

THE HOWLING NEXT DOOR

an original short by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

A quiet neighborhood. Birds chirp. A dog barks in the distance. No sign of people though, except -

DANA JENKINS, late 20s, checks a mailbox while bopping her head to headphones.

ON DANA

As she glances around the neighborhood - pleased. Among her newly forwarded mail is a postcard - "Happy to have you - Your Neighbors."

No one in sight. Shrugs, and slams the mailbox, heading up the walk to her new house.

INT. NEW HOUSE - DAY

She sets the card on the mantle, and unpacks a box while listening to headphones.

Boxes surround her - she has a ways to go. She's working on filling up a bookshelf with heavy pre-med science text books.

She suddenly stops - takes off her headphones and listens - nothing - shrugs, puts them back on, goes about her business.

Suddenly we stop hearing the music in her headphones - and notice a painful, guttural howling. It goes on, with Dana unaware.

And is interrupted by a LOUD CELLPHONE RINGTONE.

Dana notices the call, picks up, cuts off her music.

DANA

Mom! Hey! Yes, the new place is great.

The howling has stopped. Dana walks to the kitchen fridge, grabs a beer.

DANA (CONT'D)

No, I haven't met any of the neighbors yet. Just me by my lonesome.

(beat)

Wait, did you hear that?

(beat)

There was like a whining.

Mom laughs on the phone.

DANA (CONT'D)

No - not me - I'm not joking.

Dana walks around the house - no one in the BEDROOMS.

She goes down into the

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

It's creepy. Expansive.

DANA

Yeah, I swear I heard something...

(beat)

What's that? You're breaking up.

Lemme call you back.

She swats spiderwebs out of her hair.

Listening, silent. Nothing. She starts back up the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

She washes dishes, places them on a drying rack.

Turning off the faucet, she hears the noise again. It sounds like a dog in pain.

Wiping her hands, she looks around out the windows. No signs of life. She returns and opens a window - the howling louder. Nothing outside but the neighbor's house.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She goes outside, approaches the

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE

One car is home in their carport.

She approaches a window - this must be where the sound is coming from. Blinds cover any view inside.

DANA

Puppy?

The howling continues in response.

DANA (CONT'D)

(more to herself than anything)

Did you hurt yourself?

Worried, she sees the car in the carport. She takes a deep breath, approaches the door.

NEIGHBOR'S DOOR

She rings the bell - a distorted old sound chimes inside.

The howling goes silent. She waits. No answer.

She knocks.

She goes to peer into a window in/near the door.

Behind her, a second CAR pulls up.

DONNY, 45, and DONNA, early 40s, exit the car. A typical-looking clean cut suburban couple.

DONNY

Can I help you?

Dana whips around, startled.

DANA

Hi! I'm Dana. I just moved in next door.

Donna approaches.

DONNA

I see. Nice to meet you. It's great to have a new person there - the house has been vacant for so long.

DANA

Oh really? I didn't get that impress-

DONNY

Were you coming by to say hello?

DANA

Yes! Yes, hello. Seems like a nice neighborhood - lot of nice families, and stuff. Very quiet...

Donny and Donna exchange a glance.

DONNA

We always wanted a big family ourselves.

Donny smiles.

DANA

So, anyway nice to meet you, um...?

DONNY AND DONNA  
Donny and Donna.

Though they grin widely, there is something subtly off-putting about them.

DANA  
Oh, okay. Easy enough I guess.

They grin.

DANA (CONT'D)  
Okay, well, I'll leave you to it.

Slightly weirded out, Dana exits back toward her house.

They stare, wave until she is far enough away, then resume emptying the car/opening the house door.

INT. HOUSE - LATER

Dana eats a salad.

MOM  
Weird how honey? What did they do?

DANA  
Well, technically nothing. They smiled and said they were glad I'd moved in.

MOM  
Um. Okay.

DANA  
Yeah, I guess they don't sound that bad. I'll tell them.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - LATER

Both cars now in the driveway, Dana approaches the house, rings the bell.

Donny answers the door.

DONNY  
Yes?

DANA  
Hi again. Um, I just wanted to let you guys know of something - I think I'd wanna know if it was going on...

Donny's look darkens somewhat.

DANA (CONT'D)

So I think your dog is lonely when you guys are gone.

Donny laughs uncomfortably.

DONNY

(faking cheerful)

What makes you say that?

DANA

Well when you guys leave, I've heard him whining. At first, I actually thought he was in pain, but...

DONNY

Yes, well, thank you for letting us know.

Donna arrives at the door.

DONNA

Honey, is everything alright?

She sees Dana.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Oh hi, April.

DANA

It's.. Dana.

DONNA

Of course. Can we help you?

DANA

I was just letting you know about the dog...

DONNY

Apparently the -- dog -- has been whining lately. When we're away.

DONNA

(confused then going along with it)

Oh, our dog. Right.

Dana smiles.

DANA

Has he been limping or anything?

DONNY

Uh, no. Not that I know of.

DANA

It's just, I'm in veterinary school,  
so if you'd like me to look...

She peeks around them a bit into the house. Donna moves in closer.

DONNY

That won't be necessary. He's not hurt.

DANA

Well if you're sure. What kind of dog did you say he was?

Donny and Donna look at one another.

DONNA

He's a mix.

Dana stares at them.

DANA

Okay, well, if he's lonely maybe just leaving a radio or something on will help get him used to being alone.

DONNA

Of course.

DONNY

Thank you! Doctor.

He laughs. Dana smiles, exits.

INT. HOUSE LIVING ROOM - LATER

Dana Skypes on her laptop with a friend on her living room floor.

DANA

Anyway, weirdest couple ever!

FRIEND

Wow. I wish I was there to see it.

DANA

Yeah, I can't put my finger--

A loud KNOCK at the door. Dana jumps. Friend reacts.

FRIEND

Is that the door? Is that them?

DANA

Shut up!

Dana jumps up, answers the door.

Donny stands behind it.

DONNY

We've been thinking...I was wondering if you wouldn't mind dog-sitting for us tomorrow.

FRIEND

(in background)

Noooooo!!

Dana reaches back and hits mute.

DANA

Sorry.

DONNY

That's quite alright. We just don't want the dog to be lonely. If you could just sit with him for a few hours tomorrow.. If you're not busy.

DANA

Um, sure.

DONNY

Great. I'll see you at 8:15. You know the place.

He smiles.

DANA

Okay.

Dana shuts the door, unmutes her laptop.

FRIEND

Are you crazy?! Don't do that!

DANA

I feel bad for the poor dog. At least I'll be able to examine his paws and stuff. What if he got hurt on his kennel or something?

INT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

Donny and Donna show Dana the dog - a golden retriever.

DANA

So he doesn't look like a mix at all -  
this is a golden retriever.

DONNA

Oh, okay. Yeah, I'm not good with  
dogs.

DONNY

Anyway, the food's in here, and if  
you'd like to take him out, the leash  
is here.

Donny and Donna look at each other before leaving.

DANA

Okay, great. Thanks.

DONNA

Also, I made you some blondies.

She sets the baked goods on a table.

DANA

Oh, okay. Thanks!

Dana pets the dog behind the ears.

They leave. She checks his paws. No issues.

DANA (CONT'D)

Don't worry buddy. I'll keep you  
company today.

She texts her friend.

NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Studying on the couch, the dog lies asleep at her feet.

She goes to use the

RESTROOM.

She flushes, and afterward hears the moaning.

DANA (CONT'D)

It's okay, boy! I'm right here...

She exits to the living room, where the dog is still asleep.

DANA (CONT'D)

What the..

The howling resumes. It's close, but muffled.

Breathing heavy, she roams around the ROOMS, checking closets.

DANA (CONT'D)

Hello?

No answer.

A SPARE BEDROOM CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

- is filled with dolls. Which startle Dana. One has the name April embroidered on her dress.

The moaning continues. She closes the door, heads back toward the living room. The dog starts barking at the whimpering sounds.

DANA (CONT'D)

Hey, boy.

The dog faces a wall, barking at it. It has a very large painting of the owners on it.

DANA (CONT'D)

Yeah, that's a little much.

She looks at the dog, who listens, stares at the wall.

Dana considers; pulls the painting forward - behind it is a door.

She takes the painting down, tries the handle, but it's locked. She searches around for the keys -- in drawers --

She finds paperwork on the dog - checks the date --

DANA (CONT'D)

They just bought you yesterday?

She finds keys, gets into the basement. It's about half the size of the one in her house.

She looks around.

DANA (CONT'D)

Hello?

Silence. Perhaps a random water drip.

She sighs. Starts back up the stairs when she considers another moment, looking around and up at the ceiling.

She looks back at the far wall, heads toward it.

She finds a bare light bulb hanging - pulls the string and it turns on.

More dolls on work surfaces.

She hears a scratching..

DANA (CONT'D)  
Is somebody here?

She approaches the far wall. A painted framed portrait of Donny and Donna smiling hangs on the wall, with an older girl painted between them - it appears added after the fact.

DANA (CONT'D)  
What is with the freaking paintings  
people.

She approaches the picture, touches it. It swings on a pivot.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Upstairs, the dog finds the blondies Donna made. He starts eating them.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The car pulls up into the driveway.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The dog stumbles, drifts off to sleep.

The front door unlocks and Donny walks in.

BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Dana pulls down the picture, revealing an opening into a dark walled-off section.

DANA  
Is anyone in there?

A FEMALE VOICE  
HELP!

DANA  
Oh my God, I'm gonna get you out of  
there.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Donny sees the basement door open, steps towards it --

BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Dana sees a flashlight on a workbench - runs to get it while asking -

DANA (CONT'D)  
How long have your parents had you  
locked in here?

FEMALE VOICE  
They're not my parents! I used to  
live next door.

Donny walks slowly down the stairs.

Dana hears him -

DANA  
Okay come on - hurry! We've gotta  
go!

DONNY  
Oh I don't think so. No need to  
rush.

Dana shines the light inside the hole - she's staring at a  
baby monitor. No one in the hole to be seen. She gasps.

DONNY (CONT'D)  
We have all the time in the world.

The female cries on the monitor. Donna appears.

DONNA  
Ah-ah-ah, what'd we tell you about  
crying?

DANA  
Stop right there! I'm going to call  
the cops!

DONNY  
Just TRY. You just lost your  
telephone privileges.

He chuckles.

DONNY (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry Dana - you broke the rules.  
We just can't have that, young lady.

DANA  
Okay, why don't we just talk about  
this.

DONNY  
(to Donna)  
Honey, now you'll have two daughters.

Donna smiles.

DONNA  
(dreamily)  
And this one's a doctor.

Dana screams.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE - DAY

Two teenagers jog past the house. One jogger slows.

GIRL TEEN  
Did you hear that?

BOY TEEN  
(jogging in place)  
No. What?

GIRL TEEN  
Some sort of...  
(beat)  
Nevermind - it was probably just a  
dog or something.

They jog away.

THE END