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## The Death of Superman

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Shane McFarlane

2021

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Shane McFarlane, and entitled The Death of Superman, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Julie Marie Wade

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Donna Weir-Soley

---

Lester Standiford, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 15, 2021

The thesis of Shane McFarlane is approved.

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Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

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Andrés G. Gil  
Vice President for Research and Economic Development  
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

DEDICATION

For Krystil – Always:

my heart, rock, beacon of light, and loving inspiration.

Mahal kita.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to give thanks to:

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS  
THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN

by

Shane McFarlane

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Les Standiford, Major Professor

THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN is an autobiographical novel that covers years 7 to 17 in the life of Shane McFarlane, who struggles to overcome the effects of his inner-city environment and an addict father in and out of incarceration. The title is a metaphor for the decaying presence of the narrator's father in his and his older brother's life and the resulting consequences of that absence.

With the narrator's father in prison, new threats emerge, including his mother's ruthless boyfriend and the allure of fast money.

The novel is written in first person, allowing the reader to gain a heightened level of intimacy much like in Junot Diaz' novel The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao or in John Edgar Wideman's novel Sent for You Yesterday, where young narrators struggle with life altering discoveries.

Shane conquers his fear of becoming another statistic, learning the importance of letting positive influences in.

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## Chapter 1

### Facing Kryptonite

It's hard to know the ugly truth about your father, your super hero.

Years earlier, I was only seven when I found him slumped over in the bathroom on the toilet seat, murmuring a word stuck between his lips. I can still feel each moment as if it were happening now. A foul stench stings my nostrils. It smells like burning tires. It reminds me of my elementary school's chemistry lab. I recognize the look on my father's face. Zombielike, withered, and drained. It's like the walking dead I have seen in the parking lot of the abandon warehouse he takes me to on those long evening rides. His eyes are sunken in, buried beneath thick puffs of skin. I see his teeth as if for the very first time, brittle, yellowed, and riddled with divots, the picture of an anti-smoking ad hanging in my school's bathrooms. He is decaying right in front of me. Next to him is a crumpled piece of foil lying near a small black medical case splayed opened with needles and vials. The rubber hose dangles from his arm, trying to unravel itself. His eyes have darted to the back of his head and his lips and finger tips are blue. I touch his mouth in disbelief. It lies open like a fish gasping for air or as if he had stopped breathing in the middle of thinking, *oh*.

The touch flings me back to the moment that brought me here. Just minutes ago, I was barreling through a small, dusty, obscure collection of *Superman* comics my older brother, Daniel stole from a yard sale. In our family, Daniel, who was named after our father, went by Danny instead, but later to everyone else, he'd simply be D. Our mother

is at work, slaving for just over minimum wage as a nursing assistant on her fourth twelve-hour shift this week. Every few years she also enrolls in a few GED classes at the local night school, but she never finishes. This is one of those years.

Danny is playing video games, just a few feet away from me on the bed we share since our parents cannot afford to buy us each our own. He's yelling at the screen, but nothing can distract me from *Superman*. I've been obsessed with it for the past few weekends. I've even allowed my imagination to run wild, so wild I have conjured an impossible thought, a thought so crazy I don't dare say it out loud and risk a fist from my brother, but as I read, I add up all the facts, pull on every loose thread, then sew them all together to support my theory: "Daddy is *Superman*."

In my excitement, I've accidentally said it aloud. I hold my breath, hoping my brother didn't hear it. I go back to reading.

Danny lightly bops me on the head with the video game controller, "Stupid."

"Ow!" I rub my head.

"How can Dad be Superman? He's half Black, and Superman is a corny White dude."

"He's not corny, and Superman can be anything he wants. Look..." I reach for a comic. "In this one, he finds a magical chamber to turn Lois Lane into a Black woman. That's awesome!"

"Naw, little bro, I think that might be racist."

“Then, then...then what about this one?” I stammer. “He’s spanking Lois Lane.”

Danny leans in closer to examine the madman error Lois Lane over Superman’s knee.

My eyes widen as I continue to plead my case, “We get spanked when we get in trouble.”

“Um, trust me, I’m headed to middle school now; that’s a whole different kind of spanking.”

I dismiss my brother, telling myself it must be true: Dad is *Superman*, a perfect explanation why he flies into the darkness every night. Part of me needs to believe it.

I then come across (Volume 2, No. 75) *The Death of Superman*. I force myself beyond the grim title, and thumb through each page, more painstaking than the last, and there it is: *Doomsday* killed *Superman*.

*Dad?* I cannot help but think about my father’s demise. I drop the comic book, run out the room, and frantically call for my father as I search the apartment. “Where’s dad!” Danny ignores me at first then chases after, trying to calm me down, trying to get me to explain why I’m panicking. “Have you seen, Daddy?” I check the final door, my parents’ bathroom door. It’s locked. My banging grows louder with each scream, but there is no response from my father. I stop. I look at Danny. He looks more like our mother than our father, which in Jamaican culture means he is supposed to be lucky, but the look in his eyes tells me he believes me, tells me he’s going to need all his luck to get through this moment. He’s four years older. He’s seen things with our parents I haven’t,

so he admits to himself that I'm right. He understands my anguish and proceeds to bang the door with me.

“Dad!”

“Daddy!”

The two of us continue.

Danny runs to our room and returns with a cheap pen.

“What are you doing?”

“Just move!” He snaps. “I’ve seen this on TV before.” He sticks the plastic cylindrical base between his teeth and pulls off the head, separating the ink chamber from the barrel. He inserts the end of the skinny tube into the tiny hole within the middle of the door handle then applies a bit of firm pressure, pushing forward and then suddenly within the pin-drop-silence, we both hear, *pop!* The door is unlocked.

I crash in, and there I see him, my father, slumped over, dying in front of me.

Danny stops to catch his breath. His asthma is flaring up. I am hypnotized by my father's absence and continue to walk forward toward him. As I reach out to touch him, his warm breath sticks to my fingertips. It reminds me of so many moments between us: The village monster in one of his scary bedtime stories, the monster whose only desire was to be fed tiny children fingers. Father and son both laugh while Dad gobbled up my hands. Then there was the time when I laid my hand on his face, examining it like a scientist making a discovery, not saying a word, but he knew. He knew I didn't yet have

the words and couldn't fathom the questions my brain was trying to ask: *why is your skin different than mine, different than Mommy's?* His almond milk complexion was passed on from his White mother, who passed him on to his aunt's doorstep in Kingston when he was just five, something he never got over. Something he started drinking himself to sleep for at twelve. Something he found something harder for once he reached New York in his twenties. Something that found him and his children in this moment, in this bathroom in Miami.

I hear keys fumbling outside the door of the apartment. I know it's my mother. Ever since she stopped letting Dad drive her to work, to keep him off the streets, it's the same time she arrives every day off her 7-7 nursing shift. I rush to her, half explaining what we discovered, but she cuts me off midsentence, running toward the bathroom, already knowing what needs to be done.

Mom doesn't panic.

She checks Dad's pulse.

She then reaches into a pocket of her white scrubs jacket, pulls out a pint of chocolate milk, placing it on the counter of the bathroom sink. The chocolate milk is for me, a daily ritual between mother and child, greeting one another when she comes home. Normally, it's the brightest spot of my day, but as that pint of cold liquid chocolate gold sweats on the counter, mom dives back into her pockets, retrieves one of Danny's inhalers and hands it to him. She always carries a spare.

Danny shakes the cartridge and inhales.