

The Hour

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I STAND OUTSIDE his door, staring at my watch. Two minutes to go. I can hear the bells, laughter and muffled audience applause of a TV quiz show inside the house.

One minute to go.

For a moment I wonder if this is really necessary, but watching the seconds scroll down from forty to twenty, I remember just how many times he's kept me awake with the relentless thumping bass of his music. How many times he's filled both his wheelie bin and mine with a backlog of rubbish, stranding me with two weeks' worth of stinking bin bags in the summer heat. Yes, I really *do* want to do this.

1:00 AM. Go.

The doorbell is an angry buzzer. Thirty seconds pass. I hear him lumbering to the door.

'Hey, Brian, what can I d—'

My fist—spring-loaded—darts straight for his jaw. It isn't my choice any more, isn't my fault. My arm just wanted it. His head ricochets back with the blow and I'm off.

'What the hell?' He starts a heavy pace towards me, but I'm already running. 'Hey, come back here, you little shit!' I'm out of his reach, and he gives up the chase. 'You think you'll get away with this, you fucking faggot? I know where you fucking live!' he bellows after me, his voice getting further and further away as I sprint down the darkened street.

I know, I know: not the most diplomatic way to deal with a problem neighbour. What the hell am I doing? This will only hit me back and harder, right? But it's okay, I've got this all under control; he won't remember a thing in the morning. Hell, he won't remember it in fifty-eight minutes.