Like usual me an’ the other boys piled into kitchen to eat …ugh… ham stew again. Why don’t they just call it hot ham water an’ lil’ potato lumps? I get in line and the grumpy kitchen lady gives me my bowl o’ ham water, with a sad green celery strip, lying in it like a dearly departed fishy. I sit down on the nearest wobbly chair and put my tray down and pull the celery out. A boy I’ve never seen before is sitting next to me. He’s got on trousers that are still intact, not a hole or tatter on ‘em and his shirt is pretty dang white. He’s got some ham water and a sad clump of biscuit on his tray. He must be new, otherwise he woulda knew better than to grab one of them bread-rocks.

“How long you been here?” I ask him.

“Just today.” He smiles and then looks down like he could use some encouraging. I feel for the kid, being that it’s his first day. I ask him his name. “Frankie,” he smiles, “Nice to meet ya.” I see he’s lost one of his top teeth so I decide to make a joke.

“You take another bite of that so called biscuit, you’re gonna lose another tooth.” He looks down and smiles. I figure he’s just one of those shy kids, just needs some ribbing to warm up.

“That’s ok. Just stick it in that so called ham stew. It’ll break up in that toxic sludge like a vampire on the beach. He looks at his lap again, and his smile twists.

“My grammy made this food. I’m just visiting since my mama and daddy’ve gone to some errands.” He turns around and points to grumpy old Kitchen lady. Her permascowl disappears when she sees him looking and beams at him.

“Oh, well, I , uh… mmm… yum, I was just kidding….” I plow a big spoonful of cold ham water into my mouth and grin at him, “Mmmm.” He takes his tray and walks back to the kitchen. Arg, there goes me and my big old dumb mouth again. I better not do that again. Let’s see now … is it rule 61? No, Rule 63 …