

## Daydreams

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It started when Morrie was young, before they themselves were anything but a little kid learning about the world. When they failed a test, caught the flu, got bullied at school, or just simply got bored, their imagination allowed them to escape to a far away land that existed out of time. As they got older, Morrie would learn that this was called daydreaming. It wasn't just a magical power only they possessed, giving them the ability to completely transport themselves into a somewhat utopia where they were in control of how the story progressed and ended.

It would be a few more years before they learned another term: anxiety. That's what they had been diagnosed with as a teenager and, after many sessions with their therapist, they came to learn that their overactive imagination and tendency to daydream weren't things that made them special. Instead, they were just a coping mechanism in order for their brain to function better amid their muddled and complex emotions.

Now that they had other outlets, Morrie was better at not getting lost in the fantasies of their head so much. These days, it mostly occurred when they were bored and in need of an exciting but comforting distraction. What could provide that more easily than the land and people they had created and known since they were a kid?

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Morrie's sword clashed with that of an enemy soldier. They gritted their teeth at each other as they fought, both faces bloody. The sound of metal colliding with metal was seemingly all that Morrie could hear for a moment. Up close, they were swinging their sword and defending

themselves, slowly gaining the upper hand amid the clanging. Around the two of them was the same rhythm. *CLANG. CLANG. CLANG.*

Over the years, they had become quite skilled at this form of combat, so much so that this duel amid the hundred others in the battlefield brought a smile to their face. The smile did not fade as the soldier screamed in their face, “For Malcasa!”

This was met with a sword through the chest. The soldier let out a sort of cough as his face contorted into a shape mixing fear, anger, and pain. Swiftly, Morrie unsheathed the sword from the enemy. Its pristine silver was now tainted by a red that was somehow bright and dark at the same time. Since they couldn’t see their face, they wouldn’t be able to tell that the color covering their sword matched the color that was sprayed across their face. For Morrie, it came from a thin cut along their cheek, something that they would recover from easily. The same could not be said for the companion in their duel. He was slain and fully fell in front of them.

As the enemy landed with a thud, the Queen, Valentina, called Morrie’s name from across the way, “They’re retreating!”

This marked the battle being won, despite the war still waging on. Anyone who knew the Queen as well as Morrie did knew that her tone indicated excitement. This victory marked the kingdom taking the lead in the Night’s War. It had been waging on for over a decade and there was no end in sight.

Then, they were all but tackled by a hug. It came from their brother in arms, Xade. In this land, Morrie and Xade had grown up together, fought together, and most importantly, changed together.

“We did it!” he let out before pulling away. Xade was just as bloody and sweaty as they were and it was obvious that his armor was in need of a few repairs. Though, his smile was genuine and that’s what mattered the most to Morrie.

They couldn’t help but chuckle at their friend, his excitement contagious. “Yes, yes we did! Hey, we might actually win this thing!”

Morrie let himself entertain the idea for a second. Peace, an end to this war, Emanon victorious, all of it. Suddenly, a soldier they did not recognize tapped Morrie on the shoulder, repeating their name a few times in order to get their attention. The knight blinked a few times.

“Can you get this filed for me?” Roger asked, placing a big stack of a mix of loose papers and folders on their desk.

Roger was someone they had worked with for years, however, Morrie had never really tried to pursue a friendship with him. Honestly, they did not see the need. They had plenty of friends, as long as their roommate, best friend, and a few imaginary members of the royal court of Emanon counted.

They nodded, “Yeah, of course. I’ll get right on it.”

This earned a nod from their coworker. It was obvious that he was entertained by the receptionist being lost in their head.

They sighed and immediately began sorting through the papers and folders before glancing at the clock, wanting nothing more than to be able to go home.

When Morrie did finally get back to their apartment, they realized that rest and relaxation was not what was waiting for them. Their roommate, Stella, had left for their shift at the hospital and cleaning needed to be done. So, Morrie turned on their music and got to work. First came picking up trash, then dusting, then vacuuming. Then, they called it quits. They had done enough and

were exhausted. The dishes, laundry, and everything else that needed to be done could wait until the weekend.

Before plopping down on the couch, they grabbed the bags of trash that needed to be taken out, straining, just slightly, to carry them all. They certainly did not resemble a dashing knight in shining armor at this moment. This became even more true as they began their descent down the three flights of stairs that would lead to the massive blue dumpster designated for their side of the complex.

It took too long to heave the two bags into the bin's port and wipe their hands on their slacks when they finished. Once they returned to their living room, they finally got to do what they had planned on since the moment they got home from the office, plop down on the couch.

They used the remote to pull up something random on Netflix. It took a few minutes before they settled on *Parks & Recreation*. As the episode began to play, Morrie let out a sigh and let themselves zone out.

They did not know how much time had passed when they heard a knock at the door. Immediately, they checked their phone, which had no notifications. Then, they racked their brain, trying to remember if someone was supposed to come over tonight, only to come up with nothing. So, they let it be, convincing themselves that it came from across the hall or maybe even upstairs.

Then, the knocking persisted, getting both louder and faster.

"Alright! Alright! I'm coming!" they let out, annoyed.

Morrie got up from the couch with a groan and made their way to the door, unlocking it and then opening it.

Who they were met with surprised them to say the least. It was Xade, his armor completely intact, seeming to come directly from their daydreams. He was out of breath, obviously distressed.

“Morrie! Thank God! It’s Queen Valentina. She needs your help.”

Immediately, they pinched their arm, waiting to wake up on the couch and be greeted by the face of Leslie Knope or Ron Swanson instead of their imaginary friend. However, that didn’t work, Xade only looked at them expectantly.

“Morrie, did you hear me?”

“You’re not real. You’re not actually here. I’m dreaming,” they replied.

He groaned and pushed past them. As he entered the apartment, Morrie looked at him with pure bewilderment. They had actually felt that and now a literal knight in shining armor was standing at their dining room table.

“This isn’t real. You aren’t real. I made you up,” they tried again before giving up on that idea as they were yet to wake up and the spot they were pinching on their arm was now bright red. “How are you here?” they asked softly, still struggling to wrap their mind around this actually happening.

“Finally, a good question,” he sassed, causing Morrie to roll their eyes.

“I made you up. I made you up years ago, there is no way that you can actually be here.”

“That’s where you’re wrong.” Xade approached them putting his hands on their shoulders. Morrie couldn’t tell if this was to steady them or keep their attention, but it ended up doing both. “You didn’t make me up, Morrie... You *found* me. Actually, you found all of us, the entire world of Emanon.”

“What?” they asked, dumbfounded.

He chuckled, “Yeah, I knew this wasn’t going to be easy.” He took a breath before continuing, “You’re different, Morrie. You always have been. The way your mind works allows for you to have access to my world at the flip of a switch or well the blink of an eye. I mean, you’re not the only one, but that’s the fundamental idea.”

“You’re saying that because I’m mentally ill, I’m capable of a form of multiversal travel?”

Xade shrugged, “Kinda, yeah.”

“And you can do the same thing?”

“Oh, no, definitely not. The sorcerers just finally figured out a spell to get someone to you. I was just the one who volunteered.”

Morrie smiled fondly at their friend. This was turning out to be a very strange night, but their love for Xade that had been fostered since they were a kid was there and it was strong, regardless of if this was real or not.

It was only then that they remembered how this whole fiasco had started. “Queen Valentina needs me.”

He nodded, “Yes. If you come with me to Emanon, we may finally be able to win the war.”

“Couldn’t I just imagine us winning?”

“If only it were that easy. Like I said before, you found us, you didn’t create us. You may have believed you had control over things, but that was simply you manifesting the will of the universe for us.”

Morrie opened their mouth to speak only to be interrupted, “Yes, that included the times that you’ve reimagined the same scene over and over again. That was nothing but the universe getting it right for you. We’ve never known any other outcome.”

“So all this time...” They closed their eyes and let themselves think before speaking again. “My daydreams, which are actually an alternate reality that I can jump in and out of, I thought they were a coping mechanism. I thought I controlled what happened there. At times, it’s been the only thing I’ve had control over and you’re telling me that’s not true?” They easily began to fall into a deep dark hole of panic. They were breathing faster and it felt like their entire world was a second away from caving in on top of them. “You’re telling me the universe is taunting me? That it’s making me watch people die? *Actual people* die? And there’s nothing I can do to change it?”

Morrie then began to hyperventilate.

Once again, Xade grabbed onto their shoulders. “Morrie, it’s okay. It’ll all be okay. I know this is a lot but if there’s anyone that can handle it, it’s you. You’re brilliant and strong and capable and amazing.” He was obviously rambling but it was working, Morrie was breathing normally after a few minutes.

They nodded a few times, “Thank you.”

“Of course.” He was wearing a smile that Morrie had known for years.

The two of them stayed quiet for a few minutes. It wasn’t clear if Xade didn’t know what else to say or if he was waiting for Morrie to say something. Morrie decided on the latter.

“Why does Valentina need me?”

He scoffed, “Why? Morrie, you’re her most trusted knight. She needs your help strategizing for what we hope to be the final battle.”

They nodded with understanding that only lasted a few seconds. “Why did you have to come here? I mean- I would’ve daydreamed about it eventually, right? Why did you have to actually come to me?”

“It’s based on a theory our alchemist came up with. What you consider daydreams, we consider visions. So, if we were to take you to Emanon and have you stay there physically, not just within the capacities of your mind, you may be able to have visions about what we need to do to win.”

“Oh,” they said simply, not having anything else to offer.

“Yeah... I mean, if we could leave it up to chance we would, but-”

“This way you’ll have control,” they finished.

The soldier nodded, “Exactly. And, if we have control, then we can essentially flip off the universe.”

Morrie laughed at that. There had been multiple times they wanted to flip off the universe. The first time they remember that feeling was a few weeks after their dad’s funeral. They were two months from graduating high school when the universe decided to make their dad’s heart stop beating. Then, there was the time they didn’t get the scholarship they wanted. There was the time their boyfriend broke up with them. The time they didn’t get chosen for their dream job. The time the bus was late on their first day of work. The time their computer crashed at work three times in one week.

Over the years, it had become easier for Morrie to want to give the universe “the bird”. Sure, they had worked on the anger they felt, along with seemingly every other emotion during their therapy sessions, but part of it stayed, maybe because it was meant to, maybe because Morrie was desperate not to let go of it.



For them, it had always been about control. Now, the universe was punishing them. At least that's what it felt like.

They pulled themselves out of their thoughts. "What if the alchemist is wrong? What if it doesn't work? What if I go to Emanon and simply lose the ability to be useful?" they asked Xade pitifully.

"Well someone's a downer. Morrie, I've known you for a long time. You have to believe in yourself. Like I said, you're amazing. Our only option was to come to you, to find you like you found us. That has to mean something to you!" he said enthusiastically. "But it's your choice, you can control if you come with me or not."

There it was again, *control*.

After seemingly floating through what felt like their entire life. After boredom, after heartbreak, after realizing your daydreams might actually be a reality, this was the first time Morrie felt like this choice would be fully their own.

"Hopefully this is okay to wear," the half-joked.

Xade smiled excited before giving Morrie a bear hug for the second time today. Yes, they definitely had more questions, but they were set on taking this risk, on experiencing a real adventure that wouldn't stop the second they opened their eyes.

Morrie hugged him back tightly for a few moments. "Let's do this," they whispered, fire in their words.

Xade reached into a pocket amid his armor. He pulled out a vial holding a glowing, baby blue liquid. He then grabbed Morrie's hand with his free one, pulling them closer to him. He then threw the bottle down, causing it to shatter on the freshly clean floor. Morrie would have to apologize to Stella whenever they returned.

The puddle began to expand until it formed a portal for them to fall through. Morrie recognized the battlefield they had been abruptly pulled from by Roger earlier today. A bright and excited smile grew on their face.

“You ready?” Xade asked.

So this is what control felt like. Morrie had dealt with fear and anxiety their whole life. Never had it felt like this. Never had it felt this good. They never wanted what they were feeling in this second to end.

“As I’ll ever be!” they answered.

The two of them, as they held onto each other’s hands tightly, lept through the portal.

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Morrie opened their eyes with a start, letting out a little gasp. They were greeted by the “Are you still watching?” Blurb from Netflix. They blinked a few times in disbelief.

“Xade?!” they called out, not earning a reply as they looked around their apartment somewhat frantically.

Morrie closed their eyes again, trying to picture Emanon, Xade, Valentina, anything, only to be met with darkness.

The universe was flipping them off. They took a deep breath. It didn’t matter. They didn’t have to be in control all the time. They would figure out whatever happened eventually. The point wasn’t to have all the answers. The point was they had made a decision on their own in the first place.