

matters familiar



e. g. fabricant

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DEDICATION

For Frank and Betty, for the gifts of life and love—theirs,
mine, and ours—and
For M. A.; BeeEss; Tomiss; Jerome; J. L.; Fuffy; and The
Brat, for helping me fill in the blanks.

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10 Pipe Dream



Jay Johannessen glanced at his diamond-inlaid Cartier. *C'mon, man—let's go! It's just a leaky trap!* He watched the gaunt haunches in Khaki coveralls jiggle from the torque being applied invisibly ahead. *Well, that's a plus, I guess—no butt crack.* The gyrations stopped and two oxblood Red Wings glided noiselessly backward, followed by an auburn ponytail that just cleared the sink cabinet's top frame.

David DuPriest squatted, storing his tools deliberately. He finished wiping his hands, stood, and pressed into a languid stretch. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw his retainer furiously drumming his fingertips against his face. "That ought to do it, Mr. Johannessen. Use it for a couple days and call me if there's any further trouble. Oh, and you should have a carpenter check the sink base's floor. That was a steady leak, so you're probably looking at dry rot. I can give you a couple references, if—"

Jay had seized his arm. "I have a major meeting in 15 minutes and it's a 20-minute drive!" David looked

at Jay's hand until it fell off his bicep. "Give me a minute and I'll make out your bill." He fished into a hip pocket and produced a well-worn, triple carbon invoice pad.

Jay shifted on his feet. "Can't you just have your people bill me?"

David half smiled. "No 'people'—just me."

"You're kidding!"

"Nope. 'Sole proprietor.'" He toted up the charges with flourish. "Here you are. A signature and a check would be appreciated."

Jay snatched the sheet away and peered at it. His mouth fell open. "Two hundred sixty-eight dollars? For a balky *trap*? *Jeezus!* What's that—20 minutes' work?"

David was stoic. "Plus the replacement J-bend."

"Some racket, man. *Goddamn.* That works out to more an hour than I billed out as a senior associate at my firm."

David turned half away, toolbox in hand. "That's more than *I* billed out as a senior associate, as well."

"Huh? Wait!" Jay lunged and caught David by the arm again, with the identical response.

"I assume you remember the hornbook definition of battery, from Torts class."

Jay looked down at his offending fingers. "Uh...oh. Sorry. You're a lawyer?"

"*Was.*" David set down his tools.

Jay brushed at his forelock. "And you gave it up to be up to your eyebrows in *shit* every day?"

David's cheeks dimpled ever so slightly. "I regarded it a lateral move."

"Why, for Christ's sake?"

"Stress, mostly. Failing marriage. Responsibility for another life."

"What do you mean?"

"Which part?"

"'Another life.' What? Somebody on the side?" Jay leered. A frosty stare obliterated his feeble attempt at camaraderie.

"A daughter."

The muffled pounding of footfalls on carpeted stair treads accelerated into the clatter of stilettos on Italian foyer marble. A mid-teen Britney Spears replica—abdominal baby fat straining over distressed, low-rise jeans, pushed-up caricature of a bustline, and calculated makeup—burst into the kitchen.

"Daddy! Did you transfer \$500 into my checking account, like you promised? If I don't get that Moo Hoo bag by Friday night, I might as well die because I won't dare leave my bedroom this summer." She cocked an eyebrow, hands perched on her hip-folds; the sole of one of her expensive, impossibly pointed high heels marked time on the olive slate.

Jay had retreated to the counter and his knuckles grew whiter against the dark granite edge. "Why do you dress like that for a weekday? You look like a hooker."

Her eyes narrowed and her Lancôme-glossed lips parted. "I'm 15. If you knew *anything*, you'd know that *everyone* dresses like this. Besides, I'm hanging with my friends at the Galleria today." She sneered. "You know? *Friends*? Like *clients*, except they actually *like* you?"

David could almost hear the bile and invective backing up behind her teeth. He cleared his throat.

They looked at him as if he'd just materialized. Jay extended an arm. "David DuPriest. Meet Skylar, my stepdaughter."

"Oh—the plumber guy." Dismissive filters slid through her eyes. "Nyztmeechoo." She bored back into her stepfather. "Well?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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