

POETRY | SPRING 2022

## Teatime

By Catherine Read

You will learn to greet death like a friend  
Ask why he is so intent on taking you now  
Let him pull up a chair  
He will be shocked you are not afraid of him ruining the upholstery

Start to reminisce  
Remind him of the time he came for your mother  
How she fought him off with chemo and a scalpel  
He will mention he was always impressed by her fire

He will still be uncomfortable in your living room  
So tell death that if it makes him that nervous  
He can kick off his shoes  
But this carpet has known more dirt than a gossip  
So she's not surprised by anything

He still won't be ready to keep the conversation going  
So ask death about the car crash, if he was really there or not  
Because your mother and the police swear he was so close  
But you never felt like he was even in walking distance

Let him ask you why you are not afraid of him  
Death is used to being too taboo  
Offer him tea  
Tell him he's been in the room with you for too long for you fear him anymore  
He is more like an acquaintance than an event these days  
Five years of passing in the hallways of the hospital  
In the midnights you spent with patients who were awake and sputtering  
In the days you almost fell asleep while driving home  
Death was always a gentleman to you  
Never came for you before you were ready  
But was always nearby in case you needed him

Ask if he wants cream and sugar for the tea  
Tell him you trust him now  
That he won't force you into anything  
He will start to lace up his sneakers again  
Tell him you find something poetic in him  
Let him laugh

It will feel hollow, will rattle in your chest like the bell tower of an empty church  
Death will remind you he is not a metaphor, he is all too real  
He will tell you your tea was a little strong  
Laugh  
Tell him his presence has made you fierce  
He will tell you that you already were  
Don't get up, he knows to close the door on the way out  
Ask when he will be back and let the lock click in reply  
Smile to yourself  
Now, at least, you know what his voice sounds like

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