**Perchance to Dream**

by **Southern_Breeze**

**Summary**

It's amazing how simple words can create the deepest wounds. Grell, hurt by careless words slung by William, is injured and falls into a deep coma. Considering that reapers are supposed to heal quickly, why isn't Grell waking up? This idea was suggested by someone on ff.net
Chapter 1

Grell sat on the peak of a roof in the pouring rain; the tears streaking down her pale face mixing seamlessly with the rainwater. There had been times in her long life that she had been upset, but never before had felt so shattered. With just five little words, William had manage to rip her heart from her chest to leave her completely broken and empty on the inside.

No one can love you.

Those words, those simple, simple words, echoed in her mind and painfully bounced off the confines of her skull. Each time she thought of what William had said, new tears filled her eyes as the pain in the void where her heart was located grew sharper and more poignant. No one can love you. She sobbed again, although the sound of her crying was lost in the rumbling of thunder overhead. It seemed like the whole world was crying with her.

Doing her best to calm her heartache, she stubbornly wiped away her tears and retrieved a handkerchief to attend to her nose. She had caught a quick glimpse of herself earlier in a window pane when a streak of lightning had briefly illuminated the world, and it hadn't been a pretty sight. Her hair had frizzed in the humidity, her eyes were puffy, and she found that her nose was one thing that didn't look good in red. Right now, she understand how no could find her desirable.

Although William had never cared for her when she had looked her best.

It wasn't as if Will hadn't made it clear in the past that he wasn't interested in her and pushed her away at every opportunity. She had continued undaunted as she convinced herself he would succumb eventually. It became routine, a game of sorts, but her true feelings hadn't diminished. She genuinely and sincerely loved her prince of ice and iron rules, and it was better to convince herself that there was a slim chance to admit that William could possible return her feelings one day. Each day, she began the same game anew while hoping for a different outcome.

Today had been no different for her, but Will seemed to be in an especially bitter mood. She had flirted as usual, but then she had asked the question that had caused her so much heartache. "Will," she had cooed, "when will you love me?"

Coldly, he adjusted his glasses as he fixed her with a hard stare. "Honestly, Sutcliff, why do you even ask? The way you act is an annoyance."

"But Will," she had whined.
"That's what I'm talking about. You throw yourself at everyone halfway attractive man. You're lazy and rarely finish assignments correctly. With the way you are now," he paused as he shook his head. "No one can love you."

The words had struck a deeper wound than any blade. Will hadn't noticed her face as he walked out of the room, but she had stood there for several minutes trying to choke back tears. She didn't want to break down in front of everyone, so she had hurried up and grabbed her list so she could leave the office. She would cry when she was alone. It seemed that she was always alone, and perhaps she always would be.

After all, no one could love her.

The thought caused another sob to wrack her body, but she did her best to pull herself together. After all, no matter how bad she was hurt or how disagreeable her appearance, she still had a job to do. Readying her chainsaw, she set out to collect the soul that had been on her list.

Her runny nose and completely distracted state hindered her senses, so she didn't even sense the demon until he was already too close. She whirled about, but only caught a brief glimpse of an unfamiliar face before he struck and her body was flung into a nearby wall. The pain was intense as her form broke through the stone and mortar, but she regained her feet quickly as she prepared to fight. Just because her body and spirit was broken didn't mean that she wasn't going to defend herself, but that's she realized an awful truth.

The demon wasn't alone.

Against one or even a couple of demons, she could have certainly held her own, but a large group like this would have been trouble for any agent. She couldn't create a portal since the demons could have followed, so the only thing she could do was to stand and fight. Her sharp toothed companion roared to live as she leapt forward and drove it into the abdomen of a scantily clad female demon, but that's when felt the sting of claws pierce into her back. The sound of their horrid laughter filled her ears, and a part of her fear that it was the last thing she would ever hear. Would anyone even mourn if she was died?

Besides, she was unlovable.

Ronald's collections had gone well that evening, and he was actually preparing for a quick stop at a local pub when the stench of demon assaulted his nostrils. It was sickening, and there obviously had been a good deal of them in the area, so he prepared to leave but then he noticed he could also sense a reaper in the area and the faintest hint of a rose perfume. Having worked in close proximity to Grell, he recognized this as her usual scent, and the realization caused him to shiver slightly. Even the redhead would have trouble handling that many demons.

Remaining cautious of any demons, he followed the trail of the perfume, but he was unprepared for what he saw. Grell was lying in an alleyway, even more covered by the color she so adored. However, this red wasn't simple her hair or that hastily sewn coat, but Grell's own blood that covered her visible face like a red, silk mask. The blood was everywhere, congealing on the street and the walls, and Ronald feared his beloved mentor might be dead. He hurried to her side, ignoring the blood staining his pants as he knelt, and checked for a pulse. It was there. It was very faint and very weak, but it was there.

Carefully, he gathered Grell up in his arms, a bit surprised by how light he actually was, as he
prepared to create a portal. However, something nagged his normally carefree mind. Looking at the state of dried blood, this incident had occurred at least a few hours ago, but it didn't look Grell had even begun to heal. The injuries must have been even worse than Ronald realized because a reaper always began to heal almost immediately. The only exception was when they had no desire to heal, and of course Grell would want to recover.

Wouldn't she?

As the question slipped through his mind, a crash of thunder shattered the quiet of the night, and Ronald couldn't resist from looking down at Grell's face once more as if trying to memorize her features. As if he was saying goodbye.
Chapter 2:

Grell awoke without any preamble. She didn't arise slowly from the deep well of sleep as she often did each morning, grumbling about having to awake far too early, nor did she roll over to enjoy the warmth and security of her own bed. She simply opened her eyes fully and squinted her eyes in the overly bright light overhead as she knew, without question, that she was awake. She sighed softly as she sat up in bed to survey her surroundings.

To her surprise, she found she was in the infirmary. White walls, white sheets, white blankets, and even white lights – there was no mistaking this room. White had always been such a disagreeable color in her eyes. It was blank, emotionless, and all but invisible, which were three things no one could say about Grell. Well, maybe there was some truth to being invisible, if she was to admit it fully to herself. It wasn't that she was unseen, but she had to wonder if anyone had ever so much as glimpsed the real her. She wore a mask of carefree confidence usually, but she had let it slip from time to time. Had anyone ever taken the time to even look and see? Did anyone care enough to look?

Deciding not to consider such heavy matters first thing upon waking, she threw back the scratchy, white sheet as she sat up and twisted her feet around to touch the floor. To her surprise, she was completely dressed from her shoes all the way to her glasses. This seemed strange to her since they usually at least took off someone's shoes before putting them on a bed, but perhaps no one had thought of it or had bothered to take the time. One thing was for certain though; she felt perfectly fine. Although she had undoubtedly taken quite a beating from the group of demons, she had healed up even more quickly than usual. That explained the lack of physician or even nurse in the infirmary, although it might be depressing for some to wake up alone. She was used to it, so it didn't bother her.

At least, it didn't bother her too much.

With a sigh, she stood up and left the infirmary and she walked down the halls towards her own office. No one seemed to be around, and, at first, she thought it might be after working hours. The clock on the wall, however, said otherwise, so she had no explanation as to the lack of agents. Her boots clicked loudly on the tiled floors and their echoes seemed to remind she was alone. Completely and utterly alone. Finally, she reached her office door and placed her hand upon the knob to enter.

"Hey, Senior Sutcliff," a familiar voice said, "How are you?"

Looking up, she was greeted by the smiling face of Ronald, and she almost relaxed until she noticed that the hallway behind him, the desolate hallway she had just walked down, was now bustling with activity. She had no idea where all these workers had come from since they certainly hadn't been there a few minutes earlier, but she didn't say anything for fear of being seen crazier than people usually assumed her to be. "Okay," she answered Ronald, hoping he had noticed the slight pause as she had regarded the now crowded hall, "It looks like I'm already healed. How are you doing?" As she spoke, she turned the doorknob, but found that the door was inexplicably locked.

"Why's my door locked?" she asked, turning her attention to the knob as she twisted it a few times, "$\text{Is this some sort of joke?}\$" Receiving no answer from Ronald, she turned back towards him to see if he was struggling not to laugh as he often did when he pulled some sort of prank.
Ronald wasn't there. In fact, the entire hallway was as silent and desolate as a crypt, and she frowned solidly. Perhaps her injuries had been more severe than anyone had realized and she was hallucinating all this. If only she could get into her office where she could rest her head in familiar surroundings, perhaps she could make sense of everything, but her office was still locked for some reason.

Facing the door again she was ready to kick it in if necessary, but then she saw that this was not her office. The simple plaque across the wooden surface read, "William T. Spears; Supervisor." She jumped back with a start as she stared at those golden letters that spoke the truth.

She was going crazy.

Of course, William was the most level-headed man she knew, so he might be able to make sense of all the weirdness that seem to be surrounding her like a veil. The door was still locked, so she knocked cautiously. William rarely locked his door, so there was a chance he was in a meeting. After waiting for a few minutes with no answer, she knocked again – a little louder this time, but it was evident that either William wasn't in his office, or he didn't want to be disturbed. Sighing softly, she turned as she walked away.

As she walked, however, she realized something rather odd. She wanted to speak to William about more than just the strange, recent occurrences, but she had no idea what it was she had wanted to discuss. It was as if the memory of why had simply faded from her mind.

((X))

The day had been running rather smoothly for William, which was a pleasant change of pace. So far, all reaps had been uneventful and there was a good chance that this would be his first workday in quite a while that didn't require overtime. If it wasn't for the cold exterior he adopted at work in order to keep his subordinates in line, he would have smiled. Of course, this relative peace and orderliness could be shattered in mere seconds. This was especially true since had yet to hear from Grell and her most recent assignment.

He rounded a corner only to see Ronald running towards him; his youthful eyes wide with fear and there was the threats of tears brimming in the corners. While Ronald could be impulsive, William had never seen him affected by something to the point of tears, and the red stains of blood staining his white shirt was an indicator that this was bad news heading straight for him.

"What's the meaning of this behavior, Knox?" William asked, "I've never seen you act like this before. This behavior is quite unseemly for the workplace."

"It's Senior Sutcliff," the blonde gasped, "Shse's hurt. I mean, really hurt. From the smell of it he must have gotten attacked by at least a dozen demons or something."

"Or just one of the vile creatures that was sick of his unwanted advances," William mumbled bitterly, "I trust you've taken Sutcliff to the infirmary. She should heal soon, but I need to check on whether or not the soul she was sent to retrieve was not stolen by demons."

"You don't understand!" Ronald practically shouted, "She's not healing. Even Dr. Brown said so."

A chill rippled up William's spine for he realized how serious it was that Grell hadn't begun to heal. Alan happened to be walking by at that moment, so William handed him the files and told the young reaper to check on the status of the soul that Grell had been sent to collect, before
hurriedly making his way to the infirmary as Ronald followed. To his distress, he saw Grell lying on the white bed perfectly still and silent. Even with the bandages that had been wrapped about her body, William could see the spots of crimson marring the pristine surfaces, and he knew that Grell had been hurt far worse that he could have imagined. Dr. Brown had been attending to Grell, but he walked over to William when he saw the supervisor had stepped into the room.

"What's going on?" William asked, "We're already short-handed and now I have a reaper that's out of commission. How long before she can return to her duties?" William hated sounded so unfeeling, but he had to keep up his front. No one could know that he cared about anyone.

No one could know that he cared about Grell.

The doctor shook his head, his unruly mane of platinum hair swishing with his movement, as he regarded William with said eyes. "She's not healing," Dr. Brown said, "She's in a type of coma that is unique to reapers but very deadly."

"A coma? When will she wake up?"

"Chances are, Mr. Spears, she will never wake up."

"But I don't understand," William insisted, desperation lacing his voice, "Why isn't she healing herself? Why won't she wake up?"

"Reapers usually heal rather quickly," answered the doctor, "However, sometimes they slip into this coma that it referred to as The Dream of Death. In her dream, young Sutcliff here believes she is awake and living day to day as normal. Because she doesn't know she's hurt, she's not healing. Her mind is tricking her body into thinking that it doesn't need to heal. I don't understand it though." The doctor looked at Grell sadly. "This usually only affects reapers who don't want to heal for some reason, even if it's subconscious. She always seemed so happy, though, and full of life. What could hurt her so deeply that would allow her to fall into this state?"

William felt something inside him shatter like one of his prized crystal pigeons. "Can't we just wake her up? Surely there's something you can do."

Dr. Brown shook his head again as he gestured around the infirmary. "Even with all of this equipment, we're helpless to do anything." He walked over to Grell, and brushed back the scarlet hair from the sleeping face and looked at him sadly before turning to face William once more.

"If she doesn't realize that what she's seeing is nothing more than a dream," he said, "Then Grell Sutcliff will die."
“If she doesn’t realize that what she’s seeing is nothing more than a dream,” Dr. Brown said, “Then Grell Sutcliff will die.”

Ronald’s mouth fell open as the horrible words hung in the air with a tangible weight. Grell could die? Slowly, Ronald shook his head to say that the doctor was mistaken. Grell couldn’t die. She just couldn’t. Of course Ronald dealt with death daily and he was death in some people’s eyes, but everything was different here. This wasn’t a human who was scheduled to die, this was Grell – his mentor and his friend. Reapers weren’t supposed to die. Grell wasn’t supposed to die.

“There must be something you can do,” William stated, his normally even tone broken by a tremor so slight it was barely noticeable.

Hearing the shakiness in his voice, Ronald looked up at William and watched as his supervisor adjusted his glasses slightly. It was something that he did often, and Grell had once told Ronald it was a nervous habit. As he watched, he saw that William’s hand was shook as minutely as his voice had, but it was still more emotion than Ronald had ever seen William openly display. Despite his cold, professional exterior, William was genuinely upset with the situation. Grell would have love to have seen this, but sadly the redhead had to be in a coma to evoke any outward signs of what William felt inside. Ronald couldn't help but feel a bit of anger. Grell deserved to see this from William, if this was how William truly felt.

“There’s nothing I can do,” Doctor Brown answered, piercing through Ronald’s thoughts, “There’s reportedly one method, but it’s highly dangerous and would require assistance – and it would be the assistant who would be taking the biggest risk.”

“I’ll help,” Ronald volunteered.

“That’s brave of you, son,” the doctor said, “but I wouldn’t want to risk your life.”

“No,” William intoned, “If anyone is to be at risk, it should be me. I am her supervisor after all.”

“Both of your bravery is commendable,” stated Dr. Brown, “but foolhardy. Besides, I don’t even really know how you go about the procedure. Not only is it dangerous, but it is also highly illegal. It’s not taught at the academy and there are no books describing the procedure. I only know it as legend.”

A long pause followed this announcement as the three simply looked at each other helplessly. “Is there anyone who knows how to do this procedure?” William finally asked.

Ronald couldn’t suppress his gasp. He could have never imagined the day when the normally strict, by the book William actually suggested breaking the law. If either Dr. Brown or William heard the gasp, they didn’t respond as they simply stared at each other.

Finally, the doctor answered in a solemn voice. “There is no one in the reaper realm who has any understanding of the procedure.”

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Grell walked down the hall towards her office, but it seemed as if the hallway was growing longer with every step she took. Things had gotten no better than when she was first awoken. Wherever she went, it was void of people and sound, but she only had to look behind her to see the groups of co-workers laughing and talking. It was as if everyone was avoiding her, but sadly that was nothing new. She knew that she was a bit of an outcast, but normally she could walk down the halls with her dazzling smile and pretend that it didn’t bother her, but that was all a lie. It did bother her, and she no longer had the energy for masks. A few tears escaped her eyes as she paused in her endless walking down this never-ending hall.

It was then that she realized she was standing in front of William’s office, and she knew exactly why her feet had carried her to this location. Carefully, she pulled the letter from the back pocket of her pants and held it close to her chest—close to her heart. For a minute, she simply stood there as if trying to draw strength from the foolish words she had scribbled onto a page. This note contained all of her deepest feelings and emotions, which was the very things she typically kept hidden, but she somehow she knew this was the time to unveil the truth. Taking in a deep breath, she knocked on William’s door.

There was no answer.

Frowning, she tried to twist the doorknob, but it was locked as it had been the day before. William couldn’t still be in a meeting, so he might be avoiding others or he could even be ignoring her specifically. Choking back a few more tears, she slipped her note beneath the door before she could lose her nerve and hurried to her own office. How strange it was that the hallway now seemed to be the proper length.

To her surprise, her door was locked again, but she was prepared this time. Although she had never locked her door in the past, she had dug out her old key for just such a situation. Carefully, she retrieved it from her pocket and started to put it into the lock, but then she noticed something lying on the ground. Even before she bent over to retrieve the small, white envelope she knew that this was her letter.

And she was standing outside of William’s office again.

New tears streamed down her face. Why was she forced to stand outside of his closed door again and again? Why was she to be eternally rejected?

((x))

“She’s crying,” Ronald announced quietly.

Both Dr. Brown and William turned to look and there were tiny, glistening tears streaming down her face. “What’s going on?” William demanded.

“Something in her dream must be making her cry,” Dr. Brown replied, looking very distressed at this new development.

“Can’t you do anything?” begged Ronald.

“No,” answered the doctor, “As I said, no one in this realm can help her.”

“You keep saying ‘this realm,’” William pointed out, “So does that mean that someone in another realm might know the procedure.”

Dr. Brown turned very slowly to look at him. “There is someone who might know,” he answered,
“but he is not allowed here.”

“There is it?” William asked.

There was a pregnant pause as Dr. Brown looked down at Grell and gently wiped away a stray tear. “It’s the deserter now commonly referred to as Undertaker.”

Ronald’s mouth fell open. “But he’s a wanted criminal. If someone was to bring him here…”

“They would face strict punishment,” finished Dr. Brown, “Besides, there’s no way to even contact this ancient.”

“There may be a way,” William mumbled before the turned and hurried from the room without pausing to look at what was undoubtedly shocked expressions from Ronald and the doctor. He knew that everyone thought he had no emotion, but that wasn’t true. He just had to hide his emotions. If he let his feelings get in the way, it would have compromised his position as a boss. He had to be the perfect supervisor even if it meant sacrificing his own feelings and emotions, but he had never been able to stop feeling. Now, here he was, Mr. Rules and Regulations, about to break one of the biggest rules of all.

And he was going to do it all for Grell.
William stepped quietly into his own apartment and into the familiar silence and loneliness held by each four well. For the briefest of moments, he stood in his doorway as he surveyed the perfectly arranged room. Usually, he was quite proud of his décor. With the exception of his crystal pigeon collection, everything in this space was functional and practical – much like its occupant, but now William found it rather lacking. The muted earth tone, which William usually found inoffensive to the eye now seemed almost unbearably dull. It was almost as if it needed just a splash a color.

The soft noise of flapping wings interrupted his thoughts as the other occupant of his plain dwelling made her appearance as she flew in from one of the back bedrooms, and William held out his hand so that the soft, gray pigeon could rest her pleasantly plump frame. “Hello, Rosalind,” he greeted, “I trust you well.”

As only male pigeons cooed, she made no verbal answer but she did lean in happily when he rubbed her neck gently. “I have a job for you,” he announced, smiling ever so slightly as Rosalind stared up at him with her dark eyes. She seemed to be saying that she’d do anything for him, and he found this comforting. Shifting her to his left hand, he walked over to his small desk and wrote a quick note. “Take this to Undertaker,” he instructed as he tied the note to her leg, “and go as quickly as you can. Do you understand?”

Again, there was no answer, but something about the twinkling light in the depths of those small, dark eyes seemed to say that she did. As soon as he opened the window, she flew away and he watched her as she disappeared down towards the mortal world. Birds were the only creatures who were able to travel between the realms without the use of portals, which made them excellent for reaper purposes. Of course, if William ever admitted it fully to himself, Rosalind was far more than that.

She was his only friend.

With the task completed, he hurried back to the office and found it was the same as he had left it. No one had seemed to notice his absence of his return, which meant there was a strong possibility Upper Management would never know he had left work for unofficial reasons and without signing out, although he no longer cared as much. For years, his only companion, other than his pigeons, had been his career and he had worked to improve his standings just like he was improving the relationship with a friend. Now it just didn’t seem quite as important as he walked steadily towards the infirmary. His career was a title and pay grade, but Grell was an actual being of feelings and emotions. Even William couldn’t pretend to be so hard and cold as to put his career above the survival of someone who had been almost a fixture in his day to day existence since their time at the academy.

Dr. Brown and Eric were still the only two with Grell although the news of her condition must have been known by others by now, and this pained William. He knew that Grell was often ridiculed and gossiped about, but he had never taken the time to consider that Grell had no actual friends aside from Ronald. It was odd to William because Grell was so friendly and warm, but he had never realized that perhaps they were more alike than he had thought.

“Has there been any change?” William asked.
The doctor only shook his head, but it was Ronald who actually answered. “She’s cried some more,” the blonde answered, “but it doesn’t look like she’s waking up.” His eyes looked watery as if he was trying to hold back his own tears.

Walking over, William noted that Grell’s face had paled until it was nearly the color of milk, but he could see tears drying on her lashes. “I did my best to contact Undertaker,” he said.

“But, Mr. Spears,” Ronald began, “If you knew of a way to contact Undertaker all this time…” His voice trailed off as his eyes grew wide with realization. While there was no guarantee his letter would really reach the ancient, it was now clear to everyone in this room that William had been holding back some valuable information from Upper Management.

“Is there anything else we can do?” William asked, hoping to ease the tension and to distract from the troubling subject of his own misconduct.

Dr. Brown shook his head again. “All we can do is wait,” he said, “Grell still might wake up on her own, but it’s doubtful. Our best hope is that Undertaker might come but, even if he does show up and know how to perform this procedure, there is still very little chance for Grell’s survival. In all honesty, we’re probably just going to have two reapers dead instead of one.”

“The risk is acceptable,” William quickly answered, “We really cannot afford to lose another reaper.”

His mind silently added, "Especially not this one," he dared not to say the words aloud.

((x))

Grell was growing tired, and her limbs felt heavy and useless. Perhaps the demon attack had taken more out of her than she had realized, although the reflection that greeted her in the mirror looked perfectly healthy. Maybe it was just mental fatigue. She had laid down to sleep and, while time had apparently passed, she couldn’t remember actually sleeping. Plus, no matter where she tried to go in the office, she always wound up outside of William’s locked door. Other notes had been slipped underneath, but she had found each one pushed back outside untouched and unread.

Plus, there was the way that everyone avoided her. Other than a few greetings from Ronald, who never seemed to stick around, everyone else seemed to disappear when she was around. They were always behind her, laughing and talking, but none seemed to actually see her. Perhaps she was just the butt of the joke again like always.

Sighing softly, she looked again at William’s door and that physical representation of the barrier that had always stood between them. She knocked lightly and waited for a response, but nothing stirred inside.

“I know you’re in there, William,” she finally said, “because you keep returning my letters. This is getting foolish. Could you please talk to me?”

Silence was her only answer and she could feel new tears spilling down her cheeks. She had cried more in the last few days than she had ever allowed herself to do in the past. “William!” she cried, pounding on the door. The wood should have cracked under her assault, but that unforgiving surface wouldn’t relent. “William!”

((x))
“William!” Grell cried, and everyone turned to look as the redhead struggled in her coma induced dream.

“She’s getting worse,” Dr. Brown announced, as Ronald took one of his flailing hands and allowed a few of his own tears to fall.

William stood back, feeling unusually helpless. It was obvious Grell was dreaming of him, and he couldn’t help but wonder if it had anything to do with his cruel words towards Grell just before the disastrous reap. He didn’t think it could be that. In their years together, he had said far worse to Grell, so mere words shouldn’t have been enough to put her in such a state. Besides, he had only been commented on Grell’s annoying persistence, so this couldn’t be his fault.

Could it?

He started to step forward, considering taking Grell’s other hand, when suddenly the room erupted in light. From an unconventional and untraceable portal, Undertaker stepped into the room. It was obvious that he was wary by the way he looked about, but his trademark grin was firmly in place until his gaze happened upon Grell.

Frowning, he stepped forward and pushed Ronald out of the way as he laid on hand upon Grell’s forehead. “The Dream of Death,” he muttered.

“We were hoping you could help us,” Dr. Brown said, “We can’t get young Sutcliff here to wake up, and I know there’s supposed to be some method…”

“But none of you young doctors know how to perform the dream merger,” Undertaker mumbled. He looked up, but the frown was still firmly in place as he regarded them from behind the fringe of hair that concealed much of his visage. “There isn’t much time,” he announced, “And, while I know how to do the dream merger, it’s very dangerous.”

“We know that,” William stated in a slightly strained voice, “And we also know it requires an assistant.”

“Oh, not an assistant,” Undertaker correctly, shaking his finger, “a volunteer, and it’s even more dangerous for the volunteer.”

“Even so,” William said, “I accept the risk. Just tell me what I need to do.”

That trademark smile of the ancient graced his face once more. “Interesting you would volunteer,” he commented, “Is this young reaper important to you?” He chuckled, but continued before William could answer. “If you’re sure you want to volunteer, that’s fine with me. Now, strip!”

“What?” William managed to ask as he felt his face heat up.
Chapter 5

After Undertaker’s unusual command, silence hung in the room as everyone simply stared at the ancient, and William knew by the heat in his face he was blushing. “You want me to strip, sir?”

Suddenly, the Undertaker laughed loudly and the sound echoed off the sterile walls. “I was just trying to make sure the little darling here wasn’t faking,” he explained, “If there was a chance of seeing you naked, I’m sure she would have immediately sat up. Besides, I just wanted to see how you’d react. Your face turned positively red as her hair.” He giggled again as he walked over to move another bed next to the one that Grell was currently occupying. “You don’t need to take off all of your clothes,” he explained, “but you might want to remove your shirt so that we won’t need to rip it.”

William was still confused, but he swiftly removed his jacket and started to work on his tie when Ronald spoke up. “Rip it?” the younger reaper asked, “What do you mean? What are we going to do here?”

Now that the bed was in place, Undertaker had removed his hat so that when he looked up at Ronald, one of his brilliant eyes was visible. “Don’t you know what a dream merger is?” he asked.

Ronald only shook his head as Dr. Brown stepped forward. “I’m afraid that none of us do, sir,” he explained, “I only knew of some method to save someone from this dream, but I know nothing about the actual procedure. I didn’t even known it was call a dream merger.”

Undertaker shook his head. “What are they teaching young reapers these days?” he mumbled to himself.

“Just tell us what we need to do,” William commanded.

Undertaker looked at him. “You have no idea what you’re offering to do,” he announced, “The only way to wake someone up from the dream of death is to force their cinematic records to merge with another reaper’s. This will allow you to go inside the dream to let them know what they are seeing is only a dream so that they can wake up.”

“Do you mean…” Ronald began, but his voice trailed off as if it was impossible for him to finish.

Throwing back his hand, Undertaker’s impressive scythe suddenly appeared. “I’m going to have to cut both of you rather deeply,” he explained, “and merge your records. That in itself is dangerous since it can be difficult to completely separate records once they’ve become entangled.”

“I see,” William said. He could feel his heart beating a little faster in his chest, but he showed no fear as he sat down on the bed that Undertaker had moved next to Grell. “It sounds risky, but I am still Sutcliff’s supervisor. I am responsible for her. Besides, we’re too understaffed at the moment to risk losing a field agent. I suppose you’ll want me to lie here.” His anxiety had caused him to ramble, and he took a deep breath to steady his nerves.

Undertaker nodded, but an uncharacteristic frown possessed his mouth. “But separating the records is only part of the dangers,” he continued, “If our little red reaper here was to die while you’re still in her dream, you will die as well. Plus, there’s a chance that you won’t be able to find
you're still in her dream, you will die as well. Plus, there's a chance that you won't be able to find your way back to your own records, and you will cease to exist other than a part of her memory.”

“The longer we discuss the risks the less of a chance they’ll be time to save her,” William stated firmly, “I’ve already said that I’m responsible for her safety.” He laid down on the bed. “Now, let’s get this over with.”

There was an odd smile from Undertaker. “Now, you will remember everything that happens inside of Grell’s dream,” he explained, “but the chances are she won’t remember anything beyond the vague impression of a dream, so don’t hold back.” Before William could ask what he meant by that exactly, he drove his scythe into Grell’s chest, and a grimace of pain contorted the sleeping redhead’s face as her back arched slightly. William wanted to yell that Undertaker had struck Grell too deeply, but the ancient had already removed the blade and had moved over to William. “This is going to hurt, Willy,” he said as he raised his scythe once again. William didn’t have time to protest as he felt himself being stabbed deeply and a white wall of pain suddenly crashed over him.

((x))

Grell’s heart had been broken. She had felt the deep stabbing pain in her chest, pain which nearly drove her to her knees, only minutes earlier when she had been walking down the hall. She had leaned onto the wall for support with her right hand as her left had desperately clung to her chest. When the pain had finally subsided, she had brought her hand away fully expecting to see blood, but there had been no sign of an injury. This had confused her, but after puzzling on the matter for a few moments, she realized she was simply feeling her own heart break.

She continued walked down the hall, but she knew there was little use. No matter how many steps she took or which way she turned, she always found herself standing outside of the same locked door – the door to William’s office. There was no surprise, of course, when she stopped and found that’s exactly where she was yet again.

Fighting back tears, she knocked on the door like she had done countless times so far. There was no sound inside, and a part of her hoped he had simply stepped out, but the more rational part of her mind knew how rarely William was gone during business hours. He was simply avoiding her. Again, she knocked and she could no longer hold back the tears as she waited for any response.

“Will?” she called out, her voice breaking, “Please talk to me. Yell or reprimand me – I don’t care. Please, just stop ignoring me.”

“Grell,” a familiar said, but it wasn’t coming from the other side of the locked door.

Turning, she gasped as her eyes fell upon William standing there. In that moment, he was the most glorious sight she had ever seen, and she was briefly tempted to run to him so that she could hold him in her arms, but she hesitated. “Are you really, Will?” she asked, “Or just some illusion? Are you going to run away from me like everyone else?” There was a soft sigh as a new tear traced its way down her face. “I don’t know if you’re real. I think I’m going crazy.”

William hurried towards her and grabbed her upper arms in his hands. He felt completely real, but she still wasn’t ready to trust her own senses, “You’re not going crazy,” he said, “This is a dream. You’re dreaming, Grell, and you have to wake up.”

“Maybe I don’t want to wake up,” Grell responded, “I mean, you’re actually talking to me now. Maybe this is better.”
“You don’t understand,” William said, “You were hurt by demons…and by me. Instead of healing, you’re in some sort of coma. This dream is just your mind tricking your body into thinking it doesn’t need to heal. If you don’t wake up soon…”

“What? What will happen to me if I don’t wake up?”

“You’ll die, Grell,” he answered, “If you don’t wake up, you’ll die.” William’s own eyes began to glisten with tears slightly. “I’ll lose you.”

Grell touched his cheek and wiped away a tear that begun to roll down his face. “You said you hurt me, Will. What did you do? I can’t remember?”

“It’s not important because I didn’t mean what I said,” William answered.

“It is important,” she insisted, “Please, tell me.”

He took a deep breath. “I told you that no one could love you the way you act.”

She dropped her face and tried to turn away slightly only to be stopped by his grip on her arms. “I see,” she said.

“But that was a lie, Grell,” William added, “I shouldn’t have said it. I was just annoyed about a report from Upper Management, and I took it out on you. Besides…”

“Besides?”

He swallowed loudly. “I’m not very good with expressing my…feelings,” he struggled, “It’s not that I don’t feel, but I’m afraid to admit how I feel. I don’t want to be seen as weak or ever let my feelings get in the way of my duties.” He pulled her closer and wrapped his arms around her in a proper hug. “You were always there,” he continued, “always right by my side reminding me that I still had emotions no matter how badly I wanted to deny it. In a way, it scared me. You expressed everything so openly and freely, but I just couldn’t. I think I was lying to myself as much as I was lying to you.”

“What do you mean, Will?” she questioned.

“I do care for you,” he whispered, “and I have for a very long time. I had always thought that if I rejected you long enough, you would find someone better – someone who could love you like you deserve, and I could go back to acting like I was above all emotion. I see that I was wrong to have done that. I’m sorry, Grell.”

“You don’t have to apologize,” she replied, “You came to save me, after all. By the way, how did you get into my dream? Are you really Will or just a part of my imagination?”

“I’m really your Will,” he said with a slight smile, “and I’ll explain more about it when you wake up.”

She giggled despite the gravity of the situation. “Then give me a kiss,” she instructed, “and wake me up like the prince should wake his princess.”

He leaned forward and touched her lips so gently yet so warmly. As soon as he stepped back, the previously locked door to his office flew open, and a brilliant light shot out into the hallway. “What’s that?” she asked.

“That’s the path back to my own records,” William explained, “I have to leave your dream now, but I’ll be by your side when you wake up.”
“Promise?”

“I promise.”

He stepped away almost reluctantly as he entered his office and his body was enveloped by the light. It became so bright, that she had to look away and close her eyes. When she opened her eyes, however, she realized that she was now in her own bedroom looking at her own comfortable bed. “I’ve never got into bed to wake up before,” she said aloud, but she climbed into bed regardless. The dream was coming to a close, but, for once, she found herself more eager for the possibilities of reality.

William traveled along his own records; looking at how neatly his merged with Grell's. All this time he had just to create such a distance, but their memories seemed to almost compliment one another. He had never taken the time to look before, but now he could see it so clearly. She had been there all along and was such an important part of his life, but his heart ached when he was forced to relieve each time he had been callous and cold. She hadn't deserved it.

"Willy?" Undertaker's voice pierced through his thoughts, "Wake up! Willy?"

"You have to wake up, Mr. Spears!" Ronald cried, but his voice lacked strength. It was as if he was a great distance away. "If Grell wakes up first, you'll die. You'll just be a memory."

He suddenly remembered that he was in danger, and he sought to regain the path to where his own records originated. Coming here had been risky, but Grell was worth it. She had always been worth it, and now he had to live just so he could be there for her. He was never going to push her away again. It felt like swimming through a thick, viscous subject, but he still pushed on ahead. He had to make it out.

He felt a soft barrier and pushed on it with both hands. Light spilled from the other side, and suddenly William found himself waking up. He gasped loudly as he sat up. He was no longer in a dream or traveling along records. He was back in the infirmary, and he quickly looked over at the other bed.

"Did it work?" he asked, and he shakily jumped to his feet. Undertaker stepped slightly to the side so that William could see Grell clearly. As he approached, Grell still appeared to be asleep, and he feared that his efforts had all been in vain. Tears came to his eyes as he stepped closer, but then Grell sighed and began to open his eyes.

"William?" she asked quietly, "Or am I still dreaming."

Instead of answering verbally, he leaned down and kissed her gently. Her eyes widened in surprise, but then she reciprocated the kiss as she brought up one hand to touch his face. "What was that for?" she asked softly.

"It's the proper way for a prince to wake his princess," William whispered in reply.

She smiled. "You came to save me," she said, "I thought it was all just a dream, but you really saved me. Didn't you?"

He nodded. "I'll always be there for you," he whispered, "From this moment on, you'll never be
alone again. I promise."

"I hate to break this up," Dr. Brown said, "but Sutcliff does need her rest. You can talk more later, but now my patient needs peace and quiet."

William was reluctant to leave, but he knew that the doctor was right. He and Ronald left the room and started down the hall, but he couldn't help but pause and look back at the infirmary. In that room lay his life and his future. He had risked everything to save her, and he would never take her for granted again.

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