

"Odd, the Jobs I Do"

BY DICK EMMONS

Kenniston



"I have looked at a lot of furnaces in my time but I have never been able to recognize one. We really don't understand each other, furnaces and I."

IF I AM TO BELIEVE an announcement from the Chamber of Commerce of the United States (these days you've got to trust *somebody*), we as a nation are now observing National Recreation Month.

Apparently this means that 170,000,000 Americans are lying around in hammocks this very moment, fanning themselves with eucalyptus leaves.

Well, I hate to spoil a round figure, but I think the Chamber of Commerce better make that read 169,999,999 Americans. Because I'm not in a hammock.

I'm under Fred Finlayson's bathroom sink.

Not by choice, understand. It would be a unique set of circumstances that could put me under Fred Finlayson's sink by choice. I am under here because my wife, Helen, has a nasty predisposition to offer my services to all comers. And some goers.

I tens in a hammock half an hour ago. That's when Betsy Finlayson trotted over from next door to have a glass of iced tea with Helen. I've got plenty, Helen said, tell Fred to come over, too. He'd love to, Betsy confided, but he's fighting the bathroom sink. He took off the elbow pipe to clean it and now he can't get it back on.

It was then that I tossed my eucalyptus branch resignedly over my shoulder and prepared for the remark I knew would come.

"Dick's very good at elbow pipes," chirped Helen. "He'll have it back in place in no time."

"Oh, I couldn't disturb your husband," Betsy whinnied. I sank back, smiling inwardly.

Helen could, though. So here I am.

At that, it's better than the Incident in Sinclair's Basement which took place on a black night last February.

"Poor Phyllis Sinclair," my wife groaned, hanging up the telephone receiver.

"I know I'm going to regret asking, but what is the matter with Phyllis Sinclair, whoever she is?" I said.

Helen sighed. "The Sinclairs just moved in a few doors down the street. Her husband, Jim, is away on a business trip and their furnace isn't working. I told her to come over here and bring the children."

I sighed with relief. "Good idea. Maybe they'd like some hot chocolate or—"

"I also told her you'd be glad to go have a look at the furnace while they're getting warm here," Helen breezed on.

"Now wait a minute," I objected. "I have looked at a lot of furnaces in my time but I have never really recognized one. We don't understand each other, furnaces and I."

My protests went unheard. In no time I was trying to get into the Sinclair home (the poor woman had locked the doors and left the house dark). I slid through a basement window, letting my feet dangle until they touched something that felt solid. It wasn't. It was an extremely mobile baby carriage which sped me across the darkened basement and bucked me off near the preserve closet.

I was just counting my limbs when a man's voice barked. "What are you doing in my basement? Where are my wife and children?"

"They're being taken care of," I answered.

"They're WHAT?" he screamed. "If you've so much as touched one of them, I'll—"

"No, no. They're at our house. Your furnace went out and—" I started to get up.

"Don't move!"

"Look, I'm your neighbor. I don't kidnap people. I haven't kidnaped anybody in years."

The telephone rang and he took the call on the basement extension, keeping his flashlight trained on my face.

"Sorry, old man," he said when he hung up. "I guess it's my error. That was your wife. She wanted to know why it was taking you so long. She wants you to hurry up because Mildred Doyle just called her."

"Mildred Doyle?"

"Yeah. Her refrigerator is making a funny humming noise. You're to stop by and have a look at it. Your wife says you have a nice touch with refrigerators."

I got up and walked stiffly out of the Sinclairs' house, making a funny humming noise.

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