

The Day Death Died
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It was a sunny day, that fateful sinful day, when I, alone, watched Death die slowly at my feet. I watched her wheezing, seizing, lying weakly on her back, a writhing, crying monstrous sack of meat. My colleagues had brutalized her, barbarized her, cannibalized her with tools of heavy iron, pickled poisons, and fire. Oh how many tepid, teeming, tremendous inventions of medieval conception, that she had once made sure to make us endure, did we now inflict upon her? I had lost count, but I knew none of us would have to endure them anymore.

We had prepared a methodical, meticulous execution for her, we her biblical butchers. Each step had been conversed, deliberated, rehearsed, and iterated. It was now my turn, as it seemed, to do as had been written. Thus, I began to clean her in preparation for the final step of her execution.

She was disgusting, her cage, or rather her dungeon, was disgusting. The air was heavy and warm with her piercing demonic, ammoniac guilt. My skin was sticky and itchy against my thick robes of ascetic brown quilt. I tightened my gas mask harder against my face, but even that was not enough to filter out her putrid monstrous smell. I shuddered with anticipation as I stared down at that fiend from Hell. She was covered in blood, sweat, and faeces. Divine retribution we had enacted upon her for the sadistic centuries, or rather millennia, of despotic rule she'd instilled upon us. She'd spent but a fraction, a micro fraction of that time being studied by us, and now, by our mercy, she would be free to die. Not in this state however, for if she were conscious she would disgust herself, or rather, she would disgust *even* herself.

I crouched down at her feet, my large metallic boots squelching in her oozing blood, and got to work. The nails on her toes were black and purple, still steaming, gleaming, with the boiling oil which had been poured upon them. I had with me a large bucket of water into which I dipped a cloth and gently wrung drops onto her feet. They sizzled as they landed. I took a scalpel from my bag and sliced a shallow cross on the center of her feet. I told myself, when she did not react, that she had surely lost all sensation in that part of her body.

Her legs had been lashed, gashed, beaten, belted. With another cloth I wiped the thick black blood from her hairless limbs. With a thin needle and black thread, I sowed the largest of the wounds shut as I could not get them to stop bleeding, and did not want her to die before her poetic crucifixion if I could help it.

I was quite pleased to discern, as I moved on upwards, among the setting boils of her scorched and scalded stomach, that my colleagues had branded the archaic message which I had suggested: '*And Death shall be no more*'. I applied balm to the flaking, crusted skin. She winced softly. I admired the way she remained serene throughout this entire endeavor, and the restraint she had had over her own body. She could have made this much more difficult than it already was. I wondered whether it was genuine serenity or merely dejected numbness. Surely she knew what was to come. We couldn't let her go free, after all, and we couldn't overlook the crimes she'd committed upon us. I thought of the children, all of the famished children she had starved, beaten, and killed over the years. We humans always avenge our children. Surely! Surely, she knew that much was true. I cut another shallow cross across the palm of her right hand, and with a dizzy, heavy step, marched over her to cut another on her left.

It took me a long time, a dark time, a terrible, hot amount of time, to polish and scrub her scabbed shoulders and disinfect her lacerated neck. To clean the strands of her hair, stuck to each other with dried blood and bits of flesh. It took me a long, meticulous amount of time to care for her gentle face which had been savaged, ravaged and left covered with blood and with black bruises. It took me long, with trembling

hands, to wipe her chin clean of her drool. To dry her busted, crusted lips. To powder her red cheeks, to get her nose to stop spewing blood into her mouth which she could not close since my colleagues had so severely battered her jaw. With nimble fingers, I spread ointment around the black bruises of her cemetery eyes. Aside from momentary blinking, she never kept her eyes off of my covered face.

Once I had done this, given how much time I'd spent cleaning her, how tired I was, how hot this dungeon was, and how heavy my foggy mask was on my face, and given that I had completed my duty, I took off my mask, and it allowed me, for just an instant, in the last few moments of her life, to finally discern her beauty.

She was staring at me still, but was now dozing in and out of her final moments of consciousness, this ghoul, this demon, this monster. I wondered if I should say something? Talk to her in her final moments, give her a moment of comfort, of respite, before delivering the final blow, take her in my arms and stroke her hair, now clean and soft, perhaps hum a quiet prayer, rock her back and forth, lull her into her quiet eternal sleep.

I was met— nay, struck— in that instant with guttural, pandemonic laughter! My cries bellowed, echoed against the four walls of her grim and lifeless dungeon. I found myself falling onto my back, my brown robes chaffing painfully against my skin as I rolled violently across the cold cobblestone floor. I laughed and the howls rang ardently loud yet beautiful drunken hymns into my tired ears. My toes and fingers curled tightly into my feet and hands, digging into my skin, as my legs and arms flailed chaotically around me. My contorted convulsing stomach began to burn vehemently, viciously, victoriously. My choking neck began to flare brutally each time, between the laughs, I gasped savagely for air. My cheeks, contracted uncontrollably, began to brutally ache. I felt my head begin to lighten up with rapturous elation.

I suppose it was the ruckus caused by my delirium which alerted my colleagues that I had finally concluded my arduous task. A first few barged into the dungeon holding more instruments of torture and made room. Another group came in, bearing the heavy mechanical cross which Death would momentarily be nailed to and paraded across the streets of the world in a final act of humiliation.

They saw the pair of us lying there. Her, clean, stitched up and, save for a few evaporating tears which stained her eyes, completely dry. She was motionless, unmoving, uncaring, unbreathing. Her now gray lips, forever ajar, perfectly quiet, painfully still.

Me, next to her, moist and dirty. No doubt they could smell the odor of my body which had accrued over the course of my labor, seeped itself, cemented itself, into the coarse fabric of my clothing, stained my brown robes. Me, rolling uncontrollably, flailing my limbs around, bruised from smacking against the ground, like a cockroach overturned in the sand. Me, my red hot head almost unable to breathe. Me with burning tears streaming down my puckered cheeks. Me, choking on my righteous laughter, booming like the mercurial cries of a cruel and unforgiving God.

They observed me in this state, my fellow divine torturers, my fellow celestial executioners, and without hesitation every single one joined me in my laughter. They dropped their instruments, their hammers, their nails, which clanked violently against the ground. They dropped the grim metallic, mechanical cross which bellowed, blasted, burst our eardrums as it shattered the cobblestone when it fell to the ground.

They curled onto the floor overcome with the same delirium as I. Together, we formed a circle of convulsing bodies around the frozen, departed cadaver of death. We filled the sadistic demonic dungeon with the enraptured, euphoric warmth of our divine hysterics.

In this moment, I forgot about Death, and forgot about genocide. I forgot about war and conquest. I forgot about famine, and fire, and fear. I forgot about the beasts of the Stone Age, and I forgot about plagues and diseases. I forgot about sadness and forgot about joy. I forgot about life, I forgot about birth. I thought only of triumph.

And in my heart I sang the joyous declaration I would soon share with the world. It is a sunny day, ladies, gentlemen, paupers, cripples, children! Fear death no more, and bow down now to your new benign, benevolent kings!