

Trash
by
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Trash (continued)

I passed the liquor store on my way to the laundry mat. I walked slowly, not wanting to make it to see my father too soon. Across the street from the coin laundry was a Village Pantry. I searched the pockets of my favorite cut-off jean shorts for change. My jean shorts were the world to me. The front pockets were big and loose. I slid my hands into my pockets the way a basketball swooshes through a net. I had just enough money for a gummy hamburger, seventeen cents.

Crossing the road on my way back to the laundry mat with my gummy delight that bounced in my jaws as I tried to chew, two frat boys in a yellow mustang drove by and threw an empty beer can hitting my chest like a heart attack. I wiped off the splattered beer drops from my chest. The guys in the car drove off. Some of the boys laughed, while one of them yelled out the window.

“Take that, trash!” His laugh played as in slow motion in my head. My face was turning red. Was I even breathing? I don’t remember. The look I got from my father didn’t help to calm my nerves. My head throbbed. I felt my chest muscles contract. My hands were vices, tightened with a tork wrench. I looked through the window at my father looking back at me, yelling at me as if I could hear him through the window. Then I saw my reflection in the glass. The vein on my forehead, like me, was going to explode. I took a step toward the glass and my father flipped me off, extended his bony middle finger, then turned his back on me walking away toward the Galaga video game machine. I continued inside.

My father was skinny, sort of. He had chicken legs and Slim Jim arms. His hair was cut in a mullet and matted together in the back, because he always said, “Brushin’ hair is for sissy girls.” His flabby pectorals looked as though they were reaching down to hold up his impregnated stomach. I had never really seen another like it. His ponch was skin stretched over a basketball. He wasn’t wearing his shirt, wore red sweat pants, and a pair of unlaced boots without socks. His belly swung toward me as he turned, cussing

out the video gaming. I dodged out of his way as he passed. He pretended to ignore me. His wiry beard and mustache were wet with the scent of beer.

“What are you lookin’ at?”

I looked away from him; I was almost over my limit. I didn’t answer him. I looked away and counted down in my head. Ten, nine, eight... First of all it’s three o’clock in the morning... seven, six, five... I can’t go home without him, because momma said so... four, three, two... Those guys in the car...

My countdown was interrupted before I calmed down. I wanted to forget it all and just go back to my room. I wanted to look at that poster that was on the back of the door, the one that momma could never find. It was the poster of nice house, a mansion, which I had pulled from a real estate magazine. I wanted to imagine myself there, but then there was this other thing I had to take care of. My father came right up to me, his beard poking me like needles. I drew my head away waiting, holding my place, but half escaping the smell of the beer on his breath.

I was sixteen. Not bigger than my father, but scared. He had beaten me countless times for just hiding his cigarettes.

“John,” he said to me, “You’re a sissy, and no son of mine is goin’ to let some punk get away with bad fun. You should’ve made it right, boy, but you didn’t. ‘Cause you’re a sissy.”

I started counting again. This time I counted forward. One, two, three... his head, the sink, the floor... four, five, six... my fist, his face, my knee... seven, eight, nine... this was for the argument I had with my mother.

I counted all the way to ten. Ten was his punishment for no crickets on that night. If there had been crickets chirping that night, then maybe I would have never heard my parents arguing at home.

He was laid out blinking and trying to pull himself up. I wiped my knuckles on my shorts. My father was lying right underneath a pay phone. We were the only ones in the laundry mat. I dialed 911 while looking down at my pathetic father.

“Pop?”

“What, sissy?”

“I want to kill you right now.” My voice quivered with adrenaline. My legs wobbled on stilts.

I heard a voice come on the phone as I threw the handset on my crumpled father. I felt great. I walked outside and waited for a few moments until I heard the sirens.

I didn't go home that night. I had found a great couch in someone's junk pile by the alley that I slept in until the sound of the garbage truck woke me up. Momma found out soon enough what happened. The doctor told her he had been jumped at the laundry mat and that the guys who did it chased off after me. My dad had covered for me.