

Death Hitches a Ride

by W. Scott Bowlin

I'm not sure how I came to be riding in a car with Death, but it was cold and I would have accepted any ride that came my way.

There were others sitting there ahead of me when I climbed into the car, two in front and two in back, and I made an uneasy fifth.

The driver was a scary man, not because he looked scary but because he acted it. The passenger in front said nothing.

There were two in the back, and one of them was Death. Death had a bottle of vodka, which I took obligingly. I offered him a cigarette in return.

We smoked and drank and rode down the miles. Outside it began to rain, and we were followed by an endless flurry of dead leaves.

Perhaps it was Death they were chasing but aren't we all. The man sitting between me and Death began to sing Paradise City, and I couldn't remember him looking like Lenny Kravitz when I got in the car.

I wondered about Death then, was he drinking because he was taking a break or was he summoning up the courage to take the next victim? I suddenly became afraid, wondering why Death was in this car, why I was in this car, was he here for all of us.

He leaned forward then, took the bottle from my hand and said *relax, I was only looking for a ride same as you.*

But I knew I shouldn't trust him, I could see it in the black spot where his eyes should have been. I knew that for me, only for me, it was time to get out of this car. The others were not going to escape, they were dead already and just didn't know it.

The passenger lit a joint and passed it around, and surprisingly Death said no thanks. Lenny Kravitz took a pull and then offered it to me, and I casually passed it along without taking any myself.

I felt a bond with Death, then, we shared something, we didn't like being high. I stared out the window for a while, watching the rain soak the shoulder of the road.

We passed a dead cat lying up against a guard rail, its fur stringing and wet and exposing its bloated skin which had a purple tint to it. *Not my work*, Death said, smoke trickling out of one eye socket.

Death, then, in its own fashion, death the act not the entity. Was there a separation for the two?

The road broke into four lanes and we rode into town in a hissing cloud of tire vapor and the parade of dead leaves following closely

Death leaned forward, *Stop up ahead, he's getting out*

I felt a chill at this, my number was up, Death was letting me off the ride. Was it this easy to cheat Death, then?

The car stopped and I just sat there, clutching a cigarette and staring out, not sure if I really wanted to get out of this car.

There was an art festival in the town square, I don't know what town it was because I had begun to feel the effects of the joint, second hand smoke, contact buzz.

How pathetic it looked out there: the rain drizzle, the canopies and tarps strung up, the plastic over all the paintings, the people cold and miserable holding beers and meat on a stick and corn dogs and cotton candy. The sudden arrival of dead leaves

A little girl holding a half deflated balloon on a string stared at the car, her face painted like a clown. The paint had become wet and began to run down her face and she looked eerily unhappy.

Then Death touched my shoulder and said, quietly, *Go ahead. I'll wait.*

