

## WATCHERS by Jeni Whittaker

### CAST

NEIGHBOUR 1  
NEIGHBOUR 2  
NEIGHBOUR 3  
NEIGHBOUR 4  
GIRL

This is a play for five females ideally. Built in to the script are monologues and role changes, the latter being Brechtian in approach. Two tales are told within the script and the roles are taken by each of the neighbours, who narrate - sometimes speaking the directions also. There is a great deal of mime, which takes skilful physicalisation and clarity of outline.

At a pinch, if you need a play for six or seven females, the plays-within-a play could be taken by the extra cast member[s], and the Chorus work could be divided further between them, so as to make them an integral part of the whole. It is thus a versatile script for examination work.

The playing time is roughly half an hour.

It is up to you how complex you make the set. It could be done with a large raised area for the girl's 'house' and a few chairs or small blocks. Or it could be done with piles of boxes and clutter and hung doors and windows - or anything in between these two. Personally, if I were directing, I'd mime most props mentioned in the script, but not all. You will find which props are most telling. Of course, good mime is a difficult skill, and if students are struggling, I would suggest aiming for more actual props, though still a minimal set.

The style should be menacing, clear and larger than life. Even the dottiness of the Neighbour/Watchers needs to strike a balance between humour and menace, tipping first one way and then another. Lighting should focus on the house level, which needs to feel exposed and too open, with plenty of puddled shadows around the edges, for the Neighbours to melt in and out of.

This is not an easy script to take on. Your best performers at GCSE will manage it. Otherwise, it might be better for more advanced players.

### EXTRACT ONE

***The cast of 5 all take part in this opening chorus, NEIGHBOURS 1, 2, 3 AND 4 speak the lines corresponding to their numbers. The GIRL takes number 5.***

ALL We're watchers  
1 Just interested  
2& 3 In anything that comes our way  
4 Behind the curtains  
5 The other side of the door  
1 The wall  
ALL Not nosy  
2 Not us  
3 We're just friendly  
4 & 5 We want to be *your* friend  
1 We've got nothing to do except watch until ...

**At this point 5 separates from the group and looks around, a little lost. The others mob her as if she were royalty.**

2 ...You arrive  
3 Here you are  
1, 2, 3 & 4 Hello!  
1 Oh, hello there, we're your neighbours  
2 We live next door  
3 Just over the way  
4 Down the road  
3 Across the street  
1 You look so nice  
2 You'll love it here  
3 Everyone likes everyone here  
ALL We're all such ... very good ... friends.

**The watchers regroup and become someone moving in [5] and the removers. They mime carrying heavy bulky furniture, teetering tiers of boxes, etc.**

5 - from now called GIRL Over there please. **She points in one direction. Addressing another remover.** Oh, do be careful, that's very precious. I'll have all those boxes in the kitchen. Over here. The piano? In here, I think. Those things upstairs. Single bed in here, the spare room. Double here, the one with the en suite.

**More general staggering about. Then the removers make a shape of exhaustion, leaning against each other. The GIRL sits on a block.**

ALL Phew  
GIRL **rummaging in a box and getting out mugs etc., all mimed** Tea? It'll have to be black.  
ALL REMOVERS **nodding, with pleasure** Tea! And then we'll go. **They regroup, as if around a table. Two peel off to become Neighbours 1 & 2.**  
1ST REMOVER Nice neighbours you got. Friendly.  
GIRL **a bit startled** Really?  
1ST REMOVER Yeah. They've been watching everything going in the house. Couple came over, didn't they, Stan? Asked if they could help.  
GIRL I hope they're not going to be too... **She searches for a word.**  
2ND REMOVER Just being friendly, I think. Welcoming.  
GIRL Yes, I'm sure you're right, only ...  
1ST REMOVER Here come a couple now.

**Two neighbours arrive and mime peeping round a door.**

BOTH Coo-ee!  
NEIGHBOUR 1 Mind if we come in?  
NEIGHBOUR 2 Know you're really busy, but just wanting to give you this. **She hands over a plate of biscuits [can be mimed].**  
GIRL Oh, that's so kind. Sorry about the ... **She gestures around her vaguely.**  
REMOVER 1 Well, we'll be off then.  
REMOVER 2 Thanks for the tea.  
NEIGHBOUR 1 Ooh, tea. Perfect with biscuits. May we? **She sits down and pats the seat beside her for her friend to sit too.**  
NEIGHBOUR 2 Nice chairs. Antique, are they?  
GIRL **vaguely and more than a little bemused by all the goings on** Yes, I picked them up at an auction.  
NEIGHBOUR 2 **cosily** I love auctions. **To her friend.** Don't you, Suzanne? All

those belongings. All that family history. You can smell it at auctions.  
NEIGHBOUR 1 **nodding enthusiastically** Death. Misery. Family break-ups. They're all in the air at auctions.  
NEIGHBOUR 2 You can smell them.

***They turn back to the Girl.***

GIRL **getting up** Well, thank you for the biscuits but I must be ...  
NEIGHBOUR 1 **cutting in** Have another one. We made them specially. Soon as we saw the van arrive.  
GIRL **more firmly** I hope you don't mind, but I have a lot to do. ***She laughs nervously.*** I mean, just look at it all. I don't even know where the plates are, let alone my duvet.  
NEIGHBOUR 1 You on your own?  
GIRL Yes, actually.  
NEIGHBOUR 2 Only we couldn't help noticing ...  
NEIGHBOUR 1 ... The double bed.  
NEIGHBOUR 2 Big.  
NEIGHBOUR 1 You haven't always been on your own, have you?  
GIRL **astonished by the way things are going and unable to decide how to cope with it** N-no ... It's recent. If you don't mind, I'd rather not talk about it.  
NEIGHBOUR 1 **comfortably** Oh, that's all right. You can tell us anything. Everyone does.  
NEIGHBOUR 2 You could say we're receptacles for the storage of knowledge. For the whole neighbourhood.  
NEIGHBOUR 1 **cheerily** That's right. No secrets here! ***She gestures to encompass the whole neighbourhood.***  
GIRL **taking control** Well, I hardly know you. ***She tries to make it sound friendly and jovial.*** You're not getting hold of my secrets. If indeed I had any. Which I don't.

***The Neighbours exchange knowing looks.***

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EXTRACT TWO

***There is a knock. The Girl rolls her eyes. Mimes opening the door.***

***Neighbour 1 pops her head round. Behind her are the other three Neighbours.***

NEIGHBOUR 1 You've had a busy day. We came round earlier, but you were out.  
GIRL I said I'd be out today.  
NEIGHBOUR 1 Just wanted to introduce you to the other girls.

***Neighbours 3 and 4 giggle and simper.***

You met Elaine yesterday.

***Neighbour 2 smiles.***

And these are Jess and Sadie.

***Neighbours 3 and 4 step forward. 3 shakes Girl's hand, while 4 wiggles her fingers in a half-wave.***

So that's all of us.  
 GIRL **struck by the strangeness of her phraseology** What do you mean 'all of us?'  
 All of us what? All of us who?  
 NEIGHBOUR 1 All of us Watchers. All of us Guardians.  
 GIRL But why is it necessary? This is a quiet suburban area. Surely  
 there's nothing ...  
 NEIGHBOUR 2 You'd be surprised. Why only a few months ago...

**During the following, the others act out what happens.**

NEIGHBOUR 2 Jess here was weeding her front garden when a young girl tapped  
 her on the shoulder.  
 NEIGHBOUR 3/ JESS Hello? What do you want?  
 NEIGHBOUR 4/ YOUNG GIRL Can you give me work? I'll do anything. Walk your  
 dog. Polish your furniture. Hoover your carpets. I could weed your  
 garden quicker than anything.  
 JESS But I don't need any help. And I suppose you'd want money for  
 it?  
 YOUNG GIRL Just a bit. Not even minimum wage. Just a start. Give us a chance.  
 It's hard for people like us.  
 JESS **suspiciously** What do you mean, people like us?  
 YOUNG GIRL I won't lie to you, I'm a young offender. It's hard to get work  
 anywhere and I need it just as much as the next person. I've got  
 rent to pay, food to buy. All I want is a chance.  
 GIRL Sounds reasonable. What did you do?  
 NEIGHBOUR 1 Don't interrupt. Watch and learn.  
 JESS **to Girl** You'd have given her work, would you? Let her into your house, all  
 amongst your treasures, knowing what you know about her, what  
 she's just told you? You'd have trusted her?  
 GIRL Well, yes. As she said herself. She needs to be given a chance.  
 And she was honest. She didn't have to say that she'd been in  
 trouble.  
 JESS **makes a sound which is a mixture of a sigh and a sneer She turns to  
 the Young Girl and says slowly, with infinite patience, as if talking to a fool**  
 You will not come into my house. You will do as I tell you, when I  
 tell you. I will pay you cash at the end of the week. You will not  
 question the amount. Do you agree to these terms?  
 YOUNG GIRL **to the audience** What choice do I have? **To Jess.** I agree. When can  
 I start?

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EXTRACT THREE

GIRL **left on her own and chastising herself** Oh, for heaven's sake. Don't let them  
 get to you. They're just a silly bunch of women. **She pauses for a  
 moment.** But face it, Lyn, they *are* getting to you. How could I  
 have known, with a couple of house viewings in the agent's  
 company, what I was letting myself in for? **Pauses again.** I  
 wouldn't have bought the house. Not if I'd known about them. I  
 wouldn't. But I'm stuck with it now. Better make the best of  
 things. I must keep them away. Might even have to be a bit  
 rude, if that's what it takes. Shape up, Lyn. You can do it.

**The lights darken.**

It's not very bright in here. First thing tomorrow I'll call an electrician. I need more light.

**Mobile phone goes. She gets it out from her pocket.**

Oh, hi Mum. Hang on, the pick-up's not good here. **She walks around, nearer the front.** Is that better? I'm by the kitchen window. Yes, thanks, I've been settling in nicely. Bought curtains and stuff today. Lonely? Not really. The neighbours are very friendly. Well, between you and me, a little too friendly. Yes, you're right, I'll have to be firm and make sure there are boundaries. To be honest I don't think they've heard of such things. No, no, Mum, it's all right. I didn't mean to sound wobbly. I'm just all. Mum? ... Think I'm losing you. **She moves the phone in the air.** Oh, blasted thing. Where's the signal gone? Mum? ... Yes, I can hear you. But you're very tired that's **around** Mum? faint. Think the back tomorrow. Love blast it, I don't think she get a landline. **She sighs.** garden will be better. Try again during the day you, Mum. Give a big hug to Dad too. Oh, heard most of that. Maybe I need to Something else to sort out tomorrow.

**She stares out of the window.**

What's that movement out there? Oh, it's probably trees moving in the wind. Just the wood. It looks closer at night. Darker.

**The Neighbours have gathered behind her, as if they are standing in the garden looking up at her window.**

1 We can see you. Even if you can't see us.  
ALL We are bringing the darkness.  
2 Look how the black cloak of night is whisking over the trees and blotting out the stars. One by one. Gulp. Gulp.  
3 And even the silver moon is swallowed up.  
4 Now there's nothing between us and you but the friendly dark.  
1 & 2 No walls.  
3 & 4 No barriers.  
1 The dark melts them away.  
ALL We are watching you. **Pause. Then, with significance** We want what you have.

**The lights have gone to a brief blackout, then up to a new day.**

**The Girl is sitting head in hands. The Neighbours arrive, Neighbour 1 first.**

NEIGHBOUR 1 Coo-ee. Anyone home? Oh, there you are. Everything all right?  
GIRL Not really. I had a bad night.  
NEIGHBOUR 1 Did you? That's a shame. Nightmares?  
GIRL Yes. I never have them normally but ... Oh, I guess I'm tired, and everything's new and it's all on top of me.  
NEIGHBOUR 1 **beckoning the others in** That's when you need friends. When you're low and everything's on top of you. We had a feeling that all was not well, didn't we girls?

**They all nod enthusiastically.**

NEIGHBOUR 2 Now - what can we do to help? Tidying?  
Cleaning?

NEIGHBOUR 3 We're very good at cleaning.  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 How about washing up? I spy some dirty dishes over there.  
 GIRL I don't need that sort of help... I just need to be on my own.  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 Little bit depressed, are we?  
 NEIGHBOUR 2 She looks a bit down in the dumps... I know!  
 OTHER NEIGHBOURS **excitedly** What? What?  
 NEIGHBOUR 2 She needs a party - a house-warming - for you and your new friends.  
 GIRL I haven't made any new friends.  
 NEIGHBOUR 2 US!!  
 ALL NEIGHBOURS **echoing** US!!  
 NEIGHBOUR 2 We're your friends, silly!  
 GIRL Please leave me alone. I know you mean well but ...  
 NEIGHBOUR 3 How about another story? That'll cheer her up. That thief girl wasn't the only bad apple around here.  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 No indeed! This one will show you what a good job we do. Someone has to watch and guard.  
 NEIGHBOUR 3 It was almost dark.  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 Autumn, the tree branches stark against the sky, hanging onto their last leaves. People's houses lit up from inside, welcoming, warm.  
 NEIGHBOUR 3 There was someone living here, in your house, then.  
 GIRL Long ago?  
 NEIGHBOUR 3 Oh no, just a year or two - perhaps less.  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 She lived on her own too.  
 NEIGHBOUR 3 Like you.  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 But not as nice as you.  
 NEIGHBOUR 3 She was very rude, let's not beat about the bush.  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 Rude and unfriendly. Look.

***Neighbour 1 takes on the role of the rude occupant of the house, Neighbour 2 becomes the intruder.***

NEIGHBOUR 1 Don't think I can't hear you, skulking around outside my house. I'll go to the courts. I'll serve you - all of you - with injunctions. Don't think I can't. Go away or I'll call the police.  
 NEIGHBOUR 3 She thought it was us, you see?  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 That's how she addressed us. Not very nice, was it?  
 NEIGHBOUR 3 But it wasn't us at all.  
 GIRL So who was it?  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 It was a bad man, a very bad man.  
 NEIGHBOUR 3 A tramp perhaps, someone up to no good, nosing around looking for shelter.  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 Eye to the main chance, something lying around, something to steal.  
 NEIGHBOUR 3 A rapist or worse. A murderer.  
 GIRL You can't know that!  
 NEIGHBOUR 4 The man let himself into the garden.

***Neighbour 2 takes on the role of the man and mimes with the story.***

NEIGHBOUR 3 The gate squeaked a bit.

***During the next section, Neighbours 3 and 4 creep around to the other side of the Girl, out of her sight. From here they go off stage.***

NEIGHBOUR 1 I can hear you! What are you doing?  
 NEIGHBOUR 2 **taking over the narration and accompanying it with her own actions** He closed the gate behind him. He hoped he could take

shelter in the garden shed. The dark was drawing in and a sleety rain spat in his face and froze his hands. He could see the owner of the house peering from her warm kitchen out at her garden. She was eating a piece of cake. It wasn't fair, he thought. Why should this woman have cake and he go hungry? Why should she be warm and dry while he had nowhere to sleep? The shed and cluttered. No room for him there.

was small  
NEIGHBOUR 1

I know you're there. I'm not afraid of you. Look, I have a phone in my hand. I'm going to ring the police. This is your last chance. See. I'm opening the kitchen door so that you can see and hear what I'm up to.

NEIGHBOUR 2

Big mistake. ...