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## The Noise Below

by Sue Hitchcock

"Showhome for sale - last chance to reside on the prize-winning, architect-designed Finmore Gated Estate. Designer furnishings negotiable."

It was the perfect opportunity. Nicky and Micky had their wedding planned in two months time and hadn't yet found the house they aspired to. There were a few things they would change, but the style was perfect with the favoured open-plan living with sliding doors to the garden and a utility room for the washing machine and boiler, out of view. Two bedrooms, each en-suite would allow them to swank to their visiting friends.

The marriage and the honeymoon were over and they thought they were in paradise. Micky worked in insurance, while Nicky was a buyer for a cosmetic group with franchises in large stores. Nicky ran a small SEAT, pink but with room enough for the samples she was given. Micky had a pet BMW z3 which, though prestigious, was expensive to run.

After six months the honeymoon - in paradise- was over. Micky left preferring to maintain the Z3 than to pay the mortgage and Nicky was left struggling. The house itself was struggling a bit too and she had to call in a central-heating engineer to

look at the boiler. It seemed to work, but had developed a voice of its own. Sometimes it would squeak, sometimes groan - a versatile singer, if only it had a sense of melody.

The mortgage plus extras for maintenance call-outs began to intrude on Nicky's clothing allowance and she started to explore her options. Her expertise was in perfume, theoretically, but in truth she had no nose. She had the vocabulary - spicy, woody, herby, floral, but gin flavoured with lavender smelled as good as any. Looking through her samples, she found a fairly expensive perfume which was nevertheless sold in a very plain bottle.

On the internet she found a supplier of a similar bottle and ordered two hundred, then she printed copies of the box on card and assembled a few. On her glass dining table she set out a row of shot glasses and poured a little gin in each. Then going through her spices and flavourings she found vanilla, lavender, lemon, cinnamon and ginger.

What a pleasant evening, mixing, sniffing, adding colourings until she found a concoction which pleased her. What now? Set up a website, buy more ingredients and she was away. After work the next day she visited the supermarket and bought half a dozen bottles of gin, more spices and flavourings which she stored in the utility room while she worked on the website.

Exhausted she went to bed, not kept awake by the singing boiler. Then suddenly awake, the singing now a roaring, then a series of bangs as the gin bottles exploded.