

BITTER DISAPPOINTMENTS

by Bradley Walton

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A Dramatic Monologue

by **Bradley Walton**

SYNOPSIS: A lost package arrives on the same day a friend dies...a hilariously ironic gift so incredibly perfect in its timing that it would be impossible to believe if it wasn't true. A moving story about the power of laughter in the face of tragedy.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 male)

NARRATOR (m)..... Late teens.

SET: Bare stage.

COSTUME: Everyday teen attire.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Bitter Disappointments is made up, except for the parts that are real. I had a close friend named Will. He died, not in his teens, but still far younger than he should have, leaving behind a family and friends who adored him. The part in the hospital really happened, except that it was Will's wife who shared the poop story. Will really did make a miraculous turnaround after being placed in hospice, only to die four days later. The shirt was actually a necktie given to me by my wife for Valentine's Day, but it really was misprinted twice, and I received the still-wrong replacement in the mail just a couple of hours after finding out Will had died. This script was written on the second anniversary of Will's death. I miss him.

AT RISE: *NARRATOR is on a bare stage.*

NARRATOR: “Life is full of bitter disappointments.” That’s what my mom told me on the day I met Will. She’d dragged me to a Celtic festival, and I was not happy to be there. In fairness to her, I was 14 years old, and at that point in my life, I was never happy to be anywhere. But she’d stuck me in the car and brought me to the fairgrounds so I could scratch my head at men in kilts, listen to bagpipe music, and drink something called Irn-Bru—a soft drink that tasted sort of like carbonated orange cough syrup. I did think the caber toss was kind of cool, but I refused to admit it out loud.

For lunch, Mom declared we were going to try haggis, which is one of the most disgusting things on Earth. It’s basically miscellaneous sheep parts, spiced and served in a sheep stomach. For real. As we stood in line—and I couldn’t believe there was a line for haggis—I whined and complained to the considerable best of my 14-year-old ability.

“Life is full of bitter disappointments,” Mom said, totally nonplussed.

“That’s good advice,” said a woman behind us. “Life is full of bitter disappointments,” she repeated to a teenage boy, roughly my age, standing next to her. He looked about as happy to be there as I did.

“I’m not eating sheep unmentionables,” he said.

“They’re not unmentionables,” said the woman. “They’re major organs.”

“And if you mention them again,” he said, “I’m not gonna be responsible if I puke on your shoes.”

Our moms struck up a conversation about the challenges of bringing reluctant teenagers to Celtic festivals, pretty much ignoring that we were standing right there. So of course, the other boy and I struck up a conversation about moms who drag their teenage sons to Celtic festivals, pretty much ignoring that our moms were standing right there. His name was Will, and over the course of the next 30 minutes, we laughed and bonded over meat pudding served in a sheep stomach, confronting the culinary horror together. As the afternoon went on, bonding over haggis became bonding over bagpipe music, kilts, and Irn-Bru. He thought the caber toss was cool, too, although he refused to tell his mom, the same as me. And by the end of the day, we were best friends.

Even though we went to different schools, we hung out together most weekends, and got to be regular fixtures in each other's homes. We wound up babysitting his little sister, Norma, a lot. Whenever we went to the movies, it always seemed like Norma was tagging along. She liked to sit in the front row. We liked to sit further back. Will's mom had explicitly instructed us to sit together, so Will and I always overruled Norma's seating request. Whenever she complained, we'd both tell her, "Life is full of bitter disappointments." We used that line on her a lot.

For my 16th birthday, Will ordered me a T-shirt from a custom printing website. The shirt was supposed to say, "Life is full of bitter disappointments" with a smiley face at the bottom. Will gift-wrapped the shirt without taking it out of its plastic shipping bag, and when I opened it, we discovered together that the printer had messed up the graphic—they'd cropped off the D and the S in "disappointments" so that the shirt read, "Life is full of bitter isappointment." Will thought it was hysterical that a shirt about disappointment had turned out disappointingly, but he said he'd email the website and arrange for a corrected replacement.

Two days after my 16th birthday, Will woke up to discover an alarming yellow tint to his skin. His mom took him to the hospital, and a round of tests delivered terrible news: Will's liver was failing. Nobody knew why, but it was bad enough that he was moved to another hospital an hour away and put on an organ transplant list. But Will went downhill fast, and one Sunday morning an incredibly short time later, his mom called to tell us Will had been moved into hospice, and that he was going to die. He had maybe two or three days left, at most.

I went to the hospital to say goodbye. Will wasn't conscious. He wasn't going to hear anything I said. But I needed to say something, if only to know that I'd said it. This was the one and only chance I was going to get, but I couldn't get any words out. It was too much, looking at him, jaundiced and dying...knowing that this was the end. Every time I tried to speak, I couldn't get out more than a few syllables before my voice broke into incoherent sobs.

Norma took me out to the waiting room. In typical little sister fashion, she told me about one of Will's last attempts to go to the bathroom on his own, a few weeks before. Apparently Will had gotten up in the middle of the night, and midway across the 10 foot expanse of no man's land between the bed and the bathroom, came to the bleak realization that he wasn't going to make it. He was determined not to leave a mess on the floor for the nurses to clean up, and so, with no other options, he'd pooped into his hand.

I remembered standing in line with Will at the Celtic festival years before, and the contortions of disgust his face had made as he contemplated eating haggis. My brain superimposed those expressions—amplified by a factor of ten—onto a mental image of Will using his improvised stand-up toilet of last resort, and I burst out laughing. I don't think he would have minded. Actually, I knew he wouldn't. Especially since I'd never needed to laugh so badly in my life. And with that image in my mind, I returned to Will's room.

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