

From Helplessness To Hopefulness To Happiness

BOOK 1

HELPLESSNESS

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

CHAPTERS 1-5

NICK

KEEPER

CATRAN-WHITNEY

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**What Happens To Brothers When We Learn Our Sisters
Have Been Sexually Abused By Our Parents**

NICK “KEEPER” CATRAN-WHITNEY

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Library of Congress Copyright: TXu-2-228-030

ISBN: 978-1-7359446-0-9

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You can defeat the beast, all your beasts.

What happens to brothers when we learn our sisters have been molested by our father? You are about to find out.

- Keeper Catran-Whitney

Introduction

I admit openly and freely that I am terrified to write this book.

I am afraid to take this journey. No, not because of what I say to say, but because of where I must go in my head, in my heart. The thought frightens me to know that it will be I who will be staring back at me as I sneak a peek into my looking glass.

There you go, I said it. Are you happy now?

Vulnerability. Accountability. Blame. Burden. Debt. Culpability. Obligation. Exposure. Responsibility. Family. Trust. Guilt. Shame. Duty. Promise. Risk. Fault. Acknowledgment. Confession. Rejection. Failure. Realization. Understanding. Admission. Denial. Faith. Helplessness. Hopefulness. Happiness. So many words, and more, that easily explain my fear. However, I suppose in the end, the best word is...Mirror.

Like it or not, the time always comes when we all must take that long, arduous march toward the one thing we fear above all. That slow, dragging, protracted march that feels like thousands of dirty needles filled with all the grime and muck of a past so secret we will do everything and anything in our power to not have to face it. It is a past that no matter how far down into the darkness we push it, it will one day rise and break free. It is a past that sooner or later brings us to that face-to-face confrontation with ourselves.

We will all have our time with the mirror, for no one escapes the looking glass.

At some point in the future, if it has not happened to you already, you will be forced to reconcile your life in the silence of your head. Be it while you are upright or on your death bed. You know your time is coming.

Everything you have done and everything you chose not to do will be put on trial. We will all be stripped down to our naked selves with nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. And what you see looking back at you is simply everything you brought with you. The good. The bad. The ugly.

If you are fortunate, fate will see to it that this moment arrives sooner than later.

That dusty, grimy, greasy glass reflecting back will show us every moment when we should have helped the weak, the vulnerable, the helpless. We will see everyone we took advantage of, everyone we conned, everyone we lied to. The mirror will force each of us to witness every battle, every triumph, and every failure. We will be powerless as we witness our excuses *not* to engage out of fear of looking bad to those we believe most important in our lives.

Yes, many words can explain why we are each afraid to take the mirror journey. Each action reflected back begins as a small ripple, then expanding outward, gaining strength, size, and speed. Once all our memory ripples reach their horizon, they will compress together and rush back at us as one massive wave forcing all the emotions of our past actions to overwhelm us, crashing in on us. We will be forced inside our minds, inside our emotions, inside our souls

as we desperately try to stave off a judgment we know we deserve. At that moment, we will be forced to confront the only question that truly matters, “Why didn’t I help?”

* * * * *

My right-hand shoots skyward to ask a simple question. The facilitator, Susie Carder, of *Motivating the Masses*, is doing a presentation on how to write a book in 20 minutes during a Lisa Nichols "How To Speak and Write to Make Millions" event on Monday afternoon May 20, 2013, in San Diego, California. I have been here for three days, and I still have not received the information I came for. It's almost 1:00 p.m. on the last day, and I have less than one hour before I must hop back on the hated 405 freeway and drive back up to Los Angeles.

My goal for the weekend, as it was for the hundreds in the auditorium and thousands watching online, was to learn how to write a book in 20 minutes. Throughout the weekend, there have been workshops on presenting your manuscript, dressing for success, being a powerful speaker, but none so far on the topic that I came here for. Two and a half days have passed, and I'm still waiting. Time is quickly running out, and I am getting frustrated.

I think to myself, "Susie, I just have one question," That's all — one tiny question. Susie, who is white, turns in my direction. Great! She finally sees my hand in the air. Finally, I get to ask my question. From the stage at the front of the room, she locks eyes on mine. Ahh, finally, it's my turn. In my head I think, “Damn, it took you long enough.” Here we go. She raises her hand and points. "What's your name, and what's your question?" Before I could finish saying, “My name is Kee –,” Susie cuts across me and says, “I’m talking to the woman behind

you.” Then a female voice behind me begins speaking. My heart plunges to the floor. Susie wasn’t calling on me! I slowly drop my head in disappointment, slowly lower my hand, and turn around to see the woman. Sitting down I think, “What the hell! Will I ever get a chance to ask my question!”

Five minutes later Susie says, “Does that answer your question?” “Yes, thanks!” is the woman’s reply. Looking around for another *worthy* of her time, Susie scans the room to her right. No one worthy of her time on that side. Slowly turning back to her left she sees my hand is up once again. Pointing a finger in my direction she says, “What’s your name, and what’s your question?” Without hesitating for fear she was speaking to someone else behind me, I loudly and forcefully say, “My name is Keeper, and as I look at your book outline on the board, it appears to me that you are showing a layout for a how-to book. What if your book isn’t a how-to book?” She says, “The basics are the same.” I said, “I don’t see that.” She says, “Let’s use your book idea as an example.” Within seconds, an assistant thrusts a microphone into my hand and asks me to stand up.

From the stage, Susie calls out, “Do you have a book idea?” My answer is, “I don’t know.” Susie immediately stops me, and a wide smile forms across her face, and she says, “Oh no, no, no, ‘I don’t know’ is the language of a 5-year-old. You don’t look like a 5-year-old to me.” Susie roars with laughter so the entire room hears her. She then screams out, “I don’t know...don’t work no more!”

Dropping her microphone down by her side, Susie Carder scanned the audience of hundreds of people as a huge grin instantly formed on her face. And then without warning, she hollered at the top of her voice a long and loud, "I—I don't know!" Then she stopped. The next thing I know, hundreds of people have turned in their chairs and are now looking at me with shit-face grins. Then as if it was planned, they all screamed and finished her sentence in unison, "Don't work no more!" As if ordered by a drill sergeant in basic training, an infuriating chant of "I don't know..." began to break out throughout the ballroom as many of them began laughing at me. "I don't know don't work no more." "I don't know don't work no more." "I don't know don't work no more." The insulting, mocking chant reverberated off the cavernous hall walls.

Frozen in place, the entire room is shouting at me, a 54-year-old Black man. WTF! It was a game to them, and I was on the losing side. Susie wasn't waiting for just anyone to say, "I don't know," just so she could launch into her, "I don't know don't work no more" routine. No, no, no, Ms. Carder, she was waiting for a man. Like a lioness stalking her prey, Susie moved around the room, asking one person after another, "What's your book about?" All the while, she was slinking through the jungle of weekend paid guests eager to learn the secret to writing a book in twenty minutes. I didn't know it at the time, but Ms. Carder was on the prowl, laying low in the cut for a defenseless, unsuspecting *man* to say the words, "I don't know," just so she could pounce and embarrass him in front of a room full of strangers. Well, I had innocently, albeit enthusiastically, obliged. Looking around the room, I see many people

laughing at me. Clapping. Throwing their heads back roaring with laughter. Her plan had worked. I am getting pissed that Susie would put me on blast like that.

Ten seconds later she had hopped down from the stage and was now standing right in front of me, as if she is trying to intimidate me or frighten me into talking. With all the skill of a seasoned performer, she slowly leans into me so everyone in the room could witness her castigate me. And, of course, most in attendance knew what was coming next. Apparently, this was not the first time they witnessed Susie ensnare an unsuspecting man for her enjoyment and entertainment.

I don't like bullies of any kind, and yet there I was, standing literally nose-to-nose with a woman intent on bullying me for fun. It is obvious to me that Susie lives for these "I don't know don't work no more" moments during these weekend events.

She raised the microphone and put it next to her mouth. It is literally the only thing separating the two of us. With the microphone, now her trident, she is prepared for battle. Squinting her eyes, which she locked on mine, she raised her free hand to bring down the laughter in the room. She wanted quiet for her next performance. Whispering into the microphone so everyone in the room could hear her and admire her acting skills, she brought all the drama she could muster. "KEEPER, I'M GOING TO ASK YOU AGAIN. I KNOW YOU HAVE A BOOK IDEA. I KNOW YOU DO. WHAT'S YOUR BOOK ABOUT?" When she finishes, the only thing remaining on her face is a broad shit-faced grin stretching from ear-to-ear. She's so proud of herself for cornering another male victim.

I pause, and I look directly into the eyes of this crazy White woman I don't even know – a fucking crazy White woman who just called me a five-year-old, like when I was five years old, and everyone called me "Nicky." As I look at her, I know I haven't had much clarity on my book idea all weekend. My mind has been confused because I came here to write a book about network marketing and how to recruit the urban and youth markets, but the problem is I keep being pulled back emotionally toward another story.

I'm standing in front of her, seething, defiant. My eyes are boring into her with a loathing I have never felt toward a stranger before. She had the audacity to do this to me in front of all these people. She mobilized the phrase, "I don't know don't work no more" as a weapon against me. Then she marshaled her army, and they all participated in the attack! I am thinking, "Woman, you don't know me, and yet you are trying to bully me? Are you trying to humiliate and shame me in front of all these people? You don't know the inner struggle I am going through trying to determine if I should say what I'm inwardly being driven to say. You have no idea what book I really want to write. You are not ready for this book idea, Susie. I know you're not. Not this story."

The microphone the assistant gave me is still in my hand – *Thump, thump, thump*. I nervously slap it against my leg. I've put the other hand on my hip, staring at crazy Susie. I then start to think of two of my four little sisters. Then the sinister family secret about a popular singing family in Los Angeles, The Whitney Family, I've been forced to keep locked up for over forty years, begins to force its way to the front of my mind, knocking aside defenses that

had kept it at bay for over forty years, with the ease of bowling over wooden skittles – it was a strike!

It's a horrible family secret about two of my little sisters and our stepdad – a dark secret of our family on the verge of stardom who, as United Artists' recording artists, made Billboard Magazine's Top 100 twice that year. We were offered recording and business contracts by some of the biggest recording companies in the world. But for the stardom to materialize, the ugly family secret had to be kept submerged, quiet. The whole household had to do their parts to maintain the mystery, or else fame and potentially millions of dollars would be lost. Eight children in the family were told to keep quiet, even if it meant the children's emotional wellbeing was destroyed. Secrets had to be maintained by my stepdad, my Mom, my three brothers, my four sisters, and of course, me if we were to become big singing stars.

No one could ever know what happened when we lived in our homes on 53rd Street and Figueroa, Wellington Road, and 12th Avenue in Los Angeles, California. "Do you kids understand? We do not speak of it – ever. And no, 'Baby' is not leaving this family." Why? Because, for all our family and friends to keep liking us, we cannot break up the singing group. Lies and secrets, that was the family creed we lived by. Secrets must be kept. Otherwise, we would remain in South Central Los Angeles with gangs and drugs. We would remain poor, possibly homeless, over and over again.

* * * * *

As my mind finally begins to clear, and I come back to the event, Susie is still standing in front of me, smiling, waiting for the answer to her question. I think to myself, “You want so badly to know what my book idea is, don't you, Susie? From the stage, I believed you said, ‘I gotta know what this story is.’ This is going to be juicy.”

Susie Carder, you have intruded on something private, but you don't care. You just want something juicy. Okay then, you opened Pandora's box, then here it is. This is five-year-old Little Nicky's book idea. I take two deep breaths to steady myself. I slowly raise my microphone to my mouth, not taking my eyes from hers. The room is quiet, and no one is laughing or talking now.

And this is what pours out of five-year-old little Nicky's mouth...

"My book idea is about the day I found out my stepfather had been molesting two of my four sisters for years. It is about my Mother knowing all along and not doing anything to save them. I was about 17-years-old when I found out, and even though I knew nothing about what my stepdad was doing to my little sisters over the years, my sisters blamed my older brother and me for doing nothing to help them. One day I couldn't take it anymore. I had had enough. I felt I needed to step up and provide hope so one day in the future my sisters could find happiness. I needed to do something. So, I did. At 5'9" 145 lbs., I stopped my 6'6" 240 lbs. stepdad in the upstairs hall, just outside my bedroom door, and said to him, ‘You must leave this house now. If you are still here by this time tomorrow, you will be dead, because I

will have killed you.’ I felt supremely confident to confront this child molester because I knew the instrument of his death was just behind my bedroom door, less than...ten...feet...away.”

With a horrified look on her face as if someone had just slapped the shit out of her, Susie quickly backed away from me, screaming to the room, "Everyone, be quiet. Stop talking now!" She didn't have to say that. The room was already dead silent even before she spoke.” Keeper, please continue.”

I continued, "I believe there are times when the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. For me, this was that moment. On the day that I confronted my stepdad, the lives of my four little sisters were more important to me than my own life. I decided I would have to kill this man, knowing all along my young life would soon be over, because I would be put to death for having committed premeditated murder. To me, that was a fair trade-off for my little sisters’ happiness. My thinking was, I needed all four of my little sisters not to feel helpless and afraid anymore, to relive the horror and the pain whenever they saw his face in our house. I needed my four sisters to no longer be afraid to live in our house because their second oldest brother had finally stepped up and taken care of things for them, for I would have killed the monster that terrorized them for almost twenty years. He and my Mother had held my brothers, my sisters, and me emotionally hostage. My sisters needed to know that one person in their lives, in the family, including aunts, uncles, and grandparents, would finally step up and protect them at all costs.”

There it was, the incontrovertible truth, and it was apparent to everyone who heard it. More importantly, I realized at that moment, I hadn't come to the weekend to learn how to write a book; I came to the weekend to be set free.

Once I began to speak, my words roared out of me like the mighty falls rushing over the Niagara. They were unstoppable. Even more, they were authentic and incontestable. There was really nothing Susie could have done to prepare herself for what I, a man, had to say about his sisters being molested by their stepfather. As I began talking, I immediately felt the bonds of shame and guilt that had imprisoned me, that had shackled my voice for decades, melt away with such ease that I knew at that moment, as I shared my story with a room full of strangers, chains, that had twisted and serpented around my throat for over forty years, keeping me silenced and in fear, would never bind me again. Little Nicky was finally free.

So, Susie, that is my book idea. What do you think now of five-year-old little Nicky's story? Juicy enough?

* * * * *

Me and Susie Carder today:

It would be unfair of me not to point out that Susie Carder and I have become friends. As an entertainer, I now look back at what she was doing as performance art or theater to excite and provoke the audience into participation. Susie was playing to the crowd as she lay-in-wait for a man to literally say what I said, "I don't know what my book is about." She was doing what on any night, in any city, in any comedy club in the world, a comedian is doing at this very

moment to an unsuspecting audience member whom they are embarrassing in front of the whole room simply for a laugh. But this was no comedy club, and a person in an emotional setting like that should not be used for a cheap laugh in that way.

Be it a man or woman, Susie cannot know how emotionally vulnerable a person is at that moment or what their story is. Hell, I didn't realize until she pushed me over the cliff emotionally, and the parachute that brought me to a safe landing was, of all things, my horror story.

With that said, I know for a fact if Susie had not gotten in my face as she did, this book might never have been written. The freeing of my soul, me talking to my sisters, breaking through emotional prisons, me coming to understand my own sexual abuse, and the lifting of my forty-year burden of shame and guilt would never have come to pass had it not been for her 'timely,' shall we say, intervention.

You may not like what she did to me, and I admit there was a better way of getting me where I was emotionally to where I needed to be; however, I will be eternally grateful for Susie pulling out of me that which I believed I had bound and trussed, hidden away forever, never to be talked about not even with my sisters and brothers, and most assuredly never to be shared in front of a room of thousands.

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FOREWORD

WE ARE...

The ones no one asks about.

The ones no one notices,

The ones no one checks on,

The ones in the shadows,

The ones required to reside in obscurity and inhabit uncertainty.

The ones forced to endure being disconnected, inconsequential, insignificant.

We are the ones no one asks, “Are you okay? Do you need to talk?”

However, we are the ones who are asked, “How could you not know?”

“How could you not suspect?” “How come you didn’t protect me, save me?”

“How come you didn’t hear me weeping or see my tears?”

We are the ones who are told, “It didn’t happen to you. You can’t talk about it. Ever!”

There are no books written about our emotional struggles, our torment, our pain,

our guilt, our shame.

We are the ones whose emotions are disposable.

We are the ones whose feelings don’t matter.

The ones without interviews in magazines or appearances on talk shows.

The ones who have no movies or mini-series about our nightmares.

We are the ones without a support group or even a *one*-step program.

The very nature of our gender, regardless of our age or lack of knowledge, means we are the

problem.

Proximity, through gender-specific scrutiny, means we are often viewed as guilty as the molester even though we may be aware of what took place.

Without a moment to comprehend, understand, or process, we are deemed more guilty than the molester or rapist if we do not immediately attack, strike, beat, or execute upon learning of the act.

We are the ones without family or friend with whom we can share our pain, our guilt.

We are the ones society leaves behind.

After the betrayal, we are what is leftover.

We are simply, *Brothers*.

Make no mistake about it; this book is meant to make you extremely uncomfortable about those whom no one considers after it has been revealed a sister in the family has been molested...*Brothers*. It is DARK. It is GRITTY. It is UGLY. It is extremely GRAPHIC. VIVID. EXPLICIT. It is incredibly PAINFUL. And it will pull you down into one of the ugliest places of human existence. It will be HARD to read. However, it is HONEST; it is TRUE. You will want to put it down and never pick it up again. But I hope that if you do put it down, you pick it up again. Why? Your families very existence may depend on it.

HELPLESSNESS is the story about a brother who was HELPLESS for over forty-five years. It is meant to instruct, inform, enlighten, educate, and make you 'woke' to the possibilities of what could be happening in your home at this very moment. It is meant to

challenge you to ask yourself a simple question... ***“If this happened in my family, what would I do?”***

This book is meant as a warning. Be vigilant. Be ever watchful. Sister and brothers, if you suspect something is not right in your home talk to each other. Listen to each other. Share with each other, no matter how painful. I implore you seek to understand. And then, understand some more. Believe what I say is possible in your home. Do not overlook anyone in your family. Do not take anyone for granted. Everyone is affected. Everyone in the family feels it. Everyone Matters. *We all matter.* And I promise you, *all* will come out when you least expect it, for there is no right or wrong time for the truth.

Hold on tight! I guarantee you The Messenger Of Misery is just around the corner, and he is bringing friends. Lots of friends.

As brothers, we are the Forgotten. We are treated, for all intents and purposes, as if we are invisible. We are treated as pariahs. Even when we aren't aware of the molestations, we are often viewed as insiders, complicit, guilty by neglect for not knowing.

Once the secrets are revealed, our sisters are asked many questions. Mothers are asked many questions. Fathers are asked many questions. Brothers? Well, we are just – brothers. We are shunted to the side as if we have not been victimized, and our feelings don't matter. In my case and my three brothers', when we found out, and during the forty years that followed, no one asked us, “How are you? Do you need to talk? What are you feeling? Are you angry? Are

you sad? Even though you did not know what was going on, do you feel anything? Hurt? Shame? Guilt? Fault? Sorrow? Abandoned? Lost? Confused? Betrayed?"

I am sure if someone had taken the time to ask me, I would have thought to myself, "What a stupid question. Of course, I feel guilty. I couldn't stop the molester. I wasn't there to save my sisters. How do you think I feel? What a dumbass question. How would you feel after you learned your sisters were molested or raped?"

Forty years after I found out, still no one had asked me, "How do you feel?" Not even my sisters. I was, as many women have told me, "Nick, you're just a brother. It didn't happen to you, so you have no say in the matter." I imagine for my sisters the feeling was, "What possibly could have happened to you? After all, you weren't the one molested." In their minds, I was just a brother, and my feelings could be disposed of.

As a brother, how could I possibly be carrying any emotional scars of note – emotional scars worth talking about? But I am one of four brothers who were emphatically and unequivocally forbidden by my oldest sister to talk about it. When I found out as a teenager, I trusted in my Mother to handle it. At that time, I was sure it was my Mother's responsibility to get rid of the man who had molested her daughters. It was not the son's responsibility.

As much as law enforcement, policymakers, church leaders and family members would like us to believe, molestations are not isolated incidents. They don't happen in a vacuum where only the predator and the victim exist. They don't just happen to the direct victims. The

stark reality is, in varying degrees, they happen to every member of the family, whether we are aware of the molestation or not.

Even though this is my story, you will hear from five of my siblings – three sisters and two brothers. This may be a first on this topic – hearing from sisters and brothers from one family, one Black family, about their experiences. I don't know that this has ever been done before in a book. The power of numerous family members, sisters, and brothers, having the courage to share their experiences in our tragedy may offer the world a new way to understand the depth of trauma in families and new ways to intervene in these tragedies. That is my hope at least.

As a family, I am certain our story will resonate with other child molestation victims and their families who are also living in its dark shadow. I can promise you what you are about to read will be dark, sad, ugly, horrible, wicked, as well as truthful; and, I hope – persuasive. It is my hope that it gives other victims of molestation, and brothers living in silence, a cathartic relief from pain and hopefully some understanding, as it did for me once I began to embrace the pain and the guilt and the shame and accept it as a part of my being.

My siblings and I are all trying to find our way each day. Throughout this book, you will hear from three of my four sisters in one form or another. You will also hear from my older full brother, as they share in their own words what they experienced individually and the impact of having a child molester for a stepfather and a Mother who protected him at all costs. You will also hear from my older half-brother how he, too, was traumatized. As for me, you

will hear, as I spoke with my sister's decades after their molestations, what I envisioned was happening to them during their attacks. My sisters will also share, in their own words, what happened to them.

I don't care to listen to singers who sing by themselves for too long. After a while, I get bored listening to the same voice song after song. I suppose that is a product of growing up in a singing family in which nine of the ten members of the family sang both lead and background. With this book and the next two, you will not only read my story, but you will also read my siblings'. However, my approach is to provide information, education, and understanding, not only to the molested, but to those whose voices are never heard from in the family – the brothers.

You will learn over the course of these books how five of my siblings and I went from Helplessness to Hopefulness to Happiness over a forty-five-year period...albeit as a somewhat maimed happiness, we still struggle to preserve in varying degrees to this day.

For me to make this journey to the future, I must go back to being helpless. So, here I go. This is going to hurt. And if I do a good job writing this, you will know just how bad it hurts.

As a child, I was broken.
I have been trying to put myself back together ever since.
– Keeper Catran Whitney

Prologue

And just like that, her scream was snuffed out.

It felt like the ice-cold steel of a vice had instantly clamped around her long slender throat. It was as though an invisible something had gripped the iced handle and turned the long thin cylindrical screw all in one motion.

Tighter. Tighter. Tighter. The constricted feeling had quickly pressed in from all sides, trapping her vocal cords. Try as she might, the vice had entombed her wail.

The stinging swept through her body as though she had been drenched with a 50-gallon bucket of ice water. The icy feeling sent hundreds of caustic needles racing from her head down to her toes. Her eyes were growing ever wider as she stood frozen, unable to move.

Then, the vice slackened, and a soft whisper escaped.

“Oh, God, no! Not the girls, not the girls. He didn’t get to them too!” Unfortunately for her the merciless biting that tracked down her spine was not caused by iced water, nor was fear their relentless motivator. It was reality.

Bursting across her consciousness like the sun blazing through the stained-glass windows of the church, the frightening thought had unbalanced her.

Terrified, she pushes her way through the packed church of onlookers, who each look as though they have arrived at the same frightening conclusion she had only moments ago. They are frozen in place, thinking, wishing, begging, hoping, praying...

“...not my daughter!”

“...not my niece!”

“...Jesus, not my baby girl!!”

As quickly as she can, she shoves family and friends aside like bowling pins. She must reach them before they escape, but she is being held back by a shimmering, banana-shaped cocoon that wraps around her body like fine silk gossamer strands spun from a *Golden Silk Orb-Weaver* spider. The iridescent beige fabric stretches snugly from her shoulders downward, covering her ankles that are accentuated by her matching beige high-heeled shoes. It is the proper dress for the occasion. Unfortunately for her, it is the wrong dress for the chase.

The bomb *they* had set off during the going home service had rocked the congregation, leaving the parishioners horrified by what they had done and what they had said.

As she pursues, a nagging question blazes across her mind: “What if after reaching them, they look at me and...?” She knows it’s a possibility. After all, they had departed the house of worship with much haste after unleashing their explosive barrage on more than one hundred unsuspecting congregants.

Like a B-52 Stratofortress, known as the BUFF (Big Ugly Fat Fucker), dropping an B83 nuclear bomb, the two men had swooped in and exploded their own BUFF on their target.

Fully loaded with horrific and heinous accusations about molestation and rape of little girls by one of their own, it was impossible to imagine one allegation they leveled could be true, but all eight?

No one knew the men, but there was no doubt they had cratered out the church down to its foundation. However, her question would not matter if she didn't catch up to them. She needed to know if the chain of events that were on the verge of ripping through families like dominos in the church was based in fact, or were they the mad ravings of a lunatic and his older brother. As she gave chase, she was arriving at her own conclusion – these strangers were mistaken. But she had to be sure.

Passing guest after guest, their faces showing shock at what they had just witnessed for ninety minutes, the young woman exited the sanctuary as quickly as her constraining dress would allow. She turned right and hurried down a corridor which had been alive with people ninety-minutes ago but was now vacant. The two men had already passed through.

Unable to escape the unbidden voice in her head that continued to scream, “Not my little cousins too!” she knows she must get to them before they flee their wreckage. She must know *his* secret. Spotting a small pile of what looked like programs from the service strewn across the sand that had blown into the hallway from the pre-school play area some twenty feet before the double doors that led to the parking lot, she pulls up short. Quickly turning to look down at the small, scattered stack, she realizes it's not service programs, but the 8x10 pictures her quarry had earlier thrust in the face of the nervous man now standing in the middle of the

church, a man who was no doubt feeling fear from the increased contraction of the congregation pressing in on him.

As she bends down to pick up the photographs, her eyes zoom across the top of the first 8x10 picture. Hastily scrawled across the top in black ink that had gradually faded with each letter written were the words, “The Life and Lies of Henry...”

Quickly sifting through the color photos, the woman in her early twenties sees the faces of eight children looking back at her. The bottom of each picture is captioned with two printed lines. The top line in 48 pt. Bold Arial type indicated the ages of each child, the second, in 24 pt. Bold Arial, told a one-line horror story.

Her eyebrows squeeze together in anger and horror with each picture of a child she doesn't know. But there isn't time to get side-tracked.

Stopping to investigate the images for less than a minute has cost her valuable time, but it was the ages of the children that had stopped her dead in her tracks, especially the pictures of the four little girls in ponytails who forcibly reminded her of her cousins.

Realizing she had lost precious time staring at the pictures, she smashes them against her breasts and takes up her pursuit. Finally, she erupts through the double doors and is greeted by a warm dazzling California winter sun. The bright sunlight momentarily blinds her – blacking out the parking lot packed with cars. Immediately coming to a halt and squinting, she puts a hand above her eyes and glances quickly from right to left, but *they* are nowhere to be found. Those few precious seconds spent looking at those eight had caused her to lose the race.

Panic sets in as she slowly walks toward the expansive sunbaked cracked asphalt, frantically looking around, praying she hadn't lost her quarry, but she knows it's no good. Those few seconds looking at those ponytails accented by pink and blue ribbons had allowed them to escape. And, unfortunately for her, they took with them his truth, his secret, answers she desperately needed.

White.

It slowly creeps along the left sidewall at the very back of the parking lot. Its near imperceptible movement barely seen over the tops of the other cars had caught her attention. Some one hundred and fifty feet away, a Prius is slowly pulling out of the parking lot, making a left turn onto Orion Avenue.

Could that be them? Without thinking she hikes her silk cocoon above her ankles and dashes left, crossing the wet freshly manicured church grounds. However, with each short step she takes, her speed decelerates as her heels sink deeper and deeper into the soggy grass, slowing down even more what was already a slow proposition.

Unfortunately for her, hope was now moving away on four wheels, drawing nearer the corner with each sinking of her now caked with mud brown heels.

“Clack-Clack!”

Her shoes slam onto the sidewalk, but as she tries to stand upright her mud-soaked shoes cause her to stagger. Breathless, and struggling hard to recapture her balance, she tries her best to flag down the men, but their car offers no reward for her efforts. The Prius, whose

Latin meaning is “come before,” was something she couldn’t head off; it is too far down the road for *them* to have seen her feeble panicked waves.

“Nooooo!

Waaaaait!!!!”

The Prius begins vanishing into the sun. And as it does, the blinking yellow right turn signal light ridicules her wave as if saying, “Bye! Bye! Bye! Nice, try!”

Panic overtaking her, she understands with one sharp ninety-degree turn at the corner the men will be gone forever and with them the mystery of the pictures clutched against her breast.

She moans to herself, “Please wait. I need to know. Not my little cousins, please-e-e, not my little cousins, too!”

Chapter One: A Cautionary Tale

Tacit

Adjective: Expressed, understood, implied, or carried forth without words, speech, or otherwise being stated.

“If you are still here by this time tomorrow, you will be dead, because I will have....”

Chapter Two: Help

“The third secret is truth.” - The Third Secret, movie 1964

January 26, 2019
St. Andrews Lutheran Church
Van Nuys, California

Slightly overweight, the apple-shaped white-haired Pastor walked through the church as if he were on an angelic cloud. Dressed in the traditional white pulpit robe complete with white stole, embroidered with bright yellow and orange accents, the holy garment was completed with hanging yellow tassels. The Pastor was undoubtedly ready for the promise of a heavenly day.

As he walked around the church, he paused momentarily to take in the flock that had gathered to remember the woman who had passed away six weeks ago. Looking around the packed sanctuary, he couldn't contain his joy. He was all smiles.

The unassuming Lutheran church was packed with guests. Like all the seats around the four picnic tables at the back of the room, every seat in the front of the sanctuary was occupied. The overflow crowd who had come for the woman's going home celebration was forced to stand along the back and sidewalls.

His smile growing ever larger with each step, the Pastor came to another stop before a man seated at the front of one of the picnic tables. With a wide grin that clearly expressed the

overwhelming happiness he was feeling, the Pastor looked down at the man and said, “What a beautiful day for a going home service. This is wonderful. There is so much love here today. Can you feel it?”

Not returning the smile, the man slowly raised his eyebrows and looked up at the Pastor. Straight-faced, he said, “Yeah – I feel it.”

Ninety minutes later, the Pastor said, “That concludes our service. You are all invited to join us for food and conversation.”

Ten minutes later, the man who said, “Yeah – I feel it,” was delivering a sermon of his own in front of the whole church as he was literally nose-to-nose with the man whose wife had passed away.

The picnic table visitor had come to the church for one reason and one reason only. Retribution! He was a brother who had come for revenge. He had come for the man who had, forty years earlier, committed horrific sex crimes against his four little sisters for seventeen years.

As the vengeance seeker raged at the rapist, the Pastor did not step forward to calm the man down. He did not offer advice or guidance. He did not come forth with consultation. The Pastor offered no *thoughts and prayers*, nor one meager word of comfort or solace for the clearly anguished brother, or his older brother who had joined him at the church for this revival meeting between the two brothers and their ex-stepfather.

The Pastor stood by and observed as the holy sanctuary he had described minutes ago as full of love was transformed into a room to exorcise a malevolent creature. It had become an oubliette. A chamber for revenge. A chamber for...a reckoning.

Quietly slinking into the shadows, hoping not to get pulled into the confrontation, the Pastor watched as the brother verbally unleashed four decades of suffering and torment on the man who had haunted him and his siblings for most of their lives.

The avenger's wrath had been stored up for the man whose hidden past was unknown to most everyone in the room – a man who could only be described as a virus that infected everyone he came in contact with.

Henry, the man besieged by the verbal assault, was finally being exposed for seventeen-years of child rape and sexual assault in front of the entire congregation.

Before the brother's ninety-minute sermon was completed, Henry's older brother, also in attendance, would also be stripped of his holier-than-thou moral garments for his unwillingness to save the little girls he knew had been molested and raped by his younger brother.

All eyes in the church watched for almost ninety minutes as the molested girls' brothers, who hadn't been invited to the service, seized control of the sanctuary. They had come to put-down a sexual predator, a man who represented a grave threat to every girl in every family in the church on that day.

For them, if Henry hadn't gotten to any of the girls, his exposure would, at the very least, sound the alarm for the families in the church. But if he had indeed already gotten to just *one* of the girls, the damage could be emotionally devastating for that girl and her family for generations to come.

Either way, exposing the child rapist in front of them would have served its purpose. It would protect the innocent, or it would provide a potential pathway to help and support the molested.

Unsuspecting families had no idea the years of dread that awaited them if, in fact Henry, the apex child molester sequestered among them, had indeed already struck. But dissimilar to the families in the room, the two brothers knew all too well those emotional horrors awaiting a victimized family. Any family who refused to investigate their daughter's molestation claims, any family who refused to believe without a shadow of a doubt, any person who would simply believe a friend whose past they did not know would probably consider these strangers merely troublemakers, crazy – mistaken.

But the two brothers know what's coming, as all brothers know, once they learn their sisters have been molested. And no doubt the now clandestine man of the cloth does as well, having spent years protecting and restoring faith for those who suffer from an unspoken societal conspiracy of silence that doubly victimizes the weakest, most vulnerable members of society – our children.

For over four decades, the two brothers have been intimately aware of the trauma, the guilt, and shame that follows when brothers learn their sisters have been sexually molested or raped by a parent. The two brothers had been deep in the trenches for over forty years after learning of the crimes and coverups committed by all those whose job it was to protect them and their siblings from harm. Like having the most expensive tickets to a concert, they have occupied front row, center seats to PTSD-like devastation left behind by a creature who should never exist in any child's life.

Chapter Three: Tick. Tick. Tick.

Sacrifice

Noun: Destruction or surrender of something for the sake of something else

Only one person would have warmly invited him back into our home.

Saturday Night, September 1986 Victoria Avenue, Los Angeles, California

Within twenty-four hours, I will be dead. Or I'll be in a police car on the way to my inevitable death. There is no doubt in my mind this will happen. It is my fate because I will make it so. It is my death sentence for my nine years of failure. There is no stopping it. It is unavoidable. It is inevitable. It is my...destiny!

I have chosen to enter an incredibly dark place alone, a place where there's no chance of return. I have made peace with this decision, for I know my cause is just, it is righteous, and, above all, it *must* be done. It must be done for my four sisters. It must be done for my three brothers. It must be done for my family. It must be done for me, a man, *a brother*.

You are probably wondering what will happen over the next twenty-four hours to ensure beyond a shadow of a doubt that Nick will be dead or on his way to death. My answer is simple:

“Within twenty-four hours, my stepfather will be dead because I will have killed him. Within twenty-four hours...I will have committed murder.”

* * * * *

It is a beautiful Saturday on Victoria Avenue in Los Angeles, California – the kind of day that makes one think, “I don’t have a care in the world.”

For the first weekend in months, I am staying at home. Before this weekend, I have spent weekends at my fiancée’s apartment on 4th Avenue and Ardmore. We are to be married in three months on November 29th. However, before we float happily away to the land of, “To have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part,” I must take care of one *tiny* issue at home first. If I don’t handle this one tiny problem by this Sunday evening, there is no way I will get married.

Three weeks ago, I had made the decision that if I were to get married, this problem needed to be fixed. Unfortunately for my future wife, I was the only one in my family who could fix what needed fixing. If I didn’t do it this weekend, I might never again find the courage to repair a wrong that should have been righted nine years ago by my Mother. Crazy as it sounds, this one *tiny* thing might be the last thing I ever do.

Yesterday, without explanation, I told my fiancée, “I won’t be staying with you this weekend. There is something I must do at home.” She didn’t grill me over what it was I needed to do. She only asked, “Is everything okay?”

I looked into her beautiful brown eyes and said, “It will be.”

As I walked out the door of her apartment that Friday night, I knew she had no idea what I was talking about. She was clueless. She couldn’t imagine what I was going to do the

next day. She had no idea that when I walked out of her apartment door that night, she might never see me again.

If I had told her what I was planning to do, she would have come up with many reasons to stop me from doing that which I knew I had to do. They would have been good legitimate reasons – the kind of reasons any rational person who was getting married in three months would present to their fiancée if he were about to commit murder.

“What about us getting married? What about our life together? Don’t you care that what you are about to do would affect me? Why must it be you? Aren’t your brothers going to help you? What will your Mother say? What if you are killed?” Most of all, she would have tried to stop me for my safety. And if she succeeded in convincing me not to go, there was a good chance I would never do what needed to be done. Like I said, all good reasons.

However, as much as it pained her to hear the door close and my footsteps fade, I knew I was the only one in my family prepared to risk his life to cure this disease. A disease that spread back and forth from my two oldest sisters for years.

It’s easy to sit in a quiet place daydreaming about what you need to do to kill a man. Sitting alone, it’s effortless to strategize about what must be done to end a man’s life while holding a hot cup of coffee in one hand, a pen in the other, and a blank legal pad in your lap. It’s a different matter altogether to act on your plan, intentionally putting your life on the line, especially when you know going in the odds of dying are far greater than the odds of you coming through the confrontation victorious, alive.

For the past three weeks I have been obsessed thinking about this weekend. Thinking. Thinking. Thinking.

During all that time planning, I never once considered my three brothers and four sisters. I never thought about what they would be left with after the confrontation. It never occurred to me the guilt and shame they might carry for the rest of their lives knowing their brother had sacrificed his life for them. I never thought about the consequences for my fiancée either, how it might affect her, what she would be left with. Such trivial concerns never crossed my mind. Not one time. I was a brother on a mission to avenge my sisters. All I cared about was that the time had finally come for him to pay for what he had done to them. His day of reckoning had finally arrived.

I had become blinded by my obsession for revenge.

As blinded as I was by revenge, I was going to be merciful to a point. I was going to give this apex sexual molester, the one who had terrorized my two oldest sisters for almost twenty years, the opportunity to save himself by allowing him to walk out of the house under his own power. What physical condition he was in when he walked out or was carried out would be up to him. That would be the extent of my mercy. The chance to leave voluntarily under his own power was all the kindness I had left to give him.

If he didn't leave voluntarily, I was going to remove my sister's predator – by killing him! The choice would be his.

Over the three weeks leading up to this weekend, I had reached such a point of anger that I was going to do what needed to be done regardless of the collateral damage. I know I should have taken care of this problem years ago. My failure to do something, anything, was driving me to commit murder. I had convinced myself it was my failure, and no one else's. I had become angry and disappointed with myself for not handling the situation when it had become clear to me nine years ago my Mother wasn't going to do a damn thing about it.

Oh sure, I had my excuses for why I hadn't done anything nine years before, and I continued conveniently using them over the years. I was too young. I was too little. Henry was so huge, so strong. When those excuses began no longer holding up against my personal scrutiny, I assuaged myself by saying, "I'm sure Mom will eventually handle it when the time is right. However, if Mom doesn't take care of it, I definitely will. I only need to see what she is going to do first." However, with each passing year that he continued to live in our house, possibly stalking my two youngest sisters, the twins, as well, I began to realize my Mother, no matter how much harm he did, the right time and her courage would never align to the point that she would put him out of the house. She was never going to do what needed to be done to protect my sisters, and my excuses had become only that, excuses. And they had turned me into a big brother who was a coward.

I had become an older brother whose guilt and shame had reached such a level, I was hours away from losing something I cherished, my emotional control. I had handed over all reasoning to my torment. Today my abdication of emotional control had reached such a peak

that I eagerly relieved myself of my moral compass in exchange for something more animalistic: rage and hatred.

Until today it had never occurred to me that what had been my ultimate day of helplessness in our house on 12th Avenue would come to a head this Saturday night nine years later on Victoria Avenue.

For nine years, I had convinced myself I was not being a coward. I was being prudent, shrewd, even cunning. I was simply biding my time. But it was plain to see as the years went by that my lack of action, coupled with a lack of conviction, told a different story, a story I could no longer avoid. It was a story of fear, betrayal, and abandonment of my sisters.

If I am honest with myself, I knew what I was about to do was extremely reckless, but I didn't care. I was angry at myself for not removing the danger around my sisters after we found out what happened all those years ago. And now that I was engaged to be married, it was becoming harder and harder to look at my sisters. I had reached a point when I felt uncomfortable pretending everything would be all right with my family after I was married and out of the house for good.

Not being able to face them as a brother who should have fought for them was an emotional prison I was no longer willing to put myself in. I had to break out of my self-imposed jail no matter who and what I left behind. Even if it meant having to live in a six by eight feet concrete room with decorative vertical bars for the rest of my life or ending up rotting in a pine box, I was going to do what I had to do.

Growing up, I was always the son my Mother said would meet any challenge head-on. “My little businessman.” That’s what my Mother began calling me from age ten because I handled things. She would tell me, “Nicky, you do what needs to be done. You do what the other kids in the family won’t do.” Well, the little businessman had become a major disappointment as far as I was concerned – a chicken – and I could no longer live with a chicken.

Something had to give. Either I was going to rise and handle the situation, or the fire of guilt and shame was going to consume me forever.

Even though all my sisters had moved out of the house by this time, I felt I could not move out and get married, knowing he could still be around them at any time they came back to the house. The thought of my sisters being back there in the house with him without me was the catalyst for my decision.

That last excuse had begun gnawing at me every day because the question was, “Are the girls truly handling their trauma? Are any of us eight brothers and sisters handling it?” Truthfully, the answer was, “No way.” We were eight young kids – afraid. We were being intimidated and manipulated by our Mother and her child molester husband, Henry. Besides, there were lots of people depending on us to make it big: record companies, managers, fans, extended family, friends, and more. Part of me was going along with what the others wanted to do. And still, to be honest, another part of me wanted a better life. We eight kids were tired of all the different schools, never having any money, wearing old torn dirty clothes, scrounging

for food and rent money, and the many places we lived in. Singing was our way out of that life.

My Mom and my stepfather always dangled the dream of a better life in front of us. “Keep everything within these four walls. We are about to sign this record deal. Look, you are on the cover of this magazine. Guess which star is coming to see you perform tonight? Michael’s on the phone. Stevie invited you to his birthday party. Nancy Reagan, President Reagan’s wife, wants you to come to her hotel room. She wants to meet you. Before you go on stage at the 1980 Republican Convention at the Joe Louis Arena in Detroit, Reverend Billy Graham wants to meet you, too. You kids are going to be rich. You will be able to get whatever you want real soon. You’re going to be so famous!” It was the same type of emotional low hanging fruit, or shiny trinkets molesters and those who empower them use all the time to silence their victims. Except, in this case, the people dangling the low hanging fruit was our Mother and stepfather, people we loved and trusted to protect us.

Each of us eight kids remembered what life for us was like growing up. None remembered better than my older brother and I. At times it was a life of total poverty, living in twenty-one different places, attending twelve different grade schools before I graduated high school, being evicted and made homeless three times, barely living on food stamps, surviving days on government cheese, and canned meat handed out from government trucks.

There were days when we had to scrounge through the neighborhood for bottles to turn into cash for food, finding huge rats that found their way into our refrigerators to live, battling

thousands upon thousands of roaches at home after home, living in dilapidated houses with busted out or boarded up windows, walls with holes in them or sitting on broken-down holey furniture, and living through a Portland winter with snow covering every inch of ground with no heat or no electricity in our house.

Many times over the years, we came close to making it big. Because of those times, we kids no longer accepted a life of poverty as the natural order for us. We had tasted the impossible dream. We had seen it up close, and we desperately craved what that dream would bring. Even after learning what had happened to our two oldest sisters, we tried to make our singing career work for as long as we could. Having flirted with success, it was easy for us to imagine an unbelievable life as singing stars.

Was it so wrong for poor kids who never experienced anything but hardship to desire better? Depends on what you must give up. And there's the rub. The answer always lies at the dead center of that question. In the middle is literally the answer, the heart of the matter. What are you willing to sacrifice to get what you want? In the end, the question wasn't for us kids, "What are you willing to sacrifice?" The question was, "*Who* are you willing to sacrifice? I didn't learn the answer until it was too late.

What part of myself was I willing to sacrifice? For me, that day had arrived twenty-one days ago when I knew I was willing to sacrifice my life to act. The expiration date on those excuses for keeping Henry around, the ones giving me permission not to act against him, had unceremoniously expired months ago. They had shielded the molester, shielded my Mother,

and shielded me from doing what must be done. My sisters were no longer living in the house. My first youngest brother, Aaron, the third of us four boys, had married a year before, and he was also out of the house. The only ones living in the house were James, my older brother; Darrell, my youngest brother; me; my Mother; and my stepfather Henry, the apex child molester.

* * * * *

It's Saturday night. The moment that has been relentlessly pressing on me for nine tormenting years has finally arrived. For over three thousand two hundred strokes of midnight, I had turned into a pumpkin. For more than three thousand two hundred sunrises, I retreated into the dark relief of shadows of my excuse's – unseen and unheard. But no more! The time has come for me to rise and shed the coward's clothing I have worn with luxury and comfort for far too long.

This afternoon was unusual. No cars zoomed up and down the street. No car horns honked; no car alarms went off. The all too familiar stuttering's of dulled, overworked lawnmower blades cutting grass was absent, as was the whining of unsharpened metal edger blade's adding the final touches to well-manicured lawns. Missing were the sounds of rakes scraping across cracked concrete as gardeners shoved mounds of leaves and grass shavings into trash cans. There were no echoes of bouncing balls. Absent were the voices of kids playing hopscotch and double-Dutch to wake you from a relaxing nap. Non-existent were the pitter-patter of children's shoes running up and down the street, as was the all too familiar sounds of them laughing and playing. Outside, all was still. Not even the birds were singing.

It is now about 8:00 in the evening. As I look out my second-story bedroom window facing Victoria Avenue, I can see the sun has almost vanished below the Los Angeles skyline. Stars have begun to appear in the sky. The Full moon off in the distance is made a soft golden color by remnants of the setting sun as day fades into night.

My two front facing bedroom windows are wide open, letting in a warm breeze that gently undulates, caressing the walls and ceiling as it circulates throughout the room. I walk over to my bed and lie down so I can think about the confrontation soon to come. A hot musky sweat is steadily pouring down my face, and my palms fill with nervous perspiration as I contemplate what might be the last thing I do as a free man. I go over what actions I will need to take in a few minutes. I have thought about this moment for years. Those years have now been reduced to minutes, and the coward, Little Nicky, will retreat no more.

I look up at the ceiling thinking about that afternoon on 12th Avenue when I learned what Henry had done to my two oldest sisters and how my Mom had covered it up for almost eight years after that day. On that day, my world had been hit by four enormous emotional earthquakes in a ten-minute span, crushing the foundation of all I believed my family to be. Four quakes that literally changed the course of my life forever.

After having dreamt of this night for years, I had finally found my courage to act weeks ago today. Tonight would be the night. What took so long? Simply. I was afraid. There it is, the incontrovertible truth – *I. Was. Scared.*

Looking back to a day in 1977 on 12th Avenue, from the second I saw him walk past me and out the front door nine years ago, I had been afraid. It was on that day that I first turned into frightened, five-year-old Little Nicky, when the molester and I had unexpectedly come face-to-face at the bottom of the stairs and he peered down at me, laughing. Two weeks earlier, we had finally put the molester of my two oldest sisters out of our house for good. But there Henry stood on the stairs, all 6'6", 240 lbs. of him looking fifteen feet tall.

I was stunned when I saw him. Confused. Emotionally knocked off balance. Henry can't be here. He can't be.

How is this possible? How did he get back in the house? Who made it possible for the Messenger of Misery to take up residence in our house once again? After all we went through two weeks ago, who invited the molester back into our house without warning to us kids to walk the floors, bringing fear and terror once again? The list of possible candidates was extremely short. It could only be one person: the person who was complicit in the cover-up, the person who was part of the conspiracy who knew all along but did nothing, the person whose silence was permission to proceed molesting my sisters without fear of accountability. It was the person who colluded with him, empowered him, slept with him, fed him, comforted him, and loved him. It was the person who had betrayed us eight kids years ago.

In order for the Messenger of Misery to be coming from upstairs, only one person would have warmly invited him back into our home – my Mother.

Still, Henry had to have known. They both had to have known that one day, one of us would rise to challenge him. Henry had to know the clock in the head of the stepson who always took care of business was tick...tick...ticking away.

Chapter Four: Mr. Louisville

Metronome

Noun: A device used to mark time at a selected rate by giving a regular tick.

As sure as the sun will rise tomorrow, the answer is minutes away.

Clang. Clang. Clang. It felt like the ringing of morning bells at the Vatican. The ticking is pounding inside my head, hammering away. How is it possible that this thunderous, earsplitting turbulence raging inside me cannot be heard throughout the house? Everyone must have heard the reverberations bouncing off the walls getting louder and louder each day. Henry must have heard the alarm bells going off. He had to have sensed the warning signs that his time had finally run out. He had to know death was coming for him. That I, Little Nicky, was finally coming for him.

And if he didn't, he should have.

* * * * *

My senses are heightened. Every sound is multiplied a thousand times. The crickets below my second-story bedroom window are making that squeaking, cheeping sound only crickets make. I hate that sound. At first, it is only one cricket. "Cheep-cheep." Then two. "Cheep-cheep-cheep-cheep." Then the full orchestra launches into a symphony. "Cheep-cheep-cheep-cheep-cheep-cheep."

As much as I can't stand that sound, I have never hated it more than right now. The "cheep-cheep-cheep" is causing my body to shiver uncontrollably, as the mounting grinding noise rubbed my over-frayed nerves raw. The Acheta's out of tune refrain was an interminable metronome – "tick, swing, tick, swing, tick, swing" – their concerto beginning to speed out of control, bringing me closer to my inevitable face-to-face with *him*...to the meeting we both knew would happen one day. Unlike nine years ago, little five-year-old Nicky will not emerge to run interference for him, allowing him to escape. This time, I won't be alone. This time I have some serious backup – backup in the form of an instrument – black, sleek, three-foot long, thirty-six ounces and hailing from Louisville, Kentucky. All I need to do is summon it.

Henry doesn't know it yet, but this reunion will decide which one of us goes, which one of us stays, and more importantly, which one of us will see the sunrise tomorrow.

Mom and Henry are in their bedroom. My oldest brother, James, and my youngest brother, Darrell, are downstairs. Other than the sound of music coming from the downstairs back bedroom where my brother's make-shift recording studio is, all is quiet in the house.

I swing my feet off the bed, stand up, and walk to the open window. I feel the warm night air wrap around my face attempting to caress my tense sweat-drenched body, making the curtains flutter ever so gently. The white, plastic curtain drawstring lightly bangs against the side of the window with each new breeze. Each bang is another angry reminder that my life clock is quickly ticking down.

Not a sound has come from Mom and Henry's bedroom. There is still time...time to lie back down and go over the plan once again.

Thump, thump, thump. Pound, pound, pound. Closing my eyes, I plead with myself to take deep, slow breaths – in and out, out and in. Slower and slower...I try to breathe...inhaling slowly, exhaling slower. Blow it out. Nice and slow, "Huh-Ahhhhh." Whew. Even as I try to slow down my breathing, it's getting faster. Shallower. I think to myself, "Calm down. Take it easy. Relax." But I can't. I'm too frightened. I have never been this scared in my life. He's so much bigger than me, so much taller. As hard as I try, I can't relax. Fear is slowly putting me in a stranglehold. Five-year-old Little Nicky is insisting on coming out to play, but he mustn't.

* * * * *

There are only two bedrooms upstairs: Mine and Mom and Henry's. At the top of the winding stairs, directly to the left of the landing, is my bedroom door. To the right is a short ten-to-twelve-foot-long hallway. At the end of the hall on the right is a bathroom. Next to the bathroom, directly facing my bedroom door, is their bedroom. The wall on the left side of the hall has a short shelf and a large window that overlooks our patio overhang. On the right side of the hallway is a low wall about three and a half feet tall. This wall overlooks the winding staircase. From the top of the short wall to the bottom of the stairs is about a fifteen-foot drop.

* * * * *

Still lying on the bed and thinking, I tell myself to remember where I must be standing when I face

him. More important is to remember how the two of us must be standing when we are face-to-face next to that wall. I must not fuck this part up. Otherwise, I'll be extremely vulnerable. If I screw this up, he could end my life in a second, so I need to get this part right.

Okay, first, when I open my bedroom door, I will immediately be at the top of the stairs. It is imperative that I get past the landing first before we make eye contact. If I don't get this right, I could end up meeting him in front of my bedroom door, with my back to the stairs. At that point, he can easily put a long, boney finger in my chest and shove me, then I will fall backward, slowly tumbling over one step after another, helplessly slamming my head on the steps, and in the process breaking my neck. I will be dead. Job one, get past the landing fast. Don't let him beat you there.

Next, as we are walking toward each other, I must somehow stop him in the middle of the hallway so when we meet, we are face-to-face with our backs to our respective bedroom doors. This is critical. I cannot allow him to begin walking past me, causing me to spin and position my back so that it's to their bedroom door. If that happens, he walks past me and makes his way downstairs. I will have missed my one and only chance. Even worse, he could cause me to spin in the middle of the hall and stop, with him in front of the window and my back to the low hallway wall overlooking the bottom half of the staircase. Again, if I stop there, he could push me in the chest, causing me to tumble backward over the short wall, dropping in freefall with nothing to grab onto. My lungs will instantly inhale one large, quick, 'gasp' of air. My eyes will widen from shock as my feet leave the ground, and the feeling of me

skydiving without a parachute overtakes me. I'll have a split second to think, "Fuck! I missed my opportunity." Plummeting down fifteen feet I will get a quick glimpse of the ceiling, then – snap! Darkness.

I will be sprawled in an unrecognizable heap at the bottom of the stairs. I will be dead. I absolutely must not be standing there. At least if I am pushed down the stairs, I'll have a small chance to survive. But if I am pushed over the short wall? Not a chance.

So many things to remember – if I don't get them right...if I blow it, there will be no wedding for me in November. With my room draped in silence, I tell myself once more to relax and visualize the *one* plan that will allow me to survive the night.

A "CRACK!" splits the night, breaking the silence as my head jerks toward the door.

"Okay, Baby, Okay. Don't hit me again," screams my Mother.

Then I hear long footsteps quickly striding across their bedroom floor. "SMACK!" It's the sound of skin punishing skin.

"No, Baby no, nooooo."

"CRASH!"

I hear my Mom's perfume bottles on their dresser smash into each other and get knocked to the floor. Broken shards of fragranced flacon are scattered across the floor as the brutal evidence permeates their bedroom.

Another large "bump" echoes off their bedroom wall. It sounds like my Mom has been knocked backward into their old, beat-up, white dresser with pink and red nail polish streaks,

a large, brown, and black circular burn mark on the corner, and superhero stickers on the side that Darrell put there when we lived on 53rd Street.

“Okay, Baby. Okay. Don’t hit me again.”

With each plea for mercy from my Mom, a burning rage begins to rise inside me. I can see Henry’s face as he looks down at my Mom’s crumpled heap on the floor, blood, no doubt oozing from the side of her mouth. I want to run into their room and expedite his evacuation plan now. I want to end it all right this minute, but I can’t. I must wait. Slow down and wait. Follow my plan. My big scary plan.

* * * * *

“Baby.” His real name is Henry. Most all his family and friends call him “Baby.” What a name for a monstrous, sick sexual deviant who, when standing directly in front of frightened five and six-year-old little girls with his pants down around his ankles exposing his dick to molest them, must have looked 25 feet tall and 25 feet wide, thanks also to that huge afro wig that fit snugly on his head. “Baby!” If only his family and friends knew what the man called “Baby” did to baby girls.

Many days and nights, I had heard him beating my Mom. Henry has many of the same qualities I remember most about my biological dad – a man I saw beat my Mother often when I was five-year-old Little Nicky back in Portland, Oregon. Like my father, Henry is a bully. But unlike my father, he is an abuser of enormous size and strength, one who could easily threaten, terrorize, and subdue those smaller and weaker than he. One huge difference separates

my father and my stepdad “Henry.” Henry is the worst kind of sexual predator: one who preys specifically on innocent, vulnerable little girls.

Henry has a daughter from a previous marriage who has visited us on occasion. She is younger than we are. When she is in our presence, Henry has no qualms about intimidating us. However, he never does that to his biological daughter, on whom he dotes. I suppose this is his way of showing her she is still, and always will be, his baby. He saves his punishing and sexual cravings for us, his stepchildren.

A quick glance at my watch, and I see it’s almost 8:15. It is now dark outside. I quickly sit up and gently swing my legs off the bed, quietly setting my feet on the floor. Sweat is still pouring from my face and hands. I carefully stand and start pacing my bedroom. I walk back and forth for what seems like an hour, but only a few minutes pass. Back and forth, forward and back, from one end of the room to the other. I wait and listen for a sound, the sound that would tell me my time is up, and I will look death in the face.

Walking back over to the window, I peer up at the crisp night sky. The warm breeze does nothing to dry my heavily perspiring body. I look down at my trembling hands and realize I am petrified. I raise my hands to massage the tension from my neck. Yuck! Wet and sticky. I try wiping the yuckiness from my neck, but it’s no use. As quickly as I wipe the sweat away, more forms. My sweating has no intention of abating. Not tonight.

As I walk back towards the door, my room is almost completely engulfed in darkness. I can see faint shadows in my bedroom thanks to the light coming from the hall light that forces

its way under my door. I can see the faint outlines of my bed, my nightstand, a pile of dirty clothes on the floor in the corner, and my favorite thirty-six-ounce, sleek, black baseball bat leaning against the doorjamb. As I walk closer to the bat, I make out the red-painted knob on the bat's end. Whenever we go to one of my family's three-yearly picnics, everyone knows it's our bat because of the red knob.

“Aww, there you are, my old friend. Even though it is dark, I see you leaning against the doorjamb, exactly where I put you this afternoon as I anticipated tonight's game. Look at you, still being quiet, unassuming, and, best of all – deadly.”

* * * * *

I've always liked that bat. It's the first bat I ever bought. Years earlier, while working at a Fromex One-Hour Photo lab in Beverly Hills, I went into the Big 5 Sporting Goods store on Wilshire Blvd. east of San Vicente after work to buy a bat for our upcoming picnic. I tried many bats, looking for the perfect one, one that would call out to me. I was in pursuit of that one bat that would feel like magic in my hands, one that would create a symbiotic relationship between man and bat. When I picked up the black bat and held it in my hands, the bond was instant. It was as if the bat and I knew we were meant to be together. It felt like it was built for my hands. Over the years, I hit many home runs at our family picnics with it. Even though tonight will be no picnic for me, I may well smack the most historic home run of my life. And if I do, it will be a home run no one in my family will ever forget. They will talk about this one forever.

How Henry reacts to what I say and do in the next few minutes will determine if Mr. Louisville remains in my room, quietly minding his own business, leaning against the doorjamb, ready to be called on for the next picnic, or called on to swing away tonight. Henry's over-due account must be paid in full. In a few minutes the bill collector will come knocking.

* * * * *

“Logic clearly dictates that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.” I remember watching the original TV show *Star Trek* with my Uncle Harry in Portland in the winter of 1969. In one episode, First Officer Spock says this to Captain Kirk as he lay dying after sacrificing himself to save over four-hundred members of the U.S.S. Enterprise. Even though I was ten years old when I first heard it, that phrase always stuck with me. I truly believe there are rare times when one must sacrifice his own life for the needs of the many. Most people are fortunate in that they never have to face such a choice. For me, the time for serving the needs of my sisters in exchange for my life has arrived, and it's a couple minutes away.

Twenty-one nights ago, as I lay next to my fiancé, I silently decided my life would be forfeit. I was going to sacrifice my life so the helplessness of my four sisters could finally come to an end, and they would have future peace of mind and happiness knowing that Henry would never sexually torture them again.

To be clear, I do not want to die. I have a new life with a woman I love waiting for me when I return. However, weeks ago, I embraced the inevitability of my death on this night.

But I would not be walking out of my bedroom unarmed. I would be armed with the knowledge that by this time tomorrow, I will either be dead or on death row, and the dark cloud that has loomed over my family for almost twenty years will be gone for good. Never to return...

Tick. Tick. Tick.

* * * * *

Doubt begins creeping in. “Can I do this? Am I strong enough to do it? Do I have the courage today that I haven’t had for nine years?” As sure as the sun will rise tomorrow, the answer is minutes away. “What if Henry decides not to leave the house, and I summon Mr. Louisville tomorrow to help me make him “excomunicado”, but I swing and miss? What if Henry sees the bat coming, blocks it, takes it from me, then beats the shit out of me instead? What if after warning him he has twenty-four hours to leave our family for good, I walk out of the house tonight, come back tomorrow to see if he has gone, only to find him waiting for me with a gun pointing directly at my face as I step through the front door? What will Mom say after she finds out what I’ve done? What if I hit him in the head with the bat and he doesn’t die? What if I die?”

All these questions run through my mind so fast they’ve become one big blur. I try to focus, but with each question, I grow more and more distant from the mission I know I must complete. Then, an image flashes before my eyes, the differences in our two sizes. Good lord, he’s so much taller, bigger, and stronger than me. His hands are massive.

* * * * *

When we were growing up, Henry would do this thing when he challenged us boys to handshakes to see who could hold out the longest while he squeezed our hands before we would scream out for mercy. For years, he would crush my hand. Many times, I was sure he had broken it. As my phalanges, carpals, and metacarpals were grinding back and forth, sliding over each other, it felt like they were being squeezed by a vise and shattering inside. It was like a bulldozer crushing pebbles. My fingers would collapse under the intense pressure; it hurt so badly.

The entire time he had me in his grip, he would look down at me, staring, laughing, waiting for me to break. But I was determined not to let him beat me. I refused to give him the satisfaction of seeing me in pain. I would slow my breathing and focus on relaxing my hand completely. I realized if I relaxed my palm and fingers the pain would lessen a bit. My hand would collapse to a point where he could squeeze no longer. Doing that allowed me to breathe and focus on not feeling the pain. I could hold out as long as I needed. I allowed him to crush my hand for as long as he wanted until eventually, he would stop squeezing. Many times, I was on the verge of tears because the pain was so fucking intense. I would be ready to break down and say, "Okay. Stop. I give up," but I couldn't do it. I wouldn't. I would hold back my tears, looking straight into his eyes. He would look back at me, waiting for me to plea for mercy, to beg, but I never did. Not one time.

Not once did I say the words he longed to hear from his stepson – words that would signal to both of us that *he* and no one else was king of the house. I never broke. I'm not going to lie, that shit hurt. After he stopped, I would let my hand drop to my side and stare into his eyes as if to say, "That's it? That's all you got. That's the best you can do?" I would then turn and slowly walk to my bedroom as if nothing happened. I never looked at my hand. Not until I got to my bedroom and closed the door would I look at it. It would be red and swollen. But even hurting as badly as I was, I was proud of myself for not giving in. I didn't let him break me physically or mentally. Then one day, after he gripped my hand preparing to make me pay for my insolence from our last session, I showed not the slightest fear or pain as I looked in his eyes. I just stared at him. He immediately let go of my hand and walked to his bedroom, shutting the door with a loud snap. On that day, he stopped playing the squeeze-the-hand game with me for good. I think it was then, that he knew the two of us were on a collision course. When he closed his bedroom door, he had to be thinking, "I'm going to have a problem with Nicky in the future."

Even though he stopped playing the squeeze-the-hand game, the size of his hands didn't shrink. They were still enormous. From time to time, he'd ball his fist and put it next to mine, and say, "Boy, I will knock you out." Looking at our two hands next to each other was like comparing a newborn baby's fist to my fist.

"Stop it!" I must get these thoughts out of my head. If I don't, I'll never do what *I* need to do...and he may never leave...he might rule the house forever. That, I cannot allow.

* * * * *

I've come to a halt in the middle of my bedroom. My shirt is sticking to me. My clothes are drenched in sweat. A powerful cold shiver hastily runs through me, causing my jaws to clench, tighten then chatter. The shudder shakes my body as if someone has doused me with a bucket of ice water.

Almost as quickly as the shuddering starts, it stops. I can sense unrelenting fear overtaking that unflappable courage I had in spades, only moments ago.

Standing in the abyss of my room, time stands still. In the space where my courage is supposed to be unmatched and unchallenged, a grim, cold reality has just bitten back. I realize; It is almost too late to turn back. I am just about out of time.

Tick, tock – tick, tock – tick, tock – tick, tock.

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 swore not to abuse us. He vowed to protect all eight of us kids no matter the cost, 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.*”

* * * * *

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. I see 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. Deeper. Harder. My chest quickly rises and falls. Afraid of what’s coming, my eyes begin darting back and forth, left to right, up and down. Searching. Scanning. Probing. Then, off in the distance I hear it. The metallic sound. It gets louder, closer. It’s the sound of my –

Click. Click. Click.

The 8MM slowly 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 intensely bright light prepares for its arrival.

Then, for a split second, an image flashes before my eyes. I can just make it out:

It's an 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 could get at any Newberry's or Thrifty's Drug Store. They look as if it's "Picture Day" at school.

A moment after the image appears, another burst of light, and then black. They're gone.

"Wait! What was that?!"

Click. Click. Click. Click.

The bright light of the Super 8 continues to cycle, but there is nothing to see as the shutter loudly ticks through an empty chamber. My body tenses as my eyes move feverishly from side to side, searching.

Behind the long cylindrical lens protruding from the gray metal box, I hear the beast of my imagination feeding fresh film into the chamber.

For a moment, the camera projects nothing but a dark grayish image with white flickering numbers and letters. I squint my eyes, waiting for what comes next.

Click. Click. Click. Click. Click.

Flash!

A new series of images stutters to life before me. In the background, a soundtrack of film and memory wind their way through a brother's dark mind.

They're back. Their beautiful, baby faces are now broken by a flow of fear-filled tears streaming from soft, terrified eyes. 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. The image disappears but I know it's not over.

"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 drops down. The thin serpent follows a winding path to reel two, where it attaches and is pulled up and over.

The Bell & Howell flickers from dark to light. The film travels faster and faster. The click, click, click gets louder and louder. Fear pounds in my head. A deep low, reverberating terror, like the sound of an old church bell, beats in my chest. Boooooonng! Boooooonng!

Slowly the visual tones and the atmosphere of my imagination take on a more distinct shape. The light brightens, the theater screen in my head stretches to the size of an IMAX® screen. This scene morphs into crystal clear cinema with every passing second.

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

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

Howling, 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 my imagination won't let me escape until I am crushed by it.

BOOM!

What were moments ago dim, hazy thoughts have become dark, ugly images that only a brother could imagine. "Pleaseeeee! Turn off. Turn off. Turn off. Just this once, please turn off. Please...I beg you, turn off."

I want the snake to stop slithering. I want it to stop. But it won't. The serpent is still moving, singularly focused on its prey, me...the beast is forcing me to watch.

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

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

My mind whirs alive, relentlessly projecting...I am being shown the horrifying, and...and...the 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 their heads whole, on the small of their backs and begins slowly 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.

My mind explodes.

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

He feels them all over, touching their hair...their faces...their lips, 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.

They are so young, so innocent, and yet, each knows something awful is about to be done to them.

* * * * *

“Baby” has my sisters in his and their mothers’ 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, the girls 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?

This brother, their brother, 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 nervously 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.

Darkness.

* * * * *

Light.

Picture.

One lone sister is sitting on the bed. Next to her is a creature that has nuzzled up next to her. It is breathing deep, heavy.

As tear after tear drips from her face, she manages a single guttural sound. In Henry’s sick mind, this sound – barely audible, scarcely able to be articulated – is all he needs to continue pursuing his desire. To this monster, my six-year-old sister has just blessed him with permission to proceed.

Wide-eyed, she looks down in terror and watches, as his enormous fingers spread and slowly creep up the inside of her legs. Searching. Seeking. Hunting. Panting like an agitated

female dog in heat, Henry's hot breath spreads over her like thick London fog, coating her 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."

"Ohhh-kayyy."

"Don't tell anybody."

"Ohhh-kayyy."

"Don't tell Mommy."

"Ohhh-kayyy."

"Don't tell your brothers."

"Ohhh-kayyy."

"Don't tell the twins."

"Ohhh-kayyy."

"It's our little secret. It will be all right."

"Ohhh-kayyy."

"It won't hurt."

"Ohhh-kayyy."

"You believe me, right?"

"Ohhh-kayyy."

"It's okay because Mommy knows."

"Ohhh-kayyy."

As my little sister continues uttering the only sound she can, the sound that the monster desperately twists into her answer, not only as consent, but as her 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, "Ohhh-kayyy," is forced out of her, he slowly begins to stand up and face her.

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 dark green 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 sister can hear his ragged, awful breathing. It is a sound she has never heard the like of before in her young life. 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, barely hold back.

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 sister is tall, hit the floor. The very notion that she 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 her. And then the bedroom fills with the slow, purposeful sound of – *Zziipppp!*

* * * * *

The zipper reaches its metal ‘bottom stop,’ terminating its descent. Slowly 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 her 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 sister is horrified by what she sees. For the first time, at age six, she has seen 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 forward, he comes to a halt directly in front of her, his eye-level protrusion indicating how visibly excited he is to be alone with her.

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

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

For my little sister, 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 her to safety or a white rabbit racing past her shouting a warning to escape before it is too late. It is only her, 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 her. Standing mere inches from her, Henry shuffles towards my little sister. He turns around and sits down next to her on the bed. Breathing hard, he whispers, “There is nothing to be afraid of. People do this all the time.” Seizing one of her hands, he says, “Here, touch it. It's okay. Let me show you how easy it is.” He then takes one of her 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, she screams out, “Nooooooooo! I don’t want to! I want to get out of here. Where is Mommy? Where are the boys? Where are the twins?”

Unfortunately, her scream is not heard since it exists only in her head. Then he raises one of his giant hands, puts it on the back of her head, and gently forces her face slowly down, down, down until – “Aaah.”

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

Calmly We Walk Through This April's Day (Excerpt)

© by Delmore Schwartz

What will become of you and me,
Besides the photo and the memory?
This is the school in which we learn
That time is the fire in which we burn.

What is the self amid this blaze?
What am I now that I was then?
Which I shall suffer and act again?

The children shouting are bright as they run
This is the school in which they learn.
What am I now that I was then...?

May memory restore again and again
The smallest color of the smallest day:
Time is the school in which we learn,
Time is the fire in which we burn.

AFTERWORD

I'm one of eight kids, who after seventeen years, from 1969 to 1986, came to learn of my stepfather's sexual craving for little girls – my four little sisters. Throughout that period, we were on the verge of music stardom, having traveled the world, being on TV, featured in many popular music magazines, and climbing music charts. But during that seventeen year period, a monster dwelled among us. It was a creature that trust and love judged unrecognizable to our eight sets of young eyes.

Lurking silently in the shadows, listening for the snores to signal the coast was all clear, then sneaking into my sisters' bedrooms, taking, taking, taking. The monster repeatedly sexually assaulted them while encouraging and enabling other men to do so as well. During that time my mother had full knowledge of his actions and chose to do nothing until threatened with public exposure by my two oldest sisters.

These are memories, recollections, and feelings about my family life growing up and the emotional impact it has had on my own family and me over the past forty years. No doubt my experiences and recollections differ from some of my siblings'. Factors include among other things age, gender, when, where, and how each was personally affected, how and when we each received the information, and subsequently processed it. For that reason, I am not speaking for all my seven brothers and sisters nor my older half-brother. I am speaking for myself. It is as my sister, Sharon, said after pulling me out of the rabbit hole, "Your story is not we four girls' story. It's *your* story, a brother's story. You need to tell it."

This is my story, a brother's story. It is based on my experiences, perspective, and opinions. It is based on my time and memories. With that said, I am honored to know that five of my siblings (three full-blooded sisters, one full-blooded brother, and my older half-brother) lent their thoughts and voices to this book. They each did so knowing it would cause them to relive horrors from a past they had come to grips with long ago. Without their encouragement and participation, this book, which has been the greatest emotional, spiritual, and psychological lift in my life, would have been impossible.