

The Closet
By
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Patrick glanced up and down the street every five to ten seconds as he mobbed around with his older brother Michael, and Michael's sketchy friend Sean. The two older boys carried beers that they sipped from casually like they were nothing more than cold sodas. Sean flipped off cars as they passed by on the dim street. Michael chugged the rest of his beer, and threw the empty bottle at a rotting shed that shattered it on impact. Sean laughed like a toddler for a few moments before chugging the rest of his beer, and swinging the empty bottle at a passing stop sign. The bottle exploded with a metallic clang that reverberated in the air as the stop sign swung like a pendulum.

"Quit it," Patrick said. He scanned the windows in the cheap apartments across the street, checking for eyes peering through tilted venetian blinds.

"Relax," Michael said. He pointed over to Sean "see we actually like to have fun sometimes. You're the one who wanted to hangout."

"I know, but..."

"No buts," Sean said turning back and breathing his words into Patrick's face with the fresh scent of cheap beer. Michael tapped Sean on his shoulder, and pointed over to a house on the left not much farther down the street.

"Look."

The house sat between two vacant lots. The grass was tall enough to caress Patrick's chest. It was the kind of place rented out for cheap, and never taken care of like a home: dingy siding, broken windows, porch railing dangling off the side. Patrick thought he could even make out the smell of mold on the chilled tips of the breeze.

Michael motioned for them to follow, and began bearing his way through the grass. A small enough child might think it was a very tiny forest. Patrick stood back on the sidewalk, and watched as Michael and Sean ascended the steps.

"Michael please," Patrick said. His hands rested on his knees like he was getting ready to throw up. Michael turned around impatiently.

“Patrick come on. What are you afraid of?”

Patrick looked up and down the street. “What if someone calls the cops?”

Michael looked at him as if he had just asked him how to spell stupid.

“Patrick. We’re white.”

“Well what if we find someone in there?”

Sean grinned, and flipped a switchblade out of his pocket. “Oh don’t you worry,” he said. “If we do find someone I’ll be taking care of it.” Patrick shivered a little. Sean gave him the heebie-jeebies.

Michael pushed Sean’s hand down. “Put that away.” He tried the front door, but it was locked. As he turned he noticed Patrick still standing idle on the sidewalk. “Look either you come adventure, or you walk home. We can’t have you standing out there looking suspicious.”

Patrick calculated how long the fourteen mile walk home would take. Seemed to him not much of a choice. He sighed. “Okay fine, but can we please just tone down the stupid shit?”

The older boys laughed.

“We wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for the stupid shit,” Michael said.

Patrick made his way through the grass, and walked with them to the back. They used their phones as flashlights. Sean peeked over his shoulder back at Patrick trudging along.

“If this house turns out to actually be haunted, and it asks us for a sacrifice. You are our lamb, little one.”

“And who says you wouldn’t be the one voted off the island?” Michael said in jest. “I mean blood is thicker than water right?”

Sean turned back and shined his light on Michael’s back. “It’d probably want both of you actually. Two brothers for the price of one.”

The backdoor turned out to be locked too. Michael tried to give the door a few good rams with his shoulder, but couldn't get a budge. Sean pulled him back out of the way, and took off one of his combat boots. "Outta the way," he said. Then he wound back with the boot, and swung it like a baseball bat. Broken glass spewed across the entry way. Sean reached in through the broken window on the door and unlocked it. "After you," Sean said holding the door open. Michael crunched his way in, before Sean cut in front of Patrick. "Watch your step," he muttered while Patrick hopped from tip toe to tip toe, trying his best not to step on the glass with his thin soled Toms.

Inside it was dark. The faint mold scent Patrick had thought he smelled earlier surrounded them now in big stale clouds. The older boys shone their lights about, searching for anything noteworthy. They were earnest in their efforts. They opened cabinets, rifled through cupboards, even checked underneath the cushions of an old abandoned couch. After looking everywhere else on the main floor Sean walked over to the closet in the hallway by the living room, and held onto the brass handle.

"Never know what you'll find in the closet," Sean said.

"Do you remember that hotel?" Michael asked.

"Oh god," Sean laughed and shined his light over on Patrick who had stood idle in the center of the living room the whole time. "So Michael and I are exploring this old abandoned hotel. Real creepy place. Had this huge hallway with an elevator at the end like 'The Shining.' But so we're walking down this hallway and every single door is shut and locked, except one."

"Which meant we had to go in," Michael said.

"Then inside we go look in the closet, and there are feathers, everywhere."

Michael shined his light up from under his chin. "And, eight decapitated bird heads. Bwahahahaha."

Patrick crinkled up his face. "Gross."

Michael dropped his arms. "Ya know you're lucky you're my brother, and I love you. Cause you really can be a kill joy sometimes."

Sean nodded, and opened the closet without ceremony "Damn. Nothin." He shut the door with a heave, and spat on the ground.

They ransacked through the house this way. Patrick standing by, watching, while Michael and Sean checked abandoned cabinets for treasure and bird heads. Upstairs there were two bedrooms, and a bathroom. Sean scoured the bathroom first, in what Patrick assumed was in hope of forgotten pills. Both bedrooms were bare, but Michael still searched the larger bedroom in a bit of apathetic desperation. He didn't have to find something, but he'd really love to have another story to tell. Michael had always told Patrick about the strange, and always wonderful sounding stories of his adventures. But now that Patrick had finally joined him on one, it didn't seem quite so glamorous. *Some adventure*, he thought.

Sean walked over to the last closet in the smaller bedroom, but Michael told him to wait and turned to Patrick.

"Check the closet," Michael said.

"It's okay, Sean can check it. He seems really at home in them."

"Hey!" Sean yelled as he took a couple steps toward Patrick, but Michael held him at bay with an outstretched arm.

"You haven't looked anywhere," Michael said.

"Well I don't really want to."

"You don't seem to get it. You come to me all the time and complain about feeling alone, but when you finally come out you just hole up and don't participate. Because you think it's 'stupid.' But you still whine, and wonder why people don't ask you to hangout."

Patrick stared down at the floor with slumped shoulders.

"Patrick?"

"I'm sorry. I know; I'm lame, I know. I just don't really like going around abandoned junkie houses looking for old pills and bird heads."

Sean made his way to Patrick in three brisk steps, and grabbed him by the collar. Then dragged him over to the closet. Patrick pulled on his arm trying to drag himself back to his feet and squealed, "Let go! Let go! I'll check the fucking closet, Christ!"

Sean just laughed. “I figured if anyone would feel at home in the closet.” He opened the door and threw Patrick in like a sack of potatoes. Patrick ducked just in time to dodge the empty hang bar. “It’d be Mr. baby boy himself.”

Patrick tried to push on the door, but it wouldn’t budge. He backed up against the opposite wall and rammed into it with his shoulder, but the door opened just a sliver before it fell back shut under Sean’s weight.

“Why don’t you take a moment to look around, and think about how you could be a better friend,” Sean said.

Patrick collected himself and shone the light around. It was a big walk in style closet. All the shelves were clear, and the hang bars were empty save for a few rusted old wire hangers. But in the back of the closet was a door.

The door was dark walnut, and ran floor to ceiling. It had an old fashioned iron knob that was as tall as Patrick’s open palm. All of the other doors in the house had the standard white frame, and cheap brass knobs. But what Patrick saw looked ancient, and out of place.

“Alright very funny, now let him out,” Michael said.

“Give him a few more minutes to really think this one over,” Sean said.

Patrick listened to the struggle through the door. An elbow banged against the wall.

“Fine,” Sean said “but you can’t expect him to learn if he doesn’t suffer.”

“He suffers plenty enough,” Michael said, and opened the door. “Find anything champ?”

Patrick wanted to say no. Wanted to tell them it was empty, and then walk straight out of that stupid house without taking even one look back. But the words all caught in his throat, and before he could think up a good enough response, Michael poked his head inside the closet, and looked around, cutting his light across the dark like a razor.

“Holy shit. Sean, check this out.”

The two older boys pushed their way into the closet, and approached the door like it was a holy thing. Michael reached out for the iron knob.

“Michael please,” Patrick said, but he knew it wouldn’t stop him. Michael was so transfixed by the door he heard nothing except the excited thump of his own heart.

He opened the door to reveal a warmly lit room with two angled walls that came together at a narrow point exactly across from the center of the open door. There was a torch in the corner illuminating a crimson rug with orange and gold trim. When Patrick peeked in from the doorway he could see the other two corners parallel to the door also met at points (each with its own torch) so that the room formed a perfect equilateral triangle. On the center of the wall to their left, about fifteen yards away, hung a mirror in a golden frame about one and a half times Patrick’s size. And looming on the center of the wall to their right was another door, identical to the one they had just opened.

Michael stepped inside. He walked into the center of the room, and spun around a few times. “This is incredible,” he said with a huge mad grin. He laughed, then laughed again even harder. “Michael,” Patrick hissed “get out of there now! It is impossible for that to even be there.” While Michael had been wandering inside, Patrick had been doing the math, and came to a horrible conclusion. It was physically impossible for this room to be here. The side of the house had been flat. The wall that the door was attached to in the closet, also had a window in the bedroom.

Sean was frozen in the doorway staring wide eyed, and mouth open. Patrick figured that some part of his brain understood the impossibility of what was happening, and left him on the fritz. But Michael was either blissfully ignorant, or unimaginably brave in the face of the great unknown. It remains unclear how different those are.

Michael jumped up and down a few times then giggled. “Seems very impossible from in here. Let me tell you.” He turned to examine himself in the mirror, but instead of running his hands through his hair, he crinkled his face in distaste. “Huh, mirror doesn’t reflect.” Then he looked at Patrick, and made little claw motions with his hands while he brandished his teeth. “Or I’m a vampire.”

Sean was squeezing the door frame hard enough to make every vein in his arm bulge.

“That’s not funny Michael. This isn’t the place to fuck around in.”

Michael scoffed, and started toward the next door.

“Both of you are always so serious.” He grabbed the handle. “Never want to go on the real adventures, make real discoveries.” He opened the second door. From his angle at the first door,

Patrick could see another room behind the second door. Another room with the triangle walls, and crimson rug. Michael took a few steps into the second room, and waved back to the first door.

“Weird,” he said. But before he could explain, Patrick saw his eyes go wide as the second door began to swing itself shut. “Wait!” he cried out. He reached for the door, but it was too late. The second door slammed shut, immediately followed by the first. Sean flew back from the door with his arms raised in defense.

“What the fuck!” Sean yelled. Patrick turned his light back to him. Sean was pale as a ghost, and had sweat pouring from every functioning pore. His lips stuttered up and down a few times, making the beginnings of words, but never quite managed to finish more than a single syllable. “I-, Fu-, Gah-, Da-, Sh-.”

Patrick checked that the door was still there. It was. He felt detached. His mind raced for anything that made sense. When Michael opened the door, he had expected a blank wall, or that it’d be locked. It should have been locked, or burned. He grabbed the knob, and felt a slight vibration, like there was a very small electric current running through it. But when he opened it and looked in, it felt more like the mouth of some terrible beast.

“I’m done,” Sean said. He stepped out into the bedroom. Patrick rushed out to follow him.

“Sean,” he called.

Sean swung around to face him. They shone their lights on each other. Sean had the dead set features of a man headed for the nearest whiskey bottle.

“Sean please,” Patrick pleaded. “He would go in for you.”

In two quick steps Sean crossed the room, and nailed Patrick’s left eye with a right hook. Patrick crumpled to the floor, cradling his eye. It was blurry, and would definitely swell.

“Except I would never be so stupid as to go into that hell hole,” Sean said. He walked over to the bedroom door, and paused for just a moment. “I told him not to.” Then made his way down the stairs. Patrick lay on the floor until he heard the bang of the back door.

When Patrick finally managed to pull himself back to his feet, he walked back to the closet, and eyed the room. It was the exact same setup as before, except the walls had swapped. The mirror hung on the right, and the door lurked on his left. Patrick stood at the precipice for long enough

to smoke a cigarette. If he did smoke, he would've lit up the rest of the pack before taking one step in. He thought about calling the police, but figured they wouldn't do anything in time. Besides, if he called about a strange room inside an abandoned house swallowing his brother, they'd just laugh and tell him to lay off the drugs.

Patrick walked inside the room, and turned the light on his phone off. The floor under the rug was tiled, and uneven. The walls were plain white, but glowed with an orange reflection from the flicks of torch light. Patrick looked in the mirror. Michael was right, you didn't see yourself, and even more, it didn't even reflect the same room.

Across the room the next door called. Patrick walked over, and opened it. Inside it was another room, this one exactly the same as the one he was in. He went inside, and spun around searching for any sort of defining element. But there didn't seem to be any. He even tried pulling the mirror off the wall to check for any sort of clue behind, but as he did he heard a swift whoosh, and turned just in time to watch the door slam shut. Just the same as it had on Michael. He shivered at his cold realization. *I didn't hear the first door slam.*

Patrick opened the same door that had let him in from the original room. The room was again the same triangle setup, but opposite then it was when he had originally entered. *No, no, no* he thought. He ran over to the door in what would have been the original room, and opened it. Another room opposite his current. He pulled at his hair, and began hyperventilating. There was plenty of room in the rooms, but he still felt claustrophobic. A scream began welling up inside his chest. His inner machinery was working overtime, but came to a screeching halt when his phone vibrated in his pocket. He pulled it out, and almost cried when he saw it was Michael calling. He answered.

"Michael! Oh my god, Michael there's no way out, what do we do?"

Michael was panting.

"Please tell me you didn't actually come in."

"..."

"Patrick I need to know you're still outside."

"I came in to get you. Sean ran away. I couldn't just leave you."

"God damn it Patrick!

A few tears escaped Patrick's eye.

"I'm sorry."

"..."

"I don't know what to do."

"I don't either, but I'll figure something out. I promise. I'm not going to leave you. Fuck, Patrick look you can't stay still very long. You have to keep moving okay?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Listen, there's something in here. It can open the doors. Just keep moving, I'll find you. Promise."

"Michael what do you mean, it?" But there was no answer. "Michael?" Patrick looked at his phone. No signal. *Shit*, he thought. He glanced at the door in the room, then back at the open door he came from. Michael's words ran through his mind. *Keep moving, it can open doors*. He turned and stepped toward the door in his room, and froze when he saw the handle slowly turning.

Patrick hurled himself toward the open door he came from, and ran as fast as he could. All his hairs stood on end. When he reached the closed door two rooms over he chanced a glance back. A figure in a white silk robe with gold trim, towering seven feet tall, and wielding a scythe whose blade curved longer than Patrick's arm, was gliding towards him like a banshee. A blood red mask with a black line dividing it down the center vertically hovered where its face should be.

Patrick yanked the door open and ran. He bolted through room after room. The doors switching sides at random. No sense, or pattern to be made. The rooms started blurring together so that if it wasn't for the winding trail of open doors bending like a bastard spiral behind him, he might have thought he was running on a treadmill. The figure was gaining on him. It seemed to suck the heat out of the air around it. Sometimes when Patrick peeked back, the room behind him would be dark, like it blew out the torches. But if it did, it didn't stop to do it. He barely had more than a room's distance on it now.

He knew he had to think of something fast. Michael had seen it, but managed to get away long enough to call. His breath was growing ragged, and if they kept the race up much longer, he would be the loser. *Come on, think!* When he ran up to the next door, his heart almost beat through his chest. He had only half a room's lead. He opened the door, and hopped through stopping on the other side. He could see the wraith pull back, preparing to swing. But before it could, he pulled the door closed, and re-opened it.

Empty. The room was empty; the figure was gone. Inside the door was shut, and on the opposite wall. Patrick let out a long breath, and laughed. He flicked off the door. "Fuck you." *And thank you, crazy house.*

Now that he had a moment to catch his breath, Patrick noticed that his legs were quivering. They felt like Jell-O. He reasoned with himself that he must have ran at least a couple miles, but still he hadn't seen anything that resembled an exit. There hadn't even been a room different then the three possibilities. Just the same stupid carpet, and stupid mirror, and stupid doors room after room. He held his hands behind his head as he took some deep breaths. Every time he opened a door he hoped, and in some place deep within him really believed, that he would open the next door to find Michael waiting for him in his room. He would be smiling, excited over the terrible adventure they just had. But Patrick wouldn't mind, because they'd be safe then.

There has to be a better way, he thought. Patrick paced in the center of the room, idly watching another featureless room in the mirror, both doors closed. Running hadn't worked, who knows how many miles he'd run before finding anything, if he even did find something. But his train of thought was broken by one of the doors in the mirror opening. Patrick braced himself, ready to run if the figure made a beeline for the mirror (he wasn't going to take any chances with teleporting mirrors or the like), and gasped when it was Michael.

"Michael!" Patrick yelled at the mirror. But Michael didn't seem to hear him, or if he did he didn't have time to answer as he dashed straight from the door he came through to the other one. As Michael opened the second door Patrick saw the figure come through the first. He swore for just a moment, as it entered, it centered the red mask onto his eyes. Somehow able to see him through mask, mirror, skin, and bone.

Patrick jogged over to one of the closed doors in his room and opened it, then went into that room and opened its door. Two rooms head start if it came through the far door seemed enough for him to be able to get away and reset like he had just now. After opening the two doors he ran back to the room he watched Michael from, and positioned himself by the closed door. The tingle of the handle felt stronger when he gripped the it harder. Then he took two deep breaths, and

started opening and closing the door repeatedly. He'd open it, *door on the right*, close, open, *door on the left*, close, open, again and again.

The minutes crawled by this way. His arms ached, but he kept going. *Please let us go home*, he prayed to a god he didn't believe in. After a while the monotony of the same room opening before him was growing, and he would barely cast a glance in before shutting the door again.

But when he opened the door, and saw its white robe, he ducked just in time. The scythe whirled by so close overhead that it grazed his hair. Patrick almost fell backwards, but caught his balance, and blasted off behind him to the doors he had left open. The figure's scythe had caught deep in the wall, level with Patrick's neck, but didn't even slow down as it pulled it out. His lead left him out of the scythe's range by only a foot.

They ran this way for what felt like several eternities. The figure too close for Patrick to reset it like before. He knew he wouldn't make it much longer this way. But then he opened a door and found something different. He was sprinting inside a long hallway, with torches on either side of the door down on the far end. There were fifty yards left before the door. The figure's cold tingled his sweat stained back. Patrick gathered every last bit of strength he had left, and raced to the room. His will strained his body, demanding more and not receiving enough. His lead had been extended, but not by much. He screamed as he neared the door.

"Michael!"

But he didn't have time to slow down at the end of the hall. So when he reached the door he turned his side, and let the wall stop his momentum. There was a sickening pop, and pain shot all down his left side. Several of his ribs cracked, and his shoulder was dislocated. With his working arm he wrenched the door open.

It was pitch black inside.

Patrick jumped into the darkness, and turned to grab the handle. The figure was right at the edge of the door. It wound back with the scythe, and swung. Patrick fell back as he pulled the door shut. The last thing he saw before the darkness surrounded him was the tip of the scythe piercing through the old wood of the door.

He sat and sobbed in the dark.

"I'm sorry Michael, I'm so sorry," he bawled.

He had nothing left. He waited for the sound of the scythe being pulled out. Waited for the slow turn of the handle, and the red mask with no eyes for Patrick to see his own end in. But there came a light from behind him.

“Patrick?” Michael called into the dark.

“Michael?”

Michael turned his light on, and walked over to him. Patrick cried with relief. In the light above his brothers outstretched hand, there was an empty hang bar.