

Alberto took one look at his new neighbours and knew that his life was going to get more difficult. He watched them arrive in their big, noisy car and watched them get out. There they were, two of them, as big and as noisy as their car – and smelly and stupid as well.

'Terrible!' he thought. 'How am I going to put up with them?' He went to tell Mimi. Mimi was the friend he lived with.

'Have you seen the new neighbours?' he asked her.

'No,' she said. 'Who are they?'

'Two of them. The ones we don't like. Big and noisy and stupid and smelly. Just like they always are.'

'Oh no,' said Mimi. 'How awful! Still, I suppose we can just ignore them.'

'I suppose you're right,' agreed Alberto. 'We'll just have to ignore them.'

For a few days, then, Alberto and Mimi tried to ignore their new neighbours. When the neighbours went out for a walk, Alberto and Mimi didn't say hello to them. When the neighbours were in their garden, Alberto and Mimi went inside. This was OK for a few days, but, perhaps inevitably, things didn't stay this way ...

One day, Alberto woke up from his sleep to find one of the neighbours in his garden. 'Mimi!' he shouted. 'Have you seen this!? He's in our garden!!!! Look!'

'How terrible,' said Mimi. 'Let's call our staff and make sure they get rid of him immediately!'

Mimi went off to call their staff. Two minutes later, Alberto and Mimi's head of staff was out in the garden trying to get rid of the unwelcome neighbour. 'Go on!' he shouted. 'Get out of here! Go home!' The neighbour didn't say anything but gave Alberto and Mimi's head of staff a dirty look, then he went back into his garden. Alberto and Mimi felt better and then asked their head of staff to prepare their lunch for them.

However, it wasn't enough. Over the next few days, Alberto and Mimi often found one or other or both of their new neighbours walking around their own garden. It was terrible. To show how they felt, Alberto and Mimi went into their neighbours' garden at night, when the neighbours were inside, and broke all the flowers.

The next morning one of the neighbours came to talk to Alberto.

'Hey!' he said. 'Hey, you!' Alberto ignored him, but he continued talking. 'You came into our garden last night and broke all the flowers!' Alberto didn't say anything but gave his neighbour a dirty look. 'Now I'm in trouble!' continued his neighbour. 'They think I did it!'

'Who are "they"?' asked Alberto.

'My owners, of course,' replied the neighbour.

'Owners!?' said Alberto. 'You have "owners"?'

'Course we do,' said his neighbour. 'Don't you?'

'Oh, no,' replied Alberto. 'We have staff.'

Alberto went to tell Mimi that the neighbours didn't have staff but owners.

'That's not a surprise,' said Mimi. 'That explains everything. That's why they're so noisy and smelly and stupid. We need to make their owners become staff.'

The next day, Alberto and Mimi were actually very friendly with their new neighbours. They tried to explain how to make their owners become 'staff'.

'Listen,' said Alberto to them. 'It's very easy. First, understand that the house is your house, not theirs.'

'And second,' said Mimi, 'make sure that you are always clean.'

'Make sure they give you food whenever you want!'

'Sit on the newspaper while they are reading it!'

'Sleep as much as possible – on their beds!'

'And finally, try not to bark but to miaow instead.'

But it was no good. The neighbours just didn't understand. After a week, they gave up.

'It's no good,' said Mimi. 'They'll never understand – dogs have owners, cats have staff.'

