

XXII **A TIN SOLDIER ENLISTED IN THE**
CONQUEST OF DEATH.

Alternatively, I might title this episode 'A Tin Soldier Conquistador'; 'The End of Life, the Beginning of Death'; 'The Newness of Death'; 'My First Week at Death'; 'Confined to These Quarters' or simply, 'The Conquest of Death'; and myriad other associations not readily apparent.

There is a beginning to the Adventure; and the end.

We have grown accustomed to speaking in terms of 'light years'.

We say we are perceiving the emissions of stars-extinct. Thus it is, we are yet to perceive others, and perhaps, some so distant, so dim, and so diminished in the aura of others, theirs shall go unnoticed. Others are borne in the imagination, as the genius, when the pedants copulate.

Milo Minderbinder could buy eggs for seven cents each, selling them for five, gleaning a profit. He belonged to the syndicate.

NASA belongs to the syndicate. It builds a moon-rocket for millions, but cannot transport enough green cheese to pay for the journey.

Both Milo and NASA, for the glory of Man, had their hands in the pockets of other Men; easy come, easy go.

We imagine we have conquered space; some imagine they have created the money tree.

The gullibility of the Masses; the success of the confidence game; a pair. Science is the great hoodwink and boondoggle of the century.

What price adventure!

Life is so dull being confined to these quarters.

If the Moon had been a Gold Ball; just think. Not much to think; Gold is bloodless and heavy.

With our emptier pockets and a vicarious adventurism we have prospered, overcoming, for the greater glory of Man.

Although we have learned we cannot truly conquer anything, we have nonetheless set out to conquer Death. To have gone somewhere; to the top of Everest; to the bottom of the Philippine Trench; to the South Pole; to the Moon; even to that uncharted Star; and to have returned, is to have conquered; so we boast. To disrupt the order of nature; to disrupt the order of civilizations; to have Christianized; or Moslemized; to have proselytized the

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heathen, the savage, or to have annihilated them, is to imagine we have conquered.

So the two-legged rascalion toodleytweets; the Lord and Master of these Quarters.

We compose fictions; romances; fancies; flirtations. Confined to these quarters, we dream of escapes, so-called 'adventures'. Imagine a journey to the bottom or the top, or the infinity of Death - and returning therefrom.

Thus it is we have set out to Conquer Death.

Some Adventure. Apply for a government grant.

Oh Well, perchance it is better than sitting on our asses trying to act dignified while we scheme how to screw or beat the hell out of each other, and to convert the planet into a standard of living.

I let him out early one morning; he shit on my neighbor's lawn and pissed on his Honda. A Spaniard and an Englishman had been there before him. He was satisfied; conquest is largely a matter of the Mind. Remember the Falklands!

So - I'll urinate on Death and He will shit on me.

Actually I had been born Dead; they had 'imprinted' Death upon my being; 'inculcated' is another of those words. What other alternative had I but to remain in the service of Death?

Oh, who wants to hear about Death? Of course, you would rather hear about fornication. Well, even when you are confined to a living Death, you will have regular erections. Perchance this is utterly tasteless, however true. But not nearly so tasteless as what follows:

They (the insidious permeance of the ESTABLISHED ORTHODOXY) paid lip-service to learning, encouraging one to 'grow and become'; but we all copied one another; we were confined to quarters in conformity. And they had the presumption to announce: 'The most likely to succeed'. What Ho! Status Quo!

We were all going to Heaven, somewhere beyond the Moon, in a Little Red School House, in Jesus name, saluting a stripped banner awavinn' o'er the deer and the antelope, fields of grain, and 'farmers in the dell'; a plausible deception.

We did not learn about survival; we 'had it made'; provided you read and followed the instructions printed in the little red, white and blue handout. We looked at each other for approval and rather insistently conformed. Then there was this Big Shit-ass with the Rubber Stamp to encourage us.

Do you reckon you could serve up Death in any better

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fashion? More tastefully? Yes, of course, it could all be made more pleasant; we could be lying down instead of sitting.

"How can this be Death, when it is Life?", you ask.

I could not be a little Tin Soldier in their army of conceits; it was all too impersonal, throwing oneself at Death merely so as not to disturb their equanimity. Maybe if I had not been pimplepussed (zit-faced), skinny, broken-toothed, poor, inhibited (Cripes who wouldn't be after the foregoing), inadequate, and something obviously lacking. If I had been like Leo: tall, rugged, smooth, peach blossom, from the right side of the tracks - perfection; or if I had only been touched by his twin sister, the blushing cheerleader, the 'divine spark'. Could it have happened otherwise?

We were certainly living in different worlds, although standing within a hair's breadth of one another; I could smell her freshness and sweetness. Sigh and Swoon. Do you suppose?

They uttered, 'That's Life', and 'some have got it'.

Doubtlessly, a kindly, indulgent speculation. So it is, the vast untold multitudes climb to the very pinnacle only to descend; wouldn't it be better to remain seated.

Whatever transpires, let these pages not go blank.

Yes!, I set fire to the City. Should I look back? Is it their fault I could not be satisfied in their satin shackles, could not gather my wits in their bleary-eyed stupor? What have I left behind?

I walk now, that Stalking Horse, upon the distant horizon that I had seen beyond my comprehension. Whereof I have operated some kind of distillery, having created some decoction from all these readings and lives, I tremble as I tread into near-perfect darkness unassisted by the heady brew, destined not to make a better job of it than the next, but destined all the same.

I had lingered at the water's edge, dreaming of going to sea. Finally, now at sea, what of this endless water? Where doth it lead? That dream, drained to the lees, confronts this realer stuff, abandoning me to ponder its naked challenge, and my weariness.

One forgets! I have resurrected this dream again and again, despite my timidity to go beyond my fearfulness of storm, thirst, hunger and, Aye!, the FACT of vanishing in utter solitude, in abject anonymity.

Well, I know I have been there anyway, although only in a dream. My face is warm this night, for the sun had shone brightly and I had dallied. This dalliance has been a luxury. I had

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remembered something that urged me on; there is a purpose in all this memorizing then? Yes, I remembered those long gray corridors wherein You had presumed upon my time, merely because I had conformed.

This NOW then, is Life after Death.

Can it be said I have conquered Death? Have I been there and returned? Perhaps it is so.

If I leave the pages blank, who would know?

And after I have ventured out to sea, have I then lived?

A gentleman sailor, a landsman has traveled upon the ocean along the coast during the summer. A duck out of water; no, a crow in the water; awkward, apprehensive. Would the fog dissipate; would the swell increase, would the breeze strengthen; would the tidal flow nudge him athwartships; would the currents steepen the seas; would he be flaunted in his purpose? Would he be obliged to turn tail? Would it be fear, or would it be prudence that he could claim, or weariness, weariness of spirit, the landsman's spirit on the open water?

Would they laugh at him, those more familiar, those whose knack or peculiar rapport, or seasoning, enables them to give off that jaunty air; those who contained, within, some secret power, some attainment of ease in the company of their Frightening Host. How naked he felt amongst them. More Leos to humiliate one.

The SOUTH SEAS!!!. Is it the deciding that frightens us? That unwillingness to be responsible for one's own dream, one's own decision, one's own Conquest of Death?

Let another do the Captaining; yield to the mysterious wisdom of Captains, unburdening your duties to another.

Had not the Captain been a deck-lackey himself, once, with barely a seamuscle in his body; was not his face blanched when the first swells obscured his vision of the horizon? Surely he had been impressed. Had the Captain ever turned away? Ever? And if he had, would he have considered himself a failure, as would the poor dupe in his ivory tower?

Does any seaman or landsman advance purposely in the face of adversity, if he has a choice? If he chooses must he be committed or is he free always to act out his choice in feasibility? So we imagine ourselves as Captains.

In mid-ocean there is no choice. Our genesis has forfeited our gills.

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Let us not cross the street when the light is red.

Being born of the sea might be of some advantage. Landsmen we are all, without gills, without swim-bladders, without blubber, without sea defenses. Yet we persist beyond our element. In Conquest?

Oh!, perchance some dim evocation from our distant origins; we are drawn; or is it our need to escape one another?

I had forgotten my leaking roofs and the taxes. I had forgotten my complaints against 'them'. Perhaps 'they' would have expired in my absence; perhaps their awful insinuation would have disappeared. The land had been tamed; in fact it had cowered before 'them'. 'They' had urinated and defecated upon the land and upon each other; the place reeked of some kind of animal. It was all there, conquered, in all its bestiality.

You had envisioned me as serene as I was returning. You imagined an aloofness, and an austerity, one possessed of something well-learned, and perhaps invested with a most lucid perception. The expression reflected no apparent inhumanity or disdain; yet you imagined me unapproachable. You imagined me fearless, only feeling that fear did not belong; you had imagined one lived until Death overtook him, making no bargains; fear would only hinder the process. You wouldn't heed those who had declaimed 'foolhardiness and flawed'. Ah! no. I wasn't one who would shit and run, scurrying for my burrow.

Ah, now, did I serve to ennoble life or cast it in some ignominy? Should I reveal more; should I hint that most of life darts about, seeking cover, fear its constant ally, fearful of the 'Conqueror'?

Confined to these quarters we discourse on Man.

Apply for a government grant to conquer your Death.

Tell them, in your application, you are a seagoing thanatologist. Tell them sea builds character, and that one needs character to lay siege to Death. All one need is a sound vessel to conduct the experiment with himself.

The reviewers would scoff; but what do they know, in their stuffed-shirt mythology basking in some Campus Arcadia, enlightened in their vegetating, pedantically sowing their seed?

So it is; the vegetable conquers Life.

We've been swindled in the conspiracy of Pythagoras and Aristotle.

Relevance! You want Relevance.

You cannot fathom the darker associations bound into these endless meanderings.

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Aye!, encapsulate the World into the Word!

Upon the Bridge of our Worthy Ship, Behold the Dignity of Man:

Erect, Aristocratic, in Top-Hat, Cravat, Tails and Cane.

A Plume of Eagle Feathers from Topknot to Heel.

A Regal Presence Garlanded and Arrayed in Gold.

The middle-eastern Hippie draped in a simple robe, unshaven, uncrowned, save in brambles.

And the Exemplary Man, wearing Nobility of Purpose upon his Brow, but carrying Lance, Sword, Helmet and Shield.

And Odysseus who, at Ismarus sacked and slew their city,

And took their wives and substance;

AYE!, ADVENTURE thy Raiment, or some would have us believe.

Behold! Aristocrat, Chief, King, Savior, Knight-Errant; Adventurer!

And how should we adorn our Meanness

That presumes to subdue this Earthly Life?

Yes, what of this Last Undignified Aspirant to Inclusion? Behold!

While 'adventuring', Odysseus may have been sorely tried in his passage through the wail of sirens (I'll bet), yet never had he to resist the urge to murder a bureaucrat. One cannot help but muse upon those ancient storied adventures of Homer's Hero. From the shores abiding Troy to the mysterious Abode of the Dead, Odysseus' adventures ranged only the Mid-Mediterranean. And those of the Argonauts the Black Sea.

Nowadays Apollo has been to the moon and back, seeming to have no desire to return.

That's not Relevant.

Whereof does this scribe rant?

What sayeth he; verily, has anyone perceived him sighting, that one might know his aim?

This mad foible sets ensconced upon his scribbling chair scratching abroad in his dubious metaphor, doubting too, this adventure of the mind.

Given over to gauging the T. E. Lawrences, the

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Hemingways, Malraux, Camus, these seekers after adventure, engaging in righteous causes, revolutions, resistance, desiring substantiality. And what of that substance; does it validate what one already knows; does it teach one anew; what greater message ensue? Ah, some Quixotic message for sure, and truly some - Yes! SOME COLOR!!, Sanguineous, Dripping Color. We have Lived!!

And what of Slocum, Vito Dumas, Moitessier or St. Exupery?

Who are the Actors upon the stage and who are they whom the Actors emulate; who would exhibit himself for adulation, and who would confer within the compartments of himself?

Ought what one man does become something one ought attempt to duplicate or exceed?

There are many who think not these thoughts; there are many who read not, who would trumpet themselves the first - unawares.

And what if they were the last; if only they would keep it to themselves in the end?

Yet who can be gauging and exposing his life in a manner akin to these aforementioned?

When the time arrives to disembark, will not all these extrapolations become excess cargo, stuffs to be stowed, accounted awkwardly utilized, doing what one moralizes, instead of what one ought?

Is the thought so cautionary as to o'erburden the adventure?

What pursue thee?

Will I know better of thee if I comprehend my own issuance?

Has this then become the terminus? Is something fulfilled? Is it still possible, that this 'nowness' will become the plausible deception, enlisting my services as another Tin Soldier? Do I fashion a Life from this apparent Death? Shall I attempt the Conquest?