

Obituary

by Ginnah Howard

He had a full scholarship to Pratt to become a civil engineer. He soon dropped out. He did a lot of drugs, one of his brothers said. He never got along, said another. He drifted for years: No forwarding. No phone. Stood on the pick-up corner in Tallahassee to get day-jobs. Though he never asked, some of the family tried to help: wrangled with the DMV to pay his fines to get his license back; gave him a used truck and when the motor blew for lack of oil, pulled the engine and put another in; paid his rent; bailed him out when he got picked up for vagrancy. The few times I saw him, he had that intense stare of psychosis. He read a lot. Once a year, when she was still able to drive, his mother visited him in Carrabelle and they'd make the rounds of second-hand bookstores. When he lost his rental room, he put what he owned in storage. After he died—his body found along the railroad tracks—a brother paid the back-storage fee: boxes and boxes of books, giving off the moldy smell of Florida damp, and many of them marked with scraps from his life to show where he left off—pay stubs, water bills, notices from the electric company. All of John Barth and Dostoyevsky, the Iliad and the Odyssey, Don Quixote, Shakespeare's Sonnets, Spinoza, Austen, the Bible, Nabokov, Milton, The Divine Comedy... Many of the classics I've always meant to read. One sister said, We have to tell her. She has a right. I thought, but didn't say, Don't. No mother would want to know that. And so they told her:

Starvation.

