**Trapped.**

The mornings had become crisp and cool as autumn subsided and winter took over. There was a trail of darkened grass upon the lawn as if some drunken wanderer had scribbled and scrawled nonsense across it. Instead, the illustrator was a round, brown, fat little rat. Fat now, but possibly not for long. Shelter had to be found before winter, as well as a steady supply of food and maybe a nice soft, warm, pocket to sleep in. The zig zag trail ended for a moment as the furry artiste stopped, rose on his back legs, sniffed and looked around, before taking the time to clean his whiskers and move on, in search of his winter home.

The day was not beginning with quite as much movement for Walter. He was still in bed and not the least bit happy to be awake, never mind the notion of actually getting up and starting the day. “UGHHHH…” was the only sound he could muster as he turned over in his blanket cave. He pulled the covers right over his head and tried to forget it was morning at all. This time of day had become harder. As age crept forward, Walters' joints and bones disagreed with him about moving and doing their job. He would be up and about right now, if his creaky body would co-operate. Tinkering in his workshop with this and that, making clever creations and tiny inventions.

Meanwhile, the whiskered pioneer had found an option for his new residence. He had forged his way through an unruly forest of grass, onto the cold hard surface of a forgotten path. This led him to Walter’s front door. The wooden structure had been battered about by the comings and goings of life. The door rose above like a skyscraper compared to the rat. But before him, at ground level, the sill was broken and chipped. In no time entrance to his new abode was found and easily achieved.

On attempting to get out of bed, Walter had become tangled in his sheets, escaped and then hit his toe against the dresser, “Ach-dammit!” was his second word for the day, the sound squeezed out from a grimaced mouth and clenched teeth. He hobbled his way over to the kettle, flicking the switch on, hoping that a cup of tea would restore some good to his day. Waiting by the sink, Walter gazed out the window. The kettle popped and cracked as it also woke up. His eye was drawn to a darkened trail in his lawn, which he followed to see his neighbour across the road. “Hmmph, silly cow.” he muttered, at seeing “Bubbly Betty” (the name he gave her) who was always chatting away to anyone who passed her letterbox. An interaction Walter had managed to avoid.

“Click” went the kettle. Walter proceeded to make his cuppa and promptly burnt his tongue. He slammed his fist on the bench in aggravation. The bench was clear of dishes, so he did this without creating any more calamity. But the surface was littered with crumbs and debris. Walter grabbed his soggy sponge out of the sink and began wiping up the crumbs leaving a sponge sized snail trail in its wake. “What the?” He bent over, groaning as he used his back to look closer at the bench. “Ugh bloody ‘ell.” As he peered closer and poked and rolled a “crumb” on the bench it became obvious that some critter had chosen Walter’s home for his very own. “Well, just you wait!” said Walter, as he grabbed his tea and took a large gulp with renewed fervor and confidence and headed to his workshop.

Walter had made many technical gadgets and creations in his time. But one of the earliest was a simple wire snare trap. As he began to twist the wire his hands seemed to suddenly forget their age and functioned without thought.
"Watcha’ doin’ Walty?"
As his hands remembered, so did he.
"Makin’ a trap"
"What for Walty, where ya’ gonna’ set it huh? What ya’ gonna’ catch?"
Walter saw it all as if it was just yesterday. A time where the days were full of adventure and when his little brother, Jimmy, could think of nothing better than to hang out with his big brother. "Hmmph, if only," thought Walt as he returned to the present. He hadn't seen his brother Jimmy for a long time, and wouldn’t be getting a visit any time soon.

He swiftly made multiple traps. He knew it was overkill, but he wasn't going to let that little rodent run riot in his home. As each snare was completed his fingers moved swiftly and with ease and again, he was transported back to being 10 years old.
"See Jimmy, you set it up like this and before you know it, you've trapped summing." He remembered crouching down explaining to his little brother who looked at him with awe and interest. Walter’s face softened at the memory and he felt a tenderness he had almost forgotten. He paused in his work momentarily, wondering how things had changed so much. There had been a time where he had enjoyed other people. Somewhere along the way, he had just stopped trying. Maybe he should be more like Betty?

He left the workshop and wasted no time returning to his kitchen. He worked quickly as he set trap after trap around his home where he thought his invader may pass. When his work was done, he backed away from the kitchen bench and eased his weary body into his recliner. From his post, he could survey his traps, dotted and littered around the corners and surfaces of his aging home. He sat and he waited.

It wasn't long before some movement caught his eye. He watched carefully and silently as the rat appeared from beneath the broken edges of his back door. He was on the move and steadily manoeuvred his way along the edge of the wall. Walter held his breath as the rat neared the first snare, his eyes widened. But the rat stopped in his tracks, distracted by the smell or sight of something. It then quickly changed tack, darting off in a different direction. Walter let out his breath and as he did his body relaxed as it released all its tension. The rat had finished his curious side venture and returned to the route along the wall, but bypassed the snare altogether. It then began to climb the wall, gripping onto an exposed part of a wooden beam with his teeny claws. Walter eyed the rat carefully, almost with admiration at its scaling abilities. It reached the height of the bench and began to arch its body towards the formica top. His whiskers twitched and his tail spun as he balanced himself and then bravely lept. He landed perfectly and continued on his way in search of food. He found some almost immediately and stopped for a nibble, perched on his back feet, and took the time to look around and have a little clean. "Seriously?" thought Walter, who was keen to be rid of this little pest.

The rat looked around and continued its search, nearing another snare that had been carefully placed. Walter held his breath, tension returning to his shoulders. This time the rat did not digress, he kept heading straight for the snare. Walter felt sure that somehow this clever little creature would evade capture and then he watched as the little rat ran straight through his wire loop, closing the silver circle which increasingly tightened around the rat’s neck. The rat’s forward motion was suddenly halted and his body sprung backwards. He began to struggle and tried to run, his feet and claws slipping and scraping on the shiny surface of the bench until he stopped moving.

Before he even knew what was happening, Walter was up on his feet and moving over to the bench. He hadn’t moved that fast in a long time. His large, hardened hands reaching out, one lifting and cupping the small furry pest. His other hand desperately tried to loosen the snare and release its captive while his fingers were fumbling and shaking. Again, Walter held his breath, and eventually freed the little rat who now lay motionless in his hand. "What have I done?". He backed away from the bench with the furry fellow still in his hands and sat back in his chair, not taking his eyes off the rat for a second. He cradled it in his hands and watched expectantly, hoping that no real damage had been done. It had rolled partially onto its back and its little feet were curled up in the front of its body. Walter could see the underside of the rat’s chin and mouth with its teeth protruding. This was a familiar sight to Walter. He and Jimmy had caught many small animals. His head fell back and he closed his eyes. He had achieved his goal, but now felt such regret. In that moment he felt the pain of losses from throughout his life. He had been kinder once. He had cultivated this grumpy nature. Knowing it had led to his lonely life was like salt in the wound. This little rat had been his first visitor in a long time.

Walter felt a twitch from the rat. He opened his eyes and looked down and saw a paw move.    He felt a quiver and saw a whisker shifting. The muscles in Walter’s face softened and a smile began to curl from his lips like a long, forgotten habit. "There you are little fella’" he said as he looked down. The wee rat was regaining his posture and looked back at him. He was slow at first, but then sat up and cleaned his whiskers and looked around a little. He seemed surprisingly at ease, his soft fur lightly resting on the leathery and cracked surface of Walters’ skin. Tentatively, Walter moved a pointed finger towards the rat’s face. The rat lifted his body and clasped the end of Walters’ finger, gave it a sniff, a little nibble and a lick and then seated himself back down before turning on the spot and nestling down to rest in Walters cupped hand. Walter smiled. His body felt relaxed and at ease. He watched the rat for a while. Then reached across his body with his other hand to remove his hanky from his cardigan so he could gently place the rat in his nice, soft, warm, pocket.