

April 2008

The MacDowell Colony ought not to exist. It's too good to be true. We don't deserve it.

The world spends its time forging an endless chain of reasons for us not to do our work, not to value our work, not to imagine that anyone gives a damn about the words, sounds or images that we make. Then we go to MacDowell — because strangely it *is* true, it *does* exist, improbably, enduringly, against all likelihood — and MacDowell feeds us well, and shelters us comfortably; it cares for our bodies and souls. But what does that matter! Bodies can be fed and sheltered, somehow, elsewhere; and souls are a dime a dozen. It's our work that matters. And the most improbable thing about The MacDowell Colony is that — unlike the world — it wants us to work, it's waiting for us, rooting for us, *working* for us to do our work, there in the shelter of its arms, under the birch trees. Our work is the reason for MacDowell. How crazy is that? What are the odds?

And so, even, though we don't deserve such grace — this gift, free and unmerited — we try to live up to it, and work our butts off. We work like Trojans. When I am home, on a good day, a very good day, I might end up with a thousand new words to add to my novel. At MacDowell, a thousand words is chump change. I get a thousand words before a dinner and a thousand after dinner, and sometimes when I go to bed, I get under the covers and close my eyes and lie there, writing, and get up out of bed again and go back to the computer and write 500 hundred more words as a nightcap. Then in the morning I wake up and find that I appear to have been writing in my sleep, because in my hand clutched like Coleridge's flower is a solution to a problem of plotting or characterization. Even at breakfast and dinner, talking with other colonists, I am working, because I find solutions and inspirations in hearing them talk about their struggles and their discoveries — their work. And walking back to my studio, through the snow and the silence, I am working out the meaning of their work, and my work, and our common work, here in this impossible place.

Ultimately only one thing, of course, makes the impossible so beautifully possible, and allows The MacDowell Colony to shed its grace on us: your contribution. Please help strike a blow for the continued possibility of the impossible, the ongoing goodness that is improbably true, even though we can only hope, and resolve, and work to deserve it.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael Chabon". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Michael Chabon  
Colony Fellow