

Blank Page

By

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INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

ISAAC, a wiry, burned-out twenty-something, stares blankly at a computer screen, fingers poised on the keys. There are heavy bags under his eyes and he blinks slowly and deliberately as he strains to read back his work.

ISAAC
(to himself)
Louise looked deep into Adam's eyes. "Sam and I are over," she whispered softly. "It's just you and me now."

He thinks for a moment, then erases the last line and tries again.

ISAAC
-she whispered delicately.
"You're my world."
(beat)
You're my world?

Isaac sighs deeply and buries his face in his hands. He re-emerges to take a sip of coffee and spits it back into the mug with a look of disgust.

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

A coffee machine brews up a fresh pot.

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Back at his desk, Isaac sips his coffee, cracks his knuckles, and dives right back into it.

ISAAC
"You're everything I've ever wanted. And nothing can stop us now!"

He types the words, and then immediately erases them. He leans back in his chair. The cursor blinks expectantly on the screen.

Isaac looks up and eyes the dozens of empty beer bottles on the coffee table; the overflowing ashtray on the threadbare arm of the sofa; the pizza boxes piled up around the kitchen.

He spring cleans the flat.

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM - LATER

Isaac is back at his desk. Suddenly, he leaps out of his seat as though struck by a bolt of lightning.

ISAAC

Yes!

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM - LATER STILL

Isaac slumps over the desk and bangs his head repeatedly against the keyboard.

ISAAC

No, no, no, no, no.

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM - MUCH, MUCH LATER

Isaac stares at the computer screen. The computer screen stares back.

ISAAC

Shit.

He raises the coffee mug to his lips-

INT. BAR - NIGHT

-and lowers a now empty pint glass. It hits the table with a thud. He looks forlorn, and somewhat intoxicated.

ISAAC

I think I've finally reached my breaking point.

His conversational partner is LILY, a striking woman of around Isaac's age with a bright pink pixie cut and an eternally optimistic outlook on life.

ISAAC (O.S.)

I mean, I'm this close to jacking it all in and getting a job here.

Lily looks around skeptically. A middle-aged businessman stumbles out of the ladies' toilet and immediately vomits onto a table surrounded by obviously underage girls. The girls attack him and the sound of their fight continues in the background as we cut back to Lily.

LILY

You'll get there! Everyone goes through dry spells.

(CONTINUED)

ISAAC

Dry spells I can cope with but
it's been almost six months,
Lily! six months of rejection and
frustration and-

BEN (O.S.)

-Isaac bitching about his sex
life again?

BEN, a smartly dressed man with an immaculately groomed beard, appears at the table with a round of drinks.

Lily smacks Ben in the head. She reaches across the table and takes Isaac's hand. He looks up, surprised.

LILY

You'll be fine! Look, I know you
worry but you just need to have
faith that everything will work
itself out in the end.

They lock eyes for a beat.

LILY

You're a great writer.

ISAAC

I have faith, it's time I'm short
of.

BEN

Look at this morose motherfucker!

Isaac withdraws his hand and breaks Lily's gaze. Ben produces a tin of tobacco from his jacket pocket and begins to roll a cigarette; Isaac and Lily follow suit.

BEN

This is my one night off this
week!

(imitating Isaac)

I can't finish my story!
Everything I write is shit!
Nobody loves me! I-

LILY

Ben!

She flashes a warning look at Ben, who brings his tirade to a halt mid-flow.

LILY

You're not helping.

BEN

I am helping, I'm helping to get Isaac shitfaced.

(to Isaac)

And yes, tomorrow you're gonna wake up and feel like your head's full of angry bees but in a couple of hours, you'll have forgotten how pathetic your life is. Which means, crucially, we won't have to hear about it.

ISAAC

Nope.

BEN

Don't be a dick! Why not?

LILY

I think what Ben's trying to say is, why don't you tell us what the problem is and we'd be more than happy to help you through it.

BEN

(sarcastically)

That is exactly what I just said.

ISAAC

The problem is, I'm way past my deadline and the publishers are threatening to cut the funding for the book unless I deliver a completed draft by the end of the week, and I still don't have an ending.

Isaac finishes rolling his cigarette, taps the filter end three times on the table, and takes a swig of his beer.

ISAAC

You know that part in the story where the girl realises that she loved the guy all along and she confesses her undying love for him and they ride off into the sunset and live happily ever after. Easy, right?

Lily and Ben shrug.

ISAAC

I've been writing and re-writing that same scene every day for the past three months. Some days it all seems to be coming together

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ISAAC (cont'd)
but then I read it back and
Louise's dialogue is all
melodrama and cliches, and Adam's
just feels scripted. And I don't
believe a word of it. So I end up
sitting at my desk for hours on
end staring at a blank page.
Every single day.

(beat)

Oh my God. My life has become a
Bill Murray film.

Lily and Ben stare at him in a stunned silence.

ISAAC
So to answer your question, Ben,
that's why not.

BEN
Fuck that, you know you want to
stay and get arseholed with us!

ISAAC
You can use all the Jedi mind
tricks you want, man, it's not
happening. Not tonight.

EXT. BEER GARDEN - LATER

Isaac downs the remnants of a pint and staggers drunkenly
over to Lily and Ben, who are huddled together near the
door, shivering against the cold while they smoke their
cigarettes.

ISAAC
(slurring)
Fuck Nicholas Sparks. He had to
go ruin it for everyone.

LILY
I think you just need to really
get into the mind of your
character.

She takes a drag from her cigarette and follows it up with
a sip of red wine.

LILY
If Adam's dialogue is too
contrived, then just put yourself
into his shoes and ask yourself,
'what would I do in this
situation?'

(beat)

Let's role play. Pretend you're
Adam and I'll be Louise.

(CONTINUED)

Isaac begins to respond but Ben cuts him off.

BEN

No, the problem is that you're trying to throw together two people who clearly don't belong. I mean, you have the insecure, neurotic, artist-type guy, and the intelligent, attractive, prom queen girl... it doesn't seem believable because it's not. You should know all about that.

ISAAC

Yeah, but... wait, what?

BEN

Just have Adam transform himself into a swarve, sophisticated, semi-functional alcohol with a penchant for designer suits-
(to a group of women nearby)
-and a fifty k salary-
(to Isaac)
-and he'll be knee deep in it in no time. That scene will practically write itself.

ISAAC

How do you know so much stuff?

BEN

I know, right? Who knew an English degree would actually come in handy.

ISAAC

I don't know, man. He's a fish out of water. The whole point is that he doesn't change and Louise finally just accepts him for who he is.

BEN

Well, static characters only really work in comedy or tragedy.

ISAAC

It is a comedy.

BEN

Really? Fuck.

(beat)

Yeah, you should probably think about getting a job here.

(CONTINUED)

Isaac attempts a sharp look but he's clearly having trouble focusing, and instead stumbles back inside. Lily follows close behind.

BEN
(calling after Isaac)
I know the barmaid, I can probably hook you up.

Isaac has already left. Ben shrugs and knocks back his pint.

BEN
(to O.S.)
Hi there! What's your name?

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, BEDROOM - DAY

An alarm clock begins to ring on the bedside table. Isaac sits bolt upright in bed and cries out like a wounded animal.

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

He vomits violently into the toilet bowl.

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Isaac brushes his teeth in the mirror. He looks considerably worse for wear. Suddenly, he drops his toothbrush into the sink and ducks out of sight. We hear the sound of him throwing up again.

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM - LATER

He shuffles into the living room, pulling a T-shirt over his head, and sits down at his desk. He turns on the computer and wearily rubs his eyes as the screen flickers into life. He stares blankly for a moment.

ISAAC
Nope.

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The coffee machine bubbles away.

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Isaac, looking a little perkier, and with a mug of hot coffee in hand, sits back down at the desk and flexes his fingers.

ISAAC

Alright, Isaac. This is the one.
This is it. You can do this.

He closes his eyes, takes a breath, and places his fingers delicately on the keyboard.

A beat.

Isaac opens his eyes, exhales, and begins to type. As the keys begin to click and clack beneath his fingers, the scene unfolds, letter by letter, on the computer screen.

The words, "A sudden knock at the door jolted Adam from his melancholic slumber" form on the page.

The ring finger of Isaac's right hand hovers over the full stop key.

He presses the key, and at the precise moment the little black dot materialises on the page, three loud bangs break the silence.

Isaac looks up, startled. He scans the room for the source of the noise and his gaze falls upon the door of the flat. His eyes dart between the door and the computer screen, and back again.

Silence.

Isaac slowly gets up from his seat and tip-toes across the room. He reaches the door and peers through the peephole. Lily's face, distorted by the convex lens of the peephole, appears on the other side. Isaac breathes a sigh of relief, unlatches the lock, and opens the door.

ISAAC

It's you! I thought I was going
crazy for a second, you scared
the shit out of me!

LILY

I'm sorry. I know it must be
really weird for me to just show
up on your doorstep out of the
blue.

ISAAC

No, it's fine. What are you doing
here though?

(CONTINUED)

LILY

I almost didn't come but I've been going crazy all week and I didn't want you to think that I screwed you over on purpose so I had to come over and clear the air. I spoke to Dan and he told me everything... he told me about the song. But he said nobody's heard from you in days so I got your address and I thought I'd come over and... apologise.

Isaac scratches his head.

ISAAC

Are you high?

LILY

What?

ISAAC

You've been sampling Ben's secret stash haven't you?

LILY

What are you talking about?

ISAAC

What are you talking about?!
Who's Dan?

LILY

Adam, I know you must be angry but just hear me out. There's something I came here to say so please, just listen. Five minutes and then I'm gone, I promise.

Isaac stares blankly.

LILY

Adam?

A look of realisation dawns of Isaac's face.

ISAAC

I know what you're trying to do, I get it. Thanks, Lily, but honestly I really don't feel like role play this morning.

Lily looks horrified.

LILY

Role play?
(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LILY (cont'd)
Wait, did you just call me Lily?

ISAAC
(jokingly)
Oh, I'm sorry! Louise, right?

Isaac goes back to his desk.

LOUISE
Adam, you're scaring me.

ISAAC
Look, I appreciate what you're
trying to do, but I-

He glances at the computer screen and freezes. A large chunk of text has appeared on the screen, describing, complete with dialog, the entire exchange that has just taken place between himself and Lily. Every detail is correct, apart from their names which now read "Adam" and "Louise".

Isaac stares, wide-eyed and open-mouthed. Suddenly, more text appears on the screen, as though an invisible hand is typing the words: "Adam stared, wide-eyed and open-mouthed."

ISAAC
How did you do that?

LILY
Do what?

ISAAC
If this is some kind of elaborate
prank, I'm really not in the
mood.

He hits the backspace key and deletes the entire chunk of text.

ISAAC
Ben put you up to this, didn't
he?

No response.

ISAAC
Lily?

The room is empty. Isaac gets up and begins the search for Lily; he checks the bathroom, the hallway, the bin, under the sofa cushions, his coffee mug. Lily isn't anywhere.

Isaac sits back down in front of the computer, brow furrowed.

ISAAC

How much did I drink last night?

After a moment, he slaps himself hard in the face and resumes typing: "A sudden knock at the door jolted Adam from his melancholic slumber."

Three loud bangs.

Adam springs from the desk like a coiled viper and paces to the door. He wrenches it open and standing in the hallway is Lily, looking slightly startled.

ISAAC

(sarcastic)

Louise! What a nice surprise, come on in! So what can I do for you?

LILY

I'm sorry. I know it must be really weird for me to just show up on your doorstep out of the blue.

ISAAC

You've learned your lines, I'll give you that! So where were you hiding?

LILY

Hiding? I've been trying to get in touch ever since that night! I almost didn't come but I've been going crazy all week and I didn't want you to think that-

ISAAC

-that you screwed me over, yeah I know, we've done that bit.

Isaac scampers over to the desk and peers at the computer screen. The page is once again filling up with a blow by blow account of their conversation. He laughs and begins to applaud.

ISAAC

Bravo! That's a neat trick.

LILY

(voice wavering)

I didn't do anything.

ISAAC

Ben's listening to all of this right now isn't he?

He leans in closer.

(CONTINUED)

ISAAC
(whispering)
Are you wearing a wire?

He begins to frisk her and she smacks his hand away.

LILY
Adam, stop it! I know you must be
angry but just hear me out.
There's something I came here to
say so please, just listen. Five
minutes and then I'm gone, I
promise.

ISAAC
You're not giving up are you?

LILY
Is that what you want? God, I'm
such an idiot! I can't believe I
was actually considering leaving
Sam!

ISAAC
You were... wait.

Adam's mouth falls open.

LILY
But you obviously don't give a
shit.

Isaac stands rooted to the spot, swaying slightly, with a
stunned look on his face.

LILY
Adam!

He snaps out of it.

ISAAC
What? Hang on a sec... I just
need to check something.

Isaac runs over to the computer, sits down, and begins to
frantically scroll through the document, his eyes darting
back and forth and he scans the pages. He stops suddenly.

ISAAC
How did you know that?

LILY
(exasperated)
Know what?

ISAAC
(slowly)
That's not in the original
screenplay. I wrote that in
yesterday and nobody has seen
this manuscript since.

Lily stares at him, perplexed. Isaac leans back in his chair and rubs his eyes.

ISAAC
(to himself)
How is this happening?

He scrolls back down to the bottom of the document. A new line appears at the very end of the last page: "It had finally dawned on him."

LILY
Look, I'm just going to leave.

Lily takes a step towards the door.

ISAAC
No, don't move! Stay right there.

Without taking his eyes off of Lily, Isaac hits the backspace key. He watches as Lily relives the last few moments in high speed reverse as though someone had pointed a television remote in her direction and pressed rewind.

As the page becomes blank once more, Lily walks backwards out of the room, the door slamming shut behind her.

ISAAC
Well, fuck me.

Isaac scratches his head, and then looks over to the door. His fingers begin clacking away.

He places the full stop, jumps up from his seat and races to the door. He pulls it open and there stands Lily, surprise written all over her face, her hand raised ready to knock.

ISAAC
Louise. This is... unexpected.

He ushers her inside.

LILY
I'm sorry. I know it must be
really weird for me to just show
up on your doorstep out of the
blue.

ISAAC

Well, I can't say I'm not surprised to see you here.

LILY

I almost didn't come but I've been going crazy all week and I didn't want you to think that I screwed you over on purpose so I had to come over and clear the air. I spoke to Dan and he told me everything... he told me about the song. But he said nobody's heard from you in days so I got your address and I thought I'd come over and... apologise.

ISAAC

Come on, Louise, we barely know each other. There's really nothing to apologise for.

LILY

I know you must be angry but just hear me out. There's something I came here to say so please, just listen. Five minutes and then I'm gone, I promise.

ISAAC

You don't owe me anything!

LILY

Yes, I do! I made you a promise that I couldn't keep and that's not okay. I knew how much that show meant to you and I knew why you were doing it. I'm not stupid, Adam. Although, granted, I didn't know you'd go so far as to write me a bloody love song... but I want you to know that I tried to make it. I was late and I missed you and that's not an excuse, I know that. But I just wanted to say I'm sorry.

Isaac smiles.

ISAAC

I forgive you.

LILY

You can't forgive me, not yet! I still have to make it up to you!

(CONTINUED)

ISAAC

Yeah? How are you going to do that?

LILY

Why don't we start with dinner and a movie? On me.

Isaac laughs. Lily beams.

ISAAC

That sounds... perfect.

In one swift move, Isaac crosses the room, takes Lily's face in his hands and kisses her full on the lips. We CUT TO BLACK.

Isaac opens his eyes to see that Lily has gone. The flat is quiet and empty again, bearing no sign of Lily ever being there.

INT. ISAAC'S FLAT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Isaac's printer spits out page after page of text and a neat pile of paper begins to form in the tray.

The coffee machine whirs away O.S., barely audible over the droning buzz of the printer, and the pile grows millimetre by millimetre until finally, the title page slides out of the printer and fits neatly onto the top of the now inch-thick pile. It reads, "Love Songs for Louise by Isaac Carey: based on a screenplay by Harrison Ward".

The noise of the printer dies down and all we hear is the faint bubbling of the coffee machine.