

Commentary Critique

I'll Take The Aston

Overview: An excellent short story. There is very little to add, other than a general need to tighten the prose and make a few cuts. Would also reconsider the first short paragraph – it's intriguing, but its sense is a touch unclear. A little more emphasis on the environment would also be beneficial – heighten the dystopian setting, giving a little more indication of the where and when in the story.

Ronny wasn't born this way, no sir. He considers those negative months as the most beatific forty weeks of all the twenty-one years what've followed. **Nice opening. Interesting.**

Shiner's arse is giving him jip; he keeps scratching at himself, just like that foamymouthed mutt did one time we went out hunting and wound up lost in the rain.

He orders me to keep watch as he steps out for two minutes - that's two minutes longer than the poor dog lasted. One shot took him out. Afterwards Shiner just stood there, whistling into the steaming barrel like he was Lee Van Cleef, said it needed putting out of its misery, but it sure looked alright to my eyes. It had a shiny copper nametag on its collar too. Maybe it too just got lost. And we never shot no rabbit that day neither. **Possibly introducing a few too many characters early on. Might be worth holding back.**

I'll do as I'm told, but I know Ham won't try anything. For a start, he's been lookin nowhere but at the fagged-out carpet in front of his feet for the last half hour, and although he'd sworn he was seventeen, he's still real small, and wiry too, **semi-colon would be better**

here. I reckon manhood's quite some way off for the wee fella yet. **He'd sure have trouble out-muscling even half of me on a bad day.** **Cut this – adds little.** The kid had managed only about a week on the loose, but Shiner knows all the people to ask, all the crannies where to look, and when I picked **him** up, although **he** (*grammatically, 'him' and he' refer to Shiner; something to bear in mind when considering sentence structure*) didn't say, I reckon he was good and ready to be found. Those city lights he'd craved had proved not so bright after all. **Nice paragraph.**

Ronny's sat on a sofa, look**in** everywhere but at me. (**Consider: lookin'**)

“What time you got?” he asks the door. I know that he don't give a hoot about the time, it's just that he can't yet say what he really wants to, not straight out anyhow. So I'll play along, cause he'll soon clam up once Shiner's back from the can.

“About eleven,” I guess, knowing it makes no real difference, “you see those pictures?” I point to the wall behind him, it's covered with glossy pages torn out from car magazines, “bagsy the red Ferrari.”

“Fine by me, I'll take the Aston,” he says without turning round. He'd made his choice long ago. I laugh. Ham plays mute. Maybe the lad's more of a motorbike guy.

Ronny - “Why's he make us do all this?”

Me – “Who? God?”

Ronny – “No, you clown,” he stifles a snigger, “Shiner.” Me

– “Because he can,” and then, “because we let him.”

But to be honest, I really don't know.

Ronny sighs, takes a moment, looks at Ham.

“You doin OK there, Ham?” he asks.

“I’ll survive,” whispers Ham, without even raising his head.

Ham’s right, he will survive. We all will. **Won’t we? Something slightly off with this phrasing. A tonal shift.**

Shiner returns, wiping his wet hands all down the front of his jeans. His mobile pings an alert, it’s the green light we’ve been waiting for. “Right. Up you get lads, time to get out of this dump.”

#

If Ronny had been given a chance, he could’ve been a contender, you know, just like Marlon Brando said in **some ancient movie that I once saw,** **cut** a movie so old it wasn’t even in colour. And that would make me, oh whatshisname? ... Charlie, **yeah, Charlie’s his name,** **cut** the big brother who let him down, **let him down** **cut** cause I watched him throw it all away. Ronny don’t blame me though, knows he don’t need to. I’m reminded every day I should have stepped right in when no one else seemed bothered, and maybe, just maybe, things would’ve turned out different for at least one of us.

We aren’t cut from the same cloth, Ronny and I, lookin at us you’d never guess we were brothers, **full-stop / semi-colon would be better** I’m all barrel-chest, buzz-cut and biceps, always have been, **well, at least since the day those first sips of testosterone kicked in,** **cut** whereas he, well; this is Ronny – he’s three inches taller than me, four skinnier - everything he wears is ill-fitting and awkward – he’s got dark brown hair that gets in the way

and **eyes that prefer looking in nice**. He's no fighter like Brando either; his exit would've been by numbers. You see, he had this thing for math; found it a breeze, fractions, algebra, the kind of stuff that sent me dizzy. Every year at school they'd run out of textbooks for him, reckoned he was some kind of genius in the making. Yeah, I was jealous of his talent, sure I was, but I really tried not to be, I really did. Then, when I suppose he was about fourteen, the enormity of our ma's premature death kicked in and nothing seemed to matter to him any more, and as he started spiralling, everyone just stood about watching. **And no one did any doing. Me included. Nice.**

See, the only thing I reckon thicker than blood is fear, and with someone like Shiner at the helm, that's how it was, how it still is; so Ronny and I have always needed each other. Shiner's not even our real pa, he was just the one to pick up the pieces when our mum died, and as much as I despise the fella, a tiny part of me tries to be grateful, at least that's what I keep tellin myself, but that inner voice ain't so convincing nowadays. **Your sentences have a fantastic rhythm, but on occasion they can be quite long and comma-filled.**

#

Ham's face has gone a putrid greeny yellow, but the way Shiner's loving throwing the RIB about, it doesn't surprise me. He's crucifying the screaming outboard big time. Hitting the waves head on lifts us clean out of the water, my stomach lands long after the boat thuds back down on the surface. It's crazy; the sea didn't even look that rough when we set off. Ham turns away and his retching is loud enough for me to hear above the cacophony. I'm all about holding on, trying to keep a **not-too-tight cut** grip on the rope that's the only thing

between me and a sure-fire drowning. Ronny's sat opposite, **his head hidden inside the elongated hood of a luminous orange, spray-lashed raincoat.** **Nice** I try to see his face but it's like peering into a cave, but it looks like he's sat solid enough. Shiner's bug-eyed buzzin, and already spending the money.

I see a **small** fire burning on the shore of the **small** cove we're aimed at. **Craggy** cliffs rise up sheer behind the shingle beach. I can't imagine there's a way out of there on foot, and I don't see another boat docked at the **dilapidated** jetty. Up high, **wind battered** (**windbattered**) Guillemots cling to life on **all-too-narrow** ledges, and for reasons beyond me, a **solitary leafless** old tree decided to call this **unforgiving** place home (**called home-?**). **Take it easy on the adjectives and watch for repetition.**

Shiner eases back off the throttle as we approach the island. There are two figures standing there, hugging the flames, both are wearing black woollen hats and long waterproof coats, those green ones posh people wear that stink of damp horses. **They're staring into the battleship grey yonder.** **Perhaps a little too flowery / indirect.** Staring right at us.

#

When we were kids, Ronny and I would go beachcombing. We'd take the bus the five miles or so out from the city. I once pilfered one of those metal detectors out of an unlocked lock-up on the estate we were living at. I never really found anything of note with it, no buried treasure as such, just some old coins that I couldn't spend, and too many rusty tin cans to count. My best find was a pitted old car fender that was jutting out from some scrubland. Ronny wasn't that impressed; he said it was worthless. I liked it though, all of the curved

edges and that. I took it back home **nonetheless, on the bus too!** **Cut** Smuggled it indoors and hid it under the bed. For days I rubbed and buffed up the chrome. It came up really nice. I even sold it to Mr Johnson at the Jaguar garage for twenty-two fifty, and Ronny and I had a **right good** feast at the chippy three nights straight. Shiner gave us a **right good** lashing with his belt when he found out though, I'm not really sure why, he doesn't even eat fish. But he didn't need a reason, especially once the whisky got hold of him. After the beatings was when I would hear Ronny talking to ma like she was still here. It was like he was praying. He would lie dead still on his bed, face up, and whisper a thank you to her for the precious time she was with him, **for nurturing him,** **tone is off here** and that he knew that she always would be with him in some way. He never blamed her for how it all turned out. **You weave the past with the present impressively.**

#

Shiner hollers to the shore. A few seagulls get involved, welcoming the sudden excitement. His *hellooo* is met by furious waving from the pair stood by the fire. I see now it's a man and a woman; I assume they must be Ham's folks. **Two of their hands are locked together; they continue to wave at us with the other, they won't stop till we're tied up to the jetty. Their faces look ashen and lined with sleeplessness, and they're trying to catch a glimpse of their boy. Shiner points down and shouts out, *he's here*. They turn to face each other and their worry turns to tears.** **Extremely well controlled.** Ham gets a little boot nudge from Shiner and raises himself up from the prone position he'd adopted since emptying his stomach. I rope the boat steady, and help Ham step on to dry land. Shiner's forearm halts the

lad before he can run. There's a bit of business to conduct first. Ronny's lowers his hood and sweeps his fingers through his hair. Without being told, we form a barrier between the boy and his folks as Shiner marches off. Few words are uttered, they all shake hands; it looks like an envelope's exchanged, and Shiner turns and double-thumbs us an OK. Ronny and I divide, Ham runs. Parents welcome their boy into their clutches. I watch on. I guess that is what real forgiveness looks like, what real family is, and I imagine what I see in their tear-filled eyes is that thing they call love. **Super**

Enough. I turn away, Ronny's already boarded and re-hooded. I go and sit with him. Shiner is enjoying a celebratory smoke, lying on the beach, staring at the sky. The fire's now in its dying embers and the reunited family are heading off to the far end of the cove. I can now see that there's a mud coloured Range Rover parked there, *of course there's a road out of here* I chide myself. Ronny asks me if I ever wondered what it would've been like to have a proper family, you know, like Ham. I lie and tell him no. He says he can't figure out what it was that Ham was running away from, or what he thought he was running to. I tell him I couldn't say, just that in some way we're all fighting our own battles. The Range Rover disappears from view.

Damn it all. I reach down and yank at the starter rope. It catches first time. Ronny gets wind and has us untied before Shiner's even noticed. He almost slips as he clammers back on, but I'm there to catch his arm, steadying him. With the throttle fully open we make twenty yards in no time. Ronny slips his hood down and looks me right in the eye, and I swear he's laughing like I've never seen him laugh before.

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