

**From Helplessness To Hopefulness To Happiness**

**BOOK 1**

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# **HELPLESSNESS**

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

***EXCERPT***

***Chapter Fourteen: The Room Where  
It First Happened***

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## Chapter Fourteen: The Room Where It First Happened

### *Reign*

Noun: The time period in which a sovereign has authority or rules; the period in which an individual is in power.

*“Where sickness thrives, bad things will follow.”- The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*

### Summer 1970

We are living in a faded pink house on 53<sup>rd</sup> and Figueroa in Los Angeles. We’ve been in this house since late January, after being forced out of our Exposition Blvd. squalor-of-a-home literally at gunpoint by the Black Panther Party.

I’m 10 years old in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, my first year at Main Street Elementary School. Since starting school, this is my ninth elementary school. The first two schools I attended were Humboldt Elementary (Kindergarten) and Irvington Elementary (1<sup>st</sup> grade) in Portland, Oregon. Those two schools were followed by Ambler Ave. Elementary in Gardena, CA (2<sup>nd</sup> grade), Angeles Mesa Elementary (3<sup>rd</sup> grade), Menlo Avenue Elementary (4<sup>th</sup> grade) and back to Irvington Elementary in Portland, Oregon. The ninth elementary school I attended was in Longview, Washington, somewhere between 1964-1965. That was the year my two youngest sisters, the twins were born. We moved around so much I don’t remember the name of the *first* elementary school I attended in the second grade. I think it was Kessler Elementary School.

By 1970 I had already lived in at least six different homes (that I know of) in three different states – Oregon, Washington, and California. Of all the crazy things I could have remembered about the first time being homeless in California (I can’t speak about being homeless in Oregon or Washington because I was too young) is balloons – big, fat, humongous balloons. I don’t recall how many days we were homeless after the Black Panther eviction; however, what I do remember

is the ten of us driving around like a can of packed sardines on wheels in our faded green, two-door Buick Riviera, with only the clothes on our backs and those we brought back from our three-month visit with my grandparents, my mother's parents, in Portland. I remember stopping at gas stations to go to the bathroom, getting chips and soda, or pulling into Jack in the Box to get hamburgers, fries, and a drink.

Back then, when we ordered food from Jack in the Box, they gave us handfuls of huge colorful balloons. When we blew them up, they would be over a foot long and fat and looked like the Goodyear Blimp. If it hadn't been for those balloons keeping eight kids entertained as we drove around, I am sure Mom and her new husband, "Baby," would have gone crazy. It seemed like 24/7 Mom and Henry were looking in newspapers for cheap homes to rent. They called around until someone said, "Yes." Once we got the house on 53<sup>rd</sup> Street my mother told us, if the landlord, a white man, ever came by and asked how many people lived in the house, to say only four: my mom, Henry, me and my oldest sister Brenda. During that time this white man was the only white person I repeatedly had contact with. Other than our white landlord the only other white people who came to our house were bill collectors or meter readers.

My older brother James and I were close enough in age that either of us could answer the door. Each month when the landlord came to collect rent and I answered the door, he always asked how many people lived there. I always said four: my mom, my dad, my sister, and me. Eventually we kids learned what day was rent day. On that day, the younger kids had to be quiet when someone knocked on the front door.

For my two oldest sisters, this was the house where *it* all began. A half-century of emotional and physical pain and torment began for the two of them in this unassuming pink, two-story house in a typical inner-city neighborhood.

It was in this house that I first got a faint glimpse of my real “New Dad.” One night long after everyone but me had gone to sleep. In that moment and for seventeen years after, I didn’t know what I had seen. Nor did I know what I heard. I realize now that I was too young to understand, too innocent, too completely naïve. Now that I know what was going on that night almost fifty-years ago, I can close my eyes and replay the scene as if it were happening right now.

We boys would change bedroom partners from time to time. Usually, we switched because two of us sharing a room would have a falling out over something silly. That warm summer night, the night I was introduced to the predator, I shared a bedroom with my older brother, who was 11 at the time. Our bedroom door opened onto a long hall which ended at the top of the stairs. Our bedroom had the only upstairs window looking out onto 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. My two younger brothers shared a bedroom just to the right of ours. My four younger sisters slept in two bedrooms, some twenty feet away at the top of the stairs. My three youngest sisters, whom we affectionately called “The Baby Girls,” shared a bedroom, which was immediately to the left at the top of the stairs. Since my oldest sister Brenda was four years older than my next oldest sister, Sharon, she had her own bedroom. Brenda’s bedroom was to the right of the three youngest girls: Sharon, Renée and Teresa.

Usually when my older brother James and I went to bed, we left our bedroom door open because I didn’t like the dark. My bed was closest to the door. I didn’t like sleeping at the head of the bed because I couldn’t see out the door. I was afraid someone would come into our home and kill me. So, each night, I would flip my body around and sleep at the bottom of the bed. This position made it possible for me to look out our bedroom door and down the hall to the top of the stairs. The hallway light never had more than a 60-watt bulb in it. With our bedroom door open,

the light some fifteen feet away cast a dim light into our bedroom. That was enough light for me not to be scared.

James and I slept on beat-up old mattresses without frames or box springs. Like the windows downstairs, all the bedroom windows upstairs had lawn and leaf bags taped to them, acting as curtains. Over time, these plastic curtains became brittle and cracked, leaving gaping holes that allowed us to look out onto the street below. These holes let the bright streetlight filter into the bedroom, augmenting the dim hall light when our door was open.

On this warm summer night, all eight of us kids were upstairs sleeping as usual. My Mom and “New Dad,” Henry, were downstairs in their bedroom. All the lights were out, except for the bathroom light downstairs next to the kitchen, and the only sound was the loud humming coming from the refrigerator.

Looking across my dirty bedroom floor, I see I am not the only creature awake. It is now quiet and dark enough for the roaches to come out and play. Fifteen to twenty of them saunter across the floor in their nightly ritual of hunting for food and water. Off in the distance by the door are my shoes, and I am not the only one who sees them. A gang of cockroaches quietly approaches and climbs into my sweaty shoes as if they are going to a nightclub. As I watch the roaches descend into my shoes, a pair of antennae moving quickly back and forth like windshield wipers rise over my mattress. A second later they are followed by two brown, triangle-shaped heads, four tiny, beady eyes, two mouths, and eight pinching things I have no idea what they do. Slightly startled, I jump, and we all freeze. The three of us are face-to-face. I look at them and they at me. Yuck! I raise my hand and quickly knock the late-night partygoers off the bed.

Roaches climbing up the bed and knocking them off was a nightly ritual for us kids whenever we went to sleep. Each morning I had to pound my shoes on the floor to dislodge the

roaches who hadn't made it back home after a late night of partying. I guess they were too drunk off sweaty shoe odor to leave. If I didn't pound the shoes, I'd feel that crunching of squashed roach heads, thorax, wings, and legs when I stuck my feet in my shoes. Since my socks had holes in them and if I forgot to dislodge the roaches...liquid *yuck!*

Since we had no dressers in our bedroom, our clothes were on the floor. A few clothes are folded, but most are scattered in piles in a corner - clean mixed with dirty and funky. I can still see roaches crawling on the clothes piles now. It was like their after hour Snooty Fox motel. I had to remember to shake out the clothes in the morning, not wanting to take any cockroaches to school as I had the week before.

As I lie on my tattered old mattress, I look out onto the dimly lit hallway where I see five or six fat rats jumping from the top of the stairs. I hear them softly hitting the floor at the bottom of the stairs. As one leaps and lands at the bottom of the stairs, another is already running back up. Another rat is in midflight. A second later its tiny paws land with a soft "thud!" It scurries back up the stairs and lines up as another rat jumps. Then the next one leaps. That rat doesn't land so softly. I hear it slide and hit the wall at the bottom. But it scurries back up the stairs and gets in line behind the others. The rats played this game nightly.

Ever since we moved into this house, no matter what wattage bulb is in the hall light, 60 watts or 200 watts, the hallway has a dark, depressing feeling, as though something sinister and evil is lurking. Because of that, no one likes going upstairs alone unless absolutely necessary, and we get back downstairs as quickly as possible. Years later our mother told us an old lady was murdered upstairs in one of the bedrooms. It happened to be the bedroom none of us kids like sleeping in. What we thought was faded paint stains on the floor was blood stains that couldn't be removed. Perhaps that sinister feeling was the old lady? I think so.

Other than the rats playing and the roaches crawling, all is quiet. It must be about 1 o'clock in the morning, and I'm still awake. I must go to sleep. I have school in a few hours. I cover myself, including my head, with the blanket so no roaches can crawl on my face or hair again.

I have never been a deep sleeper unless I am really exhausted. When I sleep, sounds easily wake me, or I hear things while I am sleeping, and I think I am dreaming when, in fact, what I am dreaming is actually happening. Not until the next day when I wake up do I find out what I thought was a dream was actually real. This night is no different.

I finally close my eyes and go to sleep. I'm dreaming I'm in our house. All is quiet. It is long after bedtime for the eight kids living here.

In my dream, it is late into the night when I hear...

Shuffle. Shuffle. Shuffle. Shuffle.

Each approaching shuffle sounds like a creature slyly coming from the distance. What type of creature could be hunting in a house at this time of night? Unbeknownst to me, an apex predator is stalking its favorite prey. The shuffling sounds I hear are heavy feet trying to be quiet as the creature approaches.

Slide-step. Slide-step. Slide-step.

The rats on the stairs freeze. They hear what I hear and abruptly stop jumping. Like me, they realize something large and heavy is coming toward their play area. The heavy footsteps sounds the alarm alerting them danger is coming their way. They quickly scurry under the door leading into the upstairs storage room. The rats are fully aware no one goes in the storage room. The rats know they are safe. But the *genus Rattus* base jumpers needn't be concerned, for they are not the hunted this night. But what the apex-predator hunts is *not* safe. Not at all.

At the bottom of the stairs, an extra-long creaking and squeaking of the unoiled hinges on the door leading to the five upstairs bedrooms indicates something is attempting to quietly come through it.

Startled, I wake. What's that? What's making that sound?

The squeaking stops now and the door is fully open.

By the sound of it something large steps through the doorway and pauses. The shape is tall and dark. Then, the figure ascends the first two stairs.

Not fully awake I can see something rising over the stairway landing as if looking through a grey fog. My eyes have not adjusted to the dim light and yet I can make out a faint outline that looks like hair.

Another step up, and more hair. Another step up, and then in the dim light I see it. It's not just hair. It's a wig, a huge afro-wig. It's Henry. But what is he doing? Where is he going? Why is he trying to be so quiet? Maybe he needs something from the storage room and doesn't want to wake anyone.

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The predator quietly slips through his downstairs bedroom door. Quietly making his way through the living room, dining room, and kitchen he listens intently for any sound that would end his hunt. Finally, he makes a sharp left and walks six feet, coming to a halt at the bottom of the stairs. He is in the alcove.

Fortunately for him the hallway light dies a quarter of the way down the staircase. There is no light where he is standing in the niche between the kitchen and the bottom of the stairs. This small, unlit area is perfect for him; the lack of light allows the huge man to hide in the shadows at the bottom of the stairs.

The lightless area affords him the opportunity to stop and listen for movement or talking from the kids upstairs. He takes deep slow breaths, which calm his excited energy and slows down his heart rate. Taking time to linger in the shadows, he takes advantage of those heightened senses that he has called on to help him with tonight's hunt. He looks, listens, and even sniffs the air for any clue or scent that may cause him to abandon tonight's quarry. If any warning should present itself, he will slither back to his bedroom and wait until the next night to capture his prey.

Not sensing any movement or hearing a sound, he knows his way is clear. Before taking another step, he can see the dim light in the upstairs hall. He knows if the light is still on when he reaches the top of the stairs, he can be seen. A gentle press down of the light switch at the bottom of the stairs and click! The hall light is out. Moving silently in the dark like an apex-predator on the hunt, Henry is unaware that I see him.

Now in full stealth mode, he silently ascends the long staircase, one slow step after another.

With the hall light out, the sexual predator is once again on the move. With each step, he is getting closer and closer to the ten-year-old little girl he has been molesting for months - his oldest stepdaughter.

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Ascending the wooden staircase in the almost pitch black my stepfather is doing his best not to wake any of us from our slumber. With each step in almost total darkness, the child molester is trying very hard not to make a sound. He doesn't want to wake any of us kids, especially us four boys, who are thirty feet away. As he gets closer to what he desires, he finds it harder and harder to contain his sexual excitement for his favorite stepdaughter. However, because of his size and weight, his footsteps are getting louder and louder as they land on each...

"Creak."

After finally reaching the top of the stairs, my stepfather pauses. He sees it - the door to my oldest sisters bedroom. What he has desired all day is four feet away from him. The room where she is alone. Where there is no one in there to save her. Where there will be no interruption. He knows she is helpless - helpless to scream., helpless to fight back, helpless to stop him.

A quick glance to the left and he sees the three baby girls' bedroom door. He pauses and smiles and thinks, "Soon."

The room where his defenseless stepdaughter lies is one short step to the right, and she will be his once again. Reaching, he grabs the doorknob and gently turns. Slowly, quietly, he pushes the door open. Even though the door is old like the alcove door at the bottom of the stairs, when he opens it, he knows the hinges won't make a sound. He oiled it months ago so it would not wake the others – so it would keep his secret.

After months of late-night visits to her bedroom, the child molester is a master stalker, a master of the hunt. He knows how long he will have to play with and torment his emotionally and physically defenseless stepdaughter. He also knows how long "*SHE*" will wait before exiting their downstairs bedroom and come to the bottom of the stairs and whisper up to her husband, "Baby, you've been in her room long enough. It is time to come back downstairs." He knows no matter what the mother, who knew exactly what he was after when he exited their bedroom minutes ago, says, he is in no rush. He will have the time to play with his prey if he wants. It has been that way from the time they moved into the house on 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. The house where he decided to claim his reward for marrying the single mother with eight little children who needed feeding and housing.

Silently slipping into her room he makes a quarter turn to close the door behind him, all the while listening to make sure all is still quiet on the other side. He hears a tiny sound. The small sound of someone clearing their throat. Turning away from the door he realizes the sound is

coming from the ten-year-old girl sleeping on her double-stacked mattresses. She is no doubt dreaming of her next day at Main Street Elementary School.

Very tired, I fall back to sleep.

Another set of footsteps shuffling across the floor off in the distance wakes me. Lazily I open my eyes. The steps are lighter, moving faster as they pass through the kitchen and into the alcove. Coming to a halt at the bottom of the stairs, staying out of sight, a soft voice, as if on a warm breeze, gently carries up the stairs and into the darkness. “Baby, you’ve been up there long enough. It’s time to come downstairs now. Leave her alone. Come back to bed.” As I hear that, my eyes are blurry and only partially opened.

“Hmmm, that voice sounds familiar. Wait, that-that’s Mom’s voice.” Eye’s wide open now. “What is she talking about? Who’s she talking to?” Out of the dim, a tall, dark figure emerges from Brenda’s room. A soft “click,” and her bedroom door closes.

Through the dreary hallway light, I make out the wigged man going back downstairs. I don’t own a wristwatch, nor is there a clock in the bedroom, so I have no idea how much time has passed or what time it is from the time I saw wig man go into my sister’s room until he exited. Sunlight has not illuminated the trash bag curtain, one indicator that it’s time to get up for school and shake those drunken party goers out of my shoes. It’s still late in the night.

What did Mom mean by, “Baby, you’ve been up there long enough. Leave her alone. It’s time to come downstairs now.”

When I see my sister the next day, she says nothing. When we walk to school and walk home, nothing. Not a word about the night before. Not a word about Henry. Not a word about Mom. She is her usual self. When I see both Mom and Henry later that day, neither one mentions

the night before. Brenda doesn't say what happened to her, and I don't tell her about my dream. My older brother who slept in the same room doesn't mention last night either.

Did he hear anything? Maybe what I saw and heard wasn't real. Perhaps it was a dream; after all, I was tired and sleepy, and the hallway light was out. It was as though what I saw was a dream. It had to be.

But, then why was the hall light out and who turned it off?