

Narration

Max Helfman

I was born Jonathon Aaron Steel, to the parents of William and Elizabeth steel. I am a Leo, born under the sign of the lion and I was raised in a lower middle class family with only one brother Michael whom I love dearly. He was five years my senior. My father's nickname was Red which I could never understand why because his hair was sandy blond. Nevertheless, the name stuck. So when my brother was born my father became Big Red and my brother Little Red. I should have known from the first time when I realised their special connection, that I just didn't fit in to my father's plans. And as I grew older the constant comparison between my brother and myself left little doubt who was the image of perfection in my father's eye. To him, my brother could do no wrong and I became The Invisible Boy, the proverbial 'black sheep' and I soon figured out that red and black don't mix. The beatings I received became more and more frequent to the point where I would ask my father "Am I the orphaned son you would never need"? But oddly enough I worshipped the ground my father walked upon.

My brother and I were a strange mixture, as different as daylight and dark. Looking back, it's hard to imagine we came from the same parents. I sometimes wondered if we had the same father, but I always dismissed that idea as my mother was far too religious, my father as well, to ever even think of such a thing. But my brother who had always sensed my parent's instilled insecurities tried his best to encourage me. For I was born different and he knew it. He often told me when I was born an angel flew over my bed and christened me with a magic wand and said "You shall be the one". And I had no idea what 'The one' was, but as I grew older I began to understand. Most boys put their mother on a pedestal and worship them like the Virgin Mary but with her too my relationship was different and not for the good. She was opinionated, uneducated, sometimes prejudiced, overbearing, believed everything she read, true or not, and when it came to religion was over-zealous to say the least. A mind boggling combination but she was pretty, very pretty and I would often wonder, bordering on complete confusion, how a person of this description could rationalise life.

This was a series of characteristics that many times in my life I would look back on in bewilderment and the women I sought after when I was older would be nothing like her. In the pain of youth, the misery of my neglect, would manifest itself in many ways; depression - my enemy, fear - my friend, hatred - my lover, and anger - fuel for my fire. These four characteristics of my personality would become the guiding force of my life and would control everything I did or was to become. I shall explain

later in the story about them which I call my Four Doors of Doom. The mirror, the great plaything for man's vanity. The mirror was to become, at times, my altar of refuge and other, my alter ego and its magnificent obsession with a relentless pursuit of attention. It served as a chilling reflection of my own wretchedness and my greatness. It was the one place I could go to see inside myself, to find love, in an otherwise loveless household where I could be great, where I could be anything or anyone I wanted to be - one hundred percent pure escapism until I discovered its precious secret. The mirror lives, it breathes, it talks, it lies, it has a personality all its own. It is a genie that grants all the wishes you could ever dream, at least in my case - all except two. It was my 14th birthday, the day that changed my life forever. My brother Michael, the one person who was my guiding light, my friend, my hero, was killed by a drunk driver in a head-on collision. He died instantly. I couldn't even bring myself to go to his funeral. My agony was so great I just couldn't come face to face with him that one last time. My failure to attend intensified my parents' resentment for me even more. But from that moment on, nothing seemed to matter, especially that living hell called 'home'. For one year after his death I roamed the streets in a fog barely conscious of anything or anyone. I discovered alcohol, and girls, drugs and in general a life I had never known which was exciting, frightening and wonderfully dangerous. And it was then as I staggered through a down town city street in one of my drunken rages I stumbled across a small music shop and in the window stood the instrument, the fiery tool that would become the object of my new found desire. The instrument of my passion, my obsession, the blood-red six string. It was like I'd known the thing all my life.

I soon found it was the only way I could truly express myself. It was a way to vent all my frustrations and all my pain - completely opened all my Four Doors Of Doom and I found myself going to the mirror for counsel less and less. Because of this my songs seemed to write themselves and I knew my destiny was in my music but I was going to have to get out of this backwards town I was in if I was ever going to succeed. I was 16 going nowhere and the only thing my parents knew was 'live, work, die. ' And if I stayed there that was exactly what was going to happen to me - I was gonna die. So I ran away to the big city with the lights, excitement and danger and a chance for me to finally live and do my music without the persecution I had known for so long. I hitchhiked all the way with a suitcase in one hand and my guitar in the other and as I stood at the edge of the city the magic of the place was incredibly intense. It was to be my

new home the place I would call the 'Arena Of Pleasure'. I lived and struggled in the arena for two years trying to get a break in music and make a record and that's when I ran across a delightful business man named Charlie. He had been a lawyer for 25 years before he discovered he could

fuck over more people in the recording industry than he ever could in a court of law and he was the president of one of the biggest record companies in the world. The music business to Charlie was nothing more than a sacrificial lamb to be led to slaughter and the weapon of choice was his record company that he'd wield like a mighty sword. The great tool he would lovingly refer to as 'The Chainsaw'. The morgue, Charlie said, was the music business where everyone sells out. Where all the artists will eventually whore themselves to commercialism, the place where the music comes to die. And through him I learned everything I needed to know about the music business and even things I didn't want to know. He said he could make me a star, one of the biggest things the world had ever seen. The big time was calling and I was on my way. He introduced me to an aspiring young manager named Alex Rodman and together we took on the whole fucking world and kicked it square in the ass.

Just before the release of my first album I was sitting on the steps in front of my apartment when a gypsy woman passed by. She stopped and asked me if I would like my fortune read and I had never had it done so I was more than happy to say yes. She revealed a deck of Tarot cards and began to tell me of my past in which she went into great detail about the pain of my youth, my brother and my parents. She saw my present with my great struggle to succeed and fulfillment of my dreams and new found happiness but after about ten minutes she stopped and I wanted to know of my future and pleaded for her to go on and finally she spoke. She showed me a very disturbing vision of where I was going. I told her that I wanted a phenomenal wealth and fame and in the cards she saw a fallen hero and looked at me and said "Be careful what you wish for - it might come true, for the face of death wears the mask of the King of Mercy". I asked her if she was sure of what she had seen and with a blank stare she turned and walked away leaving me with the cards and a haunting that would follow me the rest of my life.

Success agreed with me with amazing ease. The more records I sold the more excess I had of everything - friends, money, women, cars, houses. It was at one of my nightly hedonisms where a flash individual entered the room. He introduced himself as the Doctor. I asked him what kind of doctor and he smiled and said, "meet my friend Uncle Sam". The mirror that was once on the wall, my alter ego, was now talking to me from the table and the next three years were a blur. Drugs became the new candy and alcohol became the new Coca Cola and Doctor Rockter was my new best friend and I never heard the mirror speak again until tonight.

I was at the peak of my career and the world saw me as I had always wanted it, The Idol, the Great Crimson Idol. Now I had everything it seemed, everything but the one thing that would have meant more to me than anything. The pain that manifested itself into my obsession, the acceptance of me by my father and mother, who I had not spoken to since I had left home.

One morning my manager Alex came in and broke up one of our nightly Easy Rider Parties. An Easy Rider Party was when everybody would come over to my house, the band, the doctor, hot and cold running women etc. And we'd watch the movie and do everything going on the film only a lot more. And

he threatened to leave me if I didn't clean up. It was not that he cared about me as a person he was only interested in my talent and what I could do to further his own career as a true showbiz mogul. But it was then I realised just how far things had gone. So I sat there alone in my palace of pain and I was just numb from the alcohol and the drugs but equally as intoxicated by my own fame and I had just enough courage to pick up the phone and dial the number. My mind went into a whirlwind thinking of what would happen and the fear overcame me and I started to put down the phone

but before I could a voice at the other end rang out and it sent a chill through me that I had never known. It was my mother. It was hard for me to speak, my heart pounding out of my chest but when I did I did the best I could. She was very cold. But I knew the shock of suddenly hearing from me after all these years was overwhelming and I was hoping that all the time that had passed would heal the deep wounds between my parents and me but... I desperately wanted them to approve of me, to accept me - it was all I ever wanted. I hoped my success would finally prove my worthiness and they would welcome the prodigal son home. All I wanted was for them to be proud of me but less than 50 words were spoken. The last four were "We have no son".

Some wounds never heal and mine had scarred me for life. A great star fell from the sky that night and with its descent left a scorched path in its way - a great path of self-destruction before burning out. And on this night the great finale is finally here. 'Be careful what you wish for - it may come true. ' Long live, long live the King of Mercy.

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