

### No 3 The Mysterious Caller

A married couple were going out for the evening and called in a teenage babysitter to take care of their three children. When she arrived they told her they probably wouldn't be back until late, and that the kids were already asleep so she needn't disturb them.

The babysitter starts doing her homework while awaiting a call from her boyfriend. After a while the phone rings. She answers it, but hears no one on the other end — just silence, then whoever it is hangs up. After a few more minutes the phone rings again. She answers, and this time there's a man on the line who says, in a chilling voice, "Have you checked the children?"

Click.

At first she thinks it might have been the father calling to check up and he got interrupted, so she decides to ignore it. She goes back to her homework, then the phone rings again. "Have you checked the children?" says the creepy voice on the other end.

"Mr. Murphy?" she asks, but the caller hangs up again.

She decides to phone the restaurant where the parents said they'd be dining, but when she asks for Mr. Murphy she is told that he and his wife had left the restaurant 45 minutes earlier. So she calls the police and reports that a stranger has been calling her and hanging up. "Has he threatened you?" the dispatcher asks. No, she says. "Well, there's nothing we can really do about it. You could try reporting the prank caller to the phone company."

A few minutes go by and she gets another call. "Why haven't you checked the children?" the voice says.

"Who is this?" she asks, but he hangs up again. She dials 911 again and says, "I'm scared. I know he's out there, he's watching me."

"Have you seen him?" the dispatcher asks. She says no. "Well, there isn't much we can do about it," the dispatcher says. The babysitter goes into panic mode and pleads with him to help her. "Now, now, it'll be okay," he says. "Give me your number and street address, and if you can keep this guy on the phone for at least a minute we'll try to trace the call. What was your name again?"

"Linda."

"Okay, Linda, if he calls back we'll do our best to trace the call, but just keep calm. Can you do that for me?"

"Yes," she says, and hangs up. She decides to turn the lights down so she can see if anyone's outside, and that's when she gets another call.

"It's me," the familiar voice says. "Why did you turn the lights down?"

"Can you see me?" she asks, panicking.

"Yes," he says after a long pause.

"Look, you've scared me," she says. "I'm shaking. Are you happy? Is that what you wanted?"

"No."

"Then what do you want?" she asks.

Another long pause. "Your blood. All over me."

She slams the phone down, terrified. Almost immediately it rings again. "Leave me alone!" she screams, but it's the dispatcher calling back. His voice is urgent.

"Linda, we've traced that call. It's coming from another room inside the house. Get out of there! Now!!!"

She tears to the front door, attempting to unlock it and dash outside, only to find the chain at the top still latched. In the time it takes her to unhook it she sees a door open at the top of the stairs. Light streams from the children's bedroom, revealing the profile of a man standing just inside.

She finally gets the door open and bursts outside, only to find a cop standing on the doorstep with his gun drawn. At this point she's safe, of course, but when they capture the intruder and drag him downstairs in handcuffs, she sees he is covered in blood. Come to find out, all three children have all been murdered.

## Word list

disturb	störa
await	invänta, vänta på
chilling	kall
Interrupt	avbryta
creepy	läskig
dispatcher	växelteléfonoist, rapportör
prank caller	någon som tjuvringer
plead	be, bönfälla
urgent	brådskande
attempt	försök
dash	rusa
latched	låst, här: sitta fast
reveal	avslöja
burst	här: störta ut
capture	tillfångata
Come to find out	Ung. Senare avslöjades att.

## Analysis

Teenagers have been scaring each other silly with this urban legend since the late 1960s, though most people nowadays are probably more familiar with it as the plot of the 1979 horror film *When a Stranger Calls* (not to mention that of the 2006 remake of the same title). So far as anyone knows it's not based on any real-life incident, but the scenario is plausible enough to give goosebumps to anyone who has a sense of what it's like to be young and alone in a big house caring for someone else's children.

"The most frightening aspect of this legend is that the babysitter is not in control at any time," writes folklorist Gail De Vos. "[T]he caller multiplies the anxiety that the babysitter is already feeling as the responsible person in the household. The possibility that this could *actually* happen is never far from the mind of any babysitter."

Never mind the unlikelihood that police would be able to trace a phone call that lasted no more than 20 seconds at most, or that an officer could be dispatched to the house so quickly. Albeit framed as a cautionary tale, the main purpose of the story is to frighten us, not give us actionable information. That it's still going around some 40 years later is a testament to how successfully it accomplishes its goal.

## Word list

plausible	rimlig, sannolik
goosebumps	gåshud
multiply	fördubblar, ökar
possibly	möjligen, eventuellt
nevermind	här: tänk inte ens på
the unlikelihood	osannolikeheten
albeit	om än
frame	inrama
cautionary	varnande
actionable	gripbar