

Inkslingers Blended Session

9th December 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“Because You Are Alive – Everything Is Possible Thich Nhat Hanh”

And the Visual



Church Hill Co, Donegal
2nd December 2023

Because You Are Alive, Everything Is Possible

Angelina Kelly

My recent encounter with cancer diagnosis, surgery and recovery has made me stop and think. It has given me a new perspective on life.

Before surgery I was self-sufficient, self-reliant and constantly strove to be someone, to do something and to have some purpose for my life to justify my existence. In the corporate world I had become an efficient Secretary. Then I chose to follow my dream and achieved moderate success as a Therapist. I had just retired and put my “past life” behind me and had embarked on a new plan for the future.

Cancer diagnosis was completely unexpected and changed the course of my plans. It sent me on a “wonderful great adventure” – not of my choosing – which I had to instantly adapt to and cope with.

Four months ago, when I woke up after surgery, I was heavily bandaged and hooked up to machines. Thankfully, the next day, the machines were disconnected and I was able to move again - but I felt different. The first thing I discovered was that I was helpless and could do nothing. I had to rely on the nurses to do everything for me. In the days following discharge from the hospital I had to rediscover what I could do immediately, what I could attempt to do and what I had to aspire to again.

It reminded me of my previous encounter with Cancer twenty-two years ago, and how alien that concept had been for me then, and here I was now having to go through it again. Thankfully I had a wonderful family around me who were willing to do everything for me and, as I progressed, helped me to do things for myself again. The knowledge that surgery was the only treatment necessary this time and that I had survived and rebuilt my life previously, comforted me in my dark hours.

Since then I have struggled to integrate back into the world and have discovered that I’m not ready yet. Every task I set myself leaves me exhausted and drained and requires me to rest more than I’m willing to do. I have learned that, although I may set myself tasks, they may take longer to do than I anticipated. What I used to do in a day, now takes me a week to achieve.

In my despair I was beginning to think that “normal” was no longer going to happen but then a wise, gentle soul, that I happened to meet this week at a neighbour’s funeral, asked me, “What is normal? Because you are alive, everything is possible.” This renewed my hope and helped me to see that a new normal would have to be developed initially and then aspire back to normal.

My family have stepped back now and are allowing me to do what I need to do for myself but are still on hand to assist when necessary. For now, in spite of my urgency to get better, I have to slow down, be patient and allow myself to heal. I used to advise my clients to be gentle on themselves – now I’m having to live my own wisdom.

2.

What the future holds I do not know but I have, once again, survived for some reason and I know that someday I will discover what that reason is.

Yes / The Abridgement of Someone's Life
Steve Huenneke

Believe me, or it, or not
English is my second language
Which I learned to manage
By keeping my words simple
My meaning and me clear and visible
Who needs big words to hide behind?
I am okay with the display
Of the bare bones of my life

When I was a young man
I always responded to rejection
By furiously rejecting myself
By disappearing into the desert
Of my imagination
The fury came
From fear and separation
Division of my family, myself and me
Before the age of three

Where do I begin, after that?
With a declaration of independence?
With a declaration of dependence?
Or more simply
With declaration of existence to someone
I wanted to accept me
I could not ask, would she?
In the form of a question
Too risky
I took the crazy step of making a plea
The words came out forcefully
"My heart is strong
Test it and see
I will show you
I will show you"

And I will never know
Why I said those particular words
Because it sure wasn't a show
And I always did so poorly on tests

I made this declaration
To the person
I called the stranger like me
I stole her name for this poem from Disney
I saw Tarzan
And remembered when I was both a boy and a man in a foreign country
In boarding school -- that was when I met her
Like Tarzan
I was in bad need of a first language teacher
Who could understand The Question
To begin with

She is the ghost who unhaunted me
Who made me feel worthy
The feeling is not about an act
There was no act in fact
Just a place where life begins again and is
At that place, she was the wiz
She said the word
The one that set me free
And would do that for any of us
Yes

To Not Be or Not to Be
Now I know the whole story
They kept hidden – nothing made sense
When I was a Hamlet at boarding school
One of many then in existence
With masters who made every rule
And established every lonely boundary
Some so impossible to see
Authenticity?

Only a thundering thou shalt not be you would always do
I could not think normally
But my gut knew
So did my heart
Put the double bind and the double negative together
And blow them both apart
I did that with her

I spoke in my first language
For the first time – I think, ever
I almost croaked
I almost cried
But I didn't cry, ever
Maybe I did but I didn't remember
I said Yes, too
To my first language teacher
I repeated what she said to me
Believing with you
Believing in you
Believing as you
These were not just words
They were hands for pulling back the cover
To discover a whole emotional past
I was a songbird at last
Bound to be unbound
Boarding elsewhere, not at that school any longer
Boarding the ship for relation
Sailing away to where things made real sense
Leaving altogether the desert of my imagination
But my imagination has not ever deserted me
Even in this final season
I am aging -- and dead set against raging about that out in the snow
I say no to saying no.

**The Church Hill
Deirdre Powell.**

A mist descends over the hill
On a grey day in winter
A light frost dusts the grass
You can cut the air with the ice.

A church stands alone on the hill
Trees in the churchyard stand tall
Their arms protectively enveloping
All who pass this way.

At night, the stars twinkle
Over the wild and wistful landscape
A silence falls
And there is peace in the land.

And as I walk the lonely road
Near a Church Hill in Co Donegal,
I think to myself, because I am alive,
Everything is possible.

Butcher

Matthew Tubridy

Butcher in Balbriggan,
Where does his beef come from?
You cycle out of town for 10 minutes and you find out!
The heifers, Sam and George,
Al, that's left of the herd,
The people of Balbriggan were greedy,
Eating lots of burgers,
The heifers are also brought into Dublin City Centre on quad bikes,
Their dead bodies loll on the back of the quad bikes,
Brought into Eddie Rockets,
The chef cuts them up,
Some people like heifer skin,
It's a fetish!
The chef cuts off the heifers head,
And nails it onto above his door of Eddie rockets,
The Americans walk past,
Hey! 'There's Eddie Rockets!' They splutter!
By this stage chef had cut the dead heifers into burger sized pieces,
He gives one to the Americans,
They eat it with a big smile on their faces,
It's prime beef! chef tells them, from outside Balbriggan,

Travels in Donegal

Elaine Reardon

Because you are alive, Everything is possible- Thich Nhat Hanh .

I was finally in Donegal. travelled from Dublin, first a bust to Donegal town, then another bus to Letterkenny, to the local bus to Glencolumkille. There was the large group that moved with me

from Letterkenny to the Glen bus. There were people from Japan, Italy, Los Angeles, and a couple locals, as well. They all carried fiddles, and they were going to the same small town as myself for a week of Donegal style fiddling!

Finally, five hours away from Dublin, we were left at the top of the Main Street in Glencolumkille, and made our way down the road together, dragging our luggage.

Most of us had stocked up on

some groceries before we got on the last bus-- fruit, cheeses, and such. The Glen had one small grocery shop.

I was there to study for a week called 5000 years in Stone, Pre-Christian and early Christian history lamp; archaeology of the area with Professor Herity. We'd be hiking into old stone sites in the

area. Oideas Gael is a well-known school that offers courses in language and culture.

There were several teachers taking the class for teacher trainings, a few people from Dublin, as

well as from the wide Irish diaspora. Some of us shared a house together, along with some of the fiddlers. We shared a common kitchen and living room.

Down the road a few minutes' walk is a folk park, three small, thatched roof cottages and a small cafe that serves soups and sandwiches at lunch time. I bought a warm wool hat here. I didn't expect to be so cold in

August. When the wind blew heavy rains my rain gear--pants and hooded jacket, held up, but I was still cold and; damp to the bone.

A wise woman from Dublin said there was no help for it,
except nipping into the pub and tossing back some whiskey to warm
ourselves from the inside. It worked better than tea.

One afternoon at our rental house I met Liam, a fiddler, who wept when
he shared that it was the first time anyone in his family had returned
since they took the soup

The folk park has the cauldron the soup was served from. If you took the
soup, you'd live, and turn Protestant.

Many didn't take the soup

Liam's family did, and then had to move down to Sligo. I don't know why
he told me the story.

We were both in the kitchen heating the tea kettle when he turned to
me and began to speak.

In the Glen there are ancient burial sites, older than Newgrange. A short
drive away there's a walk to an island at low tide to see an ancient
church. There are local stories of St Colum, who, it's said, lived here in
exile before going off to Iona.

This was the best week to be there, as it coincided with the Fiddler's
week. Fiddlers meet at the local pub every night to play and it's
tradition, on the last night, to play all night, When I was

last there the last fiddlers were still going at 9AM! If you're looking for a
place off the beaten path, I highly recommend this small town, and
Oideas Gael.

Morning Call

Matthew Tubridy

7.30 comes around, a big bear arm comes through the ceiling, with my
medication in his paws,
You won't take it?
The rest of the bear comes in,
You will take it!
The bear rears up on his back legs!
I will take it! I say.
Bear had to go to other houses in the area,
A bit like Santa Claus,
To deal with the non compliant people,
James O'Keefe,
He goes on a bus where a passenger is shouting at the driver,
Gives him serroquel,
Bear goes back to the hospital,
Stays in a small room until pills time comes back,
The nurses take lessons is being bears,

Everything is possible

Michael O'Brien

"Yeah including dropping dead right now", Jimmy was his usual cynical self,

"You know what I mean. If you don't like the job just leave it,"

"That's all pop psychology bullshit and you know it, be all you can be!, give me a break". Contempt oozed out of Jimmy as he said this,

but Colin was determined to raise his friend up.

"You know you could do a lot more with your life, you only took that job cos it was easy, and that's the way it stayed, easy Ozie, and you just fell into it. And now here you are years later bored out of your head, in a rut and depressed because of it, aimless, no goals, no failures, no achievements, you're just scared of change"

"You're wrong there buddy, I've loads of failures"

Jimmy liked hearing he was capable of more, because the truth was he didn't believe it.

"You're a dreamer Jim, you thought it was like the movies, someone was gonna call to your door and tell you how great you were and offer you a Hollywood contract, lay it on a plate for you".

Jim retreated behind sarcasm, "What?, you mean that's not the way it works".

Colin was losing his patience now and decided to be a little more incisive.

"Mary married that other dude cos she thought you weren't interested, now she's two kids and a nice life, but she'd have preferred half that with you. Indifference, or should I say fake indifference cos you're afraid of rejection, that's your main problem my friend, you're perceived indifference"

Jimmy changed the subject to football and usually over their many years as friends that would have been an end to it, but not tonight, Colin saw his friend was suffering and decided to keep digging.

"You remember when we were kids and those fuckers were beating the shit out of me and you jumped in and helped".

Jimmy smiled, "Yeah I was a bit of a hero that day"

"Yeah and I ran off to get my Dad, cos they were much older than us"

Jimmy laughed, "Yeah you really had my back".

They both laughed now like two old soldiers remembering war stories over a couple of beers,

"What happened when I was gone?", Colin asked this in a tone that suggested over the years he had always known the answer. Jimmy's right shoulder raised a little,

"Told ye, nothing, they just ran off"

"That older one was a pervert Jim, he went to prison for it later on. There was four of them, a cocky little fucker like you would have bragged about your heroics for ever about something like that, but not you, not that day, I put it down to you being the strong and silent type, a good friend, and you are those things,".

"Let it go Col, it was years ago, what are we gonna do about it now?"

They drank silently together for a while until Colin broke the silence

"You know he's dead now,

and you're alive, I never said it before but thanks Jim. I love you man"

Jim gave his lifelong friend a sideways glance, "What the fuck is this? the little house on the Prairie, I'm mildly fond of you as well, now get them in"

National Concert Hall

Matthew Tubridy

You're in the National Concert Hall but they blocked off the toilets!

Where will I go?

What will I do?

I'm the presenter of the orchestra!

Halfway through I can't hold it in,

It's part of the show I say

As I take out my todger,

The first 3 rows get my pee!

It's part of the show! I say

My pee is good for your kids!

You're known as the pissing presenter!

Kitty and the dragon flies

Heloisa Prieto

(excerpt)

Later, that same week, it was Rachel's mom's turn to invite me over. Her name was Alanna. She seemed very happy that her daughter had already made friends in her new country.

Next day, as I rang the doorbell, Rachel opened the wooden gate and led me to the front door saying:

"My house is very different from yours" she warned me.

"How so?" I asked her.

"I am an only child. My mother is a translator and writer. She stays home most of the time, but she needs silence so that she can concentrate".

Rachel's house was very silent indeed. And I loved it. I was deeply impressed by the large, comfortable armchairs, the walls covered by bookshelves, and the typewriter over her desk. Mrs Alanna was so sweet. She listened attentively to us, girls. Back home, in my family, not only does everyone talk a lot, but we always move around, doing many things at the same time. Everyone has a different schedule, so people come in and out of the kitchen helping themselves, feeding the kids, sharing the news, and chatting about life in general. Dad likes to take his time and have his meals watching tv, in the living room. Relatives come unannounced and sometimes join him. Mom is always the last one to leave the table and sometimes she gets so busy looking after her family that she forgets to eat properly. Then Mrs Harada offers her some special dish and I know she enjoys the extra attention.

Having lunch at Rachel's was an entirely new experience to me. Her mother carefully spread the plates on the table. Rachel sat and waited for her to start. We ate very slowly and I enjoyed the taste of different spices. Dessert was delicious and I remember wanting a second serving but being too shy to ask.

“Thank you for inviting me over...” I told both Rachel and her mother.

“I love having lunch at your house!” said Rachel.

“Why?” I asked her.

“Every meal looks like a party to me!” she explained.

On my turn, I liked everything about Rachel’s house, the soft light of the lovely lampshade on the desk, the large, shining, crystal chandelier, the books over her mother’s desk, but my favourite item was a collection of tiny, handcrafted toys that Rachel had inherited from her granny.

“These are my dragon flies!” she told me.

I tried to translate the word in Portuguese:

“A ying dragon?” I asked her and added “in Portuguese we call them “libélulas”. I think they look so much like butterflies, except their wings are longer...”

“Li-bé-lu-las” sounds so strange to me, but I like it!

Rachel kept on repeating the word out loud, as if she wanted to memorize it. Next, she showed me all her illustrated books about dragons. They were so beautiful and sometimes, a bit scary.

“Shall we have lunch at your house tomorrow?” she asked me, grinning.

You Can Use It

Matthew Tubridy

Ye can use your arms,
Ye can use your legs,
Ye can use your imagination!
You can brush your hair,
You can dye your hair!
You can run for the bus,
You can make bread and butter pudding,
You can make a soup with onions in it,

A God of Little Things

Hannah Stern

"It's the symbols, isn't it? DAMMIT!" Oh dear, I think; he looks very upset now.

"No. Nooooooo. It's not at all. Honestly, the symbols are, they're really perfect." Was that enough? Was he soothed? Humans are such dramatic things sometimes. He runs a hand up his face and into the hair on his head where he seems to grab some and attempt to pull it out. I watch with some fascination. Did humans have detachable parts? I was almost certain they did not, but they say you learn something new every day.

"You're just saying the symbols were ok. If they were perfect, you wouldn't be here!" Well, that's just a bit rude, I think to myself. I would clutch my pearls except I don't have any. Or a neck, strictly speaking. Still, I raise an appendage and hope this conveys my general dismay. Based on the human's lack of attention, I'm not entirely convinced the message was received.

He's begun pacing, this human. "I don't have much time!" he says. There is moisture beading on his forehead and he keeps pulling at his hands. I sigh.

"Right, well, what is it you're trying to do here?" I ask. I can get the gist of what the symbols are trying to accomplish, but I was just being nice earlier; his summoning circle is absolute rubbish.

"I wanted to summon a god!" he's breathing quite fast, this human. In and out and in and out and honestly, I'm already bored.

"Right, you did that," I say, and grow slightly in size, staying just short of the boundaries of the circle. Not because we can't cross the lines, like humans seem to think, but just because it's considered exceptionally poor manners to just waltz into someone's home without their permission.

"I summoned YOU" he says again.

"Well that tone's a bit unnecessary!" I say. His eyes are darting to the door again. "Ok, tell me why you wanted a god." Maybe this all comes down to some sort of administrative issue. You know, maybe he wrote

dog in ancient Latin when he should have written god; a fairly generous assumption on my part, but I am nothing if not a benevolent deity. I expand myself further to demonstrate that I could kill him, but absolutely won't and am therefore worthy of his worship.

Any minute now. Whenever he's ready...

"I have a demon coming after me," he says. "I wanted a god to protect me but then you arrived, and you say you're a god but you're not like any god I've ever seen. I wanted Khnum, the Egyptian ram-headed god." He's nearly panting now, eyes darting about.

"Oh," I say. "Oh I see. Well, there's your problem, then:" I indicate the markings on the floor.

"You misspelled it there. See? No, just... just there. You wanted Khnum, but you spelled

Qalam." He leans over and looks at the markings on the floor. This is the calmest I've ever seen this human. But in fairness, I've known him for approximately seven minutes. That's enough though; humans already seem exhausting.

"Oh," he says, his head skin wrinkling in confusion at my godly wisdom. "Wait, so..." he looks at me, "You're not Khnum?"

"Plainly not, no."

"You're the god Qalam?"

"You seem to be catching up now, yes."

"So, what are you the god of?" I've never gotten this question before, but again, I'm pretty new on the scene and all the really solid jobs have been taken for literal millennia. Still, first impressions matter, so I swell up a last little bit and reveal my true nature.

"I am Qalam! The God of Pen Caps!" It takes a moment for the human to comprehend the true might of my godhead.

"Pen...?"

"Caps, yes."

“I summoned not the ram-headed god of the Nile, but the god of those little plastic caps that always get lost?!” The human’s face is turning a lovely shade of purple.

“You seem to be understanding now. Good! My sacrifices may come in the form of those fancy needle-point pens that draw those smooth lines. In black, if you please.”

“PEN CAPS?!” The human is shouting. No doubt my splendour has nearly driven him mad with the glory of it all.

Suddenly, the door to his residence flies open and a demon bursts in, and normally I wouldn’t say this, but we were just about to start with him worshipping me, and this interruption is very rude. Very rude indeed! And if manners are off the table, well then: THINGS MUST BE DONE! The human is cowering but I need my worshippers out buying pens, not wetting themselves. So I do the only logical thing, I rotate sideways and shoot my plastic clip directly at the intruder, piercing its skull and shattering its weak, meaty body. My clip returns to me, and I allow my devotee to behold me. He gazes up, his breathing slowing down.

“You... how...?” he mutters.

“Ah. Yes, well,” I explain, “Pen caps.”

You Tube

Matthew Tubridy

Where am I? On YouTube!
Just like Tiffany,
Just like Axel Rose, of Guns n Roses,
Bono lives in YouTube,
Just search U2,
He's in a studio forever,
But he gets pizza,
Sharon Shannon, is playing the music box,
Sinead O'Connor is dead in his world but lives on in YouTube,
Along with Kurt Cobain,
Strumming his guitar and singing his lyrics,
He exists in the middle of his song 'Poll

Because You Are Alive

Max McCoubrey

Mitch was standing at the window of the tenth floor building watching to see if Mary made it to catch her bus.

Ever since Mary Davis had started working for him as his private secretary had begun to feel differently about the opposite sex. Her lilting Irish accent , when she said 'Good Morning Mr McDeere' found its way to his wounded heart, fanning the last remaining ember of trust and warming it.

From this position at the window he could clearly see the bus stop as she waited.

He waited too, until the moment the bus came and he saw her safely on it. Then he waited some more until the vehicle with her on it went out of sight.

Mitch felt emptiness when she left the building. He used that few moments to calm himself after his busy day and whilst he waited for Rusty his pilot to call him to tell him he had landed on the helipad.

He rose from his mahogany desk when the call came from Rusty and, walking through Mary's spacious outer office noticed she had forgotten her purple scarf. Mitch took it from the floor where it had fallen and placed it on the back of her chair, where she would plainly see it in the morning.

As he did a waft of her perfume hit his nostrils and he wondered at how sweet a moment could bring him so much joy.

He made it to the helipad and settling into the copter, looked at Rusty and said, ' I love her, do you think I have a chance?'

Rusty smiled ' Because you are alive , man, everything is possible. '

Flying

Matthew Tubridy

Matthew takes off his hoody,
He rises up in the air,
On top of the table,
He says
‘I will write about an avalanche sweeping you all away!’
I will write about the floods carrying you away too!
A volcano spewing ash on your town!
I will rise up above Dublin,
A 1000 times bigger than most people,
A big black figure,
I’ll stand in Merrion Square,
Looking at government buildings,
I’ll put my eye to Leo Varadkar’s office window,
I’ll say I’m the BFG!
I put Leo V under my arm
I carry him up to the Wicklow Mountains,
To the Glen of Imaal,
The soldiers hear about it,
And get out their machine guns,
They plug me with bullets,
But because I’m made of black clouds the bullets just go threw me,
I plonk Leo in the bog,
His suit gets soaked
He complains,
The soldiers get him and carry him to their barracks,
Give him some chicken wings,
Because that’s what he was supposed to be eating that evening,
Leo is driven back to the Dail,
In a massive army Jeep,
All the politicians commiserate with him,
The BFG took you away!
That’s terrible! Even Mary Lou does,
Leo is in his boggy soaked suit,
But the soldiers rescued me! He says,

He gives some of them a medal,
Sergeant Bill, Copper and Lucy,
Get medals,
Leo goes home and lies in bed with his partner,
He says tomorrow we will have chicken wings again, those army ones
weren't great,

Church Hill

Ciaran O'Melia

In my youth, Donegal was cut off from the Republic, or it seemed that way. If going from Dublin to the Inishowen Peninsula, you would travel through Aughnacloy and be stopped by the British. If you go by Sligo, after Grange, you have a strip of Leitrim, and then you would have about 3 hours to reach your destination.

I tell you, it was a pain in the armpit. Returning to Dublin, I was taken in by the BA soldiers in the dark of night in Aughnacloy. My final interview was with an Officer, and my second last interview was with a lady in uniform, a tight-fitting uniform; this accentuated what should remain private.

But back to Donegal, I was at a WWTP not far away from Errigal. It was the only place I saw a Cuckoo; while working in the control room, I heard the distinct call of it. It was sharp, I was blessed to see it was atop electricity pole outside the building. It was like a trust, but only larger and more significant. The next place I saw one was in West Cork; I was in for a steady walk in the mountains at the O'Donovan Castle, the ancestral home of the O'Donovan's; while I heard the distinct call, it was only a fleeting glimpse as it swooped between the trees or bushes. It appears they like land that isn't mowed.

But that is not why I am writing to you today. I was in a pub in Donegal; my companion was extolling the virtues of the game of Rugby. We were at the bar. There was a figure beside me with his head on the bar, passed out.

My companion, who was well up in the game of Rugby, just then a movement came about; he said, 'Good scissors', don't ask me who had done the scissors movement. But the other man who happened to be on my left woke from slumber and asked, 'What?' My companion on my right tried to talk over me to explain what a scissors movement was.

"Scissors, scissors," said the man resting his head on the bar, until my friend, the expert, gave up.

He must not have heard the motto: 'Because you are alive, everything is possible.'

Couch Surfing

Matthew Tubridy

Man nails your head to the wall,
With a TV in front of you,
You can't stop looking at the TV,
On the TV a man goes to the zoo,
He make's gestures at the Rhinos,
Then Mary Berry makes a roast lamb,
Then the Teletubbies come on,
Leo Varadkar has an argument with the Teletubbies on the 6.1 news,
Someone goes to the Faroe Islands,

What's Possible?

Mark L'estrange

A few minutes later the station was full of guards they stayed there for a few hours but no gang showed up. The super said. "We don't need that many guards here right now if some of you want to head home it's fine." "I will be heading off for one I'm wrecked, I will keep my phone on." Said Paddy.

A few of them made a move for home the super and a few of the guards hung on for a while, then his phone rang it was one of the army officials from Mexico. "You were looking for me is all ok?" He explained the situation to him. "That's strange, are you sure it's the same gang? We have a lot of the gang in custody." "Not sure but it's a big coincidence that a gang is after Paddy's friend Stephen and they are threatening to storm our station." "Leave it with me I will question the lads and see who these people are and I will get back to you."

Paddy woke up hearing the phone ring it was Stephen who was very upset saying. "Will I ever be able to get back to normal, I can't see any of my family, I am thinking of just heading home and take a chance." "I know it's very touch on you head home, and sure I only live about ten minutes away from you any hassle ring me and I will spin around." "But will we be able to fight these guys off there was a lot of them in my garden." "well like the saying goes we are alive so anything is possible, and my powers are a big help."

Meanwhile back in the station the Super got word from the special crimes unit. "we picked up a gang on the northside of Dublin acting very suspicious and it appears they have weapons this could be the gang we are bringing them in to the station now." "Great we can get our guards to identify them, great work well done."

To be continued

Photographs

Bernadette O'Reilly

The photographs on
My table fell
My superstitions kicked in
Learned from my maternal grandmother
A WhatsApp message delivers
News of a death
My thoughts jerk into action
This malaise
This negativity
I need to eliminate
Because I am alive everything is possible.

A short trip

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

Carly crawled out of the car. A vehicle now upside down with all its contents thrown about. Blood poured from an open gash on her head, and she looked around for her hubby. At the newly wed stage, she already understood her man. He was a hunter and avid outdoorsman, a martial artist, and very much an alpha-male, type-A, personality. She also almost certainly knew what was to take place next. She could see the back of the flannel shirt that covered his overly muscular back as he limped toward the eighteen-wheeler that had caused this debacle.

She knew Brad was a decent, tender, loving man, but also one with a certain button installed deep in his psyche. One that when pressed, made him dangerous. Now he was going to do something foolish. As she searched frantically for her cell phone, an odd sight caught her eye. It was her own body, having been propelled through the now very-shattered windshield, laying bloody and broken some thirty yards from the point of impact. At the same time, she could hear Brad's voice spewing enraged words. "You stupid, fucking, bastard! Look what you did! My wife is dead 'cause you decided to cut us off!" A series of loud thuds and further screaming were heard and then the sound of the Louisville slugger's wood frame landing on the ground as Brad dropped the bat, thereafter, collapsing himself. The road they were on was a lonely stretch between Phoenix and the Grand Canyon. Rescue efforts would be slow at best.

Carly Martinez knew what had to be done and it sickened her. She'd fled across, worlds, galaxies, and time itself, in order to escape her mother and marry Brad. Now she saw no other option but to do the one thing that was most humiliating for her, call her "mommy" for help. She was able to enter the broken husk that was now her earth-body and found an ocean of pain she'd never known growing up on Mars. She was barely able to move her wrist and activate a series of codes that could possibly rectify the nightmare of a day she was now living. She could feel herself dying, slipping into the abys as her lungs filled with blood, when a familiar sight caught her broken body's one functioning eye. It was her mom, Dr. Susan Martinez, of Temporal Team One.

In and out of consciousness, she saw a blue light come from her mom's hand and then she felt much better, all the pieces of her twisted frame, the torn ligaments, the shattered pelvis, internal injuries and such, coming together under a power she recognized. Her mother took a sip of water from a silver canister and then knelt to hold Carly's head in her lap. Even under these circumstances Carly half-expected a merciless lecture, one of many she'd heard for centuries from her Mom and Dad.

"Your Terran body is healed, just sit tight for a moment or two, Dear. I have to go help the others.", Were the surprisingly kind words followed by that white toothed smile, that she was treated to.

Her mother rose, that powerful frame and posture that never aged past 23. She turned with yet another gentle grin toward Carly. "Because you are alive, everything is possible". Carly wondered if her mother would like Brad.

The Autumn Hibernation

Greg Fields

In the greying sludge of late autumn the soul burrows underground, joining with the wilder creatures that use this time for hibernation. Steps become slower and more leaden, laughter becomes measured, and as the light of day dims and shortens, so do those spirits in need of regeneration.

Willie Meadows walked into the front lobby of the Washington Post from the morning rain that blew sideways, making his umbrella useless. The rain blew in hard, and cold, and wet, and when Willie sloshed into the lobby, small pools filled the spaces behind him with every step he took. He claimed one of the umbrella shields from the lobby rack, tucked his own into it, then flashed his ID to the surly guard who barely looked up. John, his name was, and he had been there for years, each passing with the same sour expression, the same grunts and snorts that passed for communication. John was a perfect avatar for this morning, and for the mood that clung to Willie as closely as did the rain.

After hanging his sodden raincoat in the closet, Willie settled into his desk. Outside the window across the way lights flickered, reflecting headlights and stoplights, the refracted glare of storefront illuminations, all smeared streaky by the rain. Nothing distinct in any of it. In the other seasons, Willie could count on this window for at least a tiny distraction – the glint of sunlight, the fight of leaves, on special days the wispy dancing of snowflakes. But this was the dead of autumn. Willie came to work in the dark and he left in the dark. In between were the flooding lights of a newsroom and the streaky images of a world gone sour.

Rosie Carter shared his space. Rosie, the recent college graduate assigned to menial tasks and unimportant stories on the city desk. Rosie, with her bright colours and lilting voice. Rosie, with her damnable optimism and even more damnable cheeriness. She was good at what she did. Willie knew this, and he spotted in her stories a spark of imagination, a willingness to lift the dull throb of journalistic prose to occasional wafts of high air. She was good. But damn it all, did she have to be so.....so.....so Rosie.

“Good morning, Willie,” and she bubbled into the adjacent desk. She opened her laptop and pulled up the file for her latest assignment, a fluff piece on principals at two rival high schools who had grown up together. “How’s the day look for you?”

“It looks wet, cold and dull, Rosie. And I get to go out into it again to talk to a degenerate behind bars who promises to enlighten me regarding the ins and outs of the fentanyl trade. Fascinating stuff, no?”

“That’s the type of story that can win a Pulitzer, Willie. High level crime, and all that. I’d be excited to follow that down.”

Willie smiled. “Ah, Rosie, you’d be excited to cover the three-legged race as a Kiwanis picnic.” Rosie looked up and returned his smile. She had learned to weather Willie’s cynicism. At times she even found it charming.

“I don’t get you sometimes, Willie Meadows. You have this wonderful window on our social, political and cultural comings and goings. You’re charming enough to talk your way into any interview you want, and you write well enough to have it all make sense. You’re old enough to be wise and young enough to put that wisdom to good use. You’re a special package, Mr. Willie, but you sell yourself short and try to convince yourself that it’s all a tawdry game.” Rosie chuckled and shook her head. “What’s wrong with you, man?”

“I eat poorly, I drink too much and I don’t have nearly enough sex. All that can make a man cynical. You’ll learn, Rosie. Give yourself time.”

Rosie muttered something that Willie did not hear.

“You said something?” he asked.

Rosie looked up once more and captured Willie’s eyes, this time without the lightness. “I said, you can do anything you want, Willie Meadows. You’re intelligent, you’re healthy and you have a spirit somewhere in there. At least I think you do. You’re alive. You can do anything you want.”

Willie Meadows turned back to his own laptop, stared at nothing, then rose to go stand at the window. The rain continued, the lights flickered.

Alive, he was. That he had to admit. Rosie was a child, but she saw things. Yes, she saw things.

He turned back to his desk, and settled back in. He looked up, then rapped his knuckles on Rosie's desk. "Thanks, girl."

She looked up at him, at this gentle, grand, cynical man, and smiled. "Nothing to it," she said.

Donegal Christmas

Catriona Murphy

Annie had been diagnosed with heart disease two months ago.

Every day it stuttered like a car engine that couldn't start.

Her body felt the age of a war that had worn and torn her in places too complex to heal.

Standing at a crossroads in a fog in Donegal was not how she'd envisaged herself on Christmas Eve.

But it had to be done.

Retribution was tasting in the air, and her dying wish had to be fulfilled.

Shuffling across the road, her snow boots soaked through, her toes numb from the ice, she pushed away thoughts of the rumour of the highway ghost that was sometimes glimpsed on Church Hill.

A black dog.

Named a fatal omen by the locals.

She almost laughed.

She didn't see anything as she went, but she felt watched by the eerie silence.

The twilight painted greys across the skies, but Annie kept moving forward to the spot.

She knew where to dig.

The wind gusted brown leaves over a spot next to a pole.

Not many knew of who'd been burnt there, but Annie with her fey vision, could still see the blackened earth as if it had happened only yesterday.

Her sister's death in 1806, was still a fresh mark on her heart.

Everywhere blades of frozen grass began to float upwards, as if sensing Annie's intentions.

Flowers turned their icy heads to regard her.

She pulled the decayed, wooden box out of the ground.

Inside was the journal of a Buddhist monk, Thich Nact Hanth.

Knowing who sought for it, Annie had placed the book there upon his death.

But her time was nearly up, but while she still lived, anything was possible.

Closing her eyes, she allowed her mind and body to seek another suitor, one that would leverage the wisdom inside for good.

A goodwill Christmas gesture.

A five year old girl named Amy, who lived with two alcoholic parents near Church Hill, was ideal. She spent her time alone with her dolls, and her future was one of rehab centres, support groups and dysfunctional relationships.

Annie wove her intentions into the book to find her, and keep her.

When she looked down, the tome had vanished.

She felt comfort at her resolution, one last good deed done, before she raised her glass to death.