

Untitled by E. Mellyberry

How could something end before it began?

Three days ago her world had started under the Twin Peak's sky with the *I love yous* and the kisses and the promise of a new beginning. The new chapter didn't happen because it ended prematurely the next morning when Jo accidentally found a used pregnancy kit on top of her trash. Jo's fists reached Andrew *first* before she could process Andrew's heartfelt, albeit rush, marriage proposal.

Her brother had grabbed Andrew and slammed him against the wall. His fists to Andrew's face, his knee to Andrew's stomach, Jo went mad as a bull and frankly he had every right to. His just-arrived-in-US sister got knocked up by his best friend before school even started. What would happen if Jo knew the truth? Was she crazy, forgiving Andrew the way she'd forgiven him?

Jo's voice rang in her ears. "How could you. What the fuck were you thinking!"

She should've done something. Andrew should've done something, like fight back or defend, or explain, or, or... god, she didn't know, anything, *anything* than just hanging limp and chanting *it's my fault, it's my fault, don't shout at her, leave Lea alone, it's not her fault*. She begged him with her mind to do something. He didn't. He took the beating like a good boy. She hated him this way, his helplessness, his martyrdom. The guilt was all she could see, engulfing the crying boy she'd found four nights ago outside his apartment.

Andrew's flat voice and Jo's angry howls battled to get a hold in her head. At the end, Jo's won. His voice echoed and bounced against the walls, broke the doors and windows in her building, and flew away into the streets. Every single living person within five mile radius could hear him. She couldn't turn him off, no matter how hard she shook her head.

"You ruin her life, you fuck. You *ruin* it. You ruin my sister."

Ruin.

Lea looked at Andrew instantly, for... what? Defense? A spark of emotion?

No, she saw a broken mannequin with his head hung low. She was watching a train wreck. She shook her head and muttered *no, no, no* in panic. They'd patched themselves up three days ago so that they would never be back at *this* place, this broken place.

She hated this broken place.

SYTYCW Editor Critique:

Very dramatic scene the protagonist is thinking about! But why not start the book three days ago? The way you've set it up makes the opening scene all thought, no action. Is there a crucial reason as to why it needs to start three days after the event? Let's go to where the

story starts and share the experience with the readers – set up the scene right before Jo finds the pregnancy test, perhaps. Set up the major characters, the stakes, and then drop the pregnancy bomb. Be sure to make it clear who the hero and heroine are, and make us care about what happens to them.

If there's a strong event happening after the pregnancy test was found that you'd like to open with, do so but show us, don't tell us. We need to be pulled into these characters' world, with their humanity, drama, goals, and fears on display. The main protagonists must drive the story through their choices and actions.