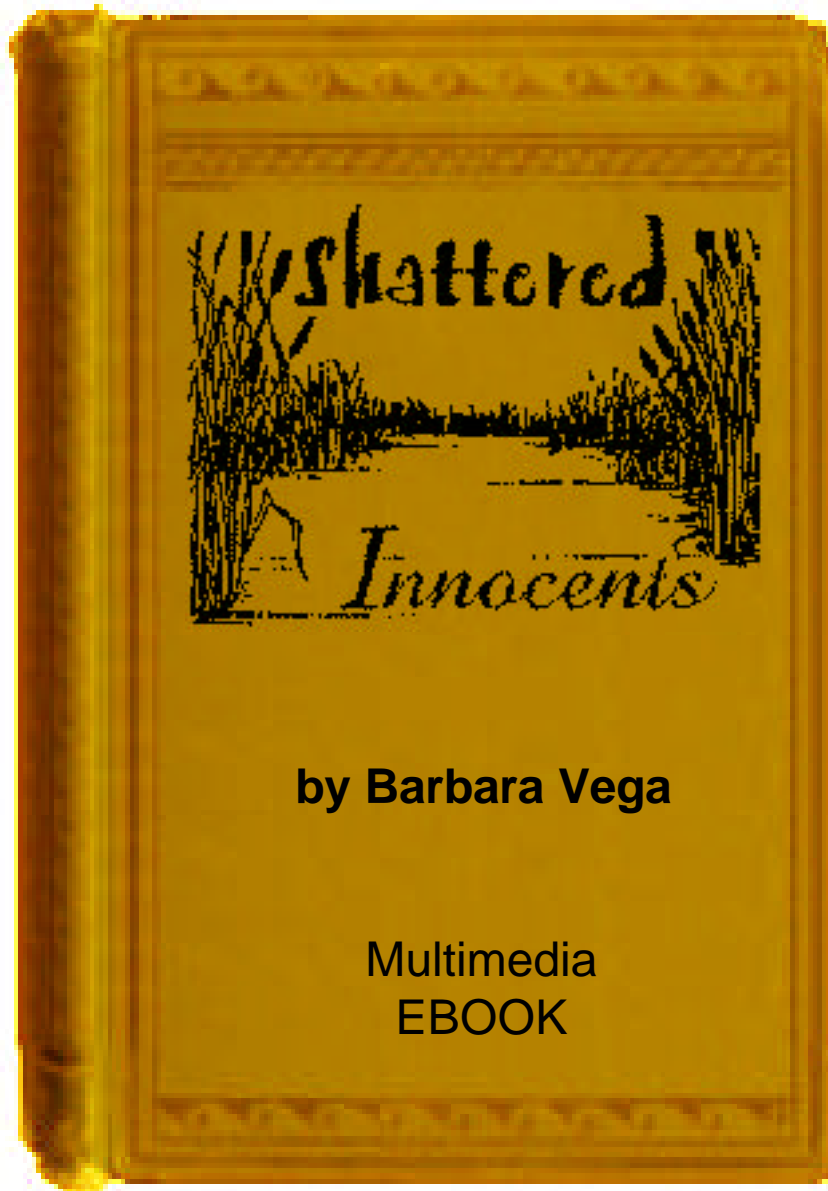
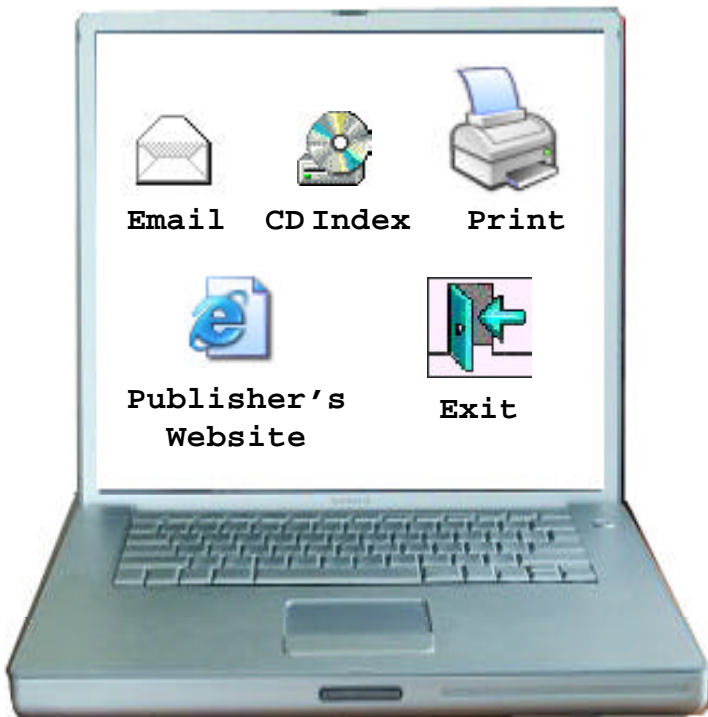





Instructions:
Use arrow keys
to turn between pages.





Shattered Innocents

Barbara Vega



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L & R
Hartley

2006

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Chapter 1

It happened in a small town near Denver, Colorado in 1959.

Crisp, cold weather chilled the air, and the two little boys' lives hung by a thread. Elaine Williams, a single mother, lived in a tiny, rundown house with her two sons, six-year-old James, and three-year-old Steven. She worked as a waitress at a dingy little diner a few miles away called Swanson's. Elaine, frustrated with raising two active boys, went out every night, leaving her boys alone. As soon as she got home from her late-night job, she would wake James up so he could take care of his little brother Steven while she went bar hopping.

One night there was a terrible storm, and Steven woke up frightened. James, skilled at comforting his little brother for as long as he could remember, immediately knew what to do.

"Don't worry, Stevie, I'll take care of you," he whispered tenderly into his little brother's ear as he rocked him back to sleep.

Late that night while the children were sleeping, sounds of people laughing and giggling woke James and his brother. James crept silently to the door and peeked out. He saw a man walking into his mother's bedroom. Frowning, James turned and climbed back into bed with his brother. The next morning, James woke up, jumped out of bed, and rushed to the kitchen looking for something to quiet his rumbling stomach. All he could find was a can of chicken soup.

Steven walked into the kitchen, rubbing his eyes.

"I'm hungry," he croaked in his early morning voice.

"Hang on, Stevie. I'm fixing us some soup," James answered. "Where's mommy?" Steven asked.

"Mommy's still sleeping."

"Can I go wake her?"

"No, Stevie, she's... "

Before James could finish his sentence, Steven ran into his mother's bedroom, and James followed closely behind. There they saw a stranger sleeping in their mother's bed.

"Get out of here right now you boys!" Elaine yelled as she woke up. The ruckus woke the man, and he jumped out of bed, swearing under his breath.

Steven started to cry at all the yelling.

"Get your brother out of here, James,

before I spank both of you!" Elaine shouted. James rushed over to Steven and grabbed him by the arm. "Don't cry, Stevie, I'll take care of you," he said as he hugged his little brother and headed down the hallway to the kitchen.

The front door slammed as soon as James and Steven entered the kitchen, and the man hurried to his car. Elaine flew by the boys, trying to catch her lover before he could leave.

"You've got too much baggage, Elaine. What a waste!" he shouted from his car window as his tires screeched out of the driveway.

Elaine reached into her robe pocket, finding an old, crushed pack of cigarettes. She pulled one out, straightened it, stuck it in her mouth and lit it, dragging slowly as she gathered her thoughts before blowing out a long, gray puff of

smoke.

"Whenever I meet someone, my kids are always in the way," she thought to herself as she walked back into the house.

James and Steven were in their room getting dressed when Elaine came inside. They were trying to be on their best behavior so their mother wouldn't spank them, but Elaine just walked past their room, ignoring them completely.

Later that afternoon, Elaine told James she was going out that night and he was to watch his brother.

"No screwing around either! Do you hear me?" she yelled. "Okay, mommy, we'll be good," James said, trying to hold back tears. Elaine went to her bedroom and slammed the door.

"I'm hungry," Steven whined to his brother.

James, afraid of being yelled at again, didn't want to bother their mother so he looked in the refrigerator for something to eat. All he could find was a slice of leftover pizza. James grabbed the cold pizza and shared it with his brother. Steven was happy to have something to eat.

A little while later, James went to his mother's bedroom where she was stretched out on the bed watching television.

"Can me and Stevie go to the park?" James asked.

"No!" Elaine shouted. "I'm tired and I'm not going to go chasing you kids down when it's time to go to work."

James just looked at her, then turned and walked away without saying a word. He went outside on the porch to sit with his brother. James could see how dis-

tant his mother was to them, but what could he do? All he wanted was her love, but Elaine was incapable of showing love to her kids. All she had inside was hostility and anger toward them. She treated them like they were in her way.

Surprisingly, a few days later, from out of the blue, their mother called out to them, "Let's go out to eat!"

James and Steven were thrilled at the idea! Elaine took her children out for a nice dinner at Denny's. James couldn't figure out the change in his mother, and felt a little suspicious, although he was happy that his little brother was finally getting some attention from Elaine. Unfortunately, her good mood only lasted for a short period and she was soon back to her old, angry self. She fed the children junk food or only left them with small boxes of cereal in the cupboard.

James was back to caring for and feeding his little brother. As the weeks passed, Elaine started to change again. She started bringing home packages filled with clothes and jewelry.

"Is it your birthday?" James asked innocently.

"I have a new job," Elaine announced, "and I must look my best." 5

As the months went by, Elaine was hardly ever home. The boys saw less and less of her. The only thing she managed to do was to leave a few groceries for them, mostly bread with peanut butter.

Suddenly, something strange happened again.

"Boys, how about going for a picnic by the old riverbank?" she asked. "I know it's kind of chilly, but you can just put on your coat and hats and we'll take blan-

kets along.

Steven started jumping up and down. He was so excited to go! James didn't know what to make of this new attention from their mother, but decided to look at the bright side and hope for the best.

As Elaine made lunch for her kids, she reached inside her dress pocket and pulled out a bottle of sleeping pills. She quickly opened it and dumped the pills onto the cutting board. Elaine looked around to see if anyone was watching. She could hear the kids in the other room getting ready to leave. When she was sure the coast was clear, she started crushing the pills on the cutting board. Then she walked to the refrigerator, grabbed some cookie dough she had just bought, and mixed the pills with the dough. Once she was finished, she rolled the dough out on the board and

called to the boys, "Come on in here and help your mother make some cookies!"

The boys looked at each other in disbelief and rushed into the kitchen, eager to help their mother.

"Can I put them on the tray and put them in the oven?" Steven asked his mother.

"Why not?" Elaine smiled. "Go for it!"

Twenty minutes later the smelt of freshly baked cookies filled the air. "Its time to go on the picnic," Elaine said cheerfully as she started to put the cooled cookies in a bag. Steven's excitement got the better of him and he grabbed a handful of cookies and started pushing them into his mouth. "Not so fast!" Elaine shouted, before she could catch herself. "We should save those for our picnic," she said in a

softer voice.

Elaine made a few little bologna sandwiches for the boys and put those in the picnic basket along with the cookies.

James was beside himself with happiness at his mother's sudden interest in him and little Stevie.

"Get your coats on now, boys, and let's go," she called to them as she swung open the back door to her little kitchen.

James and Steven jumped into the car and closed the door as Elaine started the engine.

"Oft we go!" Elaine said as she put the car in gear and pushed on the accelerator.

As they headed for the old highway that led to the riverfront, James and Steven began singing songs. They were so happy.

Elaine stole glances at her sons in the rear-view mirror, watching closely as they ate a couple of cookies.

"I love you, mommy," Steven called to his mother from the back seat.

Elaine smiled wryly at her son as she kept an eye out for the turnoff that led to the river.

"There it is!" James shouted as he pointed to the road.

"Look for a nice spot under the trees," Elaine demanded as she wheeled the car into a parking spot.

James jumped out of the car first, and then Steven. They grabbed a blanket and placed it on the ground beneath a big oak tree. Steven snatched the picnic basket and said, "I'm hungry! Can we eat now?"

"Sure. Help yourselves," Elaine said as she reached for a sandwich for her-

self.

James and Steven were ravenous and began wolfing down the sandwiches. Once they were finished, Steven asked, "Could I eat some more cookies, mom?"

"Go ahead. Eat as many as you want!" Elaine said cheerfully to the boys.

While she watched her children eat all the cookies, Elaine reached for a bottle of wine and poured herself a glass. She watched the boys carefully as they ate cookie after cookie. Suddenly Steven said, "I'm sleepy, mommy. Can I take a nap?"

"Just lay down and rest," Elaine said.

"I'm sleepy, too," James said as he rubbed his eyes. "Just close your eyes and rest," she repeated. Within minutes, both boys were sleeping soundly.

Elaine poured herself another glass

of wine, then looked at her watch.

"This is for your own good," she whispered to her sleeping children. After first checking to make sure no one was around, Elaine picked Steven up and carried him to the car. She placed him in his car seat and strapped him in. Then she carried James to the car and fastened the seatbelt tightly around him. The boys were sleeping so deeply that they were unaware of being moved.

Elaine got into her car and started the engine. Then she moved the gearshift to neutral and stepped out. Walking to the back of the car, she bent over, grabbed the bumper and pushed as hard as she could. Slowly, the car began to move forward. Then it picked up speed as it rolled closer to the river.

Continued...

(This is only an extract.)

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