

the safety of early dawn

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the safety of early dawn

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Summary

Zam readjusts herself in bed, it's about time to get up, but she's comfy, and as long as it's just her down here, she can do whatever it is she wants.

Until Minutetech groans as he rolls over, in the bed that he and Zam decided to share last night. And that sudden realisation that Zam is not alone is enough to shock him back to reality.

Right. No more dreams, back in the body he actually has. He is Prince Zam, and he's always been that. There is no sword or dress that can change who he's always been. Zam should be trying not to let himself have too much fun here, he has to go back to Lifesteal eventually. Kings was never made to be a permanent server.

They have maybe a few months more of this server, where he can pretend to be beautiful on weekends. Zam will miss this place, because he really loves it here. It's freeing in a way that he's never felt before.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Zam wakes up early, it's just her schedule. If she's not up by 8 am she might as well just give up on the day. Sure she can't really tell what time it is from her bed, deep underground in the sanctuary that her team has made, but she has a solid guess.

No light from the sun reaches down here, they are safe here, hidden. Which means that in order to get anything done, you have to go other places. That's the double edge of security, you can't get anywhere playing it safe.

But as Zam readjusts herself in bed, maybe that's okay. Cause as long as it's just her down here, she can do whatever it is she wants.

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Right. No more dreams, back in the body he actually has. He is Prince Zam, and he's always been that. There is no sword or dress that can change who he's always been. Zam should be trying not to let himself have too much fun here, he has to go back to Lifesteal eventually. Kings was never made to be a permanent server.

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For a moment Zam is mourning it already, before Minute takes another attempt at waking up. This time managing words.

"Urg. Zam what time is it?" Minute's deep morning voice rasps as he props himself upright with his pillow.

"Like. Seven thirty," Zam guesses. He trusts his internal clock, he's always had good internal senses. Like time, direction, self. He knows these things.

"Why are we awake this early?" Minute asks. It's sort of a fair question. The server operates on an unwritten rule that fights don't start before 11 am. But Zam like's his prep time.

"Cause we got grinding to do today,"

"Like what?"

"Uh. The crown recipe is releasing at noon tomorrow. We need resources."

"Do we know what it'll be?"

"No, cause we don't have the recipe," Zam says slowly, idiot.

"So what are we gathering? Let's just sleep."

”Mapicc is already up, he’s probably getting stuff already.“ Zam lies, Mapicc sleeps more than any of them.

”Let him, who cares.“ Minute says. And the idea sounds so, so tempting, but so unlike PrinceZam. He’s always been an early riser, he gets things done. It’s not right for him to let his team do the work while he’s in bed.

But he doesn’t want to be PrinceZam right now. It’s a thought he often has, in a variety of different meanings. Sometimes he just wants it to end, sometimes he just wants to be anyone else. Today, and the previous sessions of Kings. Zam has found a new meaning in it.

A new character to play, PrincessZam. He really likes being a princess, and if he were one, he’d probably just sleep in. Cause a girl needs her beauty sleep.

But alas, Zam is a prince, and no amount of sleep will make him pretty. His work as a teammate is more important than his dedication to this charade.

”We should get up, Minute.“ Zam finds a light switch and the redstone lamps buzz their undgodly morning tune. He could feel the subtle hum of the redstone circuits rub uncomfortably against his internal buzz to find a task to do to prove he’s worth keeping around.

Sleeping in is for people who’ve proved themselves. Minute can do it because he’s among the list of combat masters on this server. Zam needs to grind for materials to earn his keep.

Still half asleep, Minute says something that Zam never hoped to hear, ”You’re pretty,“ And as if he knew that Zam didn’t believe him, Minute reached over to tuck his hair extension behind his ear, to expose the face that no one really liked.

”Sure Minute. Uppy time!“

”You don’t believe me?“ Minute is so obviously still asleep, turning on the lights clearly wasn’t enough to get him to stop seeing what Zam dreamed about.

Zam snorted like it was funny, cause it was. *No it’s not, it never was.* ”You know I’m not actually a girl, right?“ *And the words hurt to think but not to say.* Zam knows who he is on the outside, who he has to be to other people.

”So? Still pretty.“ Minute’s eyes aren’t even open, like he can’t bare to see just how much he was lying. ”I like how your hair looks.“

”Yes, my very real plastic hair extensions. That you helped put in.“

”And what I good job I did putting them in, you’re beautiful.“ *Zam blushes, she’s not actually pretty.* But maybe that can be part of this character, as long as he’s acting what’s the harm in being pretty?

”Sure, we gotta get up now though.“ Zam insists although he doesn’t really believe it.

Minute opens his eyes, pure white sclera with no discernible pupil stares at Zam, not just meeting his gaze, but drinking in every detail of his face. Minute doesn't act for a moment longer than Zam is really comfortable.

"Can I kiss you?" Minute asks eventually.

"What?" Zam asks, because he knows that this isn't right. This is only something that happens in fantasies. He's pretty sure that Minute is straight anyways.

"You, Zam. Can I kiss you?"

"Uh," Zam's backing away, he can feel himself trembling, "Sure? If you really want to?"

Minute is looking a little more awake, and concerned as Zam backs away. "Are you sure you're okay with it? Cause I don't want to pressure you or anything."

Zam knows that Minute can't actually like him. He knows it as well as he knows anything, it's just a fundamental part of existence. Zam is a Prince, and he is unlovable. Those two things have been the causes of most of his problems in life. Why he can't abandon anything, and why people abandon him.

But because Zam is royalty, isn't he allowed a bit of selfishness? He can steal a kiss. So he does. Zam leans back over to Minute, and presses himself against him. Minute kisses back, and he puts his muscled arms around Zam.

And for a moment Zam forgets who he is, and for a moment she's happy. But it doesn't last, because Minute pulls away after that long, sweet moment. And then Zam is the man he's always been again.

And the moment is over now. Zam feels shame redden his cheeks, as he crawls out of the bed, away from Minute, and away from the dream. He leaves the room in his nightclothes.

Which as he wanders the bunker shoeless and cold he realises this was a bad idea. All of his clothes are in that bedroom, and while he could go take some of Minute's, from his unattended room. That might not be the vibe that Zam wants to go with.

Fuck is he just stupid. Why the hell did he do that? Why does he have to ruin every team he's on with his incessant need for love? Why was Minute stupid enough to fall for his act?

There's not many places to hide in this base, there's just the four bedrooms, as well as Mapicc's 'Thinking Room' and as desperate as Zam is to hide, he knows that those carpets are unnaturally crusty. What Mapicc did to summon that grime, Zam wants to never know.

But that's not what's important, Mapicc is useful enough to the team to be gross. Zam is just gross and useless, he hasn't done enough yet, and he has the gall to ask for something more? How's that supposed to go? 'Hey team that I only drag down, can you play into my delusions too? I think it would feel nice for a bit, if we all went crazy together.'

A Prince has always been his role, even here on Kings where he's putting on a dress and playing pretend. Even though he's never thought of himself as nice looking before seeing the

outline of his shadow with the hair extensions, and the swooshy dress. He is a Prince, and to give that up is betraying who he is.

He's put all this work into being PrinceZam, he can't change his mind now. Zam can feel tears welling in his eyes, and he needs to find a place to hide before he gets hysterical.

Zam finds a spot wedged between some barrels, and he feels like a child curled up in a ball after getting a bad grade. So vulnerable, at the mercy of whoever comes his way.

But the one to come his way is Minutetech, who had *wanted* him, or maybe even *her*. He's looking for him, and he calls out Zam's name softly, not wanting his voice to carry through the compound where their other teammates slept.

"Zam, are you here? Can we talk? If we can't, can I still keep you company?" Minute offers. It's a kind offer, one that Zam's only ever gotten before from Subz, who had been there for him during the worst time of his life. Who Zam then betrayed. Because no one can really love him, they can try but they'll always fail.

It's an offer based on patience that most people just don't have for Zam. He's supposed to be strong, he's supposed to be ready. But he's not. He's just not strong, he's never even been worth all that much. He's just worth being an extra body in a fight.

Zam doesn't want to be strong, he wants to be safe enough to be weak. That's all Zam wants, to have a chance to be weak, and not be killed for it.

"Am I good to stay here?" Minute asks, sitting on a barrel next to the one Zam's dislodged to hide. Zam feels mortified, because her teammate can see she's weak. But she manages to nod.

"Can I talk? Or would you prefer silence?"

Zam manages another nod, not that helpful with an either or choice. But it's all she can do at the moment.

"Alright, small talk or can I bring up what just happened?"

Zam can't manage to give another nod, so she doesn't. She just sits there, bawling like a little girl.

And Minute gives her the space to breathe. "I'm gonna start talking, and you can tell me to stop at any time, okay?"

She still doesn't nod, but she moves her head closer to Minute's knee.

"I think I like you Zam." And Minute lets the words hang in the underground dawn. "I think I really like you. Not just here on Kings, on Lifesteal too. I want to spend more time with you, Zam, no matter where that is."

Zam starts to cry a little harder. She doesn't like herself, she's surprised that anyone can. But Minutetech has always been full of surprises. Most of them deadly, but that was just the Lifesteal way.

She'd probably like to work with Minute on some scheme on Lifesteal one day, but *he* doesn't have allies there.

"I don't want to go back to Lifesteal." She cries.

"Okay." Minute says slowly, listening to her words carefully, "Why's that?"

"I- I like being here."

"Here on Kings? Or in this base?"

"Kings. I- I like being-" Zam can't bring herself to finish.

"You like being the Pretty Kitty Princess?" Minute guesses.

Zam just sobs. It sounds so stupid coming out of Minute's mouth. He's a prince, that's all he's ever been and ever will be. That's his name, goddammit.

"Okay. But you are allowed to be a Princess if you want. And you *are* a Princess here." Minute reassures, "And you don't want that to end when we go back home? Is that it?" he asks softly, understanding her more than she does.

Surprisingly, she manages to nod.

"You can be a Princess on Lifesteal too, you know? That doesn't have to stay here."

"But I- I can't. I'm Prince- I'm Prince." Is all Zam can choke out.

"No. You're Zam. And that can mean whatever you want it to mean."

Her sobs gradually diminish as Zam sits in the silence that Minute offers her. "Can it really?"

"Yeah, I've been handed a crown or two that I didn't ask for in my day. And the trick is you get to pick what it all means."

End Notes

Uh. So yeah. Uh, anyone else have a gender? How's that going for you?

I hope that this representation of a single character's gender identity was interesting to you all. Gender is fucked up, millions of people struggle with it in unique ways every day and that's honestly terrifying. It's like that "my colours could be different from your colours"

Except that with Genders we know that it like for sure is different.

I hope you all appreciate me deviating from my Whump roots to put a softer ending to this. tbh, Zam was going to commit to repressing it forever and ever lol

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