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GOING IN STYLE

Michael Raia

“Did you hear? Mr. Wellington down the block died.”

“Oh? How?”

“From what I hear it was a fabulous ceremony. There were fireworks and long red carpets and music. Apparently he spent most of his life savings on the affair.”

“Shame we weren’t invited. I’ve been wanting to see some of the new frills.”

“For Gerald’s death?”

“Yes. I’ve almost no idea what to do. I had my heart set on a simple ceremony until he told me he wanted to go out with a real shindig. Get this Marcie, he wants to be shot with a cannonball.”

“A cannonball?”

“Not just any ordinary cannonball, but a **solid gold** one.”

“Heavens. It will cost a fortune!”

“Well, actually you just rent it, but it’s still rather costly.”

“How would you rent a cannonball?”

“Well, I suppose they set up a large pillow of some sort behind you to catch it. I don’t know, but I think the whole thing is in rather poor taste.”

“It certainly is. Why just think of the mess.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter. It’s his death and he’ll do what he wants. I just don’t understand why he’s making me do all the work. All he knows is that he wants a gaping hole blown through him. It’s up to me to work out the details.”

“Oh, don’t worry, Gladys, you can handle it. You **did** do most of the work for your father’s death. It was a splendid ceremony.”

“Oh, it was just a little get together. I enjoyed preparing it.”

“And he died so beautifully. He just smiled quietly and expired. I think injections are simply wonderful.”

“I just wish Gerald thought so. Ah well, he’s the eccentric.”

The two women laughed slightly and sipped their coffee. The t.v. monitor set a blue pallor about the room as they gabbed about other pressing gossip. Outside the sun glowed its brownish grey like it had been doing since the beginning of the century. Pollution had more or less replaced oxygen since the late ninetys. Air-filled tram tubes wrapped about the city like giant pretzels. In another hour, Gerald would come trotting in from one of the tubes and another day of paperwork at the Pollution Regulatory Commission building. It was a wonder there was any paperwork at all regarding pollution in 2026. The Pollution Regulatory Commission (PRC) had never had any effect on pollution except to let everyone know that it was awful and constant. The paperwork tended to stick to the “awful” part. Millions of tests were made proving the toxicity and rankness of the air. Millions of essays were written by men who held such a distaste for the outside world that many had to undergo grief treatment midway through their essays. They wrote reports on the pollution’s psychological effect on people. They wrote reports on comparisons between the pollution of the day and previous days. They even wrote reports on the reports of other reports. It all added up to a lot of paper that was invariably looked at once, frowned upon and thrown into the garbage incinerators. Once turned to smoke and ashes, it would be released into the atmosphere, thus completing the cycle.

But this would become academic soon enough. In 2031, on September 17th, every tram tube would simultaneously burst under the pressure of the scum-injected air and everyone would die a horrible and sick death. Then again, if you haven’t already surmised, everyone wanted to die anyway. Unfortunately, having your lungs fill with a trillion different types of dust and soot and then exploding was hardly considered fashionable.

A commercial broke into the two ladies’ conversation. It was one of Gladys’ favorites.

“In today’s hip modern age
When ceasing to be is all the rage
You can see the reaper
And it’s never been cheaper
At Woebegone, Woebegone, Woebegone
Quiet Nights!”

The song was sung by a group of old Italian women in mourning outfits. They danced about joyfully on a giant casket throwing flowers and rice in the air. Gladys hummed the tune reflectively. The commercial was followed by a soap opera, and the soap opera was followed by Celebrity Corner. Today's guests were arena football star Dirk Derrick, movie star Fawn Hall and aging star George Burns, who was interviewed bedside by the host, Gary Coleman.

"Isn't that Gary Coleman adorable."

"I don't know Judy, he seems a bit odd."

"Well he's had a disorder. It stunted his growth."

"I don't know, I guess he's adorable enough. That Dirk Derrick though, I think he's absolutely beautiful. Why, did you see the way his muscles moved when he came in and sat down?"

"Oh my, and he wasn't wearing a shirt. I think t.v. is so much better since they eliminated the censors. It's so much more interesting."

Just then, Gerald walked in looking exhausted but in good spirits. He set his enormous briefcase down next to the door and hung his hat on the coatrack Gladys had bought 10 years ago at a tube sale (which was the past's garage sale equivalent). The hooks of the coatrack were lion's heads and the pole was formed by what were supposed to resemble four long lion's tails. Gerald hated it. He had often had fond dreams of throwing it into one of the Pollution Regulatory Commission's paper incinerators and never mentioning it to Gladys. He never would get the chance.

"Hello dear. Hello Judy."

"Oh, hello dear, we were just talking about you."

"What about me?"

"About your death next weekend."

"Ah yes. Have you looked into the cannonball? I told Ned Baker about it. He can hardly wait to see it."

"No dear, I haven't had the time. I wanted to go to Woebegone's after shopping, but Durante Tube West was blocked and I had to go around to get to Gordon's. I'll try to check tomorrow."

"O.k. dear. Don't forget."

Gerald took his coat off and hung it on one of the other lion's heads.

"What's for dinner, Dear?"

"Oh, I thought we'd just micro some soy cakes. Do you know how much they're asking for pork these days? \$11.00 a pound. Why I'd just as soon eat dog."

"Where's Tibbles?"

Gerald laughed in spite of himself. Gladys shook her head and rolled her eyes for Judy. Tibbles woofed from behind the couch. The t.v. began another commercial.

“Be the first on your block!

Happy Death Inc. announces its Fall lineup:

- Painless Injection
- Painful Injection
- Suffocation by a Large Well Built Blonde
- Electrocution
- Organized Spontaneous Combustion
- Drowning in a Vat of your Favorite Beverage
- Our Surprise Package

(Armed men dressed like crazed circus clowns burst into your house and blow you to pieces with M54 Sub Machine guns. Please give an **accurate** description of the loved one intended.)

All this and much more. Come browse. Bring the family. You’ll be glad you dead.”

“Glad you dead. Get it Judy?”

“Yes, very quaint. Don’t you think, Gerald?”

Gerald didn’t hear the question. As a matter of fact, he didn’t hear a damn thing. He was dead on his back with Tibbles licking his frozen face like a popsicle. If anyone had bothered to investigate his cause of death the following day, they would have discovered that he had been the recipient of a tremendous coronary arrest. But they didn’t investigate. Gladys just picked his body up and slid it out the garbage chute and into the rancid brown air outside.

“Terribly rude of him wasn’t it Gladys?”

“Well, at least I didn’t have to go out and rent a silly gold cannonball.”