

Frank and Beans

by Albro Daniels

I don't know why he's my brother. Everyone else in my family doesn't act like him. He looks like he does everything in slow motion. When someone sees him for the first time they can tell he's different. His ears are big and stick out. On the top of them veins are bulging like some Frankenstein monster. The veins make them look purple from far away. Everyone has a hard time understanding what he says — except my mother. Even my father can't understand him all the time. Dad never gets mad; he gives up and walks away with a tired look. Mom never gives up on Frank. She is always by his side when he is home. Always helping and always paying attention to him. I get angry and begin to hate Frank until he smiles at me.

It's weird how he is five years older than me but acts like I am bigger. I love him. He is always there to play with me. My friends complain how their older brothers leave them to play alone. Frank never leaves me. When I talk to him he looks at me like I am king. He can give me a piggyback ride for a long time because I am smaller and he is bigger. I never ask him for rides when Mom is around because she says they can hurt him. I don't see how because he laughs and begs me to let him be the horse.

The thing I don't like is now I'm in the same school with him. Going into fifth grade means going to a different school. Frank is at my new school because that is where they teach the special kids. I know how people make fun of Frank's classmates. If people find out he's my brother they're going to make fun of me too.

I knew it would happen soon. I was in gym class and I saw Frank standing against the wall. I was going into the lockers when I saw them. I didn't act like they were there — hoping no one would see them.

"Look at those dummies. I thought they would fall on their faces."

It was Pete who said that. Pete, who is always the first to put someone down. We all laughed at his remarks, including me. I wasn't laughing now. The others laughed and I felt fear begin in my stomach.

It happened at lunchtime, the same day. I remember looking for a place to sit. I hate to eat alone. I saw these kids. They reminded me of moving sea grass I have seen on nature programs I watch with my dad. I was beginning to feel bad when I wasn't finding anybody I knew. Then I saw Randy. He's this big kid in my English class. I used to be afraid of him until I realized he wasn't a bully.

"Can I sit with you, Randy?"

"Why not? You can always tell on me if I don't"

I thanked him but I had this feeling that he wouldn't let me sit with him if Mrs. Wayda wasn't around.

I look into my plate to see what I am about to eat. Turkey and green beans with a sticky blob of mashed potatoes. The worst is the green beans. The can it comes in always makes them have a weird taste, something evil, like I swallowed paint. The smell makes me look in the direction of Randy who is busy devouring his green beans. I shiver as I imagine what it tastes like when he chews.

I begin to cut my turkey. It is covered in a pale brown gravy like sandy chocolate sauce. I lift a piece to my lips. Then I see him. He never eats during my lunch period. I feel my stomach begin to tighten like a fist.

"Randy, why are the special kids eating with us?"

"It's activity day. The afternoon classes are short."

I watch Frank slowly go through the line. My food is forgotten. He is talking to a girl in his class. She is ugly but he doesn't care. Those kids don't care about looks. She laughs and hits him in the arm. They're up to the ticket counter. I watch as he hands the lady his lunch ticket. He looks like it's the greatest thing in the world. I see him say "thank you" and the woman looks at him strangely and laughs softly to herself. Frank goes through the food line with the girl behind him. They go out the exit and walk over to the ketchup table. The girl trips over something. The plate goes out of her hands and lands near Frank's feet. The cafeteria explodes with noise. Laughter and yelling mix together like a monster from my nightmares. The girl bursts into tears. Frank looks down at his feet, not understanding what happened. Mrs. Wayda and Mr. Freytag go to her. Mr. Freytag says something to Frank and Frank starts to walk. He is walking towards me. Don't, Frank, please. Everyone is watching you.

He is so close now that I see only him. I forget my stomach pain.

"Adam, can I sit with you?"

"No, you can't, Frank."

I don't want to look at Randy but I do. He makes this strange face like he is surprised and trying to smile at the same time. He looks down the table and spots Pete.

"Hey Pete, Adam knows a dummy." It was like Randy punched me with his mouth.

"Pete, come over here and look at this."

"Shut up, Randy," I said. I looked around for Mrs. Wayda but I could not see her.

"Don't mess with my brother", I added, without thinking.

"Your brother? What did you say? You can't make me stop messing with anybody."

I quickly glanced over to where Pete was sitting, but he wasn't there. I looked back to Randy and saw him looking at me. He had another weird look. I understood what it meant. He couldn't believe I'd told him not to mess with Frank. I was getting worried about Randy.

"Only Adam would know an idiot." I heard Pete behind me. I didn't have to worry about Randy. Pete could hurt a lot worse with his mouth.

"What did I hear Randy say? That the dummy here is your brother." I looked over at Frank. He was hearing everything. I knew he understood what Pete was saying. I didn't think he was upset, then I saw a tear run down his face.

I didn't think about what I did next. I just reached to my plate. I felt the green beans in my hand. I didn't feel the heat because in a second I threw them at Pete. They flew across the aisle like tiny missiles. The pile hit him square in the chest. The juice stained his shirt in a big circle.

"My new shirt," he screamed.

I felt a big hand grab me by the arm. I was Mr. Freytag.

Now I am in the office and I have to write a paper on why I hit Pete with the beans. I haven't done much. I can't write it down, I can only think about it. No one can help me. I'm getting nervous and feel sick to my stomach. All I have written down is:

Frank.