

Pets

by R. Daniel Lester

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a dust bunny under Benny's bed that he couldn't get rid of no matter how hard he tried. It was a pest that simply wouldn't die. Yes, back then, for Benny, dust was the tip of a giant iceberg of want and dysfunction. Dust was everything he couldn't accomplish. All those flashing neon signs of failure staring him right in the face. Dust was bad, dirty, unsanitary. Dust was a sign of neglect. So what he decided to do was disinfect his life of this parasite, and it would be the push that got the ball rolling, the one that was also like a stone, so it would gather no moss as it knocked down everything in its way. Everything that Benny thought was wrong with his life.

As his apartment sparkled, so would his life sparkle.

And Benny wanted that kind of sublime.

Benny wanted to shine.

So he began a campaign of strategic dust bunny attacks, becoming a never-relaxed army of one. And what he lacked in soldiers he made up for in pure, unadulterated bloodlust. Because, like Elton said, Benny had some jets, and he flew them fast and below bunny radar. He'd wipe and sweep and mop with a fevered intensity. He'd wake with the daylight, launch an offensive and then proclaim, "I love the smell of Endust in the morning."

But in the dust bunny there was an equally relentless and sneaky foe. A brilliant General that silently marshaled its troops under tables and chairs, in obscure, shadowy corners, and along the unsuspecting flat surface of things.

For weeks they battled in that natural, timeless, ebb and flow of

conflict. Territory was won. Territory was lost. The Battle of the Bookcase was a particularly gruesome event. The dust bunny suffered heavy casualties. But so did Benny suffer because when the odor from the mix of corporation cleaners made him lightheaded he had to sit down and put his head between his knees to keep from fainting.

As they say, War is hell.

Especially a dirty one.

"Come out where I can see you," raged Benny that afternoon, as he stood up on wobbly doe legs. "What are ya, chicken?"

And never one to shy away from a challenge, the dust bunny and its army became visible in a passing ray of sunlight and Benny was sorry he asked.

The enemy was everywhere.

He was completely surrounded.

And that was the day Benny put down his guns, calling for a truce. He walked away from the front line, resolved to make peace work between man and dust. And so man went on living and dust went on being the very definition of inevitability. Dust became the wrinkles forming at the edges of Benny's 30-year old eyes, the t-shirt in his closet that had this to say:

I KNOW I'M GOING TO DIE, I'M JUST NOT SURE I REALLY
BELIEVE IT

"Why, there's only one letter that separates us," said Benny of the dust bunny, as he shook his head at all the atrocities of warfare. "I guess we're not so different after all. The both of us trying to survive

in a crazy, chemical world.”

And as a sign of goodwill, of the blossoming friendship growing where only hate had festered before, Benny stopped cleaning altogether. Actually, he stopped doing a lot of things, taking the surrender thing as far as he could. The result was an experience of freedom that was almost religious in nature, and soon his apartment was a grassy meadow paradise for dust bunny frolic.

Word spread quickly.

His newest companions became an unpaid bill monkey on the table and a dirty dish squirrel in the sink.

But he had to make sure and keep them quiet.

Benny's not allowed to have pets.

