

“Barry, Barry, Barry!” his mother was yelling in that squeaky, whining voice that curdled his stomach.

“Barry, get out of that bed right now!”

The switch came down hard on his bare back. Swat!

Barry was only eight years old, but he already knew that one day he would be old enough, and big enough, to kill his hateful mother. The thought brought him comfort the way most children found comfort in a stuffed toy or a pet kitten.

Barry looked up at his mother with big round pitiful watery eyes that seemed much too big for his face. He was smaller than most children his age, almost to the point of being frail. He was easily overpowered by his towering mother and virtually defenseless against her monstrous wrath.

“If I have to tell you one more time to get out of that bed, I’m going to beat you silly!!”

She continued to bring the stick down on his back. Swat, swat! All he could do was hold his head tightly in the pillow and cry because it angered his mother when he cried out loud. That was the sign of a weak, gutless human being. Of course, weak and gutless were punishable attributes, at least in his mother’s eyes, so Barry endured quietly.

The hate he felt toward his mother was worse than any cancer. It ate away at his soul and clouded his mind like a dark ominous storm. He had never known the joy of a loving, caring mother. He’d never known the feel of a warm hug, a soft, reassuring hand or a gentle kiss on the cheek. He’d only known pain, fear and humiliation.

He had learned by the age of five, to turn off the pain. Pain wasn't the enemy. His mother was, and the pain actually helped him stay focused on that. Pain was a motivator, pain was a teacher. And Barry was learning.

Barry followed his tightly regimented morning ritual. He showered and washed carefully. The sting of the cold water against his tortured back seemed more like the swipe of an animal's claws than the soothing liquid it was. He dried slowly and dressed himself. He brushed his teeth, combed his hair and went downstairs for breakfast.

His mother was frying something on the stove and mumbling unintelligibly to herself. She wore the same tattered robe she wore all day long. As far as Barry knew, she didn't own any other clothes. She'd run the spatula back and forth in the pan and carry on a conversation with the range hood, or the light. Barry wasn't sure which.

"I'm sure I don't need to tell you," she'd say to the hood, "... 'cause I know what you do. Don't think I don't," the spatula scraping back and forth as she rocked to her own internal cadence. "Don't think you can hide from me. Don't think I can't see. I have eyes in the back of my head. I can see in the dark, I can. I'll smack you silly. I'll cut you, I will!" her frenzied voice ending in a high, almost inaudible, shriek.

Then, calmly, she placed the steaming plate in front of him and smiled warmly. Barry thought it was some kind of hash and it didn't smell very good.

"Eat up son. If you want to grow up big and strong, you got to eat up," she spoke in a bubbly, trotting gate with a huge, sickening smile.

Barry ate quietly, drank his milk, and then excused himself.

She sent him off to school with the same monologue every day. “You come right home after school,” she howled. “Or I’ll come looking for you. Do you understand me mister? I’ll come and find you!” the sentence always ended much higher and louder than it started and it always sent a ripple of prickly flesh down his back.

Barry nodded his submission and whispered his customary “Yes ma’am.”

He had learned from painful experience not to test his mother. He had run away, once, but his mother found him at a neighbor’s house within minutes. He hadn’t realized that the neighbors had called his mother – thinking she’d be worried about him. They kept him busy, playing games and eating ice cream while they waited for Barry’s mother to come and fetch him.

She took him home, carried him up to his room and immediately taped a rag in his mouth. She removed his shoes and socks and tied his ankles to the end railing on his bed with a nylon clothesline rope. She then beat the bottom of his feet with a leather strap until they turned purple and blistered. He was kept out of school for a week and locked in his room the whole time. He wasn’t allowed to leave the room. Even to go to the bathroom. He was fed once a day, which was accompanied by a frenzied thrashing from the switch. As she brought the stick crashing down on whatever part of him she could hit, she shouted the same tired speech.

“This’ll teach you not to cross me mister! Do you understand me? Don’t you ever cross me!!” she’d shriek in her witch-like howl. Until the day she died, Barry never again tried to run away from his mother.

He was an average student, which seemed remarkable considering his circumstance. He had a fascination for dark comic books and hid this secret carefully from his mother. Collecting these occult cartoons about macabre death and devastation, was one of the few things that brought him any pleasure.

Barry had no friends and was usually the one everyone else picked on. He was smaller than most of the other children and this, in itself, made him an easy target for ridicule. He was quiet and reserved and generally drew very little attention to himself, but was frequently consumed by horrifying daydreams of mutilation and torture. The subject of these bright red fantasies, was nearly always his dear sweet mother.

Barry had tried, once, to explain to a teacher he trusted about the way his mother treated him. The resulting investigation and interrogation had been so demeaning and humiliating that he swore to himself he would never approach another living person about his mother again.

He had been accused of fabricating the story. Of trying to *hurt* his mother. The counselor said he was a wicked, hateful child for accusing his mother of something so unthinkable. Even the teacher he trusted had abandoned him during the ordeal. He vowed then, to one day end his mother's life with his own hands.

After the inquiry had ended, the morning beatings had begun. She had always had a short temper and used it in the name of discipline. But in the past she had hit him only when he *deserved it* and only when she was in one of her melancholy moods. This deep, almost trance like, state in which she could talk for hours to the walls, scared him more

than anything. It was during these times that she seemed to end up working herself into a spitting frothing frenzy about something or other.

It always started with her sitting, staring at a wall. Sometimes for hours. Then, suddenly, she'd stand and begin pacing back and forth.

“What the hell good are you? I don't know why I even give a shit anymore...you sure as hell don't...and don't think I owe you 'cause I don't. You hear me? I DON'T!” she'd babble on at the wall, waving her arms and pointing at nothing.

Barry always stayed in his room. At least for as long as he could. Sometimes, he'd hear things being thrown and turned over. He always hoped it would end differently. Prayed for some kind of reprieve. Maybe she'd forget he was there. Maybe she'd slip and crack her skull. Maybe.

Ultimately, it always ended the same. She would come crashing through the door screaming, marching toward him, possessed by some unknown demon and start slapping the side of his head. His mother was a big woman and would have been a formidable adversary for a full-grown man, much less a small child.

Barry would try to cover his head, but quickly became dizzy and disoriented. He would see a shower of orange stars and hear the thunderous smack of his mother's palm as it struck his head in. Smack. Smack. The thunderous hand connected repeatedly with the side of his head.

He learned that the harder he cried or the harder he tried to protect himself from the blows, the longer the beatings lasted. So he became numb and developed a protective

shell. Concentrating on the little chant that played inside his head;

*“Pain is not the enemy.”*

A world inside a world. Withdrawing deeper and deeper into the safety of his internal world.

*“Pain will keep me focused.”*

Cut off from everything.

*“Pain is my companion.”*

Living for a dream. The dream of revenge. And one day he would have it.