

# *I am Only Thirteen*

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“You should come take a seat beside me.” I hesitate. I can sense his motive. I look over at the table in the left corner. My cousins are laughing. I want to laugh with them. He repeats his request, asking as if he cannot see the look on my face. “You should come take a seat beside me.” I look down at my plate of food; it no longer seems appetizing. He has ruined my appetite. His wife looks up and smiles at me. Doesn't she see my hesitation? As a woman, does she not recognize this face? This face is the face that every woman makes when a man tries making unwanted advances. Is she oblivious to this situation? Why is she not coming to my rescue? I'm only thirteen, and I can identify a predator. She married a predator. The first lady of Rock Hall Baptist church married a predator. Now he is asking me to take a seat beside him. I took one last look at my plate of food then I watched my child-sized feet walk me over to the chair beside him.

This predator has a name, Pastor Beasley. He smiles. I hate his smile, so like always, I refuse to smile back. If I smile back, he might think I'm weak. He might think I won't tell, so I make a cold face. I make the coldest face a thirteen-year-old girl can make. His wife smiles again. I wish I could wipe the smile off her face. How does a woman smile when a predator is in the room? With the fork in my right hand, I push my food in a playful way to the left side of my plate. Then I glance over my right shoulder. My cousins have forgotten about me. Do they not

see me sitting beside this predator? I see them sitting beside each other. I see them chatting with each other as if there is no predator in the room. I wonder if the predator has asked them to take a seat beside him. Does the predator only like young ladies? My cousins are young, but they are not ladies.

Would the predator have asked me to take a seat beside him if I was a young boy? Am I not safe in this girl's body? The predator must think so because he begins to coax me into a trap. “You're growing up; it's time for us to consider what role you want to take on in the church. We should have a meeting and discuss this matter.” I look at him. I look at him with the face you give when you know someone is lying. I'm only thirteen, yet I know the Pastor is lying. I know the predator wants to take me into his office alone. I know the predator wants to see what I look like alone. I want to see what the predator looks like exposed. I want to expose the Pastor for who he is. I want to stand up in the church dining hall and make an announcement. I want to say, “Excuse me, the man that you call pastor is really a pedophile.” I want to expose the man of God before he exposes me.

I am only thirteen, but I still know when a man wants to do things that your body is not old enough for. The predator brings his elbows to the table. I watch him raise his hands to the left side of his face. While blocking his wife from seeing

his next move he then blows me a kiss!  
The pastor blows three consecutive kisses  
to a minor. How often does this heinous  
act occur in religious settings? How often  
do spiritual leaders abuse minors? How  
often do girls and boys make cold faces  
to scare away the predator? I look down  
at my plate. Somehow the predator's  
kiss has made my appetite return. I  
square my thirteen-year-old shoulders

while lifting my chin. I look directly  
into the predator's eye, and I glare my  
truth. Without words I make known my  
appetite for justice. I am not your victim.  
If no one else will fight for me than I will  
fight for myself. This thirteen-year-old  
body belongs to me. I gently pick up  
my plate of food while authoritatively  
standing up from the dining hall table  
to join my cousins in laughter.