

R. L. Aseret

## **Brother, Eye, Hospital**

My brother has a problem. Once, we went through a multi-hour ordeal to get him hospitalized after a severe episode in which he believed himself under attack from the devil. He thought that in the process of violently defending himself—the chaotic state of his apartment supported his description of a life or death struggle—that he'd punctured his own eye. I couldn't rule out that possibility through visual inspection as his eye was severely inflamed and swollen almost shut.

We waited hours before the county emergency room doctor quickly determined that conjunctivitis, instead of a puncture, caused the pain, swelling, and yellow discharge dried to crust.

The tiny wizened county psychiatrist, whom we waited still more hours to see, answered my question about my brother's psychological condition by saying, "Schizophrenia is like cake." When I asked her to explain, she replied, "Just cake, just cake," and then abruptly told us to wait outside in the hall, where I puzzled over her words.

Hours later, my brother began anxiously pacing in place and repeating in a small, distressed voice, "Stop, leave me alone," after a pugnacious psychiatrist, newly on duty after the shift change, aggressively confronted him. The psychiatrist hollered that he wanted my brother locked up in a jail cell as a violence risk.

In an acid tone, I suggested that perhaps if he tried a different approach, he would get better results. The psychiatrist whirled and spat a challenge into my face, "You wanna take responsibility for his behavior?"

I wiped off my cheek, gestured toward my brother as he marched backwards against the wall in a futile, apparent attempt to climb it and escape, and asked the psychiatrist, "What exactly is it you're afraid he'll do?"

By 1:38 a.m. I had spent over nine hours engaged in the ongoing

ordeal of getting my brother admitted to a hospital—waiting in line and surmounting a series of bureaucratic hurdles common to county medical centers—a process complicated by my having no legal authority over him. Finally, a possible end was in sight. According to County Harbor General, St. John’s Hospital in northwestern Santa Monica would likely have a psych bed, if we could get there—about twenty-five miles away—before it was taken.

In the middle of the asphalt parking lot of St. John’s, my brother stopped walking and started marching in place. When coaxing produced no effect, I became infuriated, and railed at him, *Come ON*. His stationary pacing went into reverse. I reached to grab his arm and he made a primitive noise of protest—similar to sounds that the character Chewbacca makes in Star Wars movies—and suddenly thrust his forearm outward, pushing me back, and triggering a sense memory of him beating the crap out of me when we were kids.

I flinched into recoil, forced my voice into a calm tone, and tried to reason with him. His marching continued at the same relentless pace.

Bone weary, I was in a heart-pounding cold sweat. “We’ve come so far. But we’re not going anywhere now. We can’t stay here all night!” No stars were visible through the heavy overcast. I shut up and tried to calm myself. How absurd it was to tell him that he could not stay anywhere all night.