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One Piece At A Time

Mark Vinz

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ONE PIECE AT A TIME

Tomorrow is our annual Clean-Up Day, the only time the city garbage trucks will pick up just about anything. All over town, people are combing through their basements and garages and backyards. Gradually, the boulevards are filling up with piles in front of nearly every house—cardboard boxes full of mismatched dishes, bags of clothes and toys, battered washing machines and broken tv sets, tires and carpet squares and leaky hoses.

By dark the first groups of them start to arrive, usually in old cars or vans, sometimes dragging open trailers. They work each street methodically, a little here, a little there. Even small children help, fanning out from every stop, calling to come and take a look. Near a corner, a man in one of those souvenir sombreros is trying out a broken rocker listing off the curb. He rises, waves, and two other men appear and load it in a pickup.

Through the night, the piles shrink or disappear, and as the first garbage trucks arrive, only a couple of cars are still prowling, eyes at every window, quickly now, before it's all gone—one last piece to make the trip complete, to load and carry off to some other place, some other world invisible beyond these empty streets and first light gathering.