

## **A Weekend Off?: Lyn Overton**

Aroused from deep sleep, opening one eye I glance at the clock, 3.30am. The night is so dark, no moon. Good, a few hours left before I need to get up, just roll over, I tell myself, today is Saturday, a day in the garden after morning coffee with Kate. First weekend off in weeks and the Emergency Department has been so busy. What woke me? Is that a noise downstairs, footsteps? Is Ted up? No, he is away for 2 days, due home Monday. Imaginings I tell myself, roll over and get back to sleep. Then I hear it again. Heart racing, breathing increasing, I lie perfectly still. Emma had been barking earlier, but then she settled down, she was quiet now.

We live 5 kilometres from town, closest neighbours a kilometre, never lock the doors. The noises again, like a slow shuffle, tentative steps. What should I do? Do not move a muscle, I tell myself. If it is a prowler, they do not know the house, they may not find the stairs, it is so dark, our stairway is concealed. They (I am getting convinced there is someone there) may think the stairs too risky. The phone is on the desk on the other side of the room; I would make too much noise if I tried to call the neighbour. My handbag is downstairs. He may just be after money. However, why is Emma so quiet, has he hurt her? Who knew Ted was away? All these thoughts rushing, my heart pounding, echoing in my ears, my breathing faster, calm down, get a grip, do not lose it.

Footsteps sound on the stairs, tentative, unsure, then a bump. Oh My God! Who is it? My heart is leaping out of my chest, I cannot move, legs paralysed, nausea, sweating. I will just die of fear, chest tight, and my mouth so very dry. Do not cough, do not swallow, do not make a sound.

The backdoor slides open, footsteps crunching, moving away towards the shed. He is going. No, stops, walks back towards the house. Where is the dog? Emma gives a low growl, back-door slides open again, he is back inside. I just cannot bear it, then... 'Anyone home? It is Jim, there is a bad accident up the road, and it can be a long wait for the ambulance, told them you were a nurse and may be able to help...'