

Simon Chatterley despised his mother with a deep and carefully nurtured hatred, honed over the years until it seemed to be the major part of him. Anita Chatterley was a wealthy woman. She had been a CPA before she met Andrew Chatterley and married him, thereby going from middle class accountant to upper class socialite. They had one child and that was quite enough for Anita. From the time he was five years old, she would take Simon aside once a month to show him his accounts. She had kept track of every penny she had spent on him from the time he was born. Showing him how much he owed her seemed to give her pleasure. Simon however hated these sessions. He didn't need a spreadsheet to know that his mother resented his very existence.

His father spent all his time at work and then conveniently died of a heart attack when Simon was seven. He had barely known his father and therefore didn't grieve very much. It wasn't as if dear old Daddy had ever intervened on Simon's behalf in any of the psychological or physical abuse Anita doled out to him on a daily basis. The physical abuse had stopped one night when he was fifteen and had taken the belt away from her.

But the emotional drubbings continued. Insisting that he was too stupid for college, she had refused to invest any money in his education. The only thing she would give him was free room and board. He could live at home for free, but had to work to pay for tuition, books and fees. He tried living on his own, but just couldn't afford it. He thought about the Army, about moving to LA or New York, but eventually he just moved home. He sometimes thought that he was just too lazy or too cowed to live independently.

Despite getting his degree jobs were few and far between. He'd worked as assistant manager at McDonald's, sold shoes, spent some time working in a dry cleaners and even as a landscaper.

Overweight, balding and shy, he never made a good impression. And though he tried very hard, somehow he could never succeed at anything he attempted. The dry cleaners had actually burned down and his boss had blamed him for the fire. He didn't think it was his fault. But he wasn't sure.

He'd been a failure at romance, too. He'd tried. Oh, how he had tried. But his mother had been able to sabotage his budding romances every time he hadn't managed to bungle it himself.

Now thirty five, he'd abandoned his search for female companionship. He berated himself daily for continuing to live with her, but he kept expecting her to die. That was his only hope in life, inheriting her

money. She was obese, diabetic with high blood pressure. Surely she'd die soon. He was thinking about what he'd do with the money when she finally did shuffle off her mortal coil while he took the laundry downstairs to the basement. Treading heavily on the stairs, the third step broke under his weight, pitching him forward. One hand clung desperately to the railing, wrenching his shoulder, but he avoided a fall. The laundry was scattered down the stairs, puddling at the bottom on the concrete floor. Another thing to fix, he snarled to himself as he gathered up the clothes and dumped them in the washing machine. But as he started back up the stairs he stopped and stared at the third step for a long moment. Then he bent and very carefully straightened it, so that the break wasn't obvious, and stepped over it. His mother was still asleep.

Simon sat at the kitchen table, nursing a cup of coffee, and thought. When he heard Anita stirring in her bedroom, he went back down to the basement, carefully avoiding the broken step. He lay on the floor at the bottom of the stairs and moaned. He could hear his mother moving around in the kitchen, but apparently she didn't hear him. So he moaned louder.

"Simon?" she called. "Simon? What's that noise?"

He continued to moan until she opened the door to the basement and looked down.

"Simon!" she shrieked. "Get up! What are you doing, you idiot?!"

He continued to moan piteously. She started down the stairs. Her considerable weight came down on the third step and it broke completely this time. She threw her hands out, fingernails scratching frantically at the railings, but a little too slow to grasp them. Anita Chatterley came crashing down the stairs, screaming. The screams were abruptly cut off when she hit the bottom face first. Simon had hurriedly scooted out of the way. Now he crept forward. He was pretty sure she was dead. Her head was twisted severely, her face pulped. Blood started to pool under her. He poked her. No response. He poked her again. And again. And again. He didn't know how to check for a pulse, but her head was at a very odd angle and he went upstairs to call 911.

After the paramedics had come and gone, Simon sat at the table for long minutes, a beatific smile on his face. He couldn't believe it. He was free! He got up and did an impromptu dance around the kitchen. He could hardly wait to start going through her bank records, the ones he'd only glimpsed. And the investments! And the safety deposit boxes in the bank! He clapped his hands in delight. It was going to be like Christmas – a Christmas he'd never had. But first – the laundry. He cheerfully opened the

basement door and ran downstairs. Unfortunately he forgot the third step.