

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

(Inspired by real events and even realer people)

By

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FADE IN:

SCENE ONE

The second story window of a suburban Texas house. Framed in the window is EDNA, an older Southern woman with her hair in a net. We see her only from the chest up - her arms and hands can be seen when she's gesturing. In one hand, she's holding an old-style cordless phone. Her window is framed by tree branches; every so often one of them bounces and there's the sound of windchimes. Her accent is thick, and she speaks at a fairly loud volume. We hear only her side of the conversation.

EDNA (ON PHONE)

Bobbie Lynn, I swear I don't know what happened. I woke up t'other morning and my whole body was just covered with these RED spots.

(After a beat)

No! I ain't got no allergy to peanuts. Honestly, child, I've been eating nuts since I was a just a bitty thing, and I never did have RED spots break out before.

(Aside, off a bouncing branch)

Hey, you! Squirrel! Get yourself away from that bird feeder. Mr. Nasty-pants. You ain't got no call to be stealin' bird seed, fat as you are.

(Back to phone call)

What? Sorry, there is this RUDE squirrel keeps landing in my bird feeder.) Where was I? Right! So, I called the doctor, and his girl said he could see me a week from Friday, and I said, 'Listen Missy, I am all covered with these big old RED spots, and ain't no way I'm gonna wait til the end of next week to see what's what.

So, finally, she said she'd try to squeeze me in and...

SHE TRAILS OFF AS WE FADE OUT ON HER

AND FADE IN ON THE BACK DECK OF THE HOUSE ACROSS THE STREET

SCENE TWO

MELISSA and her dog MAX are on the deck. MELISSA, semi-reclined on a lime-green lounge chair is in her late 30s-early 40s and has magenta hair. Next to her is a low patio table with a book and a glass of iced tea with a straw. MAX is a large breed dog. Behind her is the brick side of her house, with a sliding door leading inside. The dog is a large breed, and mostly lies on the deck ear MELISSA's chair, basking in the sun, but from time to time he'll get up and wander downstage left or right to bark at something.

A canopy of trees frames the deck, and it's clear that while MELISSA can hear EDNA's phone call, neither can see the other. However, the upper bit of EDNA's window is visible above the trees, stage right.

Like EDNA, MELISSA is on a phone call but her phone is an iPhone and she's using wired earbuds. She does NOT have a southern accent.

MELISSA

(in mid-conversation)

... and she's on the phone all afternoon every day, talking really loud. This morning, the entire neighborhood learned about some weird rash she had, only she didn't call it a rash she said she had these

(imitates EDNA)

RED spots all over her skin.

(normal voice)

I keep thinking I should go over there and bring brownies or something, because she's obviously older, and I think she's got to be really lonely.

(A tree branch bounces above MELISSA's head, and there's a chattering sound (squirrels) MAX jumps up and goes stage right directly under the trees, staring up at them. He BARKS and POINTS)

MELISSA

(to MAX)

Stop that! Silly boy! It's just a squirrel and you have no hope of catching it.

MAX

(whimpers, then returns to lay down)

MELISSA

(on phone)

Sorry. Max is *obsessing* over this squirrel that keeps stealing bird seed. I came out here the other morning, and the thing was sleeping in the feeder.

(after a pause)

I know! Well, squirrels have no souls, anyway.

(a buzzer goes off inside her house)

Well, that was the timer on dryer. Time to change loads and then try to finish this chapter.

BLACKOUT

SCENE THREE

LIGHTS UP ON EDNA'S FRONT PORCH

EDNA is barefoot and wearing a pink housecoat, still with her cordless phone. The window where we first saw her is above her, but she's wandering aimlessly around her porch as she talks.

The quality of the light is different in this scene, murky, as if a storm is brewing, and the trees are moving back and forth.

The murmur of a television is barely audible in the background. Every so often certain words are discernable.

EDNA

(on phone)

So, those RED spots I had the other week? They're gone. Doctor gave me a shot of the cortisone, and said next time take an annahiss... antihissa... antihistamine! Like Benadryl or Sudafed.

(after a pause)

EDNA

Well that's what I told him. I heard about that Sudafed stuff, it's what them kids use to make the meth... All those druggie kids. My Nickie, she didn't come home til two this morning. I heard talking and laughing outside my winder and I saw her and that boyfriend of hers practically nekkid on the hood of his car.

So I yelled down at her to get inside, and she yelled back with the F-word, and I told her parents to go deal with her, because this ain't that kind of neighborhood and... hang on.

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER

(offscreen)

... hurricane force winds, driving rain and hail. Right now Dallas and Tarrant Counties are under a warning, but we strongly advise that you shelter in place, stay away from windows, and stick to interior rooms as the afternoon turns to evening because we're seeing hints of rotation and that means...

EDNA

(reacting to tv, but still on
phone)

Sorry, the tv-man was talking. No, it
wasn't Dave, it was that Pete guy. He has
such a nice face and -

(There's a rumble of thunder)

EDNA

(after a pause)

Oh, that was just thunder, there's no rain
yet, but that nice Pete from the tee-vee
says we might could have a tornado... and

(she's interrupted by a flash
of lightning)

... that was lightning that time. You think
I oughta go back inside? I kinda wanna
watch the sky, see if you can really see
the twister turning...

LIGHTS FADE OUT, BUT THUNDERSTORM NOISES CONTINUE.

LIGHTS COME UP ON MELISSA'S HOUSE AS WE BEGIN

SCENE FOUR

MELISSA is standing in the open sliding door of her house,
still with her cell phone and earbuds. She raises the phone
to snap a picture of the sky, then sends it to whomever is
on the other line.

MELISSA

(on phone)

Did you get that? Is that a serious
ominous sky or *what*?

(MAX barks from offstage)

MELISSA

Let me mute you for a minute.

Max is still going after
squirrels and the rain's
about to some.

(yells out the door)

Max! Maxi! Come! Idiot dog! You're about
to get drenched and you hate being wet.

(There's a crash of thunder
and flash of lightning, and
MELISSA steps slightly
further backwards into the
house as MAX comes from
downstage right, and slips
past her.)

MELISSA

(to MAX)

Finally! Good boy. Get a treat.

(She takes a treat out of her
pocket and tosses it at MAX
who catches it mid-air.)

MELISSA

(on phone)

Sorry about that. The storm's really
picking up. Max is inside though so that's
okay. Did I tell you about our first big
storm here? We didn't have the television
or radio on, and all of a sudden there was
hail, and then there were these eerie,
keening sirens. I remember telling Fuzzy,
'Wait, Texas has warning sirens for *hail*?'
And he laughed at me, and teased me about
it for weeks.

(She pauses, then answers in
an exasperated tone)

No, Mom, you don't run from tornados; you
hunker down. Yes, I have a crate for Max,
but *you don't run from torna -*

(She cuts herself off,
leaning out the door

obviously straining to hear.)

EDNA

(offstage, under storm
sounds)

... You think I oughta go back inside? I
kinda wanna watch the sky, see if you can
really see the twister turning...

MELISSA

Mom, you are not gonna believe this. You
know that neighbor? The old woman who's on
the phone all the time? She's out in her
yard on her cordless asking if she should
go back inside before the tornado comes.

(after a pause)

No, Mom, she's too old for the Darwin
awards to be in effect. She's probably
already contributed to the gene pool.

(another pause)

Yeah, I guess I should. I love you. I'll
keep you updated, but I'm sure we'll be
fine.

(She presses a button on the
phone to end the call and
pulls the earbuds out of her
ears. She leaves them on the
kitchen table directly to her
right, then steps out onto
her deck)

MELISSA

(yelling over increasing
storm sounds)

Ma'am? Hey, ma'am?

EDNA

(off stage, confused)

Is someone yelling at me?

MELISSA

(raising her voice as thunder
and wind increase, punctuated
by flashes of lightning)

I'm yelling at you! I'm your side-
neighbor, and I couldn't help hearing you
on the phone... you should *definitely* go
back inside.

EDNA

(off stage, angry, shouting)

You've been EAVESDROPPING on me.

MELISSA

(shouting back, snarky)

Lady, the whole neighborhood can hear your
phone calls. You can come over and yell at
me in person after the storm passes. Right
now? You should hang up your phone and go
inside and close all the windows.

EDNA

(offstage still shouting, but
into the phone now)

Some busybody is yelling at me that my
calls are too loud and that I should go
inside.

MELISSA

(grumbling to herself)

Well, you are too loud, and you should go
back inside.

(There's another flash of
lightning, one that seems to
leave after glow.)

And so should I.

(She steps back inside and
slides her door closed with a
little too much force than is

strictly necessary. There's a
really loud crash of thunder
and bright flash of
lightning)

BLACKOUT

THE END