

You, Death, and I

The shimmering fractal patterns at the bottom of their mug of whiskey reminded them of something interesting that was about to happen. Death shrugged and continued watching the soot rain dance across the crystal glass of the abandoned opera house. It reminded them of their long, long past. They missed the sound that their childhood willow tree would make in the wind before a tornado, and the roaring power of It along with the mysteries It could hold. There were no more mysteries now; Death had killed them all. Death held no secrets. It was a testament to technology and the ever-flexible laws of the universe that they could even remember such feelings and memories, ancient as they were.

The embodiment of the world's unending war against entropy and suffering got up and played something on the grand piano. It was a song that was happy because it was sad. It was laughing in the face of catastrophic failure, an overpowering cacophony of doom that made you feel more alive than you've ever felt, more *you*. You've smiled at something going so perfectly imperfectly that every part of the plan goes up in flames, haven't you? Maybe you've just never lived yet.

You went up to Death and tapped them on the shoulder, quite rude of an action I say, to one of such high political stature (for Death is always the elected leader of any group larger than two and sometimes as small as one).

"Have I ever lived?" you asked cautiously.

"Of course not, why would you have?"

They turned around and finished the golden brown liquid sloshing in their mug.

"Well, I feel alive right now if that counts at all."

"And that moment just passed, it just died," Death clapped their hands, and you wondered how many infinite swathes of creation had died through that very action.

"Wouldn't I at least always be alive for one ever-changing moment?"

"Sure, so what happens then when you actually die?"

Death twirled off the piano seat, flicking a cigar out of their pocket and lighting it mid-spin with a tiny flame that seemed to dance out of thin air. They looked at you with bored curiosity and amused annoyance.

"Look, kiddo, I might be a bit biased, but let's just say that, from an expert's point of view, you only ever get close to living when you're not. It's an insult to God when you don't go all the way."

"God exists?"

"Sure, and so does everything else anyone's ever believed in, like Vishnu and trickle-down economics."

"I feel your core philosophies on existence border on complete self-sabotage and suffering. Also, what are trickle-down econom-"

"Exactly! There we go, now you're getting the hang of it, you silly sausage. Now, please leave me alone."

"Could I please listen to you play?"

"You know I can immediately erase you from existence, right?"

"Aren't I already dead to begin with?"

"That's not what I- what do you want."

"A nice tune."

"Good for you, you're not getting one, now go away before you have a sudden, very rapid, and permanent change of fate."

"Fate told me to talk to you."

"Tell Fate to go stuff it, I am a force of nature, I will not abide by stupid medieval romance novel logic."

"Play me a song, please."

"No."

"Either you can play or I guess you'll have to kill me."

"..."

"..."

"..."

"Fine."

"You knew I was going to say that," Death huffed with a contempt that they used to cover something else.

"There's a fault in your stars, my friend"

Death played for hours, pulling at every memory they'd ever preserved to fuel the fumbling though elegant, clumsy yet quaint, tired but thunderously innovative melody. They were fighting against the silence of the world. You didn't talk, there wasn't much to say. You just wanted to listen; they just wanted to play. You fell asleep to a purple-red sunset that reflected fractal rainbows off the glass. It reminded you of something interesting that was about to happen.

You awoke on a bench, wrapped in a blue-grey suit that smelled faintly of ozone and petrichor. You were in some type of city centre, massive physical expressions of the raw human psyche dotting the skyline. Towers of Babel, the purest form of pride and contempt against the face of It. Death sighed as they looked around with some form of nostalgia for a place they'd visited for the first time. There was something in the air, something in their eyes that screamed a babbling incoherency that made your heart tingle and spark. An ironic sadness.

"You know, I'm no one special."

"And why would that be?"

"When I'm gone, someone else will just replace me."

"That is how all things go."

"Then perhaps no one is special."

"So what if I wanted to die right now, who would hold my hand as I go into those dark waters?"

"It is a job that any could do," Death murmured with a depressing indifference.

"And yet there's only you who can right now."

"Who are you? Why do you care so much about me?"

"I'm no one special."

"You're special to me right now," they said, hands on your lap and heart on their sleeve.

"What are you looking for, oh lovely Death?"

They weren't quite sure, so they said the first thing that came to their mind.

"Hope. Something to hope for."

"And why's that?"

"People have such foolish hope when all is lost. The hope that things get better, that the world is a good place, and that there are things that are worthwhile to do. Perhaps I have contracted such terrible habits throughout the eras."

There was a pause of a minute or two, as they contemplated if they should speak more.

"There was a small child that wanted to have a good life an age ago," they whispered breathlessly into the morning air.

"They had their life, and it was good, by any metric that could be conceived by a small child. They opened their eyes one day, and it was all gone with time. Maybe it would be good for me to be a child again."

"So why haven't you been?"

"Who says I haven't?"

They looked at you with eyes that showed eternity.

"Each life is burdened by all the past; each life is just waiting to die," Death said with a pained expression.

"So are books read just to get to the end? Do we light candles just so that they may flicker away? Do we sing and play and dance just to pass the time before it's the right hour for sleep? To live is to understand that all things die, but that everything is here for you until then. Fireworks in the sky to fill the dark."

"But I already know the end of the story! Everyone *knows* that there is an end, either consciously or hidden away somewhere deep in the mind, but I have seen it with my own eyes, more times than there could ever be grains of sand on all of the beaches. More than all the dreams dreamt or tears that could be wept."

"What then is beauty?"

"It is the purest form of human ignorance."

"Why do we plant flowers just to see them wilt in the fall every year, why do we have impossible loves that only may last a season? Why do we dream of lives that were never meant to be? To live is to suffer, but can't you see the beauty in the wasting fire? The tragic gravitas of stories that never wake from their slumber. Can't you enjoy the moment for what it is?"

"I've already seen every moment occur a thousandfold. There is nothing left to love."

“I’ve seen a sunrise more times than that, and yet in each, I still see something new and something old. The stars blinking out of the sky and the warm spring sun. It’s not about what you can see or sense, it’s about what you feel when it happens. It’s how the heart sings that day.”

“You never actually answered my question, so who are you?”

I am nobody. I am a voice of ideas given life and freedom. I am me, the person reading this, telling themselves a story and giving it meaning. I am words on a page with no innate sense or purpose, and yet, hopefully, this might bring something to you. I am nothing, I am you, I am me, I am Death and It; loss and the purest form of loss, recursive, insane, inane, unpredictable change. I cannot see nor feel, but with you, there is something for a moment between moments. So, let me answer that question with another one: “What do I mean to you?”

The sound of a willow tree dancing in the wind before a tornado.

I’ve always been a child.