

# In Providence: The Woman at the Door



If you were walking down Benefit Street in Providence a few years ago, you might have seen an old woman standing outside a house asking to be let in.

“She was insisting. She was insisting that she lived at the house.”

The resident of the house was a family made up of two parents, a young son who was 6 at the time, and a teenage daughter. The daughter is now in college, and she reached out to me when she heard I was looking for scary stories.

“I was babysitting my brother. It was a Friday night. I think he was already in bed, or he was getting ready for bed. My parents were out for the night getting dinner and seeing a movie. I was watching tv in the living room and I heard somebody knocking on the door.”

The woman didn't seem strange. She was nicely dressed in what looked like a business suit and an expensive coat.

“I remember the coat, and her scarf. She had on this big, beautiful scarf. My first thought was to open the door, and it's not because I was trusting as a kid. I wasn't, actually. Not at all. But she just seemed like somebody my parents would know. She was in her- It looked like she was in her late 60s or early 70s. She seemed friendly. I was looking at her through the living room window, because you could see

who was at the front door that way, and when I was looking at her, I thought she looked nice, but then she turned and looked at me looking at her, and when I tell you, my blood froze. Something about the way she looked at me. It didn't feel right. I closed the curtain and the first thing I thought after that was- I'm not opening that door."

The knocking was light. Not aggressive, not forceful. Then the woman started calling out, "Hello?" There was more knocking, more calling out. But her voice was sweet. She didn't sound aggravated or threatening.

"I started talking to her through the door. I asked her if she needed something, and she said she needed to come inside and talk to me. I told her that she had the wrong house, and that's what I really thought- I thought she just had the wrong house. But then she kept saying that she didn't, and that I needed to let her inside. I didn't want to tell her that my parents weren't there, so I told her that everyone was asleep, but I could go wake my parents up. I lied to see what she would say, and that's when she said, 'Your parents aren't home.'"

Now she was scared.

She called her parents, and when her father picked up, her voice was already shaky. She explained the situation, and her father assured her that he and her mother would be home right away, and that her mother would call 9-1-1 from her cell phone while her father stayed on the line, and that she should not speak to the woman at the door any longer.

"I stopped talking to her, but she kept knocking and she kept asking me to open the door. Then she started calling out my name, and that's when I lost it."

She had no idea how the woman could know her name. It was unsettling enough that she went upstairs to her brother's room and locked herself in with him.

"Like I said, I don't remember if he was asleep or getting ready for bed and watching a movie as this was going on, but he woke up as soon as I walked in his room, and he was asking me what was going on. He could tell I was scared, but I told him to just stay quiet, because I didn't know what was going to happen. I didn't know if this woman was by herself or- I don't know what I thought. She was just this one woman. It's not like she was going to break into the house or anything, but I was so nervous."

The two waited for the sound of police sirens, but their parents made it home first. Her father stayed on the phone with her the entire ride home, but as they pulled up to the house, they didn't see an older woman with a beautiful scarf standing out in front.

"The police got there a little bit later, but there wasn't anything there. I think they thought that I might have been playing a joke on them or something, but my parents told them that's not the kind of kid I was. It didn't matter, because what were they going to do? Go looking all over the East Side for some woman? She hadn't even done anything wrong. Or she could have been sick or something. They were sure she wasn't going to come back."

But how did the woman know her name?

"That was what nobody could explain. The police thought I imagined that part of it. I didn't. You don't imagine a stranger calling your name. She was getting loud when she would do it, too. That was the

part you could hear very clearly. It was my name. No question.”

You might be thinking to yourself-

“She knew my name.”

This isn’t really that scary of a story.

“I remember my parents kind of laughing it off. They might have just been relieved, but I remember being so mad at them for laughing about it.”

A strange woman knocks on a door and then disappears.

“It wasn’t funny. The way she looked at me wasn’t funny.”

It happens all the time.

“My brother wasn’t even scared once my parents got home. He got to stay up late, because of all the excitement, so he was having a great time.”

Nobody got hurt.

“Meanwhile I’m crying my eyes out for hours.”

Nobody died.

“Hours and hours.”

A few knocks and the odd coincidence of a woman knowing a young girl’s name before vanishing into the night.

“I went to bed crying every night after that.”

Darker things occur all the time, don’t they?

“She’s still in my head to this day.”

All of that was something she thought, too. She thought she’d be startled and then grow out of it. It didn’t seem like any kind of trauma. Aside from the way the woman looked at her as she stood in the window, what part of it would stick in someone’s mind?

“I have a nightmare about her at least two or three times a week. I see a therapist. I talk to my therapist about her. Two therapists. I used to have to push my desk in front of my bedroom door to sleep. I slept next to my little brother’s bed for a month after this happened. I wouldn’t be alone — anywhere. Not home, not anywhere. When I left to go to college, I was- I thought it would end, but her voice sounds- For some reason, it sounds like a lot of other people’s voices. I would have a professor who sounded like her or the woman at the records office at my school, and I would ask myself if people always sounded like that before I heard that woman, but I don’t think so. I think this is all new.”

When she had to move home at the start of the pandemic, she was already struggling with her mental health, but something about being back in her old bedroom evoked memories of that night.

“One night, my parents were out, and my brother was at a friend’s, and I didn’t even think that I might not be okay to be by myself, because it had been so long, you know? As soon as I came downstairs and realized I was alone, I panicked. I had a full-on panic attack. I went back upstairs, closed the door to my bedroom, got in bed, and just stayed there the whole night.”

Why has this one moment in her life seized her in this way?

“It’s like asking why you’re scared of what you’re scared of- I don’t know. Does anybody know? People are scared of flying even if they’ve never been on a plane. I know what I’m scared of, because it was right there. I saw it. It looked at me. And I think about what would have happened if I had opened the door. I almost did. If this woman did want something innocent, why did she leave before my parents got there? Why didn’t she come back and apologize for scaring me? My mother tried to tell me that it might have been someone who knew her or worked with her, because she works with a lot of people, and someone could have just been in the neighborhood, but why wouldn’t the woman have said that? There’s no explanation and that’s what makes me even more upset, because I never heard anything about it again. My father asked our neighbors and nothing like that happened to them. Why my house? Why that night? I don’t understand it.”

Shortly after moving home from college, her mother locked herself out of the house. The incident with the woman at the door hadn’t been discussed in years, and so her mother must not have thought anything of first knocking, and then banging on the door, asking to be let back in. Her daughter was the only one home, and she was upstairs in her room, frozen.

“I knew it was probably my mom, but I couldn’t move. Just that sound — the sound of her pounding on the door and yelling for me. I couldn’t do anything. I couldn’t breathe. I just wanted her to go away. I knew it was probably my mother and I just wanted her to stop and go away or break into the house and get in that way, but to just stop knocking and calling for me.”

Her father got home shortly after that and let her mother in, but nobody spoke to her about why she didn’t go downstairs and open the door. It’s possible her parents remembered after the fact, or maybe they just didn’t think much of it.

“I stayed right where I was even when she was back in the house. I think I was like that for an hour — it might have even been more.”

It’s possible they forgot.

“I thought I heard the knocking even after it was over.”

Some people can do that.