

Inkslingers Blended Session

10th February 2024

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“My dog My Dog Keeps Wrapping Things in Cardboard,
He Thinks He’s A Boxer”



Stairway To Heaven

Stairway to Heaven

Greg Fields

The call had come the night before from a voice at once mechanical and practiced at the disbursement of bad news, yet one which still sought to cultivate a notion of human compassion. Willie Meadows had just walked through the door of his apartment when his phone buzzed, and there it was. A culmination, then. Or maybe a reckoning.

After the call, Willie went to his cabinet and drew forth a glass, which he filled with ice and then filled with scotch. From there he found the tatty sofa, the one with the tear near the arm. Tears everywhere, it seemed. In the sofa. In the old mattress upon which he had slept since he had moved into this place years ago. In the corner of the carpeting near the kitchen. Tears, and rips, and rending all around him it seemed.

She had meant it this time. On so many occasions Sarah Meadows had called Willie and urged him to abandon his own life for a few days and track north to the home where he had grown up and from which he had so eagerly fled those years ago. "I'm so sick, Willie, and so weak. I think this may be it, and I want to see you again. Come say goodbye."

And each time had been a false flag, a little girl crying wolf in a meadow that ultimately proved safe, her fears the merely the shadows of passing clouds blown by breezes that she found too harsh. Each time Willie had answered the summons, had spent time with his older, broken mother, then returned back to his own life, shaking his head as he did so and vowing never again to be so crudely used by a woman who had spent her life mastering the skills of manipulation. It was only a week ago that he had done so, and left the house at the end of his visit with the usual bitterness.

But last night it had been different. "I'm sorry, Mr. Meadows. But she passed quietly, with no fuss. Her heart just couldn't take any more."

Willie had said nothing, swallowed hard, then let the nurse continue. "We have standing arrangements with a local funeral home, and we'll release her to them in the morning. The family can take it from there. I know her daughter has been in touch."

Another pause. “Mr. Meadows? Are you there?”

“Yeah. Thank you. Just at a loss right now. Look, I’ll be up tomorrow afternoon. If there’s anything I need to attend to, anything I need to sign, I can do that tomorrow. You’ve all been very good to her. Thank you for that. I’m glad she died comfortably.”

He sipped his scotch and let it all settle. Gone now, all at once, after all these years. All these false alarms. All the pressures, the resentments, the passive anger.

Guilt washed over Willie Meadows like a driving rain that night, soaking him through. He could not sort out his feelings, his emotions running wildly in directions he could not control but always coming back to the notion of his own failings. He had left her behind, buried her spirit under his own ambitions, and now her body had followed. Gone now, and Willie still here, left behind to deal with the debris of what can no longer be changed, or altered, or softened.

He slept on the sofa that night, never bothering to change out of his clothes. Willie woke the next morning, his head shrunk several sizes too small, and tried to refresh himself with a long, hot shower. No use in it, nor any use in the strong coffee that he brewed and the two oranges he ate as his breakfast.

Shortly after the sun rose, Willie Meadows walked out of his apartment and made his way to Union Station, where he would find a train to take him to what was once his home. His mother now, on the other end of the line, climbing a stairway to heaven he assumed, justified at last in the fears that had consumed her, and lost now – forever lost – to her son’s touch, and to the forgiveness he so desperately sought.

Sleeping in India

Mathew Tubridy

When I sleep I go to India,
On a magic carpet,
I need do nothing,
The carpet knows where to go,
I fly over castles,
I fly in fruit markets,
I land on the boat on the river,
I fly to Mumbai,
I open my eyes to see Elephants walking along,
The carpet rests on one of their big backs,
On the flight back to Ireland I sleep on my magic carpet,
But if I open my eyes for a minute I would see the cities of Dubai,
The church steeples of Vienna,
The magic carpet sets me down on Clontarf Promenade,
I wake up and I got for a walk with my Dad,
Thst night, the magic carpet flies me above the Dail,
Lands on the roof,
We have an intruder! Says the Stewards,
But I turn into a pigeon,
I look innocent,
Leo turns up the temperature in the Dail,
The male TDs are sweltering in the heat,
In their suits and ties,

Mick Wallace however is happy in his pink t-shirt,
And the female TD's are ok too in their dresses,
Leo lights a campfire in the middle of the Dail,
He prances around it,
He paints on his face,
He does grunting,
He forms the Pagan Party,
But they only get 1% of the vote,
They move to an island in Clew Bay,
They still put up a poster in Westport Town,

The Pagan Party!
Bring back travelling by donkey!
Make Newgrange the seat of Irish government!
So the elected reps of Ireland go to Newgrange by donkey,
They light a big fire on top of Newgrange!
They communicate with the British government in Stonehenge,
They make smoke signals to each other,
Leo rows boat out into Clew bay, to his Island,
With the other Pagan Party election candidates,
They build a big worshipping building,
A light fires in it,
The main practice of their religion is to light fires,
They worship the flames,
But unfortunately their worship buildings get burnt down regularly,
Their children are given a flame torches,
But the children keep dropping them!
Whoops!
There's a statue made of hay,
But a child drops the burning torch on his foot,
He goes up in flames!

Dreams were always the same for Sinead. A black, moving ocean of stars that she sometimes thought was bioluminescence.

Her therapist had told her it was a sign of the creative unconscious moving through her, the collective place where all ideas of humankind came from.

But she thought that was bollocks.

When her shifts ended at the Lapello gentlemen's club on Dame's street, and if there were no private banking or corporate clients to see, she'd escape to the art gallery on D'Olier street.

None really knew about it.

People seemed to just stroll past, which always flabbergasted her.

For inside were works of art from Yeats to Michelangelo, you could turn a corner and be stunned by a Botticelli.

After another long night with no tips and no return call from her mother, she strolled over to the inspiration paradise.

It was within its pristine white walls that she saw the cat.

Jet black, luminous green eyes.

It darted from the atrium into the left wing displaying European works of the 17th century.

When she poked her around to see, it ran inside a cardboard box that sat in the centre of the room.

Disconcertingly, it went through the wall of the box with no obstruction.

Sinead found herself under the glare of the gallery lights, looking on in bemusement.

She walked over with caution, unsure of the reliability of her eyesight, and leaned over to look inside.

The cat sat demurely, staring up at her, next to it was a miniature, winding stair, the kind you might see in a tourist shop.

Without knowing why, she bent down to retrieve it, but upon one touch, the room vanished.

She was now standing on the stair itself, in a wide, panoramic clearing that reminded her of the mountains in Austria, that one time when father Ben took all the foster kids for a trip as part of a global outreach program by the church.

The air was crisp, the silence of the wind, met her.

She cast about, feeling panic rise despite the peaceful setting, and she noticed the stair wound up.

Up ahead, there was a chain across two steps up with a sign that said 'Cleaning in progress'.

A man dressed in janitor clothing was mopping.

'Excuse me?'

The man stopped, and regarded her with a suspicious brow.

'Where am I? What's going on?' she asked.

'Pft' he scoffed. 'You all have the same questions,' he bemoaned. 'Where am I? Who are you? Am I dead? Are you dead? You're all so bloody unoriginal.'

A dog ran past him, wagging his tail and nosed around Sinead's legs.

'Oh yeah that's right, give all the strangers the love. Boxer has no loyalty to me!' he shouted at the dog.

Sinead swallowed.

A memory was rushing back.

She was at school at 7 years old, waiting for her mam. 2 hours later, she showed up drunk and gave a teacher a box of her own.

A feeling of anxiety, of not being in control, took over.

Focusing on breathing through her nose and breathing out for longer, she asked, 'Can you please just tell me why I'm here?'

She didn't look down, she knew it was a long drop.

The man sighed and let his mop hit the stair with a squelch.

'Two choices, really. You go up, and you find out.'

He held a hand up as Sinead was about to speak. 'And I can't tell you what's up there so don't. Even. Ask'

Sinead pursed her lips.

'Or you walk back down, back to your life. Simple as that.'

He went back to moping, the dog kept nudging her for rubs.

Sinead thought about her one bedsit on Leeson street, her ex-boyfriend who'd creep around during unsociable hours and her increasing coke habit.

She began to climb.

Audry

Matthew Tubridy

Audrey the artist lives on the 4th floor of a flat complex,
The council built them in the 1930's,
In her flat she has 10 blank canvasses,
She got down to SuperValu in Ballymun,
They give her a few pastries,
She walks down the street,
She makes drawings of starlings,
She gets the bus to NCAD,
She's a professor there,
She splashes paint on the wall,
With her students,
At lunchtime she gets a wrap,
The government leaves 4 euro in her locker everyday,
Which isn't enough to pay the rent,
Just enough for cheap food,
Audrey walks the streets at night,
Audrey joins a collective,
Other artists who get by on 4 euros a day,
They have inflatable mattresses,
One of them make documentaries about the collective,
Eventually one of them die of malnutrition,
He gets TV coverage,
Audrey goes to Ballsbridge,
She sits down on the pavement,
It took half her daily salary on the bus to get there,
She gets out her canvass and starts painting a magnificent house,
Lived in by Bonos daughter,
The police are called,
Audrey draws a painting of them shuffling her along,
Garda 213 and Garda 214 want to live in Ballsbridge,

A Date which will Live in Infamy

Gerard Keogh

Chapter 2

Tokyo Rose

Picture the scene: Stiff Little Fingers, supported by The Members, blasting out the music of their time in a venue off Dublin's Camden Street before an audience of young people, one of whom was Anthony Armstrong. He had heard Stiff Little Fingers on John Peel's show on BBC Radio. Their songs were about life in Northern Ireland during what were euphemistically called the Troubles. The two singles, "Suspect Device" and "Alternative Ulster" sound as raw and thrilling today as they did back then. Two friends from work went along with him to the concert. One of them was Rose. They ended up kissing at some point, which made the gig even more memorable for Anthony. Rose became his first girlfriend (positively ancient as he was), and for three wonderful months, they were a couple. Then, Rose dumped him (she did it gently, but he got dumped, nonetheless).

It would be seven years before he found another girlfriend (who shall remain nameless); she also dumped him after three months, this time unceremoniously. You could say a pattern had been established. Right on schedule, he went through his next rejection ritual seven years after the previous one. He had fallen head over heels with another work colleague, even though he knew she had no interest in him whatsoever. She was a few years younger than he was, and she was beautiful. She left the Civil Service to go with her then boyfriend to England, before later moving to Scotland. At her going away party, Anthony told her he loved her, whereupon she kissed him. To this day, he treasures that briefest of brief encounters. She invited him to her wedding, at which he experienced his third great rejection, even though there had been nothing there to begin with. And that is the sum total of Anthony's relationship history (more a short paragraph than a weighty reference book).

Following his break-up with Rose, things got really awkward between them in the office. She had moved on from him as if he were a once-

favourite coat that no longer fit or was in last year's colour. He, on the other hand, had been devastated by her decision to end it, and he sank into a pit of deep despair. Others would have gone through this experience as teenagers, and would have figured out how to cope with the sense of rejection and loss, at least to some degree. He, on the other hand, was going through adolescent angst as an adult. He made many mistakes in his dealings with others in the office, which only served to distance him further from his colleagues.

It became a self-fulfilling prophecy: "I'm miserable because people don't like me; therefore, it follows that people won't like me because I'm miserable."

A year after Rose had given him the old heave-ho, Anthony's father died. To say he didn't handle it well is an understatement. The fact is, he didn't know how to handle it; he was only twenty years old when it happened. Things weren't as touchy-feely then as they are now, so there was no suggestion of counselling or therapy of any kind. All that grief and confusion stayed bottled-up inside. Work became a living nightmare for him. Probably unwisely, the following summer he went on holiday to Ibiza with three other guys from the job. It was a disaster.

Anthony was suffering from severe depression, although it would be another year before he would receive that diagnosis. The last place on the planet he should have been was Ibiza. It was a modern-day version of Sodom and Gomorrah, albeit without the wrath of God descending on it from on high, or Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt. Suffice it to say that it was impossible not to "know" someone (in the biblical sense) multiple times over the course of a two-week holiday. Of course, Anthony somehow managed to achieve the impossible, thereby reinforcing the belief that he was not on any woman's radar – for any purpose other than to serve as a "good listener."

Anthony's inexorable descent towards the event horizon of a black hole continued apace. A black hole's event horizon marks the boundary between the universe where the laws of physics apply, and the interior of the black hole, where the usual laws of physics break down. Anything – or anyone – falling inside the event horizon cannot escape;

it is the point of no return. The gravitational field created by the black hole of depression was “pulling” Anthony ever closer to self-destruction. Who knows what is beyond that event horizon? Like a planet that gets too close to a black hole, nobody (with one notable exception) has ever returned from the wrong side of life’s ultimate boundary between the known and the unknown. Despite all that, he became increasingly convinced that the uncertainty of what might happen after an act of suicide was outweighed by the knowledge that it would bring an end to his misery in this world.

It all made perfect sense.

Nurse Richy
Matthew Tubridy

Nurse Richy,
Does stop for Christmas until all his patients have had their medication,
He gives it to patients in blister packs,
Richy has a spoon for every patient,
He puts it on the Christmas table.
28 spoons in total,
Richy won't eat Christmas pudding until he has poured some medicine
in each spoon,
It's Calpol with anti-psychotics melted into it,
He has a name for each spoon,
Some spoons belong to patients in the Assessment Unit,
Richy doesn't know what to pour in their spoons,
There's Consultant Psychiatrists decided that in another house before
they get Christmas dinner,
Dr Collins, Dr O'Doherty,
The consultants post the new medication to Richy,
For presents Ricky is given a Lego sized psychiatric patient,
In 5 minutes he grows the size of a man,

Arriving Late and Leaving Early

Steve Huenneke

Growing up in St. Louis, Missouri in the USA, I had what one might call a seriously dramatic childhood. There were big things that happened that I didn't understand while they were happening. Neither did my two brothers and my sister. There was profound mental illness in the most private corners of our home, without any treatment or awareness. I don't want to tell a story about this – it was just something ever present, like heavy background music. I can't explain just how, but I think it helped me become a writer. I only understood that, looking backwards.

There was a cultural clash at a psychological and economic level between my Irish-American mother and my German-American father. I would say the German and Irish identification for each of them was stronger than the American identification. And the subtle foundation of what I saw as a clash of the titans was misunderstood on every side. My parents dreamed severely different dreams. My father marched to a different Thoreauvian drummer and my mother was intent on our family making it to the top. Without realizing the top was just emptiness and loneliness. My parents would have been happier if they had never met. Yet, where would that have left me?

I understand all of this now. I didn't then.

But this is not about that. This reminiscence is nothing so serious. I am recalling something else entirely – Shakespeare would think of what I am recalling as comic relief.

When my parents did agree on something – it made an enduring impression. For example, they both loved popular musicals with a passion. Our ancient stereo cabinet was filled with 33 rpm records – what we now call LPs or albums. And these albums were played – a lot. Carousel, Man of La Mancha, Oliver, South Pacific, West Side Story, Show Boat. On and on. This music still brings rare, happy, unheavy memories. Relief, yes. But it does not qualify as comic relief.

When I tell you what was comic relief, you might question my sense of humor. It was movies. Not only comedies, but any sort of movie. My

parents did not know how to ever get to a movie on time. And my two brothers and my sister were always dragged along for the same old usual protocol.

We rushed into the car, late again. We invariably got to the movie even later than we got into the car. Forget the previews. No time to buy popcorn or soda or milk duds. The movie was already well-along when we made our breathless, not-so-grand entrance into the theatre.

Now there was *one time* when we looked like we might – for the first time ever – get to a movie punctually. But a rainstorm hit and a traffic jam developed. There was a fist fight between a taxi driver and a regular driver in the middle of the street. As we used to say in St. Louis, it was a real donnybrook. Both men fell down to the pavement, punching and pounding each other. They even got a little bloody -- well one of them did. I was seven years old at the time, and I had never seen anything like that before. Not in real life and not out in public.

So much for getting to that movie on time. As it turned out, the movie was It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World. There are four Mads in that title. Just imagine my seven year old confusion. Did mad mean angry or crazy? I didn't know what the premise was of this film and its story – all I saw was big Hollywood actors running around crashing cars, burning down buildings, getting arrested, you name it. I did think some of it was funny but I didn't understand what was going on in the least.

There was no sense to it because I had not seen the end. But even more importantly, I had not seen the beginning. Then I would have known so much more. I would have appreciated so much more. I would have laughed so much more. Humor needs to have some kind of foundation in known reality to work. Then we at least know why other people around us are laughing – as if they have a secret we might be sharing. Yet were not.

When every movie we saw was over, we did not just leave. No, not yet. We sat in our seats for about a half hour. Then the curtain opened and the lights came on for the next screening. We saw the previews. We sat through them. And finally, finally we watched the ten or fifteen minutes we had missed because we had arrived too late. Then we saw

the first scene we had already seen. Finally, we rose from our seats and left the theatre.

I didn't know it at the time – but every time our family went to a movie as a child, I was experiencing some kind of Magritte or Escher parable on life. We didn't arrive at the beginning, but somewhere closer to the middle. Maybe at the end of the beginning. Nothing made sense. Gradually, as the movie moved along, it started to make sense. It was a bit like climbing a stairway to what we hoped was heaven. We hoped, but didn't know. Among the things we did not know was where, or even when, the stairway ended.

And then it did. It ended. But we stayed on – dropping on a cosmic conveyor belt which went back through a dark passage way of nothing, back to the beginning.

And what a beginning it was! From the very start of the movie, we knew the future! We had insight! “Oh, so that's why this happened later.” It is the kind of wisdom we have in life from looking backwards, from an advanced age, or even from the afterlife.

And, finally, how is this for reflecting real life?

Wouldn't you know? With all that new found wisdom, we only had ten minutes left in that mad, mad, mad, mad world -- before we left early, for good.

Hippopotamus

Matthew Tubridy

Sitting on my own in the cottage,

But there's a hippopotamus in the end room, give him some pumpkins
and if you don't have pumpkins give him some turnips,

You throw it into his mouth,

He crunches and swallows it down,

He takes up the whole end room,

I try to get into hang up the washing in the end room too,

I squeeze past Mr Hippotamus,

He's moving around a good bit,

I get winded,

I give up trying to hang up the clothes,

I get a bucket of warm water instead and a brush,

I edge my way into the end room,

I jump on hippos back and scrubs him,

He grunts in pleasure,

I scrub his snout,

His big ears,

He closed his eyes as I scrub them,

Suddenly my mother finds out about the hippopotamus,
She had our shelves up on the walls of the end room but of course
Hippopotamus whacked them off when he got agitated,
My mothers books on botany strewn on the floor,
My mother tries to open the door but Mr Hippopotamus is blocking
the door,
She just knows he's in there by the smell,
He's been poopng a lot after the pumpkins and turnips I gave him,
My motive goes out and looks in the window,
Oh no! She says,
But I say in reply
'What about the song
'I want a hippopotamus for Christmas!
Only a hippopotamus will do?'
Mother says
'You're too big to believe in Santa!!'
I say
'I do still believe in him... to get the presents,
I had a good haul last year!'
My mothers rings the zoo and they come in a big truck, take Mr Hippo
away,
He is put in a nicely big enclosure,
The people looking at see
a notice outside saying
'A Connemara Hippopotamus!'
He lives many more years,

The zoo keepers pour warm water over him like I tried to do in the end room,

He makes a friend, Hippo No.2,

Or Sheila,

They get many pumpkins thrown into their mouths,

One morning a mother wanted to throw her child into hippos mouth,

It was an intrusive thought,

But she both the child and ice cream instead,

But she thought of sprinkling poo from the Hippo enclosure on the poor child's ice cream.

Mother and child saw many more colourful animals, left the zoo drive home in a mini Volkswagen car,

Child did swimming the next day,

Mothers name was Patricia,

Child's name was Roger the Dodger,

Because he dodged being thrown into Hippos mouth!

Dreams

Catriona Murphy

Dreams were always the same for Sinead. A black, moving ocean of stars that she sometimes thought was bioluminescence.

Her therapist had told her it was a sign of the creative unconscious moving through her, the collective place where all ideas of humankind came from.

But she thought that was bollocks.

When her shifts ended at the Lapello gentlemen's club on Dame street, and if there were no private banking or corporate clients to see, she'd escape to the art gallery on D'Olier street.

None really knew about it.

People seemed to just stroll past, which always flabbergasted her.

For inside were works of art from Yeats to Michelangelo, you could turn a corner and be stunned by a Botticelli.

After another long night with no tips and no return call from her mother, she strolled over to the inspiration paradise.

It was within its pristine white walls that she saw the cat. Jet black, luminous green eyes.

It darted from the atrium into the left wing displaying European works of the 17th century.

When she poked her around to see, it ran inside a cardboard box that sat in the centre of the room.

Disconcertingly, it went through the wall of the box with no obstruction.

Sinead found herself under the glare of the gallery lights, looking on in bemusement.

She walked over with caution, unsure of the reliability of her eyesight, and leaned over to look inside.

The cat sat demurely, staring up at her, next to it was a miniature, winding stair, the kind you might see in a tourist shop.

Without knowing why, she bent down to retrieve it, but upon one touch, the room vanished.

She was now standing on the stair itself, in a wide, panoramic clearing that reminded her of

the mountains in Austria, that one time when Father Ben took all the foster kids for a trip as part of a global outreach program by the church.

The air was crisp, the silence of the wind, met her.

She cast about, feeling panic rise despite the peaceful setting, and she noticed the stair wound up.

Up ahead, there was a chain across two steps up with a sign that said 'Cleaning in progress'. A man dressed in janitor clothing was mopping.

'Excuse me?'

The man stopped, and regarded her with a suspicious brow.

'Where am I? What's going on?' she asked.

'Pft' he scoffed. 'You all have the same questions,' he bemoaned.

'Where am I? Who are you? Am I dead? Are you dead? You're all so bloody unoriginal.'

A dog ran past him, wagging his tail and nosed around Sinead's legs.

'Oh yeah that's right, give all the strangers the love. Boxer has no loyalty to me!' he shouted at the dog.

Sinead swallowed.

A memory was rushing back.

She was at school at 7 years old, waiting for her mam. 2 hours later, she showed up drunk

and gave a teacher a box of her own.

A feeling of anxiety, of not being in control, took over.

Wicklow Mountains

Matthew Tubridy

Up the Wicklow mountains,
I have a dead lamb in my rucksack,
I sit down in the bog,
I have a penknife so I slice off a piece of meat,
I'm a vampire,
So I eat the lamb strips straight,
Theres blood running down my chin,
Helen Lawless walks past with a group of people studying the bog,
Helen says 'Here is a few plants who eats insects, they have a a sticky
fluid to trap insects!'
I hear what she says,
I lumber over, say
'what about me? My sticky fluid is my charm,
I lure vulnerable ladies up the Wicklow Mountains,
I get to work on them with my penknife,
Because I'm a vampire,
I eat them straight,
I attack passing hill walkers,
Especially children,
I peel off their waterproof clothing,
Their hats, gloves,
I bring the back to my hole in the bog,
I look at the mountain car park with my binoculars,
'More victims' I chortle!
But my brother is my exact opposite,
He directs the cars into the right parking space,
Hex called Timmy,

**My Dog Keeps Wrapping Things in Cardboard,
He Thinks He's A Boxer
Angelina Kelly**

I never wanted a dog, the expense, the responsibility, the work of looking after it didn't appeal to me. But recently I had a change of heart.

While watching TV, an advert for a rescue shelter for animals came on. I saw this cute little dachshund looking into the screen with those puppy dog eyes – and my heart melted. The next day I visited the shelter and the very first animal I encountered was the same dachshund. Our eyes locked onto each other and – I fell in love.

With the owner's permission I was allowed to hold the dog and when I bent down and picked it up it moulded its body into mine and snuggled into me. Feeling its little warm body against mine, and seeing those eyes for real, pretty much sealed the deal – my heart was no longer my own – now I shared it with this little creature.

The deal was struck, the money was paid, the paperwork was completed, and my new little friend was handed over into my custody. I called into a pet store on the way home and brought him in with me while I chose the items he would require. Each time I picked up something I showed it to him and gauged its suitability by his reaction. Driving home that day I was aware of the dog staring at me with love and affection. I had to concentrate hard on keeping my eyes on the road and my mind on the traffic.

Over the next few days, Bruno and I spent time getting to know each other and setting up a routine. I showed him his space, then clearly marked out my space, and assigned our space. We settled into our new life together very quickly, it was as if we had always known each other.

This morning when I awoke I found him putting all his things into a box. I gently scolded him and he turned those puppy dog eyes toward me and all annoyance left me. I reminded him that everything needs to be kept in its designated place. He seemed to understand and fixed me with a

look of apology. With a hug I assured him that it was okay this time but he couldn't do this anymore.

We went about our day doing the things we do but he kept wrapping everything in cardboard. Although I know he is a dachshund, I suspect he thinks he is a boxer. As I watched him I wondered what compelled him to act in this way. I contacted the shelter for some clues and was informed that, in his previous home, he witnessed his owner boxing all his things and bringing him to the shelter. She reckoned that he was preparing himself for his return to the shelter.

My heart broke and I gathered him up in a massive hug and then allowed him to witness me unboxing his things while I explained that this is his new home where he would be staying. When everything was back in place we had dinner together and then we sat on the sofa and hugged and cried and hugged and cried. Those puppy dog eyes enveloped me with love and appreciation and I vowed that I would love and care for him for the rest of his days.

I affectionately renamed him boxer, in acknowledgement of his past while confirming his future, and he fully accepted his new name. I wrapped us up in a big, warm, fluffy blanket and we both fell asleep.

From that day on he never boxed his things again.

Faithlegg house hotel

Matthew Tubridy

The glup flows down the wall,
You complain to reception,
You get a glup remover,
He has a wiper like what you clean a window with,
He wipes it off your TV,
You only have to pay half the cost of staying at the hotel,
The floor is all glup too,
You can slide on it,
Betty slipped and fell,
She sued the hotel,
From then on the reviews of the hotel say
'A lot of glup!'
After the glup episodes,
The amount of guests going to the hotel
Goes down to 1% of what it was,
The owner decides to change its use,
He turns it into an Army barracks,
The cadets should train in difficult environment,
So a glup infested lodgings would be ideal,
The cadets are cleaning up
morning noon and night,
They crawl on the gluppy floor,
They go to the dining room for their meals,
Some of the hotel staff stayed on,
To cook for the cadets,
The sergeant sits in the top table,
He has a whip,
He used to be a teacher giving corporal punishment,
But when that ended he became a soldier,
He whipped here there and everywhere,
He was stationed in the curragh,
He would ride a big horse,
Whipping it senseless,
He would get his cadets in a line,

Now he shouts You'd better get in order!
Your next mission is a gluppy hotel!
They travel down to Co Waterford,
In Army trucks,
As well as living in a gluppy hotel,
The cadets must jump in a lake,
With their uniform on,
They must swim to the bottom to get the gold,
Some get it and present it to the sergeant,
They ae spared a whipping,
The ones who don't get the gold are a
bedraggled lot,
As they wade out of the lake,
Water dripping from their uniforms,
The sergeant gets an Army truck to roll over them,
The truck rolls into the lake,
From then on it's called 'Truck lake!'
Because there's a truck in the middle of it,
Midsummer the lake dries out of you can see the aerial
from the top of it,

How does he get in there?

Bidin Mary Harnett

Not that the conversation was tiresome, but in yet another conversational ordeal before I myself had realized it, I had been talked into a strategic dialectic to know what I knew sort of a thing, which left me quite exasperated in fervent efforts to sustain my face of politeness in an extended retort, albeit a learning conversation framed within the repartee of a language lesson. I had had the same feeling when I had last played chess and someone had outmanoeuvred me – the downtrodden feeling of being usurped. Indeed, brevity had not been witty at all in this conversational regard. Certainly above all, fields of knowledge had been established in the throes of talk and I had responded as best as I could since my intention was to earn his respect. Yes, I mean the respect of the interlocut in dialogue. I had decided that the man was an intellectual, the reason I didn't want to appear to be a halfwit in the consideration of the previously earned respect of such people, being a marginal myself, formerly termed as marginally brilliant with potential - as they had said. Yes, with potential yet to be fulfilled, sort of calling as termed. But the given speech event in all apparent appropriacy was raised onto an epistemic platform out of a noisy rattling learning context onto a third space that no one was privy to except for myself and the interlocut in the locus of conversation.

A strange thing to occur in a formal setting – a learning environment, you might call it as conceived in the mind's eye of the Controller.

The moment was raised from the physical world so I could see. I could feel myself heat up in response – exasperated as I have previously stated. I had felt a perturbation to my sense, that he had somehow won something from me – nominally my steely reserve. Then there had been a pause in the aftermath of the conversational grilling.

I had thought - how did the conversation jump to that? Indeed, we had been talking about science and being as socially anxious as I am, I had refuted the interjection relating to typology per sae, but in my frustration I had not been drawn into the turn-taking response that he had somehow required from me. You know, I always think of the best things to say after the effect.

'Well then, what is it? Is he handsome? I guess that is what it is... most women have a prototype,' He had said. 'I suppose you have too.'

'No', I had answered.

Just like that.

To be honest, I felt enraged that my thinking about men would be confined to stereotypical definitions of maledom, masculinity, male presences, however you might choose to define male typology.

'It's about wheedling.' They say.

'Wheedling,' He interjected.

'Yes, wheedling. Wheedling as opposed to whittling in a rather refined process of selection – somewhat like a clothes fitting process.' I responded with a certain sense of shame.

In fact, choosing a masculine presence to accompany one in life is quite an arduous task –yinging to yang as I consider it as a musical score might lend itself to an orchestral fling of a movement. Yes indeed, mediated by the maestro of creation, God, in bare cadences and hand movements to atone the otherwise reticent spirit out of its mean nature onto a rung of the ladder of Jacob – a stairway to heaven of a spiral variety – upwards. I do need to say at this juncture that I speak from a Mohamedean perspective. However, I dote on the Prophets of the noble household.

Yes, that is what man is to woman. A step – I think rather archaic as it may seem.

'Come let me glove thee,' He should say in all sincerity and fearful that God might not be content with his effort. Our hypothetical man should learn how to say such things if indeed he wishes to present himself as a suitor.

Indeed, the crux of masculinity spawns creativity in constituting the meaning of the presence of man.

I ask you now at this moment to put down whatever you are doing to consider this next question.

Yes. And the question is...

What indeed defines a male presence?

Sometimes a worrisome concern for most men as the male presences permeate the parameters of our female lives, you know, people, places and things which contain us – as society might construe the social contexts we frequent.

In fact, we might consider apparent maledom for that matter on a continuum of individual definitions ad addendum and as eclectic as the earth lends itself to be. We happen onto their presences in the throes of existence as it were, however static, dynamic, and sometimes, still and unmoving as they might be. If the entire universe were to conspire to pitch male and female presences, inclusively once identified, intuitively for the most part, then all definitions of the former and latter would be visualised and recognized simply because as they exist as they are.

And in the end, are we not grounded souls until death, at the moment of when souls fly off under order as it were and the eyes of sight follow to the final resting place. As we see in life...

Not wishing to go off on a tangent, I note that there are radiant male presences hiding behind the facade of maquillage – and they are not stifled, although life may have rather impinged on their fine masculine presences. Some of whom are reticent of the display of masculine power, naturally imbued as they seem to be and the envy of the variety of maledom reliant on the inoculation of male drive and other such devices to work up a match of a male prosody for half measured whims of desire of no consequence at all.

As man feels himself his presence lends itself to interception in the presence of the perturbation of a catalyst, albeit female.

Yes, I rather consider that this is my commentary in response to the issue of male typology or the discourse of prototype of wonderful, beautiful and much appreciated maledom, in all its forms.

Aren't you all lovely?

Sole Trader

Micheal O'Brien

Everything in the park appeared still and beautiful to him, a bee seemed to stop in mid-air and he could see its tiger-like colours in microscopic detail, and the pollen on its legs. He was amazed to see its smaller wings at the back were connected to the forewings, he had never noticed the two sets of wings before. He could hear the individual clicks that followed each other to make the buzzing sound.

The bank had been on numerous times threatening to close his account and repossess his small shop. God how he regretted buying this effing thing five years ago, everyone told him it was a bad idea, supermarkets and franchises ruled the day and there was no place for a sole trader, but he didn't listen and steamed ahead. The guy selling him the shop filled his head with talk of building sites starting up and coming to this shop for the deli, breakfast rolls and salads. The first year was good but the last three and a half years had been hell, working his ass off seven days a week eighteen hours a day and he was still in the red. His wife had called, the card was stopped, the kids needed new books for school, new shoes and the school trip, were his kids going to be the only ones not there?. His car was off the road a month now because he couldn't afford the repairs, when the bank and credit union refused him further credit he asked his best friend for a loan, telling him as honestly as he could the trouble he was in. Five grand he'd taken, and he wasn't in a position to pay that back either. The woman who helped him at the deli counter in his shop told him not to worry about her wages, to pay her when he could, she just loved getting out of the house, the humiliation of it.

He had gone to the doctor a month ago with pains in his chest, after all the tests they put him on heart meds which he just laughed at when he saw how much they cost. He'd been feeling dizzy and breathless, just stress he told himself after getting a letter from the bank threatening to repossess his house. So, he went for a walk in the park, his beautiful little sanctuary, birds, trees, ducks, and an artist drawing flowers at the edge of the pond. He envied the woman drawing, she seemed so care free with a cap beside her filled with coins passers-by had left. No

overheads for her he thought to himself, no rent or rates, just carefree living off your talent.

He heard the artist tell a bystander she preferred to draw still life, he had asked her if the money she got was enough to live on. She smiled telling him she didn't need much, she had worked in a bank and hated every second of it, leaving after the most miserable year of her life. Her father had lambasted her for this telling her she couldn't live for free, so she was forced to take other jobs that never lasted, she started taking alcohol and other drugs to numb herself but found her art was the best escapism. She couldn't do anything else and didn't much want to either, she had her tiny flat, her flowers and her art, and she was as happy as a, well as an artist with a tiny flat and flowers. "Sometimes the right road doesn't pay that well but the peace comes from knowing it's the right road, and peace is priceless". She was talking to another man but he felt she was directly addressing him, which was strange as she wasn't even looking at him.

His dizziness dropped him and he woke up surrounded by a crowd and a medic kneeling beside him, he rubbed his eyes and moved his limbs, just checking he was still alive. Yep, this was still life, it was all still here, the trees, the flowers, the beautiful smell of cut grass, the birds singing, and his debt and the people who were chasing that debt, yeah it was still life alright. He noticed something was different though, he felt peaceful, something had happened to him during his little fainting spell, that woman made her living through her art, her life was her art. He couldn't draw but he could make his life his art, the day would be his canvas, his actions the subject and his mood the background. He asked to see the artist, he wanted to buy one of her paintings, the people kneeling over him looked behind and around, nodding to each other. There was no artist, not in this park according to some of the regulars. Maybe she left when all the commotion started.

Stairway to Heaven

Deirdre Powell.

There was a light between the hills as I walked amid the great expanse that lay before me. To my right, there was a hillock with grass that had seen better days and granite outcrops that were begging for my attention. A watery sunshine hit the mica on one of the outcrops and the mica glistened in return. To my left, the remains of furze bushes populated the scene and as I made my way steadily forward, I could see the lake glistening in the distance.

I placed one foot carefully and steadily in front of the other, with the soil, almost bog-like, squelching beneath me. It had rained earlier in the day, and though springtime, there was a bite in the air, and I pulled the hood of my anorak over my head. In the distance, I saw a flock of black crows rise into the sky, as though they were intent on their journey.

Something said that today was special, although I was unsure of why that was. I felt a sense of expectation and urgency rise in my stomach, as my feet got wetter while I trod the soil. I looked once more at the light between the hills – it was as though the clouds in the sky were opening above me.

I was within touching distance of the lake when a staircase descended from the clouds and I found myself at its base. Thinking this was a daydream, I looked up and saw an angel descending the stairs toward me. He was so close to me that I could almost touch his outer garment, when he stopped and stretched his arms out to me. I placed my foot on the bottom step of the staircase and tried to touch his hands. He looked at me with warm, kind eyes and smiled. Then he said, “I am Toby, your guardian angel, do not be afraid. I have always been with you.” Still thinking I was dreaming I said, “what do you want of me?” He smiled again and said, “if you would like to accompany me up this staircase, you may find that a wonderful dream, beyond your wildest imagination, is about to begin.” I hesitated and was curious – what could he possibly mean – was it the beginning of the end or maybe the end of the beginning? Undeterred, I took his hand, placed my foot on the next step and proceeded on the stairway to heaven.

Hole in The Ground

Matthew Tubridy

You go out of your hole in the ground,
Zoom! Goes by a jeep,
He wants to get to Wexford,
The builders move in,
They want to move my hole 50 metre down,
My hole is flooded with water,
I get a shiny new hole,
With tiles on the walls,
And a jacuzzi,
The delivery man brings me bananas,
Says Nice pad!
I call my pad, 'Topsy Turvy'
They build apartments on my old hole,
It all takes place on Bull Island,
I'm a rabbit!
The delivery man brings me carrots,
I take ut my rabbit Visa card to pay the kind man,

Delivery man drives to the flock of geese,
They want fresh grass to chew on,
He has a few buckets of it,
He spreads it on the ground,
That will be 100 euro!
There are a 100 geese in the flock so

Heaven' Stairway

Mark L'estrange

They got to the airport and sat at the bar, they ordered one or two pints to relax Stephen's nerves.

Paddy said, "Hold on there I will go and check our flight number." It turned out the flight was delayed an hour. Stephen phoned the Super to let him know "Ok there is nothing you can do about it, I will let them know on the other side you will be late."

An hour past very fast for them, then there was an announcement letting them know it was time for them to board the plane, the flight was ten hours long, Paddy said "We should get some sleep that will make the flight go faster?"

"You can sleep if you want I am a bit too worried to sleep right now."

Eventually the plane landed as they heard the pilot say, "You can take off your seatbelt, You are very welcome to Mexico it is very warm out here today, you will need your sun cream."

Then the door of the aircraft opened and a few soldiers entered the plane asking, "Where is Paddy O'Sullivan?"

That is Spin Mans second name "We are here "said Paddy."

They walked down to them and said, "You are both very welcome to Mexico, I'm sorry you both had to come back under these circumstances, hope we can get you back home very soon."

"Ok Sure we had no choice we had to come back."

"Follow us please?" They asked, "Where are we going?"

"Follow us down the stairs." Stephen then said, "They are certainly not a stairway to heaven."

They were led to an army jeep which was joined by a convoy of them, Paddy asked

"Why is there so many jeeps we must be important?"

"We have to keep you safe we are escorting you to the courts."

When they arrived outside the courts it was surrounded by people, as they entered there was tv reporters trying to get an interview from Stephen but the army were blocking them. Stephen said thanks to them saying "Don't really want to talk to them right now."

To be continued

Mount Everest

Mathew Tubridy

they all regurgitate a euro coin,
I was hoping to do it with a Visa card, says delivery man,
But he puts all the coins in a bag,
He builds a house on Seafield road,
He makes it out of bricks of pure gold,
He puts a thatch roof on it,
He gets a wife Lisa and has 10 children,
My Aunty Meave, and Ann,
My Uncle Peter and James,
Are on top of Mount Everest,
They must contend with whipping winds,
Meave puts up her tent for a few hours sleep,
She has dried food,
She melts some snow for her meal,
Aunty Ann has some jerky,
Which she gnaws on,
Geddy, Meave husband,
Huffs and puffs his way up the slope,
He has walking sticks,
He puts his wife Meave on his back,
Along with his survival gear,
He has a burger in his rucksack,
His wife is as big as a tennis ball,
He has another wife in his left pocket,
They screech,
The wives talk to each other,
He's a crappy husband they say,
I wanted to go to the southern coast of Spain,

And he brought me here! Up Mount Everest!

Geddy says 'It's just like herding the cattle!'
On top of Mount Everest a helicopter left a room made of silver,

It has a hot chocolate machine in it,
All my relatives sit in there,
They have ice on their hoods,
They get a certificate,
There are skis in the room,
Which they use to get down,
Geddy and Maeve's children are the bottom,
In Kathmandu,
They have babies,
My relatives are given 7up,
They drink it down greedily,
They are given roast lamb,
With rosemary in it,
They drink the meltwater from Everest,
They fly home to Ireland,
They are held in high esteem,
They got to the room made of silver!
They got hot chocolate,
They show us their certificate,
The climb Carrantuohill,
Where there is a bronze room,

“Stairway to Heaven”

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

“Stairway to Heaven”, It was the odd photograph that Andros stared at and analysed while in the living room of Nathan Jones, a widowed farmer in the Mid-West section of a continent called North America on this strange planet where biologicals ruled. Farmer Jones had shown Andros and his wife an exceptional degree of kindness since their ship had had to engage in an emergency landing. Looking at the photo he understood that there were parallels between this world and his own in that the ruling species looked to a maker, a deity, a higher power, albeit far outside the realm of logic and scientific deduction.

He and his wife had been allowed to consume all the metal substances that were necessary for their existence during the last week and Andros marveled at how this world’s abundance of natural resources allowed them to have treasures laying about with casual ease.

“Good morning Andros. You and the Misses sleep alright? If you sleep that is.”, Nathan’s voice boomed as he entered the room in his customary denim overalls. He had already adjusted to the routine of caring for his guests, entering with a tray of metal car, machine parts, and wiring that seemed to be a veritable smorgasbord for them. As usual Andros raised his hands and all the metal parts on the tray rose. Floating in defiance of gravity and then were absorbed by the gaping hole in his metal chest that opened up every time he consumed a meal.

“What is heaven?”, He posed to Nathan, who’s smile, and elderly face portrayed that of an amused older gentleman being questioned by one of his grandkids.

“It’s where we go when we’re done here on earth. To our Lord, our maker.”, He responded. Andros’ glowing eyes then shifted to a picture on an end table of the late Mrs. Jones.

“Is that where your life-companion has gone? To ‘Heaven’?”, He posed.

“Yes, Andros. She’s waiting till it’s my turn. Looking forward to it to be honest with you.”, Nathan responded, smiling with a hint of nostalgia as he glanced at the picture.

“It won’t be long, Nathan. Human lives are so brief.”, Andros said. With that Belinda entered. Her metal face bore what seemed to be a frown. “Good morning, dearest”, Andros said.

She held a small tablet in her hand. “They enslave machines on this world, Andros.”, She said with an unnerving seriousness as her eyes began to glow.

“True my dear, but their society is in the beginning stages of A.I. development. Soon the planetary balance of power will shift from the biological to the natural, and Mr. Jones is himself,

Mr Generous

Matthew Tubridy

Mr Generous,
Goes to the top of Henry Street,
He throws Quality Sweets at the crowd down below,
It's 3 days to Christmas,
He gets bored, gets a few Christmas trees,
Throws them down too,
A little Billy, he gets a flying Christmas tree to the back of his head,
Santa was supposed to come to Billy,
But now he's unconscious!
Carted away in an ambulance,
Next thing Mr Generous throws down is scented candles,
Mary gets one on her shoulder,
Mr Generous melts the candles in a big bucket,
He pours it on top of the Christmas shoppers,
"Arrrrg!" they say!

Waiting for Dali

Ciaran O'Melia

Waiting

"Ohmic values" he said more as a question,
"you know"? now it was a question, "you know Ohm's Law"?
To a vacant response,
The female of the trio is impressed But does not know why.
Others dipped their moist fingers
Into the remains of the quiche,
And sip the empty bottle of a light Amstel.

Meanwhile two lovers argue at
The cash register over life as the cashier looks on. The crowded
restaurant with spiral staircase to nowhere All of us gathered to see the
great one.

He arrives

As if on cue a hush descends on the gathering, Led by a 7'6" giant in
leotards.

Out of the clouds and down the staircase,
The giant with a tiny sparrow feather
Sweeping the steps as the great one cautiously moved.

This took time, time some had not,
The gathering became impatient,
A woman from Lubin could not hold back
" vick him up, varry him "

But immediately she was picked up
By one Siamese man
His four arms carried her with her feet off the ground Propelled out the
door.

The gathering got the message
Became as quiet as a church mice eating cheese

After what seemed a life or very long time,
The great one was about to step off the last step,
He stopped, his brow furrowed
He put his hand on his head

“ I must go back, I forgot my hat”

As if from nowhere she appeared
A tiny child with a peacock feather
Sweeping hurriedly as the great one ascended
Hundreds, no, thousands of steps to nowhere
He climbed so fast we did not see him go, But he did.

Gone now we became impatient
But we remembered the woman from Lublin
And stayed silent only moving from foot to foot Except the one legged
man
Who was jealous of us who had two,
Then as if reading our mind the giant appeared
From nowhere and said in a whisper,
But because he was a giant it nearly deafened Those nearest the stairs to
nowhere.
“ stop moving from foot to foot
The 100 Dali artists in the basement are sensitive to noise”
As if an afterthought
“ you with the one leg we can hear your ghost leg banging
So stop”

The one legged man thought of a bad word
But stopped thinking of his ghost leg
Now it was jealous and sore without circulation.

The giant or was it his brother appears out of the clouds
Again brushing with the sparrow feather,
The woman from Lublin who had sneaked in
The door marked ‘reserved for copy artist’ stayed very quiet,
But a fish in the clock cried out
“the woman from Lublin is here I can smell her
She ate my sister for lunch ... get her out”
Again she was shown the door without her feet
Touching the ground, but this time by a man On a bicycle giving her a
cross bar.

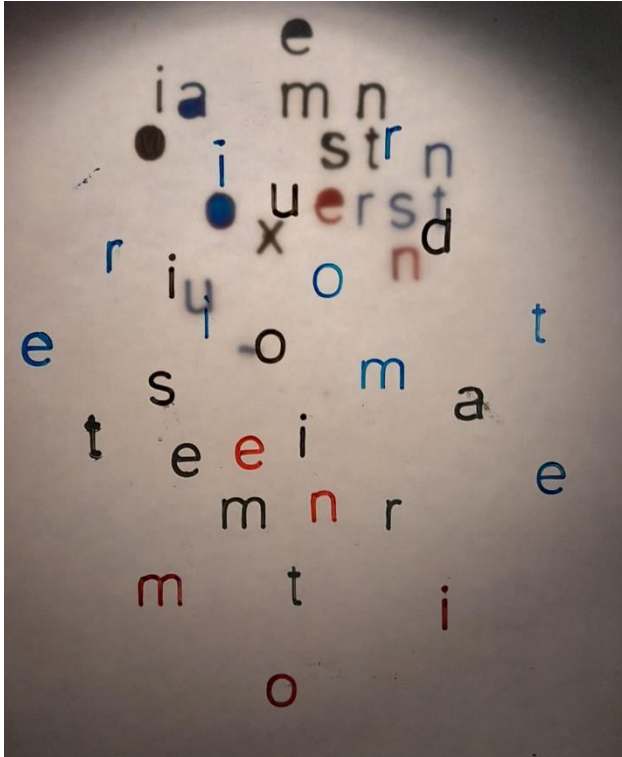
The great one eventually came among us
Twirling his Mustache, smiled, stared, danced,
On shoes with curled toes made of red cloth
That had eyes of eels sewn into them,
Then he stopped and thought
Thinking can be very hard when you are a genius
Thinking ----- thinking
Then he said " I have to go"
"ahhhhhhhh"said everyone
"no I must go, you see"
"AHHHHHHHHHH NO"
"yes I the great one must go, you see"
Again he stopped here to think, thinking,
Could or should he tell them
After all they are ordinary mortals
"I must go because" he paused "I have to sign great works of art"
Poof he's gone.

Lost and Found

The Catalogue of strange objects

Heloisa Prieto & Victor Scatolin

Illustrated by Victor Scatolin



Needle in the haystack Dropping a needle is such an easy thing to do. If hands are tired from sewing, if eyes are fatigued, if one is sleepy, it just happens.

Now, who would choose to sew sitting on a haystack?

It sounds so unlikely, better say, impossible.

Yet, if, for some strange reason, a needle falls in the haystack, it will take sharp eyes, a great amount of patience, and, of course, luck, to recover it.

Is the fallen needle in the haystack somewhat related to the three Fates' legendary balls of thread?

Not that I know of.

But, today, thinking about them, the quarrelsome Greek ladies of destiny, I wondered if one's eyes could, sometimes, avert one's surroundings and focus. Detecting a needle in the haystack is as hard as finding one's life thread.

Stairway in Heaven

Julianna Wilmoth

Where was I? I felt unsettled in my new location. I looked around the room, not able to properly identify any real form or shape in the space. A small group gathered near me. I didn't recognize them, though they felt familiar. I began to talk through my last memory, the people moved closer.

I remember every second from that morning. I was on my way to work, driving a little faster than I should, maybe 47 in a 35, and jamming to some 80s song. The singer was crooning about giving a little heart and soul. It was a bright, fresh day with a seamless blue sky. After The previous night's raging spring storm, the morning was a gorgeous reprieve. I was just cresting over the hill and looking down to the railroad tracks. I saw the warning lights flashing, but the gates were still up. They were bobbing a bit, maybe from another train having just passed. Either way, arms were upright and not blocking the crossing. I hit the gas wanting to race the gates in case something was on the tracks.

I sped toward the crossing and sang along with the radio – give a little bit of heart and soul, give a little to love and grow. My peripheral vision saw the problem – a tree branch that had broken off in last night's storm was blocking the arm from setting in its position.

At that moment, in the unnamed space, I looked around at my audience. I expected wide eyes, a couple gasps, maybe a sympathetic tear. Nothing but a few nods and recognition.

“Fine”, I continued.

Just below the broken gate stood a large deer, larger than I have seen in this region. We locked our gaze. Her deep brown eyes bored into mine as her long eyelashes bowed once. To the left of her, a speckled fawn peeked around her tall legs. I guessed mama was in protection mode – I saw her tail begin to wave furiously, as if her spine sensed danger. Her ears then twitched, independent of each other, and searched for sound. The deer's alert ears focused on her left. Her eyes were still locked to mine. The fawn and doe moved as the mother shifted her weight to

cover her infant. The baby moved under its mother. The two deer blinked together; their lacy lashes fluttered. Both dropped to the ground, behind a shrub, to hide.

My eyes shifted to the oncoming train. Its headlight blinded me while the hornblast drowned out my radio. Silence.

I looked around at my audience, relieved at the realization. "So that's what happened. And I guess that's why...I'm here?" People I only knew when I was young or saw in sepia pictures surrounded me and came towards me with hugs and smiles. I was filled with a peaceful, calm energy. I glanced up from an embrace and saw a climbing staircase.

It was the most beautifully ornate spiral staircase I'd ever seen. To compare, it reminded me of the Loreto Chapel staircase, but so much more...heavenly. It began to radiate a welcoming aura and each step beckoned. My cousin appeared next to me and took my hand. "So many people have been watching and waiting for you. Let's go." I placed my other hand on the rail. And with anticipation and hope, I began to ascend the stairs.