

THE PAINTER

Short Script Submission for the Big Break Coverfly Contest

Animated Category

FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Summer sunlight shifted. A BOY, ten, chestnut curls and freckles, stands before a canvas. His brush moves with quiet intent.

The CANDLE he's been working on sits unfinished in the center of the canvas. A faint outline of a flame, still unrealized.

His GRANDPA comes in with sliced fruits.

GRANDPA

Eat something, Elias please.

Elias peaks, partially interested but his thought is consumed with the candle.

ELIAS

Grandpa, how should I draw this candle?

GRANDPA

Hm.. Do you want to draw the candle or the flame?

ELIAS

Good question. I guess I wanted to draw both?

Grandpa places the fruits on the desk beside and leans forward thoughtfully but playfully toward the canvas.

GRANDPA

Maybe a different shade? One that could contrast the color of the actual candle and the flame. Or something that doesn't contrast?

Elias lets out a soft genuine exhale, squeezing the last drop of paint from the tube.

ELIAS

Oh, grandpa...

GRANDPA

You know, I'll leave it to you. I see you're running out of paint. Let me go get you some more. I actually found a new store that has paintings and paint!

ELIAS

Some paint would be great. But I still don't know how to draw this candle.

Grandpa sits, curious.

GRANDPA

Correct me if I'm wrong, Elias. Have you not already drawn plenty of candles before?

ELIAS

I have...

GRANDPA

Oh, I see. You want to draw a different one.

ELIAS

Not quite...

GRANDPA

Could you please explain it to me?

ELIAS

(beat)

I want to draw a candle. A simple one. I know how to draw them. But I want this candle to be different.

GRANDPA

How so?

ELIAS

I want to capture the moment the candle becomes lit.

Grandpa takes a moment, feeling as though a cool breeze just struck him.

GRANDPA

Oh...

(beat)

Maybe you could draw a few candles in a row? Something like one row starts off with the candle not lit and the other—

ELIAS

Grandpa, grandpa... I know, I thought about this already...

GRANDPA (CONT'D)

I see.

ELIAS

Something about that doesn't feel right. I want to capture it in a single picture. In a single painting.

GRANDPA

In a single painting... You know what, I think the best I can do is spare you my advice. Now I am even more excited to get you more paint!

CLOSE ON - THE CANVAS

An unfinished candle. Still waiting. The brush rests on its side, catching the last of day's light.

INT. ELIAS' ROOM - NIGHT

The lit candle on the table flickers quietly. ELIAS seated on a cushion stares at it with intensity.

CLOSE ON - ELIAS' EYES

The flame dances across Elias' pupils. He focuses on its every movement. Then—suddenly—the flame turns BLUE. He pulls back. Heart quickening.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The front door creaks open. GRANDPA enters, carrying a colorful paper bag full of paint tubes.

Elias sits watching morning cartoons, finishing eating breakfast his GRANDMA just served.

GRANDMA

Looks like Grandpa is home.

Grandpa approaches Elias, reaches in to pull out the tube, and Elias inspects it with utmost care.

GRANDPA

Ok, here is the paint!

ELIAS

Thank you. Woah... It's... amazing.

GRANDPA  
I honestly couldn't tell...

He chuckles as Elias pulls out a tube, then another. Opens one, and smells it curiously.

ELIAS  
How much did this cost you?

GRANDPA  
There will come a day when this question would be important, but do not worry about it for now. Just enjoy it.

Elias turns a tube of blue in his hand like it's made of glass, and squeezes just a drop on his finger.

ELIAS  
The texture... the flow...

GRANDPA  
Want more?

ELIAS  
It should be okay for now. But, grandpa, I would like to go to the store with you when I run out of paint.

GRANDPA  
Of course!

ELIAS  
By the way, I tried to paint the candle but it didn't work. So I just painted something else instead.

GRANDPA  
What is it?

INT. ELIAS' ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ELIAS  
A grasshopper.

GRANDPA  
A grasshopper?!

ELIAS  
Yes...

GRANDPA

Why a grasshopper? I mean, don't get me wrong. You did a great job, Elias! But its legs. They seem to be a little too short...

ELIAS

I'm aware. I made it that way...

GRANDPA

How come?

ELIAS

Because I wanted to capture the grasshopper mid-jump.

GRANDPA

Upon mid-jump? Like the candle flame?

ELIAS

Exactly... I still don't know how to do it though.

GRANDPA goes still. Breathless for a moment. He presses his palm to his chest in wonder. A second breeze. Colder. Deeper.

ELIAS (CONT'D)

Grandpa, I'd like to go with you to the store tomorrow, okay?

GRANDPA

Of... of course.

EXT. PAINT STORE - MORNING

The street is calm. The weather sunny. The windows are crowded with paintings—some simple, some wild and stormy.

INT. PAINT STORE - MOMENTS LATER

A little brass bell rings as they enter.

STOREKEEPER (O.S.)

Hello!

The STOREKEEPER, 60's, wiry and sprightly in a vest, appears from behind a tall stack of brushes.

GRANDPA

This is my grandson, Elias. The painter I told you about.

(MORE)

GRANDPA (CONT'D)

He still has much to improve on  
regarding his technique and the way  
he articulates his colors.

ELIAS

I prefer, the use of colors... To  
articulate in this case means to  
force. I never force my paintings.  
They just seem to come out of me.

The storekeeper pauses, intrigued.

STOREKEEPER

Come out of you?

ELIAS

Yes...

STOREKEEPER

What do you like to paint?

ELIAS

Things that I consider to have life  
to them.

STOREKEEPER

Things that have life to them, you  
say?

ELIAS

Yes...

STOREKEEPER

Hm... tell you what... do you have  
any samples of your work?

ELIAS

I've never really thought of them  
as samples...

STOREKEEPER

I want to see them. Do you mind?

A smile appears across Elias' face.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Elias and Grandpa walk. The occasional clack of Elias' shoes.  
A gust of wind flutters the corner of one canvas but Elias  
steadies it.

INT. PAINT STORE - MOMENTS LATER

The bell above the door chimes. The STOREKEEPER glances up.

STOREKEEPER  
You came back.

GRANDPA  
He has some paintings to show you.

Elias steps forward, setting one painting of a cocoon on the counter with care.

The storekeeper folds his arms. He looks. Quiet.

Then he looks at the second: a farm. Then the third: a field of flowers. Then the last: a single cloud.

He takes a breath.

STOREKEEPER  
No.

Elias blinks.

STOREKEEPER (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry, these don't work.

Elias doesn't respond. His arms go still.

STOREKEEPER (CONT'D)  
You're young. That's fine. Just don't rush it.

But Elias doesn't hear the rest. He steps back. His breath is shorter now. Shallow.

EXT. PAINT STORE - SECONDS LATER

The door bursts open. Elias runs out with the cocoon and cloud paintings pressed to his chest. The others left behind.

Elias makes it to the edge of the sidewalk before his knees buckle, he takes hold of both paintings, and with one hand covers his face. His small body shakes.

INT. PAINT STORE - CONTINUOUS

GRANDPA (O.S.)  
Do you even know what you're talking about?



The storekeeper looks at him, unsure.

STOREKEEPER  
I wasn't trying to—

GRANDPA  
What were you trying to?

A beat. Grandpa stares. Not angry. Just deeply disappointed, and leaves out the door. Silence.

The storekeeper looks down at the paintings still sitting on the counter. His hand hovers over the field of flowers. He gently picks it up.

CLOSE ON - THE PAINTING

A simple field of flowers, unbalanced, a little wild — but full of feeling. The storekeeper's brow furrows. He traces a brushstroke with his thumb.

He places it back down, neatly, carefully. Not in rejection this time— almost as if it's fragile. He exhales through his nose. Quiet.

Then he turns away, reaches under the counter, and pulls out a small, ornament tin of paint, no larger than a quarter. He sets it beside the painting and looks toward the now closed door as if expecting it to soon open again.

EXT. APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Elias sits at the front steps of the apartment. His eyes are red from crying. He holds no paintings.

INT. ELIAS' ROOM - DAYS LATER

The light is dimmer now. His easel is bare. His desk is cluttered but untouched.

A cup of water, clean. Brushes stiff. Unwashed.

Elias moves slowly, gathering his canvases and stacking them, one by one. He opens his closet and places them inside, closes the door, and flops backward on his bed.

Laying there Elias takes a deep breath and exhales, thinking to himself outload:

ELIAS  
But I am still a kid. I still have  
time to grow!

He gets up to see and hear from the window the sound of the children playing. And at this moment the birds have a crisper chirp; the children's laughs glisten a little brighter.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Grandpa sits quietly worried at the table. The clock ticks.

GRANDPA  
(to himself)  
He hasn't picked up a brush in  
days.

A KNOCK at the front door; Grandpa hastens to open it.

EXT. PORTICO - CONTINUOUS

Grandpa opens the door to see the STOREKEEPER.

GRANDPA  
You?

STOREKEEPER  
I came to see the boy...

GRANDPA  
A sudden change of heart? Finally  
fixed your glasses prescription?

STOREKEEPER  
(gently)  
I came to give this to your  
grandson.

He holds out a single tube of paint.

GRANDPA  
(softening)  
Paint, eh?

STOREKEEPER  
May I give it to him? I once  
painted too... before I started  
selling paints.

GRANDPA

I guess I'll pass it on. He's out right now with his grandma at the store.

STOREKEEPER

Please do...

Grandpa takes the paint. The storekeeper nods and leaves.

INT. CORNER STORE - AFTERNOON

Elias stands beside his grandma. His eyes drift from the rows of cereal to a chocolate box: white surface—matte, untouched, blank. It catches something in him.

ELIAS

Grandma...

GRANDMA

Yes, dear?

His eyes don't move from the box.

ELIAS

I am getting hungry. Perhaps it is time to go home?

Grandma smiles as if she'd waited for those words all day.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The walk is easy. Birds scatter from a rain puddle. Sidewalks littered with leaves. The kind of walk you don't rush.

Across the street, children are laughing, yelling nonsense, chasing each other in fast circles.

A rubber ball rolls from them, bouncing, wobbling, plop— it LANDS just by Elias' feet.

He stares, picks up the ball, and all he can feel are the texture of the colors. One child, grinning wide runs up, grabs the ball from Elias' hands, and sprints back to the others. They scream. They laugh. They run off again. Elias stares after them.

INT. HOUSE - EVENING

The front door opens. Elias enters first. He carries one small bag. Grandma follows behind, humming something sweet.

Elias walks head down to his room.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Grandma sets the bag and begins unpacking—eggs, a loaf of bread, a few vegetables.

Grandpa enters, holding the tube of paint.

GRANDPA  
The man came by...

GRANDMA  
Which man?

GRANDPA  
The storekeeper.

Grandma keeps unpacking.

GRANDMA  
Oh, a change of heart so late?

GRANDPA  
No, not really. He left this...

Grandpa holds out the paint.

GRANDPA (CONT'D)  
I'll go give it to him.

GRANDMA  
(softly)  
I don't think that's a good idea...

GRANDPA  
Why? He needs to paint! Don't you see that his soul is draining?

GRANDMA  
Personally, I feel as if it's growing...

GRANDPA  
Growing?

GRANDMA  
Precisely. Let us discuss this later... I think I have an idea.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The family gathers. Warm lamplight. No television. No distractions.

Elias sits curled on one side of the couch. He watches them.

GRANDMA

Kid...

Elias lifts his head.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

What do you think about going back home for the rest of summer? To start to live your own life.

Elias blinks, confused at what he's just heard.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

We will visit you every day! But it will be your life. I want you to be free. Even from us!

Elias looks down, then back up. He doesn't answer. Instead, he turns his head to the window.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE - LATE EVENING

The same children are still playing. The rubber ball bounces and spins under the streetlamp, lit like a lantern.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Elias' eyes go wide. Not in surprise—but in recognition.

In his mind—

EXT. OUTSIDE - FLASH

A different Elias. One among them. No paintbrush. Just bare feet on the grass, bare hands, and squeals of laughter. He kicks the ball. Misses. Trips. Laughs anyway.

INT. APARTMENT

Elias' shoulders settle as he looks at Grandma with an agreeing and excited gaze.

Grandma nods softly. Grandpa watches him a moment longer.

EXT. FAMILY PROPERTY - AFTERNOON

Elias stands alone before his neighborhood house, holding a suitcase, a bag of food, and an empty canvas. Children play nearby, their laughter growing louder.

A RUBBER BALL bounces to him and the world for Elias sharpens—mowers hum louder, sprinklers hiss, even the air feels different.

Elias pauses and see's the kids, sets everything down, and KICKS the ball back to them, and runs to join them, smiling, movements free.

EXT. FIELD - ANOTHER DAY

GRANDPA stands at the edge of a grass field, arms crossed, watching in delight at the sight of Elias playing with the other children.

Elias jogs over, slightly out of breath but glowing.

ELIAS

Grandpa!

GRANDPA

Elias, how's everything going?

ELIAS

It's going well... how about you?

GRANDPA

Okay, I guess. We have missed you.

ELIAS

I miss you and Grandma also...

Grandpa nods and shifts his weight, searching for the right words. He glances down, then back at Elias.

GRANDPA

Have you been painting?

ELIAS

Save it grandpa! Please! I just don't want to talk about it.

Grandpa lifts his hands in surrender.

GRANDPA

Ok, I'm sorry. It's just..  
The man came by...

Elias squints slightly, already guessing.

ELIAS  
Which man?

GRANDPA  
The storekeeper...

A pause. The name still stings.

ELIAS  
Oh... that man. What did he want?

GRANDPA  
Nothing really... but he brought  
you something.

ELIAS  
Let me guess... paint?

GRANDPA  
Paint.

Elias extends his hand slowly. Grandpa hands over the small,  
pristine tube.

ELIAS  
Let me see it...

He turns it over in his fingers for a moment. Then, without a  
second thought, tosses it into the thick grass behind him.

It lands softly, swallowed by the grass.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Elias, alone in the large, quiet house, stands at the window,  
watching children play outside.

ELIAS (V.O.)  
Could I draw them? Of course I can.  
I am a part of their moves. It's  
simple. But why? Oh... because  
there's a life in them already.  
But... what about the candle...  
What about the grasshopper?

He stares a moment longer, his fingers lightly tapping the  
window frame. Suddenly, he straightens. Something inside him  
clicks back into place.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Elias darts through the hallway, feet light and fast on the wooden floor.

EXT. YARD - MOMENTS LATER

He bursts through the front door, the wind catching his hair.

The kids pause their game. A few glance at each other, shrug, as Elias asks them to help, and they search with him—bending, crawling, laughing, and bumping into each other. It's almost a game now.

Finally, a GIRL, six, calls out:

GIRL  
I found it!

She holds it up like a treasure. Elias snatches it from her hand without much thought.

ELIAS  
Thanks!

He spins around, running off toward the house. The girl blinks, smiles anyway, and goes back to playing.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Elias runs with joy.

The tube in his hand. His feet pounding over the earth. His shadow following just behind.

INT. STUDIO ROOM - NIGHT

Elias stands before an upright canvas, still catching his breath from the run. In his hand, the TUBE OF PAINT.

He pauses. Then, FIERCELY twists the cap.

A splash of blue spills onto his fingers. He squints, preparing to paint.

He squeezes again— this time the paint splits apart.

A RAINBOW spills out.

Colors swirling, separating on their own across the palette. Reds avoiding greens. Blues circling yellows. None blending.



Elias stares, mesmerized.

ELIAS  
What is this...?

He breathes in, then, instinctively, touches his brush to the palette, sweeping once across the chaos. A flick of paint hits the canvas—a candle takes shape as he paints.

The wax. The wick. The body forms before him. Then the flame.

He paints it carefully—delicately—like he's afraid it might burn him. He steps back, just slightly, and STARES. Silence.

ELIAS (CONT'D)  
Come on... move.

He leans in. Eyes fixed. The flame is still. He stares harder, as though he could will it to flicker.

A DROP OF SWEAT slides down his forehead.

The room is quiet—only the ticking of a distant clock. His breathing grows shallow. Still the flame does not move. Elias doesn't blink. His eyelids droop under invisible weight. His knees wobble. But he refuses to stop. Then—through the blur of sweat—A spark. Tiny. Barely there. But real.

Elias GASPS quietly, stunned. The flame FLARES, just for a moment. A pulse of light. His body, at its absolute limit, finally gives way. He collapses on the couch beside, the brush falling softly from his hand.

The room holds still. Just the painting...and the flame that now seems to glow faintly, quietly, on its own.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. STUDIO - MORNING

Elias stirs awake, body sore, the morning light flooding through the window. He sits up slowly, rubbing his neck.

His eyes drift to the canvas from the night before. The candle is still there... but the movement is gone. Elias stares for a moment. Then he smiles.

ELIAS  
I know how to bring you back.

INT. BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

He digs out a fresh canvas and a new brush.

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

He opens his palette—just a bit of the storekeeper's paint remains, and he begins to paint a grasshopper.

Half its body emerges in vivid detail. Legs bending, eyes bulging with silent energy.

Suddenly— the brush SCRAPES the canvas dry. The grasshopper is only HALF PAINTED.

Elias frowns, and looks at the empty tube.

ELIAS

No, no, no...

Worrying music begins.

EXT. TOWN

Elias darts through a crowd, finally skidding to a stop outside the familiar storefront.

INT. STORE - CONTINUOUS

The storekeeper, sorting brushes, looks up as the bell above the door jingles.

ELIAS

Mister!

STOREKEEPER

Oh, hello young man. What brings you back?

ELIAS

My... painting. It came to life!

The storekeeper raises an eyebrow— subtle, calm, but intrigued.

STOREKEEPER

What did you paint?

ELIAS

A candle!

A beat. The storekeeper places the brushes down, his hands now folded.

STOREKEEPER

And...?

ELIAS

It came to life!

STOREKEEPER

Just came to life?

ELIAS

No.. First it took my soul out of me...

The storekeeper leans in slightly. His eyes narrow with the quiet gravity of someone who understands far more than he lets on.

STOREKEEPER

Really?

His voice softens. Almost to a whisper.

STOREKEEPER (CONT'D)

Okay... in this case I'll give you some more paint.

He turns, opens a small cabinet behind the counter, and retrieves a small tin about the size of a quarter- even more ornate than before.

STOREKEEPER (CONT'D)

But please remember, this is the only one for you.

He sets the tin gently in Elias' hands.

STOREKEEPER (CONT'D)

I don't have much left. There are others who might need it.

(beat)

Use it wisely.

Elias nods, grasping the tin in both hands. He turns and hurries out the door.

INT. STUDIO ROOM - DAY

The door bursts open. Elias enters, breathless but energized, clutching the ornate tin of paint.

He opens the tin. The colors inside swirl gently, quieter than before. He dips his brush and the colors turn to an exact shade of green, and he keeps drawing the grasshopper. Each stroke is measured, carefully reverent.

The grasshopper's legs take full shape. Antennae curl outward. A gentle glow flickers across its green body.

Silence. Elias steps back, waiting. Breath held. Nothing.

He leans forward, eyes scanning every inch. Then a subtle shiver in the legs. The canvas pulses—barely. And the grasshopper MOVES.

ELIAS  
(gasping)  
Ah!

But something's wrong. Its legs twitch and FAIL TO JUMP. The grasshopper tries again—recoiling, pressing down, leaping—but it doesn't move forward.

ELIAS (CONT'D)  
No... No... why can't you move?!

The glow around the grasshopper flickers, then fades as does the music coming to an end. Elias lifts his brush— but it's DRY. He frantically checks the tin. Empty. Not a single drop.

The grasshopper hangs there, suspended in a painted moment, limbs frozen mid-spring, gravity presses on it and it looks as though it's in PAIN; a petal is just too short to reach.

INT. STORE - DAY

Elias bursts through the STOREKEEPERS door once more, eyes wide with frustration. His heart races as he confronts the storekeeper.

ELIAS  
I need more paint! Just a little bit more, please! Just for the grass petal!

STOREKEEPER  
Every drop of that paint costs more than you think... not in money, but in what it takes from you. The answer, boy, is no.

Elias betrays disappointment more in himself than the store keeper, thinks for a moment, and runs out the store.

INT. STUDIO

Elias searches through the clutter to find a tube of HIS REGULAR green paint that's practically empty, only a little left and grabs it.

He squeezes the reminder out, dips his brush, his hand shaking with urgency. He paints quickly, decisively, extending the grass petal. Every brushstroke is filled with an almost frenzied energy.

The newly painted petal STRETCHES longer, more complete. Elias fixates on the ever so still grasshopper.

ELIAS

Common, little guy. Common! Common!

Elias steps back, eyes focusing on the canvas, HEART RACING. The grasshopper stirs, it's legs twitch, but they're not long enough so Elias paints the legs just a little longer.

The grasshopper hesitates, then, with a BURST of life, it JUMPS. Legs bend, its movement fluid, its body following the curve of the extended petal. And it lands perfectly on it.

The grasshopper is free.

Elias smiles, breathing deeply as he looks at his own now empty tube of green paint, in awe.

His eyes soften as he watches the grasshopper finally still and out of pain, as if an image captured in eternity.

The music fades.

FADE TO BLACK.