

The Afterlife of George Bradshaw

The waiting room smells of antiseptic, dried blood and stale beer. I have a splitting headache and a twelve-inch gash in my right leg that hurts like hell.

There must be thirty or forty people here. Most are silent, staring vacantly into space, but I can hear muffled weeping somewhere near the back of the room. A radio is playing 'O Come All Ye Faithful', which strikes me as a bit insensitive because no one here wants to be reminded it's Christmas Day.

The guy to my right is wearing a hospital gown and his face is the colour of wet putty. He's holding a yellow ticket. So is the woman next to him and everyone in the row behind. Why have they got yellow tickets and I've got a pink one? I'm about to ask him what it means when someone calls my name. A man in a white coat with a clipboard says "Ticket". As I hand it to him, he looks at me with one eyebrow raised and nods towards an open door.

I limp into a brightly lit office and sit down. It's an old-fashioned sort of room; the air is heavy with furniture polish and cigars, the walls lined from floor to ceiling with leather bound books. An old man in an ill-fitting navy suit is sitting in a leather chair behind an enormous oak desk. His thinning hair is plastered across his head and he has a scrawny neck like a plucked turkey.

He rummages through a pile of paperwork and picks out the only pink folder amongst a stack of yellow ones. He opens it and yawns, clicking a ballpoint pen as it hovers over the first page. He doesn't look up. Eventually he says, in a voice thick with tobacco, "George William Bradshaw." It's not a question so I say nothing.

"Can you confirm your date of death?"

"Yesterday I think."

"Correct. 24th December 2010." And he ticks a box.

"Cause of death?"

"I'm afraid I can't remember."

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He looks up from the folder and sighs.

“Well, Mr Bradshaw, it appears that you drank a large quantity of alcohol and tried to cycle home. Does that give you a clue?”