

*An Apology to the Ants of 1319 Franklin Street*

by Glyndon Jewell

"Be careful this time, all right, Pal? I don't want it to cut me," my brother said, as I lathered his face up with shaving cream.

"It's not going to cut you," I assured him.

"How do you know?"

"I'm not going to let it."

"But what if it slips?"

"It's not going to slip."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure," I said. "But you're going to have to sit still."

"It's slipped before."

"Yes, I know it has, Dylan, but that was a long time ago."

We referred to the razor as "it" because the word "razor" was just too much for him to handle. A "razor" is what slipped in my hand and cut his face last spring. Saying "it" made him less nervous, although he still squirmed at the thought of the pronoun.

"A long time ago was like, 1985, when we were seven, Pal."

"I suppose."

"There's no supposing to it.

Things happen in the past but that doesn't mean they're gone forever or that you can just forget about them."

"It's not going to slip, okay?"

"Okay, but be gentle, all right?"

"I will."

His slouching posture straightened up a bit every time the razor touched his face but I was careful and gentle and I did not cut him. Dylan and I are twins, so shaving him is not very difficult – it is very much like looking into a mirror, but it took nearly ten minutes because I had to shake the razor beneath the water in the bathroom sink after every stroke in order to clear the hair from between the blades. And there was a lot of hair. The only time Dylan ever got a shave was when I came to visit him at this apartment, which was only when I could get away from the university on a holiday. Our mother, who lived across town from Dylan, did not mind his beard much, and neither did Dylan's roommates, but I thought it looked rather uneven and unkempt – so when I was in town, I insisted he let me shave it for him. He almost always agreed.

His apartment was well kept by his roommates, who were actually employees of a health care agency hired on in 40 hour shifts to look after him and those in the surrounding apartment complexes who were also developmentally or physically disabled.

Dylan's roommates, as he liked to call them, were usually quite amiable and willing to step out and look after other clients when a family member stopped by to visit. Don, the fellow on duty when I arrived, said he would be right next door and asked me to let him know when I was leaving. I told him I wouldn't be long because I had a lot of driving ahead of me. He asked me if I was headed back to school. I told him I was and "Go Cougs" and he wished me good luck, adding he supposed he would see me again around Thanksgiving. I nodded and smiled and he stepped out the door without another word.

"Do you want to start the bath water for me, Pal?" my brother said.

"Sure, how hot do you want it?"

"Not too hot, okay. I don't want it to burn me."

I said okay and leaned over the edge of the tub and pulled the stopper up and started the water.

"You know what, Pal?"

"What's that?"

"I liked us better *before* you always had to shave our faces – when our voices were higher and we were smaller."

"Why is that?" I asked, as I took one of the folded bath towels down from off the rack above the toilet and wiped the excess shaving cream off his face.

"I think we were better then."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we weren't ever really bad until we were bigger and living on Franklin Street."

I asked him again, what he meant.

"Well, we weren't ever punished or anything like that until our voices started sounding all funny."

We lived on Franklin Street in Bellingham with our mother and her ex-fiancé, Richard, who if I recall, was some big-time commercial fisherman up in Alaska. He had a fast black car, a graying goatee and a red nose. I think we all lived there on Franklin Street for almost two years, but my mother, myself and my brother moved to Seattle after they broke up when we were 13. I believe he sold the house and moved back to Alaska sometime after that.

"I remember being grounded a few times for not doing my chores – and getting yelled at. Is that what you mean?"

"Well, yeah, there's that, but I mean more of the stuff like this," Dylan said, as he lifted up his arm and slowly brought the back side of his shaking hand to the side of his smooth face.

"What? When did that happen?" I asked as I took a seat on the edge of the white porcelain tub.

"Well, the first time, mom was at work and Rick was watching us and I was still eating lunch, but you were already

done and you'd gone back outside to play basketball or something I guess.

"I'd taken a real long time to eat and Rick came out from mom's bedroom wiping his nose and he got pissed, oops, I mean mad, because I wasn't done eating yet and he started yelling at me but I couldn't stop laughing 'cause I was thinking about how earlier that morning, you were playing with the ants out in the driveway, pouring glue all over them and watching them move around all slow and saying, 'help me, help me, I'm dying' in all these funny voices.

"He told me I'd better shut the "F" up and take my plate over to the counter or else, and I did but you know with my cerebral palsy and all, I started to lose my balance and I dropped the plate and it broke and the rest of my macaroni and cheese went all over the kitchen floor and that's when he did this," he said,

repeating the motion he had just made a minute before.

I sat on the edge of the tub and stared at his poor uncut face for a moment and then swallowed the knot that had formed in my throat. He repeated the motion several times and the skin on my face began to feel hot. I turned around and stopped the bath water and then stood up and leaned over to give him a hug. I told him I loved him but I had to go back to school. He said, "Okay, Pal," and then asked me if I was okay. I said yes and told him not to worry.

I stepped out of his apartment and knocked on the neighbor's door. Don answered and I told him Dylan was about ready to get into the bath. He gave me a friendly nod and I walked to my car with my head down. I felt real sorry for what I did to those goddamn ants.