

Excerpt: *The Armageddon File*

Junior Sikes was a pedophile. He knew he had a dangerous obsession that might get him into serious trouble, but he couldn't help himself. He was too frightened of possible discovery and arrest to attempt physical contact with children, so he satisfied himself with kiddie porn that he downloaded on his computer. It was a poor substitute for the real thing, yet if he could keep his appetites under control by merely watching movies of men screwing little girls he hoped he could avoid ruin, and the abyss.

He had attempted therapy for his problem on two prior occasions. The therapists made him talk during session after session about the domineering women of his youth, none of which did him any good. The past was past, may his aunt who raised him roast in Hell, and today he was who he was, a bald-headed little guy with a big chin and too much forehead that the girls in high school and college had never noticed.

These days he downloaded kiddie porn on his laptop and watched when he couldn't think of anything but sex, which was several times a day. Even a few minutes was enough of a fix to hold him until he could get home to his big-screen computer. Junior spent at least three days a week traveling for his job, so he never downloaded porn on his office desk-top. Sure, it was password protected, but everyone in the office was a nerd and hacker, so he didn't want to run the risk. That

nosy bitch in the next cubicle, Rosa, had her own hang-ups and wore men's clothes and a butch haircut. She hated him and would cut off his cock if she had a chance.

This morning he was looking at some new porn he had downloaded at home last night when he heard footsteps coming down the hall, quickly. The footsteps of a group of people. He hit the escape button and the porn disappeared from the laptop screen. In its place was some code he was working on.

The office manager came into his cubicle, followed by two policemen in uniform.

"Back away from that laptop," the manager said gruffly. She was a hefty black woman. She placed her hand on his shoulder and jerked him, chair and all, back from his desk so he couldn't reach the computer keyboard.

"He was watching it, Miz Williams," Rosa crowed as she elbowed her way around the two policemen who were blocking the opening to the cubicle. "I saw it. Filthy stuff."

Junior Sikes stared at her. How?

She saw the question on his face and a smirk of triumph crossed hers. "I cut a hole in the cubicle wall, you slimy little pervert!" She ripped down his calendar on the wall behind him, and there it was! A hole about the size of a quarter. She must have moved the calendar with a pencil eraser while his back was turned and looked through the hole.

"I'm afraid I'll have to place you under arrest, Mr. Sikes," one of the policemen said.

To Junior's amazement, he found his voice. His world was crumbling, he was so frightened he was shaking, but he got it out. "Do you have a warrant?" he asked the policemen.

"I saw it!" Rosa said. "Men fucking kids. It's on that laptop."

"You need a warrant," Junior managed.

"We have one," the black policeman said, and handed Junior the sheet of paper. He tried to read it. It was dated yesterday. Based on a sworn affidavit. Rosa has sworn to it.

"We'll take that computer too."

A ray of hope peeked into Junior's world. "Not without a search warrant," he protested.

"They don't need one," Ms. Williams said flatly. "That computer is company property and I'm turning it over to the police."

Junior stared at Rosa with hate in his eyes. "You goddamn filthy, cunt-lapping dike!"

The policemen stood him up, cuffed him, and one of them took him away. The other stayed behind to sign a receipt for the laptop.

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When they took him in front of a judge that afternoon, Junior Sikes said he couldn't afford a lawyer, so one was appointed for him. A public defender.

The lawyer came to see him the next morning. He was a rumped, overweight man, about forty, with a Van Dyke goatee and a ponytail dangling from

thinning hair. The sleeves of his sports coat were frayed and shiny. His crooked tie had a spot on it that looked like mustard.

“My name is Dillworth,” he said. He settled himself comfortably on a chair across the glass barrier in the lawyer-client room. He got out a legal pad and pen from a ratty, gray plastic, soft envelope. Uncapped the pen and inspected the tip for leaks. Apparently satisfied, he asked, “Your full name and address?”

Junior told him and Dillworth wrote it down.

“Age?”

“Thirty four.”

“Got a criminal record?”

No.

“Man, I want to know if you’ve even been arrested for jaywalking.”

“No.”

When he has all the information he wanted, Dillworth said, “They found kiddie porn on that laptop you had at work and are executing a search warrant on your apartment this afternoon. Do you have a computer there?”

“Yes.”

“Got kiddie stuff on it?”

“Yes.”

Dillworth sighed and made a note. Like he was making a shopping list: milk, eggs, bread and peanut butter. It wasn’t his life that was circling the drain.

“Are you any good?” Sikes asked. A good lawyer, he meant.

Dillworth didn't look up from his pad. "After I finished my stint as clerk for Chief Justice Roberts, I turned down a professorship at Yale Law so I could be a public defender, spend my working days visiting clients in jail. I like the smell."

"Can you get me out on bail?"

Dillworth eyed him critically. "Where are you going to go?" he asked.

"Home."

"You're lying, Sikes. You may think you can outrun the law, but I doubt it. You don't look as if you have what it takes to be a fugitive."

"That's none of your business. I want out."

"They all do."

"I have a *right* to get out. Innocent until proven guilty."

Dillworth sighed. "If I had a dollar for every innocent man I've defended, I couldn't afford a Happy Meal."

"I didn't shoot or rape anybody."

"They haven't charged you with those crimes," he said dryly. "Can you afford bail? Gotta pay ten percent in cash to a bail bondsman. Ten grand on a hundred-thousand-dollar bond. Kiddie porn, the judge will go at least that much, maybe more since you're a dangerous pervert. Your arrest made the local news section of the morning paper, the tweeters are twaddling, and he's up for re-election. You got that kind of cash?"

"Well..."

"If you do, you can afford to hire your own lawyer. I defend indigent clients, the oppressed, the under-privileged, the downtrodden, you know the bullshit. So..."

Junior Sikes rubbed his large forehead. Jesus, he was neck-deep in the shit. Now or never. He pretended to think for ten seconds or so, then played his ace.

“I want to talk to the FBI,” he said.

If Dillworth was surprised it didn't show. He made another little note. Jelly for the peanut butter. “What about?”

“I'll tell them.”

Dillworth looked him over and nodded slowly. “Like the feds come trotting whenever I give them a call. You're going to have to give me enough to elevate them off their asses at the federal courthouse or you can forget it.”

Junior Sikes wiped his forehead. And his eyes, which were leaking a little.

“I work for American ElectTech. We make and sell voting machines. The company has been rigging them so they change votes.”

“Are you shitting me, Sikes?”

“The last election and the next.”

“You were involved in that?”

“Yes.”

“How involved?”

“I helped write the code—it varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction—and installed it on ElectTech machines that are in place around the country when they had us in for a pre-election function check and certification of the machines.”

“The company knew that you were doing this?”

“They told me what races to fix and what percentage the various candidates were to get. After Hinton lost the election anyway, they are doubling down on the next one. Getting more sophisticated. I’m working on the software now.”

“And they called the cops because you had porn on your computer? You expect me to believe that?”

“It was that dyke, Rosa Caputo. She’s on the software team too, but she’s a moron. She called the police and swore out a complaint. The company probably didn’t know about it until the cops showed up.”

Dillworth’s eyebrows went up and he examined Junior’s face, his skepticism obvious. Then he gave that up as a waste of time. With his lips screwed up, he made another note, longer this time. He put his legal pad and pen back in the plastic envelope and stood. “I’ll see what I can do,” he said. “Don’t hold your breath.”

The attorney walked out.

#

Junior Sikes had a cell to himself. The cells up and down his row had inmates, usually two, and they talked back and forth. Junior didn’t say a word to anyone. He was so depressed he stretched out on the bunk, closed his eyes and didn’t move. He began thinking about suicide, how easy it would be. Not in here, of course, but outside.

Poof, and it would be all over, the obsessions, the shame, the hopeless future. He tried to shut out the world, the sounds, the smell, the situation, all of it.

That evening he roused himself to pee, then sat on the bunk with his back to the wall and his eyes closed. Concentrated on breathing, on counting his pulse, on trying to just turn off his mind.

How would he manage to survive in prison?

When the deputy brought a tray for his dinner and slid it through the slot in the cell door, Junior didn't even glance at it. He wasn't the least bit hungry.

One of the guys in the next cell tried to talk to him, but Junior ignored him. Then Lights Out came and Junior curled up in a fetal position on the bunk. The light was on in the corridor: it never went off. Still the forty-watt light in the cell was off and that afforded him a bit of privacy. For the first time in hours, tears leaked from the corners of his eyes.

He would never survive prison. He was a small man, never worked out, and would be physically abused. He would probably end up as some tattooed biker drug-dealer's butt boy. The FBI was his only hope. Testifying against the people at ElectTech in return for probation. Those people were guilty of felonies, as he was, but the first to turn state's evidence could perhaps get leniency. Maybe even immunity.

He thought about the ElectTech crowd, the dike Rosa, that bitch LaVerne Williams, both of whom threw him to the wolves. He was perfectly willing to put his co-workers in prison if he could stay out. After all, Rosa with all her kinks had been absolutely delighted to rat him out for kiddie porn. Her perversion was socially acceptable and his wasn't. Junior told himself Rosa and Matilda deserved whatever was coming.

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Junior was sleeping during his third night in jail when he heard the rattling of the cell door. It was the deputy. "Wake up, Sikes. You got a visitor."

"What time is it?"

"Jail time, idiot. Get your flip-flops on and I'll unlock the door."

He put them on as the door swung open.

"I'm going to leave the cuffs off. Behave yourself or you'll wish you had."

He walked ahead of the deputy and asked over his shoulder, "Who is it?"

"FBI."

They were amazingly early. He didn't expect them for a couple more days. Or never. His heart leaped. Oh man, if he could only cut a deal!

The deputy took him to a well-lit interrogation room. One man was in the room, a middle-aged, fit, clean-shaven guy in a business suit, wearing a tie. A small recorder sat on the desk. Four chairs were arranged around the desk.

Without preamble, as the deputy turned to leave, the man's hand came up and Junior saw with a start it held a pistol with a sausage on the barrel. The man pointed the gun at the deputy's back and pulled the trigger. The report was just a small splut. The deputy fell forward onto the floor.

The pistol turned in his direction. "No..." Junior said, lifting his hands as if pushing away the gunman. "No..."

He didn't see the flash or hear the shot. The bullet smacked him in the forehead and plowed through his skull into his brain. Junior was dead as he began to fall.

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