

Section 1:

Part #1: (Paragraphs 1-3) Strengths: Your opening establishes an effective contrast between ordinary routine and the impending disruption. Your use of sensory details like "the office smelled of burnt toast" creates a vivid setting.

Weakness: Underdeveloped character introduction. → You introduce Jake and Sam without giving readers enough reason to care about them. Phrases like "They joked about their weekend" and "Everything was familiar, normal" tell rather than show their relationship and personalities. We need more specific details about Jake's character to feel invested before the inciting incident.

Exemplar: *Jake slumped into his usual chair at Margo's Café, where Sam was already halfway through his cheese toastie. "Late again," Sam teased, sliding Jake's black coffee across the table. "Blame Harrison and his impossible deadlines," Jake groaned, loosening his tie—a birthday gift from Sam last year.*

Part #2: (Paragraphs 6-8)

Strengths: You effectively capture Jake's physical reaction to shock with "Jake's breath caught in his throat" and "He clamped his fingers tighter." The dialogue between Jake and Dr. Patel feels authentic.

Weakness: Limited emotional complexity. → The internal conflict needs more depth. When Jake says "There has to be some mistake," we need more insight into what he's feeling beyond surface-level reactions. The line "somehow, his name had been registered by Jake" creates confusion rather than intrigue. We need to understand Jake's feelings about being the emergency contact.

Exemplar: *Jake's mind raced through a decade of birthdays and Christmases with no word from his father. Now this stranger expected him to care? Yet beneath his anger, an unwelcome pang of worry took root. Why had his father kept his contact information all these years?*

Part #3: (Paragraphs 9-14) Strengths: Your pacing works well as the story reaches its emotional climax. The physical description of Jake's father as "gaunt" with a "face etched with pain" effectively shows the passage of time.

Weakness: Rushed emotional resolution. → The shift from Jake's decade-long resentment to sitting by his father's bedside happens too quickly. Phrases like "something unexpected—anger, sorrow, but also something gentler" and "He wasn't sure he could forgive" gloss over complex

emotions that deserve deeper exploration. The ending "life would never be the same" feels too neat for such a complicated situation.

Exemplar: *Jake stared at his father's withered hand, remembering how those same fingers had once taught him to tie fishing knots at Windermere Lake. Ten years of silence couldn't erase thirteen years of memories—both good and terrible. Jake didn't know if he could forgive, but perhaps he could listen.*

■ Your short story contains a powerful premise about reconciliation and confronting the past. To improve the substance and depth, flesh out Jake's character in the beginning so we understand what the disruption means to him personally. Consider slowing down the hospital scene to show Jake's internal struggle more gradually through specific memories or thoughts. You might add details about their past relationship through brief flashbacks to create emotional context. The ending would benefit from more ambiguity—perhaps Jake doesn't reach a clear resolution but takes a small step toward understanding his feelings. Additionally, consider developing the theme of time through imagery or symbolism throughout the piece. Focus on making Jake's emotional journey more complex by showing contradictory feelings coexisting. You could also expand on how this moment connects to larger themes about family bonds, forgiveness, or mortality.

Overall Score: 42/50

Section 2:

It was an ordinary day. Jake woke up to the alarm, grumbled, and hit the snooze button twice before he finally arose from bed. He made coffee, scrolled through his phone, and went to work at the usual time. The subway was crowded, the office smelled of burnt toast, and his inbox was already overflowing. Just another Monday.

He met with his best friend, Sam, over lunch at their go-to café. They joked about their weekend, complained about work, and bickered about which movie to catch on Friday. Everything was familiar, normal.

And then, at 3:17 p.m., everything changed.

#1 Jake was walking back from the coffee shop when his phone buzzed with a notification. Unknown Number: "Call me. It's about your father."

His gut constricted. He hadn't heard from his dad in over ten years. He hesitated, his eyes scanning the screen, his heart pounding. Was this a joke? A prank? Before he could go back on his decision, he stepped into a deserted hallway and dialled the number.

#2 A woman's voice interrupted him. "Mr. Callahan? My name is Dr. Patel. I'm calling from St. Mary's Hospital. Your father was brought in this morning—he's in critical condition."

Jake's breath caught in his throat. He clamped his fingers tighter around the phone. "There has to be some mistake. We're not in contact."

"I know," she said gently. "But you're listed as his emergency contact. I thought you'd want to know."

He was rigid, the chaos of the office fading away in the background. His father—the man who had abandoned their family when Jake was sixteen—was in the hospital, and ~~somehow, his name had been registered by Jake~~ [somehow, Jake had been registered as his emergency contact].

The next hour was a haze. He left work without saying a word, barely seeing the streets he passed as he made his way to the hospital. When he entered the ICU, everything was too bright, too sterile. A nurse led him to a room where a frail man lay attached to equipment. His father.

#3 Jake barely recognised him. His formerly powerful body was gaunt, his face etched with pain and age. The sight provoked something unexpected—anger, sorrow, but also something gentler.

The doctor told him: terminal cancer, a body weakening after years of ~~abandonment~~ [neglect]. "He doesn't have much time," she said. "He asked for you."

Jake sat beside the bed, his eyes fixed on the man he had worked so hard to erase from his life for ten years. When his father's eyelids fluttered open, there was something there that Jake had never witnessed—remorse.

"I'm sorry," his father breathed, weak voice barely above a whisper. "I know I don't deserve this, but... thanks for coming."

Jake didn't know what to do. He wasn't sure he could forgive. But as he sat there, holding his father's weak hand, he knew this moment—this one surprise day—had already changed him.

By the time he walked out of the hospital that night, he knew life would never be the same.