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Smiling while dying

Could we ever, as ordinary people, overcome death, make fun of it without pretence, or even fully accept it? How not to be afraid of what comes next, after we die? Not everyone is so courageous as to choose for a movie a subject so complicated and mysterious. We cannot explain death or what is after, but we can use it to explain our real human nature and other great questions about life. And that is exactly what the two Finnish directors Iddo Soskolne and Janne Reinikainen did in their fifteen-minute drama movie, *Reunion* (in Finnish: *Tuolla Puolen* – "On the other side"), released in 2015.

The movie stars only three Finnish actors: young Elma af Schulten (dead girl, Anja), Janne Reinikainen (her brother) and Riitta Havukainen, who all inhabit their characters perfectly. This unique court métrage attracted world's filmmakers and critics and was selected to represent Finland at the 2016 French Court Métrage festival in Rennes. The movie truly blows away the audience by its un-ordinary manner of making things paradoxically ordinary, even when it comes to death. The story shows people how they really are, stubborn, egoistic and almost unable to change. How they can free themselves from their attitudes to life only after death where there are no limits and no prejudices anymore.

The main character, young Anja, who died 30 years ago, spends her afterlife time with her brother Jorma, already grown-up, living sadly alone in his house, suffering guilt over his sister's early death. He refuses salvation by choosing a lonely life over a suicide. Anja decides to help people pass the boundary to the afterlife as she is waiting for her own brother to die, to finally be reunited and be dead together happily ever after. She makes dying easy by giving people some happiness, warmth and understanding.

Right at the beginning, Anja's pleasant voice is talking about ordinary people doing weird things, as if nothing is happening. The atmosphere is all gloomy as most scenes are shot during the night, in an almost deserted Finnish countryside, making the impression of death more convincing. The camera takes all kinds of shots and often changes the style of shooting. For example, using close-ups or cut-ins for thoughtful scenes amplifies the feeling of suspense. Most scenes are quiet or even without any sound. Moments of panic and fear are well captured by quick mostly tracking shots. On the other hand, a wonderfully ridiculous scene, where Anja helps a woman overcome her death by playing her a song, draws humor and energy from that particular song "I'm properly pissed off" coming out of Anja's headphones.

The whole strange run of the story forces us to think about ourselves and about death in detail and also makes us smile over it at the same time, which is frankly amazing. The peaceful, laid-back, but also gloomy atmosphere evokes a feeling of death as a part of everyday life and opens the door for black humor and irony. Sadly, I could not really catch the meaning of some scenes or statements. This could be taken as an interesting enrichment or as confusing and disturbing.

I strongly recommend the movie to those of you, who always feared of death, or those who just like strong black humor. I don't mean to convince you that there is an afterlife, but I would like you to look at it as a first move towards taking death as a part of life and to enjoy your real life, without pretending, with all its mistakes.