

Obituary 08: Boundaby Died

Pastor Jane (*New Zealand-ish accent, much like Pastor Jeff's*): Oh! Right then. Hello, my dears, welcome to the Church of Right Here Right Now. Oh! And this... THIS. Is *Death... by Dyin'*!

[*organ music introduction*]

Leroy: Um... Pastor?

[*organ music cuts out*]

PJ: Yes?

Leroy: Leroy Jones! Landlord and bridge enthusiast. The card game, not the structure. Although my brother Eustace used to play trains when we were younger and now he's a construction worker in—

PJ: Yes, that's all well and good, but did you have a query, my dear?

Leroy: Oh! Heh, yeah... um... *you're not Pastor Jeff. (suddenly suspicious, eyes narrowed)* Or are you...? Hm? Where's the old pastor?

PJ: Oh, an excellent observation, Leroy. He's in the Bahamas doing the Lord's work converting heathens on vacation. God always finds you when you least expect it, like when you're sipping Piña Coladas and yelling at your ten-year-old son to wear more sunscreen. Now then...

[*organ music resumes*]

Leroy: Pastor?

[*organ music cuts out again*]

PJ: (*sighs*) Yes, Leroy?

Leroy: Um... converting who? Where?

PJ: He got a call... from *God*.

[non-diegetic choir of angels sing on high for a moment]

PJ: And you must never send God to voicemail.

Leroy: Sure, but... what if your voicemail is full?

PJ: Right, does anyone else have any questions—

Leroy: My voicemail is *always* full. It's because I call myself. And sometimes, when I'm really lonely, I write fanfiction about all of you and—

PJ: Thank you for your concerns, Leroy. The point is, I'm here now, and I want to make the most of our time together.

[organ music resumes]

Leroy: Wait!

[organ music cuts out]

PJ *(losing all semblance of patience)*: WHAT LEROY.

Leroy *(flinching at PJ's powerful irritability)*: AH! ...I don't think we caught your name?

PJ *(calming down)*: Oh... my apologies... reasonable request... I'm Pastor Jane. I'm Pastor Jeff's sister.

[bittersweet ukulele music. rumbling thunder.]

Obituary Writer (Voiceover): It was a stormy morning when Pastor Jeff left Crestfall. He packed his things in a picnic blanket...

[door closing]

OW VO: ...and made south on foot.

[scurrying footsteps on dirt receding into the distance]

OW VO: He said he needed to spend some time where the sun was hot and the waves were choice. And where he could do some important missionary work.

[ukelele music ends. seagulls and waves slowly fade in.]

OW VO: He sent me a postcard recently. He's in a Hawaiian t-shirt and yellow-tinted sunglasses. He appears to be on a beach, drinking from a coconut. It reads *(clears throat)*:

[new ukulele music begins, this time more upbeat. chillin' on the beach vibes.]

(OW's best impression of Pastor Jeff. it's... fine. it gets the job done.) "Spreading the Good Word is proving to be quite the challenge, but some of the best things in life are a challenge. Like climbing Mount Everest. Or trying to get the barista to get your name right. Anyway, you're in good hands with my sister. She moisturizes daily. I must be off – I have a hot-stone massage at noon, and I have a good feeling that the masseuse is on the brink of a religious breakdown. Sincerely...

[music and waves cut abruptly to silence]

(OW returns to normal voice) ...Pastor Jeff."

Ever since Pastor Jane's arrival, the Church has been sieged by a new energy. Skepticism. Will she be able to fill Pastor Jeff's sizable, arch-supporting shoes? Time will tell whether this is for the better or if we are all slowly spiraling into oblivion. It's not looking so great.

PJ: You may notice some changes around here, folks, but do not fear – change is what makes the cuckoo clock of the universe go COO-COO! and *(clicks tongue twice to mimic a clock)*. I'm an innovative gal, you know? I've loads of ideas and I'll just throw 'em out there and see if it sticks like jelly or falls away like apple juice. They're controversial, but... what if we changed the communion bread to communion pizza?

[PJ's reverbing voice is met with silence... the crowd's not vibing with her so far...]

Random Churchgoer: *(coughs awkwardly)*

PJ: Hm? Pizza goes good with wine. I've always felt like the body of Christ could be tastier. Mm, maybe that isn't a good idea. Some people are lactose intolerant. Yes... we wouldn't wanna be fartin' around in the eyes and the nose of the Lord now would we? What if we colored the ceiling? The Great Flood mural could use a splash of color. And maybe we should add the ark so

that it isn't just a bunch of drowning animals? Speaking of drowning, what about this: after the incident with the 45-year-old narcoleptic last week, maybe we should consider swapping the baptismal water for like – a ball pit or something? That could be fun! And less... drown-y? And lastly, for now, I'll just lob this one your way... here it comes: we need to get more kids in the pews. How do we make the Holy Spirit more... *HOT*, more trendy? So... here's a thought... we have a church bell, and we really love it, I *really* love it, the church bell going all *DING DONG!* You know the kind.

Leroy: Ooh, I LOVE the church bell!

PJ (*a little peeved*): YES, DON'T WE ALL, LEROY! (*composes herself*) But what if we got a loud speaker, and you know the sound your phone makes when you get a message? And it goes *DOO-DUH-DOO-DOO DOO-DUH-DOO-DOO DOO-DUH-DOO-DOO-DOOOOO!* We play *that* from the speaker and all the kids will be like *Wow! Gotta keep up my streak with God!* Get the little fire emoji like Moses's bush. Anyway, thank you for your time. I think we now have a special announcement from the new usher here at the Church. Please give a nice warm welcome to Boundaby Dunfort (*PJ pronounces the last name with the "T"*).

[*congregation applauds. footsteps as Boundaby steps up in front of everyone.*]

Boundaby: Hey folks! The "T" is silent. On behalf of the insanely large Dunfort family, my mothers and my fathers, my sisters and my brothers... my aunts and uncles and grandfathers and grandmothers... well there's some cousins over there, and I think I see a second cousin over there, and three times removed maybe – Oh! And my third cousin two times removed... I just wanted to let you all know that Friday nights are scrabble nights! But plot twist – the scrabble tiles are in *Latin*! So you know what they say... (*butchers pronouncing "c'est la vie"*) "sest la vee-ay!"

[*an OMINOUS GROAN. metal shifting, the bell frame caving in on itself... then... CREEEAAAKKK, ROOOOONNNKKKK, the bell almost winding up...*]

Boundaby: Uh oh! AHHHHHHH!

[*CRASH! CLANG! SPLAT! GOONNNNNNGGGGGG, splash of blood and guts, congregation gasping.*]

Random Townsfolk: I... I think he's dead!

[*TOWNSFOLK SCREAM! freaking the heck out. plucky mystery music begins, grand, sweeping cello...*]

OW VO: The enormous copper bell of the Church of Right Here Right Now came *crashing* through the ceiling, landing directly on top of Boundaby. Upon impact, he erupted like a popped water balloon filled with blood and little chunky bits. Most of the congregation was safe from the projectile organs, but the front row splash zone of the pews were not so lucky.

[*splash!*]

Townsfolk: EWWWW!

Unlucky Splash-Zoner: My trousers!

OW VO: I was so taken with the spectacle before me, awe-struck by the sensational gory drama, I hardly noticed something far stranger than collapsing bells or exploding Boundabys. There were... *flowers*, everywhere – silk-white flowers cascading over the congregation like confetti. The petals turned crimson red as they settled over the pools of blood streaming down the pulpit.

[*music crescendoes, stops.*]

OW VO: Indeed, he was Boundaby Dunfort. And this... is his obituary.

[*upbeat orchestral music, almost reminiscent of a Jane Austen novel. typewriter clacking...*]

OW VO: Boundaby Dunfort, 26, was the most enthusiastic usher the Church of Right Here Right Now has ever seen, and I'm sure he enjoyed all forty-three minutes and twelve seconds of it. He had a passion for greeting churchgoers like it was an Olympic sport. Not like water polo. Something with a little more self-respect. Like archery. Or not being in the Olympics. Truthfully, his intensely peppy personality was rather refreshing.

In his words, "Wherever you go, you must Bring Your Own Smile," although this may have more to do with the fact that he had to wear dentures ever since his tragic water polo accident. But no matter what happened in life, his optimism was unwavering, an attribute that most people felt was misplaced given the nature of this chaotic and unfortunate world, but we can hope to try our best.

[*music ends*]

The Butcher was trying his best to determine how such a mess could have come about.

Butcher: Hm... well his liver's over here. And his spleen's over there. How'd he die?

OW: Suddenly.

Butcher: *OOF.*

[Russian-polka-esque accordion music]

OW VO: The Butcher made quick work of blocking the crime scene off with masking tape—

[masking tape being ripped]

—and escorted the gawking crowd off the premises.

Butcher: EVERYBODY OUTTA HERE!

Townsfolk (*whining, bummed*): Awe, man!

Butcher: NOW. I'm the Butcher, I'm in charge! Whatdya doin'?! Get that outta your mouth, that's disgusting! Come on!

OW VO: Crestfall Law Enforcement was notified that there had been an incident. He muttered that he would keep it in mind, and returned home to read the newest dollar-store romance novel by Janet Merriweather: "The Aroma of Lovers Past."

[music ends]

Butcher: I'm gonna need Boundaby all in one place to examine him. Hey Chesta, hand me that bucket.

Chester: Nyahhh.

[bucket passed from hoof to hand]

Butcher: OW-ya? Are you doin' okay?

OW (*sounding dazed for a second*): Oh, yeah. How do you mean?

Butcher: Well it's just... you don't look so good.

OW (*forced chipper*): I feel fine. Great, even.

Butcher: Sure, sure, but... I read Mei's obituary in the Post last week and... y'know no one would blame you if you took some time off.

OW: Death doesn't stop, so neither do I.

Butcher: I mean yeah but you could go lay down or somethin'. (*lowers voice*) Like, buddy, you're keepin' a dead body in my freezer. I wanna help ya out, but this doesn't exactly scream "I'm fine."

OW: You're just going to have to trust me. Besides, I need something to do.

Butcher: A Rubix cube would be something to do. I don't know how this could be good for anyone. Accidents like these ain't good for the soul.

Mia: You know, I don't think this was an accident.

[*cue Mia Jasper's theme music: sneaky, investigative, quirky, a nice funky bass.*]

OW VO: On the other side of the crime scene masking tape was Mia Jasper, scanning the pulpit with razor-sharp eyes.

Butcher: Hey, whatdya doin'? This is an active crime scene!

Mia: Exactly. I'm here to help.

Butcher: Eh, we don't need any help. I got myself a goat and an Obituary Writer, what else could I possibly need?

Mia: I literally studied criminal law.

OW VO: Mia sighed...

Mia: (*groaning sigh*)

OW VO: ...as though the entire human race was tiresome. She ducked under the masking tape.

Butcher: Whoa whoa whoa, where do you think you're going?

Mia: I'm as much a lawyer as you are a coroner.

Butcher: Ah... touché, heh-heh... um, right this way Miss Jasper...

[Mia's combat boot footsteps echoing by]

Mia (to the group): So. What's the deal?

Butcher: Weak structure, I reckon. Bell was too heavy and finally fell through the roof. End of story.

OW: It's entirely possible. This church is over a hundred years old. A sneeze could've knocked it down.

Mia: The bell frame. That isn't random decay. Something put serious strain on that thing. And what's with all these flowers everywhere? This feels *intentional* to me.

OW: You're saying... this could be murder?

Chester: Nyaaahhh.

[mystery music... where would we be without mystery music... haunting piano, violins packed with intrigue... oh yes, that's the stuff.]

OW VO: *Mia might just be onto something*, I thought. It wasn't every day that thousands of flower petals rained from the sky at the exact moment that a church bell pancaked a beloved townsfolk. Was it an anomaly? Or could it be... a calling card?

[AoD's thunder strike!]

OW: Oh, that's my cue. Excuse me.

[OW's footsteps start walking away]

Mia: Where are you going?

[OW's footsteps stop]

OW: I... I need to buy new shoes. There's a bit of... pancreas on these.

[OW strides away]

OW VO: Mia and the Butcher scooped up Boundaby. Pastor Jane anxiously worked away at a pineapple-shaped stress ball.

PJ *(to herself. every squeeze of the stress ball sounds like a dog's squeaky chew toy.):* I just *(squeeze)* wanted everything *(squeeze)* to go *(squeeze)* okay *(squeeze)* on my first *(squeeze)* dayyyyyy. *(crying out in despair. poor PJ.)*

OW VO: I slipped quietly out the back door...

[door creak]

...and into the Crestfall Graveyard.

[daytime crestfall graveyard ambience. a slight breeze, birds chirping. OW's footsteps on the dirt.]

Returning to the scene of my crime evoked a pang of guilt. Half the graveyard was a massive crater. The cadaver of Rowan McBean, a former locksmith, was draped over a tree branch like a slice of discarded bologna... or tinsel. The elbow of eighteenth-century Crestfall royalty, Their Nobleness Dante Smith, dangled from a cracked tombstone. Angelic statuary lay broken and scattered like fallen soldiers.

[broom being swept over dirt]

Walter Grimsly, the graveyard groundskeeper, swept a big toe back into the earth. He noticed me and pointed to the crater.

Walter: Big crater, ain't it! Yeah? Oh, what happened? DEER! ...*always the damn deer.*

OW VO: Where the cemetery remained intact... was the Angel of Death.

[ominous stinger!]

Angel of Death: Hey OW. I just carried Boundaby's soul over to the Other Side.

OW: Did he say anything?

AoD (*considering this*): He said... "oww."

OW: You never ask any questions? Final wishes? If they were potentially murdered?

AoD: I'm a force of nature. I don't conduct exit interviews.

OW VO: The Button-Eyed Raven ruffled his feathers like the weight of the world rested heavily on his wings.

[Button-Eyed Raven's feathers ruffling]

Button-Eyed Raven: HA, HA! All your friends are dead! (*chuckles rudely*)

OW: Do you have any updates... on... you know...

AoD: I'm afraid her soul is still missing. I've checked the phantom bicycles at the center of town. The Dark Woods at the edge of town. The deep-fried donut stand at the outside of the edge of the center of town...

OW: Why there?

AoD: I like to be where people are killing themselves the most.

[OW is silent]

AoD: Obituary Writer?

OW: Yes?

AoD: Have... you considered—

OW: She's out there. I-I know she is... I can feel her.

AoD: *(sighs)*

OW VO: The Angel of Death sighed, which caused a hurricane in Cheboygan, Michigan.

[hurricane-force winds]

She then evaporated into a puff of mist—

[puff of mist, WHOOSSSHHH...]

—without another word. The Button-Eyed Raven, on the other hand, *had* to get a word in.

Raven: CA-CAWWWW! You'll never pay off your student loans!

[HORRIFIC STINGER! THE SCARIEST THING OF ALL! stinger fades... then the Button-Eyed Raven gets yet ANOTHER word in. or sound, rather.]

Raven: ...ha.

OW VO: And now, the condolences. Pastor Jane offers her condolences. She says:

[peppy, samba-esque commercial music]

PJ *(nervous)*: Hi there. Sorry about the whole thing where you got smashed to smithereens. That was my bad. I mean, *I* didn't kill you, I would never. I couldn't even kill the spider I found in my broom cupboard, lookin' up at me with his great many beady little eyeballs. But that's okay, he pays rent now. But back in my standup days, God always found a way to let me know if I was bombing onstage. He usually just turned the spotlight off or threw tomatoes at me or said "BOOO." But I hear this one loud and clear, God. I will work harder on my sermons.

OW VO: Condolences also brought to you by Sharron's Shoe Emporium. They say:

Sharron *(angrily)*: Look. We have shoes. We have always had shoes. We had shoes yesterday. We have shoes today. And we will have shoes tomorrow. There will never be a point in which we do not have shoes. So come on down to SHARRON'S SHOE EMPORIUM. We got shoes!

OW VO (*somber, sincere*): Thank you, Sharron's Shoe Emporium. I don't believe more poignant words have ever been spoken about Boundaby's life.

[*music ends. mysterious piano music begins.*]

OW VO: As I made my way back to the town square, I immediately spotted it: the Bush'n'Hobby, Crestfall's last stop for recreation... and first stop for vegetation. You are just as likely to find scrapbooks and stamps at the Bush'n'Hobby as you are to find, well, bushes. And the owner? None other than Susan Collick, the local florist. A crime scene decorated with flowers? A woman who *specializes* in flowers? The clue was subtle, but I must follow my natural investigative instincts.

[*music fades. door jingle.*]

OW: Excuse me, Susan, I have a matter of grave impor– (*GASP*)

Mia: Ya snooze ya lose, deadbrain.

[*quirky, flippant pizzicato music*]

OW VO: Mia Jasper rounded the corner with a mocking spring in her step.

Mia: Flowers everywhere? The local florist. Easy peasy.

OW: What? But I...

Mia: Maybe you should stick to writing. (*uncharacteristically chipper*) Peace!

[*combat boots strutting away mockingly*]

OW VO: With a flip of her hair and some devastating sass, Mia left the Bush'n'Hobby, no doubt off to the next clue, or worse, off to solve the case before THE humble Obituary Writer, who is obviously the only one who can save this town from the whims of mysterious deaths. I stood there... *utterly humiliated*... Susan, on the other hand, gave me a well-meaning smile and pretended not to witness the demolition of my pride.

[*music ends. wind chime ambience fades in.*]

Susan: Hey, OW!

OW VO: Susan Collick said. Her afro was adorned with sprigs of holly, tiny red berries poking out from her curls.

Susan: What can I help you with? Some funeral flowers? Of course picking the right flowers for a funeral should *ne-ver* be taken lightly. I recommend blood-red roses for passionate lovers, tulips for relatives you liked, succulents for relatives you didn't like, chrysanthemums for third cousins four times removed, Venus Flytraps for neighbors who talked too much, lilies for those whose loss makes your heart ache, carnations if you were invited to the funeral on accident, belladonna for sworn enemies just to make sure they're really dead—

OW: Uh, th-thank you, but I'm actually here about Boundaby Dunfort.

Susan: *(sighing)* Look, I'll tell you what I just told Mia: I don't know about any dead people! *But* if this is about those flowers from the church? They're daisy petals. *Bellis perennis*, of the Asteraceae family. Often given for joy and new beginnings. The last person to buy daisies from here Cleared. Me. Out! *(chuckles, then turns annoyed)* Like LITERALLY my ENTIRE stock so now they're on back order and...

OW: Susan... who was it?

Susan: Some guy named Leroy Jones.

*[dramatic impact! orchestral music oozing with dread and a sense of *the plot thickens*]*

OW VO: Oh no. Leroy Jones, the perpetually pleasant landlord. Leroy Jones, the man who plays the bugle at two in the morning.

[poorly-played, out-of-tune bugle that matches the melody of the background music]

Leroy Jones, the most ferociously friendly person on the planet. And perhaps, the most deadly... bridge player.

[music fades out. wind chime ambience fades back in.]

OW: Thank you, Susan. *(leaving, then backtracking)* Uh, actually, I think I'll take some lilies to go, if you don't mind. They look lovely.

Susan *(pleased)*: Comin' right up!

OW VO: I checked my 1933 Patek Philippe Henry Graves Supercomplication pocket watch. Nice. I knew exactly where I'd find my overcaffeinated landlord... *Damn, I. Am. Good.*

[wind chime ambience fades out. diner crowd chatter fades in.]

The line at Siren's Diner was out the door. Years ago, Pastor Jeff's favorite diner booth became the official confession booth in town when folks realized they could grab a bite to eat while they unloaded their sins. Pastor Jane has now inherited the honorable duty of listening to trivial transgressions while never being able to finish her scrambled eggs. She was struggling to keep up with the confessors... and her eggs.

Chandler: Pastor? I keep gambling all of my money away on bridge tournaments!

Geraldine: My lips are chapped! I'm envious of people with smooth skin!

Butcher: Sometimes I think about going vegetarian! And I'm a Butcher for goat's sake!

Johnathan Jackson: I cheated on my wife and then I burnt my house down to ease my CRIPPING GUILT!

PJ: Alright alright, I got this. Gamble the money back, apply lip balm, it's okay to eat a Brussel sprout every now and then, and I know a great arsonist you could frame.

OW VO: Meanwhile, sitting alone in the farthest corner of the diner, was Leroy Jones, drinking black coffee with 19 packets of sugar.

Leroy: Oh! Hey there, Obituary Writer! I was just about to do my hourly crossword. Care to join? Ya know, if you thought one-person crosswords were wild, just wait until you try a twofer!

OW: I was hoping to ask you about a different puzzle, Leroy. What do you know about—

[combat boots strutting into the foreground]

Mia *(using her best perky southern waitress impression, feels totally out of character):* Howdy folks! What can I get you started with?

OW: I think we need a moment— Mia?!

[*sly brass music*]

OW VO: Indeed it was. She wore a checkered apron and a smug look on her face.

Mia: Our special today is the tuna melt with Crestfall's signature unpickled pickles. But I would recommend the Butchery down the street if you're looking for a little more... *game*.

OW VO: She glared at me.

Mia: Turns out anyone will believe you're a server if you come in with your own pens and a positive attitude.

Leroy (*completely serious*): Huh, what a normal thing for a server to say!

[*Mia sliding into the booth*]

OW VO: Mia slid into the booth, pushing me aside.

Mia: Oh gosh, did you fellas hear about that horrible murder this mornin'?

Leroy: Murder? Oh boy... no one said anything about a *murder*.

Mia: Oh yeah, it's like the talk of the town. Last time there was this much gossip that deep-fried donut stand turned out to be run by the mob!

Leroy: No! I bought a jelly-glazed chocolate donut from there!

Mia: You don't say? Well, hey, if you ever need legal help, I also happen to be a lawyer.

OW: Blah, blah, blah. I wouldn't listen to her, Leroy. She isn't really a lawyer. She isn't even a server for that matter.

Mia (*breaking character*): And you aren't really a detective.

OW: (*wounded noise*)

[*music cuts. clinking silverware and a sliding coffee cup and then the diner ambience falls to complete silence for an extended period of time. a random customer coughs. electronic crime music sweeps in.*]

Mia (*stays out of character, completely dropping the southern charmer act*): Youuuu wouldn't happen to know anything about that incident this morning, would'ya, Leroy?

Leroy: Uhhhhhhhh... why would *I* know anything about a vicious bloody murder that was probably a total accident?

Mia: You're a chatty fella, aren't you, Mr. Jones? You must have heard *something*.

Leroy (*chuckling modestly*): Well I don't know about *that*, I just like talking to people. Ooh! Like this one time when I was in the circus, these two elephants were going at it, right?

[*elephant noises, circus music*]

Not in *that* way. But there was a peanut on the floor and the one elephant—

[*back to electronic crime music*]

OW: Where were you at 9:58 this morning?

Mia: I think I have this under control, thank you, OW.

OW: I think you have customers waiting for you.

Mia: Leroy.

Leroy: Jones! Huh?

Mia: Where were you at 9:58 this morning?

OW: Hey!

Leroy: I was at the church. That new pastor is a hoot and a half, don't ya think?

Mia: (*happy*) She's a delight! (*stern*) Did you leave the premises at any point during the service?

Leroy: Uh...

OW: What do you know about flowers, Leroy?

Leroy: I, um...

Mia: Do you own any sharp instruments that you use in the dead of night?

Leroy: Huh??

OW: Do you have a history of murderous rage in your family?

Leroy: AHH!

Mia: That's sloppy! You shouldn't make a suspect suspect your suspicions.

OW VO: I admit, dear reader, this was getting... wearisome. Who did Mia Jasper think she was anyway?

[music cuts abruptly]

Mia: What did you say?

OW: What?

Mia: Something about a reader?

OW: Oh, nothing, I'll write it down later.

Leroy (scared, uneasy): Uhhhhhhhhhhhhh... ya know, this is all getting a little hootsy... I think I'm gonna... ooh, yeah, I'm, uh... I gotta go.

OW VO: Leroy spilled his coffee as he stood up.

[coffee cup clinking over, coffee spilling everywhere]

Leroy: Ooh! Owie!

OW VO: He cupped his hands to catch it as it dribbled off the table...

[coffee dribbles into Leroy's hands. searing, sizzling sfx like it's giving him second degree burns.]

Leroy: Hot! Hot! Hot! Ow! *(continues under OW's narration)* Ooh! Hmm! Ooh! Hot! Hot! Owie, owie, owie!

OW VO: ...and rushed out of Siren's Diner carrying his burning-hot coffee. Mia and I watched him leave...

[Leroy scampering away. ding! goes the door.]

...and then scrambled after him.

[OW and Mia's footsteps scrambling after him. door shuts from the outside. the town square is completely silent. a crow caws.]

Mia: Where did he go?

[questioning, slightly-eerie, where'd-he-go? music]

OW VO: Leroy was nowhere to be found. Ordinarily, I'd be quite content with this. But his absence sung louder than his unfortunate one-man musical about the Great Depression. Not the economic crisis of the 1930s. He just had a real low point in his life when his musical career didn't take off. It was Greatly Depressing for all who watched. In any case, Leroy running away was a clear admission of guilt. This man was—

Mia: Up there!

[dramatic Hitchcock-esque thriller music, a la Vertigo]

Leroy *(distant, from above, outdoor echo):* Ohh! Oh no, oh no! I... I don't know what to do! I don't know what to do!

Mia *(projected):* Leroy, what are you doing up there?!

OW VO: Leroy was at the top of the bell tower, standing at the very edge of the belfry.

Leroy *(projected):* I am NOT gonna do it! I am NOT gonna jump!

Mia (projected): Don't worry, everything is gonna be okay!

Leroy (projected): I agree! I have so much to live for!

Mia (projected): Exactly! So please come down! We can talk about this!

OW VO: Leroy was dangerously close to the edge. It wasn't so much like talking someone down from a ledge as it was like convincing a cat to come down from a tree.

Leroy (projected): I love my life! It's incredible and I have absolutely no regrets! Well... maybe the voicemail thing, but...

OW VO: People gathered in the street, watching on in moderate concern to see what was the matter. When they saw it was Leroy, some went back inside. The Butcher emerged from his Butchery, clutching Chester the goat to his chest. Pastor Jane tumbled out of Siren's Diner.

[diner door ding! PJ's footsteps racing across the town square.]

PJ (projected): Hold on, my dear, keep your knickers untwisted!

[music fades. everything goes quiet. the wind blows like an old-timey Western. heavy bootfalls and jingling keys...]

OW VO: Just then, Crestfall Law Enforcement walked by. We all froze. Crestfall Law Enforcement gave Leroy a stiff nod as if to say "As you were, carry on," and then popped into Carlson and Carlson's Delicious Pastry Shop—

[door open, bell entrance ding!]

—to apprehend a delicious pastry. Their pastries *are* exceptionally criminal.

[tense Hitchcock music resumes]

Leroy (projected): I'm awfully sorry, Pastor Jane. I truly am!

PJ (projected): Why is that, Leroy?

Leroy (projected): I did something wronnnnggggg!

PJ (projected): Worry not, Leroy. God–

[return of the angel choir, abruptly cuts off after a moment]

–will forgive you.

Leroy (projected): Are you sure? It's pretty bad...

Butcher (projected): You killed Boundaby, didn't you?

Leroy (projected): OHHHHHHH alright! I can't take it anymore! I'm gonna cave! I'm gonna spill alllllll the beans!

Butcher (to OW): Hey OW, how much you wanna bet Leroy killed the Dunfort kid?

OW VO: Before I could pull out a crisp twenty dollar bill, Leroy blurted out–

Leroy (projected): I killed Boundaby Dunfort!

Butcher (victoriously): Yes!

OW (to Butcher): Can I actually give you two tens?

PJ (projected): Everything will be okay, my sweet cherub! Tell us what happened.

Leroy (projected): Well... I wanted to give you a warm welcome 'cause you're new and all, right? *(whimpers)* So I bought a couple flowers and hung them from the belfry. When the bell struck ten, thousands of flower petals would rain from the sky! Like a movie! But the flowers musta been too heavy and, well, the bell tolled for Boundaby. Y'know, like one-a those everyday coincidences that happen all the time that wouldn't warrant arresting anyone, please? ...Please??

Butcher: Man. I can't believe Leroy killed someone. First the handyman, now Boundaby? *(scoffs)* I guess I wouldn't worry too much about it though. Par for the course in this town. OW kills people all the time.

OW: Butcher!

Mia: Yeah... he's got that look on his face.

OW: I most certainly do not!

PJ: Everyone, please, settle down!

OW VO: Everyone turned to Pastor Jane.

[music crescendoes, ends]

This was her moment. She gulped so hard you were reminded how weird throats are.

PJ: *(gulps so hard you're reminded how weird throats are)*

OW VO: But then... she took a deep breath.

PJ: *(to herself)* Alright, Janey, you got this. Knock 'em dead. I mean, don't do that, but you know. Ahem.

[inspiring, emotional music, gradually building over the course of her speech/sermon]

(to everyone) We can be so mean to ourselves, can't we? We all like to kick ourselves like small squishy puppies. *(mimics kicked puppy noise)* I got a story for ya. Make a holy sweater outta this yarn. When I was nine years old, I was extorted by the neighborhood milkman, Jerry Evans. He said if I didn't give him all of my lunch money, he'd stop delivering my family's milk and then my brother Jeff wouldn't grow up strong or have good bone density. Well, uh, that rocked me right to my core, right? I strived to make a lot of money so that milkman would see me as worthwhile, and then, maybe then, uh, you know, decide to be my dad. It took me like years to realize my mistakes and by then he had left for New Mexico in his bungalow, and I'd stolen hundreds of dollars from my mother to buy 2% goat milk for the fam. I mean, what was I to do, it would render us calcium deficient if I didn't. But you know, since then, I've learned a lot. Sometimes, we're idiots. Because we're *human*. You have a choice, and this is the hardest part: to *choose* to learn. Humans don't learn from books. We learn from our *actions*. We learn from our *feelings*. The mistakes you made in the past can feel like a bucket of vomit thrown into Birdbiddle Lake. Those mistakes can be beautiful too, though. Because they can make you more than 2%. They make you a whole, luscious, unskimmed person. And now you've been pastor-ized.

[a meaningful pause]

OW VO: The crowd was silent. Everyone's breath was taken away. All eyes were fixed on the one and only Pastor Jane.

PJ: Ooh, wow. I really got going there, didn't I!

Leroy (projected): Um... Pastor? I can't really hear you guys too well from up here. I'll come down and you can tell me.

[claps. a few at first, building into an immense applause! cheering all around!]

OW VO: The townsfolk erupted in uproarious applause. The Butcher threw Chester in the air—

Chester: NYAHHH!

OW VO: —and Chester flailed his hooves erratically in celebration.

[erratic hooves sfx]

Pastor Jane gave a small bow before scurrying off to the Church of Right Here Right Now.

[church door closes, echoing through the nave]

PJ: Whew. That was a slip-and-slide. How'd I do?

OW: That was beautiful, Pastor Jane.

PJ: Really? I think I blacked out.

OW: Truly. It was lovely.

PJ: I just wanted to do a good job. So badly. I've never led a church before. I wasn't sure how my brother did it. But... he was a mess. And I'm a mess. We're all a great big mess, and we're all waiting for someone to clean us up... like some little twerp named Timmy who never cleans his room. But then you realize... *you're* the little twerp named Timmy, and no one else can straighten you up but you.

OW: Pastor... would you like some company?

PJ: No... no, I've got all the company I need.

[religious male choir music]

OW VO: We both looked up... Through the hole in the ceiling was the holiest beam of sunlight...

[music cuts abruptly]

...that was promptly blocked by a giant head.

Leroy: Pastor! Obituary Writer! Look! *(sing-song-y)* I'm on the roof!

PJ and OW: Hi Leroy.

[reflective, it's-time-to-wrap-things-up piano and accordion music]

OW VO: On my way home, I picked up a pound of Boundaby from the Butcher for my cats. There would be a feast tonight. As I often do on pleasant strolls across town, I became full of existential dread. Boundaby Dunfort was a shining star in the community. He always brought his own smile wherever he went. He was thoughtful, and left people feeling warm and cared for, even when they didn't realize why. And yet, despite being so *genuinely good*, Boundaby still died a horrible death.

Could it be true that our optimism is misplaced? We hope, we regret, we try to learn from our mistakes. But we all share the same fate in the end. We die, optimism or not. Is it worth the glow of hope to endure the random pain of life? ...I'd like to think it is.

[music ends. apartment door opening]

Just as I opened my door, Mia came sauntering up the steps.

Mia: OW!

OW: Oh! *(throws something heavy)*

Man-Eating Cats *(hurtling rapidly into the foreground)*: MEOOOOWOWWW!!!

[OW slams the door just in time. massive thuds against the door. literally like tiny monsters thrashing about.]

OW VO: I hurled Boundaby's delicious remains inside and slammed the door shut.

OW: I wouldn't go in there *(chuckling nervously)*. They're hungry.

Man-Eating Cat: *(tiny, innocent meow)* meow.

Mia: You know, if I didn't know any better, I'd say we made a pretty good team back there interrogating Leroy.

OW: You don't say.

Mia: I do say. What do *you* say? I think we'd actually make quite the duo.

OW: I thought you said I wasn't a real detective.

Mia: And you said I'm not a real lawyer. So... maybe we could be... not-so-real together? If you wanted.

OW: Hm... Do you write walrus haikus?

Mia: What? No.

OW: Do you like peaches?

Mia: They're okay I guess.

OW: I think I'm fine on my own, thank you.

Mia: *(sigh)* Then it's on, apparently.

OW: *(sigh)* Apparently.

[ow's door opens and closes. haunting, emotional piano music. we gettin' serious now.]

OW VO: In the sanctuary of my apartment, Pastor Jane's words came back to me: "Mistakes can be beautiful." Was that true? Boundaby was so young... he had so much life left ahead of him, interrupted by something preventable – a sentence punctuated too soon. All the people he could've met, the lives he could've changed. Would he have fallen in love? Climbed mountains? We'll never know.

What about *my* mistakes? I stood there and did nothing as she vanished before my eyes. She'll never write another poem or gaze wide-eyed at a sunset over Widow's Peak... How is *that* beautiful? What am I supposed to learn from *that*?

I leaned my bouquet of lilies next to Charlotte's heart. They were full and vibrant, blooming like waterborne stars. They were beautiful. Perfect for my friend. Flowers and the dead. Endings and beginnings. We uproot flowers from their home, use them to celebrate our lives and mourn our losses, as they slowly wilt in a ceramic vase. One day, we'll return the favor, and they will flourish from our decay. We're granted a brief moment on this planet, and then... well, we're... we're a corporeal packet of nutrients, feeding life back into the earth. We're the same energy being passed back and forth. Perhaps, one solemn day, my body will nourish flowers much like these. For now, they nourish me, as I sit alone with my cats, thinking of the things I once had. (*OW takes a sharp breath, growing emotional. shaky breath out.*) Excuse me for a moment.

[*emotional music cuts off. OW scooches his chair backwards, gets up, walks across the room, shuts his bedroom door. he turns on a record player. static for a couple seconds as the needle finds the groove, and then "Two Lovebirds" by the Bally-Go-Backward Boys starts to play. OW SOBS, trying to stifle his cries under the music.*]

LYRICS:

*"I'm looking for a girl,
A girl who's just for me,
And we'll live happily until the day we die,
And become worm food.
Just—"*

[*record player scratches as OW turns the music off, sniffing and clearing his throat. he reopens his bedroom door, walks back across the room, scooches his chair back into place. he clears his throat again.*]

OW VO: Uh... AHM... (*suddenly sounds completely normal, like it's any other episode*) This has been the obituary of Boundaby Dunfort.

[mournful, musing piano music – warped as though on an old record]

Evening Post: This has been Death by Dying. Created by Evan Gulock & Niko Gerentes. Associate Producers: Luis Resto, Samariel Koster, Robert Gulock, Jordan Percle, Angel Acevedo, and Merijn Hardeman. Featuring the voices of Simran Bal as Pastor Jane, Niko Gerentes as Leroy, The Butcher, and Chester the Goat, Evan Gulock as The Obituary Writer & Button-Eyed Raven, Gordon Johnson as Boundaby Dunfort, Iridian Fierro as Mia Jasper, Lauren Denby as the Angel of Death, Whitney Dottery as Susan Collick, Samariel Koster as Sharron from Sharron’s Shoe Emporium, Calvin Brown as Chandler Brown, Finlay Stevenson as Geraldine Portidge, Alexander Stepanek as Jonathan Jackson. Additional Voices provided by The DePaul BFA 4 Class of 2023. Re-Recording Mixer: Beau Milkis. Additional voiceover recording by studio engineers Dave Langley and Logan Reeves at The Foxhole Chicago. Music by Niko Gerentes, Savfk, Steven O’Brien, Audionautix, Tyops, Hayden Folker, Scott Buckley, Doug Maxwell, and Heidi Harris. “Two Lovebirds” by the Bally-Go-Backward Boys arranged and performed by Evan Gulock and Noah Baldwin. A Very Special Thanks to Our Featured Patrons: Rowan MacBean & Dante Smith. And our eternal gratitude to Matthew Cunningham and George Zarr. If any of you squishy puppies would like to send their condolences, comments, hopes, fears, or dreams, you can contact The Obituary Writer personally at TheObituaryWriter@gmail.com, or follow us on social media [@DeathByDyingPod](https://www.instagram.com/DeathByDyingPod). If you like what you hear, consider becoming a supporter on Patreon and get access to bonus content like bloopers, mini-obituaries, and more. Visit patreon.com/deathbydyingpod, or follow the link in the episode description. And remember... if you’re going to release the next episode of your fiction podcast three years later, make sure you give a big thanks to all of your adoring fans.

Evan and Niko in Unison: THANK YOUUU!

Evening Post: This show wouldn’t be what it is without you. Thank you for sticking with us, and enjoying our silly little tale. Until next time... buh bye...

[warping piano music spins out]