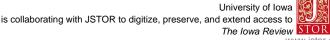
Correspondence · James McKean

He finds his place in Professor Cody's mail-order rules of punctuation, licks his pencil as if it needs to be oiled, and writes, "Dear Jim," then nothing for a long time.

Behind him my mother looks up from her boiling kettle and tells him to mention clean clothes and three squares a day. But this is his letter. He writes, "Hope your thumb is better," knowing it has been for years.

My aim is no better now than the time he stood over me, the wood and my thumb hammered, and he whispered, "Think, think," and tapped my forehead to pound the message home. When I asked if thinking was like seeing in the dark, he said nothing. "The birds have robbed us blind," he writes. "The Cascades are clear."

There's too much paper left. He fidgets in his chair. Maybe his back aches from these ten minutes of nonuse or my mother looks over his shoulder and he remembers my voice on the far side of his newspaper, "Dad, dad. . . ." Then her yelling from the kitchen, "He's talking to you!"





He writes, "\$10 enclosed for laundry," and licking the pencil one more time, signs, "Love your father," the comma left out on purpose and the last word started like a ten penny nail, with three quick strokes driven home.