

A Perfect Day to Die

Fred Gielow. 5-23-25.

It was a perfect day to die. The sky was dark and menacing. Winds were strong and gusting, and they whistled through the trees in a minor key. Rain beat down in swirling waves. Wet leaves blown off trees clung to the pavement like they were glued. When a bolt of lightening struck, nearby blades of grass leaped to attention. Raindrops pummeled the window beside Walter's bed, and they made angry little faces as they slowly slid down the pane of glass. It was such a perfect day to die.

Walter had made it to the ripe old age of 83, but he sensed he would soon be departing this world. He had been suffering for years with painful arthritis in his joints, and his doctor had told him his heart was very weak and vulnerable. Already, he had suffered three strokes and two debilitating bouts of pneumonia, which had sent him to the hospital both times. Walter knew another stroke was due, and he convinced himself this was likely the day it would happen.

He awoke at 9:13 when a loud clap of thunder rattled his apartment building. It was past time to get up, but Walter didn't feel like getting up. He didn't feel like eating breakfast either. He felt very weak and he knew in his bones this was his final day on Earth.

He called his older brother, Frank, his younger brother, Tobias, and his sister, Mona, and begged them to come immediately to be by his side for his last living moments. Then he called the office at his church and asked if Father Flanders could come to give him Last

Rites. He then leaned back into his pillows, sighed, and closed his eyes.

It was about 10:45 when the group of four had assembled at the apartment. Walter was still in bed, moaning softly every now and then. Folding chairs were found and crammed into the small bedroom and the foursome sat down and looked anxiously at Walter, who looked quite pale and weak.

Walter's favorite pet, Charlemagne-the-Dog, was seated right next to the bed, his head resting comfortably on the edge of the pillows, and he was breathing directly into Walter's ear. Lady Macbeth, Walter's cat, sat motionless, like a stately queen, at the foot of the bed, but Lady's green eyes were focused intently on Moby, Walter's goldfish, which was swimming about care-free in a small, round glass bowl resting on a stand directly under the window next to Walter's bed.

Walter struggled to raise himself into a comfortable position, he looked at each of his visitors, then spoke softly. "Thank you so much for coming on such short notice. I'm in a lot of pain – head to toe – and I feel my time has run out. I want you to be with me as I exit this world. You are the most important people in my life and I want to say good-bye to you in my last moments."

Frank, Tobias, Mona, and Father Flanders shifted uncomfortable on their hard, folding chairs. None could think of anything appropriate to say.

To get a little more comfortable, Father Flanders tilted his folding chair back just slightly, but it was enough for it to slip on the well-worn rug on the bedroom floor.

As he lost balance, he flung out his arms to grab onto something for support. His right hand landed on the edge of Moby's stand. When he grabbed it, the stand moved and began to tip.

Father Flanders was able to regain his balance, but Moby's home began to slide, and Lady Macbeth's eyes followed it intently as, inevitably, it slid off the stand onto the floor, breaking into a thousand pieces.

Charlemagne leaped instantly onto Walter's bed, and onto Walter himself, and growled threateningly.

Moby flopped about like a fish out of water, because that's exactly what Moby was. As luck would have it, there was a heat duct directly beneath Moby's stand, and much of the water drained quickly into it. Sadly, Moby was thin enough to fit through the louvers of the heat duct cover, and with one slight wiggle, the fish slipped through and fell out of sight down into the duct, landing with a soft thud, followed by some flopping sounds.

The foursome jumped up immediately and collapsed their folding chairs, in hopes of rescuing Moby. However, they hadn't noticed that Lady Macbeth had abandoned her perch at the end of the bed in hopes of a tasty goldfish snack. As Tobias folded his chair, it caught poor Lady Macbeth right by her neck, and it nearly snipped the poor creature's head right off. The cat let out a short, muffled scream, but then died moments later as everyone looked on in horror.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Tobias. "I had no idea the cat was there. I'm so very, very sorry."

"Well, I'll be dying soon," said Walter, "so I guess I

don't need a cat anymore. Besides, Lady Macbeth has been more trouble than she's worth. Her litter box stinks up my whole darned apartment." He coughed, then swallowed hard. "Oh my," he said, "the pain in my chest! I think the end is near."

Father Flanders interjected quickly, "Please forgive me, Walter. I'm so sorry about your goldfish. How stupid of me to grab onto that stand. Can I get you another fish? And a new bowl?"

Walter looked at him and said, "Moby had a long and good life, and apparently his time had come," not realizing the comment seemed to apply equally to himself.

Mona set about to mop up the floor. She collected all the tiny shards of glass and tossed them and Lady Macbeth into a black trash bag, which she deposited in a garbage bin by the back door.

The foursome was shaken by this incident, but proceeded to again set up their folding chairs and sit down on them. By then, Charlemagne had taken over the spot abandoned by Lady Macbeth, and had curled up comfortably with his head down and eyes closed.

Walter was agitated by all the drama because, while it lasted, he wasn't the center of attention. He cleared his throat and said, "There's something I need to tell you, if I'm able. Please listen to me. I need to say something to each of you."

Father Flanders spoke up quickly, "Are you okay, Walter? Should I call a doctor?"

"No," Walter said firmly, breathing quick breaths. "I

think this is the end. There's no time for a doctor now."

"Shall I administer Last Rites?" Father Flanders asked excitedly.

Walter paused briefly, looked at Father Flanders, then said, "No, I don't think so. I think maybe the pain might be letting up a little now." He looked at the anxious foursome. "Here's what I need to tell you," he said.

"Catch your breath, bro," said Tobias. "Take your time."

Mona added, "Don't strain yourself, Walter. Try to keep calm."

"I need to tell you of my wishes," Walter said with a serious expression. "I only have a few. Let me begin with you, Frank. I want you to have my Chevy truck."

"That's kind of you, my brother," said Frank. "Thank you. I appreciate that."

"Yes, I want you to have the truck. There's still \$13,000 due on the loan, but I want to give it to you because you loaned me \$500 two years ago for the down payment."

"I was sure you'd forgotten about that," Frank mumbled.

"And another thing," said Walter, "the rear axle is broken and the truck needs a new transmission, but I think you should have the truck. Oh, and by the way, the radio doesn't work, either."

"Oh my, thank you so much," said Frank, sarcastically.

“And my dear, dear sister Mona,” Walter continued, “I want you to take Charlemagne-the-Dog when I’m gone. I know you can care for him and love him as much as I do. I want the very best for Charlemagne. You’re a very sweet and loving person.”

“But, Walter,” Mona protested, her false eyelashes fluttering, “I’m allergic to dogs. They give me splitting headaches that last for hours, and they make my nose run like a fire hose. You know that, Walter.”

“Yes, I know, but you’re a member of ASPCA,” said Walter, “so I think Charlemagne should be under your care. I hoped you’d take Lady Macbeth and Moby, too, but that won’t be necessary now.”

“I’ll do my best with Charlemagne,” replied Mona, with a frustrated expression on her face.

“Next, Tobias, you were the one who introduced me to my future wife, Daisy, may she rest in peace. That was some sixty-one years ago, during that surprise birthday party you hosted for me at your house. I’ll never forget that.”

“It was quite a party!” said Tobias with a smile. “You and Daisy seemed to get along so well together. I mean, at the party. At least after the open bar began serving. But, I guess things just didn’t work out so well.”

“That’s for sure,” said Walter angrily, “and you won’t be getting one red cent from me after I’m gone!”

“I understand,” said Tobias. “Sometimes, good intentions just don’t work out as hoped.”

“And finally, Father Flanders,” Walter continued. “I have a check for the church. It’s a donation. The church has been such a blessing to me and has helped me so many times when I needed support. You and the church were always there to counsel me and support me and encourage me. That made a real difference in my life, and I’d like to give you this check.” Walter reached for an envelope that had been placed on the windowsill, and he handed it to Father Flanders.

“Well, Walter, thank you very much,” said Father Flanders as he opened the envelope and glanced at the check. “Walter, this check is for twenty-two dollars,” he said with a puzzled expression.

“It’s a token of my appreciation,” Walter said proudly.

“Thank you,” replied Father Flanders. “It will be put to good use. God bless you, Walter.”

Soon it was noon and the bad weather continued without interruption. The rain never let up.

The group talked over events in Walter’s early life, like the time he found a snake at his friend’s house and brought it home. It turned out the snake was poisonous and it bit the family dog, Wrinkles. Wrinkles died within an hour, and in considerable pain.

And the time Walter was playing with matches when he was nine years old. He started a small fire in a vacant lot, but it quickly got out of control and burned down three houses before the fire department could get there and extinguish it. The group, except Father Flanders, thought that was pretty funny.

And the time Walter found his mother’s diamond

engagement ring on the bathroom sink. He tried it on and was admiring it as he waved his hand about, but the ring slipped off his finger and plunged directly into the toilet bowl. Walter didn't want to put his hand into the toilet water to retrieve it, so he flushed it down the drain. The group laughed and laughed over that one.

The afternoon wore on. Slowly. At times no one could think of anything to say, so there were long, embarrassing moments of silence. Several times Father Flanders asked if Walter wanted something to eat or drink. Each time, Walter explained that wouldn't be necessary, as he would be dying very soon.

At about 5:45, Frank, Tobias, Mona, and Father Flanders decided they had waited long enough for Walter to pass away. "I gotta get back home," said Frank.

"Yes, I have to go, too," chimed in Mona, as she wiped her dripping nose with a Kleenex. She glanced at Charlemagne. "I have a terrible splitting headache. It's killing me."

"I need to get back to the church," said Father Flanders. "I still have work to do."

The foursome was hungry and a little disappointed and resentful that they had spent the whole day to be with Walter to witness his death, but he was still very much alive, and in fact was showing no signs whatsoever of expiring. They decided they had had enough of this mourning, as it was by then early evening.

Walter did his best to apologize for not kicking the bucket, and he thanked the group for the time spent with him. "I can't thank you enough," he said, in all

sincerity.

The storm was still raging outside. One by one, the visitors put on their raincoats to depart. Mona had an umbrella, which she opened while standing on the covered porch of the apartment building. She stepped off the porch cautiously to walk to her car.

Just then, a blinding flash of light lit up the sky and a powerful bolt of lightening streaked down and found the tip of Mona's umbrella, which she was holding over her head. She was instantly burned to a crisp, except for her false eyelashes which were shaken off just as the bolt hit.

Obviously, this incident was horrifying to witness, so Father Flanders, Frank, and Tobias stepped carefully but quickly over Mona's remains and dashed to their cars so they could get to their destinations.

At the end of the street, there was a wire that a fallen tree had knocked down, and it blocked the road. Frank got out of his car to remove the wire, never imagining it might still be energized. It didn't look energized.

When he touched the wire, 1200 volts of electricity surged through his body and kicked him thirteen feet away from where he had been standing. He lit up momentarily like a sparkler on the Fourth of July, and was killed instantly. His body became nothing more than a heap of smoldering embers.

Tobias headed off in a different direction in his Mini Cooper, so he didn't come anywhere near Frank's incineration. He drove off toward the center of town, along Casanova Creek. At one point, the creek had overflowed its banks and had flooded the road.

Tobias figured he could easily drive through the water, but Tobias figured incorrectly. At the deepest spot, his tiny Mini Cooper was lifted up by the flowing water and it gently floated away.

It floated along for maybe 200 yards, bobbing up and down, until it bumped into a large rock and came to a stop. But, only momentarily. Flowing water nudged the car slightly and it moved, then tipped over on its side, with the passenger-side door facing up. Gradually, water seeped into the vehicle and began to fill it up.

Tobias tried to be calm, but he thought there was a chance he could drown, since he didn't know how to swim. "Oh my gosh," he exclaimed, "I've gotta get outta here! And fast!" His only exit route was the passenger-side door, which was above him.

Tobias released his seat belt and somehow managed to lift up and swing open the heavy door. He then cautiously climbed up, out, and on top of the Mini Cooper. But, as he began to climb down, the car's center of gravity shifted and suddenly the car tipped, then toppled over right onto Tobias, crushing his skull and killing him instantly.

Father Flanders also did not encounter the scene of Frank's electrocution, as he headed for the Carmen Miranda National Bank to deposit the check Walter had given him. Fortunately, since it was Friday, the bank remained open until nine o'clock.

When he entered the bank, Father Flanders was startled and aghast to find a robbery was underway. The robber was startled, too, to see someone dressed all in black come through the door. When Father Flanders crossed

himself – an unconscious gesture – the robber thought for a moment he was a policeman reaching for a weapon, and in panic, he shot Father Flanders in the chest. The bullet passed through his heart, killing him instantly.

As that was playing out, a policeman, with his weapon drawn, entered the bank through another door. Witnessing the shooting, the policeman fired six times in rapid succession at the robber, hitting him once in the leg just above the knee. The robber returned fire, hitting the policeman in the neck, killing him instantly. A short time later, the robber died as a result of blood loss from his leg wound.

Yes, it was a perfect day to die, but as it turned out, Walter didn't pass away that day. Nor the next. Nor any day during the next week, month, or even year. It wasn't until nine years later, when, one night as he slept, his sleep apnea equipment got tangled around his neck and he choked to death. He was 92 years old.

Amazingly, his faithful dog, Charlemagne, out-lived him, spending his final days at Walter's church, where the staff in the office took very good care of him.

However, one day, Charlemagne decided to do a little exploring. He happily sniffed his way along streets and alleyways, until he had strayed more than a mile from the church. He came upon a large industrial building, and with a terrible stroke of bad luck, the poor dog, intrigued by smells coming from the building, wandered nonchalantly through the open back door of the Long Noodle Chop Suey Canning Factory.