

Behind Locked Doors

by Adriana Beristáin-Márquez

Abernathy laid in bed anxiously waiting. His mom and dad left for work an hour ago. However, his siblings, Percy and Leta, still needed to go to school. He laid still, listening for noise outside his bedroom. The house did not respond, and so he pushed back his thick dinosaur comforter and softly walked towards his backpack on the wall. Trying to grab his backpack, Abernathy jumped back, startled, as his school bag fell and all his supplies scattered on the floor. He stilled, waiting for a reaction from the house, but the silence remained. Ignoring the mess he made, Abernathy grabbed his backpack and slowly opened his door. He popped his head just a bit and looked down the hallway. Then, deeming his path to be safe, Abernathy headed towards his parents' study.

He entered the study and cautiously grabbed one of his moms' thick biology books. Abernathy considered the weight of the bag. It wasn't enough. He shoved one of his dad's big recipe books in too. After making sure his backpack was heavy enough, Abernathy left the study and put his bag down by a trapdoor in the ceiling.

While going down the stairs, Abernathy remembered his dad started locking the garage door after leaving for work. A habit he developed after meeting the odd neighbors down the block. Abernathy headed for the kitchen where his mother kept the spare keys to everything, including his older sister's kid jewelry box from when she was eight.

On his way to the kitchen, Abernathy noticed an unusual figure from the corner of his eyes. He looked to the big open French windows on his right. A gasp and a squeal escaped from the big-eyed child. A deer was in their backyard. Referencing from the books in his room, Abernathy identified the deer as a mule deer. The dazed child took a slow step forward. The

deer looked straight at Abernathy. He took another step to the windows, but the deer ran away. Booming with glee, he couldn't wait to tell Leta about the deer.

Remembering to keep to the mission, he headed to the kitchen. As he passed the looming grey fridge, Abernathy noticed a new post-it. It read, "Remember to take your medicine. There are pancakes in the microwave. Love, Mom." Abernathy smiled a big grin. His mom hadn't cooked since before the move, and her pancakes were Abernathy's favorite. Overly excited, he dragged one of the nearby barstools below the microwave. He climbed on top of the kitchen counter and grabbed the plate of pancakes, set it on the kitchen table, and went to get syrup from the fridge. Abernathy glazed an ungodly amount of syrup on his pancakes.

After rolling a pancake with sticky syrup fingers, Abernathy snatched the garage key from the trinket drawer. With a full stomach and a face covered in maple syrup, he made his way to the garage. Making sure no one was around, he slowly unlocked the door and slipped inside the dark space. The towers of boxes looked unfamiliar, and the garage became a dark abyss past the highlight on the floor. He did not want to spend a moment later in the garage; he reached for his hickey stick in the right corner. He stretched his arm as far as he could without letting go of the doorframe, but he could not reach. Finally, in a rush of fear, Abernathy lets go and grabs his hockey stick from the darkness.

With his hockey stick in hand, Abernathy shut the door and locked it twice. Then, taking a deep breath, he headed back upstairs to the trapdoor. He climbed up the stairs and took a good grip on his hockey stick. Once underneath the trapdoor, he put on his backpack, hooked the edge of his stick to the latch, and pulled as he jumped. The trapdoor didn't budge. Abernathy stepped back, took a running start and a big jump. Unfortunately, he wasn't heavy enough to pull it down. The trap door was more closed than the sweets cabinet in the kitchen.

He stood beneath the attic, thinking of ways to make himself heavier. Then, when genius struck, he dashed down the stairs with his bag and straight out to the backyard. After

double-checking that no deer could be startled, he went to his mother's flower bed. Abernathy unzipped his backpack and placed it by the edge of the garden. Careful not to touch any of his mom's lilies, he grabbed rocks from the flower beds and shoved them inside his backpack. Then, noticing the significant amount of extra weight on his bag, he adjusted the straps and carefully walked back inside.

Abernathy noticed the bottom of his spiderman pajama pants were caked with mud on his way back inside. He looked past the French windows into the clean white living room his parents cleaned the day before. Abernathy searched the backyard, but there were no clean shoes to wear. Realizing there was nothing better, he rolled up the legs of his pants up to his knees. He tiptoed back inside and through the living room, cautiously trying not to spread any mud or dirt from the yard. He went back upstairs and grabbed his stick again. Abernathy positioned the hook of his hockey stick and hoisted himself up in a big jump. The trapdoor came down, and some shaky steps slid down.

"Booyah!" he said, "That was totally wicked."

Abernathy looked up the steps and groaned. The path up the steps leads to yet another door. But something was off; the child squinted his eyes to see that the door was painted orange.

"A hideous color," he thought.

Even so, he slowly climbed the stairs on all fours, careful not to get any splinters on his hands. Abernathy shook at the thought of getting splinters again. He couldn't leave a trace of his quest today, especially not an injury indicating he'd done something other than being sick.

He came up to a small landing at the top of the steps with an ominous single dark orange door. The floor was covered in dust except for his father's heavy footprints. Cobwebs hung in the corners of the roof. As he got closer to the door, he realized the doorknob was higher than the other doors. He reached for it, but his fingers touched it just barely. Abernathy

looked back and analyzed the stairs; he could drag a chair up the steps they were too narrow. Then, he saw his bag lying on the floor, and a light bulb went off inside his head.

After a quick trip down the stairs and up again, he brought his backpack with him. He took out the books from his parents' study. Abernathy piled the books beside the doorknob and climbed on top. He took hold of the bronze oval knob and twisted it. The knob didn't turn. It was locked from the inside.

He stepped off his makeshift stepladder and kneeled to see underneath the door. Yet all he saw were the tall silhouettes of boxes and the steps of dust scattered in the air. The room was still. It was as if the house was holding its breath. Abernathy took a step back and stood there looking at the door, deep in thought. The knob didn't have a keyhole, so his mom wouldn't have a key in the trinket drawer downstairs.

With no other idea in mind, Abernathy mimicked a scene from his favorite storybook. He walked up to the door once again, closed his eyes, and said, "I dream and wish with all my heart to go to a distant land." Followed by a knock on the orange door. He peeked from his closed eyes, but the door remained closed. Then, letting out a deep sigh, he turned to go down the steps.

A creak came from behind him. He turned to see the door was now open and slowly being pulled back. Unnerved and excited, he hurried to the door and popped his head inside. It was empty. He looked behind the door, but no one was hiding behind it. Abernathy checked behind the towers of boxes, but nothing was there. The room was entirely still, except for the curtain on the window to the far right. He walked over to the window; it was small and quaint. The view was to the front of the house. He could see his bike next to the mailbox at the end of the empty driveway. He could see a big doghouse on the side of the neighbor's house. Abernathy pushed his face to the glass to try and catch a glimpse of the neighbor's dog. When a dark spot in the corner of his eye got his attention, he slowly moved his head, and it scuttles behind the towers of boxes.

The child took a deep breath and walked forward, careful not to make any noise. He rounded the corner and saw two glowing yellow dots following him from the darkness. Abernathy stilled, and so did his breathing. There were the noises he's heard since they moved in. A low growl and hissing came from glowing eyes. Next to the creature appeared another pair of bright yellow eyes and then two more. Five pairs of glowing yellow eyes were looking straight at Abernathy, and whatever it was, it wasn't happy he was there.

He was outnumbered. Abernathy took a step back, but that caused more hissing from the glowing eyes. He took another step, but he hit his back against the wall. A pair of bright eyes slowly moved closer to him. As it walked further from the shadows, the more apparent its shape became. It had a diamond-shaped head and a soft round body. A long dark snout peered from the darkness. The glowing yellow orbs turned into small beady black eyes. A furry black mask surrounded the eyes. The fear faded from Abernathy's body as he realized he was looking at a raccoon. The noise he'd heard all those nights, it was just a family of raccoons living above him.

The small child kneeled and extended his hand to the raccoon. It sniffed his fingers and licked them. The tongue was soft, almost like a dog, and it tickled. Abernathy got up and patted the dust off his pants. He looked to the family of raccoons, wondering how he would tell his parents about them and what would happen to them afterward. On his way out of the room, one of the raccoons followed him. He pushed it back with his foot and closed the door.

Abernathy ran down the attic steps and the stairs to the kitchen. He grabbed the same barstool as before and moved it to the side of the fridge. From the top, he took two s'mores flavored pop tart from his dad's stash. On his way back up the stairs, he noticed the clock on the wall read 3:00 PM. His sibling would be home soon. He rushes back up to the attic. When he opened the door, the family of raccoons was waiting in front of him. Abernathy ripped the pop tart wrapping open and broke them into pieces. The raccoons began making cooing noises and reaching for the pop tart bits. He put them on the floor, and they started eating. He leaned on the door frame and stared at them.

"Ah, so you found 'em,"

Abernathy squealed in surprise.

"You knew?" he asked. Leta walked past him towards the raccoons. "So, you won't tell mom and dad?"

"No way," said Leta smirking. "It'll be our little secret."