

Name :

Fiction: Plot & Character Development – Q2:5

Date :

As you answer this week's questions, highlight your evidence in the text.

A Change of Tune

Monday

Zoey was about to write her name on the school talent show sign-up sheet when Steven slid in front of her.

"You sure you want to come back for another beating?" Steven clicked his pen, then signed his name with a flourish in the top slot.

Zoey's best friend, Liv, came to her defense. "Last year was a fluke, Steven, and you know it. You won by default because Zoey was battling laryngitis."

"Yeah, right," sneered Steven. "And I suppose laryngitis caused her to flub her F chord, too?"

Zoey winced, remembering the inharmonious moment when her index finger failed to barre across all six guitar strings properly. Zoey took a deep breath, letting go of that **discordant** memory with her exhale. With her confidence restored, Zoey swiped back at him. "It's easy to hit all the right notes when your fingers never venture outside their comfort zone. I'd find strumming the same three-chord progression, over and over again, monotonous, but I guess you like playing it safe."

"Tough talk from someone who could barely squeak out a lyric last year," Steven volleyed back. "You want a challenge? It's on...on stage that is!"

Zoey marched up to the sign-up and added her signature. "See you at auditions, Steven. Come on, Liv. Bekah and James are waiting for us at lunch.

Tuesday

Zoey stood outside the auditorium with Liv, Bekah, and James, waiting for her name to be called. The hallway was crowded with fellow auditioners. Steven sat against the windows, practicing his guitar riffs.

"That sounds like more than three basic chords," said Liv.

Zoey had to admit, Steven was a lot better than she'd expected. She'd assumed he was a novice guitarist. But the way his fingers worked his guitar's steel strings, he was more proficient than she'd thought.

"Don't worry, Zoey," said James, as if reading her thoughts. "You're really talented, so don't fret. Ha! Fret...get it? Fret, as in 'worry' and fret as in 'guitar fret'...the strips across the neck of your guitar?"

Zoey groaned and rolled her eyes at her friend's corny joke. Still, she appreciated his attempt at a humorous pep talk.

"What song are you going to do?" asked Bekah.

"It's an original composition," said Zoey.

"Mine too," interjected Steven from across the hallway.

"Eavesdropper," snapped Liv. "We're having a private conversation."

"It's a public hallway," replied Steven.

"You both write music?" commented Bekah. "You two should collaborate sometime."

Steven and Zoey reacted simultaneously: "With him, no way?"/"With her, never?"

"Jeesh," shrugged Bekah. "It was just an idea."

"A terrible one," said Steven.

"Dreadful," agreed Zoey.

Ms. Martinez, the school music teacher, peeked her head out the auditorium door. "Zoey White...you're up. Steven Schwartz, **you're on deck.**"

Zoey took a deep breath and headed inside. Neither Zoey nor Steven wished the other good luck.

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Wednesday

A throng of students clustered around the bulletin board where Ms. Martinez had posted the audition results. Zoey and Liv maneuvered their way through the crowd, while James and Bekah waited at the perimeter.

"So, did you make it?" James called to Zoey.

"She did!" Liv shrieked, jumping up and down. "So did, Steven," she added, less enthusiastically.

Zoey and Liv rejoined James and Bekah outside the cluster.

"How many people made it?" asked Bekah.

"About twenty acts in total," said Zoey.

"That's a lot," said James.

"The number's irrelevant," Liv stated. "You're better than all them, Zoey. Especially, Steven."

Zoey wished she shared Liv's unwavering confidence in her. In truth, she didn't know how she stacked up against the competition since they'd all auditioned privately. She'd find out tomorrow, during the rehearsal.

Thursday

"Everyone, take your seats in the order of the line-up," directed Ms. Martinez, as the students filed into the auditorium.

Ugh, thought Zoey. She was slated for last, and Steven was to perform right before her. That meant she'd have to sit next to her nemesis during the entire rehearsal.

Zoey was enthralled by the talent that took the stage. In addition to fellow musicians, there were baton twirlers, acrobats, dancers, magicians, a ventriloquist and even a dog trainer. In a sea of fierce competitors, Steven was one of the best.

"What'd you think?" Steven asked Zoey when the rehearsal was over.

Whoa, was Steven really asking for her opinion? "About your act specifically, or the rehearsal overall?"

"Both," Steven replied.

"They're all really good," said Zoey.

"I know," Steven's voice quivered with anxiety.

"Your song's really catchy, but..." Zoey paused, unsure if she should continue.

"But what?" pressed Steven. "If you have some constructive criticism, let's hear it."

"Okay, let me show you." Zoey pulled out her guitar and began strumming. "When you bridge to the chorus, instead of going from C right into E Minor, insert a bar of F Major 7 in between.

Steven's eyes went wide. "Wow, that does sound better. Great idea!"

"Have any feedback on my song?" Zoey asked hesitantly, not certain she wanted his critique. Her song was her baby, and she felt protective of it. She felt like the mother of a newborn, afraid that someone was about to call her infant ugly.

"Your song was amazing, but I felt like the lyrics were a little off in the second verse," said Steven.

"Off how?" asked Zoey, defensively.

"Well, you're singing about having inner fire and sparking change. So, instead of rhyming 'remember' with 'December', how about tweaking the lyrics so that it rhymes with 'ember.' That way it ties back to the fire theme."

"Oh my gosh, I love it," said Zoey. "Thanks for the suggestion."

"Uh-oh," said Steven, mockingly. "Did we just collaborate?"

"I think we did." Zoey winked.

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Friday

"You did what?" Liv exclaimed, skeptically. "You told the enemy how to beat you? Don't you care about winning anymore?"

"I do," said Zoey. "But I also care about making good music."

Liv shook her head. "I don't get it. You've been bitter **rivals** for a year; now you're giving him a tutorial on how to trounce you?"

"Maybe we never should have become **adversaries**," asserted Zoey. "He won fair and square. I should have just said 'congratulations' and been done with it."

"You'll get your chance to congratulate him soon enough when he beats you for the second year in a row," scoffed Liv.

"I might still win," said Zoey. "My song is good, too."

"Uh-huh." Liv zipped up backpack. "I got to get home."

That night, as Zoey practiced her song, her fingers kept finding their way to the chords in Steven's song. His composition really was infectious. If she fiddled around with it, she bet she could make it even better.

Saturday - backstage, before talent show

Ms. Martinez clapped her hands to get everyone's attention. "We're about to open the auditorium and let in the audience."

Zoey tightened her grip on her guitar case. Almost show time! Liv dressed all in black as part of the crew, gave her friend's hand a good luck squeeze.

"Take your places, every—"

Ms. Martinez got cut off by a ringing telephone. Steven's telephone.

Do-do-do-do-do-do-do.

"Mr. Schwartz," Ms. Martinez scolded. "You know the rules. No cell phones backstage."

"But, it's my dad. He's calling to wish me good luck," said Steven.

"Take the call in the hallway," Ms. Martinez directed. "Everyone else, places."

Steven set down his guitar case and stepped out. Zoey noticed Liv's eyes following him out the door.

"What are you looking at?" asked Zoey.

"Opportunity," said Liv.

"What?"

"Never mind," Liv gave Zoey a hug. "I have a feeling tonight will be your night."

Saturday - backstage, during the talent show

Each act was as good as the next, however, in Zoey's opinion, there was no clear standout. But then Steven had yet to take the stage. He was up next. Standing in the wings, she peeked through the curtains and saw her parents seated in the second row.

Steven eased up beside her. "Nervous?"

"Extremely," Zoey admitted.

"Me, too," Steven acknowledged. "But in a good way, you know what I mean?"

Zoey nodded. "Um, your dad couldn't get off work to attend the show?"

Steven's eyes took on a distant glaze. "No. He's in the military. Stationed overseas in Iraq. It's like 3 AM there, but he called to wish me good luck."

"But your mom's here, right?" Zoey consoled.

Steven shook his head. "My little brother has the flu, so my mom had to stay home with him. Guess I don't have much of a cheering section."

"You have at least one," said Zoey. "Me."

"I like not hating your guts," said Steven.

"Me too," laughed Zoey. "Now get out there and slay that song."

Saturday - Steven's Act

As soon as Steven hit the stage, it was obvious to Zoey that something was awry. He strummed his guitar for a final tuning, and it sounded way off. As he adjusted the tension of his strings, one of them snapped.

Zoey heard Liv laugh beside her. "Looks like Steven's winning act is coming unraveled."

"Did you do something?" Zoey speculated.

"Just swapped the order of the first two strings," said Liv. "You know, they look practically identical? Can't tell they've been restrung out of order...until it's too late."

"Why would you do this?"

"You'd lost your competitive edge," said Liv, coolly. "So, I just gave you a little help."

"This isn't help! You sabotaged him." Zoey couldn't believe her friend would stoop so low.

"Don't be so dramatic. All I've heard from you for the past year is how much you wanted to beat Steven, now you can," Liv reasoned.

"I thought you believed in me?" flashed Zoey.

"I do!" Liv stated, emphatically.

"But you didn't think I could win without cheating?" accused Zoey.

"I...I didn't think of it that way," Liv stammered.

"Well, you should have!" Zoey grabbed up her guitar and darted onto the stage, joining Steven in the spotlight.

"Come to usher me off the stage?" whispered Steven, dejectedly.

"No," Zoey thrust her guitar in Steven's direction. "Here, use mine."

"I can't." Steven groaned. "I've never played a nylon-string guitar before. Only steel. If I try to play yours, it won't sound right."

"If you can't, I can," Zoey offered. "Last night, when I should have been practicing my own number, I couldn't get your song out of my head. As I said, it's really catchy. I'm iffy on your lyrics, but I know all the chords by heart. You sing, I'll play."

Steven nodded.

Zoey stepped up to the microphone, "Ladies and gentlemen, there's been a slight change in the program. Instead of two solo acts, Steven and I will be performing a duo."

From opening chord to the final lyric, the audience was captivated by their performance. At the end, the crowd was on their feet in a standing ovation.

"Think we won?" asked Steven, as they took their bows.

"You know what?" Zoey responded. "I couldn't care less."

