

First Place Prose – Middle School

The Train

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Finally, we heard the deafening scream of metal against metal and the trumpeting roar of the train's horn. I looked up at my father. We knew it was time. He squeezed my shoulder.

"Everything will be alright, son."

I knew it wasn't alright. I knew these were my last moments with him. I tried to memorize every detail about him. The creases between his eyebrows, his carefully styled brown hair, the laugh lines framing his face. There was no joy on his face now. Only fear and concern. For me.

War had been ravaging across the country for years. We thought that we were safe, that we could wait it out, but we were wrong. War was fast approaching our city.

Of course, the children were to be sent away, and even though I was technically eligible to join the army, my father wouldn't stand for it. I was being sent away too. We both knew that eventually the war would demand our country to draft men. My father, ever loyal to the nation, would volunteer. He'd never told me he would join the army, but I knew him too well.

In the fifteen years of my life, it had just been my father and I. I had his brown hair, but he told me that I had my mother's blue eyes. She had had flaming red hair and was lean and tall. My father said her smile could light up a room. Every time he told me about her, he described her as if she were an angel. She had died two days after giving birth to me. Sometimes, I couldn't help feeling that if I hadn't been born, she would still be here.

Pulling myself out of my thoughts, I focused again on my father. I couldn't help thinking about all the times he'd embraced me, comforted me, talked and laughed with me. He was my best friend, my mentor, my protector, my home. I couldn't handle the thought of having to be separated from him. If I kept thinking about leaving him, I knew I wouldn't be able to bear it. Suddenly, I felt tears welling up in my eyes. I turned and embraced him. I pressed my face into his shoulder and squeezed my eyes shut. He wrapped one arm around my back and held my head in his hand. I wouldn't cry. I wouldn't. If I did, I knew neither of us would let go.

"It's going to be alright," he murmured. We both knew that was a lie, but I nodded anyway. I only pulled away when I heard the conductor calling for the passengers. My father placed my bag into my hands and set his hands on my shoulders again. He looked into my eyes. I couldn't help noticing how worn he looked. Silver strands had been working their way into his hair lately and his eyes looked bloodshot and

red from lack of sleep. Or from crying. I hoped it was the former. "We will see each other again," he said. "I promise you." All I could do was stare back. It was getting more and more difficult not to cry.

All I could think about was how everyone in our family was about to be separated. My mother, adrift somewhere in the afterlife, me, sent to some far away, foreign country, my father, to war. Like the seeds of a plant separated in the wind, or stars, hung in space. I could only hope my father and I would be reunited someday. I could only hope.

The conductor was giving his last call. I gave my father one last quick hug.

"Goodbye, Father," I said. I pulled away and looked up to him. "I hope you're right. I hope we do see each other again." He stared at me. He looked like he was trying to commit me to memory.

"I love you," he said.

"I love you, too." I couldn't hold it back anymore. One tear fell down my cheek. I turned and ran to the train. I hopped up to the steps right as the train started moving. I looked back to my father. All we could do was stare at one another. I thought of the times he helped me when I scraped a knee, the times we cooked meals together and laughed every time they turned out awful.

The tears came faster. I thought of when we would take walks through town in the middle of the night and pass through the park my mother had always loved. When we would go to the library, looking for any books that interested us. He always loved to read about geography. He'd wanted to travel around the world with me one day. I didn't know if that was ever going to happen now.

I could see tears on his face now too.

The smell of grease and oil burned my lungs and stung my eyes as the train started off. I watched my father until the train turned a corner, and he was gone. Now, I could only hope.