

Don't Fear the Reaper

“Next”

The nasal voice echoed out around the room. It was quite a large room, though there was hardly anything in it. A desk, a chair, a door and a potted plant. It was a very nice potted plant, made from the highest quality plastic. It spoke wonders about the sort of person who worked in the office. Namely that they liked the colour black. Almost everything was black. The table, the chair, the plant and the ceiling were all black. The only thing that wasn't was the floor which alternated between tiles of black and a very dark shades of blue.

The door swung open and an elderly gentleman, wearing an Armani suit stumbled into the room.

“Ouch!” he yelped as he landed directly on his backside.

“Mind the step,” said a voice from the other end of the room.

The man, who had just entered, struggled to his feet and looked across the room at the desk. Behind it was a middle aged balding man scribbling furiously into a large book which covered over half the table.

“Don't just stand there gawking,” said the man behind the desk, “I don't have all day...well, actually I do, but that's no excuse to just stand around being idle.”

Without thinking the elderly gentlemen began to walk across the almost, but not completely, black tiled floor towards the desk. Suddenly he stopped.

“Wait a second...what the hell is going on here? Where am I?” asked the elderly gentlemen, seemingly slightly confused.

The man behind the desk looked up and peered over his glasses.

“You mean he didn't tell you?” he said as he arched his eyebrows in surprise.

“Who didn't tell me what?”

“I really need to talk to that young man. It's one thing forgetting to file the reports, but not telling the clients what's happening to them...well...” he drifted off into silence for a few seconds before continuing to scribble notes into his book.

“Talk to who?” shouted the elderly gentlemen, his face turning pink with anger, “What the hell is going on. Where am I?”

“You’re dead sir,” came the reply from the clerk without even looking up from the book.

“Oh, right then, well...wait... I’m WHAT?” yelled the gentlemen as he took a few running steps towards the desk before regaining his composure.

The man behind the desk placed his pen down next to the book with the meticulous precision found only in pedantics and Feng Shui consultants. He pushed his glasses up to the top of his nose before speaking.

“You’re dead sir. You have...how do they put it? Ah yes. You have kicked the bucket, you are six feet under, you have choked the proverbial chicken,” he paused for a second as though thinking, “No...wait...you haven’t choked your chicken. That’s something completely different.”

The gentlemen, now standing in front of the desk with a look akin to that of exasperation on his face, let out a stream of expletives.

“Please watch your language sir. Imagine what your mother would say if she could hear you.”

“But my mother’s dea...” the colour from his face drained, “She’s...she’s not here is she?”

The man behind the desk smiled slightly.

“Not here sir, but she may be where you’re headed next. Tell me your name and I can find out.”

“G...Gareth. Gareth Roberts,” stuttered Gareth, the thought of his mother hampering his oratory skills. Being dead might not be that bad, but being dead with HER around, most certainly would be.

“One moment sir,” said the clerk as he buried his nose in the book in front of him. The office was quiet, with only the sound of turning pages filling the vacuum of silence.

Gareth watched the pages of the book with awe. Every page seemed to be dedicated to a different person and their life. When the clerk stopped for a few seconds he glanced at the name at the top of the page. It read “Genghis Khan” and as he watched, he saw words scrawl across the book describing what he’d eaten for breakfast.

“But...Genghis Khan’s dead,” said Gareth, giving voice to his thoughts.

“In a manner of speaking sir, yes he is.” replied the clerk whilst continuing to search the book.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand, he’s either dead or he isn’t...isn’t he?”

“Not exactly sir” said the clerk still not looking up from the book.

Gareth was confused. Here he was, apparently dead, and yet Genghis Khan, according to the hook nosed man sitting in front of him, was still alive....sort of. Gareth hadn’t felt this confused since he’d woken up one morning to discover he was in bed with his sister-in law after a night out on the town. But despite this, there was a question burning on his tongue he needed to ask.

“I’m sorry...but, I have to ask. Just who are you?”

The clerk looked up.

“Me sir? Why I am the collector of souls. The eternal watchmen. I am one of the two certainties in life. I am...what is it your reality calls me? Ah yes. The Grim reaper! I sir, am Death.”

Death? Gareth couldn’t believe his ears. This middle aged balding man with glasses was claiming to be one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

“Could you repeat that? I need to make sure I didn’t mishear”

“I sir, am Death.” responded the Reaper, “and I do believe I have located you in the book. I’m afraid your mother will be with you also. Now then let’s see...how you died...huh. Apparently you were killed in a car crash with a ten tonne lorry. Nasty business really. Miraculous that your suit survived without a scratch, though it’s a good thing really. You’ll need clothes where you’re going. They won’t offer that much protection, but every little helps, or so they say at least. I personally have no personal knowledge of what goes on in hell, I just send people there...”

Gareth wasn’t listening. Something wasn’t quite adding up. Had Death just said he’d died in a car crash?

“Er... I’m not quite sure how to break this to you, but I haven’t been in a car crash.”

Death dropped his pen.

“I beg your pardon? Did you just say you HAVEN’T, been in a car crash/

“No. I wasn’t.” said Gareth, thinking that something had obviously gone horribly wrong. Strangely enough, he wasn’t worried. The prospect of not having to spend the rest of eternity with his mother made any mistake that was made entirely forgivable.

“Well it would certainly explain the suit.” mumbled death as he walked towards the door, opened it. “Excuse me a second,” he said as he walked out and closed it behind him. A second later the door opened again and Death re-appeared.

“Is everything ok?” asked Gareth.

“No, not really,” replied Death, “I’m afraid one of my staff has screwed up big time. I’m sorry for the trouble that’s been caused with you being brought here. If you’d just step through the door you’ll be returned to where you were before...without memory of what happened here of course.”

“Oh...alright” muttered Gareth as he walked towards the door, and slowly opened it. It was dark outside. This wasn’t the kind of dark that consisted of an absence of light however. This was the kind of dark that consisted of an absence of everything. Just pitch blackness. It matched the décor perfectly.

Gareth was about to make a comment about the darkness, but found himself pushed forward, directly into it. The darkness enveloped him. For a brief second he felt cold and then heard the door slam shut behind him.

Death wandered back to his desk, sat down and turned the hourglass that was on his desk. His eyes remained fixed as he watched the grains of ebony coloured sand fall through into the bottom half of the hourglass. As the last few grains seeped through he raised his finger and pointed at the door.

3...2...1...

Click!

The door opened and in stumbled an elderly gentleman, wearing an Armani suit.

‘Good evening Mr Roberts!’ greeted Death as he offered him a seat. ‘If you’ll be kind enough to just sit down and wait whilst I get your files in order we can see you off to your pre-destined afterlife in no time at all.’

Gareth had a strange feeling of Deja-vu...