

The Butterfly Effect

*At Slim's, what goes around always comes around.
It's called car-repair karma.*

“D’ya ever notice how one thing leads t’ another?” Tooner put down the newspaper and reached for his fourth donut.

“I sure do,” said Beanie. “Like, how passing the Dunkin’ Donuts box to you first means there’s none left for us.”

“Watch it, wise guy.” Tooner glared at Beanie. “I’m referrin’ t’ what’s called The Butterfly Effect. It says here if a butterfly flaps its wings in Central Park, it’ll cause an earthquake in China.”



I wouldn’t know about that, but Dutchy had just pulled in with a K-car on the back of his tow truck, and I knew what that did to staff morale. I was right. By the time Dutchy and I had pushed the early 1980s relic into a bay, my staff were nowhere to be seen. “What’s the complaint, Dutchy?” I asked.

“Ja, it won’t idle.” The stocky Dutchman chewed on one of his obnoxious cigarillos as he slapped a grubby invoice down on the hood. “I mean, she starts, ja, but you gotta keep your foot in it or she quits.”

After he had left, I went to the broom closet and opened the door. “Come on out, Tooner. You’re the only one besides Basil who remembers what a carburetor looks like, and he had to fix the last one.”

Tooner mumbled a few niceties under his breath. “Don’t blame me if this leads t’ more trouble, Slim,” he grumbled. “Once a K-car gets in the shop, it never leaves.”

But his gloomy predictions appeared groundless. “Simple enough problem,” he reluctantly admitted a short time later. “The idle mixture screw fell out.”

I was relieved to hear it. “Well, put it back in.”

Tooner shrugged. “I would if I could. I’ve searched high and low, but there ain’t no sign of it. Probably fell out on the road.”

I sighed. The chances of buying just a mixture screw from the dealer were slim to none, so it meant a trip to one of the local wrecking yards. I chose Rusty’s Used Iron; he had the oldest stock.

“K-car?” grunted Rusty. “Lucky you.” He jerked his thumb in the direction of the back lot. “Go down to the last row and turn left.” He turned back to his lunch. “Oh, and watch out for Killer; he’s been temperamental lately.”

Great, I thought as I tiptoed past rows of battered vehicles. *Junkyard dogs and K-cars – I’m beginning to think Tooner’s butterfly theory might have some merit.* The first six wrecks I came to didn’t have engines, but the very last car looked promising – the engine block was there minus the cylinder head. “Let’s hope they left the carb and intake behind,” I muttered to myself. Grabbing a broken axle shaft I began to pry open the trunk.

Suddenly a flash of black and brown fur flew out from under the vehicle as a loud snarl sent waves of terror down my spine. “RUSTY!” I hollered, scrambling to the roof of the car. “Call off your mutt!” I don’t think Rusty heard my yelling, but Killer’s bellows of rage were impossible to miss.

“Killer! *Platz!*” ordered Rusty as he strolled up nonchalantly. Instantly the fanged killer went silent.

“He bit me!” I whined, rubbing my hand.

Rusty shrugged. “I’d bite you, too, if you tried to hit *me* with an axle shaft...hey, what’s with all the damage to my trunk!”

When I tried to explain, he just held up his hands. “All you had to do was open the back door – the carb and intake are on the seat.”

“Hey, what happened t’ yer hand?” enquired Tooner later as I handed him the precious part.

“Never mind,” I growled. “Just don’t lose this – it came at great cost.”

Tooner installed the mixture screw and the car was back to normal, which wasn’t saying much. We began to think we’d gotten off lucky, but changed our minds when Dutchy dragged it back again the next morning.

Tooner took a stand. “Nope, no way, boss! This time it’s somebody else’s baby.”

“Relax,” said Quigley our service writer, as he came out with the keys. “It’s just a flat tire; the owner didn’t have a spare.”

We heaved a collective sigh of relief, and Beanie set to work on fixing the flat. Soon he wandered back into the coffee room looking puzzled. “Hey, can anybody tell me what this is? I just pulled it out of the tire.” The Bean held up a short threaded metal object that was pointed on one end. Tooner took one look and began choking on his coffee.

“Well, well,” grinned Basil. “It looks like we found our missing idle screw!” He pointed to my bandaged hand. “I would say that Tooner’s butterfly effect theory has some substance to it after all.”

They hooted with laughter as I sheepishly stirred more whitener into the bubbling brew we call shop coffee. *Go ahead and laugh*, I thought to myself. *If you want to see cause and effect, just wait till you see what making fun of the boss does to your Christmas bonuses.*