

FUN IN FUNERAL

By

Christopher Highland

“I’ll leave you with your husband. Take all the time you need, ma’am.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Please...call me Thomas.”

“Thomas.”

Thomas? Who does he think he is? With a name like that, he must shed his clothes at night and become a cat so he can curl up on someone lap while he licks his butt. His voice certainly gives it away. Oh, well. I know you’re there. Your presence fills the room along with your fat butt. I can feel your eyes on me; burning into me. Just when I was alive, when I had my back turned to you. You with those eyes which I swear could shoot laser beams if they were able to. They must have been invisible.

Well, I’m dead now. You got me right where you want me. You couldn’t leave it alone, as with everything else. You always have to have everything your way, no matter who you hurt. I didn’t want a memorial service, so I’m sure you went behind my back and set one up. It would only matter to you, not to anyone you would happen to invite. It’s not as if anyone truly likes you. Heaven help anyone who truly tells you what they think of you.

I can feel that the funeral staff got the scowl out of my face. First decent look on my face since...well, I can’t remember the last time I had a reason not to scowl, let alone smile. What irony. I’m sure I look better than I ever did in life, and I can’t even see it. Both my mouth and eye-lids are sown shut. I can feel the sunken absence of my eyes, and even if I could move..

Ah, what does it matter? What do words matter now? Why am I still here, stuck in my body? There must be some reason. It can't be to smell your perfume. It's strong enough to wake and kill the dead a second time. Funny, when they sell it to you, they never tell you that you have bad taste. No wonder dogs never liked you.

Oh, nothing to say? Funny, you never had that trouble when I was alive. What's that sour, smoky feeling in the air? It can't be traces of bodies being cremated. Could it be that you're smiling? Of course you are. I can just feel that fat face of yours stretch itself with gargantuan effort. It's the most exercise you've had besides stuffing yourself at buffets.

I can't imagine the last time you smiled, either. Maybe it was when we were married, but that might have been just on the outside. Could it have been when we used to watch comedies together on late night television, and rented videos? That might have been it. Oh, wait, I know what it was. It was when I told you I never loved you, and that our marriage was a mistake. Yes. Not one smile or laugh after that.

But, you never saw me laugh or smile, either, after you wouldn't grant me a divorce. Oh, you were a shrewd one. You were determined to make me drown in it. Inviting your extended family over without telling me, and always at the worst times; when I had work to get done; when I was sick. They were always too stupid realize I need to be left alone, let alone not realizing I never liked them. Always knocking on my den door, always talking about gibberish. They'd fit right in with other politicians.

I can feel you move as you walk out of the room and whisper to Thomas. At least his cologne is slightly better than your perfume as it hangs in the air. It does its best to cover it up, but that's not saying much. They might as well use it to cover up the smell of the dead. Give the guests an incentive; something to look forward to.

No reaction from you, either, Thomas. Not even from her perfume. No nothing. At least you're not one of those people who have sex with dead bodies. How could you live with yourself? How could I be dead with myself? It's not something one brings up in polite conversation. I can't imagine funeral directors come home after a long day, and after hearing what their wife or spouse did, they say "Not much, dear. I had sex with one of the bodies to deal with the stress of the day. What's for dinner?"

Speaking of dinner, at least it wasn't her food that killed me. The only time I ever ate a good meal was when I went out to a good restaurant or when I cooked. I never heard anyone praise her cooking, or if they did, it was a really-half-assed attempt at flattery.

The lid of the coffin shuts with a heavy thump. Maybe now I can finally get some good sleep.

Any second now the staff will bring the coffin to the crematorium and I'll be toastier than a brisket on the surface of the sun. Then I'll be away from here, never to return, and I can eat whatever I want without my wife or doctor nagging me. Yes, just a toasty catapult to the great elsewhere at warp infinity.

I can feel multiple vibrations of footsteps coming towards me. It's time. I'm leaving this dump. Any second I'll feel the lights of the building on me again, and the last smell that will hit me will be my own ashes as I shoot away.

Their hands take hold of the coffin. This baby suddenly has wheels. Careful not to jar it, boys. This is my grand departure. You don't want me to fall out, do you? Not unless you want to have more than one dead body to deal with. Ah, this ride is smooth; just swimmingly.

Why have we stopped already? They're certainly taking their sweet time in preparing everything. How long can it take to fire up the grill? Shouldn't they have opened up the lid already? Hey, where is everybody going? Are they all going to lunch together? Or are there other bodies ahead of me? Or are they playing cards? Maybe they're taking bets to see which of the bodies will have the worst smell when its cooked.

A little nap while I'm waiting.

Footsteps approach; there's more behind them. Wait, they come from a different direction from where they left. These aren't the same footsteps that left me earlier, either. One separates from the group and sounds like they're tuning an organ. An organ? That bitch. I said I didn't want a memorial or a funeral. I didn't even want an obituary. Even if I did, it's not as if they would print it. Even if I did want a funeral, I'd have music played that would make people faint. Some would laugh, and others' head would explode

and land with a dismount and splash, earning a perfect score from the judges.

Well, if she thinks she's going to get away with this, then she doesn't know anything than what goes on in that tiny conceited head of hers. I'll haunt her day and night. She won't get a moment's peace. I'll make her run from her breakfast as I possess the bacon and have it talk on her plate before it slides off.

And here she comes now...

The smell of the flowers is suffocating. It's as if she bought the local shop's entire stock just to try and convince others of her love and pretend guilt. It's the perfect way of saying to the mourners "See how much I loved him? I can mourn harder than anyone ever existed." Of course they have to be flowers I don't care for, and have the worst pungent smell. They couldn't have been roses. They had to have been something people don't associate with funerals. Yes, we want to gas the mourners as soon as they come inside so it's a run-by mourning. It's never anything simple with you; always having to complicate things and make it harder on everyone else.

A mad rush of footsteps assaults my ears along with their voices. This is a funeral home, not a concert hall. Not even a minute inside, and they're already pretending to profess their love for me. At least I don't have to smell them thanks to the flowers. Not yet. At least I don't have to smell their brats who came in with them. Their voices are enough to shatter glass. Ah, here they come now, always running no matter where they are. At least the flowers manage to cover up their smell. What on earth do their parents have to talk loudly about in a funeral? Completely oblivious of their demon spawn screaming and running around. Future serial killers.

Ah, just when I start to hear people tell her how sorry they are that I'm dead, the organist starts playing. It cuts into their voices just enough since they're far enough away, and not right next to me. I can still feel the vibrations of the children running around. At least they haven't knocked over the coffin. Not yet. I can picture it now. All the little ones become catatonic because a dead body reached out for them after they knocked over the coffin. They would be that way for the rest of their lives, and meanwhile their parents wouldn't feel the least bit of guilt.

I can imagine the headlines now. “Dead Body Reaches Out From Beyond The Grave!” “Paralyzes Children Half To Death!” To read it would be to risk certain death. Nothing but a sea of stricken readers falling and collapsing dead. I don’t know what song they’re playing. I better be careful. It could become one of my personal favorites.

Now the voice of my church’s pastor is droning on about death, and how beautiful it can be. I only went there because my wife made me. I’m sure anyone in their right mind would chose to sleep in on Sunday before they have to go back to work or school, and not be around people whose asses are tighter than diamond mines.

Now he’s going on about how generous I was. Little does anyone know that it was all done in my name, done by my wife’s hand, by my money. You keep on about all the organizations who are grateful for my money. Would you keep on if you knew the truth about me? Would you keep on if you were forced to speak the truth?

That voice of his doesn’t stop. They’ll let anyone in the clergy. Don’t they have auditions the same way actors do? It’s the same with lawyers. Just because someone can pass the bar, or a series of tests for other jobs, doesn’t mean they can do the job well. I can remember sitting through his sermons and thinking “Where’s the real pastor? Isn’t someone from off to the side supposed to yank him away with an elongated hook, the way they used to in vaudeville?” I can’t imagine other nearly departed stick around long to hear him. He’s enough to put the dead to sleep.

I can’t imagine any of my friends are here. If they were, they wouldn’t stand for this. They knew I didn’t want a funeral. I can imagine they would burst into the funeral home before the proceedings as if they were the “A-Team”, kidnap my body, and give it a proper Viking funeral. Why can’t that be some sort of clause in someone’s will? I’m sure that can be a profitable business. I wonder what there tagline will be. “If we can’t burn a body in less than a day, your Viking funeral is less than half-off.” Skip the nazi doctors and nurses, the poison pumped into bodies, the lies given by those brave enough to give them with the funeral and obituary, and burn the body. All watched by those who actually want to be there.

How's that for recycling?

Oh, now he's going on about how brave I was in fighting that damn cancer that got me. Well, they did say history is written by the winners, and in this case, those who are still alive. Little do you know I never wanted to fight it; just go out my own way. But, the old battle axe wouldn't let me.

Good, he's finished. The way he kept on with every syllable of each word, I thought he'd never stop. I wonder if the audience is still awake. No he's asking if anyone wants to come up and say anything. Don't all rush at once. It's not as if any of you have anything to say of real significance. Nobody? I can't imagine any of the children will. I can't imagine any of them would, unless their parents wrote them a speech; as if there would be much of a difference.

I can't imagine any child want to go to a funeral, unless they're part of The Addams Family. Then they would go to them every week, take dates to them, and only miss them after being punished. Maybe there should be an auctioneer taking bids for who gets to speak first. That would liven things up a bit. The only thing deader than me is the atmosphere.

I can feel heavy footsteps treading to the front. I know that gait before he speaks. Frank. He's talking about how often I would end up fixing his car. He's too cheap and shallow to find a good mechanic, not to mention too blind to realize that I only spent time with his car to get away from the rest of the family. At least nobody came running and bumped into the car while I was working on it. It could have fell on me and taken a chunk out of me. At least he was nice enough to help out. Not a complete waste of space.

Off he goes. At least he didn't go on forever with no consideration for those listening to him. More footsteps; lighter this time, but not too light, and not too heavy. I wonder who it is this time. Ah, yes; my next door neighbor Mark. He's telling them about how I would come over and grill for them every summer. Little do you know it was just another excuse to get away from the physical manifestation of spite and contempt I was trapped with.

Not a bad person to be around, but if he could handle my brand of humor, he would have hung out with my friends as we went out drinking every weekend. It was easy for me, with my experience as a chef in the Army. Sure it was easy, but every move, each glaze, and every spice, it was a magician's show. One

has to make it seem as if there's some effort involved. Little did I know I would impress Mark and his friends so much, I would be invited to a grillmasters contest. It was nothing that I happen to win and get my picture in the newspaper, and continue to win for eight years in a row. Of course he doesn't mention the wife was never around during any of this, with whatever excuse she had to tell. Sure she was jealous. It was the best food I had since before I married her.

His footsteps leave. A large, heavy emptiness opens up in the parlor. Nobody moves or speaks. Don't all get up at once, unless you're all scrambling to leave already. I can hear and feel bones creaking and popping a few feet away. Wheezing is accompanying them. I already know who it is before they stand up.

The queen of death drags her heavy body, limping with that cane of hers to the front. I'm surprised she didn't fall asleep. It's incredible what one's death can do for someone's self-esteem. From the sound of her heavy footsteps, it appears no one is beside her, helping her along. Knowing her, that's not saying much. I wonder if she's drunk, or even a little buzzed.

The dragon clears her throat. She's telling them how we met in high school. I must admit she was pretty back then, but you know what they say about beauty being only skin deep. Our first kiss was magical in my car; magical after giving her a mint. She has a breath that can kill any movie monster at first smell, and should be recognized by the Center for Disease Control. No wonder I invested in mints after we met.

Now she's telling them that we couldn't have children, but she loved me anyway. Why don't you tell them that you were a cold fish on our wedding night? Or that you're the one who's infertile, and not me? I'm sure they would love to hear the story about you wanting to adopt, but neither of us had the time for raising a child, and that we could afford a nanny. You would never stop nagging me about it at the most inappropriate time, so finally I had to tell you that I never loved you, and that I was attracted to men. I probably should have mentioned that sooner.

That's when we started sleeping in separate rooms, and not long after that, I asked for the divorce which you refused. You said even if you did grant it, you would make it so I wouldn't want to live. Take my

money and ruin my reputation by telling others about my sexuality. Wouldn't be any different if I chose to be with someone I really wanted to be with in the first place. I can imagine the pitchforks and torches now. Maybe then I could have avoided all this.

Why are you telling them about how my friends would come over? I would always go out with them.

If they knew what you were saying, they would carry you out of here and tell others how you scared my friends away with your personality. Always afraid to go past the driveway, always joking about you, saying that you have the personality of a rabid junkyard dog. Now that's a laugh; saying that you played cards with them. If you ever played cards, it wasn't with my friends. Must've been with your friends while you're all plotting to kill your husbands. Besides, you couldn't handle the cigar smoke. You don't have the cunning to be a card player, either. All in the brain, and the gut, of which you have the wrong kind.

Like a thief in the night, that diagnosis that becomes all too common, fell in my lap. I wanted to go out my way, and avoid all the pain and keep my dignity. But, you wouldn't let me. Forcing me to have chemotherapy, and if I refused, you would make sure my life and eternity would be smeared due to her ruining my reputation. Lies would be made up beyond my comprehension. Her shallow friends would have no trouble believing them, but my friends and business contacts might, regardless of lack of evidence.

I knew what that poison would do to me, and it did. All the while, they would smile while the pumped it into me. I could've told them it wouldn't have worked. A person knows their own body. They continued to smile as they continued to kill me; wasting me away down to nothing as I lost my energy, throwing up during what little appetite I had.

I wanted to die at home, but you wouldn't listen. You never do. I couldn't talk by then, so you said all the things you wanted to say to me before. It was a weak argument. You were too stubborn to die; no wonder you became gargantuanly fat.

I'm not surprised you left me there. I was lying there peacefully, waiting for the inevitable, when in comes this stranger, takes hold of my hand, and starts singing to me. Not just anything, but songs I don't

care to hear. “Somewhere Over The Rainbow”, my ass. This girl wouldn’t stop. Don’t the dying get to make requests, or hire out their own band? Maybe a burlesque act, or strippers? How about a magician, comedian, or comic magician, where he pretends to raise the dead. An unusual number, such as “The Theme From Shaft”, maybe. Die with a smile on one’s face for a change. No wonder I died when I did.

If I could have written the death certificate, the cause of death would have read “Lack Of Dignity”.

They’re not intelligent enough to disbelieve that she held my hand for hours while I was dying. The only thing she held for hours are cartons of ice cream, or tins of chocolates, or buckets of chicken.

It’s amazing that she didn’t have any health problems such as heart attacks, or that she didn’t choke to death. It’s as if we were in a race to see who could die first. I wonder if we were conscious of it.

Oh, don’t start crying now. You never cried once. I don’t believe it; my friends wouldn’t believe it; if anyone here believes it, an agent or talent scout must have walked in. You’ll have to thank the academy in advance.

You don’t have to lay it on so thick. I can feel the laughter behind your fake sobs. I can hear them closer as you turn your face to me. You’re telling me you love me, and you’ll miss me? You liar! You drove me to this! You should be lying here instead of me; then I’d be out celebrating with my friends getting drunk, playing cards, shooting pool.

That does it. I’m not letting her get away with this. It’s just like when I was wounded in Vietnam, and laid up in the hospital. I had to will myself to move.

I can feel her footsteps coming closer to me. You don’t deserve to be in the same room with me, or anywhere. I can hear her breath as she caresses the coffin, scraping it with one of her rings. I can feel her slowly walking away with the thumping of her cane. This is it. No one left. They’re going to take me away, and she’ll have the last say; the last laugh.

Focus. One little twitch, one tiny spark, and the rest will follow. Picture it in your mind. See it happen, and it will; just as when you were alive. Only this time, you’re Dr. Frankenstein. See the lighting, and you’ll feel it.

The silence is stretching further. I can feel them move anxiously. They’re about to leave. No! Move!

You have nothing to lose now, except your dignity! You want the boys in back cracking jokes as they turn you to dust, and your dead friends ask you about your funeral and having to cringe every time? You want your wife getting drunk tonight?

My right index finger just twitched.

My right foot just wiggled, and now my left one. I can feel my toes again, albeit rather stiffly. It feels as if I have sand in my joints. The hands claps together as I then wiggle the fingers. Warmth is flowing into my body again, like blood in the water. You better believe this shark smells it, and wants more than just a taste.

Sparks shoot up and down, crackling within me as I reach for the coffin's lid. Slowly, I push it open, sticking my fingers out as I do so. No gasps yet. They must have their backs to me.

The lid goes all the way open as I push it up. Now people start to notice. Oh, why do they have to scream so much?; So much from the men, too. Oh, that's right. They don't expect this.

Loud, heavy thumping of bodies collapsing to the floor can be heard. I wonder if they fainted, or died of fright. Snap, crackle, pop go my joints as I climb out of the coffin, hopping onto the floor. From the sound of the wheezing I hear, my wife has collapsed on the ground not far from where she sat. With my slow movements, and the odds of her getting to her feet or anyone helping her up, this should be easy enough.

A stiffness is causing me to move slow. I can feel it in my lower abdomen. I can feel a draft as I take a step. Why are my clothes falling off of me? Is this some sort of joke? I can feel something sticking out of me. It must be somewhere on my back. No, I don't feel it there. Wait, what's it doing between my buttcheeks? It certainly feels long. Is that what I think it is? Ew! What the hell was that doing inside me?!

Perverts!

I barely hear it drop as I continue focusing on her gasping and wheezing body. Another step brings a loud bang and slight pressure in my head. Who did that? I slowly turn my head and face whoever made that noise. I purse my lips as much as I can as I hear a gun drop along with running footsteps echoing out

of the funeral parlor as the smell of gunpowder greets my nose.

The sound of her heaving chest becomes slightly louder as she tries to crawl away, sloughing away like a slug. It's a shame I can see the look on her face as I step closer. I don't know if she's looking behind her, seeing me, as she tries to get away, but I doubt it. I should let her try and get away, let her think she'll win. Drink up that fear and anticipation to the utmost; to the last.

She drags her body by inches on the floor, with the sound of wheezing becoming heavier as she goes; as if she's drowning. Each move I make, every step I take until I'm right next to her as she collapses, is sweeter than anything I have ever known, or will know.

I bend down and reach for her, grabbing her by the shoulder, and turn her over. She is gasping and wheezing harder than before. I can hear her flabby face and neck shake in terror. If only I had sight for a few seconds more...

As if of its own accord, my right arm pulls back as if its part of a gun being cocked. The index finger and middle finger shoot into her eyes, with the untrimmed fingernails digging and splitting into the orbs as if they were tomatoes. I can feel the warm blood coat my fingers as they go all the way into her head, up to the hilt. Her body twitches and shakes as the blood and gore no doubt spills and flows down her face. I drink up the last vestiges of her pulse until it stops. Only then do I pull my fingers out.

Bodies surround me as I sit among them, now fully dressed. Luckily for me one of them was my size so their suit fit just right. Smoke rings now puff from my newly opened mouth. It's handy what you find going through one's pockets. A cigar, and a multi-purpose pocket knife to snip the wires holding my mouth together. Nothing brings out a victory like a fresh cigar. Now why do I smell formaldehyde?

