

My Totally Awesome Funeral

by Curtis Smith

No viewing parlors with their embedded stink of old women's perfume and phony propriety. Throw a bash at my crib instead — ain't nothing like a house party — the price of admission a single wood scrap salvaged from the cobwebbed corners of basements and garages. Arrange a heap by the door and let the handiest and most ambitious guests hammer these misfits into my farewell vessel. Buy me a suit coat at the flea market, a sherbet-colored eyesore at least three sizes too big, and fill my pockets with verses of poetry and the old photographs that never made it into the family album, the shut-eyed portraits, the embarrassing shots of pale skin and tummy rolls taken from our beach vacations. Tell the undertaker to work a smartass grin onto my face. Paint *Hello!* on one closed eyelid, *Goodbye!* on the other. Entertain my son with a magic trick, and if he laughs, do it again. Ask my wife if she's lost weight. Buy the expensive beer and wine I never thought I deserved in life and make sure no glass goes empty. Play music all night long — Jelly Roll, Louis and the Hot Fives, and once the vibe grows ragged and sloppy, crank out “Iron Man” until the speakers crackle and the stomp of beat-keeping shoes sends every shelved knickknack tumbling to the floor. Carry me to the backyard and lay me on a picnic table beneath the stars — I've always preferred the company of outcasts and smokers. Drink to absent friends. Drink another just because you can. After my wife and son have gone to bed, let the hardcore partiers highjack me for one last ride — shotgun! — and no matter the season, roll down the window and let the wind lash my hair. Drive to the old quarry and drag me to the north face's steep cliff, the one I was always afraid to jump from into the cold, deep water below, and prop me against the cliff's crowning forty-foot hemlock

while my friends yell and sing off-key into the darkness, a serenade echoed back from the circling vista of stone.

Hold the service at sundown the next day at the old drive-in, the one with the waist-high weeds straining between the macadam cracks, where the rusting speaker poles cast stretching, sundial shadows over a moonscape of broken glass and wind-swept trash. Monkeys, there must be monkeys, monkeys in red fezzes and roller skates, burning sparklers grasped in their paws. And while you're at the zoo, procure a giraffe or two to lope around the perimeter, their curious heads poking through the screen's tattered panels. Give the children noisemakers and encourage them to blow and toot until they're forced to lay their swooning heads in their mothers' laps. Hire a marginally talented mime to wander among the mourners — his glass wall routine both symbolic that we spend our lives trapped in little boxes and also a reminder that we should be eternally thankful that most of our boxes don't have mimes. Let my son wear his Superman cape if he wants. Break into the projection booth, switch on the static-spitting speakers, and broadcast a tape of a newborn's first cry. The recording can be of any baby, it doesn't matter. Tell my wife she looks great in black. Construct my eulogy with dialogue snippets culled from old Brat Pack movies and deliver them with a straight face. Relay this single message from me: "I had fun. Really." Adorn my old girlfriends in pink widow's veils and Victoria's Secret smuttery, and have them sing an A Cappella version of "Just a Gigolo."

As the light fades from the sky, stuff my casket with the drafts of my stories that went nowhere, the novels that sagged beneath the weight of their own pretensions. Let the giraffes wander the lot's edges, their shambling grace on display as they nibble the offerings of the surrounding trees. Allow my wife and me a private moment, a final goodbye before nailing the coffin shut with one last ill-fitting piece and dousing the wood with lighter fluid. Commission a dozen archers to shoot flaming arrows — high, arcing trajectories that trace the bruised sky like so many shooting stars. Hug the person next to you as the arrows thud into the wood. Stay

for a bit to study the knotted smoke plumes, the orange sparks that leap higher than the rest, but leave, with monkeys and giraffes in tow, before the flames die.

After I'm gone, visit the monkeys and giraffes at the zoo. Part of me, I believe, will be waiting in their dark eyes. Unspeaking, unjudging, I will gaze upon you with all the wonder and amazement you deserve.

