

**Becoming a Man in the Shadowlands:  
Surviving Rape, Abuse, and Incest**

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by Dennis N. Randall

**Author's Disclaimer**

This is the story of my life as a child, and it is a work of creative nonfiction. I've portrayed events as they happened to the best of my memory. I've tried to capture the essence of each experience. Human memory is more like an impressionist painting than a photograph. I can recall the emotions and feelings of abuse in vivid detail while other factors are obscured or missing. While all the accounts in this book are true, I've changed some names and some identifying details to protect the privacy of the people involved.

**I dedicate this book to:**

My wife Judy who continues to love me even when I'm unlovable.

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My children Samantha and Bradford who have made their mother and me so proud.

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My stepsister, Melissa Bryden - We are kindred spirits.

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My grandmother, Myrtle B. Higgins  
Your love was my safe harbor.

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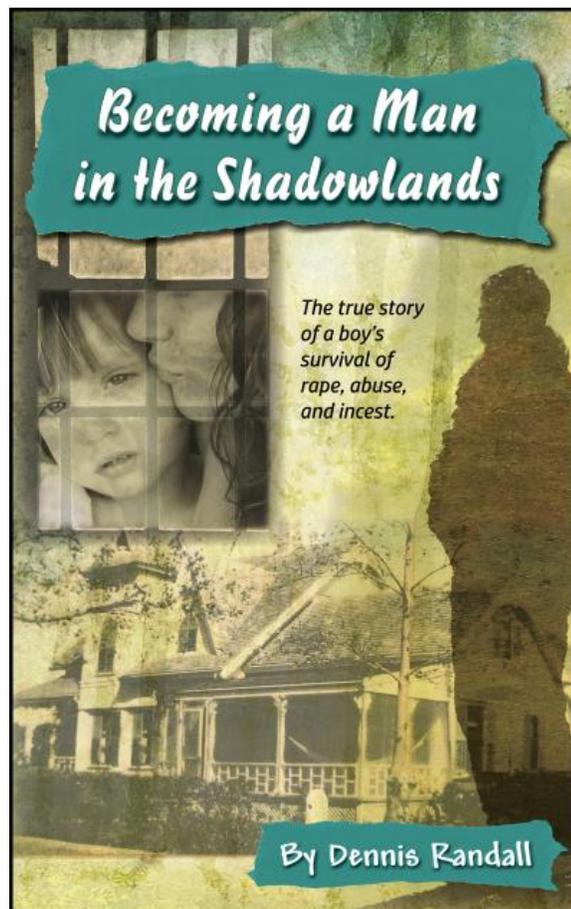
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## Prologue

**"If you wish to have a life worth reading about you must first live a life worth writing about." – *Charles H. Randall***

I was sexually abused as a child. I started writing this book by accident. One day over a cup of coffee, I told a friend. The words slipped out of my mouth before I could catch them. The secret, which I had hidden within myself for fifty years, was no longer a secret. As I broke down in tears, my friend became the first person to know.

The simple sharing of a secret unleashed a flood of emotions and memories. The experience was almost overwhelming and to restore order to the chaos of recollection; I started a journal which evolved into the story you are now reading.

I had kept the secrets and memories of my abuse hidden within me for so long that my silence became a prison. Childhood abuse casts a long shadow over the lives of the abused.

I am a survivor of the Shadowlands, and today I'm finally free. I have begun the healing process. All the energy I had consumed keeping the secrets locked within me is now available to help myself heal.

For me, healing is nothing more than coming to terms with my past and understanding how my experiences helped to shape the person I have become.

Childhood's forge of experience shaped my life one event at a time. Each of my abusers took their turn as the blacksmith. They assaulted my body and mind with their will, each strike shaped and twisted me in new ways and directions. I resisted, to the best of my ability. I refused to break, and I would not yield. Nevertheless, I did bend and change. I would never be the same again.

Healing will be a long and sometimes difficult road to journey, but I would rather walk this path with friends in the sunshine than to travel alone in the darkness.

## Chapter One: Molested by my mother

My mom is drunk.

The sound of her fury is coming from downstairs in the kitchen. Slamming pots and pans and screaming curses announce her rage. When my mother drinks she throws fits, and tonight her temper tantrum is a rolling thunderstorm of anger.

My mother is, as they say, a work in progress. She had divorced my father two years ago and remarried to the preacher with whom she had been having an affair. For the wife of a minister, she uses an impressive vocabulary of red-hot four-letter words. Tonight those heated words make an appearance, and she blazes like a forest fire.

My mother's name is Joyce, and I am her son. She demands my sister, and I never call her Mom or Mother. We are only to call her by her given name; failing to follow her name rules earns a swift rebuke or a smack on the ass.

Joyce is 46 years old, about 30 pounds overweight, and a nasty drunk.

When her alcohol fuels her temper, I give my mother an ample clearance. If she is in an alcohol-inspired rage, my survival strategy is to shelter in place and wait for the storm to pass. After a while, her tantrum abates, and the house grows quiet. Stillness is good because silence is safety.

After twenty minutes of peace and quiet, I think it is safe enough to engage in my new favorite past time: self-pleasure.

First, I check again for any sounds of human activity in the house.

Silence prevails, and the coast is clear. Joyce sleeps soundly after a round of heavy drinking. With luck, I shouldn't be hearing from her until tomorrow afternoon.

I lift a corner of my mattress, and reach under to retrieve an illicit copy of the dirty magazine "Swank." It features well-endowed women in various stages of undress. The photo content is exclusively tits and ass because it's all the censors will allow breasts and backsides.

Men's magazines are easy to acquire. Now and then as I do my morning paper route, I find a random skin magazine sticking out of a trash can set out for curbside pickup. I could always count on several addresses to produce new editions to add to my growing collection.

I kick off my shoes, remove my socks and pants and slide out of my underwear. My short-sleeved shirt is unbuttoned, and I do not wear a tee shirt. Naked from the waist down I settle onto the bed and flip open a magazine and start to play with myself.

Like virtually any 15-year-old boy, I masturbate almost as often as privacy allowed.

Early mapmakers used to mark unexplored and unknown regions of the ancient world with the inscription: "Here there be dragons."

My mental map of the female body included a swath of real estate below the navel and above the knees, which could have borne the same markings.

It would be another nine years before *Playboy* magazine published its first full-frontal nude pictures of a playmate.

A warm glow is spreading across my body, and I'm almost on the verge of orgasm when the door of my room suddenly swings open. My mother stands at the entrance, looking at me, she screams, "What the hell are you doing?"

I'm stone cold busted. I scramble to cover myself and grab the only shield within reach, the magazine I had been using as a visual aid.

In a flash, my mother crosses the room and grabs me by one arm. The next instant she drags me off the bed. As I tumble ass first to the floor, she snatches the magazine from my hands.

There is no chance to shield myself before Joyce pulls me to my feet and waves the magazine in one hand as she holds my arm in the other and shouts, "You like looking at these pictures?"

I'm too shocked and too afraid to speak. Joyce stares down at my midsection and asks, "Or should I say, do you just like to picture yourself screwing?"

She giggles at her clever wordplay. Her garbled words reek of alcohol.

What follows for the next many minutes is a barrage of words and slaps delivered first with rage and later with something almost like affection.

She keeps screaming in my face and tells me repeatedly, "Dennis, you should be ashamed of yourself."

Each time she says, I should be ashamed; she looks into my eyes, slaps me and then peeks down at my naked display.

Soon the face slaps become clumsy caresses and peeks become long gazes. I move my hands to cover my shame, Joyce moves my hands away to one side, keeping me open, and exposed for her inspection.

My body burns with humiliation as my mother's eyes focus on my private parts. I'm on fire with shame. Never before have I been so exposed, naked, and helpless.

Joyce pulls me to her body and wraps her arms around me. She buries her face in my neck and starts to weep. I can barely make out her muffled words.

My mind races in panic and confusion. Every one of my five senses is operating in overdrive.

My sense of touch overloads with impressions. Where Joyce holds me pressed against her body, I sense the protrusions of her nipples and breasts shifting and sliding against me under the smooth silk of her nightgown.

Moisture from her breath warms my skin, and her tears trickle down my neck; the chill of evening air blowing in from an open window raises goosebumps on my exposed buttocks while heat radiating from her warmed the front of my body.

I choke on her foul breath and inhale a gas cloud mixed with the stench of gin and accented with the flowery scent of cheap perfume. At the far edge of detection, a pungent odor tells me she needs a bath.

A misty fog bank of hair obscures my field of vision. Here and there between strands of hair, I can see my desk and scattered papers and unfinished homework assignments. Fear rises like steam from my body and blends with the taste of lilac hairspray from the strands of her hair stuck in my mouth.

When she shifts position, I catch a glimpse of a shelf filled with model airplanes.

All I can make out is the babble of incomprehensible words mixing with the sound of weeping, breathing and rustling fabric.

I'm also painfully aware of my nakedness and vulnerability. Every time I back away, my mother pulls me closer and holds me tighter as we stand together next to my bed.

We stand together like fence posts for the longest time. After a while, my mother begins to sway back and forth, as she mumbles something about being sorry and something about me becoming a man and other nonsense. We continue to sway back and forth in this strange slow

dance for several long minutes. Our dance is alarming, relaxing and calming all at once. The way she holds me reminds me of the affection I never received from her as a child and all the times I wish she had calmed my fears.

I've shriveled to almost nothing. As we continue our weird dance, involuntarily I am becoming aroused as my private parts brush against the terrycloth material of my mother's housecoat and the soft fabric of her nightgown.

My mom pushes me away from her body and looks down at my re-born erection. After a long gaze, she grins, places a hand on the back of my head, and pulls me in close to her body and embraces me. The scent of alcohol and perfume is again overpowering as she buries my face in the cleavage at the top of her nightgown. Her hug is confusing and comforting. It is a hollow reminder of real affection I never received from her as a child.

Joyce whispers in my ear, "Dennis, you need to stop jerking off to pictures of naked women. You need to see what a real woman looks like under her clothes. Come into my bedroom one of these days, and I'll show you everything. And I mean I'll show you everything."

While she speaks, she reaches down and fondles me for eternity. I freeze in place as her fingers explore, stroke, and caress me in places they should never be. Tears roll down my face as my shame turns to new inner horror. I am responding to my mother's trespassing touch. The implications of her invitation accompanied by her exploration of my private parts are instantly apparent to me.

Confused sensations at the edge of an expanding glow of pleasure mix with shame and tears of embarrassment. I fear I might take my mother up on her offer. Shame removes her offer from the table.

Humiliation is burning me alive. Why is Joyce masturbating me? Does Joyce think I want her to touch me like this?

After lingering for several more long minutes, she removes her hand from my erection and whispers, "I think you will like it."

She kisses me on the cheek, releases me and stumbles as she backs away and turns to leave the room. I'm still standing there half-dressed and still in a noticeable state of arousal. She stops in the doorway and stares at my crotch and then back into my eyes. "Sweet dreams, Dennis," she says with a smile.

Then she is gone.

I am trembling and shaking so badly I can't keep my balance, trying to put my pants on is an impossible chore. I give up trying to stand and sit down on the edge of the bed to finish getting dressed.

Still trembling I drop to my knees and reach way under the mattress and fish out a hidden pack of smokes and a book of matches. My hands shake as I light a cigarette and try to relax.

Smoking anywhere is against the rules, and tobacco use in the house is a hanging offense. Then again, so is playing with your son's dick.

"What the hell was that all about?" I ask myself as I take a deep drag.

My mind is trembling as much as my body. Thoughts race in one confused direction after another before slamming into a wall and rebounding off at a tangent. Anger, arousal, betrayal, rage, confusion, disappointment, guilt, and desire whirled and swirled through my brain like a tempest out of mythology.

What happened is so far off the deep end I couldn't begin to imagine how far down it is to the bottom. Joyce's offer to come to her room and see everything echoes in my head.

I imagine the scenario would play out as some sick show-and-tell ending in a sexual union. Why is she doing this to me? What kind of game is she playing?

My mind feels like it is twisting inside out and upside down every time the memory replays in my head.

After a while, I stop thinking and stare at the ceiling. I take a deep breath and will myself to relax. Each time I succeed in regaining my composure, I shudder at the memory of my mother's touch, and my response to her stimulation.

Part of me knows my arousal in reaction to my mom playing with me is involuntary. With a mind of its own, my prick ignited like a pile of wood chips set ablaze by a tossed match.

Another part of me sits in skeptical judgment as I remember the mixed sensations of arousal and embarrassment as my mother hugged me and stroked me. The warmth and illusion of affection, while she held me in her arms, is both welcome and terrifying. How wonderful it would be if I could go to her to calm my fears. Maybe sex is her way of showing affection. The more I thought about the fantasy of motherly love I had experienced the angrier I became. None of what happened is real. She had only pretended to give me her love and affection; the two things I desired the most. I muffle my sobs in my pillow.

I am pissed at myself for crying like a baby, and I fight like a bastard to get myself back under control.

Tonight, Joyce deliberately opened a forbidden door and set out a welcome mat of invitation. It is a door I didn't think I could ever nail shut again. Sweet dreams my ass!

I notice a cloud of tobacco smoke is filling my room and I open my bedside window and light another cigarette.

Pulling up a stool, I lean on the windowsill and absently pick at a few bits of flaking white paint. Gazing out into the night, I try to make sense of what happened.

My mother and I are in a virtual state of war and have been for as long as I can remember. Nothing I did ever is good enough, and nothing I did receives her approval. I could not remember her ever saying she loved me. For the most part, I defiantly rebel against her authority. If I want to piss her off, I call her mom or much worse, mummy.

Tonight, Joyce laid waste to any sense of shelter and sanctuary left in the privacy of my body. Worse yet she tried to invade my mind. I see her molestation of me as a vicious act of aggression.

My mother molesting me was weird, and in a screwed-up way, it is entirely consistent with my previous two sexual experiences. Three years ago, a couple of school bullies abused a friend and me for their amusement. My babysitter raped me about a year later.

They had been unsettling and confusing experiences: random memory blips of terror and guilty curiosity.

Guilt was the hardest emotion to process. Each unpleasant episode, including tonight's encounter, had an edge of arousal, and a part of me was curious as to what would happen if I had become a willing partner to my abuse. I mostly dealt with my feelings by not dealing with them. I just shoved the memories into a corner of my mind as if they were bad dreams and I moved on.

I didn't think "moving on" was any longer an option. Events of the night have changed everything. I couldn't leave home until I turned eighteen. Getting legal and going to the authorities after she molested me seemed like overkill, and could end up destroying the only family I had left. I had heard horror stories about the foster care system from kids at school; I didn't think the risk was worth it. There is no one I trusted enough to talk to about what happened. Besides, who would believe me? Accepting my mother's offer is a non-starter. All I

can do is to shelter in place and await further developments. It is even possible that she will remember nothing because she had been so drunk.

Nearly out of cigarettes and with the eastern sky starting to lighten, I finally give up trying to sleep.

As the sun rises, I finish getting dressed and embark on my paper route.

## Chapter Two: Making Haste Slowly

One of the benefits of an early morning paper route is the empty streets belong to me. I can be alone with my thoughts as I deliver papers to sleeping customers. Not ready to think about anything, I do my best to keep my mind blank. Head bowed, I study the sidewalk and try not to step on any cracks in them as I walk toward the city center.

Down to my last three cigarettes, I make a slight detour on my way to pick up my newspapers from the *Worcester Telegram and Gazette* office in downtown Fitchburg. I stop by the taxi stand and pretend to buy a candy bar from one of the two vending machines in the waiting area.

The lobby is a beautiful set-up. The candy machine sits adjacent to a cigarette vending machine. When the dispatcher's attention is elsewhere, I drop a quarter, and a dime into the coin slot of an ancient cigarette machine and pull the handle. Clunk-de-clunk and a red and white pack of Marlboros drop into the tray. I snatch them and hide the cigarettes in my newspaper carry bag. At the age of 15-years, buying smokes is a real hassle. Machines don't care who buys the tobacco they sell.

My side trip only took a couple of minutes, and I arrive on schedule, at the loading dock. I'm in time to wait in line with a dozen other news carriers as bundles of newspapers are distributed. Thank God It's Friday! Today's edition of the *Telegram* is the thinnest paper of the week and only weighs in at about 15-20 pounds. The Sunday edition can weigh-in at 45-60 lbs, and it's a real killer.

This morning my paper route is running on autopilot. Eventually, I know must deal with what my mother did to me, but in the meantime, I'll put it off.

I reach the mid-way mark and note I'm running about twenty minutes ahead of schedule. It is time for a break. I hop up on my favorite stone wall and take a seat, light a smoke, and try to make sense of my life.

My mother and I were at war since before my birth. Joyce says I was a hard baby to carry and a difficult delivery. For payback, she's been making me as miserable as possible for as far back as I can remember. She's told me hundreds of times it would be better if I hadn't been born and not once do I remember her ever saying she loved me.

There is no universe I can imagine where it is appropriate for a mother to play with her son's private parts, and while fondling him, invite him to visit her bedroom and explore her naked body.

Like a trapeze artist walking the high wire, I struggle to keep my balance. There is no safety net and far below lies madness. If I fall, I don't think I will ever rise again.

It is taking all my willpower to stay centered and resist the growing fear my life is turning into a complete cluster muck.

My father used to tell me, "Dennis, it isn't your fault if you are dealt a lousy hand of cards. But the blame will be yours alone if you play your hand like a fool."

Other than the crap my mother dealt out on a regular basis I consider my childhood to be happy; at least happy enough until my parents decided to divorce. After they split, my deck reshuffled, and my cards turned to crap.

Dad taught drama as a professor at Ithaca College. When the divorce became final, he married a student of his. A few days later, my mother got married to a preacher. Who would have guessed it? Both mom and dad had secret lovers. Go figure.

The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once said, "Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forwards." He may be telling the truth, but my life didn't make any sense going in either direction.

If something bad happened, my dad would tell me, "Build a bridge and get over it." The strategy worked well for small stuff like skinned knees or lost lunch money. I didn't think there could be any way to construct a crossing long enough to reach over the canyon my mother blasted in my life.

I knew how to fight with Joyce. We had been going after each other like cats and dogs for fifteen years, and I gave as good as I got. She would try to beat me down and break my spirit and diminished or ridiculed almost everything I did. In turn, I rebelled, defied her authority, and refused to break. Virtually every interaction with my mother left me demoralized. I loved, feared, and hated my mother.

Last night Joyce caught me by surprise when she burst into my room. Too stunned to speak and did not resist as she fondled me. Horrified as I was, I remained passive and became aroused. I hated what she did even as a part of me welcomed her touch.

I would've ejaculated if she continued, but she stopped before I reached the point of no return. Instead, she invited me to come to her room and so I could explore her naked body. In a weird way, she wanted my permission to continue our conflict on a new incestuous battlefield.

I glance at my wristwatch and realize my 20-minute break has lasted nearly an hour. Damn, my customers will flood the newspaper's office with complaints if I didn't hustle. I race through the rest of my paper route. I'm only fifteen minutes late in getting to my last customers.

The morning clouds have cleared, and every sign points to be a warm, pleasant, summer-like day. I make my final stop at a neighborhood variety store where the owner allows me to run up a tab. Almost everything I earned delivering papers went into the store's cash register at the end of the week. The time is 8:30, a half-hour before school will start. I am in no mood to attend classes today, and I didn't like the idea of going home. I decide to skip school.

The corner store has an excellent selection of junk food. Playing hooky on an empty stomach is no fun, so I gather supplies for a pity-picnic. I fill my carrier bag with several bottles of Pepsi, two bags of potato chips, half-dozen candy bars, and a bag or two of peanuts and head for the hills where I can be alone with my thoughts.

The rolling hills around Fitchburg are the granite remains of a once mighty mountain range. Time, glaciers, and the passing eons reduced them to a shadow of their former glory. Forty minutes later, I arrive at a sun-drenched clearing of bedrock on the crest of a high hill overlooking one of the city reservoirs.

The clearing is surrounded on three sides by scrub pine trees clinging to life in a thin layer of topsoil. As the soil increased in depth, the trees grew in height until they gave way to a full-blown forest. At the far end of the glade was a hundred foot drop-off, which afforded a grand view of the countryside. On the horizon, the skyscrapers of Boston were tiny dots in the distance.

Long since stuffed into my carrier bag is the spring jacket with which I started the day. I walk to the edge of the cliff, sit down against a boulder left over from the last ice age, and use my bag as a pillow. Overhead the cloudless sky is a brilliant blue, and the sun rests halfway to noon.

When I was out exploring a few years ago, I stumbled upon this clearing and fell in love with the place. The rocky glade is one of my favorite spots. I find the grooves on the rock face intriguing. Rocks, carried along by a mile thick sheet of ice, gouged out the lines as the glaciers advanced to the sea. They spoke of times long past.

After reading *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells, I became fascinated by the concept of time.

I close my eyes and try to capture an instant of time. I blink my eyes open and close them as fast as I can. Now I slice this image as thin as I can. I cut as close as I dare and I slide my mind into the sliver of time shaved off the face of eternity. This thin slice of time is the eternal now, and it is my only real contact with the universe around me.

I imagine time as an old-fashioned phonograph record. Where the stylus touches the vinyl, is "now." ALL that lies behind the point of contact is in the past, and everything in front of the needle is in the future. We cannot remember tomorrow because it hasn't yet happened.

I'm mindful of time. Yesterday we were memories. Tomorrow we are dreams. Today we are real. Now is the only moment I can become the person I want to be.

I was 14-years-old when a short poem I wrote appeared in the Fitchburg Co-op Society Monthly Newsletter. My poem was the first thing ever published over my name and for my efforts, I was paid \$5.

Time, that relentless line  
With no enemies, it has no friends  
With no beginnings, it has no end.

Sitting in the sun and leaning back against a boulder is both peaceful and calming. The tension within me is abating as my body begins to relax. Soon I will turn my attention to the events of last night, but first I decide to play a memory game. How far back in time can I remember. I close my eyes and let my mind drift.

A moment with my grandfather John Higgins is my earliest memory. I'm about four years old, and my granddad is packing things into the back of his Model-T automobile. It is mid-morning, and I'm excited and happy. I'm thrilled because I'm going to go for a ride with my gram-daddy.

He gets into his car, and I start to climb in to take my seat next to him. Grandpa stops me and asks, "Where is your Teddy bear? You can't forget to take him."

"I'll be right back gram-pa," I shout as I race into the house to fetch Teddy.

I grab the bear by his foot and run as fast as I can. I return as my grandfather's car pulls out of the driveway and turns on the main road and disappears into the distance.

Gram-pa abandoned me, and it is the last time I ever see him at my grandmother's house.

I loved my grandpa more than I loved anyone else on the planet, and I cannot believe he's left me behind.

I clutch my bear to my chest and cry so hard I wet my pants. With pee running down my legs I stand in the driveway wailing like a wolf howling at the moon.

My next earliest memory is of my mother, and it dates back to about the same time my grandfather dumped me.

It is a short memory clip and begins with me riding my tricycle down a sloping sidewalk. The wind is blowing my hair as I laugh. I'm thrilled beyond words at the freedom of flying so

fast. The next instant my mother is slapping me, cursing me, and calling me an idiot and a stupid, careless little boy.

Unlike my relationship with Joyce, things got better between my grandfather and me. My connection with my mother never improved.

I would've ended up bouncing off the walls of a padded cell if I had to live my entire life with only my mom. Thank the Lord for grandparents. Summers with them were islands of sanity - far from the reach of my mother. Without those ten weeks of love and joy, I shudder to think of the kind of person I would have become.

My grandmother, Myrtle Higgins, was everything my mother was not. Myrtle was a down-east Yankee. She didn't swear, drink, or hit. Grandma loved, nurtured and was supportive of me. She shared with me her love of life, history, and family ancestry.

Often when I got picked up at the end of summer, my mother would rebuke her mother because she had been "too nice" to me. Joyce would fight with her mom and rage at Myrtle for spoiling me and making me "too happy." Myrtle would reply, "loving a boy is not spoiling a child."

There are thousands of memories growing up with grandmother but only a relative handful of memories of time with my mother. None of them is a happy memory.

I climb to my feet to stretch, and another almost forgotten memory emerges from the shadows of my mind.

It is wintertime and early evening. My little sister and I are playing on the sidewalk in the glow of a streetlight in front of our house in Ithaca, New York. Huge flakes of snow are falling, and there is a thin blanket of flakes on the ground. My sister is laughing as I lie down in the snow and make snow angels for her by spreading my arms and legs. I start to make my second angel, a man steps into our circle of light and stands over me. The zipper of his pants is down, and his fly is open. He is holding a frighteningly large, reddish pink penis covered with dark blue veins in his hands. My sister starts to cry when he asks me to touch it. I jump up, take my sister's hand, and rush her into our house.

My backside is hurting. The granite clearing may be beautiful and peaceful, but it makes a lousy mattress. I stand and laugh aloud while shouting to the sky, "My memories suck!"

I wonder if God is listening. Somehow, I doubt the Almighty tunes into my channel on a regular basis. The King of Heaven runs an entire universe, and my hunch is my problems are not at the top of his to-do list. Divine intervention is not going to solve the problem I'm having with my mother. Working it out on my own is my only option.

As I walk around the clearing, I realize I need to take a piss. The Pepsi I drank wants to get out.

I unzip my fly and look around for an attractive place to pee. Being a boy is a real advantage when it comes to urinating. Our equipment makes it easy, and sometimes fun to empty our bladder. I spot a crack in the rock face where some grasses and wildflowers are starting to grow. Life is determined to live, even in thin cracks with scant soil.

I direct my stream of yellow urine uphill, and above the crack and the lifesaving liquid flows down into the small garden. I smile at my good deed because I know from science class and reading my liquid waste contains vital nutrients the plants need to sustain life.

Standing in the sunshine with my prick in my hand, I think about sex. Puberty hit me hard, and I am confused and excited at the new sexual sensations generated by a flood of hormones. My parents gave me the most minimum instruction possible on the facts of life. I learned the mechanics of sex, insert part A into part B and wait nine months for a baby to appear.

I was clueless when it came to anything sexual. I was so ignorant my stepbrother had to teach me how to masturbate in a quick show and tell session where I got to observe him jerking off.

I went into my room and mimicked what I had witnessed. After a bit of fumbling I got the hang of things, and within a few minutes, I discovered the joys of self-pleasure. Mr. Puberty introduces the boy to Mr. Orgasm. Boy has a new best friend for life.

I knew everything except how to deal with being horny 24 hours a day. I would get aroused by the underwear section of the Sears Catalogue. A flash of a girl's thigh, as she got out of a car or walked up the stairs in school would turn me on. Boobs turned me on. Oh hell, everything turned me on.

I didn't have a girlfriend or the social skills necessary to acquire one. Around girls, I was clumsy and awkward. Whenever I tried to strike up a conversation, my rehearsed opening lines turned into gibberish. I might as well been speaking a foreign language.

I was unsure about my sexuality. Girls attracted me. But, so far, my only sexual experiences had been at the hands of male aggressors. As terrifying as each experience had been there had also been an element of arousal. Did this mean I liked boys? Last night my mother derailed the whole process of establishing a sexual identity. I didn't know what I was.

As I walk around the clearing, thirty hours since I last slept, my body feels like a wrung-out dishrag.

I go back and fetch my bag from the boulder and search the edge of the clearing for moss-covered ground. It takes only about five minutes of searching before I spot a blanket-sized patch of soft green moss. I stuff handfuls of leaves and ferns into the bag and fluff it up the best I can, and lie down using the carrier bag as a pillow. I am asleep almost before I closed my eyes.

I've been napping for only a moment before I feel a chill. I'm shivering as I open my eyes. To the west, behind a stand of trees, the sun is starting to set, and my sleeping area is deep in evening shadow. I have slept through the afternoon, and it is now 5:30 in the early evening.

I follow my grandmother's advice and make haste slowly. I return home at my own pace and arrive as dinner is served.

"Where did you go?" my mother inquired.

"Out," I answered.

"What did you do?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said as I went to bed, too tired to eat.

While napping, I had decided how I was going to deal with the events of the previous evening. I am going to shelter-in-place and pretend nothing happened.

### Chapter Three: Dreams of Childhood

My father told me that every dream is a gift from Morpheus, the mythical god of dreams. I find that his gifts come in all flavors. Sometimes the gifts were strange and beautiful dishes of delight. Other times the dreams are bland servings and just a replay of my day.

However, after my mother's invitation to visit her bedroom and explore her body, the gifts of Morpheus changed. Too often, they were bitter choking nightmares, servings of fear, which would leave me trembling, and drenched in sweat. My mother called them night terrors.

Every nightmare begins with a dream. This is the story of that dream:

In the beginning, the vision is always a thing of beauty and joy. It is a warm summer night, and I'm walking alone in the woods behind my grandfather's house. Overhead the full moon is the king of the sky. High in the stratosphere crowning the ruler of the night, there is a rainbow of ice crystals creating a beautiful circle of color. Whispering pine trees start to sing and gradually a gentle tide of music rises in the glen where I stand.

Moonlight covers the forest floor like mist. In the shadows of oak trees, fireflies twinkle and dart about searching for lovers. It is a mating ritual as old as time.

I walk to the center of the glen and dance beneath the rainbows of the night. Turning and spinning I behold all the colors of darkness. There is a shining beauty at the center of each shade of light. Glorious red glitters with danger and desire while blue glows with serenity, peace, and sometimes sadness. Every hue shimmers with meaning.

Most of the time, I dance in my bedtime clothes. Sometimes I dance skyclad in the tradition of my pagan ancestors. However, I always dance to honor the good spirits of the woodland.

As the dance continues, I find that I'm following a path leading into unexplored areas of the woods. It becomes harder and harder to hear the music. My dance begins to fumble as I miss beats and stumble. My dance no longer honors anything.

I've become lost. The clouds race across the sky, so low they weave in and out between the tops of tall trees. Now and then, a dead branch snags a cloud and holds it in place. The light is changing. The trapped clouds begin to smother the glow of the moon. As the silver light starts to fail, the gray woods slide into darkness.

As blackness fills the forest, I hear the rustle of quickly moving footsteps racing toward me. Shadow people are hunting me, and I run for my life.

The faster I run the slower I seem to move. I do not know who the shadow people are and have no idea why they are chasing me. I know that if one of them captures me, I will die.

Time slows and each moment slides into the next. The music is gone, and all that remains is the constant rush of wind in the pines.

The shadows move ever closer to me, and I can hear panting as their hands reach out to take me.

Suddenly the trapped cloud is set free, and silver light transforms the forest. My pursuers fade back. Now it is their turn to run and hide. Shadows hate and fear the light, and they hide like snakes under bushes and in islands of blackness.

The moonlight starts to fade almost as quickly as it returns. Clouds again smother the face of the moon. In the swelling darkness, the shadow people rise and began their advance yet again.

The dream cycles and repeats itself endlessly. They never catch me, but I'm never safe. It continues until I wake up gasping and soaking in sweat. It takes time for my trembling to stop as the nightmare's grip fades and reality returns.

## Chapter Four: Childhood Drama

In the years, before my folks divorced, my father worked as Professor of Drama at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York. Charles Randall carried with him the reputation of being one of the best directors in the Department of Theater Arts. Students faced long waiting lists if they wished to enroll in his classes.

Final exams came in the form of full-court performances of major plays such as *The King and me*, *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *Brigadoon*, *Our Town*, and more.

Every play featured all the elements of an actual Broadway production: actors acted, set designers designed, and make-up artists did their thing. A full-sized Symphony Orchestra supplied by students from the School of Music accompanied each performance.

I got a front row seat to everything. I sat or slept through scores of first readings and hundreds of rehearsals and dress rehearsals.

My dad loved the theater, and he hoped if he plunged me headfirst into his world I would grow to love drama as he did.

The theater-company became my second set of parents. Bedtime was whenever I fell asleep. Much to the delight of my frugal father, the actors and extras served as an unpaid babysitting detail.

My father drafted me, at age six, to play an extra in the *King and I*. My tiny part required hours of makeup application to change my pale complexion to the olive tan hue of a native child of Siam. With makeup and costume, I became one of the children whom Anna had been hired to teach.

I still remember my lines: "Please Miss Anna do not go to England."

Over dinner the evening before opening night, my father chatted about the play and made a passing reference to the actor who played the king.

The man had been born with a genetic condition resulting in his birth with six fingers and six toes. Surgeons removed the extra fingers, but the doctors left the surplus toes intact.

Such a thing must be impossible. My dad must have been pulling my leg.

On opening night, I was one of five or six children on stage bowing down prostrate before the barefoot king.

When the star of the show planted his foot a few inches in front of my nose, I counted and in shocked amazement, yelled out, "Holy Crap! He's got six toes!"

The unauthorized line brought the house down and an abrupt end to my fledgling acting career. At the age of six, I was fired from my first job.

Either by osmosis or by proximity, I absorbed the background, culture, and flavor of the performing arts. I had almost unlimited access to all the workings behind the curtain. My childhood experiences gave me a level of cultural literacy far beyond my peers.

Watching costume designers stitch wardrobes from scratch, and scenery designers create elaborate sets using nothing but paint, plywood, imagination, and canvas is an amazing experience.

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