

The Garbage House

by TimChambers

If you don't know what you're getting into maybe you shouldn't take the job. Driving in the rain with the windows open, holding your breath for minutes at a time, sticking your head out to gasp for air, you begin to understand the depravity to which people in poverty can sink.

The dispatch comes about eight o'clock.

~ Two drivers needed on Capitol Hill. Round trip to the impound lot. Return with one of you driving a van. Dan, why don't you and the new guy take it. He could probably use the income.

The screen of a GPS device indicates the address.

~ On it, Dan responds, ~ we're just two minutes away.

You exchange foreboding glances as the cab pulls up in front of the house. It hasn't been maintained in years. The porch is stacked with junk and all the windows are dark. On either side two vacant lots await the gentrification process which had transformed most of the neighborhood but not yet that one block.

~ I'll blast the horn at 'em, Dan says, ~ I wouldn't go near a house like that...

~ To save yourself from zombies? you add, ~ when he can't complete the sentence.

~ Something like that, yeah. He laughs.

~ You wait a awhile, but no one comes. You get out and approach the door.

~ Be careful, Dan calls out behind you. ~ Knock from the side, like a cop.

Your foot going through the first step to the porch tells you that isn't the way inside, so you go around the back. From what you can see through the windows, the rooms are stuffed with plastic bags and the stench of garbage tells you what must be lurking inside. There is no light coming from the backside either so you wonder wonder if it weren't a prank call.

You stand to the right of the door, reach out with your left and knock.

~ Who's there?

It's a woman's voice, but the tone is rough and edgy.

~ Car service ma'am, you're expecting us.

~ Give me a moment.

~ Take your time.

The sound of superfluous deadbolts slipping out of their cylinders takes you by surprise. There must be four or five of them, though the smell ought to keep intruders out better than any lock devised. In the rainy dark you can barely see the figure who emerges from the door. If it weren't for the body odor you would hardly know she was there.

~ Evening ma'am, you say. ~ Care to use the umbrella?

~ You're not from around here, are you?

~ Ma'am?

~ Slicker'll do just fine.

~ Suit yourself.

It's not until you get back to the car that you manage to get a good look at her. Morbidly obese, with flecks of black in her matted grey-white hair, and dressed in unwashed sweats; a filth like that of a cockroach nest. She otherwise seems like a rational creature, not the sort you're used to seeing in the wards you'd visited your sister in back when you were kids. Like the man with the snot hanging out of his nose all the way to the floor. You wonder what her story is but you're not about to pry.

Then she says, ~ You know where you're going, and what you gotta do. I'll pay you twenty-five dollars for it. That's all I got to spare.

~ That'll suit me fine, you say, thinking about your food and flop, and how she's got a house, anyway, which is more than you've got lately. You won't be driving on your own until the following night and there's nothing to pay your next day's rent for the bunk you're using in the fishermen's hostel that is now your official residence.

~ But why do you need two of us? Dan says.

~ I don't have a license to drive.
~ So?
Dan, evidently, is not too quick.
~ So how would just one of you get back to the lot?
~ Oh. Right.
~ Most people would hate the smell. Got no sense of that myself.
Remember when I did, though.
~ Smell? You say.
~ Keep my garbage in it. Can't be paying for garbage service. Not with so little work about.
~ There must must be something you can do.
~ Delivering papers, mainly. But that cut back to once a day. Took a big hit when that happened.
~ I can't imagine losing my sense of smell.
~ Anosomia (sic) they call it. Takes all the pleasure outta life not being able to taste my food. Doctor says it's nerve damage. All the beatings I used to get. Finally had to kill the monster. Not a day goes by, though, I don't regret I did it. Wasn't his fault, really. Kinda people he come from, I guess it just came natural.

