

The Carpet Fitter, a common urban legend

Eddie was a carpet fitter, and he hated it. For ten years he had spent his days sitting, squatting, kneeling, or crawling on floors, in houses, offices, shops, factories, and restaurants. Ten years of his life, cutting and fitting carpets for other people to walk on, without even seeing them. When his work was done, no one ever appreciated it. No one ever said, "Oh, that's a beautiful job, the carpet fits so neatly." They just walked all over it. Eddie was sick of it.

He was especially sick of it on this hot, humid day in August, as he worked to put the finishing touches to today's job. He was just cutting and fixing the last edge on a huge red carpet which he had fitted in the living room of Mrs. Vanbrugh's house. Rich Mrs. Vanbrugh, who changed her carpets every year and always bought the best. Rich Mrs. Vanbrugh, who had never even given him a cup of tea all day and who made him go outside when he wanted to smoke. Ah well, it was four o'clock, and he had nearly finished. At least he would be able to get home early today. He began to day dream about the weekend, about the Saturday football game he always played for the local team, where he was known as "Ed the Head" for his skill in heading goals from corner kicks. Eddie sat back and sighed. The job was done, and it was time for a last cigarette. He began tapping the pockets of his overalls, looking for the new packet of Marlboro he had bought that morning. They were not there.

It was as he swung around to look in his toolbox for the cigarettes that Eddie saw the lump. Right in the middle of the brand new bright red carpet, there was a lump. A very visible lump.

A lump the size of— the size of a packet of cigarettes.

"Blast!" said Eddie angrily. "I've done it again! I've left the cigarettes under the blasted carpet!"

He had done this once before, and taking up and refitting the carpet had taken him two hours. Eddie was determined that he was not going to spend another two hours in this house. He decided to get rid of the lump another way. It would mean wasting a good packet of cigarettes, nearly full, but anything was better than taking up the whole carpet and fitting it again. He turned to his toolbox for a large hammer.

Holding the hammer, Eddie approached the lump in the carpet. He didn't want to damage the carpet itself, so he took a block of wood and placed it on top of the lump. Then he began to beat the block of wood as hard as he could. He kept beating, hoping Mrs. Vanbrugh wouldn't hear the noise and come to see what he was doing. It would be difficult to explain why he was hammering the middle of her beautiful new carpet.

After three or four minutes, the lump was beginning to flatten out. Eddie imagined the cigarette box breaking up, and the crushed cigarettes spreading out under the carpet. Soon, he judged that the lump was almost invisible. Clearing up his tools, he began to move the furniture back into the living room, and he was careful to place one of the coffee tables over the place where the lump had been, just to make sure that no one would see the spot where his cigarettes had been lost. Finally, the job was finished, and

he called Mrs. Vanbrugh from the dining room to inspect his work.

"Yes, dear, very nice," said the lady, peering around the room briefly. "You'll be sending me a bill, then?"

"Yes madam, as soon as I report to the office tomorrow that the job is done." Eddie picked up his tools and began to walk out to the van. Mrs. Vanbrugh accompanied him. She seemed a little worried about something.

"Young man," she began, as he climbed into the cab of his van, laying his toolbox on the passenger seat beside him, "while you were working today, you didn't by any chance see any sign of Armand, did you? Armand is my parakeet. A beautiful bird, just beautiful, such colors in his feathers ... I let him out of his cage, you see, this morning, and he's disappeared. He likes to walk around the house, and he's so good, he usually just comes back to his cage after an hour or so and gets right in. Only today he didn't come back. He's never done such a thing before, it's most peculiar ..."

"No, madam, I haven't seen him anywhere," said Eddie, as he reached to start the van.

And saw his packet of Marlboro cigarettes on the dashboard, where he had left it at lunch-time...

And remembered the lump in the carpet ...
And realized what the lump was ...
And remembered the hammering ...
And began to feel rather sick ...