

In My Father's Arms: A True Story of Incest (Oxford American's ''One of the best Southern Books of All Time'')

Walter A. de Milly III



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The TV-perfect family of Walter de Milly III was like many others in the American South of the 1950s—seemingly close-knit, solidly respectable, and active in the community.

Tragically, Walter's deeply troubled father would launch his family on a perilous journey into darkness. To the outside world, this man is a prominent businessman, a dignified Presbyterian, and a faithful husband; to Walter, he is an overwhelming, handsome monster. Whenever the two are together, young Walter becomes a sexual plaything for his father; father and son outings are turned into soul-obliterating nightmares.

Walter eventually becomes a successful businessman only to be stricken by another catastrophe: his father, at the age of seventy, is caught molesting a young boy. Walter is asked to confront his father. Walter convenes his family, and in a private conference with a psychiatrist, the father agrees to be surgically castrated.

De Milly's portraits of his relationships with his father and mother, and the confrontation that leads to his father's bizarre and irreversible voluntary "cure," are certain to be remembered long after the reader has set aside this powerful contribution to the literature of incest survival.

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