

Unicorn Blood

By Michael Ocheskey

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Nicolas stood alone and naked, staring around him in awe. He had no idea what was going on, and that made it all the more enjoyable to watch. From what he remembered, he had been driving home alone from a winter skiing trip he had spent with some of his friends, eager to return to his fiancé. I had watched him traveling in earnest, hoping that soon we would get the chance to meet. With that time quickly approaching, he was utterly bewildered.

There was no sign of his car and he was caught up in a world he didn't recognize. He was surrounded by an endless field as far as he could see. A multitude of colors surrounded him, flowers of all shapes and sizes, many of which he'd never seen before, but I had. Amid the flowers were trees and bushes unfettered by human interference. This was my home and I was well acquainted with it. This was the land of dreams and legends lost.

After a few minutes of silent assessment, I decided it was time to put Nicolas out of his misery. It would be much more humane than letting him continue on in ignorance. Nicolas jumped slightly and spun on his heel at the sound of my approach from behind him. "Did you know," I questioned, "Every religion on this earth possesses within it an incarnation of death. The Angel of Death, the Grim Reaper, a Shinigami; these are merely a trifle amount in a much greater scale, but no one really knows what Death is or what Death looks like. The reason for this? Everyone fears Death—even those who so adamantly affirm they don't. The truth is no one desires to know what Death looks like for it is so much easier to accept your encounter with Death when you don't realize that you are in contact with Death."

Nicolas could not believe his eyes. He shut them tight and gouged his palms deep into them; hoping to tear the impossible from them. He had hoped I was nothing but an illusion; a fabrication of his mind. It is to be expected. Though my kind was once as common as many other creatures upon this planet, we, like so many others, have vanished through the passing of time and are now nothing more than myth. For Nicolas to lay eyes upon me must have seemed to him like meeting a ghost, but there I was—an honest to goodness unicorn. Nicolas' jaw dropped and his eyes bulged as his stare burned with unfettered suspicion at my pearl white, glistening coat and silver, spiraled horn as long and thick as his lower arm.

"This isn't possible!" Nicolas nearly screamed his accusation at me as if the force of his voice could cause me to vanish.

It took a little prodding, but I was soon able to convince Nicolas of my existence. "Well, as you can see, I am real; from the tip of my silver horn down to the ivory hairs of my flicking tail. Please, do not touch me," I announced as he extended a hand toward me like he would a typical equine, "It is disrespectful and considered taboo to touch a unicorn. I have no idea, nor will I hold myself responsible, for the fate which should befall you if you do. But never mind that. You can see I exist for I am right before your eyes. Do not question your sight in this matter. Just accept it and let's press on to more important matters. Shall we walk?"

I took Nicolas strolling through the gorgeous field of flowers, my hooves clopping across the soil, leaving prints which glittered in their luminescence behind us. As we walked, the sound of rolling water caught our ears. Off in the distance, head inclined into the river for drink, a whitetail deer, a doe, continued to quench her thirst with no regard to our presence. Amid the golden-tinted

grass and flowers of first morning's light were a multitude of animals; some flustering about in search of mates, others wrestling with their siblings. Nicolas startled at first, then smiled serenely at the scene which unfolded before him. His gaze turned downward as a rabbit sprinted by, a red fox close on her heels. The fox pounced on the rabbit and subdued it, but didn't snap its jaws. Then, as swiftly as it had captured the rabbit, it sprang back and the rabbit leapt playfully onto its back. The fox continued to play with the rabbit; frolicking joyously and leaping like a bull trying to buck off a rider. This place possessed true peace—a place where the animals were not afraid of one another and enjoyed life to the fullest.

“As to what I was saying earlier,” I continued, “look around you. Do you see the gentle swaying of the golden grass in the wind? Can you smell the river in the distance or feel the mist upon your cheek from the waterfall? Listen carefully to the songbirds and the creatures of the earth as they go merrily about their daily lives. Did you know they are the only ones who can freely see Death and that they honestly don't fear him? The reason is because they have no concept of what it means to die. To them, they are simply here one day and gone the next. They do not even fear those creatures around them; though that fox playing with the rabbit may someday feast upon it when he gets hungry it does not stop them from enjoying the time they have with one another now; for to them the only thing which exists is the present.”

Nicolas continued to gape silently at the world around him. He was at a loss for words and whenever he opened his mouth to speak all that came out was a puff of air or a gentle sigh which emulated the tranquility around him.

“Isn't this a beautiful sight? I know that whenever I see it I can feel my heart flutter. Now look closely upon your

surroundings and tell me, do *you* fear Death? This peaceful existence in front of you, is it not a paradise? You know that this paradise will disappear when Death finds you.” My words shook Nicolas to the core and his hollowed eyes gazed intently into mine, “You do not need to speak, I can see it in your eyes. Your eyes scream their terror to the world. They scream of the sorrow of separation and a true separation it will be because Death comes to us all alone. Everyone dies solely and utterly alone no matter how many surround them.”

Nicolas’s fear overpowered him and asked me, his voice quaking, “Why am I here?” There was a huge tremor resounding deep from within him—his rapidly pulsating heart.

“What do you mean? Oh, you’re wondering how you got to this place? Isn’t it obvious? You are here because you chose to be here. If you had not chosen to be here, then this place would not exist. See, it is already dissipating. Where is it you want to be?”

Nicolas’ eyes became glazed as he contemplated my question and the scenery around him began to trickle out of focus; rippling like waves. For a moment we were basked in darkness, but it was immediately replaced by another gorgeous scene.

“Ah! A snowy mountain range. This place is quite lovely as well. Though there are fewer creatures and the cold makes my hair stand on end, it doesn’t deter from its elegance. You truly are a child of nature. For you to take me to such a place, words cannot describe how deeply I appreciate it. Shall we trek to the top? I have always wanted to view the world from such heights.”

It took me quite a while to trek up the mountain. I had grown accustomed to flat ground throughout my years; as more and more mountains were demolished by humans in their unending quest to dominate that which belongs not to them, but to all creatures of this planet.

As we continued to trek the mountain, Nicolas wondered, "How come I'm not cold? I am naked in this place and I have no feel for the cold. Now that I think about it; I wasn't chilled by the breeze in the field as well."

"Perhaps it is because you choose not to be," I supplied nothing more than a likely guess as I could not fathom the answer either; for even a magical creature like me could feel the cold within my bones, though it didn't bother me. In all my years of traversing dreams, I'd always felt the cold or heat of the scenery others supplied me with. "You are, after all, creating this wonderful scenery for us. It is neither me nor my magic which has brought us here. It is the power of your heart which has given birth to this ray of hope. That hope is the precise reason I am here. I have always wanted to experience this feeling, yet the only thing I ever experience is solitude and despair. That is what comes from being the sole being of my kind. We unicorns were once a prosperous clan and the rulers over all equine kind, yet now I am reduced to wondering the world in the shadows.

"For you see, humanity caused the destruction of my clansmen and I have been cursed that I can no longer show myself in front of them. For that reason, my clan has been reduced to nothing more than mythology. This is very much like Death. Death also cannot show himself to humanity. As I was saying earlier, Death has to remain secretive in order to keep people from fearing him when he approaches them. For this reason, anyone who catches a glimpse of Death, even by accident, is then condemned to death. It is a sad story, but it is the only way for Death to remain as he is."

Nicolas looked solemnly into my eyes and reached out to comfort me. I was grateful for his compassion at my plight, but I recoiled, keeping his hands from me. I had grown to like Nicolas in this short time I had been with him for I treasured the rays of

hope he showed me and I feared the fate which I might unintentionally place upon him if he touched me. His fate resided elsewhere and I had no desire to alter it.

“You don’t have to look so sad,” I consoled him. “My history stretches far into antiquity so there is no need to pity me. I am happy just to be able to walk alongside you like this. It has been so long since I’ve been able to communicate with anyone. Therefore, you shouldn’t pity me, but feel happy for me. This is a joyous instance!”

Nicolas still seemed disheartened by my plight, so I tried to distract him. Luckily, we had reached the tip of the highest peak.

“Oh, we’re here! I can’t believe it. This is a sight that may even surpass the field of gold we were in. It is quite remarkable. I feel as though I could leap forward and find myself lost in flight. It is a highly romantic spot.”

“It is,” Nicolas agreed, his cheeks flushing, “This is where I proposed to my fiancé. We are to be married in a month’s time.”

“Is that true? This is where you proposed to your future wife? No wonder I could sense such strong emotions in the air. Then this place may be considered sacred to you. These feelings should not be disturbed. Shall we let these feelings rest in peace? Let us go to another place to finish our discussion for what I have to tell you may be the most frightening you’ve yet heard.”

Nicolas once again tightened his body in terror. I tried to console him, but it seemed to be of no use. Once more the scenery rippled and we stood in darkness. This time, however, the darkness remained. Dim lights sparked into being one at a time until enormous humps of burning soil surrounded us. The ground was scorched and cracked, the moon bloodstained, and the sky dreary and blotched. Storm clouds resided permanently

above us; the occasional bolt of lightning and crash of thunder adding to the animosity permeating from every inch of this place.

“Do not be afraid,” I attempted to comfort Nicolas, who was whirling in circles; taking in all that surrounded him. His face was stretched and ghostly and he seemed reluctant to approach me or run, “I know this place looks scary, but this is an important part of my history. You have shown me so much peace that I can truly feel my heart lightening. In return, I thought I would show you my past. Perhaps, if here with you, I could come to terms with my past and finally move on. These dead wastelands in front of you are the remnants of my home; the eternally flaming mounds, the carcasses of my companions. This is my final battlefield. It was here that humanity waged war against my people. They considered us nothing more than game and slaughtered us for our meat, hides, and horns. The black and charred grounds are forever scorched by human hatred, and try as I might; I have not been able to put out the flames engulfing my fallen comrades.”

Still fearful, but starting to calm himself down, Nicolas cautiously approached me. I trotted up to one of the flaming mounds and crouched down onto my knees, bowing respectfully to my fallen comrades. From within the mound a charred hoof could be seen along with the bones of a human hand; still clenching the hilt of an ancient sword whose blade glowed like a hot poker, pieces of it melting away to form a puddle of molten metal beneath the blade. A gentle neighing left my lips and a single crystalline tear rolled down my cheek, turning to blood as it fell away from me and splashed upon the ground. Nicolas walked up beside me, bowing his head respectfully at the mound in front of him where one of his human ancestors lie defeated alongside my own.

“Would you consider yourself a religious man, Nicolas? If so, then you should know that at some point in human history they committed an act so gruesome that it left a mark. Nearly every religion has a story of how humanity fell out of favor with God. In Christianity it is called Original Sin and is described as eating an apple off a tree. But did you know that the story is simply an allegory; the apple and the tree are really a metaphor used to describe something much more fearsome and sinister.

“Yes, the act humanity committed is staring you in the face at this very moment. This scorched, desolate land is the tree and my fallen comrades the apples which were so unjustly plucked from that tree. Yet, the story of the apple and tree tends not to explain thoroughly what consequences came from eating the apple. True, at that point in time humanity became tainted by evil; for eating the flesh of a pure and holy creature such as a unicorn leaves an eternal stain upon the soul. This stain of evil became known as Original Sin, but there was another consequence born from these actions; the birth of Death. Prior to this incident, humanity was as immortal as any being of flesh can be, but their lives shortened drastically from this action and Death was born to steal their souls away.” As my story unfolded, the gentle tone in my voice slowly hardened; to be replaced by an unyielding hatred. Though the shift was subtle, Nicolas noticed and began to slowly step away from me, never turning his back on me. “As you can see by the fact that I’m here, humanity failed to destroy all of the unicorns and the one unicorn left alive burned with a fierce hatred; a desire for vengeance. These evil desires consumed the once pure and holy being; twisting him into nothing more than a weapon.

“Yes-s-s-s,” A slight hiss reverberated from me as I stood and faced the retreating figure in front of me, “I can tell by the fear enveloping you...you are catching on. *I am Death.*” I let out

a sinister chuckle. “I have thoroughly enjoyed the brief rays of hope you showed me. It is always fun to know what hopes a human holds before I crush them. As you should recall from our conversation, Death cannot let any human live who has seen him, so are you prepared?”

“I’ll make sure to enjoy this to the fullest...”

And with that, my eyes burned red, my pure white hair vanished to be replaced by the deepest dark imaginable, a void of nothingness which had taken form, and my silver horn burned red-orange like a poker as fire erupted from the tip. I leapt forward, thrust my horn firmly into Nicolas’ chest—just one more human who I so despised—penetrating his heart as he let out one pathetic scream, his voice gargling as saliva caught in his throat, and gave one last hollow gasp for air. In mere seconds, one more eternal mound of flaming carcass was added to my homeland; which my ancestors had given the name Hades or ‘land of light’ in the Unicorn tongue.