When I was 8 years old, I got involved with a 42 year old woman. This is 1971 in Jamaica. One day I was at primary school and a guy had gone to Miami and he came back and he told us a story of something he’d seen in a Walgreens. His description was, "It's a combination of a comic book, a magazine, and a book-book: The Superman Annual."

I'd never heard of an annual comic book. I'd never seen a comic book that was bigger than about 20 pages. So, I decided I had to see one, which meant going to the biggest bookstore in Jamaica, Sangsters.

My mother was very strict. My father was already gone but wasn't yet dead. He was a cop and he was scared of my mother, who was a pharmacist. My brother and I were scared of her, too. So, every Saturday she would take us to these drawing classes in downtown Kingston, which sort of looks like an old Southern town with these buildings with these pitched roofs, and we'd go to art class. And there was 15 minutes between when we left and when she picked us up. Sangsters Books, biggest bookstore in Jamaica, 5 minutes run around the corner.

I told my brother, "I'm going inside to the bathroom. I'm coming back before mummy comes."

My brother, his name is Gary, he wanted to be a priest, or so he would say to be considered innocent. I wanted to be an astronaut. How practical. So, I run around to Sangsters. And in those days in Jamaica you still had mule carts and you had cars and you had Reggae playing everywhere, and I run into the bookstore and it's strange to me because it's cold. It was air-conditioned. And I hugged myself, "Wow!

And then I look up, and 10 steps in front of me, at a cash register, was a woman in a blue polyester suit. She was the color of strong tea and her hair was like broccoli. No hot comb could cut through that. So, I said to her, "Excuse me, Miss, is there something here called a Superman Annual?"

And she says, "Yes," and she told me where it was.

And then I went around to where it was on the shelf and there was a big sign above it that said, "No Reading Allowed."

So, I skim through it. It was the size of a family Bible. Heavy. It had a hard cover. There were interviews with the people who drew the Superman comics. There were other storylines that we'd never seen before and there was about a whole year's worth of Superman comics in one book.

I ran back to art class, "Ah, made it!"

I started going every week. I became friendly with the cashier. I would go in, "Hi!"

And she'd go, "Hello," until she started sending a clerk to guide me while I read the Superman Annual under the "No Reading Allowed" sign.
So, one weekend I didn’t go to art class. I didn’t get to see the Superman Annual, didn’t get to see my lady friend. And I was thinking about her, about how nice she was and how different she was from my mother. And as I started thinking about how nice she was I felt obligated to be nice to her.

And as I started feeling obligated to be nice to her, well, my 8 year old mind started connecting something, which is: I want the book. If I ask my mother for the money to buy the book, she will say, "No, I’m a single mother."

But if I had a friend who worked in the store, then maybe I could get her to like me in a special way, and maybe we could work something out.

So, when I got back to Sangsters the next time and I walked in the store and I hugged myself, she hugged herself long. I said, "Hi."

She said, "Little friend, what happened to you? I didn't see you last week."

I said, "Well, you know..." And I began to improvise, "Well, I was out with my mother, you know, and we were shopping and, you know, I like to help my mother a lot. So, that's why I didn't come."

She said, "You are a nice little boy."

I went around the corner. Ran back to art school, made it.

Next week, I would steal the book. And I made a plan, a good plan, a wicked plan. I used to like watching "The Saint" with Simon Templar. I used to like watching "It Takes a Thief" with Robert Wagner, Alexander Mundy. America made this.

So, I went in the store the next week, ran inside, did not hug myself. I just ran up there and said, "Oh my God, you wouldn't believe what happened! I was out shopping with mummy, like last week and the bag broke. You have a bag you could give me?"

She said, "Little friend, of course!" and gives me a bag.

And I run out the front entrance and I walk around the back way, come in through the back entrance with the bag under my shirt. Pull it out.

Superman Annual was there. Take it. Drop it.

Hulk Annual was there, too.

Spider-Man was there, as well. And why should a superhero be alone?

So, I walked out nice and easy. Perfect heist. Then I got back to art school and my brother, the priest, was there. "What you have in the bag?"

Now, when your brother is 12 and he wants to be a priest and anything he says is believed, and you want to be an astronaut and anything you say is otherworldly, you get defensive.

So, there was only one answer, "None of your damn business!"

And he asked me again, and I said, "None of your beeswax."

And then my mother came. We got in the car, blue Ford Escort. My brother says, "Mummy, Colin have books, from Sangsters."
And my mother stops the car. She looks at me. "Where you get money to buy books from?"
"Well, it's not books, Mummy, it's comics."
"Well, where are you get the money to buy the comics from?"
And I experienced early-onset, pre-pubescent amnesia, because at eight, I couldn't remember, "Umm, uh, that time, when umm, Uncle Cody came and he gave me the money that time."
"You beg Uncle Cody for money? You begging people for money because you think you have no father?"
"Why is it nobody ever believes me when I say anything?!"
"You teef the books?"
"Now in Jamaica you don't steal, you thief. And you don't "thief," you "teef."
"You teef the books?"
"No, Mummy, I did not teef the books."
"Show me the receipt."
"OK, will that make you happy?" I rummage around, "I must be drop it."
"I'm going to drag you back to Sangsters. Better tell me the truth now. Don't shame me in front of people."
There was a simple calculus. When you're in the backseat of a two-door car, in 1971, in Jamaica, where parents can do anything they want, in any fashion, for however long, you say, "Let's go to the store," because in the store you'll have witnesses who are not in the family.
So, we get there. My mother walks in. She does not hug herself. They come in and my mother says, "Which cashier you buy it from?"
The amnesia again, "Umm...I think it was...I can't remem..." And I see my lady friend observing all this and I am the fortunate son. "That one, Mummy."
We walk up to her. "This boy here said he bought three book from you: Superman, Spider-Man, and another one. You remember him buying anything from you?"
I looked at my lady friend. My lady friend looked at me. And we had a connection. And she looked at my mother. And she looked back at me. And she said words I will never forget, "Little friend, I am so disappointed."
I learned the power of shame.

Years later, my second book came out. I got a letter from Sangsters Books. They were opening a new store in Kingston and they would like me to come to do a reading there.
And when I went to the store, all the memories of that heist came back, but also a real connection of what it means to be disciplined in different ways. It was the
discipline of my mother - the discipline of force. And then there was the discipline of someone saying, in her own way, "I know you can do better. Do better."

And I never stole books again.