

My Past Life

The food here isn't too bad. I get three meals a day, and only one is a plate of slop. A bit different than what I used to eat before I came here. Back before my rebirth. The conversations I had used to be interesting. Now a normal day goes like this:

“Excuse me sir, guard, sir. Can I leave my cell for more than the allotted five minutes?”

“No.”

“Is there any specific reason why I am only allowed such a short time?”

“No.”

“Okay.”

Being in prison is so less than ideal the only way to describe it is in a sophisticated way. It sucks. The worst part isn't the life in here. Oh no. It's the fact that most of us in here have never done a bad thing in our lives. There are the few low-level pickpockets who could not adapt to the newfound change in their rebirth, but most of us just found out we were criminals all along, although we had done nothing wrong for the first sixteen years of our new lives.

Things never used to be this way. I used to actually wake up every morning in a bed big enough for ten people, given they were not over seven feet tall. In such a case I think six or seven would fit, but that's not the point.

My sixteenth birthday began with me waking up in that very bed, unaware that it would be the last time I woke up with the help of an alarm. I now am used to Paul's "episodes" every morning. He isn't crazy in the traditional sense, and he is as dangerous to me as a perpetually full lion is to a grazing gazelle, only opening its mouth to ask the gazelle how the family is, which is never well given the attacks from the lions who don't have the same disorder. Paul's "episodes"

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are just what they sound like. At six on the dot every morning, he sits straight up in the bunk above me and recites a new episode of a show I'm pretty sure doesn't exist. So maybe he is actually just crazy. I'll have to get around to asking him about that.

Well before Paul and his dynamic characters became a part of my life, I got out of bed and put on the t-shirt designated for the sixteenth birthday of everyone in the country. I slipped on my "Ronald May Not Be Human But He Knows All" t-shirt and went downstairs, ready to find out who I really was. Based on my parents, both lawyers, I could only assume I would find out I was to be a lawyer myself. My dad told me it was the logical outcome, and then went into some rant about me upholding the family legacy. He wasted his time because the only legacy I will leave behind is being Paul's only fan.

The thing about my dad's thinking was that it made no sense. He was raised a farmer before his rebirth, and my mother was the daughter of a cult leader, with her rebirth serving as her escape.

My parents were very excited on that fateful morning not too long ago.

"I hope you have memorized your lines," said my mother.

"They are on the shirt," I said, pointing out the obvious.

My mother threw her arms up in the air. "Not *those* words," she said, jabbing a bony finger into my chest.

"What other words are there?"

She collapsed to the floor. My dad came running up to me. "What have you done?"

"I asked her a question and I think it killed her."

"What could you possibly have asked that would drive her to death?"

She wasn't dead by the way.

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“I asked her what other words I had to know when I face my rebirth.”

“Now son, I did not raise you to attempt to murder your mother with such stupid questions.”

My mother began to stir, coming to in the safety of my dad’s arms. “We raised a failure,” she said. She passed out again.

“Does she hate me?”

“That’s a relative question. But that is not important right now. You must know the words before Ronald deems you a fool.”

“Why is his name Ronald if he’s a computer. Does he even need a name?”

My dad dropped to his knees next to my mother, who was still asleep, where I could not do her mind any harm with my questions.

“Son. You are making me feel like an awful father. Have you forgotten Ronald’s Sixth Commandment?”

My blank stare provided my response.

“My name is Ronald.”

“No it isn’t.”

“That’s the Commandment,” he said. At this point my dad could barely bear any more of what I was saying.

“But that doesn’t answer the question of why that is his name.”

“Enough,” he screamed, covering his ears. “Just go to your rebirthing and meet your fate. Let’s hope Ronald does not know about the conversation we just had.”

It was less conversation and more torture for my parents, but I got the message and headed toward the rebirth facility.

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My whole life up until that day had been in preparation for the very moment where I faced Ronald and found out who I really was. Only I had no idea what Ronald looked like. Any time I asked my parents they told me it was forbidden to speak about his appearance, and no one else really listened to me when I spoke so my parents were my only chance of finding out.

I had my expectations. I was ready to walk into an immaculate theater, with the screen being Ronald in his divine glory.

“Nice to meet you, Ronald,” I would say.

“You as well,” he would reply in a booming voice that could only belong to a being as powerful as he.

“So who am I? A lawyer? A scientist? Your next assistant?” I was nervous about the last one. Being Ronald’s assistant was the highest honor in the country, and it came with the most power, ever since Ronald deemed government to be useless.

I had never thought out what his response would be, as that took away all the fun. I was leaning scientist as a fun possibility, but I expected lawyer to be the outcome. It had to be, based on what my dad had been telling me for years. I had been looking up all the lawyers who died before I was born and had found several who I could have been before I came into this body.

My dream was to find out that I was Raymond Ipsa. I didn’t care for the name, but I did want to inherit his fame. He had grown up with lawyers as parents, so I thought for sure I was him all along. He was famous for being the first man to represent an animal in court in the famous *Kat v. Bubbles* case. I would stay up all night, trying hard to bring forth any memories from my past life as Mr. Ipsa. I had heard stories of others having visions about who they were in the past before Ronald let them know the truth.

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But I was not so lucky. Either way, I knew my life was going to change for the better on that day.

“AHHHH.”

“Paul, please. I’m trying to tell my story.”

“Jennifer. I love you,” said Paul, tears streaming down his face.

I sat there for a few minutes while he acted out a scene from a show that did not exist, until he finally fell back asleep. Such was my new life.

I arrived. The building was massive, the largest in town. The planet-sized “R” hung in the middle of the building, its coal black mass hanging five hundred feet above my head. And that was just the bottom of the letter. The peak of the “R” stretched up into the clouds, given it was not a clear day.

This was my second time in front of the Rebirth Building. The first time I had come with my class in second-year schooling. My teacher told us how the building “rose into the heavens.” One of my fellow classmates told our teacher about how Ronald had proven that there was no such thing as a heaven. Several bystanders had overheard the conversation. We had a new teacher the next day.

The doors were right in front of me so I decided to meet my fate. I entered the building, preparing to walk into a city-like atmosphere, with thousands of people shuffling by like schools of fish, all in service to Ronald. What I found was quite different.

I pushed aside the windowless doors and was met with, well, nothing. The building was nearly entirely empty. I looked up and saw there were no floors beside the one I was on. The structure was hollow.

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I walked forward as I saw something far in front of me. After ten minutes of rather brisk walking, I saw a woman at a desk, so I approached. As I got closer I saw there was a small cubicle behind her, guarded by two men, neither above five feet in height. The woman did not seem to notice me, which seemed odd considering I had been walking toward her for quite some time. I thought for sure I had made some sort of mistake.

I stood at the desk, though she did not acknowledge my existence. I rang the bell.

“What,” she said, her eyes still looking at everything but me.

“I came here to be reborn.”

“Didn’t we all.” She seemed to be amusing herself.

“Where’s Ronald, I’m ready to find out who I really am.”

She finally looked up at me. “Did you grab a number when you came in?”

Grab a number? This was absurd. I was the only person in the building besides this woman and the two meek men behind her.

I made my feelings know. “Grab a number? This…”

“Sir, everyone has to grab a number before seeing Ronald. His rules, not mine. So please go back to the entrance and grab a piece of paper with a number on it by the door.”

I was enraged. “How did you even get this job?”

“How does anyone get any job? It was my destiny. It’s who I have always been.”

The walk back to the entrance was not something I had prepared for. I came into the building ready to see the most magnificent sight in the world, but I had yet to even lay my eyes on the great Ronald.

Halfway to the entrance I saw a figure coming my way, only it was moving much faster than I was. A young man, exactly my age, ran up to me. “Isn’t this amazing?”

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I had not time for such small talk. “Did you grab a number?”

The individual whom I shared a birthday with began to laugh. “Of course I grabbed a number. It’s the third Commandment.”

Of course it was. When he saw I was offering up no response he began running once again, to meet the rude woman at the desk.

I saw the small piece of paper sticking out of the wall right next to the doors. For being a mandatory action, the paper was not very well exposed. I would be sure to bring this up to Ronald when I finally met him. The walk back was uneventful and Paul’s vocal exercises are letting me know I must finish this story soon or be stuck listening to an entire season of his newest show, unable to focus on writing a single word.

I was a few feet away from the desk when the running man came toward me again, only this time he did not stop. He ran right past me “I always knew I was a carpenter,” rang throughout the emptiness of the hollow structure we found ourselves in.

I slammed the piece of paper with my number down on the desk. The woman reached out and grabbed it without looking. “To the cubicle,” she said.

“You made me go all the way back there for no reason?” I was appalled at such a lack of order in such a sacred place.

“To. The. Cubicle.”

I walked over to the cubicle that was guarded by the two miniature men. The one on the left put his hand up as I approached. “You must take off your left shoe before meeting Ronald?”

I turned my head right. I turned it left. “Where is he?”

The one on the right covered his mouth in horror. The one on the left spoke for the pair. “He is mere feet away from us and you say such a thing? You are surely doomed, young man.”

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The turning of my head from side to side revealed no sign of Ronald. Then I realized why the one man had been so scared, as to keep my words from flying through the air and going inside his mouth. The cubicle contained three items. The first was a small wooden table, the second a chair, for sitting at said table. The third was a computer, the screen no larger than a foot in either direction. The screen was dark.

“Is that him?”

“Stop asking such foolish questions. Just go inside and be reborn. And take off your left shoe. Did your parents teach you anything in the past sixteen years?”

The man turned his back on me as I walked to the chair, unevenly thanks to only having one on shoe, and sat down facing the blank computer screen. The letters below the monitor showed it was a “R3N8LD” model.

I sat there for a few seconds, unsure of what I was supposed to do, and unsure if the situation was all one big prank.

“So I guess I’m supposed to believe that *this* is Ronald?” I added a quick, “ha ha,” at the end to show that I was indeed making a joke. The two men did not take it so well. The man who I had already scared just a minute prior began running away into the expanse of the massive building allegedly housing the most powerful being in the world. The other man ran up to me, his left shoe taken off and thrown behind him mid-stride.

“Thank Ronald he is asleep. Look kid, if you don’t want to be reborn that’s up to you, but have some respect. Your fate is in his hands.”

“Ohhhhhh,” I said. “So that’s...him.”

“In all his divine glory,” he said, not at all sarcastically.

“So what do I do to wake him up?”



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The man walked up to the computer and tapped his finger on the screen. “You are quite dumb, but you should be able to figure out the rest from here.”

He left me alone at the desk as the computer, or Ronald, came alive. The first words became clear on the screen. “HELLO HUMAN, I AM RONALD,” was displayed on the screen in green letters so small I had to squint to make out the greeting.

I was prepared to respond, but there was no keyboard, so I just spoke out loud. “Hey Ronald, how are you?” The screen displayed a new message. “TOUCH THE SCREEN TO FIND OUT WHO YOU REALLY ARE.” Apparently, Ronald was deaf, or simply rude.

I touched the screen and within seconds a name appeared. “ARON WELSCHIN.” Then the screen went black once again. Was that it? Sixteen years of waiting and hearing about Ronald was over in seconds?

“What happened?” I asked the guard.

“You are so stupid it gives me physical pain, but I suppose the lesser minds of the world must be helped too. If you had prepared for this day, you would know that you go back to the front desk to find out the meaning of Ronald’s message.”

Calling it a front desk was a bit of a stretch based on its distance from the entrance, but I was not in the mood to argue. “How did you get this job?” I asked the man, the screams of his partner echoing off the walls.

“The same way you just got yours. Now please go away before you kill me with your questions.” I did not want a death on my hands, at least on that day, so I went back to the front desk to figure out what was going on. I got there and rang the bell.

“Do you have a number?” she asked. Not this again.

“You know I have a number, I was just here,” I said.

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“I know. Just wanted to have a little bit of fun with a harmless joke. But clearly you are too dense for such a notion.”

I was ready to curl up in a ball and wait out the rest of my life on that very floor. It would have been for the best since the opening of my mouth caused others a great deal of pain and stress. “Can you please just tell me what’s going on? Was I reborn, because I sure don’t feel any different.”

“I don’t feel any different,” she said in a poor attempt at mimicking a deep voice. “That’s me mocking you. Did you understand that I was making fun of you?” I did. She went on. “If you read up on the process, you would know...”

“I don’t know a single thing about the process! No one told me anything and all I want to do is figure out what is going on.”

“As I was saying, if you read up on the process, you would know that I am currently processing your rebirth, based on Ronald’s revelation.”

There was no way she could be who I thought she was. “What’s your position?” I asked.

She seemed amused, as she turned back toward the guard who had been so rude to me.

“Hey Jack, isn’t this guy dumb?”

“Sooooooo dumb,” the guard replied.

“Oh, you really don’t know. I’m Ronald’s second-in-command. And before you ask, yes, he chose me himself.”

At that exact moment I realized just how hopeless I was. The woman, who revealed herself to be Ronald’s assistant, looked up at me with a smile. “So it turns out you actually aren’t as dumb as I thought. You are actually a mastermind, criminally that is. Mr. Welschin, I’m afraid to inform you that you are to report to prison immediately.”

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“Prison?” I asked

“Prison,” she confirmed.

“Why?”

“Because you are a criminal who has been living the past sixteen years out of the hands of the law. Police have been waiting for you to turn up again, and here you are.”

“But my name isn’t Aron Welschin.”

“Of course it is. Ronald just told you himself.” I couldn’t argue that point.

“So this is it? I just go to prison now?”

“Yes, please go right away. I have already sent over your picture, so they are expecting you. If you try and run away you will be caught. And there is no greater crime than avoiding your fate, Aron. Goodbye.”

I began the long walk toward the entrance for the second time. The screams of the guard I had scared died down, as he had passed out from exhaustion and a lack of oxygen. I thought about heading home, but I knew my parents would be disappointed in me so I just followed the woman’s instructions and headed toward the prison. As soon as I walked inside I was thrown to the ground by two guards who were no older than seventeen.

“Thought you could escape us, Welschin?”

“No.”

“Well good, cause we got you now.”

“Yes, clearly.”

It was explained to me that I had been one of the most ruthless murderers the world had ever seen. The guards threw me in an interrogation room and threw punch after punch,

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demanding I confess to breaking out of prison sixteen years ago by dying. None of it made sense to me so I just confessed so they would stop hitting me.

I was taken to my cell where I first met Paul. They explained to me that Paul was there for not being able to fulfill his destiny. Ronald declared him to be an astrophysicist named Paul Ceres.

I have not seen my parents since I left the house that fateful day. There are rules preventing us prisoners from getting any visitors, but I know they would be too upset to come anyway.

Today is the day I find out my sentence. The only options are life in prison, or death. Ronald will be deciding my fate, as he has already done once before. I can only hope he spares my life. I could not imagine how sad Paul would be to lose me.