

## Flowered Curtains

There was a long, piercing scream followed by an audible rip. The father tore the garden fork out of his wife's abdomen, bringing a sizable chunk of her intestines with it. The deluge of gore and blood splattered the four cowering children, shocking them into action. They desperately scrambled for the door, scrabbling at the knob. The door banged open and the children surged forward. Three of them made it through. Little Maria wasn't as lucky. The shovel caught her in the small of the back, knocking her down and stunning her. Her father grabbed her ankle. Her brother turned and watched her slide across the floor, shrieking and clawing in vain.

The three remaining children thundered down the staircase, remembering with a stab of grief how their mother used to forbid such a descent. They ran full-tilt towards the door that remained tantalizingly open. Suddenly, their crazed shell of a father burst through a side door, cutting them off. He had gone down the back staircase. He caught Michael in full stride around the waist and threw him down. His foot landed on his first-born son's face with a noise like a smashing watermelon. In one movement, he kicked his dead son aside, took a step, and hacked into Michelle's gut with the sharp edge of the shovel.

Matthew had changed course the instant he had seen his father. He launched himself behind his father's favorite recliner, concealing himself behind the flowered curtains. Quivering, sick, mortified, and in shock, he covered his mouth to prevent a scream or the contents of his stomach from coming out as he watched his sister twitch in the throes of death. His father stood over her briefly, dropped the shovel, and started to

walk heavily toward Matthew's hiding place. Matthew closed his eyes and tried to come to terms with the approaching deathblow.

It never landed. His father sat down heavily in his recliner with the familiar squeak of leather. Matthew sat, forcing himself to not sob aloud. He watched in horror as his father produced a gun, put it in his mouth, and squeezed the trigger.

Twelve years later

Matthew stepped into the dim light of the store. He was decorating his first apartment, which made him feel somewhat free of his demons for the first time in years. He wandered through the aisles, browsing the various lamps, ceiling fans, and ornaments. He stepped into the aisle displaying drapes. Something caught his eye, and he froze. He stared at the flowered curtains, and the rush of memories knocked him to the floor. His shaking hand slid towards the pistol he'd carried for several years out of paranoia. He put the gun into his mouth, staring blankly at the curtains.