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Pot O' Gold

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Author Bio

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Richard eats cough drops by the window of his room and dreams. He thinks about his father, his dead mother, and the box of moth balls in the facilities closet at school. Sometimes he tries to look down to the people living outside. To do this requires pulling his wheel chair parallel to the window sill and arranging his emaciated neck to look over the rusty brown radiator. Richard watches the children across the street running around and playing ball. Sometimes one of their mothers comes out to watch them play; she brings them bottles of water and smiles. He also watches the tight bodied woman who jogs by in running shorts and a sports bra. Often, he radiator creaks and the pipes slam against the wall, arousing him from his dreams. These are the things that Richard does when he's waiting by the window.

The doorbell rings, footsteps fall nearby, and Richard's father pounds on the door. "Richard, closet time," he says, his voice rough and icy. After his slower than normal brain processes the command he turns around to wheel himself towards the closet door. His father opens the closet door, and Richard rolls himself into the musty room. The door slams behind him. He knows that his father must be having a guest. That's when he puts Richard into the closet. Then, after his father locks the door and mumbles inaudible obscenities, Richard begins to do the things he does when he's waiting. He reaches for another cherry cough drop.

Richard enjoys looking at the pretty girls at school. They come into his classroom smiling at him and jiggling. This makes Richard smile, too. These pretty girls visit despite the fact that he drools, or that when he smiles, beads of saliva span the gap between his pink chapped lips. Before they leave, they give him a quarter, and he gives them one of the chocolate chip cookies that they baked with the help of the teacher.

Often, Richard would wonder why his father put him in closet time to begin with. Sometimes he thought it was because his father didn't want guests to know that his son was different. His dad used many words to express "different," such as "retarded," "slow," and "fucked up." But the word which stings Richard the most is "mentally handicapped." If Richard knows one thing for sure, it's that you cannot be handicapped and desired at the same time, especially not without cookies.

The moth balls in the closet-time room smell like the ones in the facilities closet at school. After school Richard waits for his father to pull up in his pickup truck. He sits and does the things he does when he's waiting. He thinks and he dreams. One day after school in the fall, Richard was waiting on the porch watching the squirrels vault the fence across the parking lot. He was waiting for his father, who was two hours late because he was tracking down the blood trail of a deer that he shot but did not kill. Until dusk, he waited. A boy named Rodney "Beast" Jenkins approached Richard who was still sitting in his wheel chair. Football practice was over, and Beast was on his way out of the school when he spotted Richard. Beast approached, and without saying a word he wheeled Richard back into the school. On the way in Beast passed a professor who smiled at him, who assumed he was just helping a sped. Beast turned the corner by the stairs to the basement, and pushed the wheel chair into the facilities closet. Richard saw a box of mothballs on the shelf, much like the ones that his father had in the room designated for closet time when guests are over.

Beast lifted Richard out of the chair, and placed him on his knees facing the spigot of the floor sink. The hard plastic of the sink was scratched deep with brown striations from years of use. The only sliver of light that entered the facilities closet illuminated the box of moth balls. The smell of chemicals from the floor sink began to singe Richard's nostrils. His skinny knees made contact with the frigid, slimy floor only for a few minutes. He braced himself on the spigot against the thrusting pain from behind, curling his crooked fingers around the rusted metal. Beast, also on his knees, gripped Richard's waist with his thick grubby hands and grunted, thrusting, and laughing, and thrusting.

"How was school?" his father said on the way home while browsing through his voicemail.

After a few seconds, Richard replied. "Ok," he said, involuntarily drawling out each syllable longer than necessary.

"I'm going to need you to stay in the closet tonight; I have a friend coming from town to visit. I just don't feel like explaining things to him, you know. It's hard enough as it is talking about your mother. You just had to go and take her away from me, boy. And you can't even think straight enough to understand that."

Richard stared out the window of his father's pickup truck, thinking. He processed each word slowly, and by the time he got home, he understood his father's words, but it was too late to reply; he was already in the closet.

Later that night, while midway through another cherry cough drop, Richard began to listen to his father's conversation with his guest. His father is drunk now.

"My wife died sixteen years ago. She died giving birth to a slow child..." He said, laughing after he dragged out the word "slow."

"...And by slow I mean fucked up, you know, in the head," he said, tapping his temple deliberately. "He's handicapped; we...I keep him at a home down the street..." he lied.

Once, a man in black approached Richard. The man had no hair and tight, shiny skin on his forehead. He wore a white collar. Richard focused on his shiny head. "Hey there, son, high five!" he said enthusiastically. Richard raised his arm, damp with his own saliva, and extended his fingers to the sky. They made contact, and the man in black held on to Richard's hand.

"Hey, son, what would you do if you weren't... handicapped?" he said. Richard thought about the man's words. He thought about the woman who jogged by the window every day, wearing running shorts and a sports bra. He wondered whether she, too, liked chocolate chip cookies, like the girls at school who smile and jiggle. He thought about the noises made by the men his father brought over during closet time. Minutes later, Richard knew his answer, but couldn't reply.

Sitting in the closet again, Richard reached in the bag of cherry cough drops. He put one in his mouth, and savored the flavor of loneliness. He heard the muffled sounds of his father's guest in the bedroom next door, moaning and giggling. He heard his father's deep throaty voice cackling like Beast in the facilities closet. The cough drop diminished until it disappeared. Richard reached for another, but found the bag empty. He found the strength in his useless body to stand up from his chair. He raised his arms up towards the box of mothballs. The box slipped from his hands, which were moist from saliva, and it fell. White marble sized balls scattered to the ice cold floor. Richard got to his knees bracing himself on the shoe rack in the dark closet. He held up a mothball. He placed it in his mouth, tucked it into his cheek pouch, and sucked on it like a cherry cough drop.

He thought about his father, his dead mother, the sounds coming from the room next door, and the jiggling girls at school. He forgot how to bake chocolate chip cookies. The chemicals began to burn his tongue. Again, Richard was waiting.

His body quivered on the closet floor. He writhed, his wrists contorting in pain, the muscles of his neck bulging. He swallowed his tongue. Seizing more violently now, his head flailed into the foot pedal of his wheel chair. Blood spurted from the wound.

Richard's father paused when he heard the noise of his son's bony frame clattering on the closet floor. His friend covered himself with a sheet. "Oh, what's that sound?" he said.

"Oh, it's nothing, the radiator sometimes makes that sound, you know. It's nothing, it's nothing. I got to replace that piece of shit."

A few minutes later, when Richard's father finished with the man, he walked him to the door, and thanked him before saying goodbye. He then went upstairs to unlock the closet door and let out his son to clean up the mess in the bedroom. He walked up the steps, and turned the corner to see a pool of scarlet blood in a half circle seeping from under the closet door. He stood there waiting for an eternity. Richard's father thought about his dead wife. He then looked again at his handicapped son's blood. He opened the closet door, and from under the stench of blood he could smell moth balls and cherry scented puke. His son appeared as he did on the night of his birth. The vapors of the subliming mothballs pricked his nose. He sneezed then closed the closet door, grabbed his coat, his truck keys, and left.