

Obituary 00: Gary Died (Pilot)

**Obituary Writer Voiceover:** Hello. I am the Obituary Writer of this lovely town of Crestfall, Idaho, and this is Death by Dying.

*[church bell gong]*

**Pastor Jeff:** Dearly beloved. We are gathered here today to mourn the life of Gary Wickersham. You already knew that, of course. That's why you're here... at his funeral. Gary was like a... a star! The north star, guiding us in the darkness... the never-ending darkness of the whole existence of space and time, expanding at millions of miles per second, into nothing.....

**Leroy Jones:** *[awkward cough cough]*

**Pastor Jeff:** .....Well great! Let's get on with it then.

*[quirky but dark pizzicato music. welcome to Crestfall folks]*

**OW VO:** Gary Wickersham, 47, was found dead last week face-first in a birdbath just outside of the Dark Woods behind the Carlson and Carlson's Delicious Pastry Shop, where the Carlsons serve delicious pastries. It's springtime here in Crestfall, Idaho, late spring, almost summer, in that liminal space between seasons. The perfect time to die if you ask me. The crocuses are blooming, the tulips, the daffodils, the ginger lilies. The cicadas are buzzing and the blue jays are flying and the air is thick, so thick you could drink it with a straw.

*[eerie ambient music]*

It was a runner who first came across Gary. Ever notice how it's always runners who find dead bodies? Joggers tend to stick to pedestrian walkways, where they can exchange pleasant greetings with early-to-rise neighbors or purchase a sprinkled donut if the fancy strikes them. Runners, on the other hand, cut through dumpster-laden back alleys and dart through remote wooded areas. So it's no surprise that every forensics show on television begins with a runner stumbling across some wayward soul who climbed into the wrong white van. In fact, if it weren't for runners, who knows how crimes would ever get solved.

Not to say that this was a crime. All we know for sure is that at 5:13am, Monday morning, Susan Collick, the local florist, was running through the Dark Woods when she came upon Gary's body, head dunked in the birdbath like he was bobbing for apples at the annual Summer Solstice Festival.

*Death by Dying Podcast – Official Transcript*

Gary's clothes were torn to shreds as though attacked viciously by a pair of scissors, which some people seem... oddly happy about. His sense of fashion was notoriously appalling. Gone was the year-round Christmas tie, the blazer with shoulder pads fit for a football player. He will be missed, but not his apparel. In his back pocket was a note hastily scribbled on a napkin. It read: "I'll be right back." Was this meant for something he was going to do while he was still alive? Or does this mean he will be returning with the Second Coming, we're not sure, we're not sure...

I remember Gary, I met him when I was just starting out as an obituary writer. He wore a gray wool vest and a mustard-yellow-checkered shirt. His hair was trying to fight its way out from under a golfer's cap. His mustache curved upwards slightly, like a bowl to catch food in. He kept to himself mostly, in the old colonial house at the edge of town, living off the enormous fortune his father left behind from some off-shore account. His father is now deceased, his mother skipped town with a disturbingly-handsome Albanian man, and Gary's brother, Elias, was unavailable for comment because he has been missing for several years.

Anyone who knew anything about Gary at all knew that he spent the majority of his time on his vast collection of fake ducks. Crafting, whittling, polishing, purchasing. He drank his coffee without cream. He ate tomatoes like they were apples. Here is 5 seconds of his favorite song:

*[funky elevator music for exactly 5 seconds, followed by an abrupt cut to silence]*

And now, the condolences: The Carlson's send their condolences. They say:

*[upbeat commercial music]*

"In the mood for something delicious? Look no further than Carlson and Carlson's Delicious Pastry Shop, where you'll find the most flakey, fluffy, buttery goodness baked into a baked good sent straight from the heavens. Believe us. Angels literally work here."

Thank you, Carlson Family. We can only assume that was a metaphor. Condolences also brought to you by Lou's Sushi and Chinese Cuisine: "Egg-roll on down to Lou's! Your lo mein spot for Chinese Cuisine. We now deliver! ... We're sorry for your loss."

We really appreciate for those heartfelt consolations. It is clear Gary is in your thoughts and prayers, as in ours.

*[fade in: rain, thunder strike!]*

On the day of the funeral, everyone wore black, except for Gary's Aunt Agatha, who accidentally wore a deceptively dark shade of navy blue. It rained, but only slightly, like the suggestion of rain. It sort of hovered, rather than falling. It was almost mist, except without the mystery. The pulpy remains of dead leaves that survived the hungry winter squished under the

feet of mourners as they followed Gary's coffin to the dampened hole in the earth where he was to be buried, next to his father's grave.

*[mud squishing]*

His father, when he was alive, found a certain excessive satisfaction in being right about the nature of things, which meant his affection towards his family came in peculiar ways. On his father's gravestone is an arrow pointing to the left where Gary would eventually end up, with an inscription etched into the stone that read "I told you this would happen." He died 18 years ago... Well... there you are, Gary.

The cemetery is beautiful this time of year. Not sure what it looks like from underneath, but as far as I'm concerned it looks lovely. The apple blossoms were budding, the deer wandered aimlessly among the gravestones, and bird droppings seemed to keep landing exclusively on Gary's coffin, so eventually people gave up on cleaning it up.

*[think – bird poop landing]*

The tweeting and chirping was nice though.

*[pleasant bird chirping]*

No one knew Gary, not particularly, not personally... so the whole town came, that this might be a chance to collect some good karma for the summer to come.

*[unintelligible, overlaid murmuring and chatting of the funeral crowd]*

*[light investigative music – a song that says "Curious... very curious... what happened here?"]*

But the longer the restless crowd stood amongst each other, the more they began to wonder. The coroner was missing, and Gary was being buried without a cause of death. *How did Gary die? And why?* One by one they began to look to one another as if to say "What did you do?"

There was Wyatt Hudson, the seasoned farmer, who grows bluestem grass near the abandoned silo. He always complained about the chemicals Gary sprayed on his lawn to keep it unnaturally green. There was Earl Jameson, the alcoholic academic, with straight, straight hair, dark-framed glasses, hook-nosed, so clean-shaven the wind didn't even notice it was moving passed him. People recalled how just about a month ago he was preaching drunkenly to anyone who would listen at Siren's Diner about dominant ideologies of bourgeois society and the hegemonic forces poisoning the proletariat, and how it was wealthy families like the Wickersham's who were controlling everyone's minds through capitalistic interpolation. There was Leroy Jones, who kept coughing during every silence in the service–

**Leroy:** [*cough cough*]

**OW VO:** The Carlson's, who arrived in their 1980 Mercury Monarch, accompanied by 3 body guards. Perhaps a little overkill, but a man did just die in their birdbath. And of course, there was Susan Collick, the local florist. We get you're starting a new workout routine, Susan, but what were you *really* doing in the Dark Woods at 5:13 on a Monday morning? What were you *really* doing? The murmur of possibilities burst like tiny fireworks over the heads of everyone in the crowd, and it was just then that The Slapper arrived.

[*uneasy, ominous violin*]

Everything went quiet. The rain hovered. The birds settled in the trees.

[*dramatic stinger*]

The Slapper. Her job is to travel to funerals and mortuaries and make sure people are dead. "You can't always tell," she would say, "So the only sure way of telling is to poke 'em and slap 'em real hard." The relatives who had known these bodies for years didn't like to do this, so they would call her in. People have been buried alive before. At the funeral they would say "My, Uncle George sure looks alive for being so dead!" ...and lo and behold... Per Crestfall, Idaho tradition, everyone held their breath as the pastor opened the coffin one last time, and the Slapper raised her hand high into the air, and with a definitive SMACK!

[*SMACK!*]

–It was determined Gary Wickersham was definitely, totally, undeniably deceased, \$60 thank you very much, and The Slapper disappeared from whence she came. Was this necessary? No. But people don't like uncertainty in this town.

Much like your grandmother's delectable mixed berry muffins, the recipe that lead to Gary's tragic, untimely end remained a mystery. But that didn't stop speculation and hearsay from spreading across town like a disease or an addiction or a catchy song.

[*plucky interview music*]

**Local Mumbling Conspiracy Theorist:** Gary Wickersham? I got one word for you: Drones. Drones killed Gary.

**Upbeat Student Just Happy to Be Interviewed:** I think it's part of this... government conspiracy. Maybe he got on the wrong side of things and they just had to kill him so he wouldn't spill.

**Shifty-Eyed Grocer:** Between you and I? I have reason to believe that Gary was involved with *dark* magic.

**OW:** Why do you think that?

**Shifty-Eyed Grocer:** I mean have you ever seen the man? He's like Keanu Reeves, he never ages.

**Southern-Drawl Potato Farmer:** Well uh... I didn't really know much about Gary. After all, he was one-a them rich folk, and uh, I raised potatoes all my life. I do know for certain that he is dead though. It's good to know that. See, I've had a theory that's been, uh, ruminatin' in the backwashes of my mind, y'know. I'm thinkin' that... well he was found in a birdbath... maybe he had a thing goin' on with the birds. Y'know, like... more than just friendly if you know what I'm sayin'. I think in sort of heat-of-the-moment type of deal, he forgot to breathe, maybe passed out, fell down into the birdbath, and y'know... filled his lungs with water. I think maybe uh... it wasn't the birds and the bees, but it was the birds and Gary.

**Obnoxious Valley Girl:** So, like... Gary? Like he really had a drinking problem, like he physically didn't know how to swallow? And like, that's really an issue to, like, living? Like even I can swallow, and I can also walk and breathe at the same time? I mean, I can't blow bubbles with gum when I'm walking, but... that's not really an issue because I can sit down and do that. But like breathing? That's an issue.

**Weirdly Patriotic Groundskeeper:** So I'm mowin' the lawn, for Gary. He hires me to do such a thing. And I'm happy to! 'Cause mowin' the lawn is one of the most American things one can possibly do. I'm mowin' his lawn, air thick as soup. I see a *bird* run straight into his windowpane – Dead. I wanna take a moment to say somethin' now, is that okay?

[*music cuts*]

Birds? That's never the answer. There's *always* help. There's always *options*. There's a light at the end of the that tunnel. I *promise*.

[*music back in*]

And Gary. Great guy... Never met him.

**Giddy Assassin Enthusiast:** I'm pretty sure Gary was killed by an assassin.

**Overzealous UFO Hunter:** ALIENS! It was definitely aliens.

**Weirdly Patriotic Groundskeeper:** I think there was a second shooter.

**OW:** There was a first shooter?

**Weirdly Patriotic Groundskeeper:** AND a second! Makes ya think.

**Know-It-All:** I'm assuming... he got scared, tripped on a rock, hit his head, and died. It's the only logical thing that makes sense, I don't know why people are arguing about this.

**OW VO:** Occam's Razor suggests that the simplest answer is most likely the truth, but Murphy's Law suggests eventually, given time, everything that could possibly happen can and will happen. So who knows, who knows... Actually, there might be someone who knows... Gary's Aunt Agatha.

[*CANNON FIRE!*]

After the funeral, the Craigmire Cannon was fired, and the magnificent boom could be heard for miles.

[*music box, time-for-a-history-lesson music*]

Crestfall existed long before Idaho, and during the Civil War they desperately wanted to be a part of the action despite being far from Confederate lines. After receiving several annoying request letters, a band of Texans was finally sent to humor them. The Crestfallens were lead by Colonel Cornelius B. Craigmire... and the battle lasted roughly 19 seconds. Eager and overzealous, Craigmire lit the fuse of the cannon, only for the spark to die out just before it reached the chamber. When nothing happened, the valiant Craigmire peaked into the mouth of the cannon, and that's when the cannon went off–

[*BANG!*]

–blowing his head into the next hemisphere. To this day, the Craigmire Cannon is set off after someone dies, as a reminder of the randomly unfortunate planet we find ourselves on... drifting through the cold, dark, meaningless universe.

The cannon fire still echoed through the potato fields as I met with Gary's Aunt Agatha at Gary's estate, where Aunt Agatha had been staying while she was in town. His things were already packed into boxes. We drank hot lemon water from chipped china cups. Aunt Agatha breathed in shallow, mucus-y breaths, petting a taxidermy cat she had placed on her lap. As far as I was concerned, Aunt Agatha still thought he was alive. She resembled a vulture, her shoulders hunched, her neck craning out. Her voice echoed through the high ceilings Her eyes never strayed from mine.

**OW:** Miss Wickersham, it's a pleasure to be able to speak with you.

**Aunt Agatha:** You can do more than that with me if you'd like.

**OW:** Speaking is fine for now.

**Aunt Agatha:** Sure, okay.

**OW:** If you could just... if you could say a few words, it'd be great to hear something from a family member. Someone who was truly close with him.

**Aunt Agatha:** Oh, you know, Gary... Gary and I go way back. I remember... We all lived together, the Wickersham's in a big estate, way out in the country. And I, uh, I have this memory of Gary, as a boy... He'd be out there, his fat tummy spilling out over his jeans, and he'd be out there with the birds. He loved those birds, you know, the bluejays, the cardinals, the orioles and the cassowaries... flipper-jips! The, the wing-a-dings... all of the different winged creatures.

**OW VO:** Gary was a special child, Aunt Agatha explained. Lonely, but special, a certain magic to his imagination, a certain isolation to his character, which is why he was so often on his own talking aloud to the birds. The Wickersham family was outrageously large, 93 people at their peak, living all together on the outrageously large estate in the middle of the vast countryside surrounding Crestfall. If someone were to scream, no one could hear it in our town. Just to give you an idea of distance, of course.

Something puzzled me, however. So many people living together at one time, and yet now Gary lived in town and the Wickersham family is spread across the country. At some point they broke apart.

**OW:** If the Wickersham family all lived together for many years, what happened to everybody?

**Aunt Agatha:** Oh you know... people drift apart, family members get murdered, that sort of thing.

**OW:** Murdered?

**Aunt Agatha:** Hm? Who said that?

**OW:** You said that family members were murdered.

**Aunt Agatha:** *Eating burgers*, I said... Delicious.

**OW VO:** Aunt Agatha was less than forthcoming.

*[fun interrogation music]*

**OW:** What was Gary's relationship like with his parents?

**Aunt Agatha:** Oh they gave birth to him... Should we be wearing our shirts for this interview? 'Cause I would feel much more comfortable without mine.

**OW:** Uh... I...

**Aunt Agatha:** Is that just me?

**OW:** Let's-let's, uh, just keep it formal for now.

**Aunt Agatha:** Sure, sure, okay.

**OW:** Let's keep it formal for now.

**Aunt Agatha:** Alright. That's fine.

**OW:** I'm curious to hear more about Gary's childhood.

**Aunt Agatha:** Childhood... that's a funny word, now isn't it? Childhood implies he was once a child, doesn't it?

**OW:** If Gary wasn't a child, how would you describe him, in his younger times?

**Aunt Agatha:** He was like a... like a human, but smaller. You know?

**OW:** Like a child.

**Aunt Agatha:** Like a child, yes.

**OW VO:** She dodged almost every question I had. That is, until I mentioned the name of Gary's brother, Elias. She paused... and for the first time, her eyes looked away from mine. She muttered something about Elias and his father, but I could hardly make out what she was saying.

**OW:** I understand if the memory is too painful for you, but... would you mind, uh, indulging me and talking about what happened with Elias and Gary's father?

**Aunt Agatha:** *(sigh)*... Well he killed him.

*[creepy droning music, total classic creepypasta vibes]*



**Aunt Agatha:** It was the twelfth of October. The Wickershams were out on the Wickersham picnic, which happens every year on the twelfth of October. Or *used to*, before the incident... We were amidst the cedar trees... the breeze was blowing... as it usually does amidst cedar trees... The pot roast was being served. And then, uh... Elias took a knife and stabbed it in his father's throat. Hm.

**OW:** Just like that?

**Aunt Agatha:** Yeah, well, everything has a context.

**OW:** And what would the context be here? Forgive me if I'm not quite following.

**Aunt Agatha:** Oh, you know, well... a little bit of sibling rivalry, a little jealousy.

**OW:** So this was about Gary.

**Aunt Agatha:** Brother's fight, you know... they go back and forth, steal each other's toys, kill each other's fathers, that sort of thing... it happens.

**OW:** Jealously over what?

**Aunt Agatha:** Jealousy over... Gary's *gift*.

**OW:** Gary's gift?

**Aunt Agatha:** Oh I told you about it already! He was talking to the birds!

**OW:** Gary... *thought* he could speak to birds.

**Aunt Agatha:** Oh, no, the birds talked back. They had lively conversations. Mostly about the weather, occasionally politics.

**OW:** So you're suggesting Gary genuinely could speak to birds.

**Aunt Agatha:** Well of course he could! Why would he have spoken to them if they couldn't speak back?

**OW:** How did Gary... get this gift?

**Aunt Agatha:** The Wickershams were... an *ancient* folk. All I'll say is, you know – the dinosaurs, they turned into birds, and, well, uh, the birds turned into Wickershams. The Wickershams are what you might call... *old Nordic bird-people*.

**OW VO:** Obviously I was skeptical. Without a doubt I had my doubts. But I listened attentively to Aunt Agatha's depiction of the Wickersham family. The avian genetics manifested in different ways depending on the person. Some had wings, some had feathers for hair, and still others were unfortunate enough to have tiny beaks for a nose and mouth.

Gary, however, Gary was the chosen one. He was born with the gift to communicate with birds, listen to what they had to say, and because of this he was able to control them. This meant he was celebrated by his family. This all, of course, according to Aunt Agatha.

**OW:** So because Gary could speak with birds, was he revered by his family?

**Aunt Agatha:** Oh, well, you know, uh... he got a little bit of special treatment. Full inheritance of the Wickersham estate. That sort of thing.

**OW:** So Gary was going to inherit the entire family fortune.

**OW VO:** This struck me. I wondered aloud if Elias could possibly have had anything to do with Gary's death.

**Aunt Agatha:** Ohhhh, well, you know, I, uh, I think, em, uhhh, well, I... hmhhh (*weird indecisive whinny*)... I sound like a horse.

**OW:** I don't mean to make you uncomfortable—

**Aunt Agatha:** Oh but you are boy, you are.

**OW:** I'm merely curious.

**Aunt Agatha:** Curiosity killed the Obituary Writer.

**OW:** I'm sorry?

**Aunt Agatha:** I should be going. I've been diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome, and to be completely frank, you're making me a little irritable.

**OW:** Would you mind if I asked you one more question?

**Aunt Agatha:** No, sorry, I need to—

**OW:** Just one last ques—

[*CLATTER! Aunt Agatha throws her chair to the floor*]

**Aunt Agatha:** IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME!!!!!!

**OW:** Miss Wickersham! Where are you going?

*[the plot thickens considerably music]*

**OW VO:** Aunt Agatha's chair toppled to the floor, her tea spilling onto the Parisian carpet, Mr. Whiskers sailing over my head and hitting the window with a thud.

*[THUD]*

I followed Aunt Agatha as quickly as I could, but by the time I reached the front door, where she had left it swinging open, she was nowhere to be found. That is... until I looked up.

*[tiny fast wing fluttering]*

There she was, completely shirtless, flying away with tiny wings where her shoulder blades should have been, trying to support her weight, carrying her off into the distance, into gray, gray sky... Just then, I heard a noise from back inside the house.

*[footsteps running upstairs]*

Footsteps. Footsteps leading up a creaking wooden staircase. I straightened my tasteful charcoal-gray suit jacket and bolted up the stairs, trying to follow the sound. I saw feathers dragging across the floor for a brief moment before they disappeared around the corner. On the second floor was a long hallway, with other hallways branching off in every direction like a labyrinth. I turned this way and that, opening every door in a frenzy, but – nothing.

*[doors opening and closing]*

I noticed something strange, however. Running lengthwise down the hall, along the wall, were scratch marks, as though talons had been tearing at the tacky wallpaper. I followed the scratch marks, cautiously, one foot in front of the other. The last door on the right was ajar.

At first, the room appeared empty, save for a bare lamp with a shattered lightbulb, the tungsten filament still glowing slightly like embers after a flame. The window was open, the lacy curtains on either side fluttering in a pre-storm breeze. But... in the corner... rocking back and forth in the fetal position... was a man, covered from head to toe in bedraggled, matted feathers. He had only three fingers per hand, thin and sharp like bird feet. He lifted his head as I entered the room to reveal a twisted face. At first I thought it was a trick of the light, but no... he had a *beak*. His eyes were beady and quivered in their sockets. His beak opened once or twice before he could bring himself to speak.

Unfortunately, I did not have my recorder with me. I had left it on the coffee table where Aunt Agatha had been seated just a few minutes before. But I have a feeling that even if I did record what this man had said, you wouldn't want to hear it... not in his voice... He was almost impossible to understand, his voice cracking and wheezing and squawking with every word. I will try my best to relay what he said to me.

He was Elias. Gary's brother. After years of pent up frustration and scaring away every therapist in town, Elias explained, he had finally snapped. He had killed Gary, stabbed him with the very same knife he had killed their father with all those years ago. The stab wound must have been lost amongst all the scratches and torn clothing. I asked him about this. It looked as though Gary had been killed by a whole flock of birds. Elias nodded. There *were* birds, a swarm of a hundred at least, but they weren't there to kill Gary. They were there to save him. But they were too late, and by then the life had drained from Gary and Elias had absconded into the Dark Woods.

He had lived his entire life in the shadow of his little brother. His family adored Gary, gave him everything Elias rightfully deserved. Meanwhile, Elias remained rejected and dejected. People stayed away from him. He was a black sheep in his own home. Or should I say... the black bird... no, that's a horrible joke. He felt as though he could have had it all. He almost looked completely like a bird, and yet he was still unable to speak *to* birds. That gift went to Gary. And because of this, Elias was nothing but a dilapidated side character in his own life.

No one could ignore him now. The Wickersham family would *have* to see him for what he truly was: the rightful and worthy heir to the estate. Elias raced to the window.

**Elias** (*croaky*): I'll show them.

**OW VO:** He said in his raspy voice.

**Elias:** I'll show them that this bird can soar.

**OW VO:** And with that he jumped out the window, high into the air... before plummeting two stories down and splatting on the pavement.

[*THUD*]

Apparently... this bird could not soar.

[*twittering of a hundred birds*]

Suddenly there came the sound of a chorus of chirping, and a swarm of birds came into view, flittering over Elias's body, wrapping around him and lifting him off the ground, carrying him away. He may not have gotten the affection he always wanted when he was alive, but to be

embraced by a flock of birds at the end of his life, even after everything he did... I'm sure that's the way he would have wanted to go.

At a time like this, the only proper words that can be spoken are the words of Crestfall's very own Pastor Jeff. Here is his sermon on the day of Gary's funeral.

[*organ music*]

**Pastor Jeff:** Gary's gone... he flew away... like a little flipper-jip. But he left something behind too. Do you have a junk drawer at home? I know I do. Filled with uh... toe nail clippers, rubber bands, loaves of bread, discarded pens, canned peaches, the complete box set of all eight seasons of the hit television show *Lost*, hair scrunchies, twine, lefty scissors, 87 cents in change, (mostly pennies, a couple dimes), tickets to the carnival, dolphin puppets, pictures of your aunt, mayonnaise packets, your friend's mixed tape he claims to be "straight fire". Our drawers don't start out full. No! They start out empty. Hmm. As we move through our days, we fill them up with little bits and bots... accumulated over time, and then we leave them all behind for someone else to clean out. What is that? It's what I call legacy. What kind of legacy are you gonna leave? What kind of junk drawer are you gonna leave...? Have you heard of Jesus? He had a legacy... It took a lot to clean out his junk drawer.

**Leroy:** [*cough cough*]

**OW VO:** Legacy indeed. As far as this town is concerned, the only legacy one needs to worry about is the one you need to hide. Your legacy of secrets. It's another beautiful day here in Crestfall, Idaho. The crocuses are blooming, the tulips, the daffodils, the ginger lilies. The perfect time to die.

This has been an obituary of Gary Wickersham.

[*somber piano music*]

**CREDITS:** This has been *Death By Dying*. Thank you for listening to my woeful tales. It is my duty as the Obituary Writer of this lovely town to document the unfortunate ends of our beloved neighbors. Today you have heard from townsfolk Joshua Giordan, Annie Collick, Noah Baldwin, Chase Gehrlich, Joanne Cimarosti, Lauren Denby, Tad Deleonabreu, and Alex Klein. Pastor Jeff and Aunt Agatha are, of course, real people, residents of Crestfall, Idaho, but if they were to be voiced by anyone, it would be none other than Joshua Giordan. I would also like to thank Mr. Giordan for consulting on this story. It takes a team to expose a cult family of old Nordic bird-people to be sure. Your continued interest in my obituary column gives me the will to live and not end up in the column myself. Thank you.