

The Drop Off

Paul ran down the stairs at top speed. Out of breath, he snatched the front door open. A black Cadillac Escalade sped down the street, but no one was on the porch.

"I'd have sworn I heard the doorbell ring," he said to himself. As he pushed the door closed, he noticed a brown package by the welcome mat. He opened the door wider and picked up the box. It weighed about a pound, and there was no label on it. While looking the package over, a bit of white powder puffed out of a tear in the paper and landed on his shirt sleeve.

Paul's heart raced. Beads of sweat dotted his bald head. Panicked, his eyes darted up and down the street as he backed into the house.

"Oh my God," he mumbled, closing the door and placing the box on the dining table. "Drugs. I should have known this was a bad neighborhood. Drugs are everywhere, even in the suburbs. Is that cocaine? Heroin? I know it's not crack because it's a powder..." He quickly drew the curtains closed at the bay window and the smaller windows. He peeked out the window and trembled. "I bet this used to be a crack house or something, and now some thugs are gonna come out here and shoot the place up. Jesus... I'm gonna get myself killed. I'm gonna get Tina killed. I'm a horrible husband. We gotta get outta here!" He darted back up the steps and threw their clothes into a duffel bag.

"Honey," Tina said, "was that the doorbell?"

"Uh, I didn't hear anything," he lied, trying to protect her. He zipped up the bag and headed downstairs to tell Tina that he'd put his family at risk of being kidnapped and sent to Colombia. As he reached the bottom of the stairs the telephone rang.

"I got it," Tina said.

Paul's panic kicked into high gear. He dropped the bag and ran to the kitchen, remembering that some drug lords call you before they shoot up your house, according to some movie he saw once.

"Don't answer it!" he yelled, but she already had the receiver to her ear.

"Hello?"

"No!" he screamed, diving to the floor and covering his head.

"Hi, Mom," Tina said, smiling. "No... I thought the doorbell rang." She walked into the living room and saw the package on the table. "Oh – it's right here. Thanks again, Mom. Talk to you later!"

My wife and her mother are drug dealers? Paul thought. *See, I don't make*

enough money for her, and she's trying to help out... I love that woman, but she's putting us in danger...

"What are you doing down there, silly?" Tina asked, laughing at her husband. "You didn't tell me Mom dropped off this rice flour. I'm going to make that gluten-free cake I told you about. What's that in the duffel bag?"

Oh, it's flour, he thought.

"Just some dry cleaning," he replied. "I'll be right back."

He got up off the floor, grabbed the bag and ran to his car.

Once inside, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Man," he said, lighting a joint, "that was close. I think this stuff might be making me paranoid."

* Provide me with the name of the publication – Down in The Dirt

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