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**Forum**

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# Final Bargain

**By Robert J. O'Connell**

Mary's husband "Old Bill" used to come to our house on Long Island for a week every fall. Mostly to get away from Mary, a talent he had developed to the Nth degree. Bill was a Purchasing Agent for a trucking company in Syracuse. He had convinced Mary that the job started at 6am in the morning. So he would arise at 5am eat a solitary piece of toast and leave the house before anyone else was up. His job actually started when the office opened at 8am. It is not clear what he did with the extra two hours of quiet each morning but they probably involved a scotch bottle and a book about Egyptology A devotion to the latter he shared with my father. Both were fascinated by hieroglyphics. In any case he would come home at five, have his dinner with the family and by 6pm he would repair to his "office" in the basement where he did book keeping for several local businesses. This actual activity might take up an hour or two of his time but the remaining 2 hours before bed were again spent with his bottle and a book. So all in all he spent only an hour a day with Mary. As she spent her time shopping it seemed a serene schedule for both of them.

Bill had some heart problems, so each time he visited us I would say to him. "Enjoy your self but don't die on me". He would smile and go about his business, most of which involved reading and sleeping late in the morning. Of course, on the last of these visits he dropped dead in my living room. After some excitement in the hospital we were asked which Funeral Home we wished to use. There was a nearby establishment which seemed to be run by an Irishman so we told the hospital to release the body to O'Connors. This turned out to be a good choice as Mr. O'Conner ran a very professional operation.

Mary shortly arrived at the house and settled in. The next day we all went to O'Conner's to settle the "arrangements". He was very kind explaining to Mary what her options were in terms of shipping the body home for burial. After he had explained about the small fee for picking up and preparing the body, the possibility of renting a reusable shipping container and then buying a coffin from the local undertaker I realized that he was presenting Mary with the most inexpensive option. He was reacting to her appearance. To put it mildly, she looked like a cleaned up New York City bag lady. She did have three teeth left in her mouth and also dressed to make you wonder where she had left her shopping cart. Mary for her part was determined that Bill should have the best of everything. So Mr. O'Conner offered to take us to his basement sales room where he had a selection of coffins for sale, reminding Mary that she was not obligated to buy a coffin from him.

His basement was nicely arrayed with row upon row of coffins. It was shortly clear that they were tugging on the two opposite ends of the stick. He leading her toward the cheap seats and she looking for Mahogany with Brass Handles. After a few minutes, as she rejected the cloth covered pine boxes and gravitated toward the cherry and brass aisle she turned and asked him "do you have any coffins On Sale?" He thought for a moment and then excused himself as though going to his office to check. I followed him and found him sitting at his desk with his hand to his mouth and tears of laughter running down his cheeks. After gaining control he said to me that in his thirty years of experience this was the first time anyone had ever asked such a question. I pointed out that he was dealing with the Queen of the Remainder Aisle and that she had the means to buy anything she wanted except dentures

Bill was shortly shipped home in a nice cherry box with brass handles. Mary kept shopping.

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