

Michael Mack

From *Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith*

This excerpt from Mack's one-man show is from the end of Act I.

The year before, at Catholic School,
I learned from Sister Vincent this startling fact –
"In both heaven and hell," she said,
"a minute lasts a million years."

She stood at the blackboard with a stick of chalk
sketching a cloud labeled *heaven*
and a bucket labeled *hell*,
tapping a knuckle first on one, then the other.

"You choose," she said. "A minute lasts a million years."
I've never heard this before or since.
Where did she learn it?
And why a bucket?

I don't know. Nor do I know how long
I stayed in the rectory. Hours? Less?
What I know for sure –
when the Father opened the door to usher me out,

when he raised his finger to his lips
and swore me to a secret,
pressed a quarter into my palm
still warm from his pocket,

stepped back inside and let the door
drift into the latch,
when I turned downstairs sliding my hand
down the banister, I know for sure

it was late in the day, the sun setting behind the green
barracks of the trees,
shadows on the ground long and getting longer,
flat on their backs.

I felt like someone else – special, cupping a secret.

But weird, giddy as a fit of hiccups
like I'd ridden a swing too long,
my belly a boat
that wouldn't stop rocking.

I felt chosen for something
but didn't know why or what for –
a riddle dangled between him and me.
Was *this* the secret priests knew?

I hopped on my bike,
snapped a wheelie off the driveway,
lapped the chapel
and skidded out sideways onto Caldwell Street

pumping the pedals hard as I could – *pedal pedal pedal*
till my face burned, *pedal pedal pedal*
till it hurt to breathe,
pedal pedal pedal pedal pedal pedal pedal pedal pedal.

I wouldn't see him again.
Four days later he left town, no goodbyes,
no one saying where he went or why, no one speaking of him
at all. And I didn't ask.

Soon we'd leave town too –
both families, Dad's and Aunt May's
north to a DC suburb. First weekend in June
I jumped in the Ford right behind Dad,

buckled my seat belt, the book in my lap
Motor Cars of the World, ready to be far away,
the five hundred miles to Washington
a good start.

I would pray to forget Brevard.
But the memory tingled like a phantom limb –
sticking out sideways, tripping me up,
echoing through the silent nights

I lay awake.
A phantom limb that itched and crawled
and I the only one who knew.
Or I and one other.