

Hank's Very Bad Day

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Hank Stafford's bad day had already been one for the record books when the lights on Athens Municipal Airport's Runway 11-29 blinked out seconds after Hank had broadcast the VHF signal to turn them on.

"Shit," Hank muttered and pushed the throttle forward and banked his Cessna 350 to the right to gain altitude and come around for another pass at a landing.

"Celeste is going to chew my ass as it is," Hank thought.

Hank's two-day business run to Cleveland turned into a three-day trip when his single largest customer, the Cleveland Plain Dealer, challenged Hank and his company Vector Rolled Paper Products to come up with a 10 percent price cut for newsprint.

In the end, Hank gave up. The Plain Dealer was set to publish a series of community shopper newspapers later in the year. He'd have to eat a crap sandwich in the short term, but he'd get to stay for the prime rib.

"Celeste won't give a damn one way or the other," Hank said out loud as he lined the Cessna up to the left of and parallel with East State Street and rebroadcast the VHF signal to turn on 11 two niner's lights. When the lights came on, Hank made final course corrections and busied himself with landing.

The Davis boy, Tim...Thomas...Tony! Tony Davis was rubbing the back of his dark brush cut and looking sheepish when Hank stepped down from the cockpit.

"When is the city going to buy a new Pilot Controlled Lighting unit, Tony? We could have us a spectacular crash some day," Hank said with mock sternness.

"Hey, Mr. Stafford," Tony said. "They don't even buy me my coveralls to work here; they'll buy a new PCL when pigs fly, besides, in about half an hour the Moon will be up and folks can land by the light of the full Moon. Want some help tying her down?"

When Hank and Tony finished the post-flight checklist and tied the Cessna to huge rings set deep in the tarmac, Hank pressed a \$20 into Tony's hand.

“Holy shit,” Tony said. He blushed bright pink and added, “I mean, thank you Mr. Stafford.”

“Don’t mention it,” Hank called over his shoulder as he carried his bags to his black Porsche Cayenne parked next to the white clapboard house that served as the terminal. Hank pointed his key at the Porsche and clicked the button that opened the rear hatch.

“Full Moon in 27 minutes,” Hank said out loud as he tossed his things in the back of the Porsche.

Hank fished in his left pants pocket and pulled out a small brass key. He used the key to open a panel in the floor of the SUV. After looking both ways, Hank took off his denim jacket and pulled a double shoulder holster from the floor safe.

Hank slipped the rig on, shrugged his shoulders to make a few adjustments to the fit, and put his jacket back on.

Hank reached back into the safe and extracted a TeleDart RD406 tranquilizer pistol. He turned a dial on the side of the weapon and saw the pressure gauge turn red when the pistol was fully charged. Hank loaded a tranq dart into the breech, flipped the breech shut, loaded five more tranq darts into a clip on the front of the right shoulder holster, and jammed the TeleDart into its spot.

“No safety, no safety, don’t shoot yourself in the balls if you have to use it,” Hank said to himself as he pulled a Desert Eagle Mark XIX .50 caliber automatic out of the gun safe in the floor of the Porsche. Hank slapped a clip into the butt end of the hand cannon and put the pistol into the left holster. He put three extra ammunition clips into the pockets of his denim jacket, relocked the safe, buttoned the bottom two buttons of the jacket, and looked at his watch.

“Shit,” Hank hissed. He had less than 25 minutes until Moon rise and he had to do his best to get home to Chauncey in about 20 minutes or there could be hell to pay.

Hank knew there was no way to get over Peach Ridge on Route 33 and take Route 13 to Route 293 and get up Utah Ridge Road to his compound before the Moon popped over the ridge top. He knew it, but he drove like he could make it...he wasn’t even close.

“If the FAA let me put in my own landing strip, I’d have been home 30 minutes ago,” Hank thought as he slid around curves on Route 13. What good was money if you couldn’t do what you wanted with it?

He had to stand the Porsche on its nose when a good old boy in a late 60s Chevy pickup pulled out in front of him about a mile from beautiful downtown Chauncey.

“Move your ass, you old fuck,” Hank screamed at the old man in the Chevy. Hank wondered for the thousandth time why he agreed to move to the wilds of Athens County, Ohio.

The answer was, of course, he loved Celeste. He would do anything for her. When she agreed to marry him, Hank had promised to make sure nothing bad ever happened to her. He hoped tonight wasn't the night he'd break that promise. Most of the time, Celeste was the most beautiful woman Hank had ever met, and she was sweeter than she was beautiful. It was hard to believe she had come from such a weird family.

The Moon was up before Hank turned on to Utah Ridge Road. He knew he was too late, but he didn't take his foot off of the gas peddle until he slammed it on the brake peddle at the gate to the compound. He slid to a stop sideways in the driveway.

Hank pushed a button on the dashboard, and the two halves of the gate opened slowly at him. He drove quickly through the gate and pushed the dash button again: the gates closed behind him.

He drove the Porsche around the first bend in the tree-lined driveway before he put the car into Park. He pushed the button that slid the window down, turned off the ignition, and listened. There was nothing to hear at first except the tick of the cooling engine and the breeze in the trees.

The first howl rose up from somewhere on the south side of Hank's 50-acre property.

“Shit, the pine trees,” Hank said out loud. If she was in the pine trees, she was closer than he liked. He wasn't going to make it up to the house without running into her.

Hank put his right hand on the butt of the Desert Eagle and opened his door with his left. After he slid to the ground, he eased the door shut with barely a click. That's when he heard the second howl.

She had heard him. Her ears were like directional microphones. He could picture her turning her head at the sound of the car door closing. She would have thrown her head back and howled a warning. She wanted her prey to know she was hunting. Spooking the prey into a mistake was just the thing she loved to do.

The good news was she was coming to him. The bad news was she was coming to him. Without hesitation, Hank sprinted off the driveway and into a small knot of brush off to his left. He had the Porsche and the open road between himself and Celeste.

Hank reached into his pants pocket with his right hand and pulled out the Porsche key. He stuck the button end of the key between his teeth where he could bite down on the trunk-release button and keep both hands free.

Without making a sound and with deliberate slowness that belied his hammering heart, Hank transferred the Desert Eagle to his left hand and drew the tranquilizer pistol with his right.

Celeste would be on his scent now that she was coming. She would follow his scent right across the road and into his hideout if the trunk release trick didn't work. Hank was going to have to be at least 30 feet away from Celeste when the dart hit her, or she'd still be able to get a paw or two on him before she went to sleep.

Hank shuddered thinking about the damage Celeste could do.

Since Celeste wanted him to know she was coming, she wasn't shy about letting out excited yips and barks as she came across the property on the dead run. She was heading directly for Hank and she was already tasting him with her mind.

The light-brown werewolf broke from cover about 20 yards in front of the Porsche. She froze for a moment to sniff the air. She could smell his fear; Hank was sure of it.

She growled deep in her throat and started slowing loping toward the Porsche. She leapt from the road to the roof of the Porsche and rose on her hind legs and surveyed her surroundings.

Celeste's muzzle was long and slender. Hank could see the breeze flutter the soft fur at the nape of her neck. Her ears twitched in unison and then separately. Her black nose wrinkled as she turned slowly.

She knew where Hank was. She could smell him and she could hear his heart hammering against his ribs. Celeste was playing at trying to get him to break from his hiding place. Jesus, even as a werewolf, she was beautiful.

Celeste dropped back down to all fours and dropped to the road behind the Porsche. She would charge him any second.

Hank bit down on the trunk release button. The trunk clicked open a few inches. Celeste turned to check for an ambush. Hank leveled the tranq gun and pulled the trigger.

Celeste turned back toward the hiss of the CO₂ cartridge just as the dart struck her in the right side of her furry neck. She howled and charged, but she dropped after three halting steps.

Hank heard the growl from behind him. He flattened himself to the ground and had the sense of something just passing over his back. He heard the clack of empty jaws slamming together where his neck would have been.

“Aw, fuck, two of them. Eat matches and shit fire,” Hank screamed as he rolled to his left and pointed the Desert Eagle at the Porsche and pulled the trigger until the automatic was out of bullets.

Two of the hot brass casings had ejected and ricocheted off of a small tree and down the open neck of Hank’s shirt. They burned white hot against his neck and chest, but Hank ignored the pain, reloaded the traq gun, and jumped to his feet.

The second werewolf was flat against the road. Hank had never meant to hit it. He just wanted the boom of the .50 caliber and the sound of breaking glass to give him a few seconds to get a fresh dart in the gun.

The second werewolf leaped from the ground. Hank pulled the trigger. He didn’t hear the hiss of the dart and the whump of it hitting its intended target. He was momentarily deaf from emptying the Desert Eagle into his Porsche. Hank did feel the jarring thump as the werewolf hit him square in the middle of his chest.

Hank went down in a jumble of biting, snapping werewolf. It was trying to tear his throat out, but missed on the first two tries. The third try would have been perfect, but the werewolf collapsed on top of Hank fast asleep.

He wanted to rest. He had the wind knocked out of him and his ribs were killing him, but Hank had a couple more minutes before the first werewolf would begin to come around.

Hank got plastic cable ties out of a bag in the Porsche’s floor safe. He got to work quickly, and, when he was done, he had two hog tied werewolves. He finished just as the first werewolf started to twitch and stir.

He still wasn’t going to put them in the Porsche and take them to the house. They were far too heavy and they could still bite Hell out of him. They’d be safe out here until dawn when they would turn back into Celeste and most likely her Mom.

Sarah was a handsome woman for a 45-year-old, but Hank didn't want to see her turn back into his naked mother-in-law.

Hank saw the damage to the Porsche was cosmetic. He tossed the key on the ground where Celeste could see it in the morning. Celeste and Sarah would shrink back to normal size when they changed back, and the plastic ties would slip right off.

"God damn," Hank said to the thinner of the twitching werewolves on the ground. "I hate it when your family visits."