

Inkslingers Blended Session

2nd September 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“Five Words ”

And the Visual



Dwindling Power Source

The Giant Queen

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

Two friends, one a King, conversed as one's attention was caught by a strange, long brown object lying in the midst of his royal friend's lovely farm. Unwilling to be rude, but also overcome with curiosity, he began a line of questioning.

"Respectfully King, what is that enormous object that lies yonder? It causes my mind to stumble and wander.

With a smile the King answered. "She was a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend of a very good friend of mine". In marital bliss did our lives intertwine.

The friend was confused at this response but allowed the King to continue.

"Six degrees of separation, common wisdom for any nation.

So, tell me friend what's your hesitation?"

"Well King, with all due respect for your title and station,
There's a giant turd on your vegetation."

The King looked over and said, "Oh that!"

"Think nothing of it! I married Gulliver's sister,

For many long years I've been her Mister and she's far more
lovely than her short, hairy sister.

At forty feet tall she's a beauty, a winner.

And you but glance on the remnants of last night's dinner."

The friend thought to himself "He's pulling my leg, simply in
jest."

Then the ground trembled and a voice shook his chest.

"Hello Dear, who is your friend.", A powerful voice roared.

"My lovely Queen, this is Fred. Your midday snack, once of
course, he's dead."

Friend of a Friend, and More

Greg Fields

It was Joey DiMarco who was to blame. Joey DiMarco, with muscular forearms whose veins ran like thick ropes and a hairy chest that peaked over the top of his work shirt. Chain smoking Joey DiMarco who could suck down two cigarettes during a fifteen-minute break and half a dozen during a lunch hour, then return to the dock wafting a perpetual odour of black tar for the rest of the afternoon. Joey DiMarco, with an easy smile, a bawdy joke at the ready, and a big, wide, well populated Italian family that spread throughout the region.

Joey DiMarco had cousins, lots of them, and he had friends where he worked, all those drawn both to his constant good humor and his willingness to lift whatever was heaviest. Years later, Donal Mannion reasoned that it was Joey DiMarco who was to blame.

If Donal had a best friend at the loading dock, it was Joey, but even Donal would have backed away from that description. Joey was really the only one he spoke with, the only one who spoke to him. Joey's irrepressible humour drew no boundaries, and he treated Donal from the first day as someone he might have known for years.

"Mannion, help me with this pallet. That is, if an Irish guy has strength enough to lift anything heavier than a pint of Guinness," and he slapped the newcomer on the shoulder and drew him to the task. From the first day it was like that, all the time. Joey with his jokes, his jibes, his encouragement, and a steady rudder that kept things on course.

"What are you up to this weekend, Mannion? Let me guess. Drowning yourself in liquor and self-pity, chasing any woman who happens by and then waking up Sunday morning with a head full of dry rocks."

"You pretty much nailed it, Joey. The Donal Mannion Formula for Weekend Joy. I'd recommend it if you weren't already such a stable family man,"

"Ah, how can a man live like that? You're killing yourself, Mannion, do you know that? Killing yourself. But I can offer a brief respite. I have a

cousin I think you should meet. I'd be happy to make an introduction if you promise not to behave like a Caveman."

"You're playing matchmaker, Joey?"

"Not a habit of mine, Mannion, but I see something here. You're a desperate, lonely loser, and Gina is coming off a rocky relationship. A couple of them, actually. She's delicate right now, and she could use the company of someone who might treat her right. I thought of you."

"Kind of you, big guy, but what makes you think I'm willing. I've never been one to have someone else set me up."

"She's into the finer things. She reads a lot, just like you, and she wanders around the museums. She's sensitive, Mannion, and despite your primitive lifestyle, I think you are, too. Call it a hunch. If nothing else, it might be time well spent. You might learn something about how to treat a real woman."

"Does she have your family traits, Joey? The five o'clock shadow, the linebacker's build, that sort of thing?"

"She's cute as hell. A slip of a thing. All her cousins want to take care of her, especially after all her heartbreaks. She's adorable."

"And you'd trust her with the likes of me?"

"I think you're different than the rest of these mooks. And besides, if you ever mistreat her, I'll beat you into gutter slop.

. "She's as lonely as you are, Donal," he continued. "Divorced twice over by rogues that'd make you look like Sir Lancelot. Give her a call."

So it began. Donal called the number Joey gave him, halting and uncertain, with none of the easy, alcohol-infused charm that worked with random women in bars. Gina, lobbied as well by her cousin – "He's a decent guy, Gina. Lonely as hell, but he doesn't know it" – expected the call.

They met first at Rock Creek Park, leafy and broad this time of year, and with plenty of people around. Gina had suggested it, a bit of self-protection if things were to go poorly.

Donal's breath caught in his throat when he first saw the slight dark-haired figure that might be Gina Moretti. An instinct, some inarticulate internal calling, that told him that this woman was not to be taken casually. That this woman could mean something. Years later he would not be able to explain it, although he knew for certain at first glance that Gina Moretti would be different from all the others, that she, of them all, might change him. Redemption, redefinition.....Somewhere an angel whispered.

As his time with Gina grew more frequent, and richer in the growing of it, Donal spent less time at the bars. After returning home from work, he would spend his nights quietly, either watching television or reading. Once or twice a week he might pour himself a measure of scotch, which he would sip in the relative peace of music or a good book.

On one such night, he cradled his drink at the window that looked onto nothing. 'These streets', he thought as he looked down on them. 'All I knew as a boy was these streets. Where do dreams come from? No one ever showed me.

'But she might be the one who validates what it means at last to be Donal Mannion.'

Cracks in the concrete

Gerard Byrne

It was a bright sunny afternoon, and the nearby woods was alive with the sounds of nature. Daniel didn't miss this place at all. He'd moved out of the family home about forty-two years ago and never looked back. Sitting here in the garden was just dragging up bad memories from his past. His violent father dishing out beatings to him and his three sisters. Daniel had always gotten the worst of it. Put in hospital more times as a child than he was ever there as an adult. Busted ear drum, broken ribs and busted testicle. It was all part of living in the Cormack's household. His mother June turning a blind eye to the violence and carrying on like their little family was perfect.

His father Thomas had run off seventeen years ago and never looked back. The last thing he ever did for June was building the patio that Daniel was now sitting on. The metal garden furniture was badly rusted but his mother still never replaced it. Saying that you shouldn't get rid of something just because it looks a bit tatty. Then again, June hadn't much use for garden furniture now since she had spent the last eight years in a wheelchair. Her respiratory system was failing and she was finding it more and more difficult to breathe. So, she was now being cared for by her youngest daughter Betty.

A tired looking Betty wheeled out her mother and Parker her next to the table, "there you go mam. I'll just go get the tea", and with that she hurried off back inside the house.

Daniel felt awkward trying to think of something to say. This was the first time he'd been back to the house. It was easier to forget when you weren't reminded of the past. He was trying not to stare at his mother because it seemed rude since she now had the oxygen mask and her face was wrinkled badly, "long time no see mam", he tried to force a smile, but it got lost along the way.

June moved the oxygen mask from her mouth, "I'm surprised you came back after all this time".

“Heard about your condition and felt that I had to come back. Didn’t know that dad had fucked off years ago until Betty told me. If I had of known mam, I would have come back”.

“You could have checked up on us”.

“I know”, Daniel couldn’t think of a good excuse for his absence. He’d been selfish and deserted his family to save himself, “I’ve got no excuses and I’m not gonna try and make you understand, because that would be just insulting to you and Betty”.

“And what about Eva and Sarah?”

“Them too”, Daniel hadn’t thought about his other two sisters. Out of sight, out of mind and all that shite, “I needed to get away from dad and the violence. Build a life for me and I did that. I’ve got four kids myself and a good job. Work in the docks in Liverpool. You probably notice the twang in my voice. Never thought that I’d build a life for myself, but I did it mam and I’m proud of it. I just wish that I didn’t have to leave here to do it”.

“That’s water under the bridge now”, June took a hit from her oxygen mask, “we all moved on and made a life for ourselves. When your father wasn’t in the picture anymore, me and the girls finally lived our lives without him overshadowing everything with his anger and violence. It felt like a rebirth in ways. Might only have six months left to live, but those next six months will be ten times better than all the years of marriage I had to go through with that man”.

“Has he never been in contact since he left?”, Daniel noticed his sister coming back out with a tray filled with cups and a pot of tea.

“He just up sticks and left”, Betty put the tray down on the table and took a seat herself, “one day he’s battering me because I accidentally kicked my ball into the foundation of this patio and the next he’s packed up and left. He broke my arm that day. Didn’t even know until I went to school on Monday and was complaining about the pain in my arm. Never thought he’d leave us. Still doesn’t make sense to this day. Love to know where he is right now”.

June moved her oxygen mask, “I know where he is kids”, she lifted her walking stick off the edge of her wheelchair and banged the badly

cracked patio below them with the end of her stick, “wouldn’t be able to relax if he was still out there wandering the streets. At least I know where he is at all times and that gave me peace of mind”

June’s two kids stared at her with open mouths. It was Daniel who finally found his voice first, “did you killed him?”

“Hadn’t much of a choice”, June took a sip from her tea, “it was either him or Betty”, she turned to her daughter, “you don’t remember that day fully. He beat you so bad that he knocked you unconscious. Left you for dead in the garden and just carried on working on the patio. The prick was digging and digging like nothing had happened. I seen red and hit him with a hammer. Don’t know where I got the strength but I did. He went down and that was that. Didn’t take much work to make up a bit of cement and my problems were sealed for good. All those years of watching Brookside finally paid off”, a smile came to her face.

Daniel and Betty looked down at the patio under their feet. It was badly damaged, with large cracks running through the cement. It hadn’t many more good years in it.

“Dad’s down there?”, Betty gestured to the cement below her feet.

“Yes, my dear”, June took another sip of her tea, “and you can tell the authorities the truth after I’m dead. That’s all I ask of you both”.

But Daniel wasn’t really listening. He was just glad that he hasn’t cleaned the dog shite off his shoe properly before arriving. Felt like a final fuck you to his father.

Country Living

Max McCoubrey

'Where does the milk for ice cream come from?' my country born father asked me one day as we walked to the Italian Ice Cream parlour in Templeogue. 'A bottle' I said emphatically, mortified that he should know so little.

'A trip to your aunt's farm for you' he said smiling 'that will teach you so much'

That was how I came to be walking into the farmhouse in County Down on a winter's evening. I was immediately struck by the smell of the turf blazing in the hearth. It taught me comfort, support and bounty, which is strange, because it was a dwindling power source at that time. Electricity was on its way and the days of turf burning were at the autumn of its time frame.

Over the ever alive amber embers, there hung a three legged caldron. It was the host to the all-important water for cooking and cleaning. Within an hour of my arrival I was given the task of keeping the fire lit at all times. I was shown where the turf was kept in the shed outside and when and how to bring supplies to the main residence.

It was an important job, because the fire was also used for baking the daily bread. It had to be extremely hot for that essential task. Scones baked over the turf had a magical flavour, never again enjoyed by me once I returned to the city. My final task was to accompany my uncle to the bog to collect the fresh supplies. I loved that because it meant I enjoyed the company of Nedeen, the donkey. I learned a lesson from Nedeen too. Never do anything you don't want to do. Stop and don't start either until people get it into their heads that you're not impressed. The message was loud and clear, yet silent.

It was almost as strong as the lesson I learned that Dad knew more than me after all, and milk did not originate in a bottle.

Late August

Elaine Reardon

I sit on porch steps,
watch the sun burn
off the late August dew.
Fog fronds curl away
from Brown-Eyed Susans
and wide squash flowers.

I sip tea and watch the bumblebees
already working.. They hover and dip
into each separate garlic chive flower,
feet first, and bury their heads
deep in its glory. Orange pollen sacs fill
on their legs, like tiny brocade carpet bags.

I move close, follow their progress
as they make morning music, moving
to purple thyme and oregano. There's
a morning music of buzz, clicks when
grasshoppers jump, wings spread wide,
and morning cricket song, all before
the sun banishes morning dew.

Tomas

Deirdre Powell.

Tomas was a gardener – at least that’s what he was in Ireland. Back in his native Poland, he had trained as a watchmaker, but business was not good in his native Gdansk, and so, he decided to make the move to Ireland. He intended to work hard at whatever he did – he was aware that there might not be so many opportunities as a watchmaker in his new country so he was prepared to try his hand at anything.

And so it proved. He eventually settled in Tighlester in Leinster, a small town outside the larger city of Dublin, and joined the local church. As luck would have it, he met other Poles and shared a house with five other Polish people, which was a good thing as it gave him a sense of community, a kind of home from home. He had learned English in school but found the Irish accent a bit difficult to understand. Nonetheless, he found work as an apprentice to a gardener – the work did not require a great understanding of English and this suited his needs at present.

His boss was an Irish man named Matt, whose mother was Polish and Matt was bilingual. Tomas thanked his lucky stars that he had found something of a home from home and it appeared that he would be able to support himself and save some money that he could send home to his aging mother in Gdansk. With a stout heart, he applied himself to his daily tasks of lawn-mowing and hedge cutting. In the beginning the job of a gardener was just a job, but as time passed, he began to imitate his boss, who had the soul of a gardener. Matt loved trees, loved nature and was very sensitive to the connection between wildlife, especially birds and the importance of tree cutting. Gradually, Tomas came to love the freedom that an outdoor job gave him, and he, too, developed a gardener’s touch. True, it wasn’t the same as being a watchmaker in his native Poland, but he accepted that he now had a new life in a new country and was content with his lot. At least for the moment.

She Was A Friend Of A Good Friend Of Mine

Bernadette O'Reilly

She was a friend of a good friend of mine
The lady did not like me
When we met recently in Dublin
On a rainy afternoon
Could it be jealousy
Superstition
Feeling uncomfortable
I left.

Dwindling Power source

Mark L'estrange

They were all speechless when they saw Stephen appear, Paddy and the Super were getting second thoughts about Stephen thinking is he behind the whole thing. Paddy said to the Superintendent "Can I talk to you in private for a minute please?" They both left the room and Paddy said "You don't think that Stephen is behind this do you?" "Don't know what to think he always seems to show up when something funny happens doesn't he?" "And yet when we were away they were all chasing him and we found out what the gang did to him.

All of sudden the power source in the station dwindled and went off the whole place was in complete darkness they heard a few shouts from the interrogation room and when they managed to find their way back inside the garda spy and Paddy had vanished and then the power suddenly came back on.

They both ran outside the station to see if they could find them but there was no sign of them, next thing Paddy's phone rang it was Stephen he said "Hey Paddy how are you getting on haven't heard from you in a while any news on me being able to return home please" Paddy said "What are you on about you were just in the station you were pretending to be me and then you turned back into you" "What on earth are you talking about I am with my friend in Cabra I can face time you if you don't believe me?" "Ok please do." He did and he was with his friend. He filled in the Super about this they both thought this was a way for the Garda spy to escape from trouble.

The Super got on the radio to the garda chopper to search for the police car that was taken by the two suspects and they both took one of the cars to find them too. They were searching for the best part of two hours with no luck while they were searching, the Guards back at the station were looking a cctv footage of where they could of went which was a big help because they got in touch with guards searching. It turned out the car was heading for the airport. Spin man said to the Super. "They must be heading back with the gang we better get there quick." "Yes let's get to the airport now" As they entered the airport they saw all the gang that abducted Paddy and Stephen where away in

Mexico. The Super said “ We better be careful I am sure these are armed and dangerous.

There was a huge plane they were getting on and the spy guard was climbing the stairs on to the aircraft when the saw the garda chopper approaching and the garda car with Spin man Paddy in it one of them had a remote control they pressed which turned of the power and again like a switch it went back on and the plane was in the air.

To be continued.

Season of mists

Deirdre Powell.

Across the lake, a mist unfolds,
Steamy, shadowy, like a whisper,
Creeping across the surface,
Almost lapping against the water,
Advancing ever closer to the shore,
Secretly, seamlessly, shrewdly, softly,
Caressing the liquid in its way
A hidden beauty.

And, as I watch the mist unfolding
Its tentacles toward me,
I have to admit that I feel
As though a celebration is about to begin.
The caress of the mist,
The brush of the liquid,
Dewdrops glisten on my skin,
At the request of a hidden director.

And so it is
That the unseen hand
Of someone invisible,
Is guiding a season of mists,
Close to me,
As I sit, shoreside,
Evaluating and contemplating
In an undisturbed reverie.

Fingers On Glass

Gerard Byrne

It was a cold September morning. The fog was hanging thick in the air, but that didn't put Frank off from training that day. The weekend was always the best time to run. There were loads of people out on the boardwalk at that time. Always good to be seen out trying to better yourself. Especially when you were an up and coming local politician. Frank hoped to do the next 5K that was on early next year. There would be photographers and film crews there to report on the event. So it would look good if he was seen taking part. Anything to garner a few more votes.

As he ran alongside the Boyne, Frank couldn't help but enjoy the peace of the countryside. Not even the motorway bridge high above him could drown out the natural sounds around him. That was until there was a large screech of brakes, followed by loud smashing sounds. Suddenly a car fell from the bridge and splashed into the swollen river beside him.

Frank froze on the spot. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. He didn't know how to react. He looked around for someone to help him, but the boardwalk was empty. Frank was alone with this and he had to act fast. He pulled his mobile out and called emergency services. They asked questions which he quickly answered. Then the dispatcher asked him could he see how many people where in the car. Frank hadn't thought about that. He was still too in shock about the car falling off the bridge.

Before he had time to answer, a small young blonde girl started to hammer on the glass of the back window. The front of the car was already sinking into the murky waters of the Boyne. Her pleading eyes said more than her cries for help.

"Jesus Christ", Frank fired the phone to one side and kicked off his runners before wadding out into the river. He could feel the strong undercurrent. Thankfully he was a strong swimmer and he breaststroked out to the sinking car. The couple in the front of the car were bloody and unresponsive. Frank guessed that they might be dead, but he already planned to check when he got the girl out.

When he arrived at the car, Frank grabbed the door handle and tried to force it open. Unfortunately, the water was already up to the window, and it wouldn't budge. That didn't stop him from still trying. Frank pulled and pulled on the handle to the point that his muscles ached. The little girl screamed at him to help her. Her eyes filled with fear as the waters raised around her.

"I'm trying", roared Frank, "I'm really trying".

"Don't let me die", cried the little girl.

"You're not gonna die", Frank wasn't sure why he said it, but the words just tumbled out of his mouth.

The whole front of the car got dragged under leaving only the booth section left sticking out of the water. Frank moved around to the back window and started to hammer on the glass. With each thump he wished that he had of kept up the bodybuilding from last year. Maybe then he could have smashed the glass. Unfortunately he wasn't strong enough. His knuckles were bloody and three of his fingers broken, but Frank kept on battering the glass. His eyes locked on the scared young girl's frightened face. She was struggling to hold onto the back of the seats.

Suddenly the weight of the car shifted, and it sank into the waters of the Boyne. Frank could only watch on in anguish as it sank out of view. The young girl's desperate face disappearing into the darkness. There was nothing more he could do.

Frank couldn't hold his breath any longer and broke the surface of the water with an agonising scream. But there was no one around to hear him. He was alone with his pain. A pain that wouldn't leave him until the day he died.

Bed of Turf

Ciaran O'Melia

There was a time long ago, when I recall heading to the Dublin Mountains to cut turf, initially on the crossbar of my father's bicycle. Oh the joy of that time, the smell of Sweet Afton cigarettes of his Jersey and mingled with sweat he would peddle hard as we turned off at the Rathfarnham, the Yellow House pub.

Then up the hill to the plot, to show he was human he would walk when going in the mountains.

The thing about the plot was you had to reserve this a year before, each to his own, and clear the land before you would cut.

Then the cutting, as he set about doing it with a spade or in Irish a Slean, he would be joined by Uncles of mine, not his brothers, my mother's brothers.

My job was to gather the wet turf, which was about 12"x4"x4", and stack them in like small tripods with one across the top of the tripod. This had to be done in the Spring, to allow the Summer drying. Also to make and build fire, to boil some water in a billy can.

Then the collection, which came in as late in the year as time would allow, drying time.

This I loved, as my bum was getting sore from the crossbar.

We would pool our resources and rent the truck and driver. That day he arrived with a child, She was a friend, of a friend, of a friend, of a very good friend of mine and I was smitten by her knowledge.

But not by her work ethic, as she lay in her father's truck. I told her, "You know, you will never get a fella with your looks, you have to put your back into it, helping out like."

Her reply went something like, "I want to be a film star."

"Well," Said I, "that will put turf on the fire." And we never spoke again.

She was a Friend

Clíodhna Joyce-Daly

Sinéad was having a random day. In fact, Sinéad was having an arbitrarily strange day as she shuffled along the uneven cracked pavement. It was misting, the typical mist that regardless of the accompaniment of an umbrella covering, you get soaked through the skin anyway.

To make the day even more palpable Keith O'Reilly came speeding along the narrow lane splashing every possible puddle across its route. The only object in his trial was Sinéad – the only person in the town who would dare step into the weather's wrath.

The willingness to go out into Irish storm – was lacking more than reality Sinéad's mother would not let her use the car to go to the shops. Statements like and "I've taken you off the insurance," and "sure you could do with the fresh air and the walk" consumed her thoughts. There was nothing more startling than your mother to snap you back into reality.

Sinéad was only back a week and herself and her mother were already at wits ends with each other. Crippled with fatigue from months of tedious labour work, her body was projected into permanent hibernation and she longed for her much needed holiday. Despite this, Sinéad's mother thought 7am was an ideal time to start hoovering the hall and 7:15am was the optimal time to utilise the nutribullet blending frozen berries for that extra clamour.

With a time clock warped and quiet hours relinquished, Sinéad was exhausted.

Although, the morning commotion routines was exasperating, being home after two years did allow Sinéad some breathing room and she was able to sigh in relief.

Connaughton's lights illuminated before her, highlighting her rain soaked saturated pants. Its structure had not altered since she saw it last. The cracks still stood beneath its roof, the windows were freshly cleaned against the bright colour of the building vastly contrasting from

its grey background. Its warmth, however, was a much-needed respite from the Baltic day.

The door chimed open with the wharfs of fresh brown bread, consuming the air. The aroma was specifically unique to Bridie's bread and its favours were sorely missed by Sinéad.

"Well if it isn't herself," Bridie exclaimed as Sinéad wandered through the autumn filled aisles. Bridie stood in her usual position – her smooth arms crossed across her unwrinkled perfectly trimmed apron that displayed characters of tiny daffodils against her dark shirt. Bridie stood 5 feet tall with a mop of jet black hair that despite its wild nature suited the round angles of her face.

"Suppose it is", Sinéad replied.

"Heard you are back for the summer from Australia," Bridie responded.

"Yeah"

"Tis the weather is shocking here, pity you came at such a time where the weather isn't in your favour. You know Bernadette told me you were here. She was a friend of a friend, of a friend, of a friend of a very good friend. Have you found work out there? Bernadette told me you were waitressing or something of the like."

Projected right in front of her was the existence of small town gossip, Sinéad couldn't help but notice the tone of judgement in her voice.

"You've gotten awful gaunt looking there," Bridie continued. "You would think working in a restaurant would fatten you up. Sure the food must be desperate there so. "

Sinéad nodded in compliance.