

October 45th – 1:00 PM

I could have sworn that dinosaur bit off Ozzy's head.

I have no idea how that guy did it, but now he's thrusting his lance into the beast's back. Blood spurts out of the wound in a crimson geyser. The mighty tyrannosaurus hasn't given up yet, though, and thrashes about desperately to shake him off. Ozzy, head intact (somehow), struggles to hold on to the planted spear's shaft. The creature takes a second to regain its balance, but Ozzy takes advantage of the hesitation to remove his lance and (presumably) prepare one of his Super Moves. There's a sudden flash of light as Ozzy's figure is wiped away by the onset of a tremendous explosion.

I call out to him as the explosion subsides. "Are you okay?!"

He turns to me from atop the falling tyrannosaurus. "No worries, bud! It'll take more than that to defeat me!!" The dinosaur crashes to the ground with a thunderous roar.

I still have no idea what happened exactly... Ozzy did a "thing" and everything "worked out," as per usual. I don't really care for details at this point – there's a certain charm to not knowing. He's really amazing and that's what matters.

"What do you want to do now?" he asks me as he dismounts. "We can do anything you want!"

Dino-hunting was his idea, but it's something I enjoy doing here even if Ozzy does all of the work. I could do this for longer, but Ozzy's clearly ready for something new.

"I don't know... what about you?"

"Not even gonna try?" He frowns, glancing towards the eastern horizon.

"Sorry, you're way better at coming up with ideas than I am."

He stares into the distance for a few moments.

"Let's go on a road trip," he decides.

"A road trip? Without a car?" I'm not opposed to the idea, even if it's totally random.

Ozzy leaps onto a nearby crag. "A journey!" he shouts to the heavens, striking a fabulous pose. "Let us be known the world-over! A fabled quest awaits us!" He thrusts a finger in my direction. "Lead us to victory, Lord Ken!"

"I'm a shitty leader," I call back. "You know that."

"Alas, even the mightiest warrior of the Dawn must step down from glory when fatigued!" Ozzy says, still in Tolkien-mode. "...or something like that."

“So where is this quest taking us?”

“I’ll tell you later. But for now! For the first of our three tasks! We must grab donuts because I’m fucking hungry.”

Only he could come up with such a ridiculous idea. “You’re still covered with blood, don’t you think that’ll scare everyone away?”

“Then we’ll stop back at the dorms,” he says. “You’re going to need pants for this, anyway.”

I look down. I’m in my underwear. I must have forgotten my pants at home again.

“I’ll follow you,” I tell him. “I have no idea where we’re going.”

Octobuary 45th, 3:00 PM

We’ve been on the road for a while now. I’m not really paying attention to details right now; my surroundings are hazy and dream-like, or perhaps my mind is instantly forgetting these things as I notice them. At any rate, I’ve just been mostly focusing on my companion.

Ozzy’s been rather quiet since we left. Usually he would have something to say, something to help us pass the time. It’s a little odd that he’s just letting me follow him – I expected that he’d engage me in conversation somehow.

I’ve known Ozzy for around 5 months now. We met through a single class, Data Structures, but that was all it took – ever since, we’ve been nearly inseparable... But all that time, hasn’t he been good ol’ Ozzy?

“You know,” I tell Ozzy as we tread the earthen path to our first destination, “I’m really glad we’re able to hang out like this. I really appreciate your company.”

“Me too, bud,” Ozzy murmurs, “thanks for being my friend ‘n all.”

He seems a little off.

“Is everything okay?” I ask.

“Yeah.” He smiles at me. But this smile doesn’t quite seem right.

It’s feeble.

“Well, if you say so,” I tell him.

He's fine
he always is

May 1st, 9:30 AM

It's been a few days since I've been woken by an alarm. Recently I've been sleeping in, but I have a test in my Data Structures class today.

I dress myself and head out the door.

I walk for a while. It's just the same as any other day.

I enter the classroom, take an examination, and sit.

My answers don't really matter, so I fill in the sheet and hand it in before everyone else.

I walk back to my dorm room. I can afford to miss the rest of my classes today.

Once in my room, I undress and check my phone. I don't have any new voicemails, so I climb into bed and fall back asleep.

Octobuary 45th, 4 PM

I seem to have fallen in a daze, walking mechanically alongside Ozzy to the donut shop. I'm brought to my senses by a by a tap on the shoulder.

"You okay, bud?" Ozzy's as energetic as usual.

I turn to Ozzy. "Yeah, just a little tired, I guess."

"Well, we're here!" he sings with his trademark smile.

I look up at the store's sign.

"This is –"

"That's right!" he says, spinning. "Your workplace!"

I *do* work. But it's not at a donut place.

"Why the hell are we at this McDonald's? They don't sell donuts, first of all..."

"I changed my mind! I don't really feel like donuts anymore!"

"So fickle..." I chuckle. "And I feel like this choice isn't a coincidence..."

I said I work, but technically that's not true. I have a *job*. Recently I just haven't been going. It's been like a week since I've last showed up.

“Geez,” Ozzy sighs, “what’s wrong with wanting a cheeseburger?”

“You hate this place, dude.”

Ozzy’s expression becomes solemn. “Fine, I’ll cut to the chase. I want you to quit your job.”

My stomach drops at those words. “Wh-why?”

“I know you don’t want to work there anymore, but just ‘vanishing’ is really just inconsiderate.”

“Don’t be silly!” I say, laughing nervously. “What brought that up? Didn’t you want to get something to eat? There’s a good pizza place down the road if you want – ”

“Don’t bullshit me, dude.”

Let's go somewhere else

“Ken,” he prods, “please.”

“They haven’t even contacted me!!” I rebut in a raised voice. “I’ll take care of it when they call me or something!! Do we have to worry about this now?”

He puts his hand to his face. “For fuck’s sake, man. You can’t do this forever.”

“I only applied to this stupid job because of you! We were in this together! And now that you don’t work there anymore, what’s the point?”

“Then formally resign! Isn’t that the least you can do? You’ve been taking advantage of their generosity for too long now ... I know they wanted to give you some time, but it’s been a week since I went and –”

I don't like

where this conversation

is going

I don’t think we should be talking about this anymore.

May 2nd, 11:00 AM

The alarm wakes me later than usual.

.....I don't feel like going to class today.

I glance at my phone – no new messages.

I fall back asleep.

October 45th, 6 PM

We got pizza from Pizza Joe's and now Ozzy is leading me to our second major destination.

"I hope you're ready for some fun!" Ozzy says. "You'll never guess where we're going next!"

"I bet not," I snicker, "I'd have better luck guessing the number of hairs on your dumbass head."

"My dumbass head is gonna get laid tonight!!" he cheers. "...Along with the rest of my dumbass body!!"

"Oh god, are we going to a bar?"

"You betcha!" he chimes. I don't really like bars too much, but at least I'm not going alone.

"It's pretty close-by," he adds, "it's not like we're traversing some dangerous jungle or recovering the Triforce of Courage or anything like that."

"Do I have to do anything?"

I get a cheeky grin in response. I have a feeling this trip is not about him getting laid...

October 45th, 6:15 PM

"Are you sure you want to do this, Ozzy...?" This bar has way too many people, I feel like I'm gonna be squashed from four sides... I can't believe he expects me to talk it up in here.

"What, you don't like girls?" he smiles. "Come on, you just need to talk to someone. It doesn't have to be romantic or flirty. You know, most guys would kill to have a wingman like me." Ozzy pounds his chest.

"What do you say?"

I think talking to girls again would be nice. This makes me uncomfortable...

But maybe a little uncomfortableness isn't a bad thing...

"Alright, but only if you're with me."

Two seconds later, he's gone.

"Come back!!" I shout. That bastard left me for dead! "Wait, Ozzy...!"

As I lean forward to chase after him, a familiar face peeks out from the crowd.

"...K-Kim?" I stutter. She's the last person I want to see in a place like this...

"Hi, Ken..." she says.

I met Kim through one of my classes this semester. I've been interested in her for a while, and through Ozzy's persistent badgering, I managed to gather the courage to ask her out on a date. I felt like it went pretty well, but she never went out of her way to contact me afterwards... I think this was two weeks ago?

"H-how have you been?" I manage.

"Good." She looks away. She's not giving me a lot to work with...

"That's good."

"Yeah."

Well, if she doesn't want to talk to me, then I'll just leave.

Just as I think of waving goodbye, a punch from behind sends me tripping forwards.

"Engage her, you idiot!" a voice whispers angrily into my ear.

"Uh..." I'm totally floundering here...

"What do you want?" she snarls. "Don't toy with me."

Is she mad? Did I do something?

"I, uh, wanted to see how you were doing..."

"And I told you I'm doing fine. Is that it?"

Christ, she's pissed.

"Dude," the voice from behind me nags, "she's giving you a chance here."

I... well...

Maybe we shouldn't be here.

"Why don't you talk to me anymore?" I squeak.

"Why don't *I* talk to *you* anymore?" she scoffs. "Are you shitting me? Do you not know how people work?"

I think maybe I'd rather be somewhere else.

“What’s that got to do with anything?”

“Cut the crap. Can’t you tell that our date went well? Do you understand my feelings? How I waited for you to at least talk to me in class? Hell, do you know anything about me?”

I feel like
Ozzy's told me this too

She’s not done. “You’re sitting around for two weeks wondering why the fuck this girl isn’t reaching out to you, and you don’t make as much as an effort to talk to her at all? Do you just sit around and wait for things to happen to you?”

Ozzy
Did you bring me here on purpose

“You know, I would have been fine if you didn’t like me after all. But to hear this from you is just embarrassing. You should just fucking *try* in life every now and then.” Kim pivots and exits into the swarm of bar patrons.

“H-help,” I stammer, “Ozzy, you’re there, right...?”

I hear a sigh from behind me as he places his hand on my shoulder.

Is this something
I needed to hear

...Am I really that bad to my friends?

May 5th, 8:30 AM

Today I am awoken by my cell phone ringing. I check the caller ID: the local suit store is calling me.

I recognize the number, but I don’t feel like talking so I let the caller hang up. I’m pretty sure the suit shop wants me to return the funeral suit I rented. The service was last week and I haven’t given this suit back. I don’t really feel like doing that yet. I’ll do it another time, I guess.

For some reason, I feel that I should go to Data Structures today.

May 5th, 10:06 AM

I enter the classroom a few minutes late. I sit in my seat and place my backpack on the empty seat to my right.

The professor performs attendance.

There's a pause after "Oswald Jennings." So that's his real name.

I'm actually a bit surprised the teacher hasn't crossed that name off the list yet.

...The lecture begins, but I don't care enough to listen. I regret coming here on a whim.

I stand up, grab my backpack from Ozzy's seat, and leave the classroom mid-lecture. The professor gives me a funny look but I don't care. I'm tired so I want to go back to sleep.

Once in my bed, I check my phone for updates. As per usual, there's nothing, so I close my eyes.

October 45th, 7:00 PM

"Interesting things always happen when I'm with you," I tell Ozzy as we leave the bar. "That's one of the things I like about you. Life was pretty boring before we met."

He gives me a warm smile. "I'm glad you feel that way."

"Too bad we got bored at the bar. We have one more stop, right?"

Ozzy's smile dampens slightly. "Yeah. This one's a secret though. Until we get there."

Something's wrong.

This
is a weird feeling

"Hey..." I begin.

He weakly turns to me. I can't place it... but something's wrong.

"...Err, nothing, don't worry about it."

Shouldn't I say something?

Ozzy breaks our silence after 10 minutes.

“Hey, Ken,” Ozzy whispers.

A strange foreboding

“Do you ever feel like sometimes

you don't want to be alive anymore?”

So that's it

That's how it was.

I know everything.

I know how this ends.

I have to stop this

...that's wrong. It's already happened.

All I can do now is watch it happen again.

But even so,

I don't want this

“...We're here.” Ozzy says. We're at the ***** Bridge. Ozzy's standing with his back to me, facing the inviting blue of the saltwater body beneath us.

“Ozzy...” I don't know what to say.

“I’m sorry to put you through this.”

“No...” I say, “*I’m* sorry for not noticing earlier...”

I really have been selfish, haven’t I...?

All of the bad thoughts swarm my mind at once.

This entire time, I’ve only been taking advantage of him to give me things to do.

He always was the one in our relationship to reach out.

“I’ve never really tried to understand you,” I confess, “I always just tagged along, didn’t I...”

Tears begin to form in my eyes and soon they’re overflowing.

“I’m so sorry,” I cry, “I’m so stupid, why couldn’t I notice how troubled you were... the hints were there, weren’t they... even now I don’t know what drove you to this... but it’s too late now.”

I’m sobbing helplessly now.

Ozzy’s quiet.

“All these months we’ve been together, you’ve been guiding me, haven’t you... I’m such a dumbass, I couldn’t even tell what you were doing... you’re the one that wanted me to get a job, to get a girlfriend, otherwise I probably would have just sat and waited forever... and beyond that, I couldn’t even give the same effort towards your well-being, could I...?”

“And once you passed away, I couldn’t even follow through with your hopes for me... my life really has gone to hell, hasn’t it... I spend most of my time asleep in bed, is the real world really that dreadful...?”

Ozzy turns halfway towards me. “There’s still time to turn yourself around, you know.”

“This journey... even if this is just a dream, I think I know what I need to do once I wake up...”

Yeah, that’s right.

There’s still a way.

“Thanks, buddy,” I say, wiping my own tears. “I have some stuff I need to do. I should get going.”

“Yeah,” Ozzy says, “I understand.” He waves good-bye.

I wave back and prepare to wake up.

Ozzy disappears. I’m alone now.

I was pretty bummed to have to sit in that shitty-ass Data Structures class alone. I didn't know anyone in the class, and I sure didn't have the courage to make new friends. I was certain it would be miserable.

Someone I'd never seen before took his seat next to me. He was slightly above-average looking, with dirty blonde hair and blue eyes, so I thought that surely he'd have friends in that class. I got that impression somehow.

He didn't even pay attention once the lecture started. Not even a little bit. Half the time he had a comic book open underneath his notes, and the other half he was drawing pictures of dicks in his paper margins.

I didn't really care that much until after the professor dismissed us.

“Hey, excuse me, you were paying attention in class, right?”

He was talking to me.

“Uh, I guess. Why?”

“I was wondering if I could copy your notes sometime.”

This request in itself wasn't strange – people ask for notes all the time.

What threw me off is that this kid clearly cared enough about his studies to get the notes from someone, but not enough to actually pay attention during lectures.

“Uh, yeah, that's fine. You can just give them back on Thursday.”

“Wouldn't you rather come over and study together?”

I think he just wanted a reason to hang out.

I sure didn't mind.

“I think that would be nice.”

“Sweet! By the way, my name is Ozzy.”

“I'm Ken.”

“I'm sure we'll be great friends.”

And then he showed me his smile for the first time.

– The weeks passed.

“Dude, this class is fuckin’ dumb.”

“You’ve never played DnD before?!”

“Hey, I saw you eyeing that girl over there, are you interested in her?!”

“Yo, you don’t have a job, right? Let’s work at McDonald’s together!!”

– But Ozzy was troubled.

“Sorry, Ken, I’m not up to it.”

“Sorry, Ken, I need some time alone.”

“Do you ever wonder what it would be like to be dead?”

“I really hate my parents.”

“I’m so sick of all this.”

– Very troubled.

But I didn’t see any serious problems. Or maybe I just ignored them. Ozzy always seemed to get better.

Except for once.

– His funeral came and went.

I started sleeping more and more. When I did, I got to spend more time with Ozzy. At the same time, I didn't have to reach out to others. Life was easy.

I think I tried to run away from it all.

But Ozzy brought me back from my depths and made me face reality again.

I failed him and I failed myself. But I won't do that again. Nor will I forsake Ozzy's wishes again.

That's the least I can do for him.

May 6th, 8:00 AM

I managed to wake myself despite not having an alarm set. Even I amaze myself sometimes.

I have a shitton of work to catch up on, but that's inevitable, so I might as well grin and bear it. I pack my bags for all of today's classes.

I check my phone – again, there are no new messages. But that doesn't matter: I have some calls I need to make on my own.