

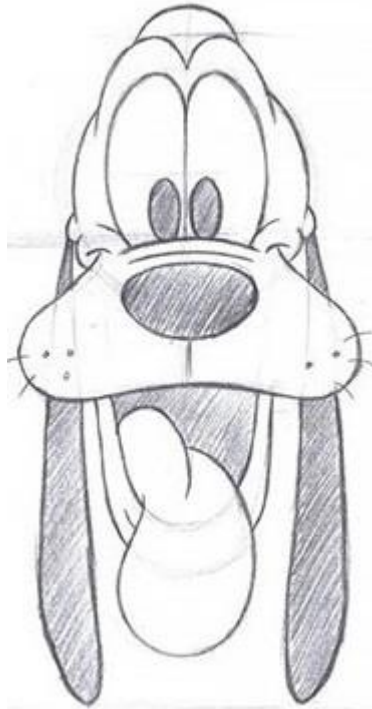
Inkslingers Blended Session

28th October 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“I know you’re here, yo might as well show yourself ”

And the Visual



Strays

Greg Fields

Most days Willie Meadows walked the mile from his office to his apartment. It was a way he had of peeling off the day, of stripping away the frustrations and the roadblocks and, on the worst of days, the inability to put together two coherent sentences. He wrote from facts, at least as he saw them, and he wrote to deadlines. Sometimes the deadlines loomed ahead of him like Godzilla over the Tokyo skyline, and the very outline of it froze him to his keyboard. Those days were the worst, and he would take his walk through the crowded and bumping streets as a kind of reset, a purging of the thoughts that did not work and the frustrations that would not leave him.

Washington was a walkable city, but it was a city without much space. At the end of a workday streets were filled, sidewalks moved in crowded and broken flows, and every building's doorway seemed never to close as people sifted in and out. Difficult to breathe in the summer, cold and raw when the autumn rains fell. No worries in wintertime when the snows fell. Washington had no stomach for snow, and a few flakes would shut the entire city. On those days Willie would work on his assignments from the comfort of his small study, coffee beside him and no editor calling for what he could not yet deliver.

And so, on this clear evening in October, the sun lowering itself earlier in the day than it had the day before and shadows changing shape and direction by the minute, Willie Meadows headed from his downtown office along M Street to Connecticut, then turned north, his mind a jumble that had yet to clear.

At the corner of DeSales and Connecticut, a small dog bounded out of the narrow street. Not much of a thing, maybe a few pounds, no collar, and tatty with ruffled and matted fur. The dog saw Willie and stopped. Willie regarded him, then stopped as well. The dog sat on his haunches and looked up at Willie. If his fur might be matted, his eyes remained alive, the darting and playful eyes of a young dog looking for adventure, a meal, or maybe a new friend.

“Hey,” Willie said softly, then, not knowing just why he was doing so, knelt to the small dog, who neither flinched nor cowered. Instead he sat as he was and kept his own eyes fixed on Willie.

“What are you doing here, huh?”, and he reached out to scratch behind the dog’s ears. Willie raised his head and looked around. “Everybody here ignoring you?” He stood then to resume the walk. “Go on home now, little man. If you have one.”

Half a block later Willie paused at a corner stop light. As he did, he felt a soft press on his pants cuff. The dog again, the same one with the same expression that Willie saw this time as one of hope. He knelt again, and let the foot traffic pass him by to cross the street. The dog nestled into Willie’s outstretched hand.

“Tough day, buddy?” He scratched the thick fur on the dog’s neck. “Me too.” They stayed that way as the light continued to go through its cycles and pedestrians stepped around them.

“You’re a cute little guy.” Willie picked up the dog, who did not resist. White mostly, with some patches of brown and black. The dog reached up and licked Willie’s face, which brought a laugh. “Jesus, that’s the first kiss I’ve had in weeks.”

He stood then, and gave a thought, then whispered to his new friend, “Maybe if you’ve got no place to be right now we could head home together.”

The dog held his gaze, and once more licked Willie’s chin. “Come on, then.”

Two weeks later, Willie told his editor that he had to take some time midday, but he’d make it up that night. “I’ve got to take Shep to see his doctor,”

Who the hell is Shep?”

“My new roommate. Seems he was something of a loner.”

“Just like you, Meadows. What’s he do for a living that he can’t take himself to the doctor?”

“Mostly he lies on the couch and scratches himself,” a statement which garnered a very quizzical look.

“He’s a dog, Danny. He’s a goddamn dog, and probably the first living creature that’s needed me in years. So I’m taking him to the vet so he can keep on needing me for years to come. Or at least until I find a woman who’ll have me.”

“It’ll be years, Meadows. He’ll be your companion for life.”

Willie flipped his editor a middle finger, then headed for the door. Shep needed him, today at least, and for Willie that was enough.

Walking down the street

Matthew Tubridy

Walking down the street,
A truck careens onto the pavement,
You have on your flip flops
Shorts, and a t shirt,
The truck slams into you,
You go flying over the truck,
The truck is driven by Tom,
but he has an epileptic fit,
He shouldn't be driving at all,
But the doctor who assessed him was his brother in law,
The truck also hits a fruit and veg stall,
The vendor is hit too,
Oranges roll down the pavement,
After I fly over the truck,
I come to a painful landing,
I break my spine,
I fracture my skull,
The paramedics cart me off to hospital,
The truck driver hits his forehead on the windscreen,
The fruit and veg vendor breaks both legs,
The monkeys climb down to get the fruit and veg,
strewn over the street,
From that day forth, Trucks were forbidden to drive on that street,
My name is Leo Varadkar,
I was popping out of the Dail for a sandwich,
I make sure no trucks can drive up Nassau street,
I spend 3 months in St Vincent's Hospital, Dublin 4,
My Finna Gael colleagues come to my bed,
They say wake up!
The bin men are on strike!
Rubbish is piling up everywhere,
There was an altercation between the guards and bin men,
so there's a bin man in the bed besides Leo's,
But because Leo has the best health insurance,

When he wakes up he's given prime steak,
And the bin man I given porridge morning noon and night!
Bu the porridge has all the nutrients he needs,
Leo is truly living in the Matrix,
Leo is given cream soda,
When Leo and bin man have got better,
They play football in the hospital grounds,
Leo is sent home to his house in Dublin 8,
With his boyfriend,
His boyfriend was at his bedside in the hospital,
When Leo was unconscious.

Chinchilla-sitter

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

For the third time in a very long day, Barney Blake Jr. found himself talking to himself. Caring for a chinchilla farm was nowhere near his ideal part time job, but since he and his friends had been caught naked, smoking weed, and drinking without restraint in the Dean's office, cleaning up chinchilla-shit had become his daily penance. It was the only way he could satisfy the three-ring circus of disappointed parties which included his parents, The Municipal Court Judge who threatened him with the wonderful prospect of a six-month jail stay, and of course, The Dean himself. Of the three, the latter had been the most difficult from whom to coax mercy. Due to his being a fellow church-member and buddy of Barney's Dad, Dean Wilson had allowed community service and a letter of censure to substitute the almost certain expulsion that he and his unwise friends had earned.

"I know you're here; you may as well show yourself!" He screamed as swarms of the small, hairy creatures ran every which way and he had not fed the one absent chinchilla who's name ironically was "Mr. Einstein". His frustration grew and amidst the height of stress, he longed for a good puff of that "Jamaican Mafia" special stash that he'd grown so fond of. His father's lecture had poured into the early morning hours and the confiscation of Barney's cell phone had been a step too far in his mind. He wondered if those proposed six months in County Jail would have been less torturous. Now his stomach was growling like an angry lion and thoughts of googling recipes for chinchilla-stew started crawling into his mind.

He reached into a crevice deep behind the couch and was finally able to reach Mr. Einstein, dragging him out by his furry tail.

"You Sir, are only slightly cuter than a rat. Please eat, make my day go a little smoother, and behave yourself for goodness' sake!", He lectured the small mammal now in his hands.

For a moment or two, Mr. Einstein seemed to understand and even ceased his squirming, in what seemed a strange gesture of submission to Barney's wishes.

"Good boy.", Barney said. Then just as he was about to place him back with the others, Mr. Einstein, in a moment of athletic prowess, leapt from Barney's now loosened grip and clamped firmly onto the tip of his nose, drawing blood and sending a spurt of red liquid into the air.

Barney unleashed a howl and inadvertently tossed Mr. Einstein out of an open window.

"Oh shit!", was the only expression the college senior, 4.0, marijuana-loving student could muster. He knew that these chinchillas belonged to the Dean's wife. They were her prized possessions, and she was partially one of the reasons Barney had received some measure of mercy. She had advocated for his cause and reminded her husband of his own "streaking" days in college. Now who would be his sponsor, his champion?

Barney frantically ran to the window, only to see that Mr. Einstein had landed safely in an older woman's wig, who rode in continued obliviousness atop the upper deck of a two-tiered tourist bus in Manhattan. Mr. Einstein appeared comfortably nestled in her store-bought blonde curls as the bus rode slowly away.

"Fuck, I hate my life..", Barney whispered.

Fork Lift Driver

Matthew Tubridy

What do you do? He is asked,
I drive a fork lift!
I'm nearly late for my writing group,
I was moving a few pallets,
He had to work on Saturday
because he drank much tea on Friday,
He was messing with Chuck in the staff room,
His Boss came in, she's called Audrey,
She says 'You must work tomorrow morning!'
Terry can't say anything because he looking for a pay rises,
He has to start today at 7am,
From then on he won't drink a lot of tea with Chuck,
When Terry gets to the Writing Group he's 5 minutes late,
He writes about his mean boss Audrey.

I know you're here.

Elaine Reardon

I know you're here, show yourself; I said with some authority, as much as I could muster.

It was the third time my keys were missing. Oh, I know they weren't far, just hidden, perhaps under a book, or a sweater.

My favourite hat brimmed to take the sun from my eyes, had popped up in funny places as well, and the rake never seemed to be where I had put it away.

It was almost the end of October, and this happened every year around this time. It didn't happen if the weather was cloudy or rainy, only on those magnificent days when some coloured leaves still held onto branches and twigs, and others fell, almost pranced to the ground.

Days when the stream would still have enough water to splash noisily, and it was quiet enough to hear the acorns fall onto the hard ground where I parked.

Some years, we'd have a brief snow shower right before the keys went missing- not more than five minutes, and then the sun would set every surface to prism-like refractions, until it all melted into the dried ferns. Oh, and this always happened right around the time the lady bugs swarmed, covering south facing window screens, diligently attempting to get into the highest corners of the house when they stormed the barricades.

It would be the finest day, and I'd be feeling all at one with my surroundings.

Until I had to drive. And then, I'd find my hat missing. Next, I'd find the car keys missing.

I had set a hook inside the door, just to train myself to put both there as soon as both my feet were in the door. Mind, this wasn't 100% effective, but it worked well.

I know they were here, the mischievous Good Folk. I could tell, didn't laughter want to bubble up from me at the sheer beauty- at the smell of the cool air? Didn't I want to prance and sing

around the trees, and wasn't I outside myself leaving my just out of the oven biscuits with a small bit of milk for them? Didn't I remember to sing to the moon especially in her fullness, and

leave treats for the passers by? I could feel them, I could glimpse them. And I knew we were in good relationship, after all, didn't we both share this place, each to their own area, visiting each other now and then?

But who were these tricky ones that just moved the keys a bit, enough to have me inside, looking for hours, before I found them in the jacket pocket, a winter jacket I didn't wear yet, but had taken out of the back of the closet to have ready.

I think I'll do them one better, and get an electronic device to put on the key ring.

Won't that surprise them next time! It'll be me having a laugh then.

Autumn leaves- let go and fall, are lifted by the wind, turn like tiny jesters in the forest.

The Autumn Good Folk migrate to wherever they go. The veils are thin now, and Winter comes close.

Canoeing

Matthew Tubridy

I'm paddling in my inflatable canoe in the shipping lanes,
A massive cargo ship is getting nearer,
I try paddling ferociously away but the wind blows me back,
I ring 999,
A helicopter comes over the horizon,
It hovers over and a man is lowered down,
He lands in the sea beside me,
Hi! I'm Nick! he says
He attaches me to his harness,
Ready? he asks
We shoot up into the air,
And into the helicopter,
I get a cup of hot chocolate,
I'm grand! I say,
We fly to a beach where they let me off,
I go back to sandcastles.

You May as well show Yourself

Mark L'estrange

When they stopped spinning, they weren't saying much except for one who said, "Your Garda Spin Man we have heard a lot about you, you were lucky to escape Mexico with your friend, when you did, or you wouldn't have lived to tell the tale, you don't realise how much shit your causing here, tell us were our device is and we will be on our way?"

"We don't have anything belonging to you anymore, so you're wasting your time searching our homes, and anyway you're in our country now and your breaking the law, you can't get away with this." The Super phoned Garda headquarters who were aware of the situation, that Clondalkin Garda station has been taken over. They came a few minutes later and took them to HQ.

Paddy was about to leave his neighbours house, when he heard someone on the phone upstairs he asked his neighbour. "Who is that upstairs?" "Don't know there is just the two of us in the house." Paddy climbed the stairs saying, I know you're here; you may as well show yourself." It was the Super, or a clone he thought, because the real Super had left with the Guards. Paddy pretended that he thought he was the Super for a moment saying.

"Oh, it's only you, I thought you had gone, come on we better get out of here" He went to hit Paddy and as you can imagine he wasn't fast enough for him, he had him spinning before he had the chance to lift his arm, and as he did he changed back into one of the gang members. Paddy put him into his own car and brought him to the Garda station, were the Super brought the others when he got there he met the Super and he told Paddy.

"I just got a call from the our contact in Mexico, he said they are sending a squad over to Ireland to help out with these crooks that are causing all this mess." "Great do you think we can trust them?" "I think it's our best chance off sorting this out, because if we jump the gun, and go in all guns blazing, we don't know what we are dealing with here." "Good thinking if it is them that sort it out, we have nothing to worry about." "True and the army are thinking the same, I have to meet them at the

airport in an hour, do you want to come, I know you haven't any time lately?" "Yes I will be there with you, be happy to help."

To be continued.

YouTube

Matthew Tubridy

All the characters on YouTube,
Come out of the screen,
Sit down and have a cup of tea,
Ricky Martin wants to sing!
Calm down they say!
We know your shook your butt in that music video,
But Dr O'Cheallaigh is here!
Have some decorum!
Melanie C, would like a herbal tea,
Ok! No problem!
She starts singing!
Sit down there now!
You have personality disorder!
Dr O'Cheallaigh says,
The baha men come out of my TV screen,
You think you're a dog! Dr O'Cheallaigh says,
He has his bag of tricks,
He gives injections all round,
The singers troupe back into my TV screen,
They wear brown clothing,
YouTube gets very boring,
Dr O'Cheallaigh watches it smiling!
No disorders here! he says
Psy who sings gangnam style has somehow escaped the treatment,
He keeps singing away.

I Know You're Here. You May As Well Show Yourself!

Angelina Kelly

I had the pleasure of minding my grand-daughter recently. She arrived up, her back-pack full of the activities she had chosen for us to pass our time together with, some approved snacks we could share and some books for us to read.

Having done the excited greeting thing, gotten "the instructions" from her parents and waved them goodbye, we settled down with our books at the kitchen table. We began with colouring – this always calmed Melanie down and gave us a chance to catchup with the latest "gossip and scandal", it was also a great bonding experience. After half an hour we put our pens and pencils down, showed each other our efforts and chatted about our work. Today our picture was of Pluto and we talked about him and her other favourite cartoon characters.

When we were done colouring we went out to the garden for a spot of hide-and-seek, thankfully we have a rather large garden with lots of nooks and crannies so she had plenty of places to hide. I covered my eyes, counted to ten and began looking for her. Try as I might I could not find her; she had really gotten herself well hidden this time. I searched high up and low down, in and out and roundabout, but I just couldn't find her.

After half an hour, with a mock tone of exasperation in my voice, I called out "I know you're there. You might as well show yourself!" But there was no sighting or sounding of her. Then I felt a gentle tap on the back of my knee and a little suppressed giggle so I looked behind me. Crouched down in a small ball, a little cheeky smile on her face, she looked up at me and exclaimed "Why, Granma, I was here all the time!" I pretended to be surprised, enveloped her in a big hug and we laughed together.

After that we went back into the kitchen, had our milk and cookies and were just finishing the last few crumbs when her parents returned. Melanie excitedly recounted her story about how silly Granma was not to have seen her sooner. We all laughed and Melanie and I shared a great big bear hug.

As she followed her parents out to the car she cheerily called back “See you next week, Granma.” I smiled, waved them goodbye then went into the sitting room, collapsed onto the sofa and fell asleep – exhausted.

Bull on the tracks

Matthew Tubridy

Going to Cork on the train!
But there's a Bull on the tracks!
The train ploughs into him,
Keep going says the train driver!
When they get to Cork they survey the damage,
There's blood all over the front of the train!
Paddy the cleaner is summoned,
He brushes the blood off the front of the train,
They stick the Bulls head on the front of the train,
The horns making the train look cool,
The train is called 'The Bull' for that time on
It goes proudly from Dublin to Cork,
Whacking cows, Bulls and sheep,
The passengers say keep going!
As another sheep goes under the wheels,
The vultures follow the train,
Diving down to pluck the meat from the road kill,
There's a list in Cork Kent Train Station
of all the animals killed by the Bull train,
Nobby the sheep,
Greg the Bull,
Daisy the cow.

Piñata

Gerard Byrne

Blood pumped from the gaping wound in Rebecca's leg. She ripped off part of her sleeve and wrapped it around her shin and knotted it tightly. The room around her was in a total mess. Tabled were upended and the bin had been scattered across the room like it had been searched repeatedly for food.

She picked up the broom that was in the corner and held it like a weapon. She was gonna strike out when it came for her. No hesitation or second guessing. That little bag of scrawny bones was getting battered to death. She edged her way further into the room, watching every area for movement.

"I know you're here. You may as well show yourself", she felt stupid speaking to it. There was no way it was gonna understand her. It had never been trained and definitely wouldn't be now. The little shit was getting put down as soon as possible.

There was scurrying along the right side of the room. Something seemed to be making a run for it. Probably trying to get out the door behind her. Rebecca swung the mop and jabbed it into the pile of boxes that had seemed to move. They crashed down noisily to reveal nothing behind them. That didn't put Rebecca off and she kept on swinging. Lashing the dusty boxes left and right with all the strength she had.

Unfortunately she didn't see the shadow looming on the bookshelf beside her. It was only when it's shape began to block out the light from the bulb, that she realised that it was behind her. She turned, just not quick enough and it jumped on her chest and with one swift movement, sunk its teeth into her neck and began to rip at her pale flesh.

Rebecca tried to fight it, but there was no hope. A mixture of shock and blood loss left her struggling on the floor, "get off me", she roared, and with one strong motion she pushed it off her and sent it flying into a nearby wall. It banged loudly off the masonry. Rebecca took the opportunity to get to her knees and scrambled to the opposite wall. Her neck still pissing blood. She tried to seal the wound with her fingers, but it was too wide and jagged.

All she could see was those eyes. Those hate filled eyes. Staring at her like it wanted her dead. It started to approach. Sliding out of the darkness in one fluid motion. The dirty, ripped clothes hanging from its person. Only eight years of age, but all those years locked in a cage with dogs, had turned him feral. He couldn't be talked to. He couldn't be reasoned with. Rebecca was regretting ever locking him in there all those years ago. It seemed like the best way to punish her ex. But he never came back and the cage stayed locked. Just a pity that she hadn't noticed the rust along the bottom of the bars. The little fucker had wormed his way out and was now causing havoc.

As it drew closer to Rebecca. She could see the blood dripping from the teeth. Her blood and it seemed to want more, "please god", she prayed to a celestial figure that she had never believed in before. But God wasn't listening and the product of her womb pounced on her weakened body. The last thing she saw was the rage in his eyes as he tore at her belly. Ripping out her vital organs as if they were the filling in a human shaped piñata.

The Thing

Bernadette O'Reilly

After our mum died
The siblings wanted the family home sold
I moved to an apartment
No previous tenant's
A year later
Ornaments
Washing machines
Dryers
Sockets
Door handles
The cooker
Started to break
Stains appeared on my bedroom wall
Clothes got damaged
This has continued over the years
I know you're here I shouted.