

Short tales
for the kindly hearted
Presented by
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SurrealiTales

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Chapter 1

A brain's hole tale

Future intelligent life in our universe would have but one remaining option: to inject enough information into a new universe to recreate our civilization on the other side of the wormhole.

Michio Kaku - "Parallel Worlds"

This is a tale of an ordinary man with ordinary thoughts. But something extraordinary happened to those thoughts, although no one really ever noticed. How do I know about it then, it doesn't really matter. The name of the man doesn't really matter either, but let's call him Ebwhe, or just Eb for short.

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Chapter 2

Par-cell

The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young.

Oscar Wilde - "The Picture of Dorian Gray"

This is the story of Boddes, a man who had to fight his own body in order to achieve his ultimate goal in this universe: to live a humble life.

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Chapter 3

God herself

One of the truly bad effects of religion is that it teaches us that it is a virtue to be satisfied with not understanding.

Richard Dawkins - "The God Delusion"

This story is about the origin of all things, and about a particular woman turned into a goddess who wasn't interested in becoming one.

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Chapter 4

Luck magnet

I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it.

Thomas Jefferson

This is the tale of Jimbo, a truly lucky man, or so everyone thought. All his wishes could have become true, if only he had wished for something. Some people get what they deserve, while others get what others deserve. And some others, they just don't care. But let me tell you Jimbo's story, and leave the morale to the reader's judgment.

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Chapter 5

Dark Ages

Shall pain help me reach completeness?

KOS-MOS in Xenosaga

Without the proper care, magic can be a dangerous thing. Even experienced witches can get burnt after abusing fire spells. Apart from these dangers, the black mage in our story suffered the consequences of casting her spells in a world that was not in need of them.

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Chapter 6

Cat interlude

Dogs have Masters. Cats have staff.

Anonymous

Have you ever payed attention to cats' lives? Cats have their own dramas, and humans participate in some of these. Since the lifespan of a human is longer than that of a cat, a single human can witness many cat dramas during his or her lifetime. This story is a recollection of some of such dramas.

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Chapter 7

The longest night

All men, whilst they are awake, are in one common world: but each of them, when he is asleep, is in a world of his own.

Plutarch

Some people seem to never get enough sleep. How much sleep is necessary for a person to fully recover from the stress of the day? The protagonist of this story managed to sleep long enough so the world that was stressing him had become a completely different one by the time he woke up.

7.1 A dream within a dream

Teeqm was a quite normal boy, but deep inside, he feared he was just the product of some ugly experiment of his parents. He had two fathers, not as in a figure of speech, or even just in legal terms, but literally. His parents were two gay men who had been the first on

Earth to conceive a baby between them in the laboratory. Perhaps a breakthrough in medicine, but a nightmare for Teeqm.

When he was a young kid, he always avoided talking about his family. When at school other kids asked him about his home, he mainly talked about his cats.

That didn't mean he didn't like his parents. His fathers played games with him, helped him with his homework, cooked delicious food, and loved him a lot. In fact, he suspected that they were better parents than any of his friends' parents.

Unfortunately, society was not ready yet for such a family model. Teeqm got often bullied at school because of this. He even had trouble sleeping, and his parents had taken him to counseling on several occasions.

Teeqm decided that he would leave his home as soon as he was old enough to find a job to pay his own bills. And that's what he did. He found a well-paid part-time job at an expensive restaurant, and a small and cheap apartment close to the university where he studied. He brought one of his cats in with him to have some company, and left his parents' house.

Combining both studies and work is not easy. Teeqm had to wake up early to go to class and work until late at the restaurant. Even worse, he had to work full time at the restaurant during the weekend, so he didn't have much time to study, less to go out with friends.

If that wasn't tiring enough, Teeqm had still to suffer having troubles with sleep. He had been O.K. for a couple of years, but when he moved out of his parents' house, his insomnia came back again. He suspected that losing the security of having his family around was, in fact, the reason for this, but he had to learn to cope with it.

Besides, he had recently developed a quite good technique to overcome insomnia. He closed his eyes and visualized himself with the eyes closed. He imagined that sleeping version of himself

dreaming about himself trying to get asleep by closing his eyes and thinking about himself with his eyes closed. He delved deeper and deeper in this recursion, trying to keep track of each different level by imagining himself sleeping in a different environment, either a nice hotel, a nice beach, the top of a skyscraper, or whatever it crossed his mind.

At some random point, he would start counting the number of levels of recursion, starting from one and going back through the different sceneries he had imagined himself resting comfortably at. He never managed to count how far he had gone, since at some point of this personal sheep counting exercise, he would finally fall asleep.

This sleeping technique would eventually be the cause of an unfortunate incident. It was one day that things hadn't been exactly right for Teeqm. He had failed one grade at university, and he felt terribly low. He called his parents, and they told him he should quit his work, and come back home. Teeqm didn't want to depend on them, so he had an argument with his parents over the phone. Because of this, he arrived late at work, and his boss scolded him that even if this was a part-time job, it was a respectable job. If Teeqm was not taking it seriously, he'd better quit, he was told.

When Teeqm reached his place, all he could think of was how nice would it be to go to sleep and never wake up again. That's why, ignoring the meows of his cat just for this one day, he went to bed right after he entered his room. It was still early, so he would have double trouble to get asleep. So he started imagining himself lying in all kind of places. In fact, he imagined all the places he knew, and some that he just knew from pictures.

From turquoise to dark blue seas, igloos, caves, his parents' house, and the top of a cherry tree in full blossom. When he ran out of memories, his mind struggled for a while, and finally he imagined himself sleeping on a field full of vegetables that glowed in the dark. Probably his imagination had gone wild, because from

that point on, all the places he imagined had this alien touch in them.

When Teeqm started counting back all the places he had visited in his dream, all that he could ever recollect was these alien sceneries. The only familiar thing he could remember was an old cherry tree. But as soon as he imagined this tree, he dreamt again that he was lying on this field with luminescent cucumbers.

And it was this way Teeqm kept wandering inside his dreams for years and years to come.

7.2 Time will tell

When doctor Reverof visited Teeqm for the first time, Teeqm had been sleeping for a whole week. Other doctors had already examined Teeqm, but Reverof arranged it so he could make his own tests. After all, he felt responsible for the life of this kid.

Reverof had been researching stem cells most of his career. 22 years ago, one of his colleagues discovered that it was possible to create stem cells out from normal adult cells. These cells were called induced pluripotent stem cells. These “super-cells” could, in principle, become any type of cell. From liver cells, to reproductive cells, the applications were of course numerous.

Even if just hypothetically, since it was even possible to create female reproductive eggs out from cells of adult males, he had many inquiries from gay couples who didn’t mind becoming guinea pigs if that meant they could have their own kid. But of course Reverof refused experimenting on humans, since the results on animals so far were discouraging. Similar to other cloning technology, the problem was that the resulting individual aged faster than normal. It was almost as if the parents’ internal biological clock was replicated with the same date to their offspring.

The solution to this problem would come from an unexpected source. One day, one of his patients, who was also one of his friends,

introduced him to his wife. She was a beautiful and intelligent woman called Om.

This lady, Om, gave to Reverof an interesting parcel containing a sample of what she claimed were the cells of a person who had lived for one thousand years. Even if Reverof didn't just swallow this story at first, he agreed to take a look at the sample. And he found out that these were indeed special cells. Whether they belonged to a long-lived individual, he couldn't tell. But it was clear there was something different in the genes associated with humans' biological clock.

Reverof had no idea how he could create this type of cells, but he thought he could replicate them in another individual. But first he needed someone willing to volunteer, so he contacted one of his gay patients who wished to conceive a baby with his partner. Reverof had planned to create a chimera out of the cells of these three men, the guy couple and whoever it was the guy of these long living cells.

Of course Reverof hid these details from his patients. But he promised them he would frequently check on their kid, even as he grew older. After all, if this was successful, his research could revolutionize medicine.

Reverof had never expected such an awkward condition to develop on this kid. Why on Earth Teeqm entered this weird comma? Did it have something to do with his genes? It wasn't even a comma. It was just as if he was asleep. And Teeqm stayed like that for months and years.

Reverof found out that while Teeqm was asleep, his cells didn't seem to age. Even if years passed, he still looked as if he was twenty. He started to believe Om's stories, so he tried contacting her. But it was too late. According to their neighbors, Om and her husband had mysteriously disappeared a couple of months ago, without leaving any notice or forwarding address.

For the doctor, it would be a shame to confess that he had used

those cells from an unknown source, and that his unmoral experiment had probably lead to this comma situation. So Reverof kept the secret to himself for the rest of his life. Unable to reproduce again the results he had obtained with Teeqm, he failed to make the breakthrough in science that he had been dreaming of.

7.3 Sleep mode setter

Eb blamed himself for what had happened to his son. Eb had suffered a similar condition in the past, and he stayed in a catatonic state for a whole year. It must have been something genetic. Eb's partner knew about this, but he never brought the topic in, neither show any sign of blaming Eb for their son's fate.

The last conversation they had with their son was an argument over the phone. This bitterness was hard to swallow. The only thing they could do was making sure that Teeqm got all the medical care he needed at the hospital.

No one knew when Teeqm was going to wake up, if ever. Doctors tried to wake him up by force, but apparently Teeqm's brain was too busy to attend external affairs. At first Eb thought their son would be recovered soon, but when years passed, he started giving up hope.

Oddly enough, years didn't really seem to pass for Teeqm, since he didn't seem to get any older. This was in part a blessing, because it meant that Teeqm had virtually all the time in the world to sleep, and still be able to wake up one day, perhaps thanks to future advances in medicine. On the other hand, it also appeared as if time were running faster for his parents, and eventually they would die before they could hear their sleeping beauty say "good morning" again.

Eb had a special ability to get rid of sad or negative thoughts, but the worry about his son was an exception. He arranged everything so in case something happened to them, their inheritance

would be used to pay to the hospital any possible expenses, through a bank account and some investments that would also become Teeqm's money in case he woke up one day.

Eventually, they got used to watch their son sleeping. Teeqm looked beautiful and peaceful. If Teeqm was having nice dreams in his sleep, perhaps it was not such a bad thing. When Eb closed his eyes for the last time, he dreamt that he was inside his son's dream. They were having afternoon tea in a white room with a wide balcony where you could see a beautiful sunset, with an awkward big sun. A somewhat familiar face entered the room and joined in for the tea. Although his memories were all blurry, it seemed as if it was a man he had met before.

When the night came in in Eb's dream, his husband came to pick him up. He took him home, helped him get in bed, and kissed him good night.

7.4 Uneternal daisy chain

Teeqm was indeed dreaming, but it was such a vivid dream that it felt real at times. However, as most dreams, it was also sometimes disconnected; he could be in one place one moment, and in another place the next. And although he felt as if he interacted with people and things in his dream, he was in fact a mere spectator.

There was a man Teeqm visited often in this world. He seemed to be a scientist with several fields of interest, from genetics to physics. Teeqm observed him and had imaginary conversations with him from time to time.

Some other times, Teeqm would go back to the familiar cherry tree. The tree was getting older, and it was the only clear reference of time in his dream. He also knew when spring had arrived thanks to the beautiful cherry blossoms.

Teeqm wandered around in this strange world. Just by observing, he could learn many new things. People in his dream all

seemed very peaceful and hardworking. He wanted to be like them, but it was easier to get asleep and forget. But of course it didn't make much sense to get asleep inside a dream. He would probably end up in that tree again anyways.

The branches of the cherry tree started to crack down with time. At some point, the tree blossoms lost their pink and became entirely white, and Teeqm didn't know if it was the same tree anymore. That's how he started to lose track of time. This was worsened by the fact that the scientist he used to visit didn't seem to grow much older himself.

One day Teeqm's conscience wondered where the cherry tree was supposed to be, but nothing was left of it. Out of the blue, he remembered the number 42, and started to count down. As he did so, he started revisiting old familiar places. 39, some holiday resort; 27, a quiet café; 14, a sunset in a familiar beach; ... When he reached 1, he imagined himself resting peacefully on a sofa at his parents' house. Teeqm opened his eyes.

7.5 System recovery

Teeqm found himself in a white room, full of strange looking devices. He tried to move, but his body felt awfully numb. He heard a small buzz, and suddenly a small 3D hologram of a nurse popped up in front of him, floating in midair. The holo-nurse told him a doctor was on his way to Teeqm's room and she instructed him to wait.

When the doctor arrived, he carefully checked on Teeqm and all the output from the machines he had been plugged at. While he unplugged him from those, he explained that Teeqm had been sleeping from two centuries. No joke.

Confused as anyone would be, Teeqm asked for a mirror. The doctor produced one from his pocket and handled it to his patient. Teeqm looked at himself in the mirror, and yes, he looked paler,

thinner, and somewhat older, but not as he would expect a person with more than 200 years to look like. The doctor explained that there was some mystery in his genes that they didn't manage to solve in all this time.

Like a sudden personal revelation, Teeqm told the doctor that he knew about genetics himself, and demanded a few more details. Even if Teeqm couldn't quite remember, he had been studying genetics in his dream for more than a century now. The doctor suggested Teeqm looked at his own records himself, after his body recovered from the longest nap in human history ever.

Teeqm started working at the research lab of that same hospital just a month later. He didn't find the reason why his genes stopped aging while asleep, but he helped his team to develop new cloning technologies.

He missed his parents and his cat. He wished he had spent more time with them. But his work gave purpose to his life, and the world around him was a different world than before he went to bed 200 years ago. For him, it was as if he had suddenly travelled into the future, and everything was new and exciting. However, things didn't look that much modern or futuristic compared to the world he remembered from glimpses of his long dream. He somehow yearned for recreating pieces of that imaginary world in this real one.

Teeqm was having problems getting asleep again. However, he didn't care anymore. There were many things to do at night, like chatting with people in other parts of the world and learn about the state of affairs here and there. He had literally slept three lifetimes or more, so he didn't really mind staying awake at times.

He felt that nights were also beautiful. The city had completely replaced the old lights that produced photopollution for new cousins of LED lights. These lights wouldn't illuminate upwards, avoiding unnatural glowing of cities, and letting people observe the beauty of the night sky. Even the air seemed to smell better than before.

He finally realized that it was so much better to live his life awake, rather than running away in dreams.