

MR. DEATH'S SUICIDE PACT

死神先生的自殺契約書

Only those who are determined to kill themselves will ever see Death and his suicide pact. If they die by suicide within seven days of signing the pact, their souls belong to Death, and they will never again suffer rebirth. In three stories, Mr. Death's Suicide Pact unveils a dark and tender panorama of the human condition, posing the question: can suicide truly liberate us from suffering?

The three stories that comprise *Mr. Death's Suicide Pact* are set in a fictional world where those who are determined to kill themselves receive a visit from Death, and an offer. If they sign a pact with Death, they will surely die within seven days, by one means or another. Three people accept Death's offer, underpinning three stories in which harsh realities are edged with the warmth of love, family, and friendship.

In the first story, a young woman, Celeste, decides to end her own life after a car accident leaves her a burden to her family. Touched by her selflessness, Ivan, aka Mr. Death, begins to develop unaccustomed affections.

In second story, Death, now in the guise of a top student, appears to Huang Wei-jen, who plans to kill himself to escape the bullying of classmates. After signing the Death's pact, however, Huang Wei-jen has a realization that changes his life, and he begins to regret signing the pact.

In the final story, suicide deprives model mother Amamiya Yuzuki of the daughter she raised with all her devotion. In the depths of her despair, a young boy appears. Claiming to be Death, he tells her he knows the real reason her daughter killed herself.



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Spanning various nations, life stages, and family relations, these three stories grant a range of perspectives on one of life's big questions: is suicide the end of suffering, or, is it merely the end of living? Both entertaining and thought provoking, each story is propelled to its conclusion by the fundamental mystery of death. An additional epilogue invites further contemplation that will linger long after the stories end.

L.C

With *Mr. Death's Suicide Pact*, one of the most promising book debuts of recent years, author L.C won the KadoKado Novel Award, and was selected to represent Taiwan at the 2023 Busan Story Market, a content development marketplace held alongside the Busan International Film Festival.

MR. DEATH'S SUICIDE PACT

By L.C

Translated by Jacqueline Leung

ACT ONE

01 I'll be in your care, Mr. Death

Old alley, dismal, desolate.

Girl, young, pale-skinned, lying on ice-cold cobblestones littered with heaps of trash.

Her face was elegant and youthful and etched with wounds. Her eyes, large as show windows, displayed glass-blue irises so exquisite they could pass for art. And like art, she was deathly still.

Wind howled and perforated the streets on this cold winter day, scouring everything of color until the surroundings were faded and mottled. Warmth seeped from the girl's body, starting from her fingertips, and gradually her whole body.

Her long lashes trembled, and her sleek brows twitched in a shiver. She could no longer feel the tip of her nose. Subconsciously, she curled into herself – she could still feel a bit of the cold, at least.

She fixed her gaze, still slightly out of focus, on an overturned wheelchair a close distance away. One of the wheels was upended towards the sky, still spinning and skidded with mud. Her forehead throbbed with pain until it felt numb. She could hardly remember how she fell.

She'd wheeled herself to this deserted town and hadn't eaten for days. She couldn't feel her hands, and any strength she might have to prop up her body had left her. She could only lie here, waiting quietly for her life to slip away.

She once heard that the tramps here ate human flesh like vultures, which was perfect.

Like this, I'll silently disappear from the world. Like I'd never been born.

"Little lady, you sure know how to pick a place."

A flippant voice sounded above her, and she felt herself enshrouded by the person's shadow, but didn't have the strength to lift her head to see who it was. All she could see was a pair of wrinkled black leather shoes, which looked like they'd been worn for a number of years, and they were man-sized.

He squatted, and the girl finally managed to catch a glimpse of the owner of the shoes.

He was tall and pale, oil-sleek hair touching his shoulders. A few curly strands stuck to his chin, mixed with his stubble. She spotted the crescent scar carving his skin from his left cheek to his chin, and her heart pounded in fear.

The man was dressed in a somber black suit, but the knot of his tie, sitting beneath his Adam's apple, was crooked, and the top button of his pants was also undone. For some reason, his uncouthness was surprisingly fitting with the unruly smile hanging on his lips.

Before the girl could ask why the man was here, he'd already scooped her up bridal style.

She felt his hot breath closing in. Her unfocused eyes widened in disbelief as she sighted his thickbrows, and then she registered the unmistakable heat and taste of alcohol on her lips.

"Hngh..." The girl grasped the fabric of the man's suit instinctively and swallowed.

"Much warmer now, aren't you?"

They parted, but the scent of alcohol still lingered between their mouths, making her feel dizzy. But like the man had said, the alcohol was flowing into every cell of her body until she slowly warmed, and her fogged mind finally began to rouse.

She gathered her strength and asked, "Who... are you?"

"Oh, I'm Death."

He said it so lightheartedly, the girl couldn't even react.

"Hey, why does no one believe me when I introduce myself?" The man gave a big sigh and scratched his head in confusion. "Anyway, since you're dying to be on your way, I suppose you'll let me take your soul after seven days?"

He poked the girl's forehead with a fat fingertip, as if that was where her soul resided. The girl rubbed her forehead in a daze and listened to Death complain about the previous person, how they'd also not believed him in the slightest, and then she smiled.

"I'll be in your care, Mr. Death."

At that, the man was stunned for a moment. Since taking on this role, he'd never once gotten this response. Surely even people who want to kill themselves still feel intimidated, skeptical, terrified as they confront a grim reaper?

But the girl before him smiled so kindly and spoke in such a soft voice, she seemed to be far removed from the trivialities of this mortal world. Looking at her reaction, the man put away his cynical smile, and his face hardened slightly.

"Call me Ivan," he said. "Mr. Death is a mouthful."

"Of course, Mr. Ivan."

He was going to tell her that she could drop "mister" too, but...he could only care so much.

Ivan unscrewed the cap of his bottle of alcohol and clamped down on the neck with his teeth as he drank gulp after gulp, all the while carrying the girl and settling her back into her wheelchair.

"Right, let me see — I've collected the person, next I'll..." It'd been a long time since he'd taken on a mission, so he flipped through the thick pages of the *Grim Reaper Guidelines*, mumbling to himself, but soon he let out a low, irritated groan. "Dammit, why are there so many words in this?"

He slapped the book shut, released the empty bottle from his mouth, and looked at the girl, who was still staring at him in a stupor.

He should just wing it. After all, he'd worked this job for several hundred years, and things had always been fine.

He peered down at the girl with confusion written all over her face, and said, "Why don't you start by telling me your name so I can verify you. It'd be awkward if I got the wrong person."

02 A Place to Live

"Right. My name is Celeste. I'm a third-year student at Fulham University, and I live in Pead. I have parents and a younger brother. I don't have any special interests, and on weekends, I also—"

"Stop, stop," Ivan raised his hands to cut Celeste off, "Little lady, I only need your name, not your life story. I only need your life, I'm not here to marry you."

Celeste froze, then smiled apologetically. "Ah, apologies."

Ivan frowned. The girl was docile as a doll. He leaned closer, his hands reaching behind her to clutch the handles of her wheelchair.

"Little lady."

As soon as Ivan spoke, Celeste smelled the thick smell of alcohol from his mouth. She kept smiling stiffly and stared at the forbidding man.

"Is it really OK to trust me so much? Maybe I'm not a grim reaper, but some over-the-top handsome boss of a trafficking gang, selling you to a rich, perverted businessman as a plaything."

Ivan licked his upper lip, then continued his jest. "You don't know how those old geezers have fun. First, they'll cut off your legs so you can't escape. After that..."

"That's all right," Celeste cut him off and gave a sorrowful laugh. "Look at me. Am I not already in the same state?"

While Ivan was unable to react, she curled her lips again and added, "I have no other option but to believe you, Mr. Ivan."

From the moment they met, this girl kept overturning his expectations.

The job of a grim reaper was simple: harvest the lives and souls of people. That was all there was to it. Unless he met someone who refused to accept their destiny, and needed to be taken away by force, this was a job with nothing much to do. And Ivan loved his job to death.

But he looked at Celeste, who was clearly cooperative, and couldn't put his finger on what was odd about her. He sighed in defeat.

"Little lady...I have a feeling we won't get along."

"Huh? Why? What did I do wrong?"

Ivan didn't respond to Celeste's frantic question. Instead, he went behind her and gripped the handles, then he pushed her along the dark and uneven alleyway.

In contrast to his wild appearance, Ivan pushed the wheelchair with care, so Celeste felt little discomfort from the bumpy surface.

"Mr. Ivan, where are we going?"

Celeste turned and looked up at him with her big eyes, and he felt like he was being gazed at by a peaceful sky.

"We need to find a place to live," Ivan responded. "It'll get colder in the night. If you died from hypothermia, that wouldn't count as a suicide."

At the mention of the word "suicide", Celeste's heart lurched in fear. She had indeed considered ending her life, but that was just a thought she'd kept to herself. How had this man she was meeting for the first time read her mind? Also...

Celeste voiced her confusion and said, "Mr. Ivan, aren't you here to kill me?"

"Kill?"

This time, it was Ivan who didn't know what to say, his alcohol-drenched voice pausing as he opened his mouth helplessly and sighed. "Really, that's... I said, don't associate grim reapers with killing. Let me tell you, I'm very gentlemanly, and have never done such a thing."

Celeste looked at the man's scar, crawling from his left cheek to his chin, and blinked.

"What's with that look of doubt?" Ivan said, displeased.

"Ah, no, I'm not doubting you, Mr. Ivan." Celeste waved her hands in a panic. "I was just thinking this is quite different from my first impression of you, Mr. Ivan."

"You really don't hold back, do you..."

The two of them talked until they arrived at a building and stopped in front of it. In the dark, the building was illuminated with several swaying lamps lit with fire.

Ivan carefully tightened the brake level of the wheelchair before walking around the perimeter of the house to observe it. He grinned in satisfaction and said, "Good, good. This house has only one floor, and it's pretty big. There's even a backyard. We'll use this one!"

"Isn't someone living in it?" Celeste questioned, pointing at the lights inside.

Ivan didn't even look where she was pointing. He turned his neck several times and pulled out a packet of cigarettes from his suit jacket. He put one in his mouth and lit it, exhaling deeply.

"We can just chase them out."

Next, he retrieved a huge, black sickle out of thin air, which he held in one hand as he went up the stairs and pressed the doorbell.

An elderly woman answered the door. When she pulled the door open, Ivan transformed his human form into a terrific skeleton, his abyssal eye sockets gazing into her, and she stumbled to the ground in shock.

"I've come for your life, granny."

"Ah—save me!"

Once her screams subsided, Ivan shapeshifted back into his humanoid form and brushed back his fringe. He knelt and tapped the unconscious woman's forehead, and a bright, small orb fell out and rolled onto the floor.

Ivan picked up the pearl-like orb, blew the dust from it, and put it in his pocket.

"Let me keep your soul for a while, I'll return it in seven days."

Finished with his flamboyant robbery, Ivan turned back smugly to Celeste, who was frozen in shock.

“See, I told you I don’t kill.”

03 Contract

The next morning, the view outside the windows was still white with fog, and the sky looked like it was covered in a gray layer of dust.

Celeste had just woken up and was staring out at the snowy landscape, but she didn’t feel a shiver of cold.

She was wearing a soft, pale sweater, though she couldn’t remember when she’d put it on. It didn’t belong to her and smelled of unfamiliar, fragrant laundry detergent.

Her wheelchair was parked next to the bed. With both hands on the soft mattress, Celeste maneuvered her body and got into the wheelchair with much difficulty. By the time she was settled, her long, wavy white hair was disheveled.

She slowly wheeled her way to the vanity table, made herself presentable, and flattened the red ribbon bow on her neckline. She stared at her reflection in a daze, touched her cheek, and slapped herself twice, rousing her pale face, as if she was trying to rouse a sleeping soul. Then she turned toward the door.

Her room was closest to the living room whereas Ivan slept in the granny’s room at the very end. He’d carried the unconscious woman to the room last night, and said, “Relax, I’m picky when it comes to women.”

Once she was in the kitchen, Celeste opened the fridge, found some ingredients she could use, and made a pot of porridge for breakfast.

“Morning, little lady, you’re up early.”

Soon after Celeste finished eating, a lazy, raspy voice came from the other side of the house. She was reading by the window, and turned to see Ivan shirtless, wearing only his black suit pants. He yawned and scratched his back, which was fully tattooed.

“Morning, Mr. Ivan.” Celeste closed the book and smiled gently. “Aren’t you going to put something on? It’s snowing outside again.”

“No need.” Ivan gave a shrug.

He sat on the couch and was going to smoke a cigarette, but then he spotted the pot on the dining table, which he guessed had something fragrant and delicious inside.

“Oh, I made some porridge. Would you like to have some, Mr. Ivan?” Celeste pushed her wheelchair to the dining table, confirming his suspicions.

He thought for a moment, and then said, “Sure, I’ll have some.”

He lit his cigarette by waving his hand in the air, and as he breathed out smoke, Celeste brought over a bowl of the porridge she had made.

Ivan held the bowl in his hands and took a large slurp directly from the rim, surprising Celeste, who was holding a spoon in her hand.

She may have taken in what he said yesterday with a foggy mind, but now that her head was clear, she felt this person in front of her didn't look like a grim reaper at all. He just looked like an ordinary gangster.

"Mm, you're quite the chef. I want seconds." Ivan licked his lips and handed the bowl over to Celeste. When she filled it for him, he said, "Actually, just pass me the whole pot."

In the end, all the porridge went into his stomach. Celeste looked at the empty pot in amazement; she'd made at least five or six servings.

After that, Ivan took out a hip flask from his pocket, relished several gulps, and said, "Ha! Drinking after a meal really hits the spot."

He offered his flask to Celeste, who lightly shook her head, and so Ivan kept it for himself, drank some more, and then lit up yet another cigarette.

"Mr. Ivan...are you really a grim reaper?" Celeste couldn't help but ask.

"Hm? Why are you asking now? I thought you'd already accepted it." Ivan raised an eyebrow. "Is there something that makes you think I'm not?"

Everything.

Not knowing what to say, Celeste kept a rigid smile on her face, and Ivan sighed. He drew a half-circle with his right hand. An old piece of yellowed parchment and a quill materialized out of thin air.

"Rights, let's get to some business and bring you up to speed."

Celeste received the parchment from Ivan, still suspicious. It had a large heading that read "Mr. Death's Suicide Pact," with "Ivan" as a signatory. The dense language was punctuated by some Old Latin symbols.

"Wait, I haven't adapted the language yet. The last signatory was a man who spoke Latin. He died a magnificent death." Ivan gave a happy laugh.

As he made a move to take back the parchment, Celeste glanced over the words and shook her head. "Don't worry about it."

"Hm, so you read Latin, too," Ivan said, whistling in praise.

"I learned bits of the language at school. I can read it if it's not too complicated," Celeste replied with a light smile. "But some of these words are difficult for me."

"Then I'll explain the terms to you."

Ivan held the parchment and quill and circled a few clauses as he elaborated on each one.

This is a contract between the grim reaper and the client who has decided to commit suicide. It is visible only to those resolved to take their own lives. The client is to die in seven days. As grim reaper, I will defend your right to kill yourself.

1. *If the client commits suicide in accordance with this agreement, the grim reaper may receive the client's soul, and the client will never be subject to reincarnation.*
2. *If the client is killed by the grim reaper, the grim reaper will fail to receive the client's soul. The client will reincarnate after losing their memories.*

3. *If the client fails to commit suicide, or if the grim reaper fails to execute their death by the limit of seven days, both parties will be punished and sentenced to death.*
4. *If the grim reaper obstructs the client from committing suicide, the grim reaper will be punished and his attempt to save the client will end in certain failure. Both the client and the grim reaper will die.*

“In other words, you’re going to die.”

04 A Reason to Die

Ivan poked Celeste’s forehead with the tip of the quill.

“Naturally, from my point of view, it’s most convenient if my clients do as they’re told and kill themselves, and let me collect their souls.”

Celeste rubbed her forehead and asked, “Have all the people you worked with been cooperative?”

“Not always, but I’ll make them commit suicide according to the contract.”

His response took Celeste by surprise, making her blink, and seeing the inscrutable smirk on his face, she couldn’t help but shiver.

“Do you know? I can knock out a client and strap them to train tracks, and if they wake and get run over by a train the next second, that still counts as suicide.” He gave her a brazen grin. His eyes turned ferocious as he fixed his gaze on Celeste. “So don’t even think about playing any tricks or dragging me down. Just face your fate.”

“I won’t give Mr. Ivan any trouble,” Celeste said softly, still smiling.

Her gentle, quiet face was nothing like Ivan had ever seen before. He stared at her for a long time before grunting out a laugh.

She still looked at ease. When death was truly near, this pretty face would cry and beg him to spare her life. The only question was how.

“That’s great then.” He shrugged, and then gave a great gasp. “Wait, there’s one more clause.”

He hovered his right hand over the parchment and drew a few circles, and a new sentence emerged into existence.

Celeste knitted her brows as she read it out loud. “The client needs to prepare the grim reaper’s three daily meals and a late-night snack?”