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# Reader's Guide

from Nathan Poole  
 author of *Father Brother Keeper*

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## Author Asks:

1) a) I think of stories—in contrast to novels—as always moving toward a moment of impulse, an action or gesture that wasn't planned or anticipated but which nevertheless happened. It's in these moments, as a character indulges in such an impulse, that they seem to take on a mysterious shimmer, and I feel as if I know the character suddenly, or more deeply. Can you identify any "moments of impulse" in *Father Brother Keeper*?

b) Characters in fiction, as in life, must reckon with what they have done. They must also come to terms with what their actions signify about who they are. How does a character's behavior signify that they have undergone change? Does their "moment of impulse" suggest his or her relationship to another characters has also changed?

2) Marginalized or isolated characters have always felt intrinsically compelling to me, be it physically, socially, or psychologically. What forms of isolation are at play in "Sillas," "Lipochrome," and "Stretch out Your Hand"? How does a character's desire to overcome his or her isolation create tension or narrative energy?

3) Eudora Welty once called "place" in fiction "the ground conductor of all the currents of emotion and belief." How does landscape in "Two from Sparta" or "Fallow Dog" change your understanding of the characters? Does it create mood or foreshadow movement in the plot? Does "place" ever act as a correlative to something happening inside a character?

4) Do any images in this story collection function as what H.L. Hix might called a "synoptic" image: an image that could represent the central conflict of the story as a whole? Which images seemed the most memorable to you? Why?

## Writing Exercise:

### And then I found . . . five human teeth

In middle school it was a common thing to say "...and then I found five dollars!" anytime you felt the story you were telling had unraveled beneath you. This solution seemed ingenious to middle-school me, a failsafe to deploy when you lose that precious thread, something that happened to me all the time.

A few years ago I was reading Aristotle's *Poetics* and remembered this strange phenomenon. I realized our old "Five Dollars" failsafe was just a version of what Aristotle called adding "magnitude," which he defined as a "change of fortune."

So the prompt: Experiment with the idea of magnitude. Write the first three sentences of the worst story you can possibly imagine: the driest, most creeping, tedious story. Then, in the fourth sentence, try to save it by adding sudden magnitude, changing a character's fortune. Start your fourth sentence with these four words: "And then I found..."