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Ultimate Judgment: A Story of Emotional Corruption Obsession and Betrayal

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This narrative requires the reader to suspend disbelief. Meg, a victim of sexual abuse by her stepfather from early childhood into her twenties, abetted by her mother, has written a dramatic, convincing story with the help of Mackey, a former medical reporter and L. A. Times columnist. While what happened is difficult to read about, and hard to believe, the authors neither overplay the horror nor overlook Meg's compounding of her problems. The very telling of this history with its remarkable outcome—a 1997 victory in Florida's courts—will help victims of incest, the communities that usually deny their existence, and the legal and psychological experts who confront these awful cases.

Sensitive and vivid writing makes this a worthwhile literary experience and a page-turner. Meg says of her and her brother's tormentor/ father, "he'd made us into who we were as surely as if he'd pinched our forms out of warm wax." Later she said, "I was like a walking human nuclear spill and all [my friend] had was a mop." The book is both a detective thriller and a meditation on cruelty and survival. It plays out in a family that is simultaneously rich and poor, white and black, cultured and ignorant. Without jargon the authors clarify issues of denial, dissociation, and complexities of private memory and public evidence.

People wonder why an adolescent or adult would endure continuing sexual abuse. There are answers here. Truth sets people free if people can stand it and respond to it. A few strong individuals were able to do that in this case, against fearsome odds.

E. James Lieberman