

Fun-Guys - a monologue

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I guess it is a quiet neighbourhood—now. However, the stories I told in the staffroom were true. I didn't exaggerate about a living hell, but finger-crossed I've solved the problem. Take last Saturday I was reading an Agatha Christie—unwinding after all those NAPLAN tests—when the words blurred on the page.

I couldn't concentrate.

Car doors slamming, lots of loud yahooing. Oh no, I thought, not another party. My neighbour Greg loves parties.

I got to the window just as more cars pulled up and counted four utes and 3 four-wheel drives. The street became a parking lot. One ugly brown ute squatted on my nature strip, like an overblown cane toad. More vehicles arrived, promising another sleepless night.

Those suggestions to remain calm always fail. You know, breathing exercises, meditation, relaxing incense, sweet harp music, long walks along the beach... I've tried them all. I mean unless I sell up, I'm still coming home to gregarious Greg! Weekend after weekend of beer-swilling blokes and giggling Gerties.

It made me sick. Why should I have to live on valium and sleeping pills?

My blood pressure exploded at the thought of another night of crude language and ribald laughter—not to mention the smell of sausages and steak. Lingers for days.

I've been a vegan for over two years now. Long before Greg moved in. And he never cleans the barbecue plates. The accumulated lumps of fat melt at the slightest hint of sun, so I cop flies and wasps. His barbie is right by the fence.

The nights I've lain awake wondering if the gods sent Greg to try me. Karma for something in my past. Don't get me started on his childish mates with their tradie shorts and singlets, loud revving and wheelies in the street. Bloody show offs.

They remind me of Peter, my ex and I thought I'd buried the memories of that marriage, a long time ago. The worst year of my life.

Anyway, another ute screeched to a halt and two twenty-somethings strolled up Greg's driveway carrying a slab of beer each. Brute aftershave dowsed the air... More obnoxious reminders of Peter. I wanted to yell, '*no amount of drenching yourself in deodorant compensates for crude behaviour*,' when the muscled blond with a tattoo of ugly snakes slithering up his arms and legs leered over the fence and winked at me.

The others laughed. You can imagine the sneers and jokes! Oh yes, they've put me in a cliched box like I have them.

I wouldn't be so uptight if they just did the right thing. I hate this living on top of each other, but the council don't care... to them more houses equals more rates! Most of the Planning Department have no interest because they live elsewhere.

The monotonous techno beat grew louder. Girls arrived to add high-pitched screams to the mix. How people can hear themselves speak over what passes as music today is a mystery.

I had to fix the lot of them once and for all. I mean, I work all week with super active Grade Fours. It isn't too much to ask for peace and quiet at home. A bit of respect. Neighbourly cooperation.

I never thought I'd miss grumpy old Wilson and his yappy terrier, but I do. Wonder how they're coping with retirement village life? No wild parties there, I'm guessing—though if it gets rowdy they can switch off their hearing aids.

Ear plugs never worked for me. Could still hear the dog yapping, and they don't block out Greg's racket. Saturday afternoons I just grind my teeth.

When I went to make a coffee, I peeked over the cafe curtains and watched them. A plastic tub rumbled like a volcano as tattoo man emptied bags of ice over a mountain of stubbies and tinnies. Trails of cigarette smoke—and the 'funny stuff'—drifted through the window. They don't care about their livers or lungs, but why punish me?

Ba boom, ba boom, ba boom, boom boom... Someone turned the music up. They'll all be deaf by thirty. When the base thumps, I can't think straight. Ba boom, ba boom, ba boom. Crockery rattles, walls vibrate. I massage my ears, even put the radio on for distraction, but no relief. Every nerve end aches.

'That's it!' I yelled at the window.

Then I remembered the wild mushrooms.

I searched the bookshelves and found *The Magical World of Mushrooms*. Flicked to the centre pages. The illustration matched the ones I'd discovered down by the creek and stuck in a basket by the door. The deadly Galerinas, small and brown, difficult to spot the difference from the ones on special at the supermarket.

The evening grew noisier, the partygoers more animated. I focussed on Greg's constant nagging for me to 'get in the party mood.' His standing invitation to 'come over anytime.'

Science curriculum comes in handy. I was in and out his side gate before anyone noticed me slip the bowl of salad among the other food.

I don't know if Greg understands karma. He hasn't been around lately for me to ask.

What do you mean you won't stay for dinner?

