

A Funeral for my Dear Friend “Spit”

By Nico Hartnett

My friend Spit died at thirty-two, which was thirty-three years before his time. Spit, also called “Spitball Stanley,” (“Spitball” being a nickname he developed in his school-boy years and had trouble shaking off) died on a moped, passing a blind corner in the oncoming lane. He was drunk, collided with a jacked-up F150, and got his head torn off, helmet and all. Makes you wonder just how much safety helmets actually provide.

Decapitation is undoubtedly a shitty way to go, and thirty-two is a shitty age to die. Had Spit held on for another thirty-three, he would’ve gotten the Euth-Juice, like everyone else. He would’ve gone out the backdoor in government-subsidized slippers and a white-cotton robe, with a tube and needle *drip-drip-dripping* a lethal dose of The Good Stuff through the silicone nipple of his injection port. On the bright side, Spit was wasted when he died. So wasted, I think, that in the moments before he collided with the truck and went hurtling through the night-air like a football, he probably didn’t even feel afraid.

In the days after I heard the news, I tried to imagine what he *did* feel—cool air against his cheeks, the night rushing past as he swayed, unsteady in his seat. In my head I picture him swerving from one lane to the next, leaning to the side as he takes a turn, the speedometer reads 25 but boy, it feels like 60. Headlights, impact, hurtling through the night-air like a football.

When I got the funeral invitation, I tried not to laugh. It wasn’t funny, the fact that Spit had died, it was just the idea of a ‘funeral’ at all which amused me. The invitation came on thick, glossy paper, with slanted calligraphy reading: *Join us, for a day of mourning, commemoration, and comfort.* It read like a fucked-up wedding invite. *Mourning, commemoration, and comfort.* Christ.

The Stanley family liked the idea of being old-fashioned; they collected memorabilia from the past and put it up in glass display cases around their house, like some sort of odd, esoteric museum. Last time I went over, Spit’s dad showed me a newspaper clipping he’d somehow acquired from the late 21st century: the paper was yellowed with age and the front page sported a faded image of the oldest bastard I’d ever seen. *Bog Backs Budget Increase* read the headline atop the photo. There was something chilling about the smiling,

white-haired-and-even-whiter-toothed Bog captured on the yellowing page; aged far past his prime and preserved that way eternally. “In this picture, he was eighty-three years old,” Spit’s dad told me excitedly, “*Eighty-three!* And he was *president* of the *United States!*”

Considering their museum-of-a-house, I guess it shouldn’t have surprised me that Spit’s family would consider throwing a funeral. In my opinion, they romanticized the past in a way that a lot of bored, affluent people seem to do. Spit’s mom and dad were well-off, and in my experience, it’s the well-off people who remain perpetually dissatisfied with The State of Things, despite the fact that The State of Things—for *them*, at least—is usually good. Despite that, I was a little curious about the proceedings, and showed up at the Stanleys’ door on the day of Spit’s funeral with a bouquet of tulips and a bottle of Merlot. The tulips and Merlot were a last-minute idea on my part; on the drive over, I realized I had no clue what people *brought* to funerals, but it seemed wrong to show up empty-handed.

Spit’s mom took the Merlot and tulips from my hands, asked me to take my shoes off at the door (I had a habit of forgetting), and led me through the museum-of-a-house and outside through sliding glass doors to the large fenced-in backyard, where I was faced with what looked like the world’s saddest birthday party.

Black and gray streamers were draped over the tops of flowering hydrangea bushes, as well as from the branches of a magnolia tree in the far corner, the streamer ends hanging limply several feet above the ground. There was a table set up under the magnolia, with plastic cups, a water cooler of lemonade, and some various *hors d’oeuvres*. Mrs. Stanley set the Merlot next to the lemonade cooler, put a hand on my shoulder in a comforting way, and then went to join the small group of people standing in the middle of the yard. I noticed a picture of Spit grinning up at me from the table, placed next to the deviled eggs, and I felt a bit sick.

The wind picked up, knocking over the pyramid of plastic lemonade cups and sending the streamers into a frenzied dance. Mr. Stanley gave a speech.

“Family, friends, welcome.” His voice was somber enough to match his dark attire—black on black, from greasily polished shoes to his thin, silk tie.

“Today we are here to mourn the loss of our son, but also to celebrate his life,” he continued. My slacks were too short at the ankles, and I became increasingly aware of an itch where my exposed skin met the grass at my feet. Bad day to wear ankle socks.

When Spit's dad finished his speech, there was an uncomfortable silence cut only by the crackling whisper of the wind-tossed streamers, spinning in the branches like the pirouetting legs of paper dancers. Among the other guests, I eventually made my way to the table of *hors d'oeuvres*, to the smiling picture of Spit propped up among the eggs and chips and celery sticks. Mr. Stanley would later confide in me that they hadn't let him recover Spit's body—instead, his son was scraped off the pavement by men in orange vests armed with the same industrial ice scrapers one might use to clear the driveway of sludge in the winter. Disposed of as if he was some unsightly roadkill.

Spit's dad found this post-mortem treatment to be a dishonor, a travesty, but to me it seemed all but unjust. After all, when the Elders reached their 65th birthday, they had no funeral. Their lifeless bodies weren't put on sick display. Death came with the promise of comfort. Death came with government-subsidized slippers, a white-cotton robe, and a tube and needle *drip-drip-dripping*. I thought of old Bog, white teeth grinning up from the yellow page, and felt a chilling discomfort in my chest, like an ice cube melting from under my skin.