

The doctor moved his stethoscope away from the child's chest while glancing at the test reports before him. The data was very clear.

"Unfortunately, it's a Non-Type-2 Inflammation type of severe asthma."

"What does that mean for him?" The child's mother asked, as she gripped the child's hand harder.

"It's a chronic type of Asthma that doesn't respond well to drugs or steroids. Unfortunately, it seems to be particularly severe in his case. His lungs are crippled and he'll need to take regular nebulizations just to lead a semblance of a normal life."

She shook when she heard that. As for the boy, he didn't understand a word of what was being said, but his mother's somber anxiety had trickled into him. He felt his throat choking up, as tears welled up, threatening to spill despite his furious endurance. His breathing grew more agitated and laboured as the conversation progressed, and his mother's despair grew more palpable, he felt like he was trekking a mountain. He felt like he was being snuffed by a pillow. He felt as though the air was growing thinner.

"Mom.." He desperately gasped as he began crying.

"John!" She held his face in her hands. He could feel her fear through her quivering palms.

"I need five milligrams of albuterol stat." The doctor immediately paged.

"Calm down, son." The doctor calmly coaxed, immediately after. "Take a deep breath, everything is ok."

He was lying. The boy didn't know how he knew, but he knew in his heart that the man was lying. His vision grew red as he felt his mind blurring

"M..om.." He whispered as he struggled to hold onto her.

The last thing he heard before he lost consciousness was his mother screaming his name.

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John woke up with a jerk, breathing heavily and coursey, drenched in sweat. It took him only a moment to remember.

"...Tsk, the same nightmare flashback.." The worst kind of nightmares were the realest ones. He'd rather have the stereotypical free-falling off a building nightmare, but nope! He would relive the worst day of his life. The day he was diagnosed with severe chronic asthma, a curse that crippled his dreams and passions, shackling his body.

"The things I would have accomplished if it wasn't for this goddamn disease..." He managed to choke out, while still gasping for air. Sports, exercise, travel, treks and of course, what he yearned for most;

Martial arts.

John Falken was a lover of martial arts. Ever since he laid his eyes on Enter the Dragon, the first martial arts movie he had ever watched, he could never get over how amazing they were, how could he? The way they moved enraptured him, their stances, their checks, their footwork, grapples and of course, their strikes. He'd spent his entire life dedicated to them, albeit not in a way that one would expect a lover of martial arts would.

He was born with severe asthma, preventing him from ever engaging in any physically intensive activities, martial arts included. So instead of practicing them, he'd decided to dedicate his life to learning about them. If he could not study martial arts as a practitioner, he would do so as a scientist.

By the age of twenty-five, he had obtained a bachelor's degree in Physics and a diploma in human anatomy, and a minor degree in statistics and probability. Armed with the knowledge of these three fields as his foundation, he spent all his time performing research on martial arts and combat sports. He would perform surveys, studies and experiments on different martial arts and gather data on several variables and attributes on them and draw conclusions as well as hypotheses based on them before publishing them in respected peer-reviewed journals.

As the advent of MMA and UFC truly arose as a major industry with a large market for combat sports entertainment at the birth of the twenty-first century, his work became the foundation for modern MMA. The sudden rise in the significance of martial arts in the twenty-first century was a dream come true to John. He built upon to publish research that would become the bread and butter of combat sports.

And then, he died. At the age of fifty-nine, his already-compromised lungs collapsed, and he passed away a peaceful death. He'd spent his entire life dedicating his heart and soul to the one thing he loved, and died loving it, while still cursing the shackles that prevented him from truly embodying it.

Yet, this was not the end.

('Hm?') John stirred as he felt a strange sensation enveloping him.

('Didn't I... die?')

John wasn't sure what was happening, but he was relatively certain he was to die when he last felt his consciousness slipping in the hospital, his last sight being that of hastened doctors injecting him with something or the other.

('I guess not? But what the fuck did they wrap me in? A jelly coated condom?')

He could barely move, yet could feel that he was in a fetal position though.magic

(I'm going to sue these motherfuckers so hard, there is no way this falls within ethical practice. Can't they just let me chill in peace for fuck's sake?') He cursed.

Just then, he felt a force pushing onto him, it seemingly pushed down on his butt attempting to push him through what seemed to be an opening of some sorts. At this point he was positive that something was definitely off, he was just far too bewildered and frightened to even attempt making heads or tails of this situation. A few seconds later, he felt his body being forced out of an opening, and that's when he panicked, calling for help.

"waaaaaaaaaaa!" Was what actually escaped his mouth.

('Eh...? Did I just... cry?')

He opened his eyes, only to behold a giant woman holding him.

('No, she's not giant... I'm the one who's small!') He barely managed to glance with his stubbornly half-closed eyes, at his clenched folded tiny arms, horrified.

"Quick, treat her! Her breathing is dangerously shallow and pupils are dilated."

What ensued was a long session of attempting to stabilize his biological mother's condition. The presumed-doctors and nurses all diligently performed variety of actions with great determination, but alas, to no avail. Slowly but surely, her eyes lost their light, yet they never once turned away from John.

"Time of death, 17:42."

John didn't understand the language they spoke, but he understood what had happened. Although he still half-believed this was some hallucination, he felt a pang of grief even as his consciousness drifted away.

('Fuck me... Please let this be a drea...')

Alas, fate deigned to ignore his wish, yet again.

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He woke up later that evening in a daze, yet he needed only one moment to know that that was no hallucination. He really was reborn as a baby, despite how absurd the notion seemed to him. He was in a rather small medical room, waddled in a thick towel in a wooden cradle, the room had windows on opposite sides of the room, one leading outside and the other to the corridor where he could see nurses and doctors walking through occasionally through the gaps in cradle. He glanced around only to realize he was not alone, there were several other babies just like him in their own cradles.

('An incubation room.')

He sighed. He hadn't the faintest idea where he was, but judging from the foreign language they spoke in, as well as the difference in clothing and even architecture, he was far, far away from the US.

('It's not just that, the technological level of this place is really low. Incubation rooms like this are filled with devices that monitor babies' vitals, furthermore, there was no electronic technology when they delivered me either. Even this room doesn't have any lights, just lamps.')

That being said, the lamps were strange, the source of light was not fire, which flickered whereas the the lamp's light did not waver, it most certainly wasn't electricity. In fact, as far as he could tell there was no electricity in the room at all. It really was a bewildering notion to someone from the 21st century, was there really a nation with such primitive technology? John wasn't sure.

('This is insane, this shouldn't be fucking possible. What the fuck is happening?')

Assuming he was reborn, he didn't know if he was even reborn in the 21st century. What if he was reborn in a dystopian future? Or the past?

('No wait... Is this even Earth?')

He didn't know yet, but he would find out sooner or later, assuming he had anything resembling a life he used to have. These experiences had shattered his subjective worldview of reality, only time would tell what his new one would end up looking like. He braced himself, in fear and partially with a tinge of excitement, for his future to unfold.