Short Story

The young undertaker woke up from his slumber to see a murky overcast day. Fringes of what might have been a clear sky were nothing more than thin strips far away to his left.

“Deals with the devil are to be made today then..”, he sighed to himself.

Young as he was, ‘inexperienced’ wouldn’t be the first thing that most thought of him, after all he had been sending beings off into the wordly ether with his grandfather ever since he could remember. Fitting it was that he took over the business after his aged mentor and kin passed and transferred legacy of the keep to him.

He made ready for the day and stepped out towards his place of work to look at the orders for the day. Awaiting for him was his partner, Innsmouth.

“Head on shoulders, Eyes forward”, was the first thing he thought of Innsmouth. The man had been a soldier of many wars and a comrade of his father. Unfortunately of the friendship only one remained. William Innsmouth was there for his father’s last moments when he requested him to take care of his only son in his stead once William’s service came to an end, to which William agreed in behest.

True to his word, William came over, while his grandfather was alive, to see the young undertaker-in-making. Innsmouth took a liking to the meek boy and over time was so integral to the old man’s upkeep of the business that he made him partner and overseer until the boy could deal with clients on his own. Needless to say the soldier stuck with him even after his grandfather’s passing.

“Ironic that he has dealt with and dealt death in one form or the other, and now he stands as river boatman, like me, for those leaving and comforter of those who let go..”, thought the young undertaker to himself.

Innsmouth turned back grunted and said “New day to ya. Big one inside and the client list is tidy n’ neat”

“So not many orders to take care of then .... just the one?”.

“Aye…. paper and pen will take care of the most for today. For now Big One will take up most of the clock it looks like.”, he said flicking his head to the shop. “Let’s split up. You do the pen, paper and inking. I’ll get this fellow pretty and ready for send-off in the meanwhile.”, he said brusque and direct. War may have come and gone to the man, but directness and all business remained.

“All the well he works in the back at times …”, thought the undertaker. “Ahem.. in a hurry then today, Bill..?”

“Yessir, I’ve got my eye on the end of day with a lady just around from ‘here’.”

“Which really isn’t ‘here’ at all but far away then, Bill ... Fine I’ll take care of the formalities and ..”

“Hold one, young’un, Big Guy came in from the morgue. So you’ll have to get to it”

“Damn it…”. Morgue arrivals meant that his ‘client’ was unknown and some foot work would have to be done.

“Alright then I’ll get to it, and while I’m away please don’t scare away anyone who comes by.”, joked the undertaker

“Why would I scare anyone here …?”, mused Innsmouth looking at the forlorn scenery surrounding their workspace. “In any case don’t forget to take your pouch and stones”. Teleportation was how they got around in the world and the stones for doing so were crucial. One could be easily stranded if the stones were lacking.

They walked inside and took a look at the newly arrived corpse. Never bloodied or battered, the hard workers at the ‘morgue’ (A place that was legendary in its own right) had done well to their namesakes and always delivered ‘clients’ to them intact and ready, almost looking alive and well at times with no signs of damage ... except obviously they weren’t.

Innsmouth was serious about the client’s size. Over 9 feet long he lay on the shop’s even more enormous stone table, half-giant with medieval-like clothing and wrought gold on rich fabrics. Strange symbols were engraved onto certain trinkets here and there. Finally catching his eye was what seemed to be a large wolf, a worn hellish looking woman, and a serpent all woven and entwined together, depicted on a large golden bracelet, the size of his head, dangling from the dead person’s wrist.

“Fancy”, said the undertaker.

“Wait till you see what bought him here then .... let me find the manifest … morgue guys typed’em up for us”, and immediately started shuffling through folders, pulling out a bunch of papers with a flourish.

“Oh so I don’t have to do any digging for today? Then this guy is a priority… boring things have their place later in the day”, referring to the inking and sealing to be done, the so-called formalities.

“Nope.. find the next of kin, inform them and if they wish they can attend the send-off”, immediately he started patting around his pockets looking for something else.

“Your glasses?...”, said the undertaker with a smile on finding out how much less of a tasking this was going to be.

“Yep.. just wait up a bit. You’ll need the details before you go out anyways”, Innsmouth retreated inside to the depths of the shop.

The undertaker went to space nearby, picked up his pouch and stones. The stones would allow him to travel. The pouch would provide sustenance for the journey.

He palmed one of the stones and muttered an incantation and nonchalantly tossed it on the ground as he had done many times before. The stone bounced, hovered as though waiting on command.

“Uh right I have no destination …. still I’ll keep the door way open”, thought the traveller-to-be. He muttered another word and fervent portal with a seething energy opened up just in front of him.

“What’s taking him so long?”, he thought. “Hey old man, I’ve got myself good and set. Where are you?”, said the undertaker in a loud voice, and put a leg into the portal.

“Here it is, here it is”, said Innsmouth coming back, with his glasses adorn his face looking at the manifest while grinning. “Right.. you’re definitely headed for something that’s for sure..”, and laughed, thumbing the paper at him.

“What are you laughing about? Read it out quick, Bill.”, said the undertaker, halfway through the portal, gesturing the obvious with his hands.

“Best YOU read this one”, handing him the paper to the outstretched arm of the traveller-to-be, chuckling to himself.

As the undertaker glanced at the manifesto while walking through the portal, he saw the proper office documentation that accompanied these kind of manifests telling one in his business the what, who and all other simplistic details necessary for him to earn his daily wage.

“….

Location : Nine Worlds

Name of Client (As Known Locally): Loki

Cause of Death: Battle Injuries from an apparent ‘Ragnarok’…”

“Best of luck! Bwahhaha”, a laughing Innsmouth being the last thing to hear as he disappeared through the portal…..