

The Darkness Within

By Scribblesinink

Paul upended the basket onto the kitchen table and sorted through the laundry. Socks with socks, towels folded in three, and—he froze, his hands stilling in the process of smoothing out the shirt. He'd forgotten it was in this batch. This was the shirt he'd been wearing when—.

He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to banish the memories. It didn't work. Opening his eyes again, he looked back down at his hands, curled into fists, tan against the white cotton.

A wifebeater, that's what they called this style, wasn't it?

He huffed a humorless laugh at his own expense. Never had something been so aptly named. 'Cause that was what he was now, right? A wife beater? And never mind that he and Rebecca hadn't been married. That was beside the point.

Battered women, abusive men.... You read about them in newspaper reports, or in articles in magazines in the doctor's office. You never expected to experience that kind of thing first hand. Paul certainly hadn't expected to ever be the one meting it out.

Even after it was over, Rebecca had still been afraid of him. Wary, as if she didn't know what he'd do when they said their goodbyes. It had been obvious in the awkward way she held herself, the sideways glances she gave him. And Alva and Evelyn might be better at hiding it, but Paul was convinced they looked at him differently as well.

He certainly did, every morning, in the mirror.

And maybe they'd all told him that it wasn't his fault, that he hadn't been himself. Assured him he'd been possessed, or under the influence of some bad spirit, or something. But that was just something people said to make you feel better. Paul knew it for the lie it was. He remembered every minute, every second he'd spent in the house in Saugerties. Remembered the satisfaction it gave him every time Rebecca flinched; the power rush after he'd chucked Evelyn in the basement; the sweet taste of their fear....

He remembered how *good* it had felt.

Pulling his thoughts away from the memories, he realized he'd crumpled the shirt into a ball in his hands, his fingers clenched so tightly they hurt. He forced himself to relax. No matter what anyone said, he'd seen his dark side, and he hadn't liked it very much.

Taking the balled-up wifebeater into the kitchen, he chucked it in the trash; he'd be wearing T-shirts from now on.

Somehow, he didn't believe that'd keep the darkness at bay.

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