

THE HOSPICE
by Jacob Juntunen

A dark night inside a very small room. The room is very somber, decorated in blacks and greys. No colors. There is a large, black canopy bed with a very, very old man half sitting up in it. Sitting near the bed is a nurse in her early 30's. She sits in a simple wooden chair and is preoccupied with a book.

I'm dying.

OLD MAN

So am I! From the day I was born. Quit bothering me.

NURSE

I don't think you understand: *I'm dying*. Soon.

OLD MAN

The sooner the better. Then I won't have to listen to you babble.

NURSE

(pause)

Is there, perhaps, anyone else working tonight?

OLD MAN

Can't you let me die in peace?

NURSE

I only thought-

OLD MAN

I'm the only one qualified to be with you tonight.

NURSE

Because you're dying?

OLD MAN

Because I've been to school. I'm a nurse.

NURSE

I see.

OLD MAN

And I'm dying, so leave me alone!

NURSE

(NURSE goes back to her book)

This is somewhat funny.

OLD MAN

NURSE

You think me dying is funny? Oh, ha, ha! What a joke! Ho, ho, hee, hee!

OLD MAN

You're but a girl.

NURSE

I'm thirty-three years old! Half my life is gone! And I still haven't read *War and Peace*!

OLD MAN

Do you want to read *War and Peace*?

NURSE

It doesn't matter whether I *want* to, how can I die without having read *War and Peace*?!

OLD MAN

I've never read *War and Peace*.

NURSE

And look where you are now.

OLD MAN

It didn't seem very interesting.

NURSE

THAT DOESN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT!!!

OLD MAN

I see.

(NURSE goes back to reading)

OLD MAN

Are you reading it now?

NURSE

No, now I'm being bothered by an old man. When you're dead I'll be able to read my book in peace.

OLD MAN

I'll die tonight.

NURSE

I hope so.

OLD MAN

Are you sure there's no one else working?

NURSE

Yes.

OLD MAN

I see.

(Pause. NURSE continues reading,
OLD MAN looks around the room.
NURSE slams her book.)

What?
NURSE

I said nothing.
OLD MAN

I can hear you breathing, what do you want?
NURSE

Nothing.
OLD MAN

Your breathing irritates me.
NURSE

I'm sorry.
OLD MAN

Shall I talk?
NURSE

If you like.
OLD MAN

There once was a young woman-
NURSE

Did she live in a forest?
OLD MAN

Why would she live in a forest?
NURSE

Isn't this one of those stories about a young maiden living alone in a forest until a handsome knight comes and rescues her?
OLD MAN

That sort of sexist dribble has been completely vanquished.
NURSE

I see.
OLD MAN

This woman lived alone among tall buildings and was a highly successful, driven woman who wore short skirts and heels. One day a band of terrorists took over her building. She selflessly convinced the terrorists to let the other hostages go and just keep her. The police were helpless. The government was helpless. She was selfless. No one could think of what to do when a tall, handsome man with an exceptionally large gun slay the terrorists and rescued her. The end.
NURSE

That sounded familiar.
OLD MAN

It's brand new.
NURSE

Who wrote it? OLD MAN

Hollywood. NURSE

I see. OLD MAN

(pause)

I wish you'd hurry up and die. NURSE

Patience. OLD MAN

NURSE
That's all you old people ever say! "Patience"! What's so great about patience? I don't have time to be patient.

OLD MAN
Are you sure there's no one else working tonight?

NURSE
Yes, yes, yes!! What will it take to convince you? (she gets up, opens the door and screams out it) IS THERE ANYONE WHO WANTS TO NURSE AN OLD MAN?! (Silence. She returns to her chair.) No one. Not even me.

OLD MAN
I see.

(The door opens. JANITOR, a man in his early 50's, pokes his head in. We can see the top of the wooden handle of his mop)

JANITOR
Hello?

NURSE
What is it, can't you see I'm dying?

JANITOR
Excuse me, I didn't mean to bother him, but-

NURSE
Him? It's me you're bothering!

JANITOR
I heard you yelling; I thought you might need some help.

NURSE
I'm dying; you can't help me.

OLD MAN
You could help me.

Yes? JANITOR

Stay here. OLD MAN

Stay here so I can read *War and Peace*. NURSE

All right. Do you mind if I clean a bit? JANITOR

Not at all. OLD MAN

Don't stir up dust. I'm very sensitive to dust. NURSE

(JANITOR begins mopping)

I'm dying. OLD MAN

(not looking up from her book) There he goes again. NURSE

Now? JANITOR

Now. OLD MAN

Then a hospice is a good place to be. JANITOR

(looking up this time) We're all dying. NURSE

I don't understand. JANITOR

She's been to school. OLD MAN

Ohhh... JANITOR

Can you speak a little quieter please? NURSE

(softly) I'm dying. OLD MAN

Can I help you? JANITOR

I would like to point out something. OLD MAN

What? JANITOR

I'm not sure. Anything. My accumulated wisdom. OLD MAN

I don't understand. JANITOR

Neither do I. OLD MAN

Quiet! I'm trying to understand this! NURSE

I flew in an airplane once. I was briefly aloft, moving so swiftly I didn't notice I was moving. I thought at first the flight would be long, and I was very uncomfortable. I made efforts to improve things, but in the end the plane was landing before I realized any time had passed. OLD MAN

Perhaps if I'd gone to school... JANITOR

(jumping up) Ah, ha! Here it is! (reading) "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times"! That must be it! That must be the secret! NURSE

That sounds familiar... OLD MAN

Now I know! I know the answer! NURSE

I'm not sure- OLD MAN

I have reached the destination, from here I live happily ever after. NURSE

I think I've read that before. OLD MAN

How could you? You never read *War and Peace*. NURSE

It sounds familiar. OLD MAN

(NURSE closes the book and looks at the cover. She throws it to the floor in horror)

I read the wrong book! NURSE

I don't understand.

JANITOR

(holding her head in her hands) Oh, I had it! I had it! I was so sure! It's got to be somewhere! If I can just think it through!

NURSE

(putting his hand on the OLD MAN's heart) He's dead!

JANITOR

Can't you see I have other things to worry about! If I could only read *War and Peace*! It has so many words, it must be in there!

NURSE

What should I do?

JANITOR

Clean up!

NURSE

Maybe if I'd gone to school...

JANITOR

(Blackout)