



Whisper

SHORT STORIES BY
CHARLOTTE KANE

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By

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LOST AND FOUND

The rain drops seeped through his already sodden clothes, burning as they bounced off his skin leaving red marks in their place. The figure continued walking, his feet squishing against the sidewalk, his clothes sticking to him and feeling heavy against his skin. A car beeped as it drove past him, forcing him to stumble and fall onto the road. He looked in the direction of where the car had come from before slowly getting back up to his feet. He didn't care, nothing mattered anymore. She had left him. Taken everything that he had – his life, his soul, his being. She had packed up and moved on with her life, saying that he was worthless, that he wasn't able to look after her and their daughter as he couldn't find a job. It was all true.

It wasn't that he couldn't find a job, it was the fact that he wouldn't find a job. He had been laid off from his managerial job just over a year ago and his confidence had been shot, causing him to spend his time in the pub and in front of the television. His wife, Joanna, had finally reached breaking point. She had had enough of his lounging around, of not even looking for a new job and wasting what little money they had on alcohol. So she packed up her and her daughters' bags and went to stay with her mother. She told Henry that he could see their daughter once he had gotten his act together and cleaned himself up.

It had been a month since Joanna had left with their daughter Lucy, three, and Henry was not coping well. He wore clothes that looked like they belonged in the trash, he hadn't shaved in God knows how long and he couldn't remember the last time he had eaten a proper meal. He had tried contacting Joanna but she wouldn't answer his calls and all of his letters were returned. He was a ghost of a man now. The Henry that was once loved and respected was now a good for nothing drunk, who spent all his days in the bar and would stagger home at night when the barman would kick him out.

He stopped outside the gate and looked up at the house where Joanna and Lucy were staying. The living room light was on along with a small dim light in the front bedroom. Henry staggered through the gate and knocked loudly on the front door. He heard a scuttle from inside the house and the front door opened.

“Henry, what the hell are you doing here?” Asked Joanna's mother, Susan. She was holding a cup of coffee in her hand and a look of annoyance was on her face.

“I just want to speak to Joanna.” he leaned against the wall to stop himself from falling over. It was obvious he had been drinking, the smell was rancid on his clothes and there was a slight slur to his speech.

“She made it clear that she doesn’t want anything to do with you, until you have cleaned up your act which clearly you haven’t! Now leave!” she went to close the door but he stepped up and placed his hand in the way.

“Please. Let me just speak to her. Please!”

“What’s going on? Who is it?” He heard a voice from upstairs. A figure appeared and started to descend the stairs. It was Joanna. She saw Henry at the door and told her mother to go and sit back down. She would deal with him.

“What are you doing here? I told you to stay away.” She folded her arms and looked at the state he was in. He was wearing a t-shirt that had holes under the arms, his jeans looked like they hadn’t been washed in weeks and his face was dirty. She could also smell alcohol on his breath. A lot of alcohol.

“Look, I just wanna talk to you. I need you Jo, please come back.” He staggered slightly and had to hold onto the wall to stop himself from falling.

“Look at you, you’re pathetic! Did you think that you could just come over here, drunk no less, and expect me to take you in my arms and tell you that everything was okay and move back in with you?” There was hostility in her voice and he didn’t blame her. She was right. Did he really think that she would take him back, especially in his current state?

“Jo please” he took another step forward but she put her hand on his chest to stop him, her nose wrinkled from the stench that was emanating from him.

“Henry just go please. I can’t have Lucy seeing you like this. I don’t want to see you like this. So please just go and stay away” She started to close the door but Henry interrupted.

“I still love you” Joanna felt her heart skip a beat, the way it did before things had turned bad. She still had feelings for him, they were married after all but she just couldn’t live with him when things were this way. She couldn’t keep supporting his drinking habits especially not when she had her little girl to think about. She couldn’t allow this person to be in her life – not until he could prove himself as a father once again.

“And I still love you. But I cannot keep doing this. Whilst you put the drink before me and Lucy I cannot have you in our lives. I’m sorry but you really should go” she placed a soft kiss on his cheek and closed the door.

Henry stumbled down the steps and made his way across the road. What had happened to him? Why did he let himself get into this state? It had hit him hard when he had lost his job, yes, but he never thought he would have turned to alcohol like he had. He had lost everything – his wife, his daughter, his dignity. He had nothing left. He was worthless.

He leaned against a wall and let out a sigh. He wanted to end it. To take away all the pain, to stop the suffering. His daughter would be better off without him. To not have him in her life. She deserved a father who could look after her, provide for her and to be there for her when she needed him. Not a father who was drunk and would not be able to support her or a father who would rather put a bottle of Whiskey or Brandy over spending time with her.

Yes. Ending it would be the best solution, but how would he do it? He remembered that there was a bridge over a river up the road, he could jump. They would find his body the next day but it would be too late. He got up and started to make his way in the direction of the bridge, his mind a jumble of thoughts and memories.

He remembered the first time he had met his wife. They were in a supermarket and Joanna was struggling to reach something from one of the shelves so Henry grabbed the item for her. The two shared a smile and after a couple of minutes of her thanking him and asking him his name, she had given him her phone number. He had called her as soon as he got home and the two had gone for a date that night.

Since then they had become inseparable and it wasn’t long before he had proposed and she said yes. They had a small wedding. They didn’t want anything extravagant - just a few friends and family and a couple of drinks. As long as they had each other that was all they cared about. Their honeymoon was cut short when Joanna collapsed during one of their day trips. They soon discovered that she was three months pregnant and had a slight heart condition that caused her to have a murmur and so she was told to take things slowly.

Henry did everything he could for Joanna while she was pregnant. He cooked, he cleaned, he wouldn’t let her lift a finger. Joanna was fine during the pregnancy but

doctors were constantly monitoring her and the baby to make sure that no other complications were arising.

On May 26th, Lucy came into the world weighing 7lbs 8oz. Henry had never felt happier. His family was finally complete and he was looking forward to settling into family life. Then things had taken a turn for the worst when he was laid off from work due to the recession, but instead of looking for another job, he had turned to alcohol to take away the worries and before he knew it, he had become addicted and found himself needing a drink when he woke up so that he could function.

He started using their savings for alcohol and by the time Joanna had found out he was £2,000 in debt. She had taken their daughter and moved in with her mother telling Henry that he would only be allowed to see his daughter when he had stopped the drinking and got himself a job. Although for most people that would have been a wake up call, Henry had sunk even further into depression and he was now in £8,500 debt.

He reached the bridge and looked over the side. He could hear the water rushing below the rain having increased the level by a couple of inches. He climbed up onto the ledge and looked down. Could he really do this? Did he want to leave his daughter without a dad? Even if he was a bad one? Joanna still loved him, she had admitted it so there was some hope there. If only he could sort his life out, he could have the happiness back. He could have his wife and child in his arms.

He could feel his body shaking as he stood on the ledge, he knew that he should climb back off but he also knew that if he moved he was more than likely going to slip and fall into the river. He heard the screeching of tires behind him and heard his name being shouted. He turned around and saw in the headlights of the car, Joanna running towards him.

“What are you doing? Please don’t do this” she held out her hand to him. The rain started up again, bouncing heavily onto the road. Henry took her hand and carefully climbed down from the ledge and onto the path. Joanna hugged him then slapped him as she pulled away. “What the hell were you thinking?” There was a mixture of anger and love in the way she spoke.

“I just wanted everything to be okay. I thought that maybe you and Lucy would be better off without me. That she deserved a father who could be there for her, who could provide for her. But then I realised that wasn’t the right option”

“Lucy loves you Henry, we both do. You just got lost along the way. I want to help you. Seeing you tonight made me realise how much I do still love you and how much I’ve really missed you. I do not want Lucy to be raised without a father. You are her father Henry and you are the only person I want to be her father. But you must promise me, and her, that you will come off the alcohol. You need to make us a priority from now on. Not the bottle.”

Henry could feel tears beginning to form and he bit them back. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He opened his eyes slowly, wondering if this was all a dream and whether or not Joanna would still be standing in front of him or not, willing to take him back. When he opened his eyes she was still there, shaking slightly from the rain. He hugged her, happy to feel her in his arms again “I promise”

Joanna leaned against his chest and lifted her head to look at him “There is a job going in Morrison’s. I know it’s not the type of job you want but you need to start paying off your debt. You will need to start providing for your family”

“I know and I’ll look into that job. At the moment, anything that gets Lucy and you back into my life I am willing to do. I don’t want to lose you two again, I couldn’t cope. I was lost without you. You two are my life. I just wish I had realised that sooner.”

Joanna leant forward and gave Henry a small kiss on his lips “We will help you find your way again. Now lets go home and get you cleaned up” Henry nodded, wrapped his arm around Joanna’s shoulder and walked to the car, ready to start a new life with the love of his life and their daughter.

TRAIN STATION

The familiar noises could be heard. The clunking of metal, the whistling of the conductors, the chatter, the voices through the speakers warning you to keep your luggage with you and that there is to be no smoking on the platforms. I looked around and couldn't help but smile. There were so many memories being here as I was growing up, each one still clear as day in my mind. It had changed over the years, dramatically, but it was still the same place that I knew and loved. I had so many memories from this train station from over the years.

1936, Aged 5

It was my first time to the train station. My mother told me that we were going to a place called London for a holiday. I asked her how we were getting there and she told me we were going on the train. Excited, I started looking at books about trains and seeing how we would be travelling. I was so excited, the pictures looked amazing to me. Long carriages of steel that could travel at speeds I didn't even believe existed. I remember asking my mother everyday if we were leaving that day and everyday I would get told that I would have to wait a few more days. Until the day finally came. I awoke early, unable to contain my excitement any longer. I sat staring at the pictures I had put onto my wall thinking that today is the day that I would finally be able to go on a train. Making sure that I had everything packed mother and I collected our bags, left the house and made our way to the station.

I didn't want to eat breakfast but mother told me I had to so I rushed it causing me to nearly choke and have hiccups. In the taxi on the way there I could barely sit still. I was fidgeting and bouncing in my seat. My mother smiled and watched the scenery as it passed us. After what seemed a lifetime we finally arrived at the station. I was amazed at the view in front of me. The building was beautiful - large and made of red brick with sculptures of flowers guarding the building. Getting out of the taxi I practically ran inside the building and mother had to stop me. She took my hand and led me onto the platform. For a five year old that was visiting a train station for the first time the place was like heaven. There were trains of all kinds scattered around the station waiting for their turn to leave and travel to their destination.

Mother and I scuttled across the platforms looking for our train. "This is ours!" Mother smiled at me. I looked up at the metal giant that was in front of us. It

was more impressive than any of the books had made out and I couldn't wait until we were able to get aboard. I tugged on my mother's arm indicating that I wanted - no needed to get on the train. "Not yet Thomas" mother said pulling me closer to her so that I wouldn't get lost in the crowds "It doesn't leave for another 20 minutes. Why don't we go get a drink and a sandwich for the journey" I nodded and followed mother to the small cafe that was situated at the back of the station. Inside the smell of freshly made coffee filled my nostrils and was slightly overpowering. We made for the shelves where the sandwiches and drinks were kept. Mother asked me what I wanted and reaching over my small hands picked up a bottle of orange juice. "Would you like something to eat?" I nodded and looked at what they had to offer. I finally decided on a cheese and pickle sandwich and mother chose apple juice and a cheese salad sandwich. We made our way to the counter and mother paid and placed the items into her handbag.

Taking my hand she took me back to platform four and I noticed that they were allowing people onto the train. "We can go on" I squealed, the excitement evident in my voice. Mother grabbed our suitcases and stepped onto the train. I followed behind, forcing myself to breathe otherwise I would have held my breath until we got to our seats. As we made our way to our seats I looked around and took in everything. The red material covering the seats making them look, I thought, elegant. Mother went to the end of the carriage and placed our bags into the storage holder and we chose our seats and sat down.

I made myself comfortable and looked out of the window. "I hope it leaves soon" I said. My mother patted my leg and smiled "It will be". After what seemed a lifetime I heard the moaning and groaning of the train as it started to move. This was it. I watched as the scenery passed us by, the countryside, the villages, all zoomed by as we made our way to London. London was great, but I will always remember it because it was my first time on a train, and the excitement I felt.

I will always remember my first time on a train, it will always be stuck in my mind. Something so small as going on a train had excited me so much back then and once aboard I loved the feeling of the train bumping along the track, watching the scenery blur and now 65 years on I still loved them. I still got a shiver down my spine when I stepped onto the platform. I had been here over the years, through all the

changes that the station had gone through. The construction work, the demolition – I had experienced it all.

1942, Aged 12

I couldn't believe what I had just read in the paper. The train station is due to be demolished and rebuilt, I discussed this with my mother. She explained that they were rebuilding it because it was very old and needed to be improved. But I stood there in horror. How could they destroy the one place that had given me so much happiness over the years? I didn't want it to be rebuilt, I liked the building as it stood now. I didn't want to think about them destroying everything inside. It was as if my memories were going to be destroyed, to be taken away from me.

I told mother that I was going to the train station so that I could spend one last day there before they knocked it down. Mother nodded and told me that she would make me some sandwiches. She understood the importance of the station to me. Ever since my first encounter there seven years ago, we had travelled on the train at least once a year to different places. It had significance to me. It meant that we were going away, leaving behind the place where I grew up for a few days.

I packed my school bag with four sandwiches, two bottles of water, a book and the old camera that I had been given for my tenth birthday. I searched for another film that I knew that I had but I could not find it. Mother remembered I had left it in the kitchen cupboard and went and got it for me. Carefully, I slid the film into the camera and placed it into my bag. Mother told me to be careful and to make sure that I didn't talk to anyone whilst I was there unless I knew them. I told her I knew what to do and that I wouldn't be late home for dinner. Mother kissed my cheek and watched me as I placed my bag onto my shoulders, grabbed my bicycle and made my way to the station.

I spent six hours there. I sat on one of the benches and just stared at the trains as they came in and out. Watched as people boarded and unboarded them, laughing and smiling. I couldn't understand how they could be so happy, did they not know that the station was going to be ripped down? I took as many pictures as I my film could hold. I wanted to remember it how it was, the style, the luxury of it. I wanted the memories to be preserved.

I finally went home. Mother was cooking dinner – turkey, my favourite – and asked me did I get the closure that I needed, I told her I had and went to my bedroom,

not feeling particularly hungry that night. I was going to get my pictures developed the following day and purchase a scrap book to put the photos into. I wanted to remember the station as it was when I first went there – the amazement, the bewilderment, the excitement. I wanted to make sure that I could feel that again whenever I looked at the pictures.

I still have that scrapbook. It is in my bedside drawer and I look at it often, remembering how the station used to look. When it was rebuilt I admit that I found it impressive but it didn't have the feeling that the old building had. There was a feeling that surrounded the place. A feeling that everything was new, which it was. It took a while for me to adjust to the new station, the new smells, the layout, but eventually I came to love it. It has changed dramatically since then, it has been rebuilt to meet the needs of the 21st Century. Electronic boards listing the trains, times and delays. Vending machines selling a variety of confectionary including chocolate, sweets and crisps. A coffee shop is still located in the corner of the station like previously but instead sells a selection of hot and cold food and about seventy types of coffee. Not to mention the fact that the station has doubled in size and now has over ten platforms whereas it previously only had four.

I look up as a train arrives on the platform and hear the chatter and laughter as people unboard the train and leave the platform. A small boy runs around his parents, his voice excited talking about the holiday that they had just come back from. His mother smiles and his father picks him up in one arm, the other carrying a large holdall. A young woman who must have been around nineteen or twenty, ran up the platform and threw her arms around a young mans neck. After a couple of seconds, they pull back, look into each other's eyes, and then embrace again. Hand in hand they leave the station. I wonder how many couples had been in the station, how many relationships had formed and been broken up on these platforms.

I myself had found love on this very platform at which I sat. I was seventeen years old and was waiting for the train to London to arrive when a girl came up to me and asked if she could sit next to me. That simple conversation led to fifty years together and forty six years being happily married.

1948, Aged 17

I placed my suitcase beside the bench and sat down with a sigh. I never remembered needing this amount of luggage when I was younger. I looked at my watch, I still had forty minutes until my train arrived. I was off to London to visit my Aunt for my eighteenth birthday, which was in five days. My mother decided that I should spend some more time with my family members and so arranged for me to spend my birthday with my Aunt and my cousins. I didn't mind I got on well with them and my Cousins were only four and seven years younger than me so they looked up to me.

I looked around the station and smiled at the memory of the fuss I had made five years earlier when the station was being demolished. I had become rather distraught at the building being torn down and rebuilt because I believed that the memories I had of being there would be removed but mother had explained to me that memories were in my mind and no matter what happened to the building I would always have those memories.

"Excuse me, do you mind if I take this seat?" I looked up to see a beautiful girl standing in front of me. She had long brunette hair and green eyes that were shining. I smiled and nodded "Not at all, feel free." I moved over slightly to make room for her. She placed her bag down underneath the seat and looked over at me.

"I'm Catherine". She looked so innocent, so delicate. It was as if she was a newly picked flower that needed to be cared for in order for it to grow. "Thomas" I replied "Where are you travelling to?" I noticed that she didn't have a particularly large bag so I didn't expect that she would be travelling very far.

"London" She must've noticed the look of surprise on my face because she laughed "I'm staying with my father so I have clothes there. This is just some food and a book for the journey" Now it made sense. "He lives there with his wife and I go every few months to stay for a week, so I have my clothes and books down there. Makes it easier than dragging them back and forth all of the time" I nodded. That did make sense. "So what about you? Going to London as well?"

"Yeah. It's my eighteenth birthday next week so I'm going to spend it with my Aunt and cousins"

"That's nice. Happy Birthday for next week. I turned 19 two weeks ago." She smiled and I felt my heart skip a beat. It was a beautiful smile, one that lit up the room.

"Thank you and happy belated birthday. Look our train still has twenty five minutes till it arrives do you want to go grab a drink?" I leaned over and grabbed my

bag and she did the same and nodded. "I'd like that". We made our way to the café and I asked her to sit down whilst I got the drinks. She wanted tea, I wanted coffee. I got the drinks and took them to the small table that she had selected in the corner of the room.

"Thanks" She picked up her cup and took a small sip of the tea. I smiled, she smiled back. I could feel that there was something between us and I was hoping that we would get to spend the journey together. We chatted over the drinks, about ourselves, where we went to school. She was a year and three weeks older than me and had attended an all girls school, which is why I hadn't seen her around before. I was sure I would have recognised her if she was in my school.

We heard the familiar whistle signalling that the train was ready to leave. Finishing our drinks we grabbed our bags and ran to the train. Whilst on board, we found empty seats together instead of sitting in our assigned seats. We spent the entire journey talking and soon became a couple.

Four years after that meeting I proposed to Catherine. She said yes and we spent forty-six years of happily married until cancer took her away from me. She died just after her sixty ninth birthday and a few days before my sixty-eight. We had planned to go to the Lake District as a joint celebration of our relationship. She was diagnosed with breast cancer at sixty-six and was told that she would be lucky to see her sixty seventh birthday but she fought the odds and survived until she was sixty nine. That was two years ago today and I'm sitting on the bench I got placed in her memory and am remembering about all the good times, and the bad that we had.

I turn seventy in three days and am thinking about the time fifty-two years ago when I looked up to see a beautiful young girl standing in front of me with a smile that could light up the room. So Catherine my love, forgive me for not being able to help you more or to ease the pain, but I promise that soon I will join you and we can continue living our lives together – as we were meant to.

I watch as the train leaves the station and look around with a small sigh. I have watched this station change through the decades for over sixty years, lived through many moments that will always be etched on my mind and found love. Yes, this station will always mean a lot to me, will always be where my best memories are but it is time to say goodbye. I get up and slowly walk out of the building, taking in everything from the large pillars that hold up the building to the litter that is scattered

over the floor, each item a part of what makes it what it is. Outside I turn around and look up – it is magnificent, but not as good as it has been when I stood in this spot sixty five and a half years ago. Yes it has changed, but then again so have I but I will always remember being that five year old boy who became amazed when I visited the train station for the first time, and the seventeen year old teenager that had found love.

Those are the moments that I would cherish forever.

NEW YEAR

Ten minutes. That was how long was left until 2010 came. Carol Jenkins sat on her couch staring at the television. She didn't care that 2010 was coming. She didn't care that it was New Year's. She didn't care that everybody else was outside celebrating and welcoming to New Year in. She was happy on her own. That was what she told the people who had invited her to their party anyway. Truth was, she wasn't happy. She did care that she was on her own but she wasn't going to show that to anyone. She wouldn't allow them to see that it mattered to her that she would not be able to see the New Year in with anyone.

She kept her focus on the television although she didn't know what she was watching. She was just staring at the screen not taking any notice of what was playing and didn't hear what was being said. Her mind kept thinking about *him*. The one she wished she could be with on this chilly night, his arms wrapped around her waist gently as they smiled and laughed with their friends at their parties. To lean in and kiss her when the clock struck twelve, to sing along badly to Auld Lang Syne. But that wasn't to happen. *He* wasn't interested in someone like her. Why would he be? She was 32, unemployed and a little on the chubby side. Of course he wouldn't be interested in her, not when he could have anyone that he wanted.

No, she was meant to be alone. She couldn't remember the last time she had a date. Her mind reeled back and she remembered it was over two years ago. The relationship only lasted a couple of months though before he decided that it wasn't working. Since then she hadn't even gotten a guys number. She had accepted it. She had accepted that she wouldn't be loved again. That she would always be alone. That was how she thought so that was how she acted. She pretended she was happy being single but of course she wasn't. She wanted a man who would be there beside her when she woke up, be there when she went to bed, to hold her when it was cold. But for her, it was never going to happen. She would go to bed alone, she would wake up alone and she would have to rely on her duvet to keep her warm.

Five minutes till midnight. She let out a small sigh. She could hear people outside giggling and shouting, getting ready to bring the New Year in, whilst she would be stuck inside on her own. Again. As she had been for the last five New Year's Eves. She turned up the television to help drown out the noise outside. She didn't want to hear people celebrating with their friends, family and loved ones when

she couldn't. *'Of course you could'* she told herself *'You just decided that you didn't want to join them. It is your own fault'*.

Four minutes. She decided to finally concentrate on what was playing on the television. It was an old movie, probably from the 1980s. She tried to understand what the movie was about but she couldn't so she turned the TV off and got up, ready to go to bed. She didn't want to see the New Year in. 2010 wasn't going to be any better, she was adamant about that. Every year she hoped that the New Year would be better than the last and every year she would be disappointed when it was just as bad, or worse, than the previous year.

Three minutes. She started to make her way up the stairs when she heard a faint knock at the door. She turned round and wondered who could be knocking on her door at 11:55pm. She decided to ignore it and continued to make her way upstairs. Knock Knock Knock. The knocking became louder and she forced herself back downstairs. It was probably one of the neighbours trying to get her to come out and see 2010 in. She opened the door ready to tell them that she was on her way to bed because she wasn't feeling well when she stopped short at who stood there.

It was *him*. He was actually standing at her door. He still looked as attractive as ever. Dark brown shaggy hair that never seemed to go flat and deep blue eyes that she felt she could spend hours staring into.

"Hi Carol" he smiled. Oh that smile. It made her feel weak at the knees. She gave a weak smile back.

"Hi Mark" her voice croaked. She held onto the door for support as she could feel her legs beginning to go weak. Was he really standing here on her doorstep?

"How come you're not out celebrating with us? It's a good night." He was still smiling at her and he was wrapping his arms around his coat trying to trap any heat there was inside.

"I-I'm not feeling well. I was on my way to bed actually" she swallowed hard, trying to breathe as her heart beat a hundred miles an hour. She needed to sit down before her knees collapsed underneath her.

Two minutes. "Well that's a shame" he took a step closer to her. "I was just thinking how nice it would be to have you around, to bring in the New Year with"

"You were?" she couldn't believe what she was hearing. Mark, the guy she had been dreaming about for months, wanted to bring in the New Year with *her? Her?* Of all people.

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