

Henry's Table Talk



Photo by Gail Mezey Morris

HENRY ON DEATH

I believe I'll die in bed, smiling, in my sleep, with my hands clasped over my breast. Now I know for certain that I'm going to die! You know, I always knew there was death, but not me, don'cha know! I'm not afraid to die. It isn't dying that's so bad. It's the agony of going through the dying process, the suffering before death. That's what I fear most.

I believe that within the next hundred years people will die blissfully, without suffering, without fear. The more fully we embrace our lives, *live* our lives, the easier it is to accept the notion of death. Yet, it's the physical suffering that is the most frightening thing about dying, I feel. With all our scientific knowledge you'd think we would've solved that one long ago.

I read a book about death called *Life After Life*, and it raised some interesting points, one being that in the last stages of life you settle accounts, prejudices, hatreds with the world, and so on. Well, do you know, there is this devilish instinct in me that wants to hold on to hating people, to hold them up to ridicule! I don't want to settle my accounts with shits and bastards! I want to actively hate them. I haven't got that instinctive feeling for goodness. Tomorrow I may change my mind, say something

entirely different. I'm quixotic, chaotic, I follow no rules. I make up my own as I go along, and have actively broken as many rules as I could in my time.

People ask me if I believe in reincarnation. I don't have reminiscences of past lives or lifetimes. Many of my friends have, but not me. I do believe that I'm an old soul, a very old soul.

The Hindus say we keep coming back again and again to learn lessons. The lessons we didn't learn in one lifetime are waiting for us in the next. Now, I don't know if this is true but seeing how I didn't learn much from my experiences this time around, I most likely will return again. I go back and forth on this. Sometimes I want to come back and then there are times that the idea is abhorrent to me.

But if I should happen back this way once more, if given the choice, I'd like not to live the life of the artist, or the writer. I'd like more than anything to be a man who grows flowers. It seems to me that the life of the horticulturist is the cleanest, the purest, the most natural life of all. The man who tends a garden is the man most directly in touch with God.

MY MOTHER

I saw as a child, maybe only a few years old, that the world was rotten. I looked at my parent's ways as stupid. Their card playing, dinner parties, attitudes—everything they did, everything they stood for, was utterly contemptible to me. They were dull, uninteresting people. It makes me sad to have to say it but it's true! I was curious as a child, always asking questions, bursting for knowledge, and they were simply disinterested. I have this image of myself being so intelligent, that after jumping out of the womb I get up and run straight out the door to the library.

My mother was a first-class bitch who beat my sister senseless for embarrassing her, my poor sister who was retarded. From my earliest days I realized that I had to contend with a mother who was a kind of monster, an idiot. Can you imagine a person trying to beat some brains into a retarded child? It's totally ludicrous. That was one of the reasons I hated my mother all my life.

I wrote a short piece inspired by a dream I had a couple of years ago. In the dream I died and went to Devachan. Suddenly my mother appears and she's completely different from my memories of her. She is wonderful, radiant, sensitive, even intelligent!

After writing that piece, my view of her softened. I had created a mother of my own making, one I could relate to, one I could love even. It occurred to me that if my mother had been like the mother I had dreamed about, perhaps I wouldn't have become a writer after all. I might have become a tailor like my father. I might have been an upstanding pillar of society like she wanted me to be.

Instead of encouraging me, she belittled me constantly. Any effort I ever made was never good enough. She tried to scold and shame me into respectability. She thought in her small way that she was doing the right thing. What she didn't realize was that she was creating a very restless angry person.

When finally I found the courage to write what I'd been storing up for years, it came pouring out into one long relentless tirade. Beginning with the earliest memories of my mother, I had saved up enough hatred, enough anger, to fill a hundred books.