

Joe

by Gary Moshimer

Nephew Joe, my old brother's son, came to fix our pipes.

Strapping, strapless, hairless, tanned, he clinked with gold. He came out to us over the pipes... drip drip...I just wanted them fixed pronto. He took precious time. He cried...drip drip...I wanted him to stop.

My wife was stunned, frozen with her thumb in an apple pie, so hot.

"I've done awful things," Joe said, his wrench floppy, useless. "I should be dead."

My sixteen year old, Sanders, was in the bathroom dry-shaving, all pain and blood. "Show this to Uncle Joe. A real man." Great, my son with the gay name a homophobe. Jerry, my other son, was down with Cartoon Network, escaping life. He was named for a real man, Jerry Lewis.

"Oh, there have been some good relationships." Joe wiped his tears on a dirty rag. I stared at the pipe, trying to will him to action. He sobbed through his soldering, the tears hissing away.

I wrote down the name of my boss's son, a guy always looking for a date. Joe kissed my hand.

A year later Joe was dead. He'd gotten mixed up with a crowd of druggies and had overdosed. I still think of that day with the pipe, and Sanders shaving, and can still smell the pie on my wife's hand.

