

THE REPAIR

“It’ll be a little tricky, Alicia, but I can make it work. I might have to add some metal though. Anyway, I can fix it ... it’ll probably run you around twenty-five dollars. It’ll be ready Saturday afternoon ... that okay?”

“Oh, that would be great, Mr. Joey. Reverend Williams says you’re the best ... thanks ... see you Saturday.”

The shop door closes behind the day’s last customer. “C’mon Joey, let’s get a move on ... the guys are waiting,” “Bullets” says, locking the door. “Pretzels” is coming and you know what that means.”

“Walnut fudge,” ‘Crazy Pat’ says, his tone bordering on reverence. Then again the mention of Bobby Pretzels’ wife’s fudge has that effect on anyone who’s ever tasted it.

Bullets looks at the jeweler as he’s putting merchandise in the safe. “Joey, why do you want to waste your time on cheap trinkets?” he asks. “That thing you just took in is barely more than costume jewelry ... bad costume jewelry at that.”

A small, knowing smile creeps across the jeweler’s face.

“Vince, when you’re right, you’re right,” he says, “... 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 sinking behind the mountains to the west ... the business day is over 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 is movie night. Joey, Vinnie ‘Bullets’ and ‘Crazy Pat’ Flanagan are headed for Rabbi Green’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 ... another reason to get together and enjoy good food and good friends. Tonight’s feature is *Animal House* and I think I heard Vince say that Josh expects about twenty guys. Of course to these guys, the gang at Faber College 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.

... What do you say we listen in...

"So Joey, tell me, since when did you become the repair monkey for the Discount Closeout Mega Warehouse?" Pat asks.

"Since I opened this place," Joey says, chuckling softly.

"Come on, why do you want to waste your time on junk that came from a jewelry case next to the pet food aisle? It was probably sold by some kid who's now back stocking dog food."

Shaking his head, again he chuckles at his friend's sarcasm. "Yea Pat, the work might seem a waste of time. 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 that aren't worth the effort. And heaven knows they can't be worth the money."

Joey opens a showcase to empty it. Thinking for a moment, he turns to his friend. "Pat, you have a point. But you see Martin sent her to me. She told him that she didn't know who to trust. So, if a person respects me and my work, I have to honor that. And besides, to her it's a treasure. No, you're right, 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 its monetary value. 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 these days."

Taking the last tray of engagement rings out of the showcase, 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 said it was the first piece of jewelry anybody ever gave her. Two months ago, she was just 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 empty. 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 really appreciates it, than I do making a piece that costs fifty times as much for some guy to give to his lady ... a lady who happens not to 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 dignity of the person performing it.” 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 fellow 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. He was a nice kid and he got the job. Martin called to say thanks ... and the young man stopped by the next day ... said he was able to keep things together. The look in that kid’s eyes ... it made it worth it. Sure, I didn’t make a whole lot on that suit ... in fact, figure in the time I put into it making sure it fit well, I probably lost money. But those are the times work feels good ... when it’s more than just a way to pay the bills.”

Pat shakes his head and chuckles. “You two ... you guys are way too easy...”

“Yea right ... sure Pat,” Bullets says. “... and you run into burning buildings for what kicks ... just to make a buck? Come on, Pat, you do what you do for reasons that go way beyond the money.”

Pat shrugs his shoulders and laughs 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”

Locking the safe, Joey closes up the back room. Walking out he tosses his friends two white bed sheets. “Here you two, put these on ... there’s a party at the Rabbi’s place tonight.”

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

“... toga ... toga ... toga ...”

Two stonemasons were working in the afternoon sun. A bystander walked up and asked what they were doing. “Laying bricks,” said one. “Building a cathedral,” said the other.

Aahhh ... perspective.

Work ... we spend a lot 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 ... a part of our identity as people of God ... part of our purpose here on earth. And seen in that light, all 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 at night hot and 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 ... that he embraced 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, cut corners, and over charge for His work? 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? Did he malingering ... procrastinate ... slack off? In the course of a

day's work, do you think Jesus ever uttered the words, "close enough for government work"? ...

Makes you wonder ... should you? ...

...Thinkaboutit ... I'm Tony Baggz.

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