

CHEATING DEATH

Written by

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FADE IN

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Late, almost closing time. Half a dozen MEN occupy stools at the bar where the BARTENDER busies himself by polishing glasses. Among the men is BOBBY, 35, a regular, blue collar. He shakes hands, ready to leave.

The door opens with a WHOOSH. The Men turn, and all talk STOPS.

Inside the door stands a figure in a cowl and holding a scythe—DEATH. He's as scary as you imagine.

Without a word, the Men scatter. Bobby starts to move. Death points a sleeve at Bobby and slowly shakes his head. Bobby sinks onto a stool as the Bartender disappears.

BOBBY

Are you...

Death nods.

BOBBY

Look, I...I'm not ready. Do you understand? I'm not ready. Can't we talk about this?

Death shakes his head.

BOBBY

I'll give you whatever you want, anything. I got a bag of meth in my Camaro. It's yours.

DEATH

Why would I want drugs? Or money? Or a car? Don't you know who I am?

BOBBY

Hell yes, I know. How about my soul? I'll sell you my soul.

Death throws back his hood to reveal a man, 60, mostly bald, worn, weary.

DEATH

I already have your soul. Get me a beer.

BOBBY

What kind of beer?

DEATH

Any kind.

As Bobby scrambles for a beer, the door opens and in marches DEATH 2, in cowl and with scythe. Death 2 throws back his cowl to reveal a black man, 30.

DEATH 2

What are you doing here?

Death looks at Death 2.

DEATH

Collecting. How about you?

DEATH 2

You're poaching, that's what you're doing.

DEATH

I beg your pardon. This establishment is on the border, right smack dab on the line.

DEATH 2

Yeah, but Bobby was supposed to die two minutes ago in a car crash.

DEATH

Can I help it if he stayed behind?

DEATH 2

Don't give me any of your crap. He stayed because you made him stay.

Bobby delivers a beer to the table, and Death sits heavily.

DEATH 2

(to Bobby)
Bring me one.

Bobby scurries away as Death 2 slides onto a chair.

DEATH

Look, I'll be honest. I'm running behind this month. I need Bobby to make quota.

DEATH 2

Cry me a river. We all got quotas, man.

DEATH

Yes, but you have the state capital, lots of people dying there.

DEATH 2

You don't think they factor in population? Those mo-fos in management got all that worked into the formula. Sometimes, I think it would be great to have a nice quiet territory like yours.

Bobby delivers another beer, and he starts for the exit.

DEATH 2

Sit down, Bobby. You ain't gettin' away.

Bobby finds a chair.

DEATH

It's not quiet, it's slow. And it's a big territory. Travel is a bitch, and they haven't raised per diem in what? Five years?

DEATH 2

Well, at least, you don't have ambulances everywhere, always saving people who should have made the list.

DEATH

Oh, we have our hospitals. Used to be someone got cancer, and you could pencil them on your calendar. Now? You need a ten year to-do list.

Bobby watches and listens, hardly believing his ears.

DEATH 2

There's strike talk going around. We quit for a week or two and maybe management gets the message.

DEATH

It's all talk. You don't think they would bring in a bunch of scabs? And what happens to our retirement if we walk?

DEATH 2

There is that. We got contracts, but they're not worth the blood they're written in. Management can dump us any time they want. We ought to be able to do something.

DEATH

You're too young to remember the golden years. World Wars, epidemics, unsafe water and food. A little water-borne bacteria and you made quota for the quarter.

DEATH 2

You know, some of the newbies don't believe those stories. They think they're nothing but myths. I mean, black plague? Really? That even sounds fake.

DEATH

I'm older, so I knew some guys who worked the wars. They told stories that would make your mouth water. Souls lying around, waiting for the picking. And not just war. There were ovens and poison gas. If I hadn't talked to them, I'd be a skeptic too.

DEATH 2

I know, I know, and I do believe mostly. It's just that we don't have anything like that any more.

DEATH

We still got alcohol and cars. That's worth a few points at annual review time.

DEATH 2

Drugs and bombs and an airplane crash on occasion. Those pad the numbers, but they don't happen every day.

DEATH

How many nursing homes you got?

DEATH 2

Not enough. But even those places are full of nurses and doctors.

(MORE)

DEATH 2 (CONT'D)

They keep those old folks alive no matter what. How you gonna get ahead in a place like that?

DEATH

You think they're gonna pass assisted-suicide laws? That might open the spigot a bit.

DEATH 2

Not when they've nixed the death penalty. That used to be a nice little bonus.

They finish their beers.

DEATH

Well, it's been fun, but time is short if you know what I mean.

DEATH 2

Yeah, I gotta get going too. I got a message a little bit ago. Seems a car full of teenage girls is gonna run into a semi whose driver is sexting a pic of his tool.

DEATH

That should make quota for you.

DEATH 2

As long as there's not some damn good Samaritan driving by.

DEATH

What do you want to do about Bobby?

DEATH 2

You can have him.

BOBBY

Hey!

DEATH

Thanks, thanks a lot. I appreciate it.

Death 2 stands and arranges the hood and sleeves.

DEATH 2

One time only. I catch you poaching again and you're going before internal affairs.

DEATH
I promise, no more poaching.

Death 2 heads for the door.

DEATH 2
Live long and prosper.

DEATH
(laughing)
God, I love that one.

Death turns to Bobby.

DEATH
Time.

BOBBY
Look, look, listen, I got a
proposition.

DEATH
We've been through this.

BOBBY
Hear me out. This is good, good.

Bobby slides off the stool and moves to the table.

BOBBY
I couldn't help but hear about your
problems.

DEATH
Doesn't make any difference since
you won't be here long.

BOBBY
No, nothing like that. I want to
help, help you get your quota.

DEATH
You kill someone, and I spare you?
Sorry, that doesn't help.

BOBBY
You're right about that, so what
would you say to half a dozen
deaths?

Death perks up.

BOBBY

I cook meth. I got my share of customers. I make a mistake, and some of those people become your customers, comprende? I make a mistake next month, and half a dozen more pad your numbers.

Death leans forward.

DEATH

Enlisting human assistance is against the rules.

BOBBY

C'mon, who's gonna know? I'm not telling anyone, that's for sure.

Death sips the last of his beer.

BOBBY

Give me one day, one day. I cook, and management thinks you're the poster child for hard work.

Death stands, arranges his robe, and grabs his scythe.

BOBBY

We got a deal?

Death points a sleeve at the door. Bobby jumps up and heads for the door.

Death hits the floor with the scythe handle.

Bobby clutches his chest and falls to the floor. Heart attack. Gasping, he fights the pain as Death leans over.

DEATH

Sorry, I can't afford to lose my pension.

FADE OUT