



Flory Cantillon's Funeral

This story is about three hundred years old. It's part of the tradition of oral story-telling in Ireland. It was made more literary by T. Crofton Croker (1798-1854), who adapted it for publication. In that form, it was a favourite of the Irish poet and senator W.B. Yeats.

The Cantillons were an ancient family. For centuries, when one of them died, they were buried¹ in the family's own burial-place. This was on a small island not far from the shore² in Ballyheigue Bay.

However, the island disappeared long ago. It sank beneath the sea during a great storm³. The fishermen say they have often seen the walls of an old chapel⁴ beneath them in the water, as they sail over the clear green sea on a sunny afternoon.

For the Cantillons, as for other ancient Irish families, their burial-place was an important part of their heritage⁵. After the island disappeared, they continued to put their dead in coffins⁶, and they carried the coffins to Ballyheigue as before. They would put the coffin on the beach⁷, and leave it where the sea would reach⁸ it at high tide⁹. In the morning, the coffin had disappeared. It was

¹ **buried**: To bury something is to put it in a hole in the ground, and then fill in the hole. Bury, buried, have buried; and the noun is burial. Bury is pronounced BERRY, buried BERRID and burial BERRIAL.

² **the shore**: The beach. The coast and the shore or seashore are the edge of the sea; where the sea meets the land. The **coast** could be a beach or cliffs but the **shore** is usually a beach.

³ **great**: Strong and impressive.

⁴ **chapel**: A very small church. It's often a private church for a rich family.

⁵ **heritage**: Your heritage can be anything (things, money, culture, eye colour, etc) that you get from your parents or grandparents. Inheritance is the same general idea.

⁶ **coffin**: A box for the body of a dead person.

⁷ **they would put...**: They used to put... (This structure with 'would' often appears in stories about the past. 'When they were young, they would often sit by the fire in the evenings').

⁸ **the sea would reach it**: The sea arrived at the coffin.

⁹ **high tide**: The tides are daily changes in sea level. At high tide, the surface of the sea around Ireland can be 4 metres higher than at low tide, and the sea covers the beaches.

traditionally believed that it had been taken away by the ancestors¹ of the dead person, and put in their family tomb.²

Connor Crowe, a County Clare man, was related to the Cantillons by marriage. He was also from a proud family³. He was often called "Connor Mac in Cruagh, of the seven quarters of Breintragh".⁴

Connor was proud of his name. He was a man who drank two pints of salt water before breakfast, for its medicinal virtues; and for the same reason, I suppose, he drank double that quantity of new whiskey⁵ between breakfast and night.

He did this with as little inconvenience to himself as any man in the barony⁶ of Moyferta; and if I added the baronies of Clanderalaw and Ibrickane, I don't think I would be wrong.⁷

Connor Crowe had heard the story of this old chapel under the sea, and he was waiting for the death of old Florence⁸ Cantillon so that he could find out⁹

¹ **ancestors**: Grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, etc.

² **family tomb**: Like a crypt or mausoleum, this is a closed room in a church or churchyard, where dead members of the family are put. Pronounced TOOM.

³ **proud family**: An Irish way to say 'a noble family': a rich family with a long history.

⁴ **seven quarters**: A noble family may have a 'coat of arms' (a family badge or symbol). One way to show that your noble family has a longer history than most noble families is 'quartering', or dividing the shield into four parts, or even more.

⁵ **drank two pints of salt water ... and double that quantity of new whiskey**: Don't try this at home; exaggeration is an art form in Ireland! Irish **whiskey** is spelled with an e, unlike Scotch whisky. They both come from the Gaelic *uisge beatha* which means 'water of life' like the Latin *aqua vitae*, the French *eau de vie* or the Scandinavian *akvavit*.

⁶ **barony**: Ireland had about 300 administrative areas called baronies. These three are quiet rural areas - just a few small villages and farms.

⁷ **as little inconvenience ... would be wrong**: More artistic exaggeration. The technical name for this literary device is **hyperbole**.

⁸ **Florence**: A man's name in Ireland, where it was often made shorter to Flory or Flurry. Outside Ireland, Florence is a woman's name, and it's the English-language version of the Italian city name, Firenze.

⁹ **find out**: Discover, learn. 'I lost my door-key, but I didn't **find out** until I got back home'. 'I just found out my mother's birthday is tomorrow!' 'How did you find out?' 'My sister told me.' It's a phrasal verb.

the truth of it. When he heard the old man had finally died, Connor went straight to Ardfert.

Flory's body was laid out in high style¹ in the Cathedral, and what a beautiful corpse² he made.

In his youth, and even in his later years, Flory had been a very happy man who loved a good party. His family and friends made sure³ that his wake was as much fun⁴ as if Flory had been there to enjoy it himself.⁵

There were all kinds of entertainment, and no fewer than three girls got husbands there - more luck to them⁶. Everything was as it should be. The best families from all that side of the country, from Dingle to Tarbert, were at the funeral.⁷

The next day, according to family custom, the body was carried from Ardfert to the beach of Ballyheigue, while the women sang the Keen, the ancient funeral

¹ **laid out in high style**: Put on display with great style (no doubt with white and gold cloth, flowers and candles). 'Lay out' is a phrasal verb.

² **corpse**: A dead human body.

³ **made sure**: Ensured, made certain. Make vs. do: Usually we **make** physical objects (a salad, a cake, a list, a boat) and we **do** activities (studies, work, gardening). However there are exceptions for 'make': We also **make** friends, journeys, beds, eye contact, noises, enquiries, suggestions, complaints, comparisons, decisions, plans, choices, money, progress, mistakes, sure and certain.

⁴ **as much fun**: Music, dancing, making new friends, flirting, eating and drinking. An event is fun if it's exciting + interesting. Fun, good fun, great fun, the best fun (but NOT ~~funny~~, ~~funnier~~ or ~~the funniest~~. Those are for things that make you laugh.)

⁵ **wake ... fun**: In Ireland, a wake is when the friends and family of a dead person come to say goodbye to the corpse at their home. Traditionally there was loud music and drinking, dancing and playing games. This continued the customs of the Bronze Age. Homer's *Iliad* talks of the display of Hector's corpse, wailing women, food, drink and funeral games.

⁶ **more luck to them**: An Irish expression that means "*and I wish them good luck*".

⁷ **funeral**: The church ceremony at which a dead person is remembered and then buried. It is pronounced FYOONERAL.

cry of Ireland¹, long and bitterly.² At the beach, the coffin was put down on the sand, with a prayer³ for the repose of the dead⁴.

The mourners⁵ departed, one group after another, and at last Connor Crowe was left alone by the coffin. He pulled out his bottle of whiskey, his drop of comfort as he called it, which he required because of his grief.⁶ He then walked away a short distance, and sat down on a big stone that was sheltered⁷ by a tall rock. Partly concealed from view, he waited with patience for the appearance of the ghostly undertakers.⁸

The evening came on, mild and beautiful⁹. As night approached and dusk turned to darkness¹⁰, he whistled¹ an old tune which he had heard in his

¹ **the Keen:** Sad, ritualised singing by women in wailing voices. 'To wail' is to make a long, varying, high-pitched (high frequency) noise. Keening for the dead was an ancient Irish custom that more or less ended in the 1930s.

² **bitterly:** In a sad but angry way. You **feel bitter** if you are sad and angry because of unfair, unjust things in your life.

³ **prayer:** A prayer is when you ask God for something. Some prayers have standard words; every Christian knows a version of 'The Lord's Prayer' or 'Paternoster'.

⁴ **repose:** Rest or sleep. You wanted the dead person to be quiet. First, you didn't want them to be unhappy after death. Second, you didn't want them to come back ... especially at 3 o'clock in the morning. You can see the same idea in the Latin words "*Requiescat in pace*" (may he or she rest in peace) which appear in many churches.

⁵ **mourners:** The friends and family of the dead person who go to the funeral. See also *I have heard ... great mourning*, below.

⁶ **grief.** Extreme sadness. The verb is to grieve. The adjective is either grieving or grief-stricken. Stricken is an adjective from 'to strike' (strike, struck, have struck). To strike means 'to hit'. You can be panic-stricken if there is a sudden danger and you run without thinking; or grief-stricken by the death of somebody you love. Connor is perhaps not very grief-stricken, but he does like whiskey.

⁷ **sheltered:** Shelter is protection. Our homes **shelter** us from heat, cold, wind and rain. A forest will shelter you from a storm; it will also shelter you from being seen by other people.

⁸ **undertakers:** 'Undertaking' is a job. Undertakers prepare dead bodies for burial, and organise funerals.

⁹ **mild:** Gentle and pleasant; not extreme or severe. Weather and illness can be extreme or severe, but they can also be **mild**. A mild day in winter is one that is not very cold or windy. A mild illness is one that doesn't make you feel very bad. Mild is pronounced like *child* or *wild*.

¹⁰ **dusk turned into darkness:** Evening became night. **Dusk:** The time after the sun sets but before night. Dusk may last for half an hour after the sun goes below the horizon. The equivalent time before sunrise is called the dawn. A day goes from dawn to dusk.

childhood, hoping to keep foolish fears out of his head;² but the wild tune³ itself reminded him⁴ of a thousand old tales.

"If I was near the gloomy⁵ tower of Dunmore,⁶ in my own sweet⁷ County Clare," said Connor Crowe, with a sigh⁸, "I might expect the coffin to be carried off by the ghosts of prisoners who were murdered⁹ there¹⁰ long ago, in the vaults under the castle¹¹. None of them was buried decently, nor ever in a coffin. Often enough I have heard sad cries and great mourning coming from the vaults of Dunmore¹².

"However," he continued after taking another affectionate drink from the mouth of his companion and silent comforter, the whiskey bottle, "I knew all the time that it was just the sound of ocean waves at the bottom of the cliffs. Oh,

¹ **whistled**: He made a musical noise by blowing through his lips.

² **to keep foolish fears out of his head**: To stop them entering. You will often see signs that say 'Keep Out' or 'No Entry', and they mean exactly the same.

³ **wild tune**: The music of J.S. Bach is mathematical and civilised, but a wild tune is very different. It sounds almost mad. The violin is perfect for a wild tune like the fast bits of '*The Devil Went Down to Georgia*'.

⁴ **reminded**: To remind somebody is to make them remember. '*Whisky always reminds me of Scotland*.'

⁵ **gloomy**: Not light and bright but dark and sad. Days are often gloomy in winter, especially in Ireland.

⁶ **Dunmore**: Originally Dún Mór, then Dunmore, later Doonmore, this small castle was built by Philip Mac Sheeda Nor McCon for the O'Brien clan in the 16th century.

⁷ **sweet**: These are sweet, in different ways:

- sugar, honey, and some flowers (hyacinth, dianthus, nicotiana, some roses).
- a cute little child or baby animal.
- a very kind, gentle person.

Here, 'sweet' just means that Connor Crowe has a patriot's love for the county he lives in.

⁸ **with a sigh**: To sigh is to breathe out so that other people can hear it. It shows you are sad or disappointed.

⁹ **murdered**: Killed. 'Murder' is a crime. It means killing somebody, illegally, because you want to.

¹⁰ **who were murdered there**: This is an example of the 'passive voice' - it doesn't say who murdered them. We use the passive when we don't know who did it, or we don't care who did it, or we don't want to say who did it, or it's obvious who did it.

¹¹ **vaults**: The rooms under a castle or a church that have a ceiling made of stone arches.

¹² **I have heard ... great mourning**: 'Mourning' is feeling sorrow (sadness) or grief (extreme sadness) because of the death of a friend or family member. If you mourn for somebody, you don't necessarily make a noise.

Dunmore, you're a gloomy-looking tower on a wet, grey day, with the gloomy hills behind you, when we all have gloomy thoughts in our hearts, and there you are like a ghost, rising out of the smoke made by the seaweed burners on the beach¹. Well then, anyhow,"² said Connor, after a pause, "is it not a lovely night, even if the moon looks very pale in the face? May Saint Senan himself stand between us and all kinds of harm."³

It was, in truth, a lovely moonlight night. All that Connor could see were the dark rocks and the white beach, with the waves breaking on it in a melancholy murmur.⁴

Connor, despite his frequent return to the whiskey bottle, felt rather uneasy⁵, and almost began to regret his curiosity.

It was certainly a solemn sight⁶ to see the black coffin resting on the white beach. His imagination gradually converted the deep roaring⁷ of the ocean into a mournful song for the dead, and when he looked at darker shadows in the rocks he imagined strange supernatural beings.⁸

As the dark hours went by, Connor became more and more tired with watching. More than once, he found his head nodding forwards in sleep.⁹ Every time, he

¹ **seaweed burners:** This was a job. Seaweeds are big green, brown or red algae that grow in the sea and look similar to land plants. For example, *Laminaria* and *Fucus*. Some can be eaten, and some can be burned to extract chemicals for glass-making and fertiliser.

² **Well then, anyhow:** This doesn't mean anything. It just shows that he's a little anxious.

³ **May Saint Senan ... harm:** An old County Clare prayer. See *prayer*, above. **Harm** is damage (to a thing) or injury (to a person).

⁴ **murmur:** It sounded as if the waves were talking very quietly.

⁵ **uneasy:** Anxious. Uneasy is not the opposite of easy; it's the opposite of calm.

⁶ **a solemn sight:** Something that makes you feel very serious is 'solemn'. For example, a funeral is a solemn ceremony, and Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* is very solemn music.

⁷ **roaring:** Roaring is a loud, angry sound; lions roar.

⁸ **being:** Humans are often called 'human beings'. (The equivalent for an animal is 'creature' - strange creature, fierce creature, friendly creature, etc).

⁹ **nodding ... shake:** To nod your head is to move it up and down; to shake your head is to move it from side to side as if you are watching a game of tennis.