

The Jolly Reaper

(2008)

The poor old angel felt quite weary –
his tired eyes were somewhat bleary –
from sending cards from the Almighty
To all the saintly here in Blighty
And all his friends across the nations.
He'd packed a million salutations
To bishops, preachers, deans and priests
Wishing them goodwill and peace
As well as wisdom, wit and reason
And joy throughout the Christmas season.

Within each card there was a section
In which He gave discreet direction
To everyone to whom He wrote.
For instance, this, the following note
Was scribbled on the card to Santa:
'Ho, ho, old friend, enjoy the banter,
As through the chimney pots you slide –
I only hope the chimney's wide
Enough for that big sack of toys
You're going to give the girls and boys.'

His note to Lucifer was longer.
'Terror, drought, disease and hunger –
Another year has come upon us;
And, as you know, I feel the onus
Is on you to cull the people:
I mean the old, the weak and feeble –
Take up thy scythe and lay them low
Don't even stop to say *hello* –
The wide awake, the fast asleep –

Go, grim reaper, go and reap!

These two cards were among the last.
The angel's eyes were dimming fast.
Oh, how he wished to lay his head
Upon the cloud that was his bed!
But no, he picked up Santa's card,
an envelope; and, blinking hard,
Because he was not seeing well
Addressed it thus: 'To Satan. Hell'
Then there was just one more to go –
It went to Lapland, not below.

When the postman pressed the bell
Affixed upon the Gates of Hell
Lucifer was peeling sinners
For all his little devils' dinners.
Above the screams he heard 'Ding Dong'.
He called out, 'I'll be right along',
Then, wiping blood upon his dress,
He read the card. 'I must confess –
Chimney pots I haven't tried.
And bags of toys? I *am* surprised!

But what an opportunity!
I'll tempt the kids with ecstasy.
I'll take a sack of naughty things
Like Icharus's waxen wings
(Which melt when you are in the air,
Then fall apart – and leave you there).
I'll give them catapults and knives
A pile of copies of *Readers Wives*,
Perhaps a psychedelic bun...
Oh yes, this Christmas will be fun!

Meanwhile in the frozen north,
Santa Claus was going forth.
He'd got the team of reindeer ready
And in his sack he'd packed the deadly
Tools he'd need. He took diseases
From coughs to things far worse than sneezes –
Like being knocked down by a car
And not remembering who you are,
And cancer, strokes, and going mad,
And finding out your feet smell bad.

Very late that Christmas Eve
Two drinkers just could not believe
The sight they saw upon the road
A bearded man – red suit and hood –
Wielding a scythe across their way.
As he approached, they heard him say
'Behold your time has come at last!
Your mortal hours are fading fast.
The Jolly Reaper's here! Now go –
To the Underworld! Ho Ho Ho!

The moral of this Christmas Card
Is simply this. Don't work too hard.

Happy Christmas 2008

Ian Mortimer