

The Last Will And New Testament Of Henry J. Worthmore, Jr.

by Paul Steven Stone

I, Henry J. Worthmore, Jr., being of sound mind and failing health in my 73rd year do hereby set down in words this final and irrefutable disposal of all my worldly goods.

No matter what anyone may say to the contrary, this document represents my true wishes, written without undue influence except perhaps by the uncomfortably close and ever-looming shadow of my Maker. May He prove to be the first honest and faithful authority I encounter in a lifetime of lonely, self-reliant struggle. And may He understand that what transpired in my lifetime, much of which may appear of questionable humanitarian purpose, was merely a matter of good business practice and never anything personal.

Oh, damn . . . ! No sooner do I write those words than a soft, unfamiliar voice (could it be my conscience after all these years?) whispers, "Is that entirely true, Henry? Good business practice and never anything personal?"

What right does a conscience have to speak to me now--answer me that--after a lifetime spent in silence?

I know what's wrong, and why I suffer myself to sit up in my sick bed scribbling to replace a will previously drawn and re-drawn half a dozen times. This very morning, awaking from a dream in which I'd been dragging dead weights across the floor of the Boston Stock Exchange, I looked over at my nightstand to find amidst the panoply of pills and potions a thin, black vinyl-covered copy of The New Testament. Left, no doubt, by an overzealous nurse or one of you, my dear children, desperate for a larger share of my appreciation and, ultimately, my fortune.

Well, no complaints there. That's the way I brought you up and I have no right to complain if you prove apt pupils in the end. I suppose I should even be proud, but I raised you so damn well in my own image I can't stand the sight of you.

And now all of you—my five progeny, my attorneys, my associates, even my ex-wives—will laugh, and with good reason, to hear that Henry J. Worthmore, Jr. woke up on his death bed to find the New Testament staring at him like a snake placed in his path by an ironic deity. Funnier still, that when I angrily picked it up to fling across the room, my eye—still sharp as ever—was caught by a saying from the text that went right to my heart and stayed my hand from its angry gesture.

And for those critics who implied otherwise, I hereby affirm that I, Henry J. Worthmore, Jr., did actually have a heart. Not my fault if it was so small most people naturally overlooked it.

But I digress, and there is little time for diversions. I feel the shadows closing in and can barely write as my fingers struggle to grip the pen.

The words that caught my eye, from the Gospel of Luke, caused something magical, or maybe I should say *mystical*, to happen. In an instant, I saw that this fragile life to which I was clinging was only one of many lives my spirit had taken on. And when the time soon came for me to die, that same spirit would not vaporize into nothingness but rather take on a shiny new body and a lifetime of yet-to-be-sampled experiences.

Now laugh if you want, but the funniest part is still to come, because I also saw that everything I did in this incarnation would have consequences in the next. And, as most of you know better than I, mine was a life spent far from the fields of brotherly love and higher ideals.

And so, if you look below you'll find a long list of charities to which I bequeath my entire fortune down to the last penny, yacht and offshore tax shelter.

As for you, my children, I leave the wisdom garnered in these last fateful moments of my existence. And my apologies for abandoning your needs to once again serve my own selfish purposes.

But there's a lesson in this worth more than the \$350 million dollars you almost inherited. And that is, to make sure you never go anywhere in life, or death, without adequate insurance. I knew I had almost failed to provide such insurance for myself—call it travel insurance--when I read those fateful words from Jesus, "Give, and it shall be given unto you . . ."

As a tired old man completing his last piece of business in this lifetime, I just wish Jesus had given me more detailed instructions.

