

NYC MIDNIGHT 1000 Word/24 Hour Flash Fiction Challenge

Parameters:

Genre: Crime Caper

Location: A mausoleum

Object: Taffy

Big Things

Tory Blanding has one focus in life and it's dead.

Tory Blanding's job as Assistant to the Director of Recreation in Wayne, Pennsylvania meant she was next in line to be the Director of Recreation in Wayne, Pennsylvania. But, when? At forty-one, she'd already been in her position for a decade; and even at seventy-two Franklin DeSpazio wouldn't give up his power easily.

"Tory," Franklin decreed looking down at her from his high desk, "there's going to be a fund-raising gala for Wayne County's Library System. Contact Miss Derringer to see if she needs help planning."

In the cramped Rec Office, Tory had her own little desk facing the Director's big metal one. When the middle school replaced students' desks a few years ago, Tory snatched one of the old ones by the dumpster. She didn't even need to find a chair because it was already attached.

Tory didn't get to make recreation decisions; instead she did things like making sure the building's restrooms were clean.

Davelyn Frinkle actually cleaned the Rec Building. Tory got to oversee Davelyn. That was fun because in high school Davelyn was a cute, little cheerleader with a loud voice and high kicks. These days, Davelyn was a dumpy wreck with body odor. Who's got the spirit now, Davelyn?

When Tory was a child, her parents expected big things of her. Bill and Florence Blanding were never specific about what big things, but they named her, "Victoria" anticipating she would succeed in something. And, that's why they didn't mind letting her live rent-free in their basement.

Work was work. Sometimes 10am to 2:30pm felt grueling. But, when the metaphorical whistle blew, Tory spent her time in the mausoleum she created for her dearly beloved Taffy who died eleven years prior at the age of twenty.

At first glance, Taffy's Mausoleum looked like the prefab vinyl shed that it was in Tory's parents' backyard. But, upon closer examination one would find a tastefully made balsam wood plaque super-glued over the shed door with the name, "Taffy" burned into it with the sun and a magnifying glass.

Taffy was Tory's best friend. He had been a Christmas gift from Tory's Aunt Francis: a big, blobby, orange tabby cat named because he stuck with Tory everywhere she went. Also, at that time Tory was obsessed with grape Laffy Taffy.

Inside the mausoleum was a card table draped in an orange plastic sheet. There were brass, glass, and porcelain figurines of cats on it, and candles to burn in remembrance.

By the way, yes of course Tory considered having Taffy's fluffy body immortalized by a taxidermist. But, that just felt degrading. Think of the Russians. Think of Lenin. Someone stuffed him and tourists walk by and gawk.

Taffy's homemade Plaster of Paris sarcophagus was a fine representation. The bottom of it was just an Adidas box. Tory had run out of Plaster of Paris and then got busy. We all do.

Mr. DeSpazio interrupted Tory's thoughts. "I'm cutting out early today. Have a good afternoon. That trash can is getting pretty full."

Tory remembered to call Miss Derringer.

"Hello, Miss Derringer? This is Tory. Do you need any help planning the library's fund-raising gala?"

"No. I have all of the seeds already and we'll reuse last year's gala decorations."

"Seeds?" Tory was confused.

That's when Miss Derringer told her the theme of this year's silent auction would be, "Seeds of our Future."

"Our top item will be the Baptisia Australis Grape Taffy. It's a lovely, hardy flowering perennial and we have heirloom quality seeds!" Miss Derringer gushed.

Never mind that grape was still Tory's favorite artificial flavor. Never mind that this flower was named, "Taffy." Never mind that it's perennial and would never die...!

Tory hung up and took the Rec Director's master key off his Reggie Jackson bobble head doll's bat. Director DeSpazio often mentioned that that key opens every government door in Wayne. The library administration office... in Wayne!

Tory concocted a plan to slip through the backdoor of the library admin office, into Miss Derringer's office, and steal away with the Baptisia Australis Grape Taffy seed packet after dark!

It turns out the "master key" doesn't work for the library admin office and that office has an alarm system.

Tory ran through the night back to the mausoleum, where she could think.

Another idea! She'd attend the gala on the guise of serving punch and then, when everyone was busy eating at the buffet, she'd dump the Baptisia Australis Grape Taffy seeds into a Ziploc, and replace them with Zinnia seeds! No one would ever know!

The day of the gala all was going as planned until Davelyn and her pudgy son decided to hang around the punch bowl at the exact time Tory needed to get to that seed table! Then, the boy spilled punch on the table and Tory had to clean it up. She missed her chance to make the switch!

Miss Derringer's voice caught Tory's attention. The winning bid for the Baptisia Australis Grape Taffy was...

Tory's mind raced. Blood pounded loudly in her ears. Miss Derringer's lips moved... she lifted the seed packet... Davelyn waddled toward the prize. No!

Tory moved fast. She got to the stage riser before Davelyn, but tripped over the microphone cord, and knocked over Miss Derringer. Seeds flew everywhere!

Tory went into a frenzy scooping up seeds and cramming them into her Ziploc. The audience gasped. This was the person next in line to replace Frank DeSpazio?

Tory got up, triumphantly held the seed-filled Ziploc in the air, opened her mouth... and then, everything went black.

When she came to, Miss Derringer was standing over her.

"Thank you for saving the seeds! Davelyn is grateful! We all are!"

Tory trudged home and to Taffy's Mausoleum as a devastated hero.

As Tory lit a candle under her velvet portrait of Taffy, something fell onto the table...

Grape Taffy seeds that stuck to her skin...

"Big Things," by Christina Myers

Professional Reviews:

"I like how much tactile, descriptive detail was baked into the story. It made each scene feel more real and also helped us to understand the various motivations at play here. I think you did a great job incorporating taffy from the brief, and like that you did so in multiple ways. I also like the wry undercurrents of humor that helped elevate this story and paint a clearer picture of Tory as the protagonist."

"Oh my gosh, this was a sweet, funny story. I thought Tory was absolutely adorable! The fact that she was 41 and still waiting for the Director of Rec to move on was really sad. You have a delightful sense of humor. I loved the image of her sitting at a school desk with the seat attached - this was really funny, yet also very sad. Her attempts to get the seeds were entertaining. I loved the ending, as Tory ended up with seeds after all, by accident!"

"Your logline is a drumroll of build-up and thud - it immediately made me curious. 'Blanding' is a perfect surname for someone in a secondary position of assistant ~ always designated to do the quotidian chores.

The fact that she sits at a school pupil's desk adds to her puerile status.

Tory's contemptuous schadenfreude re Davelyn's devolution further re-enforces the petty hierarchy.

Being 41 and still living in her parents' dwelling makes for a great pressure cooking to ignite "Victoria's" urge to claw her way to the middle!

You earn points for your original use of the "taffy" element.

The quantum leap from a cherished, now-deceased cat to Lenin's taxidermized corpse was hysterically hyperbolic!

Ouff! You are soooo good at maintaining the mediocre frequency of this poor soul's life: just the awful fact that she has a favorite artificial flavor: Grape.

Satisfying finale: that Tory got trumped by Davelyn again after mocking her, but also got the consolation prize of a few Grape Taffy seeds in her Memorial sanctuary, sticking like taffy."