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PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

A tongue-in-cheek guide series ;)

My Neighbor Is Testing My Patience

How to Handle Noise, Shared Spaces, and
Everyday Friction Without Starting
a Neighborhood War



We've got a problem. But relax.
It can be solved - and we'll even have something to laugh about.

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INTRO

You Buy the Apartment. The Neighbors Come Free

When people choose a place to live, they usually inspect the obvious things.

The size.

The layout.

The kitchen.

The bathroom.

The balcony.

The parking space.

The view.

The amount of daylight.

The distance to shops.

They measure walls, imagine furniture, open cupboards, stare thoughtfully out of windows and ask important questions such as, "Could a proper dining table fit here?" and, "Would this bedroom survive a wardrobe without becoming legally classified as storage?"

There is, however, one major feature that rarely appears on the floor plan.

The neighbors.

There is no specification sheet.

No premium upgrade.

No checkbox marked:

"Quiet people only, please."

You cannot ask the developer to install a family upstairs that never moves furniture, owns no subwoofer and considers drilling before 9 a.m. morally unacceptable.

You cannot order the deluxe parking package in which everybody understands painted lines.

You do not get to test the future residents of apartment 28 for door-slamming tendencies before you sign the paperwork.

And yet the people living a few meters away can influence your quality of life more than the color of the walls, the kitchen worktop or the fancy rainfall shower you were briefly convinced would transform you into a calmer person.

Sometimes it works beautifully.

You say hello.

You accept each other's parcels.

Someone lends you a screwdriver.

Someone waters your plants while you are away.

You live close enough to help each other but far enough apart to maintain the healthy illusion that everybody has a completely normal private life.

That is the ideal version of apartment living.

Polite contact.

Reasonable consideration.

And absolutely no need to understand why someone appears to drag a chair across wooden flooring every night at 1:14 a.m.

Then there is the extended edition.

Someone plays loud music.

Someone parks as if the painted lines are merely an artistic suggestion.

Someone leaves a stroller in the hallway.

Then a scooter.

Then a bicycle.

Then a box that has apparently been waiting "just until tomorrow" since March.

A dog barks.

Children run.

Doors slam.

Cigarette smoke floats through an open window.

A renovation begins at an hour previously believed to exist only for airport departures.

Someone leaves rubbish next to the bin rather than inside it.

A mysterious armchair appears in the shared basement.

And suddenly forty adults on the residents' group are conducting a forensic investigation into who left a cardboard box next to the recycling container.

The strange thing is that the object itself is usually not the worst part.

The worst part is what happens inside your head.

At first, you hear music.

Later, you start waiting for the music.

Nothing is happening yet, but at 8:40 p.m. you are already thinking:

"I wonder if he'll start again tonight."

At 9:15, you hear the first thump of bass.

And suddenly you are no longer hearing music.

You are hearing disrespect.

You are not imagining a person in another apartment who may genuinely have no idea how efficiently low-frequency sound travels through concrete.

You are imagining someone who has personally decided to destroy your evening.

This is how neighborhood wars often begin.

Not with a dramatic event.

Not with a major act of hostility.

With interpretation.

One person does something irritating.

The other sees it as deliberate disrespect.

The first hears a complaint and feels attacked.

They answer defensively.

The second person takes that defensive response as proof that the neighbor is exactly as awful as suspected.

The next conversation no longer starts with the original problem.

It starts with the entire history of the relationship.

"You always..."

"You never..."

"This is the third time..."

"Well, what about you..."

Welcome to the building.

Please keep your arms inside the elevator at all times.

This book exists to help you avoid reaching that stage.

It is not a manual about learning to love every person within a fifty-meter radius.

I am not going to convince you that the neighbor who practices something resembling a cross between a trumpet and an emergency warning siren at 6:30 in the morning is secretly a gift from the universe sent to develop your emotional resilience.

Nor are we going to pretend that every conflict can be solved with a warm smile, soft eye contact and the words:

"Could we perhaps have a calm conversation about this?"

Some problems are easy.

Some require a firm conversation.

Some require documentation.

Some require the building manager, homeowners' association, housing cooperative, landlord or another responsible party.

Some require formal escalation.

Some require professional help.

And some involve a person who simply does not want to cooperate.

The goal, then, is not to make everything pleasant.

The goal is to make it effective without turning a manageable problem into a permanent private cold war.

Because neighborhood conflict has one very special feature.

Your opponent lives extremely close to you.

You do not finish a difficult conversation, drive home and leave the situation behind.

You finish the conversation and walk three meters back to your apartment.

The person you just argued with may be above you, below you, behind your wall or four doors away.

You meet again.

At the elevator.

At the mailboxes.

In the garage.

Near the rubbish bins.

At 7:48 in the morning when you have keys in one hand, a bag in the other, coffee cooling somewhere nearby, and fate decides this is the perfect moment for Round Four of the Great Bicycle Dispute.

This is why winning at all costs is often a terrible strategy in neighbor conflicts.

You can win the argument and lose the next three years of living there.

You can be completely right and still create an atmosphere in which every accidental meeting feels like the opening scene of a Western.

All that is missing is a tumbleweed rolling through the hallway.

Throughout this book, we will therefore focus less on victories and more on solutions.

There is a difference.

Victory sounds like:

"I proved he was wrong."

A solution sounds like:

"The problem stopped affecting me."

Victory sounds like:

"The building manager agreed with me."

A solution sounds like:

"The bicycle no longer blocks the elevator."

Victory sounds like:

"I told her exactly what I think."

A solution sounds like:

"The music stops being loud late at night."

If you ever have to choose, the solution is usually more useful.

We will also separate two things that tend to fuse together very quickly during conflict: a person's behavior and your judgment of the person.

If your neighbor leaves a rubbish bag in the hallway, the first useful fact is that a rubbish bag is sitting in the hallway.

It does not automatically mean you live next to the moral collapse of modern civilization.

If someone parks over your line twice, this does not necessarily mean they have spent years preparing for a hostile takeover of thirty centimeters of your asphalt.

Maybe they were careless.

Maybe they did not realize they were causing a problem.

Maybe their standards are different.

Maybe the parking layout is terrible.

Maybe they are inconsiderate.

Maybe they really are difficult.

At the beginning, you do not know.

Problems grow when we choose the most hostile explanation before the first proper conversation has even happened.

If you knock on the door thinking:

"This idiot knows exactly what he is doing,"

your face, posture and voice will often communicate that message long before your very polite opening sentence has finished.

The other person then stops listening to the problem and starts defending themselves.

Thirty seconds later, you are no longer discussing music.

You are discussing respect.

Then manners.

Then who has lived in the building longer.

And if the conversation becomes especially productive, somebody will bring up an event from November two years ago that the other person does not remember at all.

One of the most useful ideas in this book is therefore very simple:

****fact - impact - request.****

Instead of:

"Could you finally stop making noise every night?"

you say:

"For the last few evenings, we have been hearing the bass very clearly around 11 p.m. It wakes our child. Could you turn it down after 10?"

Fact.