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A Knock at the Door

by Louise Alley

Gideon leaned back and stretched, staring with satisfaction at his screen. He checked the wordcount and grinned.

He flicked on some music and was moving to the wine rack when the door chime went. Unshaven, dishevelled and thirsty, he wasn't in the mood for company, but he buzzed back. "Hello?"

"Hi" it was a man's voice, uncertain. "Hey, really sorry to bother you. My name's Fenton. I'm looking at the apartment next door and I just wondered if I could ask you a few questions. Only if you had some time. "

There was something about the man's voice; cultured, neutral and extremely familiar. He rubbed his chin. "Um, sure. Come on up."

He opened the door to let him in and watched him pounding up the last few stairs. The man smiled and held out his hand. "Fenton. Nice to meet you, and thanks for this."

"Gideon Ravidge. You're welcome. Come on in."

Fenton McMillan. Familiar indeed. Broadsheet columnist, television host and radio presenter. Gideon had watched his fame and reputation grow, from a mischievous stand-up comedian and player of pranks on commercial radio, to a respected satirist and owner of a production company. He would have admitted to being a committed fan, had he not been swathed in resentment and jealousy every time he saw him.

“Aah...did you want a drink?”

Too far. Too needy. Fenton looked surprised but recovered himself. “ No, thanks so much. Look, I’m thinking about making an offer next door and I just wanted to get the download on the building. I hope you don’t mind.”

“No, too easy. It’s a great building.”

They talked about strata management, how long Gideon had lived there, the neighbours, the security. Gideon provided answers promptly, but was casting his eyes around his living room. Were his novels on display? Was Crowded House too bland? He wished he hadn’t tidied away all his copies of the London Review of Books.

He talked Fenton through last year’s roof repairs while he edged slowly across the room, so he had his back to the bookshelf. He leaned on Karl Popper and David Hume.

Fenton took the hint and swivelled his eyes from floor to ceiling. “That’s a great collection you’ve got there.”

Gideon looked round in surprise. “Oh, well, you know. It’s the dayjob.”

He paused. “I’m a writer. Novelist. Fiction. Stories.”

“Oh wow. Great. Good on you.”

Fenton did not ask what he’d written, and Gideon felt need mounting in him like bile. He grabbed a copy of Loss on the Corner from the windowsill and thrust it into Fenton’s hands. “This is mine! My last one, I mean. Just a...it’s just a little thing really..not sure if you’ve seen it in the shops.”

Inside, he mournfully watched himself behaving like a prat.

Fenton stared down at it. “Oh! Good on you. You must be. Proud. Well – I better not keep you.” He handed the book back to Gideon and moved towards the entranceway. “I’m really grateful – thanks so much for taking the time.”

Gideon followed him and held the door. “No worries, anytime. Happy to help. See you soon I guess, if you make the offer that is. Ha ha! Good luck.”

Then - “What are you filming now?” He couldn’t help blurting it out. Fenton looked faintly alarmed as it visibly dawned on him that Gideon had recognised him from the start.

“Oh. A consumer affairs show. Going quite well. We should be on air this year.”

Gideon closed the door with a smiling farewell and cursed himself behind it.