

## Excerpt of Chapter Forty-Eight: No Sanctuary For This Old Man

### *Lean In*

**Verb, colloq.:** To grab opportunity without hesitation; to press a point with emphasis.

*Henry was looking up into the pitiless eyes of my older brother who was looking down at him with nothing but disgust.*

Halfway up the aisle, I had to dart and weave around people who were rapidly filling the center aisle after the Pastor's announcement. Just like that, my quarry became harder to get to. Focused only on Henry, I bobbed and weaved, almost knocking one woman down, but luckily, I sidestepped just enough that I glanced off her; however, I bumped her kinda hard. Quickly reaching backward with my left hand as I was passing, I tried to help her regain her balance as I rushed by. I did not look back to see if I was successful or had knocked her to the ground.

When I arrived at Henry, I was the fourth person in line. Just like in the hallway when I was five people behind him, I was close enough to reach out and grab him. The width of three bodies was all that stood between me and the man I waited thirty-two years to confront once again.

*"So much for being the first to get to him – three people ahead of me. At least it isn't fifteen or twenty."*

Now the fourth in line, I purposely stood just to the right of him, behind his right shoulder where he couldn't see me. I didn't want him to be talking to someone and then spot me. No, I wanted this to be one hell of a family reunion. When he laid eyes on me, I wanted him flustered, confused, but most importantly, emotionally knocked off balance. I wanted him disoriented and terrified, just like my brother and I had discussed in the car on the way to the church. I wanted to see the same fear in his eyes that my sisters saw when he stood over them, and they heard the sound of *ziiiiiip!*

I looked back toward the sanctuary doors. David was still in his seat. He hadn't moved from his seat after I rushed past him. However, he was looking directly at me. He knew he was too late to warn his baby brother.

The plan was simple: I'd say what I came to say, show him the pictures, drop them at his feet, and then we could bounce. This wouldn't take long, ten minutes at most. Ten minutes and it would finally be over.

How wrong I was.

Besides the three people ahead of me, others began surrounding him, talking amongst themselves. The church was alive with excited conversations as adults and kids who hadn't seen each other in years caught up.

With my folder of pictures in my hands, I waiting for my time to move in and pounce. Being so close to what I'd waited years to do was exhilarating. It was invigorating to know how close I was to delivering vengeance. Honestly, knowing I was about to slay the monster was incredibly empowering. I had never felt more powerful in my life.

Ahead of me were three people - one man and two women. The first person, a Black woman wearing a black dress, was standing in front of the seated and walker-less Henry. She was smiling and laughing as he greeted her with a loud, "Hey -- -!!!! How are you?" The woman was all smiles as she bent down to give him a hug. Talking softly, she shared whatever it was she wanted to share. After she said her piece, she walked off and stood about ten feet away from Henry and waited. I suppose she was waiting for someone in line.

Next, it was the man's turn, two people ahead of me. Wearing a black suit, the man stepped up with a huge grin on his face and shook Henry's hand. "Hey, \*\*\*\*\*!!!! My man, what's going

on?” The man leaned in, and he too whispered in Henry’s ear and stood up as they both laughed about what he had said. Then he turned and walked to stand by to the woman who had gone first.

I know if I were fuming watching all this, James, wherever he stood, had to be boiling inside, too. We had seen this act hundreds of times over the seventeen years Henry was our stepfather. His boisterous laughter at his own cleverness. His overt arrogance that we brothers despise so much because it constantly points to our failings. It is this “I got away with it” brazenness being rubbed in our faces by the molester and those who empower him – spouses, law enforcement, legislators, judges, community leaders, and clergy – that drives us to want to lash out in any way imaginable.

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The fact is gender, age, race, wealth, religion, societal norms, political parties, legal systems, and more defend the molester first. These protections by government, religious, and union policies have seeped so far into our national education system victims of sexual abuse end up being treated more like abusers than the abused. Sexual abuse has become so systemic it is affectively acceptable at the highest levels of government if you have the financial wherewithal to buy your autonomy. This archaic, systemic, and social bias around gender, race, and economic inequality ensures sexual predators get away with their crimes 99.99% of the time without ever having to answer to anyone. When the molester is initially accused, it is usually we victims who are shamed simply for coming forward and sharing our pain. Or even worse, if your abuser is the right skin color and a male it is viewed simply as “boys being boys.” And when the abuser admits their crime(s), it is “locker room talk” or “boys sharing jokes” – nothing to look at here folks, move along.

Often, as was the case with my sister Brenda, thanks to my Mother's encouragement, victims become undesirable number one in the family and are told never to mention what happened to them to anyone, ever. Unless justice is brought quickly, victims are branded as outcasts by their family and friends, forever preserved in family lore as pariahs.

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The second woman, who was also wearing a black dress, moved in to speak to Henry.

"Henry, honey, how *are* you?"

"Hey – -!!!! I'm good. How are you?"

One person back. I was closer to him than I had been in almost thirty-three years. I could literally reach out and grab him by the throat and squeeze the life out of him if I wanted too. If I'd been a dog, I'd have been salivating, growling, frothing at the mouth, hardly able to contain my excitement for the upcoming feast. But, no, I had no need to draw attention to myself. All I had to do was just wait a little while longer, and he would be mine.

It wasn't until then that I noticed James was standing just behind on my left. Oddly enough, when I made my dash to get to Henry, I hadn't given any thought to James. I just stood and went for the Beast. But now, seeing James next to me was reassuring. He was there simply to ensure I got back to our sisters.

Glancing across the room, I noticed a large muscular Black man in a multi-colored short sleeve tight fitting shirt next to the woman and man who had spoken to Henry earlier. This guy was huge. He was standing by and watching people converse with the grieving husband who seemed to be enjoying the spotlight.

It was good that Henry was sitting. It gave me a temporary advantage. At 6'6", and now pushing 300lbs compared to my 5'9," 175lbs, height was an advantage I hadn't counted on, but I

welcomed it just the same. Even though I was in great physical shape, a man with Henry's height and weight could still easily hurt me or knock me off balance if he stood up quickly and lunged at me or hit me.

With my turn fast approaching, a woman in black came up and stood next to me on my left side, just in front of James. She had positioned herself slightly in front of me. If she thought she could 'cute look' her way ahead of me, she was sadly mistaken. Today was not that day. I had not waited almost thirty-three years to let anyone get in front of me. No, today is my day. Today is my only if-I-had-a-second-chance day. Today is one of these days. Today is someday.

Without a word, I turned my head and glared at her with a look that plainly said, "Are you really trying to jump ahead of me? How dare you! You need to back the fuck up!" She instantly grasped the meaning of my look, walked away.

Finally, the last person before me stopped her giggling and laughing with Henry and stepped aside, leaving nothing but rapidly chilling air between Henry and me. The reckoning had finally arrived.

I stepped forward and I turned to face him.

Henry looked up at me. His eyes were shining bright, full of life, a grin stretching from ear to ear. It was as if laying eyes on a long-lost friend. But what he saw looking back at him was not friendly. I looked down at him with pure hatred in my heart. The creature was cornered. He was mine.

*I* was staring into the eyes of the man who had molested and raped my four little sisters. When I stopped before him in 1986, ready to kill him, I only knew a little of what he had done to my two oldest sisters. This time, I stood in front of him full of the knowledge about what

irredeemable sins he had committed against all four of my sisters and how all four of them – all eight of us kids – struggle with it today.

At first, his shit-faced didn't recognize me. Staring at him, I allowed the moment to linger silently a few moments. His grin never faded. However, his eyes narrowed, focusing on a past he believed he had long left behind that was now rushing toward him at 200 plus mph.

*“Ah, there it is...comprehension, understanding.”* Now that I had his full attention, I slowly, quietly, and methodically said...

“Henry. Lee. Perrin.”