

Alexas from Texas

by

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FADE IN:

SUBURBIA. AN HOUR FROM NOW. DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS.

TRACE LOPEZ is an avuncular, mid-career law enforcer. Relaxed and smiling, the plainclothes detective's manner suggests the folksy *Andy Griffith*, not the aggressive *Cops*. Lopez steps onto the front porch of an unexceptional home in an unexceptional neighborhood. He RINGS the doorbell.

DETECTIVE

(loudly enough to
be heard through
the door)

Hello! Burnet County Peace
Officer!

It is not unlike many doorbells that afford residents a video view of visitors. Lopez examines the device. A tiny eye-shaped icon suggests it allows homeowners the option of unlocking a door with a retinal scan.

Again he RINGS the doorbell. This time, he holds a law enforcement badge in front of the doorbell's camera. He speaks to whoever might be monitoring his arrival.

DETECTIVE

Abigail Allen? Burnet County
Sheriff's Office, ma'am.

Dogs BARK. Children LAUGH. People do whatever it is that people do on pleasant autumn days. If cars pass at all, they do so infrequently. An idyllic residential street.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(from a speaker
near the camera
lens)

Yes. May I help you?

Helpfully, Lopez wiggles the badge in front of the lens.

DETECTIVE

Detective Trace Lopez. Burnet
County Sheriff's Department,
ma'am.

Throughout this encounter, his manner is deferentially tender. It borders on apologetic, even meek. It's not a put-on or a strategy.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Yes, I see that.

DETECTIVE

Can you come to the door, ma'am?
Just a couple of routine
questions.

WOMAN'S VOICE

I'm sorry. What's this about?

DETECTIVE

Shouldn't take long, Ms. Allen.
My shift's over soon. Just trying
to get home for dinner, you know?

After a beat, the door opens to reveal ABIGAIL ALLEN. Single. Self-possessed. Employed full time. With benefits. Two weeks of paid vacation every year. An office, not a cubicle. A conventionally respectable but unexceptional woman of child-bearing age.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

Ah. Great. Thank you. This
won't take... um...

The detective gestures vaguely to the home's interior. He waits to be invited in. No such invitation is forthcoming.

ABIGAIL

How can I help you?

DETECTIVE

Oh. Okay. Right here, then. All
right. Did you schedule out-of-
state travel in...

He consults his phone

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

...four months ago? The week of
January 16th?

ABIGAIL

I'm not sure that's any of your -

The detective offers Abigail a brief glance at the screen of his phone before reading from it himself.

DETECTIVE

On twelve January you booked American, American Eagle out of Killeen...? Fort Hood? American Eagle to Dallas-Fort Worth. DFW to Atlanta.

He squints at the phone.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

One of those little twin jet thingies to... Charlottesville. A lot of puddle-jumpers between here and -

ABIGAIL

I have family in Virginia. People visit family. Out of state.

DETECTIVE

Oh, yeah. The wife and I visit in-laws in, well, not Denver proper, but right outside. You know, we do that that thing where you swap out holidays. Christmas with her family. Thanksgiving with mine. Then, next year, the other way 'round. Lot of people do that, I guess. Thing is, we plan that. Months in advance. That way you get those low fares from Travelocity or CheapFlights or whatever.

He checks his phone.

DETECTIVE

I guess you used Expedia. But, see, you got burned on the prices. You booked on the twelfth. Tuesday. With departure on the

16th. That's not a lot of lead time. Maybe something sudden came up? You were in some kind of a hurry...?

Abigail looks at the detective, a cautious edge in her eyes and body language.

The detective holds Abigail's gaze for a moment. He surveys the neighborhood, then turns back to her.

DETECTIVE

You sure you don't want to invite me in? Might keep the neighbors from gossiping.

ABIGAIL

Can't keep people from talking.

DETECTIVE

No, you really can't. Even people who live alone can't get enough of talking. They talk to houseplants. Cats. Talk to Cortana, Google Assistant. "Turn off the lights," "Turn on the music." That kind of thing.

ABIGAIL

I don't know what you're getting at.

DETECTIVE

Nothing special. Just that Alexa's a good listener, is all. Has to be. She never knows when you're gonna need 9-1-1 or if you want to add something... I don't know... broccoli, cottage cheese, pregnancy test... something like that, just add it to the grocery list.

Carefully, Abigail flexes her lips. Her eyebrows gather a fraction. She is not yet fearful, but she is concerned... and trying not to show it.

ABIGAIL

Okay...?

DETECTIVE

Alexa. She listens to folks all day. All night. All month long. Some days the voice is lower. Some days the voice is higher. She can track that sort of thing. Make a spreadsheet of it, even.

ABIGAIL

I guess. And, yeah, everybody's voice is different day to day. So?

DETECTIVE

Well, not just everybody. Women especially, it turns out. I'm not trying to be indelicate, but... I hear the pitch of a woman's voice tracks with her... you know... with her cycle.

ABIGAIL

What?

DETECTIVE

Hand to God. Look it up. Or you can get Alexa to search it for you. Especially if you've got one of those monthly tracker things. Like an app. On your phone, for instance...?

ABIGAIL

Not everybody has an Alexa. I barely trust Siri. Can I see your badge again?

The Detective digs the badge from his pocket, hands her the wallet it's in.

DETECTIVE

Sure, sure. You'll want to write that badge number down, probably. Or I can just text it to you.

She examines the detective's badge and ID. His thumbs tap the screen of his phone.

ALEXA

(from inside the house)

You have a text message from Burnet County Sheriff's department.

Abigail stares at him. The Detective smiles benignly without seeming smug.

DETECTIVE

There you go.

He holds out his hand. Slowly, she surrenders the badge. Lopez puts it away.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

That's not the only thing, of course - your voice. Lots of other things change throughout the month.

ABIGAIL

Thanks for the heads up. I've kinda been doing the whole 'female' thing for a few years now. But it's always helpful to have a man explain some of the finer points.

DETECTIVE

(embarrassed)

Oh. See. I get what you're saying. No. It's not like that. I'm... no, see. I'm not mansplaining anything to anybody. Hoo, boy. That'd be... nope. No, ma'am. My momma definitely didn't raise one of those fellas. I just... a lot of people would be surprised is all. They'd be surprised to hear that a woman's pupil gets bigger when she's... you know... ovulating.

The deputy looks at the doorbell. Abigail looks at him. He looks at her. He looks back at the door bell. She looks at him. He gives the slightest, subtlest nod toward the doorbell. Abigail finally looks at the doorbell... at the tiny icon of an eye on its scanner. Her eyes widen. Blanching, she looks back at Detective. For a long beat, neither speaks. In the silence, the neighborhood's happy AMBIENCE is less evident than it was.

DETECTIVE

I wouldn't presume to explain how your body works, ma'am. And I don't know how these retina scanner biometric lock things take pictures. I'm not even an expert in the law. I just... when a district attorney's got enough evidence... when a magistrate signs an arrest warrant, well... somebody needs a ride to the station.

ABIGAIL

You *know* this is America.

DETECTIVE

Well, not exactly, ma'am. Not any more. This is Texas. But it could be Idaho or Missouri or any other state where life is just as precious.

ABIGAIL

Precious. And what about *my* life?

DETECTIVE

Did you need to get a snack or a sweater or something before we go?

ABIGAIL

I guess I need to call somebody.

DETECTIVE

Oh, no ma'am. You can do that a little later.

ABIGAIL
(forcefully)
I said I need to call somebody.

DETECTIVE
(genuinely gentle)
I've been admiring that necklace
of yours. You've got my wife's
taste in jewelry.

Lopez reaches under his jacket for a handcuff case on his
belt in the small of his back

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
You need some bracelets to go with
that, or... are you good to go, as-
is?

ABIGAIL
Bracelets? What do you...? Oh.
You mean...

The deputy's hand eases back to his side, empty.

DETECTIVE
I don't expect we have to go that
route. If you're ready to come
along.

The deputy reaches across the threshold and takes Abigail
gently by the elbow. She is a little too stunned to
resist. He quietly closes the door behind her. And ushers
her off the porch into the nation's uncertain future.

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