

POSTMORTEM CONJECTURES:

Some Semi-Sober Thoughts about Death



Lex leaned forward, his voice cutting through the air like something wet and alive. He glanced at his friends seated uneasily in a row of chairs and then at his empty beer mug. Somehow the bookstore-café they were seated in seemed to have grown indistinct in the murk.

"Tell me," he began, his eyes reflecting the unsettled light, "when we stop breathing will our spirit peel away like the skin of a grape? He turned his empty mug upside down, and it made a flat thud.

Lis had been wondering which century Lex came from. That question was never fully resolved. She opened her mouth to say something smart. The first lager would have allowed that, and the second might have, but the third had its own agenda entirely. What emerged was a burp. Long, architectural, almost tidal in its resonance. It moved through the bar like a slow shockwave. "Yes, indeed," she then remarked in a half-inebriated voice.

Ron laughed. Sharp and jagged, the snigger of a someone deflecting something he couldn't name. However, his giggle soon went quiet and his smile stalled as his jaw went slack. His eyes drifted toward the middle distance, and past the bar walls, past the building into somewhere that had no address. The room didn't go silent so much as it hollowed out. Every face in the café seemed briefly lit from within by some pale, consuming fire. Every person appeared to be burning—privately, invisibly—plagued by a specific ghost that had always known their name. The persons in the bar seemed to stop moving.

Then Ron convulsed. He snapped upright with a violence that knocked over his chair back—a full-body gasp, as if he'd been hauled up by the collar from somewhere very cold and very far below. His eyes swept the room with an expression that was almost hunger—wet, animal, frantic—his fingers raking at the air as though invisible teeth were working at him from all sides. Lex broke the spell, his voice came out urgent, raw at the edges, as if trying to push back the encroaching shadows. "Hey, why waste time asking metaphysical questions?" He then grabbed a fresh mug and drank deeply, his hands not quite steady. "We still have eyes. Why not turn them toward the living while we still have breath?"

For a moment, Ron seemed on the verge of saying something profound, but decided against it. For several long seconds Ron hung there, trembling at the rim of something vast and unspeakable, mouth forming the shape of words that had perhaps never been spoken aloud in any language—then Ron and Lex blinked. A few seconds passed. The lights in the bar flickered once. Twice. And then the room roared back—laughter, clinking glass, the bright stupid noise of the living. After that, perfectly nonplussed, he asked, "Hey, where did the beer go?"

Note: This piece was partially generated using AI tools for styling and ideation;
human editing was then applied.

- T Newfields

Beg.: 2015 Tokyo ☆ Fin.: 2026 Shizuoka