

THE REPAIR

“It’ll be a bit tricky, but I can make it work, Alicia. It’ll probably run about twenty dollars. It’ll be ready Saturday ... is that okay?”

“That would be great, Mr. Joey. Reverend Williams says you’re the best.”

Joey smiles. “Thank the good Reverend, for his kind words, Alicia.”

“I will. See you Saturday,” the young woman says with a wave as the shop door closes behind the last customer of the day.

“C’mon Joey, let’s get a move on,” Bullets says, locking the door. “... the guys are waiting. ‘Pretzels’ is coming, and you know what that means.”

“Walnut fudge,” Crazy Pat says in a tone bordering on reverence. Of course, the mention of Bobby’s wife Linda’s fudge has that effect on anyone who’s ever tasted it.

“Joey, why do you waste your time on cheap trinkets,” Crazy Pat says, looking a Joey place the repair envelope in the “to do” box. “That thing you just took in is barely more than costume jewelry.”

“When you’re right, you’re right, Pat ... it isn’t worth much ...

“But the lady wearing it is.”

Hi, I’m Tony Baggz. It’s a little after five, the sun is low over the mountains to the west. The business day is done and we’re in “Uncle” Joey’s jewelry shop. Pat’s been waiting for about fifteen minutes and ‘Bullets’ just arrived after closing Gino’s. Tonight’s movie night. Joey, Vinnie ‘Bullets’

and ‘Crazy Pat’ Flanagan are headed for Walt Robinson’s house. Movie night started a few years back with a couple of guys getting together to watch some old classics. But now it’s a once a month thing, sometimes twice. It’s another reason to get together and enjoy good food and good friends. And sometimes share some wisdom. But not tonight. Tonight’s feature is *Animal House*. I think I heard Vince say Walt expects about a dozen guys. Of course, to these guys, Otter, Bluto, D-Day, Flounder, Pinto, and Boone, and Dean Wormer have taken on demi-god status. Hey, what can I say, the classics always bring out this crowd?

Joey’s the best jewelry craftsman on the South Side ... maybe in the whole city. Not only is he an expert gem cutter and metalsmith, he has a wall full of awards for his designs. The quality of his work keeps him in demand and currently he has several months’ worth of work backlogged. So, I can understand Pat’s question. Of course, knowing Joey he has a reason. And, knowing Pat, he’s going to try to talk him out of it.

... *Let’s listen in...*

“So, Joey, tell me, since when did you become the repair monkey for the Mega Discount Closeout Warehouse? Why waste your time on junk that came from a jewelry case next to the pet supplies aisle ... probably sold by some kid who’s now back stocking dog food?”

Pat’s rant isn’t lost on Joey.

“Yea Pat, the piece might seem a waste of time,” he says, chuckling at his friend’s sarcasm. But like I said, the person who owns it isn’t.”

“Okay sure, but this is beneath your talents. You’re always saying you have to slow down, yet you keep taking on things like this. Heaven knows it can’t be worth the money.”

Joey opens a showcase to empty it. “Granted, you have a point,” he says. “But you see Martin Williams sent her. She told him she didn’t know who to trust. So, if a person respects me and my work, I honor that. And besides; to her it’s a treasure. No, it’s not worth much and deep down inside I think she knows that. But that doesn’t matter. To her, its meaning goes way beyond dollar signs. So, should I see it any other way? Should I only work for people based on how rich or good looking they are? Or how important their jewelry is?”

“Why not, everyone else does?”

Taking out the last tray of rings, Joey heads for the safe. “Martin told me about her. Last Saturday was Valentine’s Day and her new boyfriend gave it to her. She told Martin it was the first piece of jewelry anybody ever gave her. Two months ago, she was a lonely lady working for little more than minimum wage at a convenience store. Someone for whom romance only happened to other people ... whose dance card was always blank. Today she has a boyfriend who buys her a treasure and makes her feel special. Should I treat her differently?”

“Commendable, my friend. But you’re not in the business of making sacrifices.”

“Again Pat, you’re right, no good businessman is. And it would be a sacrifice if I hated doing the work. The thing is ... I don’t. Matter of fact, I get more satisfaction working on something like this, for somebody who treasures it, than I do making a piece that costs fifty times as much for some guy to give to his lady ... a lady who just might not be his wife.”

“Well, when you put it that way ...”

“Pat, this woman just trusted me with maybe the most important thing she’s ever received from someone other than a family member. I

have to look at it this way ... the dignity and the significance of the work is directly related to the person requesting it.”

“... and to the person performing that work,” Both men turn to the sound of Bullets’ voice.

“I know where Joey’s coming from, Pat,” Vince says. “Last month Martin sent a young man over for a suit. Kid was down on his luck ... Martin said his church would foot the bill. Just asked if I could give him the best deal possible. The kid had a wife and two kids and was down to his last few bucks. But he had a job interview and needed to look good. It wasn’t the most expensive suit I’ve ever sold, but I put something extra into it to make it look sharp. Martin called to say thanks and the kid stopped by the next day. Said he got the job and was able to keep things together. The look in that kid’s eyes ... it made it all worth it. Sure, I didn’t make a whole lot. In fact, if you figure in the time, I put into it making sure it fit just right, I probably lost money. But those are the times when work feels good; when it’s more than just paying the bills.”

Shaking his head, Pat chuckles. “You two ... you’re both soft touches. You guys are way too easy.”

“Sure Pat ... and you run into burning buildings for what kicks ... just to make a buck? Come on, admit it, you do what you do for reasons that go way beyond the money.”

Pat shrugs his shoulders, laughing quietly to himself. “Okay, I give ... you guys win.”

“Hey, let’s get a move on,” Bullets says, winking at his friends. “I hear a plate of fudge calling my name.”

Joey locks the safe and closes the back-room door. Walking out he tosses his friends two white bed sheets.

“Here, put these on ... party at Hammer’s place tonight.”

Looking at each other, Pat and Vince laugh, and in unison begin to chant,

... “toga ... toga ... toga.”

Two stonemasons were working in the afternoon sun. A passerby asked what they were doing. “Laying bricks,” said one. “Building a cathedral,” said the other. Aahhh ... perspective.

Work; we spend much of our lives at it. So, what does work really mean? Well, if man is made in the image of an intelligent, creative, and productive God, then work is the tangible expression of our God-given abilities and talents. Seen in that light, work is sacred.

Jesus was a carpenter. A working man. It isn’t hard to picture Him and Joseph working side by side, father and son ... well, step father and son ... sweating in the hot afternoon sun of the Galilean countryside. And coming home tired in that good way one feels after a solid day’s work. One can only believe Jesus worked with a scrupulous honesty and a meticulous dedication to His craft; embracing His responsibility to be a contributing member of society and provide for himself and his loved ones. And that he made a fair and honest profit for His products and His labor. We can believe nothing else.

Or can we? Do you think Jesus picked His customers based on how attractive, important, or rich they were? Did He produce second rate products ... provide second rate services ... use shoddy materials, and cut corners? Did He pad His invoices ... charge for time spent elsewhere, or on other jobs? Did Jesus consider Himself the “carpenter to the stars” and everyone else got what was left over? Do you

think He ever uttered the words, “close enough for government work?”

Should you?

Thinkaboutit ... I'm Tony Baggz.

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