


III

DEAREST MARVIN

earest Marvin,

"Family is a mixed blessing," said comedian Richard Pryor, who knew a thing or two about childhood betrayal, "You're glad to have one, but it's also like receiving a life sentence for a crime you did not commit."¹ It seems that you received that life sentence just the same.

Self-love is learned through the mirror of the child's surroundings. Yet who conveyed to you that you were lovable? No one seemed to care. No one could be trusted. There was nowhere to go.

Your mother told you that you could only be free and happy in heaven. No wonder you practically handed your father the gun to shoot you, provoking him to end the anguish that would not go away. You had been violated, shell-shocked, and stressed beyond endurance all through your childhood.

Your father exposed you to a hell worse than a Nazi slave labor camp. An inmate in a concentration camp cannot defend himself against the insult and humiliation of beatings and might blunt his feelings of horror and disgust. But he is inwardly free to hate his tormentor and see him as vulgar and brutal, like Viktor Frankl and other Holocaust survivors did.² The opportunity to experience hate and share one's feelings of hate with other inmates prevents the inmate from having to surrender his self.³

In a family that holds up the absurd belief-system that children love and obey their parents unconditionally in the face of severe physical and emotional abuse, this opportunity does not exist. You were told you must honor the father. You could not hate your father for fear you would lose his love. You did not want to hate your father. You wanted to love your father. So, there you are, confronted by a tormentor you want to love, utterly confused, and in danger of losing your self.

You lost your marriages and wound up broke because you believed in your father's appraisal of yourself as a deficient, defiant, unworthy child, who deserved beatings with the belt. How could you not? Nobody explained how your father was using his children to free himself from inner demons. Nobody explained how you, the most spirited and brilliant child, had become a convenient repository for your father's raging projections.

You were everything your father was not and could never be, and you had everything your father had not and would never have. He could not stand it. He wanted to be you and because he knew he never could he had to destroy you, the constant reminder of his failure.

Every single day you swallowed and internalized your father's falsehood like you inhaled air. The falsehood became part of self-assessment and self-esteem.

You wound up thinking you were not worthy. Children feel the need to smooth over all kinds of disorders in the family to regain the lost harmony. To replace feelings of helplessness with the illusion of control and power, children resort to blaming themselves.

“The betrayal of the parent’s role as caregiver is the essential shameful act of parenting. The abusive (shameless) parent does not feel the shame, and this unfelt and unacknowledged shame is broadcast into the child’s mind, who thinks that the shame is his own rather than his parent’s. The result is that the child believes he is worthless. He carries the shame for life...”⁴

Nobody allowed you to complain about the father or hate the father. Thus, the hatred went inside, just like the rage went inside. You learned to be loyal to your father’s appraisal to the detriment of you. This loyalty became a self-fulfilling prophecy: as an adult you threw it all away. How could you not? No one in your environment unburdened or enlightened you.

Your mother, who supposedly loved you so much, devastatingly failed to protect you from your father’s condemnation and sadistic, sexually tainted beatings. Back in Red Oak, North Carolina, your mother had witnessed her alcoholic father shooting her mother with a shotgun. She said, “Mama survived, but the fear still lives inside me.”⁵

Your grandfather was taken away, and no one knew for sure whether he eventually died in an insane asylum or in prison, convicted for another crime.

Violence not only begets violence, but it hooks up with violence, and makes it seemingly impossible to find love.

When your mother chose your father as her husband, she, unconsciously, picked the father of her childhood and set you up for the resurrection of the same old crime that had befallen her and her mother. Your mother was conditioned by the fear that lived inside her and became a hostage to her husband. She learned to feel helpless in the face of self-righteous attack like her Mama before her, avoiding trouble, taking abuse, keeping the family together. She said:

“I felt sorry for him [father]. I knew he needed help. So I stuck with him.”

Feeling sorry meant indulging your father to the detriment of her children. Your mother raised another victim when she told your cousin Barbara, just fifteen years old when your father tried to grope her, “He’s just teasing, don’t take it seriously.”⁶ Your mother was putting one foot in front of the other, holding

dangerous emotions at bay with the help of a steady diet of comfort-denial, while rationalizing and minimizing the impact of your father's pathology. She said:

"He was not ready for children. He did not know how to treat them."

Minimizing the impact of your father's pathology meant that your mother chose to deny your suffering and taught you to renounce your natural feelings, taught you not to question, taught you to submit to violence, taught you that there was no choice or hope, and no salvation on Earth.

"Mother: 'You know, Marvin, there's no escaping rules. Wherever you go or however big you become, you always have to answer to somebody.'

Marvin: 'There's got to be a place, there's got to be.'

*Mother: 'Like I've told you before, there's only one place that I know and that's heaven.'"*⁷

In the face of torture and trauma, the loyalty of your siblings was unwavering. Your brother Frankie was so brainwashed by and bound to father that he went on living the rest of his life looking over his shoulder, always wondering, "What would father think if I did that." Frankie never dared doubt the god-father. Instead of mourning the loss of the father he so desperately wanted but never had, he created an illusory father and a bizarre lie:

*"Father had never hugged Marvin, or any of us for that matter, because, as he so often pounded into us, he showed his love through his teaching and discipline."*⁸

What was called teaching was in fact haughty pretense and posturing as a cover up for pathology. What was called discipline was in fact indulgence in out-of-control behavior. While your father displayed the Ten Commandments in extra-large print and while his flock recited the Ten Commandments out loud, your father never disciplined himself. He who preached of Christ killed Christ in his innocent children, again and again.

Frankie was deeply confused about love. Even after you were murdered he never thought to question the father who had aimed the gun a second time and shot his son, who had slumped to the floor, again, at point blank range. To keep up the image of a good and protective father your brother came up with another bizarre lie:

*"Pulling the trigger, I feel, was Father's last act of giving for Marvin."*⁹

Frankie magically transformed a cold-blooded murder into a final solution and a cold-blooded murderer into a benefactor. Frankie was acting like victims of capture bonding who take the side of their victimizers to the point of defending horrendous deeds. In their struggle for survival, victims of capture bonding come to rely on the victimizer, particularly when the duress of danger and real harm is consistent. Frankie was distorting reality and creating an illusion of a good father to be able to carry on as if everything were all right when it was not. Frankie was avoiding the awareness of a horrific truth; Mom and Dad are only out for themselves. They do not love me, as I need to be loved. I am not safe. I am not protected. I am not recognized in this home.

Pitcairn women defended the men who raped them, and men and women all over the world defend their deranged mass-murdering kings and presidents just the same. The co-creator of weapons of mass-destruction, J. Robert Oppenheimer, who colluded with evil and allowed evil to be taken to its highest and most lethal level, exposed the same irrational thinking:

*"We had the pride of thinking we knew what was good for man. ... We all felt that this business had to stop and hoped that nuclear weapons would blackmail men into peace and produce a profound cleansing of international relations."*¹⁰

Oppenheimer magically transformed an evil destroyer into a "rescuer" and a war crime and evil act of the highest order into "cleansing." General Carleton called the camps in which some eighty-five hundred Navajos and some four hundred Mescalero Apache were imprisoned, "Sweet Carletonia," and insisted that Indigenous People on the reservation were the happiest people he had ever seen. Yet:

*"The land was a barren patch of mesquite without wood or fresh water. The prisoners lived in brush shelters or in pits dug in the ground. ... The alkaline water sickened them. ... When they used the meat of diseased cattle, many prisoners died. ... From St. Louis General Carlton ordered a thousand pound bell to be used as a signal for hours of labor and repose for the Indians."*¹¹

The law that allowed Hitler to rule Germany by decree as an absolute dictator was called *Gesetz zur Behebung der Not von Volk und Reich*, law to remedy the distress of the people—as if the Nazis were a godsend and doing it all out of love. Nazis

called mass-murder “evacuation” and “the final solution.” They blamed the deaths of their victims on the victims, stating that those who died suffered from *lebes mude*; they were tired of life and that was the reason why they died.

U.S. warmongers sold killing unarmed Vietnamese families as “pacification” and killing unarmed Iraqi families as “bringing democracy.” These rationalizations are classic examples of delusional thinking bordering on psychosis. It is the way of evil to pretend that it is something other than plain evil.

The more insane the perpetrator becomes, the more insane the adaptation of the environment needs to be. It was the willingness of your family, your church, and your neighborhood to adapt to the violence of your father and absorb the insanity of your father that allowed your father to continue. Being loyal to someone who is destructive to you is self-defeating and insane too.¹² As young as you were, you intuitively understood this.

Your inclinations were healthy; you were not going to adapt to madness. Revolt against a violent father is vital for the preservation of a young self and maladjustment in the face of violence is a responsible and wholesome act. In the face of the command “honor thy parents” and the death threat “I brought you into this life and I can take you out,” you resisted the oppressor with a hero’s determination, letting your father know: You will not control my mind, you will not murder my soul, you will not ravage my spirit. You made your point when you said, “I can breathe, can’t I?” zeroing in on your father’s demand; don’t be aware, don’t be spontaneous, don’t be autonomous, don’t be alive.¹³ You insisted: I am alive, I am breathing, I am Life!

Yet your courage was an intolerable provocation to the many brainwashed hostages who had become the champions of the hostage-taking god-father.

“Marvin had a problem with authority,” said your sister, instead of, “My father was a violent man, who abused his power and authority and beat up young children.”

“Marvin would always flirt with danger,” said your sister, instead of, “My father was a dangerous, out of control man who should have been stopped long ago.”

“Frankie would do anything his father said, but Marvin would retaliate,” said your neighborhood friend instead of, “Frankie allowed father to retaliate, allowed his violence and never said enough is enough, but Marvin rightfully protested.”¹⁵

“Marvin was rebellious, kids can go a little too far,” said another of your neighborhood friends, instead of, “Father was abusive. Father went too far.”

“Marvin was always looking for trouble,” repeated your brother Frankie instead of, “In our home you were not allowed to be an exuberant, playful kid. Our father was a deeply troubled man, who saw the devil in sports and popular music.”¹⁶

Marvin was defiant, Marvin loved going against the grain...

Systematically, relentlessly, and without exception your environment created a portrait of you as a rebel without a cause and joined your father in his chronic, immature, and deadly rage. While the entire family fled in pathological togetherness, insult was added to your horrific injury. How utterly lonely you must have felt.

American Indians and black slaves encountered the same crazymaking double bind you encountered as a child. If they did not fight back they were going to be annihilated in soul and/or body. If they fought back they were branded savages and troublemakers. Passing sin and guilt onto Indigenous victims, declaring them "the problem," the Euro-American profiteers absolved themselves from the guilt of slavery just the same. Lynching the scapegoat was the next step. Just like the Euro-American profiteers absolved themselves through creating an African American problem, your environment absolved your father by passing the guilt onto a problem called Marvin. On their knees praying to God for the father to stop the beatings they never thought to intervene and stop the beater. And thus, your environment inadvertently handed out the license to kill.

And then there was that visit of Uncle Howard, your father's brother, who later served a prison sentence for indecent and immoral practices with a young boy. He brutally took advantage of your victimization. He told you to do exactly as you were told to do and keep quiet. He told you your father would never believe your side of the story. And then he violently raped you.

"Now, after the ass whippin' I heard him giving [you] last night, what do you think will happen to you [if you talk]?"¹⁷

No one spoke up. No one expressed indignation. No one stopped the tormentor. No one punished the rapist. So how were you to know you deserved better? No one seemed to care. No one could be trusted. There was nowhere to go.

Immature, trapped in the tiny corner of the old, reptilian brain, a puppet on the string of the lower instincts of self-preservation, incapable of love or compassion, the father tyrant insisted on owning his children and drove them out of childhood paradise. Your siblings did not understand why the tyrant parent betrayed them and sacrificed them. Shocked, confused, afraid to be left alone or punished, and without an alternative model, your siblings swallowed tyrannical behavior, suppressed the free senses, and could no longer see, hear, or feel what was real. Cruelty became part of the interior world of the children and

was given a positive valuation in the child's cognitive system and that valuation was held up for life. Cruelty became second nature and a brute ancestry.

After you were murdered, in court, the judge joined the lynching, blaming it all on you too.

"The sacrifice is simply another act of violence, one that is added to a succession of others, but it is the final act of violence, the last word."¹⁹

There you were, the sensitive, eloquent man who had been touched by the gods, standing on stage during your last concert tour in 1983 in a drug-fueled haze, naked except for your bikini briefs, in front of a screaming audience. Tears were streaming down my face. I instantly saw the frightened child standing in front of the parent, alone, unprotected, naked, waiting for the monstrous father to pick up the belt. It was as if you were resurrecting the long years of childhood hell right there on stage in front of your public. It seemed as if you were reliving the unspeakable past as the reality of today and no amount of applause, adulation, and tender love would do. The damage had been done. Smokey Robinson got it: "Marvin needed to be loved by Marvin, that was the problem."

If only you had entered a program of recovery. If only you had engaged in the personal archeological dig that brings understanding here today. You are entitled to your own awareness. You don't have to see the world as your parents told you to see it. You deserve to learn how to hand back blame, hand back shame, and hand back insanity to those to whom it belongs. A secure and long recovery might have broken through everything, even the damage, even the addiction and the acting out, even the pain. A secure and long recovery might have helped you to refuse to play the game of the tyrant-father.

Thank you, dearest Marvin for the gift of your spirit, your music, and your courage. We miss you. I sincerely wish you heavenly recovery. I wish for you to know how sweet it is for you to be loved by you.

-
- 1 Richard Pryor, *Pryor Convictions and Other Life Sentences*
 - 2 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*
 - 3 I personalized page 118 and 172 of Alice Miller's *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and Roots of Violence*
 - 4 From PIT Definitions in the *Cutting Edge* and the *Meadowlark*, The Meadows, Arizona
 - 5 David Ritz, *Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye*, 6
 - 6 Steve Turner, *Trouble Man: The Life and Death of Marvin Gaye*, 20
 - 7 Frankie Gay, *Marvin Gaye, My Brother*, 18
 - 8 Ibid, 21
 - 9 Ibid, 187
 - 10 Mark Wolvertson, *A Life in Twilight: The Final Year of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, 265–266
 - 11 Frank Waters, *Brave Are My People*, 118–119
 - 12 Patrick J. Carnes, *The Betrayal Bond*, 116
 - 13 Frankie Gay, *Marvin Gaye, My Brother*, 10
 - 14 Steve Turner, *Trouble Man: The Life and Death of Marvin Gaye*, 23
 - 15 Ibid, 23
 - 16 Frankie Gay, *Marvin Gaye, My Brother*, 21–22
 - 17 Michael Eric Dyson, *Mercy, Mercy, Me*, 210
 - 18 Alice Miller, *Paths of Life*, 153–163
 - 19 Rene Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the Earth*, 24