

User 210074

Mackenzie Simms

User 210039: User 210074 would you like Option A or Option B for your Post-Schooltime Meal?

User 210074: What are the differences between Option A or Option B?

User 210039: Option A is Roast Chicken, slow cooked with yukon gold potatoes, carrots, and french bread for dipping. Opinion B is Beans and Rice served over a bed of lettuce with a side of tortilla chips for dipping.

User 210074: I would like Option A.

A portion of chicken and vegetables is passed through the slot in User 210074's Room Door, like it is every night after Schooltime Activities are complete for the day. User 210074 then decides between two Mealtimes Entertainment Videos to watch while fueling up for the rest of the evening, the decision is between Dancing Markers or Talking Butterflies, two of the User's favorite programs. User 210074 decides on Talking Butterflies— the way they speak is so elegant and makes User 210074 feel a sort of joy that is indescribable. User 210074 finishes the meal and leaves the tray on the slot for the WasherBot to take to the kitchen and clean for tomorrow's Pre-Schooltime Meal. User 210074 is enthralled by the video program, and continues watching until the clock strikes 9:00. User 210074 gets in the Goodnight Clothes for sleeping. User 210074 falls asleep at 9:13 pm.

User 210016: Good morning child, what will you have for your Pre-Schooltime Meal? Option A contains eggs scrambled with a side of toast and a pad of butter for spreading. Option B contains one bagel with strawberry cream cheese and a side of bacon. Both options contain one serving of pulp-free orange juice.

User 210074: I would like Option B.

User 210074 rises from bed and takes off the Goodnight Clothes for sleeping, exchanging them with the folded set of light blue pants and a matching top. User 210074 sits on the edge of the bed and puts on two white socks and slips each foot into a slipper that has been placed neatly on the floor. At exactly 7:00 a.m. the WasherBot passes the User's meal through the Room Door slit, where User 210074 takes a seat at the desk to eat. User 210074 looks at the computer monitor which takes up a large portion of the desk, waiting for the Morning Recaptry to begin.

Morningtime Recaptry plays for the entire household as User 210074, User 210039, User 210016, and User 210091 consume their meals. Morningtime Recaptry shows the Great Leader waving to all of the dedicated Users who spent their Overtime Allowances to visit the Capital City on the Great Leader's 25th Anniversary in Power. User 210074's Family Unit was just short of being able to join in on the festivities, something they would all blame on User 210016, who took an 8 hour absence from Working on April 17th. They all scowled at the thought in their separate Rooms. Morningtime Recaptry ends the same every WorkWeek Day, urging Family Units to WorkLearn for an extra twenty minutes per day to receive Premium Mealtime Options. User 210091 then begs User 210039 and User 210016 to Work extra.

User 210039: User 210091, it just is not that easy. Some day you will learn that you earn your Time Off and you will not want to Work extra for Premium Mealtime Options, Classic Mealtime Options are fine, especially for a Learner like you.

User 210091: I disagree with you but as your Younger, I will respect your decisions.

User 210039: Reminder– it is User 210016's Company Anniversary this WorkWeek OffDay, and for that we have opted in for one day of Premium Mealtime Options and opted for a

Celebratory Dessert, and User 210016 has selected chocolate cake to share with our whole Family Unit.

The Family Unit begins their WorkWeek Day now, with User 210091 and User 210074 logging into their Schooltime Activities. User 210039 and User 210016 begin their Work, picking up their headsets and logging into their different sectors of Work in front of them. User 210016 works in the Waste Management department for the Capital City, filtering the waste products out of the water that feeds the Bots. In order for Bots to work properly, there may be no debris or organic matter in the water supply, and it is the duty of people like User 210016 to use Bot Technology to target the waste and eliminate it, one of the most vital and time-consuming tasks in the Capital City. User 210039 is a Visual Designer, using Bot Technologies to create programs for the Capital City. All Users benefit from this Work, as they are entertained constantly by the creative Work Visual Designers do. WorkWeeks are incredibly vital to the very existence of the User's Capital City. Every User is needed in the continual effort of productivity and greatness. The Great Leader reminds the Users constantly of the civilizations that have fallen before their eyes. Faraway lands that were not protected by their Users. The Great Leader is forever indebted to the loyal Users that protect their Capital City just as Users are indebted to their Great Leader for his efforts.

For Users that are fifteen years of age, Schooltime Activities serve as an opportunity to receive specialized trainings before entering the Workforce. For User 210074, this looks like following in the footsteps of User 210039. Becoming a Visual Designer is no easy task, Users must practice visual design elements and Capital City Logos and perfect the art of creation.

The WorkWeek Day ends, and User 210074 selects a Post-Schooltime Meal. User 210074 opts for the Steak and Salad, Option A. User 210074 uses the mouse to click on the Dancing

Dogs icon as a Mealtime Entertainment Video. The program fills the large monitor screen. The image on the screen flickers a few times as User 210074 takes more bites of food, eyes fixated on the two cartoon corgis on their hind legs, arms waving in the air rhythmically. User 210074 grins at the silly video, gobbling bites of steak. The image of dogs on the monitor shifts and blurs, the sound coming out of the speakers is no longer light-hearted, as it is replaced by static. A new image flashes onto the screen as the static noise clears and soft violin replaces it. An older User, bald with no facial hair, is wearing a formal black suit with shiny shoes. He's holding hands with a younger User with long, blonde hair, in a white gown swaying to the rhythm of the violin music. Tables and tables of nicely dressed Users are gathered around, watching the two dance together in the middle of a wooden floor. Once the dance is complete a few moments later, the crowd of Users stand up and clap their hands, hugging and chatting. The video flashes and skips to a new scene. The older User is now skinnier and paler than he was before. He is lying in a bed, tubes connected to his arms and stomach and monitors on the wall behind his head. There is no music now, there is no audience. The older User is surrounded by the younger, blonde, User and another older female User with long white hair. The group is huddled here together, grabbing hands and weeping silently. The steady beep...beep...beep... is all that User 210074 can hear in this video. The older User holds tightly onto the two females and rubs their shoulders comfortingly. Static comes back and Dancing Dogs reappears like it never glitched to begin with. User 210074 realizes that her Post-Schooltime Meal plate is still mostly full. She rubs her eyes, as they are streaked with salty tears. User 210074 doesn't remember crying, but the image of the other Users is still on the mind. User 210074 places the Post-Schooltime Meal plate in the slot for the WasherBots to take to the kitchen. User 210074 wants more, watching and waiting for that same glitch, for those Users to come back. The User waits all evening until eventually User

210074 puts on the Goodnight Clothes for sleeping. User 210074 does not sleep until 11:43 tonight.

On this WorkWeek OffDay morning, User 210074 wakes up to the Capital City's Anthem, as it is User 210016's Company Anniversary.

User 210091: Congratulations User 210016. And thank you for selecting Chocolate Cake, that is my favorite Celebratory Dessert!

User 210039: We are so proud of the vital work that you do for our Capital City every day. I am extremely lucky that you are my Husband and to be in your Family Unit.

User 210074: Congratulations, we are so proud.

User 210016: Thank you all, I am sincerely grateful to be in your Family Unit. Let's enjoy this milestone together.

Just then, the WasherBots pushed a slice of Chocolate Cake through the slots in the Room Doors, with trays complete with balloons for decorating. User 210016 selects Dancing Salad as a Mealtime Entertainment Video to cast onto everyone in the Family Unit's monitor screens. The Family Unit is ecstatic, they let him know so in their Chat. User 210074 doesn't feel as thrilled as the others, however. User 210074 hasn't been able to get the Users from the video glitch out of her mind for four days now. Everyone begins their eating, as they are shown a highlight reel of User 210016's WorkWeek Accomplishments from the past year. User 210074 takes a bite of Chocolate Cake, bored with the video on the monitor. Thirsty from the rich Chocolate Cake, User 210074 pushes open her Room Door, when she notices that another Room Door is also cracked open. User 210074 never really pays much attention to other Room Doors, as she knows these are where her Family Unit WorkLearns, but now, she's intrigued. User 210074 walks down

the dimly lit hallway towards the opened Room Door, noticing the gold-plated tags on the right of each, for the first time. The Room Door across from User 210074's Room is labeled: "User 210091–*Isabelle*". Walking further down towards the lavatory at the end of the hallway, User 210074 sees another closed Room Door, labeled "User 210039–*Melissa*", and the opened door across from that one says, "User 210016–*Michael*". User 210074 wonders where User 210016 could have gone, especially during his Anniversary Celebration. User 210074 walks back down the hallway and through the double doors labeled "*Living Room*". She walks past the large, glass doors that lead to the back patio, and notices a figure moving inside of the Family Unit's Shed in the Backyard. User 210074 is curious, and wants to see what is out there, could this be where User 210016 has run off to? User 210074 creeps out the back of the house and towards the Shed in the right corner of the patch of grass. The large, wooden fence prevents User 210074 from seeing the Family Unit Homes on either side of her Family Unit's Home. The small path leading up the Shed is paved and warm underneath User 210074's feet. The User peers inside the small structure to find User 210016 sitting on a workbench, with a small, brown box open. His eyes are fixated on whatever the box contains, unaware of the presence of another User. User 210074 rushes back towards the Home, unsure if she can forget what she's just seen. Why would User 210016 be outside the Home, especially during his Anniversary Celebration? Did User 210016 also have a glitch on his monitor? What was in the box User 210016 was holding, and why was he in the Shed? No one ever goes into the Shed, unless it is Capital City mandatory Spring Cleaning WorkWeek Day or a Family Unit Picnic. User 210074 returns to the desk and puts a headset back over her ears, catching the final minutes of the Dancing Salad program. The User tries to laugh along with the vegetables on her screen, she tries to tune in, but her mind continues

to wander. Unsure of what is happening, User 210074 knows one thing for sure: she needs to find out what was in that box in the Shed.

The screen monitor in front of User 210074 shuts off at exactly 9:00 pm, and she knows to get on her Goodnight Clothes for Sleeping next. The User trudges from the closet to the bed. She pulls back the comforter and sheets from their made position and sits down gently. User 210074 waits for just a few moments on the bed until it feels like an appropriate time to go to the Kitchen and get a glass of water. User 210074 once again creeps out of the Room Door and down the hall towards the back sliding door leading outside the Home. User 210074 thinks once again about the potential consequences of leaving the Home without permission. The last time the Family Unit went Outside was the Capital City Family Unit Picnic, where all of the Users celebrated in their Backyards, safe after a successful Capital City invasion response. Here, the Users sat at their picnic tables and were provided Picnic Food courtesy of the Great Leader. Now in the quiet night, User 210074 does not know what would happen or what was out there. Could this be a test from the Great Leader to gauge User 210074's worthiness of being a Visual Designer? Willing to trust her instinct, for the first time in her life, User 210074 steps out into the nighttime breeze. The wind gushes loudly, as helicopters roam overhead, shining beams of light over the Family Unit Homes all around. Quickly, User 210074 skips down the pavement path leading to the Shed. She quietly opens the wooden door which creaks upon her touch. Inside to her surprise, sits User 210016, and five other Users that stare back at her.

“Our message got through to you, child” An older User’s voice calls out to User 210074, “Come and have no fear, please”.

User 210074 is silent, unsure of what to say to the new crowd of strange Users looking back at her.

She sees User 210016 for the first time, their eyes lock in on each other.

“We didn’t mean for you to find us like this, truly” User 210016 says, “We meet here sometimes in the night, and we were experimenting on some things and...” he trails on.

“–User 210016, hello” User 210074 interrupts, overwhelmed with her new surroundings.

“Here, Ava, please call me dad” says User 210016, reaching his hand towards the young girl in front of him. He motions for her to sit down on the workbench with him and another older woman. The woman looks to Ava with a tearfilled grin, she reaches her hand to her chest, placing both palms on her heart.

“Wha– where– who are you people?” Ava exclaims, looking once again at the five faces that meet her eyeline.

“Now then,” the elder man starts, “we haven’t a moment to waste. Ava, we’re delighted that our messages have gotten through to you. Our apologies for the secrecy, but our work is important and it must not be shared with the wrong crowd, do you understand?”

“I–I–I mean I guess I understand, but then again I don’t. What do you mean the work you do? Can I ask once again who are all of you?” Ava replied.

“We’ll have time for introductions at another hour, now you must choose, Ava. Do you wish to continue on this journey with us, or do you wish to forget our connections? If you wish to forget we will give you this tablet to swallow,” the elder reaches out and places a tiny green pill in Ava’s palm. “If you wish to be a part of our work, you will carry the tablet with you and return it to us here, in this spot, tomorrow evening at the same timing you arrived this evening. Do you understand these instructions, child?”

“Yes, I understand,” Ava says, forming a fist with her hand holding the tablet tightly inside. One by one the Users get up from their seats, scampering out of Ava’s Family Unit’s Backyard. They jump over the large wooden fences and dodge the beams of light in the sky overhead.

“Go on inside, I’ll be soon to follow but we mustn’t go together,” Michael tells his daughter after three of the others leave. The corners of his mouth curve upward to a small smile as he pats Ava’s back in a paternal manner.

Ava scurries back down the pathway, closing the glass door carefully behind her.

The next morning, Ava wakes with new questions circulating in her mind, is it better to be in the know or remain unaware forever? She puts on her WorkWeek Day clothes and heads to her desk, where she places her headset over her ears. She logs into her computer monitor and makes a choice on her Pre-Schooltime Meal. Throughout the day, her mind won’t stop racing, she clicks on colors from the wheel on her screen, dragging them to different parts of the page she’s designing. She keeps the tablet in her left pocket, not knowing which decision is the right one, she feels comfort in knowing there is a decision to make at all. At 12:18 pm, her computer monitor screen glitches once again. Ava feels immense excitement welling up inside of her, maybe this will be a message from the elder, or her father, maybe this will explain the work that they do, the work that they want her to join in on.

A hillside appears in the monitor, decorated with the tiniest wildflowers, poppies, daisies, and bluebells scattered as far as she can see. The tall grass sways in a summer breeze, the sky overhead is bright blue with clouds that echo cotton candy. At the peak of the hill, an old willow tree sits, its long, full branches flexing in the wind. Beside it, an older woman bends forward on a

wooden stool, she holds a paint palette in her left hand, her right hand using a thin brush to create green stripes all across the bottom of a canvas. The woman wears a tan sunhat with a large brim, decorated with a few of the wildflowers from the hill, her silver hair curls up messily underneath. The sun slowly fades away, and the woman continues to paint the colors she sees as they appear, using larger striking motions now, pinks and blues and oranges. Ava can hear the wind whistling through the grass and trees in the distance, the leaves rustling and swaying. The sun goes down and the old woman stands, packing her easel and carrying it down the left side of the hill. The video blurs away as quickly as it appeared. Ava tunes back into her Schooltime Activity, realizing she's been carving small, geometric shapes into the desk in front of her. Her fingernails are raw and bleeding with splinters poking into her flesh. The WorkWeek Day is almost complete and Ava has nothing to show for it. She decides at this moment that she would rather risk knowing, than ever forget.

That evening begins the same as the last. Ava sneaks to the Shed, holding tightly onto the green tablet, firm in her decision to return it to the elder that gave it to her. She approaches the crowd of people, the same smiling faces as before.

"These people," the elder begins, "are your new family. Everyone here is connected in a way that cannot be undone by ourselves, once you know, you can never forget."

Ava looks around at the five individuals in her Shed, "I'm ready to know, at least I think I am."

"Well then, from now on you can call me Samuel. I've reached out to every person here starting with my own daughter, Sherise." He says, pointing at the middle-aged woman to the right of him. The woman waves with a sympathetic grin, like she, too, knows what this feels like.

“We are the group that seeks to remember, our past, our lineage, who we really are. We want to discover what we’ve been forced to forget, worse than that we want to know more about the life that we’ve been forced into not living, at the expense of living for someone else. Your father there,” he continues, pointing his index finger at Michael, “He’s shown us the true detriments of his Work for the Capital City. Believe it or not kid, there is a whole world beyond what you and I know, and this is the group that intends to find out what exactly that is.”

These are things that Ava has never thought about before, what does it mean to have lineage? To not serve the Capital City? The more Samuel talks, the more questions swirl around Ava’s mind.

Fifteen nights pass. Samuel teaches Ava and the others more about what is beyond the Capital City. He tells of vast bodies of water, luscious forests and deserts, tall mountains and open skies. He reads them literature, about civilizations that have risen and fallen, fighting for a cause. He talks of warriors and heroes, and frames the work they do as the work of such tropes. The more he talks, the more Ava yearns to go and see, the more she hates WorkWeek Days, the WorkLearning she does every day. She begins to hate her Great Leader, the only person she’s lived her entire life adoring. Now during Morning Recapatry, she can’t even stand the sound of his voice.

On the sixteenth morning, Ava wakes the same as she always has. She logs into the computer monitor in front of her and notices that she has a new Chat notification, waiting to be opened.

User 210016: Hello User 210074, I am writing to inform you that I have been promoted for my Grand Efforts working for our beloved Capital City. I no longer have the burdensome life of remote Work from Home, as our Great Leader has given me the opportunity to Lead the Waste

Management department from the Great Chateau, alongside him and the other Greats. I will not be returning to the Family Unit Home for some time, as I adjust to the changes in our lives, changes that will benefit our Family Unit and all of the Users of our Capital City. I have been granted permission to inform you and our entire Family Unit that I share affection for you and our times that we have spent together up until this point. I will return someday, and I am thrilled at the prospect of that opportunity. Take comfort in knowing that I am with our Great Leader and am striving for the Greatness that we all shall be, each and every day.

There is no option for Ava to reply to her father's message but she knows that this cannot be true. What about the grave danger that comes with the Waste Management department? Without thinking she bursts out of her Room Door and down the Hallway. She sees the Room Door of her sister, and her mother, but notices the WasherBots painting over a new layer of drywall, where User 210074's Room Door used to be.