

1990

## Death Nips Over for a Cup of Tea a Tale in Five Pages

Anthony Glassman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/calliope>



Part of the Creative Writing Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Glassman, Anthony (1990) "Death Nips Over for a Cup of Tea a Tale in Five Pages," *Calliope (1954-2001)*: Vol. 1990 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/calliope/vol1990/iss1/8>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Calliope (1954-2001) by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).

**Death Nips Over for a Cup of Tea  
A Tale in Five Pages**

Anthony Glassman

The room is small and damp, sparsely furnished. I call it spartan; that, however, is because admitting that I live in abject poverty always depressed me. On the kitchen side of the hovel, there is a small fridge, as well as a sink with a mirror above; on the living room side, I have placed a bed, a television, and a chair. A single lightbulb swings listlessly above, attached to the ceiling: the switch is near the door to the room. This has been my home for the last year or so; I am lucky to have it. Before I could call this space my own, I lived any place I could sleep without a bobby billy-clubbing me on the head and telling me to move on.

I rise from the bed and look at the mirror; I recognise the stranger who looks at me from its depths. He is pale, and gaunt, with slightly sunken cheeks. The hair is tousled and straight, a dirty blonde. The eyes staring at me from under the shock of hair are an icy blue-grey, like looking at a coin under an ice cube.

It was a face that I both loved and hated, that inspired awe and revulsion in me; were I not so emaciated, it would most likely be considered quite handsome. At my weight, however, I looked rather like a cadaver walking to and fro in my room, instead of an artist.

I always considered myself to be something of a bohemian; when I was a child, my teddy bear was a koala; I asked for a pet rat instead of a puppy, and instead of playing cricket with my schoolmates, I would lock myself in my room and spin webs of ancient paladins, along with accompanying sketches. I was ridiculed a bit, but when I bit off the earlobe of the offending bourgeois, it gained me a bit of peace.

Anyway, back to my narrative. I have been plagued by a wracking cough of late, perhaps the result of a dash in the rain to the tube, or, more likely but less desirable, a slightly indiscreet liaison with a young woman from the Catacombs, the nightclub near my flat. Her name, I believe, was Siobhan, pronounced shi-vahn'. She was an interesting character, with hair that was, depending on the angle from which you viewed it, blue-black, purple, red, or green. Her eyes were brown. Her lips were painted blood-red; when I awoke next to her the next morning, her lips were still crimson, although I am certain that she had not risen to freshen her lipstick.

There is a sudden rush of air in the room, a cold breeze, like someone opening an ice-box with a fan inside. I sit down on the bed and am pulling the blankets around my shoulders when I realise that I am not alone in my room. There is a tall, white-faced man standing about ten feet in front of me, clad in a black

robe, as a bailiff would wear, except that this robe has a tight-fitting hood that reveals only his face. I don't suppose he realises that I know who he is, but with all the earthly knowledge that I lack, it stands to reason that I have some of the arcane nature.

"I... am Death," my visitor states, as if expecting dramatic music in the background.

"I... am Colin Windsor," I reply, not expecting any music.

"I know. I have come for you."

"Then take me."

This, for some reason, seems to fluster my ghostly guest. He looks around at the room quickly, then turns back to me.

"Aren't you afraid? Aren't you going to beg me to leave you be, to take that cruel manager at work, or the bag lady down in the alley, or some rot of that sort that mortals always do when faced with the great abyss beyond the veil of life and death?" he asks me, concern flashing for an instant across his visage.

"No, should I?" I respond. "You know, that little speech was rather melodramatic. You should work on that."

"Yes, you should be struggling for life; it's an integral part of the human spirit, the will to live."

"Ah, but say I resist, how could I escape you? And even if I did manage to get you to desist, you would be back for me eventually anyway, and one day is very much like another."

"Well, we could always play a game of chess, and your life could be the stakes," he answers.

I think about this suggestion for a minute. It seems awfully familiar.

"That's no good," I say. "You already did that with Klaus Kinski in The Seventh Seal. If you want me to fight for my life, you'll have to come up with something more original."

This takes him aback. He pauses momentarily, thinking of some suitable response. After a few seconds, a smile dawns across his face, the moon rising over a white plane.

"What if we played a game of Dungeons and Dragons?"

"A little passé, but then again, you don't need to keep up with all the current fads, do you?" I say.

And so it is decided: a role-playing game to decide my fate. I quickly state that I will be Dungeon-master, and draw up a character for him on a scrap of paper.

"Elric, the elf, enters the large cavern. It is very dark. What do you do?"

"I light a torch."

The elf is soon set upon by kobolds, a beholder, some very nasty Cockney dock-workers, and a Margaret Thatcher clone with a deadly lisp. My competitor passes through all these hazards like a champion, quickly making his way to the first treasure room.

"You see before you a single vial--it appears empty. What do you do?"

"I open it," Death says, after thinking it over, mentally weighing the risks and rewards. This is when I tell the killing joke.

"It is a spirit jar, completely escape-proof," I say, reaching under my pillow and pulling out its non-fictional

counterpart. I remove the cork and watch as the reject from an Ingmar Bergman film is sucked inside, like fluid into those vacuums that dentists have in their offices. He screams as I do it, a scream that would shake the universe were it audible to any but me. I then re-cork the bottle and put it in the ice-box to cool.

When the time comes, I pull the bottle out, and once again remove the stopper from the bottle. Death's essence has distilled in that time into a reddish fluid that looks, in itself, not unlike blood. I open my mouth and tilt back my head, quaffing down the liquid as quickly as possible. I walk to my bed and take a nap.

It is now eternity later; my clock, however, registers a two-hour difference. I rise once again from my bed, and, after passing one hand over my smooth chest, spread my raven's wings and fly up through the ceiling, out to fulfill the task left me by him whose office I usurped.