



S.G. BLINN WINS 2023
AWOA SHORT STORY
CONTEST WITH THE HELP
OF A LINE EDIT FROM
SARAH HAWKINS
EDITORIAL STUDIO.



"SHE LINE EDITED THE STORY WHILE KEEPING THE RESTRICTIONS FOR THE CONTEST IN MIND. SHE KEPT TRUE TO MY VOICE AND KEPT COMMUNICATION OPEN TO MAKE SURE MY VISION WAS SEEN. I COULD NOT HAVE GAINED THE CONFIDENCE TO DO THIS WITHOUT HER."

S.G. Blinn

S.G. Blinn is a horror, mystery, and dark fantasy romance author of “The Monster’s Daughter,” the Seven General series, the Where’s Death series, and several novellas.

Highlights

Challenges

- Blinn was tasked with writing a 7-page short story outside her usual genre.
- Blinn had never written a short story before and did not feel confident in her draft.

Solution

A line edit focusing on:

- Highlighting the vignette structure
- Creating narrative cohesion
- Removing redundancies
- Adding sensory detail

Results

- Blinn was confident in her story and submitted it.
- Blinn won first place!

Challenges

When horror, mystery, and dark fantasy author S.G. Blinn wanted to submit a short story to the Aspiring Writers Association of America’s 2023 Short Story Contest under the category “Outside Your Genre,” she gave herself a double-challenge.



I have never written a short story before. All of my knowledge and experience comes from novella/novels well over 20k words. The restrictions of page length and writing OUTSIDE my genre was scary!



After she finished drafting her 7-page, 2,109-word contemporary romance, Blinn didn’t feel confident enough to submit it yet.



I played with tenses. She [the protagonist/narrator] talks about her past in stages, then present. I tried to keep it flowing ... Tried is the key word.



Solution

“

I tried my best but ran to Sarah and asked her for help.

”

Upon reviewing the contest guidelines and the manuscript, I suggested a line edit focusing on:

- Rearranging and restructuring sentences and paragraphs to highlight the vignette structure of the story and smooth out cohesive issues in detail. This was done in-line with tracked changes.
- Removing redundant tells that may disrupt the narrative flow. This was also done in-line with tracked changes.
- Adding additional sensory details by asking questions and giving examples. This coaching and mentoring was done through comments.

We completed two rounds of edits.

In round one,

I made

- **456 revisions**, including **55 comments** that either coached, mentored, or explained a suggested edit.
- I delivered the first round with enough time that Blinn could review and revise the story well before the contest deadline.

In round two,

I made

- **40 revisions**, mostly copy edits to ensure clarity, cohesion, and correctness while staying within Blinn’s straightforward, punchy writing style.

Original draft sample

Charlie Myer

I first met Charlie Myer when I was six years old. The leaves were starting to change color to symbolize the welcoming of the Fall season. It was also the beginning of a new school year. I saw a child in the distance who was still. He stood in the center of the Riverbend Elementary School playground and looked towards every child that passed him. That shy little boy had a face full of freckles behind his messy blonde hair.

Everyone pretended he was invisible. The cruelty of children knew no bounds. He was a new face. With no one to talk to, Charlie chose to observe. Riverbend was built from old families that did not look kindly on outsiders. The children were told to stay away. Curiosity to the new face was over shadowed by their parent's restrictions.

"He looked funny."

"Why is he looking at everyone?"

"I heard he doesn't even know how to speak."

The whispers engulfed the playground. When I looked to Charlie, he kept his eyes moving. I didn't understand why he was different. My grandmother told me to stay away from him. I knew better than to ask question. In that moment, like all the other children, we chose to listen.

"Look, he got another good grade."

"He must be smart."

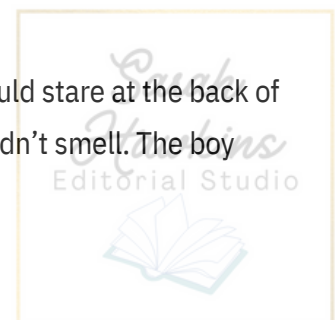
"Look at those freckles."

"His hair is a mess."

"I think that smell is coming from him."

The students wouldn't stop whispering about him. During class, I would stare at the back of his head demanding answers. Why was everyone being mean to him? He didn't smell. The boy was smart and other children didn't like it.

"Quiet please!" The teacher yelled.



Looking to the school work in front of me, I thought about what my mother said earlier this morning. He didn't belong in this community. She used words like poor and unfortunate. Why did he have to be different? These were words a six-year-old couldn't comprehend.

I didn't understand why the world detested him. My curiosity got the best of me. I knew my grandmother would scold me if she found out I disobeyed. The next morning, I walked up to that boy and decided to introduce myself.

"My mother told me that I needed to leave you alone. I am a kind girl and wanted to tell you that you do not smell." I held out my hand.

I was nervous. It started to shake the longer it was exposed. That boy looked to me with the kindest eyes I have ever seen. Slowly, he took my hand in his and smiled.

"My name is Charlie Myer, what is yours?"

I smiled at his voice. It sounded different from the other children in town. He continued to shake my hand and waited for my answer.

"Nadia," I replied.

His smile grew wider. "I am happy to meet you, Nadia."

That was the first conversation I had with that boy. His handshake was firm yet gentle. I knew from that moment I was going to continue to disobey my family. I wanted to get to know him, regardless if other's found him to be odd.

Fast forward to middle school. The student focused changed from playing with others, to trying to match what they considered popular. The clothing you wore defined where you belonged. To fit in meant you were safe. There was no sense of loneliness or fear of retaliation from your classmates.

I had to fit in. I had to be perfect. My mother always made sure I looked like everyone else. Those who attended this school knew each other's weaknesses and were waiting to exploit them. They all were worried about what other's might say. Everyone changed, except Charlie Myer.

When I saw him in the hallways, he still had the same unkept hair and wrinkled clothing. He was a victim to the bullies that took his silence as a challenge. They used him as an example and

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I for one, couldn't bare the sight. But, if I stood up to them, they would turn their fists to me. I didn't know what to do.

I remember when I found Charlie underneath the bleachers after school. His face was swollen, and dried blood was on his shirt. He had gotten into a fight, but never did he throw a punch. I needed to know why he wouldn't fight back. Like before, I started the conversation.

"Why didn't you fight back?"

Those blue eyes looked up to me. "Would it have changed anything?"

I watched him stand. I never felt threatened by him. Even as he grew taller than me, there was a comfort in having him around. I watched as he held out his hand. Like before, I took that hand into mine and he smiled. That smile held a confidence. A confidence I yearned to master.

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Line edit sample

1

Charlie Myer

There were three points in my life that I didn't know I needed a friend, and Charlie Meyer was at each of them.

Rewind to when I was six, my mother moved us in with her parents. There was yelling every night, but the changing color of the leaves welcomed the fall season and the beginning of a new school year, where there was only silence.

Charlie. I first met Charlie Myer when I was six years old. The leaves were starting to change color to symbolize the welcoming of the Fall season. It was also the beginning of a new school year. I saw a child in the distance who was still. He stood still in the center of the Riverbend Elementary School playground. I saw that shy little boy had with a face full of freckles behind his messy blonde hair. from a distance, happy that I wasn't the only new kid. Riverbend was built by old families that did not look kindly on outsiders, and the cruelty of children knew no bounds. Their whispers engulfed the playground, but everyone pretended he was invisible. "He looks funny."

"Look at those freckles."

"His hair is a mess."

"Why is he looking at everyone?"

When I looked at Charlie, his eyes kept moving, looking at every child that passed him.

and looked towards every child that passed him. That shy little boy had a face full of freckles behind his messy blonde hair.

Everyone pretended he was invisible. The cruelty of children knew no bounds. He was a new face. With no one to talk to, Charlie chose to observe. Riverbend was built from old families that did not look kindly on outsiders. The cruelty of children knew no bounds. The children were told to stay away. Curiosity to the new face was over shadowed by their parent's restrictions.

"He looked funny."

"Why is he looking at everyone?"

"I heard he doesn't even know how to speak."

The whispers engulfed the playground. When I looked to Charlie, he kept his eyes moving. I didn't understand why he was different. I asked my grandmother that night My grandmother, but

Style Definition: Normal: Line spacing: 1.5 lines

Commented [SH1]: This was moved from later in the story. It had such punchy, first line material, and it works to frame the anecdotes/vignettes.

Commented [SH2]: Since you use the "fast forward" to introduce the other anecdotes, I added a "rewind," which also hints at the movie frame of this story.

Commented [SH3]: This is a great detail! It gives us a visual of what is happening around them in this scene.

Commented [SH4]: Where is she on the playground? What is she touching or sitting on?

Commented [SH5]: This is showing Charlie's POV, which we can't know since we're in Nadia's POV. First person narration is tricky that way!

Since you already have a beat where Nadia sees Charlie watching everyone passing him, I think we can safely remove this sentence.

Commented [SH6]: This conflicts with the motivations you gave us above. We're told the children stay away because they are cruel; now, it's because they were told to stay away and they were afraid of disobeying their parents. The dialogue below seems to indicate that they are more cruel than scared, so I think this can be safely removed.

Commented [SH7]: This suggests she's sitting among

people but is not included in the conversation. Does she feel invisible, then? Does this make her feel uncomfortable? How does that discomfort manifest in her body?

Commented [SH8]: She's new, too, so is she being

ostracized as well? What is the difference between the treatment of her and the treatment of him. Is there some indicator you can describe that would give away the reason he's treated differently other than he's new?

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she only told me to stay away from him. I knew better than to ask question her, so. In that moment, like all the other children, I we chose to listen avoided him.

Commented [SH9]: Why did she know better than to do that? What is it about her grandmother that instills this fear in her?

The students wouldn't stop whispering about him.

"Look, he got another good grade."

"He must be smart."

"Look at those freckles."

"His hair is a mess."

"I think that smell is coming from him."

The students wouldn't stop whispering about him. During class, I would stare at the back of his head, demanding answers. Why was everyone being mean to him? He didn't smell. The boy was smart and the other children didn't like it.

Commented [SH10]: What DOES he smell like to her? Everyone has a smell.

"Quiet please!" The teacher yelled.

Looking to at the school work schoolwork in front of me, I thought about what my mother said earlier this morning: that. He didn't belong in this community. She used words like poor and unfortunate. Why did he have that make to be him different? Why did the word detest him?

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These were words a six-year-old couldn't comprehend.

Commented [SH11]: How does she physically respond to these thoughts? Wrinkle her nose, clench her hands, shake her head?

I didn't understand why the world detested him. My curiosity got the best of me. I knew my grandmother would scold me if she found out I disobeyed, but my curiosity got the best of me.

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The next morning, I walked up to that boy Charlie and decided to introduce myself.

Commented [SH12]: How far in explanation. I updated the question before this to show she's questioning those words, so I removed it here.

"My grandmother told me that I needed to leave you alone, but. I am a kind girl and wanted to tell you that you do not smell."

I held out my hand, and i.

I was nervous. It started to shake the longer it was exposed. That boy looked to at me with the kindest eyes I have ever seen. Slowly, he smiled and took my hand in his and smiled.

"My name is Charlie Myer, what is yours?"

Commented [SH13]: What did his hand feel like? Hers was shaking; was it clammy too? Did his hand feel dry and steady in comparison?

I smiled at his voice. It sounded different from the other children in town. He continued to shake my hand and waited for my answer.

Commented [SH14]: How did it sound different from the other kids?

"Nadia," I replied.

His smile grew wider. "I am happy to meet you, Nadia."

Commented [SH15]: How did this make her feel? Fluttery? Inflated? Jittery? Calm?

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That was the first conversation I had with that boy. His handshake was firm yet gentle, and I knew from that moment on, I was going to continue to disobey my family. I wanted to get to know him, regardless of whether if other's others found him to be odd.

Commented [SH16]: This can read redundantly because we already know it's her first conversation with him.

Commented [SH17]: How did it make her feel? Safe? Happy? Like she finally found her kindred spirit?

Fast forward to middle school. The student's focus ed changed from playing with others, to matchmaking what they considered with popularity. The clothing you wore defined where you belonged and, fitting To fit in meant you were safe, that. t There was no sense ache of loneliness or fear of retaliation from your classmates.

Commented [SH18]: Sense was nonspecific, so I updated it to ache to keep the parallelism of ache/loneliness to fear/retaliation

I had to fit in. I had to be perfect. My mother always tried to made make sure I looked like everyone else, but I had grown into my body and was starting to get teased. No matter how hard I tried to understand myself, no one came to my rescue because Those everyone who attended this school knew each other everyone's weaknesses and was were waiting to exploit them. They all were worried about what other's might say. Everyone changed, except Charlie Myer.

Commented [SH19]: What does this mean? What is uncomfortable about her body? What about her would be teased and how does she think about her own body?

When I saw him in the hallways, he still had the same unkept hair and wrinkled clothing. He was a victim of to the bullies who that took his silence as a challenge. They used him as an example, and I for one, couldn't bear are the sight. But, if I stood up to them, they would turn their fists to on me. I didn't know what to do.

Commented [SH20]: How did she feel when she saw him in the hallway? Does she have a crush on him still? Give us some sensory details here that show what she wants from him at this point.

One day, I remember when I found Charlie underneath the bleachers after school. His face was swollen, and dried blood was on his shirt. He had gotten into another fight, but never did he throw a punch. I needed to know why he wouldn't fight back. Like before, I started the conversation.

Commented [SH21]: How does she react to this physically? Does she pull out some wet wipes from the last time she got buffalo wings to wipe off the blood? Does she try to use her own sleeve? Does she move toward him or away from him?

"Why didn't you fight back?"

Commented [SH22]: The reader may find this confusing considering she wasn't there to see the fight. Please revise.

Those blue eyes looked up at to me. "Would it have changed anything?"

I watched him stand. I never felt threatened by him. Even as he He'd grew grown taller than me, and there was a comfort in having him around. I never felt threatened by him.

HI watched as he held out his hand; I Like before, I took that hand into mine, and he smiled. That smile held a confidence. A confidence I yearned to master.

"Hi," I whispered. I missed those our handshakes and. Those stolen moments we shared.

Commented [SH23]: How does his hand feel different from the last time? How does it feel the same?



Final delivery sample

1

Charlie Myer

There were three points in my life that I didn't know I needed a friend, and Charlie Meyer was at each of them.

Rewind to when I was six, when my mother moved us in with her parents. There was yelling every night, so I welcomed the changing colors of the leaves. The fall season meant the beginning of a new school year. I could finally have silence.

Charlie stood still in the center of the Riverbend Elementary School playground. I saw that shy little boy with a face full of freckles and messy blond hair from a distance. Shamefully, I was happy that I wasn't the only new kid. Riverbend was built by old families that did not look kindly to outsiders, and the cruelty of children knew no bounds: Their whispers engulfed the playground. Harsh daggers to your heart. Everyone pretended he was invisible because Charlie was different.

"He looks funny."

"Look at those freckles."

"His hair is a mess."

"Why is he looking at everyone?"

When I looked at Charlie, his eyes kept moving, looking at every child that passed him.

"I heard he doesn't even know how to speak."

I didn't understand why he was different. When I asked my grandmother, she told me to stay away from him. Why? I knew better than to question her. But the need to know why he was different still swirled in my mind. In that moment, like all the other children, I chose to avoid him.

The students wouldn't stop whispering about him.

"Look, he got another good grade."

"He must be smart."

"I think that smell is coming from him."

During class, I would stare at the back of his head, demanding answers. Why was everyone mean to him? He didn't smell. The boy was smart. The other children didn't like it.

"Quiet please!" the teacher yelled.



Looking at the schoolwork in front of me, I thought about what my mother said earlier this morning: That boy didn't belong to this community. She used words like poor and unfortunate. Why did that make him different? Why did the world detest him?

I knew my grandmother would scold me if she found out I disobeyed. She had a wooden spoon she used as punishment. But my curiosity got the best of me. The next morning, I walked up to Charlie.

"My grandmother told me that I needed to leave you alone, but I am a kind girl and wanted to tell you that you do not smell."

I held out my hand, and it started to shake. That boy looked at me with the kindest eyes I have ever seen. Slowly, a smile formed on his chapped lips and he took my hand in his.

"My name is Charlie Myer; what is yours?"

I smiled at his voice. It sounded different from the other children. He continued to shake my hand and waited for my answer.

"Nadia."

His smile grew wider. "I am happy to meet you, Nadia."

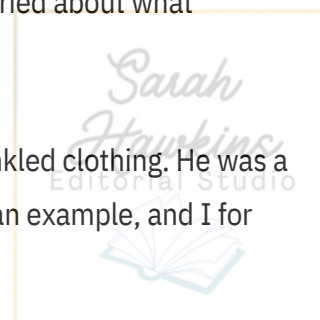
His handshake was firm yet gentle. I knew from that moment on, I was going to continue to disobey my family. I wanted to get to know him, regardless of whether others found him to be odd.

Fast forward to middle school. The student's focus changed from playing with others to matchmaking with popularity. The clothing you wore defined where you belonged and fitting in meant you were safe. The fear of retaliation from your classmates grew and words turned violent.

I had to fit in. I had to be perfect. My mother always tried to make sure I looked like everyone else. I had grown into my body and was starting to get teased. No matter how hard I tried to understand myself, no one came to my rescue. Everyone who attended this school knew everyone's weaknesses and was waiting to exploit them. They all were worried about what others might say.

Everyone changed, except Charlie Myer.

When I saw him in the hallways, he had the same unkempt hair and wrinkled clothing. He was a victim of the bullies who took his silence as a challenge. They used him as an example, and I for



one couldn't bear the sight. But, if I stood up to them, they would turn their fists on me. I didn't know what to do.

One day, I found Charlie underneath the bleachers after school. His face was swollen, and dried blood was on his shirt. He had gotten into another fight, but never did he throw a punch.

"Why didn't you fight back?"

Those blue eyes looked up at me. "Would it have changed anything?"

I watched him stand. He'd grown taller than me, and there was a comfort in having him around. I never felt threatened by him.

He held out his hand; like before, I took that hand into mine, and he smiled.

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Results

Blinn gained the confidence to submit her short story to the 2023 AWOA short story contest under the category "Outside Your Genre."

“

I could not have gained the confidence to do this without her.

”

At the conference in April, Blinn was awarded first place!



“

"Charlie Myer" won first place! Thank you so much for being there for me!

”



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