

“Hey, you’re in my seat!”

The man’s round protruding belly slightly obscured his face from the little boy’s view looking up at him from the big seat at the head of the dining room table.

“You’re in my face!” The boy retorted.

“Oh, don’t say that,” the man’s wife said, walking over from the kitchen and wiping her wet hands on a towel before placing one firmly on little Tommy’s back. She was a pretty young thing, nice brown eyes and hair, her loose auburn curls sliding out from her bun. Obeying his step mother’s quiet order, Tommy begrudgingly slid off the large armchair onto the cold tile underneath the table, crossing his arms and legs in protest. Tommy’s father gathered his belly and shifted his weight into the seat, spreading his legs and leaning back into it. The chair whimpered beneath him.

“Helen, this chair needs to be fixed.”

Back in the kitchen, the woman nodded as she removed three plates from the cabinets.

“You hear? Either that or I need a new one.”

Her husband was 25 years her senior and nice enough. They had started dating a year or so after she had graduated college. They married five years ago in someone’s backyard underneath the shade of a rotting gazebo since he had insisted on having a “low profile” wedding. Sure, Helen had always dreamed of the traditional church wedding with family and friends, but she was willing to accommodate his wishes. Later she found out that her

ring was involved in a messy settlement case. True to her vows, she would stay by his side through any obstacle. And why shouldn't she, it was true love.

Steam from the pot wafted to the low ceiling of the couple's kitchen/dining room, filling it with the sweet aroma of cooked tomatoes and spices. On the stove was Helen's best lasagna, her mother's recipe. She made it only when guests were over or during special occasions because she rarely had time. This was a special occasion: her stepson was in town. The circumstances weren't the best; his mother had left him at their house the evening before insisting she had had enough, and a full on argument ensued between her and her ex husband. Helen also had two extra shifts to cover the next day (one in the early morning the other in the late evening) but she was raised right and was determined to make her company as comfortable as possible.

Balancing the three plates up her arms, Helen made her way to the kitchen table, setting them down in front of her husband and Tommy, who had become tired of the cold tile and lack of attention. Immediately after putting the plates down, her husband had started fishing out the meat and serving himself. Tommy watched as red sauce dribbled down his father's chin. Helen stepped back to the kitchen. She smoothed a strand of hair that had sprung loose from her bun back against her head. Dried tomato guts stared her down at the sink. The clink of forks against plates sounded like twinkling laughter.

"There's a lot responsibility that comes with sitting in that seat you know." she said to Tommy, fishing the disintegrating sponge out from beneath the red stained dishes.

“What?”

Helen nodded towards his father.

“That one. Lots of responsibilities.” She rolled up her sleeves and doused the sponge in dish soap.

“What kinds of responsibilities?” The boy replied with his mouth full.

The slick oil from the meat fat held fast.

“Responsibilities you’ll have once you’re older and live in your own house with your wife and kids.”

As she said this her hand rose to her chest. She fingered a small gold pendant in the shape of a teddy bear, suspended by a delicate chain around her neck. A gift from her grandmother. For her first grandchild, she had said.

Tommy’s nose wrinkled up to his eyes. Next to him, Helen’s husband shoveled food into his mouth. Helen lowered her hand and retrieved the greasy sponge from the muddy water.

“You’ll be the man of the house. Your family will depend on you.”

“Helen, would you stop? You’re scaring the kid.” Her husband said, stuffing part of a chunk of ground meat in his cheek with his tongue. He swung over to his son. “It’s a piece of cake.” he said with a wink.

The boy's explosive laugh sprayed food from his mouth across the table, making him laugh even harder.

When she spoke she didn't expect the crack in her chest to rip up through her throat and off her tongue like acid.

"I'm...going to get something."

The hallway out narrowed and blurred in her vision, thinly veiled eyes beneath her hand. One foot following the other blindly - as they always had for years.

With the click of the latch of the back door came a brief moment of solace. Hazy clouds in the kitchen replaced by cold cold air. A familiar weight now burned a hole in the back pocket of her worn blue jeans. Carefully she took one from the pack and rolled it between her fingers. The feel of it was familiar and comforting; it reminded her of her ambitions of becoming a well known and published author and storyteller, like Colette. Funny, she hadn't thought about it in a while. She put it to her lips, and embarked on a daydream boat to France. Food and sites, yes, that would be nice. And what would a girl have to do for some romance in her life? Still on her lips lingered the bitter taste from before; still between her lips was the shaky scene of France. Her other hand would refuse to light it. Her decisions meant more now that she'd be making them for two.

Through the threshold of the doorway and down the hallway, one foot after the other.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Character	<p>Characters seem unrealistic, not convincing. No clear protagonist. Dialogue does not advance the story or reveal character.</p>	<p>Characters feel somewhat believable but, at moments, cliché and predictable. The protagonist may need to be more defined as such. Dialogue provides some facts of story but doesn't sound authentic. Dialogue isn't balanced with action (either too much or too little.)</p>	<p>Characters' internal conflict(s) (especially the protagonist's) are clearly designed and developed through action and dialogue. Dialogue and action develops, strong, believable characters. Dialogue and action could be more effectively balanced.</p>	<p>Characters' internal conflict(s) (especially the protagonist's) are revealed through nuanced dialogue, subtle action, and atmospheric details. Dialogue reveals character conflicts, quirks and emotions and forwards story with complexity. Dialogue and action are effectively balanced.</p>
Plot	<p>Story does not provide a clear set up that moves characters and actions from logical start to resolution. Sequence of scenes doesn't make logical sense.</p>	<p>Some set up provided, but exposition needs improvement. The central conflict is not compelling. Middle scenes follow logical sequence but do not build tension and suspense towards story climax. Ending basically resolves the central conflict but it is somewhat unsatisfying.</p>	<p>Central conflict is established early and clearly moves the story forward. Middle scenes build interest and suspense to story's climax. Ending resolves central conflict in a satisfying way.</p>	<p>Story set up establishes a provocative, well-defined dramatic premise. Middle scenes build interest and suspense and deepen our understanding of protagonist. Ending resolves central conflict in a satisfying way that is unexpected yet believable.</p>
Narrative Perspective / Style	<p>Narrative perspective is largely neglected in this piece. No literary devices are used to connect with the audience.</p>	<p>Story reflects some attention to narrative perspective, although it is inconsistent or does not create appropriate psychic distance. Story feels summarized, rather than shown through specific details. No clear subtext.</p>	<p>Narrative perspective is recognizable, conveying an appropriate psychic distance between reader and protagonist, although it could be more consistent. Obvious thought has been put into the use of diction, imagery and detail to develop the central purpose or mood of the story. Some element of subtext is present, but it could reveal character, plot, or theme in a more compelling way.</p>	<p>Narrative perspective is consistent, effectively conveying the perfect amount of psychic distance between reader and protagonist. Obvious thought has been put into the use of diction, imagery, detail, symbols, and metaphor to develop the central purpose or mood of the story. Use of subtext reveals character, plot, and theme in a compelling way.</p>

Mechanics	Story cannot be understood due to many errors of spelling, grammar, and punctuation.	Story contains some errors. These errors affect reader's ability to comprehend material.	Story may contain a few errors. These errors do not affect reader's ability to comprehend material.	Story is free from errors of spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

**Grade: B**

End it with nothing changing. Maybe helen goes for a smoke break outside, thinks about her life, but then doesn't change anything and just goes back inside to finish dinner for a husband who doesn't care about her. Maybe like have her think about her dreams for the future or what she could've been/could still be, and like kinda think yes, I'll change, but in a way that both helen and the reader know she will never really do

These weren't her writing days, and she wasn't Colette.

H shovels food into his mouth.

(C)

(W)

(W) You'll take good care of your family won't you?

(C) I guess.

H scoffs

(W) You will.



After the wedding she had suggested a short honeymoon in Hawaii - she'd heard from a friend that it was lovely. They barely left the hotel.

A year or so later she had confessed to him that she wanted a baby shower for her first child, but he said it wasn't necessary.

Now, there was a baby in the crib and one on the way.

- Wife, husband, and child
- Wife is upset about how husband doesn't do enough work, but she also isn't going to say anything

Smoke break, can't do this, I'm pregnant contemplate what will life will be like with kid and husband with the cig she can't smoke

-dreamd

Could have been this, can still be this

All know Helen's not going to change anything

Think about comparing unborn child to tommy who takes after husband a little too much