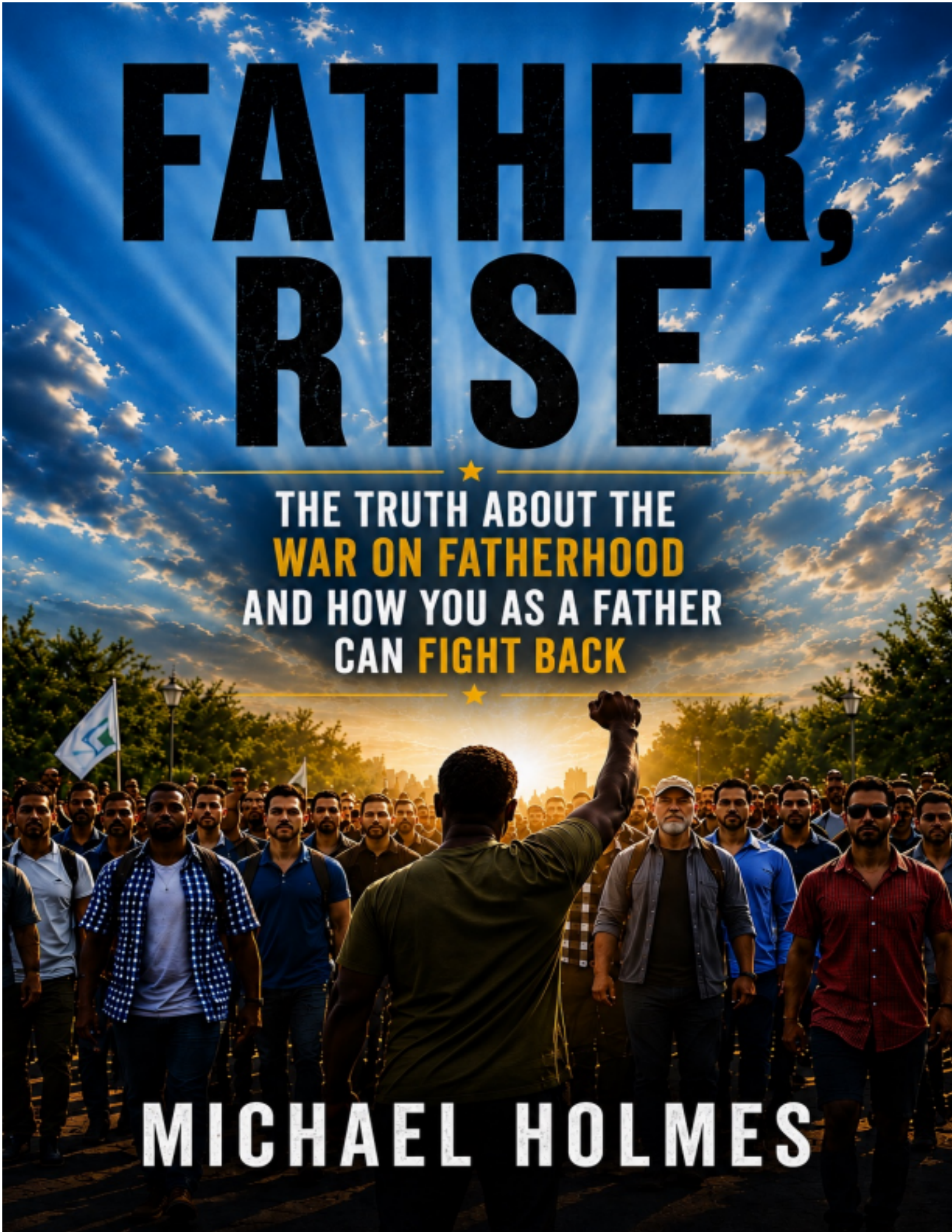


FATHER, RISE

★
THE TRUTH ABOUT THE
WAR ON FATHERHOOD
AND HOW YOU AS A FATHER
CAN **FIGHT BACK**
★



MICHAEL HOLMES

FATHER, RISE

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE WAR ON
FATHERHOOD
AND HOW YOU AS A FATHER CAN FIGHT
BACK

A Free Preview — Chapters One & Two

Michael Holmes

Father Rise: The Complete Edition

The Truth About the War on Fatherhood and the Men Fighting Back

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The story contained in Part One of this volume is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

The statistics and systemic information referenced throughout this volume are drawn from real research and represent documented realities of the family court system.

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Dedication

To my son Ethan.

You are the reason I refused to stay down.

*You are the reason I kept fighting when the system said
stop.*

You are the reason this book exists.

*Everything I do — I do so that you never have to fight the
battle I fought.*

And if you do — you will not fight it alone.

For every father who showed up.

For every child who needed them to.

For every Marco.

Foreword

Why This Book Has Two Voices

Most books about family court are written in one of two voices.

The first is clinical. Statistics. Case studies. Policy analysis. Compelling to the mind. Cold to the chest.

The second is emotional. A father's raw, personal account of what the system did to him. Powerful. But easy for critics to dismiss as one man's story.

I wanted both. Because I've lived both — and I know that the fathers who need this book most need to feel it before they can fight it.

So this book has two parts, written in two voices, telling one truth.

Part One is a story.

Meet Jordan Cross — a fictional father whose journey through the family court system mirrors what millions of real men have experienced. His children. His marriage

unraveling. The sheriffs at the door. The courtroom that was supposed to be neutral. The slow, grinding discovery that The System was never built with him in mind.

Jordan is not me. But his story is mine. And if you've been through it — it's yours too.

Part Two is the war report.

After you've felt what Jordan felt, Part Two gives you the data, the history, and the roadmap. The statistics behind every courtroom scene Jordan experienced. The policy choices that produced them, the men already fighting to change them. And what you can do — specifically, right now — to join that fight.

Read Part One first. Let it land. Then read Part Two with the fire Jordan lit still burning.

You're not optional. You never were. Now let's prove it.

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Chapter One

Saturday Morning

The pancakes were Jordan's thing.

Not because Simone couldn't cook — she could — but because Saturday mornings belonged to him and the kids the way Sunday belonged to church and Friday belonged to pizza. It was an arrangement nobody discussed or negotiated. It simply became true, the way the best family traditions do: quietly, without announcement, until one day you realize *this is just who we are*.

Elijah ate his with syrup pooled in every square like he was filling in a map. Seven years old and already particular about things. Already had opinions. Already pushed back when something didn't seem fair — a quality that drove his teachers crazy and made Jordan quietly proud in the way fathers are proud of things they're not supposed to say out loud.

Zoe was five and ate her pancakes the way she did everything: with complete commitment and zero strategy.

Syrup on her chin. Syrup on her sleeve. Somehow, syrup in her hair.

Jordan stood at the stove watching them and felt something he didn't have a name for. Not happiness exactly. Deeper than that. The feeling a man gets when he looks at something he built and realizes it's the best thing he will ever do — the thing that will outlast everything else, the thing that, when the noise of the world finally goes quiet, will have been worth it.

"Dad." Elijah didn't look up from his plate.

"Yeah."

"If a shark and a lion fought — who would win?"

Jordan flipped the last pancake. "Depends on where they're fighting."

Elijah looked up, considering this with the gravity of a supreme court justice. "In the ocean."

"Shark."

"What about on land?"

"Lion."

"What about in a swimming pool?"

Jordan set the plate down in front of his son. "Elijah. Why is there a lion in a swimming pool?"

Zoe giggled without looking up from her systematic destruction of breakfast. Elijah thought about it. "Maybe he fell in."

"Then the shark wins. The lion is scared and confused."

Elijah nodded slowly, filed it away, moved on. This was how his mind worked — collecting information the way other kids collected baseball cards. Jordan recognized it because he was the same way at seven. His own father just hadn't been around to notice.

That thought arrived the way it always did: quietly, without invitation, trailing something cold behind it.

* * *

Jordan's father left when he was nine.

Devon, Jordan's younger brother, was six at the time.

That was the story Jordan carried his whole life — the story Patricia, his mother, told without telling, in the sighs,

in the silences, in the way she'd change the subject whenever his father's name came up. The story Jordan filled in himself over the years with the only material available to a boy who decided, at nine years old, that his father chose to leave.

Devon filled in a different story.

Devon was three years younger and somehow got more of their father — more time before everything fell apart, or more time after, which was the part Jordan couldn't quite reconcile.

Devon spent summers in Georgia. He called his father. He knew him in a way that Jordan — close to Patricia, shaped by Patricia's silence, armored by Patricia's pain — refused to allow himself.

"Dad is not who you think he is," Devon would say.

"He's good. He loves you. You should call him."

Jordan didn't want to hear it. He was Patricia's son in that way — the way the oldest child absorbs the injury of a broken marriage more completely, more permanently, because he was old enough to understand what was lost.

The disagreement about their father was the one fault line in a relationship that was otherwise solid. They argued about it, went quiet about it for months at a time. Devon eventually moved closer to their father — not to the same city in Georgia but close enough to see him regularly — while Jordan stayed near Patricia and told himself the geography meant nothing.

It meant something. They both knew it.

But they were brothers. The love held across the fault line the way love sometimes does — not by resolving the disagreement, but by deciding it wasn't worth the cost of the alternative.

Devon was single, no kids, thirty-two years old, and still the one who called on birthdays without being reminded and showed up when it mattered.

Their father died three years ago. Heart attack. A phone call from a woman Jordan didn't know — a wife, remarried years earlier, a whole life Jordan hadn't been part of.

Devon also called him, crying in a way that surprised Jordan: not because Devon was emotional, but because

the grief was clearly about more than just the man who died. It was about everything the relationship was, and everything Jordan's relationship with their father never became.

The funeral was in Georgia. Devon was there. Jordan went too — he stood at the graveside surrounded by strangers who wept for a man he never got close enough to know — and he drove home telling himself it didn't matter.

He was still telling himself that.

What he didn't know yet — what he couldn't have known, standing at his stove on a Saturday morning watching syrup pool in the squares of his son's pancakes — was that the conversation was still coming.

Just not the one he imagined.

Not an explanation from a man who chose to leave.

But a conversation about a man who was pushed out — quietly, systematically, by the same System that was already warming up its gears for Jordan Cross.

His father wasn't a ghost.

He was a casualty.

And nobody told him there was a war.

* * *

Simone came downstairs at 9:25am in the yoga clothes she started wearing everywhere.

Jordan noticed the change months ago without fully understanding what it meant. She started building a version of herself that existed separately from the house, from the kids, from him — pieces of a life assembled quietly, the way you pack a bag before you've admitted to yourself you're leaving.

He didn't want to see it.

"Morning." She moved to the coffee maker without looking at the table.

"Morning." Jordan slid a plate toward her spot. "Made extra."

She glanced at it. Something moved across her face — not quite guilt, not quite gratitude. Something in between

that didn't have a clean name.

"I have yoga at 10am."

"It's 9:25."

"I know what time it is, Jordan."

Elijah looked up. Children always know. They don't have the vocabulary for what they're sensing, but they feel the temperature of a room change the way animals feel weather coming. He glanced at his father for a half second — then looked back down at his plate.

Jordan let it go. He'd been letting things go for eight months.

He was still letting go when Simone picked up her coffee, left the plate untouched, and went back upstairs.

Jordan sat down between his kids. Elijah was back to his pancakes. Zoe was explaining something to her fork in a language that was mostly her own.

He looked at them — really looked — and made the promise again.

"I'm not going anywhere."

"I will always be right here."

* * *

He'd think about that promise later.

In the months that followed — in the courtrooms, the motel room, the waiting rooms — he would think about it constantly. Not with bitterness. With a grief that had no bottom.

Because he meant it with everything he had.

But...it wasn't enough to save him.

Chapter Two

The Tilt

The first sign was the phone.

Not what was on it — Jordan wasn't that kind of husband. He never went through Simone's messages, never checked her location, never planted seeds of suspicion in soil that didn't need them. He believed in the marriage the way he believed in showing up for his kids: completely, without auditing it for return on investment.

It was the way she held it now.

Face down on the counter when he walked into a room. Angled away from him on the couch in the evenings. Carried into the bathroom during conversations that used to happen in the kitchen. Small adjustments. Individually — meaningless. Collectively — they told a story. Something was load-bearing that used to be open air. Jordan told himself he was imagining it.

He was good at telling himself things.

* * *

He doubled down the way men do when they sense something slipping.

He came home earlier. Started cooking dinner on weeknights — not just Saturdays. Suggested the weekend trip to the mountains they spoke about for three years and never taken.

Bought Simone the book she mentioned once in passing four months ago, the title of which he wrote on a note in his phone the moment she said it, because that was the kind of husband he was.

She thanked him for the book with a smile that didn't reach her eyes.

They went to the mountains. Elijah and Zoe ran through trails and collected rocks and asked questions about trees that nobody could answer. Jordan watched Simone watch the kids with an expression he couldn't decode — something that looked almost like sadness, which made no sense given everything they were surrounded by.

On the last night he reached for her hand across the dinner table.

She let him hold it.

But she was already somewhere else. He could feel it the way you feel a room getting colder before you can see your breath.

* * *

The business card was in the pocket of her jacket.

He wasn't looking for it. He was moving laundry from the chair to the hamper — the invisible maintenance work of a household that runs on ten thousand unacknowledged small acts — and it fell out onto the floor.

He picked it up.

He almost put it in the trash without looking.

He looked.

*Victoria Lane — Family Law Attorney
Lane & Associates*

The card was clean. Cream-colored. The kind that cost real money to print because the person handing it out needed you to feel their credibility before they said a word.

Jordan stood holding it for a long moment. *Family law.*

He turned it over. Nothing on the back. Just the front — name, title, phone number, small gold scales of justice embossed in the corner like a promise.

He set the card on the counter. He walked to the window. He stood there looking at the backyard where Elijah's bicycle leaned against the fence and Zoe's sidewalk chalk drawings were slowly fading in the weather.

He stood there for a long time. Then he picked the card up and put it back in Simone's jacket pocket exactly where he found it.

He never mentioned it.

Neither did she.

* * *

Three weeks later he came home to a different house.

Not physically — everything was where it always was: Elijah's backpack by the door, Zoe's drawings on the refrigerator, the smell of the candle Simone burned in the evenings. The architecture of a life still intact around him.

But Simone was sitting at the kitchen table with her hands folded in front of her like she was about to conduct a meeting. Her expression was resolved in a way that had clearly cost her something to arrive at, but arrived at nonetheless.

Jordan set his keys down slowly. The kids were at her mother's.

He always knew, somewhere underneath the politeness of family dinners and holiday gatherings, that Renee — Simone's mother — never fully believed in him. Not because he'd done anything wrong. Because Renee had a wound that predated Jordan by twenty years — a marriage of her own that ended badly, a man who hurt her, a story she never stopped telling herself about what men were. She looked at Jordan from the beginning with the particular wariness of a woman who'd been burned and was determined to make sure her daughter wasn't.

He dismissed it. Told himself it didn't matter. That Simone was her own person. He was right about that.

What he hadn't understood was how long a voice could live in a person. How a mother's wound, repeated often enough and wrapped in enough love, could eventually sound like wisdom. How it could eventually sound like your own thought. How it could eventually sound like the truth about your own life coming from inside you — when it was actually someone else's pain that had moved in and rearranged the furniture.

"Jordan, can we talk?" Her voice was careful.

Rehearsed.

He sat down.

What followed was twenty minutes that Jordan would spend the rest of his life trying to process. Not because of what she said — the words themselves were almost clinical, delivered with the composed effect of someone who practiced them many times — but because of what she *didn't* say.

She didn't say he failed her. Didn't say he hurt her. Didn't produce a list of grievances or a catalogue of wounds. Didn't give him the thing a man can push back against, argue with, promise to fix.

She simply said she wasn't happy.

She deserved to be happy.

She said she needed to find out who she was outside of "this."

Jordan sat across from the woman he loved for eleven years and listened to her describe their life together as a room she needed to leave to breathe. He listened to her talk about herself with a tenderness she stopped directing at him somewhere along the way — without either of them marking the moment it changed.

He asked her if she wanted to try counseling. She said she already tried — alone — and it helped her get clear.

He asked if there was someone else. She looked at him with something that might have been pity.

"This isn't about someone else, Jordan. This is about me."

He nodded. He didn't know what else to do with his hands, so he folded them on the table the same way she folded hers — and thought, distantly, absurdly, that they must look like two people about to pray.

He asked her one more question. The only one that actually mattered.

"What about Elijah and Zoe?"

For the first time that evening, something moved behind her eyes that wasn't rehearsed. "I would never keep you from your kids Jordan."

He believed her. God help him — sitting at that table in that kitchen under those lights — he believed her.

* * *

The knock came six days later.

Jordan was making breakfast — Tuesday was eggs. Elijah was at the table with a library book. Zoe was still upstairs, engaged in the elaborate private ritual of getting dressed

that recently began taking 25 minutes and produced results that were creative at minimum.

The knock was official. The kind that wasn't asking permission.

Jordan wiped his hands on the dish towel and went to the door.

Two officers stood on his porch in the early morning light. One older — mid-forties, salt-and-pepper at the temples, the kind of face that saw things and decided to keep doing the job anyway. The other younger, maybe early thirties, still carried tension in his shoulders like he didn't learn yet how to let the weight sit.

The older one was holding a document: folded, formal, the kind of paper that arrives when the world decides something about your life.

"Jordan Cross?"

"Yes," Jordan said.

Officer Daniels — his name tag said so — held up the papers. "Sir, we have an order of protection. You're

required to vacate the premises immediately. You are to have no contact with Simone Cross or your minor children until further notice from the court."

The words arrived in the wrong order. Jordan's mind kept trying to rearrange them into something that made sense.

No contact with your minor children.

"My kids are inside. My son is at the breakfast table," Jordan said, stammering.

Officer Daniels didn't move. Something shifted in his face — a small hardening, as if bracing for impact. Officer Reyes looked at the porch floor like it was suddenly very interesting.

"Sir, you need to gather some essentials. You have 15 minutes."

Jordan looked back into his own kitchen where his seven-year-old son sat at the table with a library book — still unaware that the world was ending in the next fifteen minutes.

Officer Reyes shifted his weight. Still wouldn't meet Jordan's eyes.

"Fifteen minutes, sir." Officer Daniels's jaw was tight.

"Pack a bag. One bag. Then we escort you to your vehicle."

And that's when Simone appeared.

She came down the stairs in her yoga clothes. She knew they were coming. Of course she did — she made the call, signed the papers, set this Tuesday morning in motion from whatever quiet room she'd been in when she decided this was how it needed to go.

She looked at Jordan.

For just a moment — one unguarded, unrehearsed moment — something moved across her face that wasn't resolve. Something that looked almost like the woman he made pancakes with, made children with, made a life with.

Then Victoria Lane's preparation reasserted itself and she looked at Officer Daniels instead.

"Thank you for coming," she said. Steady. Professional.

Officer Reyes looked at her, looked at Jordan, then looked at the floor.

"Dad?"

Elijah was standing in the kitchen doorway, library book still in hand, his seven-year-old mind trying to build an explanation out of pieces that didn't fit together.

"Hey, buddy." Jordan's voice came out steadier than he felt. "It's okay."

"Why are there police here?"

"They just need to talk to Dad for a minute."

Elijah looked at the officers. Looked at his mother. He was seven years old, doing the math, and the math wasn't adding up.

"Are you in trouble?"

"No." Jordan crossed to him. Crouched down. Put both hands on his son's shoulders the way he always did when something needed to be said man to man. "I am not in trouble. Okay? Look at me."

Elijah looked at him.

"I love you. That doesn't change. Not ever. You understand me?"

Elijah's chin trembled.

"Sir." Officer Daniels again. Quiet. Not unkind. But clear.

And that was when Zoe appeared at the top of the stairs.

She got herself dressed — purple leggings, a yellow shirt with a cat on it, one sock on and one sock off because Zoe operated on her own timeline. She looked down at the scene below with the pure unfiltered perception of a five-year-old who doesn't yet know she's supposed to pretend she doesn't understand things.

She understood.

Not the details. Not the legal language. But she understood that her father was at the door with two policemen, that her mother was standing very still, and that something was very wrong.

"Daddy?"

Her voice — small, uncertain, nothing like her usual confident self-narrating-everything voice — broke

something open in the room.

"One minute. Please. She's five years old." Jordan looked at Officer Daniels. Daniels looked at Reyes. Reyes was already looking away, jaw working. Daniels gave the smallest nod.

Jordan went to the bottom of the stairs. Zoe came down three steps and launched herself at him the way she always did — full commitment, no strategy, total trust that he would catch her.

He caught her.

He held her the way a man holds something he doesn't know when he'll hold again. Face in her hair. Eyes closed. Memorizing.

"Is Daddy leaving?" she asked into his shoulder.

"Just for a little while, baby."

"Why?"

He didn't have an answer. Not one a five-year-old could hold.

Elijah crossed the room. He didn't launch himself — he was seven and seven-year-olds have dignity to maintain. He just stood next to his father and leaned against him with the quiet desperation of a boy who understood more than anyone knew.

Jordan put one arm around his son and held his daughter with the other, crouched there in his own living room surrounded by everything he built, and felt it being pulled away from him like something physical. Like a tide.

Zoe started crying first — the pure, uncomplicated tears of a child who knows something is wrong and has no language for it except grief.

Elijah held on longer, trying to be strong the way he saw his father be strong. His face doing the work of keeping itself together.

Then his father made a sound — small, involuntary, the sound a man makes when he is trying not to come apart in front of his children and almost fails — and Elijah stopped trying to be strong.

He buried his face in Jordan's shoulder and cried.

Jordan held them both.

Officer Reyes turned completely away from the scene. His hand went to his belt. His head dropped. His shoulders did something that had nothing to do with his posture.

Officer Daniels looked at Simone.

Simone was still standing at the bottom of the staircase. The resolution on her face developed a crack — the kind that appears in a structure when the weight it's carrying turns out to be more than it calculated.

"Okay. Okay, come on. Come to Mom." Zoe tightened her grip on Jordan.

Elijah didn't move.

"Kids. Come on." Simone's voice had lost its steadiness. She reached for Zoe.

"No." Zoe said it with her whole body — turning away, burrowing deeper into Jordan's shoulder. "No. I want Daddy."

"Zoe — "

"I want Daddy to stay." The words dissolved into crying.
"Make Daddy stay!"

Simone stood there with her arms out, her children choosing their father, and the morning she so carefully orchestrated coming apart at the seams in the living room.

She looked at Jordan.

He looked back. No anger in his face. No accusation. Just a grief so enormous and so quiet that it was somehow worse than if he shouted.

She looked away first.

"Sir." Officer Daniels again. His voice, lower now. "I'm sorry. We need to move."

Jordan peeled his daughter gently from his shoulder. Held her face in both hands. Wiped her tears with his thumbs.

"Zoe. Look at Daddy."

She looked at him with wet eyes and a trembling mouth.

"Daddy loves you more than everything. That doesn't change. Not today, not ever." She nodded. She didn't believe it'd be okay. But nodded.

He turned to Elijah. His son was rebuilding his composure brick by brick and not quite managing it. One tear made it down his cheek before he caught it.

* * *

Jordan spent his fifteen minutes carefully.

He grabbed clothes from hangers without looking at them. Jeans. A jacket. Socks balled up from the drawer the way he'd been putting them away since he was twelve. His hands worked without instruction while the rest of him stood somewhere else entirely.

In the bathroom he moved faster. Toothbrush. Deodorant. His razor. He knocked something off the counter — Simone's moisturizer — and stood looking at it on the floor for three full seconds before he understood that he should leave it.

He left it.

Back in the bedroom he stopped. The clothes and the toiletries fit the logic of emergency. The next part didn't fit any logic. It was just need.

He went to Elijah's room. The library book was still on the bed. On the nightstand was a small laminated card Elijah made at school the previous year — a project titled My Family. Jordan's face printed on it next to Elijah's careful handwriting: Dad.

He put it in his bag.

Zoe's room smelled like her. On her dresser was a drawing she made for him two weeks ago — a purple horse, his name spelled carefully: D-A-D-E. The extra E made it more hers than any correctly spelled word could.

He put it in his bag.

Back in the kitchen he took Elijah's camping drawing off the refrigerator — the one in eight shades of orange — and folded it carefully. Front pocket, where it wouldn't get bent.

He stood in the middle of his kitchen absorbing the house he was about to leave. Officer Daniels appeared in the doorway.

"Sir. We need to go."

Jordan looked at the eggs. At the kitchen. At the drawings on the refrigerator — the ones he hadn't taken. Evidence of a life that would keep going in this house without him.

He picked up the bag and walked to the door.

Stepped out onto the porch into the early morning light.

Jordan Cross walked to his car between two officers who knew they were doing something wrong and did it anyway because The System required it.

"I'm a good father," he said quietly. Not to the officers. Not really to anyone. Just into the air, into the record, into the morning.

Officer Daniels nodded slowly. "I know you are, sir."

And that was almost worse than if he disagreed.

Because a good man knowing he was good — and being powerless to prove it — was its own kind of death.

He didn't look back.

If he looked back he wouldn't be able to keep moving.

And he had to keep moving.

Jordan's story doesn't end here.

What happens next — the courtroom, the false allegations, the brotherhood of fathers who refused to stay quiet — is waiting for you in the full book.

Part Two gives you the data, the history, and the battle plan. The truth about why this is happening to millions of fathers. And exactly what you can do about it.

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— *Michael Holmes*