

Obituary 05: And Then She Died

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

[ominous music, per usual, except this time... extra ominous]

Charlotte: This is amazing. It's exactly like I remember it.

OW VO: It looked exactly like a "childhood home." It was white, with blue shutters. There were five windows: two on the first floor, two on the second, and a small, circular third for the attic. Smoke billowed softly out of the chimney. Yes. A house in the middle of a forest was a strange sight to behold. Charlotte's old house, 1600 Cherry Street, was a seemingly unexplainable anomaly. Charlotte was entranced, lost in thought. I paced the clearing.

OW: Remember, this might not actually be your house, Charlotte. It may just look like your house. An illusion. We don't know what we're dealing with here.

Charlotte: I know. It's just... you see that window up there? That's where I used to sit waiting for the mailman to round the corner. I would try to send my mom letters... Here! Where the front lawn would have been. Aunt Lillian and I would run through the sprinkler on hot summer days. I loved the feeling so much, jumping over the sprinkler, I would insist we keep the sprinkler out even as it started getting chilly... And there! That front door... It's been a really long time since I've been back here.

OW VO: Charlotte turned to face the house and slowly drifted towards it, taking in the hydrangeas and cracked wood of the porch. She wandered up the stoop. The stairs creaked with her every step.

Charlotte: It always felt like nothing bad could ever happen here.

OW: Charlotte, I wouldn't get too close.

Death by Dying Official Transcript

OW VO: The house seemed to sigh and settle. She reached for the handle. The entire woods held its breath.

Charlotte: (*SHRIEKING*)

[*door flying open, whoooooosshhhh! SLAM!*]

OW: CHARLOTTE!

[*PANICKED "OH NO!" music*]

OW VO: The door flew open and Charlotte was sucked in as though she were grasped by an invisible hand. Just as quickly as the door opened, it shut. Charlotte was gone. I twisted the handle. Nothing. I clashed into the door with all of my weight, throwing my body against it again and again, but it wouldn't budge. Quiet... The house groaned, staring at me, taunting me. Charlotte was gone. I was outside. My *friend* was inside. I could see Charlotte flying up the stairs like she was a marionette being yanked by the strings. I found a disproportionately large tree branch for a man of my size, striking one of the windows.

[*glass smashing*]

[*slow-motion-shattered-glass twinkling*]

The window caved, shattering into a thousand pieces... a thousand pieces that then reassembled.

[*glass smash reverse*]

The smashed window fixing itself, becoming whole again. I swung again and the window cracked, only to heal itself once more. With every blow to the window, the window broke less and less, until it became completely impenetrable. The house had Charlotte now, and it wasn't about to let anyone else in.

[*dramatic music fades as a dark wind grows amongst the trees*]

Death by Dying Official Transcript

OW VO: The trees surrounding me swayed back and forth in a rhythmic dance, moving closer to each other and closer to me. The darkness deepened until I could hardly see anything at all. When I turned to look at the house, it was gone, and I realized I was in a completely different part of the forest.

Angel of Death: Obituary Writer.

OW VO: From the darkness emerged the Angel of Death.

[*THUNDER CLAP!*]

OW: Angel, thank goodness, what on earth is happening?

AoD: What I feared most.

OW: How could you be afraid? What could Death possibly be afraid of?

AoD: Life.

OW VO: Her face was somehow paler than it had ever been before. Her bony ribcage wings twitched uncomfortably. The Button-Eyed Raven was so depressed it had collapsed on her shoulder, slouching against her neck, one of its wings placed against its forehead like it was having a bad headache.

Raven: Caw! Caw! Woeful are the unlucky living!

AoD: I have failed you, Obituary Writer. I was blind to my sister's plans and now I fear it is too late.

OW: Your sister? Is she the shadowy beast I've seen in these woods?

AoD: Yes. She is the most wicked creature... in all of Idaho. She is evil incarnate. She is a trickster, a demon, a malevolent presence, and an all-around terrible sibling... she is... the Angel of Life.

Death by Dying Official Transcript

[harmonic angels singing, cheerful in an ironic way]

OW: The Angel of Life is evil?

AoD: Of course she is. Death doesn't kill people. Life does.

OW: What does she want with Charlotte?

AoD: My sister can offer a deal to those who grieve. A chance to bring their loved ones back to life. But it comes at a terrible price.

OW: What kind of price?

AoD: You must take their place.

OW: And Charlotte doesn't know.

AoD: That she will die in the process? Doubtfully.

OW: What can I do? The house is impossible to get into.

AoD: Do you think the Angel of Death doesn't have a skeleton key? It's too convenient for me to not have one.

OW VO: From her robes she presented a crooked, white key that looked as though it was made of actual bone.

AoD: This should get you into the house. Unfortunately I cannot enter the house myself. Life is the one thing I cannot touch. But I warn you, there is only danger ahead. If you enter that house, there is no going back.

OW: I understand.

AoD: Then begone with you... and good luck.

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OW VO: The Angel of Death pushed me, it was kind of a jerk move, but as I fell backwards, a black fog enveloped me. The Button-Eyed Raven's words echoed after me.

Raven: Preposterous! Perilous! I have a migraine! CAW!!!

[thunder grumbles overhead, a storm is coming]

OW VO: When the fog cleared, I was in front of Charlotte's house once more. 1600 Cherry Street loomed over me. It seemed to be growing, stretching upwards to abnormal heights. The sky swirled with midnight cumulonimbi. The key clicked in the lock like a burly man with offensive tattoos cracking his knuckles.

[crreeeeaaaaaak...]

[haunting, otherworldly, drifting-inside-someone-else's-memories piano music]

The inside of the house was warped, like a funhouse mirror. The wooden floor raised up and down in waves. The walls were bent into impossible angles. A table-side lamp floated through the air, its light curving in swirls around it. The gravity in the foyer seemed to shift with every step. Roots and vines wrapped around everything.

Young Charlotte: *(giggling)*

[little footsteps]

OW VO: A young girl darted around a corner. She crouched as she hid behind a sofa in the living room. She wore mismatched socks, a dark blue t-shirt that clashed with her corduroy jacket, and an oversized baseball cap. I don't even know where to begin. Socks mate for life and should always be with their corresponding pair. One's jacket should always be darker than the shirt underneath. And hats are never necessary unless you are at a hat festival. But who goes to hat festivals. People who wear hats I suppose. But in any case, the young girl's fashion was appalling. I never liked children. They have no sense of style.

Lillian: Charrlllloooottttee...

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Young Charlotte: *(giggle)*

OW VO: This was... Charlotte as a child.

Young Charlotte: *(giggle)*

OW VO: She stifled a laugh as her Aunt Lillian entered the room, looking this way and that. She looked right at me, but did not see me. Aunt Lillian suddenly sprung on top of the couch, snatching Young Charlotte and lifting her into the air.

Lillian: I found you!

Young Charlotte: No you didn't.

Lillian: *(gasping)* Are you invisible?

Young Charlotte: Yep.

Lillian: Again? How will I ever find you if you're going to be invisible all the time?

Young Charlotte: You have to wear the special invisible goggles!

Lillian: How could I forget, the goggles, the goggles. Oh there you are!

Young Charlotte: Noooo you have to start over now.

Lillian: Charlotte...

Young Charlotte: What?

Lillian: I gotta get dinner started.

Young Charlotte: One more time, pleeeeeeassssseeee.

Lillian: *(sigh)* Alright, one more time.

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Young Charlotte: Yes!

Lillian: I'm always going to find you though, invisible or not, you know that, right?

Young Charlotte: I know.

[whoooooosssshhhhh]

OW VO: The memory dissipated, evaporating into a mist.

[a noteworthy pause... CRASH!]

Teenage Charlotte: DON'T follow me!

OW VO: I turned abruptly and a teenage Charlotte was coming charging down the hall. The lamp I had seen floating moments before was shattered on the warped wooden floor. I had no time to move, but she passed through me –

[swoosh!]

OW VO: – uninterrupted by the tangible world. An older Aunt Lillian was close behind her.

Lillian: Where do you think you're going?

Teenage Charlotte: Anywhere but here!

Lillian: No one leaves Crestfall, you know that.

Teenage Charlotte: What if I want to?

Lillian: And what about your poor Aunt?

Teenage Charlotte: You always have to guilt me, don't you?

Lillian: I just want what's best for you –

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Teenage Charlotte: But You. Don't. Know. What's best for me... I'm gonna find my parents.

[front door opens and slams shut]

Lillian: Charlotte!

OW VO: I watched on as Charlotte slammed the front door, a transparent version of the front door, transposed over the real front door.

Evil Young Charlotte: *(demonic voice)* What are you doing here?

[shifting, darker tone in music]

OW VO: The light dimmed. The floorboards creaked. The roots and vines began to move, strangling the inside of the house. I rotated on my heels, slowly, very slowly. Before me was Young Charlotte, but she was now wearing a faded pink dress, a dress that was deteriorating, different parts of her withering and flaking off of her like pieces of ash. Her eyes were all pupil, black black black.

OW: I'm here to find Charlotte.

Evil Young Charlotte: Why would you want to do that? She's where she needs to be.

OW: Please, take me to her.

Evil Young Charlotte: Charlotte doesn't want you here.

OW V.O.: All around me, different Charlottes, Charlottes at different ages, appeared around corners, descended the stairs, and glided down the hall. I was surrounded by an infinity of Charlottes.

Evil Young Charlotte: GO AWAY!

OW: Charlotte is in danger, don't you want to protect yourself?

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Evil Young Charlotte: She is in pain. She has made her choice. NOW GO AWAY.

[*ding ding ding...*]

OW VO: Suddenly, Martin the Bicycle came launching through the air –

[*CRASH!*]

Evil Young Charlotte: (*blood curdling scream*) AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!

OW VO: Crashing through the door and into the different versions of Charlotte. They collapsed into clouds of dust.

OW: (*panting*) Thank you.

OW VO: The bicycle flashed its headlights as if to say *You're welcome*. It also seemed to say *You owe me one*, but I wasn't too sure what it meant to owe a bicycle something. A spare tire? Some oil? I determined this would be something to figure out another time... if I'm alive.

Whispers came from the second floor. I crept up the stairs with the stealth of a tapeworm sneaking up on someone's stomach. Upstairs was one room. The walls were stripped bare. Not a single object or piece of furniture in sight. It was entirely empty – save for two people. There was Charlotte, the *real* Charlotte.

[*disgustingly-plucked horror pizzicato string music*]

OW VO: And then there was an androgynous figure standing in front of her. Its head was bald, Its features soft but defined, as though made of plastic. They both stood incredibly still.

Charlotte: What are you doing here, OW?

OW: Charlotte... I'm here to save you.

Charlotte: I don't need to be saved.

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OW: You don't understand. I know you want to bring Aunt Lillian back, I really do, but if you do so –

Charlotte: I will die. I know.

OW: You... you know?

Charlotte: Yes. And I am willing to accept the consequences. This is what I want.

OW: But... why?

Charlotte: I owe my life to her. She did so much for me and I did nothing in return. And there was so much she wanted to do in her life. Watch the sun rise on Widow's Peak. Read until she felt as though she had read every book. Skydive with dolphins. Some of them were unrealistic. Like seeing my mother again. But she was never able to do them because life got in the way... and then death got in the way. I suppose that didn't help. But I think her life could be more valuable than mine. Better spent.

[crickling crackles like sizzling bones, heavy, thudding footsteps, one after another]

OW VO: The ominous figure stepped forward, walking in tiny twitches and jerks as though walking wasn't Its usual mode of transportation.

Angel of Life: It's time.

OW VO: It gestured to the window and moonlight flooded the room. Charlotte took a step backwards into the light. Charlotte's feet lifted off the floor, and she levitated as the light carried her away from me. I threw myself after her, but I was hurled back by an invisible force. The ominous figure twitched more and more until they were full convulsions.

[gooey, fleshy, bubbling, trickling, oozing]

Its face fell off like a mask. Its shoulders hunched and Its skin bubbled as It grew to an inhuman height. From Its head sprouted two twisted antlers. The Angel of Life.

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[low, grumbling, beast-like snarl]

It spread Its arms, tilting Its head backwards in some Holy ecstasy.

[heart beating]

Charlotte gave me a sad smile, with tears that made her eyes look like two clusters of glistening stars.

[heart beat stops abruptly]

Charlotte: It's okay... Write me a good obituary, won't you?

[crick]

OW VO: Charlotte's body bent backwards.

[heart beat, returning, growing louder]

A rhythmic thumping grew louder and louder and louder, until the walls were vibrating.

[rrrrriiiiipppppppppp]

Charlotte's heart burst from her chest, floating above her, still beating.

[heart beating]

Her limbs went limp. Her head became heavy. The Angel of Life took a deep breath, a breath that seemed to suck all of the oxygen from the room.

AoL: What is the sound that makes the world most beautiful?

OW VO: The moonlight receded from the room and Charlotte toppled to the floor. Her heart remained hovering in the air.

AoL: What is that beautiful sound?

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OW VO: I raced to Charlotte, cradling her in my arms. I couldn't say a word. The Angel of Life shuddered.

AoL: It is the sound of a heart that beats for someone else.

OW VO: My words were lodged in my throat, raging hot like the core of a dying sun.

OW: And now that she's dead you're going to bring her Aunt back to life?

AoL: (*giggling*) Of course not.

OW VO: The Angel of Life vanished like a shadow and the house sunk into the earth, flickering like a broken projector until it was gone entirely. It was just me, an empty clearing, and Charlotte. 1600 Cherry Street was no more. The Angel of *Death* emerged from the trees.

OW: And there was *nothing* you could have done?

AoD: Nothing then. I cannot come close to my sister. Life and Death do not coalesce. But we can do something now. Charlotte's heart still has the power to return life from the grave.

OW: We can bring her back!

AoD: Very well.

OW VO: The Angel of Death leaned over Charlotte's lifeless body, only to pause. Her face grew solemn.

AoD: Her soul is gone.

OW: I'm sorry?

AoD: When she died, she must have run off, like so many souls do when their body dies. Out of fear, out of shame, out of anger.

OW: So... she's gone?

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AoD: I'm afraid there is not much else that can be done.

OW VO: The Button-Eyed Raven was quiet for once, and I closed my eyes, listening to Charlotte's floating heart beat like a far-flung drum.

[thump, thump, thump...]

[DING! DING!]

Just then, a bicycle came flying through the air and zoomed passed us, only turning briefly to beckon us to follow it.

OW: Martin? What is it?

[DING! DING!]

OW: He... he knows where her soul is going.

[the sound a heart makes when it's snatched from the air]

OW VO: I snatched Charlotte's heart from the air.

OW: Take me to her.

[eleventh hour music]

[vvvvvvvvvv - Martin's tires race through the woods]

OW VO: My world lunged, with every beat of my heart, my heart beating fiercely, Charlotte's heart in my hand, beating with my own. We raced through the Dark Woods, through bramble and thicket. The trees ended abruptly and we found ourselves standing in the Crestfall Graveyard. A dreadful sensation washed over me. *Where is she going?* We weaved between gravestones, over muddied earth, this way and that, until Martin skidded to a stop. We were standing before a single grave. Engraved in the stone: *Here Lies Lillian Parker.*

[eleventh hour music ends dramatically]

OW VO: It glowed slightly as though Charlotte was wrapping her arms around it. Charlotte wanted me to carry out her final wish. She could not die in vain. Her life now belonged to someone else. Aunt Lillian needed to be brought back to life. My brain was on fire. I didn't know what was right. I wanted to be there for Charlotte. And I wanted to care for her, but I didn't know if it was right for her to give her life in this way.

AoD: There is still time, Obituary Writer. You can bring Charlotte back.

[heartfelt, reminiscing music]

OW VO: I thought about my time with Charlotte and what it had meant to me. It meant late-night walks. It meant soft laughter. It meant listening to her haikus about walruses. It meant not feeling so alone anymore.

AoD: Obituary Writer?

OW VO: But then I thought about what that time had meant to Charlotte. It had meant sharing her life with someone else because she didn't have anyone to share it with anymore. I was someone who could be there for her when she couldn't be with her aunt. She always put others' lives before her own. And now that she had made the ultimate sacrifice, she needed someone to do the same, so she could finally be at peace. That person she needed could be me. I shook my head.

[heartfelt, reminiscing music stops]

OW: No.

AoD: No?

OW: This is what Charlotte wanted. This is what she needs. I could be the friend she needs.

AoD: You will lose her forever.

Death by Dying Official Transcript

OW: This isn't about me... We need to dig up Lillian's coffin.

[the sounds of digging and clanking, the door of the coffin opening]

OW VO: Lillian's body was still intact. Her skin was pale, her eyes closed, her arms crossed over her chest, but she had not yet begun to decay. I reached into the coffin, resting Charlotte's heart over Lillian's. Nothing.

OW: Was there more to it than that? I didn't really think about the mechanics of the ritual. Am I supposed to –

Lillian: *(gasping for breath)*

OW: Oh okay, there we go.

Lillian: What's happening?

OW: You were dead.

Lillian: Yes, I- I know that part.

OW: And now you are not.

Lillian: But why? And why am I holding an uncooked piece of meat?

OW: That's a heart.

Lillian: A human heart?

OW: Yes.

Lillian: Oh!

OW: Be careful, that's Charlotte's!

Death by Dying Official Transcript

Lillian: Charlotte's? My Charlotte's? What have you done to my Charlotte?

OW: I did nothing! I wouldn't dare. She did this for you... She wanted you to keep living your life. To do the things you didn't get the chance to do before you died.

Lillian: And she... she killed herself to do that? For me?

Charlotte: *(echoing)* Yes.

OW VO: Charlotte's glimmering spirit appeared standing beside her aunt's grave.

Charlotte: I owed you my life, and now you have it.

OW VO: Lillian looked at her niece, crestfallen.

Lillian: *(muttering)* No. No, my dear, this isn't right. It was my time.

Charlotte: But it didn't have to be.

Lillian: But it was. I died when I was meant to die.

Charlotte: Think of everything you could do now that you have more time. You could see that sunset. You could see my mother. I was in the way when you had to raise me. That's why I ran away. I wanted to find my parents, but I wanted you to have a second chance at life. I wanted it for you then and I want it for you now. Why didn't you do the things you wanted to do when I was finally gone? When I ran away?

Lillian: Because I was waiting for you, sweetheart. I didn't want those things as much as I wanted you. There is no life without you, Charlotte. You weren't in the way, you were the one I wanted to share my life with.

Charlotte: But... no, that can't be right, I was... you had so much left to – this can't have been a mistake.

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Lillian: No, you didn't make a mistake. Nothing done out of love is a mistake. But you must lay me to rest. You must move on. I'm okay, I really am, I promise.

Charlotte: I don't want to let you go.

Lillian: Life is so precious. Don't waste it on your old aunt. It is your life I want go on, not mine.

OW VO: There we were, the three of us: Charlotte, Lillian, and I. Lillian had accepted her fate, Charlotte had not, and I wanted to be there for Charlotte, but I also understood that I must respect Lillian as well. We were all looking at the same thing: Death. Life lost. Love lost. Yet we all thought something different. And none of us were wrong.

Lillian held out Charlotte's heart, urging her to take it back.

Lillian: Go back home, love. Live your life.

Charlotte: No, I can't.

Lillian: Yes, you can. You're my brave girl. You can do this. Here.

OW VO: Lillian loosened her grip on Charlotte's heart.

Charlotte: We never got to say goodbye.

Lillian: And now we can. Thank you for this opportunity. Oh how I longed to see you one more time... Goodbye, my dear.

Charlotte: Goodbye.

OW VO: Lillian let go of Charlotte's heart and immediately collapsed into her coffin, dead once more. The heart, resting in the grass around Lillian's grave, began to beat.

[thump thump, thump thump]

Death by Dying Official Transcript

I took a step towards Charlotte.

OW: Charlotte, please come back.

Charlotte: This isn't what I thought would happen. I don't know what I've done.

OW: We can talk about it when you are alive again, just come back.

[heart beat increases, faster and faster]

Charlotte: No, I – I don't know what to do, this isn't – this isn't how things were supposed to go.

[whoooooosh]

OW: Charlotte? Charlotte! Where did she go, what happened?

OW VO: The Angel of Death rested a bony hand on my shoulder.

AoD: She is gone.

OW: Gone? What do you mean gone?

AoD: She ran away... And now her soul is lost.

OW: Is she still out there? How can we get her back?

AoD: I don't know.

OW VO: I sat down next to Charlotte's heart, criss-cross applesauce. I looked around me at the thousands of worn graves stretching out to the unseeable horizon.

AoD: There is no right way to handle death. We all make a choice on how to grieve.

OW: Charlotte is gone. Lillian is gone. Everything has fallen apart. I don't think I know how to respond.

Death by Dying Official Transcript

AoD: You are the Obituary Writer... Write about it.

[soft piano - charlotte's theme]

[typewriter keys]

OW VO: Charlotte Dawson was born in Crestfall, Idaho. Her parents, Dean and Rachel Dawson, raised her until the age of five, after which they left town for unknown reasons. She was then adopted by her aunt, Lillian Parker, who she lived with until she ran away at the age of 19. She did not return to Crestfall until her Aunt Lillian passed due to an unfortunate accident involving a rare blood disease, a deadly book, and three man-eating cats. Her soul is out there. But for now, I keep the still-beating heart of Charlotte Dawson in a jar on my shelf. And each night I sit on the hillside of Widow's Peak, watching the riderless bicycles go by, wondering if one of them might be someone I love. Charlotte loved peaches. She wrote haikus about walruses. When she spoke, her words were thoughtful and careful, her voice soft. She was kind even when life was unkind to her.

[DING! the typewriter's bell goes off and all is silent]

This has been the obituary of Charlotte Dawson.

[The carriage slides over with a definitive clunk, OW gets up and walks away. A door opens... and closes, suddenly wistful music plays]

Charlotte: *(echoing)*

Heavenly springtime.

A sullen walrus tumbles

after the biscuit.

Death by Dying Official Transcript

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 of Evan Gulock as The Obituary Writer and The Button-Eyed Raven. Angela Morris as Charlotte. Hannah Smith as The Angel of Death. Deb Doetzer as Aunt Lillian. Ally Madzia as Young Charlotte. And [REDACTED] as The Angel of Life. Music composed by Nicolas Gasparini and Steven O'Brien. Sound effects courtesy of FreeSound.org. Creative Producer and Script Editor, Joshua Giordan. Recording Engineer and Casting Director, Niko Gerentes. If any of you beautiful 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 complain about not having any friends, maybe you should re-think going to hat festivals- hat festivals- hat festivals- hat festivals-

[warping piano music SKIPS AND ABRUPTLY STOPS]

Angel of Life: *(laughing maniacally)*