

A Turkey of a Story...  
or rather I mean,  
A Turkey Story  
by  
Brett Paufler

“It’s the unions!” Harry nearly yelled. “They’ve gotten too strong.”

“Please don’t make a scene,” Margery his wife begged. “He’ll only be doing his job.”

“Well, I wish he would hurry up and get to it,” Harry replied a little more calmly. “How long ago did you call him anyway?”

“An hour... but it’s Thanksgiving,” she added quickly. “We’re lucky he’s coming at all. No one else even answered their phone. All I got were their services.”

“Harrumph,” was all Harry managed. He grumpily moved over towards the bar and ordered a “Scotch and Soda,” while Margery silently hoped that machine didn’t start acting up as well. She breathed a sigh of relief when Harry took a sip of his drink and seemed pleased with the result. “You want anything Marge?” he asked politely.

“No. I’m fine. I’m still nursing the Manhattan the bar mixed for me before I made the call...” Marge’s voice drifted off, but she knew the damage had been done. She could already feel the tension growing in the air as Harry started to get a good head of righteous indignation going. You couldn’t really blame him. It was a holiday. Wasn’t there a law or something? I mean, the one day a year when you really needed your oven to work and what did it do? It broke down -- as if it was designed, as if it was programmed to do just that.

But Marge wouldn’t let -- couldn’t let -- a little thing like this ruin the day, so once again she tried to change the subject and said the first thing that popped into her head, “The bar is a Swift and Tyler, isn’t it?”

“Sure enough. We don’t have any problem with the fridge, the doors, or the bed and they’re all Swift and Tyler’s, but the one time we buy a... What type of oven is it anyway?”

“A Broadloom McDerm.”

“A Broadloom McDerm? What kind of stupid name for an appliance is that?”

“I don’t know, honey.”

“Why did we buy it anyway? Was it on sale?”

“I think it came with the house.”

“Well, that explains a lot,” but before Harry could go on a long winded rant about the previous owners and their lack of sense, common or otherwise, the doorbell rang. “That better be the repairman.”

“I’m sure that it is. Now be polite. Just be thankful you don’t have to work today.”

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The repairman was everything you could hope for in a service worker. He wore greasy, ill fitting clothes, which -- in the traditional manner -- didn’t quite cover his backside, while his toolbox was adequately stocked with all manner of arcane, obviously outdated, and patently extraneous gadgets, gizmos, and other esoteric doodads like screwdrivers, wire cutters, and pliers.

After sticking his head into the oven for the compulsory ‘looksie,’ the repairman took out his government certified meter, plugged it into the diagnostic slot on the front panel, and pushed the magic button.

“This is the moment of truth,” the repairman explained conversationally. “Could be anything: blown fuse, shorted wire... or a fried heating element. Better hope it’s not that,” he continued merrily. “I don’t have any of those on the truck and I’d have to order one from dispatch.”

Now it was Margery’s turn to worry. “But it’s a holiday?”

Frank -- as the repairman’s nametag indicated -- simply shrugged.

Harry, on the other hand, wasn't about to let it go. "I thought there were rules. You know, black out dates, some sort of law." "Sure, sure," Frank assured him. "But you've got an older model. I don't see many Broadloom McDerms these days. Most folks replace them. They've got an uncanny way of breaking down just when you need them... say on a birthday, an anniversary, or when the in laws come to visit. Don't ask me how they figure that last one out."

"But the law, the convention," Harry protested again.

"Doesn't apply to older models," Frank explained simply as the diagnostic computer beeped.

"What does it say?" Margery asked anxiously.

"Well, here, I'll show you," Frank replied easily. "See that series of dashes?"

"Yes," Margery answered.

"That means it's a simple repair, just a defective bit of programming code. Won't take but a second to fix." He waited a moment as he savored the look of relief that washed over Margery's face before turning to Harry. "But you see this?" he asked as he tapped the licensing credentials that hung under his nametag. "This little asterisk here indicates that not only am I licensed repairman, but I'm a fully credentialed gouger as well."

"You wouldn't dare," Harry protested angrily. He was getting ready to tell this Frank character exactly what he thought of him and his all too powerful union. He had insurance for this sort of thing! And, he had friends in city hall! But then, Harry noticed the big monkey wrench Frank was holding in his hand, the smile plastered across the guy's smug face, and the silver-bordered get out of jail free card he was happily showing off -- just daring Harry to make a move.

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After a moment the repairman broke the tension, "Tell ya what I'm gonna do. Seeing as it's a holiday and all, and on account of my not being able to help but notice that your wife just made a pumpkin pie..."

“If you think I’m sharing my Thanksgiving meal with you...”

“Be nice Harry. It’s a holiday,” Margery said, cutting her husband off before turning to the repairman and sweetly explaining, “We understand if you have to gouge us, Frank. You’re just doing your job, and besides, you gave up your own Thanksgiving just so you could help us out. We are ever so thankful. Could I offer you some pie? Or... I could whip up a sandwich, coffee, or whatever.”

“A slice of pie would be fine ma’am,” Frank agreed as he started putting his equipment away.

“But you’re going to fix it?” Harry demanded.

“Already done. I was just letting you know what I could do, but it’s a holiday... Besides, I need the repeat business.”

“If you think I’m calling you again...”

“Harry!” Margery said quickly, cutting her husband off for the second time. She could see where this was going. “You’ve been ever so nice and helpful Frank, and on a holiday to boot. Of course, we’ll call you the next time we need help.”

“And tell your friends too,” Frank interjected. “That’s the big one.”

“Goes without saying,” Margery agreed amiably, and then, after he was done eating the pie, she asked, “So you liked it?”

“General Bakeries?”

“Of course.”

“Mmmm. Just like mom used to make,” Frank replied good-humoredly as he played along. “Now normally I’d charge you for three hours...”

“What?” Harry yelled. He looked like he was going to have a heart attack right there and then.

“Plus parts and travel,” Frank continued nonplussed. “But,” he said as he raised his hand to stop Harry from interrupting again. “But you’re going to give these cards to your neighbors, and you’re going to explain what a pleasant time you had... Or, do I need to call in a grievance specialist?” he asked as he looked Harry dead in the eye.

“No... I guess not,” Harry agreed glumly.

“Good,” Frank said brightly. “Anyhow, normally I’d rake you over the coals, but I like your wife and the pie brings back the memories, so I’ll only charge you for an hour -- the industry minimum for a service call.”

“That’s very sweet of you Frank,” Margery said thanking him.

“You know,” Frank continued, “after a visit like this, most folks are tempted to get rid of their older models. I mean sure, a new Swift and Tyler would never break down on a holiday like Thanksgiving, and you can even set it to avoid birthdays and whatnot, but with a newer model, if you were due for a breakdown today, the governor would just save the malfunction till tomorrow.”

While Harry and Margery were digesting this tidbit of information, Frank continued, “That’s the real reason most repairmen don’t work on Thanksgiving. There’s not much to do on a day like today, but tomorrow... Tomorrow will be my busiest day of the year. And believe it or not, I charge more to work on the newer models. I mean, all that smoke, sparks, and greasy realism, who needs it?”

Frank took a moment to look Harry over then. His informal, casual, seemingly impromptu speech was not having its usual, desired effect. In fact, rather than being soothed, the old man seemed to be getting angrier and angrier at every word. Frank knew he’d never get another call from this neighborhood if the old man had anything to say about it, so, for business sake if nothing else, Frank felt the need to expand on his usual spiel and try to smooth out any hurt feelings.

“Sure, you feel bad now, after an unneeded service call and all,” Frank agreed sympathetically. “But tomorrow morning take a step outside and look around your neighborhood. Note which houses have smoke pouring out of their windows, and then go and talk to their owners after the repairmen have come and gone. In the end, you’ll realize what a good deal you got.”

“I’m sure we will,” Margery assured Frank as she handed him a carefully wrapped package containing an extra slice of pumpkin pie to go.

“You shouldn’t have,” Frank insisted.

“Oh, but I had to,” Margery countered as she pressed a Sweet Little Old Lady Sewing Society card into Frank’s hand. “Now, whenever you’re in the neighborhood, just drop on by, and I’ll fix you some coffee, a sandwich, or whatever you like. You’ll be like the son we never had.”

Frank tried hard to hide his sour grimace, and he couldn’t bring himself to look Harry in the eye as he stumbled out the door. A Sweet Little Old Lady Sewing Society card -- he’d been had. He’d be doing odd jobs for this old couple for rest of his life. Whenever he was within 10 clicks, he’d have to drop by, say “Hi,” grab a cup of Joe, and unclog a drain, fix a squeaky door, or repair a malfunctioning door chime... and for what? A cookie? A slice of cake? Or, a piece of pie?

It didn’t seem fair. He was going to have to talk to his union representative and see if there was anyway out of this. He should have known better than accept a slice of pie! And on Thanksgiving at that!

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www.paufler.net  
Brett@Paufler.net