

The Cemetery and the Shooting Gallery

By Charles Baudelaire

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"Graveyard View Hotel! Singular announcement," said our stroller to himself, "but well calculated to produce thirst. Sure enough, the master of this inn must appreciate Horace and the poets of the school of Epicurus; perhaps even he knows the refinement of the old Egyptians, who held no festival without a skeleton or some other emblem of the shortness of life.

In he went, drank a glass of beer opposite the tombstones, and slowly smoked a cigar. Then the fancy took him to go into the cemetery whose grass was so tall and so inviting, and where so rich a sun held sway.

In effect, the light and the heat were revelling there, and one would have said that the drunken sun was wallowing at all its length upon the carpet of magnificent flowers nourished upon destruction. An immense rustle of life filled the air; the life of things infinitely small, which was interrupted at regular intervals by the rattle of the shots of a neighboring shooting gallery, which burst forth like the explosion of champagne corks amid the murmur of a muffled symphony.

Then, under the sun which warmed his brain and in the atmosphere of the burning perfumes of death, he heard a voice whisper beneath the tomb where he was seated, and this voice said, "Accursed be your targets and your guns, ye noisy folk that are alive, who care so little for the dead and their divine rest! Accursed be your ambitions, accursed be your calculations, impatient mortals, who come to study the art of slaying so close to the sanctuary of death! What futile mark do you aim at, what petty result do you obtain? Is it not all vanity that prompts you to this practice? Is your effort to learn how to kill sufficiently to be rewarded by the infliction of death? If you knew how easy the prize was to gain, how easy the mark was to hit, and how all is nothing except death, you would not take so much trouble, O toilsome folk that are alive, and you would trouble less often the slumber of those who long since have hit the mark, sole true mark of detestable life."