

Just Dropping In

Louisa Swann

I woke up that Saturday morning to the strains of Bach, the rich scent of freshly ground coffee, and a body in my bathtub.

The Bach and the coffee I'd expected. And the body? Well, she was a drop in.

I'm not much of a morning person. Until I get that first caffeine IV hooked up and dripping, my worldwide awareness is rather unfocused. I'm a person who needs his routine – stumble out of bed at 7 am, fall into the shower for some eye-crust peeling. Once my eyes are up and working, then it's out to the kitchen for that quick java jolt.

I'd gotten as far as the bathroom before I realized there was something in the air besides coffee. I pushed open the door and tried to figure just how a rotting whale had fallen through the ceiling into my tub.

By the time realization set in – yo, dude, this ain't no whale – I'd walked up to the tub, stuck my finger on what appeared to be skin and watched that skin slip sideways leaving what used to be muscle behind.

No more need for caffeine. My heart kicked into overdrive and my mouth went dry as a desert mummy.

I stumbled out of the bathroom and headed toward the kitchen. What I really needed was a good stiff drink, but just thinking “stiff” almost spoiled that idea. The body in my tub was anything but stiff. In fact, she was so unstiff, parts of her were clogging up my plumbing.

A bottle of Jack Daniels hid behind two bottles of Merlot and a half bottle of Chardonnay. The wine was for romantic evenings; the whiskey for emergency purposes only. A garbage truck groaned somewhere outside as I yanked out the square bottle, twisted off the cap, and opened my throat.

Two good swallows helped bring reality back into focus. I headed for the kitchen sink and splashed water on my eyes. Certain I was now awake and not walking around in some nightmare, I sloshed more whiskey – another three fingers plus a fist – into a mason jar, stalked down the hall to the bathroom, and glared at the ragged hole in my ceiling.

I could almost picture Elaine's accusing eyes. "I told you that ceiling was rotten," my wife would've said. But Elaine up and left me little over a week ago. Just up and disappeared.

Probably ran off with another used car salesman – southern California's full of 'em.

There wasn't any sky showing through the hole, so I had to consider the fact this body had been hanging over my shower for a while. A chill raced around my body like all the spiders in the neighborhood were having a derby and I was the track. I took another slug from my jar. Tried to concentrate on the damage and not on the blubbery body sloshing in the tub.

Torn drywall dangled against the tiled wall, its underside black with some kind of goeey shit I won't even try to describe. Plaster lay all over everything like frosted flakes.

Yeah – what I was smelling was sweet, but it sure wasn't sugar coating.

I caught a glimpse of something moving through the backyard bushes as I wrenched the bathroom window open and tried to find some fresh air to breathe. Probably a neighbor's mutt attracted by the alluring eau de death. I chased the bile from my throat with another slug of whiskey. Whiskey couldn't dull that smell, though. I was beginning to think nothing could.

I grabbed the cell phone and headed out back before I lost the breakfast I hadn't gotten to. The "patio" was a ten by ten concrete square made out of weak cement with a basketball hoop dangling at the far end. I settled into one of the plastic chairs I'd bought at a local five and dime back when I could afford the extravagance, set my mason jar on the matching table, and stared at the phone.

That's when I realized none of the guys I knew specialized in rotten corpse disposal.