

## ***Iceberg Ahead***

A **Teen Titans** story

Written by Corey W. Smith

Awright, so, it's a Saturday night and all's quiet on the crime front. So, we're all kickin' back and...uh, watching *Titanic* for the fifth time since Terra moved in. And it's only been about a week and a half.

Credits roll, and she bursts into tears at almost the exact same point she did the other four times, down to the second. I can't help but notice things like that; my brain's half-digital, after all. For the record, I think it's funny, and kinda cute.

Trouble is, I'm not the only one who notices. Raven's annoyed sigh is hard to miss.

"C'mon, leave me alone!" Terra protests, between sobs. "I can't help it, okay?! It's just...so...sad...!" And now Starfire joins in, and they're both blubbering and huggin' each other.

"Of *course* it is," Raven answers, clearly disgusted. "It's designed, packaged, and manufactured to be. Emotional manipulation, in its most basic and blatant form. And you react exactly the way you're supposed to, every single time."

"So?!" Terra demands, and now she's starting to sound more mad than sad. "What's wrong with that? I just *like* it! How come you're always so down on me??"

"I was only pointing out—"

But *Beast Boy* cuts her off, an' that's a new one on me. "Yeah, Raven, you shouldn't throw rocks when you're – sleeping in a paper tent, an' stuff."

Here's where everything stops for what I call a Beast Boy Pause, while everybody takes a second to figure out what the heck he just said.

As usual, Raven clocks in at number one. "Okay, first, it's bricks and glass houses. Second...meaning *what*, exactly?"

Now it's BB's turn to play it cool, an' let her sweat. Or, maybe he's having second thoughts about goin' head to head with her, over a movie. I can't tell.

Robin decides this is a good time to head things off. "Come on, guys, let's..."

"**Meaning...what?**" Raven repeats, an' I'm startin' t' worry about BB catchin' on fire or something, just from the way she's lookin' at him.

He sighs, and when he looks up, it ain't what I'd have expected. The kid almost looks *smug*.

"C'mon, Raven. You totally cried at the end of *Return of the King*. You were real quiet about it, sure, but...I saw you. An' not just once, either. –Nothin' *wrong* with that, or anything, I'm...just sayin'."

The temperature in the room *literally* drops a good fifteen degrees, an' I've got the external temp logs to prove it. I swear, the next few seconds you coulda heard a pin drop, and we've got special, shock-absorbent carpet in that room.

Me an' Robin look at each other, tryin' to decide who's gonna make for Raven, and who's gonna dive in front o' BB. I tense up.

An' then, just like that, Raven turns an' walks outta the room.

After I beat Robin at rock-paper-scissors to decide who got to chew out Beast Boy, I went looking for Miss Sunshine. Problem was, I couldn't find her. She wasn't in her room, wasn't on the roof, wasn't in any of her other 'usual places'. I figured she probably wanted some time and space to cool off, so I decided to let it go for the time being. Spent the rest of the evening stompin' Robin an' BB on GameStation, which was even funnier than usual 'cause with both Star *and* Terra there, I was the only one who *didn't* have a ready-made cheering section.

Next morning, I head down to the garage to work on some performance tweaks for the T-Car's engine. The beauty of havin' a car you've literally built from scratch is knowing exactly what's under the hood – and everywhere else, for that matter – without having to flip through some boring old manual, or go poking around the engine block. Also makes it a lot easier any time you want to fix, tweak or change anything; having a complete understanding of what's already there.

But, I'm getting off track. Anyway, I'm under the car, and I spot a loose bolt I wasn't expecting to find, so I slide out to get the wrench I need from the tool box...except it's glowing black and hanging in the air right above me, within easy reach.

"Well, hey, that's handy," I grin up at Raven, where she's perched on the workbench nearby, as I grab the hovering tool.

She shrugs, not really looking at me. So I play it cool, slide back under and go back to work on the car, although I can still see her from this angle.

A couple of minutes pass, and she fidgets a little, then hugs her knees. "It's cold down here, in the morning," she mutters. "Doesn't it bother you?"

My turn to shrug. "Nah, not really. 'Course, most o' my body's not especially temperature-sensitive, y'know?" I throw her a wink, which takes more effort than you might think when you've only got one real eye.

She makes a grumpy noise in response. I *almost* say something along the lines of that she could try putting on a pair of pants, if she's cold...but at the last second, I decide I'd rather live to find out what's gonna be on the breakfast menu, and keep my mouth shut.

People accuse me an' Beast Boy of bein' birds of a feather, and maybe we are, when it comes to some things. But the difference is, *he* would've said it.

In any case, I figure she's down here because she wants to talk about what happened last night. But I've also learned that when Raven has something to say, it's better to let her get to it in her own time, rather than trying to force it out of her. So, I just keep tinkering, letting the sound of my tools fill the silence for now.

She's sure taking her time, though. A few more minutes pass, and I start thinking about ways I can try to broach the topic without having her storm off again. But, finally, she speaks up.

"It's...not the crying that bothers me, by itself. With Terra, I mean. It's the *way* she does it."

"What, right on cue, at the exact same part of the movie, every time?" I ask, keeping my eyes on the engine above my head.

"More than that. She's a fake."

"Uh, come again?"

“The tears, the whole routine, it’s all a show. She doesn’t *truly* feel that strongly about the movie. She’s acting.”

“How do *you* know?” I ask, and she gives me a look that says I’m in the wrong lane, and there’s oncoming traffic. “Okay, okay, fine, but—”

“Oh, sure, the *first* time we watched it, it was spontaneous. But not the second time, or the third, the fourth, and certainly not last night.”

“But why? That’s what I’m not getting. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“I think she decided, after the first time, that we’d all expect it. So she’s been giving us what she thinks we want, basically.”

“Huh...” I lean back. Come to think of it, it *does* kinda make sense; BB an’ Star always get extra mushy with her when the waterworks are going. Heck, they usually join in – well, Star, anyway. As for BB, he...

And suddenly, it’s all so obvious I can’t stop myself from laughing. “Why, that sneaky little...heh heh heh...sorry, Rae, I know it bugs you, but I’ve gotta hand it to the grass stain, this time. I bet the two of ‘em have had this whole thing worked out, right from the start.”

She isn’t laughing. Actually, she kinda looks like a cat that’s had water poured on its head. Uh-oh. Better try to smooth things out a little.

“Now...I’m not sayin’ it was okay for him to take that cheap shot last night. Robin talked to him about that, and he said he’ll apologize.”

She blinks, still looking annoyed. “What cheap shot?”

“That thing about you, and that other movie.”

She blinks again, and suddenly, she hops down off the bench and starts pacing back and forth, next to the car. I can’t see her face from this angle, now...can’t see anything above her waist, for that matter.

I *am* still glad I kept my mouth shut earlier, but that, as they say, is a whole other story.

“Say, uh...as long as you’re up,” I ask her, “Would y’ mind passing me the six-point quarter-inch socket?” Mentally, I send a wireless signal to the car’s internal CPU that tells it to pop the hood, while Raven goes fishing for the wrench I asked for.

She bangs around a little bit over there, but the great thing about tools is, they’re tough. Y’know...for a girl who’s always telling everyone how she can’t afford to feel any strong emotions, it’s funny how wound up she can get, and over the silliest things.

After a few seconds, she comes back around to the front of the car and lowers the tool down to me, through a space between the engine and the car’s frame.

“Thanks,” I grunt. I’m half expecting her to leave, at this point, but to my surprise, she’s staying put.

“He...doesn’t owe me an apology,” she says, after a minute. “He was right.”

I almost bang my head on the underside of the car. I swear, every time I think I’ve got her all figured out, Raven always finds a new way to surprise me.

All of a sudden it’s quiet, and I realize I’d better say something.

“Well, uh, that’s...that’s nothin’ to be embarrassed about. Lotsa people cry at movies. That’s why they’re called tear-jerkers, heh.” It’s lame as hell, but it’s all I’ve got.

“...You don’t get it.” It isn’t a question.

“No, well, I mean...”

“It wasn’t like that.” Her voice is getting quiet. “It...it was...have you ever...ever seen something that was so, so *beautiful*, so...” I don’t think I’ve ever heard her use that word before, and it almost throws me. She sighs, sounding frustrated. “...Something that just...*spoke* to your *soul*, somehow, that...answered a question, deep in your heart, that you hadn’t even figured out how to ask yet? Something that made you think that maybe...just maybe...someone else in the world, somewhere, might actually...*understand*?”

She pauses, and I think she’s realizing how much she just said, maybe more than she meant to.

“You’re, uh...not tellin’ me you’ve got a magic ring stashed away somewhere that’s gonna enslave the world, are you, Rae?” I’m hoping she’ll laugh. We could both use one, at this point.

She doesn’t laugh.

She asks a question.

“...Remember *A.I.*?”

Oh.

Oh, man.

It figures. Somehow, it figures that she’d know just exactly where to hit me.

I only saw it once, and a long time ago – years back, even. Don’t remember a lot of details, impressions mostly.

Basically, it was *The Future*, and this family’s only kid was in some kinda accident, wound up in a coma. Doctors thought he’d never come out of it. So the parents, they went and got this android – a little robot boy, basically to replace the son they thought they’d lost. And he’s programmed to look and act just like a real kid, and to love his parents unconditionally. Especially his mom.

They were real happy for a while, but then, the real son woke up from his coma. And all of a sudden there was no room in the family for the little robot, the replacement son, anymore. So the parents got rid of him, they drove him out in the middle of nowhere someplace, and just left him there.

Problem was...this little android, he still loved his mommy. He was programmed to think and want and need everything a ‘real’ little boy would, even though he really wasn’t one. And his mother’s love was at the top of that list. So he spent the rest of the movie traveling and struggling and trying to find his way back again...back to his mom.

Things got complicated in the middle, and like I said, I don’t remember much in the way of details. Except for the ending, which was what really hit me.

Somehow, the little robot boy ended up falling into the ocean, and being a *robot*, he sank to the bottom and got stuck there. He was there for, like, a thousand years. Maybe ten thousand, don’t remember exactly. Point is, he was there for a really long time. The whole Earth froze over and everything living on it died off, all while he was at the bottom of the ocean.

Eventually, some alien explorers or something came along, and they found the little robot boy frozen down there, and they thawed him out and reactivated him. They wanted to do something nice for him, since he’d been down there for so long, and was also basically the last surviving relic of human civilization at that point. So they asked him what he wanted, and the one thing he wanted more than anything else, was to see his mother again.

Well, it turned out the aliens, or whoever they were, had his mom's DNA on file. And they could clone a copy of her, but their technology was limited, and she'd only live for one day. But they could also set it up so that the little boy robot could have the one thing he'd always wanted, but could never have...for her to love him, as much as he'd always loved her.

So...they created the clone, and she woke up with a bright, beaming smile when she saw her one and only beloved son. And the little robot boy got to spend one perfect, wonderful, beautiful day with his mom, just the way he'd always wanted to. And that night, they went to bed, and she read him a story, and she fell asleep holding her son, and she never woke up again. And he fell asleep in his mother's warm, loving arms, smiling. And he never woke up again, either.

It's...a sad way to end a movie, I guess, but that's not what hit me.

It was that last, perfect day that the little robot boy got to spend with his mom. It was how happy they were, how much they loved each other, the pure joy they felt...it was so...so...I just...

Something wet drips on my face, from above. It's not motor oil.

*"...That's how it is,"* Raven whispers.

*"Just like that."*

***-Fin-***

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