

BEST STORY AWARD

Leftovers

He tossed his lunch onto the table and plopped himself down. His side-kick, opposite, did the same.

"I don't know," he grumbled. "I just woke up mad. You know how you wake up real abruptly-like, how it stuns you, then you're irritable the rest of the morning? That's what happened. I didn't even want to get up in the first place. Then it just got worse. I was madder'n hell."

"What'd your mom say?"

He unwrapped his sandwich. "Oh yeah, well, Bink's party last Saturday. I told her Babs and I were going to Babs's sister and brother-in-law's, you know, so I can use the car. So we go to Bink's, have a few beers, I get Babs home by one, bring the car home, lock it up in the garage, and go back to Bink's. I come home around four-thirty, unlock the door, sneak in, she's sitting at the kitchen table like some kind of eternal statue, just staring. She goes, 'Don't plan on using the car for awhile until you learn to tell the truth!'"

The other grimaced. "Oh-h-h-h man! How'd she know?"

"Who knows? She knows what I'm going to do before I do it. I thought about standing there and arguing, you know, plead my case — but she just would have said, 'I don't want to hear,' and gone to bed. So I beat her to it. She starts to yell at me some more. I just wave her off, tell her to relax, and go to bed."

"Good strategy."

"Don't I know it." He finished the first sandwich and began unwrapping the second one. "So I'm laying in bed Sunday morning, she comes in and wants to discuss it. 'You know if you said you were going to Bink's, you wouldn't have been allowed to use my car, don't you?' I got a pillow over my face and I go 'Hmmmmmmm.' Ugh — liver sausage again. She goes, 'If you had to do it again, would you say that you were going to Babs's sister's?' I go, 'Yep.' That got her — What am I gonna say, no? This way I at least got to use the car."

"Yeah, but now you're walking."

"Ah, so what? Then in the evening I go into my little brother's room. I start playing linebacker — halfback — and before I even touch him he yells ouch and starts crying! And my mom's out to get me, so she tells my dad that I hit him and he comes up and gives me the wrath. And later, I'm typing in the basement — it's like an icebox down there! My hands are shivering, I'm making a mistake every other word —" He tossed the remains of the liver sandwich into the nearby trash barrel. "If I told her once, I've told her a thousand times — No liver! Does your mom ever put liver sandwiches in your lunch?"



"Why's the typewriter in the basement?"

"Cause it gets in the way in my room. Anyway, I ended up going to bed mad."

He tore open a bag of chips. "So I wake up, I'm already irritable, and go in to take a bath. There's no hot water. There's a big glob of green toothpaste in the sink. Wash rags rolled up in balls. Wet towels on the floor. Hair dryer sitting on the toilet seat. And it's the same thing every morning, mind you! All three sisters have to take a bath and wash their hair. I wake up, there's no dry towels, no hot water, no clean rags! And it's not that I'm some hygiene freak or something. I don't want to impress anyone. Hell, it's an all-boys school. I could stay away from water for a week and still smell better than half the kids around here. It's just that some mornings you like to feel refreshed, revived, clean!"

"So get up earlier."

"I can't wake up early."

"What about your little brother? Doesn't he —"

"Him? He encourages them to use the hot water so he doesn't have to take a bath."

"So what'd you do?"

"What I usually do. I threw a tantrum. I go, 'Goddammit! I'm sick and tired of living with slob!' Then I picked up the towels and rags and threw them into their room. I screamed, 'You three are pigs! Can't you ever pick up after yourselves?' One says, 'Shut up! Just 'cause you woke up in a bad mood.' I go, 'How'd you like to walk into the bathroom every morning and see this!' Then I threw the towels on the floor and go, 'How do you like that?' Another says, 'I don't care, do it all you want. You'll just come in and get them when you need a towel.' Made me madder'n hell." He sighed. "Then I came to school, got bored for five hours, flunked two quizzes."

"Did you have to work?"

"No, thank God. I hate that job. I'm sick of cleaning up after other people, being up to my elbows in someone else's meal scraps."

"Well, then, at least you didn't have to go in to work."

He finished the chips and searched his lunch bag for more and found a few cookies wrapped up. "No, instead I went home and thought of everything that I've got to do. Books to read, term paper, reports. It depressed me."

His side-kick shook his head. "Must be February. Everyone I know is either irritable or depressed."

"It's not February. I love this time of year. Nothing to do. Just lie on the couch in sweat pants, watching TV while it's snowing outside. That's why I want to be a millionaire, so I can lie around in sweat pants, watching Andy Griffith reruns on cable."

"Yeah, that'd be mint."

He nodded. "Yep, that'd be neat — But not this February. No sireee, this is the February that everything comes down on me."

"Did your mom say anything to you?"

"Oh, she came home and grumbled about a few things. I didn't say anything to her, though. I answered her questions with one word or less. But then she started being nice to me around supertime."

"Ah, that old trick."

"Yep. But I wouldn't budge. I figured I'd let her suffer the silent treatment. She asked me if I was going to eat dinner — You know I rarely eat home anymore since I'm working — It did smell good. It was only leftovers, but it still smelled good. But I told her I wasn't hungry and went into the living room and turned on the TV."

"Good move," his friend responded admiringly.

"Yep." He sighed.

"When my dad came home, Mom dished up only two plates, one for her, one for Dad. Dad asked where everybody was tonight. My brother had basketball, one sister was at the library, another at cheerleading, and the other babysitting. And she said that I was mad at her and had said I wasn't hungry. I went into the kitchen to get a glass of Pepsi. The two of them were just sitting, eating . . . alone. Mom asked if I was sure I wasn't hungry. I stood my ground and said no. They looked so old sitting there." He looked into space for a mo-



ment. "I went back into the living room and sat down. I kept listening to them in the kitchen mumbling. They didn't say much, asked about each other's day, but mostly it was quiet, just the sound of silverware scraping the plate. God, what a lonely sound that was. I hadn't eaten with them in so long. I didn't realize no one else did either. I kinda wanted to go out there, dish up a plate, and eat with them. Talk to them. . . ."

There was a moment of silence.

"Did you?"

He cleared his throat and coughed. "'Course not. I've got my pride. Why should I be the one to give in first?"

"Right!"

He finished the cookies and again searched his bag for something more. "Awww man! Look at this. My mom packs my lunch every morning and I've always told her — No bananas! I hate bananas! So what does she do? She packs me a banana. You know, she probably did this just to spite me!"

"Yeah. . . yeah. . . ." □

Matthew Weiland '83

*If*

*What if . . .*

*dreams came true,  
good things were here to stay,  
if Mom let you keep stray mutts  
without regret in any way,  
if that inside straight had just paid off,  
if you would only smile instead of scoff,  
if guns and bombs would disappear,  
the blind would see,  
the deaf would hear,  
if dusty tigers never gathered beneath your bed,  
and your shoelace never broke,  
if cookies didn't crumble and  
all problems were a joke,  
if dreams came true,  
if dreams came true,*

*If . . .*

Brian Rotsaert '85