

Yaaaawn

I rub at my eyes. A bit dazed, it takes a few seconds to orient myself. I check my flip-phone; it is 8am, and me and Eric are in the back of Justin's van. Oh right, we just left the hotel a few hours ago. God, why did they have to be so insistent on leaving early?

Kathunk. Ah, guess we're on a bridge now. The view is really nice, the morning sun shimmering off the surface of the water. The window cracked a bit open, enough to hear a slight hum over the sound of whatever obscure 80s new-jack-city-pop-whatever musician Justin is really into now.

I hear Eric gently close his notebook. "Didn't expect you to wake so early. You were out cold the instant we got in here."

I rub my eyes. "Yeah, I guess I'm more tired than I thought...". Wasn't initially sure about going to this con for an entire weekend, but ultimately I'm glad we did. Even if we had to sustain ourselves off of junk food. I turn to look at Eric. He raises an eyebrow.

"Oh god, you look like shit. Makes sense you fell asleep instantly, you were up until like, what, 3am?"

"...4am" I sheepishly admit.

"4am!?!?!?!?"

"Well well excuse me, wasn't my fault that I just gotten to the actual good part of Persona 3 Portable!!"

"You mean the ending?"

"I said actual good part, didn't I?"

He lets out one of those comforting sly chuckles. "Hope it was worth it".

Eric looks back down at his notepad, resuming his writing.

Yeah, I think this was a good first convention. The panels were insane, if a bit dry at times. That live screening of Dragon Ball Evolution was admittedly really funny to witness, even if it meant having to watch Dragon Ball Evolution. Never gonna be able to forget the stench created by that one Homestuck cosplay group in the room next to ours though...

"I still don't know why we had to leave so early..." I complain, seemingly to no one in particular.

"You don't want to miss the train back now, do you?" Eric responds, still writing intently.

"Eh, I wouldn't mind."

God, I don't want to go back to studying. Though I guess not wanting to study is why I'm in this situation in the first place...

Man, I wish I had Eric's smarts sometimes. Here I am taking summer courses to make up failed credit...

Wait, summer courses. That reminds me, midterms are coming up soon, right? Might as well check my phone's calendar to make sure.

...Fuck.

"Eric."

He keeps writing. "Yeah Zack?".

"Promise me you're not gonna panic".

He once again closes his notebook, and looks up. "I'm not gonna panic".

"I forgot I had my Japanese exam tomorrow".

He gives a look, and raises an eyebrow. "And?"

"And??? Dude, I'm totally gonna flub it!!!!!"

"And whose fault is that".

I groan. Eric continues.

"Well, I guess I can help you. Though I'm admittedly not the most familiar". He stashes away his notepad into his modestly stuffed Fjallraven-branded backpack, stashed between his legs. "You brought your laptop with you, right?".

"Yeah!!!" I pipe up. Mustering every force in my body, I pull my humongous Gamer Laptop For Gamers With RGB Lights out of my bag packed with collectable plushies and too many handheld consoles. I press the power button at once, and the seldom cleaned fans begin to whirl to life, as the keyboard fades in an array of colors. I slowly begin to feel the heat of the behemoth on my legs. In hindsight, maybe I should've sprung for something more portable...

"So, where are we starting?"

"Well, its only a midterm exam, so we're focusing on Hiragana, Katakana, and Basic Sentence Structure. I think there'll be a few very basic sentences on the exam, but all Kanji will have accompanying Furigana; they are also giving us a dictionary of some words that'll be on the exam.

Eric raises an eyebrow. "That sounds shockingly forgiving, though I suppose it is only a midterm..."

"Yeah... So, Hiragana?"

"Ah, yeah..."

"How much do you know?"

"Uh, I mean, I can recognize あ and い!!!"

I stumble. and pause for a second.

"uhhh.... a and i?"

"....is that it Zack?" Eric seems concerned.

"I mean... I'm sure if I refresh my memory it'll come back!!!"

Eric sighs, then gives a slight smile "Well then, lets get started".

It is half past noon. The blazing sun shines down upon us in our van, idling in the parking lot of some gas station, the full blast AC not nearly enough to keep me cool. Its too hot in here.....

"So なんか kinda looks like an old man that'd go 'fufufufufu!'" Eric says, in his weirdest falsetto imaginable, leaning slightly into me. Just to get a better view of the laptop screen. No other reasons.

"Huh, I see!!!! I think I'm starting to get this".

"Yeah, its really all about memorization and mnemonic devices at first. Once you do it a few times you can easily pick them all up. I'm kinda shocked at how much Katakana you seem to remember, so we can probably move onto to Sentence Structure once we finish here."

As much as Eric makes fun of me for being a bit clumsy and clueless sometimes, according to him I can be a bit of a quick learner? It feels nice when he compliments me...

Come to think of it, I guess I've never really thought about it whenever we'd be this close together. I guess its just, kinda felt normal? Being able to see his eyes up close is really nice, they're a really pretty baby blue colour, they seem fitting for someone so put together.

Man, it must be really hot in here, he's sweating like crazy, I can see the beads of sweat running down his forehead. Makes sense, I am also sweating like crazy right now. Thank god someone rolled the window down, I need some air in here. Man, even his face is flushed...

"What are you two doing".

I jump back from him, startled. Through the window, Justin raises an eyebrow, hands me two bagel sandwiches, and then hops into the drivers seat.

Eric looks a bit... sad? pensive? is that the word?

"What's up?" I ask him.

"...Its nothing", he solemnly responds. Jeez, whats got his mood down? The cassette player blares to life again, and we begin our journey once more...

"So basically これ is for referring to something near the speaker, それ is for referring to something that is near the listener, and あれ is for something that is distant from both the speaker and the listener".

"Ah, I getcha...."

"Think of it like 'This', 'That', and 'That over there'. We can go through some sample sentences again".

It is now around 4pm, the sun has substantially lowered, daylight is starting to seem fleeting, as the brightness ever dims.

..is what I'd say if I was a cool anime person.

Usually, I hate studying. I can't stay still and focus. I always get too distracted and start scrolling Reddit aimlessly... I don't even like Reddit!!!

But doing it with him? I mean yeah, its still a chore, but I guess its a chore I'm willing to tolerate, y'know? He's just such a good friend!!

"So basically あれは何 would translate to roughly 'What is that.'"

"Ah yeah, gotcha gotcha."

"You sure? You seem distracted, you've been staring at my face for like a minute now".

"I have??"

My face feels flush. Because of how goddamned hot it is outside, of course!!

"...something on your mind Zack? You know you can talk about it if you want".

"Yeah Zack, got something to say?" Justin pipes in for like, the first time this entire car ride. Eric just shoots him a glare.

I sigh. "Guess I'm just tired from this weekend"

"Ah, that makes sense... You really need to fix your sleep schedule." There he is again being so goddamn considerate.

"Yeah yeah, I know. Can we continue now? If we review some sentence examples I should be able to piece it together."

"hu.. wha?"

Its like, evening, right? Jeez, we must've fallen asleep.

Oh, Eric is right next to me.

Right right next to me. Oh right, we changed seats right at the gas station, he was really insistent about being okay with the middle seat.

Normally I'd like, wake him up like this, but he just looks so peaceful here? His head resting on my shoulder.

I do need to study, but like, I really shouldn't bother him. Not when he's like this.

Surely, he'd be cool with it if I like, pulled him closer, right?

Yeah, it was really hot out earlier, but it gets colder in the evenings!! I don't want him to freeze to death or anything.

I'll just, put my arm here and...

"Eee..eh? Zack?"

Oh fuck. Uhh fuck uh shit oh fuck o

"How long were we out for?" He says, in a dopey tone that sounds sooo unlike him. Its almost kinda...

cute? Is that allowed?

Oh right, the time.

"Its 7pm" I say, looking at my phone.

"Ah, I guess we're almost at the station. I suppose we can review a few more things, and then we'll take a break on the train?"

"Yeah, that sounds awesome!" Finally, at last, freedom!

The inside of the van is dark. Justin won't let us turn on the lights, meanie. Messes with your ability to drive in the night, according to Justin. Still kinda annoying but whatever. The faint streetlights illuminating the road we're on provide temporary glows.

"Okay, quiz. 私は馬鹿です?"

"Okay, Watashi, Baka, hmm... wait! I got this!!!"

Oh man, I'll show him! I've come so far!

"It means 'I am an idiot!' "

I said it with so much confidence, I didn't even realize what I said until after the fact...

I turn towards Eric. His hand is covering his mouth. As I look at him, he goes from just snickering to laughing violently.

"BWAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA"

Oh man, its rare I see him laugh this hard. Seems like the sound nearly woke up Justin too. Thankfully.

"...you're mean."

"I know" he responds.

"...I did get that right though, didn't I?"

"Yes, you sure did." Eric seems to reach his hand in towards my head, before stopping himself... reluctantly? I think? I don't know, I've never been good at reading people.

"Okay, one more. 月が綺麗ですね. I don't think they taught you the kanji for these yet, so I'll give you a hint, 月 (つき) means 'Moon'. and 綺麗 (きれい) means something along the lines of pretty...".

Hmmm, well が indicates the subject of a sentence. です is kinda like 'it is'. I'm assuming ね is a particle for something, its not か, so the sentence probably isn't asking a question.

Hmmm, Moon is pretty. Hmmm...

""The Moon is Pretty"? I think I get the most of it, but the particle at the end is throwing me off."

"Oh yeah, I forgot they probably didn't cover that one. It kinda translates to 'right' or 'don't you agree?'"

"Ah, I see."

Wait. This sounds familiar....

...Oh. I turn towards him... look at him

...He's blushing. "The Moon is beautiful, isn't it Zack?".

Does... does he really mean it like that? Maybe he means it literally? A brief glance outside disproves this theory, because It Is Cloudy.

I give myself the courage to look back. Those eyes. Those beautiful blue eyes...

Maybe... its okay to feel this way, maybe its-

"Yo, earth to gayboys, we're here".

Bam. Snap back to reality, I fucking guess.

"Your train should be here in like, 30 minutes I think? Anyways, it is laaaaaate, I gotta skedaddle."

We stash our things and get out of the vehicle, not really saying anything. The trunk pops open and we grab our bags. I really overpacked....

"I'll go ahead and get checked in". Eric runs off.

Slam. The trunk closes.

"Well, see ya next semester Justin?"

"Yeah of course, have a good rest of the summer".

I turn around.

"Wait, Zack."

"Yeah?" I respond, timidly.

"You know he'd say yes, right?"

"Dude, whats that even supposed to mean?"

"...you'll figure it out". He gets back in the van, and drives off.

Its been an hour, and Eric hasn't said anything. The atmosphere between us, it usually doesn't feel this tense. God somebody needs to say something soon...

....something, please, right?

...literally please say anything.

...god I don't wanna be the one to do this, what if I fuck up???

...okay fine here it goes.

...

...

..."So-"

"So what was your favourite part of the con?" he looks up. I can tell when he's trying to hide something... It pains me to see that...

"Hmmm, thats kinda difficult to say. I mean, getting to hang out with all three of us was fun, but I guess I enjoyed getting to spend time with you the most?"

Eric seems to lighten up at that.

"Yeah, like my god you were half the reason I was cracking up during that DB Evolution

screening. Some of those attendees are like, way too confident in their ability to be funny y'know? I guess you're always really insightful in interesting ways..."

His mouth slightly opens a bit.

"Oh and how you held my spot in the autograph line so I could run to the washroom because I drank like an entire big gulp in one sitting! Or how you always gave me your extra fries, or how you always checked up on me first thing in the morning. Or how you made sure I wasn't too overwhelmed in the vendors hall. You really do so much for me, I wish I could return the favour more."

"Zack, I-"

"Yeah Eric?"

"...its nothing."

"Ah, I see."

"...y'know Eric, I don't know if its like, y'know, normal to say this, but I think I love you? I just, feel I can let loose around you, y'know?"

"Zack, I-"

Oh my god his face is so red, haha. I'd totally take a photo if I could.

"Now arriving..."

Eric looks up. "Ah, I guess we're here. Shall we get going?"

"Ah, yeah, of course."

--

The moon shines over the front of the station's facade. This area of town is always so quiet at night, it really does help to clear the brain admittedly.

"I think my cab is here" Eric points at it. "See you later Zack?"

"Yeah!". He walks off...

...

...

...This doesn't feel right. I should say something. "Wait!"

He halts. "What is it?"

"I know that you know I don't really like coffee, but like, you maybe wanna get coffee later?"

Eric looks... stunned? He then starts to smile almost?

"...as like a date?"

"...yeah, something like that."

Eric comes forward, and leans down a nudge. I close my eyes. I feel the softest peck imaginable upon my lips.

A few seconds pass, my eyes open again, almost reflexively.

"I'd, I'd really love that."

Its Tuesday evening. I don't even like coffee, but the vibes at this place are really nice I have to say. Its usually quiet, and the lighting is dim. Its perfect if you just wanna chill out, y'know?

I hope Eric isn't like, too weirded out by the events that happened this weekend. In hindsight, I guess I didn't really allow myself to acknowledge what I was feeling. I'm not sure where this is going to head now, or what this means for or friendship or living situation or weekly fighting game sessions but like.

I'm glad I'm allowing myself to accept these feelings now.

"Kept you waiting, huh?" Eric places a cup on the table, and sits right next to me.

"Oh hey!"

"Sorry, had a busy shift at work, they made me stay way late". He wistfully takes a sip out of his black coffee. "How'd you do?"

"Definitely had to guess a handful of times, but ultimately I think I passed."

"Oh that's a relief. I think this calls for a celebration." He picks up a menu. "Y'know, the brownies here are shockingly good".

"Oh please, I didn't do that well". I say, self-deflecting the compliment.

"Hey, you take the wins when you get them, right?"

I pause for a moment to think. "You know what, yeah. I guess you do". I place my hand on his. He smiles. Its warm.

I take another look at my phone. "Ah shit, I forgot I have another exam this Friday".

"You do?" Eric asks.

"Yeah." I gaze into his eyes and take in the view.

"But I don't mind blowing off studying again....."