

DIRECTIONS FOR THE FUNERAL OF FOXCROFT GULDENBAUM BY FOXCROFT GULDENBAUM

Fiction by Juan Caceres-Silva

El Salvador, Film and television

1. Tell everyone in the family to dress up in their finest clothes and get ready to cry. Read this carefully, Junior. In fact, I should stress enough that you fish inside my pants, look for my platinum card and take the family shopping. Pick purple dresses for your sisters and a black one for your cousin. And all of them must be made with the same type of fabric, which ought to be complemented by handkerchiefs, lighter in tone, but all cotton, very humble, you see? Otto has no need for a new suit, but I know that he would accept the gratuity. Get him a blazer, one made of wool with lined interior, elegant. Convince him to choose a dark grey, because he is the younger brother. Let your mother buy what she wants because she will never be persuaded otherwise. Take the family to the tailor. And remember that your cousin Elsa has the most elderly taste in fashion. Instruct the tailor to remove any ribbons, and tighten the waistline to reveal the unflattering gut of the average Salvadorian woman¹; when in doubt, ask your mother for honest criticism, she's an expert. If necessary, allow her to give orders to the tailor. Once the whole family is looking their best, and looking their saddest, get them ready to cry, and call the mortuary to plan my party.

2. Wakes are too ordinary and cold these days, especially in El Salvador. Too cold and too lifeless, yes, it's only fair, but then again, too boring...too quiet. Junior, I have paid for a group of mariachis from El Triangulo de San Miguel to serenade my corpse during my wake. They should be situated at one of the opposite corners of the room,

1. According only to your mother. Or according to her genes, really. You can see how I am right in saying this. Do not feel bad about agreeing. And I am dead; this makes it acceptable for me to say it. Have the tailor fix everything to exploit every little flaw of everyone in the family. And back to your cousin, remember

facing the casket. Three men in zoot suits on the other corner will play free jazz, and take turns with the mariachis, and both bands will be confused. It is important that you give the musicians plenty of fuel in their drinks. Always fuel the drinks, Junior. I should trust this enough to keep the musical mood always on the edge of becoming too interesting, and the display of emotions constantly fresh. The combination of these elements will surely create a unique charm to the scene.

3. For my sarcophagus, I have already left instructions to my brother, Lipton, but really, I am confident of his incompetence. It is true, he is insane, but don't think badly of your uncle, at least he does not disappoint. I want it open, so that the family can see me, and old friends can remember what I look like. I wish to be dressed in a black tuxedo with a vest, and ignore the bowtie because this is no time to be uptight. After I am dressed properly, stick a real-human-hair handlebar mustache on my face. Use cement gum so that it won't fall off halfway around the galaxy. In retrospect, I could never grow a satisfactory mustache in my life. It must seem natural, I want one in death. And it was all due to my childhood, back when I used to draw mustaches on the cowboys in my father's world encyclopedias. See, I used individual strokes, very foolish of me. I should have used brushes, cross-hatching. It was one of those curses that you never break. It is then, my wish² I was meant without any facial hair, that is unacceptable. And when forgotten friends of mine ask you about it, is that real? Is that real, Junior? Give them a long stare, and remind them with a face full of grief that I am dead and that they should know better than to ask stupid questions.

4. Also, speaking of my corpse. Using the motor of a cuckoo clock and string, I have developed a clever pulley system, to open my right eyelid. It deactivates^{2,9} when a hidden weight sensor placed under a

2. To impress Fate itself. My mother took particular emphasis every chance she ever got to remind me of my curse. And then she laughed. She did not see the gravity of my situation. I spent all of my life without the chance of living my life with a mustache. See, Junior, I've been mocked and told that

2.9. Activates

“welcome” mat in front of my casket detects a variation in the pressure³ when the person leaves my sight. Let me spy on the people mourning me for a while, or until the motor runs out, and you can wind it again if you feel that I have not peeked enough. And when someone faints at the sight of the mustache or at the fact that my corpse is on the watch, there will be a room with a bed, stage right from the casket; take the children and my friends with my age. Loosen the belts of the men, and have Francisca or Leonor lend their handkerchiefs to the women crying, all while you hurry to get everyone warm coffee. Ask the mimes about it, and ignore this sentence until you read direction 6. Once the people finish their coffee and start smiling and there are no more tears to be wiped, kick them out of the room and into the main room. Continue to check that the pulley system still works. You were always my favorite child, and I trust your judgment.

5. Invite Miguelito and his family. This should take your mother by surprise, but understand; he has been my personal assistant and driver since I became old enough to work the coffee. Even before that, he worked as a teenager for my father, picking the beans on the steep hills of Santa Ana. I consider him part of the family. Really, as far as I would prefer, he forms more part of the family than some of those cousins from your mother’s side. Take a look at this man and you learn something, Junior. You will see a genuine and honest soul, and this is extremely rare these days. Junior, now that I am passed on, I wonder: Couldn’t that be the solution? I want you to invite all of the workers and children from the coffee farms. Miguelito will get in touch with them, and he can bring them on the bed of the pickup truck. And how much they work, Junior, they never tire during harvest times. In my early twenties when I first took over the plantation, your uncle Lipton and I ate ritalina eggs and rice and then tried to collect more coffee beans than the workers. At the end of the day, we were exhausted, and

3. It is supposed to work with any weight that is equal to or greater than sixty kilos. It was quite a complicated device to build. And surely you can imagine how difficult it was to test. Your uncle Lipton almost lost an eyelid. Assuming the device still works, it is built to close

we counted a pathetic number of three sacks full of grain gold. The villagers averaged an impressive eleven sacks per person, and what good fun is the world of being a coffee farmer. Yes, have them all come to the wake, and tell them to enter all at once. But do not stop just there. Once they are inside the mortuary house, put a sign outside the front door that says, “Public wake. Free booze.” This ought to attract some villagers and a couple town drunkards. In my life, I have learned to trust these people; remember I never could trust your mother with sufficient discipline to shut the hell up. Yes, I think the villagers being there, and so many of them, that will annoy her greatly, and I’ll be dead happy.

6. All guests must be constantly served warm coffee with milk and sweet *nuegaros*⁴ on large silver platters carried by waiters dressed as mimes in full makeup, and with a single black tear, very subtle, you see? These mimes are not to say a word during the entire wake or the show would be ruined. However, do put them to the test. For example, all mimes should be proficient enough to perform the rope routine, which, I believe, is a basic requirement for that profession.

7. Has always been my least favorite number. Yes, I find it very pretentious and confident. You must keep this in mind from now on, Junior. Never trust this number.

8. I made a film, a will, a final testament, and I wish you to screen it for the guests. I find it to be a great art film and it stars me. It’s very Jean-Luc Godard, very Luis Buñuel, very Federico Fellini. Do I brag? It is really quite good. Now, Junior, you have to play this video using

4. Please remember to warm the *nuegaros*. Remember, they can only be served warm. They are not particularly delicious either way. Serving them cold would offend the villagers. But they will never hesitate if you serve them

a high-quality projector and a white silk screen⁵ eye. But wait to show my film at the right time, Junior. Meanwhile, enjoy the variety of music and think about the juxtaposition of emotions that it has brought to new mourning light. Call the mimes and offer coffee to everyone and tell them that the movie is about to start. Try to wait for the people that arrive late, and accept their condolences while you encourage them to sign their names on a blank sheet of paper. Call the mimes, offer newcomers fueled drinks or frozen juices. Once the guests are in the mood, start the movie.

Video: What is the big scoop? I died.

(I hope you notice, Junior, I am wearing that black suit you gave me. And that armchair has been in the family for a number of generations that I don't feel like remembering. You must keep this armchair. Your mother will sell it on a whim, I warn you, be ready for her. And under no circumstances allow her to do so. It would be such a stoic catastrophe. She is a wonderful woman. I don't miss her at all.)

Yes, it must have been a big shock for you to find out, but surely it was a greater shock for me. Anyway, damn you all for coming to mourn me in such a morose way. You remember, of course, my strong reluctance towards funerary traditions. But what am I saying...Of course you do not. You are here. Watching this film. Maybe you were only hoping for a goodbye or a requiem that I will not sing. Yes, I am happy to see some of you. My family, please don't cry anymore...

(This is your cue: When I take a particularly long swig of Scotch, the whole family must suddenly cease to cry. Everybody in the family should have been crying until this point. If anyone in the family has already stopped crying for me before this point, then you have failed in following your directions, Junior.)

5. The biggest silk screen, one of amazing proportions. Compare it to my bed sheets. Yes, that will be the test. If it is bigger than my bed sheets, then it may be big enough. 6.* Do not cover the casket side, where my corpse is visible. Even though there is no need for me to say it, Junior, be careful with the string attached to my

6.* If the bottom part of it touches the floor, then it is big enough. Careful

There are many things I have to tell you. Yes, some involve my wealth and some material possessions. But before, well, I am just dying to say some things. This is coming out of my heart, really. I liked very few of you present. And I mean that in the most sincere of ways, but I do intend to go into more details here, and say hello to some of these people, so please bear with me while I read names from this paper, very official, you see?

My dearest sister-in-law, Edna...Ho-ho-ho-ho. I dare to say, you are one to be forward. Let me assure you, I always knew what dinner at your house really meant. I am flattered, I admit, but I am married to your sister. Ruben, how are you doing these days?

Here's a character from my childhood, Mario Aguirre. You must be wondering why you were even invited to this event. Well, let me explain: You pushed me out of the cafeteria line constantly, back in '95. You made fun of me constantly. You abused me constantly. And I do believe you constantly threw rocks through my bedroom windows. I owe to you some of the scariest moments in my life. So allow me to repay you. My henchmen will now punch you deep in your gut. Look out behind you! Yes, well, I wasn't about to have anybody punched in this type of event, so don't you worry. Just, fuck you. And to the people around him, really, he is an asshole. What else...

Ah! Do I remember you, Laura Cromeyer? I hope you remember, you know, I was madly in love with you in my school days. You taught me about romance and disappointment very early in life. And remember, you literally ran away from me? I suppose our friendship took a giddy turn. I would have loved to marry you at one point. Well, damn you for the subjunctive. I hope your life is a mess. I can only say, this is very fun. Let us see who else is here...

Doctor Reyes! Let's see here...you are a terrible dentist. Do you want to talk about post-civil war torture? Actually, I think I may be too idealistic. How you ever got a degree in dentistry in the first place is beyond me. Bravo, Doctor! It amazes me even from the grave.

Lipton Guildenbaum. Do you remember the old days, how we used to play when we were kids? You are a piece of shit. What? Nothing? Okay.

I must admit this was more fun when you were not a mute. Honestly, to those who cannot remember his voice...This wet pecker used to scare my mother with some of the most creative obscenities. Maybe I should start pitying you now that I'm dead, if only I had somewhere to look down at. So, to my brother Lipton. He's a good man, but he is a lunatic.

To my distant relatives who traveled so long to come here...how did you even find out about this? I must congratulate your sources of information. And I really must congratulate your effort, your effrontery. I almost want to reward your curious habit of researching obituaries. I propose a game! The one relative among you who displays the most misery by mourning me, Victor Lopez, my accountant, will give all of my shares of Copefa. Imagine partial control over all the coffee exporting from El Salvador. So start weeping and good luck to all of you!

(Play the game: watch for the bawling vultures, Junior!)

Professor Trang Dwong, I know more about acting in drama than you ever will. This is true, but I am not the one pretending you are not there. I am saying hello to you. I suppose, by saying this, I am also saying go fuck yourself...Yes, hello as well. I'm feeling buoyant enough...

And my wife, that speck of grey in my rainbow. I really should thank you, Erica. Without your wretched soul consuming mine, exhausting my patience...without your hiss of a voice in the early mornings...and without your profound ignorance of logic and reason...well, I'd be a rather pleasant person. I enjoyed your company in the worst way possible. Cynicism is just so rare these days. You ought to open lessons and worsen the world entirely. And hope that there is always hope. Your job would be easy. At least the level of intellectualism would rise. And then out of your black hole, you birthed four creatures—only two of whom I can account for. But I love the girls. They are exactly like you before marriage. This is how the universe becomes interesting, I suppose.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I go on to the distribution of my wealth according to my testament...I would like to propose a short cigarette break, because that's what killed me, very postmodern, you see? This film will continue for those who wish to watch me while I

smoke a cigarette by the window.

9. Choreography for the cigarette break: Look around you for a stiff in a dull suit, that's Victor Lopez,⁷ my personal accountant. At this point, there is no doubt in my mind that he'll be looking to talk to you regarding the shares I promised to those leeches you have for second cousins. You will be able to recognize these bleating bastards, as they will be the only group of people still crying. Memorize their faces, and step quickly into the bathroom to avoid Victor. This will give you some time.

Have Otto step outside for a cigarette and talk to the people there. He will take long drags of smoke and remember all of a sudden funny moments of my life. He will tell them one by one, with impeccable comedic timing, easily cheering the smokers around him who already enjoy a cloudy head buzz.

You must wait no less than five minutes inside that bathroom, and spy out of the keyhole for predators before venturing into the main room. Lipton will then distract Victor by attempting to communicate; he will discuss what he knows about dialectics. This is when you step out of the bathroom and look for an Indian man dressed in a white robe; he smells like marijuana.⁸ Go talk to him. This person was my life mentor, for about two decades or so. And, Junior, you must respect my mentor very much, but make sure Victor is not yet starting to grasp my brother's mute philosophy. One of the mimes will then become frustrated in silence and attempt to translate Lipton's mute speech, using pantomime.

Your sisters will walk counterclockwise around the main room, behind my casket and behind the silk screen. My figure on the screen

7. I sent him a document titled, "Greetings & Fake Will Pending More Instructions by Foxcroft Guildenbaum," but remember he has no sense of humor. Not a trace of one. In spite of working almost his entire professional career as

8. The man swears he's from one of the moons of Saturn; what can I say? Titan, I think. I couldn't ever tell if this was actually true. I did not see any evidence of this in the time I spent with him. Nevertheless, I assure you he will be there, I won a bet about it, you need to

will block them, while they collect a few of the liquor bottles—they'll tell one of the mimes, It's OK, and he will display a thumbs up while winking the eye with the black tear drawn underneath. Watch over your sisters as they make their way outside to where the guests smoke and listen to Otto's versions of my adventures. And you will count two minutes.

Your cousin Elsa will introduce herself to the all of the sobbing guests after receiving your signal; point. And she will speak with a sweet voice, and her words will warm their hearts. She will lend them her black handkerchief and motion them to come outside and get some air, where bold Otto will propose a shot and a toast to my memory.

Two minutes up, Junior, and excuse yourself from my mentor...You may then look at Victor, make eye contact with him, and head outside to find all of those obnoxious relatives drinking jovially and laughing. And upon waiting for Victor to catch them, indicate to Otto and Elsa that my video persona has taken back the armchair, ready to resume with the film.

10. Sit down. I'm ready to continue:

Shall we go on? Actually, allow me to refresh my drink. Yes, Mozart, bring the gift bags...

(Out of the side room—stage left from the corpse—my good friend, Daniel, will spring out wearing a period outfit and a pink wig. He will recite the vulgar words of Rimbaud to the melody of Figaro's *Overture*, while he presents luxurious gift bags to all the guests. Each of the bags includes a framed photograph of myself, very glamorous, you see? Styrofoam peanuts. A copy of the Merriam Webster's English/Spanish pocket dictionary. And a scratched DVD titled: "Foxcroft Guildenbaum's Video Will Art Film – directed by Foxcroft Guildenbaum.")

That's better. Well, where was I? Ah, yes...

(The motivation behind this shot in the film is not to draw focus on the extensiveness of wealth, but rather on my nose, which I've always

felt to be the focus of my face. And, Junior, I met many filmmakers in my day.)

And as Hamilton Guildenbaum used to say...Let's waltz, shall we? I hope you've all had your good share of coffee and nuegaros. In fact, I would prefer if all of you are right on the edge of bubbly...

First and foremost, I announce that I will be limping my way through the afterlife with a cedar peg leg. Yes, I can smell it now inside the coffin here. Yes, I have donated my left foot to medical research, and by doing so, I repay my debt to the world of science, which has been exquisitely enticing during my lifetime. My family, please don't feel ashamed of me. It was a rather collaborative foot, really. So I say, good riddance.

Father Chuchito Delgado. My dear Chus, you have taught me everything that I came to forget about being a devoted Catholic. But do not misunderstand me, Father, look at the way I turned up...and it should be attributed to your person. To you, I leave my collection of Hawaiian shirts.

Francisca and Leonor...I confess, I wanted you both to be boys. And to no avail, how I analyzed your genitals after you were born, hopelessly trying to find a penis somewhere...It really has made me appreciative to find my predictions right ever since. Queen Franzie, you are an exact replica of your mother, who can be so bitter and charismatic at times. Keep embracing that sarcasm and you'll end up marrying a man like myself. Leonor...don't let your sister convince you that you are repellent to the eye...you have always been the prettiest. Remember that you did not inherit the Guildenbaum nose. To you ladies, I wish to leave behind all of my collected paintings. Barnett Newman's artwork should only become more valuable as more years pass and more people start to think critically and see how very annoying is the media. This would never happen in this country...I suggest you both look into that.

Juanita de Silva, you are the smartest woman I have ever met. Please, do not mistake this for malicious sarcasm. I want to thank you for

every conversation we ever had, and how you considered every aspect of all the most ridiculous of my epiphanies. You did give me too much credit, and let me say, you are a lovely fool. With pleasure, I give you my library. I am certain you already own a copy of each one of these books, so allow me to be annoying to you by unnecessarily making your library two times sillier.

Miguelito! What a loyal bastard man you've been. I mean that. I'm happy to have known you. I want you to take over the coffee plantations, they are yours, they have always been yours. You certainly have worked on the land more than me...however, I will ask that you allow Lipton to live at the hacienda.

(Junior, there is a good chance that your mother plans to leave at this note. Convince her to stay put...tell her there is more.)

And do me a favor and start wearing deodorant. And, Victor, the deodorant note is just a personal recommendation and is not to be considered as a condition. Can everybody please turn to look at this man? Victor, quit shaking your head at me. I'm dead. You've been shaking your head all your life. Do you realize this? You've become a person who shakes his head at other people. I'm joking with you, of course, Victor, but seriously...you're a naysayer and you don't conjugate your verbs correctly.

To my youngest son, cheers. Here's to you, Otto...I must say, I never imagined a Guddenbaum on the other side of the psychiatrist desk. I have to ask that you take care of my beloved companion, Foxcroft. The parrot, not your brother. And also of that fat cat that I'm very fond of, Polykleitos. You may disregard the other cats...I don't care. And speak to them on a regular basis, especially to the parrot. Another thing, both of these creatures seem to show less stress around the ocean...So, I want to give you the house in St. Tropez...Yes, I believe that's all for you. Good luck in life, son.

My love of a lifetime! I miss you dearly from the afterlife. I remember when I first met Manuela, always waiting on the same corner in downtown San Salvador, waiting for me, of course. Everybody always judged her, and still judge her, and she was always open about her passionate

career. *Manu, you have made me a young man many times over. I wish I could tell all of you how much we made love. I wish I could recount... how we got tangled together to face the Caribbean. And how many times, and how many cars, and how many transatlantic flights, and the balloon! Yes. Manu. Mi Manu. I want you to have my shares of Copefa. They are worth quite a lot of money, maybe you can travel more now...I would send you my love a million times, but there are no mailboxes here. Goodbye, my love. Take good care of yourself.*

And to the woman who married me...Mrs. Erica Guildenbaum. Could you believe that after all of my defiant acts as a lousy husband... acts that frequently led to many emotional meltdowns...she still kept my name. What a woman. What a terrific woman, honestly. And I mean that. She is not funny at all. Erica, you should have gotten a bolted chest a couple of days ago. Mozart is going to hand you the key to that. I am sorry for everything. You must understand that I needed you to come tonight, and how very clever, you see?

(I am giving your mother all of my left socks. You really ought to witness her face when she opens the chest, she creates the most comical expressions sometimes.)

Also, Erica, as customary, I am giving you one dollar in quarters. I think you are meant to spend that money before you enter your house again. Maybe buy yourself a chocolate?

Finally...Foxcroft Junior the Second. Here's an epithet for you: Foxcroft the Fortunate. I leave you my apartment in Berlin, which I believe to be magical. It was my favorite place in the world.

(Walk into the closet in the master bedroom. You should see a variety of my shoes there. Underneath the pair that I claim were owned by Peter Sellers there is a rug. This rug hides a map of the globe. This is my most important possession, Junior. It is now yours. Notice all of the countries marked with an X in red. Those are the countries to which your great-grandfather, and your grandfather, and myself have ever traveled. But read carefully now: We have been fortunate enough to have engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse in each country,

except for the ones that are not yet marked. I leave this adventure in your hands. It was your great-grandfather's wish to experience every woman from the world, sexually. And this tradition has been continued with my father, and then myself. Now, it is your feat to carry. I myself achieved an impressive number of countries. I do believe my record broke those of my father and grandfather. Junior, you may very well finish it.)

Have fun with that, Junior.

Well. That was it. I'm done giving, and with the exception of being dead, I feel much better about this whole night. Here's to a future without me. And with all of my heart...Se acabuche pat'é cuche.

11. Junior, bury me right before dawn, that'll give you an eventful day⁹ under a tight amount of dirt. I think you'll bury me alone. You can only offend enough people in your lifetime. That is good enough for me.

12. As I grew older, especially while I still lived in El Salvador, I found...you'll find that not everything is amusing anymore. Or perhaps, things are simply not as amusing as when you are young. As a child, humor is everywhere and everything is very funny. As an adult, you'll see that it is your job to pursue the humor in life. And it, really, does not find the old man, if the old man does not wish to be found. You have to fabricate your own humor, and the majority of times it happens at the expense of someone else. And then, maybe, you obtain a little joke. A very funny little joke, Junior, just a tiny joke. But you end up retelling it again and again, until it is no longer funny for you. And while all of your friends and all of your family keep asking to hear it once more, you'll say fuck you,¹⁰ come up with your own tiny jokes!

9. Which you must spend with the family. Buy them lunch and propose going to the movie theater; perhaps you'll come across a Wes Anderson movie. That would be funny enough, but remember that I recently died. And be nice to everyone. I would do it myself, but my current situation has me

10. But you won't just say fuck you, then call it a day...Oh no, Junior. You must not allow this. Remember that they crossed the line. It was your little joke. And do you even remember how much you laughed when you first heard it? So, you emphasize it, FUCK YOU, and suddenly you are overreacting, but then you smile. And maybe you accompany it with a little bow of the head. But then maybe you want to shake them and scream again

And what a joke that will be when it happens to you.

13. Junior, I write this to you because I can see much of me in you.
And if you fail at following any of these simple instructions...I am going to come haunt you in your sleep and pull your feet.

From infinity,
Foxcroft Guildenbaum