

## There Is A Man Living In My Closet written by u/Capt\_Norrys

Looking back upon the last few months of my life, I now feel a peculiar clarity upon the once foggy and suspicious events which have suspended my life for their allotted time. The cause of my suffering is now evident beyond all reasonable doubt. There is a man living in my closet, of that I am certain.

Six months ago, at the dawn of September, I had finally moved away from the safe nest of my mother into my own apartment in a small town just off the eastern sea of North Carolina. Befitting of the small town, my apartment was a quaint place, consisting of only three small rooms; a kitchen, a bedroom, and a bathroom attached to the bedroom. Money had been tight, and any ambitions of scholarly advancement had been snubbed out by the absurd toll it asked of me. I resigned to focus on my work life until I had acquired a suitable amount of savings to pay off college. As for my job, I had chosen to work at the local library. It was a small and mundane place, hardly ever visited by the locals. In truth, the building stood more as a historical landmark than anything else, for many years ago it was deemed historically important, and the government had barred any change in the building's appearance from that point onward. The town praised it as a pillarstone of the community, yet the few employees who worked there could attest that such sentiments were merely hollow praise.

Speaking of my coworkers, there was naught but four. First and foremost was the head librarian, Esmerelda Grimshaw, whom every man with his head on correctly called Miss. Grimshaw. She was a stern old woman, about age 70, yet I never dared to ask her exact birthdate. She had never bothered to marry, for in her own words her “only love was books” and to that, my coworkers can attest. Her knowledge of literature was deep and vast; one could often find her at the front desk burning through the works of Shakespeare and Orwell. I had a certain sweet spot for what many would consider a mean old crow, perhaps due to her sharing a sweet spot for me. She was the foundation of that library and did well to honor its legacy.

After her was her son, Tony, a bastard on all accounts, who wholly disproved the common theory that all apples fell near their tree. A young chap of 17 years, he spent his time finding new and creative ways to waste time and wreak havoc. I wholly suspected that he had been working at the library due to being unable to hold down any other job, with the upside of his mother keeping an eye on his behavior. Despite his apparent behavioral issues, I found the boy to be quite charming and intelligent, approaching ideas in ways I had never considered, he often held the key to a nuanced perspective, even if he himself did not quite grasp this concept.

Attached to Tony at all times was his girlfriend, Lilly, a more straightforwardly bright young girl. Having some of the best grades of her high school, she stumbled into her job through many long nights of studying at the library. After one particularly long night, Miss Grimshaw had reprimanded her with the

phrase “If you want to stay here all night, why don’t you just keep a set of keys for God’s sake!” Lilly had obviously taken up this offer as it was in no time at all that she had begun working at the library, where she soon after began dating Tony. The two of them could not be more opposite yet together they seemed natural. Lilly was the best employee of the library, being perhaps the only one to consistently find work to do during her shifts.

Finally was Ted, the man who I firmly believe is the cause of my suffering. Ted was a twisted man on all accounts, the type of person to idolize Dahmer and Bundy, the latter of whom he madly believed to be the inspiration for his name. He worked in the library, yet his home was what I assumed to be the local prison. Having been unfit for physical labor, the jail had resigned to send him to the library, a deal which Miss Grimshaw only accepted after she had been handed a generous donation from Ted’s wealthy father and had purchased a low-caliber pistol to store permanently in her front desk. Of his crimes, I am not entirely sure, yet in hushed whispers between Tony and Lilly, I heard all manner of rumors ranging from petty burglary to brutal murder of the first degree. His frame was peculiarly small, standing only about 5’4, and weighing what I can only assume to be under 100 pounds, though I never directly asked. Despite this his presence in a room was rarely unnoticed, and with it came hushed tones and thoughts of immediate evacuation. Even thinking of his odor now makes my stomach churn, he smelled strongly of dead fish and iron, with a third rancid smell unplaceable in my mind. His attire consisted of his prison jumpsuit, which loosely hung over his tiny frame, and a peculiar necklace, colored a freakish red and depicting an unknown symbol that had the faintest resemblance to a fish. Ted rarely worked, yet whenever he did days slogged on, and nobody could ever feel entirely safe, even with Miss Grimshaw keeping a watchful eye, hand always primed to grab her gun.

My first two months living in North Carolina had brought with them a freedom that I hadn’t yet experienced in my lifetime. My journey towards inhabiting this new town was greatly helped by my co-workers, all but one of whom helped me learn the customs of the small town, eventually allowing me to blend myself into its natural ecosystem. In this environment, I was living a thriving and fun life. I had made new acquaintances throughout town and had become favorable to the local university students, which I now planned to attend come the next year. It was at this university I met what would soon become my closest companion: Richard, Dick for short. We had become acquainted through a night of debauchery and alcohol, our bond cemented by sunrise, at which time both of us were in the back of a police cruiser, loudly and oafishly singing “My Heart Will Go On” voices cracking upon every note which could be considered remotely high. The two of us spend a great deal of time together, enjoying our newly found freedom and all the perks of a young adult’s life.

My life looked to be going upwards, and befitting of this trend my apartment had become quite the cozy little place. The walls had become filled with posters defining my interests in music and

literature, a few of which were heavily influenced or altogether put in place by Dick. Particularly the poster of Michael Jackson which hung slightly crooked on my kitchen wall, placed one hazy night while I was passed out at the foot of my bed. Dick had shared this interest with me through a conversation about the King of Pop's ailing health and appearance, remarking how sad the day will be when he draws his last breath. Dick then proceeded to show me concerning and offputting pictures of the popstar, which I remarked looked strikingly similar to Ted. Intrigued by my comment, Dick wrestled all that I had known about Ted that night, eventually turning the conversation onto the local urban legend, the night watchman.

Dick relayed to me the tales he had heard growing up in the town. Tales of a wicked man who had spent upwards of a year living underneath the house of his victim. A victim who he had relentlessly stalked, following them around in public and watching them sleep. Eventually, the night watchman had grown bored and decided to play with his victim by moving household objects around, occasionally stealing the ones he found particularly interesting. The cops upon hearing this, believed none of it to be a reality. That was until they had found such evidence within the house of the nightmarish terror of the night watchman. The case was deemed too gruesome for the public, and the whole matter had been settled privately, leaving the civilians the wonder who the night watchman truly was. Dick then, in a matter which unsettled me deeply, proposed that Ted was the night watchman. Disturbed by this thought, I wholeheartedly disagreed with this horrifying statement. Dick agreed, jesting that he knew Ted wasn't the night watchman, because he was.

The two of us began to laugh and continued the rest of our night without mention of the night watchman. The next day I woke up and went to work, slightly late and hungover. As I walked in Miss Grimshaw asked me why I was late. I evaded telling her the truth, lying that I had simply forgotten to set my alarm, yet in her eyes I could see she didn't believe any of what I was saying. As I was leaving to begin my daily cleaning ritual she told me the good news that Ted was finally done working at the library. I asked why and she simply shrugged, attributing it to him finding another job to do, one more befitting of an inmate. At the time I agreed, but even then I had already known the truth, Ted was out of prison.

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Tony began exhibiting odd behavior following Ted's leaving of the library. More days than not he would come in substantially late, if he bothered to show at all. When he did show his attire was disheveled and his mind unfocused, his evenings of mischief turned to quiet days, where more often than not he would resign himself to a corner of the library and simply stare. On one such night, I asked him what the bother was, and he complained of a failing relationship with Lilly and problems concerning his house, notably that of the drinking water and the chilling breeze that now freely flowed through the house. He then checked his surroundings, as if looking for an intruder, before leaning into me and whispering in a dreadfully hushed tone about feelings of being stalked.

I was taken aback by such a suggestion and commented that in all likelihood, he was not being followed or stalked by anyone, but was rather just feeling paranoid due to stress. He seemed to believe me, thanking me for my words, yet after our conversation, I could not help but wonder if his words had genuine weight to them. For the remaining time of his employment, he and I would share a few other words, and his behavior would only become worse and more frequent.

My work aside, it seemed that every day my small apartment became more like a real home to me. Besides the multitude of posters Dick and I had placed on the walls, filling up nearly every inch of space on the plaster, the rest of my house began to fill itself up with homely items. Kitchen utensils, foodstuffs, and many other miscellaneous items necessary to a true home all naturally worked their way in over time, giving the small place a cozy feel. I worked my best to never allow clutter to take over the place, but by my nature, it eventually worked its way in. My closet in particular was busy enough to put a minimalist into cardiac arrest, with various clothing items, cleaning supplies, and various knick-knacks scattered chaotically around the small interior.

My apartment had been a safe haven for me, until one day, during my routine cleaning Dick had made a chilling observation. He had noted that a CD he had gotten for me was strangely missing and after spending upwards of two hours looking for the thing, we both found nothing. The strangest matter of all was how cherished that CD was to me. It had been the first gift Dick had given to me, and with that status, I kept it safe in my nightstand cupboard, taking care to never misplace it. Dick eventually chalked it up as “One of those things” before we both quit our search in favor of an exploratory night in the town. Upon returning the next night, I once again searched for the thing but never found it. I couldn’t think of it as “One of those things” but my obsession with the search bore no fruit, and I began to think that perhaps it had been stolen by some malicious force. This obsession led to the purchase of a new set of locks on my doors, which I hoped would prevent any further incident.

There was, however a most annoying issue which began to form in my apartment. A mere three months after my move in the water started to taste and smell terribly. I asked my landlord about this and he responded that there was no issue, and if there was it would soon be resolved. His ineptitude and clear lack of care for his tenants made me curse my beloved home, yet my financial situation and sentimental attachment made me cautious of a move, resigning me to simply accepting the oddity.

As November passed and the town became acquainted once again with Christmas cheer and Mariah Carrey, Miss Grimshaw burst through the doors of the library, unusually late and fuming out the ears. She relayed to me that Tony had not only failed to show up to her family’s Thanksgiving party but was flat-out missing from her home. I displayed nervousness for the safety of the boy, and Miss Grimshaw responded, telling me she was far too angry at her son to care about his safety, and that he had

plenty of friends to stay with if he chose to run away. I was still deeply concerned for Tony's safety but did not dare press the furious Miss Grimshaw further.

Upon my next meeting with Lilly, I inquired about Tony and she responded, telling me that the two hadn't been speaking for the past month and that she had no idea where he was or what he was doing. I relayed the information Miss Grimshaw had told me, and she responded with a mundane voice that she was not surprised, as Tony had begun exhibiting erratic behaviors, eventually leading to their breakup. I gave my apologies for the situation and changed the topic to the Christmas season, leading into a nice conversation about holiday cheer and gift-giving. From both accounts of Miss Grimshaw and Lilly, it seemed Tony had gotten into trouble not too atypical for a boy his age, yet my mind could not resist thinking about his statement early into November, shuddering at what implications it left.

Throughout December, my apartment began showing strange behavior. The CD had only been the first of many objects which would be unceremoniously stolen from me in the dead of night. In total, five objects were taken; the aforementioned CD, a pair of headphones, a polo shirt, a bottle of counter cleaner, and the most striking of the bunch, a kitchen knife. Beyond the thievery, which my new locks had failed to protect against, strange notes began appearing throughout my apartment, left in odd places where they were particularly difficult to find. They had bizarre utterings written repeatedly onto them, phrases such as "The Joys of Peace" and "The Freedom of Falling". Their perplexing nature led to me asking the landlord once more. He simply looked at me as if I were crazy and told me that if I were truly worried I should call the police. I did exactly that, and after a quick search, they left without finding any hint of foul play. I hoped they were right, and continued in my life, attempting to find a sense of normalcy once more.

This attempt at finding what I had just a few months prior was stomped out by Dick, who I noticed began to drift further away from me. What was once a daily friendship became a weekly facade, where in Dick kept me at arm's length and left before we could do anything substantial. Our short friendship ended two days before Christmas when the two of us exchanged gifts. I had gotten him a collection of H.P. Lovecraft books, an author I had tried perhaps too hard to get him to read, while he had gotten me a CD, the same CD I had lost in November. As I opened the gift my heart sank, slowly realizing what he had done. I immediately burst out at him, accusing him of stealing the CD only to re-gift it to me. He argued that he had simply gotten another one to replace the one I had lost, but in my anger I rejected his claim and furiously yelled at him, accusing him of stealing from my house and writing those strange notes. He looked at me with a mix of sadness, confusion, and anger, before bursting out that he didn't know anything about notes or other stolen objects, telling me that I was crazy and needed some serious help. On that note, he left, and in the aftermath, I realized he wasn't the likely cause of my suffering, and that I had ruined my only true friendship over nothing.

After my tragic parting with my beloved friend, my days began to blur together into one monolith of monotony and suffering. I can hardly now recollect my last weeks working at the library. My time in there now blurs together, yet in this hazy fog, I cannot help but feel disturbed, as if those days were spent in a demonic ritual, my only protection against the amnesiac state I had taken following the heinous acts. On my final day of work, I entered the library in a fog, only to be snapped to by Miss Grimshaw, whose eyes conveyed a veritable disgust and hatred for me. I knew what was going to come out of her mouth before she said it, and soon my suspicions were confirmed. She fired me, for reasons still partially obscured in my mind, and on that note, I left the library forevermore.

Depressed and disturbed, not desiring to go back to my home just yet, I decided to stop by a local bar for a drink. As I sulked my way towards the place, I heard a voice spring from an alley I was passing by. The voice called to me once more, and I realized who it belonged to. I turned and saw the face of Tony in the alley beside me. He was wearing raggedy, torn clothing, holding a blanket around his shoulders and chest, shivering all the while. We conversed for a short time about his current situation, in which I learned he was now homeless, having been kicked out by Miss Grimshaw, and rejected by all his friends. As he got closer I noticed his skin looked blotchy and leathery, now hanging loosely over his malnourished face. He talked of his problem, most concerning of which was the continuing fear of being stalked. This time I did not offer any reassuring words to the boy, instead looking at him with glassy eyes. As our conversation ended I wished him a recovery from his horrid situation, in response, he looked at me and wished the same thing, claiming that we were in this together. A perplexing statement, considering the full extent of my misery was not known to the boy.

Upon entering the bar I got nothing but frightful glances from the inhabitants. I took my seat at the bar, and those around me noticeably moved away. After finishing my first drink, failing to strike up any meaningful conversation with the bartender, I paid my bill and headed into the bathroom. It was here while looking into the mirror I realized how ill I appeared. My hair had grown out to an unnatural length, being oily and matted throughout. My face was thin and frail, its lines now perpetually conveying misery and dread. My body looked the same way, my clothes hung loosely over my frail and unwashed body, I looked like a skeleton underneath it all. I did my business and left, resigning to return immediately to my home, where those frightful eyes could not reach me.

Crestfallen and with much time to spare, I decided to spend a few days organizing my abode, in hopes of finding the cause of its many oddities. I soon realized that the house had a peculiar way of keeping itself cluttered. Days I would spend cleaning and organizing would be unearthed upon my waking the next day. It wasn't until mid-January that I finally managed to get the place neatly packed up. With no sign of the missing objects, and having found many more strange notes, I was more convinced

now than ever that foul play must be present. I didn't trust the police, so I decided to hold off on informing them until I found something more substantial, a wish that would soon be fulfilled.

It was within my closet that I found the strange trapdoor leading to a tiny room. The door had been hidden with all manner of items, and upon finding it my bones chilled and a tingle crept up my spine. I opened the door to find a small space, barely enough to fit a huddled-up body inside. Lying on the floor in the space, placed in a ritualistic manner, were all the miscellaneous items that were stolen from me, and along with them was a pack of sticky notes and a pen. The walls of the place were filled with the same type of notes scattered through my home, two peculiar ones stuck out, one being a rudimentary map of my apartment with small dots scattered throughout it, and another being what seemed to be a grocery list. The discovery made me frightened, but more so it made me angry.

I backed away from the crawlspace and began ranting and raving, stomping through my home and screaming out threats towards whoever may have been in my home at the time. It made all the sense in the world, if there was one hidden cubby, there very well may have been more. I did the only thing I could think of and threw all my organized mess around, frantically searching for another cubby, one that might've had the perpetrator within it. I knew who was stalking me, it was the night watchman, Ted, he had to be the one behind this terror. I screamed threats toward him as loud as my lungs could muster while continuing my search for further hidden artifacts and rooms.

I was unable to find another such chilling abode before I heard a knock on my door. It was two police officers, sent here due to a complaint by my neighbors. I thought them fools for disturbing my important search, and I flung open the door to relay that to them. Upon viewing me their faces twisted into disgust and fright, and upon asking me what I was doing I told them in a cold and callous tone. They were doubtful of my truth, believing me mad just as they had the first victim of the night watchman. I took them to my closet and revealed to them the frightful cubby, however upon viewing the nightmare they looked at me with apparent concern, their eyes betraying their belief that I was the one responsible.

The two officers eyed me down in between glances at one another, before telling me that they needed to take me in for a psych evaluation. I vehemently refused, and when the officer reached to try to calm me down I smacked his hand away and pushed past them both before they could take me away. I burst through my door to find the whole hall peering through their doors towards me, their horrible, intrusive eyes peering through my body and into my soul. I ran as fast as I could, bolting down the steps ignoring the screams of my neighbors and cops as I went. I made it outside, taking a sharp right down a dingy alleyway, running as fast as I could through the shadowed streets.

I lurked in the darkness for quite a while until I was sure I had lost the police. I crept about, I knew I couldn't return to my apartment, either the police or Ted would be waiting for me when I did, so I decided to find an alleyway where I could make my new home. After much careful creeping about, I did

exactly that. It was a damp, dark place, illuminated by neither sun nor moon, I needed that, I couldn't let them find me. I moved some trash into position to make a suitable bed, obscured beneath the shadows and garbage of the alleyway, and slept, pondering what I was to do next.

My dreams have become a hellish nightmare. Every time I close my eyes I'm back in that apartment, but not where I normally resided, I'm hidden away in that cubby. I hear myself walking about, continuing the life I had just a few months prior. I write notes, some the insane ramblings that push their way into my mind, others warnings to my previous self about his future. Sometimes, I dream of being outside that cubby, lurking about my apartment as my other self sleeps soundly on his bed. I take what I need and leave the warnings where I hope my past self can find them, before resigning once more to my hiding place. There is not a night where I sleep soundly, these insane dreams haunt my rest, reminding me of my suffering, reminding me of the night watchman who lurks ever near.

My waking hours are hardly better. I never move about during the day, I'm entirely nocturnal. I need the cover of darkness to hide me from those who want to take me. I creep about the town, stealing anything that I can use. Houses are easy to break into here, nearly every one has a crawlspace beneath it, a crawlspace I can quietly sneak into and use as an access point for the home. I steal food, clothing, tools, anything that can keep me alive for another day I take as I please. On a few occasions, I've been caught in my acts, leaving the homeowners screaming, terrified at merely viewing my putrid form. So far none has been quick enough to catch me, I'm always able to slink away back into the cover of darkness, back where I belong. I've sustained myself like this for weeks now, leeching off the sane in a desperate plea to save my maddened self, but in my heart, I know the end of my escapades is not far off.

Occasionally I hear of myself from the townfolk. Listening in from an unseen position, I hear rumors of the night watchman, of the cursed beast who roams the town at night. In their assertion they are correct, this torment has turned me into a beast beyond all reason and sanity. Occasionally I see myself, reflected in pools of water in the pale moonlight. In those puddles, I see a true beast, one more horrifying than the worst nightmares of man. For the sanity of man, and the safety of myself, I hide myself, as there is no place safe for a monster such as me.