

Senior Eyes

Cori Armstrong

She's watching. Staring out her window at the unsuspecting neighbors. One passes the decaying blue house, while walking a golden puppy. She's watching. There is nothing unknown about these people; every secret, every lie, she knows. Everything is done to an art; what time the neighbors come home, when they leave, and where they're going is catalogued. She knows exactly what window to use for who and what setting on her binoculars to use for each distance.

The sun is shining through the window, and through her. It's warm and a comfort, especially seeing as nice days bring the neighbors out of their homes, providing hours of entertainment for her. Almost unfair, she knows everything about them but they don't even know her name, just the lady in the blue house on Stringle Crescent. It's now 11:30; Mrs. Kring will be leaving with the children to go to soccer. Rather dull to most. But to her she knows that by 11:36, Mr. Kring has his "lady friend" come over for forty-three minutes before the Mrs. comes home.

How fun it is to have this power twisting through her veins. To know that none can ever be cruel to her; she has dirt on everyone. Around the clock like a prison guard; alarms are set to wake her up in the middle of a still night, to creep to the guest bedroom window and watch the insomniac next door come out for a 2am smoke. Puffing away, she cracks the window open to inhale the smoke; sharing an unknown moment with her neighbor. After ten minutes, it's back to bed but only until the next alarm.

This is an expertise, and who would ever expect an old lady to become consumed by staring? What once was a fun thing to do occasionally became an obsession, keeping her paranoid from missing a single movement between houses. She watches them, but the obsession is watching her.

Erma McArthur has lived on Stringle Cres. since the houses were built in the 40's. Never married, but twice engaged, Erma has lived a life of solitude and loneliness. However, she is never alone -neither are those who she watches from her doorstep-. This twisted hobby started out years earlier just as that; a hobby. Eventually, either from boredom or what some would call a sick need to know, Erma became consumed by it. Crying if she missed the neighbor leaving, and hurling vases at her walls if a dinner party took place and she was unaware, causing the decrepit wallpaper to peel.

Nothing is worth doing anything if it means leaving the house. Groceries and packages are delivered to the once beautiful blue house. The house stands ruined now by years of neglect; weeds cover the lawn, paint peels making mosaics up the sides of the walls, shingles hang, and the white fence leans like a smile of crooked teeth. Walking by the house reminds you of a haunted house from a fairy tale. Children gape at it and whisper about the witch living inside whom occasionally hobbles onto her porch, only to return back to her cave. Of course, she is aware of her nicknames and what people think, but she has no time to worry about appearances when attending to more important matters. Do not pity her. She has chosen this and with that, her house becomes her prison, unable to leave on her own will.

No friends and no children, Erma can make do without. Those are not necessities but needs. She has all the company she would want, and with more on the way; new neighbors are moving in right next door, a perfect new opportunity to learn about a foreign being. Slowly walking with the aid of her cane she slips over to the west side of her house to the kitchen to look out the window. The old neighbors (the Smiths) had to move due to the fact the husband's mother passed away on the other side of the country and relocation was necessary. Its easy to learn these things, windows are always open and people speak of important matters far too loud. However, the Smiths were too boring for Erma's needs. The most scandalous thing they did was cheat on their taxes slightly. Hardly even worth observing. Hopefully, these new folks will boost the fun around town.

From the looks of it, there's a teen girl and little sister. Teenagers are absolutely dreadful, noisy creatures that serve no purpose in Erma's eyes. Dear God, the girl is dressed like an absolute slut; you can see her stomach and her shorts are barely even there. Grumbling heavily and gagging in disgust Erma thought of how that girl would be treated in the 40's dressed like a cheap hussy. Moving on now. The little one looks sweet enough, why anyone would choose to have children was beyond her, waste of money and time. Ahh, the main act has arrived, Mommy and Daddy. They seem rich. But neither looks like they deserve what they have; trophy wife and most likely a lawyer or office worker as a husband. People used to have to work hard for what they got. Something is off about them.

Most people wouldn't notice but for someone who does nothing but study people, it's easy to see through the fancy clothes and bleached grins. They're not happy with each other; now just to find out why.

A new story to read, a new mystery to solve, and the thrill of gaining power.

The movers are beginning to drag in heavy sofas and boxes containing the lives of others. What she wouldn't do to rip open those boxes and tear away the bubble wrap and see what these new people thrive off of.

The aged and yellowed clock sits on the wall ticking and tocking. Everyone else will have the day to themselves, Erma's attention is being drawn to a new toy, the others can sit in silence for the day.

Exhausted and excited, Erma finally leaves the kitchen, pleased with what she has learned. Not learning many big things, but small and glorious, like names. The Bennetts. The eldest daughter is Serena, the youngest Elli. While the parents are Kallie and Neil. And by the looking shallowly, they seem like a suburban family with a perfect life; however look deeper and see their amazing faults. The parents seem to have a bad marriage, only held together by money and greed, while the daughters are ignorantly unaware and spoiled.

It's around three in the morning and the alarm should go off in about 22 minutes to awake Erma and warn her of the single mother across the street getting out of her home to greet her drug dealer. However, what woke Erma was not the bleeping of an alarm but the yelling next door. Surprised at first but then realizing her luck, she giggles giddily while she drapes her threadbare housecoat around her frail body and makes her way to the west side of her house. The enraged screams grow louder as she nears the dusty kitchen window. It seems Kallie and Neil are having a midnight brawl. Neil is the one

speaking, cursing out his wife. It's hard to hear between the sobs and yells, but it sounds like they're yelling about money, and having to move. Neil throws insults like baseballs, stating how costly it was for Kallie to buy all her useless things. Now Kallie stops her weeping and bellows curses to her husband, stating it was his fault they moved, she didn't want to leave the city. *Amazing*, thought Erma, *what joyous fun*. The whole street would surely wake up from this, causing more commotion and more entertainment for herself.

Kallie is mumbling now, Erma can barely make out the sounds but I quick adjustment to her hearing aid is a fast solution to that problem. Only making out the last few bits, Erma comes to learn why her new houseguests have joined her. It seems Neil had a few bad business deals back in Chicago, and to avoid certain troubles, moving to the suburbs was the appropriate solution. So, this is all Neil fault, this must be the reason Kallie resents her well-dressed husband. The yells have settled and the lights go out. Erma is left alone in the dark of her kitchen, her eyes glowing wildly with delight.

Not much changes in the next two weeks. The Bennetts have settled in, the girls are in school; Charleston High and Webley Elementary to be precise; which was discovered by the labels on the yellow busses screeching by in the morning. It seems that Kallie is no more than a homemaker no job, useless woman. This how ever leaves her vulnerable to Erma's watching eye. Just by simply gazing into their window, Erma could see the constant bottle of liquor in Kallie's hand. Leaving her incapacitated for most of the day. But the last few days she's seemed up tight and extremely tense. She can be seen pacing around her house or rapidly writing things down on paper. Her behavior has drawn in the attention of her spying neighbor.

Two days later, around 2 o'clock making her usual rounds to the west side of her house, Erma can hear the bennetts fighting yet again, but something is very different about this fight its far more intense and angry. Things are crashing and being thrown. A plate hits the window narrowly missing Neil's head. With her face pressed against the cool glass of her dusty window, Erma watches intently unable to pull her eyes away. Screaming, Kallie comes at Neil with a shimmering sliver kitchen knife and stabs it right through his stomach. Taken aback, Erma leaps back from the window, watching still as Neil's body presses against the window and slides down to the floor leaving a smear of blood. Eyes wide, Kallie looks up through her blood red window only to have her gaze meet with Erma's. Frightened, Erma stands staring back, mouth gaping as a slight grin creeps across Kallie's wrinkle free face, revealing a row of white teeth.

Who's watching whom now?