

## **Good Things**

**by J.L. Barr**

I got a flat tire on my way to kill David Delilah. After finally figuring out how to jack the car up high enough for the tire to lift off the cracked pavement I narrowly escaped being crushed as my Mercedes S-Class lurched forward, the jack clattering to the ground. The second time I got it lifted up I realized the silver things were hard to unscrew as the wheel continued to spin in mid-air. Another 25 minutes of struggling with the t-shaped bar later (not sure what that thing is called), I finally gave in and called my Platinum Plus roadside assistance. While on a brief hold I pictured David Delilah's froglike face sneering down at me as I crouched by the deflated rubber. I made a mental list of witnesses who had seen me since I left home:

1. The dark-skinned mover in a black golf shirt carrying a bundle of garment bags from a nearby U-Haul toward the stately front entrance of the recently-sold house next door. I tried to signal him over with a few snaps of my fingers, intending to ask him when the new owners would be arriving, but he just looked at me incredulously and continued on with the garment bags. Probably a Haitian refugee that made it across the border somehow, I surmised, no English yet. He would not want to speak with the police.

2. The surprisingly unpierced barista at the coffee shop where I ordered my go-to iced white mocha with lowfat oat milk, caramel, and salted cream cold foam, add three pumps of hazelnut, two pumps cinnamon dolce, and a drizzle of chestnut praline syrup. After waiting over four minutes I went back to the counter and got into it with her a little bit about my wait but not likely that she would remember.

3. A portly customer waiting for his own coffee, giving me the stinkeye behind his thick glasses. He pointed at his covered face, shaking his head. "I don't own a mask," I told him with a smile. It was one of my favorite things to say to strangers, along with "I don't carry small bills" to panhandlers.

4. Though we mainly saw each other through her rearview mirror, the motorist with a “The Chief is Hostile and Abusive” bumper sticker. After tailgating her for several blocks I passed her on the shoulder, feeling some kind of thump under one of the tires as I zoomed around her in a blur.

5. Now the tire-changer guy.

After he got out of the tow truck, clipboard in hand, he did a double-take and his eyes narrowed as he looked me over. “Um, hi,” he said. “You’re not...”

I sighed briefly and forced a smile. “No Aussie accent here, mate. But I get that all the time,” I said, eager to finish the interaction, but he went on.

“I didn’t think so but you do look like him. I’m a big fan of those movies, love that giant hammer you used to have, Thor,” he chuckled.

I gave a final pained smile and pretended to make a phone call.

I parked a few driveways down from David Delilah’s house in Brittany Trails, noting with some satisfaction that my stonemason-crafted mailbox was far superior to his post-mounted one, and my landscapers clearly pay much more attention to detail than whoever he was using. Caryn’s car was not in the driveway at least.

I started planning this little mission during my three week stay at the Dreams all-inclusive resort in Tulum, technically a business trip. Our most profitable divisions in the past year have been retail cannabis and housing non-violent drug offenders from other states, so the company paid for everything since there was a prison privatization conference in neighboring Mexico City. As all of the cab drivers parked out front said it was much too far to take me to the convention center for some reason, I just stayed at the resort. By the end of the stay my veins flowed with Dos Equis and I added a third Equis at the local massage parlors, but at least it was all tax deductible for Father. He took charge of the company after Grandpa died and someday I will take over from him.

My family have always been winners. In 1941 Grandpa was on the verge of closing the family business, the second biggest factory in the area. However, when old man Sato (the owner of our biggest competitor) went away in '42, this in turn meant that Grandpa could combine the two plants into the wartime juggernaut that became our current company. Chip off the old block, Grandpa. His grandfather before him overcame the unbelievable misfortune of having his most valuable property taken from him in 1863, later managing to innovate some different kind of arrangement to stay afloat, “cropper-sharing” I think he called it. Great-Grandpa later founded the original factory with loans from some other members of an organization he was involved with in the 1920s, the White Knights. I always enjoyed hearing Grandpa talk about the family history, though I did not always understand his jokes. The one he used to say about Sato was “One man’s Uh Nar is another man’s treasure” then he would crack up, whatever Uh Nar is.

I first discovered David Delilah while watching a Facebook video of a birthday party at Chuck E. Cheese posted by one of Caryn’s friends. Since Caryn was not tagged in the post I almost missed it, but after repeated viewings and despite the fact that they were never close to each other on camera it became obvious from the various clues in the video that her seat was next to David Delilah’s at the long table—clearly then they were fucking. He worked for a small company specializing in self-driving car technology, a space that we were trying to expand into with minimal success. Further research into his social media habits confirmed my worst suspicions, he was a liberal douchebag. Caryn had even stopped retweeting evidence for the Biden impeachment. Despite her claiming to want to “co-parent” our son, I definitely knew something was wrong when she did not support my request to transfer our first-grader to another private school after he was suspended for starting a “build the wall” chant during a forced viewing of a Cesar Chavez propaganda documentary.

Snapping out of my reverie I leaned forward on the aftermarket Argentinian leather seat as the larger door of the Delilah three-car garage opened. There he was, rolling an apparently empty red trash can back inside the garage from the curb. I eased the car door closed and started to stride purposefully toward him, Grandpa’s favorite handgun tucked in the back of my \$600 jeans. Ducking under the closing garage door while stepping over the infrared safety sensor, I was abruptly left in the dark when the heavy wood finished its descent.

Entering the spacious and well-lit kitchen I remembered a thought that first occurred to me the night I lost my virginity: to spend a minute inside a stranger's home is not so different from encountering an alien civilization for the first time. This little green man (and he did have on a pea green button-down) was replacing the garbage bag in the kitchen trash can. He let out a startled yelp when he saw me, his eyes growing wider still as I wriggled the grayish gun from the tight grip of my \$300 belt.

"Oh fuu..." he stammered before I silenced him with a wave of the barrel.

"Sit down, David," I commanded. He obeyed slowly, never taking those beady eyes off the metal. "Do you know who I am?" I could see his mind working.

"No one else knows!" he suddenly gushed. "I figured it out last month, not even corporate knows what this means yet." He noticed me hesitating. "No, I don't know who you are, but I can cut you in. We take it to Google, Uber, Tesla, whoever. I'm going to give my notice and..."

"Shut up," I barked. Then I softened my tone, sitting down across from him at the kitchen table, the gun now pointed at his midsection. "Tell me exactly what you are offering."

"This discovery is going to revolutionize level 5 cloud connected autonomy, actual V2X. No one else knows, but you need me," he whined.

"And Caryn?"

A confused look washed over his amphibian features. "Who is Karen?"

"That's right David. That's a good way to play this." I stood up, returning the gun to the small of my back. "We'll be in touch. We know where to find you." I may never have been QB1 but I know how to call an audible.

"Karen?" he said again, before a sudden recognition hit his voice. "Oh, Caaaryn! From the birthday party!" echoed in the hallway as I walked out the front door.

I called Father as soon as I pulled away from the curb. "I have something for the company. It's big." I gloated on the voicemail. "Call me when you can." Father is going to be so proud, maybe more than he has been since I scared off those Potawatomi who claimed our headquarters was built on their ancestral burial grounds.

Approaching home I heard the faint sound of sirens behind me in the distance, and the same thought came to my mind that always does when I hear that sweet blue sound: hope you catch him, boys. Pulling into my driveway I noticed the mover next door had inexplicably brought a woman and two children with him to work. I parked in the garage and carefully peeked around the corner. They all stood in the high and wide archway of the front porch, looking up at the beautiful façade. The mover held what looked to be an expensive stolen bottle of the new homeowner's champagne, and he cheerfully clinked glasses with the attractive woman. I shook my head and went inside, muttering to myself that I will never understand why good things happen to bad people.