

Michael & The Reaper

by Stephanie Soden

1.

That sound.

Bone against bone. Skin across skin. Blood fraying into the unknown dark. He loved that sound. He loved it as much as the intense, though infrequent sensation that followed it. Pain.

The dark-haired figure stumbled back. His silhouette barely recognizable against the smoke and sweat of the basement. Above them, club music pounded; pulsating passionately like the figures around him. Screams and hollers demanding a fight swarmed like flies. The horrid sound of their jeers only made the desire to finish this more immediate.

Tiny, lithe, and wiry—outraged cries filled the room when the behemoth of a man was silenced by a sweaty, jittery person.

There's no way, they said. Just no way.

Foreign blood slicked down his dirty olive pants while he sulked, dissatisfied, huskily rubbing his nose. Burly men identical to the one he just ended rushed the circle, demanding an explanation. While they shouted the boy stalked to his chair in the corner, splitting the crowd before him. Angry voices bellowed around him. More challenges. So much anger. So much.

Noise.

He sneered, grabbing a dirty towel from the counter and dabbing at the minute cuts from his forehead. He was about to reach for his neglected bottle of vodka when a fiery palm settled on his shoulder, wrenching him around. Suddenly he was staring into to beady black eyes. Glistening almost as much as the muck-kissed skin around them. The man in his face was a disgusting mongrel.

“Did you hear me?!” the man harked, standing a full head over him, “I raise you a hundred, boy! I won't stand for cheap tricks!”

Ebony hair swished as he leaned over, casting a glance at the gang in tacky leather jackets. Indifferently, he sounded out what was embroidered on them.

“Death's Angels?” a smirk.

“C'mon!” the muscle beast was out of breath on adrenaline alone, “C'mon!!” a well defined circle of spectators formed again.

“What a creative paradox that is.”

“Shut up and fight!” the bald, bearded man had removed his shirt. Carnal and fierce, hardly a comparison to his opponent's twig-like limbs and sleek muscles. The rest of the Death's Angels were thoroughly riled up then, showering the circle with money like ash.

There was a deep, elegant move that bordered inhuman. As one mighty, impatient arm swung down, another stealthily dove up. Bone. Skin. Blood. The shorter man's fingertips collided with all sundry surfaces until wrapping around a frail, trembling flutter.

Suddenly the grunts and wails of the men around them ceased. Red thickness splattered upon the floor, hardly fazing the calm demeanor of the boy with his arm inside another man's chest. Footsteps and shuffles sounded while the gangsmen clamored up the staircase. A few stray promises of revenge were slung at him, but he paid no mind.

Amazingly sharp eyes remained set on this terrifying expression.

“Your friends have left you, Angel. And that delicate heartbeat of yours is shortening.” He smirked, “When you get there, don't run. They far less merciful than I.”

A gurgle followed the squeeze as the panicked muscle in his hands went still. With an arrogant, curt chuckle the boy threw him to the side in a heap of flesh.

Where the man once stood, a new figure remained.

Draped in ratted black cloth and a beaming aura of the unnatural was Death. An eerie, pointed finger found his direction, quickly snapping,

“Stop that.”

2.

“Stop that.” He said, ripping the cloak from his head, “I’m on vacation.”

“Pardon my intrusion of your precious free time.” The boy before him gestured, sauntering back to the now, woefully ignored vodka bottle, “How death is even granted a vacation amazes me.”

The Grim Reaper. Hades. The Gravedigger. The Spirit of Darkness. The Bringer of Sorrow. Looks like a redheaded teenager.

“Fuck you, Michael.” He said, “I get twenty-four hours of human-free interruptions and you go and ruin it with your unsolicited killing. Do you know what it’s like getting a blasted call from upstairs during my well-deserved holiday? To be told I have to babysit the Angel of Battle because he’s gone missing? And here you’re just whining. Angels have it so easy.”

At his last comment, the bottle shattered, “Easy? Ohh you’re barking up the wrong tree, Grehm.” Michael was in his face, still shorter than the youngest member of Heaven’s court.

Grehm sneered, utterly unthreatened. The Angel of battle stomped away, returning to the corner to reacquaint himself with a shirt. Stepping over the dead man, the other sighed, “Why did you come down here anyway? Looking for your own vacation?”

“No.” hissed the pale figure from the darkness, “I don’t get that *luxury*, you spoiled little non-breed. I’m down here because they’re too busy to keep track of me upstairs.” He nodded to the ceiling, “I couldn’t resist the opportunity.”

“Opportunity?” Death twirled the gigantic scythe at his side, “What opportunity? To come down here and slaughter humans like stray cats?”

Michael slammed his hand upon the pool table beside them, “I came here for the music and booze, and they started it. Not I.”

“Well you sure as hell finished it.” Grehm glared, then motioned to the corpse with the hole in its chest, “Look at that. Did you really have to squeeze the guy’s...”

“How do you think *I* feel?” the other leered, “Michael. The Angel of Battle rotting away in Heaven going trivial paper work under that jackass Gabriel.”

Grehm pointed a finger, “Hey!”

“They tell me I'll have plenty of time to fight when the apocalypse comes, but that's not for another millennia! So I file their blasted prayers and miracles all day in that dreary hell of a cubicle, and...”

“I hardly feel sorry for you, Michael. Do your job like the rest of us.” The red head sighed, “Hearing you whine is infuriating.”

“You moronic dead thing!” the Angel snarled, grabbing a fistful of endless black cloak, “I am not like a human! My will only goes so far. I cannot wake up and decide, ‘*Hm. I don't think I want to destroy anything today*’. I'm an angel. I have a purpose. And when I am denied, it is torture!”

“God you're riled up tonight.” Grehm groaned prying the other heavenly being off his collar, “Do you always get this way around Christmas?”

“Don't speak to me as if I am a mindless, instinctive beast.” Michael sobered, gliding back to the darkness to seize his things, “It's not that I have no control over what I do; It's that I know what I was created for. And that is to battle. Like any other being on our plain, human or—cosmic mistake created from mankind's greatest downfall—.”

“Hey!”

“—when I am barred from my greater purpose, it creates something similar to heartbreak. I've been told.”

Unearthly lavender eyes beamed at Grehm from across the room, shuttering slightly when Michael slung his black jacket over his shoulder. Moments of lingering silence rolled. Muffled club music. The impending arrival of sirens. Grehm rolled his eyes.

“Do you feel better now?” he said.

“A little.”

“Good. Because I'm taking you home now.”

When Grehm advanced, Michael stood ridged, “If you touch me, I swear...”

"I'm not down here because *I want to be*. As much fun as this was to rain on your bloody parade, I'm under orders. Now stop acting like a child and get up there." Death hissed, pointing to the ceiling.

"You are in no position to give an Angel orders." The dark-haired boy inched toward the door.

"Don't get official on me so you can play misunderstood runaway. They're going to be on my ass if I don't deliver you to headquarters immediately. Don't make me drag you."

"My answer is no, Grehm. If you had a lick of sense you'd stay out of this. I'm taking my own blasted holiday. Interrupt me again and you'll be as lively as Mr. Clean over there." Michael motioned to the balded man on the floor.

When he looked back to Death, he found instead, a monstrous metal scythe at his neck. His eyes shone like the reflection of headlights on its surface. The edge gentry licked his neck, drawing red like a bee sting.

"Get your pathetic, angsty, pubescent little ass back up that divine ladder before I shred it and deliver you in pieces." The red head explained, very slowly.

"Do you intend to teach me a lesson?" Michael smiled, pointed back teeth flashing, "Non-breed."

The Angel ducked, two slick swishing sounds nicking the hair above his head. In Grehm's moment of recoil, Michael braced himself on the floor and kicked the boy square in the ribs. While the two were almost evenly matched, it was universally acknowledged that Michael was the superior fighter. He had been designed to be unbeatable.

All of this seemed secondary, however, when the scythe came slashing into the Angel's chest. He coughed, pain-filled, awkward, and bloody. The moment of agony didn't last long; when he rolled to the side and smacked Grehm in the face with his own scythe stick.

They roughhoused for a great length of time; blood was drawn, minor bones were broken. Grehm managed to slice another hole in the boy nearly a foot long, though his achievement was shadowed by

the Angel's creative use of pool cues—gifting Grehm with a black eye and a little bit of blue dust.

“Oh for fuck's sake!”

The two halted their tumbling punches. When they froze in whatever bizarre position they had befallen, they looked upon a painfully white figure. Blonde hair waving in an unseen wind and ice blue eyes scathing. This is Gabriel.

“Honestly Grehm, I would have expected more from you.” The high angel groaned, “And Michael!”

The boy with black hair stood up, the other side of the room clearly visible through his abdomen. He pouted, stomping across the room to claim his jacket a second time.

“Leaving without permission! Interrupting predetermined fate!” Gabriel pointed to the biker man, “It's the day before Christmas Eve, and you're down here running amuck. When are you going to grow up? Act your millennia!” he barked while Michael stalked out of the bar, slamming the great metal door in his wake.

“Little twerp.” Death stood, rubbing his swollen nose.

“That goes for you too.” Flaring eyes shifted his way; “You didn't have to piss him off so much.”

Grehm turned in the light just right to show Gabriel his face. Streaks and slivers of blue chalk ran across his skin as if scribbled on by a child. And this had a little truth to it. “What are you talking about?” the reaper bellowed, “You asked me to retrieve him, and I did! Or I was about to. Then he starts with this ‘*non-breed*’ talk, and—.”

Gabriel interrupted him with a warm, escalating laugh. Suddenly Grehm felt very small; it would never cease to annoy him that God's highest angel found his temper so amusing.

“Come on. Let's go home.” His friend gestured.

“What about your Angel of Manic-Depression?”

“He's already back.”

“Well this was endlessly infuriating. Thank you for ruining my vacation.”

“Lighten up, it's Christmas!”

“Never again, Gabriel. The next time a ranking officer runs away, send a cherub to fetch him!”

Far from Gabriel to speculate the level of Grehm's hurt feelings. Words like Non-Breed. Mistake. Evil. The Angels flung them thoughtlessly, leaving a permanent scar on the only creature in Heaven's court that could be scarred. Nodding, half listening to the boy's animated re-telling of the night, Gabriel pondered this. Michael would never know the extent of Grehm's sorrow, born from sin, carrying out a grim sentence. And Grehm would never know Michael's envy of him. His jealousy of the free will he possessed, never knowing how free he really was.

There, in the quiet and the muck of a basement on the day before Christmas, stood Heaven's highest commander.

He supposed he understood this. At least a little.

The need for a some white, red, noise.

