

Playing Dead - a poem

by Winnie Khaw

The Wallflower is a prudish, prim sort of person. Priding herself on being an example of proper decorum to others, she disapproves of what people enjoy. She spent her youth boring everyone around her to genuine tears of repentance—at knowing her. In her retirement she reads to the elderly in senior homes and makes the people miserable and die an early death to escape the truly astonishing monotony of her reciting voice and subject matter. She's headed to Las Vegas to reform the morals of the people in that most sinful city. Her method consists of entering places of dubious virtue and sitting there, staring. People shrink with sudden apathy regarding their present activities at this cross-eyed gaze, and quickly exit the building. Needless to say, no one has ever asked the Wallflower to dance.

Never have I failed in my self-appointed duty
Of scoffing at all things of apparent beauty
(Of which I have none, but that's beside the point)
To scorn and disdain, to utterly disappoint
All expectations for something of gratifying “fun”
I quickly disabuse the audience of the notion and shun
Morality now has taken on horrifying distortions
(Kindly overlook my figure's equally terrible proportions)
Please listen to the following tale
Provided, of course, you find it stale

A foolish rich man liked to pretend he had died
To see who in the audience would be dry-eyed
“To whom should I leave my goods and riches?”
He'd ponder aloud, “Or only my well-worn britches?”
And after a thoroughly convincing death scene,
Amid some weeping and looking at the will, obscene
Curses would arise concerning certain articles

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As well as those left without a single particle
“Ah ha!” he'd sit up chortling and crow with a shout
“You there, son! I know what you're about!”
Five times he did enact this without a bit of shame
Relatives killed by heart attacks thought him much to blame
Finally only the preacher was left who had not rejoiced
At the man's apparent death, and so in his will he voiced
To bequeath all worldly goods to that single pastor
In case there befell him some sort of terrible disaster
And indeed one fine day the man chanced to die
Without the opportunity to even say a final goodbye
At the funeral: “He was a great man,” the preacher said
Then, nervously, “That is, ahem, if he's actually dead.”

