

Advice from the Trenches: Neighborhood Stalker



Dear C;

I have a stalker. Don't laugh, I really think I do. It's a guy on my street.

I've lived in this neighborhood for almost five years now, and I've been going for walks since I moved in. Lots of people around here wave when they see me, probably because they see me so much. I've talked briefly with a few of them, mostly people out with their dogs.

This stalker guy seemed friendly and normal to me at first, like anyone else in the neighborhood; maybe a little lonely. He did seem to be home most of the time. I think that he's on disability or something, because I noticed him occasionally limping past my house on the way to the bus stop across the street. The only reason I ever even exchanged words with him was because he has a cute little dog he takes out a lot. The dog always runs up to me.

I never gave any thought at all to the guy, but then, about a year ago, he started making occasional comments that seemed a bit odd. He'd notice that I cut my hair, or comment that I hadn't been by in a while. Once he even asked me if I'd lost weight. This made me feel like he was ... I don't know ... watching me or something.

Then I started noticing him sort of lurking more often near the house. At first, I thought he was just going for the bus like he sometimes did, but then I realized he wasn't getting on the bus. He was just going back home.

So now I'm getting nervous. Every time I see him and his dog, I cringe inside, but I can't just walk by, because the puppy runs up to me. I want to simply avoid his street, but then I'd feel like I was letting him dictate where I can and can't go. So I act like nothing's wrong. But I feel creepy and weird and I wonder what is going to happen next.

Am I nuts? Am I worrying for nothing?

Intended Prey

Dear Prey;

Of course you aren't nuts. The guy is watching you. He's noticing details. There's only two reasons he

would do this — 1) he's a private investigator working a surveillance job, or 2) he's checking you out as a potential target. Target of what? That is the big question. And I doubt very much that you want to find out.

I taught self defense and there is something that I picked up from studying police statistics and victim accounts: In 99.9% of incidents reported, the attacks were not random. Every victim was watched first, whether for five minutes or five years. The victims often knew their attackers by sight. This guy is paying close attention to you. He could even know that he's making you uncomfortable and he uses the dog as an excuse to see how close he can get despite your nervousness. It's one way potential victims are tested.

Of course, he could be just a lonely guy who thinks he's saying something nice to the woman who walks in his neighborhood. But the lurking? That's not the behavior of a normal lonely guy. That's the behavior of a stalker.

Here's what I recommend: Stop letting this guy near you and do not walk anywhere near where you might run into him. It sends the wrong message. It says, "I want to keep seeing you." If you don't want him near you, then don't let him near you. That's what victims do. They sense danger, but don't trust their own judgement. Afraid you'll hurt his feelings? Please! This is some guy you don't even know, and that comment about your weight? That is too personal. You have every right to nip this in the bud, and you don't do that by smiling and playing with his dog.

If you see him hanging out near your house again, call the police. Tell them the situation and tell them that you feel uncomfortable. Ask them to check him out. That is their job. They are trained to deal with situations like this.

This protects you in two ways — 1) you are not subjected to more contact with someone who makes you feel creepy, and 2) now the guy knows that the police are watching him. If that's not enough to keep him away from your house, I'd seek advice from both the police or an attorney. Does this seem unfriendly? Too freakin' bad. You are not, as a woman, obliged to be friends with every guy who wants something from you. You have a right to your own boundaries. It's time you drew the line.