

Gabriel Coxhead

The Teacher

As soon as he got home, Bill saw he had lost his mark book. It wasn't in his leather suitcase. He thought he must have left it back at the school. Maybe when he had taken all his papers out, that time just before lunch. Or maybe one of the boys had stolen it. When he was teaching, when he wasn't paying attention. Maybe when he was explaining perspective.

"Things get smaller as they get far away," he had said. "They get smaller and more remote. The things in the foreground have to be bigger. That's perspective."

Most of the kids, they weren't good at art. There was this one boy, though, he was really something. Most of them couldn't even draw a decent stick-man, but Anthony—this kid he really knew what he was doing. Maybe when he'd been talking to Anthony, Bill

thought, maybe that's when they'd stolen his mark book. Reached right into his suit-

case and taken it. Right out from under his nose.

Bill fixed himself some food. He'd get the mark book tomorrow. It'd probably be in his pigeon hole in the morning, or else he'd get the headmaster to make an announcement in assembly. He ate his food watching tv. Some science program. He rolled himself a little joint, and ran a bath.

Sitting in the bath, he sparked the joint. The room was hot and thick with steam, and he got pretty high pretty fast. He looked at his toes, curled against the taps at the far end of the tub.

"Things get smaller as they get far away." He said this out loud to himself, and giggled. Then he thought about Anthony, and about himself when he was Anthony's age. He'd been good at drawing, but not as good as Anthony, probably. Well, tomorrow he'd see. Bill had given all the kids in his art class a drawing to do for homework, any drawing they wanted, but it had



I'm supposed to write about why I write. Or maybe to describe the shape of my life, so that readers will then be able to relate that to my writing, which is perhaps the same thing. So I've been thinking about why I write, and I've been thinking about the shape of my life over the past year or so, and why I write and the shape have come together in my mind and I've formed some kind of answer. I began writing to fall out of love. Not creative writing, not short stories, but contemporary art

to show good use of perspective. Tomorrow, he'd see how good Anthony was, when a teacher wasn't around to show him. Tomorrow. Anthony's drawing and the mark book. Those were the two things.

The phone rang and Bill got out. He went into the bedroom to pick up. The colder air made his skin feel tight.

"Hello?" he said.

There was the whispering of voices on the other end of the line.

"Hello?" he said again. He realized he was completely naked. Standing naked there, talking on the telephone.

"Mr. Anderson?" said one of the voices. It was high-pitched and nervous and quick.

"Yes," said Bill. "Yes, that's me. Who is it?"

"Hello," went the voice, "I have your book," and then hung up.

Bill kept the receiver to his ear, listening to the dead tone. Those kids, those fucking kids! He saw that he was shivering.

The next day after school, Bill sat in the kitchen, smoking a cigarette. He took a sheet of paper out of his

briefcase and smoothed it flat on the table. Fucking Anthony, he thought. Other kids couldn't even draw a decent stick man. Their perspective drawings had been pathetic. But this was something, Anthony's drawing. A river in the foreground, that ran back past some trees and through green fields to a lake in the distance. There were boys playing in the lake, swimming and splashing. Another boy was getting ready to jump in the river. He was close to the front. Further back, past the lake, was a house, and beyond that, a hill. A big red sun hung above the hill. It made Bill feel strange, looking at it. It made him feel sad and small.

He didn't want to eat. He ran himself a bath straight away. He got in the bath, and waited. He left the door to the bathroom open, so that he would be sure to hear the phone. When it rang, he got out of the bath and went to his bedroom. He took his towel with him.

"Hello?" he said.

"Hello Mr. Anderson," said the voice. There was no whispering in the background. The voice was more certain this time. "How are your marks?"

"Give me back my book," said Bill. "It's my book, and

reviews. I'd just broken up with this girl. I still write reviews of shows. I also lecture and teach and work in a gallery in London. Back then, I needed something to keep from going crazy, and decided to become a freelance art journalist. The girl was an artist. I wrote a lot of reviews.

I began writing short stories to fall in love. This other girl was an artist as well. I wrote my first story after our first night together. I wrote her lots of other stories. I wrote my way in love with her. When we finished, I worried that I wouldn't be able to write anymore.

you have to give it back.” And then he said, “I have your drawing.” He said it though he knew it wasn’t Anthony he was talking to. There was whispering again on the other end of the line, and Bill’s grip on his towel tightened as he waited for the reply.

“What drawing?” went the voice, and suddenly it sounded like a child again.

“I have your drawing,” Bill repeated.

“What do you mean?” went the voice. “What drawing?”

“It’s mine,” said Bill. “It’s mine now,” he shouted, and raised his fist in the air. The towel swung out and flapped.

He put the phone down and walked into the kitchen. He picked up the drawing from the table and looked at

it for a long time. He looked at the boys playing in the lake. Then he went back into the bathroom and climbed into his bath. He smoked a little joint. Pretty soon, he sat up. He fixed his heels right up against his buttocks, so that his knees reached out of the water and up to his chest. Pushing himself hard against the curve of the tub, he worked his body down across the enamel till he could feel the trapped air in the small of his back forming a vacuum. He was aware of the bath water sucking at him from below. He sat like this, his haunches pulled tight and down.

I read an article recently, where the songwriter Nick Cave described himself as suffering from the psychological condition erotigraphomania—the obsessive writing of love letters. Many of his songs, he said, were kinds of love letter. I think my writing short stories during that very tumultuous and complicated affair was something like that. The story printed here was one of the ones I wrote for her. She became a muse, of sorts.

There are other reasons for writing too. I had just started a club with a good friend where we exchanged short stories every ten days. Also, I should mention that I was brought up in a very literary environment. Always lots of books around, always read a lot, always enjoyed expressing myself through writing. I mention these reasons because I don’t want anybody to think I’m too much the self-indulgent, love-sick miserablist, because I’m really not.

But in the shorter term, the reason for writing is because of two women. The first one was called Charlie and the second one was called Annie. At the moment I’m seeing somebody called Stephanie, and it’s going pretty well. I hope I haven’t hurt her feelings by writing this. I don’t think she ever quite knew the extent of my feelings towards Annie till now.

Stephanie, I hope I haven’t hurt your feelings.