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## Smoldering Suburbs

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## Smoldering Suburbs

A heightened sense of panic has settled in the suburbs. It is no longer safe for children to frolic and skip in the dry patches of grass in their yards. It is no longer safe for a woman to walk alone in the cul-de-sac. Families huddle in their paper thin homes crossing their fingers; perhaps they will go unnoticed. It is no longer safe; stay under the radar.

The new neighbors are into drugs. Orally, sublingually, inhaled, injected, snorted; it is a gross speculation. The retired detective across the street has all the answers to this great crossword puzzle. There is a gang in the suburbs. Locally and internationally connected; they like to keep their options open. They are thinking of opening a new branch soon; a father and son operation. I can feel it.

My mother is frazzled; coming loose at the seams. Is it meth? Or a lesser evil? My father is angry; it simmers just below the surface. He wants to drive his truck through the house. I don't think it helps that the environmentally oblivious are creating fire as tall as the pines in the backyard. Where a peaceful neighborhood once stood will be a gigantic crater of nuclear proportions. One day I will come home and there will be nothing.

My mind takes all of this and runs with it. Tragedies, horror films, comedic episodes; I have thought of them all. I dream of it. Nightmares really. The whispers and gossip are disconcerting. *Rape...gun shots...roofies... screams...* It makes me shiver.

*They found panties in the school playground.* A neighbor lady wrings her hands. The doped up maniacs drive on her yard. She hides her kids.

*My mother heard girls screaming...*

*They don't even realize, they wake up seeing the blood...but they had been drinking...they decided it was what came with the fun...*

Shadows follow me to my front door at night. I don't dare look.

One night I hit the deck. My mother and I crawled on the floor, shaking. Acid trips and drug ridden brains on empty shells were stumbling up to the window. Slam dunks with no basketball. We were trapped; they were on the front steps. A boy and girl hold hands with vapid gazes; while we darted glances to the phone.

I can't believe this is happening here. My mother wanted to protect me from the world.

Its everywhere mom...I act unfazed. But it's just that; an act. Hearing about it and living it are different. Drunken, pot-induced students on college campuses are amusing in comparison.

I have been forbidden to come home at night. My safe haven has been violated. Ripped to shreds from utopia to hell. The police come, hold polite conversations, and then leave. My neighbors are getting bolder. We are dealing drugs. It is why we have all the cash... Astonished onlookers cover their ears. I know better; genius plots beg to be revealed. Even arrested, the boy dives back into the fray. Parties beat and sway to the music; oozing smoke penetrates the air. I could get high standing in my front yard.

A parade of vehicles swings through the cul-de-sac. I sat at a sun-kissed window all summer watching. Tires screech; a dark figure jumps out, saunters to the door. At times they linger all afternoon, while others make a speedy escape. The car is gone; replaced by another. Gas guzzlers, chipped paint, dents, shiny beamers; I have seen them all.

Each driver parks differently. Perhaps they believe they can win an award for most unique getaway. Along the curb, flying in at ninety miles an hour, backing into mailboxes, leave the car running. The garage door is closed; it is shy of keen minds. With narrowed eyes the remaining sane population plays a memory game with license plates. We play bingo later with the numbers; who has which culprit?

Most nights I don't like to sleep. I wake up sweating fear. Silent screams rip from my throat even though I am paralyzed. My dreams know I am no brave woman. I call for my daddy. Hands reach to grope, hold me down, and gag my piercing vocal cords. Darkness, angry leering eyes follow me as I stumble through unconsciousness. Bats smashing windows, catcalls; I can't escape. I run, but my legs are disobedient. Tripping, crying, I am always caught.

I want to take self-defense. Carry a tiny pistol in my sleeve. Know how to use a knife. Have a good left cross. Keep a bat in my car. Get rid of my fear. It probably won't happen. I have slow reflexes.