

**Creative Writing Sample. Novel in process: *The Bricklayer*. 2011**

Ezra's eyes focused on the square he'd dug out with his trowel. Poised down on his knees like a praying monk, he gently carved small strands of dry dirt away from the slight hole, only about two inches down. He was amazed at how the earth retained its shape. He caressed and pushed against the flat surface at the base of the hole so the bricks set neatly in and lay flat against the next ones. It was as if he knew exactly where the perfect brick would be as he pulled a thick, red block from the pile behind him. It was an old one, probably a paver from an old barn or carriage house floor. All the bricks were excavated from his property, part of buildings long since washed away in time. This gave a romance to all of this, as though Ezra was not only building, he was raising the dead. He slowly placed each brick in place and pulled them together so they snuggled close in a perfect fit. They lie there as if in a sarcophagus, stately and dead, forever unanimated and blessed by Ezra's soft, pale hands.

The sun peaked low on the horizon illuminating the valley with a soft blanket of warm orange light that reflected from the old windows of the house. The light dug deep into every crevice of the rocky hillside and even with the chill breeze of an early spring evening, the rays felt warm on Ezra's face and neck. Nature can be unforgiving and callous, but there are times when for Ezra nature feels like a secret lover, understanding him like no one else and touching and soothing him when he needed it the most.

Over to the backside of Ezra's house stood the offices of his small publishing company. As always, the offices were lit up with bright fluorescents that had already carved away the shadows along the stone window edges. In this town of the dead, those lights shone like a lighthouse beacon calling out to the ancient homes that still stood saying that yes, there is life! There is passion! There is a heartbeat in this morgue! Correct me if I'm wrong, but there is a universal passion that lives on in old places, though buried with each generation, the longings and the denials and most of all the secrets remain calling out to us. Ezra told me once that since he had worked to bring the old house back to life, he felt more and more like it was meant to be. Maybe he was the original owner reincarnated, he pondered, whimsically looking up at the clouds. Maybe if my business takes off, he said, there'll be famous people riding into this town in limousines and we'll toast with champagne and dance in the yard and run drunken and naked through the dewy grass. His mind was never in its proper place. I hadn't the heart to tell him that in order to become the Great Gatsby, dreams have to become more than dreams.