

THERE IS A REAPER

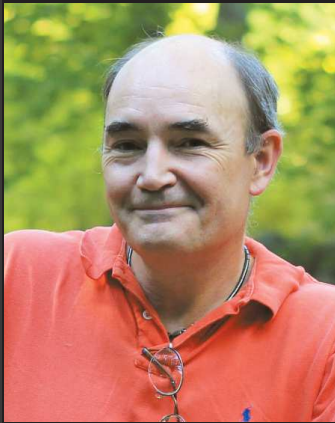
Losing a Child to Cancer

Michael Lynes



FIVE-YEAR-OLD CHRISTOPHER AARON has always been a whirlwind of heroic action, leading his brothers into all sorts of youthful mischief. A mysterious illness suddenly plunges him and his family into a frightening nightmare of hospitals and doctors and extreme therapies far from his small-town home. Can his doctors diagnose his strange disease? How will he and his family adapt to a bizarre new world they have been thrust into?

Heart-wrenching, searing, and powerful, *There is a Reaper* immerses the reader into Christopher's intense struggle against his pitiless foe as he matures and transforms in the white heat of his epic battle.



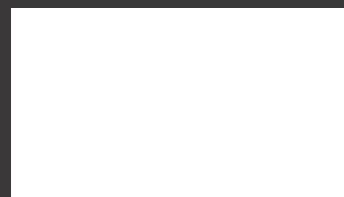
MICHAEL LYNES is a serial entrepreneur who has founded several startup ventures. He enjoys dry red wine and the occasional single malt scotch. When not occupied with arcane engineering projects, he spends his time playing with his two grandchildren, baking bread, feeding seasoned hardwood into his ancient Timberline woodstove, working on his various cars, bird watching, and taking amateur photographs. His current menagerie includes one short-haired turtle shell cat and a pair of actual turtles.

Mr. Lynes was awarded a BSEE degree in Electrical Engineering from Stevens Institute of Technology and currently works as an embedded software engineer. He has a consuming interest in the science of emotion as promulgated by Dr. Paul Ekman and has made a comprehensive study of his Face and Emotion courses.

He has four sons, has been married for over thirty years, and currently lives with his wife and youngest son in the beautiful secluded hills of Sussex County, New Jersey.



FULL COURT PRESS
ISBN 978-1-938812-42-2
\$21.95



THERE IS A REAPER

Something woke her—powerful, sub-vocal. A call, a command:

Now.

Across the dimly lit room, she saw his head drooped awkwardly against the pebbled plastic rail, and she rose and, gently, for movement meant pain, lifted him and laid him softly back. She stood beside him, silent, waiting.

Be present. Bear witness.

His eyes, bottomless black pools, veiled that long night by sleep, veiled too long by pain, opened. He sat up, and his hand rose, outstretched, reaching.

Instinctively, she grasped his hand and held it wordlessly.

Slowly he lay back down, black pools open and alert, a look on his face almost of elation, of bliss.

Breath now drawn in, deep-filling his chest, and out—his hand loosed, his body eased, his face relaxed.

Breath, softer now, in. . . just a memory, a reflex, and out, a last leave-taking to a well-loved, well-used and familiar friend, my old home.

Still then: soft-breath in, so soft, almost silent, almost sacred.

It is finished.

Soft. . .out. . .out, free, free-released, free.

His mother waited, watching it end.

Outstretched, his hand fell, finally, to rest.

She bore unflinching witness.

THERE IS A REAPER

FOREPOEM

*There is a Reaper whose name is Death,
And with his sickle keen
He reaps the bearded grain at a breath,
And the flowers that grow between.*

*“Shall I have naught that is fair?” saith he.
“Have naught but the bearded grain?
Though the breath of these flowers is sweet to me,
I will give them all back again.”*

*He gazed at the flowers with tearful eyes,
He kissed their drooping leaves;
It was for the Lord of Paradise
He bound them in his sheaves.*

*“My Lord has need of these flowerets gay,”
The Reaper said, and smiled;
“Dear tokens of the earth are they,
Where he was once a child.*

*“They shall all bloom in fields of light,
Transplanted by my care,
And saints, upon their garments white,
These sacred blossoms wear.”*

*And the mother gave, in tears and pain,
The flowers she most did love;*

Michael Lynes

*She knew she should find them all again
In the fields of light above.*

*O, not in cruelty, not in wrath,
The Reaper came that day;
'T was an angel visited the green earth,
And took the flowers away.*

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I

WHOSE NAME IS DEATH.

I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I SAW HIM. Before he even had a name, he lay on one side, naked, bloody and exhausted on his mother's chest. Big feet searching for familiar contoured softness, warm kind darkness replaced by cool alien light, half muffled sounds.

He was our second son; his brother Ian, three years his senior, was at Grandma's. Mom and Dad had rushed off to the hospital—the happy event of the birth of our second child had finally come.

I remember that first time, him lying there with the skin of his chest half pressed to Margaret, amniotic fluid still plastering his dark, curly newborn hair to his gently pulsing scalp. He opened his eyes—black, black pools, seemingly without pupil or iris, and looked at me, at us.

It was the same look those eyes would hold throughout his life: intense scrutiny, frank appraisal, direct, unflinching, powerful, and fearless. Flash: infinite night, and gone.

I am sure I noted it, brief though it was, and later, when he had been warmed and cleaned and wrapped, mummy-like, in soft cotton and all of us resting from our labors (real and vicarious). We paused and hugged each other and started to consider, in our way, what name should this child be given.

Some background.

Michael Lynes

Margaret and I have our ways, and they may be strange to you, but we like them. We decided long ago (not really, but it seemed so then in our youth, long) that, for each of our children we would do certain things.

First, never, in that day of the instant sonogram image, did we want to know the sex of our children prior to their birth.

We like surprises.

Second, we keep our own counsel, are very private, and believe that the best secret is one not shared. When we became pregnant for the second time, our first-born was about two years old. We told no one, other than Dr. C (Margaret's OB-GYN) and Virginia (Margaret's mother and, not coincidentally, a registered nurse with fifteen years of experience in Labor and Delivery working with the aforementioned Dr. 'C'). So, with no one else the wiser, we three (née four) plugged along till about halfway through the second trimester, when the obvious gave us away.

We also like being surprising.

Third, we would not engage in the common practice of choosing names prior to meeting our offspring. We thought it presumptuous to prejudice ourselves one way or another. A relative, friend, saint, or sinner—names are important things, we knew, and to choose a name sight unseen was not our way. We like to meet our children, see them as they are, and then choose for them the name they will bear throughout their lives.

It works that way for us.

So there we sat together in one bed, so we could, head over shoulder, both gaze at the book of names we had brought with us to the hospital. Our nameless Baby Lynes was not present (he was sleeping soundly after his great exertions), but we had seen and held and observed and we were ready to "call 'em as we saw 'em."

We read and spoke and pronounced and considered. There were many names. In between, we discussed what we had each perceived about this new life.

The eyes, the look, were mentioned, and we focused on those dark portals. I forget who said it first (which means to say it was Margaret)

THERE IS A REAPER

about his eyes.

“He has a look about him, so intense,” she said.

“Umm,” I said, employing my rapier wit.

“He looks right through you, like a challenge.”

“Like his mother,” I said, tired as she was from her own struggle, she inflicted only superficial burns and minor flesh wounds on me for that. When order was restored we reconsidered the book, the eyes, the soul so embodied still needed a name.

“Christopher,” she said. “He who bears Christ. That’s his name.”

There was no Christopher in the family (my sister Chris was a ‘tine’ not a ‘pher’,) and it really fit. I repeated it after her, out loud, to get the feel of it,

“Christopher. I like it. It sounds solid and strong. But it needs a middle name to match.”

(We also like middle names, and meanings—told you we have our ways.)

Back to the book; more names, more pronouncements, and we asked ourselves, asked him in absentia, “Christopher, what middle name do you need?”

What name could be strong enough for those dark pools, that intense energy, that challenge, that strength of body and character force?

Abruptly it jumped out from the page: *Aaron*.

Mountain. Brother of Moses. Strong, solid, profound. Christopher Aaron Lynes. It seemed to lock, a steady beat of a name, a march of a name. It fit, him, the eyes, the look.

Christopher Aaron he would be—and, in our youth and folly, little did we realize how well we had chosen.

2

AND WITH HIS SICKLE KEEN

THE NEXT FEW YEARS WERE HAPPY ONES, mundane and important (to you and to us respectively) in the way that all our lives are. We brought Christopher home with us the next day to our little house in Sussex County, to meet his big brother and all the family.

Happy times.

He was baptized later in our little church, and most of our large family came to the party.

The first of the many events that were to become a theme in the life of Christopher Aaron happened then.

He was a November child, born as the year died, and it was cold that November of 1986 in our little corner of the New Jersey Skylands. So we waited to baptize him till it was warmer, till he was bigger, till the spring, till the summer.

So summer came, 1987, and we planned the day. We invited relatives from far and wide to celebrate with us, and the summer day dawned fine and hot. Margaret's family came up from Jersey City, Lolo and Lola, and Old Lolo and Old Lola, and Nanny (more about Nanny later) and Margaret's sister and (first) husband and her brother and relations (uncles and aunts and children), all the way from Virginia. My family traveled in from

THERE IS A REAPER

Morris County (south and east), Grandma and Grandpa and Great Grandma and my sisters three, husbands two, brother one (and children none), and aunts and uncles, cousins and many of our single friends.

It was a big party.

We decided to have a cookout; it was summer, and cookout weather, and Lolo, a former and excellent chef, was to man the grill and bring his barbecue sticks (famous in several states). There was food aplenty and room (outside) for all.

Of course they forecast rain.

But we carried on—“*What’s a little rain?*”—and all proceeded to the church to have our baptismal mass and sing for Christopher Aaron.

My sister Chris, and Margaret’s brother Amado, would be his godparents. Monsignor Gacquin, our pastor, would preside at Mass. We had a beautiful ceremony, and we lit the baptismal candle, and the rite was performed, and all were happy and blessed.

We returned to the house caravan style—there were no cell phones or Internet or Google to help (it was the pre-technological age)—and the party began.

Foil was opened, food heated, the charcoal grill lit, and the wine and beer began to flow. The sticks hit the hot steel, and the smells were enough to bring neighbor children down the long driveway—that was the kind of cook Lolo was.

As he cooked, uncles set tables and aunties talked, and children played, and all sat down to eat. The sky darkened, and the wind began to blow, and the leaves turned, and the light became strange and other-worldly, and it *rained* and it *poured*! Lightning began to flash, and thunder to roll, from the west.

We gathered in quickly and dragged the barbecue (too hot) to our porch (too small), and ran in the house (way too small), leaving the cook to cook in the rain and all to overburden stove and table, couch and chairs. And the party continued—“*What’s a little rain? It will soon blow past—a summer squall, and all will be fine outside again.*”

Michael Lynes

And then it really began to rain, to howl, to blow, *to rumbbbllle, thunder, to flash with lightning!*

We were hushed, awed, by the power of the storm. Children clung seeking solace, and solace was given and received. Still the storm mounted, the grill now abandoned, cook soaked, coals steaming.

Trees lashed in the gale, and the lighting and thunder built till they seemed ready to split the roof! One great flash, and the lights failed, and still the gale grew, twisted branches flailing against the little house, which trembled on its sturdy foundations. The darkness belied the time (just past 3:00 p.m.), and the noise and dazzle, flash and sound, were unbelievable. The very door jamb started to leak water from the top and sides. Prayers were mumbled and signs of the cross made.

The storm reached its height, and a final ear-splitting discharge of raw energy blasted from the sky! All felt the galvanic tingle, smelled the heavy ozone. The following slap of thunder deafened the company, and came over. . .over. . .over, rumbling off down the hill, water dripping from every seam, branches strewn whole with leaves on drive and cars. We at last released the breath we had unknowingly been holding, and the lights came on, and clouds lifted—and later the sun peeked out and the drive steamed.

So Christopher Aaron was baptized, and Heaven and Earth were washed clean, and we noted it but did not as yet understand.

3

HE REAPS THE BEARDED GRAIN AT A BREATH

CHRISTOPHER LIVED HIS LIFE at the speed of that wind, with the brilliance of that lightning and at the volume of that thunder. He stormed, he flashed, and we, mere mortals, attempted to govern his furious force and channel his boundless energy. Lesser souls were awed by the might of his character, beetled brow projecting the potency of his will and the piercing brilliance of his eyes. As far as Christopher was concerned, everyone else in the world was doing it wrong! His way was the correct way to do everything. He was going to lead and the rest of us . . . we just had to follow or get out of the way.

Looking back now, the years seem compressed; it's often that way with memory. But each day with its joys and sorrows was lived, and they seemed long at the time. About a year after Chris was baptized, the spring of 1988, our third son, Devon, was born. We now had ourselves fully occupied; Margaret was juggling three kids, two of them in diapers. I was working long hours at my job, which was at the time located a good hour or so away from home. So there were a lot of goings on and mayhem that I was not a direct witness to. But I did hear the stories.

Chris was often at the center of the best ones—though all of the boys,

Michael Lynes

and our crew were real boys, happiest when they were up to something—caused their share of the mischief.

We lived then (and still do) in the northwest corner of New Jersey, Sussex County, also known as the Skylands.

The Skylands region is a far cry from most people's idea of New Jersey, which is shaped by, and confined to, the view available from the I-95 corridor, rank with rusting tank farms, bustling dirty cities, and foul smelling, reed-tattered swamps.

In contrast, where we live is paradise. I mean, really. It is a beautiful part of the state, with ancient rolling hills dotted with sudden small, deep lakes and tumbled glacial moraine. Much of the area is part of the great Appalachian Mountain chain, stretching from the tip of Maine to the red hills of Georgia. They are among the oldest mountains on the planet, and they prove their age, blunted slumbering stumps and obdurate mountain roots with memories of greater vistas and loftier heights.

Towns in this part of the state are small and sometimes quaint, a mix of the very old and the very new. The county has one of the fastest-growing populations in New Jersey, mostly due to its affordability for young couples and its undeniable beauty. It is full of working dairy farms, truck farms, fruit orchards, and horse farms.

From our front windows we often see wild turkey, deer aplenty, shambling black bear, ghostly fox, and great red-headed pileated woodpeckers. The yips and howls of coyote packs echo off of our moonlit hills, and vultures circle endlessly in the dead summer air. Eagles and red-tail hawks rule the day, ghostly barred owls the night.

It is (as my 105-year-old grandmother says) God's country, and Margaret, who grew up in the city, and I, a suburban guy, both fell in love with the area back in early 1985 when we were searching for a home for the three of us—our first son Ian was then about a year and a half old—scraped together, with the assistance of our folks, the necessary, and moved our bits and things in June of that year.

Yes, winters are colder, snow deeper, life a bit more challenging. We

THERE IS A REAPER

did not have cable TV or the Internet then (no great loss), and we still depend on a Rural Electric Co-Operative to get our electricity. There is no natural gas, and when the oil truck can't make it past the ice on the drive, you burn wood or you have a problem.

To balance these, there is the beauty.

We have real seasons up here, stone-cracking frosty nights, deep white snow, sudden mud-spattered spring with nesting birds in abundance, a riot of wild flowers all through the summer, cool under the green canopy no matter how hot the day, flaming autumn foliage, deep drifts of leaves, and silent Yule under the cold bright stars.

Our property is large, a remnant of one of the first parcels of land in our block. It is an odd shape, an elongated trapezoid, large end towards the rear and tapered tip (twice narrowed by previous owners and transactions) towards the road and the valuable frontage thereon. It is, as they say in that part of the world, a "fair size," some tens of acres, mostly forested with second-growth hardwoods—maples, wild cherry, beech, birch (black and white and gray) and gigantic (eighty-foot) oaks (white, red, pin, and black)—all but hiding the ancient signs (rock walls and pastures) of earlier cultivation and husbandry.

Below the trees are many types of wild berry bushes, huckleberry and goose berry, blueberry (sweet, if you can beat the birds to them), and blackberry. Unruly wild rose thickets abound along the margins of the woods, and their brief, fragrant flowering in spring almost makes up for their unsightly ugliness and scratchy thorns the rest of the year. Grape vines (as thick as a man's wrist) trail along the ground and weave sinuously through the tree branches. It is an uncultivated, untamed, deciduous jungle that, in summer high, forms an impenetrable wall of green leaves and interwoven branches.

Our home is located near the geometric center of this land—far, far back from the road (not seen and but faintly heard) and out of sight (save through the bare, tangled boughs of winter) of all other houses around us. It was our sanctuary, our respite from the world, our own little kingdom,

Michael Lynes

guarded well, and both loved and cared for.

Children, growing up in this secluded and extraordinary part of semi-rural America, can find thousands of things to amuse themselves, hopefully scaring the bejesus out of their mothers as they do them.

Our three boys were no exception and, as soon as they were able, headed out on daily expeditions into our out-sized wooded property. Once out of sight of home base, enveloped in the trackless wilderness of their imaginations, they would spend their carefree hours at outdoor play.

4

...AND THE FLOWERS THAT GROW BETWEEN

IAN WAS THE LEADER, being the oldest, nearly three years older than the other boys. He had a talent for organization and planning (an aptitude he retains to this day), and for making sure that goals were set and achieved, and that time was not wasted in fruitless or uninteresting pursuits.

The youngest, Devon, was often willingly employed in the role of innocent fall guy or sacrificial lamb. He had the duty (richly rewarded) of providing an engaging and successful distraction for his mother while the stealthy, two-man black-ops team executed its ninja raid on the unguarded cookie cupboard.

He was also the un-trusty courier, sent back with dispatches from the front (committed to memory to prevent them falling into enemy hands) requesting additional supplies for the troops encamped on the western slopes of the shared bedroom. His assignment always included the possibility of capture by hostile forces, subsequent temptation, and torture, resulting in the discovery of the allies' most secret strategies.

Occasionally, he would fail to remember his mission (succumbing to the wiles of the enemy) and end up munching a tasty forbidden snack till

Michael Lynes

the ever-more-desperate, stage-whispered cries emitting from the camp of his beleaguered comrades recalled him to his duty with a guilty start.

Christopher, sergeant at arms of the tiny platoon, was the fulcrum of force, at once powering and balancing the trio of marauders. A year or so older than Devon, he was ever ready to commit his boundless energy and resources to the accomplishment of daring feats.

He had the personal power of an unbridled, fissionable mass, the energy of refined purpose, the magnetic force of personality of which archangels or demons are made.

5

“SHALL I HAVE NAUGHT THAT IS FAIR?” SAITH HE...

BREAK HERE: STRONG LINES NEED COLOR, shading, so learn a bit more about us. Margaret and I first met at college; both of us attended the same engineering school in Hoboken, New Jersey. We were introduced by mutual friends. I do not recall that we liked each other immediately. We were then (and to this day), wary with friendships, reserving judgment.

We are the same age (she, a week older, looks years younger and acts far more maturely, thank God), children of the early sixties, the tail end of the boomer generation. Both of us were born in spring—she in March, and I in April. We were eighteen when we met, the fall of our freshman year.

Margaret is beautiful, with a light tan complexion and Asian/Polynesian features. She is petite, just less than five feet tall, with long dark hair, large dark eyes, a brilliant mind, and a precise memory. She is the oldest of three, with one sister and a younger brother.

I am an inch shy of six feet, with an unremarkable half-Irish face (at best), thinning dark hair now mixed with gray, and green-brown eyes. Most days I feel fortunate to get by on dry humor and drier technical ability. I

Michael Lynes

am the oldest of five children, with three sisters and a brother.

We fell in love that winter and were engaged to be married (no unaffordable ring, not yet) at nineteen, though we told no one till the beginning of our senior year. By that time, we had, in our way, made our plans and were quite pleased with ourselves about them.

Our folks were less pleased. But once our obvious love and determination became apparent, they relented and joined us in wedding plans, details and deadlines.

We were married at twenty-two (in June 1983) at the Benedictine Abbey, St. Mary's of Delbarton, and Ian was born within a year of the date.

Fast movers, we were voyaging far, far from safe routes and well-traveled shores. Most of our friends and peers were single, unattached, care-free, and living in apartments. We were married, owned two cars (safe though far from new, with car seats aboard), had a toddler in diapers, and were living in our secluded retreat. Moss-less we rolled, living life at full speed, meeting and enjoying every challenge.

So you have more of the picture, more color to the setting and some additional background—it is enough.

The picture you have now is wrong in most details, but correct enough in conveying the feeling of these boys, this circumstance, of us and our happy, humdrum lives.

6

HAVE NAUGHT BUT THE BEARDED GRAIN?

MEMORIES LIE. Not in a bad way, but they do. We live our separate lives, recording our own stories from our own viewpoint. The overlapping of all of these phantoms collectively creates “reality,” but the eternal bright sword of the present moment is all that we ever have.

My memories, real and complete though they seem to me, are flawed lies, blurred by my own perspective, softened by time and contaminated by what makes them what I want them to be.

Here’s a good one.

Back when they were small, all three of our boys shared one large room. The house, undersized for our growing brood yet all we could afford, called for shared accommodations.

Ian, the senior resident, aged five, had his own full-size single bed, which I had made by hand, low and sturdy and strong—captain’s quarters. Devon, though grown-up enough not to, slept in an ancient wooden bassinet, a large wicker basket with wheeled folding legs, for reasons both of safety and the absence of alternate lodging.

The bassinet, a family heirloom, had been purchased and used by Mar-

garet's mother Virginia for all three of her own children. It was cunningly built and indestructible; we have it still.

Christopher slept in the crib (he was approaching two and a half), and was very active, with long straight dark hair framing his flashing eyes. The crib was about twice the size (mattress-wise), of the bassinet, though not quite as large as Ian's bed, and was again of vintage Jersey City stock (Virginia bought to last). Its squeaky wooden sides could be lowered or raised; barred white gates corralling the occupant, chin high to the upright, tippy-toed-toddler, and it was escape-proof (so we thought).

Bedtime, for our sanity, was early. We tried to keep them to a schedule, and as none were actually in school—Ian would start kindergarten that fall—there was not much in the way of homework or after-dinner activities. So on a bright early summer evening, exhausted parents would call for bedtime at 7:00 p.m. The light would last for another two hours, but we had had it and they and we needed the rest.

Then came the lament, and we would move them along—bottle for one, diaper for two, three faces washed and teeth brushed. Jammies might be worn or not, depending on the temperature, and in any case Chris never wanted anything on his legs; a T-shirt and diaper were all he needed to feel completely comfortable in any situation.

Devon went down easily: a small bottle, a snuggle, and a kiss, and he would settle.

Ian was the old man, and he resented having a bedtime the same as the "babies," but I would buy his cooperation with the promise of a story, his choice, and he would run to get the current favorite.

Chris would (was born to) resist. He wanted nothing to do with bedtime. But we would wrestle him in at last, persuading through stern routine and backed by mass as necessary (he was a solid package and fast on his feet).

Usually, though, he wanted to hear the story as well, and between Margaret and me we would get them all in. On a warm evening this might occupy us for the better part of twenty minutes, but at last the book would

be opened.

Just thinking of it now makes me smile. I would sit in the center of the room. I had my folding canvas director's chair, and I would bring it in and take the book and command silence and begin.

Whatever story we read would weave its spell, and they would listen and I start to yawn, putting myself to sleep even as they began to drop off. After a half hour or so they would all be asleep, and I would dim the light and leave the room. . . still evening, still light, peaceful and quiet, the end of the day.

Or so it might seem.

Downstairs Margaret and I would sit, watch TV, or read, or just look out at the summer evening as the day came to a close, and above peace would reign—for about five minutes.

Slowly at first (then quicker as necessary), Christopher would rouse himself from his feigned sleep. He would stand up in his elevated wooden divan and survey the situation. The story was over, and Dad was gone, and being good was for other, lesser beings. There was still fun to be had! And the night was young.

Through practice and innate cunning, he had perfected an ability to move quietly. It was not in his nature, but he could be very patient when it served his purpose. And toys, far more interesting than his soft mattress or pillow, were strewn all about the room, ready for playing, and no one to have to 'share' with.

He was strong and agile, and though the sides of his crib were at least as high as his jutting chin, he had found through diligent effort that he could lever his body up, one hand on the bars, the other on the headboard, and slip one bare foot and half leg over the rail. Transferring his weight to the outside leg, he would slide onto the top of the rail and find purchase for the leading foot. Simplicity itself now to bring the rest of his body over and step softly down the last sixteen-inch stretch to the throw rug below . . .and *out!*

Freedom—and he was going to make the most of it! Often he would

Michael Lynes

get all of the boys up, and they would join him. Who could resist that energy, those eyes daring you to fly, to take the chance, to come with him on the adventure.

And when he was caught, oh the scene!

Some minute sound, a toy dropped or a careless footfall, the creak of the door (not well oiled) or squeak in the floor, would alert us.

“*Christopher!*” we would yell from below, or whisper “*Chris!*” through clenched teeth if the others had not yet awakened. “What are you doing out of *bed?*”

Pandemonium! And he would scat like an electrified cat, caution and stealth thrown to the wind as we charged up the stairs.

Often we would actually have to *look* for him!

He was good at hiding as well as running.

By this time they would all be awake—Devon, with big sleep-filled eyes looking on from a seated pose, and Ian, trying to be the good cop, joining us in remonstrance or guiltily jumping back into bed if he had played a part.

No amount of condemnation, explanation, loss of privilege, or summary deprivation could halt these excursions.

Looking back at it now from the depths of hard-won experience, it was obviously both a dare and an amusement to him. He *had* to do it, had to push us, challenge our authority.

In Christopher’s eyes, we were not his parents. We were merely bigger and older, certainly slower and more gullible. We were obstacles to be overcome, beneficent ogres to be tolerated and obeyed only when no other option was available.

The old TV show *Hogan’s Heroes* comes to mind: Margaret as Kommandant Klink (and I the unfortunate Schultz, though she may argue about who was which), and they as the plucky, resourceful POWs, ever scheming to escape.