

Obituary 09: Kai Died

Obituary Writer (Voiceover): What's shakin'? I am the approachable Obituary Writer of this fun little town of Crestfall, Idaho, and this is *Death by Dying*.

[melodramatic cello solo – sweeping, brooding, yearning... a meaningful pause...]

It gives me no pleasure to say that the funeral business in Crestfall is booming.

[cello music resumes, then pauses again, really milking it]

It gives me slightly more pleasure to say that the funerals are nothing short of *dazzling*.

[music resumes, ramping up]

On a crisp November evening, the town of Crestfall had outdone itself. A funeral for the ages. A funeral for the aged. And I would expect nothing less... for my tailor.

[cello solo builds, faster, more emotional...]

It is with a heavy heart... and a pair of trousers that need to be taken in half an inch... that I say... this is the obituary of Kai Nocturne.

[a final resonant bow of the cello and the music ends. silence. THEN. paper being wound into a typewriter. typewriter keys a-clackin'. fading in: wind rushing by as though we as an audience are falling through the sky. from a distance, rocketing towards us from above: A SCREAM. is it out of fear? excitement? it's unclear.]

Kai: AHHHHHHHHH!

OW VO: Kai Nocturne, 43, died the way they had lived...

Kai: *(scream breaks into a thrilled, roller coaster worthy:)* WHOOOOOO!

OW VO: ...skydiving with dolphins...

Dolphins: *(cheering excitedly and making whatever sound dolphins make)*

OW VO: ...on some exceptional hallucinogens.

Kai: YEAHHHHHHH!

OW VO: Kai was on the hallucinogens, not the dolphins. The dolphins need to keep their heads clear to make sure they pull their parachutes in time and stick the landing.

Dolphins: (*chirping*)

[*click, whoooooosshhh, parachute activated*]

OW VO: Kai, on the other hand, didn't so much stick the landing as they were *sticked* by the landing—

Kai: AHHHH—

[*SHING! SPLAT! Kai's body makes impact with something sharp, and blood and guts spill everywhere*]

—skewered on the sword held by a statue in the town square of Crestfall's greatest bocce ball champion.

[*sweet, pensive piano music*]

Kai was the finest tailor in town. They had a way with fabrics the way an artist graces a canvas or a taxidermist turns a pet Pomeranian into a couch cushion. Their style was unmatched. It could best be described as flowing, elegant, growing.

It was in the way they walked, the way they laughed, the way they dotted their i's with stars. Their hair spun out in cascading curls, eyes popping with emerald green eyeliner. They wore long, crushed velvet suits, bold diamond drop earrings. They were like a bluebell drooping in the moonlight – dark, graceful, and vegetative. I would be the first to enthusiastically admit I have a shrine dedicated to them behind a secret panel in my armoire.

[*slowly fading in over the course of the next sentence: wheels rolling and squeaking*]

On the day of the funeral, Kai's casket was rolled up and down the aisle to show off their final outfit: the most stunning cape dress I had ever seen in my entire life.

[funeral attendees ooh and ahhh at Kai's outfit like they're at a fashion show]

Attached to the cape dress was a broach with the image of a potato with an all-seeing eye: Kai's signature symbol stitched into all of their clothing. No one was entirely sure what it meant, but people were convinced it surely meant something, and they seemed to be content having arrived at this conclusion.

Everyone stood for the cremation ceremony.

[chairs groan, people shuffle to stand up. an old man pants and wheezes as he pushes a squeaky piano in front of the audience. the wheezes are belabored and concerning. like why is no one helping this man.]

Crestfall's oldest surviving man wheeled out Crestfall's oldest surviving piano... cracked his knuckles...

[the old man cracks his knuckles]

Oldest Man in Crestfall: *(YELPING as though his cracking knuckles just impacted his entire equilibrium)*

OW VO: ...and *played.*

[jaunty "maple leaf rag" on piano]

The Craigmire Cannon was shot to signal the death of an absolute icon.

[SSSSSSS – fuse sparkling. BANG! the cannon fires!]

Everyone put on their sunglasses... then a troop of girl scouts fired up the flamethrowers...

Girl Scout: Fire in the hole!

[CLICK! BLAST! WHOOOSSSSHHH – fire spews out of a flamethrower]

OW VO: ...and blasted Kai to Kingdom Come until there was nothing left but a pile of ashes.

[WHOOSH! CH-SSSSHHH – Kai’s body poofs into ashes with a final flourish]

The cremation ceremony is an opportunity for their community service badge.

[“maple leaf rag” concludes]

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, people to smaller chunks of people. Just like their suits, Kai’s service was a perfect fit.

[nighttime ambience, diegetic soft dinner jazz music fades in]

After the funeral’s reception, which consisted of fine wine, gruyère cheese, and some soft atmospheric jazz, I made my way back across town to my apartment, following the beat of Charlotte’s heart.

[heartbeat thumps]

I’ve taken to carrying it around in my suit jacket, tucked in the inside pocket, beating over my own, just in case it’s trying to tell me something.

[heartbeat fades away. THEN – the rustling of a nearby bush. silly intrigue music – horns, strings, clarinet]

Just then – a noise came from the shrubbery behind me. Ordinarily, I wouldn’t have questioned this, as the shrubbery of Crestfall are particularly rowdy at night. But an ominous silhouette was clearly watching me from between the leaves.

OW: Good evening.

OW VO: I said.

Stalker: *Drat.*

[more rustling, emerging from the bush...]

OW VO: From the shrubbery emerged a man who resembled what one assumes people mean when they say “Oh, we don’t invite him to parties anymore.” His hair was an unmitigated disaster, with enough pomade to sink a small ship. He wore an oversized polka dot tie... *on purpose*. And he smelled like an apple pie forgotten in the back of a refrigerator.

[final round of bush rustling]

Stalker: Well well well, you clever little minx – you caught me. But only because I *wanted* to be caught. With the right attitude and proper body paint I could vanish from the face of the earth... but who would want that. Not these cheekbones.

OW VO: He flashed a devil-may-care-a-little-bit smile.

[music hushes to tense strings, building to the reveal]

I had dreaded this moment for quite some time. I thought if I was careful I could avoid it, but... alas... it was none other than that two-timing bastard–

[music cuts]

Jimmy Hawkins: Jimmy Hawkins, Private Investigator, at your service.

[groovy noir music]

Charmed and charming, as always. It’s good to see you, O-Dubs. I see you still have that look on your face. Glad to know some things don’t change.

OW VO: If you’ve been following along, Jimmy Hawkins is the wicked fiend who stole my lover, Karen Digby. Karen and I had been going steady for a few weeks when Jimmy showed up, dazzled her with his halfwitted metaphors, and left me in my default mood:

[music stops]

OW VO (*insanely somber, echoing*): Devastated... and Alone...

[music resumes]

OW VO: Ya know... I honestly don't even know what she sees in him. He's a walking mess of a human being, with an atrocious sense of humor, sub-par detective skills, nerves like a wet noodle...

[music shifts to a romantically longing orchestra]

...eyes you could get lost in... a jawline for days... cheekbones like a chiseled angel...

[music cuts]

(OW snaps out of it) Why she would want anything to do with him, I'll never know.

[noir music returns, then concludes]

Jimmy: Ah, I've been keeping myself busy, thanks for asking.

[light jazz music, like from some skeevy 1940s bar]

Ever heard of the Outdoor Garden Gnome Robbery? Hm, turns out it was an inside job. What about the Piano Thief? He went out on one helluva note. And then there's that Norwegian Weed Killer, the Half-Arsed Arsonist, the Eco-Friendly Car Jacker, the Fraudulent Fork Salesmen. How about the Case of the Butcher's Missing Meat? The culprit turned out to be a goat, but it was a thrilling adventure that I definitely saw from beginning to end and did NOT run away from in a panicked frenzy. And of course... ugh, how could I forget... the Great Bread Factory Fire of 1982—

[echoes from the past: raging fire, workers SCREAMING]

—where I lost my arm, my wits, and my taste for toast.

[a severed arm whips across the factory, splatting on the floor]

Panicked Bread Factory Worker: WHOSE ARM IS THIS???

Jimmy: The bread may be cold now, but that doesn't mean the trail is! It's a lot of cases *(chuckles in fake modesty)*, I know, I know, but I believe you should bite off more than you can chew... *(smacks his lips)*... then chew it some more.

[jazz music fades out, night ambience fades back in]

OW: Who hired you to follow me?

Jimmy: Nobody.

OW: Come on, Jimmy.

Jimmy: Actually I think it's pronounced Nu-bo-dié, I think it's... French? Doesn't matter! My clients tend to contact me under pseudonyms. I wasn't hired to follow *you* anyway. I was hired to investigate... your cats.

[dark, intriguing ambient music – what's going on here?]

OW: My cats? What for?

Jimmy: I'm not at liberty to say.

OW: I can assure you they've done nothing wrong. We have a strict No Murder policy when they're hunting.

Jimmy: What?

OW: Nothing.

Jimmy: Look, all I know is that those three cats have been up to some nasty business. And nasty business is *my* business. I was on my way to your apartment to track them down when I *allowed* you to notice me in the shrubbery.

OW: There's no way I'm letting you follow my cats.

Jimmy: Then you're just gonna have to join me, old sport! Don't ask for permission, just get the hell out as fast as you can. That's what my grandmother always used to say.

OW VO: I stared in disbelief at that two-timing bastard Jimmy Hawkins, Private Investigator. I had spent countless irritable daydreams serving up choice words for this man. I don't wish death or disease upon him, but I do hope his soup is never warm enough. I wish upon him... a general comeuppance, filled with mundanities, random misfortunes, and miscellaneous pratfalls. And here I was, about to spend the night with him.

[*music fades*]

My three man-eating cats leave for their nightly outing at the stroke of midnight. Since the bell broke through the ceiling of the church, Pastor Jane has taken to racing up the belfry every hour and banging a giant gong.

[*Pastor Jane pants as she runs up the belfry stairs for a ridiculous amount of time, footsteps pattering on the stone steps. she reaches the top, makes an effort like she's lifting a large mallet, then BANGS ON A GONG 12 TIMES haphazardly.*]

Pastor Jane (*yelling across the town square, voice echoing*): IT'S 12 O'CLOCK... A.M.!

OW VO: It's been surprisingly effective.

[*a cat meows! plucky string music begins.*]

Like clockwork, my cats strolled onto the balcony of my apartment. The One Who Hunts—

The One Who Hunts (*aggressive*): MEOW!

OW VO: —black with white stripes and an anger management problem.

The One Who Hunts (*aggressive*): MEOWWW!

OW VO: The One Who Glares—

The One Who Glares (*chill, maybe even a little forlorn*): Meow!

OW VO: —jet black and known for inducing feverish nightmares for those who look too deeply in his eyes. And The One Who Sulks—

The One Who Sulks (*depressed, whimpering, dainty*): meeeooooowwww....

OW VO: —who cleans her calico tabby fur with her bulbous tears. Mind you, she's a very content and well-cared-for feline. She just cries recreationally. The One Who Hunts gripped the edge of the balcony and slid off, hanging with her front paws. The One Who Glares climbed down her, grabbing onto her hind paws. The One Who Sulks followed suit, and together they created a sort of cat ladder, by which they reached the ground. Jimmy and I—

[*string pluck*]

–crouched behind yet more shrubbery–

[*string pluck*]

–watching on.

[*final string pluck. music ends. new nighttime ambience fades in, this time outside OW's apartment.*]

Jimmy: Some innovative cats you got there.

OW VO: I was not fond of secretly following my cats. It felt like a breach of contract. They look the other way when I dig up the grave of their dead owner's niece, and I do the same when it comes to their shenanigans. But perhaps this was my only way of protecting them from the sleazy likes of Jimmy Hawkins... Private Investigator.

OW: It... would be helpful to know what you're hoping to catch my cats doing.

Jimmy: Ahh, no can do, O-Dubs. That would be breaking the code of the private eye. Emphasis on *private*... and *eye*... because I have my eyes... peeled... at all times.

OW: (*sighs*) If you say so.

[*pause*]

Jimmy: I was sorry to hear about your friend... No one should have to go through something like that.

OW: Well, you know... everyone does, eventually.

Jimmy: You're a morbid son-of-a-gun, aren't you?

OW: I guess the cat's out of the bag with that one.

Jimmy: I never understood that phrase. Whose cat is it? And why is it in a bag? And should you be a pet owner?

[*CLANG! Jimmy bumps into a garbage can.*]

Jimmy: *Shoot.*

Man-Eating Cats (*who goes there?*): Meow! Meeooww!

OW: *Get down!*

[*OW and Jimmy hit the ground to hide. silence...*]

Man-Eating Cats (*must have been the wind, let's move on*): Meow...

Jimmy: I don't think they saw us.

OW: You can get off of me now.

Jimmy: Oh, ahem, sorry.

[*clothes shuffling as they disentangle*]

OW: Perhaps it's better if we don't talk?

Jimmy: Agreed. *No talking...* Nothing uttered *whatsoever*..... The exact definition of silence..... Comparable only to the moment before the dawn of time—

OW: Jimmy.

Jimmy: Right, right.

[*slunking-through-the-streets-at-night detective music – slapping bass, slick xylophone.*]

OW VO: Crestfall at night is like a quiet carousel. The colors, the gentle twinkling, the faint music, the motion sickness – Crestfall after dark is a place of hazy wonders. The fog willows down empty streets. The graveyard statues dance together in the moonlight. The phantom bicycles chime their haunting bells.

[chiming bell echoing into the night, bike chains chick-chick-chick along spinning wheels...]

At first, the path my cats took was... unremarkable. They swatted at a gathering of mice, which appeared to be a rival gang situation.

[cats meow and hiss, mice squeak angrily. tiny guns popping and cocking, semi-automatics the size of toothpicks firing.]

They played with shadows and jumped across rooftops. They received boops on the nose from the Wild Man.

Wild Man: Aw... nice doggies.

Man-Eating Cats (*hi weirdo, thanks for the boops*): Meow.

Wild Man: (*Wild Man noise*) Mmm.

OW VO: All the while, Jimmy and I slunked in the darkness, dove behind recycling bins, and once, when we were almost caught, pretended to be lovers meeting for a romantic midnight rendezvous. This happened spontaneously, with a lack of better ideas, and should *never* be spoken of again.

[music ends with a pattering of cymbals. then new music begins – mysterious plinky synth, we’re wandering through the nightscape...]

Following my man-eating cats afforded us a new view of Crestfall – a tour of sorts, a peek behind the curtain of the wee-hour lives of Crestfallens. Mia Jasper and Fen Lou were on a date at Siren’s Diner, sipping overly-sweet coffee and chatting emphatically about toppling the surveillance state. Megan Houghton and Isabelle Joe, the unrelated identical twins, practiced a choreographed ballet. And then, of course, there was Bobbie Parker, Crestfall’s resident melancholy poet, who spent most of her time professionally staring out into the distance, in various inspiring locations, with a morose look in her eyes.

Just when I was starting to think my cats were less interesting than I had hoped, they pranced up to a shop in the town square. Hopping on top of one another like three cats in a trench coat, The One Who Hunts picked the lock with her claw–

[The One Who Hunts jiggles the lock with her claw... click! it unlocks!]

The One Who Hunts (*success!*): Meowww!

OW VO: –and the three snuck inside.

[*door creaks open...*]

The store in question: The Loose Thread... Kai Nocturne's tailor shop.

[*dramatic pulse impact. fade in night ambience.*]

Jimmy: What could they possibly want in there? Little kitty suits?

OW: Maybe a... tiny cat tie.

Jimmy: A miniature top hat.

OW: A pocket square shaped like a paw print.

Jimmy: (*chuckles*)

OW: (*chuckling, then snapping out of it*) Anyway. Back to not getting along.

Jimmy: Ah, right. (*clears throat, mocking OW*) Hello, I am the fancy Obituary Writer of this dashing town of Crestfall, Idaho–

OW (*chuckling, faux-offended*): Hey!

Jimmy: That's you. That's what you sound like.

OW: (*chuckles fizzle out, catching himself... he pauses...*) We should get going.

[*OW and Jimmy's footsteps across the street*]

OW VO: Jimmy and I dashed over to the front window and peered inside. In the faint glow of the moonlight we could see our three feline suspects. The One Who Glares catapulted himself onto the front desk. He swiped at a book until it opened–

[*muffled inside: book thumps open, pages flipping*]

–then thumbed through its pages until he reached a spot he seemed to be looking for.

OW VO: He booped the page with his nose...

The One Who Glares (*right here!*): meow.

OW VO: ...and just like that, the trio scampered toward the back of the shop and launched themselves out a closed window.

The One Who Hunts (*geronimo!*): MEEOOOWW!

[*CRASH! glass shatters*]

Jimmy: Quick, after them!

[*Jimmy starts running after the cats*]

OW: Hold up!

[*Jimmy skitters to a stop*]

Jimmy: We're gonna lose them!

OW: I know those cats. They're as hungry for clues as they are human flesh.

Jimmy: What?

OW: N-nothing. You go on ahead, I'll catch up.

Jimmy: Eh... *Suit* yourself.

OW: Oh! (*chuckles*) I see what you did there.

Jimmy: I can be clever.

OW: Yeah that-that was good (*interrupts his own chuckles*) – No! I refuse to be amicable with you!

OW VO: Jimmy took off like an overzealous gazelle.

[Jimmy's overzealous gazelle gallop – somewhere between a human skipping and a horse on a good day. OW opens creaky door.]

I slipped inside The Loose Thread.

[whimsical piano and flute music]

The day Kai Nocturne opened this store was the day Crestfall was saved from eternal damnation. Mind you, this is a town where the burlap sack is considered a traditional and perfectly suitable form of garment (especially on bank holidays). Once Kai entered the scene, however, no one would be caught dead wearing a burlap sack – except when they were, as we unfortunately don't know when the endless nap will strike.

Crestfallens never realized they could express themselves unabashedly, any time of day or night. After Kai, the townsfolk wore bubblegum-pinstripe rompers while mowing the lawn, silk-ribboned evening gowns while screwing in lightbulbs. Kai Nocturne truly had a transformative effect on everyone.

My mind was a-swirl in color and fabric. Alas, I tried my best not to linger on such earthly delights, as it would be an endless distraction from the mystery at hand. The book on the front desk was Kai Nocturne's diary, where they marked all relevant measurements for their customers. But the page my cat had turned to didn't contain their usual detailed records... It was a note.

[cryptic all-male choir singing "POTATO" over and over again in a way that makes it sound like Latin, like the announcement of a Pagan god]

Kai (*grand, as though delivering scripture. echoing.*): The Potato has eyes, and all beneath the burning sun, It knows, and It knows well. I have been chosen by the Cosmic Spud, and now I feel my end approaching. I will be peeled, boiled, and mashed, as the prophecy has foretold for all who dare to walk the Path of the Tater. I bid this mortal prison adieu. Adieu! Adieu...

[choir fades]

OW VO: At the bottom of the page was a symbol: a potato with an all-seeing eye. Kai's note was cryptic but the message was clear... the skydiving accident was no accident.

And now, the condolences. Condolences brought to you by The Jaunty Romper, Crestfall's *second* most popular tailor shop. They say:

[upbeat piano and drum commercial jazz music]

Muriel Buttons: Here's the thing. We *liked* being second. We don't *want* to be first. Now that The Loose Thread is closed, this is simply just too much pressure for us. So we will be closing. Effective immediately. Sorry not sorry.

OW VO: Condolences also brought to you by (*surprised*) the abandoned toy factory. They say:

[music shifts to eerie drone and dread-inducing drums]

"Stop coming here. We get it: There used to be a toy factory here. But there is no longer a toy factory here. There is no factory. There are no toys. Please leave us alone."

[music changes back to commercial jazz]

Huh... We aren't exactly sure where that message came from. Like the message said, there is no factory and there are no toys. So logic would dictate there are also no workers. But I suppose even an anonymous, mysterious message from no one in particular that has nothing to do with your death is better than nothing at all.

[music concludes. nighttime ambience fades in. diegetic music starts up, muffled from behind a door: "I Wanna Wear Your Skin, Baby," by the Bally-Go-Backward Boys – finger-wagging bluegrass swing instrumentals. clarinet, trumpet, piano, banjo, bass, drums, the whole shebang.]

OW: *Jimmy.*

Jimmy: Shhh! I'm... witnessing... something...

OW VO: We were standing in the alleyway behind the Butcher's Butchery. Jimmy's mouth was agape. Through the porthole of the backdoor... was a dance party.

Chester (*singing goat-style*): Nyah-nyah-nyah-nyah nyahhhhhh!

Butcher: That's my goat right there! Hahahaha! Pipes of an angel, I tell ya!

OW VO: The Butcher was sweeping a mop off its feet – an imaginary dance partner. Chester the goat clip-clopped his hooves in rhythm to the music.

[clip-clopping hooves]

And my cats were dining on the Butcher's latest autopsy.

The One Who Sulks (*yum!*): meoowww...

Jimmy: What on earth... Are your cats–

OW: Giving the corpse little kisses? Yes, let's go with that.

OW VO: All this to the tune of The Bally-Go-Backward Boys' most popular hit, "I Wanna Wear Your Skin, Baby."

Bally-Go-Backward Boys:

[Lyrics]

Won't you take my hand

And listen to the band

I want to see what life would be like

Through your eyes.

(You got two of them, don'tcha?)

There wouldn't be a trace

If I cut off your face

And then I wore it like a mask

So I could be you.

I love you,

Let me in.

I love you,

I wanna wear your skin.

I love you,

LET ME IN

OH PLEASE! I LOVE YOU!

I WANNA WEAR YOUR SKIN ON MY FACE!!!

[song ends with a final blast of a muted trumpet! Jimmy knocks a trash can over. goddammit, Jimmy. night ambience reintroduced.]

OW: *Jimmy!*

Jimmy: *Drat!*

Butcher (*muffled*): Gadzooks! They found us!

Jimmy: Ahaha... oh boy.

Butcher (*muffled*): The jig is up! Get outta here, quick! Scram, kitties!

Man-Eating Cats: Meow! Meow! meowwww...

[absolute chaos inside The Butchery (all muffled inside). crashes, smashes, clattering, smattering, bangs and booms. a car screeching away (still muffled), crashing into another car, one of the cats meow-groaning from behind the wheel like "goddammit, who put that parked car in my way" (wait, are the cats driving a getaway car??), car squealing into the distance. The Butcher approaches the back door.]

Butcher: Alright alright, who's makin' a commosh out here...

[door opening]

Butcher: Oh! Uh, sorry about that. I was just, uh... I was, uh, havin' a business meeting! Heh-heh, yeah... (*clears throat*) That's what I was doing. Hey Jimmy! Wanna meet that ghost who was stealin' my meat?

Jimmy: I know, I know, it was a g-

Butcher: It was a GOAT. HAHAHA! Nothin' supahnatural goin' on over here. Heh-heh. Private eye – more like... scaredy guy!

Chester (*laughing*): Nyahhhahaha. Nyahhhahaha!

Jimmy: Only cowards stand their ground in the face of a roaring lion.

Chester (*sure, whatever you say*): Nyahhh.

Jimmy (*to Chester*): Yeah, well, you're welcome, goat. (*to the group*) You only live to fight another day if you run away screaming like a little boy who dropped his Neapolitan ice cream. Courage makes dead heroes.

OW: Now who's the morbid son-of-a-gun?

Jimmy: Well, we should be on our way—

OW: Actually, Butcher, I was wondering if I could inquire about the body of Kai Nocturne.

Butcher: Aw shucks, ya sure know a way to a butcher's heart, OW-ya. Ask about his pork chops or his corpses.

OW: Did you find anything... *suspicious* during the autopsy? I suspect foul play.

Butcher: Less fowl... more fishy.

OW: How so?

Butcher: Well, I found traces of highly concentrated Solanum Tuberosum Glycoalkaloids in their bloodstream.

Jimmy: Egad! Not sola, s-s – sof-nuh, sola f-f uh... num-tah... tooblesum glowkymoids!

Butcher: Don't hurt yaself, kid. It's a poisonous substance not usually found in concentrated forms.

OW: They were poisoned!

Butcher: The whole being impaled thing just sealed the deal. Curious way to kill someone though. Solanum Tuberosum Glycoalkaloids come from... potatoes.

OW: Do you, by chance, recognize... *this*?

[*paper flip*]

OW VO: Kai's note continued on the back.

[pagan god choir returns]

Kai (grand, echoing): Like Tantalus to his fruit, I yearn for the sweet allowance of my deepest cravings sprung from my innermost self. The union of soul and potato, becoming one through forces beyond and within myself – granted by the Cosmic Spud. For certain, to fall is to fly, and I will meet my end with the bliss of a siren's song.

[choir fades, night ambience resumes]

Butcher: Where did you find this?

OW: It was in Kai's diary. Do you know what that symbol means?

Butcher: Look... I've heard murmurs... but I didn't understand what they were saying. It was too quiet. You might wanna talk to someone who's a little more connected with the townsfolk than I.

[organ music, a silly, circus-y tune, completed by shave and a haircut]

Pastor Jane: Right then! So the organist would play a little ditty like *that* and then I would step up to the pulpit.

[Pastor Jane's footsteps echoing in the church]

OW VO: As luck would have it, the next stop for my cats was the Church of Right Here Right Now. They sat attentively in the pews while Pastor Jane practiced her next sermon.

PJ: I really appreciate you kitties holding these focus groups. The feedback really helps. Alright... oof, I dunno why I'm so nervous! Don't look at me...

Man-Eating Cats (you got this): Meow. meeoww...

PJ: You're right, better get used to the attention now. Alright, here it goes... ahem... (*deep breath through the mouth*)... *Forgiveness*. It's something we all *want* but can't easily *give*. I used to be a grumpy little tot. Got into all sorts of rustles and tussles. When my brother Jeff stole my Virgin Mary action figure. When my gal pals talked smack about my jean shorts behind my back. When all I had for dinner was lima beans because my mother caught me smoking the Devil's

lettuce with Sister Jude, ‘cause Jesus was rock’n’roll, baby! Gotta toke up for the woke man in the sky. And don’t get me wrong, I’m not hating on lima beans. A bean is a bean and mama loves a good legume. But the problem isn’t the problem – it’s how you *handle* it... *Love thy neighbor*. That’s what God says. You wanna know why he said that? Because your neighbors are the ones who are blasting dubstep and shooting off fireworks at three in the morning. They’re the ones who let their dog poop on your petunias and mow their lawn every time you go to record your podcast. God says “Love thy neighbor” because they’re weird, frustrating, and talk way too long when you’re frankly not in the mood, *Leroy...* (*clears throat, composes herself*) But despite this, we must find a way to forgive. A way to love. Because you can’t live your whole life being a grumpy little tot. Amen...

Man-Eating Cats (*amen*): Meow!

PJ: Great, let’s take five!

[*PJ steps away from the pulpit*]

OW (*softly*): Excuse me?

PJ (*startled*): Jesus Christ! Oh, dear Lord above. I thought you were a vision!

Jimmy: Thank you, I get that a lot.

PJ: A *holy* vision. They’ve been stopping by every now and then. (*sing-songy*) *Glimpses of the future*.

OW: How does it look?

PJ: Far away... What can I do for you, my honey crumpets?

OW: We were wondering... what you knew about this.

[*page flip. pagan god choir returns one last time.*]

Kai (*grand, echoing*): At the hands and green thumbs of my brethren, cloaked in indigo cloth, I surrender to the fate of joyous awakening! But to awaken, I must sleep. There is no escaping now. They come for me.

PJ: *(big dramatic gasp, interrupting choir)* I shouldn't say.

OW: Please, Pastor Jane.

PJ: I couldn't say!

OW: Please.

PJ: I wouldn't!

OW: Pastor—

PJ: Can't!

OW: Jane—

PJ: Shan't!

OW: But—

PJ: Fine! And I'll spare no details.

Jimmy: Your interrogation skills are remarkable.

OW *(genuinely flattered):* Thank you!

PJ: Alright boys, lean in...

[eerie sci-fi synth music]

Every now and then I get a confession at the diner booth about this. I don't know much, but I do know this: there's an old barn on the Fryer Family Farm, about twenty two point three minutes from here. It looks abandoned, *but it isn't*. There you will find your answers about... The Cosmic Spud.

[dramatic spacey alien stinger! music ends. phone alarm goes off.]

(PJ snapping out of it) Oh my god! Oh! If you'll excuse me.

[racing feet going up stone stairs, again for a very long time, PJ panting. she hefts up the mallet and SLAMS three good hardy blows to the giant gong in the belfry. GOONNNNNGGGGGG...]

PJ: IT'S THREE O'CLOCK... A.M.!!!

[exciting string music – this mystery's gettin' good...]

OW VO: Nothing like a new mystery to help you feel refreshed in life. I strutted confidently into the fresh air of Crest–

[music cuts]

Jimmy: Now hold on just a minute, buster.

[night ambience]

OW VO: Jimmy was standing several paces behind, with the same look on his face as that of a defiant puppy.

Jimmy: You are on *my* adventure, not the other way around. The only reason you're here is because I *allowed it* to be so. I don't know about any barn in the backwoods. All I know is that your cats have a date with Lady Justice, and she is a fickle mistress that waits for no man... or feline.

OW: And you were paid.

Jimmy: *AND* I was paid! An extremely handsome sum, I might add. As handsome as a glass of crème de la crème on a hot summer day. We're gonna keep following those cats.

OW: They're probably long gone by now. Whatever, continue on your fruitless search. I have more important things to do. I have an obituary to write.

[OW starts striding away]

Jimmy: You don't seem to like me very much.

[OW stops, swivels with teeth-gritted purpose back to Jimmy]

OW: As a matter of fact, I don't think anything of you!

Jimmy: Well, you've been treating me like garbage this whole night.

OW: Alright, fine, you really wanna know? Every time I *look* at you, I'm reminded of what I've lost. I think about losing Karen, and that makes me think about losing Charlotte, and that makes me think about losing Lillian, and Pastor Jeff, and Kai— Any of the people I care about seem to either die or leave for the Bahamas or cheat on me with that two-timing bastard private detective—

Jimmy: Whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa, cheat on you? *Bastard??* As far as I'm concerned, you and Karen weren't together anymore. She said dating an obituary writer was a fast-paced lifestyle and she was looking for something else. Sound familiar?

[shocked silence]

OW: Jimmy... I...

Jimmy: And besides... Karen and I aren't together anymore. Something about my halfwitted metaphors.

[sad this-is-the-low-point piano music]

OW VO: This... hadn't occurred to me. Could I have been looking at an incomplete picture? A fragmented story? Had I been mad all this time for no reason? Impossible... My memory of the breakup suddenly felt... fuzzy. Before I could say another word, Jimmy put on a pair of sunglasses even though it was the middle of the night.

Jimmy (wounded): I thought we were having fun, old sport. But now I must wear these sunglasses to hide the teary gleam of my midnight sorrows. Good night to you, Obituary Writer.

OW VO: Jimmy tottered away... like a weebegone duckling. I was left once more... in my default mood:

[music stops, reverb on OW's morose voice]

Devastated... and Alone...

[*creepy piano music*]

The Fryer Family Farm is situated in the *It Ain't Happenin' Honey* region of the Crestfall farmlands, where it is high near impossible to grow absolutely anything. The soil is dry, the sun averts its rays, and even the rain clouds avoid the area at all costs. And yet, the Fryer Family has insisted on staying for generations. The field was flat, the crickets exposed like constellations of black stars on the ground. In the middle of the field was a dilapidated barn – its bright red paint faded to a dusty brown, drained of color from time and the nightscape. The barn was aglow–

[*ominous humming drone*]

–an ancient yellow light piercing through the holes of the hollowing wood.

[*music shifts to foreboding strings, gradually growing in tension...*]

What lie ahead, I could not be sure, but the time is forever now to expose the dark secrets that lurk beneath the roily veil of your hometown. With a running start, I busted through the rickety door, unblinking in the eye of the roaring lion.

[*strings CRESCENDO, OW slams into the rickety door! it doesn't budge. he hurts himself BAD. he topples to the ground in a pile of hay and pain.*]

OW: (*groaning in pain*)

OW VO: And promptly dislocated my shoulder.

OW: (*cringing, groaning*)

Friendly Cult Member (*muffled inside the barn*): *It's open!*

OW: Oh man...

[*OW staggers over grassy ground, opens the barn door...*]

OW VO: The barn was full of hooded figures...

[*bizarre, uneasy, revealing-God-and-God-is-scarier-than-you-thought music*]

...kneeling before an enormous potato. The potato loomed high like a towering monolith. And it was *breathing*.

[*Cosmic Spud breathing like a great beast*]

Before I had a chance to say “That’s a big potato,” the hooded figures grabbed me!

[*horns blare! orchestra pops off! our-intrepid-hero-has-been-caught-by-the-bad-guys music*]

They hauled me into the barn, then dropped me like a sack of – well, you get the idea.

[*thump – OW is dropped to the wood floor*]

The monstrous potato bellowed an unearthly groan.

[*Cosmic Spud GROANS*]

OW VO: A particularly tall hooded figure stepped forward – “I Heart the Great Potato God” on their cloak.

[*footsteps over hay*]

Cult Leader: Greetings, newcomer! Welcome to The Order of the Cosmic Spud.

[*fantastical, rapt-in-wonder music*]

Cult Leader: This land was always cursed. Never a hope for new life. Then – salvation. A small potato with big dreams.

[*small potato CRIES like a small baby*]

Just when the Fryer Family Farm was about to go under, a flash of light in the darkest night!

[*BOOM! WHOOOOSH! the baby potato god punctures the earth’s atmosphere and rockets down like an asteroid*]

A burning wonder descended from the skies!

[CRASH! BOOOOMMMMM... the baby potato god makes impact with the earth, creating a giant crater]

Fredrick Fryer discovered it growing right here in this... very... spot, a miracle in the form of a spud from outer space - *space - space - space* (Cult Leader simulates an epic echo but it's actually just her kinda awkwardly doing it herself)! He didn't dare harvest such a marvel – *no*. And before he knew it, the potato grew and grew and grew!

[vines growing, baby potato cries transforming into massive, bellowing entity]

With clever marketing and exquisite salesmanship, Fredrick convinced down-on-their-luck townsfolk that the Cosmic Spud had special healing powers, which we now all believe wholeheartedly and without question.

[music turns deadly – a deep, pulsing synth, dark and threatening]

And now... the Cosmic Spud requires a new sacrifice...

[SHING! SHING! SHING! the cult members whip out sharp potato peelers like small daggers.]

Cult Members (chanting, increasing in intensity from a murmur to a bold proclamation, continuing behind OW's narration): po-ta-to... po-ta-to... Po-ta-to... Po-ta-to...

OW VO: The hooded figures raised a set of razor-sharp potato peelers in the air. I was about to be just another of a thousand Idaho residents... skinned for a potato god.

Cult Members (practically screaming in ecstasy): PO-TA-TOOOOOO!!!!

OW VO: Through my fright, I uttered...

[music cuts]

(counting to self) one, two, three-four-five – TEN words.

[music resumes]

OW: I just want to know what happened to Kai Nocturne!

[*threatening music ends*]

Cult Leader: Oh. You aren't here to answer our advert? Potato cult seeking fresh human sacrifice?

OW: No!

Cult Leader: Aww (*disappointed*) Peelers down, folks!

Cult Crowd (*even more disappointed*): AWWWW... SERIOUSLY?

Cosmic Spud (*cosmically*): AWWWW...

Cult Leader: (*to cult*) Sheath thy peelers! (*to OW*) You ask about Kai Nocturne?

OW: Yes. Why did you murder them?

Cult Leader: Murder them? Oh, quite the opposite! We *freed* them. More importantly, they freed themselves. And now they have ascended to the next world: *The Outer Spudverse*.

[*dramatic sci-fi stinger*]

They were chosen, you see.

OW: Then what about the solbon... too, uh, tooba-horn duh, t-tooboglyno...

Cult Leader: Oh, Solanum Tuberosum Glycoalkaloids! Mmm. The potato juice.

OW: I could have been saying *potato juice* this whole time?

Cult Leader: It was in the hallucinogens they took before their flight. You must believe me when I say there was no crime here. Kai died exactly how they wanted to: skydiving with dolphins, tripping balls like nobody's business, in honor of an alien potato god.

OW (*not trying very hard to hide his judgement*): We... all have our things... *don't we*.

Cult Leader: Precisely.

Cosmic Spud: *(deep sigh)*

Cult Leader: Now if you'll excuse me, the Cosmic Spud requires our attention.

[surprising reveal music – but not in a scary way. just a momentous build and flourish under the next sentence.]

OW VO: It was at this moment that the cult leader turned. Their hood slipped off their head.

OW: ...Karen?

[goofy, plucky string and clarinet music, sweet and a little humorous]

Cult Leader (Karen): Oh, hey, Dubby! I couldn't see you under this hood. Darn cloaks *(dorky, sort of laugh-adjacent noise)*. It's good to see you. Hey everybody! It's my ex!

Cult Members *(delighted, laughing, clapping):* Ahhh hahaha! Wow! Oh my god, that's crazy! Oh, that's so cool.

OW: ...So you're clearly doing well?

Karen: Mmmmm, oh, absolutely. I'm living my best life!

OW: Good, good... I'm seeing now that it's probably for the best we grew apart.

Karen: Well, as the Cosmic Spud always says: hhhhhhhrrrrrrroooooaaaaahhhhhhh *(imitates weird incoherent alien groaning sound the potato makes)* I have a poster of that in my office with a cat hanging from a tree. *(weird giggle)*

OW VO: I... nodded? I'm not entirely sure what that translates to, but I think I understood the sentiment. Enjoy the moment while it lasts, and don't despair when it's over. I gave Karen... a closure smile.

Karen: You too, Dubby.

[sweet, humorous music ends. nighttime ambience outside OW's apartment fades in. OW's footsteps approaching...]

OW VO: Upon returning to my apartment, I discovered the door was *already open*. Did The Order of the Cosmic Spud already track down where I live? Did I know too much?

Jimmy (*screaming, slightly muffled*): OH! OHHHH!!!

OW: OH NO.

[*panic-fueled music. OW races into the apartment.*]

Jimmy: OHH!!!!

OW VO: Sprawled on the floor of my apartment was none other than Jimmy Hawkins, Private Investigator!

Jimmy: OHHHH!

OW VO (*truly mortified*): My cats were on top of him, lunging in a furious manner. I couldn't believe my eyes. I couldn't believe I had allowed this to happen. Jimmy Hawkins was dying before my eyes, and there was nothing I could do to stop the ceaseless hunger of my man-eating cats!

[*cymbals CRASHING! violins FLYING! OH THE HORROR!*]

Man-Eating Cats: (*VICIOUS MEOWS LEFT, RIGHT, AND CENTER, POUNCING, GOING NUTS*)

Jimmy (*screaming, sounding horrified*): OHHH! OHHHHHH!! OHHHH!!!! (*tone changes, maybe he isn't screaming for his life*) OOOO-Dubs! Your cats are adorable! HA!

[*music switches to silly, playful clarinet, pizzicato strings, and twinkling xylophone*]

OW VO: Then I realized my cats were in fact *not* eating Jimmy Hawkins. Instead, they were playfully crawling over him—

The One Who Glares (*this guy's fun, can we keep him?*): Meooowww...

OW VO: —swatting at his oily hair, nuzzling his oversized polka dot tie, licking his cheek.

Jimmy (*laughing, animated*): They caught me following them and dragged me back here. And I was *terrified*, and I may have screamed like a cantankerous baboon, but we discovered... we actually get along quite well. (*adorable pinching-cheeks energy*) Isn't that right? Awww, so cute. Yes. Ooh (*giggles*).

OW VO: The One Who Hunts nibbled on his finger. I thought it best not to say she was likely sampling him.

[*silly, playful music ends*]

Jimmy: I'm really sorry about everything, Obituary Writer. Truly I am. I didn't realize I hurt you. And as for your cats... they don't seem like criminals to me. It's not like they've ever *killed* anybody. (*chuckles*)

OW (*laughs a little too overzealously*): **DEFINITELY NOT.**

Jimmy: Let's forget this ever happened, shall we?

OW: Jimmy... (*sighs*) I... I want to apologize as well. I've held onto a lot of resentment towards you. I'd like to try and... let that go.

Jimmy: Truth be told, I hope we don't forget this night ever happened. I had fun tonight.

[*wistful, slightly sensual Spanish-style guitar starts to play*]

OW VO: I don't often think about being wrong, dear reader. I deal with death for a living, and death is an absolute. It can be easy to forget that your thoughts and beliefs are not. Unchallenged beliefs can be dangerous. It can lead to arguments, fights, cracks in the fault lines between people. But three man-eating cats, a goat, and a butcher can have a dance party. A group of hooded figures from all across town can come together to worship a Great Potato God. Perhaps a two-timing nemesis could be a one-timing... *something*.

Jimmy: See you around...

[*Jimmy saunters to the door. Spanish guitar music CUTS-*]

...hot stuff.

[sweet, daydreamy guitar, bass, and drums kick in: someone handsome just got a surprising, flirty one-liner in before walking away – those kinda vibes. the door to OW’s apartment shuts.]

OW VO (*embarrassed, caught off-guard, maybe even blushing a little*): Uh... hm...
AHEM... heh... This has been the obituary of Kai Nocturne.

[daydreamy music ends... then... mournful, music piano music – warped as though on an old record]

Evening Post: This has been Death by Dying. Created by Evan Gulock & Niko Gerentes. Associate Producers: Luis Resto, Samariel Koster, Robert Gulock, Jordan Percle, Angel Acevedo, and Merijn Hardeman. Featuring the voices of: Evan Gulock as The Obituary Writer and Panicked Bread Factory Worker. Niko Gerentes as The Oldest Man in Crestfall, The Butcher, Chester the Goat, Friendly Cult Member, and The Cosmic Spud. BriElle Achterhof as Flamethrower Girl Scout. Ryan Goldsher as Jimmy Hawkins (Private Investigator). T.H. Ponders as Kai Nocturne. Nina Butterly as Linda Romper. Simran Bal as Pastor Jane. And Kristi Boulton as Karen Digby. Additional Voices Provided by The DePaul BFA 4 Class of 2023. Re-Recording Mixer: Beau Milkis. Recording Engineers: Niko Gerentes, BriElle Achterhoff, David Langley, and Logan Reeves. Additional Music by Doug Maxwell, Scott Buckley, Steven O’Brien, Christopher J. Cozzi, Niko Gerentes, Tyops, Migfus20, Kevin MacLeod, Nicolas Gasparini, and Dan Lebowitz. “I Wanna Wear Your Skin, Baby” by The Bally-Go-Backward Boys, arranged and produced by Alex Brinkley, Evan Gulock, and Niko Gerentes. Sung by Niko Gerentes, with trumpet by Michael Van Bodegom-Smith and clarinet by Adam Dib. Sensitivity Reader: Fern Fernald. A Very Special Thanks to Our Featured Patrons: Megan Houghton, Isabelle Joe, and Bobbie Parker. And four wittle boops on the nose to Bri, Henry, Kate, and Gav Farmer for their contributions to the look of the man-eating cats. And our eternal gratitude to Matthew Cunningham and George Zarr. If any of you potato cultists 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](https://www.instagram.com/DeathByDyingPod). If you like what you hear, consider becoming a supporter on Patreon and get access to bonus content like bloopers, mini-obituaries, and more. Visit [patreon.com/deathbydyingpod](https://www.patreon.com/deathbydyingpod), or follow the link in the episode description. And remember... “Errahh Ha Hara Bah Hara Humpha Whoorah Ha...” which loosely translates to: “The early bird gets the worm.... Or in this case... the potato.”

[warping piano music spins out]