



**Excerpt: *The Big 5-OH!* ©2010 Abingdon Press**

The evening ended on a high note, but dawn brought with it an old and familiar frustration; *OLD* being the operative word in this particular instance.

Liv checked the clock. 5:52 a.m. This was outrageous, even for Clayton Clydesdale!

Liv's teeth were clenched so hard that her jaw ached. She pulled on sweat pants beneath the long sleepshirt she'd worn to bed and stalked toward the back door amidst a peel of barks and growls and snarls.

"Boofer! Quiet!"

With all of the unexpected strength that anger affords, she flipped on the patio lights and threw back the sliding glass door. Stomping out to the patio, she searched the water for any sign of Clayton or bright neon chartreuse swim trunks, or some equally shocking apparel.

Shocked is what Liv got, times ten. But not because of the color of any ensemble Clayton was wearing. In fact, Clayton was nowhere to be found.

Instead, moving steadily across the patio from the open screen door was an alligator.  
Destination: swimming pool.

Liv shrieked, and the five-foot reptile paused, turning its head full of teeth toward her. She tried to gasp, but her lungs were completely devoid of anything resembling air, and the world began to spin. She was locked in a cyclone of teeth, scales and very black eyes.

The ringing in her ears evolved into high-pitched barks, and she realized that Boofer had passed her by and was heading straight for the creature at the other end of the patio.

“Oh, n-nooooo,” she cried, finding her feet just in time to rush forward and pull the dog from the ground by the rim of her lampshade collar.

“Eeeeeeeeyy-yyeeeeeee,” she screamed, running on sharp tiptoe straight into the house.

Liv slammed shut the door and locked it before ever looking back. But when she did, the gator had transported itself completely across the patio and was no more than five feet away. She shot a quick and generic prayer of thanks upward for the wall of glass that separated them as she fumbled with the phone.

“Y-yes, hello? I n-need some h-help, please. There’s an in-intruder.”

Liv could hear her heartbeat pounding in her own ears, but the 911 operator was calm as she asked for Liv’s name and location and the whereabouts of the trespasser.

“Well, he was on the patio,” she said, wide-eyed as she peered out through the glass. “But now he-he’s in the pool.”

“I’m sorry, ma’am. Did you say the intruder has gone for a swim?”

“Y-yes. I just saw his tail disappear into the water!”

“His ... I’m sorry. Did you say *his tail*?”