

## From the Cradle to the Grave

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I usually do not pay close attention to the many lives I encounter, and for a long time, they have been nothing more than a blur of faces. But Eve is certainly a peculiar case. The best way to describe it would be a myriad of near chance encounters. Unfortunate chance encounters, at that. You see, when I say “near”, it is because although our paths have crossed many times, we did not formally meet until much later. Our bond –if we could call it that– was akin to a game of push and pull in which Lady Fate was the puppeteer, pulling our strings closer or further apart as she saw fit. One twisted game was the one our dear Lady liked to play.

The first time I noticed Eve she was seven years old. She was on a stroll with her parents during a winter afternoon. In those days they lived in a city in the north; the freezing air, the cold puffs of breath and the slippery roads permeated the streets. The holidays were always a busy season, especially in this weather, which made people tread with quick steps and with their noses buried deep in their scarves, hoping to dive into the nearest warm establishment. Eve and her parents had reached the crosswalk, and she had started to walk, lost in her own world. In that instant, a car horn blared in the street and my eyes were immediately drawn to the impending accident. However, her father, probably full of adrenaline, managed to snatch her tiny arm and pull her out of the way of the rapidly approaching vehicle. Just like that, with a split-second change, she was able to stay alive and I took a turn at the corner of the block.

Our second near-meeting occurred years later, when she was twenty years old. She and her friends had decided to go hiking –a fine activity, granted that one was not unnecessarily reckless, as a surprising amount of young people were– and they were already on their way back, after what they deemed to have been a successful trip. Once again, it happened in an instant. A simple misstep on uneven ground, a twisted ankle due to a stone that stuck out awkwardly; whatever the cause was, the result was one and the same. In the blink of an eye, she tripped and fell, rolling down the side of the hill. The screams of her friends rang out, breaking the calm lull of nature. Once again, though, Lady Fate decided that it was not Eve's time to go yet. A tree in the middle of the way managed to stop what otherwise would have been a one-way ticket to the Land of the Dead.

The third one happened not long after. The fourth and the fifth times were more spaced out. The sixth time was the closest we had been to meeting: I remember the glazed look in her eyes, and how those eyes had met mine among the crowd of people that surrounded her. It had been brief and she soon returned to her normal life, not paying too much attention to me. Nevertheless, I am sure she thought about me from time to time, even if our encounter had been no more than a mere graze, like two leaves that brush against each other in the blowing wind.

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This brings us to our last encounter but also the first official one. Eve was sixty-seven years old, and as luck would have it, her life was destined to reach a somewhat premature end. For her, that day was just another date in the calendar. Well, not quite. I am sure she felt the heaviness and difficulty in her breathing, as well as the weight in her steps around the house. She probably had an inkling of what was soon to come, a vague idea of the shadow that loomed close by.

Eve died at a quarter past nine. No more than 10 seconds after that, her spirit awoke once more and left its human vessel. There she stood, by the side of the bed, looking at what she had once been. I gave her a moment to take it in. Just a few customary minutes, since Time waits for no one, no even for Death.

“It is time to go,” I said, pulling her out of her thoughts.

She was slightly startled at the suddenness of my voice, and quickly turned her head in my direction. I could see the question in her gaze and how that same question was immediately answered when her eyes swept my figure. She first studied my features –the long dark hair, the ghostly pale skin and the eyes that resembled black pools with red pupils in the centre. Then, her eyes drifted to the conspicuous scythe in my right hand. Human instincts are certainly sharp, I thought, when I noticed the goosebumps that erupted in her skin and the slight shiver that ran through her body; yet the smile that tugged at the corners of her mouth made me tilt my head with a tinge of curiosity.

“I probably should be more shocked about what’s going on, but really,” she shook her head as if chiding herself. “I just really wasn’t expecting the suit.”

I hummed softly. She was still shaking, almost imperceptibly. Her nerves were at play here, that was certain, but she did not seem scared. As I gazed at her, I got a glimpse of her teenage fascination with books about obscure topics, that delved into long explanations about good and evil, Life and Death, Fate’s whimsical nature, and the like. Many mortals were intrigued by these topics, seeking to understand the unanswerable questions of the universe. It was not the first time someone had commented on my attire and it would most likely not be the last one. I merely gave a small nod in response. She seemed to understand that she would not get a better reaction out of me. Eve gave one last look at the body in the bed –her body– before striding towards me.

I extended my hand, and after exhaling a deep sigh, she took it. Hers was still shaking and a bit damp, but all in all she dealt with the situation remarkably well. Not everyone is willing to take Death by the hand –at least not without putting up a fight– when their time has finally come.