

# The Fixer

by Todd Maupin

Whenever someone asks me what I do, I tell them that I am a fixer. Sometimes, an intrepid and inquisitive type will ask me what this entails, but most just nod and pretend to know what a fixer does. The truth is, almost everyone I meet has come to me because they need me to fix something for them.

There is nothing that cannot be fixed. Will it ever be as good as new? That is subjective, but I will fix it for you.

You do not want any more puppies or kittens. I will fix your pet. I'd tell you it hurts me more than it hurts them, but it does not hurt me one bit. Once someone's dog bit me while I was snipping. That did hurt. Otherwise, it just hurts them, but they will recover and they will be fixed.

Do you want to fix a sporting event? I can do that, but nothing involving the White Sox in the World Series. Too obvious.

Is Amazon undercutting your profit margin on your products? I will fix the price for you.

If you want me to come to an office to fix a copier for the scantily clad receptionist and then some kinky music starts playing, this is where I draw the line. Probably.

Feeling vengeful? I will fix someone's wagon for you. Not literally, but I can fix wagons too, of course.

I will type something for you using fixed margins, and if you need a fixed width font, I can create one for you, or fix one you have messed up already.

If you want to buy a fixer-upper, come see me. Need a fixed rate mortgage for that? Done.

Maybe it is restaurant week or you are feeding tourists? I can set you up with a fixed price menu.

They call a single fixed speed bicycle a fixie. I can take a multi-speed bicycle and strip it down to one gear for you. And if you do not like it, I can fix it back to what it was.

When I am preparing to do something, I am never “fixing to do it.” That is just not in my vernacular.

I will fix up two of your friends to go out on a date.

Need to affix something? I will do it, using a bad Italian accent.

Are you in a fix? Come see me, I will get you out of it.

Occasionally, they call being in a fix being in a bind. I have a friend who binds things, but even having binders full of something will not get you elected.

Upon whatever you are fixated, I can fix it.

You probably expect that this is going to be some story where I encounter something that cannot be fixed, and learn some valuable lesson of redemption, and we all come out as better people, holding hands and stuff. That is not going to happen. Sorry.

This is not even my story. Although I am in it, this is Reginald's story. I have a hand in it, but I am not in it up to my elbows, only my forearms. My legs too, unfortunately.

Reginald came to my office because he had been told that I am the guy who can fix anything.

“What can I fix for you?” I asked him after we had met and he was comfortably seated in my office.

“Me. You can fix me,” he said.

“What's wrong with you?”

“I am broke. Umm, broken. All of me is broken.”

“Are your legs broken? Your arms? Any fingers or toes?”

“Well, no, but...” he admitted, looking both sheepish and downcast.

“That is a good start then,” I told him, but he did not seem overly convinced that we had already made some progress. I was about to ask him what about him specifically was broken when he told me.

“You see, I lost my psychic powers,” he explained.

“Pardon my asking, but are you sure you ever had them? I think that something like that is pretty rare, if they even exist at all,” I reasoned, not at all concealing my skepticism.

“Yes, I'm sure. I am not imagining it, I'm not crazy. It's not just all in my head,” he replied, slightly on the defensive. I was not about to

remind him that the point of powers like these is that they are all in a person's head. I decided that this observation could wait.

"I'm not a psychologist, or a psychiatrist. I don't know that I am qualified for something like this," I said rationally.

"Someone like that would not be either. I came to you because of your success in fixing all sorts of things, and also because this has to do with you," he finished ominously and watched for my reaction, but I remained impassive. One thing at a time.

Recognizing his resolve, I decided to proceed as though I normally would for a consultation. "Okay, so when did the problem start?" I asked, ready to take notes if necessary.

Reginald squirmed in his chair and took a deep breath. After exhaling, he simultaneously clarified and muddled the issue. "Truthfully, I have not lost my powers yet, but I will, later today, shortly after I leave your office," he revealed, gauging my reaction, which I am certain encapsulated disbelief.

"Let's stop right here then," I commanded, wishing I had one of those portable stop signs that crossing guards wave around. "You still have your psychic powers now but you will not have them later. Prove it to me then. What am I thinking of right now?" I looked him directly in the eye.

He met my gaze and without blinking, answered my question. "You are trying to think about baseball, but mostly you have many thoughts swirling around about how silly and ludicrous you think I am." He was not at all smug, more despondent. I would not have blamed him for being smug because he was correct.

"All right, which baseball team?"

"The Bowie Baysox," he replied instantly.

"That's correct. Although they pronounce Bowie like the knife, not like the man who fell to Earth," I added for his edification, should he ever be in Maryland. God help him.

Reginald finally blinked, but remained silent.

"Let's say I believe that you have powers and will lose them. If it will happen after you leave my office, why did you come here?" I considered this a fair question.

Reginald straightened his posture in the chair. "Do you remember Viewfinders? Those toys that were like portable slide projectors for kids?" I nodded, and beckoned for him to continue. I did remember those. In fact, when I was in grade school, I had fixed several of them, of course.

"My psychic powers function sort of like a Viewfinder. They come to me a series of an advancing still images, leaving me to interpret or determine the context. Sometimes the series is incomplete, as in the case of me losing my powers. I saw disjointed images of myself coming here, leaving here, then shaking your hand after you had fixed my problem by restoring my powers. I do not know how I lost them or how you fixed them, but I did and you did."

"You will and I will, you mean," I expounded, feeling the tension of the future tense. "So, if this happens after you leave my office, and I can only fix it after it happens, then the next step would be for you to leave my office, right?"

"You're not just trying to get rid me, are you?" Reginald asked with a hint of a smile.

"I do admit that the thought crossed my mind."

"I know it did," Reginald confirmed, still smirking.

"Before we proceed, could you try again? I don't know how your powers work but if you concentrate, would you be able to see the missing images that you could not see before?" It took all of my resolve to refrain from making finger quotes when I used the word "powers."

Reginald sighed. "I'm afraid that it is not so simple. I can generally read minds in real time but the visions come to me more randomly; I cannot really control when they happen. Think of the mail. Your post person will deliver it at some point in the day but you will never know for sure. My powers do not come to me by special or scheduled delivery, so to speak." He started to slump in his chair again but was self-aware enough to reposition himself instead.

"So, no powers on Sunday or on federal holidays?" I asked. Yes, I know it was a jerk question.

“Funny. I'm glad I am not asking you to fix my comedy routine.”  
Touché.

Another thought occurred to me. “Have you ever lost powers before? Is there any kind of lessons learned - to use obnoxious corporate speak - we might apply here?”

“That is obnoxious. And no, unfortunately. This will be the first time.” I noticed that he used the future tense, **will** not *would*.  
Unconditional love.

“The gaps will have to fill in themselves then. So, let's leave my office. Should we go separately or together? Would you like to leave first, I count to 100, and then follow you, or vice versa?” My suggestions seemed more ridiculous than I intended. We were not having an affair, playing hide and seek, or orchestrating a surprise party.

“Let's just go together and see what happens. I don't know what's best, honestly, but I think we would be better off assessing the situation as it develops if we were both there,” Reginald decided.

And that's what we did. I verified on my calendar that I had no further fixed appointments for the rest of the morning, then followed Reginald out the door to my office. I switched off the lights and locked the door, hopefully rendering it obvious to all comers that I was not inside. Perhaps this was yet another instance in my life in which I held people in too high regard and overestimated their worth or integrity.

This was also the mistake that I made regarding Reginald. This realization arrived when it was too late: as soon as we were in the parking lot outside of the building. Waiting for us there was Branson. The paths of Branson and myself had crossed a few times, and these had been harrowing intersections which I preferred to avoid.

Branson was a breaker. Not a broker, a breaker. He was not a breaker in the sense that truckers use the word on their CB radios. Well, maybe he was. I never knew what truckers meant when they said that, but I can only hope that they were not talking about guys like Branson. In the same way that I fix things, he breaks things. His

capabilities were more limited but certainly not less impactful. My brushes with Branson had previously all been indirect, but I inferred from his imposing and sardonic grin that we were about to become further acquainted by a more direct approach.

Reginald touched my arm. "I am truly sorry. I had no choice. I really am broke, and this was my last resort to prevent harm to my family," he said solemnly. He did demonstrate genuine remorse. I suppose that was something.

"Yes, don't blame poor Reginald. He is broke, thanks to me, and I put him up to this," Branson trumpeted in menacing pride. "He still owes me and has no more money or collateral that I want, so I asked him to give me you."

I should have felt touched by the importance that Branson had assigned to me, but the outcome promised to hurt far more than Reginald's stinging betrayal. Even if his back was against the wall, how does someone with psychic powers lose all of his money? Wouldn't he have seen that coming? There was probably some Hallmark Channel "greed is blinding" lesson behind it.

"Fiston, don't take this personally. We are both old warriors, you and I," Branson continued, and with his emphasis of the word "warriors," I knew. Branson was from San Francisco, or Oakland, depending on whom you asked, or to whom he was talking. Anyway, he was from the Bay Area. Somehow, he must have found out that I had orchestrated the fixing of the 2016 NBA Finals. And I was responsible for this. I absolutely was, and it was one of my greatest unsung achievements. I will not reveal who contracted me to do this, nor how I did it, even though it entailed an ingenious use of drones, hypnosis and subliminal messaging to pull it off. You're welcome, LeBron. I did not do it for you and you did not deserve to win.

Branson studied my reaction and his face exhibited the giddy satisfaction of knowing that I knew why he was here. There was no need for additional elaboration. I would have pardoned him the cheesy line, "this time it's personal," because for him, it was. Yet, there was no need even for that.

If Branson were narrating this story, here, he would likely break the fourth wall to explain that the author named him, not after the low-rent Nashville facade in Missouri, but after that billionaire who tried repeatedly to be Magellan in a hot air balloon. He probably sounded like a broken record, talking about breaking that record, to anyone who would listen. Thankfully, this was not either Branson's story and thus we spared any breaking of character from the Branson adjacent to me in the parking lot.

"I lost a ton of money that summer, Fiston. And my proud city, a city of Pride, lost its pride. It was not easy to connect it all to you, but I did. I know it was not your idea, but you made it happen. I will deal with Nike later. Today is your day, Fiston." Branson made his knuckles crack as he clenched his fists. Fiston is my name, by the way. No relation.

"Reginald, you can go. We're square," he said, with a motion of dismissal, thereby dissipating my psychic friends network. Reginald scampered away, effortlessly, in a show of movement that I envied then and even more now.

This Branson did not break any records either, so far as I know, but he did break my legs. I really wish that was not the breaking news I had to share with you. While he appeared to enjoy breaking them one at a time, Branson, to his credit, also did so in such a clean and businesslike manner that it transpired less like an assault and more like the transaction that it was. The doctor remarked in awe that he had never seen two such pristine breaks that were so easy for him to reattach. I suppose I should have been grateful for that aspect.

As I sit here in my wheelchair, awaiting my next client, what I am feeling is not exactly gratitude. My encounter with Reginald and Branson happened two weeks ago. The doctor predicted I might be able to walk again by Thanksgiving, on crutches. My favorite holiday. Not so much for the turkey, but for all of the fixings.

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