

the saturnalian

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The Median by Paul Mann

"I was clawing at the bank of the river when my big sister reached out and pulled me to safety," Thomas says. "I was five." He smiles at Linda. "Thanks to her I'm able to be here celebrating my 50th birthday with friends and family. So here's to Linda, my sister! Cheers!"

Everyone applauds. Linda smiles cheerlessly and raises her champagne flute. Thomas walks over and sits down.

"Linda?" he asks. "Why so sad?"

"You know why, Tommy. Same thing every year. It's not real."

"Duh," Thomas says impatiently.

"So why?"

"Cuz I can," he says, pouting.

They are sitting on the bank of a raging river. Linda pats the soil. "I slipped right here."

"Hush, Linny. It was my fault. Momma said not to play in the river."

"You were -- *are* --only five." She stares at the river. "It's so beautiful. Weird, huh?"

Thomas shrugs. "Guess so."

"We drowned here, Tommy."

"I *know*, Linny," he whispers. "I know."

Paul Mann is a writer living in Northern California with his beautiful wife, exuberant daughter, and hyperactive dog. His stories have been published in The Farallon Review, Susurrus, Sunken Lines, and Sacramento News & Review.

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