

Vincent awoke, staring up at a sky full of stars. He didn't know how he got there. As he went to sit up, a tangle of memories came flooding back to him. Jumping from the plane, the split second falling that felt like eternity, plunging deeper and deeper into a bright tunnel of light and finally, awaking here, in this strange world.

Vincent, now sitting up, looked down at himself. "This isn't right." He said, gazing at the jumble of mismatched limbs that now made up his form. His right arm, now covered in tattoos, usually only covered in scratches and burns from working in the kitchen. His legs, one short like a child's and the other long and delicate, ending in a flip flop covered in sand. This wasn't him, this is someone else. He hoped he would be able to walk properly. Breathing heavily, he looked around, desperate for some hint that this wasn't reality, that he would wake soon and this nightmare be over. All he saw was others like him, a mess of random parts, wandering aimlessly around, and above, a vast sky full of stars.

Still staring at the sky, his mind so full of noise and outlandish ideas, Vincent heard a grand voice, seemingly from all around. "Hello Vincent" it said, as a form began to materialize in front of him, a figure cloaked in flowing white robes with a pair of wings sprouting from its back. "An Angel," Vincent whispered, shocked by the overwhelming virtue of this divine creature, this absolute being. He wondered why its wings were that of a moth's rather than the feathered wings commonly associated with Angels. It began to speak again.

"Welcome to the Afterlife. Regrettably, I must inform you that you have died, if you have not pieced that together already" It said. Vincent, still staring in awe at the Angel, could hardly process what was being said. After a few seconds, it hit him. Like waves in an ocean, it hit him again and again, each time swallowing him in a different realization, a new hollowing sensation. The feeling of sadness and dread you get when you know things will never be the same, when your chest feels empty and sick and you think of all the things you ever did and how you'll never get that back.

"No." He said, unable to understand, trying to grasp onto the slim chance this was only a dream after all.

"Yes, you are, Vincent. You have died." It explained once more. "I am here to explain to you how you died, and the way the Afterlife works."

Vincent looked up into its eyes, looking for deceit, poorly concealed, though he saw none.

“H-how did I die?” He stuttered, barely managing to say it aloud.

“You were skydiving with a coworker, and your parachute did not deploy. You might have some memories of it but most should be gone.” It replied.

“Why is my body like this?” He asked, trying to wrap his head around this whole situation. It looked at him once more, pausing for a while before continuing.

“When you passed the portal to come here, it had a harsh toll on your body. It ripped it apart, casting those pieces across this world, and other pieces, from other Souls, came together to create your current physical form. The only thing that is still you is your Soul, your consciousness. The parts that are yours now were real people as well, your arm belonged to man who was hit by a car, a child’s leg, a poor little girl left alone one day, and no one came back for her, starved to death. The other leg, a mother on vacation, drowned in the sea.” It told. “The rest of you is also made from others, from time to time you may remember things, not from your life but from these other pieces.”

“The way it works here, is that if your Soul is deemed pure, you have the chance of being Reincarnated, being brought back to life. The thing with this is, that if you are Reincarnated, there is no guarantee that you’ll come back as a human, you may be an ant, or fly or really anything. You may also be Reincarnated if you manage to find all of your body pieces, then your form will be whole and pure once more.”

Vincent looked at the Angel, trying to process what had been said. He looked down at himself, his strange new self. A change swept over Vincent, a sort of knowing, that he had to live again. His life was far too dull and meaningless. He achieved nothing, did nothing that would ever leave a mark on the slate of humanity. “I deserve more.” He thought. “More than I had in life, I need to live again and live life better. I have a lot of potential, people need to see that.”

Though it didn’t say this, the Angel could sense a change, but it was not its place to intervene. It need only explain the workings of the Afterlife, and leave Vincent to his own devices. “A couple more things before I leave Vincent,” It started again. “You see the moths that are fluttering about?” Gesturing around them.

Vincent, who before was too dazed to notice, saw countless moths around. Confused, he replied “yes?”.

“If one of them lands on you, you can Ascend, to an Angel, such as myself, or become a Creator, an all knowing being who protect the balance of Life on Earth, and shape each star in the sky into

new Souls, and sending them down when it is their turn to life." The Angel said.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes." Replied Vincent. At this the Angel began to disappear, just as it came before. Vincent was left alone. "I must be Reincarnated," He mumbled. "I need to find the rest of me."

And at that, Vincent set off to find his lost body pieces. He started off walking towards a Soul he saw, who was restless pacing back and forth. It was a bit of a struggle at first but after a bit he got into a rhythm walking with his uneven legs. He was a few metres away when he recognized a part of himself. The other Soul had his arm! He needed that, even if it didn't complete the puzzle, it was still a vital piece.

"Hello there. I'm Vincent. You have my arm. Give it to me." He said bluntly. The Soul looked up at him.

"Oh, hi. I think I'm gonna keep it. Sometimes I get nice memories from it. Cooking in a nice big kitchen. I used to love cooking." She replied sleepily. Vincent came closer, he wasn't leaving without that arm. The Soul smiled up at him. "You know it doesn't really matter if you do collect all your pieces, if you just wait a while your mind will settle down, and you'll start to forget your life soon enough."

Vincent had had enough of this. A mad urge overtook him. He lunged forward, and attempted to rip the arm off the Soul. It was a struggle but it eventually came off, muscles and skin ripping. Instead of blood, smoke seeped out of the wound, filling the air with a sickly sweet scent. The Soul let out a cry of shock, though she didn't seem to be in pain, perhaps one cannot feel pain in the Afterlife. He held his arm, something he had always had but seemed so alien in this moment. Vincent didn't have the time to process what had happened. He needed to leave. Vincent started walking again, clutching the arm tightly to his chest. His mind was racing, the feeling you get when there's just too much going on and you can't control your thoughts and everything seems like it's falling apart. A gnawing hunger tore away at him, an indescribable feeling of emptiness and longing to be complete.

He came across another Soul, this time with none of his pieces. He decided to stop for a chat though, to see how their body piece hunt was going.

"Why hello there. My name's William." The other Soul said before Vincent had the chance to say something. "What brings you here today?" He said. Vincent, a little surprised that William seemed so willing to talk. "I'm Vincent. I was wondering how many of your pieces you've found." Vincent replied, holding up his arm, and without meaning to, smiled quite eerily.

At this, William frowned. "You took that from another, rather forcefully it seems. Why? Is Reincarnation so important to you that you would hurt another? You're selfish and do not deserve a second chance if that's what you think."

"I do deserve it!" Cried Vincent. "I need this! I never had the chance in life! You don't understand!"

"Things happen for a reason Vincent. You must accept that. Each star in the sky is an unborn Soul, each with their own purpose, their own destiny" William said coldly. "You are dead. That means you have fulfilled your purpose, even if you don't know it. There's no need to be alive again, you might not even be human again, and you come back as a bug, how would that suit you? Try not to disrupt things anymore than you already have."

Vincent was mad. This man did not understand. He must be alive. He stormed off, leaving William alone. His head was buzzing again, too busy to think straight. A strangling feeling, almost a drowning sensation washed over him. He kept walking until he came across a familiar figure.

It was Ron, his coworker! Vincent was confused on why he was here. Then he remembered that Ron and he had gone skydiving together, maybe Ron didn't survive that either.

"Ron!" He cried. "What happened? Did you die from the accident too?" Vincent had never cared much about Ron, but occasionally went to parties and such with him, in attempt to break free from his mundane life. Ron looked up at him, eyes full of sorrow.

"Vincent! I'm so sorry please forgive me!" He pleaded, sobbing. "I was so miserable about my sister, I had to take it out on the one who took her from me!"

Vincent did not know how to respond. What was this about him killing Ron's sister, he didn't even know he had a sister! "What are you talking about Ron? Get a hold of yourself!"

"A-about a week ago, just before you finished your shift, you cooked a dish for my sister, Bella, who was in town and wanted to visit where I worked. But you put peanut sauce on it, not knowing Bella's deathly allergic! I was absolutely devastated. You had no idea. I hated you for that, for your blissful unknowing." He said. "I needed you to die. I invited you skydiving, and tampered with your parachute, making sure it wouldn't deploy, it would look like a tragic accident!"

Vincent was speechless. He couldn't believe what he had done; what Ron had done.

"But I was so full of despair afterwards, I felt so guilty. I finally understood that hurting another for such a petty reason as revenge was a terrible thing, and I did not deserve to live on. I threw myself off a bridge, honouring you by falling to my death, just as I sentenced you to die." He threw himself at Vincent's feet, begging for forgiveness. "I've been searching for you since I got here, to

apologize!”.

Vincent felt a wave of understanding, just as he had before. He had caused this. Three people dead because of one stupid mistake. Another mutilated, just because he felt he was worth it. He was not, a killer is not worthy of another chance. He stepped back from Ron, and started running. He needed to find the girl he took the arm from. He needed to give it back. He did not deserve a thing.

He could not find her. After what seems like hours of running, he collapsed. His heart felt so empty yet filled to the brim with guilt.

He screamed “I’M SORRY! BELLA, RON, ALL THE SOULS I CAME ACROSS! I WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE THE ERROR OF MY WAYS!” He know this was not enough, nowhere near, but it was something.

He continued this, repenting every ill deed he had ever done, until he saw a bright light forming in front of him. A heavenly voice echoed around him.

“Vincent, I’ve heard your cries, and I have come to sooth you”. She spoke. “I’m Bella.”

Vincent, let out another cry, this time of relieve, and told Bella everything, and how he was so sorry. “Vincent, you didn’t mean to, and this happened for a reason, don’t worry, you’ll find out soon enough.” Bella said.

And with that, Bella held her hand out and a small moth came to rest on her hand. She held it out towards Vincent and it flew on to his own hand. He instantly felt a sense of pure belonging and relief. His current clothes melted away into robes, and he grew a set of wings.

“You have proved yourself, and now you are an Angel.”

The End.