

Why Are You Here?

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“I woke up, and even as my eyelids were closed, I had to squeeze them tight because of the bright light shining just beyond them. It took me a few minutes for my pupils to shrink and for my mind to lower the volume of its danger alarms. I fully opened my eyes and looked around. I awoke facing up, lying on my back. I was surprised by the warmth of the floor because it felt like polished marble when my hand pushed against it as I stood up. I scratched my behind when I gathered that there wasn’t anybody around to judge me. My eyes and mouth felt dry and my limbs begged for a nice stretch. I must have been asleep for a while. This bright space surrounded me and has not changed from what you see now. I had to deal with migraines for a while before I got used to them. Don’t worry, it’s not too bad. Just...uninteresting. I felt how you probably feel now. I was confused, disoriented, surprised, but I also didn’t care that much. That’s probably one of the many reasons I’m here.” I stand there, seeming to be lost in thought for a moment, but snap out of it and meet your gaze once again and give a slight chuckle.

“I’m getting ahead of myself, though. Where was I? Oh! So I stood up and looked around and didn’t see anyone, just this terrible interior design.” You look around at the lonely space surrounding the two of us. I do the same. “I remember I even called out ‘Hello?’ like they do in the movies. Like, what even is that? If you wake up in a blank space with no memory of how you got there, what are you going to expect as a response? Like, is a booming voice just going to respond ‘Hey dude! What’s popping?’ So turns out you’re actually banished from existence, sorry about that!” I imagine he would sound like Morgan Freeman. Sometimes I talk to imaginary Morgan Freeman because somebody is probably watching me to make sure I don’t escape. Well, so we don’t escape now, isn’t that right?” I say, giving you a wink.

“So I stood there, listening to my echo go on for forever and I realized that there weren’t any walls around me. I walked around, naturally, in hopes of finding anything that gave me a clue to what happened. I must have walked for days, but it could have been years for all I know, because, in case you didn’t notice, neither of us are wearing a watch, and time is kind of strange here. As I walked, I sang songs in my head, and as I was on the twenty-first time through Beyonce’s Lemonade album, I realized how far I had walked, and my legs weren’t even tired. I wasn’t hungry or thirsty, either. I didn’t even need to pee, which was

kind of a relief, because I would NOT know where to go.” This makes you laugh and allows you to momentarily forget about all of the questions queued up in your mind.

“Eventually, I gave up on the walking thing and sat down and tried my best to remember how I got here. This was ultimately unsuccessful, but I soon did determine why I was here. Probably.” I straighten my posture and my smile grows on my face. “You see, I was like the coolest person when I existed on Earth. I was basically the best in everything I did, and my blinding awesomeness must have angered the boss man upstairs. He tried to punish me with all kinds of punishments like bad karma, death, reincarnation, torture, and whatever other inconveniences the universe could throw at me, but as I said, I’m like a god. I also have noweaknesses! I’m not afraid of pain, death, spiders, anything. Although I must say, that animatronic mouse from Chuck E. Cheese has shown up in a few of my nightmares.”

“I’m not gonna lie, it was a looooooong couple of millennia just biding my time before you showed up.” My expression turns from a prideful grin to an irritated frown. “I will give the boss man some credit, though. He found the one thing that pushes my buttons. I wouldn’t call it a weakness, but definitely an annoyance. Boredom. Having nothing to do for thousands of years is really not that fun. I tried to make the best of it by singing as loud as I could, exercising, reciting the small amount of poetry I still remembered from high school, and whatever I could do to occupy my time, using only my brain and body. It’s hard to pick up a new hobby when most of them require physical objects to practice. I can’t even eat here, which really stinks because the last meal I remember eating was a salad. Can you believe that? If I knew that I was having my last meal, I would order a triple bacon cheeseburger and an entire two-liter bottle of Dr.Pepper with a side of turtle cheesecake. Not a salad!” I put my head in my hands. “He probably knew that before he put me here, too. He knew that I would regret it, and it was just another little punishment on top of the big dumb stupid punishment cake.” I look upwards, scowling to no one in particular.

“But anything gets boring after a while, even your own endless imagination. I got bored a lot on Earth, and that’s probably why I’m here, besides the whole being awesome thing. When I existed, I did so much that the universe couldn’t catch up with me. I started as a hyperactive child, relatively normal, but still, as many of my different parents would say throughout the years, I was a little different than the rest of the kids. I tried to be normal, but that got boring too, so I decided to just do what I wanted, and I eventually got bored of all of the hobbies so I escalated the danger of the things I did to fill the little piece of myself that always yearned for more.” My expression is now very hard to place, now made up of fondness, sentimentality, and something more troubling. “Some people might not approve of the things I have done, but I am not here to impress those people. I have lived many lifetimes on Earth, living my life to the fullest every time I come back. I knew the big guy had always had his eye on me after a few interesting occurrences I would rather not get into.

“Sadly, before I could start on my most magnificent experience yet, I showed up here. It must have been the last straw for the big guy, and he was too tired to take care of me on Earth. So what do you do when you can’t tame an animal? You put it down.” I turn around and take a deep breath. I look back towards you, not making eye contact, and say, “And I can tell you this with absolute certainty, I would rather be euthanized than live another day here. This opinion might change, however, now that you have arrived. So tell me.” I say, facing you and meeting your eyes, this time with a potent gaze. “Why are you here?”

You look surprised to be asked a question directly. I must have snapped you out of being so invested with my story. You take a moment to consider the question, and I realize how little you have spoken so far because I almost forgot what your voice sounded like already. “I am not quite sure, to be honest. I still have a lot of questions about this place, and maybe they can help me... I don't know... figure out why I am here?” I was hoping for a more exciting response, but I can’t really do much else than answer your questions. “Sure! What queries are plaguing that lovely little mind of yours?” I say, making a dramatic gesture towards you with my arm. “Um, first of all, when exactly in Earth time were you put here?” You ask with the poise of an innocent child interviewing their parents for a school project. “A basic question, I must say, but if you must know, the last time I remember waking up was on November 19, 2018. Nothing particularly interesting happened that day. No holidays, no worldly news, no celebrities breaking up or getting back together.”

“And what did you do on that day?”

“Well, I went to the store to pick up some supplies and I was running out of cereal I think, so I got some Cheerios. This is really boring. Can you at least make this interview thing fun? I mean, come on, we are both standing in who knows where literally banned from existence and I’m talking about Cheerios? I think you can do better than this.” Your expression relaxes, and you crack a smile, but I can’t tell if it is a genuine smile or a smirk. “Calm down, I’m just trying to get an idea of things. So you said you were getting supplies. Did those supplies have anything to do with that ‘most magnificent experience yet’ you seem so fond of?” My eyes widen and straighten my posture, happy to talk about myself more. “Ooh, yes! Now we’re getting to the more juicy parts! The supplies were in fact for my...project”

“And what would that project be?” you ask.

“I can’t tell you that.”

“Why not?”

“We aren’t friends yet.” I tease.

“What do I need to do to be considered your friend?”

“Let me get to know you. You haven’t told me anything about yourself and you expect me to tell you all about my super-secret awesome project? Ever heard of stranger danger?”

“Okay. I agree with the first part of what you said but we are literally standing in the middle of a luminescent mindscape and you are really worried about stranger danger?” I smile at your comment. “You never know. You could be a murderer for all I know. I mean it would be pretty likely considering you gotta apparently do some crazy things to get here. You know what? Never mind. I honestly would be totally cool with having you be a murderer. It’s definitely more interesting than an accountant or something.” We both chuckle at this, but a quizzical expression takes over your face again. “Wait, weren’t you a murderer? You certainly implied it when you talked about your life on Earth.”

“Oh yeah, I killed, like, a LOT of people. Haha! I can’t believe I forgot about that for a second!” I say, and start laughing. It feels nice to have something to laugh about, even if it is my malignant past. I look at you and am surprised that you are as indifferent as you have looked throughout much of our conversation. I would have expected either you’d be laughing along with me if it turned out you lived a similar life to mine, or you would look terrified because you were trapped in a universe alone with a person who just admitted to killing a large sum of people. But instead, you just say, “Fine, then. Although I have no recollection of getting here, I will tell you something regarding myself. I woke up here just like you. I looked around at the open space and saw in the distance a speck that stood out from the emptiness around us. That would be you.” “Well duh. I want to know about your past life or lives that got you here. So what is it? Did you set off an atomic bomb? Did you cure cancer? Did you open a rip in the space-time continuum Dr. Strange style? What is it?” I start getting impatient with my curiosity and a begging tone filters into my voice. You now look very serious and your demeanor changes from an innocent and naive look to a soberer one. It catches me off guard. “I think you know who I am,” you say. I was not expecting that response. I am unsettled by the sudden change in the dynamic of our conversation. “What’s that supposed to mean? I have met a lot of people so don’t be offended if I don’t remember you.” I try to act playful and nonchalant but something feels off.

“You were wrong, you know.” You meet my eyes and take a small step forward. I take one back. “About what?”

As I ask that, a buzzing starts in my ears that mimics the sound that emanates from bad fluorescent lights and my head starts hurting. The whiteness around us feels like it gets brighter and I am reminded of how it felt when I first got here. I get disoriented and it feels like the gravity keeping my feet on the lukewarm ground is rapidly changing the direction of its pull on me. My vision starts to blur and the buzzing gets louder and louder. Before I blackout, I hear you say, “I sound nothing like Morgan Freeman.