

## ROMANCE

Rebecca R Peel

*We're all thinking it*

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*A ubiquitous language to warn future people of nuclear hazards has neglected those who decipher the world through sensation. They have little use for the symbolic; they may well indiscriminately chew away at the fixtures we've created to hold us aloft, scorch the earth, and attempt to sponge it back up. But a nickel once skipped across a fecund pond is extant stone in a well once full of wishes is now a salt lick, a mere shiny thing, or a choking hazard. (RRP)*

“Til death do us part” remains a forever contract with your god or legal firm even as wildfires burn. What do we want a commitment to forever for? The symbolic phrase promising a lifelong union comes from the 16th century Book of Common Prayer when human lifespan was roughly half of what it was today. We know in our lungs and hearts that this extension of our years on precious earth is at its breaking point, yet we are still bound to institutions and collective beliefs that keep pulling the cord tighter.

*Around everything, some sort of cinch or ratchet strap or tension device clicks: it's all about the race maybe to the bottom but either way a “finish line” at which point the constraint translates into efficiency and maximized output – the last drop of blood / the last pinch of salt / the last ounce of oil ... life is only as good as its toils and subsequent spoils. (RRP)*

As recapped by the Klein Law Group's website, marriage was arranged for hundreds of years based on class and economic interest: “The children of leather tanners would marry the children of shoemakers, the children of prosperous farmers of grain would marry millers. Such arrangements helped consolidate economic activity – which would eventually lead to the rise of family-owned craft and industrial firms.” Hopefully a new sentimentality can soften the brittle ideals of a life well-lived.

With a slight turn of phrase, Peel embroiders “Til death do its part” in faint teal on a white wedding napkin. The phrase's earlier wording was again slightly modified: “Til death us depart.” with “depart” meaning “separate,” rendering mortality more like an entity, as Peel suggests, or a verb akin to the experience of living rather than an inert future kicked down the road. And we're not innocent, no matter how quaint the pastoral scenes of handpainted burning barns, wallpaper decorated with horses tied up at the hooves, or a pedestal bearing the weight of a trophy. A force majeure clause would never hold. We're all thinking it. But even if we can't be the main characters riding in as heroes, maybe we can at least accept that this is happening.

*And let's say the meaning of martyrship dissolves, as in a break in the lineage of a common perspective – the images and objects created in likeness and homage to secure their immortality, stripped of aura are liberated, yet lonely; they are no longer pressured to perform the script prescribed to them, but their status no longer equates to protection and preservation. What tends to get neglected is the inevitable remnants. The contents of a boiling pot evaporate rapidly; the water is gone, but a crust of minerals takes its place. (RRP)*