

# Teen Short Story

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Edward T.

I didn't really need to be here. It was the money that I needed for the research that drove me to watch my grandfather's estate. The dining cabin was lonely and isolated as I sat there. The midnight clacks of the train made me uneasy in the moonlit booth. Snow fell heavily in the dark surrounding forest. There was little reason to be on a train in this unlikely hour, especially in this weather. I hadn't seen a town since leaving the capitol. It was eerie as I made my way between cars and I felt a twinge of rigidity in my back. There was something about the night mixed with a single-person voyage that made my stomach roll. The night moved on like mud as I sat there.

Then at an unknown hour, a loud smash was heard that seemed to come from the front of the train. A deep hum sounded deep within everything. It pulsed like a somber heartbeat and all was still and quiet for a moment. Yet, this peace would not last. Everything slowed to a magnitude that could be recorded by no man-made tool on this globe. The train was almost still. It was horribly interrupted by an ear blistering screech. I turned my head towards the sound and looked out the window. In my horror, my body shattered like ice.

A large creature of darkness with hollowed white eyes and the antlers of an elk stood. This was a thing of void blackness and soulless hatred. What had happened? What was going on? The creature ran towards the transport full of unholy hate and disgust. I knew that this thing wanted me gone. Then, I heard a sound. A distant whirring. I prayed it was not another monster. To my confusion, a red biplane flew in and proceeded to attack the beast. Shooting firework-like bullets, it berated the monster sending it back into the woods further from the train. Another airplane swooped in and proceeded to attack the monster as well.

These were highly outdated aircraft and unregistered to this state or any state for the matter. I was shocked when a loud boom sounded, and the thing was no more. The monster was but a puff of smoke wisped away in the cold winter air. The world sped up again and a

rush of energy pulsed throughout by arteries. The acceleration of movement pushed me across the cabin. To my shock, two poundings on the roof of the car alerted me that the biplane pilots intended to make a visit. Two scruffy, hefty gentlemen fell from the ceiling exit. Dressed peculiarly, the two men proudly wore green military uniforms with unrecognizable insignias.

“Hello, who are you gentlemen exactly?”

“Why, Lieutenant Douglass and Commandant Grenville.”

“I see. Thank you for saving the train” I stated, unsure of what to say in this situation.

“One passenger to Brigsby, eh Karl?” Grenville points.

“Yes indeed. Isn’t this the classical setup?” Douglass inquired.

“I’m sorry what? I don’t seem to follow” I responded, confused.

“Well, the thing is your grandfather doesn’t have an estate needing supervision.”

At this point, I was peeved and concerned with what these loons seemed to be suggesting.

“How do you know this information about me? How do I know you aren’t lying to me?”

“Well, you can see for yourself,” Grenville proclaimed and pointed out my right window. I turned to see a world that I planned to never forget. I saw a mansion property with strange machines dotting the immense area. Floating dirigibles, aircraft of unimaginable designs, rockets the size of skyscrapers. Any machine that had ever lived in the realm of science fiction sat here.

I heard my grandfather yell from one of the machines, “What do you say, friend, still interested in the offer? You can help design tomorrow if we can get the paperwork done in a jiffy!”

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I was in utter disbelief at this place that sat hidden from the current world. What sat outside that window was something that would change my life most definitely. It was not just observing the machines that were enticing, but a mission to explore the great depths of technological science left me with a melting heart. I hollered back, "I guess so."

# Teen Short Story

2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Priyal P.

I had come to her grave to pay my respects. If she could see herself now I know it would cause her such pain, and that gave me a sliver of what I believed to be satisfaction. But even with that satisfaction came an overwhelming sense of grief and guilt. It was distasteful how much it had a grasp on me and how it choked me down. Made me feel emotional and at fault. Like I was the reason she is six feet under.

I've always hated the way she has made me feel. As if I owed my life to her. You would think with her death I would feel somehow freed from her emotional grasp on my life, but I felt like even more of a burden now that she was gone. She would laugh at me to see how much of a mess she has made me. It was evident all over my face that I hadn't slept without seeing her sneering face laughing in my dreams. The cruel way her eyes crinkle at the corners while watching how much she had affected me. My eyes were decorated with dark circles and bags placed so it looked like I was supposed to be the body buried in her spot. She had truly gotten to the best of me.

Once I had returned home, I rummaged through the alcohol supply that she had left behind. I settled on an amber colored liquor that burned my throat when I drank it. Its smell reminded me of her because she always reeked of pungent drinks. You're no better than her I began to think. I hadn't eaten in days only what started out as the occasional drink filled my system. I was sluggish and deeper into the never ending pain that my thoughts brought me like a never ending thread of reminders popping into my head. No matter if she were to be dead or alive and a thousand miles away, she could still control my mind. I was predictable to her in that way. Like a puppet she could control or a mind she could read.

As I remained on the counter of the kitchen drinking myself into a deeper hole, the sound of the doorbell rang. I was in no way in a presentable state, but I could care less about who

would see me this way. What rumors would spark through the neighborhood if they saw me this way.

I stumbled to the door and opened it in a swift yet awkward motion. Behind the door stood my older brother, Benny. Was I surprised to see him? No, I knew that he would come to visit me sooner or later. Out of guilt of course. He could never help himself and continue being the selfish person he is. He had to take a break and remember me every once and awhile.

He invites himself inside without saying anything to me. Typical. I rolled my eyes at his manners.

“You reek,” he states, looking me up and down. Leave it to Benny to point out the obvious.

“Come to watch me continue the cycle of self destruction that *she* left for me,” I jest throwing my arms back in a way for a touch of flare. I do have a touch for the dramatics.

His face is covered in pure disgust. I have not missed his presence at all.

“You can’t even call her by her name. She was our mother after all.”

*Mother.* The word fills my mouth with bitterness. Maybe it is coming from the surplus liquor that I had consumed before and I was now noticing the taste of it lingering in my mouth.

“I wouldn’t call her that. There are other words to describe her. Psychotic, yes. Mother just doesn’t do it. It doesn’t have that certain *umph* to it,” I reply continuing to act unfazed by the fact I am at the verge of tears. It is not working.

“Did you actually come in to check on me, Benny? Did the guilt of leaving me alone with her finally catch up to you yet. Or do you need a while for it to sink in? Sit while you think,” I say, my voice dripping in sarcasm. I motion him to sit on the stained, velvet couch.

He does not find what I said to be funny. Tough crowd I guess.

“You would’ve done the same. If you had the chance to, you would’ve left. No matter the circumstances,” he replies head shaking in disappointment.

His words anger me so much I contemplate yelling and screaming at him until he leaves, but he is right. Mother did give the both of us her selfishness, one of her many ugly traits. The bitterness returns to my mouth and I shudder. I hate that he is right. Benny is not like the stereotypical older brother. Strong and protective. And I was not his meek little sister. We did what we had to do to survive, even if it meant sacrificing our relationship with one another.

A small voice inside me pushes me to ask the question I’ve been wanting and craving to ask him. “Do you think I’ll turn out like her?”

His face drops. I’ve finally done the impossible. I’ve broken Benny. They should give out medals for that. He’s thinking too, trying to carefully answer the question. He knows I’ll call him out if he lies because at least I can point those types of people out. Liars.

“Lizzie, since you could talk I knew you wouldn’t turn out like her because you care too much. She didn’t care about anything at all, unless it was for her own benefit,” he thoughtfully replies. His words are cautiously manicured to make me listen and understand. He got that from mother, a way with words. Only she knew how to weaponize them properly, so each word would stab you harder than the last.

“You’ve always cared about people and things that were out of your control. You know why you feel so much of this grief and guilt is because you are so full of empathy you won’t even allow yourself to feel entirely mad at her,” he continues.

I shake my head. “Why am I like this? Why am I causing myself the pain of feeling sorry for a woman who made me feel like I was a problem? Like I was worthless and a burden. Her biggest burden and mistake.”



“You are human and you have your faults. Mother had hers too, so many that she caused us all this pain because she wouldn’t get help herself.”

He moves forward to comfort me and the movement is unfamiliar. Foreign. Odd. Unusual. I move back as if I were in his way.

“You have to stop believing that being fragile is a bad thing. Stop trying to push it away and confront it because that is another difference between you and her. You can overcome any adversity and she was the adversity to begin with,” he says.

This time I step forward. I’m the one who hugs him. It was awkward and uncomfortable at first. My breathes were coming out in an odd pattern, as if I had just run a marathon. My tears were staining my face and his shoulder. And out came a sense of comfort, realization, and forgiveness from this odd moment of affection. I think in that moment is when our relationship seemed to start to mend and begin its healing process.

Emotional. Fragile. Vulnerable. I knew that she had broken me in many ways, but I needed to forgive myself. I needed to forgive myself for being human. For allowing myself to feel grief and guilt because it was a part of who I was. There is something interesting about broken things. The task of fixing them seems like a burden at first, but once you start it is a beautiful and raw process of putting all the pieces back together.

# Teen Short Story

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Anne Catherine  
J.

## Banana Pancakes

Afterward, Mom stopped making banana pancakes on Saturday mornings. Gone were the pizza and movie Friday nights, the after-church lunches with Aunt Grace and Uncle Jack. The yellow slowly seeped its way off the walls, out of the closets, replaced by shades of grey. The house, which used to be so full of life, is dark with the looming grief and sadness that peeks behind every door.

I'm perched on the cold radiator by the living room window. The sun is out for the first time since we found him, and I soak up as many rays as I can, not caring about the way the brightness stings my eyes and makes me tear up. It's only a matter of time before she draws the curtains again, closing the box that used to be our home but has now become nothing more than a roof over our heads and a floor beneath our feet.

When Mom finally shuffles out from her room at half-past noon, she has her faded blue bathrobe tied tightly around herself, a pair of mismatched slippers on her feet. One has a monkey on it. The other is red.

She's lost weight. Her face is hollow and sunken. Like someone has taken a knife and cut out all the pieces that make her look like my mom. Her eyes twinkled when she smiled. She had a dimple on the left side.

She doesn't smile anymore.

"Hi mom," is my feeble attempt at conversation. I cross my fingers in hope that she'll say something, anything. I'm scared that I'll forget the way her voice sounds. It's been three weeks since the day, and two weeks since I've heard a single word pass through her lips. Hand gestures and head nods have become her communication.

Mom says nothing, just pads into the kitchen. Even the way she holds herself is different. She's a puppet whose strings have been cut.

I hear the coffee being poured into a mug, and then a click as she opens the oven. She keeps the urn in the oven. I don't know why she does it. Maybe she's scared he'll get cold.

He never got cold. He just acted like he was so Mom would have an excuse to spoil him.

She never spoiled me.

He got extra servings of ice cream, he got new clothes, he got Mom. I got hand-me-downs and Dad. I got bullied and bruises.

There's a part of me that's angry. It burns and sizzles in my chest, a red-hot poker against flesh, leaving a mark indefinitely. I want to scream, to cry, to punch walls, and break doors like Dad used to. I want to bring life back into the house that is no longer a home, I want my mom back, I want to stop feeling. The list of wants has been tattooed on my tongue, and I have to bite it until it bleeds to stop them from slipping out.

But the other part of me, the side that is less myself and more Charlie's kid brother, tells me to go and wrap my arms around my mother. Shoulder her burden. Take care of her. Pay the overdue rent bills that are inevitable. Give and give and give until your heart no longer beats to keep yourself alive.

Charlie's dead.

I opt for option three. I stay silent.

I focus on the world beyond the window. I watch the family across the street load their oldest son into the car, lugging suitcases and bags into the trunk. The dad is wearing a "Michigan

Dad,” sweatshirt. He looks so proud, as he takes a step back, observing the rest of the family as they pack up his son’s old life, and push him into his new one. Dad never would have done that.

As I watch them, I can’t help but think about Charlie and Dad and Mom and how our lives would be upside down if we weren’t us, but the family across the street. Mom would still make banana pancakes on Saturday mornings. Dad wouldn’t be drinking himself half to death, with the hope that it would somehow erase the cigarette burns up my arms. And Charlie, he wouldn’t have picked that lock. He wouldn’t have stolen that gun and pushed the barrel to his head and-

I hear a shatter from the kitchen. Mom must have dropped her coffee mug. In the past week, she’s broken four. Her hands shake too much to keep anything steady.

Then, there’s a scream. A bloodcurdling, horrifying scream, and my heart falls ten stories.

No.

No.

*No.*

Yes. The hardwood floor is painted with a thin layer of dust. Except it’s not dust. As much as I will it to be dust, it is not.

Mom stares down at the coating of ash across the floor with wide eyes. Like she can’t believe it. I can’t either.

“Charlie.” The words leave her quietly. My head whirls. Her lips move slightly, the only indication that she is speaking. Her voice is raspy, probably from lack of use. She still sounds like Mom.

“No,” I say. She turns her head slowly. Her eyes are empty, like a child who does not understand.

“Charlie,” she repeats. Slowly. Her voice is thick with disbelief, while the rest of her face is blank. Emotionless. It terrifies me.

“That’s not Charlie!” I scream at her. I am no longer Charlie’s kid brother. I am no longer a good person. I raise my voice at my mother, anger dripping like honey through my body, so burning hot that I feel as if I will split into two.

My mother just stares at me. She watches me, her face still closed, her eyes hollow.

“He’s dead, Mom! He’s dead and he’s never coming back!” My throat hurts as I hurl the words into the universe. I want to yell, shout, scream until I get my mom back. Anything. Anything but blank stares and broken expressions.

“Charlie.” My fingernails dig into my palms at my sides.

“He blew his brains out. He was too much of a coward to,” my voice has risen to a scream now, “DEAL WITH HIS GODDAMN SHIT!” These words are not me. I cannot believe the syllables that form sentences that spill from my mouth.

I loved him.

I needed him.

He left me.