

## GRIP: A MEMOIR OF FIERCE ATTRACTIONS BY NINA HAMBERG

### EXCERPT - DESIRE

Sometimes during sex Stephen referred to himself as *daddy*.

I hadn't thought about where that came from until one night he turned to me in bed, stroked my cheek and asked if I could guess the one person in the world he'd most like to meet.

"I have no idea."

"Manson."

"Charles Manson?"

"You've got to admire him, the way he controlled women. Look what he got them to do, how much power he had over them. You know he had to be very, very good." Stephen's eyes flashed as he said this.

I pushed him away.

*He's puffing himself up. He wants to scare me into thinking that he's a bad, bad boy because he can evoke that psycho's name.*

"Yeah, sure," I said.

I looked at Stephen's skinny arms now propped up behind his head.

*He's all talk. I could take him.*

The year before, during the Manson family trials in 1971, I'd read an article that described how Charles Manson led each new woman who joined his group out to a hidden place, a cave somewhere, to initiate her. He'd make love to her, whispering over and over, "Daddy's here now." At the time, I couldn't imagine any power in that, at least not with most women, certainly not with me. The idea of having sex with my father, shuffling around the house in his sleeveless undershirt, boxer shorts and black socks, was repulsive. But when Stephen called himself *daddy* in the midst of sex, a cloak dropped over me and I could imagine what Susan Atkins or Squeaky Fromme felt. Here was the dark home that went back before I could judge my father's appearance, when all I knew was the sound and the smell and the warmth of him. Here was the word that reached straight down—past all the years—to the very seeds of desire.