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Why Not Die Now?

By GEORGE AMBERG

IT ALL happened so suddenly that I can hardly believe it myself. Last week I was just a second-rate copy-writer making thirty dollars a week; now I'm a full-fledged vice-president of the Shumley Casket Company with a salary of forty thousand dollars a year, two private secretaries, a private office of my own and a whole lot of buttons to push.

And all this happened because I went to work one morning half-tight and angry with the world because I had fought the night before with Louise. Louise is my fiancée now—last week she was just my girl. That's how things happen to me.

I walked into the office of Schuster, Schuster & McGunthrie last Thursday morning as sore as a freshman's posterior after a fraternity initiation.

I sat down at my desk and started to work on the copy for a casket company. I knew what I was supposed to write. It was an old routine that went something like this:

To everyone there comes a time in life when he or she loses a dearly beloved one. These times are particularly difficult, for in the depth of sorrow a person may unavoidably err in his duty to his beloved departed.

It is in these times that thoughtful, sympathetic help is needed. And the Shumley Casket Company supplies that help for a sum that is not only reasonable but is almost so negligible as not to be considered at all.

For a slight down payment the Shumley Casket Company supplies not only a modern, upholstered casket but the advice of one of the specially appointed Shumley Funeral Directors. The whole service is arranged on such a small installment plan that the money is never missed.

Shumley Caskets are scientifically designed to withstand the rigors of all elements. They are specially lined with a weather-proof textile that is placed beneath the regular satin lining. Shumley Caskets come in three grades: Silver Shumley, a very modern casket trimmed with silver; Angel Shumley, also a modern casket, differing only from Silver Shumley in the trimming; Super Shumley, a beautifully modern creation trimmed with 14-carat gold.

Shumley Caskets may be purchased for as low as one hundred dollars: easy payment plan.

Should you be suffering from the loss of a dearly beloved one, won't you drop in to your nearest Shumley Casket dealer and ask him about our Shumley Funeral Plan?

It will pay!

I had written at least four of these ads for the Shumley people, but today I felt sore at the world and, obeying a crazy impulse, wrote the following:

The life of man is short. At most, a man can live but a hundred years or so. And those years are filled with rigors of life that he can easily escape.

Death should hold no fear for you, for the Shumley Casket Company can bury you with the pomp and ceremony that is accorded a king. Our specially designed Shumley Caskets are artists' creations—smooth satiny linings for the empty shell, that will be your corpse, to repose upon, a beautifully-carved exterior, silver and gold trimmings—they have beauty—a thing that must be paid for dearly in life but which is given to you at no extra cost through the generosity of the Shumley Casket Company. And for a cost so small that even a poor man can be buried like a prince.

Since death is inevitable, why prolong the agony? Just make arrangements with the Shumley Casket Company for their specially conceived funeral service and escape the trials and tribulations of a life that is, at best, inconsequential.

Why wait?

Why not die now?

I read over what I had written. It startled me—I started to tear it up. Then I thought, what the hell, I don't care about this job—I'll join the Bengal Lancers and forget Louise and this whole business.

So instead of sending it into V. R. McGunthrie, who keyed all copy written by the drudges, I got a picture of a corpse beautifully laid out in an ornate casket. I scribbled an illegible V. R. McG. on the bottom of the copy and put the picture and the copy into an envelope addressed to a magazine.

Then I went downstairs and mailed the envelope myself. After I put it into the mail box I was frightened. But it was too late. The ad would be printed as it stood—McGunthrie's initials were on it.

I went back upstairs and without saying a word to anybody, I got my hat and left the office.

I went over to Joe's place.

Going over to the bar I searched my pockets. I had \$7.28. Besides this I had my fraternity pin and a gold wrist watch.

I walked into Joe's and threw the seven bucks and the junk on the bar.

"Take these, Joe," I said. "I'm going on a bender. Don't throw me out until I've used up all this."

I don't remember anything that happened after the fifth quick one I took. I guess it is just as well.

When I woke up I found myself in Joe's back room. I walked unsteadily out. Joe was cleaning the bar with a rag. He looked up.

"Oho! So you finally woke up. Boy that was a bender!"

"Give me a drink quick, Joe," I said.

After I had the drink I felt a little better but my head still felt like the Graf Zeppelin about to take off, and the burnt rubber taste was still in my mouth. Except for that I was all right.

"What day is it?" I asked.

"Monday."

I whistled. Monday, and the magazine I had written the copy for came out on Tuesday.

"Thanks Joe," I said, walking away. "See you again."

"Wait a minute, Mr. McCarthy," Joe said. "Your boss was around here looking for you. What you do now?"

"Nothing, Joe. Nothing at all."

I walked toward the door. Then I remembered that I didn't have any money with me.

"Gimme a buck, will you Joe, so that I can get something to eat?"

Joe looked as though he wasn't going to give it to me but I just stood there and finally he fished one out of the cash-drawer. "That's six bucks you owe me," he said. "You ran up a five buck bill on the cuff. You were buying drinks for the crowd and running around yelling 'why not die now' or something like that. Whatsa matter, you crazy?"

I didn't answer. Just took the buck and had something to eat and went home to bed.

Sometime later the telephone awakened me. I got up and took the receiver off the hook and drowsily said hello. It was McGunthrie and the way he talked to me! Why I never dreamed that he even knew such words!

Finally I got sick of listening to his spiel and hung up on him. But I was no sooner in bed than the telephone rang again. This time it was Louise and she went to work on me. She didn't mention anything about the ad, just kept asking me why I quit my job.

So I just said:

"Got no reason, Toots. I was just sick of it. Now hang up and let me go to sleep."

I heard a bang on the other end so I went back to bed, carefully leaving the receiver off the hook.

And that was the way it went for the next couple of days. I skulked in and out of the house on trips to the

pawn-shop and the liquor store and the coffee-pot on the other side of block. I kept the receiver of my phone off the hook and tore up my mail without reading it. I smoked a carton of cigarettes and drank two quarts of rye in two days.

My landlady brought up the papers to me every night. Two hundred people had committed suicide within twenty-four hours after the publication of the Shumley Casket Company advertisement. Editorials were being written. Each night the papers printed indignant letters from public-minded citizens demanding the identity of the writer of the ad. I was scared stiff but I knew that things could not go on as they were—there would be a time when I would have to face things.

So on the third morning I made up my mind to face the music. I placed the receiver back on the hook and waited. I did not have to wait long. In a minute the phone rang. I picked up the receiver, my pulse jumping ten beats.

"Hello," I said.

"Hello," said a feminine voice on the other end, "is this Mr. McCarthy? . . . Mr. Terence McCarthy? . . . Mr. Shumley, president of the Shumley Casket Company would like to speak to you. Will you hold on?"

I held the receiver a little less close to my ear, waiting anxiously for the verbal blast that would be Mr. Shumley. Instead of a blast I heard a genial voice saying:

"Mr. McCarthy? I'm so glad we located you. I've learned from Mr. McGunthrie that you are the man that wrote that fine ad for us."

I could hardly answer. Why all the kindness?

"But Mr. Shumley," I finally said. "Monday night Mr. McGunthrie called and gave me hell for writing that ad. He claimed that you saw the ad in an advance copy of the magazine and told him that your account was closed with him. He told me that I was fired and that he never wanted to see me again and that if I were so much as to put my nose into his office that I'd be finding use for one of your coffins."

"Ah, my boy! That was before we discovered that the ad produced such great results. It's sensational! Why in the past two days we've sold more coffins than we'd sold for weeks! And we have more advance orders than we can handle. Furthermore, Mr. McCarthy, I'm glad to learn that you have severed your connections with Schuster, Schuster & McGunthrie because I'm sure that we can find a place for you in our organization. Our organization needs a man with the initiative, the spunk, the nerve that you have shown. . . ."

That is how I became vice-president of the Shumley Casket Company.

She Is Lost

By JOHN DILLON HUSBAND

Search for her, wind,
Under and over;
In the misty sky
And the clean white clover.

Call for her, wind,
The whole night long,
With a keening voice
Half sob, half song.

Weep for her, wind,
For she must know
That she is mourned
Above . . . below.