

# Will I Eventually Be Everybody?

*by* Martin Heavisides

A jump, a fall, that's how it begins. I don't know much about living but dying I should have down to a science, if practice makes perfect.

Death by burning as a witch (often) a warlock (not so much) a heretic (quite a bit, you'd be surprised--though, if you count all the religious wars there are a surprising number of ways you can die as a heretic and even a true believer. I've experienced most of them. These are remarkably unstable categories incidentally; pretty much every form of true belief is also a heresy. And yet every true believer insists they're polar opposites! If that's the case why can't anybody come up with a definition of one that effectively excludes the other, instead of which what do you find every time? the two promiscuously bundling up together the moment either one rears its head. I'd try to sort this out for everybody myself, but as you might imagine I'm a little preoccupied with all this . . . monotonous! oh God it's a straight razor this time, urrrrrgggg! aa-g--g-g-g-g-g-g-

Was I gone for long? Really? I don't know how to measure the . . . intervals between the . . . events so. . . oh don't ask me *that*! I lost count ages ago, or possibly less than a second, looked at another way. Hmm. . . bound to a stake, heaps of wood, torches, midnight mass, it's burning this time, which is painful but takes quite a while. . . still intoning the prayer for my soul in Latin. . . so I might have time to answer all your interview questions.

What? of *course* if they burn me as a witch I'm being burned as a woman. Witch--woman, warlock--man, don't you know your genders of the supernatural? I don't know how I appear to you, but when

they skim me through these flip cards murders executions and such, I pretty much leap across every boundary of--well, time obviously, but also: gender, language, nation, race so-called but it doesn't actually exist, that's simply sloppy definition, very bad and even very corrupt 19th century science giving its stamp of approval to centuries of hard cour pre-judgment, in spite of which I've been lynched a fair number of times as well. God I'd *prefer* burning to any more of that voice droning on!

I was past the age of majority (even if only just) when I took the leap off the bridge to my death--presumably, though I have no recollection of my plummeting body meeting the gilded sunset waters of the Bay, hard as concrete I'm told if you hit it after a plunge from that height--so it all depends on the frame in your view, in one I might still be falling even as in another I'm sitting in a comfy studio chair being interviewd for a cable show called **Trans-Dimensional Times** while in yet another yes! homily done at last, they're lighting the wood, first plumes of smoke, first crackles of flame. . .

Anyway I was a full-grown if somewhat unformed adult--I've learned a great deal since in a school where hard knocks are very far from the worst of it--but I've often been children, infants smothered, shaken to death, tossed into cisterns or abandoned naked outdoors in the depths of winter, sometimes deliberately, sometimes in boozy or drug-induced neglect, I've died of the last 'accidental' blow after a long history of abuse, in the terminal minutes of starvation, that's a peaceful death at least, without pain at the last--don't get me started on the infinite variety of ways I've died as a child.

I've died in so many guises, so many times in so many places, always in some way by force, at the end of a long, wasting, painful disease is the closest I've come to a natural death, or a swift outcrop of buboes, and *those* deaths were often the result of deliberate or

unconscious germ warfare--I've begun to wonder: will I eventually be everybody? If and when the waters I speed toward part at my coming, leaving a splash on the surface and a ripple not for very long, will the whole world drown with me? If I'd known that was even a possibility I'd never have taken the leap.

A gasp thrills through the crowd as a stray flame ignites the breastline of my sackcloth gown, showing a sudden flash of naked bubie--that flame of lust won't last, it's the rare individual finds fat streaming and bubbling from flesh charred progressively over visible, blackening bone an aphrodisiac pleasure.

San Francisco. Summer of love but I'd had little of that in my life up to then, and no appreciable uptick that summer, just the reverse in fact. I'd not met with true coercive *force majeure* much either I have to admit, now that I've experienced several lifetimes worth of it for comparison and contrast--crackle of fire or crackle of bones? urrk! blade across the throat, oops! grenade in the foxhole, that's me all over--but such a weight's on me, the golden beauty of harbour and Bay is a kind of creeping jaundice in my eye. Not all that easy to stand at this height with the wind grab! grab hold what is it the cable wire the pillar? think this through. No, no more thinking: Let go. One step, two.

