

The image shows the front cover of a book. The cover has a yellow background. In the center, there is a photograph of a white door with a wooden handle and a lock. To the right of the door, a closet is visible, containing several dark-colored shirts hanging on hangers. The text is overlaid on the photograph in a white, sans-serif font.

Excerpt from  
**THE ROOM**  
novel

Flashbacks from  
Harry's childhood

***Excerpt from THE ROOM, novel. Flashbacks from Harry's childhood***

*Harry Ladd was finally able to get away from his father and make it upstairs. His father, Henry, was such an imposing presence when he was home. Everything had to revolve around him. When he was outside his room, he would walk around loudly, making sure that his presence was known. Even if Harry and Malcolm were talking, when Henry spoke, they stopped. No one in the house had anything more important to say.*

*Henry wasn't a tall man, thin build, but now with a larger waist and bottom compiled from years of sitting in his eighteen wheeler, as he transported goods around the county. He would shave, but only after the scruffiness was far too obvious and even then he would miss patches.*

*He had been on edge all day and Harry knew it was just a matter of time before there was trouble.*

*It wasn't even three o'clock and Henry insisted on having his dinner early. All it took was to have them all together at the table. His mother, Rue, was hurt but Harry couldn't stay around. He was afraid his father would remember why he got angry in the first place. But for the moment, his father was distracted. Henry was yelling at Rue about why it was her own fault that he pushed her down.*

*Harry was worried that his brother, Malcolm, might still be downstairs. But when he opened the door to his mother's closet, he saw Malcolm inside. He found him frightened and sitting in the back corner with the small battery lantern they always left in there. Harry crawled inside, closing the door, and sat against the wall. Malcolm was only ten years old and Harry looked out for his little brother as best he could. After all, Harry had two more years of experience with their father. But Harry could only do so much.*

*They felt safe for now. Their father would never find them in their mother's closet. They knew he never bothered to put in any effort once they hid. They could wait it out in there. The wooden floor even had a small gap between the boards where they*

*heard sounds that carried up from the hall below. It was hard to make out words, but they could hear the intensity of the conversation.*

*"My stomach hurts," Harry said. "I didn't mean to waste my supper."*

*Malcolm, still shivering from time to time, just looked at Harry.*

*"I wasn't talking back," Harry continued. "I was just trying to tell him that I didn't feel well. He pushed Mom down. She tried to stop him when he slapped me, and he just pushed her out of the way. He got me only once when he saw that he hurt her."*

*Malcolm finally spoke.*

*"You have a red mark on your face."*

*"He got me good with that one shot," Harry said.*

*Harry put his hand to his face and flinched as he touched the spot where he was slapped.*

*"Why is he always mad, Harry?"*

*"I don't know, Malcolm. I wish I knew."*

*In a quiet moment they heard the smash of something being thrown against the wall downstairs.*

*Their father, Henry, was tired of blaming his wife, Rue, for what he had done so he threw his glass against the wall and stormed off to his room. It struck the framed photograph of Rue's parents and cracked the glass from bottom left to top right. Earlier, she struck her leg on the table when he pushed her down. But the pain in her heart hurt worse when he split the glass covering that photograph. She would later move it to the wall in her room, but would never get the glass replaced.*

*After the sound, Harry and Malcolm heard it go silent downstairs, so a short time later, Harry cracked open the door and peeked through the slit into the room. There*

*on the wall he saw the photograph of Mom's parents. It was surrounded by light. He knew that it normally hung downstairs, but now it was here with a crack in the glass. They waited inside for a while, but once convinced their father had gone away, the boys came out and sat on their mother's bed. Harry looked toward the door and found it strange that the picture was gone, as was the light. They had only waited inside the closet for a few more minutes, Harry thought, there was barely enough time for Mom to remove it. Besides, they would have heard her on the stairs.*

*Rue struggled to clean up the mess in the kitchen, favoring her injured leg, but making it increasingly worse. She couldn't help herself. If Henry were to continue to walk past the mess, she knew he would take out his displeasure on the boys. When Rue finished, she took a small hammer from the drawer, removed the photograph from the wall, and pulled out the hanger.*

*The boys could hear their mother struggling to walk up the stairs. When she got to her bedroom, Harry saw her holding the photograph he saw hanging just minutes ago. Harry was puzzled as he watched his Mom hang it in the same spot. Rue finished hanging the photograph and put the hammer on her night table, then collapsed onto her bed. With the additional damage she had done, the pain had gotten so great that she was unable to get out of bed for days.*

*"Harry, please go next door and ask Ruth to come by. Please tell her that I need her help," Rue said. "You don't have to worry about your father. He's in his room."*

*Henry knew he'd gone too far, so he decided he would make himself scarce for a few days, sleeping in the back room of the trucking office where he worked. His regret didn't come from conscience. It was from a selfish fear he would cross a line, and lose the woman who waited on him hand and foot.*

### ***When Harry Returns:***

*Harry returned from Ruth's house and noticed his father's car was gone. He couldn't have felt more relieved. He went up to tell his mother that Ruth said she could come over in an hour. Rue was in bed, Malcolm rolled up next to her, and she was holding his head.*

*“Mom, I’m hungry,” Malcolm said. “My food was thrown on the floor.”*

*Rue was in pain and knew she couldn’t get up.*

*“Ruth will be over soon, sweetheart. I will ask her to make you something.”*

*“I’ll make something for Malcolm, Mom,” Harry told her.*

*“I appreciate that, Harry. I heard your father’s car. Did he leave?” Rue asked.*

*“Yes, and I hope he stays away.”*

*They never spoke about what happened. Just as Rue couldn’t help but clean up the mess as soon as she could, they always put Henry’s outbursts out of mind just as fast. But seeing their mother hurt and in bed was a reminder that made it more difficult this time.*

*When Malcolm and Harry got to the kitchen, they saw everything had been picked up. There was a rectangular dark spot on the wall where the photograph of Rue’s parents hung for so many years. It was darker in that spot because the picture had shielded the spot from the sunlight that faded the surrounding wall. The kitchen smelled like an old mop. Rue barely was able to rinse it because she had been in so much pain.*

*“Malcolm, would you like a sandwich?” Harry asked.*

*“If there’s peanut butter,” Malcolm told Harry, while looking down at the table.*

*All Malcolm did was to stare down at the table. He was feeling so hopeless.*

*Harry pulled out the jar and found it almost empty, but he managed to scrape enough out to make the sandwich for his little brother. It wasn’t much, but it would have to do. Their mother always left money in the cabinet. Harry would ride his bike to old man Perkowski’s store the next day to get more. When Malcolm sat down to eat, Harry stayed with him. He was listening to make sure their father didn’t*

*return before they could make it back upstairs to their room. They would run out the back door if he did.*

*“Harry,” Malcolm said. “When I get old enough, I’m gonna run away. I don’t like it here.”*

*Harry didn’t respond. Being older, he knew there was nothing they could do, but he felt bad for his little brother.*

*“Do you want something else to eat?” Harry asked him. “There are sweet pickles in the refrigerator.”*

*“This is OK,” Malcolm said. “Harry, do you think Mom will be OK next week for my graduation?”*

*“I hope so Malcolm, but I’ll be there.”*

*When Malcolm finished, Harry checked down the hall and they ran up the stairs. At the top, Harry noticed a glow beneath his mother’s door, so he went to check on her. He opened the door but saw nothing unusual. Rue was sleeping with her head turned slightly away. The boys could stay in their room now. Ruth would just walk in when she saw Henry’s car was gone.*

### ***Later that night:***

*It was dark in the boy’s room except for a small nightlight plugged into the socket on the wall. It was darker than usual with Malcolm’s clothes piled against the wall, covering part of the light. But Harry could see that Malcolm’s head was slipping off the bed, so he walked over, lifted him back onto his pillow and covered him with his blanket. He was relieved that the evening had gone by and his father hadn’t come back. After taking a book from his dresser, Harry crawled into bed, pulled his blanket over him and turned on a small flashlight so he could read. He had barely gone through a few pages when he heard Malcolm turning in bed. He couldn’t tell if he had woken but then heard Malcolm talk faintly to himself.*

*“Who’s going to wash my cloths before I go back to school Monday?” Malcolm almost whispered.*

*Harry knew Malcolm was just speaking to himself, but answered him anyway.*

*“Don’t worry, Malcolm. I will wash them for you. On Monday, I’ll make sure you get up, and before I leave, I will get you ready for your bus. We can walk down the street so you can wait with Daniel if you like.”*

*“OK. But I’m also supposed to bring three dollars for the party we’re having in class,” Malcolm said.*

*Harry reached over to his night table and pulled off the top of a tin can, where he kept his money. He took out three dollars and walked over to give it to his brother. Malcolm cupped the bills in his hands and held it under his blanket.*

*“Thanks, Harry,” Malcolm said.*

*“We will work it out, Malcolm. I promise.”*

*It was quiet in the room for a while, but Harry could hear his brother still turning in bed.*

*“Malcolm. Can’t you sleep?” Harry asked.*

*“I’m trying to, but I keep waking up. I was thinking about something, Harry. Daniel’s family believes in God. They say he watches over people. Do you think it’s true?”*

*“Not over us, Malcolm.”*