

I wish I could say I was a hero but...

Most of the time it seems as though my entire my entire life exists for the sole purpose of contradicting that identity.

Take for instance my current situation. I'm washed up on a beach, tired, thirsty, and sore in places I didn't even know I had. I'm not even sure if I should bother standing up.

This isn't to say I don't try. Quite the opposite, in fact my current situation is due to my "heroics".

Several weeks ago people in my village started getting real nervous about some serpent thing living in these long lost ruins way out on an island in the middle of nowhere. Apparently it had started making meals of people stupid enough to try and loot the place and now my village wants to make seafood out of it.

I of course didn't see the point in killing something that wasn't going out of its way to harm people but that didn't do anything to help my already bad standing with the rest of my village.

So here I am, stranded on an island with orders to either kill this serpent or be exiled. I'll give them one thing. At least after beating me half to death and throwing me overboard clinging to a barrel, miles from shore, at least they bothered to leave me a sword.

In front of me is a thicket of woods. To my right is a few hundred yards of beach leading to a cliff face. To my left is more beach and rocks.

Running into the woods might or appeared as an attractive option. Were this not an island that is.

With a deep sigh I turn and drag myself to my sword. Strapping it to my back I begin to make my way towards the ruins, although still crawling on my stomach.

It's nearly half way there, with my skin reaching a nice warm burnt from the sun beating down on my back; That it occurs to me that perhaps dragging myself across the beach like a worm on a frying pan might not be the most efficient method of travel. So I started my attempt at standing when it struck me. Why should I have to rush to my own death? The question was small, but its effect was immediate. In an instant I went from almost standing back to flat on my stomach, only now with renewed vigor.

Yeah, this is my life and I'll crawl to its end if I damn well please. After all, what's the rush? This thought started repeating itself in my head, soon all I could think was; What's the rush? What's the rush? What's the rush?

Over and, over again, until I was even repeating it out loud. "*What's the rush? What's the rush?*" I kept thinking and saying until it became hilarious. "*What's the rush?*" I began to choke out amidst waves of laughter. Soon the joke felt hilarious and I could do nothing but laugh as I rolled across the beach and sand.

Then a sharp pain wiggled up my leg from my toes and stuck a knife in my Humor. Suddenly the

laughter was over, and the joke long over told. The only thing going through my mind now being the enormous pain pulsing through my foot. Hopping up I started swinging my foot back and forth in a mad one legged dance, hoping to free my toes from whatever was causing this pain. Finally after what felt like ages the pain relinquished its grasp upon me and I fell flat on my back just in time to see a crab make it's way into the ocean.

"Of course" I mumble to myself in contempt. Picking myself up, I try to shake as much of the sand now clinging to every square inch of my skin as possible. *Well that's one way to get lucid.* I think to myself, and with a resigned sigh continue my journey to the ruins, only now on two feet and a limp.

The hobble over there wasn't so bad, save the fact that it left me staring at an old iron gate with bars 3 inches thick. This place had "foreboding atmosphere" in spades. Tall stone walls encased the inner grounds from all sides, and more than one tall spire could be seen rising above them. The walls themselves though undoubtedly over century old at least, still radiated their message as clear as ever. STAY OUT.

After a quick inspection I found vines strong enough to be climbed that grew right up to the very top of the wall. *Lucky me.*

Waddling over to what appeared to be the densest thicket I gave it a few tugs to make sure it was secure before beginning my ascent.

A quarter of the way up a breeze started blowing in from the sea. About halfway there I was continuing out of sheer unwillingness to look down alone. But it wasn't until I was nearly to the top that I started feeling a crawling sensation up and down my body. *Please don't be ticks.* Was all I could think before finally hauling myself over the top.

It was on my hands and knees whilst trying to catch my breath that I noticed my climbing buddy crawl it's way across my fingers.

A Morgana spider (or so they're called) no bigger than my index finger in width, it's furry little body a mix of browns and greys, like the dirty wall it lived on. It's species earned their name from the petrified state for which they left their victims. Very rare, very deadly.

Realizing it had been noticed it froze staring up at me with all eight of it's beady little eyes. I would have been horrified, should have been horrified, but right now I lacked the energy to muster an even somewhat surprised look on my face. So instead I just stared back, waiting for it to make its move.

After a few long moments of this the arachnids stance went from tense to one one almost resembling pity before scurrying off into one of the many dark crevices in the wall. I imagine it laughed at me with all eight of it's little legs. I'm not saying that image makes sense, I'm just saying that's how I pictured it as I once again I find myself struggling conjure the strength of will it takes to stand.

The sun, getting ready to take its 8 hours of rest, had started painting the horizon in its manifold hues of red and yellow. All the while the moon was just getting started, already pulling some of the stars from behind the curtain as she made her way across the sky. Add this to the wide open ocean reflecting the image above in between it's waves and you have a picture almost serene. That is, were it not for the still dangerous looking ruins now somehow managing to look even more threatening with the new shadows it was casting about the place.

Not the worst place to die, I guess. I think with a smirk before making my way down the wall. A process made much easier by the existence of stairs, can you believe it?

Finding the main entrance also wasn't too difficult I might add. All I had to do was find the most intimidating doorway to the building with the most unnerving atmosphere and limp right up. The doors were less doors than they were walls on hinges, standing a good 10 feet tall, and spanning an easily 12 feet in width. Their iron and steel craftsmanship featured a wide array of different depictions. featuring such things as slaughter, battle, torture, and everything else one would expect to find on the last door they ever open. *How pleasant.*

"Not the worst place to die, by any means." I remind myself with a sigh. And with one last look at the world around me, I take a deep breath and push open the doors.

Part 2:

First off, I didn't so much as open the doors as I did hurl my full weight against them, straining with every muscle in my body till I could finally squeeze myself through the small gap in between. Despite how graceful that might sound it left me awfully winded and not very mindful of my surroundings, although there was one thing I noticed. The interior looked a heck of lot better than the exterior. Not that that's saying much. A dead cat could have made for better ambiance, but at least the inside was clean.

Unfortunately it was before I could regain my valorous composure that I caught her eyes. I'm not sure how I knew it was a "she" that eyed me from across the room. Just that my last thoughts were *who is she?* That is until I realised the blue pattern on the floor had started moving moments before it knocked me straight to the ground. Then I was thinking *ow.*

Suddenly those brilliant eyes were looking down on me from above. They were a deep blue, cold, intelligent, and silent save a tiredness they spoke wearily of.

Slowly a coiling force began to make its way around me, lifting me up off that floor. *Well at least I don't have to pick myself up this time.* I thought to myself. All the while her eyes kept staring at me, unblinking.

Her skin was blue, a much lighter blue than her eyes, with slightly darker patterns in strips across the surface. She had four arms, the lower of the two slightly smaller than the ones above, and her

body from the waist down extended as one long serpentine tail far beyond my sight. It was this tail that now coiled around me, rendering all but my head and my arms completely immobile. *Like they're going to do me any good right now.* She appeared to have breasts although as to their exact nature I haven't the faintest idea. *Well at least I'll be able to enjoy the view as she crushes me to death.*

"You mean to kill me?" She spoke, her voice fluctuating in volume and tone like someone who knew how to speak but not quite how to be heard.

I however was already getting ready to die, so it took me a few moments to realize her words were a question. *What was that? Do I mean to-* Suddenly the joke was back. And it was all that I could do to keep from bursting into laughter.

"Nope. Actually I'd rather it's quite the opposite." I somehow managed to chuckle out.

"Really?" Her coil tightened around me as I could feel every bone in my body threaten to break. *Why didn't she just kill me?*

"Yes!" I wheezed out like an old bellow.

The humor in the joke was now competing with my will to live, and with each passing moment I can close to begging for my life. *Why can't she just end it already and spare me the shame of dying in tears?*

"I'm an exile." I continued in wake of her silenced. "Sent on orders to either slay the beast living within these halls, or be executed on sight."

Her skin body smelt of honey and old books. It reminded me of my father and wasn't making the will to live thing any easier. Her breath however smelt of honey and blood.

"So you're just a criminal?" She inquired, her tone now a recognizable condescending. "A criminal who wants to kill me."

So you're just a bitch. "You wouldn't say that if you knew the charges."

"Hmm?" Was her only response.

Well we just love asking questions now don't we? "Heresy, and obstruction of justice in the defence of a monster" I said reciting the same charges drummed up by my villages elders. *Bastard could barely read yet they still sat with those smug grins on their faces like they were the most intelligent beings on the planet.* "I not here because I wanted to kill you, I'm here because I tried not convince people not to."

Well that got to her. Suddenly her gaze went from tired to curious, and her grip loosened just enough for me to breathe again.

“Why?” She asked, tension still hanging off the edges of her broken voice.

This can't be happening. “Because I didn't see the point in killing someone who wasn't going out of their way to hurt people.” I can't quite explain the hope that flooded through me the moment I realised I might not die. I can only say that it's the closest thing to a blessing that I've ever felt. “Here,” And I wasn't about to give it up. “Take my sword if you need proof.” Grabbing my sword by the blade I held the handle up to her. *I've felt fabric sharper than this.*

First she backed off a bit in incredulosity, but slowly she neared until her top left hand wrapped around its handle as she began examining it with the others. “Someone...” I hear her whisper beneath her breath. Gradually her grip loosened on me until I lay unhindered in the slack of her coil, finally able to breathe. *I wonder if I could make a r- A sharp jarring pain interrupted my thoughts the moment I tried to move my leg. So much for that idea...*

Finally she looked up from the blade, having examined every inch of it, and back towards me. Although lying still I could feel the blood roaring in my ears and my heart threatening to burst within my chest. *Just what is she thinking... Could it be what I hope?*

“Follow.” She spoke, and then without warning completely uncoiled around me before disappearing behind a corner down the hall. And just like that I was alone again in the open foyer, lying on the ground.

“What?” I asked to the empty air. “Uhh... Does this mean I'm going to live?” I tried to call out, but whether or not she heard me she didn't respond. *Well doesn't this feel familiar.* Once again I found myself flat on my back, having to find the will in order to stand.

Just what is it I'm doing? I ask to myself. The roof looked nice. On it trailed numerous engravings with all sorts of interesting characters and scenes. *Much more pleasant than that door.* I even started making stories behind each them. *Over there a man is trying to save his treasure from a rampaging sea dog. And there a dragon is trying to teach a tiger physics. All the while the monkey beneath them is trying to ask the moon to marry him despite his families fierce opposition.*

“Follow.” Again my thoughts were interrupted by her arrival.

“Hey it's not like I can ju-” I manage to lift my head just in time to see her once again disappear behind that same corner. *Didn't even wait for an answer.*

sigh... "At least I'm alive right?" I ask to the knight on the roof dancing with a giant snake.

And with a groan and a moan I'm back on my feet. "Hey I'm co-" Suddenly a sharp leg buckling pain shot up from my heel and I dropped to my hands and knees. *I can't even take one fucking step.*

Staring at the ground I ball my hands into fists and try to hold myself up. Tears began to well up in my eyes, blurring my vision. I tried to blink them back but eventually one escaped and rolled down my face, dripping from the tip of my nose. "Get a hold of yourself damn it." I mumbled to myself through clenched teeth. *After all, at least I'm still alive right?* With slow deep breaths I try to slow my heart and steady my breathing. *After all if I just stay here the one word wonder will be back, and maybe next time she won't be feeling so friendly.*

That gets me to chuckle, just enough to regain my sanity. Whatever is left of it anyway. I look up and see the doorway I've got to get to, I look down and see the weak limbs that have to get me there. *Back to crawling it is then.* And so begins my pathetic four legged shuffle. And when I finally made it to the end of the hall I was met with a tail tip vanishing behind a doorway at end of another hallways. *Because of course it couldn't be that easy.* And when I got through that door, another door, and same with the next, and the next, and on it continued until I gave up on trying to keep track of where I was. *Guess I should have brought some string.* Just when I had about reached my limit the doorways and disappearances led to a stairway. The most horrifying stairway I had ever seen. Not that was anything scary about it's appearance. Not at all, it was just your average spiral staircase. But to me it might as well have been the river of Styx, and a vertical river of Styx at that. *There's no way she actually expects me to climb that.* I lamented to myself, but very faint rustlings said otherwise.

And so I took the first step, and the ones after it, and the one after that. Just the same way I had got through those halls, only now for each and every step forward. *I'm so happy to be alive... Just so fucking happy.* As I continued my ascent the walls around me began to change to shelves, and the silence to the sound of pages being turned. *I wonder if she has a book on how to fly. That'd be great.* Somewhere along the way my body became numb, and I wasn't sure to be scared, or thankful. *It's probably have some stupid prerequisite, like having wings, or hollow bones.* Every once and a while a discarded book would be left obstructing my path and I got to experience the joy of lifting my limbs a whole two steps high instead of one. *Damn birds.*

When I did finally reach the top I didn't realize it. It wasn't until I unwittingly ran into a bookshelf with my head down that it dawned on me, the ground had gone flat again, and the walls were no longer in a perpetual curve. *This is great!* I thought. *But wait... Why am I here again?* Over and over I tried to remember but was met with nothing but memories of pain and jade eye's. Finally I resided to just keep crawling about in the hopes that I'd eventually find whatever it was that I was looking for.

It was amongst piles upon piles of books I found her. Coiled in a nest of blankets arranged on top of them. At first I thought all I could think was *Wait, giant snake things don't have nests. Only damn birds have nests.* But then I remembered the reason why I came all this way to begin with.

“Hey.” I called from several meters away.

At first her head darted up, and her eye’s started bouncing back forth across the room startled. Then finally, her gaze eyes caught me, the pathetic whelp crawling on the ground, and she remembered she had company.

“Oh, finally.” *Finally she says. Yeah, I’d like to final her ly.* Slithering over the where I crawled she began picking books up, one for each hand.

Wait... Oh great, now not even my snarky remarks make sense.

“Kill me not, yes?” *Damn.*

“That’d be the idea.” I replied.

Suddenly she began eagerly flipping through the pages in each book. Then she paused for a moment before looking back down on me.

“Why don’t you stand?” *Oh how nice of you to notice.*

“It’s been a long day.” *Isn’t that just the king of all understatements.*

“I cause you pain?” *So we’re playing nice now are we?*

“You’re not the only one.” I answered while making my way to a particularly comfortable looking pile of books. Her gaze following me the entire way

“For me?” She asked, her books once again hanging closed at her sides. *Isn’t that a nice thought.*

“You’re not the only one.” *Honesty is a part of being nice right?*

For a moment she just sat there, staring at the ground.

“Reward?” It was starting to look like she could only ask questions. To wall in front of me, beyond her nest there was a window from where the moon shone high in the sky. Inside was lit by candles, and insulated by walls of books. *Cozy with a view.* I smiled, my eye’s starting to close.

“Wouldn’t that be nice?” I asked deciding it was my turn for a question.

Suddenly I felt myself being lifted into the air and then without warning my lips met another's, and for a moment I could feel her tongue wrapping around mine. And then the moment was over as I opened my eye's only to see hers staring right back at me.

"Thank you." Finally making a statement. And suddenly that was it. I was done. Head spinning a spiral of shock and exhaustion I fell into unconsciousness. I'd had as much as I could take for one day and my body agreed as I blacked out at that very instant.

Yeah, I wish I could say I was a hero, but...