

# Careful What You Show

*by*  
*Rick Allden*

*Typical casting:*        *Woman (30s – 70s)*  
*Word count:*            *1034*  
*Approx. run time:*      *8 minutes*

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*Sally sits in front of a laptop*

SALLY           The first time he went through my bins I nearly had him with an ironing board. Before it all happened, this was. I quietly unlocked and unbolted the front door, sneaked out with it behind the, if I say so myself, immaculate conifer and then, with all my might chucked the rusting missile straight towards his big, melon head. Wasn't a great success; it landed all of about a foot in front of me. He didn't even look up as he shouted "don't take ironing boards love". I'm glad he didn't look up, glad he didn't see me like that. You've got to be careful what you show, haven't you?

But I saw him though; saw him striding down the street as I brought the board back into its home. I saw him and look at me now.

Can't remember the last time I put on makeup. It's harder than I remember. I'm trying to YouTube it, but it's harder still to take instruction from a stretch-faced embryo with an attitude and a fringe. I wore dungarees the *first* time round sweetheart.

See, we've been in a game for a while now, me and the bin man. Turns out you can't just recycle anything. We live in a world where we can clone a sheep, print a gun and watch TV on your phone as the car parks itself, but everything and anyone around us would burn if we dared try and recycle the film top of a spaghetti carbonara for one. And he'll find it. Almost invisible they are, but he'll find it. He

can just find that one thing he's looking for in amongst all that. He's like a ferret. A sexually magnetic ferret. His jaw muscles tense as he plucks each offending item – even his face has biceps. Nice to give them a little workout.

I started putting a few in, the lids, to test him; sometimes making sure there were more lids than cardboard sleeves to try and throw him off but he's got them all so far. Every single one. Started putting passive aggressive stickers on the bin lid then, didn't he, reminding me of the community's recycling responsibilities. He'd tick off the genres of offending items I'd left and yeah – that was it –that was when I realised that, by rooting through the bin, he's been building a picture of my life. Building his own picture of me, not the one he'll have seen in the local papers. A refuse profile. I stopped buying the single microwave meals for one, and instead filled the bin with bottles of Yakult and packets of Rivita that probably have more flavour than the biscuits they held.

Trying to draw the eyebrows on now. When did that become a thing? Animating your face. You've got to be careful – one of the Youtube spermazoa said you should pick an expression that you're likely to have through 80% of your day. What happens if it suddenly changes? It's hard to show your genuine delight and surprise at something if you first have to disappear to the toilet to draw it on. What do I do if –

*A knock at the door*

Oh. Is that –

*She leaves for a moment, and she stumbles off camera. She returns.*

Yep. It's him. I can see his unmistakable shape even through the frosting. I can't be sure, but I think he's smiling.

I don't know - I didn't really expect - I need to finish the make-up if I'm going to, if we're going to - I'd left him a note, you see. A note to say that he was doing a great job, that I'm amazed he can sniff out a film lid a mile off and, if he wanted to stop in for a cup of tea then he'd be welcome to. Now he's here, at the door. I didn't actually think - and smiling too - I don't know now - but I've made a path to the kettle and everything. I rembere his sticker about community responsibility, you see? And, maybe, you know, with the unsociable hours he keeps (*distracted by YouTube Video*) - the unsociable hours he - God. Yeah. What was I thinking, watching these videos of impossibly toothy teenagers prettily laughing at this now-locally-infamous wreck before them who can't even work out her 80% expression of choice. And he's still there, knocking.

It's a reminder, isn't it, sometimes? It's not just them either, the YouTube babies. The paper's still here, in front of me, I've hundreds in the attic. It's been a few months, since this one at least, but - look, such an unflattering angle of the back garden. They've made it look like a tip or a landfill site. It probably has got worse these last few weeks, I couldn't put the rubbish in the green bin, could I?

I'm not what they say I am. I hope he knows that. An easy headline, isn't it?

Hoarder.

*A knock at the door – impatient now.*

Hoarder. I'm not but – you've got to be careful what you show, haven't you? To the outside world. Never show them anything, Mum always said. When she went & I moved back here I just – I don't know, I don't like things going out anymore. That's all. Doesn't do any harm. It's not as if people could see in the backgarden with that fence, but then the journalists must've gone and got themselves some drones or something. Mum would've hated that. She'd have boarded the windows.

Just the doorstep for now then. I keep it lovely out there. Out there every day with the brush. Mum's memory, isn't it? It's what people see, what they remember. So, yeah. The doorstep. Next to the immaculate conifer and with Mum right there beside us. We'll meet on the doorstep and see how we get on. Just look at them, on the screen, presenting themselves to the world; laughing and clapping from their childhood bedrooms with their parents downstairs keeping the outside away.

Think I'll go big with the eyebrows. Hide a sin or two. You've got to be careful what you show, haven't you?