

Inkslingers Blended Session

28th September 2024

The Prompt from The Bag Was:



Sea Otter Alaska USA

“Life is short; make it sweet.”

Fingersnap

Greg Fields

There would be no saving the house, that was clear. Flames ran in every direction, flew out of every window and engulfed the roof, while black and gray smoke blew in great clouds, choking the air and those who tried to breathe it. No saving the house, and little chance to save anyone who might still be inside it.

Willie Meadows arrived with the last of the fire engines. A gas explosion apparently, and fortunate that it didn't blow out the entire block. He shook his head there on the sidewalk, then reached into his jacket pocket for his notebook, unsure what he would write in it. 'Christ,' he muttered to himself. 'Is this even newsworthy? A black speck, that's all.'

It had been a quiet week, to be sure. Willie's beat tended to the grandiose, at least in his own mind – city corruption, bureaucratic snafus, the occasional shooting, maybe a hate crime. He tried to find the city's grit. Despite years of experience, he still maintained at least a flimsy sense of purpose.

But what was the purpose in this? A house fire, likely violently and suddenly kindled by a leaking valve, and a family thrown into chaos. But in a city of several hundred thousand souls, the sad accidents of the few carry little meaning. Besides, he thought, what family doesn't own its share of chaos?

Willie approached an officer keeping the onlookers away, and flashed his Post ID. "Looks like a complete loss."

The officer grunted. "Happened all at once. We heard it at the station, three blocks over. It happens sometimes. These gas lines are old, and nobody pays them any mind. Just a matter of time, and we'll see this again."

"Any fatalities?"

"Probably. We won't know for sure until this thing dies down. But no one came out of the house and the neighbors said that there were four

people who lived there, parents and two kids. Hope they were out of town.”

Willie looked down the street. The sidewalks were filled with people drawn by the flames, the light, the smoke – the horror of it. They stood there immobile, staring, sometimes gesturing. Some had not bothered to change out of their nightclothes, and they stood before the burning house in slippers and robes.

He thought to see what they were thinking. “Excuse me,” and he approached a woman, perhaps in her sixties, her eyes wide and her mouth open in a mixture of awe and fear. “Do you know who lived there?”

“No. Not really. They were a quiet family. Kept to themselves.”

“How old were the kids?”

“Hard to say. They were kids. The boy was maybe ten or so. The other, his sister, was a little younger. I almost never saw the parents, but they were nice enough. A nod or a wave when we passed by.” The woman grabbed Willie’s arm in a sudden realization. “My God, are they still alive?”

“No idea, ma’am. Do you know their names?”

“Clifford. Or maybe it was Clinton. Yes, Clinton. And the kids’ names were Jefferson and Sherry, that I remember. I didn’t know the parents.”

Willie stood with the woman and the two watched the flames, which showed little sign of taming. It would be a long night for the firefighters, for the police, for the neighbours. A longer night still for the Clintons.

“Such a shame,” the woman said. “So young, they were. All of them. Even the parents.”

“Yes, ma’am. And to have this happen in just a flash, then it’s all changed. Forever.”

“No one tells you how short it all is. It’s all just a snap of the fingers, and then you’re gone. No one tells you that when you’re growing up, you know? We go about our lives like they’ll last forever. But they don’t.

We owe it to ourselves to make it mean something, don't you think? To blend in some sweetness with the sour."

Willie nodded, then turned back to the sidewalk. "Thank you," he whispered, and headed back toward the house. A difficult night, but an easy story to write, one that would almost write itself.

He'd make the morning deadline. That was as much sweetness as he could convey on nights like this.

Life is short

Laura Alves

It's true life is short, everybody knows. Still it can be long enough for us to achieve our dreams. In the beginning of our life, when we are not mature enough to start making projects to be achieved at each stage of life, sometimes our parents may try and do that for us. But that doesn't work, as each person's life is their own and not their parents' to take. Our life is already one of the projects in our parents' lives. They should know that each of those pretty little projects is unique and each has their own ideas about what they want to do with their life.

The best way to deal with life is really not to think too much about its short length and take it a day at a time. Some people say if you get into a routine life can get boring, but I don't see it that way. As I see it, we are gifted with some daily pleasures in life: eating, drinking, sleeping. We don't live without these. Other pleasures should be added to make life longer and healthier: exercising, thinking, smiling, socialising. Exercising your mind and body will lead you into a happy path in life.

My grandmothers lived to be 102 and 104. At 104 my grandmother Quide would say "I just wish I could live to be 107". She loved her life. If she did reach 107, she would aim to 110. There was no end to life for her. Still, there is no secret to a long life. You can live your life exactly like they did, but that doesn't assure you a passport to 2070. The only thing that's sure about life is that we may or may not know exactly when it started, but we have no idea when it will end!

Life is short; make it sweet

Angelina Kelly

Julia sat in her now newly landscaped garden the fresh smell of mowed grass hung in the air. She inhaled its aroma held it for a moment then exhaled consciously letting go of her depression, listlessness and exhaustion. The last year had been a hard one for her and right now she felt traumatised and sorry for herself. It shouldn't have happened; it shouldn't have been a decision she had to make. She should be in Florida with the WPs living her best life with the man of her dreams and his energetic friends.

Deep in thought and isolated within her head she didn't hear Sophie arriving and calling out to her. It wasn't until Sophie stood in front of her blocking the sun that she realised she was no longer alone.

"Hey, a penny for your thoughts." Sophie greeted her.

"Oh, Sophie, you're here. I didn't hear you come in."

"That's obvious. I brought us a bottle, I figured you'd be partial to some 'medicine' to assist your recovery."

"As always you were right. Go get us some glasses you know where everything is."

As Sophie busied herself in the kitchen Julia shook herself smoothed down her trousers and mentally prepared herself for her friend's company.

Sophie returned to the garden holding the wine bottle in one hand and two glasses in the other. Julia reached out and took one. Sophie filled her glass then filled her own and placed the bottle on the table between them. She sat down and surveyed the garden.

"Nice job, it looks great, should be on the cover of a glossy magazine."

"I won't be doing that. In fact, I wouldn't have bothered at all only Theresa insisted upon it and I hadn't the strength to argue with her."

"She is a bit bossy alright. Seems to like getting her own way."

“It’s all she has. Her whole existence revolves around Douglas and their mutual friends. Douglas is busy minding his investments, he’s happy to leave the running of the household and calendar to her.”

“Well, they seem to know their place in the world and how to live within it. Which is more than we can say about you.”

She turned to Julia raised her glass towards her and looked her friend in the eyes.

“It’s about time you did the same. Make a decision, based on what you know, and go for it. Life is short; make it sweet.”

Anthony's sweet life

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

"A pasty man, red as a beet. A corny phrase I won't repeat, here comes the heat, here comes the heat, life is short so make it sweet." Boom, the chaser was a long, loud, wet escape. It was the same maddening poem every evening of every day for the last fifteen years. Always followed by a shameless release of bodily gas which, for some God forsaken reason, tended to waft Southward towards the cell of Anthony Shavers. Bill Mannersby, the author of that little ditty and owner of its accompanying gas, was the man in the cell down the tier from Anthony in one of the many death row wings of Colorado's A.D.X supermax.

In that place, things like scheduled flatulence were clocks. Each announcing a tick towards D-day or execution day. It was always a sad, tragic event when one of the men on the tier was taken by the guards for that last walk. The giving away of personal items and written works, the handshakes through bars, the crying, and the false bravado of holding one's head up. Smiling as though going on a fishing trip to Hawaii instead of towards an unforgiving needle that was the gateway to the next world.

Strangely enough however, one could help but grow attached to the assortment of maddening personalities, the jokes, the bad habits, and stories that formed the crew of eight men in this small, wing-of-the-damned.

There was Vernon Anders, a.k.a. "Monkey man", a mountain-man cannibal whose diet consisted of lost hikers and outdoors aficionados. Known for his very hairy and Neanderthal-like appearance, almost no centimeter of skin was visible on his impressively shaggy, 400-pound body. There was Butch DiVite a mob hitman who liked to mail body parts back to his victim's families, and the Sanchez twins, brutal hitters for the Cartel who'd put down entire families. Also, Manny "The mouse", Niedermeyer, who's calling card was executing those who'd dared to turn informant against his organization, and then stuffing dead rats in their anal cavities as a warning to others. These were, for the most part, clearly evil, unhinged men, but Anthony found out that they were surprisingly human, sometimes relatable, and even entertaining.

Almost to a man, each lived in denial with respect to their crimes. They all craved a return to the real world, the free world, despite their numerous collective atrocities.

But such was not the case with Anthony. He was that rare breed of inmate who openly embraced his fate and now wished to remove the taste of freedom from his mouth forever.

Anthony was here for having snapped the neck of a wayward mailman who'd romanced his fifteen-year-old daughter and then mailing the sealed remains to Bangkok. The smell of fresh air, making love to women, riding his horse through the countryside, these were now distant things. Long forgotten pleasures that only served to haunt his dreams. Consequently, Anthony had instructed his lawyer, in no uncertain terms, to cease all filing of appeals to his conviction. Death was a welcome friend and the only real freedom that was now achievable.

Yet one day, he received a letter from the courts, explaining that his death sentence had been commuted and that he would now be entering the prison's general population for the rest of his life.

Upon arriving in his new wing, Anthony noted that the cells were double bunked. On the top bunk was a man lying on his back. One who'd also been given a reprieve from the death sentence. It was none other than Bill Mannersby, the poetically gifted fart machine. Realizing what this meant, panic set in. Anthony glanced at his watch. It was almost 9pm and the all too familiar poem began... "A pasty man, red as a beet... A corny phrase I won't repeat, here comes the heat, here comes the heat, life is short so make it sweet." Boom!

Unlikely Conversation With An Otter

Ciaran O'Melia

About 10 miles outside Dublin on the coast, there is a town called Bray. It is a charming old-world town, very English, as one can imagine on the promenade parasols, with ladies with long flowing skirts and gentlemen with suits and slanted straw hats on their heads.

Yes, there are bumper cars, wheels of fortune, ladies who tell the future, and air rifles that hit the target and get a surprise gift. Yet it all leads to the charm of the place.

It was there I met my first sea otter. He said, "Hello" I looked around at the ventriloquist, to which I

found none, nothing but the quiet of the early morning.

You see, he had a twang in his accent, and that interested me after we had our introduction, I said,

"You are a long way from home?"

"Jesus, once out of the country of what we call Canada, I made great speed with the current."

I asked him where he was from.

"Alaska." He replied.

"On the west coast of America, how did you make it across USA?"

"Canada." He said, a bit miffed.

"Rivers, it was then I hit the current; it blew me off the coast."

"How do you like Ireland?" I asked.

"It's great, but I have one complaint."

"What's that?"

"Well, there are no dams allowed." He said, but I got confused with the twang. I thought he said, Dames.

I corrected him, and he seemed not put out by this. It would not be the first time he fell into the female company and lingered.

“Dams,” he said, “but I tried to put dam around Dublin, but I gave up, and Bray was the only place.”

“Well, there is very little timber around here,” I said.

With that, he went into a backflip and made a racket as his tail splashed the water. I got a fright; it was so violent.

“What are you going to do now?” I asked him.

“I miss me, ma and da.” It was then I knew he was hanging around too much Dublinese, but he continued, “And they miss me, but life is short – make it sweet.”

By the time he said this, the sun was up, and a crowd had gathered to talk to the otter; he dived and was away with the fairies