

# Death's Song

SHREYOSI ENDOW

There's a song at the end of the tunnel. It is such that when you reach the end, it will diffuse into every cell of your body and pull you closer to it, and soon you will find yourself in a state of eternal bliss. But to hear the words, you will have to let go of every memory of every sound that you have held onto till now. My job is to help you do that. Are you ready?

*I, um, I don't know.*

It's alright to be scared. Very few people are courageous enough to trust me and hold my hand while I lead them to the other side. I've always been portrayed in a very negative light, you see. But I assure you, you need me as much as I need you, and I shall not mislead you.

*How so?*

I need you to tell me the words of the song. All those before you betrayed me once I took them to their destination and left me with my questions unanswered. My life's very mundane, you know. There isn't much to do but transport mortals in their death beds to a place I myself have no idea about. I had once heard there is madness in the words of the song and I crave madness. Will you tell me the words? Will you?

*Alright then.*

Perfect. I trust you will keep your oath. Now close your eyes.

*Okay.*

**What do you hear?**

*The beeping, buzzing machines. I hear a drop of saline trickle down the pipe towards the cannula. I hear the clanks of metal equipment and faint words like 'scalpel.' I hear people talking fast in tensed voices but in a language I don't completely understand. The machines are beeping faster.*

Keep your eyes closed. Take a deep breath. Now tell me, what do you hear?

*I can hear someone groan and vomit. And the shrill cry of a young girl. Wait, that's me isn't it?*

It is. You are going back in time. That is how it's supposed to be. Now go on. What do you hear?

*I hear the wheels of the stretcher whizz across white tiled floors and come to a halt. There's a lady reporting an accident on the television, her voice sounds robotic. I hear someone talking to my parents. They're crying.*

*Don't peek.*

*I'm not peeking. I feel out of breath.*

About time. Keep going. What do you hear?

*Honking horns and screeching brakes. Drum beats and electric guitars. The sound's too loud. I hear people laughing, and lethal liquids being poured into plastic cups. I hear a thud and I'm lying on the ground. "You alright?" "You need a drink?" I hear my own voice, "Yes."*

*You're tensing up. Relax.*

*I can't breathe anymore. What's happening to me? Help me please.*

You're inside the tunnel. The darkness shall bring out your darkest memory so prepare yourself. What do you hear?

*I can hear someone moaning, a man. And he groans and says, 'Would you stop being a wuss?' I can hear myself screaming at the top of my lungs. I... I keep... I keep calling out to*

*my mom and-*

*I feel weightless. What are you doing to me?*

Relax. Embrace the silence that surrounds you. Everything will be alright as you walk forward. The darkness is leaving you. Hold on.

*No. This doesn't feel right. Let me go back.*

I'm afraid it's too late for that now, sweetheart. You're close to where you truly belong. What do you hear?

*[silence]*

Take your time.

*I hear the echoes of a first kiss. And bated breaths and nervous giggles. I hear the footsteps of two people on an icy pavement. "Do you think we can be forever?" A boy says, and I hear my heart beat faster. I hear us singing out loud in a park in the dead silence of the night and bursting into hysterical laughter at our idiocy. I hear heated conversations and muffled cries. I hear a sad goodbye. Oh how horrible it sounds.*

You're very close. You've just got to keep going. What do you hear?

*A swing creaks against its rusty hinges. It's in my grandmother's backyard. I hear my sister's laughter. And my mother's. And my father's too. I hear the oven in grandma's kitchen beep and her high-pitched voice. "Cookie time, children." I hear happy footsteps on soft grass. "I can run faster than you," my sister yells. "Catch me if you can," I hear my voice.*

Keep going.

*Catch me if you can... catch me if you can... catch me if*

*you*

*can.*

*You're there, aren't you? Can you hear the voice?*

*It's so... beautiful.*

*Now I want you to listen carefully. Try to pick out the words and tell me.*

*[silence]*

What is she saying? Listen carefully, you!

*[silence]*

What are the words? What do you hear? Don't you dare stop now. I've held your hand and helped you all this time. Don't you dare betray me now.

*[silence]*

You've left, haven't you? Just like all those before you. You're gone.

*[silence]*

**H**Hands folder in prayer

The pilgrims' chants resounded against the harsh mud walls.

The winds sharpened the rain drops

As they howled against the restless leaves; As though, in their own words they struggled

To answer the many sheds of tears that last restive

for pardon and for peace.

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