

June 2018

The Backroom

Michael Rodriguez

John Carroll University, mrodriguez20@jcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://collected.jcu.edu/jcr>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rodriguez, Michael (2018) "The Backroom," *The John Carroll Review*: Vol. 71 : Iss. 3 , Article 34.

Available at: <https://collected.jcu.edu/jcr/vol71/iss3/34>

This Short Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Student at Carroll Collected. It has been accepted for inclusion in The John Carroll Review by an authorized editor of Carroll Collected. For more information, please contact connell@jcu.edu.

The Backroom

By: Michael Rodriguez

We have two rules when we go to our family reunion. Don't wander by yourself, especially at night, and never enter the basement. These rules seemed fair, especially when considering the size of my uncle's manor. It wasn't that hard to follow the rules anyway, since I spent all my time outside playing with Bryan. I mean, what else would I want to do... I was twelve.

We used to play all sorts of games, even making up some of our own when we were bored. This time, however, we weren't feeling that inspired. Following the rules of Hide and Seek, we decided that I would be "it". I closed my eyes and began counting to 30, my excitement increasing with every second. As I got to the number four, I heard a loud, wooden slam nearby. I could tell it was the front door. Approaching the number 25, I had already made a list of every possible hiding place I could think of in the house. Announcing the final number, I immediately ran into the house. I had some ideas of where he could be, but I didn't know for sure. The house seemed to go on forever and he could easily switch spots if he wanted to. I walked around for a bit until I heard a thud coming from the other end of the house. When I walked over, I heard it again.

THUMP.

A jolt of adrenaline shot up through my spine as I realized the noise was coming from the basement. I thought it might be Bryan hiding down there thinking I wouldn't break the rule by avoiding it.

To prove my cousin wrong, I creaked open the door to the basement and saw a wooden staircase well lit from the windows. As I walked down the stairs, I was not only looking for Bryan, but also looking for what my uncle could possibly be hiding down there. Well I got my answer. When my feet touched the stone floor, what I saw was an extensive collection of wine.

"*A wine cellar*", I thought to myself. "*This must be why Uncle Robert doesn't want us down here.*" My initial curiosity dwindled, but my journey was far from over. Continuing my search for Bryan, I turned a corner only to find a backroom about the size of a walk-in closet with no door blocking its entrance. As I crept in, I saw that this backroom went to the right about 20 feet when you walk in. No windows were in this backroom, but enough light came from the cellar for me to make out the back wall... and the door.

This wooden door seemed old and worn. It didn't even look like anyone had thought to fix it, with signs of termites all over. I began stepping closer to the door, noticing two padlocks on the door with a giant wooden plank nailed to wall, barricading the door. When I got about 15 feet in front of it, something began to come over me. The hairs on my body stood up. I needed every ounce of will power to move. With every step the feeling of dread and fear seemed to get stronger until I couldn't muster any more strength. The door no longer looked as before, but now more grotesque and covered in what looked like fungus. I tried to turn around, but my feet wouldn't move. The fear had taken over and I had no control of my body. The fear and curiosity of what could be on the other side of that door seemed to be the only thing going through my head.

And that's when I heard...it

I can only describe it as something you would hear in a movie. Something so sinister that it brought absolute fear to every inch of your being. The voice came from every direction almost as if it was in my head and whispered,

"I'M HERE"

I no longer felt fear, but pure terror. I forced my feet out, of desperation, to move as I turned the other way and ran. I only managed to get about halfway to the stairs when I bumped into something and fell to the ground. I looked up and felt a tidal wave of relief as I saw Bryan's hand reaching out to assist me in getting up from the floor. He told me, while struggling to hold his

laughter, that he had been switching hiding spots to tease me until I finally gave up. He said he saw me go into the basement and followed me in to try and trick me. He denied ever making any noise while in the basement, including any whispers. I was so freaked by the experience that I couldn't believe his denial, so my mind tried to rationalize what had happened by blaming the whole thing on Bryan playing a trick on me.

"He won't admit to it", I thought, "He's just trying to keep me scared". With that, I tried to calm myself with these thoughts, as they did make sense. Bryan was always a one to play tricks on me, especially since he was a year older. My fear turned to anger as I began to believe what I was thinking. I told him he needed to be "it" now since I technically found him. He agreed, shrugging it off like it was no big deal to find me. My anger grew, as I desperately wanted to beat him and maybe even get some revenge. He began counting and I bolted out the door. There was only one place I could get both revenge and victory.

As I bolted through the trees, my eyes scanned around me searching for a good hiding place. As I went deeper into the forest, I noticed a bush in the distance.

"Perfect!"

I ran to the bush, sliding behind it as fast as I could. I could partly see through the bush, making it easy to spot Bryan in case he decided to come into the woods. I knew I had won. I had thought that Bryan would either never come into the woods, making me the winner, or he would come into the woods, giving me the opportunity to scare him. I was satisfied with either one. As I waited, I could feel my body tiring out. The adrenaline from the basement had worn off and my body was beginning to feel drowsy. I sat behind that bush for 20 minutes until my eyes could no longer bear their own weight and fell asleep.

When I woke up, the first thing I noticed was the time. It wasn't too dark out, but it was difficult to make things out from far away. That was when I realized I wasn't behind the bush. There was no bush in sight and not even the faintest sign of the house in the distance. I had no idea where I was. My thoughts raced back to the door in the backroom of the basement. I tried to stand up but a sharp pain shot up through my right leg. I didn't want to stay until I could stand again so I decided to crawl in one direction hoping I was heading the right way. To keep me going, I focused on the sound of the leaves crunching under my hands and knees.

Crunch, crunch, crunch... crunch-crunch

I stopped. My heart started pounding. A familiar sense of dread came over me as I turned to the source of the other sound. A dark human-like figure crawled out from behind the tree and before it could do anything else, I turn back and crawled as fast as I could. I don't know how far I went but I could hear the figure patiently stalking behind me. After what seemed like an eternity, my body gave out and I collapsed. I turned over only to see the most horrifying creature I could ever imagine. It was completely naked with skin as pale and shriveled as a corpse. It approached and as it hovered over me, its wicked face was revealed.

And that...face...if you could even call it a face, will forever be engraved in my memory. It had no mouth, just skin where the mouth should have been. The eye sockets were empty, with only darkness coming through. If I looked hard enough though, I could see a faint, green glow emerging from the darkness. A slit was all that consisted of its nose. As it forcibly opened its jaw, an unforgettable voice crept into my head and whispered,

"I KNEW THEY WOULD NEVER FIND YOU HERE"

It raised its left hand to show sharp claws instead of fingernails. Set against the moonlit sky I could see something dripping from the claws, with the smell of tar. The creature then used its other hand to force open my mouth, my worn out body unable to fight back. It then stuck the claws of its right hand to pour the tar-like substance into my mouth. I could feel the tar slide down my tongue and into my throat, blocking any air from coming in or out. I was panicking, thinking only of how I

could get another breath to relieve the pain of suffocation. What already appeared to be a dark night seemed to get even darker as my mind began to cloud. Black spots filled my vision and I blacked out.

I woke up to Bryan shaking me and yelling,
“I found you! I found you!”

A sheer sense of comfort was all that I felt in that moment. I stood up and saw that I was behind the same bush I hid in before and that the house was viewable in the distance. The sky showed signs of impending darkness, but the sun was still present.

“Just a dream,” I sighed under my breath. I embraced Bryan, holding back tears, and even as we walked back towards the house I still couldn’t believe it was all just a dream. We went inside and after a few hours of watching television in the family room, we decided to go to bed. We slept in the same bedroom, as it had two beds and the rest of our family occupied most of the other rooms. As we got into bed, my leg began to itch. I scratched and scratched but couldn’t seem to get rid of it. I got out of bed to turn on the lamp to get a better view of where the itch was coming from.

My heart skipped a beat.

On my calf were the scabs of a stab wound and a slash protruding down from it, almost as if whatever stabbed my leg had been pulling and tugging...or even dragging. I didn’t know what to do so I immediately woke up Bryan and told him everything that had happened, and although he was skeptical at first, he took it seriously as he could see how freaked out I was. He said that we should go down and see the door since it all started with that, and he also hadn’t seen it. We walked out of the bedroom with flashlights and slippers, sneaking through the house and making our way down to the basement. As we walked passed the shelves of wine, I began feeling anxious, not knowing what to expect when we turned that corner into the hallway.

I let Bryan go into the back hallway first and his face went pale. Fear prevented me from entering, but I knew I needed to see it too, so I mustered enough courage to run into the hallway and glance over at the door.

With two locks broken and a splintered plank of wood on the ground, the door laid wide open with only darkness and two faint green lights beyond the threshold.