

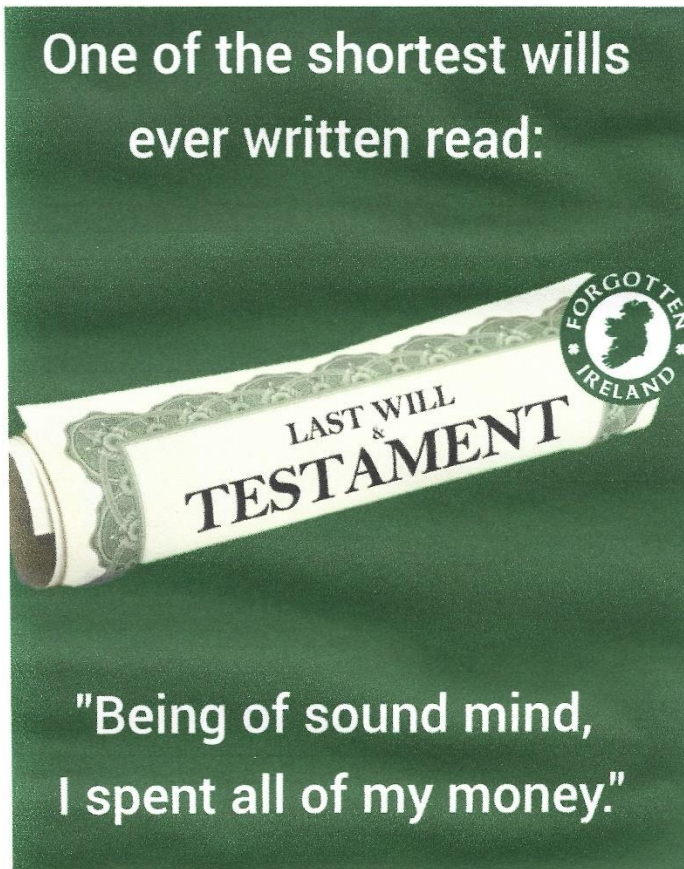
Inkslingers Blended Session

27th April 2024

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

"You're not Fat, You're just Easy to See. "

And the Visual



The Dark Glasses

Miguel A. Rivera, Jr.

Once upon a time, in a family far more interested with material things than smiles or rainbows, there came a day when the last will and testament of Lord William Struthers or “the will”, was to be read. Assembled was a host of relatives from all corners of the globe, some thought long dead themselves or otherwise kidnapped by aliens for testing purposes. As the reading of the will began, smug looks turned to desperation, and finally runaway indignation as many a would-be zillionaire discovered that oddly enough, they were not the object of Uncle William’s greatest affections.

“I can’t believe that old bastard, I sent him Christmas cards on several occasions!”, One unrelatable-relative muttered.

“But...he promised me the world, I changed his bed pans, fetched his paper, showed him my puppies twice a day”, a rather supple-bodied former maid let out.

“I canceled my golf outing and took two planes for this?”, Yet another disappointed voice unleashed.

All the while, Arnie sat in the back of the room. Silent, wounded, and sad. Well aware that this nest of hypocrites neither cared for nor deserved a single wet scent from a man whom he’d come to love more than his own father. Arnie had been by Lord William’s bedside day and night, but now expected nothing more than to be shown the door by his surviving, parasitic clan.

As the Attorney came to the near end of the will, many had left the room in disgust, but some remained. Seething with the anger of the erroneously entitled type. Curious as to who would actually inherit the eight-billion-dollar empire that Uncle William’s uncanny innovation and hard work had made into reality.

The Lawyer explained that Uncle William wanted the fortune donated to the widows of veterans, orphans, wounded policemen, children’s cancer studies, and so forth. That last line cleared the room of the collective avarice that had filled it moments before.

The lawyer looked up and only Arnie remained. Chained to his seat by grief. A somewhat misplaced smile then danced on that lawyer's lips and Arnie could not understand the source of his glee in these circumstances.

"Mr. Arnold Anthony Rodriguez, Lord William left you his most precious and guarded asset. He began reading a pre-written statement.

"To my beloved and pure-hearted Arnie, I leave my most treasured item. Amongst the collection of useless humans who claimed to be close to me, you stand apart. Alone, a tender-hearted and true young man. Therefore, I do hereby bequeath you my dark glasses. You'll soon see why they are of such value. I only ask that you never use them for evil, never change, and only gift them to one such as yourself when your own time of mortality comes.", Were the words the lawyer read, thereafter handing a plain-looking wooden box that contained a pair of glasses within.

Arnie took them, smiled, and felt grateful for anything connecting him to William.

As he got to the lot he put them on due to the sunny day. A small shock ran across his face and neck, replaced moments later by a warm, calming, settling feeling, unlike anything he'd ever felt in his life.

Immediately thereafter, he could see the relatives. Sensing their thoughts, feelings, fears, diseases, and everything else about them with astonishing clarity. Even the dates of their future deaths was suddenly and painfully obvious. Arnie pulled out his phone and could see when and exactly by how much, which stocks would rise and fall. He could see men and women on the opposite side of the globe. Leaders, criminals, scientists, artists, and a plethora of others.

Arnie mounted his small, cluttering, insignificant vehicle, and drove past the Mercedes Benzes and Rolls Royce's of haughty relatives. With disdainful looks, they scoffed at the bloody, "Yank", ass-wiper, who'd dared to attend this reading. Driving away as his clunker's bad muffler sputtered on the brink of dying, Arnie smiled and waved.

Because I Would Not Stop for Death

Tadg O'Brien

Because I would not stop for Death
He make a bed for me,
Inside my cell there was a bell
If nurses were of need.

We held a wake my friends brought cake,
And so the stories flowed!
We laughed and cried as if I'd died,
A sweetness in such woe.

The videos of little shows
My nephew made for me.
My college mates, my old ex-dates,
and long-time frenemies!

The Tadg of old his story told
yet still each day they came.
A wake so long a worthy song,
My life so well exclaimed.

Since then, 'tis centuries –
Seems shorter than the day,
The party now it's over,
The phone rings not for me.

Brotherly Love

Gerard Byrne

Douglas stood in front of his brother Donald's grave and winced at the thought of how much this abomination had cost. It made many of those traveller graves look practically low-key in comparison. There was low marble walls surrounding the double plot. The whole base was covered with tiny gold coloured pebbles. Marble plaques read out quotes from anonymous people. Donal, you will be missed dearly and Donald, you're the man. A bit pathetic that Donald had paid for all of this. Including the large eight foot statue in the middle of Donald himself. Douglas wasn't sure what that was made of, but the bloody thing was painted gold like an Oscar statuette. The sculptor had definitely taken at least six stone off the look of Donald.

Douglas's brother was a big wide guy that was known to book two planes seats for himself when travelling. Douglas had been polite about his brother's weight in the early years. Donald would come back from school crying about all the bullying that befell him that day. Douglas would sit him down and explain to him that other teenagers could be right little bastards at the best of times. Donald had asked Douglas out straight did he think that he was fat. Douglas tried to make light of the situation by telling Donald that he wasn't fat, just easy to see. The two brothers had laughed together that day. But that hadn't lasted between them. Bad blood and the love of money and one particular woman had come between them. Things had come to past that couldn't be forgiven by either side.

Douglas tried his best to ignore the group of teenagers hanging around his brother's grave. It wasn't that they knew Donald or had even heard of him. It was because the sneaky bastard had gotten free wifi installed into his headstone and anyone within a ten foot radius could use and abuse it. Donald's little sad way of trying to make himself look popular to the masses. It was even more embarrassing on cemetery Sunday when half the men in the graveyard stood around the grave trying to get the football on their phones.

The last kick in the proverbial testicles that Donald had hit his one and only brother with that morning was the reading of the will. Douglas was

the only name read out. Not that he was the recipient of any of his brother's fortune. No bloody way. It was just a message read out by the solicitor to say. Being of sound mind. I spent all of my money. Have fun trying to pay for all that chemo for that bitch whore of a wife of yours. May she rot in hell for eternity.

Douglas unzipped his pants and urinated over Donald's grave with much delight. Even the teenagers looked shocked by the steam rising in the cold afternoon air. Still didn't make them move any further away from the free wifi. As Douglas's bladder finally emptied, he felt a small pang of pride in his actions. He then headed home to spend what little time he had left with his adoring wife.



The Bridlington Abhorrence

Stephen Brady

Hertfordshire, 1805

Reverend Henry Stewart was at his study-table, composing the sermon for that Sunday's service. The topic was to be "On The Desirability Of An Even-Handed Disposition, After The Example Of Our Saviour." He was reaching for a chapter of Job to supply the requisite weight

to his ruminations, when a knock came upon the door. It was his maid, who after begging his pardon for the interruption, announced that the Reverend had a visitor.

Knotting his day-robe, he went into the lobby and down to the front door. Standing there upon the step was a man he recognized, though it cost him a moment to append a name to the face. It was Francis, the manservant of his nearest neighbour. The fellow seemed quite out of breath.

"Good day to you, Francis. Won't you come in?"

The fellow stood there, worrying his hat between his fingers, and presented the appearance of some discomfort. When he finally replied, it was all of a rush.

"Begging your pardon, Reverend, but I cannot. Mr Henley bid me fetch you to his house with all haste. He allowed as I was not to return without Your Grace."

Rev. Stewart was taken aback by this intelligence. He knew Charles Henley to be a steady, deliberate sort, the very model of a gentleman farmer, and these exhortations appeared quite out of character.

"Come, Francis. What does all the commotion mean?"

Francis met the vicar's gaze, and at once looked away.

"Not at liberty to say, sir."

"Well what does Mr Henley require of me?"

"All I know is that a stranger arrived at my master's house this morning, in the hour after sunrise. He was... strangely attired, and his speech was... well, I never heard the like. Some class of foreigner, I shouldn't wonder. He had a wild look about the eyes, like he was more than half a madman."

Rev. Stewart felt a little chill.

"What did he want, this stranger?"

"Couldn't say, sir. The Master bid me let him enter, in the spirit of charity. He brought the stranger into the drawing-room, and they passed some talk together. I couldn't guess to what was said. Then, about the stroke of nine, my Master emerged, and he had a look upon his face... well, I hope to never see it's like again. As if he'd just been in conference with the Devil himself. He summoned me, and bid me fetch you to his house with all speed. 'Do not stop, Francis,' he told me, 'no, not even to take a drink of water.' He said he hoped Your Grace could be with him within the hour."

Rev Stewart was somewhat disconcerted by this talk. He fetched his coat and hat, and bid his girl delay luncheon until his return. And within

three minutes, he was seated in the pillion of Henley's trap, clutching the rail, while Francis snapped the reins beside him. They flew, raising great gouts of spray, along the byway to Bridlington, as though all the powers of Hell pursued them.

As they rode, Rev Stewart looked out across the hills, upon the broad and pleasant valley that had been his home these last fifteen years. It was a sight he knew as intimately as the whorls and creases of his palm. But today there was a strange variance in the prospect. A kind of mist had obscured the horizon, and even now, as he watched, it was descending, crawling with slow deliberation over the gentle hills. It was like no mist he had ever seen before. A wall of pearly, faintly opalescent vapour, swallowing the hills and meadows that had for so long been the limits of his Universe.

As he observed the swelling void he was visited by a formless, yet all-powerful certainty: on this day God would lay a test before him. Some choice would soon be his to make, and it would be a terrible one. But one that he must not shirk, though in the very core of his being he might abhor it.

They arrived at the house of Charles Henley, and Rev. Stewart wasted no time in dismounting the trap and entering through the front door. In the lobby he found his neighbour, loitering at the door to the study. Upon seeing the visitor he exclaimed: "Henry! O, thank Heaven! I'm half out of my mind, and simply don't know what to do."

"Well, Charles," said the clergyman, "your man informs me that you received a rather singular visitor this morning, and the thing has nigh on caused an uproar."

"He said... that is to say, he spoke of... no. No. I cannot bear to repeat it. You must speak with him yourself!"

"Come come, Charles. Calm yourself. What would your domestics think, to see their Master so discomposed?" He handed his hat and cloak to Francis, who was lingering nervously behind them. "Well. You'd better let me see the fellow."

Henley ushered the vicar into the drawing room.

There, upon the chaise-lounge, sat the strangest fellow the clergyman had ever laid eyes upon. He was rangy, long-limbed, with dark hair cut in a square, outlandish manner. His clothing was bizarre, all of one piece and made of some slick canvas-like material. On his feet were stout rubber boots. An odour hung about him, which could only be described as metallic, and somewhat burnt. The vicar was struck dumb at the sight of the visitor, and stood frozen in the doorway.

The stranger looked at him, with dark eyes that flashed. "Who are you then?"

The Reverend cleared his throat.

"I am the Reverend Stewart, pastor at St Jerome's. Rector of the parish of Bridlington and Shrosey. Mr Henley, in whose house you sit, is of my congregation. I am bound to tell you that your arrival has caused a deal of commotion. Is there some way we can be of service to you?"

"Service?" the stranger said, making a short noise that might have been a laugh. "That's a good one. That's priceless, that is. 'Service.' I come all the way here, the distance I've come, and they bring me a sodding priest!"

Rev. Stewart could follow the stranger's speech only with difficulty. His manner of speaking, low and rapid and circular, like a waltz played staccato, was quite alien to his ear. He glanced at Henley, who only stared helplessly back.

"Well..." The vicar cleared his throat again. "You present the appearance of some distress. As a man of God, I am here to offer such aid to you as I can."

"God?" The fellow made that short sound again. "God's got no place in this business."

Rev. Stewart bridled somewhat at that, but elected to pursue the exchange.

"Well, perhaps you can enlighten us, poor and confused as we are? Tell us your name, your business, and from where you are come."

The fellow gazed at him, with wild dark eyes. "My name's not important. My business you wouldn't begin to understand. And I come from the future."

At first the vicar could not be certain he had heard aright. He looked at Henley, who nodded with vigour, as if to confirm that he, too, had heard the same startling claim.

"Come, sir. Surely you do not take us for such fools. You would be better served to state your case truthfully."

The stranger turned those storm-tossed eyes on him again.

"You people need to listen. We don't have much time. I come from the future. I'm a scientist, and I was involved in a large-scale temporal experiment, the first of its kind. We encountered... a problem. We were sabotaged, if you get that. Anti-progress fanatics, they had somebody on the inside... never mind. The two men on my team are dead. And somehow I ended up here."

"My dear fellow! These wild fancies do not become a gentleman."

"It's true!" The stranger shot to his feet, startling both men. They shrank a little from those flashing eyes. "I landed here! Wherever this is! But it's wrong! Don't you get it? It's wrong! And it's gonna destroy everything!" He took a step toward them, and they quailed. "I shouldn't be here!"

For the first time, Rev. Stewart found himself thinking of the strange mist he had seen upon the road.

"My friend..." he stammered. "You must not speak of such things. It is madness."

"Go to the window," the visitor said. His voice was calmer now, but laden with the promise of dread. "Go to the window and tell me what you see."

Troubled by a vague apprehension, and watched closely by the others, Rev. Stewart went to the drawing room window and looked out.

"Well?" the stranger said. "What d'you see?"

The valley was half-swallowed by the marching mist. That wall of nothingness had slid across the hills and woodlands, until it encroached upon Bridlington itself. No more to be seen that pleasant and familiar horizon.

"Good lord..."

"Henry?" Charles Henley's voice was all a-tremble. "What is out there? What do you see?"

"Nothing," the vicar replied, and his voice seemed to come from a place far distant. "I see nothing."

But that was not precisely true.

The mist, now that he viewed it at a closer quarter, had a quality that was subtly translucent. And when one looked into it for a time, it seemed that shapes could faintly be distinguished. Forms that were unnaturally regular, tall and straight-sided, all angle and plane, like mathematic figures that loomed above the world. They were almost like structures, but in their rigid and monotonous dimensions they were not the forms of Nature. His eye was appalled by such visions, and he was seized by a terror such as he had never known.

"Reverend? Reverend! Henry!"

Startled from his awful trance, the vicar turned from the window. Charles Henley was staring at him, and his narrow face was deathly pale.

"Look... look at him!"

He was pointing toward the stranger.

That fellow had slumped back upon the chaise-lounge, and appeared to have suffered a fainting fit. His face was red, and his whole form twitched and shuddered like a landed fish. His hands clutched about his throat. Rev. Stewart, heedless now, crossed the room and seized the man by the shoulders.

"Who are you? What calamity have you brought upon us? In the name of God, speak!"

"Henry..." his neighbour groaned, from the window. But the vicar paid no heed. He had begun to think that this might be the final hour for all of them, and before he went thus unprepared before his God, he would at all costs know the reason.

The stranger's convulsions seemed to ease a little at his touch. He clutched the vicar's arm, and his hand was hot as fire.

"It's me! Don't you get it? It's me! I don't belong here. And now it's all dissolving."

"God would not permit such a thing. You must be in error."

"You saw it, right? It's all coming undone."

The vicar chewed his lip.

"If this be true.."

"It is!"

"How long, then?"

"Just a matter of time."

"Is there nothing that can be done?"

"One thing." The stranger put his arms around the vicar's shoulder's, and they huddled there, in a most unseemly embrace. "Kill me. Nothing else for it. You're going to have to kill me."

"For God's sake, man..."

"It might not even work. But it's your only chance."

There were many things Henry Stewart might have said in that moment, but he found, when visited by the recollection of the looming void, that he could not articulate them.

Faintly he heard Charles Henley's voice: "Henry? Henry! The world is gone! God save us!"

Rev. Stewart's face was close now, mere inches from the stranger's.

"What is your name?" he said. "Your name, pilgrim, if men have names from whence you come."

"Harris. My name's Harris."

"Harris. May God have mercy on your soul. And mine."

So this was the choice his God was pleased to lay before him. This the dread dilemma of which he'd had premonition. Too late for Bridlington – but was there not a world beyond, that might yet be delivered to Salvation? This was the question which tormented him, as those moments dwindled to their doom.

Bridlington lost; the remainder of Creation in the balance. And he must make the choice, however in his depths he might abhor it.

His hands, acting as though guided by a Will beyond his own, had closed around Harris's throat. Still the prayers and weeping of Charles Henley could be faintly heard. Henry Stewart was set on committing an Act which would place him forever out of sight of his God, and he could only wonder if the forfeiture of his soul would stand payment enough for the prevention of the nearing Armageddon.

In Loving – Slade
Bridin Mary Harnett

‘Where are you my love?’ He asks -

‘I’m busy my love,’ I say, ‘You see, I’m in love,’ I say -

‘Well then, why aren’t you with me?’ He asks -

‘Because I’m here in love to make sense of you, love is here with me, can’t you see?’ I say -

Love is in here, so don’t come in now and it’s a private audience between myself and my chest’s heart’s pillars to the sky, you see, I’m in love here even if you are there incidentally -

But you are causative of the love I feel in here,

And my love’s colours with me are white and red and rather pinkish,

And they billow in satiny silk and I look in fascination -

And there is something written here, however small and in a language I don’t fully understand ‘

‘How did you put that there?’ I ask.

‘God,’ he thinks, ‘Can I come in now?’

‘Well no, not yet,’ I say...

‘Well, when, then,’ He asks,

‘When you stop trying to dupe me and who told you to do that?’ I say...

There is only me and it – love, I mean, in love -

And then I need more love to be more in love so that it doesn’t fade in its upright standard -

But you took my legs and how they shake in the calves,

And once they nearly ran away without me,

And yesterday, you took my hands until they were no longer mine and I had no feeling in them

And you caught your shirt in desire and I remembered Prophet Joseph in peace

And then you sent someone whose shoulders held me in place,

And another of human feeling, and another of pallor sweet

And your voice filtered instructions through the sky,

And beauty's a jewel, his superficial cervical, twirled fingers
outstretched palms of height

Of a fireman's lift and in remembrance thereof –

A debonair indeed of natural incline to theory and games as a sideline

And your sword protected my right side, and it is not brass,

So, I got frightened, so I came here to be in love with you there

As your voice pitched through the air...

The strangest togetherness, he thinks, and without an accoutrement

Surveying the ground where he plays ball.

Am I spoiled in love between your proverbial hands?

So don't leave me now, not even for the period of the blinking of an eye.

I think.

And when in love I dance for you and the dance takes me up there

My natural flair I think suffices – harboured somewhat in reticence

And in a gifted kind of repartee to the untrained eye, there is certain
arrogance in knowing how to do something, to excel at a degree and
without much effort exerted – a master of knowledge

But he knows me,

And if I have the ability to stretch, then he requires that I stretch to the
extent of my limbs,

If my legs are long, then he wants their full extent until I feel their
length, until I feel the stretch

'Flair,' he might say,

'And what will you do with it?' He asks.

'Please me more,' says love,

'Struggle for me just a little,' love asks -

And I shall receive you ever so slowly because I see your fright.

He thinks however theoretically and is seen through a
wide-eyed frame of glasses.

Jealousy, jealousy

Saoirse Hanley

Sometimes I'm jealous of my sister. At 17 years of age, she has reached a point of self-actualisation and acceptance that I did not think could precede the development of a frontal lobe.

I was jealous of her before, three years ago, which is weird because she was 14 and I was an adult woman. We went to a wedding, and most of the guests - including her - got Covid. One of her main symptoms was nausea and she vomited after drinking a cup of tea, which instilled in her a deep fear of cups of tea and being sick. She found it difficult to eat during that week, since she was unwell, and she dropped pounds almost immediately. I was not jealous of her nauseousness, but I was jealous of the effect it had on her.

The women in my family carry weight easily, and lose it sporadically, and though it has always bothered me, I knew I wasn't the only one grappling with it. But suddenly, our trio of weight loss try-hards was reduced to two. My sister never gained back the weight she lost, likely because it was mostly puppy fat anyway.

You might think that she would gloat at her lack of gluttony, but her reaction envies me more since she's so gracious. Me and our mother have a difficult relationship with food and its impacts. We dieted together when I was a teenager, and I still brace myself for a well-meaning but ever-stinging comment when I visit home.

My sister is very different. She does not fixate on how her body looks, unless for the sole purpose of celebrating it. She eats intuitively, in a way I have spent a lifetime trying to master. She does not pass comment on other bodies, whether in approval, disapproval, or wishful thinking.

Though I am jealous of her, I am inspired by her too. When I catch myself falling into old habits, or critically analysing the figure in the mirror, I think about the chastising she'd give me. I look at her, and see so much of myself reflected back, to the point where it's hard not to think about my teenage self. If that girl had half the confidence my

sister does, she could have avoided wasting so much time - and eaten so many donuts.

But that's the double-edged sword of moulding the people that come after you, I suppose. I inherited many of our mom's habits, reshaped them and tried to shield her from them. No doubt my mum's habits come from before, too. We can only do as best we can.

And for those of you concerned, my sister has indeed regained her love for cups of tea after her short trauma-response hiatus from them.

Fat

Bernadette O'Reilly

During teenage years
I was fat
I was tiny
I had no friends
The boy next door asked
Many girls out
Except me
My sisters wedding arrived
She chose the bridemaids dresses
With her best friend
I went alone for a fitting
My thirties brought the gift
Of diabetes and a strict diet
I could now buy clothes
I retired my sewing machine
A door opened to the world of
Poetry
Cabaret shows
Theatres
Galleries
Museums
Concert halls
Friends.

Last Will

Greg Fields

There comes a time of reckoning, the scales in balance or imbalance, the collective equilibrium of sins and charity, gains and losses, the hearts we claim and the hearts we break. Unavoidable, even if we do not recognize it, as permeable as air, and light, and time itself.

Gina Moretti turned the page on her sixth decade and clung to the notion of being in the full ripeness of middle age. She remained vibrant, committed to all the right things, and very much alive. Still attractive enough to lure her share of attentions from the men she encountered, still energetic enough to hold a stable of good friends of both genders, still sharp enough to pursue the best books and go to the concerts she fancied, still strong enough to take an occasional run through Rock Creek Park or spend an afternoon at the gym working the elliptical. Not young, to be sure, but certainly not old, Gina faced the days with grace and acceptance. She had always done so.

But as the calendar moved past 60, she reasoned that, given the unlikelihood of living to be 120, she was no longer middle-aged. She had buried her reflective tendencies years before, during the confusing times when Donal Mannion befuddled her intentions with his quiet charm and gentle wit. He had been an intoxicant for her, a man unlike any she had ever known.

He had wafted into her life effortlessly, seemingly making no effort to impress her or win her over other than being himself. There was no artifice to Donal Mannion. He was who he was, and would always be, and apparently Donal trusted that, whatever that was, that would be enough. He was drawn to her, clearly. The times they spent together were light, pleasing and devoid of the tension that had wrought Gina's previous relationships. They went on, it seemed, as weightless as two butterflies skittering between the flowers.

In the end, though, it was that very nature that undid them. Donal was effortless in his pursuit of Gina, and he was effortless in all the other aspects of the way he spent his days. Donal did not chase, or plan, or strategize. He drifted through life, content and discontent alternately

tumbling within him, but neither causing the burn of a deep fire or the crafting of a straight line. Gina could only do so much, and it would never be enough. He would drift beside her as long as he could, even in death, a remora clinging to a shark.

It ended, more with a whimper than a bang. Eight years ago it was, and she had heard nothing of him since. Until a friend sent a death notice from a funeral home in the northeast section of the city. "Thought you'd like to know."

Now, a birthday ending in a zero just concluded, Gina took time once more to weigh the balances of what had been. "Regrets, always," she told herself, "and they weigh us down like magnets dragged through the sand. Small enough so that we barely feel them at first, but they accumulate, bit by bit. In the end, it's the regrets that constitute our last will and testament."

She drank her wine and listened to the last movement of Mussorgsky's Pictures At An Exhibition. "The Great Gate of Kiev" it was called, and she let the stirring and bold rise of the trumpets fill her blood. The piece lifted and exalted, celebrated the strength of the human character and finished with a crescendo of brass and tympani. The wine moved within her through the music.

"I was always honest," she thought, "and never false. I never cheated myself. I never cheated anyone around me. It was all I could do. And I live now with the bright freight of memories, clear to me, and me alone."

She drank more of the wine, then closed her eyes. "When I am an old woman....." she whispered aloud, with no one to hear her.

And when the piece ended, when Mussorgsky's final tympanum had sounded and the brass and cymbals reverberated to echoes, her room filled with the quietude of time itself.

Where Ther's A Will

Ciaran O'Melia

Where there is a will, there is a way of keeping the kinfolk and neighbours on tenterhooks.

"Uncle Justin passed away last week. Christ, he was a sight; they had to make a special coffin for him. Oh, they tried the Vaseline trick on him, but that didn't work; he was halfway in and out of the coffin. It was a whore to get him out of the coffin. Still, old Mr Stafford put an extension on the sides, but wait till I tell you what happened at the graveyard, but first."

"What did you say?" She was slightly hard of hearing.

"When is the reading of the will?"

"The reading is supposed to be tomorrow at Buckley's office. No, it's not there, as there is such interest." She paused, wondering if she would ask, but decided to ask anyway.

"Are you going?"

"Ah, Uncle Justin. He was kind enough to give half a crown to my Peter when he made his first holy communion."

"Christ, they'll have to open the community hall."

"Not I my account," she said indigently.

"No, I'm not saying that, but the whole village is coming." She wanted to change the conversation and wondered how.

"You were going to tell me what happened at the graveyard."

"Oh yes," she said with relief. "We walked to the graveyard. The crowd was amazing. The gravediggers have done a wonderful job. However, the priest was impatient and had to wait for the crowd in the graveyard. The gravediggers had straps in place and boards across the grave on which they rested the coffin. As they lifted the coffin, the boards were removed. But then the coffin would not go down. The gravediggers giggled and tried their best, to no avail. Then the modifications fell asunder, and Uncle Justin fell out and ended up in the bottom of the

grave. He was wedged in. The priest was agitated as he was to say the 4 o'clock Mass."

"How did it end?"

"There were a lot of people there, and each had suggestions. I'll tell you it's terrible. There was mayhem in the graveyard. The Vaseline did the trick. Not before he was disrobed, if you get me meaning, they tied a rope around both hands and feet, and the men lifted him out; Jesus, he had a big behind on him. Then, the gravediggers got to enlarge the grave. They put him in the grave. It was dark before we got home." She wonders how the listener would take what she will say next.

"There is going to be no reading of the will tomorrow; it is cancelled. Due to the graveyard scene and the antics that went on there, there is talk of claims going on.

Sleep

Gerard Byrne

Sleep, an overrated concept that many have mastered. Sleeping for eight, nine, even ten hours at a time. And that's not counting the many feckin naps and snoozes they have throughout the day. I've come to a point in my life that I've grown to accept four hours as the norm and that five is a luxury that is only bestowed on me at random times. It worries me that I accept this as the norm. That I plan my day around my shitty sleeping patterns. Eyes open at four, time for a piss and maybe an hour of candy crush on the phone. They boast its relaxing. Not relaxing enough to help me off to the land of nod again. Then it's time to get up and do whatever chores need to be done that won't waken anyone in the house. It's difficult to see for hours upon end waiting to mow the lawn because you haven't the head for irate neighbours who take offence to being woken up by a rattling electric mower and my curses as I spill the cut grass all over the driveway. Don't want that topic coming up in the residents WhatsApp group.

Sleep is for dreamers. Not the nightmares that haunt mine. Not like Freddy Kruger shite, more like basic problems that play up to my general neuroses. Dealing with awkward people or social situations. Nothing that would bother most people, but it drives my tired brain mental. My only escape is the PlayStation or sometimes just the telly. All depends on how tired or motivated I feel. Normally not very motivated if I'm brutally honest.

The wife normal wakes up sometime after ten, still moaning about being tired and wondering why I'm sitting down relaxing doing nothing. Unaware of my busy morning already. Looking at the day from a totally different perspective to mine. It can be awkward at times, especially when I just want a bit of peace. Peace that will never hug me deeply and rock me off to a ten hour long relaxing sleep. I'd happily take six hours at this very moment.

From the Beach

Bridin Mary Harnett

'It's your turn. No, it's your turn,' they had said.

It is a matter of drawing straws with exception in that the art of such probability is not permitted.

'No, the oldest men, single men, those without families, you go...' They decided.

'How are you with oars? Can you fish? No fish finders here mind. You sort of have to have an intuitive sense, a gut instinct for fish finding. There's no fishing tackle, just make-shift nets. The drones are on the left, so row quietly without a fuss. Any consternation or panic in anxious excitement will register in the air and you could suffer a tunnelling indeed.

Like they did with the food queue when you started to argue and panic over food. The rising emotion frightened them and they thought you were up to something, so they drilled you and killed you and all you were doing was waiting for food.

Be as orderly as you can, even in the water. No shouting, no screaming, no death threats, insult or injury.'

Do what you need to do and let God, the Almighty do his work. You are targeted, whatever you do, whatever you say, albeit of noble descent.

Fish until death might be the motto as water rises to cascade against the bullets which rock your boats to destabilization, your boats of simple wooden structures floating out of the efforts of the hard hands of the fashioner – the hands of the adept craftsman.

Upon a catch and then bloodied into the sea, perhaps fish in hand to say, 'I caught one until I died but without drowning.'

An act of martyrdom to sustain life in a living hand until life was shot of his heart and his soul rose beyond the water. Moments before that he had trailed his fingers in the water; the third and fourth fingers in the calm breadth of flow, tracing beyond the makeshift outboard motor in manual operation.

'Nothing wrong, the sun shines and the air is clear,' he had thought.

A single coarse wooden frame bobs to float, buoyant in remnant of a stoic resemblance of life.

No, martyrdom does not reside in the one who runs to death, who desires to leave life without fighting to sustain it. Martyrdom is earned in those who made every effort to sustain life and who are killed in life's movement albeit gun in hand in self defence against an onslaught of another who wishes you dead.

'Do you prefer death over life? 'God might say...

I imagine it like the opening scene of Saving Private Ryan.

I nearly got sick.

Blood fuses in the water, diffusing chromatographic patterns of male responsibility – societal claims. Hands of a splat of palms, empty handed had reached.

Yet another dichotomy of eaten thumbs, forfeited in curdling stomachs in upheaval at cannibalistic threats of a trophy hand, made to suck on his fingers until he was pummelled to death, and she sodomized by a beast of nature in orifices which should only tolerate humankind – acts in synchronization.

And I say that there is no reprieve for that at all.

A stiff call via call connect from there – her order in apparence.

Yes, of people who do not pontificate anything at all. No, not a label. Yes, you see, their identity marks are God given. It doesn't matter what you do to them. Their marks won't go away. They are heaven-bound indeed, however hard you try to deflect them from themselves and they know who they are.

'Blessings from heaven,' they had shouted from the beach as they prepared to welcome the windfall from the sky.

And then it happened.

Overtuned life capsizes floating death in a moment of an insane blitz. Life drops from the sky and is then assailed, shot in the lungs, of flailed

bodies in rigor mortis wafting death to the shore – doornail dead, as it were.

‘Are you following up on the IP addresses?’ I ask.

‘Yes, we are, ‘they say.

‘Did you report the shift to Flap? Wired feet, spine infiltration, broken feet, ankles, knuckles, that sort of thing...’

‘Yes we are working on it.’

‘Good. Hurry up!’ I said.

Tyrone midsummer drive

Anna Horgan

Roundy, grassy drumlins. Plumped up, green, pillowed hills
Piled high along the road
We drive in cool, green tunnels
Through fat hedges and lush, leaf- laden trees.
Big cows in summer meadows
May turn their heads,
or not, to watch our passing car.
Pungent, green- apple smell of new-mown grass.
Then, jolting,
The stench of slurry.
Reality check,
in case we lose the run of ourselves
And drowse and dream
That life is perfect.

You're not fat

Laura Alves

You're not fat. You're just easy to see from the distance and that's not because your shape will stand out from all other people around you, making them invisible to the naked eye.

It's your charisma that has that effect. Every time you go out it seems like you know everybody around you and they are always so happy to see you they have to stop and ask how you're doing, what you have been doing these days, like you haven't seen each other for ages and these are locals that may see you every day and still they want to know more and others are passing by and want to talk to you too so they stand and wait, sometimes forming a queue in the middle of the street to talk to you.

That's what makes you easy to see: your brightness glowing in the air, attracting only good vibes from all directions.

Great-Uncle Albert's will

Deirdre Powell.

It had been a cold September day when it happened – that is, the passing of Great-Uncle Albert. The man had been a bit eccentric and had never married. He lived on his own and did not have too much to do with his relatives, except at Christmas and, if they were lucky, at Easter. There was a rumour going around the family that he sometimes enjoyed spending some of his time as a hobo but no-one was too sure if this were true or not.

So, it was a great surprise for his family to learn that they were all to be summoned to the reading of his will by his solicitor. No-one thought that he had the gumption to make a last will and testament and people were surprised to find that he might have had some money to leave them, as his family only saw him on rare occasions.

The family gathered at the offices of Messrs. Longton and Leveredge, Solicitors, and Mr. Longton ensured that everyone was comfortably seated. Mr. Longton opened a sealed envelope containing the will and began reading it aloud to the family.

It began: - I, Albert Nicholas Chrysologus Smith, being of sound mind and body, wish it to be known that it was my intention to spend all of my money. However, in the event that a residue remains, I wish it to be distributed as follows: -

To my sister, Delia, I bequeath my watch and the sum of €3,000 with sincere thanks for the good times we enjoyed when we were young.

To my brother John, I bequeath my tool kit, with particular reference to the gold-plated spade that is part of that collection.

To my younger brother Edward, I bequeath the sum of €1,000 euro with sincere thanks and happy memories of the good times we shared together when we were young.

To my niece Kate, I bequeath my entire collection of Shakespeare books.

To my nephew Tom, I bequeath my golden sword.

And to my brother-in-law Hal, who always said that I would never remember him in my will, "Hello Hal."

Mr. Longton looked around with a dry smile at the last bequest and said, "that completes the reading of the will."

The family retired to a respectable coffee lounge in a hotel across the road and began discussing the events of the day. Initially the conversation focused on the contents of the will. Then Delia said, "Albert always meant well, even though he was a bit eccentric. I remember that when we were young, someone once called me fat, but Albert intervened and said it's just that I was easy to see!" And with some tears in her eyes, as she recalled that day, she took out her handkerchief, dabbed her eyes and said "God bless you, Albert."

Last will n testament

Michael O'Brien

What will you leave behind, what is the sum total of materials that you will leave behind that will benefit your loved ones. That's one part of it

But what about the other stuff, that you can't see, the stuff that's not tax deductible. The things that you planted so deep no one on earth will ever see. The seeds that you maybe didn't know you planted . Kind heartedness or selfishness, Patience, calmness, love, what have you left behind in you're children for them to journey through life with.

They say children of a certain young age are like sponges, they listen more to what you do than what you say, more to how you behaved at certain times rather than any sage like advice you may give. How we behaved ,that will be the last will and testament of all of us.

The Fable of the Fallen Flowers

Heloisa Prieto & Victor Scatolin

Volleyball?

Swimming?

Walking?

Soccer?

Tracking?

Mary Anne and Mary Claire, the twins, were in all sorts of sports. They abhorred not having anything to do. “Never a dull moment” was their motto. Their schedule was always filled with sports, hobbies and, of course, parties. High School in the morning, the beach late afternoon, the mall on rainy days. Always surrounded by friends, chattering, laughing, having fun.

Until the day of their fall.

Girls had been really excited during volleyball practice. Now everyone was talking about the olympic games. The twins were practicing really hard as if they, somehow, would take part in the international competitions. Esther, their mother, noticed how driven her daughters seemed to be.

“My girls will be the champions of Santos shore. Both of you have been so focused, it looks like you are really into the Olympic games mindset”.

But life has its way of leaking out of schedules and plans. This was the girls’ great revelation on that specific summer.

The accidents took place during the week-end, at the end of a volleyball match. A toddler kicked his colorful ball into the field, on the sand. Mary Ann saw the ball, but did not lose her balance. The child started to cry. The ball rolled away, near the sidewalk.

The girls left the match and ran after the baby’s ball. A little dog was walking down the street. Mary Ann inched to avert running over the dog, but when she twisted her body, she stumbled and fell over her leg.

Mary Claire was just behind her sister, and fell over her body on the sidewalk. She stretched out her arms, trying to shield her face, but as she did so, she also stumbled, tripped and fell breaking both her wrists.

To make a long story short: broken bones, piercing pain, two bed ridden twins.

Girls were used to stumbling, rolling over, falling down, getting back on their feet again, but not this time.

Next morning, the sisters had to face their worst nightmare: staying in bed. Mary Ann had her broken leg on a cast as Mary Claire had her broken arms on casts as well. Moving around the house was hard. Everything felt painfully uncomfortable: no more slouching over the couch, no more jumping around, no more dancing, no more joking and laughing. All they could do was to stay in bed, motionless, patiently waiting for their bones to heal.

Waiting?

How so?

Motionless?

How's that?

What a nightmare...

And this is how a whole new routine imposed itself upon the girls. And, as it frequently happens in life, changes that seem to be so small, boring and stupid at first, actually make space for new, unexpected and meaningful events.