

# CORONAVIRUS



ALL YOU  
NEED IS  
HER



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Four are they, those who ride among us without our knowledge.

He is inevitable; many say they do not fear him, and yet he has not known a soul that has not been terrified when finally witnessing him. He is the leader of the four, the one who has several names, although one of them prevails above all: Death.

She enjoys watching us confront each other; her heart beats strongly as a battle is about to begin. For she loves the fight and conflict and is driven by the pain it causes. She is known as War.

He roams the world, destroying crops, smiles whenever scarcity ravages our homes and feeds on our desolation. He is a being with a voracious appetite known as Famine.

And she... oh, she. She is different from the others. That radiant lady is the reason we humans continue to fight for a better future.

Together, they are known as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The Riders that control our world.

## It all starts with an idea

Disease was hunched over in his dark laboratory. His hands were resting on his knees as he tried to breathe as deeply as he could. He had had a brilliant idea. No, that was too modest, it was an astonishingly spectacular idea. He was about to make a new creation, one so lethal and harmful that those pathetic humans would be able to find no cure, or at least not until it was too late. The very thought of all the suffering that was to come, thanks to his creation, caused him a terrible feeling of suffocation, the tightness in his chest, and even the annoying tremors. It was an anxiety attack.

He closed his eyes and tried to calm himself. He had been through such emotional distress before, and it had always preceded the creation of his greatest works. He took a deep breath, slowly regaining control.

Disease put his hands on his temples, trying to get his thoughts in order. He was feeling better already, though he could still feel his heart thumping in his chest. He had to get down to work. He bent over the table in his laboratory and looked at the various test tubes; he had to find the perfect mixture.

*"What form should this creation take?"* Disease thought. *"A parasite?"* No, he wanted it to spread faster than that. *"Maybe bacteria? Yes, bacteria sounded good"*. Then Disease shook his head. *"A virus, I want it to be a virus this time"*, he decided.

Disease smiled as his ideas flitted around in his head.

*"A virus is the answer I'll make it excessively infectious. They won't be able to stop it in time."*

He set to work. He would not rest until he had his new creation ready. He wanted it to be perfect; good enough so that his boss would be proud of him.

In fact, he was going to try so hard this time, that he had decided he wanted his creation to be a gift for his boss. So, he had to focus. Only with focus could one achieve perfection. Disease was aware that when presenting one's work to one's boss, it had to be flawless. Such a requirement was intensified when your boss was none other than Death himself.

He had to ensure that those repellent humans, who did so like to fight his beloved creations, would not be able to cope with the next one that was coming to them. Humans who, with such an evil discipline they called the 'art of medicine', had already thwarted his plans more than once, and with that had come shame and, even worse, the loss of prestige and respect from Death. Those idiots, with their vaccines and medical advances. At the thought of all that, Disease couldn't help but clench his jaw until it hurt.

Respect, an accolade he had worked so hard to achieve in the past. It was curious how, no matter how many successes one achieved, a single failure was enough for it all to be thrown away Disease thought.

Yes, it was true; the humans were making it harder and harder for him. This time it was going to be different. It was time to stand out and overshadow even the work of the Riders themselves. Pride and revenge, he had it all.

## A gift to be proud of

Death inhaled as several new souls became part of him. They had emanated from the vortex placed just at the far end of the dark room. Another feast of souls. War had done her job, Famine too. He could not complain about his companions. With him they were four, those called the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and he got along wonderfully with two of them. In fact, one could say that they enjoyed an almost astral rapport, a symbiosis that was most suitable in his humble and wise opinion.

The fourth member, however, Death tightened his fists at the thought of her as he settled down on his throne, upon which on one side rested his scythe. *Not everyone can be of your liking*, he thought, trying to calm himself, *just look at the humans, how many of them can say that they like all their co-workers? Few*. Death knew better. After all, he had reaped some souls as the result of disputes between coworkers that had ended with disproportionate consequences. *Ah, Hatred, Envy; old and faithful servants whom one can always trust*.

"My lord..." said a timid and tremendously deep voice.

"Uh?" said Death. Distraught, before him knelt one of his henchmen, Disease. "What do you want?" he said in a terribly grumpy tone. Their relationship was somewhat complicated. Not long ago, Death had considered Disease to be by far his best servant. His work had been worthy of mention, the Plague, the Smallpox... Death still put a smile on his emaciated face every time he remembered all those souls reaped during the glorious Plague.

During that time, his henchman's work had overshadowed that of Hunger and War, two of the Riders. A shocking achievement, given Disease's more humble origins. While he, Death, along with the other Riders, had been created by the Superior Power in order to control the world, this was not the case for Disease. He, instead, was one of the creations made by the very same Death, servants that helped him in the arduous task of reaping souls.

Death had been really proud of his creation many times in the past. Now, instead, Disease had succumbed to mediocrity. His works were a shadow of what they once had been. For Death, his henchman had lost his touch, the one that had made him special. The mere fact that he stood before him, wasting his time.... "You'd better have a good reason for being before me" his voice echoed around the black walls.

"I come with a good purpose, my lord", said Disease, as he rubbed the scaly skin of his arm.

He seemed confident, but Death knew he probably could not keep a chill from running down his purulent back. Disease was well aware that his master had knowledge of ways of pain that made one wish that Death would carry out the mission for which he had been entrusted in the universe. "It is a gift to you..."

"A gift?" he said as he leaned forward on his throne with interest.

"My last creation. I would want this one to be unleashed by you." Seeing that Death was going to interrupt him, he rushed on "I know I have failed you before, my lord, I know you have been disappointed in me. But I assure you that my new creation will put me on a par with Famine and War once again."

Such words caught Death's attention. Disease had not even said such a thing when he introduced him to what Death had so far considered the most remarkable work of his servant: Malaria. Death's sunken eyes stared at his servant for an instant, then he extended his bony hand slightly, urging Disease to continue.

"It is highly contagious, my lord. It will spread before they even know it exists" he said with a sickly smile. "They're not prepared for something like this. They will fall in their thousands... No, millions!"

Death motioned for him to approach, after which he placed his hand on Disease's forehead. He entered into the mind of Disease. There were no secrets that he could not know from him. Like his other henchmen he had, after all, been created from his essence. He saw that Disease was truthful, that he had worked hard to regain the fame that had once shadowed his name.

"What is this creation's name?"

"Oh, in that I have not changed, my lord", said Disease, allowing himself to preen a little. "I prefer to let humans name my works; they have so much imagination..."

Death nodded, satisfied.

"You need only to open the box, my lord, "said Disease," and the virus will spread."

Death stood up, grabbed his scythe, and walked straight past his henchman without even looking at him as he headed for the vortex at the end of the room. He placed two of his fingers in his mouth, and a whistle echoed in the dark space. Moments later, a beautiful bay mare appeared before him. Death mounted her and trotted off into the vortex.

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Death emerged on the other side of the vortex. He looked around him. He was surrounded by people going from one side to the other. Those people, being present before Death himself without being aware of it, felt nothing. Quite an opposite state of mind to the battery of emotions which humans exhibited when his scythe was about to fall upon them.

He dismounted from his trusty steed and looked down. In front of his bare feet was a small, worn-out cardboard box with a yellowish hue. Death did not overlook that small detail. The color of the container had not been randomly chosen by Disease, since for humans, yellow represented both happiness and sickness. It seemed that his henchman had his romantic side.

He bent slightly and tapped the box with the tip of his scythe, causing it to open. From the box, the virus emerged and began to spread around him, landing on every human and on every surface. It spread at a rate that Death could only define as frenetic and adorable.

Death smiled, pleased. He re-mounted his mare, urging her to ride in the direction in which the virus was advancing. Desiring to witness how quickly the disease spread, he galloped his mare as fast as he could, his black clothes flapping in the wind while letting out a loud, maniacal laugh that predicted the vast number of souls his scythe would soon reap.

He rode on, restlessly day after day, as he watched with delight how the virus spread with a voracious appetite. It laid siege to new cities, new countries, and even new continents.

Disease had succeeded, at last he had been able to regain back the reputation he had longed to reclaim.

## An unexpected visit

The doorbell rang. The ding dong resounded over and over again. Famine walked to the door and opened it, he wasn't expecting any visitors.

"War? What are you doing here?" said Famine as he wiped his mouth with one of his thick hands. He had finished eating.

"Shut up and let me get through," snapped War as she made her way inside, dodging the rotund figure of Famine. "We need to talk."

"What's going on, War? You look indignant! Well, more than usual."

War frowned as she glared at him angrily with her red eyes. Famine could not help but fix his gaze on the axe handle that was strapped to her back. It was true that they could not kill one another. Ironically, even their leader, Death, could not end the lives of the other Riders. That did not mean that they could not inflict terrible pain upon one another; an art form in which War excelled.

"May I offer you something to eat?" Famine said as he shrugged.

"No," War replied dryly as she eyed the little room in Famine's house. She grimaced in disgust, seemingly not approving of the unhygienic conditions in which Famine lived. Her eyes fixed on a dusty old TV set on a little wooden table. She extended her right hand and pointed to it "does that old thing work?"

"Yes, of course, humans show the most entertaining things through it."

War looked at him and grimaced again, but once again, she kept her opinion to herself.

"Turn it on."

Famine nodded and headed for the couch, starting to search through the cushions until he finally found the remote. He looked at it for a moment; something was stuck to it, was that melted cheese? Famine took the piece of cheese with his thumb and index fingers and put it in his mouth, to which War reacted with a disgusting gesture.

As he chewed, Famine raised his thick arm and pointed at the TV, tapping the remote control several times until the picture stuttered on. The screen displayed a soap opera; a woman was reproaching her husband for having been unfaithful.

"Switch the channel," War ordered.

Famine nodded as he once again pointed to the TV and pressed the button to switch to another channel. On this channel, there was a chef cooking what seemed like a complicated dish. Famine bowed his head, watching the screen with his mouth open.



War lost her patience. She approached him, and violently grabbed the remote control from his hand. As she touched the device, War glared at it with disgust; the stickiness clearly visible.

Shuddering off her revulsion, she began to press the buttons with rage in a sequence that seemed completely random. With each new channel that did not show what she seemed to be looking for she looked ever more furious.

"War, may I ask what you're..?"

War raised her index finger in his direction, urging him to shut up, then used the same finger to point back at the TV.

On the screen, a man with greasy hair was broadcasting the news. The anchor was exchanging words with a reporter who was on the street with part of her face hidden by a mask. They were discussing a disease that was ravaging several countries across the world.

"It doesn't matter which news channel you watch, they only talk about him," said War indignantly, "about Disease and his stupid creation! Do you know how many warlike conflicts I've organized all over the world? And for what? So that I don't get an ounce of recognition from these feeble-minded idiots?" War said as she pointed to the television.

Meanwhile, the news anchor commented that the Coronavirus was one of the great tragedies of the century. At such words War turned red with anger and gave a loud howl of rage as she drew her double-edged axe and charged at the TV.

With one blow she split the television in half, causing both pieces of the device to fall to the floor. War continued to hit the remains of the device with her axe, again and again, relentlessly, causing sharp pieces to fly into the air while she was roaring curses and screams in equal measure. Finally, when the television had become a mere mass of technological debris, she breathed a sigh and stopped.

"Much better."

"You should learn to control that temper", Famine said, unable to hide his tone of indignation. "And it wouldn't hurt you to have a little respect for other's property, either."

"Don't be a whiner, Famine, remember you owe me. After all, it's not a small number of times that my work has served your interests." She reminded him, pointing one finger at him while she replaced her axe on her back.

Famine squinted, how many times had War used those words so that she would not have to pay for her outbursts? But he had to admit she was right, countries in which there had been a war had invariably suffered hunger, and he could only be grateful to her for that.

"Tell me that it does not bother you. Tell me that the fact that your work gets no recognition does not bother you at all. We've been through this before, Famine, and I don't want it to happen again, I have enough scars."

Famine laid his eyes upon War's muscled arms, which were riddled with scars. She had once told him the reason for this; every time War lost a battle, she marked her body in shame, so

that she would never forget her defeat. Famine noticed a large, ugly mark that ran down her right forearm.

"What caused this scar?" he asked, pointing to it, not being able to suppress his curiosity.

War looked at her forearm, "that's the result of the peace treaties that were signed in World War II... Focus! The point is that these people aren't killing each other in battle or starving to death; they are dying because of that stupid creation of Disease's."

Before Famine could answer, he felt a chill in his massive chest, accompanied by a feeling of emptiness and sadness. Seeing War's astonished face, he knew she had felt it too. Such a feeling was unmistakable. It was his Call. Death was summoning them; they were to present themselves before him.

Famine looked at War in panic. "Do you think he knows you are here?"

War shook her head, "Death is powerful, but he does not have the power of omnipresence." she said as she looked down at the ground, not seeming too sure of her own words.

"What should we do?" said Famine fearfully as he put his chubby hand where he had felt the Call.

"We must go to his domain, you idiot! We were only talking; we'd better head there soon."

War said. Just as she and Famine were about to teleport, War put her hand on his partner's chest to stop him from doing so. "And whatever happens, don't give him any reason to read your mind." she warned him.

## The Call

Death's fingers were tapping with impatience on the armrest of his throne. In front of him were three wooden chairs, each representing one of his companions: one reddish, one pale blue, and one silver. All three were empty. Who did they think they were to keep him waiting? He decided to make the Call a second time, an effort that would mean severe punishment for the rest of the Riders.

He put his hand on his black robes, just at the place where his heart would be, and began to call upon them a second time.

Before he did so, War appeared in front of him out of nowhere, with a reddish glow, and almost instantly a light bluish gleam announced Famine's arrival. Death pointed his finger at them.

"I was about to call you a second time, and you know what that would mean." They both looked down and nodded their heads. They knew that meant the purest pain. "Sit down." They both obeyed, sitting in their respective chairs. Death could see they were uncomfortable in their seats, especially Famine, who had to rest such corpulence in what was, to him, a tiny blue chair. It was true that Death could easily create more comfortable seats for his companions, yet there was a certain significance to his choice: no one should be comfortable when facing Death, not even them.

Death glanced at the empty silver chair. "And where is she?" he said resentfully, his sunken black eyes fixed on the other two Riders.

Famine gave a very slight smile which he suppressed instantly as War cast a fleeting warning stare at him. *They know where she is*, Death realized. He knew that the two of them despised the fourth member of the Riders, if not as much as he did, then enough for him to assume they had played some kind of trick on her. He wasn't even going to ask. The more she suffered, the better.

"You know what? I don't care. In fact, I'm not even going to do the Call again just for her; you two will let her know what was discussed in this meeting as soon as you see her. I called you here for a reason. You see..." suddenly Death paused. "Yes, perhaps it is better that he be present," Death placed his hand on his forehead and called him with his mind. Almost instantly, from one of the dark walls, a door appeared from which stepped Disease.

"Did you call me, my lord?" said Disease timidly with his hands clasped together without moving from his spot.

"Yes, come closer." Death said, accompanying his words with a gesture of his right hand.

Disease nodded and shuffled past War and Famine without looking them in the eye. Finally, he stood before the throne of Death and knelt.

"Sit in the silver chair" he ordered. Disease stared up his eyes wide open. Famine and War appeared baffled by his words.

"But, my lord, that chair is..." Disease began.

Death looked levelly at his servant: an empty look that was enough to make him shut up and obey. Disease nodded in fear and sat in the silver chair while Famine and War cast furtive glances in his direction.

"As you know, Disease has done it again. Once again, humans tremble at one of his creations. One of my servants overshadowing the work of no less than two of the Riders" Death boasted.

Death perceived how War frowned and clenched her fists at such words. Famine merely looked at him with his mouth slightly open.

"That is why I am going to propose to the Supreme Power that Disease becomes part of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse." Death announced.

"What?" said War indignantly rising from her chair. "Death, this is highly irregular, this is..."

Death raised one of his fingers. And even War with all her temper knew to fall silent. She simply nodded and sat down quietly.

"I know, War, nothing like this has been done since... well, ever. But, I'm sure, seeing what Disease has been able to achieve this time, that I will have no trouble convincing the Supreme Power that he deserves the job." Death took a slight pause. "I'm a fair leader, so if any of you have anything to say against my decision, I'm willing to listen."

Death remained silent; his gaze fixed on the two Riders who were present. Famine lowered his gaze. War held it in for a brief moment then sank back into her chair.

"Good." Death said, satisfied with his power. "On my next visit to the Supreme Power, I will make my proposal. Now, go away."

Both Riders nodded and vanished instantly, leaving just a faint glow in their respective chairs.

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Famine reappeared in his house. As he turned around, he couldn't help but scream; War was in front of him.

"You scared me to death, War."

"I'm not going to let it happen. I would rather help to achieve world peace than let that idiot become one of us" she shrieked indignantly with her hands on her hips. Realizing that Famine did not seem concerned, she frowned. "What is it? Do you agree with Death's decision?"

"It's not that, War," he said with a shrug, "it's just, what can we do after all? Death is our leader, and he's determined to make him one of us. And, let's face it, Disease has done a good job..."

Famine stopped talking when he noticed the cold edge of her axe nudging his jugular.

"Finish that sentence, and you'll live the next weeks with your head off your shoulders." She threatened him, her eyes emitting a reddish flash.

"It's okay! It's okay!" he said with his hands up in defense. War held her axe close to his neck for a few more seconds until she finally pulled it away. "But I can't think of what we can do, what good is it to be against his decision if we can't do anything?"

War put her hand on her chin in a reflective move.

"We can't... but she can! Where is she? Where did you lock her up?" said War as she tapped Famine's chest with her index finger.

"What?" replied Famine in confusion. "She? After all your efforts to capture her? And all the time I spent looking for somewhere to lock her up?"

"Don't make me remember; it wasn't easy at all. She's tough... just what we need, she'll take care of it!"

"I don't know, War..."

She raised her axe slightly as she looked at him sternly.

"All right, you win. Get into my mind and see where you can find her."

War nodded and placed her hand on Famine's bulbous forehead, as he had given her permission, she could know the exact place where he had hidden her.

## Lesser evil

The Call, she had sensed it. She could still feel the ghastly echo of emptiness in her chest. She could not help but wonder if that was the last emotion humans felt before Death claimed their soul.

The chains that shackled her to the wall tingled as she moved her neck. She did not know how she had reached there, only that the chains on her wrists fed on her power. A peculiar artifact that let her know to whom she should be thankful for being held captive. War or Famine. Or maybe both. She was aware that her existence was not to their liking. She did not care; after all, the feeling was mutual.

She was in total darkness; which meant she was unaware of how long she had been there. But for her, that was nothing compared to the inconvenience that she did not know how much longer she would be there. This was one of the problems of being an immortal being. If you were locked up, it could be for eternity.

However, she knew that sooner or later, she would get out. She didn't know how, much less when, but her optimistic nature told her that at some point she would manage to get out of whatever place she was locked up in.

Suddenly, there was a loud bang. Light began to enter the room, causing her to avert her eyes for fear of being blinded. A shadow appeared in the opening, one that she could not clearly make out.

"So here you are," said a harsh feminine voice as the shadow walked towards her. Such a mocking tone... it could only be War. "I have to admit, Famine did an excellent job of hiding you."

She raised her head, not without some difficulty. The chains clanked. War stood in front of her, her scarred arms crossed, the handle of her axe sticking out behind her back, wearing an ear-to-ear smile.

"Have you come all this way just to make fun of me?" she managed to say with some effort.

"Ha! Actually, no, although I must admit a scene like this is not seen every day. So weak and fragile... I have to immortalize this moment in my mind, don't move!" said War as she extended her arms and with the index and thumb fingers of both hands created the shape of a rectangle, simulating taking a picture. "Perfect, no smile, as it should be."

"Why don't you start what you came here to do?" she said, annoyed, as she looked up at the handle of the axe.

War shook her head in confusion, then seemed to understand. "Oh, you thought I would..." she said with laughter as she gently tapped her axe handle. "I mean, it wouldn't be a bad idea at all, but that's not... that's not why I'm here." She added with a cheeky smile. Then War moved closer to her and bent down until their faces were almost touching. She placed her

scarred index finger under her captive's chin and raised her face, the reddish eyes of War meeting her silver ones. "I know you think I hate you, and you have reason to think so, but the truth is that in some way I am grateful to you and I value your work. After all, isn't it because of you that humans keep fighting until their last breath?" she said, as the index finger with which she had held her head up caressed the chains, making them clank slightly.

"While they are killing each other, you mean?" she replied in a mocking tone.

War snorted as she shook her head to the ceiling and stood up.

"Can't you take a compliment?" she said, upset, as she extended her arm and grabbed the handle of her axe. "Anyway, that's enough talk."

War made two quick motions with her weapon, a sharp metal screech flooding the room as it collided with the chains and broke them.

"That's it; you're free", War said, looking at her while still holding the axe in her hand.

She was still on the ground; her eyes fixed on the shackles around her wrists.

"Why?" she said, confused.

War shrugged.

"Let's just say that, hard as it may be to believe, there are even more undesirable beings than you", she replied as she put the axe in her back. "As soon as you go out into the world again, you'll understand. Famine and I will keep our work to a minimum so that He will not be suspicious..."

*He.* She knew who War was referring to. There was only one being with so much notoriety that did he not even need to be named; their leader, Death.

"Oh, I almost forgot, you'll need this", she said as she reached around her waist, taking a leather scabbard that was suspended from her grey belt. War dropped it in front of her. "You sure missed her, huh?"

She looked at the hilt of the sword; a silver disk pommel with a golden 'H' in relief. She recognized it at once; it was her sword, the one she had wielded so many times. Why was War giving it back to her?

"Anyway, I'd better go now, wars aren't going to declare themselves, you know?" said War turning around. "See you", she said as she started walking towards the door.

"Thank you," she said without moving from her spot.

War stopped, "Don't make me regret it!" she said without turning around as she raised a finger in a threatening tone. "Just do what you have to do."

After her words, War vanished, leaving a reddish glow in the air.

She put her hands to her numb wrists; what could be disturbing the world that meant War had decided to free her? It had been she who had captured her and left her in the hands of Famine to be kept prisoner somewhere, she now knew. If they had changed their minds, it must be important.

And, for her, curiosity was to be satisfied. She had to get out of there and find out. She leaned forward and grabbed her sword, then she pressed her back against the wall and tried to get to her feet. She could feel the tingling in her legs, but she wanted to walk, and she wanted to do it now, and no one could beat her in matters of will.

She took one step, leaning her weight on the scabbard, then another. She almost fell to the ground but managed to keep her balance. Slowly she reached the door, grabbed the frame tightly and looked up at the sky.

The rays of the sun illuminated her dark greenish hair. She stood there, unmoving, letting her smooth skin be bathed in the faint rays of the sun as if they helped her regain her strength. A slight whitish aura could be seen around her.

Finally, she felt strong enough to teleport. Like her companions, she could teleport anywhere in the world simply by wishing to do so. She decided the easiest way to find out what was going on was to teleport herself to a place as crowded as possible.



## A desolate world

She was on Fifth Avenue, New York. Whatever may be affecting the world, she could surely find out there.

When she appeared on the streets of New York, she couldn't help but frown. The streets were virtually deserted. The few souls who roamed the usually bustling sidewalks of that city kept their distance from each other and wore masks. *What was going on?* she asked herself. She approached a young man who was unlocking his bike and put her hand on his forehead, thus accessing all his memories and experiences.

Then she saw it. A virus was ravaging the world. Disease. He had done it again. Now she understood why War had freed her. Disease was one of those undesirable beings she had mentioned when she freed her from her chains. This time she had to agree with War; Disease was indeed a most despicable being.

She lifted her hand away from his head, and the boy remained unaware that she had entered his mind.

She was desolate; she had to see it. She had to witness the effects of the virus for herself.

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The hospital was crowded; the medical staff running from side to side taking patients from one room to another. She walked through the corridors, her heart shrinking at the sight of what humans were going through.

"Please let me in! I want us to be together until the end..." said a voice steeped in sadness and desperation.

She turned. The words had come from an elderly man who was being held by two nurses so that he could not enter one of the rooms.

"Please, sir, let us do our job," one of the nurses said in a calm tone. "I assure you your wife is in good hands."

The man fell to the ground, landing on his knees. "I don't want to lose her, please..." he begged in tears. The two nurses tried to give him words of encouragement.

She could not suppress her curiosity, so she entered the room where the old man indicated his wife was. There, on a bed, was a woman with gray hair who was completely intubated and seemed to be asleep. A machine next to her was beeping every few seconds. She went over and sat down next to her. The machine kept beeping, this time a bit faster. She ran her hand over the wrinkled cheek, caressing her as she sadly watched her.

The woman seemed to be at peace, she thought. Then she placed her hand on the creased forehead. She witnessed all her memories and smiled. She understood why her husband

wanted to be with her until the end; that couple was lucky to have found each other. Then she immersed herself in the old woman's feelings. She expected to feel her fear or even her despair, emotions that are most understandable when someone is in such a situation. But that was not the case. Instead, she just felt her desire to survive, to hold on to life at all costs.

*Humans are impressive creatures*, she thought. Then she moved her hand away from the forehead, stood up, and returned to the corridor.

She leaned against the door frame, watching the humans, working together, helping each other. They did not seem afraid; they were willing to face the virus.

They had no fear. She nodded; that was all she needed to know. She slid her hand to the hilt of her sword. If humans were willing to fight, she would be no less willing. Other Riders fed their power through the suffering and pain of others. She did not. She fed on the desire of humans to keep fighting.

It was time to visit her beloved leader.

## You know my name

"Sit by my side, old friend." Death said, pleased, as an old olive-green chair emerged from nowhere.

Seeing the chair, Disease had to make an effort to hold back the tears. It was the chair on which he had sat after creating Malaria and which, after his past failures, his master had shattered into a thousand pieces. Now, he had recreated it again for him, symbolizing that he had regained his confidence. Disease swallowed rapidly; after so much sacrifice, so many decades in the shadow of War and Famine, at last, it was his turn.

He still could not believe that Death would recommend him for the position of the Fifth Rider. He had only ever dreamed of regaining his position as his master's favorite henchman. Not in his wildest dreams would he have expected such a reward.

"My lord," began Disease while sitting on the chair. From such a perspective, he could see the vortex at the other side of the room, from which now an immense number of souls appeared without end and floated around the room until they found their way to Death's body. "I want to thank you for your trust; it means everything to me."

"Don't get too sentimental on me, Disease," Death said, as several souls entered his chest, becoming part of him. Then he extended his arms. "All these reaped souls are thanks to your masterful work, for which once again I congratulate you."

Disease's pale cheeks blushed.

"It is a new era", said Death. "A time for humans to suffer under..."

"Not so fast" spoke a feminine voice.

Disease shuddered at the sound of that voice. In front of the vortex appeared a whitish glow, then out of nowhere she came, her dark greenish hair falling on her light armor, with a look of defiance in her silvery eyes.

"You!" said Death as he watched her with a mixture of displeasure and hatred. "How did you get in here?"

"You know me, Death, as long as I put my mind to it, there's nothing that can stop me. And my name is Hope, don't be afraid to mention it" she said with her chin held high.

"Have you come to defy me?" said Death, extending his arm and taking his scythe, which was resting next to his throne.

"I have not come for you; you are inevitable, and so it must remain. I have come for him." She said as she pointed with her forefinger at Disease, who tried to shrink into his chair at her fiercely defiant gaze.

"You know very well that he must answer for his actions to me alone..." replied Death sharply.

"Then it is you I ask to put an end to this madness," Hope said as a tear ran down her cheek.  
"Finish this, Death; they've suffered enough..."

At such words, Death rose from his throne, pressing his hands tightly against his scythe as he walked toward Hope.

"You enter my domain without my permission, and if that is not offensive enough, now you tell me what I must do?" Death brandished his scythe with both hands in a threatening pose.  
"Get out of here."

Without a word, Hope drew her sword, holding it with both hands ready to fight.

"You're no match for me!" he laughed as he leapt and lunged at his rival.

The steel of the scythe and the sword collided; the clank echoing along the dark room. Seconds later, a beam of light emerged from the sword of Hope, hurling Death several feet away.

"I know. But as long as they believe in me, as long as they keep fighting together, at least I'll be able to stop you."

After that, she stood in front of the portal, raised her sword with both hands and with all her strength, she thrust the blade into the black floor. The floor cracked, and a beam of white light appeared from the blade of her sword, extending around the entire area where the vortex was located.

Meanwhile, Death, already on his feet, advanced towards her in a fury with his scythe held high, ready for a second attack. Hope closed her eyes while holding her sword tightly.

*Keep fighting,  
keep believing in me,  
as long as you do and keep working together  
we can win this battle.*

*All you need is her; all you need is Hope.*

Speaking of her, I hope you enjoyed this short story. If you want more of this motivational fantasy style, I invite you to read my main series.