

Street Trash

by Foster Trecost

My route to work depends on when I leave. I had some time so I strayed down a street a few blocks over, a nicer street lined with well-kept row homes and mature trees, no cracks in the sidewalk. The setting was just about perfect, marred only by trash; not litter carelessly thrown to the ground, but rather bags and bins purposefully put out for pick up. It was still a beautiful street.

Ahead I could see someone and after a block, came to a lady sifting through the refuse. Our eyes locked for a second before she broke the brief stare. She seemed startled to see someone so early, and a little embarrassed, too. I didn't expect her to speak, but she did: "My husband never gets it right," she said. "They give tickets, you know."

She looked about right for the hour, hair a mess, no make-up. I should've nodded at most and kept walking, but something bothered me, not in the sense I became aggravated, but something seemed out-of-place, so I asked: "Tickets for what?"

"You can't put recycling with regular trash and regular trash with recycling. You gotta separate them. They give tickets if you don't."

She kept her head down and I watched as she went about what appeared to be sorting the garbage. With nothing more to say, nothing I could say, I walked on. No goodbye. No have a nice day. Nothing. After a few steps, I heard her again, "It's just that they give tickets..."

I'd already gone, but she needed to continue the charade, to believe it, to feel human. I didn't even turn around. I left her there with the garbage. And the street no longer seemed beautiful, but not because of the lady and not because of the trash. Because of me.

