

The Body

by Pete Barrett

They seemed to appear from nowhere, the new neighbours. There was never any sign of a removals van. We assumed they must have moved in overnight.

He was six foot tall all covered in tattoos and dripping with thick gold jewelry.

She was short and wore leopard skin boots and white leather outfits with seriously short skirts. He was called Merv. She was called Sandra and the daughter was called Gemma.

Just to complete the picture a big German Shepherd patrolled their grounds and barked at anybody who dared come anywhere near. He was called Prince.

The house had been on the market for half a million pounds so whatever they did for a living, they made a lot of money. In contrast to ourselves, who inhabited a similar house but one in such a rundown state it was probably worth a quarter of the price of their place.

After a while we became friendly with our new neighbours. For me it was just a matter of the occasional chat with Merv over the fence but Julie and Sandra often used to meet for coffee and a natter.

He appeared to have something to do with the motor trade although what and whether it was legitimate we never dared ask. They must have suppressed a giggle when we drove up in our ancient Ford which ran on a wing and a prayer and not much else.

And it wasn't very long before even the wing and the prayer failed us. The recovery service deposited the Ford on our front drive and told us it would need at least a thousand spent on it to get it through the MOT, Either that or the scrap heap.

We stood by the car in depressed silence, we needed it but couldn't afford to get it fixed and certainly couldn't afford to buy a new one. There was no two ways about it – we were buggered.

It was at this point that I noticed Merv leaning casually over the fence. 'Trouble?' he asked.

'A thousand quid's worth.'

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'Have to get a new one,' he observed brightly.

'No money,' I replied.

'What none at all?'

'Afraid not.'

'Insured is it?' he asked.

'Yes'

'Comprehensive?'

'Yes.'

'Waste of money on a motor like that.'

I'd always insured my cars fully comprehensive and never gave it a second thought. Of course it was wasted on a car like ours.

'Unless...,' Merv was leaning over the fence now, his interest awakened, 'It was to get nicked.'

'Who'd want to steal a car like this?'

'Oh you'd be surprised.'

'Where would you leave it?'

'Depends.'

'On what?'

'Depends if you seriously want to get rid of it. And get the insurance. Depends, you see,' and with that he walked away.

We knew exactly what he meant. Julie and I talked about it over tea. I was completely against the idea. It was against the law and would get us mixed up with all sorts of local villains. It was totally wrong: morally and ethically. But then, as Julie pointed out, that wasn't why I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't do it because I didn't want to get caught. And after five minutes

polite questioning by the local police or an insurance assessor, I'd be on my knees confessing

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all and I'd end up in prison or on Merv's hit list. I wouldn't do it because I was a fully paid up loudly clucking chicken. That's why I wouldn't do it.

Julie on the other hand had no such worries. She announced she'd handle the whole thing.

So we found ourselves round at Merv's place discussing strategy over a can or two of lager.

All Julie had to do was to drive into town in the evening, leave the car in a certain place, give Merv a spare key and then make sure she didn't come back looking for it before eleven. After that she could call the police.

'And that's it?'

'Yes'

'That's all?'

'You got it.'

'And what do you get out of it,' I asked Merv naively. Julie tried to shush me.

'Oh I'll do alright out of it,' Merv gave me one of his unnerving smiles, 'And you'll just owe me a little favour.'

Two weeks later the car had been stolen, the police had been informed and the insurance company had agreed to pay. It was all so simple.

But that didn't stop me lying awake through the dark nights thinking about the fact that we owed Merv 'a little favour'.

But nothing happened. Nothing at all. We got the money, bought a new car and everything settled down back to normal. I stopped worrying and put the whole business behind me.

That is, until we got the knock on the door.

It was six thirty on a Tuesday morning.

It was Merv. He looked disheveled and worried. 'I need a favour.' He said.

'Oh God, here it is,' I thought. The time for us to pay.

He led me round to their house and through the side gate. When the side gate banged he turned put his finger to his lips and said,' Sssh'. Now I knew I really was in trouble.

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At the back of the conservatory my worst fears were realized, There was a black plastic sack tied up with string and a shovel.

'I'll bring the shovel,' said Merv, 'You bring the sack'.

It was heavy and I had to drag it along the ground.

We reached the little wooded copse at the back to their garden. Merv turned to me, 'You'll have to dig. I can't.'

So I did. I started digging. Why didn't I just run away? I just couldn't seem to think straight .

'That's enough,' said Merv, 'That'll do for now'. He stared at me. 'Well?'

'Well what?'

'Stick the bag in'.

I got hold of the bag and swung it into the hole. As I did so I felt something sticky on my fingers. When I looked it seemed inevitable it would be blood, and it was.

I filled in the hole and Merv kicked the soil over to hide the slight mound that was formed.

'That's that done then. Thanks for the help'

'I'll get back to the house then,' I said.

'Yeah, sure. You get off.'

I didn't look back. I didn't run. I just walked calmly back to my house walked in through the front door walked into the toilet and threw up.

'Are you all right?' Julie's voice came from the kitchen I could smell coffee. I rinsed my mouth and walked into the kitchen.

'God, you look white as a sheet. Look at your hands. They're filthy'

'It's not surprising is it. I've just been down the garden with Merv doing a bit of digging. At

half past six in the morning'

'Yeah. Sandra said'

'You know?'

'Sandra told me.'

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'Why didn't you call the police,'

'Well. I did think about it. I know you're supposed to. I decided it wasn't necessary. There's no point is there?'

'No point?! –I could get arrested.'

'Oh don't be so melodramatic. Look Sandra told me last night.....'

'Last night! You knew about this last night?'

'Yes. Merv's hurt his back. He can't dig and they wanted to get it done before their little girl woke up. They didn't want her to see him in that state – all covered in blood. She'd be really upset'

'See him? See who covered in blood'

'Prince. The Alsatian. He got knocked over in the road last night. Well, what did you think you were burying, a corpse?'

I tried to pretend I hadn't, but she saw through me.

And it was some time – days possibly – before she stopped laughing.