FLYING TOILETS

 By

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Things happened to Nick. All sorts of things. Funny things. Sad things. Nick resembled that Al Capp cartoon character with a black thundercloud over his head. The only real difference between the cartoon character and Nick was that no matter what happened, Nick remained cheerful and optimistic. Everybody liked Nick and wanted to be his friend.

When our company president found out Nick and I would be flying together to visit a client, he advised me, “Don’t sit next to him.” That was before Nick worked for me. Naturally I asked why he would say a thing like that. “You’ll see,” he said. My seat was three rows back so I kept a curious eye on Nick.

When the plane hit a pocket of air, the flight attendant spilled a container of hot coffee all over Nick and his seat-mate. An hour later, we hit another air pocket and the overhead bin above Nick opened and dumped four tennis racquets on his head. The attendant spent the rest of the flight applying mercurochrome and band-aides to Nick’s scratches while Nick told funny stories about his other misadventures.

We had a profitable visit with our client and after we got up to leave, Nick said how much he admired the client’s wooden rocking chair. The client invited Nick to try the chair. “This is great,” Nick said. “And it’s amazingly quiet. Where can I buy one like this?”

As luck would have it, the store was only a block away and they still had one chair—the display model—assembled and sitting in the front window. Nick really wanted the chair so I said to the clerk, “Please give us some rope so we can tie it in the trunk. We have a plane to catch.” Naturally the airline charged us extra freight, but Nick was happy and our flight home was uneventful.

At our destination we dragged the chair into the parking garage. I helped Nick tie the chair to the roof of his sports car. At the exit Nick discovered the ceiling was too low for the chair to pass through. We borrowed a screwdriver from the parking attendant and working in the cold, dark garage we took the chair apart and threw the pieces in Nick’s back seat.

A few days later I ran into Nick at work. “So how’s the rocker?” I asked. “Well, it’s fine,” he replied. “Except, you know, it squeaks. I oiled it. Took it apart again, but. . .”

A few months later I visited Nick and his family and tried out his rocking chair. It still squeaked.

When Nick was assigned to my work group, I was happy to have him. He always exceeded quota and I began to look forward to the amusing stories of things that happened to him during his travels. I noticed that during our annual sales meeting, Nick always had a little story explaining why if only something had not gone wrong, he might have been awarded the salesperson of the year bonus. After a few years of this, the company president gave every attendee a box of Kleenex tissues to mop up after Nick’s sad stories.

And then there was Nick’s greatest sad story of all: the flying toilets. One day Nick called to say he was submitting an invoice for $2000 in damages to his company car. “New windshield, hood and a headlight,” he said. “But I think I need a new car.”

That was a lot of money but the car could be fixed. Why did he need a new one? “You know how the Smithfield Street bridge has so many potholes that you have to drive across really slow?” he began his tale. “Well, I followed this truck full of porto-potties. He speeded up, hit a pothole and the chain holding the potties broke. Potties went everywhere. Some flew into the river. Two went sideways. Two came for me. And the worst part”—here he hesitated— “was that the potties were not empty so the inside of the car doesn’t smell too good.”