

Never Walk Alone

A Short Story Written by
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The pandemic struck me like it did most people, my job closed for several months in the early days. While I had enough money saved to live on, I didn't have much to occupy my time. Cabin fever set in on the first couple of days, I spent very little time on social media, and I had grown bored of watching movies or TV in general for that matter. My last few years I had grown accustomed to my job and my schoolwork, this was my last year of college. I lived in my hometown which was a rather large city and attended the local university. I would work, study, and do projects or assignments for class. Then when I did have free time, it was mostly spent sleeping or studying. I had very few friends, just one I grew up with that still lived in town, and occasionally I would get random videos from him in a text message. At times they were outlandish conspiracy videos and sometimes they would be videos on cryptid sightings, stuff that would sometimes pass the time. I watched them and some would be entertaining, and some would be laughable. My friend's name is Mark and we've been close since third grade. Mark is really the only friend I have now that I think of it, he is always there for me no matter what. When this whole pandemic started, we really kept each other company even if it was just electronically. Some of my free time was spent laughing and texting with Mark about the videos he would send, and it helped but I was still going stir crazy having to stay in my apartment. School had cancelled all classes even foregoing online class meetings, like everyone else all my essentials were home delivered during this time so I couldn't even go to the store. I tried walking but I would walk the same streets over and over, I grew tired of it quickly. Just when I thought things couldn't get any better, Mark text me with something to do. This time instead of a random video Mark sends me the link to download this app called The Eye, I thought it was something to do with those illuminati conspiracy videos he would send because they use eye symbolism a lot but, Mark tells me that this app is being used by a lot of people to break the monotony of the pandemic lockdown and it is gaining in popularity, and I should try it. The app would give you a random set of coordinates and once there you would take a picture of an object that the app reveals to you once you arrive at the location, you upload the picture, and the app would generate a fortune for you. I didn't understand why the app didn't just randomly generate a fortune for you, but Mark said it was meant more for getting out and getting away from home more than the fortune. I normally didn't care for silly little gimmicks like this app, but I was desperate for something to break the boredom, so I downloaded it. It was a typical app once you downloaded you had to enter all kinds of information, email, username, password, and allow it to access your location. I still was rather skeptical about it but figured I would go ahead and give it a try. It accessed my location and went to work once I clicked begin, numbers spun like on a slot machine and after about a minute a random set of coordinates appeared. I clicked on the numbers and my map opened up and showed the location, it was just a few blocks from my apartment. It was chilly out and was late afternoon, I grabbed my jacket and keys and headed out the door trying to open my mind and try to have a little innocent fun.

The streets were empty where normally it would be bustling this time of day. Shops all had signs in their windows that said "Closed until further notice" the sight was eerie, like something out of one of those sci-fi movies you would watch late at night as a kid. I followed the GPS and walked by more and more empty buildings and streets. No cars, no people, not even animals, it

was still and cold. I continued down the main street until it told me to turn right onto a street I never ventured down before. The buildings were more run down and there were a few industrial buildings that used to be warehouses all long abandoned. This part of town was home to several businesses that once thrived here, but the companies had been either bought out or went bankrupt. It added to the uneasiness I felt as I continued following the GPS, I just kept thinking of all those people who lost their jobs. What were they doing now? Did any of them struggle? I remember when I was a kid hearing news reports of suicides after some of the warehouses closed, hopefully it wasn't related to any of these closing. I caught something out of the corner of my eye as I walked past one building, it almost looked as if I saw a man standing in a second-floor window. I couldn't make out a face, but the shape was as clear as could be. The city didn't really have a problem with homeless people, so I didn't think it was that. Just as I was thinking that to myself my phone starts beeping frantically, it was the app. I didn't even realize I arrived at the location. The app starts to change screens and goes to my camera; the message that appears in it sent chills down my spine [Take a picture of the man in the window] I had to do a double take; did it really say that? I shook my head and closed my eyes, when I opened them again it still said the same thing. I started to feel rather nervous, but I was curious as well, I looked up to the second-floor window and the shadowed shape of the man was still there. This had to be a joke but for the life of me I couldn't think how such an elaborate prank could be done. Curiosity got the best of me, and I raised my phone up to the window where the shape stood and took the picture. My phone beeped again, and the message now read [Good, upload pic to server] I pressed the upload button and after a few seconds a new message appeared [Click to play again] I stopped and wondered if I should even do this, I started to really feel creeped out by this point. I looked up to the window and the shape was gone. Curiosity can really take a hold of you because I clicked the [Play again] message. Part of me thought I was making a mistake as the numbers started rolling again, but a small part of me was glad to be out of the apartment and not letting the cabin fever get to me. The coordinates stopped again on a random spot and on the map, it showed it was only a few blocks away from this spot. I hoped that everything that happened up to this point was just a part of the experience or a joke somehow, I guess it was better than being bored to tears, so I sucked it up and started off to the next spot.

I didn't realize how long I had been out because the sun slowly started to fade into twilight. I thought when I left I had at least another two hours before sunset, I guess time flies when your mind is occupied. The more I walked down these long streets the worse the buildings and surroundings got; I almost couldn't believe that this was in my city. It occurred to me that as a kid I may have explored a lot with Mark, but we never explored this part of the city and for good reason. I still felt uneasy heading toward the next spot, but something kept pushing me to go, call it curiosity if you will. This time I come across a whole residential block of abandoned houses; the coordinates brought me to one house that was particularly run down. My phone beeps again and the message flashes on screen [Take a picture of the man in the basement window] I was too busy looking up at the second story of the house I neglected to see there was a basement and several windows lining the bottom of the house. What should not have surprised me but did, there was the blank shadow of a person's head in the window to the far right of the house. I really started to get frightened and thought to exit the app and run home but the app beeped again and flashed another message [You came all this way, take the picture] My heart felt like it sank

into my stomach, I raised the camera, took the picture, uploaded it to the server and exited the app. I turned around to start running home not paying attention and ran right into this girl I didn't notice. She dropped her phone and looked shocked, she wasn't paying attention either, I must not have been too because I also dropped my phone. I apologized as I reached for her phone, she was using The Eye app just like I was. I handed it to her and as I did, I noticed she was beautiful, she wore black plastic frame glasses, her hair was a gorgeous chestnut brown with matching eyes. She was young around my age twenty-four, I never seen her before but it was a rather large city so that wasn't too strange. But the app, did it bring both of us to this same exact spot, no it couldn't have, just a coincidence right? The girl smiled big at me and apologized as well, "I am so sorry, I just wasn't watching. This app I've been out all day on these little scavenger hunts, and it's been so fun...I am so sorry what's your name?" She was so sweet, no girl had ever payed any attention to me and if they did it was usually with a cold and callous demeanor, I suddenly felt a sense of calm come over me and I started to respond to her, "My name is Eric, what's yours?" I asked trying not to sound like a complete dork, "My name is Anna." The girl replied in the most heavenly of voices. She looked down at my phone and asked, "You playing The Eye too?" I responded back, "Uh, yeah, it's been interesting. Has it asked you to find anything strange?" Anna looked confused and shook her head, "No, nothing strange, just a mural, a couple of statues, and a broken shingle on a roof. This was going to be my last stop, but I guess my phone reset, so I never got to see what it wanted a picture of here. What about you, what have you found?" I didn't want to sound crazy or weird right after meeting her, so I just lied, "Oh just a couple of cars and this house here that's all." Anna smiled really big, "It's so much fun, isn't it? Just to get out and do things, I hate being cooped up at home." Again, I didn't want to come off as weird, "Yeah, it's nice, my friend told me about it. It's been nice to walk around town, really clears the mind." Anna looked at her phone and her eyes got big, "Oh, it's getting late, would you mind walking me home if it's on your way? I don't like to be alone past dark." I couldn't let her be alone and to be honest I didn't want to be alone either, so I agreed. She showed me on the map where she lived, and it just so happened to be on the way to my apartment. We both put our phones away and started to make our way home.

It was refreshing to have the company on the walk back, we talked and laughed for what seemed to be hours. She liked a lot of the same music I did, and she really enjoyed going to concerts when certain bands were in town. I always thought that I would never find anyone with the same music tastes as me, everyone especially Mark always said my music taste was forty years behind everyone else. Anna even dressed as if she were from that era too, leather jacket, black t-shirt, light blue denim jeans, and her jacket had pins and buttons from all the bands I loved. She would have been easily considered the "heavy metal chick" had we been in that time. While we were walking, I kept thinking in the back of my mind about the strange things on the app, I wanted to ask her so bad what she thought but everything was going so well I wasn't going to chance it at all. We come up on the street to Anna's house and I noticed the houses were not quite run down like on the other side of town, but they were a bit unkept. We made our way to Anna's house, it looked dark inside, almost abandoned and the yard was overgrown, paint chipped all over the house. Anna gave me a big hug and said, "Thank you so much, this has been a lot of fun, let me give you my number, let's text and maybe meet up again tomorrow?" I suddenly got butterflies in my stomach. This girl was perfect, and she showed interest in me so of course I responded,

“Absolutely, let’s do this again.” Anna hugged me again, “See you tomorrow.” I watched as she walked into her house and stood there for a minute but not once did a light come on in the house. I didn’t ask, it wasn’t my business, so I started to make my way back to my apartment. I had almost completely forgot about the strange occurrences on The Eye app when my phone beeped again. I remember exiting the app before Anna and I started walking back but it was back on my phone with a new message that really frightened the hell out of me, it read [Did you enjoy your walk with the pretty girl]

I immediately shut off my phone and ran all the way back to my apartment. I didn’t know what was going on but this app was scaring the hell out of me. My only logical explanation was Mark might be playing a prank on me somehow. I get home and rush into my apartment and lock and bolt the door. I set my phone on the counter and head for the living to open my laptop. I pull up the video call service and start calling Mark. We connect and I begin frantically asking him, “What did you do with this app?” he looked shocked and asked, “What are you talking about? Are you ok? You don’t look so good.” It must have shown on my face how frightened I was, or maybe I was flushed, or maybe my best friend just knows me that well. I tried to calm down as I explained, “Something weird is going on, the app sent me to a run-down part of town, and I kept seeing these figures that it wanted me to take pictures of. It was just off, then I met this girl using it and she didn’t have any of the issues I did. I walked her home, and the app asked me how my walk was with the girl. I’m really scared man please tell me it’s you doing this.” Mark cocked his head to the side and raised an eyebrow, “Dude, you met up with a girl, first off congrats, second you two were using the same app I’m sure it just read the data from her phone too. I’ve also used it with nothing weird happening. Calm down man, everything is fine, no one is pranking you.” Mark was right, how did I not think of that, of course it read her data then sent the message. I started to calm down as talking to Mark usually did for me. We talked some more, and I told him about the evening with Anna and that we were to meet up again tomorrow, he was genuinely happy for me and wished me luck that things went well. We hung up and I went to bed feeling way calmer and not scared anymore. Tomorrow should be a good day.

I woke up the next morning feeling great, I was rather excited about the following day with Anna. Oh no, I had forgot to turn my phone back on after the video call with Mark and message Anna. Damn it! Just like me to have a good thing going and screw it up. I turned on my phone hoping against all hope that Anna would still answer me. My text alerts beeped and there were three messages from Anna all asking if I was there. I frantically sent an apology text and told her if she didn’t want to meet up that I understand. I told her I was just so tired after I got home that I fell right asleep. I hoped beyond hope that would be enough. A few minutes later she responded saying everything was fine and she understood, she still wanted to meet up. I asked if I should pick her up at her house and she responded that we should meet up at the first set of coordinates on The Eye app, she would go first then me. I still felt a little strange about the app, but I wanted to see Anna, so I agreed. She sent me the coordinates and I headed out the door to meet her there.

The spot was back in the same run-down part of town I was in yesterday that all those strange things happened. Mark was right about the app reading our phones data but then it hit me, that didn’t explain about the strange figures I was seeing that it wanted pictures of. The uneasiness

set in again as it did yesterday the more I walked through this part of town. I came upon the same building and house I saw those figures in and I stopped to stare looking for any sign of what I saw. There was nothing, just dark empty buildings no figures, no people, not even an animal. I must not have been paying attention because I kept walking in my own thoughts when my phone beeped, I was at the coordinates, but this couldn't be right. It was Anna's house I walked her to last night. I really started to get scared when I start to realize now that I can see the house perfectly clear in the daylight, I have seen this house before, and before last night I mean. I quickly exit the app and search the address on the internet and to my horror the several articles come up from the 1980's. A family was ritualistically murdered in this house by a young girl, the daughter, and her demonic cult. The girl sacrificed her family and then herself and her cult members in a bizarre ritual that was said to give them eternal life, their cult was called "The Eye" and even more frightening, the picture of the girl in the article, was Anna. I became so scared I was about to turn around and run when my phone beeped loudly, the app left another message and this time I froze dead in my tracks, it read [Never walk alone] I tried to scream but nothing would come out. I looked around frozen in place and I saw three shadow like figures emerge from Anna's house, then the most horrifying sound, gurgling and scratchy humming getting louder and louder coming from behind me. I turn around and I see Anna only this time she was inhumanly pale and covered in blood, a hole dead center in her chest and a large scar on her neck. She lunged forward toward me and everything went black.

I don't know how long I have been here, but I have figured a way to record my voice on my phone left here in this nightmarish version of Anna's house. Time seems to run differently here, and I am not sure if I am dead or not. I can see people come and go as the app brings more and more people here and I scream at them to run away. No one can hear me, I have even tried to leave the house, but I can't, the second I step outside I am sent back here. Whatever Anna's cult was I think they succeeded in their ritual, and I am certain they are behind The Eye app. It's ironic, I used the app to break the boredom of being alone, but I am now alone, more alone than I have ever been. If you can hear this recording I beg you, don't use The Eye app, delete it off your phone. A little boredom is better than the nightmare I am trapped in. I have figured out that if two or more people do use the app it is less likely Anna and her cult can harm you. So please hear my warning, if you do decide to use the app, take care of yourself, stay vigilant, and most importantly, never walk alone.