

Obituary 04: Martin Died

Angel of Death (Voiceover): Hello. I am the Angel of Death, here to collect your soul, and this is *Death by Dying*.

How are you feeling? Dead? That's good, you're off to a great start. You may be experiencing an overwhelming numbness, a desire to run, and for whatever reason, the unfading taste of your last meal. You will taste this for the rest of your undead life. I hope you didn't have any garlic. You'll get used to the numbness, and the taste is irrelevant, but I need you to promise me one thing: DO NOT RUN. You may want to, even desperately so, but I need to carry you over safely to the other side. And if you run, I cannot guarantee where your soul will end up. Sound good?

[frantic running]

Oh... He's running.

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

Obituary Writer (Voiceover): I was on my way back from a late night at The Evening Post, working on the obituaries of people who had died under normal circumstances. Old age. Kidney failure. Choking on a pastry from the Carlson and Carlson's Delicious Pastry Shop, where the Carlsons serve delicious pastries. How boring it is when boring people die.

A stroll through Crestfall is forever charming, especially with the arrival of dusk. It is the kind of place where everyone knows everyone, but won't talk to you because they know too much about you. They smile as you pass, wanting to say hello, but all they can think is, "So, I hear you broke up with Karen because she cheated on you with that two-timing bastard Jimmy Hawkins." And so we say nothing, and they are some of the best conversations never had. The cherry blossoms were in bloom. Mrs. Shambles dog was on fire again.

[flames ignite, a dog yelps]

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OW VO: The birds were singing a hauntingly impressive rendition of “O Fortuna.” It was another beautiful night in Crestfall.

[*rendition of “O Fortuna” sung by birds tootling in the distance*]

But waiting for me in my apartment was the Angel of Death.

[*THUNDER CLAP!*]

And she was standing over a dead body. Blood was oozing onto my Persian carpet. My beloved Persian carpet. I had been so careful not to stain it. Had he no respect for culture? Who did this dead man think he was? Actually, who *was* this dead man? My three man-eating cats were already eating his face off, completely mutilating his features, which made this question slightly more difficult to answer.

AoD: I found him here. His soul ran off before I could claim it, so I know nothing of his life before he died. Now his soul is lost, wandering the earth until he can find his way back to his body. Only then can I bring him over to the other side.

OW: Can’t you, ahem, do some kind of, I don’t know, ethereal, supernatural power thing?

AoD: Unfortunately it does not work that way, and to be completely frank, my favorite TV show is on tonight.

Raven: Caw! You’re screwed!

OW VO: Her pet, the Button-Eyed Raven, moaned inconsolably as usual.

Raven: Your friends are abandoning you, ONE BY ONE!

AoD: Best make haste, Obituary Writer, before the townsfolk find out and think you are the killer. They are sweet but unforgiving like a flock of goats. Dumb, hungry goats.

OW: But –

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AoD: Goodbye, my dear.

OW VO: And with that, she transformed into a multitude of moths. Most flew out the window,

Raven: CAW! (*slams into window with a thud*) cawwww...

OW VO: But some lingered to chew on my linens. Tonight was a bad night for my fabrics.

[*thud, body hits ground, OW begins to drag it across gravel*]

OW VO: There is only one way to move when you are carrying a dead man: Quickly. And when that dead man might land you in prison for the rest of your life, you move very quickly. There was only one option for me. Figure out who this man was, and track down the true killer. This would involve some help, however, and that would mean transferring the body into the trunk of my midnight-black 1951 Hudson Hornet. With one arm over my shoulder, I hoisted my new friend through the parking lot.

Leroy: Oh hey there, Obituary Writer!

[*horror music, like Leroy just pulled back the shower curtain holding a knife*]

OW VO: Oh lord. Actually it was the *landlord*, Leroy Jones. He tilted his head to the side in curiosity. He wore suspenders high enough to make him float when he walked. He was never the talk of the town, but he was certainly the talker of the town.

[*horror music fades*]

Leroy: How ya doin' on this fine evening?

OW: Just fine, thank you, in a bit of a rush.

Leroy: Oh sure, no problem. Hey, did I tell you about the time I fell into a bush? Haha, oh, what a riot! I was on my way home from playing Bridge with the guys, you know Pete and Chandler, don'tcha? Well, we were having a bit of a drink to celebrate on account of Pete waking up from a coma recently and –

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OW: As much as I would love to hear this story, I really must be going.

Leroy: Oh sure, no problem. Long story short, I fell into a bush.

OW: A thrilling account. Good night, Leroy.

Leroy: Good night there! Say, who's that friend of yours?

[*horror music resumes*]

OW VO: I froze. My mystery man hung limp around my shoulder.

OW: A friend.

[*car trunk creaks open*]

Leroy: And he's riding in the trunk there?

OW: (*grunting as he lifts the dead body*)

[*plunk*]

Leroy: Seems like there's plenty of the room up front.

OW: ... He likes it. It's sort of his thing.

Leroy: We all have our things, don't we...

OW VO: He stared at me... just long enough for it to be incredibly uncomfortable. He stood there, unmoving, like a switch had been turned off. My car jerked as I reversed and accelerated into the night. Leroy remained completely still, watching on...

[*alleyway ambience, knock knock knock*]

OW VO: There was a chill in the air as I knocked on the alleyway door of the Butcher's Butchery. Marigold street lamps reflected in small pools of recent rain.

[creaking door opening]

Butcher: Yes?

OW VO: I lifted the dead body in my arms.

Butcher: Oh okay, yeah, sure.

OW VO: Since the Butcher took over as town coroner, he had been conducting the autopsies in the back of his butcher shop. Slabs of meat hung from the ceiling, swinging slightly. A lung. A pig head. Some eyeballs in a glass jar.

Chester: BAHHHHH.

OW VO: Chester, his pet goat –

Chester: Bah.

OW VO: And crime-solving partner –

Chester: Bah bah.

OW VO: Wandered aimlessly amongst the meat.

[splunk]

The Butcher plopped the body onto a cold metal table.

Butcher: So, is this official business or of the down-low variety?

OW: The down-low variety.

Butcher: Did you finally kill someone?

OW: Why does everyone think I'm going to kill someone?

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Butcher: You got that look on your face.

OW: What look?

Butcher: That one.

OW: What, this?

Butcher: Yeah.

OW: Oh, huh.

Butcher: *And you spend a lot of time with dead people, but it's mostly your face.*

OW: I need to know who this man is.

Butcher: That's a toughy, considering he doesn't have a face.

OW: There's... nothing you can do?

Butcher: No, there is, but I'd have to cut him open... Luckily it's been a while since I've cut someone open.

[*SHHIIINNGGG! out comes the knife, STAB, splash, SPLAT, glish, the grossest wet organ sounds imaginable*]

Butcher: (*muttering to himself*) Lemme get my tools out, let's see here... Uhhh, I think I know how to use this, uhhh anyway. Yeah okay. We'll go in here... Oh god, that's gross. Eh, okay. Uhhh duh duh duhhh, hm, oh man, I guess, yeah, yep, that's his lung... Yep, that's another lung. Uh huh... I don't get paid enough for this. Hell, I don't get paid for this at all. But I guess I'll do it. I mean what else am I gonna do today? I already watched that movie I wanted to watch... Whoa! I didn't know any restaurants around here served chicken and waffles.

OW VO: The Butcher held up the mushy contents of the man's stomach.

[squish]

Butcher: Man, now I'm hungry.

OW: Can we get on with this?

Butcher: Ah, yes, well, the more important thing here is there appears to be a metal capsule inside the chicken and waffles.

OW VO: The Butcher held up a small silver object no larger than a pill. I leaned in as the Butcher carefully unscrewed the capsule to reveal a small piece of paper rolled up like a medieval scroll. He unwound it with a pair of tweezers. On the tiny scroll was a tiny note.

"If found, please return to 1600 Cherry Street."

A dead body with a return address? What could this possibly mean?

Butcher: Ahem, yeah, so that's gonna be 50 bucks for an under-the-table autopsy.

Chester: Bahhh.

Butcher: No Chester.

Chester: Bahhh.

Butcher: I know it was on top of the table.

Chester: Bah.

Butcher: *Under* the table is just a metaphor for a shady hush hush when someone kills a man to feed his cats and satiate his inner squirming.

OW: I have no such squirmings!

OW VO: The Butcher gave me a knowing smile as I left the room. I sighed, paid for the overpriced autopsy, and made my leave.

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[ominous twinkling piano music]

[car driving down a road]

OW VO: Cherry Street was out of the way of, well, everything. It was a neighborhood that Time had forgotten and now felt too awkward to text back. On my way I passed Widow's Peak, a small hill where you can see all of Crestfall. Charlotte and I used to sit there on the grass and throw pennies at birds. We haven't spoken in a while. I'm sure she's just tired... As I pulled down Cherry Street, I could see that the lights were out in every house. The curtains were drawn on every window. This part of town was lifeless. I counted the houses as I passed, the mystery man's message in hand. 1597, 1598, 1599... And then there was a giant hole where House 1600 should have been. It was as though it had been lifted from its foundations, launched into space like a rocket ship. Or like it just disappeared. But I find the visual of a rocket ship more illuminating. Debris surrounded the peripherals of the house-shaped hole, as if some of the contents of the house had fallen out. Photographs in shattered frames, toys torn from limb to limb, broken kitchenware. And everywhere, absolutely everywhere amongst the detritus: peach pits... Now might be a good time for a brief note on vanishing acts.

[grand, haunting, fantastical music]

It is not enough to simply vanish. The disappearance of something in and of itself only causes confusion. A magician may wave their wand, flourish their cape, do a little dance and say a secret word, but if a volunteer just disappeared and the magician walked out of the theater, jingling his tip jar, never to return again, people might start to wonder if he was a magician at all and not a psychotic murderer who happened to find the hidden trapdoor on the stage. The point is – it is the reappearance that causes wonder. When something dematerialized rematerializes, when something gone returns, bewilderment ensues, and that is the truest of tricks. It is the *reappearance* that matters. The reveal is resolution. Vanishing is only the beginning of a mystery. That is all for now.

OW VO: And now, the condolences:

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[*upbeat sleuthy investigative music*]

OW VO: The Butcher secretly sends his condolences. He says:

Butcher: Sorry for judging you on your choice of food. Never judge a man on the contents of his stomach, especially if your cutting that man's stomach open after he has died. My bad. I shall never make that mistake again.

OW VO: The man who accidentally saw us doing a secret autopsy in the back of the Butcher's butchery also sends his regards. He says:

Panicked Man: I saw nothing. I will tell no one. I was never there. Please don't kill me. I have a family. You had that look on your face.

OW VO: What lovely, poetic words Man Who Accidentally Saw Us Doing A Secret Autopsy. I know they would have meant a lot to the deceased and his loved ones. Who ever they are.

[*crickets at night*]

[*knock knock-knock-knock knock, click clack, the knocks like Shave and a Hair Cut, and the door opening like the response, Two Bits*]

OW VO: I held up a single peach pit when Charlotte opened her door.

Charlotte: What do you want, Obituary Writer? It's 3:30 in the morning.

OW: I found a peach pit.

Charlotte: I can see that.

OW: I need your help.

Charlotte: I hate you.

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OW VO: A moment of back story. My pastor and I had killed the empathic vampires that had been draining her of negative emotions... the negative emotions came back.

OW: Your plants are looking nice.

Charlotte: I'd like to be by myself now.

OW: Hear me out. There's a house that is supposed to be there but it isn't. Where it should have been were a myriad of peach pits, and I might be wrong, but... I thought of you. Also there's a dead body in my trunk, but that's not important right now.

Charlotte: (*sighing*) I just don't think I can involve myself –

OW: But the house at 1600 Cherry Street, it just –

Charlotte: Wait did you say 1600 Cherry Street?

OW: Yeah?

Charlotte: Yeah... that's where I grew up. That's my childhood home, where I lived with Aunt Lillian.

[*the church bell gongs*]

OW VO: Charlotte and myself dragged the mystery man's body inch by inch, foot by foot, to the entrance of the Church of Right Here Right Now. Charlotte's first suggestion was to deliver the mystery body to Pastor Jeff, as to not have any dead weight on our hands... That may not have been how she put it.

[*THUMP! body hitting a table*]

Pastor Jeff: Yes, well, this is a bit of a snaggletoothed conundrum, isn't it?

OW: How so?

Pastor Jeff: Well I don't know how you came by this poor chap, now do I? You could be murderers or grave robbers or taxidermists.

OW: You have our word.

Pastor Jeff: Hm. Okay.

OW: Is there anything you can do to help? We were hoping to find out who this man is.

Charlotte: *And make sure he gets a proper burial.*

Pastor Jeff: Well I can do a burial no problemo. As for who this man is? That's a little harder, but I think I can manage. It should just take a lock of hair, a drop of virgin blood, an animal sacrifice, and the word of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That should do the trick.

OW: We were hoping to make this a quick ordeal.

Pastor Jeff: I can always just look at him, there's that option, too.

OW VO: Pastor Jeff told us to stay put as he whipped around, carting the dead body behind him like a sack of potatoes into his private quarters. We were left standing amongst the empty pews. Charlotte felt distant. I wanted to be there for her, but I didn't know how. I wanted to be a good friend. I've never been a good friend before. I couldn't say the right words at the time... which is why I always write them later. I needed to say something.

[*SLAM!*]

Pastor Jeff: Alrighty! Good news and bad news. Good news, his name is Martin.

OW: And who is Martin?

Pastor Jeff: Quiet fellow. Volunteered at the Church. Came every Sunday. He liked chocolate chips in his pancakes.

Charlotte: How do you know all of this?

[*the Holiest of music*]

Pastor Jeff: I had a word with the Man Upstairs.

Charlotte: God?

[*the Holiest of music cuts abruptly*]

Pastor Jeff: No, Elder Norman. He's a deacon who lives upstairs, he knows everybody.

OW: And what was the bad news?

Pastor Jeff: Oh, the bad news is that he is dead.

OW: We already knew that.

Pastor Jeff: And it's not still bad news to you, Obituary Writer? You make me sick.

OW: But –

Pastor Jeff: I'm just Joshin', I like you, kid. You're probably going to Hell, but I like you, and that's what's important.

OW: So say... say we wanted more information about Martin... You know... from the source.

Pastor Jeff: You mean... speak to the late Martin himself? Hmm...

OW VO: Pastor Jeff thought about this with deep consideration. He furrowed his brow so low it looked as though his eyes were growing hair.

Pastor Jeff: You could always ask the bicycles.

OW VO: The bicycles.

[*ding ding! tick tick tick, vvvv vvv vvvvv... the bicycles wander*]

OW VO: As far back as anyone can remember, there have been riderless bicycles roaming the streets at night. They travel in packs, usually sticking to the winding roads at the edge of Crestfall. When the sun has set and the streets are mostly empty, you can hear them – the gentle whirring of their gears and pedals, the dinging of their bells. There are theories. Some say bicycles have started developing consciousness and there will be an uprising when we least expect it. It is the natural order for bicycles to replace us and become the new dominant species on the planet. Some say they are an experiment that escaped from the Crestfall Laboratories. Meanwhile others say they don't exist at all and are simply a trick of the light. These people are affectionately known as idiots.

The most popular theory, however, is that the bicycles are being driven by phantoms – Souls who have passed but never left Crestfall. And now they wander aimlessly, this way and that, perhaps searching for a way out of this world, perhaps sticking around because they couldn't bare to leave it. Rumor has it that at the right angle you can see glimpses of the riders: A nose in the air, a foot on the pedal, a hand waving at you. Families will have picnics at night and watch the bicycles as they go by, wondering if their loved ones are out there, riding with them. This is one of the deepest of sorrows in life. Wondering if a bicycle that is moving by itself is dead Uncle George. He always was a poor cyclist when he was alive. What a cruel fate in death. I pitied them, to be honest. There is no use in searching aimlessly for what you have lost. There is no use watching on for someone you can never get back. They're gone. You can't hold on to what isn't there anymore.

It seemed as though I was always at “the edge of town” every time something mysterious happened in Crestfall. Perhaps it is because “the edge of town” sounds more mysterious. Or maybe it was merely a coincidence. A gang of bicycles were in the middle of the dirt road ahead, standing upright by themselves. Some coasted around in circles like wandering fish. To the right was a field of tall grass. To the left was the Dark Woods. We approached them.

OW: Ahem, excuse me.

[*sqeeeeaaak, clink!*]

The bicycles all turned to look at us simultaneously.

OW: We're looking for a Martin, do you know of one?

[*ding ding!*]

OW VO: The bicycles broke apart like synchronized swimmers and began to orbit us, gliding this way and that. I could see and hear fractured details of the invisible riders. The smile of Robert Jameson. He spoke no words but I could understand the things he had to say. He had stuck around after he died so he could see his nephew Earl rediscover a book he wrote for him when he was a child and watch him as he read it for the first time in years. There were others. The waving hand of one of my old neighbors. The middle finger of Bernard Hudson, who was accidentally killed by the Craigmire Cannon while running away from me, and most likely still blames me for it. One by one they passed, gradually leaving us until only one remained. It flashed its headlight as if to say "Hello."

[*blink*]

I asked if he was Martin.

[*blink blink.*]

His headlight flashed again.

OW: Who are you?

OW VO: Again I heard no words, but I understood, as though Martin's thoughts were being sent directly into my brain. He was a nobody when he was alive. He was the kind of kid who his classmates called "quiet" when they were asked what he was like because no one ever took the time to get to know him. When he grew older, he worked at an old folks home called The Old Folks Home where he spent most of his time with folks of the older age. People didn't find him particularly interesting, but it didn't help that his hobbies included collecting traffic cones and photographing Persian rugs. He was worried no one would attend his funeral. Martin proceeded to explain that earlier that night, he was cleaning up after an elderly person who had crapped themselves, when he slipped and cracked his head open like a farm fresh, cage free, organic egg. A shadowy beast came to him as he was dying and placed him in my apartment.

Charlotte: Will you take me to It?

OW VO: Its front tires shook fervently.

Charlotte: It took my home. It put you in OW's apartment. It clearly wants me... If there really is some kind of creature after me, It can't just go around doing horrible things to other people if what It really wants is me. I can't have people hurt because of me.

OW VO: The bicycle stood very, very still.

Charlotte: Listen... Martin, I know what it's like to feel... alone.

OW: You may not have had friends when you were alive... But I could be your friend now... *We* could be your friends now. Most of my friends are dead actually. And, I like Persian rugs a tremendous amount. You ruined mine in fact. I'm still slightly bitter. But that's okay. You don't have to be alone anymore. I may not always know how to be a good friend... But I care a lot.

OW VO: A dusky breeze rustled the leaves of a nearby willow tree. The night sky was clear. Charlotte looked at me. She smiled. I smiled back.

OW: Can you take us to It?

Charlotte: I should go alone.

OW: No... No, I'm going to be there.

OW VO: The bicycle was so still it felt as though it were at risk of falling over. Then – Martin's headlight flickered on and he turned, pedaling steadfastly into the Dark Woods. Over crunching leaves and broken branches, across tiny streams and rocky slopes, we followed Martin the Bicycle through the Dark Woods. It all felt the same, like the first time I was there. It was cold, it was dark, and it felt like everything around us was alive.

[*bird caws overhead*]

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OW VO: I was just about to regret our decision to follow Martin when we came upon a clearing. And in the clearing was a house. An entire house standing tall amongst the trees. Next to the front door was an address: 1600 Cherry Street.

[dramatic impact in music to accent this mind-blowing discovery]

The vanishing act. With the vanishing comes confusion. With the reappearance comes wonder. Charlotte seemed unnaturally calm. She breathed in deeply as though she hadn't had a breath of fresh air in years.

Charlotte: Home.

OW VO: This has... sort of been an obituary of... a friend named Martin.

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 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. And Niko Gerentes as Leroy Jones, The Butcher, Chester The Goat, and Frantic Man Who Accidentally Saw a Secret Autopsy. Music composed by Nicolas Gasparini, Steven O'Brien, Alex Nikita, and Kris Kalvenes. Sound effects courtesy of [FreeSound.org](https://freesound.org). Creative Producer and Script Editor, Joshua Giordan. Recording Engineer and Casting Director, Niko Gerentes. If any of you duplicitous 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... think twice before sitting on your bicycle. It may be your Uncle George.

[warping piano music fade out]