

A voice echoed from the cracks above, sinister and mocking. "It seems you've met a terrible fate, haven't you..." it whispered, cold as a winter wind.

Rubbing my eyes, I noticed the unnatural chill on my skin. But something was wrong—my hands, they didn't feel right. They were cold, way too cold. Trembling, I pulled them from my face and looked at them under the dim, sickly light. What I saw nearly stopped my breath.

My hands were grotesque—pale, pink, with patches of scaly flesh glistening like a serpent's under the skin. It was like my skin had peeled away, leaving behind the raw, exposed tissue beneath. But I didn't scream. I couldn't. I was too numb, too confused.

My thoughts spiraled as I realized this wasn't my bed, this wasn't anywhere I knew. Where was I? What had happened to me? I stood slowly, my body groaning with pain. My body is aching like it never has before. There were no windows, no sense of time or place. I felt like I was in a dream—no, a nightmare. I can't see my feet with the fog, but I begin to walk, and pain surges through my body.

Through the fog, I find a door that opens! As I make my exit, the fog begins to follow me, it is just bright enough to see a torch on the wall. I've never seen a torch in person before, I'm so used to having a lightswitch with bright light bulbs. But something tells me I'm going to be taking a step out of my comfort zone.

Speaking of taking a step, boy am I uncomfortable with every single step I take! Every step I took felt like I was pulling myself through quicksand, each movement scraping at my raw, aching flesh. The fog was thick and suffocating, but through it, I saw the faint glow of a torch flickering on the wall. Desperate for warmth, I grabbed it. But the flame...it gave no heat, only light. The cold remained, gnawing at my bones. I'm still freezing. I hold the flame as close to my hand as possible, and it isn't until my hand is inside the flame do I realize something. I can't feel anything except cold and pain! The light from the torch enhances my vision only slightly. I hear a cough in the distance, a splatter sound hits the floor. I turn the torch to the sound, lighting the way in front of me, and I see a person lying on the ground.

A knight, clad in tattered clothing, his chest rising and falling with ragged, wheezing breaths. Maybe I can get some answers about what is going on. I am uncertain of what to say to him, as I have many racing thoughts. My voice barely a whisper, echoing in the desolate space, asks the knight, "Hello sir, where am I?"

"Ah, Georgius," he answers, "you're in the second stage of life. You and I, we're both undead... Hear me out, won't you?"

'Georgius?' I think to myself, 'My name is George if I recall correctly... Wait, I died? I need some more answers. I must hear what he has to say.'

"Tell me more!" I ask, eagerly.

"Thank you, Georgius.. I am Oscar, a failed knight in both my past life, and this current life. I'm afraid I don't have any time left." He coughs violently. "You must make a pilgrimage to ring the bell of awakening. There will be a slight.. complication.. along the way. Beware of the next room you enter, Georgius, there will be a giant. I was too hasty in my attacks, and he stomped the last bit of life out of me. Only after you ring the bell, will you become reborn. I will equip you with my sword and armor. Please, carry on my legacy. Do you wish to take on the challenge?"

Without thinking, I respond, "I guess I have no choice!"

"Good, good." He replies. "Spoken like a true adventurer. Here is a lantern, keep the fire from your torch burning. I have faith that you will feel rage and fright during your quest. But there is no greater feeling than victory"

I light the lantern, and out of desperation, I inquire, "Before you die, Oscar, why can't I feel anything but cold and pain?"

He laughs. "You have lost your humanity. Don't worry, I have some in my equipment. You will be able to run and jump as much as you wish with this gear without the aching you've been feeling. Trust me, you will want to run and jump as you face the giant."

He hands me his armor, helmet, boots, and sword. His skin is pink and scaly just like mine. He smiles at me. "Please, Georgius, ring the bell." He coughs, gasps, and reaches towards the ceiling. His breathing stops.

As I put on his armor and helmet, I have more questions than answers. No time to stop and think though, I must get revenge and carry on Oscar's legacy. I put on his boots, the aching in my feet disappeared completely. Feeling even more motivated, I make my way to the door, lantern in my left hand, sword in my right. The sword is rather heavy. But I am so filled with bravery that my scaly muscles get used to it, almost like holding the sword came naturally to me, despite never holding a sword in my past life.

I approach the door, filled with anxiety just thinking about being stepped on by a giant. I do not wish to have the same fate as Oscar. I feel determined to slay this giant and ring the bell. The door creaks as I open it.

I see the giant on the second floor. He is more terrifying than I pictured in my head. His forehead is massive! He has a round body, draped in a brown vest and brown pants. His square hands clenched into a fist. He jumps down from above, shaking the ground as he lands. He lets out an ear-shattering roar, and it is at this point where I realize that the battle has begun.

He stomps in my direction. I begin to run. No time to think, it is time to slay this beast. I drop the lantern in the middle of the arena, wielding my sword in both hands now.

He reaches to grab me, and without hesitation, I swing my sword at his fingers. It probably looks like a cat-scratch to him, he winces slightly, but continues to reach his giant hand.

I dodge to the left, narrowly avoiding his hand. I need to come up with a plan, fast! I see a door behind the giant, maybe I can just run away! I run between his legs, and push against the door as hard as I can. It squeaks open and I run through the corridor. It's dark in here, I should have brought my lantern! What was I thinking?! His hand punches against the open space where I opened the door, but his hand is too big to grab me. I can barely see the stairs and begin to climb them as fast as possible. They curve upwards. I trip on them once, and run into the wall twice but I make my way to the top.

It's the second floor! The one where I saw the giant after leaving Oscar's room! It seems like I can't run my way out of this battle. The giant looks up and smiles at me. He takes one step towards me. If I wasn't undead, I would feel my heart pumping for sure. Suddenly, a miracle happens. I hear the sound of glass shattering from below me, and the giant begins to roar. Oh my goodness, he stepped on my lantern! His foot is now ignited in flames! My plan unfolds, thinking of what Oscar said to me, I run and jump off the ledge, sword pointed down, plunging into the giant's head.

It is done. I have slayed the giant. I feel a rush of euphoria and triumph surging through my body. Oscar was right, there is no greater feeling than victory. I have never felt this accomplished. I take a moment to catch my breath and reflect on everything.

I walk slowly to the door that I used to climb to the second floor. This time, I did not trip over the stairs and did not bump into the wall. I see another door across the other side of the second floor. I make my way around, and it's another set of stairs, but this time, it looks like it's been illuminated by sunlight.

I climb up the stairs and there it is, on a balcony filled with grass and flowers, is the bell. I ring it, and slowly feel light wrap around my body. The feeling is pure perfection in every way possible. Thank you, Oscar. I've done it. But as the light swallowed me whole, I couldn't help but wonder—was I truly alive again? Or had I merely traded one curse for another?

THE END