

My Turn

By: Nathan Jones

"It's way too dark out here." I thought to myself. *"I'm never gonna be able to see anyone."* I pushed my body closer to the tree-line and waited for a sound, any sound to let me know that one of my brothers or even my sister was nearby. I'd heard one of them running a few minutes before, but the clouds above blocked any moonlight that might have been there in the past half hour. Everything was black, and my eyes were refusing to adjust. Feeling pricks at my side, I groaned as I realized my chosen "fort" was right next to a briar patch. Served me right for picking the backyard as my starting point.

"You guys have thirty minutes!" My mom's voice carried across the yard and all the way up the street we lived on. Looking out across the freshly mowed lawn of my neighbor's property, I secretly hoped someone would yell "OK!" Nothing. Apparently, my brothers and sister were smarter than that.

I shifted my weight away from the briar patch, hoping someone would make a mistake soon. Knowing my little brother and sister especially, I expected one of them to give up any minute, most likely out of pure boredom. They weren't like Philip and I. They didn't let these competitions amongst the four of us completely and utterly consume them. They didn't add rules to a game of kickball or stakes to a round of Frisbee to make it more "interesting," and they didn't set out to completely dominate the competition or taunt them mercilessly afterwards. If they even agreed to participate in the first place, it was safe to say that they didn't really play to win. They were just there to have fun, and I was certain they'd never get used to the level of patience my older brother and I possessed for the sake of victory. After all, our bouts were legendary. I didn't know anyone else who could stomach a four-hour game of RISK either. *"This one's mine."* I thought to myself. *"It's my turn this time."*

Wincing beneath the pain of the plastic vests we'd all put on at the house, I tried not to think about the fact that mine was digging into my ribs. We'd bought the laser tag set from WalMart earlier that day, and though this version was very different from the one we were used to playing at the skating rink, the box had looked cool enough to beg our mom to buy it. I looked down at the counter on my gun and frowned. "2." I'd lost a life early on trying to hide. I didn't want to make that mistake again, and as I covered the counter once more with my hand, I continued to scan the lawns behind our house and the neighbor's. Nothing was moving. It was as if we were all thinking the same thing: sit, wait, and watch for someone to be stupid. *"Not me."* I thought to myself. *"I'm done sitting around."*

I pushed myself off the ground, taking one last look across the street in front of me. I figured I had at least one shot to lure someone out if I gave them what they wanted. It was risky, but I needed to find out where Philip was. *He* was the target. *Him*. He was the *only* one I cared

about. I *had* to find him. He couldn't win *this* one too. Re-adjusting my vest, I tiptoed across our backyard, keeping my body against the tree-line in the process. As much as I hated the briars, sprinting headlong across the yard was suicide. Someone was bound to be up in a tree somewhere anyway, and I didn't want to be such an easy target. Using the outside lights from our house as a guide, I maneuvered my way towards one of the larger trees in our lawn. It was lined with our trash cans, and if worse came to worse, I could just as easily use one of the lids as a shield. We hadn't set any rules against that. Suddenly, I heard a shout.

"Found you!" my little brother yelled, his tiny legs pumping as he rushed towards me.

"You're mine!"

I wasted no time, bolting towards the other side of the house, my little brother in hot pursuit. Zigzagging as best I could in the dark, I could hear the faint sounds of his gun firing off laser after laser, and I prayed he wouldn't connect. I rounded the corner closest to the road faster than I intended, and as I pressed my back firmly against the wall, I nearly slipped as my brother, still panting from the chase, came barreling past me. His tiny frame was barely recognizable in a vest entirely too big for him, and I smiled as the sensors on his back came into full view. With my finger firmly on the trigger of my gun, I pressed down hard. One, two, three.

Ryan's vest lit up like a Christmas tree, and as it vibrated from the shock of so many direct hits, my little brother slumped to the ground. "No fair." he moaned. "I thought I had you."

"Not this time." I said, pushing past him. "And don't tell anyone where I am either."

"I hope they see you!" he snapped back, turning to leave. "I didn't wanna play anyway."

I rolled my eyes but continued towards our front lawn, confident that my older brother and sister were hiding farther up the street. With our house sitting at the bottom, I had a lot of open ground I had to cover if I ever hoped to find them. As I thought it over, I imagined my brother and sister were probably hiding somewhere near the top, a darker area for sure, but one only accessible by crossing the remainder of our front lawn. Tucked neatly against the woods where we often played during the summer, it was the perfect cover, and I wished I'd been smart enough to go there first. My options of making it up there now without being spotted would be slim. The cars going up and down the road adjacent to our house certainly didn't help either, and with their headlights casting shadows in every direction, I couldn't help but drop to the ground every time one went by. I was beginning to get annoyed. I heard our front door slam, and turning quickly to face it, my gun raised, I frowned as I realized nothing was there. "*Must have been Ryan going inside.*" I thought to myself. "*He's probably telling Mom and Dad I cheated or something.*"

I imagined my parents sitting in the living room in front of the TV, my dad on the couch and my mother alongside him, their watches wrapped firmly around their wrists as reminders that

their children were still outside stumbling around in the dark. With my dad working a full-time job and my mom beginning to teach again, this kind of thing was a usual pattern around our house. My dad had rules about playing outside, and they usually revolved around making sure we were at it for hours on end. From playing pitch, to fixing flat bike tires, my dad took every opportunity he could to keep us active.

“It’s too nice outside to play video games.” he’d say. “Go out and sword-fight your brother or something.”

We didn’t need much encouragement, really. We loved the street we lived on. Set against the pipelines where we often rode our bikes or went exploring, Maple Way was about as good a place as any to grow up. We never had to worry about getting hit by a car when we were out rollerblading, and we certainly never worried about getting in trouble with our neighbors for kicking a soccer ball into their yard. It was a quiet place full of good people, and our yard being so big meant that we never short on things to do. We could camp out in the summer, or even sled down our neighbors’ lawns when and if it ever snowed. It just sucked that we couldn’t go to bed later, and I was fearful that at any moment, my mom would call out that it was time to wrap things up. Thinking this over, I made the decision to hunt my older brother. I knew it was stupid, and I knew it was probably exactly what he wanted me to do, but I didn’t want to lose the opportunity to shut him up for once. He was always winning everything. Even if he didn’t know the rules, and even if he was brand new to the game, my older brother had a knack for picking things up quickly. It was an ability he’d often taunt me with, always making sure to keep the competition between the two of us alive.

“Call me *Master*.” he’d mock, lowering his voice to sound like Darth Vader. “You are second place!”

I was tired of being second place. I loved my brother and I lived for these moments, but I was *tired* of being number two. With my gun raised and my mind made up, I waited for another car to go by, then bolted across our front lawn, keeping to the right side of the street adjacent to our neighbor Mr. Crewley’s fence. I scanned the houses around me, wishing and hoping I’d see something, anything that could be my brother. It was then that I heard the crunch. I spun around quickly, expecting to see either him or my sister, fearful that I was about to lose all my remaining lives in an instant. Dropping to my belly, I began firing wildly. Nothing. Had I stepped on something? No, I couldn’t have. The sound had come from behind me. I was sure of it. Ducking behind another tree, I stooped to try and hide. The ground beneath me was wet, probably from the drainage pipe that ran alongside Mr. Crewley’s yard, and as my pant legs began to soak up water, I couldn’t help but feel as if I was being watched.

“There’s no way he’s here...” I mumbled. “There’s no way he’s this close. He’d have shot me already.”

Standing up slowly, I peered around the tree where I was hiding. There was nothing there, but as I started to contemplate that I might be hearing things, I caught sight of something leaning against the van in our driveway. I smiled as I recognized the yellow hair and skinny frame of my older sister, and my grin grew wider as I realized I had snuck right by her. There was no telling how long she'd been there, but there was no doubt that she'd been sitting next our mom's van hoping I'd come the other way. The first shot from my gun hit the sensor on her back, and laughing to myself as she spun around helplessly to locate the source, I fired the remaining two at her gun.

"Hey!" I heard her shout, still unable to locate me. "No fair!"

Wanting to gloat but fearful I'd get sniped myself, I stayed in the shadows and watched my sister sulk, grinning as she stomped back into the house. There was only one more to go, and I had a good feeling I knew where he would be. I just needed to get up there without being seen, and with the moon now starting to peer through the clouds and paint our street in a bluish hue, I wondered how I'd ever make it all the way up the street undetected. Stationed as I was, I had two options. I could continue through Mr. Crewley's yard, but that would mean passing by his shed. Mr. Crewley had a dog back there, and though Dusty was nice, he'd probably bark if I got too close. My other option was to sprint up the street, but I still didn't know where Philip was. I didn't know if he was tucked behind a bush, or sitting on top of a car, or even if he was hiding under someone's porch. If I had any hope of beating him, I'd have to come up with something fast. It was probably past ten o'clock already. My dad hated when we went to bed past ten, and because my little brother and I were still in fourth and fifth grade, we were lucky to get ten o'clock on a weekend. Our usual bedtime was much earlier, and he wasn't going to care if I told him I "wasn't tired," or that there was no way I could sleep until I'd beaten Philip once and for all. He was going to ruin this for me if I didn't find my brother soon, and he wasn't going to think twice about it.

Taking careful steps into Mr. Crewley's backyard, I made the decision to take my chances with his dog out back. If Dusty was sleeping, I'd have nothing to worry about. No matter what, this was absolute best way to sneak up on my older brother. My shoes crunched the fallen leaves scattered across the lawn, and I prayed that I wouldn't step on a big one. More and more moonlight now began to seep through the clouds, and as I carefully maneuvered my way through the tall grass and pot holes behind Mr. Crewley's house, I kept my eyes peeled for any sign of movement within the nearby trees. Nothing. Not even the leaves were moving.

"Where did he *go*?" I groaned. "This makes no sense."

I pushed onward still, up and over the hill that separated Mr. Crewley's yard from the last house at the top of our street. I breathed a sigh of relief that I'd managed to slip past Dusty's cage without waking him, and I found myself standing next to the garage of Mr. Crewley's neighbor. It was the farthest possible point from my house. Save for the actual tree line leading

into the pipelines, you couldn't go any farther than the Pettways' garage, and though I wondered for a moment whether my brother had gone the extra mile to venture into those woods, I quickly dismissed the idea. There was no way he'd go that far. He was around here somewhere, I was sure of it.

I started scanning the garage. I didn't want to linger there too long, but I had to be sure that my brother wouldn't sneak up behind me. Glancing around as best I could in what little light I had, I did my best to check every crack and crevice before moving on. Two cars, a riding mower, some lawn equipment, and a tool shed. I groaned as I realized that I might have to start looping *back* towards the house to find my brother. This was the worst possible scenario, and I tried to keep my frustrations quiet. I stopped to re-tie my shoe. It was then that I heard the branch fall.

At first, I thought it was nothing. Though it had startled me, my first thought was that I was hearing things again. After all, I'd spent so much time scanning trees and seeing nothing, that I honestly figured it was the wind. There was a slight breeze that had begun picking up, and since we'd heard from our parents that it might rain while we were out playing, I had to consider it. Nevertheless, I froze. With my fingers tying the rest of my shoe in slow motion, I peered hard at the trees down the Pettways' driveway and told myself it couldn't be him. *No one* climbed those trees. *No one*. They weren't even climbable, were they? Another branch, this time from somewhere near the middle. "No way..." I said to myself, looking closer at the trees. "Did he really...?" A third branch, this one much bigger than the other two, and it suddenly became clear that something was making its way down. "I've got him!" I nearly cried, "Now's my chance!"

I wasted no time, and within seconds, I was sprinting down the driveway, gun drawn, pumping my legs as fast as I could to make it to the base of that tree before my brother could exit. Though I had picked off my little brother and sister from a distance, this "kill" would be different. I wanted to see the look on my older brother's face when he jumped out of that tree to find me standing there. I wanted to be there smiling when he came crashing down to the sight of my laser lighting up his vest like a machine gun. Arriving at the base of the tree, I anxiously waited for my moment of glory. As branch after branch began crashing to the ground around me, I waited to see my older brother's lanky, sixteen-year-old frame come sliding down in front of me. I didn't expect the thud.

My face hit the ground the first, followed by my gun. "Ow!" I cried, realizing what had just happened. "Get off!"

"The hell?!" I could hear my brother say, scrambling to get to his feet.

He fumbled around for his gun, and I could hear him groaning beneath the pain of the collision. Reaching for my own, I tried to raise it towards where I thought he was, but my head

was still spinning. “Crap!” I could hear him yell, his voice trailing off as he ran towards another neighbor’s yard. “My gun’s not working!”

From my dazed position beneath the tree, I watched as my brother Philip ran toward the back of another house, slapping his gun like a fading flashlight. I fired my own as best I could in his direction, and watched triumphantly as his vest began to light up once, then twice. Before I could fire off a third shot, he had disappeared around the corner. I struggled to my feet, my head still hurting from his fall, but I couldn’t give up now, not when I was so close. Following as best I could, I chased my brother down the street, through our neighbor’s yard, and around back where I had originally sat waiting at the tree line. I looked everywhere, anxiously searching to finish him off, and though I briefly thought I had lost him, I suddenly spied him huddled near their back porch, his hands over the sensors on his vest to cheat his way out of a loss.

“Come on.” he laughed. “My gun stopped working. Let’s call it a truce.”

“Never!” I cried, raising my own. “This one’s mine!”

With my legs aching from the chase, I fell to my knees, trying to catch my breath before I pulled the trigger. I’d done it. I’d finally done it. I was about to beat him. All I had to do was squeeze. “Say goodb---”

Another thud and I was on the ground once more, my gun knocked from my hand and my arms flailing to push the family dog off me. “Rusty, stop!” I cried. “Get off! You’re ruining it!”

With a last lick to my face, our hundred-pound golden retriever stepped away to go pee in the woods. Wiping the last bit of drool from my chin, I looked up to see my older brother standing above me, his laser aimed directly at the sensor on my chest. “I fixed it.” he smiled.

“I know.”

“You should have known not to challenge the *Master*.”

“Shut up.”

“Second place...” he whispered. And with that, my two remaining lives were lost, wiped clean in a matter of seconds.

I punched the ground with my fist and wanted to cry. I’d spent so long looking for him and everything had gotten messed up in just a few seconds. It wasn’t fair. Suddenly I heard my dad’s voice call out for us to come inside, and as my older brother helped me to my feet, I punched him on the arm. “It was my turn.” I muttered. “I thought I had it.”

“One day.” he said, rubbing my head. “Wanna go play Mario Kart or something?”

I thought it over. "First to three?"

"Loser cleans the other's room." he replied.

I nodded, smiling as I let him put his arm around me. Calling over the dog, the two of us walked back into the house, and I began mapping out how I'd beat him. *This* one would be mine. I was sure of it this time.