

Beaten but Not Broken

"Bam! Bam! Smack!" are the sounds of my father's hands slamming and slapping my fragile body. It's a Saturday night; I was already expecting it. This is specifically the night when my dad is off work, but instead of spending quality time with his loved ones, he decides to drink himself so drunk that he would rather give my mom, my 2 brothers, and me bruises and injuries. It's been going on for 4 ½ years, but it's gotten far worse since my dad was fired from his railroad job. Now, he works at a local fishing shop, but it's definitely not a lot, says the dirty, single wide trailer and the rusted car that breaks down every other week in the front yard.

I hopped off of the morning bus rather sore on Monday morning. Most of my bruises were hidden by my shirt, but the shirt doesn't hide my pain. "Splat! Splat! Splat!" I felt some kind of liquid hitting my neck. It smelled like... roses, maybe? The fragrance was rather pleasant, but it was definitely overused.

"Um, I think you could use a little of this, sweetie! You smell like you haven't showered in days!" It was Breanna Thrift, the starting point guard for our high school basketball team. The truth is, I've always wanted that spot: to handle the ball with perfection and make incredible passes, but I can't because of Breanna Thrift. I gave her a death glare and simply walked away. She's the reason I have a crappy life (besides my father). She bullies me because of my lack of wealth and because I sit the bench. She and her friends chuckled and headed in the opposite direction with their noses held high.

The rest of my day went by as usual: sat alone at lunch, shot at a basketball goal by myself at P.E., and barely spoke a word all day. I've gotten used to it, actually. I'd definitely

EM

6th

RESA 16

rather be bullied by attention-seeking teenagers than be battered by my own father. Wow, those are my choices. That's the kind of world I live in.

"Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh." I love that sound of the basketball gliding over the top of the rim and sliding through the net, yet my ball doesn't do that. It's not because I have a bad shot. No, my shot is pretty decent. It was because there was no net on the goal in my yard. It was just a rusted rim and a dirty backboard. It doesn't help that my ball is also half-way flat. I wish we had a new one, but I wouldn't dare to ask my father. Saturday nights are enough for me!

It was another Saturday night, and my father was more drunk than I've ever seen him. I'm pretty sure he drank more than 4 cases of beer. He beat us worse than he ever had before. We all had black eyes and bruises on all parts of the body. Our faces were flushed from the countless slaps from his callused hands. He shoved us on the floor and kicked us with all the anger he had in him. He did this numerous times. We tried to limit our wails because he would shove us down once again, but sometimes, we couldn't help it. After he got so drunk, he collapsed into a deep sleep. We were so relieved that words couldn't describe it.

"I'm... so... sorry... you kids... have to... live like this!" cried my mother. She was sobbing uncontrollably on the floor for her helpless children.

"It's... not your... fault, Mom," I winced in pain as I spoke with my stiff jaw. "We will get through it. We... always have." She nodded; she wasn't convinced, but it relieved her a tad. Her sobbing lowered to short, stifled cries. I couldn't do this anymore. I had to escape this.

I took most of the clothes I owned. It wasn't a lot, but it was enough. I packed deodorant and a pair of tennis shoes. Lastly, I took the picture of my family together happily before my dad became an alcoholic out of my sock drawer. I stuffed it all in a large, tan duffel bag and sneaked

in the hallway. This would be easy, running away. My father was still sleeping from the night before and my mother was cleaning in the kitchen. I hate to abandon my brothers and mom, but I have to do what I have to do. Who knows; maybe they could follow in my footsteps. I slumped to the front door sneakily and opened the door, but I saw someone unexpected.

"Hey, girl! I've seen ya working at P.E. and at practice. You've got some real potential! I was wonderin' if you'd wanna have some extra practice with me." claimed Coach Jacobson, my basketball coach. I was really astonished. I thought no one noticed me. That's why I was running away, but if Coach really thought I had potential, why would I? On the other hand, this would mean more brutal beatings. There would be more scars, more bruises, and more soreness, but I could possibly play in my games. That means maybe, just maybe, Breanna would quit riding my butt about it. I still just didn't know if I could handle any more beatings just for a chance to play in my games. I just had to make the choice: should I stay or should I go? I stood there thinking for what felt like hours until I made my decision. I loved the game that much; I chose to go with Coach. I threw down my duffel bag and told Coach I had to ask for permission from my mom first, but I would like to go. Mom agreed when I asked, and we were off.

"Good, good! Your handles are awesome! Your shot has improved so much! Your defense is phenomenal! Kid, I'm gonna start you in the championship over Thrift on Saturday!" I was astonished. We've had practices like this for the last 2 months, but I never thought I had improved that much. I was going to start over Breanna Thrift. The girl who has bullied my whole life would fill my shoes as a benchwarmer.

There were 2 minutes left in the game. I was still in, really the only reason we were up by 2. I had 27 points so far, an astounding difference than 0 points and sitting the bench the whole

EM

6th

RESA 16

game. Still, the game wasn't over. We kept the score tight until there were 18 seconds left on the clock. One of my teammates didn't cover her man, and her man shot a 3-pointer right over the rim. We were down by 1 point with 10 seconds left. We took the ball down the floor, and Coach Jacobson called a time-out. She drew up a play that would give me a wide open shot on the free-throw line. Once our 30 second time-out was over, we ran the play with 6 seconds left on the clock. I got the ball, shot, and missed. The game was over. Our season was over. I'm the reason that we lost.

"Booooo! You suck! You can't shoot to save your life!" yelled a voice in the crowd. There was my dad, drunk. Of course, it's a Saturday night. After coming out of the locker room for a post-game talk and the awards ceremony, my dad snatched my by the ear and took me home. Then, he beat me.

I was sobbing, and I'm not a sober. "Coach, I can't do this anymore!" I cried hysterically in his office. "I have to get away from him! I need a way out! I need help!" I told him about everything: the beatings and the alcoholism. He smiled at me. He knew something that I didn't.

"I have scheduled you a try-out at Georgia Southern University for basketball. The coaches have already seen you and wanna offer you a full ride there. They say they need someone like you! C'mon, you can do it! You can get away from your dad!" declared Coach. I sat there thinking for a long time. Georgia Southern was in Statesboro, a couple hours from my hometown. There would be no more beatings for the rest of my life. I would have four years at the college by myself. I could get a good education, get a job, and be a successful person, but

EM

6th

RESA 16

could I leave my family like that? Could I survive four years alone, no one but myself to push my limits? I think I could.

"Okay, I'll go." I responded with a shy smile.

There were 8 seconds left in the game. It was the championship, my last collegiate game. My coach called a time-out. He drew up a play that was exactly the one my coach drew up in my senior championship in high school. We got out of the time-out and ran the play. I got the ball, and I shot. The ball went right through the net and made that swishing sound I love. That was it; we won the game. My team went and tackled me as if we were playing football. After freeing myself from my teammates, I looked up in the crowd, and I saw him. There he was. It was my dad.