

# Quiet Friday

By Pete Malicki

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Gordon – an everyday office worker suffering from sleep deprivation.

*Note: the pace of the play increases as Gordon loses his grip.*

A leafblower wakes me. Every Tuesday at seven AM, like clockwork, my neighbour's leafblower wakes me up. I drag myself out of bed and brush down my suit, searching my bedding for a tie and slipping on my loafers. Stumble into the kitchen. The fridge is spluttering like it's got Tourette's so I kick it to shut it up.

I raid the plate of sandwiches I took home last Friday and slip one into a paper bag. The paper bag drawer squeaks shut and I make my fiftieth mental note to get WD40 on my way home. Spoiler alert, I forget.

The weather's fine so I catch the train. Sit down next to a guy whose headphones would be the perfect volume if *I* was trying to listen to Avril Lavigne. I don't say anything; last time I asked someone to turn their music down I got a black eye and a cracked rig. Two stops later another Avril Lavigne fan sits next to me and I'm hemmed in all the way to Central.

Arrive at work and go to my workstation. Santiago is on the phone. Santiago is the Chilean guy who used to work in an airport hangar. When his Spanglish dies down enough for me to vaguely hear, I immediately notice IT haven't fixed my computer.

"Yeah hi, it's Gordon from level six. My fan's still making that noise. *(pause)* I know Lenovos are more useful as paper weights but it's a company computer and you're the IT guy."

Santiago takes another call and Mike from IT is effectively gone. My day is an alternation between *(in loud, Spanish accent)* "You think I'm yoking? There are too many variables" and *(makes clicking, whirring noise)*.

Mr Nicholson calls me in for a meeting. "Gordon, what the fuck is with you, pal? Your performance is terrible. And you look awful. I thought you went into remission." "I've never had cancer, sir. I'm just not sleeping so well."

Catch the train home at the end of the day and I'm sandwiched between a death metal fan and a trance fan who are competing for the Loudest Dickhead on Public Transport award. Kids from the other units are running up and down the stairs until dinner time, when old Mr Hirsch puts the TV on at full blast. This stops at nine and the baby starts crying. It shuts its demonic little trap just as the family of possums wake up and start their breakdancing rehearsal. They stop at around one and the owl takes over, hooting irregularly so I can't get used to it.

Wednesday morning, another leafblower comes in at seven fifteen. I drag myself out of bed and stumble into the kitchen. Sandwiches are starting to go sour. The ham one seems alright so I bag it and make my fifty-first mental note to get WD40 for the drawer. Spoiler alert, I forget, and the sandwich gives me food poisoning.

Today's train ride brings us a teenage girl who hasn't learned what an inside voice is making a series of inane phone calls. I'd be annoyed by this but something else is on my mind. LinkedIn has just sent me a job notification, and it's the most perfect job. Sales manager. Small staff. Proactive self-starter. Works well without supervision. Translation: quiet office. I have to apply.

Santiago is away but the aircon in the conference room directly opposite me is broken so they leave the door open and have back to back meetings all day. I get home and work on an application, forgoing dinner thanks to the food poisoning. There's the kids and TV and baby and possums and owl and it's hard to focus.

Thursday, six-thirty AM, the hedge trimmer. It's raining so I drive to work flanked by a motorcycle club. They must have waited around all day because they flank me on the way home too.

I read my application. I've misspelled both "excellent" and "communicator". I'll finish it tomorrow.

Tomorrow! There's no neighbourhood maintenance on a Friday. It's the one day I sleep. TV, baby, wildlife. I wake up at six fifty-five. There's drilling in the unit next door.

Drilling? But it's Friday.

"No! No fucking way!"

I leap out of bed and dash next door. (*makes knocking noise*) "Hey! Hey, open up! Oh, hey, what's going on here? You can't drill on a Friday."

A tradesman stares dumbly at me. "We're redoing the kitchen and bathroom. We're drilling every day for a month."

I feel like I'm been shot. No more Quiet Friday? I can't live without Quiet Friday.

I stumble back to my living room and stare out the window. The creepy neighbour who's always staring at me from his kitchen is staring at me something chronic. How am I going to deal without my Fridays?

Saturday is another leafblower day. Sunday is kids' sport. Monday is miscellaneous day. There's nothing scheduled but there hasn't been a silent one for three months. This Monday is a three-dog bark-off.

It's overcast so I drive to work. No motorcycle club but I slightly sideswipe a cyclist. (*as cyclist*) "Stay in your lane, you f-ing c!" (*as Gordon*) Didn't even mean to change lanes.

Santiago is on the phone and he winks at me as I sit down. Winks at me? Why the hell would he wink at me? Are we trying to pull a conspiracy? I shrug it off and get stuck into the new accounts.

Then the weirdest thing happens. Linda from reception walks past and I only just see her out of my eye corner. It takes me a full ten seconds to realise she was topless. Topless! I get up but can't see where she got to.

“Santiago! Linda just went by *topless*.” “Really? That do not seem likely.” “I know, man, but I swear she was.” “Describe her areolas.” “I... I didn’t get a good look.”

Tuesday, seven AM. The leafblower battles against the drilling to ruin my morning and they both win. Arrive at work and notice my swipecard isn’t working. Wait near the door and follow someone in. My desk is gone. In fact, the whole office is different.

“You need something?”

(*spinning around*) Some cranky frump is staring at me. “I work here.”

“What’s your name?”

“Gordon. Hang on, which level is this?”

Shit! I’d gone to level five. How embarrassing. I go to my actual workplace and the day passes in a shame coma.

Next day I get a call while walking to the station. “Mr Turner? It’s Sales Force Seven. We’d like to interview you on Monday. Can you make it?”

Yes I can make it! Salvation is coming and her name is Monday. For a blissful half day I don’t hear the cawing birds and sniffing commuters and loudmouthed co-workers.

That evening, it’s twice as loud as ever. I knock on Mr Hirsch’s door five times but he doesn’t hear me, the deaf old coot. Wednesday night I go looking for the owl. Wake up in some bushes on Thursday. I’m still in my suit so I walk to work. The whole way. Arrive two hours late and sit down next to J Law. J Law? What’s she doing here. “Hey J Law,” I say. She pouts angrily at me. “Whoa! Settle down, J Law.”

Mr Nicholson pulls me into his office that afternoon and tells me what he’s about to tell me will change my life so sit down. I sit. He says he’s my father. He’s only ten years older than me. I know he’s not my dad because my dad is a fighter pilot. For the Intergalactic Space Corp.

TV, possums. Friday might be my last day working here and it passes in a blur of fevered anticipation. That evening some neighbours are having a domestic which runs longer than the *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy. Owl, leafblower, kids’ sport. Before I know it it’s Sunday evening and I desperately need to be at my best for tomorrow’s interview with Sales Force Seven. I need to sleep. Knock on Mr Hirsch’s door but he doesn’t answer. “Mr Hirsch, open up. MR HIRSCH!”

No response. I grit my teeth and kick his door in. He’s asleep next to the television so I pull the plug out of the wall. It stays on. “Damn it!” I hurl it to the ground and it scurries off into the bathroom.

The baby starts crying. I kick in that door and push my way past mummy and come nose to nose with the little shit. “Wah!” “Shut up.” “Wah!” “Shut Up!” “WAH!” SHUT UP!” “WAAAHH!” “SHUT THE MOTHERFUCKING SHIT UP, YOU LITTLE BASTARD!”

Go back inside and put a bucket over my head. Stuff it with blankets. No owls or possums tonight but I can hear crickets. It's winter. There aren't any crickets. And these ones are angry. I count fourteen thousand eight hundred and sixteen sheep and before I know it it's Monday morning.

Job interview's in half an hour. I shower and put on a fresh suit and jump in the car. It's only five minutes' drive from here, in that old industrial area. *Perfect* job. I arrive and get out and... and there's nothing but a hole in the ground. Check the address I wrote down. It's the right address but there's no building here. I google Sales Force Seven. Google comes up with nothing.

They can't not exist. I need them. (*in prayer*) "Sales Force Seven, I believe in you. Through the good times and the bad times alike I have kept my faith in you. I need a sign, Sales Force Seven. Just one teensy little sign."

*Gordon waits for a response. There's nothing. Despondent, his anticipatory posture collapses. Exhausted now, he crosses the stage and sits back on chair which indicates the driver's seat of his car.*

Now I think about it, I never even sent my application. I shut my eyes and take a deep breath. All I hear is my exhalation.

I open my eyes. There's nothing here. No cars, no people no birds no nothing.

I turn to J Law. "Jennifer, do you hear that?"

She raises an eyebrow.

"It's dead silent."

She nods.

"Do you think I can possibly... get some sleep?"

She shrugs.

"This will all be better when I wake up, won't it?"

A smile.

"Splendid."

I shut my eyes. Every muscle in my body melts like liquid as exhaustion takes hold of me.

"Goodnight, J Law."

*Gordon sinks into the seat and drifts away with an enormous smile on his face.*