

Teenagers Nick and his girl-friend Holly naively plan for him to woo the banker's daughter in order to obtain her Father's money. Three people stand in the way; his Mother, Holly's step-father and a friend who refuses to help.

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# **For the Sake of Emily**

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# **For the Sake of Emily**

**Richard Lemmon**



## **PROLOGUE**

No one who saw those three slabs of stone balanced precariously over the piles of sodden leaves could believe what was rumored to be beneath them, until they dug down a little.

And then they knew.



## CHAPTER 1

Nick D'Amata stared through the rusty grating of the second story fire-escape. Below him at the red light, a long white limousine had come to a stop. Tinted glass, dark insides, he could just picture himself in that limo, lounging back, buried in the Wall Street Journal, chomping on a big, black cigar while sipping champagne.

"The office, sir?" One of them big black chauffeurs would ask and he'd look up and shake his head. "Get away from this neighborhood as fast as you can, Jeeves. It stinks."

Still caught up in the glory of money, he kicked at a pebble wedged between the grating and watched it bounce off the limo, bringing a girl's pale face out the hurriedly opened window.

Christ! Nick's mouth dropped open. Emily Melbourne! The same dork that was in his history class. She had to be loaded big time to ride around like that. But then it probably belonged to her old man. He smiled as she stared up at him and waved. All that money and he'd ignored her? Emily's face turned red as she retreated back behind the window.

"Nicholas D'Amata!" A scream from the hallway outside his room. "Off that fire-escape and get ready for school."

"Yeah, yeah." Nick squirmed through the window back to his room where he collected his school books and stepped into the hallway. "Hey, Ma," he called as he went down the steps, "guess who the fuck I just seen in a big limo?"

Anna D'Amata followed him into the kitchen. "What did I tell you about using that word, Nick? You won't get anywhere in this world with that mouth."

Nick pulled out a chair at the table and sat down, stomach on the back. "Emily Melbourne! Big old limo out to here," he gestured. "Probably on her way to school and look at me. Waiting on a goddamn bus. Where's the justice in that?"

Anna D'Amata poured milk on his cereal and shrugged. "And why shouldn't she travel like that since her Father owns that big



department store downtown?" Taking a seat across the formica table, she lit a cigarette, inhaled and sighed.

Mouth full of Cheerios, Nick said, "Thought you were going to cut out them things? What else you got for breakfast?" He looked at the open cupboard. "How 'bout some eggs for a change? This ain't much for a growing athlete."

"I have to wait till payday, Nick. You know that."

"Thought you were going to get a part-time night job at the drugstore?"

"You get the extra job, Nick. I'm worn out at night. Sometimes I think your Paw was lucky dying early. Mr. Big Shot Quarterback."

"Lucky getting caught robbing a gas station? Bull. He was an asshole and he deserved being shot down like the dog he was. We're better off without him. But what ever happened to the Oldsmobile? I thought you were going to give it to me?"

Anna collected his empty cereal bowl and threw it into a sink full of other dirty dishes. "It was impounded and it's still at the towing company."

"So? It's mine. Get it back."

"We need to sell it."

"Being poor is your thing, Maw. Not mine. So will you get it back if I paint this dump?"

"We can't afford the paint." At the sink, she started on the dirty dishes.

Nick's fist slammed down hard on the table. So hard the milk bottle fell off and splattered milk across the floor. "I tell you I need wheels, dammit! W-h-e-e-l-s. Every guy on the starting team has got him a set of wheels and I'm the goddamn quarterback!"

His mother grabbed a towel, dropped to her knees and began to sop up the milk. "Nick, if you'd only--"

"Been born to rich parents," he interrupted with a laugh, "I'd of had a damn car." He paused to stroke his chin. "But you don't have to be born rich if you can marry right."

She shifted about on the floor and looked up pleadingly. "Please, Nick, help me clean this up. You know how bad my knees

are.”

“My job to eat, you’re job to see to it. But back to Emily, if her old man really owns a department store, she has to be real rich.” His eyes began to glitter. “I should have thought of that when she turned those cow eyes on me in elementary school. Guess maybe the limo just woke me up to the possibilities there.”

Anna looked up and shook her head. “Now and then a mother is real ashamed of what she raised, Nick, and when you talk like that, I become one of those mothers.”

Nick threw his napkin on the table, shrugged into his football jacket and walked around his mother to the back door. “Rattle on, I gotta go.”

“Nick!” His mother struggled to her feet, towel dripping milk. “If I had to choose your girl friends for you I’d choose this Emily girl, sight unseen. Anybody would be better than that blonde tramp you bring around when I’m at work.”

“You don’t like it when I bring her around, don’t come home without calling. This is my house too.” He smiled then, walked slowly back across the floor and helped her up, in the process fingering the beads in her necklace one by one and chanting, “She loves me, she loves me not, loves me, loves me not.” And then without warning, he jerked at the necklace and broke it, scattering beads everywhere. “My goodness Maw, just look how them beads took off. Now I’ll never know if Holly loves me or not.”

On her feet, Anna took a roundhouse swing at her son and left a bright red hand print on his cheek. “That was the last gift that your Father—“

”Stole?” Nick’s face tightened as he shoved her back against the wall. “Never do that again, Maw. Never.” Back to the kitchen door, he opened it and stepped outside. “Remember what I say, Maw.”

“Just like your Father!”

Through the grimy window of the high-school bus, Nick watched the campus of State Teachers College flash by, Texas flag

fluttering from high atop the administration building. "Small minds, small school," he muttered. "Fuck them." He shot a finger through the open window, recalling their refusal to offer him a football scholarship.

"My main man," a nervous voice in the aisle whined as Freddy Parton slid onto the seat alongside Nick.

"Pimple Man." Nick didn't bother looking up.

"How'd you do on your SATs, Nick?"

Nick turned and fixed Freddy with a stare. "Sounds like you might be surprised if I told you I did good. What do you think I am? Some kind of dumb football jock?"

"Nothing like that, Nick. Just asking."

Nick returned to his window and watched the courthouse swing past.

"You and Holly still hanging together?"

Nick's eyes swung back and narrowed. "And if we ain't, what? You standing by to take my place or something?"

Freddy shook his head. "Nothing like that, Nick. I know she'd never like somebody like me. Just asking." Freddy's tortured eyes looked down. "It's just that...I was just wondering, that's all."

"You ever bat an eye at her, Pimple Man, and I'll close it for you, toots sweet. Got it?" Nick's hands balled into fists.

"Nothing like that, swear to God." Freddy started to get up only to be jerked back when Nick grabbed his hand. Face white, he watched Nick slowly twist the index finger back toward the knuckle. "Tell me you ain't plannin' on moving in on me, Freddy. Say, 'I ain't plannin' any such thing, Nick.'" The pressure on his finger increased.

"I ain't plannin' on moving in," Freddy whimpered, staring down at his finger.

"Can't hear you," Nick whispered, continuing the pressure until the bone snapped and the finger swung free. Freddy screamed and pulled back.

"Don't know my own strength ...oops." Nick returned to gazing out the window.

As the screaming slowly wound down to a whimper, the bus began to slow and by the time there was silence, the bus had come to a

stop and the driver was on his way back toward Freddy. "Always happens when I'm in a hurry," the driver mumbled as she approached Freddy, who by then was in the aisle crying and waving his finger. Pushing Freddy back to his seat, she examined the swollen finger and then turned to glare at Nick. "Another of your little games, Mr. D'Amata?"

Face a mask of pretended concern, Nick shook his head. "I think he fell, Mrs. Grimes. I was studying for a History test. Ask her," Nick smiled at a young girl across from them.

Wrapping a rubber band around a hastily fashioned pencil splint, Nelly stared at the girl. "Well? And what's your name?"

"Mary." She smiled at Nick. "And I saw everything. I swear it couldn't have been Nick."

"See?" Nick gave the young blonde a quick wink. "I'm on the football team and we take an oath of honesty. Honestly." He raised his right hand in a Boy Scout salute.

The driver shrugged, sensing the futility of trying to get through the peer group and turned back to a still whimpering Freddy. "I could, perhaps, do something if someone would tell me the truth. Freddy. Would you like to start?"

Freddy's glance briefly took in the young blonde, Nick and then returned to his lap. "On second thought ..." he took a deep breath, "I think it happened when you hit the brakes. Yeah, now I remember."

"I didn't hit the brakes until you screamed," Nelly reminded him.

"Then I guess you could say I uh...don't know ..." Freddy's voice wound down to a whisper.

Nelly Grimes stared at Nick, sighed, and stood up. "If that's the way you want me to write this up, Freddy, I'll do it. But check with the nurse when you get to school." Behind the wheel again, she swung back into the early morning line of cars.

## CHAPTER 2

Emily Melbourne got out of the Rolls limousine, watched it circle the bird-splattered statue of her great-grandfather, General Beauregard Melbourne, edge through the vine-covered portico and disappear in the direction of the garages. Before tackling the winding stairway to the porch, she rearranged her long auburn hair into the celibate bun her Father insisted on. Up on the wrap around porch then, she paused to watch the lawn crew mow their way back and forth between the porch and the lake and then patted the ugly gargoyle that had supported her through the last seventeen years and the long parade of new mothers.

"Late again?" Her latest step-mother looked up from hall table as she tucked a stray strand of blonde hair under a hair-ribbon.

"Looks like it, sorry." Emily threw her jacket on a table as she walked toward the spiral stairway leading to the second floor. "I had to stay after school."

"The jacket," Lydia Melbourne suggested. "You know what your Father likes."

Back to pick up the jacket, Emily tucked it underarm and started back to the stairs.

"What happened to make you late?" Lydia asked, following her up to the landing.

"If I tell you, will you promise not to tell Daddy?"

"If it'll explain why you wear your hair one way going to school, and another way coming home, I'll keep it to myself."

"Oh God, you noticed." Emily paused to clutch at her arm. "Look, I mean, it's just that Daddy's old fashioned and doesn't know what I look like compared to the other girls."

"I remember those days, sweetheart. And just in case you haven't noticed, I disagree with your Father quite often. It's just that we have to be careful. Both of us."

Emily sighed, took Lydia's hand, and continued up the stairs. "You're so much younger than Daddy, heck, he's still in the Middle

Ages and expects me to join him there. I can't, I can't."

"I'm with you there too, Emily. But give him a chance. He talks about you all the time. You're his pride and joy and all he's trying to do is keep you safe. I think he feels the same way about me although I'm old enough to know what's going on."

"That's Daddy all the way," Emily agreed. "Anything to eat?"

"Let's go back down to the kitchen and check with the cook." In the kitchen a few minutes later, Lydia watched as Emily opened the refrigerator. "I'll tell you something else, hon. Do you know why your Father is so strict with you?"

"No."

"He promised your Mother."

"Whatever." Head in the refrigerator, Emily found yesterday's meatloaf and brought it back to the table. "But he's still driving me up the wall. If he doesn't quit it, I'll take off when I graduate. Just wait and see if I don't."

"We'll see." Lydia watched her assemble a sandwich. "But you still haven't told me why you're late today?"

Emily's eyes rolled up and her face suddenly glowed. "You're never going to believe this, Lydia, but I'm actually trying out for cheerleader. Cheerleader! Can you imagine how Daddy will take to that?" She found a Coke and returned to the table. "Where's Albert?"

"Helping Mary wax the upstairs hallway. But back to your cheerleading, does that explain the hairdo?"

"Is that what Albert told you?"

"Chauffeurs sometimes talk too much. Otherwise, no comment."

Emily shrugged. "Not exactly directly but I can't keep looking like some pre-historic spinster!" Finished with the sandwich, she grabbed the Coke and started back up the stairs. "And maybe I'm not through since guys always seem to prefer blondes to redheads. Or wasn't it so in your day?"

Lydia trailed after her up the stairs. "I hope you're not thinking of bleaching anything, Emily. If you did, your Father would no doubt blame me. Which he will anyway if he ever catches you wearing those

short cheerleader skirts.” At the door leading to her room, Emily waited and together they entered her room. “As to the short skirts, go slow on your Father. Don’t rush him. When I was your age, I--”

Emily sighed as she opened her closet. “Do you realize I have nothing to wear but nuns clothes?”

Lydia shrugged. “So what’s his name?”

“I knew you’d guess. It’s Nick.” Emily giggled. “He’s the quarterback and this morning I saw him watching me in the limo. He tried to hide, but I saw him and I know he was smiling.”

Lydia patted Emily’s arm. “Relax, honey. You’re jumping the gun. Don’t go off half-cocked until he at least asks to hold hands.”

“I know, I know,” Emily said. “And I will, but this is a start. It’s the first time he almost smiled at me, even when we knew each other in grade school.”

Lydia sat on the bed and watched her step-daughter change from her school clothes to the expected demure dress. “So what does Mr. Right look like?”

“Real tall with a real good build.” Emily blushed. “I mean...you know...I think he’s the handsomest guy in town. I’m so glad Daddy didn’t send me away to school. I never would have met Nick.” She eyed herself in the full length mirror and sighed. “I just wish,” she pulled her dress tighter in the bodice, “that I had something worthwhile up there. Like your boobs,” Emily turned to give her another wink. “And don’t tell me Daddy didn’t notice. The bigger the boobs, the more Daddy looks.”

Lydia shrugged. “Patience, sweetheart. You’re not me so don’t wish for more than you can handle at the time.”

Dinner that evening on the back porch allowed everyone to watch the sun set serenely behind Lake Tucker, flanked on all sides by clouds. Emily, dressed properly for supper, toyed with her steak and watched her Father, dressed as always in a dark blue business suit. Unlike his daughter, he eagerly attacked his steak as he sipped the usual red wine.

Emily discretely glanced at Lydia who shook her head and

formed the word, "Wait," with her lips.

But Emily was too keyed up to be denied. "Daddy? Have you got a minute?"

"After supper," Frank Melbourne advised, mouth filled with meat. "You know the rules."

Emily was not to be denied. "Can I at least ask you to think about something before we talk?"

Frank shook his head. "No." He motioned the butler forward and pointed to Lydia's empty wine glass. "Albert, that '61 Bordeaux is just right, so see to it that Mrs. Melbourne's glass is refilled. After you take care of that, be so good as to prepare the drawing room. We'll be there directly for coffee."

"Daddy!"

Her Father sighed. "If you must, Emily, but keep it short."

Knees together for strength, Emily took a deep breath. "To start with, Daddy, I'm eighteen years old--"

"Seventeen."

"Whatever, but I'm still old enough to start making decisions on my own."

Frank's tolerant smile tightened. "Where are we going with this, Emily?"

"They're having a competition at school to replace one of the cheerleaders and I wondered--"

"No."

"Frank!" Lydia's voice warned.

Melbourne shook his head. "Be so good as to allow me to handle my own daughter, Lydia." He reached out and patted Emily's arm. "Your mother, God rest her soul, would turn in her grave if she knew you'd even considered becoming one of those girls who dance in what amounts to underwear in front of boys. But as you suggested, I will dwell on this until we discuss it more fully after supper. Now can we return to our meal?" An uneasy silence settled around the table until Emily groaned aloud.

"You make cheerleading sound terrible, Daddy. You're ruining it for me." On her feet, fighting tears, Emily threw her napkin on the



floor and ran into the house.

Lydia got up, followed Emily and shouted over her shoulder. "Frank, you couldn't have handled that worse."

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Twenty miles away, on the other side of the lake, with much the same problems, Les Parton stared at the cast on his step-son Freddy's hand. "What happened?"

"Nothing. I fell in the parking lot." Freddy had long ago stopped sharing anything with his step-father. And only rarely, his mother. No one, he thought to himself as he stared at his plate, knows what being me is like.

"You haven't touched your meat." His mother Marian reached across her plate to push Freddy's porkchop across his. "And don't be so short with your Father. He's only trying to help."

"Busy man like him," Freddy pointed, "doesn't have time for a kid like me." He carved off a piece of the porkchop and began to chew it. "Never has, never will."

"What'd you say?" Les Parton snapped, hands on the edge of the table.

Freddy shrugged. "Not that it matters, but I said that I didn't think you really care what I think about anything, much less my health."

Les Parton settled back and nodded at the cast. "You think I don't care how you injured yourself, you're wrong. I care about you, I care about your Mother and I think I deserve an explanation given I'm the one paying all the health insurance around here!"

Freddy looked up, sighed. "If you must know, it happened on the school bus when that old Missus Grimes—I told you about her before--stopped suddenly and threw me to the floor."

"Why were you standing?"

"Maybe it was too crowded," Marian intervened. "Women that age shouldn't be allowed to drive."

"Can I be excused?" Freddy jumped up and not waiting for a

reply, ran through the kitchen to the garage.

"He's worried about the finals," Marian defended. "It's not us, least of all you. Boys his age are just naturally filled with self-doubt. It comes with the territory. Give the boy a chance to find himself."

"Find himself?" Les rolled his eyes. "He needs to muscle up and quit running around whining. Like anything else in the animal world, you have to fight for your place in life and he shows no inclination to do that. And I still say he doesn't deserve a car like that at his age."

"Get off his back, dear. I know I haven't exactly been the disciplinarian you think I ought to have been, but since his Father was a drunk, I felt guilty about raising Freddy without a male voice."

"That's me? A male voice? Look, your loving attitude makes you blind to what you're creating and you've ill-prepared your son for a life of competition. Back when I was a kid...oh, hell, never mind." Les Parton pushed up from the table. "Whatever he is at this moment, is both of our faults. And we need to admit it. Maybe I'm too fixated on being Postmaster. Maybe you're too fixated on past mistakes. Speaking of past mistakes, it's beyond me why your rich brother gave the kid one of his classic Corvettes, a Stingray no less, for graduation. Cars are something boys earn."

"Josh told me he thought the car might entice Freddy to take an interest in something besides himself. Like a farm father giving his son a calf to raise. According to Josh, Freddy will have to get his hands dirty once in awhile keeping up a used car."

Les paused at the kitchen door and shook his head. "Taking care of what? I'm the one who buys the gas and insurance for that car."

"I know, dear, but we can afford it and I already think I've seen changes in Freddy. At least his hands are occasionally dirty." She forced a little smile for the man she'd been married to for five years. "He's always got his nose in that maintenance manual and maybe I'm just imagining, but to me he's happier. Now why don't you go out to the garage and talk car-talk with your son?"

"How's it going?" Les stood in the doorway to the garage.

“You’ve taken on quite a job with a car like that.”

“Uncle Josh knows how I love his old Corvettes, so it’s not work.”

Silence.

“What are you doing now...son?” Parton came all the way into the garage to stand at Freddy’s back. “What do they call that thing? Stingray or Corvette?”

“Stingray, one word, and I plan to upgrade the fuel injector,” Freddy mumbled from under the open hood.

Les leaned over and patted Freddy’s back. “Isn’t easy working with that cast on your hand, right?”

“It’s okay.”

Les shook his head and tried again. “Hell of an engine on that thing. Bet you could take the old Ford any day. How fast does it go anyway?”

“It’s an L88 engine.” Freddy’s voice was bored and still muffled by the hood. “And it goes zero to 60 in five seconds. Only ten thousand of these babies made.”

“Need any help finding parts?”

Freddy came out from under the hood and wiped sweat from his eyes with the back of his hand. “I can handle it if I get a part time job. Can I use your metric wrench set?”

“Absolutely.”

Silence. Again. Until, “Remember Lake Tonato? I was thinking we might be able to get in a little fishing one of these weekends, son.”

“Step-son,” Freddy corrected as he re-buried himself under the hood.

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