

MY HANDY MAN



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Introduction

In a cramped one-bedroom basement apartment, single father Marcus Cole and his young son are doing more than just surviving — they're learning how to rebuild. Once the beloved handyman of the local public school, Marcus was the guy everyone counted on — until tragedy struck. Losing his wife and daughter to a drunk-driving accident sent him spiraling into depression, drinking, and smoking away the pain. His skills gathered dust, and life became a series of hard days and harder nights. But sometimes, the smallest hand can pull you from the deepest hole. For Marcus, that hand belonged to his son — the boy who never gave up on his father, even when he'd given up on himself. Slowly, Marcus found his way back to what he did best: fixing things.

First, it was small repairs for strangers he met on the street, then quick fixes that saved people from massive bills. Word spread, and with every nail hammered and faucet tightened, Marcus wasn't just mending homes — he was repairing his own heart. What began as an act of kindness turned into an unexpected mission: walking the streets, offering help where it was needed most, and building — dollar by dollar — his long-dreamed-of DIY emergency fund. But life has more surprises in store. Friendships, second chances, and even romance begin to bloom. And just when Marcus thought he was done losing, he realizes he's been gaining all along. My Handy Man is a heartwarming, deeply human story of loss, resilience, and rediscovery — a reminder that sometimes, fixing what's broken around you can help heal what's broken inside you.

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Chapter 1: Rock Bottom

I sat on the edge of the worn-out mattress, staring at the half-empty bottle on the floor. The room smelled of stale smoke and regret. The tiny basement apartment was silent, except for the low hum of the old fridge in the corner and the soft, rhythmic breathing of my son, Ethan, asleep in the next room.

I should've been beside him — reading him a story, tucking him in — like I used to when life made sense. But those nights felt like memories from someone else's life. The man I used to be died on a rainy night three years ago, on a highway where drunk drivers don't care who they take with them.

I ran a trembling hand over my face. My head pounded, my chest felt tight, and the weight of everything I'd lost pressed down harder than ever. I looked at the photo on the nightstand: my wife, Carla, laughing as our daughter, Mia, sat on her lap, cake frosting smeared across her little face. Their smiles haunted me.

I whispered to the empty room, "I'm sorry."

The apology was useless. It couldn't bring them back, couldn't erase the nights I drowned in whiskey and chased it with cheap cigarettes, thinking it would dull the pain. It never did. It only made me forget, and forgetting felt like another betrayal.

A soft knock on the door pulled me from my spiral.

"Dad?" Ethan's voice. Small. Hesitant. Too mature for his age.

I cleared my throat, trying to sound steady. “Yeah, buddy?”

The door creaked open. His slight frame stood in the doorway, his pajamas too short on his growing body. His hair was messy, and his eyes looked tired, but there was something in his face — strength. He didn’t get that from me.

“I heard you coughing,” he whispered. “And... I smelled the smoke again.”

I couldn’t lie. He deserved better. “I know, Ethan. I messed up.”

He walked in slowly, sitting beside me. His little hand reached for mine. Warm. Steady. Stronger than I felt.

“I miss Mom and Mia, too,” he whispered.

Tears burned my eyes. I squeezed his hand. “I know, son. Every day.”

We sat there in silence, the silence that holds pain and love in equal measure.

“Dad,” he said finally, his voice firmer. “Stop. The drinking. The smoking. It’s not helping. It just makes you sadder.”

I let out a shaky breath. “I don’t know how, Ethan.”

He looked up at me with eyes far wiser than his nine years. “You fix things, Dad. That’s what you do. You fix broken stuff.”

I let out a bitter laugh. “Some things are too broken to fix.”

He shook his head stubbornly. “Not you.”

I looked down at him, and for the first time in a long time, I saw hope — not in me, but in him. And maybe, just maybe, that could be enough.

“I’ll try,” I whispered.

He leaned his head against my arm. “That’s all I want, Dad. Just try.”

He stood up and headed back to his room, pausing in the doorway. “I love you.”

“I love you too, buddy.”

The door closed softly.

I sat there for a long while, staring at that bottle on the floor. Then, with shaking hands, I picked it up, walked to the sink, and poured it down the drain. The cigarette pack followed, crushed and tossed in the trash.

The next morning, I woke up feeling like a truck had hit me. Withdrawal was cruel, but not as cruel as watching my son lose the father he deserved.

I made him breakfast — eggs and toast — burned the first batch, but he didn’t complain. He smiled.

“Thanks, Dad.”

We sat at the tiny kitchen table; the sunlight peeking through the small basement window. For the first time in forever, I felt the weight lift.

I didn't know how to fix myself yet. But I knew how to fix things.

And maybe that was enough to start.

Chapter 2: My Son, My Anchor

The next morning, I woke up before the alarm. No hangover. No ashtray taste in my mouth. Just a dull ache in my chest that wasn't from withdrawal — it was from reality settling in.

Ethan was already up, sitting cross-legged on the floor, building something with old LEGO bricks. His brow furrowed in concentration, tongue poking slightly out the corner of his mouth — just like his mother used to do when she focused on baking.

He looked up when he saw me. “Morning, Dad.”

“Morning, buddy.” My voice felt rough, but lighter.

He patted the spot beside him. “Come see.”

I sat next to him, careful not to knock over his creation. It was a tiny house. One wall was bright red, the other blue, the roof crooked but sturdy.

“I built us a new house,” he said proudly. “Bigger than this basement.”

I swallowed the lump in my throat.

He pointed to the tiny figure inside. “That’s you. Fixing the sink.”

I let out a soft chuckle. “You really think I can still do that stuff?”

He turned serious. “I know you can.”

I didn’t deserve that kind of faith, but he gave it to me, anyway.

That afternoon, I found myself outside for the first time in weeks without a cigarette between my fingers. The air felt crisp, almost foreign. I wandered around the neighborhood, my hands stuffed in my jacket pockets, my head down.

Then I heard it — the creak of a loose fence post, the frustrated sigh of an elderly man trying to hammer it back into place. His shaky hands struggled to hold the nail steady.

Old instincts stirred.

I hesitated. My feet wanted to keep walking. But my heart... my heart knew what to do.

“Need a hand with that, sir?” I asked softly.

He looked up, squinting. “You any good with a hammer?”

I managed a small smile. “I used to be.”

He handed it over without question. “Be my guest.”

The first strike felt foreign. The second felt familiar. By the third, my hands remembered.

When I finished, he smiled. “Well done. You saved me from calling someone who’d charge me an arm and a leg.”

He reached into his wallet, pulling out a crumpled twenty.

“Oh no,” I protested.

“Take it,” he insisted. “You earned it.”

I took the money. Not because I wanted it, but because it felt like the universe giving me a nudge.

I walked home, that crumpled bill in my hand feeling heavier than any weight I’d carried. It wasn’t about the money. It was proof that maybe I wasn’t broken beyond repair.

That evening, I sat down with Ethan.

“I fixed a fence today,” I told him.

His eyes lit up. “I knew you could!”

I handed him the twenty. “Here. For the jar.”

He looked confused.

“We’re going to start something,” I said. “Every time I fix something, every time someone pays me, we put it in the jar. Maybe one day... that jar will get us out of here.”

He jumped up and ran to the kitchen counter, grabbing an old pickle jar. We cleaned it out, dried it, and dropped the twenty inside.

Ethan smiled. “The DIY Emergency Fund.”

I nodded. “Exactly.”

That night, I sat on the edge of the bed again. But this time, there was no bottle on the floor. Just hope in a glass jar sitting on the kitchen counter.

And for the first time in a long time, I slept.