

THE SILENT WITNESS

*She witnessed a murder. The police found nothing.
Now someone is determined to silence the only
person who knows the truth.*

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INTRODUCTION

Rain had a way of making the city feel distant. From the tenth floor of her apartment building, Emma Carter often sat by the living room window and watched the streets disappear beneath shimmering reflections. It had become part of her nightly routine a cup of chamomile tea in one hand, a sketchbook resting on her lap, and the quiet comfort of observing strangers whose lives briefly crossed beneath the glow of streetlights.

After months of recovering from a severe anxiety disorder, silence had become her safest companion. Crowded places overwhelmed her, loud noises made her heart race, and unexpected visitors sent her into panic. Working as a freelance graphic designer allowed her to stay home, where the walls felt familiar and the world remained at a comfortable distance.

Across the narrow street stood another apartment building, nearly identical to hers. Most evenings, illuminated windows revealed fragments of ordinary lives: families eating dinner, students buried in books, couples laughing over late-night movies. Emma never considered herself nosy. Watching those quiet routines

simply reminded her that life continued beyond her own struggles. That night, however, something was different.

A violent summer storm swept across the city. Rain lashed against the glass while thunder rolled through the sky, causing the lights in nearby buildings to flicker. Emma closed her sketchbook and stood at the window, absentmindedly tracing raindrops as they raced down the pane. A sudden movement caught her eye.

In one of the apartments directly opposite hers, a man staggered backward into view. His expression was filled with terror. Another figure stepped from the shadows behind him, their face hidden beneath the darkness of the room. Emma leaned closer. The two struggled violently.

Furniture crashed. The frightened man attempted to escape, but the second figure grabbed him, forcing him against the wall. For a brief moment, lightning illuminated the room with blinding clarity. Emma froze. She saw the unmistakable flash of a knife.

The blade drove forward. Once. Twice. Then the victim collapsed onto the floor. Emma's breath caught in her throat.

Her trembling hands fumbled for her phone as panic flooded her body. She dialed the emergency number, struggling to steady her voice while explaining what she had witnessed. The operator instructed her to remain calm and assured her that officers were already on their way.

She never took her eyes off the apartment.

Minutes later, flashing blue and red lights reflected across the rain-soaked streets. Police officers hurried into the building while Emma watched from her window, convinced the nightmare was finally coming to an end.

But when the officers entered the apartment...

Nothing happened.

No stretcher.

No crime-scene tape.

No frantic activity.

Nearly half an hour later, the officers emerged looking more puzzled than alarmed. One detective glanced toward Emma's building before quietly shaking his head.

The apartment had been empty. No body. No blood. No broken furniture. No sign that anyone had been there.

Emma stared across the street, her pulse hammering in her ears. She knew what she had seen. She had witnessed a murder. So why did it look as though it had never happened?

CHAPTER ONE

THE NIGHT IT HAPPENED



Emma barely slept. Every time she closed her eyes, she saw the same image the flash of lightning, the terrified man's face, and the knife plunging into his chest. By dawn, her untouched cup of tea had gone cold, and the rain had finally stopped, leaving the city wrapped in a dull gray silence. She stood by the window again. The apartment across the street looked ordinary. The curtains were open,

revealing an empty living room. No furniture was out of place. No police officers remained outside. It was as if the events of the previous night had never happened. A knock at her door made her jump.

She looked through the peephole before opening it.

Two police officers stood in the hallway. One was a middle-aged detective with tired eyes and neatly combed gray hair. The other, a younger officer, held a small notebook.

"Ms. Emma Carter?" the detective asked.

Yes. I'm Detective Daniel Brooks. We'd like to ask you a few more questions about the incident you reported."

Emma invited them inside.

Detective Brooks glanced toward the large living-room window that overlooked the neighboring building.

"This is where you were standing?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And you're certain you saw someone being attacked?"

"I'm not certain," Emma replied quietly. "I know what I saw. The detective nodded but remained expressionless. We searched the apartment from top to bottom," he said. "There was no one inside."

Emma frowned.

"That's impossible."

"There wasn't any blood," the younger officer added.

"No signs of a struggle. No fingerprints besides the property manager's."

Emma stared at them.

"But I watched it happen."

Detective Brooks folded his notebook.

"The apartment has been vacant for almost eight months."

The words struck her like ice.

"Vacant?"

"The previous tenant moved out last year. Utilities have been disconnected ever since. Emma turned slowly toward the window.

The apartment had looked lived in.

She remembered the lamp glowing beside the couch. The framed pictures hanging on the wall. The bookshelf. The curtains moving slightly. She couldn't have imagined all of that.

"There has to be some mistake," she whispered.

"We're not saying you're lying," Brooks said carefully.

"Sometimes distance, poor weather, and stress can make people misinterpret what they see."

Emma didn't answer. After a few more questions, the detectives left. The silence inside the apartment felt

heavier than before. She walked back to the window and stared across the street. Nothing. No movement. No sign that anyone had ever been there. Trying to distract herself, Emma opened her laptop and attempted to finish a logo design for a client. She adjusted colors, moved shapes around the screen, and changed fonts repeatedly, but her concentration was gone.

Her phone buzzed. It was her best friend, Maya.

"Hey," Maya said cheerfully. "How are you?"

Emma hesitated. I saw someone die last night. There was a long pause.

"What?"

Emma explained everything. When she finished, Maya sighed softly. You've been under a lot of stress lately. Maybe it just looked worse than it was. It wasn't my imagination."

"I'm not saying it was. I'm just saying... maybe wait until the police figure it out. They already have."

"And?"

"They said the apartment has been empty for months." Another silence.

Emma... I'm telling you; someone was in there."

"I believe that you believe it."

Those words hurt more than Emma expected.

After ending the call, she leaned against the kitchen counter, feeling more alone than ever. That evening, unable to shake the memory, she picked up a pair of binoculars she used for birdwatching and focused them on the apartment across the street. The room remained empty. She was about to lower them when something caught her attention. Near the back wall... A door. She frowned. She was certain that door hadn't been there before. As she adjusted the focus, the doorknob slowly turned. The door creaked open.

A figure dressed entirely in black stepped into the room. The person's face remained hidden in the shadows. They walked calmly to the center of the apartment. Then, with chilling precision, they turned their head and looked directly toward Emma's window. Toward her. Emma instinctively stepped back, her heart pounding. When she gathered the courage to look again, the room was empty. The figure had vanished. On the windowsill beside her lay a single white envelope. She hadn't heard anyone enter her apartment.

Her hands trembled as she picked it up. Inside was a small piece of paper with only five handwritten words. I know you saw everything.

CHAPTER TWO

NO ONE BELIEVES HE



Emma read the note again. I know you saw everything. The words were written in neat black ink, without a signature or any indication of who had left them. Her heart pounded as she rushed to the front door. The deadbolt was still locked. She checked every room in the apartment. The bedroom. The bathroom. The kitchen. The balcony. Nothing. No one was there.

She hurried back to the living room and examined the envelope. There was no postage stamp, no return address, and no fingerprints that she could see. It looked ordinary, but the message inside was anything but. Someone had been inside her apartment. Or someone had found another way to leave it.

Emma wasted no time calling Detective Daniel Brooks. "I need you to come back," she said, struggling to keep her voice steady. What happened?

I found a note. Less than thirty minutes later, Brooks and Officer Collins were standing in her apartment once again.

Brooks carefully slipped on a pair of gloves before examining the envelope. Did anyone else come in after we left?

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"I've been alone all day."

He looked around the room before walking toward the windowsill where Emma had found the note. There are no signs of forced entry," he said. Emma folded her arms. So, you think I wrote it? I didn't say that. But you're thinking it.

Brooks remained silent. Officer Collins placed the note into an evidence bag. We'll have it tested, he said. Emma wasn't convinced it would lead anywhere. That afternoon, she couldn't shake the feeling that she was being watched. While walking to the neighborhood grocery store, she noticed a man standing across the street. He wore a black baseball cap and dark sunglasses despite the cloudy weather. The moment Emma looked at him, he turned away. She continued walking. A few minutes later, she glanced over her shoulder.

The man was still there. Keeping the same distance. Following her. Her breathing became shallow. She crossed the street. So did he. She entered a crowded café. When she looked through the window moments later, the man was gone. Had he followed her?

Or had he wanted her to know he could?

That evening, Emma decided she needed answers. She walked across the street to the neighboring apartment building. The elderly doorman greeted her politely.

"Can I help you?"

"I'm looking for the tenant in apartment 10B."

The man's smile faded. There hasn't been anyone living there for quite some time.

"Are you certain?"

He nodded. I've worked here for twelve years. Emma hesitated. Did the police come here last night?

"They did. And?"

They searched the apartment. What did they find? Nothing. His answer came too quickly. Too rehearsed. Emma thanked him and turned to leave, but before she reached the exit, she noticed something. A maintenance cart sat near the elevator. On top of it rested a clipboard. The latest inspection report listed Apartment 10B as... Occupied. Emma blinked.

Occupied?

She looked again. Someone had quickly drawn a thick black line through the word and replaced it with: Vacant. Fresh ink. It had been changed recently. Very recently. Before she could take a picture with her phone, a firm voice echoed behind her.

"Miss?"

She turned. The doorman was no longer smiling. I think it's time for you to leave. Back in her apartment, Emma locked every door and closed every curtain. She couldn't stop thinking about the inspection report. Someone was lying. Either the police... Or the people inside that building.

As night settled over the city, exhaustion finally pulled her toward sleep. Sometime after midnight... A loud metallic bang jolted her awake. She sat upright.

Another bang. This time it sounded like it came from the apartment across the street.

Emma slowly moved toward her living-room window. The building opposite was almost completely dark. Almost.

Apartment 10B had a faint light glowing behind its curtains. She reached for her binoculars.

As she focused the lens, the curtain moved. A man stood inside. His face was pale. His clothes were stained with what looked like dried blood. He raised one trembling hand toward the window. Then, slowly... He pressed a single finger against his lips. A silent plea. Don't make a sound. Before Emma could react, another figure stepped into view behind him. The room went black. The light disappeared. And once again... It was as though no one had ever been there.

CHAPTER THREE

SOMEONE IS WATCHING



Emma didn't move. Her hands tightened around the binoculars until her knuckles turned white. She kept staring at the dark window across the street, hoping the light would return. It didn't.

The apartment was once again swallowed by darkness. She reached for her phone and dialed Detective Brooks. He answered after the second ring. Brooks. I saw him again.

A pause. The man from the apartment.

"Emma, it's two-thirty in the morning."

"I know what I saw."

"Did you take a picture this time?"

She looked at her phone. No. Then stay inside. I'll send a patrol car to drive by the building. Before she could reply, he ended the call.

Emma lowered the phone, frustrated. She knew how she sounded a frightened woman making impossible claims with no evidence. If she wanted anyone to believe her, she would have to find proof herself.

The next morning, Emma reviewed the security camera footage from the hallway outside her apartment. Her building manager had agreed to let her see it after she explained that someone had somehow left a threatening note inside her home.

The manager loaded the footage from the previous evening. Emma watched carefully. She saw herself leaving to buy groceries. She saw herself returning.

She saw Detective Brooks and Officer Collins arrive.

Then they left. After that... Nothing. No one entered her apartment. No one even walked down the hallway. The manager looked puzzled.

"See? Nobody came. Emma stared at the screen.

"Can you rewind it?"

He did.

Again, there was nothing. Her stomach tightened. If no one came to my door... she whispered, ...then how did the note get inside?

The manager had no answer. That afternoon, Emma decided to take photographs of the apartment across the street every hour. She set up her camera on a tripod beside the window. 10:00 a.m. Nothing. 11:00 a.m. Empty.

Noon. Still nothing. At exactly 2:17 p.m., her camera shutter clicked automatically. Emma reviewed the image. Her breath caught.

A man was standing inside Apartment 10B. He was facing away from the window. She immediately zoomed in. The image became grainy but clear enough to make out one detail. The back of his neck. There was a long scar running from his left ear down beneath his collar. Emma quickly checked the next photo. The apartment was empty. He had disappeared within seconds.

She printed the photograph and hurried to Detective Brooks' office. Brooks studied the picture in silence. Could this be edited?" he asked.

No. You didn't see him leave?"

No. He handed the photograph to Officer Collins.

Run facial recognition. Collins frowned. We can't. His face isn't visible. Then enhance it. As Collins left the room, Brooks leaned back in his chair. This is the first physical evidence you've brought me. So you believe me now? I believe someone was in that room."

Emma finally felt a flicker of hope. Late that evening, Emma returned home.

As she stepped out of the elevator, something felt...wrong. Her apartment door was slightly open. She was certain she had locked it. Her pulse quickened. Slowly, she pushed the door wider. Everything looked untouched. The furniture was exactly where she had left it. Nothing appeared stolen. Then she noticed it.

Her bookshelf. One book was sticking out farther than the others. She pulled it free. A folded photograph slipped onto the floor. Emma picked it up. It was an old picture of her.

She couldn't have been older than ten. She was standing in front of her childhood home, smiling

beside her parents. Written across the bottom in black marker were four chilling words. We've always known you. Emma's blood ran cold. No one should have had that photograph. It had been stored in a sealed box at her parents' house over two hundred miles away. Someone hadn't just broken into her apartment. Someone had been watching her for years.

Unable to think clearly, Emma drove to her parents' house early the next morning. Her mother greeted her with a warm smile, but it faded the moment she saw Emma's face. Emma? What's wrong?"

Without saying a word, Emma placed the photograph on the kitchen table.

Her mother picked it up.

The color drained from her face.

"Where...did you get this?"

"It was in my apartment."

Her mother slowly sat down.

"I threw every copy of this picture away years ago."

Emma stared at her.

"What do you mean...every copy?"

Before her mother could answer, someone knocked loudly on the front door.

Three slow, deliberate knocks.

Everyone in the house froze.

Then a voice called from outside.

"Police."

Emma looked toward the window.

A black sedan was parked across the street.

She had never seen it before.

Neither had her mother.

And yet...

The engine was already running.

