

## **Next In Line**

A thunderstorm forces a father to relive the terrifying events of when he was abducted.

*“Even to this day it disturbs me. In all my 38 years of life, I’ve yet to be told a story more sinister than the one my father told me when I was 10-years old.”*

**IT** was raining cats and dogs the night my father came into my room without turning on the light.

“You awake?” he whispered as thunder followed a tremendous flash of lightning.

I rolled over half-sleep and saw the paralyzing fear on my father’s face. He was just standing there, head bowed, eyes clinched, breaths cloistered up in his chest.

“Dad? What’s wrong?” I asked as lightning flashed across his color-drained face.

He said nothing. He couldn’t speak or move— at least not until a loud crash of thunder pounded the room and jolted him into my bed.

My father curled up next to me and wrapped his arms around my body. I could feel his entire body trembling as he wedged his unshaven face deep into the back of my neck.

I rolled over and looked at him. “Dad, you’re shaking. What’s wrong? What is it?” I asked to no response.

Every time an explosion lit up the sky, my father’s body would shudder with horror.

“Dad, what is wrong?” I asked again, but with more force this time.

A heavy bout of thunder pulsed through the room and my father whimpered like a scared puppy as his body shuddered more violently.

I gave my dad my hand and he squeezed it tightly.

“It’s okay,” I whispered, not exactly believing in my own words.

My father swallowed. It looked painful. Like when one is trying to pass food down a strep throat.

“I... I... He was... Oh God...”

My father’s words were choppy, breathless and full of fear.

“Breathe dad. It’s okay. Breathe.” I said while showing him how to take in air.

Together, after a few calming breaths, my fathers' heart rate steadied and he was able to explain to me what it was about stormy nights that terrified him.

“**IT’S** been years, but I can still hear the words to that song...”

*“I know you’ll excuse me if I say goodnight.  
I’ve got a promise to fulfill. Pardon me I’ve  
got someone to kill.”*

A long time ago, deep in the mountains of Appalachia where trees fall and no one hears, a man weighing over 450 pounds drove his pick-up truck back and forth through dark, wooded back roads to the tune of country music.

My father told me that he didn’t know if the man played a different song on these trips. All he knew was that, the song playing while he was lying in a body bag, in the bed of the pick up, has been burned into his memory.

The brakes screeched as the truck stopped. The engine sputtered and the music died with it.

“He gave me something earlier that night that knocked me out. But whatever it was, it wore off on the way.”

The door squeaked open. When the truck lifted, presumably from when the heavy man exited, I regained full consciousness and could hear the heavy rain pelting the bag, his sickly breaths between bouts of thunder and the gravel crunching beneath every one of his heavy footsteps.

“Have you ever smelled an over-charged lead acid battery?” asked my father.

I shook my head, no. My father went on to explain that it has a very distinct smell, like rotten eggs and that his initial thought was that the man was going to use the acid on him.

“But he didn’t. He had darker plans for me,” my father said terrified.

The man put down the tailgate and slung me up over his shoulder like a wet rag. I thought about putting up a fuss. Who knows, maybe someone nearby would hear my terrified screams. But after hearing how quiet it was, I realized where I was and decided against it.

I remember waking up again, on my back, to six pair of brainwashed eyes staring down on me. Sickly kids with swollen bodies and aprons on— they all looked like chefs. I was by far the smallest.

The place was set up like a kitchen. It was hot, dirty and had the most god-awful smell. A car battery powered a single bulb that hung over a bloodstained table. It was leaking acid, which was where the egg smell came from.

I rose to my feet and was about to ask the others what this place was when a door opened and my eyes laid upon the most grossly shaped man I've ever seen in my life. He was a mess. Wore a bib around his neck. When he walked in, the kids quickly took their places in line. With bloodshot eyes, the man looked at a portly kid next in line. Then in the deepest, most artery-clogged breath, he told us to prepare his meal and left the room.

I looked at my father and he nodded to the unimaginable question in my head, "Yes, he was kidnapping kids," my father said. "A new kid would arrive and the kid who'd served the longest time would be the meal for that night."

I looked at my father stunned.

"How did you escape?"

My father looked at me with a pain in his eyes that I've only seen once before when my mother died.

"It's a good thing I stayed quiet the night I arrived. "

It was my turn and all the kids turned to me. For some reason, whatever drug he injected us with, didn't stay long with me. When he returned for his meal, he entered a dark room. He growled and called out, but no one answered. Not until he shined a flashlight did he see that the children were dead, everyone but me. The man screamed. I screamed back. He turned, shined the flashlight in my eyes and that's when I doused him with battery acid.

**The End**