

*Saturday 30th of January 2010*

## **Home Alone**

Claire took the kids to the gold Coast for a few days so I could finish writing my new novel. While they were away, I experimented with alternative lifestyles, including nudism and sleeping around.

Since I started working from home, I've found it difficult to get dressed. What's the point of putting on a shirt and pants when you only have to take them off again, like, 16 hours later?

When there's nobody in the house, I've developed a disturbing - even to me - habit of walking around naked. I would've thought this image was of limited interest to the outside world, but last week I was asked to pose naked for a women's magazine. I told them I "had something on"\* that day, but the truth is I probably didn't.

Of course, Claire left me with a list of things to do while she was away, including cleaning the barbecue. The bathroom is downstairs in our house, and you have to walk through it to get from the backyard to the kitchen, which is upstairs. Rather than carry the heavy barbecue plates all the way to the kitchen sink, I thought I'd save even more exertion by soaking them in the bath.

Here's a handy household hint: although you might conserve a minute amount of strength by not climbing a dozen stairs, it's nothing compared to the enormous effort involved in cleaning a bath that has previously contained filthy barbecue plates.

Independently, I decided to wash all my running shoes in the washing machine. I was going to leave them out in the sun to dry, but opted to put them in the dryer instead. The last time I did this, all the little air pockets in the heels of my Nikes exploded, but that was because the dryer was too hot. Our new dryer has a temperature control\*\*, so I set it to medium and left a pair of shoes to spin.

Obviously, there is some new set of safety standards aimed at people who try to tumble-dry pets and children, as it is no longer possible to do this with shoes. As soon as they make hard contact with the inside of the dryer door, it springs open. The shoes, in effect, kick their way out. Try this at home\*\*\*. It's quite spooky to come back and see your runners looking smug and self-satisfied because they've finally learnt to get along without feet.

Another sweat-saving attempt that failed was washing my white T-shirts with my beach towel. Although the toweliness rubs off on the T-shirts, the whiteness does not transfer to the towel.

I also initiated a new policy of enlightened co-existence with the arachnid world.

When a spider the size of my hand appeared in the kitchen, I didn't have to run off in search of a container the size of my head in which to trap him. I just let him stand there by the fridge, not bothering me, living his spidery life undisturbed. I communed with nature in hairy-legged harmony until, after three days, I got sick of looking at him and threw him out the window.

My time alone was a journey of discovery. Among my more surprising findings were: (1) mangoes have great big stones in the middle; (2) the bathroom switch that doesn't trigger a light isn't broken - it activates a fan; and (3) I have no idea how to turn on the TV.

Ever since my mum came to stay, there has been a bed in my office. I slept there one night because it was closer to the office than my own bed, and I'd thereby cut about 19

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seconds off my 20-second commute.

I think I can safely say this was my only successful labour-limitation strategy of the entire period.

\* Actually, I didn't. I only thought of that response about an hour later.

\*\* The old one probably did, too, to be honest.

\*\*\* When your partner is away, and with shoes rather than pets or children.

*Saturday 23rd of January 2010*

## **Fantasy Island**

Somewhere there is an island where the sun shines over the calm blue ocean; with a resort where the chalets are called "pavilions" and have private swimming pools; and with roads where even people who have failed their driving test seven times are allowed behind the wheel of a vehicle.

At Qualia resort on Hamilton Island in the Whitsundays, it was as if I'd died in a traffic accident and gone to heaven. I know it would've been a traffic accident because, in one of the more memorable of my seven post-driving-test assessments, I was told by my instructor that I drove with "no respect for human life".

I'm not even a good pedestrian - I've been knocked down twice by other people's cars. But I've only had accidents in those parts of the world where the majority of people drive petrol-driven motor vehicles. That is, everywhere but Hamilton Island, where the most popular vehicle is an electric golf buggy.

On the ride from Hamilton Island airport to the resort, our driver told us that even though I don't have a licence, it would be "allright" for me to drive.

"It's got 'stop' and 'go' and no gears to worry about," she said.

"Ninety-five per cent of accidents involve alcohol," said another staffer, "five per cent involve the weather, and every now and then you get a very intelligent person who lets their 10-year-old drive a buggy. You wouldn't let a 10-year-old drive a car, so why would you let it drive a buggy?"

This turned out to be the way my partner, Claire - who won't allow me to drive her car even though I'm 46 - feels about me.

The speed limit on the open road was 20kmh and, even though our buggy was restricted to 15kmh, Claire wouldn't let me near the wheel.

Brilliantly, however, she herself took the right-hand-drive vehicle onto the wrong side of the road, and would have gone straight into oncoming traffic, except that there wasn't any.

That night, we were due to sit down to the degustation dinner cooked by celebrity chef Matt Moran, and Claire let me pilot the buggy a little way, perhaps in celebration.

I noticed we were the only people on the whole island wearing seatbelts.

When I handed the steering wheel back to Claire, Matt cruised past us on the other side of the road, his bald head gleaming in the sun. "Lucky you weren't driving the buggy," said Claire, cruelly, "or we wouldn't've had dinner."

On my last day there, against all Claire's best advice, I decided to drive back from the pool to our pavilion to get my towel. I completed the two-minute journey with magnificent ease. But on the way back, I couldn't remember whether to turn left or right. Of course, I chose the wrong one. Instead of heading to the pool, I drove to the resort gates. In panic, I turned blindly into a little street of pavilions, and became instantly lost. A pedestrian distracted me by smiling, and another by lingering. If they all just co-operated, nobody would get hurt.

I was tailgated downhill by a laundry van, which threw me into disarray, and the driver must've wondered why I slowed down to 10kmh. (Even I wondered that.)

By the time I got back to the pool, Claire had seen a whale in the Coral Sea. I hurried to the seafront and, to Claire's disappointment, caught a glimpse of it myself.

"I thought that would be a great end to the story," she said. "You crash the buggy while

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I see the whales and you miss them."

But somewhere there is an island where nothing goes wrong, and where I can drive with the wind on my head where my hair used to be, and where even the wildlife waits for me to catch up. \_

Mark Dapin was hosted by Hamilton Island.