

The Answer

Since as long as Sophie could remember, she always read the last page of a book right after she read the first page. Then she would read the rest of the book, to understand how it became that way.

Understanding had always been important to her.

One Wednesday in December Claire called her. Nobody calls her these days, when everyone is just texting, but this time it was Claire. "Sophie, I have a favor to ask," she said.

Claire never asks for favors. She hardly ever even talks to Sophie, so Sophie was curious to hear what she had to say.

"You know the thing we've been working on, well, sometimes I feel like it's gonna work, and sometimes not. I've been feeling this way for a while now. Last week I forgot to buy more materials, so I couldn't get anything done. But I was thinking, instead of it being entirely about ____, if we could just change the theme a bit, like, say that it would be about ____ and ____, I think I could get more inspiration. So my favor I wanted to ask is actually if you'd give me approval to do that."

Six weeks ago they had decided to start on a painting project. It was called "Project Express". Claire thought it sounded like a pizza delivery, but Sophie said that's not what it means. She said once you explain it to people they will see it differently.

"It is up to us to explain it so people can understand", she had said. But Claire could understand Sophie even without her explaining. That was one reason why they became good friends.

The idea behind Project Express was that they would take turns to work on pieces of painting while listening to soundtracks on repeat. The playlists would be composed together by themes with regards to the meaning of their lyrics. When they just came up with the idea, they thought that they'd be doing "illustrations for songs", on a one-to-one basis. They tried that for a bit but found that it was too annoying to listen to one single song on repeat for the entire day. Then they decided, that they'd mash up important parts of different songs into some kind of life philosophy that they'd try to depict. They'd take turns, so that one person could take part of the interpretation of the other and continue on. Kind of like a quote collection. Sometimes they listened to classical music, music without lyrics at all. But always at the end of a painting's process they would sit together and complete it together. It was like drawing a circle in a musical note. The final note.

"You don't need approval from me Claire, just do it," said Sophie.

They had already finished two paintings together. The first one was called "Bryan Adams in Underpants" (although the motif was something completely different), and the second "Through the Eyes of Forrest Gump". The third one that Claire was working on at the moment was "More Than Words".

*** The fabricated part begins ***

Claire wakes up in the morning, brews her coffee, and goes into her living room. The painting looms in front of her. She had been staring at it for two days already. Three days ago, she was happily painting away and felt she had the perfect round up to it all. It was like she had already completed the entire painting in her mind, even the part that she and Sophie were supposed to do together. She knew exactly what to do. She couldn't wait to tell Sophie about it. Then they would have finished three paintings, this one her favorite of them all.

On the evening three days ago, she examined the painting proudly, having completed her part. Suddenly a feeling strikes her, and it is like a lightning bolt out of nowhere. An almost panic like feeling grips her and won't let go, and Claire has no idea why all of this is happening.

Because the feeling is too inexplicable, she decides to go to bed. Next morning I will feel better, she thinks to herself.

She doesn't feel better. On the morning two days ago, she spilled her coffee. Luckily, the coffee didn't spill on the painting. It spilled on her computer. She calls Gustav, Gustav is the only one who would know what to do.

"Gustav, I've almost completed the best painting I've done so far but now I can't even look at it. Why is this happening?"

"The Yearning for Happiness is symbolized by the Genii and finds appeasement in Poetry," Gustav says.

"What? Gustav, what are you talking about? Why do you not sound like yourself?"

"Go listen to some Beethoven, I can't help you more. Only you can find the answer," says Gustav.

On the evening two days ago, Claire puts on Beethoven's Pathetique Sonata played by Rolf Lindblom. The first movement is her favorite, although the second and the third are also good.

When Claire was listening to Beethoven, three main words were popping up in her head.

(How can I) feel so much...

The next morning, she decided to get out of the house and go for a walk. Sometimes she went for walks just to random places and took the subway to random stations, just to see something new, even though places mainly looked the same.

During her walk, what she thought was:

Yesterday I wondered how I could feel so much, but what I also wonder is how I can doubt so much.

She hears an imaginary voice in her head. It's Sophie and she asks, "Claire, what are you doubting?"

I doubt whether I can finish the painting.

Sophie replies and Claire has an imaginary conversation back and forth with Sophie in her head.

On the current day, Claire stares at the painting and thinks:

I should just avoid this for now.

*** End of fabricated part ***

When finally Sophie writes to Claire after not hearing from her for two weeks, she asks how it's going with the painting.

"I've got a lot of things to do Sophie. I mean, I've finished my part even, and I think all that's needed is the final work that we do together, but I've got too much on my hands."

"So why did you call me that day?" Sophie asked.

"What day?"

"When you called and wanted my approval for you to do modifications so you could continue with the painting."

"I just wanted to talk to you," Claire said.

It made no sense, Sophie thought.

"Why would you want to talk to me when you did not want to complete the painting?"

"Sophie, you can't understand everything. If you don't understand, just fabricate a theory!"

"But when will you have time to sit with me?"

Claire looked at Sophie.

"I mean, it's not like I'm gonna go away," she said.