

1986

# Correspondence

James McKean

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## 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.