Very early prologue for Move to Strike:

Prologue

My mother is a famous singer. If I told you her name, you would recognize it from the back of the Sunday entertainment section - she's the one playing the dinner bar in Vegas this weekend, or maybe the York Hotel bar in San Francisco. Most weekends, she tries to get local gigs at the casinos up here in South Lake Tahoe, so that she can really be a mom and stay close by and basically bust my chops.

My name is Nikki, and I'm fourteen.

Up until a year ago, we had what my history teacher calls an "uneasy alliance." Mom went her way and I went mine, as long as I could come up with a good story to satisfy her. Then she met Harry.

She was hooked up with a group then, two women and two men. They specialized in reggae and Cajun music. Although my mom is white her hair kinks up pretty well and she prides herself on being an excellent mimic. Ridiculous and racist, I say, but the fat-kneed tourists loved it for awhile. The gig lasted for almost six months. She made some money on the deal. All good. The only problem was Harry, her biggest fan.

She introduced me to him backstage one day when I ducked in after my jazz dance class. I knew right away this guy was not her type, but what are you going to do, bark at her? She looked just like my pomeranian Tiki when she wants you to scratch behind her ears.

I soon discovered Harry had more on his mind than my mom's fabulous musical talent and whoo whoo body, which is what he claimed first interested him. But that's to get ahead of my

story, and Mrs. Copenhaver says that is a flaw in my writing I can easily avoid if I just listen to my inner storyteller.

I have nothing against men. There is even a boy I like at school who almost asked me to dance once. He came very close to where I was standing with Maureen, who had earlier complained of not feeling well but who I forced to come anyway. He sidled up and asked for some of the candy I was eating, which was a bag of caramels. They are terrible for your teeth, and I am lectured often about my rotten, awful cavities which cost so much money to get filled, so that was my last, absolutely, bag. I had two left and I gave him one. His hair is brown and he is almost as tall as I am. (I am 5'8", although during my last trip to the doctor he said I was a real giraffe and would tower over him next time I saw him. For that reason alone, I hope he is right because then I can strike the top of his shiny round head from above.)

He said, "Want to..."

Just then, Maureen threw up.

I just know he wanted to dance, but right then we kind of banded together to find a teacher. They packed poor Maureen off to the doctor. She had something horrible and contagious, and my mom was terrified I would catch it, but I never do. I am in superb health.

I am going to kiss that boy before I am fifteen years old.

To make a sad story short, my mother married Harry. They were married for six months. And that's when I found out having a stepfather you don't like is not the most disgusting thing that can happen to you.

Getting kidnapped is worse.

What happened was, Mom sent me out to hose off the driveway. I had this ugly big parka on because it's still cold even though if the calendars do say it is Spring. I slipped on a wet spot and

went down at one point. And the old lady across the street had her curtains pushed aside so she got a good laugh out of it in between dipping into the moldy candy she keeps around.

You get the picture. A bad start to the day.

Still, you don't expect someone creeping up behind you. You don't expect a bag getting slipped over your head, or a hand mashed into your mouth.

You don't expect any day could be that bad.

<u>And yet another early attempt at the prologue</u>:

In the winter of my fourteenth year, my mother married the wrong man.

Up until then, we lived peacefully, or so it seems to me by comparison. Not that we didn't have our mother-daughter set-tos right on schedule, because we did. There was the issue of the dance. The issue of the boy I've been "chasing" according to her. The issue of me running around in internet chat rooms! Unbelievable, trivial stuff it seems like now, although at the time it rated pretty high on the Richter Scale.

Our house was a little shabby, true, but on the hill leading up to Heavenly's ski runs, with a pretty view of Lake Tahoe. Mom planted bulbs each fall, and around the porch, red purple flowers bloomed all spring and into the summer. Actually, this is one of those cases where you will get the wrong idea from the specific I have chosen to tell about her as a character, because she is as domestic as a forklift operator. Still, the flowers made the place seem homey and gave us both a satisfied feeling that we took some pride in our place and ourselves.

Mom worked all the time, which is why I spent much time alone, which was fine with me. I'm a reader and hiker, and having worked my way entirely through Thoreau and John Muir, have decided to hike the entire Pacific Crest trail next summer alone, that is, if things go the way they should, and if I can rid myself of this albatross step-father of mine and convince my mother that no bears will maim me and no nasty men will take an unhealthy interest in me and cart me off to their lairs.

I know she loves dancing and when she's in a show we have the best time. When she's not it's like - no more sunny days. She mopes around in a robe with her hair frizzed putting on false fingernails - you get the picture. It's not a pretty sight.

But to return to my stepfather, Max. I hate him and if a bear came in to tear his face off I wouldn't lift a finger to help him. He's trying to rip my mom off. I have to come up with a plan to expose him without her blowing her stack at me and accusing me of wanting to hold her back from her happiness.