FACE OF A MONSTER

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When I was a small child my parents made the mistake of permitting me to attend the old Boris Karloff movie, FRANKENSTEIN.

For weeks I was haunted by the fear that Doctor Frankenstein's monstrous creation was lurking nearby, ready to step out of the shadows and destroy me.

My mother had a tremendous task in convincing me that there was no such thing as a monster. It was a long time before I accepted this and stopped covering my head at night in fear of seeing that hideous face at my window.

Now, these many years later, I find that I am haunted, once again, by fear of a monster. This one too is man-made. And he is very real. He lurks in the shadows of every city in the United States. But in my city he has come out of the shadows to stand in the sunlight and make a mockery of the human race. Here, in Birmingham, Alabama, he reveals his hideous countenance without shame.

On Sunday morning, September 15, 1963, he stood in full view of the world and announced that here he rules with an iron hand. Four little girls lay dead in the basement of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and two little boys were marked for death that same afternoon.

My feelings upon hearing the news of the bombing of this Negro church are indescribable. For the remainder of the day I moved like a sleepwalker. I remember that I cried and I prayed. But I remember best the reactions of the people with whom I came in contact; friends and family. I could not believe that they spoke the words I heard.

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They all agreed that it was a tragic happening but... But, the N.A.A.C.P. was behind it - but, it would never have happened had it not been for the Kennedys. A tragic happening - BUT; excuses, accusations. The monster that walks the streets of my city was beginning to reveal his true face to me.

I was suddenly a stranger in the city that had been my home for twenty-one years. I felt that within it's bounderies my husband, my three children and myself were aliens. What had happened to the warmth, the capacity for love that I had always believed existed within the heart of my city?

I slept little that night. I was disturbed by a thought that there must be something I could do. But what could a nondescript, thirty-three year old housewife possibly do to counteract the injustices and atrocities being inflicted on her neighbors of a darker skin? I felt I had to reach out in some way for an answer. An answer to what had happened and why my city had accepted it as inevitable. When I decided what I was going to do I was not afraid for I still believed in my city's capacity for love.

The next morning I sat at my kitchen table and wrote a letter. Without a second thought I mailed it to the BIRMINGHAM NEWS. It read:

"The great majority of Birmingham's white citizens were quick to admit that they found the bombing of a church and the willful murder of children appalling. But were even quicker to attempt to excuse those acts with accusations hurled at the Supreme Court, the N.A.A.C.P., the Kennedy brothers, etc.

How can responsible, clear-thinking white people possibly believe that there is any excusing such acts or for that matter any excusing their own prejudice against the colored race?

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Most of these people profess to be Christians. They worship in a house that they call the Lord's. They sing hymns of praise to His great name and claim that they are seeking to follow in His footsteps. And yet they carry prejudice in their hearts and foster it in the hearts of their children.

If, in fact, these "Christians" are sincere then surely they must know that God is Love, that He is no respecter of persons.

Perhaps some of these good people can set me straight.

My one question for them being: Is God a lie? "

This letter was signed and carried my address as it is the policy of our paper not to publish anonymous letters.

On Thursday, September 19th, my letter appeared in VOICE OF THE PEOPLE. Headlines screamed across the editorial page - ASKS 'IS GOD A LIE?'. I received my first phone call at 2:30 that afternoon.

What followed was a nightmare. Day and night I was called on the phone and subjected to every manner of accusation and abusive language. I was called nigger-lover, communist, atheist and worse. My husband is part Cherokee Indian and I was informed by one caller that the lowest form of humanity that ever tread the soil of this great country is the half-breed Indian. Of course, there were those who did not have the nerve to phone and they wrote letters. This continued for days.

During the course of this verbal and written persecution a person or persons, unknown to me, saw fit to push our small, foreign car down an embankment and into a tree. Another time, toilet tissue was strewn over my front yard.

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Much has been written in recent months concerning Birmingham.

It has been called the City of Fear and the Tragic City. I agree that each of these titles is quite appropriate and speaking from my experience I can tell you why. I know the monster for what he is.

I have learned that he speaks with many voices; masculine, feminine, young and old. His vocabulary is spiked with peculiar and hateful words such as nigger, wop, kike, etc. He assumes numerous forms and various roles in the community. He is a minister who preaches Anglo-Saxon supremacy, a housewife who insists that God upheld segregation among His own people, a businessman who compares the Negro to an animal, a teen-ager who screams nigger-lover, a teacher who leads her class in applause upon learning of the assassination of our President, John F. Kennedy.

He displays the confederate flag and denounces the federal government. He wears the uniform of the National States Rights Party and places copies of the Party's nauseous publications in the hands of children.

I have learned that to speak freely is to fear him for he cannot be apprehended, tried and convicted for his crimes. He finds
protective sanctuary in our churches, our homes and our schools.
He runs rampant to inflame the ignorant and demented to acts of
violence. My city condones his presence and embraces his doctrine.

To say that now I am not afraid would be to lie. Familiar faces no longer smile, familiar voices have grown harsh, the people I hold dear have become strangers to me. And there is no place for me to hide. There is no way to avoid looking into the monstrous face of prejudice and bigotry pressed against my window.

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