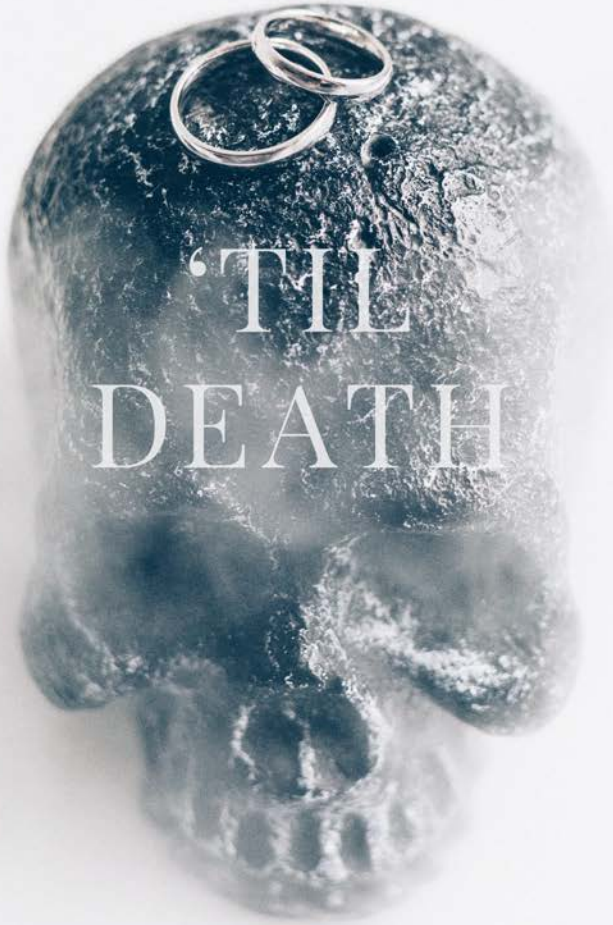


A Short Story



ANDREW VAN WYK



A Short Story

'TIL DEATH

Andrew Van Wyk



TINY WINDOWS

Cover: Photo by [Mihail Macri](#) on Unsplash

“Til Death” was first published exclusively on
Tiny Windows, November 2023.

© Andrew Van Wyk

Additional information can be found online at:

TINY WINDOWS
www.tinywindows.xyz

“Life is eternal, and love is immortal, and death is only a horizon; and a horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight.”

— Rossiter W. Raymond

THE FIRST

Sirens screamed. Their cry, carried on the wind, seemed to circle around me, clasp and cloy like clothes with too much static. I felt them as they drew nearer, saw their combative lights clashing with the darkness.

Red. Blue. Black.

Red. Blue. Black. Like a bruise expanding beneath the skin, their colors seeped into the air, becoming an eye sore on the evening.

Blood dripped down my face, clouding and obscuring my vision, and only then did I realize that my arms were pinned at my sides. The car around me had been crushed to the point where steel hugged me in a death like embrace.

It was then that I saw him, for the first time: blinking away blood I gazed upon a figure, cloaked in black, seemingly existing only between the strobed shadows created by the emergency lights.

Red. Blue. Black.

And there he was. Floating more than standing, his presence was haunting and holy. With a face masked in the shadow created by a deep hood, I could only sense his gaze scanning the scene of the crime, my broken body, and the bodies of those dying around me.

A FEW YEARS AND MANY BODIES LATER

An expanding pool of blood seeped across the floor, staining the concrete. I watched her chest rise and fall, waiting with bated breath for him to arrive. Her eyes pleaded with me, begging not for help as she knew there was no hope of that, but rather for mercy. But I didn't like rushing him, and a specimen like her deserved no mercy. It was the reason I chose her. You should know I didn't choose them lightly.

I felt him before I saw him. He loved his arrivals, almost as much as I loved seeing - and feeling him - arrive.

“So soon?”

“I missed you.” I confessed.

“It wasn’t her time.”

With that, she exhaled her last, and something like peace settled on her evil visage.

“Well too late for that now,” I smiled. I breathed him in. He smelled of the stillness before a storm. Controlled and contained chaos. It was my aphrodisiac. He was my aphrodisiac: A potent and powerful love potion crafted through the ages - cologne created with hints of immortality, a dash of danger, a taste of the eternal, and a subtlety that only time merged with timelessness can concoct.

“I missed you, too.” He admitted. I knew it wasn’t easy for him, connecting like that, showing weakness of vulnerability. He was, after all, eternal, omnipotent, and nearly omnipresent. Weakness was not an attribute inherent to his person.

“How much time do we have?” I prompted, already knowing the answer.

“Never enough,” he stated, with what could almost be interpreted as sadness in his eyes.

I melted inside at those words. And I trembled as his long, nearly translucent fingers grazed my shoulder. A cold breeze blew down my spine, cooling and comforting; easing the tension I always held in my neck, my shoulders, my lower back.

He leaned down resting his head at the crook of where my neck curves to my shoulder, inhaling. I shuddered. Each time he did this I felt a part of me stir, loosen, and leave my body. It wasn’t pain. It wasn’t even loss. It was the most intimate connection by way of disconnection. He absorbed me - or at least a part of me - and in those brief moments we became one. Or I became one with him. I still don’t know how to describe it.

“I can’t stay.”

“Just a little longer,” I plead in vain, “Please.”

Pulling me closer, he envelopes me in his cloak. My heart beats against the stillness of his chest.

The perfect silence of his being always calms me and I drift in his embrace. Time and space disappear and I'm floating. No longer here. No longer now. My body far from me, or maybe I'm just falling deeper into it. Just as the exploration of self often leads to the acceptance of the universal, I find myself as I simultaneously lose all sense of the individual.

As he relinquishes his hold on me, briefly holding me at arms length to gaze at me, into me, through me, I find myself laughing, crying, sighing, smiling - longing for just one more moment, grateful for the timeless moment we were able to share.

He turns from me to bend over the silent still form of the woman that allowed for our reunion. I'm never sure what he does to them. He never lets me see. Intentionally or not, his cloak, moving with a life of its own, always covers and obscures this most private of moments.

“Thank you.”

He never says you're welcome. He doesn't need to, nor would he. I don't need him to, but I always feel compelled to express my appreciation, my longing... my love.

“I love you,” I whisper, expressing a thought I'm almost certain he could already hear, but one which I realized I'd never actually uttered verbally.

I can't be certain, but his shoulders seem to sag, depressing a pristine posture that contradicts the character, the person, the essence of him. I instantly regret my naiveté, my immaturity, my desire for affection and affirmation - my humanity.

But as his cloak reclaims his figure, returning to its natural size, shape, and form he shifts his gaze - from the now vacant spot on the floor where the woman lay just moments before - to me.

“My darling,” he pauses for a shiver to snake through his body. “If only I could feel what you feel, see what you see, know what you know. If only you were,” he hesitates, “If only... I were.”

His silence finishes the thought, the sentence, the quietude filling the void like words never could. He wasn't human. I wasn't eternal. He knew it. I refused it.

"But..." I broke the stillness first.

"You know, as I do, that this can never be."

"But what we have..."

"...shouldn't exist."

"Yet it does."

"Yes," he admits, "It does."

And with that he disappears, and though I remained, utterly alone I'd never felt more connected, more alive, more accepted, more affirmed, more validated... more seen.

ONE MORE...

I was already anxious, but as it had taken me longer than normal to find this one, I was impatient. We hadn't been apart this long since the first time, before I discovered I could beckon him circumstance, invite him with the situational coincidence inherent to his profession - if you will.

"We can't keep meeting like this," his words reaching me, and filling the claustrophobic room that I'd done the deed in before his presence consumed the corner.

Was that a joke? God I loved him.

"Tell me another way," I tossed back as lighthearted as I began to feel with his presence drawing nearer, relieving the anxiety that had weighed so heavily before his arrival.

"If only I knew..."

"You know, for someone - "

“Someone...” he murmured with a tone that could only exist if uttered through the expression of a smile.

“ - for someone that has always been and will forever be... who has seen everything, literally, there sure is a lot you don't know,” I smiled back.

“You confound me.”

I drew back, not with confusion as one might expect, but with pride: I confounded him. Warmth blushed my cheeks.

“You are my enigma. My universal paradox. My dream. My nightmare. My riddle.”

“Yes,” I swelled.

“My pandora's box... just as likely to undo me... just as likely to complete me.”

He'd never spoken to me like this before.

“And you are mine,” I reciprocated. I so badly wanted him to know all I felt. “You are my day. You are my night. You are my sun and my moon. You are a dream - “

“I'm a nightmare,” he corrected.

“Maybe to some, but to me you are an angel - “

“Of death.”

I couldn't argue with that.

“You. Are. My. Life.” I stuttered.

He paused in his routine over the body at our feet. His cloak moved like a thunderhead, undulating with an emotive rhythm I'd never witnessed. Within the recesses of his hood lightning flashed, blinking with a subtle but blinding strobe.

“That... I cannot be.”

Had I said something wrong?

“That is not me. It never will be.”

His cloak flowed, receding around him and rushing back to enfold him like the tide upon a shore.

“I’m sorry...”

And with that, like a wave crashing, like thunder after a bolt of lightning, I felt and saw him disappear.

“Wait!” I screamed impotently.

But he was already gone... leaving only shadow where his powerful form had just existed. I’d never actually seen his face before, only the darkness that surrounded and masked it, but now I longed for nothing more than that black void; the shadows in the room a dark reminder of what I’d lost.

THE NEXT VICTIM

He breathed his last as I thrust the blade deeper, hastening his departure.

I looked around expectantly. I shut my eyes, forcing myself to feel more than see.

Where was he? He didn’t take this long. He was prompt if he was nothing else. It came with the territory.

I checked my watch.

I paced the small room where I’d done the deed; the same deed I’d done countless times before. This act, like a phone call, that had never failed to bring him to me.

I was devastated.

For a moment I felt fear. I'd never before left a body behind. He took care of that for me. What would this mean?

I grabbed my blade and dashed out of the room. At the end of the corridor I paused. Looking back I knew -

There he was, cloak flowing, folding and unfolding, his dark business nearly complete. He rushed the last steps, stood, glanced in my direction with posture sagging like I'd seen only once before, and he vanished.

DOZENS LATER

This time was different somehow. Deep down I knew it. Maybe I'd crossed a line. Maybe given the state of affairs around the world he was just too busy.

But he'd never not shown before. I knew eventually he had to. There were rules - or at least that's what I told myself.

I could wait. I would wait.

I felt something. It was subtle at first, like the first drop of rain before a storm, when the skies seem to hesitate, to question their decision or their timing, but then it came. My eyes welled, swelling like a rising tide, moisture flooded my cheeks, and tears broke free from the dyke of my eyelids. I was alone, but for the first time I felt true solitude, I felt the loneliness of the abandoned, the rejected, the cast-aside.

And I cried.

THE FINAL VICTIM

"You came?"

He nodded, "Of course."

I smiled for what felt like the first time.

"I knew you'd come."

Blood pooled at our feet, slowly, but relentlessly gaining territory across the floor with each life-giving pump of the heart.

“I’ve missed you.”

“I could tell.”

I shuddered at his stoicism. He was always restrained, but this felt different.

“I’m cold,” I confessed with chattering teeth.

“This won’t help,” he admitted as he stepped near me, with steps that caused the most beautiful ripples in my blood that now fully covered the ground between us. Those ripples reached me first, cascading against my paling skin, touching me in ways he never had before.

“Where do we go from here?”

He looks away. Silence his response.

“D?” I question. And for the first time I feel fear. Distant at first but growing in strength and intensity.

“Where you’re going I can’t join you.”

No. That’s not how this was supposed to go. My mind reels, searching for answers to questions I wouldn’t even know to ask, inspired from a place I’d never comprehend.

“No,” I corrected him. “Now we can be together.”

“Shhh.” He says as he cradles me in his arms like a newborn. He was the eye of the hurricane I had created, yet like that center, his peace was only temporary and served as a foreboding warning of things to come.

“Don’t let me go.”

He pulls me closer to him and I feel that sensation of drifting away, that feeling I’d always longed for, sought, fought for, and relished in over the years.

“I won’t.” And he squeezes me tighter.

It’s only then that I realize his cloak is enveloping me. His words crackle like distant thunder.

“Everything’s ok. You’re ok.”

Darkness consumes me, save for a singular light. Flashes, like lightning, give way to a steady orb like the sun. Warmth comforts and holds me up as I see it for the first time, see him for the first time, my introduction to him is my last chapter and conclusion.

My last vision, the thing I’d been seeking since that moment years before, stirred an ecstasy in my soul, an acceptance of things to come. As I looked on, finally seeing, at long last, the face of death, he smiled with tears steaming down his cheeks - ever the contradiction - death had been my life, and in my death I would be his life.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANDREW VAN WYK is a film executive and award-winning multimedia writer and producer with over a decade of entertainment experience. He's a medium agnostic creative developing IP from concept creation and adaptation for screens big and small. His strong story skills are seeped in a background of literary and film history supported by an academic foundation from UCLA and USC and practical, hands-on experience from co-founding multiple production companies.

Van Wyk is the recipient of the inaugural Dan O'Bannon Screenwriting award and a multiple Telly and Addy Award winning commercial writer. He has led research into VR/AR/360/AI at a variety of companies and has been a keynote speaker at major international conferences specifically discussing how artists and the industry at large can and should adapt to technological change. As a producer his projects have screened at festivals worldwide, including Venice, Cannes, Zurich, Telluride, Toronto, SXSW, and Santa Barbara Film Festival.

Currently, Van Wyk is the Vice President of Development for the multi-award winning River Road Entertainment, overseeing a slate of feature and television narrative and documentaries projects. Prior to that, he worked in the Story and Development Department at Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment. More recently, he launched Tiny Windows, a publication platform highlighting classic stories from history alongside contemporary short fiction.



TINY WINDOWS

TINY WINDOWS

A curated collection of classic and original short fiction highlighting authors from yesterday and introducing the storytellers of tomorrow.

We highlight classic stories from history, introduce contemporary authors of the present, and commission original and exclusive works in an effort to follow the muse and meet publishing and film industry desires.

Questions about licensing or adapting? Want to know more about these writers or this story? Please reach out.

FOUNDERS

ANDREW VAN WYK

+1.424.341.4121

andrew@tinywindows.xyz

VAN DITTHAVONG

+1.323.905.2050

van@tinywindows.xyz