Anthony Berru

The Spot

The spot was always there for the three of us. Sam, Tim, and I were happy to share the spot through good times and bad times. We found it when we were playing hide and seek in the house. Inside the hall closet and behind the coats, there was virtually an entire room. All three of us could stand side by side and stretch our arms and barely touch the walls. There was a small lamp in the closet that we plugged in so we could see better in there. The area looked like it was supposed to be a room, but whoever built the house decided to change it at the last minute to a large closet.

“Should we tell mom and dad what we found?” Sam asked, holding her teddy bear.

“They’ll want to fill the space with boxes, let’s keep it to ourselves,” Tim said.

I, being eight and the oldest, had to decide whether we keep the spot or tell. “We’ll keep this as our spot,” I said. A place we could go that was all three of ours that no one knew about. We decorated the room with pictures we drew, a box with our favorite toys, blankets, and pillows. That spot was a gateway to another world where nothing else existed. When our parents fought, I’d grab Tim and Sam and take them to our spot. The spot was in an area that we couldn’t hear the screaming so we would play in there and fall asleep on the floor. I’d tuck them in, make sure Sam had her teddy, and wait till the screaming stopped or they fell asleep, whichever came first, before I succumbed to sleep.

I tried to protect my siblings as much as possible from the tumultuous parental relationship. If I felt there would be conflict I would try to have them stay at their friends on the weekends. But most of our time was spent in there. The spot became a sort of safety blanket for us. When we were scared, we would hide in there. When we did good in school, we would hang our grades on the wall. Anything that would make us happy found its way onto the walls in our spot.

After I graduated, my parents forced me out of the house. I wasn’t able to protect Sam and Tim, anymore. Luckily, I had gotten into a college close to the house so we could see each other as often as possible. But sometimes, the seeing each other isn’t enough. I watched as Tim went from a jovial teen to self-destructive and dark. I tried to get him to talk about things but he kept everything bottled up. One day, he was happier than I had seen him in a long time. He was talking, joking, and laughing with me. I thought he had finally gotten back to his old self, and I was happy to be there with him. The next day, Sam called me, Tim had killed himself.

All of his friends were at the funeral, talking about him and laughing about the things he did. They told me he always looked up to me and wanted to be like me. My parents came up to me and asked if I had seen Samantha, they didn’t know she liked being called Sam, anywhere. I told them I didn’t, but I knew where she was. When I was able to, I snuck away from the party and went upstairs. I crawled under the coats in the closet and found Sam lying on the blankets, squeezing her teddy. I crawled next to her and hugged her. We cried for what felt like several hours. When it felt like we had cried everything out, we finally talked.

“Are you ok?” I asked.

“I wish he would have talked to me before,” she said.

“He did talk to me, but he didn’t say anything about it. He was laughing and joking with me,” I told her.

“He was always trying to be strong for you. He wanted you to know he could protect me,” Sam said.

“But he didn’t need to. It was my job, not his. I was the adult, you were the kids,” I was so angry at that moment, I just let it all out. “And that wasn’t even how it was supposed to be, our parents were supposed to be the adults, not us. We were supposed to live like kids, playing and having fun. Not hiding out in a room, praying for the fighting to end, hoping they don’t find our spot and never allow us in there again. We shouldn’t have been made to fear for our safety every night.”

“They almost found our spot a few months ago,” Sam admitted to me. I was shocked, neither of them told me this. “Dad was yelling at Tim and I began walking toward the closet. Dad noticed and grabbed my arm, Tim shoved dad and they began wrestling on the ground. I screamed for them to stop but they wouldn’t. Tim got on top of dad, hit him, and ran. He stayed at his friend’s for a few nights before coming back. That was when I noticed the smell.”

“What smell?” I asked.

“He began smelling like alcohol, all the time,” she continued. “It didn’t matter what time of day. He even stopped going to the spot when they began fighting. He would just sit in his room and drink until he heard enough and he went downstairs and started yelling, too. It would be too much for me so I would hide in here.”

It hurt me to hear they had gone through so much after I was kicked out. They were my family, and they were torn apart by what was supposed to be our parents. I looked around our spot. I looked at all the pictures we had hung over the years, the tests we had taken, the books we had read. I thought about all the nights we had spent in that spot, all the laughing, all the crying, all the dreaming of growing up and leaving that world behind. I looked at Sam, she was latching on to her teddy. She was still the baby sister I had protected when I was barely old enough to take care of myself. But now I was older, and I wasn’t going to let anything else happen to my family. I sat up and pulled all the papers from the walls and put them in our old toy box. I grabbed Sam’s hand and we crawled out of the closet. We stopped at her room long enough to grab her things as we walked out the front door. Our parents tried to stop us, but I glared at them, daring them to try. Neither of them tried.

The first few months after storming out were hard, but we managed to find a small place of our own. We set up a small area in our living room full of old pictures, tests, a small toy box with a teddy sitting on top, and a blanket and pillow. When we had a hard day at school or work; we would come home and go to that area. We would look at our old pictures, all the little things our teachers wrote to us, or just lay there with the teddy. When we had good days, we would go to the spot and tell each other what good happened. Our spot may have started as our safe zone, but it became so much more.