

“Death Cab” or, “The Widow”

By T.D. Smith

The man is safe with me, now.

He is tired. He has been through an ordeal. But it is all over now. Wrapped up tightly, just as he is, in my arms.

You are safe now, my dear. Relax.

Yes, that's it.

As he drifts off, I kiss him. I can feel his mind, read his thoughts, see his dreams...

It is Halloween Night. The young man has just finished handing out candy for the evening. He is still in costume as he puts the bowl of treats above the fridge and taps the button on his app, calling the Uber. He sits waiting eagerly in his living room.

Behind him, a scuffling, a sound of multiple soft feet lightly drumming on the floorboards, a light breeze caresses his skin and a rather large shadow passes by in the corner of his eye. He turns his head to look.

Nothing.

The young man shrugs his shoulders, deciding to ignore it.

His phone buzzes. The ride is here! Off to the pub.

I see the man swinging his front door closed and using the key, bolting it, then turning and walking down the front stoop. He raises his head, turning his attention from his phone to the driver.

He stops, petrified.

For in front of the young man is not the SUV he had expected, but a sleek, black, hearse, shining forebodingly in the light of the full moon. (Yes, I can see it, too, the glinting gleam nearly reflecting off my dark eyes)

The window rolls down.

The man squints. His heart rate increases, as a chill runs down his spine. (I can feel it *too*, and it causes the very hairs on my long legs to stand!) His stomach tightens at the sight of the unbelievable.

Inside the hearse, behind the steering wheel, is a cloaked figure. It turns its head and considers the man, looking at him with an oddly piercing gaze, for a face so darkly obscured.

“Tyyyyyyyllleeeerrrrrrr.....” the figure calls out in a cold, whispering hiss.

The young man’s eyes widen. He turns and flees, running back up the front stoop and tripping on the final step, scrambling with his keys, as he looks back to see that the hearse has come up onto the curb and is slowly drifting across the lawn, inching towards the front porch! Tyler just manages to fit the key into the hole, turn the knob, open the door and get inside, slamming and bolting it back, just as the cursed vehicle reaches the front stoop.

He draws the blinds and sits down on the floor, hands hugging his knees to his chest. (What is this slight, dull aching in his sternum? He hadn’t noticed that before.) As he rocks nervously, a cold, icy chill suddenly fills the air. Rising and gaining a slight amount of courage, but limbs shaking nevertheless, he peeks through the blinds. The hooded figure is approaching the door.

Step.

By.

Step.

With each approaching step, Tyler can feel his heart drumming. (I feel its hammering against my great bosom.)

The driver knocks on the door.

Knock.

Knock.

Knock.

With this, the man’s heart rate rises exponentially. (Why are his palms *sticky*? Why no sweat?) He quivers. He dares not answer.

“P-please, go away!” he insists.

The door begins rattling, then shaking, first slightly, then violently, until the whole house is rumbling. All at once the door flies off its hinges and bursts into a thousand splinters that rain down and softly accumulate on the floor. A skeletal foot emerges from the black robe, planting itself on the threshold with a thud, followed by the rest of the dark, cloaked figure, who enters the house.

Death has arrived. It takes a step forward, toward the young man, who takes a step of his own backward.

Tyler can see the face now: a pale, plain, skull, with two flaming red lights where eyes should be. Its teeth are gritted. It raises a bony finger and gesticulates in his direction.

Suddenly, a growl!

Tyler's dog leaps into the room, the fur on his back standing on end. He faces down Death. The cloaked figure takes a step back. The dog lunges forward, gripping the intruder in his jaws, pulling it by the leg.

The hooded figure lets out an ear-piercing shriek that could freeze the blood, and the robed menace collapses to the ground. The dog wrestles and pulls and tears.

A great cracking sound, followed by a pop and an unsettling rip. The hooded intruder bellows.

The dog emerges, victorious, a shining, white shin bone clutched between its teeth.

Death moans. It limps on one leg, its other one useless, the slightly detached foot dangling pitifully from its fibula, then collapses, and crawling out of the room, across the threshold, over the front porch, down the front stoop, hoists itself back into the dread hearse.

Tyler watches it go. The hearse slowly backs out, the driver's red eyes piercing the night with a frightful, bitter stare, before the death cab turns and retreats slowly, slowly, finally disappearing into the blackness of the night.

Relieved, the young man collapses. He sleeps.

* * *

It is morning now. The man awakens on his couch to see his beloved dog chewing a long, white bone. As the day progresses, the dog chews, bites and licks, delightedly.

The bone does not erode, or wear down, whatsoever. At sunset the tibia looks as fresh and new as it did at dawn. What was at first elation and relief over the averted crisis slowly subsides and is superseded by a deep, uneasy feeling of anxiety, malaise. Tyler gradually realizes that his dog's actions are no cause for celebration, no victory whatsoever.

Tyler shudders. As the sun disappears, setting, an epiphany dawns: Death will be back. He has not escaped its clutches. Each day is now merely borrowed time; he is only awaiting the dark figure's return: it will surely be back to reclaim its bone, soon.

And you are right, my dear, you are so right. I hold you now, caressing you, drinking your juices that nourish me so wonderfully.

Death *will* be coming, and soon! To take back *all* its bones. Is the dark figure already on your doorstep? In the very room with us, even now? It doesn't matter.

The man stirs ever so slightly, opens his eyes and beholds me, kissing him with my long, hairy fangs, which are deeply embedded into his chest. In a moment of coherence, temporarily aware of what's happening, his two blue eyes make contact with my hundred dark, black ones. They widen.

He struggles.

So valiant, so noble.

But it is no use. He is all wrapped in webs. I continue to drink. It is *good!*

He glances over and sees, for a moment, the dog whom he never adopted, chewing on the bone. He squints, wonders why the dog isn't helping him, coming to his rescue. Then the canine figure slowly fades away, disappearing along with the bone as Tyler remembers reality, and his decision to forgo pet adoption. A tear trickles down his web-covered cheek, as the man laments alone, in deep regret.

There, there, my dear, it's okay. All this is almost over. Relax. Go to sleep.

That's it.

I wipe the tear from his weary eye with a hairy feeler. The man's heart is becoming slower and slower as he drifts further and further into eternal slumber and the hooded figure grows ever closer. With each slowing heartbeat, the figure ever so gently approaches: step by deliberate step.

He will be here soon.

And I drink.

The End.