

PARDON MY DYING

A SEQUEL TO ASH WEDNESDAY.

The first lesson recalls yesterday's Imposition of the Ashes,
Genesis 3:19: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return."

The second lesson is I Corinthians 15:49: "Just as we have borne the
image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

'A conversation overheard,
at least imagined,
a private conversation
between a husband and his wife--
she on her deathbed,
he seated close beside,
both of them hoping still to say
what needed saying most
before the end.

"Before I leave," she said,
"I do have something to confess."

"Please don't," he said,
"Now's not the time for that.
If there's confessing to be done,
let's let it go at saying
you're my girl
and that I've loved you always."

"That's right," she said, "I'm only yours.

And that you love me, that I know.

It's just because you do

that I believe

that you could handle

my confession now."

"But don't you understand,"

he said,

"that I don't need

for you to say you're sorry,

not for anything?"

"Well," she agreed, "you may not need that

but I do.

And I do understand

that if I have that need

--the need to make confession

and to be forgiven--

you're strong enough to hear me out."

"Maybe," said he, "I'm not so strong, at
that,

At least I'm not afraid

that some last, unacknowledged sin

still stands between us.

And if I'm not afraid of that,

why should you be?"

"Oh, Adam, you poor dear,

Is that what you had thought I said,

that I'm afraid,

that that was why

I wanted to confess?

I'm not afraid, at least not much.

At any rate that wasn't why

I wanted to apologize:

not out of fear

but out of hope.

I dare to hope that I'm absolved

and hoping that, I want to hear you
say

I really am.

And hoping that I am

does make it easier to say

I'm sorry."

"All right," said he, "you win.

What is there to forgive?"

"Forgive my dying

Pardon this damned mortality."

"Your dying? Pardon that?

But girl," said he,

"that's something you can't help.

Dying is . . .

only natural."

"No, it's not natural at all,"

she said.

"Life wasn't meant to die.

Neither were we.

We both know that.

We've known that ever since

we've known of Easter.

Death isn't natural at all.

It's a downright dirty, dastardly
demeaning defeat.

We're not meant to 'accept' it,

not even if with 'dignity.'

We're meant to trump it,

as we shall."

"But then," said he,

"if death is conquered anyway,

if we outlast it,

(and we shall)

why do you still think

dying needs forgiving?"

"Does that," she asked, "disturb you so,

for me to say that death

is what we've brought upon ourselves,

what we've got coming to us?

Does that strike you as morbid,

despite the fact I'm not afraid?

Despite the fact that it's my hope

and not my fear.

which frees me to admit

the shame of dying,

do you see that

as merely clinical escape?

Come, Adam, can't you deal with that?

I believe you can."

"I wouldn't say," said he,

"that that is morbid.

Still, it does seem--

how shall I say?--

a bit too self-important

for us to take the credit for

so vast a thing as death.

Are we, for all our guilt,

really that influential?"

"That does seem hard to believe,"

she said,

"unless we manage first to believe

that God is interested enough to

because he's still more interested

in resurrecting and forgiving.

For him to let us die is judgment,

not contempt.

And there's a difference.

Ignore us? That he never does.

But deal with us he does.

That important we all are."

"But then," said Adam,

"why do you

ask now to be forgiven

by me?

Forgiveness, yes. But why from me?

I'm not the one who judges you."

"But you're the one I hurt.

For, Adam dear,

I do hurt you by dying.

You know I do.

It hurts me, too, of course.

Death even hurts my vanity.

Death isn't pretty

and, as you know,

I've always like being pretty,

But worse than that by far,

it hurts to have to liquidate

the fondest love affair

that any wife could want.

And it's for that, for interrupting that,

That I do say I'm sorry."

To which he said, "I do forgive,

I too forgive."

"And thanks for that," said she.

"Meanwhile, Adam, think spring,

Think Christ."

"I'll see you later, girl."

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