



# Grim Love

It was a vast assumption for Bard to believe the other man in the elevator was actually a man. This is because, as a product of Western culture's TV programming (you know, shows like *Family Guy*), Bard had always thought the Grim Reaper to be a dude. But when Bard saw the Reaper, standing idle and pushing the heat-sensitive elevator buttons to no avail, gender wasn't on his mind. All he whispered was, "Please, God, not today . . ."

The response wasn't comforting: "Bard, holy shit, I've been looking everywhere for your sorry ass! I'm assuming you know why I'm here." Bard didn't respond though, mouth agape. All he heard was the voice, not the words, and it was that of a somewhat sexy female.

This *he*, sporting a tattered charcoal cloak and gripping a menacing scythe, was actually a *she*. Behind that skeletal face, one of every Halloween horror imaginable, resided the opposite sex of which Bard had spent the better part of his life trying to understand. He should've known it would be a woman sent to reap and collect his soul; after all, his two ex-wives had taken everything else.

The elevator then interrupted the man's dumbfounded thoughts, buzzing to his obstruction between the doors. "Well," Bard finally muttered, "we going up . . . or down?"

"That's not really for me to decide. I'm just kinda here to kill

you.”

“Can I at least grab one last beer?”

Death loosened her grip on the scythe, checked her watch. “I don’t usually do this,” she said, “but it’s a bit of a slow day. I suppose it wouldn’t kill us.” They both chuckled, making awkward eye contact as Bard leaned across her to push the elevator lobby button. It would have been a vast assumption at this point to ever believe these two would end up in love. But they did.

That night Death got way too drunk to kill Bard, as she is wont to do, and made a complete ass out of herself. Bard took her home, cleaned her up, and they fooled around a little. He then, after a minor debate on the issue, let her take the bed and him the couch.

The next morning Death slept till noon, late for the daily harvest, and donned sunglasses when facing the midafternoon light. She was too hungover to track down and kill Bard, but he left a note inviting her to make herself at home, that breakfast was waiting on the kitchen island. She played *Call of Duty* while waiting for him to come back. She smoked pot to pass the time. Once Bard returned, they sat together and killed CG Germans throughout the night. They made a good team.

Weeks passed, and yet, Bard lived. He took her dancing, on walks along the coastal cliffs, to archaeological lectures. They discussed politics, religion, and the unlikely possibility of time travel. Sometimes

she would make him watch *Sex in the City* with her. Sometimes she would take him to the cemeteries and brag of her favorite assignments.

He would daydream of spending a life with her—having kids, growing old, the whole works. But Bard was *already* old. And he'd already made two attempts at such an existence, both failing: one to the folly of youth, the other to midlife dismay. Death was different, though. She renewed Bard, making him think he could do life all over again—and somehow get it right this time.

They made a good team, but this isn't to say every moment was coming up roses. They would fight over petty bullshit, usually both drunk, with Death threatening to kill him and Bard threatening to kill himself just the same (out of spite, of course). They'd later joke and refer to such arguments as death-defying altercations. It was cute and they both knew it.

Despite the mutual obsession though, they still hadn't made love yet—and it wasn't due to any pragmatic lack of flesh either. Bard would tug at her cloak in fits, but she'd refuse. He'd send her provocative texts to no response. There was embarrassment strung across her bones, or maybe just hiding somewhere in that vacant ribcage of a chest, but she never confessed the shame—not even during the recurring inebriated nights.

“Why won't you *just* fuck me?” he blurted one evening during foreplay. “Are you seeing other people? Is that it? Or is this just some

sick game to you—something you do with all your victims? Huh? Is this just—”

She slapped him—

He open-mouth kissed her—

She pushed back—

He pulled her in. “Hey,” he said. “Hey,” grabbing her face, “please . . . please just be honest with me?”

To this she broke down, knowing the hurt she was fully capable of, and clutched him like the life she wanted so badly. “I used to be beautiful!” she lamented. “I hate what I’ve become. *I HATE IT*. And I could never give you what you need: I work strange hours, I’m moody, and my boss is such a dick—he *really* wants me to kill you!”

Bard grabbed her by the hand; he knew what it was to work for an asshole. “Hey,” he whispered, “just kill me when you’re ready . . . but please don’t drag this out.”

That night they made love like they’d been doing it for eternity, grace and ease lubricating the eccentricity. Death was nothing more than bones beneath that robe, but Bard handled every joint, knuckle, and spinal column with care. And when she would weep, thrusting aggressively and grinding her hips into his, he would draw her in, running a hand down her femur, and breathe her breath.

Thrust after thrust, dark orgasm after dark orgasm, they felt alive together, ravishing and abusing each other with only the lonely

passion that flirting with death can bring. They tore each other apart, creating galaxies in the space between. He tasted her marrow. She, his mortality.

Bard's body wasn't found for nearly a week, not until the odor overtook his apartment complex and neighbors became concerned. The coroner's reports ruled the matter a heart failure: poor diet compounded by inevitable aging. It would have been a vast assumption for anyone to think otherwise. It would have been a vast assumption to ever think the true culprit was the grimmest of love.