

Celine DeSaix

CREA 178

Word Count: 1,339

The Monster Was Never Under My Bed

Do you know how to spot a monster when he looks like a man? When he covers his bloody claws by keeping his hands in his pockets. When he hides his collection of bones and souls until you've already signed a lease and moved in.

I didn't know he was a monster until it was already too late. Until I had left my home behind me and consigned myself to a life locked away in an apartment with him. Two bedrooms, a kitchen, a bath. No breathing room.

He was almost silent at first. I could trick myself into thinking I was living alone unless it was dinner time. I would sit in my room, on my bed shoved away into the corner and away from any light that dared peek in. My arms wrapped around my legs, the blanket my mother made pulled around my shoulders. The barest creak of the floorboards would sound when he entered the kitchen. The sounds and smells of his cooking drifted through the gap between the floor and my door. The faint rush of water into a pot. The click of the stove igniting. Garlic and herbs and pasta. Blood red sauce.

I sat school girl still, sucking saltines until soggy enough to swallow. Afraid of what might happen if I crunched them between my teeth.

I grew thin living with the monster. I watched my collar bones shift beneath translucent skin. The delicate joints of my wrists protruding. My waist shrinking week by week. People

winked, conspiratorially, and asked what was my secret. I could barely stand without getting dizzy.

I lived in a gray room with one bed, one desk, one chair and one window with the shades always drawn. I didn't decorate - no posters or pennants or pictures. I deserved blank walls. Plain sheets and drab bedspreads, except for the blanket my mother made which laid on top. Knitted and colorful. As the days went by it became harder and harder to look at, the yarn too bright and each stitch a painful reminder of what I turned my back on.

I told her that I'd be fine. That she didn't have to worry about me. That I didn't need her anymore.

I hid the blanket in a box, tucked far underneath my bed.

He started speaking to me at some point, it's hard to remember when. Sometimes I heard my father's voice - my young, foolish father from when I was five years old and he was thirty and still not settled down. Boisterous. Loud. Stupid. Sometimes it was my brother's. Sometimes an ex-boyfriend.

"Don't cook fish, I hate the way it smells."

The monster controlled my meals.

"Don't play that song, I hate the way it sounds."

I could hear his music through the thin walls. The vibrations nestled under my skin.

"You have bags under your eyes. You would sleep better in my bed."

Those nights held the most agony for me. He grinned with his many sharp teeth. He loomed in my doorway until I had to say yes. I laid on my side, straight and stiff and pinning my arm underneath myself until it became numb. My nose was squished against the wall as I faced

away from him, trying to get far away in a twin-sized bed. His breath was hot and sticky against my neck. I didn't sleep at all. I didn't know how to say no.

I waited for the minutes to tick by. One second at a time. I lived like a bomb was counting down. I prayed for it to reach zero.

The monster, with his matted fur and cracked lips and rancid breath, was amused by how I clung to anything shaped like kindness.

A church.

A boy.

A girl.

I never invited anyone over. How could I? I lived in a void. There was nothing, I had nothing, except for the shell of myself, and the monster. I sought refuge in anyone or anything that could provide it. I slept on couches and floors, in clothes that didn't belong to me.

But how long can you take people looking at you with pity? With big eyes and worried brows and an "*oh, you poor thing*" waiting to break out of their throats. I didn't even have to tell anyone that I lived with a monster. It was like I was marked. They all saw it. They all tried to help but this bomb was strapped to *my* chest. My burden to bare.

I stopped going to church.

I ignored the boy.

I pushed away the girl.

Too stubborn, too stuck, I pretended that the monster was my friend. If I closed my eyes and held my breath I could almost believe it too. I ate what he fed me without tasting it. I drank

whatever he poured in my glass without questioning it. I swayed to the music he liked, too weary to dance.

There wasn't much time left. The days dwindled. The bomb ticked, and ticked, and ticked.

I was fading, becoming smaller and smaller. There was never enough warmth in my body. I buried myself in thick layers - leggings and wool socks under jeans, shirts and hoodies under sweaters. I shivered under my sheets and comforter.

I needed something else to keep me warm. I remembered the blanket my mother made me. How could I forget? As I pulled it out of its hiding place. The warmth radiated as I wrapped it around myself once more. I knew something must be done.

I kept a lighter. I could buy gasoline.

Do you know how to start a fire? How to burn a monster alive? I didn't until I tried it myself.

I was exhausted carrying the cans from the gas station down the street. My muscles were weak, my lungs could never hold enough air. I stopped in the stairwell of my apartment complex to catch my breath, the cans not quite hidden in big plastic bags, stayed at my feet. No one saw, no one cared. I was just a girl in an empty stairwell planning arson.

I stored the cans under my bed, behind a box of baggy clothes and a box of textbooks I no longer needed.

I waited to regain my strength for days. I slept through classes and exams, ignored calls from friends. When I couldn't get out of bed I ran through my plan over and over, even watching myself start the fire in my dreams.

I just needed one day without weakness.

But my soul was snatched from my body, my dignity and my pride waned. It felt impossible to stand.

One night the monster stalked past my door, footsteps heavy with delight. My heart pounding in his hand. I felt a single scratch from a claw and I screamed.

“Your guilt and shame is syrupy sweet.” He whispered through the door. He licked that claw clean. “I think I’ll let your heart soak in it a little while longer.”

He stomped off to bed and slammed the door. I couldn’t stop shaking. My eyes were blurry with tears.

I cloaked myself in the blanket my mother made me, running my nervous fingers over the bands of color until I was calm. I waited and waited until I was sure the monster was asleep. His snores filled the place, filled my head. I couldn’t think, I couldn’t plan. I had to act.

I scattered books and papers round the living room. I poured gasoline over wood and carpet. I splashed it on the walls. I drenched everything I could.

I walked in bare feet, splashing in the puddles. The lighter flickered in my hand. The blanket dragging behind me, sopping wet.

I pulled my blanket around myself, tight, as I crept into his room. I saw my heart beating next to him as he slept. I heard it’s loud, pathetic drumming. I doused everything in gasoline.

The monster had his crimson eyes open, wide and panicked, as I dropped the lighter. Our screams were engulfed by the roaring flames. The blanket my mother made me cloaking me in fire and pain.

I am a burn victim of holy fire. I eradicated the monster. I saved myself and I have the scars to prove it.