

Death of Heaven

By JZ MURDOCK

jz@jzmurdock.com / gordonhayes@jorunaled.com

Legal name: Gordon Hayes

WildSound payment from Paypal - 8RJ33690E4995201A

Chapter one begins on page 7

* * * * *

PUBLISHED BY ZILYON PUBLISHING

COPYRIGHT 2012 JZ MURDOCK

LICENSE NOTES

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the authors' imaginations or are used fictionally. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

ISBN- 1936809044

EAN13- 978-1936809042

Copyright © JZ Murdock 2012

Death of Heaven

By JZ Murdock

Cover Art By Marvin Hayes

<http://www.redbubble.com/people/marvinhayes>

Prepared For Publishing By Calvin A. L. Miller II

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author. The only exception is by a reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

Published By:

Zilyon Publishing, Inc.

www.ZilyonPublishing.com

* * * * *

The Conqueror Worm – with due respect to Edgar Allen Poe for his title, was originally published in Rhonny Reaper's Creature Features Anthology 2010 by Zilyon Publishing Incorporated: all proceeds going to Diabetes Research. Poe's storyline of "The Conqueror Worm" was actually the catalyst for another short story of mine, The Mea Culpa, also contained within this book.

Table of Contents

The Steppes
The Conqueror Worm
[below deleted for submission]
Rosebud
A Thirst Divine
The Mirea
Harbinger
"Sweet Jane"
Illustrations
The Mirea – A Beginning
Marking Time
Going Home
Vaughan's Theorem
The Mea Culpa Document of London
The Mirea – Fade
Earth Meets The Shade
Untying the Knot
Addendum A
Addendum B
About the Author

“I do not pretend to have set down, in Baconian terms, a true, or even a consistent model of the universe. I can only say that here is a bit of my personal universe, the universe traversed in a long and uncompleted journey. If my record, like those of the sixteenth century voyagers, is confused by strange beasts or monstrous thoughts or sights of abortive men, these are no more than my eyes saw or my mind conceived. On the world island, we are all castaways, so that what is seen by one may often be dark or obscure to another.”

- Loren Eiseley

“The certainties of common sense and natural attitude to things— being the presupposed basis of any thought, they are taken for granted, and go unnoticed, and because in order to arouse them and bring them to view, we have to suspend for a moment our recognition of them.”

- M. Merleau-Ponty

"There are three basic problems: how a mind can know the world of nature, how it is possible for one mind to know another, and how it is possible to know the contents of our own minds without resort to observation or evidence. It is a mistake, I shall urge, to suppose that these questions can be collapsed into two, or taken into isolation."

- Donald Davidson

"Insofar as he makes use of his healthy senses, man himself is the best and most exact scientific instrument possible. The greatest misfortune of modern physics is that its experiments have been set apart from man, as it were, physics refuses to recognize nature in anything not shown by artificial instruments, and even uses this as a measure of its accomplishments."

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

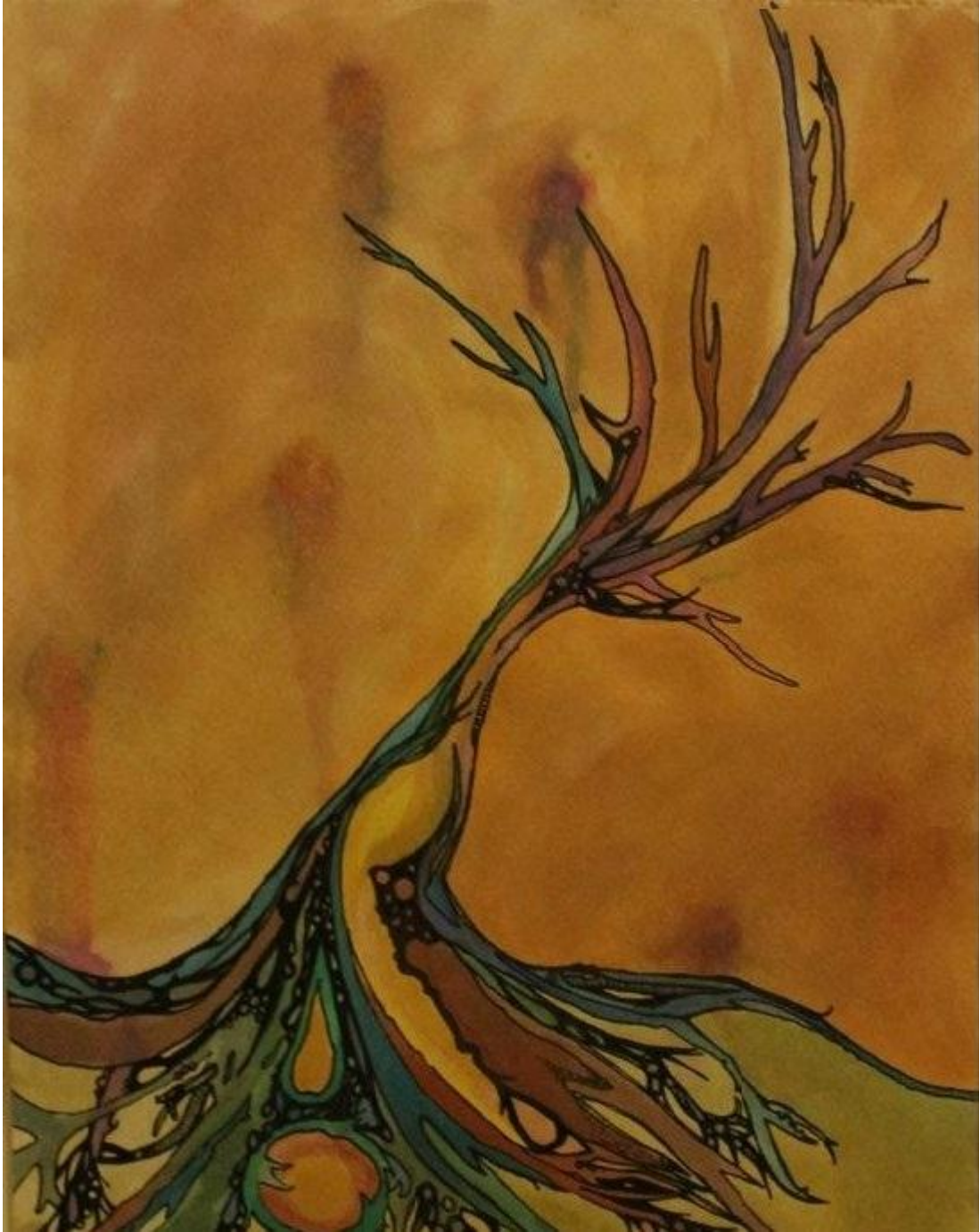
The mind is its own place, and in itself, Can make a heaven of Hell, a hell of Heaven.

- John Milton

Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world.

- Albert Einstein

“A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality.”
-John Lennon



Andrew's Final Vision - by Gosling

Introduction

This story is about the catastrophic events leading up to the end of the world as we know it.

“My name is Legion for we are many”, we are told in the Bible of Christian faith. This quote refers there to devils or demons, of “many cast out of a one” by a prophet named, Jesus. The Authors of the Bible refer to there being the One and Another and nevertheless, Another. And yet all are said to be One, albeit the One is multiple. There is a reason for this perceived confusion, for all this complexity.

In fact, within the confines of every mind on this planet there is more than one individual, and yet those multiples make the one, with that one being of a multiple. So really it’s not all that confusing. The Bible talks about a Holy Trinity but it does not mention the Holy Others, or the Overseers. But here in this book, they are revealed; others, alluded to.

The story of Fade in this tale and those within the scope of his care are during a Time immense to us. Their existence has either been unknown to us, or known to us only through obscurity, difficulty, tribulation. How Fade, Light and Fathom came to be together, is yet another story not within the scope of these tales. There is a connection between Fade and Light that is spelled out more clearly in another book called, “Anthology of Evil”.

So please read on. Soon it will all be made clear how Fade’s Time is so intimately tied with our own. And how it is so much greater than our own; and yet, not.

Acknowledgments

[deleted for submission]

The Conqueror Worm

Fade's Story

For many thousands upon thousands of years, Fade had worked up to this point. Looking across the world from the perspective of having seen all of Human history and so very far before that, Fade ascended to the surface and could feel the two young entities rooting around in the dirt. Pulling quickly back so as to not damage them, Fade's consciousness sadly felt theirs.

But it was much too much and pulling back came too late. Fade could feel Reality change, knew their environment had been warped and that this encounter had changed the two young individuals, forever. But Fade could also feel that one day, this could be tried again and at that time, it would be more successful. There was something special about these two.

Not wishing to damage them further, Fade receded back down to a quick and troubled Slumber. It would be a Slumber that couldn't wait for too long, otherwise, these individuals would be lifeless merely due to gerontological causes; for these were creatures, these Humans, and were not very long lived creatures at all.

- *_ -

"Jimmy, come here, look, LOOK at this," James said. He was poking at something in the dirt. Jimmy, was nearer to the house, poking at his own buried curiosity. They had gotten the spades from the garage and were digging holes in the side yard. Today's effort was to find buried treasure, either gold or dinosaurs.

They hit a lot of "glacial fill", a mixture of dirt and sizeable rock from 100,000 years or so of glaciers proceeding and receding, grinding huge boulders into smaller ones the size of a person's hand or head. It was like this, along through the Pacific Northwest. This yard in Tacoma, Washington, was no different. But this part of the yard was, as if it had previously been dug up and refilled.

"What!?" Jimmy responded, too wrapped up in his own marvelous devices.

"Look!" James said, looking up and realizing that Jimmy had found his own fascinating thing to poke and prod. He looked up at the brilliant blue sky. It felt, wonderful. James put his head up, closing his eyes. He breathed in the aroma of a summer day beyond all summer days. Suddenly, a bright white light fell out of the sky, or more correctly, it grew on him exponentially and slammed him to the ground. He lay there, motionless for a moment.

Hearing a twig snap, he opened his eyes. Everything was bleached out from the sun bearing upon his closed eyelids. As his vision began to return, he could see that Jimmy had broken the twig he was using to poke at something in the ground.

Jimmy lived next door, but across the street from James. The boys played together regularly, ever since James' family had moved in the year before. They had become fast friends— after their initial meeting. And was it a good one. Just after their sixth grade class had let out for the day and with all the adults nowhere to be seen in the school yard, Jimmy had walked up to the new kid, James, initially just a little curious.

They had just stood there for a moment, eying one another. Then, nearly simultaneously, they both hauled back and took a slug at each other. Both had landed blows incompletely and inaccurately. But they were both hardy warriors and had tried again, and again, and again, neither giving an inch.

In unspoken silence they had ineffectually beaten one another to the proverbial pulp. In actuality, neither was much hurt in the fracas. Once they both realized they were pretty evenly matched, they gave up; just as quickly as they had started. Jimmy gave James a hand to help him up from the dirt and from then on, they were literally, "fast friends".

They had many adventures in the previous year. Searching through the local “haunted house” on Ventnor Street; finding their way into their soon to be Junior High building; stealing apples from crazy old Widow Roosevelt’s apple tree which was more about getting caught or not getting caught, than it was about the apples.

Today’s foray however, was one of archeology. They were in James’ yard, digging it up for ancient relics. Not the grassy part, just the dirt part. James’ step-mother loved the lush green front yard lawn and badly wanted a nice back and side yard, too.

James liked his step-mother but still missed his mom. They had been just about ready to move into this house when suddenly, his mom had disappeared, she just abandoned them. James and his Dad did eventually get a postcard from Seattle saying that she was sorry, that she loved them, but that she just couldn’t stay with them any longer; and that she was leaving the country. Then she asked them to try and not to think too badly of her, and she promised that once she gathered herself back together, she would come back.

It was a couple of months after that, when James found out his dad was remarrying, saying that he had received divorce papers from James’ mother, through a lawyer; and that she was in Saigon. Though James couldn’t understand that, it was still how things were. So, Jimmy never got to meet James’ mom, but they both liked his step-mom a lot, and that helped some. She was nice, but a little odd. Jimmy thought she was, “hot”. James having no opinion about it, and quite to the contrary, so that every time Jimmy said anything about it, James would punch him in the arm. Jimmy would just laugh.

But, James and his Dad did what they could to make his step-mom happy. And so, someone was hired to put in a new lawn. The trouble was that the back and side yards had such big rocks, “exceptional glacial fill” as James’ father had called it, that the guy they hired to use his tilling machine to dig it up, finally surrendered. In fact, he seemed kind of angry when he had packed up to leave. James figured that it had something to do with his machine just stopping altogether right in the middle of the tilling. And then it wouldn’t start again.

So for the past year the grassless parts of the yard, had remained the grassless parts of the yard.

And so, to the boys, the yard seemed like ancient burial grounds, or the fields of Egyptian Kings. Today’s foray was a beckoning of ancient treasures. It came upon them suddenly, right after watching a documentary in school on how archeologists dig up dinosaur bones. Then just the night before, they had watched a Johnny Depp pirate movie, as one of the coolest pirates ever, who always moved like he was drunk; but it was pretty funny and very entertaining. So today, they were Pirate Archeologists.

"Okay, what do you have going?" Jimmy said, waiting to see what James had unearthed.

"I don't know," he said, "it's like a worm, but not. I've never seen a worm that was so— thick, and well, white." They both peered down into the hole. It was about two feet deep and just at the bottom, the boys could see the "worm" wiggling. It was in the shadows of the hole, so not the easiest thing to see and therefore—

"Classify," Jimmy said. "That's what we have to do now, classify it."

Squatting, James looked up, remembering the show they had watched.

"Water," James said, "we need water. It will soften the earth and we can, well, unearthen it." Jimmy looked reticent.

"I don't know. That will just make it muddy." Jimmy said. The boys stared at one another, waiting for one of them to show the knowledge and foresight to make a decision. "I don't know, maybe— "

Jimmy squatted too and reached deep and prodded the "worm" with his finger. At the moment he touched it, something made him jerk his hand back, like he had received an electric shock. Something about it had really spooked him. He looked up at James.

"Well, otherwise," James said, "we might tear it in half, trying to get it out. Nothin' worse'en two worms that were just one. Even if they turn into two whole worms then, we've wrecked our—."

"Artifact. True, true." Jimmy said. "Here, let me see your stick." He picked up James' stick, an eight inch long piece of thin branch. He poked at the "worm". Nothing. He manipulated it as James watched. He moved it first one way, then back the other several times and then he stopped. They just stared at it for a minute. Suddenly, it moved of its own accord. Both boys jumped. James actually fell back on his butt.

"Damn!" they both said in harmony.

"Screw this." Jimmy got up and walked over to the house. He got the hose off its holder that was attached to the house and turned on the water. Then he walked it back to James and filled the hole with water, then drenched the soil.

"Great, now we just have a mud hole." James said. They sat in the sun, watching their new mini pond.

"Hey, move the hose away." Jimmy moved the hose off and they watched as the water level dropped. Even they could tell it was going down far too fast to be just seeping into the hard packed dirt.

"What the—" Jimmy said. In another minute, the hole was empty again and the "worm" was no longer, exposed. Then the mud moved again and they saw it. Wrinkled and shriveled flesh avoiding any and all light.

"I've never seen a worm with skin like that." James was getting irritated. "Man, its coming out of there. One way or another." Just as he was about to reach in to the bottom of the hole and pull the "worm" out, the sun had breached the bottom of the hole as the day hit high noon. Finally they could get a clear and bright look at it, but as the sun hit the flesh of the thing and it suddenly pulled into itself and the mud and nearly disappeared. It was as if the sun had hurt it. And its movement was quick.

"Like its feeling pain— from the sunlight," James said as he looked up at the sky.

"What— the— Hell—?" Jimmy said. "So, it's a vampire. We've found, a vampire," he said, rather cheerfully.

"Uh, right—" James said, giving his friend an incredulous smirk.

Just then, James' mother called from the front door.

"Boys, its lunch time, come on in and wash your hands."

"Aw, crap," James said, "it's always somethun'." And then he walked away.

Jimmy looked down and kicked a nearby rock, releasing some of his anxiety and annoyance at being pulled away. The rock skittered and fell squarely into the hole, settling down to a wet, quiet sunbath. He shrugged his shoulders and started to look away, but out of the corner of his eye, he caught the rock moving. This was too big a rock for any "worm" to be able to move. He did a double take, but there was no further movement. So he tossed the stick and walked off. Maybe they'd check it out later. He was hungry now.

*

James was standing once again, at the edge of the hole. This time, alone. It was dark out now. The neighborhood was silent. A crescent moon was smiling down upon him, like a sardonic smile from the face of outer space. It gave him the creeps. Peering down into the hole, he could

see that there was still something down there at the bottom. He reached into the hole, down into the darkness, and could feel the cold, white “worm”.

So, throwing caution to the wind and frustrated in having waited this long to figure out what the hell it was, he grabbed it. It seemed to be buried pretty well in the dirt, so he pulled up on it in a circular motion. But it didn't seem to want to go in certain directions very much.

Off in the distance, James heard a dog howling. A breeze crawled gently over him, but it seemed too warm for this time of night. Still, it warmed him, because the worm he had his hand on, was too cold, and a bit too solid. But he had to see it. He figured if nothing else, it might make a good “show and tell” at school. Maybe he'd get extra credit for it. Or maybe, he'd discovered a new kind of creature.

He pulled harder on it. Not wanting to rip it in half, he loosened up, got a better hold on it, but then, quite without expecting it, it curled away, just as it had done earlier that day. A cold chill and a line of sweat ran down his spine. Without any warning, a wave of fear washed over him as the worm grabbed his hand, locking on to him. He tried to pull back but he couldn't. And it was pulling him down, into the hole, toward IT. James pulled back, pulled as hard as he could. Bracing himself, he yanked back.

‘Screw trying to keep it in one piece,’ he thought. At this point he really didn't care how many pieces he tore it into. Then his face slammed into the dirt on the edge of the hole.

He was going down and he knew it. James filled his lungs with air. He thought about screaming for his dad, for Jimmy, for anyone. Then the ground next to the hole began to give way, like it was breaking apart from something that was trying to come UP from beneath. And there was! Something grabbed his wrist, it moved up his forearm as the dirt was now rising above him, as it fell away off whatever it was that was rising above him. He began to see a naked white skinned form in the half light of the moon.

James was too scared now even to scream. He tried, but nothing would come out. As in a dream, when you try to scream but nothing comes out; or you shoot a gun at a dream monster, but the bullet only drops out of the barrel and onto the ground, lying there, impotent and ineffectual. He'd seen that last one in a movie and thought it was a great scene, pretty scary. But when you are terrified and you shoot something, even if the bullet is ineffectual, you at least expect it to hit what you shot at!

Then he saw two putrid yellow-green eyes appear, rising through all the mud and dirt as the mound broke into pieces and became a being. It pulled him in to it, his face brought inches from an inhuman white face, its eyes changing now to red and bulging.

“James—“ It rasped at him. “It's mommy!” Then she bit into his face. Unbelievable pain filled his skull while she continued to rip away his face in bites and pieces. She started chewing it, smiling a lipless grin and going:

“Ummmm—yummmmy.” She bit into his face again as he continued screaming, and her teeth chomped repeatedly on him, the sound knocking around the inside of his skull; and then—

*

Tap, tap, tap.

James sat bolt upright in bed. A cold sweat covered his entire body. He tried to fully wake up. His eyes, were bulging, his breathing, came fast and hard. He felt the sweat running down his back. He shook his head, then in a panic, felt his face. But it was fine. He breathed easier.

Tap, tap, tap.

"James. James?" Jimmy was standing outside of James' bedroom window. It was late; the moon was full this summer night. Clouds passed in the warm evening air. They moved along, allowing moonbeams to fall upon the earth in an eerie and perfectly creepy fashion; and Jimmy loved it. James moved the curtain aside and raised up the double paned window.

"Hey," Jimmy said. "Ready?"

"Yeah, sure, yeah—" James said.

"You okay?" Jimmy said, a little concerned. James was fully dressed, easily climbed out the window.

"Sure, you?" James looked at Jimmy, daring him to say anything.

"Yup. Parents asleep?" said Jimmy.

"Yup." James said. They had taken to sounding almost exactly alike; such was the power of friendship. Even though it gave both their parents a weird feeling. They had both heard their parents talking about it, thinking the boys were out of earshot range. They weren't. But the boys got a pretty good feeling about it. They kind of looked up to one another. Even though they really weren't, they felt they were the exact equals of one another. But then, who is?

"I'm not so sure about this, Jimmy." James said, stalling, still trying to gather his wits. Jimmy gave him a weird look that shut down any more argument.

"Let's go." Jimmy said, ignoring how James looked. He could tell that he must have had another bad dream, probably about his mother again. They were getting less frequent, but he still had a bad one every now and then.

They walked the short distance around the back corner, to the side of the house. The neighborhood was quiet. Wind in the trees was about the extent of the sound. A house a little way down the street had what sounded like a horror movie on a little too loud. But at this end of the house, no one inside could hear what they were doing. The rest of the bedrooms were at the other end of the house.

On the other side of the wall closest to them in the house was the large living room, with the fireplace, the garage entrance and laundry room doors. But no windows. So, they had about all the buffer they needed to complete their covert midnight explorations, in unattended peace.

"Well," said James, "how much trouble could we get into, we haven't even left the yard, have we." He smiled.

"Exactly. Next door is just that empty lot, so there shouldn't be anyone who we could disturb." Jimmy said. The empty lot next door was mostly bushes, a few trees, some bramble and basically, nothing interesting. Not as interesting as a hole at midnight with a bizarre angular "worm" the size of an index finger hiding out in it.

"Got the flashlight?" Jimmy said.

"Yup."

"Gonzo. Well?" he looked curiously at James. "Gonna turn it on?"

"Oh! Yeah, right." Snap. Light.

"Shine it over here. Where's the moon?"

"Clouds keep passing over it." James said. "Hey look, the water didn't drain. Damn Jimmy, you left the water on!" James had visions of his parents water bill costing as much as the national debt, which he was also unsure what that might be.

"Aw, nuts." Jimmy walked over and turned off the water. He pulled the hose over and wrapped it around its holder. "Sorry. Maybe no one will notice," he said.

"Right," James said, "my dad doesn't miss anything." As Jimmy was walking over to the hole, James looked up as the moon appeared from behind a cloud. When he looked back, Jimmy

had completely disappeared. There was maybe a second that he wasn't looking right at Jimmy, and no one can move that fast! He was just, gone.

James looked left and right, then all around. As he turned back, he realized that the wet ground next to the hole, was moving and then, suddenly, Jimmy sprung up from beneath the ground!

'Wait!' James thought, 'it's, it's like a pool or something.' And sure enough, as Jimmy was sputtering and trying to breathe, looking like some kind of mud monster, he realized the ground had indeed turned into some kind of quick sand. James was stunned. All he could do was stand there. The passing clouds continued to cast moving shadows on Jimmy and the ground that were eerie beyond words. It was like the entire ground was moving. It had a disorienting effect on him. All this had happened during the passing of only several seconds.

"Damn! Dude, get me out, help me!" Jimmy said, still sputtering and spitting, wiping his face and trying to bounce up and out. At each attempt to bounce out, he was slipping back in, going down further than before until one time, he must have kicked something down below, because all of a sudden the water just, drained away.

Jimmy was standing there immobile, half immersed in mud and looking stunned himself. James walked over and put out his hand. Jimmy just stared at him. Finally, he took James' hand and together they worked Jimmy out of the mud. Once he was back up on the ground level with James, they both just stared at the lowered area of ground, not quite a hole, but certainly not level with the ground. They looked at the deep indentation in the ground. Now that the water had completely settled into the ground, they could see that it was oblong in shape.

"What in the hell was that all about?" Jimmy said. They looked at each other. Then back down at the semi rectangular hole.

"You're filthy." James said, "Here, let me hose you off, get rid of some of that mud. God, it stinks, what is that, it smells like you fell into something— that died."

"Septic tank?"

"Not shit, death. Besides, we're on the sewer line like you and everyone else on this block. But you really stink."

"You're telling me?" They both stopped short and looked at the hole. Jimmy continued to stare as James got the hose and started washing him off until he was someone resembling a normal person drenched in waste of some sort. Now he just mostly smelled bad but it was obvious he'd had some kind of, accident.

"How do I explain this to my mom," Jimmy said. James just shrugged.

Snap, crack.

Both boys froze. Trying to put on a brave face, they both simultaneously decided to just ignore it. Nothing can hurt you if you don't believe its there, or refuse to acknowledge it. Or, show no fear.

"James," Jimmy said, "there was no hole there before, so how could I have fallen into what isn't—wasn't, there?"

"Well," James said, "there must have been something in there. Dirt doesn't just vanish from the universe, does it? Now it's just, gone. Something that was down there isn't down there anymore."

"But, there was only a worm down there."

"Maybe it was bigger at the other end than we thought."

Crack. It sounded like someone stepping on dry twigs in the vacant lot, maybe behind one of the trees.

“James, how about we go back into my bedroom.”

“But, I’m filthy, I’ll get your—”

SNAP. Something in the shadows moved closer.

Jimmy pulled his eyes away, just to see James’ face, to gauge how scared he should be. But James was already half way around the back corner of the house. Not being able to help himself, he turned to look at the shadow in the vacant lot and realized that whatever it was, it was now a lot closer.

Just as he was gearing up to run like Hell after James, the moon burst out from a cloud and illuminated the yard and then, he saw it. It was the size of a small horse, all white, there were gray filthy rags hanging from it here and there, it was lumbering in an angular way, jerkily moving forward, but then sideways, then forward, then sideways the opposite direction, giving it a most horrifying visage of stop action animation. Like the worse horror anime from Hell.

Jimmy was half way around the back of the house before he even realized he had started running. He got to James’ bedroom window, and didn’t even stop, he just leaped, and literally flew in through the window (‘Thank God James didn’t close the window,’ he thought). He flew straight, like Superman, or more accurately, like Superboy. Hitting the floor inside, he tucked, rolled and slammed right into the footboard of James’ bed.

Jimmy sat there, stunned. He looked around the room, vicarious patches of moonlight reflecting from the home across the alley giving the room a patchy, spooky kind of motif. The first thing he really noticed was, no James. Then something grabbed his pants pocket and yanked as if to pull him beneath the bed; childhood thoughts of the “Boogey man beneath the bed” fought for purchase on his consciousness, forcing Jimmy’s heart up into his throat so badly, that he couldn’t even scream.

He sprung forward and rolled sideways from his seated position, spinning around and found himself looking eye to eye with James, peering out from beneath his bed’s footboard. They just stared at one another for a moment, both breathing hard; but Jimmy, breathing very, very hard.

“God dammit! What the Hell, James!” Jimmy yelled at him in the quietest whisper scream he could contain.

“Shhh—you’ll wake people up.”

“Like we haven’t already? And good! We’re gonna need people awake!”

“Good point. What happened?”

“I saw it.” Jimmy’s eyes showed pain, fear.

“You saw it?” Just then there was a bump, right outside the window. The boys hearts stopped. They looked at the window. Still open, the curtains fluttered slightly in the miniscule breeze. James looked up at Jimmy, then slid out from under the bed and stood side by side with his friend. Both boys, feeling emboldened with the powerful force of mutual male support, took a step toward the window.

“We should close the window,” Jimmy whispered.

“Yup,” James said. Gingerly, they stepped toward the window, the curtains lightly moving in the slightly cool night air that was entering the window. As they arrived at the window, they carefully peered out, and down, straining to see what might lurk below, ready to leap backward if need be.

They looked at one another. Then each gently placed a hand on either side of the window, and started to carefully, and very quietly, slide the window down. But, it stuck. James took a

deep breath. Both steadied and readied, to pull harder. The window moved, but jerkily, making a quiet sound that sounded like a gunshot to the boys.

That was when the bedroom door flew open and James's father stepped into the room in his robe and slippers, scaring the boys nearly half to death as they leaped away from the window.

"AAAGHHHHhhhhhh!" They both screamed.

James' father, Paul, got the feeling they were hiding something by abandoning the open window. Perhaps having heard him coming, they had thrown something out of the window. He found it hard to believe that it could be anything too bad, as the boys were both good kids.

'But, modern times', he thought, 'modern times.'

"What the Hell is all the noise, James?!" he said, obviously not wanting to wake anyone else in the house. "It's after midnight. Jimmy. What are you doing here? Why aren't you at home? What? You're a mess! What's going on here?"

"Dad! There's— there's— "

"Jimmy. Home. Do your parents even know you're here? James. You. In bed, now!" The boys moved from the window, James stood closer to his bed and Jimmy moved past the bed and James' dad, itching for an escape. Paul moved to the window, looking out, still wondering what they were doing. He turned and looked at them both.

"James. What's going on? Why— " It was then that the thing outside the window decided to make its presence known. The boys watched Paul as he seemed to fold in half, his belt not moving an inch up or down just receding from them, as he was sucked out the window in an instant. In that movement, they could hear two sounds, one a whooshing sound, the movement of air; the other, the quick sound of squirting fluid hitting something; the floor maybe.

The boys gave a little yelp, too scared even to scream, and then they were silent; completely stunned into shock. They looked at each other. Then both ran as one to the window. Forgetting silence, They slammed the window down shut as hard as they could. Then they threw their bodies up against the wall, flattened on either side of the window, terrified. James reached over and yanked the curtains completely closed.

They looked at each other, then down at the wood floor. There was a black puddle of liquid on the ground where James' father had been standing. Jimmy put his shoe in it slightly, and lifted his foot to see in the light. The somewhat muddy white end of his shoe was now red. Both boys, warily moved away from the window, away and toward the other side of the room. They stood by the open doorway, carefully watching the window as they huddled backward through it, pulling the door shut behind them, but never losing sight of the window.

Something, moved fluidly outside the window, its shadow faintly cast upon the drapes. They snapped the door shut and stood there on either side of the door; breathing, breathing.

"Oh—m-my— " James stammered.

"God— " said Jimmy.

"My dad. My dad—what, what do we do now?"

They stood there, listening to the midnight sounds of the sleeping household. There was only his step-mother left, at the other end of the house, seemingly, half a mile away down the hall.

"We have to tell my step-mom." James nodded down the hallway. "We have to go down, there." He pointed down the hall to the other end of the house. The boys never, ever went down to that end of the house.

"What is that thing?" Jimmy said, realizing his mouth was so dry he could barely talk.

"I don't know, YOU saw it!"

“What?” Jimmy said, feeling he was being accused of something.

“Outside, you saw it. You said. It has to be the same thing. What was it!?”

“It was buried. I felt it, in the hole it was in. I thought it was a worm.”

“So did I. Come on.” James pulled Jimmy down the hall to his parents’ room.

They pretty quickly arrived at the end of the hall and the target bedroom. James glared at Jimmy in the semi dark, moonlight streaming in lightly through the drapes in his parents’ room, just like his. All the bedrooms had the same drapes. James’ step-mom liked things being orderly in that way. She was less the decorator than the economical budgetary administrator of the whole household.

“M-mom?” James said. “Mom?”

“You call her ‘Mom’?” Jimmy said. “I never heard you call her mom before.”

“What do you want me to call her, ‘Step-Mom’? That would just sound stupid. Okay, I guess I always avoid calling her Mom when you’re around. It still feels, weird. Look, at least she’s not a step-monster.” Jimmy agreed a little too lasciviously, but James couldn’t quite make out what that look was.

“What?” James’ step-mom said, trying to sit up, a bit groggy. She was a heavy sleeper. “James? Is that you? Who’s with you?” Jimmy took a step into the room. “Jimmy? What time is it? Where’s Paul? Where’s your dad, James?”

“Mom. Dad. Dad, he— we.” James’ step-mom was waking up faster now, getting the feeling, something wasn’t right. Reading the terror in the boys’ attitude. She blinked. It was dark, but in her sleep adjusted eyes, there was enough light to see; well, just enough. Right next to her bed, was the window. The boys glanced over at it, concerned. But, then they kept looking because they really were not sure what they had just seen. It simply made no sense, such an odd shape. It centered on the window, then either disappeared or had moved so fast, that it was simply gone.

“Okay, what’s going on, where’s Paul?” She was starting to get annoyed now. More so at being scared, than at anything concrete. She got up and following the boy’s attention on the window, she took a look herself. Brushing aside the curtains, she raised the window quite before the boys could realize what she was even doing. But when they did—

“NO!” They both screamed. Their commanding tone affected her. She stopped and started to pull her head back in, but hesitated and took a look around, first. Nothing was there. She smiled. But, then there was something there, and her smile faded.

The boys started to run for her, to pull her back, but before they got even a single pace forward, James’ step-mom fell back into the room with a “Thwump”, onto the floor. But she had moved too quickly and too lightly, picking up speed until she hit the ground pretty solidly, at which time they felt a splatter of fluids all over the front of them. Both of them turned their head for a moment, trying not to taste the new flavor on their tongues. They wiped their faces with the sleeves of their shirts and looked back toward the window.

That was when Jimmy, then James realized that it was only half of her body that had fallen back into the room. Even weirder, it was the top half; it had flipped over and landed with her head nearer to the window. They could see her arms moving in the final throws of becoming aware of her demise. They could hear a kind of gurgling sound and saw a dark fluid began to grow on the floor, surging out in pulsations from the bottom of her torso, in an ever widening elongated circle, creeping slowly toward them.

They both stepped back until they were in yet again, another doorway. There was a gross crunching sound coming from outside the window that made their skin crawl and seemed to push

them further back through the doorway. James reached forward as they entered the hallway, slowly closing the door until it clicked shut.

They stood there, in the hallway, in the darkness. Light from the living room window, slightly lightened the other end of the hall. They could just make out one another's faces in the dim light.

"Dad's-- dead," whispered James. Jimmy nodded. "We, we're—gonna die, too." James said, whispering, trying to keep his panic from rising. Jimmy nodded again. James couldn't believe they were going to die. He hadn't lived long enough yet. First he'd lost his mother. Now his father. And now another mother, even if he didn't much care for her. He didn't want her dead though. Mom was dead. Dad was dead. They're all dead! Dead!

Jimmy was having similar if different thoughts. Both of their eyes were wide opened with adrenalin and fear. Their breathing was coming too fast and too loud. Fear on one's eyes was escalating the other's anxiety and fear. Jimmy could see that James was about to do something. He wasn't quite sure what that might be, but suddenly realized he was about to become hysterical himself and maybe, start screaming. They could not allow that to happen. Not if they were going to survive.

Fighting back within himself, Jimmy realized he was not going to let it happen to James, too! Maybe everyone else in his life was going to disappear, but he refused to let it happen to James. Or, himself!

"No, we're not." James said. "We're not gonna die. At least, if I'm gonna die, I'm NOT goin'— alone!" Jimmy abruptly looked at James, a startled look on his face. James, curiously looking back at him, suddenly understood his friend's apprehension.

"No! You idiot. I didn't mean you!" Jimmy relaxed a little. "Look, we have to stay calm, we have to be quiet. Okay? Can you do that? I'm scared too, but—we will die if we don't stay calm. Somehow." James took a couple of deep breaths, and nodded his head.

"Come on." James led Jimmy quietly through the hall and across the living room to the garage door. They stood at the door, staring at it. It was a pretty typical garage door, joining the living part of the house so that it was pretty solid and would be a formidable barrier to get through. That also meant that it was a sound barrier too, so if something were on the other side of it, they'd likely not know it until it was too late. But, what choice did they have?

"Oh!" James said.

"What?" Jimmy asked him.

"The phone. We need to call for help." James looked around.

"There's no time. We need them here, like now! Sooner," Jimmy whispered.

"I know, but we need, backup. And they might get here in time."

"My dad says they always take a while to get here because we're kind of far off the main tract and there's not enough cops anymore because of budget cuts." Jimmy grimaced. "The economy."

"Well, its better than nothing." James picked up the living room phone and punched in 911. The operator answered, Jimmy listened. James went through the typical banter and then Jimmy could hear the Operator say:

"Please stay on the line, James. Officers are on their way. They should be there in ten to fifteen minutes. Just stay on the line, okay? Do not hang up. Is there someplace you can hide and take the phone?" The 911 Operator was very calm, reassuring. James almost didn't want to put down the phone, but what he did next might be the only thing that could save them.

“Sure, I understand. I just have to go check something. I’ll just set down the phone and—”
“ James set the phone down, careful not to hang up.

“Hello? No, no, do not set the phone down. Hello? James. James?” Jimmy could hear the woman, her voice fading as they quietly walked to the garage door. James reached up and fingered the knob of the dead bolt. He hesitated.

“Turn it?” Jimmy said. James just looked at it, trying to get the nerve up. He put his hand down and looked at Jimmy.

“Jimmy, what if, dad’s okay? Maybe, he’s just like, unconscious. Or, something.” James waited of a reaction but Jimmy only frowned.

“Yeah, I’m sure, that’s probably it. He’d come help, if he hadn’t been knocked out.” Jimmy said. “That kind of thing would have to knock someone out. Yes? But, what about the—”
Jimmy froze. He could feel himself turning white, so he looked down, studying his feet in the dark, mostly the one with the blood on the tip. Jimmy looked back up at James’ face, but now James was looking down, also at the blood on Jimmy’s foot; then he looked up at Jimmy.

“Hey, I’m— I’m sorry, I—” Jimmy said, feeling horrible.

“No. It’s okay.” James turned to the door again; he put his hand back on the knob of the dead bolt. Then he looked back at Jimmy. “Look. The garage door is metal. There’s no easy way in, even the double paned windows even up high. It’s either hard to get into, or if anything did, we would had to have heard it. Okay? It would make a lot of noise. So, there’s nothing in there. Nothing is on the other side of this door. Okay?”

“Okay.” Jimmy was starting to believe him.

James turned the knob. It gave a solid “kachunking” sound. Then, he put his hand on the doorknob, took a breath and turned it, steadily, completely, until he heard it click. The door released just a hair, and he could feel the air pressure just barely equalizing. He pulled the door open, trying to be quiet. Once they could see into the garage, he realized that they could see better than he thought they would. It was a good thing that tonight, there was a full moon.

Slowly, James pulled the door open enough for them to step inside. Just as they were about to take a step forward, they heard a loud crash behind them, from up the hallway. Like someone had ripped the window from the wall in his parents’ bedroom. The boys bolted though the door and pulled it shut as fast as they could. But just at the last second, James body blocked the door to keep it from slamming hard and loud, and slowly closed it until he heard the reassuring, click.

They listened up against the solid door, but there were no further sounds. Jimmy thought he heard a kind of dragging sound from beyond, but he didn’t say anything; kind of like something heavy was being dragged along the floor.

“Come on,” James said, “over here.” He walked over to a work bench and started going through some chemicals his dad had around. He found a jar of DMSO and set it aside. He found a container of toluene, and another of strychnine. Then he found another jar, an empty Mason jar and put some one inch steel ball bearings in the jar. To that he added the liquids and the strychnine powder.

He stirred the concoction with a putty knife that was sitting on the work bench, carefully dissolving the powder and mixing it well. Then he put the top on and screwed the ring down tightly. He pushed it back a few inches and stepped back. He exhaled and looked at Jimmy.

“What did you do? What is that?” They looked at the jar. The moon light was beaming in through the high windows, shining on the work bench, refracting through the jar of white, opaque liquid.

“I don’t know. I’m just glad it didn’t blow up.” James said.

“It’s a bomb!?” Jimmy backed up a few steps.

“No, no, I mean, well, I don’t know, really. I mean, I wasn’t trying to make a bomb, you just never know when you mix things, what will happen, exactly. These are pretty scary chemicals. I just took the stuff my dad said never to touch, and mixed them together.”

“Okay, that was stupid. And, the ball bearings?”

“So we can throw the jar and it will break easily. On whatever we throw it at.”

“I know what strychnine is, usually to kill rats, right?” Jimmy said. James nodded. “But what’s that other stuff?” Jimmy queried further.

“DMSO. I don’t know, it’s a solvent, but some people use it to help heal faster. Jamie at school said deranged people use it to heal. Anyway, it’s supposed to work for damaged tendons, things like that. My dad used it on my foot once. I had bruised my Achilles tendon. He said it would help it heal faster. It was nasty stuff; as soon as he touched the wet rag to my foot with the DMSO on it, I started to have a disgusting, strong taste in my mouth of, oysters. Dad said it absorbs through the skin faster than just about anything.”

“And that other stuff?” Jimmy asked.

“Toluene. All I know is that it’s toxic. Really, toxic. I figured, the DMSO might help the toluene, pass through the skin of whatever we throw it at and the strychnine, well, it can’t hurt. Right?”

James beamed, ‘I’m going to kill that damn thing!’ he whispered to himself.

“Right.” Jimmy looked at James with admiration. “Well then, now what?”

“I have no idea.” The room shook with a loud boom. Something, had hit the garage door they had just passed through and had hit it with full force. It— was coming in.

“Here, hold this.” James gave Jimmy a butane torch bottle. He picked up a torch lighter, basically a piece of steel scratching a piece of flint, to make a spark. Jimmy turned the knob on the bottle and James sparked it to life. The hiss seemed immensely loud but the blue flame was in some way, reassuring.

“Get ready, if it comes through the door, I’ll throw the bottle, then you toss the torch.”

“Then what? We’ll burn up.” Jimmy looked around, James followed his panic, then ran over to the side door, unlocked it, opened it, and relocked it, so when they ran out, it would lock when they closed it, slowing down any pursuers. It was a fairly heavy door, just like the one going into the living room.

“Ready?” James said.

“No.” Jimmy said.

“Maybe it can’t get through the door.”

“Yeah, its pretty damn solid.” Just as Jimmy said that, the door burst into pieces with a sound so loud it felt like a bomb going off, and in came, “a force”. They could feel it more than see it, the torch somewhat blinding them from seeing a dark form across the garage. Both boys felt the shock of panic and fear course through them at the speed of lightning.

“Fight or Flight!” Jimmy said.

“Fight and Flight!” James yelled and grabbed the poison jar and tossed it hard at what was slowly lumbering warily toward them. They heard the jar hit, and shatter. Then a grotesque kind of blended roar and scream hit them like a tidal wave, knocking them both back against the work bench.

“Now!” James screamed.

Jimmy tossed the torch and both of them ran out the side door. Just as James was going through the door, he used all his will power to stop, turn and grab the door to slam it shut behind him. But just as the door was slamming shut, he caught a glimpse of something big and white that was fully on fire, blazing, thrashing around, making it hard for him to make out what form it was. Was it a person? An animal? He really couldn't tell.

Then, just as he turned to run, he heard something, very strangely familiar; but he wasn't really sure whether he actually heard it or not. It was a single word, hissed and blending with the flames and thrashings:

“Jamessss—”

His head snapped around to look back inside just as the door locked shut with the momentum of its closing, and then they were outside. As James turned from the door to run toward the street, he saw Jimmy on his back, on the ground, and staring horrified at something in the shadows near the garage.

‘He must have tripped over it as he ran’, James thought. So, he walked carefully closer to see what it was.

“No!” Jimmy said, “Don’t, don’t look!” But James squatted down to see better in the shadows. He had to move very close to be able to actually see anything and got within several inches of the thing in order to realize too late, that it was the remains of his father. It was as if his dad’s entire body had a zipper that had held him together and someone had unzipped it, and removed parts of him here and there. James jumped back up in fright and screamed.

“No! NO! NOooooooo—” He shouted. Jimmy jumped up, grabbed his friend, and literally drug him away, toward the street, away from the burning garage. “What? What the fuck, WHAT THE FUCK! What’s going on!?” James screamed, unsure if he was pissed off or simply scared nearly literally to death.

They didn’t stop running until they got curbside across the street. Once there, in a few quick looks around and at one another, they easily decided upon their escape route if one became necessary. Should something emerge from the garage that was now a blazing inferno, they would head straight through the neighbor’s yard away from James’ now burning home and then shoot up the alley to Jimmy’s yard and back door. Jimmy’s dad had guns and he would be able to protect them. James’ dad was a writer and he was a smart guy, but even if he were there, and alive, he wasn’t really suited to this kind of thing. Jimmy’s dad on the other hand, used to be a Navy SEAL.

Back at the garage, the light from the fire inside was now huge and blazing. The neighborhood was beginning to light up from it. The noise from whatever it was, inside the garage, was horrifying; it was screeching in grave pain and anger. It was banging on the walls, trying to get out, repeatedly slamming into the metal garage door; but it held. The fire, the heat and the brightness were increasing in intensity. Other things must have caught on fire now as the roof was smoking; steam and waves of heat were rising from it. James, took a step back.

“What is it?” Jimmy said.

“It’s going to blow. I wasn’t thinking, but my dad has stuff inside that is supposed to be kept away from flame. That means—”

Both boys looked back at the garage as they stepped out of the street and onto the sidewalk. The screeching started to diminish as the windows in the garage began to melt. Then there was flame and light in the interior of the house. The thing must have gone back inside.

It was about then, that the garage exploded. Several loud BANGS and BOOMS occurred, one after another, and then the entire building went up in flames; the garage, the living room, just

about everything. The screeching continued but was getting less and less noticeable among all the noise of the blaze until they could no longer hear it.

Parts of the garage and living room roof began to rain down upon them from the explosions and they ran the few steps back to get under a tree for protection. The flames from the garage were a good fifty feet above the top of the building now and white hot. The entire house was in flames.

‘No matter what was in there,’ James thought, ‘it wasn’t going to survive.’ He spit on the ground.

“Screw it. Its dead now,” He said.

“Yeah.” Jimmy agreed.

People were streaming into the streets from around the neighborhood now. Sirens were approaching in the distance. Jimmy saw his parents in their robes standing in front of their house, in the street, stunned along with many other people who were all approaching in awe. Several men had run up as close as they could to the house, but had to stop due to the intense heat, realizing that anyone left inside, was already dead.

Jimmy turned to tell James he was going to go talk to his parents, and he saw James begin to sit down at the base of the tree, mesmerized by the burning building, by the incineration of his home, his family; the death of the home his mother had apparently refused to move into with them. It was then that he remembered his sister.

‘Oh God,’ he thought, ‘she has to be told.’

“Hey, I’ll be right back; I need to talk to my dad. And Mom will be freaking out by now.” James just nodded, but Jimmy wasn’t even sure he really heard him. So he walked off to his parents. Others were milling about; asking each other what was going on, most likely.

James watched the house flaring up in even more intense flames. He could feel the heat on his face; it was almost too hot to believe. He saw a neighbor on the other side of his house, standing outside with a hose, watering down his own house, trying to keep it cool enough to not burst into flames, too, until the fire department arrived. He looked back at his home and realized, everything he ever had, was burning to a crisp.

James felt a presence next to him and he looked up, tears streaming down his face. At first it was hard to tell which neighbor it was, but he did notice that whoever it was, they weren’t in robe or night clothes. They were fully dressed. He blinked his eyes and was able to tell it was a woman. Perhaps, about his mother’s age. She knelt down next to him and put her arm around him.

“James. It’s okay. Everything, will be okay.” She leaned over and smothered him in a hug, kissing him; then as she pulled back, he realized that it actually was, his mother.

“Mom? What? Mom!? But—“ he stammered.

“Never mind my little monkey. I’m here now.” James wanted to ask more questions, but he was so choked up, he couldn’t speak, so he just melted into her, and enjoyed her warm hugs.

Jimmy was talking to his father and mother. He didn’t know what to say, so he just said that after they were asleep, he had gone over to James’ and he was so sorry for breaking the rules, but he was in James’ bedroom and a burglar had broken in, killed James’ parents and then tried to kill them, but they had escaped through the garage by throwing some chemicals on the person. It caught on fire and they had escaped. His dad had said that he didn’t even bother to run over to the house, because it was quite obvious; anyone inside, was no longer alive, such was the heat that he could feel, even as this distance.

His parents were so happy he was safe that they didn't question him any further. But his dad had made it clear that 'they would talk more about all this later.' Which didn't have a good sound to it but that was later and this was now. He thought he'd better go back to check on James and told his parents as much. They looked over and James, nodded and said they'd come over in a moment, too.

Jimmy walked toward James, still sitting alone under the tree. The Police were just driving down the road, trying to make it through the crowd. He got to James who was sitting alone and crying. He felt so badly for his best friend that he had to choke back his own tears.

"James. You okay?" James looked up at him, he was crying, but smiling. It gave Jimmy a strange feeling of both sadness and yet a kind of warmth in his heart. "My parents say you can stay with us. I know you don't have any other family. Oh, except for your sister. Oh, shit. Well. Mom said, 'don't worry'."

"Thanks, but I'm not worried. Mom's here now," James looked up and away from Jimmy, as if he were looking at someone next to him, "I think things will be okay now." Then James nodded as if someone were talking to him.

"But— James, there's no one—" James looked at him oddly, how could things get any weirder than they already had been? Sometimes, your eyes can simply take in more than your heart can hold. "Look. Uh, nothing, never mind."

Jimmy smiled and said, "Hi, James' Mom. I'm Jimmy. James is— my best friend. I'm really glad you could make it! James really needs you now."

Rosebud

Fade's Story

Fade cast a glance toward the creature, Jimmy. It had only been a moment for Fade since their last encounter, now so many years later, more than a quarter of Jimmy's life was now concluded. Fade looked into Jimmy's life and found him now with another, a female of their species unknown to Fade. The other, James, was no longer with him. Fade pulled quickly back, but again, the intensity was hard to gauge. No further damage was done to the male, but the female, had ever so lightly, felt the Thought.

How it would affect her, there was no telling.

--*

I lost track of my best friend James after graduation from high school. I don't think he could have made it through school without me, but after we graduated, things changed. After he lost his dad in the fire my family kind of adopted him, becoming my unofficial brother. As to what happened that night, we never discussed it. I tried to a few times but he just faded away on me. James' "Mom" helped him through the first few weeks. Then he started to realize it was better that he kept his special relationship with her secret. After a while, my Mom seemed to morph into his Mom, or vice versa, and that was the end of it. I was never actually quite clear on that one.

[continued in Death of Heaven....]