

Ed

Summary: the story of a man searching the most dangerous place in the world—Iraq, six months after the start of the war—for the son of the friend he betrayed.

where?

The war started today. Rain falls as the news repeats on my office radio. I adjust my collar, run my finger between it and my neck to relieve the chafing, cross myself and pray for those first victims along the banks of the Tigris. ~~Artie. Artie.~~ In the year since you died, through my grievous fault, Marybeth has come to me for solace and with her I find comfort as well. For weeks she has been watching the run up to this day and I wait for her to call me about Daniel's National Guard unit. If your son is deployed, would my promise to watch over him be broken? He is too young to be sent halfway around the world, and I can't follow him to a war zone.

religious phrase

From the windowsill, I pick up that picture of the three of us, holding baseball gloves after a game of catch [when Daniel was in grade school]. Just the boys, said Marybeth as she pressed the shutter on her camera. I want to put that picture away, to store it in a box with other relics. But not yet. Even after all this time, your last message remains on my answering machine.

[Har—har—har—you're laughing just like the old days—see you tonight for a beer.]

By now the congregation must be gathering for a sparsely attended evening Mass and afterward the Sacrament of Reconciliation. How warm and safe they imagine themselves, during this season of Lent, as they huddle in the pews and gossip with their neighbors. I wrap the amice about my shoulders. Now the alb, I pull it over my head, push my arms through the sleeves and thank our Lord for the strength He provides. The thought of kneeling before the altar, silent but

maybe select words ordinary people might know their meaning

talics? protest my?

— a little difficult to tell what's going on in places, where he is, what he's doing?
— definitely have achieved a somber tone throughout

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

for the rattle of cheap Valium beneath my vestments, makes me shudder; I take the vial from my pocket, untangle my rosary and hide the pills in my desk. I knot the cincture around my waist. It is too loose and I retie it. Over my shoulders I drape the stole, its fringes swishing. I pin the maniple to my sleeve then finally put on the chasuble.

Pacing around that uneven floor board, never repaired in all my years here, I am struck by a vision of the darkened church. Empty pews haunt me as I stare at my wall calendar, lines slashing across the weeks and months since the accident. For me it has been a year of tossing and turning in bed, of sleeping pills, of waking before dawn unable to exorcise my culpability.

The telephone rings and makes me jump. I pick it up. From the sound of her breathing I know it's Marybeth, then I ask about Daniel.

"Thomas, I hate the phone." *why did she call him then?*

"Maybe he won't be deployed," I say, remembering that last night with Artie. Basketball on a television over the bar. In the din we heard talk of war. Daniel's in the National Guard, he said. They stay stateside. Don't worry. *— father comforting him?*

could this be a scene?

For a moment Marybeth taps her receiver, the sound an insistent ticking. "Thomas, can you come by and see Daniel? He should talk to someone."

"Is he still home with you?"

"For the last year . . . it's only been him and me."

My hand shakes from gripping the telephone. "I can't replace Artie."

"You can still talk to Daniel."

"It wouldn't be father to son."

"No, but at least it would be man to man."

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

Man to man. When did Daniel grow up? When did God become blackness and void?
Only when my alarm rings, reminding me of the Mass, do I set down the phone to lay my face in my hands.

“Thomas—Thomas—”

Dimly, I hear Marybeth’s voice then pick up the phone again. She thought we had lost the connection, but I tell her everything is fine and promise to come by and talk to Daniel.

“Don't mention that I asked you to check on him.”

Again the radio announcer—laser guided bombs are pulverizing cities in our campaign of shock and awe. I look at the clock. “He's a soldier. I'll treat him like one.”

“He may be a soldier but he’s still only nineteen.”

After she hangs up, someone knocks on my door. I open it to see Benjamin, still our pastor though slower for age, hunched like he was that day he first guided me to this office, his cane tapping one knee with each step through the rectory.

“Thomas, you have much on your mind. I can see it.” Benjamin raises a finger to my forehead.

“This isn’t an ordinary day.”

“No, it isn't. Tonight you should speak of it.”

“I'm not ready.” I want to yield the service to Benjamin. He speaks clearly and with faith; he knows how to reassure people seeking divine guidance.

“What's wrong?”

“This isn't a good time.”

“Thomas, we all have our duties. Please do yours.”

“Forgive me.” I close the curtains to shut out the drizzle.

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

“You are a pup. It’s time to go.”

* * *

During the homily I ask for attention and talk of war and rumors of war. “We cannot let this conflagration become a conflict between faiths. Does Islam not mean peace in submission to God? Was Christ not born Prince of Peace?” A watery light filters through stained glass windows that portray His life and agony. The face of Christ shines like amber. The storm behind Calvary churns in a ruby sky.

One man arrives late. He takes off his coat, runs fingers through wet hair plastered to his temples and finds a seat in back. In the first pew a woman clasps her hands so tightly that her knuckles are white. She has the bright flush of rouge on her cheeks. Her husband nibbles a cracker, hides it in his palm and brushes the crumbs from his lips. Two daughters squirm next to them. Such innocents, thumping their shoes against the kneeler. We cannot question the ultimate mystery of God’s design. If it is His wish then we must follow, although our free will allows us to stray. Yet, again and again I return to that last night with Artie, while outside I hear only the murmur of chill winter rain.

* * *

When? Bread. The staff of life. I visit the bakery where bells jingle on the door as I open it. Standing behind the counter, the owner wipes her forehead with the heel of one hand. “You again?” It’s still early and already she seems spent. We talk about the news over our usual cup of coffee. For days satellite feeds and embedded reporters have dominated the airwaves, yet we can’t get enough. When I ask for another donation to help my shelter down the street, she says, “Sorry—no cash to spare,” then goes to the back room and returns with some loaves in a paper

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

bag. "They're too stale to sell, but it's all I have. . . ." She would like to give more, yet the lines around her mouth—deep grooves worn by labor—say, I can't.

After I thank her and buy a dozen muffins for the shelter, she packs two extra for me. I walk past a diner that must have been busy long ago, when the morning crowd stopped for coffee and doughnuts. Now its booths are empty, its windows opaque with grease and dirt. Pitted, discolored, interrupted here and there by broken concrete, the sidewalks seem forlorn and this neighborhood of graffiti-covered buildings feels lost.

Stinking as always and wearing grimy camouflage fatigues, Hector sleeps in the entry of the shelter. I hold my breath and bend over to rap him on the shoulder. "You're blocking the door."

He curls against the steps. "Go 'way. I'm tired."

"And I'm tired of finding you here."

"Where were you?" Hector huddles in his jacket and sneezes. His nose drips. He wipes it on his sleeve and complains of the snot that won't stop.

"You want to sleep inside? Come when we're open."

"Piss off."

"You piss off." I nudge him with my foot but he doesn't move. After watching him for a long time, I help him stand then unlock the door. "All right, come in. You know what to do."

He mutters with the rasp of gravel in his voice and tramps behind me through the vestibule, where a wan glow emanates from the windows and tiny brown moths flutter in shafts of light. In the common area I ease him onto a folding chair and grasp his face. His cheeks feel cold and greasy; the stubble is at least a week old. Years of sun exposure have thickened his skin, now mottled with lesions. Could he have ever been nineteen? Yet, some remnant must lie in this

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

husk of a hobbled old man. Did Hector dream of sailing across the ocean? Flying to the moon? Marrying the girl next door? When did his life veer to the streets? I look into his eyes but find nothing, except possibly that thousand-yard stare. His social worker would remind me to ask the questions: “What’s your name?”

“Go ‘way.”

“Tell me your name.” I shake him. “What’s your name?”

“Hector. It’s Hector—okay?”

JULIE

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: BLEEDING IN BABYLON BY H.L. LEE

Summary: the story of a man searching the most dangerous place in the world—Iraq, six months after the start of the war—for the son of the friend he betrayed.

Don't blatantly state.
Allude to it
Show news report - anchor announces
Phone call.
Dialogue between characters.

Start with Marybeth's phone call.
"It's time."
"It happened."
"I'm frightened for Daniel!"

The war started today. Rain falls as the news repeats on my office radio. I adjust my collar, run my finger between it and my neck to relieve the chafing, cross myself and pray for those first victims along the banks of the Tigris. Artie. Artie. In the year since you died, through my grievous fault, Marybeth has come to me for solace and with her I find comfort as well. For 9 weeks she has been watching the run-up to this day and I wait for her to call me about Daniel's National Guard unit. If your son is deployed, would my promise to watch over him be broken? He is too young to be sent halfway around the world, and I can't follow him to a war zone.

Good description

What?
Why did/didn't
9 - ?
go back for you?
stop the - ?

Why?

From the windowsill I pick up that picture of the three of us, holding baseball gloves, after a game of catch when Daniel was in grade school. Just the boys, said Marybeth as she pressed the shutter on her camera. I want to put that picture away, to store it in a box with other relics. But not yet. Even after all this time your last message remains on my answering machine. Har—har—har—you're laughing just like the old days—see you tonight for a beer.

Quoted?

By now the congregation must be gathering for a sparsely attended evening Mass and afterward the Sacrament of Reconciliation. How warm and safe they imagine themselves, during this season of Lent, as they huddle in the pews and gossip with their neighbors. I wrap the amice about my shoulders. Now the alb; I pull it over my head, push my arms through the sleeves and thank our Lord for the strength He provides. The thought of kneeling before the altar, silent but

JULIE

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

for the rattle of cheap Valium beneath my vestments, makes me shudder, I take the vial from my pocket, untangle my rosary and hide the pills in my desk. I knot the cincture around my waist. It is too loose and I retie it. Over my shoulders I drape the stole, its fringes swishing. I pin the maniple to my sleeve then finally put on the chasuble.

I had to look up = lot of this liturgical garb.

Pacing around that uneven floor board, never repaired in all my years here, I am struck by a vision of the darkened church. Empty pews haunt me as I stare at my wall calendar, lines slashing across the weeks and months since the accident. For me it has been a year of tossing and turning in bed, of sleeping pills, of waking before dawn unable to exorcise my culpability.

START WITH THIS!

The telephone rings and makes me jump. I pick it up. From the sound of her breathing I know it's Marybeth, then I ask about Daniel.

"Thomas, I hate the phone."

"Maybe he won't be deployed," I say, remembering that last night with Artie. Basketball on a television over the bar. In the din we heard talk of war. Daniel's in the National Guard, he said. They stay stateside. Don't worry.

For a moment Marybeth taps her receiver, the sound an insistent ticking. "Thomas, can you come by and see Daniel? He should talk to someone."

"Is he still home with you?"

"For the last year . . . it's only been him and me."

My hand shakes from gripping the telephone. "I can't replace Artie."

"You can still talk to Daniel."

"It wouldn't be father to son."

"No, but at least it would be man to man."

JULIE

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

Man to man. When did Daniel grow up? When did God become blackness and void?
Only when my alarm rings, reminding me of the Mass, do I set down the phone to lay my face in my hands.

“Thomas—Thomas—”

Dimly, I hear Marybeth’s voice then pick up the phone again. She thought we had lost the connection, but I tell her everything is fine and promise to come by and talk to Daniel.

“Don't mention that I asked you to check on him.”

Again the radio announcer—laser guided bombs are pulverizing cities in our campaign of shock and awe. I look at the clock. “He's a soldier. I'll treat him like one.”

“He may be a soldier but he’s still only nineteen.”

After she hangs up, someone knocks on my door. I open it to see Benjamin, still our pastor though slower for age, hunched like he was that day he first guided me to this office, his cane tapping one knee with each step through the rectory.

“Thomas, you have much on your mind. I can see it.” Benjamin raises a finger to my forehead.

Why?
ashes?

“This isn't an ordinary day.”

“No, it isn't. Tonight you should speak of it.”

“I'm not ready.” I want to yield the service to Benjamin. He speaks clearly and with faith; he knows how to reassure people seeking divine guidance.

“What's wrong?”

“This isn't a good time.”

“Thomas, we all have our duties. Please do yours.”

“Forgive me.” I close the curtains to shut out the drizzle.

“You are a pup. It’s time to go.”

During the homily I ask for attention and talk of war and rumors of war. “We cannot let this conflagration become a conflict between faiths. Does Islam not mean peace in submission to God? Was Christ not born Prince of Peace?” A watery light filters through stained glass windows that portray His life and agony. The face of Christ shines like amber. The storm behind Calvary churns in a ruby sky.

One man arrives late. He takes off his coat, runs fingers through wet hair plastered to his temples and finds a seat in back. In the first pew a woman clasps her hands so tightly that her knuckles are white. She has the bright flush of rouge on her cheeks. Her husband nibbles a cracker, hides it in his palm and brushes the crumbs from his lips. Two daughters squirm next to them. Such innocents, thumping their shoes against the kneeler. We cannot question the ultimate mystery of God's design. If it is His wish then we must follow, although our free will allows us to stray. Yet, again and again I return to that last night with Artie, while outside I hear only the murmur of chill winter rain.

* * *

Bread. The staff of life. I visit the bakery where bells jingle on the door as I open it. Standing behind the counter, the owner wipes her forehead with the heel of one hand. “You again?” It's still early and already she seems spent. We talk about the news over our usual cup of coffee. For days satellite feeds and embedded reporters have dominated the airwaves, yet we can't get enough. When I ask for another donation to help my shelter down the street, she says, “Sorry—no cash to spare,” then goes to the back room and returns with some loaves in a paper

During war?
What town?
country?

yet, no
appearance
of Artie
in this
scene.

bag. "They're too stale to sell, but it's all I have. . . ." She would like to give more, yet the lines around her mouth—deep grooves worn by labor—say, I can't.

After I thank her and buy a dozen muffins for the shelter, she packs two extra for me. I walk past a diner that must have been busy, long ago, when the morning crowd stopped for coffee and doughnuts. Now its booths are empty, its windows opaque with grease and dirt. Pitted, discolored, interrupted here and there by broken concrete, the sidewalks seem forlorn and this neighborhood of graffiti-covered buildings feels lost.

Stinking as always and wearing grimy camouflage fatigues, Hector sleeps in the entry of the shelter. I hold my breath and bend over to rap him on the shoulder. "You're blocking the door."

He curls against the steps. "Go 'way. I'm tired."

"And I'm tired of finding you here."

"Where were you?" Hector huddles in his jacket and sneezes. His nose drips. He wipes it on his sleeve and complains of the snot that won't stop.

"You want to sleep inside? Come when we're open."

"Piss off."

"You piss off." I nudge him with my foot but he doesn't move. After watching him for a long time, I help him stand then unlock the door. "All right, come in. You know what to do."

He mutters with the rasp of gravel in his voice and tramps behind me through the vestibule, where a wan glow emanates from the windows and tiny brown moths flutter in shafts of light. In the common area I ease him onto a folding chair and grasp his face. His cheeks feel cold and greasy; the stubble is at least a week old. Years of sun exposure have thickened his skin, now mottled with lesions. Could he have ever been nineteen? Yet, some remnant must lie in this

Reaction to Hector:
kind? cruel?
should be compassionate

JULIE

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

husk of a hobbled old man. Did Hector dream of sailing across the ocean? Flying to the moon? Marrying the girl next door? When did his life veer to the streets? I look into his eyes but find nothing, except possibly that thousand-yard stare. His social worker would remind me to ask the questions: "What's your name?"

"Go 'way."

"Tell me your name." I shake him. "What's your name?"

"Hector. It's Hector—okay?"

THIS STORY SHOWS PROMISE. COULD BE VERY POWERFUL.
A FEW QUESTIONS:

WHERE ARE WE AT THE START?
CIVILIAN RESIDENCES? DOES HE RESIDE AT CHURCH?
SMALL TOWN, MAJOR CITY, ARMY BARRACKS?

WHEN ARE WE?

HOW OLD IS PROTAGONIST THOMAS?

WILL READER EXPERIENCE WAR ZONE?

OR IS WHOLE STORY IN PROTAGONIST'S HEAD?

DO WE GET TO HEAR DIALOGUE WITH MARYBETH?
DANIEL?
ARTIE?

Dave

Summary: the story of a man searching the most dangerous place in the world—Iraq, six months after the start of the war—for the son of the friend he betrayed.

What a sad story. No one in these few pages is happy. Depressing, I'd say. I hope there is someone who finds redemption. The tone is bleak, and the people are depressed, hopeless, haunting, and effective.

In six pages we have been introduced to six people. There should be a place to develop a deeper understanding of the situation where we could understand the depth of their despair. I like rainy days. I really like this beginning and would like to read the revision of this story when the confusions are combed out.

Good start. Concentrate on the when of the story. You need to help the reader cross the street. Hold their hand and take one step at a time.

The war started today. Rain falls as the news repeats on my office radio. I adjust my collar, run my finger between it and my neck to relieve the chafing, cross myself and pray for those first victims along the banks of the Tigris. Artie. Artie. In the year since you died, through my grievous fault, Marybeth has come to me for solace and with her I find comfort as well. For weeks she has been watching the run up to this day and I wait for her to call me about Daniel's National Guard unit. If your son (*Marybeth's?*) is deployed, would my promise to watch over him (*Daniel?*) be broken? He is too young to be sent halfway around the world, and I can't follow him to a war zone.

(The first paragraph needs to be more tied down. Who are the characters? We have three unconnected characters in the first paragraph. Usually too many. What is their relationship to one another? Artie, dead. Marybeth, miserable. Artie's her son? Daniel? Whose son? Too many loose ends to keep straight.)

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

From the windowsill I pick up that picture of the three of us, *(family?)* holding baseball gloves, after a game of catch when Daniel was in grade school. Just the boys, said Marybeth as she pressed the shutter on her camera. I want to put that picture away, to store it in a box with other relics. But not yet. Even after all this time *(,)* your *(Marybeth's?)* last message remains on my answering machine. Har—har—har—you're laughing just like the old days—see you tonight for a beer. *(Very confusing. Need to identify who the main character is talking to. Also, what is the relation of the main character to the others. NEEDS TO BE SORTED OUT before you go on.)*

By now the congregation must be gathering for a sparsely attended evening Mass and afterward the Sacrament of Reconciliation. How warm and safe they imagine themselves, during this season of Lent, as they huddle in the pews and gossip with their neighbors. I wrap the amice about my shoulders. *(Ah. He's the priest. I think)* Now the alb; I pull it over my head, push my arms through the sleeves and thank our Lord for the strength He provides. The thought of kneeling before the altar, silent but for the rattle of cheap Valium beneath my vestments, makes me shudder; I take the vial from my pocket, untangle my rosary and hide the pills in my desk. I knot the cincture around my waist. It is too loose and I retie it. Over my shoulders I drape the stole, its fringes swishing. I pin the maniple to my sleeve then finally put on the chasuble. *(Good paragraph. Detailed and thoughtful)*

Pacing around that uneven floor board, never repaired in all my years here, I am struck by a vision of the darkened church. *(Are people gathering for a service?)* Empty pews haunt me as I stare at my wall calendar, lines slashing across the weeks and months since the accident. *(Vague reference to an accident. Obviously, this is an important element in the story and must be clearly*

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

defined.) For me it has been a year of tossing and turning in bed, of sleeping pills, of waking before dawn unable to exorcise my culpability. (*culpability. Needs explanation.*)

The telephone rings and makes me jump. I pick it up. From the sound of her breathing I know it's Marybeth, then I ask about Daniel.

"Thomas, I hate the phone." (*AH, the name of the main character*)

"Maybe he won't be deployed," I say, remembering that last night with Artie. Basketball on a television over the bar. In the din we heard talk of war. Daniel's in the National Guard, he said. They stay stateside. Don't worry.

For a moment Marybeth taps her receiver, the sound an insistent ticking. "Thomas, can you come by and see Daniel? He should talk to someone."

"Is he still home with you?"

"For the last year . . . it's only been him and me."

My hand shakes from gripping the telephone. "I can't replace Artie."

"You can still talk to Daniel."

"It wouldn't be father to son."

"No, but at least it would be man to man."

Man to man. When did Daniel grow up? When did God become blackness and void? Only when my alarm rings, reminding me of the Mass, do I set down the phone to lay my face in my hands.

"Thomas—Thomas—"

Dimly, I hear Marybeth's voice then pick up the phone again. She thought we had lost the connection, but I tell her everything is fine and promise to come by and talk to Daniel.

"Don't mention that I asked you to check on him."

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

Again the radio announcer—laser guided bombs are pulverizing cities in our campaign of shock and awe. I look at the clock. “He’s a soldier. I’ll treat him like one.”

“He may be a soldier, but he’s still only nineteen.”

After she hangs up, someone knocks on my door. I open it to see Benjamin, still our pastor though slower for age, hunched like he was that day he first guided me to this office, his cane tapping one knee with each step through the rectory.

“Thomas, you have much on your mind. I can see it.” Benjamin raises a finger to my forehead.

“This isn’t an ordinary day.”

“No, it isn’t. Tonight you should speak of it.”

“I’m not ready.” I want to yield the service to Benjamin. He speaks clearly and with faith; he knows how to reassure people seeking divine guidance.

“What’s wrong?”

“This isn’t a good time.”

“Thomas, we all have our duties. Please do yours.”

“Forgive me.” I close the curtains to shut out the drizzle.

“You are a pup. It’s time to go.”

During the homily I ask for attention and talk of war and rumors of war. “We cannot let this conflagration become a conflict between faiths. Does Islam not mean peace in submission to God? Was Christ not born Prince of Peace?” A watery light filters through stained glass windows that portray His life and agony. The face of Christ shines like amber. The storm behind Calvary churns in a ruby sky.

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

One man arrives late. He takes off his coat, runs fingers through wet hair plastered to his temples and finds a seat in back. In the first pew a woman clasps her hands so tightly that her knuckles are white. She has the bright flush of rouge on her cheeks. Her husband nibbles a cracker, hides it in his palm and brushes the crumbs from his lips. Two daughters squirm next to them. Such innocents, thumping their shoes against the kneeler. We cannot question the ultimate mystery of God's design. If it is His wish then we must follow, although our free will allows us to stray. *Yet, again and again I return to that last night with Artie, while outside I hear only the murmur of chill winter rain. (Very intriguing sentence. It deserves more explanation.)*

* * *

Bread. The staff of life. I visit the bakery where bells jingle on the door as I open it. Standing behind the counter, the owner wipes her forehead with the heel of one hand. "You again?" It's still early and already she seems spent. We talk about the news over our usual cup of coffee. For days(,) satellite feeds and embedded reporters have dominated the airwaves, yet we can't get enough. When I ask for another donation to help my shelter down the street, she says, "Sorry—no cash to spare," then goes to the back room and returns with some loaves in a paper bag. "They're too stale to sell, but it's all I have. . . ." She would like to give more, yet the lines around her mouth—deep grooves worn by labor—say, I can't.

After(,) I thank her and buy a dozen muffins for the shelter, she packs two extra for me. I walk past a diner that must have been busy, long ago, when the morning crowd stopped for coffee and doughnuts. Now its booths are empty, its windows opaque with grease and dirt. Pitted, discolored, interrupted here and there by broken concrete, the sidewalks seem forlorn and this neighborhood of graffiti-covered buildings feels lost.

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

Stinking as always and wearing grimy camouflage fatigues, Hector sleeps in the entry of the shelter. I hold my breath and bend over to rap him on the shoulder. “You're blocking the door.”

He curls against the steps. “Go 'way. I'm tired.”

“And I'm tired of finding you here.”

“Where were you?” Hector huddles in his jacket and sneezes. His nose drips. He wipes it on his sleeve and complains of the snot that won't stop.

“You want to sleep inside? Come when we're open.”

“Piss off.”

“You piss off.” I nudge him with my foot(,) but he doesn't move. After watching him for a long time, I help him stand then unlock the door. “All right, come in. You know what to do.”

He mutters with the rasp of gravel in his voice and tramps behind me through the vestibule, where a wan glow emanates from the windows and tiny brown moths flutter in shafts of light. In the common area I ease him onto a folding chair and grasp his face. **His cheeks feel cold and greasy;** the stubble is at least a week old. Years of sun exposure have thickened his skin, now mottled with lesions. Could he have ever been nineteen? Yet, some remnant must lie in this husk of a hobbled old man. Did Hector dream of sailing across the ocean? Flying to the moon? Marrying the girl next door? When did his life veer to the streets? I look into his eyes but find nothing, except possibly that thousand yard stare. His social worker would remind me to ask the questions: “What's your name?”

“Go 'way.”

“Tell me your name.” I shake him. “What's your name?”

“Hector. It's Hector—okay?”

Jenni's Comments

Summary: the story of a man searching the most dangerous place in the world—Iraq, six months after the start of the war—for the son of the friend he betrayed.

The war started today. Rain falls as the news repeats on my office radio. I adjust my collar, run my finger between it and my neck to relieve the chafing, cross myself and pray for those first victims along the banks of the Tigris. Artie. Artie. In the year since you died, through my grievous fault, Marybeth has come to me for solace and with her I find comfort as well. For weeks she has been watching the run up to this day and I wait for her to call me about Daniel's National Guard unit. If your son is deployed, would my promise to watch over him be broken? He is ^{so} young to be sent halfway around the world, and I can't follow him to a war zone.

From the windowsill I pick up that picture of the three of us, holding baseball gloves, after a game of catch when Daniel was in grade school. "Just the boys," said Marybeth as she pressed the shutter on her camera. I want to put that picture away, to store it in a box with other relics. But not yet. Even after all this time, your last message remains on my answering machine.

"Har—har—har—you're laughing just like the old days—see you tonight for a beer."

By now the congregation must be gathering for a sparsely attended evening Mass and afterward the Sacrament of Reconciliation. How warm and safe they imagine themselves, during this season of Lent, as they huddle in the pews and gossip with their neighbors. I wrap the amice about my shoulders. Now the alb; I pull it over my head, push my arms through the sleeves and thank our Lord for the strength He provides. The thought of kneeling before the altar, silent but

-never start with weather

What year is it?

Good weeks curiosity

Good tension

Symbolic?

too much play-by-play slows things down

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

for the rattle of cheap Valium beneath my vestments, makes me shudder; I take the vial from my pocket, untangle my rosary and hide the pills in my desk. I knot the cincture around my waist. # is too loose and I retie it. Over my shoulders I drape the stole, its fringes swishing. I pin the maniple to my sleeve then finally put on the chasuble.

the chasuble is representative of the pastoral care for his flock. Like a shepherd. Thomas will become Daniel's shepherd. right?

Pacing around that uneven floor board, never repaired in all my years here, I am struck by a vision of the darkened church. Empty pews haunt me as I stare at my wall calendar, lines slashing across the weeks and months since the accident. For me, it has been a year of tossing and turning in bed, of sleeping pills, of waking before dawn unable to exorcise my culpability.

The telephone rings and makes me jump. I pick it up. From the sound of her breathing I know it's Marybeth, then I ask about Daniel.

"Thomas, I hate the phone."

"Maybe he won't be deployed," I say, remembering that last night with Artie. Basketball on a television over the bar. In the din, we heard talk of war. "Daniel's in the National Guard," he said. They stay stateside. Don't worry.

For a moment, Marybeth taps her receiver, the sound an insistent ticking. "Thomas, can you come by and see Daniel? He should talk to someone."

"Is he still home with you?"

"For the last year . . . it's only been him and me."

My hand shakes from gripping the telephone. "I can't replace Artie."

"You can still talk to Daniel."

"It wouldn't be father to son."

"No, but at least it would be man to man."

-why does it make him shudder?

Don't think you need this play by play. slows down the story.

Good

Does Thomas tell him this?

Good. we know something bad has happened

-this is a weird thing to say.

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

- Is his faith being tested?

Man to man. When did Daniel grow up? When did God become blackness and void?

Only when my alarm rings, reminding me of the Mass, do I set down the phone to lay my face in my hands.

"Thomas—Thomas—"

Dimly, I hear Marybeth's voice then pick up the phone again. She thought we had lost the connection, but I tell her everything is fine and promise to come by and talk to Daniel.

- use dialogue here.

"Don't mention that I asked you to check on him."

Again the radio announcer—laser guided bombs are pulverizing cities in our campaign of shock and awe. I look at the clock. "He's a soldier. I'll treat him like one."

"He may be a soldier but he's still only nineteen."

After she hangs up, someone knocks on my door. I open it to see Benjamin, still our pastor though slower for age, hunched like he was that day he first guided me to this office, his cane tapping one knee with each step through the rectory.

"Thomas, you have much on your mind. I can see it." Benjamin raises a finger to my forehead.

"This isn't an ordinary day."

"No, it isn't. Tonight you should speak of it."

"I'm not ready." I want to yield the service to Benjamin. He speaks clearly and with faith; he knows how to reassure people seeking divine guidance.

"What's wrong?"

"This isn't a good time."

"Thomas, we all have our duties. Please do yours."

"Forgive me." I close the curtains to shut out the drizzle.

of the window?

- I had sure you need this Benjamin in important character?

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

“You are a pup. It’s time to go.”

I don't understand what he means here

During the homily, I ask for attention and talk of war ~~and rumors of war~~. “We cannot let this conflagration become a conflict between faiths. Does Islam not mean peace in submission to God? Was Christ not born Prince of Peace?” A watery light filters through stained glass windows that portray His life and agony. The face of Christ shines like amber. The storm behind Calvary churns in a ruby sky. *(He can see the sky from inside the church?)*

One man arrives late. He takes off his coat, runs fingers through wet hair plastered to his temples and finds a seat in back. In the first pew, a woman clasps her hands so tightly that her knuckles are white. She has the bright flush of rouge on her cheeks. Her husband nibbles a cracker, hides it in his palm and brushes the crumbs from his lips. Two daughters squirm next to them. Such innocents, thumping their shoes against the kneeler. We cannot question the ultimate mystery of God’s design. If it is His wish then we must follow, although our free will allows us to stray. Yet, again and again I return to that last night with Artie, while outside I hear only the murmur of chill winter rain.

This is a general statement of a boy talking about something specific? Say what that is.

Good. It's clear something is haunting him.

Bread. The staff of life. I visit the bakery where bells jingle on the door as I open it. Standing behind the counter, the owner wipes her forehead with the heel of one hand. “You again?” It’s still early and already she seems spent. We talk about the news over our usual cup of coffee. For days satellite feeds and embedded reporters have dominated the airwaves, yet we can’t get enough. When I ask for another donation to help my shelter down the street, she says, “Sorry—no cash to spare,” then goes to the back room and returns with some loaves in a paper

Is the bakery significant? If not, remove it.

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

4
4
bag. "They're too stale to sell, but it's all I have. . . ." She would like to give more, yet the lines around her mouth—deep grooves worn by labor—say, I can't.

After I thank her and buy a dozen muffins for the shelter, she packs two extra for me. I walk past a diner that must have been busy, long ago, when the morning crowd stopped for coffee and doughnuts. Now, its booths are empty, its windows opaque with grease and dirt. Pitted, discolored, interrupted here and there by broken concrete, the sidewalks seem forlorn and this neighborhood of graffiti-covered buildings feels lost.

Stinking as always and wearing grimy camouflage fatigues, Hector sleeps in the entry of the shelter. I hold my breath and bend over to rap him on the shoulder. "You're blocking the door."

He curls against the steps. "Go 'way. I'm tired."

"And I'm tired of finding you here."

"Where were you?" Hector huddles in his jacket and sneezes. His nose drips. He wipes it on his sleeve and complains of the snot that won't stop.

"You want to sleep inside? Come when we're open."

"Piss off."

"You piss off." I nudge him with my foot, but he doesn't move. After watching him for a long time, I help him stand then unlock the door. "All right, come in. You know what to do."

He mutters with the rasp of gravel in his voice and tramps behind me through the vestibule, where a wan glow emanates from the windows, and tiny brown moths flutter in shafts of light. In the common area, I ease him onto a folding chair and grasp his face. His cheeks feel cold and greasy; the stubble is at least a week old. Years of sun exposure have thickened his skin, now mottled with lesions. Could he have ever been nineteen? Yet, some remnant must lie in this

What is the purpose of these paragraphs? To show the neighborhood is poor?

4
Is he a veteran?

- would a priest say that?

1
Good, compare to Daniel.

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

husk of a hobbled old man. Did Hector dream of sailing across the ocean? Flying to the moon? Marrying the girl next door? When did his life veer to the streets? I look into his eyes but find nothing, except possibly that thousand yard stare. His social worker would remind me to ask the questions: "What's your name?"

why?

"Go 'way."

"Tell me your name." I shake him. "What's your name?"

"Hector. It's Hector—okay?"

I'm so afraid
Daniel will end
up like this?

I like the story's premise. I think you take too many detours in this beginning that slow it down - Focus on what will move the plot forward. Does the bakery scene move the plot forward? Does Hector? Does the scene in church?

I think your writing is good. I just want to better understand the ~~the~~ issue with this priest, his guilt about Artie & how he might redeem ~~the~~ himself by saving Daniel.

I do like the impending knowledge that Daniel will get deployed. Good tension there. Let's see more of that.

I would keep reading. I want to know what happened to Artie & what Thomas' role was in his death.

Great peppering of backstory. Not too much. Just enough

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

Summary: *the story of a man searching one of the most dangerous places in the world—Iraq, six months after the start of the war—for the son of the friend he betrayed.*

The war started today. Rain falls as the news repeats on my office radio. I adjust my collar, run my finger between it and my neck to relieve the chafing, cross myself and pray for those first victims along the banks of the Tigris. Artie. Artie. In the year since you died, through my grievous fault, Marybeth has come to me for solace, and with her I find comfort as well. For weeks she has been watching the run up to this day, and I wait for her to call me about Daniel's National Guard unit. If your son is deployed, would my promise to watch over him be broken? He is too young to be sent halfway around the world, and I can't follow him to a war zone.

Commented [s1]: Good establishment of setting.

From the windowsill, I pick up that picture of the three of us: holding baseball gloves after a game of catch, when Daniel was in grade school. *Just the boys*, said Marybeth as she pressed the shutter on her camera. I want to put that picture away, to store it in a box with other relics. But not yet. Even after all this time, your last message remains on my answering machine. Har—har—har—you're laughing just like the old days—see you tonight for a beer.

Formatted: font italic

By now the congregation must be gathering for a ~~sparsely-sparsely~~-attended evening Mass and afterward the Sacrament of Reconciliation. How warm and safe they imagine themselves during this season of Lent, as they huddle in the pews and gossip with their neighbors. I wrap the amice about my shoulders. Now the alb; I pull it over my head, push my arms through the sleeves and thank our Lord for the strength He provides. The thought of

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

knecling before the altar, silent but for the rattle of cheap Valium beneath my vestments, makes me shudder; I take the vial from my pocket, untangle my rosary and hide the pills in my desk. I knot the cincture around my waist. It is too loose and I retic it. Over my shoulders I drape the stole, its fringes swishing. I pin the maniple to my sleeve, and then finally put on the chasuble.

Pacing around ~~that the uneven floor board that I have navigated since my first day here,~~ never-repaired-in-all-my-years-here, I am struck by a vision of the darkened church. Empty pews haunt me as I stare at my wall calendar, lines slashing across the weeks and months since the accident. For me it has been a year of tossing and turning in bed, of sleeping pills, of waking before dawn, unable to exorcise my culpability.

The telephone rings and makes me jump. I pick it up. From the sound of her breathing, I know it's Marybeth, ~~then~~ I ask about Daniel.

"Thomas, I hate the phone."

"Maybe he won't be deployed," I say, remembering that last night with Artie. Basketball on a television over the bar. In the din, we heard talk of war. Daniel's in the National Guard, he said. They stay stateside. Don't worry.

For a moment, Marybeth taps her receiver, the sound an insistent ticking. "Thomas, can you come by and see Daniel? He should talk to someone."

"Is he still home with you?"

"For the last year . . . it's only been him and me."

My hand shakes from gripping the telephone. "I can't replace Artie."

"You can still talk to Daniel."

"It wouldn't be father to son."

"No, but at least it would be man to man."

Commented [s2]: Reword or use tags-a little confusing the way it's written

Commented [s3]: It sounds like he speaks with Marybeth all the time; wouldn't he know this?

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

Man to man. When did Daniel grow up? When did God become blackness and void?
Only when my alarm rings, reminding me of the Mass, do I set down the phone to lay my face in my hands.

“Thomas—Thomas—”

Dimly, I hear Marybeth’s voice. ~~I then~~ pick up the phone again. She thought we had lost the connection, but I tell her everything is fine and promise to come by and talk to Daniel.

Commented [s4]: Continue the conversation as dialogue (don't summarize)

“Don't mention that I asked you to check on him.”

Again the radio announcer ~~speaks—laser-laser-~~guided bombs are pulverizing cities in our campaign of shock and awe. I look at the clock. “He's a soldier. I'll treat him like one.”

“He may be a soldier, but he's still only nineteen.”

After she hangs up, someone knocks on my door. I open it to see Benjamin, still our pastor though slower for age, hunched like he was that day he first guided me to this office, his cane tapping one knee with each step through the rectory.

good tags (description)

“Thomas, you have much on your mind. I can see it.” Benjamin raises a finger to my forehead.

“This isn't an ordinary day.”

“No, it isn't. Tonight you should speak of it.”

“I'm not ready.” I want to yield the service to Benjamin. He speaks clearly and with faith; he knows how to reassure people seeking divine guidance.

“What's wrong?”

“This isn't a good time.”

Commented [s5]: Would be good to see facial expressions or body language here

“Thomas, we all have our duties. Please do yours.”

“Forgive me.” I close the curtains to shut out the drizzle.

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

"You are a pup. It's time to go."

Commented [s6]: ?

During the homily I ask for attention and talk of war and rumors of war. "We cannot let this conflagration become a conflict between faiths. Does Islam not mean peace in submission to God? Was Christ not born Prince of Peace?" A watery light filters through stained glass windows that portray His life and agony. The face of Christ shines like amber. The storm behind Calvary churns in a ruby sky.

Commented [s7]: I think you need a better transition between these two paragraphs. His speech is cut off. If it's from the man arriving late, perhaps the priest pauses, watching him, and then realizes that he's stopped talking and that everyone is watching him. Something like that.

One man arrives late. He takes off his coat, runs fingers through wet hair plastered to his temples and finds a seat in back. In the first pew, a woman clasps her hands so tightly that her knuckles are white. She has the bright flush of rouge on her cheeks. Her husband nibbles a cracker, hides it in his palm and brushes the crumbs from his lips. Two daughters squirm next to them. Such innocents, thumping their shoes against the kneeler. We cannot question the ultimate mystery of God's design. If it is His wish, then we must follow, although our free will allows us to stray. Yet, again and again I return to that last night with Artie, while outside I hear only the murmur of chill winter rain.

→ Why do they distract him?

* * *

Commented [s8]: Great phrasing here and throughout!

Bread. The staff of life. I visit the bakery where bells jingle on the door as I open it. Standing behind the counter, the owner wipes her forehead with the heel of one hand. "You again?" It's still early, and already she seems spent. We talk about the news over our usual cup of coffee. For days, satellite feeds and embedded reporters have dominated the airwaves, yet we can't get enough. When I ask for another donation to help my shelter down the street, she says, "Sorry—no cash to spare," then goes to the back room and returns with some loaves in a paper

Commented [s9]: No one else there?

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

bag. "They're too stale to sell, but it's all I have. . . ." She would like to give more, yet the lines around her mouth—deep grooves worn by labor—say, I can't.

After I thank her and buy a dozen muffins for the shelter, she packs two extra for me. I walk past a diner that must have been busy, long ago, when the morning crowd stopped for coffee and doughnuts. Now its booths are empty, its windows opaque with grease and dirt. Pitted, discolored, interrupted here and there by broken concrete, the sidewalks seem forlorn and this neighborhood of graffiti-covered buildings feels lost.

Stinking as always and wearing grimy camouflage fatigues, Hector sleeps in the entry of the shelter. I hold my breath and bend over to rap him on the shoulder. "You're blocking the door."

He curls against the steps. "Go 'way. I'm tired."

"And I'm tired of finding you here."

"Where were you?" Hector huddles in his jacket and sneezes. His nose drips. He wipes it on his sleeve and complains of the snot that won't stop.

"You want to sleep inside? Come when we're open."

"Piss off."

"You piss off." I nudge him with my foot but he doesn't move. After watching him for a long time, I help him stand, and then unlock the door. "All right, come in. You know what to do."

He mutters with the rasp of gravel in his voice and tramps behind me through the vestibule, where a wan glow emanates from the windows and tiny brown moths flutter in shafts of light. In the common area, I ease him onto a folding chair and grasp his face. His cheeks feel cold and greasy; the stubble is at least a week old. Years of sun exposure have thickened his skin,

for
→ need a purpose ~~to~~ his
visit to the bakery

Commented [s10]:

Commented [s11R10]: Need to reword-awkward-I didn't know what you were talking about until I got to the word "concrete."

such good description!

EPISODE 20: LITERARY NOVEL EXCERPT: *BLEEDING IN BABYLON* BY H.L. LEE

now mottled with lesions. Could he have ever been nineteen? Yet, some remnant must lie in this husk of a hobbled old man. Did Hector dream of sailing across the ocean? Flying to the moon? Marrying the girl next door? When did his life veer to the streets? I look into his eyes but find nothing, except possibly that thousand yard stare. His social worker would remind me to ask the questions: "What's your name?"

"Go 'way."

"Tell me your name." I shake him. "What's your name?"

"Hector. It's Hector—okay?"

I think your writing is terrific, and I was pulled into your story right away. Great sentence structure. The emotion is clear, and I'm taken right away with the main character. For me, my interest waned a bit once the priest went to the bakery. The beginning of the story was what captured me, but because it changed so much, and you moved away from the guilt, pull to his friend's wife, etc to a scene that didn't seem connected at all, I lost a bit of interest. There was no connection between the first 3 ½ pages and the last two, at least that I could detect. Perhaps if there was a full conversation between the priest and the bakery owner, revealing more about why the priest feels so guilty, or something about Hector that triggers a memory... but I didn't see anything. I want to emphasize that the writing was still terrific, but I wanted you to stick with the theme that you started at the beginning. Overall, great writing and I would definitely keep reading in the hope that the other part of the story would come back soon.