

# Old Haunts

by John Wentworth Chapin

The Ancestors confront The Writer. "Why do you write filth?" they howl — the very timbers quake.

The Writer drinks in their longcoats, sabers, powdered hair. *It's not... well, not all filth.*

"April 12, 1986!" thunders a corseted woman with an eyepatch, waving folded yellow legal paper: "Fellatio, drunkenness, bestiality, and six blasphemies!" A man in black frock with buckled boots nods, glowering.

*That was a fake letter, a joke...*

"He thinks it not filth if a joke!" The gentleman in dingy Civil War-era military garb hisses, the blue or gray faded to a judgmental charcoal. Someone belches fire somewhere; brimstone and sulfur creep hot down The Writer's throat.

*Uh... yeah, that one was filth.*

The Writer's mind races. Nothing he has written comes forth; all he remembers is sitting with a pencil, a pen, a typewriter, a laptop, an iPhone, words and images spilling over the lip of his mind like so much lava, too hot to touch but oh so tempting. He thinks of houseplants blooming in January, doe-eyed pets on his lap, lovers in blissful repose. Dappled sunsets...

"Well?" croaks a woman in rags, shaking her fists. "You think we have eternity?"

The Writer begins to object... *Every time I go to write about beauty, I hear you scoffing at my weakness.* He doesn't speak a hurtful truth: *I write about your weakness.*

The Writer clears his throat: "You have written yours. Be still."

