

The Closet

by Jake Barnes

Her thirteen year old daughter had hung herself in the hallway closet of the old house. Now the closet was empty and unused. The door was locked.

She slept upstairs. Her husband slept in the sun room downstairs. He was a roofer, but he seldom worked. He drank. That was his true occupation. He drank and they watched television together in the early evenings. They seldom spoke anymore. What was there to talk about? What was there to say?

Weekends she spent with her lover, a woman, in a city some miles away. There was a big clinic there. Her lover was a nurse. She had a condo on the bluff above the river.

Then one weekend the bereaved mother called and said she couldn't get away. Something to do with the family business, of which she was now in charge. She called and asked the nurse to drive down to the little town where she lived. You can stay here, meaning the house. "What about Phil?" her friend asked. No problem. Come late and leave early. He would be passed out.

And so that night they slept in the house where the child in her confusion and misery took her own life. The visitor comforted her lover as they lay entwined in bed. Why? The bereaved mother asked the question again and again.

The nurse didn't answer. Her friend refused to accept the obvious. No doubt life had become unbearable for the child. Whispers, smirks, unspeakable cruelties. Kids could be like a pack of dogs.

Early the next morning, the nurse departed. Out of habit she stopped for her coat in front of the door to the hall closet, then

realized her mistake. "Oh!" she said, and put her fingers to her mouth. Her friend gave her a gentle push. Her coat and scarf were on the back of a chair in the living room.

"I gave some of her clothes to Goodwill," said the mother. She took a deep breath. "One of these days I've got to get at the rest." The nurse smiled. She knew her friend would do, it, too. That's what people were like in that part of the country, she thought. They persevered.

