

THE
ENDLESS
HOUR

THE TRUE STORY OF A HAUNTED SOUL

THE
ENDLESS
HOUR

JESSE BATTLE
WITH WILLIAM GREENLEAF

theendlesshour.com

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PART I
IMAGINATION. CREATIVITY.
DREAMS.

UNSPOKEN WORDS



AS HIS EYELIDS slowly opened, an orange ball of fire descended from the sky. He heard an explosion, followed repeatedly by others. Screams and angry yells echoed through the air. Tires screeched, and cars crashed on contact. Footsteps pounded the pavement like thunder. Frantic faces filled with fear cried with apprehension.

Inside his jacket, he felt the heavy weight of steel. He braced the gun with both hands and pointed it in front of him. Quivering with excitement, he fired six consecutive shots, the bullets leaving trails of smoke.

“Jesse! Get in your room and pick up your toys.”

Hearing his mother’s voice, Jesse got up slowly, standing above his toy soldier. He bent over and picked it up. The small plastic green figure stood about two inches high, with immovable parts: his warrior and hero.

Longing to continue his adventure, he stared at the other soldiers from a distance. His childlike mind fought the transition back into reality, the soldiers’ words still on his lips.

“Ahhh, I’m hit! Don’t think I’m going to make it. They got me! Oh no! I’ve... I’ve got to get up!”

Escaping back into his imaginary world, he bent over to place his green playmate among the others.

“You’d better be picking up those toys and cleaning your room,” came his mother’s voice again.

Five-year-old Jesse looked around in a daze as he returned to the present. Annoyed with the interruptions, he frowned and stood up slowly.

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Looking down at his clothes, he made sure that his short-sleeved red-print shirt, blue jeans, and white canvas sneakers were still meticulously neat.

Although he resented having to give up his adventure, he knew that his mother meant business, so he headed toward that dreaded place. Emerging from behind the living room sofa, he walked in the direction of his room, passing the empty kitchen. Then he stopped, took four steps backward, and slowly crept across the kitchen floor. Approaching the gigantic refrigerator, he struggled with the handle but managed to open the door. He peered inside.

There it was, wrapped tightly in plastic: his favorite snack, watermelon. Jesse plunged into it. The plastic covering presented a problem at first, but in no time Jesse had it out of the way. He stuffed one handful after another of cool sweetness into his mouth. The melon's juice dripped down his face and onto his shirt. It didn't take long before he had managed to get the juice all over himself and the floor.

Spotting a pitcher of Kool-Aid®, he wanted a glass. He tried to reach the pitcher by standing on his toes, but couldn't. He quickly put his plan into action. Moving a chair from the kitchen table, he pulled it toward the refrigerator. He couldn't seem to get the chair there fast enough.

Through the open window, the sun cast rays of warmth upon freshly washed dishes. Jesse grabbed a glass from the drain board in the sink. After climbing onto the chair, he poured and slurped down the Kool-Aid® so quickly he hardly had time to taste it before pouring a second glass. After wiping his face with his hands and shirt, he shut the refrigerator door, leaving sticky wetness sliding down the handle.

Moving as quickly as he could, Jesse placed the dirty glass back with the clean dishes. He was grabbing paper towels when he heard the latch on the screen door. He froze as he listened to the familiar footsteps coming toward the kitchen. He wiped his shirt with the paper towels before throwing them in the garbage. Quickly pushing the chair back to the kitchen table, he tried to camouflage himself in the chair. *I'll make myself invisible*, he thought.

A mood of a man walked through the kitchen door, six-foot-three-inches of unrest, with eyes dark and intense. Happiness seldom lingered there, Jesse knew, and a magnitude of tension always followed him. His steps thundered like an earthquake, causing the floors to shake and Jesse's fragile body to tremble. Andre Battle was his name.

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Wiping the sweat off his forehead, Andre opened the refrigerator door, never noticing the little boy sitting perfectly still. After realizing he didn't have a glass, he removed one from the sink. He poured himself a glass of Kool-Aid®, drank it hard and fast, and wiped his mouth. He was about to close the door when something caught his attention. His eyebrows shot up like alarms going off.

“Grace!” he shouted, his thin face scowling in anger. “Why is this kitchen such a mess? The watermelon in the refrigerator is uncovered, and it looks like someone stuck their hand in it!”

Jesse's father slammed the door shut and went hunting for his wife. Jesse held his breath. He felt powerless to say something in his mother's defense. Filled with fear, he was unable to speak. The rage he heard in his father's voice paralyzed him. He knew his dad was going to be mean to his mom.

Jesse climbed out of the chair and peeked around the living room doorway, watching as his father found her rolling up the vacuum cord. Grace looked up at him with her gentle brown eyes, not intimidated by his yelling. The expression on her face was a look of sadness—sadness equal to weariness. A quiet woman, she didn't speak much. When she spoke, it was with a voice of instruction. When love and affection were needed, she offered them.

“Woman, can't you hear?” his father demanded. “Answer me!” He stood supremely above her. The tension inside him made his lean, muscular body seem larger than life as he towered over her petite, plump form. He was like a volcano ready to erupt.

Grace continued to look at him as if deciding the best way to handle the situation. Her energy had to find somewhere to go as her hands worked steadily, rolling up the vacuum cord.

“A man works hard and can't even find a clean glass in the house,” Andre growled. “The Kool-Aid® was almost gone. And why is it every time I come home, the kitchen is a mess?”

“I just washed the dishes,” his mother said firmly. “It seems the harder I work and try to please you, the more you complain. What is it that makes you so unhappy? I do my best, and yet you still show no gratitude. What's happened to you?” His mother looked tired. The light in her eyes had become increasingly dim.

“Who are you talking back to?” he barked.

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The violent eruption of the volcano was at hand. Jesse waited for his father to vent his uncontrollable anger. He felt even more nervous and afraid, while still attempting to maintain his powers of invisibility.

He heard someone knocking at the door. His parents didn't seem to notice. Then the screen door slammed, and their neighbor Janice walked in. Jesse liked Janice, a short, stout woman with a light complexion. She kept her hair in a short afro. She often commented that his mother was a good, respectable woman, and how her children were always kept clean and well taken care of. According to her, the other children in the neighborhood looked as though they were raising themselves, with their hair unkempt, their clothes filthy, and their faces unwashed.

"Grace, are you all right?" Janice called out. She touched Jesse on the head as she passed by and went to his mother. Janice put her arms around her while glaring at Andre with distaste written on her face.

"What do you mean, is she all right?" Andre demanded. "And what are you doing in my house?" Jesse knew his father didn't like women like her, who "didn't know their place and how to stay in it," as he often said.

"You heard what I said," Janice said, her voice rising. She didn't seem intimidated by him.

"Get the hell out of my house," Andre commanded. "I'm the man here. Who do you think you are?" He took a step toward Janice.

"Man?" Janice said in an outraged voice. "What makes you think you're a man? I hear that word so often. I must ask myself, do you know what that word truly means? Well, let me explain to you what a man is. He is someone who has gained self-knowledge of his own nature, abilities, and weaknesses. A man is self-reliant, supporting women, rather than being manipulative and cunning and feeding on women like leeches. Having respect for oneself and others shows another quality. In order to gain respect, you must show respect. A man is endowed with courage. He uses that courage to instill strength and confidence in others."

Infuriated, Andre barked, "I'm tired of listening to your crap."

Janice shot back, "Are you aware of your responsibilities as a man?"

Andre looked at her in disbelief, his body rigid and tense.

"You must make someone else feel inferior because of your own inferiority complex," Janice continued. "When no one subjects

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themselves to your irrational way of thinking, you use physical force. You think you win with fear, but you lose. Love and hate are the same to you.” Janice leaned her face closer to his. She now stood only inches away as she glared directly into his eyes. The tension between them reached its peak.

Jesse felt his heart pounding in anticipation of what might happen.

“You obviously don’t know what a man is,” Janice said, “so you definitely have no idea what a husband is. If you did, you would never let your children see you yelling and beating their mother, who is supposed to be your sacred wife.”

His father replied in a chillingly calm voice, “I’ve had enough of your mouth. If you don’t get out of my house, I’ll have you regret the day you were born.”

Not intimidated by this threat, Janice turned and saw the audience standing in the doorway. Jesse jumped as he noticed that his older brother, Eric, and sister, Leah, had joined him. They looked frightened, and Leah’s eyes were glazed with tears.

“Get in the kitchen, and don’t be all day about it!” their father yelled at them with a wave of his hand.

The children dashed into the kitchen, one almost knocking the other over.

“Come with me, kids,” Janice said, following behind them.

“Get out of my house!” their father roared, rushing at Janice from behind like a lion ready to pounce on its prey.

Janice ignored him. “Grace, I’m going to take the children with me,” she said, continuing to walk toward the kitchen.

Their father raised his arm to strike Janice.

“Andre, no!” Grace screamed, barely holding his arm back with both of hers. “Please, no.”

For a moment, he seemed bewildered. He gawked at his wife for a brief second and snatched his arm from her grip with his familiar stubborn, ugly resolve.

Janice glared at Andre for a moment longer. “Come on, children,” she said, her voice trembling. She picked up Jesse and led Leah and Eric toward the front door, ignoring their father’s ranting and raving.

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“You’ll pay,” she yelled back over her shoulder as she crossed the street. “By God Almighty, you’ll pay. Whatever you sow, you shall reap. God don’t like evil.”

Jesse’s heart raced as he looked over Janice’s shoulder at his father, whose voice was filled with outrage as he shouted above Janice’s voice. He shook his fist wildly in the air.

Jesse heard his mother’s voice. “Andre, please calm down.”

“Who are you telling to calm down? What goes on here is my business. I’m the man here!”

Jesse heard distant screaming and shouting inside the house. He also heard the sounds of furniture hitting the walls, glass breaking, and his father’s voice yelling above it all. Jesse could tell blows were being laid between the shouts of anger. With what measures Andre chose to place upon Janice, it was doubled to his wife.

Screams of torment could be heard. Jesse’s small frame ached with hurt as he stared at their house. If only he were a warrior, he could help his mother. But he wasn’t, and for now, all he could do was watch over Janice’s left shoulder as she carried him across the street. It was a moment he would never forget.

“Don’t worry, kids,” Janice said, trying to sound cheerful. “Everything’s OK. We can go have some ice cream.”

The tears now flowed from Leah’s eyes; Eric looked solemn.

Janice placed the children on the couch in the living room. Jesse sat on the floor.

“Here, you can play with these things while I get the ice cream,” Janice said in a warm, friendly voice.

Leah and Eric looked somberly back at Jesse as Janice left. Leah’s hair, which had been parted in the middle as usual and pulled back into ponytails, was now mussed. Her tall, thin frame hunched over as she wiped away her tears. Eric, with his dark complexion and close-set eyes, resembled their father. His coal-black hair, like Jesse’s, was cropped short. He looked older than his years today.

Jesse gazed down at his own hands, lying limply in his lap. He had inherited his mother’s lighter skin tone—“like cocoa-colored taffy,” she had once said. He was small for his age and wondered if he would ever grow up to be a big man like his father.

The three sat quietly together, while Jesse let his mind wander.

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Hours later, Grace arrived to pick up her children. She looked shaken, as though she had been crying. Her right cheek was bruised and swollen. As always, however, she maintained her poise.

“Thank you, Janice,” she said softly.

“You’re quite welcome,” Janice replied.

“Are you all right?”

“Everything is OK now.”

Grace and the children left the house, with Janice looking out from her porch protectively. Things were quiet when they got home. Andre was sitting in the kitchen, contemplating. He didn’t even acknowledge that they had come home. Grace ushered the children to their rooms. The house was quiet and subdued. The stillness of nightfall was stifled by silence and tainted with fear.

That night, Jesse’s pillow was wet with tears. His tiny heart felt sadness, and his eyes became weary as he dozed to sleep.



In the morning, the house was a different place, as if the events of the previous night hadn’t happened. Jesse’s mother arose as she customarily did and began her day, seeing about her family. His father sat in the living room with Jesse and his siblings, watching television, while their mother was in the kitchen. There was another side to his father, a side that sometimes tried to shine through even if it didn’t stay long. Saying sorry wasn’t something he could do.

Their mother was cooking bacon, which popped and burst with a mouth-watering aroma. Soft mounds of grits and scrambled eggs also filled the room with scent. She called them in to eat. The table setting was complete, everything put in dishes and steaming hot. Their father, now in a good mood, walked up to the kitchen table and playfully pushed Eric on the back of the head.

“Big-head boy,” he said, chuckling a bit. “Your nickname ought to be Hook.” He smiled thoughtfully, sitting down.

Eric smiled, too, but he didn’t say anything.

“And you,” Andre said, looking over at Leah. “A girl should have a soft name. Grace, what do you think about...Rain, for Leah?”

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Their mother set a steaming plate of bacon, eggs, and grits before him. “Rain is nice,” she said while serving the children.

They all sat down together and ate until they became full of her cooking.

Andre sat back, satisfied. “Little man, we’ll give you something... Tiny Tim? Naw, we’ll just call you Tim, that’s different enough.”

Jesse just looked at him, unconcerned about the entire issue of nicknames. He wanted to play in his own world.

Grace stood up and started to scrape the excess off the plates. She then instructed the children to pick up their toys before going outside to play. Quietness surrounded the house that day.



Jesse really only had one day to play and rest: Saturday. Sunday was for church. Many things might fade from his memory as he got older, but never Sunday morning.

Waking, Jesse opened his eyes and saw Eric still asleep, his head turned this way and his arms that way, his mouth wide open and lopsided. Jesse lay still trying to ignore the constant rhythm of his brother’s snoring.

“Wake up.”

Jesse turned to see his mother standing over him. She was always awake before everyone else. Never once had she looked tired, and she always had a bright smile to greet them. The sun was shining through the window behind her, creating an angelic glow. She always looked beautiful, and never seemed to have as much as a hair out of place.

“Go wash your face and brush your teeth,” she told him as she moved to wake up his brother, who, when Jesse left, was still fighting her off in his sleep.

“This bed is wet!” his mother said as she pulled the bedspread from the bed.

“The bed’s wet?” his father asked, coming down the hallway. “Which one of you wet the bed?” He started to unbuckle his wide black leather belt to deliver the usual punishment.

“Jesse did it,” Eric said quickly.

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Jesse was just about to brush his teeth when he heard his father call out his name. Dutifully, he came.

His father stared at him through narrowed eyes. "What are you doing wetting the bed? You're too old to be doing that."

Before Jesse could respond, Andre began interrogating him with a barrage of questions. Jesse stood before him confused, not knowing what to say in his defense. Grace stood aside, looking on thoughtfully as the two boys stood side-by-side in front of their father. Eric had been excused and Andre was about to proceed with the thrashing.

"By the time I'm finished, I guarantee, you won't wet the bed again," his father said while raising the belt to strike.

Jesse trembled with fright, feeling helpless to defend himself.

His mother quickly spoke. "Andre, wait, check his underwear."

"Come here, boy," his father said to Jesse and checked him for dampness. The side of him was wet, but his underwear was not.

"Eric!" he commanded.

Completely wet. He was the culprit.

"Go on and finish getting ready for church," Andre told Jesse abruptly. "Come here, Eric." He motioned to Eric to follow him.

"No, Daddy, please!" Eric pleaded, knowing that he was going to receive the punishment he had almost escaped.

Jesse lingered in the hallway and listened as Eric was dragged into the living room.

"First, you lie to me," their father said, and Jesse heard the snap of the belt. Eric cried out. "Who do you think you were trying to fool? I wasn't born yesterday." He gave Eric another and another. What seemed to last an eternity, lasted five minutes.

Then their father yelled, "Go get ready for church and get out of my eyesight."

Eric, his face wet with tears, passed Jesse in the hallway on the way back to the bedroom. He rammed into Jesse and shoved him into the wall. "Punk!"

Back in his room, Jesse saw that his mother had laid their clothes out neatly. He started to dress in the heavily starched clothes and was halfway dressed when his brother returned. Eric didn't hit him again, but he kept giving him dirty looks.

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Their mother appeared back in the room with a hairbrush and Royal Crown Pomade. She placed a glob of the sticky substance on the back of her right hand, then combed and parted Jesse's hair while oiling his scalp. She took the remainder and smeared it onto his face, making circular motions. He felt as if his face were being covered by an octopus. She rubbed the pomade around until Jesse looked like a shiny copper penny.

Starched, greased, and clean, it was time to leave for church. The ride to church seemed to take forever. Nobody talked much. Eric stared ahead and turned periodically to give Jesse mean stares that he wasn't aware of until he turned his head. Jesse stuck out his tongue and turned away.

Jesse hated the routine of going to church. All the younger children had to go downstairs to the bowels of the church: the basement, where Sunday school was held. He'd rather stay with his mother instead of going there. When they arrived at the church, everyone was around outside, talking and laughing with each other. It seemed as if a thousand hats floated around above him. The women were always stylishly dressed in brocade dresses and pearls, hats adorned with decoration, and high-heeled shoes. The smell of different perfumes engulfed him. The men just looked like giants, most of them with booming laughs and firm handshakes.

The stairs were an annoyance. Jesse had to be dragged up the huge, speckled granite steps because he could never keep pace. His legs simply weren't long enough.

Leah always took Jesse and Eric down to the basement's entrance. The dim light was too weak to brighten the entire area, so Jesse carefully watched his steps. He sat with all the little kids as the Sunday school lesson began. He didn't understand many of the lessons, although he tried. He didn't like being around the other kids. He wanted to go off by himself, so he just waited impatiently until the lesson was over. That day, his collar was too tight around his neck, so he kept trying to loosen it, and the starch in his pants was making him itch. The teacher kept giving him looks as he fidgeted, but he couldn't sit still.

When class was finished, all the kids went up the dark, winding staircase. Jesse carefully looked at the intricate designs in the wood grain as he walked up. All the other kids with boundless energy always rushed past him while he was observing his surroundings.

Their mother waited in the same area every Sunday for her children, to lead them to their seats for church service. In the pew, Jesse's feet never reached the floor; they always dangled. He swung them back and forth due

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to boredom. Church was always crowded, so they would have to squeeze together tightly wherever they sat.

While Grace said hello to some of the other members who had come to sit beside them, Eric reached over Leah and hit Jesse. Jesse reached over and hit him back. They did this until Leah threatened to tell. She didn't have to, because Grace always knew what was going on.

"Jesse, come and sit on this side of me," she said, patting the space on her left.

The service began. Everyone sat like straight arrows, with undivided attention, except for Jesse. He constantly leaned over and looked around at all the faces. He wanted to move freely and couldn't stand to be confined.

Soon, the sun began penetrating the stained-glass windows. The gospel choir, adorned with colorful robes, stood and sang. Jesse noticed several of the people, including his mother, stood and clapped. Then the moment always came, the Altar Call. The music became slow and mournful. People with tears and sad hearts walked to the front of the church and gathered around the altar, bowing their heads.

His mother walked up front this day, effortlessly gliding down the center aisle, her eyes fixed on the altar. Jesse could tell she was dispirited. Even though he was a child, he knew something was troubling his mother deeply. He felt her heart hurting, and it hurt him. All he knew of her was caring, love, and guidance. When she came back from the altar, she sat beside him. She looked at him and smiled slightly, then turned her attention back to the service. He noticed she appeared to be relaxed and at peace. Grace had received an answer she had been seeking for some time, and from that point on, she had the strength to make a change.

Jesse continued to dangle his feet and look around. Finally, when church was over, he was happy. Back down the giant stepping stones. Back to being swallowed up in a world of adults and their boring environment and conversations. Everyone was saying goodbye, and some even hello. He was grateful it was over.



It was a dark, angry night. The summer wind whipped and beat anything with which it came in contact. The rainstorm had cooled things

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off from the heat of night. Jesse was in bed when he heard pounding on the front door and his father's thundering voice.

"Grace!" his father yelled. "It's me, Andre. Open the door!"

"Andre, it's late," Grace said.

"Just open the damn door!" he said angrily.

Several weeks had passed since his mother and father had separated. His father had gotten his own apartment nearby. They had rarely seen him during that time.

Now, hearing his father's voice, Jesse tensed, lying in his bed like a board. As his father pushed open the door and came inside, Jesse heard their exchange.

"What? Now I'm not good enough for you?" Andre demanded. "You act as though you weren't even going to open the door."

"Andre, please don't. Just leave!"

"You don't tell me to go! Where are my boys?"

"They're asleep."

Jesse heard his father's heavy footsteps coming down the hall, while his mother followed behind, protesting. Then his father burst into the room, slamming the door against the wall. He stood there dripping wet, his clothes plastered to his body.

"Come on, boys," he said loudly. "Get up. You're going with me."

"Andre," Grace said, her voice pleading, "please stop. Jesse, Eric, go back to sleep."

"I said get up!" he yelled angrily, pulling the sheets back. He grabbed Jesse first, scooping him into his arms and lifting him out of the bed.

His mother reached for him. "Give me Jesse!" she cried.

"Get out of my way, woman!" He slapped her hard with his spare hand.

She slammed against the wall with the force of the blow, which echoed through the house.

"You!" Andre said in a cold, emotionless tone. "Do not tell me what to do. You think you're so independent now. You think you can whip me. I'll kick your..."

His voice trailed away as she rose up. She looked at him with so much hatred, he looked away.

"No! Give me Jesse," she screamed.

Andre pushed her hard, still being the stronger power. Then he picked up Eric and started for the front door. Both Jesse and Eric were upset and crying.

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Jesse felt the rain soak him as his father carried him outside. Their mother reached the car just as their father placed them inside. On the top of the car, the heavy raindrops made rapid pattering sounds. Other cars sped by in the storm, causing gushes of water to splash against them.

Jesse could barely see through the darkness as his father struggled to place him in the car. Headlights moved in both directions, the vehicles only a blur to Jesse. Then he heard an eerie, piercing shriek. Jesse turned his head and saw a black shadow darting across the street between the cars. Then he heard a deadening thud.

Everything seemed to move in slow motion. The moment became like a silent movie. Jesse no longer heard the thunderous rain, vehicles passing in the night, or blowing horns. He turned again and looked out the back window. Through the rain on the window, he could barely see his mother on her knees.

Within seconds, the downpour of rain became heavier. The rain soaked her, leaving her clothing and body drenched. She struggled to stand but couldn't. She let go screams of pain and anguish as she clenched her fists helplessly. Slowly, she made it to her feet, her body bent and swaying. She took a step, lost her footing, and slipped back into despondency.

Jesse's father started the car and drove off. He turned the corner sharply, the car swerving almost out of control. He sped the car down the slick expressways like a madman, mumbling as he drove, not saying anything coherently. He seemed unaware of his children in the back seat, shivering and crying with fear. Headlights from other cars zoomed in, lighting the entire vehicle, giving it an ominous glow.

They pulled into a narrow driveway, and their father opened the car door for them to get out. He ushered them through the rain and into the house, but not before they were soaking wet again. He took them to a room in the back of the house, cold and confused.

"Get in the bed and go to sleep," he said gruffly as he left the room.

Jesse looked around the empty room. The walls were shabby and dirty. The bed was unmade; the blanket and sheets lay on the floor. The carpet looked as if it had never been cleaned. Eric picked up the covers from the floor, threw them on the bed, and climbed in.

"Come on," he said. "He might come back in here and beat you."

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Jesse scrambled under the covers. The bed smelled horrible. In fact, the entire house had a stench to it.

They lay still. Jesse stared at the ceiling, uneasy and uncertain how to accept what was happening, wondering if they would see their mom and Leah again. As the night grew long, he eventually drifted off to sleep.

It seemed as if they had just closed their eyes when they were being awakened again. Jesse heard voices, and men in blue uniforms came into the room with his father. Picking up Eric and Jesse, the men took them home.

Jesse was relieved to be in familiar surroundings again. His mother was there with a tear-stained face. She took him and his brother into her arms, then bathed and dried them with a mother's care. Relief and gratitude showed on her face.

"OK, now you two get into the bed," she said softly, smiling at them.

Eric ran to bed, but Jesse walked slowly through the living room. In the dark, he saw a light flickering in the corner of the room. Like a magnet, he was drawn to it. He drifted closer and closer toward the light, as if in a trance.

On the television screen, violence had erupted. Screams of anger and terror came from a crowd of people moving through the streets. He saw a woman fall, and within seconds, men in uniforms began beating her with clubs and pulling at her clothing. Helplessly, she was dragged along the concrete curb.

Jesse's heart pounded wildly like the drumming of the Congo, out of control.

On the screen, another boy was pinned against a wall, screaming, while two enormous, ferocious animals growled viciously like wolves, barking and snapping their teeth at him. The German Shepherds seemed on the verge of breaking away to devour anyone in their path.

Women searched for any kind of protection, with babies and children in their arms. People rushed frantically for places of safety. In the background were flames, overturned vehicles, explosions, sirens, burning storefronts, and shattered windshields. People's mouths hung open, while making no sound. Many victims turned to retaliate.

More zookeepers in blue uniforms appeared by the hundreds, with stern faces and cold, steely eyes. They moved in unison with menacing accuracy, their hands gripping clubs. Some wore hard hats. Huge leather belts hung around their waists, with heavy pieces of metal in their holsters.

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Suddenly, the fear of the people turned into anger, which led to action. They pelted the uniformed men with rocks, bottles, just about anything. Some uniforms retreated back to their cars, while others continued their attack on the crowd. More police cars were turned over and set ablaze. Many of those in uniform now displayed frantic faces.

A voice came through the television set: "As you can see, the situation is out of control. The National Guard will obviously be called in if order cannot be established. This is total mayhem."

Fury rose in a burst of flames as a police car and a helicopter caught ablaze. More and more fire trucks arrived as the flames of hate and aggression grew. People were being hosed down by firemen. The force pinned some against the buildings, while others fell through storefront windows or to the pavement. Some other substance was sprayed on the people, who now rebelled completely, like wild animals escaping from their cages. Busloads of police arrived to help the uniformed survive in the jungle.

Though outmatched against the fire hoses, dogs, clubs, and guns, the people tried to maintain dignity and respect. Nevertheless, they were overcome by those in authority. What had started as a defiant demand for respect had turned into a massacre. The people were being slaughtered. Screams muffled by sirens continued as blood flowed along the street curbs.

Jesse continued to watch as the people were beaten down with repeated blows. He saw people running, screaming, and holding their heads, trying to stop the flow of blood.

His mother walked by with laundry in her arms. "Jesse, I thought I told you to go to bed," she said.

Mesmerized by what he was witnessing, Jesse barely heard his mother's voice.

"Jesse, go to bed now!" she said again, this time pulling him by the hand as he stood still, transfixed.

For a moment, she stopped pulling at him. He looked up at her and saw that her eyes had turned to the television screen. She clasped her hands over her mouth, aghast.

Then she murmured, "I know I've done the right thing. I know it." She turned to Jesse, her face wet with tears. "There is power in prayer, Jesse. You remember that. Now go to bed."

Not knowing what his mother meant, Jesse turned around and took the steps of a child. His feet moved forward, but his mind stayed back.

THE ENDLESS HOUR

For a long time, he lay awake in bed with nameless faces passing through his mind. Sleep refused to lay by his side. Even when he did finally sleep, he could still see their faces and hear their cries.



Jesse had witnessed the horrors of the summer riots of Rochester, New York, on July 24, 1964. When he was older, he learned that there had been riots in several other cities at this time.

There were mixed stories of how the riot began. Those in authority had their version. Extensive looting and vandalism had taken place on Joseph and Clinton Avenues. City, county, and state police officers were needed to control the people, with the help of the National Guard. By July 30, 1964, the unrest had simmered to a halt. Many people were hospitalized, and four people had died. More than five hundred arrests were made.

The black population had grown in Rochester between 1940 and 1960, with people looking for better jobs and opportunities. What they found was quite the contrary. Blacks were often denied good jobs and housing solely due to race. Police brutality was common. Often, officials ignored the cases brought by blacks, who were discouraged by the system of bureaucracy. Meanwhile, whites in the same area lived lives of leisure, feeling well protected by those whom they trusted.

To some, there were no racial problems; there was no police brutality or discrimination, because it was all swept under the rug. It all went unnoticed, even when the pot began boiling over.

Nevertheless, years of pain had mounted into tension, which exploded into anger. The people wanted true freedom from their oppressor and had not received it. They had spoken softly first, through the voice of the law. They had made statements that America did not want to hear. In a reasonable tone, they had asked for equality and justice, but time and time again, their cries went unheard. They had cried out for freedom and equality to a system that said they didn't even deserve rights as human beings. The people grew tired of being manipulated, oppressed, and ignored by the government. The anger, hatred, and words turned into action. The hurt and the pain formed the unspoken words of the silent majority.