

Requiem

Of all Governor Robinson Cain's writings, this is by far the most extraordinary and incredible. Many suspect some sort of imposture or hoax, perpetrated by his survivors. The New Plymouth Historical Society simply offers it as it is; only the title is our own. The brief, erratic entries are undated, and aside from Gov. Cain's demise, there is little by which to date them. The reader is welcome to draw his or her own conclusions.

Due to the controversy, and its fragile condition, this is one of the very few Cain manuscripts not on display for the Memorial Exhibition.

It's been a wonderful life, all in all. I know my time is growing short. I have few regrets, and nothing I need apologize for. Here on this impossible planet, I built a life, a family, a nation. I have many grandchildren, and I think a few great-grandchildren. I find it difficult to remember some things lately, but I can never forget the greatest blessing any man could ever have asked for, on this or any world, my dearest wife, Penny.

She's been gone eight years, and every morning, the memory of her leaving me is a fresh grief. Some newsman from the televisions asked me if that was one of my "regrets," that she had died too soon. Damn fool. A man can only regret something he has done. There was nothing anyone could have done about Cranston's Plague. The doctors finally stopped it, but I know they couldn't have prevented it. I bear no-one any ill will on that account. It's a pity, a tragedy, that they couldn't have stopped it sooner, before it took Penny and the hundreds of others. It was a plague that swept down from the stars. Four other worlds in this sector felt its scourge, too. No rhyme or reason to who it afflicted, who it then spared, who it took. It ravaged our world for three weeks that season, before a vaccine stopped it. For too many, it was too late. It was too late for my dearest angel. I spent five days at her bedside, watching her body waste away. Hands and feet shriveled, hair fell out, until

I had to take a small reprieve after my last. The symptoms of Cranston's Plague are well known, and I needn't rehearse them here for the prurient pleasure of strangers. Suffice it to say, she wasted and died, while I held her hands and cradled her to the end, and I was left untouched. Untouched in my body. I remain unshaken in my belief that there is a Providence which guides us, and brings us to all good things. I'd still like to box Providence about the ears with my agony and demand a reckoning, though. Someday very soon, I think.

I would have to say that my only real regret is this, that I was unable to oblige my Penny's last desire to be buried on the land we first carved out of this wilderness, in the cool shelter of the stone bulwarks overlooking the small pond which, I understand, now bears her name. I think she would have liked that, at least. But the busybodies on that absurd Governor's Council insisted that our home – OUR HOME – was a "historically significant" location, and locating a tomb there would be somehow "inappropriate." I regret that I didn't fight harder against those jackasses, and win my Penny the right to spend eternity in her own damn home.

Penny, oh Penny. I miss you so. To hear you laugh again, chiming like a silver bell. Some days I can hardly bear it.

I dreamed of you last night, my angel. Is that what you are now, a real angel at last? I woke with the smell of your hair in my nostrils, even though I felt it twined in my fingers. I sobbed for a while before getting out of bed. One of your granddaughters is ten years old now, and looks so much like you it makes my heart ache. I suppose you still live on in that way, even if none other.

I suppose I'm at least satisfied with where the busybodies put her. They opened out a small natural cave on a hillside, and you can at least see our little oasis from there. It hardly deserves to be called an oasis any more. The trees grow for miles around now. A very small part of this world is finally turning green. My doing, a lot of it. Mine, and hers, and our childrens', and the Robinsons', and the Wests'. We built this world into something where men and women and children could live without the constant fear of some mad death surprising them in their tracks, or in their beds. Until the Plague, at least.

I visited her today. It's too far for me to walk, these days. I have to pay some kid in a ground car to take me out to the hill, then pay him more to walk at my side, lest I fall. Damned if I'll let him come in there with me, though. I have a chair to sit in. I sit and rest my face against the cold, hard walls of your long home, my dearest. Like most else on this world, the tomb is a little rough. This is still a frontier. The crypt itself is polished, although the cavern seems little more than natural. Set into the cover of the crypt, in a carved niche, is a most remarkable ornament, a delicate, elegant blossom fashioned out of the thinnest platinum imaginable. It was a legacy of our dearest friend, Zachary Smith. He willed it to Penny, and that was her only other request, that it decorate her crypt. I have no idea who could have fashioned such a thing. I have no such desires, all I want is enough stone next to her to lie in. Damn, it's a long way down, where is that kid?

You were a braver, stronger, finer, soul than I was, that last terrible day, but then, you always were.

One thing I remember vividly, Penny, are the promises I made to you that night we wed. I gave myself to you as your husband, and vowed it would be so until Grim Death parted us. Well, I have some news for Grim Death, maybe he's managed to part us for a time, but I love you now even more than I did when I said those words, and I am still your husband and Grim Death can go straight to Hell all by himself.

I've been ill. The doctor tells me it's my age. Isn't he the clever one? I haven't been able to get out of bed for three days or more, I'm having trouble keeping track of time. I'm stronger today, though. All I want is to go out and sit with my Penny. Oh Penny, I dreamed of you again, I think it was a dream, of being in a soft whirlpool, warm and black, and it was your eyes, your eyes like obsidian, before the Plague ate them. Please God, I'm done with this world, this universe. I'm ready for the next.

I have decided to hire a man to take me out there every day. I have the money, and my children have no business stopping me. They can't prove I'm mad or incompetent in any way, and the laws of this world, laws I wrote, insist on my right to be a damned old fool if I wish it. Someday, he won't need to bring me back, and that will save some time and effort all around.

Even with anti-gravity lifters, it's a hard trip up and down. Maybe I'll just stay here, ask him to bring me a sleeping bag and some food in the mornings. All else I ever wanted is up here already.

My children are calling me an old fool after all. Maybe they're right, but it's no business of theirs if I am. Do you hear that? It's none of your damn business!

I brought some gear up with me this morning. I have a sleeping bag, a heater, a few bites of food, a canteen of water. Most days I don't bother eating.

I dreamed of her again, or this time it may have been more than a dream. I woke with something in my hand, a small orange and yellow blossom. It's impossible of course, but it resembles the bloom I gave her the day we fell in love, and which she wore for our wedding celebration. Of course it's impossible, for I entombed it with her. I must still be dreaming.

The man looked in on me this morning. I don't know how long I've been here now, two or three days? He left food and water, and a letter from children and doctors telling me that they were going to come get me and bring me down, against my will if need be.

I've just awoken, thinking I've heard her laughter again, the laughter like silver bells, and a whisper in the still cavern, "Dearest husband . . ." I remember a story she told me once, a story of when she was just a lost child on a barren planet. I gather my strength. "Hey!" I shout feebly, "Hey!" The small cavern allows for the tiniest bit of an echo, and I listen. The echoes of my voice trickle off to silence, a terrible stillness.

And now: "Hey!" replies a voice like a silver bell. Oh, Penny. Penny.

Look for us again in a million years, look to the sky above this marvelous, magical world, when a new constellation will blaze into glory and illuminate your night, you will look up, and know that the only name for this new sign in Heaven can be "The Lovers," gaze at us then, and wonder.

A few facts are indisputable.

The mortal remains of Governor Robinson Cain were indeed found in the cavern which was his beloved wife's tomb, and subsequently his own. When found, he was sprawled across her crypt, with one of his notebooks on the ground, and an odd orange-yellow blossom in his hand, evidently fresh.

Shortly after his own interment next to Lady Penelope, rumors began circulating that the tomb was haunted, and that voices could be heard from time to time within it.

About 25 years ago, when the Cain and Robinson families expressed concern that the tomb was becoming a common tourist attraction, rather than a solemn resting place, the Governor's Council ordered the opening to the tomb sealed, to frustrate the casually curious and thrill-seekers.

But to this day, hundreds of reputable citizens will swear that if one stands on the surrounding hillsides when the stars are right, the sound of laughter, as of great silver bells, can be heard ringing in the night air.

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