

The Quirky Old Couple

Dem heard the wooden floorboards creak above him as he sat beside the window, sipping his morning tea. *She's up*, he thought with a heavy sigh. It would only be moments before the chaos started, as it did every morning since his wife was cursed with magical amnesia.

He slowly got up, his knees aching terribly. He wasn't untouched by the effects of aging either, though he didn't share the same burden as Aby.

"Dem?!" Aby called loudly. Her voice carried a long way. It was the kind of voice you could pick out in a crowd of people and one of the reasons Dem fell in love with her centuries ago.

Her feet padded softly down each step of their tiny cottage in the woods. Dem turned to face her just in time. He knew from experience, by the number of steps, that she would be walking toward him now. "Morning, dear," Dem said lovingly. "How did you sleep?"

He already knew the answer because it was the same every morning. Yet he entertained her all the same because she was still the woman he loved, only a bit crazier.

"Terrible, Dem," Aby replied, waving her hand as if trying to swat a fly, "just terrible. The house creaked all night long. I couldn't catch one solid wink of sleep!"

She walked past Dem into the kitchen and grabbed a flower pot holding a single yellow daisy he had picked for her. She poured the contents of the pot into a mug, not realizing that it was now full of dirt. Dem watched without surprise as Aby lifted the cup and took a sip. Unfazed by the contents, she smiled contently, a dirt mustache above her upper lip. "Now that's some good tea," she said with satisfaction.

Dem laughed to himself. He knew it wasn't funny, not really. Aby could go at any time now. Yet, he couldn't help but adore her behavior. It reminded him of the fun times they had together when they first met. Aby would crack jokes at the most inappropriate times, though Dem never felt offended. He found great joy in her tactless approach to life. It was refreshing.

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So really, Dem thought, I am only reacting how she would if the roles were reversed.

“Aby dear, I’ve made some breakfast. Then I thought we could walk along the water,” Dem said. He waved his right hand over the small circular table. At the motion of his hand, two egg and sausage omelets appeared. Aby’s eyes widened with joy and she inhaled the scent.

“I had the most peculiar dream last night,” Aby said, chewing loudly.

“Hmm,” Dem responded with a raised eyebrow, his mouth full of food. He didn’t find it at all curious that she had a dream to share even though she had just said she couldn’t sleep a wink.

This was a result of her magical amnesia.

“Yes,” Aby continued on as she chewed, “I walked on the moon, the world far below my feet. Everyone looked so small, like little ants on the hunt for food.” She gestured animatedly with her hands as she spoke. This made Dem nervous. “I giggled uncontrollably because I was running out of air up in the sky, you know.”

“That is very interesting, dear.”

“But that’s not the best part,” Aby continued, her voice getting louder. “Just when I was about to pass out from a laughing fit, a shooting star flew by, right past my head, and crashed into the earth. And the world was filled with a glowing white light.” As she said this last part, her hand shot into the air to demonstrate the shooting star. Dem recoiled expectantly as the floor above their heads broke apart and the bathroom sink came crashing down to settle in the middle of their sitting room.

Dem was prepared, though. He lunged forward and pulled Aby out of the way just in time. The dust from the crash filled the air around them and Aby coughed theatrically. “Good heavens, Dem. This house is falling apart.” Dem didn’t answer but helped her to her feet. With a simple

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movement of his hands, the sink rose from the ground and back up through the hole in the ceiling; the wood panels fit awkwardly back into place.

I'm not as skilled as I used to be, he thought, looking up at the now-crooked ceiling.

“C'mon Aby, let's go for a walk,” Dem said, ignoring his growing concern for his wife and himself. His magic was deteriorating at a faster rate with his age. Soon, they would be two crazy old people who walked around aimlessly, destroying their house one magical misstep at a time.

The air outside was cool and refreshing, the sun breaking over the horizon behind dispersing clouds. Hand in hand, Aby and Dem walked toward the ocean. “Do you remember the day the dolphins came, Aby?”

Aby didn't answer for a while, her face contorting in strange ways as she fought hard to retrieve a memory. Sometimes, the memories didn't come. That made Dem sad because each time she lost a memory, she was that much closer to being gone forever. To his relief, a smile spread across Aby's face, and she spoke thoughtfully.

“That day was magical. We flew through the ocean on their backs and they took us deep beneath the sea to their underwater kingdom. We grew fins of our own that day.”

Dem chuckled softly. “Yes, love. That's exactly what happened.” They did ride on the backs of dolphins—for hours in fact—but they did not grow fins. The underwater kingdom was a coral reef where the dolphins liked to gather, but it was no less magical.

“I miss them, Dem,” Aby said softly. “They never returned for us, did they?”

“No, dear,” Dem replied, squeezing her hand gently. “That is what made that day so spectacular and dream-like. It happened only once.”

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From the corner of his eye, Dem saw a distant shadow on the water. He looked more closely, though he already knew what it was. A heaviness came over him. A ship with golden sails glided peacefully over the calm ocean, miles away, but unmistakably headed towards them.

“Aby,” Dem started, unsure of what words he was looking for. Before he could say more, Aby broke away suddenly and ran toward the woods, screaming—not screaming in the usual sense, though. It was a singsong sort of scream. Dem watched for a moment as she disappeared behind the trees, dumbfounded, before taking off after her.

When he finally caught up to her, Aby had run a good mile into the woods and well past their cottage. She had stopped beside a tree, breathing heavily and singing to herself in a quiet voice. The woods they left behind them were now stained with deep shades of blue and purple, like someone had come and splattered paint all over them. Dem knew she sensed the ship’s approach and had panicked, causing the discoloration of the trees.

He knelt beside her and stroked her hair. She looked as if she were in a different place now, her eyes unfocused as she huddled on the ground. That moment by the water a few moments ago was probably his last glimpse of Aby. She was slipping away. The magic had become too much for her.

“Let’s get you back inside,” Dem said, helping Aby to her feet, who now shook uncontrollably. He nearly carried her back to their little home, which always felt warm but would soon be filled with a cool silence.

He helped Aby into her bed upstairs and tucked her safely under the covers. She still hummed softly as she fell asleep. Dem settled in the chair beside her bed and looked out the window, not wanting to leave her side. The sails grew bigger on the horizon through the tiny bedroom window.

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It's moving too fast, he thought. His mind drifted, and he remembered all the great moments they had shared. He wouldn't trade any of it. She had made him a better man. He would miss her more than anything.

Dem's eyes felt heavy, so he let them close, though he didn't intend to fall asleep. He woke that evening to a gentle knock on the door. *It can't be*, he thought, jumping up from his chair. He first looked at Aby, still sleeping peacefully in her bed, then out the window. To his shock, the ship was perched on the shore just outside their home. He ran down the stairs, turning the corner to see it for himself.

Four cloaked figures stood on his doorstep. "Not yet," he pleaded, falling to his knees in the doorway. "Please don't take her from me yet."

One cloaked figure stepped forward and spoke kindly. "Her time has come, Dem," the woman said. She carried a sympathetic tone in her voice. "You know the rules. We will give you a moment to say goodbye." She rested her hand on his shoulder, and he felt slightly at peace in that moment. He stood and returned upstairs to where Aby rested.

"Aby dear," he said, kneeling beside her. "The ship has come to take you." His voice shook as he spoke. Though he knew he would see her again someday, it was far too difficult to let go at this moment.

Aby's eyes opened at the sound of his voice and she smiled when she focused on him. "I love you, Dem," she said with no sign of the amnesia in her now. "I've always loved you. You know that?"

Dem wasn't sure if he laughed or cried as a response. "Of course, dear. I will always love you." He leaned down and kissed her on the lips, lingering for a few moments, salty tears running down his cheeks.

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“It is time,” a voice spoke behind him. Dem looked up and saw the four figures waiting. Giving Aby’s hand one more squeeze, he watched with a heavy heart as they lifted her onto their shoulders and carried her from the bedroom. He followed them down the stairs and to the front door, his eyes never leaving Aby, who now seemed to be in a deep sleep.

“You must stop here,” the woman said to him when they reached the doorstep. Dem began to shake as the tears poured out. “Do not worry, Dem,” she said to him as the others took Aby down the shore and carried her onto the ship. “You will see her again when you fall asleep tonight.”

He was confused by this statement. Surely it wasn’t his time to go so soon. But though he couldn’t see her face under the cloak, the tone of the woman’s voice told him that she was smiling. And with that, she turned to follow her companions onto the ship that would take Aby back home.

Once sailing toward the horizon, Dem walked out to the water’s edge and watched until the ship’s sails faded. He was very sad, but no longer crying. The woman’s words comforted him.

A sudden shadow in the twilight pulled him from his thoughts. He looked up, hoping for a moment the ship was bringing Aby back to him. Instead, and to his delight, he saw a small black figure dancing across the moon.

Squinting hard, he swore he saw a familiar smile flash across the moon’s surface before a flash of light lit up the sky. *Aby*.

He laughed out loud, feeling slightly insane but in the best way. And with that, he gladly went back inside and straight upstairs, where he tucked himself in. He understood the cloaked woman’s words now. His time was much sooner than he thought, and while he didn’t understand why, he wasn’t worried or afraid to fall asleep because as soon as he did, he would be with Aby again—eternally. And that was all he ever wanted.