**The death of DEATH**
By K. N. Parker

**Cover Illustration**
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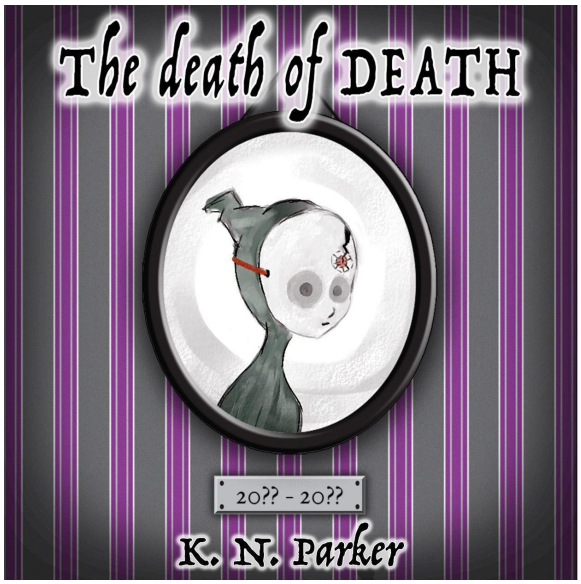


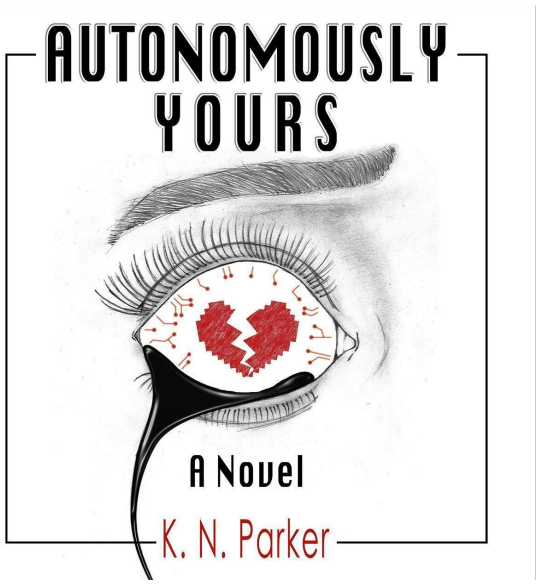


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# 1

## An Unexpected Visitor

One dreary night, a small, slim figure draped all in black arrived in a room rather inconspicuously in a cloud of dark smoke and what can only be described as dozens of little sparks, quite like the sparks you see when you touch someone or something after rubbing your sock covered feet on a shaggy rug. The room the figure had just appeared in was rather dark, save for an eerie glow from a large square shaped hole, no doubt a window, in front of which sat a similar small and bald silhouette looking up into the cloudy night sky.

The figure cleared her throat before quietly calling out, "Miss Wilkinson?"

The small silhouette did not move. The figure in black tried once more.

"Tabitha? Miss Tabitha Wilkinson?"

This time the silhouette moved its head in the direction of the voice. Clearly startled, Tabitha asked, "Who's there? Is someone there?"

"Yes," a soft, ghostly voice answered back. "Someone is most definitely here. Well, I was once considered a someone at one time but I'm not quite sure I can be classified as such anymore."

The tiny silhouette stepped slowly down from the windowsill and apprehensively inched toward the direction of the voice.

"Whatever you are, you sound female. Do you know if you were female?"

"Perhaps I was," the figure in black answered rather unsurely.

"May I ask what you are doing here?"

"Certainly. But first, a little light may help our situation,"

“Oh, quite right. Let me––”

Tabitha started toward the light switch on her wall but before she was able to take a single step, a dim white glow sprang forth from two small circles and a slim slit below them. The barely bright enough light moved closer and closer toward the silhouette until it finally revealed––but only just––a young girl in sleep wear decorated in pink kitty cats and yellow stars with frilly trim, the conventional sleep wear of many a young girl her age. She had no eyebrows and no hair except for a little fuzz on the sides and a few scraggly strands on top. Her face was at that moment pale and sickly, yet sweet and pretty; the expression on it was all at once one of inquisition, fascination and terror.

The face that stared back at Tabitha’s was a strange one at that. In fact, it was hardly a face at all; it strongly resembled a mask, complete with red string tied around the back. It was chalk white with no usual facial features that could be spoken of, with two small circular––and rather empty––eye sockets and a very small mouth that were now, as mentioned before, glowing with a dull white light. There was, however, one unusual feature: a crack that started from top left of her head that ended in a spider web-like pattern just above her left eye with a faint red stain in the middle. The rest of the body was as black as a shadow: a living, breathing shadow. The two were nearly identical as far as their body shapes and heights were concerned.

As the two beings finished sizing each other up, the figure in black finally spoke.

“You are a Miss Tabitha Wilkinson, are you not?”

“Yes… yes I am, but why are you––?”

“––I am here to inform you, Miss Wilkinson, of your impending death,” the figure in black said, cutting Tabitha off.

“My impending what?”

“Death.”

“Death? So that means… are you *the* Death?” Tabitha curiously asked, rather unshaken by the news.

“Some incorrectly refer to us as such. But that is not our official name. We are your caretakers in death. Your death guides if you will,” the small figure in black answered back.

“We? Are there more of you then?” Tabitha asked, startled more by this revelation than she was of her own mortal end.

“Yes, quite a bit more of us actually.”

“Death guides,” Tabitha murmured to herself as she slowly and absentmindedly wandered back toward the moonlit windowsill.

A tuft of smoke that resembled a pad of paper suddenly appeared before the figure in black. Its appearance was accompanied by a sound, the kind you hear when you lay your head down quickly onto a large and especially fluffy pillow. The sound caught Tabitha’s attention.

“What is that you’re doing?” she asked.

“Excuse me?”

“That thing in your hands you keep looking at. That rather smoky thing,”

The figure in black slowly looked up at the girl.

“Notes,” the figure answered, simply.

“Notes on what exactly?”

“I must say, Miss Wilkinson, you are taking this much better than the other clients I’ve had so far. The others were terrified at the mere sight of me. And they were even more upset when they learned they were going to die. But you seem to be keeping your bearings,” said the figure in black, completely ignoring Tabitha’s question.

Tabitha climbed onto her squeaky bed, brought her knees to her chest and wrapped them in her arms.

“Oh, I’ve been fairly calm all my life. Besides, you’re not all that scary. And why worry about something you cannot change?”

“Exactly,” the figure in black agreed.

Tabitha scooted a little closer toward the figure in black and stared at her intently as the figure looked over the pad seemingly made of smoke.

“You look kind of familiar. Where have I seen you before?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea,” said the guide as she continued looking over her notes. Tabitha’s curiosity about something finally got the best of her.

“When shall we be going then, guide? When is my time?” asked Tabitha, with slight nervousness in her voice.

“How old are you Miss Wilkinson?” asked the figure in black.

“I will be twelve and a half by next––”

“––You will not be making it to thirteen,” said the figure in black rather dryly, and interrupting once again. Tabitha gave out a slight whimper and clasped her hand to her mouth.

“Was that your attempt at comforting humor? Because if it was, you have sorely missed the mark,” she said, fighting back tears.

“My apologies Miss Wilkinson. I can assure you it was not.”

The figure in black, looking down at the tuft of smoke, cleared her throat once more before speaking again.

“If you will allow me to formally inform you that you, Miss Tabitha Wilkinson, are due to perish from this realm and enter the next at approximately two days from our current date, at which point I will return to collect you.”

“Enter the next? The next what?” asked Tabitha, frustrated.

“Realm, of course,” answered the figure in black.

“What realm? How extremely vague.”

“We feel that since you will experience it for yourself very soon, there is no need to go into arbitrary details at this time.”

“Can I at least know your name?” asked Tabitha.

The figure in black answered back, “My name is not important,”

“Are the rest of the guides as cold as you are?” asked Tabitha. The figure in black did not have an answer for this.

“I’m going to die in two days. You could stand to be a little warmer. You are my caretaker after all,” said Tabitha.

“I do not have a name as of yet,” the figure in black answered, ignoring the latter question and addressing the former. “I have just begun this occupation. I am at the moment, nameless.”

“Nameless,” said Tabitha. The figure silently nodded her head before she started again with the rest of her prepared speech.

“We, your humble guides, advise you to use this precious time to express your final farewells to any loved ones you are able to. This includes personal possessions and pets of any kind.”

As she finished, the pad of smoke vanished back into the thin air it appeared from.

“Oh, and we also advise you not to divulge this information to anyone, least of all, because they will plainly not believe you, thus avoiding any unnecessary embarrassment. You may also run the risk of causing them unneeded distress,”

“Cause them distress? I’m the one who’s perishing,” said Tabitha.

“What about not worrying about those things which you cannot change?”

“I am calm about it. That doesn’t mean that I do not care about it. There is a difference. Who’s going to comfort me?” asked Tabitha with genuine concern.

“Loved ones of course. A dog or a fish perhaps,”

“I don’t own either of those,”

“A bird then?”

Tabitha shook her head.

“How about siblings? Do you have any of those?”

Tabitha looked visibly shaken by this question. Her eyes grew very sad on her face. She slowly lowered her head and hesitated a moment before shaking it once more.

“Well, I’m sure you’ll figure something…”

“I have a father and a mother. Will those do?” Tabitha spoke up.

“I do not see why they wouldn’t. Now if you will excuse me,” said the figure in black as she turned to leave.

“Wait!” pleaded Tabitha. “I have many more questions for you, guide,”

The figure paused for a moment before turning back around toward her.

“Yes?”

“Does everyone who dies receive a guide such as yourself?” Tabitha asked with sincerity.

“No,” she said.

“Well, who then? Who is deserving of a guide?”

The figure in black took a moment before answering. She spotted a pillow on the girl’s bed and briefly considered picking it up and throwing it at her if it would stop her asking questions. She did not do this. Instead, she answered her.

“Those with a similar condition such as yours mostly: Those with time. Most elderly. Those whom, with reasonable certainty, can sense their oncoming demise before anyone else around them can.”

There was pause before she spoke again.

“And those who do not receive a guide…” she started, anticipating Tabitha’s next question “…are those with no time. Those who perish in freak accidents, those who perish in their sleep without warning, and those who perish due to heart attacks and strokes and other similar unavoidable medical conditions. And infants.”

“Why don’t infants deserve a guide?”

“Why, the inability to comprehend of course.”

“Oh, of course. Are there anymore?” continued Tabitha.

“Yes, there are more but these are the primary candidates. Now, I really must be…”

“Wait, please guide. A few more questions.”

The figure in black nodded, trying her hardest not to sigh audibly.

“How does one get to be in a situation such as yours? You make it sound like work. How do you get this job?” Tabitha asked innocently.

The figure in black hesitated to answer. None of her previous clients, though small in number, have ever been this inquisitive before so she never had to question herself or her own situation. She thought to herself long and hard but no simple answer to the question had entered her mind. The oldest memory she could conjure was one of approximately a month old, or, at least what seemed like a month––it may very well could have been a week, a day or simply an hour––and she remembered opening her eyes and being in a rather drab, medium-size room lacking in detail that seemed to be painted with cigarette-ash, standing in line with

many similarly dressed death guides; all dressed in black from head to toe, but of varying heights and varying faces: some rather odd and disfigured, and some with only slight blemishes, but all peculiarly familiar. She remembered standing with the rest of the guides, all of them very compliant, including herself, and all facing a figure in black, much taller and much older in appearance than any of the guides themselves, standing at the front of the room. He was giving a rather generic and, as she could judge, a much-prepared speech that included the rules and regulations of the task that they were to perform. She could not pull a memory from her mind that was older than this.

As her senses returned to the present, she looked at Tabitha and answered, "One does not apply for this position. One does not ask to be put in this situation. One just is and one just does."

"I see." Tabitha nodded in comprehension. She asked one more question before the figure had a chance to turn and leave again. "And how did you die?"

The figure stared, with what was considered to be her eyes, into Tabitha's own. "Excuse me?" she asked Tabitha.

"You said that you used to be considered someone. That implies that you were once alive. How did you die? What is your story?" Tabitha asked once again.

"I… I…" This seemed to cause the figure some distress of her own. She thought and thought but could not for the life of her, or death of her rather, conjure an answer.

"I do not have a story. I cannot remember," she finally said, and Tabitha grew sad once more.

"I really must be going, Miss Wilkinson."

"Before your next visit, guide…" Tabitha started before the figure had a chance to move "…I want you to do something for me. I want to hear your story. I want you to find out how you died and how you came to be in this position, and I also want you to find out your real name. And then I want you to tell me your findings when you return. Can you do that for me, guide?"

The guide thought to decline, she really wanted to, as this was no business of this bald and sickly little girl's. But instead, for reasons only known to her, gave a

sharp and hurried nod. It was unclear whether she did so in compliance or because she was in hurry to leave, but Tabitha seemed satisfied with the response.

“So, I’ll see you again in two days time.” Tabitha confirmed as she raised her hand to wave goodbye to her guide.

“Yes you shall. Be well,” she answered back. With that, the figure in black made her exit, disappearing within the same cloud of black smoke and weak sparks that she arrived in.

# 2

## The Story of Three

The figure in black arrived back in her own realm. She was in a room that was devoid of any detail or color––unless you would consider skull-white a color––and the room had no door or furnishings of any kind, save for a lone chair in the corner, and one window; a window she stared out of while deep in thought about something. In fact, it was someone who had gotten the wheels in her head spinning, spinning much too fast for her liking. For some reason, her recent visit with Tabitha Wilkinson had affected her deeply. So many questions the little girl had for her, and so unprepared was she to receive them. But she had begun to wonder what her story actually was. How did she come to be in this state? Who or what exactly killed her, if something or someone had killed her at all? Or perhaps she choked to death on a random food item in some random restaurant in some random town. She could have even drowned in the ocean while the sea life looked on, not lifting a finger or fin to help. Or maybe she had committed that one unspeakable act, the act of removing oneself from the life of the living, the act of suicide.

As she stared out into the billowing gray tufts of what resembled clouds that slowly passed in the area above her that could only be sky, she thought and thought to herself but nothing manifested. This affected her more than she anticipated. Perhaps a stroll would clear my mind, she thought, and she glided straight ahead, through the window and the wall that it was built into, and floated down to the ethereal plateau that resembled a ground. Many guides were leaving the premises in exactly the same fashion from windows next to, above and below hers and she observed every single one of them. She had known many of them for