The Man

The man sat in his chair. It was old and the stuffing was having its own exodus through into the light of day. Unfortunately for the slowly escaping batting the only light in the room was dim, and cast by a dingy oil lamp in the corner. The man did not know where the oil lamp had come from, but then again, he knew very little. Maybe Momma had bought it at one of the countless yard sales she had drug him to over the years. When he was little, he had kicked and screamed, because they were boring places with weird, half-broken things, and funny smells. The man cringed at the thought of those places overrun with gramma-types. They would pinch his face and ears and squeal over how cute he was but if he had dared to touch any of the half-broken crap, they screamed like banshees and swatted his hands. That had hurt. If they swatted him now it would not hurt. He was big now and those gramma-types could not hurt him anymore. The very thought made him laugh. Laugh, fit to split. He had heard that somewhere…fit to split…but now he could not recall where. He hated how fuzzy his brain was, and he knew (somehow) that it had not always been fuzzy like this. The man stood, using his hands on the arms of the old chair to boost himself into a standing position. His knees popped as he made his way into the kitchen. That had been Momma's domain and he hated to violate it even now. He looked toward the old Frigidaire and cringed again. Momma would have been so disappointed in him. The dark brown stains ran like rivers down the front of her prized machine. It would have spelled his doom if he had been little. Hadn't she told him again and again? "The Frigidaire is an expensive piece of machinery." And aye, it had been, back in its day. But, its day, like Momma's, had passed. Momma was dead. Dead as the doornail…or something like that. His sandwich was in a Tuppa, and the man felt the water from his tears as they streaked his cheeks. Momma had been good to him. She had been the only one who was good to him after he got all fuzzy in the head. The boys had made fun of him because he was big and clunky. They made fun of him because he could not read good. They made fun of him because he sometimes fell down for no reason. He looked at the Tuppa in his hands and smiled. It was large enough to hold a whole box of the mac and cheese he liked. Now that Momma was gone, he could use the stove any time he wanted. He always remembered to turn it off too. That had been Momma's explanation for not letting him use it. "Boy, you'll forget and burn the whole damn house down. You ain't right in the head no more big boy." But he did not forget. He always turned the knob so that it went from red to black. He even knew not to touch it for a while or it would burn. Not like the switches used to…but in a different way. He was still looking at the Tuppa and how small it looked in his large palm. He bet, to himself, because Momma did NOT approve of wagering, that he could crush the little thing if he closed his hand hard enough. It would snap and pop, just like bones.

Chicken bones.

He amended his thought though he knew no one could hear the conversations that went on in his fuzzy brain. He laughed again. What if folks could hear the conversations, he had with himself? They would look at him even funnier than they did now. And not funny in a good way, like those guys who talked ugly on the tv late at night. Momma would never have let him watch the things he watched late at night. She would have swatted him. "That's nothing but trash boy." That's what Momma would have said. He would have been mad but would not have said anything because Momma was always right. Even when he didn't think she was right she was, and if he argued it would be the closet for him. He hated that closet.

Damn closet.

It was dark in there and even as big as he was he didn't like the dark. Sure, it was dark in the house now but it had to be. No one could know that he was still there. Momma had said that people would come and take him away if anything ever happened to her, and now she was like that doornail…Dead. He fell into the chair. Into the familiar puff of dust and old farts that he had so long ago grown accustom. Momma would have hated what he had done to her beloved house. She had vacuumed and dusted every Saturday, but after she was dead the man had quit. He hated doing that kind of stuff. Cleanin'…That's what Momma had called it. It was dummy. Who cared if there was a little dirt on the floor or a cob web in the corner of the room? What was a cob anyway and did the spiders get mad at them for stealing their webs? He had never seen a cob. Maybe he would watch the one over the tv more closely and see if he could get a look at one. Maybe it would make him famous like Mr. Burt Reynolds. He didn't know who Mr. Burt Reynolds was, but Momma sure didn't think HE was trash. No sirree. She said he was an actor on the tv and that was all he needed to know. One time when Momma had been drinking her spicey grape juice…she didn't know it, but he had tried it a couple of time and thought it tasted bad…she had said that Mr. Burt Reynolds could get him some. Some of what? He didn't know and he had been scared to ask because Momma liked to hit hard when she had been drinking her grape juice. The man looked over at the tv now. It was on. Of course, it was on, and the volume turned all the way up. His sandwich smelled good, even though it was a day old. But it had been in the Tuppa just like Momma always said. She had told him all about the salmon vanilla that people got from food they left out. He didn't remember much of it except that's how you got it and it was bad sick. Momma said some people even died from it. That wasn't how Mamma died though. Not even close. The man on the tv was talking to some pretty girl. The man didn't know who the pretty girl was, but he didn't really care. She made him feel funny…not like laughing but like something had gotten loose on his insides. And then that thing happened in his pants and that was uncomfortable…but not really. He wondered why it was only pretty girls that made him feel that way.

"I'll have to ask Momma."

The man said, startling himself. He didn't speak out loud much. He remembered how Momma used to get mad at him for speaking out loud sometimes. He would ask a question and Momma would swat him and tell him. "Shut up you dang fool. You can't say that in public." He didn't even know when he was "in public" and when he wasn't. Of course, he knew that if he didn't do what Momma said that it was the closet that awaited him. There he was again thinking about that closet. He didn't ever open it now. With Momma gone he didn't have to open it or even go near it. He would be happy if he never saw the inside of it again…All the way until he ended up like that doornail. What is a doornail? He often wondered. Is it like a fingernail? That did not make any sense. Doors did not have fingernails. No, but toes did. But those were toenails. So, what was a doornail? And why was it dead? He had so many questions in his fuzzy brain, but he knew better than to ask them because he could be "in public" and not even know it. His sandwich was good. He liked his sandwiches. Nobody made sandwiches like he did, and even after a day in the Tuppa it was still good. He knew that after about a day he had to throw it out because of the salmon vanilla, but it was ok now. It didn't even smell funny yet. But it was a little dry. He reached for his water that he always kept beside the chair. It was in his cup. He had made his cup, and he loved his cup. Other people would think it was weird because they thought he was weird, but he liked it and always drank out of it. Always…always…always.

My special cup

The tv was loud, but he knew that he couldn't turn it down. He would have to get up to do it and he was comfortable in his chair with the little sprigs of cotton sticking out. Plus, and really the reason he didn't dare turn the tv down…He would have to hear that terrible noise. He knew where it came from. He knew what it was. He even knew how to fix it. See, he wasn't so dummy like the kids at school used to call him. But, he knew something else too. It wasn't time to fix the noise. Almost time maybe, but not quite. Quite…Quiet. Now that was a puzzle he would have to think about. Not that he was any good at thinking. He would soon fix the noise, and then he could turn the tv down again. At least, for a little while. The noise would start back. That much he knew. And when the noise started people would watch him closely if he went into town. He tried not to go to town when the noise was happening. He wondered how people knew about the noise and why they looked at him funny when it was going on.

The damn closet.

Everything bad that happened to him was in that closet. That's where Momma had locked him when he had been bad. It was where she had kept the switches that had burned the backs of his legs. Burned, not like fire or the stove rings, but burned just the same. Momma's cigarettes would burn like fire, because they were fire. She had to get them going with her flicker she kept in her pocket. And that thing would burn too. But all of it happened in the closet. Now someone else understood the closet. Oh…Yes…They did. He could hear her in there.

Bang…Bang…Bang…

Scream…Scream…Scream…

Cry…Cry…Cry…

Soon though, maybe tonight or tomorrow the noise in the closet would quit.
Quit…Quiet…Quite…Another puzzle for him to think about. He wondered what he would do this time after the noise stopped. He had that tickle in his fuzzy brain. What had Momma called it…an I Dear? He wasn't sure about that. But it was there…The I Dear. Wasn't that what folks said when they got married. "I Dear." No dummy he thought. They say "I do." And he would do his I Dear. Sure, he would. It was more than a tickle now. It was becoming a full blowed I Dear. And he liked this I Dear. Oh, the man liked this I Dear very very much. When the noises stopped. The banging and the screaming and the crying. He would make himself a new cup, or maybe a bowl. She did have a big head.