



A SHORT STORY

PLAY NICE

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CHAPTER 1

It was a cool spring day in mid-May of 94'. I was a quiet young lad of 24 going on 25 months. Big for my age, and currently mute by choice, except for the occasional grunt for basic communication. At the time, I was always being compared to my older brother. People constantly asked if we were twins. Pfft. Like I would share a womb with that kid...Speak of the devil...There he is now. My brother with his average build, supposedly cute face (don't ask me, I'm biased towards the opposite), abundant vocabulary, and a full stinky diaper of attitude that made every day a living hell. I don't mean to over sell it, but if Lucifer himself had to share his toys with this arrogant egotistical five-year-old demon, he too would change which level of Hades he resided in. I may be laying it on a bit thick, but I'll let you be the judge.

Anyway, where was I before I lost my place? Oh, yes! It was a cool spring day in May of 94'. My family and I had attended an exciting Mariners baseball game the night before. I say exciting by assumption only. Is it exciting when the overzealous crowd, whose sheer rudeness

and lack of situational awareness ever so blatantly woke me from my attempts at perpetual napping? I'd say so, but I still use a sippy cup to drink my juice, so don't take my word for it. Regardless, the night had been full of cheering, laughter, and free stuff. If you didn't know this, FREE is the best price out there. Or so I've heard. To this day, I haven't paid for a single morsel of food. Jealous? You should be.

Now, I bet you're wondering what stuff was given to me exactly, and perhaps why? Well, I was given a marvelous shiny brand new, fresh out of the box, mini souvenir baseball bat. Emblazoned with Edgar Martinez's name and the number 11 in fancy font on it. Still jealous? I thought so. Do you know why I was offered such a beautiful gift? Was it because of my adorable round squishy face? Was it because I am THE blessed child my mother surely deserved, (especially when compared to THAT kid)? Actually...It's because it was 'free bat day' at the stadium... But that doesn't mean those other things I listed aren't true! I'm stating this for the record so there is no confusion. I deserved that bat, my older brother did not...but they gave him one anyway. I'm beginning to think that the world is full of people who don't understand how important I am...

I really should get to the story. I tend to ramble. Like I was saying, it was the morning after the baseball game. A wondrous time was unfolding before my youthful pupils. Mom had pulled out some balls, blocks, and two incredible three wheeled contraptions into the family room. She called them tricycles! One for each of us. I recall sitting stunned by their beauty. The engineering prowess it took to assemble a masterfully designed contraption for my cushioned bottom was something I remember grunting happily at. Mine was green and black. Marvelous. The other, a shade of blue. Meant for my brother.

Mom picked me up and sat me atop my three wheeled steed. While my brother darted for his ride like a clumsy dog on hardwood floors.

Then he proceeded to run headlong into the wall, the stairs, and into me. Rear ending me wildly. Road rage much? I, however, when not being bombarded, bounced like a jovial rabbit as I gripped the polished rubber handles, scooted back and forth, rolling effortlessly across the thin carpet. By and large the best time one could have while wearing pants.

In the coming hour my brother and I would continue to play, while mom would record us for memorabilia sake, and play referee... I, for the most part, stayed and rode my green gallant three wheeled pony. The *other* kid would traverse between building towers, which he subsequently would bowl over with the balls, and pelt me with the same aforementioned balls as I was some sort of interactive carnival game...I was not amused! Although, I believe you all would be proud of me. Besides the occasional glare and greater gorilla grunt I did NOT retaliate...At that point.

“Play nice,” my mother would say, “Leave him alone. He isn’t bugging you.”

Of course, the little turd would retort in kind with a smug smile and excessive blinking to convey innocence of the highest level (Darn near Pope like) ...Did I mention that this assault was all on camera? Criminals are stupid. Now we had evidence of this and what was to come. His trial would be swift and filled to the brim with justice. Imagine me pumping my fist. Sip on that for a second. Ahh, doesn’t that fill your soul up with joy? Karma. Gotta love it. Dang it, I’m getting ahead of myself again. Moving on!

Playtime continued as it normally did, I would be minding my own business, reflecting on the inner workings of the world, exploring with blocks, and of course taking my trike for a spin around the family room. Then my good time would be blatantly interrupted by a rogue ball to the head, shattering my concentration. Or a pillow would be

tossed at me like a soft frisbee. Or even an assault of the most heinous kind. A ‘push and run!’

My brother would scoot up next to me, like you would see in traffic. One hand on his handlebars, the other forcibly removing me from my molded Playskool throne. Devastation ensued sobbing would be pushed down to the deepest part of my soul. Crying is for babies, and I was two! Determined not to be labeled a terrible two kid, I swallowed my annoyance. The emotion transcended through me into a resentful silt in the bottom of my well of patience. That well, for the record, was getting a tad full...If you know what I mean.

Just to add more evidence to the eventual close and shut case that would be my brother’s premeditated attempted murder conviction; he at the time of my birth requested that I, the always loving, complaint free, obedient angel child, go live permanently with my grandmother. While, on the one hand, it would have been a wonderful life full of cookies and milkshakes. On the other hand, how terribly rude of him to suggest such a thing! Just saying. Now are you starting to understand my previous statements about him? I don’t lie or embellish. I’m about as honest as Abe. Anyway, back to it.

After repeated push and run events featuring my mother’s repeated demand of, “Play nice!” he was removed from the playroom for a few minutes of well-deserved peace for me, and as you guessed it, an earned time out for him. I recall the pleasant sounds of cartoons on the television screen, the dog snoring by the couch, and my brother screaming like a gremlin getting his legs removed viciously by a pack of jackals...Actually, he was just *really* vocal about not liking timeout. But a little guy can dream, can’t he? However, it was what came next that pushed me over the edge.

This next alarming transgression occurred after my brother was released from his bedroom prison. Several uninterrupted peace filled

minutes later he had returned to the playroom under the watchful eye of our mother. At this point, he made camp on one side of the room sorting blocks, while I maintained my stance on the beloved tricycle. It was around that time that my mom grabbed her camera again and continued to film us. Doing her best to capture the fun innocent moments. However, instead of precious memories, my mother would capture an act so hellacious that Beelzebub himself would weep all over his pointed goatee.

At long last, I made the brave decision to move closer to my brother, a prior convict. Now that he had been rehabilitated, I wanted to extend an olive branch to see if he'd desire quality time together. Perhaps to share those delightfully colored blocks. Build a tower or even a bridge. A literal representation of our future relationship. If you see where I'm going here, prepare to be disappointed.

I scooted my padded booty over to his blocky metropolis. On arrival for the proposal of 'quality time', our eyes met. He stared. I stared back. I sucked on my binky. He licked his lips. We were communicating like long lost friends. Like family. Like brothers! Then...Heart wrenching betrayal! Without wasting any time, he greedily leapt for me and my steed. A repeat offender, no doubt. I should have known!

His dastardly hands unlatched my thumb and fingers from the handlebars. Prying them away from my precious trike. While simultaneously using his foot to shove me to the side like some foul detritus. A broken and forgotten toy, cast aside. A tree felled to make way for something noble like a shopping mall or parking structure. A city razed to the ground like the Rome of antiquity, and he, embodying the hordes of barbarian tribesmen with a lust for looting in his heart kicked me to the floor with a wallop of such great malice and unquenched materialism that I could do nothing more than brace for

impact. Falling to the carpeted floor only to witness him riding off with my beloved green and black steed.

My heart wept. The level of sadness that invaded my soul that day cannot be understated. It is a wrongdoing that is etched within my being like the fossilized footsteps of the lost dinosaurs. Leaving an indelible mark, never to be washed away. At that moment, I knew no amount of free food or stuff would ever cure me of this treachery. This couldn't possibly get any worse, I thought to myself. Well, I was wrong, yet again! Damn, my naivety. Then he took it a step further. If it wasn't bad enough that he, my own flesh and blood stole, no, ripped away my favorite toy in the whole world. The thing I had for the past hour (I bond quickly). He decided to mock me further. The final humiliating blow to an already devastating frontal attack. He double mounted his and my tricycle...At the same time!

Talk about throwing dirt in your eyes. He didn't even have the courtesy to look back at me one last time. He took what he wanted, showed his dominance, and left me on the floor, in a heap of my own making. It was at that precise moment when my sadness evolved into a feeling not of self-loathing, but of anger. Pure and dignified malice welled in my chest. I knew then that I would have to put a stop to this behavior myself. I was going to have to make him, as my mother put it, "Play nice."

CHAPTER 2

It was an hour or so after the crime took place. The fate and whereabouts of the criminal, you ask. Well, after the offense he had yet another stint in the slammer (our shared bedroom), then was released on whatever stems for ‘good behavior’ these days. Mom, the warden, said he “learned his lesson” (Pfft. Not yet he hadn’t) and was now happily stationed in front of the television watching his beloved, “Mary Poppins.”

Me on the other hand? I was still reeling from the tragic scene, wandering aimlessly in the living room upstairs. Far away from him. That terrible moment continued to unfold before my eyes over and over again. All I could do was see him riding off with his and my tricycle. Like he owned both. Like he deserved both! Something had to change before he became more belligerent in his actions. Before every waking moment was his to control and I his adorable little plaything to abuse. Well, enough was enough! Even though I wasn’t speaking yet, I was going to give him a piece of my mind in the bluntest way possible...

CHAPTER 3

I can't begin to explain where the idea stemmed from, nor do I care at this point. The thought presented itself and I took hold of it. I gripped it in the form of my brand-new mini souvenir baseball bat emblazoned with Edgar Martinez's name and the number 11 in fancy font stenciled in its glossy finish. I remember standing at the top of the split staircase near my bedroom holding the smooth object. Binky in mouth, ready to exact my revenge. There were two kids in this house fighting for dominance, and I was about to come out swinging.

Descending the stairs, one hand on the wall steadying my short stature, I walked with a slow deliberate pace. Something like a man on death row. Each step taken being one less he would ever take again. Heavy in both the literal and metaphoric meaning. I knew if I did this. If I crossed this line, I would be thrown in with the lifers like Al Capone and Bugsy Siegel. Alcatraz, here I come!

I arrived at the bottom of the first staircase only to be met by my mother. She was sitting on the top step looking into the family room.

Mom watched my brother like prison guards tend to do when the ruffians were out in the yard. She glanced at me, granting me one last sweet smile. This was going to hurt me more than it would ever hurt him. I patted her back as a solemn and silent apology. *Sorry mom, it just must be done.* I thought to myself.

When I passed her, bat in hand, I could sense a queer thought emanating from her mind. As if to say, ‘No...He wouldn’t. Not my sweet little boy. He won’t do anything with that bat...Will he?’ Continuing my intentional route forward toward the television, my brother watched his favorite movie with tranquil obliviousness. Again, I could almost hear my mother’s thoughts, “No. He won’t do anything. He’s never in his life done anything to his older brother before.” Perhaps that was the problem, mom. Not fighting back meant drastic measures to be taken now. Before it was my life on the line. The scales of justice were either going to be balanced or destroyed. There were no other options.

At last, the opportunity came. I found myself standing above him. Bat in hand. Ready to strike. He looked ahead at the screen like one of those dopey turkeys staring at the sky during a rainstorm. But this turkey wouldn’t have the chance to choke on droplets of water. No. He would learn the hard way that you never turn your back on anyone. Most certainly never steal your younger brother’s favorite steed and ride away into the sunset with both horses. You greedy little monster!

Then it happened. In a swift motion. I lifted the bat, vengeance fueling my muscles. In that split second, I felt like I could hear my mother’s shock. Her predictable sweet boy surprised her. But do you know who I surprised the most? If you don’t know the answer, you clearly haven’t been listening. Anyway, I struck my big brother on the back with the bat. The smooth wooden stick came down with the devastating force of the strongest lumberjack. At least, it felt like I

hit him hard. Then with the moral fiber of a judge or someone else virtuous, like a dog walker, I dropped the bat. This was, of course, not abuse. It was justice. My own brand of discipline. A leveling of the playing field. A show of force. A shot over the bow, if you will.

However you slice it, I was now a criminal. I was about to be arrested by my shocked mother for the necessary assault. Dutifully, after dropping the bat and drinking in the sight of my brother's inevitable pain (Only liking it a little. Think about it, if it wasn't for me, it would have been someone else at school. Let's be honest with ourselves), I turned myself in.

Walking past my mom, who consoled my brother wailing on the ground, I dropped my chin to my chest, slunk my shoulders low, and marched up those stairs back to my bedroom. I didn't need a bailiff. I didn't need handcuffs. I had enough sense to know where I would be spending the remainder of my day. Finally, when I arrived willingly incarcerated, I sat with my head held high knowing that I finally taught my brother a lesson, "This is what happens when you don't play nice."