

Bones

<http://nogoodsonofabitch.com>

CHARLIE

Daddy says the walls don't have a name, but I call them Charlie. Daddy says the walls aren't alive. How can a wall be alive, he says. The warm pink layer that covers the floor, the ceiling, and the walls of the cellar are not skin. So says my dad. The hair that grows from the walls, the thin black, straight hairs, are not like the hair that grows from daddy's arms. Because Charlie is not a living creature, and only living creatures can grow hair. Says daddy.

Daddy is lying.

Every Sunday daddy brings me a bucket of soapy water and a straight razor which I carry with me down into the cellar, my bare feet pressing against the fleshy floor that seems to be expanding, covering a new step every few months. Once I reach the bottom, where the skin has overtaken every inch of space, where not a single spot of original cellar remains... Once I reach the bottom, where the fleshy walls will, every now and again, pulse, will breathe, if you watch them long enough... Once I reach the bottom, I will dip the razor into the bucket of soapy water, and I will shave the hairs that grow from Charlie.

Shaving the walls is a difficult chore. It takes an entire day to rid the cellar of all those pesky hairs. To shave bald the entire ceiling, floor, and of course, the walls that connect them. An entire day and, lately, even more. Cause Charlie's skin is growing. When I was a younger boy, years ago, the skin hadn't reached the cellar stairs. But now I must shave halfway up the stairwell, all the way up to where I can smell the food cooking in the kitchen above us. It smells good, and provides me with the encouragement I need to shave faster, to finish sooner, so I can return to enjoy a delicious dinner with mom and dad.

Mom is a wonderful cook. And I think that's maybe why Charlie is growing. Because he smells the food. Maybe that's why his skin slowly crawls up the stairs. To the kitchen. To join us at the dinner table.

Daddy tells me that it's ridiculous to think such thoughts of the walls. The walls aren't growing! The walls aren't trying to reach the kitchen! The walls aren't hungry! Because the walls are not alive! I have stopped asking daddy about the walls. Stopped telling him my thoughts about Charlie. Because daddy has begun to grow very angry with my questions. And I don't like it when he slaps my face. Or shoves me against the kitchen counter. And even worse, when he yells at me, his cheeks flush red with such brilliance that I fear he'll explode. Daddy has grown more and more odd over the past year, and has been spending a lot more time sitting alone at the kitchen table, drinking from a bottle.

Daddy blames his drinking and his anger on stress from work. He says that it's not the walls that cause him such strife, but his boss. How could it be the walls, he says! Because the walls are not alive!

Daddy is lying.

Daddy is lying, and he knows it. But he doesn't know that I know it. Because he doesn't know that I've crept out of bed in the middle of the night and I've crouched at the top of the stairway that leads down to Charlie. And I've listened. Listened to my father down there, screaming. Screaming at the walls. Drunk. Screaming, "I cannot do it! You cursed beast, don't make me do it!"

Daddy doesn't know that I've listened.

Daddy doesn't know that I *know*.

He doesn't know that I've crawled from my bedroom to hide in the shadows of the hallway and spy on his late night conversations with mother. To hear her sobs. To hear him calmly tell her that it's time to bring home another dinner guest.

Daddy brought home another guest about a month ago. An older man who worked in the bakery at the end of town.

When daddy brings home a guest, mother always cooks a wonderful meal. But I only get to smell it. I don't get to enjoy the creamed corn and mashed potatoes and roast beef. I am ordered to spend the evening in my bedroom, to work on my puzzles. I am not allowed to sit at the table and join the conversation with the adults. Because these are "special occasions."

But daddy doesn't know that I *listen*.

I hear the conversation with the dinner guest. I hear my mother ask simple questions and tell simple stories. And sometimes when she tells such tales, she'll mention my brother who is no longer with us. And daddy will interrupt her and tell her to bring more wine. And soon daddy will ask the guest if he is enjoying the wine. Does he drink a lot of wine? Does he have interest in wines? Would he like to see the wine cellar? Please, please, you must come with me. You must see my fine collection of wines.

And I will watch from my hiding place as daddy and his guest will rise from their chairs and head towards the door that leads to the cellar. To Charlie. And I will watch mother, who will follow them with her eyes as they step down into the dark stairwell. She will cross her arms and remain standing alone up against the oven. And then she will bury her face in one of the cloth napkins and weep quietly.

I have watched many of my father's dinner parties. And I watched the dinner party last month with the baker. And I watched daddy lead the baker down the stairs to Charlie.

And I watched.

And I waited.

For father to return from the cellar.

Alone. As always.

Daddy says the walls are not alive. Daddy says I should never call the walls Charlie, and if I ever call them Charlie again, then I'll be sorry. Daddy says the walls are not alive.

But daddy is lying.

Mother doesn't know that daddy lies, but I do.

Mother doesn't know that daddy was lying last night when they talked. When daddy quietly whispered into her ear until mother burst into tears. When daddy tried to quiet her wails for fear that she'd "wake the boy." When she begged, "please, no!" and he replied calmly that, "I have no choice," and she screamed, "no, honey! Don't let it take our other son!" And daddy just laid down his head. Rested his chin against his chest, his eyes closed, as mother cried and cried.

"Not our son. Not our only son..."

Daddy doesn't know that I listened. That I know.

That I know that daddy is lying.

This I know for a fact. Because I know something that daddy doesn't. I know Charlie, and daddy doesn't know this.

Oh yes, I know Charlie. I know him well. Because he is my friend. Because I have spent every Sunday shaving the walls, all day long, removing every last hair. And I don't do it because daddy tells me to. I don't do it for the reason he wants me to but will never say - that he wants Charlie to look *less alive*. So he can take his dinner guests deep down into the bowels of Charlie without suspicion.

No, this is not why I shave Charlie. I shave Charlie because Charlie likes it. Because it keeps him cool. Keeps him cool down there in the dark. And I know this because Charlie speaks to me. Just like he speaks to my father.

Daddy says the walls aren't alive and he is lying. And I know this because I have spoken to the walls!

And I have traveled deep down into the cellar. Deep down into the open crevice that daddy does not know that I know of. The hidden crevice behind the flap of soft thick skin that drapes down from the ceiling like a curtain. Or a tongue.

Daddy does not know that I have lifted the moist skin drape and ducked underneath and walked down the corridor. Where the air is thick and heavy. And the walls are a deep dark red. Daddy does not know that I have crossed the crevice. That I have crawled over the teeth and peered down the hole. And daddy doesn't know that I have held my head over the hole and have

heard the screams that echo from deep down below. The screams of the dinner guests. Screams of agony. Horrible screams.

The sounds of dying. Slowly. The sounds of Charlie digesting his meal.

Daddy doesn't know that I've seen this. Heard this. Daddy doesn't know that I've talked to Charlie. Because if he did, then he would know that I know that he was lying. Lying to mother.

Charlie doesn't want me, you see. Charlie is my friend. Charlie wants daddy.

And daddy knows this. And so he lied to mother. Said it was I whom Charlie wanted.

His one last chance at survival. A trade-off. His own son for his own life.

I know this.

And I will come to daddy when he calls. And I will watch my mother lean against the oven and sob. And I will follow daddy down to the cellar. And I will follow him into the bowels of Charlie. And when we reach the pit and we hear the screams of Charlie's past meals, and daddy steps toward me to lead me to my end...

I will push him into the hole.

And I will watch him fall.

Into hell.

Where he will once again join his dinner guests.

And I will return back to the kitchen to share a meal with mother. And we will be happy again.

The three of us.

Me, mother, and Charlie.

Until he becomes hungry again.

-Bones

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