

## The Morning Before We Meet

I wake up.

Harsh, cold, and ruthless. I hate the voice in my head. I desperately long for the few tranquil seconds of calm I have every morning before full awareness sets in. As soon as I try to hold on to those mellow moments, they vanish, like my cotton candy did when I was young. I had forgotten to close the lid of the box properly.

“Did you know that cotton candy can evaporate when you don’t close the lid of the box?” I ask. Is evaporate the correct word? Honestly, I don’t understand the science behind it. Is it a chemical reaction? Probably. I make a mental note to google it later. I definitely never will.

The duvet-hill lying next to me grunts. I forgot that it is early. I sigh, my chest feels tight. I decide to move, get up, get on. A million things to do. I drink a glass of water. According to Instagram it is healthy to drink a glass of water right after you get up. One thing all Influencers seem to agree on. Apparently, it does wonders for you. Something about hydration. Drink it before you get your first coffee.

I shouldn’t drink so much coffee. I do it anyways. I notice I am still in bed. Sometimes I get lost in my thoughts.

I read a book once where the protagonists could access their minds, their heads, using a magical key. The space they’d enter would mirror how they were feeling. I have always wondered what the inside of my head would look like.

Some days I imagine it being stormy, cold, deserted, an uncomfortable place. Other times I think it would be full of old worn-out couches. They’d be different colours and sizes. They are comfortable. A place to dwell, to pause, to recharge after a hectic day. On the best days I think it would look like a library in an old, grand mansion. Not organised. The windows large, sunrays falling through them, highlighting the dancing dust particles in the air. Books piled up randomly, everywhere. The smell welcoming me, a room full of possibilities. A thousand worlds I can visit, a thousand journeys to embark on, a thousand facts to learn. A happy place. For me anyways. On the worst days

My body contracts. This happens to me when thoughts are dark, too dark. I experience bodily reactions. Like something deep inside me is trying to shake them off. Trying to remind me I am present in this moment. I am safe and I am not my thoughts. I sound like my meditation coach. She comforts me. The lessons stick.

I sit up, finally. My feet are cold, even though I got up in the middle of the night to make myself a hot water bottle. Didn’t help apparently. I see it lying on the floor. That explains why. A little light fights its way through the curtains. Just barely making it through on both sides. It’s quite bright, not golden like the light in my happy-library-head. Anyways, light means it’s too late. I check the time. I should have gotten up half an hour ago, where has the time gone. What have I been doing? Why does it take me so long to do anything?

It feels like I am back in my old room at my parents' house. A nice room. Orange walls, spacious, inviting. They let me decorate it myself. Never let a teenager decorate a room. My red couch made up as a bed, me sitting at my desk trying to memorise my Latin vocabulary. It used to take me hours. I still can't wrap my head around that. I enjoyed Latin. I was – still am – interested in learning new things. I just couldn't stay focused. I drift away. Then I find myself anywhere but in my room in front of my book, studying.

Am I the only one that feels this way, I wonder. I can't be. I am nothing special.

"I'm getting up now." I whisper. "Mhmmh." A mutter beside me. "I'll make some coffee," I promise, then remember, "but I'll get you a glass of water to drink first." "Mhmmh."

My feet touch the ground. Wood. It's soft. Whoever said walking on carpet was comfortable has obviously never walked on a wooden floor. Real wood. It has its disadvantages, of course. Temperature sensitive, eccentricities, dents, splinters. To me, however, it is perfect. It is home. I put on an extra pair of socks. I sigh. I stand and walk around the bed, hitting my shin against the corner of the bed. A sharp pain, I curse. The duvet-hill grunts.

I slide open the door and am greeted by the day. I must have forgotten to close the curtains last night. My eyes need a moment to adjust. Do pupils constrict in the light? I think so, but I am not sure. Does it matter? I take a few steps and am at the door. I pull it open; it takes some force. It is always stuck to the frame somehow. The rooms felt cold to me. Nothing compared to the hall. It's freezing. I rub my arms as I make my way to the kitchen. A little warmer here. I can still smell the garlic. Our meal last night. It was delicious. Everything prepared here is, as long as I am not involved in the process. I smile a little thinking about it. We all have our talents; cooking definitely isn't mine.

The coffee is on top of the shelf. I shake my head as I reach for the beans and the grinder. Who needs this kind of stuff? Too fancy. The noise of the grinder makes me uncomfortable. I hate loud noises; they are too distracting.

I remember a friend telling me about a walk she took once. She was strolling through her hometown, an old town with a beautiful, historic city centre. She thought it'd be idyllic, distracting her a little from all the stress she'd been having lately. So, she's walking, and she passes a building site where they were using this pneumatic hammer or something of sorts. It was quite early in the day, like today, and she just started crying because she got so overwhelmed by the noise surrounding her. I get that. I feel like that. Maybe I have too much stress as well, I think.

I boil the water in a pot. To most people this seems weird and eccentric since there is a working electric kettle in the kitchen. Easily reachable. Easily usable. But the limescale. I prefer boiling my water in a pot.

I finish preparing the coffee. It took me a few times to figure out the right amount of ground coffee to use. But I have gotten the hang of it.

I hope I haven't woken up the flatmates. I dislike being disruptive to anyone's sleep. Or anyone's life really. I stand on my tiptoes to open the cupboard above. I look for two specific mugs. One black, one yellow with a giraffe. Very ugly. It's my favourite. I am suddenly very conscious of all the noise I am making. Why do I care so much? I press down the French Press. It's satisfying, easy and smooth. The smell of coffee fills the room when I pour the dark liquid into the mugs, replacing the garlic from the night before.

This transports me to the Sundays I spend at home. My father reading his paper in his old armchair at the dining table. Printing ink and fresh coffee. A childhood memory, the smell of comfort and love. I'd join him with my own mug and a book. A different one every week. A wholesome tradition. Do I use the word comfort too often? What does this say about me? Some psychotherapists would certainly make something of it.

I grab the steaming mugs and awkwardly open the door to the hall with my foot. I place one on the bedside table once I get back to the bedroom. I don't quite know what to do next. I decide to hang out in the other room and enjoy my coffee alone. It's a nice feeling, being on my own, but having somebody sleeping in the room next to me. Comforting.

I sit on the couch; my hands are wrapped around the hot beverage. I feel okay, calm. I am glad I did not get swept away this morning. It takes a while for me to finish the coffee.

I stretch, get up. The million things push to the centre of my consciousness, demanding to be heard and dealt with. I try to sort through them, try to order them somewhat logically while slowly getting dressed. Comfortable Jeans, large Hoodie. A washed-out grey.

The smell of sleep and coffee is still lingering in the bedroom. I go and kiss the duvet-hill goodbye. "Are you leaving?" "Yes, call me when you get up. Drink the water before you drink the coffee!" "Is it still warm?" "-Ish."

I hurry down the stairs. A lot to do. I squeeze past the clothes horse standing in the hall of the second floor. I hope I didn't brush the freshly washed clothes with my jacket. I would hate somebody touching my freshly washed laundry with their dirty clothes. The smell of detergent mixes with my perfume, carelessly applied just a few moments before. I miss the smell of coffee and sleep. I think I'll go get another coffee before I start dealing with my list. I shouldn't be drinking that much coffee.

I open the door. It's windy. My ears are sore immediately. I should buy a hat. Add that to the list. My shoelaces are undone. Why does this keep happening? I should clean my shoes. Add that to the list. They look like I don't take care of them. I don't. Maybe I should invest in a new pair. I'll take care of those. Add that to the list.

I stumble.

I bump into somebody. "Sorry," I exclaim, "I am so so sorry! Are you hurt, did I hurt you?"

I look up. I know these eyes. I can feel them on me. They have been on me for a while now, observing me interestedly, caringly. The energy is familiar, we seem to know each other.

Or rather, you know me. You've been following me through my morning. A constant companion. Before you say anything, let me just say hi properly.

"Hi! It's nice to meet you. I was about to grab a coffee! But you already know that. Will you join me? We can talk more then, get to know each other better."

I start walking slowly. I am a few steps in front of you. I turn my head. You're still here, watching me closely. Our eyes meet. I see your face and smile. "Coming?"