

## The Disappearing Neighbor

Mr. Bautista was real. I *know* he was real. But now... it's like he never existed.

It all started last night. I couldn't sleep, so I was just staring out my window, watching the street. That's when I saw the black car. It wasn't like the normal cars in our neighborhood, this one was shiny, with tinted windows. It stopped right in front of Mr. Bautista's house. Two guys in suits stepped out.

Now, Mr. Bautista was kinda strange. He always wore the same brown jacket, even when it was hot, and he never really talked to anyone. But he was *there*. Every day. I'd see him getting his mail, walking to the store, sitting on his porch.

So when those two guys knocked on his door and he answered, I knew something was up. Even from my window, I could tell he was nervous. His hands were shaking, and he kept looking around, like he thought someone was watching.

Then the lights in his house flickered.

For a second, everything went completely dark. And when the lights came back on, the front door was wide open. The two men were gone.

And so was Mr. Bautista.

This morning, I ran outside to check. His house? *Empty*. No furniture. No pictures on the walls. It looked abandoned, like no one had lived there for years.

I ran back inside. "Mom!" I shouted. "Where's Mr. Bautista?"

She looked at me like I was crazy. "Who?"

"Mr. Bautista! Our neighbor! He lived *right there!*" I pointed at his house, but she just frowned.

"Honey, that house has been empty for years."

That didn't make sense. It *wasn't* empty yesterday. I saw him. I *talked* to him. But when I checked his mailbox, it was empty too. No name. Just dust.

I don't know what happened. I don't know who those men were. But I *know* Mr. Bautista was real.

And now, he's gone.