

Wilderness House Literary Review 14/4

Doug Hawley
Testament

"I'LL INTRODUCE MYSELF FIRST. I'm George Simmons, the attorney for the late Duke Hanley. We are gathered to go over the last will and testament of Mr. Hanley. You probably know that Mr. Hanley committed suicide last week at age fifty-three. Before I get to the will, his instructions were to read what he called the testament Testament first."

"Excuse me miss, do you want to leave now?"

"I put up with enough from my geek brother when he was alive, I don't want to hear any more now."

"Then, before I proceed, does anyone else want to interrupt the reading? No? Good."

"I, Duke Hanley, was always ignored when I was alive. I'm hoping that I get your attention now that I'm gone. This is my testament."

"I understand why my life was so miserable. Much of it was my fault. I should have treated those better, who, like me, were the underdogs of the world, but I mostly just stewed in my bitterness. Short, ugly guys just don't have much chance at winning in this world. My first love, the one that I thought I would marry and live with happily ever after, just dropped out of sight with no warning. The second moved on after what I thought was a minor disagreement over politics. After that, I just gave up on women to avoid being hurt again. My family ignored me. In any case only my brother Gene and my sister Jan are left alive. Work was pretty much the same. I was stuck as a mid-level actuary for most of my life. No one ever saw me as a leader or wanted to promote me."

"OK, enough of my whining. There were a few bright spots in my life. My neighbors, Ken and Beth Jergens were very good to me. He was happy to help out when my toilet overflowed. I was not much of a handyman, but he was first rate. They looked after my cat Sam and dog Jo when I was out of town or in the hospital. Mostly, they were always friendly and tried to involve me in their social life. At least Sam and Jo loved me. I know that it is kind of Caine Mutiny pathetic, like Humphrey Bogart in that film, but they brought such joy to my mostly sad life. That's pretty much the end of the good stuff."

"A few months ago, I decided to kill myself, but was too chicken to just shoot myself in the head and be done with it. I contacted Mr. Simmons and arranged for him to take care of all my bills and other business, and told him that I was taking a long vacation. I quit my job then. My intention was to just starve myself to death. I went to bed and only got up to go to the bathroom. After a week, I was miserable and in pain, so I decided to go the more traditional route – a lot of pills and whiskey."

"My one real success in life was investing. My actuarial career gave me a leg up in predicting economic trends. Besides that I had either incredible intuition or luck. I got into Apple and Microsoft at the right time. There were a bunch more successes, but suffice it to say I accumulated a large fortune. You may wonder why I led such a Spartan existence. I never had much interest in ostentation or what is now known as bling. Mainly, I had

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no one to share my riches with.”

“That’s the end of the testament. Mr. Hanley had previously filed the will with me, but not the so-called testament, which I received a day after he died. He didn’t know much about wills, but I think his is still legal.”

“First Mr. Hanley specifies that except for the Jergens, no one will receive anything from his estate unless he or she stays through the aforementioned testament.”

“The Jergens will receive the bulk of the estate, estimated to be worth \$13,675,000 if they are willing to take care of Sam and Jo. The estate probably would have been worth twice as much except for Mr. Hanley’s penchant for prostitutes and gambling. He wasn’t quite the plain living man that he claimed to be. He would take a trip to Vegas every weekend and play high stakes roulette, losing up to \$250,000 a night, and then hire a bunch of escorts for his suite. Sometimes as many as five.

Gene inquired “So Mr. Simmons, why do you know so much about Duke’s habits?”

“I’m pleased to say that I wasn’t only Duke’s attorney, but just about his only close friend. There were times that he invited me along with him on his junkets, even though I have no interest in gambling. I particularly remember a very talented and large young lady named Candy who had some interesting props, and the very flexible Janice. Janice said that she had been a gymnast.”

Simmons’ face stayed dreamy for some time, but slowly changed back to his serious lawyer face “Enough of reminiscing, back to the will.”

Gene interrupted Simmons “That’s not all Duke lied about. When our parents were alive, we tried to stay in touch, but he always ignored us. I don’t know what his problem was.”

“If everyone will let me finish, his brother Gene receives \$50,000. Sister Jan would have received an equal amount had she stayed. The local Humane Society gets a \$25,000 bequest, and that is all. I’ve got to be on the golf course by 2:00.”

“Nothing will be distributed until the will goes through the legal niceties for large estates.”