**Treatment of Ham Sandwiches**
by Norman Welthagen

**To find his mother, his father has to die…**

*Comatose after witnessing his father’s death, a young boy fights through his tormented imagination in a quest to save his life and reconnect with his workaholic mother.*

There’s no stronger bond between father and son than the one between Jonathan Harris and his son Tommy. But when a tragic accident kills Jonathan, Tommy is left to look for guidance from his workaholic mother. Unfortunately the two are strangers and it takes a simple Ham Sandwich to send Tommy over the edge into a catatonic state. Trapped in his own mind, Tommy becomes the hero in his shadow world. He’s led on a journey of self discovery by a faceless doll with a quest to destroy the queen of shadows that threatens to destroy the imaginary world created by Tommy’s father. Finally recognizing the shadow queen as his own mother, Tommy attempts to destroy his memories of her. He wants to live out his life in the shadow world with the Hermit, a character who looks and acts just like his father. But ultimately it will take one memory, his very first memory of mother and son, to save him from eternal darkness.

Statement of Intent:

Ham Sandwiches was born from the very moment I became a father and held my son in my arms for the first time. Even though the story itself would only manifest itself in my imagination a few years later, that moment changed my reality. All my goals and my deepest desires were influenced by how it would affect this life I created.

Being an only child, my son relies very heavily upon the relationship he has with both myself and my wife. So one day I raised the question: How would I as a parent cope without the influence or support of my wife should something happen to her? This prompted me to start looking at the lives of those closest to me. My best friend, a workaholic father of three does not know his children. He sees them on the weekends, sometimes not at all as his job takes him overseas on many occasions.

How would those children and my friend cope should something happen to their mother? Would he become more aware of his relationship with them? Would the children resent him? Who would change first and would change be possible? It was through these questions that the story of Ham Sandwiches was born. It was through a need to explore a frightening topic that I as a parent am terrified of and I want to tell it with all the feeling and honesty that I can muster.

Character Biographies:

Jonathan Harris: Mid thirties and a very successful novelist and journalist. He works from home, so gets to spend a lot of time with his son. Being a writer he connects with his son through fantasy stories that they often play out in imaginary worlds throughout the house. Jonathan is not the strict disciplinarian, choosing rather to allow his son to have freedom of choice.

Christine Harris: Thirty. A young ambitious attorney trying to find her way in a very competitive career. She’s a workaholic, goal orientated and strong woman. She is on the brink of becoming her firms go to lawyer after winning a massive case. Her dedication to her career has seen her drift away from her husband emotionally. She is also unable to connect with her son and so relies very heavily on her husband to ensure he receives the values she herself does not have time to teach him.

Tommy Harris: Ten. Small for his age, incredibly intelligent. Tommy has an imagination second to none. He lives for his father’s stories and wants to be just like him. His relationship with his mom is strained and often played out through instructions, but his love for her is very real, with a desire to connect with her and make her proud. The problem though, he has no idea how to communicate with her.

The Doll: A faceless handcrafted doll given to Tommy by a beggar outside his school as a gift for his kindness becomes Tommy’s mentor and conscience through a fantastic journey through his imagination.

Sir Blake: The hero from Jonathan’s fantasy novels and Tommy’s companion on his quest to find the Hermit of knowledge. Sir Blake has been Tommy’s hero his whole life.

The Hermit: He looks and acts just like Jonathan Harris and in Tommy’s mind is his real father.

Synopsis:

A clean family home with happy photos hung proudly on the walls, shows a family very much in control. An ominous figure, hooded and carrying a weapon stalks up the stairs and enters the bedrooms, looking for something. He enters a bedroom littered with toys and Star Wars posters. Suddenly a small figure launches from behind the door and onto the man’s back. A playful sword fight ensues between father and son. Jonathan Harris and Tommy.

Lights flash from outside as a car pulls into the driveway. Christine is home! Jonathan grabs his son and starts pulling his clothes off. They both find it a little funny, even though they know trouble is opening the front door.

Christine Harris, a stunning beauty in a serious corporate way is upset that her son has once again missed his bedtime and lets her feelings known. Christine is all business, even when she’s not in the office.

That evening Jonathan tells Christine about Tommy’s fear of jumping off the high board at the swimming pool. (Foreshadowing)

Morning. Jonathan is making his son a magical ham sandwich. First he grinds down the bones of an ancient dragon to make the bread and smears it with smelted fairies gold. For garnish nothing else will do except freshly killed trolls flesh and flavored with the blood of giants. This is Tommy’s favorite breakfast.

Christine is running late and rushes through the kitchen paying only a passing attention to her son. Today is the day the jury will rule on her latest case and she expects nothing but victory. Tommy is excited about a comic book convention she promised to take them to the next day and Christine confirms that all is on track.

Jonathan picks Tommy up from school when an old bum begs them for money. Jonathan refuses but Tommy gives the old man the change from his lunch money. Grateful, the old man gives Tommy a hand crafted doll as a gift that he claims has magical powers and will come to his aid when he’s needed most.

The next morning with Tommy excited about their trip, Christine gets a call from her office. She has just landed the biggest case of her career and has to go into the office. The trip is cancelled, leaving Tommy crushed, Jonathan fuming and Christine promising to get home as soon as she can.

Jonathan takes Tommy to the mall to take his mind off the disappointment and they are involved in a car accident. Jonathan is killed.

Christine is devastated at the hospital. She visits a withdrawn and emotionless Tommy who is yet to cry. When she tries to reassure him that the accident was not his fault, Tommy is cold in his response. “No, it’s your fault.”

It’s a week since Jonathan’s death and the day after the funeral and Christine isn’t coping. Tommy still hasn’t cried and hardly speaks. She makes him a ham sandwich, knowing it’s his favorite. The ham sandwich is a stark reminder of what Tommy has lost and it sends him over the edge. He smashes the plate against the floor and attacks his mom with pounding fists and hysterical screaming. Christine grabs him as he starts to convulse.

At the hospital, the doctor tells Christine that Tommy has withdrawn from reality into a state of catatonia. He’s waging a war in his own mind as he tries to come to terms with all that’s happened. A nurse gives Christine a package that was dropped off for her. It is all the contents that were retrieved from Jonathan’s car. Inside is the wooden doll that she puts beside his bed.

Christine falls asleep when suddenly the room begins to shake. Cracks form on the walls and the roof starts breaking apart. The doll comes alive and shakes Tommy awake. It’s an earthquake. Tommy and the doll escape just as the room collapses.

They’re in a fantasy world. Dragons shoot across the sky, while unicorns graze nearby. Tommy’s excitement grows when he sees a tree with the leaves in the shape of bright red hearts. “The beating Tree” is a symbol from one of his dads stories.

Tommy tells the story of how he believes his dad named his favorite character, a dragon, after him. He also expresses his disappointment that his mom never took an interest in his dad’s stories.

Tommy and the doll meet Sir Blake, the main hero from his dad’s stories. He’s on a quest to destroy the Queen of Shadows, an evil sorceress that is slowly destroying their world. But in order to do that Sir Blake must find the Hermit of knowledge, a character famed to have all the answers. This excites Tommy, as he knows that the Hermit was based on his dad. Tommy is convinced that it is his dad and begs Sir Blake to allow him to accompany him.

At first Sir Blake refuses, but when Tommy gets two unicorns to agree to let them ride them, he lets him tag along.

On the road, Tommy and Sir Blake are attacked by soldier trolls. Tommy defends himself admirably and impresses Sir Blake. In the distance they get their first look at the Shadow Queen, dressed in black and riding a black stallion that breathes fire. Tommy doesn’t recognize her as his mother.

They reach the mountain of loneliness and in the centre the home of the hermit. Tommy is ecstatic when he sees that it is his father. They embrace and Tommy is the happiest he has ever been.

 Nobody notices that they were followed. It’s too late and an army of trolls’ attacks, with the queen watching in the distance. Sir Drake is killed, something that Tommy cannot grasp because he is the hero of all the stories and never dies. The hermit is also taken hostage by the queen. With an evil laugh she leaves Tommy alone and in despair. Sir Blake gives Tommy his sword in the hope that he can finish his quest and save their world.

With resolve, Tommy vows to kill the queen and save his father.

Deep in the forbidden swamps, Tommy and the doll make their way toward the queen’s castle. But the closer they get, the darker it becomes. They are attacked by wolves and giant mosquitoes and with each step come despair and a sense of failure.

Tommy and the doll cross through a cave and into the lands of giants, haters of men. But in order to cross into their lands Tommy is faced with a waterfall and a golden lake far below. The only way down is to jump. Tommy is scared, but through the strength given to him by the doll he takes the plunge.

Buster, a young and impulsive giant watches in awe as Tommy makes the massive jump and then swims to shore. He offers Tommy aid by carrying him through the lands and hiding him from the giants who would surely enjoy the delicacy of human flesh.

The queen’s castle is within sight and Tommy is feeling upbeat when they are suddenly attacked. Buster is killed trying to save Tommy. The trolls take both the doll and Tommy prisoner.

Tommy is taken before the queen who sits on a golden throne held up by slaves. His father is locked in a cage hanging from the ceiling. The queen is beautiful as she talks to Tommy. The doll is warning him to see more. Not everything is as it seems. Finally Tommy recognizes the queen and realizes that everything is based on his own imagination. It gives him the power to manipulate his surroundings and in a moment of triumph he is able to break free of his bonds and attack the queen. But it’s a false victory as he realizes that even in his own mind he isn’t strong enough to defeat her.

The queen is elated by his failed attempt and taunts him by making him watch her as she kills his father. But Tommy, still in control, vows to destroy all his memories of his mother, thus giving her no power in this world. Tommy runs through a dark door.

He’s in a massive room. Suspended in the air are thousands upon thousands of framed pictures. Each one represents a single memory in his life.

The queen is in the room. She stalks past the pictures, goading Tommy into revealing himself.

Tommy looks at one of the pictures of his mother in the kitchen, dressed for work. On the picture is a number. 5678. He smashes it with all his strength and watches as the queen doubles over in pain. Tommy now knows how to beat her. He runs to another, 3444 and smashes that one too.

Tommy realizes that the only way to end this once and for all is to destroy the very first one. He runs through the pictures, looking at the numbers. They’re getting lower and lower, until he sees the one numbered “one”. It’s a picture of his mother, except she isn’t as beautiful as he knows her. Her hair is all messed up, her face is sweaty and she’s crying. Tommy senses the queen behind him and raises his fist to smash it. But then he hears the queen crying. She is no longer dressed in black, but as he remembers her best. As his mother. Tommy looks back at the picture and runs his hand over it.

He is in the hospital watching as his crying mother accepts a small baby from the doctor. His dad is there too, proud, smiling and kissing his wife. His mom takes the baby, the joy on her face impossible to hide. “I want to call him Tommy.” His dad nods.

Tommy turns to his mom who is on her knees. “I thought dad named the dragon after me?” She shakes her head with a smile. “No. I named you after his dragon.” Tommy embraces his mother, realizing that they do have something in common.

Tommy wakes up on the hospital bed. He is alone, the doll on the pillow next to him. He sees his mom outside talking to someone and gets up.

Christine tells her boss that needs to resign and be at home for her son. She sees Tommy awake and is overjoyed. Tommy hugs her tight and says he’s sorry.

At home, Tommy is in the kitchen waiting for breakfast when the doorbell rings. Christine answers it and it’s the newspaper delivery boy. He is gives her the latest copy of the daily newspaper that Jonathan used to write a weekly column in. There is a tribute to Jonathan on the front cover and a reference to his final published column. Christine turns to the page and the headline of the column read. “How to make the perfect Ham Sandwich.”