

The Last Appointment

Death arrived at the Sunset Salon at exactly five thirty, carrying a scythe and a picture of George Clooney. I put down my coffee and immediately started to beg. “I need more time.”

“But your ad said only forty-five minutes.” Death’s knuckles cracked as he gripped the photo tight.

“For a haircut,” I said. I looked at the photo. After thirty years in salons, I’d finally met someone with even less realistic expectations than Denise from the bank. Slowly, I gestured to my chair and had him hang his robe on the hook and place his scythe in the umbrella stand.

I wrapped the cape around his neck twice and looked at the few hairs left on his scalp. “George has more to work with.”

“I was hoping you could create some volume.” Death gestured with his skeletal hand.

“Have you thought about wearing a hat?” His shoulders sagged. Wishing I’d kept my mouth shut, I lowered the chair and looked at him in the mirror. “So, what brings you in?”

“A date. My first one, actually.” He watched his hands move beneath the cape as I adjusted and pumped the chair up again.

“Well, let’s see what we can do.” Once I found my rhythm with the comb and scissors, he stopped gripping the armrests. “Nervous?”

“People generally ask me to leave.”

I smiled. “Dating can be like that too. What are you planning to say?”

He thought about it for a second. “I’ve been waiting a long time for you.”

My scissors stopped. “We’ll work on that.” He produced a notebook with questions about hobbies, favorite foods, and preexisting conditions. I crossed out the last one. “Bring flowers, and avoid funeral flowers. Something red or pink.” His skeletal fingers made fast work over the pages as he wrote down each instruction.

By the time I brushed off his collar, he had a side part and a dinner reservation I’d made him change from eight fifteen to six. “At our age, you eat that late, you’re up all night.”

Standing, he turned to me. “You also have plans this evening?”

“My daughter’s arranged something. She keeps telling me that I need to get out more.” I reached for the mirror and handed it to him.

"Is your daughter Melissa by any chance?" He looked at his phone before showing me the screen. There I was, next to my tomato plants, in the photo I had explicitly asked her to delete.

We looked at each other in the mirror. “She told me you worked in collections.”

“I do, in a way.” Death muttered.

Outside, a car horn sounded, and Melissa waved through the window, giving us two thumbs up.

I sighed. Death reached for his robe. “Would you prefer to cancel?”

I considered another evening eating over the sink, then took his notebook and added one more instruction: *You pay*.

“Leave the scythe here. I’ll get my purse.”