

Inkslingers Blended Session

16th December 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“I Have Never Been Hurt By What I Have Not Said – Calvin Coolidge”

And the Visual



Tyger Tyger Burning Bright...

Strange Cookies

Matthew Tubridy

Someone brings cookies to my writing group,
They're probably poisonous!
Like the red berries of a Yew tree,
They're supposed to be for Christmas but I'm having none of it!
The other participants eat the cookies away,
But I expect them to keel over soon,
Off their chairs, onto the floor!
There be Yew's red berries in the cookies,
Someone eats a whole cookie,
His face goes red, like the berries,
He clutches his neck,
He falls off his chair,
Clunks on the ground,
The other participants look at him in alarm,
But it's not long until they're clutching their necks too!
Soon there's only 1 person standing, me!
I ring for the ambulance!
The participants are thrown into the back of the Ambulance!
They're brought to the Mater,
A ward is set up for them...
Red Berry ward,
Is it contagious? Nope!
Dr Bow,
The consultant strides down the ward,
He does triage,
A man with a purple head is his biggest priority,

Tyger, Tyger

Ciaran O'Melia

Prompt: I have never been hurt by what I said.

He or she, you see, I am not sure what sex it is, but no matter, let us call him or her a thing. So we need to start all over again.

The thing sat in the sun. Okay, okay, correction here. The thing lay in the sun. I came upon it on a trip to India. I am a photographer, so my expertise is much sought after.

The editor asked me, "I want a picture of a Tiger. I do not care if you get it in a local Zoo. I need it by next week."

Well, you know the Dublin Zoo has no Tygers. Be that as it may, I headed for India. Where they have plenty.

The guide I got was specially selected, as he knew where to find one. There is another reason, but I'll go into that later.

The first night was spent at the bar, sure what's the hurry, drinking a local Brew, Taj Mahal. You have to sit by the jungle, drinking your Taj Mahal with the guide and listening to the exotic sound of the forest.

We went to bed at the crack of dawn and slept the sleep of babies; it was late getting up, and as the guide is on the heavy side, he needs the sleep.

Note to the editor: Never drink Taj Mahal in India, only in the Indian takeaway, and Never hire a foreigner, no matter what they say about knowing where the tigers are, that is all poppycock?

So we headed out at dusk without luck. The after-effects of the night before caught up with me and put me off guard. The next day, we headed out bright and early. Sure enough, we saw one off in the distance. Looking back now, it was blurry even with my zoom lens.

The guide wanted to spend the night drinking, but I said, "No, We've had enough drinks." I had to lecture on why we are here and to keep a clear head.

At the crack of dawn, we headed out searching for the Tyger. We spent most of the morning looking for it, stopping for lunch on the trail and a siesta.

No sooner asleep, I seemed awoken by the roar of the guide as he sprinted by me. I soon realised he was gone, and I ran after him.

Do you recall when I mentioned why I selected the guide?

1. was. He knew where to find a tiger and 2. He was heavy, and while he was nimble on his feet, I caught up with him and passed him out.

I did not get the photograph of the Tiger in his pose. This I got off a catalogue.

But I got the picture of the Tiger asleep, with a full belly.

Never Been Hurt

Laura Alves

I have never been hurt by what I have not said. That's why I am so careful on choosing my words before I say anything. You say something really harmless and when you least expect it offends someone and they get right back at you! When I am surrounded by people, especially if it's a group of friends that haven't seen each other for a long time, I prefer to sit tight and just listen to what all the others are saying. You don't want to say "Where is that lovely husband of yours?" and hear back: "That bastard left me for a student!" And if you think someone is different and you can't tell exactly why, wait until someone clears that up for you somehow. Watch what all the others are saying and you might get your answer all of a sudden. It may be because that person lost a lot of weight, and before you go and congratulate them for it you find out that person is very ill.

Nowadays you can't notice someone's hair is different because it always is. Some people like having their hair in a different colour every day. One day a friend asked me the name of the colour I had dyed my hair in, and I answered: "I never dyed my hair". To that she replied by repeating my answer: "I never dyed my hair", like I was boasting about it. She probably didn't believe me, but what can I do? It was true then and still is. I never dyed my hair and have no intention of doing so in the foreseeable future. It's a great thing that people are different and have different tastes and values in life and it's a shame some people don't seem to understand that. Some people may want to go around saying all sorts of thing about others, even people they have never met, walking in the street. But I will continue being careful and trying to only say positive things to others. Even then, what's positive to me may be offensive for someone. I will have to take that chance, as I can't read thoughts yet.

A shut Mouth

Bernadette O'Reilly

It's like walking on egg shells
It's like walking a tight rope
Watching what you say
I keep my mouth shut
I am usually misunderstood
When I do speak
So why bother.

The Christmas Crib

Matthew Tubridy

Father Miceal locks the door to the church,
But Andy is still in there!
Andy lights up a cigarette,
The smoke wafts around,
It makes Jesus sneeze,
Jesus comes down from his statue,
He dances with Andy,
Jesus has wafers in his tummy,
Andy stops dancing with Jesus and becomes a statue,
The next morning Father Miceal unlocks the church to say Mass,
Andy is there as a statue,
He winks at Jesus,
Father Miceal wants to be in on the act!
Father Miceal says
'I have a PhD! I'm the Prior General!'
The next night, when the church is locked up,
All the statues come to life,
The saints.

McGovern's last rites

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

Father O'Malley's eyes were fixated on this man. The hairy, tattooed, beast that had committed any number of heinous acts. Knowing time was of the essence and that the Governor himself had denied his last appeal, he still moved with the calm of a man on a tropical vacation. Rinsing his face in the iron sink that was attached to a lidless toilet, in a drab, windowless 5' by 8' cell. He then turned and provided the toothy grin with a gold cap at the front. His eyes were shovels that naturally dug at one's soul even from behind the reinforced bars designed to keep monsters at bay.

At 6'4" 270 Pounds, Arthur McGovern was indeed an imposing man. To the average observer, he was a creature born for violence as Mozart for music. A hairless bald head with tattoos of lightning bolts told the story of his attitude.

Father James O'Malley felt out of place and thrown into a situation over which he had little to no control. He was new to the order and only filling in for father Ruane after a philosophical debate had ended with Arthur pulling him to the bars, repeatedly smashing his cranium against them, and then ripping the old Priest's tongue out, thereafter, swallowing same.

Given that incident, Father O'Malley had been warned ad nauseum by the Warden and guards. He kept a healthy 5-foot distance from the bars, wearing black running shoes in the event that he should have to beat feet out of there.

"Father O'Malley, is it?", Arthur asked while drinking in this young scrawny, man of the cloth.

"Yes, Mr. McGovern. I'm here about your last rites and we've only got about ten minutes.", O'Malley tried to answer with the courage of a wounded gazelle in a lion's den.

"Yes, well, about that. I don't have time to hash over every detail with you so I concocted a little poem that should give you some notion of how I find myself in this predicament.

“I’ve never been rich and often been slumming, but never killed a bastard that did not have it coming. Those guys at the mall, drug dealers you see. And the one on the road hung good men from a tree. For wicked folks I’ve given no quarter, like that hag up the hill who rented her daughter. And then of course, there’s Father Ruane. A despicable guy and hardly a man. A villain and devil of the most vile sort. Courting young Altar boys, his favourite sport.”

“These folks have no conscience; they wallow in mud. Do you think 10 hail-Mary’s will wash off the blood?”, Arthur McGovern unleashed.

Father O’Malley stilled himself, rose, and made the sign of the cross. “May God have mercy on your soul, Arthur McGovern. You were not sent here as Judge, Jury, and executioner”.

“No, and yet here we are, Padre’. Now you be sure and keep your hand out of that collection plate! I have never been hurt by what I have not said. But plenty by what I have seen. Be a good preacher and keep those hands clean.” He retorted.

Disturbed by those odd words, Father O’Malley rose and turned toward the door. A second later a backward glance revealed an unsettling sight. An empty cell. Arthur McGovern was gone.

The Hole in the street

Matthew Tubridy

I wanted to ask about the hole on the street beside my house,
Leo Varadkar goes there in his suit.
With a wheel barrow, and shovel,
Or is it one of Leo's employees?
Leo's employee is called Agent Smith from The Matrix,
Staff in hospital all have Leo's face,
The surgeon has Leo's face on him as he operates,
Ireland! The dumper truck driver,
A employee of Leo takes some blood from Leo,
And he injects it into above employees,
A play school employee is injected,
Starts talking like Leo,
Her children grow up talking like him too,
But their not gay so the species shall reproduce itself,
Mark, becomes a fork lift driver,
But he's kicked off the forklift,
Because he's supposed to be Leo!
He even has a mask of Leo covering his face,
Mark gets a seat in Trinity College,
The provost gives him fine wine,
Says' Hello Leo!
They lounge back in sofas,
Ah Leo me old plum!
How are ye Provast!
Mark is given an honorary degree
because the provast thought he was Leo Varadkar!
From then on exiting the front gates of Trinity College are
Leo lookalikes,
Coming out 2 every minute,
In their gowns.

Boxing Match

Michael O'Brien

Five hundred euro, five hundred euro, Richie just sat with it, he wanted the insult to sink in, to truly feel the reality of his situation. He was on the circuit twelve years now and here he was, he had reached the point in his life where people considered him a journey man, not a contender or a respected pro, despite what they said to his face, this offer, this five hundred belied their true opinion of him. He knew the story, he knew what was expected and right on cue his phone rang, he smiled and answered,

"Richie how are you" Harley, the promoter sounded like he was ringing to tell him he'd won the lotto.

"I'm Ok," Richie mumbled

"You sound down, I don't like it when my guys are down, come on tell me what's bothering you"

"Well, you know, I'm just surprised, you're puttin me in with this kid he's, I mean ye know he's" Richie could never talk straight to people he considered senior to him,

"He's the next big thing Richie, the kid has it, immigrant, good looking, sad story, talent, and a right hook that'd knock an elephant down he's going to the top"

There was a silence while Richie let the message sink in.

"Now listen Richie I don't want you to go easy on him, push him, do your thing, but just make sure the crowd get a good fight, we want to keep up the excitement around this kid"

Richie's heart sank when it was confirmed, he knew the code, push him meant test him but lay off, don't beat him, and give the crowd a good fight meant he had to let the kid knock him out, as if he didn't already have enough head trauma.

Harley being the predator he was sensed the silence was spooking his prey so he pounced.

"Listen Richie, just say it doesn't go right for you ok, and the kid takes you out, I can still get you taken on to his team, with your experience you'd be gold in that corner, I'm telling you my word counts with this kid, I'll get you in there, I've already sort of suggested it to them and they seemed keen on the idea"

Richie had heard Harley make offers to people like this before and knew Harley could drop a promise as quick as a ticking bomb.

Up to now any time Richie felt a trickle on his face it was usually from a cut, he touched his face and quickly examined his fingers to see clear liquid and not the usual red, he was crying, he hadn't cried since he was sixteen when his dad died, a boy, ever since then when he was afraid he fought, broke, he fought, sad he fought, but now he cried, maybe the fighter was being squeezed out of him.

He'd had thirty six fights and lost six which was too many if you wanted to be champion. He'd little or no money, his big heart had loaned to people who were never gonna pay him back, fooling himself that he was doing well and would make it back easy.

He was running out of road, and then there were the tremors, his left arm shook uncontrollably sometimes and this was frightening him, he'd been able to hide it up to now but it was only a matter of time, and as well as that he knew how he sounded, he was losing his words. This was certainly a light bulb moment, Harley had made him promise's before and not delivered. The thought of his future frightened him, the thought of letting this powerful young kid knock him out also scared him.

"Thought you said if I could string three wins together you'd get me a shot at a title, at least a decent purse, I've won my last three"

"Yeah but it didn't catch fire Rich, they were points wins, messy, few fuckers thought the decisions were dodgy, anyway MMA is taking a lot of the pay per view these days, big pay days are rare now ,but this kid he can generate the gates and you can be part of that"

Richie went to wipe his eye and noticed the area around his cheek bone was numb he felt like he was touching stone,

"Ok Harley thanks for thinking of me I'll do it"

"Good man Rich, if it all goes well I'll look after you at the other end, I always look after my lads you know that"

Richie said his goodbye's and hung up. He was feeling sleepy and he dozed off, waking hours later after a strange dream.

A raging bull was making its mark in the dry soil with its front right hoof, blood poured from it's side and there were three brightly coloured lances piercing the top of it's neck, the matador stood proud in his glistening costume, his pert buttocks and legs tightly clinched together with his immaculate slippers pointed at ten to two, he kept his back arched straight as he took his eye off the wounded animal to gaze around at the cheering crowd, in that gloriously cocky careless moment the dying bull charged for its life smashing it's preening tormentor into the fence, and silencing the crowd.

Days later when the fight was announced it was impossible to get decent odds on the kid, he was overwhelming favourite, most people thinking it was a mismatch, and the odds on Richie reflected this. He was ten to one to win on points and twenty to one to win by stoppage. Richie had ten grand to his name, "ten grand at twenty to one, I could retire somewhere warm on that, pay some medical bills too".

This kid was good but Richie had been watching him a long time now, he'd been eased through his career with hand picked opponents, never met a seasoned determined pro who was willing to die in the ring. Richie had reached a point in his life where it was all or nothing, he was taking a deadly risk and he felt it, but there was that whisper "go on, you can do it" and it seemed to be smiling.

Under The Ground

Matthew Tubridy

Under the ground,
the buses rumble along,
Children go to school,
Green Party members devise ways to facilitate children cycling to school,
People sell donuts,
But then the owners of the mine fill in the hole,
They, by law had to put a roof on the hole,
So the underground civilisation will carry on,
A pond is built, the children dip their toes in it,
One day a child asks her mother
'What's above the ground?
Can I study physics up there?'
Her whole family funds this daring move,
This child builds a house beside the mine,
At Christmas child goes back underground,
The men underground pick away at the earth looking for diamonds,
But they are focused on building underneath the ground,
One of the order a TV from Curry's...
The delivery man comes to the steel plate over the big hole,
He bangs on it!
The TV gets installed,
The people of underground land,
Watch the TV,
They see David Attenborough flying over the jungle,
More of the children want to leave the hole,
They want to paddle on lake
They want to fly to the moon.

1970s Christmas

Anna Horgan

Christmas in 1970s Ireland was a slapdash affair.

Dad would extract the artificial tree from the attic. The only tree it resembled in nature was one irradiated in a terrible nuclear accident.

Then the decorations. Tinsel was wound around the branches with hapless attempts to conceal bald patches and several years of sellotape. Baubles were hung by loops of wool.

At this point Mom would get the kids hurriedly into the kitchen. Dad was trying to get the tree lights to work. It was an emotional time for him and even from the kitchen we overheard some choice cursing.

After this the battered foil streamers were pinned to the ceiling.

Lastly came the crib which was out of step with everything else. It was lovely- made of real wood with a straw roof . The back wall was navy with a silver star. The crib figures of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the cow and donkey were painted ceramic with only one chip on the baby's bed.

As children we were enchanted by the shiny stuff and found this crib underwhelming.

One year my youngest brother, then aged five, took an executive decision to rectify this situation. He got his plastic zoo animals and added them to the crib. His favourite was a bright orange and black tiger with an extravagantly large open mouth. This he placed reverently at the head of baby Jesus.

These modifications went unnoticed by the rest of the family as this was the day Sister Mary Perpetua , my father's aunt was visiting.

We three children were put into the sitting room in our good clothes to stay clean. These ensembles included the Aran jumpers Sister Mary Perpetua had knitted for us. Looking back I realise this was kind of her. Back then I was troubled by the tight scratchy jumper neck - a design feature in all her creations.

My older brother and I were playing Chinese checkers while the crib improvements were happening. My mother was in the kitchen making

curls of butter, tiny crustless sandwiches and putting Sr Mary Perpetua's mothers good China ware on the table.

My father had driven to the convent to collect his formidable aunt.

We all heard the car arrive and then heard the front door open.

She was here , giving her ever helpful opinions.

" you will destroy the car engine if you keep driving that fast"

" the outside of your house could do with a coat of paint"

We children stood up and instinctively huddled together.

Mom, Dad and Sr Mary Perpetua entered.

I'm sure she was a normal nun size but to me she looked 6 foot tall. She was dressed in black and white- not a post Vatican two, short skirt and mini veil. No -it was the whole shebang - wimple, long voluminous dress and wooden rosary beads.

She smiled a shark like smile

"Hello children."

Then her gaze went to the crib.

Her face darkened.

We all looked at the crib.

In my memory the plastic tiger was glowing -his awful jaws a millimetre above the holy baby's head.

I glanced around me. Fear was on everyone's face except for my little brother. He looked happy and proud.

It was a catastrophe.

By nature I was a bit of a loudmouth child and in such a situation would normally have leapt to my brother's defence.

Even in my terror I knew this would further inflame the situation.

I recalled a strategy used by a girl I admired at school whenever she was caught in trouble. She fainted.

I threw myself onto the floor theatrically and lay with my eyes closed.

It had the desired effect. All attention turned to me.

The only problem was that I hit my head on the wooden armrest of a chair.

So unlike Calvin Coolidge I was hurt by what I did not say.

Humanity

Elaine Reardon

Humans are prone to judge.
Is it human nature to look for difference,
to assign better than, less than, to judge, other?

Not just with other humans who live outside of our vision
of what the world should be, but also our way caring for Earth herself,
her waters, oil, soil for growing food and forests.
So much profit made—
Who profits?

Who is harmed when rivers dry, oceans warm,
when oil rigs dot landscapes, wind and ocean currents change,
push storms of magnificent proportions across oceans, spawn tornadoes
in climates
that never saw them before?

When flooding washes away towns, bridges, whole hillsides,
when wildfires rage out of control on every continent
except Antarctica.

1

When rainfall patterns change,
forests become dry tinder,
and can food crops cannot grow.
Who suffers?

Did humanity begin this competition of wanting more—
whose country has the largest Gross National Product,
the strongest military?

Might makes right?

I think of porpoise and whales, troops of monkeys, herds of elephants
that wander earth, mostly cooperating, with no political boundaries.
They reach agreement on who is leader, who is follower.

On tv I watched a group of porpoises protect a mother porpoise and her child from shark attack. Her child was prevented from rising for air and drowned.

Other porpoises came, surrounded her and the child's body for more than a day. They kept her safe while sharks circled and she grieved, trying to revive her child.

Is this humanity?

2

I ramble here.

If it wasn't for the Brazilian immigrant in Dublin, riding by on a bike, who disarmed a man with a knife attacking young school children, who took a chance that he could help, himself a father.

If it wasn't for this one thing that happened in the midst of grief from Karabakh to Azerbaijan in mid-September, to Palestine, Hamas, and Israel still

I would perhaps rather have porpoisanity, monkanity.

But I still wonder, what do we think humanity is, how do we love?

I Believe In the Curve, the Changeup and the Almighty Fastball.....

Greg Fields

I wanted him to love the game as much as I do, so we started when he was very young. When he was three he had a plastic bat and ball, and he would knock the ball around the living room, swatting it off the bookcases and the coffee table, or bending over awkwardly to field the soft grounders I sent his way. During the summer of 1999, when he had just finished his first year, he fell in love with Sammy Sosa, who would rhythmically tap his chest and send kisses to the cameras after hitting a home run. Michael copied Sammy's moves, and dreamed of one day hitting the ball as far.

He was always among the smallest players on every team he played. Michael never hit for power, except for the occasional double in the gap and, in his very first high school game, an amazing triple over the right fielder's head. He was a slap hitter – high average, good in the clutch, and likely to steal once he got on. He did what he could with what he had, and what he had was a solid body, quick hands, and an instinct for the game that no one could touch. His high school teammates voted him captain two straight years.

I look out now at the backyard where he learned to play this game. Most nights in the spring and summer, I would meet him there, after work, after school and homework, and we would throw. Timid at first, and somewhat afraid of the hard stone-like sphere that came his way, but with time he grew more comfortable, then confident, and at last magnificent, diving to his left or right to snag grounders that I threw to be just out of his reach. He developed quickness, and, on the uneven turf, he learned to keep his hands low and loose to handle bad bounces. The pop flies that eluded him, or he dropped, when he was seven he caught with ease when he was eight.

I sit here now holding a baseball in my hand, regarding its weight and shape, smelling the earthy smell of its seams, and considering what power there is in simple things. We played catch with this ball, and with maybe a hundred of its brothers, hearing the plock of good throws smacking into the pockets of well-broken mitts, watching the arc of

dirty-white against the green of trees, smelling the grass beneath our feet. We would talk then, as we threw. Little things mostly, but things that would otherwise go unsaid – bits of information, a quick story, maybe a piece of gossip. I would encourage him, or offer tips on catching, or throwing, or positioning. He became a better player because of it, but that was never the point. The point was to be father and son. The point was to form something that was as strong as a real diamond.

The week before he left for college, I saw eighteen years channelling into a single day. I saw the things at hand that must carry me forward, that confirm who he is, and what we are together. I hold a ball now, as mystical to me as the bone of a saint, or a druid's staff. And I realize now that baseball was never a game. Baseball was a sacrament.

That spring, after Michael had played his last competitive baseball game, I planted a tree in the back yard. It's a lovely little red maple that promises to reach 6 feet when it's mature. I planted it right where home plate used to be, and, as I did so, I said a silent prayer that its roots would develop as strongly and as deeply as the roots that had already grown so well in that sacred place.

Kneeling In Church

Matthew Tubridy

Imagine someone kneeling in church,
But a bold boy came in and nailed his legs to the pew
with a big piece of wood,
People would come in and say, 'What dedication!'
But a compassionate parishioner would ring for an Ambulance,
The real faithful!
And remove the big plank of wood,
Arrest the bold boy,
And bring the injured man to hospital!
The Ambulance guy would kneel himself on the pew,
Keeping a lookout for any bold boys!

I have never been hurt by what I haven't said

Mark L'estrange

The special crimes unit pulled up outside the Garda station with a van full of the gang, Paddy had just arrived at the same time, the Super said. "Good timing you can help if this gets out of hand." "I sure will." They decided to drop five of the gang off at that garda station because they would be tight for space, and they brought the rest to different stations for questioning.

One of the gang managed to get his cuffs off and made a run for it, but Paddy ran after him and as you can imagine he had him spinning in seconds, and he was easy to get back to the station. A few of the guards from the special crimes unit were rubbing their eyes in disbelief seeing Spin man Paddy in action saying. "He would be very useful to have with us." The Super then said. "Forget about it he is one of our best assets in the station."

They got them in to the station as the van went off to the other locations around the city. Paddy rang a few of the guards that were held hostage by the gang, a few weeks ago to come in and identify them. He rang one of them, and Garda Tony said.

"I am kind of nervous of these guys that call themselves the pirates, because they made a lot of threats and I have never been hurt by what I haven't said if you get me." " look don't let these scare you they are only bullies I just got one of them spinning a few minutes ago and he cried like a baby, I have a video of him I will send you." When Paddy said that he felt more relaxed and started laughing as he watched it he said. "I will be in shortly."

He arrived at the station with a few more of them and Paddy had the five in a room with a mirror that they could see them but they couldn't see out only the reflection. Tony one of the guards was able to identify tree of the gang that held him hostage, then they made contact with the other stations and it turned out that most of the gang had been identified. The Super said to Paddy. "Maybe give it till tomorrow before ringing Stephen again, that will give us time to question these to see if

there is any other members in Dublin.” “Good idea we should contact your friends in Mexico to get them sent back.”

To be continued.

Tyger Tyger burning bright
Angelina Kelly

Tyger Tyger burning bright...
Shine your light into the night.
And with your energy so strong...
Give us strength to sing our song.

Orange and black your stripes remind...
Rejuvenation and strength combined.
Will bring our souls back to the fore...
And gladden our hearts and minds once more.

Our time will come when we will be...
From our burdens again set free.
Until that day we'll sit and pray...
And bask with you where you lay.

Kitty and the Dragon Fly

Heloisa Prieto

Illustrated by Laura Beatriz



When Rachel came to visit, the following day, it was my turn to show her my collection of drawings. I have always loved drawing and my parents know it, so they keep on giving me notebooks, pens and pencils.

“Let’s make drawings!” I told Rachel and she asked me:

“What would you like me to draw?”

“Cats! Lots of cats, of course!” I told her and both of us laughed.

“Shall we draw green cats?” asked Rachel as she chose her pencil.

I teased her:

“Green cats? As if cats were plants?”

Suddenly, Rachel halted. I noticed tears in her eyes. Kitty jumped on her lap and petted her arm with her little paw. I did not dare ask her about her sudden sadness.

It only took Rachel a few minutes to draw an entire forest. Tall, large, leafy pine trees, a narrow path with a cute cat looking ahead with sweet, green eyes.

“This is such a beautiful drawing, Rachel! I love this cute, little cat of yours!”

I lifted my eyes from the page and noticed my dear friend seemed so sad, her eyes were teary.

“Rachel, please tell me what’s going on? Did I make you sad? Was I silly? So sorry...”

Rachel wiped her tears away and told me:

“Marcela, thank you, you are such a good friend... I was sad, this is true, but it had nothing to do with you or your family. Just the opposite, I love

coming over to your house... And Kitty makes me so happy!”

“What is it then?”

“Back in Canada I used to have a cat, we called him Duke. He was supposed to move to Brazil, along with our family. But just before we left, he fled to the woods. We lived by the forest, you see? He was nowhere to be found. I hope he is still alive...”

I took my pencils and drew seven kittens flying around the sky.

Rachel smiled and told me:

“This is lovely!! Your drawing reminded me that cats have nine lives!”

“Nine?” I asked her “I thought cats had seven lives! So I will draw two more kittens”.

Rachel picked up a pencil and suggested:

“How about drawing cats with crazy colours?”

I nodded and asked her:

“Can you say the names of colours in Portuguese?”

“Not really” she told me and asked, “Will you teach me?”

“As long as you teach me all the names of colours in English. I only know a few of them...”

“Meow” Kitty said and both of us laughed again.

Rachel petted Kitty’s head and asked me:

“Do you think she is speaking to us in her cat tongue?”

“Sure!” I said.

“I think she is saying something like let’s play together”, Rachel told me.

“Oh, really? I think she is telling us how much she loves us!”

As if she understood all the conversation between us, Kitty moved and sat between her human friends.

“I think she feels as if she belonged to both of us...” I said.

“Oh, no! It’s the other way around!” said Rachel - “Both of us belong to Kitty, of course!”

Kitty blinked at us as if she agreed with her words.

“Yes!” said Rachel, laughingly.

“Sim!” I agreed.

“I want to draw a dragonfly now!” said Rachel and she immediately started drawing the most delicate dragonfly landing on a beautiful flower.

I laughed and drew a huge, grey dragon, crossing the starry sky.

“Do you think we are drawing the same word, at the same time?” I asked her.

Rachel and I spent hours and hours together, talking about dragonflies, “true” dragons, the names of colours and the infinite lives of cats, we sang lullabies and taught each other new words, in English and Portuguese, we also had a hard time deciding which home made cakes were the best. We shared dreams, some spooky tales, jokes we did not actually understand, and, of course, Kitty’s loving company.

In my childhood there were plenty of adventurous trips to the rain forest, to the beaches, and dear Rachel used to come along whenever

we went down to the harbour of Santos, at my granny's. She loved the warm sea.

At Rachel's I learned to appreciate the quietness of a reading room, the wealth hidden in books and the secret harmony of silence.

Yet, when I think about her now, I realize we lived the greatest adventure of

all: sharing different spaces, languages and worlds as only true friends can really do.

The Pills

Matthew Tubridy

The pills, I go down a dark alleyway and a nurse offers me anti
psychotics,
I was just trying to get to Easons,
And get a milkshake,
But on my t-shirt it says I'm a billy goat!
Nurse says, 'Your clearly not a Billy goat!'
I run out of the dark alleyway,
I get a taxi to St Patrick's University Hospital,
It's the private hospital.

He had never been hurt for the words he had not said

Clodhna Joyce-Daly

The droplets of heavy water splashed along the dusty pines of the painted shut window. It's weight shoving itself against the tattered glass, hoping to find any crevice it could slither into. Along the chipping wood that held stature together, illuminated a growing fog that began to expand. The blistering cold winter season was now highlighting in wreaths and was in full form.

Beyond the battle of bashing rain laid a dim light encompassing the curtain drawn room that found warmth with the blazing turf fire.

The room was small, cramped, yet held a story for perhaps a character that might live within the walls of the dwelling. Books and crumpled newspapers were thrown across the scratched wooden table marking the stains that were spread across the frame. Bookshelves held photographs of unnamed places, faces and statutes that collected from years of disorganisation.

The crimson light projecting from the fire illuminated a wrapped up hunched man, who held a dusty book in his callused hands flicking the pages back and forth determined to find meaning between the lines of the novel. He was still looking.

It had been two days since his wife left and two days since he grappled with the idea that she might not return. There were so many words left unsaid between them. She droned on about the cracks in their marriage. He stared at the half lit fire shovelling turf into the darkening spots.

He was never hurt for what he had not said, but the growing silence between his wife's anger screamed the truth. The stillness and the unwavering expression in his reaction projected the reality that their marriage was over. It did not come as shock, their kinship had crumbled beneath them. In fact, both of them had been living in a fantasy that the thin string that united their bond was fading.

She wanted to go to New York. He never wanted to leave home. She begged him not to take over the family farm. He took over the farm. He wanted to buy machinery and new cars. She preferred to cycle. She was organised. He was disorganised.

The opposite personalities was the mechanism that ignited the two in the initial stages of their relationship. The blistering fights that amounted to passionate entanglements in youth translated to agitation and compliance as an adult. The years of miscommunication, different ideals and disconnected views eroded such damage in their relationship. Despite caring deeply for each other, the pair knew the only way to untangle the destruction made, was to leave. And so she left.

The house was still and quite without her. The noise she would make in the kitchen would echo throughout the house – banging of pots , pans and other machinery that was apparently used for cooking and in his opinion making noise. Although he expected her to appear in the doorway rattling on about god knows what, he did not miss the attempt to deafen her tone with the sound of his own thoughts. He preferred the solitude and reckoned she preferred the hustle of the city she was racing to. It was officially over now and he was alone.

The bristle of the trees made their song outside the window, as their tune echoed throughout the night. He was finally at peace and he hoped she was too. It would be an adjustment living without each other, but an adjustment the pair would ultimately need to get accustomed to.

I miss you. I think we will be okay. Let me know you are okay, were the words he last texted to her the brightness of the words illuminating off his phone.

She replied, I miss you too. I think we will be too. I am happy John, I hope you are too.

With that, despite all the crumbling of their marriage, they both knew they would be okay.