

DEATHREAPER SERIES

BOOK ONE



# THE DEATH REAPER

FREYA DAREE

Copyright © 2021 Freya Daree

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication in print or in electronic format may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Design and Distribution by Bublish, Inc.

ISBN: 978-1-64704-315-5 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-64704-316-2 (eBook)



## CHAPTER 1

**M***onster. Dangerous.*

Words that tacked themselves to me. The words every person in school latched onto when thinking of me. No one looked at me with anything kind or genuine in their eyes; they didn't know my story, but they still feared me, still kept their distance.

Your indiviym ruled where you went, what jobs you were placed into, and how people perceived you. My indiviym was a plague. One that I wished I could rid my life of.

Hateful glares penetrated the back of my skull. I felt them watching, waiting for me to make a mistake—to prove them right. Speaking behind my back had never been a problem for anyone, including teachers.

My life was uprooted when my indiviym arrived twelve years ago, when I was seven. I was treated with warmth and general acceptance before. After, I received cold stares and disgusted expressions—the treatment reserved for undesirables. It caused my life to be vacant of anything social or welcoming.

But now, my family was moving to a new city—and all I hoped for was to be given that same treatment from my childhood. But I'd witnessed many who didn't know me give the same wary, side-eyed glance. A part of me wanted to believe that this time it would be more than a lonesome place without interaction from my peers, a place I could make a new life for myself, without my past being the burden it was.

Days passed, and I swelled with anticipation, desperate to see this place disappear. The constant, watchful eyes of this city had grown to the point

of insanity. Thinking of a place where I might be like a speck of dust in an abandoned home kept me from losing my mind. More times than I would care to admit, I'd bargained at the possibility of letting my indiviym speak for itself, but I knew the penalties of such an act. My mother said it would lead to my death being broadcasted on TV for the world to see.

Sighing, I turned to my classroom, already preparing myself for whispers and pointed looks. The walk to my desk always felt like a three-mile trek. The entire time, without fail, whispers circled the room. After my classmates learned of my departure, they became rowdier—happy to see me go.

Lifting my head, I glanced at all the students. They turned away with haste, hushing their words. Little whispers reached my ears.

“Look, there she is. Can’t wait till she leaves,” a girl I never met whispered to another. They grinned as my eyes met their own. “How about you end it already?”

Pain flared in my chest as I gripped my fists. My breathing grew rigid as my eyes teared up, but I would not give them the satisfaction of me crying. They were becoming bolder at throwing insults my way without the buffer of my back turned.

“Yeah, no one cares about you anyway.” The other spoke up while she picked at her nails.

My lips fell into a frown. They always talked, discussing my life like a movie for their own enjoyment. Always feasting on my past like leeches looking for more blood.

My forehead rested on my palms as I repeated under my breath, “Two days. Only two more days.”

The remaining periods before the move dragged on with no end. With the final day arriving, time felt nonexistent, taunting me that I was hours away from the bell signaling school was over. It was a miracle that I reached my last class for the day.

With a simple ring, pressure from the day fell from my shoulders. I sprinted out of the room, trying to beat the river of students flooding the halls. Pausing at my locker to grab what was left, I rushed out of the school doors.

It didn’t surprise me—the lack of attention I received. I knew everyone in the school, including the faculty, would be celebrating my departure.

With a final huff, I marched away from Trinity High School, praying to never cross paths with it again.

My walk home was always the best part of my day. Ten minutes of guaranteed alone time.

Being within earshot of the school, I heard snickers and whispers flow between students. A feeling passed over my body. Something was amiss.

My feet carried me from the murmurs. I allowed my mind to drift with each step, the hum of passing vehicles and the ringing of nature pulling me deeper into thought. I chose to not to fret over what might be nothing at all.

Suddenly, I heard a loud sloshing behind me. It allowed no time for me to react. With one *swoosh*, a cascade of water encompassed me.

I stood, shocked to my core. The ice-cold water sent shivers down my spine. Gathering my bearings, I brushed the water from my soaked clothing. Classmates appeared—watching me, laughing at me. They held no remorse for their actions. The Water indiviym user had his arms crossed across his chest, holding a proud expression.

I was humiliated.

Eyes looked at me—not with concern, but with hatred. I could see with clarity the thought in their minds, that they believed they were better than me.

The voice of a teacher filled the heavy air. “What is the meaning of this gathering?” He made it to the front of the students, eyes locked with mine. A sneer grazed his mouth. “Ah, I see.”

He made no attempt at breaking up the gathering or scolding the student. He scoffed before turning, leaving the scene.

Most, if not all, chose to do nothing when a situation concerned me. They turned a blind eye when they heard other students making horrible remarks. On any typical day, teachers ignored my pleas for help and tended to reprimand me three times as harshly as the average student.

Rage overwhelmed my body. I wanted to become the monster they’d always accused me of being, to be what they’d dubbed me behind my back. As the power surged, it hit an invisible wall. Even with powerful emotions being the driving force, I never got it past activation in all the years I’d had it. I’d asked my parents—they suggested it was due to a lack of practice. It was a fair theory. In rare situations, I had used my indiviym. In high-tension situations, it had flared beneath my skin, but never boiled over.

I swallowed my emotions, knowing I had nothing in this situation. Keeping my composure, I sloshed away.

“See?” someone shouted behind me. “I knew she wouldn’t do anything! All the rumors are true; whatever we feel from her is just a ruse. She’s weak.”

I dropped my head, gazing at the ground. *He was right.* As much as I hated to admit it, I was weak. The exterior I showed to the world had always been a thick shell I’d put on. After years of harsh words, I had become spineless. It was who I was. It was who I’d become.

The school now a blur in the distance, I allowed my body to relax. The early fall air didn’t help the slow creep of chills on my skin. My soggy clothes grew heavy on my shoulders.

Heaving an audible sigh, I pushed forward down the curved road. After today’s events, I wanted a shower and my bed. Nothing more.

My house floated into view. Both my parents’ cars were parked in their rightful places.

Tapping the dirt off my shoes, I recognized my mother’s shrill voice coming from inside the house. It poured out of a crack in the door. Hesitant to step in, I waited in the rapidly dropping temperature this evening.

Mom’s voice rose with every syllable. “I can’t do this anymore!”

“She is our daughter!” Dad huffed. Clattering followed his high-pitched speaking. “How can you say those things about her?”

“She is *not* my daughter.”

With strained ears, I grasped what she’d said. With such a simple sentence, my heart shattered. *What did she mean by that?*

“She is a fiend, a demon. After giving birth to her, my true daughter died.”

Without realizing it, I’d begun to shake. Tears pooled in my eyes. I’d always believed that between my parents, she would be the one who would step up to the plate to defend me. Streams of tears rolled down my face. Something inside me broke. What more would I have to endure?

“All I see when I look at her is the face of death,” my mother said, “the life she took that day when she was seven. I can’t unsee it.” Her short, shaky breaths resonated through the quiet house. “I wish she had been born normal. Someone I could be proud of, not a secret I have to keep.” The shaking subsided; what remained was a shell of who I was. “I have seen the way you look at her, the disgust. You aren’t any better than me.”

“You might be right, but I decided for a while now that I need to change. She’s nineteen. I’m tired of seeing her as a monster. All the things I know about her came from you—I never got to know her!”

My world crushed under me. What has Mom told him about me? How long had she felt this way? Question after question formed as I listened to them argue.

Mom cackled. “Did you forget what happened that day? She took her life! That teacher died that day! All because of her! Because of that power, she must be turned into the government!” Mom shrieked. The shatter of glass echoed around them.

“No,” Dad boomed. “She will not! She was more scared than everyone else. I remember it clearly. She didn’t know why it was happening. I remember she looked at us, yet all she saw was you. When I turned and saw your face, I wanted to cry. No child should be looked at like a criminal.” Sobs came from where my parents spoke. From what I could hear, my dad held back his emotions as his shaky breath gave insight into his anger.

“Julian...”

“No. Don’t.” His voice tightened as he tried to keep his composure. “Let me ask this: Since that day, have you seen Amelie smile or laugh? Or show any joy whatsoever? I’ve watched her all these years. I may have thought she was frightening, but the more I watched her, the more I saw how depressed and deprived she was of everything.”

The level of emotion laced through his words hit me harder than anything I had ever felt.

He didn’t wait for a response from my mother. “Can’t you see that she has changed so much? Even when she was young, you never allowed her to have a normal childhood. You mocked her, berated her, and even beat her at times. I regret being persuaded by your image of her. I wish I’d never listened to you.”

I could hear my father’s voice breaking—the tears he was struggling to hold back.

“She never even tries to talk to anyone at school—not because she wants to be alone, but because she’s scared to hurt anyone else. She is nineteen, and in all these years, I have never seen her use her individuality. Not once. Just once, try to see this through her eyes, from the point of view of a child. Now try to call her a monster—because the only monster I see is the one in front of me.”

Footsteps emitted from the kitchen, drifting to the front door. Dad stopped and stared, wide-eyed when he found me standing here. Mom, who was chasing after Dad, froze. She didn’t seem to feel one ounce of

regret for her words. In fact, she raised her eyebrows with a small smile—she was proud that I'd overheard.

I turned, running from the house. I needed time to think, to get away.

“Amelie! Wait!” Dad shouted after me, but I didn't care. I needed to sort everything out. To pick up the mess my mind had become.

My own mother saw me the same way the world did. Someone I thought was my haven had turned out to be the one person most against me. My mind was a mess; I couldn't think properly.

Everything my life had been built around had crumbled in one evening.





## CHAPTER 2

The forest near home came into view. It was the perfect place to escape and make sense of what had just happened. The chill of the evening seeped further into my bones. With the conundrum of today, it slipped my mind that I was wearing clothes that were soaked.

Groaning as the wind brought a new shiver with gentle ease, I stepped through the woods with caution. Settling onto a fallen tree, I fell into my thoughts.

Time passed with aching slowness, and the cryptic entangled mess of my mind soothed—allowing a further, in-depth investigation of this situation. A tranquil feeling set over my body, one that was foreign to me. Even with my wet clothes and shivering from the cold, I could feel nature around me.

With the warm day turning into a cold evening, it made me wish for an indiviym that would allow the creation of heat.

With a deep breath out, I allowed my head to fall back, holding the gaze of the clouds above me. My thoughts no longer meshed with the horrible day. The forest spoke with a soft rustle of leaves and the beautiful songs of birds. I wished to have come here earlier. For a second, I rested my eyes.

“Hello,” a deep voice said from behind me.

My eyes snapped opened as I jumped to my feet. My stomach dropped as I faced a man. I felt sick when I looked at him. His persona was off, and it made my skin crawl, as if hundreds of spiders crawled from the dirt onto my body. Death radiated off him.

“I see you are troubled.”

The sight of him stirred a primal instinct of flight. I wanted to run, yet the feeling pushed me two steps back. The man cracked a wicked grin.

“Tell me, sweetheart,” he growled, licking his jagged canine teeth, “what might be on your mind?”

My throat cracked. I didn’t trust my voice to speak. Broken sounds escaped as I stood there, rooted to the ground.

With a simple blink, he vanished. I glanced around, looking for the man, hoping that he was a figment of my deranged thoughts.

A chuckle came from behind me as a slender hand placed itself on my shoulder. The skin burned below his hold and a searing pain erupted down my arm.

“What are you?” I attempted to keep my voice calm. He was dangerous—his demeanor alone told me that.

“Well, darling, that’s quite the story.” His voice faded before he appeared in my line of sight. “But that’s such an old tale, I will save you the history.” He took a bow. “Allow me to introduce myself. My name was Kane Blackwell. These days, I go by whatever they deem to call me.”

“What do you mean *was* Kane Blackwell?” I was amazed my voice came out steady and clear. I would have expected a broken stream, but courage that I hadn’t known I possessed filled my being.

Death itself followed Kane’s every move. With a grace ever so subtle, he extended his arms out, taking up space.

“I was killed. Forced to turn over my soul.” His arms fell to his sides as he eyed me with suspicion. “But enough about me...”

He moved closer. His face inches from mine, he reached a hand out, grabbing my chin, turning it every which way. “A person born with a power that matches my own. It’s no wonder I was drawn to this location. How is it that you live with a soul? Without dying, a DeathReaper cannot be obtained. So, how is this possible?” He paused, brows furrowed. I felt as though my heart would beat its way right out of my chest, wishing more than anything he’d just go away. “You *have* died. You were a newborn. By some stroke of luck, the DeathReaper integrated itself within you, resulting in it keeping your soul and body alive.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked in a shrill whisper.

“Your indiviyum, the DeathReaper, lives in both you and me. But for you”—he turned my face over in his hands, examining it further—“it’s

more than power. It's your life. One could say you are the last pure-blood DeathReaper in the world. In fact, I believe we are all that survived."

I wanted to laugh at the man's outrageous statement, but his sureness faltered my denial. I knew the claim was out there, but did it hold any truth?

I shook my head.

"That's impossible." I pushed back. He held my gaze—the firmness in his voice, his posture, the way he looked at me, it was almost enough to turn my denial into belief. But I couldn't have already died. I would know something like that, wouldn't I? "Neither of my parents' lineage has an indiviym that even comes *close* to a Dark Class indiviym."

"You are trying to disprove my theory." He dropped his hands from my face, placing them on my shoulders. "I've decided."

I stared at him in confusion.

"You will be the one to gain all the knowledge I possess of the DeathReaper. With the state of your indiviym now, you wouldn't be able to use it for even five minutes straight. It's a shame it has gone to waste for such a long time. Even now, a barrier holds back the immense power you possess." He moved to my ear. "Soon the shackles will fall," he whispered.

I wanted to ask how, exactly, he would accomplish such a feat, but he suddenly dug his nails into my temple, distracting me completely. Pain flared throughout my body.

"Stop! What are you doing?" I screamed in pain.

His nails pierced my skin like paper. Pain encompassed my entire body. Strain held over my lungs as it became hard to breathe. As I collapsed to the ground, the man kept his nails in place. Blood flowed from my temple, splattering on the leaves below me. His nails dug further into my skull. With each drop of blood that fell to the ground, the pain heightened. With ease, he retracted his hands, smiling at his bloodied fingers.

"It is complete," he stated, licking the crimson liquid in one swipe. "I never imagined finding such a perfect candidate to test another theory. You came at a perfect time."

"What did you do to me?" I shouted at the man who stood above me. I attempted to stand, but no matter how I struggled, my legs caved out from underneath me.

"Don't you see? Your life has been nothing but groveling about—wondering why you were born this way. Indiviyms are living things that sit inside

us. They know when they are not wanted, when their possessor wishes them gone.” Kane leaned against a tree in a manner that one wouldn’t have expected him to when, only moments ago, he’d been impaling my skull.

“You’re right.” I cried in agony as my blood boiled under my skin. “I hate my indiviym! Every day, I wish it were gone! I want to destroy myself so that I no longer have to live with being hated!”

Tears mixed with the blood rolling from my temples, red filling my vision as it pooled within my eyes. Trees grew blurry, and I was nearly blinded.

“I gave you a way to *appreciate* your indiviym.” His voice grew gentle for a second. “If you don’t change the path you walk, you might never walk this earth again. The DeathReaper inside you dies with each passing day. The suppression from not only you, but outside forces as well, is not just killing your indiviym—it’s also killing *you*.”

His words cut deep and scared me to my core. I trembled, sobbing at the truth behind his words. For the first time in my life, I felt true terror. A malicious turn of events had pulled the veil from my eyes; I didn’t want to die.

“My time is up. I know we will meet again—sooner than you may think.” His words echoed in my mind. Unanswered questions were left sitting at the tip of my tongue.

My body ached with each push to lift myself. My temples bled, but it felt like my entire being was beaten. Whatever the man did was far more than what met the eye. With continuous effort, I was able to stabilize my body on nearby trees. The burning continued to scratch at my head; I focused away from the endless numbing it brought. I hoped I would get out of the forest before the evening turned to night.

I hadn’t traversed far into the woods, but I walked far longer than originally thought.

As the evening sun settled into the crest of the horizon, the waning rays of light cast the forest in dark shadows. The probability of reaching the road from here might be an optimistic stretch in my state, but I wanted to try.

Night lay over the land as I staggered past the dotted trees to the road. I assumed some hours had passed by the deep, darkened sky. The distance between me and home seemed to go on for miles.

With each step, my body was closer to collapsing. Pushing away from the thoughts, I focused my energy on preventing myself from dropping to the ground.

Ten minutes of agonized hobbling placed me at my front door. The more time passed, the more it felt as if my body was deteriorating from inside out—making me sure that something more was at play. Faint voices floated once more from the house.

Taking a deep breath, I stepped in. My goal was to reach my bedroom before my parents got a glimpse at me. The staircase was in the entrance—which I was glad for in this instance.

Trying to be quiet when my body was giving out proved to be more challenging than I'd assumed. With tender steps, I reached the base of the stairs. The small climb felt more daunting than ever. I reminded myself that I would have to take my time.

“Stop spewing nonsense!” Mom’s voice startled me, causing the release of my hold on the railing. My parents seemed to have continued their spat for some hours. I hated the thought of it being about me.

“You’re the one talking nonsense! You speak of Amelie like she is a pest!” Thunder resonated with each syllable Dad spoke. “Can’t you see what you have done?”

“What *I’ve* done?” The conversation continued with no end.

Their voices cut out as I reached the top of the stairs; the noise they both created allowed a smoother climb to the top. Reaching my room was a blessing in and of itself. Shutting the door behind me, I fell to my knees. My exhaustion had reached a tipping point.

My body slumped over itself. Every move became harder as my eyes fought to shut. Holding onto the last few strings of my consciousness, I crawled into my bed. The difficulty of basic activities rattled my mind. The act of getting into bed proved to be as tough as climbing a rock wall. It felt as if my mental state had strained far past its normal capacity. Whatever the man from the woods did, it was far greater than just a physical injury.

Once I reached the comfort of my mattress, the world went black.