

Chapter 1: The Feeling You Can't Shake

The night you started checking the door twice

You went to bed. You lay there. And then you got up again, walked down the hall in the dark, and put your hand on the deadbolt you had already locked.

It was locked. Of course it was locked. You went back to bed anyway, and the thing that bothered you was not the door. It was that you had needed to check.

I have done it. In our house, I did it for three weeks straight one autumn after a neighbor two streets over came home to a kicked-in back door. Nothing had changed about my house. Everything had changed about how I slept in it. That is the feeling this book is about, and I want to say plainly at the start: the feeling is not foolishness. It is information. Your gut noticed something your daylight mind has been talking itself out of.

Here is what your gut noticed. Somewhere in the last few years, your house stopped being able to defend itself with your body. When you were forty, some part of you believed that if a stranger came through the door, you would deal with it. You do not believe that anymore. You are being honest, and honesty is uncomfortable, and so the feeling shows up at eleven at night as a walk down a dark hallway to touch a bolt you already threw.

The night check is not anxiety. It is your mind filing a complaint about a house that has never been assessed.

Why 'being careful' stopped feeling like enough

Being careful is a habit of attention. Lock up, park in the light, do not open to strangers. It works, quietly, for decades. Then one day it stops feeling like enough, and most people cannot say why.

The reason is simple. **Being careful protects you when you are there. It does nothing at all when you are not.** Every one of your careful habits is a live action. Locking a door is something you do. But the hours that matter most to a stranger sizing up your street are the hours when nobody in your house is doing anything, because nobody in your house is home.

That is the gap. Careful is an *active* defense, and your house spends most of its week *passive*. Sitting there. Telling the street whatever it happens to be telling the street.

A case worth thinking about, and I will mark it plainly as illustrative rather than a documented incident: picture a couple in their late sixties who leave Thursday morning for a grandchild's graduation and come back Sunday night. They locked everything. They were careful. They also left a porch light burning around the clock, a mailbox filling, one car in a two-car drive, and blinds shut tight in every window since Wednesday evening. Nobody broke in through a mistake they made on the way out. If anyone had come, they would have come because the house spent four days announcing that no one was in it.

That is the shift I want you to make in Chapter 1 and carry through the rest of the book. Stop asking *am I being careful enough*. Start asking a colder question.

“

What does my house say about me when I am
not standing in front of it?

The two lies that keep good people frozen

Almost everyone I talk to about this is stuck. Not lazy, not careless. Stuck. And nearly always it is one of two beliefs doing the sticking.

Lie one: 'If they really want in, they will get in'

This is the most quietly destructive sentence in home security. It sounds like wisdom. It sounds like a man who has seen the world and is not fooled by salesmen. And it is a trapdoor, because it converts a real problem into an impossible one, and impossible problems require nothing of you.

The sentence is true only about a person who has decided on *your* house specifically and will accept any cost to get in. That person is vanishingly rare, and no consumer product on earth stops him. The person who actually shows up on an ordinary street is doing something entirely different: choosing. He has options. Your block has a dozen houses on it. He is not solving a puzzle; he is shopping for the one that costs him the least.

Against a chooser, small obstacles are enormous. He does not need to be stopped. He needs to be made slightly more expensive than the house next door.

Lie two: 'Real security costs thousands of dollars'

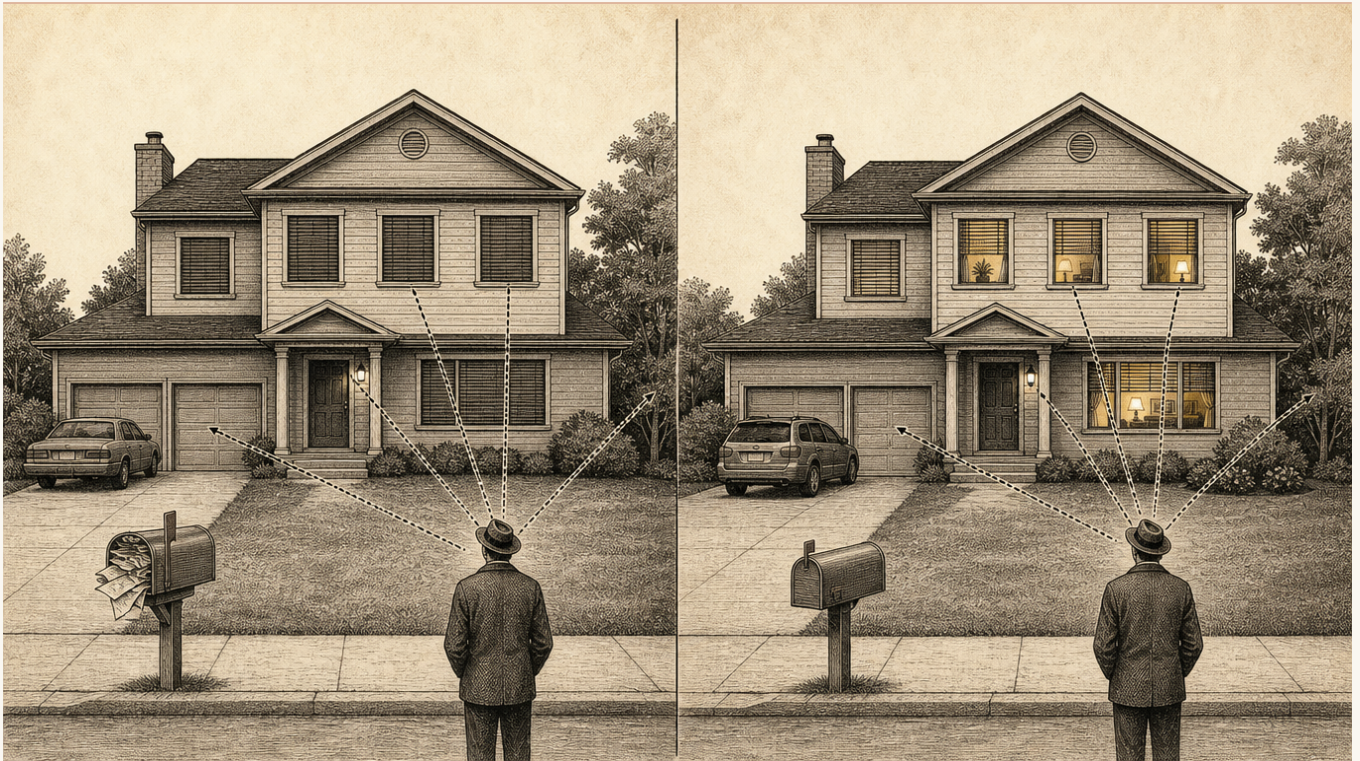
You have been told this by people who sell thousands of dollars of security. It is the second trapdoor, and it works the same way. If the price of safety is five thousand dollars plus forty a month forever, and you do not have that or do not trust that, then you are excused. The problem goes back in the drawer and you go back to checking the deadbolt twice.

I want to break that sentence in two, right now, because it confuses two very different things.

One is **detection**: knowing that something happened. Cameras, sensors, alarms, monitoring contracts. Detection is what the industry sells because detection is what you can be billed for monthly.

The other is **deterrence and delay**: making entry look unappealing from the street, and making the physical opening hard enough that it takes too long. Deterrence and delay are what actually keep a stranger out of your kitchen. They are made of screws, dowels, lightbulbs, timers, and habits. Almost none of it is expensive. Most of it you already own half of.

A monthly monitoring plan tells you your door is open. A pair of three-inch screws, which we install in Chapter 16, makes it considerably harder to open in the first place. Only one of those two is billed to you again next month.



The Easy-Target Principle

Here is the one idea this whole book stands on. I call it the **Easy-Target Principle**, and it has two halves.

First half: selection happens before entry. A house is chosen from the street, at a distance, in seconds, based on information it gives away for free. By the time anyone touches your door, the important decision was already made. Everything in Chapters 3 through 8 is about the information.

Second half: entry is a race against a clock. Once selected, a stranger is working against time and noise. He is not picking a lock. He is applying force in the two or three places every house is weak. Add seconds and he leaves. Everything in Chapters 15 through 21 is about the seconds.

You are not trying to build a fortress. You are trying to be the third-most-attractive house on a street of ten, using free habits and under a hundred dollars of hardware.

I cannot hand you a statistic here that I have verified, and I will not invent one to make the point land harder. So I will give you something better than a statistic: something you can confirm yourself, tonight, with your own eyes.

Do this before you read Chapter 2. Walk out your front door, go to the curb or the sidewalk, and turn around. Stand there for sixty seconds. Take nothing with you and fix nothing. Just look, and answer three questions out loud.

- ✓ Can I tell, from here, whether anyone is home right now?
- ✓ Can I tell, from here, roughly when this household goes to bed?
- ✓ Is there any spot along the front or side of this house where a person could stand for five minutes and not be seen from the street?

Most people are unsettled by their own answers. That discomfort is not a setback. It is the first accurate reading you have ever taken of your own property, and it is worth more than a catalogue full of equipment.

What this book will and will not ask of you

It will ask you for one weekend and, honestly, less than a hundred dollars for most houses. It will ask you to use a screwdriver, a drill if you own one, and a tape measure. It will ask you for one minute a day of new habit, and ten minutes once a month.

It will not ask you to sign a contract, learn an app, buy a subscription, or trust a stranger with a key to your home. It will not ask you to keep a weapon, and it will not ask you to be braver than you are. Nothing in these pages depends on you winning a physical confrontation, because the entire strategy is designed so that confrontation never begins.

Every job in this book has a price, a time in minutes, and a way to check that you did it right the same afternoon. Nothing is left as a feeling.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Treat the midnight door-check as data, not weakness: it means your house has never been properly assessed from the outside.
- ▶ Separate **detection** (cameras, monitoring, monthly fees) from **deterrence and delay** (screws, dowels, lighting, habits). Only the second keeps someone out.
- ▶ Reject "if they really want in, they'll get in." A chooser with ten houses to pick from is stopped by small, cheap obstacles.
- ▶ Do the sixty-second curb test tonight and answer the three questions honestly. Write the answers down; you will use them in Chapter 9.
- ▶ Commit to one weekend and roughly a hundred dollars before you spend a cent on anything with a monthly bill attached.

You now know that selection happens from the street and entry is a race against a clock. But how long is that clock, exactly? How many minutes does a stranger give himself inside your house before he walks away empty-handed, and what does he do with them? That number changes where every dollar of your money should go.