

**Human Physics: An Anthology  
of Short Fiction**



**Christopher  
Michael  
Mansour**

# Human Physics: An Anthology Of Short Fiction

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## *Forward*

What is it about the past that morbidly compels some people into desperate acts? Acts of pure desperation or madness that culminate in the very worst of consequences, murder, suicide, or worse. Each story attempts to examine the nature of the past and the power that it holds over our lives—the power to teach and inspire us or the power to destroy. The anthology alternately deals with love and loss, madness and hysteria, fanaticism versus liberty, and early death.

In *The Ghosts of the Past*, an embittered Professor sets out to discover the truth about his mother's disappearance and confronts the nature of evil itself—an evil that left him scarred both physically and mentally. *Requiem* introduces us to HOWARD RICHARDS, a guilt-ridden author and academic whose obsession with his wife's suicide and daughter's death culminates in an unforeseeable madness and hysteria. In *Objects in Motion*, a young Islamic girl dreams of her own emancipation amidst the violent oppositions of her tyrannical father and beloved feminist professor eliciting a showdown with deadly consequences. In *Objects at Rest*, a woman faces an impossible scenario—she has been transformed into a statue as the ultimate punishment for the evil she wreaks upon others.

By turn enlightening and entertaining, *The Ghosts of the Past* clings to the reader like a burial shroud, offering no answers, but a cold acknowledgment of the haunted human mind.

## *Dedication*

*I wish to dedicate this electronic book to my father.*

*No person has been more inspiring, articulate, and passionate than you. You are the truest scholar and the greatest literary critic I have ever had the pleasure of knowing and sparring with. Without you, the work never would have been the same.*

Human Physics:  
*An Anthology*  
*Of Short Fiction*

By: Christopher Michael Mansour

# “The Ghosts of the Past”

## *Home*

The incessant vibrations and clanking of the train made John nervous. Snickety-snick, cha-cha, snickety-snick. *It shouldn't*, he thought. He had always been fond of train rides; especially, those long, mid-summer train rides to Aunt Selma's place every summer for the fourth of July.

His family used to spend the July and August months in Charlottetown and leave their Toronto home in the capable hands of neighborhood friends. Then there would be the long train ride from Union Station that eventually got them to Prince Edward Island. Auntie's place was the tall beige-coloured house by the ocean with the Amityville-style windows. John smiled as he remembered it.

*Crazy Aunt Selma*, he thought. *Of course you'd pick a house that looked just like the Amityville horror house straight from that obscene 70's film.* He had always thought Selma to be an oddball. She reminded him of Margot Kidder. John had loved the 70's--the whir and the rush of disco music and the time when Margot Kidder still had her elegance and grace.

Aunt Selma's place...tall grass that covered the sand for half a mile

in each direction. The rolling blue waves that pounded and sliced across the shoreline like a razor blade dancing in the hands of a psychopath; the sloshing white foam floated across the ocean in every direction; the whole world one bright gem-like cerulean, from the horizon to the tops of the clouds that hovered over the earth, god knows how many thousands of feet.

They would all sleep in till ten o'clock in the morning, then load themselves with pancakes and maple syrup, all the while joking about some funny story in the paper. He remembered how his dad would talk about Walter Kronkite's disapproval of the Korean War; his mother would be too concerned with her nail polish, while he and Amy would laugh at the cartoons in the Saturday paper.

Life was easy, then. He had been a boy, carefree and innocent. There were the Friday night evenings spent at the diner, bowling with Amy on Saturday mornings, and the endless horsing around with the boys who lived nearby. Auntie made them play endless games of charades to John's great disgust and she would load them all with gifts. Gifts for the children she saw only twice a year--at Christmas and in the summer. John had loved kite-flying with his dad along the seashore. But he missed Marjorie most of all.

Each morning at Aunt Selma's, he would wake up and inhale the fragrance of the sea salt like the faint wisp of a woman's perfume you catch, but never seem able to forget. His father would eat with them, then go outside to drool over the 1951 Cadillac he had bought at a dealership in Charlottetown. It was blood-red, with the silly-looking checkerboard grilles under the hat-shaped hood, with those circular headlights that resembled the half-closed eyes of a camel in the desert sun.

His dad's car had always made him laugh; the front end resembled the toothy grin of some nerd kid wearing glasses; his father had always laughed at

that analogy. Both father and son would sit together and talk about everything from Bobby Darin, to the cute 12 year old next door, Marjorie Henley. His father was always telling him to make the first move, get to first base, while he was still so young. But he hadn't felt ready to kiss her yet.

*Marjorie was cute*, John thought to himself, missing the nights he and the girl would spend together. She was fair-haired and slender, with a slightly pale complexion, blue-green eyes, and delicate features. He had been twelve at the time, and instinctively knew that she would become a beautiful teenage girl.

Marjorie didn't care much for boy's games, or boy's talk. But she didn't mind it so much if it was with him. They clicked somehow; she the girl who liked pony rides and romantic movies, he the boy who loved baseball and catching garter snakes in the fields nearby. They would walk along the shore about a kilometre or so to the baseball diamond and sometimes go for milkshakes at the drug store.

Mostly they would laugh and talk together in the tree house at the edge of the property, about anything, everything. Sometimes they talked about what they wanted to do when they grew up, which high schools they would go to, or gossip about the other kids at school. Sometimes they would tell ghost stories and quite literally scare themselves out of their wits.

John and Marjorie would curl up in the tree house together and talk about grownups. They would talk about which girl kissed whom or how silly Amy's face looked when she kissed Scott Chalmers. Sometimes she asked him why the boys at school fought so much over stupid and senseless things. He and Marjorie would go to the movies and catch anything from the latest Westerns to such dubiously entitled features as *The Blob* or *Attack of the Crab Monsters*. He frowned at the memory. *God I miss those summer nights!*

John shifted in his seat. His eyes drifted back to the novel he tried to read.

Whenever Marjorie got scared, she would bury her head in his shoulder and he would feel compelled to put his arm around her and draw her closer. They had been best friends, and it hadn't felt strange. *She was my first crush*, thought John. *All I have now is an empty house and the bitterness of old age. How had Marjorie fared?* The rustling of the beverage trolley interrupted John's thoughts and he waved the attendant away.

Time had passed, most of it not well. John's last summer in paradise had been cruelly spoiled by the outbreak of turmoil in Marjorie's family. Back then, his young companion had cried her eyes out after her parents' divorce. It had been an unfaithful and loveless marriage. Douglas had been seeing a waitress from Charlottetown and told Janice he was leaving her; Janice was devastated and fell into a deep state of depression. John knew why he did. Some miners did that.

John had known many miners; some of his relatives were in the occupation. *Poor Janice never stood a chance*, he thought. *When you live your life under hundreds of metres of stone and soil and face death in every conceivable way, including the filth that ballooned in your lungs, you turn to cheap sex as a comfort and an escape.* Douglas had been thus condemned.

Marjorie wept after her mother told her Douglas was leaving them. And John remembered how Marjorie had told him about Douglas' sickness and how he had finally told her mother that he did not love her. He had only stayed with her because he felt sorry for her; because it was his duty as a responsible man to do so.

Broken and sobbing uncontrollably, the girl related how Janice had fallen to the floor cursing Douglas to high heaven and low hell. Marjorie had been watching outside the kitchen window and neither of her parents had

known she was there.

“Love’s just an illusion,” Douglas had said. “It’s not real, Janice. How can it exist for a man condemned to the darkness and the caves?”

Later that same day, Marjorie ran barefooted across the field with small, bleeding cuts covering her legs. It had torn John’s heart out to see her so broken and to see those cuts. She threw herself into her young friend’s arms, sobbing and telling him everything.

“Promise me you won’t leave me, John. Swear to God and hope to die that you won’t leave me, too!”

It was all John could do to stay calm. “I promise.”

He had held her close and they had kissed.

It had been an awkward kiss, tentative and slow. She drew closer to him and closed her eyes. The young boy had pulled her closer, and awkwardly planted his lips on her mouth. He tried to imagine how they did it on movies. He could taste the peppermint candy she had eaten a short while before.

After their kiss, Marjorie quieted down. She slept on the floor. John didn’t know what to do, so he went into the house to get a blanket. He draped it over her sleeping form. Turning away from Marjorie, he sat at the top of the tree house ladder contemplating things he couldn’t even understand. His thoughts were a chaotic jumble of adolescent longing and romantic images from movies. *What does it mean to have parents who never loved each other? Maybe this is what death feels like? The heart dies first.*

He couldn’t even imagine what it would be like to not have his parents. Did he love Marjorie? He had strong feelings for her. But he didn’t even know what love meant. Nor did he fully understand the gravity of what his friend had told him. There were many things about the adult world he couldn’t understand, and hoped he never would. Overcome by inexplicable sorrow,

## *About the Author*



Christopher Michael Mansour was born in Barrie, Ontario, Canada, and presently resides there. He holds both an Honours Degree and a Masters Degree in English from

Toronto's York University. His intellectual and creative interests include literature, education, politics, and writing. Many of Chris's academic articles were published online in Canada's Suite101.

*Human Physics* is his first published book of short fiction. He is an instructor of Communications at Barrie's Georgian College. Many of his political musings and letters have appeared in several local community newspapers in central Ontario.