

## A Will To Give?

By John McNeil

### Summary

A mean-spirited businessman makes out his will.

### Bible reference

I Timothy 6:17-19

### Characters

Silas Brody, a businessman

A young lawyer (preferably female)

### Props

Office desk, two chairs

### Setting

A lawyer's office

### Script

Silas: So being of a sound mind and all that stuff, I Silas Brody hereby revoke all former wills and make the following provisions for the disposal of my estate. That's how we start, isn't it?

Lawyer: Not exactly, Mr. Brody. But don't worry, I'll tidy up the details. It's all standard legal jargon and it will amount to the same thing. The important thing is that you do make a will, so that your estate is settled in the manner you want.

Silas: You're bloody right there. There's no way those greedy hands are getting their hooks into what I've sweated to build up all these years. And that goes for government and family (he finds it hard to say the word) alike.

Lawyer: If I may say so, even though you obviously still have many good years ahead of you yet, Mr. Brody, you're wise to plan your affairs in advance.

Silas: Not so many good years as that. Either before or to come. Maybe if there were but this cancer doesn't leave too much to hope for in that regard.

Lawyer: I'm sorry, I didn't know

Silas: Why should you. I don't make a habit of shouting my affairs from the rooftops. And I don't need you patronizing me, either. Come on; let's get on with it.

Lawyer: Well, the usual thing first of all is to appoint trustees. They can be your wife, children, someone else you trust, or of course ourselves.

Silas: I didn't get where I am today by trusting people, young lady. I pay people good money to do good work. I'm not afraid to spend top dollar, but I expect top performance. Your father understood me. He handled my affairs satisfactorily till he retired, and I'm paying you to do the same. Is that clear?

Lawyer: Perfectly clear.

Silas: Then let's forget this nonsense of making trustees of any of my family. If I thought they had an ounce of responsibility, I'd pay them, too.

Lawyer: Well, that brings us to the next matter. Providing for your family after the settlement of any debts, funeral expenses, death duties and the like. You can leave the exact wording to us. The important thing is to make sure your intentions are carried out. Now, I presume your wife and children would be your first concern.

Silas: My wife and I haven't lived together for 15 years.

Lawyer: But you're not divorced?

Silas: No, I pay her to stay out of my hair.

Lawyer: You pay her...

Silas: Look it up in my file. If we'd divorced, the settlement would have cost me my business. It wasn't much then, but she and I both knew I was on the verge of succeeding. She could see the sense in not throwing away a comfortable future for short-term gain. The arrangement can continue.

Lawyer: You don't want to give her anything additional? Does she have any claim on family heirlooms, or the like?

Silas: Look, let's get this straight. Your father understood this and I expect you to as well. One, Louise had nothing before she married me. Two, I don't give anything to anybody. I expect them to earn it. I had to, and so do they. I worked my butt off to achieve what I have. I know the value of every dollar I sweated to earn. I did three after-school jobs to earn pocket-money when I was a kid. And I held down a full-time job while I put myself through university. There were none of these soft student loans in those days. And after that, it was 80-hour weeks building up the business. Giving is not in my vocabulary.

Lawyer: With a schedule like that, you can't have had much time for relationships, I guess.

Silas: Relations are the easiest thing in the world to buy. Heaven knows, I bought enough of them when I married Louise. If any of them came to my funeral it would be only to dance on the grave. But that reminds me I hear tell that in places like Scotland they have professional mourners. Allow an appropriate sum to pay a piper to raise a dirge a lament to any lingering hopes they might have had.

Lawyer: You have children, though. Two, I believe. They'll grieve.

Silas: Only over their lost chances.

Lawyer: Do they know you have cancer?

Silas: No. We've not communicated for years.

Lawyer: Pardon me if I'm speaking out of turn. You say you've never given to anyone, but as a father you must have given to them as they grew up. Birthdays, Christmas presents, the ordinary day-to-day love of a parent.

Silas: I was away from home so much, I had to leave most of that to Louise. And okay, perhaps I was more comfortable with that. I learnt precious little about giving from my parents that it wasn't something I knew how to do. The most they taught me was to look out for my backside, and to hold on to what I had. Then when I did try to give to my children they threw it back in my face. They sided with their mother, chose to ignore the career paths I planned for them in short, told me what I could do with my money. What does anyone get by giving? I got nothing.

Lawyer: Some get satisfaction from seeing their money used for a good cause, helping others. Others see it as a way of thanking God for the good things they have enjoyed in life.

Silas: Really! God gave precious little to me. I earned it the hard way. I don't believe in propping up churches, do-gooders or charities, and philanthropy is misguided altruism.

Lawyer: Where does that leave you now? In relation to your will, I mean.

Silas: Cut them out!

Lawyer: Aah, I'm afraid the law doesn't allow you to do that. Or rather, even if you do, they can contest the will in court, and they will be awarded a share anyway.

Silas: We'll see about that. I can try. There are ways of exercising control beyond the grave, and your job is to help me.

(Stage lights progressively dim from here to end.)

Okay, no doubt they'll fight it in court. But I want to tie it up so tight that even if they succeed it'll cost them a packet. With a bit of luck, the fear of losing will put them off trying.

Lawyer: Are you sure this is the best course? Perhaps a little generosity may help them realize that you had their best interests at the beginning. Maybe they already want to re-establish communication with you, but don't where to start.

Silas: Your sensibilities are causing you to overstep your professional responsibilities, young lady. We'll continue if you please. (Pauses, looks around.) It seems to be getting rather dark in here. Could we have a little more light, please?

Lawyer: (Puzzled) It's the middle of the afternoon, Mr Brody. Are you sure you're all right?

Silas: Perfectly. I've done a bit of reading, and it looks like I can set up a trust that will tie the money up for two generations. Where's that paper I drafted with my plans? Here we are. That means the money won't be freed up before their children come of age. I can only hope that my grandchildren will have a bit more going for them than their parents. (Pause, he's struggling to see.) For Heaven's sake, young lady, what's wrong with you? Can't we have some more light in here?

(Fade to black)

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