

It Came in the Post

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It came in the post, addressed to The Occupant. There were two of us so I waited for my flat mate to get home from work. When I heard her keys jingling, I went to meet her at the door.

“We've got post.”

We never get proper post; it's all advertising and charity bags. I've often wondered why people bother with post-boxes. Until today.

She followed me into the kitchen, flinging her bag on the table. I gave her the mail. She twisted it around, examining every angle.

“You open it.”

“No, you.”

So she carefully untied the bow and let the tissue paper fall away.

We stared. It was delicate, fragile, and beautiful.

“We can't keep it,” I said.

She pleaded and wheedled and promised to take care of it.

I was sceptical, reminding her of the Jack O'Lantern. Last Halloween we carved a pumpkin for the front porch. It grinned garishly for a few days after the 31st, but then the mouth folded in on itself. Eventually the entire head caved in, disintegrating into a sticky putrid orange nest.

“We couldn't even take care of a vegetable,” I said. “How will we manage this?”

She said pumpkins are fruit, as if that made any difference.

But eventually she wore me down. It would be company for me during the day. Somehow I was saddled with first watch, staying up late into the night until it was settled. After that, we took it in turns, swapping night shifts like a couple of security guards.

I work from home, so I became the first responder. I brought it to my office and while I worked at my computer; it sat in my in-tray. At lunch, I propped it in a kitchen chair, talking to it while I ate. In the evenings, it sat between us on the sofa while we watched bad drama and worse news.

After a few weeks, we began to argue over whose turn it was to look after it. Once, when I came home from a date, it was home alone. I waited up for my roommate, the non-responder, seething. She claimed we had switched shifts, but I knew she was lying.

One day when she was at work, I made a decision. I went to Google Maps and found an address on the other side of town. Then I put it into a box, stroking it gently before I tied up the ribbon. I wrote the house number and street name for across town and addressed the package to The Occupant.