

Nighttime in Texas



It was approaching midnight when the cab dropped Dave off at the house. He had arrived at the San Antonio Airport in Texas a few hours earlier and spoken with Carlos, his host, while the plane was still on the runway.

“It’s the one with gardenias outside and the silver scooter parked in the driveway,” Carlos told him about the house, adding that he’d be inside watching the HBO series “The Wire.” “I’m addicted to that show,” he said. “Sometimes I stay up all night and watch eight or nine episodes in a row!”

But as Dave approached the house on foot, none of the lights seemed to be on. The street was dark, as if the police had imposed a strict curfew. A black pit bull in the yard next door eyed him suspiciously as he walked to the front door.

Dave rang the bell. No answer.

He rang again, this time waiting a full thirty seconds.

Nothing.

“Carlos?” he called, his voice echoing in the empty alley beside the house.

Dave walked around the house, making fruitless attempts to enter through the doors and windows. He pulled out his iPhone and double-checked the address.

Carlos had spelled it out for him in a text message and an email: “154 South Pine Drive, San Antonio, TX.” He could smell the gardenias planted by the side of the entryway. In the driveway, the silver scooter glinted in the orange glow of the streetlight.

This was the place, all right. But where was his high school friend, whom he’d traveled all the way from Maine to visit for a spring break?

He called Carlos and left a message on his voicemail.

“Hey dude,” Dave said. “It’s me. Uh, I’m outside your house right now and can’t figure out where you are. I thought you’d be up watching TV. Hoping you didn’t forget about me!”

As Dave spoke, a police car drifted by, slowing noticeably as it passed. It was too dark to see through the windows, but it appeared as if the cop was watching him.

Dave was officially perplexed. Carlos had always been an extremely responsible guy, much more so than Dave, whose friends often referred to him as a “space cadet.” In high school, when the two of them played on a travel soccer team together, Carlos always brought an extra pair of socks and shin guards, in the likely event that Dave would leave one or the other—or both—behind.

Whereas Dave dressed sloppily, as if he’d just rolled out of bed, Carlos always dressed in crisply ironed button-downs and jeans. As a teenager, he was always reading thick novels and talking about the characters as if they were people he knew in real life. “The thing about Raskolnikov is that he’s inherently a good man,” Dave remembered his friend saying of one of those characters, though of course he had no idea what he was talking about.

Carlos, in other words, was not the absent-minded type, let alone the kind of guy who forgets his best friend is about to arrive at his house. And yet, by all appearances, this was what had happened.

“He must have zipped out for a soda at the Mobil station or something,” Dave thought, giving his pal the benefit of the doubt. True, it was odd to have done such a thing at midnight, he reasoned. But sometimes you just need a Slim Jim and a Mountain Dew. Dave understood the urge.

He sat down atop his suitcase and waited.

Fifteen minutes went by. Then thirty. Then forty-five.

The pit bull in the yard next door did not stop staring at him the entire time. But while it had irked him at first, Dave found himself amazed at the dog's capacity to concentrate. At a time when Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were overtaking human beings' attention spans, he thought, dogs had not lost their ability to focus. Or not this dog, at least.

Another fifteen minutes passed. Dave was seriously considering falling asleep on the doorstep when he saw a woman approach on the sidewalk. She appeared to be in her late twenties, and she wore a bathrobe and a pair of fuzzy pink slippers. Noticing Dave half-asleep on the steps, she walked towards him.

Startled, Dave bolted upright. "This night is about to get even weirder," he thought.

"How are you?" the woman called in a thick Texas accent as she made her way across the wet grass.

"Fine, just waiting for my friend here," Dave said. By now he could see that she was wearing a nightgown beneath her robe.

"Carlos, right?" she said, stopping ten feet in front of him. She fixed him with a neighborly smile, which seemed out of place on this dark and desolate block.

"That's right," he said.

"How do you know him?"

"Oh, he's an old friend," Dave said. "Or at least I thought he was." He let out an exhausted laugh. "I just flew in from Maine. He was supposed to meet me here about two hours ago, but I can't seem to figure out where he is. And the house is locked up tight."

"Well, Carlos has been acting a bit strange lately," the woman said. "In fact, over the last few months, this whole neighborhood had been acting weird."

Dave shifted uncomfortably on his suitcase.

"What do you mean, the whole neighborhood?" he asked.

"Well," the woman said, casting a sidelong glance at the extra attentive pit bull next door. "There seems to be something going around. A kind of sickness. A night sickness, I guess you'd call it."

"Night sickness?" Dave said.

“Mmmhmm,” the woman said, raising her eyebrow. “I’m Patricia, by the way.”

The two of them shook hands.

As Dave listened raptly, Patricia explained the recent spate of strange events. A few months before, she’d noticed one her neighbors, a kindly retired dentist named Hans, walk past her bedroom window at 3 o’clock in the morning. Patricia was rightly spooked. She leapt out of bed and ran outside to see what was going on.

She found Hans removing Coke cans from her recycling bin. Hearing her approach, he turned to look at her with a blank stare.

“He was clearly sleepwalking,” Patricia explained. She added that her father was a sleepwalker, so she recognized the symptoms. To wake him from his slumber, she drew near him and clapped loudly several times. Poor Hans suddenly came to his senses and gazed at her with a bewildered look. Patricia gently led him back to his house.

In the ensuing weeks, however, Patricia began to notice more neighbors walking slowly down the sidewalk in the middle of the night. “It started to look like that video for Michael Jackson’s song ‘Thriller,’” she said with a laugh. “Like a bunch of zombies walking down the street.”

No one knew what to make of it. The police were fielding dozens of calls per night. The reports were wildly varied but consistent in that they all occurred at night: “A strange man is pretending to hit golf balls in my backyard!” “There’s a woman in hair curlers pruning my hedges in the front yard!”

The county physician had determined that all of the intruders in question had been sleepwalking. But try as he might, he could not figure out the cause. “Mass sleepwalking,” he told the local newspaper, “is not a diagnosable condition.”

To prevent injury, the town police had issued a strict curfew of 11 o’clock. They also instructed all residents to bar their doors at night to prevent themselves—and others—from opening them in a sleepwalking state.

“Pretty weird, right?” Patricia said.

Dave took a moment to form a response.

“Yeah, yeah,” he finally managed. “I mean, that’s really crazy. I’ve never heard of anything like that!” After a pause, he continued, “So do you think Carlos—I mean, do you think he’s one of the . . . afflicted?”

“You know,” Patricia said, “I wouldn’t doubt it for a second. In fact, I was just coming over to check on him.”

Just then, the two of them wheeled around at the sound of a car skidding into the driveway. Dave recognized the beaten-up black 1996 Jeep Cherokee.

Carlos sprang out of the driver’s side door.

“Dave!” he shouted. “Dude! I’m so sorry!” He ran across the grass to greet the two of them. “I got a flat tire on my way to the 7/11, and I had to hitch a ride to the nearest gas station. Took forever! My phone died just when I was leaving the house.”

Carlos clapped Dave on the shoulder. Dave uttered an unintelligible sound.

“I see you’ve met Patricia,” Carlos said, kissing her on the cheek. “She’s the girl I’ve been telling you about. We’re totally in love.”

As Patricia rolled her eyes, Dave stared at her, trying to discern whether she’d been lying.

“So . . . that stuff about the sleepwalking. Was that . . . true?”

“Oh yeah,” Carlos said, shaking his head. “Whole town seems to be coming down with it.” He paused. “You’re not scared of the dark, are you?”

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why does Dave go to Texas?

- A to take a break from Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram
- B to meet a woman named Patricia
- C to see the sleepwalkers he has heard so much about
- D to visit his friend Carlos

2. "Nighttime in Texas" could best be described as which of the following?

- A a fairy tale with an unhappy ending
- B a mystery with a surprise ending
- C a biography that tells the true story of a man named Dave
- D a science fiction story set in the future

3. What evidence from the story suggests that Carlos is not at home?

- A None of the lights in Carlos's house are on.
- B A pit bull in the yard next door eyes Dave suspiciously.
- C There are gardenias outside and a silver scooter in the driveway.
- D Carlos texts and emails his address to Dave.

4. How can Patricia best be described?

- A scared and confused
- B watchful and suspicious
- C sneaky and untruthful
- D kind and friendly

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A Carlos's trip to the gas station
- B a sleepwalking trend that's affecting a neighborhood in Texas
- C Dave's first night in Texas without Carlos
- D Hans's sleepwalking patterns

6. Read the following sentences: "To prevent injury, the town police had issued a strict **curfew** of 11 o'clock. They also instructed all residents to bar their doors at night to prevent themselves—and others—from opening them in a sleepwalking state."

What does the word **curfew** mean in the sentence above?

- A rule
- B punishment
- C time when people must leave their houses
- D time when people have to be inside their houses

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Carlos gets a flat tire; _____, he is not at home when Dave arrives.

- A in the end
- B however
- C as a result
- D for example

8. What strange activity in the neighborhood does Patricia tell Dave about?

9. Dave asks Patricia whether she thinks Carlos might be one of the people suffering from the sleepwalking condition. At this point in the story, why might Dave wonder whether Carlos is suffering from the sleepwalking condition?

10. How might Dave feel when Carlos finally appears? Support your answer with evidence from the story.
