

NEIGHBORS

By Brett Schlagel

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - DAY

A Victorian home sits on a car-lined street mid-west America. A car pulls up and RACHEL, 30s, gets out. She pulls a pair of grocery bags from the trunk and walks to the front door.

INT. ADAM'S HOUSE - DAY

ADAM, 40s, sits in chair smoking a cigarette in front of the window. He looks up to see Rachel with the grocery bags. He quickly snuffs his smoke in an overfilled ashtray as he scrambles for the door.

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - DAY

At the door, Rachel sets the bags down so she can fish for her keys in her purse. Footsteps approach quietly from behind her, but her focus is on finding her keys.

RACHEL
(Frustrated)
Don't tell me I left them at work.
(Finds keys)
There.

Rachel plucks out her keys and puts them into the knob. She catches a glimpse of something lifting the grocery bags and hears the crinkling of the craft paper.

Rachel turns to see Adam staring at her. He's only a breath away. It sends chills over her body.

ADAM
Hi.

Beat.

RACHEL
Hey, Adam... can I help you?

ADAM
Helping you with your groceries.
Seemed like a lot.

Beat.

RACHEL
Thanks for the offer, but I can manage.

Rachel goes for the bags but Adam takes a step back and shrugs.

ADAM

It's, it's no problem. I-- I can help. I like helping. I used to bring in the groceries for Mom when she was 'round.

RACHEL

Again, thank you for offering, but I'd like to go inside now. Can I have my bags?

ADAM

Do, do you have more I can help with?

RACHEL

No, Adam, really it's fine. Just give me my groceries.

A beat as Adam considers it... and then hands the bags back. Adam backs away, glancing over his shoulder at Rachel as he goes back to his house.

Rachel turns back for the door and opens it.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rachel hauls the bags into the foyer and slams the door shut with her shoulder. She pauses against the door and lets out a breath.

INT. ADAM'S HOUSE - DAY

Adam sits in his chair, lighting another cigarette. He keeps stealing glances at the window. He draws on the cigarette.

ADAM

(Mocking himself)

I like helping.

He exhales a cloud of smoke. He eyes Rachel's house like a hawk.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Rachel walks back to the living room with a mug of coffee after having unpacked the groceries.

RACHEL
(into phone)
...Ever since I moved here. Yeah,
and then I turned around and he was
just standing there holding my
bags. It's like he totally expected
me to let him follow me into the
house.

MANDY (V.O.)
Maybe he's just the nice guy on the
block. He sounds harmless.

Rachel looks out the window at Adam's house.

RACHEL'S POV: the curtain in the window across jerks closed.

RACHEL
I don't know, Mandy. Somethin's off
with this guy.

INT. ADAM'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Adam slowly draws the curtain to the side to steal another
peek.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rachel sits on the couch watching TV. Her knees drawn to her
chest, Rachel keeps glancing towards the window.

Nothing. No one.

She grabs the mug of coffee sitting on the coffee table,
putting the window out of her sight.

WOOSH! A figure darts across the window silently and
undetected. Rachel cups the mug with two hands and takes a
sip.

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

ADAM'S POV: Adam stares at Rachel through sheer curtains.

Adam glances down to the sketchbook he's holding. It's an
expertly sketched drawing of Rachel sitting on the couch.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Rachel gets out of her car in sweats. Listening to music. She walks up to the front door, opens it, and then enters. She gives the heavy door a shove to close it and turns away, but it doesn't latch.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

As Rachel rinses her water bottle in the sink, the floorboards groan. Rachel plucks out her earbuds, turning--

She lets out a short scream as Adam stands as a silhouette in the dark dining room. He steps forward into the light of the kitchen entryway.

ADAM

Hi.

RACHEL

Get out... of my house.

Beat. Adam gestures toward the front door.

ADAM

The door was, was open and I-

RACHEL

Out, now.

Adam looks confused, unsure why Rachel is angry.

ADAM (CONT'D)

I just, just wanted to say hello. I mean, I could go but I just wanted -

He balls his fists and won't look Rachel directly in the face. Only short glances stolen as his eyes dart up from the floor. His arms are stiff by his sides.

ADAM

I just wanted to see you...I'm not a bad guy... I'm a nice -

He is so frustrated he is on the verge of tears. He quickly turns his back, biting a curled finger, before whipping back around and stamping his foot like a child. He stares at the floor.

ADAM (cont'd)

I'm a good guy.

Rachel is caught off guard. She furrows her eyebrows harder as she tries to process what just happened.

RACHEL
Please...leave my house.

A flash of anger washes over Adam's face, then he nods and backs out of the house. He grabs the handle and gently closes the door.

Rachel grips the kitchen counter and hangs her head in relief.

FADE OUT

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The clock on her dresser shows it's late. Rachel sits in her bed staring at her bedroom door. She gets up and double checks that it is locked.

She steps over to her window and moves the curtains aside to see -- GASP! -- Adam standing on the sidewalk staring back at her. She quickly shuts the curtain and steps out of view.

Beat. She carefully opens the curtains again, but just barely. He's gone!

She shoves the curtains open all the way and searches every inch of her view from her window...but no Adam. She looks over her shoulder to a closet door.

Rachel, crouched in front of an open closet, pulls out a baseball bat, inspects it briefly, shuts the closet door, and steps back to the window for one last look. Just an empty street.

She pulls the curtains closed and climbs into bed with the bat.

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The light in Rachel's room goes dark.

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - MORNING

An establishing shot of the house. Adam's old shoes hit the concrete in perfect but slow tempo. Hands in his pockets, he slowly walks by Rachel's house on the sidewalk, glancing up into the house's many great windows. He's smiling.

MRS. HENSLEY - 60s - approaches on her routine morning walk.

MRS. HENSLEY
Good morning, Adam!

Adam's concentration is broken only for a moment as he glances briefly at Mrs. Hensley.

ADAM
Morning Mrs. Hensley.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Rachel, exhausted, peels the curtain back to find Adam staring back at her with his vacant eyes and a simple smile. She lets out a deep sigh and picks up her phone from the nightstand as she watches turn and walk on.

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - DAY

A white SUV pulls up out front of the house.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Rachel and VANESSA, 50s, step off of the stairs having just come from the 2nd level.

RACHEL
And back to the first floor. I think that's all of it.

As Vanessa talks, Rachel is nervous, stealing quick glances through the windows around her.

VANESSA
From what I've seen I'm sure this place will sell fast. Great house, good neighborhood. Things are crazy right now. I've got more people looking for homes than we have homes to sell.

Beat.

Vanessa slowly heads for the front door with Rachel matching her pace and her arms crossed above her chest.

VANESSA (cont'd)
I have a bit of paperwork I will get working on today.
(MORE)

VANESSA (cont'd)
The faster we can get the finer
details out of the way the quicker
we can get you on the move.

RACHEL
Okay.

Beat. They stop at the front door and turn to face each other.

VANESSA
Everything okay, sweetie?

RACHEL
Hm?

VANESSA
You just seem a little...anxious...
is all.

RACHEL
It's just... I need to leave. Like
right now.

Beat.

VANESSA
Is it a finances thing or?

RACHEL
My neighbor. He sees that I'm a
single woman living alone in this
house and...

VANESSA
Ohhhh.

RACHEL
Yeah.

Rachel rubs her tired face with both of her hands. She bites at her nails in between thoughts.

VANESSA
If it's a stalker problem, I'm sure
the cops can help.

RACHEL
I've tried with the police. They
come out and talk to him and
everything is fine for a day or
two. And then he's right back at
it. He's relentless.

VANESSA

Well, considering the circumstances, maybe we avoid signage out front for now. I have a few couples I know who might be interested. I'm sure at least one of them will want to see the house.

RACHEL

Yeah, sure. They can come by any time.

VANESSA

Great. You have my number if you have any questions. Otherwise, I'll be in touch!

RACHEL

Thank you.

Rachel opens the door for Vanessa.

VANESSA

Stay safe.

RACHEL

You too.

Vanessa gives Rachel a sympathetic smile before leaving.

Rachel goes to shut the door but stops just before it closes when she notices Adam on the sidewalk. She leaves it slightly cracked to watch Vanessa leave safely.

RACHEL'S POV: Adam stares at Vanessa as she walks to her car.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

As Vanessa passes across the sidewalk, Adam stares, mouth agape and brows furrowed.

VANESSA

Hello.

Adam is too deep in thought to respond.

He looks at the car. There's a sign on the car door: BELL REAL ESTATE.

ADAM

(to himself)

Real estate?

He looks up at the front door in time to see the door quickly shut tight.

The car door slams and the engine starts.

Adam approaches the passenger window.

ADAM (cont'd)
Hey, hey. Are you a realty - uhh -
realtor person?

He knocks on the passenger window.

ADAM (cont'd)
Hey, are you selling this house?

Vanessa puts the car in gear and waves at Adam as if he's just saying hello. As she pulls away, Adam follows the car into the street.

ADAM (cont'd)
Is this house...

Vanessa is too far away. He looks back to Rachel's house. Concerned.

ADAM (cont'd)
...for sale?

INT. ADAM'S HOUSE - NEXT DAY

Adam sits in a chair. On the floor are a dozen hand-drawn pictures of Rachel. He rocks in the chair. He smokes a cigarette feverishly. His leg bounces rapidly. Vacant stares through the window. We hear a car door open and close.

His leg freezes. His eyes lock onto something.

The sound of several voices can be heard conversing inaudibly.

He leans forward, getting as close to the window as he can.

ADAM'S POV: Vanessa stands outside Rachel's house with a couple pointing to several features on the front.

INT. ADAM'S HOUSE - DAY

Adam pulls the curtain almost closed. He sits back in his chair. His leg begins to bounce again. He keeps his eyes locked on the happenings outside.

He has a realization.

ADAM
It's not for sale.

He gives an awkward laugh. He tries to convince himself.

ADAM (cont'd)
It's not for sale!

He shakes his head and smiles as he snuffs his cigarette in the dirty ashtray. He grabs the pack of cigarettes next to the tray.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Vanessa walks with the couple back towards the front door.

MAN
This home is absolutely perfect.

WOMAN
Our dogs would just LOVE the
backyard.

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Vanessa stops on the front porch leaving the door open.

VANESSA
It's a beautiful place that's been
well maintained. And it's in a
great neighborhood. The public
school isn't that far either. What
more could you need?

The woman takes the man's hand.

WOMAN
We love it.

MAN
Can we maybe go ahead and put in an
offer on it?

Vanessa lights up.

VANESSA
Absolutely! If you guys want to go
ahead and head back to my office,
I'll be right behind you.
(MORE)

VANESSA (cont'd)
I just have to go through and turn
off the lights and lock up.

MAN
Sounds great, we'll see you in a
few, then.

The couple starts walking down the sidewalk. Vanessa heads
back inside, closing the door behind her.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Vanessa hits lights switches as she progresses through the
first floor. She turns the corner in the kitchen and is out
of sight.

CUT TO:

The handle on the front door actuates and the door opens
slowly.

CUT TO:

Vanessa comes back around the corner, leaving the kitchen
light on. She opens the basement door and flicks the light
switch to off.

ADAM
Who-

Vanessa let's out a small yelp as she turns to face Adam.
Adam avoids eye contact, he stares at the ground.

ADAM (cont'd)
Who are they?

Vanessa backs up, her feet on the edge of the basement
stairs. She struggles to find words.

VANESSA
Eh- I-

ADAM
Those people?

VANESSA
You need to leave immediately.

ADAM
You're going to take her away from
me...

(MORE)

ADAM (cont'd)

He lifts his gaze from the floor and into Vanessa's eyes.

ADAM (cont'd)
...Aren't you?

CUT TO:

EXT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - EVENING

The street is calm and serene. Tree branches sway in the light breeze. Peace. Tranquility.

Rachel's car pulls up in front of the house. Rachel gets out and looks around before heading into the house. Luckily, Adam is no where to be seen.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Rachel shuts the door and double locks it. She starts to head for the stairs but stops and looks at the living room window. The curtains aren't quite closed. She takes a second to close the curtains. Satisfied with her privacy, she goes up the stairs.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - EVENING

Rachel enters the bathroom, taking a towel out of the cabinet and putting it on the toilet seat. Rachel reaches into the shower and turns on the water.

INT. STAIRS - EVENING

We slowly ascend the stairs. The shower head can be heard but is muffled.

INT. SHOWER - EVENING

Rachel starts running her hands through her hair. The steam and blistering hot water calming her. She closes her eyes and tries to relax.

Outside the shower stall, we start to draw closer towards the feminine figure behind the foggy glass.

Rachel's eyes flick open and dart around through the steamed glass.

Rachel snaps the water off.

RACHEL

Hello?

She sticks her head out. Beat. Nothing.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Rachel is dressed for the evening. She brushes her wet hair as she peeks out the window. Adam isn't there. Rachel breathes out her relief, sets her hairbrush on the nightstand, and sits on the edge of the bed to put her shoes on.

We hear a heavy THUD from downstairs. Rachel shoots up - fixed on the door. She inches to the bedroom door to begin her investigation.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Rachel starts to come down the stairs, her eyes scanning the dim of the first level. She comes down the stairs and sees the basement door ajar.

She silently slinks towards the open door, holding onto the wall for stability...

Rachel comes around the corner, whips open the door -- and screams--

INT. BASEMENT STAIRS - SAME

Vanessa's body, is twisted inhumanly across the base of the stairs. Her eyes are open, her head bashed and bloody from the fall.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rachel covers her mouth with one hand and slaps the door shut with the other -- Adam was behind the door.

ADAM

Hi, Rachel.

He stands between her and the front door. She gives another terrified shriek as she turns for the kitchen.

Adam grabs her by the arms with both hands. She tries to pull away from him.

ADAM (cont'd)
Hey, hey. Don't worry, it's me.

RACHEL
Let go of me!

ADAM
She was going to sell - sell the house. I couldn't let her take you away from me...I did good.

Rachel tears herself free from Adam's grip. And walks backward toward the kitchen sink. Adam matches the slow pace and follows her.

RACHEL
You're sick! You're a monster!

What's left of Adam's world shatters. Tears well in his eyes.

ADAM
Why would you, you say that? I just wanted to, wanted to help. I'm a good guy. Don't you like good people?

Rachel cups her mouth. She's crying and gulping air. There's no hate or malice in Adams eyes, instead pure innocence as he follows her until she stops against the counter.

Rachel's free hand searches behind her for something to use in the sink.

RACHEL
(whisper)
She was good...

Her hand finds a meat tenderizer. Adam is close enough he begins to reach for her waist.

ADAM
She was bad...

BLAM!! Rachel hits Adam on the side of his head with the meat hammer. He yells out, clutches his wound, and falls backward to the floor.

ADAM (cont'd)
AHH! Why did you do that?!

Rachel, tenderizer in hand, looks at Adam, glances at the door, and then back to Adam. She makes a run for the door, jumping over Adam in her path.

SNAG! He grabs her ankle as she passes, bringing her to the ground. KRSSSSSSSSSS! The tenderizer slides across the floor.

He quickly starts pulling himself up and on Rachel, climbing up her flailing body with wild grabs of limbs and clothing.

Rachel grabs Adam's wrist as he chokes her with both hands.

ADAM (cont'd)
Why are you making me do this?

Rachel wheezes. The life is fading from her eyes. Adam begins to sob. Rachel's legs kick from under him.

ADAM (cont'd)
(screaming)
Why are you doing this!

She stretches her right arm out for the meat hammer. It's just out of reach. She keeps trying until finally - SHE HAS IT!

She swings hard! But Adam saw it coming and catches the hammer by the handle just below the hammer's head with his right hand.

Rachel gasps and coughs as he let's off her throat.

He sits up, ripping the tenderizer from her grip and gives the improvised weapon a look.

He raises it high and brings it down with everything he has, aimed right for Rachel's face.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT - SOME TIME LATER

An old cartoon with a big band soundtrack can be heard playing in the living room. The TV flashes its glow across the walls and furniture. Cutlery clinks against a plate. Adam sits on the edge of the couch, eating a meal off of a TV tray.

He cuts a piece of meat as he is watching the cartoon. He freezes - something in the cartoon catches his attention. He starts to crack a smile, then a chuckle, and back to finishing his cut. He takes a bite and chews open-mouthed. Chuckling with food in his mouth at the cartoon.

His focus is grabbed from across the room.

ADAM
(innocent and sweet)
What's that, honey?

No reply.

ADAM (cont'd)
I know. I'm glad we worked it out,
too. And you, you were right. It's
just like Mother used to say, "It's
better to forgive than to forget."

Rachel sits tied to a kitchen chair, covered in blood from her brutal head wound.

Adam starts to chuckle again.

A twitch in Rachel's finger is the only sign she's still alive.

HAHAHAHA! Adam guffaws like a child at the TV, food falling from his mouth.

END.