"There are a hundred doors in the imagination. Behind each of these lies a hundred more and behind each of that hundred lies still another five score. I only ask you to see the first set. After that you may only go as far as your sanity will forbear."

- from "Other Stars" (unpublished)

"For him all clocks have stopped. It is now a complete and finished story. Full of failure, dreams never come true and general feelings of sexual inadequacy, the same as any man. They may pump him full of formaldehyde but it will only put off the eventual process of decay as his body will be food for worms." He spoke these words with firm resolution as he put the coins on the corpse's eyes. He had once wanted to be a dramatist, as we can see through the deliberate but unbalanced words of his speech, and though his father had long ago persuaded his activities to be of a more remunerative nature he still enjoyed a soliloquy when the moment called for it. He walked to the door and led the poor lady in announcing the news. He skipped the speech, for her, and only stroked her back as she knelt sobbing over the body. God Dr. Shields could never quite understand what function crying over the dead fulfilled ("Cry if they live or cry if they die," he would often say to himself) but he understood that comforting mourners was his professional obligation. After a few more lines about the deceased he would be able to leave and go home for dinner.

One might actually get the wrong impression from the preceding record of the Doctor's remarks at the aforementioned death. I should now take pains to let the reader know that his statements were more than just a thesis generally revised in such tragedy situations but rather a carefully crafted epitaph particularly designed with the body's character in mind. The Doctor was no stranger to the corpses. No, a bond between them had grown over many years and though it was a curious one it is indeed worth mentioning.

It had been in college when they met. From the day they first talked, in the first year of college, they were to be each other's best friends. Longe sat by him and immediately began their dialogue with a scathing complaint on women. A relationship with one of that sex had just ended and for months Longe did not stop cursing of it. Shields gave him verbal support since such views are quite acceptable for men.

"Such curious ways—no sense at all."

"So totally irrational."

There was another bond as well. As we have seen by the Doctor's speech he once considered himself quite a playwright. Longe wrote pages of poetry and fiction and this mutual drive kept them inseparable. One would exchange tragedies of futile grief for the circus thoughts in verse and thus they consorted as two fugitives working for a common freedom.

After giving the crying women a final phrase of comfort he stood, smoothed his coat and stared down at the body thoughtfully as if such a pause would offer Longe a solemn dignity. He remembered the first piece of writing Longe had given him. Reading out loud that late summer day:

"All true men are dead and gone

   Dead and gone away,

   We talk in dreams

   That never mean

   Exactly what we say.

   It even rhymes, very good."

"'Is it one of the only two rhyming things I've done.'"

"Really?"

"Well, it's such a bore trying to channel the words into lines that sound alike.

   But when one just can't cut in rhymes right off the top of my head."

He had written other more impressive things, such as the one I inserted at the
beginning of this story, but this one stuck to Shields' imagination more than almost anything Peter had ever written.

Pulling his gloves tightly over his hands he wondered how Virginia would take the news. Longe had been there the day they had met. It was in the second maybe third year of college and Longe also took an instant liking to the girl. Not the kind of compatibility that a man normally assumes for a woman but rather they type of relationship that a boy has for an older mysterious sister. He would often silently gaze at her in those days as if she was some sort of goddess, a Helen perhaps, whose manner could not be put into words. One got the impression from Longe that even if such things could be verbalized he would not want to subject her to the constraints of definition. But he never did try to move in one her. No. The entire situation quite perplexed Shields at that. He knew that Longe was more attractive, more intelligent and, in general, more charming than himself. He often was sure that Longe was also quite aware of this fact and enjoyed his snug role for the time it took him to convince Virginia that the love of Peter Longe was indeed her destiny. Virginia never objected to his presence. How many of their college weekends had been spent with the three of them in parks, the three of them on picnics or the three of them taking long rides in the country.

He was out the door now. The long carriage ride through the late 19th century scenery and to his home gave the Doctor plenty of time for contemplation. It was when they were about to graduate. Yes, an odd conversation at that.

"Do you're going on to medical school?"

"Yes, I was thought I had to besides if Virginia and I am to be married we'll need a steady income. What do you expect to find in Boston?"

"I don't know. There's bound to be some place that needs someone who can write a decent page."

"Ah. If the way," Shields glanced around, paused, "Thanks a lot for....""Oh what?"

"For not doing anything....I mean, for letting me have Virginia."

Shields then remembered the very odd look that Longe gave him and the queer smile that seemed to cross his face. He never could quite fathom what all Peter had meant by that grimace though it had long been perfectly recorded in his memory. Longe had made it to the wedding the following year. "It'll be your turn soon too."

"Yes, that's what I've been told."

He seemed, at that time, happy as ever. The change that age brings had not yet struck him and it seemed, to Shields, that perhaps Longe would be one of those people who always stayed young and never seemed to have to get old. Letters from Boston soon proved otherwise as bitter pieces of prose showed that Longe indeed was facing the trammus of assuming adult status. There was one in particular: a short piece that Shields hadn't looked at in years. It seemed to be somewhat of a turning point. The Doctor made a mental note to look at it when he got some. Longe had sent it right before he became employed at the "Charyles of the West" publishing firm. It was there that for some fifteen years Longe wrote a series of fifty-two dime novels, that were then the crop, which would make his name and fame as the foremost American writer of popular fiction. He was actually writing what was quite typical of the adventure stories that were being circulated in the West in the late 1870's through Longe's flair for humor and old situations made the legend in his field. Whenever Longe would visit his spinner sister, who by chance lived in the same Massachusetts town that Shields and taken up his practice in, he was viewed as somewhat of a celebrity. This status never interfered with his relationship to the Doctor and his wife. "You mustn't act so shocked. You're quite white. I told you last week that he couldn't have the sixth cut."

"Virginia looked out the window into the February progress quite ignoring her husband's previous-lot tone. I went to see him. She went into the bedroom and began to change the window sash."

"You don't have to dress up. I'm not like he's going to see you."

She continued with a good sense of purpose and he walked into his study and unlaced the drawer that had long been reserved for Peter's letters. "I'm here to it. I'm read the letters that produced his page:

in Undefiled Manhood
Of tattooed dreams
As worn pages of notes
To an overplayed theme,
Reposing in glory
To an unfinished rhyme—
Leaving not a note
In the music of time."

She shouted at him from the bedroom. "Why did he come back here, to—"
"To die?"
"Yes."

"I don’t know. I can’t even say what he died of. Probably because his only family was here."

"Did he say anything? Want anything done?"

"He only would lie and stare at me. Not just a blank gaze but a deep, I dare say, penetrating look. He would then ask how you were, ask how the children were and then stare at us some more."

"That’s all?" A more observant person would have noted a quiver in her voice as she spoke.

"He would sometimes grip my hand—very tightly. The way he used to then—"

"Then what?"

"Then, he would grip my hand and then push me forward. He was seeing less and less it happened. It was seeming to say something too. He would grip more and more and finally—"

"Only to push you off."

"Worse still."

She gave a quick glance in the direction of the story as she finished bouncing her dress. She went on looking at the faded mountain. The moon appeared in his newly born. Her gloves held tight in hand she pulled a little on them, bogging them this way and that.

"What are you reading?"

"Something he sent me a long time ago."

"Is it titled?"

"No. He never gave this one a name. I have thought—"

"Oh really? What?"

"Epitaph upon a fallen star."

"Will you read it to me?" She brushed a tear from her eye as she was seated.

He didn’t notice her turning toward the window as he began to read.

"He would sometimes mention, only to the closest of friends, that he once wanted to be a writer. They would as to see some of his work but he would not answer them until he turned off into the distance as if he saw a star falling silently from the heavens. He was vaguely using those in his profession. Everyone during his creative periods, his brainstorm insights and his silent movements. Some tried to imitate the wistful distance he kept from his work—seeing a king of comprehension in such an equation—but they were never quite as talented in putting it all. In fancy he was often uninspired, sometimes unyielding but always respected.

They were on to had achieved every award and accomplishment that was in his field could expect. Instead, everything he wished for seemed to be his. While not a conscious man he never seemed to prize such things, quietly allowing a rocking gesture when their significance—as if they were worth not by a separate person, living a separate life.

His closest friends consider how he would make a passing reference to something else—something that could never be found again. The circumstances of his death were never revealed though some said it was some form of suicide."

I sit at the paper that forms the center of stories like this in the distance.
"I guess he was going to make it into a longer story. I don't think he ever did."

"Oh."

"Come here and sit by me."

"What?"

"Never mind."

"I wonder why he wrote it."

-the end-