

# Through The Closet Door

Rick R. Reed



Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

**Amber Quill Press**

[www.amberquill.com](http://www.amberquill.com)

Copyright ©2008 by Rick R. Reed

NOTICE: This eBook is licensed to the original purchaser only. Duplication or distribution to any person via email, floppy disk, network, print out, or any other means is a violation of International copyright law and subjects the violator to severe fines and/or imprisonment. This notice overrides the Adobe Reader permissions which are erroneous. This eBook cannot be legally lent or given to others.

This eBook is displayed using 100% recycled electrons.

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

**CONTENTS**

[Also By Rick R. Reed](#)

[THROUGH THE CLOSET DOOR](#)

[Rick R. Reed](#)

[Amber Quill's Rewards Program](#)

\* \* \* \*

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

THROUGH THE CLOSET DOOR

By

RICK R. REED

\* \* \* \*

Amber Quill Press, LLC

[www.amberquill.com](http://www.amberquill.com)

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

**Also By Rick R. Reed**

Dead End Street

Fugue

High Risk

How I Became Sexually Irresistible

Orientation

Riding The El At Midnight

VGL Male Seeks Same

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## THROUGH THE CLOSET DOOR

### Journal Entry (College)

*I see through a flickering light, faded in time. I see only in this blue light, only in this memory. The figures pass before me, bare shadows in a rumpled room, heavy with the smell of sweat and cigarette smoke. The room is in complete disarray. Bedding thrown back carelessly, clothes strewn on spotted wall-to-wall carpeting ... standard issue for college apartments. A dying pothos plant graces the windowsill, looking out on a dark and moonless light. The room's dim light gives it an appearance of black and white unreality, like something from a movie. Perhaps I can get through this if I pretend I am an actor in a movie, something with a tawdry soundtrack with lots of lewd brass.*

*Light from a computer monitor illuminates me as I remove my clothing. I do not look at the screen, but know there are thumbnail images there of men in various stages of undress and arousal. Knees crack as I struggle out of my jeans, catching my ankle in the folds, doing an embarrassing little hop-skip as I struggle out of them. Sheepish grin toward the bed, where you lie, waiting. There's no way to be graceful, no way to be smooth. Not with lust and nerves conspiring to force my heart to beat out a tribal rhythm. I grope through the darkness to the bed to find you there, already naked, the hair on your chest tracing a line down your stomach and farther south. Nameless. The room is cold. You are warm. I*

Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

*have never seen your face and I have seen it a thousand times.*

*Your hands are ghostly and white as they extend; your face is hidden in shadow. Excitement surges as you pull me toward you. "Come here," you whisper, your voice husky, a growl. I can smell beer and cigarettes on your breath. I feel that same breath on my face as I move closer, feel your hand on the small of my back, urging me near, forcing me down on top of you. There is a swarm of butterflies in my stomach. A tiny voice in my head causes my heart to pound hard and the blood sings in my ears. The voice, the sensible one, tells me to flee, that this is all wrong, that, as a Catholic boy, what follows will bring insurmountable guilt, depression. I shove that voice deep down inside of me where it's muffled, its warnings indistinct.*

*The bed creaks as I allow one knee on the mattress, my body stooped awkwardly as I bring my clean-shaven face down to meet your bearded one. Your mouth seeks mine in the darkness. Tongues duel. Your spit is sour, yet something in me wants more. I suck your tongue, drawing it deep inside me, surrendering. I lean over more, both legs on the bed now and coming down, down, on top of your waiting, supine form. The hair of your chest brushes against mine like bristles, urging me on. For a while, I forget you are a stranger. You become one with all the rest. Corporeal reality ... all that exists ... warmth ... wetness ... darkness and the murmuring of your pleasure. I wrap my arms tight around you. Our bodies merge and meld, become one. Your hands flutter down my back, lower, and a finger gently pushes inside, making me*

Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

*gasp, making my cock twitch. The kiss deepens and becomes something rough and devouring. Suddenly, the embrace turns into a wrestling match and you swing your body effortlessly over mine, pushing me down into the dirty sheets, covering my body like a big, hairy blanket. Your hands grasp me roughly, urgently, finding purchase in the small spaces behind my knees. You push my legs back, farther, farther, until it feels almost as if my knees will touch my ears. I look at you, plaintive, as you rise up above me, between my open and spread thighs. Your fingers have moved deeper inside me, first one, then when that's comfortable, two, three. They are only to be replaced by something thicker and solid, pressing against me, seeking to find a home inside. I close my eyes and bite my lips as you enter with a gasp. The pain rises up and I slow my breathing, trying to quell it. Involuntarily, my hand reaches up to your chest to slow your progress. I whisper, "Wait." I suck in some air once more, trying to quell the alarming pain down there, waiting for it to ebb. Finally, it does and with a small nod and a whimper, I look up at you, and, for the first time, our eyes truly meet in the darkness. I nod. You push in deeper, breaking through the ring of muscle. I imagine the ring opening, surrendering at last. Once inside, your tempo builds and my hands grasp at your thighs and your ass. The pain is gone. I urge you deeper. Squeaking bed springs reach a crescendo. The grimy white walls of this cheap apartment disappear in the overwhelming breath of my passion. You quicken your tempo, faster, faster, until I can imagine your hips moving in a cartoon blur. You cry out,*



Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

*shutting your eyes tight against the waves of pleasure coursing through you. I feel you shudder and buck.*

*Coming. Without even a touch, I feel several hot splashes on my shoulder, my chest, and my stomach. The intensity moves down quickly and we are out of breath. You roll off of me and the cold rushes in once more. You grope in the nightstand drawer for a towel and hand it to me without a word. I long for a smile from you, but you only turn once more to grope on the surface of the nightstand for your Marlboro Reds. You light up, the acrid smell of the match and freshly lit cigarette stinging my nose. I wipe away the cum with the towel, then fling it to the floor to mingle with the heaps of dirty clothes there.*

*The room seems to have grown even colder and I think this is due not to a drop in temperature, but to the absence of your body atop mine. I do not pull the covers over me, as I might do if this were a romantic comedy or a love story, but rise to dress. This is a porno. You lie and watch. I try not to dwell on the grime of the room, noticing instead the drawing table in one corner, a riot of brushes, pastel crayons, papers in different sizes. So, you are some kind of artist. It might have been nice to know, along with your name ... and if I was good enough. I feel nauseous and want to cry, but I don't. I never have. You sit up, offer to drive me home. At least there's a smidgen of grace in you, some kindness.*

*The car smells of cigarettes and its exhaust tells a tale of old age and imminent obsolescence. The heat doesn't work and I burrow down into my shearling coat, pull the hood up over my head, obscuring my face. The engine complains,*

Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

*taking several turns of the key before it finally turns over. I try to find purchase with my feet on a floor littered with fast food wrappers and textbooks. We do not speak. I ask you to drop me off at the library.*

*We drive through the dark autumn night. I stare out the window, taking in the red brick campus buildings as if I'm seeing them for the first time. They have never looked more fascinating. I try to avoid my own face reflected back in the glass of the passenger window, but it's impossible. Part of me wants to laugh at the frowning face I see looking back at me, a lower lip sticking out as if on the verge of tears. But there's no humor here.*

*Only guilt. Only remorse.*

*I get out without speaking, and take my time going inside. The colder air outside the car feels good, fresh. I suck it in, as if this simple act will cleanse me. I think of the paper I have yet to write on The Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgakov. Magical realism. Is there some irony here?*

*"Hey, thanks, man," you grunt from the seat of the stuttering and ticking car. "See you around." You light up another Red, dismissing me.*

*I do not look back. The lights of the library are bright ... it's a clean, well-lighted place and I wonder if I belong here. Resolutely, I shift my backpack more securely over my shoulder and press in through the bank of doors, where hundreds of bright-eyed, preppy collegians swarm around me. And not a single one knows who I am.*

\* \* \* \*

Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

Gregory closes his journal, places it beneath his beach towel, and grasps a handful of pebbles, letting them trickle through his fingers like water. The sun beats down on his back and he knows that he is wearing one of those far-away gazes like in a romance novel. He laughs, but there's no mirth in it, and whispers, "Ain't nothin' romantic about that." His legs, long and lean, are stretched out before him, catching the summer sun, deepening the bronze of his skin. They are a deep golden brown, matching the rest of him. He knows his hair is lighter from the summer's sun, too, a mixture of straw and wheat, needing a trim. His face is stubbly and unshaven, framing full lips and bright blue eyes. Beyond his toes lie the surface of the small lake, greenish-brown and still, its glassy surface betraying not even a ripple on this still, humid August day. The other side of the lake is thick with trees, causing Gregory to think of the darkness and cool that wait on the other side. He could lose himself in that darkness. He could hike into the trees, making himself one with the birds, forest creatures, and insects that live out their whole lives there. He could disappear.

The beach is empty on this Wednesday afternoon. Even so, Gregory takes care to move the journal from its place beneath his towel and to secret it between the pages of *Entertainment Weekly* in his tote bag. He pushes the magazine to the bottom of the bag, piling the baby oil, apples, and water bottle he brought with him on top of it. He looks down and is satisfied: no one would ever guess his secret sexual history lies at the bottom of the bag, like a snake coiled beneath a rock. He stands and stretches his

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

arms above his head, surveying the clear blue sky and feeling the heat of the sun on his face and chest. The day is hot and still, not even a whisper of a breeze. A mosquito buzzes by his ear. The air feels thick around him, and he thinks that drawing it too deeply into his lungs will scar the delicate pink tissue. He laughs again. "Oh, come off it," he whispers to himself, looking around. "Save the creative writing for your journal."

He breathes in deep, heedless, and runs toward the water. Its green chill splashes up over his knees and thighs as he clears the pebble-strewn surface of the lake's bottom near the shore and heads toward the deeper part, where the water is cooler down deep and the bottom is nothing more than a carpet of muck. Diving, the warm water surrounds him, shutting out the blazing day with its relentless, cloudless blue sky and its almost buzzing heat. He swims deeper, legs kicking behind, searching for the chilled depths in the tepid water of the small lake. He opens his eyes and sees the sunlight streaking through the water, illuminating the silt he has stirred up, bits of moss. A fish (a blue gill?) swims by, just out of reach. He pushes himself deeper, heading for the lake's bottom, wishing he could disappear into it, burrow into the soil, become a bottom feeder. Maybe he would like that, down in the dark, free from exposure.

When he can no longer stand it, when it feels as if his lungs are beginning to burn to warn him of an imminent bursting, Gregory turns and scissoring his legs hard to break through the brownish-green surface of the lake. When he splashes through, the heat of the day and the air itself are

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

like gifts, and he gasps, shaking his hair and the water from his eyes. He sidestrokes in toward the beach and then wades in where the water is shallow enough for him to stand. Near the shore, the pebbles on the lake floor sting his feet. He imagines the beach will still be empty, its rocky surface decorated only with his own beach towel and bag and its backdrop of pine trees, but someone else has claimed a spot on the beach and Gregory doesn't know whether he should be happy or sad that the quiet of his day has been shattered by another human being. He accepts that he is capable of feeling both emotions at the same time. Isn't that what most people do?

His neighbor, Jake Gamble, reclines on an old sheet on the beach, his long, dark-brown hair-covered legs stretched out before him. Before Gregory looks up to meet Jake's face, he allows his gaze to linger on those legs, cut and bulging with muscles, a geography of veins decorating their surface. Even though Jake is twenty years older than Gregory, his good looks are timeless. He is one of those men whom time only enhances the solidity and beauty of his features. The deep brown eyes look even more thoughtful and probing with the network of small lines surrounding them, intensified now as he squints to look up at Gregory as he emerges from the water, the brutal sun beating down behind him. Jake's face, with age, is even more chiseled, the lines and planes pleasingly angular. His close-cropped hair and wiry beard are dark and flecked with silver. And the tattoos on both shoulders, tribal symbols, cause Gregory to quicken his steps, lest the interest he's feeling at the moment becomes painfully

obvious in his loose-fitting trunks. Jake's fine, aquiline nose wears a bridge of red across its center, spreading out to each cheek. Even the sunburn makes him look sexy. Jake smiles and waves, and his smile draws Gregory out of the water like a magnet. Jake's shoulders are broad and his solid form fills out the faded and cut-off Levi shorts he wears. Gregory forces himself to draw his gaze away from the way Jake's crotch bulges almost invitingly. *What's wrong with me?* Gregory wonders. *I'm a happily married man.*

Gregory sits next to Jake, extending his arms behind him so he gets the sun. For a reason he doesn't want to probe, he doesn't want to look over at the man sitting beside him, doesn't want to meet his gaze. "Even the water doesn't cool you off in this heat. You just get out and feel more humid, like somebody needs to wring you out."

Jake laughs and his voice is deep, with a velvety rasp. "Well, it's better than staying inside. I have three fans running and all they do is blow around the hot air. I feel like I'm living in a convection oven."

Jake looks over at Gregory and Gregory allows himself a smile. "That's a good one. I know just what you mean. We don't have AC either." Gregory sheathes the water from his legs with his hands. "There are a few cold spots in the lake. The trick is finding one and then treading water." Gregory allows himself another glance at Jake's legs. "No work today?" Gregory is used to having the beach to himself these weekdays ... or maybe sharing it with the few children whose parents' summer cottages dot the landscape surrounding the water. It was one of the things he liked about the place when

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

he and his wife, Rosemary, bought their home two years ago, shortly after they were married. Rosemary said it was like a retreat ... and that was just what Gregory loved about it.

"Nah. This week I'm off Wednesday and Thursday. Don't you know we Budweiser delivery truck drivers work while the world plays and vice versa?" Jake lays back and shields his eyes from the sun with a forearm. Gregory notices the tattooed band of stars that circle his forearm, almost hiding, but not concealing the muscles that, even there, tighten and bunch.

Gregory smiles and lies back, too, closing his eyes against the sun's relentless glare. "And teachers don't lift a finger all summer long." He pauses. "It's common knowledge we get paid too much." He laughs, and then feels self-conscious because Jake doesn't join him. Maybe his salary, meager as it is, is more than Jake makes.

The men are silent for a while. A small breeze kicks up finally, skimming across the surface of the lake. Gregory feels like if he tries really hard, he can feel just a hint of coolness in it. Or maybe that's just his imagination. And maybe it's just his imagination that he can feel Jake lying beside him, close enough that he could reach out and touch him with almost no effort. He imagines casually moving his leg to one side so that it brushes up against Jake, imagines the hard feel of Jake's calves. The thought of touching Jake makes Gregory's throat go dry. He has a fanciful image of the hair on both of their bodies having a magnetic pull toward the other. It's almost a paradox, the way Gregory feels himself relaxing, like a lazy turtle in the sun, and the ramped up pull of the man beside

him. The two feelings war with each other and Gregory isn't sure which one he wants to win. He opens his eyes a slit and allows himself to catch a quick peek at Jake, beside him. *The man is beautiful*, his mind tells him, simply. *And you need to get away*. Gregory shuts his eyes, fearing that Jake will pick up on his glance ... and then his thoughts.

Suddenly, Jake sits up and Gregory notices how the sweat makes his smooth back glisten. He licks his lips, but finds little saliva in his mouth. He can feel Jake's gaze bearing down on him. He rolls over on his stomach and picks up a handful of pebbles, drops them.

Jake shields his eyes from the sun with his hand and leans close. "You're gonna get really burned if you lay there like that much longer. You with your blond hair and creamy skin..." He snickers. "How 'bout you let me put a little lotion on you? Just for protection?"

For just a moment, Gregory allows himself the fantasy of Jake's strong hands on his shoulders, massaging and kneading his flesh, digging into the bunched up muscles, loosening them and untangling them like bunches of knots, freeing him. The thought causes an entirely surprising shiver to course through him.

Gregory rolls over and sits up, brushing his hair out of his eyes and wiping the sweat from his brow with the bottom of his towel. There is such a strong urge to allow the man to rub oil on him and such a pull in the opposite direction. He is, after all, a happily married man. The conflict makes him feel a little nauseous.



Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

"That'd be great, but, um, I need to be getting back. I need to get started on dinner. I forgot to put the trout out to thaw ... and I need to get down to the market to pick up some corn." Without meeting Jake's eyes, Gregory gathers up his towel and bag and hurries away.

\* \* \* \*

An unusual chill in the air this late August night. Bright lights, the murmur of voices in a crowd.

"Damn. I wish I had our nightstand here."

Gregory laughs, cocking his head and looking quizzically at his wife. She is so small and cute, pixyish his mother called her, with her short auburn hair and button nose. "Why? What on earth would you want to do with a nightstand here?"

Rosemary grabs Gregory's chin, turning his face from side to side, as if he should comprehend what she's getting at.

"Because that's where I left the tickets, silly."

Gregory feels suddenly excluded from the bright lights and the anticipatory crowd. He searches his wife's hazel eyes for some sign of a joke. But Rosemary, as always, is serious. She frowns. "Disappointed?" She looks off at the other people gathered around outside the theater, eager to get inside and see George Winston's performance, a performance the two of them have been anticipating for weeks.

"I've been waiting all summer." Gregory feels the excitement he had felt only moments ago shrivel up inside him. He had imagined them in their orchestra seats, the ones they had paid too much for, blissfully awaiting Winston's first plinking of his grand piano keys.

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

"Maybe we can run back to the lake and get them." Even Rosemary, Gregory can tell, doesn't really believe there's time. But Rosemary is all about finding solutions to problems and Rosemary wouldn't be Rosemary if she didn't offer at least one, no matter how implausible.

Gregory shoves his hands deep into the pockets of his denim jacket and stares down to suddenly notice how the sidewalk underneath them has a jagged crack running through it. "It's an hour's drive."

Rosemary slides her arm around her husband's waist. "Hey, I'll make it up to you. Let's get a bottle of good wine, spend the evening at home. We've got a whole shitload of George Winston CDs at home. We can have our own concert," she offers. A tangerine moon, full, rises on the horizon. She looks up at the orb, then back at him, an impish grin playing about her freckled features. "Maybe we can take a moonlight swim."

Gregory gazes back longingly once more at the theater entrance and the lights on the marquee. "Well, it better be an awfully good bottle of wine."

\* \* \* \*

Rosemary cracks open the bottle of Pinot Noir as soon as she comes out of the liquor store. Gregory is still getting used to the idea that a good bottle of wine can come with a screw-on cap. On the seat between them, they take turns swigging from the bottle. The wine feels warm, cloying on his tongue and Gregory finds himself relaxing. What can he do but let go of his disappointment? Rosemary watches the road, taking a

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

sip only every now and then, eyes never leaving the asphalt unrolling beneath the Prius.

"You're too careful," Gregory whispers. In spite of the fact that she's drinking *and* driving, he knows his wife's mind and how she's on the alert for the deep blue sedans that mark the patrol cars of their area.

"What?"

"Nothing."

His friends at North Elementary school had always envied him. Rosemary was beautiful, her hair the color of whiskey, with a curvaceous body that didn't seem to belong to the doll-like face above it. Rosemary was sin and redemption all wrapped up in one delicate package. She was the kind of woman men brought home to meet their mothers and all the while tried to get her away, slipping perhaps into a bathroom upstairs for a quick fuck, unbeknownst to Mom. She was tiny, but all woman. Most of the other men at school thought Gregory was one lucky man and that the two newlywed twenty-somethings must surely spend all their spare time in bed. Just looking at her conjured up thoughts of the wild side she must certainly be hiding.

But she's an accountant. "A good provider," his mother had said. His mother had never thought teaching elementary school was good enough for her only son, and Gregory thought she comforted herself in dark, disappointed moments that at least he had found a mate with whom he could make a decent living.

Outside Gregory's window, the hills of western Pennsylvania, silver in the moonlight, rush by.

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

Back at the lake, the air is still, their brick cottage a dark rectangle under the maples. Rosemary swigs wine and leans over to kiss him, her movements already a little unsteady. Even approaching drunkenness looks cute on his wife. Gregory parts his lips, closes his eyes and strokes the hair at the nape of his wife's neck. It is like the down of a baby duck. When he feels her begin to pull away, he places his hand on her shoulders and the other hand on the car door handle.

"Last one in..." Gregory whispers, leaving Rosemary bewildered and still clutching for her husband in the car's darkness.

"Hey wait..."

Gregory jumps from the car. Ignoring the chill, he flings off his jacket, pauses to hop out of his jeans and pull his black T-shirt over his head. The night air is freezing. Gregory pauses to rub his arms, wondering why he wants to continue with this inane idea of skinny-dipping. He knows why, but he can ponder that later, perhaps on the pages of his journal. "Come on! You always say the water's fine." Dashing down the fieldstone path to the boat pier, Gregory dives in without looking back.

The water is surprisingly warm in contrast to the chilly night air and the moon spreads out like butter on its surface, waiting to swallow him up. After a while, Gregory turns on his back. Rosemary waits at the water's edge, still wearing her jeans and emerald green sweater. Her arms are folded across her chest. Even in the dark, he can tell she's affixed an indulgent smile on her face.

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

Gregory dog paddles toward her. "What's the matter, a little chilly?" He splashes water toward her and she jumps back, shrieking, "Come on!" But then she laughs. Still, she makes no move to undress.

He submerges again, in the pitch dark of the water and stays down as long as he can. When he resurfaces, Rosemary is wading in. She has stripped down to her bra and panties, and he can see she's hesitant, indulging the whim of a husband who's behaving more like a son, a boy. Gregory turns and swims out farther, but it's not long before she's behind him, latching onto his ankle. He wants to shrug off her surprisingly firm grip and swim farther out into the black water, but knows that's not the right move. That would not be in the script. So he endures her touch, turning his body and freeing himself so he can face her. He fixes a grin to his face.

"Hey, let's get in to where we can stand." Rosemary is smiling and the water drips down from her hair across her face. For just a moment, Gregory feels a heart-tugging jolt of love go through him. She is really the most beautiful woman he's ever seen. He wants to pull her close to him, to protect her from the water's chill, but something holds him back ... something he doesn't want to consider.

Instead, Gregory laughs. They swim toward the shore in silence. When they can stand, Rosemary takes him in her arms and kisses him deeply, her tongue exploring the inside of his mouth. He pulls away. "It's too cold to stand still. Let's go in."

In the kitchen, they kneel together on the tile floor, bodies dripping, goose-pimpled. Gregory leans back until his

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

shoulders touch the cold tile. Closing his eyes, he feels Rosemary's mouth on him, engulfing him and making him hard. She alternatively uses her hand and mouth to stroke him. It's working. She places her hands on his shoulders and straddles him, grasping him with one hand and lowering herself down on him. She gasps, "Oh, perfect," she whispers. She begins rocking atop him and Gregory shuts his eyes tight, praying that this time, it will be good.

\* \* \* \*

Early morning sun. Gregory opens his eyes. Golden light cuts rectangular patterns into the ivory bed sheets, the dark mahogany of the footboard, Rosemary's freckled back. He frowns at her narrow shoulders, the bones sticking out like wings that were once there. He listens to the easy rise and fall of her breath. He thinks about reaching over to stroke the close-cropped hair, but doesn't want to wake her.

He touches her anyway, tracing a line down her spine, and remembers the previous night. He recalls the cold surface of the kitchen floor beneath him, the way the moonlight crept in through the windows, lending a silvery opalescence to everything it touched. He remembers curling up and turning on his side as Rosemary left him to use the bathroom, the contentment he felt at being alone. He hadn't come, although he made Rosemary think he had. But even in spite of her ministrations and how she rode him like someone primed for the rodeo, he could never seem to get *there*. After awhile, too long, he didn't want her to go on any more and could feel

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

himself beginning to go soft. So he did what he had heard women did on a routine basis: he faked it.

Rosemary stirs, her eyes fluttering open. Her hazel gaze meets his and she smiles, reaching up to trace a line around his jaw. "Handsome," she whispers, her voice still husky from sleep. She drops her hand and her eyes take on more clarity. "What time is it?" She props herself up on her elbows, letting the sheet slip below her breasts, which are small, the nipples pointed upward, salmon.

Gregory turns and looks at the clock. "It's 6:15."

"6:15?" Rosemary sits up. "I'll barely have time to get in fifty before work."

Gregory listens: the sheets rustling as she slips from bed, the squeak and friction of the dresser's bottom drawer opening, Rosemary sliding into her one-piece, rooting around in the drawer for her goggles, then the rush of water, flush of the toilet, footsteps, screen door complaining as it opens, then slams shut.

Gregory pulls the sheet up to his shoulders and turns on his back. Now, he could stretch out. Now, he could sleep.

He dreams of Rosemary cutting through the lake's waters, the mist parting as she strokes through it with even strokes. Water splashes up, catching the light. Rosemary's face, mouth open, gulping air, returning her face to the cold, green water. The water swallows her and its blue-green surface goes still. He sees himself, in khaki cargo shorts and a T-shirt, walking along the grassy bank of the lake alone.

He wakes and thinks of how he would rearrange the cottage, the furniture he would buy, the bookshelves he

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

would build on either side of the fireplace. He wonders how he can even allow himself to imagine such a thing. He would hate to see any harm come to his wife, yet the lure of being on his own is one that has its appeal, right here and right now, with no one to hear his mutinous thoughts but himself.

Rosemary's panting breath, as she passes the windows, causes Gregory to slide from the warmth of the bed, ashamed, to make her tea and toast with strawberry jam.

\* \* \* \*

There are two days left until Gregory returns to his third grade classroom. He has been busy, trying to make up for what the school board refuses to supply, going to Costco and buying reams of construction paper, safety scissors, watercolor kits, and crayons. He looks forward to entering the world of children again, of being part of that innocence and of not having to think about his own life. His days with the kids are so filled that he scarcely has time to ponder things like his marriage and Rosemary and the impulses he buries down deep inside.

His journal is open before him and he's proud of how much he has written over the summer and wonders how much he will be able to accomplish during the school term. He traces his fingers over the lines of neat penmanship on the journal's pages and thinks of the little combination of glue, ink, and paper as a friend, someone in whom he can confide. Who else would listen to him?

He wonders also if he will ever have the courage to share his writing with anyone. He doesn't wonder if it's good or not,



Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

but is uncertain about the secrets it reveals and what it says about him. He could call it fiction, sure. But would anyone ever believe that what he'd written here, fanciful as it is, is anything other than the truth, all dressed up and looking to be admired? Whoever that faceless reader was out there would know. They would know, and they would see beneath his mask, his veil of language.

\* \* \* \*

Journal Entry (Unspecified Time)

*Dream. Hazy. The lens of the camera smeared with Vaseline. A silhouetted form appears. Lost. Confused, he runs to a forest, where snakes appear, dangling and hissing, from the trees. They writhe before him, both tantalizing and terrible in their serpentine beauty. He reaches out to grasp them.*

*He cannot. They are always just beyond his reach. They gaze back at him with mocking eyes, their forked tongues protruding.*

The stark landscape changes, darkens. Lightning rips through the sky. Thunder rumbles. Mountains. He tries to climb, but the rocks crumble beneath him, setting him searching desperately for footholds or a protruding tree root to grasp. Falling back. Coming closer to the top each time.

*A scream. "I can't make it!" And he tumbles down, down, into a darkness so black it seems solid. It swallows him.*

\* \* \* \*

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

Gregory places dinner on the table: corn on the cob, chicory salad dressed in extra virgin olive oil and red wine vinegar, chicken breasts poached in wine, and finished with butter and dill. Rosemary pours chilled Riesling and Gregory lights candles. To an outsider, the dinner spread out on the distressed oak table has all the earmarks of a romantic interlude, something to be shared and savored by a couple very much in love. Gregory's thoughts are interrupted by Rosemary's voice, teasing. He tenses as he knows she is about to launch once more into a subject he does not want to discuss. He can't, not now. Will the time ever be right?

"You know..." Rosemary smiles and puts the matches back in a kitchen drawer. She sits down at the table and arranges her napkin in her lap. Her eyes are bright. She looks radiant, the bridge of her nose kissed by the sun. "When we have a little one, we won't be able to have dinners like this."

Gregory gets up. "Almost forgot! I made rolls." He crosses the kitchen and stoops to open the oven. Grabbing an oven mitt, he pulls a tray of Parker house rolls from the oven. He rummages around in a cupboard for a trivet and then sets it on a table with the rolls on top of it. He pauses for a moment, a finger to his lips. "And with a dinner like this, we need a little music." He leaves the kitchen for a moment to put an Oscar Peterson CD on and sits back down; the sound of "Night Train" fills the cottage.

Rosemary regards him. She is no longer smiling. "Did you hear me?"

"What?"

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

Rosemary laughs and shakes her head. "I said, when we have a baby, we probably won't be able to have meals like this."

"Oh." Gregory cuts into his chicken. "I don't see why not." He takes a bite of chicken. "This came out good. Moist."

"He'll probably want hot dogs or something. There'll be food splashed across the table, we'll probably need to make airplanes out of spoons, coming in for a landing in his little mouth." Rosemary beams at the image she must be conjuring up in her mind's eye.

Gregory forces himself to smile. "Probably."

"Hot dogs aren't so bad." Rosemary winks. She butters her corn and lifts the ear to take a bite. "Have you given any more thought to having a baby since we last talked?" She cocks her head and puts down the corn, staring at him. He wonders if the move is calculated to say, "You're not going to avoid me on this. Not again."

"Rosemary, school starts in a couple of days. I just have a lot on my mind right now."

"You don't want to, do you?"

"I didn't say that."

"What do you say then?" Her fork clatters to the plate and her eyes have become bright, watery. They have gone back and forth on this issue over the past year and it never ends in a positive way. But Gregory just isn't ready. He butters a roll and considers the surface of the table. He takes a sip of wine and then spills the glass as he sets it back down. "Oh shit!" He starts to rise, but Rosemary places a hand on his shoulder, forcing him back into his chair.

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

"It's okay. I'll get it." She grabs a wad of paper towels from over the sink and sops up the wine. She tosses it into the trash and sits back down. Her voice is softer now. "I still don't know how you feel about a baby."

"Well, I feel fine. In time."

"Gregory, we've been married for a couple of years now. I thought we'd have one by this point."

"Well, we don't. Is that such a big deal? We're only in our twenties. We have lots of time."

She reaches across the table and grabs his hand, does her best eyebrow-raising Groucho Marx impersonation. "But we could try..."

Gregory yanks his hand back and snaps, "I told you I'm not ready!" He didn't mean for the words to come out so sharply. It's just that he feels cornered. Why can't they just enjoy the lovely meal he's prepared? Why can't they talk about something else?

Rosemary stares at her food.

Suddenly, Oscar Peterson's "Georgia" sounds too loud.

Later, as Gregory puts the last of the dishes in the drainer, Rosemary wraps her arms around him. Gregory stiffens.

She whispers, "Hey, how about we give it a try right now?"

"What?" His stomach flip-flops.

"Having a baby."

"I told you, school's about to—"

"I know. So I get pregnant now. I don't see what difference that would make in your school year. You could teach the whole term, most likely, even if you want some time off."

"That's not the point."

"What is, then?" Rosemary sighs and yanks her arms away. She compels Gregory to look at her with her stare.

"I told you, school—"

"Right. School. I thought an elementary school teacher would like kids."

"I do. I do like kids."

"Just none of your own."

"Oh, Rosemary..."

"Don't! I want a family. I think it's time we start trying."

Gregory mimicked her. "I want. I think..." He places a wine glass upside down on the counter. "Doesn't it matter what I think?"

"That's what I want to find out!" Rosemary shouted. "What do you think?"

Gregory walks to the door, lets it slam behind him.

\* \* \* \*

Jake Gamble lived less than half a mile from them, in a little white clapboard cottage, with a fieldstone path, prairie grasses, and wildflowers. The house looks like Jake, in a way, simple, attractive, and bearing all the marks of someone for whom his own space is important. Gregory wonders if he's a Cancer; Jake should be, at least if the line about their homes being important to them holds true. Gregory has watched him from a distance several times, shirtless and sweating, as he works on the garden, lifting pots, pulling weeds. He had been there when Gregory and Rosemary had moved in two years ago. Gregory tries to remember the first time he noticed Jake,

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

and can't. It seems the man has always been nearby. Would things be any different if the idyllic little cottage were inhabited by an old woman? Or a family?

It is toward Jake's house that Gregory now makes his way, shutting out all thought, concentrating on the sounds of night surrounding him: the wind rustling the leaves, cicadas, and crickets. The air is warm, but there's a chill in the background that foretells the approach of autumn. The water with its clean, oddly mossy smell and the wind give him comfort. It's as though nature regards him unemotionally and without judgment. Gregory has never known Jake well, speaking only in passing or when he's run into him at the small pebble beach people who lived on the lake shared or at the little grocery store up the road where all the lake's residents end up at one time or another. Yet, he has always felt a connection between them. There is an irresistible pull between the two men, something Gregory's conscious mind weakly tries to deny, but deep down, he cannot refuse to acknowledge. It is as if Jake is always waiting for him, somewhere just out of sight.

The creak of Jake's porch swing interrupts Gregory's reverie. He tenses and stops walking, unsure if he wants to be observed. He has watched Jake so many times without the other man knowing. This time, he isn't so sure he wants to be a silent observer, someone hanging around in the shadows, struggling to thwart the desire that rises up within him whenever he sees Jake, a sensation both queasy and delicious.

Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

An orange cigarette tip glows in the darkness. Normally, Gregory hates smoking; the smell of it, the way it makes people reek of something nasty. But with Jake, there's something manly about the glow of the cigarette as he brings it to his mouth and draws in, something decidedly sexual as he expels twin plumes of smoke from his nostrils. Gregory allows himself to imagine being tainted by that smell, the rough stink of it as Jake draws him near, his mouth on Gregory's. He shakes his head. *Stop it.* Barely breathing, Gregory watches from the shadows, wondering if he should say something, a simple, "hello" to announce his presence. It would be embarrassing to have Jake discover him standing here in the shadows, watching, a voyeur in the most literal sense. Part of him wants to turn and creep, then run, back home, make up to Rosemary. He'll tell her everything will be all right; let's make a baby tonight. He imagines her back at the cottage, standing near a window, watching anxiously for his return. Another part stands rooted to his spot as his eyes adjust and Jake's features become clear: the broad shoulders and chest, encased in a simple white T-shirt that serves only to emphasize the muscles beneath, the mass of thick salt and pepper hair, the rough beard, the clean lines of his face. Jake is humming. His voice is deep, smoky, resonant ... soothing. Gregory longs to squat down and just sit and listen, the warmth of the voice washing over him. He thinks that the humming would be perfect for putting him to sleep.

Instead, Gregory takes a deep breath and almost without thinking about what he is going to do, approaches the porch. "Jake?"

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

The humming stops. He can see Jake swivel his head, searching the darkness. "Who's there?"

Gregory steps into the wan light from Jake's screen door. "It's only me."

Jake smiles and stands. He wears a pair of old jeans and is barefoot. "Gregory. What a surprise." Jake turns to stub out his cigarette in an ashtray and turns back to him. "I wasn't expecting company tonight." Jake walks to the edge of the porch, where a broad pair of stairs descend, standing above Gregory.

"I know, I know. I should have called. I was just out walking and I heard you humming and thought I'd stop." Breathless words rush out as Gregory mounts the steps, their tone undercutting the casual way he wants to sound. The steps creak and Gregory ponders a quick shrug and saying something like, "Well, just wanted to say hi. I need to get back to Rosemary." Hurrying off into the night, tail firmly between his legs. But something keeps him rooted to the porch's bottom step.

Jake comes toward him. He smiles and in the darkness the white of his teeth and eyes almost seem to glow. "Want to come inside? I've got some iced tea, or if you'd like something a little stronger..."

"No. Please, sit back down. I didn't mean to bother you."

"Really. It's no bother. I was going to grab a beer myself. I'll be right back."

Gregory climbs up on the porch, painfully aware of the sweat on his palms and the way his heart thuds uncomfortably in his chest. To calm himself, he takes a seat



Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

on the porch swing and looks out: Jake has an unobstructed view of the lake and right now a crescent moon is reflected on its shiny black surface. He thinks briefly of Rosemary and their argument, lowering his head, wondering how he'll ever be able to reconcile what they both want. The porch light comes on, a yellow beacon, and Jake shoulders the door open, holding two tall, brown bottles of Iron City beer in his hands. He holds one out to Gregory, smiling. "Here. Puts hair on your chest." He leans back and takes a swallow of his own beer. Gregory takes the chilled and sweating bottle in his own hand and stares as the muscles in Jake's neck bunch and contract as he swallows.

"Just a sec." Jake leans back in and switches off the porch light. "That's better, isn't it? That light's a little too bright. We'll draw every moth from miles around." With his disposable lighter, he fires up a Citronella candle. He sits down close to Gregory and drinks his beer. Jake's presence against Gregory makes his heart pound harder.

They sit for a while in silence, listening to the night insects, the wind, the distant rumble of thunder, far across the lake. Heat lightning flashes every now and then. Finally, Jake turns to Gregory and asks, "So, what's bothering you?"

Gregory looks up from his beer, startled. "Who said anything was bothering me?"

"You didn't have to. The quiet interest you take in that beer says it all." Jake leans a little closer and Gregory can feel his arm draped across the back of the swing, almost but not quite touching him.

"Am I that transparent?" Gregory takes another swallow of beer, staring out into the night, not wanting to look at Jake, for fear of what the other man will see written on his face.

"People have a way of letting it show when something's wrong. I've always been able to pick up on it pretty quickly. Want to talk?" Jake turns his head to look at him, expectant.

"I don't know." Gregory feels salt warmth on his cheeks and wonders where the tears came from. He sighs, and reaches up to rub at his face with both hands, hoping he's being inconspicuous, wiping away the tears. He doesn't want Jake to see, doesn't want him to know how deep his heart runs and how out of control it is. Is he this upset over what could hardly be described as an argument? "Rosemary and I had words, I guess."

"What about?"

Gregory longs to tell Jake more—everything—but instead, says, "About having children. We've been through it before, dozens of times, but she's getting more insistent."

"She wants them?"

"So much. And I just don't know ... yet. I like kids." Gregory sets down his beer, turns so that he is facing away from Jake. It surprises him and he sucks in a breath when he feels the calm pressure of Jake's hands on his shoulders, kneading. The massage is soothing, his digging fingers sending warmth through him. He allows his head to loll back, surrendering to the pleasure of Jake's strong hands. If he could just sit here forever and Jake would continue his ministrations, his problems would disappear and he wouldn't have to think. He believes that's the key to this problem:

thinking. He doesn't ever want to think again. He closes his eyes as Jake's hands move up and down his back, squeezing and releasing the taut muscles just below his skin.

"Jesus. You did have a fight. You're so tense. Relax and let old Jake take care of untangling those bunched-up muscles."

Gregory wants nothing more. This feels so right and so wrong ... all at the same time. He shouldn't be doing this. Reluctantly, he moves forward, so that Jake's hands will drop from his back. The absence of Jake's touch makes him long for more, like some deep-seated hunger that is simple minded in its pursuit of satisfaction.

"Sh-h. Listen, it's okay," Jake whispers and leans close to Gregory, his chest pressed against Gregory's back.

Impulsively, Gregory turns and hugs him. He is more surprised by his action than he imagines Jake is. The intense brown of Jake's eyes is apparent, even in the dark. Gregory feels he could lose himself in the brown, letting it swallow him up like a cold spot in the lake. The feel of Jake's body so close, the strong arms wrapped around him are like a blessing, a relief after so much denial.

Then Jake is leaning close, and Gregory feels the soft pressure of his lips on his own. Gregory closes his eyes, shutting everything out save for the soft cool of Jake's mouth on his. He lets his head go back, parts his lips to admit Jake's tongue and, almost of its own accord, his hand comes up, grabbing Jake at the nape of his neck and pulling him closer. The feel of Jake's beard against his smooth skin is electric, and Gregory finds himself out of control, lost, as he mashes his mouth against the other man's, his tongue dueling, the

taste of beer and cigarettes and something indefinable and sweet filling his mouth.

An image of Rosemary intrudes, that same image of her standing near the window, watching for his return, wondering what he's doing. And what *is* he doing?

Just as suddenly as the kiss begins, it stops as Gregory stiffens, leaning back. Jake pulls away, regarding him out of the corner of his eye, back against the porch swing. Jake is breathless. He lets out a small laugh, husky.

Gregory forces himself to scoot down on the bench a couple of inches, so that their contact disappears. He doesn't want this to end, yet at the same time, sees no other road open to him. He can't live split in two. Weakly, he mumbles, "I have to get up early tomorrow."

"Sure," Jake whispers, reaching for another cigarette. The flare of the lighter illuminates his face for a moment and Gregory is certain he can see frustration and disappointment in the other man's craggy features. He exhales smoke and looks out toward the lake. "I understand. You run along now. Be a good little boy."

"Jake, I—"

And Jake puts a finger to Gregory's lips, the lips he's just kissed. "Hey, don't worry about it, man. Believe it or not, I was married once, too, even have a couple of kids, so I know. I know."

Gregory is off the porch and swallowed up by the darkness before Jake has a chance to say another word. He stomps through the night, his footfalls hard, firm, and rapid as he heads back toward his own home ... and Rosemary. He

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

doesn't question why his breath is catching and why his face is covered with salty tears.

\* \* \* \*

Later, in bed, a thunderstorm awakens Rosemary. Gregory had lain most of the night staring at the ceiling, listening to the storm's first grumbles, distant, watching as flashes of heat lightning gave the room a black and white unreality for a second. He had traced the course of the storm as it moved closer, sweeping across the lake. Now, the rain beats against the roof of the cottage, staccato, wind rips through the maple trees outside. The house trembles. Gregory thinks this should be comforting, here all snug and warm in bed with his wife beside him. So why is he feeling tense, as if her very touch will send him hopping from the bed?

"Better check the windows." Rosemary slides from the bed just as a flash of lightning illuminates the room and her naked body, looking blue-white, electric. He listens as she makes a circuit through their little house, the slam of the windows going down, deadening the sound of the storm outside.

Returning, she pulls the comforter up around them and puts her arms around him. She nuzzles the nape of his neck and reaches around to run her hand across his chest, pausing to tweak his nipples.

Gregory draws his legs up and tilts his body so that her hands fall away, his spine gone rigid, almost of its own accord.

Weakly, she whispers, "I love you, you know." Even though she's next to him in bed, her voice is distant. Gregory

thinks he knows a lot, her loving him one of them. But he also thinks he knows something is very off in their relationship and wonders if she has a clue what that something is. Sorrow for her suddenly rises up within him; he wishes there were a way he could find that would make things better. Wishes things weren't so complicated. If only he could just reach out to her, return her embrace. But the falseness of such a move holds him back, makes him wait, tense. Still, he can't just leave her lying there, feeling neglected.

So Gregory turns to her, forcing himself to pull her close, and kisses her gently on her neck. "And I love you," he says, voice breaking. "I really do." It's the truth, but not all of it.

They kiss and Rosemary caresses his body, her hands gliding up and down his back. He wants to scream at her, "You just don't get it, do you?" But he knows that it's not her place to "get it," it's his to be honest with her, something he has not done in a very long time, if ever. She pushes against him so he's on his back and rolls on top of him, straddling him. Her face nuzzles against his own as she lowers her head to kiss him. She bites his earlobe and whispers, "Storms always make me horny." She gropes downward, and he's embarrassed because her touch has done nothing to arouse him.

Gregory clings to her with arms and legs, trying to put some feeling into the moment, despairing because he can't deliver, not in a way that would make a difference to her. Not in the way she deserves...

"Hey! You're going to squeeze the life out of me. And right now, that's a lot of life." Rosemary lifts her head and smiles

down at him, her eyes searching his face tentatively. He wonders if she thinks just by being persistent she can change what's facing her right here and right now, in their marriage bed.

Gregory stares at the ceiling, the hairline crack there, hoping she won't kiss him again and feel his tears.

She reaches down again and feels his soft, velvety cock lying on his thigh. He senses his face heating up with shame.

"Please." He whimpers, pushing her hand away, trying not to be too rough or rejecting. "I'm tired."

She sighs and lies back on her own pillow. For a few moments, there is only silence between them, with the sound of the rain pelting the windows and roof the only sound. He can sense her turning her head to regard him in the darkness. She speaks softly, "Sorry. I was moving too fast. It's okay. We've got all night." She plants a gentle kiss on his neck and moves her hand down once more to his chest, moving in small circles around his nipples. Doesn't she get it? How can he stop her without feeling like a heel? He lets the touch continue, holding his breath, hoping she will stop and turn on her side, away from him, go back to sleep. But her hand begins to wander down his stomach and farther south.

"No!" he says. "I don't want to." He wants to temper the words with something akin to kindness, but there is no other thought within him at this moment other than to flee. Gregory jumps from the bed, not looking back, not wanting to see Rosemary's bewildered face, not wanting to see the pain he causes. He hurries from the bedroom and stands in his own living room, feeling like a stranger. He listens for the pad of

Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

Rosemary's footfalls as she gets up to follow him, to demand an explanation, but the house is quiet.

He pauses at the desk, pulls out some books in a lower drawer, and takes out his journal. He moves to the kitchen and sits down at the table with the notebook spread open before him. For a long time, he can barely read the words scrawled across its pages, but gradually his eyes adjust to the dim, silvery light and he begins to read.

\* \* \* \*

Journal Entry (Before We Were Married)

*Memory in red light. Dancers do a pas de deux in red light, behind a scrim. He watches the memory, blurred by tears. The man and woman dance, black blurs of motion, elusive.*

*I run out from behind the scrim. My eyes are filled with lust. The man sinks to his knees as the light fades.*

*A new dancer appears. A strong figure. Broad-shouldered, tall. Lumbering grace, yet gentle. Taking my hand, he waltzes me around the dusty stage, in pale light. Colors around me swirl and I feel myself melting into his embrace, my feet following his effortlessly.*

*Floorboards become soft, morphing into something familiar, yet entirely different. The stage has become a bed and we sink down into its comfort, not breaking our embrace. The lights dim.*

*I watch as the memory takes on reality, framed in crisp white light. I watch as the pair embraces. I see the grasping hands, the probing tongues, the bodies fitting together like a puzzle. Their backs are sheathed in sweat. The only music to*



Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

*this dance is the soft murmuring of their sighs, the syncopation of grunts, increasing in tempo, building up to a crescendo.*

*I watch myself cry. I watch the man walk away, head hung low. Part of me longs to reach out, to will him back to the bed, but he knows as well as I that he is not welcome there, not yet, not with this half-person on the bed. They both deserve more.*

*The bed is soft. He is real. Red light returns, fades to blue, back to red. I am real only in these lights, only in these memories.*

\* \* \* \*

Gregory closes the book. Outside, a young peach tree bends in the wind, elastic, not breaking. A lump has formed in his throat, which he tries to ignore. What's with all the tears lately? He's been crying like a school girl. It's undignified.

"What were you writing?"

Rosemary's voice causes him to jump, to slam the journal shut. "Nothing. Go back to bed." Immediately, his heart begins to race. He had assumed she had fallen back asleep. He had never even heard her get out of bed and pad toward the kitchen. He feels heat rise to his face and begins to scan the kitchen desperately, looking for a place to hide the journal. He feels cornered. He didn't want things to come out this way, not yet. Not ever?

"Let me see."

"No. Really, it's nothing. I'll be in in a few minutes." Casually, he closes the cover on the journal and looks up at

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

her, trying to smile, and knowing how sheepish he looks, like a little boy with his hand caught in the candy jar.

Rosemary shrugs. "We have to talk, Gregory." He can see the hurt on her face, the way she regards him, eyes darting from his face to the journal and back again. "I know there's something you need to tell me." Her voice catches a little. "I'm not sure what it is, but there's something we need to get out between us ... tonight." She bites her lower lip and he can see she's trying to hold back tears.

"I'll be right in."

He watches her turn slowly and head back toward the bedroom. The slump of her shoulders reflects defeat. Does she know? How could she? He listens for the creak of the box springs and sits at the table for several minutes, not allowing himself to think, barely allowing himself to breathe.

And then he gets up and slips out the back door.

The rain has abated, slowing to a steady, gentle fall: almost a mist. In another time, it would be soothing. He pauses for a moment, torn, just outside the door. He knows Rosemary is waiting for him, wonders if she heard the soft closing of the door. The journal lays open on the kitchen table and he wonders if he should go back inside and secrete it once more in his desk, hiding it among the disarray of books and papers there.

The moment of indecision is a long one. Gregory lifts his face to the rain, one hand still on the door knob. Then he releases it and draws in a breath,

He turns back into the night and walks from the house.

\* \* \* \*

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

It doesn't take him long to traverse the short distance between his and Jake's house. The wet grass is cold on his bare feet and he hopes no one is up at this late night hour. All he's wearing is a pair of boxer shorts. His mind is on auto-pilot; he feels there is something he must do and he doesn't want to question himself.

Jake is still up, he assumes. The lights from his house look yellow and warm, welcoming. For a long while, Gregory stands rooted at the foot of his front porch steps. Then, he breathes in deeply and mounts the stairs and taps gently on the door. He hopes that perhaps Jake is asleep or that he's out, leaving his lights on for a time when he will return. And, paradoxically, he hopes the exact opposite. But Jake answers quickly. Like Gregory, he is clad only in a pair of boxer shorts. His near nakedness just about takes Gregory's breath away.

Jake smiles, then softens his expression into one of concern. "I thought you might come back. Come in." He steps back to admit Gregory.

Gregory enters the living room, keeping his arms folded over his chest to ward off the cold and damp he's just left behind. He's trembling; his face is wet with rain.

"Cold?"

"No."

Jake shakes his head. "C'mon, you're shivering. Jake encircles him with his arms and it's like some great bird has enfolded him in its wings. He kisses the drops of rain on Gregory's face. He pulls back and his eyes search Gregory's face. He cocks his head. "Do you want to go in the bedroom?"

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

Gregory has no voice. Mute, he lets Jake lead him by the hand to the bedroom. Once inside, Jake puts the book he has left on the bed on a nightstand and switches off the overhead light. Gregory's grateful. Darkness will make it easier. It always had. He stands in the doorway, waiting.

Jake comes to him and takes Gregory in his arms once more and his kiss is full, his tongue exploring Gregory's mouth. He takes Gregory's hand and places it on his bare, hairy chest. Gregory's hand moves almost of its own accord, moving across the rough landscape of his pecs with increasing abandon.

He lets his hand slide down, no time now for modesty or building up to a moment. He grasps Jake's cock in his hand. It's already hard. Roughly, Gregory pushes the other man's shorts down to the floor. Jake kicks them away and stands naked before him. Gregory drops to his knees, no longer thinking, just wanting, and doing: taking the warm, pulsing cock into his mouth with one deep swallow. He begins moving his head up and down with slow, swirling strokes, savoring the taste of him, the pungent smell of his hairy balls. He realizes he has been starving and Jake is sustenance.

"Oh, that's perfect," Jake moans, burying his hands into Gregory's hair, guiding him and thrusting gently into his mouth. Gregory pauses to take one ball and then the other into his mouth, moves back to his cock.

And then he stops, looking up at Jake, whose head is still thrown back in pleasure. Jake finally looks down at him, kneeling there before him on the hardwood floor and

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

whispers. "Should we take this to its logical conclusion? The bed's right over there. Come on, man..."

Gregory swallows. Nausea and desire war and he wonders which feeling is stronger. "I can't!" he moans. "I just can't."

He gets up and touches Jake's face briefly. He looks at him, imploring him to understand, because he doesn't have the words to explain himself. He backs toward the door. "I can't stay here. I have to go back."

As he runs from the house, he hears Jake call, "Please, Greg, come back. We don't have to do anything."

Yes. Yes we do, Gregory thinks. We have to do everything, but not yet. Not yet.

He runs through the damp night, panting and slipping on the wet grass. His own house is filled with warm yellow light, and the moment has come. Gregory stops suddenly, listening and half hoping and half dreading Jake will come after him. It would delay the inevitable. It would give him what he wants, but what he wants is not an illicit affair or a quick sexual encounter. What he wants, more than sex, more than love, is honesty.

He looks back and sees the lights being extinguished in Jake's cottage and thinks of him going to his bed, alone. What must Jake think of him?

Gregory heads toward the water's edge. There, he lays on the wet grass and slips out of his boxers. He closes his eyes and reaches down, touching himself. In spite of all the turmoil and trauma, he is hard and slick. He wraps his fist around himself and begins moving his hand up and down, thinking only of Jake, images of him rising up from between his own

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

spread thighs. Thinks of Jake's face contorted in pleasure, moaning and bucking, arching his back to slide more deeply into him. Gregory whispers his name, his hand moving faster and faster until the orgasm races through him, causing him to shut his eyes tightly, to gasp, and finally, to cry out into the darkness, sticky with the heat of his own release.

When he opens his eyes, it's quiet. The sky is a paler shade of gray and he's cold. He stands, heading back toward the house he shares with Rosemary.

The back door is locked and Gregory can see the journal missing from the kitchen table. He goes around to the side and finds the door on the lake side open. He goes inside.

The bedroom door is closed. Gregory sighs, feeling weariness like none he has ever known wash over him. Turning, he collapses onto the couch. Something hard pokes into his ribs. Pulling it out, he sees the familiar green leather of his journal. He hugs it to himself, closing his eyes and feeling the pain it's caused, praying for sleep.

Morning will be more than just a new day.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Rick R. Reed**

Rick R. Reed's horror/suspense fiction has been referred to as "a harrowing ride through cutting-edge psychological horror" (Douglas Clegg, author of *The Attraction*) and "brutally honest" (*Fangoria*). His most recent books include *IM*, a thriller about a serial killer preying on gay men through internet hook-up sites; *In the Blood*, a tragic vampire love story, and *Deadly Vision*, about a small town single mom who begins having psychic visions into a series of murders of teenage girls in her small Ohio River town; *High Risk*, a sexy thriller about a bored, promiscuous housewife who brings home a very handsome—and very psychotic—stranger; and *Orientation*, a paranormal love story about reincarnation, love, and sexual orientation. Other published work includes *A Face Without a Heart*, a modern-day version of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Published in Dell's acclaimed Abyss horror line, *Obsessed* and *Penance* together sold more than 80,000 copies. All three novels were re-released in 2006. Rick's short fiction has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines. A collection of his short horror fiction, *Twisted: Tales of Obsession and Terror* was published in 2006. Rick lives in Seattle with his partner, Bruce, and is at work on a new novel.

You can read more about Rick and his various titles at:  
[www.rickrreed.com](http://www.rickrreed.com)

\* \* \* \*

Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

Don't miss Dirty Love, by Lacey Savage,

available at [AmberHeat.com](http://AmberHeat.com)!

*Isabel Warren wouldn't dream of defying the morality statutes that forbid women over forty from ever making love again. As a medical practitioner, she understands the need for laws preventing "dirty love." The S.O.S. virus of 2030 left most of the male population infertile and turned human DNA into something resembling a microscopic jigsaw puzzle. The virus itself is undoubtedly dangerous, but older women are perhaps the most significant threat humanity has ever faced.*

*Yet knowing what's forbidden and keeping her feminine urges under lock and key are two different things. Especially when Isy's most recent assignment requires her to run intimate tests on Connor Flynn, a man sixteen years her junior, who seems determined to prove she's not the monster everyone else thinks she is. And if such delicious temptation wasn't bad enough, she's also got Trevor Jones to worry about. It seems he, too, is willing to risk everything to be with her.*

*Two sexy men, and one woman who could destroy them both ... if they don't destroy her first...*

\* \* \* \*

Don't miss Orientation, by Rick R. Reed,

available at [AmberAllure.com](http://AmberAllure.com)!



Through The Closet Door  
by Rick R. Reed

*Robert and Jess may just be the world's most unlikely couple—a gay man and a lesbian. But there is something more complex going on here: Jess may be the reincarnation of the lover Robert lost to AIDS more than two decades ago.*

*Can they transcend sexual orientation and find true love ... again?*

*But before this question can be answered, both must confront a deadly peril just waiting to pounce...*

\* \* \* \*

Don't miss *Dressed For Dying* by Janet Quinn,

available at [AmberQuill.com](http://AmberQuill.com)!

*In 1892, reporter Sean Madigan is pitted against the New York police when he's assigned his first high-profile murder story, the slaying of the wealthy Marshal Haversham, clothing industry mogul and sweatshop owner. While Sean hunts for the killer in order to prove his worth to his newspaper editor, the madman goes on a violent spree, burning down Haversham's warehouses and sweatshops and killing young women who work within them. Each victim is found dressed in a fancy ball gown that was secretly made within the sweatshops themselves.*

*When Madigan's sweetheart, Bridget, becomes the killer's next target, Sean determines he will find the man and his connection to the ball gowns. But the murderer has other designs, and it soon becomes a race against time and the*

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

*police to discover the fiend's identity before he silences Sean or Bridget ... permanently...*

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Amber Quill's Rewards Program**

For every ten books bought, receive one free!

Visit all three of Amber Quill's web sites

for our very latest releases!!

\* \* \* \*

### **AMBER HEAT EROTICA**

Gimme Fever!!

Steamy, sensual genre fiction...

[www.AmberHeat.com](http://www.AmberHeat.com)

\* \* \* \*

### **AMBER ALLURE**

Where love is blind to gender...

[www.AmberAllure.com](http://www.AmberAllure.com)

\* \* \* \*

Through The Closet Door  
*by Rick R. Reed*

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

Quality Books, Print And Electronic

Genre fiction at its best!

[www.AmberQuill.com](http://www.AmberQuill.com)

---