

Death and Life

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It didn't end the way it did in fairy tales.

But how it started like one.

It began as many stories do: with a man and a woman.

When I first saw her . . . oh, stars, it felt like my heart had started in my chest. She was so beautiful. I had stumbled upon her in the meadow of the Greenwood, watching as she laughed and bounded and twirled under the midday sun, newborn fawns following clumsily after her, the very picture of goodness and grace. She reached down to stroke their fur with her

slender green hand, basking in the adoring gazes of their innocent black eyes, gazes that mirrored my very own. It had been impossible not to fall under her spell; she'd played her role remarkably well.

New flowers bloomed in the dark green tresses of her hair, reaching for the sun, languishing in its warmth. At the time, I had been too enamored to notice them, to question where they had come from, too expertly spellbound to see the transparent spirit of the doe trying desperately to escape the hold of the woods, mouth open, silently screaming for her children, her hindquarters a bloody, ravaged mess.

By design, I didn't see. I simply watched her from beneath the darkness of my hood, falling more in love with Life with every breath she took.

Took.

She turned, her eyes impossibly finding mine through the shadows of the great oak I stood within, as if sensing I was there. As if she'd *known* I was there. It mattered not to me the way her lips pulled into a smirk that was pure self-satisfaction. All I knew was that she had given me a smile.

In that moment, I believed in everything that only the stories spoke of: fate, destiny, true love. I was a fool not to realize that in the real world, those translated to manipulation, power, and greed.

You see, I hadn't always been the villain. I had been a friend, a shepherd, appearing only to come guide you home. She twisted that image, made it her own. With me following devotedly, lovingly in her footsteps after that meadow, she had someone to blame for the lives she stole. Over time, you all came to associate me with what she left behind.

Death.

In truth, death does not exist. Death is simply the absence of life.

It was quite genius of her, wasn't it?

Your lives do not end because I come for you. Your lives end because *she* abandons you. Because *she* gets bored, because *she* decides she'd rather have other toys to play with instead. She takes your life, uses it to sustain another, and calls *me* the Grim Reaper, calls *me* Death.

And you all believe her.

I understand though; I do. I believed her once, too.

But here is the truth, and you'd do well to remember it when comes your time:

Life leaves before Death ever arrives

