

Cheyenne Kirby

Professor Seeger

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Reaper

Once upon a time, in a kingdom far away...

Wait.

No that's not it.

A long, long time ago, in a galaxy far away...

Nope, that's definitely not it either.

Okay, let's skip the formalities here, Luke Skywalker is not going to save me from Darth Vader, and prince charming is not coming in to sweep me off my feet; because this isn't a fairytale and there is no such thing as a happy ending. Because, in the end, the same thing happens to us all; we die.

Now, don't get me wrong, there are plenty of happy beginnings, happy middles galore, I suppose one could even die happy. But what about the people we leave behind? Because unless you made absolutely sure that everyone you ever met hated you – which is nearly impossible to do – there's bound to be someone out there in the world that will be devastated to lose you.

Besides, even if you were able to make sure no one even cared enough to show at your funeral, you probably wouldn't be dying happy.

Now, I'm sure you're wondering what it is that has turned me into the eternal optimist I am right? The answer is simple: I died.

And no, you didn't read that wrong, I'm dead as a doornail. And now here I am, looking down at my corpse, all dressed up for her saddest party yet. I try to run my hand over the flowers placed over me. Hibiscus, my favorite, as my fingers pass through, I close my eyes and try to imagine the way they felt when I was alive. Soft petals so delicate they stick to your fingers a bit and even the slightest amount of rain could make them droop.

My mom is sitting behind me in the front row, my two sisters huddled – sobbing – in her arms, as tears silently streamed from her eyes. No one will ever be able to convince me that there is anything even remotely happy about this. I sit beside them in the pew and wish, more than anything I could make them feel better. I wished I could hold them and tell them everything was alright and that I was going somewhere better. But, even if I could, I don't know if that's true. I've been dead maybe a week now and I haven't been able to get my words to them, I haven't even been able to do so much as push a penny.

"Some funeral you got here, Jillian." A deep voice rumbled from behind me and I nearly jumped out of my skin before I turned to get a look at who had spoken.

His eyes were golden in color and shimmered with amusement and something deeper, unfathomable, his hair was a deep brown and wavy, and his smile...his smile alone was the kind that could make any girl melt in mere moments. He was kind of guy that would have had a girl like me tripping over herself in life. But now, there was no time for something like that. All I had for him now were questions and, of course, the first one to tumble out of my mouth was:

"You can see me?" He grinned, leaning forward to rest his arms on the back of the bench as he nodded.

"Of course, I can; sorry about the wait," He replied. "I had...things to do, people to see to the underworld."

“The *underworld*? That’s a thing?” His laugh rolled over me like a warm breeze on a summer night and for only a moment, my breath caught in my throat and I forgot just what was happening. “Does that mean you’re Hades or something?”

“That’s one of the names I’ve been called, yes.” A chill hot up my spine as nausea twisted my stomach in an almost painful way.

“Am I going to hell?” I swallowed the lump in my throat and he raised a sharply curved eyebrow, his eyes glittering.

“Do you want to?” I shook my head and he grinned. “Good, because I was actually hoping you could help me.

“Help you? You’re literally a god, what in the world could you need my help for?” I sputtered.

“As you know, I was late in finding you. I am only one man, albeit a rather powerful one, but with everything lately I’ve been spread thin. I could use a Reaper.” He was staring down at his hands as he spoke, but in the last word he glanced up at me from under his dark lashes.

“You want me to collect souls for you?” I shifted in my seat to get a better look at him.

“...Among a few...other things.” He muttered almost imperceptibly.

“*What* other things?” Frowning he leaned back, stretching out his legs and running his hands down his thighs as he mulled over what to say next.

“That – that is where this becomes a bit more difficult to explain.” I only met his gaze and waited for him to continue. “Look, I know the thought of finally getting some rest seems to be the best option – “

“It doesn’t, actually.” I interjected, the gears turning in my head as I glanced over towards my mother. Memories flooded my brain, her teaching me how to cook breakfast, coming

home late from work and seeing just how tired she was when she thought I wasn't looking. The way she would run in and hugs us all as though she had the most energy in the world, even though I knew deep down the toll being a single mother took out on her. I felt my heart squeeze as I thought about how much harder it would be without me there to help anymore. My sisters were still so young, mom and I had tried so hard to keep them from growing up too fast. I looked back towards Hades.

“If I take this job, there are a few conditions I'd like to ask of you.”

“And what might those be?” He asked.

“The first is that I can check in on my family from time to time, make sure they're okay.

My mom, badass that she is, is only human and I'm sure my funeral wasn't cheap.”

“That is fair, and your other request?”

“I want you to help me find my killer.” I stated plainly.

“That can be done.” He said after a moment of quiet.

“Then we have a deal.” The finality of my tone surprising even me.

And that is the story of how I became the Grim Reaper.