

# Christina Irby Clinton Sellers

*Clutter and dirt goes with the idea of a thief or a killer.*

## *Christina Irby*

When I think of cleaning, I see a plaid dishrag. That's the image!

## *Clinton Sellers*

A mop.

## *Christina Irby*

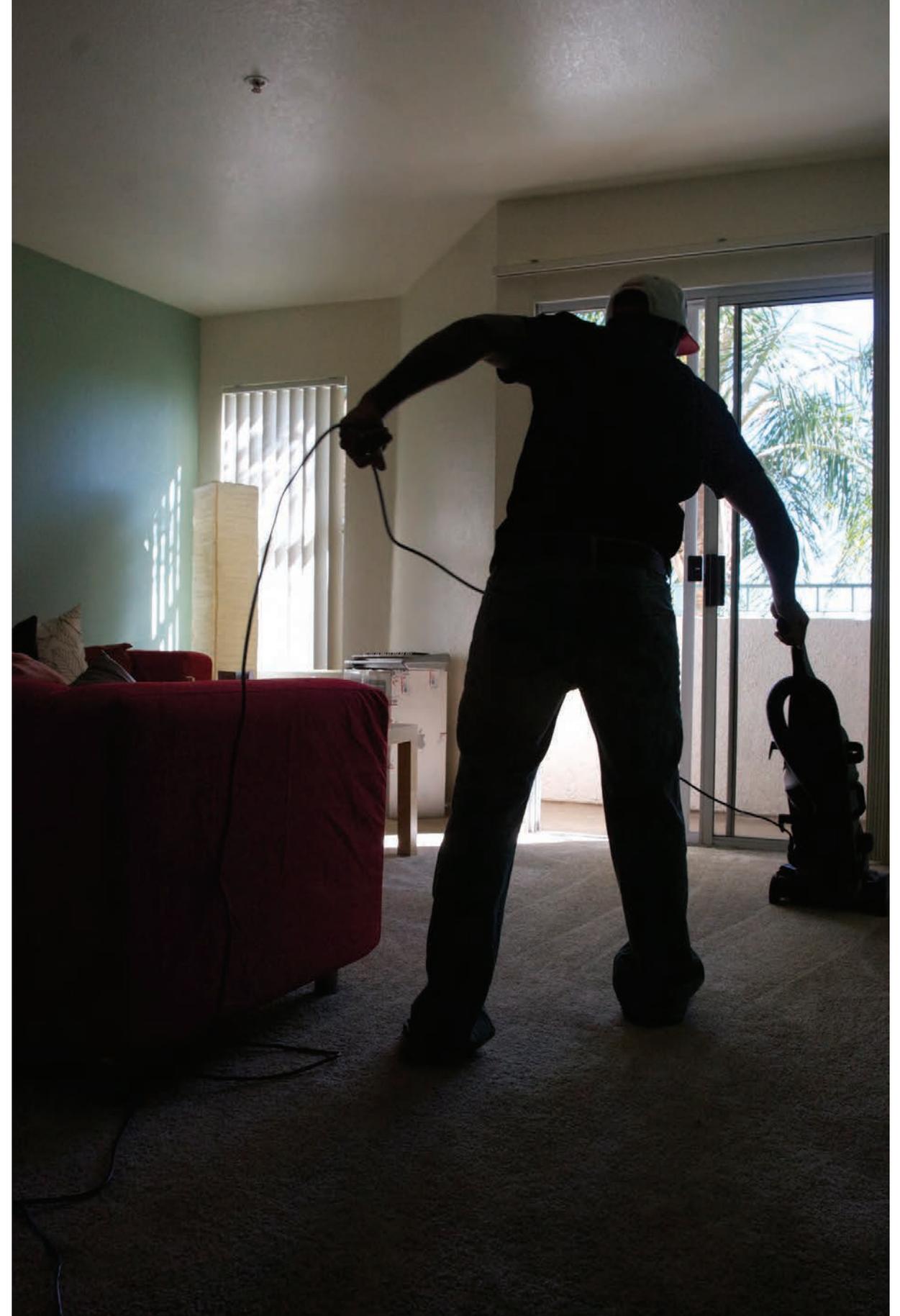
Everything was manual growing up. We had a dishwasher, but we were not allowed to use it. You wash it by hand. No fancy little dusting things. You had a cloth, and you wiped it by hand. Everything you did by hand. The first time I used a dishwasher was when we moved into this house. Clinton and I are originally from Baltimore. We've known each other since we were eight or nine, and we've lived together since July of this year.

## *Clinton Sellers*

When my mom started working at two jobs, I had to do my own food. I knew when my mama came home, she only got to sleep four hours before she had to get up and go back to her next job. She didn't want to walk in the house and see everything chaotic. She didn't want to see no dirty dishes. So I made sure I did everything that I could.

## *Christina Irby*

I never had chores; it was just expected. My friend would say, "I'm getting an allowance. I have to go home and do my chores." And I said, "Lucky you! You get paid to wash dishes?" Not me. I better wash the dishes, or...





*Clinton Sellers*

...I'm gonna get a whuppin.' [Laughs]

*Christina Irby*

Yeah! Or you were disciplined for it. I was disciplined for it. And I didn't get disciplined for it, because I knew to do it.

*Clinton Sellers*

With our parents, cleanliness is next to godliness.

*Christina Irby*

In church, we were always told, "We operate in excellence," which means: you don't lie, you don't steal. If you lie, you cheat; if you cheat, you steal; if you steal, you kill. Clutter and dirt just kind of goes with the idea of a thief or a killer. My parents would say, "We don't have much, Chrissy, so when people come over, it needs to be in order, so that guests can see that, the little bit that we do have, we take pride in it." Even now, when I go home to Baltimore, I'll do dishes. I'll clean after dinner; I'll start sweeping. It's a habit.

To be clean is to have a clear mind, and to have a clear mind means that you have a clear soul. Not meaning that you're pure or you have no faults, but that you are able to take your faults, acknowledge them...

*Clinton Sellers*

...and correct them.

*Christina Irby*

And that's almost like cleaning. You're able to take the mess and fix it and make it better. And life is gonna keep happening, so you're gonna have to keep fixing it. Same thing with your soul and your being. You're gonna keep messing up, but you just gotta keep fixing it. Nobody's perfect. That's how it was in my house. To have a clear soul means you can function as a sane human being.

*Clinton Sellers*

Bringing in the new year was big in my household. We couldn't go into the next year without washing every piece of clothing. Everything in the house had to be cleaned. My mama had us eat black-eyed peas and greens. Black-eyed peas was for change. Greens was for money. Everything in the house had to be clean, because if you start the year with stuff being that way, then it will stay that way throughout the year. That's how my mom looked at it.

*Christina Irby*

One big thing: where we lived at, we had mice. Mice and rats. The occasional roach would crawl. But it was mice! Everything needed to be picked up. The food needed to be put away. If you left your food out, or you left the kitchen crazy, or if you had a pile of clothes, you best believe that a mouse was gonna get into it.

*Clinton Sellers*

We had a neighbor, back where I was living at, and when I say "roach-infested"... My mother actually went and helped her bomb the house and put things around so that the roaches wouldn't come over to our house.

*Christina Irby*

I'm afraid of mice.

*Clinton Sellers*

I don't like insects. I don't like mice. Thankfully we ain't got none of them 'cause I wouldn't know how to act. I would not know how to act. [Laughs]

*Christina Irby*

I would have to leave. [Laughs] I could deal with bugs. I could deal with a roach. I could not deal with a mouse.

*Clinton Sellers*

Not me. Not a roach, not a nothing. Mm-mm.

*Christina Irby*

Because where there is one, there are many.

*Clinton Sellers*

Exactly. A roach don't come alone. [Laughs] Rats and mice don't come alone. "A'ight, we got a house [snaps], come on, we gonna act a party over there." [Laughter]

*Christina Irby*

They lay eggs. They start having babies.

*Clinton Sellers*

Exactly. They multiply... fast. And once they get in, it is hard to get them out. So we don't want them.

*Christina Irby*

Clinton grew up in the projects.

*Clinton Sellers*

Yeah, I lived in—

*Christina Irby*

—the PJ's.

*Clinton Sellers*

When I went to take out the trash, I stood way back to throw the trash in the dumpster. There were rats, and raccoons, and things that would get you, so I was like, "You know what, before one of them jump on me, I'm gonna just throw this right here." If it didn't go in the trash can, the garbage man would come get it when they picked up the trash in the morning.

*Christina Irby*

Me and Clinton started going out when I was sixteen. I had known him when he was younger, but I had never been into his house. My perception of the projects was: low income, low class families who live like animals. And then to go into his house and see white couches and ivory things...very clean. Not the biggest house, but very clean. I thought, "Oh my gosh. Why did I even think that?" But that's just the perception that the media and everybody puts out.

*Clinton Sellers*

A lot of people that lived around me, we were so close, we considered each other family, when we really wasn't. So they pretty much had the same morals that my mom had. But we did have them few, where you went down the street and their doors was wide open, and things of that nature. And mind you, the dumpster's across the street, and I just told you there was rats and raccoons. You don't leave your door open! Because it's that easy for something to run in there and give offspring, or whatever, so we didn't do that. But there were a lot of people around that did do that.

But everybody that lived on my block pretty much had the same mentality, as far as cleaning: "We're gonna clean our house, and make sure ya'all clean your house, so we don't get roaches." The way things was, we was so close, if I did something wrong, my neighbor could chastise me. And vice versa. If I needed to eat, I could eat there. My mom was working two jobs, and my neighbors made sure I ate, and made sure I wasn't having a bunch of people running in and out of the house. If I did anything wrong, I'd get spanked by my neighbors. [Laughs] You know?





*Christina Irby*

Well, for me, I lived on a block of big, brick row houses. Four doors up from me was my grandmother. Four doors up from my grandmother was my uncle. And then right across the alley were my mom's in-law's. Also my stepdad's. You couldn't do anything! [Laughs] And no matter whose house you went over to, you had some type of responsibility.

*Clinton Sellers*

Exactly.

*Christina Irby*

"When you go over there, you pick up after yourself. You don't just leave stuff." When you went to somebody's house, to spend the night over at a friend's house, or at a slumber party—

*Clinton Sellers*

—you respect their house—

*Christina Irby*

—better than you respect your own house. You clean up. You don't allow their parents to clean up. If you have a plate, you take your plate to the sink, unless they tell you, "Uh-uh, sit down, I have it." Because that's a reflection of how you're raised and how well your manners are. My mom would say to my friend's parents, "If she acts up—"

*Clinton Sellers*

"—whup her." [Laughter]

*Christina Irby*

"Whup!" This sounds so bad.

*Clinton Sellers*

It do now...

*Christina Irby*

But, I mean, it never happened. It was just that fear of "Okay, my mom gave them permission. I have to do it!" [Laughs] I always tried to be ten steps ahead of my mother, She'd say, "Wash the dishes!" And I'd say, "I already did it." [Laughter] "Clean your room!" "I'm doing it right now."

*Clinton Sellers*

When I was a kid, I came home, did my homework, and cleaned my room, so I could get outside to play football or basketball. The way crime was, where we're from, after a certain time, it wasn't okay for kids to be outside. So if you didn't get to go out before them streetlights came on, you couldn't go outside. And no matter where I was, I heard that voice! [Laughs]

*Christina Irby*

"Streetlight's come on! Get in the house!"

*Clinton Sellers*

I hear my mother calling me from a mile away. I be on the basketball court and nobody else could hear it. "I see ya'all tomorrow!" [Laughter]

*Christina Irby*

Oh, that's funny. That's funny.

*Clinton Sellers*

I'm quirky, too. When we go upstairs to bed now, we gotta take off all our clothes. We wash our hands and feet before we go to sleep.

*Christina Irby*

No dirty feet in the bed! I don't even sit on my bed in my street clothes. Last night we went out and got some food, and because I sat in the car in the pants, I can't sit on the bed wearing them.

*Clinton Sellers*

Your mama is crazy, too, I just realized that. [Laughs] We went and stayed at a hotel with her, and she made them bring new sheets to the room. Then she got Lysol wipes—

*Christina Irby*

She recleans the room.

*Clinton Sellers*

All of the doorknobs. The toilet. The remote controls. Anything she gonna be touching, she cleaning it.

*Christina Irby*

She'll reclean the tub. It'll smell like my house, basically. It'll smell like Lysol.

*Clinton Sellers*

I play basketball. I went to school for ball. A lot of nasty things go on when you do that. I wipe the bottom of my feet a lot, I lick my hands a lot...

*Christina Irby*

Ooh boy!

*Clinton Sellers*

It's part of the game for me now.

*Christina Irby*

Do you really do that?

*Clinton Sellers*

You don't see me do that? I do it all the time!

*Christina Irby*

Wait a minute!

*Clinton Sellers*

I usually wipe the dust off the bottom of my feet so my feet will have more traction on the floor.

*Christina Irby*

And then you do what? Don't you dare do it!

*Clinton Sellers*

I lick my hands. If you look, they used to talk about it on ESPN a lot. A lot of guys in the NBA, they do that. It gives you grip on the ball.

*Christina Irby*

That's gross.

*Clinton Sellers*

You shape your game around the people that you admire the most, you know what I'm saying? I've been watching these people for years now, for as long as I can remember. And that's the things that they done. So that's the habits that I picked up, without even knowing it.

*Christina Irby*

And that's how cleaning is! It's second nature. That's why our house is never really dirty, because we're always doing it.

*Clinton Sellers*

When we go to sleep at night, everything's clean. We don't have to worry about waking up and doing it. Everything's already done. Your home should be a relaxing place.

*Christina Irby*

Like if I'm having a shitty day at work, the last thing I want to do is come home to a house full of—a mess. I just want to relax.

*Clinton Sellers*

You want to come home and just be like... [Sighs deeply].

*Christina Irby*

My house is my sanctuary. My house is my safe place. So it has to be in order.

