

The Dog Catcher

by Ron Earl Phillips

"Fuck no!"

I clicked off the phone and rolled over. It was Mitch's goddamn morning to work, but the asshole ditched another shift. Not my problem, and fuck me if I was getting out bed.

My cell rang again. Fuck. Me.

I clicked it on. Irlene would call until the battery was dead. Then show up on my stoop. No way out.

"Irlene, goddamn it, I just got to bed. Harass Mitch. He's the asshole"

Irlene laid it real straight. Either I filled the fucking shift or I find myself another damn job. As tempting as it was, I rolled out of bed and said I would.

I choked down a stale beer from the nightstand.

Goddamn Mitch.

Thirty minutes later I rolled into the lot and I could hear the dogs already. Irlene was waiting for me at the door with keys and clipboard.

"RayJay, appreciate this." Big old slant tooth smile. "Got you a call already, so you need to turn your butt around and get yourself up to Red Oak."

"Whatever," I took the keys and the clipboard.

Bitch.

Red Oak was on the other side of town and the clipboard request was an *Officer Needs Assistance*. I should pull over. Take a nap. I wasn't in no hurry to help a pussy cop.

There was a cruiser waiting in the drive. I pulled behind . No cop inside, so I got out and walked up the house.

I knocked on the door. No answer. Knocked again and tried the door.

"Hey, officer? Somebody here call for Animal Control?"

I strolled down the main hall, peering around, wondering where the fuck's the cop? I grabbed a picture from a side table with a familiar middle aged dude and a smoking hot Asian chick.

"I'd put that down, if I were you."

"Shit." I nearly dropped the frame, catching it in mid-bobble.

"Mr. Z wouldn't appreciate you touching his stuff."

I looked at the photo and then at the officer standing at the end of the hallway. Shit. "J.C., so you're the pussy cop I'm looking for?"

"Guilty as charged." He turned and waved me down the hall towards the kitchen. I put down the frame and followed.

"Been a while. So this is Mr. Zacharis' joint?"

"Yep. You heard?" J.C. opened a door to the basement and clicked on a flashlight.

"A bit, the hag at work has son in his class. The boy was all balls up over Zacharis taking a dirt nap."

J.C. nodded and I followed him down into the dark dankness of Zacharis' unfinished basement. A rank roiled up the stairs. The prick, J.C., already covering his face didn't even warn me. My stomach tried to lurch.

"What the fuck? Dude."

"Dunno. We got a call from a neighbor about some noises, so I got sent over. The house was clear, but then something fell in the basement."

He flung the light in my face and saw I had it deep in the crook of my arm. I was trying not to wretch.

"You're going to be cool?"

I wave him on. Sure just as soon as I lose my beer breakfast.

"Something's down here. Found a bowl and a makeshift bed for a dog, I figure." He flashed the light over into the corner. "Heard something over in that corner, figured it was an animal and called AC."

Wasn't like the upstairs. The basement was stacked floor to ceiling with boxes and junk. This is where Zacharis kept his skeletons.

I gagged. "Seen this kind abuse of shit before. Didn't pin Mr. Z. as a punk."

I scanned the floor with my own flashlight and what open areas I saw. The ground was wet, piles of shit in the corner.

A box rustled and both our flashlights swept catching two pale brown eyes. "You see that?"

J.C. was pushing through the boxes, throwing them side to side. Making a path.

I looked around the room at the shit, the dog bed, the dish. Lights burst behind my eyes, knees weak. "Fuck..." I bent over and puked.

When I looked up, J.C. emerged from the boxes with a stick thin, flat faced girl with matted black hair and in a soiled oversized t-shirt.

"It's going to be okay. We're going to get you safe." He said soothingly, carrying her up the stairs.

I puked again.

