

Ten Years

“Ten years?”

“Yeah, ten years.”

“How do you figure you can tell how many years you got left to live?”

“Well, obviously I can’t. I could get hit by a fuckin bus tomorrow. But lookin at a finite future that trims off that shitty incapacitated time at the end, makes it all manageable. For me anyway. I’m not one of those guys who wants to live to be a hundred. Hell, I don’t even want to stray into the eighties. My dad is 96. Livin in a nursing home, wearin a diaper and doesn’t know where he is. No fuckin thanks.”

“So how old are you now?”

“Sixty-six”.

“Damn, you look good for sixty-six. I was thinkin you were around sixty. You ready for another beer.”

“I believe I am, thanks.”

Stanford retreated back away from the sunny beachfront panorama of the front window of the Beach Ball Bar (hours 6am till 2 am) on Balboa peninsula in Newport Beach and found a place at the bar where he ordered two Buds in bottles. When he returned, his buddy James was finishing off his previous beer and observing the barely dressed females moving up and down the sidewalk a few feet below them.

“Won’t you miss eyeballin all those good-looking women James?”

“At some point it just becomes a reminder of what you can no longer have.”

“Come on man, you still got some fuckin left in you.”

“I said ‘at some point’. But it’s been a few years since I could pop a full chubby without chemical support.”

“Yeah, thank god for Viagra.”

“I’ve led a pretty interesting life Stan. Not like the guy in the Dos Equis commercial, but I have rarely been bored and when I was, I did something about it. Now I just want to focus on the next ten years. And make sure I have a few more adventures. Continue to avoid boredom and not spend my golden years living under a bridge.”

“You can’t do that and live to be, say eighty-two?”

“Knowing I only got so long keeps me from putting shit off and hoarding my money. This summer I want to drive up the coast highway to British Columbia and visit Quadra Island. Stay at the Herriot Bay Inn. It’s a spot I visited in the seventies with this beautiful blue eyed blond named Jean. I want to go there again and rent a kayak. Paddle around the bay. So, I’m doing it next fall. Want to come along?”

“Uh, I don’t know about that.”

“See, that’s exactly what I’m talking about. You got no sense of urgency. You figure you got plenty of time.”

“Maybe I just don’t want to go to BC.”

“Or drive the Pacific Coast highway through the redwoods. See Oregon and Washington?”

“OK it does sound pretty cool. I just don’t know if I can afford it.”

“Cause, you don’t know how long you got to make your money last. Instead, you sit here all day drinkin six dollar beers and runnin up your tab.”

“Get off your high horse. You’re sittin here too. Drinkin beer on my fuckin tab.”

“Sorry. You got every right to do what makes you happy.”

No one spoke for a few minutes as Stan's anger dissipated. When he thought about it, he wasn't sure if he was happy or not. More sunshine dappled waves rolled in. More tourists and beach rats made their way past the Beach Ball. It was just past nine on Tuesday morning.

"So how you gonna do it?"

"Do what?"

"You know, make sure you only live ten more years."

"On my seventy sixth birthday I'm going to go sky diving. But I'm not going open the chute."

Stan jerked his head toward his friend, a look of horror spreading across his grizzled features.

"Jesus."

“Nah, I’m just shitting you. I got a gun.”

“I’m not sure that blowing your brains out is much better. Where did you come up with this shit?”

“I’ve thought about suicide since I was a teenager. I guess I was depressed. In my twenties I read Steppenwolf. Ever read it?”

“You mean like the band?”

“It’s a book by Hermann Hesse that the band named itself after.”

“OK college boy.”

“I didn’t read it in college. But the guy in the book considered suicide a legitimate option if things got too shitty. It freed him up. So, I kind of adopted that mind set. I could do whatever I wanted and if it didn’t work out... kabloohey. It really has

helped me to keep from getting over stressed. I know that I can limit how bad my life can get.”

“I don’t know if you’re nuts or a genius. I’m leaning towards nuts.”

They lapsed into silence again. James picked up the empties and headed to the bar for refills. Stanford mulled it all over. He had always been a ‘take life as it comes’ kind of guy. Never really forced the play. And it had worked out. He was divorced, but with social security and his half of the 401K, after his last divorce, still had enough dough to have a little studio apartment a few blocks from the beach. He didn’t hear from his kids much and his only friends were the other old farts that hung out at the Beach Ball and Blackies next door. But there were sure as hell worse places to be. And maybe he would take James up on that offer to drive up the coast next fall.