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## The Lane

by Sho Botham

Overnight, our neighbours began to look at us differently. Let us go back in time to before our neighbours were our neighbours. All of us in the Lane remember fondly, the Dickensons, our previous, friendly neighbours. When the pandemic began some of us caught Covid and recovered but the poor Dickensons succumbed. Their house was not empty for long. Our new neighbours moved in. But were they Lane folk?

All of us tried to make the Smarts welcome to the Lane. But they made it difficult. Our private gardens were very dear to us Lane people. Big exotic shrubs tended over many years mixed with bamboos and other large screening plants that gave us complete privacy from our neighbours. This was not because we didn't get on with them. It was that all of us liked having the choice of being totally private or having get-togethers in our gardens when we wanted company. This was the Lane way and it had been long before we moved in.

Some of us called a Lane meeting. We didn't invite the Smarts. It was time for us to decide what to do about them. They were not fitting in with the Lane ways and we were getting more and more stressed. Those of us next door to them and our friends across the Lane were finding the usually quiet, peaceful life we loved was being destroyed. We wanted to stop it before it was too late. Those of us who enjoyed walking sedately along the Lane to the fields beyond and our elderly cyclists who had always found the Lane safe, were becoming too frightened to venture out. The Smarts liked fast cars. We counted at least four loud, brash cars speeding up and down our Lane every day.

We were not happy about this. The Smarts didn't seem to care. If it wasn't fast cars, it was large white vans screeching along our Lane at all sorts of funny times of the day and night.

Most of us voted to install small cameras at the end of our gardens to give us evidence of the loud fast cars and the white vans tearing up our Lane and to make sure the Smarts weren't spying on us. Old Mr Palatray was a retired solicitor and always gave us good advice on any legal matters affecting our Lane. The last time this was needed was so long ago most of us couldn't remember when it was. Our Lane had been existing in almost perfect harmony until the Smarts moved in.

We agreed to hold a Lane get-together in an effort to encourage the Smarts to get to know our Lane ways. This event was planned for Sunday afternoon. With the Smarts being our immediate neighbours, we got the task of popping round to their house to invite them. They weren't very gracious. But they agreed to come. We noticed that their drive was overwhelmed trying to accommodate four fast cars plus two white vans. They'd parked right into the beautiful privacy screening shared with us on the other side. We didn't want our privacy ruined.

It was our evening to relax in the garden. All our Lane friends knew and left us to it. But no one had told the Smarts. Wanting to check the time of the get-together on Sunday, the Smarts strolled into our garden. We didn't hear them walking across the grass. We didn't hear them leave. They returned next morning to ask us about the time of the get-together. We were puzzled. It was as if, overnight, our neighbours began to look at us differently. They looked at us with such curiosity as if they couldn't quite believe their eyes. It was only when we saw them in our garden on our new small camera that we understood. They'd seen us. They'd broken the Lane code of visiting on our garden naturist night. It was obvious that they weren't aware of our Lane's long past as a cluster of individual naturist properties.