

## The Neighborhood Watch

It was October 31st, the most haunted night of the year. The most anticipated night of the year. Maybe that can explain the events you're about to hear.

It was quiet in the house.

It was even as quiet outside. The wind was silent, even the wolves didn't howl at the moon.

Everything was still.

Every house on Krueger Lane was dark.

Lights had been out for hours, kids had been tucked into bed, dogs given their last treats, everyone had been taken care of except Laurie Marsh.

Laurie Marsh lived by herself in a house she should not have been able to afford but could because of many reasons but mostly because sinister events took place in that house. She was from out of town so said events never flew on her radar. Laurie refused to let the realtor tell her about whatever psychotic events took place here.

She wasn't a scared-y cat; she watched her fair share of horror movies, but it was because of that she knew better. Maybe paranoid was a better word. She knew what danger lurked in the outside world, and she didn't need her realtor telling her what happened in her new house that she now owned.

It was Halloween night. A night where ghosts and goblins slip between the border of the living and the dead. To say she was jumpier than usual was an understatement. She eventually just put a bowl of candy outside her door because she had a heart attack every time the doorbell rang.

Now it was 11:30 pm, trick or treating was over. The ghosts, witches, and goblins had settled into their beds sleeping soundly dreaming of candy and never-ending sugar rushes.

She was alone. In bed. Candles burning. The TV was off, but her night light was on. The only thing keeping the monsters at bay. She couldn't sleep in total darkness. She couldn't sleep knowing she wouldn't be able to see what was right in front of her face.

Laurie always needed to be aware and alert.

She laid in bed staring at the ceiling counting the seconds on her clock as they ever so slowly tick by minute by minute by minute. She couldn't bring her mind to sleep, to dream peaceful colorful dreams.

No. She was all too aware of the silence. Even the ticking of the clock would have been a welcomed noise, but it had been broken for weeks. Counting the tick marks was not as relaxing as counting sheep.

The silence was going to drive her mad.

Normally the TV would be on, but her cable had turned off earlier in the night, and she wasn't able to call in without being put on hold for thirty minutes at a time. So, she had given that up and decided to read. Reading always made her sleepy.

Except for now.

She had finished her romance book and still was not any closer to sleeping than before.

*Maybe you just need a glass of water.* She thought to herself.

Begrudgingly, she made herself get out of bed. She pulled on her robe to fight the October chill.

She turned on the hallway light before padding down the steps to the kitchen.

Laurie had a thing against the darkness. She hated not being able to see what was right in front of her or even a few feet in front of her. Who knew what lurked in the shadows waiting to catch you off guard, waiting to attack you, kill you.

*Stop.*

She grabbed a cup from the cupboard and poured herself a glass of water.

There were no lights on outside anywhere. Not on the street or in a house. She thought it was odd that no one was up at this hour.

How could she be the only one?

Before her thoughts could get the best of her, Laurie set her cup in the sink and made her way back to bed. When she rounded the corner to the stairs, the darkness was glaringly noticeable.

*Didn't I leave the light on?*

*Yes.*

*No.*

*I don't remember.*

She tried to fight the clench in her bones, the tightening of her muscles, the pounding of her heart. Hesitantly, she made her way upstairs. She tried to think of anything else. Anything happy.

Puppies.

Babies,

Children.

Holidays.

Halloween.

Ghosts.

Haunted.

Stop.

As soon as she shut her bedroom door, she ran for her bed and jumped under the covers.

There are only two possible explanations. 1. She never turned the light on. Or 2. She turned the light off when she got downstairs. Both seemed quite possible. Because any more options meant there was someone or something in the house with her, and that wasn't an option.

There is no one else in this house.

Laurie looked at her phone.

2:30am.

She hated being up past 3:00am. The bewitching hour.

She's seen enough horror movies to know nothing good happens after 3 am. And things were already starting to get weird.

Laurie cuddled further under the blankets, turning on her side to face the door. She closed her eyes and willed herself to sleep.

Sleep.

Sleep.

Sleep.

Laurie jolted awake to the sound of something crashing downstairs. Her eyes shot open.

*What the hell was that?*

It sounded like books falling off a shelf.

Minutes had passed and she couldn't hear anything else. She was almost fully asleep when she heard another bang. This one sounded like pots or pans hitting the ground.

*Of all nights.*

She slowly pulled back the covers, letting go of the warmth and inviting the cold in. Again, she reached for her robe.

There was no way she was going to be able to fall back to sleep now. Not when mysterious noises are coming from downstairs.

Her heart felt like it was going to beat out of her. Her hands wouldn't stop shaking.

*Calm down.*

She took small steps towards the door so the floor wouldn't creak. She didn't want whoever was down there to hear her from upstairs. Before going any further, she grabbed her big umbrella by the door. Just in case.

Laurie slowly turned the doorknob.

She slowly opened the door.

The hallway light was on.

"What?"

She kept the light on as she peered over the banister. As far as she could tell, there wasn't anything amiss. But she was still going down.

Her phone was clenched so tight in her hand, she thought she was going to break it. The umbrella was in her other hand. Her dominant hand.

She took a deep breath and walked down the steps.

As she came down, she saw little tea light candles set in a circle in her living room.

"What the..."

Laurie crept into the living room. On her side table she found a note folded in half.

It read:

*“Our Dearest Laurie,*

*Tonight, is your induction into our community. We take newcomers very seriously and want to give you the welcome you deserve. First, there is one thing we need you to do.*

*In order to stay in the community, you must do something for us. It is a rather small favor in the grand scheme of things.*

*We need you to kill your neighbor, Mr. King.*

*It does not matter to us how you do it, as long as it is done before 6 am November 1st.*

*We look forward to sharing our community with you.*

*The Neighborhood Watch.”*

“What the hell.” She frantically searched her whole downstairs for someone, anyone. “What the hell is this!”

*We need you to kill your neighbor, Mr. King.*

Mr. King was the first person she met in the neighborhood. He was a sweet, older man next door. A widower from what he told her, but she couldn't remember how he said his wife died.

Not that it mattered.

He was nice and had shown her kindness. And now some crazy people were telling her she had to kill him?

What if she didn't? What if she didn't kill him before 6am?

There was a knock on her door. She jumped in her bones.

When she looked out her peephole, she couldn't see anyone. Ding dong ditch at this hour?

Laurie opened the door to find another note taped to her door.

She quickly grabbed it then shut and locked the door. She triple checked the lock before unfolding the piece of paper.

This note read:

*“Dearest Laurie,*

*Failure to complete your task will result in your removal from our community with force.*

*Play by the rules and you will be safe.*

*Fail and you're fair game.*

*The Neighborhood Watch"*

This note was signed the same as the last. It looked like it was written on a typewriter.

*This can't be happening.*

Laurie tried to keep the panic at bay. She couldn't lose this house. Everything she had was tied up in it.

Was this what her realtor tried telling her? That this neighborhood was full of psychos who wanted their neighbors to kill each other. Someone probably died in this house who was tasked with the same messed up bullshit.

She was not going to kill anyone. No way.

Especially not Mr. King. The man is a saint and has helped her out in so many ways.

She was going to have to run. Go out of town for a little while until she could think of a more solid plan.

Maybe she could say that she tried but he was just too strong.

*Will result in your removal from our community with force.*

What the hell did that mean?

Was she dead either way?

Her thoughts were interrupted with another knock on her door.

"Hello? Ms. Marsh, are you in there?" She recognized that friendly voice.

She quickly unlocked the door. "Mr. King? What are you doing here?"

"Someone broke into my house. They seemed to have taken most of the valuables, the TV, my wife's jewelry, and any money they could find."

"Oh, Mr. King, I'm so sorry." She looked around outside but didn't see anyone else lurking about.

Maybe those are the same people that broke into her house? The same people who left the note?

What game were these people playing on this old man?

He was old and vulnerable.

"Come inside Mr. King, it's quite chilling outside. I have a phone you can use."

"Oh thank you dear, that is so sweet of you."

A chill ran down her spine as Mr. King walked through the door and into the living room. The note was sitting out on the table where she had found it, and she hoped that he didn't look at it.

"Let me just get my phone."

She went into the kitchen and pulled her phone out of her pocket. This was the perfect opportunity. He was here in her house. Standing in her living room. She could end it fast and quickly. He wouldn't see it coming.

Laurie reached for a steak knife and tucked it into her robe.

She could do this.

There was too much a stake. This house. Her new life. She needed it.

“Here you go Mr. King.” She said as she walked back into the living room.

“Thank you, dear. Can you do me one more favor?”

“Anything.”

“Would you mind getting me a glass of water? I feel a bit shaken up by everything.”

She nodded, “Of course. Anything for you, Mr. King.”

As Laurie turned to get her neighbor a drink, she felt something sharp slice through her back.

In the mirror in the hallway, she could see Mr. King behind her with a knife in his hand. Before she could react, the knife came down again. Slicing through her back again.

*No.*

*No.*

*No.*

*That old bastard.*

She lost her balance and fell to the ground. She reached for the staircase banister to pull herself up.

“Oh Laurie, you made it so easy.”

She couldn't believe what was happening. She couldn't see anything beyond the knife in his hand now covered in her blood.

Her shirt was drenched in blood. She was in searing pain, everything hurt. It was so hard to move.

The knife came down again and again and again.

Her hand slipped off the banister, her body falling against the stairs. She couldn't move. She couldn't feel anything but the blade.

She couldn't see anything but her dark red blood dripping down the steps onto Mr. King's shoes.

“I really am sorry, sweetie.”

The metal of the knife glinted in the light as it came down on her one last time.

*“Congratulations for completing your task, Mr. King.*

*We were so happy to hear about your success. It really does strengthen us as a whole, and we welcome you with open arms into our community.*

*As promised, the location of your wife's bones is enclosed below.*

*Happy digging and welcome to*

*The Neighborhood Watch.”*

