

But I Know

I live down the street from you.
Our suburban houses are similar in size and shape,
Two-story Cape Cods with front porches and detached garages.
Similar to the house on the end of the block,
And the next one, and the next, and the next.
You live with your wife and three children.
Yes, three. Or it will be three in about 8 months.
Even your wife doesn't know that yet.
But I know.

Your oldest daughter is twelve and has begun to have the most interesting dreams about a boy in her class.
She has seen him playing basketball, wearing those loose shorts,
And she has wondered at what undiscovered treasures she might find behind that material.
She thinks that nobody else on earth, not even that boy,
Knows that she awakens in the middle of the night, fresh from a dream of him
Aroused beyond her ability to fully understand the feelings that race through her body
Or how she can't help but touch herself until she cries out, muffled in her pillow
But I know.

Your nine-year-old daughter still thinks boys have cooties, but last month she smoked her first cigarette, behind the school with her friends.
It made her sick, and she made a pact with her peers to tell no one.
She has also, just last week, in fact, had her first sip of beer.
And if you were to look beneath the long sleeves of the shirts she wears –
Shirts too warm for this time of year –
You would see the shallow cuts she has been making in her own flesh
With a razorblade she took from your bathroom.
She doesn't know why she does it
And she thinks no one else knows about her scars.
But I know.

Your wife works in a store downtown.
She has never been unfaithful to you.
Yet.
But she has thought about it.
There's a customer who comes to her shop regularly, and he has made no secret of his attraction to her.
She likes the sound of his voice, and the aftershave he uses.
And sometimes when you make love to her, she thinks about him.
You have no idea how she has imagined him – his body – on top of her --
Inside her.
But I know.

Oh, and I know about you, too.
You drive a truck, ferrying car parts or appliances or whatever the market needs.
I know about the women you meet at truck stops,
And what they do for you.
And what you secretly want them to do.
But they charge extra for that – a lot more than you can afford without it showing up on
your charge card receipt next month.
So, instead, you imagine them being what you truly desire.
You fantasize about the slender, gangly body,
The smooth skin just barely shadowed by the first tentative tufts of golden hair on the
arms,
At the crotch,
And across the thin chest.
You think nobody knows about these desires.
But I know.

How do I know these things?
Bugs? Listening at the windows and doorlocks?
No, nothing so mundane.
I am merely a man of peculiar talents
One who hears the unspoken word,
Who sees the truth that others don't perceive,
Or turn their eyes from lest it bite them.
They are blind, whether intentionally or not,
And don't know the delicious agony, the exquisite horror of knowing what people hide in
their souls
But I know.

No, I'm not a blackmailer.
Your life would be better --
Infinitely better --
If that's all I was.
No, I haven't come to take things away from you,
But to give them to you; a present, if you will.
I bring to you wisdom and knowledge
That what you think you possess –
Your safe, secure, little world –
Isn't nearly the lovely place you imagine it to be.
I bring to you sleepless nights
And the grim realization that you only see the faces of those around you;
Not the real person, the shaggy primitive that huddles and hunts and capers and cavorts,
hidden in the folds of the human brain.
You don't know what monsters lurk in the shadowed caves inside those you love.
But I know.

What will you do now?
From experience, I know that you will read this letter again,
As the pain and fear settle into your stomach like a lump of wet cement.
Then you'll look at the envelope, searching for clues as to my identity.
You won't find any.
I've done this too many times, to too many people, to be so sloppy as that.
Then you'll investigate what I've written – look for evidence that I'm wrong.
You won't find that either. I know I'm telling the truth...
And in your gut, you know it too.

But then what?
I know you won't go to the police for help; they never do.
You have too much to lose for that.
So what's left?
In the past I've seen people accuse their spouses of horrendous things,
Or go to their priest and confess their sins,
Or put a gun barrel in their mouth and silence the accusations forever.
So that's the big question, isn't it?
What will you do?
I know you are scared sick,
And that you will read this letter while drinking a cup of coffee: black, one teaspoon of
sugar – as you do over your morning mail every day,
And that, by this time the cigarette in your ashtray will have smoldered, forgotten, down
to a stub.
You see, I know the present and, sometimes, the future.
But what you'll do next,
That, I do not know.

Stephen Thorn
August 16, 2005
stephenthorn.weebly.com