

Trash

By
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It was one of those nights when he had wished the crickets would hum. He wished that they would rise above the noise of his mother yelling at his father for blaming money for all of his problems when she knew how much money he spent a week on booze. He laid in his bedroom trying to block out his mother's accusations.

"Don't you tell me you could be a better father if you had more money."

He pulled his pillow over his head. He heard the screen door wretch as it was slammed tight.

"Where do you think you are going? I'm talk'n to you." Her voice raspy with five year resin of tar that had seeped out from her lungs and coated her throat. Stress had stolen her beauty from both inside and out. She wore lines under her eyes where years of mascara could never be erased from the tears that she fought daily. She was only so strong, but never strong enough to leave her husband. "If you don't straighten up, I'm through."

John flipped over in his bed. He was laying there unable to sleep. It was three o'clock in the morning for Christ's sake. He hoped that the police would not be there again tonight. "Please shut up!" He whispered as fiercely as if he were telling them to their face.

Loud thumps of footsteps could be heard passing by his bedroom door. The screen door popped open and squealed a screeching close slamming again.

"I'm goin' to the laundry, Suzanne."

"You don't even have a load with ya."

"I'm goin' anyway." He said and walked off.

The door slammed again and he heard his mother slide across the room her slippers dragging the floor like a sweeping broom.

His bed was made of laminated cardboard like any cheap furniture, but it was nice to him. Even though it had been passed down from one of his friends who were better off, he appreciated it. He laid there making shadow puppets against the headboard from the porch light that pierced his window. He noticed all the cracks in the ceiling. He wondered if it would ever get painted. There was a thin layer of paint on the ceiling, but not enough to cover up the yellow and brown flower print wallpaper. The ceiling was probably being painted white, but with his uncle and his mother smoking there he could only stare at the dark tar yellow. His wood paneled walls looked scaly from the corners of the posters that had been taped to his walls. Just the part under the tape survived his mother coming weekly threatening to ground him if he hung up any more band

posters or posters of girls in beer ads. He had memorized those pictures and would lay there still picturing them on the walls. The carpet on the floor was stained. He wasn't sure if the carpet had been bought brown, but whatever had stained the floor was darker still. His clothes covered most of the floor. His books and letters from army recruiters and colleges filled his trashcan next to his desk that was actually a kitchen table that he had found in someone's garbage by the alley. It was crooked, flimsy, but he always considered it his drafting table. The legs of the table were black rusty metal tubes that tapered down towards the little round feet. On the table was drawing paper that was held tight by masking tape. His arms were as frail as his lamp post. He had an orange lamp that teetered on a laminated wood cardboard end table that had a broken door. The end table door leaned up against the end table next to the kitchen table. The lamp was half wanting to be thrown away and half wanting to be refinished. The lamp had been through hell and that's what made him feel better about his situation. It hadn't a lampshade and the bright bulb flickered on its last few breaths.

John's mother's footsteps stopped outside of his door. He rolled over in bed to place his back facing the door and pretended to sleep. His mother slowly opened the door. He could see her shadow form against the wall. He clenched his eyes shut. Holding them closed as tight as he could while breathing heavy, he was convinced she'd go away.

"John..." Her voice cracked. "John!"

"What, momma, I'm sleepin'. I got school in the mornin'."

"Well ya ain't got school right now. Your daddy went down to the laundry. You need'a goin' get'em."

He rolled over in his bed to face her. His face was that of a docile yet timid bulldog. His jaw was set with mortar. He wasn't going anywhere. He started to yawn.

"Go on, get up! Ya can't expect me to goin' get him made up the way I am in my robe, can you? Get up!"

"Momma I'm in my drawers close the door."

"Ain't nothin' I haven't seen."

"Momma close the door."

"You'd best be getting' up." She closed the door halfway.

John threw the blankets off of his body which seemed underdeveloped and malnourished. He took one step off the bed and pushed the door close the rest of the way. He was always the middle man. What was momma hurrying him. When pop is good'n calmed down he'd be back on his own. He thought about a time when he could get away from all this. These were the things that drove him to consider military training. He'd even considered prison a vacation from

home. His dark brown hair was matted to one side of his head. He stretched and yawned while scratching his groin. He put on his pants leaving exposed his cavity of a torso. He stepped out into the living room. His mom was standing by the door to his left looking out into the night. The humidity made her face shine with the light of the porch. Her hair was as if she knew she should brush it every day, but was too busy keeping up after his little brother Kyle, that she never made herself up nice. She was neglecting herself. She neglected John, and from the look of the house, she neglected it too.

“Hurry up. I’m wakin’ your daddy early and takin’ him to get a job. That’s what he needs. He’s been mopin’ ‘round here too long. Don’t you ever be like your daddy.”

John never had a problem with his dad. He did what he could do for the family. He was always there for John to talk to. He felt closer to his dad than he ever did his demanding mother. He didn’t mind that his father drank, he understood. He knew how hard it was to live with momma and considered drinking for his own escape.

“Momma I’m goin’ can ya quit naggin’”

“I’m gonna nag you boy now get out and gett’im. Don’t you come back without your daddy.”

“Pops knows the way home by hisself.”

“You’re always argueing with me. Your jus’ like your good for nothin’ father.”

At that John had had enough. “My father is the only one who’d been there for me. You just sit around here and tell us all what to do. Momma you are good for nothin’, daddy’s tryin’ and your too blind to see. Your stuck in your own thick head.”

Her mouth was open, she was shocked and trembling. Then her jaw set firm. John was standing tall wanting to have said that many times before. His mother turned her back to him.

“Get out. Don’t come back without him.” She spoke breaking her silence, though not yelling or barking orders. John somewhat pleased and somewhat feeling sorry he’d said anything at all walked past his mother and hesitated by the door. He stated to turn toward her to give her a hug. Seeing she was only icing her shoulders for him he sighed and walked out into the night.