

The Weatherman

“Those of you in New York are not going to get a break from the snow for at least a few days. Precipitation has reached a record for this time of year. So buckle down and make sure you have plenty of supplies.”

Sprawled out on the couch in a half unbuttoned black satin shirt, Fred’s father sounded like a duck being strangled. Each breath was slightly labored as his dirt mound stomach rose and fell. His leg twitched. It reminded Fred of a dog chasing rabbits in its sleep.

Fred was tired of listening to the weather. However, he knew if he strayed from the weather channel his father would bolt upright and start screaming about needing to know the latest update on the storm. Fred snuck past the kitchen where his mother had the phone growing out of her ear with a Jim and coke on the table in front of her and a Marlboro light in her left hand. He halted at her words.

“You know that boy is never going to change. You should consider sending him to the military academy. Well you know I think it would do a world of good. It worked for Mark Ellison, he was in a mess of trouble and they sent him off, now he’s at the top of his class.”

Fred tiptoed down the hall to his room. Amid the jungle somewhere was a book he’d been reading, but it was more than likely lost for good now. He made a half ass attempt at finding it under a pile of dishes stacked on top of a mountain of filthy laundry. Luckily his mother’s threats of lurking creatures never turned out to be true. No luck with the book. As he turned toward his desk something caught his eye. A gleam from the wall. Just the fake plastic sheriff badge his best friend TJ gave him before he left one day and ended up a red smudge on the Interstate after some jacked up asshole decided to drive into oncoming traffic. They always joked about growing up and being cops together.

He ripped his alarm clock off the nightstand and hurled it into the closet ending in a dented wall and his alarm clock looking like the view from a kaleidoscope. There was a squeal that sounded straight out of a pig's mouth. The last pet the family had was long dead. Fred's heart mimicked a steel drum. *It's gotta be a squirrel or something or some kind of wild creature that found its way in somehow.*

He could feel his skin getting hot, he was clenching his fists. The wind outside made a howling noise against the house, Fred jumped. There was another noise like the giggle of a small child with its mouth full. The full view of the closet was blocked by a mass of clutter but there was definitely space for something to be living in there. *Squirrel's don't giggle though really, do they?*

Fred picked up his polo stick. First he hit a GI Joe action figure into the closet. No response. Then slammed one of his boots and it disappeared into the mess. This enticed whatever it was because it threw the boot back. Fred wasn't aware of any siblings that might be stowed away in his closet for however long, but he wouldn't put such trickery past his mother.

Fear no longer held Fred back, if the thing could throw a boot, it was time to face it. He began tossing junk out of his closet. A twister of helmets, baseball bats, shoes, dirty clothes, went flying across the room. Finally, he moved his sleeping bag and found the Labrador sized hole in his closet. He could definitely fit through this but not without a flashlight. This had to be where whatever was making the noise came from but whatever the thing was it had disappeared into the hole.

The damage to his wall was nothing he did by throwing alarm clocks in there. The hole was perfectly round, at least to his eye. It was polished, sanded, and had a decorative trim around

the outside. *How long had this hole been there?* Fred gained control of his jaw, and shutting the door tight, went to retrieve the flashlight.

“Why don’t you just come up this summer when all this snow is gone? Fat chance getting up here any time soon with this horrid weather we’re having.”

She was always bossing someone around but yet she only ever sat there eating away her lungs with death sticks. The near death duck still occupied the couch. Somehow the fact that the TV was getting snow too instead of the bouncy weatherman didn’t seem to wake his father. Fred had his own problems to deal with, TV was bullshit these days anyway.

The flashlight, one of the only household items his family managed to keep up with, was in the hall closet on the middle shelf right next to the Tide laundry detergent, the refreshing smell of which never reached most of his clothes. He checked the batteries, the beam stretched out like a pointing finger and touched the edge of his door. His eyes deceived him or he saw tiny feet shuffle past on the other side.

He bolted for the door but whatever it was, if there was even anything there, was gone. He knelt down in front of the hole and shined the flashlight. The light was overcome by darkness. This hole was becoming evermore strange as it turned out to be a tunnel. He scrunched his way into the black musty space and found that it opened up slightly. The tunnel walls were slimy and the space smelled of molding potatoes.

He crawled down the tunnel his knees growing continually tired until he came upon a wall. He heard the gasp before he saw the thing and flashed his light right in its eyes. It howled and covered its face with hairy hands. Only three meaty fingers protruded from the stubby palms. The grey brown skin was wrinkly and covered in a variety of shaped spots some raised and some not, hair growing out of some but not others.

The thing was squatting in a tiny room off to the right of the tunnel. It had acquired some of his things. An old stuffed animal he got for Easter about 5 years back, a pretty hefty pile of his T-shirts that the thing was apparently using as a bed. The book he had been looking for was propped up on two stacks of books and was lined with some of his favorite matchbox cars.

The thing howled again. It hadn't attacked him and seemed slightly pitiful. Fred positioned the flashlight behind him so he could still see but so it wasn't shining directly in the thing's face. It moved its hands away from its face and stood up reaching only about 2 feet and started pulling on the long black curly locks around Fred's face.

“OUCH!”

Fred nudged the thing with his knuckles. Its skin reminded him of a salamander with a hair problem. The thing shrieked. Its chubby face contorted oddly. Its huge black eyes sunk back in their sockets and its long disproportionate nose scrunched up mimicking a crinkle cut French fry as it backed into the corner.

Fred gently extended his hand forward to try and console the thing. It turned around and rummaged around through a small box of trinkets for something. As the thing turned Fred got an overly strong whiff of the moldy potato odor. Finally, it turned back to him. A glint caught Fred's eye. The thing placed a fake plastic sheriff's badge in the palm of his hand.

Fred's mother stood over him. The room was spinning. It took a moment or two for his piles of junk to come into focus.

“I told you to clean this room, Fred. How many times have I told you?! You are going to clean this room, Fred.”

Fred's head felt like someone had run over it with a semi truck. He removed the baseball he landed on from underneath the base of his skull.

“I tried to tell that damn boy not to change the channel while I'm watching the weather! I didn't even push him that hard! It's all this damn junk he's got piled up in his room here! He tripped over something. I didn't push him that hard. Damn! I just want to be updated about this storm!”

Fred bolted to his feet, the fish sticks and French fries he had for dinner threatening to reappear. He was swimming in a rip current unable to reach the shore, every breath pulling him closer to the bottom.

“GET OUT OF MY ROOM. GET OUT NOW!”

He pushed his mother back, his father catching her. He slammed and locked his door. He flew over to the closet and started throwing things about the room, a familiar twister. Helmets, baseball bats, shoes, dirty clothes. The sleeping bag. He halted. He threw it behind him with such force and carelessness he knocked the lamp off his nightstand, the floor breaking it beyond repair. There was no hole. There on the floor, precisely in front of where the hole would have been, was the fake plastic sheriff's badge.