

# **TO ACHIEVE DEATH**

**by Terence Sellers**

And so it came to pass that he too was claimed by the plague. By his bed I stayed - I could not be drawn away from the fevered eyes, the daily frailer hands. Towards the end few others would come near, the thick of contagion a psychic effect - fear the molecules of the air.

My devotion was viewed as a morbid thing, they shuddered at my constancy - for was I not some kind of maggot, why didn't I go, get on with my life? But I was to be the next to die. Their kindly warnings filled me with disgust.

What did I care, anymore, of the difference between life and death? In that long-extended twilight we sat together, while around us the world froze into mute and meaningless forms - yet white somehow, and smoother.

The concerns and normal noise of those humans we had contact with irritated us with their fatuous health. They were frantic with life, the lie - that there was no worm in the rose - that they could go on, blind in the security - while we were set upon the truth that destroys all security.

He suffered in a hundred ways and did not particularly want the attentions I showed him. But thus it had always been between my beloved and I. He had never understood my attachment to him. How I loved him was for him still unknown. And now more than ever did I embarrass him with adorations, as in each passing day his powers waxed and waned, and waned.

The end was long in coming - that inevitable our one dull companion. In the sere twilight of his death, a deep and velvet grey gathered. This half-light warmed and soothed us... for in some incomprehensible way, we loved this death. For it was ours.

Still I as putative representative of the living made an effort, now and then, to turn his thoughts to things eternal - to poetry, ideas, the celestial abstractions of music. All the beautiful infinites. I say I tried, but the artist in him was tormented by such perfections. For he could not longer engage in creation, torn as he was now from all material.

I looked at the one painting of his that was mine, and I saw the living germ, his very jewel of life that still beat with its creator's full pulse. The secret of his vision, mined by him from a depth that would not soon again be opened - would not soon repeat itself - leapt to my eye and tormented me with all that was best, beautiful and lost.

His death was a crime against all Art.

The proud and ambitious heart in him seethed against the strictures of the disease. For long hours I sat with him in the greying air, steadily thicker... gazing upon the hands, the slowly weakening eye, and rail against the loss of further elaborations... the incomplete text of his dream. That constant twilight sealed our mouths with dust.

When he died, those who felt they had some claim upon him gathered round to cut up the corpse. To prevent my hearing his name in their mouths, I maintained total silence towards anyone who spoke to me. They left me alone, and I stood apart (loathed by a few, as was to be expected.)

For certainly I was one source of infection? Again was I viewed a "carrion-bird." One insinuated I was the murderer. Next in line to die? Good, certainly I deserved my death!

I did not follow the funeral cortege, but remained in my rooms to make the last arrangements. Oh deadly meditations! Long past midnight I prepared to go out, drew on my gloves and took up the pistol. It had been well-oiled for weeks, and loaded but two days before his last crisis. I left the door unlocked - all pertinent letters written, and left unsealed on my desk. I set off on foot to the cemetery.

Those last embraces! The pain had kept him awake all night. No drug could divert him anymore from anguish - the consciousness of his fate. And in the dull light of yet another dawn, I held him in my arms as he wept a last time. It was then I told him of my decision. Though he begged me not to, it was in desultory fashion. He understood.

So that is why you never feared infection - you planned this all along. I said nothing, as again into that sublime indifference I watched him lapse...

But this last 'devotion' of mine, if you will, was to add to his torment. When I insisted,

“I do not want this life without you - I want to go too!” I saw his mouth set, he averted his gaze from mine.

I went on: “This side was intolerable - until I met you... In you, with you, new worlds were revealed. Your appearance held back my hand for a time - from the thing inevitable.”

So you’re not even really dying for me, he teased, with that signature peevishness. I am just some excuse for you to indulge your endemic masochism? He tsked and made a motion as if to brush a fly - Then all at once he shouted, GET AWAY FROM ME!

I was crying, told him he was cruel to insist I go on living in the stinking bad world. “YOU don’t wish to stay,” I faltered. Oh don’t I? he laughed. And I have better reason to go - I have the right! You don’t.

So you must not do it. You must do as I say.

I pretended to agree, “Alright then... I obey.” I’ll go on living in a dead world, crawling through days full of sickened hate.

Life for what we were, he urged me - but faintly. I knew he knew - I said no more. This valiant will to live had always been a charade. Neither of us had ever been able to feel very thrilled about what there was “left to do,” in a short and shallow future, full of yet more plague, torment and unfreedom.

Later he reconsidered the oldest theme: In our long search for the only panacea - love - we have achieved Death. Death, as part of love, we have embraced more strictly than any other part. No children - no marriage - perversion - self-indulgence: these negative worships yet have left our hearts uncorrupted.

You have time, he panted... you are ungrateful. Death we have too long worshipped, our love... he trailed off. It is ungrateful... for you to continue hating the Life which brought us together. There will be another... he was stopped by a spasm of coughing.

Black flower of his illicit passions! We tried to laugh at the sickening irony.

He was surpassing me, indeed. But I had still myself to surpass, and achieve my purest Death with all the passion I had left.

By the end we had sworn our vows to one another anew. We passed hours in silent

beatitude... ask me not to record our words, nor the last gestures... He passed into the crisis again, swiftly downstream where I could no longer reach him. His eyes would open once a day, to gaze with fear, yes fear took even that noble heart.

Once when I rose to get a drink of water, he cried, Don't leave me!

His hand wavered towards me - I rushed back to his side. Don't ever - he started - then catching my eye, stopped.

That was enough for me. All doubt and hesitation could be laid aside.

Then we were alone no longer. The mob descended to begin their pluckings.



He scaled the cemetery wall at a low point he had noted on reconnaissance. Towards the beloved grave he ran, and with a light heart. He even laughed as he clutched the weapon. Kneeling by the stone that had not yet been graven, he spoke to his beloved one last time, and drew from his pocket his death.

“My beloved, my heart, I follow you now.”

He prayed he would not be thrown to the winds, adrift on another hundred-year search.

“I hope you believed me. I hope you are waiting.”

The winds stirred faintly and he thought it might be he.

“My beloved, this world is nauseating without you. I shall die anyhow of grief, and though you are worthy of that prolonged homage, I prefer not to grieve in any public eye.

“For inevitably I would live on, forget a little, ‘recover’ from my loss. Which thought outrages me. That perversion does occur in living: we forget. So life I no longer undertake to live.

“I will love no-one but thee! There shall be no possibility of any other love...”

He fitted the gun-barrel down his esophagus and fired. Against the ungraven stone he fell, and his blood soaked into the new-turned earth.

And the earth recoiled and rejected this offering, so his spirit could not linger there, nor conjoin with the beloved form below. It flew into the air -

But the spirit of his beloved was waiting there for him. And at last, and for the first time, they embraced. And never again would there be any obstruction to their embrace. There was no-one, nor would there ever be anyone, to tear them asunder.

Thus hard entwined, they travelled to a place where they had lived together, and had deeply loved nature, mountains, deserts and dry streams. And it was there in that clarion sky where the two souls became one, and drifted upon the astral - tranquil, clear and diamond-hard. Sparkling dense light leapt out, so all men saw and wondered that a new star had come into being. Was it a new creation, this marvel of the night?

But would such a well-knit Soul again have to be born? Would there be any flesh worthily unfortunate enough to receive Perfection? But from this, too, you see, they were freed! Never again to have to return.

Yet in their embrace, never broken and ever-renewed, do they bring lovers together as they had been brought - to a most final refinement of love.

And now, to mind and page, may this soul dispense a boundless inspiration, enliven my cell with visions sublime and lithe. So may I tell of hearts unchastened and free - tell us, dark spirit, of love's nobility! We shall meet again ... we shall meet again, in our deathless dream, the dream of we two, where we may live together, forever, alone and One.

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