

## The Last Word

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As this the end? Is **sex** dead? **Necrophiliacs** argue that it is. The rest of us are hardly prepared to agree. “Not over my dead body!” we say. There is, however, a consensus that **sex** is a deadly serious business. As W.C. Fields reminded us, “Sex isn’t necessary. You don’t die without it, but you can die having it.”

Most favor the **mort douce** (“sweet death”), also known as **dying in the saddle** or **with one’s boots on**. It has claimed many a prominent figure, who found it quite a way to go. When the producers of TV’s “Hill Street Blues” had to explain the death of Sergeant Esterhause (1983–84, coinciding with the real death of actor Michael Conrad) they had him die in the arms of his **paramour**. Others allegedly exiting in this fashion included a former Vice President of the United States and a French Archbishop locked in a **conjugal embrace** in a **house of ill repute**. Speaking of his father’s death under similar circumstances, comedian Richard Pryor noted how “he **came** and went at the same time.”

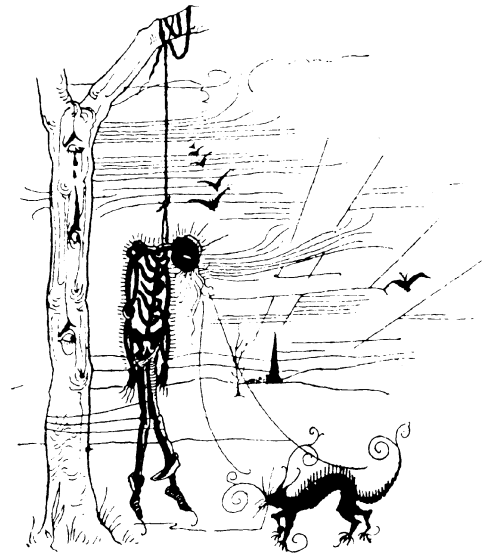
However, it also happens under more traditional circumstances. Death has frequently been used as a metaphor to describe the **sexual spasm**. As Benedick promised Beatrice (in *Much Ado About Nothing*), “I will live in thy heart, **die** in thy **lap** and be buried in thy eyes.” But no need to mourn. Samuel Butler reminded us, “O ’tis a happy and heav’nly death when a man **dy’s** above and a woman beneath” (“From Love,” mid 17thC).

### Never Say Die

Others also consider **sex** a dying activity. The scientific news magazine, *Discover*, in a 1984 article entitled, “Why **Sex?**” discovered that **sex** is an inefficient way for an organism to reproduce itself. For the first time in recent memory, **sex** faces tough competition from an alternative lifestyle. The word is out about “the new **celibacy**” (from the Latin *caelebs*, “unmarried,” which originally referred to a state of living alone and only later to **sexual abstinence** and

*Take your course, use your force  
Kill me, Kill me, if you please;  
Nay. I’ll die willingly  
In this sweet death, I find such ease.*

—Anon., Roxburghe Ballads, 1871



*I will die bravely like a smug bridegroom.*  
—Shakespeare, King Lear