

## The Day Death Came To Town

Long ago, in a little town not so faraway, three young men sat outside a tavern. They saw a funeral procession passing by. They asked a young man who worked in the tavern<sup>1)</sup> to find out the identity<sup>2)</sup> of the dead person. The boy returned and said, “It is your old friend Lively. He was murdered by a thief named Death.

The oldest man in the group turned to his friends and said, “Who is this fellow Death? Why is everyone so afraid of him? I am not scared. Let us find this Death and get rid of him. ”

The three men agreed. They shook hands. They were going to find Death and put a nend to his evil deeds. They went into the tavern and asked the keeper where they might find this fellow called Death. The man said, “Ten miles down the road there is a village. Recently, a plague<sup>3)</sup> went through there. Men, women and children all died. I am certain you will find Death in that unhappy place. ”

The three men got up and set off to the village. They were in high, good spirits. They had only gone a few miles when they met an ugly old woman. They laughed at her wrinkles<sup>4)</sup> and her wispy grey hair. They made fun of her<sup>5)</sup> old, torn clothing. They would not let her pass even though she looked frightened.

“Please, please, get out of my way, ” the old lady cried. “I tell you Death is following me. I must get away from him to survive. I do not want to die. Get out of my way<sup>6)</sup>. ”

“We will not let you pass, ” the leader of the three men said. “Tell us where we can find this Death. He has murdered our friend. When we find him, we will kill him. ”

“Gentlemen, ” said the old lady, “if you want to find Death, all you have to do is look under that old oak tree, up there at the top of the hill. ”

On hearing this, the three men allowed the old woman to pass. They ran up to the oak tree. When they got there, they did not find Death. Instead, they found a chest filled with gold coins. They sat down to count their newfound treasure. They quickly forgot about finding Death.

Finally, the leader said, “We must be careful with this gold. The town’s people will say we stole it. We will be hanged as thieves. Let us draw straws. The one who draws the shortest straw will go back to town and get some food. The other two will stay and keep watch over the gold. Tomorrow we will divide the treasure and go our separate ways. That way no one can accuse us of being thieves. ”

They agreed to this plan. They drew the straws. The shortest straw was drawn by the youngest of the three men. The other two gave him a few gold coins. He went off to tow n to buy some food. The two men guarding the gold quickly made a plan. They decided to kill their friend when he returned with the food. First, they would eat the food. Then they would divide the treasure two ways instead of three.

The youngest man walked into town. He thought, “I will buy the food. I will also buy poison and put it in the food. My two friends will die and I will have all the treasure to myself. ” So he bought a strong poison. He put it in to the food and drink he

purchased<sup>7)</sup>. That night he went back to his friends.

When he returned, his companions jumped on him and murdered him. They quickly buried his body. “Now,” the leader said, “let us relax and eat. We are very wealthy men.” They spread out the food and drink. They ate their dinner with satisfaction, not noticing any strange taste. In a few minutes, both men were dead from the poison.

So it came to be that the three men found Death—just the person they had been looking for. And they found him under the old oak tree, just as the old woman they had tormented<sup>8)</sup> had promised.

□by Mark Hull

## 当死亡来到小镇上

很久以前，在一个不远的小镇上，三个年轻人坐在一个小旅店外面。他们看见一个送葬队伍经过，便让一个在小旅店工作的年轻人去打听打听是谁死了。那小伙子回来说：“是你们的老朋友，名叫‘快活’。他被一个叫‘死亡’的贼谋杀了。”

三人中年龄最大的人转过身，对他的两个朋友说：“这个叫‘死亡’的家伙到底是谁？为什么人们都这么害怕他？我可一点也不害怕。走，咱们一起去找‘死亡’，然后把他干掉！”

三人同意采取这一行动，互相握了握手。他们打算去找“死亡”，终止他的罪行。他们走进小旅店，向旅店老板打听到哪儿才能找到那个叫“死亡”的家伙。那个老板说：“沿着这条路走10英里，有一个村庄。最近，那里流行一种瘟疫，男女老少都死了。我敢肯定，在那个倒霉的地方，你们一定能找到那个叫‘死亡’的家伙。”

三个人站起来，朝那个村庄出发了。他们精神抖擞，情绪高昂。他们刚走了几英里就碰上相貌丑陋的老太太。他们嘲笑那老太太的皱纹和她的缕缕灰发，还取笑她的褴褛衣衫。尽管老太太神色惊慌，可是他们还是挡住她的路，不放她走。

“求求你们，给我让条路吧，”老太太哭喊着。“我告诉你们，‘死亡’正在跟着我，我必须逃掉，才能活下去。我不想死，赶快把路让开。”

“我们不会让开道的，”那个领头的人说。“快告诉我们到哪里才能找到那个叫‘死亡’的家伙？他杀了我们的朋友，等我们找到他，我们一定要宰了他！”

“先生们，”那老太太说，“如果你们真想找到‘死亡’的话，只要跑到那山顶上，到那棵老橡树下看一看就行了。”

听到这话，三个人放老太太走了。他们跑上山来到那棵橡树的下面，可是，他们没有找到“死亡”，却发现了一个装满金币的箱子。他们坐下来数着刚刚得到的宝物，很快就将寻找“死亡”的事忘得一干二净了。

最后，那个领头的说：“我们必须看好这些金子，小镇上的人会说我们偷了金子。我们会被当作贼绞死的。这样吧，咱们现在抽签，谁抽到最短的签谁就到镇上去买吃的。另外两个就留下来看守这些金子。明天我们就分了这些宝物，然后各奔东西，这样，谁也没法指控我们是贼。”

他们都赞同这一计划，抽了签。最短的签被他们当中最年轻的抽到了。另外两个人给了他几块金币。他拿着金币到小镇买吃的去了。两个看守金币的人很快想出了一个计划，他们打算等他们的朋友带着吃的回来时马上杀了他。然后他们将先把食物吃掉，再把本该分成三份的宝物分成两份。

那个最年轻的人走进小镇。他想：“我要买一些食物，还要买一些毒药放进食物里。我

的两个朋友吃了就会死掉，那些宝物就可以全部归我所有！”于是，他买了一种烈性毒药，他把毒药放进他买的食物和饮料中。当天晚上，他回到朋友身边。

他刚走回来，他的两个同伴就扑向他，把他干掉了。他们迅速把他的尸体埋掉。“现在，”那位领头的说，“让我们放松一下，吃点东西吧。我们现在已经是富翁了。”他们把吃的、喝的摊在地上，得意地吃起晚餐来，他们没有觉察到食物有什么怪味道。几分钟后，他们就中毒身亡了。

就这样，三个人都找到了“死亡”---这正是他们要寻找的那个“死亡”。像那个他们折磨过的老太太所说的那样，他们果真在那棵老橡树下找到了他。

### NOTE 注释：

tavern ['tævə(:)n] n. 酒馆，小旅馆

identity [ai'dentiti] n. 身份

plague [pleig] n. 瘟疫

wrinkle ['rɪŋkl] n. 皱纹

make fun of 取笑

get out of the way 让开,避开

purchase ['pɜ:tʃəs] vt. 买, 购买

torment ['tɔ:ment] v. 折磨