
Death Confessions

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12-14 Age Group Runner Up

Some mortal men think they have monopoly on caring, that emotion is a purely human thing. Some days I think I can agree, as I do not find myself trifled by the petty annoyances, nor am I ever fearful of the unknown. It is not in me to be concerned, only to fulfill my purpose.

Some days, on particularly bad years, when with every tick a thousand bodies drop, I think I come the closest to feeling as I can. I do not have eyes to cry, nor a heart to hurt, but these physical limitations do nothing to soften the pain in my mind. I do not wish them back to life, I do not care for them past what I am meant to, but I do not relish in the hurt I bring. I am simply a ferry from one world to another, and I must always bring my passengers.

Sometimes, there are so so many, and I am so so tired, and I feel myself edge more closely to caring than I like to admit.

It is 1942, a war so bloody I dare not try to put it into words. Even the skies seem angry, and this is the war where man goes too far. I am very very busy.

I do enjoy being busy. Or I did, when I was young and naive, until I began to see myself from the perspective of the dying, and I did not like what I saw. Many times I will bring a soul across the endless plane and I will see myself in the reflection, the line I cannot cross, and I wish I had the power to change my story.

I do not have favorites, as I often see mortal souls at their worst, but I especially remember the death of Clay Sallow, because he was the only one to ever say hello back.

Clay was dying when I met him. This was the first curious thing, because often I only arrive after the death, and I take the soul from the prison of the body. Clay was strong, and he refused his fate, and I found myself endeared to him due to his stubbornness alone.

He was walking through a bombed and burning town, fires still roaring, the sky a bloody red and the dust making it impossible to breath without coughing hard enough to rattle bones. He walked with the limping gait of either a very old or very sick man. He belonged to the latter. His blond hair had quickly turned gray with ash, and despite his young age his face was beginning to line.

The war did that to people.

His once shining boots were dull as he struggled along the road, and I watched, almost amused. Clay should have died by now, his abdomen was gaping, rivers of blood running to stain the earth. He could stop anywhere, and yet he kept going. To where, I did not know, but his face was determined. He did not show his pain, and for that I admired him.

I followed, a few steps behind, ready to catch him when he fell. Then, something surprising happened. He stopped, and turned to me. He was not scared, and I was once again struck by the courage of the young man.

Hello Clay

Clay smirked, and beneath the dirt and other mens blood I saw a young man, barely more than a boy, fighting and dying in a country he'd never seen before. I saw a man who should be at home, bored and listening to the ticking clock and thinking about his mothers cooking and his sweetheart and his friends and his long and prosperous future. I saw a man who was dying before he met his niece and I looked deep in his eyes and I thought that even if I had never felt sadness before, I knew this was it, me breaking at the sight of all the fear in him.

And yet he stood tall.

“Hey. I was wondering when you would show up.” His eyes betrayed him, but he grinned at me, voice cracking from lack of use. His face was bruised and scarred, and even if he had made it home he would be so changed. I wanted to wash away his pain, but that was not my job.

My job was to kill him. Or, rather, let him be killed.

“One thing sir, before you take me will you tell me something?” I wanted to laugh. You do not bargain with me, and yet here he was. I found myself humoring him.

What do you want to know

“Does Claire survive?” It is a duty of mine to know everything about every man and woman's death, and I knew, just once, I would break my vow and tell my secrets. From Death to the dying, I could tell him his sister would live a long and happy life.

I nodded, and tried not to think about her, receiving the letter, her crying, her never truly getting over her brother's death.

I try not to think about the result of my job. That is the job of the humans I leave behind.

“Just get it over with.” Clay said to me, stoic and dying, a whisper of a voice that was carried away on the wind, the last words of a man too young, and I snatched them from the air, to keep them close and never forget how it felt to take him away.

I always carry the dead with me, to make sure I never forget what I truly am.

I am not the epitome of evil, and I do not relish in pain. I suppose this is the one thing that makes me human, as human as I can be.

I am not human, but I do think I have a monopoly on this specific kind of pain.

I think, in its own way, it breaks my heart.