Don’t Fear the Reaper

Throughout my childhood and school life I was always the outcast. There was only one person who stayed with me, and played and talked to me during that time. His name was Chris. We were inseparable. Our lives were filled with adventure, and with our overwhelming curiosity we went everywhere. We played on the hills, we planted a tree, and we ran through the forests and even poked around in the gutters. We laughed, we smiled, and we were brave kids exploring the whole world. We learned about everything outside our doors. When it rained we played in the puddles. We loved to watch the clouds glide by in the cerulean sky. We would do that when the sky was perfect, on the same hill with the same tree. Sitting in the middle of the street we would play with the chalk and would draw on each other, blissful. We would often go out early in the morning to watch the sun rise above the trees and the valley below. We were content with our lives and looking back, if we had to die right then and there, we would with no regrets. He meant everything to me and was my only friend, my absolute best friend. Perhaps more than that, like brothers. We were one of the same.

One day he came to me with a bruise on his face and his hands. Something felt off. I tried confronting him but he acted as the same old happy Chris that I knew. He was smiling his old goofy smile and said that everything was all right. I had no reason not to believe him. He was always nice to everyone and it just never seemed that anything would happen to him. We would often sit on the hill, overlooking the small valley under the willow tree. We took care of
it, and met there almost every day after school. We talked to each other a lot, about the future, about the past. One day it was very chilly, and we had our sweaters on under the tree. It was getting dark and we hugged each other. I could still remember it to this day; the warm soft embrace and the quiet sobs behind all the layers with the defeated look in his blue crystal eyes. We sat there in silence with the wind faintly blowing his light hair. Something happened. Something happened that day and I didn't do anything about the bruises or the scars. I had scars of my own. We were one of the same.

It's very hard to see your best friend, your boyfriend, and your companion die all at once. He was suffering, mentally and physically. He was much thinner than before, his hair disheveled, but he was still the same old person I knew. He was everything to me and he was the light of my life. The day he died right in front of my eyes; the sky was barren. Before then, he was still playing with me, still adventuring with me, still laughing and smiling that goofy smile of his, and it all just went away. It was like the flickering off of a light like the flickering off of my happiness, my sanity, and my health.

It left me little by little, that happiness. Then came the insomnia, schizophrenia, and that constant, irrational fear. When asked what I wanted to do in my life, I would always hesitate since I wasn’t sure if I even wanted to keep it. It was the stone bridge that night. A few days ago it was the roof of my apartment complex. My legs dangled over the river and my back rested against the lamppost. It was well past midnight when I met him. I didn’t notice him at first, a tall man sitting a few yards from me. At first I thought it was a maintenance worker, or perhaps someone else who shared the same sadness that took over me that night, but I realized after a
moment that he was wearing a robe, a cloak. I knew what I was looking at. I’ve read books, and
watched television. I knew what Death was supposed to look like.

He was just sitting there, silent. He was turned a bit sideways, almost like he was looking at me.

“Why are you here?” I asked that night; a question to which I already knew the answer
to. He stared at me from his post, knees pressed against his chest and arms curled around his
shins, sort of a fetal position. I was not afraid of him; instead I studied him with curiosity.

“To watch,” He told me. I shuddered at those first words. I had expected those words
taking the form of mist, but it was something more. It was a voice of confidence and strength. It
disturbed and comforted me.

“To watch what?” I asked. He simply looked at me. I saw his face for the first time that
night. I expected it to be a face of horror, with soulless eyes that stared back. Instead, I found
blue orbs in a bleached skull. Those eyes held everything inside them. It held the universe, and
everything that never was. It held countless years of wisdom and an eternal flame. And there
they were, right in front of me.

“Over you, child. To see what you would do next,” Death responded. I questioned if
here was here to intervene, but he quickly dismisses that idea. He said that was he simply there
to guide me if I were to succumb to my nightmares, embracing the dark churning waters below.
We both knew that I would be there for a long time, sitting there on that bridge. We continued
talking that night, and he would tell me stories about the past, and the future, both many
millennia from now. He would tell me that everything was all right and that I shouldn’t be
worried, that I would be okay. I asked him questions about the afterlife and the many countless
experiences that he’d had. He always answered vaguely, telling me that I’d understand when
the time has come. He stayed up with me and comforted me. He was more like a father to me, a friend that I longed to find after Chris passed away. I never grew tired from talking to him. He would speak in many different tones and voices, those of my mother, my father, and Chris. He would speak with voices that sounded familiar to me, but ones that I could never assign a face to. The air was cool and he pulled a thick leather bound book from his robe and opened it. Inside were countless stories, and those of fairy-tales in many different languages. As he read on I leaned against the cold metal lamp, hearing a faint creaking. He stayed with me and comforted me until the dawn peeked over the tree line. After a while, he stopped talking, and only stared at me, blue eyes unmoving.

I’ve made my decision that night. By then, I had nothing left else to say, because by that point, there wasn’t anything left to say that mattered. We locked eyes and time seemed to stand still for us. The sunlight touched his black robes, turning it piercing white. I looked out towards the rising sun and tears suddenly fell from my eyes. He reached out and placed his hand around mine. I would’ve expected his skeletal hand to be cold, voided of all warmth, but I knew that it would be nothing like that; and it wasn’t. He broke his gaze and looked forward, out towards the river and the breaching sun ahead, and I did the same. It was beautiful. It reminded me of those moments many years ago under the tree, with Chris’s arms and mine intertwined. I was mesmerized and I wanted to speak to Death again, to tell him what that sunrise felt like, to tell him of the overwhelming joy that I was feeling. But when I turned towards him, he was gone.

I felt comfort and content looking at the stone where he once was seated. I sat there looking at that spot until the sound of birds chirping broke me from my thoughts. I climbed
down from the ledge of the bridge and started to walk. I didn’t know where my destination was, but I soon found myself walking up the familiar trail that took me to the hill. The leaves swayed back and forth as the breeze blew past, and I leaned my back against the ancient tree. I was happy. I was happy because I knew that when Chris passed away the gentle being was with him, standing by his side holding his hand and telling him that it would be all right. I was content because I now understood that Death wasn't like the depictions in stories and tales in our world, that he is a kind, gentle, and patient being that would always be there with you, every step of the way. I was content because I knew that when it was my time, one day in the future, I would open the door and invite him inside. I would treat him like an old friend and we would talk for countless hours again, talking about our experiences and share stories of nature and the universe. And would talk about last night. And when we were done he would only stare at me, silent, blue orbs unmoving. He would extend his hand, waiting for me to take it. I sighed. I breathed in the fresh air and look up at the tree. It’s branches swayed slightly and little patches of sunlight shone through the leaves. And I would have decided.