Free

Scott always frowned when his wife would send him on a mission to go pick up some free item or piece of furniture that she found on one of the various community share sites she frequented. It wasn’t that he didn’t want whatever it was or that he didn’t want to lug the thing into the car, it was the personal interaction that he dreaded. Scott was not what one would call a social person. He met all the qualifiers for an anti-social introvert. Nerd, check. Computer programmer check. Gamer, check. In fact if there was an anti-social activity you could think of Scott was probably into it. Not that he could not handle himself in social situations, it was more that he just didn’t want to. All of that aside, it was always interesting picking up free items around town. Sometimes it was simple and easy; just pick the thing up off someone’s porch and go. Other times he had to knock on doors trying to find the right person. On more than one occasion he had to enter the persons house and pull the item out of a back room. On these dreaded occasions he would have to navigate awkward conversations, all the while thinking that he was going to be knocked out and wake up in some shabbily cobbled together murder dungeon strapped to a metal table. The worst-case scenario had not yet been the realized however and generally he would simply pick up the item and have a funny story to relate to his wife Kim when he got home.

It was Thursday night and Scott had planned to pick up a desk for his daughter before the rains began. The people who had the desk said it was on their back porch and that he could come and get it before six. Powering down a quick dinner after work he hopped in the car and headed to get the desk. It was clear that this might be one of those pickups, being that the instructions were vague and the mention of “on the back porch” made him think of fending off an angry dog who, “is usually good with people” in someone’s island of misfit toys backyard.

Sure enough the destination did not disappoint. The small blue three-unit building failed to provide any visible address with the exception of reflective numbers on the mailboxes, which luckily caught his eye when he parked by the curb out front. It was unclear which unit matched the address he was looking for so on a whim he headed around back. Small drops of rain began to fall as he walked around the side of the building releasing the smell of new rain on dirty asphalt. To Scott’s surprise there were no fences baring his approach to the back of the apartments, only two small black poodles tied to a pole who stared menacingly but didn’t let out so much as a whimper. Looking around Scott noticed the desk sitting in a section of overgrown grass outside that back door of the furthest unit in the complex. A woman and man were sitting on the back porch near the desk talking quietly to one another. As he came closer to the desk the woman stood and nodded motioning to the desk.

“Hi, I’m here for the desk.” Scott noticed that the woman looks as if she had been crying.

“This is it. Good timing, looks like it is going to rain soon.” The woman moved toward the desk.

“I cleaned it out as well as I could, my daughter loved it.” She said, there was a bit of hesitation at the mention of her daughter. She seemed to be upset about something. Scott figured that something must have happened to her daughter and the connection of the desk was bringing up memories. He was about to ask about her daughter when the man who was still sitting offered “If ya open the drawers you can carry it easier, that’s how I got it out here.”

It seemed obvious to Scott but he still responded with a polite “Thanks.”

Testing the weight, he realized it was heavier than he had hoped but his aversion to awkward social situations had him lifting the desk quickly and walking it away.

“You need help with that?” The woman asked.

“No, it’s fine I got it.” Scott replied, realizing almost immediately that he didn’t really “have it” but he wasn’t gonna stop and get these people involved at this point. Struggling to carry the desk he rounded the corner as quickly as he could so that they wouldn’t seem him put the thing down, gasping and rubbing his creased fingers. It wasn’t too far to the car, maybe one or two more breaks and he would be there. As he stopped for a second time the rain began to fall. He looked into the dark grey sky, to the west even darker clouds loomed. Taking a deep breath, he picked the desk up and quickly walked it to the car. Getting it in was easy, his fingers burned from the creases the wood corners had made in them. The rain was in full swing by the time he got it into the car and shut the door. Running around the car to the driver side door he hopped in quickly. He took a quick glance at the three-unit apartment building behind him toward the unit he presumed was the desks owners. It was hard to tell in the rain but he thought he could see a face in the crack of the curtains staring blankly back at him. A shiver ran up his spine, it’s cold out there he thought as he turned the key. The engine sprang to life, the music from the radio shaking him out of his trance, the warm air of the heater hitting his cold damp face. He hit the wipers and watched as they cleared off the beaded water on his windshield.