

Sliding Doors Script

Blake

Is it really time for work? Feels like only an hour ago since I went to bed.

Oh, that's because it was...Damn you, Virtual Wars 2... it should be criminal to make a game that's *that* addictive!

...

Ugh, couldn't I just play games for a living? That's a job, right?

...

Aiden

BLAKE!!!! VELVET CLAW LOOKS AMAZINGGG

Blake

Velvet Claw...?

Oh yeah, that's that old comic they adapted into a film that's releasing next week.

did u really stay up until 3am to watch a damn trailer?? ur an idiot >_>

Not like I'm any better...

Aiden

AN IDIOT WHOS ALREADY GOT THE BEST SEATS AT THE CINEMA ON OPENING NIGHT

Blake

yeah yeah :/

u want anything from train station? coffee or food or anything ?

Aiden

actually coffee would be nice i feel like the embodiment of death. iced coffee, my fave please and thank u

OH also blake. wanna go into town this weekend? whatever we make in sales this week, we'll bring to town. sounds good to u

Aiden

sure sounds like fun. ill bring u ur iced coffee. Cya dont be late this time!!!

What am I saying? I love being a painter. When I have more than 3% of my brain functioning, that is...

Okay, out of bed at 3...

2...

1!

...

...

It's just so cozy...

...Just five more m-

Okay. No messing around!

3...

2..

1!

There. I can't be late today. We scraped together pretty much all our savings for this damn studio.

If I'm late again, everyone will hijack the good easels and I'll be sat behind the pillar in front of the subject again.

It was supposed to be the study of the whole male anatomy...

And I only got half of the left hand at a 45 degree angle.

Anyway, I have to get going!

Okay, nearly there...

Hmm... it's quite busy here, but I think I can make it on time.

Okay, I'm in the mood for something sweet.

Barista

Good morning, Sir. What can I get you?

Choice 1. Espresso

Choice 2. Hot Chocolate

Choice 3. Fizzy Pop

CHOICE 1.

Barista

One espresso coming right up.

Blake

Ugh... this is way too bitter for me right now...

I've never been a fan of bitter coffee, so why did I even order this? I must still be half asleep... Man, the taste is lingering, even now. I have no idea how people can enjoy that stuff.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

CHOICE 2.

Barista

One hot chocolate coming right up.

Blake

Ah, perfection...

The way they make hot chocolate here makes me forget about extortionate train station food and drink prices.

It may be an unsophisticated choice, but nothing beats a hot chocolate in the crisp winter air... I think I'm ready for today.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

CHOICE 3.

Barista

Here you go, Sir. Enjoy.

Blake

There's something about drinking fizzy pop at 7am that makes me feel like a psychopath. It's so cold to the touch...!

I think if I keep hold of this drink, I'll end up getting frostbite. Then how will I earn a career?

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

MAIN BRANCH

Blake

I guess I'll grab a newspaper too. The [Newspaper Name] always has some interesting stories.

The Public's Opinion | Pop Culture | Saffron Sinclair

Is bubble tea over? Not if the influencers have anything to say about it. Despite six new rival chains opening in the city this month alone, on the same street, The Public's Opinion looks into how the people are divided...

Railway Daily | Transport | Sienna Vale

The Alder Valley line reopens for a week only! Tickets are only available for a limited time. The line includes all inclusive tea, coffee, biscuits and champagne, and features stunning views such as...

The Aesthetic Agenda | Art | Tara Bloom

On The Aesthetic Agenda, we review a local art gallery at Greengrove, that has been run by Mr. Fields for 28 years. As he passes on his legacy to his son, we ask him...

Blake

It's so busy on this train... I'll just keep on going down the carriages.

There we are.

The train journey is event free, as usual. Most of the time is spent gazing out of the window in a half-asleep trance, admiring the frost-laced grass and the sunrise peeking through from the horizon. The train eventually makes it to the next stop, where a few people get on board.

?

Excuse me, Sir, is this seat taken?

Blake is almost jolted from their seat, so lost in their own thoughts and plans for the day. They quickly spin around, to see a young lady with a bright smile standing to the side of them, carrying a backpack.

O-oh, not at all...! Feel free to sit.

The woman puts her bag on the upper storage rack, and takes her seat opposite Blake. She places a notepad in front of her and a blue pen, adorned with a small claw pendant.

Blake watches in the corner of his eye as she first touches up her makeup, then opens her journal. The book is filled with notes and doodles.

There is a comfortable silence between the two, as the woman scribbles in her journal, and Blake continues to ponder on many of the thoughts swirling in his head. A wave of anxiety washes over him as he thinks about some of his ongoing troubles.

Blake

I love being a painter, but recently, I haven't been able to get out of this art block, no matter what I do.

And then I have rent. We're all pitching in to keep this studio, and I'm the only one not pulling my weight...

It's been harder to get out of bed lately knowing that I need to create something that people are going to want to buy as fast as possible.

It was so much easier when I was a kid, and I was able to just paint whatever came to mind. No constant nag to create a piece that blow up my social media... when my creativity could just simply come from the heart.

...Maybe this career was a mi-

?

Thank you so much, for the seat by the way. I didn't want to bother you, but this is the only free seat I can see.

Blake

Not a problem! I've come to realise after starting this commute last week that the train can get pretty hectic at this hour. And lending a seat is what anyone would do.

?

Ha! You'd be suprised. People turn their headphones up if you ask for the empty seat next to them..

You get used to being rattled around at seven in the morning, though. I'm an expert now at balancing coffee, my bag, my laptop and my sanity all at once, while trying not to fall into anyone!

The fact that I even got a seat makes this a truly lucky day...

Blake

Yikes. You're saying this is what I have to look forward to?

... Whatever, I need to make it to the studio on time and luckily, I got an apartment close to Greengrove station. So this is my best bet, since I hate sleeping early. I stayed up all night playing video games, hah.

?

Hahaha! Fellow night owl, huh? I know the feeling, I'm totally exhausted...

Blake
Hahaha, yeah...

Wait, I'm being rude, aren't I? I'm Blake.

?
Well, now that I have your attention, Blake...

Can you give me your opinion on Briana Cooper accidentally kissing a reporter at the Zenith Gala?

Blake
Wh-

?
No, no... wait, can you give me your opinion on Raymond Lavender's scandalous press conference for their upcoming TV show, The Vista of Romance?

Wh.. what's happening...? Am I still asleep?

Wait! I know you, you're...

Wrong - Are you joking around with me?

Wrong x2 - Nope...

Blake
That's right, you're *the Saffron Sinclair* from the Daily Crescent.

Saffron
I'm impressed that you knew who I was so quickly... OR We got there eventually... FINALLY!
OR I thought you were trying to insult me...

But shh! Don't say it so loud...

Blake
Why...?

Saffron
It's 7:28 am, I really don't want people hounding me for an autograph before I've even had my morning coffee...

But I have to wonder, how do you know it was Saffron Sinclair? I mean, I only asked you a couple of innocuous questions for my 'The Public's Opinion' section for next week's article...

Blake

One of my friends from Uni used to read your blog every morning, and you had your face on the front page - A Smash On Life, or something like that... that's where I know you from.

Saffron

It was a *Slice of Life*... but close enough.

I do miss A Slice of Life, though.. It was somewhat enjoyable when I had only a few followers and my biggest fans were my parents. It's daunting when you have a whole city to entertain with your writing.

Blake

How come you don't show your face anymore? Are you that tired of being recognized? I mean, I get the Daily Crescent is the most talked about paper in the city, but still.

Saffron

Well, when you write about pop culture, you have to be *extra* careful...

You give a celebrity the slightest morsel of criticism and you wake up to their fans outside your house with pitchforks and torches.

Blake

Yeah, I can see that...

Saffron

But hey - you never told me.

You said your friend was a fan of my work, but what about you? Come on, be honest, I can take it...

Saffron

Saffron tilts her head playfully as a small smirk spreads across her face, but Blake can see a glimmer of earnestness in her eyes as she anticipates his opinion.

Wh-? Well...

BRANCH 1

Tell the truth

I've read your articles a few times and they were pretty flashy. I get why you're famous, but I'd be lying if I said pop culture was my thing.

Blake

... Am I going to wake up to pitchforks and torches outside of my apartment now? Please.. I don't have enough money to replace my window panes again...

Saffron

Ha, don't worry about that - I'll spare you for letting me have this seat.

But, do you wanna know a secret?

Me neither!

Blake

Wait, seriously? But your articles are some of the best when it comes to pop culture, even I have to admit that.

Saffron

Truth is, I've never really been into pop culture.

BRANCH 2

Saffron

Oh, come on... did you really expect me to believe a guy like you, who stayed up until 5am playing video games, would have even a basic interest in pop culture?

I can practically hear the disdain *dripping from your voice*.

Was it really that obvious...? Well, I guess you're right, I can't tell you the first thing about anything to do with pop culture...

I haven't even had a glimpse of cable TV since I moved out from my parents.

Haha!

But, do you wanna know a secret?

Me neither!

Wait, seriously? But your articles are some of the best when it comes to pop culture, even I have to admit that.

BRANCH ENDS - BACK TO MAIN

Blake

Don't get me wrong, I don't look down on the people who love it; even I have to admit some reality TV shows had me hooked. My mum would watch them all the time and occasionally I'd get sucked into whatever crap they were arguing about in that episode.

Saffron

That's how they pull you in!

Blake

Apart from that though, I guess it's never appealed to me.

Saffron

I bet you don't even *listen* to mainstream artists, right?

I can hear the video game OST playing through your headphones - Virtual Wars 2 Main Menu Theme!

Blake

H-hey! There's nothing wrong with that! Video game OST is just as vali-

...You know that?

Saffron

You bet! It's the best sci-fi grand strategy game on the market - why would I not?

There's a game critic at The Daily Crescent, and they *hate* grand strategy games - can't stand the things.

So, they gave me the free game code and I played it for them, and I basically told them exactly what to write.

Blake

All I'm hearing is The Daily Crescent isn't exactly the best when it comes to picking their writers..

Saffron

Oh, by the way, you seemed a little lost in your thoughts earlier, are you alright? Or is it just that you're not a morning person?

Blake

Ah, it's nothing, really...

Saffron

You can tell me, if you're okay with sharing. I was joking earlier when I asked for your opinion on current celebrity affairs - you looked practically half asleep. I just wanted to rile you, in good fun of course. I could tell from the moment I laid eyes on you that you had no clue.

And I promise you, I've heard worse than whatever your problem is right now.

Unless you're a serial killer... which in that case I'd like an interview before the police get a hold of you.

Blake

...Well, I guess I'm just under pressure right now.

I'm a painter, and my friends and I graduated last year from our art degree. We eventually all mustered up the money to buy a studio, so we could all work together and collaborate. But if I'm honest, the rent is pretty steep.

And since I moved from my family home, I've been so focused on keeping myself afloat that I've hit an art block. I haven't had any inspiration at all and I've been struggling to paint. And on top of that, it's not just myself I need to account for, it's all my friends who work with me in the studio.

Saffron

A painter? That's an interesting job!

Blake

The big question is, do you actually *like* painting?

For sure. It's always been my passion.

My parents always used to have such an easy time with my birthdays and Christmas presents. All I'd want is a new easel, or new paints.

I spent most of lunch time at high school painting in my art teacher's room. We had similar taste in art, painting a story through what we saw around us.

Saffron

And what do you mean by 'painting a story'? Do you mean painting a narrative that's conveyed through the structure of the painting?

Blake

Kinda, I like to paint events that have happened in my life. I guess I draw the most inspiration from what I've seen first-hand, because I can capture the emotion I felt in those moments.

Which was way easier when events *were* happening in my life, which is the problem. I think eventually I may have to pursue another career, as much as I hate to say it.

You seem quite interested in it, though...

..Are you trying to write an article on it or something?

Saffron

Hah, if I spent my days writing about people struggling to pay rent, I'd be in the same position as you.

To be honest, I spent a lot of time interviewing celebrities, writing for the paper, trying to meet deadlines...

Let's just say, it's refreshing to speak to someone so... genuine.

But I think from the way you talk about it, you understand the essence of what it means to be an artist. You don't just follow trends...

You make sure each piece is meaningful.

And if that's the case, I'd say you *have* to keep going. I'm sure eventually, you'll find the inspiration you need to pull through.

The authenticity of her words catches Blake off guard. He looks down, his mind swimming - partly from the one hour of sleep - but her words had struck a chord. As if it was what Blake had needed to hear...

Blake

I just don't think I'm good en-

Saffron

I have to say, I'm quite envious of you. My true passion has always been comic books. It's kind of a sensitive subject for me at the moment...

Blake

Oh? How so?

Saffron

Well, I stayed up all night last night to watch the trailer of Velvet Claw...

And it was amazing! I've been a fan of Velvet Claw since I was a little girl, and I'm not one of those fake fans who only started liking the series after it got popular! I've been dying for a movie adaptation of the series practically since I came out of the womb!

Saffron

They adapted Velvet's character straight out of the original 1998 series, but they also made sure to use the original rendition of [villain name] - that's the villain, by the way. Because the 2006 reboot completely messed up their characterization... not that any of these *new* fans would know.

I'm getting ahead of myself again! There's a reason my boss banned me from talking about comics while at work.

The point is, like I said before. I've always adored comics, I used to write them in my spare time and it was always my dream to write for Velvet Claw. But, I started off blogging about pop culture. It's just easier to write about because it has a vast audience, and I continued to write comics in my spare time, hoping that's what would blow up.

But I got scouted up by the Daily Crescent's editorial team after my blog blew up, and here I am. It's hard to say no to such a lucrative offer. Like you, I have family I have to support. Take my story as a cautionary tale, if you will...

But I would do anything to go back and make it as a comic book writer. If you have a passion for something, and the chance to make it your career...

That's something worth holding onto.

Announcer

The train is now approaching Maywell. Please ensure you take all luggage with you, and thank you for traveling with us.

Oh, that's my stop. It was great to meet you, Blake. I hope everything works out for you in the end!

Saffron stands up, quickly gathering her journal, pens and her bag and makes her way to the exit of the train.

Blake

Y-you too! And thanks a lot for the advice! It means a lot!

Saffron gives Blake one last smile, before the sliding doors open, and closes, and then the train continues on its way.

Something worth holding on to...

Blake

If I quit now, would it have all been for nothing?

STUDIO

Blake looked up at the apartment with a pit in his stomach. He felt almost guilty. How could he face his friends when he feels like he's become a burden?

He quickly shakes himself.

No, I can't think like that. I have to go in there, this is what's worth holding onto.

?

Blaaaaake!

Blake

Huh?

Aiden

Hey, Blake! You're actually on time, for once. Well done!

Blake

Yeah, yeah...

Oh, here's your iced coffee.

Aiden

Hey thanks! I'm definitely gonna need it, I was up allll night.

You know what's crazy? So many times these adaptations screw up the characters. They actually managed to keep Velvet's character so similar to the original series. And [villain], man I was so worried they weren't gonna get him right after the reboot!

Blake

Heh, you're sounding like someone else I met today...

Aiden

Who's that?

Blake

Oh, no one important.

Aiden

Oh come on! You met someone who likes Velvet Claw and you're not even gonna tell me their name? Stop smirking!

...Man or woman?

Blake

They're a girl.

Aiden

Ohh, girlfriend material?

Blake

Can you just stop? I'm having enough trouble trying to focus as it is...

Blake begins to set up his canvas and paints. He looks at the canvas, thinking about how the day has been, trying to stretch his mind for a topic. He thinks back to Saffron, her words, her own turmoil.

[paint minigame]

So, what should the tone be...?

Humorous (1 pts) Indignant (0 pts) Cynical (0 pts) Hopeful (2 pts) Sincere (2 pts)

And the mood...

Lonely (0 pts), Passion (1 pts) Perseverance (2 pts) Sadness (0 pts) Whimsical (1 pts)
Romantic (0 pts), Excited (2 pts)

What about the key colour?

Yellow (2 pts), Green (0) Blue (0)

If SaffronPaintingOne = 6/6

Aiden

Hey, Blake! Wow, that's a really interesting piece! I'd rate it 6/6. You should put that up on your portfolio. Definitely the best work you've made in some time, I'd say.

If SaffronPaintingOne = 3/4/5 - Hey Blake, that's a good piece! I'd rate it around 3/4/5 out of 6.

If SaffronPaintingOne = 0/1/2 - Hmm, to be honest, Blake, I've definitely seen you do better. I'd rate it 0/1/2 out of 6.

Blake

Thanks, I was feeling inspired today, it sort of just came more naturally than it has been.

Yeah, I don't know what's up with me, but I'll definitely produce something better tomorrow.

Aiden

I'm gonna head back soon, so I'll see you tomorrow. Don't be late, you owe me five pounds each time you're late, remember?

Blake

Got it...

Aiden

I mean, you were never like this at uni, or high school, or even last week! Is that Virtual Wars game really that good or something...?

Blake

I guess it is...

Blake knows the truth deep down - his lack of inspiration had made it hard for him to even want to even get out of bed, let alone actually paint anything. His followers had been on a steady increase, but since his art block, his social media has become stagnant. Even though he knew he had his friends relying on him and he wanted to talk about his problems desperately, every time he tried it was like he couldn't get a single word out.

Aiden

You need to pull yourself together, Blake! How are you gonna afford to come see Velvet Claw on opening night with me?

Blake

You stayed up too last night, you know!

Aiden

Yeah, well, I haven't been late once!

Blake

I'm trying! Can you not just try and be a better friend?!

Blake regretted the words as soon as they came out of his mouth.

Aiden

How can you say that when I've been texting you in the morning to make sure you even make it to the damn studio?!

Blake packs up his belongings and walks out of the studio, his mind swirling from their argument.

< Cuts to the train station>

I can't keep going like this...

How can I tell them the truth? They're all producing the same high quality pieces and I keep falling behind...

...

...

...

?

Hello?

?

Hello...?

Blake

Huh...?

?

Hello there, I hope I didn't startle you.

I saw that you've been asleep for a while, and I didn't want you to miss your stop, that's all.

Blake

<i> Shit! I fell asleep?!

... Okay, I'm still half an hour away, thank God... <i>

Blake

You didn't startle me, don't worry...! I'm still a little bit away from my stop, so it's all good.

?

Oh, in that case, I do apologize! I should've let you sleep.

Blake

Oh, no, no! Don't apologize, I'd rather not fall asleep in public anyway.

?

Do you want me to order you some coffee to help wake you up?

Blake

You don't have to spend your money on me, don't worry...

?

No, I insist. It's the least I can do since I woke you from your nap. It's no trouble at all.

What type of coffee do you like? They do a few different varieties on this line. Flat white, espresso, cappuccino...

Blake

Do they do any hot chocolate? I'm more of a fan of sweet tasting stuff.

?

They do, but that's not going to wake you up, now, is it?

I'll order you a flat white, but lots and lots of sugar. Is that an acceptable compromise?

Blake

Thank you so much... er, what's your name, miss?

Vivian

My name is Vivian.

The girl smiles and goes to walk down the carriage, before freezing and turning back around.

Vivian

Oh, how rude of me! I forgot to ask for your name! Please forgive me...

Blake

No problem, I'm –

Vivian

You must think I'm some kind of savage barbarian...

It took a lot of courage for me to wake you, and, well... I suppose I'm a little all over the place.

Vivian gets up once more and rushes through the carriage. Blake glances out of the window and gazes at the stars, sighing heavily, the argument he had had with Aiden earlier swirls through his mind once more. Vivian returns, holding a flat white.

Vivian

There you go.

Blake goes to take the coffee, but he sees Vivian's bag sliding off of the train seat.

Blake

H-hey, watch out!

The contents of her bag slide off and onto the floor.

Vivian

Oh, dear me... what am I like...? All of my books...

Blake

Here, let me help.

The two spend a moment collecting the books off of the train floor.

Blake

... So, I guess you just had a shopping trip to be carrying around so many books?

Vivian

Hahaha, not quite! I suppose it does appear odd that I carry around a bag full of heavy books.

I'm a volunteer at the Waterway Library. It's rather close to the train station. I tend to take a few new books with me a couple of times per week.

Blake

Huh.. The Complete Chronicle of Gaming Through the 90s? Do you like to play video games?

Vivian

No, not at all.

You see, I tend to just pick up the occasional random book on a topic I don't know much about. My grandfather used to say learning new things, rather than just sticking to what you know, helps to keep your mind sharp.

Blake

I could probably do with picking up some books myself then... my mind definitely needs to be sharpened.

Vivian

...Do you really view yourself as some mindless buffoon?

You come across as quite bright, I promise.

How is your drink, by the way? I hope it is to your liking.

Blake takes another sip of his drink, the unexpected company of Vivian and the pleasant taste of his drink making him able to put his day behind him, if only for a moment.

Blake

Lots of sugar means it tastes great to me, thank you.

Vivi

Splendid!

Blake

Are you sure you don't want the money back for that coffee? Here, lemme just...

Vivi

I assure you, It's on me. Please don't concern yourself with the price of the coffee any longer.

Blake

Thank you, Vivian.

Huh... An encyclopedia on trains? Is that another random topic?

Vivian

You're not very good at asking questions, Blake. It's quite an endearing trait.

I am, in fact, a big fan of trains. I suppose you could call it my special interest.

This train in particular that we're currently on board, I happen to know a lot about.

My grandfather used to take me on train rides, or to train stations where we would take photos together, this line included.

I'm truly blessed that my current routine allows me to take train rides each day. Not only for the train ride itself, but for the people I meet too. Whenever I get the chance, I try to approach people and talk to them as long as I can.

Blake

You're definitely... enthusiastic about it.

Vivi

...Oh, apologies, did I do something wrong? Maybe my approach wasn't the best this time..

Blake

Oh, no. I was kidding around with you. I guess it didn't land.

...I'm sorry, my head is all over the place right now.

Vivian

We're doing a lot of apologising tonight, are we not?

Either way, don't fret. We all have our off days.

...Do you have something on your mind, Blake? I would have no qualms listening to what troubles you, if you're willing to share.

Blake

It's nothing serious, I wouldn't wanna bother you with it.

...What were you saying about books?

Vivian

If you're sure. I suppose everyone has their secrets, right?

...Where was I? Oh, yes. I have days like that when the library is empty, and I spend the whole nine hours just staring into a new book! It's quite wonderful.

In modern times, people are accustomed to simply using their mobile phones or computers to find all their knowledge.

To me, I feel more connected to the world around me when I read books to learn new things. Nothing beats reading a new book right next to the fireplace with a nice cup of coffee.

In my opinion, that's a feeling that a computer or phone could never replicate.

What do you think?

BRANCH

BRANCH 1 - Teasing response - Bad

I'm not a nerd

BRANCH 2 - Kind Response - Best

What you're describing sounds great.

BRANCH 3 - Dont really read books. Middle

To be honest, I'm more of a phone/video games person.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

I used to go to the library after school with my friend, Aiden, well..

We...

...

... Nevermind.

... Is there still something on your mind, friend?

I can call you friend, yes?

Or, well, I'd call you by your name but, I think I went to get coffee before you could tell me!

Blake

Haha, don't worry, I'm Blake.

Vivian

A lovely name.

You know, Blake, burdens become much lighter when you carry them with others.

I too, have had my fair share of burdens, and after speaking with my friends, or the library customers, or a passenger on the train... they often feel like a weight has been lifted. Just saying it out loud is often enough.

I understand you don't know me very well, yet, that's all the more reason to share, is it not? Perhaps I can offer you an outsider's perspective, free from judgement.

Blake

Well, I... I've been having some trouble I guess. Ever since I graduated and moved from my family home to be closer to the studio I bought with some friends...

I've been having trouble painting, which is my job now.

Vivian

Ah, you're a painter? Exquisite! You must paint something for my family some day!

Blake

Hah, yeah... but at the moment I'm trying to produce pieces that people are even gonna want to buy...

Which is hard when there's the added pressure of </i> needing <i> to create, rather than wanting to.

And I just don't know how to tell my friends, y'know? I'm not sleeping well, and for me as an artist, I find inspiration from things that happen in my life. But I'm not really seeing anything anymore; it's just the same streets, same conversations, same day over and over. And now I live alone, it's even more...bland. Well, today has been kind of different, I guess. I've met some interesting people, and I've been able to draw from that.

But, it's just hard to... express myself to my friends, I guess. Every time I try to tell them, I just end up making some excuse.

And they think I'm just slacking off, when that's not the case at all. Well, I guess a bit. But I'm just met with this damn... feeling of dread, whenever I think about creating *anything*! So now my friend and I argued about it, I told him I was just up playing games because I was bored, and I'm just digging my pit deeper.

Vivian

Oh, Blake...

It appears to me that you understand what's at stake, but you have trouble expressing your troubles, from the fear of your friends reacting negatively.

Is there a reason why you don't just tell them? Surely they would respond worse to you saying you were simply playing games?

Blake

I know, I mean, that's the problem.

But telling him, 'Hey, I barely have inspiration, the pieces I just push myself to create always get less sales, and I'm in this anxious loop of not wanting to even show up to work but needing to work harder because I'm falling behind.' is much harder to just... say.

Vivian

But why? You're human, Blake. Or at least, I hope so.

Your friends understand that, I am sure. So why not tell them the truth as to why you're struggling?

Blake

Because it's easier for me to be like, 'Yeah, I was up playing games'. Even if that excuse will make me look worse.

Vivian

I see... so the true nature of your issue is harder to confront...

Let me ask you, Blake, how do you feel right now?

Blake

... Tired.

... Hungry.

And I guess.. A little relieved.

Vivian

I knew it! I'm quite wonderful at spotting these little things.

I say 'little', but you were practically bursting at the seams, my friend, while you spilled all of your worries to me.

Blake

... I guess it's because I love painting, and this is my dream job... I just don't want it to end like this. I know I need to continue, not just for my friends, but for me. I owe myself that much after dedicating my life to this craft.

And... I've been reminded that not everyone is as fortunate to be able to pursue their dream.

I'm sorry, I'm rambling. Like I said, I'm pretty much half asleep all the time now.

Vivian

Don't worry, I like listening to the troubles of strangers. In truth, it is half of the reason I initially approached you. Oftentimes, it helps to hone my problem-solving techniques.

And well... I suppose ironically, strangers are much easier to converse with, since you will never see them again.

I met someone with a similar case to you Blake, on the train last week, don't fret! The only conundrum is that I never saw them again to ask how my advice went down...

For you, you face a rather momentous task. One that I believe from what I've seen of you, you can face.

The fact that you are self-aware enough to recognise the reason behind your confusing actions is a great start...

But you need to open up to your friends, Blake, and let them help you. You cannot bury your head in the sand for eternity, lest your issue continue to grow and grow until it becomes unmanageable.

A burden shared is a burden halved, after all.

[Blake sits in silence for a moment, his groggy mind thinking over her words. He didn't want to let his friends, parents or himself down, so he continued to lie, make excuses, instead of confronting reality.

Blake

<i.> What Vivian is saying is true! I need to make things right.

[The train is now approaching Greengrove]

Blake

Ah, shoot! That's my stop!

Thank you so much for your advice, Vivian, I think that's what I needed to hear.

Vivian

I'm glad I could assist you, Blake.

Oh! Before you leave, here, you can have this. Let me just retrieve it from my book bag...

Blake

</i> The Secret Kingdom Beneath Willow Creek and Other Tales...?

Vivian

It's one of my own books. It has some sentimental value, as it is one of the books my grandfather would read to me as a child, as some days I would have trouble falling asleep. But I'd like you to have it now.

Blake

Seriously? I can't take this from you!

Vivian

I said I liked to solve people's problems, did I not? And if I remember correctly, you told me you have been struggling to sleep. So please, you can take it. And if we ever meet again, you can tell me which of the stories you liked the most.

\$vivianBook

BRANCH - TAKE IT

Blake

Thank you Vivian. I'll take good care of it, don't worry.

Vivian gives Blake a fond smile as he watches him quickly gather his belongings to make it to the train exit. Blake gives her a wave before stepping off the train and into the crisp winter air.

BRANCH - DONT TAKE IT

Blake

You've already helped me so much, Vivian, I don't want to take a book that's so important to you.

Vivian

That is quite alright, Blake. I would have liked for you to have it, but I won't insist.

The train doors open, and Vivian gives Blake a fond smile as he watches her quickly gather his belongings to make it to the train exit. Blake gives her a wave before stepping off the train and into the crisp winter air.

[Cut to Blake's room]

Blake

</i> What a day... it's definitely been the most eventful one I've had since I moved out...

Oh, but before I sleep, time to put today's painting on sale. ...Haven't done this in some time.

[

If saffronPaintingOne = 6

Name: The Unyielding Dawn

If saffronPaintingOne = PaintingOneBad Passage Achieved

Name: The Endless Beige

Tags: #moodvariable #themeveriable #colourvariable

Okay, all done. Let's head to bed before I stay up all night checking if it's been sold...

...

...

... </i> Damn it, I can't shut my brain off. Instead of it being the usual feelings of dread, it's almost like my brain is just trying to soak up all of the advice I was given today.

'Something worth holding onto...'

'A burden shared is a burden halved...'

Blake stares at the ceiling, listening to the ambience of the city that still feels like a stranger to him. He feels his heart clench thinking about his childhood home and his parents, missing the

simplicity of that period of his life. He curses himself for taking those days for granted. The thoughts spiral into an uncontrollable whirlwind, until he forces himself to sit up.

</i> I'm getting nowhere!

[IF VIVIAN BOOK TAKEN]

...Oh yeah, the book Vivian gave me, 'The Secret Kingdom Beneath Willow Creek and Other Tales.'

<rustling sfx>

Well, it's a children's storybook.

I can't believe she let me have this... what a kind woman.

I can't say my expectations are high, but let's just read a few pages and see where it takes me.

... (Page turning) x3

'Until he fell through the floor'...

Blake

No way! He got so mad he fell through the damn floor!

... (Page turning)

And he was never seen again?!

No way, I gotta read more...

... (page turning x2)

...

Blake spent an hour reading through 'The Secret Kingdom Beneath Willow Creek and Other Tales'. But after that, he managed to drift off to sleep. Something he hadn't been able to do in a while - get a good night's rest. Perhaps the words of Saffron and Vivian had encouraged him, even if just slightly.

[IF VIVIAN BOOK NOT TAKEN]

Maybe I should text Aiden.

... Nah. I'll just wait until tomorrow. I guess something like this is better said face to face.

Let's just try and sleep again.

Blake spent an hour tossing and turning. But after that, he managed to drift off to sleep. Something he hadn't been able to do in a while - get a good night's rest. Perhaps the words of Saffron and Vivian had encouraged him, even if just slightly.

[MAIN BRANCH]

Thursday, December 8th, 2022

Next day [chill sounds]

Blake

Mm... wow, it's been so long since I slept a full eight hours, I forgot what not being half asleep feels like.

No new messages.

Blake

No message from Aiden. Damn it.

I should get ready.

... (beep)

Huh...?

?

hey, that's a nice piece you got there :))

Blake

</i> Who is this...? Nice piece? Let me check my website. <i>

Currency \$saffronPaintingOne bad = 20 dollars, Medium = 60, good = 80

Huh, looks like someone bought it!

I was supposed to be saving money for the weekend, because Aiden and I were gonna go to the mall, but now I don't know if that's happening...

Blake

Sorry i dont have u in my phone. Who r u?

?

Blake

Wait... saffron???

Saffron

GOOD! For a min i thought i would have to reintroduce myself.

Blake

Wait but how did you get my number?

Saffron

Did you not know I work for the government as an elite hacker for my side gig?

Blake

Rly?!! WTF

Saffron

Your telephone number is on your website which you can find when you search your name >_>
ya goof

Either way hope everythings going well for you.

Blake

I woke up like 10 minutes ago, give me a break Saffron :(

And thanks. im getting there yknow.

Blake

</i> No point in telling her about the argument. I may as well just go there and face it. <i>

Saffron

Anyway, my shift starts in 5. Hope u have a good day mr painter

Blake

Cya! o/

[Train station]

Barista

Hey there. What can I get you?

Blake

Hi, just one iced coffee please.

Barista

Coming right up.

Blake

Let's go look at the newspapers for today while we wait.

Saff article

Random article filler

Article maybe on rival painter...?

Barista

One Iced Coffee?

Blake

Here. Thanks man.

Barista

Enjoy.

Train

Blake

<i> An uneventful train journey for today's commute. I suppose Saffron doesn't share exact hours with me since she's already at work. What she said about perseverance really struck a chord.

I need to just... talk it out with Aiden. After what Vivian told me, I think she's right. I just need to face what I've been running from, and explain it all.

I have some ideas for my piece today, too. I was able to draw from the events from before I arrived yesterday with Saffron. I still have a lot of thoughts and feelings I know I can not only talk to Aiden about, but also put brush to canvas with.

[Outside Apartment]

Blake

Damn, I feel the same way as I did yesterday - nervous. But for a different reason. I hope Aiden is willing to listen.

[paint minigame]

So, what should the tone be...?

Sympathetic (2 pts) Trustful (1 pts) Sarcastic (0 pts) Melancholic (0 pts) Sincere (2)

And the mood...

Angry (0 pts), Whimsical (2 pts) Fearful (0 pts) Sadness (0 pts) Content (2 pts) Elated (1 pts), Nostalgic (1 pts)

What about the key colour?

Pink (2 pts), Orange (0) Blue (0)

—

Blake took a step back from the finished piece, letting out a weary sigh.

Blake

...Well, I suppose it wouldn't hurt to do. Some self-reflection, rather than relying on Aidan's judgement all the time.

If ViviPaintingOne = 6/6

Blake

This one turned out great. I think I'm starting to break through this rut! Dare I say, today's session was enjoyable.

If ViviPaintingOne = 3/4/5

Blake

Not too shabby. I think I'm starting to break through this rut. Dare I say, today's session was enjoyable.

If ViviPaintingOne = 0/1/2

Blake

I went for a more experimental interpretation of my piece's muse today. Even if this time it didn't pay off... dare I say, today's session was enjoyable.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

He glanced up and met eyes with Aiden, the two exchanging a surprisingly soft glance

<i> it seems like Aiden wants to smooth things over just as much as I do...

Blake sets his paintbrush down, and walks sheepishly up to his best friend.

Blake

Hi, Aiden.

Aiden

Blake.

Blake shifted uncomfortably, trying his best to put his thoughts into words. If this was any other day, it would be time for an excuse as to why he didn't show up early, the usual 'video game this...' or 'TV that'...

but today, he knew he had to confront what he had been running from.

Aiden

Blake, what's going on with you? You've never been like this... why is it that suddenly you don't show up for work on time?

Blake

...

I should've told you sooner, I realise that now.

In truth... It's been hard for me to paint lately. I think, moving from home, having this routine where— until recently— it's been difficult to draw inspiration from. It's only a few people I've happened to meet on my commute that have made it possible for me to gain inspiration again and want to paint.

But, I didn't wanna let you and the others down. In my mind, I felt like it would be better for you to be mad at me for being lazy rather than let you down with the real reason.

Aiden

Blake...

You should have told me... I've known you for years, do you really think I'd be mad at you for struggling? The studio is covered, but even if it wasn't, I would *never* ostracise you!

Blake

It was just easier to bury my head in the sand, painting has been one of my life's only constants...

Aiden

Heh, do you even remember how we first met in high school?

We were the only two boys in the class who took art class seriously.

Those break times indoors just painting together... wow, it's nostalgic to even think about now.

Blake

I know, and I thought that if I lost my ability... then I'd lose you too...

Aiden, I'm sorry...

Aiden glances over Blake with a saddened expression, with a hint of frustration that Blake had just not told him the truth. But his expression quickly softens, knowing how hard it can be to reach out, when you think by facing the problem head on, you'll lose what matters most.

Aiden

Blake... you know I'd never turn your back on you — no matter how much your brain tries to convince you otherwise.

Don't forget it. Whatever happens, we're in it together, all of us here. We came to the idea of renting the studio knowing full well the risks.

Blake feels a mixture of emotions bubbling to the surface — the same ones he had felt when he spilled everything to Vivian the night prior. Knowing his friends really did care made him feel a massive relief.

The two stand in silence, out of words, but both of them simply being here at this moment was enough.

Blake

...

Aiden

...

(X2)

Aiden

Hehehe! This isn't like us at all, is it? Being all serious...

Blake

Hahaha, I guess not...

Blake

Oh, wait!

Blake quickly rustles through his bag before pulling out Aiden's usual iced latte.

Aiden

Wow, you were reallyyyy trying to butter me up for your confession.

I mean, did you think I was gonna get someone to bring me your head or what?

Blake

Shut up...

Hey, you wanna come over tonight and play virtual wars 2?

Aiden

Sounds good, I'm in.

Let's head out.

[cut to train]

The train journey tonight was uneventful, the two friends spending it chattering and laughing, catching up on a surprising amount, considering they had only been in their argument for a single day.

[cut to Blake's house, video game sfx]

Aiden

I think I'm finally getting the hang of the game...

Blake

Yeah you're way better.

Aiden

Oh yeah, Blake, didn't you say some people you'd met on your commute who helped you get your head together?

Blake

Yeah, the girl I mentioned yesterday, her name was...

Okay, don't freak out.

Aiden

I won't! Why the hell would I-

Blake

It was Saffron Sinclair.

Aiden

Saffron Sinclair...? Oh, shoot! You met *the* Saffron Sinclair?!

Blake

Yeah, Saffron told me that I shouldn't give up, and I should try my best to persevere.

Aiden

Give up? You were seriously considering quitting?! I had no idea that's how you felt...

Promise me, if you ever feel like that again...

You *gotta* tell me.

Blake

I promise...

I met another girl called Vivian, she really helped me open up to you. She told me I need to face what I'm running from.

Aiden

Hm... hey, Blake, when we go to the mall this weekend, maybe you should get a [gift] using the [cash] you've earned this week, for one of the people who you've talked to.

Blake

Really? But how will I know what to get them?

Aiden

Maybe, if you meet them again, you can ask them, or they might tell you? They might just bring up something they've been after, and you can snag it for them.

I mean, if I met *the* saffron Sinclair, I'd be saving up to gift her a diamond ring.

Blake

That's not gonna happen.

Aiden

Anyway, i gotta get going. I'll see you tomorrow, Blake.

[cut to night]

Okay, I need to throw today's painting on the website.

if has Vivian book

Blake

I should probably head to bed too.

I'm glad I was able to smooth everything over with Aiden, and now I've let everything out, I feel *way* better

'Her stepsister did WHAT?!

...

...

...

[if not]

Blake

I should probably head to bed too.

I'm glad I was able to smooth everything over with Aiden, and now I've let everything out, I feel *way* better.

[Cut to daytime]

Date

Blake

Another night of good rest... man, it's been too long.

Okay, let's get going.

....

Okay, all ready, just need my earphones. Maybe I can bring my laptop too and do some maintenance on the website.

Cut to the coffee shop

[Barista one iced latte, read newspaper]

Cut to train

The train journey felt much more productive this time around. He racked his head for ideas for what to paint next, or how he could change up his approach — the wonders of a full night's rest. He decided to take his old laptop out of his bag and do some changes to the layout of the website. As he did so, he heard a ping.

Blake

Oh! My painting from yesterday sold.

Great, I'll have some money to spend at the mall with the way things are going.

....

Blake

<i> I have this really strange feeling I'm being watched...from behind. The train's pretty crowded like usual and I can feel someone standing right behind my seat. Maybe they want my seat...?

Blake quickly spins around and his eyes widen at the sight.

Blake

<i> ... Shit.

Is it really him?!

Blake turns back around and types on his laptop nonchalantly, despite seeing the sight of his childhood rival - []. The train arrives at the next stop and the man set across from him exits through the sliding doors, leaving [] to plop in front of him. He took a deep breath, and braced himself.

?

Blake Saunders... it's really you.

I'd be able to recognise that primitive art style anywhere.

Blake let out an inward sigh, thankful for Saffron, Aiden and Vivian's help. He knew Ezra would be able to get to him without their support.

Blake

Hah, I'll take that as a compliment if you can still recognise my art style, after what, 8 years? Must mean my work is very memorable, or you're a bigger fan than you let on, Ezra.

Ezra

Don't flatter yourself, Blake.

A few measly sales, and it all goes to your head.

Blake

Heh, I'm only saying from experience. There was a time you actually treated my art and I with respect.

Ezra

That was long ago.

What brings you to the city, then? I haven't heard anything about you moving here.

Blake

After I graduated, my friends and I set up a studio here. It's only been a few weeks, so I'm not surprised you haven't heard anything, but we're getting there.

Ezra

Oh, and why is that? Too scared to go solo?

Don't tell me you've been riding off the coattails of your friends.

Blake

Not at all, we all have to pull our weight. But even if one of us struggles, we all have each other's back.

Ezra

Sounds like you are struggling, then.

That art style of yours is so thoughtless. I'm surprised you've managed a single sale.

Blake

That 'artstyle' you speak of managed to win at the 2017 Greengrove Art Competition. You know, the biggest art competition in the entire county..?

Ezra

Yeah, a fluke. The judges must have been blind.

I do wonder, though.

How on earth did you even beat me?

I did *everything* right, I spent hours and hours everyday on that piece, my parents didn't even let me play with my friends until I'd made substantial progress each day in the leadup to the event. It was mine to win! And still...

It was *you* who bested me. The first loss I ever had.

Blake

It wasn't even a loss, dude. You got second place - to me.

Ezra

So you admit it? You bested me?

BRANCH - I was just better

Blake

On the day, I was just better. It's pretty obvious you're still hung up on it. It doesn't erase everything you've achieved but... you can't take that win from me.

Ezra

...Pffft, I really didn't miss that smug grin of yours, you're insufferable. You'll never admit it, but you're just as competitive as I am.

And, Of course I am upset. That was supposed to be *my* moment. And *you* of all people had to ruin it.

Blake

You're acting like you didn't kick my ass most of the time. I was jealous of you, you won pretty much everything.

Ezra

And on the biggest stage you fluked your way to a win.

... At least you admitted it this time. You're always dancing around it with this modest pretense. It drives me crazy.

BRANCH 2 - You were overworked

Blake

I mean, you said it yourself. Your parents worked you to the bone.

If you were falling asleep at your easel, then they were pushing you too hard.

Ezra

I don't need your damn pity...

...

...But I suppose you're right. If it wasn't for that, I would have won for sure.

Blake

I was always second best, you faltered and I capitalized. That's all.

BRANCH 3 - Art is subjective

Blake

Art is subjective, just because I won on the day doesn't mean your piece was any worse than mine — It's all about perspective.

Ezra

I'm well aware, Blake...

That's the only possible reason your haphazard art style ever won over mine.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

Ezra

I don't get it, how is it you can just carelessly throw together a piece like that? The one for the Greengrove competition.

Blake

It's not careless, It's just that I have a different approach to art from you.

For me, the best art is what comes from the heart, from a person's lived experience...

Whenever I paint, it's almost as if I channel that energy, the emotions in that moment, onto the canvas.

Ezra

Your piece was lots of people wading through the ocean, lost, as a thunderstorm was ripping through the sky... but they were laughing. You're telling me you've been lost at sea in a storm but laughing..?

I find that hard to believe.

Blake

Hah.. you remember it better than I do. You must think about me a lot, then, it seems.

Ezra

Not at all, you moron. You're sitting in front of me, of course I'm going to think about you at this moment.

Blake

It's just too easy to get under your skin..!

Ezra

If you know me so well, then tell me, how do you think you managed to win?

BRANCH

Branch 1 - technical mastery

Blake

I'm a better painter than you, I have better technical mastery of the craft.

Ezra

Oh, come on. Even *you* don't believe that.

I know the truth - you tack on a silly sentimental story for attention. You knew that's the only way you could beat me.

Branch 2 - Storytelling

Blake

I've always been able to add a story to my pieces, to make them feel more memorable.

Ezra

I respect that you'd reveal your greatest strength to me. But it's more like you tack on a silly sentimental story for attention. You knew that's the only way you could beat me.

Branch 3 - Luck

Blake

Hah, what can I say? I'm just a lucky guy.

Ezra

You're just trying to keep your secrets. I almost respect that, but don't bother, I know - you tack on a silly sentimental story for attention. You knew that's the only way you could beat me.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

Ezra

But I've always wondered how you do it.

Blake

I take a lived experience and then turn it into something bigger, more grand, I guess you could say.

I remember, I was on holiday with my parents. We got stuck in the pouring rain on the way back to our hotel, and we met another family who were in the same position. We were all huddled under a coffee shop awning.

None of us had umbrellas, or coats, so we all sprinted down the road together as fast as we could, laughing. It turned out they were staying at the same place as us, and we all ended up sitting in the hotel bar together after.

It doesn't sound like much, but those are the types of moments that tend to stick, y'know? That had only happened two months before the competition, so it's where my mind went straight to.

Ezra

So you're just able to make art from that? Some small moment, and people love it?

Blake

Yeah, pretty much. I like to put a more dramatic twist on it, you could say. In the moment, it's a joyful experience, but then in the goggles of nostalgia, you always remember it as way more interesting and intense than it actually was. It's like a blend of reality and emotion.

Ezra

...

What a bunch of nonsense...

Your art style is so much more simple than mine. It could never be better.

In terms of technical skill, I am a superior painter to you.

Impressionism, realism, surrealism, abstract... I have won awards for my pieces in all categories.

There is no reason as to why you should have won over me. Anyone with half a brain can see the truth, I'm superior in every way...

Blake

You underestimate how much a story can sway people.

And that's what you've never been able to do.

And it's why I piss you off so much.

Ezra, it's time *you* admitted something.

No matter how much you try to capture emotion in your work, it always falls flat.

Ezra

Tch...

Yet, the judges were swayed by the silly little sentimental story you tacked on.

Blake

What you're missing is that there's more to art than just technical mastery. For someone who claims to be superior to everyone in our craft, you're missing this fundamental, Ezra. You always have.

If a piece's narrative resonates with someone, it grabs their attention and sticks in their mind. People like it when pieces tell a story, when it sways them emotionally.

You know this deep down.

Ezra

But how could I have painted a story when I had no stories to..

....

Whatever.

Blake

...What are you doing now, then? You never told me.

Ezra

I teach art classes at Melworth college, I've been there for a few months now. Why do you care? Did you expect me to be a janitor or something?

Blake

That's a pretty interesting job. I didn't think you had the temperament to be a teacher though, to be honest...

And I care because like it or not, we spent most of our childhood competing against one another. You're someone I know pretty well, all things considered.

Do you still paint?

Ezra

I take commissions.

Blake

Well, I guess that makes us...

BRANCH [SCRAPPED]

1 - Friends - middle

Blake

Friends. I mean, it's not like we're directly competing anymore, right? Can we go back to how it was before I got in your head with that damned win?

Ezra

...

You're insufferable. (Smile)

2 - Rivals - Top points

Blake

Rivals. I guess some things never change, right?
As much as I want us to go back to how it was before I got in your head with that damned win.

Ezra

...

You're insufferable. (smile)

3 - Nothing to each other - 0

Blake

Nothing to each other now. As much as I want us to go back to how it was before I got in your head with that damned win.

Ezra

...

Is that truly how you feel...?

Blake

Hah, don't look so down. You're the one who's put this wedge between us.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

Announcer

The train is now approaching () thank you for travelling with us.

Blake

Oh, shoot. That's my stop.

Well, I'll see you around, Ezra. I bet you'll go out of your way to harass me now you know we take the same train together...

Ezra

Whatever.

Cya around.

Studio

Blake

Dude. You'll never guess who I saw on the train today.

Aiden

Who?!

Blake

Ezra.

Aiden

No way! How is he?

Blake

Just as disagreeable as he was, when we stopped seeing him.

Aiden

He knows how to hold a grudge, I'll give him that.

Blake

I wanna make things right between us. But I just don't know if it's possible.

Aiden

If you ask me, he's a lost cause.

Blake

Anyway, I'm gonna go and try and make a piece. I'll cya later.

Blake stands at his canvas, thinking about his conversation with Ezra - an old friend that was lost to bitterness and envy. Blake picks up his paintbrush, a rush of old feelings flowing through him that he thought would never be unearthed again, and were lost to time.

Blake

If nothing else, Ezra will make for a great muse.

Alright, what should the key colour be for this piece?

```
[[CyanPaintingVivi1_2][$paintingEzraOne += 2]]  
[[Purple|PaintingEzra1_2][$paintingEzraOne += 0]]  
[[Orange|PaintingEzra1_2][$paintingEzraOne += 0]]  
  
<<run slowPaintStroke.play()>>  
So, what should the tone be...?
```

```
[[Trustful|PaintingVivi1_3][$paintingViviOne += 0]]  
[[Jealousy|PaintingVivi1_3][$paintingViviOne += 2]]  
[[Sarcastic|PaintingVivi1_3][$paintingViviOne += 1]]  
[[Happiness|PaintingVivi1_3][$paintingViviOne += 0]]  
[[Hope|PaintingVivi1_3][$paintingViviOne += 1]]
```

```

```

And the mood should be...

```
[[Angry|EzraPaintingOneConclusion][$paintingViviOne += 1]]  
[[Frustration|EzraPaintingOneConclusion][$paintingViviOne += 1]]  
[[Whimsical|EzraPaintingOneConclusion][$paintingViviOne += 0]]  
[[Sadness|EzraPaintingOneConclusion][$paintingViviOne += 0]]  
[[Joy |EzraPaintingOneConclusion][$paintingViviOne += 0]]  
[[Content|EzraPaintingOneConclusion][$paintingViviOne += 0]]  
[[Nostalgia|EzraPaintingOneConclusion][$paintingViviOne += 2]]
```

```
<<run fastPaintStroke.play()>>
```

```

```

Blake

Okay, all done. Hey, Aiden?

Aiden

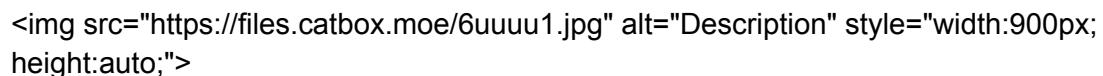
You want me to give you a review?

Blake

If you would.

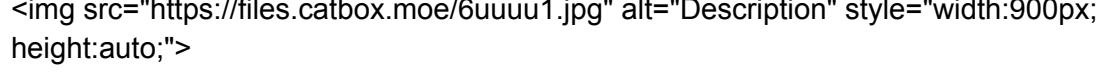
```
<<if $paintingEzraOne == 6>>  
  <<goto "PaintingEzra1Perfect">>  
<<elseif $paintingEzraOne >= 3>>  
  <<goto "PaintingEzra1Middle">>  
<<else>>  
  <<goto "PaintingEzra1Bad">>  
<</if>>
```

PERFECT



Aiden
Wow Blake, this one is amazing!

[[Next |Painting1Perfect2]]

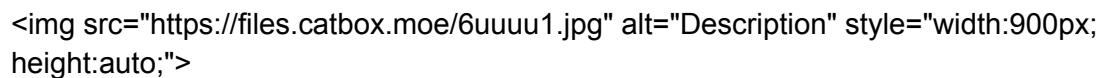


Aiden
If you're asking for my honest opinion, I'd say...

\$paintingSaffronOne/6.

[[Next |Painting1Perfect3]]

MIDDLE



Blake

Thanks, man. Looking back, there's a few things I'd change, but I'll make sure to stick it on the shop tonight.

[[Next |Studio21]]

Aiden

Hm, I would say you've definitely made better pieces.

[[Next |Painting1Bad2]]

Blake

Thanks for your help.

Aiden

So, you off now?

Blake

Yeah. Gonna try and stick to this sleep schedule.

Aiden

Hopefully you don't bump into that bastard again.

Blake

I dunno. I think with the right words I could get to him.

You miss him too, right?

Aiden

Well, kinda... but he treated you like he was your enemy! You never deserved the way he flipped on you like that.

Blake

Regardless, let's see how it goes. Cya around.

Cut to train

The train that night was uneventful, Blake spent the journey gazing out of the window, and into the black void of the night, thinking of everything that had happened lately. Him, Aiden, Saffron, Vivian, Ezra...

Cut to apartment

Blake

Okay, let's put this painting up onto the website.

All done. And now... we sleep.

Thursday, December 8th, 2022

Blake

Sweet. My painting sold overnight!

Let's count this all up...

Okay, I have £\$blakeMoney saved up now.

Headphones on... and let's go.

Train Station

Blake

The queue is so big today. I'll have a look at the Daily Crescent while I wait for Aiden's iced coffee. Wonder what Saff's writing about today.

The Public's Opinion | Pop Culture | Saffron Sinclair
Yesterday, I met with the elusive director of Velvet Claw, Gideon 'Golden' Ashcroft. Dressed in his signature black turtleneck and his designer sunglasses indoors, I asked him the question everyone wants to know, 'What exactly is Velvet Claw? Sure, the actor playing the protagonist is hot. But what else? What does Velvet Claw stand for?' He told me, and I quote, "it's whatever you want it to be." For more profound quotes coming from the man who has said he invented the genre of super-hero movies, join me, Saffron Sinclair, on page 16!

?

Oh, well! Look who it is...

Saffron

Painter boy.

Blake

Look who it is...

Totally-not-Saffron-Si-

Saffron

Shhhhh...!

You better not mess with me today, Blake.

Blake

Someone's grumpy.

Saffron

And of course you don't know why! I swear, you're about as observant as a lettuce.

Blake

Of course I do! It's..

BRANCH

BRANCH 1 - You had to write about Velvet Claw

Blake

You had to write about Velvet Claw?

Saffron

EXACTLY....

You got fired from your job

BRANCH 2 - You missed your train

Blake

You missed your train?

Saffron

...Do you think you're talking to a projection of me?

Blake

I meant the previous train. Yeesh.

Saffron

No, it's because I had to write for Velvet Claw...

Blake

I mean, I don't get it though. Shouldn't it be a good thing that you're getting to write about it?

Saffron

Well, yes..

But, no...

Ugh...

Velvet Claw comes out next week, and it is starring popular actors as it's become mainstream, because of course it has! I can't have anything to myself...

But because of that, it's pop culture. So I have to sit there, and ask the director the most BASE questions and act like I don't have a damn clue. I probably know more about the lore than the director himself!

Blake

Yeah... you definitely do.

Saffron

... But, apart from that - it just reminds me again of what could've been.

Blake

With your career?

Saffron

Exactly.

Blake

But, I don't get it. With the cult following you have, surely you could start writing comics? I bet most of them would follow your work, no questions asked.

Besides, you're known for how your comic book style translated into your journalist articles.

Saffron

Agh, damn it, Blake...

I hate when people say stuff like that!

It's not your fault, but, when you're desperate to make your dream happen...

But you know you have to abandon it, and you think you've accepted it...

And then someone says something that sparks that fire again, it's like a wound reopening.

Blake

Again? Do you have this conversation often?

Saffron

Well, for starters, this is the second time *we're* having it. Apart from us, though, I've discussed it with my family.

Blake

And what did they say? They're the reason you stay at the Daily Crescent, right?

Saffron

... Well, after we talked a few days ago, I brought it up with them.

You had me feeling reminiscent of my childhood dreams, I suppose... and with the Velvet Claw film releasing soon, it's like I can't escape it.

Blake

And what did they say?

They told me to go for it. But I just can't!

Blake

But why, Saff? You have everything at your disposal to succeed.

Saffron

What if I fail to get the following needed to support them... it would be like a stab wound to the heart.

You see, I was raised by my father alone, with my two younger brothers. He sacrificed a lot for us, and still does. I still live at home to support my family.

I think my dad feels nostalgic about it too, which is why I'm unsure if I can take his advice to heart.

Blake

Saffron

What do you mean...?

Saffron

My dad has always been a big comic book fan. He's the one who introduced me to comics. He read the Twilight Masquerade series to me when I was very young.

Then, when I was older, we created our own silly comic book series together, it was about a superhero family - not very creative, but it directly mirrored my own family.

My younger brothers got involved, even though they were so young.

We didn't have that much money, so we'd spend all weekend just drawing panels on the back of old notebook paper.

It was there I discovered my true dream to be a famous comic book writer.

Blake

So you think your dad is only saying to go for it because it's a sentimental topic?

Saffron

Yeah... but it just pains me. To have my dad's blessing and my brother's, but I'm just too much of a coward to follow through and take that jump.

Blake

It doesn't make you a coward. Not at all.

Blake

BRANCH - I'm sorry

Blake

I'm sorry you're in such a difficult spot, Saff. I hope you choose the right path for yourself.

Saffron

Thanks... I'll just have to think about what that is, exactly.

BRANCH - It's not too late

Blake

It's never too late, Saff. You can change your path. You have your families' blessing, and I have complete faith in you.

I've read enough of your work to know you have a true talent for it.

Saffron

...

Thank you...

BRANCH - Sometimes dreams have to be sacrificed.

Blake

No matter what you choose, you did the right thing by prioritising your family first over everything else. Don't be hard on yourself - I know better than most how unforgiving creative work can be.

Saffron

... Blake...

Thank you.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

Saffron

I just didn't want to let them down.

I know in my heart that I need to pursue this, at one point or another. It's one of the dreams I just can't let go of, yknow?

Blake

I get what you mean, my parents were unsure of me pursuing painting as my career, even though I spent practically every weekend painting something, entering competitions...

And in truth, it's a bumpy ride. But, what you said to me when we first met, it clicked with me. And I hope at least in some way I can do the same for you, even if it's small.

Saffron

Blake...

Blake

Hey, Saff.

What was the name of the comic book series you said you and your dad used to read together?

Saffron

Hah, do you really not remember already?

Hahaha! You really are something.

Blake

H-hey! Of course I do.

Saffron

Oh, you do? Pray tell me the name of this comic.

Blake

</i> Jeez.. she said it earlier. What was it?

Twilight Masquerade

Shooting Star

Clustered Comets

BRANCH - Shooting Star/Clustered Comets

Saffron

Where'd you get that from? Hahaha!

I'll give you another guess.

BRANCH -Twilight Masquerade

Saffron

So you do remember, then, why were you being so coy? Are you trying to act all cool and nonchalant to me?

Blake

Pffft.

... So, anyway, if you were gonna read it again, where would you go from?

Saffron

Hm, well... I haven't read it for some time. In fact, I believe the series got a remaster a few years ago. So probably from there.

Twilight Masquerade: Remaster, Volume 1, Issue 1.

Blake

Interesting.

Saffron

What are you scheming, Mr. Painter?

Blake

Nothing, nothing.

Announcer

(The train is now approaching __)

Saffron

That's my stop.

I'll see you around.

... and, thanks for the advice. It meant a lot. I've been struggling with it for some time, just not wanting to let my family down. But I think I know now how to move forward.

Blake

Not at all. You did the same for me.

Saffron

Hah.

Cya, Mr. Painter.

Blake

It's Saunders. Blake Saunders.

Saffron

....

Cya, Master Saunders.

Blake

Are you allergic to calling me by my full n—

And there she goes.

Aiden

Hey, how was your journey?

Blake

It was fine. Here's your iced coffee.

You just wanna know if I saw Saffron again, don't you.

Aiden

Well, maybe.

Blake

I did, and she seems to be struggling with the idea of wanting to change to be a comic book writer, but she's worried about losing her job security as a journalist at the Daily Crescent...

Aiden

I'm sure she'll do amazing wherever she goes! I'll be first in line to buy whatever she releases.

Blake

I know.

I'm just hoping she can figure it out on her own. I tried to give her advice, but ultimately, it's her decision.

Aiden

That even people as seemingly perfect as her struggle...

Blake

Whatever, dude.

Blake looks at his canvas, thinking about what Saffron has told him. The idea of being stuck between doing what you believe you should, when your aspirations are there, just in reach. But the jump could lead to an unrecoverable fall.

Okay, what should the key colour be for this piece?

[[Blue|SaffronPaintingOne2][\$paintingSaffronOne += 0]]

[[Yellow|SaffronPaintingOne2][\$paintingSaffronOne += 2]]

[[Green|SaffronPaintingOne2][\$paintingSaffronOne += 0]]

Alright, what should the tone be for this piece?

[[Humorous|SaffronPaintingOne3][\$paintingSaffronTwo += 1]]
[[Teasing|SaffronPaintingOne3][\$paintingSaffronTwo += 0]]
[[Patience|SaffronPaintingOne3][\$paintingSaffronTwo += 2]]
[[Indignant|SaffronPaintingOne3][\$paintingSaffronTwo += 0]]
[[Reassurance|SaffronPaintingOne3][\$paintingSaffronTwo += 2]]

<<run slowPaintStroke.play()>>

And the mood should be...

[[Bittersweet|SaffronPaintingTwoConclusion][\$paintingSaffronTwo += 0]]
[[Renewal|SaffronPaintingTwoConclusion][\$paintingSaffronTwo += 2]]
[[Comfort|SaffronPaintingTwoConclusion][\$paintingSaffronTwo += 2]]
[[Nostalgic|SaffronPaintingTwoConclusion][\$paintingSaffronTwo += 1]]
[[Stillness|SaffronPaintingTwoConclusion][\$paintingSaffronTwo += 0]]

<<run mediumPaintStroke.play()>>

[NEWSPAPER ABOUT NEW TRINKET SHOP FOR TRAIN MODELS]

– Vivi 2nd Encounter–

Blake suddenly sees a shadow in the corner of his eye and turns. A familiar face smiles down at him, before flopping into the seat across.

Vivian

Ah, Blake, there you are. I was just chatting to a lovely old woman I see on Tuesday nights on this train, but I was secretly hoping I would catch you again.

Blake

Vivian!

It's great to see you again.

Vivian

Salutations, my friend.

Before we go on, I have to ask - you *did* talk everything through with your friend, yes?

Blake

I did. Thank you for giving me your advice. It went well, Vivi.

I don't think I would have had the courage to tell him the truth, and well, it would have gotten so much worse.

Vivian

I am so glad I could be of assistance.

Hm...

Vivi... how lovely.

...

...

...

... I cannot return the gesture as your name does not appear to have a shortening, how unfortunate.

But do not take it as a sign I do not view you as a dear companion!

Blake

Haha, don't worry. I know.

... Just don't start calling me Mr. Painter, and we're all good.

Vivian

Hahaha! Because of your occupation...?

Who calls you that? Is it perhaps a niece or nephew, or younger family member?

Blake

Someone much worse.

BRANCH (not visible to the player)

If Vivi book got

Blake

Anyway, I just wanted to thank you as well for giving me your book. You didn't have to do it, but it's nice and safe in my apartment, I promise.

Vivi

How wonderful!

Tell me, how are you finding it?

Blake

BRANCH - It's Amazing

I've been really enjoying it. I mean, this guy who got so mad he fell through the floor and was never seen again?

Vivian

Oh, I know! That was the part that got me hooked as well. I don't remember the name of it, however.

Blake

Neither do I, but it was *so* good. I have lots more stories to get through.

BRANCH - It was hoooorable.

Blake

It's *hooooorable.*

Vivian

Dear me, I'm so very sorry. I thought you would have found some solace in it.

Blake

Oh no! I was just kidding around with you. It has been a great help to me.

Vivian

Ooh! I think I understand now.

Or maybe I don't. You have an odd sense of humour, Blake.

But I suppose I like that about you.

BRANCH - I disliked it

Blake

To be honest, I'm not the biggest reader. But I really appreciate the gesture. It did definitely give me some solace when I was overthinking on the night of approaching my friend, though.

I hope you're not offended...? And you can have it back if you want.

Vivian

Oh, no. Not at all, please keep it. Perhaps another time in your life it will be handy once more.

And I'm not offended in the slightest! You have to try new things and live through new experiences so you can learn more about yourself, even if it ends up not being your cup of tea. I would rather someone told me the truth. When people mask their words with lies or sarcasm, everything becomes so awfully confusing.

Blake

Thank you, Vivi. I'll keep it safe regardless.

IF VIVI BOOK NOT GOT /M- GO TO MAIN BRANCH

Vivi

Oh, speaking of which, Blake. I bought you a little something.

Vivi rustles around in her bag, before pulling out a small box. She passes it over to him, a small smile on her face as she anticipates Blake's reaction.

(IMAGE OF BRACELET)

Blake opens the box and sees a silver bracelet. He glances up at Vivi with wide eyes.

Blake

Vivi... this is beautiful.

But why...? I don't mean to be blunt, but this looks like.. it's pretty expensive. Do you mean.. t-to keep?!

Vivi

Of course to keep! Why else would I give it to you?

Blake

But, I'm not sure I can take something like this from you...

Vivi

Well, why not? It was merely pocket change, if that makes you feel any better.

Blake

<i> Pocket change? But this looks like silver. </i>

Why though, Vivi? I haven't really done anything to deserve this.

Vivi

I suppose because, when last we met, you had a face of thunder. I was quite worried I had made a mistake by waking you up.

But, seeing your kindness towards me shine through despite your terrible situation...

...Well, my intent was to cheer you up, as I was unsure the book would suffice.

And I was not sure if I made a good impression on you. I was worried you found me rather rude.

Blake

Rude? Where did you get that from? You're not rude at all.

Vivi

Do you really think so?

Blake

Of course! I'm confused why you would even think that.

Vivi

I suppose it is because I've been told by my family that I can come off as 'aloof', or 'arrogant'... despite my best efforts to not appear so.

Blake

What? There's nothing aloof or arrogant about you.

Vivi, you're confusing me - where is all of this coming from?

Vivi lets out a long sigh, her eyes glued to the floor of the train. She slowly glances back up at Blake, a weary smile on her face.

Vivi

I don't wish to bore you with my life, Blake...

I have quite a comfortable one, after all. Even compared to my family.

Blake

You helped me with mine, you even gave me this bracelet. It's the least I could do.

There must be *something* bothering you. Come oooon.

Vivi

Well, you may have guessed, but my family is quite prestigious. My father is the CEO of HARPER.

Blake

Wait, **the** clothing brand?!

Vivi

Yes. Unfortunately.

That isn't to say I am not grateful, but I have always had a hard time clicking with my family, I suppose.

I'm not exactly the type of person who enjoys mingling at parties or dinners and the like. I would much rather be at home, reading one of my books.

Blake

So you get dragged along to these... these rich people events? And you hate them.

Well, I've never been to one myself so I can't give you much advice. But I can't imagine I'd enjoy them either.

Vivi

No problem, Blake, I could have guessed that without you telling me.

Blake

Hahah...

...yeah.

Vivi

I mean, I try my best, but these people, wearing their luxury suits, their hair slicked back with grease ... those inhumanly white smiles - it's all too much. I tend to just go and hide somewhere in the corner.

Do these people not realise natural human teeth are supposed to have a naturally yellowish tint, due to the layer underneath the white enamel?

...I suppose I've never really understood the point of these events. Everyone just feels so plastic, so fake.

My father and brothers turn into completely different people, it's almost uncanny to witness.

It is like everyone is in competition to be the most attention grabbing, charismatic man in the room. I've never been good at hiding my true feelings, so I often get into trouble with my family for acting too... aloof to these people. But in reality, their overbearing personalities make me quite nervous.

Blake

Hm...

You can't just... force a smile then bow... curtsey... embrace... shake hands... salute...

...

You can't just greet them, engage in some boring small talk and move on?

Vivi

Exactly, Blake! You read my mind.

Blake

Do your family not understand, or, have you tried to talk to them?

Vivi

I haven't really brought it up, to be honest. It feels a little small in the grand scheme of things.

My brother is older than me, hence him being the heir to the company. So the attention is on him most of the time at these events.

But, in truth, it does make me rather sad when my father scolds me. I have never been good with people, save my grandfather.

He is the one who introduced me to trains, he is the one who would read to me at night, he taught me many things. He is the only person I think who ever truly understood me.

Blake

...What is it about your grandfather that drew you to him?

Vivi

He was patient, understanding... he knew I was not good with people, but he would encourage me to speak to people in my own time. He would teach me to approach people, even if it was just to pay for my train ticket. He encouraged me to speak more and more whenever it was just us.

In truth, thanks to him, I find it easier to speak to strangers. Because strangers are people you will most likely never meet again, there is no need to feel under pressure when speaking to them. Like you were when we first met, you opened up to me more than even your closest friend. There's no falsity.

In front of people I may meet again, like my father's business partners, I just... crumble.

But I think I was worried you viewed me in the same way. I wanted to get you this present that I hoped would impress you, because I really would like it if we remained friends.

Blake

Vivi...

Vivi

Did I do something wrong? Please be honest.

BRANCH - It's really kind of you.

Blake

You didn't do anything wrong, Vivi. Please don't think badly of yourself.

Blake and Vivi share a warm smile, before Blake places it onto his right wrist. The engravings of flowers shimmering in the light.

Vivi

Thank you Blake. Not many people have ever complimented me in such a way. It means a lot to me.

I'll make sure to get you something even better next time!

Blake

You... really don't have to do that, Vivi. This is more than enough.

BRANCH - The best gifts have meaning.

Blake

I appreciate the thought, and it is really beautiful. But I would say, the best gifts are the ones that aren't about price, but are about meaning.

You know I'd be your friend regardless, right? This bracelet is beautiful, but you don't need to woo me with gifts. I like talking to you because you're kind and sweet and thoughtful.

People who are only in your life to take and not give are true friends.

Vivi

Thank you Blake. Not many people have ever complimented me in such a way. It means a lot to me.

Hm, that trick worked when I was trying to befriend the magpies outside of my family home...

But I suppose it is different with people! How different we all are.

BRANCH - You're trying too hard

Blake

To be honest, I think you're trying too hard. If the only way you can keep someone around is by lavishing them in gifts, you'll end up looking desperate to them.

Most people will find that off-putting, because people want what they can't have. If you offer everything to someone, they'll take it for granted.

Vivi

/

Blake

You got it.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

Vivi

But, yes... this is my main problem. I really cannot handle speaking to these people - but I have to, or my family thinks I'm being rude to our guests, and bringing shame to the company.

Blake

Hm... well, you don't have an issue talking to me, right?

So, let's roleplay. I'll be one of these important people. And you can practice talking to me.

Vivi

Hahaha! A roleplay... alright.

Blake
Okay...

Ah, Vivian. It's a pleasure to see you. How is your father's business?

Vivi
...

Yes.

Blake

... Okay, great. And how are you?

Vivi
U-Um. Quite... alright.

Blake
Vivi. You know it's just me, right...?

Vivi
I know, but you are so good at impressions that I felt myself in the room with one of them!

Blake
Maybe we should try a different approach...

Vivi
Perhaps just, speak as yourself. I am most at ease when speaking with you and other strangers.

Blake
Myself? Okay, what would I say?

BRANCH - Hey, Vivi. How is your dad's business doing?

Vivi
It is doing quite alright, thank you, Blake. But why are you asking?

Oh - the roleplay!

Blake
Exactly. You nailed it that time.

BRANCH - Greetings, Vivian! Please do disclose the current state of your father's business.

Vivi
Y-yes, it's... good.

You do not usually speak like that, Blake.

Blake
I guess you're right...

I thought maybe if I sounded similar, maybe you'd trick your mind into thinking they sound like me.

Vivi
A valiant effort, but I am still quite terrified.

BRANCH - You! Tell me EVERYTHING you know about the business!

Vivi
Gah!

Blake
I'm sorry! I thought if I surprise you, you'd be too focused on being shocked to be nervous.

Vivi
Despite the near heart attack, it *almost* worked. I think I prefer that straight forwardness over their usual prattle.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

Vivi
Either way, I think I will feel a little more at ease when talking to them now. I will just think back to this conversation and pretend they are you!

Or I'll pretend they're naked. I heard that works wonders too.

Blake
I'm glad I was able to help, but maybe don't do both tactics at once, please...

Vivi
Oh, never! I would never defile you in such a manner, my dear friend.

Blake
R-right.

Vivi
Where are you headed, by the way?

Blake
Oh, I was at the library. It is my day off from volunteering there, but I still like to go each day and read. I love reading books on trains in particular.

Vivi
Oh yeah, I remember you talking about that when we first met too. Your grandfather got you into trains, right?

Vivi
Yes, but my family tends to find my enjoyment of trains... irritating. I talk about them too much, apparently. I try to keep it to myself nowadays.

Blake
Your family don't seem to get you very much, Vivi. You should be able to express your love for something without needing to feel ashamed.

Vivi
I suppose they don't.

My family are very busy people - I am the only one fortunate enough to not be an heir or the current owner of the brand. My father and brother run themselves ragged, in all honesty.

It's quite alright - I prefer the company of people I meet at the library, or people like you, Blake, that I meet on my commute.

I wish I could find something, though. Something that could remind me of trains even when I am apart from them. Maybe a little {train trinket} to own. Something small and subtle that my family wouldn't mind.

Blake
<i> Didn't the newspaper I read earlier have an article for the new tourist shop at Greengrove station? They might have something I could look for for Vivi. </i>

Vivi
Oh, that's my stop!

I missed my stop yesterday, I was too busy talking to this lovely woman, Rochelle, she's works at the supermarket in the city, where she works in the bakery section. She just gave birth, to a little boy! She—

—I'm doing it again. I have to go!

Goodbye, Blake. I hope we see each other again soon. Please don't lose your job, or I won't be able to tell you about how my next dinner goes!

Blake

Hah. I'll try my best...

Cya, Vivi. I'll take good care of the bracelet. Thank you.

Vivi's eyes sparkle with joy as she waves at Blake, before quickly stepping out of the train; the sliding doors closing behind her into the bustling city.

– Ezra 2nd Encounter–

?

Well, well. Look who it is.

Blake

Oh, Ezra. How did I know you'd come harassing me now you know we take the same train?

Ezra

Don't get all defensive, I just wanted to ask you something.

Blake

Go on, I'm listening...

Ezra

I saw one of the last few paintings you listed on your website - the one from the same day we talked actually.

Did you make it based on me?

BRANCH - Yes.

Blake

I did, is that a problem?

Ezra

... No. It's not, I'm just glad my intuition was correct.

BRANCH - No.

Blake

No, it wasn't.

Ezra

Oh, come on. Don't lie to me and waste my time - I'm a much busier man than you.

Blake

Why do you want to know? Are you gonna get mad at me for it?

Ezra

... No, I won't. I just wanted to know if my intuition was correct.

Blake

Fine, then it was based on you.

FEzra

...

Blake

Don't start backtracking now, you promised!

Ezra

I wont, I wont. I'm not mad. I'm just glad my intuition was correct.

BRANCH - Why do you care?

Blake

Why do you care?

Ezra

Jeez, you're such a little kid.

Blake

Can you blame me? You keep bringing up this rivalry that happened ten years ago...

Ezra

I'm not trying to start a fight, you moron. Just tell me!

Blake

Fine, then it was based on you. Are you mad?

Ezra

... No. I'm not, I'm just glad my intuition was correct.

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

You weren't lying, then. You spoke to me, managed to create a piece from that, and then someone bought it.

Blake

You know as well as I do how I make my art. We discussed it last time.

Hah... you really don't want me to think you admire me at all, do you?

Ezra

Pfft... shut up.

Blake

Is that wh-

Ezra

Shush. Before I regret this, I just wanted to say sorry.

Blake

Sorry for what?

Ezra

I'm sorry for how I've treated you since you beat me all those years ago.

I've been doing some thinking, and to be honest, I think I was just angry that someone beat me at what I thought I was best at, and in a way I've just never been able to replicate.

Blake

Never been able to replicate? What do you mean?

I've never really stuck to one art style.

Ezra

I don't mean that. I mean, the way you add a narrative to your pieces, purely based on your own experiences.

Blake

I'm sure you could do it too, if you tried.

All I know is you spent years calling the way I have to 'fall back on a story' pathetic. That you should have beaten me because the way you paint is objectively better, which is true, but you made it clear you think my work is lesser.

Ezra

...

I never meant that.

And I did try, it just... never came to me.

Blake

Never came to you...?

Ezra

After we talked a few days ago, I was thinking. And I realised something, why you bothered me so much - it wasn't just the win.

All those nights I spent as a kid, staring into my canvas, thinking of a topic. But nothing... nothing came.

...

But I don't blame anyone but myself. Painting was the one thing I was good at. All of my time was spent staring at the canvas, that I never made a memory worth replicating.

Blake

... Ezra...

Ezra

That's why you bothered me so much. You beat me at something I could never do. Draw a moment, a piece that held a story within.

Blake

But how? Did you never have any fond memories?

Ezra

My parents were strict. I wasn't allowed out to see my friends after 6pm. Once I came home, most days I would just paint.

I found some solace in it too. But more so just the idea that I was spending my time productively. I was dead set that I was going to become a legendary artist until you beat me.

Forgive me.

BRANCH - It's in the past now

Blake

It's in the past now, Ez. Don't worry about it.

I'm just glad you were able to open up about your struggles with me. I think if we hadn't have met again, it would have kept gnawing at you, over and over.

The fact that it's been – what – 4 years, since that competition, and it's basically the only thing you've mentioned since seeing me again.

Ezra

I think you're right. I think I knew it deep down, it's why I came to you today... I felt like I had to just... apologise. No matter what you said to me. No matter if you laughed, rejected it – I needed to just let it out of my system for good.

But the fact that you're so accepting has made it easier for me.

Thanks.

BRANCH - You shouldn't have taken your bitterness out on me

Blake

You shouldn't have taken your bitterness out on me. You know, I basically dreaded seeing you at one point. We were friends, and it got twisted into this, jealousy, almost hatred.

Ezra

I know. I can't say anymore. I can't take back what I said. But I'm sorry.

BRANCH - Finally, you apologize!

Blake

Hahaha! I'd never thought I'd live to see the day that you apologize to me.

Ezra

Yeah, yeah, whatever, Blake.

I hope you're happy.

Blake

I'm just messing with you. *maybe not the right time...*

BACK TO MAIN BRANCH

Ezra

I can't take back what I've said. But, I hope admitting that you always had what I lacked makes you feel better.

Blake
No, it doesn't, Ez.

I just want my friend back. Y'know, when it was me, you and Aiden. It wasn't a long time, but I enjoyed it nonetheless.

Ezra
...
If you're willing to accept me back, then...
I'd be grateful to call you my friend once more.

Blake
Of course I am.

...
What can I do to fix this for you, Ez?

Ezra
Fix what? I just apologised. You don't need to fix anything.

Blake
Well, you mentioned you don't have many happy memories from your childhood. I can't exactly fix that, but let me help make you some new ones.

Hm, what's a place you've been wanting to go for a while?
...Within reason.

Ezra
Um, an odd question, but...

The Zoo in Maywell. It's a massive one, and I've always been wanting to go - just haven't had the time.

... Or friends.

Blake
<i> Perhaps I can get my hands on a zoo ticket...? </i>

Right, I think I've been there a few times. It is pretty incredible.

Announcer

The train is now approaching Greengrove. Thank you for travelling with us.

Blake
That's my stop!

Uh, keep in touch, yeah?

BLAKE - how did u find out anyway, you know my website
Ez *panic*

To Do:

Spare Scenes

Saff Gift Giving

TEXT
Blake
Hey saff where u at rn?

Saffron
im in greengrove atm why u in town?

Blake
Yeah wanna meet up with me and my friend for a bit?

Saffron
sure thing

Saffron
Hey, Mr. Painter. What's going on? You're being terribly vague...

Blake
No worries, it's nothing crazy.

I just saw this while I was out, and thought I'd get it to you since you're in town.

Saffron
...?

Oh! It's (comic name)!

Thank you so much, Blake. You didn't have to.

Blake

It's alright. I know things must be a little tense for you right now...

So, I was thinking, maybe rekindling your love for comics a little will make it easier to make up your mind?

Saffron

You know, it's funny you should say that.

Today, I was going to go and visit my father, and well, tell him I wasn't going to make the switch. But seeing (comic name) back in my hands again...

I'm not so sure now.

Blake

Oh?

Saffron

I feel like a little kid again. I definitely have to bring it with me to show him.

When I was little, I used to run into the living room with the comic in my hand — 'Dad, dad! It's time for my bedtime story, you promised!'

And once he sees (comic name) in my hands again, I know there will be no convincing him for me to stay at the Daily Crescent.

Blake

Hah, he sounds like he knows what's best for you.

Saffron

...

He definitely does.

I have to run, Blake. I'm gonna be cooking my dad's favourite, lasanga, tonight for him.

With those tiny meatballs that take me all bloody day to make...

But... Thank you. I know I mess with you sometimes, but you gave me the courage to finally do what I was... <i>cowarding</i> out of.

Blake

It was all you, Saff. You just needed that final push.

Saffron

Heh, and one last thing.

No promises - but keep your phone with you the next couple of days.

If things all go well, I *may* have a proposal for you, one I think you might like.

Blake

Oh? And wh—

Saffron

Like I said, gotta run.

And again, no promises. But I'll keep in touch.

Cya, Mr. Painter.

Blake

Cya!

A proposal? What was all that about...

Vivi Gift Giving

phone call

Blake

Hey Vivi!

Vivian

Oh, hello Blake. How are you?

Blake

I'm doing well, thanks. I just wanted to know if you're near Greengrove? I have something to give you.

Vivian

I am in the area, yes. I can meet now, if you would like?

Blake

Sounds good, cya soon.

—

Vivi

Blake! How lovely to see you.

Blake

Hey, Vivi!

I wanted to give you this. It's nothing crazy, but I thought you'd like it.

Vivi

...

Wow, it's beautiful...

The best gifts really do have meaning. Thank you so much, dear friend.

Blake

Not at all. I'm glad you like it.

I'm not exactly sure what it is, but Greengrove train station was celebrating the anniversary of its construction and they were selling those little trinkets.

Seemed right up your alley, especially after what you said, wanting a reminder of trains when you're apart from them.

Vivi

What a thoughtful gift. Let me have a look...

Ah! I see now. These numbers down the side - 4472. Do you recognise them?

Blake

Can't say I do. Do you?

Vivi

I do - class A3 4472 - The Flying Scotsman. It stopped at Greengrove on its way to Edinburgh. One of the most famous, if not *the* most famous train to pass through Greengrove Station.

It's also the first train to have a recorded speed of 100mph!

Blake

Ooh, I think I've heard of that train. It sounds vaguely familiar.

Vivi

Thank you for this trinket, I'll treasure it greatly. In fact...

Vivi rustles around for a few moments before clipping it onto her tote bag.

Vivi

There we go.

Oh, and thank you for your advice when we last met, Blake. I've been working up the courage to speak to my family about it all. But I will, I promise!

Blake

Hah, no problem. I'm glad you're getting there with it all.

Vivi

In fact, I think I'll do it tonight. I'm going to go and head to the library and drop off some books.

But... Thank you again for everything. Perhaps I can find a way to repay you. I already have a wonderful idea, so let's keep in touch, okay?

Blake

Sounds good. But please, nothing more expensive than that bracelet, as lovely as it is.

Vivi

Oh, you're wearing it! It looks lovely. And I promise, well... I think I promise. It depends on how much it will all cost.

Blake

Vivi, you bet—

Vivi

I have to go, Blake! I'll miss my train, otherwise! Thank you for the trinket, goodbye now!

Blake

And there she goes.

What on earth is she planning now?

Ezra Gift Giving

Blake

Hey Ez u free?

Ezra

Hi Blake. I'm just getting some art supplies for my class next week. Whats up?

Blake

I have something to give you if u wanna meet up

Ezra

Sure. I'll meet you in town soon.

—

Ezra

Hey, Blake.

Blake

Ez. I just wanted to give you this. If you're busy on the day, it's no problem.

Ezra

... Tickets?

Oh, For the zoo...

Why, Blake?

Blake

Well, you said all that stuff about not having many good memories to draw from. So I thought, to celebrate our... rekindled friendship...

We could go to the zoo together?

Ezra

...

I'd love to.

What day?

Blake

I got these tickets for Saturday. Are you free?

Ezra

I am, but...

I don't deserve it.

Blake

Oh, come on. I could be a little shit back then too, we were just as bad as each other.

What you did, it wasn't arrogance. You were longing for something, something your parents should have provided, but didn't.

And Aiden and I want to help you make up for that lost time.

Maybe then... you can once and for all say you're a better painter than me in every way.

Ezra

Hah...

I'll look forward to it, Blake.

I needed an outsider's perspective to understand what was going through my head. I felt like a bad person, but I know in my heart I'm not one.

So... thanks.

Blake

No problem, dude.

So, see you on Saturday?

Ezra

I wouldn't miss it for the world.

Mostly because I'm excited to try out this painting style of yours. I think I can crack it.

Blake

Hah! You're on.

Cya around, Ez.

Saff Regular Ending + Good ending + Bad

Bad - she ends up staying at her job

Regular- Saff leaves her job and starts her career as a comic book artist. She was able to find a fan who is a professional artist who wants to join her

Good ending - she offers blake to join her part time to work on ideas and drawing for the comic

—

Saff ending

Saffron

hey, blake. wanna meet up in a coffee shop in greengrove?

i have some news for you

Blake

Sure, ill be there soon

Saffron

dont keep me waiting mr. painter

I have a tight schedule u know?

Blake

Okay okay coming!

—

Saffron

Hey, you made it. Take a seat.

Blake

Hey, Saff, what's up?

Saffron

Well, I've made a decision on my career. And I just thought since I've bothered you with it the whole time, it would be right to tell you what I've decided.

BRANCH (not seen by player) - Good ending

Saffron

I'm going to do it. Well, I've done it.

I quit my job at the Daily Crescent.

Blake

You did...?!

How do you feel?

Saffron

Huh, well, excited.

And nervous as hell.

But either way, I'm glad I did it. All this talk about Velvet Claw, and then meeting you, and my dad insisting it...

I had no choice really but to go for it!

For once, I'm actually excited for the future.

Blake

I'm so happy for you, Saff. I knew it was what you wanted from when you first brought it up.

Saff

The idea I have is something kinda different. I grew my fanbase with my unique signature style, so I was going to continue with that. Something new, innovative.

Now, here comes my proposal.

And I totally get if you don't want to.

Blake

Go on..

Saff

Well, I thought if I'm going to go for this, I may as well do it right.

I'm going to make a comic that's more like... a visual storybook, with expressive painted spreads.

I think perhaps, seeing your art and how you tell stories through your medium made me want to go for this, a way for emotion to come through the art as much as the writing.

So, I was gonna ask if you'd like to be a painter for the comic. Part-time of course, I know you have your website to take care of.

Blake

Seriously? You mean it?

Saffron

Well, like I said; This new work will be based on emotion and passion. I'd like to think since we've both inspired one another to find ourselves recently, after a chance encounter...

What better way to celebrate this new path but by working on this project but together?

Blake

When you put it like that, I'd love to join.

Saffron

Hah, thanks Blake, I knew you'd be all over this project. I mean, it's what you excel at, after all.

.. and also because I cannot draw for *shit*.

Blake

Yeah, I was wondering when you were gonna get that point.

Regardless, I'm flattered you would take inspiration from my art for your project, Saff.

Saffron

I think we're gonna make something great together.

Okay, onto our first problem, we need a name for the comic. And I think we both know how bad I am at that...

...Mr. Painter.

Blake

God, working for you means I'm gonna hear this name all the time, aren't I...

Saffron

You know it!

Anyway, let's get on with it. A name for our new comic... what should it be?

The two chat for a little longer, both buzzing with inspiration, ideas and caffeine. They leave the coffee shop and onto different trains, the sliding doors opening and closing behind them as they exchange a smile and wave.

BRANCH - Middle ending

Saffron

I'm going to do it. Well, I've done it.

I quit my job at the Daily Crescent.

Blake

You did...?!

How do you feel?

Saffron

Huh, well, excited.

And nervous as hell.

But either way, I'm glad I did it. All this talk about Velvet Claw, and then meeting you, and my dad insisting it...

I had no choice really but to go for it!

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I thought if I'm going to go for this, I may as well do it right.

I'm going to make a comic that's more like... a visual storybook, with expressive painted spreads.

I think perhaps, seeing your art and how you tell stories through your medium made me want to go for this, a way for emotion to come through the art as much as the writing.

I would have invited you to join, but I see that you're busy with your friends and the studio, so I've hired a small team of artists already who are mocking up some storyboards for the first draft.

Blake

< i > Damn, seriously? I would have joined, at least part time, if she would have offered. Best not to say anything now she's already hired a team... < /i >

That sounds great, Saff. I'm excited to see what you can come up with.

The two chat for a while, the coffee shop slowly emptying as dusk begins, the last beams of sunlight glistening through the windows.

Saff

What about you, Blake? What's your next move?

Blake

Well, I'm pretty happy at the studio. I'm out of that rut, after you and some others pulled me out of it. It was a dark time for me, to be honest - the guilt and feeling of not moving forward.

But now, I'm with friends that I know have my back, and I've been getting more and more sales since I was able to start painting in the way I want to again.

Saff

I'm glad. You're talented, Blake. Hold onto it, that passion and talent. It's a blessing to be able to do what you've always wanted to do.

And again, thanks for helping me realise that too

Blake

I will. Keep in touch?

Saff

Of course! Well, I'm gonna be super busy with the project until it gets on its feet. But you're few to come visit the studio anytime.

The two chat for a little longer, before leaving the coffee shop and onto different trains, the sliding doors opening and closing behind them as they exchange a final smile and wave.

Bad Ending

Saff

I've decided to stay at the Daily Crescent, after all.

Blake

Really? How come? You seemed set on leaving...

Saff

I don't know, I guess I just don't think I'm ready. I think if I got that final push I would have done it, but right now, I'm not sure I have the inspiration to make the jump.

Besides, even if my family were supportive, they're family, y'know? Because I've tasted fame, my dad thinks I'm infallible. But I'm not. Not at all.

The Daily Crescent at least gives me job security.

But, even so, I really wanted to pursue my dream. I can't shake the damn feeling.

Blake

Maybe one day...?

Saff

Perhaps. But the longer I leave it...

...I don't know.

Blake

I'm sorry, Saff. But at least you can rest easy knowing you're in something stable.

Saff

I guess, but, it's not really what I..

..Anyway, what about you, Blake? What's your next move?

Blake

Hm, well, I'm pretty happy at the studio now.

I'm out of that rut, after you and some others pulled me out of it, which I'm eternally grateful for.

Things have been going much more smoothly.

Saff

I'm glad. You're talented, Blake. Hold onto it, that passion and talent. It's a true blessing to be able to do what you've always wanted to do. After all this debating I've done, I see that clearly now, even if it hurts me to say it.

The two chat for a while, the coffee shop slowly emptying as dusk begins, the last beams of sunlight glistening through the windows. The ambience feels melancholy, but Saffron continues to chat away, trying to hide her feelings of solemnity.

Blake

I had better get going, Saff. Keep in touch?

Saff

Sure thing.

The two chat for a little longer, before leaving the coffee shop and onto different trains, the sliding doors opening and closing behind them as they exchange a final smile and wave.

Ezra Ending Intro - If Zoo Gift Given

Zookeeper

Thank you both for coming - we hope you both enjoyed your time today!

Blake
It was great, thanks!

Ezra
Wonderful, thank you.

Well, what now, Blake?

Blake
Hm, want to go for a walk around the park for a bit?

Ezra
Sure, let's go.

Blake
...Still can't believe you're afraid of penguins.

Ezra
Shut up...

Ezra Ending Intro - If Zoo Gift not taken REMOVE AIDEN FROM ZOO GIFT

Ezra
Thanks for getting coffee with me, Blake.

Blake
No probs. Wanna do anything else before we head back?

Ezra
Hm, wanna go around the park for a bit?

Blake
Sure, sounds fun.

—

Ezra Good ending

Ezra
Today has been fun, Blake. Thanks.

Blake
It has, hasn't it? Never thought we'd be hanging out like this again.

Ezra
It's odd, isn't it...

So, I have to ask - is this the type of situation you'd paint from?

Blake
Hah, you're persistent, aren't you? You wanna know all my tricks.

But yeah. I mean, anything that evokes emotion is something I can draw from and make into a piece.

Ezra
Are you saying I make you feel things?

Blake
Yeah, yeah...

I mean, the company is one part. But don't you think the environment helps too?

Ezra
The environment?

Blake
Yeah. Look around us.

Weather can impact the feeling of the piece. If it's a bright and sunny day, the feelings of happiness and friendship are amplified. Sometimes, it can make a piece feel dreamy or hazy.

When the sun is setting, you get this feeling of melancholy and longing as the day draws to a close. Even if you're in the presence of friends. It's the type of memory that makes your heart clench a few years down the line, y'know?

Or maybe, when it's raining, or stormy, but you're hanging out with friends or doing something fun, you can actually juxtapose that with the weather to make an interesting piece through the contrast.

Ezra
That sounds like what you did with your piece that won the competition.

Blake
Yeah, exactly.

The weather is pouring, but you're surrounded by friends, and in the case of my <i> winning </i> piece, strangers, who run down the street with you through the pouring rain, laughing together.

All those emotions you bring together to create something new on a canvas.

Ezra

So, what would you do with this piece if you were to make it?

Blake

Huh, well... we're at the park, it's full of people just going about with their daily lives.

Ezra

Is that not boring, though?

Blake

Just seeing ordinary people partake in their ordinary lives is sometimes beautiful in its own way.

Ezra

Hm, I guess I see what you're talking about, sometimes I see people on the train and I'm thinking, 'Where are they going?', 'What are they going for?' It's almost like a mystery.

What else?

Blake

Hm... The sun is setting, giving it that bittersweet feel. And at the same time, you have us, two friends who were enemies for some time, reunited. That's something I can work with...

Blake ponders for a while, thinking of how he would create this hypothetical piece. The two walk side by side in comfortable silence, as though the years of them being apart had never happened. They watch the sun set in front of them, the only sound from other passers-by, or the crunching of the leaves beneath their feet.

Blake

...I've got it.

Ezra

Just like that..?!

Blake

Okay - I'd put us as the focal point, using the pathway as a leading line through the centre of the piece, the sunset between us, peeking out, as though the distance between us has become warm and bright, symbolising our new friendship.

Then I'd maybe paint some of the people around the park on either side - the piece is about relationships and human emotion. So having some other people scattered around within the piece, maybe playing catch, walking their dog, adds to that intentional mundanity.

Ezra

Just like that indeed...

Blake

It's nothing special.

Ezra

God, you're such a humble bragger.

Oh, before I forget. Thanks for hanging out with me today, Blake. It was fun.

Blake

It was nice to catch up. And you're welcome to come over to my place anytime and we can paint and share ideas together. Maybe with Aiden too?

Ezra

That sounds like fun. Thanks.

Blake

Well, it's getting late. I guess...

...well...

You wanna head over to mine tonight? We can play games, order a pizza?

Ezra

You've not changed one bit.

Blake

What's wrong with playing video games and eating pizza?!

Ezra

It's a bit childish, don't you think?

Blake

If video games and pizza have an age limit, then count me out of growing up...

Ezra

Pfft...

I'm still down.

Blake

Of course you are. You're not much different from me, y'know...

Ezra

Hah. Let's go.

Ezra Medium ending

Ezra

Today has been fun, Blake. Thanks.

Blake

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Ezra

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But yeah. I mean, anything that evokes emotion is something I can draw from and make into a piece.

Ezra

So you get your ideas from here? But how? We're just two people talking.

Blake

Don't you think the environment helps too?

Ezra

The environment?

Blake

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Ezra

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Blake

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Ezra

Is that not boring, though?

Blake

Just seeing ordinary people partake in their ordinary lives is sometimes beautiful in its own way.

Ezra

I still don't get how you could make a piece from such a boring topic.

Blake

Well, maybe think like this, The sun is setting, giving it that bittersweet feel. And at the same time, you have us, two friends who were enemies for some time, reunited. That's something I can work with...

Blake ponders for a while, thinking of how he would create this hypothetical piece. The two walk side by side in comfortable silence, as though the years of them being apart had never happened. They watch the sun set in front of them, the only sound from other passers-by, or the crunching of the leaves beneath their feet.

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Ezra
Just like that indeed...

Blake
It's nothing special.

Ezra
Oh, before I forget. Thanks for hanging out with me today, Blake. It was nice to catch up.

Blake
It was, Keep in touch?

Ezra
Sure thing.

Blake
Well, it's getting late. I guess... I'll head back now.

Ezra
Me too. If I don't catch you for a while, good luck with your career, Blake. I'm sure you're gonna hit it big someday.

Blake

Heh, same to you too. Cya, Ez.

The two exchange a brief smile and wave before heading out of the park in different directions, the last of the sun fading into twilight.

Ezra Bad ending

Blake

Never thought we'd be hanging out like this again.

Ezra

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Blake

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I mean, anything that evokes emotion is something I can draw from and make into a piece.

Ezra

So you get your ideas from here? We're just two people talking. Doesn't sound inspirationmal to me.

Blake

Don't you think the environment helps too?

Ezra

The environment?

Blake

Yeah. Look around us.

Weather can impact the feeling of the piece. If it's a bright and sunny day, the feelings of happiness and friendship are amplified. Sometimes, it can make a piece feel dreamy or hazy.

Or maybe, when it's raining, or stormy, but you're hanging out with friends or doing something fun, you can actually juxtapose that with the weather to make an interesting piece through the contrast.

Ezra

That sounds like what you did with your piece that won the ...competition.

Blake

Well, yeah. All those emotions you bring together to create something new on a canvas.

Ezra

So, what would you do with this piece if you were to make it?

Blake

Huh, well... we're at the park, it's full of people just going about with their daily lives.

Ezra

Is that not boring, though?

Blake

Just seeing ordinary people partake in their ordinary lives is sometimes beautiful in its own way.

Ezra

I still don't get how you could make a piece from such a boring topic.

The two walk side by side in silence, unsure of what to say. They watch the sun set in front of them, the only sound from other passers-by, or the crunching of the leaves beneath their feet. Blake lets out a sigh of relief that he hopes Ezra didn't catch, as they approach the park gates.

Ezra

Oh, before I forget. Thanks for hanging out with me today, Blake.

Blake

No problem, man.

Blake

Well, it's getting late. I guess... I'll head back now.

Ezra

Me too.

...Good luck with your career, Blake. I'm sure you're gonna hit it big someday.

Blake

Same to you too.

Cya, Ez.

The two exchange a brief wave before heading out of the park in different directions, the last of the sun fading into twilight.

Vivi Good Ending/Medium Ending Beginning

Blake

Hm, a letter?

Dear Blake,

I would like to invite you to join me on Monday to ride the Alder Valley train? It's a luxury steam line, one of the ones with dinner service and lots of champagne. I can buy you a ticket if you'd like to join me!

- Vivian

Blake

Damn, that sounds amazing. Whe—

In two hours?! I gotta get ready...

—

Blake

Vivi! I'm here! I'm here...

Vivi

Blake! You came! The train isn't boarding for a few minutes, don't fret.

How are you? You look exhausted...

Blake

I'm fine. Just had to run across town to get here on time though...

Thank you for inviting me to this though, I appreciate it, the train looks... amazing.

Vivi

Hehe! You are so ridiculous, Blake.

I am glad you made it. This train doesn't run very often, but it's quite a lovely experience, even for those not particularly interested in trains.

Blake

I can't wait.

Oh, I think we're able to board.

Vivi

Let's get on! I'm so excited.

Vivi Good Ending

The two board the train, and find an empty carriage together. Vivi chats away for a while about the train, and Blake happily listens, while enjoying the all-inclusive coffee and biscuits. Blake notices her expression is brighter than usual.

Blake

You look happy today, Vivi. More than usual. Did anything happen?

Vivi

Oh! Yes – I also had to attend a dinner last night, and it went well, for once.

Blake

It did? Great! What happened?

Vivi

Indeed. Everytime someone approached me, I just thought of you, and our conversation together,

Remember – when you tested me?

Blake

Don't tell me you had to imagine them naked...

Vivi

No, nothing of the sort, thankfully...

I just thought of how we chat together and how casual it feels, but still full of warmth.

Blake

I'm glad to hear that.

To be honest, you've had a great impact on me too, Vivi. I don't think I would have overcome my problems with my job without you helping me.

I understand as well, to some people, talking to strangers is something that comes naturally as breathing. To me it did.

It's only when I had this issue with my paintings, that like you, well, it became hard to face people in conversation. Something I dreaded.

Vivi

Yes, you have to overcome your own mind, that fight or flight feeling... I am glad it is coming more naturally to me.

The two sit either side, sipping their tea and coffee. The faint noise of laughter and chatter can be heard from other carriages. They both glance out at the sunset as the train travels across the vast empty plains of the countryside.

Blake

Oh, yeah – did you talk to your parents in the end, Vivi – about your stress? Or do you think it's not worth it, now that you're beginning to overcome your anxiety?

Vivi

I did. My father and brother – the heir – were... quite saddened. It wasn't malice, or indifference. They're just so consumed by work that they never thought to look deeper. They assumed *I* was the indifferent one. But really, I was trying my best.

I felt guilty even bringing it up. I told them I was fine on my own, but they insisted on being more considerate – that family comes first over the business. They said they won't lose sight of what matters again.

Blake

It's strange, y'know? When I first met you, you looked so put-together. Then I found out you were the daughter of the HARPER CEO and thought, "She's got no worries in the world."

Vivi

Sometimes, that's what people are. Ducks. That's what my grandfather used to say.

Blake

Ducks...?

Vivi

Ducks – serene on the surface, but paddling like crazy underneath.

Blake

And you feel like that?

Vivi

Sometimes. But my family are *< i> definitely </i>* ducks.

I know it sounds silly, being anxious about parties when I have everything I could ever want. But my life never felt like... mine. I always wanted a family that wasn't so wrapped up in work. I can't remember the last time my father took a day off.

Sometimes you need to stop and smell the flowers, or life just carries you away until it's gone completely. I wish my family realised that sooner. But maybe we're getting there, thanks to your help, Blake.

Blake

Oh? What did they suggest?

Vivi

We're actually planning to take this same train together next week. My grandfather loved the Alder Valley Line, he used to bring my father here when he was young. Maybe it'll remind him that there's more to life than the company.

Blake

That would be great. Let me know how your family gets on, yeah?

This is not something I would ever do normally, but it's been fun, Vivi. I'm sure your family will love it, especially if they love trains as much as you do.

Vivi

Of course! I'll send you a letter once we've been on.

The two chat for a while longer about many different topics, laughing and sipping the last of their drinks.

Announcer

The train is now approaching Greengrove. Thank you for joining us on the Alder Valley line.

Blake

Well, this is it...

Vivi

Indeed.

[Train station]

Vivi

Thank you so much for joining me, Blake. I'll ensure to write a letter on how it goes with my family!

Blake

I'll look forward to it! Cya around, Vivi.

The two exchange a warm smile and wave, before departing the train station and back to their homes.

Vivi Medium Ending

The two board the train, and find an empty carriage together. Vivi chats away for a while about the train, and Blake happily listens, while enjoying the all-inclusive coffee and biscuits. Blake notices her expression is brighter than usual.

Blake

You look happy today, Vivi. More than usual. Did anything happen?

Vivi

Oh! Yes – I also had to attend a dinner last night, and it went well, for once.

Blake

It did? Great! What happened?

Vivi

Indeed. Everytime someone approached me, I just thought of you, and our conversation together,

Remember – when you tested me?

Blake

Don't tell me you had to imagine them naked...

Vivi

No, nothing of the sort, thankfully...

I just thought of how we chat together and how casual it feels, but still full of warmth.

Blake

I'm glad to hear that.

To be honest, you've had a great impact on me too, Vivi. I don't think I would have overcome my problems with my job without you helping me.

I understand as well, to some people, talking to strangers is something that comes naturally as breathing. To me it did.

It's only when I had this issue with my paintings, that like you, well, it became hard to face people in conversation. Something I dreaded.

Vivi

Yes, you have to overcome your own mind, that fight or flight feeling... I am glad it is coming more naturally to me.

The two sit either side, sipping their tea and coffee. The faint noise of laughter and chatter can be heard from other carriages. They both glance out at the sunset as the train travels across the vast empty plains of the countryside.

Blake

Oh, yeah – did you talk to your parents in the end, Vivi – about your stress? Or do you think it's not worth it, now that you're beginning to overcome your anxiety?

Vivi

... Not yet, I am working on it though, I promise!

It is just that, they are usually so busy, I still don't feel like I should trouble them. And I'm quite alright being alone.

Blake

I think you should try, Vivi. To be honest, I can tell you like being with others. You met me just because you were lonely! And you have this... undeniable warmth. I'm sure if you just talk to them, they'll listen.

Vivi

I'll work up the courage eventually! Thank you for supporting me, Blake.

I suppose I'm like a duck.

Blake

A Duck...?

Vivi

Ducks – serene on the surface, but paddling like crazy underneath.

Blake

And you feel like that?

Vivi

Sometimes. But my family are *definitely* ducks.

I know it sounds silly, being anxious about parties or facing my family when I have everything I could ever want. But my life never felt like... mine. I always wanted a family that wasn't so wrapped up in work. I can't remember the last time my father took a day off.

Sometimes you need to stop and smell the flowers, or life just carries you away until it's gone completely. I wish my family would realise that sooner. Hopefully I'm able to make them.

Blake

Let me know how you get on with your family, yeah?

If you're still struggling, maybe we can do another roleplay.

Vivi

Haha, of course! I'll send you a letter soon enough, I'm sure.

The two chat for a while longer about many different topics, laughing and sipping the last of their drinks.

Announcer

The train is now approaching Greengrove. Thank you for joining us on the Alder Valley line.

Blake

Well, this is it...

Vivi

Indeed.

[Train station]

Blake

Maybe next time we meet, you'll have talked to them.

Vivi

I hope so Blake! I hope I'll have many good stories to tell you next time we see each other. But for now, I'm glad I've had this one with you.

The two exchange a warm smile and wave, before departing the train station and back to their homes.

Vivi Bad Ending

Blake

Huh?

Aiden

Hey, Blake! I'm just at the studio with the others. We're discussing a new project together. Wanna come round? I know it's a weird time.

Blake

Sure. I'm not up to much.

Cya in a bit.

Blake

Okay, I'll grab Aiden's iced coffee, and then...

Wait...

Vivi?

Vivi!

Vivian

Oh, Blake. What are you doing here? It's not your usual time.

Blake

Hah, no. I'm just gonna go help out at the studio for a few hours.

What about you? This train looks interesting.

Vivi

Oh, yes! It's the Alder Valley train. It's a luxury steam line, one of the ones with dinner service and lots of champagne

Blake

It looks great... enjoy.

Vivi

Thank you.

The two stand in silence for a few moments, unsure of what to say.

Blake

Well, I should go and get to my train.

I'll see you around, Vivi.

Vivi

Goodbye, Blake.