A LITTLE PIECE OF HEAVEN

 So, I’m on my way to the sticks to pick up a package. Package – gentle euphemism, really. I’m picking up a body. One of our dealers cut a deal with the Feds. Juan Pablo made sure he didn’t live up to his end of the bargain. Now I get to clean up the mess. I’m part of the Mexican Mafia in Texas. Well, not so much a part of it as their errand boy. A gringo can only get so far with them.

 I’m not asking questions. They don’t pay me to ask questions – just to get the job done. This guy got iced a few hours ago. They didn’t call me in to help out with the prep work because I was on my way back from Houston. I was delivering some product to one of our guys.

 But now that the prep work is done and now that I’m back in town, I get to have the ‘oh-so-fun’ job of disposing of the body. Such is my life.

 I pulled a beat-up pickup truck off the interstate and wound my way around to the address where I’m supposed to get my cargo. I parked in the driveway and walked around to the back and opened the tailgate. Then I strolled up the hill in the back to the rear cellar. It was like something out of a movie…those big wooden doors on an angle to the ground. I wasn’t sure that really existed. I’ve never seen them in person before.

 Once I got up to the doors, I banged on them with a closed fist. Very quickly, they opened up for me, and I was looking into Javier’s face. “Hola, Miguel. Come on in.” Javier was the only one who called me Miguel. I felt it was respectful. Everybody else called me Mikey. I hated that; still do.

 As I ducked my head and stepped into the cellar, Juan Pablo felt just because he whacked the guy, that it was his place to give me shit. “You’re late, Mikey!”

 I’ve had a day that has been more bad than good, so I don’t feel like putting up with him. “Besame mi culo,” I shot back at him. For those unfamiliar with Spanish, it means ‘kiss my ass.’ That seemed to be the end of that.

 Javier shut the huge wooden door behind me and spoke. “Miguel, we’ve got the body all ready for you.” He handed me a bowling ball bag as he continued, “These are his head and hands. The body is in that bag. It’s dark now, so I don’t think you’ll have any problems from nosy neighbors. Just take the body out to the hills and dig a hole and bury it. That’s all.”

 They didn’t tell me much about the poor slob that was now minus a head. Just that he had worked for them and had held out on a deal. Lots of guys keep a little piece for themselves, but he got caught. Even I’ve done it; I don’t want to be a package boy forever.

I watched Javier as he spoke. Only now that he was finished did I take time to look around and see the plastic bag on the floor. It was shorter than I expected, but then I guess that makes sense, once you take the head off.

 I took the bowling ball bag out to the truck and set it in the passenger-side floorboard. That way I didn’t have to worry about it falling if I had to stomp on the brakes or if I hit an armadillo or something. When that was taken care of, I went back for the body.

 This time, I didn’t bother knocking; just opened the door and walked in. They must have expected that, because I didn’t see anybody flinch. Without another word passing among the three of us, I just bent over and picked up the body.

 Javier stopped me as I turned to go up the steps. He had some last words to get out. “Now, remember, Miguel, it will only be dark so long, so dig fast.”

 “Gotcha.” Then, raising my voice slightly and addressing both of them, I continued, “See you guys. Hasta mañana. “

 I turned and walked up the rickety wooden steps and out the cellar. As I was climbing the steps, I could hear a song in my head, “All dressed up with nowhere to go. Walkin’ with a dead man over my shoulder.” Juan Pablo shut the heavy doors behind me without so much as a nod. I don’t think I like him.

 With a heave, I dropped the body in the bed of the truck and slammed the tailgate shut. I got into the cab and put my seatbelt on like a normal person. After all, I couldn’t get busted for a speeding ticket or a seatbelt with a corpse in the bed of the truck. That would just be all kinds of bad.

I drove for half an hour until I felt like I was sufficiently out in the sticks. At first, there was the regular grid pattern of the city, then windy-ass country roads. There were no city lights anywhere. If it hadn’t been for the full moon, there wouldn’t have been much of any light at all. This seemed like a good place to do my business.

I parked the truck and got out. I would pull out the two bags I brought with me later. First, I should get onto digging that hole. I let down the tailgate and got my shovel. The ground beneath my feet seemed reasonably soft. We had gotten rain for a few days while I was gone; that helped.

Once I had picked out a nice secluded spot, I started digging. I dug for what seemed like a long time (but probably wasn’t as long as I thought) until I got too hot. I was only a few feet down, but I had to take a break. This was going to be a long night.

Thankfully, I had brought a six-pack with me. I walked to the cab and got one of the beers. After a long hot dig, it tasted good. I lingered for a long minute and enjoyed my beer, then threw the empty can in the bed of the pickup. Time to roll up my sleeves and get back to work.

My break was refreshing. I cooled off just in time to start digging and get hot again. One of the things I’ve always been afraid of is digging a hole and running into somebody that’s already buried in it. Luckily, I don’t think that’s going to happen this time.

Another hour of digging, and I was finished…well, as finished as I was going to get. I had decided that the hole was deep enough. I was hot and tired, and it was getting late. Clouds were starting to roll in and I was going to lose my light before long.

I put down the shovel and went to the back of the truck. I reached into the bed of the truck and pulled the body toward the tailgate. It was never going to decompose surrounded by trash bags, so I decided to remove them.

As I tore away the plastic to reveal the torso, I said out loud, “So, who’s getting buried tonight?”

Just then, a movement came from inside the bag. I brushed back the bag to reveal an arm clutching a pistol. A voice came through, too. “You’re the one getting buried, gringo.”

Two pistol blasts later, I staggered backwards and fell into the hole I’d spent half the night digging. It was from those depths that I breathed my last.