

# Conversations With Cliche After Death

PERSONAL ESSAY & MEMOIR

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Cliche, tell me; when a girl drives depression as if it were a nail against a wall, did you ever stop to think? If you've ever read Plath, ever kept a comforting kind of cold that creeps in between silence, taming fires in bones and combing out your hair, untangling every memory, you'll know Melancholy will sit there with me. He's reactive, recitative; he likes to express; he concludes and dissects and stresses, tending a garden so wild it's enough to swallow god. I didn't notice him standing in my shadow and watching over me when I knelt in that garden to lay another flower down. You see, yesterday they told me they will find her. She'll come home, warm and loved. I was sitting in Spanish when a friend called me.

*It's about her. Come outside.*

I ran out to the hallway.

They found her!

They found her.

They found her dead.

What a sick, twisted joke.

I hear someone call out my name.

No, you're kidding.

My glare, my incredulous laugh; I blanch, I express my grief in silence; a marble statue was I, set in moveless despair. If I could weep.. but I couldn't. I simply sat and let others cry into my arms that day. Oh I'll tell you! The room was filled with half-taught anguish, people bent upward to the heavens in loud tears. And there was I, days after, coloring into stupid coloring books during grief sessions, talking

about her favorite color (pink) and how kind she was. Stop looking at me with those eyes. I'm okay, just leave me alone and let me go home. I thought I was a horrible person; what friend am I who can't cry for her? I'll crumble to the dirt beneath.

Cliche, tell me, what was the purpose of any originality, when in the midnight hours I get to dream about my own future when she thought she didn't have one. I get to sit on my bed and sleep and wake up, when she will never wake up again. I walk to class, I go home, but what fear sweeps this little life of mine? Do I terrify? Did she? What of the sad mothers and helpless fathers?

I finally wept. I cry because I am still here and she is not. I cry because my mother is sleeping downstairs while her father could be staring into her empty bedroom.

I kowtow into her absence, my knees- eyes dressed in dust and dearth, debris flooding her mouth before she coughs up.

You know, there are others growing in the garden. My relatives; my kin, my flesh; them in their war torn clothes and dirty fingernails. They still have their shrapnel wounded legs and their ears still ringing from bombings, lungs smothered in gunpowder even after death. Tainted, black and bruised, whatever chorus that lifted up to my mouth's blade—

*Dying is an art.*

But tell me, Cliche, who wants to die this young.

Do you cut away at your life to fit whatever gorgeous blueprint? Makes me retch.

There are eggshells and my feet are bleeding again.  
When Death says “you were born for this,”

He clearly means “you will die for this.”

Melancholy hangs his ghastly lilies in his garden. I  
ask him if it’s peaceful. Quiet.

He doesn’t respond, but I know. I know death  
chokes the aged and the meek. It chokes the young  
and the strong. It’s like some fat Ceberus, wheezing  
at the gates, licking at whatever sins or virtues there  
are left. There is no fairness. The pieces of peace  
I’ve collected in my pockets, well jee, I didn’t know  
there was a tear in the stitching. I’ll sit here and  
haunt and wait for a small kind of revival. I’ll defend  
myself with a broken pen for a sword, brackets for  
a shield and a small prayer that no one will find  
me tucked between pages of books and paranoia in  
every paragraph I write.

Tear it! Shred it, mutilate it, beg the person in the  
mirror just one more day, one more request:

Come, Death! Be sure to take off that invisible cloak  
you wear and be a little kinder this time. Be a friend  
and take my hand, walk me into the friendly dark.  
Walk me into a different room where I will still hear  
her laughter.

You lose people you overlove; I pick at petals, I  
love me not. The passagework of pain, the way it  
tenderly goes; the slick, the clever, the guileful. We  
sit for an hour while she tells me how unreasonable  
I’ve been; crying in the checkout line, refusing  
to eat, refusing to shower, the self-medications  
certainly don’t work, and I’m breaking my mother’s  
heart.

I tell her we learn so little from peace. There is no  
scar from happiness. So why did you do it?

She tells me to forgive myself. The heavy feelings  
in my heart will dissolve with the rain. It will  
feel like folding a blanket. I don’t have to hold it  
in; I can sing it, or draw it, or wear it; This hand  
of ordination that laid upon her brow like some  
birthmark..what is the power to kill without the  
power to die.

It seems that healing feels like clutching cold fruit  
in a cold kitchen. Melancholy has followed me  
everywhere, like a son. But what would I do without  
my tears? I see it now: her death does not grow  
smaller with the march of time. She is still there, in  
my mind’s eye. When I think of all our days, I wish  
that they would come clear– I’ll travel through the  
haze and conjure her up. I won’t go looking in the  
silence. I’ll search in the spaces between the trees,  
in the memories when I find us lingering in the  
sunshine through the leaves, so when the friendly  
dark visits me, I’ll tell it no. I’ve got people to see.

Cliche, I think there will be a silver lining in every  
rainstorm. Tell her:

*I hope you’re okay. I hope the garden is peaceful and  
it smells like mangoes. ■*