

**No Wife No Kids  
No Plan**



# No Wife No Kids No Plan

*A Novel*

*Doug Green*

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# 1

There is no substitute for living on a busy street in an urban lower-class neighborhood. I know this because I recently made my way to a seemingly-forgotten stretch of cracked pavement in order to leave my old life behind. Here my neighbors are predominately of Italian descent, with the exception of a few scattered mutts and one Nazi named Getman who is the nightmare on Oak Street.

If you go two streets north, you'll wander into a Vietnamese neighborhood. Three blocks south and you'll find yourself standing amongst nothing but Poles. Two to the east and it's African Americans. While the area isn't an absolute melting pot because of the way the neighborhoods are self-segregated, you're guaranteed to see all walks of life if you choose to go less than a quarter of a mile in any direction.

Although I've only been here a few weeks, I've already learned that you don't need to turn on the T.V. to find action. In this neighborhood, all you have to do is step out the front door and you're bound to be entertained. Take yesterday, for instance. Mrs. Abarno, a woman with a mustache as thick as a Major League Baseball manager's, was chasing her son down the street with a Michael Myers-sized butcher knife. Apparently the athletic high school sophomore was in hot water for misfiring a hockey puck through the bedroom window of "Grandmother" after the frail old woman returned home from the hospital where she was receiving treatment for a heart attack. As much as I sympathize with "Grandmother" and her failing heart, when Mrs. Abarno came to my porch and asked which way the boy went, I led her down the wrong street.

I liked the kid, and he certainly didn't deserve to get all cut up over one lousy slapshot, especially by a woman with more facial hair than he could muster on even his most testosterone-filled day.

All in all, I liked living on Oak Street despite what outsiders thought of the lack of safety of the neighborhood. While the curbs were lined with decrepit cars of every make and model, long stripped of any value, and the sewage drains clogged with everything from hypodermic drug needles to used condoms, I found myself at peace here. Sure, most people would choose pin-drop silence over blaring sirens, but then again I've never considered myself to be like most people. I recently even went so far as to make it a personal goal to avoid the majority like an especially-itchy sexually transmitted disease.

To give you an idea of my background, I previously lived in a posh condo community for what turned into an eight-year span of yuppie madness. Built like Fort Knox to keep the lower and middle classes from infiltrating, the only time you got to meet your neighbors was during fire alarms, which thanks to my tinfoil broiling pan, usually happened every time I cooked a steak. In fact, whenever an attractive woman moved into the building, I would purchase a nice cut of rib eye and cook it at two o'clock in the morning, preferably in the middle of the week. Before ever turning on the stove, I'd ensure I was well-prepared, having showered and put on designer jeans and a stylish t-shirt. This was my way of outshining all of the other single males in the complex, who would stagger half-conscious out of the building in their pajamas, sporting various styles of bed head and rubbing the sleep crusties from their heavy eyes.

I decided it was finally time to leave the discomfort of my home when I received a two-page letter from the trustees of the condo association accusing me of trying to convert the high-end building into a college dormitory. They listed multiple transgressions that included leaving a canoe in the laundry room, hosting a soccer game

in the parking lot, and scaling the three-story building in the wee hours of the morning. Not that I feel the need to defend myself, but the canoe looked ridiculous in my living room and the soccer game was a precursor to a twenty-four hour poker game that culminated in me locking myself out of the building, hence the need to forge my way upward. Would they have preferred that I slept in the lobby? I think not.

I sold my two-bedroom unit to a Guatemalan factory worker who was an honest, hard-working family man. I came to this conclusion because he spoke freely about bringing ten of his relatives to live with him in the modest condominium I once called home. Even though I had received significantly higher offers from other, equally-qualified buyers, I gave it to Pedro because I felt it was time to give something back to society—and to those pretentious fucks in the condo association who thought it was better for me to sell than stay. I'm happy to say that when I went back to pick up my canoe from the laundry room, Pedro rushed over to greet me with a warm "Amigo" and a powerful bear hug that I was surprised he was capable of due to his tiny, almost muscle-free frame. After our embrace, he invited me over to the picnic tables where he and a few dozen of his friends were having a pig roast. I spent a few hours with the group, munching on perfectly-cooked pieces of pork, drinking beer from an endless keg, and playing a serious game of condo-people-watching, which consisted of having to associate each person that passed by us with a particular celebrity. Unfortunately, I was unfamiliar with the majority of the overseas pop culture icons that Pedro and his friends chose, so I just agreed and smiled for the most part. The building's occupants that fell victim to our taunting all had the same look of horror and disgust on their snooty faces when they saw our fiesta taking place. When the building supervisor came over and accused me of having turned the place into the projects, I joined

two of Pedro's friends who were urinating in the bushes and marked my territory one last time.

The place where I now hung my hat was a large, dilapidated brown Victorian that sat at an angle on the corner of Oak and Cherry Streets. If you tilted your head slightly to the left, the once prestigious house righted itself in an almost magical fashion. I can only assume it was built on a sinkhole or that an army of termites with appetites that rivaled their size had been treating the triple-decker as an all-you-can-eat buffet. But regardless of its posture, this was now my abode. I rented the first floor while the other two floors remained unoccupied. Apparently the run-down condition of the house was making it difficult to rent.

As it turns out, my new home was owned by an imprisoned drug dealer. The realtor told me before I signed the lease that the landlord was serving a lengthy sentence and had no intention of fixing up the place now or in the near future. I was informed that I could get a rent reduction if I did some regular work on and around the house, but I told her I liked everything just the way it was. In fact, the only change I made was to hang a set of chimes from the porch roof next to a long-dead plant that was unidentifiable due to its wilted appearance. When the breeze blew, naturally or unnaturally, which it frequently did in this neck of the woods, my hanging orchestra chimed away, performing a never-ending symphony as if it were the only music being made in the entire world.

If you didn't know I was living there, you'd assume the house was long-abandoned. My dining room table consisted of a piece of particle board propped up on four overturned ten-gallon buckets. The matching chairs were four milk crates I walked off with from the nearby mini-mart. On particularly hot days, the wafting odor of sour dairy products emanated from the plastic seats. My living room set was homeless chic, from the lobster pot coffee table I bought off of some grizzled fisherman for a twenty-dollar gift certificate to

Denny's, to an Oldsmobile sofa that I built out of two front seats from something that once resembled a car. I tore them out of the rusted carcass that sat on my front lawn like a dead dinosaur caught in a tar pit, and while they had a certain musty quality to them, I found them to be quite comfortable.

In fact, the only furniture I brought with me after my release from yuppieville was a big screen, high-definition T.V. that I couldn't find myself parting with for fear of never again seeing the animal kingdom as it should be seen—I'm a big Animal Planet fan—and my box spring and mattress, which I'd have happily left behind if it wasn't for all of the compliments I received on it from the many conquests I bedded since buying it a few years ago. And let's be clear, the compliments weren't for the activities performed on said mattress, but for the comfort level itself.

The outside of the house wasn't any better than the inside. The grass had not been cut in countless years and the yard had grown into its own ecosystem, complete with what I assumed were unclassified plant and animal life. I kept to the cracked, concrete walkway because I feared what was inside the jungle-like brush, whether it was killer poison ivy or gigantic fleas. I even went so far as to post "Keep Off The Grass" and "No Hunting" signs in the yard for everybody's protection, and in all honesty, for my own personal amusement.

While there wasn't technically anybody else living in the house, I wasn't there alone. A group of gypsy roaches pitched their tents under that roof long before I arrived and they had been breeding nonstop ever since. At first I thought we could coexist, but when the lights went out, the *Periplaneta Americana*, as they're called in the scientific community, would go apeshit for life and ransack the place like a swarm of kindergarten kids hopped up on Pixie Stix. I could deal with the sounds of them marching around the hollow house, each tiny foot echoing step after step, but it's when they

decided to use my sleeping body as a jungle gym that I put my foot down, both figuratively and literally, as I now chose to stomp on the scurrying pests.

About a week in I decided to make my new home an insect bed and breakfast, scattering roach motels throughout the square footage. They were effective for a little while, but for every hundred I gave shelter to, a hundred more would show up in my cupboards, shoes, and in one instance, the very pants I was wearing at the time. There was no denying that I was losing the battle between man and insect, which is when I decided to call in reinforcements.

My friend Mikey knew a guy who had a cousin that was interested in selling what he described as a “big snake.” Apparently the reptile had a hefty appetite for anything with two or more legs and while I’ve always sort of sympathized with Indiana Jones and his dislike for serpentine creatures, I felt having him manage the cockroach population was better than the alternative—having someone fumigate the place with chemicals sure to make my balls shrink. It also felt appropriate having a wandering snake in my new apartment of Eden.

I gave Mikey eighty bucks and a six-pack of Molson. That was the price of the snake. After the drop was made, a box rivaling the size of the car carcass on the front lawn appeared on my doorstep within three hours. I stared at it for a good ten minutes before mustering up the courage to look inside. Peeling back the duct tape on the cardboard cover, I quickly understood what a “big snake” looked like as a monstrous, almost prehistoric python was curled up at the bottom of the box doing its best impression of “inconspicuous.”

I released the legless dragon into the belly of my house and felt confident that my cockroach problem would no longer be a problem, though for a moment I wondered if having the air squeezed out

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