



Hafaman Construction

It amused his customers that Jimmy Hafaman had an MFA in Creative Writing and taught it part-time, in the evening program at the Community College. When he showed up wearing his Carharts and a tool belt, with a copy of Bukowski's *Maybe Tomorrow* in the nail pouch, it always started a conversation that ended badly.

At his age - thirty-eight - people didn't know whether he was a failed college professor on the way down or a day-job remodel carpenter hoping to start a literary upswing.

He didn't bother to tell them he could just as easily be a failed general contractor, trying to follow in his father's large footsteps, the man who built Hafaman Construction and half of downtown Port Hudson. Or maybe a

small-change community college instructor aspiring to build something out of more than just words, something people could raise a family in; generations of a family, for that matter.

In fact, he was none of the above. Jimmy Hafaman wanted nothing more or less than to spend all day writing stories.

At the moment, what his customer, Jonathan Mann, wanted was for Jimmy to explain why it was day seven of a contract to finish his basement in five days.

“Mr. Mann, I would have been here yesterday except I had to replace the transmission on my pickup truck,” Jimmy explained. “Yesterday was the only day AutoWorks could do it.”

In fact, he had spent the day before updating his website, *InnerSquirrels.com*, and at a movie matinee. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

“Tell you, what,” Jimmy said. “Today is on me. Eight hours of work. Free.”

Mann mumbled something and went back inside. Jimmy contemplated the predictable effects of another day without cash flow. He was still contemplating an hour later, when he left to “pick up some blades for the Skilsaw.” Which he would do, for sure, after he took an early lunch.

When he got back from spending an hour-and-a-half finishing *Maybe Tomorrow* and starting *The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over The Hills*, and ordering *Poems Written Before Jumping Out of an 8 story Window*, he spent the rest of the day organizing his tools and left an hour early to “go to the equipment rental place.” Or, maybe to McDonald’s, for more of *The Days Run Away*, with fries and a Dr. Pepper.

When he got home, there was a voicemail from Mann.

“Jimmy,” Mann said, “this is absurd. I don’t think you know what you’re doing. You were here four of the eight hours you promised and nothing’s been done but pile up some sheetrock where I usually park my car. I’m done with this. Figure out how much of my deposit you actually earned and bring a refund check for the rest when you pick up your stuff. Which better be tomorrow or the next message will be from my lawyer. Do you ever answer your phone?”

Jimmy called him back. He expected to leave a voicemail, but Mann picked up.

“What, Jimmy,” Mann said. “I thought I was pretty clear about where we go from here.”

“Look, Mr. Mann,” Jimmy said, “I totally understand why you’re upset. You hired me to do a job and it’s gone way over what I promised you. I am

sincerely sorry. I will make this job the only thing I do next week. You have my word on that. I will have your basement sheetrocked by next Friday or I will refund your entire deposit.”

Mann said nothing, just cleared his throat a few times.

“Okay,” he said, finally. “I don’t why I’m doing this. I guess I feel sorry for you. But, if you don’t turn this around starting Monday I *will* call the Department of Licensing and go after your contractor’s license, if you even have one. This has been an extremely disappointing experience. I expected more from Bill Hafaman’s son. What would your father think, Jimmy?”

“Absolutely,” Jimmy said, ignoring the question. “I totally understand. I will be there Monday ready to get busy, I swear.”

And he was. At seven-thirty he started hammer-and-nailing it like a robot. By noon he had an entire wall ready for taping. A couple more days and he’d be ready to paint, knock in some trim, and he’d have it done.

It was around lunchtime that he first heard the hissing sound. *Shit*. There was a hot water heater at the far end of the basement and it sounded like the sound was coming from there.

When he looked at the tank he didn’t see anything right away. He took a look at the gauge. The water temperature and pressure looked normal. There was a funny looking bug crawling around under the round glass cover. *Double shit. That bug will starve in there.*

He went out to his truck and grabbed the toolbox he kept his specialty tools in. It took him a good hour, and getting the cover off and back on again was tricky, but he got the bug out and carried the little critter outside, in his coffee cup. He shook it out onto the broad leaf of a weed. *There you go, little guy. Have a happy life.*

It only took an hour and a trip to the hardware store to repair the leak he found in the intake line to the hot water heater. As a boy, when he’d helped his dad, he’d had a fascination with pipes and water and stopping leaks. It served him well now. He looked at what he’d done. *That’s a work of art, right there.*

The leak had been spraying into the insulation and flooring over the tank. He was pretty sure the tank was directly under the bathroom toilet.

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“I pegged you wrong, Jimmy,” Jonathan Mann said. He had come outside to help pick up the scraps from the sheetrock. “You did a helluva job. And Lord knows what could have happened if that leak went

undetected much longer. Could have rotted out my bathroom floor. That's a real professional-looking repair job, too. Give me your bill and I'll get you a check."

Jimmy looked at the ground and rubbed a hand across his jaw a few times.

"No," he said, "you pegged me right. I'm lazy, I'm a first-class procrastinator. You don't owe me anything."

He turned and walked toward his pickup. Jonathan called out after him.

"Jimmy, that's ridiculous. You may have saved part of my house. What the hell? I'm ready to write you a check. You deserve it."

Jimmy waved over his shoulder, climbed into his pickup and drove home. It was only two in the afternoon. He deserved the rest of the day off, is what he deserved.

When he collected his mail from the box at the end of the driveway, he saw one of those envelopes from the bank that never has good news. He stuck it up on the dashboard.

He'd deal with it tomorrow.

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