Beauty out of Darkness

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I always identified with the creature in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, not because I secretly harbored murderous inclinations, but because I grew up knowing what it felt like to be a being brought into existence as a fulfillment of selfish desires. I was not wanted. I was not loved. I was created by accident. My dad worked as a truck driver, so he was seldom home. When he was home, my mother, who habitually pawned me off to my grandparents, kept me away from him. She wanted his time, his attention, all to herself. My other siblings all had other homes to disappear to but I was not that lucky. As a result, I grew up, similar to Shelley's monster, desiring a family, a place to belong.

Like most kids, from broken homes, I learned to construct my own family as I entered school and made friends. Tim was the name of my first friend, and after meeting on the playground, we quickly realized we had many things in common, secrets we should never tell to the adults around us. His mom was nicer than mine but she never protected him from his step-dad who habitually became violent at the drop of a hat. One time, his step-dad hit me and we ran all the way back to my house, through the rain, at lightening speed.

My mother saw my blackened eye first, and she tried to rush me out of the kitchen before my dad noticed. She wasn't quick enough:
"What the Hell happened to your face?" my dad grumbled at me.
"I got in the way," I mumbled slowly moving to step in front of Tim who was standing in the back of the kitchen.

"In whose way?" he asked, moving closer, lifting my chin, and looking over me to the boy trying to shrink into the wallpaper.

"His dad. He's mean Daddy."

"Does this happen a lot?" he asked gesturing to my face and then to Tim.

"Not to me. I told Mom about Tim but she said it wasn't our business."

My parents argued a lot that night and my dad kept asking her what she was thinking by letting me play at a place like that. He called her irresponsible and asked her why she was living in his house if it wasn't to be a mother to his child. I quit listening after a while though because I wasn't interested in her answers.

My dad never left to drive truck again after that night. He started a different job and as a result life at my house improved drastically. Tim became a member of our family, spending more time with us then away. After one long talk between my dad and his, the amount of bruises he was forced to hide became almost non-existent. Eventually his parents got divorced but life never became "happy" in his home. His mother had a weakness for mean men that never faded away, at least not until it was too late.

We were about twelve years old when we discovered the old, rundown; two-room, stone building that was hidden in the woods on my property. It became a sanctuary for us; a haven, which we could run to and pretend that it was our home; a place where we were safe; a place we belonged. By the time we were sixteen, with the help of my dad, we had it completely restored with windows, doors and a working fireplace. I remember believing then that the darkness was done, for both of us, that we finally had a place where we could both always be safe. I was wrong; the darkness wasn't done with me yet.

In early spring, after a ridiculous fight between us in which I denied him access to our sanctuary, Tim died in a car accident while driving around looking for a place to stay. This happened late Sunday night and when I found out about it on Monday afternoon the mash-up of grief and guilt that I felt ripped my soul apart.

After spending countless hours lost in a haze of emotions, I ran to the only place I could think of—Maybe he would be there, maybe it would all be a joke. I went inside—His sweater still hung where he had forgotten it—but he wasn't there. I lay on the floor, wrapped up in his sweater, breathing in his scent—Adidas cologne, raspberry shampoo, sweat—willing the world to just be silent. My dog found me first; he came in and lay down next to me. I buried my face in his damp fur, grasping him tightly, letting his warmth leech into my body and he just lay there staring into the night, guarding me in my grief. Next, my dad arrived. He

came in and sat down by the door staring at me.

Before that moment, I had never seen my dad cry, but as I watched him watch me I could see the tears slowly slipping from his eyes to disappear again into his beard:

"I never wanted this for you, kid... Losing a friend, losing a love... it haunts and it never stops."

Eventually I walked back to my house with my dad. I wanted him to be angry with me and hold me accountable for my actions. I wanted him to understand that it was my fault that Tim had died, that we had a stupid argument and I refused to let him come stay in our cabin because I was mad:

"Kid, it doesn't work like that. You have to understand, we all have moments we want to take back, but that does not make this your fault..." I walked away from him then, I wasn't ready to hear that yet, nor would I be for many years to come.

In fact, it has taken nearly ten years for me to put my life back together from the events of that day. It took me becoming an alcoholic, going through recovery, surviving multiple instances of domestic abuse, two near-death car accidents, and finally becoming a mother for me to truly see the beauty hidden in the darkness of my life.

I am living proof that lost little children, like Tim and I, do not have to grow up and re-create the broken homes that they came from. I see that in my little boy as he explores the cabin that we built so many years ago. He does not need to view it as a sanctuary, somewhere to be safe and hide like we did. Instead because of his innocence, it is magical, somewhere to explore, a place where he is free to play and be a child. That feeling was denied to me, but I am not some creature from a novel that has to reap havoc on the world around me because I was unloved. No, instead, I have found the beauty that was hidden from me by years of darkness; it is small, trusting, smelling of raspberries, with sapphire eyes, and a little voice that sounds like bells when it calls: "Mommy, come play with me" and when I run to answer him it is not guilt or ghosts that I see lurking behind the trees, but rather it is beautiful memories of a long lost smile on the face of a boy slipping through the trees, a trick of the light, as my son Reid helps me find happiness in this place once again.