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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HANDYMAN ***



HANDYman

By FRANK BANTA

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***They didn't have to worry about a thing
for the rest of their natural lives....***

James Ypsilanti swung at the door with the steak cuber. Or was it the cube steaker? No matter. The door was a good, hardwood door and resisted his onslaught well. But time was on his side.

He had the energy and the time, he knew, and sooner or later the door would be kindling.

It was the door to his room. It was evident to him that he did not need the door to his room and that he *did* need heat. In fact he had better get some heat pretty soon—although he was keeping warm enough for the present by beating on the door. So he would beat this door to kindling, and then he would build a nice, cozy fire in the hall that would keep him warm for a long time ... if he was stingy with his fuel.

The carpenter came by. The carpenter was always coming by, except when you wanted him, Jim realized. The carpenter was a mighty, mighty busy fellow.

The carpenter stopped short when he saw Jim demolishing the door. In fact he came to a grinding halt.

"Jim, why didn't you tell me!"

"Carpenter, how was I to know where you were? Who can ever find you?"

"I know Jim. Jim, you work so hard!"

"Yes!" he said, pounding.

"Take this hatchet, Jim. A hatchet is what you demolish doors with! Good-by." The carpenter departed.

James Ypsilanti swung on the door with his newly acquired hatchet. Soon he was ready for his fire. He struck a match, and in no time had the pile of varnished kindling blazing smokily in the hall. He held his hands over the blaze.

"Ah, good, good. Good." He closed his eyes. "What could be better than this?" Then he opened them again regretfully. "It's dinner time. I'd better fix it while I have my fire going." He hurried to the kitchen and chose a can of eggs-bacon-and-pancakes from the massive stores.

Opening the large can, he heated it over his hall fire. Then he dumped the contents on his tin plate and ate.

"Murder," he thought somberly. "That's what I'm in for. Practically murder with consent. She said she couldn't live without me. Margie begged me to kill her, you might as well say. Good old Margie; a good kid, but I killed her. And now.... Well, that's life!" He speared a pancake.

"Damn, but it's *cold!*" He threw an armload of wood on the fire and it blazed up. "Sure wish these carpenters had feelings. My lord, they got no feelings at all!"

The carpenter arrived with a new hardwood door. Whistling cheerily, he began to install it where the other one had just been hatcheted away.

"Carpenter, that door won't be staying there long. I'm almost out of fuel."

"I hope you don't expect me to be surprised, Jim, if this door doesn't last very long. The previous twenty-two doors at this location, Jim, did not last very long either." Still whistling to himself, he installed the last of the hinge screws.

"Why don't you just *give* me the doors, instead of causing yourself all this work?" demanded James Ypsilanti.

"'Inmates will not be issued materials,' Jim. I've quoted that section of the rules to you many times, Jim."

"But couldn't you just *lean* the door up against the door jamb and leave it?" argued the inmate. "You go to a ridiculous amount of trouble."

"It is not ridiculous, Jim. I am a carpenter, Jim. Good-by."

After lunch, James Ypsilanti crawled into his escape tunnel.

He liked to go in there every day and daydream. The tunnel ended abortively at the wall of the prison, for the prison wall extended down into solid bed rock for a meter, and it was fabricated of one-meter thick compressed steel. It was the nearest thing to an exit that the prison had.

Officials had always come and gone through the massive, englobing wall by matter transmitters. "Smarties couldn't find me though, when I was in my escape tunnel," he chortled, as he stretched out in the cave under the concrete. "They can walk through walls, but they couldn't find *me*." Then his tone became baleful. "The smarties'll never find me."

As James Ypsilanti chopped on the door next day, the carpenter stood cheerily watching.

"Carpenter, why don't you fix the damn heating plant? Then I wouldn't have to be chopping up your doors all the time to keep warm."

"I am a carpenter, Jim, not a heat-plant fixer, as you well know from our previous negotiations on the subject."

"What will you do, carpenter, when I have used up all your doors?" the convict jibed.

"Why, Jim, we will have to send out for some more," the carpenter answered condescendingly.

"Still, I wish you would let *me* work on that heat plant," urged Ypsilanti. "I might fix it."

"Inmates will not be permitted to disassemble or otherwise interfere with the machinery of the institution," quoted the carpenter. "Need I say more, Jim?"

"Okay," said James Ypsilanti, resuming his destructive work on the new door. "Scram, stupid." The carpenter departed.

"That dope," Jim said between blows, "is even foggier in the head than my lousy lawyer was, and that's going some."

"Jim," said the carpenter, returning and sounding very pleased with himself, "look here at what I have found, Jim."

James Ypsilanti turned to look at what the carpenter held in his hand. It was a carpenter's square sheathed in plastic.

"Found enough of them to last me a lifetime, Jim," said the carpenter complacently. "I'll never have to buy any."

"No, you won't," agreed James Ypsilanti bitterly. "Can't you get it into your head that you and I are the only ones left on Earth? After the war the rest left. They couldn't *find* us when they evacuated this atomic-explosion wrecked planet, because we were in this escape-proof jug. So they went away and *left* us!"

"I know, Jim."

Ypsilanti studied the mobile features of the carpenter, searching intently for a sign.

But the carpenter robot strolled away, whistling.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HANDYMAN ***

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