

Obituary 06: Wait... I Thought He Died?

[from silence]

Obituary Writer (Voiceover): The funeral of Charlotte Dawson was perfect.

[somber violin music – aching, wistful, sorrowful]

OW VO: It was simple, subtle, and silent. There was a rarefied stillness to the air. There were walrus balloons tied to her casket. The Wild Man played a sublime rendition of Concerto No. 23 in C Minor on a violin he had made out of a dead possum.

[we realize the violin music we're listening to is Concerto No. 23 in C Minor. it sounds really good for being played off a dead possum.]

OW VO: There was no wake, there were no eulogies. A chilled silence had befallen the crowd as a misty evening rain enveloped the Crestfall Graveyard.

[light rain]

OW VO: Heads hung low, eyes remained shut. Mostly to keep the rain from getting in people's eyes, but also because they were sad. Funerals are peculiar that way. Someone bites the dust and the living look to one another and say, "You know what? I'm sad. You're sad. Why don't we all just stick this body in a box, stare at it for a while, and then bury it – as deep into the earth as we will bury our depression afterwards?"

[wind, leaves chattering]

OW VO: Autumn was coming to an end. Just a few weeks ago the trees would have been aglow in a vibrant, fiery orange and red and yellow. By now they have mellowed to gold and rust and beige, turning opaque in the moonlight as the rain subsided and the clouds parted. There we were, a crowd of the Still-Living, staring at a wooden box, waiting to bury it so we could move on with our lives and ignore our own suffocating fear of the fragility of life. Yes, Charlotte Dawson's funeral was perfect. For my friend. My truest friend. My only friend. A fitting way to lay her to rest in peace... That being said...

[violin music abruptly stops]

OW VO: Charlotte Dawson wouldn't be dead for long. Not if I could help it.

[big dramatic orchestral music. we're back baby!]

OW VO: Hello. I am the totally fine and emotionally stable Obituary Writer of this flawless town of Crestfall, Idaho, and this... is Death... by Dying.

[the click clack of a typewriter, typing away as the dramatic music grows. the typewriter dings! with a striking impact, and the carriage slides into quiet... fade in intriguing, whimsical music with piano, light strings, an airy feminine choral voice]

OW VO: I'm not one to condone grave robbing. Body snatching tends to be for medical students, treasure hunters, and human taxidermists. But I would hazard a guess that most resurrectionists don't intend to resurrect the body they are stealing... Charlotte is dead. But she doesn't have to be. She *shouldn't* be. And I can bring her back... Possibly.

[faint heartbeat]

OW VO: I have her still-beating heart in a strawberry rhubarb jam jar, courtesy of Carlson and Carlson's Delicious Pastry Shop, where the Carlson's serve delicious pastries. Her spirit is lost to the ether, which will be a considerably more difficult feat to recover. But for now... I simply need to exhume her body. A process I'm not *unfamiliar* with.

[music fades. fade in nighttime graveyard ambience. shovel pierces the dirt, digging. OW whistles to himself, a tune you may recognize later...]

OW VO: I was alone in the graveyard, a single living soul in the parking lot of the dead.

[rustling. OW stops digging.]

OW VO: Mid-digging I heard a noise. My eyes scanned the graveyard. Nothing...

[further rustling, hooves stomping on dirt]

OW VO: Then I saw it: A Deer. Ohhhh dear...

[uneasy music begins... something's about to go down]

OW VO: Ordinarily, I wouldn't be concerned. After all, Walter Grimsly, the graveyard groundskeeper, cares not what you do in his cemetery, as long as you do it quietly. But a deer, in *his* graveyard? Now that is another story... The deer looked at me. I looked at it. It nodded. I nodded back. For a few seconds, it felt like an unexpectedly pleasant moment of mutual respect. Just two living beings going about their business: a deer wandering the cemetery and an Obituary Writer absconding with the corpse of his dead friend. But then...

[crick, the deer's neck crackling, subtle bone crunching]

OW VO: The deer cocked its head to the side, a little too... unnaturally far.

[the deer's neck crackles even farther. hooves shuffle over fallen leaves, getting closer and closer...]

OW VO: It crept between the gravestones, its head still bent at an irregular angle. It crawled right up to me until it was mere inches from my freshly clean-shaven face.

[low, quiet growling exhale]

OW VO: It sniffed me.

[sniff sniff...]

OW VO: – and licked its lips

[deer's tongue licking and slurping]

OW VO: – as though agreeing that my rose and patchouli cologne was the right choice.

[uneasy music fades... the deer gives another low guttural exhale as it looks up...]

OW VO: It craned its head to the sky... Then it winked...

[silly little violin pluck to signify "wink". then silence...]

Deranged Deer (wailing): HUUUUUAAARRRRRHHHHH!!!

[SLAM! Goes the door]

Walter: What!?

[exciting, playful action music – energetic pizzicato. action efforts from OW throughout as he jumps, slides, runs, hides.]

OW VO: Walter burst from his cabin, and I scissor-leaped over Charlotte’s tombstone.

Walter (*sniffing the air intently*): Huh. I could recognize the smell of that mangy musk anywhere. Show yourself, DEMON!

OW VO: You don’t expect deer to betray you, but then again, what is life but a long and agonizing series of dreadful surprises. The deer crouched low to the ground and edged away from me, its angular legs shuffling like a spider...

[deer shuffling erratically, indeed scuttling like a spider, wailing like a dinosaur squeal, then grunting heavily]

Deranged Deer: HUARH! HUARH! HUUUARRHH!!

OW VO: ...its tongue hanging out, drooling. I held my breath. *Quiet, Obituary Writer, quiet...*

Walter: You brazen brutes have tormented me for the last time!

[deer calls out one last time before diving through leaves and twigs back into the woods]

OW VO: The deranged deer bolted, vanishing into the bramble of the Dark Woods. I had less than very little time. Walter was approaching Charlotte’s grave at rapid speeds.

[Walter’s racing footsteps, belt and keys jingling, Walter howling a battle cry]

OW VO: My head was spinning like a drunk finger puppet... There: I spotted my salvation. A mausoleum.

[playful action music ends. fade in slow-burn horror music... OW is being hunted...]

OW VO: It wasn't ideal, but... there it was. I made my break for it – And Walter immediately shot at me with a crossbow.

[chick chack clack! Walter loads the crossbow. THWANG! Pewwww! – crossbow fires, the arrow pinging off a gravestone, the crumbling of stone]

OW VO: The arrow ricocheted off the tombstones.

[chick chack clack! Walter reloads. Walter's slow but steady footsteps, menacing, taking his time as he tracks...]

Walter: The year was 1872! My great-great grandfather, DUNDERFORTH GRIMSLY! He discovered a scraggly doe feasting upon the flowers he left at graves!

[THWANG! Pewww! Walter fires again. OW yelps and pants – A near miss.]

Walter: Dunderforth retaliated, like the noble man he was... He poisoned the flowers... smart! But it only made the deer... stronger.

[chick chack clack! Walter reloads]

Walter: And so the centuries-long feud began. Deer versus man. Man versus deer!

[THWANG! Pewww]

OW VO: I moved as fast as my dainty feet would carry me.

[OW's dainty run... his race is desperate, but yeah... dainty feet]

OW VO: You need only be one step ahead of the bullet behind you. At least, that's what the epitaph said on a grave I passed. The grave belonged to one September Brogan, a dueling gun-woman in 18th century Crestfall. To this day she holds the fastest record for outrunning a speeding bullet, until she was killed by a separate and completely unrelated bullet coming from the other direction. Anyway – I was being shot at.

[Pewwww!]

Walter: You deer are nothin' but tricksters. Kinda starting to appear more human by the year!

OW VO: I ran confidently into the gate of the mausoleum—

[gate clang!]

OW: *(efforted grunt)*

OW VO: But my momentum was halted. The gate did not budge.

[gate clang!]

OW *(as if surprised):* Owwww...

OW VO: Another ram into the mausoleum gate had no further effect. Walter Grimsly drew closer...

Walter: Hah! Hoh! Hah! Ho! DEEEEEEEER!!!

[OW unzips a small case. the clinking of tiny tools.]

OW VO: When aggressively slamming into a door doesn't work, a set of professional lock-picking tools should suffice.

[clinking and clanking as OW plays with the lock, before it springs open and the gate creeaaaakkksss...]

OW VO: The lock clinked open with a healthy dose of jimmying and jamming from my trusty twist-flex torsion wrench. I eased the gate open... to reveal a web of tripwires covering the floor. And that is when I realized: I was inside the Mausoleum of Dunderforth Grimsly.

[dramatic echoing impact! uh-oh!]

Walter: You fool! My dear old great-great grandpappy rigged this coffin.

[chick chack clack! this time, the reload sounds closer...]

Walter: You won't stand a chance!

OW VO: I had no choice. I tip-toed between the tripwires, closer and closer to the tomb of Dunderforth. There was only one thing left for me to do.

OW: *(pushing efforts)*

[creeeaaak. CRRRR – OW pushes the stone crypt lid open. bone rattling as he settles down next to a skeleton.]

OW VO: When your life depends on it, laying next to a decaying corpse isn't so bad.

[crypt lid closes. the audio quality of OW's narration shifts to slightly muted and closer, as if in a smaller enclosed space.]

OW VO: I settled down next to Dunderforth's remains, making myself as small as possible, as though this would somehow decrease my level of existence in this world. I would be safe from the revenge-bent groundskeeper in here... As long as I didn't set off the detonator clasped in his great-great grandpappy's skeletal hands.

[a pause as we appreciate how peaceful it actually is in here...]

OW VO: Hm. It was actually kind of peaceful in the tomb. I could see the appeal. I could see myself moving into a place like this in my retirement from life. Nothing bad could happen to me here...

[the jingling, heavy footsteps of Walter entering the tomb – muffled because we're inside the crypt with OW]

Walter (muffled): Thought you could hide from me, eh? HA! You can't outsmart the smartest man in the crypt!

[a cracking, crumbling sound – bottom of tomb starting to deteriorate, an unsteady foundation from years of deterioration]

OW VO: The bottom of the tomb began to vibrate and crackle beneath me. The corpse of Dunderforth Grimsly began shaking his head in rhythm, as if to say "Uh oh". And that is when the bottom of the tomb gave way–

[CRASH! music fades as OW falls away]

OW: AHHHHHHhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

OW VO: I was sent tumbling into an abyss, down... down... down...

[nothing but the wind whistling through the hole in the crypt, down into whatever lies below... fading into silence...]

OW VO: And now, the condolences: Condolences brought to you by the Never After Funeral Home and Beauty Parlor. They say:

[funky upbeat music]

OW VO: If you're a corpse, come on down! Our mortician beauticians are so talented you'll look better than when you were alive. However, if you're a living customer, we advise you to stay away. Our hair stylists could... use some practice, and you will likely walk away wishing you looked like the corpses. The deranged deer of Crestfall also send their condolences. They say:

Deranged Deer (multiple): HUUUUAAAARRRRHHHHH!!!

OW VO: Thank you, deranged deer of Crestfall. Your words could calm even the stormiest of minds.

[funky music ends on a bright, pleasant note]

[ominous, where-the-heck-am-I music. OW groans as he comes to his senses.]

OW VO: Above me, the hole in Dunderforth's tomb was a distant speck of dusty moonlight. Walter's curses had become but a faint echo. I could feel soil against my back – soft, doughy, and damp. In my left hand was the detonator, which I had caught at the very last second.

[clothes rustling as OW pockets the detonator]

OW VO: I gingerly slipped it into my suit pocket. One never knows when explosives may come in handy. At least, that's what another epitaph said on a grave I had passed. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I realized I was in a long, twisting tunnel. It appeared to have been

crudely carved through the underground like an animal burrowing into the earth. Roots snaked from the walls. Along the ceiling were the bottoms of coffins...

[*metallic dramatic impact!*]

OW VO: I was beneath the cemetery. *Inside* the cemetery, where no living soul was meant to enter. I'll admit there was something rather thrilling about it.

[*OW's tentative footsteps on dirt*]

OW VO: As I proceeded down the passageway, I walked past coffin after coffin as though I was moseying down a sleepy suburban neighborhood. I wondered which deceased neighbors they were. Who used to wave to me from their porches on early morning strolls as they drank their freshly-ground coffee? A local shoemaker? An elderly seamstress? That one annoying mother at parent-teacher conferences who demands their child receive a better grade even though the child has *clearly* demonstrated no ability whatsoever to conjugate verbs into the nosotros form? Who now resided motionless around me, arms crossed, eyes closed, skin paled and sagging? The end of the passageway branched off in three directions: A maze of coffins. That fickle itch of curiosity tickled the back of my neck. Who constructed these tunnels? And why? An eerie hush held the under-earth in its grasp...

Mystery Man (*loud groaning*): OHHHHHHH!

[*intriguing music shift... "what was that?"*]

OW VO: A groan sprung from the darkness... I squinted... Up ahead, rocking back and forth, was... a *man*. He quickly curled himself into the fetal position. He was completely naked, save for a loin cloth that appeared to have once been whitey tighties. His cheeks were sunken, his face was covered in a poorly-executed beard, but there was something familiar about his face...

OW: Excuse me, sir!

Mystery Man (*surprised*): ACH!

[*big startled impact with strings!*]

Mystery Man: Ohhhh...

OW: Are-are you okay?

Mystery Man: Did you have to do that? You startled me raw!

OW (*realizing*): ...Gert?

Gert: ...Obituary Writer?

[sweet, uplifting music, almost as if it was from an inspiring corporate video... two lads involved in a bloody incident that killed at least two people... reunited.]

OW: Is that really you? It's good to see you.

Gert: Well...

[music cuts abruptly, switch to cave ambience]

Gert: I'm gonna slap you in the face until you feel like a silly boy!

[SLAP! Gert smacks OW across the face. probably a long time coming for OW.]

OW: Ah! Hey!

Gert: You ruined my life, you swine!

[SLAP!]

OW: GERT! Gert, please!

Gert: Would'ya stop with the Gert thing, that's not my name!

[SLAP!]

OW: Ugh, cut it out!

[SLAP!]

Gert: You nearly killed me!

[SLAP!]

OW: Stop!

Gert: And my poor Bernard... (*slaps throughout, back to back*) OHHHH BERNARD! You will payyyy!

[SLAP!]

OW: But Gert, it wasn't my fault! Technically, *Bernard* shot you... by accident. Bernard's hand got blown off... by accident. And then she was decapitated by a loose cannonball... *by accident*. And it wasn't your fault either! Don't blame yourself for the death of your beloved.

Gert: Very well, you pretty man. I still blame you. Mm-hm. But I need your help getting out of this wretched place of horror!

OW: How did you end up here?

Gert: It feels like an eternity... and yet also like exactly two and a half months ago!

[*morose piano music, gradually building, perfectly fit for Gert's near-Shakespearean lament*]

Gert: I was shot in the stomach by my dear Bernard and went into a state of shock. Even The Slapper could not wake me. Everyone was so distracted with Wyatt's death, the *scoundrel*, and my oozing stomach was yucky, so they just figured I was dead, and tossed me in a coffin, and buried me! And then I found myself here.

OW: Where exactly *is* "here"?

Gert: ...It gets lonely down here. My only friends are worms! But then I have to eat them. For *SUSTENANCE*.

Gert: Slurp them up like spaghetti noodles. Mm...

OW: Ew. But Gert—

Gert: My dear, sweet, crunchy, delicious friends... It's dark down here. I've developed a Vitamin D deficiency! It's made me itchy. Don't call me a rat man, I can see it in your eyes! I *know* I'm a rat man.

OW: I really just want to find out—

Gert: Sometimes I'm accosted by visions. Of buxom women who are calling my name, whispering for me to come hither!

OW: Oh my god...

Gert: And hither I go. But they vanish without a trace.

OW: Um... Gert—

Gert: Sometimes I *YEARN* to be held. So I cuddle with the corpses... but they never hold me back! The embrace is not returned. You understand? The unrequited spooning you might say! I am *always* the big spoon. And who doesn't want to be the little spoon?!

OW: That sounds really hard, Gert, but—

Gert: I am lost... ALONE... in the nude. It's terrible. Horrendous, okay? Dreadful, awful, *HEINOUS*. And my guts are still hangin' out of my tummy, they're getting stinky. Ya wanna touch 'em?

[piano music ends with a satisfying Bach-ian clunngggg...]

OW: Uh, that's quite alright, Gert. Your guts aside, please, do you know *anything* about these tunnels?

Gert: Ah yes... They go across the entire graveyard. I've tried to escape, but even if I get up to the coffins, the coffin lids won't budge under the weight of the dirt. So in short... y'know... you're *DOOMED*! Betta get comfortable now. Would you happen to be interested in being the big spoon? Hm?

OW: All I want is to retrieve my friend. She was buried here not too long ago. And once I have her... I may just have a way out.

OW VO: I reached inside my suit pocket and pulled out the detonator. Gert's eyes widened.

Gert: Ohhhh... Kablooey.

OW: Indeed, kablooey.

Gert: Kablooey.

OW: Kablooey. The only problem is... how do I find my friend from under here?

Gert: Oh, you mean the new one? I can get you there. I know these tunnels like I know the guts in my tummy. I can see it all. All is known to me.

OW: Take me to her.

Gert: Very well. Hither or dither we go.

[Gert's footsteps hobbling like a sad goblin]

OW VO: Gert led the way, hobbling like a sad goblin.

[dark reflective music, light piano slowly introduced]

OW VO: The coffins went by overhead. I found myself, as I often do in the presence of death, becoming pensive. Seeing a cemetery above ground provides the illusion of normalcy. You walk among the graves and think to yourself, "Yes, of course this all makes sense." Someone dies, we dress them up, and then we seal their coffins tight so we don't have to think about them rotting away. We don't want to imagine maggots finding a home in their skulls and hosting dinner parties over a splay of delectable brains.

[we enter the World of Maggots. 1910s orchestral/jazz music plays from an old record. the maggots have adorable, tiny, cartoonish voices – Maggie the Maggot with a high-pitched, almost-Minnie-the-Mouse-esque voice and Marcus the Maggot with a huffy, comparatively-deeper voice like he has something stuck in his throat. sounds of silverware as they eat. glasses clink as they give a toast.]

Marcus: Cheers!

Maggie: Cheers!

OW VO: Maybe the maggots gossip about current events inside their chest cavities...

[static as a News Anchor Maggot comes on the radio]

News Anchor Maggot: This just in – The president has died!

Maggie: Oh no!

Marcus: Good riddance!

OW VO: Or host game nights in their eye sockets.

Marcus: G-2.

Maggie: Aw, you sunk my Battle Ship.

Marcus: *(chuckles)*

OW VO: Do maggot couples fight?

Maggie *(furious):* You did it again!

Marcus: I'm sorry!

Maggie: *(crying)*

Marcus: Maggie! Maggie, calm down!

Maggie: The fourth year in a row!

OW VO: Did Marcus the Maggot forget about his anniversary with Maggie the Maggot?

[Marcus knocks desperately on the other side of a door]

Maggie: *(crying, sobbing, wailing inconsolably)*

Marcus (*muffled, other side of door*): Open the door, Maggie!

OW VO: Did she cry herself to sleep in an ear canal that night?

Maggie: (*more crying, she can't contain herself*)

OW VO: Did Marcus make it up to her by bringing her to where your grandmother's heart once was?

Marcus: This is where I fell in love with you. Please forgive me!

[*old-time-y whistling starts like at the end of a 1930s cartoon*]

Maggie: Ohhh Marcus, I love you!

Marcus: I love you too.

[*Maggie and Marcus start going at it kissing and smooching hot and heavy as the whistling plays us out...*]

[*1910s music cuts abruptly, then we return to the musing music back under the graveyard*]

OW VO: We don't like thinking about such things. We don't want to think about the social lives of maggots... and certainly not how they pertain to our dead loved ones. And so we don't. Indeed, seeing the cemetery from above, it all made sense. But seeing the coffins from below... it all seemed so strange. We all return to the earth, destined to the soil. No matter what you believe happens after we die, we all end up down here, slowly becoming a part of the earth again. And perhaps there is something beautiful about that. But even I was guilty of rejecting that reality. Surely Charlotte wasn't dead, or at least, wasn't dead forever. I could change that... right? I stood apart from the crowd of common grievers. Charlotte's heart was still beating. Perhaps, sometimes death *could* be reversible. Perhaps, there was no need for me to grieve. Charlotte didn't belong here yet.

Gert: Ahem. (*Gert falls into a thick coughing fit*) Ooh, sorry... And here we are.

OW: Well, there's only one thing left to do.

Gert: Here, this should help.

[*bone clacking*]

OW: Why are you giving me this?

Gert: I thought you could use a hand.

OW: Whose arm is this?

Gert: Does it matter? Works like a charm opening coffins.

OW: Very well.

Gert: Well go on, get your lass and let's get outta here! My feet hurt.

OW: (*efforts, struggling to pry the coffin open*)

[*wood creaks as the coffin strains to open – then the bottom falls free*]

OW: Are you sure you brought me to the right grave?

Gert: You bet your sweet cherry bottom I did.

OW: It's just that... how do I put this... it's empty. Charlotte isn't here.

[*unsettling music, something is coming... electric whirring sound*]

OW VO: There was a shift in the air. A humming vibration, an electric crackle. It sort of... tickled. I felt *giggly*.

[*a warped laugh, almost like OW's, but mad... mad... oh so off its rocker, fluttering around, pitched up and down...*]

OW VO: From the corner of my eye, two cloaked figures glided by...

[*whoosh, whoosh!*]

OW VO: ...but when I turned to get a better look, they were gone.

Gert: Ah, yes, the hideous monsters that live down here.

OW: The what?

Gert: Did I not mention?

Hideous Monsters: *(BLOOD-CURDLING SHRIEK)*

Gert: This might be a good time to run!

[DRAMATIC MUSIC – DRUMS]

OW VO: We stumbled through the dark, my heart pounding in my temples.

OW: *(panting)*

Gert: Come on, you're so slow! You're not a Sewer Boy! You're a Land Man!

[whoosh, whoosh!]

OW VO: The cloaked figures manifested at a crossroad ahead. Vacant eyes, jagged fangs, faces like misshapen clay... The Silent Nuns.

[music crescendos into the Empathic Vampire theme from Obituary 03: Isaiah Died – electronic pulse, whispers darting this way and that, a slow-building distant scream]

OW VO: Pins and needles ran down my limbs. My racing heart slowed to a gentle rhythm. Against my will, my lips crept upwards into a smile.

Silent Nuns *(warped, oscillating voices, one a whisper, one a witch): This is our domain. Our home of hopeless paradise. What are you doing here, our precious child?*

OW *(dazed, struggling to think clearly):* I... I could say the same to you.

Silent Nuns: *What better place to feed than where people come to grieve? Beneath the graves. Beneath the feet of mourners, where the soil is soaked with tears.*

OW: Where's Charlotte? What have you done with her?

[Silent Nun theme fading... whooshes as the nuns step aside]

OW VO: In unison, they stepped apart.

Silent Nuns: *Look. She's happy to see you.*

OW VO: There she was. Charlotte... propped up by the Silent Nuns. Lifeless. But she was smiling.

[sick, twisting, quiet horror music]

Silent Nuns: *We thought we'd cheer her up, just for you.*

OW VO: I thought I could handle it. I thought I could see her with the hope that she wasn't gone forever. But to look at her limp body conjured an unbearable, unshakeable dread. My sight blurred with tears.

[OW whimpers as the Silent Nuns speak]

Silent Nuns: *Excellent. Feel the pain. Feel the fear. Let it fill you to the brim. But no need to let it consume you. We can do that.*

[Silent Nuns hiss in hunger, their mouths opening way too far in wet crackles]

OW VO: Their mouths opened wide, revealing endless rows of teeth. The heaviness in my chest lifted.

[blooming tear droplets, slithering tongues]

OW VO: The tears floated from my eyes in quivering droplets, and the empathic vampires' long slithering tongues licked them from the air.

Silent Nuns: *(hiss in satisfaction)*

OW VO: They wanted my sadness. They desired my grief. They craved my despair. Charlotte had said the fake happiness the nuns gave was better than living with reality. At the time, I didn't

know what she meant. But now... Maybe she was right. Maybe it was better than nothing. Better than the weight we carry when we lose someone. Happiness surged through my body. My vision brightened.

[bright angelic choir, somehow still eerie and unnerving, but representative of the Nuns fake happy spell]

OW *(laughing, crying, struggling, laughing)*: I miss her so much. Thank you.

Silent Nuns *(ravenous)*: *Our pleasure.*

Gert: Don't fall for their dastardly tricks, Obituary Writer. *(to himself)* I'm doing this for you, you sweet lovin' boy. AHHHH!

[Gert launches himself on a nun]

Silent Nuns: *(SHRIEK)*

OW VO: Gert lobbed himself onto one of the Nuns and it batted him to the side like he was a human tennis ball.

[tennis ball SFX]

Gert: Ach! Ohhhh...

OW VO: The Nun's habit toppled to the ground, revealing its true form...

[large, slow, one-beat heart pumping oozing vile liquid through its body. the Empathic Vampire SNARLS.]

OW VO: Perverse, demented, animalistic. A deformed body covered in throbbing black veins.

Empathic Vampires: *(Growling)*

OW VO: The world dimmed as I came to my senses. Distracted, the other Nun dropped Charlotte, and I dove to catch her.

[body thud as Charlotte collapses into OW's outstretched arms]

Empathic Vampires (*voices becoming deeper and more warped*): *Leave her! With no body, there is no one to mourn. With no one to mourn, we are nothing!*

[Empathic Vampire SHRIEK like you've never heard before – a call somewhere between a tiger, a viper, a cackling parrot, a laugh-crying woman, and a scream pushed to the limits of humanity. their disgusting, oozing heartbeats quicken.]

Gert: Stay back! I'm... armed.

[swinging whooshes back and forth]

OW VO: Gert swung a severed corpse limb. The empathic vampire coiled on its haunches, ready to pounce. Gert turned to me.

[horror music, gross heartbeat, and empathic vampire growls fade to silence]

Gert: Don't worry, you beautiful man. You gorgeous boy! I'll hold them off.

OW: But... Gert.

[sentimental piano music]

Gert: I lived a good life, Obituary Writer. Well, not really, it was pretty miserable to be honest. The food at my favorite restaurant was just okay. But I'm a sucker for discounts at Dawn's Dinner Bucket! You hear me? Dawn's Dinner Bucket! My best friend was a teddy bear named Snuggles McGee. The only woman I ever accidentally loved accidentally shot me. I say that I love her, but sometimes she wouldn't even go into Dawn's Dinner Bucket with me. I think I'm too loyal to the brand. I'm serious, you really gotta go there. Some of their discounts are like the deepest things I've ever seen. And I'm underground... I was a kind man. I was a giving man. But people gave to me, so it canceled out in the end, pretty worthless. I had everything and nothing. But it was alright, I guess. A simple life for a simple man. Two plus two equals four. I don't know what that has to do with this, but... There's no way I'd rather go than to be eaten by slippery snake people. I guess there's a few other ways I'd like to go but... that might hit my kink the hardest.

OW (*sincere, touched*): Thank you, Gert.

Gert: My name... (*aggravated exhale*) (*to self*) Breathe... breathe... (*to OW*) My name is Marian. My NAME is MARIAN. Don't forget me! FOOOOOOOR BERNAAAAAARRRRD!!!!

[*Gert sprints at full speed before being halted and impaled by the Empathic Vampire. intense shocking music as the Empathic Vampires ATTACK!*]

Silent Nuns: (*wailing, chewing, the ickiest eating sounds*)

Gert: (*agonized screaming, sometimes in pain, sometimes almost laughing in horror*)

[*music comedically cuts*]

OW: I should leave.

[*new dramatic music starts up, running-for-your-life type music*]

OW VO: Cradling Charlotte in my arms, I moved with the speed of a man who's been practicing better posture in front of his typewriter.

[*running, panting*]

OW VO: Tunnel after tunnel, I scrambled like my life depended on it... but more importantly, like *Charlotte's* life depended on it.

[*distant SHRIEK*]

OW VO: I rounded an earthy corner. Moonlight flooded the passageway ahead of me. The hole in the crypt. My escape!

[*Empathic Vampire attacks OW!*]

OW: AH!

OW VO: Just then, an empathic vampire tackled me to the ground.

[*teeth piercing skin*]

OW: *(screaming through gritted teeth)*

OW VO: It sunk its countless teeth into me, and what at first felt like pain became a numb tingle. My panic drained away, until I could hardly feel anything at all. I squeezed Charlotte's hand.

Empathic Vampire *(voice so warped and deep and monstrous, no longer perceptible as human): Delicious, malicious, grieving is nutritious. Tears like rain, relinquish your pain.*

OW *(struggling):* You like pain?

Empathic Vampire: *YESSSSSS.*

OW: Then I have the perfect present for you.

[click! beep! the detonator – oh fuck]

OW: Kablooeey.

[EXPLOSION. distant at first, coming from way above them. then – different parts of the mausoleum erupting, stone crumbling and coming down, the explosion rushing down into the tunnel below, right onto OW and the Empathic Vampire.]

Empathic Vampire: *(ONE FINAL FATAL SHRIEK)*

[then – ears ringing. the real world vanishes. whimsical twinkling. distant human heartbeat slowly growing louder, an all-encompassing inner-body murmur like being in the womb. warping-record classical music plays. rumbling, rattling, like an earthquake from inside the earth]

Charlotte *(warping, oscillating from ear to ear):* Are you the detective in town? Really? Someone said you solved murder cases. I'm Charlotte by the way. It's my aunt, you see. Oh she's fine. No, she's dead, sorry, I don't know why I said that. Yeah, she's quite dead. Please. She was my aunt. She was all I had growing up. I need to know why she's gone. I need to know why she's gone.

OW *(overlapping with Charlotte's voice, slowly fading away until it's just OW's voice):* I need to know why she's gone. I need to know why she's gone.

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

[the heartbeat is all that remains, and even that ends. silence. excruciating silence. you're almost tempted to think the episode stopped playing. we sit in nothingness.]

[slowly... ocean waves fade in... gentle at first. crashing on a shore. we become present.]

OW (*reverb voice*): What... Angel?

Angel of Death: Hello, Obituary Writer.

OW: Where am I?

AoD: You're having a near-death experience. I'm supposed to sit next to you until it's over.

[bird wings flutter]

Button-Eyed Raven: Cawww! You're a loser! You can't even die right!

AoD: Besides, your last words were "Kablooey". I can't allow that.

OW: Is this... heaven? Hell? Valhalla?

AoD: Yes. And no. Nature isn't finite, nor is it singular. Not the way you mortals view it. To die is to become unhinged from reality. Reality as you know it. You enter a realm that is malleable, where anything is possible. Including the possibility that it doesn't exist at all. What you believe shapes what you experience. Just like me. I am, and I also am not.

OW: I rather like you existing. You're one of my only friends.

AoD: That's sad. But if you want me to exist, I will exist, simple as that... Usually people go to a place that makes them feel most at home when they die... Where are we, Obituary Writer?

[waves]

OW: Somewhere I could only go if I was dead.

Raven: Being mysterious makes ya sound like a schmuck!

AoD: Why are you doing this?

OW: Charlotte is my friend.

AoD: That's it?

OW: Yeah.

AoD: Humans are strange.

OW: I have to try.

AoD: Trying is for the living.

OW: Then I'm just going to have to keep on living then, aren't I?

AoD: *(sigh)* Very well. This is going to hurt.

OW: What is?

[The Angel of Death snaps her fingers. the snap echoes into the ether. a baby crying, reverse classical music, a rushing wind, OW screaming from far away, falling closer and closer, then –]

[nighttime graveyard ambience]

OW: *(gasping for air)*

OW VO: I jolted back to reality as I knew it.

OW: Charlotte? Charlotte?!

[scrambling, shuffling]

OW: Oh thank goodness, there you are. I got you. I got you.

OW VO: I clutched her head to my chest. She was a little scorched, but she was okay. Well she was dead, but she was intact. The air was crisp. And by that, I mean it was ripe with the smell of dead bodies *burnt* to a crisp. I had been hurled up and out by the explosion of Dunderforth's Mausoleum – along with half the graveyard. I was sprawled at the edge of an enormous crater. Shattered tombstones, scattered limbs. The scene would have been horrific, but... it was snowing.

[a soft, harmonic piano note, followed by peaceful music accenting the feeling of watching the first snowfall of the year]

OW VO: A beautiful, hushed snow – early for this time of year, but not unheard of. It frosted the carnage in a tranquil veil. I opened my mouth, catching a few flakes on my tongue. And that is when a charred earlobe fell from the sky and smacked me in the face–

[smack! splat]

OW VO: Reminding me that it was in fact not snow, but the ash of hundreds of obliterated corpses. Walter Grimsly stood before the ruins of his graveyard, mouth agape. On the other side of the wreckage was a mob of deer, staring innocently at the groundskeeper.

Walter: You've won this round... *(disgusted)* Deer! But Dunderforth didn't put me on this Earth for nothin'. We will MEET AGAIN!

Deer: *(deranged honk)*

[the deer trot away back into the Dark Woods]

OW VO: Yet another point for the psychotic wildlife of Crestfall. I absconded to the other side of the cemetery, which was largely left untouched from the blast. There was someone I needed to talk to.

[linger on nighttime ambience]

OW: Hey... It's been a while.

OW VO: The tombstone of Charlotte's aunt, Lillian Parker, did not reply.

OW: You once said nothing done out of love is a mistake. I don't know if what I'm doing is a mistake. But I'm doing it out of love. I hope that's enough. I'm going to find your niece. I promise.

[haunting piano conclusion music. suit garment bag rustling and being zipped shut.]

OW VO: I hid Charlotte in a suit garment bag and slung her over my shoulder like I was going out for a night on the town. I needed to keep her safe. Hidden. Preserved. I knew just the place. I hopped on Martin the phantom bicycle and we rode off together into the night.

[bicycle ding, tires rolling]

OW VO: My mind wandered to the peculiar life of Gert. Against all odds, he fought to stay alive. He lost the love of his life. He was left for dead. He survived beneath the Crestfall Graveyard on a diet of worms. He put up with the garbage food at Dawn's Dinner Bucket. Again and again nature called for his death, and he fought back. Could nature be challenged? Perhaps not. Perhaps nature will always take its course, whatever that course may be, and it is best to leave it to its business. Let the dead be dead, let the deer roam free, and let the living do as they will... But Charlotte didn't die naturally. And how boring it would be if we didn't try to do something a little different. This has been the obituary of... Wait, I can't publish any of this can I?

[music cuts]

OW VO: Stealing a body, blowing up a cemetery... might be a bad look. Oh well. So long, Gert.

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

Evening Post: This has been Death by Dying. Created by Evan Gulock and Niko Gerentes. Featuring the voices of Evan Gulock as The Obituary Writer and The Button-Eyed Raven, Donovan Mullings as Walter Grimsly, Tucker Ramseur as Gert, Niko Gerentes as Marcus the Maggot, Maggie the Maggot, and News Anchor Maggot, Hedley Knights as the Silent Nuns, Lauren Denby as the Angel of Death, and Angela Morris as Charlotte Dawson. Portions of this episode were recorded at The Foxhole Chicago by studio engineer Dave Langley. Music composed by Savfk, Doug Maxwell, Scott Buckley, Hayden Folker, Nicolas Gasparini, Darren Curtis, Steven O'Brien, and Niko Gerentes. A very Special Thanks to our Featured Patron, September Brogan, and our Indiegogo Associate Producers: Luis Resto, Samariel Koster, Robert

Death by Dying Podcast

Gulock, Jordan Percle, and Angel Acevedo. And lest we forget, our eternal gratitude to Matthew Cunningham and George Zarr. If any of you Dawn's Dinner Bucket enthusiasts would like to send their condolences, comments, hopes, fears, or dreams, you can contact The Obituary Writer personally at TheObituaryWriter@gmail.com, or follow us on social media @DeathByDyingPod. If you like what you hear, consider becoming a supporter of the show on Patreon and get access to bonus content, bloopers, messages from The Button-Eyed Raven, and more. Visit patreon.com/deathbydyingpod, or follow the link in the description. And remember... if you're going to fall in love with a woman who's hell bent on ruining her marriage and running away with you...at least make sure you have similar taste in food...

[warping piano music spins out]