

The Literary Issue

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# Kentucky

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# The Plumber

Bobbie S. Bryant LOUISVILLE

W put a bucket under the back of the toilet in the upstairs bathroom," says Margaret the housekeeper as she descends the stairs. "I had to mop up a good bit of water."

"Just what I need," Phil groans aloud to the housekeeper. "Guess I'll have to call a plumber."

"Yeah, it's leaking pretty badly. You'd better keep an eye on the bucket to make sure it doesn't overflow." Margaret places the wet mop in the hall closet, finished for the day. A moment later, she calls out, "I'll see you in a couple of weeks," as she lets herself out the back door.

Phil continues typing at his computer. When finished, he leans back in his chair in thought. *Stupid toilet. I really can't afford to get it fixed right now. I just got the hospital paid off from surgery six months ago.*

With conviction, he gets up and marches directly to the utility room to get a wrench.

"I'll just fix it myself," he mutters.

Knee replacement surgery has left Phil with diminished mobility, but he manages the stairs relatively well. He holds tightly to the handrail and takes his time.

Sure enough, the bucket is already filling with water.

Annoyed, he looks at the backside of the toilet to locate the problem. He gingerly kneels on his right knee, holding onto the bowl for balance. He leans to the left and locates the bolt that probably needs adjusting. The task is going to be tricky as he's right-handed. The space between the wall on his left and the toilet on his right is only about a dozen inches apart. Then there's the toilet paper holder on the wall in the spot where his body needs to be.

With the wrench in his left hand, he wedges his substantial girth into the narrow space. At such an awkward angle, placement is complicated, but he manages to secure the wrench and gives it a twist. Nothing happens. Another tug and the wrench slips off the bolt.

Darn it! This isn't going as well as he'd imagined.

He makes another clumsy attempt, and the wrench drops off again, clanking loudly onto the base of the toilet.

Wiggling his less-than-supple body a little further into the tight space, he leans in, his head pressed against the back wall. His right hand grips the toilet lid, serving as his anchor.

His face reddens, and a bead of sweat forms at his hairline.

Phil tugs the bolt one more time. Nothing.

He curses.

Frustrated, he contemplates his next move.

This has got to be what's causing the drip, he reasons. Minutes tick by. His neck is numb from his head being turned to the side, pressed against the wall. With resolve, he repositions himself and makes one more rotation, this time with force. The bolt suddenly gives, and Phil loses his balance. His body lurches and pins his torso and hips

between the wall, the paper dispenser and the toilet.

To make matters worse, the water bucket is nearly at capacity.

Fully wedged in the corner of the back and side walls, Phil distends his right arm. He reaches for the tank of the toilet and braces himself for lift. He digs the toes of his shoes into the linoleum floor for leverage. He sucks in his belly and shimmies his hips.

Nothing moves.

He tries again.

Nada.

He can't believe the dilemma. No one else is in the house, and he's not expecting company. He didn't bring his cell phone upstairs, and there is no phone in the bathroom.

What a pickle.

Drip. Drip. Drip. The water is less than a quarter-inch from overflowing the bucket.

Phil ponders his next move.

He aligns his right arm above his head, placing his hand against the back wall. He pushes with all his might while slightly lifting his lower body. His body plops heavily to the floor.

With moves that would make a contortionist proud, he wiggles backward and finally works loose from the torture chamber.

Clear of the toilet, he rolls over and sits on his rump. His hair is wet against his brow. Sweat streams down his back, and his shirt is soaked. He is exhausted.

Now, to stand up so he can empty the bucket.

He puts his left forearm on the lid of the toilet seat for leverage and strains to get his right leg into position.

It doesn't work.

He rolls onto his hip and tries again.

Crap.

Sweat pours profusely.

Drained, he thinks about those old ladies on TV commercials who have fallen and can't get up.

He curses.

Minutes tick by. What to do?

Drip. Drip. Drip.

Finally, good, old-fashioned ingenuity wins the day. Using both hands and feet while sitting on his butt, he inchworms his body toward the door, out into the hall. At the top of the stairs, he plants his feet on the top step.

With labored breath, he rests, dog-tired from the exertion.

He grips the handrail, hoists himself up and stands erect, shoulders squared. The Hallelujah Chorus rises to a crescendo.

Phil wearily returns to the bathroom, grabs the bucket of water and dumps it into the tub.

Now, if he can just remember the name of that plumber.