

The Call

Tingles run down my skin, skittering across it like a thin layer of water. I'm alerted to the off feeling of something bad heading my way.

It starts with a call in the night.

A little voice says, "Yvonne, can you please talk to my dad? He's drinking again."

Glass breaks with the melodic crash of cymbals in the quiet.

My heart accelerates to a rapid rhythm, thrumming through my body. Another day with the same bullshit. My brother's drunk and terrorizing his house again.

All the fog drops away, and I'm wide awake.

I'm done.

This is the final time for me. I want this to stop, and the time is now; but how? How do I deal with the disappointment and hurt I feel strangling my soul?

I love him. I know how good he can be, but alcohol has a way of stripping away one's humanity. Addiction is a sorry, lonely tyrant and bully, preying on the weak-bodied and ravaging their will.

"I'm on my way. Stay on the phone and talk with me. Are you okay? Where are you now? Where's Grandma?"

Oh yes, my mother lives with him.

Twelve years ago, he lost his wife to a drug overdose. It turned him into a stronger man back then. He became the Superman his children needed.

Why are we here now, you ask?

Well, love, of course.

My brother's love for his children put him in a horrific situation. His eldest son, by another woman, came to stay with him two years ago. This man is everything wrong, evil and nasty, which he showed by undermining my brother's authority inside the home. Yes, he's charismatic and handsome, but beneath that lies a sinister, entitled individual focused only on self.

This man is jealous, overrun with greed and selfishness, and determined to kill all the good out of my brother.

You see, he came to cause chaos.

He came to kill his father.

You can't stop evil, but you must face it, never exposing your back lest you be attacked. My brother lowered all his shields and allowed the monster inside.

At first, nothing happened.

Six months later, like a switch, things changed.

The monster showed himself.

He demanded money.

He demanded respect.

And in the end, he demanded flesh.

The attack came out of nowhere. One minute, my brother was on the toilet...yup, I said that.

The next, the monster was attacking his own father. Eye to eye, so my brother felt everything aimed his way. All the anger and sickness shining bright in the monster's eyes.

My brother gazed at his own death.

The monster beat him down, and my brother, now an old man, could not and would not fight back.

This is who my brother is today: a closet alcoholic, terrorizing the innocents because he can't face his reality.

His own flesh and blood sought to end his life. There's no denying that.

The aftereffects are a rage locked inside his chest and fury stuffed inside his soul. A hurt so bad it's trickling out and burrowing inside the bottle of Jim Beam.

I pull up to a house lit up and humming with fear, anger, and hopelessness.

It's time for confrontation.

My brother wrenches the door open as my feet touch the stoop.

"Why are you here?"

I walk past him into the home, silence hanging heavy in the room.

"Where is my mother?"

It's all I can say. My eyes fall on glass glittering on the floor; juice spattered across the table.

My brother stands, breath wheezing inside a chest riddled with COPD, in the silhouette of the fractured light from the lamp.

"You know why I'm here."

My feet take me into the kitchen, where the kids and my mother sit with red down-cast eyes.

Any fool can see the fear. It's so tangible, like humidity hanging in the air, wrapped around everyone but him.

And now me.

"I came for them. Go pack a bag," I toss over my shoulder. "We're leaving."

To my brother, I say, "Get your ass together. You need counseling and rehab."

"FUCK YOU! I don't need you telling me what to do in my own house."

Derrick, my brother, stands six-two, one hundred eighty-five pounds. He pulls his shoulders back and glares at me.

"Too bad. Move your ass out of my way and go sleep it off. They're coming with me."

When faced with a drunk, you never show fear. Stand your ground and PUSH.

Gina and DJ rush past me, a bag rolling behind them, focused on the front door. Their faces are streaked, eyes red. With determined steps, they leave and close the door with a soft click.

"Mom, are you okay?"

My hands feel the cold of her skin as I tug her up to me.

"Is this your bag? I got it. Go on out to the car."

Derrick sits down with a thud in his chair, eyes filled with tears, lips trembling on a sob.

I push the door open, my head turned toward Derrick.

"You need help."

The slick card with raised letters slides from my hand onto the table. The counselor's name is prominent:

Althea Williams
Trauma & PTSD Services

The door closes.

Derrick sits alone.

Lonely, shamed, and broken by love.