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Short Story: “*Schrodinger’s Baby”,*

**RI 7.3** Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

**RL 7.3** Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

**“Schrödinger's Baby” by** [**Charlie Fish**](http://www.eastoftheweb.com/cgi-bin/read_db.pl?search_field=author_id&search_for=CharlieFish&order_by=author_last,title&page=1) **- Lexile: 1080**

There she slept, a puckered little bundle of DNA fighting to organize. She looked and smelled like a lump of dough. Her breathing rattled less than it had when she was born; I could hardly tell she was alive apart from that relentless ticking.

     There was an electronic pad tucked beneath her baby mattress that sensed her breathing, translating each inhalation and exhalation into a metronomic tick. The ticks were supposed to be reassuring, but to me they sounded like a countdown.

     Everything about the last year had been a countdown. Waiting to conceive, watching the bump grow, buying everything we thought we needed. At each stage I was convinced that the hidden timer would reach zero, and Elaine would get bored of our workaday lives, escape back to the material wealth she'd been accustomed to. Even after the birth, the countdown seemed to continue. I stared at the baby, waiting to feel something. Tick. Tick. Tick.

     She wasn't born, technically, rather pulled from Elaine's stomach like a weed. That's where Elaine was now, having her stitches tended, having her shredded dignity prodded into further submission.

     I told the baby I loved her, trying to believe it.

     Coffee. I went to the kitchen and prepared a really strong cup. But we were out of milk. The shop was next door to our flat; I could be out and back before the coffee cooled. Cursing, I grabbed the ticking intercom from the lounge and went out.

     "Hi, Mo," I said to the Indian guy behind the counter as I entered the corner store. It wasn't always the same guy, but as far as I could gather they were all called Mo.

     "Hello, Mister Franks. How is your little girl?"

     I held up the ticking intercom. "Still alive."

     "This is the best age, ah? You can gaze at them all day. I have seven daughters, you know. Can't stop myself."

     "Really?" I said, distracted. What had I come in for? I hadn't been getting much sleep.

     "They are very difficult when they grow. Our oldest – twelve years – she is chatting about eye-phones and Myspacebook and popping music. We have no idea what she is talking about."

     "I always wanted a child," I said. "But I'm not sure I want an infant."

     I rubbed my face. Milk – that's what I'd come in for. I grabbed the biggest bottle. Elaine called these six-pinters "the Cow". But when it came to paying, I realized I didn't have my wallet. I grumbled under my breath, set down the Cow, and scurried out.

     At the door to our building I patted my pockets. Patted them again. Looked down. I was wearing my pajamas, the powder-blue ones Elaine's mother had given me for Christmas. I put the ticking intercom on the floor and, ridiculously, patted my pockets again.

     Of course the keys weren't there. I knew exactly where they were – in my jeans, next to my bedside table. On the other side of two double-locked doors. In a last-ditch display of utter fantasy, I gave myself one last full-body pat-down before the panic started to set in. A prickle at the back of my neck; a tinge of whiteness in my vision. I contained it and willed myself to think. My first instinct was to walk away, pretend the baby didn't exist, and live the rest of my life under a bridge.

     Elaine's mother had a spare key. She lived just a few bus stops away. I could call her and be there in ten minutes. But – no. I couldn't call her: my mobile was also in the pocket of my jeans.

     Back to the shop.

     "Hello again, Mister Franks. You forgot something?"

     "Mo, have you got a phone I could use?"

     "Not for customers, sorry."

     "Please, it's an emergency."

     "*Ji*? Problem with your little one?"

     "No, it's, uh . . . it's . . . Can I use your phone please?"

     Mo must have seen something in my face. He handed over his mobile. But I had no idea what number to dial. I called Elaine instead, the only number I could remember.

     "Hello? Who's this?"

     I felt a blush of warmth, an abdominal tug.

     "Elaine, it's me. How're you doing?"

     "Still waiting. You know how it is with hospitals. Waiting, waiting, waiting. How's the baby?"

     "I'm just calling . . ." Why was I calling? What was I doing? Elaine had entrusted me with the baby and I was about to admit that I was the worst father in the world?

     "What number is this?" she asked.

     "The baby's fine. She's asleep."

     "I miss her." Her voice became shaky. "Sorry, still feeling a bit fragile."

     "I just . . . What's your mother's number? I wanted to call her to . . . thank her for those pajamas. I'm wearing them now."

     I made a frantic scribbling gesture towards Mo, who took a few seconds to realize I was asking for a pen. I scrawled the number onto the back of my hand, filled the air with sweet platitudes, and hung up.

     "That did not sound like an emergency," said Mo.

     "Shut up, Mo."

     I dialed Elaine's mother's number.

     "Hello?"

     "Mrs. Leclerc, it's –"

     "Daniel! What a surprise. How lovely to hear from you. How's my gorgeous granddaughter? She is simply the most ravishingly beautiful baby I have ever set eyes on. She gets it from me, darling."

     "She's fine."

     "She's fine, he says. Men are always so articulate on such matters. My husband –"

     "Mrs Leclerc, I wonder if you can help me."

     "Ah! Seeking some parental advice? Well, you've come to exactly the right place. You only need to look at how wonderfully well-mannered Elaine is to see –"

     "Do you have our spare set of keys?"

     "Yes, dear. You endowed us with responsibility for them and we've taken that responsibility seriously. They're in the jewelry box at the back of the cutlery drawer."

     "Could you please bring them over? Or can I come and get them?"

     "I'm in Brighton, dear. The Conservative conference. It would take me an hour at least to get home, and Sebastian's away on business, in Monaco. Is it an emergency?"

     I gritted my teeth.

     "Darling?" she prompted.

     "No. Sorry to bother you."

     I hung up.

     Mo glanced at the baby's ticking intercom, which I'd left on the countertop, and then looked sideways at me, grinning. "You're in a bit of a pickle, aren't you?"

     I could feel the panic spreading in my veins like a poison. I wanted to shout, lash out. Instead, I closed my eyes, took a deep breath. My hands shook with the effort of containment.

     "Mo, have you got the number of an emergency locksmith?"

     Mo shrugged.

     "I'll call directory enquiries." I held up the phone. "If you don't mind?"

     Mo made a concessionary gesture. His lips clenched as if suppressing a smirk.

     I got numbers for two locksmiths, and called the nearer one. "Hello," I said when a man with meticulous received pronunciation answered. "I've locked my keys in my flat and I need someone to come and let me in. It's urgent."

     "Certainly," said the man. "We charge £250 for changing locks, and a £50 call-out fee."

     "Fine, fine." I told him my address.

     "We can be there in ten minutes. Do you have a form of identification?"

     "No. My wallet's in the flat."

     "A driver's license? A utility bill?"

     "I'm in my pajamas."

     Mo leaned over, cupping a hand to his mouth. "Very nice pajamas they are too!" I elbowed him out of the way.

     "I'm afraid we can't change the locks unless you can provide valid identification showing your address."

     I tried not to let my irritation show. Unsuccessfully. "I can provide ID as soon as you let me into my flat."

     "I'm sorry, sir," came the snitty reply. "I'm afraid we can't help you." He hung up.

     I let out a primal roar. Mo looked concerned that I might cast his phone into the liquor aisle. I swallowed my rage and stabbed in the number of the second locksmith.

     "Hello, Securelock Limited."

     "Hi. I'm locked out of my flat."

     "Right. I can sort that out for you, no problem."

     "It's an emergency. And I don't have any identification."

     "What's the address?"

     I told him.

     "I'm on another call at the moment, sir, so I can be with you in . . . say . . . forty-five minutes."

     I checked my watch. My face must have been a picture – Mo actually looked sorry for me. "Can't you come any faster?"

     "Forty-five minutes."

     I sighed tensely, hung up, and handed over the phone, blinking back a tear. "Thanks, Mo."

     "My name is actually Sukhvinder."

     I picked up the plastic intercom from the countertop. It wasn't ticking anymore. I shook it. Held it to my ear, straining to listen. Popped the back open and rolled the batteries around. Nothing.

     "Batteries, batteries!" I barked.

     Mo fumbled, spilling several packs of batteries onto the countertop as he reached up for them. I grabbed one, ripped it open. Levered out the old batteries and shoved in the new ones. Nothing.

     I checked and double-checked. The batteries were in correctly, the intercom was switched on, the volume was turned up, yet there was no sound. I looked up at Mo. His eyebrows formed an inverted V. He covered his mouth with his hand.

     I ran out of the shop and banged on our front door. I rattled the handle, uselessly, then stepped back and ran at it like a battering ram. Mo came out of the shop to watch as I banged at the door again and again like a wasp against a window. It wasn't going to budge.

     I stopped. Tried to think rationally. Failed. "Mo, help!"

     Mo shrugged. "Do not to go crazy. Probably she scooched off the sensor or it has malfunctioned."

     "I don't know if I've got an alive baby or a dead baby until I can open this bloody door!"

     I looked up at the windows. Our flat is on the first floor. An old Victorian metal drainpipe led up past the nursery window. I clamped myself to it and tried to shimmy my way up.

     Turns out that kind of thing is only possible in cartoons. The drainpipe was rusty and flaky, and in my effort to gain purchase I managed to pull it off the wall. A stinking slosh of stagnant water landed on my face. I spluttered and retched as the pipe arced gracefully down, twisted to one side, and landed heavily on my neighbor's Subaru Impreza, popping out the passenger-side window.

     I stared at the car, my shoulders jerking with dry sobs that were almost laughter. It was parked near the porch; now that the drainpipe lay across the front of the house it might be possible to climb from the top of the car up onto the roof of the porch.

     I jumped onto the car, denting the hood, then reached up to the broken pipe. Hanging, hand over hand, I worked my way up. I tried to haul myself onto the porch roof, but the drainpipe bowed. "Mo!" I shouted. "Give me a leg up!"

     Mo glanced nervously at the door of his shop, then slunk over and held up his hands. I stepped on them, then onto his turban, and heaved myself onto the porch roof.

     Leaning precariously over the edge, using a stretch of broken drainpipe for support, I stared into the nursery window. I could see her, just, but there was no way of telling whether she was moving. Never before had I appreciated what it meant to have a lump in your throat, but now I felt like I'd swallowed a lemon.

     Directly over the porch was the lounge window. I braced myself and kicked. It resonated loudly, but didn't break. I wound myself up for a firmer kick, and nearly slipped off the roof with shock when a siren sounded not ten meters behind me.

     I crouched on all fours to keep my balance. Cautiously, I turned my head to see a policeman stepping out of his vehicle. From the corner of my eye I saw Mo slip quietly back into the store.

     "Hold it," shouted the cop.

     "This is my house! I need to get my baby!" At least that's what I intended to say. It came out a little garbled.

     "Down. Right now," ordered the policeman. "We'll discuss it at the station." He yelled more orders and threats, but I could only hear the rush of blood in my ears. I turned back to the window and gave it a powerful kick.

     My foot went through the glass. The sound was surprising, a staccato of hollow ringing. Even more surprising was that when I retrieved my leg, a large triangle of glass came with it, embedded in my calf.

     I staggered, reaching out for something to hold on to, but my leg gave way beneath me. As I fell, I saw every mistake I'd ever made, and I had just enough time to register that none of them had been as bad as this one.

     THWACK. The pavement tasted salty metallic. I blacked out.

I woke with a start. Horizontal. Tried to get to my feet, but my leg was braced and my head felt like someone had stuffed it full of nails. I squinted my eyes to try and focus. I was in hospital. Without the baby.

     A pressure built up on my chest, and kept building, like a marching band trampling my ribcage. It grew into a full-on military tattoo. I was officially the worst father – no, the worst person – in the world. If I was on a life-support machine, it should be switched off now.

     "Please try to relax." The voice belonged to a robust-looking female doctor. "You're in King's College Hospital Emergency Department being treated for shock, head trauma, a broken leg and a partially severed Achilles tendon. You'll be all right, but you need to settle down."

     I tried to say something, but my voice sounded like it was coming from somewhere else and I lost my train of speech.

     "Calm down or you'll do yourself more damage. Stop moving about and tell me your name."

     I looked up at the doctor with pleading wet eyes.

     "What is your name?" She enunciated every syllable.

     I concentrated, struggling to cut through the morphine mist. "Dan. Yel. Franks."

     "Daniel Franks?"

     I nodded. "My . . . Baby . . ."

     "Can we contact someone for you?"

     "My baby my baby my baby!"

     The doctor's face tightened with concern. "I'll be right back, OK Daniel?"

     "No!" I bawled, but she'd already left. I needed to concentrate. I needed to speak to someone. I had to get to a phone. I searched my bedside for an emergency pull-cord, thinking that this couldn't possibly get any worse. Then it got worse.

     A familiar figure loomed above me, leaning on a crutch. My heart swelled and fluttered. It was Elaine, wearing a hospital gown. I gawked at her helplessly. She looked crestfallen.

     "Oh, Danny," she said. "I was just about to have my check-up and I got a call saying you were here. Oh, honey . . ."

     I wanted to gouge my eyes out with a spoon. "I'm . . . sorry, Elaine – so sorry . . . The baby –" The word caught in my throat and came out as a kind of hiccough.

     "You must have been terrified. Sukhvinder told me all about it."

     Sukhvinder?

     Then I saw him. Mo – Sukhvinder – standing behind Elaine. In his arms, a tiny miracle. My precious doughy baby. He winked at me. "I called your wife on my mobile phone and told her about the *bewakoof*burglar who broke your window and attacked you while you were responsibly babysitting."

     Elaine leaned over and stroked my hair. "I don't know how you had the presence of mind to drag yourself downstairs and ask Sukhvinder for help. Or should I say... Mo." She flashed me a wry smile and kissed me on the forehead. I sank back into the crisp hospital sheets; felt like I was floating.

     Gingerly, Mo bent down and placed the baby on my chest. He lingered a moment to whisper in my ear. "The locksmith arrived. I took the baby and called your wife from my last-dialed numbers." He straightened up, then ducked down again to whisper one last thing. "You owe me three-hundred fifty for the locksmith. And four pound ninety-nine for batteries."

     But I barely heard him. I stared at the baby wriggling on my chest. She glowed with life. The thought that I might have lost her – that I might ever lose her – filled me with butterfly panic. She was small and perfect, yet so precarious. I caressed her yielding fontanelle, weeping with joy and apprehension.

***Questions:***

1. How does the setting affect the story? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Briefly discuss how interaction between the protagonist and another character (or even themselves) causes even more tension in the story? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. What do you consider to be the theme of the story? Why (use examples from the text)? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you consider this to be a character driven story or an event driven story? Explain using examples from the text. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Double Chunk Paragraph Response:***

*(Topic Sentence, Evidence, Analysis, Analysis, Evidence, Analysis, Analysis, Conclusion)*

List one character flaw the protagonist has that causes conflict?

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