

## Late for Dinner

“Jimmy, would you like to stay for dinner?” She stood in the doorway from the kitchen to the living room. The TV show had just ended.

“No, thank you, Mrs. Gilroy,” said Jimmy. “My mom expects me home for dinner.”

She gestured to the yellow rotary phone on an end table. “Would you like to call her and see if it’s ok?”

“That’s alright, I’ll just go home.”

“You sure? I’d be happy to call for you. I’m sure Bill would like you to stay.”

“Yeah, Jimmy.”

Jimmy would’ve liked nothing better than to stay. He enjoyed hanging out with Bill. Besides, the pair could watch the Gilroys’ big RCA console color TV. Theirs was black and white. He knew, however, how angry his mother would be at him if he didn’t get home on time. She’d be doubly angry with him if Billy’s mom called for him. He knew that his mom would say yes to her, but he’d catch it when he got home.

“No, thank you.” He stood. “I should probably get going.”

“Alright,” Mrs. Gilroy said, “but we’ve got plenty.”

Bill stood, and the two nine-year-old boys said goodbye outside the back door. The sun had set, and darkness loomed.

“See ya, Jimmy!”

“See ya!”

Jimmy trotted across the lawn to a corner of the fence when Bill went back inside and shut the door. His backyard was kitty-corner from Bill’s, and Jimmy quickly scaled the six-foot stockade fence. Supporting himself with his hands on the top cross beam, he swung one leg over. In a coordinated motion, he swung the other leg and let go as he plummeted down. He felt a stabbing pain in the sole of his right foot as soon as he landed that caused him to crumple to the ground.

Tears in his eyes, he pulled his foot up to look at it in the failing light. The head and the top of the shank of a nail protruded from his low-rise PF Flyer. A wire was wrapped around the nail beneath its head. The tears now flowed down his cheeks. He grasped the nail in his shaking fingers and tugged with all his might.

It didn’t budge.

Jimmy slid down onto his back. He thought, *Maybe I can limp to the house and get help.*

He got on the knee of the opposite leg and tried to struggle to his feet. The nail in his foot prevented him from being able to push off that foot and stand. He switched to kneeling on both knees. Raising his left knee up, he rested for a moment. He took a deep breath, pushed off the raised knee with both hands, and rose to one leg. He stood poised with his good foot flat on the ground and the other on his toes. He took a test shuffle step and moved forward slowly. Gaining confidence, he took another successful step. Mid third step, however, the movement of his foot with nail was suddenly arrested, and he fell to his face like he slipped on ice.

He lay crying, his face in the dormant winter grass, his hurt foot immobile. When he regained his composure, he scooted on his belly back toward the fence. He found he could move his damaged foot again as he got closer. He sat up and looked once more at the nail in his foot. The wire wrapped around it extended back to the fence, and he could see it was attached to the fence by other nails, an old, disused lattice. He found he didn't have enough slack in the wire to unwrap it from the nail. Sliding on his butt some more toward the fence, he was able to gain the slack needed to free the nail and himself from the wire.

Although freed from the lattice, Jimmy's nine-year-old brain never considered simply crawling to the house; he felt the need to limp there under his own power. *Oh man*, he thought, *I'm going to need a shot because of this. Maybe stitches.* He tried to pull out the nail again without success. It still wouldn't budge. He could not grasp what protruded from his shoe, and the sole itself seemed to have its own rubberized hold on the nail.

Jimmy wiped off the dry grass stuck to his face by his tears. *Maybe if I can pull my shoe off, the nail will come with it*, he reasoned. He untied his shoe, removed the lace, and popped the tongue out. His heel moved easily, but his toes were stuck beneath the white, rubber toe. He curled his toes, and as he did so, he felt the nail shift out of his foot slightly. Not wanting it to slip back in, he kept his toes curled, grabbed the rubber toe of the PF Flyer, and strained as hard as he could. Although the pain intensified, the foot suddenly spit free of the shoe. The shoe remained suspended from his sole by the nail. With a final yank, the nail came out, and his white sock bloomed crimson.

He felt exhausted by his travail and rested briefly. Somewhat in a stupor, Jimmy got upright using the same method he'd employed before. Although the puncture hurt, he could shuffle along more efficiently without the nail. By the time he reached the back door, his sock was clotted with blood and dry grass.

Tears flowed down Jimmy's cheeks again as he opened the screen then the door.

"Where the hell have you been, goddamnit?!" In the kitchen, his mother had her back to him as he came through the laundry room. "When I say I want you home by a certain time, I expect you to be home! You're lucky I didn't just feed your dinner to the dogs."

Jimmy started to speak.

"I'm not interested in hearing your lip! Go wash your hands. Your dinner's cold, but you'll eat it anyway."