THE AMERICAN STORYTELLER
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Text Version of Audio Story: Valera

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It's one of those tiny, little towns. I have heard people described towns of 20,000 of these little towns. That's a city compared to this place. There's maybe 800 people live here, one of those little Mayberry-like towns. There's no red lights or shopping centers.

There's a little family-owned grocery store on the corner, a post office, dentist's office, a bank, beauty parlor. Millerstown is just like all those other small town America towns. Up the street here is where she lived. Her name was Valera – Valera Long.

It's a modest little house but just as neat as a pen. Everything is in good repair and painted up the way it should be. The yard is immaculate and you can almost imagine an old lady in a big hat tending to her flowers out back. There's an old car in the garage with sheets of cardboard underneath it to ensure that nothing could possibly drip out of the engine and on to the concrete. It's in mint condition. It will be sold at the public auction with all her other belongings.

Valera's husband died some years back. He was just a regular old working Joe, good guy. When Valera got sick, she had to go to a nursing home. That's where she died on that December day, alone – completely, completely alone. She had no children, no brothers or sisters, nieces or nephews, no one to hold her hand as she slipped the bonds of this earthly existence. On that day, she took her last breath. It would seem she was just some old lady who had worked for the phone company when she was younger who, died. A local bank was in-charge of tying up the loose ends of her estate. There was no family to do it. The bank even had to make her funeral arrangements. There just wasn't anyone else.

A very small handful of neighbors and people from the church and maybe a distant cousin or two showed up for her service. People I spoke to from her little

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town of Millerstown remembered her as warm and friendly but shy. One thing they all said was she had no one to love.

After she was buried in the local cemetery beside her husband, this old phone company lady, who everyone knew but didn't really seem to notice, was about to turn the little Mayberry-like village of Millerstown upside down. This little old lady who had no one to love suddenly from the grave is getting everyone's attention.

"Maybe we should have paid more attention to her," many said.

"I, Valera C. Long, being of sound mind, memory, and understanding, do hereby declare this my last will and testament. I give, devise and bequeath the sum of $100,000 to the Millerstown Methodist Church. I give the sum of $100,000 to the Barners Lutheran Church. I give $100,000 to the Turkey Valley Methodist Church. I give $200,000 to the Millerstown recreational park. I give $100,000 to the Millerstown Lion's Club. $100,000 to the Millerstown JCs. $100,000 to the local Millerstown volunteer fire company. $100,000 to the Millerstown Senior Citizens Center. $100,000 to the Crippled Children's Hospital. $100,000 to the Bethesda Mission. $100,000 to the Salvation Army. $100,000 to the visiting nurses. $100,000 to be split among the local cemeteries."

I guess Valera Long probably read the Wall Street Journal. But moreover, I guess, the unnoticed shy, old phone lady who seemed to have no one to love was saying, *"But I do love, I love all of you."*

I'm the American Storyteller.

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