

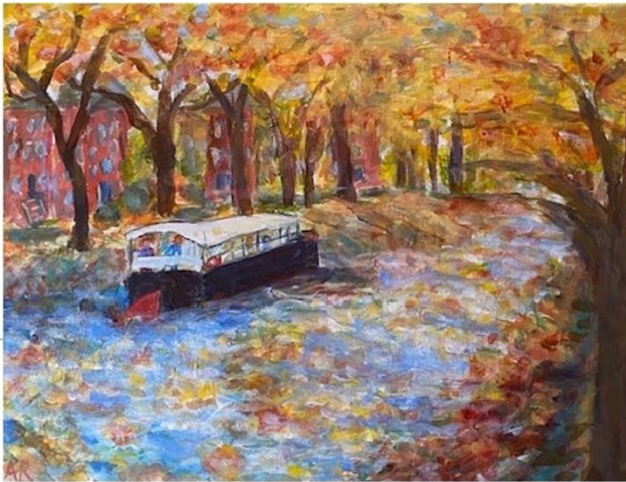
Inkslingers Blended Session

25th November 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“One of them loved the outdoors, the other did not”

And the Visual



Canal Boat – Elaine Reardon

Lost in the Country

Greg Fields

Early on Carrie Donovan had been intrigued by the man. Willie Meadows was not typically handsome, but he carried a type of attraction that transcended the physical. A reporter he was, and therefore innately curious, and curious people tend to explore things. He would be open to new ideas and new places, the excitement of a small restaurant that could offer a distinctive dinner, or a store where she might find shoes she'd never seen before.

They had spent a few nights together, doing the simple things to learn about one another, and a few days doing the things she wanted. Their first day together she wandered through Saks Fifth Avenue looking for a new dress, and Willie tagged along, showing an inquisitiveness that was either genuine, or at least well enough structured to convince her that he was interested in colour and line and hem.

So they went on for a few weeks, alternately testing each other's limits of personality and character, Carrie trying to sense who Willie Meadows really was and whether he might actually be willing to subjugate himself to her whims, and Willie mesmerized by Carrie's obvious beauty and her experience in things he had not yet touched. For a while it worked.

But this day was Willie's idea, and a damn silly one at that. "Let's get away from the city," he had said. "We can head west, to the Blue Ridge. It's gorgeous out there, and we can just see what we can."

"What is there to do out there besides gazing at chipmunks?"

"Little country stores, maybe a local café, antique stores, that kind of thing."

"So we can shop?" she asked with a teasing smile.

"All you want," laughed Willie. "And you'll find things there that don't make it into the city. Things like raccoon traps and old milk cans."

So she agreed, more than a bit reluctantly, but perhaps she owed him this. They left early to drive the two hours or so that would take them to the head of the Shenandoah Valley Parkway, where Willie turned the car south through a forest speckled by the late morning light.

Lunch came at a simple place off the road. "I've never eaten in a cabin before," said Carrie as she eyed the simple wooden framing and the uneven steps that led to a thick front door. Once inside her mood darkened when she looked at the menu.

"It's all red meat and fat," she moaned. "They don't even have salads."

"But they do have beer. Maybe just a drink then, before we head on."

"Head on to Where, Willie? It's all more of the same. And, really, how much natural beauty can a girl be expected to absorb?"

"Ah, come on, Carrie. There's wildlife up here. If we're lucky we can spot some of it. A few deer, a fox. Maybe if we're really fortunate, we can spot a bear."

"A bear. Willie, I have no desire to go looking for something that might eat me. Let's get out of here."

And so they did. The drive back was quiet, neither speaking more than a word or two. They returned to the city early, in late afternoon, and Carrie let out a sigh as they turned a bend on the interstate and the spear of the Washington Monument came into view. Back on her home turf, in the place she belonged. She had survived the day.

"Shall we find a place for dinner?", Willie asked softly, knowing as he did so what the response would be.

"Not tonight, Willie. I think I just need a quiet night. But thank you," and she leaned over to kiss his cheek. "Thank you for trying to show me something new."

Willie drove to her street and moved to the curb. He opened the door and went to her side to open Carrie's door. "A gentleman always," she said as she rose from the car.

"What a lady deserves," and he kissed her then, fully on the lips. She responded warmly, but there was no passion. Not tonight.

"Call me this week."

Willie did, and they set dinner for the following Saturday. But a new insecurity had planted root in his delicate breast. And Carrie, back now

in the city, back in the forms and rhythms that gave her comfort, knew, too, that she came away from this day with new knowledge.

It would end on that Saturday next. It had to, and, as the sun dipped behind those same hills that had garnered this new wisdom, Willie's insecurity met Carrie's relief. They would go on. But not together.

The 2023 Blues

Steve Huenneke

Now, come look
At what lies wrought
Now, come look
At what lies wrought
In the Midwest
A mass shooting
It's just a thing
Lawmakers aren't interested in stopping
For one day, it's distracting
The usual people made a fuss
Then the band played on
At Circus, Circus,
In the Mideast
There's one more bomb
On it, it is written
It's no time to be an inspiring King
It's no place to have a Dream
No!
There must be an eye for an eye
Before noon
Gliders come down from the sky
Motorbikes and cameras roll, and missiles fly
After noon
There are good dead people on both sides
And no one knows why
By the Rivers of Babylon
Memories of Zion for a Palestinian
Grow hazy
Someone being pushed into the Sea
Is just
Saying please
Don't beware of me
Be aware of me
For what it's worth

I do exist on this Earth
I don't want any nightmare war
Look for me in your distant mirror
I am not in the business of Terrorismus
I am not hurling rockets
I am just tired, tired
Of mistaken identity
Of whoever, whomever, whatever
That's made you so lonely
That's got you so hot wired to shout
Ka-boom!
At a count of three
All swear by the same book
And bear the same charge, one without doubt
The charge
To take offense
And call it defence
To take offense
And call it Défense
Your reaction
Vindication
Killing becomes you
Just do it
Call it a religion
When you read a flash card
That says alien
Your reaction
Places you far beyond mere suspicion
When you hear a bell
It's automatic
Contempt trumps goodwill
Here is an animal
Here is the animal that started it all
Whoever, whomever, whatever
No!
It was you
Who posted the picture

Spoke for God
And gave permission
Without stopping or thinking
You made someone else's life
A game like Tour of Duty
So magically deadly
The personal is not political
The political is personal
Down -- and like the money
Dirty
So bloody theatrical
The Great Deception
Lights, camera, action!
Your oldest friend, a person
Just yet, well done
Cast as one of them, who was "so typical"
And now needs a funeral
Your oldest friend was
Like Abel, very able
To be stoned
To be cast as your enemy
Cast out as your enemy
Cast out as your enemy.

One of Them loved the Outdoors

Michael O'Brien

Happiness was a walk in the mountains in any kind of weather in the right clothing as far as Maria was concerned.

To her mother Kathy, this was the exact description of hell. Kathy's idea of a good time, was a long time in a comfy armchair by a fire with a good book and an old scotch.

As far as Kathy was concerned dramatic landscapes belonged on the page of a book on her lap, or the other side of a window. Though she had no physical gifts or aptitude and had no interest in good diets or exercise, she was in remarkably good health for a 93 year old. She put this fact down to what she called her wonderment.

From childhood, Kathy had possessed a gift, the page of a book to her was literally a 3d experience, she could pour herself into the page of any story she was reading, experiencing the appropriate changes in pulse and heart rate, even scent and sensations came to her when she was immersed in a story.

She could smell the mustiness of old bleak house and the excitement of romance in any love story she entered. In truth, the world had too many hard edges and sharp corners for Kathy, she was quite happy in her garden and little greenhouse, pottering about to her hearts content by day and escaping to different worlds when night fell.

She had seen the world in the pages of books and spent hours lost in time. The sad irony was that Maria had actually inherited her love of the outdoors from her mother, but she had been born before that traumatic day, and so had no memory of the horror that had changed Kathy forever.

Canal Boat Fruge

Fergal Canton

Come, my love, to an Autumn scene,
Redolent with russet, gold leaf rug,
Of fallen leaves and crackling dreams,
By canal streams our cares to shrug.

A barge awaits to ferry us,
To slip as Summer's King and Queen,
With gentle diesel's engine push,
Along the placid peaceful scene.

No more the traffic nor noisy streets,
No more the urban graffiti.
But pond and splash and lily-pads,
And the otter's plaintive cry, our plea..

Aisling ar Bórd Canál

Tar a grá don fomhar órga,
Le fraobhaca gan diliúr glas,
Mar deora Dé ag titim as,
Chun bás ar bhruach na habhainn deas.

Tá baid ag feitheamh, ar do chos,
Chun muid a sheoladh, barríon 's rí,
Le hinnéal diesel, thall is abhus,
Amach ón cathair briúidiúil, neamhní.

Saor ón trácht, ó torann na sráide,
Na bac le scríobhnóireacht na fallaí,
Eist le plash 'gus scuab na sruthan,
Agus feadaíl an madra uisce.

The Canal Boat

Ciaran O'Melia

Looking back now, I was a child in a man's world, at least on reflection I think I was.

However, who would take a good (?) canal boat in exchange for a working welder, that's what I did.

We had a few drinks in Searsons facing Waterloo Road, you know the sort when all is well with the world, meself, Des and Paddy. We laughed so much that our faces nearly cracked, we were happy.

The woolly-headed guy joined us, and the crack was ninety, we had so much fun the bartender asked us to tone it down and bit, you see in the lounge they had a funeral crowd in, it seemed the father of the family had died. He had six daughters and one son. They were a loving family and we in the bar could be heard above the din. Now each of them wanted to show how much they loved the father and each of the girls to show their love, in turn, each of them complained to the barman. All except the son who I know wanted to be where the laughs as did the deceased, I never heard him complain about laughter.

So we quietened down a bit, It was then the woolly-headed guy who was looking into his pint, ye know mournful sort as if the world had taken his life and childer away.

"What's wrong," I asked.

"Ah nothing, it's just that."

"A troubled shared is a troubled halved," I said and the others agreed.

"I have an idea and it is connected to the security business, to try this out I need a welder."

"Do you mean a machine or a welder?"

"No, I mean welder, I can weld ye know." He replied with some force as if I had insulted him.

I had a welder an industrial welder, but before I said that I had asked the woolly-headed who had very little money, but not for the drink I might add here, "What can you offer as a barter?"

"I can give the wife," he said.

He looked left and right before he said anything "It take that back, the women would be up in arms, if they heard me saying that. I might be interested in a barter." That was all he said.

"Do you have anything to offer?" Asked Des who was impatient.

"Not really." As he started to explain his situation the phone rang on the bar counter, "It's the wife, by any chance did you call her about the barter, just tell me in preparation for what I might get myself into."

"Hello, darling." He rose to take the call, in case she was giving out to him.

On his return, he said "The wife reminded me of the barge on the canal. Only if you are interested."

Immediately we did the deal on the barter, he wished us luck, and the address where he might pick up the welder, as the wife was out and about, and no time like the present to pick it up.

As we staggered out of the pub and adjusted our eyes to allow focus. We turned right to the canal on Baggot St. Bridge, then left. We could not see the boat.

We called the house and it was there all right, and it was a barge, but sunk to protect the timbers.

"Ye didn't tell it was sunk."

"A boat, is a barge, no matter what you say." He replied in a calm voice.

One loved the outdoors, the other did not. (underwater)

Someone Else

Laura Alves

I was walking in the street, and suddenly someone came in my direction with a huge smile and open arms, saying: "Hello, stranger! How long has it been?? It must be at least - what? 10 years?" "Sorry," I replied. "It must be really that long, or even longer. Where do I know you from?" "From university. Most recently you were there at the Biology department, but we went to Sports College together".

"Ah", I said. "Sorry to disappoint you, but I never went to sports college. I studied Literature".

"Oh, I am terribly sorry about this, I thought you were someone else. But that is strange, you still look so familiar to me..."

"That's all right," I replied. "You seem familiar to me too, now that I think of it". It was my sister who went to college with you".

Kitty and the Dragon

Heloisa Prieto

Illustrated by Laura Beatriz



I thought I should get the ladder and try to jump over the wall that divided our yards, but I was still climbing down the tree when I heard the doorbell ring. I ran to the gate and, as I opened it, I saw my new neighbor holding my cat.

“Desculpa” she said, pronouncing the Portuguese word for “Sorry” carefully. “I am Rachel. Here is your kitten. I can't speak Portuguese. I have just arrived from Canada. Can you speak English?”

“Thank you!” I said. I had already learned how to thank people in English at school and to make some conversation. So, I asked her “how did you guess my cat's name?”

Rachel smiled at me and tried to explain:

“Oh, Kitten means baby cat in English. Didn't you learn it? I reached for my cat and after I held her, I explained:

“No, I did not. I am just beginning to learn English.” “And I am just beginning to learn Portuguese”, said Rachel.

I kissed Kitty's furry, little head and let her jump down to the door. I remember feeling so happy and grateful! I tried to give Rachel a big hug, but she ran away.

“Bye! Bye!” she said on the way out.

“Meaow!”

I laughed imagining that my Kitty was also grateful because our new friend had brought her back home. I already knew that, in cat tongue, each “meow” meant something different. Sometimes, it meant “I am thirsty” or else “I am sleepy”, but it could also be just a cute way of expressing cat happiness. From that day on, Rachel and I visited each other daily. Kitty kept on jumping over the wall to Rachel’s house as if she thought she lived in both our homes. Everytime Kitty moved houses, one friend called the other. The first time Rachel came into my home, she noticed how large our family seemed to be. I am the oldest child and I have three younger sisters. My grandparents on my father’s side came from Spain. I can speak Spanish, but this was new to Rachel. My mother lost my granny when she was still a baby. When she was pregnant with me she met a lovely Japanese lady, called Mrs. Toyoko Harada in a lower shop. They became friends and Mrs Harada, who was a widow, came to live with us. She had several Japanese friends, so I was used to listening to three different languages in a single day. Not only that, food came in so many flavours, because my mother, my granny and Mrs. Harada took turns in the kitchen and each one of them had their favourite recipes.

Some habits of ours seemed quite unusual to Rachel at first. My Spanish granny loved telling gory, horror tales, my mother had a very peculiar sense of humour and laughed when things seemed to go wrong. People talked all the time, not always to each other, I must say. Although our furniture was quite conventional, Mrs Harada spread her futon, a double mattress with lovely flowery patterns, in the living room. She enjoyed watching my sisters play with their toys on the soft fabric.

“She is so lovely”, said Rachel gesturing towards Luiza, my baby sister. Lina, my middle sister, was sitting on the futon, right next to the baby, and she repeated slowly... “lo-ve-ly...” I knew she was memorizing a new word.

Next, she raised, smiled, and introduced herself:

“Hi! I am Lina! This is my sister Luiza! She is only a baby!

Look at her tiny, little hand! She is so cute!

Then Lina joined her singers and said:

“Fofa!”

Her arms down, Rachel smiled largely. She turned to me, copied my little sister’s gesture and asked:

“Fofa? It sounds like the word u y...What does it mean?” I laughed and told her:

“Yes! Sim! It means soft and cute at the same time!” Then, Rachel added:

“Here, in Brazil, you like to speak with your hands... Back home, in Canada, we don’t gesture so much!”

Luiza seemed curious and asked Rachel:

“Why don't you speak like us?”

At this very moment, I remember my Mom coming into the room. She had been listening to our conversation and decided to introduce herself and make some comments: “Olá! Hello dear, I am Eloá!”

Rachel smiled at my Mom and also sat on the futon, next to Mrs Harada and my sisters.

Mom told us:

“Usually, when people are learning a new language, they speak with an accent.”

“Accent? How so?” asked Luiza.

Mom grinned and said:

“Let’s say it is as if our tongue needs some practice to pronounce new words properly; each language uses the throat, the mouth in a very particular way. So when we shift languages, sometimes it is just like trying new steps in a dance class.”

I thought about it and found Mom’s explanation a bit weird. I asked her: “Can’t we say that the words in English are still clinging in Rachel’s mouth?”

Mom burst out laughing. She said:

“Children can always find a better way to express things that are so hard to explain”.

One of them loved the outdoors but the other did not

Mark L'estrage

Paddy phoned Stephen to let him know the good news but Stephen was a bit worried saying I am getting a lot of Strange phone calls from private numbers, they are saying we will find you." "Don't think you will get them anymore they are all gone back to Mexico with the army."

"Ok will I head back home now then?" "Yes you will be fine we will send a car over to your place tonight to make sure all is ok."

Paddy headed home to Julie saying, "I think this is finally sorted out, once I hear everything is good I will take a week off and we will go somewhere of your choice to say thanks for being so understanding." Paddy loved the outdoors going hiking and running although Julie was more of a person who liked team parks and going for nice meals so she said "Great I would love to go to Disney Land in Paris." "Ok I will book it tomorrow once I know I'm not needed for a while."

When he woke the next day he phoned his boss the Super to check all was quite he said. "All ok thank God I was talking to our lead in the army and he said he was in touch with the Mexican army and he thinks he will be able to get the cloning device to them to be destroyed so that's progress." "Great I am thinking off taking a bit of time off now, Julie wants to go to Paris to Disney land for a few days." "Ok you enjoy that." "Thanks I know Julie will she loves all that stuff."

They had a very nice few days in Paris and Paddy also got to do some outdoor stuff as well while they were there. On their last night there Paddy got a call from Stephen who sounded very upset saying. "Sorry to trouble you I heard you were away somewhere, the phone calls are still happening and I have noticed a car following me when I am out." "Stay calm Stephen I will phone the station and let them know what is happening and get to send a car around, how did you know we were away?" "Sorry I hope you don't mind I phoned your boss and he told me." "That's ok be careful, I will be back tomorrow." He was about to put the phone down when he heard someone banging Stephen's door down, he asked. "Who is banging at the door?" "I don't know I will look out the window."

Capel Street

Stephen Brady

The world has ended
Early.
Ghouls with covered faces
Windows shuttered blind
Overhead a police craft drones
Stabs a beam into the
Hellscape far below.

The Men He Killed

Fergal Canton

I am writing this decades after his death, that old fraud the jumped up bully. That cause of so much misery. That father that never fathered me. If you were to ask him he'd say I was effeminate bookish, an indoors kind of failure which in his mind was a kind of sickness.

He wanted a son to scale mountains, swim channels, cross vast deserts, survive in dangerous jungles. He had killed men in the war... he said. I wonder had they served under him? I wonder was he keeping some kind of score or competition on killing more of his own men than the enemy?

I wonder did he think himself more brave than other officers because more of the men serving under his authority died? Did Generals become Generals because they failed to be good majors? Did Majors become Majors because they made major mistakes? Did Captains become Captains because they led disastrous missions? Did second Lieutenants become first Lieutenants by dropping live grenades?

My father was only a lowly Sergeant yet he made me camp with him out in the woods every Summer until I left home. One of us loved the outdoors and one of us did not. After he died I went through his old things, His medals, His papers and the truth. He only served in the catering corps.

A Hunter's tale

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

Baylon sniffed the piece of torn cloth on a bush. Still wet with the blood and moisture of his prey. It told him she was not far. That she was desperate, tired, and almost out of options. He had to save the debacle that had become this month's adventure, since the background research and preparation had not been done by his normal talent finders.

His family's investments had yielded him billions, a plush lifestyle, homes, women, and all the amenities that money could buy across the globe. From a very young age he'd wanted for nothing except to fill the gnawing darkness within himself.

The monthly hunt was his only true freedom. It was his well-arranged "me-time", his peace, his release. Raised in a strict Christian family, he could not circumvent his moral compass and so instructed all his "finders" to select the most vial, morally grotesque and detestable members of the human race for his adventures.

The new finder's research had acquired a pair of twin sisters from Colorado. Allegedly, they had butchered their foster parents in a macabre ritual, thereafter, emptying their accounts and partying with friends. Local law enforcement had not been able to locate them, but his finder used a combination of social media and bribery to track them to a cabin in the woods. Now they were in his domain. The most remote area of Alaskan forest that money could buy. Kidnapped here and given one day's rations and food apiece, their job was to escape. Capture would bring certain death and the heads of Baylon's 53 prior hunts hung as trophies on his own cabin's basement wall.

This hunt was different. The twins had immediately split up and his finders had advised him in their target-assessment report, that there were both physical and psychological differences between the two. That there were gaps in the girl's education and red flags in the psychological profile of the elder twin. Only time would tell if this would be a good hunt.

The dogs began barking and they'd picked up a scent. Footsteps could be heard in the underbrush of the forest and a few moments later there

was screaming and struggling as one of his targets had been run down by the hounds. She still wore the grey sweatsuit that Baylon supplied to his prey and she was now covered in dirt and blood with fear in her young face as Baylon calmly walked up, unslung his riffle and prepared for the kill shot. It was at that moment that a leaf-covered creature leapt from the trees and drove a sharpened branch through the top of Baylon's shoulder which penetrated deep into his chest cavity, sending him to his knees. Without hesitation this creature grabbed his riffle and made short work of the two hunting dogs.

"Oh Baylon. Did you really think you could get away with this thing forever? You thought you were the hunter and not the prey!", A female voice said as she stood over him with a smile. It was Anya, the missing twin.

"Your new reader works for me, you see. Didn't tell you that one of us loved the outdoors while the other does not? My sister was all the bait I needed, rich boy.", She said. Baylon looked up and his last vision was that of Anna and Anya walking away as he gurgled on his own blood.

With the help of the "reader" they'd planted in his organization, most of his funds were neatly transferred to an offshore account while the twins searched for their next victim. It would be their 99th.

The Other Did Not Love The Outdoors

Angelina Kelly

Julia came from a middle class, working background. Although she spent time outdoors, when she needed to, her life, primarily, was lived indoors. Living in Ireland this didn't bother her, the weather was not conducive to outdoor activities most of the time anyway.

In her corporate life of finance, she conducted meetings, project reports, figures, stats and stock market projections all of which kept her indoors. She loved it because she knew what she needed to wear and, when she had to go out, a warm, wool coat, hat and boots kept her warm and dry.

Darren, also originally from Ireland, came from a wealthy background, money was no concern, his father was fabulously rich, and he lived off 'daddy's money'. He loved the outdoors, the sun, the heat and water sports. The Irish weather was not conducive to his lifestyle, so he jetted off to whatever exotic location that took his fancy and engaged in water sports. His life was consumed by fun, parties, champagne and limousines.

A twist of fate brought Julia and Darren together one night on a beach in Jamaica and an unexpected chance encounter in Gran Canaria a few months later saw their lives slowly merge.

At first their differences didn't matter. Darren brought Julia into his circle of friends, commonly known as "The Waterproof People", showed her a life that she could only ever have dreamt of and instructed her in the safe practice of their water sports.

Life was fun for Julia, she still had her corporate life but now she also had exciting new friends and outdoor activities in high-class places surrounded by expensive things. As their friendship developed and her dream of marrying a 'handsome prince' materialised, she tried to show him the mundane things of owning a home and doing the weekly shopping. Unfortunately, Darren couldn't adjust and the sun, the sea, the sand and the parties drew him away. Eventually Julia had to choose which life was more important to her.

She was young, footloose and fancy free and she had time on her side. Although she didn't like the outdoors her love for Darren was strong and he offered her a life of 'fun in the sun'. After much deliberation, and interference from an over-powering mother-in-law, she decided she would go with him and live in his chosen location.

In spite of their differences, they moved to Florida where The Waterproof People had secured paid jobs as water sport instructors and with her financial background they entrusted her with their money, and she became their manager.

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Darren continued to engage in his water sports and Julia did too but her 'job' as their manager meant she got to spend some time indoors, which she preferred.

One night, sipping a cocktail, on a balmy night on the terrace, she reflected on her new life and reckoned she had the best of both worlds.

One of them?

Max McCoubrey

One of them loved the outdoors
The other did not
One preferred a pint
The other a shot
One was a triplet
With curly hair
One was an only child
Whose scalp was bare
One a question of taste in art
One love Claude Monet
That stole his heart
The other graffiti on a wall
And valued Banksy most of all
One procrastinated all the time
One arrived exactly on the chime
One loved stripes the other dots
One loved the outdoors
The other did not