

Obituary 02: Lillian Died

Obituary Writer (Voiceover): Hello. I am the strikingly well-dressed Obituary Writer of this secluded town of Crestfall, Idaho. And this is *Death by Dying*.

[charlotte's theme - sad but thoughtful piano music]

I will admit I wasn't going to write about the death of Lillian Parker. I was far more taken by the death of Robert Jameson. He had died of dysentery, which is essentially the equivalent of being diarrhea-d to death. I found this mildly amusing. It made a great premise for a story – I mean an obituary. But that night, I was greeted with something far more intriguing than lethal bowels. It was the night I met Charlotte.

Death is exhausting. To be sure, being an Obituary Writer is no picnic on a sunny Sunday afternoon, at the beach with your beautiful wife and three kids. It's not a picnic so much as a potluck, with a bunch of strangers, whose grandmother just died. And so, after a long day of funeral-attending, I had retired to my apartment to get some shuteye. Returning to my apartment is like returning to a coffin.

[jingling keys, opening door]

Small but comfortable, snug, free from the expectations of life. Velvet lined.

[door close]

It is a two-room apartment. Pickled frogs and antlers, stuffed squirrels and snow globes litter every surface. I am a collector. Not of anything in particular. Just anything to stave off the aching, void-like loneliness of my existence. I poured myself a glass of brandy and stared out the window at the abandoned toy factory across the street. I loosened my Versace tie and changed into my Egyptian silk pajamas. It felt good. I was home. Home is never perfect, but it remains home nonetheless. It was at this moment that there was a knock at the door.

[knock, knock-knock-knock, knock, click, clack – knocks imitating Shave and a Hair Cut, and the door opening in response, Two Bits]

Charlotte: Are you the detective in town?

OW: No, I'm the Obituary Writer.

Charlotte Really? Someone said you solved murder cases.

Death by Dying Official Transcript

OW: Murder?

Charlotte: I'm Charlotte by the way.

OW: Forgive me but I haven't gotten passed the murder part.

Charlotte: It's my aunt, you see.

OW: What happened?

Charlotte: Oh she's fine. No, she's dead, sorry, I don't know why I said that. Yeah, she's quite dead.

OW VO: Her name was Charlotte Dawson.

[*curious, "who is this intriguing woman at my doorstep" music*]

She wore black. Her hair was tied in a messy bun. She smelled like peaches, but not in an elderly way. And above all else, she looked tired. Not sleepy, but drained, as though her vitality had been consumed by a specter. She peered into my room and saw the skeletal remains. She seemed concerned.

Charlotte: Please. She was my aunt. She was all I had growing up. I need to know why she's gone.

OW VO: I nodded. *All she had*, that's what she said of Lillian. I looked around my cluttered apartment and it suddenly felt... empty. So I said yes. This is the obituary of Lillian Parker.

[*typewriter keys, the bell dings, the carriage slides*]

Lillian Parker, 59, was the local bookshop owner off Edgewood and Derby Street. Borrowed Books was the name of the shop, which started as a collection of books Lillian borrowed from friends and promised she would return in a timely manner. Instead, she started a bookstore. No one seemed to complain, however. Lillian was one of the sweetest and most unassuming people in town. It was a closed-casket funeral due to the condition of the body when Lillian was found. Her shop was ransacked, books flung from shelves, bookcases knocked over. Her cats were already eating her by the time she was discovered. Never trust a cat.

[*meow... eating flesh...*]

Death by Dying Official Transcript

OW VO: Earl Jameson, the alcoholic academic, found himself at the wrong funeral. He was meant to be at his Uncle Robert's funeral down the hall, but turned left instead of right and he was no longer at the right memorial. Earl – particularly inebriated, and particularly intellectual – was muttering to himself.

Earl: (*slurred*) Let me tell you about the degradation of morals at the hands of funeral homes operating and profiting from a capitalist system centered around the dead...

OW VO: The eulogies had just begun when Earl stepped into the room, and people assumed he was exactly where he was supposed to be. At the sight of Earl, Leroy Jones, whose gift for inappropriate timing was on an olympic level, spoke up.

Leroy: Oh hey Earl! Why don't you give a eulogy?

OW VO: And suddenly there he was, 50 eyes staring up at him with unassuming anticipation. Against his better judgement, Earl slumped up to the podium, musing over the fact that at this very moment, he was probably supposed to be giving a eulogy for his uncle. As is custom of awkward moments, sniffles and coughs and throat-clearing filled the room. Crickets aren't in season yet, but if they were, they most certainly would have been chirping. After much contemplation, Earl spoke up.

Earl: At a time like this... I believe silence is appropriate.

OW VO: And people loved it.

[*applause*]

OW VO: They congratulated him for it all week. What is poignant exists in the space between what is spoken and what is not spoken. Those who speak in a moment of poignancy often have missed the moment entirely. Speaking of, Pastor Jeff had some very poignant words of his own...

[*organ music*]

Pastor Jeff: Family... Familia! Ya know, I had a father. I used to love to catch fish in the backyard with my dad. We'd go out back, with maybe a halibut, a red snapper, a tuna. And we'd toss them back and forth, back and forth, catching fish. [*Sigh*] I loved my father. And I loved to catch fish. One day, my father, he left, to pursue his dreams of working on an oil rig. That was a sad day. But I have another father, a father who is not in the Louisiana bayou. I have a father in heaven. A father who is always there to catch a fish with me. If you're ever feeling sad, if you feel alone, if you need someone. He's right there. And He's holding a red snapper... Let us pray.

Death by Dying Official Transcript

OW VO: Now that Lillian Parker was dead, everyone was scouring her vandalized bookshop, looking in a feverish fashion for the books she had never returned to them. They seemed oddly calm about it, however, as though they didn't mind her so-called "borrowing" of their books. Charlotte had the suspicion Lillian had been murdered, and I was tempted to believe her. Perhaps it was my instincts, and my deep desire for intrigue. But murder is the spice of life. I knew where I had to go. I knew just who I had to see.

[subtle horror music, building in suspense]

Everything is beautiful when it rains at night. The Crestfall Graveyard is no exception, as I'm sure many of you know. The earth becomes soft beneath your feet, the rain tickles your face, and the tombstones become fractured by the falling droplets. Waiting for me... was the Angel of Death.

[THUNDER CLAP!]

She is tall and infinitely pale, with boney ribcage wings behind her back. We have become friends over the years. The Angel's pet, the Button-Eyed Raven, looked depressed as usual.

Angel of Death: You're late.

OW: Look who's talking. You're the queen of the late.

AoD: I cannot wait to take your soul.

OW: How have things been?

AoD: Not good.

OW: What happened?

AoD: I hurt my foot.

Raven: Caw! Despair and calamity!

OW VO: Moaned the Button-Eyed Raven.

Raven: Disappointment and damnation!

OW VO: I peered around the graveyard, taking it all in. In the distance I could see the groundskeeper, Walter Grimsly, and he raised his lantern to say hello, like a flirtatious man might raise his glass of scotch from across a bar.

Death by Dying Official Transcript

OW: What do you have for me?

AoD: It's important you know something.

OW: Yes?

AoD: Lillian Parker. When I came to collect her soul, she had a message to give. She said she died... because of a book.

[*THUNDER CLAP!!*]

OW VO: My eyes lit up.

AoD: Careful. Death is ever present.

OW VO: And with that, I sprinted across the muddied ground, jumping over the coffins that have gradually been raising out of the earth due to years of erosion and bad planning. I was perhaps inappropriately gleeful.

Raven: Caw! Danger leads to disaster!

OW VO: Cried the Button-Eyed Raven.

Raven: What if your friends don't really like you???

[*chilling musical chord, raven cawing and flapping away*]

OW V.O.: It was relatively easy to break into Borrowed Books.

[*glass breaking*]

Who's to notice some shattered glass when the place is already a mess. The marigold light of the streetlamp outside projected jumbled shadows on the wall. Paintings hung askew. The smell of flesh ripped from bone tainted the air.

[*meow*]

I looked down, and there was a cat staring up at me.

[*meow again*]

Black with white stripes, like a zebra. There were flecks of something... meaty on its whiskers.

Death by Dying Official Transcript

[*even more meowing*]

OW VO: There were two other cats, one tiptoeing across the pillaged shop. The third was on the check-out counter, pawing a novel.

[*the last meow*]

These cats have had a taste for human flesh. Who knows what will become of them. The striped one nuzzled my leg, purring. It nibbled my ankles slightly, but then thought better of it. It turned with a certain confidence and sauntered towards the back of the shop. I followed it, careful not to break the spines of the books beneath my feet. In the back was a bookcase that *hadn't* been knocked over. But something else was noteworthy about it. All of the books had been removed from the shelves, except *one*. It remained perfectly upright. I pulled on it, but it didn't budge. I pulled harder and it tipped like a lever –

[*snap*]

And the bookcase sprung open like a door.

[*crreeaaaakkk*]

[*dark, creepy, "oooooh this mystery is getting good" music*]

Beyond was a darkened room lined with logbooks and ledgers in alphabetical order. I picked one at random: C-12. The pages fluttered like wings as I thumbed through the tome. March 20th: Sarah Carlisle stole a Jesus action figure from the gift shop at the Church of Right Here Right Now. April 29th: Susan Collick, the local florist, saw a mysterious, beast-like figure in the Dark Woods while she was on her morning run. May 16th: Scott Chapman's cows have become addicted to methamphetamines. These... were confessions. These were admissions. These books were filled with secrets.

[*dramatic impact in music to accent this shocking discovery*]

Perhaps this was why people were so unbothered by Lillian taking their books for her to sell. They were bartering so she would hold onto their secrets. I scanned the shelves, flipping through ledgers and diaries and scandalous photo albums. Until something caught my eye. Or rather, the *absence* of something caught my eye. One book was missing. Only one. J-1. I remembered the Angel's words. Lillian died...

AoD: (*echoing*) BECAUSE OF A BOOK...

OW VO: The process was a simple one. Scour this downright marvelous town of Crestfall, Idaho and find all of the people whose last names began with J-A.

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[the mystery begins type of music]

OW VO: The first, Lisa Jane, answered the door with a wild look in her eyes. “Come quickly,” she said. The room was lit with candles. Cinnamon-scented candles. I found this offensive but said nothing. This was the wrong season for cinnamon-scented things. Think before you scent next time, Lisa Jane. She pointed at the far wall straight ahead. There I saw my shadow, and hers... and then a third. I looked around the room, searching for a source, but the room was empty. The space was defined by lack. It was a shadow with no one to cast it. It waved and I waved back. “Is this a bad time?” I asked. She said the shadow had been there for weeks now and they had fallen in love. I congratulated them and made my leave, as it is imprudent to interrupt young lovers.

The second on my list was Johnathan Jackson. His house was on fire and I thought it best to leave him to sort out his issues.

The third was Mia Jasper. Mia Jasper lives above Lou’s Sushi and Chinese Cuisine where she pays the landlord in strange luminescent fish she finds in the lagoon outside the Crestfall Laboratories. Lou’s is delicious for a reason. Mia Jasper left her apartment at exactly 12:37 am. Her dyed-blue hair glistened in the neon glow of the restaurant’s sign. She wore a black leather jacket with cuts and holes that suggested she has been in more than one gang-related knife fight. Under her arm was a book. Perhaps a stolen book... And now, the condolences.

Lou’s Sushi and Chinese Cuisine sends their condolences. They say:

[upbeat music]

“Egg-roll on down to Lou’s! Your lo mein spot for Chinese Cuisine. We now deliver! ... We’re sorry for your loss.”

Condolences also brought to you by The Dollar-Store Romance Novel Book Club: “If you’re romantic, and if you’re cheap, we welcome one and all to join our book club! This week we are reading “Disrobed: My Affair with a Celibate Monk,” by Jannette Merriweather.” Thank you. Lillian would have been grateful and slightly confused by your thoughtful words.

[the hum of a town at night]

OW VO: Down winding streets and narrow alleyways I followed Mia Jasper’s meandering path. I slunked in the shadows, stealthy as a jackal in a midnight fog. She stopped abruptly at the door of Siren’s Diner.

Mia: Why are you following me?

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OW VO: I combat rolled behind a recycling bin.

[crash, failed combat roll]

OW: *(muttering) ow.*

OW VO: Crestfall is a very environmentally-conscious place.

Mia: I can see you.

OW VO: I poked my head up.

Mia: What do you want?

OW: Mia Jasper, you are officially a suspect in the murder of Lillian Parker.

Mia: Murder? Why?

OW: Your name. Your book. Things are adding up.

Mia: Two things are adding up to murder? This is a textbook on criminal law, dude.

OW: A textbook?

Mia: Yeah, I'm studying for the bar exam.

OW: Oh... Congratulations.

Mia: I'm clean, alright? This doesn't seem healthy, you should get a life.

OW: I'm a little busy with death right now.

OW VO: She rolled her eyes so far it seemed as though she could see the back of her own head. And with that, she stepped into Siren's Diner. Through the closing door I caught a glimpse inside. At the counter was Earl Jameson. Jameson spelled J-A.

[ding! an order-up restaurant bell but also a lightbulb going off in OW's lil' brain.]

The lights were dingy, the air smelled of bad coffee, and somewhere a moth was fluttering over a pot of black sludge. Earl leaned over the Formica counter nursing a flask with an image on its side of a lion doing pilates.

OW: Earl Jameson.

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Earl: Ah! Obituary Writer. The author of small tragedies. Hello.

OW: Interesting to see you here.

Earl: Yes, well, I come here to sober up.

[*glug glug glug*]

OW VO: He poured the remainder of his flask into a cup of coffee.

[*inspiring music, full orchestra, building, OW is ready to go!*]

I knew exactly what I would say. I had a speech prepared on notecards. It had to do with truth and justice and balance in the universe. It had to do with the battlegrounds of right and wrong. I proclaimed that murder was the death of human decency. It was *absolutely stunning*. I just knew it would convince Earl to talk about the stolen book.

Earl: You've come here about the book, haven't you?

[*music abruptly stops*]

OW VO: ... Oh. I was looking forward to that monologue. At least I've told you, patient reader.

OW: The book from Lillian's bookshop?

Earl: Yes.

OW: So you are the culprit! You broke into Borrowed Books. You killed Lillian Parker.

Earl: (*sighing*) Are you familiar with Michel Foucault's cultural theory on power and its relationship to the knowledge of power? It proclaims that power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined – power is a function of knowledge, yes, but more importantly, in the instance of our little predicament here, knowledge is an exercise of power. Power is a blender and knowledge makes the blender go, my boy. James Watt invented the steam engine! He invented power. With knowledge... CASTRO! What did he do when they tried to kill him with a Cigar? He didn't have the tools, good man! If Castro had known what and wither it went, if he had known the way those sub-boreal winds wafted, had he the knowledge to back up the thought of his knowledge to back up his power, to make his blender go... we would have been drinking a different smoothie, OW. The problem is when those who *think* they are in control lack the knowledge to *stay* in control.

OW: What are you trying to say?

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Earl: I'm trying to say you are an idiot, Obituary Writer. What you lack is knowledge. I would never kill anyone! No! This was a personal matter. This wasn't about death, this was about life. My Uncle Robert's life.

[*music box flashback music*]

Earl: He was a bit of a literary artist, you see, and he wrote a book, a children's book, that he wrote for me when I was just a boy. He was terrified to share it with the world because he didn't know what people would think of him, so it was hidden away in Borrowed Books. You could say I wanted to (*chuckle*) borrow it (*nervous laugh*), but I did a little more damage than I intended.

OW: What was the book, if I may ask?

Earl: He titled it, "The Lonely Astronaut". It's about an astronaut searching the universe for his lost friend... It's a good read. My Uncle is dead now you see, and I'm feeling a little lonely myself. I thought that retrieving the book would bring him closer to me.

OW: So you *didn't* kill Lillian Parker?

Earl: No! I'm an academic! It may seem that I break into places willy nilly and snatch books like some sort of criminal mastermind, but I would never, I say, never take a life.

OW: Then how is it that just moments after you break into Borrowed Books, Lillian Parker turns up dead?

Earl: Ah. That would be a mystery even to me. All I did was take a book that was meant for me.

OW VO: At that very moment, Leroy burst into the Siren's Diner.

Leroy: (*out of breath*) Obituary Writer. You're gonna want to see this.

[*chatter of folks gathered*]

OW VO: Borrowed Books was packed with people despite it being the wee hours of the morning. Charlotte stood off to the side, near the room of secrets, with downcast eyes. At the center of the room was the Butcher. The coroner has been missing for months now, and after much debate from the Committee About Nettlesome Things Regrettably In Guaranteed Hindrance That No One Wants (the acronym CAN'T RIGHT NOW, if that is easier to remember), the Butcher was appointed to take his place. He knows his blood, meat, and flesh.

[*crime solvin' music*]

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OW VO: He scanned the room with keen eyes. He tested the wind patterns with an unwavering finger. He dropped down on all fours and sniffed the books. He licked the splattered blood on the counter.

Butcher: Ha. O-Negative. As I suspected.

OW VO: He muttered to himself. The white-striped cat hissed at him and he hissed back.

Butcher: Well, uh, heeeessscchhhh to you too!

OW VO: He launched himself back onto his feet and whipped around to speak to the crowd. He was still wearing his butcher's apron, covered in pig's blood. Beside him was his pet goat, Chester –

Chester: Bahhhhh!

OW VO: Who hasn't left his side since Wyatt Hudson died. They do everything together. They stroll through the Mud Fields. They go shopping. They share a bottle of pink moscato before bed. The Butcher cleared his throat.

Butcher: This is no longer a crime scene.

[huge collective sigh]

OW VO: A sigh of relief washed over the crowd, as though choreographed. I must have missed the memo. It was impressively synchronized.

Butcher: Lillian Parker *was* murdered.

[huge collective gasp]

OW VO: A collective gasp from the crowd. Surely this was rehearsed.

Butcher: By this book!

OW VO: He held up a copy of "Disrobed: My Affair with a Celibate Monk."

Butcher: She had a severe blood disease, you see. Fatal, to say the least. Upon discovering her ransacked shop, she scrambled to find her favorite book, to make sure it was still there. Whether it was this embarrassment to literature or not, I cannot be sure... A surprisingly deep paper cut to the radial artery caused some serious exsanguination. Blood spraying everywhere like a firehose. Horrendous. Blood everywhere! Totally awesome. It truly was an unnecessarily excessive accident.

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OW VO: The crowd murmured amongst themselves. I remembered the Angel's words: Lillian died...

AoD: (*echoing*) BECAUSE OF A BOOK.

Butcher: And then her cats ate her. But that's beside the point, hehe... That is all.

OW VO: The Butcher threw his apron back like a cape and fled from the bookshop. Chester trotted after him.

Chester: Bahhhhhhhh.

OW VO: The crowd was ecstatic. Jubilation abound now that the death was solved.

[*champagne bottle POP!*]

A small impromptu party with champagne ensued. Charlotte disappeared around the corner into the room of secrets. I followed.

OW: At least she wasn't murdered.

OW VO: I said.

Charlotte: I'm not sure it matters.

OW: I thought you wanted to know how your aunt died.

Charlotte: No... I didn't realize what I wanted. I think I wanted to know *why*.

OW: Life is fragile.

Charlotte: So are the living.

OW VO: I sat down next to her. Criss-cross applesauce, as is customary of serious conversations on floors. We talked for hours. About her aunt. About her. About her affinity for writing haikus about walruses.

[*waves upon a beach, seagulls calling, wistful music*]

Charlotte:

Cloudless bulgy toss.

A glorious walrus flies

whilst watching the sea

Death by Dying Official Transcript

OW VO: *We were connected by a string that lead to a singularity of loneliness.*

Charlotte: Will you take the cats?

OW: I'm sorry?

Charlotte: Perhaps they could keep you company.

OW: Who?

Charlotte: The cats.

OW: Surely you would want them. They were Lillian's.

Charlotte: No, I'm, I'm allergic to cats, and, well, they ate my aunt so I have mixed feelings, but if I don't take them I don't know who would. But I think they could find a home with you.

OW: I think –

Charlotte: Please?

OW:... Okay

Charlotte: Thank you.

OW: Well, good night.

Charlotte: Good night, Obituary Writer.

OW VO: And so I returned to my apartment... with three man-eating cats. They immediately started knocking things over and destroying the place, but I didn't mind. The apartment didn't feel so dead anymore.

[charlotte's theme]

A glass of unfinished brandy was waiting for me. I resumed my broodful staring out the window. The abandoned toy factory was happy, and it glowed with a crimson light to show me its delight.

[crimson light shining]

Perhaps not everything is lost. Even the things that seem abandoned, even abandoned for good. I think it would be best to leave you with a passage from Robert Jameson's *The Lonely Astronaut*.

Death by Dying Official Transcript

[page flipping]

Robert Jameson:

Nothing from the planets.

Nothing from the space junk.

Nothing from the astrobleam of a fallen meteor.

*The Lonely Astronaut searched and searched and searched,
And would never truly stop searching,
Because the hope of finding his friend, his dearest friend,
Was what made those distant stars in the sky shine just a little brighter.*

OW VO: This has been an obituary of Lillian Parker

Unknown Ominous Presence: This has been *Death by Dying*.

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

Written and Directed by Evan Gulock. Produced by Niko Gerentes. Featuring the voices Evan Gulock as The Obituary Writer and the Button-Eyed Raven. Angela Morris as Charlotte. Hannah Smith as the Angel of Death. Joshua Giordan as Pastor Jeff. Iridian Fierro as Mia Jasper. And Niko Gerentes as Earl Jameson, Leroy Jones, The Butcher, and Chester the Goat. *The Lonely Astronaut* narrated by George Zarr. Music composed by Nicolas Gasparini, Steven O'Brien, Kevin Macleod, and Niko Gerentes. Sound effects courtesy of FreeSound.org. Creative Producer and Script Editor, Joshua Giordan. Recording Engineer and Casting Director, Niko Gerentes. If any of you inquisitive listeners would like to send their condolences, comments, hopes, fears, or dreams, you can contact The Obituary Writer personally, at TheObituaryWriter@gmail.com. Or follow on FaceBook, Instagram, and Twitter, @DeathByDyingPod. And remember... if you're going to borrow a book, make sure you have every intention of borrowing it back.

[warping piano music fade out]