

Inkslingers Blended Session

16th March 2024

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

“Apparently this year is being written by Stephen King ”

And the Visual



*Iguazu Falls,
Brazil*

This week

Mark L'estrange

They both left the court and Paddy asked one of the guards "Where can we go to get some air my friend doesn't feel too well?" He led them to a court yard, where they waited for word about the sentence, thirty minutes went by when eventually Paddy's phone rang he rushed to answer it was only Julie who asked "Is all ok when are you coming home?" "It's all working out can I ring you back I am just waiting on the judge to ring me to let me know about the sentencing." "Ok just be careful."

He hung up the phone and it rang again straight away it was the judge this time saying. "I have some good news they are all going down for fifteen years each." "Great thanks for letting me know, are we still needed or can we start making are way back home?" "Yes you are free to arrange your journey home now thanks for all your help today." When he told Stephen he had a look of relief on his face, asking. "Will we go and tell the army now?" "Yes good idea let's go.

They walked back into the building and approached one of the soldiers that escorted them to the court earlier and said "The judge said we are good to go now, can we start making a move?" He said we have got word the president wants to meet you to apologise on behalf of the government for all that's happened." Stephen asked. "Do we have too I just want to get out of here can he not come to Ireland."

"I will make a call now one moment." He went off for about five minutes and came back and said "He is insistent he meets you, don't worry we won't let you out of our sites." Paddy said to Stephen "Doesn't sound like we have a choice?" Then the army said "Come with us please we are going to The National Palace it's the president's residence." "when they approached the building there was an unusual sign on the wall of the building that read Apparently this year is being written by Stephen King. The president was waiting for them at the top of the steps with a few armed guards.

To be continued

The Same Ending

Greg Fields

Another call to the front. Tom Rojas heard the urgency in the radio, confirmed to the dispatcher that he was on his way, flicked on the siren and dodged through the city's traffic. Something to do tonight, and the shift would at least free him of the boredom that sometimes settled into a cop's routine.

But tonight something had happened, something that required his presence, his badge and his strong sense of authority. To the front lines, then, to bring it all to bear, to calm the situation, and to restore law and order to the streets of Washington.

Another shooting, one of the hundreds that recoiled through this wounded city. Another shooting of another faceless, nameless victim. Another beat in the tempo of gunfire that cut through the air and sent hearts to the darkest places. It had become all too common, and Officer Rojas had seen more than his share of the detritus that lay on the streets afterward and the panicked heartbreak that wafted in the air like acid rain. Friday night in Washington, and another shooting.

Unlike most of the others, though, the person who pulled the trigger had not escaped. In fact it was the shooter who made the call, and who drooped now against the side of the building, surrounded by Officer Rojas's colleagues who had arrived earlier. A corner store, a mom-and-pop operation that Rojas had passed by a thousand times, never stopping in for coffee, and never even really noticing it aside from the other small fronts that pocked this part of the city's usually quiet northwest. Now here he was, in full uniform, the officer in charge of another tragedy.

Already a crowd had gathered on the sidewalks. People milled about, asking their questions, furrowing brows and shrugging shoulders. Two officers had taped off the area, and the crowd stood restless against the tape. Rojas parted them as he approached the scene.

"Evening, Tom. Nice night for a murder, no?" Amir Garrett had been on the force only a short time. Rojas knew him to be a good cop, thorough, and a bit irreverent. Already it seemed he had seen too much.

“What’s the story, Amir? Who we got on the ground.”

“A kid. No more than 15 or 16, I’d say. We’re tracing ID. Apparently he thought he might grab some easy cash. The storekeeper had other ideas.”

“Shot him then?”

“One clean hit through the chest, less than ten feet. Kid never had a chance.” Rojas turned to the sheet covering the victim. Another officer stood over him, but at this point the body was almost an afterthought.

“I assume the kid was armed.”

“So to speak. A knife, that’s all.”

“Just a knife? In a city filled with guns? Jesus, what an idiot.”

“Yeah. My guess is that he wasn’t too experienced at this sort of thing.”

“What’s the shooter have to say?”

“He’s pretty calm about it, all things considered. Said the kid came into the store, ranting and cursing. Thought he was high on something, maybe jacked up on amphetamines. Waved a knife in his face. The guy had a gun under the counter, and survival instinct kicked in. Bang.”

“Self-defense then. He’ll be back behind the counter in a week,”

“Seems so.” Garrett looked around at the crowd on the sidewalk, which had grown in the few moments since Rojas’s arrival. “They seem pretty upset.”

“Seems like they should be relieved. One less piece of garbage soiling the streets.”

“Don’t know, Tom. They see a young kid shot dead. A black kid shot by an old white guy. Doesn’t sit well.”

“It’ll pass, especially when they learn who this kid was.”

“He was a nobody, Tom. That’s the point. Just another kid.”

Tom Rojas turned back to the scene before him. He would go talk to the storekeeper, then he would debrief with the other officers and file a report. Long night ahead.

Before he faced the rest of it, he turned back to Amir Garrett. "Never gets any easier, Amir. People shooting each other everywhere, it seems, and no one gives a damn. Body counts that read like sports scores. It's like this year was written by Stephen King."

"I never liked his stuff," replied Garrett. "Seems like he writes the same story, over and over, just in different ways."

"Yeah," said Tom Rojas as he adjusted his badge. "Same story. Same ending."

Iguazu Falls

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

Mike was a Jersey Boy. he'd been to Niagara Falls once or twice with both his parents and later his girlfriend, so he didn't expect to be terribly impressed by Iguazu Falls in Brazil. He was only here at the behest of his Uncle and Chief Editor for Nature Magazine, in order to write about some of the natural beauty of this place. He was hot, sweaty, and despite gallons of bug repellent, could not think of a corner or crevice on his body that remained unbitten by the winged monsters that were part of the Jungle's natural food chain. He just needed these last six credits, and he could graduate college and move on with the rest of his life.

The tour guide had tried to be nice as the boat approached the raging falls that seemed to be unleashing the water supply of Heaven itself. The noise of the boat's motors coupled with the guide's thick accent, made it nearly impossible to understand what he was saying but soon a smaller boat pulled alongside of theirs and four masked men boarded their vessel. They spoke no English, but their AK-47 rifles and the pointing of rough brown fingers told Mike this was a kidnapping, possibly the end of his life. As he and his friend Harry were dragged into the smaller boat their tour guide was handed an envelope by one of the pirates, presumably a tidy sum for delivering a pair of wayward Gringos. The guide smiled as he looked back at Mike and Harry, now riding away with their heads down and rifle barrels pointed at them.

"God don't let me die here and in this way!", Mike thought, as the pirates ran their hands through his pockets and knap sack, confiscating any items of imagined value while discarding the rest overboard. They seemed to be heading for the falls and Mike prepared himself for drowning and/or an unpleasant end. He looked over and Harry had a small puddle beneath him, whose yellow hue told spoke of unspeakable dread.

They made a turn and suddenly the falls stopped as they sailed into a small cavern that no map or internet site had ever depicted.

Mike was soaked and scared as his eyes focused on what appeared to be a giant, silver-colored, saucer, with a man sitting in front of it at a desk. In the corner was some sort of golden cage.

They were dragged from the boat and then stood before the man at the desk.

“You are Michael Randolph, are you not?”, The man asked.

Mike was unable to respond, still shaking and soaked from head to toe, no longer concerned with mosquito bites. His eyes caught sight of the golden cage, which contained a silver-haired gentleman who Mike recognized. It was Stephen King!

“You are here because your imagination can save the world, Michael.”, The man began explaining. You will aid your people in harnessing hydro power in combination with our technology.

“But what about Mr. King?”, Michael asked, trying hard not to sound utterly terrified.

“Oh him? He’s just food for our pets.”, The man answered.

What We Come To

Elaine Reardon

Each breath fills us
rises and falls moves
from nose to lungs
belly fills and empties

lungs to blood
where prana fills
your life stream

nourishes you
continues with
each breathe
each thought

courses through
the whole of you, into
each cell of your eye
in the heart and the
smallest bone in your foot

ever changing with time
by the air we breathe
by the water we drink
thought by thought
breath by breath.

Awakened

Tajana Mohnacki

Awakened by the tumble of water, Morana opens her eyes. She blinks a few times, feeling hazy and disoriented, and moves the strains of long, wet hair obstructing her view of the world out of her face. Once able to see clearly, she realises that she is lying down on a solid, slippery ground surrounded by slick, moss-covered stone walls. She inhales deeply, heavy and damp air filling her lungs, before standing up. The slippery surface makes her stumble,

but her annoyance with her own weakened physical state helps her regain composure quickly.

The space she has found herself in is so dark she can barely see anything. The water is trickling down the walls, creating an eerie echo. Her bones hurt and her skin feels prickly, making her too aware of her body. Morana clenches her jaw until the excruciating pain sets in, trying to distract herself from the sinking feeling in her heart as the realisation dawns upon her. She knows this feeling all too well. It comes once a year, no matter how hard she prays to the gods or how many sacrifices she makes in their name, begging them to put an end to this curse.

With a heavy sigh, Morana pushes her frustration aside and steps forward. Guided by the rumbling of water, she presses forward through the dark cavernous space, gritting her teeth against the pain. She hates her mother for passing the legacy of weakness on to her and she hates herself for being incapable of surpassing her limitations. Maybe she should hate her father for putting his paws where they don't belong, but she never had it in herself to hate the old man. Nevertheless, tiny rocks leaving agonising traces on the soles of her feet, hot air biting her skin, and the sweaty scent of her body bring her one step closer to resenting him.

After walking for – oh, who knows how long, she stopped tracking time once she learned it did not affect her - she notices a shiny stream on one of the cave's walls. The vibrating sound of water increases; she rushes towards it and as she makes a sharp turn to the left, she is faced with cascading water that makes her stop dead in her tracks. A thick

body of water is falling down furiously in front of her eyes, the noise creating a humming sound in her

ears. The water smells fresh, emanating life; a scent that until recently evoked bitterness and resignation now makes her nostrils flare in delight. Morana shakes her head and regains her composure, noticing that the cave's surface stretches to the other side of the waterfall.

She decides to make her way to the other side, hopeful that once she does she will wake up from this horrendous dream. A bad sign already, she hears the voice in her head say, since beings like her neither hope nor dream.

Steeling herself against the rush of water, Morana takes a determined step forward. The curtain of water envelopes her, and a sudden surge of energy makes her heart beat furiously, threatening to jump out of her chest. The feeling lasts only for a fleeting second before she emerges on the other side of the waterfall, her senses reeling from a sudden shift of environment. Stepping from a dark and damp cave to the rough and freezing waterfall, and finally onto a cliff surrounded by harsh air has left her body trembling. Her trembling limbs are only another sign that her fears have come true and that her weakness has caught up with her. At least the water removed the sweaty stench from her body.

Morana takes a moment to steady herself, her breath coming out in ragged gasps as she tries to regain her composure. She looks around, taking in the breathtaking beauty of her surroundings; the tranquil lake at the bottom of the waterfall, the sandy beach stretching around it, the lush forest encircling it. She can't help but admire the natural splendour around her. She looks down at her body and notices her bare feet, smooth porcelain skin, and a delicate lacy dress. All reminders of the curse that binds her. She rolls her eyes. The wardrobe change is a part of it. She hopes that the gods are having a good laugh at this cruel joke because she certainly isn't.

The time has come for her to grapple with the annual manifestation of her weakness passed down to her from her equally weak mother. Not that she ever met her mother, but she has heard the stories of her goodness and vulnerability. Like clockwork, with the arrival of the season of rebirth, she loses her powers and is forced to endure the

indignity of becoming human. She is stripped of her entire identity and trapped in a body and mind foreign to her, in a form that she despises. Her body becomes desirable to humans, unlike her natural form, and her mind begins to manifest thoughts and feelings of joy. She is forced to remain in this shape while the world is in bloom, full of light and warmth. Once the darkness and cold begin to emerge, she reverts to her natural form. Each transformation makes her reek more and more of humanity, a constant reminder of her otherness. Why does she have to pay for her mother's weakness or father's sins?

The sound of water splashing and laughter brings her out of her thoughts. She looks down at the lake below her and notices a group of young men jumping into the water, playing and laughing.

Despite the temporary loss of her supernatural powers associated with her natural form, her weakened state comes with a few useful tricks up its sleeve. Over time she has learned that she can trick men into doing her bidding, bending their wills to her desires. No man can resist her charm, but seducing and manipulating young and inexperienced men is especially easy.

A smile curls upon her lips. With a calculated flick of her hair and a coy glance, Morana descends from the cliff towards the lake. It is play time.

Somewhere, over the rainbow

by Deirdre Powell

I sat at the edge of the water, my legs dangling above the shoreline and reflected. It had not been the best of days, and I felt as though this year was being written by Stephen King. First, my brother, Tom, had been in a car accident earlier in the year, and it was taking him some time to get over his injuries. He had experienced concussion and had some internal injuries, which were slow to heal. Our family was very concerned about him, and I had just received a call from my mother, who was almost in tears as she spoke about Tom. I told her not to worry and that all would be well in time, but she seemed unconvinced.

To make matters worse, my boss had indicated to our working team that day that there was a possibility that the Head Office in the US would be downsizing its international operations, and it looked as though our jobs were on the line. I thought that things couldn't get any worse and was worried about my prospects for the future. However, in the afternoon, I received a phone call from my best friend at school whose doctor thought that she would have to go for a mammogram as breast cancer was suspected. She was distraught with worry. I tried to calm her down and to tell her that often, mammograms were taken as a precaution, and they were frequently found to be clear – it was quite possible that her situation was not as bad as it first appeared.

And now, as I sat beside the water's edge, reflecting on the happenings of the day, I couldn't help noticing the beauty of my surroundings – it was as though I had been missing the beauty of the day because of its gravity, and now, a faint glimmer of hope in the form of a magnificent rainbow lit up the sky. There were cumulus clouds floating in the air, and it was as though the seven beautiful colours were forming diamonds in the sky as the light was reflected. A weeping willow tree enveloped its arms over the water's edge, and the branches swayed gently in the wind. I noticed a crow pecking at the base of the tree, with the bird's feathers displaying an oily blackness. And as I looked up at the rainbow, high in the sky, I thought to myself that somewhere, over the rainbow, lies the hope that today's life will get better and that, for tomorrow, there is a promise of a new day.

The Great Fire of Samhain

Tadgh O'Brien

Gold leaves crunch like bones, I pace.
A tiny skeleton makes a face.
I throw the little girl a smirk.
It's frowned on to be late for work.

'American thing — it's obscene!'
A colleague moans in to his tea.
My blood simmering to broil,
'It's not A——', no, I must uncoil.

'Tell me, when instead we burn
that Guy onto a fire infern?'
'That "Guy"?' he almost spits and flails.
So sad, I enjoy the detail.

Afternoon lull, my work not done.
He works 'til seven, last one home.
Hand-dryer — check. I crawl inside.
Now for only time to bide.

Outside is dark. I strobe the lights.
This helps make what comes next seem right.
Our mark now busy at the sink,
Hits the button — two worlds link!

A torrent of my tiny bats,
And darkness, oh so cold unwrapped!
His little feet go pap pap pap
right out the door towards my trap.

Oh London City never change!
Your narrow empty streets betray
With medieval airs bewitched
So many ways to come unstitched.

Pap pap pap on Fenchurch Street
A slimy tongue his neck does greet.
Frantic paps down Pudding Lane
On which so many souls I claimed.

Those frantic cries just now he hears!
Forever screaming on deaf ears.
And from a drain my cold dead hands
onto his puny feet they land.

Our friend determined to outsmart,
On cue towards a doorway darts.
A flaming beam above caves in
as tortured souls embrace his skin.

Footnotes:

- Bonfire Night is a festival in England on 5 November, about a week after Halloween, when an effigy of Guy Fawkes is burned upon bonfires in many neighbourhoods.
- The Great Fire of London i

The World will hold its Breath

Gerard Keogh

Chapter 4

Oberkommando des Heeres

Anthony Armstrong had encountered some people in his short time in the Department of Education who were never going to win a personality-of-the-year contest; but the collection of tinpot dictators and horrible human beings that awaited him in Youth Affairs was in a category all of its own. A little while later he would wonder how it was possible to have so many unpleasant individuals in a relatively small population (that is, the Department of Education). Were those people like that anyway, or did the environment in which they worked turn them into the little shits that they were? Whether nature or nurture, the origin of this nastiness mattered not one iota. For his sins, Anthony would languish in that place for the next four years. The Battle of Stalingrad lasted less than six months.

The Oberkommando des Heeres, or OKH (the German Army high command), was the body responsible for planning the strategic aspects of Armies and Army Groups on the Eastern Front. As one of the field armies of Army Group South, the Sixth Army was employed in the attempt to capture Stalingrad, known today as Volgograd. When the Soviets encircled the city, the Sixth Army was cut off and almost completely destroyed. Tens of thousands of German soldiers were taken prisoner, including Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus. Of those men, only a few thousand made it back to Germany when they were finally released from captivity ten years after the end of the war. If the Eastern Front can be described as analogous to the Department of Education, then the OKH can be seen as the equivalent of the department's Personnel Unit in the manner in which it allocated commands to various parts of the battlefield. Personnel moved people around the department as a grandmaster would move pieces on a chessboard. For those who found themselves on an unfamiliar square, it was far better to be a king or a queen than it was to be a pawn.

It is said that a fish rots from the head down. Whatever the true explanation for the awful stink that permeated the corridors of the Department of Education, there was no denying that something was rotten, and everyone who worked there could smell it.

Without a doubt, the best thing about working on the eleventh floor of Hawkins House was the panoramic view of the city, with aircraft on approach to Dublin Airport clearly visible in the distance. On second thought, a more accurate statement would be that the view was not the best thing about working on the top floor of Hawkins House; it was the only good thing about working there. The department shared the building with the Department of Health, which occupied the space below the tenth floor. The contrast between the staff who worked in Education and those who worked in Health could not have been clearer. Whereas the Health people were mostly youngish and enthusiastic about their work, the Education staff were downbeat and cynical in their approach to most things in life, but especially their work.

As if to rub their Education noses in it, the Department of Health spent quite a bit of money on improving the office space on the floors it occupied. On one occasion, Anthony was waiting for the lift to take him down to the main lobby of the building, when the doors of the lift opened to reveal three or four people who appeared somewhat puzzled. (Evidently, one of them had selected the wrong floor, going up instead of down.) They had been visitors to the Department of Health and had clearly been impressed with the surroundings there. However, the shabby appearance of the lift area on the eleventh floor had the opposite effect. One of them turned to the others and said, "I don't think we were meant to see this." Then the doors of the lift closed again and the traumatised visitors were whisked away to safety at a lower altitude, hoping never again to witness such a scene of deprivation.

"I should be so lucky," Anthony said to himself, before realising he had just referenced the title of a Kylie Minogue song. How much is a grown man expected to take? First, the OKH sends him into harm's way in Stalingrad/Youth Affairs; then he's reduced to quoting those great thinkers of the 1980s, Stock, Aitken, and Waterman. How could it all have come to this?

The men who returned from Stalingrad had witnessed and been subjected to acts of unspeakable horror while they were in Soviet captivity. Physically and psychologically, they were broken beyond repair. Anthony had never fired a weapon in anger, nor had he been anywhere near a war zone; and yet he too had been mentally scarred by his experiences as a government employee. The damage done during his time in the Department of Education would stay with him long after he had moved on from there. Sometimes the scars we cannot see are the hardest of all to heal.