted uneasily in his seat, "Albert, please, come on, I'm trying to get elected, there were hundreds of people there from the town, I need votes, I have to put my face around".

Vanessa nodded, "There was no one there from the town Mr Philips only gang members and their affiliates".

Gary's face tightened as he let his breath out through his nostrils, "Now hold on Vanessa I'm trying to get elected, I can do nothing until I get into office"

Vanessa continued, "There were drugs at that party as well as biker groupies and young ladies who work for their escort agency".

Gary raised a smile and frowned, "So what?"

Vanessa was gentle as always, "Did your wife go with you to the party?"

"No, why would she? She doesn't go to all my canvassing events"

Albert took over, "You are on the verge of being elected Mayor, your majority is easily big enough, we are working hard behind the scenes to get you there, the last thing you need is some unforeseen controversy, ruining your chance of being elected".

"We're still on course, nothing happened, I can't take anything for granted I've got to get every vote I can".

Vanessa had her grey hair tied back tightly in a pony tail, which exaggerated her expression as her face was laid bare, when she smiled she looked like a gentle grandmother, when her face became expressionless it hardened her features,

She smiled at Gary, "Carmella Carbone",

Gary smiled uncomfortably and snorted as if puzzled,

Vanessa was as compassionate as she could be, "Mr Philips did you honestly think you could have a liaison with this young lady in a biker's clubhouse, and they wouldn't record it, that they would not have hidden cameras placed there, seriously for a man running for office that is unbelievably naïve, not to mention the doubts it raises about your judgment".

Gary was like an embarrassed schoolboy, "She practically climbed on me, for Christ sake she started it, and I'm dam sure they put something in my drink, ye know to relax me, I couldn't stop her"

Albert kept up the momentum, "She might have started it, but you certainly finished it".

There was no sarcasm or humour in this remark, it was simply a statement of fact said with no expression or judgement.

Gary squirmed and shifted in his seat, unsure what to say next, but spoke anyway,

"Look I know these bikers are a serious problem in our town, I,,

"Not any more Mr Philips,", Vanessa's face became expressionless, which Gary found unsettling,

"Sorry? What, what do you mean?"

Albert continued, "They are no longer a problem, the police failed to deal with them, you failed to deal with them, so someone else has taken on that responsibility, they are all dead, shot, this morning in a drug deal gone wrong, it's all over the news."

Gary grabbed the remote and flicked on a news channel,

“Jesus Christ, Holy shit, sorry, excuse my language, how did you know about this?”

“That’s not important, right now you should be concerned about the fact that there is a sex tape in that club house and pretty soon the police are going to be all over it”.

Gary’s face was drained of blood, turning him sheet white,

Vanessa was soothing, “Don’t worry we have someone who has already been there and retrieved the tape, it’s Ok”.

“Where is it?”

“Safe”

Suddenly, it dawned on Gary, and the situation he was in terrified him, these two meek, gentle little old people who had been helping him with his election campaign, he had always thought there was something strange about them, but always thought it was a type of spiritual strangeness or religious thing, but this, Jesus, they were players, at their age.

Albert spoke now to ease Gary out of his shock, “Did you read the manifesto I sent you?”

“Yes, eh, well no,”

“Read it now”, Alberts face and voice were deadpan.

Gary startled, but leaned forward and clicked into his emails, and began to read it aloud..

Gary leaned closer to the screen and began reading,

“The overriding theme of your mayorship will be redistribution of wealth, we understand this has become a catchphrase for politicians these days, but not for you. You will pursue this goal vigorously with no regard for your personal popularity. You will penalise private healthcare and subsidise public health, this process will start with paediatric care.

You will tax the two major football clubs in this area 50 per cent of their gross profits, the same will apply to the movie companies in this jurisdiction, all of these companies will be asked to choose a local

hospital, hospice, school or some community project they wish to be paired with, the funding they give these hospitals will free up local government money to fund other hospital and hospices that don't have a major football club or media company in their area. We are aware that there is a danger these people will take their business elsewhere, you leave those concerns with us.

You will govern with the fact in mind that the most important jobs in society are the least well paid and the most useless ones, particularly celebrity types, are paid the most, you will aggressively work to reverse this, again the minutiae of this will unfold as we proceed, the beginning will be a maximum wage these football clubs can pay players. We are a community of six million people that is as big as some countries, we will be controversial at first but we will use that attention to lead by example, we will face aggressive resistance, again you leave those concerns to us. You will proceed with blinkers on and this policy document front and centre of all that you do in office.

You will govern with the principal in mind that absolutely no one in life gets what they deserve, billionaire or bum, you can be sure neither of them has fully got what they deserved. It is true they've both probably contributed to their circumstance, but good luck contributed to one's success as much as some bad luck has contributed to the other.

You will see to it that luck, which is all that most people have going for them is spread out more evenly throughout society. Again, remember this is not a policy document it is a mission statement, we cannot predict exactly how this will be done but every single policy decision that comes before you will be decided upon with this mission statement in mind, and of course after you have consulted with us".

Gary laughed nervously, "It's a little rambling Albert, a little eccentric I have to say"

Albert smiled, "Obviously you can't just do this, the minutiae of the tax code have to be changed, corporation tax too, we have people in place for that, as we've said this is not a policy document, it's a mission statement, you will govern with this statement in mind, you will learn it off by heart, I mean off by heart, we will test you on it regularly, we will ring you regularly you will always answer, if you don't or if you fail to

recite the statement, the video of you with that young girl will be released to every media outlet in the county. This is not blackmail as you would understand it, you will be doing good work and when your term ends this video will disappear, we want no money from you and no favour or influence. This statement is a mindset you will govern from, watched closely by us”.

Gary shrugged, “You can’t change the world Albert”

Vanessa intervened here, Gary always enjoyed her gentle tone and graceful demeanour, “Sincere effort never goes unrewarded Gary, it’s a universal law, never ever, nothing is wasted, every single thing has a reason to be, every single action has a consequence, every right action has a reward even if it’s not immediately obvious. You are setting in motion here the steps toward a more equitable society, in years to come you will be heralded as a visionary, as a great man, a compassionate man, all as a result of your dalliance with a young girl, a defilement to a virtue, as I’ve said, the universe wastes nothing,”

Gary was puzzled, “And what about you, what do you get?”

The old couple both smiled, and Vanessa spoke, “We will be both long forgotten and unknown, we will both know the consequences of our actions, we will be in peace”.

Love is...

Bernadette O'Reilly

Excepting the one you love
The way they are
Forgiving the one you love .
If they do wrong
Loving the one you love
When times are tough
Loving the one you love
When they do not love you
Letting the one you love go

Love is, not having to say you're sorry

Ciaran O'Melia

Well, that's a bit extreme, as you will find out if you read this.

You see, when we came to this country I got carried away with meself, and thought I was the big kahuna in the land of lesser human beings. Let's head back there to explain, you see I'm in a nation called Lilliput, and their all small around here, so small you could nearly walk on them, much like a yapping small dog who scurries in and around your feet, if you get me drift.

So I was in my carry-away phase and left her behind to tidy up in the house, that and the ten kids I have. And I head down to the Lilliput Inn and belly up to the bar saying: Give us a pint, I immediately change that as I look around at the other clients. I see they are drinking out of tiny glasses, whiskey glasses for beer. So I change my order for a jug of beer.

Well the barman says looking up into my eyes, but he talks very softly, I say you'll have to talk louder, so he shouts.

"WHAT BEER DO YOU WANT, SIR"

"Have you got a local ale, not the hoppy stuff?"

"OH, WE HAVE THE BEST OF ALES ALL THE WAY FROM IRELAND,"

"I'll try that. In a jug," I remind him.

"COMING RIGHT UP, WILL YOU TAKE A SEAT DOWN THERE?"

I looked at the seats and knew my bum would not fit. "If you don't mind, I'll stand here?"

"FAIR ENOUGH, I'LL BRING THE JUG TO YOU, BUT I SHOULD ADVISE YOU AFTER THE PARTY WE GET A CROWD IN HERE, THEIR TEN DEEP AT THE BAR,

By now the effects of the beer were going down smoothly and I was up for a party.

I asked the barman "Where are they coming from – " the door opened and the flood of tiny people, he was so busy he couldn't answer.

It was then I overheard a conversation like, now I must admit I was on my second or third jug of beer, strong beer, so take that as it is.

“There is a lot of eating in your man” or “I’d love a bite of the big guy there” or “There’s eatin’ you man there.” This was said with a nice Dublin accent.

After about 5 or was it 6 jugs of beer, you man the barman said or shouted in a whisper “I have to tell you, you have enough, there is no more I can do”.

I was at a loss as to what he meant, however the biggest guy in the party crowd came up to me and started to feel my calve muscle, he turned to the crowd, “He’ll do for a month of today’s.” Well I can tell you they tried to tie me down, it’s funny when you have small men, they tickled me. I laughed and laughed so must so, they all started to laugh.

Over me shoulder I said, as they laughed, “I showed up late to a cannibal Party, and I got a cold shoulder. “ This put them in stitches, and they rolled around the floor laughing, so much so I had to walk on some of them, sorry I said so much

This is when I slipped away, thinking to meself: Love is, not having to say you’re sorry.

About 9 months later the eleventh baby was born to us.

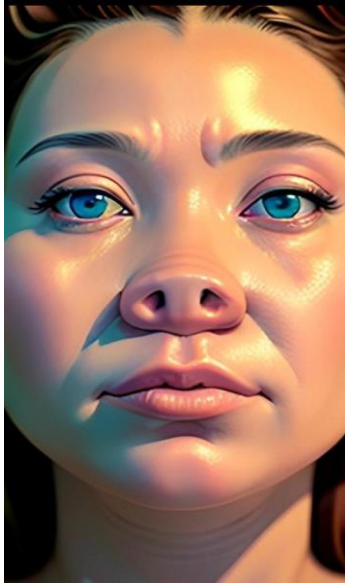
Wexford Poem Number One

Steve Huenneke

(September 2021)

I am glad I understand
Said Nikki Giovanni
That while language is a gift
Listening is a responsibility
I will talk but you won't listen to me
Said Sinead O'Connor
I know your answer already
If they have you all figured out
And they make you a target
Surprise them and keep moving
Float like a butterfly
But don't sting like a bee
Said me and Muhammad Ali
I will listen to you
And give a different answer
One you didn't know was in me
I am not up to anything
I hope you will be happy
While listening is a responsibility
It is also a gift
It won't ever want a gift in return
So here you go -- this is not poetry
I was listening not writing
This is a sand painting
The surprise I stopped and made for you
Before I kept moving.

The Pig master
Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.



Anna's vision was still a bit hazy when she came to, but the smell was unmistakable. The pungent, rancid, Odor of rotting meat. It brutally assaulted her nostrils. The kind of smell only generated when protein products have been left out too long following a period of refrigeration. She found herself in a long, coffin-like, metal box with the decaying remnants of food products. It was August and yet steam rose from her mouth every time she exhaled.

Still in her cheerleader's uniform, she lay horizontally in what was essentially a long metal cage. Through its bars, she observed several other identical cages in this cold, smelly room. Some were stacked upon one another all the way to the ceiling. The room's walls were metal and there was a door at the end with a small glass window that had no visible internal knobs or handles. A row of hooks revealed beebes hanging in neat rows. Anna realized it was a meat locker. One that now served as her prison cell.

Panic set in and she began to kick at the door of the cage at her feet, clearly it was sturdy and built for containment. After screaming, crying, and struggling pointlessly for several minutes, her feet and legs ached. She then resigned herself to whimpering quietly in this dim room. She was clueless as to just how she'd been cast into this nightmare. How had she gotten here? Where was her cell phone? Why would no one heed her desperate pleas for help, and most importantly who her abductor was. Her overly protective parents had warned her ad nauseum about issues of trust and strangers, but yet here she was. Would they sell her? Violate her body? Kill her?

"No! This is about money! It's always about fucking money with these human trafficker types! Mom and Dad will give them an amount and they'll drop me off at some alleyway or something!", She thought, weighing her parent's customary solution of throwing money at every conceivable problem.

"Mom and Dad will get a note or a call demanding ransom. I've seen this type of crazy shit on YouTube, and this will all be over soon!", She hoped.

But nagging at her bravado were some dark thoughts in the exact opposite direction. Uncontrolled doubts that were overtaking her mind like a fever.

Intuition, a feminine "survival-voice" from deep within, or perhaps some other clairvoyant force telling her that there would be no rescue, no ransom, no hope. A voice placidly explaining that something far more sinister and complex was at work here. As the cement of these hard truths began to dry in her eighteen-year-old mind, she heard the muffled voice. It came from one of the cages in the far corner of this frigid room.

"I was invited to a Cannibal party, and they gave me the cold shoulder", was the cryptic line that echoed across the large room.

"What?", Was all that Anna could muster while she felt her lips and fingertips growing numb and losing feeling in the cold air. She also noted that when the girl in the other cage spoke, there was an odd squealing in between her words.

“Who are you? Why are we here? What the HELL is this place?”, Panicked questions poured from Anna’s mouth like water from a broken dam.

The girl ignored her pedestrian inquiries and continued speaking. “He has the strength and intellect of twenty men. Soldiers, police, laws, bullets, radiation, diseases. Those things mean nothing to him and soon you will begin experiencing ‘the change’”. She said, all the while squealing every few words.

“Change? What fucking change? What the fuck are you babbling about? We have GOT to get out of here, we have to call the cops, escape, or get help if we can!”, Anna rambled out.

“His daughter was burned as a witch in 1347. He is an alchemist like no other, he does not age. A thousand girls like you have come and gone. Only prayer helps. It slows the transformation. I beg you, please pray,....”, she let out, now whispering but still unleashing those apparently involuntary squeals.

Before she could utter another syllable or Anna could pose further questions, the metal door creaked open. The silhouette of a monstrous figure blocked the light. He wore a Butcher’s apron over white, blood-soaked clothes. Black galoshes rose to his knees. A shiny, bald head covered in perspiration was at the top of that mountain of a man while dark, round goggles covered his eyes. A cleaver was in his right hand. It dripped with the crimson of some recent victim. Steam rose from his clothes and flesh, and he stood still for a few moments, surveying the room. He then turned to the cage of the girl who’d spoken to Anna.

“Thou yet lackest understanding, and thy tongue will no more utter prayer.”, He announced in what was from Anna’s perspective, old English that sounded straight out of a Shakespearean high school play. He then flipped a switch on the wall that revealed numerous other cutting instruments. Attached to the side of his belt Anna could also see a bullwhip, curled up and hung on a belt loop.

From the girl’s cage a new squeal could be heard but this one was more subdued like the sound of an accident victim. The light now revealed her naked form in the cage. Her face was tucked into the corner and Anna could see countless scars along the entirety of her naked body. Some

were fresh, red, welt marks. Also visible was a strange sight. What appeared to be a long, thin tail rose from the bottom of the girl's excessively whipped back, just above her ass-crack. Anna was horrified at what this man had done and simultaneously paralyzed by the very real fear she'd be next.

"Present thyself!", The large figure ordered. The naked girl turned slowly, and Anna had to blink once or twice. Her mind was having trouble drinking the Kool-Aid that her eyes were providing. The girl had reddish hair, blue eyes, and full lips. The front of her naked body revealed not the customary two breasts of a human female but multiple teats. Most disturbing of all the front of her face bore the unmistakable snout of a pig.

Anna's eyes also took note of a large pile of women's clothes, shoes, purses, underwear, and jewellery in an opposing corner. The surreal and atrocious nature of what the pig-girl had been trying to warn her about began to settle in. A brief bout of denial danced in her mind like a cancer patient receiving a dark prognosis from their physician.

Anna immediately began praying...

Beyond common sense

Written by Heloisa Prieto

Excerpt from The Storyteller

I had warned Giulia over and over against being snobbish and inadequate when dealing with the girls at the centre. The mirror wall was already set and she wanted to teach them some jazzy moves.

“Giulia, I know you! It’s going to be the other way around! Girls will teach you their moves and, in exchange, you will show them very little!”

She was so upset. Her voice was harsh and her eyes narrowed when she said:

“You are the one who assumed that the little storyteller boy had a loving granny who fed him with the most beautiful narratives every night. You are the clueless one! I can tune in with the girls. I know my way around them!”

Having said that, Giulia got into the dance studio with a huge backpack. She sat by the mirror and opened it. She had brought several brand new leggings, tops, dancing shoes and was giving the items away. Girls were jumping around her, choosing their gifts, laughing and thanking her. I could tell Giulia felt special at that very moment, but still I couldn’t trust her real intentions. Was she being generous or did she want to impress Kadu?

Giulia quickly placed the girls in line, in front of the mirror and played some funky jazz for them. She had taken dancing classes ever since she was a little girl, so her moves were truly beautiful. For a while I forgot all about Giulia’s waspish ways and enjoyed her dance. When she nally turned to her students to teach them her moves, they were already dancing them perfectly.

Kadu sat at my side and commented:

“Girls are quick to learn” he said “they dance on the streets just about every day...” His relaxed gestures and voice soothed me. Still, I felt I needed to tell him:

“I am so sorry about the little storyteller. I should have guessed he carried some suffering in his heart. You see, I have just lost my mother, I can usually detect a painful soul. But he was so cute with his strong voice and all...”

Kadu kept quiet for a few seconds and I was lost at words. Finally he went on:

“I like to think my mother is still alive and that I will be able to meet her, one day...”

“What happened to her?”

He sat cross legged on the floor and went on:

“Mother and I lived on the streets for years. Mostly under the bridge. She made her living out of selling recycled trash. We kept several dogs and I loved them. I never met my father, I don’t know where Mom came from, except that she spoke a very refined Portuguese and taught me all about Greek myths... You see, she believed the Greek gods were still alive and well. She was a brilliant storyteller. Most of her talk was nonsensical, but when she told a story everything made so much sense to me. She was a loving mother, so I guess this is why people see me as a strong, resilient fellow. Love is the strongest force in the universe, she told me. Some years ago, I woke up and realized she was nowhere to be seen. Wagner and Claudia helped me because I felt so alone and lost. So here I am now, working at two jobs, trying to have a nice life. I have accepted the fact I will never be able to find out about my origins, so all I have is the present day.”

I couldn’t stop staring at him. So many aha moments. I really could identify with his loss, I shared the same uncanny frustration of never having met my biological father, yet, I had been raised in a wealthy family, I had a beautiful house and a whole new future ahead. Suddenly, I felt stupid, spoiled and shallow. He was so grateful for his mother’s affection, and she couldn’t even have an actual conversation with him. My feelings for Kadu then were so intense. But I can’t say I was actually in love with him, I felt some sort of devotion and awe. I had never met anyone so remarkable. Kadu seemed to break all common sense beliefs. He was a most wonderful young man no matter what. I knew, at that very moment, I could count on his friendship forever.

“Kadu, my brother has invited me over to his house in Lagos. I am sure Akin would love to take you with us. Would you consider traveling to Nigeria? At least for a couple of weeks?”

Now it was his turn to be at loss for words. Giulia arrived before he could give me an answer. Kadu raised from the floor to meet her. She smiled and greeted the girls.

Leaving her backpack on the floor, Giulia placed herself in front of the mirror wall and waited for the girls to play funky music. I was so amazed when Kadu joined the group dancing and jumping as if he could y. Giulia seemed dazzled and tried to follow his fast, flexible moves. As I watched them dancing together I realized that yes, their bodies could communicate and it was so beautiful to see them owing, laughing, just having a great time.

A Twist in the Tale

Sharon Hutchinson

Poor Susie is in heat again and we have a variety of gentlemen callers. We have Hugh Hefner who is an old, decrepit brown and white mongrel of some sort, very short in stature with little stumpy legs and he is the most persistent. We have Romeo who is much younger and bigger than Hugh but is put in his place with surprisingly agility by him. Then we have James Bond, a sprightly white Yorkshire Terrier who takes Hugh's place on the doorstep when he dodders home for a rest and a bite to eat. I have to bring the sweeping brush with me when I take her out for a pee. Hugh is not too bad, I can usually shoo him away with the threat of the brush, James is a bit more daring and will dart around it to try and get a smell of her and Romeo is the worst of all. I could break the brush over him and he'll still come after her; not that I would of course.....

All this wouldn't be too bad if she was in any way picky about her suitors, but no, she's an out and out slapper and will actually lie down if Hugh gets near her. I'm convinced she knows the logistics are impossible for him to mate with her with his disadvantaged stature, and is aiding and abetting him in his endeavours. The cheek of her! She has gone completely deaf as well. If she gets away from me for a second she is gone and no amount of calling will get her back. She is on a mission.

Hugh often sits outside the front door at night - a sitting sentry, and at certain times he reasons that howling might bring better results. You can hear him shuffling around on the doorstep trying to get comfortable but unable to rest as he knows his beloved is right behind the door. I nearly feel sorry for him at times. On one occasion another dog decided to join Hugh in his howling so then I had a chorus of dogs serenading her. Susie loved it and did her utmost to dig her way out through the front door. When I'd had enough of the amorous antics of the doggy kind the sweeping brush came out and both were soon sent howling back from whence they came.

The day after the night of the howling hounds we were pretty much under siege. The mangy mutts had formed a coalition. In order of rank

they positioned themselves around the house. So, we have Hugh, the smallest and mangiest of them all at the helm, we have Romeo, the biggest of the trio taking up the rear and we have James with a 007 to his name just off to the side. They're mooching around, as lovesick doggies do, hoping against hope that she'll grant them an appearance. I'm at the window, hoping against hope that they'll feck off back to their own houses. A German Shepard bladder can only hold so much, and I didn't fancy a river running through my sitting room so I had to plan our outing with some semblance of order.

'Just be forceful, use the voice'. I thought, 'that should do it'..... NOT!

As soon as we exited the front door, me with brush in hand and voice at the ready, they were off in a frenzy of excitement..... I had Susie's lead wrapped about 10 times around my hand. There was no way she was going to get away from me. We proceeded towards the grass area with me swinging the brush in a wide arc whilst shouting in my most forceful voice "Get away, get away", this very quickly descended into "Get the feck away yis gang of flea ridden feckers" as they descended on her en masse. I'm twirling around with the brush, she's doing her utmost to get to anything with fur, so this was never going to be a marriage made in heaven, all that happened was as I went around in circles the lead wrapped itself around my lower legs with Susie helping it on its way. Never put a long lead on a bitch in heat - Ever!

After extracting myself from the entanglement I then reasoned that as long as I positioned myself at her rear end they couldn't get near her. This worked for only a few seconds as my lovely Susie was just as determined to 'present' her rear end to the first caller! The shameless hussy! Finally, the full bladder got the better of her and she had to relieve herself. Well - that was it - I'm putting it down to the hormones. The poor lads went overboard with the excitement of it all. I had Hugh whining like a banshee, running around us on his stumpy legs and licking his lips in a most unsavoury fashion, I had Romeo trying to dart between me and her and I had Mr Bond trying to sidle closer to her on his belly. The brush is going full pelt until finally she finished her business. Never have you seen a woman move so fast. I was off, dragging a very reluctant Susie behind me. I finally made it to the sanctuary of the house and as I looked behind me the scene was a sight to behold. Their

frustration level at breaking point, the other three were trying to mount each other. I could see poor Hugh trying to grab onto Romeo's head with 007 coming at him from the rear. Romeo was having none of it and I closed the door to the sound of him snapping and snarling at his wayward companions.

Whewwwwww.

The next day - the last of her heat, just when I thought it was all over, another raggedy rogue arrived on the scene. We immediately named him Frank Gallagher due to his long, scruffy hair and general unkempt appearance. Susie absolutely loved him, and the others never got a look in from that point onward. She was out on the front step with a friend of mine when he made his grand appearance. She took one look at this amorous villain, and she was off, the two of them charging up the road with only one thing on their mind. The shameless flirting between the two of them in the space of a minute was a sight to behold and they hadn't even started their dastardly deed. Luckily, she had her long lead attached so my friend was dispatched one way while I came at them from a different angle. Frankie was a big dog so the two of them created quite a distance very quickly. With military precision we ambushed them. They were so interested in each other that they didn't see us creeping up on them. We managed to catch her and dispatch him with a well-aimed boot to his butt and order was restored. I wasn't the better of it afterwards and had to have a cup of tea to calm the poor nerves. Remind me to get a male dog next time.