He had noticed her some weeks before, reflected in the mirror as he shaved each morning. Impossibly small and far away, given the size of his bathroom, and when he turned round to look behind him, all he could see was the bathroom wall. Every day her image in the mirror grew bigger and more distinct, along with the pain in his chest that refused to go away.

A young woman, he had thought at first, but as she came nearer, he was forced to revise his opinion. The breasts visible beneath the diaphanous wrap were not those of a young woman, and the body seemed somehow older.

Irritatingly, her face remained hidden, the head turned sideways, and her features screened by a mass of black hair that fell over her shoulders.

Every day a little closer, until she appeared to be standing right behind his reflection. He turned, painfully, almost expecting to feel her breath on his body, but there was nothing to be seen. He waved his arm through the space where she would be if she was real. Nothing.

And now, as he wiped the last of the soap off his face, and reached for the towel, she stepped, impossibly, through the mirror, and stood between him and the basin.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I am Death,” she said simply, her face still turned away from him.

“But Death is…”

“An old man in a hooded robe with a scythe? Sometimes I am.”

“And now…”

“You’ve been waiting for me, haven’t you?”

It was true. Ever since the consultant had told him, “Mr Lomax, I’m afraid we have some bad news. Please sit down,” and then proceeded to describe the horrors growing inside his body.

“Yes,” he said. “I have been waiting for you. But I am not ready. I have things to do. Papers to clear up. Messages to leave behind. Things to throw out… No, I’m not ready for you. Go away. Come back in two or three days.”

“All these things you mention, they are not your problem. They are for those you leave behind,” she said gently. “No-one is ever ready. Except in their soul, and you are ready there.”

He sighed. “At least let me see your face,” he said.

She turned. Her face was the face of his mother, not as he had last seen her in her coffin at the undertaker’s, shrivelled and shrunken, or even as he had last seen her alive, in the oxygen tent, an old woman gasping and fighting for breath, but of the mother who had picked him up and kissed him better when he fell over as a child, and had stood by him through all his life’s crises.

“I’m ready,” he said, after a long silence.

“Come,” she said, holding out her hand. “Come.”

He took her hand, and together they stepped through the mirror.

So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.