“Clickety-Clack, Clickety-Clack, The Clickety-Men are on the attack… To this day I can never seem to get that old rhyme out of my head. Twenty years, and thousands of dollars in therapy have not been able to keep the nightmares at bay. As I sit here recording this I’m stumped, not with what to tell you; just where do I start? Scott I need you to know something, I’ve a responsibility to my bloodline; to you, to Ben, which I can’t ignore. I fear I’m running out of time so I need to bring this truth forward. I’ll start at the beginning. Better place to start then any I guess.

Money. It’s been a staple of family. Baines Steel, our quality speaks for itself. Most of our clientele was major automobile corporations, military, and construction outfits. Our girders could be found in many buildings from New York to California. Our company took a hit when auto manufacturers switched from steel cars to fiberglass. Nonetheless; the fiscal cut was small because steel was needed for trains, construction equipment, etc. The Baines family buggered ever onward.

“Fiberglass was crap,” my dad used to say. Dad swore that fiberglass was about as good for car body protection as paper. “Rolling coffins,” he’d say. I thought he was exaggerating when I was a child, but when I turned sixteen I saw firsthand why he thought that. I was filling my mustang when I saw a guy with a really cool crimson 73’ Duster get smacked into by one of those little Honda jobs. The Honda driver pulled out of the pump without looking and smacked head first into the duster. As the Honda tried to pull back from the duster its hood tore in half, just like paper! The drivers were okay and all, but I was even more amazed to see the Duster only had paint scratches and a slight dent on its bumper. That’s why I always wanted to stay with the older cars. Of course I’ve never really known my way around an engine, but that’s what I’ve always paid Taz for. In college Taz was obsessed with being a successful mechanic and he was good; so I hired him.

Great-Grandpa Alexander died in the 1940’s at the hands of Nazis at the age of twenty-eight, but not before he smuggled Great-Grandma, Grandpa Robert, and Aunt Gloria out of Germany. Soon for my family there would much more death to come. Grandma Jeanne died young like my mom, and it devastated my Grandpa Robert. Grandpa Robert married Silvia around age twenty-six and was murdered two years later by his second wife Silvia who stabbed him to death while he was sleeping. She was also found the next day butchered. “A nasty gory mess.” Aunt Gloria had said. Grandpa’s body was also never recovered. Gloria always swore that Silvia deserved it. Aunt Gloria wanted Grandpa Robert to be happy it was just that he married Sylvia too young in her opinion. Aunt Gloria swore that Silvia never loved Grandpa just the family fortune. What Silvia didn’t know was that she was never in the will, in the event of death all the money went to my aunt Gloria Baines and Steven Baines, my father. There was another man in Sylvia's life, Gary. Gary was convicted of both murders. Even though he only found the bodies, Auntie Gloria made sure the finger pointed to him. My aunt never fully coped with the loss of her beloved brother. Aunt Gloria said Gary’s shared sin with Silvia lead to grandpa’s death, and in her mind he was just as guilty.

As for my parents, theirs is also a tale to tell. My parents were high school sweethearts; my Dad, Steven Baines, met my mother Helen Spears around Christmas 1984. They jumped into love quickly and married Christmas of 1985. Most would have said there’s was a puppy love, but Aunt Gloria said she knew different. “Their love was real.” she always told me. Mom never cared about the family money, she truly loved my father. I was born in summer 1986, and became Dad’s and Mom’s most priceless treasure. I know that, because Auntie never let me forget it. Aunt Gloria loved my mother as her own, they had a strong mother/daughter bond. Auntie never had children, but she had always wanted a little girl. Helen was the closest she ever had to that wish. I was three when she died, mom, I mean. Mom went to a college slumber party with some of her sorority sisters as the designated driver. Mom never liked to drink too much so she’d maybe have one or two to keep a level head. Dad knew Mom’s friends very well and didn’t mind their once-a-week get-togethers. This time though, Mom never came home. She was on her way when a drunk driver from the Gamma Frat House drove into Mom’s car head first. Dad and Aunt Gloria were devastated, we all were, and I still miss her. Dad never really was able to cope with Mom’s death. Even though he always had a smile for me I could always see a frown behind it. I love/loved my father so very much, he always spoiled me in a good way, but was firm to keep me a good man. Dad always used to say, “A man who loves with all his heart, has more strength than a hundred men.” If Dad loved with anything it was all his heart. I do too. That’s why I’m recording this for you now Scott. I’ve never told you everything that happened, but I will now.

My father met Katherine in summer of 1993. Even though you know what Katherine did that night, she didn’t start out “The Evil Stepmother”. I admit that I was apprehensive at first. Shit, I was seven and had just lost my mother, and Aunt Gloria had contracted lung cancer. Katherine gave me my distance, but still she tried to connect with me. She picked me up from school in her car, not a limo, to kind of give me a feel of what it was like to be a regular kid, not just a rich one. We went places together. Katherine never tried to buy me, wouldn’t have worked if she did. I started to respect her. Even I came to believe that I could find a place in my life for her. By Christmas of 1994 I made my decision, I’d let her in.

Katherine took care of Auntie Gloria very closely. Katherine had always shown tenderness in front of Dad and I toward Gloria, she always made sure that Auntie had clean sheets and clothing, fresh healthy cooked food, and her medicine right on the dot. Katherine made sure she was the only person to give Aunt Gloria her medicine. As Katherine put it, she didn’t want to stress out Dad any more than he already was. Aunt Gloria was by all rights a mother to my dear father. Richards, our trusted family butler was the first to question why only Katherine was able to administer medications to Gloria. Auntie slid downhill fast despite these conditions, which surprised Dad and I. Martha, my nanny was fired when she along with Richards questioned Gloria’s care. Martha was fired because she acted without proof trying to help Aunt Gloria, and Katherine wouldn’t have it. Katherine caught Martha in Gloria’s room the day before Gloria died, as she searched for anything that would prove foul play. Dad spoke up for Martha but to no avail. Katherine’s word was law around the house. Dad wouldn’t even listen to Auntie’s wishes concerning Martha; Katherine had him convinced Gloria’s mind was slipping toward the end. I didn’t want Martha to leave either I loved her. Dad let her go to appease Katherine, but did allow Martha one final conversation with Aunt Gloria; much to Katherine’s dismay. I was not privy to that conversation at the time. Richards on the other hand, stayed silent, and watched me like a ridged guardian.

The night Auntie passed away was the scariest night of my life. As Aunt Gloria grew worse that last week I refused to be anywhere but by her side, even with Katherine’s protests. Dad had the final word when it came to me and my aunt. I sat with her while I did homework and talked with her when she’d wake up. Though most nights Auntie was loopy because of the level of morphine they had her on, that night, Gloria’s mind seemed like a steel trap. I was working on some math problems the last night when out of the blue Aunt Gloria shot awake and grabbed my hand causing a pencil scratch across my paper.

“Yes Auntie?” I responded.

I sat down my papers and stood by her side. Aunt Gloria looked in my eyes. Her eyes filled with pure dread. I was instantly terrified, but could not look away from her. What she said next gave me chills;

“Clickety-Clack, Clickety-Clack, The Clickety Men are on the attack.

To one whom spills our blood before sunrise,

The Clickety-Men will bring their demise...”

“Auntie what does that mean?” I reluctantly asked.

“It’s the curse of our blood child.” she answered.

“Curse?” I quizzed.

“Your great-grandfather refused to sell steel to the Nazi’s during the Second World War. Through the rise of Hitler’s regime he sent our family and company little by little to the Americas via contacts he had established here. As far as Germany was concerned we were traitors. The Nazis captured him before he could flee to America to join us” Auntie explained. “They brutally tortured and murdered my father.”

“How would you know what they did to him? You were in America.” I quizzed her.

“He sent me a letter after he died.” she choked matter-of-factly.

I was sure she’d lost her mind, “Auntie that's not real.”

Gloria coughed up some blood trying to respond quickly.

“Auntie!” I grabbed some tissues to help her, but she took the tissues and pushed me back and pointed with a bony finger to her dresser.

“There!” she coughed out.

I looked at her puzzled.

“Bottom drawer,” Gloria coughed. “False bottom.”

I went to Auntie’s dresser and opened the bottom drawer. Sure enough, as my aunt said, the bottom of the drawer lifted right up and underneath was a letter. I opened the letter wearily. It was faded and yellow and carried the scent of blood and oil, yet was dry to the touch. As I unfolded the letter a picture fell to the floor. I picked up the photo, gave it a look, and screamed.

“Shhhhh... Child!” Aunt Gloria hissed. “I don’t want Katherine in here now!”

In the picture was a creature that couldn’t be, a metal man. It wasn’t a robot, even as I am recording this I can’t find the words to describe what “it” was. The creature stood as a man, a combination of steel and clockworks.

“That’s not real!” I exclaimed. “It’s not! It’s not!”

“It is Alex, my sweet boy,” Gloria’s tone switched back to soothing. “I need you to have this knowledge. I don’t want you to know, you need to know.”

I was so scared. I didn’t know what to think. What is this thing? Why does Auntie want me to know this?

“Auntie you need your medicine!” I said honestly.

“You must know the truth Alex. You must believe!” Gloria begged.

After a few minutes of awkward silence, I reluctantly agreed and finally I looked at the letter. It was inked with blood and stained with oil. These were my great-grandfather’s undead words? My only connection to him. Scared as I was, I read:

My Dearest Gloria,

I have committed a terrible sin my child, and I pray you can forgive me. Commandant Reinhold would not forgive my impertinence in moving our operations to America, but I in good conscience could not allow Baines’ steel to be used for the purpose of mass murder. I never meant for you to grow up without me. Reinhold discovered the details of the paperwork and stopped me from boarding the last train to France. I was tortured, beaten, battered, enslaved, and murdered. In my college years I electively studied the occult, form that knowledge I drew a means to exact vengeance. Protect our bloodline Gloria. Run our company well and watch for those would steal from us. Keep the Clickety-Clack Men trapped within the realm of the dead. I love you my daughter and I am sorry. So very sorry. Know this rhyme my child, teach it to our children and your children’s children:

Clickety-Clack, Clickety-Clack…

The Clickety-Men are on the attack!

To one whom spills our blood before sunrise,

The Clickety-Men will bring their demise.

Skin of steel, joints of clockworks,

Lubricate with only blood their inner works.

Woe to the fate of a fallen Baines son,

For after thy death ye shall become one.

I didn’t say a word. I simply sat beside my aunt. Aunt Gloria began to softly weep as she watched me trying to take this all in. I was eight. What the hell? Why this? Am I destined to become a monster over my grandfather's hate? It wasn’t fair! It wasn’t! I ran from grandma’s room suddenly to my own, only to be stopped by Katherine in my path.

“Your aunt is sick, she doesn’t need you bothering her.” Katherine said with malice out of the blue. Her tone angered me.

“I can see my Aunt!” I protested. “You can’t keep me from seeing her!”

“I am in charge of this house when your father isn’t here. You will do as I say!” a strange paranoia seemed to have claimed Katherine’s tone.

‘Who the hell does she thinks she is?’ I thought. I glared at her silently.

“Your room! Now!” Katherine ordered.

I obeyed reluctantly, and walked past her down the hall to my room. I closed my door and laid on my bed in a huff. I puzzled to myself Katherine’s deal. She had been nicety-nice up to this point, but something disturbed me. Why does Katherine want to keep everyone away from Aunt Gloria? Why was so much paranoia in her voice? And, why was Gloria so distrusting of Katherine? Something was wrong, and Dad couldn’t see it, we couldn’t see it. That is when I heard raised voices from Auntie’s room. I felt compelled to investigate. I crept silently down the hallway. As I neared Auntie’s door the voices became clearer. I peered through the crack of the open door.

“You’re making a mistake.” Gloria coughed. “Our money isn’t worth it.”

“The money is definitely worth it,” Katherine smarmily responded. “You will have no more worries soon. I’ll take care of Alex and Steven don’t worry.”

Katherine disappeared from my view a moment then reappeared with a syringe that looked filled will nothing, and injected it into Auntie’s IV.

“No!” Gloria choked and then suddenly started to convulse.

I was horrified at what I saw, but I stayed silent.

Aunt Gloria’s last words coughed out, “There… are… consequences…” Auntie’s voice trailed off to silence.

Shocked, I stumbled backward. My foot caught the door as I backed away swinging it open. Finally my presence was revealed to Katherine. Our eyes met a moment, mine filled with shock and terror, and Katherine’s eyes were filled with anger and malice. This was only a second of time, but it felt like eternity. Katherine stepped forward, I stepped back to the wall. Suddenly reason gripped me. I ran! I ran down the stairs; bolting before Katherine could even exit Auntie’s room. I was headed for the basement. I could hide there! I could get in the crawlspace!

“ALEX!” Katherine screamed as she pursued me. My youth and speed kept me ahead of her.

I ducked through the living room quickly down the hall to the kitchen. Salvation just before me. The basement door. Katherine was hot on my heels screaming my name and curses as I fled.

“Get back here you little shit!” She yelled.

No way in Hell! I thought to myself as I flung the basement door opened and flew down the stairs. I ducked quickly under the many wine racks. Her footsteps sounded closer as I frantically searched for the grate I found it quickly. Katherine’s curses replaced all sound to me. Auntie showed me this once. She said in case of intruder, to hide here as if she expected something to. I never understood until that moment. Stuck again in a moment of infinite time; Katherine’s every step on the stairs, my hands working at what seemed faster than sound unscrewing the grate nobs. I freed the last one when Katherine reached the last step, and I was in the crawlspace before she made it through the wine rack maze, and rounded the corner. Holding the grate terrified, I stared from the grate watching Katherine’s every move. Katherine looked desperately around the racks, her frustration growing. I saw a false calm befall Katherine’s face.

“Alex I’m sorry.” She started. “We need to talk. I need to explain what’s going on.”

Explain! You murder my aunt you bitch! You won’t get me. I’ll run from you. When Dad finds out what you’ve done, you’ll go to jail. You won’t get away with this! You won’t! I dared not to boast these thoughts aloud from terror...

“Time’s running out for you Alex,” Katherine said. “Hide for now. You aren’t going to be able to for long.”

I heard her footsteps trail off up the stairs. Katherine shut of the light and slammed the door shut, locking it.

I was alone, in the dark, in the crawlspace, afraid. Finally alone with my thoughts I sat there. There was a flashlight Richards had kept filled with fresh batteries at Aunt Gloria’s request, but I at the moment didn’t care. Eight-year-old me sitting in the dark trying to process the information of these events that had just happened. My aunt had just been murdered. I was in danger. I cried. Fear and panic overtook me as I sobbed, and the darkness of slumber claimed me.

My eyes opened to an assault upon my sense of smell. The pungent odor of excrement and blood filled my nose. There were people around me emaciated, pale, thin, and rancid. The skin of many of the people in the room was spotted with back patches of dirt, boils and disease. All their heads were shaved and other than thin gowns they were dressed. Most were androgynous to the eye save a small few that had shriveled breasts poking through thin dirty gowns. They looked long dead, like living corpses, zombies! I screamed. No one looked at me. No head turned, as if I wasn’t even there. After a moment I stood, before me, sleeping I hoped, was one of the living corpses. I thought a second, if they couldn’t see me they couldn’t see me, maybe I could find a way out, get to Dad and tell him what Katherine did. Carefully I stepped over the sleeping zombie in front of me. I stumbled catching my balance. When I looked at my footing, noticed my foot was inside the poor creature in front of me.

Am I a ghost? I panicked.

Did Katherine find me and kill me while I was sleeping?

Was I dreaming?

Yes! I thought. A dream. It had to be.

It was there another voice spoke in my head, “You need to know. You need to understand.”

The voice was my aunt’s. Here I decided to conquer fear. The emotion had me paralyzed until now. Auntie was always right. She may be right now too. I moved forward, walking invisibly through the sleeping and weeping zombies. No not zombies, people. These were people hurting deeper than my young mind could understand. This was despair, the meaning of the word. I had never seen suffering until now. Who did this to them? Fear fell from my heart as creeping sadness devoured it. The sadness I felt for them was more than I felt for Aunt Gloria. I noticed then a man, not as emaciated as the other suffering souls. He was dressed in familiar clothing, a business suit brown, but torn and filthy like the others around him. His face was turned from my view, so I could not see the man’s face. I needed to know who this was. The man turned his head, and instantly I knew. It was Great-Grandpa, in his twenties. He was young, like in the pictures Auntie had showed me. His eyes never met mine at that moment for I didn’t exist in that time. Time! I was back in time, but when?

The sound of a screeching metal lock releasing grabbed my attention from behind. I turned around to see a man, tall in a green uniform decorated with medals. On his arm was a red band with a white circle and an all too familiar symbol, a swastika. This man was a Nazi. My mind calculated quickly now. Auntie’s story flooded back to my mind Great-Grandpa and this Nazi man must be Reinhold the man that murdered my Great-Grandfather. The Reinhold walked through my non-existence and roughly grabbed my great-father up by his shirt. Face to face the Reinhold spoke in German through clenched teeth, I could not understand the words, but the Reinhold’s tone and overall countenance emanated malice, and evil. Great-Grandpa didn’t reply to the monster-man, but his face and eyes were contorted in hate and rage. The hatred was radioactive. Reinhold backhanded my great-grandfather and threw him to the floor, and barked a loud order. Six armed Nazi’s entered, they roughly began to pull the abused souls from the floor and by gunpoint forced them all, including Great-Grandfather, outside.

The motley crew of poor nearly dead souls stepped through mud and rain in a gruesome death march commanded by monster-men with guns. A child fell as they stomped ahead, a girl I think. One of the armed guards yelled at the child, but she cried. Weak with hunger? I wasn’t sure. The yelling guard drew a small pistol and shot her in the forehead. Brain matter mixed with blood splattered from the back of her small skull. The sound of the pistol was deafening and shook me to the core. I wanted to vomit, but a ghost in this world I’d no function and could not. A bald woman from the back of the death march fell wailing upon the child cradling the small girl in her thin, nearly skeletal arms. The group continued their march not looking back. The guard yelled at the woman yanking her from the child. The woman refused and pulled back from him. Another deafening crack sounded from the guard’s pistol ended the poor woman’s life. Silent to the ghosts of this time, I wept for her as she fell next to the girl, lying dead in the mud and blood washing away through the rain.

“Follow them child”, Gloria’s voice filled within my mind.

Once again I followed the march to a large building, brick, with a thick steel door. Aside the building came a pungent odor, stronger than the one within the prison. Beside the tearful trail laid a giant trench filled with piles of naked shriveled corpses in various stages of rot. The faces of the dead were contorted in the last moment of their death, eyes wide open in horror staring into oblivion.

The death march stopped at the large steel door. Two more armed guards greeted them, one lid the large bolt back and opened the door. The door made a screeching noise as it slid open to a darkness within. The escort guards barked commands to the zombie people, and they began to strip off their gowns revealing their shriveled bodies. Great-Grandpa did the same. The guards pushed zombie people into the dark building. I walked through the guards inside with the zombie people. The big steel door slid shut with a slam, the giant deadbolt slid locking into place. Bright lights flooded the building revealing showers, rows of steel pipes connected together like coiled serpents jutting upward into showerheads ready to strike.

At first the zombie-people were confused as their eyes adjusted to the new light. Then as though they’d been through this many times, the zombie-people turned the rusty knobs at hand level beneath the viper-like showerheads. It was not water that flowed forth. The showerheads struck: bellowing out a dark green gas that enveloped all as a jellyfish would envelop its prey. The zombie-people panicked and rushed to the steel door trampling each other pounding upon it and screaming. All except one; Great-Grandpa. Those closest to the gas began to gag, a sickly mucus-like sound. Even I gasped in terror, but I wasn’t breathing in that time, I was unaffected. My great-grandfather stood, not choking, in the middle of the green gas. He should have been retching like the others, but he wasn’t. Instead my great-grandfather was chanting in a language I’d never heard of. His voice was hollow as though he was speaking beyond breath. Many of zombie-people chokingly joined in. At first they were gagging the words, then in unison their voices changed matching the same pitch as my great-grandfather. The hallowed voices haunted my mind. What happened next brought my terror full circle.

The zombie people chanted, no longer choking or from what I could see, or breathing. The green gas began to grow darker, becoming black, and congealing into a mucus-like liquid state. The black mucus fell to the ground with a sickening splatter, ankle deep around everyone’s feet. Even I could feel it, a ghost in the room! It was viscous, like wet mud mixed with oil. I shouldn’t have been able to feel it but I did, and I panicked because I couldn’t pull my feet out of the liquid. It was then that the liquid began to move! Black tendrils morphed upward from the viscous fluid like growing black weeds. They moved with a blind-sight like earthworms. One tendril raised up before me and began to inspect me, as though it had eyes. I was frozen in terror. After a second of scanning me the tendril moved away from me and wrapped itself around the zombie-people like all the others. I felt nothing holding my feet in place anymore. I was a ghost again to them, ignored by the tendrils as they not only grabbed the chanters but they also began to attach themselves to every metal object in the room. Within the grasp of the tendrils the metal they attached to, began to melt and separate. With the grace of an expert craftsmen the tendrils began reshaping the metal into gears and steel plates shaped into plates in the form of metal skin. It was then that the chanting stopped; and the screaming began.

The tendrils assembled… I don’t know how else to describe in one word what I saw. The tendrils stripped the flesh from the bones of the shrieking zombie-people. Blood, guts, and gore drenched everything, spraying like an arterial fountain. Everyone, except my great-grandfather screeched in agony, he laughed as the flesh ripped from his bones. He laughed! A manic sound that continued even after his vocal cords were gone. Surrounded around my ghostly form was a small sea of flesh-stripped organ pulsing skeletons suspended in air by oily pseudopod. Though the living corpses no longer had the vocal organs to continue screaming, I swear I could still hear them in my mind. Other pseudopod began cleaning the walls of blood and gore as the torn flesh at my feet was dissolved by the black viscous ooze. I was too horrified to scream; simply, I was frozen in time itself. The tendrils which had in their grasp the metal gears and plates started adding gears to the joints of the suspended living corpses. The tendrils moved with the same grace of both a skilled surgeon and clockmaker as they assembled the gruesome machinations. Everywhere on each victim where organs to be protected were covered with steel plates molded to a semblance of skin. Finally the black ooze started rescind itself as it placed each metal monster upon its feet with a slight clunk. Helms molded exactly as the faces of each victim, covered each skull revealing only the original victim’s eyes. Emotionless gazes inspected one another as the viscous crafter evaporated leaving only and ghost of a boy and a small army of clockwork dolls in an otherwise empty building.

The doll that had been my grandfather moved forward taking at first stumbling steps, as one who lost a leg would learn to walk again. The sound the creatures made resounded the words of our cursed family poem; Clickety-Clack, Clickety-Clack. The other’s followed my former great-grandfather to the large steel door. They, The Clickety-Clack Men, waited. Since the soldiers could only hear silence from the outside, the Nazis opened the steel door. The doomed soldiers were dumbfounded in shock when the Clickety-Clack Men greeted them. The soldiers had no time to react as they were overtaken by the mechanical monstrosities who mercilessly took their revenge. Metal hands ripped apart flesh, arterial sprays showered the unholy clockworks. The blood seemed to fuel them, joints clicked and clacked less and less as the crimson lubricant was absorbed through metal and between gears. The Clickety-Clack Men marched forward to the slaughter picking up the weapons of their fallen prey as they advance upon the Nazis as an unstoppable force. Bullets bounced off of the dead-steel that was the machinations’ skin, and artillery was not fast enough to compensate. I almost pitied the monster-men dying in agony but there was no pity nor mercy in this foul place. It was here, under showers of blood, I finally screamed myself awake.

I had no time to regain my cognizance, as soon my eyes opened a butcher knife landed two inches near my left thigh… Katherine! Katherine was only able to fit her head and right arm through the grate I had crawled through. Her eyes were filled with savagery, like a crocodile trying to grasp its prey within its jaws. I frantically between knife slashes reached for the flashlight, but the knife knocked the flashlight towards Katherine’s face. I abandoned the flashlight and crawled through the dark space as fast as I could away from Katherine’s reach. She screamed and cursed after me but I ignored her. I crawled onward through dust and webs. I wasn’t a fan of spiders; but at that instant, arachnid bites were the least of my worries. A light shone down at an intersection of frame ahead of me, from the plans Aunt Gloria made me study, led me upward with a small tight climb to the first floor where I knew I had a chance of escape. As I pulled myself up on the first floor, I heard the doorbell ring.

“Fuck!” I heard Katherine swear through the wall, as she swiftly and angrily ran to answer.

My heart hoped from a moment. Maybe this visitor was someone that could help me, more likely maybe I could sneak out the back while Katherine was distracted. I crawled forward the front room grate and peaked through. Katherine’s back was to me, but she couldn’t see me unless she really looked. Katherine opened the door cautiously. She instantly recognized the stranger, for Katherine flung wide open the door. There was a young man in the doorway. He was college-age, he was between the ages of nineteen to twenty five, I can’t remember exactly. The man was large and muscular, like a football player. Later that night after the shit had hit the fan I learned his name was Eric Oliver, but at that moment I’d only learned his first name from Katherine’s outburst.

“Where the hell have you been?” Katherine yelled. “I’ve been chasing the little brat all over the house!”

“Don’t jump my shit!” Eric snapped back. “I had to get rid of that P.I.”

“You’re sure he didn’t follow you?” Katherine insisted.

“He can’t. Not anymore.” Eric said darkly.

Katherine smiled, “Killer.” She said as she kissed Eric on the cheek.

She kissed him! That Bitch! I knew it! I screamed inside my own head. I hate her!

Enraged I pulled my face away from the grate, with my back against the wall, alone in the crawlspace. I fought the urge to cry out. If I did, they’d find me.

Katherine’s next word’s ripped me from my revere and filled me with dread.

“Hide!” Katherine commanded Eric. “Steven will be home in ten minutes.”

Daddy! I screamed in my head.

“What about the kid?” Eric asked.

“We’ll worry about him later.” Katherine said confidently. “He’s not going anywhere.”

Eric’s footsteps headed upstairs toward Aunt Gloria’s room, after a moment Katherine’s followed. I turned around and looked through the grate again. I couldn’t see either Katherine or Eric. I decide to try and make a break for the kitchen. I could use the phone, get help, and if I needed, get back to safety through the basement. I moved the grate and crawled out of the wall, up from under the table. I dusted myself off and before I could react I was weightless. I was up in the air. Eric had me hanging by the back of my shirt, tug of my own weight against my chest and shoulder muscles made my arms useless. Still I screamed and kicked with my legs. Eric was big, and his arm was long and thick like a steel girder. Eric said nothing he just held me in the air, smiling. Katherine walked around Eric and slapped me hard across the face. It hurt, I cried. Katherine stood there proud of herself.

“Kids will fall for anything.” She said triumphantly.

Eric wasted no time gagging me and tying me up. At least Eric wasn’t a complete dick, he did fold the duct tape in half instead of sticking it to my skin. I never had felt so my hate in my heart before. I just sat quietly glaring at Katherine.

“Now we can talk,” Katherine said calmly. “Your family and mine go way back, and your daddy is going to be part of the reunion.”

It was then we heard his key turn the lock on the front door. Eric stepped out of view of the doorway with me, “Shhh…” was all he said.

Katherine opened the front door surprising my father. Daddy. Steven stood there in the doorway dumbfounded. Katherine could have been an Oscar winner by the performance she gave. She greeted my father in tears, and told my father that Aunt Gloria had died in her sleep. I tried to wiggle loose, but Eric’s grip was a vice. Daddy burst into tears sobbing onto Katherine’s chest. Katherine motioned and Eric hoisted me quickly and silently up the stairs. I was amazed how this Frankenstein of a man could be so light on his feet. Eric ducked with me into Aunt Gloria’s room where her body lain, and slammed me hard upon the chair I set earlier. Eric hid in Auntie’s closet, I on the other-hand stared directly into my aunt’s dead eyes. I heard Auntie’s voice trail to silence, but I never expected her face to be contorted in a state of pure agony. I sobbed again, as from behind I heard the voices of my father and Katherine as they neared the trap.

I screamed in muffled protest, wrestling against my bonds. I fell on the floor at the exact moment as my father opened the floor. Dad’s eyes met mine, and instantly he knew. Everything happened so fast. Dad had no time to even turn to his attacker before Eric was on top of him. Dad was no weakling either, but Eric was just stronger, and in seconds Eric had Dad restrained. While the battle raged above me, I turned my head to avoid Eric’s giant foot from stomping my face. I saw a pair of scissors that must have fallen from the medicine tray during the earlier struggle between my aunt and Katherine lying just under the edge of the bed. I turned my body around with a flap like a lake-less fish, and blindly grabbed for the scissors, praying for a grip upon them. My prayer was answered just as Katherine roughly picked me up from the floor and slammed me back on the chair.

“Now you may be wondering what’s going on,” Katherine started revealing the knife from behind her back, the same damn one she chased me with. “But since you’ll be dead soon, I think you should know why.”

Katherine started walking around with the knife in her hand narrating like a Bond villain, “It all started 20 years ago. We were kids then, like you Steven. We never had our lips around silver spoons like you of course, but our dad tried the best he could trying to keep us afloat. Of course he had no help from Mom, she was too busy whoring around with male in the tri-county area…”

“Katherine, why?” Dad puzzled.

Katherine rolled her eyes at my dad as if he was an idiot, and continued: “Mom’s appetites were killing my father, but she never gave a shit. My Dad, good old Gary had been raised with Christian values, basically a doormat. Then Mommy met a rich man, a real rich man. The rich man took Mommy away leaving Daddy and a ten-year old girl to raise a baby.”

Katherine looked lovingly at Eric, “There’s my boy. Big sis and baby bro. I raised him! My baby.”

We all sat silently listening. Eric seemed uneasy and a little embarrassed of his sister as she rattled on. I frantically yet subtly cut the bonds on my wrists as Katherine continued.

“The rich man had a little boy and a bitch of a sister. Our mother married the rich man, she never even divorced Gary. Our father found out and went to confront her, but when he got to the rich man’s house, Mommy was dead. The rich man too.” Katherine got close to Dad’s face. “Got the picture?”

“My Dad was NEVER cheating with your stepmother Steven,” Katherine emphasized leaning menacingly close to Dad. “Your Dad did!”

Shock and realization washed over Dad’s face.

“Gloria…” he started.

“Gloria!” Katherine flew into a rage. “The woman who murdered my family. She had to have a scapegoat! She HAD to have someone to blame. So why not my Dad? He was convenient wasn’t he? It all would have been fine if Gloria had listened, but no! My dad went to jail and we went to hell!”

“I,” Dad tried.

“You nothing,” Katherine screamed in rage. I could tell even Eric looked uncomfortable. I felt bad for him and I still do. “They took Eric away from me. We spent our lives in the system. Home to home, not even crossing paths until I was 18. I couldn’t protect my baby. When we reunited a foster home had stolen his innocence. He was like me now, angry, hurt, and ready to revenge.”

I may have only been eight, but knew where this was heading. I finally felt the last bond round my wrist break free.

“Kat please,” Dad begged. “Let Alex go.”

“To a foster home?” Katherine asked sarcastically. “No of course not, he’s a rich kid. He’d have money to pay him through life.”

“No,” she said. “Death is the only language rich people understand. You die. We get the money. Fair trade.”

Dad lunged forward suddenly with all his might breaking Eric’s grip and toppling over Katherine. Dad fought Katherine determined. I, however; used the diversion to hop from the chair to the doorway scissors in hand. I quickly cut at the tape round my ankles and freed them as Eric began to rise. Dad had Katherine’s knife hand in a vice grip, he had her pinned to the floor.

“DAD!” I screamed, but it was too late; Eric was on him before he could react.

Eric pulled Dad back giving Katherine an opportunity. She thrust the knife deep into my father’s chest. His eyes met mine at the moment life left him. I screamed and ran downstairs with Katherine and Eric fast on my heels. The next thing I can remember is opening the front door to a familiar sight. My Great-Grandfather stood there, at least the thing that was eternally my great-grandfather, with two members of his unholy army. The three of us stood in the Fourier frozen in disbelief and horror. The sound turned my head that sound; Clickety-Clack, Clickety-Clack. I didn’t know where they’d come from, how they got there, but they were there: The Clickety-Clack Men.

Great-Grandpa looked down at me with his emotionless steel gaze. The two monsters at his side stepped forward at me. Great-Grandpa raised a clicking-clacking hand and the two monsters stopped, looked behind me to Katherine, and advanced on her. Great-Grandpa patted me on the head with a cold steel hand. It was then that it had dawned upon me that Katherine and Eric were screaming in horror. The Clickety-Clack Men grabbed Katherine and Eric, restrained - not slaughtered. Why had they not torn Katherine apart like the Nazis? The sound of ripping flesh and vaping tendrils from Gloria’s room answered my thought.

I did not dare to near the stairs, I remained silent and stared upward with the steel dolls and their captives. A few moments later the slashing, vaping and clanking stopped, then I heard Clickety-Clack, Clickety-Clack coming from my aunt’s room. Auntie clicked and clacked down the stairs in a steel form more akin to a clockwork ballerina. She was like a doll in a musical jewelry box. Katherine completely lost it, whatever semblance of shred of sanity she possessed was gone. Eric was too horrified to speak. As my father descended the stairs after Gloria I collapsed. Father clicked his steel head at me in concern and pushed past the others to come at my side. I don’t know if I was screaming, or even making a sound at all. He lifted me in his strong hard steel arms and gently laid me upon the couch in the living room. Dad stayed by my side as the sounds of tearing flesh, spraying blood, screaming emanated from Katherine and Eric’s comeuppance carried on merely feet away. Dad stared at me, keeping my attention upon him and not anything else. I lost consciousness.

The rest you know Scott. Richards and Mama Martha raised me the rest of the way. I love them so much. We hoped I could break the cycle. When I discovered I was gay I felt my first sense of hope. Then I met you. The tabloids had a field day of course a young gay billionaire and a UFC Fighter. Richards and Mama Martha welcomed you with open arms, that support helped us both I think. People like George Takei, Neil Patrick Harris, and Sir Ian McLellan paved the way for men like us. Goddamn you were hot, still are. Your opponents weren’t the only ones you could knock dead. I thought that finally I’d broken the cycle. We had a rocky start, but you saw me through it. You put up with all my baggage. I’m sorry I never told you everything about that night before, I thought you’d never believe me, yet you always have.

These last six years have been the closest to heaven I’ve ever felt. You are the closest thing to family I’ve ever had, but that wasn’t enough for either of us. We wanted to raise a child together. Adopting Ben was best thing we could have done. I know you wanted to start with a baby, but you still supported me in wanting Ben. I saw me in him. This kid, eight and alone like I was, like Katherine and Eric were. I forgave them. Ben was partly a reason for that. We all have baggage, and I didn’t want that poor kid to grow up unwanted, in danger, unloved. The adoption process was hard fighting the discrimination we faced, but we stuck through it together. Now Ben is happier and becoming more well-adjusted because of it. We are blessed.

I decided to come forward to you about this because I am on edge right now. One more month and I’m 29. I will have beaten the curse of my blood. Just in case, if the unthinkable happens, promise me something. I want Ben to grow up and have a family someday I want him to be a good man, like you, like me. If I should die within this month. Give the money away, all of it! Keep what you and Ben need to live happily, but please avenge me. If I should die liquidate it all. End the curse of the Baines money before our son reaches 28. Don’t let the Clickety-Clack Men take our son. Share it with all, and keep my bastard Great Grandfather and his damned monsters in hell where they belong. Please Scott, I love you and I’m not crazy. I love our son. If I leave you through early death forgive me, sometimes the sons are still forced to pay for the sins of the father. I love you.”

--- “This transcript was revealed during the investigation of the God’s Lambs Church massacre, a week after the cult admitted to the murder of Baines heir Alex Baines, age 28 years. The terrorist militia had recently been responsible for many hate crimes against the LGBT community, soldiers, and other racial hate crimes. Since Alex’s death, his surviving widower Scott Baines started liquidating Baines stock, donating exuberant amounts of funds to LGBT causes, college scholarship funds, AIDs and cancer studies, and homeless housing. Many Facebook and Twitter comments are calling Scott Baines crazy. But in my opinion, I believe Alex, my Dad. I miss him. I don’t want money which so much blood had been spilt upon. I’ll be 18 soon and Bethany and I are engaged. We’ll be married to two years. So it’s official TMZ, run with it. I only wish Dad could be alive to see us together, I know he’d be proud. Wherever you are Daddy Alex, I hope you’re finally at peace. I love you.” -- Ben Baines Facebook post Father’s day 2023.