

From Helplessness To Hopefulness To Happiness

BOOK 1

HELPLESSNESS

**WHAT HAPPENS TO BROTHERS WHEN WE LEARN
OUR SISTERS HAVE BEEN MOLESTED BY OUR PARENTS?**

EXCERPT

Chapter 5: Rise Of The Stepson

NICK

KEEPER

CATRAN-WHITNEY

Chapter Five: Rise Of The Stepson

Zziipppp

Verb: The sound heard when a zipper is closing or opening.

*Little Nicky, you are not strong enough to withstand my world, my inferno.
I will show you no mercy.*

“Remember why you are doing this. Remember what he made them do to satisfy his perverted sexual desires. I must protect them from him because it is apparent Mom won’t lift a finger to stop him. When he came into our family, he promised to protect us. He promised not to abuse us. He vowed to protect all eight of us kids and we all believed him, we all trusted him. But it turns out he’s a monster, a monster that must be put down for good. Slay the monster; that’s why I’m doing this. *Slay the monster.*”

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To this day, I imagine my little sisters with him, the monster, "Baby," in the house where it all began in 1971...in our home on 53rd Street and Figueroa. It's the same images over and over. It's like I'm watching a movie. The pictures never deviate, they never change. And the movie in my head always starts the same way. I close my eyes. Black. Silent. I can only hear the sound of my breathing. Faster. Faster. Faster. Deeper. My chest rises and falls. Knowing what's coming my eyes begin darting back and forth, left to right, up and down. Searching. Searching. Searching. Listening. Then I hear it. It's a metallic sound off in the distance. It's getting louder, coming closer. It's the sound of guilt and pain.

Click. Click. Click.

Slowly the 8MM feeds its way into the gray and silver Bell & Howell, shuttering through my mind.

The cellophane snake makes its way over and around one eight-spoked reel. It descends until it makes contact with, and goes under sprocket one and into the gate where an extremely bright light is prepared to receive its arrival.

Then, for a split second, an image flashes before my eyes, and then it is gone. But I can just make it out. It's a slightly unfocused image of my little sisters sitting on their bed, trembling. They are wearing their signature cute, flowery, white dresses with those blue ruffled collars, white socks, and scuffed up black shoes. Their soft black curly hair is pulled back into twin ponytails. Each ponytail is held in place by a black, elastic hair tie with those cheap blue plastic balls on the end that you can get at any Newberry's or Thrifty's Drug Store. They look as if it's picture day at school.

Another burst of light, and then black. They're gone.

"Wait! What is that?"

Click. Click. Click. Click.

The sound of the super 8 passing in front of the bright light continues, but there is nothing to see. My body tenses as my eyes move from side to side, searching.

Behind a long cylindrical lens protruding from the gray metal box, I hear the film feeding the beast of my imagination as it passes behind the lens, now projecting nothing but a dark grayish image with white flickering numbers and letters. My eyes squint as I await what comes next.

Click. Click. Click. Click. Click.

Light!

A new series of images stutters and shifts before me. In the background, the soundtrack of film winding its way through a brother's dark imagination plays. They're back. Their beautiful baby faces are now broken by a flow of fear-filled tears streaming from soft eyes that are wide and terrified. Their tiny legs and knees tremble as they try to keep them closed tight. Their short fingernails are dirty from playing outside with their big brothers' moments ago.

Black.

I think, "No, not again! Why can't I turn this shit off? Why can't I stop thinking about this?"

Unrelenting, the film slithers its way to the stabilizer and then down. The thin serpent follows a winding path to reel two, where it attaches and begins being pulled up and over.

Bell and Howell flickers from dark to light. Faster and faster the film travels. Its click, click, click is getting louder and louder as the sound of my mind's expectation, and fear

begins pounding in my head. My fear-filled anticipation has set off a deep, low, reverberating sound like that of a church bell. Boooooonnnng! Boooooonnnng!

Slowly the visual tones and the atmosphere of my imagination begin taking on a more distinct shape. The light has become brighter, the theater screen in my head has stretched to the size of an IMAX® screen. This scene is becoming more cinematic with every passing second.

"Ugggggh!" I know what's coming next and I want it to stop.

Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click.

Howelling, the film is now at full speed. Every time I get to this point, I want to snatch the film out of the projector and throw it where it belongs - in the trash. I want to return to my blissful ignorance, but because it's my imagination at work, I am not allowed that favor.

BOOM!

Images explode across my mind. Images of little girls. It's my four little sisters. They have filled every crevice of my imagination.

What were moments ago dim, hazy thoughts have become dark, ugly images that only a brother could imagine. I want to turn the projector off. I want the snake to stop slithering. I want it to stop. But it won't. It is forcing me to watch.

My eyes expand as my breath is ripped from my throat.

There's Henry, and he is sitting next to...

As I am locked onto what's in front of my mind Bell and Howell whirs as if it were alive. What I am now being shown is horrifying, and...and ... it's real. It is all too real.

Terror is firmly etched in each of my sisters' faces. Henry moves to sit next to them. He bends over and gently whispers words they cannot comprehend. Before they can respond, Henry puts one rough, humongous hand, a hand that can swallow one of my hands whole, on the small of their backs and begins rubbing up and down. He then reaches the other hand toward their tiny little legs, coming to a stop between their knees. Slowly his long fingers begin to expand, forcing their tiny legs open.

Detonation.

Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click.

He is feeling them all over, touching their hair, their faces, as he tries to stem their flow of tears. He speaks to them softly the whole time, reassuring them that everything is all right, that

all this is normal. I can picture them so young, so innocent, and yet, each knows something awful is about to happen to them.

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He has my sisters in his and Mom's bedroom. He is looking at them with a hunger in his eyes that they have never seen before.

In the semi-darkness, in the only bedroom on the first floor, in the room next to the front door, he is alone with them. No one can hear them. No one can see them. Sitting on the bed, they are paralyzed with fear. What can they do? Where can they run? Is there no adult around to help them? To protect them? To hear their tiny screams?

I can see the looks on their faces, desperately hoping someone, anyone, will burst through the bedroom door into his secret hiding place and holler, "Stop! You monster!" saving them from what is about to happen. My little sisters, who have never had a problem being heard in our house, want to holler, to scream for help. I see them opening their mouths to form words as a stream of tears slowly navigates down their faces, before falling mutedly into their trembling laps. They need to say something that will get him to stop, but fear has robbed them of their powerful voices. Not a word escapes their mouth – except one.

As tear after tear drips from their faces, they manage a single guttural sound. In Henry's sick mind, this sound – barely audible, scarcely able to be articulated – is all Henry needs to continue pursuing his desire. To this monster, my five and six-year-old sisters have just blessed him with permission to proceed.

Wide-eyed, they look down in terror, and watch, as his enormous fingers spread and slowly creep up the inside of their legs. Panting like an agitated female dog in heat, Henry's hot breath spreads over them, coating them as he leans ever closer to hear the whispered word, he has so longed to hear.

In a low quick voice, Henry whispers, “Don’t say anything.”

“Okay.”

“Don’t tell anybody.”

“Okay.”

“Don’t tell Mommy.”

“Okay.”

“Don’t tell your brothers.”

“Okay.”

“Don’t tell the twins.”

“Okay.”

“It’s our little secret. It will be all right.”

“Okay.”

“It won’t hurt.”

“Okay.”

“You believe me, right?”

“Okay.”

“It’s okay because Mommy knows.”

“Okay.”

As my little sisters continue saying, “Okay,” the one word their stepfather desperately seeks to hear after each question, he takes their answer not only as consent, but as them urging him to keep going. To him, it means consensual sex with a six-year-old has been granted. For him, it means, “I’ll do what you want, daddy, if that will make you happy.” As each strained, “Okay,” is forced out, he begins to slowly stand up and face them.

After uncoiling himself like a giant serpent, our stepfather reaches his full height of six-foot-six. Taking a few steps to the side, he reaches over and turns off the dimly lit lamp on the nightstand. The only light now coming into the bedroom comes from sunlight that manages to fight its way through several rips of double-thick black plastic leaf-and-lawn bags covering the bedroom window.

The two hands by his side a few seconds ago have begun slowly and deliberately making their way toward his belt buckle. His massive chest rises and settles, rises, and settles. My sisters can hear his ragged breathing. It is a sound they have never heard the like of before in their young lives. It is the sound of child sexual predator anticipation.

Unbuckling his black belt, Henry knows he does not have on underpants, and this excites him even more. He is so exhilarated by their answers. Each, “Okay,” intoxicates him to the point that he can barely hold on.

To Henry, there is only one thing left for them to do. His long fat fingers unsnap his pants. Never taking his gaze off my sisters’ eyes, he longs for a reaction from them. He hungers for any sign of a hint indicating they know what is coming once his pants, which are as long as my sisters are tall, hit the floor. The very notion that they may know what is about to happen quickens his breathing, exhilarating him even more.

Grasping his pant zipper and tugging down slowly, never taking his gaze off them, the bedroom fills with the slow sound of – *Zziipppp!*

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The zipper reaches its metal ‘bottom stop,’ terminating its descent. His pants begin to slip down his legs. A large bulge is pushing the fabric out just below the zipper, but due to his protuberance, his pants only drop inches.

Grasping the outside waistband of his pants, he begins pulling them down even further stopping below his knees. He releases his hands. Even though he has let go of his pants, they continue slowly, silently sliding down his long hairy legs. They finally come to a halt covering his scuffed, unpolished black shoes as the soft rustle of clothing contacting the dirty floor, kicks up dust.

His breathing is heavy now with his child prey right in front of him and nowhere for them to run. Even more exciting is knowing no one is in the house to stop him.

In my mind's eye, I visualize my little sisters are horrified by what they see. For the first time, at age six, they see an adult penis, one that is fully erect.

In the near darkness, light bounces off drifting dust as each lit particle fades into shadow, only to reappear in the next sliver of sunlight. Standing in the middle of the room, the towering, near-naked silhouette of our stepfather is backlit, glistening as sweat traces the outline of his butt and legs. Taking a step toward my little sisters, he comes to a halt directly in front of them, his eye-level protrusion indicating how visibly excited he is to be alone with them.

With absolute terror in their eyes, my little sisters do their best to look up past the erect penis and into his face, fearful of what is literally thrusting at them.

In a room void except for the slightest of light and the sound of the zipper being pulled down, they are exposed to something their wildest imaginations could never conjure in a million years. The room is filled with Henry's deep heavy breathing. To a six-year-old trapped in an oubliette, their stepfather has been transformed into something they cannot comprehend. The hulking shadow of the semi-nude Henry is enormous.

For my little sisters, falling into this looking glass is much deeper and darker than the one for Alice. There is no blue caterpillar smoking a hookah to guide them to safety or a white rabbit

racing past them shouting a warning to escape before it is too late. It is only them, and one very mad, mad, hatter.

This mountain of a man who becomes even larger when wearing his huge afro wig – which covers his receding hairline – and his large beard must look like the mythical Bigfoot monster as he towers over them. Standing mere inches from them, Henry shuffles towards my sisters, turns around, and sits down next to them on the bed. Breathing hard, he whispers, “There is nothing to be afraid of. People do this all the time.” Seizing one of their hands, he says, “Here, touch it. It’s okay. Let me show you how easy it is.” He then takes one of their tiny hands and places it on his penis exactly where he wants it. “See, honey, there is nothing to be afraid of.”

Frightened and alone, they scream out, “No! I don’t want to! I want to get out of here. Where is Mommy? Where are the boys? Where are the twins?”

Unfortunately, their screams are not heard since they exist only in their heads. He then raises one of his giant hands, puts it on the back of their heads, and gently forces their faces slowly down, down, down until – “Aaah.”

Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click