

THE LAST WISH

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FADE IN:

EXT. TOMMY'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Bird view - a quiet neighborhood, manicured lawns, not rich but not shabby either.

A Crow soars over the houses. Its sharp eye spots a chimney.

The Crow shoots toward it and jets inside with an unlikely for a bird speed.

INT. TOMMY'S HOUSE - GUEST BEDROOM - DAY

The Crow lands on a headboard of a bed, plummets down, hits the floor and turns into a tall figure in a black cloak. Cowl covers its head.

It is DEATH.

Death sizes up the room, steps behind the window drapes.

INT. TOMMY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A house of a single parent, meagerly furnished but meticulously clean.

A few loose helium balloons glide under the ceiling. The remains of the birthday cake let know the party is over.

NORMAN GATES (PADDY THE CLOWN, 60s), clad in a clown attire - orange wig and clown face, looks out the window.

A soft female voice wafts in from the outside.

CLARA (O.S.)
See your friends off, Tommy.

The front door opens, CLARA JONES (40s) walks in.

CLARA
Sorry for making you wait, Mr. Gates.

NORMAN
Norman, please.

She approaches a cupboard, rummages in one of the drawers, pulls out an envelope with pay, hands it to Norman.

CLARA

You were amazing out there with the kids. I'll tell the school moms to keep you in mind for their next event.

NORMAN

You really don't have to, but thanks. May I change into something more comfortable before I leave?

Clara readily nods and shows him into the guest bedroom.

CLARA

Take as much time as you need.

Norman picks up his bag and proceeds to the bedroom.

INT. TOMMY'S HOUSE - GUEST BEDROOM - DAY

Norman leaves the bag on the floor, wearily sits down at a dressing table.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

It's been a long time, Norman.

Norman doesn't even turn to look at who it is.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

No hello? Ain't you happy to see me?

Norman holds his chest, closes his eyes. He takes a deep breath, exhales, in very much pain.

He looks up, sees DEATH in the mirror. Death's bone fingers touch Norman's shoulder.

Norman shakes it off.

NORMAN

I don't want these people to have a dead body in their house. Hold off till I get home. Consider it my last wish, please.

DEATH

That's just another trick of yours!

Norman pants and coughs.

NORMAN

Mrs. Jones... Tommy...

There are steps behind the closed door, then it opens. TOMMY (10) and Clara size up Norman, a look of concern registers.

CLARA

Are you okay, Norman? You don't look good.

Norman tries to get a hold of himself best he can. He studies their faces - they can't see Death.

NORMAN

My stomach is acting up, should be nothing. Just wanted to ask for a glass of water for my medicine.

He reaches into his pocket, retrieves a pill, swallows it.

Tommy runs away. In a moment, he's back with the water. He hands the glass to Norman.

CLARA

You sure you're okay?

NORMAN

I will be in ten minutes or so.

CLARA

That's good to hear.

Tommy asks his mother to lean closer, reaches to her ear, whispers to her. Clara shakes her head.

CLARA

Not now. Mr. Gates' not feeling well.

Norman makes his best effort to look normal.

NORMAN

Do you have a question for me, Tommy?

Tommy steps inside the room, his eyes shine excitedly.

TOMMY

How did you become a clown? I mean why a clown?

CLARA

Tommy! This is way too personal.

NORMAN

That's alright. But it's kind of a long story.

TOMMY

Would you tell it to me?

CLARA

Gosh, sorry, the kid is taken with you. He just told me he wants to be an entertainer when he grows up.

Norman smiles.

NORMAN

Tell me, Tommy, do you see anything behind my back?

Norman turns around. Tommy shakes his head - there's nothing behind Norman.

Norman shows his empty hand to the boy.

NORMAN

How about now?

Norman swoops his hand behind his back and... a baseball appears in it.

NORMAN

Your birthday present from me.

CLARA

You shouldn't have!

NORMAN

That's alright.

TOMMY

Hey! Tell me how you did it!

Tommy excitedly grabs the baseball, hurls it into the air and catches before it hits the ground.

NORMAN

Maybe some other time.

TOMMY

What about the story?

Norman's enormous red clown lips stretch into a wide smile. Clara pulls Tommy out of the room. She reaches for the door handle but Norman stops her.

NORMAN

I think Tommy might like that story. See, my uncle was a clown.

(MORE)

NORMAN (CONT'D)

One day he took me with him to a children's hospital. I was nine.

Norman closes his eyes for a long moment, sips his water.

NORMAN

There was that kid in a wheelchair, I shall never forget him. He had two scars on his shaven head and one on his cheek. Brain cancer.

Norman closes his eyes, sits still for a really long moment.

NORMAN

My uncle reached behind his back and handed this boy a baseball.

TOMMY

A baseball just like this one?

NORMAN

Exactly like this one.

TOMMY

What happened next?

NORMAN

The kid smiled at him, said it was the happiest day of his life. That's when I thought I'd be like my uncle.

Tommy stands quietly. Clara pulls Tommy close, embraces him, deeply affected by the story.

CLARA

Thank you for sharing it with us. And the baseball... You really shouldn't have.

NORMAN

That's alright.

CLARA

Now close the door, Tommy, let's give Mr. Gates some privacy.

They shut the door to the bedroom.

Norman hears them walk away. Now, he breathes with short, quick breaths from exertion.

Death tilts its head, sits at the bed, close to Norman.

DEATH

That was quite a lie, Norman.

Norman takes off his wig. Now we see that he's bald, two large scars mark his head.

DEATH

Your zig-zag stitches are as hideous as when you first got them.

Death inches closer, breaths at Norman.

DEATH

I should have taken you when you were in your creepy wheelchair, dying from brain cancer.

Norman holds his heart again.

NORMAN

Shut up.

DEATH

You be nice to me, old man. I took a pity on you back then. You won me over with your eerie warmth and unusual for a little boy strength.

Norman nods - angering Death is not a smart move.

NORMAN

Listen, these folks don't deserve a dead stranger in their house.

DEATH

Are you saying you don't want to die now because of them? I won't fall for your kindness this time.

Norman puts a hat on and fastens it with a piece of sticky tape.

He reaches for his pants, slides them on without taking off his clown attire. His every move pains him.

DEATH

You'll go into cardiac arrest. Your altruistic heart will fail you, isn't that ironic?

NORMAN

It actually is.

DEATH

Why don't you ever tell people you became a clown so you could disguise your monstrous stitches?

NORMAN

I don't want to creep people out, that's all. And that's not the reason I became an entertainer, you must know better.

DEATH

I think you've been lying to me, pretending to be amiable to win yourself more time.

NORMAN

You're welcome to be done with me. Just not here, please.

Death roars a laughter, rubs his thin cloaked hands together.

DEATH

I sure will. You have an exactly half hour to get home.

NORMAN

Thank you.

Norman puts on his jacket above his clown shirt, reaches for his bag and trudges toward the door.

He shuffles out.

INT. TOMMY'S HOUSE - HALL - DAY

Norman pulls the front door open.

Clara and Tommy rush toward him.

TOMMY

Bye, Paddy. Thanks for everything.

CLARA

It's Mr. Gates, Tommy.

NORMAN

Smart boy. He knows I like to be called Paddy much better.

Norman makes a funny Paddy face. He extends his hand to Norman's ear, pulls out a coin.

Puts the coin into the palm of his hand, rolls the hand into a twist, opens it up, a flower appears in it.

He presents it to Clara.

NORMAN

This is for you. And this--

Once again, he extends his hand to Tommy's ear, pulls out another coin, wraps it in his fist and voila - a tiny spinner appears in it.

NORMAN

Another birthday present, specially made for Tommy.

An inscription on the spinner reads "Tommy".

CLARA

Oh, my. We need to pay you for this.

NORMAN

That's a present. I got to go, there's something I have to do at home.

He closes the door behind.

EXT. TOMMY'S HOUSE - DAY

Norman trudges along the quiet street. Every step pains him, but he pushes forward.

Death follows him closely, its wide mouth hole stretched into a theatrical smile.

DEATH

"There's something I have to do at home" - that's rich. Sorry, Tommy, let me go die real quick.

Norman's stops for a second, cringes his face, wets his dry lips. Stagger forward.

NORMAN

You're not half as bad yourself. Thanks for not letting me die in front of them. She's a single mother, you know.

His voice sounds exasperated.

Death seemingly finds it amusing. It sashays around Norman, peers into his eyes, gets close to Norman's face to make him flinch.

DEATH

I know lots of things, child. Like the fact she paid you a handsome fare. Four hundred dollars' a pretty high rate you're charging there.

NORMAN

I charge three hundred like everyone else.

DEATH

She paid you four. Now you can get that nice wooden casket you wanted. You were exactly four hundred dollars short, I know that, too.

Norman abruptly stops. He rummages his pockets for the envelope.

DEATH

Hey, I'll be nice enough to give you a little time to reorder the casket. How about that?

Norman finds the envelop, opens it quick, four crisp one hundred dollar bills inside. He recounts, Death speaks the truth.

Suddenly, with new found strength Norman spins around, hurries toward Clara's house.

DEATH

Don't you dare. I can't waste this much time on a fool like yourself. It's a tip! Everyone pays tips!

But Norman doesn't listen. He rushes toward Tommy's house. Clara waters the flowers on the lawn. She notices Norman.

CLARA

Did you forget something?

Norman hands her a hundred dollar bill.

NORMAN

I can't take it, I'm sorry.

CLARA

Is it because you think we can't afford it?

NORMAN

Please don't think that. It's just I don't take tips. If I accept it now I'll have to do so tomorrow, possibly from someone who struggles to meet the ends. I appreciate the thought very much though.

Clara gives him a warm smile, takes the money.

Norman holds the tip of his hat and bows to Clara.

He walks away.

As soon as he rounds the corner he turns to check on Death. Death is nowhere around.

NORMAN

Hey, where are you?

He spots Death's black cloak few steps ahead. It talks under his breath.

DEATH

You haven't changed since the day we met when you were a boy dying from cancer.

Death hurls itself into the Crow and jets up. The Crow coos angrily at Norman, shoots away.

Norman takes a deep breath of air. He straightens up.

His heart obviously doesn't hurt anymore.

Norman walks home.

FADE OUT.