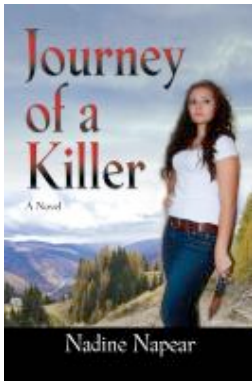


Journey of a Killer

A Novel



Nadine Napear



Raised by the son of a mob enforcer, Sunny Whitaker learns that revenge is an acceptable response to those who do her an injustice. Following her father's instructions, she began killing when she was twelve and has so far evaded capture. Now thirty-nine, she's on the run from Detective Spinoza, who has vowed to bring her to justice. Can she get away and start a new life? Or, is it too late?

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JOURNEY OF A KILLER

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JOURNEY OF A KILLER

A NOVEL

Nadine Napear

For Beatrice. She would have enjoyed this journey.

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And a special thank you to Freddie. You tickle my soul and have shown me that "life is good today."

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*A man that studieth revenge keeps his own wounds
green, which otherwise would heal.*

Francis Bacon,
"Of Revenge," Essays, 1625

MARY-MARGARET

October 1, 2007

Sometimes I think I've had an extraordinary life, marrying an incredibly handsome, delightful (if not a little on the straight side,) intelligent man. We had prestigious jobs and traveled around the world on vacations.

The only bone of contention between us had to do with children. I didn't want them; he did. And despite all the good things about our marriage, this was the thing that ended up destroying our lives.

Two weeks ago, my day started like any other. I awoke in the lavish lavender retreat in the home I shared with my husband. I stretched my body, my bones creaking from the physical demands of my job. I reached for Michael, but he had already left for work. After lingering a few moments to inhale the scent of his Polo cologne that hung in the air, I arose and went about my daily routine. Later that night, we fought, he died, and I ran.

Now I awaken in a darkened motel room, barely able to catch my breath from the nightmare that has left me in a cold sweat. I use the coarse white top sheet to wipe the sweat from the back of my neck and my forehead; I shiver from the cold air blowing from the wall air-conditioner. The dank and musty odor of the room is a far cry from the scent of my husband's favorite cologne.

Even in my dazed state, I clearly hear my father's voice. "*Come on Sunny Girl. Pull yourself together.*" I take deep breaths trying to slow my racing pulse.

"My name is not 'Sunny Whitaker,' Dad. At least not anymore," I whisper. "That may have been the name you gave me, but I changed it after I killed four people, remember?"

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"I do," he says. "But you remember what I taught you about revenge. Retreat. Plan. Attack."

Oh, I remembered all right. Only this time I attacked without a plan, something that went against everything my father had ever taught me. But maybe it's not too late. Maybe I can still plan my escape.

Ever since I fled Las Vegas, I've managed to stay one step ahead of Detective Lew Spinoza who, during our last conversation, all but told me he'd like to see me spend the rest of my life in jail.

Now I need to figure out where I'm going. I need some place safe. Some place to hide. Some place to call home.

My extraordinary life has taken a turn for the worse. The first twenty-nine years of my journey were far from perfect, but the last ten were mostly blissful. Until two weeks ago when it all fell apart.

SUNNY

November 4, 1974

Ever since my mother walked out on us when I was three weeks old, my father - with our neighbor Rachel's help - raised me the best he could. I was his little "Sunny Girl" and there was almost nothing I could do wrong. Like the time he allowed me to decorate my own room when I was six. He laughed when he saw sky-blue paint in my red hair, on my clothes and on the tarpaulin he had laid on the floor to protect it.

"There's more on you than on the walls," he said, tousling my hair and kissing the top of my head just as he'd done so many times before. I laughed like crazy when I saw the paint was now on the tip of his nose.

We had just moved into a two bedroom, one bathroom apartment on the top floor of the same three-story building we had been living in since I was born. It was warm in the summer and cold in the winter, but we finally each had our own room and he would no longer have to sleep on the living room couch.

My childhood was spent roughhousing with two of Rachel's five boys: Samuel, seven, and Thomas, ten. We played stickball, football, basketball, hide-n-seek and tag. I was a tomboy and my father dressed me like one.

"You've ruined too many dresses, so from now on you'll wear hand-me-downs," he said, as I tried on one of Samuel's out-grown overalls. Dad wasn't being cruel, just practical.

Every night after work, he picked me up from Rachel's and prepared dinner. When it was time for bed, he read to me, beginning the lessons that would be reinforced throughout the rest of his life. It began with his version of *The Three Little Pigs*.

"After the big bad wolf huffed and puffed and blew away the houses of straw and sticks, do you know what the three pigs did?"

"No, Daddy, what?" I asked, fixated on my father's warm chocolate eyes.

"Well, they made a plan, and one night while the wolf slept, the three little pigs grabbed a hatchet from the farmer's barn, and slowly, quietly, they crept up to the wolf and cut off his head. See Sunny, they got even. They fought back. Not right away, but they waited, planned and attacked when the wolf didn't expect it. And that's what you need to learn. Retreat, plan, and then attack.

"So, when someone hurts you or does something wrong to you, that's what you have to do. Walk away. Think about how you're going to get even, then carefully plan what you're going to do. And finally, when they least expect it, when they don't know it's coming, that's when you pounce and attack. Just like the three pigs did. Got it?"

I nodded as I absorbed what he was telling me. "Yes, Daddy," I replied, receiving a kiss in return. Those words became the creed by which I would live.

But by far, my favorite story was "David and Goliath." How a young man, half the size of the giant, slew Goliath, not with his might or muscle, but with his intellect and cunning.

"It just goes to show you, Sunny Girl, that with the right plan, you can always prevail."

"What's pre...pre...?"

"Prevail, honey. It means to win. With the right plan, no matter how small you are, you can still win. Understand?"

"I think so."

"Sunny Girl," he said, caressing my curly locks, "sometimes people do you wrong, and then you have two choices. You can either turn the other cheek and walk away, or you can fight back. Personally, I choose fighting back. But remember, if you do that, there are consequences."

"'Conse' what?"

"Consequences. It means punishment. If you fight back, you have to be ready to accept your punishment if you get caught. And if

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you don't want to get caught, you have to plan your attack very, very carefully. Understand?"

"Yes, Daddy, I understand."

"Good girl. You see, this is what my daddy taught me and now I'm trying to teach you. Got it?"

"Yes Daddy." I smiled and stared into his warm brown eyes. "I got it."

"Good. Now remember this and don't ever forget it and you'll get through life just fine."

"I won't. I promise."

He leaned down and kissed the top of my head and I wrapped my arms around him, ignoring the itch of his long beard on my face.

The next three years were peaceful and uneventful as I made my way through first, second and third grades. I did well in school and even made a couple of friends. Then I met Tracy Douglas and in a fit of uncontrolled, childish anger, I lashed out, forgetting everything I ever learned.

DANIEL

November 4, 1974

"Daddy, Daddy, come see."

Daniel laughed when he walked into his six-year-old daughter's room to check out how much she had accomplished. Although she was dressed in old clothes, he had told her to be careful and try not to drip too much on herself. Nevertheless, she was covered in paint, right down to her nose.

"What?" she said, and he only laughed harder.

God, how he loved his little girl. *How could Francine ever have walked away from her? I can understand her maybe wanting to leave me, but her own daughter? How could she do that?* he asked himself as he had a hundred times before.

He knew his nineteen-year-old girlfriend had been having a rough time adjusting to her new life as a mother; but he didn't think she'd ever just walk away. Leaning against the doorjamb, he watched his daughter draw on the tarpaulin using the leftover paint and thought back to the day he met the most beautiful woman in the world and the beginning of their relationship.

June 26, 1967

The excitement he felt when he began his cross-country trek was waning. But this morning, two days into his trip from New York to Los Angeles, the eager eighteen-year-old had that fluttering feeling in his stomach again as if he'd swallowed a thousand butterflies. His groin stirred as if he had seen a gorgeous girl. Something wonderful was going to happen; he just knew it. He turned up the music on the VW bus's radio and sang along to Bob Dylan, the Beatles, the Beach Boys and the Rolling Stones.

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Daniel was excited about starting a life of his own and getting away from his father, an enforcer for the New York mob. He didn't like or approve of what his father did. In fact, he hated it and wanted nothing to do with it, despite his father's attempt to push him in that direction. He had other dreams and aspirations, and he was on his way to California to fulfill them.

Six hours later, he parked his vehicle in front of the East Side Eatery in downtown St. Louis. He walked in and took a seat by the window. Twenty minutes later, his world changed forever.

The young man was eating his cheeseburger and french fries when the door opened, and in she walked - the girl who took his breath away despite her weary appearance. Shoulder-length strawberry-blond hair framed her gaunt, tired face, and her skin-tight jeans and red blouse were torn, ragged and dirty. However, he couldn't take his eyes off her. She could have been wearing a shapeless housedress and she still would have looked good.

He saw her looking around the busy restaurant for a place to sit, but there were no empty tables. He raised his hand to signal her and when she spotted him, she walked over.

His wildly beating heart made it difficult to talk. "Hi. Since there are no other seats available, would you care to join me?" he stammered.

She was even more stunning close up. "Thanks," she said, tucking her tattered suitcase under the table by her feet. Her wide-set, turquoise eyes shimmered in the beam of light from the imitation Tiffany glass lamp hanging above the table. Her nude lips were full and sensual, her nose perfectly sculpted. The word "beautiful" did not sufficiently describe her. Sexy, fantastic, captivating, and superb, were the adjectives that ran through the teenager's head.

"My name's Daniel." He extended his hand to her.

"Francine," she said warily, meeting it halfway.

"Where you headed, Francine?"

"Denver. And you?"

"Los Angeles, where it's warm, and there's good surf. What's in Denver?" he asked, motioning for the waitress.

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When the middle-aged woman approached, Daniel said, "Go ahead and order anything you'd like. It's on me."

"You sure?"

"Yes," he said, staring into her captivating eyes. "Go ahead."

"In that case I'd like a burger please," she told the server.

"How would you like it cooked?"

"Medium, please."

"Would you like fries and a Coke with that?"

She looked at Daniel, who nodded assent.

"Yes, please."

Once the waitress retreated, he asked her again, "So what's in Denver?"

She rubbed her left ear lobe between her thumb and index finger. "Actually, I'm going to Arvada. It's a little suburb west of Denver." He noticed her eyes darting about the room, checking it out. "I love to paint and my friend, who lives there, told me the scenery is absolutely stunning, so I can't wait to get there and begin to capture it on canvas."

When the waitress put the food in front of her, Francine devoured it in less time than it took Daniel to finish his meal which was already half-eaten before she sat down.

"So, what's in California again?" Francine asked, wiping the ketchup from the corners of her mouth and chin.

"Like I said, sunshine and warm weather. No more shoveling out from under three feet of snow. After years of that, I'm ready for some sun."

"What about your parents?"

"What about them?"

"Didn't they object to your taking off? I mean California is a long way from here?"

"What could they say? I'm eighteen. They understand my need to be on my own. What about yours?"

Finished with her meal, Francine laid her napkin on her finished plate and leaned back in her chair. "I've been riding that damn bus for the past three days, and it chooses now to break down. You'd think they'd take better care of their equipment."

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"Yeah, you'd think so." Daniel was so enraptured by her iridescent blue eyes, he didn't notice she hadn't answered his question.

"Yeah, well," she continued, "they told me the replacement bus was stuck outside of Louisville and may take a couple of days to get here. 'So what am I supposed to do in the meantime?' I asked them. And you know what they told me?"

"No. What?" *God, she's gorgeous.* His penis twitched in agreement.

"They told me to get a motel room and send them the receipt and they'll reimburse me. I barely have enough money for food and they want me to lay out even more. Do you believe it?"

"Yeah. I mean no." Without another second's hesitation, he said, "Hey, I've got an idea. I'm heading in that direction, so why not ride with me? It'll save you some money. You can cash in the unused portion of your ticket."

She cocked her head to the left and again rubbed her ear lobe. When she didn't answer right away, he pushed, "Who knows how long you'll be stuck here, so why *not* ride with me? I'm harmless. You can trust me."

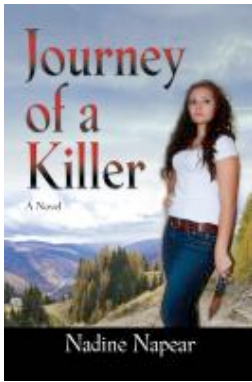
He waited nervously while she contemplated his offer. It seemed like his entire future rested on her decision and she was taking forever.

Finally, she looked up and said, "Yeah. Sure. Why not? You seem harmless enough. Besides you wouldn't have bought me lunch if all you wanted to do was rape me and kill me, right?"

He laughed. "I guess. So you'll come with me?"

"Yeah. Sure. It's better than being stuck in this God-forsaken place."

Daniel exhaled, unaware he had been holding his breath. He smiled, knowing this was the wondrous thing he had been waiting for.



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